

The Construction and Representation of Urban Identities:
Public and Private Lives in Late Medieval Bury St Edmunds



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Abstract

This thesis relocates the individual within the processes of representation in order to compensate for the relative neglect the subject has received in recent treatments of medieval urban studies. It reassesses the behaviour of urban communities not in terms of the demographic and economic, by aligning the particular community along the growth/decline debate; but by viewing social process in terms of the interpersonal relationships of the town's inhabitants. This has been pursued by examining the construction and representation of personal and communal identity within defined urban contexts, and by suggesting a method by which these subjects might provide a useful critical tool for approaching traditional urban historical concerns from a new perspective. Sociological conceptualisations of self, person and community have been invoked to provide a vocabulary for discussing the issues involved, and methods for reconsidering approaches to evidence using a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques.

Using Bury St Edmunds, a relatively sophisticated and somewhat distinctive urban community, an examination of the ways in which identity and self representation are enacted by its inhabitants is undertaken to establish the role of the individual within the social processes at work within urban communities. It is shown that identity can be seen as a mechanism by which communities order and regulate their participants. Specific case studies of individual identity are presented alongside a model of communal identity in the town, with the intention of situating the individual constructions of identity within the contextual discourses of identity produced by the community. The location of the individual within the communal constructions of identity enables the observation of the effects that individuals had upon their late medieval urban communities, with the result that the nature of social change can be seen to originate from the activities and perceptions of individuals, rather than communities.

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Abbreviations

BL	British Library
BRO	Bristol Record Office
BSERO	Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds Branch
CCHR	Calendar of Charter Rolls
CCR	Calendar of Close Rolls
CFR	Calendar of Fine Rolls
CIM	Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous
CIPM	Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem
CPR	Calendar of Patent Rolls
Dinn <i>Popular Religion</i>	R. Dinn <i>Popular Religion in Late Medieval Bury St Edmunds</i> (PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1990).
EETS	Early English Text Society.
Gottfried <i>Bury St Edmunds</i>	R.S. Gottfried <i>Bury St Edmunds and the Urban Crisis 1290-1539</i> (Princeton University Press, 1982)
Lobel <i>The Borough</i>	M.D. Lobel <i>The Borough of Bury St Edmunds</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935)
Lobel 1327	'A detailed account of the 1327 rising at Bury St Edmunds and the subsequent trial' in <i>The Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History</i> (no.21, 1933) pp.215-31.
Lobel 1381	'Some additions to André Réville's account of events at Bury St Edmunds following on the revolt of 1382' in <i>The Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History</i> (no.21, 1933) pp.208-14.
<i>Memorials</i>	Arnold, T. ed. <i>Memorials of St. Edmund's Abbey</i> (London, 1965 reprint) Rolls Series; 3 vols.
PCC	Prerogative Court of Canterbury
PRO	Public Record Office
Thomson <i>Archives</i>	R.M. Thomson ed. <i>The Archives of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds</i> (Suffolk Record Society vol.21; Bury St Edmunds, 1980).
Trenholme <i>EMB</i>	Trenholme, N.M. <i>The English Monastic Boroughs: A Study in Medieval History</i> University of Missouri Studies, vol.II no.3 (July 1927).
Tymms <i>Bury Wills</i>	Tymms, S. ed. <i>Bury Wills and Inventories</i> (Camden Society no.49, 1850).
VCH	Page, W. ed. <i>Victoria County History of Suffolk</i> (London, 1907).

Note.

The use of 'his' or 'him' in the text is not intended to be exclusive: 'his/her' or 'him/her' should be inferred. Similarly 'townsmen' is not intended to be exclusive.

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Chapter 1: Introductory

1.i. Overview

1.i.a. General aims of the thesis.

This thesis will attempt to reposition the individual as the central focus of historical studies concerned with the structures and processes of communities. It will do so both in general and within the context of urban communities in particular. The individual's participation in the social and political spheres of public life has been chosen because this is the area in which key facets of individuality, motivation, agency and strategy are evident. The principle method adopted to achieve this goal is the use of comparison between a constructed model of an urban elite as a marker of the 'typical', and case studies of individuals whose relation to the model constitutes the 'particular'. The elite of Bury St Edmunds in the late 15th century will form the backdrop to this study, as they were a distinctive body which attempted to operate in a way that was common among urban elites of the period, but, as will be shown, were located in a community not organised or structured in the same way as many towns. In other words, the individuals who comprised elite of Bury offer an example of an elite who had to improvise in order to achieve their ambitions; and this process of improvisation was made manifest through a number of instances of self-consciously constructed and disseminated identity. The late 15th century, it will be suggested, marked something of a culmination of this process.

It is possible to construct a conceptual model of community because the behavioural ideologies and realities of 15th century social life can be seen to have filtered into the public lives of individuals to the extent that they are evident in the daily interaction of the whole community. This model will be designed to reflect modes of behaviour of an individual in the contexts of infra- and inter-community interaction, with the ultimate aim of enabling the identification of the expression of individuality. This is really the point of the exercise: to observe the activities of individuals so that a sense of their *mentalité* can be gleaned, but without subjugating the individual to immersion in his social, cultural and structural contexts. This is an approach to medieval urban studies that has not been attempted in other town studies, even those concerned with the social dimensions of interaction and life cycle.¹

¹ Such as Pythian-Adams' work on Coventry, and Gottfried's on Bury St Edmunds.

The focus of studies upon community rather than the individual has led to the regrettable situation whereby 'the individual' as subject has been largely neglected in studies of pre-Reformation society, a remarkable development given the treatment it has received in the later period.² It is very easy to lose sight of the individual when one is faced with a complex of symbolically compulsive social structures, social and political ideologies, spiritual authorities and unpredictable economics conditioning life, especially in a pre-modern context to which our access is impeded at every step of our researches. To some extent it is necessary to think about the individual in revisionist terms, as the subject has undergone considerable fluctuations in popularity.³ In sociological circles the individual has enjoyed something of a resurrection, after effectively being denied by the methodologies of community studies; now the individual is viewed by some as a component, often the *critical* component, in the mechanics of communal interaction.⁴ From historical quarters the fascination with community in the last decade or so has been considerable, with discussions appearing of community in both conceptual terms, and in terms of contextual case studies;⁵ although some have warned that medievalists' adoption of the issues and discourses of community has been naïve and obfuscating.⁶ In historiographical terms, particularly for the purposes of this study, it is necessary to align *both* sets of conceptual constructions in order to gain an insight into how the individual could locate himself within a community; and, almost incidentally, how *we* can locate historical individuals within communities of which we have no experiential knowledge.⁷ Sections 2.ii and 5.i below attempt to do this, by discussing possible approaches to locating the links between the individual and the community through the medium of identity, its expression and consumption.

² See for example Lena Cohen Orlin's *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Cornell University Press, 1994) for a recent discussion of the interface between public and private, and between the individual and the community. Rather than present in the introduction a literature review for each issue met with in this study, separate discussions of available secondary works will be presented as and when the subjects arise.

³ Historians have argued among themselves about the validity of biographical studies, with the result that despite its position within historical tradition, this type of endeavour is currently generally speaking "unfashionable", to use Gottfried's term; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.131. Miri Rubin's essay in Kermode, J.I. ed. *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth Century England* (Stroud; Alan Sutton, 1991) is an example of the current historical acknowledgement of the interest in the individual, although it is not explicitly situated within a methodological framework.

⁴ See for example Cohen, A.P. *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London, 1985) and *Self Consciousness: an Alternative Anthropology of Identity* (London, 1994); Cohen, A.P. and Rapport, N. eds. *Questions of Consciousness* (London, 1995); Rorty, A.O. ed. *The Identities of Persons* (University of California Press, 1976).

⁵ See for example McIntosh, M. *Autonomy and Community: the Royal Manor of Havering 1200-1500* (Cambridge, 1986); Bennet, M.J. *Community, Class and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge, 1982); Rosenthal, J. and Richmond, C. eds. *People, Politics and Community in the Later Middle Ages* (Gloucester, 1987); and Rubin, M. *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1987).

⁶ Rubin, M. 'Small groups: identity and solidarity in the late middle ages' in Kermode, J.I. ed. *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth Century England* (Stroud; Alan Sutton, 1991) pp.134-5.

⁷ Susan Reynolds' *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe 900-1300* (Oxford, 1984) discusses

An urban community is well suited to this project, because in the later middle ages towns were self conscious about the nature of their social, political and ideological organisation. Principally this means that they were often concerned with definitions of themselves, both in terms of their distinct identification as a community, and also in the ways they imposed order and hierarchy upon the social lives of their participants. Social stratification and economic control by the civic elite were aspects of this, as was artificial and ceremonial representation of the community as a social body.

Bury St Edmunds in the 15th century had a number of distinctive and even idiosyncratic features in its social and civic structures which render the town an appropriate source for a study of the links between the individual, community and identity.⁸ The political aspect of the lives of Bury's inhabitants, embodied as it was in the quasi-constitutional and entirely unofficial representation of a figure-head alderman and a nebulous oligarchic group of the town's elite, was dominated by the enduring opposition to the government of the town's monastic lords in the abbey of St. Edmund's.⁹ The townsmen's efforts to gain a degree of self-determination in the conduct of their public affairs in the face of a conservative and restrictive regime which was increasingly under pressure throughout the late 14th and 15th centuries, and the fact that to some extent they achieved it, provides an excellent opportunity to examine the processes behind the interface between the individual and authority. Furthermore, the fact that the secular community of Bury had no legally recognised vehicles with which to represent themselves means that it is possible to examine the prevalent ideology regarding the organisation of community, as one can witness how the town's elite went about mimicking such structures.

Other reasons for choosing Bury St Edmunds as the focus of this study exist as well. There has been considerable modern attention paid to Bury, with a number of full length works dedicated to the town.¹⁰ This body of work requires a degree of synthesis, not least because

'community' as a contemporary concept, indicating a number of ways in which community was understood in the period.

⁸ For a discussion of the town's political, demographic, economic and social conditions, see below Chapter 3.

⁹ In a number of ways the relationship of the townsmen to the monastic officers of St. Edmund's resembles that shared between the inhabitants of Oxford and the university's student population; see *The History of Oxford University* vol.1: Catto, J.I. and Evans, R. eds. *The Early Oxford School* (Oxford, 1984); and Cobban, A. and Balfour, A. *The Medieval English Universities: Oxford and Cambridge to c.1500* (Aldershot, 1988).

¹⁰ For example, Lobel *The Borough*, Dinn *Popular Religion*, and Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds*. Thomson's work on the archive of St. Edmund's abbey should also be included here, as his discussion on the records kept by the abbey directly bears not only on issues of the town's civic administration, but also upon relations with the townsmen; Thomson, R.M. ed. *The Archives of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds* (Suffolk Record Society vol.21; Bury St Edmunds, 1980). See also Lobel, M. 'The gaol of Bury St Edmunds' in *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History* (no.21, 1933) pp.203-7,

individual commentators have concentrated upon single issues: Lobel, for example, focuses upon political and constitutional aspects of Bury life; while Robert Dinn and others have concerned themselves with literary or religious appraisal of the monastic community, with only indirect reference to the town itself.¹¹ Robert Gottfried, who has adopted a sociological framework for discussing demographic, social and economic conditions in the town, with reference to topographical and occupational frameworks, has produced work which requires re-evaluation due to an imprecise and often incorrect reading of the evidence.¹² The work of Gottfried in particular needs re-examining, as many of his arguments regarding the social composition the town, its relative growth or decline, are based upon observations made on Bury's elite. However, in Gottfried's work the elite is a loose, mostly undefined group, which bases much of what he has to say upon somewhat shaky foundations. It is one of the intentions of this thesis to remedy this state of affairs.

Therefore, the amount of work already produced on Bury raises particular methodological issues regarding the mechanics of community which this study aims to address. Similarly, the nature of the Bury archive itself provides another justification for using Bury.¹³ The types of extant evidence are in many ways unlike those normally expected of an urban community, and this is largely a reflection of the system of administration employed in the town.¹⁴ What survives is unusual not only in its reconstruction of the community that produced it; but also in the way in which it circumvents the official structures and organs, and at the same time self-consciously imitates them. That is to say, the records reflect not only the secular community's lack of archive-producing mechanisms, but also the desire and the attempts made to acquire them.¹⁵

'Some additions to A. Reville's account of events at Bury St Edmunds following the revolt of 1381' in *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History* (no.21, 1933) pp.208-15, and 'A detailed account of the 1327 rising at Bury St Edmunds and the subsequent trial' in *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History* (no.21, 1933) pp.215-31.

¹¹ Older works on Bury, or works with accounts of Bury, have (naturally enough given the nature of the sources) tended to concentrate upon the workings of the monastic community: see for example, Trenholme *EMB*; Battely, J. *Antiquitates Rutupinae* (Oxford, 1975); Green, J.R. *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century* 2 vols. (London, 1894); *Memorials*; Dugdale, W. *Monasticon Anglicanum* ed. by Caley, J., Ellis, H. and Bandinel, B. 6 vols (London, 1817-30); Yates, R. *An Illustration of the Monastic History of St. Edmund's Bury* 2 parts (London, 1805).

¹² Particularly in the case of Gottfried's *Bury St Edmunds*. Gottfried's intentions and theoretical approach in this work, particularly his use of statistical method, are enlightening and highly interesting, but his use of the Bury material is erratic and occasionally simply wrong.

¹³ See below pp.5-18 for a discussion of the surviving material.

¹⁴ In other words a great deal of the routine administrative records (especially the court materials) were kept by monastic officials and recorded in the abbey's archive, subsequently to be dispersed and lost at the Dissolution.

¹⁵ Moreover, the material from Bury that is consistent with that surviving for other towns, especially the testamentary material, is unusual in its quality and quantity, suggesting highly efficient probate administration under the sacrists of St. Edmund's.

1.i.b. Material used, and topographical and chronological framework.

The topographical and chronological frameworks for this study have largely been determined by the materials that are available for consultation. The extensive use of testamentary evidence has inevitably shaped the 'where and when' of the study, as convenient topographical and chronological boundaries have been provided by the collections of registered wills from Bury. The period covered is c.1350 to 1493: the earliest probate register from the sacrist's court of St. Edmund's (BSERO Osbern) contains wills starting from the year 1351,¹⁶ while the latest entries in the next probate register, Hawlee, are dated 1493. In fact these latter are later additions to the register and are all letters of administration, and the latest *wills* to be entered are dated 1482.¹⁷ The period also covers the years in which the struggle for political dominance between the secular and monastic communities shifted irretrievably toward the former; and includes not only the events marking the most violent forms of resistance to monastic rule by the townsmen, but also the displays of civic identity and authority that signalled what was in effect the victory of the townsmen.¹⁸ Obviously the period has not been adhered to rigidly, and various types of testamentary and non-testamentary materials have been employed which date from both before 1350 and after 1493.

The probate registers drawn up by the sacrist's court comprise a cogent topographical boundary, due to the privileges attained by the abbey over the centuries. As part of the peculiar ecclesiastical jurisdiction enjoyed by the abbey, the sacrist held archdiaconal authority and consequently was responsible for the proving of wills of testators holding property within the banleuca. Furthermore, whereas a hierarchy of courts existed in the probate of wills,¹⁹ the exemptions accrued by St. Edmund's meant that wills of all testators with any holdings in Bury were proved, or at least registered, in the sacrist's probate registers, even if they held property beyond the liberty of the monastery.²⁰ Thus the probate

¹⁶ There is a will, that of Ralph Stanton, a wealthy chaplain of Bury possibly associated with the parish of St. James', which is dated on the feast of St. Stephen 1346: there is no probate date given, so perhaps it was not proved until much later; BSERO Osbern f.25v.

¹⁷ The register for the years 1482-1493 is missing, as is that for 1531-9. Apart from these two aberrations the series of wills from Bury St Edmunds is complete. For a list of Bury probate registers and registers from the archdeaconry of Sudbury see bibliography.

¹⁸ For details of the violent uprisings of the 14th century and the civic organisation of communal affairs through unofficial mechanisms in the 15th century, see below Chapter 3.

¹⁹ Testators holding land or property only within their archdeaconry had their wills proved in the archdeacon's court; those with holdings in more than one archdeaconry but within the same diocese had their wills proved in the bishop's consistory court; while those with holdings in more than one diocese had their wills proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. Thus the court of probate is often taken as a rough estimation of social status; Dinn *Popular Religion* p.45; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.259.

²⁰ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.46. A number of wills therefore appear in both the registers of the sacrist of St. Edmund's court and the PCC: BSERO Hawlee f.35 (PRO PCC Wattys f.4); BSERO Hawlee f.260 (PRO PCC Wattys f.35); BSERO Pye f.213 (PRO PCC Blamyr f.25); BSERO Hoode f.1 (PRO PCC Fetiplace f.25); BSERO Mason f.26 (PRO PCC Holder f.20); BSERO Hoode f.92 (PRO PCC Maynwayng f.12); BSERO

registers from the Peculiar court of the sacrist of St. Edmund's provide a body of wills that are geographically codified and distinct. Wills proved in the court of the archdeacon of Sudbury have also been used to provide a comparative element. The wills registered in this court are those taken from the rural areas that effectively comprise the hinterland of Bury St Edmunds, and as such have been exploited for their biographical, topographical and demographic content, as with the Bury wills.

The potential sources for a study of identity and authority in late medieval Bury St Edmunds are paradoxically both good and bad. On the one hand there is a plentiful supply of testamentary material, a source which constitutes the direct presentation of the individual within the mechanisms of institutional and legal administration. On the other hand, there are limited types of evidence emanating from the non-monastic community of Bury. As a monastic borough all aspects of civic government were undertaken by the obedientiaries of St. Edmund's or their officers and servants, with the result that any administrative records in connection with the running of the town were drawn up under the auspices of the abbey.²¹ Indeed much of what is known about the political relationship between the monastic and secular communities is derived from monastic chronicles and accounts; and virtually everything that is known of the economic and commercial aspects of public life in Bury comes from the registers, rentals and accounts of abbey personnel, or else from royal records. There *are* a number of sources which do originate from the townsmen themselves, principally in the 15th century, but of these the will material is by far the most complete and chronologically continuous. Those sources that are secular in provenance are isolated and often idiosyncratic, in that they are dissimilar from the material one would expect to find surviving in other towns. A particularly unfortunate result of the lack of civic archive is the absence of any contiguous series of documents that could be used to analyse the community over periods rather than at instances. Similarly unfortunate is the absence of material such as freemen's rolls,²² which would have proved invaluable in analyses of status, the composition of social groups, population, relative wealth and so on.

This has required that the material that *does* exist for Bury St Edmunds be read with sensitivity to its context. It has been important to analyse the material with an awareness of the social and political background to the production of documents from a community with a tradition of self-conscious representation. As will be seen, this has often led to reading against

Hoode f.131 (PRO PCC Porch f.27).

²¹ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.38.

²² Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.265.

the texts to elucidate this tradition.²³ It has also required the closest possible reading of the material to fulfill the aim of achieving a definition of status that is explicit and as broad as possible, in order to compensate viably for the relative lack of extant evidence.²⁴

The will material from Bury may be unusual not only insofar as it has survived relatively intact, but also in that it may have been more comprehensive than that of other communities to begin with. This may have been due to the peculiarities of the sacrist's jurisdiction regarding testamentary matters, and Gottfried estimates that between 70-75% of adult males from Bury registered their will accordingly in the sacrist's court.²⁵ The size of the will sample from Bury compares favourably with that which survives for other towns: for example Norwich, with a much larger population than Bury, has 1804 wills extant for the period 1370-1532, although Tanner used only a sample of 904 in his work.²⁶ The collection for Bury, if it does represent the registered wills of three quarters of the adult male population, may well have included the wills of all social groups in the town except for the poorest, and indeed indications of this are apparent in the material.²⁷ In other words the tendency of will material to represent the wealthier groups in a community by virtue of the fact that the poorest individuals had little to commit to formal administration is somewhat mitigated in the case of Bury.²⁸ While models can be built of communities as a whole, in the current study, which is concerned with aligning the elite and non-elite of Bury, the leaning towards the top end of the social scale is something of a virtue.

Including wills taken from the PCC, 1472 wills and testaments survive from Bury inhabitants, and 168 letters of administration regarding Bury inhabitants between 1350 and 1493, all of which have been examined and recorded in a relational database. In addition a sample of wills and testaments registered in the archdeacon of Sudbury's court have been examined, containing 229 wills taken from the registers BSERO Baldwyne and BSERO

²³ See the case studies in Chapter 5.

²⁴ See the model of the Bury elite below, Chapter 4.

²⁵ He also suggests that the registration of wills became increasingly systematic from the 1440s onwards, thanks to the efforts of a number of assiduous officers keen to reap the profits arising from probate; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.259-60.

²⁶ Similarly other communities did not preserve such large collections of pre-Reformation wills: for Hull there survive only 355, Bristol 328, Chester 80 and Colchester 203; Dinn *Popular Religion* p.58.

²⁷ While there are a number of references to named individuals from the poorer sections of the secular community as recipients in the wills, there are also several instances of poor testators. For example, the wills of two husbandmen have been registered, BSERO Hawlee ff.89v, 270; while those of five Bury labourers remain also; BSERO Hawlee ff.17, 21, 36, 46, 276v. Although one has to recognise the variety of social status of servants, whereby not all servants are by any means necessarily poor, the testator that claims servile status at the end of their life (unless they died young) might well be of low social status: BSERO Osbern ff.17 (two references), 69b, 97, 124 ; BSERO Hawlee f.124. These wills are those of testators indicating low status occupations, and do not include those who might be deemed poor by the value and content of their will.

Hervye which cover the period 1444 to 1493.²⁹ Specific wills of individuals from after 1493 have also been examined from both the sacrist's court and the archdeacon of Sudbury's court for the purposes of reconstructing particular families.

Wills from Peculiar court of the sacrist of St. Edmund's				
	1346-99	1400-49	1450-93	Total
No. of wills	373	633	466	1472
No. of administrations	3	58	107	168
Total	376	691	573	1640
No. of male testators	315	579	463	1357
No. of female testators	61	112	110	283
Wills from the court of the archdeacon of Sudbury				
	1346-99	1400-49	1450-93	Total
No. of wills	0	3	226	229
No. of administrations	0	0	0	0
Total	0	3	226	229
No. of male testators	0	3	196	199
No. of female testators	0	0	30	30

Table 1.1: Will sample examined from Bury St Edmunds and hinterland c.1346-1493.

Other sources have been examined alongside the testamentary materials, mainly with a view to supplementing the biographical data of individuals with associations with Bury St Edmunds. Material emanating from social and craft guilds has been examined, although as with many of the sources for Bury the documents are quite isolated. There are guild returns from eighteen Bury guilds in 1389, and twenty-one others from guilds held in west Suffolk parishes.³⁰ As Robert Dinn suggests, these returns in their explanation of the guilds' activities tend to emphasise the religious aspects of their members' participation, while obscuring the social elements.³¹ This suggests either widespread changes in the role of guilds in Bury (and elsewhere), or else implies a degree of caution on the part of the late 14th century townsmen which led them to conceal the aspects of their fraternities that suggested association or smacked of 'confederacy'. In Bury, as elsewhere, this caution may have been justified considering the unrest and violence that preceded the royal demand for the returns. Guild material from the 15th century consists of the crucially important collection of statutes of the

²⁸ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.59.

²⁹ That is, only a selection of wills from the registers Baldwyne and Hervye have been examined.

³⁰ See bibliography for references.

³¹ Dinn cites the 1389 guild return for the Candlemas guild, which contains little evidence for any kind of social responsibility or activity on the part of its brethren. By 1471 when its statutes were drawn up, while the religious element of the guild's activities were still evident, many of the statutes are concerned with social relations between the brethren; Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.37, 39. For a transcript of the 1471 Candlemas guild statutes see below Appendix II.

Candlemas gild,³² and two records associated with craft guilds of Bury.³³ The 1478 ordinances of the craft of wool and linen weavers are as significant for the sociological and biographical material they provide, as for their commercial and economic evidence.³⁴

Perhaps the most interesting and distinctive sources to arise out of the secular community's struggle against the political, economic and municipal control of Bury date from the second half of the 15th century, and they are the most pertinent to this study. The first is known as *Jankyn Smyth's Book*,³⁵ which dates from the end of the century and is composed of a number of connected documents and references. The principle contents are reproductions of a number of deeds and charters made by John Smyth esquire, which convey a huge endowment to the population of Bury subject to the administration of the Candlemas gild. Parts of the endowment can be found in Smyth's will, but other sections of it appear for the first time in this compilation. *Jankyn Smyth's Book* also contains a reproduction of the endowment appended to Smyth's enfeoffment by Margaret Odeham a decade or so after Smyth's; as well as the most complete and detailed survey of the individual parcels of land and property enfeoffed by Smyth and Odeham that survives. More interestingly from the point of view of a study of the construction and display of public identity, the manuscript contains a verse or prayer enjoining the secular community of Bury to celebrate the memory of Smyth at the respective occasions laid down by Smyth in his will. This source is indicative of a number of critical developments that took place within the secular elite of Bury in the 15th century, and may have been designed to act as not only a definitive practical record of the endowments made to the town, but also a record of a communally constructed identity produced by the Bury elite.³⁶

A similar source in many ways is BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents*, another (this time vast) compilation of records dating from the late 16th century. It contains copies of hundreds of records pertaining essentially to anything connected with the public property of the town. Thus it includes numerous extracts of deeds, charters and enfeoffments from John Smyth, many of which appear in his *Book*, as well as those of many other individuals. Copies of several important burgesses' wills have also been inserted into the collection in cases where the testator has made an enduring provision for the community. The collection also includes copies of a number of records made at the Dissolution regarding the chantries and clergy of

³² See Appendix II.

³³ The weavers' craft guild ordinances of 1478, BSERO B 9/1/2; and a writ issued by the plain and coverlet weavers, BSERO B 9/1/7. The latter is badly damaged and fragmentary.

³⁴ See below chapter 3.

³⁵ BSERO H 1/2/1. See below section 6.ii for a detailed discussion of the contents of this source.

³⁶ See below pp.195-280.

Bury, as well as the religious guilds of the town. This document differs from *Jankyn Smyth's Book* as it provides evidence of specific institutionalised aspects of public life in Bury (such as the perpetual chantries, or Smyth's endowment) over a prolonged period. An example of this might be seen in the accounts which detail the transfer of the Smyth enfeoffment to new feoffees in complete and careful compliance with the instructions originally laid down by Smyth.

A final collection of single sources which are linked thematically and functionally with both *Jankyn Smyth's Book* and the *Feoffment Documents* originate from the Bury elite at the end of the 15th century and beginning of the 16th century.³⁷ These are in effect individual records of one or more sizeable land grants made to the town as a whole by three Bury families, which follow the aspirations and occasionally the forms of Smyth's endowment. In all cases the mechanisms and processes involved in the alienation of land and property have involved the consultation and active participation of networks of social peers and professionals which provide useful evidence of the sociological aspects of public business and legal structures. The 1471 Candlemas guild statutes should also be mentioned in explicit connection with these sources, as many of the ordinances are concerned with the perpetuation and administration of both the large endowments made by Smyth and Margaret Odeham, and the celebrations that constituted conditions of the grants.³⁸ These sources in particular are useful to this study, as they comprise clear examples of the self-conscious construction of a communal identity and ideology.

Royal records provide a further means of examining the secular community of Bury without recourse to monastic sources. The calendars of the various rolls, letters and inquisitions throughout the 14th and 15th centuries elicit details of Bury individuals and families, particularly in the spheres of their legal, commercial and political activities.³⁹ The calendars are good sources for tracing the county connections of the townsmen of Bury, especially the wealthiest, most politically active and prestigious individuals. Nevertheless this in itself might prove to be something of an advantage as well as a drawback, as *exactly because* the calendars often display the activities of the elite, a small number of people even within the context of a county, the same individuals appear repeatedly in the material. This potentially enables the construction of reasonably detailed networks of the most prestigious and politically significant individuals within the region.

³⁷ BSERO H 1/5/18 *Fishe gift*; BSERO H 1/5/19 Thomas Edon's grant to the Candlemas guild; BSERO H 1/5/21 Adam and Margaret Newehawe's obit.

³⁸ See Appendix II.

³⁹ Such as service at parliaments or on commissions, land and property transfers, the settlement of financial disputes and criminal cases and so on.

The taxation material available for Bury, particularly the returns made for the 1377-81 poll taxes and the 1524 lay subsidies and anticipation, have also provided useful evidence of demographic and economic contexts in Bury at the beginning of and shortly after the period examined.⁴⁰ These are standard sources for beginning the process of estimating population levels, although the methods of such use of them are surrounded by considerable disagreement.⁴¹ Using the taxation material to determine relative levels of wealth within communities is somewhat less controversial, and doing so provides an indicator of status, or at least a platform from which an examination of status can be begun, especially with regards to the elite. This type of evidence is subject to all the vagaries and concerns connected with the inevitable problem of underenumeration as people tried their best to cheat the assessors. This was particularly so in the case of the 1380 poll tax, which not only required 'strenuous means of collection' due to the numbers of individuals liable to pay, but also because it directly followed earlier taxes.⁴² However the 1380 poll tax was levied on everyone of the age of fifteen or above, including women, while the 1524 subsidy applied to all those of the age of sixteen or above earning or worth £1 a year, which means that theoretically the figures and names presented should be more or less comprehensive in terms of the adult population.⁴³ Unfortunately the poll tax list for Bury St Edmunds for 1380 does not survive, but the lists taken for the hundred of Babergh (the region immediately to the south of Bury) provide an excellent resource for examining the wealth and population levels of the industrial parishes serving as Bury's hinterland. The lists for 1377 do survive, however, and have been used to make estimations of Bury's population at the end of the century. The returns for the 1524 lay subsidy, apart from naming individuals, listing their contribution and the value of their personal wealth, occasionally refer to occupation or titular status as well. As far as Bury is concerned, it also has the advantage of assessing people within their wards so that topographical information is sometimes forthcoming.

The last royal records examined that pertain to Bury St Edmunds are those generated by the

⁴⁰ See Powell, E. *The Rising in East Anglia in 1381: with an appendix containing the Suffolk Poll Tax Lists for that year* (Cambridge University Press, 1896); and Hervey, S.H.A. *Suffolk in 1524 being the return for a subsidy granted in 1523* Suffolk Green Books no.10 (Woodbridge, 1910) pp.348-56 for reproductions of the returns made in Bury and West Suffolk.

⁴¹ See below pp.57-62.

⁴² Commissions initiated to investigate the returns and analyse lists of inhabitants after the collection of the first part of the 1380 tax produced totals significantly lower than anticipated. Although the commissions discovered higher populations in communities than the initial returns indicated, the number of tax payers was still lower than that paying the 1377 tax; Powell, E. *The Rising in East Anglia in 1381: with an appendix containing the Suffolk Poll Tax Lists for that year* (Cambridge University Press, 1896) pp.4-7.

⁴³ Powell, E. *The Rising in East Anglia in 1381: with an appendix containing the Suffolk Poll Tax Lists for that year* (Cambridge University Press, 1896) p.4; Hervey, S.H.A. *Suffolk in 1524 being the return for a subsidy granted in 1523* Suffolk Green Books no.10 (Woodbridge, 1910) p.xvi. Hervey claims that the latter contains a list of virtually every householder in the county of Suffolk, including even the labouring

Dissolution. These consist of a letter from John ap Rice to Cromwell dated November 1535 reporting upon the abbot's abuses of privileges and the 'superstitious' behaviour of the convent;⁴⁴ and fifteen chantry certificates issued in 1548.⁴⁵ Several of the latter have been copied into the compilation known as *Feoffment Documents*, and these tend to be those connected with a number of prestigious civic patrons of Bury.⁴⁶ These sources are useful because they provide evidence of the continuation of a number of civic 'projects' begun by the secular elite in the 15th century.

The final source of material for the study inevitably originates from within the abbey archive. This is a condition of the political and social reality of the town's administration in the period, and such material should be consumed with a due degree of consciousness of its provenance. The material within this category includes forms of evidence that one would expect to find in a monastic archive, as well as forms of evidence one would expect to be produced by civic administrations. In other words chronicles, manorial accounts, narratives, rentals and obedientiaries' accounts all originate from the same source. The archive of St. Edmund's is vast, and a brief glance at Thomson's calendar of materials emanating from the abbey's scriptorium and departmental offices indicates the breadth of subject matter drawn up.⁴⁷ However at the Dissolution the archive was greatly dispersed with the result that it is not possible to be certain about what has survived.⁴⁸

For the purposes of this study only abbey documents directly relating to the townsmen of Bury have been consulted, which has primarily included a number of the financial records of St. Edmund's, but also a number of narrative accounts from the 14th and 15th centuries. The office of the sacrist has furnished the archive with a number of records of property ownership and account material. An important rental of 1295 survives which provides evidence of the holdings of many abbey officials, including the sacrist, the cellarer, the almoner, the

classes.

⁴⁴ BL. Cotton Cleopatra E.IV f.120, reproduced in Dugdale, W. *Monasticon Anglicorum* (London, 1830). See Dinn *Popular Religion* p.37.

⁴⁵ PRO E/301-45.

⁴⁶ For example, the certificates for the chantries of John Smyth esquire and Thomas Eriswell have been reproduced; as well as those of a number of chantries whose foundations are obscure but which seem to have been popularly supported by the townsmen, like that known as 'Becket's chantry'.

⁴⁷ Thomson *Archives passim*. Alongside the huge administrative archive the materials from St. Edmund's include: devotional, hagiographical, poetic, didactic and theological works. See also: James, M.R. *The Manuscripts in the Library at Lambeth Palace* (Cambridge University Press, 1900); 'Bury St Edmunds manuscripts' in *English Historical Review* (no.41, 1926) pp.251-60; *A Descriptive Catalogue of the manuscripts in the Library of Lambeth Palace* (Cambridge, 1932); Ker, N.R. *Medieval Libraries in Great Britain: a List of Surviving Books* (second ed. London, 1964); McLachlan, E.P. 'The scriptorium of Bury St Edmunds in the third and fourth decades of the fifteenth century' in *Medieval Studies* (no.40, 1978); Thomson, R.M. 'The Library of Bury St Edmunds abbey in the 11th and 12th centuries' in *Speculum* (no.47, 1972) pp.617-45.

infirmarer, the warden of the chapel of St. Mary, the prior, the hosteler, the subcellarer, as well as the masters of the hospitals of St. Peter, *Domus Dei*, St. Nicholas and St. Petronilla.⁴⁹ Next there is an incomplete rental produced by the sacrist Thomas Rudham in the late 14th century.⁵⁰ From 1433 a sacrist's rental survives which claims to include all *Hadgovel* properties within the town,⁵¹ although Gottfried disagrees with Lobel over the extent to which this burgage payment applied to the town as a whole, and in fact suggests that the rental only covers Southgate ward rather than the whole town.⁵² Finally a rental from 1526 drawn up under the sacrist Thomas Gnatsale listing over 230 properties and parcels of land survives which provides an indication of the decline in the fortunes of St. Edmund's by the early 16th century.⁵³

Also of use are several accounts drawn up by various abbey officials. From the sacrist's office three have survived, those for 1418/19, 1429/30 and 1537/38.⁵⁴ There are also two sets of accounts drawn up by the custodian of St. Edmund's shrines, which provide details of the relics, shrines, altars, images and chapels of the abbey.⁵⁵ As it is they still provide interesting insights into the official, public relationships between the townsmen and the monastic officials, as well as occasional information of a topographical, occupational or personal nature. Other records associated with the abbey are those connected with the town's hospitals.⁵⁶ These are of interest as the hospitals seem to have constituted an aspect of the monastic administration that the secular community supported and approved of. Finally narrative accounts and chronicles, often contained within the reasonably numerous departmental registers,⁵⁷ have provided details of relations between the monastic and secular communities of Bury in the 14th and 15th centuries. These sources are crucial for the details they provide about the violent disputes of the 14th century.⁵⁸ Included in this category of sources should be the abbot's registers produced throughout the period, although after 1446

⁴⁸ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.42.

⁴⁹ BL. Harley 743. See Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.23-4, 256.

⁵⁰ Rudham was sacrist of St. Edmund's certainly between 1382 and 1386, as wills registered in the sacrist's court during this time are listed under his name in the registers; BSERO Osbern ff.48v, 49, 49v, 50v, 52v.

⁵¹ This rental, along with a number of other financial records of various officers of the abbey, can be found in BL. Harley 58.

⁵² Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.257; Lobel *The Borough* p.9.

⁵³ BSERO A 6/2/1.

⁵⁴ BSERO A 6/1/5, A 6/1/6 and A 6/1/7.

⁵⁵ That for 1520/21, BSERO A 6/1/17; and that for 1524/25, PRO SC 6/3397. See Dinn *Popular Religion* p.43.

⁵⁶ These have been collected and edited in Harper-Bill, C. ed. *The Charters of the Medieval Hospitals of Bury St Edmunds* (Suffolk Charters no.14; Woodbridge, 1994).

⁵⁷ See Thomson *Archives* pp.42 ff.

⁵⁸ Many of the most crucial accounts, such as the *Deprædatio Abbatix* and the *Articuli et Punctus*, and the 'extorted charter' of 1327 can be found in *Memorials* vols.II and III. See also Hervey, F. ed. *Pinchbeck Register* (Brighton, 1925) for contemporary or near contemporary accounts of the various disputes during the 14th century.

none have survived.⁵⁹ From the early 15th century the two part register of abbot William Curteys is of particular interest, as not only is it a substantial and varied source from a period oddly lacking in non-testamentary material,⁶⁰ but it is also an indication of the sweeping administrative and archival renovations undertaken by Curteys in the first third of the century.⁶¹

Other miscellaneous sources that are available include gaol delivery rolls, the procedures of which were undertaken by the townsmen themselves,⁶² and the works of John Lydgate the poet who was a brother of the convent of St. Edmund's in the first half of the 15th century.

Chapter 2 will address the theoretical aspects of community and individual, concepts which are central to both the development of the model of the Bury elite presented in Chapter 4, and also the explication of identity depicted in the case studies of Chapter 5. It will also discuss the issues concerned with qualitative and quantitative analysis of the evidence. Chapter 3 is intended to provide the historical environment for both the model and the case studies, by providing a demographic and economic account of the town, and by presenting an account of the events and the forms of political dispute which directed and shaped Bury's elite in the 14th and 15th century. Chapter 4 constructs a model to define the Bury elite, drawing on a wide variety of different criteria, in order to be able to discuss the individuals in the case studies relatively. Chapter 5 presents a number of case studies which are intended to portray the processes of constructed identity in late medieval Bury St Edmunds, both at the level of the individual and in terms of the manipulation of elite identity at the level of the community. Finally Chapter 6 will conclude as to the necessity of relocating the individual at the centre of studies of historical communities, and the need to be able to discuss individuals relative to their community through the medium of a modelled contemporary environment. It will also conclude that the 15th century in Bury marked the achievement by the elite of a process of establishing a purely secular communal identity, which was both consciously constructed and which circumvented the elite's relative lack of legal structures of civic authority.

⁵⁹ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.43.

⁶⁰ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.267.

⁶¹ BL. Additional 14848 and 7096. For details of the archival reforms of William Curteys see Thomson *Archives* pp.36-41.

⁶² There are 38 gaol delivery rolls: see Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.265, 292.

Chapter 2: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

2.i. Analysis of evidence.

2.i.a. Testamentary analysis.

Like many studies of communities and the individuals within them this study relies upon testamentary materials, partly due to the intrinsic value of wills and testaments as sources, and partly due to the prominent position held by probate registers in the extant archive of the secular community of Bury. Anyone holding property within the Liberty of St. Edmund's was obliged to register their will in the peculiar court of the sacrist, even if they had holdings elsewhere. In the light of the lack of any civic or municipal records relating to the activities of the secular community of the town, the testamentary material, especially as evidence deriving from the townsmen themselves (albeit *via* clerical and monastic mechanisms), takes on increased significance.¹ However it has been acknowledged that the application of various forms of quantitative method to large series of wills and testaments requires a more critical awareness of just what it is that testamentary material can tell us about its authors; otherwise all that can be explicated is a sample of numerical trends that has no contextual appreciation of the forces or structures that are at work on testamentary production.² In order to use testamentary material to say anything about the people it originates from, it is necessary to avoid treating the material as somehow representative of an individual's whole perspective upon life and death,³ and to view it as a source which serves to indicate a number of influences and attitudes.

Quantitative methods of analysis may well seem the most convenient and appropriate for use with testamentary material, not only because as there are often a lot of them available for examination, but also because they often contain similar information, or at least similar forms or

¹ For the survival rate of Bury wills and the breadth of social classification of testators, as well as a discussion of the secular records, see above pp.5-14. See also Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.45-88.

