

LONDON MERCERS FROM SUFFOLK *c.* 1200 to 1570:
 BENEFACTORS, PIRATES
 AND MERCHANT ADVENTURERS
 (PART II)

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IT WAS INDUBITABLY the cloth industry that paid for most Suffolk-born London apprentices directly or indirectly. By 1200 Bury and Sudbury were well known cloth producers, although not in the top rank. Places like Lavenham had significant numbers of cloth workers by 1327, and the hundreds of Babergh and Cosford formed a district which specialised in cloth, with other centres at Clare and Hadleigh. Cloth was nevertheless still a by-industry with its participants maintaining agricultural interests – as the worsted masters still did in sixteenth-century Norfolk. After the Black Death the Suffolk industry became exceptionally dynamic with a fifth of its male inhabitants involved (not counting the high involvement of women in this labour-intensive industry), a dominant position being enjoyed by Bury.¹ The Bury origin of both William de Bury and John Church may be one illustration of this dominance (see part I). But it was not only clothmaking families which had the urge to improve their children's prospects. The growing yeoman class took a keen interest in commercial enterprises, and peasant farmers also had ambitions. There is the example of Robert Parman, a hard-working farmer who moved to Chevington in the 1430s to lease from the abbot of Bury St Edmunds. By the end of his life (in 1475) he had an income of about £20 a year, and he had managed to educate one son so that he could go to Cambridge and become a churchman, while the other sons and daughters stayed on the land. His efforts show the strong desire of a family to better the prospects of children.² Nor was it uncommon for a well-to-do, urbanised family to send a girl to be trained in the metropolis – the favourite niece of John Baret of Bury St Edmunds, Jenette Whitwell, had had a mistress in London, although Baret does not specify if she had been apprenticed to this woman to learn a trade, and Baret's contemporary, Thomas Vale, dyer of Bury St Edmunds, sent his well-educated son to London to serve the rich draper Thomas Cook as secretary and factor.³

The earliest mercers from Babergh hundred whose apprenticeship may have been paid for by the cloth industry were Thomas de Cornerth, possibly of a manor-owning family, and William Cavendish, from an armigerous family. Thomas de Cornerth – that is Cornard – was known by his place of origin and is interesting for several reasons. He had become a London mercer some time before 1348 when he was one of the first to pay the new livery fee; he survived the Black Death and represented his company in 1351, and his ward, as one of the 'wealthier and wiser' commoners of Bassishaw in 1356. He died in 1379–80 a very prosperous man, leaving George, the parson of Little 'Cornerthe' ten marks. He established a year's chantry there as well as one in his London parish.⁴ His most famous apprentice was John Shadworth, mayor of London 1401–2 – successful apprentices were a tribute to their master – and Cornerth was generous to all his young men in his will. William Cavendish benefited from apprenticeship with Richard Whittington, no less, at the end of the fourteenth century, at the cost of a substantial premium probably in excess of £20, as was suitable for a grandson of Chief Justice Cavendish (through his younger son). Family capital was arguably also behind his immediate promotion to the livery of the company in 1403. It is not surprising to find him a valuer of fine bedding and jewels owned by a merchant of Lucca in 1415.⁵ He took a long

string of apprentices as was appropriate for a successful businessman. He also maintained his link with Suffolk and was sealing with the arms later associated with the dukes of Devonshire in the 1420s; it was his son, Thomas, who eventually inherited the manor of Overhall in Cavendish, and the feoffees involved in the transfer of 1439 were all London mercers apart from two clerks.⁶ William Cavendish's trading capabilities also attracted a loan of £500 from Sir John Fastolf as an investment.⁷ In 1433 he died, providing for his burial either at Cavendish or in London at a cost of £20, and he set up a perpetual obit in St Mary, Cavendish, for his parents. He left £5 each to the churches of Poslingford, Suffolk, and Pentlow, Essex, both near Clare, as well as money to repair the common ways between Poslingford and Clare and between Cavendish and Clare, all of which may suggest a particular interest in the cloth industry of Clare. He was apparently buried in Cavendish church, a brass there being reputedly his.⁸ Cavendish's apprenticeship with Whittington shows a high level of local wealth and pretension, and a desire to provide for a younger son in the best way.

A glance at some of Cavendish's associates from Suffolk illustrates how mercers with a common origin often worked together as feoffees, executors or business partners. Two of Cavendish's feoffees were Thomas Roos and John Wells. Roos, who died in 1433–34, is most famous as the earliest recorded London lay owner of *Piers Plowman*, but he is also worth recording for his legacy of 13s 4d to John Lyng junior of 'Batsford' (Battisford), and his pardon to John Mille of Hadleigh of 20s of debts.⁹ Thomas had been apprenticed by his father, Richard Roos, to Richard Whittington in 1391–92, and had succeeded well enough in business to be elected a warden of the Mercers in 1401 and 1410. It was natural for him to be a feoffee for William Cavendish as a fellow apprentice of Whittington.¹⁰ John Wells, mercer, another feoffee of Cavendish, married a Denardston of Suffolk and made the highly personal bequest of the furnishing of his private chapel to the church of Milding (Milden) in the hundred of Babergh, a gift to take place after the remarriage or death of his widow.¹¹

The large number of mercers with Suffolk origins during the fifteenth century endorses the evidence for a flourishing, widely urbanised county, with the wealth to pay high premiums. As regards the mercers' trade in their traditional goods defined as 'mercery', the pardons to chapmen-debtors of London mercers listed in the patent rolls between 1400 and 1499 show only a fraction of the high level of trade between Londoners and Suffolk towns, a total of eighteen cases, fourteen from small towns and four from Ipswich. From 1376 the London Mercers began to demand that local traders or chapmen come to buy from them in London, and they penalised any mercer who travelled into the counties with his wares. London was ostracising the peddling tradition, while locally the infrastructure of markets was being rationalised and such conveniences as large fairs were reduced in number. There are few medieval inventories of London mercers and no account books, and therefore few debts recorded, but in 1473 the probate inventory of the wealthy Sir John Stockton recorded £23 due him from William Crogan of Sudbury. Suffolk's elaborate trade structure connecting its own towns and Colchester (by 1400 the main market for Suffolk cloth) and London, has been emphasised by Britnell. As the Mercers were determined to bring provincial chapmen to London to buy, so were the Drapers determined to draw in all provincial cloth: Blackwell Hall, which was established as the London market for cloth at the end of the fourteenth century, was run by the Drapers. Although London merchants, as well as the Hanse and Italians, might still prefer to travel to the counties to buy, the small independent producers began to give way before the local clothiers who organised the sales, and they in their turn gave way to the wealthiest amongst them and to the Londoners. The independent peasant producer was replaced by the wage-earning worker. London offered great opportunities to the successful apprentice – its streets were proverbially paved with gold – but it also produced the dictatorial entrepreneur who wanted peasant producers to conform to his demands.

Production expanded rapidly and by 1470 Suffolk cloth production had overtaken that of Essex into first place, with considerable growth in places like Lavenham from the 1480s to 1520s; the county was a major source for the 'unfinished' cloths for adventurers to ship to the finishing industries of the Low Countries.¹²

The main evidence for the origins of London mercers in the fifteenth century comes from their wills.¹³ They are described here in chronological order of their date of death:

John Otley gave Ufford church near Woodbridge £5 for the fabric of its nave on his death in 1404. He was already well established in his trade in 1382 when William Knightcote, another mercer, appointed him a guardian of his three daughters, who had an estate of nearly £1500 between them,¹⁴ and he trained at least eight apprentices between 1391 and 1401. His brother William and wife Elizabeth were released from their debts to him – they may have been back in Suffolk – and he gave twenty marks to their son Robert, who was to go on to be a grocer and mayor of London (1434). He also remembered John Aleyn, his apprentice and nephew, and John's brother, William, both mercers with Suffolk connections. Significantly, Otley left a cup called a 'grypeseye', (a cup made from an ostrich egg), gilt and ornamented with silver, to the supervisor of his will, the lawyer John Staverton of Rendlesham, Suffolk.¹⁵ Otley's nephew, John Aleyn, left ten marks to repair the church of Eyke near Woodbridge so that he and his wife should be remembered as benefactors in 1416. He and his brother, Thomas, may however have thought of themselves as from Essex – perhaps the county of their Aleyn father – as John mentions *parentela* (kinsfolk) in Tendring, and left plate to Bradfield, Essex, besides money to repair the roads between Colchester and Bradfield and the bridge at Ramsey, Essex. Cattawade Bridge on the Essex and Suffolk border was also to be repaired.¹⁶

There is little doubt that John Green, mercer, who died in 1413, came from the Norfolk/Suffolk border as he left a total of £9 to Hopton, near Thetford, and cups and chasubles to nearby Fundenhall and Wreningham, to Nayland, further away on the river Stour, and to several villages in Norfolk. Perhaps Hopton can be construed as his place of origin, with trading or family connections at the other places.¹⁷

Alexander Orable was taxed on lands in Kent and Suffolk in 1436, but otherwise there is little to associate him with the county though one of his many apprentices in the 1440s was called John Thurston. He himself was an apprentice of John Knottingley, issuing in 1426–27 and on the livery six years later (1433–34), and was still exporting English cloth to the Low Countries in the 1450s.¹⁸

The mercer Mans may have been of the Lakenheath family, but there were also Man clothiers of Hadleigh in the 1460s aulnage accounts. The Lakenheath family had progressed from villeins to substantial farmers by the end of the fifteenth century and did some sheep rearing.¹⁹ An Edmund Man (a good Suffolk Christian name) was an apprentice of the London mercer, Robert Haringhay, a substantial wool exporter; he was on the livery 1394–95, served as an executor of Robert Guphey in 1412, and died intestate in 1421.²⁰ A Roger Man was admitted in 1482 and flourished as a merchant adventurer, undertaking to ship cloth in a Suffolk ship, the *Anne of Orwell*, in 1492. Roger's Suffolk origins are reinforced by the bequest of a ring from his fellow countryman, John Stile, in 1505.²¹

