

MERCHANT ADVENTURER OR JACK OF ALL TRADES? THE SUFFOLK CLOTHIER IN THE 1460s

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INTRODUCTION

THE 1460s WERE turbulent times in English history. The Wars of the Roses were at their height after York's Edward IV had wrested the throne from Lancaster's Henry VI, but as yet taken no firm grip on the crown. The climate of lawlessness which prevailed in this political vacuum is well documented by the Pastons of Norfolk in their well known family letters. Against this backdrop, the first signs of new economic life began to emerge. The volume of English cloth exports was just starting to grow and would soon help bring an end to mid-century recession. Thomas Spring II, father of an even more illustrious son Thomas Spring III, 'the Rich Clothier', was making cloth in Lavenham and he and his colleagues were ready to respond to the demands of an international market.

This essay looks at Thomas Spring II and his fellow clothiers of Suffolk and considers who they were, where they lived, what proportion of the economically active population they comprised, what else they did for a living, how many children they had, how well they were doing, how prominent they were in their local communities, and why perhaps they and their descendants made south-west Suffolk one of the most prosperous regions of early Tudor England. Many historians have written about the great clothiers, engaged in proto-industrial organisation and putting out cloths to textile workers. Few have studied their more humble neighbours who comprised the vast majority of clothiers at that time. This essay sets out to cast some fresh light on both the merchant adventurer and the Jack of all trades, and on how the Suffolk cloth trade was divided between them.

SOURCES

Research began by lining up in orderly fashion the clothiers named in the alnage accounts for Suffolk for the four years 1465/66 to 1468/69,¹ before putting some flesh on their statistical bones from the wills² that they had left behind and their entries in the medieval calendars, and concluding with a foray into the archives of medieval Hadleigh.

In reviewing the secondary sources, E.M. Carus-Wilson and Eileen Power are indispensable points of reference for any study of the medieval cloth industry. Gladys Thornton's *A History of Clare* and Barbara McClenaghan's *The Springs of Lavenham* provide wonderful detail about the industry in medieval Suffolk. Richard Britnell's *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300-1525* and Alec Betteerton and David Dymond's *Lavenham - Industrial Town* have been ever dependable companions.

The alnager and his accounts

The alnager arrived on the medieval scene as early as 1197, nearly 300 years before the period under discussion. He was a royal appointee, concerned with cloth sold within the realm, and his original role was to seal cloths which conformed to statutory requirements - a medieval 'CE mark'. Over the succeeding centuries his responsibilities grew and he

came to measure and tax cloths too. The clothier paid him $\frac{1}{2}$ d. alnage for sealing and 4d. for tax on each whole cloth, and a fraction of these amounts for smaller cloths which came under a variety of names. From 1402 the office of alnager was farmed out, like so many other medieval revenue-raising functions, to local worthies who were sometimes more and sometimes less trustworthy in the returns that they made to the Exchequer (Thornton 1928, 143–45).

The alnage accounts are one of the more controversial medieval sources. In her study of the West Country cloth industry Professor Carus-Wilson (1967, 291) took a very dim view of their value. She described them as 'second-hand compilations of doubtful veracity, often abbreviated, distorted, and repeated again and again'. Dr Gladys Thornton, one of the pioneers of English local history, began their rehabilitation in her study of Clare when she concluded that there was no reason to doubt the Suffolk alnage accounts before 1473 (Thornton 1928, 148). This process continued with Richard Britnell's work on Colchester and Alec Betterton and David Dymond's study of Lavenham.

These Suffolk accounts list towns, clothiers, the number of cloths each presented and the amount of tax each paid in the year. In the first year, 1465/66, the accounts are sub-divided to record separately cloths presented up to Easter and up to Michaelmas. Clothiers presented to the alnager whole cloths and straits in a proportion of about 3:5 in number and 12:5 in value. Four-fifths of the straits were presented in the first two years and none in the fourth. Occasionally whole cloths are referred to as 'brodes' and just once straits are referred to as 'kerseys'. There are also references to 'stricti', but these almost certainly equated to straits (Britnell 1986, 295) and they are treated the same in the accounts. No other type of cloth was recorded. Whole cloths were supposed to measure 28 yards 28 inches long by $1\frac{1}{4}$ yards wide, but the accounts for Bildeston at Easter 1466 suggest that in Suffolk they may have been as long as thirty yards. One suspects tax evasion – better to pay 4d. tax every thirty yards, than every twenty-nine. Straits were half the length, half the width and a quarter the weight of whole cloths (Betterton and Dymond 1989, 37). There is no evidence that they were of different style or quality.

The four years 1465/66 to 1468/69 have been chosen for several reasons. They were years when Suffolk was the greatest cloth-making county in England, the epicentre of what much later became known as the Old Draperies, easily outstripping Essex and Norfolk (McClenaghan 1924, 26). Four years are too brief a period to disclose clear trends over time, but are enough to provide a good snapshot. Much earlier and the records reveal only 'administrative chaos'; much later and they become fossilised (Britnell 1986, 182, 187). From 1465 to 1469 William Whelpdale, in Richard Britnell's opinion 'an experienced and trusted receiver of royal revenues', was responsible for collecting the alnage in Suffolk. His accounts, 'if not a perfect mirror of reality, were at least the fruit of an attempt to make them so' (Britnell 1986, 187–88). Thereafter the office was farmed out to John Flegge the younger, who appeared regularly in the Needham Market accounts, and he and his henchmen do not inspire Dr Thornton's confidence (Thornton 1928, 148–49).

These accounts from the 1460s are not without fault. Minor arithmetical errors are common, but given the shortcomings of contemporary methodology, are forgivable, if infuriating. Where the cloth figures and tax figures do not tally, the former have been preferred to the latter. The proportion of straits in the accounts fell markedly over the four years, from 82 per cent to nil, perhaps revealing an interesting trend which is discussed below, but perhaps hinting at some other weakness in accounting method. The accounts are unlikely to be a comprehensive list of all clothiers or of all cloths made in Suffolk, or an entirely accurate record of clothiers' places of abode, particularly on the eastern side of the county. As an example, they record a total of forty-seven clothiers in Ipswich, but only

three appeared in the 1467/68 accounts and only four in 1468/69. The likelihood is that the Alexander Frer who paid tax in Wickham Market in 1465/66 was the same man who paid tax in Ipswich in 1466/67, but with more common names this is not always so obvious. Nevertheless, the accounts generally identify strangers in town either by name or as a group. The Bury St Edmunds accounts for 1467/68, for instance, refer to Ralph Tayllour of Newmarket, John Tayllour of Mildenhall, Robert Aylek of Brandon and to other 'strangers' coming to the Monday market. In fact very few cloths, less than 2 per cent, go unallocated to one named clothier or another.

Richard Britnell suggests (Britnell 1986, 78) that alnage, but not tax, was payable on cloths which were destined for first sale abroad. There is, however, no sign in the accounts of any cloths being charged only to alnage, so these may well have escaped the record. If so, the number of cloths attributed to those merchant adventurers who were involved in exports probably understates the total number that they traded. Suffolk clothiers may well have been exporting direct out of London, but in the 1460s none of them was operating on any scale out of Ipswich, Colchester or Harwich. Hanseatic merchants were involved in the Suffolk cloth trade and dominated cloth exports from these local harbours (Britnell 1986, 171–75). As there are no foreign names in the accounts, some of the cloths they exported may well have gone unrecorded.

Certainly, William Whelpdale's accounts show no obvious signs of the creative accountancy that so annoyed Professor Carus-Wilson. The tax figures are naturally multiples and fractions of $4\frac{1}{2}d.$, but with no artificial pattern to them. As with all medieval sources the alnage accounts cannot be stretched too far, but the present study supports other historians' faith in the underlying honesty of the Suffolk accounts in the 1460s.

The evidence of wills

It is a little ironic that wills, as life's closing statements, provide some of the best evidence for the lives of ordinary people in the later 15th century. The great age of manorial documents had passed and the age of parish registers was barely on the horizon. Even so, the evidence is still patchy, since at that time only the enterprising few made wills at all. The present writer's work on late medieval Woolpit, which had a population at any one time of between three and four hundred, showed that only fifty residents had wills proved at the court of the Archdeacon of Sudbury in the hundred years between 1450 and 1550 – an average of just one every two years. Even that modest count was above the average for the Hundred of Thedwastre in which Woolpit lay (Amor 2002, 140–41).

It would, therefore, have been surprising if more than a small fraction of the clothiers who appeared in the alnage accounts had left wills, and indeed wills have been traced for only ninety out of 577 of them, a not unusual ratio for the time. Identifying clothiers' wills is no easy task, for medieval names are infuriatingly alike and elusively fluid. Nevertheless, diligent enquiry and a process of elimination disclosed one will proved at the court of the Dean of Bocking, fifteen at the court of the Sacrist of St Edmund's Abbey, forty at the court of the Archdeacon of Sudbury, thirteen at the court of the Archdeacon of Suffolk, three at the Norwich Consistory Court and eighteen at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, that could be attributed to clothiers with reasonable confidence.

