

EARLY SUDBURY CLOTHIERS.

By V. B. REDSTONE.

Sudbury is correctly considered by the antiquary, Camden, to mean the South Bury or Town. He is erroneous, however, in his assertion that it is so called because it lies to the South of Norwich, or the North *Wick*. The town was called Sudbury because it was South of the Bury of St. Edmund's. In early documents it is called the Bury of St. Gregory. While the former place retained the name of its patron saint, the latter became known only as the South Bury; there was no other settlement of sufficient importance between the two towns which could be designated a Bury.

St. Gregory visited Britain at the close of the 6th century A.D. Mention is made in the "Anglo Saxon Chronicle"—a MS. of the 12th century—of the death of Bishop Alfvín at Sudbury in 798 A.D., In the 11th century it was a flourishing town, held by the Countess Aelvera, mother of Earl Morcar. Around her hall, which doubtless stood upon the site of a fortified mound or "burg," rose the dwellings of her dependents, thriving burgesses. More than sixty of these households were immediately attached to the estate, and an almost equal number rendered service to the Countess for their lands. Both market and fair were held within the precincts of Bury St. Gregory.

Money was coined at the local mint, but it did not change hands freely. The right of administering justice was held within the town, and not at the Court of the Hundred.

When a tax was levied throughout the county, Sudbury was assessed as a quarter of the Hundred; not, however, of Babergh Hundred, of which Hundred it now forms a part, but of the Thingoe Hundred. It answered at the court of the Thingoe Hundred in the place of Bury St. Edmund's, whose population in the days of William I. was three times as great as that of the South Bury.

Besides this connection with Bury St. Edmund, Sudbury appears to have had a closer tie with that town, for on the earliest plans of the fields of St. Edmund's a portion of the South Field is marked out as Sudbury Town Lands. Whatever may have been the connection between these two "Buries," there can be no doubt but that a thriving trading intercourse existed between the inhabitants in early days. Silver pennies from the mint of Bury mingled with Sudbury coin in the pouches of Suffolk merchants.

Money was not abundant in those days; trafficking was chiefly carried on by a system of barter, and no articles passed so freely in exchange as woad and the produce of the fields. The French and English knights who resided at Bury St. Edmund's required an abundance of clothing and apparel; the Benedictine Monks of the Abbey obtained their supplies of wool and clothing from the many outlying manors belonging to their House. The homespun cloth from the looms of the households standing in the valleys of the Stour and the Bret may have been good enough for English backs, which found coats of Linsey woolsey, Carsey cloth, Sudbury says and Colchester bays warm and comforting; the French Knight preferred his native "burell" a thick reddish-brown cloth.

There were Frenchmen settled in Sudbury in Norman days; not knights as at Bury St. Edmund's, but merchants who saw the advantage of exporting the English wool to be re-imported as French cloth. One of the most famous of the Sudbury French wool merchants was Robert de St. Quintin, who, together with his brother John, is mentioned in a public record, dated 1275, as "Merchants of Amiens, in France." Ipswich was the port through which these brothers exported their wool to the continent in spite of Royal prohibition. The export duty levied upon a sack of wool was £2. Robert de St. Quintin, who resided at Sudbury, despatched the wool he collected in his district to his brother John, of Ipswich, who sent to Sudbury in return "burells" and French wines. When a tax was levied upon the inhabitants of Ipswich by Edward I. to carry on the Welsh war in 1282, John de St. Quintin was assessed upon his wines, his silver cups, and cloths. The various cloths mentioned in this taxation were both woollen and linen cloths. The principal cloth merchant of Ipswich, Hugh Golding, possessed French "burells," valued at £70; his English cloths were valued at only £6. So much greater was the sale of French cloths than of those of English manufacture.

Besides the introduction of cloth the French introduced new dyes. The English dyer used woad and madder, and gave the names "blues" and "azures" to English cloth; the French cloth came over as "medleys" or "browns" and "russetts" or "reds."

