

## THREE SUFFOLK FIGURES

THOMAS WOLSEY : STEPHEN GARDINER : NICHOLAS BACON

*A Study in Social History*

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It must be said at the outset that this paper is not primarily intended as a study in genealogy. It is rather an attempt to evaluate the social class or classes from which sprang three notable Suffolk figures, each of whom played an important part in the affairs of the country during the century which followed on the close of the Wars of the Roses.

Amid the differences of opinion as to when the period commonly known as the middle ages may be said to have come to an end one significant fact stands forth. That twenty-second of August, 1485, the day on which Richard was alive and was dead, had a particular significance in the history of England. For the next one hundred and twenty years the monarchy was to be vested in the Tudor dynasty, and round the figures of father, son and that son's three children stood those of the men who, in their various degrees, high or low, shared in the governance of England.

Many of these were, what they have been called, new men. Yet even as the machinery of government went creaking on as before with modifications and adaptations, so among those who worked the machinery were many already familiar with it. Nevertheless there was, more particularly perhaps in the higher offices, a more than usually marked infiltration of new comers. Those who resented and disliked them regarded them as upstarts—'spawned on a dung-hill' was the cry of Somerset, himself of the knightly house of Seymour, when he saw William Cecil. But upstarts or no, they were men of ability, some of remarkable ability.

In seeking to ascertain whence came these new men, there lurks always in the background a question which it seems improbable can ever be answered completely and yet is one which affects the entire situation. Recent authorities<sup>1</sup> have emphasized how difficult it is to estimate with any degree of accuracy what was the population of England at any epoch prior to the nineteenth

<sup>1</sup> See Professor Postan and E. E. Rich in the *Economic History Review*, second series, ii, 3, pp. 221 *seqq.*

century. Professor Postan <sup>2</sup> has shown how wages are one of the best and clearest sources in reflecting population trends. But this refers mainly to the labouring and artisan class. At the other end of the scale F. W. Maitland <sup>3</sup> pointed out with reference to the period under review that although the Wars of the Roses combined with attainders and executions had indeed thinned the baronage the result had not been nearly so drastic as had been supposed. But the baronage was always a small class; and one the figures for which, as Maitland shows, had always fluctuated. Between the baronage and the artisans and labourers lay that section of the community covered by the term middle class, always fluid, reinforced, under the conditions of the English social structure, having no *noblesse* in the continental sense nor any rigid caste line, by those drawn from both the other classes above and below. This class, largely engaged in trade and agriculture, had also ever been a source of supply for the church, for the law, and for that vast indeterminate group of petty officials and scribes without whom the business of government, central and local, could not have been carried on. It was from its ranks that the great majority of the new men who were to appear in ever greater numbers as the sixteenth century progressed, were drawn. To say what was its general numerical strength may prove well nigh impossible. One remark may be tentatively ventured here. An examination of this section of society in the counties with their towns and villages suggests that within each community the number of those available for the many services which the system of local government required of them was small. For any given period of years during the epoch examined the same names occur again and again. The like is true of the services the members of the community did each other, for example as gild brothers, as witnesses to deeds and wills. All this could be explained as a case of oligarchies of families keeping power in their own hands. For many reasons this seems unlikely or if so only to a very limited degree. It is at least probable that the rise to prominence of the most able and of course in many cases the most pushing among them was facilitated by the limitation of numbers. Pushing and ambitious those who got on definitely were. But to succeed under the Tudor régime required ability as well as push. The class out of which the new men came had a long tradition of responsibility for local affairs. It also to a greater or less degree according to circumstances shared in what C. L. Kingsford <sup>4</sup> called the intellectual ferment of the fifteenth century, that period of preparation for the great achievements of the new age.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Constitutional History of England*, 1920, p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> *Prejudice and Promise in XVth Century England*, 1925, p. 47.

It is in the light of these general considerations that investigation into the families of the three Suffolk figures was undertaken. No one conducting such an enquiry can fail to be impressed with the richness of local records as a source for social history in general. The rewards of a search among them are very great. The existence of lamentable gaps where it was hoped to elucidate some particular point, and anyone undertaking such work knows well how disconcerting such gaps can be, tantalize even while throwing into relief the importance of the whole. Such gaps will be perceived in what follows.

