

# LONDON MERCERS FROM SUFFOLK *c.* 1200 to 1570: BENEFACTORS, PIRATES AND MERCHANT ADVENTURERS

(PART I)

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THIS STUDY DRAWS together details of as many of the men who left Suffolk to become London mercers as can be found.<sup>1</sup> It will provide some facts about migration and the reasons for it and, it is hoped, will draw local historians' attention to the wealth of medieval sources in London which can illuminate local social and economic developments. The choice of the Mercers derives simply from the author's long study of that trade and company and awareness that there were many mercers who derived from Suffolk; a similar study of the Drapers of London might produce an even greater number of men with Suffolk origins.

As regards the earliest period, a comparison with the emigration from Norfolk *c.* 1270–1350 into the mercery trade of London must be made, for it illuminates the case of Suffolk in subsequent generations. It has been said that the roll call of the Mercers' Company of London between about 1270 and 1350 reads like a gazetteer of Norfolk villages. Although Suffolk too projected a substantial number of young people into London in this early period, it did not send an exceptional number into one trade. The South folk of East Anglia made their main emigration into the London Mercers' company in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, several generations after that of the North folk. Fundamentally, the emigrations from both counties were driven by many of the same economic and social reasons, and both were paid for by a thriving textile industry.

Around 1300 Norfolk was the wealthiest and most populous county of England, with land-hungry peasants operating in a remarkably free, village-dominated society, and able to eke out their livelihoods with by-industries, some based on the domestic skills of women, notably textile manufacture. The two most important by-industries of north-east Norfolk which become visible in the records at the end of the thirteenth century were the manufacture of linen and worsted. North-east Norfolk developed an important linen industry, of which the finest product was called after the town of Aylsham – it sold even to the royal court – and the nearby village of Cawston was equally famous for its coverchiefs into the fifteenth century. Linen was by definition mercery from the earliest of times. The other great product was worsted cloth, called after the town of Worstead. Worsted was made from long-stapled wool and its main products were piecegoods: gown-cloths, such as monks' or canons' cloths, that is enough cloth in one piece to make one monk's robe. These were woven by the women on their vertical looms. The other staple product of these looms was bedding, the curtains and coverlets that made up the hangings and covers for a bed, sold singly or as a set. All piecegoods were mercery. As these industries expanded, their products circulated throughout England and Europe and of course at London, which was fast becoming the greatest emporium of the realm. Trading contacts between Norfolk and the capital meant that Norfolk boys were apprenticed to Londoners, and as linen and worsted piecegoods were mercery, the linen and worsted producers naturally chose to apprentice their boys to the mercers of London.

Mercery in London was dominated by linen as its commercialisation took off from the end of the eleventh century with the development of the horizontal loom. The other traditional mercery goods were silk and all goods made of silk, and all manner of piecegoods, from headwear, gloves and hosiery to buttons, pins, and those goods which are now classified as haberdashery. The goods ranged from useful to luxury, and included the larger piecegoods of bed-curtains and coverlets of Worstead. The mercer took these goods to markets and fairs: the

lowest rank of mercer was a pedlar who carried his pack on his back; in the countryside another name for a mercer was chapman. His wife at home might be making some of the goods he sold, while managing his shop and apprentices.<sup>2</sup>

The connection between north-east Norfolk and the London mercers was established by Eilert Ekwall, who was investigating the reasons for the remarkable change of London English from a Saxon to a Midland or Anglian dialect.<sup>3</sup> He tested the hypothesis that this was effected by the weight of immigration into London from those areas before the mid fourteenth century. He relied on the names of Londoners to trace their origins: in other words a man was only called by the name of a place after he had left that place and lived elsewhere. Ekwall amassed some material from before 1200, but most of it fell between *c.* 1270 and *c.* 1360, covering about three generations. Ekwall's total count was over 2900 persons and the East Midlands dominated the results with 1970. Of the eastern counties, Norfolk led with just under 500 persons, with only twenty-five of these dating from before 1260, the great majority occurring between 1270 and 1360. Among these the trade of mercer was conspicuous and the vast majority of mercers came from north-east Norfolk. The county also produced a high number of aldermen and high achievers over the entire period. As regards the production of mercers from north-east Norfolk, counting Ekwall's figures conservatively and adding in the present author's discoveries, ninety-three mercers can be identified with certain Norfolk origins, and including the more borderline cases the total goes up to 130. This means that about a third of the masters of the London company came from Norfolk over three generations, *c.* 1270 to *c.* 1360. This connection between Norfolk and the London Mercers' Company persisted, for masters always had a tendency to take apprentices from their family or from their home county and village: among the famous Norfolk dynasties of London mercers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were the Boleyns and the Greshams

