

EARLY SUDBURY RECORDS.

By ETHEL STOKES.

It is extremely easy to find material of historic interest concerning Sudbury, but the very wealth of material is embarrassing to one who has very little leisure to devote to its collection. Some day I hope to put the Society in possession of all that can be found at the Record Office and elsewhere relating to Sudbury history. In this paper I have confined myself to the period before State town records commence to be preserved consecutively. The first account we have, in any detail, of the state of the town was made in return to a writ issued after the death of the Earl of Clare, then Lord of the Manor, who was killed at the battle of Bannockburn in 1314. Under the feudal system an inquisition was taken on the death of every feudal lord and tenant to determine the value of their holdings, and the consequent dues payable to the overlord.

We find that at that date the burgesses of the town already farmed the market from the Earl, "by ancient custom," at a quarterly rent. They paid him 40s. a year for a certain meadow called Portmannescroft. There were two watermills and a windmill worth 10s. a year; the fishery at the bridge was worth 5s. a year. There was a custom from woollen weavers, worth 8s.; a duty called stallage was worth 20s. a year to the lord. At this date, besides rents in money, which in Sudbury amounted to £6 10s. 6d., the lords, even of towns, used to demand manual labour and what were called "boon works" of their tenants. Among the inhabitants of Sudbury in 1314 were 30 free customary tenants who were obliged to hoe the lord's corn, supplying their own food, and their work was worth 1½d. a day; in hay-time they had to toss the lord's hay, and the work was worth ½d. a day. At harvest-time the lord was more gracious to them, and gave them food at his own expense, while they reaped and bound his corn. The lord had another source of income in what are officially known as "pleas and perquisites" of the courts, which in Sudbury in 1314 were valued at £6 13s. 4d. a year—or more than the money rents. These "perquisites" were raised by fines paid to be admitted burgess, sums paid by incoming tenants, prices demanded for the lord's "mercy" from anyone who offended against the assize of bread or ale from any good wife whom the neighbours returned as a "scold," etc. If A broke B's head and drew blood, he did not pay damages to B for his broken head, but bought

the lord's "mercy" for 2d. or 3d. to make amends for the lord's broken peace.

We have another such return about a hundred years later on the death of Edmund, Earl of March, in 1424. By this time the money rents had risen in value to over £7, while the "perquisites" were worth only £4; whether the number of scolds had decreased, or the good wives of Sudbury brewed ale and baked bread to a better standard, or were less frequently detected in their adulteration of food, history does not relate. This inquisition tells us there were 62 ancient stalls in the market, for each of which 3d. a year was paid. The weaving industry had made great headway, for there were now 12 dye-houses for cloth, worth 3s. 4d. a year. At a court held four years later, among the perquisites raked in by the far-reaching arm of the lord were fines from Henry Marchal, Alice Batteres, Joan Thachere, and Cicely Derham, who were accused as "regrators" of cloth. These unfortunate people, three of whom you will see belonged to the fair sex, were guilty of an offence against the mediæval commercial system, which in these modern days would be called simply enterprise. To re-grate was to buy foods or produce of any kind and to sell it again at a profit within four miles of the place where it had been bought. For this offence against society, a fine was paid, not to society but, as usual, to the lord. If one rose early in the morning and bought up eggs from the farmers' wives as they came into town, and set them out afterwards in an artistic way, made up in convenient dozens, or displayed any of the well-known methods for securing Bond Street prices for Whitechapel goods, he was guilty of the sister offence of forestalling, and again the sensitive lord stepped in and demanded a fine.

The amounts paid at this date for admission as burgesses varied, I do not know on what ground. In 1428-9 we find John Bray, junior, and William Barber were sworn burgesses without any payment at all; John Peartre paid 2s., Roger Scholesham 20d.; Richard Luffy, glover, and Robert Hycche, bocher, 2s. each, to be burgesses. Three offenders against the sanitary regulations of the town have preserved for us the names of three streets as named in that year 1428, each being fined for making dung-heaps in front of their houses. These streets are Wyrlewarlelane, Borhamgate, and Maldoneslane.