Between the testators whose wills were proved in the lower courts of the Dean, Sacrist and Archdeacons, and those with wills proved in the higher courts of the Bishop and Archbishop, there was no rigid class divide. The executors of some wealthy people were content to approach the lower courts, while conversely, the wills of some with more modest means were proved in the Archbishop's court because they owned property outside the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Norwich. Nevertheless, by and large the lower courts give us

a glimpse of ordinary people, Jacks of all trades, whilst the higher courts are a record of the rich.

Wills proved in the lower courts present a fair cross section of Suffolk cloth-making society. The testators came from twenty-five parishes, with those from Bury St Edmunds being over-represented, those from east Suffolk under-represented and those from Hadleigh and Monks Eleigh represented only by John Brownsmith.⁴ Whilst three out of four died in the 1470s and 1480s, dates of death span the period from 1465 to 1509, so that some clothiers must have been close to death when they made their cloth whilst others had another forty years to live.

With the exception of two Londoners, Stephen Gardener of Bury St Edmunds and the Flegge brothers of Needham Market, all those clothiers whose wills were proved in the higher courts came from the cloth-making heartlands of south-west Suffolk. Nine of the twenty-one made it into the list of the top twenty clothiers and thirteen into the top fifty. Whilst their dates of death spanned a similar period to their more humble colleagues, they appear to have lived rather longer, with twelve surviving beyond 1490. Then as now, the good life usually meant a long life.

CLOTHIERS AND CLOTH TOWNS

In the four years 1465/66 to 1468/69 some 577 Suffolk men and women presented to the alnager for sealing a little over 20,000 whole cloths or their equivalent in straits, with production spread fairly evenly over these four years. What do the records tell us about them?

Nearly all clothiers were men. No more than fifteen women, scattered across seven different towns, appeared in the records. Five of them, recent widows perhaps, appeared only under their husbands' names and just four presented cloth in more than one year. Between them they presented 240 whole cloths or their equivalents in straits, a little more than 1 per cent of the total. Only Mrs John Gruyte of Bury St Edmunds, who presented sixty whole cloths in 1468, appeared in the list of the top hundred clothiers.

Some 285 of these clothiers, very nearly half the total, lived in Glemsford, Lavenham, Long Melford, Nayland, Sudbury and the other towns and villages of the Hundred of Babergh and made two in every five Suffolk cloths. Another eighty-two lived in Hadleigh

TABLE I: CLOTHS AND CLOTHIERS

| Whole Cloths or equivalent | Number of Clothiers | % | Cumulative % | Payment | % | Cumulative % |
|----------------------------|---------------------|------|--------------|-------------|------|--------------|
| More than 660 | 2 | 0.3 | 0.3 | £60 4s.5d. | 16 | 16 |
| 132 to 660 | 21 | 3.6 | 3.9 | £85 8s.4d. | 22.7 | 38.7 |
| 32 to 131 | 130 | 22.6 | 26.5 | £144 7s.2d. | 38.5 | 77.2 |
| 16 to 31 | 121 | 21 | 47.5 | £52 0s.6d. | 13.9 | 91.1 |
| 4 to 15 | 194 | 33.6 | 81.1 | £30 0s.9d. | 8 | 99.1 |
| Less than 4 | 109 | 18.9 | 100 | £3 8s.4d. | 0.9 | 100 |
| | 577 | 100 | | £375 9s.6d. | 100 | |

NB: This Table records the number of cloths presented, the number of clothiers presenting them and the amount of tax paid over the four-year period. An additional £7 9s.0d. was paid by clothiers who are unidentified in the alnage accounts.

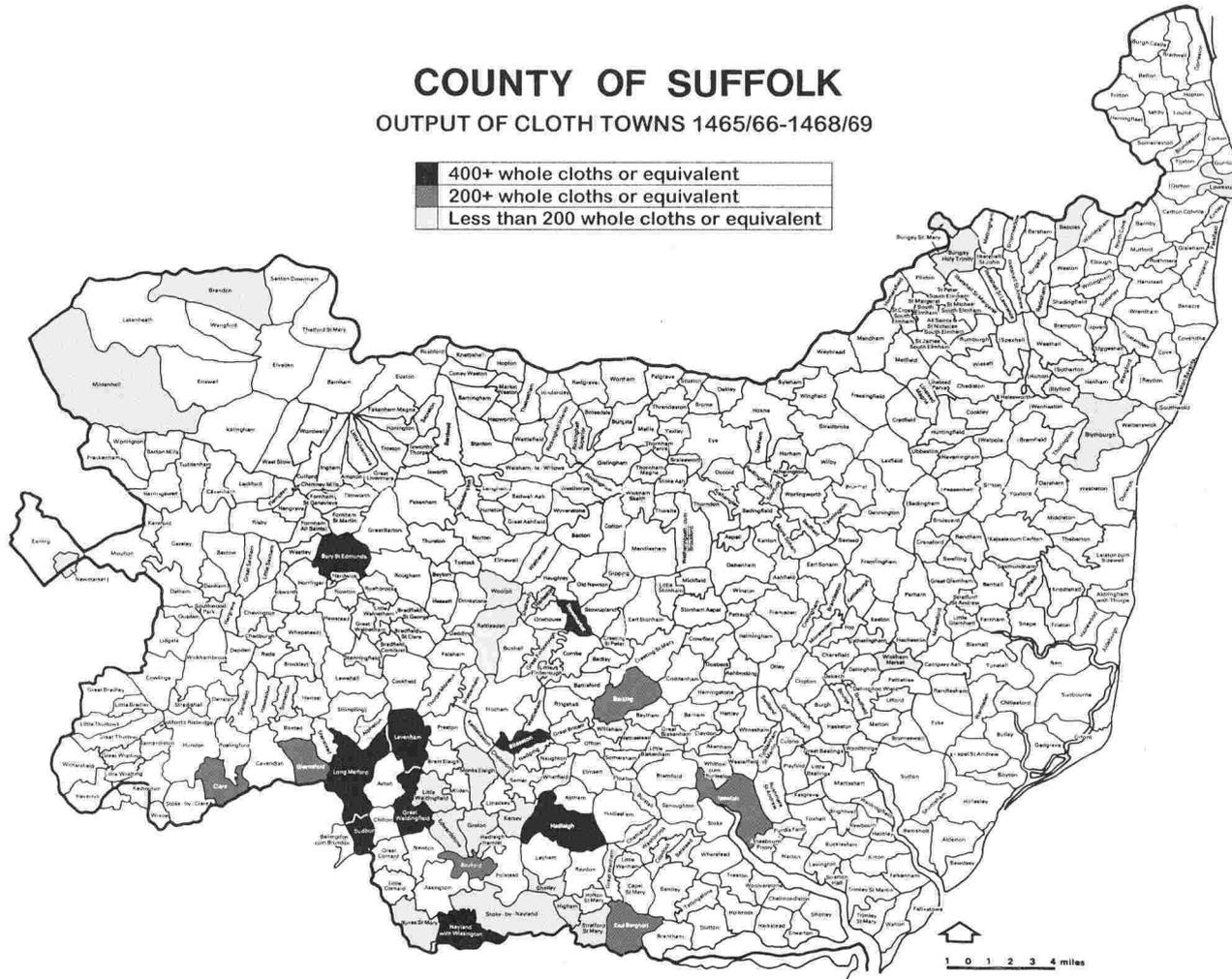


FIG. 109 – The county of Suffolk: output of cloth towns 1465/6–1468/9.

and its surrounding villages in the neighbouring Half-Hundred of Cosford. Communities of clothiers flourished, in descending order of prosperity, in the towns of Bury St Edmunds, Stowmarket and Ipswich. But if the head of this great body of cloth-makers lay in south-west Suffolk and the spine ran along today's A14 corridor, the tail wound its way around the perimeter of the county from Clare, Newmarket, Mildenhall and Brandon in the west, to Bungay and Beccles in the north, Lowestoft and Blythburgh in the east, and back down to East Bergholt and Stratford St Mary in the south, all of which had at least one resident clothier. In no less than thirty-seven Suffolk towns and villages spread across fourteen of its twenty medieval Hundreds, clothiers were at work in the 1460s (Fig. 109).⁵

Assuming that a whole cloth sold for £3, that a sale would generate 10 per cent profit and that a reasonably comfortable trading income was £10 a year,⁶ a clothier would have to sell thirty-three whole cloths a year and 132 over four years to make a living from the sale of cloth alone. As Table I shows, such merchant adventurers were unusual. Only twenty-three clothiers, less than 4 per cent of the total, presented 132 whole cloths or their equivalent in straits, although they accounted for nearly 40 per cent of the total value of cloths presented. Forty-one clothiers appeared in all four accounts, as against 344 who only ventured into the trade one year in four. For the majority, cloth-making was very much a part-time and intermittent activity.

