

STEPHEN GARDINER AND BURY ST. EDMUNDS

By ARTHUR OSWALD.

Miss Gladys Scott Thomson in her delightful paper, *Three Suffolk Figures*,¹ has adduced fresh evidence about the presumed parentage of Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester. It seems virtually certain that his father was the Bury clothmaker, John Gardener, whose will was proved before the Sacrist on 20 November 1507, though wisely, perhaps, since it is only too easy to jump to wrong conclusions in researches that concern medieval documents, Miss Scott Thomson points out that the identification has 'no absolute proof', only 'a very high degree of probability'. It may be of interest to cite a few additional facts that establish the Bishop's connection with Bury St. Edmunds beyond a doubt and which show that he kept in closer touch with 'the group of clothiers and other industrialists who had made up the family circle of his boyhood' than a reading of his will by itself might suggest.

Early in 1530 the Abbot of Bury had an office to fill. On 13 July 1528 a grant of the Hospital outside the South Gate of Bury called *Domus Dei* had been made to Master Thomas Larke, priest.² Less than two years later, 'through the cession or demise of the said Thomas', there was a vacancy, and on 8 March 1529/30 the Abbot, Prior and Convent granted the Hospital to Master Stephen Gardiner, Archdeacon of Taunton.³ Thomas Larke was in all probability the important ecclesiastic who had been chaplain to Henry VII and Secretary to Wolsey, Archdeacon of Sudbury (1517-22), Archdeacon of Norwich (1522-28), Surveyor of the Works at King's College Chapel, Cambridge, during the final phase of building, Surveyor of the Works at the Palace of Bridewell, and Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge (1517-25). His successor in the mastership at Trinity Hall was the future Bishop of Winchester. There is reason for thinking that Thomas Larke was himself a native

¹ *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, xxv, pp. 149-163:

² B. M. Harl. MS. 308, f. 85.

³ *ibid.*, f. 88a. As Archdeacon of Taunton, Gardiner assisted in the examination of heretics in the chapter house of Westminster Abbey 8 February 1526; he attended Convocation in the same capacity in 1529 (*L. and P. Hen. VIII*, iv, pp. 885-6 and 2698). His tenure of this office is not mentioned by Venn (*Alumni Cantabrigienses*) or the writer of the account of him in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, who, in common with Blomefield (*History of Norfolk*) and other writers, state that he was Archdeacon of Norfolk 1529-31. Their authority is Le Neve, but his accuracy on this point is questioned by Brewer (*L. and P. Hen. VIII*, iv, p. 2699n).

of Bury, perhaps a son of Thomas Larke, vintner, of Bury, who died in 1500.⁴ Indeed one is inclined to suspect that Larke, whose 'omnipotent' influence with Wolsey is mentioned by Ammonius in a letter to Erasmus. (26 June 1515), may have played a not inconsiderable part in launching the young Stephen Gardiner on his career.

When Gardiner received this grant from the Abbot of Bury he had been Master of Trinity Hall for nearly five years, but Cambridge is not far from Bury, and in 1529 he was there some time after Michaelmas, when we find him auditing the accounts of the supervisors of the lands and tenements bequeathed to the town by John Smyth, William Fyssh and Margaret Newhawe. This property was administered by the Candlemas Guild. In the Bodleian Library there is a series of *compoti* of the supervisors of the Guild, extending from 1520 to 1534,⁵ which show that four supervisors were appointed annually and that at the end of the year (Michaelmas to Michaelmas) their accounts came before four auditors 'chosen and assigned to audit and terminate the comptus'. First named of the four auditors for the year 1528-29 is Master Stephen Gardyner, clerk.⁶ It would appear, therefore, that he was himself a member of this influential guild of townsmen.

On 31 May 1538, Robert Payn of Bury, 'Coverlettwever', made his will.⁷ He was of St. James's parish, and he desired that there should be bought by his executrix, his wife, Joan, 'A paull coloure blake velvet' for the church 'patroned in lyke to the blake paull longing to Seynt Mary Churche'.⁸ But there is a more personal bequest that jumps to the eye: 'to my lorde of Wynchester a Rynge of the fyve woundes the whiche his Lordship dyd giue me wt so good a wyll as ever I receuyd yt of hym'. The will of his widow, Joan Payne, dated 8 March 1541/2, and proved 2 September following, affords further information.⁹

Item I bequeth to my lorde bysshop of Wynchester that now ys my stonding cupp with the couer double gilt.

