

A DETAILED ACCOUNT OF THE 1327 RISING AT BURY ST. EDMUND'S AND THE SUBSEQUENT TRIAL.

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Civil commotion in the kingdom at large usually had its repercussions at Bury where the burgesses were always on the look out for an opportunity to acquire greater independence despite the opposition of their lord, the Abbot of St. Edmund's monastery. The "lack of *gouvernance*" of Edward II's reign and the civil war terminating it was not exceptional in its effects on the town, where a violent outbreak took place.

The outline of the rising at Bury has long been common knowledge. The nineteenth century historian of the town, Mr. Yates, wrote a fairly full account of it from chronicle sources. More recently, Mr. Trenholme, in his *English Monastic Boroughs*, has made a short summary of it, but no complete or accurate account has yet been printed. As this rising and its result settled the question of whether Bury should develop into a free self-governing borough or not, it seems worth while to put on record the details of the gallant struggle then made by the burgesses. The town's failure to get royal support for the charter extorted from the abbot and convent at this time meant the continuance of its dependent status and the end of all its hopes to be recognised as an incorporated town.

A fairly exact idea of the various stages of the riot can be had from chronicle accounts (*Memorials of the Abbey of St. Edmundsbury*. ii, 327 ; iii, 38-47), from references in the Patent Rolls and in particular from the record of the trial which took place at Bury after the rising had been quelled. The original pleadings of this trial are preserved in the Public Record Office. Duplicate rolls of part of the case are also to be found in the Town Hall at Bury. Accurate copies occur in two registers, in MS. Harl. 638 (fols. 56-118b), and in the Pinchbeck register, which has been printed by Lord Frances Harvey (1925).

The outbreak appears to have begun on Tuesday, January 13th, when John Fraunceys and other "capitosi ribaldi" met together in a tavern. Stirred up by London agitators they collected other townsmen and conspired to destroy the abbey. By noon a large gathering of lesser burgesses and common people had assembled at the gild hall. They summoned the more substantial burgesses, and all took oath to maintain the quarrel against the abbot and convent. Some compulsion may have been used but it is clear from subsequent events that the majority of leading townsmen were prepared to gain their ends by violence and sympathised whole-heartedly with the popular discontent.

On January 14th the attack began in earnest and lasted for sixteen days. The toll house bell was rung and it is said (almost certainly with exaggeration, as the adult population of Bury in 1377 was only 2,445) that about three thousand armed people assembled. Having forced an entrance through the great gates of the abbey, they roughly handled the monks and abbey servants, plundered the offices and carried off registers, muniments and charters from the Sacristy and Treasury.

We get some idea of the inconvenience caused by this robbery from the Patent Rolls where there is an entry recording that the loss of these muniments obliged the abbot to pray the king to stay a suit against him in the royal courts, as the deeds necessary for his defence had been carried off. The theft of the assay also led to complications and involved the abbot in trouble with the barons of the Exchequer (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1327-30, p. 411. MS. Harl., 645, vol. 128). These acts of violence were followed up by the imprisonment of the prior, Peter of Clapton, and four other monks. The sacrist only escaped this fate by fleeing to one of the abbot's manors. There he found that his original plan of getting to London must be abandoned as the townsmen had set ambushes on the road to the capital.

On the Thursday, January 15th, nine more monks were imprisoned and the important step of setting up a new alderman was taken. Richard of Berton, recently elected at the previous feast of St. Michael and admitted by the abbot, was deposed. His brother, John of Berton, was elected in his place. The abbot's consent was not sought nor was any oath, in accordance with the usual practice, taken before the sacrist. The new alderman's first act was to see that the gates were in loyal hands and to appoint new keepers. The following day the prior and his fellow prisoners were led back to the abbey and compelled to sign with the common seal of the chapter an acquittance of all actions which the abbot and convent might have against the town; also an acquittance from the payment of five hundred marks and fifty barrels of wine which the burgesses had pledged themselves, in 1305, to forfeit if they rose at any time against the abbey. They further promised to pay the debt of £2,000 due to the town. Elated by this success the townsmen turned their attention to plunder and destruction. The leading burgesses devoted themselves to taking over the government of the borough and its profits. Rents due to the convent were collected for the use of the alderman; toll, payable to the sacrist, was withheld; the judicial business of the courts was usurped. As at St. Albans, a block with an axe was set up in the market place and anyone refusing to join the anti-convent party was threatened with the loss of his head.