The location and spread of cloth-making in Suffolk in the 1460s has already been touched upon. Details of the leading eleven cloth towns are set out in Table II below. Lavenham was slightly ahead of Hadleigh in both the number of clothiers and the amount they paid to the alnager, but neither town dominated the scene or accounted for as many as one Suffolk cloth in five.

In determining what fraction of the economically active population was engaged in cloth-making, one runs into the perennial problem of medieval history – a paucity of evidence. No population figures are available for Suffolk in the 1460s, but there are good data in the subsidy return of 1524 (Hervey 1910). Whether or not the intervening sixty years saw any significant population change is a matter of considerable debate (Britnell

TABLE II: THE LEADING CLOTH TOWNS

| Town | Clothiers | Ranking | No in top 10 | No in top 100 | Taxpayers In 1524 | Clothiers/ Taxpayers | Payment | Ranking |
|-----------------|-----------|---------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------|---------|
| Lavenham | 72 | 1 | 2 | 26 | 195 | 36.9% | £73 19s.2d. | 1 |
| Hadleigh | 67 | 2 | 6 | 10 | 311 | 21.5% | £69 13s.2d. | 2 |
| Bildeston | 10 | 14 | 2 | 3 | 88 | 11.4% | £48 10s.5d. | 3 |
| Bury St Edmunds | 60 | 3 | 0 | 16 | 645 | 9.3% | £41 5s.2d. | 4 |
| Long Melford | 57 | 4 | 0 | 8 | 152 | 37.5% | £21 14s.10d. | 5 |
| Nayland | 34 | 7 | 0 | 9 | 99 | 34% | £20 0s.1d. | 6 |
| Sudbury | 41 | 6 | 0 | 6 | 218 | 18.8% | £18 11s.7d. | 7 |
| Waldingfields | 31 | 8 | 0 | 8 | 98 | 31.6% | £18 1s.7d. | 8 |
| Stowmarket | 31 | 8 | 0 | 2 | 94 | 33.0% | £12 3s.7d. | 9 |
| Ipswich | 47 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 484 | 9.7% | £6 8s.2d. | 10 |
| Boxford | 20 | 10 | 0 | 2 | 109 | 18.3% | £6 5s.8d. | 11 |

1997, 242–47). After a century of falling numbers, any population growth nationwide was probably marginal, although growth in the boom towns of south-west Suffolk may possibly have been more significant. What is generally agreed is that the population was no longer falling. Any comparison between the number of clothiers in the 1460s and the number of taxpayers in 1524 must, therefore, be made with caution, but is unlikely to understate the proportion of people making cloth.

In four of the six major centres of cloth-making in Babergh, namely Lavenham, Long Melford, Nayland and the Waldingfields, it is a fair assumption that one in three of the taxable population was presenting cloth to the alnager. Outside Babergh only Stowmarket approached such a high proportion. In Hadleigh and Sudbury the cloth industry had been first established much earlier. Records of cloth-making in Sudbury date back nearly two hundred years before, to a time when Edward I ruled England and Lavenham was just a country village. In Hadleigh two fullers and a fulling mill figured in a manorial extent in the opening years of the 14th century (McClenaghan 1924, 4). By 1381 there were eleven clothmakers, seven fullers, six weavers, five cutters of cloth and three dyers living in the town (Powell 1895, 111–23). The leading drapers and dyers of Hadleigh, such as John Kempston and John Smith, were among the most important customers of London merchants, such as Gilbert Maghfeld, buying woad, alum and other dyes for their cloth (James 1971, 202–06). The industry in Sudbury and Hadleigh had had more time to establish itself and develop restrictive practices, so that the proportion of clothiers in the taxable population was smaller – closer to one in five – and the cloth industry was more concentrated in the hands of a wealthy few. Eileen Power, in her study of the medieval wool trade (Power 1941, 104–23), has shown how an early free-for-all settled down into a more regulated and restricted market. The same was happening in the cloth trade.

In the 1460s there appear to have been three quite different types of cloth economies within these towns – monopolies, oligopolies and freer markets – depending on the degree of ‘industrial concentration’ (Britnell 1986, 183–86). Bildeston best exemplified a monopoly with John Stanesby accounting for nearly 85 per cent of the town’s cloth and John Motte for nearly all of the residue. No other major town had a leading clothier with more than a 30 per cent share. Hadleigh well illustrated an oligopoly. Six of its clothiers appeared in the county’s top ten and between them presented more than 70 per cent of the towns’ cloth. Elsewhere the top 10 per cent in numbers in any town were presenting between 30 per cent and 40 per cent of total production. Only four other Hadleigh clothiers figured in the county’s top one hundred and only six others were engaged sufficiently regularly in cloth-making to appear in at least three of the four annual alnage accounts. Lavenham had some characteristics of a freer market in which a high proportion of the economically active population traded as equals. Nearly two in five of its taxable population were making cloth and its top seven clothiers shared only a third of total production. Whilst only two of its clothiers figured in the county’s top ten, twenty-six figured in the top one hundred. Nevertheless, most townfolk were involved only intermittently in the cloth trade and only sixteen of seventy-two Lavenham clothiers appeared regularly in the accounts. Richard Britnell (1986, 184) suggests that, even in Lavenham, industrial concentration was more advanced than in Colchester.

Stowmarket offers an even better example of a freer market, albeit on a more modest scale. By the 1460s Stowmarket had already been a commercial centre for several centuries and its market is recorded in Domesday Book. Nearly a hundred years before William Whelpdale drew up his accounts, the poll tax return of 1381 discloses that one in five of Stowmarket’s artificers was involved in textile production. Two spinsters, two dyers, a fuller, a shearwoman and two cutters were all at work (Powell 1895, 89–91). In the years

that followed it became a much more populous town whose growth must be largely attributed to the cloth industry.⁷ Whilst none of Stowmarket's clothiers could claim to be a merchant adventurer and only two appeared in the county's top one hundred, in the 1460s a third of its taxable population was making cloth, the share of its top three clothiers was limited to 30 per cent of production, thirteen of its thirty-one clothiers were making cloth and appearing in the alnage accounts regularly and six of them showed sufficient enterprise to make wills.

TABLE III: CLOTH WORKERS IN SOME TOWNS IN THE HUNDRED OF BABERGH 1522

| Town | Clothiers | Weavers | Dyers | Fullers | Shearmen | Total | 1460s |
|---------------|-----------|---------|-------|---------|----------|-------|-------|
| Lavenham | 34 | 15 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 57 | 72 |
| Glemsford | 20 | 5 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 29 | 14 |
| Nayland | 14 | 8 | 0 | 4 | 9 | 35 | 34 |
| Boxford | 11 | 37 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 60 | 20 |
| Long Melford | 8 | 6 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 28 | 57 |
| Sudbury | 8 | 11 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 27 | 41 |
| Waldingfields | 7 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 21 | 31 |

Quite possibly, William Whelpdale recorded the high water mark of mass participation in cloth-making in the 1460s which was followed by a slimming down in the number of clothiers, if not the number of cloths. Even if everyone engaged in the industry in the 1460s was presenting some cloths to the alnager, which is unlikely, Table III (McCleneghan 1924, 59) suggests that in Lavenham and Nayland the cloth-making base was no broader, and in Long Melford, Sudbury and the Waldingfields markedly less broad, by the 1520s. There may have been some westward migration to Glemsford, where only fourteen clothiers were recorded in the 1460s and which was by the 1520s gathering the momentum which would one day make it a greater power than Lavenham (Dymond 1999, 140–41). Nevertheless, such migration was nowhere near enough to make up the difference. Without doubt, by the 1520s the cloth trade was concentrated in fewer hands.

Location, rather than wealth, appears to have determined who made what type of cloth. Rich and poor alike made both whole cloths and straits. Different towns, however, made different types of cloth. Babergh towns were strong on whole cloths and weak on straits. Lavenham and Nayland production was entirely of whole cloths and Long Melford's clothiers presented only twenty straits (taxed at 1s.10½d.) in four years. Only a few miles away across the Hundredal boundary, the clothiers of Cosford were concentrating on straits for the first three years' accounts, with those in Hadleigh presenting more than 6,000 and John Stanesby and his colleagues in Bildeston more than 8,000.