It is gratifying to find another, later, emigration, this time of Suffolk men into London, coinciding with the rise and expansion of the Suffolk woollen cloth industry from the late fourteenth century through the first half of the sixteenth century up to the crash of 1550. Suffolk produced woollen cloth, not worsted or linen, and it did not produce piecegoods but cloth by the bolt. Suffolk's cloth appealed first and foremost to the draper of London, an entrepreneur who supplied raw materials to the workers and took their cloth, often destroying local independence in the process. The London mercers developed an interest in this cloth for different reasons: by the end of the fourteenth century they were rejecting aspects of their traditional mercery trade – particularly anything that smacked of peddling – and were increasingly taking an interest in the export of English woollens to the finishing industries of the Low Countries. They did this as members of the Merchants of England who traded in the parts of Brabant, Flanders and Zeeland, the grand full title of the company later more commonly called the Merchant Adventurers of England. These merchants had collected trading privileges from the princes of the Low Countries since 1296. By the 1380s the mercers' greatest trade was linen; they dominated the import of linen into England, bringing in vast quantities from the fairs of Antwerp and Bergen-op-Zoom, much of it made in the Low Countries, and even more made in Germany, especially Westphalia. It was as linen importers that they were able to dominate the fellowship of Adventurers. Mercers also exported: worsted goods as these were mercery, but the Norfolk industry proved slow to expand, preferring to ignore the demands of the entrepreneur and to continue with its piecegoods for which there was a continuous but limited demand overseas. What was expanding, however, was the woollen cloth industry of England, which began to swallow up the wool that had previously fed the great cloth industry of the Low Countries. Driven by the high prices of English wool (taxed by the English kings), the workers of the Low Countries began to concentrate on finishing the increasingly abundant English woollen cloth – they also changed over to linen production. The great linen importers, the mercers, began to export English cloth to the finishing industries of the Low Countries.<sup>4</sup> This is where the Suffolk connection comes in.

Before covering the influx of Suffolk men from the end of the fourteenth century onwards, however, the emigrants from the county found in London by Ekwall, 1200–1360, deserve mention. Suffolk shared many of the characteristics of Norfolk in this period: a high density of population and a high proportion of freemen, who often struggled on smallholdings and needed additional crafts to support themselves.<sup>3</sup> In general terms, people emigrate to better themselves elsewhere: they go to escape conditions that they do not like, and a great metropolis such as London attracts the most immigration from its nearest counties. Using the evidence of place names, Ekwall found a total of 320 Londoners of Suffolk origin for the period before 1360, of whom thirty-five were for the period before 1270 – ten more than Norfolk, interestingly, for the great flood from Norfolk was to coincide with the commercial success of worsted from the 1270s onwards. There was a fair sprinkling of high achievers from Suffolk, and a dozen mercers.<sup>6</sup>

The earliest Suffolk man to be found as a mercer in London was Brichtmar de Haverhill, the head of an important group bearing that name. He was a sheriff in 1157–58 and 1173–76. His wife's activity as an embroiderer of orphreys, which she sold to the king and others, suggests that her husband dealt in mercery. She was a silkwoman – the name that later became usual for a London female mercer – and her husband's mercantile activities supplied her with the silks of her craft. Their son, William, was also sheriff 1190–91 and alderman of Cripplegate ward in the early 1200s; of William's sons, Thomas was sheriff 1203–4 and succeeded his father as alderman. Brichtmar, however, can be proposed as a mercer only because of his wife's occupation. An Elias de Haverhill found in 1305 as a mercer, may have been a relative.<sup>7</sup> Of a total of about eight persons from Beccles, two can be suggested as mercers: Richard de Beccles and Andrew de Beccles c. 1280.<sup>8</sup> There were also Suffolk men in trades closely associated with mercery in this period: Geoffrey de Bradley was variously called a girdler and buckler, and in his will of 1310–11 named de Cavendishes as legatees and poor relatives at Dullingham, not far from Bradley.<sup>9</sup> Several Cavendish men were girdlers and buckle-makers, some including the legatees of Geoffrey de Bradley. The well known Thomas de Cavendish, 'mercier or draper' as he called himself in his will of 1348, one of the many victims of the Black Death, was in fact the son of William atte Watre de Ewelle (either Kent or Surrey) and took his name from his master, Walter de Cavendish, mercer, about whom little is known except that he paid the company's livery fee of 1348. A place name was more suitably up-market than atte Water for the successful apprentice.<sup>10</sup>

An impressive total left Bury St Edmunds<sup>11</sup> for London to learn and practise diverse occupations before 1350: over seventy men and women were counted by Ekwall, including an interesting clan of burellers (makers of coarse woollen cloth), all called 'de St Edmund' or 'de Sancto Edmundo', 1270s to 1349. Was this high number driven by a desire to escape the control of the abbey? Among them were also two haberdashers (the Scandinavian word for a mercer or pedlar): Robert de Bury and Roger de Bury in the 1270s were probably brothers and partners; and a Thomas de Bery was defined as a mercer 1300–2. There were also some men of Bury in the trades of capper and hatter, paternosterer and glover, all makers of piecegoods suitable for a mercer's pack.<sup>12</sup> As fairs governed the way of life of a mercer, the archetypical pedlar, from the mid 1100s to the early 1300s, it is worthwhile mentioning that Bury St Edmunds had an important fair, run with great profit by the abbey. The abbey also guarded its markets so assiduously that there was none in the immediate vicinity, and Bury market was large enough to have a distinct mercery area.<sup>13</sup> Bury fair did not rank with the fairs of St Ives, Winchester or Boston which were of greater international significance; it took place in December following that of Northampton in November. London visitors were of pre-eminent importance at such fairs and they enjoyed considerable privileges: they were free of all tolls and could not be impleaded outside their walls, and from 1268 they had the right to elect their own wardens at all fairs. Any lord of a fair who was unwise enough to infringe the privileges of London citizens was easily brought to heel: a two-year boycott in 1190 defeated the abbot of Bury St Edmunds.