On Wednesday, January 28th, Abbot Richard returned from London in the hope of restoring peace. He was met with the demand that he should sign the charter prepared for him. Its twenty-four clauses contained a restatement of the ancient borough privileges and new demands which would have had the effect of emancipating the town from monastic rule. The annalist of St. Bennet's, in commenting on the charter, wrote that it contained many articles "*Deo et ecclesie ac justitie sue contrarii*," and it is evident that the abbot and convent regarded it with horror. Fear finally obliged the abbot to fix his seal to the document. His discomfiture is

vigorously depicted by the chronicler. The burgesses treated him "vilely and rushed from place to place, brandishing their weapons and threatening death to him and the convent if he would not obey them." At the same time he was forced to sign a document promising to take no action against them for their transgressions and to pay £5,000 if the charter was not enrolled in the king's Treasury within a definite time. Extorted by force, "by satellites of Satan," and entailing "a great disinheritance of the Church," the life of this charter was short. The abbot, allowed to return to London to get it royally confirmed, poured out his indignation before parliament, and on the advice of the barons proceeded to ignore the contract on the grounds that it had been made under duress. Some burgesses who had followed him to London, hoping to see the matter completed, hearing of his treachery returned to Bury with all speed and, "incensed by the devil," they renewed the rioting.

This second outburst, which began on Monday, February 16th, was distinguished by the burgesses' appeal to the villeins. They promised them freedom from toll and customary work and thus obtained large reinforcements. The work of plunder and violence was continued and an effort was made to starve the monastery out by preventing it from getting provisions. For the next two months the records have no sensational events to record and it may be supposed that for the moment the town was satisfied with its work and with the maintenance of a vigilant and hostile attitude towards the convent. At the end of April developments began to take place. The alderman and community obtained a writ of protection for a year, which looks as if they feared the use of force by their opponents. In the next month the disturbed condition of the town led to royal mandates to the abbot and convent, and to the bailiffs and men of St. Edmunds forbidding them to assemble armed men or attack each other under penalty of the forfeiture of all their wealth. The Patent Rolls record that both parties were ordered to send two representatives to York by the second week of June for the purpose of discussing

a way to settle the dispute. Twelve days later, on May 26th, the abbey was taken into the king's protection, and two guardians were appointed. The reason for this move was that the previous prohibition of May had been ignored. The guardians were empowered to make arrests of rebels but not to remove officers and ministers of the abbey or town so long as they were obedient (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, p. 106).

In spite of the king's letters a furious outbreak took place on May 19th. The abbey church was attacked and plundered. The part played by the parish clergy and the friars minor was particularly conspicuous on this occasion. Two clerks of the churches of St. James and St. Mary led the attack on the abbey church. Two clerks also set out to Rome as advocates for the town and in opposition to the abbot's emissary, sent for papal aid. The interest of the latter episode lies in the fact that besides setting forth the town's case they were to gain permission to appropriate the two parish churches. Though this claim does not appear to have been made very seriously the fact of its being made at all is evidence of yet another cause of discontent. The miserable stipends of the parish clerks and chaplains was no doubt responsible for turning them into rebels. This opposition between the regulars and the parish priests was not, of course, uncommon, and the abbey at Bury did no more than others did when it appropriated endowments and oppressed the lesser clergy.

As for the Franciscans their hostility was of long standing. Ejected from the *banlieue* in 1263 by the monastery, which had been determined to preserve its monopoly there, they had been allowed to establish themselves at Babwell just outside the boundary. They were not prepared to be content with small mercies and in their attitude to the monks in 1327 were described as *graviter infesti*. They took the opportunity of their enemies' discomfiture to revive their claim to dwell in the borough, and six of the brothers sought licence from the burgesses to live there. The petition was refused owing to the influence of the chaplains who feared that they would lose their fees. This, however, did not

disturb the alliance of the two bodies which was publicly demonstrated in the three days Rogationtide procession. The usual custom was for the monks and chaplains to proceed round the towns and fields together, but on this occasion the monks dared not leave the convent as they had been threatened with death. Evidently the monks had become intensely unpopular and some, at least, of the townsmen desired not merely reforms but the abolition of the regulars and the restoration of the secular chaplains to their ancient position as guardians of the shrine of St. Edmund.