Why this difference? The answer perhaps lies in tradition and technology. At the close of the 14th century East Anglian clothiers were petitioning Parliament for the right to make dozens, twelve-yard cloths of half the width of whole cloths, 'in the manner that they used aforetime' (McCleneghan 1924, 4–5). The number of such narrow cloths made in Suffolk outnumbered broad cloths by nearly thirteen to one (McCleneghan 1924, 5). As has been seen, Hadleigh was then in the forefront of the industry. Production of straits depended on narrow looms normally operated by one weaver, whilst whole cloth production depended on broader looms normally operated by two (McCleneghan 1924, 17). Both John Amyot the younger of Long Melford and John Risby of Lavenham owned their own 'brodelomys'. As whole cloths began to dominate the Suffolk market, Hadleigh and its

satellites may have been reluctant to abandon practices, skills and technology that had served them so well in the past. One possible explanation for the disappearance of straits from the alnage accounts by the end of the 1460s is that the clothiers of these towns finally concluded that they could no longer avoid new fangled ways.

JACK OF ALL TRADES

How well were the mass of Suffolk clothiers doing as the Middle Ages drew to a close in the second half of the 15th century and what do their wills proved in the Dean's, Sacrist's and Archdeacons' courts tell us about their lives ?

Medieval trade was a risky business and not even the cloth trade was sufficiently predictable or lucrative to rely on as a sole source of income. Most clothiers earned their living in some additional way.

Bequests of grain and livestock in their wills suggest that some clothiers were engaged in husbandry and it is a fair assumption that, unless they were rich, they and their families were labouring in the fields themselves and were not absentee landlords reliant on paid labourers. Stowmarket's leading clothier Robert Cake worked his land, meadow and pasture, including a virgate called Colmanys, with his wife and three sons. Alexander Sake of Sudbury left his plough with harness and horse to his son John to carry on the family farm. Old habits die hard. Like any God-fearing villein two hundred years before, one clothier left his best cow to the local church. Ironically, whilst plentiful evidence comes from the granary and the dairy, only John Heyde of Nayland referred to sheep, ewes and lambs in his will.

What other evidence survives of clothiers' day jobs? Most were working in one stage or another of the elongated chain of textile production. Wool passed from spinsters to weavers such as John Amyot the younger, John Mey of Bury St Edmunds and Henry Pulcoo and John Risby of Lavenham; then to dyers such as Roger Crytott of Lavenham and John Hyne of Sudbury; then to fullers such as John Barker of Long Melford, Thomas Blowbolle of Needham Market, Adam Kechen of Bury St Edmunds, John Lacy of Hadleigh, Roger Lynge of Bury St Edmunds and John Wyllymot of Lavenham; and then to shearmen – giving each of them some insight into how wool became cloth. At the far end of this virtual production line stood the draper John Odeham of Bury St Edmunds, the mercer John Flegge the elder of Needham Market and their like. They sold cloth to their fellow countrymen, to those merchants who still shipped out of Ipswich⁸ and, through London's great collecting point of Blackwell Hall, to merchant adventurers who carried it to 'Esteland, Russia, Spaine, Barbary, France, and Turkey, and other places' (McClenaghan 1924, 24). If not quite Jack of all trades, the clothier was Jack of all cloth trades. He did not toil in vain.⁹ For two hundred years overseas buyers would echo Chaucer's Wife of Bath in her applause for the quality of English cloth-making in the Old Draperies: 'Of clooth-making she hadde swiche an haunt/She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt'.

If their well-being can be measured by the size of their families then they were almost certainly doing a little better than their contemporaries. John Brownsmith remembered seven children in his will, four testators mentioned five children and another four remembered four children. John Flegge the elder clearly brought up his family well, founding a successful cloth-making dynasty with two of his four children, John the younger and Robert, appearing in the alnage accounts and having their wills proved in the higher courts. Although such large families were unusual, clothiers appear to have contributed to whatever population growth Suffolk may have experienced in the late 15th century. Sons

were mentioned more frequently in wills than daughters, perhaps because they were more often appointed as executors and perhaps because, once married, girls were expected to look to their husbands and husbands' families for financial support. Taking this into account, clothiers were producing marginally more than two children each. That they appeared in their parents' wills at all suggests that these children were the lucky ones who survived infancy. Replacement rates in town and country differed markedly. In the larger towns of Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich, where endemic plague exacerbated high levels of infant mortality, clothiers were producing on average less than one and a half children each and nearly half the Bury testators made no mention of any children. Those in the country towns and villages were producing on average more than two and a half children each.

TABLE IV: NUMBER OF TESTATOR'S CHILDREN MENTIONED IN WILL

| Children | None | One | Two | Three | Four | Five | Six | Seven |
|---------------|------|-----|-----|-------|------|------|-----|-------|
| Lower Courts | 19 | 15 | 17 | 9 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| Higher Courts | 2 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 0 |

Another guide to clothiers' well being, at least relative to their non-cloth-making contemporaries, is provided by the amounts they left to the high altar of their parish church for tithes forgotten.¹⁰ Details are set out in Table V. Their value as a barometer of wealth lies in the fact that nearly all testators made such bequests. Clothiers appear to have been doing significantly better than the average of all Suffolk testators over the period 1430–80. Whilst it may be argued that most of the clothiers' wills were proved towards the end of or after this period, when the economy had begun to recover from the mid-century recession and they could be expected to be doing better, it may in turn be argued that such recovery was due in part to the enterprise of the same clothiers.

TABLE V: BEQUESTS TO HIGH ALTAR OF PARISH OF BURIAL FOR TITHES FORGOTTEN

| | <5d. | % | 5–20d. | % | 2–5s. | % | 6–9s. | % | 10s.+ | % |
|-----------------|------|------|--------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|
| Suffolk 1430–80 | - | 11.9 | - | 40.4 | - | 23.3 | - | 12.4 | - | 11.5 |
| Lower Courts | 7 | 10.1 | 20 | 29.0 | 22 | 31.9 | 11 | 15.9 | 9 | 13.0 |
| Higher Courts | 1 | 4.8 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 23.8 | 5 | 23.8 | 10 | 47.6 |

NB: The figures for less than 5d. include those wills in which the bequest is unknown.

Peter Northeast, in his study of the *Wills of the Archdeaconry of Sudbury 1439–1474* describes such bequests as only a 'rough guide' to testators' wealth (Northeast 2001, xlv). They normally comprised only a tiny fraction of the estate. Robert Hardhede of Buxhall paid only 20d. to the high altar, but divided £1 between the three churches of Buxhall, Rattlesden and Little Finborough for building work and gave his chaplain son William £16 to pray for him for three years.

It was a great age of church rebuilding and refurbishment and Suffolk's many fine Perpendicular churches bear witness to the piety and prosperity of 15th-century parishioners. Most clothiers left something for the fabric of their parish church. At one end of the scale Roger Crytott bequeathed £20 to Lavenham church and John Baldewyn £10 to the church of St Lawrence in Ipswich, whilst at the other various testators left a modest

3s.4d. Some remembered more than one church, such as John Rushbrook who gave 6s.8d. each to St Peter's, Stowmarket and St Mary's, Buxhall and 3s.4d. to St Mary's, Stowmarket. Most were happy to let priest and churchwardens decide how to spend their money, but a few were more particular. John Amyot of Long Melford wanted his gift to be used for the belfry where perhaps he had rung the peals in happier times and John Depyng of Ipswich mentioned the church tower. Most left cash, but William Style gave half a fother of lead for the roof of St Nicholas in Ipswich. Bury St Edmunds was the one town where testators' generosity did not run in this direction. Robert Coket gave 6s.8d. to maintain St Mary's, but he was the exception. John Ayleward divided 16s. between the parish churches of Halstead and Gosfield, but gave nothing to St James's or St Mary's in Bury.

Fewer testators provided for church furnishing, but gifts were made for altar cloths, canopies, chalices, fonts, paintings, rood lofts, sepulchres and tabernacles – all adding to the richness of Catholic ritual. William Mayner left £6 13s.4d. for a chalice in Groton church. In 1479 John Coket of Bury St Edmunds took what was by then the unusual step of leaving 12d. to the shrine of St Edmund. It was a gesture to former glories, but a very modest one.

Whilst reverence for the great saint and his abbey was in decline, the continuing power of religious ideology over medieval minds, even the minds of hard-nosed commercial men, is perhaps best illustrated by the expense clothiers were ready to incur on prayers to speed their souls through the torments of purgatory. Thomas King's executors were instructed to find sixty priests to sing *dirige* and mass for his soul. As Table VI shows, over one in four employed chantry priests full time to pray for themselves and their families for an extended period after death. It was expensive spiritual insurance. The normal rate in Bury St Edmunds was £5 6s.8d. a year and elsewhere £6 a year, although William Hardhede in Buxhall showed true filial devotion by praying for his father for three years at the lower town rate.