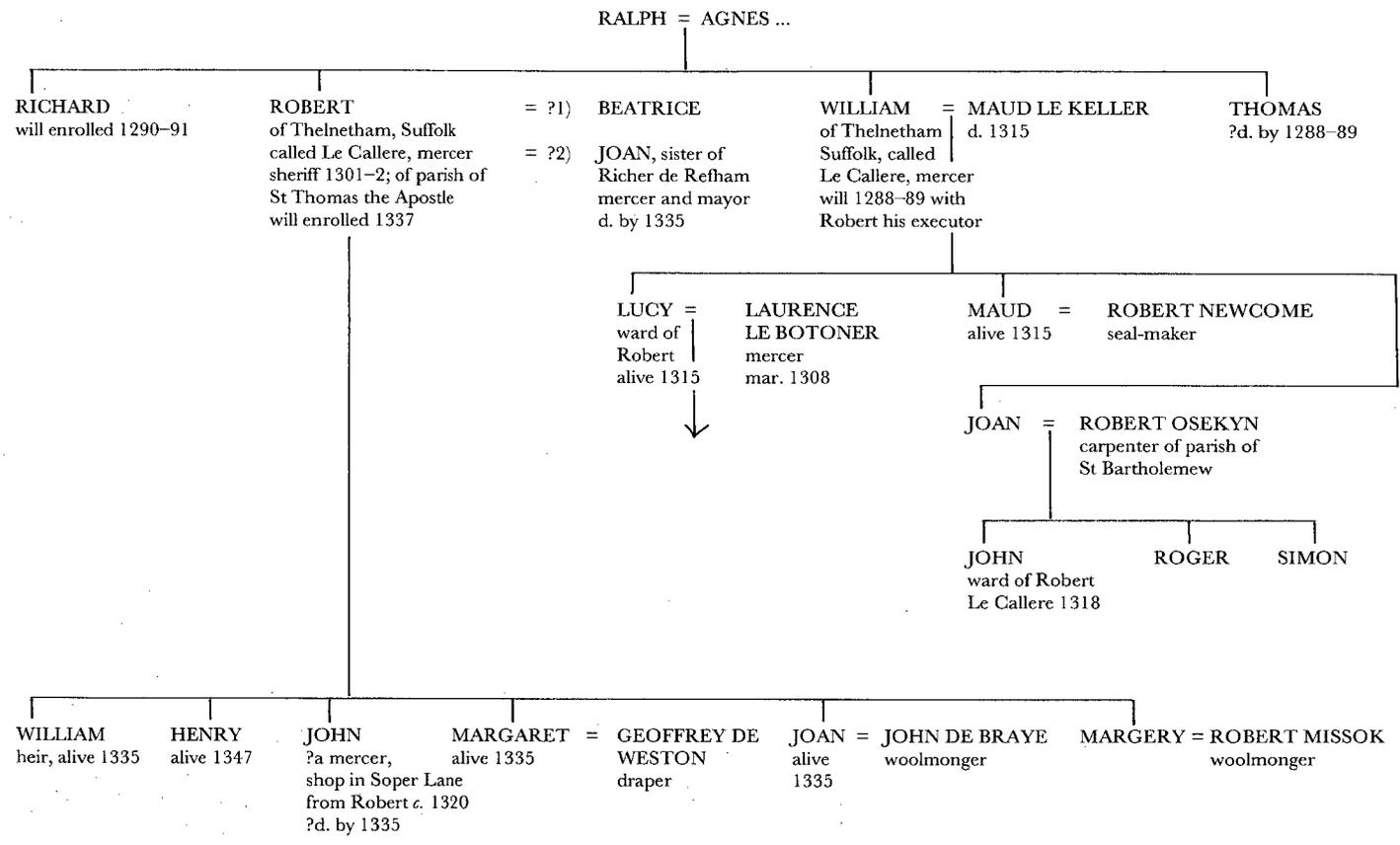


FIG. 1 - The Le Callere Family

No one in Bury would therefore have been unaware of the advantages of going off to be a citizen of London.<sup>14</sup>

A significant early clan of mercers came from Thelnetham near Thetford, only just in Suffolk. These were the le Calleres, that is, they bore an occupational byname taken from the caps and headwear which they made. All forms of headwear were mercery; piecegoods were easy for an itinerant mercer to carry. Norfolk supplied a striking number of cappers to London c. 1270 to 1360. Four brothers from Thelnetham came to London from about 1260 onwards (Fig. 1), and of these the most conspicuous was to be Robert. Brother William was flourishing in London by the late 1260s as a mercer living in St Michael Bassishaw, with shops there and in Soper Lane, the main mercery street of London. He died in 1289 and made Robert his executor and the guardian of his youngest daughter. Brother Richard died shortly after and left Robert a shop in Soper Lane inherited from William. Of brother Thomas nothing is known except that he too predeceased Robert. It seems probable that both William and Robert came to take up apprenticeships in London and that Robert, at least, was apprenticed to a callere or capmaker and both brothers eventually became mercers. It is also possible that they came from a cap-making family in Thelnetham. Robert became a rich man: he was trading with France in the 1290s, probably for wine and certainly for mercery from Paris, the fashionable centre for mercery goods. He was a recognised authority on mercery, and he was also exporting wool in the early 1300s. In 1301–2 he was elected sheriff and was briefly an alderman 1321–23 for the ward of Cordwainer, which had a substantial population of mercers. He died 1336–37. His mercer son, John, had had a successful career but had predeceased his father; he was, however, survived by two sons and three daughters who had married a draper and two woolmongers, the occupations of his chosen sons-in-law indicating Robert's wide-ranging trade contacts; his ward and niece, Lucy, had married Laurence le Botoner, a fellow mercer in 1308. Robert's own second marriage to Joan, sister of another exceptionally successful mercer of Norfolk origins, Richer de Resham (Reepham), mayor 1310–11, testifies to Robert's success. Robert took three known apprentices, of whom Elias, from Garboldisham, near Thelnetham but on the Norfolk side of the border, went on to be a mercer of equal distinction. Elias enjoyed the byname of le Callere like his master and also that of le Chaucer as his trade extended to hosiery.<sup>15</sup>

