

# The Borough Arms



In 1576 the Mayor and Burgesses of Sudbury applied for a Grant of Arms; this was given on the 20<sup>th</sup> September by Robert Cooke, Clarendieuex King of Arms. The original charter, on thick vellum, gives first a quaint preamble telling of the origin of the gift, and goes on to describe the arms. The principle charge in the coat, the hound (or Talbot), is taken from the paternal coat of that eminent native of the borough, Simon of Sudbury, while the charges on the chief are brought in from the Royal Arms, to illustrate the ownership of the Manor by the early Norman kings.

# **Town Coat of Arms**

## **Simon's Dog**

The dog featured on the Town Coat of Arms and on the Mayoral Chain of Office is a heraldic Talbot. This early breed of hunting dog is thought to have been brought to England with William the Conqueror and to have links with the modern bloodhound and beagle. This dog was used to enhance the dignity of the Borough of Sudbury when in 1554 it received a Charter from Queen Mary I outlining its rights and privileges. The device of a Talbot was probably taken from the coat of arms of the Theobald family

Around 1318 Simon Theobald or Tebauds was born into this wealthy and important family in the local cloth trade. This brilliant man eventually rose to become Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor. These titles were a great honour not just for Simon but also for his home town of Sudbury: a local man was now the most powerful man in England apart from the King. Unfortunately he was a key figure in a government whose policies raised an eruption of violence rare in English history- the Peasants Revolt of 1381 and Simon took much of the blame. The people had many grievances but they all coalesced around the proposed new Poll Tax of one shilling and three groats to be paid by all people over the age of fifteen.

In 1381 an angry mob of peasants dragged Simon from his refuge in the chapel of the Tower of London and hacked him to death on Tower Green. His head was impaled and displayed on London Bridge, a fate usually reserved for traitors. Somehow it was brought back to his home town of Sudbury and was placed in St Gregory's church, perhaps in the hope that it would make St. Gregory's a place of pilgrimage similar to Thomas a Becket's shrine at Canterbury. His head is still kept in the vestry whilst his body lies in Canterbury Cathedral.

On Christmas Day the Lord Mayor and City Council of Canterbury process to his tomb where the Mayor lays a posy of Christmas roses and the Dean leads prayers. This tribute is in thanksgiving for Simon's rebuilding of the city wall, the Westgate and the Holy Cross Church which is now the Guildhall. This tradition is not upheld in Sudbury.

# The Town Seal



This is of silver, mounted on ivory and an inscription in Latin tells that it was the gift of Richard Skinner in 1616. The donor apparently was a successful Sudbury trader, a man who issued many Sudbury tokens, and who became Mayor in 1637. In the accounts for the expenses of William Nicholl, Mayor, in 1635 is the item, "Payd for mendelinge the Towne Seals Vjd". The story is told that in the eighteenth century the seal was mysteriously lost for several years, but found when one of the ponds at Chilton Hall was dredged.

# The Town Maces of Sudbury



Pride of place among Sudbury's Mayoral Regalia must go to the two ancient maces which are carried before the Mayor on Civic occasions. Eight hundred years have passed since the first mention of a Mayor in Sudbury – a few years after the freemen of the town received their first charter in the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century from the Lord of the Manor, Richard de Clare, Earl of Gloucester and Hertford.

A century later another Lord of the Manor, Roger Mortimer, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of March, granted another charter, written in Norman French, and dated 'at our Castle of Clare the 17<sup>th</sup> day of June in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of King Richard the second (1397)'.

This proclaims: 'know that we have given licence for us and our heirs to the Mayor and Bailiffs of our Town of Sudbury and to their successors for ever that they may elect and appoint every year two sergeants to carry before them Maces of our Arms within the franchise of our said town'.

Those Maces would have been of much simpler design than the ones we see today, which are surmounted with ornate heads. In the proceedings of the Suffolk institute of Archaeology for 1892 William Walter Hodson, the Sudbury historian, suggested that the original Maces were reversed, the original heads becoming the handles, and new heads being attached to the other end of the staff, a procedure known to have been used in other Boroughs. This work would have been paid for by the bequest of a former Mayor, Richard Firmyn, whose will, made in 1614, included 'legacy of tenne poundes, given to the Mayor and Aldermen of Suthburie for the tyme beinge, to be by them employed and laide out towards the newe-making, bettering and inlargynge of the two Maces used to be carried by the Sergeants there before the Mayor of the Towne of Suthburie aforesaid for ye tyme being'. So the present heads may be about 400 years old but the staffs are almost certainly older.