² See for an example of a wary approach to using testamentary material Burgess, C.L. "'By quick and by dead": wills and pious provision in late medieval Bristol' in *English Historical Review* (no.405, 1987) pp.837-58; and more particularly 'Late medieval wills and pious convention: testamentary evidence reconsidered' in Hicks, M. ed. *Profit, Piety and the Professions in later Medieval England* (Gloucester, 1990) pp.14-33. For questions raised about the reliability of evidence blindly extracted from wills see Marsh, C. 'In the name of God? Will-making and faith in early modern England' in Martin, G. and Spufford, P. eds. *The Records of the Nation* (British Record Society, 1990), esp. p.248; and Zell, M. 'Fifteenth and sixteenth century wills as historical sources' in *Archives: Journal of the British Records Association* (vol.XIV no.62, Autumn 1979).

³ Lutton, R.G.A. *Heterodox and Orthodox Piety in Tenterden, c.1420-1540* (PhD thesis, University of Kent at Canterbury 1997) p.7. This position is contrary to that taken by Tanner in his study of piety in Norwich, *The Church in late Medieval Norwich 1370-1532* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies; Toronto, 1984)

categories of information.⁴

This last issue should draw our attention to one of the difficulties faced by anyone attempting to use testamentary material to say anything about the *mentalité* of an individual or group of individuals: the last will and testament are essentially above all else legal documents.⁵ The legal status of wills necessitates the intercession of a number of agents, many of which have official and authoritative agendas. The mediation of family, friends, strangers, professionals, social and commercial colleagues and institutions in the production of testamentary materials is something which is difficult to gauge and is liable to both under- and overstatement.⁶ The effects of mediation in the production of the will may have extended not only to language, structure and presentation, but also to content: local social, familial and spiritual contexts impacting upon certain types of bequest.⁷ Anyone examining the will and testament has to consider the extent to which what has survived is representative of the testator, and indeed whether it actually reflects the individual's 'will' at all. However, no matter how restrictive the influence of external agents upon the testator, it is likely that the content of the will to a large extent remained the prerogative of the will-maker, and not the authorities.

But the formulaic nature of much testamentary material does not have to be an insurmountable barrier to analysis. Once one has a concept of the normative testamentary strategies of a community's testators,⁸ then it is possible to examine a particular will to see how closely the putative norm has been followed. Within this comparative framework it becomes plausible to look for divergence both from the formulae of the wills, and also *within* the accepted forms. It would be possible to identify (and then extrapolate from) a hierarchy of priorities for any given testator, which might provide a potential basis for examining the effect of local testamentary

p.116.

⁴ Indeed testamentary material is one of the few types of evidence which survives with suitable frequency that it can be approached quantitatively. For a discussion of the problems associated with quantitative analysis see below pp.19-24.

⁵ And as such a substantial element of their construction is usually formulaic, and particularly the preamble which is increasingly being dismissed as a source for examining lay piety. Both Dinn and Lutton, for example, see testamentary preambles as markers of local clerical preoccupations; Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.73-5; Lutton, *Heterodox and Orthodox Piety in Tenterden* pp.4-5.

⁶ Even if the extent of the intervention is difficult to estimate the fact remains that the process of mediation in the construction of the will (and therefore the effect that the mediation may have on the subsequent achievements of the will) is a communal event. It serves to bring the desires and priorities of the testator into the public domain: the question is whether or not it serves as a vehicle for the design of the testator, or whether it *masks* his individuality in an attempt to mould it into acceptable, traditional and local forms.

⁷ For a discussion of this in the context of Bury St Edmunds, see Dinn *Popular Religion* chapter 2.

⁸ Derived perhaps from a quantitative, comparative presentation of the discourses involved in will production within a particular community.

mediation upon specific individuals within a community.⁹

The comparative examination of large samples of wills to identify a model of testamentary mediation and construction would therefore seem to be a productive method of *beginning* the process of analysis, and to do so quantitative methods have seemed most applicable.¹⁰ The mediated nature of wills and the often large numbers of people involved in their construction means that each single document constitutes a network of multiplex connections possibly extending over several generations and different communities. Just as it is necessary to develop a model of testamentary construction from a comparative study, so too it might be profitable to examine comparatively the range of contacts within a single network described by a will.¹¹ Each network involved in the production of a will may have influenced the attitudes and opinions of the testator, and it would be interesting to try to ascertain whether different types of connections evident in the testamentary material exerted different influences upon the testators.¹² In this way one might be able to begin examining the expression of attitudes and priorities in the testamentary material for signs of acculturation, and the dissemination of attitudes and values. This would constitute a crucial step toward the present goal of understanding the role of individuality in the interaction between individuals and their community, as it would provide suggestions as to the contextual influences exerted upon the individual particularly at the level of kin, but also at the levels of familiar and occasional social (and public and private) contact.

However the examination of testamentary material then has to be switched from a quantitative to a qualitative perspective in order to address certain issues. In order to fully appreciate the processes involved within the network of mediation surrounding the testator, one has to establish firmly the position of the document within its cultural context, and to do so requires a qualitative approach.¹³ What is required is a treatment of testamentary material that recognises the presumed decision making processes of the testator, as well as his recognition of and

⁹ Lutton suggests that where the content or presentation of a will deviates from the model, "Often scribal or clerical influence, but sometimes kinship or trade links worked to introduce the testator to new patterns of expression"; that is, beyond the locality; Lutton, *Heterodox and Orthodox Piety in Tenterden* p.5. See also Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.75-6.

¹⁰ It must be stressed that this is only a preliminary step: see below pp.19-20.

¹¹ As well as the types of network evident in a broader sample of wills.

¹² This would require building a model for testamentary networks for a given community to position alongside the model of testamentary construction. It would also work reciprocally, so that an exposition of the will might help to assign meaning to the specific connections within the networks associated with the will.

¹³ Vale, M.G. *Piety, Charity and Literacy among the Yorkshire Gentry 1370-1480* (University of York Borthwick paper no.50; York, 1976) pp.8-9.

reaction to the external directions that operate culturally and communally around him. Quantitative method does not enable this kind of analysis, and indeed obstructs it by extracting categorised details without any reference to the rest of the will's contents. In other words one must view wills not merely as vehicles for statistical information which act as simple repositories of classifiable data, but as 'integral texts' in themselves worthy of individual attention to character and content.¹⁴ It seems to me that this must be the position adopted in a study such as this, which hopes to indicate the place of the self in the construction and expression of identity and authority through just such mechanisms as testamentary production. A fine line must be drawn, as the desire to view the will as an holistic entity must not result in the isolation of it from other textual and contextual considerations. Just as networks of contacts mediate in the construction of a single will, so too groups of specific individuals are involved in greater numbers of wills; and consequently wills, even as 'integral texts', are interlinked within any given community.¹⁵ It would thus be beneficial to trace any links of style, contents, implied attitudes and beliefs as well as personnel across such inter-connected testaments.

Incorporated within this acknowledgement of the need to examine wills in their entirety is the focus adopted for this study upon the processes of reflexivity and decision making inherent in the construction of all documents, but particularly in wills. Testamentary texts may often have afforded their authors an opportunity to reflect upon their past lives and the future of those who would survive them, although in all but a minority of cases the period involved must have been relatively short.¹⁶ This process of reflexivity imbues the decisions taken about religious, familial and commercial affiliations evident in the individual bequests of a will with a degree of self consciousness which can prove valuable to an understanding of an individual's behaviour within the community.¹⁷ All the while, however, it is important to remember the position occupied by the document within its cultural context and within the structure of mediation and others' involvement; and then to acknowledge the sensitivity of the testator to those processes and structures. This latter can again be achieved by examining wills comparatively in order to see the different responses to mediation and context and strategies for self expression within

¹⁴ "Piecemeal analysis of wills, fails to respect their unity as cultural artefacts, and as texts"; Lutton, *Heterodox and Orthodox Piety in Tenterden* p.9.

¹⁵ Similarly Burgess suggests that wills should be considered within the context of wider local textual production, so that testamentary materials are examined in conjunction with non-testamentary documents; Burgess, 'Late medieval wills and pious convention' p.30.

¹⁶ It is perhaps the assumption of an opportunity for reflexive meditation provided by impending death that has led to the will being viewed rather simplistically as a summation of the testator's attitudes towards his life. As might well be reasonably expected, the wills of the more wealthy townsmen of Bury manifest a greater propensity toward reflexivity and appraisal of the 'success' of their lives; see sections 5.iii and 5.iv.

¹⁷ See below pp.25-52.

these constraints. Alongside this it is equally important for the historian to acknowledge his own acts of mediation upon the material being examined, appreciating (rather than ignoring) his own processes of reflexivity and the part they play in the understanding of the testator as a *social individual operating within a cultural context*.

2.i.b. The potential of testamentary materials.

The potential of wills and testaments as valuable sources of evidence probably shares the same limitations as any other sort of material. For example, anything ascertained from testamentary material about the preoccupations and patterns of expression of a *community* have to be accepted within the context of both the incomplete survival of wills, and the gender bias of those that do remain. Similarly the problem of discussing a community in terms of its social stratification is a factor in testamentary analysis,¹⁸ as often the wills and testaments that survive are those of the more prestigious members of the community. Indeed the production and registration of wills was a prerogative of the wealthy, with the formality being waived by those with little need of legal administration. Generally, if the sources that survive find their provenance within the elite of a community then the patterns and developments they portray will be appropriately skewed and relatively inapplicable to the community as a whole: in the case of testamentary materials the misrepresentation may be more severe: for example, it is the richer members of a community that are more likely to have made pre-testamentary provision for the disposal of their wealth and property.

Other factors specific to testamentary materials may also serve to limit their potential value as sources of information regarding the testators as *individuals*. These might include: the fact that wills indicate intent or desire, rather than actuality;¹⁹ the suggestion that wills show a preoccupation with the 'cult of death';²⁰ and the unique psychological and philosophical impulses and heightened reflexivity of writing a will often at the time of death. Even with such factors, it is still appropriate to assume that the content of wills are unlikely to diverge wildly from a lifetime accrued values and experience.

¹⁸ For instance the study of any subject in its 'popular' aspect may well require some consideration of -just where it is among a community's social and status structures that constitutes popular; Lutton, *Heterodox and Orthodox Piety in Tenterden* p.2.

¹⁹ A realisation that Lutton has found among other historians working on lay piety, *Heterodox and Orthodox Piety in Tenterden* p.15. See also Dinn *Popular Religion* p.78.

²⁰ Which results in a distortion of various attributes within the document, thus leading to a false impression of the priorities and values espoused by the testator. Burgess, 'Late medieval wills and pious convention' p.16. Thus testamentary piety need not necessarily reflect active lifetime piety, for example; Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.77-8.

Another concern regarding what it is a will might be able to tell the historian about its author is connected with the mediation that is involved in its construction. The level of scribal and clerical involvement in the compilation of the will, quite apart from the less tangible directorial influences exerted by local social, political and ecclesiastical institutions, raises the question already hinted at about how much of what is expressed originated from the testator himself.²¹ As suggested above, possible ways of getting at a testator will include identifying where a testator diverges from established local testamentary forms,²² and then examining priorities within the mediated forms of the will.

In the end one must decide whether testamentary materials are to be examined for the information they provide about individuals, or for the portrayal of patterns within the community. It is necessary to decide if wills indicate individual designs and ideologies, or whether what is being constructed is a reflection of communal interests, or more probably, whether it is a combination of the two.²³ If the former is to be the focus of study, as it is here, then one must acknowledge the possible distorting influence of communal and institutional mediation. At the same time one must also be aware that the processes of testamentary construction are to some extent malleable, and that individuals (perhaps only extraordinary individuals) could and did manipulate them to their own ends. Using a critically aware method combining quantitative techniques (to determine models of local testamentary production and mediation as context for will makers) and qualitative examination of content and character of specific wills, it is intended that the respective roles of the self and person in testamentary materials should be explicated.²⁴

2.i.c. Data management and quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Statistical analysis of material, and perhaps especially wills, can provide what are in effect

²¹ Tanner suggests that particularly crucial in this aspect of testamentary production is the role of the parochial clergy; Tanner *The Church in late Medieval Norwich* p.14; Vale, *Piety, Charity and Literacy among the Yorkshire Gentry* p.14; Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.73-6. From Dinn's sample of over 1000 wills taken from periods in the late 14th and 15th centuries, he indicates that 32% refer to secular clergy as witness, executor or supervisor; and he suggests that their presence indicates participation in the compilation of the will, or at the very least in the writing of it. He identifies two early 16th century wills the testators of which claim to have written with their own hands: BSERO Hoode ff.88, 145.

²² As far as Bury St Edmunds is concerned, Dinn is happy to conclude that the voice of the testator is achievable, and that the attitudes and beliefs of the individual *are* evident through the external influences. However he *is* concerned with impositions of exclusively clerical structures upon the will, but he does not take into account other agencies which might affect the construction of the document (such as family inheritance patterns; local charitable interests; occupational or gild membership and so on); Dinn *Popular Religion* p.76.

²³ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.73; Marsh, 'In the name of God?' pp.217-48.

quantitative indices of attitudes, beliefs, priorities and connections of a *community* (as opposed to a collection of individuals). Ultimately, however, the quantitative method employed in its simplest mode has little to recommend it to the student of individuals and their sociological contexts. For one thing there is always the fear of incomplete source survival, which is particularly damaging for one trying to make judgements and derive 'meanings' from statistics. Furthermore, quantitative techniques compound their methodological problems by introducing the need for classification of material, adding further authorial imposition upon the sources. Often it is necessary to group samples of wills, for example, according to their various features in order to *begin* the process of analysis, and the choices made by the analyst at this stage may have a great impact upon the substance of the analysis.²⁵ The process of classification, an inherent part of the quantitative process, effectively transforms the material into a homogenous soup of statistics, completely masking the discrete nature different documents in order to arrive at some level of general understanding. The result of such techniques may well be to prompt observations that merely scratch the surface of the contextual reality of the individuals and communities being examined.²⁶

The processes of classification involved in collecting large series of data are nevertheless inevitable, even if they are not desirable; and they have been necessary in this study due to the methods of collecting and arranging material in a relational database.²⁷ The design of the database was initially concerned with the collection of information taken from testamentary material, with the result that, at least initially, the basic framework could be quite simple.²⁸ However the collection of data from the testamentary material, even at the earliest stage, required the definition of a structure which allowed it to be analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively as desired: so that the material that was similar in form could be examined statistically and that which was distinct would not be lost in the mass of records.²⁹ Categories of data were defined as generically as possible into fields within tables, so as to prevent the structure of the database imposing upon the material. Nevertheless the inevitable problem arose that the material extracted from the testamentary material (and then later other types of

²⁴ For a discussion of 'self' and 'person' see below pp.25-52.

²⁵ This is a point also raised by Robert Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.82-3.

²⁶ Rob Lutton warns about the dangers of ignoring the "content, character and processes of construction" of materials used quantitatively; Lutton, *Heterodox and Orthodox Piety in Tenterden* p.9.

²⁷ The software used (Microsoft Access v2.0 and 97) is a relatively simple program enabling the construction of flexible and customised relational databases.

²⁸ This was because the material obtainable from Bury wills is (except in very few instances) very similar in presentation and form, although not necessarily in content. In other words data can be easily arranged when it consists of the same constituent parts every time (e.g. donor, recipient, bequest and so on). The design of the database became somewhat more complicated when it came to considering non-testamentary evidence.

documents) did not always comply with the classifications. This resulted in creating a balance between the quantitative and qualitative aspirations: the data could not be forced into classifications that were patently inappropriate, but at the same time it was desirable to keep the *number* of classifications to as few as possible so that a statistical approach was still viable.³⁰

The organisation of material in this way means that in effect quantitative method underpins much of the use of the database, as information drawn from it is taken from a body of categorised and ordered data. The biggest advantage of arranging material in this way is that it provides considerable opportunities for record-linkage, and thus the explication of networks of individuals, as well as for tracing these individuals through connections of all kinds. For the purposes of this study the potential for highlighting interpersonal relationships of all functions (familial, social, civic, legal, financial and so on) offered by the manipulation of information in a relational database is indispensable.

This concern with the social networks thrown up by the relational database is why, for the purposes of this study, the more qualitative aspects of analysis have adopted the ethos, and some of the techniques, of microhistorical endeavour.³¹ Microhistory attempts to reconstitute social relationships and networks in order to arrive at a biographical trajectory of individuals, to piece together the events and experiences that form the framework underpinning their life. The position adopted by this school is one that is very sensitive to the aspects surrounding the construction of evidence, acknowledging not only the absences of information, but also the role of the imposed authorial voice. To some extent it might be said that microhistory even makes a virtue of these seemingly grievous pitfalls of historical practice. One of the ways it tries to pursue its almost ethnographical aims is to focus analysis upon the relationship between people and institutions at the margins of society and community, and those at the centre; and

²⁹ For a diagrammatic representation of the design of the database see Appendix III.

³⁰ In other words if more and more categories had to be introduced into the structure of data organisation then it would become increasingly difficult to run statistical queries to achieve large scale analyses of patterns and general trends. An example of the balance required might be: categorising the types of bequests made by testators as 'religious' (which may be too generic, allowing a wide range of records which may or may not be appropriate); and 'religious/chantry/perpetual/St. Mary's church' (which is specific enough that the number of entries classified as this type will be so low that it would prevent statistical analysis). See Appendix III.

³¹ For an exposition of the aims and methods of microhistory see Edward Muir's 'Introduction: Observing Trifles' in Muir, E. and Ruggiero, G. eds. *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore and London, 1991) pp.vii-xxi. See also S. Tyler's essay 'Post-modern ethnography: from document of the occult to occult document' in Clifford, J. and Marcus, G.E. eds. *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (University of California Press, 1986). The writings of Carlo Ginzburg, among them *The Cheese and the Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* trans. J. Tedeschi and A. Tedeschi, (Baltimore, 1980), have been central in the development of microhistorical ideas.

particularly by examining the inequalities of power in those relationships.³² The nature, origin and exploitation of authority is an issue closely connected with this, particularly in the ways in which authority relates to individuals and social interaction; and the perspective taken by microhistory is that by examining those on the fringes of society, those excluded from employing authority but subject to it, a better understanding of the nature of authority can be attained.³³ Similarly, in order to avoid the “traditional overemphasis ... on institutional history” microhistorians are inclined to concentrate upon features of popular culture (and its interaction with elite culture) so as to redefine the institutions in terms of the individuals affected by them.³⁴ This emphasis upon the marginal in communities may well prove attractive to a study of the interplay between identity and authority in 15th century Bury St Edmunds, not least because the institutions in the town were imposed upon the secular community, and the individuals enacting and manipulating the construction of identity and the mechanics of authority effectively did so unofficially.³⁵

As far as the use of evidence is concerned, microhistorical method claims the same degree of discipline in the accumulation and assessment as other schools; however with a somewhat defiant air it acknowledges that its methods of analysis are ‘highly unconventional’.³⁶ What is not said by the evidence is as significant as what is, as far as microhistory is concerned, so that gaps in the material are used positively to form the basis of suggestions and discussions of the experiential aspects of social and cultural context.³⁷ The gaps in the evidence, especially in Bury St Edmunds, are often such that the microhistorical preoccupation with qualitative analysis of details becomes most applicable, as (apart perhaps from testamentary materials) there are no continuous series of data to examine quantitatively.³⁸

The processes involved recognise the direct and generative part played in cultural reconstruction by the historian. Inherent in all of this is the application of imaginative reasoning to the usually disjointed material at the disposal of the historian, where the latter brings to his

³² Muir, ‘Introduction: Observing Trifles’ pp.ix-x.

³³ Muir, ‘Introduction: Observing Trifles’ p.xv.

³⁴ Muir, ‘Introduction: Observing Trifles’ pp.xv-xvi. There is an awareness in microhistorical method that institutional historical studies are usually dependent upon “the elite’s self-descriptions of political behaviour”; and that material generated by the elite (the ‘forces’ of authority) deforms the ‘social reality of the subaltern classes’.

³⁵ In other words those with authority within the secular community, and the institutions (such as the Candlemas gild, see Chapter 5), *were* marginal.

³⁶ Muir, ‘Introduction: Observing Trifles’ p.xii.

³⁷ Ultimately the aim of the microhistorian is to understand how people drew meaning from their experience of their contexts.

³⁸ Indeed examining *details* (as opposed to large scale stereotypical data) and ‘interpreting utterances’ are

textual evidence his own perceptions with the ultimate purpose of trying to “evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality”.³⁹ There are clearly dangers lurking around such an endorsement of authorial superimposition, and I think that it is necessary to maintain a balance (as between qualitative and quantitative methods of analysing material) between imaginative reconstruction of cultural contexts, and letting the evidence speak for itself.⁴⁰ There is a place in this study for the former, but it is intended that its argument is fully rooted in the material.

2.i.d. Conclusion.

Many of these issues surrounding the nature of the evidence used in this study are applicable to all areas of historical endeavour, and to all subjects under examination. The decisions about the evidence that need to be taken for studies using testamentary materials, and which have been made for this one, are perhaps more inevitable for a discussion of Bury St Edmunds given the prominent position occupied by the wills in the archive. The arrangement of the data extracted from the wills, and the subsequent analysis, has tried to maintain a balance between the quantitative and the qualitative: with the former providing statistical and comparative frameworks for commenting upon patterns and discourses of identity in Bury; and the latter allowing the location of individuals within such contexts. It is hoped that the combination of the two modes of analysis has enabled a discussion of the means by which community and individual are connected, by illuminating both without obscuring either. The contextual and the specific have been determined in tandem, with sensitivity to the specific methodological potentials and problems of the different techniques, so that they can effectively inform each other. This combination of techniques is not only applicable to Bury, however, but could be employed in studies generally so long as two principle criteria were observed: firstly, material appropriate to *both* quantitative and qualitative analysis would have to be available; and secondly, the object of the study should be a definable entity, so that patterns could be discerned.

the chief goals of microhistory; Muir, ‘Introduction: Observing Trifles’ p.vii.

³⁹ Tyler, ‘Post-modern ethnography’ p.136.

⁴⁰ Letting the evidence ‘speak for itself’ does not necessarily mean that the historian has to avoid reaching conclusions: it simply means that whatever is said must be based upon the evidence, which is after all the most direct connection to what we try to reconstruct.

2.ii. Communities and individuals.

The main concern of this thesis is the explicit construction and expression of identity enacted through the public lives of individuals within communities, and the implications this may have for understanding their *mentalite*.¹ This involves distinguishing the role of individuality in the career of the individual, an individuality directed by their self. The terminology required for such a study clearly needs explication, drawn as it is from the fields of sociology and social anthropology, particularly as it is to be applied to historical subjects. The remainder of this chapter is therefore divided into five sections: an exploration of the communal structures that individuals may be seen to operate in; an examination of the construction of communal identity; a discussion of the role of the urban elite in the construction of communal identity; an examination of the mechanics of the construction of individual identity within communities; and finally an examination of the relationship between self-conscious action and unconscious motivation, in order to provide a theoretically rigorous methodology for investigating the impact of community upon the behaviour and *mentalité* of individuals.

2.ii.a. Definitions of community.

Definitions of what may have constituted a town in the later middle ages are numerous, although several characteristics can be discerned. A town for example may be seen as a concentration of population which does not simply produce its own subsistence, but which is actively engaged in both manufacture and trade as well;² and where the community enjoys a sophisticated political structure.³ Perhaps a more useful indicator of urban status however is whether or not the community impinged in any way upon the social and economic lives of the communities around it, as a defining feature of a town may have been that it had its own hinterland.⁴ Ultimately, however, a modern definition of the town may be a less useful concept than reaching an understanding of contemporary perceptions of 'urban' and 'community'.⁵

¹ See below Chapter 5 for case studies.

² Holt, R. and Rosser, G., *The English Medieval Town: a Reader in English Urban History 1200-1540* (London, 1990) p.75.

³ Clark, P. and Slack, P. eds. *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700* (London, 1972) p.4.

⁴ Clark, P. ed. *The Early Modern Town: a Reader* (New York, 1976) pp.54-7.

⁵ It may be justifiable to refine this to the contemporary perceptions of the elite of any given town, as they were the group within the society that formulated ideology and acted upon their perceptions of their community.

This thesis perceives communities within late medieval towns to have been divided up into recognisable, concrete but at the same time overlapping groups. Membership of these groups, identifiable as family, occupation, gild, household, parish, ward, neighbourhood and so on, informed every aspect of an individual's public and private lives.⁶ The fact that individuals could belong to many groups at the same time, enforcing their involvement in set types of social interaction, provides one possible means of exploring notions of 'success' in such a community: the kinds of groups a person belongs to can indicate status in a society whose cultural structures and symbolic meanings are absorbed through the processes of social engagement.

Within such a society, it is difficult to discuss social structure (and particularly distinguishable 'class' structures) in terms of how we may classify individuals by social status, and how contemporaries did this for themselves.⁷ Social structure as a subject has proved elusive, and unhelpful, in the past:

For many historians, the term 'social structure' has been restricted in its usage, being applied most commonly to the stratifications of 'class' or wealth.⁸

Urban society has traditionally been viewed in terms of broad social strata with a great deal of minute subdivision, with servants and labourers at the bottom of the social pyramid, through individuals occupied with trades or craft, and with those wealthy individuals pursuing mercantile interests at the top.⁹ However, the division of class (and therefore identity) may not have been codified or delineated by the different economic motivations of the different social groups so much as the political freedoms, and indeed level of political control, enjoyed by a minority of the wealthiest individuals.¹⁰ At one level freedom of a town with the associated legal and customary privileges and right to trade was the most distinctive social category,¹¹ while involvement in and potential monopolisation of civic policy and

⁶ Phythian-Adams, C. *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1978) p.72. In his work on Worcester, Alan Dyer identifies groups within the community: the 'largest' being the city itself, constructed around a very real sense of identity; the next largest group comprising an individual's relative wealth group; and finally the smallest group being an individual's family. Dyer suggests that the importance of membership of a group to an individual increases as the size of the group diminishes; Dyer, A. *The City of Worcester in the 16th Century* (Leicester University Press, 1973) pp.173-4.

⁷ Reynolds, S. *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977) p.162.

⁸ Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* p.72.

⁹ See for example: Reynolds, *Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* p.74; Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* pp.127-9. Phythian-Adams estimates that 2% of the population constituted the elite of Coventry, which in 1520 comprised forty men.

¹⁰ Reynolds, *Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* p.76.

¹¹ Such freedom being derived from inheritance, marriage, the payment of fines, apprenticeship or long term residence in the community; Clark, P. and Slack, P. eds. *English Towns in Transition 1500-1700* (Oxford University Press, 1976) p.115.

administration marked the individual out as one of the elite.

Reynolds suggests that the only real social division was between wage earners and independent traders, but that this has been traditionally extended by historians to form a hierarchy with the mercantile elite at the top, the craftsmen next, and finally the servants and employees at the bottom.¹² She suggests that instead of trying to impose layers of social demarcation upon a community by examining the different economic motives of various groups within it, distinctions might be drawn along political lines through an examination of the groups who controlled local government, and particularly local taxation.¹³ Clark and Slack discuss social structures in terms of broad bands of polarised rich and poor occupying a very steep pyramidal structure, in which the single most important tangible indicator of status was freedom.¹⁴

In his work on Coventry, Phythian-Adams shapes the sociological elements of his investigation around a working definition of social structure as:

a description of the contemporary system of social positions and the socially prescribed relationships between the individuals occupying those positions. During his life, every individual pursued his own path through the structure of these positions, many of which, like those of husband, father, craftsman and citizen, might be occupied simultaneously, and none of which, obviously, was occupied for a whole life-time.

Alongside this definition, he enjoins us to recognise that an individual's life-cycle, in terms of social status, was closely related to social process; and that modern day notions of class have no place in discussions of late medieval urban society.¹⁵ This dynamic view of social structure, with its fragmentation into allegiances to different structural elements within societies, makes a study of individuality possible. One can see that the positions suggested in Phythian-Adam's definition of social structure, or the 'groups' mentioned above, each construe some form of identity for the individual concerned; and it is likely that these identities informed the individual's understanding of the social roles demanded by each group, as well as directing his behaviour when engaged in social interaction in a particular role. Individuals, in other words, participate within their community in such a way that their

¹² Reynolds, *Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* pp.74, 162. The greatest degree of subdivision occurs at the level of the craftsmen.

¹³ Reynolds, *Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* p.74.

¹⁴ Clark and Slack, *English Towns in Transition* pp.112-5. Freedom conveyed the political and economic rights to trade and take part in the community's public life. Dyer believes that the most significant division in urban society (despite the fact that the disparity between rich and poor was greater than in the countryside) was that between a town's independent tradesmen and those employed; Dyer, *The City of Worcester* p.174.

¹⁵ Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* p.72.

social positions guide their activities. It may be the case that in any given social interaction a single position, designation or role is dominant, but given the multiplexity and density of social relationships in the urban environments of the later middle ages, this dominance may have been diminished.¹⁶

If individuality is constructed through the relationship between different roles, then it functions as a more or less explicit comprehension of similarity or difference from others within the community. The perceived relationship between the social strata is therefore vital to an understanding of an individual's potential within his society, particularly with regards to the likelihood and extent of social mobility within his lifetime.

Urban economies revolved around the richest individuals,¹⁷ and the social structures of towns naturally reflected this. Social mobility was crucial to a constant replacement of the elite, as the positions at the top of the social structure were often held for only short periods due to high mortality rates, economic instability and the 'transience of wealth'.¹⁸ Movement up the social ranks was possible if difficult, particularly in towns where a number of families dominated the higher civic offices, but the systems of promotion provided a 'pool' of potential individuals to replenish the elite.¹⁹ These systems often operated, as in Coventry, through craft organisations and social guilds, but could also be exploited through other structures, such as family.²⁰ In Bury, due to the lack of official civic structures, the opportunity for social advancement may have been greater than in other towns, although Gottfried suggests that it would have been easier in the 14th century than the 15th as fewer types of craft were producing individuals wealthy enough to advance into the town's elite.²¹

The oligarchic character of civic government in the middle ages was a feature of urban life that has received considerable attention by historians, and the term is still often used in a pejorative sense.²² Urban oligarchies have been seen as plutocratic, mercantile and self

¹⁶ That is, for example, if two individuals employed in the same craft were involved in a professional or commercial dispute, they would act in court as plaintiff and defendant, even though they were probably involved in other relationships as well, such as neighbours, gild brethren, business competitors and possibly partners, and so on. The question would be how far one set of roles and the consequent mode of social relationship would dominate the others in terms of the current interaction.

¹⁷ Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* p.47. Rigby sees a decrease in the numbers of significantly wealthy individuals as a contributing factor to economic decline in 15th century Grimsby; Rigby, S. *Medieval Grimsby: Growth and Decline* (University of Hull Press, 1993) p.132.

¹⁸ Clark and Slack, *English Towns in Transition* pp.117-8.

¹⁹ Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* pp.142-6.

²⁰ Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* pp.114, 150-3.

²¹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.145.

²² Rigby, S. 'Urban 'oligarchy' in late medieval England' in Thomson, J.A.F. ed. *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1988) p.62.

perpetuating, and often dominated by 'dynastic' families.²³ But as Rigby suggests, to think of urban 'ruling elites' in such negative terms ignores the contemporary preconceptions underlying civic government in the period.²⁴ The ideology informing the provision of civic government centred around harmony and unity within the community, where political unrest or open conflict were seen as sinful.²⁵ The natural state of public life was that the wealthy would govern, albeit with the restraint of custom and the consent of the commonality;²⁶ and indeed the elite in turn used the opportunity of political authority to promulgate this ideology, *not necessarily motivated by self-interest, but perhaps to create a consensus among the community. The practice of civic government, itself a very expensive and time consuming activity, was seen as a burden undertaken by the wealthy in recompense for their wealth: in other words it may have been viewed as the justification for their wealth and prestige.*²⁷

It is probable that the ideal of civic government was often manipulated until the administration of a town became, as Rigby suggests, an 'executive committee for managing the affairs of rich townsmen', which may provide one possible explanation for apparent conflicts within the elite of a given town.²⁸ In a practical sense the administration of towns may have revolved around a very small number of wealthy individuals,²⁹ and it may be the case that it is with these individuals that an analysis of elite identity should begin. In Bury, as elsewhere, the elite almost certainly constructed a distinct group identity which was consciously designed and disseminated *via* the mechanisms available to them. While the official structures were limited by the lack of civic government in the town, by the 15th century the identity was coalesced in the existence of the Candlemas gild as an organised society for the town's elite, and had been shaped by over a century of occasionally violent opposition to St. Edmund's.³⁰ The burghal class of Bury in the 15th century was a small section of the community, and may have formed an unofficial 'standing council' which supported

²³ Kermodé, J. 'Obvious observations on the formation of oligarchies in late medieval English towns' in Thomson, J.A.F. ed. *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1988) pp.87, 96.

Phythian-Adams suggests that wealthier families tended to have larger numbers of surviving children, and while the younger sons often left the towns for the family's country estates, the elder sons enabled the oligarchic families to maintain their grip on the civic administration for more than a generation; *Desolation of a City* pp.142-4.

²⁴ Rigby, 'Urban 'oligarchy'' pp.62-3. He also suggests that at least by the 15th century, town records are self-conscious about the nature of civic government, and serve to 'flatter' the individuals concerned in the administration, pp.62, 67.

²⁵ Rigby, 'Urban 'oligarchy'' p.63. This principle may also be seen in many occupational gild ordinances, where conflicts between members were to be resolved within the brethren before recourse to the courts is sought. See the Bury weavers' ordinances of 1477 for an example, BSERO B 9/1/2.

²⁶ Rigby, 'Urban 'oligarchy'' pp.64-6.

²⁷ Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* pp.137-40.

²⁸ Rigby, 'Urban 'oligarchy'' p.72. For conflict within the elite of Bury St Edmunds see below pp.110-11.

²⁹ Lobel *The Borough* p.93; Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* p.47.

³⁰ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.165.

(and possibly constrained) the alderman in his role as their political mouthpiece.³¹

While it is clearly true that medieval urban social structures had explicit and obvious, if not clearly defined, vertical components to it, one must also be aware that many aspects of a town's public activities, particularly in the realm of ritual, were designed to limit the excesses of social demarcation and the gaps between the strata, albeit on a periodical and temporary basis.³² Repeated face to face interaction between the social strata, such as regular feasts and festivals, as well as interaction on less ritualistic occasions, also helped to 'soften' the differences.³³ The rituals and processions employed in towns also served to dramatise the community as a single entity, so that the hierarchical representations of the different groups in the town related those groups and the individuals within them to each other, and gave a sense of identity to the whole.³⁴ It is possible that this ritualistic facet of medieval urban life, the increase of which may have been the most significant change in 15th century urban culture,³⁵ was such an integral part of public activity that it served to obscure any real social differences between individuals to the point where the identities of people involved in interaction could accommodate them,³⁶ perhaps as Victor Turner³⁷ suggested, ritual built *communitas*:

an identification among members which is so absolute as to be tantamount to the stripping away of all those social impedimenta which would otherwise divide and distinguish them.³⁷

2.ii.b. The reconstruction of communal identity.

This section examines the methods by which communal diversity is related to a cohesive and encompassing communal identity. Methodologically it was the case that 'community' was

³¹ Lobel *The Borough* pp.90-4.

³² Phythian-Adams' work on the socially integrating functions of public ceremonies, processions and rituals, especially those associated with civic and governmental processes, is well known, and tends to emphasise the hierarchic mechanisms of the community.

³³ See for example, Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* pp.110, 141.

³⁴ Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* pp.178-80. See also Clark and Slack *Crisis and Order* p.6; James, M. 'Ritual, drama and social body in the late medieval English town' in *Past and Present* (no.98, 1983) pp.1-29; and Phythian-Adams, C. 'Ceremony and the citizen: the communal year at Coventry 1450-1550' in Clark, P. and Slack, P. *Crisis and Order 1700* (London, 1972) p.111. At the same time ritual serves to express the 'essence and distinctiveness' of the community, but each individual participant, due to the symbolic nature and form of ritual, imbues it with his own meaning; Cohen, A.P. *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London, 1985) pp.42, 55.

³⁵ Reynolds, *Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* p.179; Clark and Slack *Crisis and Order* p.145.

³⁶ Although probably not to the point where "the population ... was thoroughly homogeneous and capable of united action in matters that concerned the material welfare of the burgess body"; Trenholme *EMB* p.89.

³⁷ Turner, V.W. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Penguin, 1969), cited in Cohen, *Symbolic Construction* p.55.

seen by historians as a static, unchanging phenomenon, defined by geographical or administrative boundaries.³⁸ More recently this perspective has changed to a position where 'community' is viewed as a dynamic conglomeration of social relationships.³⁹ In what follows, 'community' will be taken to refer to a social and topographical entity with relatively precise geographical boundaries, and with legal, social and economic distinctiveness in its own right. It will be discussed as if it were primarily a network of social relationships of many different kinds all lodged within a defined physical space. Each member of a community shares a sense of belonging to a quantifiable and isolatable entity, participation of which incurs the adoption of elements of identities.⁴⁰ While the social, commercial and cultural networks that 15th century townsmen are involved in stretch beyond the borders and jurisdictions of their town, the topography of their community remains crucial not only to the mechanical aspects of administration, but also to the sense of communal identity. For this reason it is possible in the present context, to a certain extent, to use the terms 'town' and 'community' interchangeably.

Cohen sees communities as defining themselves in contraposition to other communities, a process which involves particular sensitivity to cultural differences and distinctiveness of identity at the boundaries between communities:

... the boundary encapsulates the identity of the community and, like the identity of an individual, is called into being by the exigencies of social interaction. Boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or other with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished...⁴¹

The boundaries in Cohen's conception can be physical, racial, religious, linguistic, statutory or legal; and in the case of 15th century Bury St Edmunds the topographical limits of the town contained elements of a number of these facets of identity. That is, the spatial area that constitutes an important feature of Bury's identification as a town incorporates within it, to a greater or lesser extent, the town's identity as a religious, legal, economic and social entity.

³⁸ In 1973 Dyer positioned his study of Worcester as working against the recent trend of town studies which analysed their subjects in terms of constitution, that is as systems of local government rather than as local communities: he wished his approach to Worcester to provide as its theme the "functioning of urban community in all its aspects"; Dyer *The City of Worcester* p.12. In 1979 Palliser acknowledged the growing interest in town studies as investigations into community, noting that recent work was increasingly concerned with the identity of community; Palliser D.M. *Tudor York* (Oxford University Press, 1979) p.288.

³⁹ Calhoun, C.J. 'Community: towards a variable conceptualization for comparative research' in *Social History* vol..5 no.1 (January 1980) p.106.

⁴⁰ Defining 'community', Cohen suggests: "A reasonable interpretation of the word's use would seem to imply two related suggestions: that the members of a group of people (a) have something in common with each other, which (b) distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other putative groups"; Cohen, *Symbolic Construction* p.12.

The topographic, geographic and demographic aspects, as far as these aspects are clearly defined for the community in question, are used by communities to identify themselves as discrete entities. They define themselves in terms they can generate by perceiving the structures and behaviour of other communities:⁴² that is, the individual inhabitants of a town understand their town (and their place within it) by experiencing other towns. This might provide the roots of a communal identity, as any differences between one town and the next would provide the means by which each could be differentiated. Such an identity is likely to be commonly perceived by all members of the community. Another aspect of such a circumstantial identity might also be seen in the communal perception of the rural/urban distinction, where towns accrued a further dimension to their identity in contraposition to the countryside.⁴³ The 'physical and psychological boundary' that separated the town from the country has been seen by some as so evident that contemporaries were unthinking in their assumption of its existence;⁴⁴ where urban inhabitants saw themselves as culturally superior to their rural counterparts, avoiding rural modes of dress and speech.⁴⁵

The construction of identity is, however, complicated by the nature of the social interaction that takes place within the community, identified above. If a community is defined as a complex web of social relationships, commitments or ideologies,⁴⁶ then how can something that is perceived differently by each individual participant constitute the basis for a construction of a single, all-encompassing identity, with which everyone can identify? That is to say, each individual inhabitant of a town can only experience the 'town' through his individual and unique set of relationships with others in the population; and as such 'community' should be understood to be variable. Furthermore, it is unlikely that most individuals within a community are conscious of the notion of 'community' as an abstract, except perhaps when it is explicitly promulgated as such. The sense shared by a group of individuals of belonging to a *community*, which is in itself one of the defining features of what constitutes a community, is only significant insofar as that sense affects the behaviour of those individuals. How then is it possible to move from this to a communal identity?

⁴¹ Cohen *Symbolic Construction* p.12. See also Calhoun 'Community: toward a variable conceptualization' pp.107, 111.

⁴² The symbolic construction of community is essentially *oppositional*, and its boundaries are *relational*; Cohen, *Symbolic Construction* p.58.

⁴³ Indeed Calhoun suggests that the whole concept of 'community' as it has come to us is "rooted, for the most part, in the contraposition of ideas of country and city"; Calhoun, 'Community: toward a variable conceptualization' pp.105-6. For a discussion of the urban/rural dichotomy see Rubin, M. 'Small groups: identity and solidarity in the late middle ages' in Kermode, J.I. ed. *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth Century England* (Stroud; Alan Sutton, 1991) pp.132-3.