Of the three figures to be dealt with the first is inevitably as it is chronologically that of Thomas Wolsey. To the patient research of the late Vincent B. Redstone and of his daughter Miss Lilian Redstone<sup>5</sup> all historians who have occasion to deal with the county of Suffolk owe a debt which cannot be over-estimated. It seems unlikely that much more will be learned of the background for Thomas Wolsey than that which Mr. Redstone has uncovered.<sup>6</sup> Yet it is worth while to examine shortly the data he collected in the first place as an illustration of what may and equally what may not be found whence a great man sprang and what was his early life; and in the next to note what deductions may be drawn therefrom.

There can be no doubt that Thomas was the son of Robert Wolsey of Ipswich and Joan his wife. The often quoted will of Robert<sup>7</sup> is really sufficient proof, but there is an additional piece of evidence to be mentioned shortly. Robert, whose name is also found as Wulcy and Walcy, may not originally have been an inhabitant of the town. It was Mr. Redstone's opinion that he migrated thither from elsewhere in Suffolk, perhaps from the neighbourhood of Beccles. What must be said is that he appears, with no ascertainable background, as living in the parish of St. Mary Elms by 1467, perhaps a little earlier. There he carried on a trade which covered, as was by no means uncommon, a multitude of activities. He was an innkeeper and also a butcher. In both capacities he was constantly in trouble with the authorities, being presented in the Court Leet not once but often; for breaking the assize of beer; for extortionate prices at his inn; for selling bad meat in the market; for selling meat from unbaited bulls and for

<sup>5</sup> I should like to take here the opportunity of thanking Miss Redstone for the invaluable help given by her while I have been writing this paper; and for the generosity with which she placed her father's notes at my disposal. Without her skilful research and great knowledge of the local records it would have been impossible for the work to have been completed.

<sup>6</sup> *cf. Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, xv, pp. 11 *seqq*; also *East Anglian Daily Times*, 13 March 1930.

<sup>7</sup> Norwich Consistory Court, reg. Multon, p. 146.

depasturing his beasts in the town ditches.<sup>8</sup> Then in 1473 or thereabouts he and Joan purchased a messuage and houses in the parish of St. Nicholas, at a price of £8 6s. 8d., to be paid off at the rate of £1 a year.<sup>9</sup> That they moved thither is again proven by the Court Leet books; for the prosecutions continued. A presentment in January 1477 was for making and selling bad meat pies. Here he was definitely described as a butcher. The picture of Robert that emerges thus is hardly one of a citizen of credit and renown. Yet an examination of other prosecutions not only in Ipswich but elsewhere suggests that Robert, if certainly not better, was perhaps not much worse than the majority of his kind. His two more responsible actions for which there is a record are that in 1479 he was himself a juror in the Ipswich court of Common Pleas;<sup>10</sup> and in 1491 he was churchwarden in the church of St. Nicholas.<sup>11</sup>

What then appears is that nothing is so far known of the origins of the father of the future Cardinal but they were probably humble. He is seen first as a petty tradesman in the thriving borough and port of Ipswich; always breaking rules, in common with most of his fellows; paying the penalty when found out; taking a small and in no wise considerable share in the affairs of borough and church; probably making a sufficient livelihood but not being really well-to-do.

In which of the two parishes of those where his father lived Thomas was born remains an open question, depending on the date of his birth, unknown, but taken to be some time between 1471 and 1475. Nor can his figure as child or boy be once discerned in those early years. That he attended the grammar school, recently enriched by the endowment of Richard Felaw is merely a supposition.<sup>12</sup> The first signpost in his career belongs to the year 1497 when he became Fellow of Magdalen; to be ordained the following year, March 1497/8, at Marlborough.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless one point of some importance remains to be discussed. It is quite possible that Thomas owed more to his mother and her family than to his father. The maiden name of the wife and mother, Joan, has not come to light. But Mr. Redstone's conclusion that she was connected with either the family of Cady, yeomen, of Ipswich and Stoke by Ipswich; or that of Daundy, merchants of Ipswich, or quite likely with both, is of much interest. Both families were well-to-do and both somewhat superior in the social scale, as far as these things can be estimated, to Robert Wolsey. It was Thomas Cady, yeoman,

<sup>8</sup> Ipswich Corporation Records, Leet Rolls, 6 Ed. VI, *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, Recognizance Rolls, 18 Ed. IV, Thursday after St. Barnabas.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, Petty Pleas, 18 Ed. IV, Thursday after Epiphany.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, General Court Book, 7-9 Hen. VIII.

