

ing to 'acomodandoci', finding other pieces of marble so that 'with sawing and splitting' most of the work could be done.³⁵ However, he was not going to let the *scarpellino* off the hook, and told Busini that Starnazini needed to see Francesco di Ser Iacopo, who would get his hands on him ('gli fara dar delle mano adosso') and would write to the *Podestà*.³⁶

Within days, Starnazini was in Florence, and Busini had sent an immediate response. Although the contents of Busini's letter are unknown, Ammannati's reply to him (15th June 1572) suggests that the *provveditore* may have reacted unpleasantly or fearfully, or both (Fig.47). Ammannati attempted to reassure Busini, writing that 'I know that you have a thousand reasons. In the end, you do well because you facilitate the works, and you do what it takes to have Their Highnesses get what they want.'³⁷ The artist pointed out that he himself had been exceedingly patient in trying to get things finished and that he had done all he could to satisfy his patrons and had kept quiet in order not to create difficulties:³⁸

I beg you to be patient with what remains of the fountain so that I might bring it to completion to satisfy not just the patrons but all the nobility of Florence If I had allowed indignation to carry me away, I would have made the greatest mess in the world Come on, let's finish this because I am blowing off steam.³⁹

This was the second time that Ammannati had used the term '*porcheria*' in these letters.⁴⁰ The word has far more negative connotations than the English word 'mess' and was commonly used to suggest a range of unpleasantness, including dung or excrement, literary works lacking in merit, actions of an ignoble or base charac-

ter, and sexual and obscene practices.⁴¹ While it may be just coincidental, Lapini used the same word to describe the state of the fountain after the pottery materials had deteriorated.⁴²

Ammannati was understandably anxious to finish the work properly since it was over twelve years since he had undertaken this important public commission under the scrutiny of his fellow artists and the Florentines. There was still a great deal of marble to be delivered, and archival records show that much of it was in fact sent that same year during June, July, August, November and December.⁴³ The demands of his patrons and the pressure of time recur throughout Ammannati's letters, and he emphasises the importance of the fountain for '*tutta la nobilita di Firenze*'. As the two letters of June 1572 show, he was required to resolve potential conflict both in a physical sense, in regard to the piecing together of new blocks for the fountain, and in the role of manager, by maintaining a good rapport with his administrators and by keeping the workmen in check. Two years later, on 23rd June 1574, the fountain, by then completed, with its four horses, splendid marble basin, ornate chariot and bronze statuary, was finally unveiled to the public, with only a few of the smaller pieces of marble still to be delivered.⁴⁴ Yet, for all Ammannati's trouble, the *scaglioni* of the fountain are barely noticed because, as Detlef Heikamp has pointed out, two of the three steps have been replaced by modern *pietra serena*.⁴⁵

The survival of these letters allows us to reconstruct the history of this phase of the fountain's construction. Without them, one might never have known, looking at the splendid panoply of water, stone and bronze that constitutes the Neptune Fountain, that at times its construction resembled an unending series of '*porcherie*'.

³⁵ There are even a few payment records for March and May. In documents cited and transcribed by Cinelli and Vossilla, there are references to a 'Francesco di Vincenti Todeschi da Seravezza Scarpellino' being paid for work on the fountain; see Zangheri, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.322 and 324, note 30; *idem*, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.62, note 15; Vasić Vatovec, *op. cit.* (note 7), pp.333 and 356, note 57; and Cinelli and Vossilla, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.103-04.

⁴⁴ Archival documents show that in 1576, a '*nicchia di mistio*' had been delivered, and in 1579 a '*nicchia*' still remained at Pietrasanta. On 29th May 1578, Ammannati referred to an *aviso* regarding the cargo (*nolo*) paid for the fountain in a letter to Busini; see Zangheri, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.324, note 30; *idem*, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.62, note 15; and BAL, 29th May 1578. On the date of the unveiling, see Heikamp, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.20.
⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.25, note 39.

Three portraits by John de Critz for the Merchant Taylors' Company

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COMPARED WITH THE patronage for portraiture extended by individual leading liverymen, not to mention portraits of the court circle or the aristocracy, the London livery companies were surprisingly slow in the sixteenth century to commission easel portraits of their own leading members. Notwithstanding such works as Holbein's group portrait of Henry VIII granting the royal charter to the newly formed Company of Barber-Surgeons in 1540 (Barber-Surgeons' Hall, London), only a trickle may be identified and dated with certainty before the last decade of that century, and not until about then did the practice become common among the leading companies. Yet from that time on it moved rapidly forwards. Com-

panies not only commissioned portraits with increasing frequency but, by about the 1620s, they turned to the most fashionable 'picture-makers' of the day, such as Daniel Mytens¹ and Cornelius Johnson,² to portray their leading masters and benefactors, both living and deceased. To that list may now be added the name of John de Critz, three of whose portraits can be identified as having been commissioned by the Merchant Taylors' Company as early as the fiscal year 1606-07.