Not much can be concluded about these early mercers of London with Suffolk origins. There is no striking emigration from one place and there is no obvious reason why any of them chose to become a mercer of London. Ekwall found a good sprinkling of emigrants from the cloth-making townships of the hundreds on the Stour and the Cambridge border, but there was no strong link as yet to any London company; his research did show, however, that the profits of cloth-making already paid for young men to enter the freedom of London and seek their fortunes there.<sup>16</sup>

It was natural for boys of the South folk to be apprenticed to those of the North folk who had already established themselves in the mercery trade of London. The same roads took them and merchandise to and from London, and they had the bond of being East Anglians. Since one in three of all London mercers came from Norfolk, it was also difficult to avoid a master with Norfolk connections. These Suffolk boys placed with Norfolk masters before 1350 were as follows. William de 'Haldresfeld', Suffolk, was apprenticed to John de Depham, a mercer of Norfolk in 1311.<sup>17</sup> John Edmund junior came from Finningham in Hartismere hundred, West Suffolk, to be apprenticed to Robert de Elsing, and when his master died in 1350 he was entrusted with the £80 left by his master to his son to trade with until that son was of age.<sup>18</sup> By 1357–58, however, he was being pursued for the considerable sum of £300 by another mercer, Elias Fraunceys, but he had a sizeable estate in London, including property rented from Elsing Hospital and two shops in St Pancras Soper Lane, the heart of the Mercery, and was apparently able to make arrangements to pay this debt and later the remainder owed to the son of his former master in 1369.<sup>19</sup> In 1349 a Thomas de Eriswell can be found as a legatee and executor of the prosperous mercer, Edmund de Hemenhale (Hempnall, Norfolk) and as he was

bequeathed a property in the great covered market known as the Great Seld by Edmund, it is likely he too was a mercer.<sup>20</sup> Twenty years later an Alan Everard, mercer, remembered the important Cattawade Bridge, across the Stour, in his will of 1366. In the fifteenth century the Everards were an armigerous family from Linstead in Suffolk, with lands in both Norfolk and Suffolk including an estate at Cratfield, and it is possible that Alan was one of them.<sup>21</sup>

Ipswich, the most dominant town in Suffolk alongside Bury, produced surprisingly few Londoners – the freedom of its inhabitants, its port, trade and manufacturing supported fourteen parishes and apparently provided for everyone. John de Gypeswich, an apprentice of Peter de Sparham, a mercer of Norfolk origins, was admitted to citizenship in 1312 and can be found in trade as late as 1343–44. Also admitted in 1312 was John le Gnopwed of Ipswich, an apprentice of yet another Norfolk mercer, Richard de Horsham, and later to be a considerable property owner on Cheapside.<sup>22</sup> With these may be linked John de Swiftlynge of Ipswich, his first name indicating earlier origins than Ipswich: he was apprenticed to John de Dalling mercer and admitted to the freedom in 1310–11. He was later known as John de Dalling junior – his master was the senior – and then later still he was called the senior to distinguish him from his son. He was an MP in 1340 and died in 1349.<sup>23</sup> The complexity of his nomenclature illustrates the problems as well as the revelations of this kind of study. Last of this group, Ralph, son of Robert de Kelsale, saddler of London, was, to judge by his name, a second generation Suffolk-Londoner, who took apprenticeship with another Londoner of Norfolk origins, William de Cawston, mercer and haberdasher; his will was enrolled in 1311.<sup>24</sup>

Mercers of London sold their goods at all the fairs and markets of Norfolk and Suffolk, either in person or by sending apprentices and servants, and Suffolk was supporting nearly a hundred markets by 1349, above the national average. This ubiquitous itinerant trade is well illustrated in the 1348 will of Roger de Horsham, Norfolk, mercer of London. He specified a number of places in Norfolk and Suffolk where he kept stores of 'stock and chattels': those in Suffolk were Ubbeston and the adjacent Cratfield, in the east Suffolk hundred of Blything, not far from Harleston. His regular trade with the counties may have made use of local men and women to sell his goods, and he may have used an established circuit of local markets as he would certainly have done at the great fairs of England. He also left a bequest to the friars of Thetford, who may have given him hospitality on the road.<sup>25</sup> What the London merchant apparently was never to find on his travels in Suffolk was a prestigious religious fraternity to join: it was not uncommon for a Londoner, from the late fourteenth century on, to join a religious guild in a town with which he did regular business, such as the Guild of Holy Trinity Coventry or the Holy Cross Guild of Stratford upon Avon.<sup>26</sup> This role may have been filled in East Anglia by St George's Guild of Norwich, or by the Corpus Christi Guild of Ipswich, but the latter's lack of records does not allow any examination of the possibility.