The Maces are of silver gilt, 2 feet 5¾ inches long, with their heads crested with seven crosses and fleurs-de-lys alternately, and surmounted by open crowns, with orbs and crosses. The 'Crowns of the Heads' are engraved in high relief with the Royal Arms (of Charles II), and round the heads, which are divided by vertical lines of conventional leaves and terminal flowers with thistle-like heads, into four compartments, are the Borough Arms, the Rose of England, the Thistle of Scotland, and the Fleur-de-lys of France (crowned). The staffs are 16½ inches long, with a bold, semi-globular moulding in the centre, and a smaller ovolo at the lower end.

The Sergeants at Mace of earlier days had other duties as well. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century they had to execute processes and warrants. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century it was the Sergeants at Mace who distributed 'common money' to the Freemen who did not exercise their right to pasture cattle on the Commonlands.

Today new Freemen of Sudbury still pledge their support to the Mayor and his Sergeants at Mace when they are admitted and in recent years the Sudbury Freemen have been proud to provide honorary Macebearers to maintain the centuries-old Mayoral tradition.

## **Claret Jugs**



Presented to the Borough of Sudbury by the Suffolk Regiment, 1953

# **Silver Cup**



Presented by the Mayor and Corporation of the Borough of Sudbury to  
D. Company 2<sup>nd</sup> Volunteer Battalion Suffolk Regiment

# **The Burke Cup**



Presented by Sir George Burke Esq., the Auburies, Sudbury, to the 11<sup>th</sup>  
Suffolk Rifle Volunteers. Competed for by 24 members  
on October 12<sup>th</sup> 1864 and won by Corporal F. Wheeler

# The Godfrey Tankard or Sudbury's Loving Cup



This is not the original one given to Sir Edmund Godfrey by Charles II in 1665, for it bears the London hall-marks for 1675/6, and the inscription states that the cup was the gift of Sir Edmund "to someone who is not named, but most probably to Sir Gervase Elwes, of Stoke College". It would appear that this tankard is one of several that were made to perpetuate the fame of Sir Edmund Godfrey's public services. He was given a knighthood by Charles II for the services he rendered during the Great Plague of 1665 and the Fire of London the next year. The King did present a cup to Sir Edmund in 1665 but also gave him 800 ounces of plate and it has been suggested that Sir Edmund, with pardonable pride, had several of these tankards manufactured out of the royal gift to give to his friends and relations.

It was not known how the cup came into the possession of the Corporation until recently when a draft was discovered amongst the Borough muniments containing allegations made in 1684 against the Mayor, Mr. John Catesby, an eminent attorney in the borough who was unpopular with some of the Burgesses on account of his strong political opinions.

One of these allegations runs thus:

**Sir Robert Cordell has been for a long time member for the Borough of Sudbury (1661-1679), and ye Corporation had declared that they would vote for him, but were overpowered by ye continued entreaties and wheedles of Mr. Catesby, and Sir Gervase Elwes, to gratify the Corporation did present thme with a Tankard with some inscription thereon ingraven in latine, relating to Sir Edmund Godfrey, which ye now said Mr. Catesby keeps and brings forth at all Corporation feasts, and in most solemn mannere drinks Sir Gervase his health, and ye said John Catesby hath declared he had made such an interest for Gervase Elwes in Sudbury, as all ye gentlemen in ye County could never destroy it.**

The Corporation was grateful for the gift, and at the election in 1679 Sir Gervase Elwes, Bart. of Stoke College, and his son were duly returned together as members for Sudbury.

# **An unpleasant ending to a Sudbury Mayoral Banquet**

'A fracas is reported to have occurred on Saturday evening, November, 9, after the Mayor's Banquet at the Town Hall. The unfortunate affair, it is stated, arose between the hall-keeper, George Johnson, and the caterer, Mr. Ulmer, of King Street. As the guests were leaving Johnson felt aggrieved because the 'tips' at the cloak-room were given to the waiters, whom he threatened to turn out. Ultimately the waiters left the cloakroom and reported the matter to Mr. Ulmer. The hall-keeper then made his way to the assembly room, where the caterer and his men were packing up. The dispute was discussed with considerable warmth, and it is alleged that Mr. Ulmer pushed the hall-keeper on one side. Johnson retaliated by striking Ulmer on the back of the head with the massive silver Loving Cup, the property of the Sudbury Corporation. The melee was at length brought to an end by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, who heard a crash, putting in an appearance. Johnson was then suspended.