<sup>12</sup> *cf.* Gray and Potter, *Ipswich School, 1400-1950*, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> *English Historical Review*, ix, p. 709.

who was executor to Robert. His own will shows him a prosperous citizen owning property in St. Mary Elms and St. Nicholas as well as in Stoke.<sup>14</sup> The other family, that of Daundy, seems to have been even better off, having connections with families of substance in East Suffolk. That between them and the Wolseys was some close link is evident, since in February 1509/10 Edmund Daundy had licence to found a perpetual chantry at the altar of St. Thomas in the church of St. Lawrence, Ipswich, with one priest to say mass for, *inter alia*, himself, his wife and son; for Thomas Wolsey, dean of Lincoln; and for Robert Wolsey and Joan his wife, father and mother of the said Thomas.<sup>15</sup>

Here is corroborative evidence to the will for Wolsey's parentage. It is difficult not to assume that some particularly close link, almost certainly in the nature of kinship, brought the names of the two families, each father, mother and son, into juxtaposition in this act of piety to ensure welfare of those prayed for here and hereafter.

Certainly if Joan were of the Daundy family and very probably if she sprang from the Cady family she had connections superior to those of her husband. If so, it was not an unusual case. Investigation into communities within other counties again suggests that while the families composing such were almost invariably of many gradations in general prosperity yet groups over-lapped one with the other; there were common interests; and certainly inter-marriage. The advantage to the offspring of such marriages could be considerable. Edmund Daundy included Thomas Wolsey, then well on his way to greatness, in the masses to be sung by the chantry priest. It can but be speculation, yet it is tempting to suppose that the Daundy connection may have helped him materially. Cavendish it will be remembered says that he was 'conveyed to the University of Oxford' by his parents *or* by his good friends and masters. Another influence arising from the connection is even more elusive. But the play of heredity is incalculable and the Cardinal that was to be may have derived some of his talents from the distaff side.

The great instance of the personal contact of Thomas with Ipswich belongs as is well known to the last year of his triumphal career, the final glory of the flame that was about to be ruthlessly extinguished by the king. In the early autumn of 1528 one Thomas Cromwell was in Ipswich, sent there with others by the Cardinal to supervize the preparations for the ceremonies which were to mark the formal inauguration of the college planned for the native

<sup>14</sup> Archd. Suffolk, bk. ii, f. 4; *cf.* also H. G. Casley, *East Anglian Notes and Queries*, n.s., ii, pp. 21 *seqq.*

<sup>15</sup> L. and P., Hen. VIII, 1 (1) p. 381 (69).

town of the great Churchman.<sup>16</sup> Cromwell's special function was to supervise the placing of the hangings which with the magnificent copes and other vestments had been sent down from London for use in the hall and for wearing in the procession planned for Tuesday, 7 September; a procession which owing to a remorseless downpour of rain never took place. Cromwell stood high in the circle around the prelate; so did one Stephen Gardiner, who the previous July had been one of the commissioners appointed to examine statutes for the College. And Stephen himself was of Suffolk, although not of Ipswich.

Behind the borough and port lay the hinterland, with its towns and villages, largely given up to sheep-farming and cloth weaving; receiving goods from the distributing ports and sending out its own, chiefly cloth, in return. Here, in Bury St. Edmunds, was found the family of Gardiners or Gardeners, long established in the town, prosperous trading members of a thriving industrial centre.

On 20 November 1507 was proved, before the Sacristan of St. Edmund in the Sacristy, the will of John Gardener, clothmaker. It had been drawn up the previous January.<sup>17</sup> This is an admirable example of a document of the kind from which a good deal of information can be deduced. The customary first paragraphs refer to the Church of St. James. There the testator desires to be buried, in the north aisle, before the Salutation of Our Lady standing by a glass window, with a new Salutation to replace the old. A priest is to have a stipend of £10 13s. 4d. to sing masses for the soul of the testator 'and all my good friends' souls that I am bound to'; twenty shillings goes to the high altar; and a cope worth £10 is to be provided to be worn by the priest of the Candlemas Gild in procession. That gild was outstanding in Bury when by reason of the Abbey the town had no self government. Then follow those details which reveal something of the testator's trading and home circumstances. Here are references to the fulling mill; to the two stalls standing in the great market; to the cross beams with the scales and five leaden weights; to the sherman shears; to the looms, one broad and two narrow. There is mention of household goods and personal possessions; among them a red 'cors gyrdell' powdered with gold and harnessed with silver; paternosters silver and gilt; beads of white amber. There were tenements with a garden on Sparrow Hill held of the hospital of St. Nicholas; there were four acres of meadow land; there was also a further distribution of monies. Here is a flourishing industrialist of Bury, with close affiliations to the Church of St. James and interest in the Candlemas

<sup>16</sup> See L. Redstone, *Ipswich Through the Ages*, 1948, pp. 80 *seqq.*, Gray and Potter, *op. cit.*, pp. 18 *seqq.*; *V. C. H. Suffolk*, ii, p. 143.