TABLE VI: TESTATORS EMPLOYING CHANTRY PRIESTS

| | None | Half year | One year | Two years | Three years | Four years | More |
|---------------|------|-----------|----------|-----------|-------------|------------|------|
| Lower Courts | 50 | 3 | 10 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Higher Courts | 6 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 5 |

Outside the parish church, the main objects of clothiers' generosity were the orders of friars – the Augustinian, Carmelite (White), Dominican (Black) and Franciscan (Grey) Friars.¹¹ Owing to their vows of poverty, their intercessional prayers were considered particularly efficacious. Franciscans were favourites in Suffolk. In Ipswich they fared better than Dominicans or Carmelites and in West Suffolk, as Table VII shows, better than Dominicans or Augustinians. The mean value of bequests is somewhat skewed by the generosity of John Coket of Bury St Edmunds who left £3 6s.8d. to the Franciscans of Babwell and John Sake of Great Waldingfield who made the same bequest to the Dominicans of Sudbury. As the local house, the friary at Babwell was a particular favourite of Bury's clothiers and eleven of the fifteen testators remembered it in their wills. Few gifts went outside the county, although the Dominicans of Thetford received 3s.4d. from Thomas Kyng, the Carmelites of Cambridge received the same from Peter Blower of Long Melford and the Franciscans of King's Lynn received 10s. from Roger Crytott.

Suffolk clothiers had interests outside their own parish for many reasons. John Flegge the elder spread his largesse throughout East Anglia. He remembered the parish church

TABLE VII: BEQUESTS TO FRIARS

| House | Testators | Parishes | Total bequests | Mean bequest |
|------------------------|-----------|----------|----------------|--------------|
| <i>Lower Courts</i> | | | | |
| Franciscans of Babwell | 17 | 6 | £11 5s.4d. | 13s.3d. |
| Dominicans of Sudbury | 11 | 5 | £7 6s.8d. | 13s.4d. |
| Augustinians of Clare | 10 | 5 | £3 8s.4d. | 6s.10d. |
| <i>Higher Courts</i> | | | | |
| Franciscans of Babwell | 8 | 5 | £26 6s.8d. | £3 5s.10d. |
| Dominicans of Sudbury | 7 | 5 | £25 6s.8d. | £3 13s.9d. |
| Augustinians of Clare | 7 | 5 | £19 3s.4d. | £2 16s.2d. |

of his birthplace of Tallington, Lincolnshire with a bequest of 6s.8d., as well as contributing towards the maintenance and repair of three other churches in his own neighbourhood. He owed allegiance to the secular college at Thetford. In addition to the three local gilds endowed by his will was a fourth in Framingham, Norfolk. Joan Derby of Sudbury left 13s.4d. to the high altars of churches in Dedham and Maldon (Essex), twice as much as she gave to her own parish church. His legacies suggest that the well-travelled mercer Thomas Kyng of Bury St Edmunds was a member of the Gild of the Holy Trinity in King's Lynn and of the Penybrotterhood in London. The wider interests of his fellow townsman John Ayleward were more down to earth, lying in the land which he owned in the Essex parishes of Halstead, Bocking and Gosfield. Another Bury clothier, William Buntynge, had extensive urban landholdings in Hatter Street, Horsemarket, Long Bracklond, Southgate Street and Westgate Street, but like so many of his wealthy contemporaries was acquiring open fields too in Bradfield St Clare. A few were concerned with the upkeep of roads linking their own towns to others where they might have had commercial interests. John Herry left £6 13s.4d. for the king's highway from Lavenham to Eleigh Combust (Brent Eleigh), perhaps home to some of his domestic workers, and Adam Kechen of Bury St Edmunds left £1 for the road to Fornham All Saints. Several others mentioned friends and relations in other parishes. One of John Randolph's four sons lived as far away as Sandwich, Kent, which had grown in importance as a port of transshipment for cloth on its way out of London (Kowaleski 2000, 478–79).

For a few, such bequests provide clues to more widespread trading interests, perhaps even involvement in the export trade. Nevertheless, nearly half the clothiers expressed no interest in their wills outside their own parish and less than one in four had interests more than ten miles from home. One might have expected their engagement in the world of commerce to have given them wider horizons, but it seems that theirs was still a very parochial society.

MERCHANT ADVENTURER

We know from bequests in his will that Thomas Spryng sat at the centre of a web of spinners, fullers and weavers to whom he outsourced work and from whom he received enough cloth to present 294 whole cloths to the alnager. Thomas Spryng was the leading clothier of Lavenham, but only seventh in the league table of Suffolk clothiers, and still greater men dwelt in nearby towns.

In Hadleigh, the second cloth town of Suffolk, William Forthe, Robert Forthe, Thomas

TABLE VIII: SUFFOLK'S LEADING CLOTHIERS

| Name | Town | Whole Cloths | Straites | Approx. profit (£) | London connection | Will |
|-----------------|-----------|--------------|----------|--------------------|-------------------|------|
| John Stanysby | Bildeston | 504 | 6,760 | 658 | ✓ | |
| William Forthe | Hadleigh | 389½ | 2,514 | 302 | ✓ | ✓ |
| Robert Forthe | Hadleigh | 188 | 950 | 128 | ✓* | |
| Thomas Fulsnap | Hadleigh | 168 | 927 | 120 | ✓ | ✓ |
| John Motte | Bildeston | 34 | 1,180 | 99 | ✓ | ✓ |
| John Clerk | Hadleigh | 164 | 544 | 90 | ?† | |
| Thomas Spryng | Lavenham | 294 | 0 | 88 | ✓ | ✓ |
| Richard Cook | Hadleigh | 169 | 300 | 73 | | |
| John Brownsmith | Hadleigh | 169 | 220 | 67 | | ‡ |
| William Jacob | Lavenham | 223 | 0 | 67 | ✓ | ✓ |

NB: This Table records the number of cloths presented to the alnager, the profit earned by Suffolk's ten leading clothiers over the four-year period, any documented London connection and the incidence of probate in the higher courts.

* *In 1478 Robert Forthe of Hadleigh and others acquired land at Mascalls and Mundeford in the neighbouring parish of Offton from John Bolton, citizen and clothier of London (H.A. 56/11).*

† *There are references in the medieval calendars to John Clerk citizen and mercer of London (see C.P.R. (1494–1509), 282), but there is no firm evidence linking him to the John Clerk who appeared in the Suffolk alnage accounts.*

‡ *John Brownsmith's will was proved in the Court of the Dean of Bocking.*

Fulsnap and John Clerke each presented more than 300 whole cloths or their equivalent in straits. For five decades until his death in 1504, William Forthe was the patriarch of Suffolk cloth-making. As merchant and landowner, he had interests throughout East Anglia as well as mansions and shops in London (*C.C.R. (1485–1500)*, 77). His daughter Elizabeth married into London society. Towards the end of his life he appeared in a list of merchants of the Staple of Calais excused by King Henry VII of trade offences relating to the import and export of wool and woollen cloth (*C.P.R. (1494–1509)*, 447). Nevertheless, his heart remained in Hadleigh. During his lifetime he appears to have belonged to five local gilds. When he died he asked to be buried in the local church or churchyard and, among many other charitable gifts, he laid on a magnificent funeral feast. Perhaps in recognition of the contribution that they had made to the building of his fortune, he left £100 to be distributed among the people of Hadleigh and neighbouring towns and a hundred marks (£66 13s.4d.) for repair and maintenance of the roads within six miles of Hadleigh that would have brought them into town.

Roughly half way between Lavenham and Hadleigh, John Stanesby and John Motte carried on their cloth trade in the village of Bildeston. John Stanesby was Suffolk's foremost clothier in the late 1460s, presenting more than seven times as much cloth as Thomas Spryng and over 10 per cent of the county total. John Motte operated on a more modest scale, but was still the fifth clothier of Suffolk. They are two of the most interesting characters to emerge from the alnage accounts. John Motte is better known because he left a will when he died in 1473; John Stanesby left no will and is consequently a more shadowy figure. Both were Londoners and, unlike William Forthe, not countrymen at heart. John

Motte asked to be buried in the parish church of St Michael beside Crokellam in London and left generous bequests for several friaries and the inmates of several prisons in the City. It is not known whether John Stanesby ever lived in Bildeston, but it may be that his descendants did. John and Richard Stannysby appeared in the list of Bildeston taxpayers in 1524 and a quarter-century later Richard Stannysbye appears in the probate register as a gentleman of Bildeston (Hervey 1910, 157; Grimwade 1984, 535). Like Thomas Spryng, John Motte had a team of spinners, fullers and weavers working for him in and around Bildeston whom he remembered in his will and, like William Forthe, he invested heavily in the local road network, dividing a total of £240 between roads linking Bildeston to Semer, Rattlesden and Ipswich and, further afield, Colchester to London. John Stanesby employed twelve Italians¹² in Bildeston as servants to assist him with cloth-making (McClenaghan 1924, 6). This Italian connection is reinforced by his response in 1473 to one of the many brawls that broke out all too often between Londoners and resident foreigners. This particular incident resulted in the sad death of one John Drew. In order to dissuade him from pressing charges against Leonard Bounisegna, merchant of Florence, John Stanesby and Gerard Caniziani, another Florentine merchant, bought off John's father William with a bond in £40 payable on Midsummer Day next (*C.C.R. (1461-68)*, 183). John Motte had overseas connections too, although not quite as distant as Florence; in 1473 he was trading with the port of Civile called S. Lucar de Barmede in Spain (*C.C.R. (1468-76)*, 282). Since both were stockfishmongers by trade, cloth-making was for them a side line, though a lucrative one. As stockfishmongers dealt in dried cod from Norway (Dyer 2002, 203), they may already have had contacts and outlets in North European markets for their cloth.