On Monday, November 11, at the monthly meeting of the Corporation, Johnson's conduct was discussed, and a letter was read from Johnson expressing regret, and promising good conduct in the future. The Council, however, unanimously decided to dismiss the hall-keeper at a week's notice. The ancient loving cup has a large indentation on the side.'

***(Note: This has since been repaired.)***

**From the Essex County Standard, 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1895**  
**Extract from "Suffolk Country Town – A Sudbury Miscellany" by Allan W. Berry**

# **The mysterious death of Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey**

This tragic event was linked to Titus Oates' Popish Plot in 1678 which was an alleged plot to kill the King and put his Catholic brother James, Duke of York on the throne but the true intention was to discredit Catholics in England. Titus Oates made the allegations before Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, who was an eminent justice of the peace. The following is based on a anti-Catholic account of the time.

As a result of Oates' allegations various Jesuits and papists were arrested. About a fortnight later, on Saturday, October 12, Godfrey went missing after leaving his house in Green's Lane, in the Strand near Hungerford Market, where he was a wood-merchant. For some days unsuccessful searches were made to find the magistrate. He had been seen near St. Clements Church, in the Strand, on the day he left home. Shortly after this he was seen in Marylebone, and at noon he had a meeting with one of the Churchwardens of St. Martins-in-the-Fields.

From this time Godfrey was never seen alive again; nor was any message received by his servants at home. Sunday came, and no tidings of him; Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday followed with no word of him. Then at six o'clock on the Thursday evening, the 17<sup>th</sup>, two men crossing a field on the south side of Primrose Hill observed a sword-belt, stick and a pair of gloves, lying at the side of the hedge. They paid no attention to them at the time, and walked on to Chalk Farm, then called at the White House, where they mentioned to the master what they had seen. He accompanied them to the spot where the articles lay. One of the men, stooping down, looked in the adjoining ditch and saw the body of a man lying on his face. It was Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey. His sword was thrust through him but there was no blood on his clothes or about him; his shoes were clean and there was money in his pocket. But a large lace band he was wearing around his neck was missing, there was an inch wide mark around his neck, which was broken, and bruises on his chest. It was obvious he had been strangled, then carried to the ditch then run through with his own sword.

A jury was empanelled, and the evidence of two surgeons showed that Godfrey's death was indeed caused by strangulation. A large sum of money and a diamond ring were still in his pockets, but his pocket-book, which the magistrate used to take notes of examinations, was missing. It was claimed that white wax, something he never used himself but which was used by 'persons of distinction' and by priests, was scattered over his clothes. From this it was concluded that Roman Catholics were involved in his death. This of course was regarded as evidence of the existence of the Popish Plot and warrants were signed for the arrest of twenty-six persons who had been implicated by Oates, and they were committed to the Tower.

The body of Sir Edmund was taken home, embalmed and, after lying in state for two days at Bridewell Hospital, taken to St. Martin's Church for burial. The pall was supported by eight knights – all Justices of the Peace - and all the City Aldermen, together with seventy-two members of the clergy, walked before the body, and a great multitude followed. The body was interred in the churchyard and a memorial to Sir Edmund was erected in Westminster Abbey.

As yet, however, the perpetrators of this murder had not been discovered, though a reward and the King's protection had been offered to any person making the disclosure. But a few days later a servant named William Bedloe was brought to London from Bristol, where he had been arrested at his own request saying that he knew some circumstances relating to Sir Edmund's death. He stated that he had seen the murdered body in Somerset House (then the residence of King Charles's Catholic Queen) and had been offered a large sum of money to help remove it. It was then remembered that at that time the Queen had been for some days in so close confinement that no person was admitted. Even Prince Rupert, who came there to wait on her, was denied access. This raised a strong suspicion that she was involved in the death, but the King would not allow the matter to be taken any further. Coleman, the Duke of York's Secretary, who was soon afterwards convicted of high treason, confessed when he lay in Newgate, that he had spoken of the Duke's designs to Godfrey 'upon which the Duke gave order to kill him.'

Soon after, Miles Prance, a Goldsmith, who had worked in the Queen's chapel, was arrested on suspicion of having been concerned in the death of Sir Edmund. On his confession and testimony, confirmed by Bedloe and others, Green, Hill, and Berry (all in subordinate situations at Somerset House) were convicted of the murder. Two Irish Jesuits who were implicated absconded.