⁴⁴ Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* p.174.

⁴⁵ Clark and *English Towns in Transition* p.141.

⁴⁶ Calhoun 'Community: toward a variable conceptualization' pp.106-7.

One way to approach a study of the communal identity of communities might be through an examination of the mechanisms they employ for self-regulation and social organisation. In the case of Bury this might prove profitable as the ways in which the secular community organised itself (to the extent that it *could*) was effectively unofficial, or at least unconstitutional. It has been argued that the multiplexity of the social relationships in the community acts to shape communal activity to resolve differences and bring about stability:⁴⁷ in which case common interests begin to become apparent, and from these might develop a common root identity. People can never operate as individuals within their community because the web of social interactions in which they are immersed limits independent action and thought to some extent, as well as providing cultural information as to how one is supposed to act in given social contexts. This 'systematicity' of social networks binds the individual into his social relationships, and therefore into the groups that individual participates in, and consequently helps to position that individual within the community.⁴⁸ Once again this generates a degree of what might be called 'root' identity, a common set of interests as a community, and an awareness of how that community works, at least as far as that individual is placed in it.

A community could begin to establish its communal identity in the face of diverse individuality and cultural perception through the employment of symbols in public life. In Cohen's view communities act as repositories of symbols, and, despite the apparent structures or functions of a community, "its substance may be largely constituted by its symbolization of the community's boundaries".⁴⁹ This coincides with the function of ritual in society: part of the way in which ritual achieves what is claimed for it is through its use of symbols, and often these are presented on a larger scale than 'ordinary' communal life. The role that symbols play in communal life allows individuals to express, or to see an expression of, a sense of community; ideas, concepts and beliefs common to all could be displayed symbolically in ways that would have meaning for all participants, although perhaps not exactly the same meaning for everyone:

[symbolism] might be compared to vocabulary. Learning words, acquiring the components of language, gives you the capacity to communicate with other people, but does not tell you *what* to communicate. Similarly with symbols: they do not tell us *what* to mean, but give us the capacity to make meaning... The quintessential referent of community is that its members make, or believe they make, a similar sense of things either generally or with respect to specific and significant interests, and, further, that

⁴⁷ That is, as individuals share a number of different types of relationships with each other in small communities, conflict in one of those relationships is likely to affect the others; so that the multiplexity serves to provide an incentive to resolve conflict and maintain the social bonds. See Calhoun, 'Community: toward a variable conceptualization' pp.115-7, 119; Cohen, *Symbolic Construction* p.29.

⁴⁸ Calhoun, 'Community: toward a variable conceptualization' pp.119-20.

⁴⁹ Cohen, *Symbolic Construction* pp.19, 50.

they think that that sense may differ from one made elsewhere. The reality of community in people's experience thus inheres in their attachment or commitment to a common body of symbols.⁵⁰

This perception of symbolism provides a bridge between the unconscious (root) notions of communal identity, and a more conscious awareness of belonging.

It is upon these foundations that urban leaders are able to construct consciously designed and motivated identities for the community.⁵¹ One of the most potent and subsequently commonly used raw materials for this identity was the past, a resource filled with a store of ideology, precedents and events potentially applicable to any prospective identity. This too is closely associated with symbolic constructions of communal identity, as the store of meaning of communally used symbols presumably lies somewhere in the memory or past of the community. Quite often a putative past was referred to by a community in order for it to assimilate critical changes within the community in the present; but in these instances the past that is referred to is selectively reconstructed so that those aspects of it that resonate with the present crisis are utilised.⁵² The past thus becomes mythological,⁵³ an element of the community's 'cultural store', and assumes a kind of sanctity of tradition that serves as a moral framework within which the community's crisis can be examined. The other advantage of using the past to make sense of the present is that it can employ the function of symbolism to relay complex series of meanings in relatively simple forms, so that "Simple 'historical' labels are made to describe complex and often ideological messages";⁵⁴ and these labels can often deliver their messages in an emotional form, helping to superimpose their meaning from the past onto the present.

But as the reconstruction of tradition becomes malleable and subject to recycling to suit current needs, it can also serve to establish a consensus regarding the crisis that engendered the reconstruction. It is this ability to use the past to create consensus that turns the reconstruction of a mythological history into a construction of communal identity, as the

⁵⁰ Cohen, *Symbolic Construction* p.16. See also pp.11-21, 50-96.

⁵¹ The 'larger scale' of symbolism, promulgated within the social structures of towns, and its capacity to be repeated in many different contexts, makes it particularly susceptible to control. The mechanisms of control over communal identity were available to the town's elite, through the political and administrative structures in place for the government of the town (including the legal and ceremonial aspects). To talk of communal identity then, is really to describe the manifestly self-conscious image constructed by certain interest groups within the town, in effect the town's wealthy and prestigious leaders. In other words, the 'community' as an entity is displayed by a small proportion of its membership, and they are usually those individuals with a vested interest in the image of the town portrayed.

⁵² Cohen, *Symbolic Construction* pp.99-101.

⁵³ Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* p.171.

⁵⁴ Cohen, *Symbolic Construction* p.101.

overall objective is to coalesce the community into a directed response, usually to a political, economic, demographic or social crisis. It is the role of the urban elite to direct this response.

It is at this stage that the connection between authority and identity at the level of the community becomes clear: those in the position to construct the identity, often having recourse to the cultural store that is the past, are those entrusted with the authority in the community; and these more senior members of the community who wish to shape public opinion are often those at the centre of the community's social networks.⁵⁵ Whatever their motives in establishing an identity for their community, their official and social positions within it enable them to design, construct and disseminate it. The authority held by the urban elite is such that its construction of communal identity can be enacted without the involvement of the whole community, thus facilitating a simple, one-dimensional and codified communal identity. This is not to say that the individual participants in the community consuming the constructed identity received it as intended, nor that every individual perceived it in the same way, however.

It might seem that the idea of an urban elite, for whatever reason, trying to establish an identity for the town resembles an attempt to create a corporate image, or 'party-line', to achieve a political purpose, and this analogy may not be inaccurate. To some extent the level of consciousness involved in the construction of identity is evident in the forms that the construction takes, and usually this is a product of the models and media available to the community. Essentially the 'party-line' would have had to represent the interests of the community insofar as these coincided with the interests of the elite, and agreement upon what the constructed identity should be probably rested upon a number of factors. Firstly, if the identity was intended to coalesce the community in response to some form of crisis then the form of the identity would be directed by the crisis it was a response to. Secondly, the very mechanics of the construction of a communal identity would enable the construction to be vague but at the same time comprehensive: the symbolic nature of the identity would allow the crucial aspects of the 'message' to be understood by each individual within the community in their own way without it having to be explicit. In this way it would not have been necessary for the constructors of the identity to agree entirely on what the identity was to be: by rendering it in symbolic terms, individual members would do this for them by assuming that everyone else consuming it would understand what it meant in the same way they did.

⁵⁵ Calhoun, 'Community: toward a variable conceptualization' p.120.

2.ii.c. The function of the elite in communities.

This section examines the function of urban authority in the relationship between communal identity and individual identity. The links between authority and identity within communities are numerous and complex, and perhaps are so well integrated that they cannot be separated. Authority and identity are mutually interdependent: the acquisition of authority, particularly within a later medieval urban context, brings with it the accretion of a distinct type of identity; while at the same time the construction and dissemination of a distinctive identity is usually motivated by the desire to attain some position of authority, either in an official (legal) sense, or else socially or experientially. This latter might be understood to comprise authority based upon the enduring participation within a particular community, where the individual has had considerable experience of the structures, institutions, mechanics and social interactions of the community.⁵⁶ Identity and authority are interrelated to the extent that they require the construction of each to be a *public* activity, and not just conceptual, so that positions of authority and especially civic office can be ostentatiously encompassed within a visible, traditionally assumed and generally assimilated kind of 'identity of authority'. The links between identity and authority were cultivated and exaggerated by those in official positions within urban communities, so that they became effectively synonymous. The construction of this identity by individuals holding legal or administrative positions within the community served to justify the authority held by the elite. The legitimisation of authority could be achieved in a number of different ways, most of which required the acknowledgement and active participation of the community as a whole. This was a function of the ceremonial and ritualistic elements of public life in communities, to legitimise a particular group's self-perpetuating possession of authority through the propagation of dominant political ideology.⁵⁷ Public ceremony was designed to create and maintain a sense of communal consensus regarding the way civic government was to be administered, and part of the way in which it did this was to emphasise certain aspects of the elite's ideological context for their civic authority: the status they held as royal representatives or agents;⁵⁸ their dignity; the visible trappings of wealth and so on.⁵⁹

The ideology underlying the concentration of authority in the hands of the urban oligarchies, as a medium by which such authority could be justified, was one which civic leaders clearly had an interest in promulgating. It was an ideology of the rich governing the community with

⁵⁶ It may be likened to the authority that is often ascribed to older members of the community by sheer virtue of their age; Phythian-Adams *Desolation of a City* p.137.

⁵⁷ Rigby, 'Urban 'oligarchy'' pp.66-7.

⁵⁸ Kermode notes that every incorporated civic governing body or council required the sanction of a higher legal authority, that of the crown; Kermode, J.I. 'Obvious observations' p.88.

the consent of the whole, according to the enactment of custom and the implementation of ordinances, which coalesced the community's will into the formal structures.⁶⁰ While the individuals in possession of authority may have had varying levels of private ambitions and motives, the authority they enjoyed was essentially enabled by the consensus of the community: in theory, those in authority acted as spokesmen for the principles that underpinned social relationships in the community.⁶¹ Just as civic government was underpinned by a political ideology perpetuated by the urban elite, so too social structure was represented in terms of artificial ideals. That is, just as we clearly cannot understand the reality of an historical community in its entirety, but only in the abstract, the same was true for its contemporaries, especially for those consuming the propagated ideology.

Rigby prefers to see this as an 'aristocratic' form of town government, rather than viewing it in terms of the 'loaded anachronism' oligarchy, with its pejorative connotations of self-interest and corruption. The ideology found support by positioning itself within an established and universal hierarchy of authority, which served not only to justify the position taken and the authority adopted by the urban oligarchic elites, but which also contributed to their identities as public figures. This hierarchy of authority linked the civic elite into a structure which encompassed all the possible worldly and supernatural sources of authority with God at its head, through king and down to nation, civic leaders and communities. Thus each member of the community knew their place in the social body according to the political ideology, and those propagating it were located within a hierarchy which gave them a particular identity. Part of the justification for the elite monopolising their community's administrative offices was that the experience that being part of this hierarchy gave them equipped them to handle civic government. In other words, the links that the elite maintained with other towns (and probably the interests they held in rural communities as well) and therefore with the 'nation' made them fit to govern.⁶² Thus the processes of identity and authority were not only interrelated and interdependent, but they also mutually developed each other.

David Sacks suggests that it is in this period that a transition between Weberian 'types' of

⁵⁹ Rigby 'Urban 'oligarchy'' p.66.

⁶⁰ Rigby *Medieval Grimsby* p.108. For a more traditional view of oligarchies comprising plutocratic and mercantile dynasties running town governments to their own profit see Kermode, 'Obvious observations' pp.87-106, especially pp.87, 96. The consent of the community may perhaps be taken to mean, as Sacks suggests, that the authority invested in the hands of their leaders was "agreed upon"; Sacks, D. *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450-1700* (London, 1991) p.171.

⁶¹ Calhoun 'Community: toward a variable conceptualization' p.121.

⁶² Phythian-Adams *Desolation of a City* pp.137-40. Perhaps the parliamentary representation of towns, which was increasing during the 14th and 15th centuries, contributed to the structures of this ideology; Reynolds *Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* p.112.

authority was occurring in society: that society was moving from *moral* authority with its grasp upon the past, its 'sanctity of tradition', and the legitimising status (or identity) given to those in positions of authority; to *legal* authority with its attachment to 'normative rules'.⁶³ A symptom of this transition may have been the increasing levels of bureaucracy seen in administration of all levels, and particularly in the realms of records and documentation. In towns this is perhaps more conspicuous than elsewhere, as not only were civic governments responsible for drawing up their own regulatory documents, but many during the course of the later 15th century adapted machinery for the production of texts of different kinds. The textual production of towns in the 15th century displays a distinctive consciousness about the nature and ideologies of civic government, what Rigby calls a 'literary civic self-awareness', which at the same time aims to legitimise the elite in their monopoly of civic authority.⁶⁴

In towns where oligarchic dynasties prevailed, or where a single identifiable interest group of individuals monopolised the administration of the community, justifications such as these had to be disseminated occasionally as part of the prevailing political ideology. This was necessary because those with the authority also had certain rights above others in the community, which were undoubtedly abused.⁶⁵ But there were burdens as well for the town leaders, and not just in financial terms: civic government brought with it duties which would involve the elite bringing their identities and authority into contact with those individuals in the community without authority. This should lead us to question the validity of trying to discuss 'authority' except in terms of perceiving it as contemporaries may have: in other words we should be less concerned with abstract notions of authority, and concentrate instead upon the effects of authority upon individuals and communities in the 15th century.⁶⁶

2.ii.d. Individuals' construction of identity within communities.

This section advocates the study of communities through an investigation of the individuals of which they are formed. Community is the place where individuals gain their experience of social life and culture, a kind of forum where social relationships can be learned.⁶⁷ Community

⁶³ Sacks *The Widening Gate* pp.171-2.

⁶⁴ Rigby 'Urban 'oligarchy'' pp.62, 67. If this was the case then it casts doubts upon the suggestions of some that towns in the 15th century took little interest in *national* politics, except insofar as their individual interests were concerned; Bridbury, A.R. *Economic Growth: England in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1962) p.41; Reynolds, *Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* p.179. Perhaps it was more of a case of keeping distance from national politics to avoid 'picking the losing side', especially in the dynastic struggles of the 15th century; Clark and Slack *Crisis and Order* p.10.

⁶⁵ In Bury abuses of authority appear in the material, such as the corruption involved in the raising of the 2000 mark fine imposed upon the town in the aftermath of the 1381 revolt; see below section 3.ii.c.

⁶⁶ Rigby 'Urban 'oligarchy'' p.63.

⁶⁷ Cohen, *Symbolic Construction* pp.15, 40, 70, 115.

essentially acts as the interface between the individual and his culture: his social interactions with others are guided, but not prohibitively determined, by the structural and mechanical aspects of the community; and it is these interactions that inform the mentalite of the individual. Within this basic framework, public life is conducted more self-consciously than private life, as the individual is more aware of social constraints and the behavioural and ideological models that are applicable to him as a member of the community. In the past it has been the case that anthropologists studied communities as collectivities, in terms of their structures, boundaries, rituals and symbols, rather than as bodies of individuals, in order to understand how they functioned.⁶⁸ Increasingly anthropologists concerned with studies of communities, be they 'traditional' or modern, are turning away from the structural aspects of their subjects in order to examine the individual as the focus at the centre of the social processes within the communities.⁶⁹

If an attempt is made to try to conceive of 'community' as being in some way the result of the presence of individuals, then perhaps it would be plausible to look to the internal worlds of those individuals as the source of the ideological bases underpinning social interaction.⁷⁰ Such an approach is made imperative by the insights of anthropologists into the nature of the individual's conception of community. For Geertz the perceived culture of a community is likely to be different for each individual member of that community, as each individual effectively constructs it for themselves. Cohen, in his attempt to discuss communities as the result of individuals interacting, unravels Geertz's 'webs of significance':

There are three interrelated and powerful principles contained within Geertz's precise and eloquent formulation. The first is that culture ... is created and continually recreated by people through their social interaction, rather than imposed upon them as a Durkheimian body of social fact or as a Marxist superstructure. Secondly, being continuously in process, culture has neither deterministic power nor objectively identifiable referents ('law'). Third, it is manifest, rather, in the capacity with which it endows people to perceive meaning in, or attach meaning to social behaviour.⁷¹

If culture is self-generated and then continually reconstructed by social interaction, and is in turn recognised through the meanings which it allows each individual separately to assign to 'social behaviour', then communities (which embody the culture) must be analysed from an individual perspective.

⁶⁸ Cohen A.P. *Self Consciousness: an Alternative Anthropology of Identity* (London, 1994) p.6.

⁶⁹ Cohen, *Symbolic Construction* pp.70-3.

⁷⁰ See for example, Calhoun, 'Community: toward a variable conceptualization' p.108; and Fernandez, J.W. 'Amazing grace: meaning deficit, displacement and new consciousness in expressive interaction' in Cohen and Rapport *Questions of Consciousness* pp.22-5.

⁷¹ Cohen *Symbolic Construction* p.17.

Indeed the two approaches ('community' through its structures; or 'community' through its individuals) do seem to be mutually exclusive as far as the methods which the anthropologist or historian can employ are concerned. The processes of categorisation that take place within 'complex' communities have in the past been seen to act in direct opposition to the exercise of individuality of those living within their bounds. The community places an individual in one or more categories or social designations and so renders the individual subject to stereotyping: the community 'knows' that individual not for 'what he is', but for those stereotypes which apply to him (e.g. unemployed, immigrant).⁷² The structures in a community thus serve to 'neutralise the self';⁷³ and it is the self that Cohen, and Geertz, see as the root of community and culture respectively. By studying communities from the point of view of their structures, historians risk reconstructing them as single, unified and homogenous entities. They implicitly reiterate the community's projection, as conceived and propagated by the ruling elite, rather than attending to the members' internal perceptions of such projections. They demonstrate symbolism rather than experience.

If such a complex approach is to be followed, it becomes necessary to consider the concept of *individuality*. Anthropologists and philosophers tend to impart different meanings to this term, but I take it to refer simply to the perception of a person's biographical and behavioural 'distinctiveness', the element of the person that distinguishes them from others, and which expresses their individual identity beyond the compelling behavioural directions imposed upon them by society and its structures.⁷⁴ Individuals operating in communities, situated within the groups mentioned above, can never really act discretely, and while the sociality of the community can constrain the social behaviour of the individual, it can also provide what might be termed 'behavioural support' for the individual by providing collective models of action and interaction.

Occupying and conducting a public role in the community might increase the controlling effect of these forces: it would be reasonable to assume that individuals would be conscious of the existence of certain ways of behaving when engaged in public activities, and that the individuality of the person would consequently be repressed by these modes of public

⁷² "The state and other powerful social agencies compel us to compromise our individuality in our dealings with them by squeezing us into categories. The effect of this constraint is that we belong to society as members of collective entities (whether categories or groups) rather than as individuals. ... I have to contort my conscious self into: a husband; father of three sons; ... Individuality and socialness seem to be in contradiction to each other"; Cohen *Self Consciousness* p.12.

⁷³ Cohen *Self Consciousness* p.100.

⁷⁴ As Amélie Rorty puts it, "Individuals are indivisible *entities*" that are defined against an existing society: Rorty, 'A Literary Postscript: Characters, Persons, Selves and Individuals' in Rorty, A.O. ed. *The Identities of Persons* (University of California Press, 1976). Cohen and Fernandez have other ideas about what individuality means: Cohen and Rapport *Questions of Consciousness* pp.1-4, 13-8, 28.

interaction, the 'sociality' of the community. In terms of discussing an individual's public and private lives, the distinction being an expression (not a determinant) of personal identity and social consciousness, one has to assume that the individuality or 'self' of members of a community somehow manages to remain intact. Cohen suggests that social (i.e. what I might call *public*) relationships do not have to "necessarily deprive the individual of self- (or authorial) direction"; and that rather than the self being repressed in such interaction, a 'particular version' of the person's individuality is employed, which is "tailored to the terms permitted by the community".⁷⁵ These terms are often represented through symbols which are used for the 'demarcation of the roles' involved in the transition between the different contexts of social behaviour (the different spheres of interaction), which in turn direct the aspects of a person's individuality that are employed in public life.⁷⁶ It is this neutralisation of self which enables communities to operate despite the diversity of consciousnesses that exist, as suggested above.⁷⁷

If we assume that the conduct of public life is more self conscious than private life, then we can acknowledge that this degree of awareness may have implications for concepts of identity, especially in medieval urban contexts. The combination of increased social and personal consciousness involved in leading a public life, and the social and political structures that exist in towns, provides the opportunity to construct, display and explicate identity in a much more elaborate, conscious and controlled manner.⁷⁸ While it would be easy to follow the structural functionalists in their assertions that structure determines behaviour, and the logical conclusion of their argument (which is that "similar structural influences produce similar behavioural responses"⁷⁹), one needs to look beyond this simplistic relationship of structure and behaviour. We should probably be more concerned with the meaning of the structures to their participants rather than study the functional aspects of the structures themselves. It is reasonable to maintain that while the structures that exist in communities do not determine the behaviour of their members, they can and do provide basic models for the dissemination of identity at the communal level, without placing too many constraints upon the exercise of the individuality of the inhabitants of the community.

The symbols of community which allow it to function, as investigated above, are also relevant

⁷⁵ Cohen *Self Consciousness* pp.24, 155.

⁷⁶ Cohen *Symbolic Construction* p.31.

⁷⁷ Fernandez, J.W. 'Amazing grace' pp.22-5.

⁷⁸ This opportunity for the construction and display of identity and authority is crucial to this study, and underpins much of the argument of chapter 5.

⁷⁹ Cohen *Symbolic Construction* p.36, drawing upon the work of R. Redfield in his *The Little Community* (Stockholm, 1955). As Cohen points out, to accept the assertion that 'structure determines behaviour' is to "assume ... that people are somehow passive in relation to culture: they receive it, transmit it, express

here, where they can be appreciated in terms of their interpretation by individuals. Cohen claims that symbols provide flexibility in meaning so that the same symbolic references can have different significance for different people. He goes on to argue that community is:

highly symbolised, with the consequence that its members can invest it with their selves. Its character is sufficiently malleable that it can accommodate all of its members' selves without them feeling their individuality to be overly compromised. Indeed, the gloss of commonality which it paints over its diverse components gives to each of them an additional referent for their identities.⁸⁰

This would suggest that the notion of 'community', despite its categorising structures, allows (even *encourages* through the provision of a referent) the expression of personal identity and individuality, rather than repressing it through social and behavioural direction. The community strives to categorise individuals into various groups, and the social interaction that takes place within these groups serves to provide points of reference for the individual, stimulating not only Cohen's 'creative self', but also the reflexivity of the individual. It is in this reflexivity that the self is 'nurtured': self-conception is a result of social interaction.⁸¹

While the behavioural framework of a community may construct models of behaviour (and identity), the individual is left to reconcile his own perspectives and individuality with them.⁸² As James Fernandez suggests, the categorising processes of a community serve to provide enough coherence for the society to 'get its work done' despite the diversity of the community's constituent 'consciousnesses'.⁸³ At the same time, though, we have to be aware of the efforts made by individuals to fit their selves into these structures: the process is partly one of navigating Cohen's 'framework of principles' in order to resist the constraints of social structures, and partly one of anticipating and conforming to other people's expectations.⁸⁴

Given the role played by the consciousness of the individual in the interpretation and employment of symbols, it should be understandable that Cohen is moved to assert the

it, but do not create it".

⁸⁰ Cohen *Symbolic Construction* p.109.

⁸¹ Cohen cites the arguments of G.H. Mead, who "was concerned with the ways in which individuals symbolise themselves in social interaction ... He distinguished between the 'me' - the unthinking being, the enduring product of experience - and the 'I', the *consciousness* of being which, through its ability to symbolise, is capable of behavioural control, precisely because it conceptualises the self." He also agrees with the social psychologist Ralph Turner in suggesting that "a person's experience of his or her engagement with the social structure gives rise to a 'self-conception', a symbolisation of self which runs consistently through all of the person's activities ... This essential self is informed by social engagement, but is not dependent on it." Cohen *Self Consciousness* pp.9-10, 29, 56.

⁸² Cohen *Self Consciousness* p.71.

⁸³ Fernandez 'Amazing grace' p.23.

⁸⁴ Or as Fernandez puts it: "one has to recognize how much people warp their intimate interiority in order to accommodate to the expectations of others in their presentation of self" Fernandez 'Amazing

'primacy' of self over the behavioural constraints of communal life in the conduct of social interaction.⁸⁵ An individual's consciousness is constantly referring to the consciousness of others through social interaction,⁸⁶ so that the relationships between community, culture and the individual are mutually interfacial: social interaction and behavioural direction inform the identity and consciousness of the individual, while it is these very identities and consciousnesses that form the modes of social interaction.

The role played by memory in social interaction and conscious self-representation, is also vital to consider here. Memory ties the individual to his contexts present and past, and functions as a kind of database of experience, knowledge and information, at different cultural, social, personal and spiritual levels. Kirsten Hastrup defines the function of memory as "the active if voiceless presence of the whole past, forgotten as history, and deposited as self-evidence".⁸⁷ The deposits of public actions in the individual's memory act as a guide to the probable success or failure of certain strategies. That individual's own behaviour will then be guided by a wish to emulate or avoid the perceived effects of particular types of action.

For the purposes of the analyst an individual's sense of belonging to a community can prove a useful indicator only insofar as communal relationships affect the individual's choice of action, as it is only in the outward behaviour of the individual that such a sense might become evident. This must inform a methodology for analysing communities by examining the social interactions of their constituent individuals. One must isolate the 'individual' from the structures of the community. This is particularly difficult in urban settings as individuals have to operate within numerous contexts, where interaction is much more closely determined by the environment than in 'simpler' rural societies.⁸⁸

One way of beginning such an enterprise is to consider individuals and their communities in terms of models. Putative models of individuals can be constructed which allow one to view a subject in relation to a 'norm'. From this it is possible to make judgements about the

grace' p.25.

⁸⁵ Cohen *Symbolic Construction* p.109; *Self Consciousness* chapter 5, esp. pp.114-7.

⁸⁶ As Bruce Kapferer says, "Consciousness, while always embodied and constituted and expressed through the action of the body, is formed, I stress, through its engagement with other human beings in the world", Kapferer, B. 'From the edge of death: sorcery and the motion of consciousness' in Cohen and Rapport *Questions of Consciousness* p.135.

⁸⁷ Hastrup, K. 'The inarticulate mind: the place of awareness in social action' in Cohen, A.P. and Rapport, N. eds. *Questions of Consciousness* (London, 1995) p.183. She uses the term 'recollection'.

⁸⁸ At least as far as the Chicago school were concerned: "Rural society ('community') was small, parochial, stable and 'face-to-face': people interacted with each other as 'total' social persons informed by a comprehensive personal knowledge of each other...". In cities people only interact with individual's roles as determined by the context of the interaction (business transaction, social event etc.). Cohen *Symbolic Construction* pp.25-8, 43-5, 47-60.

individual's identity and individuality based on how his behaviour conforms to or diverges from the model. In an historical context certain types of evidence lend themselves to this exercise (e.g. testamentary material), and there are a number of methods that can be exploited more generally. The first of these is located in a form of network study, where an individual's contacts across the spectrum of social interaction provide some insight into how the individual perceived, constructed and disseminated his identity and authority. Here individuality and consciousness (or otherwise) might be discerned in the decisions implicit in the range of social contacts enjoyed by an individual, especially those beyond the sphere of kinship; as well as in the observable impact that such webs of referential contact and social experience may have had upon the individual.

The other source for the potential expression of individuality is in the application of detail in the evidence. By 'detail' I mean specifically 'examples of description' which are in some way more pronounced and more obviously volunteered than is normally required by or found in the respective kinds of evidence. Examples of detail of this kind might not only express the importance of various items, themes and relationships to the individual, but may also indicate the forms and media through which such preoccupations could be expressed. Similarly the decision-making process involved in description can be seen as a source of reflexivity, and it is from this that we can assume the primacy of the individual's conscious self-conception.

Many anthropologists use the concept, or metaphor, of 'narrative' in discussing the forms and mechanisms of consciousness. Cohen defines the metaphor in terms of seeing:

individuals as having distinctive narratives of their embodiment and being-in-the-world ... 'Narrative' expresses, and suggests a focus on, the development, continuity and change of the individual's acts of orientation. Individuals own - and perhaps come to be owned by - unique narratives which unfold and mutate as these individuals situate themselves within moral, social, cultural and historical habitats.⁸⁹

The historian may see this metaphor as serving the same purpose as the concept of an individual existing within a biographical trajectory. The metaphor of 'narrative' can be used to describe the aspects of consciousness that assimilate, store and order experience in an organic way, and which orientate the individual within his past, present and future.⁹⁰ The use that this metaphor, and what it suggests about the workings of self and consciousness, may

⁸⁹ Cohen and Rapport *Questions of Consciousness* p.7. A. Kerby defines narrative as "the recounting of a series of temporal events so that a meaningful sequence is portrayed", Kerby, A. *Narrative and the Self* (Indiana University Press, 1991) p.39.

⁹⁰ Cohen and Rapport *Questions of Consciousness* pp.7-11.

have for biographical study rests in the way in which it breaks down an individual's history into constituent parts: experience, cultural awareness and memory, for example. It also places those constituent parts into a selective sequence that might be called identity. In terms of trying to look at an individual's private life it might be possible therefore to employ the concept of 'narrative' to try to examine the identities of the individual over time in relation to experience, cultural awareness and memory as it is suggested in the public life of the individual; this could then be applied reconstructively to what the biographer imagines to be the *mentalité* of his subject.

2.iii. Self-conscious action and its motivation.

2.iii.a. The myth of 'private life'.

The preceding sections have examined the construction of communal identity, and its relationship to the formation of individual identity. If communities are to be studied through their individuals, then it is now necessary to assess the nature of the individuality which it is possible to access, and to consider the ways in which it relates to the frequently alluded to binary of public and private life.

The mechanics of the construction, expression and comprehension of public and private identity inevitably require a definition of the areas of an individual's life and experience in which these processes feature. The aspects of a person's life that ought to be examined as comprising their private life are subject to methodological problems of categorisation: where does one category cease to be distinct from another; what are the criteria for the different categories; and who decides what they should be in the first place?

The convenient distinction between 'private life' and 'public life' might be used to make the point that the aspects of an individual's actions and behaviour that cannot be said to take place as part of their public life have to exist as part of their private life. The distinction cannot be a simple one, however, as the activities of individuals that take place for the benefit and within the context of their communities can originate from widely differing degrees of public awareness, communal responsibility, or more obscure personal motivations. To speak of a public life need not be a simple case of identifying the activities of an individual that have consequences for the community, or that take place in the full view of the community: such behaviour at the level of the community can be driven by motivations specific to the individual and perhaps even contrary to the defined structures of civic organisation. A person can be involved in the life of his community and yet be engaged at the level of the individual, and it is the position of this engagement along the public/private scale in terms of purpose or motivation that might suggest whether any given activity can be said to be a part of an individual's public life as far as the acting *individual* is concerned. Conversely, to talk of a person's private life is not to talk just of what is not seen or heard by his community, as the actions of that individual that do impact upon those around him may be grounded in personal aspirations, while the public aspects of them may be accidental or unconscious. It is necessary to be explicit about the relationship between the level at which activities are conducted and the motivations which lies behind them.

The limitation of the public/private binary arises from the expectations we bring to the processes of identity and authority: our assumption is that they involve some adjustments as part of the transition from public to private life, and *vice versa*. But Cohen states that the essential character of an individual

is not 'replaced' by something else as its bearer moves from privacy into public social space; rather, it adopts or discards elements which are not pertinent in more private contexts (for example, in intimate interaction or in solitary contemplation). The self is not a monolith; it is plastic, variable and complex.¹

Public life, then, is in some form a more artificial mode of social interaction than private life. People are likely to be much more conscious of the way they act and think when it is obvious that they are involved in the public sphere, particularly if the context is civic, ceremonial or political. Activities that take place in overtly public contexts would perhaps be more rationalised or considered than behaviour in more private spheres, and so it is permissible to talk of public life being 'conducted', whereas private life may be said to be relatively less self-consciously 'lived'.

Methodologically speaking, 15th century material impinges upon this problem. The evidence that is available for a biographical study of a late medieval subject is essentially public in provenance. Its status as 'public' is due either to the extant material comprising records of public events (chronicles, court cases, records of births/deaths etc), or to it being material intended for subsequent public use. This distinction is not intended to be clear cut or specifically defined, but the vast majority of evidence from the period is orientated towards the public aspects of the lives of those mentioned in them. While on the one hand this can leave us wondering what it is that we can learn from such evidence about the private lives and personal identities of our subjects, on the other it might be argued that the official and formulaic nature of the material might make the task of isolating the individual from the community somewhat easier. This is because people's appearance in such material often indicates those occasions when individuality exceeds what is expected of the behavioural models as constructed by the community. In other words some types of evidence (particularly court materials) provide examples of individuals displaying their identity beyond the normal bounds of their community.

The suggestion that behaviour in private life is to an extent enacted subconsciously calls into question our entitlement to make a connection between an individual's unifying and unified self and the way that that individual operates within the world, using the latter to explicate

¹ Cohen *Self Consciousness* p.2.

the former. However, in Cohen's view, individuals are conscious of their environments to such an extent that they *construct* rather than recognise the distinction between the public and private contexts of their lives, "as a necessary condition of community life".² Members of the communities that he studied accepted this distinction and referred to it as a framework for behaviour in different social environments, but at the same time "were not fooled by it".³ In other words the distinction was constructed in order to facilitate the range of social behaviours necessary for and conditioned by different contexts; it was a reflection rather than a determinant of the behaviour of a community's members, and the link between public action and private motivation is thus ensured.

This suggests that the public/private distinction, as far as it applies to social interaction and the expression of personal identity and authority, might indeed prove to be a useful tool if we can identify the processes of its construction through the behaviour (and what this tells us of the motivating ideologies and perspectives) of our biographical subjects. It might be possible to discern what an individual considers to be a private sphere of interaction and what he considers to be a public one as indicated by his behaviour, and then from this to speculate about the perspectives and aspirations of that individual. If we could determine where the distinction was drawn for a particular individual, then we would be in a better position to discuss his behaviour in terms of identity.

The presence of individuality in public action could be sought after in what Cohen calls the 'creative' or 'performing' self, "the self as driven largely by a calculation of how to gain an advantage over others, rather than by ... idealistic or cosmological convictions".⁴ This conceptualisation of social interaction as competitive or 'adversarial', with the processes employed by the self in the conduct of public life being essentially those of calculation and strategizing, depends upon acknowledging a high level of consciousness in the individual; and the manifestation of these rational processes in the activities of the individual might provide a resource for conjecture about the *mentalité* of the biographical subject in the same way that determining an individual's personal understanding of the public/private distinction might. To deduce personal identity from public behaviour in this way would be a simpler prospect if the investigated activities took place in the *political* arena of public life, say in the complex civic system of structures, groups and ceremonies of late medieval towns, where social engagement is not only more likely to be conducted in a strategic mode, but is

² Cohen identifies this act of innate construction among the members of the small community of Whalsay, Shetland. Cohen *Self Consciousness* p.155.

³ Cohen *Self Consciousness* p.155.

⁴ Cohen *Self Consciousness* p.42.

also likely to operate at the level of rhetoric. Developing the arguments of F.G. Bailey⁵, who extended the concept of a contrived and calculating self from political endeavour to more general social activity, Cohen suggests that what

people may commonly do in social interaction [is to] interpret other people's behaviour by imposing on it a sense of their own making. This is what an audience does when it listens to rhetoric, especially to political rhetoric the meaning of which is clouded by the speaker's vagueness of expression ... What happens, of course, is that the members of the audience supply the meaning, supply their *own* meanings ... They all know what [the speaker] meant: what she meant was what *they* individually mean ... the audience constructs the speaker's intentions as being the same as theirs.⁶

If we can somehow arrive at the 'meaning' of a given social exchange as far as the protagonists of the interaction are concerned, here in a public and political context, then we might be able to take a step closer to the internal perceptions and interpretations of individuals. Therefore the task that faces a historian who wants to gain a sense of his subject's life within the latter's own contexts has at least two separate stages. Firstly, the mechanics of the construction of personal identity have to be examined as they apply specifically to the subject; and secondly, the reception of the individual's identities within his community has to be analysed. This would not only enable an understanding of how individuals are situated in their communities (perhaps leading to a sense of how small scale communities work), but would also build a platform from which an investigation of how individuals relate to culture might be attempted. It is as important to see how the identities of the biographical subject are achieved and received, as it is to know what they are intended to be.

By examining the individual's acts of interpretation of their and others' behaviour, and the relationship of this behaviour to the symbols and structures around them, we can start to ask questions about the bases for their interpretations. As Cohen says, the interpretations people make are "made within terms which are characteristic of a given group, and are affected ... by its language, its ecology, its traditions of belief and ideology, and so on",⁷ but at the same time they are firmly grounded in personal experience garnered from active participation in both public and private lives. It is possible to comment upon an individual's private life using insights gleaned from the decisions made in their public life, which in turn might reflect the forms taken by their perception of their own personal identity and authority.

The historian's task is most vital and most intrusive on the past when it comes to the re-

⁵ Particularly as represented in *Morality and Expediency: the Folklore of Academic Politics* (Oxford, 1977) and *The Tactical Uses of Passion: an Essay on Power, Reason and Reality* (Cornell University Press, 1983).

⁶ Cohen *Self Consciousness* pp.45-6.

⁷ Cohen *Self Consciousness* p.17.

formation of the links between the self-conscious actions of the historical subject and their possible motivations, Here it is necessary to resort to imaginative reconstruction.

The 'socialness' of the act of communication in social discourses implies an awareness on the part of the individual of the consciousness of those he is interacting with; and in the same way the biographer assumes from what he studies/reads/hears that what he knows about his subject is in some way an expression of the latter's consciousness. It is possible to say that both the biographical subject in his social dealings and the biographer in his analysis employs the 'individuated act' of interpretation: we take what we hear or read about an individual as an expression of their self-consciousness, but the 'meaning' about the individual that we derive from it is inevitably contextualised, a construct of our own consciousness.⁸ But then if, as Cohen says, it is impossible to distinguish what can be known about another's consciousness from our construction of it,⁹ any conclusion that a biographer arrives at regarding the internal world of his subject has to be reached with the positive acknowledgement of the part played by his own consciousness.¹⁰

A possible technique for assessing motivation would be to superimpose artificially the public/private distinction onto the modes of social interaction. One aspect of this might be found in a demarcation made by Anthony Cohen and Nigel Rapport "between public language and private thought, between communication (a social act) and interpretation (an individuated act)".¹¹ It is possible that given the right individual, one with a prolific and conspicuous public life,¹² it might be possible to draw conclusions from the relationship between what he *says* publicly and what he *does* in terms of the way he leads his life.

However, anthropologically speaking, there is an even more important question to be asked about the nature of knowledge: just what can the biographer actually 'know' about his subject? Many anthropologists would go further and ask what it is that the *subject*, or the subject's peers, can know about the subject. Cohen acknowledges the problem in terms of locating the self among the different roles or identities of an individual as they appear in different contexts:

We take some responsibility for how we are viewed, or how we wish to be viewed; ...
But how can my many guises be understood if I am not also acknowledged as their

⁸ Cohen and Rapport *Questions of Consciousness* p.12.

⁹ Cohen *Self Consciousness* p.3.

¹⁰ Cohen and Rapport *Questions of Consciousness* p.9.

¹¹ Introduction to Cohen and Rapport *Questions of Consciousness* p.11.

¹² With an historical subject, this would obviously have to be one for which considerable documentation survives.

author or, at least, as having some responsibility for their selection? I do not suppose that I will be seen by others as I see myself ... But where am 'I' in all this, if I am not the one who composes the variations on the cultural themes;¹³

The answer to what can be known about the consciousness of another individual lies, for Cohen, in the awareness by the biographer of the part played by his own consciousness in the act of social analysis.¹⁴ For others, it lies in the frank acknowledgement that the mental processes of fiction or imagination constitute analytical tools in the pursuit of social science.¹⁵

In the light of the above mentioned relationship between individuals and communities, it is not the place of the biographer to try to represent what his subject 'truly' is, as not even the subject himself knows: everything that is said about an individual, especially an historically distant individual, must be firmly placed within a context or contexts that the biographer has constructed (imaginatively) based on his understanding of the degree of his subject's consciousness about his own culture and social position.

It is perhaps instinctual to suspect that individuals are aware of a "self that has perfect identity and simplicity",¹⁶ which at the dullest level of awareness does indeed appear to be uncomplicated to themselves if to no one else; a kind of "undifferentiated, irreducible organic self"¹⁷ that serves as a marker to the individual of his individuality or distinctiveness in the context of his community. Yet writing about such a thing, let alone identifying it in others, is anything but simple. We can work anthropologically with the concept of an individual's identity or identities (roles), or we can try to establish an individual's reputation and mode of public representation through historical method; but it might be that knowledge of the individuals that we study may lie somewhere in between the two.

