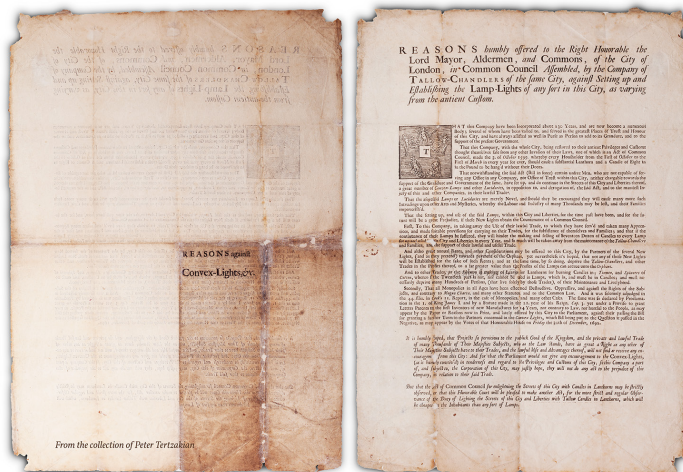


The Candlemaker

By Michael Sawers, HBA 2021



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As he walked through the chamber, the echoes of his footsteps rang out like gunshots amidst the fragile air of St. Paul's Cathedral. His eyes were fixated on a recently created painting. A quote by the artist posted below the painting read, in Latin—

Lector, si monumentum requiris, circumspice.
"Reader, if you seek a monument, look about you."

Charles Wosley found himself here every morning before work, without fail, staring at the brilliant painting of Sir Christopher Wren that was recently put on display in the vast cathedral. He admired Wren; a physicist, astronomer, and mathematician, Wren had taken on the surprising role of architect to help re-build London after the Great Fires. Charles saw himself in Wren; whereas Wren had to rebuild the city, Charles was tasked to rebuild the economy. Specifically, the Lord Mayor had tasked Charles, a high ranking Alderman, to address the City's latest debacle regarding convex lenses. Charles left the Cathedral with a cloudy head, and headed to the meeting.

"Attention, attention" the Lord Mayor said with a growl. He was a lazy man who conducted himself with a complete lack of poise. He sharply contrasted the sanctity of the office around him. There were sleek oak benches lined up diagonally in orderly rows facing the Mayor, while paintings of Mayors before him lined the walls.

"As you all know, we gather here today to make a decision about lenses... or something" the Mayor muttered the end of his sentence. "Today, we have a representative from the Tallow Chandlers who wishes to address us. Representative, please proceed."

"Thank you, Lord Mayor. I represent the interest of hundreds of candlemakers. I wanted to remind you all, before you reach a decision, that candles are cheaper *and* better for the environment, *and*...

The representative droned on in an alarmist tone. Other aldermen shared their opinions until it was Charles' turn to speak.

"I will make this short," said Charles, immediately commanding the respect of his fellow aldermen. "There have been talks among the banking merchants about forming The Bank of England. As you

know, this has long been a goal of ours to achieve. However, the most powerful among them have made it explicit that they wish to be the exclusive lenders for the manufacturing and installation of these new convex lenses. Should we ban lenses, we can say goodbye to the Bank of England.”

This ruffled the crowd as the Lord Mayor ended the meeting and called another discussion for tomorrow morning. As Charles left the building, he was met with another protest from the Candlemakers. He met eyes with a few of them, and for a moment, he thought he saw a glimpse of Ben Shomakker.

Ben was Charles’ close childhood friend; they used to share family meals together, play with toy guns, and as they grew older, even went hunting with their fathers. Charles had always regretted losing touch with him. He heard Ben was now a lesser-known candlemaker in the East End, and Charles tried to crush the pang of guilt he felt then with the quick rationalization that his eyes must have failed him. He headed home.

As he began the next morning’s walk to St. Paul’s, he caught the subtle scent of smoke. He turned his head, and saw a store simply called ‘The Candlemaker’ a few blocks from the cathedral. His eyes drifted inside and met the gaze of an individual giving him a cold grimace. Charles responded with an awkward, guilt-ridden smile as their line of sight was suddenly broken by the store’s brick wall. That same haunting feeling of guilt he experienced outside the council building returned, this time more profound, as he realized how much these candlemakers were at the mercy of The Council. With weak legs, Charles walked into the cathedral and returned to that same painting. Again, he read:

Lector, si monumentum requiris, circumspice.

