

# THOMAS LE RENTE: A MEDIEVAL TOWN RULER

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THERE EXISTS AMONG the national customs accounts a parchment membrane so faded, to the unaided eye, that it has received scant attention from historians;<sup>1</sup> yet this document, an inventory of the realty and moveables of a burgess customs collector, *die quo obiit*, is rare in its detail for such an early period and for a figure of relatively mean social standing. The subject is Thomas le Rente of Ipswich, a man in many ways typical of the class which dominated borough administration in the early 14th century. Yet paradoxically his type is difficult to classify, for he was a man of varied activities — merchant, artisan, farmer, man of property and professional administrator. He might perhaps be best described as an *entrepreneur*. If Thomas is of greater historical interest than most of his peers, it is firstly because his life is comparatively well-documented, and secondly because he was a focal personality in a political crisis, part of the reform movement which, manifesting itself in many 14th-century boroughs, gives an insight into the character of urban government.

Thomas le Rente's origins are somewhat obscure. He was not from the élite which dominated the government of Ipswich in the 13th century, exemplified by Vivian fitz Silvester, ten times bailiff between 1270 and 1295, whose family had provided the fledgling borough's first bailiffs in 1200. There is no trace of Thomas's family in Ipswich before his father, John le Rente, who first appears (with Thomas) in the records in 1281.<sup>2</sup> The surname provides little clue to geographical or social origins; there is no evidence that John was sufficiently involved in property-holding to warrant describing him as *rentier*, whilst the expansion of the surname to the locative or toponymic 'de la Rente' seems a later aberration. Although John le Rente is listed, in the lay subsidy of 1283, among the more prominent townsmen who lent the king 100 marks, and his main entry assessment indicates he was of above average wealth, he never took upon himself the responsibility of local administration which so often attended the wealthier burgesses. Thomas is also listed but, not surprising for a young man just starting out in life, his assessment is well below the average.<sup>3</sup> Both men were assessed on small quantities of malt, timber and domestic utensils, while John also had a few pigs and a handmill. Of greater interest is that each owned a boat, and it is notable that their first appearance in the records is in the context of their being sued by a business partner for his share in the profits from three cargoes of herring.<sup>4</sup> Thomas still had a part-share in a boat at the time of his death,<sup>5</sup> possibly the same with which he began his career; the use of *batellus* instead of *navis* suggests a small craft, perhaps no more than a fishing-boat, so that Thomas's ship which freighted a cargo from St Valery in 1305 may have been a different vessel.<sup>6</sup>

If this was so, it is an indication that Thomas's affairs were prospering, and Ipswich's court rolls show how this was at the expense of others. Thomas was rarely a party to legal actions unless the plea was one of debt, and then he was usually defendant. If the rolls are an accurate indicator, Thomas made a career of insolvency, an inclination inherited from his father.<sup>7</sup> From the same source doubtless came his knowledge of the legal trickery that enabled a debtor to delay repayment by drawing out court proceedings. For example, John le Man obtained a writ against Thomas on 24 September 1298 for a debt of £4 16s. 4½d.; Thomas was essoined on 11 December and 22 January, on the dubious excuse of being absent in the king's service. He was still absent from court on 5 February, when it was ordered that he find better pledges for appearance; this was followed on 26 February and 19 March by orders to distrain on him. After repeated essoins during April and May, on 11 June his pledges were sternly warned to have him in court; he finally appeared in person to recognise his debt on 9 July.<sup>8</sup> Other such pleas involving Thomas invariably ended in recognisances, not in themselves certain guarantees of payment, and were marked by

the same difficulty in obtaining the defendant's personal presence,<sup>9</sup> a tactic later to tell against him at a crucial point in his career.

As Thomas's financial affairs prospered — for his perpetual indebtedness may represent disinclination more than inability to repay — so his standing in the community rose and he shouldered those duties which his father avoided. He first appears in a responsible rôle in 1291, as a member of a committee appointed to draw up a restatement of borough customs, consequent to a period of custodianship of town government while its liberties were seized into the king's hands.<sup>10</sup> Dr Williams has shown how similar circumstances in London in the same period caused an influx of *nouveaux riches* into the ranks of the established city leadership.<sup>11</sup> The personnel of the 1291 committee illustrates the changing membership of the Ipswich ruling class. Several members of families long-established in the town, or prominent in local administration before the seizure were included: bailiffs Vivian Silvester and John Clement, Richard Clement, brothers Laurence and Hugh Haraud, John and Richard Leu, Thomas le Maister and others. Then there were those who would dominate borough government during the next three decades; some, notably Philip and John Harneys, Arnold le Peleter and Elias le Keu, were already among the wealthiest townsmen by 1283. Others occupied a less prominent position in that year's taxation list, or migrated into Ipswich after the assessment, and it is with this group that Thomas le Rente had the closest contacts. Thomas dil Stone, *alias* Clement, was (with his father) business partner to the le Rentes in 1281; he was listed next to Thomas le Rente in the 1283 assessment, and the pair are more explicitly revealed as neighbours, to the extent of owning adjoining properties, in 1306.<sup>12</sup> Nicholas le Clerk was also associated with Thomas le Rente from early days, for both were among sixty-five Suffolk men indicted for a homicide in 1283.<sup>13</sup> Alexander Margaret and Thomas twice worked together as arbitrators between parties in legal disputes, and Thomas was similarly associated with Laurence Cobbe, several times as pledge, and as his business partner on at least one occasion.<sup>14</sup> Even more closely associated were John de Whatefeld, according to the 1327 subsidy, Ipswich's wealthiest burgess and Gilbert Roberd. The former's daughter, Nichola, had become the wife of Thomas's eldest son John by 1318; similarly, Thomas's daughter Isabelle had married Richard, son of Gilbert Roberd, and Thomas was furthermore both neighbour and landlord to Gilbert in St Peter's parish.<sup>15</sup> Thomas, John de Whatefeld and Gilbert Roberd were participants in a four-man partnership which took out a ten-year lease from the community on Horswade mill in 1312.<sup>16</sup> But, most importantly, the committee of 1291 provided Thomas's first official association with Thomas Stace, the fourth member of the partnership, another newcomer and of even less distinguished lineage than le Rente, for his father was a tailor of such mean social standing as to lack a surname, who perhaps migrated to Ipswich c. 1284, from parts unknown.<sup>17</sup>