<sup>17</sup> Bury Wills, bk. vi, f. 196, printed in *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, i, pp. 329-30.

Gild. He left a widow, Agnes; three sons, William, John and Stephen; two daughters, Rose and Joan. Of the latter, Rose was to enter religion; Joan was destined for marriage. The sons, William and John, were to inherit, with some consideration for Agnes, the *imbedimenta* of their father's trade. It was otherwise for Stephen. The wording of the bequest to him runs:

. . . to Stevyn my son 20 marks to his exhibition to find him to school to be paid him as he shall need it honestly.

. . . to said Stevyn, when 21, a silver salt with cover parcel gilt weighing 13 oz. a maser with 3 feet, silver & gilt, 6 silver spoons 'knopped' with lions (together  $7\frac{1}{2}$  oz.).

to said Stevyn, £4 to be paid him by Agnes my wife when he shall take commencement in the school at the University. If he die before that time, the £4 to be paid to Thomas Edon & Richard Edon, 'gentlemen' to remain to John & Jone my children . . . to said Stevyn a featherbed, bolster, red coverlet of damask work wrought with five 'Jhesus' thereon, one pair blankets, one pair sheets. . . .

This boy Stephen was thus clearly under age at the time. This by the wording of the will applies also to his sisters and his brother John. William had perhaps attained twenty-one, as he was to have his legacy paid within a year. It must then be asked whether this Stephen was indeed the future Bishop of Winchester. It must be said at once that here, unlike the case of Thomas Wolsey, there is no absolute proof of identity. There is however a very high degree of probability; and the parentage is accepted by Venn<sup>18</sup> and by James Gairdner.<sup>19</sup> In addition to the evidence cited by them, there is a small point to be noticed in connection with the will. John Gardener mentioned that one of his stalls in the market was let to a Thomas Chesteyn. This was almost certainly the Thomas Chesteyn or Cheston, a tanner whose will was proved in 1513.<sup>20</sup> It again shows a well-to-do Bury tradesman. Now the Bishop of Winchester left several bequests to members of the 'Cheston' family in his will,<sup>21</sup> including £40 to 'my godson Cheston of Burye'. This is not conclusive evidence, any more than the fact that search has revealed no other Stephen Gardiner in Bury or at Cambridge who fits in; as said earlier, all we have is a high degree

<sup>18</sup> *Alumni Cantab.*, ii, p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> *cf.* the essay on Gardiner in *Typical English Churchmen*, series ii, pp. 169 *seqq.* (Church Historical Society, 1909).

<sup>20</sup> *Bury Wills*, bk. vii, f. 26.

<sup>21</sup> PCC 3 Woodes.

of probability. As for the age there is the usual doubt concerning the year of the birth. The *Dictionary of National Biography* gives it first as 1483 but afterwards implies it might be as late as 1490. Gairdner would prefer to make it 1493. Certainly a year considerably later than 1483 applies better to the known facts of the Bishop's career as it does also to the wording of the will.

Then as to Agnes. It may be that she was John's second wife. The constant occurrence of second and also not infrequently third marriages does not make the path of the genealogists any easier; that they did occur with such frequency is of considerable interest for social history. In this case of John Gardener we have an indenture dated at Bury 3 October, 18 Henry VII (1502) whereby William and Walter Copynger enfeoff John Gardener cloth maker and Agnes Copyldyke of a tenement called The Bole in the Mustow (now Angel Hill).<sup>22</sup> John and Agnes and their assigns were to have the tenement for life. After their deaths it was to revert to William and Walter. The Copynger family, also engaged in the wool trade, was well known in Bury. There is little doubt that this Walter was the Walter Copynger, cloth maker, whose will<sup>23</sup> was proved in November 1506. His executor was William Copynger, woolman. Like John Gardener he desired to be buried in the church of St. James. The indenture between the Copyngers and John and Agnes shows a very good signature of John and his seal, with the device of a spindle or perhaps a distaff. The seal of Agnes, with a blurred device, is also appended, but she does not sign. This looks remarkably like an impending marriage between John and Agnes; while the date, 1502, in view of the children mentioned in the will, makes it certain it was a second marriage. Gairdner had surmised that Agnes was not John's first wife but thought she was the mother at least of Stephen. He did not however it seems know of the indenture which would put Stephen's birth at an improbable although of course just possible late date.