We have seen that in 1314 the stallage was worth 20s. a year, while in 1428 there were 62 ancient stalls, each paying 3d., a total of 15s. 6d. From the bailiff's accounts we gather that the number of stall-holders in the market, corresponding to the shop keepers of the present day, grew from 80 in 1314 to 107 in 1340. Shortly afterwards, by reason of the Black Death and other calamities,

the number was greatly reduced. In 1340 we find that 102 men paid the old capitage called stallage; at 3d. each for their lives; four others were paying 3d. each, this being their second year, and William Salter was paying 3d. for the first year. These entries shew that four had started stalls in 1339 and one in 1340. Two years later we find that 13 men who were in the "ancient stallage" are dead; the names of these old Sudbury tradesmen were Adam le Sadeler, Nicholas de Illeye, John de Ocle, Michael Hangard, John Maynard, Hugh le Webbe, Henry Schirlot, Simon le Clerk, John le Gerdere, John le Smeyt, John Pride the younger, Peter le Salter, and Michael le Fuller, many of them names borne by Sudburians of to-day. William Leffone and John Bray live in our history as having started stalls in 1342. The Black Death is supposed to have carried off about one-third of the population of the entire country in 1348. That Sudbury suffered heavily is apparent from the fact that in 1361 the number of "ancient stalls" had been reduced to the 62, whose successors were carrying on business at the same stalls in 1424.

The bailiffs' accounts (preserved in the series known as *Ministers' Accounts* at the Public Record Office) contain references to the following chamberlains and bailiffs:—

- 14-15 Edw. II. [A.D. 1320-1] Thomas de Sparham, late chamberlain.
Symon de Edwardeston, late chamberlain.
- 10 Edw. III. [1336] .. Thomas atte Melne, chamberlain.
John Portrose, late chamberlain.
John Dobbes, last chamberlain.
- 10-11 Edw. III. [1336-7] .. Robert Bantying, chamberlain.
Simon de Berton, late bailiff; John Knyvet, John Prentiz, and other bailiffs before him; Thomas de Peyton and Robert Bantying, late bailiffs; Walter Deyer and Hugh Sewale, late bailiffs.
- 14-15 Edw. III. [1340-1] .. John Pride, late bailiff.
- 35-36 Edw. III. [1361-2] .. Nicholas de Eye, chamberlain.
- 45-46 Edw. III. [1371-2] .. Thomas Bene, chamberlain.
- 46-47 Edw. III. [1372-3] .. Thomas Warde, chamberlain.
- 2-3 Ric. II. [1378-9] .. Roger Darre, chamberlain; John Dobbes, chamberlain last year.
- 22 Ric. II. [1398-9] .. John Bray, chamberlain.
- 22-3 Ric. II. [1399] .. Richard Peynton, chamberlain.
- 1-2 Hen. IV. [1399-1400] .. John Holdelym [?], chamberlain.
- 3-4 Hen. IV. [1401-2] .. William Plasshe, chamberlain.

The only two early Mayors of whom I have found mention so far are Thomas Dobbes, who was elected at the Court in October, 1428, and William Cressener, who was Mayor in 1444.

The register of Abbot Curteys, of Bury St. Edmund's, contains some letters throwing an interesting light on the functions of the Mayor of Sudbury in the 15th century. In April, 1444, the King (Henry VI.) directed his letters to the Abbot, to the Sheriff of Suffolk, Sir John Heveningham, and Sir William Drury Knights, and to John Harleston, bidding them follow the good example of the City of London, in furnishing men and victual to the King from the county of Suffolk, for the succour of the duchy of Guiennés, which had been attacked by the French. The abbot in his turn sends on the King's letter to Sir R. Waldegrave, William Cressener, Mayor of Sudbury, and the true commoners of the same town, commanding them to deliver it to the chief constable of Babbergh and Corsford Hundreds, and to furthermore purvey men and victual, to strengthen and comfort our said Sovereign Lord against his adversaries in his great and behoveful necessity, and to appear before the Abbót at Bury, to certify him what they will do in this behalf.

CLARE PRIORY.

This house, which belonged to Friars Eremite of the Order of St. Augustin, is said to have been founded in the year 1248 by Richard de Clare. His widow Maud (or Matilda) and their descendants were also liberal benefactors to the Friary, which was probably the most important house of this order in England. Their grants of land, together with many other matters relative to the history of the Friary, may be found in the *Chartulary*, a MS. collection of deeds now in the British Museum (*Harl. MSS.* 4835). There is also a rhymed dialogue between a secular priest and a friar quoted in Weaver's "Funeral Monuments," which gives an account of the Friary together with a history of the de Clare family, who were its chief patrons. Weaver also gives a list of important persons buried in the Friary Church at Clare. The dress of the friars was a white tunic over which a black habit with leather girdle was worn when they went abroad.

Gilbert de Clare (son of the founder) married Edward I.'s daughter, Joan of Acre, so called from the place of her birth. She built a chapel which she dedicated to St. Vincent, and in which she was buried, 1307.

The Church of the Friars was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1338. Mention is also found in the *Chartulary* of a Chapel of Annunciation which was in use in the year 1361.