The years between 1509 and 1519 formed a remarkable and creative decade in the history of the Mercers' Company of London. At the heart of the Mercers' business were two great English Christian humanists, Thomas More and John Colet. They both played a major role in several prominent events that shaped not only their own careers but the history of London itself. The decade began with acceptance into the Mercers' Company, which prefaced More's immediate involvement in the company's legal business and the first negotiations for the foundation of Colet's new St. Paul's School, which celebrates its 500th anniversary this year. It ended with both men leaving London life, the first in order to attend to the King's business in 1518, the other dying of the sweating sickness a year later. Although More became a more notable historical figure, Colet was equally important in his service to the City of London and was influential in More's life not least as his spiritual director.[1]

More and Colet shared much in common: they were both Londoners, probably attending the same school and both having well-known Londoners as fathers: John More, a judge, and Henry Colet, twice lord mayor. Both Colet and More were close to Henry VIII and both fell foul of him, though at different times, in different ways and with different results. As humanists, they were part of a London-based circle of 'English Erasmians'[2] including Thomas Linacre, Thomas Lupset and William Grocyn. They both wrote great humanist works, Colet focussing on biblical commentary, exegesis and Neoplatonism, and More producing thirty or so major titles, none of which is greater than his Utopia of 1516, which has been described as ‘... the most avant-garde work of humanist moral philosophy north of the Alps and one of the crowning achievements of the Reniassance.[3] More and Colet were neither Oxford Reformers nor Proto-Protestants[4] but were loyally Roman Catholic Londoners to the point that, had Colet lived longer it is extremely plausible that he would have followed More's example of protesting against the King's divorce. Perhaps the best evidence for More and Colet's personal relationship is the extant letter from More to Colet in 1504, before Colet had become Dean of St. Paul's and before he had returned to London for good:

What can be more distressing to me than to be deprived of your most dear society, after being guided by your wise counsels, cheered by your charming familiarity, assured by your earnest sermons, and helped forward by your example, so that I used to obey your very look or nod' With these helps I felt myself strengthened, but without them I seem to languish.[5]

In this lecture, I will, firstly, consider the current scholarship concerning Colet and More, particularly works which relate to the years 1509-19. Secondly, I shall examine More the Mercer, including his negotiations with the Pensionary of Antwerp, foreign diplomacy on behalf of the Mercers and his legal work as under-sheriff of London. Thirdly, I shall examine Colet's involvement with the mercery, including his re-foundation of the Guild of Jesus, his work to improve the hospital of St. Thomas of Acres, and the foundation of his school, as well as offer a comparison of the two humanists' ideology regarding education.

It is testimony to More's historical importance that, even during his lifetime, Erasmus had penned a small summary of his life in a letter to Ulrich von Hutten (1519).[6] The earliest biography to be written was by his Son-in-Law, William Roper, in 1557, shortly followed by another by Nicholas Harpsfield. Yet another, by Thomas Stapleton was published in 1588.[7] By the late seventeenth century More was regarded as a Protestant Reformer before his time: Gilbert Burnet, in 1684, saw More's Utopia and Colet's 1511 Sermon to the Convocation at St. Paul's as a pair, both being anti-clerical tracts, with More denouncing clergy in his first book of Utopia.[8]
Of the more recent biographies, Marius and Guy have contributed most to a revisionist approach to More, releasing him from his saintly reputation, but nevertheless retaining a genuine admiration for an astonishing man. There are several works which specifically analyse More's *Utopia*, notably by Baker-Smith, Olin, Turner and Wootton. Of the many other works on More perhaps Elton's, 'Thomas More: Councillor' and the edited volumes by Sylvester and Marc'hadour are outstanding. Of course, for More's works themselves, there is the excellent *Complete Works* and various editions of his work.

Regarding More's activity as a Londoner and a mercer the best source is still Lyell and Watney's *Acts of Court of the Mercers' Company* and the relatively recent survey of the London mercery by Sutton. Both Harpsfield and Roper give little account of More's activity from 1509-1518 and none regarding his work for the mercers. More recent works regarding More's public life and work, such as Guy's *The Public Career of Sir Thomas More*, also tend to skate over this important decade in London history, preferring, as most biographers do, to focus on his more prominent work as Privy Councillor, Lord Chancellor and his dissent over the royal divorce. However, in addition to the *Acts of Court* and Sutton's work, there is Ramsay's 1982 article 'A Saint in the City: Thomas More at the Mercers' Hall' which collates the scant documentation and suggests that the city mercers were more his clients than his intimates and that, as he knew as much about the City as anyone, he would have been an obvious choice to become the Recorder (the senior legal officer in London) had not events elevated him to other positions.