Gairdner founded his supposition on clauses in John's will similar to that which gave the custody of the £4 which Agnes was to pay Stephen; or, in the event of his death before he came of age, to Thomas and Richard Edon. The two were also, should Agnes die leaving children under age, to have the custody of the latter's money and goods; and the 'keeping of the shears'. They were further appointed to receive certain debts due to John Gardener. Richard Edon had the testator's best gown as a legacy. Now these two Edons seem to be the two sons of those names mentioned in the will of one Thomas Edon dated September 1495.<sup>24</sup> Thomas was also almost certainly the one of that name who had been

<sup>22</sup> Bury Muniment Room, E3/10/10.11.    <sup>23</sup> Bury Wills, bk. vi, f. 182

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, bk. vi, f. 44; *cf.* also f. 178.

feoffor with John Gardener and others of two closes which a priest, Master of the Lazar Hospital of St. Peter's had given to the use of the Hospital.<sup>25</sup> The bequest was to be administered by the Candlemas Gild; it was typical of the kind of business undertaken by the Gild in which John Gardener played his part. In this deed Thomas Edon is also called 'gentleman'. There are indications, though no more, that this family were connected with the Edens of Sudbury,<sup>26</sup> a 'Visitation' family. It is tempting to think that John Gardener's first wife and Stephen's mother may have been an Edon. The evidence is as much and as little as for the Wolsey-Daundy connection. What does emerge in each case is the manner in which families of a somewhat different social status acted together. There is however here one further point to be made. We know from a letter of Stephen Gardiner found at Breslau and written to Erasmus that he had memories of a visit to Paris, sometime about 1511 where he lived in the household of an Englishman named Eden residing in the street of St. John.<sup>27</sup> Thither had come Erasmus; and then follows the delightful picture of the lad preparing daily for the great man a dish of lettuce cooked with butter and sour wine, received with much approbation. No evidence has so far been found to connect this Eden resident in Paris with the Edons of Bury. That Stephen should have been sent to the former is at least suggestive. There are gaps here; but the picture of John Gardener and his family as it is taken from wills and deeds shows a prosperous trader's household; having substantial and even elegant possessions; playing their part in the life of the town; having many affiliations with other industrialists; pious and closely connected with the church of St. James.

It should be possible to take the story of this family further back; representing something of a tradition in their trade of cloth-making and their attachment to the church of St. James. That John's father and the Bishop's grandfather was Stephen Gardener whose will<sup>28</sup> was proved in 1473 is proven by the mention in that will of the tenements on Sparrow Hill which were spoken of in John's will and bequeathed to his son William. This Stephen like his son after him was connected with the Church of St. James; left money for the High Altar, 'for forgotten tythe'; and for a chaplain to sing mass for his soul. Wills, deeds and such sources as lists of Aldermen<sup>29</sup> reveal other Gardeners who may have been direct ancestors of, or closely connected with, the family from which the

<sup>25</sup> Bury Muniment Room, H 1/5/19.

<sup>26</sup> cf. J. J. Howard, *Visitation of Suffolk, 1561*, i, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> Gairdner, *loc. cit.*, appendix, note 2. (See note 19 above).

<sup>28</sup> PCC 4 Wattys.

<sup>29</sup> cf. Lobel, Bailiffs and Aldermen of Bury, (*Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, xxii, p. 17).

Bishop of Winchester had gone forth from Bury, by way of Cambridge, to high success.<sup>30</sup>

It will be remembered that although Stephen Gardiner's path of preferment lay, as Wolsey's had done, through the Church, yet he was a Doctor of Civil as well as of Canon law. Mr. Gairdner remarks that to Henry it was most important to have a legally minded Bishop such as was he of Winchester for Councillor. It is a point stressed also by Professor Pollard who also quotes Du Bellay's remark that Gardiner's power would have been increased had he abandoned his clerical vows.

Du Bellay's remark was a reflection on the importance attached to the branch of learning that was represented by the second degree, that of Doctor of Civil Law, held by Gardiner. The law, that great and intricate structure with its forms forever multiplying to meet the demands of an expanding society,<sup>31</sup> afforded a livelihood to myriads of scribes and clerks even while it opened up in its higher ranks opportunities for the ambitious at least as great as, if not greater, than those offered by the Church. The third figure in the Suffolk trilogy took advantage of those opportunities to the full.