It is easy to understand that the Suffolk wool merchants who traded with France also found it profitable to carry on the trade of the vintner. Suffolk woolmongers in the reign of Edward I. occupied an extensive settlement in Thames Street, which formed part of the parish of All Saints, London. Their dwelling-houses were extensive taverns, visited by fellow-merchants from the chief towns of Suffolk. These traffickers found keen rivals in the "merchants of Brabant," and records state that in 1291 the rivalry was

settled between them by resort to arms. It was not only Suffolk vintners and woolmongers who left their native country to establish some of the wealthiest of city houses; there were, besides, Suffolk moneyers, potters or bell founders, tailors, cheesemongers, and numerous other traders. It was in his city tavern that Robert Darre, a future Mayor of Sudbury (1332), slew his fellow countryman, one Hervey of Playford, in 1316. Among the Ipswich Corporation Records is the will of Nicholas Darre, of Sudbury, wherein mention is made of Sayenna de Quintin, of that town, 1335.

Suffolk-born merchants dwelling in London retained a connection with their county even when they rose to the highest office the City could give them, viz., that of Lord Mayor. John Spencer, of Little Waldingfield, clothier, one of the most famous of Londoners, hailed from Sudbury, and was connected with the cloth industry. In 1290 the fulling mill of Sudbury was in the hands of one Theobald.* His city-trading is seen in the fact that his son Nigel Theobald, of Sudbury, was apprenticed to Philip le Chaucer, of London. After serving five years of his apprenticeship he took up his freedom in 1312, and then followed the trade of a "Chaucer." The name "Chaucer" was given to the Anglo-French cloth merchants, who dealt largely in the parti-coloured red-and-white hose of the day. In the ordinary vernacular the "Chaucers" were known as cloth merchants or hosiers, and subsequently as drapers.

Nigel Theobald, of Sudbury, chaucer of London, held a messuage, called Lombard's Hill, and three shops in the parish of St. Mary Magdalene, Knight Rider's Street, Banyard Ward, London. These were the premises which his sons, Simon of Sudbury, and John, his brother, sold to the Nuns of Eaton (convent of Nuneaton, Warwickshire) for the advowson of the Church of St. Gregory, Sudbury, and to found a College of Chaplains in the said church. Nigel Theobald's Ipswich tavern and shop became the property of his other son, Robert Theobald, who at the age of 16 years was married to a girl, Margaret, aged 17 years. Nigel Theobald's (Tebaud) moveables in Sudbury in 1327 were valued at £5: Spencer's goods were assessed at £5.

John Theobald, known afterwards as John de Chertsey, followed his father's calling, that of a "chaucer," in the Farendon Ward, City. His son, John de Chertsey, junior, when the term "chaucer" was no longer employed, was by calling a "draper," and thus retained the interest of the family in the cloth trade.

Simon Theobald, better known as Simon of Sudbury, entered the Church as a profession. He was Bishop of London when the College of St. Gregory was founded. At this time he ordained

* *Parker's History of Long Melford*, p. 281.

his kinsman, Adam Tybold, acolyte, subdeacon, and Archdeacon of Middlesex in one year, 1363.

The incidents connected with the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, wherein two Suffolk statesmen, Simon de Sudbury and John de Cavendish, fell victims to the fury of the rebels, is well known. It is doubtful whether the fury of the mob was roused solely by political affairs; personal animosity or local disputes may have to some extent urged on Geoffrey Palfrey, the Vicar of All Saints', Sudbury, and Ralph de Somerton, dyer, of the same town, to pillage the goods of the Lord Chief Justice, and finally to hound him on to death.