The mercer John Sturmyn came from Lavenham: the name is sufficiently unusual and there is enough data from wills to make relationships certain. Before describing the Sturmys, however, a few words should be said about the town's two most successful emigrants, the two Thomas Cooks of whom the younger was in the multi-millionaire league by the 1460s, by which time Suffolk was responsible for 13.2 per cent of England's total cloth production. In 1468–69 Lavenham produced over 1000 cloths, and among the more modest clothiers recorded by the aulnager was a John Cook.²² 1468 was the year that the younger Thomas Cook of London was accused of treason and Lavenham would have been agog. The elder

Thomas Cook had been a younger son of Robert Cook, who owned property in Lavenham, Hitcham, Kettlebaston and Monks Eleigh, and he was apprenticed to a draper of London. It was certainly profits from the cloth industry that had allowed the Cook family to send a son into apprenticeship in London. The drapers were above all commissioners of cloth who could underwrite local clothiers and supply them with materials: wool to supplement the poor wools of Suffolk, dyes such as madder and woad and the all-essential alum.²³ Thomas the elder prospered, he was a warden of London Bridge and of the Drapers. He never lost contact with his home county and, most importantly, he held the post of aulnager of cloth in Lavenham, Great and Little Waldingfield, Brent Eleigh and Acton from 1432, holding it jointly with his son Thomas from 1452.²⁴ He did not gain the wealth necessary for the post of alderman, but his ambitious son was to achieve a wealth that put him among the richest of Londoners of the fifteenth century. He was an alderman from 1456, mayor 1462–63, and knighted in 1465. Despite twice falling foul of King Edward IV and paying large fines for his misdeeds, he was still able in 1478 to bequeath a fortune to his eldest son, Philip, who became a member of the gentry in Essex with a large estate centred on Havering. His extensive landed estate included property in Brent Eleigh, and tenements in Bury St Edmunds, which were almost certainly rented out to clothworkers and part of his drapery empire. He sold his Suffolk lands when he needed to raise cash to pay his fines, the Bury tenements going to John Marlborough, son-in-law of Margaret Odiham, probably in 1471.²⁵ His will made no reference to Suffolk, though he mentioned a William Thurston, and of course the faithful John Vale of Bury, who was still his secretary, was well rewarded. Among his closest associates was William Edward, grocer and fellow alderman. He was of the prosperous Edward family of the Fornhams, Suffolk, an area of large sheep runs.²⁶ Lastly, it is worth suggesting that Cook's decision during his mayoralty that the city cover over the river Walbrook, which had become little more than an open sewer – and was at the bottom of his garden – may have placed valuable expertise at the disposal of Lavenham when that town constructed the magnificent culvert in Water Street that dates from his lifetime.²⁷ Cook is a good example of what a move to London could accomplish: such a man could confer great benefits if he chose, but he could also take more than he gave, controlling the local workforce and reducing them to wage labourers. It is certain that Cook's main objective was to make a personal fortune and turn his favourite eldest son into a squire able to live off his estates.

The earliest Sturmyrn from Lavenham who went to London to be apprenticed a mercer was John, contracted to Solomon Salmon in 1391, but that is all that is known about him. The family was prosperous enough to produce a minor benefactor of Queens' College, Cambridge, in the mid fifteenth century, Alan Sturmyrn, clothworker.²⁸ In Alan's lifetime the family sent two other Johns to London, one of whom was admitted to the Mercers in 1457, whilst the other issued from his apprenticeship to Thomas Niche in 1451–52. One of these was John, the son of Christian Sturmyrn, who went on to achieve the livery in 1454–55. He was an executor of his mother with his brother Robert in 1457, and when power to administer was granted to Robert at the Sudbury court, power was specifically reserved for the young Londoner when he should come home; Christian left to the altar of Lavenham church ten marks for cloth of gold, which her mercer son could easily have supplied as he sold velvet to Edward IV.²⁹ He and his brother received £10 each and shared the household goods with their sisters. John did well and nearly twenty years later in 1475 he was living in the ward of Cripplegate and assessed as worth 100 marks for taxation purposes.³⁰ He married well to a daughter of Sir William Taillour, grocer and mayor (1468–69), and he had a son John, who was of an age to receive a gift of his father's goods and chattels in 1479 with his grandfather Taillour. The elder John may already have feared death and made this gift to avoid the necessity of making a will; he was, however, alive in 1481 when he was released from all

duties as the executor of his brother-in-law, Richard Syff, mercer, by his niece Elizabeth Syff, granddaughter of Sir William.³¹ He was dead by 1483 when Taillour made his will and so were his son, John, and all Taillour's children. A young Robert Sturmyn received a large bequest from Sir William, consisting of the entire furnishings of his private chapel, his copy of Boethius' *De consolacione*, a new unspecified English book, and £200. Described as Taillour's 'cousin' and in his keeping, Robert was to receive the goods when he came of age – it is possible he was another, younger son of John Sturmyn, Sir William's sole surviving grandson and a grandson of Christian Sturmyn of Lavenham.³² Another prosperous mercer with probable connections to the town, was Roger Bonyfaunt, once an apprentice of Geoffrey Boleyn. Roger left a bequest to the high altar of 'Gitting' church, Suffolk (Gedding or Gipping, Suffolk or perhaps Gidding, Hunts.), in 1494. It is an unusual surname and there were Bonyfaunts in Lavenham.³³ The evidence is inconclusive.

Hadleigh should not be forgotten. The Fords or Forthes also sent boys to be apprenticed to London mercers, but the commonness and spelling of the name (Ford in London) makes identification uncertain. In chronological order they were: a John Ford issued from apprenticeship to Richard Aylmer in 1414–15; a John Ford apprenticed to John Boston in 1426–27, and a William Ford apprenticed to the extremely successful mercer and adventurer, Thomas Dunton, in 1439–40, but for neither is an issue date known. It is just possible that the William was the future clothier, but if so he speedily returned to his home county.³⁴ A William and Robert Forth or Ford of Hadleigh were producing between 225 and 2000 cloths each year in the aulnage accounts of the 1460s, and Robert the elder can be found in 1476 buying wool in St Paul's cathedral from Robert Syred and John Fisher, mercers of London, for his cloth-making, a small part of a complicated series of transactions, worth at least £300, which ended in a tangled lawsuit in Chancery the following year.³⁵ The clothier, William Forthe, who acquired property throughout East Anglia, died in 1504 and was buried in Hadleigh. His daughter Elizabeth married another Suffolk boy made good, Thomas Baldry II, mercer of London (see below).³⁶ In 1505 an Erasmus Ford was admitted as late apprentice to one of the several William Browns of the Mercers' Company, probably the brother of Erasmus's first master, Thomas Brown (son of Sir John Brown),³⁷ who had died in 1501. Erasmus went on to trade in wool like his Brown masters – William Forthe had also apparently been a stapler – a combination with the cloth trade of the adventurers that was increasingly frowned upon by die-hard Staplers. As mercers of London by this date dominated both of the trading companies, a precarious peace was maintained. Robert Forthe of Hadleigh, heir of William, died in 1540 possessed of many manors – his youngest son, William, was to prove to be the heir – and his will was witnessed by Dame Elizabeth Baldry the widow of Thomas II, with Robert Barfoot, mercer of London, and Thomas Barfoot, parson of St Dionis Backchurch, together with Dr Thomas Rivett, archdeacon of Suffolk (1540–42), all names endorsing the strong London/Suffolk connections of the Forthes/Fords. Robert had apparently made his will in London.³⁸

Robert Cobbold, a good Suffolk name, left Hardwick, Suffolk, to be apprenticed with Thomas Fyler, a mercer of Bristol origins, in 1449–50. He acquired the livery promptly after issuing from apprenticeship in 1460–61 so it can be presumed he had family money behind him, but as he was fined 5s for taking the gown and hood before his time he also displayed an improper impatience for that distinction. He prospered and was in demand as an arbitrator and as an administrator for the company. In 1477, for example, he was one of those instructed to draw up a bill against mercers trading at country fairs contrary to the company's ordinances and against the activities of the worsted men from Norwich in London.³⁹ He derives some fame from the fact that he facilitated the delivery by the antiquary, William Worcester, of 13s 4d to his sister in Bristol for the repayment of a debt to a third party; and

Worcester usefully recorded that Cobbold was living in the prestigious Milk Street.⁴⁰ About 1480, however, he appears to have fallen on hard times and taken a job as a weigher of wool at Leadenhall, London.⁴¹ His money problems also led him secretly to mortgage the dowry of his daughter, Joan, wife of William Neve, glazier, which consisted of what were presumably the family lands at Hardwick. Neve prosecuted him in Chancery.⁴²

Another mercer who fell on hard times was John Neve from Beccles – no connection of the glazier. His origin is known because he sold his inheritance of a messuage and two acres of meadow in Beccles to a John Bell for £1.⁴³ Thomas Neve, a close relative of John, was also a London mercer.⁴⁴ From the day of his admittance to the Mercers in 1447, after apprenticeship to John Nutbrown and then Thomas Rykes, Neve had an erratic mercantile career, frequently acting as a factor for men like Roger Bonyfaunt (already mentioned).⁴⁵ The complexities of Neve's deals resulted in lawsuits involving men such as William Caxton, and he dealt in a wide variety of goods including alum from Italy,⁴⁶ wool, and cloth. He wrote a wildly optimistic will before 1484 which implied that he could bequeath his wife £250 and £80 to each of his five children, and which his chosen executors, who included Henry Colet, alderman and future mayor, unsurprisingly refused. His eldest son, however, did manage eventually to inherit a piece of property in central London, though it is unlikely Neve's widow and other children fared as well.⁴⁷