But today, he failed to find a monument within himself.

“Order, Order!” The Lord Mayor bellowed above the frenzy as he slammed his hand on his desk to gather attention. The room had a tension unlike ever before; the Tallow Chandlers representative was yelling at an Alderman, and many other aldermen seemed to have chosen sides. The meeting had not even started yet. The Lord Mayer spoke. “Let us begin – ”

“Indeed, let us begin.” Interrupted Charles, as he walked right into the middle of the room. “We must appreciate what is truly at stake. Although these lenses would be excellent for our relationship with the banking merchants, we must remember the other candlemakers, and their suppliers, who are at the mercy of our decision.”

The Tallow Chandlers representative smiled at the Alderman he was arguing with earlier.

“However,” continued Charles, “we must also be cognizant of the forces at play here. If we ban convex lenses, are we not discouraging innovation? Are we not telling our merchants, who embrace economic risks to develop valuable technologies, that we do not, in fact, value them? Claps erupted from many of the Aldermen.

“Thus, gentlemen, I hereby propose we encourage the production and implementation of convex lenses, but also create a program that assists the inevitably high amount of displaced candlemakers!” Shouts erupted from the others.

“It is NOT the council’s job to help those who deny the advancement of society!” yelled an Alderman.

“Convex lenses are already costing us money in the short term; why spend more?” yelled another.

Charles replied “the Lord Mayor has put me in charge of this proposal. I will provide it in two weeks’ time, at which point, you can then form your opinion.” The Lord Mayor called the meeting as Charles walked out of the room into the crowd of protestors once again.

Two weeks had passed, and Charles had finished the proposal—he had missed church every single day for the past two weeks to complete it. He had also made multiple summaries of the 30 page document to hand out at the meeting. Soon after he passed the protestors, he handed out the summaries to the other Alderman. It read:

This proposal aims to address the concerns stat’d by the Tallow Chandlers regarding the Common Council’s decision on whether to ban Convex. This proposal suggests that the Council enlighten the streets with Convex-Lights, but also hire displaced candlemakers full-time to manufacture and install said Lights until either the project is completed, or the given candlemaker has found alternative work.

Contrary to his expectations, Charles was not met with another outburst of emotion from the aldermen. In fact, that would have been better than what he heard, or rather, did not hear. There was just silence.

After everyone present was provided the opportunity to read through the proposal, the Lord Mayor initiated a vote.

“All in favour of the proposal, raise your hand.” 18 out of 40 hands went up. *Rejected.*

“All in favour of the convex-lamp ban?” 19 out of 40 hands went up. *Rejected.*

“Very well. Alderman Wosley’s proposal is rejected, and the city hereby votes to install convex-lamps throughout London.”

And just like that, it was over. The Tallow Chandlers representative stormed out, while Charles walked up from his seat, and with a dejected look on his face, limped outside on a broken heart.

As he left, he suddenly thought of Ben, and on a whim, he approached two Alderman having a conversation.

“Hi, sorry to interrupt – do either of you by chance know where a candlemaker by the name of Shomakker works?”

“Hi Charles – sure, he is a few blocks down from St. Paul’s, at a store called “The Candlemaker. It’s just him who runs it.” said one of the men.

Charles left in a hurry and turned the corner to Ben’s store – he thought he would visit and break the news to him personally. As he turned, however, he saw a closed sign. *Shoot, I must have just missed him,* Charles thought to himself.

Then, his eyes processed the entire scene—the windows were boarded up, the door was caged shut, and the closed sign didn’t just mean closed for the day—it meant closed forever.

Ben had already gone out of business.

Charles went home to his family in a hurry, and was now convinced that the Council had failed the candlemakers. He knew the

candlemakers were ill-qualified to quickly find other work. While Charles went home to a family meal in his West-end home, Ben had to face the humiliation of telling his family he had failed them. The convex lamps may have advanced the interests of society at-large, but without assistance from the council, many of Their Majesties Subjects will now meet the same fate as The Candlemaker.

Lector, si monumentum requiris, circumspice.

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