Another mercer who followed the traditional activities of his trade a little later was Richard Boneby. He was in debt to an Emma Mildenhall, and a William Boneby of Mildenhall who was also a citizen and tanner of London, for £40; Richard was prosecuted in January 1391 for his failure to pay and was declared unfound by the sheriff. Was he dead or gone home to Mildenhall, for it must be assumed that he too was from Mildenhall? The town ranked about seventy-sixth in size in England and was prosperous.<sup>27</sup> Richard's goods were inventoried, seized and handed over to his creditors: mercery consisting of coverchiefs of 'Lubyk', of 'cremyll'. of 'relusance', of 'Lampasduk', of 'Cypre et Wormys', of Paris and Flanders; linens including bultel, pytling, and fine varieties including that of Constance, cambric of Cambrai, and table napkins from 'Denant'. There was taffeta, velvet, fustian, Cologne thread, coverlets made in York, six hats of beaver, and six chasubles with their parures worth 10s. His household goods ranged from the counter of his shop to his chair, bedding, table, curtains and cooking vessels. The wealth of London mercers and their trade with chapmen from the counties usually meant they were the creditors, but in this instance a sizeable estate passed to Richard Boneby's creditors in Mildenhall, probably members of his family who had subsidised his trade.<sup>28</sup>

Poor Boneby failed, but other Suffolk men flourished in the London environment. There were two exceptional London mercers of Suffolk origin whose careers cross the first decades of the fifteenth century: a benefactor of a library, William Bury, and a pirate, John Church, both from Bury St Edmunds. It is likely that Bury's family name was also Church. As his apprenticeship occurred before the first wardens' accounts of the Mercers' Company,<sup>29</sup> it is not known who was his master, but in 1391–92 he paid a fee for an apprentice of his own so it must be assumed that he was at least in his later twenties by that date. Bury's only other known apprentice was his kinsman, John Church, whom he later employed as his servant.<sup>30</sup> In 1415 the case of an Italian who fraudulently obtained cloths of gold worth £150 from him reveals Bury as in an excellent way of business, located in the prime mercery parish of St Pancras and with John Church already his servant.<sup>31</sup> In June 1417 he and other citizens of London, including several mercers, lent money to Henry V for his expedition overseas, and his contribution was £20.<sup>32</sup> Bury and Church were jointly prosecuted during the major usury trials of 1421 in London, conducted under the eagle eye of Richard Whittington. The defence was that Church had transacted the loans with his master's goods in 1417–18 while still an apprentice and unknown to Bury; Church was committed to prison until he paid the sum of £72. Bury died two years later in February 1423: in his will he described himself as William Bury, citizen and mercer of London, and asked to be buried where God pleased.<sup>33</sup> He remembered the poor of Bury St Edmunds and its vicinity with £73 6s. 8d. Two women were left life pensions of £2 13s. 4d: Beatrix de Delf and Margery Church of Bury St Edmunds.<sup>34</sup> John Church, his kinsman, received £100 and all the household goods of his dwelling and was to be an executor – this was surely his ex-apprentice, their relationship having survived the verdict of the usury trial (collusion between the culprits over the punishment seems likely). John's brother, Thomas Church, who was a chaplain, was left a missal, a chalice and the apparel of an altar. His fellow executor was no less than Thomas Chaucer, the poet's son and a great and wealthy man, whose acquaintance confers considerable distinction upon William Bury. The two executors received the residue of the estate of which the movables were to be spent on food, drink and clothing for the poor, on poor prisoners and on the poor in hospitals. It was the executors who decided they had enough to dispose of to augment the endowment of the civic library at Guildhall, along with a contribution from the estate of Richard Whittington, who had died in the same month as Bury. Whittington, like Bury, had not specified in writing this object of charity but had left many decisions to his executors. The estate of Whittington was very considerable and that of Bury would have been much smaller, but was clearly enough to allow the executors latitude. Bury had lived close to the Guildhall as a parishioner of St Michael Bassishaw and left bequests to that church's chaplains, clerk and fabric, and also substantial bequests to the nearby parish of St Stephen Coleman Street, both its church and its poor (40 marks). This proximity and the executors' knowledge of their friend suggest that Bury can be taken as a man who would have approved of a civic library.

Turning to John Church, it is fairly certain from the records of the Mercers that we are dealing with a man who began as apprentice and servant of William Bury, whose relative he was, and who ended as a wealthy and famous, even notorious shipowner.<sup>35</sup> In 1420–21, the year of the trial and his imprisonment, he is recorded as issued from his apprenticeship.<sup>36</sup> The trial had no effect on his career for he was admitted to the company's livery the next year, a process that took the average mercer four years, so it is certain he had money behind him – he received £100 from his master in 1423, a considerable sum, and there may have been other family money. He occurs regularly in the Mercers' Company's accounts paying fees for his own apprentices until 1450.<sup>37</sup> He was in a considerable way of business as early as 1422 when he was buying four cloths of gold and silk from a Lombard merchant for £30.<sup>38</sup> In 1425–26 he was renterwarden of the Mercers,<sup>39</sup> but he became too busy elsewhere to seek civic office thereafter.