That this has not been discovered before may well be due to the confident assertion of the cataloguer of the Merchant Taylors' pictures, Frederick M. Fry (Master of the Company in 1895-96), that no mention of the acquisition of these pictures had been found in the Company's records as catalogued by him in 1907.³ Yet a company account of 1606-07 records the payment of five pounds to 'John Decreete for making Sir Thomas Whites picture in a faier larg frame' and another five pounds to 'Mr John DeCreete for making the princes picture all anewe in the kings chamber and for Mr Dow his picture in a faier frame'.⁴

¹ *Portrait of Nicholas Leate, thrice Master of the Ironmongers*, commissioned from Mytens by Leate's three sons for presentation to the Company in 1631; see 'Leate, Nicholas (1565/6-1631)', in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison, eds.: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford 2004, ref.16250; see also London, Guildhall Library MS16988/5, *Freemen's Admissions and Inventories of the Ironmongers' Company*, p.7.

² Portraits of Sir Hugh Myddelton (1628) for the Goldsmiths' Company and a triple portrait of Thomas Babb, Clement Pargiter and William Peacock for the Painter-

Stainers (1620s); for Myddelton, see W. Prideaux: *Memorials of the Goldsmiths' Company*, London 1896, I, pp.159 and 136; for Babb, see London, National Portrait Gallery, Heinz Archive, and G.P. Harding: 'List of Portraits, Pictures in Various Mansions of the United Kingdom', MS, 3 vols. (1804-), II, p.137.

³ F.M. Fry: *A Historical Catalogue of the Pictures, Hese-cloths & Tapestry at Merchant Taylors' Hall with a List of the Sculptures & Engravings*, London 1907, p.97.

⁴ London, Guildhall Library MS34048/9, *Merchant Taylors' Company Masters' and Wardens' Account Book no.9*, microfilm frame no.915, accounts for 1606-07.

These references can only refer to John de Critz (c.1552–c.1642). The son of Dutch immigrants, and the father of sixteen children by three wives, De Critz had by 1606 established himself as one of the leading portrait painters, and also painters-of-all-work, in London. He had gained his initial entrée to court patronage through Sir Francis Walsingham, who used De Critz's talents both as a painter and as a messenger and spy in journeys abroad. De Critz's career may have experienced some pause in its advancement between Walsingham's death in 1590 and his own employment by James I from about 1604.⁵ Yet this presumed hiatus, and the burden of supporting a growing family, may also have caused him to search more widely for patronage and to take on a broader scope of work. There are independent indications that De Critz had accepted livery company work in this period. For example, in 1604 he contracted to do 'a table of four pictures' for the Barber-Surgeons' Company and was late in delivering them: it is unclear whether or not he completed this work.⁶

Although less is known of De Critz in the period between the birth of his fourth child, Anne, in 1599 and the year 1607 when his son Thomas was born, he did become the king's Sergeant-Painter in 1605 (sharing the post from 1607 with Robert Peake) and held that position until his death in 1642. This would have brought him much miscellaneous work in and around the Whitehall Banqueting House and other royal buildings. While it undoubtedly required him to engage assistants and employ artisans of various specialities, it may have threatened to take him away from the lucrative portrait commissions of his Walsingham years. The year 1607 (or perhaps 1606) was also the point at which De Critz moved house, perhaps from the parish of St Sepulchre without Newgate, to the parish of St Andrew Holborn, no doubt to accommodate his increasingly large family.⁷

Thus there were several reasons which may have led De Critz to consider his personal financial position in 1606–07. The birth of Thomas, his fifth child, the move to a new house and (presumably) new workshop, and the necessity of having to share his office of Sergeant-Painter with Peake after having it to himself for less than two years, must all have pressed hard on his income.

The subjects of these three Merchant Taylors' Company portraits can be identified as Sir Thomas White, Robert Dowe and Henry, Prince of Wales, himself an active supporter of the visual arts. The painting of the Prince of Wales does not seem to have survived, and Fry did not record it as being in the Company's possession in 1907; paintings of Dowe (Fig.48) and White (Fig.49) may, however, still be seen in the Company Hall.