Ultimately a definition of 'private life' may be so bound up among issues concerned with the individual's consciousness of his individuality being located within the informing social context of his community, that to try to pick it out might well prove futile. This is especially the case given the limitations it is possible to place upon the potential of our evidence as a source dealing with the private lives of individuals. Nevertheless, perhaps by examining the modes of self representation employed by an individual, for example the textual or visual

¹³ Cohen *Self Consciousness* p.153.

¹⁴ Cohen and Rapport *Questions of Consciousness* p.10.

¹⁵ Watson, C.W. 'The novelist's consciousness' in Cohen and Rapport *Questions of Consciousness* pp.79-89.

¹⁶ Terence Penelhum, T. 'Self-identity and self-regard' in Rorty *The Identities of Persons* (University of California Press, 1976) p.253.

¹⁷ Cohen *Self Consciousness* p.170, citing Ralph Turner 'Articulating self and social structure' in K.

significators he arranges around himself, one can begin to unravel the contexts which he deemed private or public.

Chapter 3: Bury St Edmunds in the 14th and 15th Centuries.

3.i. The demographic and economic contexts of the religious and secular communities in Bury St Edmunds.

3.i.a. The region of Bury St Edmunds.

In order to discuss issues of identity in late medieval Bury St Edmunds it is necessary to discuss the town in its context. This will enable us to identify the particularities of Bury, its distinctiveness, which must have had a profound effect upon the townsmen's perceptions of themselves and their habitat. This section will therefore discuss Bury in economic and demographic terms, with the aim of providing a context for the experience of Bury's townsmen in the period.

As with most prosperous urban settlements, Bury owed its success to its location. It is placed on a small rise in a region of low lying wetlands, surrounded by navigable rivers. It was able to grow into a major settlement because it did not impinge upon the hinterland of any other town.¹ The town found itself in one of the wealthiest regions in the country, with three fifths of the 25 wealthiest towns found in eastern England in the early 14th and 16th centuries.² While it had good access to London and was economically bouyant, the region was geographically and culturally 'self-contained'.³

Bury also had the distinct advantage of the presence of St. Edmund's as a substantial land holder and centre of consumption. The abbey was central to the initial prosperity of the town, although a market had pre-dated the arrival of the Benedictines at this location.⁴ Early in the period Bury became the market centre of the region, although initially it had to thrive at the expense of its Anglo-Saxon competitor Thetford;⁵ and it became the focus for trade in west Suffolk. The rise of Bury as the most important regional market was a development encouraged and protected by the senior officials of St. Edmund's: control over the town's two

¹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.15.

² Dyer, A. *Decline and Growth in English Towns 1400-1640* (London, 1991) pp.70-1.

³ Gibson, G.M. *Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 1989) pp.19, 22.

⁴ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.84. For a discussion of the wealth and significance of St. Edmund's, see p.71-3.

⁵ Bailey, M. *A Marginal Economy? East Anglian Breckland in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1989) p.144.

markets was strictly enforced by the abbey. Early on in the development of the town, the authority of St. Edmund's was used to carve out a 'market monopoly' in the area, so that no settlement within 10 or 15 miles of the town was able to develop any kind of market itself.⁶ This was in spite of the fact that Suffolk boasted a very high number of markets, many of which were involved in trade beyond the immediate region.⁷

Bury's markets were essentially regional, with much of the volume of trade coming from west Suffolk. Bury was the market for south Suffolk's dairy produce,⁸ but more importantly in terms of the town's prosperity, it was the market for the Stour river region, the highly industrialised cloth producing area in the southern part of the county.⁹ Bury found itself at the heart of a wealthy region, situated at a road and river junction which served as a stopping point between London and central England, between the trading ports of East Anglia and the Low Countries. Bury's merchants were engaged in enterprises further afield, but often on a smaller scale than their counterparts from the larger mercantile centres of London, Bristol and York; and indeed in many of the cases where Bury merchants ventured to Brabant or Flanders, they were engaged jointly with London men.¹⁰ Nevertheless it was the case that Bury was part of the commercial domain that extended to eastern England, the Low Countries and northern France.¹¹ Similarly Bury's markets attracted traders from far and wide, and individuals from East Anglia and the Continent are found settling in the town.¹²

In terms of Bury's economic, cultural, financial and religious influence over its hinterland, Gottfried has discussed the town in terms of its 'greater urban region'.¹³ The town's banleuca or suburbs, contained within four crosses, was legally subject to Bury's jurisdiction, and by the 13th century its distinction from the town proper had blurred almost to the point of non-existence. Beyond the banleuca were 17 parishes (within a 5 mile radius) which were completely dominated by Bury, and more precisely by the officials of St. Edmund's. 5 miles further out again and Gottfried identifies parishes that were socially, economically and

⁶ Bailey *Marginal Economy* p.144. In the 12th century the abbot Samson went so far as to send his bailiff and 600 armed men to dismantle a market set up in Lakenheath by the monks of Ely; Miller, E. ed. *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: vol III 1348-1500* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) p.330.

⁷ Bailey *Marginal Economy* p.143. By the mid-14th century Suffolk had the highest density of markets per square mile in the country, with twice that of its nearest county rivals; Britnell, R.H. 'The proliferation of markets in England 1200-1349' in *Economic History Review* (2nd series no.34, 1981) p.210.

⁸ Bailey *Marginal Economy* pp.128, 145.

⁹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.99. See Figure 3.1.

¹⁰ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.86, 91, 97.

¹¹ Exports from Bury were probably carried from Lynn, although Ipswich and Great Yarmouth were also accessible. The most common exports were raw wool and finished cloth.

¹² Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.90, 93; Bailey *Marginal Economy* p.179.

¹³ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.18-22.

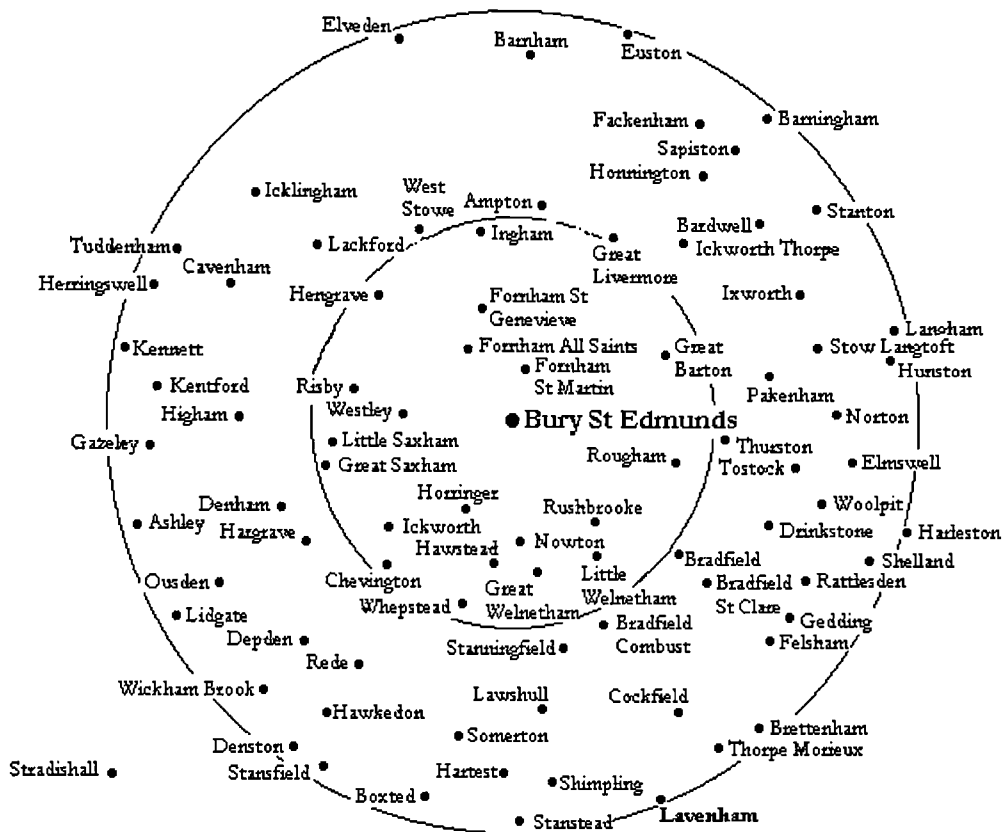


Figure 3.1a: The region of Bury St Edmunds showing settlements within 5 and 10 mile radius of the town

culturally dependent on Bury, if not exactly under its control.¹⁴ In other words the influence exerted by Bury as a market in the region, centre of consumption and specialist products, was significant and wide reaching.

Bury, along with the rest of East Anglia, was able to maintain its prosperity through the demographic and economic crises of the late 14th and 15th centuries thanks to the textile industry. Although much of eastern England was endowed with fertile soil, large areas to the south and southeast of the fens had very poor quality soil which was unsuitable for intensive cultivation.¹⁵ Pasture was always the predominant mode of land use here, and large sheep flocks were common, especially in the 14th and 15th centuries where large arable holdings were converted to pasture.¹⁶ The industrial cloth villages of south Suffolk like Hadleigh, Lavenham and Long Melford generated large-scale wealth,¹⁷ and much of this wealth passed through Bury either through the town's markets, or else through the passage and

¹⁴ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.22. See also Figure 3.1.

¹⁵ Bailey *Marginal Economy* p.32; Miller *Agrarian History of England and Wales* p.53.

¹⁶ Miller *Agrarian History of England and Wales* p.57.

¹⁷ As seen in the magnificent 'wool-churches' and prodigious wealth of individuals like the Springs from Lavenham and John Clopton esquire from Long Melford; Gibson *Theater of Devotion* pp.26, 28.

immigration of successful rural clothiers.¹⁸ Many of the villages producing high quality cloths during the mid-15th century cloth boom were located within Gottfried's 'dominated' radius of villages.¹⁹

In the 14th and 15th centuries Bury was located at the centre of a network of smaller cloth communities in the region.²⁰ In this role Bury had to compete with Ipswich and Colchester, and it is possible that its inland position may have restricted it somewhat. However Bury comprised a central junction of a road network that provided good communications in the region, which may have compensated for this to some extent.²¹ In the mid-15th century the East Anglian cloth industry prospered,²² and from the 1440s the sheepfolds of St. Edmund's became the most lucrative of the abbey's estates.²³ Indeed Bury's involvement in Suffolk cloth production was both commercial and industrial, as can be seen in the occupational breakdown of Bury's testators in the period.²⁴

Therefore Bury's place in the region should be seen in terms of the marketing and industrial functions the town had, as well as its role as a centre of consumption. Bury was in competition with a number of other marketing and industrial centres in the region, but was able to draw upon the natural benefits of its geographical location and the resources of its hinterland to compensate for the competition. The role of St. Edmund's was crucial to both the early establishment of the town as a significant economic feature of the region and its continuing success throughout the later medieval period.

¹⁸ Dyer *Decline and Growth in English Towns* p.34; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.73.

¹⁹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.22.

²⁰ The ulnage accounts of 1466-7 show that Bury ranked behind Hadleigh, Lavenham and Nayland, but was listed 'cum membris'; Bailey *Marginal Economy* p.179.

²¹ Gottfried suggests that the roads leading from Bury to the Stour valley were particularly important to Bury's merchants, and so are frequently remembered in their wills, *Bury St Edmunds* p.101. See also BSERO Osbern ff.34v, 133, 142v; Hawlee f.107.

²² After recovering from a slight fall in fleece prices at the end of the 14th century; Bailey *Marginal Economy* p.289.

²³ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.79. Even in the previous century, before the rise of the Stour valley cloth towns, the cellarer's rentals indicate very substantial flocks kept in the suburbs of Bury.

²⁴ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.101-2. See below Table 4.2, pp.145-8.

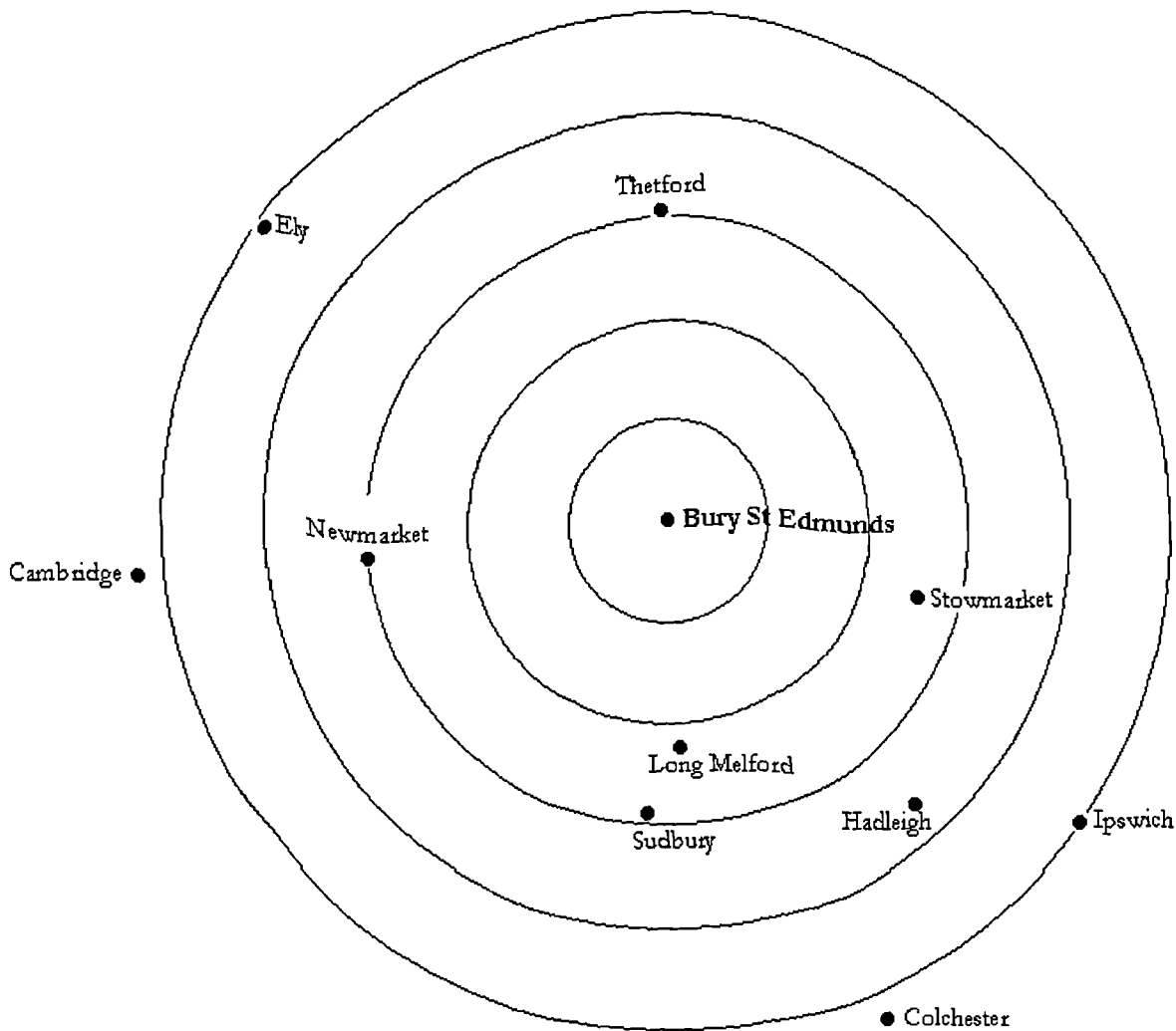


Figure 3.1b: The wider region of Bury showing larger towns within a 25 mile radius

3.i.b. The population of Bury St Edmunds.

If in the later middle ages Bury St Edmunds ranked high among provincial towns in terms of both the size of its population, and the wealth generated within its boundaries, then both of these factors were the result of the existence of the abbey of St. Edmund's. From the town's origins as a 10th century vill arranged around the wooden church housing the remains of the martyred king Edmund at Beodericsworth,²⁵ to well beyond the Dissolution, the prosperity and size of Bury's secular community was augmented by legal privileges enjoyed in the banleuca of the abbey. The presence of the monastery, the constant royal patronage it

²⁵ For an account of the early development of the town alongside the increase in size, fame and importance of St. Edmund's, see VCH pp.57-8, Lobel *The Borough* pp.1-15, Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds*

received and its status as one of the more popular pilgrimage sites,²⁶ all served not only to engender auspicious economic conditions for Bury's traders, but also to create the demand for specialised skills in the town. This, alongside the town's geographical disposition, would have made it an attractive target for immigration.

Town	Number of poll taxpayers in 1377 ²⁷	Number of poll taxpayers in 1381 ²⁸	Ranking among provincial towns ²⁹
Norwich	3952	3833	4
Lynn	3127	1824	7
Colchester	2955	1609	8
Bury St Edmunds	2445	1334	13
Great Yarmouth	1941	-	17
Cambridge	1902	1739	20
Ely	1772	-	21
Ipswich	1507	963	26
Hadleigh	917 ³⁰	-	39

Table 3.1: Numbers of taxpayers in East Anglian towns in 1377 and 1381

A concept of the size of Bury, especially in terms of its population, is an important step in this study as it would serve to provide a contextual reference for the relationship of Bury's townsmen to inhabitants of other communities. The scale of population would also have had a direct influence upon the nature and complexity of social relations within Bury. Several population estimates have been produced using taxation material from the latter half of the century, and particularly the returns from the poll taxes of 1377-81. In Bury St Edmunds 2445 individuals were liable to the 1377 tax, while in 1381 the number had dropped to 1334. While these figures should reflect the total adult population of Bury apart from the poorest and transient inhabitants of the town, they almost certainly underestimate the number of individuals liable, and the 1381 figure should be seen as very unreliable given the widespread and well documented evasion of the third poll tax in four years. The number of taxpayers recorded for 1377 places Bury thirteenth in a list of provincial towns ranked in order of numbers of taxpayers.³¹ In the context of East Anglia, Bury ranked below Norwich,

pp.73-82, Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.103-6 and *Memorials* vol.I pp.xxii-xxiv; Trenholme *EMB* pp.2-7.

²⁶ Apart from the physical remains of St. Edmund and his sword and shirt, the monastery acquired relics of a number of other saints through the ages; Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.147-9.

²⁷ Taken from the top forty ranked provincial towns listed in Dyer, A. *Decline and Growth in English Towns 1400-1640* (London, 1991) Appendix I pp.64-5.

²⁸ Taken from Powell, E. *The Rising in East Anglia in 1381: with an appendix containing the Suffolk Poll Tax Lists for that year* (Cambridge University Press, 1896) pp.121-3; '-' indicates where Powell does not provide an equivalent figure.

²⁹ Taken from the top forty ranked provincial towns listed in Dyer *Decline and Growth* Appendix I pp.64-5.

³⁰ The figure for Hadleigh has been estimated by Dyer.

³¹ Dyer *Decline and Growth* Appendix I pp.64-5. See also Powell *The Rising in East Anglia in 1381* pp.121-3, which also reproduces the total numbers of taxpayers by county. In 1377 Suffolk had 58610 taxpayers, while in 1381 the number was 44635.

Lynn, and Colchester, but above Great Yarmouth, Cambridge, Ely, Ipswich and Hadleigh.

Gottfried, using the 1377 figure, extrapolates using a number of gender, mortality and replacement ratios.³² He arrives at a “gross estimate” of Bury’s population in 1377 as 4200. Gottfried then proceeds to use the 1377 figures to estimate the town’s population earlier in the century, taking as his starting premise the theory that the population had diminished since the 1340s as a result of various epidemics.³³ Between 1347 and 1377 he estimates the population decline to have been somewhere in the region of 40%, making the pre-Black Death population approximately 7150.

Robert Dinn suggests that Gottfried’s figure for 1377 is too low, preferring Hatcher’s method of almost doubling the number of poll taxpayers³⁴ to arrive at a figure of 4890.³⁵ Rigby is similarly cautious about Gottfried’s figures, suggesting that it was possible to arrive at a total 1377 population of Bury St Edmunds as high as 5900 using methods espoused by Postan.³⁶ Notwithstanding the difficulties (and politics) of estimating populations from taxation figures, they are sufficient for providing a concept of the population of Bury St Edmunds in the late 14th century:³⁷ that it was between 4000 and 5000, which marked a decrease of between 40% and 50% from the 1340s.

A similar opportunity for estimating the population of the town arises in the early 16th century with the various taxes levied in the 1520s. Gottfried uses the 1522 muster material, which lists a total of 6476 men within the ‘franchise of Bury St Edmunds’, which probably equates to the liberty of St. Edmund’s, that is the eight and a half hundreds that comprised most of west Suffolk.³⁸ As Dinn points out, Gottfried’s ultimate figure for 1522 of 5438 is perhaps more controversial than his estimate for 1377, and seems somewhat arbitrary;³⁹ Dinn

³² For the processes involved in Gottfried’s estimates, see *Bury St Edmunds* pp.47-51. He is explicit in his admissions that the estimates are controversial, especially as he uses Russell’s equally controversial methods.

³³ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.51-3. He arrives at an estimate of Black Death morbidity at 50% based on the death rate among the convent of St. Edmund’s.

³⁴ Hatcher, J. *Plague, Population and the English Economy 1348-1530* (London, 1977) pp.14, 26-9, 68; Dyer *Decline and Growth* p.39.

³⁵ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.107.

³⁶ Rigby, S.H. review of Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* in *History* no.68 1983 pp.500-1. Rigby points out the shortcomings of Russell’s methods used by Gottfried, and indicates that the latter does not use them correctly.

³⁷ As will be seen the disagreement in the figures suggested for 1377 by Gottfried and Dinn is an indication of the different views they hold regarding the demographic experience of Bury in the period: Gottfried describes Bury’s population as growing in the 15th and 16th centuries in contrast with the ‘urban crisis’; while Dinn sees the population in gradual decline.

³⁸ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.52-4.

³⁹ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.107. Gottfried assumes that the population of the town of Bury is 25% of the figure given for the whole franchise: he does not give his reasons for doing so.

also objects to the use of the 1522 muster rolls as evidence rather than the 1524/5 lay subsidy returns. Using these latter sources Dinn arrives at a figure of 3240, while Rigby suggests somewhere in the region of 4140.⁴⁰ Where Gottfried has Bury's population rising from 1377, Dinn has it in decline;⁴¹ and Alan Dyer lists Bury within the group of towns maintaining a more or less stable population between 1377 and the 1520s.⁴² Both he and Gottfried deny that the town's population experienced a process of endemic de-urbanisation, such as may have affected the inhabitants of Coventry in the period.⁴³

Town	Number of subsidy payers 1524/5 ⁴⁴	Ranking of largest provincial towns
Norwich	1423	1
Colchester	701	8
Bury St Edmunds	645	9
Great Yarmouth	497	19
Cambridge	550	14
Ely	300	39
Ipswich	484	20
Hadleigh	311	34

Table 3.2: Numbers assessed in East Anglian towns for the lay subsidy of 1524/5

Gottfried examines the manorial records of St. Edmund's in order to determine the demographic developments inside and outside the banleuca, and discovers that the population of Bury reached its peak at the start of the 14th century, dropping somewhat during the famines of the 1310s and 1330s, and then regaining its previous height in the 1340s. The population then decreased from the 1350s until the mid-15th century, during which time the replacement, marriage and progeny ratios of the town's inhabitants (gleaned from a testamentary sample) were low;⁴⁵ and by the 1440s Gottfried suggests that the population levels were as low as half those from the 1340s.⁴⁶ From the 1460s there was a gradual demographic upturn. Mortality rates were still high and the population continued to decline,

⁴⁰ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.107; Rigby, S.H. review of Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* in *History* no.68 1983 p.501. Clark and Slack arrive at a 1520 figure of 3550 *English Towns in Transition 1500-1700* (Oxford University Press, 1976) p.83; while Phythian-Adams places Bury in a broad group of towns with a population between 4-5000, or 750-1250 families, whereas Coventry had between 700-1250 households; *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1978) pp.12-14. Hervey, S.H.A. *Suffolk in 1524 being the return for a subsidy granted in 1523* Suffolk Green Books no.10 (Woodbridge, 1910) pp.348-58, lists 641 individuals from Bury who were liable to pay in the first two years: 139 from Southgate ward; 96 from Eastgate ward; 172 from Risbygate ward; 97 from Northgate ward; and 137 from Westgate ward. Dyer, p.39, suggests that a multiplier of 6.5 be applied to the figures from the subsidy returns to arrive at an estimate of population.

⁴¹ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.108.

⁴² Dyer *Decline and Growth* Appendix V p.73. His estimates are 4646 for 1377, and 4193 for 1524/5.

⁴³ Phythian-Adams *Desolation of a City* pp.16-38; Dyer *Decline and Growth* p.39.

⁴⁴ Dyer, A. *Decline and Growth in English Towns 1400-1640* (London, 1991) Appendix II pp.66-7.

⁴⁵ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.55-72. There were also a series of mortality crises caused by outbreaks of disease, p.65.

⁴⁶ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.70.

but replacement ratios increased. From the 1480s immigration was increasing and mortality rates dropped; and from the 1490s marriage rates were increasing, so that by the end of the century the number of inhabitants was increasing. During the latter half of the 14th century and throughout the 15th century Gottfried suggests that due to high mortality and low progeny rates the population base was dependant upon high levels of immigration.⁴⁷

We see a population reaching its height at the beginning of the 14th century, and then subjected to the ravages of the Black Death with perhaps a 50% mortality rate. For the next century or so mortality rates remain high, accentuated by occasional crises, while replacement ratios remain low; a population base of somewhere between 2500 and 3500 is maintained through steady immigration.⁴⁸ Then at the end of the 15th century, as mortality rates decline and fertility increases alongside the continuing migration, Bury's population begins to stabilise and finally rise. This provides a useful context for both the model of the Bury elite and the individual case studies below, as the status of the town in terms of growth or decline affects the way in which individuals perceive themselves.

3.i.c. The prosperity of Bury St Edmunds.

Discussions of the success or importance of particular late medieval urban centres usually revolve around the size and wealth of the communities that inhabit them; and often the significance of a town's success lies in the fact that as centres of distribution, production and consumption, towns can be viewed as "registers of economic development" in the region or country.⁴⁹ Bury St Edmunds is found high up on the list of towns ranked by population, and the same is true of its prosperity.⁵⁰ As has already been stated, the prosperity of Bury was closely associated with the textile industry, first with wool and then with cloth, and its economy was growing throughout the 15th century.⁵¹ It is now necessary to examine the economic profile of Bury in more detail in order to later place particular townsmen in the context of local structures of wealth.

⁴⁷ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.59, 67. Gottfried suggests that before 1460 at least 10% of Bury will makers were immigrants, while after that date the number increases to 15%. Just over half the immigrants he identifies as originating from West Suffolk, or as he puts it, the 'greater urban region of Bury St Edmunds'.

⁴⁸ According to Gottfried, *Bury St Edmunds* pp.67-70. This may have indicated a situation that occurred in other towns where the urban community was in a state of 'decay', but its industry was prospering (see below pp.62-71); Bridbury, A.R. *Economic Growth: England in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1962) p.44.

⁴⁹ Bridbury *Economic Growth* p.40.

⁵⁰ Although population should not be taken as a simple indication of prosperity, Clark and Slack *English Towns in Transition* p.97; Dyer *Decline and Growth* pp.9-19.

⁵¹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.5. For a general account of the developments taking place in the textile industry see Bridbury *Economic Growth* pp.23-38.

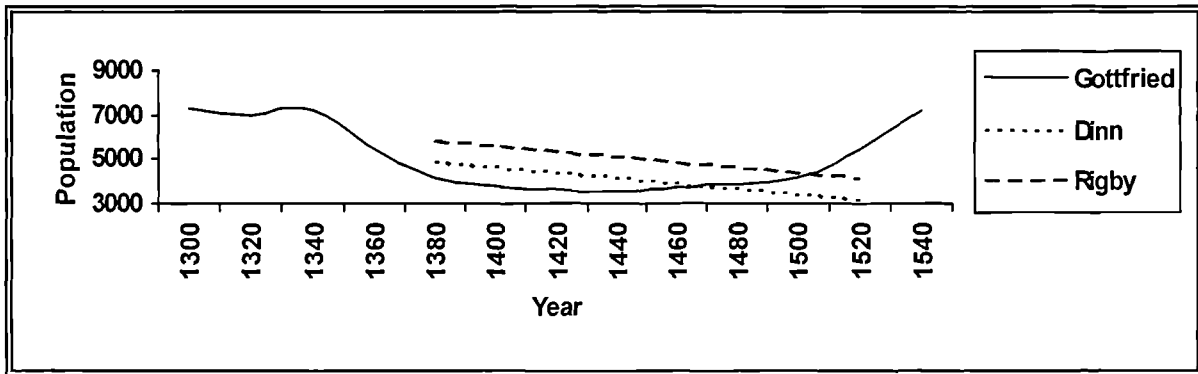


Figure 3.2: Population of Bury St Edmunds c.1300-1540.

Among Dyer's list of 15th century 'rising towns'⁵² can be found a number of urban centres in East Anglia that were involved in cloth production and marketing, including Bury, Hadleigh, Lavenham and Ipswich; and he places these in a region of comparative prosperity.⁵³ It has

Town	Assessed wealth for 1334 lay subsidy	Ranking of richest provincial towns
Norwich	£1100	4
Lynn	£700	9
Colchester	£250	49
Bury St Edmunds	£360	24
Great Yarmouth	£1000	5
Cambridge	£500	19
Ely	£315	31
Ipswich	£500	17
Hadleigh	-	-

Table 3.3: Wealth assessed in East Anglian towns for the 1334 lay subsidy

been claimed that by the 1520s Suffolk was one of the richest counties in England, with the hundred of Babergh (in which Bury was located) being the richest hundred in the county.⁵⁴ Bury became increasingly prosperous between the 14th and 16th centuries, moving up the rankings of towns according to wealth.⁵⁵ In 1334 Bury did not rank highly among the

⁵² Dyer *Decline and Growth* pp.34, 45, 72-4.

⁵³ Dyer *Decline and Growth* p.42. He cites among other evidence the 'wool-churches' of Suffolk (particularly around Long Melford and Lavenham) as evidence of the region's prosperity. Others rate East Anglia as one of the most prosperous areas in England, Clark, P. ed. *The Early Modern Town: a Reader* (New York, 1976) p.93. See also MacCulloch, D. *Suffolk and the Tudors: Politics and Religion in an English County 1500-1600* (Oxford, 1986) p.55.

⁵⁴ Patten, J. 'Village and town: an occupational study' in *Agricultural History Review* 20 1972 pp.2-4. The hundred returned over £600 in the first two tax years of 1524/5; the next highest return was from Thingoe hundred (the area immediately neighbouring Bury to the west), which only managed £300. The prosperity was created by the production of coloured cloths in the region centred on Sudbury.

⁵⁵ Dyer *Decline and Growth* Appendix IV pp.71-2; Rigby, S.H. review of Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds in History* no.68 1983 p.500; see Tables 3.3 and 3.4.

country's wealthiest towns, and even within an East Anglian context was surpassed by Norwich, Great Yarmouth, Lynn, Ipswich and Cambridge (Table 3.3). In other words the town was as yet only a market centre with *regional* importance, and even within West Suffolk Bury seems to have had competition from industrial centres such as Sudbury, which was assessed at £281.⁵⁶ However, by 1377 Bury had passed Ipswich (its main Suffolk rival) at least in terms of population (see Table 3.1). By the time of the 1524/5 lay subsidy Bury had sustained its prosperity through its involvement in the textile industry, although it had once again fallen behind Lynn and Ipswich in the rankings.⁵⁷ It is probable that the height of Bury's prosperity occurred some time during the mid-15th century.

Town	Largest sum paid in any year of 1524/5 lay subsidy	Ranking of richest provincial towns
Norwich	£749	1
Lynn	£302	6
Colchester	£204	11
Bury St Edmunds	£280	12
Great Yarmouth	£125	18
Cambridge	£97	30
Ipswich	£282	7
Hadleigh	£109	23
Lavenham	£180	13
Beccles	£74	41
Long Melford	£65	46

Table 3.4: Amounts returned from East Anglian towns in 1524/5 lay subsidy⁵⁸

The rise in the relative wealth (seen in the tax returns) of Bury's inhabitants was connected with the function the town served as the market of the region's industrial cloth production, although to a lesser extent Bury was also involved in manufacturing.⁵⁹ From the mid-15th century the cloth industry flourished and this was especially the case in West Suffolk: many of the parishes to the south of Bury (including Woolpit, Lavenham, Mildenhall, Long Melford and Rattlesden) became leading producers of woollen cloth;⁶⁰ and the raw products from

⁵⁶ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.119-23. In terms of the wealth of its population Gottfried sees Bury 'losing ground' during the early 14th century, coinciding with the periods of the worst violence between townsmen and abbey.

⁵⁷ Gottfried suggests that if the returns for Bury St Edmunds and Lavenham (one of the more significant of the industrial cloth producing parishes in Bury's 'greater urban region') are added together, then jointly they appear seventh in the national rankings of wealthiest towns. It is unclear how Gottfried arrives at his figures for the 1524/5 lay subsidy as presented; *Bury St Edmunds* p.125.

⁵⁸ Tables 3.3 and 3.4 are taken from Dyer *Decline and Growth* Appendix IV pp.71-2. The data in Table 3.3 differ somewhat from those presented by Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.122.

⁵⁹ Gottfried suggests that Bury acted as the market for the textile production of a region "extending twenty to twenty-five miles from the abbey gates", and that the seventeen rural parishes immediately surrounding the banleuca (within a five mile radius) were completely dominated by the commercial activities of the town; *Bury St Edmunds* pp.7, 22, 84, 99-101.

⁶⁰ Many of the villages within a ten mile radius of Bury (that is, Gottfried's 'greater urban region of

these villages became the staple for the Bury markets.⁶¹ Bury merchants' most common overseas exports were raw wool in the 14th century and finished cloth in the 15th, with Brabant and Flanders the most common destinations.⁶²

During the 14th century Bury merchants often took part in joint ventures with merchants from more established trading towns such as London, Norwich and Ipswich, although towards the end of the century Bury's merchants could often be found engaged in solo ventures.⁶³ This was perhaps indicative of the pattern of the 15th century, when Bury's townsmen were becoming increasingly wealthy and better organised, and when its merchants were becoming more established in trading and credit networks, both in the region and overseas.

Merchants from Scotland and the Low Countries attended Bury fairs and markets with increasing frequency during the 15th century, and in the latter half of the century there is evidence that some settled in the town.⁶⁴ By the 1420s Bury had an annual fair for wool and cloth products on the feast of St. Matthew apostle and evangelist which by the 1450s had become sufficiently important for Bury merchants to use grants of privileges to merchants from other towns attending it to wring concessions from the king regarding tolls in fairs elsewhere.⁶⁵ In other words by the mid-15th century, the period in which the individuals discussed in Chapter 5 were operating in Bury, the town was firmly established as a leading *national* market centre. Importantly, Bury's market and fair specialisations enabled its merchants to manoeuvre themselves into a position where they could protect their privileges and at the same time exploit their connections with the industrial capacity of the town's hinterland.

The instances of occupations connected with the manufacture, finishing or marketing of wool

Bury') became significant producers of cloth; *Bury St Edmunds* pp.22-3, 99-101. The industrial and commercial connections between Bury St Edmunds and Lavenham seem to have been particularly strong, pp.100-1. The towns that prospered within the "widely experienced urban decay" of Phythian-Adams' view of the period included those that had an industrialised rural hinterland; *Desolation of a City* pp.18-19.

⁶¹ For an account of the markets in Bury see Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.84-9.

⁶² Although wool was still an important commodity in Bury in the 15th century, cloth generated more income; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.98. Bury merchants were involved in overseas trading during the 14th century as well; CCR 1360-4 p.248.

⁶³ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.91. Lynn was the port most used by Bury merchants.

⁶⁴ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.93; Thomas Thomason a Scottish merchant settled in Bury in 1480; CPR Edward IV 1480 p.217.

⁶⁵ In July 1406 a grant was made of an annual fair which, 'as by custom', was held on the feast of St. Matthew the apostle in "a certain place that has been harmful to the town"; the grant allowed the fair to be kept for two days before and two days after same feast, but in a different and better location. CCHR 1341-1417 p.431. In 1364 it was confirmed by Edward III that one of the privileges held by St. Edmund's was that the burgesses of Bury were quit from toll and customs in all markets and fairs anywhere in England forever as granted by successive kings; CPR 1364-7 p.22.

or cloth recorded from Bury St Edmunds are an indication of the importance these industries had for the town.⁶⁶ We see high frequencies of incidences of drapers, dyers, fullers, hosiers, mercers, tailors, weavers, websters and woolmen; with the associated presence of smaller numbers of bedweavers, 'brouderers' or embroiderers, clothmakers, collarmakers, coverletweavers, haberdashers, hatmakers, 'lyn' or linen drapers, sewsters, shearmen, 'steynours' or stainers and wool chapmen.⁶⁷ Gottfried claims that "weavers were the most numerous of all Bury craftsmen in the later middle ages", although he does not indicate how he reaches this conclusion, and while Table 4.2 suggest that weavers were prominent in Bury, I would not be confident in agreeing with him. The 1477 gild ordinances of the weavers, indicate the significance of the textile industry for the whole community:

forasmoche as many *persones* and greate multytude of people aswell of men as women & children withinne the Toun of Bury Seynt *Edmundes* bee deyly gretly occupyed be the menie of the Crafte of Wevers. wevvyng alle maner of wuluen and lynen clooth to the greate avayle & profyth as well of the seyde Toun as the Cuntre ...⁶⁸

It is significant that the crucial role of the region is recognised by Bury's weavers, as was the belief that the success of the craft in the town and the industry in the hinterland (currently under threat if the characteristically plaintive ordinances are to be believed) was inextricably linked. However it is certain that the weavers, along with associated crafts, were very important to the prosperity of the town, and particularly in the second half of the 15th century.

Occupations mentioned in the testamentary material also indicate the relative importance (particularly before the mid-15th century) of industries connected with leather. Thus we see that cordwainer, currier, corviser, glover and saddler are among the most frequent of occupations, especially if we include the English variants of their titles (such as leather dresser and shoemaker). These professions are involved in the latter stages of the production of leather goods rather than in the preparatory stages: there are only twelve instances of skinners and two of pelters active in Bury between 1346 and 1492, while there is only one mention of a Bury tanner.⁶⁹ Both Dinn and Gottfried postulate that the leather crafts suffered a dramatic decline in the early part of the 15th century, and this is certainly borne out by the testamentary material for Bury.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ See below Table 4.2.

⁶⁷ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.102.

⁶⁸ BSERO B 9/1/2. See also the associated document relating to a deed compiled by the plain and coverlet weavers, BSERO B 9/1/1.

⁶⁹ The tanner was John Methelwold of the early 1360s; BSERO Osbern f.10.

⁷⁰ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.112; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.114-5. See below Table 4.2.

Although the cloth and wool industries were the most crucial in Bury (cloth especially from the 1440s) other occupations and therefore industries existed within the town. Crafts connected with both provisioning and building are well represented in the material, particularly bakers, butchers, chandlers, cooks, fishermen/ fishmongers, grocers, masons (including the rough and stone varieties), spicers, and tylers; and other craftsmen such as one would expect to find in a community with the population of Bury are also mentioned quite frequently.⁷¹ Table 4.2 (below) suggests that in addition to those involved with textiles or leather, the wills of Bury inhabitants also indicate the presence of what might be termed 'specialised' crafts, practitioners of which would only be found in small numbers in communities of substantial populations. These include occupations such as bellfounder, glazier, goldsmith, leech, 'lymnour', painter, 'parchemyner' or parchment maker, physician and scrivener. Many of these would have been present in Bury principally due to the patronage of the obedientiaries of St. Edmund's, for the edification of the great monastic house and for the parish churches and hospitals under its auspices; as well as the equipping of its personnel.

Using a variety of evidence Gottfried has described the topographical distribution of wealth and property within Bury St Edmunds between the 13th and 16th centuries.⁷² In the 13th century⁷³ Eastgate ward was the poorest and the most closely administered by St. Edmund's, while Southgate ward was the richest and most densely settled. This latter ward had industrial and commercial districts as well as residential, with concentrations of fullers and other textile workers around the river Linnet, and included within its boundaries the Horse or Old Market, which had only recently been superseded by the Great Market. Southgate street was Bury's most settled and prosperous street throughout the period.⁷⁴ Westgate ward was sparsely populated in the 13th century and seems to have included areas of arable. The most populated and commercial ward of Bury was Risbygate ward which included the Great Market and the Brentgovel, the street containing many of the town's inns. Also located in Risbygate ward were the Corn Market, and the Barbers' and Cooks' rows. Adjacent to the Great Market was the Tollhouse, the gildhall, Moyses hall and the gaol.⁷⁵ Finally Northgate ward covered the largest area and was lightly populated, although many of its properties

⁷¹ For example, smiths of various kinds (bladesmiths, ferrous, brasiers) coopers and wrights. The provisioning crafts may have flourished as they not only had to provide for the large Bury population, but also for large numbers of immigrants and visitors attracted to the town and St. Edmund's.

⁷² The following is based upon Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.26-41.