Nicholas Bacon sprang from the family of that name found at Hessel, a village lying between Bury St. Edmunds and Stowmarket about nine miles south-east of the former, and like others in that hinterland, they had long been engaged in sheep farming.

Once more we may begin with a will, and one that like that of John Gardener is an informative will. The testament of Robert Bacon of Hessel is dated 10 August 1548. It was proved on 10 December that same year.<sup>32</sup> It shows that the testator was farming his own land at Hessel and that he had more land at Drinkstone, a village near at hand. The holdings were partly freehold, partly copyhold, with one piece of leasehold. He left a widow, Isabel, and three sons James, Thomas and Nicholas. As in the case of Thomas Wolsey but not in that of Stephen Gardiner, there is absolute proof of the identity of Nicholas as the future Lord Keeper. The bequest to him in the will runs:

To Nicholas my son all the sheep that I have going at the day of my decease upon the farm that he and I have in farm of the Mayor and Chamberlain of Thetford, he to pay the whole farm the year I die.

<sup>30</sup> The story that the Bishop was the illegitimate offspring of Lionel Woodville, Bishop of Salisbury, is now generally discredited. It will be found in full with copious notes in S. H. Casson, *Lives of the Bishops of Winchester*, 1827, i, pp. 441 *seqq.*

<sup>31</sup> Dr. Helen Cam in the introduction to her *England before the Reformation*, (Home University Library, 1950).

<sup>32</sup> PCC 19 Populwell.

The acquittance which shows that the farm (or rent) was duly paid by the son in 1549 has survived. It names him Nicholas Bacon, Esq., Attorney of the King's Wards.<sup>33</sup> He was now, at the time of his father's death, well up the ladder of advancement in the law; and if the generally accepted date of his birth, 1509, is correct, was close on forty years of age. Once again there is no conclusive evidence whereby the date of birth can be verified, but 1509 fits in well enough with the entrance in 1523 into Corpus Christi College Cambridge and with other known dates in the great lawyer's career. The statement that the birth place was Chislehurst has not so far been verified<sup>34</sup> nor has any evidence been found that the boy was educated at the Abbey School of Bury St. Edmunds, though that is a likely supposition enough.

What the will shows is that Robert Bacon of Hessel and Drinkstone was a yeoman in prosperous circumstances. On his land he had good stock of horse, neat and swine with corn, malt and wood. All these went to the widow Isabel. She too was to enjoy the various tenements, excepting the piece of land having the sheep on it, in farm of the Mayor of Thetford, during her lifetime. The remainder was to the son James. She and James also had the household goods, including bedding, silver and silver gilt, brass and pewter, divided between them. These two were in fact the principal beneficiaries under the will. The explanation may be a simple one. Nicholas was well embarked on his own career. So too was the other brother Thomas, who was bequeathed an annuity of twenty marks. He like Nicholas had left Hessel to seek his fortune in London. There he had gone into business. An acquittance, dated 1543, in which he is seen acting with Nicholas, calls him Thomas Bacon, merchant. In another, dated four years later, he appears, again acting in conjunction with his brother, as citizen and salter of London. In that year, already an Alderman, he became member for the City.<sup>35</sup>

Now it seems likely that James also sought a career in the City, that is if he were, as generally stated, the James Bacon who was citizen and fishmonger, became Sheriff in 1568 and was buried in St. Dunstan in the East in 1573.<sup>36</sup> He also appears in deeds acting with Nicholas and Thomas. The dates suggest that he was a good deal younger than his brothers, a supposition which is borne out by the will. He may even have been a stepbrother. Here occurs once more the tiresome question of a second marriage. There

<sup>33</sup> This and other acquittances cited later are from the copy, in the Ipswich Library, taken by the Rev. E. Farrer, from a Book of Acquittances which was formerly in Redgrave Hall and is now at the University of Chicago.

<sup>34</sup> It is given in Hasted's *History of Kent*, i, p. 97, with no reference.

<sup>35</sup> Beaver's *Aldermen of London*, i, p. 274.