Of the two liverymen, White (1495–1567) was certainly the more prominent and celebrated in his time and is best remembered today. A Master of the Company in 1535, a leader of the London merchant community and one of its wealthiest members by the 1540s, White helped pave the way among London's merchant elite for the accession in 1553 of Mary Tudor, with whose religious views he sympathised. Elected Lord Mayor of London and knighted in the first year of Mary's reign, White soon turned his attention to philanthropy. He founded St John's College, Oxford, and then proceeded to develop an imaginative scheme which offered interest-free loans to allow journeymen cloth workers to establish their own shops. The scheme applied to four recipients in each of twenty-

48. *Portrait of Robert Dowe*, by John de Critz. 1606–07. Panel, 111.7 by 86.4 cm. (Reproduced with the kind permission of the Merchant Taylors' Company, London).

three individual towns plus the Merchant Taylors' Company itself, each of those bodies being given a hundred pounds for that purpose (plus administrative costs) in an annual, twenty-four-year rotation.⁸ This extraordinary magnanimity accounts for the widespread appearance of portraits of White, twenty-three of which have so far been identified.⁹ These were made, mostly as copies of one or two of the earliest White portraits, in Oxford and in most of the benefiary towns. The majority of them still survive.

Robert Dowe, or Dow (1523–1612), served as Master of the Merchant Taylors in 1578 and was a much beloved and frequent benefactor to the Company and to other institutions associated with it. Like White, he was a friend of the historian and fellow Merchant Taylor John Stow, and set up a pension for that 'loving Brother of the Mysterie' in his old age. Unlike White's, Dowe's portrait was commissioned by the Company during the subject's lifetime, though this was not in itself particularly unusual by that time. Following Dowe's death in 1612, the Company held a funeral dinner in its Hall, and decided to perpetuate the memory of his virtue by placing a brass memorial plaque in St Botolph's, Aldgate. In 1622 the Merchant Taylors replaced the plaque with a wall-tablet funerary sculpture.¹⁰

Whether or not John De Critz painted all these pictures himself, and whether the White portrait now to be seen in the Merchant Taylors' Hall is the one paid for in 1606–07, remains conjectural. It was not at all uncommon for portraitists of his stature to accept a

⁵ M. Edmond: 'Limners and Picturemakers, New Light on the Lives of Miniaturists and large-scale portrait-painters working in London in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *The Walpole Society* 47 (1978–80), pp.141–45.

⁶ S. Young: *Annals of the Barber Surgeons of London*, London 1890, p.508.

⁷ Edmond, *op. cit.* (note 5), pp.144–45 and 168–70.

⁸ R. Titler: 'Sir Thomas White of London: Civic Philanthropy and the Making of the Merchant-Hero', in *idem: Townspeople and Nation, English Urban Experiences, 1540–1640*, Stanford 2001, pp.100–20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.119.

¹⁰ Fry, *op. cit.* (note 3), pl.38 and pp.98–101.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.93–94.

¹² R.M. Poole, ed.: *Catalogue of Portraits in the Colleges, University, City and County of Oxford*, 3 vols., Oxford 1912, 1926, 1926, I, pp.244–45, and III, p.157; W.H. Stevenson and H.E. Salter: *Early History of St. Johns College*, Oxford Historical Society, n.s., I, 1939, p.386.

¹³ A portrait of White hanging in the Mayoress's room of Chester Town Hall in

49. *Portrait of Sir Thomas White*, probably by John de Critz. ?1606–07. Panel, 111.7 by 86.4 cm. (Reproduced with the kind permission of the Merchant Taylors' Company, London).

commission and then direct assistants or apprentices to carry out much of the work, leaving only the trickier parts such as the face and hands for themselves. This may possibly have been the case with these commissions, as White's portrait, in particular, falls somewhat short of De Critz's best work. The Dowe portrait seems much more likely to have been painted by De Critz than the White, for the details of the face and hands are more sensitively and expertly carried out. As no other portrait of Dowe is known to have been held by the Company, the archival evidence can only refer to this work.