⁷³ Gottfried's description of the 13th century comes from analysis of a St. Edmund's rental of 1295 which lists the holdings of a number of abbey obedientiaries, including the sacrist, cellarer, almoner, prior, subcellarer, pittance, chamberlain and wardens of several of the hospitals; *Bury St Edmunds* p.23.

⁷⁴ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.29.

⁷⁵ During the 14th century the gildhall fell into dilapidation as the townsmen and the abbey argued over who was responsible for its upkeep. In the 15th century a new gildhall was built by the townsmen in

were large, prestigious and exacted high rents.⁷⁶

In the late 14th century the rental of sacrist Thomas Rudham indicates that Southgate and Risbygate streets and Goldsmiths' Row had become the most populated, with increased population in Westgate ward and beyond the town's walls, especially around the gates.⁷⁷ This was at least partially due to the town's inhabitants moving away from the traditional high rent areas into cheaper areas, and consequently Southgate ward appears to have been in decline. By 1433,⁷⁸ however, Southgate ward seems to have been prospering, being increasingly populated again despite the high rents. Northgate and Westgate wards show the biggest increase in population, while Eastgate ward shows marked decline. A list of payers of *relevia* on properties from 1353 to the Dissolution leads Gottfried to suggest that over this period, and increasingly towards the latter end of it, the most settled areas of Bury were towards its outskirts, and that the central areas of the town were only lightly occupied.⁷⁹

The 1524/5 lay subsidy records list those assessed by wards.⁸⁰ Risbygate ward was by far the wealthiest, and Gottfried suggests that this reflects the transition in Bury from 'old money' to 'new';⁸¹ that is that many in this ward were involved in textiles, and did not derive their income from land or property.

Gildhall street.

⁷⁶ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.33-4.

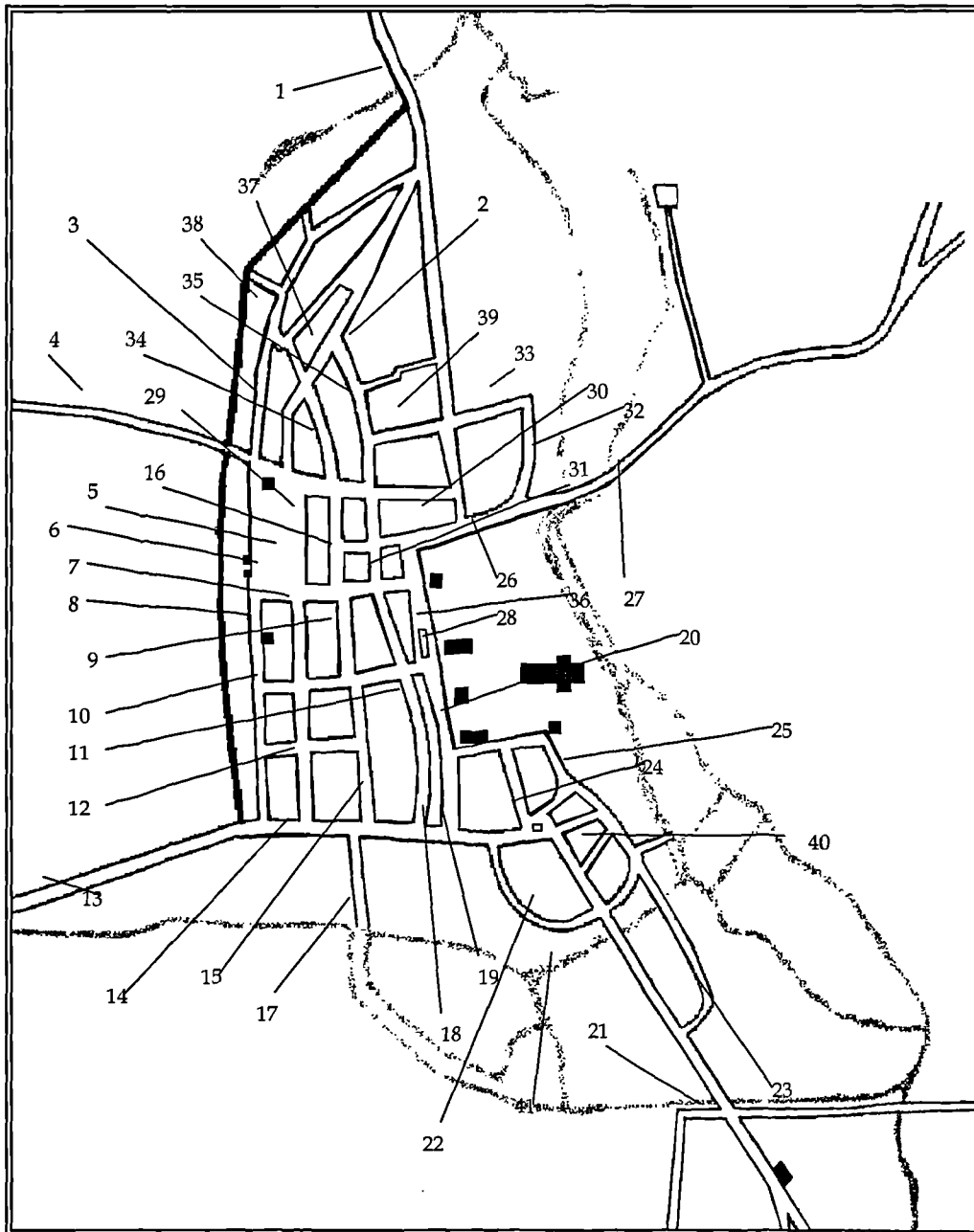
⁷⁷ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.34-6.

⁷⁸ When a rental of all *hadgovel* properties was made; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.36-8. See also Lobel *The Borough* pp.8-9.

⁷⁹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.38.

⁸⁰ See Hervey *Suffolk in 1524* pp.348-58 for the list of townspeople and what they were assessed for; and pp.424-5 for the Anticipation. Hervey also provides a list of Bury inhabitants who did not pay in the second year of the instalment, pp.434-5.

⁸¹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.40-1.



KEY:

- | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1: Northgate Street. | 15: Bernwell Street. | 29: Brentgovel Street. |
| 2: Littlebrakelond. | 16: Baxter Street. | 30: Lambs Lane. |
| 3: Longbrakelond. | 17: Fryers Lane. | 31: Eldbaxter Street. |
| 4: Risbygate Street. | 18: Neetmarket Street. | 32: Scour Lane. |
| 5: Great Market. | 19: Smiths' Row. | 33: Burmans Lane. |
| 6: Cornmarket. | 20: Punches Lane. | 34: Welles Street. |
| 7: Cheesemarket. | 21: Southgate Street. | 35: Garlond Street. |
| 8: Barbers' Row. | 22: Eldmarket. | 36: Poulterers' Row. |
| 9: Cooks' Row. | 23: Raingate Street. | 37: Bow Lane. |
| 10: Gildhall Street. | 24: Sparhawk Street. | 38: Pudding Lane. |
| 11: Churchgate Street. | 25: Schoolhall Street. | 39: Crispens Lane. |
| 12: Whiting Street. | 26: Le Mustowe. | 40: Yoxford Lane. |
| 13: Westgate Street. | 27: Eastgate Street. | 41: Maydewater Street. |
| 14: Hog Lane. | 28: Goldsmiths' Row. | |

Figure 3.3: Bury streets.

Ward	Risbygate	Southgate	Westgate	Northgate	Eastgate
No. of individuals assessed	172 ⁸²	139	138	97 ⁸³	96
Total levied	£63 4s 6d	£38 3s 4d	£35 19s 4d	£18 3s 0d	£13 8s 6d
Individuals assessed at £10 +	15	8	11	3	9
Individuals assessed at £20 +	9	7	5	4	1
Individuals assessed at £40 +	9	2	3	1	0
Individuals assessed at £100 +	3	2	1	1	1

Table 3.5a: 1524/5 lay subsidy in Bury St Edmunds⁸⁴

In terms of the distribution of wealth in Bury, Table 3.5b indicates that 6.17% of those assessed for the 1524/5 lay subsidy were responsible for paying 72.72% of the total amount levied; and if the group of individuals this represents can be deemed the elite of Bury, then this percentage of people is in fact larger than the economic reality of the community would allow. This is simply because the poorer groups within the town are not a part of the returns for the subsidy, and consequently those named in the returns are already a wealthier sample of the whole community. In Norwich, the returns for the same subsidy indicated that 11.39% of the community were assessed for 74.15% of the town's total wealth.⁸⁵ This suggests that the wealth of Bury St Edmunds was concentrated in a smaller proportion of the community than in its more populous and prosperous regional rival. This has implications for the model of Bury's elite to be developed in Chapter 4, because if the concentration of wealth should in theory facilitate the identification of the elite.

⁸² The "stok of our lady Guyld" (i.e. Candlemas gild) is valued at £2.

⁸³ The "stok of our lady guild ther" (i.e. Candlemas gild) is valued at 5 marks.

⁸⁴ Extrapolated from Hervey *Suffolk in 1524* pp.348-58.

⁸⁵ Pound, J.F. 'The social and trade structure of Norwich 1525-75' in Clark *The Early Modern Town* p.131. The percentages have been derived from Pound's Table 6.1 using the figures for those assessed at £20+ to correspond with the figures above in Table 3.5.

Ward	No. of individuals assessed	Individuals assessed at £20 +	% of individuals assessed at £20 +	Total levied	Total levied by those assessed at £20+	% of total levied paid by those assessed at £20+
Risbygate	172	21	12.21	£63 4s 6d	£49 8s 8d	78.19
Southgate	139	11	7.91	£38 3s 4d	£29	75.98
Westgate	138	9	6.52	£35 19s 4d	£22 15s	63.25
Northgate	97	6	6.19	£18 3s 0d	£13 13s 4d	75.3
Eastgate	96	2	2.08	£13 8s 6d	£8	59.59
<hr/>						
Total	632	39	6.17	£168 18s 8d	£122 17s	72.72

Table 3.5b: Proportion of 1524/5 subsidy paid by wealthiest individuals.

3.i.d. The fortunes of St. Edmund's.

It is necessary to turn now to the economic context of the town's chief landlord, the abbey of St. Edmund's. This is principally because the changing fortunes of the abbey was a significant factor in its relations with the secular population of the town. As the abbey suffered in the later 14th century along with all great landowners, and the prosperity of the townsmen increased, the nature of the relationship between town and abbey changed.

The abbey of St. Edmund's was one of the largest, wealthiest and most prestigious Benedictine houses in England from its foundation by Cnut until its Dissolution, and was firmly established even at a time when the borough was still a minor market settlement.⁸⁶ A great expansion of the abbey buildings and community took place in the 12th century under abbot Samson,⁸⁷ the most famous of the abbots thanks to the writings of Jocelin of Brakelond; and by c.1200 the convent numbered over ninety monks.⁸⁸ In the latter half of the 13th century

⁸⁶ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.73. The Domesday survey refers to the vill where St. Edmund king and martyr is buried, which is held *in capite* by the abbot of St. Edmund's. There were 172 freemen and 43 alms men and women, each holding a occupying a cottage; as well as 52 *bordarii*. There were also 30 priests, deacons and clerks, 28 'nuns and poor folk', 75 ancillaries of various occupations; as well as 34 knights with 22 *bordarii* serving them; Trenholme *EMB* p.4.

⁸⁷ *Memorials* vol.1 pp.xxxvii-xlvi.

⁸⁸ Thomson *Archives* p.2.

St. Edmund's housed eighty monks, twenty-one chaplains and 111 servants;⁸⁹ but like the secular population of Bury it seems to have been hard hit by the Black Death in the 1340s. At the beginning of 1351 pope Clement VI granted the abbot William Bernham permission to ordain as priests ten monks under the age of twenty-five in order to replace those that had died of plague.⁹⁰ By 1381 the abbey only accommodated forty-seven monks; while at the Dissolution there were at least thirty-eight.⁹¹ In other words St. Edmund's was a very significant house throughout the period.

The monastic community's wealth was partly derived from its dominance over governmental and legal matters in its liberty, and thus from its control over industrial and commercial activities within the town.⁹² Primarily its income came from its huge endowment: essentially the convent or one of its officers held and took an income from every property and piece of land within the borough and suburbs.⁹³ In the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535 St. Edmund's was assessed at £2336 16s 11d, ranking it the fifth wealthiest house in the country, below Westminster, Glastonbury, St. Albans and Christchurch in Canterbury.⁹⁴ The commission that took possession of the abbey valued its revenues at 4000 marks, while the lead and bells were worth 4500 marks.⁹⁵ The abbot was assigned a pension of £333 6s 8d, while the prior received £30 and the sacrist £20.

But this in fact marked a decline in the fortunes of the abbey, as by the early 16th century it had suffered a series of financial crises which had grown particularly acute from the second half of the 15th century. By the 1530s the abbey's chief source of income, its property holdings within the banleuca, had dropped significantly, with the number of holdings recorded falling to the levels of 1295, even though the town's population was reaching its pre-Black Death peak.⁹⁶ Throughout the 14th and 15th centuries St. Edmund's had operated as a *rentier*, and had pursued a policy of adding to its holdings wherever possible. Like every major landowner St. Edmund's suffered due to the dramatic population decline in the latter part of the 14th and

⁸⁹ VCH vol.2 p.69.

⁹⁰ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.51.

⁹¹ VCH vol.2 p.67.

⁹² Lobel *The Borough* pp.58-62; see section 3.ii below.

⁹³ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.74, 78-80. The legal and political aspects of the role of St. Edmund's in the borough will be discussed in section 3.ii below.

⁹⁴ VCH vol.2 p.69; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.74. Lobel *The Borough* pp.30-1, 47.

⁹⁵ VCH vol.2 p.67. The abbey was stripped of over 5000 marks worth of gold, silver and gems: including 1553 ounces of gold plate; 7003 ounces of gild plate; 1078 ounces of parcel gilt; and 2352 ounces of silver gilt.

⁹⁶ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.41-3. Nevertheless the sacrist's rental of 1526 indicates that this officer at least still had over 230 properties in Bury St Edmunds; BSERO A 6/2/1; Lobel *The Borough* pp.53-4. In the 12th century it has been estimated that the house was one of the six richest in England; Thomson *Archives* p.2.

early 15th centuries, and as the 15th century progressed it was increasingly debt.⁹⁷ It seems that St. Edmund's, perhaps manifesting its conservatism like other monastic landlords of the period,⁹⁸ was unable to adapt to the economic conditions of the 15th century. Instead of turning to increasing rents and direct exploitation of their estates, the convent and officers instead chose to alienate ever larger portions of their holdings, thus compounding their financial difficulties in the long term.⁹⁹ Extravagant life styles and administrative ineptitude were thought by contemporaries to be factors in the decline of St. Edmund's prosperity. The *Cronica Buriensis'* account of the 1327 rising in Bury St Edmunds has often been quoted as evidence of the dissolute behaviour of the convent.¹⁰⁰ Whatever the truth of this, the decline of St Edmunds' popularity throughout the 15th and 16th centuries is reflected in the decline in bequests from Bury testators.¹⁰¹

3.i.e. Conclusion.

This was the context for the experience of individuals within the secular community of late medieval Bury St Edmunds: a conservative monastic landlord with almost total political, legal, industrial and commercial authority; and the progressive erosion of the economic foundation of this authority. The town's population was large by regional and national standards, and throughout the period seems to have been occupationally diverse, although much of the community's prosperity derived from the textile industry and relations with the industrial cloth region to the south of the town. Levels of wealth among the townsmen were probably increasing during the 15th century when that of St. Edmund's was in decline, as demographic and industrial developments made active participation in cloth production and marketing very profitable, and put the occupation of large scale *rentier* at a disadvantage. The population losses of the 14th and 15th centuries crippled landowners like St. Edmund's, and the demographic changes may have provided the foundations upon which the secular community could establish a measure of commercial independence from the abbey, allowing them to pursue the boom in the textile industry. Indeed, the diminishing authority of St. Edmund's not only enabled the townsmen's attempt at independence, but also stimulated the

⁹⁷ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.240.

⁹⁸ Lobel *The Borough* p.ix.

⁹⁹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.237-30. Indeed monastic institutions specifically seem to have suffered as the 15th century progressed, Bridbury *Economic Growth* pp.75, 92.

¹⁰⁰ *Memorials* vol.3 p.39. It indicates that at the time the violence against the abbey broke out, 32 monks were 'holidaying' in the countryside. A commission appointed by the bishop of Norwich in 1345 charged the convent of St. Edmund's with a number of disciplinary lapses, including living away from the abbey and wearing lay clothes; Lobel 1327 p.220. Arnold describes a belief on the part of the Bury townsmen that a lack of discipline and morality pervaded the convent, particularly during the 14th century under the abbacy of William Bernham; *Memorials* vol.2 p.xlvii; vol.3 pp.ix-xiii.

¹⁰¹ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.433; MacCulloch *Suffolk and the Tudors* p.136. The reduction in bequests to the abbey did not hinder its wealth.

attempt in the first place by imposing stringent economic burdens upon the community.¹⁰²

To theorise the secular community operating within this context requires the employment of imaginative resources as much as it relies upon a close reading of the available material and statistical analysis of trends. For the context to *mean* anything, for it actually to inform the description and discussion of the community, one must ask how the social and economic factors affected the lives of individuals living within the community, and also the structures and operating conditions of the community as a whole. For the purposes of this study the questions must also include reflections upon the extent to which these factors impinge upon the public and private lives of the individuals within Bury St Edmunds. Wealth, social status and occupation were clearly inextricably linked, and as well as providing the foundations of any individual's position within any community in the late middle ages, they may also have been the chief means by which identity (of any kind) could be produced. They were also the mechanisms by which the secular community of Bury could develop their ever-strengthening position in opposition to the authority of the officers and convent of St. Edmund's. Changes in the demographic and economic climates which would affect the relative standings of individuals' wealth, rank and occupational career, would thus clearly also affect the public identity of that person, and to some extent the position of that person in relation to the political contest between town and abbey. The radical population losses of the mid-14th century and the continuing demographic decline through to the late 15th century may well have had the effect of rendering the issue of identity all the more immediate and vital and *conscious*: the demographic 'gaps' left by the population losses meant that the established social structures began to destabilise and become more fluid, with the result that the processes of identification and demarcation (often at quite minute levels) of social status became less exact. This, combined with widespread changes in commercial and industrial practices caused by the developments in the regional and national cloth industry, and the redistribution of wealth caused by these industrial and demographic changes, must have impinged quite dramatically upon the public lives of the Bury laity. As a community their political and economic relationship with St. Edmund's was changing in their favour; and as individuals they had to fit their conception of their selves and their environment within the changing conditions in which they lived their daily (public) lives. This must have occasioned a heightened degree of consciousness and increased sensitivity to their place within the world, and the nature of their relationships to those around them. This is one reason why a study of this particular place at this particular time is so valuable.

¹⁰² Lobel *The Borough* p.123.

3.ii. Political conflict in Bury St Edmunds 1264-c.1500.

3.ii.a. The legal relationship between townsmen and St. Edmund's.

In order for the sociological issues raised in Chapter 2 to be applied to the community of Bury St Edmunds, it is necessary to examine in detail events in the public life of the town, and the relations between town and abbey in the 14th and 15th centuries. It is intended that this section should form the context for and the link between the sociological elements of Chapter 2, Chapter 4's model of the Bury elite, and Chapter 5's case studies of expressions of identity in 15th century Bury. This is because the nature of the legal relationship between town and abbey, and the tradition of dispute between the two, played a significant role in the development of communal and individual identity in the town, and in the creation of the institutions around which the townsmen's identity could be formulated.

The lord-tenant relationship that formed the basis of the constitutional structures of Bury St Edmunds dated back to the foundation of St. Edmund's by Cnut. Following the replacement of the secular priests with twenty Benedictine monks in the first half of the 11th century a charter was granted by Cnut which exempted the banleuca from any administrative authority, and gave the abbey all legal and political rights within that area.¹ From the point of view of the secular community at that time and thereafter this meant they were liable only to the officials and courts of the abbey, and were not subject to the shire or hundred courts due to the exemption of the banleuca from their respective jurisdictions.² As the borough developed into a prosperous market settlement, the relationship between St. Edmund's and the town was embodied increasingly in the office of sacrist:³ the town was the property of the convent rather than the abbot, and the sacrist served as their agent in all matters relating to it.⁴ The relationship between the town and the abbey was structured by the unreconcilable aspirations of either side regarding the financial burden and executive limitations imposed by

¹ Lobel *The Borough* pp.4-5. Cnut's charter is regarded as false by some, but Lobel considers the existence of a charter with similar contents to be largely substantiated by the fact that confirmations of the privileges appearing in it were granted by Edward the Confessor and his successors. See also VCH vol.2 p.58.

² "The abbey had been vested by successive kings with almost total executive and judicial control over the entire banleuca," Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.167. Indeed the Liberty of St. Edmund's of eight and one half hundreds provided one of the most important political boundaries in Suffolk, effectively divorcing West Suffolk from the administrative structures of east Suffolk; MacCulloch, D. *Suffolk and the Tudors: Politics and Religion in an English County 1500-1600* (Oxford, 1986) p.52.

³ Although the cellarer, as lord of the grange of St. Edmund's (or Eastgate Barns), controlled large sections of the town fields. In the rental of 1295 the manor included 260 acres arable and 50 acres of meadow within the abbey's banleuca, and 36 tenements within the town and suburbs; Lobel *The Borough* p.19. A 14th century cellarer's register suggests that the total acreage of the manor approached 400 acres.

St. Edmund's upon the secular community. Much of the violence that occurred in the 13th and 14th centuries resulted from the intractable approach that St. Edmund's took in its management of its privileges.⁵

The convent and senior officers of St. Edmund's had certain privileges associated with their position.⁶ The cellarer had extensive pasture rights in and around Bury, as well as a monopoly of the mills in the town from the 13th century. The cellarer also owned three sheep folds within the town, an especially profitable resource given the development of the textile industry in the 14th and 15th centuries.⁷ He had tenants in a number of Bury streets both within and beyond the town walls who owed agricultural service.⁸ The prior and cellarer were responsible for making arrests and distraints within the cellarer's fee, but all prisoners in the town were kept in the gaol under the supervision of the sacrist.⁹ During Jocelin's time the jurisdiction of the cellarer was diminished by abbot Samson who deprived the former of his court, and extended to the suburbs (where many of the cellarer's free tenants lived) the jurisdictional privileges enjoyed by those living within the town walls.¹⁰ This greatly reduced the legal authority of the cellarer within the town, but the office still brought with it extensive privileges, particularly with regard to commercial affairs. During the 12th century the cellarer had lost many monopolies and rights, but maintained some that were very profitable.¹¹ Perhaps one of the cellarer's most profitable privileges was the monopoly of sheep folds that he enjoyed: originally every townsman had to use the cellarer's sheepfolds, although after the 12th century a few exceptions were made, and anyone found keeping sheep anywhere else in the town was distrained on. Other privileges were possibly less significant in their financial

⁴ There were some small exceptions to the sacrist's monopoly; Lobel *The Borough* p.17.

⁵ Susan Reynolds claims that the towns that enjoyed the least independence or autonomy in the period were those with ecclesiastical or monastic landlords, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977) p.115; Diarmid MacCulloch suggests that the abbey was increasingly conservative in its attempts to halt the decline of its wealth and authority by the 16th century, *Suffolk and the Tudors* p.136.

⁶ In 1352 and 1353 several charters were granted to St. Edmund's confirming their existing privileges which included the provisions that: no agent of king can meddle in the borough of Bury St Edmunds; that the abbot and convent were to hear all pleas touching them, the borough or their tenants unless the king was affected; CCHR 1341-1417 pp.125, 137. In 1383 a charter was granted reproducing and reiterating five long established charters of privileges; CCHR 1341-1417 p.294.

⁷ Lobel *The Borough* pp.20, 27. The cellarer held at least five mills as part of the manor. The sheep folds were located at the Eastgate, the Risbygate and at Hardwick.

⁸ In the 13th century the cellarer claimed that since Crut his office had had the right to hold a court for his tenants, and that it was his right to hold the view of frankpledge and take the associated incomes; Lobel *The Borough* pp.21, 191-2.

⁹ Lobel, M.D. 'The gaol of Bury St Edmunds' in *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History* (no.21, 1933) pp.203 ff.

¹⁰ Lobel *The Borough* pp.22-4. The suitors at the cellarer's court were thereafter required to attend the town's portman-moot instead; and his tenants had to renew their pledges at the toll-house like the burgesses, rather than at the cellarer's court.

¹¹ Including the right to sell the produce of his farm at the town market at higher prices than other sellers and were free from toll; the right of precedence over the abbot in buying from the market; the right to buy certain produce at deflated prices; and the right to forestall. Lobel *The Borough* p.25.

benefits, such as the ownership of all chalk, clay, grass and trees in his fee; and the right to stray animals in the town fields or suburbs or any where else on his demesne land. The cellarer also had monopoly on fishing and washing in the waters in and around Bury, particularly the river Lark and Teyfen.¹² Traditional and firmly established privileges of the cellarer included the payment of *rep-selver* and *schar-peni*.¹³

However it was the sacrist of St. Edmund's that held the greatest authority in all aspects of the life of the secular community through the legal and economic privileges that came with his office. He was responsible for administering the abbot's authority in the town, and was rewarded with receipt of all ensuing profits; this authority had been transferred from the abbot and convent some time during the 12th century. Indeed the abbot's potential role in the government of Bury was limited in terms of his active participation, although ultimately he was responsible for the administration through his legal liability for the activities of his officers. The sacrist's authority was exercised through the two bailiffs, which in the 12th and 13th centuries at least were effectively servants of the sacrist, although the election of the bailiffs was made with the consent of the whole convent.¹⁴ The bailiffs were paid by the sacrist,¹⁵ but also served in various capacities for both the abbot and the king; they acted as the president of the portman-moot and as such were responsible for borough administration, hearing cases and organising land transfers; and they also held the office of coroner.¹⁶ The bailiffs were responsible for appointing juries, taking recognizances for debt, and distraining for rent arrears. Most significantly the bailiffs were responsible for the returning and execution of royal writs.¹⁷ As new administrative posts appeared (such as justice of the peace and constable) the new powers were added to those the bailiffs already possessed. They also had the responsibilities of the clerks of the market, and consequently had to enforce the assizes of bread, ale and weights.¹⁸ By the 14th century the system of two bailiffs and two sub-bailiffs had been replaced by one bailiff and a clerk of the toll-house, each of whom had a

¹² Lobel *The Borough* pp.26-7.

¹³ *Rep-selver* and *schar-peni* were respectively a payment made in exchange for reaping the cellarer's corn, and a payment for the free pasturing of cattle. These individual payments were replaced by abbot Samson in the 12th century by a single payment of 24s paid to the bailiff at the portman-moot, and payment of this continued into the 16th century; Lobel *The Borough* p.30. Before this, along with the payment demanded in commutation of the annual trip to Southrey pond near Lakenheath to fish for eels for the cellarer, they were among the services particularly resented by the Bury townsmen; Trenholme *EMB* p.6.

¹⁴ Lobel *The Borough* pp.61-72. The term of office for the bailiffs was unfixed and subject to the sacrist; by the 14th century it was usual for the position to be held for several successive years.

¹⁵ See Lobel *The Borough* p.65 for an example.

¹⁶ Lobel *The Borough* p.63.

¹⁷ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.167-8.

¹⁸ Lobel *The Borough* p.65.

subordinate officer to assist them, although the clerk was still often known as a bailiff.¹⁹

Most of the administration of justice was undertaken by the sacrist and the bailiffs, although the confusing state of affairs regarding the various courts and overlapping jurisdictions led to conflicts within the hierarchy of St. Edmund's.²⁰ By the 14th century the sacrist was often appointed justice in eyre by the abbot which enhanced his authority, so that instead of the two disputing the extent of their relative jurisdictions, effective legal power was concentrated in the office of the sacrist. The sacrist also had control over the market and fair courts, as well as over the Leet court and therefore over the view of frankpledge.²¹ He was responsible for enforcing the regulations associated with the assize of weights and measures, and had similar control over the gaol and its keeper and servants.²² The sacrist was in charge of determining and collecting rents throughout the town.²³ Adding further to the authority of the sacrist was his position as archdeacon of the exempt ecclesiastical jurisdiction of St. Edmund's which made him the spiritual authority within the banleuca, despite the repeated episcopal attempts to encroach upon the abbey's privileges. As archdeacon the sacrist could become involved in the townsmen's portman-moot whenever clergy were involved as defendants;²⁴ and he came into further contact with the secular community through his involvement in testamentary matters. All testamentary cases and grants of probate took place in the sacrist's court, which must have proved very expensive as the costs involved were targeted by the extorted charter of 1327:

At the same time we [the abbot] will and grant, that every one may have power to dispose entirely by will of tenements which he shall have by purchase in the said town, and that we, nor any of our servants, will take anything for probate of will, nor for proclamation of will, nor for quittance, nor for the grant of administration.²⁵

Even in the calmer times of the early 15th century the testamentary authority of the sacrist was

¹⁹ Lobel *The Borough* pp.71-2. The sacrist's account for 1419 (BSERO A 6/1/5) records that Ralph Chambyrleyn received £6 10s wages and 50s fee for the year as bailiff, as well as 20s for furred robes. Robert Somerton received 69s 3d (at 16d per week) wages, 6s 8d fee and 20s for furred robes for his role as clerk of the toll-house.

²⁰ Lobel *The Borough* p.34.

²¹ The requirement for all men of the town to be in tithing was a feature of abbey control over the government of Bury, and persisted throughout the period; Lobel *The Borough* p.35.

²² Lobel *The Borough* pp.37, 40. The gaol was that of the whole liberty of the eight and one half hundreds, and it was situated in the Corn Market adjacent to the toll-house; Lobel 'The gaol of Bury St Edmunds' pp.203-4.

²³ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.169.

²⁴ For the portman-moot see below pp.83-5.

²⁵ *Memorials* vol.3 p.309. The translation from the French is Arnold's. Where no will was made the sacrist had the authority to dispose of the deceased's property, Lobel *The Borough* p.44; but this too was something the rebels of 1327 objected to, *Memorials* vol.3 p.305. For the extorted charter of 1327 see pp.99-102.

resented.²⁶

The financial value of the sacrist's privileges in Bury was enormous.²⁷ He was entitled to all the profits ensuing from all courts held within the banleuca, including those of the townsmen held in the toll-house and those that Lobel calls "semi-royal".²⁸ He took all the profits from the administration of the markets and fairs, and the dues such as tronage, stallage and picage; and more significantly was the recipient of toll paid in Bury.²⁹ In the 14th century all townsmen except burgesses and those renting *hadgovel* tenements had to pay toll, although occasionally this was commuted to an annual sum instead.³⁰ This was another of the sacrist's privileges that the 1327 rebels tried to abrogate in their charter, forcing abbot Richard Draughton to agree that:

At the same time we will and grant that every one who is in the said town, being a denizen or native thereof, be quit of tax in the said town, to trade at his will.³¹

There are a number of examples of Bury townsmen attempting to evade the payment of toll and other commercial dues.³² Other privileges of St. Edmund's that were held by the sacrist included the right to maintain a mint in Bury St Edmunds, a right which had been granted to the abbot by Edward the Confessor in 1065.³³

Ultimately the wealth and authority of the sacrist was founded upon the property the office held within the town. The 1526 rental of sacrist Thomas Gnatsale, which probably includes all assize properties still held by the office, lists 232 properties with total income from rents of £28 7s 8½d;³⁴ but this indicates a decline in the income from property received by the sacrist, as the rents due according to a rental of 1386/7 amounted to £39 18s 2½d from 387 tenements

²⁶ Lobel *The Borough* p.43.

²⁷ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.77-81.

²⁸ Lobel *The Borough* p.47. By the early 16th century the income from the courts had dropped to a fraction of that received at the beginning of the 14th century.

²⁹ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.110, 116; Lobel *The Borough* pp.48-51.

³⁰ Lobel *The Borough* pp.48-51.

³¹ *Memorials* vol.3 p.307. There were also numerous instances of opposition to the sacrist's right to collect toll from traders from other towns who held charters of exemption, and particularly from London merchants, but also from local tenants of powerful lords (such as those of the earl of Oxford's manor of Lavenham).

³² In 1380, for instance, Alice Hylberworth was sued for selling from stalls inside her house, thus preventing the sacrist not only from assessing and collecting toll but also from supervising the quality of the merchandise; Lobel *The Borough* p.51, taken from the 14th century sacrist's register Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.33 f.24v.

³³ Lobel *The Borough* p.53; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.82-3; VCH vol.2 p.58; Trenholme *EMB* p.3. Phythian-Adams does not include Bury in his list of mint towns; Phythian-Adams, C. *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1978) p.20.

³⁴ BSERO A6/2/1. The rents owed for two of the 232 entries are illegible.

and six shops.³⁵ The sacrist also received the *hadgovel* payments of two halfpenny instalments per year payable on original burgage tenements in addition to the property rent. A 14th century *hadgovel* rental indicates that it was worth 17s 10½d.³⁶ Relief payable on inheritance or pre-mortem transfer was also received by the sacrist: it was unpopular with the secular community even though the abbey persisted in levying it right up until it was dissolved.³⁷ A similarly long established due received by the sacrist was *landmol*: for every acre of the 900 that had once belonged to Bederic (the original lord of the vill) in the town fields a tax of 2d was owed to the sacrist. In the 12th century this tax was worth 51s 5¾d to the sacrist, while in 1531/2 it was worth 53s 4d.³⁸

In 1281 the sacrist was granted the manor of Haberdon which brought with it considerable demesne. The sacrist's rental of 1295 shows that he held the East and South Lees in Bury, six granges, 51½ acres of land and a mill belonging to the manor of Haberdon, as well as 67½ acres of meadow known as 'Sexten's Meadow'.³⁹ The sacrist and the cellarer between them effectively monopolised much of the meadow and pasture in and around Bury, a fact that was greatly resented by the townsmen, even as late as the 1470s, as the answer put in the Star Chamber by the abbot to a bill of complaints by the townsmen reveals:

Item as to the XXth article of the denyeng of comons upon the grenes at the southgate and northgate and the reud from the southgate to Sidolvesmere and all other high weyes aboute the same town diches, arable landes and sexstens medewes and nomannes medew in strey tyme the seid abbot seith that these grenes reuds, dyches, arables landes and medewes in ther severall ground of the seid monastery without that that the men of the town have any comon ther.⁴⁰

The incomes generated from these sources were essential to the maintenance of his office and the activities he was expected to be involved in.⁴¹ This meant that the holder of the office was likely to exercise his privileges strenuously wherever possible, and financially this would have proved a significant burden upon the townsmen, especially as they were also liable to dues levied by the other obedientiaries. While the authority held by the sacrist through his control of justice, commerce and industry was considerable, his income was his principle

³⁵ Lobel *The Borough* p.53 n.8.

³⁶ Lobel *The Borough* p.54 n.4; the rental is one of a number copied in the sacrist's register BL. Harley 58 ff.22-43b. Lobel estimates from this that there were approximately 425 *hadgovel* tenements in Bury at the time of the rental.

³⁷ As indicated by the 1327 charter, *Memorials* vol.3 p.307.

³⁸ Lobel *The Borough* p.56.

³⁹ Lobel *The Borough* p.57.

⁴⁰ PRO Star Chamber Proceedings, Henry VIII Bundle xxii no.6; The abbot's rebuttal in 1478/9 of all twenty-one complaints made by the townsmen is quoted in Lobel *The Borough* pp.182-5. See pp.114-17.

⁴¹ The *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* of 1291 assessed the total income of the sacrist at £134 3s 11¾d; VCH vol.2 p.68.

source of power, and this was essentially derived from rents.⁴²

Thus the customary relationship between the town and the abbey to all intents and purposes complied with the official, designated hierarchy: it was essentially one of lord and tenant, with the former's legal authority exercised through the sacrist's department. The individual holding the office of sacrist could exert enormous influence over the lives of the townsmen, and an element of this included deriving some profit from virtually every activity of the public life of the secular community. Any privileges the townsmen may have had (particularly outside Bury) were not held by right but by the pleasure of the abbey and so could be revoked at any time, a threat which was always present in the relations of the two communities.

3.ii.b. The secular community's representation.

This section details the customs and structures available to the townsmen of Bury to further their burghal and civic ambitions, and to interact with St. Edmund's as a body. The enactment of these ambitions forms the most crucial component of the secular community's identity in the period. The elite of Bury St Edmunds consisted of the town's burgesses, although exactly what defined this status is unclear. Nothing has survived which gives an indication of what being a burgess was intended to mean, or about how one attained the position.⁴³ When the term is used in the Bury material it seems to have been regarded as a vague reference to the wealthiest and most prestigious of the town, rather than as a technical term. Burghal status seems to have implied no specific function (certainly in a civic governmental sense), and the term 'burgess' seems to have been a social designation.⁴⁴ The rank of burgess also seems to have brought no privileges, at least officially. It may have been that recognition of burghal status was dependent upon possession of a burgage tenement,⁴⁵ or membership of the town's elite gilds (the Gild Merchant and later the Candlemas gild);⁴⁶ alternatively, given the significance attached to the payment of *hansing silver* in order to be allowed to trade in the town, in the various disputes of the 14th century,⁴⁷ the status of burgess may have been connected with the possession of mercantile interests and privileges. At various stages of the

⁴² Dinn *Popular Religion* p.117.

⁴³ For example there are nothing resembling freemen's rolls for Bury, nor indeed is the concept of 'freedom' easy to explicate.

⁴⁴ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.134.

⁴⁵ Lobel *The Borough* p.81. This may have been the case at least in the 12th century.

⁴⁶ Gottfried's claim (*Bury St Edmunds* p.134) that burgesses in Bury were all brethren of the St. Nicholas (or Dusse) gild is wrong: the gild's membership was restricted to clergy, and then only to a warden and twelve clerks. The gild may have had a confraternity of laity, however, to which townsmen could have belonged.

⁴⁷ See pp.92-117 for a chronological account of the disputes.

ongoing dispute between town and abbey both the abbot and the alderman (and the burgesses themselves) claimed authority to create new burgesses.⁴⁸

The secular community thus existed within a framework of judicial, commercial and industrial privileges that effectively restricted it in terms of its economic and social development. The town had originally grown up around St. Edmund's as a consequence of the abbey's prestige, and had been encouraged by the abbot and convent as part of their view that the town and its population existed to benefit the monastery. The level of involvement in the government of the town enjoyed by the secular population was minimal, at least initially, and the representation that they had recourse to was deliberately and carefully restricted by the officers of St. Edmund's. There was no civic governmental structure such as would have been found in other towns of comparable size and complexity: elements of policy and day to day administration were handled by the sacrist or his representatives, while larger issues of policy and the abbey's liberties were directed by the abbot.⁴⁹

The regulation of the townsmen's affairs took place in Bury's courts. These courts were the places where the administrative business of the secular community was conducted, but the form that the administration took was always under the close control of the sacrist and convent of St. Edmund's. There was no illusion of independence allowed to the townsmen: every right and detail of justice in these courts was rigorously and constantly defended by the monastic authorities.⁵⁰

The portman-moot had been the main borough court for the secular community, but from the 13th century it was being superseded by the court of the market⁵¹ and the *curia nundinarum* (the court of the fair or the Piepowder court). The wider liberty of St. Edmund's was subject to the abbot's court, or the Great Court, which met every three weeks and normally did not deal with cases from the town.⁵² The sacrist also had his own peculiar court for registering wills and trying testamentary cases, as well as cases of 'moral transgression' such as adultery and negligent church attendance.⁵³

⁴⁸ Lobel *The Borough* p.81.

⁴⁹ Indeed the control over the daily lives of townsmen by various institutions was probably a fact of urban life in many towns in the period, Phythian-Adams *Desolation of a City* p.79.

⁵⁰ In 1327, for example, the activities and jurisdictions of the various courts were disputed by the rebels, but the rights of the abbey and convent were vindicated in the subsequent trial and settlement of 1331. See pp.99-107.

⁵¹ The court of the market was also known as the Merchants' Court (the *curia mercatoria*), or the Little Court, to differentiate it from the abbot's Great Court.

⁵² Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.170-1.

⁵³ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.123.