Thomas Goding apparently came from the prosperous port of Woodbridge, for on his death in 1466 he pardoned ten marks of a debt to his brother, William Goding of that town.⁴⁸ John Brompton who died in 1471, devoted much of his will to specifying pieces of silver plate for his relatives including Joan, the wife of John Baldwyn of Ipswich and her son, John Genuie. He defined no other relative by a place outside London.⁴⁹

One of the most eminent of fifteenth-century mercers from Suffolk was Richard Gardiner, who came from Exning, a failed borough but a prosperous town on the Cambridgeshire border.⁵⁰ He was the product of an apprenticeship with William Stevens and went on to wealth, an aldermanry (an estate of £1000 was the requisite for this office), and the mayoralty 1479–80. His second wife and widow was a member of the Cotton family of Cambridgeshire, who held the manor of Exning. He died in 1489, expecting to be buried in the small church of St Pancras 'where I was once parishioner' under a tomb he had constructed there in honour of the Resurrection – possibly an Easter sepulchre – but allowing for the possibility he might be buried in his home town. Of the torches used at his burial four were to be sent to Exning church. Prayers remembered his parents John and Isabel, his son Ralph, and William his brother, but these were said in London. Small bequests went to his 'sisters', Agnes Lolham, Elizabeth Wynge and Maryan Massan, who may have lived near his home town, like John Patrick his 'brother'. He paid for repairs to the roads about 'Horseth' (?Horseheath) Lane and Park in Cambridgeshire, ten marks went to the poor of places where he had lands in that county, and another ten marks to the poor of Exning. His lands were the inheritance of his daughter, Mary, who he planned should marry the Alingham heir. The future serjeant-at-law, Richard Heigham of Higham, Suffolk, his special friend and 'lover' was his executor; Heigham lived close to Gardiner in London, had a Cotton sister-in-law, and came from a well established family in the Bury area.⁵¹

Gardiner was an executor of Thomas Fabian, also from Exning,⁵² but died himself only a few months later. Fabian had taken apprenticeship with his uncle, John Adam, mercer and adventurer, and when Adam died he transferred to John Baker, who had himself been an apprentice of John Adam. There may have been a family connection between them.⁵³ Fabian became a successful adventurer, employing his apprentices as his factors at the marts of Brabant to sell his English cloth, facts known from disputes which arose; he also became a stapler of Calais.⁵⁴ He married twice and left two sons; the mother of his second wife married

another mercer, Thomas Goding, who seems to have come from Woodbridge (see above).⁵⁵ Like his friend, Gardiner, Fabian left money to scholars of Cambridge, but in general his will, like that of Gardiner, focused on his life in London, and the prayers he established there benefited his parents (unnamed), and his two masters, his uncle John Adam and John Baker.⁵⁶ He left £20 to repair the roads between London and Exning, and specifically remembered the parish church of St Martin of Exning, his birthplace, with £6 13s 4d for its repair, 40s for its poor, and a further £10 for his poor kindred there. He remembered a Thomas Lolham with twenty marks over and above his wages – he was a past apprentice of Fabian, acted as one of the witnesses of his will and collectors of his debts, and was presumably a connection of Richard Gardiner's sister Agnes Lolham. Another connection of the alderman was John Gardiner a tailor, presumably of London, one of Fabian's executors – his wife, Julian, was left 40s by Fabian, and their children, John and Margaret, another 40s. Unfortunately Fabian linked none of his many legatees specifically with his home town, but some must have been of Exning for he had lands there to leave to his son, Richard, with remainders to his other son, John, his right heirs, and finally, when all heirs failed, to charity.⁵⁷

Moving across country to Stowmarket, this prosperous town, eighth in the league of Suffolk cloth-producers in the 1460s,⁵⁸ spawned a group of very successful mercers from about 1455 to the 1530s. A good deal is known of Richard Gowle who became rich and married above his station but never held high office. He was born around 1440 in or near Stowmarket, the son of John and Margery, who were well enough off to afford the premium demanded by John Shelly, mercer and adventurer, in 1454–55.⁵⁹ Shelly lived in the central parish of St Michael Bassishaw. The young Gowle would have gone to the Low Countries for the last years of his ten-year term, and learnt Dutch and the skills required for the import of linen and other merceries, which appear to have been his chosen speciality. He was well established in trade by 1472 for he was then renting a shop on an upper floor of the Mercers' Crown sold on Cheapside, an ancient covered market and a prime selling site, paying 12s a year rent. He kept this shop on until 1492–94. In 1472 he also took over the lease of a large house at the south-east corner of Bow Lane and Watling Street from the mercer William Shore, largely famous for his wife Elizabeth, the mistress of Edward IV. From 1474 Gowle is visible as a man trusted by his company, but strangely he was not raised to the livery. As this meant entering a higher tax bracket, he could have been assiduously avoiding the honour. He excelled as a shopkeeper of top quality mercery cloths: in 1476 he sold silks to Richard, duke of Gloucester, and in 1480 he sold to Edward IV via the Great Wardrobe, the department that provided the king and his household with clothes and furnishings; in 1483 he was the mercer who supplied the most silks and linens to the same department for the coronation of Richard III and Queen Anne Neville, including the linen for the anointing coif and Richard III's bath – over £240 worth. In 1484 Gowle was again supplying this king with mercery. He would have bought most of his silks from Italians in London, but would have imported his linens himself, buying especially at the great fairs of Antwerp and Bergen-op-Zoom. It is known he kept a Picard servant in his household in 1483 and this man could have acted as his agent.

As a man of Stowmarket he was naturally on good terms with Sir James Tyrrel of nearby Gipping, a long-term servant of Richard of Gloucester who was appointed Richard III's Master of Horse and Master of the King's Henchmen, the noble youths attending what could be called a finishing school in the royal household. Tyrrel and Gowle were together granted in 1484 the wardship of Robert, son and heir of John Arundell of Trerice.⁶⁰ Gowle maintained many other Suffolk connections: his feoffees included John Sulyard, the successful lawyer from Wetherden, a justice of the King's Bench from 1484, knight (1487) and husband of the niece of the wealthy mercer widow, Dame Alice Wiche;⁶¹ and Ralph Tilney, a grocer and alderman, apparently of the Tilney family of Boston, Lincolnshire.⁶² Apprentices, as

mentioned, often came from the master's home county, but Gowle apparently only took two: Thomas Baldry from Thorney near Stowmarket in about 1470 (see below); and William Bromwell.⁶³ He also continued to trade with his home county for he prosecuted chapmen of Mildenhall for debts, among others. His influence may have contributed to the Mercers' refusal to take on the under-funded chantry proposed by Philip Booth of Bergham (Barham), Suffolk, in 1488.⁶⁴ Gowle bought land in Suffolk,⁶⁵ and it seems he decided to retire there about 1490 and marry a Suffolk woman – he was now sixty. It is likely this was his second marriage and he chose a woman of a higher social status than his own, as had Alderman Gardiner. She was Anne, widow of Nicholas Timperley of Buxhall, an heiress in her own right as the daughter of John Ive of Great Finborough, with an array of lands in Suffolk, all of which would pass to her four sons by Timperley.⁶⁶ By Gowle she had one son and five daughters. On his death she received for life lands in 'Fymbergh' which were then to be sold to provide for his daughters (£20 each). The Timperley connection was a socially advantageous one for a man of Gowle's comparatively humble origins – his industry had achieved gentry status for him in his home county and his money recommended him to his wife's family. His son Edmund was to have his lands in Stowmarket and Upland (Stowupland) when twenty-one, but if he died they were to go to his wife and her heirs. Anne was executor with her son, John Timperley, and the priest, Roger Wentworth, of the Nettlestead family. It is not known if any of Gowle's children survived.⁶⁷

The two brothers Baldry, both Thomas, who were apprentices of Richard Gowle and Thomas Wyndout, continued the story of Stowmarket's success. Gowle's apprentice was admitted to the company in 1480 and Wyndout's in 1489 so there was quite an age difference between the brothers.⁶⁸ They were the sons of Richard and the grandsons of John Baldry of the manor of Thorney in the parish of St Peter in Stowmarket who had died in 1449.⁶⁹ They both prospered, but Gowle's apprentice chose to return to Suffolk and specifically Ipswich. Ipswich's position favoured trade with the Zeeland town of Middelburg, and the port competed fairly successfully with London in the export of English cloth to the finishing industries of the Low Countries and to central Europe via the merchants of Cologne. Baldry's return to Suffolk suggests strongly that, as he was the elder, he had inherited family property. He also immediately made a good marriage with a well-to-do, local woman, Alice, the widow of a past bailiff (1469–70), Robert Wimbill. The date of this marriage, shortly after Wymbill's death in 1479, suggests that Thomas came back to Ipswich promptly on his emergence from apprenticeship in 1480: marriage to a wealthy widow was a highly recommended way of acquiring capital with which to trade, and in this instance was also a convenient way into the higher echelons of Ipswich civic life. Alice also had a family by an earlier marriage to an Edgore (see below) so Thomas acquired a ready-made family. His Baldry relatives may have organised this profitable alliance – a William Baldry had been a justice of Ipswich in 1458 and no doubt there were other influential connections. Thomas was almost immediately elected portman and MP in 1483, no mean achievement for a young man not thirty; he was bailiff in 1484 and seven times thereafter; he was MP five more times. He died in 1525. He was buried in St Mary-le-Tower next to his first wife who had died in 1506 (they had no surviving children). His second wife, Christian, was bequeathed sole ownership of their dwelling called 'Dryys' with 'Dyers' and 'Montgomerys' (perhaps she had brought these to the marriage). She took her widow's wealth into her own second marriage to a knight, thereby gaining status in the same way as Thomas Baldry I had gained it from his first wife, Alice Wimbill. Thomas Baldry apparently had no children who survived, and the sons of his London-based brother, Thomas II, were to benefit from his lands – perhaps another indication that Thomas I had inherited Baldry lands. Further land at Middleton and Fordley was to go to William, the son of his other brother, John, who had been buried at Stowmarket in 1504; William's brother,