As for Colet, his reputation as a Christian humanist survived from the sixteenth into the twentieth century. In the 1960s, scholars such as McConica, Adams, Hunt and Reynolds emulated Seebohm and Lupton's nineteenth-century portrayals of Colet as a proto-Protestant character, whilst Jayne drew important attention to Colet's admiration for the Italian Platonist Marsilio Ficino (1433-99). However, in the 1970s, historians made significant contributions to the understanding of humanism's role in the pre-Reformation English Church. In the early 1980s, scholars such as Heal, Orme, Hay, Yule, Goodman, Brigden and Schoeck recognized the importance of education and preaching to early sixteenth-century Christian humanists in the reform process. By the 1990s, a number of publications by historians such as Rex, Dowling, Haigh, Fox and Pettegree had examined Christian humanism's essential role within the intellectual life of the pre-Reformation Church. In these publications Colet's name is associated not only with humanist heavyweights such as Erasmus, with whom Colet was good friends; More, to whom Colet was a spiritual director; and Fisher, with whom Colet shared a passion for preaching. The 1980s and 90s saw the publication of the best work on Colet, including revisionist articles and book by Trapp, and the Gleason's biography. Gleason's impressive work stripped away Victorian misconceptions about Colet's proto-Protestantism and re-planted his reputation firmly back into traditional Catholic territory. Gleason refutes Seebohm's claim that Colet was an immense influence upon Erasmus and seeks to correct a defect in Lupton's account, which had divorced Colet's life from his writings, by connecting his 'world of thought' with his 'Vita Activa', if only in the realms of education and politics, rather than attempted clerical reform. Gleason's work is significant in that he understands Colet's complex intellectual make-up and therefore refuses to portray Colet one-dimensionally; he examines Colet's written works and the foundation of his school in detail. My own articles and recent Colet biography build upon Trapp and Gleason's work and attempt to fill historical gaps by exploring Colet's work at St. Paul's Cathedral, and his reformist aims at Court. I shall first examine More's work as a Mercer.

II

Thomas More was admitted into the Mercers' Company in March 1509, as the *Acts of Court* attest:

ANNO XVcVIII - *Also Shewde* that Maister Thomas More, gentilman, desired to be fre of this felishipp, which was graunted hym by the holle company to haue it franke and fre.
Although Thomas neither served an apprenticeship with the company, nor was he son of a company member, the implication of the records is that he made a request to be 'made free' of the company, rather than being approached, and that this request had been granted. Although it is uncertain whether the John More, who was a Mercer in the reign of Richard II or the three other John More's who appeared in the Court of Assistants between 1502 and 1510, were related to Thomas. Harpsfield also mentions two other Thomas Mores, one a mercer, who died in 1513 and another, a London gentleman, alive in 1521. Neither of these are to be confused with our Thomas More.

It can be surmised, therefore, that More was an honorary mercer, perhaps an indication of his standing in London society, but also perhaps evidence of his usefulness to the company as a lawyer. Sutton asserts that More had 'received membership of the Mercers' Company as a useful lawyer to the Adventurers and friend of Dean Colet', implying that Colet assisted his entry to the company. By September More was deeply involved with Mercers' business, receiving the Pensionary of Antwerp on his visit to Mercers' Hall. As this episode is one of the few well-documented activities of More at the Mercers' Company, it is worth closer examination.

More's involvement with the Antwerp business is significant in that it takes us back to the *Intercursus Magnus* treaty of 1496 between England and the Low-Countries, which Henry Colet, as lord mayor, had enabled by giving his personal seal when the Corporation of London refused to do so. Although this treaty was short-lived, trade relations were resumed by April 1507, but some teething problems which had not been resolved in the *Intercursus* treaty remained, such as where English cloth merchants might establish their trading base in the Netherlands. In the fifteenth century it had tended to be Antwerp and Bergen-op-Zoom. By 1509, the Antwerp merchants were keen for the English cloth traders, the Merchant Adventurers, to make Antwerp their trading home in the Low Countries, as their presence inspired cloth dressers, dyers and attracted trade from as far as the Germanic states. There were rival towns attempting to attract the Merchant Adventurers, such as Bruges, so the embassy to England, in the form of the Pensionary of Antwerp in 1509, to the Mercers' Company, was of extreme importance.

Since 1507 and the re-opening of trade, the Merchant Adventurers had chosen to base themselves in Middelburg. In order to entice them back to Antwerp the Regent of the Netherlands wrote to them declaring that they would be received 'in all favour and sweetness' if they returned. However, in May 1508 they replied that they were still less than confident that Antwerp would be as beneficial to them as elsewhere, perhaps worried about the availability of warehouses and headquarters during mart periods. Thus, the Merchant Adventurers prepared to go to Middelburg once again. The Lords of Antwerp were thus forced to send their own emissary, Jacob de Wocht, one of the towns two Pensionaries, which was a legal office. Thus, Ramsay suggests, given all these facts, it is likely that the Merchant Adventurers anticipated an overture from the Antwerpian and encouraged the admittance of the clever young lawyer, More, into the Mercer's Company, specifically to deal with the case.