The portman-moot and was concerned with cases involving property and debt, and *occasionally felonies*. Although it was the most popular with the townsmen the court was always under the sacrist's control. It was the court that administered the customs of the town, and by the 11th century one of the privileges enjoyed by the secular community that derived from the authority of its lord was that the townsmen were exempt from attending any shire or hundred court except the portman-moot.⁵⁴ It was held fortnightly on a Tuesday except between Ash Wednesday and the second week of Easter, and between the feasts of St. Peter *ad vincula* and St. Matthew.⁵⁵ The portman-moot was traditionally opened by the blowing of the *mothorn*, which was in the keeping of the bailiff.⁵⁶ The town's alderman and his predecessors sat in the court with the bailiffs and the five gate keepers, and two juries would be appointed, the first comprising people from the south and west wards, the other from the north, east and Risby wards, who would deliver verdicts openly except in felonies or cases of treason. The sub-bailiffs presided, and the clerk of the toll-house recorded the proceedings.⁵⁷

By the 15th century the Leet court met during Lent when the portman-moot was not in session,⁵⁸ and was the court of frankpledge. It dealt with commercial cases including matters connected with assizes. In the 15th century the abbot claimed that not only had the Leet court existed for 'time out of mind', but that he and his predecessors had held the Leet as the lords of the town.⁵⁹

The *curia mercatoria* met in the toll-house on market days (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) and was concerned with market business,⁶⁰ and like the *curia nundinarum* had probably only dealt with cases involving foreign litigants at first. With the development of Bury as a market centre and the consequent rise in commercial cases for the court, the market and fair courts increased their business and began to replace the portman-moot as the foremost court for the townsmen,⁶¹ although the rebels of 1327 attempted to hinder this development:

⁵⁴ It had met in a hall on Le Mustowe but had moved to the toll-house by the 13th century, Lobel *The Borough* p.95.

⁵⁵ That is between August 1st and September 21st; Lobel *The Borough* p.97.

⁵⁶ Lobel *The Borough* p.99.

⁵⁷ Lobel *The Borough* p.99.

⁵⁸ Gottfried suggests that it met twice a year, *Bury St Edmunds* p.170, and this would certainly have been more typical of such a court. Lobel remarks: "The divergence from the normal custom for leet courts to hold two sessions a year is interesting". However the Leet court of Norwich only sat once every year, also at Lent; Cottingham Tingey, J and Hudson, W. eds. *The Records of the City of Norwich* (Norwich, 1910) vol.1 pp.cviii-cxxxiv.

⁵⁹ Lobel *The Borough* p.97.

⁶⁰ It sat all year except between Christmas Eve and January 6th, between Maunday Thursday and fifteen days after Easter, and Whitsun week; from the beginning of the harvest to September 14th it was held only on Mondays; Lobel *The Borough* p.98.

⁶¹ Lobel *The Borough* p.98.

At the same time we will and grant, that no burgess be impleaded by plaint in the little court, but in the Portmannemot,⁶²

The Piepowder court was in session during the St. Matthew fair which took place for five days around September 21st, and from St. Edmund's eve (November 19th) to Christmas eve. It was held in the toll-house, and dealt with business arising from the increased commerce that occurred at that time of year.⁶³

What communal identity did surface among the town's population was initially created through the organisation of the gild merchant, a vehicle through which a limited (and deliberately tolerated) amount of self representation could be achieved. The Gild Merchant (or Alderman's Gild) seems to have been the earliest body within the secular community with any interest in public expression, or structure with which to display it; and it may have been that the actions of individuals within the gild organisation, particularly the alderman, were informed by the interests of both the gild and the town generally. As with other urban centres, it is possible that it may have developed into something more akin to a constitutional civic government had it not been for the dogged and prolonged opposition of St. Edmund's.⁶⁴ The Gild Merchant is first mentioned in the 12th century chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond, but it had probably been founded during the abbacy of Anselm (1121-48).⁶⁵ The gild was probably supported to some extent by the abbot and officers of the abbey as their financial interests were promoted by the better organisation of Bury merchants who by the end of the 12th century were operating in the kingdom with royally confirmed privileges.⁶⁶ Part of the initial role of the Gild Merchant may have been the supervision of the various craft guilds in Bury; and by the early 13th century the Gild Merchant was leasing a number of properties in the Great Market, and had been responsible for the building of the Tollhouse.⁶⁷ However even in the early stages of the Gild Merchant's development it did not comprise quite the vehicle that the abbey would have intended;⁶⁸ and Lobel detects the townsmen's claims for

⁶² *Memorials* vol.3 p.309.

⁶³ For a description of the Bury markets and the St. Matthew and other Bury fairs see Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.84-94.

⁶⁴ Lobel *The Borough* pp.59-60, 79. In many towns Gild Merchants emerged from groups of merchants who held town lands, and then developed into civic governments so that gild ordinances became town customs; Toulmin-Smith, L. and Brentano, L. eds. *English Guilds* (EETS old series no.40, 1870) pp.93-114.

⁶⁵ Lobel *The Borough* pp.72-3.

⁶⁶ These privileges were constantly being confirmed by successive kings at the petition of the burgesses: in 1364 the burgesses petitioned for and received confirmation by the king that one of the liberties of the abbot and convent was that the burgesses were quit of all tolls and customs in all markets and fairs anywhere in England forever; CPR 1364-7 p.22.

⁶⁷ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.87.

⁶⁸ Lobel (*The Borough* pp.73-4) refers to Jocelin of Brakelond's account of a dispute between the Gild Merchant and the sacrist over the commercial rights of people living in Bury's suburbs and abbey servants, who were effectively receiving the benefits of membership of the gild without suffering the burdens of membership.

certain burghal rights originating at the end of the 12th century within the Gild Merchant.⁶⁹ The development of the gild as an organ through which communal interests could be voiced may have contributed to the decline of the business and therefore importance of the portman-moot in the public life of the secular community by the 13th century.

By the 14th century the Gild Merchant was held by four officers elected by twelve burgesses, and who were informed when to hold it by two 'dyes'.⁷⁰ The four elected were then obliged to find surety for holding the gild, and were punished with a fine of 46s 8d if they refused to take the office.⁷¹ Membership of the gild was compulsory for townsmen of a certain level of wealth living in Bury (and in the tithing of the abbot) who wished to conduct trade, and admission was expensive.⁷² The gild was led by the alderman of the town, although this office may well have developed in Bury later than the Gild Merchant, with the first known alderman appearing in the material at the start of the 13th century.⁷³ It is possible that the position of alderman of the town arose from the office of alderman of the Gild Merchant, so that by the mid-13th century the two positions were either seen as synonymous, or were traditionally held by the same individual.⁷⁴ Lobel sees the office of alderman of the town as a separate position developing from the office of alderman of the Gild Merchant, while Gottfried considers them to have been the same all along.⁷⁵ The role of the gildhall here was significant, as by the end of the 13th century gild members required townsmen to take oaths regarding the customs of the town in the gildhall,⁷⁶ and the building itself was claimed to be the property of the alderman, although this was strictly denied by the obedientiaries of St. Edmund's.⁷⁷ The development of the alderman's role has been seen as an element in "a case

⁶⁹ At the end of the 12th century the burgesses tried to arrange the removal or substitution of the customary dues of *rep selver* and *schar-peni*; and also tried to obtain permission to build permanent properties in the market in order to raise 24s to pay certain burdens on behalf of the whole town; Lobel *The Borough* pp.74, 121-2, 172.

⁷⁰ See Appendix II for this title remaining in use in the Candlemas gild, the 14th century successor to the Gild Merchant.

⁷¹ Lobel *The Borough* p.75.

⁷² The first clause of the extorted charter of 1327 granted a Gild Merchant (along with an alderman, commune and common seal), and it established the entrance fines: townsmen had to pay 2s 1d *hansing* silver if they owned goods worth 10s, or 48s 6d if they owned 10 marks worth; *Memorials* vol.3 p.305. It is very possible that women were admitted to the gild; Lobel *The Borough* p.76.

⁷³ This alderman was Wodard son of Ely, and he appears with the title 'alderman' as witness in a number of deeds; Lobel *The Borough* p.76 n.6.

⁷⁴ Lobel cites three charters from the early 13th century from Cambridge University Library Ms. Gg.4.4 ff.250v, 263-5, where quitclaims are made to the alderman and burgesses of the 'ville de Sancti Edmundi'. The third charter makes its grant to "Iohanni filio Luce aldermanno sancti Edmundi et gilde mercatorum"; *The Borough* pp.77-8.

⁷⁵ *The Borough* pp.77-81; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.132. Dinn *Popular Religion* p.118 agrees with Lobel.

⁷⁶ In other words the members of the *gild* conducted business connected with the government of the town in their gildhall.

⁷⁷ Lobel *The Borough* p.78. The alderman was elected in the gildhall, rather than in the portman-moot, the erstwhile centre for town affairs.

of an elaborate fusion of the functions of merchant gild and borough community",⁷⁸ although to some extent at least the 'fusion' may have been less effectual than symbolic. This was largely due to the role played by the bailiffs (and their equivalents) in the administration of civic affairs: they enacted the government of the community in the same way as borough officials in a constitutionally independent urban community;⁷⁹ and their authority was carefully divorced from the townsmen. Any authority held by the alderman in town affairs was limited to areas not encompassed by the jurisdiction of the bailiffs as servants of the sacrist.⁸⁰ Working on behalf of the alderman in the town's affairs may have been the dyes of the Gild Merchant, who are seen as 'ministers' of the alderman and 'commune' in the 1327 charter.⁸¹ The senior personnel of the Gild Merchant would have been indistinguishable from the most substantial burgesses: the distinction was probably not made either by the authorities or by the burgesses themselves. As the Gild Merchant was inaugurated to advance the commercial concerns of the townsmen, action taken to further this would have benefited the town's leading figures whether it was conducted by them as gild officials or as interested townsmen.⁸²

The election of the alderman was undertaken by the whole of the town,⁸³ who would present their nominee to the abbot to appoint unless there was good cause not to. Before the election took place the townsmen had to go to the church of St. Edmund's on the feast of St. Michael and ask permission to hold the election. By 1351 the townsmen were presenting three nominees for the abbot to choose from, and this was the procedure still in use throughout the 15th century.⁸⁴ The elected alderman then took an oath administered by the sacrist or the bailiff, swearing among other things that he:

⁷⁸ Lobel *The Borough* p.79. In the monastic borough of Reading a similar development seems to have taken place. In 1253 the Gild Merchant there received a royal charter granting members of the gild many important privileges, including exemption from the abbot's hundred court and freedom from tolls and customs throughout the country; Trenholme *EMB* pp.21, 71, 92.

⁷⁹ For a detailed account of the activities of the bailiffs see Lobel *The Borough* pp.59-72.

⁸⁰ This may have left the alderman with powers to levy and assess taxes in the town, Lobel *The Borough* p.79.

⁸¹ For example, the alderman and commune were to have custody of wards and orphans and their property, "And that the Alderman and the commune may, by their dyes [Arnold incorrectly translates *dyes* as *orders*, when in fact they were officers] and ministers, distrain the security to render an account of the said things, and make execution upon them, until they have made enough of the said chattels and goods received, with the other profits appertaining to this kind of wardship." *Memorials* vol.3 p.305.

⁸² Although the senior individuals in the Gild Merchant were also the most substantial burgesses, individuals who were not burgesses could also be admitted; Lobel *The Borough* pp.80-1. The 1327 charter demanded that all who wanted to trade in the town had to belong to the Gild Merchant; *Memorials* vol.3 pp.305, 315.

⁸³ Lobel *The Borough* p.81. The agreement reached after the rioting in 1292 granted that the "homines ville" were given the right to elect the alderman.

⁸⁴ Lobel *The Borough* pp.83-4. Lobel suggests that the presentation of three burgesses was contrary to custom in 1351, but that it became standard procedure after this point. The account in Cambridge University Library Ms. Gg.4.4 f.342 states that one of the three burgesses presented was chosen by the abbot William Bernham as a 'favour' to the townsmen; quoted in *Memorials* vol.3 pp.177-8.

truly schal bere me in þe office þat ys takyn me ageyn my lord þe abbot of Sent Edmond and hys covent & hys cherche & alle hys mynystres & þet y nothyng schal takyn therof neu nothyng of þe thyngs appropriysthen þat longen to þe cherche, ne of no thyng y schal entremety n me of þe offyce þat longyth to þe bayllyf ... & þat nothyng y schal doon ne procuren be mee ne be non other privilyche ne apertlyche ne soffren to be doon þat may be damage to þe abbot or to þe cherche to my power, soo god me help & alle hys seyntes.⁸⁵

The office came with a number of properties to offset the presumably high expenses involved.⁸⁶ Once in office the alderman's main function was maintaining the peace among the townsmen, a primarily administrative role in contrast to the judicial activities of the bailiffs. The alderman was required to sit in sessions of the portman-moot, the market and fair courts, and more importantly he was the mouth piece for the burgesses of Bury in their pleas made in cases held in the abbot's Great Court.⁸⁷ He also had to co-operate with the servants of the abbot and bailiffs in the administering of judgements on those held in Bury gaol; and could make distraints and arrests with the authority of a court judgement, as well as arranging for the collection of fines and tallages.⁸⁸ By the 14th century the alderman was involved in commissions of array, and was responsible for paying the soldiers raised at Bury and possibly for provisioning them as well.⁸⁹ It was also the responsibility of the alderman to appoint the watchmen, although this privilege was removed by the abbot after the 1327 rising.⁹⁰

The Gild Merchant ceased to serve its communal function at the beginning of the 14th century when the right to keep such an organisation was withdrawn from the townsmen in retaliation for the rioting against St. Edmund's between 1304 and 1327.⁹¹ Very shortly after, however, it was replaced as the vehicle of communal expression by a society which was less directly commercially orientated than the Gild Merchant, known as the Purification of the Blessed Virgin (or Candlemas) gild.⁹² The Candlemas gild was founded at the end of the 1320s, and its activities included an annual mass (with an offering) and a colloquium called a

⁸⁵ BL. Harley 645 f.88v, quoted in Lobel *The Borough* pp.194-5. This oath, which was probably that used throughout the 14th century, acknowledges the judgement of the royal justices after the riots of 1304 regarding the privileges and duties of the alderman. A slightly different version of this oath appears in Trenholme *EMB* Appendix II p.98.

⁸⁶ Such as certain forfeits, the privilege of collating the St. Mary priest of St. James' church and the priest for Robert Eriswell's chantry; Lobel *The Borough* pp.86-87.

⁸⁷ Lobel *The Borough* p.87.

⁸⁸ Lobel *The Borough* p.88. One of the claims constantly made by the townsmen during the 14th and 15th centuries was that the alderman should also be responsible for assessing taxes and fines, but this was never allowed by the abbot. The principle was stated both in the extorted charter of 1327 and the customs of 1470; *Memorials* vol.3 p.315, Trenholme *EMB* p.103.

⁸⁹ Lobel *The Borough* p.89; CPR 1364-7 p.432.

⁹⁰ By the 12th century the burgesses had to appoint eight men to serve for the year in the four man watches at night, as well as eight gate keepers; this service may well have been attached to the holding of tenements within the town; Lobel *The Borough* p.89.

⁹¹ Lobel *The Borough* pp.137-41.

⁹² Lobel *The Borough* p.72; Dinn *Popular Religion* p.120.

“morwespeche” in St. James', with the burning of wax before an image of the Virgin.⁹³ There were also to be prayers for the fraternity and a dole to the poor.

The Candlemas gild, like the Gild Merchant before it, was headed by an alderman who, like his predecessor, remained at least nominally distinct from the alderman of the town. Dinn suggests that a coalescence of the two aldermen (that of the town and that of the Candlemas gild) took place sometime between 1463 and 1473, based on John Baret's references to two distinct officials,⁹⁴ and John Smyth's reference to the alderman of the Candlemas gild acting on behalf of the whole community.⁹⁵ I think it is more likely that the two officials had long been considered the same by the second half of the 15th century, and that the distinction made by Baret is not only indicative of the mutability of the titles as far as the community was concerned, but also of the precision and 'correctness' of John Baret's descriptive mode. The gild also had officials known as 'dyes' by the 15th century just as the town alderman was assisted by dyes,⁹⁶ although the 1389 gild certificate refers to the election of a *decanu~* rather than a dye.⁹⁷ The gild also had four 'holders' who were responsible for arranging gild meetings.⁹⁸

By the 15th century the Candlemas gild had developed into something approaching an unofficial civic government, representing the interests of the secular community of Bury, and administering property on behalf of and for the benefit of the town as a whole.⁹⁹ It is possible that the governmental aspects of this gild were consciously organised, as apart from the titles of the officers the gild ordinances specify that:

no brother shall procure no man to be a brother in the foresayde guyld but he be of goode name and fame and of goode conversacion and by thassent of the bretherne and that they excede not the number of xxxij¹⁰⁰

⁹³ The 1389 gild certificate for the “Gilde sancte marie virginis de feste Purificatio eiusdem” states that the gild was founded sixty years before by diverse men of the town for the honour of the Blessed Virgin, and was held in the church of St. James; PRO C 47/46/406. By the time the 1471 gild statutes were drawn up the Candlemas gild met in both parish churches; BL. Harley 4626 f.22v.

⁹⁴ In his will of 1463, BSERO Hawlee f.95. See section 5.iv for a detailed discussion of this extraordinary individual.

⁹⁵ In his indenture of 1473, BL. Harley 4626 f.24. See below pp.229-30. Dinn *Popular Religion* p.122.

⁹⁶ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.120; Lobel *The Borough* p.148. The distinction may well have been technical rather than actual, as the personnel involved in the holding of the two offices may have been the same at any given time. For the reference to 'dyes' in the Candlemas gild see BL. Harley 4626 ff.21-3 (Appendix II), and also the wills of Margaret Odeham, BSERO Pye f.8, and John Baret BSERO Hawlee f.95 (see below section 5.iv); for 'dyes' connected with the alderman of the town see *Memorials* vol.3 p.305.

⁹⁷ PRO C 47/46/406.

⁹⁸ BL. Harley 4626 f.21.

⁹⁹ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.120-1, 435, 452-6.

¹⁰⁰ BL. Harley 4626 f.22 (see Appendix II).

constructing, in effect, a council comparable with those operating 'officially' in other towns in the period. Membership of the Candlemas gild was exclusive to the wealthiest of the townsmen,¹⁰¹ and this may have added to the perception of the gild as an oligarchic entity with a distinct identity fashioned around a political form. The gild's organisational structure was based around its payment of communal financial burdens and a number of taxes in particular which fell upon the townsmen of Bury, such as the hundred mark fine (the 'Abbot's Cope') payable on the installation of a new abbot.¹⁰² The gild acted as trustee of lands and properties, and much of the landed wealth of the gild was donated by individuals like John Smyth and Margaret Odeham with the express purpose of diminishing the burden of taxes on the secular community.¹⁰³ The endowing of the Candlemas gild continued throughout the 15th century, so that by the 1520s it held land in over 200 parishes in East and West Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex.¹⁰⁴

In 1471, as part of a general renewal and re-design of political consciousness among the secular elite of Bury, the Candlemas gild drew up a new set of ordinances.¹⁰⁵ The first statute suggests that membership of the gild also entailed enfeoffment in the goods, properties and lands held by the gild, which in 1471 were to be imminently increased by the grants of John Smyth, whose will (along with that of Margaret Odeham) the new member had to swear to fulfil.¹⁰⁶ The two wills were to be read out to the gathered gild members at their principal feast at Candlemas, and prayers and psalms were to be sung for their souls. The statutes restricted membership (as mentioned above), and also dealt with the administrative elements of the gild's structure, such as elections of the officials and arrangements for ceremonies, masses and meetings (including the 'Speche daye' on the feast of the Epiphany).¹⁰⁷

The gild also had a number of social functions, for example that prayers are to be said for dead brothers and sisters as part of the annual Candlemas ceremonies, and attendance at

¹⁰¹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.181; Dinn *Popular Religion* p.330. See also his table of the wealth of testators remembering socio-religious gilds in their wills, pp.331-2. Indeed the wills in which the Candlemas gild are mentioned are those of very wealthy individuals: for example, BSERO Osbern ff.94v, 104, 141v; Hawlee ff.95; Pye ff.8, 85, 141, 146v; BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* pp.57-8; PRO PCC prob 11/17/256.

¹⁰² Lobel *The Borough* pp.148-9.

¹⁰³ See below section 5.iii.b (esp. pp.209-18) and Appendix I for a more detailed account of the enfeoffments made to the Candlemas gild. The donation of lands and properties to the Candlemas gild would also have circumvented the need for expensive mortmain licences.

¹⁰⁴ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.187; MacCulloch *Suffolk and the Tudors* p.141. In the lay subsidy of 1524 the Candlemas gild had goods worth £5 6s 8d (see table 3.5).

¹⁰⁵ BL. Harley 4626 ff.21-23v; see Appendix II.

¹⁰⁶ BL. Harley 4626 f.21. The subsequent grants of both John Smyth and Margaret Odeham were anticipated in the statutes. The re-enfeoffment and administration of the grants of these two benefactors was also legislated for in the statutes; f.23.

¹⁰⁷ BL. Harley 4626 f.21v. The 'Speche daye' might correspond with the 'morwespeche' of the 1389 gild

funerals of gild members was compulsory.¹⁰⁸ Conflicts between members were to be mediated by the alderman and dye before recourse was made to the courts. Property and goods (including the gild hearse and lights) seem to have been available for the use of members.¹⁰⁹ The statutes also indicate a charitable function to the gild, with cash doles being made to the poor of Bury from the doors of dead brethren, and the colleagues of a dead member paying the alderman a half-penny which would be distributed to the poor.¹¹⁰

The Candlemas gild (and the Gild Merchant before it) thus acted as a 'buffer' in the relationship between the secular community of Bury and the officers of the abbey. While the gild represented the interests of the townsmen and did so actively, its authority was not strictly political in a legal sense as it would have been had it been a constitutional civic government. Equally the office of alderman, as spokesman for the gild, was restricted to administrative duties; and the authority the post claimed was more the result of his symbolic identity as intermediary or champion of the townsmen.¹¹¹ The social status and wealth necessary for the holding of the office also contributed to the individual's authority. The Candlemas gild and its officers were largely tolerated by the abbot and sacrist as convenient tools for governing the secular community peacefully, possibly by perpetuating the delusion of independence and self-government.

3.ii.c. Political relations between St. Edmund's and the secular community.

The reality of the relationship between the townsmen of Bury and the obedientiaries of St. Edmund's was driven by the fundamental struggle for control of economic elements of urban life: the abbot and sacrist tried to maintain the strictest control over all aspects of the public life of their tenants to safeguard the maximum income for their house; while the townsmen strove to attain their independence from this control as their relative wealth was increasing. The relationship was characterised by constant resistance and sporadic violence against the personnel and property of St. Edmund's, with the most dramatic conflicts coinciding with periods of national political crisis. This conflict was essentially the principle and most immediate context for life in Bury, underpinning many aspects of social interaction and certainly informing most modes of regulated public activity (such as commerce, legal procedures, property management and so on).

return, although the latter was to happen on the day after Candlemas, PRO C 47/46/406.

¹⁰⁸ BL. Harley 4626 f.21v.

¹⁰⁹ BL. Harley 4626 ff.22, 23.

¹¹⁰ BL. Harley 4626 ff.21-21v.

¹¹¹ For the symbolic aspects of the office of alderman see below pp.113-14.

The dynamic of conflict between town and abbey was a malleable commodity in the 14th and 15th centuries. That is to say that it was clearly not the only structure of interaction between the two communities, as relationships based upon commerce, services, administration, and familial personal connections took place for the majority of the time as a function of day to day community living. But resistance on the part of the townsmen to the authority of St. Edmund's was a fundamental part of what it meant to be a Bury townsman, and the significance that this had for the construction of identity should not be underestimated. That this underlying dynamic of dispute was a self-consciously and explicitly acknowledged mode of behaviour in the town is made evident in this section's discussion of how the dispute could be 'whipped up' in times of crisis. At these times the heritage of dispute could be actively employed to rally support against the abbey, and the support from the townsmen would be immediate, as if identification with the dynamic was a natural condition of life in Bury. The tension usually took on a political aspect with certain rights, offices and institutions forming the main battlegrounds,¹¹² but in essence the motivation on both sides was economic.

Conflict was apparent in the relations between town and abbey as early as the late 12th century. In 1191 abbot Samson summoned the townsmen to answer as to why it was they were setting up so many stalls without the permission of the officers of St. Edmund's. The townsmen replied that they were not subject to the jurisdiction of the convent, but to that of the king, a claim that was clearly bound to offend the former.¹¹³ In 1257, the year abbot Simon of Luton was installed, the townsmen supported the Franciscan friars who were attempting to settle in Bury with the approval of the king, but in direct opposition to the sacrist and convent of St. Edmund's.¹¹⁴ The exploitation of the other struggles of St. Edmund's, and of more general national crises was a characteristic of the secular community's strategy. The earliest outbreak of violence in Bury took place in 1264, and took advantage of the instability of the national political context.¹¹⁵ During this year the younger burgesses rioted against abbot Simon of Luton's right of veto over the election of the town alderman and gatekeepers.¹¹⁶ In an attempt to claim the right to free election of the town officials they elected their nominee for alderman without the approval or ratification of the abbot, and then granted him the authority and powers of the bailiffs. The attempt was founded on the

¹¹² See pp.118-37.

¹¹³ In order to avoid serious opposition Samson took recourse to law rather than arbitrarily dispossessing his tenants, and the debate dragged on for three years until the rights of the abbot and convent were finally vindicated; Trenholme *EMB* pp.9-10.

¹¹⁴ In July 1259 a writ was sent to the alderman by Henry III requiring him to allow the friars to build a chapel in the town. Lobel *The Borough* pp.125-6; *Memorials* vol.2 pp.xxxiii-xxxv.

¹¹⁵ *Memorials* vol.2 pp.xxxv-xli.

¹¹⁶ In 1194 abbot Samson granted a charter to the townsmen which gave them the right to choose keepers for four of the town's five gates, but at the same time making the appointments subject to the abbot's approval; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.218.

organisation of a 'sworn confederacy' calling itself the *gilda iuvenum*, and the members of this gild took the title *bachilarii*.¹¹⁷ The imposition of their own alderman was followed in Easter 1264 by an attack on the abbey and cemetery gates, and several monks were assaulted. The sacrist, cellarer and abbot were all barred from entering the town.¹¹⁸ The *bachilarii* also demanded the right to a 'corporate secular gild' which would then form a civic government.¹¹⁹ The rising thus took on an explicitly political nature, a factor common to much of the conflict between town and abbey.¹²⁰

Discussions took place following the violence, with the mediation of William le Blund who was already in Bury attempting to secure a settlement between the townsmen and St. Edmund's. At the end of October royal justices were commissioned to hear the complaints of the convent and officers against the town, and at this stage the rising collapsed. The more senior burgesses, being those with most to lose through a royal investigation into the affair, asked the abbot not to involve royal justices but to appoint his own to deal with the rioters; they also guaranteed to enforce the attendance of the guilty and to suppress the *gilda iuvenum*.¹²¹ An agreement was reached forbidding the renewal of the *gilda iuvenum*, and the burgesses were bound to pay £40 damages for the attacks on abbey property. Twenty-four of the most prominent townsmen swore an oath that the agreement would be honoured, although whether they did so on behalf of the town is unclear. Here were two significant aspects of this early rising in Bury: the first was the fact that the Bury rioters modelled themselves on their social counterparts in London;¹²² and the second was the evident social differentiation of the burgesses, with the elder and more senior among the elite divorcing themselves from the younger rebellious element as soon as royal involvement became a realistic prospect (if not before). As will be seen, this latter aspect was quite a common occurrence throughout the periods of unrest, but the 1264 instance of burghal division is unusual because of the conscious attempts by the *bachilarii* to identify themselves as the junior elements of the elite.¹²³

¹¹⁷ Trenholme *EMB* pp.22-3. During the 1260s, national political instability led to disputes in many towns across the country. In St. Albans, for example, the townsmen attempted to wrest local control from the abbot by setting up a commune and a common fund which the inhabitants of the town were obliged to contribute to; Trenholme *EMB* p.29.

¹¹⁸ Lobel *The Borough* p.127.

¹¹⁹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.219.

¹²⁰ In the monastic borough of Dunstable a number of 13th century disputes between the townsmen and the priory of Augustinian canons which held the town took on a similarly explicitly political aspect; Trenholme *EMB* pp.12-6.

¹²¹ Lobel *The Borough* p.128. The agreement is reproduced in the *Album Registrum Vestiarii* of Walter Pinchbeck, monk of St. Edmund's; Hervey, F. ed. *Pinchbeck Register* (Brighton, 1925) vol.1 pp.56-8.

¹²² Lobel *The Borough* pp.126, 131.

¹²³ In 14th century Norwich the term 'bachelery' was used in connection with unlawful assemblies in the city; Cottingham Tingey and Hudson *The Records of the City of Norwich* vol.1 pp.xxix-xli, 67-88.

The tension persisted after the 1266 agreement. In 1268 instability was still prevalent to the extent that in April the king appointed two keepers of the town; and in September the alderman and twenty-four burgesses were charged with not aiding the keepers in maintaining the peace so that the king's interests had been affected.¹²⁴ In 1287 the *communitas* complained to Edward I that the abbot and his servants were abusing their judicial privileges in various ways;¹²⁵ and in October 1290 the king was again forced to make inquiries into trespasses of the townsmen after they had objected to the cellarer building dams in the Teyfen.¹²⁶

The enmity between town and abbey escalated into open conflict in 1292,¹²⁷ over what would become the two traditional areas of struggle: the alderman and the town gates.¹²⁸ The townsmen appointed their own alderman, John Goldsmith, without the consent of the abbot John of Northwold, and although the abbot claimed that he had also been made bailiff, the burgesses were acquitted of this charge.¹²⁹ The townsmen replaced the keeper of the Southgate (who had been appointed by the abbot) with their own choice.¹³⁰ The alderman and thirty-seven burgesses were charged but failed to appear several times until finally John of Northwold was willing to negotiate with townsmen outside of the courts, probably because he was involved in protracted litigation against the king at the same time. An agreement was reached in 1293 which reiterated that the election of alderman and gate-keepers was the right of the townsmen, subject to the ratification of the abbot. John Goldsmith was re-elected and presented to the abbot for his approval.¹³¹

In 1281 an incident occurred which set a precedent for future disputes regarding the critical importance attached to official documentation. In November of that year Edward I inspected and confirmed charters granted by Henry I and John to St. Edmund's which enshrined the traditional privileges of abbot and convent. The townsmen, unbeknownst to the abbot (John

¹²⁴ Lobel *The Borough* p.131.

¹²⁵ Lobel *The Borough* p.132. The king issued a writ informing the abbot that these complaints had been made, which can be found at BL. Harley 230 f.11 (reproduced in Lobel *The Borough* pp.175-6).

¹²⁶ Lobel *The Borough* pp.132-3; the Teyfen was an area of marsh to the north west of the town.

¹²⁷ *Memorials* vol.2 pp.xliv-xlv; Trenholme *EMB* p.23.

¹²⁸ An early 14th century account of the conflict in 1292 and the subsequent agreement can be found at Hervey *Pinchbeck Register* vol.1 pp.58-66.

¹²⁹ Lobel *The Borough* p.133.

¹³⁰ Other charges laid against the townsmen included: that they had levied tallage independently of the bailiffs; that they had collected *hansing* silver payments (possibly as entrance fines for the Gild Merchant); that they had distrained on merchants selling goods within the abbot's markets; they had prevented the bailiffs from taking tronage and similar tolls; and they had prevented trials involving merchants they had received cash from and strangers abused by Bury men. Lobel *The Borough* pp.133-4.

¹³¹ Other clauses of the agreement dealt with issues of tallages and various customs; Lobel *The Borough* p.135. Gottfried's assertion that as part of the agreement of 1293 the burgesses were entitled to elect the bailiffs is incorrect; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.219.

of Northwold), petitioned the king for a duplicate copy of these charters, and obtained them. The abbot only became aware of the existence of the copies when they were read out in the town sometime shortly before 1297.¹³² The abbot argued that the townsmen could only hold such charters by his grace, and petitioned the king to force the town to return the copies. Peter of Ellingham (who had been alderman in 1295) and Stephen son of Benedict (who, interestingly, had been a *bailiff* in 1284) appeared at Westminster, admitted they were responsible for procuring the duplicates, and gave them up to the abbot.¹³³ A group of the more senior burgesses became anxious at the possible reprisals and volunteered a pledge to appease the authorities.¹³⁴ But as with many of the large fines imposed on the townsmen of Bury during the period, the abbot and convent were diplomatic in their acceptance of the pledge, remitting 100 marks.¹³⁵

In 1304 the discontent escalated into a situation requiring royal intervention once again.¹³⁶ On the Monday following the feast of St. Lucy 33 Edward I¹³⁷ a commission was held in the town by the royal justices William de Bereford, William Howard and William de Carleton to inquire into the 'transgressions and conspiracies between the town and abbey'.¹³⁸ Sixty individuals are named whose activities were to be investigated.¹³⁹ Nicholas Fouke and the other townsmen bound themselves by an oath in September 1302, and stated that no inhabitant of Bury worth 20s in goods was to pay to the monastic authorities more than 2s 1d in *hansing* silver, that is, so as to be allowed to trade within the town.¹⁴⁰ A number of merchants staying in Bury were subsequently forced to pay this charge and were also fined.¹⁴¹ At the same time the burgesses publicly announced a list of 'customary' ordinances concerning the sale and inheritance of properties and associated dues, the rights of married women in their properties, and the rights of those possessing property for a year and a day.¹⁴² Any stranger residing in Bury for a year and a day was to be forced to swear an oath to

¹³² Hervey *Pinchbeck Register* vol.1 p.1.

¹³³ Lobel *The Borough* p.136.

¹³⁴ Hervey *Pinchbeck Register* vol.1 p.2.

¹³⁵ Hervey *Pinchbeck Register* vol.1 p.2.

¹³⁶ *Memorials* vol.2 p.xli; an account of the trial following the events of 1304 can be found in Hervey *Pinchbeck Register* vol.1 pp.67-93.

¹³⁷ December 14th 1304.

¹³⁸ The commission to the justices appears at Hervey *Pinchbeck Register* vol.1 p.67. CPR 1301-7 p.283 records the commission to the three justices, and the complaint that the abbot was being denied his right to appoint bailiffs to hear cases in his own court. The abbot claimed that he had by right the custody of the town's gates and gaol, as well as pavage and murage. The charges made against the 61 named defendants included: they had conspired by oaths of confederacy; held unlawful gatherings; usurped the abbot's rights of wards, orphans and the appointment of gate-keepers; and that they had prevented the abbot receiving certain profits and distrains. See also CPR 1301-7 pp.403, 471.

¹³⁹ Hervey *Pinchbeck Register* vol.1 pp.67-8.

¹⁴⁰ Hervey *Pinchbeck Register* vol.1 p.74.

¹⁴¹ Lobel *The Borough* p.137; Hervey *Pinchbeck Register* vol.1 p.74.

¹⁴² Lobel *The Borough* p.138.

observe these ordinances.¹⁴³ Abbot Thomas of Totingham complained that the townsmen then appointed two bailiffs to hear cases, and that members of the Gild Merchant (i.e. those who had paid *hansing* silver) could only plead before them and nowhere else.¹⁴⁴ Alongside the statement of ancient customary rights was the more 'revolutionary' behaviour the burgesses indulged in, including actively preventing justice being done on individuals charged with forestalling and with the damaging the property of St. Edmund's, and appointing new keepers for all the gates without the consent of the sacrist or abbot.¹⁴⁵

The trial lasted until January 1305 and the justices acquitted the townsmen of conspiracy and making illegal ordinances; but using the agreement of 1293 (and the fact that the alderman had retaken his oath of fealty to the abbot in that year) they denied the townsmen the *right* to either an alderman or a Gild Merchant on the grounds that the abbot held the town in demesne, and both these institutions were enjoyed at his pleasure. The claim of the townsmen to these by prescriptive right, their only argument as they had no charter, was denied. Indeed all the abbot's seigniorial rights were upheld most stringently.¹⁴⁶ Not only did the justices of 1304 effectively deny all the privileges that the townsmen had been claiming since the first half of the 13th century in their findings, but they inflicted even more damage to their cause for municipal independence by judging that the Gild Merchant was an illegal body.¹⁴⁷ Those who had been charged were imprisoned, although the *Pinchbeck Register* reproduces a list of fines paid by the townsmen for their release;¹⁴⁸ and as Lobel suggests, the amounts paid indicate that many must have been substantial individuals.¹⁴⁹

Despite this the townsmen continued in their opposition to St. Edmund's. In December 1306 William Bereford and William Howard were involved in a commission of *oyer* and *terminer* to investigate claims by the abbot that people had under cover of night broken into the houses held by the abbot in Henhowe where pleas were heard; that a mill of the abbot's at Babwell had been burnt down; and that the gallows at Westley had been destroyed.¹⁵⁰ In 1314 a number of townsmen were heavily fined for assaulting the bailiffs and several monks in the

¹⁴³ The abbot refuted many of these ordinances with statements of his own privileges, of which Walter Pinchbeck made a summary (reproduced in Lobel *The Borough* pp.189-90).

¹⁴⁴ In the event the townsmen were once again acquitted of installing their own bailiffs in the town, Hervey *Pinchbeck Register* vol.1 p.82.

¹⁴⁵ Lobel *The Borough* p.138. 'Revolutionary' is Lobel's term, p.140.

¹⁴⁶ Lobel *The Borough* pp.140-1. The townsmen's claim to free burgess-ship was also refuted; Trenholme *EMB* p.24.

¹⁴⁷ Lobel *The Borough* p.141. The abbot and convent had perhaps decided that the Gild Merchant was the root of all the vocal opposition to the authority of St. Edmund's since 1264; Lobel *The Borough* p.137.

¹⁴⁸ Hervey *Pinchbeck Register* vol.1 pp.92-3.

¹⁴⁹ Lobel *The Borough* p.142. Although Nicholas Foukes did not pay over £20, as Lobel claims, but 100s; and Stephen Haukedon did not pay over £18, but 5 marks; Hervey *Pinchbeck Register* vol.1 p.92.

¹⁵⁰ CPR 1301-7 p.472.

town.¹⁵¹ In 1320 the burgesses petitioned the king over the abbot's activities regarding the royally founded St. Saviour's hospital, claiming that the crown's rights were being usurped.¹⁵²

The frustrated attempts of the townsmen to gain some form of political civic independence over the past half a century or so culminated in the rising of 1327.¹⁵³ This rising was like much of the unrest in Bury throughout the period: re-ignited by the imposition of taxation (in the form of a lay subsidy) and facilitated by national turmoil.¹⁵⁴ On January 15th 1327 a mob (claimed to have been 3000 strong by abbey authorities¹⁵⁵) gathered at the Tollhouse and then attacked the abbey gates.¹⁵⁶

The next day the abbey treasury was raided, and prior Peter of Clopton and several monks were beaten. They were imprisoned in the gildhall where a number of charters stolen from the abbey were deposited.¹⁵⁷ Shortly after this outbreak the senior burgesses of Bury took over and deposed the alderman, replacing him with John de Berton without the abbot's approval.¹⁵⁸ De Berton and his supporters, particularly Gilbert Barbour, immediately encouraged another attack on the abbey, and while chaos ensued he issued a proclamation which cancelled all debts owed to the abbey, a measure which would have benefited every townsman in Bury had it been effective.¹⁵⁹ He then assumed control over the town's gates,¹⁶⁰ and sanctioned further attacks upon the buildings of St. Edmund's. William Stowe the sacrist escaped Bury by night and made his way to the monastery at St. Benet Hulme.¹⁶¹ All rents

¹⁵¹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.220.

¹⁵² Lobel *The Borough* pp.142-3.

¹⁵³ Details of the 1327 rising can be found in the account of Walter Pinchbeck, *Hervey Pinchbeck Register* vol.1 *passim*; and the *Deprædatio Abbatiae Sancti Edmundi* of BL. Cotton Claud. A.XII ff.116-42v (reproduced in *Memorials* vol.2 pp.325-54) which was probably compiled by Walter Pinchbeck, *Thomson Archives* pp.20-1. An account can also be found in the *Cronica Buriensis* reproduced in *Memorials* vol.3 pp.38-47.

¹⁵⁴ The queen, prince Edward and Roger Mortimer landed in England in September 1326; Keen, M. *England in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1973) pp.70-101; Lobel 1327 p.215. These events occasioned widespread conflicts across the country; for details of risings in St. Albans, Abingdon and Coventry see Trenholme *EMB* pp.32-7, 41-2, 45.

¹⁵⁵ *Memorials* vol.2 p.330.

¹⁵⁶ It was claimed that the rioters had been incited in Bury's taverns by agitators from London; *Memorials* vol.2 p.330; Lobel 1327 p.216. The author of the *Deprædatio Abbatiae* considered the riots in London in 1326 to have set an example for other towns; *Memorials* vol.2 p.329.

¹⁵⁷ Trenholme *EMB* p.42; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.222; Lobel 1327 p.216; *Memorials* vol.2 p.330. The townsmen also demanded all the bonds that were in the possession of the convent by which the former were bound for large sums of money; Trenholme *EMB* p.38.

¹⁵⁸ John de Berton was the brother of Richard, the elected alderman he replaced; Lobel 1327 p.217; *Memorials* vol.2 p.331.

¹⁵⁹ Lobel 1327 p.217. The prior was also forced to seal with the chapter's common seal an acquittal of all actions against the townsmen, as well as remitting the pledges taken by the town in 1305 against another rising.

