

**Article title:** 'If it be a faulte in us, it exceedeth from yourselves': The Election of Scholars from the Merchant Taylors' School to St. John's College, Oxford

**Author(s)'s name(s):** Katherine A. Parsons-Koh

**Author(s)'s email address(es):** [kparsons@lasierra.edu](mailto:kparsons@lasierra.edu)

**Affiliated institution(s) or organization(s):** La Sierra University

**Abstract :**

In 1555, Sir Thomas White, a wealthy Merchant Taylor, founded St. John's College at the University of Oxford. White established St. John's College as an institution of counter-reform during the resurgence of traditional religion in England during the reign of Mary Tudor. Following her death, and the accession of Elizabeth I, he reframed his foundation as conformist, but it gained a reputation as a haven for crypto-Catholics, educating the future martyr-saints Edmund Campion and Cuthbert Tunstall.

In 1562, Sir Thomas White also assisted in the foundation of a grammar school run by his company, the Merchant Taylors' School, London. Shortly after, White tied the two institutions together, giving the Merchant Taylors' Company the ability to elect 42 of the 50 fellowships available to St. John's College, Oxford. While this arrangement initially seemed ideal as it provided the College with a 'feeder' school as well as one of the wealthiest guilds in London as a benefactor, the relationship became complicated following White's death in 1567. Differing religious views became a key point of tension underlying the problematic relationship between the Merchant Taylors' Company and St. John's College. St. John's remained a conservative college, and after the turn the seventeenth century was a hotbed of Arminian belief and practice, particularly during the presidencies of John Buckeridge and William Laud. Meanwhile, the Merchant Taylors' Company became increasingly Calvinist, its leadership frequenting London parishes led by prominent Puritan ministers.

The tensions between these two institutions tended to explode each year on St. Barnabas' Day, the time assigned for the Merchant Taylors' Company and the Master and Fellows of St. John's College to choose new scholars from the Merchant Taylors' School to come up to Oxford. A number of these occasions erupted in to name calling and underhanded dealings. These troubles are recorded in a scrapbook of the elections housed at the Guildhall Library London, letters in the Company and College archives, as well as logged in the St. John's College Register. This paper utilizes these sources in order to tease out how

religious differences played a role in professional interactions of these two institutions, particularly in relation to the yearly elections.

**Five keywords:** 1. William Laud  
2. The Church of England  
3. Merchant Taylors'  
4. Benefaction  
5. Puritans