The case began with a letter, dated 29 August 1509, from Antwerp explaining that they were sending Jacob de Wocht to speak to them and praying that they receive him with hospitality. After this letter had been read out at the 'General Courte of Merchautes Aventuerers' on 30 August, they agreed to hear de Wocht at the next general court meeting, in order that a conclusion might be reached upon the matter.

On 3 September, at the ...
Thus, on 6 September 1509, the Aldermen, Wardens and eight others gathered from the ‘Mercers, Grocers, Drapers, Fysshemongers, Taylours, Skynners & Haberdysshers’ met in court. The proceedings were initially led by the Master of the Mercers’ Company, John Hawes, until the Pensionary was brought in, at which point More took control, speaking to de Wocht in Latin. The main point of division between the Antwerp Lords and the Merchant Adventurers soon became clear, being the issue of ‘the shewe houses and pak houses in the Englysshe street whiche was not, nor yit is, in the Power of theym of Andwerpe to graunt us.’ This one street became the pivotal issue and, from the Merchant Adventurers point of view, the entire reason for Jacob de Wocht’s presence, ‘Whereofare the grete cause of his comyng was to know oure pleasures in that behalf to thentent that according to their proyse they shulde prepare the said street against oure coming’.

With the initial petition heard, More and the company retired to consider their action, with the result that some men were chosen to gather the next day at 9 a.m. to conclude the matter. And so, on 7 September, the Pensionary, now anxious to deliver his ‘lettres unto the Kynges grace’, awaited a decision in the Mercers’ Hall once again. The company decided that de Wocht should go and deliver his letters and return later for a verdict.

Two days later, the ‘Generall Courte of Merchauntes Aventurers’ heard that the ‘Commyssioners of Andwerpe had appointed iij streets of the whiche it shulde be at theire pleasure to take oon of the said iij ... Notwithstanding, the same pensonary is comen ... for to offure us to chose also of iij streets moe.’ The company chose the ‘Englysshe strete’ with the problem that some of the property in that street was unavailable to them, and so they required ... ‘In recompense of the whiche they offer us the Pelican [property], and to make it necessarie for us as we shall devise.’

Having deliberated long enough the poor pensionary, now waiting in the Church below, was again brought forth ... ‘Than Maister More syttyng on the South bynche next the Wyndowe began to declare unto hym the mynde and pleasure of the company in Laten’, which was that the Merchant Adventurers agree to bring their merchandise to Antwerp at the next ‘Bamas marte’ as long as the Lords of Antwerp gave their word to fulfil the promises concerning streets and buildings available. The pensionary, no doubt relieved at the positive outcome and that he was now free to go, reassured the company that ‘all the promises whiche haue ben made unto us by them of Andwerpe shalbe truly perfourmed on theire behalf.’ Once More had translated this into English to the company, business was concluded and each man went his own way.

Whether More was cunningly appointed to the Mercers’ Company specifically to deal with the Antwerp case or whether it was merely happy chance that brought More into the Company at just the right time cannot be made certain. Nevertheless, he proved himself to be an extremely valuable asset to the Mercers’ and to the London Courts in general.

More was an MP at this time also, the houses meeting in January 1510. Ramsay has conjectured that, as More was one of the burgesses of the city and a mercer, he would have voted against a custom duty that had officially expired with the death of Henry VII as other burgesses had done. In the end they only managed to free themselves of liability for a period from the death of Henry VII until the tax was renewed in 1510.

In addition to his parliamentary duties, More took on the post of under-sheriff of London in September of that year. This was an important year for More as he also began his career as a judge at this time. Guy suggests that More’s promotion had been aided by his contacts, specifically his maternal grandfather, Thomas Graunger, had been sherriff (1503-4). However, it seems that More also made his own luck. By use of his great legal mind, by joining the mercers, by possibly being retained as counsel by the Merchants of the Staple, and as under-sheriff (a ‘minor but useful public office’), More was making himself an indispensable part of the City administration. Roper was told that there was ‘in none of the Prince’s courts of the law of this realm any matter of importance or controversy, wherein he [More] was not with the one part of counsel.’
The work of the under-sheriff was to advice the sheriffs and to sit as judge in the Sheriff's Court. This court dealt with most matters, including assaults, violence, debt, defamation, disputes over money etc. It met at the Guildhall, usually on Thursday mornings and More apparently enjoyed his work and was popular with Londoners. Erasmus wrote that 'no judge ever disposed of more cases, or showed greater integrity'. As under-sheriff, More also had the right to represent the City in the central courts at Westminster as assistant counsel under the recorder, London's chief law officer. This was a profitable business for More, accounting for the fact that he remained in this post until 23 July 1518.