¹⁶⁰ *Memorials* vol.2 p.332; Lobel 1327 p.217.

¹⁶¹ *Cronica Buriensis* in *Memorials* vol.3 pp.39-40. The chronicle provides a transcript of a letter from

that were due to the abbey were paid to the alderman, and other customary payments (such as toll) were withheld. Violence and menace were used to persuade any townsmen who were not sympathetic to the new regime.¹⁶²

At this stage abbot Richard de Draughton was attending the parliament in London, and did not reach Bury until January 28th. De Berton met him at one of the town's gates and gave him a charter the townsmen had drawn up describing a list of privileges that the secular community demanded.¹⁶³ The first clause of the charter granted the town the right to an alderman, a common seal and a Gild Merchant (to replace that which had previously been banned), in effect incorporating it.¹⁶⁴ The alderman was to be freely elected and have the authority to make burgesses (upon the payment of various levels of *hansing* silver), as well as receiving all of:

the taxation in the town of St. Edmund of every kind of wares and merchandise along with that which appertains to taxation¹⁶⁵

Those who wanted to trade in Bury had to belong to the Gild Merchant and be "rateable among the burgesses".¹⁶⁶ The alderman and *commune* were to have custody of wards and orphans, as well as all the town's gates except the Eastgate, which had always been reserved by the abbot. Clauses dealing with the administration of justice regarding different crafts' practices were included in the charter,¹⁶⁷ and every native of Bury was to be exempt from toll. Restrictions were placed upon the costs involved in possessing *hadgovel* tenements, and quite extensive procedures were stipulated for the inheritance and alienation of land or properties.¹⁶⁸ Burgesses were only to be impleaded in the portman-moot, and the alderman was responsible for all judgements and records.¹⁶⁹ Clauses concerned with regulating rents and distrains are prominent in the charter; and ownership of property or land was to be decided upon year and a day possession. All taxes and tallages to be levied on the secular community were to be assessed and collected by ministers of the alderman, and not by the

Richard de Draughton to abbot John of St. Benet Hulme thanking him for protecting Stowe.

¹⁶² *Memorials* vol.2 p.332. A pardon to William Rammesden for his part in the rioting issued in February 1329 indicated that he had been forced to take part by John de Berton, who had threatened mutilation unless he swore to be part of the rioters' company; CPR 1327-30 p.363. As in Bury, a block and axe was also set up by the burgesses in St. Albans to intimidate the townsmen; Trenholme *EMB* p.38.

¹⁶³ *Cronica Buriensis* in *Memorials* vol.3 p.40. A full transcription and translation of this "extorted charter" of 1327 appears in *Memorials* vol.3 pp.302-17. The 1327 rebels of Abingdon also drew up a charter of their demands which was forced upon the convent there; Trenholme *EMB* p.43.

¹⁶⁴ Trenholme suggests that the charter indicates the "practical identity of the burgess community and the gild merchant" that existed in Bury up to this point; *EMB* p.38.

¹⁶⁵ *Memorials* vol.3 p.305.

¹⁶⁶ *Memorials* vol.3 p.315.

¹⁶⁷ *Memorials* vol.3 p.307. This clause included punishments for "working women".

¹⁶⁸ *Memorials* vol.3 pp.307-9.

¹⁶⁹ *Memorials* vol.3 p.309.

“bailiffs of the Abbot” .¹⁷⁰

The extorted charter included two clauses by which the abbot was bound to the secular community for £5000 that he would have the charter confirmed by the king and enrolled in the Chancery and Court of Common Pleas before the fifteenth day after Candlemas.¹⁷¹

Richard de Draughton was forced to accept this charter, which embodied all the privileges claimed and sought after by the townsmen since 1264.¹⁷² Gottfried suggests that the charter was “fairly restrained in its demands, the result of the caution of the senior burgesses, who had a vested interest in preserving their positions at the top of the existing social order”¹⁷³ but Lobel suggests that it might have been more dramatic a document than this, and indeed that the townsmen were “rendered less cautious by the influence of the civil commotion in the kingdom” .¹⁷⁴ The charter certainly indicated the desire of the townsmen to have an alderman free of monastic control, an element of the secular community’s ambition throughout its opposition to St. Edmund’s, and a right which would have diminished the obedientiaries’ control over the town.¹⁷⁵ Alongside this claim for what would have been a new right enjoyed by the secular community, the clauses of the charter comprised the restoration of ancient rights, particularly those enjoyed in the reigns of Cnut and Edward the Confessor.¹⁷⁶ A number of the clauses seem directed to preventing abuses of authority on the part of the bailiffs and other officials of the abbey.¹⁷⁷ Others are concerned with obviously unpopular traditional dues, such as those associated with inheritance and disposal of *hadgovel* properties, and those involved in the administration of wills.¹⁷⁸ The burgesses also opposed the sacrist’s right of tronage, and were later accused of obstructing the weighing of wax, wool, iron and lead for this purpose.

The abbot returned to London soon after receiving the charter from the alderman and townsmen, where he declared his acceptance of the latter’s demands void as he had acted under duress. He had the charter annulled as soon as possible, and went further by using the rising as an excuse to annul all charters granted to the townsmen by abbots Anselm, Ording,

¹⁷⁰ *Memorials* vol.3 p.315.

¹⁷¹ *Memorials* vol.3 p.317.

¹⁷² Lobel *The Borough* p.143.

¹⁷³ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.224-5.

¹⁷⁴ Lobel *The Borough* p.143.

¹⁷⁵ Lobel *The Borough* p.144; Lobel 1327 p.217.

¹⁷⁶ *Memorials* vol.3 p.317.

¹⁷⁷ For example, that stating that the bailiffs could not distrain from inside a man’s house if he could do so outside; *Memorials* vol.3 p.311.

¹⁷⁸ *Memorials* vol.3 p.309.

Hugo and Samson.¹⁷⁹ De Berton heard of the abbot's recantation and incited another raid on the abbey, which took place on February 16th: the dormitories were looted, and then the rioters paraded through the Great Market with what they had stolen.¹⁸⁰ Support for the violence was increased by the burgesses' promise to those in the town without burghal status of their freedom. At the end of April the alderman and burgesses obtained a writ of protection for a year,¹⁸¹ while in the following month both the convent and the townsmen received royal orders forbidding them to gather armed assemblies.¹⁸²

On May 19th the abbey was attacked again, but this time the townsmen were encouraged by the Franciscan friars of Babwell and the secular clergy of Bury, rather than John de Berton or the burgesses.¹⁸³ The secular clergy complained that the abbey provided them with too small a stipend and no privileges in the town. The friars of Babwell chose this time to renew their attempts to settle within the town, and sought licence to do so from the burgesses.¹⁸⁴ The friars, secular clergy and burgesses conducted the Rogationtide processions around the town fields, even though the ceremony was usually the prerogative of the abbot and convent.¹⁸⁵

Also in May the monks who had not fled St. Edmund's with their servants physically attacked the townsmen, and in retaliation the abbey was once again raided, and the church of St. Edmund was burnt.¹⁸⁶ On May 26th the abbey was taken into royal protection and had two keepers appointed.¹⁸⁷ Meanwhile, as the lack of central royal authority caused by the deposition of Edward II and the minority of Edward III prevented the sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk Sir Robert Morley putting an end to the violence,¹⁸⁸ abbot de Draughton had sent to Avignon in search of assistance from pope John XXII. The delegation did not arrive there, but that sent by John de Berton and the townsmen (consisting of sympathetic secular priests) did, and won the pope's support.

During the second week of June the convent and the town sent, as ordered, delegations to York where both were ordered to keep the peace. During the summer the townsmen fortified their decaying walls, while in the autumn de Berton, who seems to have been able to control

¹⁷⁹ Lobel *The Borough* p.145.

¹⁸⁰ *Memorials* vol.2 p.334.

¹⁸¹ CPR 1327-30 p.99.

¹⁸² CPR 1327-30 p.151. Both sides were to send two delegates to treat at York.

¹⁸³ *Memorials* vol.2 p.335.

¹⁸⁴ Lobel 1327 p.219. The friars' request was refused at the petition of the secular clergy who feared for their incomes.

¹⁸⁵ *Memorials* vol.2 p.336; Lobel 1327 pp.220-1.

¹⁸⁶ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.226.

¹⁸⁷ CPR 1327-30 pp.106, 156.

¹⁸⁸ Keen *England in the Later Middle Ages* pp.70-101.

the assembled townsmen at will, raised another mob to attack the abbey; and a ditch was dug across the 'Sexten's meadow', in protest that the 67½ acres that the sacrist reserved for himself was in fact held in common.¹⁸⁹ This time outbuildings in the complex (including the abbot's stables) were burned, and lead from the roofs were stolen. As it was harvest time the rioters looked further afield for targets, and the abbey's grain barns within the banleuca were raided, and convent cattle rustled.

During September the townsmen tried to ingratiate themselves with various authorities: they begged the abbot of St. Benet Hulme not to excommunicate them but to show leniency;¹⁹⁰ and they tried to impress Robert Morley, who entered the town with a commission to investigate the violence, by gathering the bodies of dead burgesses and placing them by the abbey gates.¹⁹¹

The influence of London upon the actions of the townsmen became evident again in October, when the alderman and burgesses wrote to the citizens of London justifying their actions and asking for their support. On October 16th Sir John Howard was made guardian of the town and given authority to arrest those who attacked the abbey.¹⁹² Two days later de Berton once again encouraged the townsmen to raid the increasingly ruined abbey, and this proved to be the most violent attack of all. The townsmen were summoned through the ringing of the Tollhouse bell and the fire-bell of St. James', and John de Berton, Robert Foxton, Robert Ereswell, a parson, 28 chaplains, two women and all the *maiores* and *minores* swore an oath to uphold their cause, and then attacked the abbey gates.¹⁹³ What was left of the convent left St. Edmund's and met the alderman at the latter's demand, and all 24 were imprisoned.¹⁹⁴ The townsmen then proceeded to rove around the abbey lands in the banleuca (and some of the 22 manors of the abbot and convent¹⁹⁵) pillaging and destroying what they could find. The lands belonging to the hospital of St. Saviours were also damaged, perhaps indicating that the townsmen were not too particular where their violence was aimed.¹⁹⁶

However in November 1327 the situation changed dramatically as Pope John XXII suddenly

¹⁸⁹ Lobel *The Borough* p.57.

¹⁹⁰ A copy of their letter is incorporated into the *Cronica Buriensis* in *Memorials* vol.3 p.43.

¹⁹¹ Lobel 1327 p.223.

¹⁹² Lobel 1327 p.222.

¹⁹³ *Memorials* vol.2 pp.337-8; Lobel 1327 p.222.

¹⁹⁴ *Memorials* vol.2 p.340; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.228; Lobel 1327 p.223.

¹⁹⁵ The *Deprædatio Abbatia* provides details of the losses sustained in twelve manors and the Grange, *Memorials* vol.2 pp.340-7. The total damages were £580 9s 4d (p.344 note b).

¹⁹⁶ The losses sustained by the hospital totalled £21 9s 6d, and included crops, livestock and buildings; *Memorials* vol.2 p.346. A commission of October 24th lead by the earl of Norfolk cites numerous accusations against the townsmen; CPR 1327-30 p.213.

reversed his allegiance and excommunicated the whole population of Bury apart from thirty of the most substantial burgesses and their families.¹⁹⁷ Early in the same month a complaint by the abbot named 155 individuals among a multitude of other rioters.¹⁹⁸ Meanwhile the national political crisis had stabilised somewhat and a writ was issued to the sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk and others to raise an army. On the sheriff's arrival at Bury with his force the townsmen conceded without a fight, and accounts claim that thirty carts were required to take the rebels to Norwich where they were to be tried by four royal justices.¹⁹⁹ The imprisoned monks were immediately released.²⁰⁰ De Berton, Barbour and the other leaders were charged with treason, and imprisoned.²⁰¹ By May 26th 1328, 154 out of the original 400 or so charged with treason and other felonies were outlawed for not attending when summoned. John de Berton had been found guilty, but Robert Foxton obtained a pardon.²⁰² The abbot's three suits of malicious trespass against the townsmen estimated (and were awarded) the total damage done to the abbey at £40,000, £33,000 and £60,000 respectively.²⁰³

Shortly after the feast of the Epiphany in 1328 de Berton and Gilbert Barbour escaped from the gaol and took sanctuary with the friars of Babwell,²⁰⁴ remaining there until August, when a gang of outlaws under the leadership of Thomas Thornham came to Bury. Despite the abbot's requests the townsmen opened the town gates to them, and may even have greeted them with a ceremonial procession along Risbygate street.²⁰⁵ Thornham settled himself and his followers in Moyses Hall, one of the largest and most prestigious houses in the town.²⁰⁶ In October de Berton and Barbour left Babwell and joined with some of the outlaws,²⁰⁷ and went to Chevington where the abbot Richard de Draughton was, and proceeded to kidnap him.²⁰⁸ Thornham and his band left Bury in December 1328, but there was more unrest in the town. More of the rebels in the gaol of Bury, including some clerks, escaped but were recaptured on

¹⁹⁷ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.228.

¹⁹⁸ CPR 1327-30 p.217. The charges include the prior and several monks being forced to sign a deed stating that they owed the townsmen £10,000. Further commissions were sent on the 17th and 29th November to investigate further accusations made by the abbot, CPR 1327-30 p.219.

¹⁹⁹ Lobel 1327 p.224; *Memorials* vol.2 p.348.

²⁰⁰ Even at this time of crisis the abbot of St. Edmund's was concerned that royal judicial involvement should not set a precedent. On December 2nd 1327 the king acknowledged that the commission of *Oyer and Terminer* against the rioters would not prejudice the judicial rights of the abbot in the future, CPR 1327-30 p.193. See also CPR 1327-30 p.411.

²⁰¹ An account of the trials appears in Lobel 1327 pp.224-7. So many were charged with felony and imprisoned that Bury gaol could not accommodate them all; Lobel 'The gaol of Bury St Edmunds' p.205.

²⁰² Robert Ereswell also received a general pardon on December 1st 1327, CPR 1327-30 p.192. For other pardons see CPR 1334-8 p.162.

²⁰³ Lobel 1327 pp.226-7.

²⁰⁴ The negligence of the gaoler is blamed for this, *Memorials* vol.2 p.349.

²⁰⁵ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.229.

²⁰⁶ *Memorials* vol.2 pp.349-50.

²⁰⁷ Again there is a suggestion that the rebels included a contingent from London; Lobel 1327 p.228.

²⁰⁸ He was taken to London and hidden in various houses; eventually de Draughton was taken to Brabant via Dover; *Memorials* vol.2 pp.350-2.

the road to Cambridge and returned to Bury.

In January 1329 the archbishop of Canterbury excommunicated all those thought to be involved in the abduction of the abbot, and a royal commission to determine his whereabouts discovered the role played by certain Londoners who were duly punished. De Draughton was eventually released in April 1329 without any ransom being paid.²⁰⁹ In November the bishop of Ely was commissioned to intervene to reconcile the town and the abbey.²¹⁰

An agreement between St. Edmund's and the townsmen was reached in 1331, which required the personal appearance of the king to broker.²¹¹ The abbot agreed to the king's request that £122,333 6s 8d of the £140,000 owed by the townsmen ought to be remitted.²¹² Of the remainder of the damages owed (£17,666 13s 4d) 4000 marks were to be remitted if the townsmen paid 2000 marks within twenty years. Another 10,000 marks were to be excused if they restored all charters and documents to the abbey. Nineteen named burgesses and others were obliged to acknowledge before the council that Bury was not a corporate body or *communitas*.²¹³ The means of raising the fine were left to the townsmen themselves, and consequently much of what was collected fell to poorest townsmen to pay.²¹⁴ The failure of the townsmen to get royal confirmation for their extorted charter and the reprisals taken against them by the abbey effectively ended their hopes for achieving any measure of civic independence.²¹⁵

Despite the severity of the response to the 1327 rising, the tension between town and abbey still continued. During the aftermath of the violence the burgesses were probably engaged in the organisation of the Candlemas gild.²¹⁶ With the Gild Merchant gone after the conflict

²⁰⁹ In February 1330 Ralph Tornham received a pardon for his part in the rising, as had been promised by the king to anyone who delivered abbot Richard from his incarceration abroad; CPR 1327-30 p.490.

²¹⁰ CPR 1327-30 p.425.

²¹¹ A copy of the agreement taken from the abbey's *Register Kempe* (BL. Harley 645 f.141) is reproduced in Arnold, *Memorials* vol.2 pp.357-61. Arnold's introduction erroneously states that the agreement is reached between the abbot and convent of St. Edmund's on the one part, and Richard de Draughton and other men of the town on the other, p.357. De Draughton was abbot during the rising (and indeed until 1335).

²¹² *Memorials* vol.2 p.358. Gottfried mistakenly puts the sum owed by the townsmen at £14,000, *Bury St Edmunds* p.231.

²¹³ Trenholme *EMB* p.40; Lobel 1327 pp.230-1; *Memorials* vol.2 pp.360-1. In August 1330 the abbot and convent were given licence to acquire the churches of Rougham and Thurston in consideration of the losses sustained at the hands of townsmen and because the abbey was prepared to pardon a large part of townsmen's fine at the king's request; CPR 1327-30 p.546.

²¹⁴ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.231.

²¹⁵ Lobel 1327 p.215; Lobel *The Borough* p.145.

²¹⁶ PRO C 47/46/406. Interestingly comparable with the strategies of Bury's townsmen, the elite of Cirencester founded a social gild (dedicated to the Trinity) which was independent of the abbot, and which furnished the town with a focus for civic sentiment; Trenholme *EMB* pp.50-2.

earlier in the century, the leaders of the secular community may have considered it prudent to arrange themselves into a body capable of dealing with the impending and inevitable repercussions of their more recent activities. In October 1331 there were two royal commissions for the arrest of rioters in Bury, and in 1334 the abbey was granted the king's protection as a precaution before he returned to Scotland.²¹⁷ The officers of St. Edmund's were still experiencing opposition throughout the 1330s and 1340s, and not only in Bury. The abbot's judicial rights had been opposed in Mildenhall in 1341: he was attempting to punish Margaret Claver of Mildenhall and other brewsters of the town as the Leet court (which was held by the abbot as the town's lord) found that they had abused the assize. The customary punishment for this was the 'judgement of the tumbrel', and the bailiffs duly appointed two men to carry out the sentence; the two were prevented from doing do by a large gang of 'evildoers' (including forty-seven named individuals) and beaten.²¹⁸ In June 1347 Joan Hilteynger was pardoned for breaking the gaol at Bury and taking Nicholas Brandon (possibly her husband) with her.²¹⁹

The violent aspect of the conflict seems to have diminished during the middle part of the 14th century, although more controlled modes of resistance to the abbey's political monopoly were still employed by the townsmen. Evidence of the townsmen probing the authority of St Edmund's exists from this period.²²⁰

The century's second outbreak of violence was occasioned by the combination of an internal abbey dispute and the widespread risings of 1381.²²¹ The crisis began with a disputed election

²¹⁷ Lobel 1327 p.231. The protection was issued on October 23rd 1334; CPR 1334-8 p.35.

²¹⁸ CPR 1340-43 p.316.

²¹⁹ She had been placed in the gaol for various felonies and for stealing 10s worth of the sacrist's goods; CPR 1345-8 p.539. For evidence of the tension between the secular and monastic communities in the period see CPR 1317-21 pp.181, 362, 469; CPR 1321-4 p.318; CPR 1338-40 p.364.

²²⁰ For example, the *Registrum Alfabeticum* records the presentation of three nominees in the election of the alderman in 1351, Cambridge University Library MS. Gg.4.4 f.342; while in 1367 the townsmen obtained an exemplification of the settlement reached with the abbey in 1293 which had dealt with the appointment of the alderman and the keeping of the gates; Lobel *The Borough* p.150.

²²¹ There is a large body of work existing for the uprisings of 1381, ranging from national political overviews to regional and local accounts. Standard works on the subject include Oman's *The Great Revolt of 1381* (Oxford, 1969 ed.); and Hilton's work in particular remains prominent, see for example *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (London, 1973) for a contextual account of the events of the rising, and pp.198-206 for the events in Bury St Edmunds in particular; see also his introduction to Hilton, R. H. and Aston, T.H. eds. *The English Rising of 1381* (Cambridge University Press, 1984). In the latter volume the essays by Christopher Dyer and Andrew Butcher on the social environment of the risings have been useful to this study. For accounts of the upheavals in and around Bury St Edmunds see Dyer, C. 'The rising of 1381 in Suffolk' in *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History* (no.36, 1988); and Powell, E. *The Rising in East Anglia in 1381: with an appendix containing the Suffolk Poll Tax Lists for that year* (Cambridge University Press, 1896).

of the abbot in 1379 following the death of John of Brinkley,²²² between the convent's choice John Tymworth the sub-prior, and the papal provisor Edmund Bromfeld (a monk of St. Edmund's who had been sent to Rome as proctor).²²³ Tymworth was elected by the convent but only accepted the promotion reluctantly, and was denied licence to go to Rome for papal confirmation as the king deemed the trip too dangerous.²²⁴ Instead two monks were sent to gain the confirmation, but when they arrived at the *Curia* they discovered that Urban VI had already granted the abbacy to Bromfeld after the latter had 'intrigued' to obtain it. Bromfeld returned to St. Edmund's where he gained the support of some of the convent.²²⁵ An attempt was made to read the bulls granting him the abbacy in the church of St. Edmund's, but the prior and Tymworth's supporters prevented him from doing so. Bromfeld's party then went to the churches of St. James' and St. Mary's where they gathered the support of the townsmen,²²⁶ and with their help returned to St. Edmund's and announced the bulls.²²⁷ Bromfeld was installed as abbot, and then proceeded to 'tyrannise' the monks that had supported his opponent; while his supporters went about the town spreading false rumours to create animosity between the town and convent.²²⁸ Tymworth's party made formal protests to Bromfeld, and stated that they would not recognise his authority until they were assured that the pope had been fully aware of the situation when he had given him the office. Meanwhile a mob of townsmen incited by Bromfeld's supporters broke into the abbey, driving Tymworth's supporters into the infirmary chapel.²²⁹

Bromfeld was summoned to Westminster but did not appear, and finally warrants were issued for his arrest;²³⁰ also to be arrested were a number of townsmen including Thomas

²²² A contemporary account of the election dispute between John Tymworth and Edmund Bromfeld (or Brounfeld) was made by the almoner (later prior) John Gosford in his *Electio Johannis Tymworth* found in the hostiller Andrew Aston's early 15th century compilation BL. Cotton Claud. A.XII ff.126v-30v; it is reproduced in *Memorials* vol.3 pp.113-37. The same manuscript contains an account of the complaints made by the abbot and convent in 1382 of what they had endured in the previous year; *Articuli et punctus de diversis transgressionibus et horribilibus malefactis illatis et factis priori et conventui de Bury per maleficos et rebelles eiusdem villæ*, in *Memorials* vol.3 pp.137-45.

²²³ Lobel *The Borough* p.150.

²²⁴ *Memorials* vol.3 p.114.

²²⁵ *Memorials* vol.3 p.117.

²²⁶ On October 8th 1379 Thomas Halesworth, William Chapman and John Clak were summoned to appear before the council at Westminster on pain of 1000 marks to answer for their part in these disturbances; CCR 1377-81 p.269. Clak was involved in the violent rioting of 1381, and on June 6th received a pardon for all insurrections, treason, sedition etc. committed before December 22nd 6 Richard II; CPR 1381-5 p.547.

²²⁷ *Memorials* vol.3 p.118; Lobel *The Borough* p.151.

²²⁸ *Memorials* vol.3 p.120.

²²⁹ Lobel *The Borough* p.151.

²³⁰ In October a writ for his arrest was issued which named the monks who had supported him, as well as several townsmen; CPR 1377-81 p.420. Interestingly Marham had been commissioned in August with the bailiffs and alderman of Bury to arrest Bromfeld, CPR 1377-81 p.418. Other orders for Bromfeld's arrest can be found at CPR 1377-81 p.419 and CCR 1377-81 p.276.

Halesworth, James Marham and Robert Westbrom and six others.²³¹ Bromfeld was eventually arrested and committed to the Tower.²³² Fourteen townsmen pledged over £2000 for their future good behaviour.²³³ The situation in 1379 was such that the authorities acted very promptly and with a certain amount of trepidation it would appear.²³⁴

The situation in Bury was exasperated in the summer of 1381, at which stage the townsmen were reeling from paying half of the £2000 they had pledged in 1379,²³⁵ as well as having to contend with the poll tax.²³⁶ On the 13th June Jack Wrawe and his rebels arrived at the town, and ordered the townsmen to meet him at the Southgate threatening death to those who refused. The prior John de Cambridge and several other monks fled immediately. The violence that then ensued against the convent and property of St. Edmund's was blamed on the burgesses of Bury by the abbey accounts,²³⁷ which is corroborated by Wrawe's testimony at his trial: he claimed that Ralph Somerton dyer and five other leading townsmen aided the outlaws in the attacks on St. Edmund's church and on Sir John Cavendish on June 14th.²³⁸ The townsmen were also blamed for the capture, mock trial and beheading of the prior John de Cambridge near Newmarket, with Wrawe specifying the participation of Robert Westbrom mercer,²³⁹ Thomas Halesworth²⁴⁰ and Geoffrey Denham esquire, a servant of the prior.²⁴¹ Wrawe also accused Thomas Langham of killing the keeper of the barony, brother John of Lakenheath.²⁴² Other substantial townsmen were accused of trying to murder John Gosford.²⁴³

²³¹ Lobel *The Borough* p.151.

²³² *Memorials* vol.3 pp.123-4.

²³³ Details of who acted as mainpennors for whom and for how much can be found at CPR 1381-5 p.13.

²³⁴ In October a writ of aid was issued to several men 'whom for certain urgent reasons the king has appointed to go to the town and abbey of Bury'; CPR 1377-81 p.391.

²³⁵ Lobel *The Borough* p.152. The townsmen had to pay half the fine on May 28th 1381.

²³⁶ The account of John Gosford acknowledges the "taxa onerosa regno" as a factor in the rising; *Memorials* vol.3 p.125.

²³⁷ *Memorials* vol.3 p.125; Lobel *The Borough* pp.152-4.

²³⁸ Somerton, it was claimed, procured keys for the parish church of Cavendish so that it could be ransacked for the treasure of John Cavendish who had reputedly hidden his goods in the belfry there; Powell *The Rising in East Anglia in 1381* p.11. John Cavendish, the chief justice, was murdered at Lakenheath and his house in Bury was sacked; *Memorials* vol.3 p.128.

²³⁹ Westbrom was pardoned on April 7th 1385; CPR 1381-5 p.547.

²⁴⁰ In the pardon granted to Halesworth on April 20th 1387 he is titled 'esquire', and is called "unus principalium insurrectorum comitatus Suffolchiæ"; *Memorials* vol.3 p.354. See also CPR 1381-5 p.547; CPR 1385-9 p.244. It was Halesworth who conducted the mock trial of de Cambridge; Powell *The Rising in East Anglia in 1381* p.18.

²⁴¹ *Memorials* vol.3 pp.126-8. Denham's betrayal of the prior is described at *Articuli et Punctus* in *Memorials* vol.3 p.141. He received a pardon on January 24th 1388 at the supplication of the abbot of St. Edmund's. Like Halesworth, he had originally been one of those exempted from the earlier general pardon as a principle insurgent in Suffolk; CPR 1385-9 p.383.

²⁴² Lobel *The Borough* p.153. Lakenheath was beheaded by the rebels; Thomson *Archives* p. 24.

²⁴³ Some of the town's women were also specifically accused of riotous behaviour. The wife of Henry Lacford, for example, intimidated the sacrist into handing over some goods which he held in pawn; *Articuli et Punctus* in *Memorials* vol.3 p.141.

But in terms of directed communal activity the townsmen do not seem to have become involved in the rising until June 16th, when the alderman and burgesses demanded that all charters and muniments relating to the town were to be delivered to them. The author of the *Articuli et Punctus* of 1382 claims that the alderman “cum magna multitudine rebellium sive ribaldorum dictæ villæ” demanded the charters and grants of privileges of the convent should also be handed over to them.²⁴⁴ The alderman also presented the convent with a triple indented document stating that Edmund Bromfeld should be reinstated and that he should hand over all town documents that had been taken by the abbey.²⁴⁵ The monks agreed to this within forty days, and went further by promising to restore all the privileges the town had forfeited after the rioting and burning of the abbey in 1327. This was agreed in the gildhall with the assent of the ‘whole town’, and the agreement was consigned to writing in the vestry of the abbey and sealed by the sacrist and alderman.²⁴⁶ Two days later, following renewed threats from the townsmen, the convent handed over all the charters and muniments, as well as £10,000 worth of plate and jewels, which were taken to the gildhall.²⁴⁷

As soon as it became apparent that the authorities were about to restore order in Bury and elsewhere in Suffolk the senior burgesses began to reduce the possible repercussions for themselves individually. They asked that the king should only punish those who had actually been involved in the rising, that is, those indicted by the burgesses, rather than inflicting harsh penalties upon the whole town.²⁴⁸ On June 23rd the bishop of Norwich Henry Despenser arrived at Bury at the head of an army, and the burgesses immediately surrendered without hesitation and handed over Jack Wrawe. Their pleas were ignored, and the whole town was exempted from the general amnesty of the following year.²⁴⁹ John Gosford tells us that the townsmen were outlawed and only received into the king’s protection at the end of 1382 after pledging 2000 marks to be paid before Christmas.²⁵⁰ The townsmen were also forced to pledge £10,000 to both the king and the abbot for keeping the

²⁴⁴ *Articuli et Punctus* in *Memorials* vol.3 p.137.

²⁴⁵ *Memorials* vol.3 pp.130-1; *Articuli et Punctus* in *Memorials* vol.3 p.138. The townsmen apparently also insisted on being given the registers of the various obedientiaries, p.139. Bromfeld had a brother among the wealthier townsmen of Bury who was obliged to provide surety that Edmund would fulfil his part of the agreement; Trenholme *EMB* p.56.

²⁴⁶ Lobel *The Borough* p.154.

²⁴⁷ Trenholme *EMB* p.56. The jewels were returned to the convent 16 weeks later at the order of the earl of Suffolk, *Articuli et Punctus* in *Memorials* vol.3 p.137; the charters were held for a further 14 weeks, and kept in the gildhall during that time. One was kept permanently; Lobel *The Borough* pp.154-5.

²⁴⁸ Lobel *The Borough* p.155.

²⁴⁹ Lobel *The Borough* p.155. Even in the general pardon issued on January 26th 1388 the inhabitants of Bury St Edmunds were exempted; CCR 1385-9 p.372.

²⁵⁰ *Memorials* vol.3 p.131; Lobel 1381 p.208. In 1383 the king persuaded the townsmen to pay half of this fine to the abbey in order to make the abbey inclined to pardon the town; CPR 1381-5 p.274. In 1385 the abbey tried to obtain the remaining half, an attempt that was obstructed by the townsmen counter suing for debt; CCR 1385-9 p.54.

peace.²⁵¹ The 2000 mark fine was made the responsibility of the alderman and twenty-three of the most senior townsmen to assess and levy,²⁵² and so naturally the burden of payment fell upon the lesser townsmen. On February 5th 1385 Roger Rose the alderman, and the twenty-three burgesses who had pledged the 2000 mark fine on behalf of the whole town were ordered to assess and collect the fine.²⁵³ In doing so they abused their authority and the subsequent complaints from the poorer townsmen to the chancellor led to a number of commissions to investigate the process.²⁵⁴ The twenty-four burgesses were to deliver the assessment and collection rolls to the commissioners, and were to be compelled to levy the fine according to contributors' means.²⁵⁵

John Tymworth was reinstated as abbot of St. Edmund's in 1383,²⁵⁶ and demanded the customary payment of one hundred marks due to a newly installed abbot.²⁵⁷ The town pleaded with the king that this expense could not be borne, but as the abbey was as impoverished as the town at this stage Tymworth maintained his demands and the dispute went to chancery. The only defence that the townsmen could propose was that the 'Abbot's Cope' payment could not be a permanent duty of the town as they had no corporate body which could be responsible for raising it, nor did the secular community have any free tenements or liberties for which the payment could be in exchange for.²⁵⁸ In November 1383 the abbot's case was upheld due to prescriptive custom and his lordship over the town, and the townsmen were forced to pay. It is possible that the unrest in the town evident in rioting that took place in 1384 may have been connected with this recurring complaint of the townsmen.²⁵⁹ Similarly in December 1391 Robert Hethe and Robert Carbonell were tried for trespass by force of arms committed against St. Edmund's abbey.²⁶⁰

The more intemperate expressions of the desire for political independence petered out in

²⁵¹ CCR 1381-5 p.851. 722 recognizances were taken from the townsmen from early July 1384 through to mid-February 1385; Lobel *The Borough* p.157; Lobel 1381 p.212. See also CPR 1381-5 p.498.

²⁵² See CPR 1385-9 p.3.

²⁵³ The 2000 mark fine was to be levied before Easter week on pain of a further £1000; CPR 1381-5 p.586.

²⁵⁴ On October 14th 1385, for example, the bailiffs of Bury, two burgesses and a royal official were ordered to inquire into the estate of the townsmen of Bury, and particularly the burgesses who had agreed the 2000 mark fine after complaints from the poorer inhabitants. An interesting example of these complaints records that John Berard and Geoffrey Middleton, themselves substantial figures in Bury, pleaded for an inquiry on behalf of the poorer inhabitants of Bury; Lobel 1381 pp.211-2.

²⁵⁵ Two of the six men ordered to collect the fine were Thomas Halesworth and John Berard; CCR 1385-9 p.10. See also CCR 1385-9 p.19, CPR 1381-5 p.592, CPR 1385-9 p.56. For a number of Bury inhabitants who received pardons after the payment of the 2000 mark fine see CPR 1385-9 p.39.

²⁵⁶ *Memorials* vol.3 pp.132-3. He was eventually confirmed, licensed and blessed by the bishop of London on June 24th 1384, *Memorials* vol.3 p.136.

²⁵⁷ *Memorials* vol.3 p.135.

²⁵⁸ Lobel *The Borough* p.157.

²⁵⁹ On September 1st 1384 the alderman, bailiffs and twenty-five burgesses of Bury (effectively the elite of the town) were ordered to keep the peace and arrest assemblies; CPR 1381-5 p.501.

Bury in the 15th century, after the repercussions of the 1381 rising.²⁶¹ There are no more occurrences of similar violent demonstrations in the town, at least none on the same scale as the crises of 1327 and 1381. Part of the reason for the more peaceful context of the relationship between the secular and monastic community may be found in the conciliatory administration of abbot William Curteys in the early 15th century;²⁶² and part may be found in the increasingly favourable economic condition that the townsmen found themselves in.²⁶³ The latter development served to strengthen the position of the townsmen in their search for municipal independence and diminished the power base of St. Edmund's, so that the secular community did not have to resort to extreme methods of resistance as employed during the 14th century. However this does not mean that the ambitions of the secular community had disappeared, merely that the townsmen were more confident of achieving them. There was obviously some conflict within the town in this period, an example of which might be seen in the recognizance for £2000 made by abbot William Excestre in July 1424 that he, Robert Wesnam, John Charlys and Thomas Cambrygge (all monks of St. Edmund's) do not harm Thomas Hethe esquire or anyone else in Bury.²⁶⁴ Similarly in 1431 an inquisition was held at Henhowe (where the abbot's Great Court often sat) by the sheriff of Suffolk, William Paston and John Howard knights into all manner of insurrections, felonies, extortions and other violence throughout Suffolk, in which a number of Bury men were suspected in particular.²⁶⁵

That the ambition for civic self-governance still existed in the latter half of the 15th century is evident from a number of documents with expressly political themes issued by the burgesses of Bury. The most explicit of these was the set of ordinances drawn up by the alderman Robert Gardiner and the burgesses in 1470.²⁶⁶ The ordinances are in Latin, perhaps unusually given their civic secular provenance and the date of their compilation; and they begin by announcing the long history and status of the town, although the assertion that the town was

²⁶⁰ CCR 1389-92 p.524.

²⁶¹ For an account of the 1381 rising in St. Albans see Trenholme *EMB* pp.58-64. Just as in Bury the leaders of the rising used intimidation to coerce the townsmen to support their cause, and may have drawn support from Londoners. Unlike Bury, the rebels had a contingent present at events in London, which constantly sent updates about the latest stages of the revolt there. Indeed they explicitly exploited the more general uprising to further their own, as orders and charters extorted from royal officials in London were used to threaten the abbot in St. Albans on a number of occasions. Dunstable and Peterborough were other monastic boroughs whose leaders took the opportunity presented by the widespread discontent in 1381 to rebel against their respective lords; Trenholme *EMB* pp.65-6.

²⁶² Schirmer, W.F. *John Lydgate: a Study in the Culture of the Fifteenth Century* trans. Keep, A.E. (London, 1961) pp.138-9, 247.

²⁶³ Lobel *The Borough* p.159; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.235-6.

²⁶⁴ CCR 1422-9 p.154. However in 1462 a number of burgesses were arrested for rioting in the town, but it is unclear whether their misdeeds were part of a wider and conscious expression of political ambition; Lobel *The Borough* p.159.

²⁶⁵ BL. Add. 14848 ff.72-72v (original foliation).

²⁶⁶ The ordinances were drawn up on September 10th 1470. What survives is an incomplete copy of an Elizabethan transcript, BL. Add. 17391 ff.156-6v. They have been transcribed in Trenholme *EAIB* pp.98-102, with omissions supplied in Lobel *The Borough* pp.181-2.

an ancient demesne of the king was untrue.²⁶⁷ They then proceed to explicate the role and rights of the town's alderman, assigning the office more authority than the convent and officers of St. Edmund's ever had allowed it.²⁶⁸ The abbot is to appoint annually an alderman from three nominees chosen by the town's burgesses, although the mode of the election is missing.²⁶⁹ The alderman is to have for the whole term of office the gildhall with all its messuages, gardens, lands, rents and appurtenances. He is to have all fines resulting from public nuisances in Bury's streets, except such as pertain to the bailiffs, and is to receive all forfeits resulting from the bearing of arms or assaults that occur in his presence or that of his officers.²⁷⁰ Perhaps more significantly, the alderman is to enjoy the privilege of creating burgesses;²⁷¹ but he was also to play a role in the bailiff's assessing and collecting of taxes and tallages levied on the inhabitants of Bury, and was to sit in the courts at the right hand of the bailiff.²⁷² Other ordinances deal with the testamentary rights of married women and widows, and the relations between servants and their employers. Clauses dealing with the traditional customs concerned with holding of tenements,²⁷³ the portman-moot (its traditional status to be revived), market and fair courts, and commercial privileges all reiterate the positions taken by the townsmen throughout their struggle with St. Edmund's. As Lobel says:

The document is typical of the prevailing attitude of the town to its lord. It contains no declaration of independence. It concerns itself rather with the more practical business of asserting its right to certain privileges of a very moderate order, of protecting the burgesses from the excessive extortion of convent officials in the courts, in the markets, or in the matter of rents.²⁷⁴

The chronology of dispute continued in the 15th century in non-violent form. In 1478 there is a record of abbot Richard Hengham (or Heigham) petitioning against the alderman Walter Thurston and a number of burgesses, accusing them of usurping his rights, rioting and holding 'illicit conventicles' contrary to his rights and liberties. In fact Thurston had taken it upon himself to appoint keepers of the market, constables and the town watch, claiming that it was the right of the alderman to do so, and that the assent of the convent was

²⁶⁷ Trenholme *EMB* p.98.

²⁶⁸ Lobel *The Borough* p.160.

²⁶⁹ Trenholme *EMB* p.98.

²⁷⁰ Trenholme *EMB* p.98. The alderman is also to have the collation of the St. Mary priest in St. James' church, as well as that of Robert Eriswell's chantry chaplain in the same church.

²⁷¹ Trenholme *EMB* p.98. The alderman also had to be present whenever the assize of bread and ale were taken, or whenever inspections of merchandise were conducted; *EMB* p.99. The alderman was also to receive other forfeits connected with infringements of market regulations, *EMB* p.102.

²⁷² Burgesses who had previously held the office of alderman were to sit in the "superiore Banco" with the bailiff; *EMB* p.99. Burgesses also claimed the privilege of not being impleaded in certain types of case.

²⁷³ For example the holding of a free tenement for a year and a day without any complaint is deemed to be a qualification for possession; Trenholme *EMB* p.99.

