

Expansion and Integration: Networks in a Late Medieval Guild

Rachael Harkes
Department of History, Durham University



1. Introduction

- The Palmers' Guild of Ludlow (Shropshire) was a religious guild, offering spiritual and social benefits to all of their members from c.1250 to 1551. These benefits included an annual feast on Pentecost, masses said for their souls, financial and legal aid.
- Only two membership lists survive from the fourteenth century, while twenty-one survive for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Very little is known about the first century and a half of the guild's membership.
- A *cursus honorum* existed between Ludlow's town council and the Palmers by 1461, demonstrating their integration into town governing structures.¹
- By the sixteenth century, there was extensive membership across England and Wales (Fig. 1) averaging over 1000 new recruits/year with a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds (beggars, labourers, merchants, gentry, nobility and royalty). This was highly unusual for a late medieval English guild.

2. Aims and Objectives

- To use social network analysis to suggest who might have joined the guild when membership lists do not survive.
- To understand the characteristics of membership in the fourteenth century – occupation, location and connections.

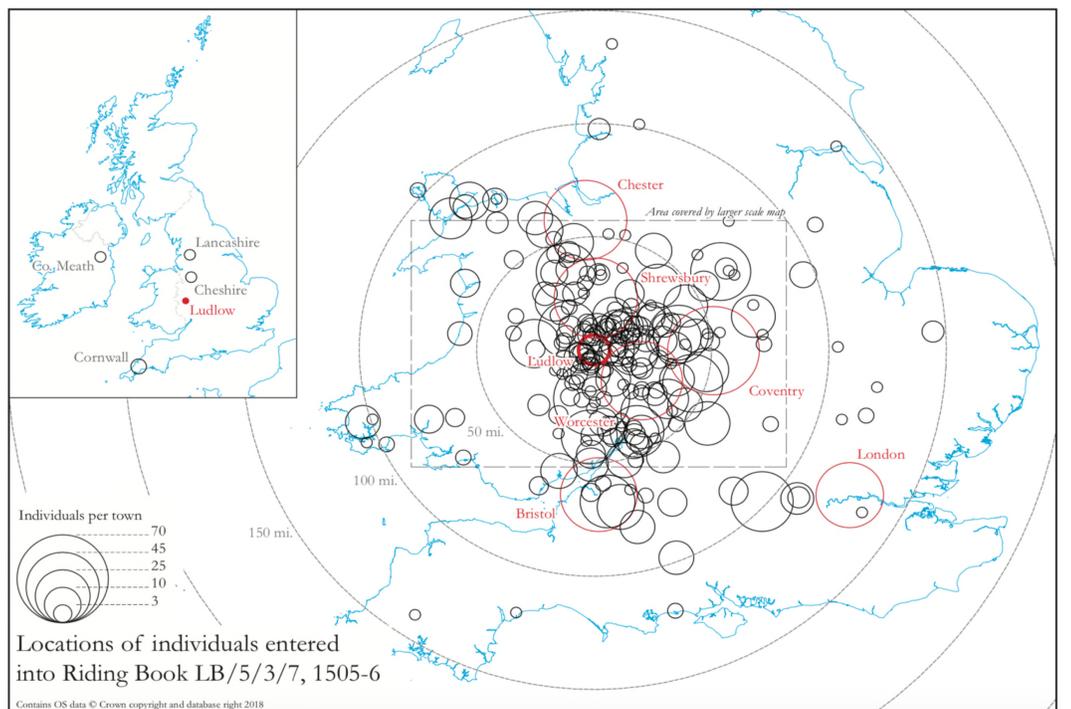


Fig. 1: Geographical spread of membership of the Palmers' Guild, 1505-6.