Church became a major shipowner and is known to have possessed at least four or five ships, several of which were probably the proceeds of legalised piracy.<sup>40</sup> He profited from the crown's

policy of keeping the seas in the 1430s by licensing merchants and shipowners to protect themselves at sea and keep all prizes taken. It was a system greatly open to abuse,<sup>41</sup> and Church was only one of several London mercers who benefited.<sup>42</sup> He also served the crown in other ways: in 1436 he was one of those seizing ships on the south coast to take Richard, duke of York over to the war in France, and in the next year to convey the earl of Warwick to France; and in 1439 he was performing the same duty to ship soldiers to France. He had become a collector of customs at Southampton by 1438, and in the same year he was awarded letters of marque to recover £2000 worth of goods on two ships which had been seized by Flemings in peace time. He was inevitably associated with the port of Calais: in October 1438 he and Adam Dane were to seize the necessary craftsmen to repair the town and its wharves and harbour.<sup>43</sup> In 1439 he received further letters of marque because his ship the *Margaret of Clarence*, laden with goods worth over £5332, had been attacked by ships of St Malo and Mont St Michel and taken to St Malo, and the duke of Brittany had failed to give him redress.<sup>44</sup> In January 1441, by which time he was victualler of Calais, Church was allowed, in consideration of his labour and losses in the king's service and his loss of several ships at sea, that his ships the *Trinity* and the *Isabelle* should not be seized for the king's service for the next three years: he had fitted them out at his own costs and undertaken to defend the seas and bring merchandise to England.<sup>45</sup> In 1442, under new orders from parliament to make war to safeguard the seas, and with further losses at sea of his own to avenge, Church contributed a balinger (a sailing ship often fitted with oars, between 20 and 50 tons) to a fleet of twenty-eight vessels to keep the peace for eight years. The execution of these plans underwent much modification with unknown results and certainly no major sea-keeping, but Church was listed among some of the great shipowners of his day.<sup>46</sup> As a useful servant of the crown he could count on support: when masters and mariners whom he had hired refused to take three ships, the *Trinity*, the *Isabel* and the *George*, laden with corn and other victuals, to Bordeaux, preferring to sail to the Low Countries, their arrest and compliance was ordered.<sup>47</sup>

His knowledge of the sea was sufficient to get Church appointed to a commission to hear an appeal against a judgement in the court of admiralty in 1441. He also acted as a surety or lender of money to the crown to continue the war in Normandy in 1449. In 1455 he was on a commission to investigate the complaint of men of Bruges and Sluis that Englishmen had seized a ship laden with wheat and taken it to Queenborough in Kent.<sup>48</sup>

Church's main trade seems to have been with the Iberian peninsula in the valuable commodities of oil, carpets, iron, steel and nails. In 1433 he was prosecuting men of Devon, Fowey and other nearby ports, who in their ship the *Edward* had seized a Genoese carrack laden with goods from Seville, including his own eight tons of oil, which had cost Gianotti Salvaro, his Genoese factor in Seville, £10 the ton – the cost of the freight added another £1 the ton.<sup>49</sup> He is also known to have traded with his own ships to Spain and Portugal in the 1430s and 1441, and he had a safe-conduct for four Basque ships with a John Langley.<sup>50</sup> He was importing hides and other goods in 1436 from Ireland in his own ship the *Jesus* when it was seized for royal service (he was allowed to remove his goods).<sup>51</sup> He was also exporting cloth to Lisbon in 1438.<sup>52</sup> Church, with his fellow mercers Stephen Titchmarsh and Peter Alford, was in a position to help Portuguese merchants who had lost goods and ship to West Country pirates who had sold both in Fowey. It was a complex case which involved merchants of Bristol, and illustrates the position that Church enjoyed as a merchant of London who was well known in both Bristol and the Algarve.<sup>53</sup> With this level of interest in the Iberian peninsula it was natural that he should have had the hosting of ten Spanish merchants in London in 1440 and 1443–44, and men interested in the goods of these Spaniards would have used Church as a go-between, a not unprofitable position.<sup>54</sup>

He did not get away with everything: in 1449–50 the Mercers fined him a piece of blue velvet woven with gold which was made into a pillow for the company's chapel, his fault unrecorded.<sup>55</sup> As regards his private life, he married Isabel, the sister of Thomas Staunton, mercer, and sister-

in-law of the wealthy mercer Robert Large (mayor 1439–40). Church's association with Large had begun by 1428 when he had acted as his surety, and continued after Large's death when he acted as a surety for Large's widow, Dame Joan, over the estate of the heir.<sup>56</sup> Church had sons and his grandson, Edmund Church, claimed the Staunton manor of Offord, Huntingdonshire, and Large property including the manor of Horham Hall, near Thaxted, in Essex, and seems to have generally wasted his patrimony.<sup>57</sup> It seems likely that John Church died in 1457 leaving no surviving will. Thomas Walsingham, squire and citizen of London who died in 1457, referred to my 'gossib Chirches wif' to whom he left a little covered gilt cup – if this was the shipman John Church then the context suggests that he was dead.<sup>58</sup>

Other Suffolk men were also aggressive overseas merchants, taking advantage of the very considerable privileges awarded the English merchants by the several princes of the Low Countries since 1296, and paying fees to join the fellowship of St Thomas Becket, the religious fraternity of the company which was to become known as the Merchant Adventurers of England. The Adventurers operated under their own elected governors and were allowed to hold meetings and vote on their constitution. The Londoners inevitably dominated any meeting in the Low Countries and could usually secure an easy majority in the voting on communal decisions taken at the fairs of Antwerp or Bergen-op-Zoom in Brabant. In September 1421 it was decided by a majority that they needed to have a permanent governor in the Low Countries to manage their affairs throughout the year and not just during the fairs. John Warren, a mercer of London, was voted in with the considerable salary of 200 nobles and expenses. Sixteen Adventurers from the cloth towns of York, Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds, Sudbury, Colchester and Norwich, refused to contribute. Those from Suffolk were John Deken, William Witherell and John Prior from Ipswich, John Payne of Sudbury and John Edward from Bury St Edmunds. They failed to attend the hearing and lost their case: there had been a clear majority vote at the meeting against them, not only composed of Londoners.<sup>59</sup> Suffolk men were not unknown as opposers of the governors of the Adventurers: an earlier governor William Stokes, who was particularly active against smuggling, fell foul of one London mercer, William Brigge, who threatened him and attacked him and was as a consequence heavily fined in 1411. Brigge had been admitted to the Mercers in 1406 and had property in Suffolk.<sup>60</sup>