It appears that apart from the repressive policy adopted by the abbot and convent towards the town there were other serious grounds for dissatisfaction which may well have brought their whole institution into contempt. The monk of St. Bennet Hulmé, who wrote an account of the riots, naively reveals a rather ominous fact when he says that many monks "*qui erant in patria causa spatiandi cum amicis suis*," sought refuge at his monastery. He adds that at that time thirty-two monks, nearly half the house, were taking holiday in the country.

There are other indications of a lack of discipline and of general decadence. The charges of the special commissioners appointed by the Bishop of Norwich in 1345 depict a scandalous state of affairs. Allowing for the jealousy of the seculars and the evident incompetency of abbot William Bateman, it is clear that the morals and general conduct of the house must have been at a low ebb for some time. The monks are charged, among other things, with living away from the monastery, with wearing lay clothes and indulging in every kind of vice. Their financial condition was not much better. The abbot and convent had been heavily in debt for some time. In 1300 Abbot Thomas for the sake of economy had established himself and his household in his country manors, but this did not save his successor from the necessity of borrowing freely. The abbey's creditors included the Bardi, various individual friends of the abbey, and the town (C.U.L. MS. Mm., 4.19, fols. 235b, 236b, 238b, 239b). In 1326 the latter lent Abbot Richard £2,000 which he pledged himself to repay on

June 24th (MS. Harl. 638, fol. 218b). The loan, however, was unpaid in 1327 when the abbot was sued by the burgesses in the court of King's Bench. When Sir John Howard was made guardian of the abbey in 1327 he was ordered to apply its revenues towards the payment of its debts (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, p. 182).

To return to the events of Rogationtide (May 18th–20th). The friars, who had never assisted before, joined with the chaplains and burgesses in the procession. Tithe and offerings were withheld and the chaplains were bidden on pain of death to cease carrying out their duties, the townsmen preferring, according to the chronicler, to live and die as pagans rather than receive the sacrament from them. This last step seems to have been prompted by the desire to prevent fees for mortuaries and the like going to the convent, and not by animosity towards the chaplains.

The conference arranged at York for the second week of June took place and the delegates were duly sent. Beyond the fact that the two parties were ordered to keep the peace nothing is known of this meeting or its outcome. It was probably about this time that Sir Robert Morley tried to assist the abbey by arranging a settlement between it and the town. He induced the latter to come to terms, but on his departure we are told that the burgesses' malice made itself felt worse than before. The sacrist, William of Stowe, was obliged to seek royal protection so that he might carry on his business in security.

Meanwhile the Crown was still keeping a watch on developments at Bury. In July, the Sheriff, Robert Walkefare, and John Claver were associated with the two guardians of the abbey previously appointed (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, p. 156). On August 1st the king warned the burgesses, in a letter close, that he intended to proceed with vigour against them because, during his absence in Scotland, they had beaten and wounded the abbey's servants, imprisoned and fined them, mowed the meadows, felled the trees, fished in the ponds and altogether had done £200 worth of damage, and this in spite of the

abbey and town being in the king's protection, and of the June conference. On October 16th Sir John Howard was made guardian with power to arrest those who had injured the abbey. This seems to have encouraged the monks for on the 18th they made, according to the complaint of the alderman and burgesses, an armed attack on many of the townsmen, their wives and children when they were worshipping in their parish church. Some of the victims escaped with difficulty. Others were imprisoned and when their deliverance was demanded the townsmen were answered by "setes, peres et engins," which killed a great number. The result was that the whole town rose up in fury and a great part of the abbey was burnt. The alderman and burgesses, in a letter to the city of London, justified their conduct and besought the citizens to defend their just cause. The peroration to their letter provides a good illustration of the self-conscious communal pride of the borough at this time. Aid was asked for "auxint nous sumes prest de vivre et morir pour vestre droit com chescune commune doit pour autre qe nostre querele est la vestre et la vestre la nostre" (Redstone, *T.R.H.S.*, 3rd series, VII, 165).