Thomas III, also a mercer of London, was to have his tenement in Stowe called Tytwells;⁷⁰ other Baldry relatives were Richard Baldry and his wife who received money and gowns; his cousin Nicholas Hubbard had a gown, and cousins Anne and Dorothy Forthe a gold ring each. He remembered all the churches of Ipswich as well as the prior of Butley; and Thomas Tyler and his children (bailiff of Thomas Baldry II, see below); his executors were his widow and Thomas Baldry II, his brother, with others.⁷¹

Before passing to the more illustrious Baldry brother, a word should be said about another London-trained mercer of Ipswich: Thomas Drayll, who had appointed his friend, Thomas Baldry I, his exact contemporary, as his executor in 1512. The Mercers' Company of London admitted him as Thomas 'Druell', late apprentice of Alderman Richard Rawson, in 1480, the same year as his friend. The aldermanic status of his master is a good indication of the wealth and standing of the Draylls in Ipswich. The two boys were apprentices at the same time and as boys from Stowmarket and Ipswich would have known each other, quite apart from the close-knit surroundings of the Mercery. Baldry's master, Gogle, lived at the south end of Bow Lane, and Rawson, a Yorkshireman by origin, lived due north in All Hallows Honey Lane in Cheap ward a stone's throw away.⁷² Drayll, like Thomas Baldry I, returned to Ipswich promptly after admission to the London company, served as bailiff seven times and was MP in 1489. He had three wives and was survived by a widow and several daughters. He had a wide range of property including a 'place' called 'Baldrys' or 'the Stylyarde' in the parish of St Mary-at-the-Key.⁷³ He established a chantry in St Mary at Tower (where he was buried) for several named Draylls. The implements of his trade, his beams and weights, were to be sold, but the chests, shelves, warehouses [*sic*] and his shop in his dwelling house were all to go to his daughter Anne, who had married William Hert, merchant of Norwich. The residue was reserved for the use of the executors, who included 'Thomas Baldry of Ipswich merchant' and William Hert, his son-in-law.⁷⁴

Turning to Thomas Baldry II: he was taken as an apprentice by Thomas Wyndout (from Hertfordshire) in 1479–80. Wyndout was pleased with him, for in 1498 he included him and Thomas Stile, another mercer from Suffolk, among his executors. As the estate of his children was over £2000 this was a considerable responsibility.⁷⁵ Baldry served first as a warden of his company in 1505 and as its master 1514–15, the year in which he became an alderman; he was sheriff in 1517–18 and mayor in 1523–24, receiving a knighthood while mayor. He maintained strong family and territorial links with his home county, and that there were trade links is suggested strongly by his marriage to Elizabeth, the daughter of the clothier, William Forth of Hadleigh, who left the couple 100 marks in 1504.⁷⁶ At the time of the so-called Amicable Grant demanded by Henry VIII, which raised so much opposition in Suffolk and London, Sir Thomas was among the forty-one Londoners listed as worth over £1000; he had paid £300 in the previous tax of 1522–23.⁷⁷ As regards his lands in Suffolk: he was in line for the manor of Overbury in Layham near Hadleigh in return for a payment of 500 marks if all the Hobart heirs should fail⁷⁸ (he called a Nicholas Hobart his cousin in his will);⁷⁹ he also held the manor of Boyton Hall in Monks Eleigh, once a Forthe manor, and rewarded his baliff there, Thomas Tyler, with £5 when he died.⁸⁰

Sir Thomas died in 1534 asking to be buried in the Hospital of St Thomas of Acre where the Mercers had their Hall.⁸¹ He remembered the churches of St Peter and the Virgin Mary in Stowmarket, and his parents, Richard and Margaret Baldry, benefited from a ten-year chantry in St Denis Backchurch, London, and other prayers, along with his brother, Thomas, and his former master, Thomas Wyndout; a hundred persons of his kindred were to have 40s each; and William and Thomas, the sons of his other brother, John Baldry, were to have £40 each and their sisters £10 each; his 'brother' Roger Martin gentleman was to have a ring or cup worth £6 13s 4d and his son Richard another sum; Anne, the daughter of his 'brother' Robert

Forth was to have £10 for her marriage, and his other children other sums. Sir Thomas Baldry's executors were his wife, Elizabeth Forthe, and Robert Forthe of Hadleigh, along with four mercers as overseers. The simple rehearsal of these names puts Baldry at the centre of an extended family of which the livelihood was the cloth industry of Suffolk: to hold land in a place like Monks Eleigh was automatically to have clothworkers as tenants; the Martin connection took him to Long Melford and the Ford connection to Hadleigh. His sons George and Thomas both became mercers of London in their turn, George in 1536 and Thomas in 1537; George as the eldest inherited an estate in Oxfordshire – he married into the gentry and his heiress daughter into the baronage; while Thomas, who had survived his father by only five years, had the Suffolk lands. Of his several daughters, Thomasin had married William Brown, mercer.⁸²

Relatives of the Baldrys, the Edgores, also joined the Mercers. This was a family which had bought its way out of serfdom in 1346⁸³ and expanded in the fifteenth century into the civic life of Ipswich and London. Robert Edgore, mercer of London, claimed Thomas Baldry I's wife, Alice, as his 'grandame' and left her and her husband £40 worth of stock when he died in 1505 aged only twenty-nine; he had two brothers, William and Dan John, monk of Bury St Edmunds, and a sister Anne, wife of Richard Stone of 'Snapebridge'.⁸⁴ Edgore had been an apprentice of Robert Ymber and was admitted to the company in 1503. An earlier Edgore mercer was a Thomas admitted in 1465 and a later one was William, son of John, admitted 1512. William also died young at the age of thirty in 1517, asking Alderman Thomas Baldry to be his overseer and leaving land in Combs and at 'Hendyclesehuth' (?Hinderclay), near Stowmarket, and at Rickinghall.⁸⁵ The reference to Combs makes it certain that these mercers were of the Edgar family whose farmhouse has been re-erected at the Museum of East Anglian Life in Stowmarket.⁸⁶

Contemporary with the Baldrys, the Stile family of Ipswich had as strong a connection to the London Mercers; they too believed in the benefits of a good apprenticeship in trade and had the good sense to write wills. They are best explained diagrammatically (Fig. 46). The first in the sequence was Thomas Stile, who was apprenticed in 1443–44 to Robert Coggeshale,⁸⁷ he was successful enough to take two apprentices and can be found shipping goods through the port of London between 1439 and 1457.⁸⁸ His relationship with the William Stile who was buried in St Nicholas's Ipswich in 1475 is uncertain. This William left a widow Isabel (born Bolle) and two sons, John and William, both apprenticed to London mercers, and there was also a daughter Agnes.⁸⁹ The younger brother, William, was admitted to the Mercers in 1479 as the past apprentice of John Baker (for whom see above) and apparently returned to Ipswich forthwith; he was buried in St Nicholas's Church with his father and mother in 1500, leaving a widow Margery.⁹⁰ The Bolle, Bol or Bulle connection continued: Richard Bulle was apprenticed to the wealthy Richard Rich, mercer of London, and continued with Rich's widow, an eminent silkwoman. This was a high status beginning, but the young man fell foul of his mistress who spent a great number of words in her will spelling out his bad behaviour: 'for the hard damage, losse and rebuke that he hath put me unto' her executors were to sue him 'in the scharpest wyse' and recover the 'uttermost peny ... rebatying to hym for his wages for his untrue service that he hath doon to me'.⁹¹ Nevertheless, Bulle can be found trading as an adventurer in the Low Countries and he married the daughter of William and Alice Pratte, lifelong friends of the printer and mercer, William Caxton. He and his wife received bequests from William Pratte in 1486, but they were both dead, leaving no children alive, when Alice Pratte also died in 1491.⁹²

John, the elder of the Stile brothers, was to be the last but one known recipient of the psalter-primer which the pious William Pratte left originally to his daughter, Alice Bulle, with instructions that it serve as a common-profit book.⁹³ He fared better in the unhealthy