The 1291 committee was clearly that group of burgesses whose policies determined the course of Ipswich's government;<sup>18</sup> in 1309 ten of the committee members, including le Rente and Stace, were numbered among the twelve portmen who formed the town council.<sup>19</sup> Thomas le Rente supplemented borough duties with service in the royal administrative network. First found in a modest capacity in 1295, when he and Alexander Margaret were paid for lodging and supervising workmen brought into Ipswich to build a galley for the king,<sup>20</sup> Thomas entered the customs service in April 1304 and remained therein for sixteen years. He was partnered initially by Nicholas le Clerk, but from 1307 onwards by Richard Leu; primarily active in collecting the wool duties in and around Ipswich, he was also involved with the prisage of wine in 1310, Thomas Stace being his partner. Retiring from collection of the New Custom in February 1319, on the grounds of being too busy to fulfill his duties — a standard excuse — he continued as collector of the Ancient Custom until November 1320.<sup>21</sup>

By this time Thomas had attained a prime position in borough government. He was first elected to its foremost office of bailiff in 1297, and held it repeatedly, through annual re-election, from 1303 to 1305 and 1307 to 1312; in 1312 he was made coroner instead, and so remained,

even through another term as bailiff in 1313–14, until 1318. In that year he was once more bailiff, to which office he clung until removed by the reformers in 1321.<sup>22</sup> Thomas Stace was his fellow-bailiff (for the town was governed by two) on every occasion except in 1313–14 when Richard Leu took his place. During this period of power le Rente twice represented his borough in parliament (March 1313, January 1315), on both occasions in association with Stace, and in 1319 was summoned, as one of those men well-versed in mercantile matters, to counsel the king on how to stabilise the wool trade.<sup>23</sup> That his parliamentary career was somewhat meagre is not significant, for at this period the Ipswich burgesses did not consider parliamentary affairs so important as to warrant always sending their most experienced politicians; of the twenty-three Ipswich members identified between 1300 and 1330, twelve never held a post in borough government and two others had no such involvement until well after their terms in parliament.

Control of power by élites was not uncommon in medieval boroughs, although its significance has been exaggerated, but to the extent practised by Stace and le Rente it truly merits the description 'monopolisation'. Stace was in office even more frequently than le Rente: bailiff eighteen times between 1295 and 1321, coroner during two years when not bailiff, and parliamentary burgess ten times. This power may not have been maintained by legal means, nor was the government of the two Thomases of the disinterested and paternalistic quality expected by the borough community; the term 'oligarchy' has been over-used, but does apply in this case. This we must infer primarily from a set of reforming ordinances directed against a corrupt administration during the course of the 1320–21 ballivalty of Stace and le Rente. The first signs of hostility towards the ruling clique are the royal letters of protection that Thomas le Rente and his sons John and Richard, Thomas Stace and four of his sons, Richard Roberd, John Irp, Alexander Margaret, Thomas le Maister the younger and eight others found necessary to obtain on 26 October 1320.<sup>24</sup> As this followed hard on the renewal of the ballival authority of Stace and le Rente, one may suspect a disputed election here. One month later Irp and Margaret were summoned to answer for unspecified crimes against the community; these may perhaps have been forestalling of merchandise, which was a sensitive issue at the time.<sup>25</sup>

Further assertion by the community of its traditional authority took the form of a set of ordinances issued on 12 December 1320.<sup>26</sup> Although including the customary prohibition of prevalent market offences such as forestalling, hostage, brokerage and merchandising in private, the ordinances struck nearer the desired mark in reforming abuses of ballival power. The bailiffs were accused of extorting salary-augmenting fees beyond those customarily assigned them; of using the communal seal improperly and denying its use to lesser burgesses who could not afford the fees demanded; and of imposing inordinate taxations and putting the money to personal use. The chosen remedy was the appointment of clavigers to hold the keys of the chest containing the common seal and treasury, and of chamberlains to supervise the borough finances and ballival conduct generally. A further accusation was that the bailiffs created new burgesses at will, without common consent, and pocketed the entrance fines; it was therefore ordained that such entrances be made only in public, at the four Great Courts of the year. Most telling, however, was the charge that the bailiffs were being maintained in power by a select group of burgesses holding private elections. To prevent this usurpation, it was ordered that bailiffs be elected only at a public meeting, by the community, which was also empowered to depose bailiffs during their term of office.