Meanwhile, evidence of More's involvement at the Mercers' Company appears again in records of 1512. For several years previous, there had been antagonism between the Staplers (wool merchants in a minority within the Mercers' Company) and the Merchant Adventurers (cloth merchants with a majority), regarding trade routes, ports and cities, namely Calais and Bergen-op-Zoom. Merchants on both sides were arrested for trespassing onto the other's territory. The Court of Assistants met in December 1509 to try and resolve their differences, under Warden Thomas Seymour, but the wrangling continued until January 1512, when each fellowship sought justice in from the King's Council in the Star Chamber (or Camera Stellata) in the Palace of Westminster, where Colet was later to be a member from 1515-18.

The two sides also met in the Mercers' Hall. On 1 April 1512 the Staplers requested that eight representatives should be chosen to speak on their behalf.

Seven of them were wool merchants and the eighth was Thomas More. Ramsay suggests that More's presence was easily explicable given that Alderman Thomas Graunger, a recently-deceased Stapler, was probably his grandfather. Whether More was responsible for initiating this reconciliatory dialogue and what resulted is undocumented. However, the dispute dies away and so the negotiations, in which More no doubt took a significant role, were probably a success.

Roper and Harpsfield allege that More continued in his diligence as a city officer until, in the Spring of 1515, he was sent on a mission to represent the English interest at a merchants' conference in Bruges. Charles V had rejected the 1496 intercursus and was looking for a way to revive trade in Bruges. Thus, he 'initiated negotiations for a new 'amity' between the rulers of England and the Low Countries.' More was part of an embassy as an advisor. He appointed a deputy under-sheriff in London and travelled with John Clifford, mercer and governor of the Merchant Adventurers. The negotiations lasted the whole of the rest of the year, during which time More drafted much of Utopia, and agreement was reached early in the new year of 1516. Charles agreed to a new intercursus (agreement) on 12 February 1516, 'ratified by Henry VIII on 9 March', which secured good trade relations between England and the Netherlands for some time.

In 1517 he was off again on a mission to secure the City of London's interests with the French. On 20th June More specifically invited the mercers to inform him of any grievances they needed resolved:

Where it was shewed unto the Company by Maister Wardens that Maister More shuld go over the see as Imbassador into Frunce for a day of dyat there to be kepte, and they of the Compeny that haue had any Iniuries or wronge done unto theym by Frenchmen lett theym shewe it to the said Maister More.

However, More's days as a city official and friend to the mercers were coming to an end. His work in Bruges in 1515 had brought him to the attention of both king and cardinal (Wolsey), just as Colet's sermon at Wolsey's installation as cardinal in 1515 had brought him royal favour and a place on the King's Council. Roper reports that the further embassy on behalf of the merchants in 1517 increased his reputation:
Whose wise and discrete dealing therein, to his high commendacion, coming to the kings understanding, provoked his highness to cause Cardinall Wolsey (then Lord Chauncelor) to procure him to his service.[70]

After another ingenious negotiation with the Pope's ambassador in Star Chamber Henry VIII would wait no longer for More to be in his service, for Thomas was now ...

'so greatly renowned, that for no intreaty wold the king from thenceforth be induced any longer to forbeare his service. Att whose first entry thereunto, he made him mayster of the requests ... and within a moneth after knighte, and one of [his] privy Councell[71]

By 1518 he was in receipt of a royal pension of £100 per annum. Shortly after he resigned as under-sheriff, on 23 July 1518, More performed his last act as city officer. His role was, along with the mayor and aldermen, to receive the papal legate, Cardinal Campeggio, into London and give a 'brief oration' of welcome to the city.[72] More was still to be found negotiating for the city's interests, however, in the 1520s. He attended the dialogue between the English and the Hanseatic League in the summer of 1520 in Bruges and, in 1522, helped secure two English war ships to escort Merchant Adventurer ships from Zeeland, probably by means of persuading Wolsey to oblige, for which he was paid £20.[73] It was in 1522 also that More gave an address, along with William Lily, high-master of Colet's school, at a reception for Emperor Charles V.[74]

III

Colet's roots in the Mercers' Company were established by his father, Henry. Much data concerning his family's mercantile history is found in the Acts of Court of the Mercers' Company and in Sutton's excellent history of the mercery from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries.[75] Henry's significant activity at the mercery included licensing, in 1480, the wardens of the company (and their wives) to have private altars erected where they and their families may receive the holy sacrament. Henry was Master at the time (1479-80)[76] and would also go on to be twice mayor, from 1486-7 and 1495-96. John was lucky to have been the only child of Henry and Christian to survive from their twenty or so progeny.[77] As master, alderman and mayor, Henry kept a tight rein on the Mercers' business dealings, in 1479 apparently making decrees concerning the late payment of bills,[78] in 1485 being involved in the discipline of a mercer for buying goods contrary to the company's ordinances; and, in 1487, forbidding freemen of London to send goods to provincial markets and fairs for seven years.[79] He expanded his business connections in Buckinghamshire, his place of origin, and Essex, buying stalls and other property in Colchester in 1485.[80] Nevertheless, Henry's wealth was founded upon and enhanced by overseas trade, which had been well established in the company in the 1430s.[81] Henry's most famous and significant contribution as Mayor was his personal guarantee in the Intercursus Magnus treaty of 1495, allowing dealings with the low countries to continue, which marked an important moment in his relationship with King Henry VII and eventually had significance for John Colet's career when the king looked favourably upon John when seeking a new dean for St. Paul's.[82]