It appeared that the unfortunate magistrate had been inveigled into Somerset House at the Water-Gate, under the pretence of his assistance being needed to allay a quarrel, and was immediately strangled with a twisted handkerchief after which Green, "with all his force, wrung his neck almost round." Four nights later the assassins had taken his body to Soho in a sedan chair and then on a horse to the place where it was discovered on Primrose Hill. There one of the Jesuits ran his sword through the corpse. Green, Berry, and Hill, were executed, each of them protesting his innocence to the last.

This horrible event is commemorated in a contemporary medallion depicting Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey walking with a broken neck and a sword in his body. On the reverse St. Denis bears his head in his hand with this inscription:

**Godfrey walks up-hill after he was dead,  
Denis walks down-hill carrying his head.**

Another shows Sir Edmund being strangled and the body being carried on horseback, with Primrose Hill in the distance. A third medallion depicts the Pope and the Devil; the strangulation by two Jesuits; Sir Godfrey borne in a sedan and the body with the sword through it.

# A pen dipped in venom: the Sudburiad of Hamilton Roche

When the nineteenth century began, the small Suffolk Town of Sudbury was a Borough ruled by a Corporation that was not elected by townsfolk, but self-perpetuating. When vacancies occurred through death or resignation, the Corporation appointed new members.

At its head was the Mayor, elected annually by the Corporation. In the roll of Mayors, only half a dozen names appear in the twenty years up to 1817. In the nine years preceding that date, only three men took it in turns to hold the office – Dr. Lachlan MacClean, M.D., William Strutt, and Branwhite Oliver.

In this period there was in Sudbury a certain John Hamilton Roche (who preferred to call himself simply Hamilton Roche), sometime an officer in the light infantry. He was described as a wine merchant when, in November of 1810, he had the misfortune to become bankrupt.

He married Sara, one of William Strutt's daughters. Roche then set himself up as an author and in 1810 published 'A Suffolk Tale' sold at 10 shillings (expensive at that time).

Hamilton Roche viewed Sudbury's local dignitaries in contrasting lights. To his Father-in-law he dedicated verses, and he wrote a laudatory poem to the memory of Mrs. Strutt, who had died in 1775 during the second of her husband's total of a dozen Mayoralties.

His attitude was very different to the other two holders of the Mayoral Office during that nine-year rotation. During Branwhite Oliver's turn in the Mayoral chair, Dr. Lachlan MacClean, in his capacity as a Justice of the Peace, had incurred Roche's enmity by committing him to Bury Gaol in April 1811 on a charge of forgery. Of this crime he was later acquitted.

Thereafter Roche set about lambasting the despised Lachlan MacClean and Branwhite Oliver in vitriolic verse. He announced his intention to publish a book of poems called '**The Sudburiad**' the contents of which revealed a whole series of thinly-veiled attacks on local worthies above all, of course, on the author's pet hates, MacClean and Oliver as well as the Town Clerk, Robert Frost.

Here are just three of his verses:-

**TWO BOROUGH HIRELINGS, known as O- and Mac'-  
A dripping vender and a Scottish Quack!  
Perch'd at Moot Hall: - in PRIVATE did debate,  
As late in venal majesty the state  
And judg'd it crime, to screen a man from writt!  
And for such crime, they did a man commit!!!  
While they from JUSTICE, and a Fieri Facius,  
CONCEAL THEIR SWORD! – Their TANKARDS! And the MACES!!!**

O – Branwhite Oliver – was a Grocer; the Scottish Quack was Lachlan MacClean, MD. The Tankard referred to is now known as the Town Loving Cup or Godfrey Tankard.

There is a story behind the lack of maces in the Mayoral procession. In 1809 William Shave, a brazier and tin plate worker, had claimed admission to the Freedom of the Borough through his holding an apprenticeship. The Corporation had declined to admit him. He took his case to the Kings Bench court and on the 16<sup>th</sup> June 1810 the judges ruled in favour of William Shave and awarded costs against the Corporation.