On the other hand, the question may be asked:—What was the condition of the weaving industry in Sudbury for one of its vicars to lead his parishioners on to plunder and slaughter? Fortunately the existence of contemporary records enables us to give an answer to the question. When the Clare borough of Sudbury fell into the hands of the King during the minority of the lord, or from other causes, yearly accounts were rendered to the Exchequer of various sums of money paid by the burgesses as burghal dues. Among these dues were those of the "big woollen weavers," who paid an annual amount of fourpence, and the "little woollen weavers," who paid twopence per annum. A "big weaver" (*b.w.*) produced broad cloth from his large loom; a "little or small weaver" (*l.w.*) produced cloth called "narrows or straits" from his small loom. The *Minister's Accounts* for the following years give the number of weavers then occupying houses in the borough:—

Year.	<i>b.w.</i>	<i>l.w.</i>	Sum.	
			s.	d.
(1340) 14–15 Edw. III. . .	23	6	29	8 8
19–20 Edw. III. . .	20	12	32	8 8
20–21 Edw. III. . .	20	12	32	8 8
22–23 Edw. III. . .	20	12	32	8 8
24–25 Edw. III. . .	22	9	31	8 10
(1361) 35–36 Edw. III. . .	28	4	32	10 0
(1371) 45–46 Edw. III. . .	30	1	31	10 2
46–47 Edw. III. . .	12	1	13	4 2
(1398) 22 Ric. II. . .	13	2	15	5 0
(1399) 22–32 Ric. II. . .	27	6	33	10 0
(1402) 3–4 Hen. IV. . .	12	3	15	4 6

The following conclusions may be drawn from the above figures:—

That the number of looms at work annually in Sudbury for the greater part of the reign of Edward III. was about thirty.

That the broad cloths produced far exceeded the "narrow" in number.

That the Sudbury industry was not affected to any great extent by the immigration of Flemish weavers. The households assessed in Sudbury in 1327 were about 160.

That a great decay of the industry is perceptible at the close of Edward III.'s reign, and probably during the reign of Richard II., when only half the number of looms were occupied.

The facility with which Suffolk merchants were able to trade with the merchants of Flanders would lead us to imagine that Flemish settlers were numerous in Suffolk, and helped largely to promote the weaving industry of the county. An examination made of the returns of the number of aliens for the years 1460, 1470, and 1480, gives the following facts:—

	1460	1470	1480
Norfolk	51	39	127
Suffolk	23	15	108

There was a steady growth of alien population, but the return of aliens for 1486 shows that the increase was not owing to the settlement of Flemish weavers. This last return fortunately gives not only the place of origin, but also the trade or profession followed by the alien immigrants. There were 308 aliens in Suffolk in 1486; the greater number were settled upon the coast and were returned chiefly as brewers, coopers, and shoemakers. Few Flemings settled in the cloth-making district. Only five of the hundred Flemings who were then living in the county were returned as weavers. At Bildeston, John Stansby, clothmaker, employed, as servants, twelve alien weavers, but they were all Italian born.

Through the courtesy of the Earl of Ancaster, I have been able to obtain a complete transcript of the musters roll of the Babergh Hundred for 1522, the original of which is among his manuscripts at Grimsthorpe. This roll gives a full list of all the inhabitants of the parishes within the Hundred, and the weapons they were required to furnish.

Omitting to reckon the clerics of the religious houses of Sudbury, we find that out of the 234 persons who were called upon to provide arms, 49 were directly connected with the weaving industry.

The sum of all the arms assessed in the town of Sudbury in 1522 was:—

90 harnesses, 39 bows, 39 sheaves of arrows, and 51 bills.

The Cloth Industry Returns for 1522, as taken from the Musters Roll, are as follows:—

Boxford	63	of which weavers	37
Lavenham	61	of which weavers	15
Sudbury	49	of which weavers	12
Nayland	40		
Melford	35		
Glensford.. .. .	28		

276 out of full total of 370 for
30 parishes.

The date 1522 of the assessment brings to notice the episode of the weavers' riots at Lavenham, in 1525, mentioned by Shakespeare:—

Upon these taxations,
The clothiers all, not able to maintain
The many to them 'longing, have put off
The spinsters, carders, fullers, weavers, who
Unfit for other life, compelled by hunger,
And lack of other means, in desperate manner,
Daring the event to the teeth, are all in an uproar
And danger serves among them."