

The Worshipful Company of Distillers 350th Anniversary Banquet
Theodore Turquet DeMayerne – Distiller of London

JARED BROWN AND ANISTATIA MILLER

JB:

“Master, wardens, Lord Mayor, Mr Sheriff, Visiting Members, Ladies and Gentlemen...” As our founder Theodore Turquet DeMayerne wrote “...our intentions are not to obraid the ignorance or folly of any, but rather endeavor the information & direction of such of our members (as wanting the true knowledge of this Art) have run into errors and absordities in their practices.”

AM:

It was his intention to and I quote “at least to stop the intrusion of Interlopers into the practice of this Art: who by their preposterous ways of working, and frequent use of base and unsound materials, have brought scandal, not onely upon the works of this Art, but also on the Art, and Artists themselves.”

JB:

But how did distilling start in Britain and how did it get that out of hand?

AM:

Roger Bacon experimented with making an elixir to prolong life at Oxford in the 1260s. He was certain the solution would be distilled. Bishop Richard Ledrede recorded 12 distillates being made in Ireland in the 1360s. James IV of Scotland ordered Brother John Cor to distil spirit from barley malt in 1494. By the 1500s, printed manuals showed English housewives and apothecaries how to distil all sorts of spirits from wine or beer plus botanicals. In London, Laurens Andrewe translated and

published a German distillation book in 1527; Peter Morden did the same with a Swiss distillation book in 1565; Hugh Plat published *Delightes for Ladies* in 1602 which explained how to make usquebaugh—an Irish spirit rectified with botanicals, and *Spirits of Spices*; and Gervais Markham's *The English Huswife* explained how to make aqua compositae with the best ale in 1615. This names just a few. In other words, spirits distillation was even more popular and more uncontrolled.

JB:

Enter Theodore Turquet de Mayerne, first physician to James I and Queen Anne of Denmark. James I granted de Mayerne a monopoly in 1617 to establish the Worshipful Company of ...[pause]... Apothecaries to regulate what the apothecaries produced and sold. A year later, de Mayerne presented the king with a manual of standardised recipes—*Pharmacopoeia Londinensis*—which included a handful of distillate recipes, written in Latin to protect the company's "mysteries".

AM:

But there were also about 200 commercial distillers in London who also clamoured for control and legalisation. They petitioned for a charter in 1621, complaining that disreputable distillers made "British brandy" with beer dregs, rotten fruit, you name it. They pleaded to unify the budding industry. It didn't work. The House of Commons, at the time, was anti-monopoly—selectively anti-monopoly, really. Their request was turned down.

JB:

Then Charles I and Henrietta Maria ascended the throne in 1625. He inherited the debts left by his free-spending father and added on a few more of his own to feed his lavish lifestyle. To pay his bills, he laid heavy taxes on wine imports. This made spirits even more popular—and even more in need

of regulation. De Mayerne...the queen's physician Thomas Cademan, and Sir William Brounckner, a member of the king's privy chamber, took up the cause. The trio lobbied and obtained a monopoly on 20 March 1638, incorporating an initial body of 99 of the city's commercial distillers.

AM:

Despite this major win, the distillers' company suffered a major setback. The apothecaries' company denounced the establishment of the new distillers' company whom they accused of being comprised of quote: "sailors, bawds, innkeepers, quack slavers, aliens, men and women, whose honesty and skill are both of no value."

JB:

[They may have been right. Any sailors in the room? Innkeepers? Aliens?]

De Mayerne and Cademan countered the attack by presenting the king with a standards manual in 1639—The Distiller of London. To protect its mysteries, measurements were given in a number-to-letter cipher and some directions were given in astrological symbols. The volume contained 34 approved "strong waters" recipes plus 16 variations in both large and small quantities. Usquebaugh, aqua rosa solis and other trendy drinks were featured. So were three recipes that closely resemble modern-day gin recipes, especially Rule XXXIII—Aqua Fructum or Water of Fruits. [Beefeater Pink Strawberry] Remember. This is 1639, when genever was supposed to have just arrived and would someday, somehow evolve into...well...this born in London recipe.

AM:

Yet, the City of London declined to enrol the distillers' charter despite Charles I's threats to use "some coercive way for despatch of the business, and by that means vindicate his honour". Then the

Civil War dispatched the king, the argument, and the hopes of enrolling the distillers' charter. Freedom records show membership continued to grow until January 1640 then nothing appears until 1659 when the City finally enrolled the neglected charter. Women were invited to join the company during the next decade such as distiller Judith Rollins who was admitted in 1666. The company continued to grow in membership and activity: they acquired land and plans for a hall, conducted inspections, sought out "interlopers", and lobbied the City Corporation, the Crown, and Parliament. In November 1671, the City Corporation granted the distillers livery status which was confirmed by the Court of Aldermen the following year, entitling them to participate in civic elections and ceremonies as the city's 69th livery company—sandwiched between the wheelwrights and the patternmakers.

JB:

(Coincidentally, 1672 was the year the Daiquirí was born according to a 1734 Spanish dictionary. The 1672 Siege of Havana saw the British Royal Navy overtake Cuba and import ponche which the dictionary's author Francisco Sobrino called "an English drink made with aguardiente, water, lemon, and sugar.")

Despite the continued presence here of sailors, innkeepers, aliens, and the odd bawd, with the accomplishments of the livery over time and up to today, there is no question our founder would be proud of our stewardship of a significant and great industry, as we pass it with care to future generations. Long may their spirits drop as rain and distil as dew. Thank you.