Thus, the Mercers' Company had been dominated by the Colet family for the last two decades of the fifteenth century and it is not surprising therefore that the return of Henry Colet's only surviving son to London was a significant one for the company and an event that was to deeply effect them for the first two decades of the sixteenth century. John was admitted into the company in 1509 and from 1510 was looking forward to the possibility of a new school, just as More was looking forward to his new job as
under-sheriff of London.[83] However, before Colet was even formally admitted to the company, the dean was forging links between the mercers and the cathedral by means of the re-foundation of the Guild of Jesus.

The Guild of the Holy Name of Jesus, of Colet's time, met in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral, although it is not certain that it originally gathered there. Membership not only provided regular private liturgy and annual ceremonies but also guaranteed that one's soul would be prayed for after death, which was in fact its main *raison d'être*. As the name suggests, there was a heavy stress placed upon the name and character of Jesus, which was celebrated as a particular feast on 7 August annually from 1488-9 onwards. In fact it was not uncommon for confraternities to devote themselves in this way: another example is the Jesus chantry established in Manchester's collegiate church in the early sixteenth-century.[85] The Brigittine monastery at Syon, and the highly influential benefactor, Lady Margaret Beaufort, were supporters of the London fraternity.[86]

That the Mercers' Company were a significant element in the guild is beyond doubt. The fraternity was wealthy from those who left bequests. Naturally, the more one bequeathed the more prayers one bought for the departed soul. Records show at least twenty bequests from the Company between 1513 and 1535, although evidence of mercer bequests goes back as early as 1455.[87]

The guild, like St. Thomas of Acre and St. Paul's School to come, was in the firm grip of the mercery and was controlled by a nucleus of wardens and their assistants. It attracted a 'pious minority' who, though already belonging to other fraternities, were often invited to join.[88] Thus, the membership, the quality of the liturgy and the income were elite. The large income from alms giving, in return of course for prayers and indulgence, was over £200 in 1524-3 and over £400 in 1534-5. The Mercers' Company, successively thirteen wardens and seven masters to be precise, naturally managed this money.[89]

The revival of the guild, from 1507 onwards, provides evidence for the generalization that Colet's reforming activities were more successful when touched by the secular world of the mercers - the guild, St. Thomas's and the school - than when he attempted to restore clerical discipline and high liturgical standards at the cathedral in a purely ecclesiastical environment.[90] I now turn to Colet's attempt to improve the hospital of St. Thomas of Acre.

St. Thomas's Hospital was situated adjacent to the Mercers' Hall and, upon Colet's return to London in 1505, was in a poor state. The bad state of affairs may have been the fault of Richard Adams, who was master by 1505 and was dismissed in 1510, by which time the mercers decided that they needed a new hall and chapel. St. Thomas's being down at heal, the mercers sought to take over the establishment, become its patrons, and profit their own company into the bargain. It was John Young, Rector of All Hallows, Honey Lane, who was made the Master of St. Thomas's on 15 September 1510. With reformist ideals he disciplined the chaplains of the company and made plans to expel the laity from his church and construct an enclosure for his own brethren. As Sutton puts it: 'There seems little doubt that Young was a man after Colet's own heart.'[91] Only one week after his appointment as master, Young was called to conference with the dean, who had been informed of the inadequacies of the company's existing banqueting hall and chapel. It was agreed that, by levying each man according to his wealth, the chapel could be expanded and further rooms built above.

The purchase of the land was completed in February 1512. Various monetary gifts from merchants contributed to the cost of the new building. Young continued to prosper as Master of St. Thomas's, becoming a Prebendary of St. Paul's in 1511, Suffragan to Bishop Fitzjames in 1513, and Bishop of Gallipoli, in Trace, as well as Archdeacon of London in 1514.

Thus, Young set in motion plans for a new hall and the reform of the hospital by making the Mercers' Company its patrons. In 1510 the hospital had debts amounting to over £718, with its properties in poor repair, and only eight brothers remaining.
Young paid off the debt and found over £1400 for repairs over the next eight years. The house was just about solvent when Young presented the accounts to Wolsey and the papal legate, Cardinal Campeggio, on 1 March 1519, the year of Colet's death. By negotiating agreements with the company concerning chantries, loans, and the sale and exchange of land, the mercers were able to build themselves a new hall and chapel on and near their existing site.