<sup>36</sup> See Stow's *Survey*, ed. Kingsford, i, p. 134.

is nothing whatsoever in the will to show whether Isabel were the mother of all three sons or no. In the Visitation of 1561 the mother of Nicholas is called Eleanor, daughter of John Cage of Pakenham, Suffolk; in that of 1612 her name is changed to Isabel. The confusion of Christian names may not mean very much. It occurred with some frequency. But it seems that all the Heralds really knew was that Robert Bacon had married into a family named Cage, who were of Pakenham. The name is found in that village and some of the family at least were clothiers. They do not appear as in anything but quite moderate circumstances, and were possibly somewhat inferior in standing to the Bacons. But the Heralds also gave the Lord Keeper two sisters; Barbara married to Robert Sharpe of Bury St. Edmunds and Anne to Robert Blackman of the same place. That these two were the daughters of a Robert Bacon; and that a connection existed between the Bacon and Cage families is proven by the will <sup>37</sup> of one Margaret Cage styled of Hessel, who died in 1520. She made a Robert Bacon her executor and residuary legatee; and left bequests to his son John and his daughters Barbara and Ann. John may have died young but if the father of Barbara and Ann was also the father of Nicholas and his two brothers it is curious that he does not mention the daughters in his will, and Barbara at least did not die until 1571.<sup>38</sup> It is almost as curious that Margaret Cage ignored the other three. All that is certain, by reason of the many transactions they undertook together, is that Nicholas and Thomas were brothers, sons of Robert Bacon, yeoman of Hessel; and that there was a third, James, who was either brother or step-brother. Barbara and Anne certainly existed but their exact relationship to the Lord Keeper is doubtful. Nor can it be proven with exactitude who was the latter's mother. That she was of the Cage family may be assumed.

Nicholas and Thomas then, with probably James after them, went forth from a yeoman's family to seek careers in law and in business. Canon Cooke in his researches into the history of Hessel <sup>39</sup> showed that the grandfather of the Lord Keeper was likewise a yeoman, John Bacon styled of Hessel late of Drinkstone. His will printed by Canon Cooke, was drawn up and proved in 1500. It reveals him as an ordinary, tolerably well-off yeoman. But he had relatives of more importance in the world of Suffolk than himself; and he mentions one of them in his will, calling him his kinsman Thomas Bacon of Hessel gentleman with his manor of Barton by Mildenhall, which is Barton Ferry. Thomas—his own father is shown by Canon Cooke to have been a John Bacon—must have been a youngish man in 1500. His own will was drawn up in March

<sup>37</sup> Bury Wills, bk. x, f. 74.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, bk. xxxi, f. 296.

<sup>39</sup> Materials for the History of Hessel (*Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, v, pp. 1 *seqq.*).

1546/7 and proved the following June.<sup>40</sup> It is a long will and the testator was a man of wealth, sheep-farming on an extensive scale—he left 300 wethers to his wife and there were other flocks—with goods and chattels befitting his position in life. His executor was Nicholas Bacon, Attorney, who also appended a note dated 5th June that it had been ‘subscribed and redde by me, Nicholas Bacon’. He himself had a bequest of twenty wethers. It is abundantly clear that the two related families, the one of a yeoman and the other of a much wealthier sheep farmer styled ‘gentleman’, had always been in close touch with one another. It is the existence of these kinsmen with the same surname and the Christian names only too often duplicated, at least in the eyes of genealogists, which perhaps led the Heralds into some confusion. But then the Heralds were ever anxious to prove a reputable descent, and more, for their clients—Canon Cooke points out that Dethick for one tried to tack the Lord Keeper on to a knightly family. In fact, whenever a ‘new man’ reached eminence, the work of exaltation or alternatively denigration of his origins went merrily on, in his lifetime and long beyond it.

But when Nicholas ‘supervised’ the will of his relative he himself had since some years been styled both ‘gentleman’ and ‘esquire’.<sup>41</sup> In his public life he was now Solicitor to the Court of Augmentations. In his private life he had commenced to buy land, in London and in his native county.<sup>42</sup> It was not unfitting that what were, it seems, his earliest purchases in Suffolk were connected with sheep farming. In 1542 he had become possessed of Ingham manor with the stock upon it; as well as a parcel of lands near his old home, with a foldcourse for 600 sheep,<sup>43</sup> and both properties were late of the Abbey of St. Edmund. Nothing has so far been found to show the truth or otherwise of the statement that the Lord Keeper’s father had been sheep reeve of the Abbey. From what has been gathered concerning the father it seems unlikely it was he who held this office. It is possible that the grandfather or a more distant relative did so. But sheep-farming is the most vibrant note in the background of the Lord Keeper. To study the story of his forbears as of those of Stephen Gardiner, the offspring of a clothmaker, is to realise anew the truth, as one always must, of Dr. Eileen Power’s dictum that ‘The trade which gave England her key position was bound to dominate the domestic scene’.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> PCC 41 Alen.