This attack, the third and most violent, began on Sunday the 18th. The burgesses entered the abbey church threatening death to the monks. Meeting with opposition they retired to summon the community together by ringing the tollhouse bell and the fire bell in St. James' tower. The reliability of the account of this affair, known as the *Deprædatio abbatiæ*, can be tested by the report taken from the jurors summoned to Elvedon after the riot had been quelled. The official record bears out the chronicle in the main facts. According to the jurors, John of Berton, Robert of Foxton, Robert of Ereswell, Michael Scabayle and a host of other less well known people, including a parson, twenty-eight chaplains and two women, took oath to live and die together. They then burnt down the abbey gates, various offices within the great court and monastic property in the town and the surrounding manors. The work of violence lasted until the Thursday evening, with one interval,

in which an attempt to make peace was made. On Wednesday a deputation from the town consisting of Helen of Cossey and a chaplain of St. Mary's had begged the monks to send representatives to St. Mary's Church to discuss terms. Five were sent but this did not satisfy the townsmen and John of Berton, the alderman, demanded that the whole convent, the guardian of the shrine excepted, should come. Twenty-four monks were then sent, only to be seized, and imprisoned for a week. In answer to this treachery the abbot obtained a commission to Thomas, Earl of Norfolk and Marshal of England, to Thomas Bardolf and others to take if necessary the *posse comitatus* of Norfolk and Suffolk, to arrest and imprison those besieging the abbey and to make inquiry about the names of the criminals (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, p. 213. Cp. *Chronicles of Edward I and Edward II*, I, 334).

At first the rebels prepared for resistance but the news that the abbot had secured indictments against them and that the sheriff's force was close at hand induced prudence. The alderman and twenty-four of the burgesses made an effort to obtain the favour of Lord Robert Morley, one of the commissioners, and the next day, when the soldiers entered the town, an attempt was made to gain their sympathy by collecting the bodies of burgesses killed in the conflict and placing them near the great gates of the abbey. But the horror of the sight proved less horrible than the fear of excommunication. Already the Abbot had appealed to the Pope for aid and His Holiness had directed the Abbot of Hulme to use ecclesiastical censures and even a general excommunication against all who refused to return goods plundered from the abbey or who withheld dues. The threat of this excommunication was evidently a serious matter to the burgesses. On September 17th the alderman, burgesses and community of St. Edmund had sent a letter to the abbot of St. Bennet Hulme, begging him not to proceed to excommunication too precipitately but to use his powers with leniency and deliberation. The richer burgesses, or thirty of them, had actually procured papal letters exempting them from such a

penalty. The letter to the abbot was backed up by a deputation of advocates and friends of the town, but any effect these may have had was lost on the appearance of brother William of Gimmingham, sent by the Abbot of Bury to make arrangements for the promulgation of the bull (*Memorials*, iii, pp. 40-43).

The entry of the soldiers led to the immediate release of the imprisoned monks. The Sheriff with a large number of his followers took up residence in the abbey. The Abbot's bailiffs had the dead thrown outside the walls like dogs as was the custom with the excommunicated. Thirty cartloads of prisoners were sent by the Sheriff to Norwich. Meanwhile the Abbot had sued out three separate writs against Robert of Foxton and a host of other laymen and chaplains, and commissions of *oyer* and *terminer* had been appointed to deal with each case. On December 1st justices were commissioned to hear the indictments concerning the disturbances at Bury which the Earl of Norfolk and his colleagues had been taking, in so far as the indictments charged felony. Walter of Friskney, John de Bousser, Robert of Mablethorpe and John Stonar accordingly arrived in Bury and the trial was set on foot on Wednesday, December 16th. It was a long and wearisome business. The copies of writs and the evidence for and against make a bulky assize roll (P.R.O. *Assize Roll*, 854), and the copy of it in the Pinchbeck Register covers a hundred and ninety-eight printed pages.

There can hardly have been much doubt as to the verdict and the justices, in consequence, had a good deal of difficulty in getting the very large number of the accused, well over four hundred men and women, into court. The work was complicated by the fact that the justices were trying two separate charges concurrently, first the charge of felony with the Crown as prosecutor, and secondly the charge of malicious trespass brought by the Abbot in three distinct suits. This distinction was not observed by Yates or Trenholme.