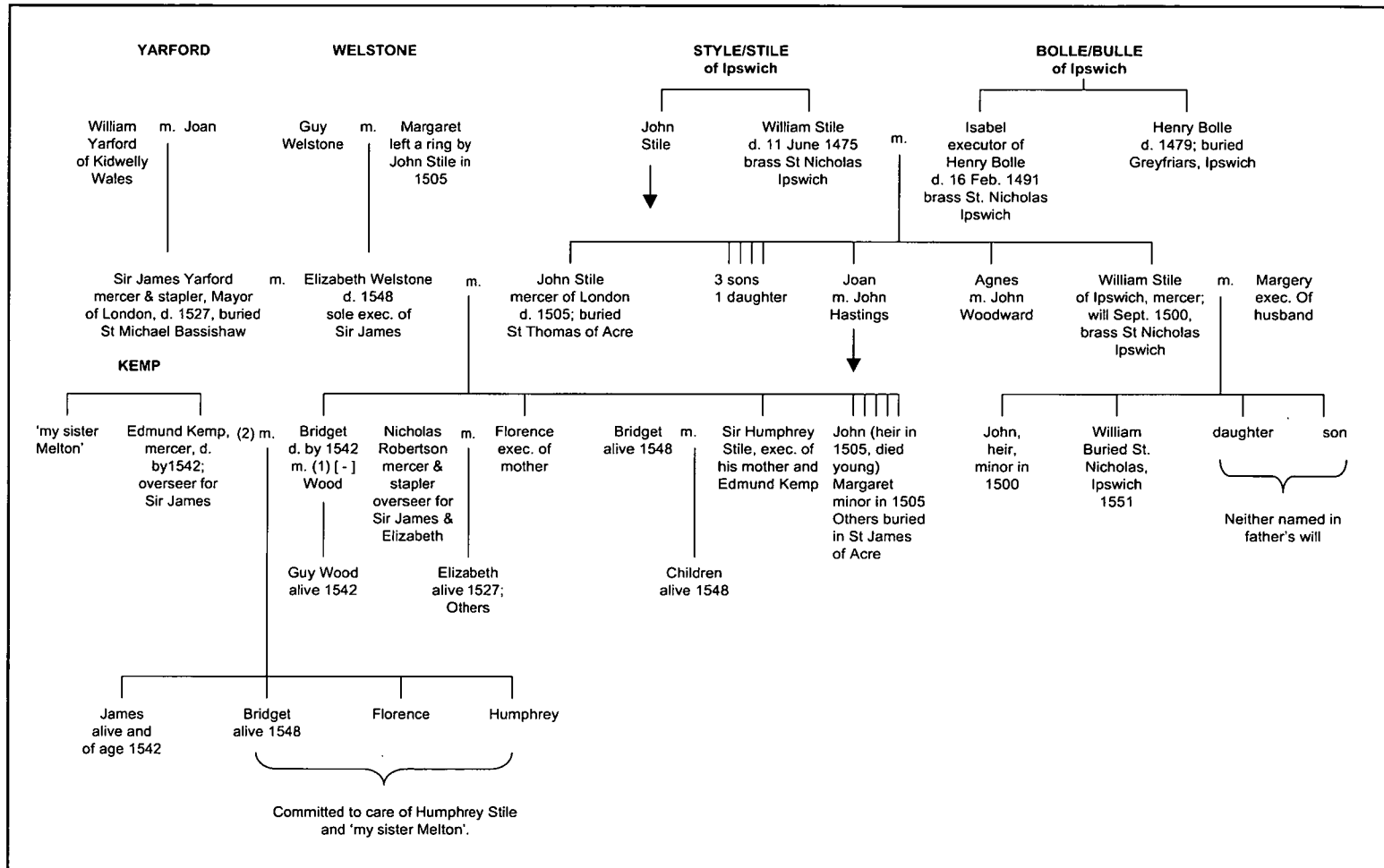


FIG. 46 – The Style/Stile family of Ipswich and London.

environment of London, although his own will was to refer to several dead children. Apprenticeship in London could lead to prosperity and riches, but the city was not the place in which to bear and bring up children – they died in their thousands and London's population needed constant reinforcement from the provinces. John Stile emerged from apprenticeship to John Shelly in 1478. He benefited by inheriting property from his father, always a good start for a business,⁹⁴ and also under the will of his uncle, Henry Bolle of Ipswich, along with his mother, Isabel, the testator's sister.⁹⁵ From 1490 he can be found regularly working for the Mercers' Company on domestic and adventurer affairs; he was a warden in 1497. In Antwerp he was served by his apprentice and factor, John Medwall.⁹⁶ John married a Margaret Welstone by whom he had at least seven children, several of whom predeceased him and were buried in the churchyard of the hospital of St Thomas of Acre, and whom he desired to be buried near when he died in 1505. His will set up a chantry for his parents, for Thomas Wyndout (master of Thomas Baldry II), his uncle Henry Bolle and others. He left money to repair St Peter's and St Nicholas's in Ipswich. The houses of friars each had 20s., but he singled out the Greyfriars, where his brother William was buried, with forty marks from the sale of the house in the Vintry of London left him by his uncle Henry Bolle. The residue was to be spent on alms in Ipswich. He set up a five-year chantry for his uncle Henry Bolle, his mother and a John Woodward (to all of whom he had been executor) in St Nicholas's next door to the Greyfriars. Campsey Ash Abbey near Wickham, benefited by 40s. He left rings to James Yarford (see below), to Roger Man (see above), 'cousin' Baker,⁹⁷ and William Bolle of Ipswich. He asked Thomas Baldry II to be an executor.⁹⁸

John Stile's surviving children flourished: Humphrey achieved a knighthood, whilst Bridget and Florence both married prosperous mercers, Edmund Kemp and Nicholas Robertson (a stapler) respectively. They benefited from their mother's second marriage to Sir James Yarford, a wealthy mercer and wool stapler who was mayor of London in 1519–20 (he was originally from Kidwelly in South Wales). James never had any children and he took his step-children into both heart and home – the closeness of all the family is testified by the use of relatives as executors and guardians. Yarford died in 1527, a notable benefactor of the Mercers, and his widow, Lady Elizabeth (*née* Welstone, later Yarford), survived until 1548.⁹⁹ The wide connections of the Stiles and the Bulles of Ipswich, with strong links to the Baldrys, are revealed in an impressive number of surviving wills. Those connections were created on the back of the cloth trade of Suffolk and membership of the London Mercers' Company.

The Baldrys and the Stiles benefited from the massive increase in cloth exports; neither they, nor even the long-lived Lady Yarford, lived to see the major upheavals of the English cloth trade. By 1500 London's share of the nation's export of cloth was well over half, and the mercers' share of that was about 46 per cent – in other words they were exporting about a quarter of the nation's cloth.¹⁰⁰ Cloth for the Low Countries' finishing industries was still the concern of the Adventurers and they were still dominated numerically by mercers, but gradually members of other London companies were questioning that dominance, and in 1527 a major row ended the use of Mercers' Hall for the meetings of the Adventurers for the time being. The adventurer fleets now only sailed twice a year to Antwerp in convoy for protection from pirates and the almost constant wars of Henry VIII and his fellow monarchs. These regularised fleets allowed the king and Privy Council to manipulate the company and also allowed the rich men of the company to control their lesser fellows both as regards the quantity they could ship and how they could sell their cloth at the fairs. Despite the wars and incessant piracy, however, the mercer-adventurers did phenomenally well in the export of cloth from the 1520s to 1550: in the 1490s London adventurers as a whole exported nearly 40,000 cloths and in the 1540s 108,000 a year. In 1534–35, for example, the Mercers had 164 men shipping cloth, but there was a growing, insidious, concentration of the trade in fewer

hands: only twenty-five of these 164 shipped a substantial number of cloths, for the trade was becoming a rich man's preserve.¹⁰¹ The trade was also unhealthily focused on Antwerp, now the greatest emporium of Northern Europe. Last but not least, there was the problem of the finishers: from the 1460s the English cloth finishers increasingly demanded that they should be allowed to finish more of the cloth that was sent to the finishers of the Low Countries. At first the finishers were easily fought off, but by the 1560s they were a force to be reckoned with. In London the most powerful were the Shearmen and Fullers who were formally joined into one company, the Clothworkers, in 1528.¹⁰²

Changes were also taking place in the Mercers. They had more aldermen and more mayors than any other company in the reign of Henry VIII, and it therefore became increasingly expensive to seek apprenticeship and admission to this select body. The company moreover hindered young men who were without capital – no one with less than £100 could become a shopkeeper, for example, although the second company of the city, the Grocers, had long since given up their £40 ruling.¹⁰³ Parents and guardians began to look elsewhere. The Suffolk cloth industry was changing. In the early sixteenth century Lavenham was one of the wealthiest towns in England, with its heyday in the 1520s, but its wealth was now dependent on a workforce of wage-earners, who were in turn dependent on regular orders, regular sales, and a buoyant market for English cloth overseas. Such dependence did not produce families able to pay high London premiums. There were troubles in the 1530s when the market fluctuated, but the overseas demand for English cloth continued to grow, although other counties gradually supplanted Suffolk as the premier county for cloth production.¹⁰⁴

The great crash of 1550, when over-production hit the industry, was driven by the wealthiest of merchants, like the mercers Thomas Gresham and Vincent Randall. There was a glut in the market followed by a dramatic drop in the value of sterling. The disaster was rounded off by an attack of sweating sickness and government incompetence; many smaller men were ruined. The great men blamed the lesser clothiers, and the clothiers blamed the untrained men who had intruded into the industry. Equilibrium reasserted itself but thereafter clothiers, merchants and government realised that expansion was not infinite, and the greatest period of success was over.¹⁰⁵ Merchants and government began to consider new and alternative markets, and after the major embargo of trade with the Low Countries in 1563, which was underwritten by religious quarrels, they had to face the fact that the trade with Antwerp was doomed.

With this background in mind the number of mercers from Suffolk certainly does appear to fall off sharply. There were some very successful men but they were few in number. The Redes of Norwich and Beccles had strong contacts with the Mercers of London. Edmund Rede of Norwich, son of John Rede, mayor of Norwich, had given £500 to the building of Mercers' Hall before his death in 1520, but Cardinal Wolsey and Rede's widow made sure that the Mercers received very little of it. Edmund's son, William Rede of Beccles, became a mercer of London by redemption in 1532 presenting the company with a pot of silver worth 40s as well as paying the ordinary charges; he also became a tenant of the Mercers for a house in Catte Street shortly afterwards. His family has received a bad press for its greedy attempt to acquire Beccles common or fen after the dissolution of the abbey of Bury St Edmunds, and he has achieved fame of another sort as the first husband of Anne Ferneley who took his wealth into her second marriage with the young Thomas Gresham on Rede's death in 1544.¹⁰⁶ The Mercers took the fortunate and wealthy young Gresham on to the livery forthwith, and this was the start of his great fortune.¹⁰⁷

The Martins of Long Melford were probably sending boys to London mercers by the 1430s, though identifications are uncertain: Alan Martin was admitted in 1437; one John was admitted in 1439 and another John, his son, was admitted in 1469. One of them at least

exported cloth to Italy, and both served as administrators of the estate of the wealthy mercer, Ellis Davy (d. 1456).¹⁰⁸ The famous Sir Roger Martin served his apprenticeship in the reformed household of Humphrey Packington, whose daughter he married. As Packington's apprentice he sold Coggeshalls and Worcesters in Antwerp in 1539; the next year, when he was a freeman, he was selling Coggeshalls there on his own behalf. In 1547–48 when he was shipping over 1000 cloths, Martin and another fifty-six mercers shared nearly 38 per cent of the cloth exported through London. Unsurprisingly he was named in the new charter granted to the Merchant Adventurers in 1564, which acknowledged the change in the direction of trade away from Antwerp and the search for a direct route to the markets of Germany and Russia. He was an early investor in the Russia Company and he is known to have maintained factors in Hamburg in 1570 and 1573.¹⁰⁹ His firm protestant convictions showed themselves when he was one of the jury which acquitted Throckmorton in 1554, and he suffered imprisonment for it – his namesake, the recusant Sir Roger Martin of Long Melford, was his first cousin once removed.¹¹⁰ He also took civic office unexpectedly early, serving as sheriff in 1559 and mayor in 1567–68. He founded a loan charity of £200 with the Mercers, paid for twenty sermons in the company's chapel, and left the company a fine standing cup. His sons Humphrey and Edmund were admitted mercers by patrimony in 1570 and 1572, just before his death in 1573.¹¹¹