It was not until 1524, however, that the plans finally came to fruition and on 26 May 1525 the new chapel was consecrated. The total cost had now amounted to over £2700 and the building reflected the grand price tag: the hall had a battlemented frontage on Cheapside of around one hundred feet, with a central porch, underneath a statue of St. Thomas Becket. Behind this frontage was the vaulted chapel with the hall above, which measured about fifty-four feet by thirty feet. There were other rooms to the west.[92]

As Sutton summarizes, the whole exercise of making the mercers patrons of the Hospital of St. Thomas of Acre foreshadowed Colet's entrusting of his school into the hands of the lay mercers. Both arrangements had the effect of emphasizing the Mercers' exceptionally powerful position within London society. Although Colet was not the main protagonist in this episode, he was involved at the inception of the idea and would have watched the progress of reform and rebuilding with interest. This episode no doubt played an important role in shaping his own plans for the governance of his school, to which I now turn.

Henry Colet died on 1 October 1505, leaving John to consider how best to begin his school-building project. Colet's immediate instinct was to involve the Mercers' Company in the preliminary work, rightly supposing that their support for the school would mean significant financial gain for the project. By 1508, a large schoolhouse of stone had been erected in St. Paul's Churchyard, to the east of the old cathedral building. In 1509, the Mercers' Company, by way of a real estate endowment, offered financial support.[93] The pre-existing grammar school was still evident in 1509, attested to by an indenture, dated 1 July (I Henry VIII) 1509, in which Colet and mercers agreed to grant one William Gerge, his heirs and assigns, a manor in Hertfordshire on condition that Gerge and his heirs should pay the company £8 a year for the use of the school.[94]

The paperwork for the official foundation of the school was sorted out speedily in 1510: on 9 April 1510, Colet formally notified the company of his intention to found the school. This date marks the first mention of the school in the Acts of Court of the Mercers' Company and it is interesting to note that Colet's reforms were again being supported by his mercer friends who belonged to the Guild of the Holy Name of Jesus, in this case Master Thomas Baldry.[95] Only three days later the Acts of Court attest that communication had indeed taken place:

Maister Thomas Saymer, oon of the Wardens, sheweth that he and Thomas Baldry had ben with Maister Dean of Poules, according as it was agreed at the last Courte of Assistens, and had felde parte of his mynde for the foundacion of his scole in Poules Church Yarde, whereof he purposeth to maue Company conseruatours and Rulers.[96]

On the 16 April, Colet submitted a list of lands in three counties whose revenues were to be allocated for the support of the school, compensating the company by donating some London land to them. The company accepted this proposal the following day, becoming trustees.[97]

The master's house, a timber-framed structure, was built sometime between 17 August 1510 and before 28 March 1511.[98] On 21 July 1511, Colet conveyed some 2000 acres of land in Buckinghamshire to the Mercers' Company for the support of the School.[99]
On 6 September 1511, the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's Cathedral conveyed a small piece of land on the east side of the cathedral so that the boys could relieve themselves. The rent was one red rose every ninety years! On 4 November of the same year, further London lands and tenements were transferred to the mercers. On 30 March 1512, so it could not have been in use for long at this point. Furthermore, Colet proposed the articles of governance on 15 June 1512. On 16 April 1513, Colet obtained a licence to found a perpetual chantry for one chaplain in the chapel of St. Mary and St. John on the south side of the school in the cemetery of the church of St. Paul, to be called the chantry of St. Mary. In June 1514 Colet executed a second will in which he left to the mercers, in addition to lands and houses already granted, some tenements in Old Change, London, and the whole school, 'and in which', wrote the dean 'at present I am solely seized in my demesne as of fee.' On 8 August 1516, Colet executed a deed by which he granted to the Mercers' Company property in the eastern counties.

Colet showed no intention of trusting the administration of his school to anyone other than the laity of the Mercers' Company. As we have seen, there was precedent for lay trustees at other schools, going back at least to the beginning of the fifteenth century. The mercers themselves had run the college of Robert Whittington, former master of the company, since 1421, as well as the school at Faryngho (or Farthingoe) since 1443.

There are several reasons why Colet may have preferred laity, rather than clergy, to take charge of his school. Firstly, Colet apparently found less corruption in 'married men of established reputation' than in clerics. This fact must have caused Colet a great deal of sadness considering his lifelong ambition for clerical perfection. Secondly, Colet was himself a long-standing mercer who would have felt comfortable entrusting the precious pupils and financial matters to those whom he knew personally to be of good moral standing. He would have had ample opportunity to evaluate the trustworthiness of the mercers in dealing with statutes, for instance. Thirdly, Gleason argues that Colet foresaw the coming ecclesiastical, economical and political changes of the Reformation, such as the suppressing of monasteries and chantries, and that a school controlled by laity would give no pretext for a takeover by Wolsey and the king, or the sequestering of its funds. This argument flatters Colet as being gifted with the most amazing foresight and political insight. I would prefer to argue that, at this stage, Colet was rather politically naïve. The fact that Colet's school survived the Chantries Act of 1547, when other ecclesiastically controlled schools did not, is probably more a matter of good fortune than fortune telling.