On the first day of the trial the king's prosecutor opened the proceedings against the accused. The indictments taken by the Sheriff and John Claver at

Elveden, on October 26th, were heard. The jury declared that Alderman John of Berton and a varied assortment of people, for the most part apparently of the lower classes, including fourteen women and some chaplains, were guilty of feloniously burning and plundering the abbey property.* The Sheriff was, therefore, ordered to arrest them and have them before the justices on the following Friday (December 17th). When the day came Michael Scabaylle, Ralph the Smeremonger, two leading burgesses, and eighty-five others were acquitted of felony. John of Berton with thirty-one clerks was declared guilty and handed over to the Deacon of St. Edmunds. John was said to have incited the people of the town by telling them that the Abbot had in his custody charters which in their hands would mean acquittance from certain customs and exactions. The day's work was enlivened by one of the accused acting the part of a mute. But he was too well known a character, for the jury declared he could speak well enough if he wished, and he was sent to prison for contempt of court. The rest of the accused, whom the Sheriff had not succeeded in arresting, were ordered to be exacted at every county court.

When the Crown prosecution was resumed on Thursday, May 26th, 1328, all the clerks and seculars present were acquitted of felony though their chattels were declared forfeit as they had previously fled justice. The rest of those indicted, one hundred and fifty-four in number, who still had not appeared in court, were outlawed. Robert of Foxton, an influential burgess, escaped the common fate as he had secured a pardon on February 20th and was consequently dismissed *sine die*. After enquiry had been made about the goods and chattels of the outlaws and those already hung, the Crown case ended.

Meanwhile the Abbot had been proceeding with his suit. On Wednesday, December 16th, the first day of the trial, and on the following Friday he sued, through

*For inquisitions made at Henhow in 1327 before John Howard and Robert Walkefare concerning John of Berton, the alderman, and others, see P.R.O. *Assize Roll*, 862.

his attorney, Robert of Foxton and the rest for trespass. For various reasons his suit was unanswered. John of Berton and others, clerks, had already been convicted of felony and were in prison. Robert of Foxton and a large body of people were returned by the Sheriff as not yet found. Others had been hung. "Ita contra eas partes non procedatur" was the laconic comment. The Abbot prosecuted, in the first place, those who had attacked the abbey, the monks and their servants, and who were supposed to be guilty of the imprisonment of the prior and twelve other monks, of the extortion of an obligation pledging the Abbot and convent to pay the debt of £10,000 which they owed certain burgesses, of the extortion of a release from all actions and suits for debts or trespasses which the Abbot and convent could have against the town and of generally impeding the duties of the Abbot's bailiffs as set forth in the writ of November 2nd. (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1327-30, pp. 217-19). The damage was estimated at £40,000. In the second suit (*Pinchbeck Register*, I, 131), almost identical charges were made with particular reference to the Abbot who was said to have been imprisoned with the other monks and to have been compelled to put his seal as well as the convent's seal to the extorted documents. The accused were also charged with stealing goods to the value of £10,000 and £100 in money, with destroying the abbot's houses in the town and carrying off the timber, with fishing in his fish ponds, rooting up his trees, making hay in his meadows and doing in all £300 worth of damage. In court, the Abbot complained in addition of the armed attack on Thursday, February 5th, when the monks had been obliged to sign the charter granting a commune, and another conceding various liberties including the guardianship of the gates, and of wards and orphans. He claimed £5,000 damages in all. In the third process, initiated by the writ of November 29th, the charges were more serious. In spite of the King's having taken the Abbot and convent and all their belongings under his special protection and having specially forbidden anyone to do them injury, Richard of Drayton and many others had attacked the Abbey on the Sunday (October 18th), set fire to its gates and

buildings, destroyed several houses in the town, chapels and manors. The damage for property burnt and stolen was assessed at £100,000. Richard of Drayton and those who were in court pleaded not guilty. The jury nevertheless decided against them in each case and awarded the Abbot £40,000 damages in the first suit, £33,000 in the second and £60,000 in the third. Richard and those of his associates who were in court were handed over to the Sheriff.