Such grievances and remedies are found time and again in other towns, which makes it difficult to gauge the accuracy of specific charges. However, some at least are supported by independent evidence. An inventory of Ipswich's archives drawn up c. 1334,<sup>27</sup> in addition to listing the court rolls, notes the burgess entrances recorded therein, but for each roll between 1308 and 1321 states '*nulli sunt burgenses hoc anno*'.<sup>28</sup> Since the twelve ballival years from 1323 to 1336, for which rolls survive, indicate an average of over thirteen entrances annually, about

twice the rate of the late 13th century, it is hard to believe that there were no entrances during the period in which Stace and le Rente were in power. One suspects that they were simply not recorded, because made outside the formal court context, before the bailiffs privately. This abuse, lingering, was to prompt further reform in 1361.<sup>29</sup> The charge of maintenance of a power-clique is also bolstered by the identity of the office-holders in the first two decades of the 14th century. On the few occasions when not occupied by Stace and le Rente, the office of bailiff was in the hands of their inner circle: Laurence Cobbe, Alexander Margaret, John and Richard Leu, Gilbert Roberd, John de Whatefeld, Thomas dil Stone. The less authoritative office of coroner was held by some of the same men or other members of the 1291 committee, Elias le Keu and Arnold le Peleter. Similarly, parliamentary elections, properly the right of the community,<sup>30</sup> were manipulated in favour of the adherents of Stace and le Rente: men already encountered such as Richard Leu, Laurence Cobbe and Nicholas le Clerk; Clement Shawe and John Lenebaud, associated in the letters of protection issued in October 1320; Geoffrey son of Thomas Stace; William de Croffeld, who assisted le Rente in some property transactions and was co-defendant in a plea of detention of chattels; William de Causton and Philip de Leghton, occasional business associates of le Rente; and William de Boxferd, whose son, related by marriage to Elias le Keu, is found as pledge for le Rente.<sup>31</sup>

Had the Thomases accepted the reforms with good grace, crisis might yet have been averted. Instead they fought back, and thereby precipitated their own downfall. In this struggle le Rente was somewhat hindered, for at this crucial time he was impleaded for a not inconsiderable debt of £24 and, true to form, reacted by staying away from court between January and August 1321;<sup>32</sup> his absence from that power-base doubtless facilitated the reformers' efforts. Nonetheless, in February le Rente obtained a royal commission to investigate his charges that, a month earlier, an armed mob, led by John de Halteby, Geoffrey Costyn and John de Preston, had broken into his house, assaulted his wife and servants, and carried off his goods, in disregard of the letters of protection; his petition further complained of '*si forte conspyracie com est en la dyte vyle de gentz que sunt entrelyez par serement a vivre e moryr ensemble*'.<sup>33</sup> A second commission was obtained on 1 March 1321 following a more official complaint by both Thomases that the same group was rioting, resisting ballival authority and preventing collection of tolls.<sup>34</sup> The reformers were left with little choice other than to take the extreme measure made possible, perhaps anticipated, by the 1320 ordinances. Precisely when Stace and le Rente were deposed is unknown, but by 28 April two new bailiffs were in office.<sup>35</sup>

Neither side was prepared to let matters rest there. A son of Thomas Stace was murdered in August.<sup>36</sup> The 1320 ordinances were brought into operation and during 1323 charges were levelled against members of the old clique, including John de Whatefeld and Gilbert Roberd. Some of the accused defiantly refused to answer and Richard Roberd, *in absentia*, was disfranchised for life; others, such as Geoffrey Stace and William de Causton, in the light of this example, threw themselves on the mercy of the court.<sup>37</sup> The fortunes of this party had revived sufficiently for them to renew charges of unlawful conspiracies, sworn confederacies, imposition of tallages for personal profit, self-interested manipulation of local justice, and maltreatment of visiting merchants against Halteby, Preston and others in 1324. The last charge is confirmed by an independent complaint of a merchant of Berwick-on-Tweed, while that concerning false court verdicts was perhaps a response to the charges of 1323. The reformers replied with counter-charges of confederacy, assault and impeding borough administration.<sup>38</sup> The disruptive impracticability of perpetual hostilities, time's dampening of the fervour of reform, and the death of the central figures of controversy (Thomas Stace was dead by the turn of the decade) brought a return to normality, although at least one grievance lingered to reach fruition years later.

Thomas le Rente, however, was past caring; for him the battle ended in 1321. Hard on the indignities already suffered came prosecution at the Exchequer for concealment when he was collector of customs; his partner Richard Leu, through the intercession of the Bishop of Norwich, obtained pardon for his half of the £666 1s. 11½d. fine in December 1322, but Thomas was not so fortunate.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, he was heavily in debt in other quarters, notably for £200 owed to Hugh Despenser the younger, possibly in connection with the customs fraud fine.<sup>40</sup> He died, a broken man one may suspect, in 1323; his will has not survived although he is known to have bequeathed three acres of arable land in St Augustine's parish and sixteen shillings annual rent to his daughter Isabelle, and other Ipswich rents to pay off £140 remaining from the debt to Despenser, now transferred to the king.<sup>41</sup> Because of these debts to the king, an extent of Thomas's property was ordered.

No action seems to have been taken following the inquisition, no wholesale seizure of property, elements of which are found later in family hands; possibly Thomas had transferred his lands to trustees.<sup>42</sup> Yet the family never quite rid itself of the stigma of Thomas's actions. In 1317 we hear of four sons, probably all by Thomas's second wife Alice; two of these, Henry and Nicholas, are not mentioned in 1324, while Thomas the younger and a fifth son, Richard, are rarely encountered after 1324, and perhaps moved to properties held by the elder Thomas outside Ipswich.<sup>43</sup> More is known of the eldest son, John de la Rente, who had sufficiently regained the confidence of the community to be elected bailiff in 1338. He was a portman in the early 1340s — perhaps even as early as 1332, if one may judge from his prominent position in deed witness lists — and a royal commissioner to combat smuggling in 1343. This modest career fitted the modest means suggested by his below-average assessment in the 1340 subsidy, and after him the family name appears no more in local records.<sup>44</sup> The Staces fared a little better. Thomas was returned to both parliaments of 1327 and was briefly coroner (May 1328 to January 1329),<sup>45</sup> but it is questionable whether he would have been permitted, had he lived, to resume a position of higher authority. Geoffrey Stace attained ballival office in 1326, 1333 and 1341, but did not carry on his father's quarrel, being distracted by other mischiefs, and was even reconciled with former enemies in due course; the other sons are less prominent and one departed for Yarmouth.<sup>46</sup>