Although the mercers were officially responsible for the school, Colet held a tight grip on its affairs. He personally selected the first Highmaster, William Lily, who was already known to Colet as the Godson of the Oxford scholar William Grocyn. Lily was educated at Magdalen College, Oxford from 1486. After graduation, he went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, returning via Rhodes and Italy, where he perfected his knowledge of classical languages and authors. Lily's pay at St. Paul's School was extremely high for the time, at over £20 per annum. Lily appointed his son-in-law, John Ritwise, as Surmaster, thus qualifying him, under the terms of Colet's own school statutes, to succeed Lily as Highmaster in due course. According to McDonnell, Colet apparently selected and paid for the chaplain. Colet also kept a close eye on the administration of the trust, insisting upon a separate account for the trust from all the other Mercers' Company business. The dean presented his school statutes to the company on 15 June 1512 and sneakily, on the same day, introduced his agent, William Newbold, who was to oversee the proper administration of the trust. The master and four other wardens of the company ran the trust from then on, with Newbold becoming an accepted member of the company and secretary from 1 February 1521/2, after Colet's death.

Colet's school was a great success and it is interesting that More shared so many of Colet's educational ideals. Although he never founded an educational institution like many of his humanist contemporaries, More's ideal for a school curriculum, found in *Utopia*, demonstrates that More and Colet were of one mind with regard to the ultimate aim of education: the promotion of moral well-being. As Guy rightly asserts, 'virtue and learning were ... upheld as the way to attain piety, charity and Christian
humility. Only then would a person be equipped to lead and innocent life. Like Colet, this led More to an extreme moral stance which espoused hard work and condemned idleness. The practical effect of which was that, not only were More and Colet workaholics, but that they attempted to encourage hard work in others, no more so than in More's own home and for Colet's own cathedral and school.

It may well be that More was influenced by Colet's enthusiasm on the subject of education and moral probity, especially as Colet was More's spiritual director. Only a few years after the completion of St. Paul's School, More's *Utopia*, posits an ideal educational curriculum which is remarkably similar to the one that Colet had devised in real life. More's fictitious children were to learn Latin and Greek literature, logic and philosophy, as well as the works of the Church Fathers, astronomy and mathematics. The Utopians are keen students, especially for classical literature as More relates:

> When I told them about Greek literature and philosophy ... they became extraordinarily anxious to study the original texts, under my own tuition ... everyone who volunteered for the course ... was a mature scholar or outstanding intelligence.

They also apply this intelligence to scientific research. More went further in his idealism by opening education to all, both men and women, and having public lectures as recreation. He attempted to improve the education of both his wives by means of personal tuition and supervision. However, More's optimism for educational reform of society may have been limited, given that, for him:

> The humanist ideal of reform through education will not work because it fails to address the root causes of Christendom's disorders. Only radical reform will work, but modern Europe is too committed to private property and social hierarchy for such reform to have any hope of success.

Colet's real school was open to boys from all nationalities and backgrounds, up to the maximum of 153. Perhaps this was as close to a cosmopolitan ideal as was realistically possible at the time.

For Colet, moral education was paramount; he preached it to his congregations, he used it as the basis for his administration of the cathedral, and he built his school upon the ideal that he could create generations of morally upright pupils from his London base. What Colet had learned in Italy and Oxford concerning the need for humanity's purity and struggle towards perfection was to drive Colet on to an evangelical effort to encourage as much moral and religious piety in young people as he could. He would do so by the same ascetic and rigorous method as he attempted to employ at the cathedral, emphasizing discipline, routine, and very hard work, being careful to avoid all worldly things. Colet's hierarchical view of the universe applied to both ecclesiastical and educational institutions. As the pupils were more subservient, impressionable and malleable than the obstinate clergy, Colet was to achieve much more success at the school than he did within the Church.

It was upon the issue of Latin and Greek that Colet's school would differ from its contemporaries. The question, for Colet, was whether the wisdom of classical antiquity was one that could supplement the essential truths of Christian teaching, or whether they were to be ignored in favour of a purely scriptural curriculum. As the inscription on the school's façade indicated, Colet wished to emphasize education in the faith first, with knowledge of good literature second place: 'for my entent is by thys scole specially to incresse knowledge and worshipping of god and oure lorde Crist Jesu and good Cristen lyff and maners in the Children'.
IV

Thomas More and John Colet shared many characteristics, in relation to the spiritual as well as the material world. They were both wealthy and well-educated humanists who sought societal reform by whatever means lay open to them. Although More was unable to commit to the celibate life of a monk or a priest, his spiritual life was, nevertheless, of the utmost importance to him, signified by the fact that the ultra conservative and ascetic Dean Colet was his guide and mentor in spiritual matters. Their spiritual life underpinned their worldly business with Colet seeking disciplinary reform at St. Paul's Cathedral and founding a school on a humanist idealistic curriculum, and More giving his life to diligent service of society through the law, diplomatic and royal service, whilst at the same time writing with an idealistic fervour that would have been pleasing to Colet.