*To be continued.*

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#### NOTES

- 1 This study does not pretend to be complete, nor have many references to Suffolk property owned by mercers of London with non-Suffolk origins been included.
- 2 For a larger definition of mercery and the early trade, see Sutton 2005, chapters 1–3, especially pp. 3–5, 48–57.
- 3 For all that follows on the Norfolk emigration: Ekwall 1956, xi–xlviii, 35–92. Only the Home Counties came near the figures of the East Midlands: about 3000, with Essex at the head with about 850, and he accounted for the high figure for these counties by their vicinity to London, p. lx. And see Sutton 1989, 201–25; and Sutton 1995, Appendix 6, 'London Mercers with Norfolk Origins and Connections'.
- 4 Sutton 2005, chapters 6: iii and iv; 10: ii and iii.
- 5 Bailey 2007, 8, 12–13, 17, 21–22, 25, 27–36, 39, 42–43, 55, 62, 150–51.
- 6 Ekwall 1956, xlvii–xlviii, 28–31. A considerable number of men were called by the name of de Suffolk in London in this period, but no mercers.
- 7 Haverhill, on the upper Stour. Ekwall 1956, xlviii, 17–18; Sutton 1995, 36–37.

- 8 Richard was a surety for a mercer in 1278; Andrew was a debtor of John de Vilneve probably for mercery in 1287–88, Ekwall 1956, 2.
- 9 Ekwall 1956, 3.
- 10 For Thomas's will see Sharpe 1889–90 (hereafter *CWH*), I, 547–48. For his successful family see also Ekwall 1956, 13; *CWH*, I, 628–29, 632–33; II, 149.
- 11 The tradition that King Edmund himself was baptised in the London parish of St Mary Colechurch like the other great English saint St Thomas Becket, should not go unmentioned. Mary Colechurch was across Cheapside from the Mercery of London, where most of the mercers in this article either lived or had a shop at some time in their lives. The baptism of St Thomas there is a fact; but how the tradition concerning St Edmund grew up is unclear. It was current in London in the fifteenth century; see Sutton 2007, 215. It was also said that St Edmund's body performed acts of healing when carried through Cripplegate and that the body was kept three years in the church of St Gregory by Paul's when the Danes were in East Anglia: see Kingsford 1908, I, 33.
- 12 Ekwall 1956, 5–11.
- 13 Dymond and Martin 1999, 76–79; Bailey 2007, 119–20, 126, 128–30, 137–40.
- 14 Birch 1887, 3–5; Charters of Henry I and II (1133, 1154–62); Sharpe 1894–95, I, 40–41; Clarke 1903, 112–14.
- 15 Sutton 1995, 282–88, and App. 6, 412. Thelnetham is so close to Norfolk that it was counted as Norfolk. Ekwall 1956, 33 for Thelnetham; *Oxford DNB* for de Refham.
- 16 Ekwall 1956, lxxvii–viii.
- 17 Sharpe 1899–1912 (hereafter *Letter Books A–L*): *Letter Book D*, 147; Ekwall 1956, 16. Haldresfeld unidentified.
- 18 Ekwall 1956, 16; *CWH*, I, 637; *Letter Book G*, 18, 44–45.
- 19 The National Archives (TNA), C131/10/24; *Letter Book G*, 238. He may have been an ancestor of the later John Edmund, mercer, 1391–1440s. No will survives for either man. For the prestigious Feverer family of Elsing, Sutton 1995, App. 2; Sutton 2005, 530.
- 20 Thomas de Erswell (Eriswell), Ekwall 1956, 16; *CWH*, I, 608 and *Descriptive Catalogue of Ancient Deeds in the Public Record Office* (hereafter *CAD*), II, A2359, A2363. J.T. Munday's extensive work on Eriswell before 1350 provides no clue to Thomas, but Munday was puzzled by a John de Eriswell who suddenly prosecuted the abbot of Bury and the prior of Ely 1315–50, and who perhaps was someone who might have sent a son to London: Munday n.d.; *CWH*, I, 608; Sutton 1995, App. 6, 408.
- 21 *CWH*, II, 98. 'Catewade' was misidentified by Sharpe as Catford; Cattawade Bridge was a double one which linked Essex and Suffolk and was costly to maintain; I am indebted to David Dymond for details. Later Everard mercers reveal no connection to Suffolk: Alan Everard, mercer by 1391–92, an alderman and MP, who died 1426, see Roskell, Clark and Rawcliffe 1993, under Everard; Richard Everard mercer, died 1414, Archdeaconry Court of London, Guildhall Library (hereafter GL) MS 9151/1, fols 9–10. For the Linstead family, Middleton-Stewart 2001, 61–63, 260; the name also occurs elsewhere in Suffolk, e.g. Northeast 2001, no 293.
- 22 Ekwall 1956, 20; Sutton 1995, 260 and see below for Roger de Horsham.
- 23 Ekwall 1995, 20, 31.
- 24 Ekwall 1995, 22.
- 25 *CWH*, I, 506–7; Sutton 1995, 249–51, App. 6, 408–9; Ekwall 1956, 65–67. For markets see Bailey 2007, 116–18, 120, 168, 174; and Sutton 2005, 32–36, 213–26.
- 26 Sutton 1998, 5, 8–9. Mercers with Suffolk connections who joined the Holy Cross Guild of Stratford were Alexander Orable and wife Agnes, Thomas Fabian and wife Margaret, John Baker; and Holy Trinity Coventry, Alan Everard and John Edmund.
- 27 Bailey 2007, 281–82.
- 28 TNA, C131/40/18 and 207/31, Jan.–Feb. 18 Richard II [1395]. For Boneby's earlier career see *Letter Book H*, 305. Mildenhall, Suffolk, is more likely than its namesake in Wiltshire. For the traditional mercer see Sutton 2001, *passim*.
- 29 All details of apprenticeship, entry and livery are taken from the Mercers' Company of London, Wardens' Accounts 1348, 1390–1464 (hereafter WA), and can be found under the years quoted; after 1464 the List of Members has to be relied upon for entry dates and the names of masters.
- 30 Bury paid for John Albon as his apprentice in 1391–92; he was not prompt in paying his dues to his company for the entry and issue of his apprentice, John Church (4s.) paid in 1420–21, well after both events it must be presumed; and he was fined 3 times 1402–10.
- 31 Riley 1868, 622–23.
- 32 *CPR* 1416–22, 234–45.
- 33 Bury's will, Commissary Court of London, GL, MS 9171/3, fol. 107, given in full in Smith 1956, 2–6. No will concerning real estate survives. See *CPMR*, 1413–37, 105–6. And see *Letter Book K*, 53.
- 34 Margery Church paid rent for property on the north side of Westgate Street, between what is now Bridewell Lane and Crown Street: British Library, MS Harl. 58, fol. 16v; reference kindly supplied by Margaret Statham.
- 35 Smith 1956, part 2, 4, suggests the executor is an earlier John Church, a wealthy merchant associated with