To do justice to le Rente and Stace, and to understand more fully the aims and effects of the reform movement, it is necessary to delve a little deeper. Without denying that the government of the Thomases was less than exemplary and that reform was justified, one may yet doubt whether the motives of the movement's principal protagonists were entirely altruistic. In so far as the reformers sought to moderate the hold of the 1291 clique on government they were successful, and several reformers subsequently aspired to ballival office.<sup>47</sup> None profited more from this transfer of power than the movement's leaders, Halteby, Costyn and Preston, to the extent that old abuses found new life in them. Although of only average means according to the 1327 subsidy, they outstripped most of their artisan followers in terms of financial ambition; the only occupation with which John de Preston can be associated is that of merchant; John de Halteby and Geoffrey Costyn were business partners and by 1340 the former at least had achieved some degree of wealth.<sup>48</sup> If Stace and le Rente were guilty of monopolising office, how then is Preston to be judged? Following the fall of the former pair, Preston held the offices of chamberlain, coroner and bailiff in swift succession (1322–25). Again bailiff in 1336–37, from 1340 to 1356 he was never out of office, being either bailiff or coroner and frequently holding both offices; he also represented the borough in parliament on ten occasions between 1336 and 1348. Costyn, town clerk at the time of the fall of the Thomases,<sup>49</sup> was four times bailiff and served four times in parliament between 1326 and 1332. Halteby is found in the office of constable of the peace in 1324;<sup>50</sup> although probably a portman c. 1338–44, he was never bailiff, and parliamentary burgess but once (1339). This prime mover of the events of 1320–21 evidently preferred to

remain the power behind the throne. A born troublemaker, he appears initially as comrade-in-arms of the Staces and le Rentes in their violent excursions to hamlets neighbouring Ipswich in 1312 and 1315.<sup>51</sup> But, not included in the inner circle with which power was shared, his inclination to dominate sought other avenues of expression. It was he, with the backing of Despenser, who was leader and beneficiary of the raid on le Rente's capital messuage in 1321.<sup>52</sup> His coercive tactics made him generally unpopular and it was said that he '*est appelle Roy de Gyppewyz parmy le pays*'; fraternization with former enemy Geoffrey Stace could not have improved his reputation.<sup>53</sup> His murder in 1344 was greeted with such popular approval that neither bailiffs nor king's justices were able to take effective measures against the culprits, at least some of whom were pardoned.<sup>54</sup> However noble the reformers' aims, as expressed in the 1320 ordinances, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they were directed by men who sought personal advancement.

Into the warp of events which was Thomas le Rente's life, as thus far reconstructed, certain more descriptive strands may be woven. The document printed in the Appendix is testimony to the fact, already noted, that Thomas wore a coat of many colours. He was no different from his peers in perceiving the security of investment in real property and records of some of his property transactions can still be found.<sup>55</sup> His reach extended beyond the town into the neighbouring countryside: besides those lands listed in 1324 we hear of a messuage and a carucate of land in Wenham on one occasion, 200 acres of land, 20 acres of woodland and 3s. 4d. rent there on another; 60 acres of land, 20 acres of heath and 20s. rent in Wherstead; a messuage, 190 acres of land, 8½ acres of meadow, 18 acres of pasture, 4 acres of woodland and 44s. 8d. rent in the area of Barham, Hemingstone, Coddendam, Henley, Claydon and Creeting (a few miles north of Ipswich).<sup>56</sup> The greater part of his property transactions took place during the second decade of the 14th century, when Thomas's fortunes were at their peak.

Beyond their investment value, the farmlands Thomas acquired had more immediate use. He required somewhere to keep his sheep — not a large flock but larger than necessary to supply personal needs; his interest in the wool trade may be associated with his involvement in the collection of the wool customs. The other kinds of livestock listed in 1324 are more typical of burgess property and could have been kept within the borough. Produce from his arable lands, besides supplying domestic demands and presumably providing stock for trade,<sup>57</sup> was used in victualling operations. The grains, the quantities of meat, of tables, seats, containers for wine and ale, the salting-vessels, baking-pots and handmills, all listed in 1324, the interest in the town mill already noted, and the reference to a cook in Thomas's employ,<sup>58</sup> suggest that the bakery and brewery specifically mentioned may have been more than domestic affairs, perhaps servicing retail businesses in the shops of which we hear. The extent of wholesale merchandising is less clearly indicated; one can only point to his growing of wool and crops, his shipowning and fishing interests, his private quay and the large quantity of timber stored there, his constant contracting of debts and the £4 in ready cash in 1324. In addition he is found doing business with a Gascon merchant, albeit at the time an Ipswich resident, and a merchant of St Malo.<sup>59</sup>

From modest beginnings Thomas le Rente rose to the apex of his urban society, but this was a society which could be volatile and fickle. His taste for such comfort and display as the medieval burgess could aspire to at this period, witnessed in the section of the inventory dealing with personal apparel and domestic furniture, relied on a financial security maintained by pursuing any avenue of profitable activity open to him, not all of them legal; in politics and business alike, self-interest was the keynote. In his diversification of interests he was no different from his contemporaries, and we may say the same regarding his exploitation of positions of trust. It is the wont of the entrepreneur to take risks; Thomas le Rente gambled and ultimately lost.