Although both men were wealthy, More's attitude to the Mercers' profit-making trade was surprisingly negative and in sympathy with, if not influenced by, Colet's own asceticism. Sutton writes:

Lord Chancellor More - had little sympathy for mercantile obsession with profit; this offended his sense of morality and perhaps he had seen too much of mercers and adventurers. *Utopia* - declared that ideally men should be controlled by the 'beneficent' state and take little reward for the goods they brought into the country.\[125\]

Indeed, as Chancellor, More promoted heavy fines for merchants avoiding government taxes.\[126\] Not only that, but he was a 'bitter persecutor - of good men' during his anti-heresy campaigns (1529-32): "he cannot be regarded as sympathetic to the mercers as merchants at any time."\[127\]

It is impossible to think, given their friendship, that Colet and More did not have dealings together at the Mercers' Company, although the records show that their official business at Mercers' Hall did not coincide. Although Colet was a mercer through family connections, and More was not, nevertheless they both became key figures in the company, with the result that not only did the mercers themselves benefit from the two men's generosity and skill, but also so did the wider city itself in the form of Colet's new school, the re-founder of the Guild of the Holy Name of Jesus and the improvement of the hospital of St. Thomas of Acre along with the various legal and diplomatic services that More provided, which ensured good international trade relations, especially with the Netherlands, for many years to come.

Both men left a significant mark upon society, not just in the City of London, but also in the wider fields of spiritual discipline, in ascetic Catholic piety, in the furtherance of educational curricula, and in the world of Christian humanist learning through their writings. Quite simply, the Christian humanist activity of More and Colet within the Mercers' Company, from 1509 onwards, helped to shape the London we know today.


[34] See Arnold, *Colet*, pp. 18, 52 and 89


[36] Ibid., p.283.


[38] Ibid., p.328, Ramsay, 'Mercers', p.283.


[41] Ibid., p. 329.

[42] Ibid., pp.329-330.


[44] Ibid., p.331.

[45] Ibid., p. 331.

[46] Ibid., p. 332.

[47] Ibid., pp. 333-4.

[48] Ibid., p. 334.

[49] Ibid., p. 335.


[56] Ibid., p. 6.


[58] Ibid., p. 6.
Harpsfield, More, p. 313; Roper, More, pp. 8-9: 'After [this] he was made one of the vndershirifs of London, by which office and his learning together (as I haue herd him say) he gained without grief not so litle as foure hundreth poundes [by the] yeare'.

Ramsay, 'Mercers', p. 278.

Arnold, Colet, pp. 136 and 167.

Acts of Court, p.401.


Ramsay, 'Mercers', p. 279.


Sutton, Mercers, pp. 334-5.

Ibid., p. 335.

Acts of Court, p. 446.

See Arnold, Colet, pp.166-70.

Roper, More, p. 9.

Ibid., pp. 10-11.


Ramsay, 'Mercers', pp. 286-7; Acts of Court, p. 537; Sutton, Mercers, p. 356.

Acts of Court, p.365; Sutton, Mercers, p. 357.

Sutton, Mercers.

Ibid.,p. 171.

Ibid.,p. 193.

Ibid.,p. 313.

Ibid., pp. 216 and 274.

Ibid.,pp. 221-2.

Ibid.,p. 234.

Ibid.,pp. 326-8.

Ibid.,p. 361.

The most useful manuscript source for information concerning the guild is Bodleian, MS Tanner 221. Fos. 48v-52v (1517-8) give a good indication of the high quality of the ritual and liturgy.

Sutton, Mercers, p. 381, n. 9.

E.A. New, The Cult of the Holy Name of Jesus, with Special Reference to the Fraternity in St. Paul's Cathedral,
In 1402-3 a school in Stratford-on-Avon was administered by a guild. Lay trustees were also employed at schools in Macclesfield (1502-3) and Bridgenorth in Shropshire, 1503: Arthur F. Leach, 'st. Paul's School before Colet', *Archaeologia*, 62, 1, (1910), p. 207.
Double that paid to the high master of Magdalen College School at Oxford: Gleason, p. 222. Lupton suggests that the highmaster was paid over £34 a year: Lupton, Life, p. 177.


Acts of Court, p. 403.

Ibid. pp. 3 and 572. According to Gleason, Newbold's death was not in 1540 as McDonnell suggested: McDonnell, Annals, p. 56.


Ibid., p. 101.

Halpin, 'Utopianism', p. 305.


An issue which had been raised by Giovanni Dominici over a hundred years earlier in 1405, in his book Lucula Noctis, in which he argued that Christian writing illuminated the darkness of pagan ignorance: Gleason, p. 225; Iohannes Dominici, Lucula Noctis, ed. Edmund Hunt (Indiana, 1940), p. xiv.

Colet's Statutes in Lupton, Life, p. 279.

Ibid., p. 352; More, Complete Works, iv, pp. 144-51.

Sutton, Mercers, p. 368.

Ibid., p. 383.