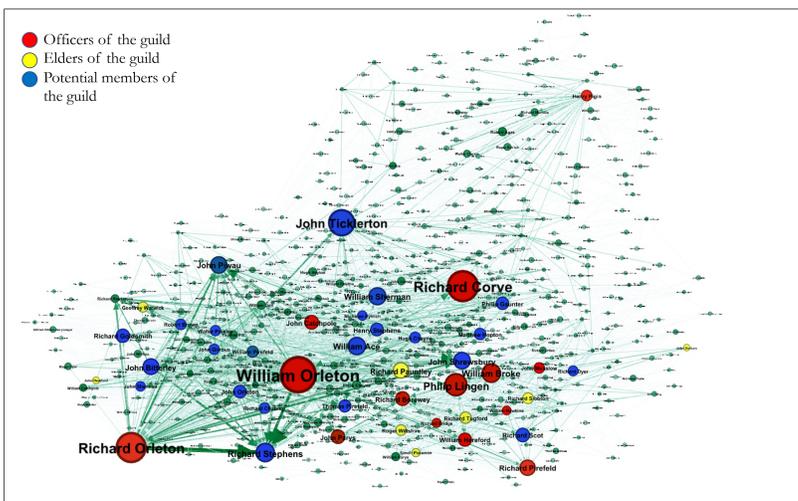


Fig. 2: Networks of the Palmers' Guild in the Fourteenth Century

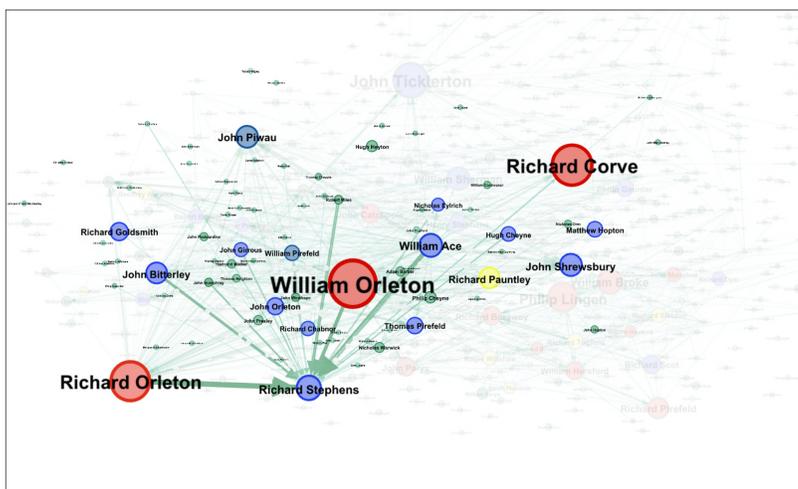


Fig. 3: Network of Richard Stephens, illustrating the extensive connections between potential members.

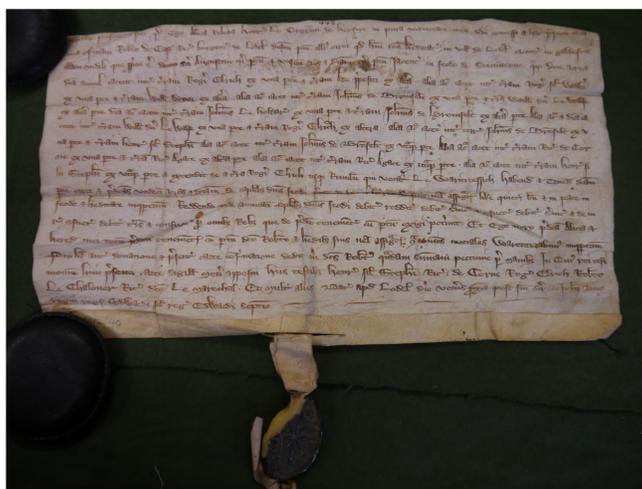


Fig. 6: Fourteenth-century guild deed, LB/5/2/40. Shropshire County Archives.

3. Methodology

- Record the names of grantors, grantees and witnesses from the 345 surviving guild deeds of the fourteenth century (Fig. 6)
- Analyze the connections between the grantors and grantees towards the witnesses.
- Membership is suggested only if an individual has a degree of connectivity of 33, for this is the degree of connectivity of the legal body known as 'the brethren of the guild' in the deeds.
- Map the networks in Gephi (programme for social network analysis).

4. Results

- There were 30 individuals with a degree of connectivity of 33 or above whose names were not recorded in the surviving registers (Fig. 2). There are now 155 known members of the guild.
- The wardens and stewards of the guild were, unsurprisingly, those with high degrees of connectivity, as shown through the size of their nodes (Fig. 2).
- Potential members had extensive connections with other potential members. For example, Richard Stephens was connected to 12 other potential members (Fig. 3).
- Bailiffs became increasingly involved within the guild networks during the latter half of the century, as shown in a comparison of the networks of John Ticklerton (Fig. 4) and John Pivau (Fig. 5).

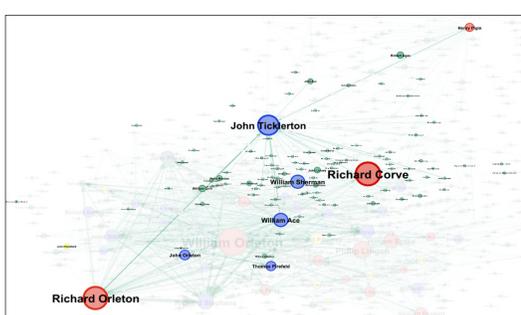


Fig. 4: Network of John Ticklerton, bailiff of Ludlow 1295-1332

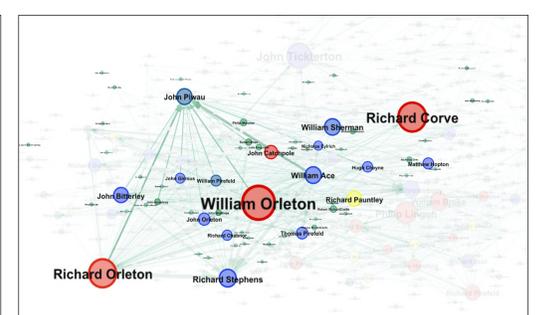


Fig. 5: Network of John Pivau, bailiff of Ludlow 1340-46.

5. Conclusions

- Membership was more expansive than the extant membership lists suggest, based on the strength of connections found in guild deeds between the grantors, grantees and witnesses.
- Potential members were of local origin and generally merchants, differing significantly from the heterogeneous membership of later centuries.
- The guild encouraged wide-ranging relationships (Fig. 3). Directed relationships between actors and witnesses in deeds demonstrates purposeful relationships, suggesting the regard in which individuals were held by members of the community.² The relationships between the potential members indicate strong associations encouraged by guild membership. It has been suggested that religious guilds provided a social and economic framework for developing relationships, and this appears to be happening within this network.³
- 10 of the 30 proposed members acted as bailiff and William Orleton was bailiff during his tenure as warden (warden 1372-90, bailiff 1378-92). Evidently a potential *cursus honorum* existed before the previously suggested 1461.

References

1. Michael Faraday. *Ludlow, 1085-1660*. Chichester, 1991.
2. Charlotte Berry. "To Avoide All Envy, Malys, Grudge and Displeasure": Sociability and Social Networking at the London Wardmote Inquest, c.1470-1540'. *The London Journal*, 42:3 (2017).
3. Gervase Rosser. *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages*. Oxford, 2015.