## APPENDIX

EXCHEQUER, KING'S REMEMBRANCER: CUSTOMS ACCOUNTS, E122/50/11<sup>60</sup>

Inquisition taken before Richard Lieu and Thomas Stace at Ipswich, Thursday next after the feast of the Decollation of St John the Baptist in the eighteenth year of the reign of king Edward son of king Edward [30 August 1324], by writ of the lord king, letters patent from the Exchequer directing Robert de Asphale and the aforesaid Richard and Thomas, or two of them, to inquire what lands and tenements Thomas le Rente deceased, one of the collectors of [custom on] wool, wool-pells and hides in the port of the town of Ipswich, had within the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk in the eighth year of the reign of the present king and afterwards, and what their annual value in all profits, rights and services due therefrom. And also to inquire what goods and chattels the aforesaid Thomas had in the same counties on the day of his death, what their price according to their true value, and into whose hands they fell after the death of the deceased. And who holds them now, by what right and in what fashion. And what debts were owed to Thomas on the day he died, that is, by whom and for what reason. By the oath of Robert Starlyng, John le Maister, John Irp, John le Blount, Laurence dil Wentte, John dil Hawe, Geoffrey Costyn, Elias le Keu, Gilbert de Ponte, Robert de Ispannia, Alan Davy and Thomas Coman, jurors.

Who say, on their oath, that the aforesaid Thomas le Rente had in fee on the day he died a certain messuage with appurtenances situated in St Mary's parish, which is now held by Alice who was wife of the aforesaid Thomas; and it is worth half a mark annually. Item, he had a quay with buildings in St Mary's parish which Robert de Cleydon and John de Cleydon now hold, and is worth 40s. annually. Item, he had there in the said parish a messuage which belonged to William Toke, which Gilbert Roberd now holds; and it is worth 20s. annually. Item, he had 4 shops in St Peter's parish which are called Les Corners, which Richard Roberd and John le Rente now hold and are worth 10s. annually. Item, he had one messuage which belonged to John le Gest, Osbert Smith and Richard le Bowyer in the parish of St [illegible], which Richard Roberd and John le Rente now hold and is worth 26s. 8d. annually. Item, he had two shops in St Mildred's parish, which Alan Davy now holds and are worth 1 mark annually. Item, he had a certain ruinous messuage called Sefowles in St Augustine's parish, which Richard Roberd and John le Rente now hold and is worth 12d. annually. Item, he had one garden in the said parish called Rolvysyerd, which Alice who was wife of the aforesaid Thomas now holds and is worth 12d. annually. Item, he had one messuage in Stoke which formerly belonged to John Rodlond and now is held by Richard, John and Thomas, sons of the aforesaid Thomas le Rente, and Alice who was the aforesaid Thomas's wife; and it is worth 12d. annually. Also in Stoke, he had three roods of woodland which Richard, John and Thomas, sons of the aforesaid Thomas le Rente, now hold, and they are worth 6d. annually. Also, they say that before the aforesaid eighth year, and afterwards, he had one messuage in St Matthew's parish called Bardys which he sold to John de Houndelond, who now holds it, and it is worth 4s. annually. Item, he had one workshop and an empty plot adjacent in St Mildred's parish which John le Noble, chaplain, now holds; and they are worth 4s. annually. Item, he had a certain messuage in St Peter's parish called Goldhauks which Christina, who was the wife of Thomas de Weston, now holds and is worth 10s. annually. Item, he had a certain plot at the quayside which he sold to Gilbert Roberd and which the same Gilbert now holds, and it is worth 12d. annually. Item, he had a certain plot in St Peter's parish which he sold to John Irp and which the same John now holds, and it is worth nothing beyond its costs.

Also, they say that the aforesaid Thomas had, before the aforesaid eighth year and afterwards, 20 shillings in annual rents, which he sold to William Malyn, in St Laurence's parish, received from the tenements formerly of Roger Cook; and the said William is now the tenant of the aforesaid tenements. Item, he had five pence rent in St Augustine's parish, received from the tenement of Walter le Carter. Item, he had in the same parish 1 penny rent received from the tenement which belonged to Margery le Mayden. Item, he had 4d. rent received from the tenement formerly of William dil Hay in the same parish. Item, he had 7 shillings rent in the same parish received from William le Quelwrythe for his messuage in the said parish. Item, he had 4 shillings rent received from William Russel for his messuage in the said parish. Item, he had 3d. rent received from the tenement formerly of William Stryk. Item, he had 8d. rent received from the tenement of Ralph le Taillour. Item, he had 12d. rent received from the tenement formerly of Adam Verdoun. Item, he had 28d. rent received from the tenement of Rose Alp. Item, he had 4 shillings rent received from the tenement formerly of William Pathet, the which tenement Richard Maynard now holds. Item, he had 14d. rent received from the tenement formerly of Wymond Chelyng in St Matthew's parish. Item, he had 25d. rent received from the tenement formerly of Ralph Rotoun, the which had belonged to Geoffrey Beaumeys; and now William, son of the aforesaid Ralph, holds the aforesaid tenement. Item, he had 12d. rent received from the land and tenement of Thomas dil Dene in Brooks. Item, he had 4d. rent received from the tenement of John le Bour in Stoke.

Also, the aforesaid jurors say that the aforesaid Thomas le Rente had on the day he died, in Stoke-next-Ipswich, 120 acres of arable customary land held of the Prior of Ely, of which 60 acres are worth 30s. annually, at the value of 6d. an acre, and the remaining 60 acres are worth 15s. a year, at the value of 3d. an acre. Item, he had in Stoke 5 acres of meadow fit for mowing and they are worth 30s. annually, at the value of 6s. an acre. Item, he had there 17 acres of pasture; and they are worth 11s. 4d. annually, at the value of 8d. an acre. Also, the aforesaid jurors say that on the day he died the aforesaid Thomas le Rente had, of the aforesaid 120 acres of customary land, 30 acres sown with rye and the crop therefrom was worth at that time £15, at the value of 10s. an acre. Item, he had 24 acres of the same land sown with barley and the crop therefrom was worth at that time £12, at the value of 10s. an acre.