If Jack of all trades was a parochial fellow, there was nothing parochial about the merchant adventurers. We have already met the Londoners John Stanesby and John Motte, mentioned William Forthe's London mansion which was on Watling Street and read about their overseas exploits. A sufficient number of other Suffolk clothiers had London links to invite suggestions of a metropolitan set. John Kyng, who made cloth in Shelley, was a successful London grocer¹³ and Thomas Fulsnappe of Hadleigh had property interests in the capital (*C.C.R. (1485-1500)*, 77). John Horrold of Clare appointed a Londoner as executor of his will. The brothers John and Robert Flegge and William Jacob of Lavenham all did business with Londoners (*C.C.R. (1476-1485)*, 126-27); *C.P.R. (1494-1509)*, 330). William Forthe, John Motte and John Odeham appear to have moved in the same London social circle since their names are linked by a single entry in the medieval calendars (*C.C.R. (1485-1500)*, 77). Whilst it is impossible to be sure how much time they spent in London and how much in the country, their wills suggest that most of our merchant adventurers were at home in Suffolk and went to London for business and pleasure. John Motte and John King were exceptions. Even so, King owned property and gave to churches in various Suffolk towns and villages.

If there was a London set, there was also a Colchester set, no doubt looking for trading opportunities in another of England's leading cloth towns. The ubiquitous William Forthe acquired land there in 1475 (*C.C.R. (1468-1476)*, 414). Thomas Fulby of Long Melford and John Hyde and Robert Reynham, both of Nayland, also had property interests in that town. John Archer of Sudbury remembered the friars of Colchester in his will.

All the indices of wealth and well-being employed in Tables IV to VII above show that the merchant adventurers were doing very significantly better than their more humble colleagues. They were raising larger families. In contrast to so many childless clothiers in Bury St Edmunds, Stephen Gardener with three sons and three daughters had, after John Brownsmith, the largest family of any testator. Seven of the twenty-one each named at least

four children in their wills and another three each named three. Adjusting the figures to compensate for fewer references to daughters, wealthy clothiers had on average three children each.

Very nearly half of them left at least 10s. to the high altar of their parish church whilst six left at least £1 – making them, in Peter Northeast's terms, respectively 'wealthy' and 'very wealthy' (Northeast 2001, xlv). Whilst one will in four proved in the lower courts provided employment for a chantry priest, nearly three in four wealthy clothiers were ready to incur the substantial cost involved. William Forthe paid John Gilbert to spend the rest of his life praying for his soul. John Archer, Thomas Fulsnap, William Jacob and Thomas Spryng paid for forty-seven years' worth of prayers between them at a total cost exceeding £280. Although far fewer in number, they contributed to the friars of Babwell, Sudbury and Clare more than three times as much as more plebeian clothiers.



FIG. 110 – 'I wyll have a crosse made of my perpetual coste that shall be sette upon the markett hyll within the towne of Lavenham' (William Jacob, 1500).

In hope of immortality, wealthy clothiers were inclined to the grand gesture. Robert Flegge employed a scatter-gun approach, making bequests to no less than twenty churches in and around Needham Market. Others were more focused in their benevolence. John Archer contributed £40 towards vestments for the parish clergy; John Golding of Glemsford gave the same amount for the building of a new chapel to house his coffin; and William Jacob paid for the market cross in Lavenham that has for 500 years borne witness to his memory (Fig. 110). John Motte gave £80 to Bildeston church; Richard Rysing of Great Waldingfield spent £20 on a table and catafalque before the altar in his parish church; and Thomas Spryng started the work that his son later finished by contributing £200 towards the building of Lavenham church tower (Fig. 111).

Their impact on Suffolk communities can be measured in other ways. In many towns and villages they were the principal employers. Some sent out the wool to spinners and weavers in their own homes, whilst Robert Flegge summoned employees to his workhouse, William Jacob occupied them in his shop and John Horrold put them to work in his fulling mill. Wealthy clothiers provided some rudimentary social assistance for the deserving poor and kept highways in basic repair through bequests in their wills. William Shakespeare recalled their pivotal role when he wrote in his play *Henry VIII*: 'For 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 uproar, / And danger serves among them'.

In keeping with their station, clothiers answered the call of public service. Robert Gardener, a strong second among the leading clothiers of Bury St Edmunds, was Alderman of the town in 1466, 1467, 1469 and in three subsequent years. John Ayleward, Alderman as early as 1453, was still making cloth throughout the late 1460s and lived on until 1477. Walter Thurston, making cloth on a more modest scale than either of these contemporaries, was Alderman in 1468 and in four subsequent years. As only one Alderman was appointed each year, the town's clothiers clearly had a firm grip on local government (Gottfried 1982, 271). In Hadleigh Robert Forthe served as a feoffee of the almshouses in Hyll Street.¹⁴ In Clare William Barker, John Fenne, John and Thomas Horrold and Walter Rowge all served at various times as bailiff, constable or aletaster (Thornton 1928, 215–16).

WHY SOUTH-WEST SUFFOLK?

The basic laws of supply and demand dictated that the cloth industry should flourish in England at the close of the Middle Ages. A switch from arable to pastoral husbandry after the Black Death created a ready supply of wool which was no longer flowing abroad to Flemish cloth workers. At the same time higher wages meant greater demand for woollen cloth from common people, such as John Depyng the Ipswich porter and part-time clothier, who could cut a dash in his 'best gowne ... rydyng gowne ... dobelet and hosyn ... cloke [or] russet gowne' when carousing with his friends at the Ship Inn.

Nevertheless, the question of why the boom happened in south-west Suffolk is still an intriguing one. Geography, social trends and economic forces all played a part. Some have looked at the headwaters of the Stour as a good location for the fulling mills that automated and revolutionised the cloth industry from the 13th century.¹⁵ Fulling mills were first recorded in Sudbury in 1290 and in Hadleigh in 1305. There are, however, faster flowing rivers elsewhere and there is no known evidence for any other such mills in south-west