The Corporation duly admitted William to his Freedom. They were, however, unable to pay costs of £164 18s 6d. As a result in September 1813 the Sheriff's officers entered Sudbury's Moot Hall and removed property to be sold to pay the debt. This included the Mayor's gown and other paraphernalia – scales, brass weights which were used at the weekly market, scarlet cushions, green cloths, and some 260 leather buckets (presented by Freemen on their Admission) and fire cromes (forks with long prongs) – leaving the borough bereft of much of its fire fighting equipment. These were all sold by auction on the Market Hill, raising a total of £82.6s.6d, the Mayor's gown being bought by a local farmer who wore it when hunting. The concealment of the Maces, the Tankard and the Sword, referred to in the verse, was obviously to protect them from the 'Fieri Facias', a writ commanding the Sheriff to seize a defendant's goods.

'**The Old Red Gown**', tells how the Mayoral robe was worn in turn by William Strutt whom it fitted, and then –

**Sir Knight MaC-Dirty was the next who wore it,  
and like some rag to frighten crows he bore it.  
A turn-coat quack, full six feet two in height,  
that wander'd from sky isle, some folks to bite!  
And, whether for fashion, or for kindred shame,  
he mounted spectacles and chang'd his name!  
And what was worse – though I aver it true,  
the turn-coat scrub chang'd his religion too!**

It was then Branwhite Oliver's turn –

**Thus the Red Gown did grace the sawny quack,  
until next year it grac'd a chandler's back!  
A filthy dwarf, who retails cheese and butter;  
sells eggs! And in 'his shop' would make a splutter.  
How such an ape was let the Gown to mock,  
'twould better suit to dress him in a smock.**

**Within 'his shop' he look'd quite spruce and fine,  
Retailing soap, figs, butter and sweet wine,  
but was so short in stature, that 'The Gown'  
(whene'er he wore it publicly through town)  
would sweep the streets, as he along them pac'd,  
and justice, Gown and Gownsmen, all disgrac'd!  
Thus has this Gown been worn, from year to year,  
and god knows how long it may yet appear.**

*Extracts from the book "Suffolk Country Town – A Sudbury Miscellany" by Allan W. Berry*

# **Sudbury Gaol and Bridewell**

## **A report by James Neild after a visit on 17th October 1801**

'The Keeper, Richard Wright, is by trade a Baker: has no salary. Fees, 4s. No table. This miserable prison has for debtors and criminals two rooms on the ground floor fronting the street, about 13 feet square. A fire place in each, with iron-bar grated windows, and a small aperture to beg through. Upstairs are two little rooms, 7 feet by 5 each, for the debtors to lodge in; and for women criminals a room with a fire place about 13 feet square. The Courtyard being insecure, prisoners have not the use of it; and water is not accessible to them. There is no necessary; a bar of wood across one corner of each room with a little straw on the floor is used for that purpose. Gaol very dirty. Neither the act for the preservation of health nor clauses against spirituous liquors hung up. Allowance 6d a day. No prisoner.'

(Note: The site of the old gaol was at 25 Friars Street; it is marked by a blue plaque.)

**(Gentleman's Magazine, September 1804)**

**Extract from the book "Suffolk County Town – A Sudbury Miscellany" by  
Allan W. Berry**

# 'The moorhen's nest'

## A painting by George Washington Brownlow



At the time he painted 'The moorhen's nest' Brownlow lived in a cottage next to the school in Belchamp Walter. The name of the little boy was Felton (thought to be John Felton) and the little girl was Mary Ann Ives (later known by her married name of Mary Ann Wright).

Her daughter, Mrs Mary Chatters, who lived at 'Ashcroft', Belchamp Walter, well remembered her mother speaking of going with Brownlow to the lake east of Belchamp Walter Church (locally known as the "Canal") and posing for the painting. Mrs. Wright was born in 1864 and, if she was about 8 years old at the time, it would date the painting around 1872.

There are a number of tangible reminders of the artist in the village. A headstone in Belchamp Walter churchyard records: 'George Washington Brownlow, died July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1876, aged 41 years.' While in the north wall of the nave a stained glass window bears the inscription: 'This window is inserted by Samuel J. St. Clare Raymond to the memory of George Washington Brownlow who died July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1876, aged 41 years.'

Brownlow also painted the four evangelists on the panels of the quadrangular pulpit and these are signed G W B 1865. In addition he adorned the front of the altar with two paintings depicting 'Abraham preparing to sacrifice Isaac' and 'The breaking of bread'.

(Note: This information was given to me by Mr W G Deal, a neighbour of Mrs. Mary Chatters. Anthony H. Moore , Mayor of Sudbury, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1981.)

**This anthology has been compiled by Sudbury Town Council. Revised February 2008.**