Also, the aforesaid jurors say that, on the day he died, the aforesaid Thomas le Rente had £4 in ready money. Item, he had 3 quarters of wheat which were worth 36s., at the value of 12s. a quarter. Item, he had 6 quarters and 5 bushels of barley and they were worth 66s. 3d., at the value of 10s. a quarter. Item, he had 9 quarters of barley malt and they were worth £4 10s., at the value of 10s. a quarter. Item, he had a brass pot, value 13s. 4d. Item, he had a brass pot, value 3s. Item, he had a basin,<sup>61</sup> value 5s. Item, he had 6 pewter pitchers, value 6s. Item, he had 18 pewter plates, value 10s. 6d. Item, he had 2 kegs, value 20s. Item, he had 2 other small kegs and other minor articles, which Alice le Rente bought from the bailiffs of Ipswich, value 3s. Item, he had 6 large tables, value 36s. Item, he had 6 other tables, value 18s. Item, he had 10 small pork carcasses, value 25s. Item, he had four quarters of beef carcasses, value 8s. Item, he had 2 barrels of varnish, value 4s. Item, he had a pipe of cider, value 8s. Item, he had 1 empty tun and 4 empty pipes, value 6s. Item, he had 8 ale-barrels, value 6s. Item, he had 12 large pans, value 36s. Item, he had 8 [illegible<sup>62</sup>], value 4s. Item, he had 3 'cows',<sup>63</sup> value 2s. Item, he had two pipes in which to put bread, value 2s. Item, he had 2 dishes for the salting of meat, value 12d. Item, he had two tubs for the salting of meat, value 2s. Item, he had a cask to sift [flour] in, value 2s. Item, he had 2 kneading-troughs, value 2s. Item, he had 1 table with 2 trestles in the brew-house, value 12d. Item, he had 2 hand-mills with [associated] equipment, value 4s. Item, he had two other white hand-mills, value 4s. Item, he had 3 gridirons, value 3s. Item, he had 2 andirons, value half a mark. Item, he had two weights, value 6s. 8d. Item, he had a wooden cover lying over the vat [plumbum] in the bakery, value 4s. Item, he had a cover of straw, value 6d. Item, he had 4 fish-traps, value 4d. Item, he had 2 reed baskets, value 2s. Item, he had a piece of iron weighing 14 pounds, value 6d. Item, he had 12 stools which are called Nalstoles, value 2s. Item, 12 small benches, value 4s. Item, he had 3 winnowing-fans,<sup>64</sup> value 12d. Item, he had 2 mortars with pestles, value 20d. Item, he had 3 woollen hooded capes, value 26s. Item, he had a Rheims blanket, value 3s. Item, he had a blanket of wool, value 4s. Item, he had 4 woollen bench-covers, value 6s. Item, he had 13 woollen cushions, value 4s. 4d. Item, he had a feather-bed with 3 bolsters,<sup>65</sup> value 10s. Item, he had 3 hoods prepared from muslin and cloth, value 3s. Item, he had a blue blanket, value 5s. Item, he had a large treasure-chest in which to put his jewels and other objects, value 20s. Item, one other chest in which to put charters and tallies, value 10s. Item, he had two silk belts decorated with silver, value 20s. Item, he had one 'beggar's purse', value 4s. Item, he had a silver container [atenam] for carrying his seal, value 1s. Item, he had a bugle-horn for drinking from,<sup>66</sup> lined with silver, value 3s. Item, he had a cup called la Note, value 12d. Item, he had a strong-box for his armour, value 2s. Item, he had two robes with tabards, value 26s. 8d. Item, he had a winter overcoat with tabard, value 13s. 4d. Item, he had half a tabard of new cloth, value 2s. Item, he had 2 pairs of gloves, value 2s. Item, he had 2 small pewter kegs, value 2s. Item, he had a sieve belonging to the bakery, value 2s. Item, he had one sow, value 5s. Item, he had 1 pair of shoes, value 3d. Item, he had 1 cart lined with iron and 1 wheelbarrow, value 10s. Item, he had a certain part of one boat, value 40s. Item, he had timber at his quay and elsewhere, value £20. Item, he had hay, value 10s. Item, he had straw, value 20s. Item, he had 6 quarters of chalk, value 5s. Item, he had harnesses for 2 carts, value 4s. Item, he had 1 keg and 1 [illegible], value 10d. Item, he had 1 cart lined with iron, value 20s. Item, he had 1 cloth of muslin, value 2s. Item, he had 1 painting hanging above the chamber, value 2s. Item, he had one tapestry [doserum], value 40d. Item, he had one piece of silver bullion, weighing 20lb. Item, he had 1 painted cloth, value 2s. Item, he had 80 sheep, value £8 12s. Item, he had two pieces of silver [plate], value 26s. 8d. Item, he had one pack of 'ticstols' of Picardy, value 12d.

And they say that the late John Harneys the elder and John son of Richard Haltebe have taken all the aforesaid goods and chattels, of which the total [value] is £118 18s. 11d. And the same are divided between themselves and not sold . . . And they say that, after the death of the aforesaid John Harneys, the whole part of the aforesaid goods and chattels [remain] with the aforesaid Leticia, wife and executrix of the aforesaid John Harneys, and John Haltebe. Item, he had 4 calves which Richard Roberd has sold to Adam . . . [value] 10s. Item, he had 3 horses and 1 cow which the same Richard has sold to John Lombard for 24s. Item, John le Rente . . . 20s. Item, he had 1 large horse, value 25s. Item, . . . John Haltebe . . . formerly of Thomas [le Rente] . . . value 13s. 4d. Item, they had 1 . . . value 20s. Item, they had 1 hauberk, value . . . Item, they had . . . value 2s. Item, they had 1 bassinet, value 18d. Item, they had 1 sword, value 3s. And [they say that John Harneys and John] Haltebe have taken deeds and tallies from the house of Thomas de la Rente . . . in the custody of the aforesaid Leticia, wife of John Harneys. In testimony of which thing . . . they place [their seals].