The wealthy and well connected John Hare, younger brother and eventual heir of the lawyer, Sir Nicholas Hare, hardly deserves inclusion, but in his will of 1564 he mentioned that he had been born in the parish of Our Lady, Homersfield, Suffolk, and he left its poor 20s. He left many rings to his relatives and acquaintances including the powerful mercers, Sir Thomas Leigh and Sir Thomas Gresham, but also Mr Lionel Timperley. His main lands lay in Norfolk and unlike his lawyer brother he had several sons to inherit them.¹¹²

In 1571 a lesser man, John Mun, left 20s to the poor of 'East Barfolde' (East Bergholt), and to his brother-in-law, Thomas Norden, a clothier of the same town, a black gown and ring worth 40s of gold, to repay him for undertaking the task of executor. These few details argue close ties to the cloth trade and suggest that his family came from East Bergholt. His father had been a John Mun and he had a son John Mun, but all his fairly extensive lands lay in other counties.¹¹³

The Gowle-Baldry tradition was continued by other boys of Stowmarket: the father of Thomas and William Rivett was a yeoman of that town. Thomas was admitted to the Mercers in 1551 and immediately took on his younger brother, William, as his apprentice. Thomas became an extremely wealthy mercer and adventurer: he was already a major exporter by 1554 when he shipped at least 800 cloths, which had cost him over £3000 at Blackwell Hall, and in the record shipments of 1559 he accounted for 509 cloths. He was one of the men named in the new charter granted to the Merchant Adventurers in 1564. He made loans to men like Lord Robert Dudley, he invested in the Mines Royal and bought himself extensive lands, making his home at Chippenham, Cambridgeshire. He also married well: his first wife was a daughter of Sir John Cotton of Lanwade, Cambridgeshire, and his second a daughter of Lord Pagett. His brother, William, preferred to have an official life in the Customs House rather than trade. Neither of the Rivetts has left a good reputation behind him: Thomas was notorious for his absenteeism and negligence as an office holder, his arrogance, and his improving, engrossing and enclosing in Cambridgeshire; William was one of those customs officials who were prosecuted in Elizabeth's reign for negligence and profiteering.¹¹⁴

It is not easy to resurrect these people, their emigration and trade. Only occasionally does the career of a man like Richard Gowle reveal itself with anything like completeness. Only when several members of a family can be identified through a reasonably plentiful supply of wills,

as with the Baldrys and Stiles, can the multifarious interconnections of family and trade be sketched. We have only a small fraction of the original, infinite variety. To conclude on a light note: the device or arms of the London Mercers' Company was a maid's head, an attractive survival of the shop-sign of their original trade which had sold so many goods to women and whose goods were so often made by women. Members of the company decorated their houses, silver plate and furnishing with this device, and identified themselves on their tombstones and brasses with it. Provincial mercers, not of the London Company, found her equally attractive and adopted her. Carvings of her can still be seen at Bungay, there was once one in an Abbeygate Street shop in Bury, she is on the tomb of a Baldry in Ipswich, and she is still displayed on the great house at Hengrave built by the London mercer, Sir Thomas Kitson, who came from Lancashire but chose to settle in Suffolk.¹¹⁵

NOTES

- 1 Britnell 2003, 86–87; Dymond and Betterton 1989, chs 1–2; Bailey 2007, 157–58.
- 2 Yeomen, see Bailey 2007, 246–49, 262–63; Dyer 2007, 1–22.
- 3 Baret's will (1467), Tymms 1850, 22–23, 41; Kekewich *et al.* 1995, 103–4.
- 4 Cornerth wrote his will in 1361 (enrolled 1379–80), Corporation of London Records Office (hereafter CLRO), Husting Roll 108 (75), (hereafter HR); Sharpe 1889–90 (hereafter CWH), II, 212–13 and see 222; Ekwall 1956, 14–15; Sharpe 1899–1912 (hereafter *Letter Books A–L*), *Letter Book F*, 238; *Letter Book G*, 60; Crabbe 1888, 16, records the de Cornerthe family up to the 1320s but it is entirely speculative to connect the mercer to them. It is, however, intriguing that the manors of Little Cornard and Peacock's Hall (also Little Cornard) both belonged to the Frowyks, descendants of the Henry Frowyk, his apprentice, and mercers of the 15th century, *ibid.*, 19, 33–34.
- 5 *CPMR 1413–37*, 34–35. Cavendish seems to have maintained an interest in the true mercery trade like his master, see Sutton 2001, 44–46 for some of his apprentices.
- 6 Copinger 1905–11, I, 59–61; but the pedigree given is not entirely clear.
- 7 McFarlane 1981, 70 n.62, 183.
- 8 William Cavendish, The National Archives (TNA), PROB 11/3, fol. 141v. He left a widow, Joan; a brother Walter; Thomas his son and his bequest of £20 were to be in care of William's brother Robert until of age or married, and this Robert was executor with two mercers, William Fleet and William Bernewey.
- 9 Roos also left sums to the Stradbroke family of Norwich, Guildhall Library, London (GL), MS 9171/3, fols 369–70. Wood 1984, 85–86.
- 10 Sutton 2005, 556. The property was at North Burlingham, Norfolk, which was eventually sold by a Robert Cavendish, Blomefield 1805–10, VII, 223; John Wells was a co-feoffee in this transaction of 1426.
- 11 Wells' will, GL, MS 9171/4, fol. 19v. Maldon, Essex, also received bequests, but it is possible that Milden was his birthplace. See also CWH, 2, 559 and TNA, C 1/71/20. A John Davy of 'Bretylly' (Brent Eleigh), Suffolk, gave his goods and chattels to Edward and Erkenwald Wells, mercers of London, sons of John; and Alice, widow of John, gave her same sons her goods and chattels and her lease of the manors of 'Mildyngge' and 'Fenhalle' and other lands at 'Illegh Combuster' (Brent Eleigh), Lavenham, etc, 1445, 1446, *CCR 1441–47*, 281, 387–88.
- 12 Sutton 2005, 212–26 (Stokton, 218). Britnell 1993, esp. 79–85, 181–92, and 2003, *passim*; Bailey 2007, 145, 264–76, 287. Thorneton, 1928, 143–67; Dymond and Betterton 1989, ch. 2.
- 13 The wills of all mercers between 1400 and 1499 have been read in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (TNA, PROB 11), the Commissary Court of London, and the Court of the Archdeacon of London (Guildhall Library London (GL) MS 9171 and MS 9051) to find references to Suffolk. As regards the court of Husting the entire index of Sharpe 1889–90 (CWH) has been checked through and many of these wills have also been read in the original. Inevitably many details concerning Suffolk but not from the wills of Londoners from Suffolk cannot be included, e.g. an intriguing bequest of £5 for the soul of [...] Bunting, carpenter of Needham Market, to be disposed by the advice of his son the abbot of Bury St Edmunds [William Bunting], left by Nicholas Alwyn