- Whittington and others in large loans to the king in 1407 (*CAD*, 4, A6255). He failed to identify these men to his own satisfaction but did not use the Mercers' records. It seems likely that the earlier John Church died well before Bury and was a close relation.
- 36 See n. 29.
- 37 William Saxby entered 1420–21; Geoffrey Dutton 1422–23; John Bilburgh 1424–25; William Tyler 1426–27; John Ansell 1429–30; Richard Hales issued 1440–41; John Lambe issued 1443–44; John Wrythe 1449–50.
- 38 *CPMR* 1413–37, 146.
- 39 Sutton 2005, 556.
- 40 Childs 1978, 164.
- 41 Richmond 1963, 167–91: he lists cases of piracy by decade, 95 n. 1; Gardiner 1976, xii–xvii.
- 42 Gardiner 1976, no. 38; and Sutton 2005, 249–50.
- 43 *CPR* 1429–36, 534; *CPR 1436–41*, 144, 166–67, 173, 340.
- 44 *CPR* 1436–41, 349. It is possible that the chancery case, TNA C1/17/377, concerning goods seized in Flanders may be connected to the first letters against the Flemings.
- 45 *CPR* 1436–41, 488.
- 46 Strachey 1777–1832 (hereafter RP), V, 59–60; Postan 1933, 126. The whole affair is elucidated in Richmond 1963, 213–26.
- 47 *CPR* 1441–46, 107.
- 48 *CPR* 1441–46, 94; *CPR 1446–52*, 267–68; *CPR* 1452–61, 256.
- 49 TNA, C1/11/204, printed Gardiner 1976, no. 33; *CPR* 1429–36, 352; Childs 1978, 111, 140.
- 50 Childs 1978, 212.
- 51 *CPR* 1429–36, 540. He could reload the ship once the king's service was done.
- 52 Cobb 1961, lxiv. In a ship with a Lisbon master.
- 53 Case covered in Carus-Wilson 1937, no. 87; and Carus-Wilson 1933, 222–23.
- 54 Childs 1978, 51, 184.
- 55 WA; probably for repeated non-attendance.
- 56 *Letter Book K*, 63, 280.
- 57 This was after the failure of all other heirs, see Large 2008, 48–49. For Large's will and the property: TNA, PROB 11/1, fols 120v–21v; *CPMR* 1458–82, 9; TNA, C1/61/92; Page 1932, 323–24. Edmund Church was selling manors of South Wotton, Norf., and Baburgham (?Babraham), Cambs., to William Capell, draper of London, in 1485, *CCR* 1485–1509, no. 77.
- 58 Walsingham had a brother who was a London mercer. The cup had been given to Walsingham by a William Michell: TNA, PROB 11/4, fols 61–62v. For additional proof of the connection between Walsingham and Church, *CCR 1461–68*, 264.
- 59 Smit 1928, I, part 1, nos 983, 985. Kerling 1954, 150–52, gives the names of the troublemakers and some of their smuggling activities; Sutton 2005, 239–40.
- 60 Sutton 2005, 239 and n. 17; Kerling 1954, 146; Thrupp 1948, 379. There were several Brigges in the Mercers' Company, with little known of any of them.

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