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., E.122/50/11. It is translated as an Appendix, as completely as legibility permits. I am indebted to Professor G. H. Martin for assistance in rendering the more problematical passages, and for helpful criticism of this paper in general.

<sup>2</sup> G.C.R. 8-9 Ed. I, m. 4r.

<sup>3</sup> E.179/242/42, m. 1r and schedule, E.179/242/40; printed in *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, xii, 137-57.

<sup>4</sup> Further involvement in the herring trade is evidenced in P.P.R. 15-16 Ed. I(b) m. 8r.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix.



- <sup>6</sup> P.P.R. 32–33 Ed. I m. 5r.
- <sup>7</sup> G.C.R.: 8–9 Ed. I m. 4r; 11–12 Ed. I m. 3r; 12–13 Ed. I m. 5r; P.P.R.: 15–16 Ed. I(b) m. 8r; 17–18 Ed. I mm. 12r, 23r, 28r, 20–21 Ed. I m. 4d.
- <sup>8</sup> G.C.R. 26–29 Ed. I mm. 7–8.
- <sup>9</sup> Further examples, not exhaustive, may be found in G.C.R. 33 Ed. I–1 Ed. II, 14–15 Ed. II; P.P.R. 17–18, 19–20, 28–29, 33–34 Ed. I.
- <sup>10</sup> C4/3, f. 27.
- <sup>11</sup> Williams 1963, ch. 9.
- <sup>12</sup> P.R.O., E.179/242/40; G.C.R. 8–9 Ed. I m. 4r; Martin 1973, 31.
- <sup>13</sup> C.P.R. 1281–92, 97.
- <sup>14</sup> P.P.R.: 28–29 Ed. I m. 8r, 29–30 Ed. I m. 17r, 33–34 Ed. I m. 15d; G.C.R.: 21–25 Ed. I m. 9r, 15–16 Ed. II m. 3r.
- <sup>15</sup> P.R.O., E.179/180/6 m. 30d; G.C.R.: 10–11 Ed. II m. 2d, 11–13 Ed. II m. 3d, 17–18 Ed. II mm. 3–4; R.R. 1–2 Ed. III m. 2r, 19–20 Ed. III m. 1r, 20–21 Ed. III m. 2d.
- <sup>16</sup> C2/23/1.
- <sup>17</sup> P.P.R. 15–16 Ed I(b) m. 4d. Thomas Stace first appears in P.P.R. 13 Ed. I m. 3r; neither father nor son were listed in 1283.
- <sup>18</sup> On this see Martin 1955, 69.
- <sup>19</sup> The first list recorded since 1200; B.L. Add. MS. 25012 f.50.
- <sup>20</sup> P.R.O., E.101/5/7.
- <sup>21</sup> P.R.O., E.356/1 m. 11; E.356/2 mm. 10–11, 31d; E. 122/50/1, 6, 8; E.122/52/38; C.F.R. 1307–19, 68, 390.
- <sup>22</sup> All references to borough offices are from the court rolls, *passim*, unless otherwise stated.
- <sup>23</sup> P.R.O., E.101/457/5. All references to parliamentary office are from *R.N.E.M.*, supplemented by reference to the original returns.
- <sup>24</sup> C.P.R. 1317–21, 512.
- <sup>25</sup> G.C.R. 14–15 Ed. II m. 1r; Martin 1955, 59.
- <sup>26</sup> Embodied in C4/1, ff. 71v. – 76v.
- <sup>27</sup> C1/2/5; a transcript may be found in Martin 1955, appendix II.
- <sup>28</sup> In fact one entrance is recorded in each of G.C.R. 8–9 and 11–13 Ed. II, but these were special cases necessarily involving public ceremony and without payment of a fine.
- <sup>29</sup> C4/2, f. 66v.
- <sup>30</sup> To judge from local electoral indentures which appear a century later, e.g. C219/11/1.
- <sup>31</sup> P.R.O., C.P.25(1): 59/2, 60/3; P.P.R.: 32–33 Ed. I m. 11r, 16 Ed. II m. 2r; G.C.R. 33 Ed. I–1 Ed. II m. 6; Martin 1973, 80; P.R.O., E.101/457/5.
- <sup>32</sup> G.C.R. 14–15 Ed. II mm. 2d–4d.
- <sup>33</sup> P.R.O., S.C.8/11637; C.P.R. 1317–21, 603–04. Possibly here is the explanation of how the chattels listed in the inventory came to be in the hands of Halteby and John Harneys.
- <sup>34</sup> C.P.R. 1317–21, 605.
- <sup>35</sup> Martin 1973, 95.
- <sup>36</sup> C.P.R. 1321–24, 55.
- <sup>37</sup> G.C.R.: 16–17 Ed. II m. 2, 17–18 Ed. II m. 1r.
- <sup>38</sup> C.P.R. 1324–27, 65, 67, 72.
- <sup>39</sup> C.P.R. 1321–24, 227. Evidence for Leu being in, and le Rente out of, favour with the bishop may be found in C.P.R. 1313–17, 404, 524.
- <sup>40</sup> P.R.O., S.C.8/2485. See also P.P.R. 16 Ed. II mm. 3r, 4r.
- <sup>41</sup> P.P.R. 16 Ed. II m. 3r; G.C.R. 17–18 Ed. II m. 3r; R.R. 6–7 Ed. III m. 1r; C.F.R. 1319–27, 251. His executors were his son John and Richard Roberd.
- <sup>42</sup> See C.C.R. 1323–27, 179, showing Despenser suing John, parson of Petrestre [Pettistree], for his moiety of lands formerly of Thomas.
- <sup>43</sup> P.R.O., C.P.25(1) 59/2.
- <sup>44</sup> B.L. Add. Ch. 9952; R.R. 12–13, 15–16, 16–17 Ed. III *passim*; C.P.R. 1343–45, 75; P.R.O., E.179/180/12 m. 13r. In 1345 John and his second wife Alice are found selling up their Ipswich property; R.R. 19–20 Ed. III m. 1r, 20–21 Ed. III m. 2d.
- <sup>45</sup> R.R.: 1–2 Ed. III m. 3, 2–3 Ed. III m. 1. His son of the same name may just possibly have been the parliamentary burgess.
- <sup>46</sup> Martin 1955, 67, 183; C.P.R. 1343–45, 332; R.R.: 1–2 Ed. III m. 2r, 7–8 Ed. III m. 1r, 20–21 Ed. III m. 2d.
- <sup>47</sup> For a complete assessment of the reformers' achievements, see Martin 1955, 68–96.
- <sup>48</sup> P.R.O., E.179/180/6 m. 30d, E.179/180/12 m. 13r; G.C.R.: 11–13 Ed. II m. 5d, 16–17 Ed. II m. 1r.
- <sup>49</sup> P.R.O., S.C.8/11637.
- <sup>50</sup> C.P.R. 1324–27, 184.