Meanwhile Robert of Foxton and the rest of the fugitives were being demanded in the county court at Ipswich. The summons was made on January 6th and 27th, on March 3rd and 31st and on April 28th. Not until the fifth summons was any appreciable result obtained. Then the main body of the accused gave themselves up and were imprisoned by the Sheriff. The charges against them were repeated at the session held on May 26th and a similar verdict was returned. Robert of Foxton and many others were released from prison on making fine and finding sureties for their keeping the peace.

But the quarrel did not end with the trial. In November, 1328, we find from the Patent Rolls that the king appointed a commission consisting of the Bishop of Ely and two justices to compose the differences between the Abbot and convent and the men of St. Edmundsbury. The events of 1329 were soon to show how ineradicable these differences were. After the feast of Epiphany early in that year John of Berton, the ex-alderman, and Gilbert Barbour, who were still in prison, escaped and fled to the Franciscans at Babwell. Whether their escape was due to the insufficiency of the prison or to the connivance of their goaler cannot now be determined. The latter cause was hinted at, "fregerunt gaolam per assensum ut dicebatur vel negligentiam custodis gaolae." At Babwell, in any case, the fugitives cast off their chains and then fled the district. John of Berton was a dangerous man to be at liberty in a discontented neighbourhood and the Abbot wrote to the Chancellor for assistance, relating the facts of his conviction and escape. (P.R.O., *Ancient Correspondence*,

vol. 35, 199). The Abbot's own authority had broken down in the liberty of the eight and a half hundreds as well as in the borough. In time an abbot was to make the boast that it was "the most notable franchise of good rewle in this lond," but then general lawlessness prevailed. A month or so after the escape of the prisoners a band of fugitives and outlaws came in the middle of the night to St. Edmundsbury and took possession of the town gates. The burgesses, still filled with resentment against the monastery, made no resistance to these breakers of the peace. They allowed them to go to Moyses' hall for breakfast, killing as they went an abbey servant. When the whole town heard of their arrival there was great rejoicing and feasting. The abbey retainers who attempted to arrest them were easily driven off or killed.

The success of this raid may have inspired the more daring one which took place towards the end of the year. On October 17th, John of Berton and Gilbert Barbour, who had taken refuge outside the *banleuca* after their escape, returned with a band of people, all incensed against the abbey. One of them was a knight and a member of a distinguished local family—the Criketots. It is possible that he was genuinely in sympathy with the borough's aspirations but more probable that he wished to take advantage of the lawless times to wreak a private vengeance. Among the rest were some Londoners and two women of St. Edmunds. These people went to the Abbot's Manor at Chevington, plundered it and kidnapped the Abbot. It was an astounding affair and well illustrates not only the contempt into which the Abbot had fallen but also the ineffectiveness of the central administration. They proceeded to take him to London to the house of a tanner in Wode Street. There he was dressed in John of Berton's clothes and his head and eyebrows were shaved so as to disguise him further. After being kept in London for some days, first in a house in Friday Street then in Oldfish Street (*Eldeffyschstrete*), Hamund of Chigwell, once mayor, was bribed into helping the conspirators to get the wretched man smuggled out of England to Brabant.

The ferment at St. Edmund's continued. Just before the Christmas of 1329 some outlaws and other townsmen brought a clerk from Cambridge bearing a forged commission, purporting to be signed with the Abbot's seal, for purging the clerks in Bury goal. They were got out of their prison which was carelessly guarded and a sham ceremony of purgation was conducted at St. Peter's hospital. They then fled towards Cambridge. Some were retaken by the abbey retainers under the steward of the franchise, Ralph of Bocking, and Sir John of Whelneham, but the greater number found safety with the friars minor and in other parts of England.