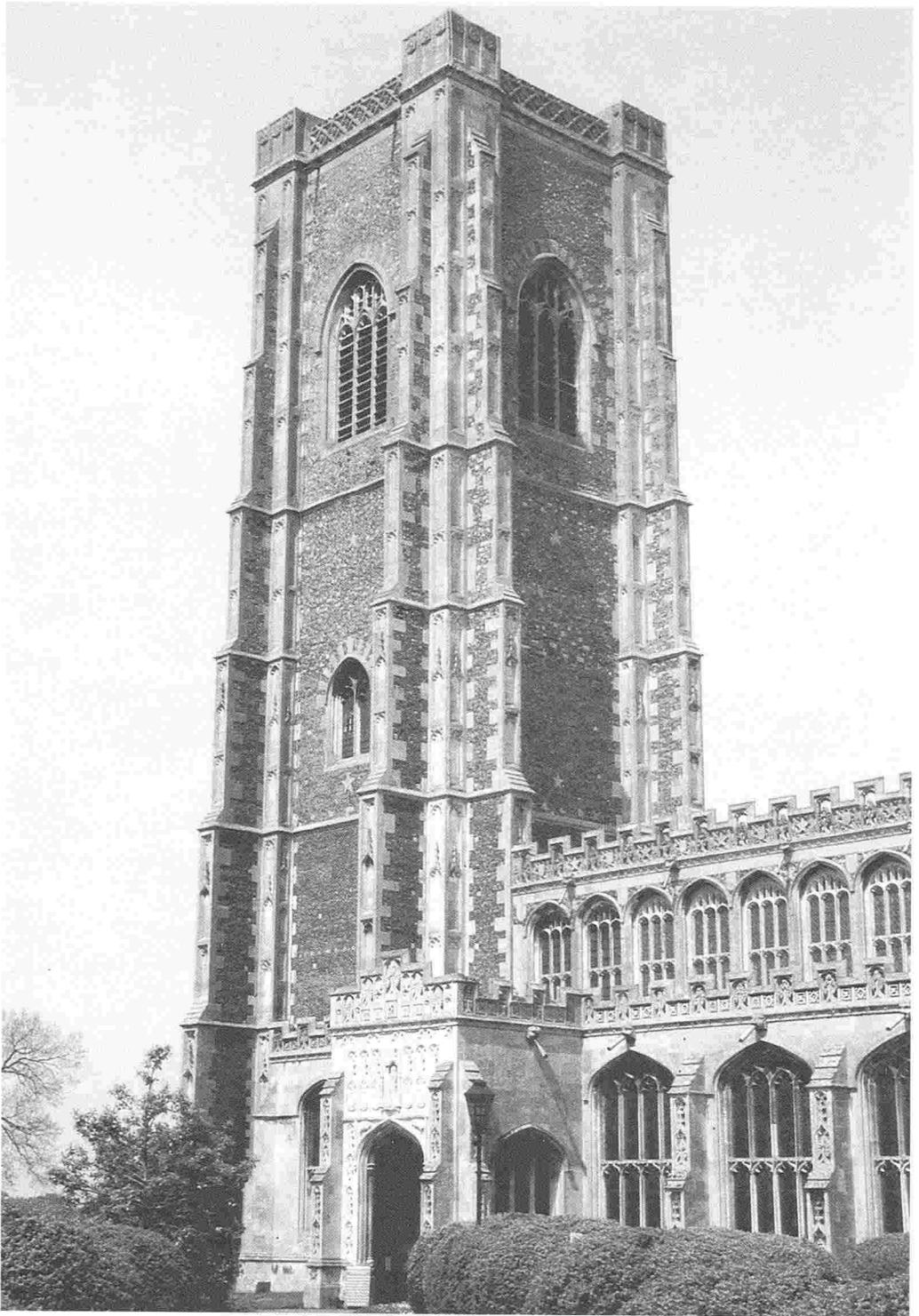


FIG. 111 – 'Item, I leave to the building of the bell-tower... of the parish church of Lavenham aforesaid 300 marks' (Thomas Spring, 1486).

Suffolk in those early years (Bailey 1989, 172). Others have stressed the importance of London connections and the pull of the London market (Britnell 2000, 319–20), as illustrated by the careers of our merchant adventurers. Some have pointed to the relative personal freedom that many Suffolk people enjoyed throughout the Middle Ages which allowed them time and opportunity to pursue different trades, and to their relatively small land holdings which forced them into employment outside agriculture in order to survive. They have identified the relaxation of seignorial control and the waning power of the Abbot of St Edmundsbury in the 15th century as further encouragement to such people (Gottfried 1982, 236, 244–45). Others have argued that, in the towns and villages of Babergh and Cosford, the absence of the strict trade regulation which had developed in longer established towns, coupled with a commercialised local economy, enabled more enterprising residents to harness a versatile workforce, prosper and grow rich. The same towns and villages may have benefited from a favourable tax regime. The apportionment of royal subsidy between different communities was set in the early 14th century, before most such towns and villages came to flower, and remained largely unchanged until the 1520s. So, Lavenham and its neighbours may have borne a share of the subsidy much smaller than their population and wealth merited;¹⁶ they were perhaps a tax haven, the Grand Cayman of the 15th century. In the 1520s Thomas Wolsey changed the tax regime and looked to Thomas Spring III and his colleagues for a much greater proportion of the subsidy. Consequently, the people of Lavenham paid eighteen times the tax they had paid in 1334 (Bridbury 1962, 112). The result was civil unrest among cloth workers so serious that it merited the poet laureate's attention at the time and moved the Bard's pen nearly a hundred years later (McClenaghan 1924, 53–57).

Whatever the reasons, and they were probably a combination of all these, a high proportion of the economically active residents of south-west Suffolk were involved in the cloth industry by the 1460s. As John Hatcher and Mark Bailey argue (2001, 216), 'Once an industry is established, however, its presence serves to attract other entrants through a process of what is termed "agglomeration economies"'. Such a broad base of clothiers supported the lofty peaks on which John Stanysby, William Forthe and Thomas Spring made their fortunes.

CONCLUSION

The Suffolk cloth trade was quite possibly the first example in English history of mass participation in manufacturing industry. Men of all degrees and station, some alone and some with sons and brothers, were making cloth for a national and international market. Some made a few, others a few hundred. They were doing it well and they were doing well out of it. What evidence survives suggests that they were raising more children and accumulating more wealth than their non-cloth-making contemporaries, providing skilled employment for their neighbours and bequeathing their profits for poor relief, roads and churches. A few merchant adventurers were involved, but they were heavily outnumbered by Jacks of all trades who produced the majority of the cloths.

APPENDIX

WILLS OF CLOTHIERS REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

WILLS PROVED IN THE COURT OF THE DEAN OF BOCKING

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Parish of Death</i> | <i>Date of Death</i> | <i>Reference</i> |
|-----------------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| John Brownsmith | Hadleigh | 1486 | H.A. 16/A/01 (Transcript only) |

WILLS PROVED IN THE COURT OF THE SACRIST OF ST EDMUND'S ABBEY (S.R.O.B.)

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Parish of Death</i> | <i>Date of Death</i> | <i>Reference</i> |
|------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| John Ayleward | Bury St Edmunds | 1477 | 232 Hawlee |
| Robert Aylewen | Bury St Edmunds | 1469 | 121 Hawlee |
| John Borle | Bury St Edmunds | 1475 | 206 Hawlee |
| John Brasyer | Bury St Edmunds | 1468 | 115 Hawlee |
| William Buntynge | Bury St Edmunds | 1478 | 262 Hawlee |
| John Coket | Bury St Edmunds | 1479 | 268 Hawlee |
| Robert Coket | Bury St Edmunds | 1478 | 249 Hawlee |
| Adam Kechen | Bury St Edmunds | 1508 | 198 Pye |
| Thomas Kyng | Bury St Edmunds | 1500 | 92 Pye |
| John Lovedey | Bury St Edmunds | 1480 | 295 Hawlee |
| Roger Lynge | Bury St Edmunds | 1496 | 52 Pye |
| Adam Prentys | Bury St Edmunds | 1475 | 205 Hawlee |
| John Redell | Bury St Edmunds | 1477 | 236 Hawlee |
| Richard Sterne | Bury St Edmunds | 1472 | 165 Hawlee |
| William Symond | Bury St Edmunds | 1473 | 175 Hawlee |

WILLS PROVED IN THE COURT OF THE ARCHDEACON OF SUDBURY (S.R.O.B.)

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Parish of Death</i> | <i>Date of Death</i> | <i>Reference</i> |
|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| John Amyot the younger | Long Melford | 1476 | 79 Hervye |
| Peter Blower | Long Melford | 1503 | 27, 71 Fuller |
| John Brokhole | Long Melford | 1467 | 420 Baldwyne |
| John Bronde | Boxford | 1480 | 219 Hervye |
| John Buxton | Stowmarket | 1475 | 174, 436 Hervye |
| Robert Cake | Stowmarket | 1481 | 212 Hervye |
| Richard Colman | Great Waldingfield | 1493 | 444 Hervye |
| Robert Cosyn | Stowmarket | 1474 | 565 Baldwyne |
| Walter Cowper | Brockley | 1477 | 45 Hervye |
| William Cowper | Boxford | 1476 | 133 Hervye |
| William Crosse | Boxford | 1498 | 90 Boner |
| Roger Crytott | Lavenham | 1476 | 52 Hervye |
| Joan Derby | Sudbury | 1478 | 149 Hervye |
| William Gamlyn | Glemsford | 1498 | 102 Boner |
| John Glassewryghte | Great Waldingfield | 1472 | 534 Baldwyne |
| Robert Hardhede | Buxhall | 1483 | 303 Hervye |
| Thomas Heed | Long Melford | 1488 | 426 Hervye |
| John Herry | Lavenham | 1473 | 536 Baldwyne |
| William Herward | Great Waldingfield | 1498 | 86 Boner |
| John Hyde | Nayland | 1478 | 578 Baldwyne |
| William Jacob | Sudbury | 1476 | 67 Hervye |
| John Joye | Stoke by Nayland | 1476 | 61 Hervye |
| John Lonelyche | Sudbury | 1474 | 144 Hervye |
| John Markes | Stowmarket | 1496 | IC500/1/24/133 |
| William Mayner | Groton | 1467 | 403 Baldwyne |
| John Meryett | Stanstead | 1480 | 207 Hervye |
| Robert Parle | Lavenham | 1493 | 444 Hervye |
| John Petywater | Glemsford | 1471 | 474 Baldwyne |

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Parish of Death</i> | <i>Date of Death</i> | <i>Reference</i> |
|-------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Richard Plandon | Long Melford | 1481 | 356 Hervye |
| Henry Pulcoo | Lavenham | 1477 | 102 Hervye |
| John Randolph | Great Waldingfield | 1503 | 63 Fuller |
| John Resshbrook | Stowmarket | 1488 | 423 Hervye |
| Walter Russhbrok | Stowmarket | 1487 | 426 Hervye |
| Alexander Sake | Great Cornard | 1479 | 147 Hervye |
| John Sake | Great Waldingfield | 1477 | 149 Hervye |
| Stephen Sheldrake | Stoke by Nayland | 1479 | 3 Fuller |
| John Skynner | Stoke by Nayland | 1487 | 396 Hervye |
| John Syday | Great Waldingfield | 1487 | 417 Hervye |
| John Waryn | Groton | 1477 | 99 Hervye |
| John Wyllymot | Lavenham | 1477 | 86 Hervye |

WILLS PROVED IN THE COURT OF THE ARCHDEACON OF SUFFOLK (S.R.O.I.)