Further on, we find her bequeathing her 'hole bedde as yt stonndith hoolly in my parlour in the whiche my lord was wonte to lye in wt all the hangings in or about the sayd parlour'. And then it transpires that William Payne is 'servaunte to my sayd lorde bysshop' of

⁴ Bury Wills, book vi, f. 93.

⁵ Bodl. MS. Top. Suffolk b. 1, fol. 8 *et seq.*

⁶ This is the only appearance which Stephen Gardiner makes in these *compoti*, but in the accounts for the years that follow the auditors' names are not given.

⁷ Proved 10 December 1540 (P.C.C. 18 Alenger).

⁸ There is an embroidered black velvet funeral pall of this period belonging to St. Peter's Church, Sudbury.

⁹ P.C.C. 9 Spert.

Wynchester'. He was to have 'one goblet of syluer parcell gilte and one Cubberd whiche he desired of me wt one bason and one Ewer standing vpon the same Cubberd'. William Payne had a son, Robert, to whom she left two silver spoons and to whom her husband had left a legacy of £20 when he should reach the age of twenty-one. Joan Payne, it would appear, was *née* Rudland for she mentions her 'brother Rauf Rudlond of Long Melford'. Otherwise one might feel tempted to suppose that she was the Bishop's sister, the Joan, daughter of John Gardener, named in the clothmaker's will.¹⁰

Miss Scott Thomson has suggested a connection between the Gardiners and the Cheston (or Chesten) family of Bury, pointing out that John Gardener, the clothmaker, mentions in his will that one of his stalls in the market place was let to a Thomas Chesteyn, probably the tanner whose will was proved in 1513,¹¹ and that the Bishop made several bequests to members of the Cheston family. Robert Payn, the coverletweaver, appointed William Cheston as supervisor of his will, while Joan, his widow, made bequests not only to William Chesten (who is described as 'yoman') and his wife, Cristian, but also to each of the eight children of the said William, namely Stephen, Robert, William, Thomas, John, Andrew, Joan and Alice. Stephen, one infers, was named after the Bishop, but it was Robert who was the recipient of the bed 'in the whiche my lord was wonte to lye in'. This William Cheston was probably the same person as William Cheston, the elder, of Bury, whose will was proved in 1557,¹² and is likely to have been a nephew of Thomas Chesteyn, the tanner. The latter mentions Robert and William Chesteyn, 'my nevys', to whom he made various bequests, and among the witnesses to his will were John Chesteyn and Robert Payne. There must have been close ties between the Gardiners, the Paynes and the Chestons, marriage ties, it would seem, but they still remain to be unravelled.

Among the many deeds of the Corporation of Bury concerning the Smyth feoffment is one dated 2 August 1542 relating to the appointment of new feoffees to administer the manor of Bretts in Hepworth.¹³ This estate was the subject of elaborate provisions set out in the will of John (or Jankyn) Smyth, the great benefactor of the town.¹⁴ First named among the new feoffees appointed in

¹⁰ It is possible, however, that in referring to her 'brother' Ralph Rudland she meant her brother-in-law.

¹¹ His will was proved before the Sacrist of Bury 14 October 1513 (Bury Wills, book vii, f. 26) and in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury 28 October 1515 (P.C.C. 20 Holder).

¹² P.C.C. 11 Wrastley.

¹³ Bury St. Edmunds, Corporation Muniments, H 1/1/50.

¹⁴ The will of John Smyth of Bury was proved 20 September 1481 (Bury Wills, book 12, f. 304). It is printed by S. Tymms in *Camden Society*, vol. XLIX, pp. 55-73. For the manor of Bretts see especially pages 57 and 61.

1542 is Stephen, Bishop of Winchester, and another of them, it is interesting to note, was William Cheston. Perhaps the townsmen of Bury in those uncertain times felt that powerful advocacy might be needed to safeguard their endowments if they were threatened.

One other fact may be noted in conclusion. Among the wills from the Bury registers printed by Samuel Tymms is an inventory and valuation of the goods of Margaret Baxter of Hundon, followed by a return of the executor's outgoings rendered in the court of the Archdeacon of Sudbury 14 October 1521.¹⁵ A payment of 5s. 8d. was made to a Mr. Miles for the acquittance 'at thys cownt makyng in Fornham' and for the fine of the testament, and after this item there comes a payment of 16d. 'to Mr. Doctor Gardyner for his consell in thys court'. Stephen Gardiner obtained his doctorate in civil law in 1520 and his doctorate in canon law in 1521. Here is a glimpse of him at the outset of his career receiving a small fee for his counsel. The Archdeacon of Sudbury at the time, it should be added, was Thomas Larke.

¹⁵ S. Tymms, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-121.