<sup>41</sup> *cf.* Acquittances, note 33 above.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> In the introduction to *The Wool Trade in English Medieval History*, (Ford Lectures), p. 17.

Looking then at the achievements of these three Suffolk worthies in relation to the environment whence they sprang differences can be perceived. Thomas Wolsey's father died before the son was well set on his career. The Ipswich borough records show his mother Joan carrying on her husband's business as a widow. In 1499 or a little before she married again, a man called William Patent.<sup>45</sup> Nothing has so far emerged concerning her subsequent history; nor has anything been found concerning the Cardinal's stepfather. The Cadys and the Daundys too remain dim figures, save only for the foundation of the chantry. But behind the portly, berobed, bejewelled figure with the broad fleshy face of Henry's minister in all his glory images can be discerned. There is no evidence that Wolsey took any interest in the daughter who was thrust into a convent. But no one can accuse him of neglecting to forward the advantage of the son, Edward Winter. Nor can he be reproached with forgetting his native town. Had not nemesis been close on his footsteps when he planned his College, the town of Ipswich might have benefited greatly. In the end it was the king who was the beneficiary of that staggering accumulation of wealth.

Stephen Gardiner came of a more stable and more prosperous family than did the other great ecclesiastic who was his patron. Yet, looking at his will it seems as if Bury and the group of clothiers and other industrialists who had made up the family circle of his boyhood were further from the Bishop of Winchester in his prosperity than had been Ipswich from the Cardinal of York in his. Stephen Gardiner's will<sup>46</sup> is that of a wealthy man, although of course that wealth does not even approach the opulence of the other. Still there was a good deal of money to distribute. There were also fine hangings; and articles of gold set with jewels. But no relative is mentioned among the legatees. Here however it must in fairness be said that if, as seems likely, Stephen was among the younger members of his family, or was perhaps the youngest of them, his brothers and sisters may well have all pre-deceased him. With one, and apparently only one, Bury family he had kept in touch, as shown by the already mentioned legacy to his godson Paul Cheston or Chesteyn together with bequests to other members of that family. Otherwise his monies and possessions went to the Queen; to Winchester Cathedral; to the Legate, who had a diamond ring 'too small for him but as big as this testator can afford'; and to a long list of beneficiaries many of whom were clearly of his household. And for himself he provided well in death; £500 for the funeral; £300 for a chantry; £400 for the tomb. The will of Stephen Gardiner Bishop of Winchester has similarities with that

<sup>45</sup> Ipswich Corporation Records, 15 Hen. VII, Tuesday after St. Bartholomew.

<sup>46</sup> See note 17 above.

of Thomas Gardener, clothman; and yet strikes a different note.

Now the Gardeners and their circle, like the Wolseys with the Cadys and the Daundys, represent groups from each of which had sprung a single great man. The members of the groups themselves remained perhaps pretty much as they always had been. Nor in the nature of things could either Thomas Wolsey or Stephen Gardiner found a family of his own. The case of Nicholas Bacon, of a younger generation, the lawyer and not ecclesiastic, is far otherwise.

It is true that Nicholas was the outstanding success of a yeoman family. But in their own world of business his brothers were also very successful men. And always, in their personal affairs, indicated by deeds and acquittances, Nicholas, the legal luminary and Thomas, citizen, salter and Alderman of London, sometimes with James, fishmonger and Sheriff of London joined to them, are seen acting together. They were indeed a family firm. So, too, in the same documents we may watch the transformation of the plain Nicholas Bacon to Nicholas Bacon gentleman and then esquire, ever in his offices mounting the legal ladder until at last he is the Lord Keeper. More than this, he is all the time buying land; and presently he begins to build, so that he becomes Sir Nicholas Bacon of Redgrave Hall, once the hunting lodge of the Abbey of St. Edmund, in his own county of Suffolk, the founder of a family destined to lend fresh lustre to the name. This is the tale of an Elizabethan *arriviste*; the yeoman's son who became the well-nourished figure—'his soul lodged well' remarked his Queen—which was the great lawyer, the man of wealth, the country gentleman.

The question must always be asked, and perhaps always remain unanswered, as to what inheritance of genes produced a Wolsey, a Gardiner, a Bacon from a petty tradesman's family of Ipswich, from that of a clothman in Bury St. Edmunds, from a third family of old yeoman stock.