These crimes were not to go unpunished. The Archbishop of Canterbury excommunicated all concerned in the Abbot's abduction and all those who had stolen the abbey's goods. The Pope did likewise. The King appointed a commission to make inquiry at London concerning thefts. John Coterell, who had received the Abbot in his house in London, and the barber who shaved him were hung. Hamund Chigwell only escaped with his life by pleading benefit of clergy. But it was not until April that through the efforts of his friends the Abbot's whereabouts was discovered and that he was brought back to St. Edmund's. His temporalities were restored on May 5th, and there ended so far as is known this mysterious case of abduction. Whether Gilbert de Criketot or John of Berton was ever brought to justice we cannot tell. There may be some fragment of the truth in the account given in the *Brevis Cronica*, though it is a rather inaccurate and fictitious work. It says that John of Berton was tried for taking part in the attack on the abbey and for the carrying off of the Abbot before the itinerant justices sitting in the tollhouse at St. Edmund's in the seventh year of Edward's reign. He was condemned to perpetual imprisonment and he finally died in Bury gaol. The chronology of the account is obviously very confused. The imprisonment of the subprior and monks in the gildhall which took place early in 1327 is made to occur after the removal of the Abbot to Flanders in the November of 1329. Whether John of Berton died in prison or not we certainly hear

no more of this determined and, from the burgesses' point of view, heroic figure. The convent's opinion of him can be briefly indicated by the words of the *Brevis Cronica*—"de cuius memoria monachis sit minime cura."

The steps taken to punish this outrage on the abbot appear to have done little to restore order in the Liberty. Lawlessness continued to characterize it throughout 1330 and 1331. The hostile relations existing between the abbey and the town were undoubtedly made worse by the attempts to collect the enormous fine, a fine which the burgesses even if they had been willing could not have paid in its entirety. So serious was the state of affairs that on June 6th, 1331, the king himself came to Bury in order to bring about a reconciliation. The chancellor, John of Stonor, John of Cambridge, and others of the royal council, arranged with the Abbot at the king's request that the sum of £122,333 6s. 8d. should be remitted to the offenders. Of the remaining £17,666 13s. 4d., 4,000 marks was to be excused if the townsmen paid 2,000 marks at the rate of 50 marks twice a year within twenty years; another 10,000 marks if they restored all charters and other documents which the Abbot and convent had made both to the town, "sub nomine communitatis dicte ville," and to individuals between the nineteenth year of Edward I and the date of the signing of the present deed, and if the townsmen brought no actions against the Abbot and convent or in any way inconvenienced them by reason of these charters. Furthermore, the townsmen were not to attempt to reverse the judgement given by John of Stonor and his fellow judges, or to sue or annoy in any way the jurors who had indicted and convicted the rebels. A remittance of the whole of the remaining sum was then promised if the townsmen did not rise against the convent again or attempt to procure and maintain a *commune*. Nineteen of the leading burgesses then came before the council and acknowledged for themselves and their heirs that the town was no corporate body—"quod ipsi communitatem in dicta villa de sancto Edmundo de se non habent nec habere debent nec clamant nec clamare poterunt in futuro."

Favourable though this settlement was to the town from a financial point of view it did not restore peace altogether. On October 15th it was found necessary to issue a commission for the arrest of certain of the rioters who had been indicted of felony and were still at large and committing further breaches of the peace. On October 20th a similar commission, recorded in the Patent Rolls, was issued with a further mandate to see that the king's peace was kept at St. Edmund's. As late as 1334 the town was apparently still in a very disturbed state. It was thought necessary to grant the abbey the king's protection in view of his intended expedition to Scotland and the increasing hostility of the townsmen which threatened to ruin the monastery as it had done before, particularly as the recent attack had been made in the absence of the royal army in Scotland.

There is no evidence that the town was paying off the fine agreed upon at this time but it is improbable that it would have risked upsetting a settlement so lenient to it from the financial point of view. (The Abbot and convent, one imagines, could only have been induced to agree to it by the bribe of the royal confirmation of their rights obtained in 1330 when Edward III had confirmed the long *inspeximus* of 8 Edward II and a charter of 10 Edward I). Besides it was certainly paying its fifty marks in 1349, for one of the promised acquittances is still to be found among the Corporation Muniments. In it Abbot William acknowledges that he has received from Richard of Drayton and Ralph the Butcher and other men of the town fifty marks in full payment of the 2,000 marks agreed on between Richard of Draughton, Abbot of St. Edmunds, and certain men of the town.

Thus the burgesses, bid for independence petered out and the monastery backed by royal support reasserted its authority. Attempts were made later on to wring concessions from the town's lord, notably in 1381, but the occasion was never so favourable as in 1327 when the movement for municipal freedom was at its height and the town was led by a group of ardent men bent on acquiring some measure of political freedom.