- mercator and alderman, originally from Lincs., PROB 11/15, fols 9–12, proved 1506.
- 14 Two of Knightcote's daughters married London mercers and the third, Margaret, married Simon Sampson of Suffolk in 1389, *Letter Book H*, 316.
 - 15 Otley, PROB 11/2A, fols 57–58. See also CWH, II, 362 (1404). He held land in Suffolk, but, apart from his name, no evidence has been found to connect him to the manor of Otleys in Ufford. For identification of gripesey, CWH, I, 661 n. 1.
 - 16 His nephew, Robert, the future mayor, was an executor, GL, MS 9171/2, fols 334–35v, proved 1416.
 - 17 Archdeaconry Court of London, GL, MS 9051/1, fols 1v–2, 61v–62, 19v–20. I am indebted to Robert Wood's notes from this will. Green's will mistakenly puts Hopton in Norfolk.
 - 18 Some of his cloth was seized by pirates in 1451, Jenks 1992, I, 17, n. 40. No will survives. A Thomas Orable was admitted after an apprenticeship to Sir John Stokton in 1477.
 - 19 For the Mans of Lakenheath, Bailey 2007, 217, 248. Hadleigh: Clement Man 45 cloths; Thomas Man 13 cloths, both from N. Amor's aulnage lists. The name can also be found elsewhere in Suffolk, e.g. Northeast 2001, nos 346, 948, 1466, and Thorney, see Amor 2006, 184.
 - 20 GL MS 9171/3, fol. 74v. He can also be called Esmond. Sutton 2005, 537. For John Stile see below.
 - 21 Roger was admitted in 1482 as late apprentice of John Cowlard: Lyell and Watney 1936, 225. John Stile's will, PROB 11/14, fols 292v–94; Roger was still renting a shop from the Mercers 1508, Keene and Harding 1987, 104/33e.
 - 22 Bailey 2007, 270–76. Dymond and Betterton 1989, 1–8, and esp. 7 (1468–69).
 - 23 E.g. TNA, C 1/70/102, in which a London draper sold woad to John Person of Lavenham, clothmaker, in return for blue cloth.
 - 24 The aulnage details enabled their descendant, the late Mr A. Th. Arber-Cooke, to be certain that the two men were father and son, a fact previously doubted by London historians. He kindly gave the author access to his notes in 1977. The author is also grateful for aulnage details supplied by Nicholas Amor. See Kekewich et al. 1995, 73–103, for a full account of the Cooks.
 - 25 It is not certain if Marlborough kept the lands, C 1/51/249–52, and Sutton 1978, 107. Margaret Odiham's will, Tymms 1850, 74–75. For Marlborough, see Kleineke and Moreton 2009, 34–35.
 - 26 Buried across the nave from Cook in the London Austin Friars. For the family see Northeast 2001, nos 297, 849, 1233. Bailey 2007, 208, 218.
 - 27 Culvert illustrated Dymond and Betterton 1989, 34.
 - 28 Cambridge University Library, Queens' College Archives, Box 30, his bond with Richard Clere of Lavenham to Geoffrey Boleyn and another 1444; Boleyn's brother Thomas appeared with Doker, the founder of the college, in other bonds.
 - 29 Christian's wills, Northeast, 2001, no. 1002, 1048. In the first she designates John as 'of London'. Robert died 1485. They had two sisters, Rose wife of Alan Sextyn, and Katherine wife of Walter Antyngham. John, son of Christian had been left 6s 8d in the will of Katherine Whassham of Lavenham in 1441, who left a message in the town to Christian, her executrix, *ibid.*, no 161; the bequests suggest Katherine was a relative, possibly a sister of Christian; Dymond and Betterton 1989, 16, 106; TNA, E 403/848, m. 1.
 - 30 Christian's will, Northeast 2001, no. 1002. *Letter Book L*, 39–40, 70, 72, 93, 108; CPMR 1458–82 45, 154, 165. 1475: Lyell and Watney 1936, 84.
 - 31 The gift, CPMR 1458–82, 176; the release, *ibid.*, 144–45. See Sutton 2008, 171 and n.
 - 32 Taillour's will, PROB 11/7, fols 106–8. And see Thrupp 1948, 368–69.
 - 33 Roger issued 1449–50, on the livery 1452–53; worth £10 p.a. for tax purposes in 1475 and an active worker for the company, Lyell and Watney 1936, 78, and *passim*. And see CCR 1454–61, 219, 313. He had connections with other counties too, PROB 11/10, fols 122v–23. For the Bonyfaunts of Burwell, Cambs, see Northeast 2001, nos 67, 389; Dymond and Betterton 1989, 107. And see will of Christopher Bonyfaunt, mercator of Lavenham, 1507, PROB 11/15, fol. 197r–v.
 - 34 William Wulrych of Hadleigh, draper, recorded the lease of property in Hadleigh to William 'Foorde' the younger and others including John Shelley grocer of London in 1457: CCR 1454–61, 191.
 - 35 N. Amor's aulnage notes. TNA, C 1/59/192–93, and see Sutton 1997–99, 64, for a more detailed rendering of this suit. Neither Fisher nor Syred appears to have had family connections with Suffolk.
 - 36 William's will of 1504 is given in Muskett 1900, I, 109, with a limited pedigree for the earlier family,

- 119; he made his son Robert his executor, with Sir James Hobart to assist. William's will shows no sign of London property but a William Forde 'clothman of London' (an odd terminology) acted as a feoffee for Richard Odiham, draper of London (related to the Suffolk family), probably for the purposes of Odiham's will in 1487, *CCR 1485-1500*, nos 287, 288, *pace Amor 2004*, 426, and Bailey 2007, 274.
- 37 The Browns and Baldrys were closely connected. Thomas Brown's will, *PROB 11/11*, fols 113r-v.
- 38 Erasmus and William (William had recently died) were pardoned as staplers 1505, *CPR 1494-1509*, 447, 449; for relations between the companies, Sutton 2005, 338-41, 424-27. Robert acquired the manor of 'Boytonys' in Monks Eleigh in 1475, *CCR 1468-76*, no. 1448. Robert Forthe's will is given in Muskett 1900, I, 109, as is that of William Forthe his son, proved 1559, in which he made John Brown, his cousin and mercer, his supervisor, 110. And see MacCulloch 1986, 163. No later Fords/Forthes were in the Mercers' Company. Robert Barfoot was admitted 1504, warden 1538-39, and had Thomas Baldry III as his apprentice; John Barfoot was a bachelor in 1564, Sutton 2005, 476, 559.
- 39 WA 1449-50. Lyell and Watney 1936, 63, 76, 91, 97, 100, 105, 108, 128.
- 40 Neale 2000, 218-19. In 1475 he had been living in Cripplegate ward, which included Milk Street, Lyell and Watney 1936, 79.
- 41 Hanham 1985, 124.
- 42 TNA, C 1/60/125. Sutton 2005, 208, 221, 225, 557.
- 43 TNA, C 1/185/62. The troubles of the Bells over this property may have resulted from Neve's erratic financial state. Neve can be found later in transactions involving other mercers who came from Suffolk: *CCR 1454-61*, 313.
- 44 *CPR 1461-67*, 420.
- 45 Neve's service as a factor seems to be the explanation for his fine by the Mercers for buying and selling while in Bonyfaunt's service, WA 1456-57. Two gifts of goods and chattels also tie him to Bonyfaunt in 1457-58, *CCR 1454-61*, 219, 313. This connection may strengthen Bonyfaunt's Suffolk credentials.
- 46 Sutton 1994, 122-24. TNA, C 1/31/80.
- 47 TNA, C 1/67/331-36, heard 1484: includes a copy of his will.
- 48 Thomas Goding, *PROB 11/5*, fol. 106v. For his wife Margery, see Sutton 2008, 171. His pardon of 13s 4d of the debts owed him by Robert King, clothworker of Peteron, may be a reference to Pettaugh, Suffolk, near Debenham. For Goding as a Suffolk name, Northeast 2001, nos. 10, 816.
- 49 GL, MS 9171/6, fols 89v-90.
- 50 Bailey 2007, 120, 126. Gardiner had no connection with Gardener's manor in Exning, though it may account for the family name, Copinger 1905-11, IV, 160-61.
- 51 No connection with the Gardeners, clothiers of Bury, is known. His heiress, Mary did marry Sir Giles Alington of Horseheath, Cambridgeshire: Blomefield 1805-11, I, 429. Wills, *CWH*, II, 591-92 and *PROB 11/8*, fols 277-80v: £5 went to support scholars at Oxford and Cambridge disposed to read divinity; relatives were mentioned but no places; other executors were Mr John Breton and John Tate, mercer. Heighams: Thomas Heigham the younger was an executor of John Baret of Bury, Tymms, 1850, 27, 36, 42, and served as bailiff of Bury St Edmunds regularly 1438/39 to 1484/85: Lobel 1936, 26-27; Richard Heigham's pedigree and will (proved 1500) in Howard 1866, II, 213, 254.
- 52 No relationship with the Fabians of Coggeshall is known. Several Fabians of Exning left wills or are mentioned in the wills of others: Thomas Dere of Exning referred to Alice, servant of John 'Fabyon' the younger, and his executors included John Fabyon in 1449, Northeast 2001, no 429; John Dere of Exning in 1449 had John Fabyon the elder as his overseer, *ibid.*, no. 435; in 1458 John Fabian of Exning [the elder] left bequests to the sons of John Fabian the younger and left a widow Isabel, *ibid.*, no. 1480.
- 53 It would be nice to relate John Baker mercer to the John Baker, clothier of Lavenham 1463-64, Dymond and Betterton 1989, 7, but it is too common a name and no wills survive for the London mercers. John Baker had another apprentice, William Stile, for whom see below.
- 54 Lyell and Watney 1936, 113-15, 124, 125, 133-34; Smit 1928, I, ii, no. 1856. Sloomans 1985, 766, 1545 (pp. run on).
- 55 Fabian's first wife, Alice (daughter of another mercer, Richard Wise) was an executor but died, and his second wife, Joan, widow of Stephen Gibson, mercer, took over. For Joan's career, Sutton 2008, 171-73.