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Parish of Death</i> | <i>Date of Death</i> | <i>Reference</i> |
|-----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| John Baldewyn | Ipswich | 1488 | 1C/AA3/65 |
| Robert Chirchous | Kessingland | 1476 | 1C/AA2/323 |
| John Crosse | Ipswich | 1509 | 1C/AA5/113 |
| John Curteys | Blythburgh | 1473 | 1C/AA2/215 |
| John Depyng | Ipswich | 1471 | 1C/AA2/258 |
| John Flegge the elder | Needham Market | 1474 | 1C/AA2/284 |
| Thomas Mannyng | Sudbourne | 1483 | 1C/AA3/26 |
| John Mersh | Copdock | 1477 | 1C/AA2/293 |
| Robert Mylle | East Bergholt | 1486 | 1C/AA3/43 |
| William Peverell | East Bergholt | 1489 | 1C/AA3/83 |
| John Smyth | Ipswich | 1465 | 1C/AA2/156 |
| William Style | Ipswich | 1475 | 1C/AA2/291 |
| John Wareyn | Reydon | 1475 | 1C/AA2/268 |

WILLS PROVED IN THE NORWICH CONSISTORY COURT (N.R.O.)

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Parish of Death</i> | <i>Date of Death</i> | <i>Reference</i> |
|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| John Flegge the younger | Needham Market | 1500 | 132 to 134 Cage |
| Robert Flegge | Needham Market | 1486 | 276 to 278 A Caston |
| William Jacob | Lavenham | 1500 | 115, 116 Cage |

WILLS PROVED IN THE PREROGATIVE COURT OF CANTERBURY (P.R.O.)

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Parish of Death</i> | <i>Date of Death</i> | <i>Reference</i> |
|-------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| John Archer | Sudbury | 1492 | PCC 14 Dogett PROB 11/9 |
| William Forthe | Hadleigh | 1504 | PCC 19 Holgrave PROB 11/14 |
| Thomas Fulby | Long Melford | 1492 | PCC 20 Dogett PROB 11/9 |
| Thomas Fulsnap | Hadleigh | 1498 | PCC 30 Horne PROB 11/11 |
| Stephen Gardener | Bury St Edmunds | 1471 | PCC 4 Wattys PROB 11/6 |
| John Golding | Glemsford | 1497 | PCC 13 Horne PROB 11/11 |
| Nicholas Gosselyn | Lavenham | 1491 | PCC 46 Milles PROB 11/8 |
| John Horrold | Clare | 1478 | PCC 35 Wattys PROB 11/6 |
| John Hyde | Nayland | 1494 | PCC 13 Vox PROB 11/10 |
| John King | London | 1469 | PCC 28 Godyn PROB 11/5 |
| William Meryell | Long Melford | 1486 | PCC 27 Logge PROB 11/7 |
| John Motte | London | 1473 | PCC 11 Wattys PROB 11/6 |
| John Pye | Long Melford | 1487 | PCC 4 Milles PROB 11/8 |
| Robert Reynham | Nayland | 1492 | PCC 11 Dogett PROB 11/9 |
| John Risby | Lavenham | 1493 | PCC 25 Dogett PROB 11/9 |
| Richard Rysyng | Great Waldingfield | 1505 | PCC 4 Holgrave PROB 11/14 |
| Alan Sexten | Lavenham | 1487 | PCC 7 Milles PROB 11/8 |
| Thomas Spryng | Lavenham | 1486 | PCC 25 Logge PROB 11/7 |

DEDICATION

I dedicate this essay to the courage in troubled times of my family: Julia, Benjamin and Rosalind.

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NOTES

- 1 P.R.O. E101/342/25, P.R.O. E101/343/2, P.R.O. E/101/343/4 and P.R.O. E/101/343/5.
- 2 See Appendix of Wills below.
- 3 A. R. Bridbury describes the cloth that was exempt from alnage including cloth 'that a man makes for his domestic needs in order to clothe himself and his household'. (Bridbury 1982, 53).
- 4 Hadleigh and Monks Eleigh were in the Archbishop of Canterbury's Peculiar Deanery of Bocking, and so were outside the jurisdiction of the Archdeacon of Sudbury and the Bishop of Norwich. With the chance exception of John Brownsmith's will, which served also as a title deed and exists now only in transcript form, no wills proved by Hadleigh testators in the Dean's court have survived from the medieval period. Walter Cowper and John Joye both appear in the Hadleigh lists of clothiers, but as they died in Brockley and Stoke by Nayland respectively, their wills were proved in the Archdeacon of Sudbury's court.
- 5 In addition to those referred to in this paragraph, the following towns and villages appear in the Accounts: Bildeston, Boxford, Bures, Chelsworth, Edwardstone, Groton, Harleston, Higham, Kersey, Monks Eleigh, Needham Market, Rattlesden, Shelley, Stoke by Nayland, Wickham Market and Woolpit. In addition to Babergh and Cosford, there was cloth production in Blything, Bosmere and Claydon, Carlford, Lackford, Mutford and Lothingland, Risbridge, Samford, Stowe, Thedwastre, Thingoe, Wangford and Wilford.
- 6 Carus-Wilson 1967, xxiv; Dyer 1989, 193–96. Edward Miller and John Hatcher suggest that the sale price of a whole cloth in the early 14th century was £4 (Miller and Hatcher 1995, 213), but even allowing for this, only thirty-nine of Suffolk's 15th-century clothiers would have generated a profit of at least £10 a year over the four years 1465/66–68/69.
- 7 Using Christopher Dyer's multipliers, the population of Stowmarket in 1381 was about 404 and in 1524 about 564 (Dyer 2000, 536).
- 8 The share of cloth exports of the headport of Ipswich, which also encompassed the harbours at Colchester and Harwich, declined during the second half of the 15th century. Even if the alnager recorded all the cloth made in Suffolk, which is unlikely, in many years less than one Suffolk cloth in four would have been exported that way (Carus-Wilson and Colman 1963, 153; Kowaleski 2000, 479).
- 9 A. R. Bridbury pays tribute to 'the medieval English clothmaker who, in the event, turned out to be a better craftsman, designer and business man than anyone has ever suspected' (Bridbury 1982, 104).
- 10 For a general discussion of such bequests and data for Suffolk and other counties, see Gottfried (1982, 125–30).
- 11 Peter Northeast (1999, 70–71) provides a helpful survey of medieval religious houses in Suffolk.
- 12 Having read the workers' names, Susan Andrews doubts the contemporary Bildeston churchwardens' view that they were Italians and considers that they were probably Flemings. It may be that, if the churchwardens were aware of John Stanesby's Italian connection, they simply assumed that his workers were Italian.
- 13 Many wealthy London grocers dealt in the import and export of a variety of goods including cloth (Dyer 2002, 305).

- 14 H.A. 16/F/06.
 15 A. R. Bridbury (1982,16–26) is far more sceptical about the impact of the fulling mill than E. M. Carus Wilson (1967, 183–210).
 16 See Todd and Dymond (1999, 203) for the relative wealth of Suffolk Hundreds in 1327 and 1524.

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Abbreviations

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| <i>C.C.R.</i> | <i>Calendars of Close Rolls.</i> |
| <i>C.P.R.</i> | <i>Calendars of Patent Rolls.</i> |
| <i>H.A.</i> | Hadleigh Archive, Hadleigh Town Hall. |
| <i>N.R.O.</i> | Norfolk Record Office, Norwich. |
| <i>P.R.O.</i> | Public Record Office, London. |
| <i>S.R.O.B.</i> | Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds Branch. |
| <i>S.R.O.I.</i> | Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Branch. |