- <sup>51</sup> *C.P.R. 1307–13*, 531–32, *1313–17*, 404.
- <sup>52</sup> P.R.O., S.C.8/2485, S.C.8/11637. The excuse for the raid was distraint to obtain payment of Despenser's £200. Association with the pro-Edward II party is also evidenced in *C.C.R. 1323–27*, 357, and *Rot. Parl.*, II, 31.
- <sup>53</sup> *C.P.R. 1324–27*, 65, *1343–45*, 200, 332; P.R.O., S.C.8/11637.
- <sup>54</sup> P.R.O., K.B.27/338 m. 162d; *C.P.R. 1345–48*, 150, 155, 492–93, 522. Geoffrey Costyn also met a violent end, in 1338; C.R. 3–14 Ed. III m. 3r.
- <sup>55</sup> P.R.O., E.40/3420, E.40/3516; Martin 1973, 31, 48, 62, 67, 69, 110.
- <sup>56</sup> P.R.O., C.143/147/16; P.R.O., C.P.25(1): 59/2, 60/3, 60/27; *C.P.R. 1317–21*, 530. In collecting the Wherstead land he may merely have been an agent for St Peter's priory, Ipswich.
- <sup>57</sup> There is no direct evidence for involvement in the grain trade, but Thrupp 1948, 121, notes that the growing of large quantities of crops tended to draw burgesses into the produce trades.
- <sup>58</sup> P.P.R. 16 Ed. II m. 1d.
- <sup>59</sup> P.P.R. 17–18 Ed. I m. 12r, 32–33 Ed. I m. 11r.
- <sup>60</sup> I have elaborated punctuation for purposes of clarification.
- <sup>61</sup> *Pelvem*; but possibly *pelum*, a baker's shovel.
- <sup>62</sup> One possible rendering of this word suggests a derivation from *tina*, a kind of tub.
- <sup>63</sup> Probably a type of tub; see Wright 1898, I, 755.
- <sup>64</sup> *Vannas*, but possibly benches are intended.
- <sup>65</sup> *Tranesayns*. My translation is founded upon the definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and an association of terms found in Colchester Court Roll/67 m. 22r. (Colchester Castle).
- <sup>66</sup> *Ad delibendum*. But this phrase is barely legible and might be *ad delaborendum*, implying that the horn played a descending interval.

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*Primary Sources: Abbreviations*

## Printed Works

- C.C.R.* *Calendar of Close Rolls*, H.M.S.O.
- C.F.R.* *Calendar of Fine Rolls*, H.M.S.O.
- C.P.R.* *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, H.M.S.O.
- R.N.E.M.* *Return of the Names of Every Member Returned to Serve in Each Parliament . . . 1213–1702* (House of Commons Sessional Paper no. 69, vol. LXII, part i, London, 1878).
- Rot. Parl.* *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, Records Commission.

## Unpublished MSS.

- (N.B., all manuscripts, unless otherwise stated, are in the Ipswich Borough records at the Ipswich Branch of the Suffolk Record Office.)
- B.L. Add. Ch. British Library, Additional Charters.
- B.L. Add. MSS. British Library, Additional Manuscripts.
- C.1/2 Miscellaneous documents.
- C.2/23 Ipswich Corporation leases.
- C.4/1 Black Domesday Book of Ipswich.
- C.4/2 White Domesday Book of Ipswich.

THOMAS LE RENTE

C.4/3	<i>Custumale Gippovicense.</i>
C.143	P.R.O., Inquisitions <i>ad quod damnum.</i>
C.219	P.R.O., Writs and Returns of Members to Parliament.
C.P.25	P.R.O., Feet of Fines.
C.R.	Ipswich Coroners' Rolls.
E.40	P.R.O., Ancient Deeds.
E.101	P.R.O., Various Accounts.
E.122	P.R.O., Original Customs Accounts.
E.179	P.R.O., Sudsidy Rolls.
E.356	P.R.O., Enrolled Customs Accounts.
G.C.R.	Ipswich Great Court Rolls.
K.B.27	P.R.O., <i>Coram Rege</i> Rolls.
P.P.R.	Ipswich Petty Plea Rolls.
P.R.O.	Public Record Office.
R.R.	Ipswich Recognizance Rolls.
S.C.8	P.R.O., Ancient Petitions.