- 56 He also acted as a feoffee with or for Baker in 1461 and 1466, *CCR 1461–68*, 100, 400–1.
- 57 Fabian, *PROB 11/8*, fols 66–68. See also Sutton 1994, 147.
- 58 Amor 2004, 419–20.
- 59 This John died in 1461 and left two sons and a daughter, all of age, one son called Richard. The will is now available in *Northeast 2001*, no. 1461. There are Shelleys in several counties; it has not been possible to link either of the mercer Shelly brothers to Suffolk: they appear to have come from Hertfordshire. For all on Gowle, Sutton 1985–87, 238–45.
- 60 Horrox and Hammond 1979–83, I, 170. *CPR 1476–85*, 420.
- 61 Richmond 1987, 199–219.
- 62 Thrupp 1948, 369–70.
- 63 Bromwell witnessed Gowle's will in 1504, was warden of the Mercers 1512–13 and 1522–23, and died 1536. No obvious sign of any Suffolk connection, but he took a John Baker as his apprentice (see above under Fabian), who appears to have been his sister's son. He left black cloth to the widow of Sir Thomas Baldry and they were fellow members of the Jesus Guild in the Crypt of St Paul's. He remembered John Baker, his sister's son, Hugh Baker his brother, and Rauf, son of John Baker; he also left a bequest to a Robert Brought, dyer. *CWH*, II, 692 and *PROB 11/27*, fols 13–14v. This may be Bromwell's apprentice, John Baker, who died in 1547, *PROB 11/31*, fols 394–95.
- 64 Philip Booth (1455–1528) of Barham (married to the daughter of Sir William Hopton of Blythburgh, d. 1484, a mercer from 1475), failed in his attempt to claim for himself the London property left by his relative, Robert Booth, Dean of York (d. 1488) for a chantry (*TNA*, C 1/86/19–24); Gowle was one of the dean's feoffees. In 1488 Booth failed to persuade the Mercers to administer the same property to support the chantry in Barham (*Lyell and Watney 1936* 185–86; Sutton 2005, 197). Philip was later admitted to the company for £5.
- 65 E.g. active in the land market of Thorney: Amor 2006, 181.
- 66 For some details on the Ive property in Stow hundred, Copinger 1905–11, VI, 179. The Timperleys' interest in Hadleigh manor in Hadleigh may have been of interest to Gowle because of the cloth industry, see Copinger 1905–11, III, 168.
- 67 Gowle's will, *PROB 11/14*, fol. 54v. Ryan and Redstone 1931, 27 and pedigree; no identification of Gowle. Wentworth was to have the next vacancy of the benefice of 'Hemsame' which Gowle had reserved by writings from certain lands sold to Sir Robert Drury, to give where he and his wife chose.
- 68 The brothers were separated and identified by Blatchly and *Northeast 1989*, 257–66; this underlies much of what follows. Their several wills are otherwise the main source, apart from the records of the Mercers' Company; and I am also grateful for details from John B. Weller often based on information from Peter *Northeast*.
- 69 Grandfather John Baldry's will of 1449 specified his dead wife Margaret and his son Richard, *Northeast 2001*, no. 444; Richard Baldry's will, *Baldwyn 533* will be in the forthcoming *Northeast* volume, no. 673. The will of the two brothers' nephew, Thomas Baldry III, another mercer of London, made 1534, mentioned that he had shared land with his brother, William, under the direction of the manorial court of Thorney Hall, and had also received a bequest from Sir Thomas to pay his debts, which Lady Baldry still owed him; a Mrs Baggade of Stowe also owed him £3 13s 4d for an old house she had bought from him, *PROB 11/25*, fols 193v–94.
- 70 Thomas III appears to be the Thomas Baldry admitted to the company in 1529 as late apprentice of Robert Barfoot, at which time he was 26 years, the last or even posthumous child of his father. He died 1534. For the Barfoots, see above n. 38.
- 71 Thomas Baldry I, *PROB 11/21*, fols 265r–v. For Tyler see n. 80 below.
- 72 In 1475 Rawson lived in Cheap ward, but he had moved by his death in 1483 from All Hallows Honey Lane to the parish of St Mary Magdalen Milk Street in Cripplegate ward, a short move as regards yards, see *Lyell and Watney, 1936*, 79 and *PROB 11/7*, fols 123v–25.
- 73 A tenement called Baldrys was left by Geoffrey Baldry of Barningham in 1460 to his son William, *Northeast, 2001*, no. 1225.
- 74 Thomas Drayll/Druell, *PROB 11/17*, fols 71–72, and Blatchly and *Northeast 1989*, 266; the Baldry brasses in St Mary le Tower were made in London and that of Drayll in Norwich. See also *MacCulloch 1986*, 142, 146.
- 75 Wyndout, *PROB 11/12*, fols 28v–29, no probate clause, but he died 1500. And see Sutton 2005, 537 and n. 76.

- 76 Muskett 1900, I, 109.
- 77 Sutton 2005, 357, 359. Amicable grant, see MacCulloch 1986, 289–98.
- 78 Under Thomas Hobart's will of 1515 the manor of Overbury Hall passed to Thomas Baldry, mercer of London, if neither his daughter, Dorothy nor his brother had issue, on payment of 500 marks, PROB 11/18, fols 88v–90, and see Copinger 1905–11, III, 191.
- 79 The Norfolk Hobarts are set out by Blomefield 1805–10, VI, 395–6, including the lawyer, James Hobart, who was retained as legal adviser by Ipswich from 1450 to about 1465, when John Sulyard took over, with Hobarts on the town council again from 1485: Wodderspoon 1850, 120. The Hobarts of Monks Eleigh were descended from the lawyer's elder brother. Hobarts are difficult to identify in the Mercers' records as their name is given as variants of Hubbert: an Adam Hubbert was apprenticed in 1420 and a John in 1456; another John was admitted in 1491 and a William Hubbert in 1488, apparently brothers: Lyell and Watney 1936, 550; of more obvious importance, two John Hubberts were apprenticed to Benjamin Digby and Sir Thomas Baldry and admitted 1527 and 1529 respectively. The author is indebted to notes from J.B. Weller on the Hobarts and Forthes.
- 80 This manor was acquired by Robert Forthe in 1475: CCR 1468–76, no. 1448, and see n. 38 above. Copinger 1905–11, I, 162–63. An earlier Thomas Tyler of Monks Eleigh left a will in 1447: Northeast, 2001, no. 392. Northcote 1930, 19, suggests that the manor passed from the Chamberlains by a marriage settlement when Mary Chamberlain married George, son of Thomas Baldry.
- 81 For all details from will, Thomas Baldry II, PROB 11/25, fols 116v–17v.
- 82 The several William Browns are difficult to unravel: this was probably William Brown, son of William Brown (mayor 1513, d. 1514), and grandson of Sir John Brown (mayor, d. 1497); they came from Northumberland. See Browne, Sept. 1897, 1–11. Thomas Baldry the younger, son of Sir Thomas Baldry, by his will of 30 Jan. 1538 left everything to his executors, his sister, Anne Brown, and his wife, Mary, PROB 11/27, fol. 265.
- 83 See Scarfe, n. 86 below.
- 84 Robert Edgore, PROB 11/14, fol. 287v.
- 85 William Edgore, PROB 11/18, fols 262v–63. Unfortunately it is not possible to link these London mercer Edgores precisely with the Robert Edgore of Thorndon who left three sons, William, Edward and John in 1441, nor to the John 'Adgar' the elder of Combs, who died in 1452, leaving sons, Richard and John, but they were undoubtedly close relatives because of the reference in his will of the property at Combs.
- 86 Northeast 2001, nos 117, 609. Scarfe 1996, 57–68, esp. 65–66.
- 87 Robert Coggeshale was an apprentice of Thomas Osborn from 1426–27 and was on the livery 1443–44; and see CPMR 1437–57, 73, case not complete. I am most indebted to Wendy Moorhen for constructing the Stile pedigree in IT format.
- 88 Lyell and Watney 1936, 45. It was probably his widow, Isabel, who shipped just over 12 cloths 1461–62, TNA, Petty Custom, E 122/194/11, m. 7.
- 89 William Stile's will exhibited 1475 (but made 1463), Archdeaconry of Suffolk, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich, ICAA2/2/291; ICAA1/7/2, details kindly supplied by Dr John Blatchly. Brass of William Stile d. 1475 and Isabel Stile (*née* Bolle) d. 1490 in St Nicholas's.
- 90 Norfolk Record Office, Norwich Consistory Court will 32 Cage, for which I am indebted to Dr John Blatchly. The brass of William and Margery is in St Nicholas's.
- 91 Katherine Rich, 1469, GL, MS 9171/6, fols 47–48v, esp. fol. 48; thorns modernised.
- 92 William Pratte was originally from Canterbury, Kent, and his wife from Derbyshire, Sutton 1994, 142–46.
- 93 Sutton 2005, 168.
- 94 See n. 89.
- 95 Henry Bolle, PROB 11/7, fols 92r–v; John Stile and his mother, Isabel, Henry's sister, shared the residue of the estate. The house in the Vintry is referred to in the will of his nephew John Stile, PROB 11/14, fols 292v–94, esp. fol. 293.
- 96 For a comment on the Shellys see above n. 59. Doehaert 1963, III, no. 3299 and 3381, in 1500 and 1504; Medwall only issued in 1514, which suggests that he paid the issue fee belatedly having stayed overseas; a long service could also reflect the limited means of the apprentice.
- 97 See n. 53 above.

- 98 John Stile 1505, PROB 11/14, fols. 292v–94.
 99 James Yarford, PROB 11/22, fols. 159–60v; Elizabeth Yarford, PROB 11/32, fols. 96–97v; Edmund Kemp d. 1542, 11/29, fols. 64–65, made bequests to Stiles: Sutton 2005, 553–54.
 100 Figures: Cobb 1978, esp. 605. Sutton 2005, 348.
 101 Sutton 2005, ch. 14, esp. 411–52; Britnell 1993, 183–86, on the concentration of trade in fewer hands.
 102 Sutton 2005, 335–38 and n. 108.
 103 Sutton 2005, 447
 104 Britnell 1993, 190–92. Dymond and Betterton 1989, ch. 4.
 105 Sutton 2005, 420–22 on crash. Dymond and Betterton 1989, ch. 4.
 106 Sutton 2005, 362, for gift to Hall. William Rede died 1544 leaving £100 to the poor of Beccles; his brother-in-law, Nicholas Bacon, was his executor: PROB 11/30, fols 21–22v. Evans 1989, 31–32, and MacCulloch 1986, 326–27.
 107 Sutton 2005, 362 and n. 52. Mercers' Company, Acts of Court 1527–60, fol. 186.
 108 John Martin v. Ralph Kemp for usury, C 1/46/369; in 1446 John Martin exported cloths to Italy, Petty Customs Accounts E 122/73/20B and 20C. For Davy, Sutton 2005, 528–29.
 109 Sutton 2005, 411n, 412, 428, 432, 436 and n. 438.
 110 Howard 1866, I, 27–28; an aunt by marriage was a Forthe of Hadleigh.
 111 Sutton 2005, 392, 477, 482, 505, 542–43.
 112 John Hare, PROB 11/48, fols 36–38v. The will of Richard Hare in 1574 made no reference to Suffolk, PROB 11/57, fols 290–91. For Sir Nicholas (d. 1557), Master of the Rolls and High Steward of Ipswich 1554, MacCulloch 1986, 59, 71, 174, 175; Foss 1870, 328.
 113 John Mun, PROB 11/55, fols 90–91.
 114 Ramsay 1978, 535. 536, 537, 539–40; Sutton 2005, 428, 432, 441, 471, 488–93 *passim*, 495. Undoubtedly relatives of Thomas Rivett of Rattlesden, MP 1597: Hasler 1981, under Rivett. Their sister Mirabelle married William Burde, another mercer and corrupt customs official.
 115 Sutton 1998, *passim* and esp. 31–37.

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