The authorship of the White portrait remains more ambiguous. The record of payment leaves no doubt that De Critz painted a portrait of White for the Company in that fiscal year, but it is less certain that the painting currently to be seen is that same work. For one thing, the painting's inscription reads, in part, '*ann dom. 1566, aetatis suae 72*', the year before White's death. It was either made in that year or is a literal 1606–07 copy of an earlier work dating from 1566. Fry records two portraits of White once held by the Merchant Taylors, noting that one had been destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666.¹¹ We also know that several of the towns that received White's bequest, as well as St John's College, possessed portraits of White before 1606–07. These are likely to have been primary or even secondary copies of a first Merchant Taylors' portrait of 1566. The Corporation of Reading, not only a recipient town for White's loan scheme but also his place of birth, holds a portrait of White inscribed with that date. This may be the date of that painting itself, which could make it the first of all the White portraits and the

prototype for the rest, or the date of the original from which this Reading painting has been copied, or simply a date added later to indicate the sitter's age at the time. However, the Reading portrait of White seems more likely to be an early copy of a Merchant Taylors' prototype done in that year and one of several extant pre-1600 copies. St John's College had two 'counterfeits' of White's portrait made in 1580–81, one of them drawn by the English painter John Bettes. One of these was sent to London to be 'refreshed' (and possibly compared to the original) in 1583–84.¹² Both Chester¹³ and Coventry¹⁴ had White portraits by 1593. A third Oxford portrait of White, also a copy, is recorded to have been made in 1593–94. This seems to have been done not for St John's or even the University but rather for the City, which owns it today, and which was another town to benefit from the loan-scheme. It has reliably been attributed to a painter from the Oxford area, Sampson Strong.¹⁵

Unfortunately, no archival documentation for a 1566 Merchant Taylors' painting can now be retrieved, as the Company's accounts for the years 1557–69 have not survived. Yet these works all share a mark of authenticity about the sitter's expression. We know from some of his own correspondence that White was a sick man in 1566, that he knew it, and that it worried him greatly.¹⁶ It is precisely this anguished look which has been captured in many of the extant White portraits, including both the Merchant Taylors' and Reading's. As all of these paintings show only White's face alone or utilise the same three-quarter-length pose and facial expression of the current Merchant Taylors' painting, it may well be that they are all (including the 1606–07 work) copies of a 1566 Merchant Taylors' prototype, whose author remains unknown, and which was destroyed in the Great Fire.

On the other hand, several aspects of the Merchant Taylors' extant portrait suggest De Critz's hand. Although, ironically, not quite as well or expertly worked as the Dowe, it does display the slightly lumpy facial treatment and rubbery fingers which characterise some of De Critz's other known works; and it conveys a sense of dignity and an emotional intensity which would be beyond the capability of a lesser artist. In addition, it is the same size as the Dowe, which would indeed be the case if the two were commissioned together in 1606–07 and intended, as they surely were, to hang in the same room. These factors open the strong possibility that this is indeed the De Critz painting commissioned in that year, but it is De Critz's rendition of the earlier work.

The firm attribution of three Merchant Taylor portraits to John de Critz in 1606–07 tells us several things. It allows us to see De Critz, traditionally more widely recognised as a 'painter' rather than a 'picture-maker', as one who carried out more portraits, and for a wider circle of patronage, than has generally been assumed. Secondly, it adds weight to the perception that, by the opening years of the seventeenth century, the London livery companies were gaining sufficient confidence as merchant communities to employ painters associated even with court circles. This stands in contrast to almost all of the earlier institutionally commissioned portraits, in both livery companies and provincial towns and cities, which were still being carried out by far less talented and often merely artisanal hands. Thirdly, it contributes to the efforts to identify the prototype for the remarkable number of reproductions of the portrait of Sir Thomas White.

modern times is said to have been in the Corporation's possession by 1593, 'adorned with taffeta and other cloths in 1594' and 'refreshed' by Stephen Darker in 1648; see H.T. Dutton: *Chester Town Hall*, Chester n.d., p.16.

¹⁴ J. Lancaster: *St Mary's Hall, a Guide*, Coventry 1981, p.71; I am grateful to R.A. Clarke for affording me access to this work in the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry.

¹⁵ F. O'Donoghue, ed.: *Catalogue of Engraved Portraits Preserved in the Department of*

Prints and Drawings in the British Museum, London 1908–25, IV, p.459; Poole, *op. cit.* (note 12), I, pp.244–45, cat. ref.740.

¹⁶ Letter from White to Mayor and Aldermen of Coventry, 1st February 1566/67, Coventry Record Office, MS. BA/D/A/1/3; *ibid.*, 3rd February 1566/67, BA/D/A/1/14; and letter from Sir William Cordell (one of White's executors) and Johan White (his widow) to the Mayor and Aldermen of Coventry, 20th March 1566/67, BA/D/A/1/15.