²⁷⁴ Lobel *The Borough* p.160.

unnecessary.²⁷⁵ Both the abbot and the alderman appeared in the Star Chamber in November 1478: the abbot presenting his numerous charters and confirmations of privileges accrued over the centuries, and particularly since 1327; the alderman could only impotently plead prescriptive custom and could offer no corroborative documentation. The townsmen's case was rejected utterly and the abbot's privileges were confirmed once again.²⁷⁶

There are two documents that may be associated with this case which reflect the political aspirations of the townsmen: a bill of fourteen complaints made by the townsmen against the abbot and convent between 1475-80, and the abbot's response to them.²⁷⁷ The bill complains:

~ The abbot has always kept certain lands and properties in Bury for the specific purpose of paying £8 19s 6d whenever a fifteenth is levied, but now he charges the payment to the inhabitants of Bury "against all right and conscience".

~ The townsmen of Bury claim that most of the town is held of Katherine queen of England "by suit to here court there called the court of honour",²⁷⁸ and that certain rents were due to her. The abbot however, pretends that the town is held entirely of him and forces the inhabitants to pay 100s annually for their freeholds.

~ Ever since the death of Richard duke of York the abbot has had the town in farm and by sufferance, and have never held the court for the honour so that it would be discontinued, so as to disinherit the queen.

~ That the abbot refused to admit John Smyth II to office despite being elected alderman, "to their great danger, þe troublesome time considered".²⁷⁹

~ That the alderman ought to have certain quit rents (amounting to 8s 3d a year) for maintaining the gildhall from the sacrist, almoner and hostiller of St. Edmund's, and a further 1s 10d rent, which are withheld by the abbot and his officers.

~ That the alderman by right has authority to keep assizes of weights and measures and bread, as well as 'corrupt wines', and should receive all forfeitures; but these are being denied.²⁸⁰

~ At the next Portman-moot after his election the alderman should present four gate-keepers to the sacrist or bailiff at the Toll house for the purpose of collecting tolls. But now the sacrist appoints the keepers who "exact upon þe Burgers against their ancient privileges, þe toll being farm'd þem at great rates".

²⁷⁵ Lobel *The Borough* p.160.

²⁷⁶ Lobel *The Borough* p.161.

²⁷⁷ The articles of complaint are found in BL. Add. 17391 ff.156v-7, and are reproduced in Trenholme *EMB* pp.102-4. There are in fact a number of complaints made in the bill before the fourteen numbered clauses. The abbot's response to the townsmen's complaints can be found at PRO Star Chamber Proceedings, Henry VIII bundle xxii no.6, and is reproduced in Lobel *The Borough* pp.182-5. The 'reply' in fact answers twenty-one complaints and dates from 1478-9, so the relationship of this document with the townsmen's bill is not clear.

²⁷⁸ This may refer to the honour of Clare which held the manor of Maydewater within the town's boundaries; Lobel *The Borough* p.17.

²⁷⁹ For more on the public career of John Smyth II see below section 5.iii.

²⁸⁰ This complaint corresponds almost exactly with an ordinance in the 1470 customs of Robert Gardiner; Trenholme *EMB* pp.98-9.

- ~ That the alderman should have authority to appoint watchmen in summer, but the sacrist exempts certain individuals from serving by pretending they are abbey servants.
- ~ That the alderman should have the right to appoint constables of the wards and keepers and searchers of the market; and that the alderman as constable of the town was to gather all tallages and taxes receiving from the sacrist £8 19s 6d for his tenements. But for forty years the abbot and sacrist have withheld this payment.
- ~ That the alderman's prerogative to deliver inmates of the gaol that he had committed is denied.
- ~ Anyone holding a free tenement in Bury should not be arrested or imprisoned for any action in any court in the town without the king's writ, except for treason, felony and to be bound to keep the king's peace.²⁸¹ However this custom is constantly broken by the abbey officials.
- ~ In every Leet or view of Frankpledge every case presented by twelve men should be assessed by two chosen out of the twelve; but the bailiffs and abbot constantly choose their own men to favour their friends and oppress their foes.
- ~ That all encroachments made in the king's highway ought to be punished, but that the sacrist accepts fines and allows such encroachments to be conducted.
- ~ That the bailiffs allow brewers and bakers to break the assize in return for bribes.
- ~ That the inhabitants of Bury "time out of mind" have always brought horse and cart in and out of the town toll free, now the sacrist's officers are charging them.
- ~ Every freeholder can alienate his property at will at no cost, but the sacrist takes fines of 5s, 10s and 20s because of the *hadgovel* payments.
- ~ That the hundred mark payment forced upon the townsmen upon the election of a new abbot is "an importable charge, they crave to have it remitted".

Table 3.6: *The townsmen's bill of complaints against the abbot of St. Edmund's, c.1475.*²⁸²

In several cases the complaints of the townsmen correspond closely with the ordinances drawn up by the secular community headed by Robert Gardiner in 1470, perhaps indicating an element of co-ordination in the political manoeuvring of the secular community. The bill makes evident that even in the late 15th century the rights and duties of the alderman were still being exaggerated by the townsmen in direct opposition to the authority of the officers of St. Edmund's. There is also an indication that the townsmen were claiming privileges that they had once in fact enjoyed, such as the right to enter the town with a cart and pay no toll, but which had since been withdrawn from them.²⁸³ The opening clause of the abbot's rebuttal of the townsmen's bill states categorically:

that there was never communalte corporate of the town of Bury but thabbot of Bury

²⁸¹ This is another clause that strongly echoes the 1470 ordinances. See Trenholme *EMB* pp.98-9.

²⁸² Taken from Trenholme *EMB* pp.102-4.

²⁸³ Lobel *The Borough* p.162.

entier lord of the said town and so hathe be withoute tyme of mynde and the seid abbot seith that the men of the seid town of Bury never are to chose alderman of Bury without lycence asked of the abbot for the tyme beyng and that the abbot pryour nor president never admitted aldermen elected by men of the town of Bury but at ther own will and liberte²⁸⁴

which suggests that the officials of St. Edmund's may have seen the complaints as a symptom of a deeper political movement. The bill of complaints does not refer to this issue, and so by beginning their response with a denial of the corporate status of the townsmen, the obedientiaries of St. Edmund's firmly establish the legal and political context for the dispute. In other words the complaints are all answered, but in effect the abbot is claiming that the rebuttal is unnecessary as all the authority and privileges lay with the monastic community. Other clauses in the rebuttal claim that ownership of the gildhall lies with the abbot and not the alderman, and that the abbot as lord holds the Leet of the town.²⁸⁵ Regulations regarding the election and appointment of the alderman, gate-keepers, watchmen, constables and other minor positions are explicated; as is the judicial authority of the alderman.²⁸⁶ Other clauses deal with the extent and form of punishments to be assigned by the courts, as well as the destination of the profits of justice. *Hadgovel* is also affirmed as one of the most ancient of the abbey's privileges; as was the hated 'Abbot's Cope':

that the inhabitaunts in the seid town of Bury have contynuelly payd after the deces of every abbot an 100 marc to thabbot newly chosen therto²⁸⁷

The last clause denies that the suggested oath for the alderman to take at his installation is suitable.²⁸⁸ The rebuttal to the claims of the townsmen deals with more general issues of political authority in the town than are actually raised by the original complaints; and it is possible that the reason for this lies in the tradition of opposition that has preceded this dispute. The following section will draw out the major themes of these disputes across the period, in order to explicate the relationship between identity and strategies of political expression.

²⁸⁴ Lobel *The Borough* p.182.

²⁸⁵ Lobel *The Borough* pp.182-3.

²⁸⁶ That is, the only instance the alderman can make arrests is when an affray takes place in his presence; Lobel *The Borough* p.183.

²⁸⁷ Lobel *The Borough* p.184.

²⁸⁸ Lobel *The Borough* p.185. This oath has not survived.

3.iii. Political morphology: themes of dispute and strategies of political expression.

3.iii.a. Experience and expression of political authority.

The process of conflict between the secular and monastic communities of Bury throughout the period 1264-c.1500 was informed by the underlying ambition of the townsmen to attain a degree of civic self-determination concomitant with their emerging prosperity and regional commercial status. A number of themes are evident in the experience and expression of political authority of the secular community, particularly during periods of violent conflict. These themes are indicative of the political interests and awareness of the townsmen of Bury, and may have served as 'banners' around which sections of the community could rally in their opposition to the political authority of St. Edmund's.

The most obvious political theme centres around the office of the alderman as the representative of the townsmen, with the extent of his authority, duties and privileges disputed by both the respective communities. In the context of monastic boroughs as a whole, Trenholme suggests that the office of alderman (or equivalent) was generally vested with little actual authority, but constituted the natural figurehead for burghal ambition.¹ The source of the conflict was that the officers and convent of St. Edmund's viewed the office as a convenient figurehead position through which the peace of the secular community could be maintained and the profits accruing to the abbey from commerce and industry could be secured.² The townsmen saw the office as the means through which they could express their political aspirations as well as the vehicle through which their interaction with the obedientiaries could be conducted formally.³ The 1470 ordinances state that the role of the alderman included that he should fight diligently to maintain the rights of the town, and to correct transgressions against them;⁴ and if this had been the attitude of the townsmen throughout the 13th and 14th centuries then it is perhaps not surprising that the individuals holding the office behaved aggressively toward the convent.⁵ Indeed the townsmen's increasing consciousness of the secular community's separate existence and identity was a feature of public activity from the 13th century onwards, and consequently the need for an

¹ Trenholme *EMB* p.81.

² As far as the convent were concerned the officers with the real authority in the secular community were the bailiffs and their servants; Lobel *The Borough* pp.62-4.

³ See pp.87-9.

⁴ "debet pugnare diligentes contra usurpationes et libertatum ac status dictæ villæ, violationes seu læsiones et eas corrigere"; Trenholme *EMB* p.99.

⁵ Lobel *The Borough* pp.90-1.

effective leadership in the office and person of alderman became increasingly imperative.⁶

The most critical aspect of the office of alderman seems to have been the right of the townsmen to elect him freely and without the necessary licence of the abbot. This was evident in the most violent conflicts of 1327 and 1381, with the installation of aldermen without recourse to the traditional process.⁷ In these same disputes the repercussions of the violence included the temporary withdrawal of the right even to make nominations subject to the abbot's approval.⁸

A second theme that appears in the outbreaks of animosity is the townsmen's opposition to their financial responsibility to St. Edmund's. The extorted charter of 1327 and the 1470 ordinances both indicate that ancient dues (such as the costs connected with alienation and inheritance of *hadgovel* tenements, and the debt of various types of non-monetary service owed to the sacrist in particular) were extremely and persistently unpopular. Perhaps the most hated custom was that of the 'Abbot's Cope', the hundred mark payment owed to a newly elected abbot. Expensive litigation throughout the 14th century indicates the lengths resorted to by the townsmen to avoid paying this, and it was still a focus for discontent in the 1470s.⁹ The reason this due was resented above all others may be that as the townsmen received no privilege or benefit in return for their hundred marks, the 'Abbot's Cope' was essentially a symbol of the authority the abbot and convent of St. Edmund's enjoyed over the secular community: in other words the monastic community levied the payment simply because it could.

The town and abbey conflict was reflected in the struggle between the two communities over a number of buildings and institutions in the town, particularly the gaol, the schools and the gildhall. The gaol of Bury was perhaps an obvious target for the secular community's political aspirations through as the exact provenance of the prison was unclear, and certainly disputed (particularly between the crown and the abbey obedientiaries). The gaol was not a county gaol, but served the liberty of St. Edmund's, and indeed the official authority in control of it was the abbot and obedientiaries of St. Edmund's: it was held officially by the abbot,¹⁰ but the

⁶ "By the end of the thirteenth century the conception of the group as an entity was slowly ousting the idea of it as a plurality, and a definite notion of an abstract corporation was being evolved", Lobel *The Borough* p.82.

⁷ See pp.99-100.

⁸ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.119. The provision of gate-keepers also seems to have been a central feature of the political dispute; see Trenholme *EMB* p.80.

⁹ See p.119.

¹⁰ Lobel, M. 'The gaol of Bury St Edmunds' in *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History* (no.21, 1933) p.203.

senior obedientaries of the abbey all had a role in its administration.¹¹ The fact that townsmen were imprisoned in the gaol may have encouraged the desire for a degree of civic collaboration in its running. Gottfried suggests that burgesses of Bury were often appointed to deliver the gaol, and that those so chosen were members of the Candlemas guild; and that consequently the secular community had a degree of *de facto* control over the institution.¹² Lobel and Gottfried suggest that in the 15th century the interest of the townsmen in the gaol was increasing.¹³ My analysis of the testamentary material, however, suggests that it is not the case that larger numbers of testators remembered the plight of the prisoners in their will: rather in the 15th century the prisoners of Bury are remembered specifically and independently, whereas in the 14th century they are a generic target for charitable donations, more often than not lumped together with the more general sick and poor.¹⁴

The schools in Bury similarly constituted a focus of enmity between town and abbey.¹⁵ The grammar school in the town¹⁶ was a 12th century foundation under the administration of secular clergy, and although it initially enjoyed the support of St. Edmund's, it was not a monastic institution.¹⁷ The school was staffed by clerks and attended by pupils from the town: the abbot had the privilege of appointing its masters, while the sacrist guarded the monopoly of the grammar school (and the Song-school) as no other school could be set up in the town without his licence.¹⁸ St. Edmund's financial support for the grammar school dried up after the 12th century; and it is possible that the school had very little else by way of endowment as poor scholars were not allowed to attend for free.¹⁹ The school's master was exempt from the jurisdiction of the sacrist, and he and his pupils were subject only to the

¹¹ The prior and cellarer were responsible for incarcerating people, whence they became the responsibility of the sacrist. The sacrist's involvement in the gaol is evident from his accounts; BSERO A 6/1/5; BSERO A 6/1/6.

¹² Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.174. Unfortunately Gottfried again fails to provide references for this assertion. An example may be taken from 1388 when a number of prominent townsmen were appointed to deliver the gaol; CPR 1385-9 p.467. In 1432 of the abbot appointed several Bury men to deliver the gaol; Lobel 'The gaol of Bury St Edmunds' p.206. Two such commissions appear in BL. Add. 14848 f.57 (original foliation).

¹³ Lobel 'The gaol of Bury St Edmunds' pp.205-6.

¹⁴ 14th century wills making bequests to prisoners in Bury include: BSERO Osbern ff.13v, 17, 20v, 25, 27v, 32v, 40v, 41v, 46v, 51, 60v, and 74. 15th century references include: BSERO Osbern ff.101v, 103v, 115v, 127v, 133, 137v, 142v, 231; BSERO Hawlee ff.40, 95 and 164; BSERO Pye ff.8 and 162v; PCC Prob 11/17 f.256.

¹⁵ For a detailed account of Bury's schools see VCH vol.2 pp.301-324.

¹⁶ Located at the corner of Schoolhall Street and Raingate Street; VCH vol.2 pp.306-7. See Figure 3.4.

¹⁷ Leach assumes that Bury's grammar school developed out of the earlier college of secular priests instituted there by king Athelstan after it was subsequently transformed into a Benedictine community by Cnut; VCH vol.2 pp.306, 308. For details of its endowments in the 15th century see BL. Add. 14848 f.52v (original foliation); BL. Add. 7096 f.110v.

¹⁸ Lobel *The Borough* p.46; VCH vol.2 pp.308-9. Throughout the latter half of the 13th century there are several examples of litigation over the setting up of adulterine schools in Bury. For a 15th century example see VCH vol.2 p.309.

¹⁹ VCH vol.2 pp.306, 307.

authority of the abbot.²⁰ The town's Song-school was probably as old as the grammar school, and was responsible for teaching song and the psalter, a monopoly enjoyed by the master.²¹ The Song-school was under the administration of the secular priests of the Dusse gild, or the gild of the translation of St. Nicholas. By the 15th century the school also taught elementary Latin reading to its pupils.²² Gottfried sees the schools of Bury moving from the control and support of St. Edmund's into the domain of the secular community,²³ and he suggests that the officials of St. Edmund's took no part in the teaching practices of the schools.²⁴ During the 15th and 16th centuries the grammar school was increasingly financed by the fee paying pupils originating from the burgesses of Bury, and those attending the school increasingly became recipients of testamentary charity during the 15th century.²⁵ By the middle of the 16th century the grammar school was flourishing,²⁶ and the curriculum followed may have been quite extensive.²⁷ The Song-school remained autonomous from the officials of St. Edmund's through its administration by the secular clergy of the Dusse gild, and the financial backing of its lay members. Bury's schools provided the secular community with institutions in whose administration it could play a part, which may have served to provide the townsmen with a sense of involvement in the management of the civic affairs of Bury.²⁸

²⁰ Lobel *The Borough* p.45; VCH vol.2 p.308. There are a number of examples of the sacrist taking legal proceedings to circumvent this privilege of the schoolmaster. See BL. Add. 14848 f.120 (original foliation) for a 15th century copy of a late 13th instance of this type of dispute.

²¹ As with the grammar school there are 14th and 15th century examples of adulterine song-schools in Bury: VCH vol.2 p.310.

²² VCH vol.2 p.310.

²³ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.207-8.

²⁴ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.210.

²⁵ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.210; VCH vol.2 p.312. See for bequests: BSERO Osbern ff.104, 163v; Hawlee ff. 29v, 95, 264; BSERO Pye f.146v, 162v. Baldwyne f.559; Hervye f.365; PRO PCC prob. 11/11 f.142.

²⁶ VCH vol.2 pp.313-17.

²⁷ The 1552 will of John King schoolmaster (BSERO Sunday f.247v) leaves to the school the hangings from his chamber, a table, a 'sede', a 'joined forme', his 'Pline de naturali historia, Virgilius cum commento, Oratius cum commento, and Ovidius cum commento'. John Sterman, priest of Bury, receives the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius.

²⁸ The schools of Bury would have enhanced the town's status as a regional educational centre and this, as Gottfried suggests, would have "added to the town's intrinsic non-monastic attractions" for the increasing numbers of immigrants throughout the 15th century; *Bury St Edmunds* p.213.

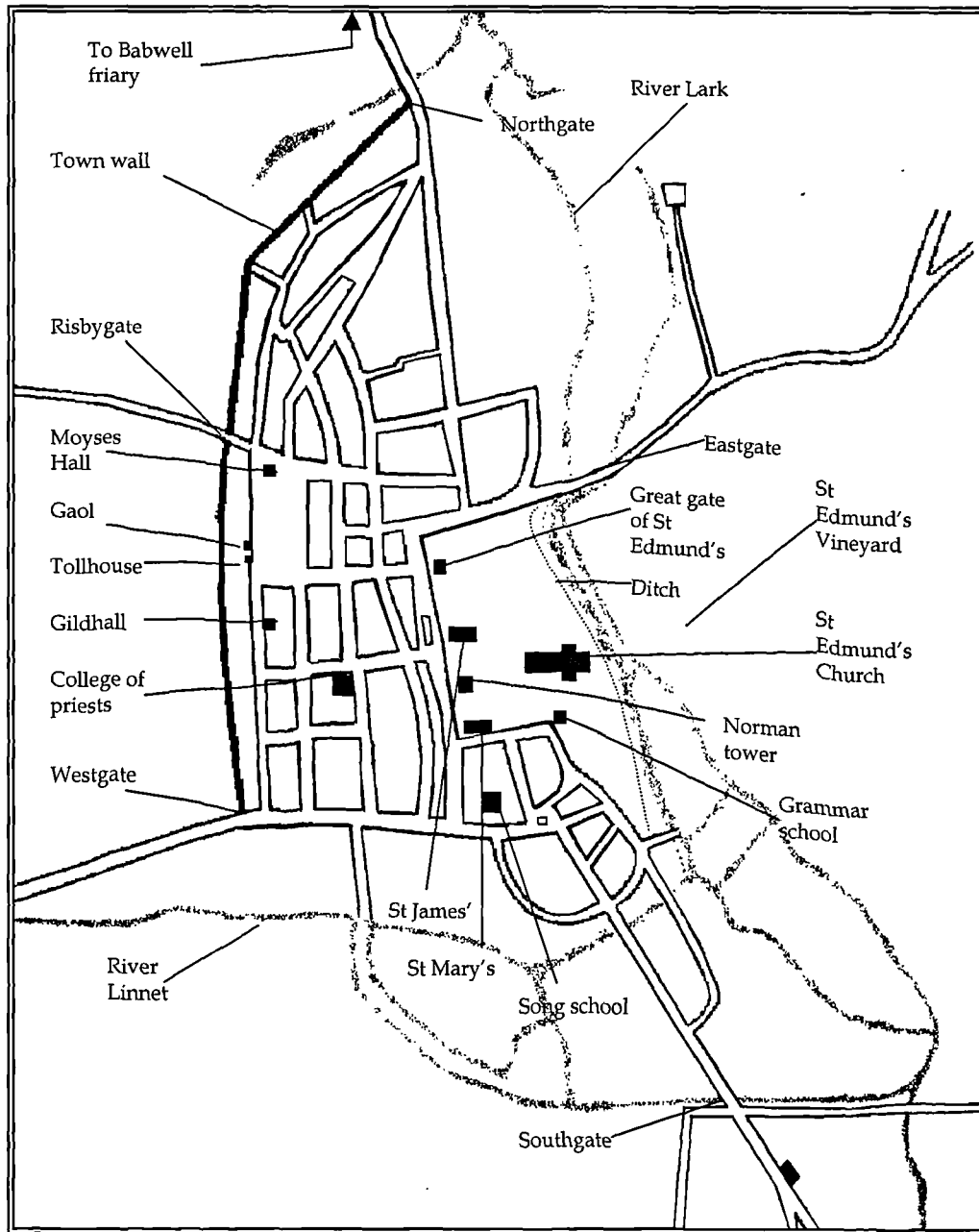


Figure 3.4: Buildings and institutions of Bury St Edmunds.

The gildhall was one of the clearer symbols of the wider municipal struggle between town and abbey. It had been built by the townsmen at the end of the 12th century with the consent of the abbot, who legally owned it until the dissolution. The building was used by the townsmen for their assemblies and for the administration of business, and so formed a centre for their affairs.²⁹ During the 14th century the secular and monastic communities disputed the

²⁹ Tittler, R. *Architecture and Power: the Town Hall and the English Urban Community c.1500-1640* (Oxford, 1991) p.12. In 1292 the burgesses were in the habit of making the townsmen take oaths to obey the town's customs at the gildhall, Lobel *The Borough* p.78; while two years previously the gildhall formed the meeting place for the townsmen enraged by the damming of Teyfen, Lobel *The Borough* p.133.

responsibility for the maintenance of the gildhall,³⁰ to the extent that in 1378 the king had to issue an order to the alderman to compel the townsmen to contribute to repairs to the building.³¹ The townsmen's interest in the gildhall and the function it served in civic life can be seen in several 15th and 16th century wills. In 1507 Thomas Rydnale used the gildhall as a base from which doles to the poor could be administered at his month's mind;³² and in 1514 Richard Kyng mercer made a series of reversionary bequests involving the gildhall in the event that none of his children reached adulthood: large parcels of land and property were to pass to the alderman and Candlemas gild, the incomes for which were to be kept in the gildhall and used to pay tenths, fifteenths and other taxes. A copy of his will was to be kept in the gildhall and read out annually by the clerk of the gildhall at the time the wills of John Smyth and Margaret Odeham were proclaimed; and 33s 4d was to be taken from the income generated from his lands to be used for maintaining the building.³³ The gildhall also featured prominently in the 1492 will of Margaret Odeham.³⁴

In the ordinances of 1470 the townsmen claimed that the building belonged to the office of alderman,³⁵ who customarily levied a charge on the secular community to contribute to the building's upkeep.³⁶ The abbot's answer to a bill of complaints made by the townsmen in 1478 denies the claim that the alderman should be assigned certain rents from various abbey obedientiaries for the upkeep of the gildhall, and indeed the abbot took the opportunity to categorically deny the townsmen's possession of the gildhall:

Item as to the IInd article the seid abbot saith that the yeldhall of the said town apperteyneth to the seid abbot as in the right of his hous and not unto the men of the town of Bury but that by lycence of thabbot or sexteyn men of the town of Bury have held the seide gildehall to holde in there gildes and their gildefests and for none other cause payng yerely for such lycence had a certeyn rent etc., and that it apperteyneth not to the alderman to have any suche rent of the sexteyn, almoner nor hospitler of the seid monastery of Bury as it is supposed in the said article, and as to the remenaunt of the mater conteyned in the seid article ther is no lawe nor reson to put the said abbot to answer³⁷

³⁰ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.31, 186. Gottfried claims that the situation led to the deterioration of the gildhall to the extent that a new one was built by the townsmen in Gildhall Street in the 15th century, but the rather vague reference he provides (p.31 n.27) makes it difficult to substantiate this.

³¹ CCR 1377-81 p.57. Bury wills from the latter half of the 14th century indicate a willingness to contribute to the upkeep of the gildhall, so perhaps the official opposition by the alderman and burgesses to St. Edmund's demands that the townsmen be responsible for its maintenance was a matter of principle rather than economics. Examples of 14th century wills leaving cash to repair the gildhall include: BSERO Osbern ff.1, 16v, 17, 32v, 37.

³² PRO PCC prob. 11/16 f.256v.

³³ PRO PCC prob. 11/17 f.256.

³⁴ BSERO Pye f.8.

³⁵ Trenholme *EMB* p.98.

³⁶ Lobel *The Borough* p.78.

³⁷ Quoted in Lobel *The Borough* p.182.

In other words the abbot allowed the townsmen to use the gildhall for *gild* purposes and business, but not for civic affairs, even though it certainly was used for business beyond the domain of the town's guilds: the alderman was elected in the gildhall, for example.³⁸ That the gildhall served as a focus for the communal activities of the secular community is clear, as Robert Tittler puts it:

So central was this building to the townsmen's sense of identity and to their hard-won rights of self-government that the building itself seems to have formed the organizing principle of local government between the dissolution of the abbey and the acquisition of the borough's charter in the early 17th century. That is, by a deed of enfeoffment the townsmen created a legal trust to govern the town itself as 'Feoffees of the Guildhall': an arrangement which endured for the control of the hall itself, if not the whole borough, until 1893.³⁹

A final focus of dispute between abbey and town was the issue of political authority derived from written evidence. Many aspects of the disputes were driven by the acquisition and physical possession of charters, grants, confirmations and exemplifications, especially on the part of the secular community, as they were often the party which felt the lack of such documents most keenly in their legal battles.⁴⁰ Apart from the numerous royal and papal charters issued to the abbot and convent, the role of documentation, particularly with regard to the explication and record of privileges, precedents and holdings, was very important to the administrative life of the monastic community.⁴¹ During the 12th century, as indicated in Jocelin of Brakelond's chronicle which lists the economic and jurisdictional rights of several obedientiaries as they were customarily, and lists those that have been lost by the end of the 12th century, the survival of administrative documents from St. Edmund's is indicative of the extent to which the convent must have accumulated materials.⁴² In the 13th century the archive of St. Edmund's was in a very rudimentary state,⁴³ but the production of improved records was often a part of the response by the abbey to unrest in the town. In the year following the riots of 1264, for example, a customary was produced which concentrated upon abbey property rather than monastic observance.⁴⁴ In 1270 the *Liber Albus* was compiled, which again lists the customs of all the departments of the abbey.⁴⁵ It is also from the latter

³⁸ That the gildhall was *also* used for gild business is indicated in the 1477 weavers' ordinances; BSERO B 9/1/2.

³⁹ Tittler *Architecture and Power* p.12. See also pp.85-7.

⁴⁰ Particularly after 1327 and 1381, when the cause of the abbey was completely vindicated at the trials as the townsmen could never produce any written evidence to support their claims.

⁴¹ Not least for the adequate running of large estates; Thomson *Archives* p.1.

⁴² There are 176 extant charters, 1083 manorial or obedientiaries' rolls, 41 registers or cartularies and 39 record books; Thomson *Archives* p.3. This must represent only a fraction of what originally existed, as much of the archive of St. Edmund's was split up at the abbey's dissolution.

⁴³ Thomson *Archives* p.14.

⁴⁴ Thomson *Archives* p.16.

⁴⁵ Thomson *Archives* p.17. The *Liber Albus* of St. Edmund's is BL. Harley 1005. It contains copies of over 2000 deeds and charters granting property and privileges to the abbey, each indexed according to date,

half of the 13th century that the earliest obedientary register originates.

At the end of the 13th century the political potential of documentation became clear. In 1291 the abbot, John Northwold, took all the abbey's charters to Westminster to defend his privileges against the repeated and costly encroachments of the crown.⁴⁶ Indeed the financial burdens imposed on the abbey by the king were probably a factor in the process of administrative reorganisation that took place under John Northwold and his sacrist William Stowe.⁴⁷ This increased awareness of the political and administrative potential of written evidence of rights and holdings must have taken place within the secular community at the same time, for the rioters of 1327 were determined to appropriate the charters and muniments relating to them as part of their rising.⁴⁸ The monastic accounts of the theft of the documents discuss the affair in terms of widespread destruction,⁴⁹ but Thomson suggests that in fact very little material was actually destroyed, as the townsmen were led by individuals who knew specifically what was advantageous to attain.⁵⁰ Following the 1327 rising Walter Pinchbeck began his register with a view to:

record all pleas between the abbot and convent of St. Edmund and the townsmen from the creation of the world until the present, along with the agreement made between them by the lord king ... also all the knights' fees belonging to the monastery of St. Edmund; next, the collations of all the churches belonging to the lord abbot and their assessment for taxation; and also, among these things, the liberties conceded by the various kings to St. Edmund and his men from the beginning until the present, and their allocations and where they can be found; and registers of the eight and a half hundreds and of all holdings of the monastery.⁵¹

Pinchbeck did not succeed in his planned rejuvenation of the abbey archive, but he began the process which was followed by others in the century. In the 1350s abbot William Bernham began a survey of all the abbey's manors, although if the information was ever recorded the volume has been lost.⁵² At the end of the 1370s John Lakenheath, the keeper of the barony, took up Pinchbeck's attempt at archival reformation, stating:

Because, after our monastery was destroyed by fire and plunderers, and the abbot's registers and other muniments were thievishly abstracted without compensation, there

contents and participants.

⁴⁶ Thomson *Archives* p.20.

⁴⁷ In 1300 a survey of all the knights' fees owed to the abbey was drawn up; Thomson *Archives* p.20.

⁴⁸ See p.99.

⁴⁹ Hervey, F. ed. *Pinchbeck Register* (Brighton, 1925) vol.1 p.150 records that the townsmen destroyed twelve pre-Conquest charters; Thomson *Archives* p.21.

⁵⁰ Thomson *Archives* p.21.

⁵¹ Quoted in Thomson *Archives* p.21. The manuscript known as the *Werketone Register* also dates from the mid-14th century, and comprises a record of the trial of the 1327 rebels and the proceedings that took place between town and abbey after the violence, p.23.

⁵² Thomson *Archives* p.23.

hardly remained a meagre grain or two from such an abundant harvest left behind by the reapers: I, brother John Lakenheath, have compiled from various registers a sort of calendar, in which I have set down in alphabetical order the names of those manors for which I have found any evidences, that these evidences might be better known to posterity, so that the abbot and convent shall be able to vindicate in security their liberties and regalian rights within and outside the liberty⁵³

His prologue then goes on to explain how the reader is to find his way around his book which in turn is to serve as an index for the abbey archive as a whole. This text is the first to note the classmarks of the existing documents, and the first to cite precisely and transcribe earlier, and (where possible) original, documents.⁵⁴ It is perhaps ironic that this elementary organisation of documents in the abbey archive may have aided the townsmen in their theft of charters and muniments in the 1381 rising.

It may be significant that the period of peaceful relations between the town and abbey at the beginning of the 15th century coincides with the abbacy of William Curteys, under whom it appears the most comprehensive reformation of the archive was conducted.⁵⁵ The contents of abbot Curteys' two part personal register⁵⁶ are concerned primarily with the rights of the abbey, but also with the rights and status of the abbot as an active national figure.⁵⁷ In the 1420s all the obedientiaries were drawing up new cartularies for their departments;⁵⁸ and most of these documents were drawn up by the same scribe,⁵⁹ and arranged according to the same plan instituted by Curteys when he was cellarer.⁶⁰ Once Curteys was abbot, he drew up a series of cartularies for all of his manors.⁶¹ The extent to which literary form and political substance had been associated might be seen in the *Cartæ Versificatæ* written by Lydgate at the commission of Curteys, which comprised a verse translation and explication of all the royal charters (and the specific privileges they granted) presented to St. Edmund's from the very earliest times.⁶²

⁵³ Quoted in Thomson *Archives* pp.23-4.

⁵⁴ Thomson *Archives* p.24. Thomson posits that Lakenheath may have been murdered by the rebels of 1381 for his "administrative efficiency".

⁵⁵ Thomson *Archives* p.34. 15 new codified and cross referenced archival documents can be dated to the period of Curteys' abbacy. However Curteys himself was also responsible for a number of documents drawn up when he held the offices of cellarer and prior, pp.34-8.

⁵⁶ BL. Add. 14848 and BL. Add. 7096.

⁵⁷ Thomson *Archives* p.35.

⁵⁸ Including that of Thomas Ickworth the infirmarer in 1425; Andrew Aston the hostiller in 1426; and that of 1428 by the pittancer.

⁵⁹ A man known as 'T.B.'; Thomson *Archives* pp.36-7.

⁶⁰ Thomson *Archives* p.37. The registers all have indices, all cite the originals from which they are drawn up, and are all cross referenced with each other.

⁶¹ Thomson *Archives* p.38.

⁶² Schirmer, W.F. *John Lydgate: a Study in the Culture of the Fifteenth Century* trans. Keep, A.E. (London, 1961) p.236. The *Cartæ Versificatæ* appear in abbot Curteys' register, BL. Add. 14848 ff.214-227 (original foliation). The *Cartæ Versificatæ* is partially printed in MacCracken, H.N. ed. *The Minor Poems of John*

The bill of complaints drawn up by the townsmen at the end of the 1470s, along with the 1470 customs of Robert Gardiner, the 1471 Candlemas gild ordinances, and the 1477 weavers' ordinances all indicate an awareness on the part of the secular community of the potential application and authority of written documents. Indeed in the mid-15th century a muniment room was added to the gildhall.⁶³ Similarly the Candlemas gild statutes of 1471 refer both to documents being made and kept by the gild, as well as a 'hutche' in the gildhall in which documents were presumably kept, and for which there were a number of keys.⁶⁴ The fact that they are all produced more or less at the same time and after a prolonged period of peaceful relations with the abbey may indicate a collective confidence about a renewed attempt to pursue the political ambitions that had underpinned the social and communal identity of the town throughout the period, at a time when the balance of power in the town/abbey dispute was shifting towards the secular community.

3.iii.b. Authority and religious and charitable activity.

This section assesses the community's relationship with the sanctified authority of the structures of institutionalised religion. It does so in order to indicate that religious and charitable giving on the part of the townsmen could also manifest the spirit of resistance to the abbey. The obvious source to turn to for this kind of examination is the testamentary material, and although using the will material to determine the religious beliefs of *individuals* is a hazardous enterprise, it may be possible to discuss the attitudes and general trends of *communities* from the wills they produce. This will allow the links between authority and identity to be examined through an analysis of conformity with existing behavioural structures. In the domains of religious and charitable activity, this might prove illustrative as these were particularly organised and directed aspects of public life.

In Bury the religious life of the secular population may have been overshadowed by the pervasive religious and non-religious authority of St. Edmund's, but it centred on the town's two parish churches St. James' and St. Mary's. Topographically the two churches were situated at the centre of the town, and were integrated with the precincts of the monastery;⁶⁵ St. James' served the north part of Bury while St. Mary's covered the southern areas of the town. The sacrist of St. Edmund's was the rector of both churches, and so the responsibility for appointing clergy and receipt of tithes rested with him. That there were only two parish churches for a town with a population the size of Bury (somewhere between 3500 and 4500 in

Lydgate (EETS extra series no.107, 1911).

⁶³ Tittler *Architecture and Power* p.12.

⁶⁴ BL. Harley 4626 ff.22v-23v.

the 15th century) is perhaps unusual, as Norwich, with a population of approximately 12000, had forty-six parish churches.⁶⁶ Both churches, in terms of the dedications of their altars, indicate popularity for similar cults: Dinn claims that both had altars dedicated to the Holy trinity, Saints Mary,⁶⁷ Thomas, Peter, John the Baptist, Lawrence, and to the Holy Name of Jesus.⁶⁸ Obviously not all of these altars were in operation at the same time, they would probably have appeared and disappeared as their popularity developed; a will of 1452 refers to the presence of six sub-altars beside the high altar in St. James',⁶⁹ and Margaret Odeham's will of 1492 refers to six in St. Mary's.⁷⁰

	1346-1399	1400-1449	1450-1493
Total no. wills giving to St. Mary priest/Mary mass of one or both churches	235	316	228
% of total testators	62.5%	45.7%	39.8%
Total no. testators	376	691	573

Table 3.7: Number of Bury testators making bequests to one or more St. Mary Priests or Mary masses in Bury.

The clergy staffing each church consisted of a parish priest, a St. Mary priest to say the Mary mass at the St. Mary altar, a 'Morrowmass' priest to sing the daily matins, and three parish clerks.⁷¹ Throughout the vast majority of the Bury wills bequests are made to the parochial clergy, and a strict order of precedence is followed, with the parish priest being followed by the St. Mary priest who in turn is followed by the parish clerks.⁷² The St. Mary priests seem to have been popular with Bury testators, particularly in the early 15th century, and may have been supported solely by the charity of their parishioners.⁷³

⁶⁵ See Figure 3.4.

⁶⁶ York too had a large number of parishes for its population, with one church for every 200 people; while East Anglian towns such as Lynn and Yarmouth, which had larger populations than Bury, had only one parish by the 16th century; Dinn *Popular Religion* p.136.

⁶⁷ Although the St. Mary altar in St. Mary's was also dedicated to St. Martin.

⁶⁸ St. James' also had altars dedicated to Saints Margaret, Stephen and Anne; while St. Mary's had altars to Saints Edward the Confessor (described as new in 1468, BSERO Hawlee f.118), James, George and Wulfstan, as well as a Resurrection altar; Dinn *Popular Religion* Table 4.1 p.138. The will of John Redgys chaplain of Bury in 1432 indicates that St. Mary's also had a St. Stephen altar which had an ornamented chest to which the testator committed his great Portiforum, BSERO Osbern f.202. Perhaps due to the choice of periods from which he has selected wills, Dinn also seems to have missed a St. Michael altar in St. James' in the latter half of the 14th century, which by the 1430s was still popular enough to be having a new panel commissioned for it; BSERO Osbern ff.3, 3v, 6, 12, 44, 145v, 199.

⁶⁹ BSERO Hawlee f.40v.

⁷⁰ BSERO Pye f.8.

⁷¹ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.142-4.

⁷² Although towards the end of the 15th century the number and size of bequests made to the parish priests of Bury (as distinguished from the St. Mary priests) decline; Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.387-90.

⁷³ No entries appear in the sacrist's accounts for stipends for the St. Mary priests, and the frequency with

The parish clergy of Bury were, as elsewhere, clearly significant members of the population, often ranking among the wealthiest individuals in the town.⁷⁴ Many of the town's clergy came from prominent Bury families, some of which may have had links with senior officials of the monastery. The town also enjoyed the presence of a number of other stipendary priests, particularly those associated with various chapels, chantries and gilds, which may have augmented the service provided by the town's small number of beneficed clergy.⁷⁵ The College of priests in Bury provided a residence for secular clergy, and it is possible that this particular institution proved especially valuable to the secular community as it had been created and endowed largely by laity and secular clergy, and was almost entirely free from the authority of St. Edmund's. Chapels were located at all of the town's gates,⁷⁶ and many of the town's six hospitals had chapels of their own.⁷⁷ There were also a number of chapels within the town walls, including that of the St. Margaret gild in Southgate Street, that of the College and that of the gaol.⁷⁸ There were also a number of private chapels founded by the wealthiest individuals in Bury. John Baret in his will of 1463 refers to a chapel in one of his new properties,⁷⁹ while Elizabeth Drury in her 1475 will makes a number of bequests to her servant William Coke and his wife including "the second chaunge of my aulter in the chapell & the hede of Seynt Johne & ymage of the Trynite".⁸⁰ John Parfey's will of 1509 refers to a chapel and yard adjoining the new property he leaves as almshouses.⁸¹ Similarly the 1524 will of Robert Blakman indicates that he had had his own chapel during his lifetime.⁸²

Chantry chaplains augmented the townsmen's access to religious activities, and Bury was well endowed with chantries. In the 14th century chantries were founded only in the wills of Bury's richest testators, but during the 15th and early 16th centuries chantries of varying duration were more commonly found in the wills of the lesser townsmen as well. In many instances chantries were founded by testators with no family.⁸³

which they appear as beneficiaries might suggest that this was how they made their livings. The Morrowmass priest is named as a recipient in far fewer wills: an example can be seen in BSERO Hoode f.150

⁷⁴ At least according to the questionable indicator of distinguishing wealth through the bequests made to the high altar; Dinn *Popular Religion* p.142.

⁷⁵ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.161. For a list of Bury clergy see Appendix VII.

⁷⁶ Lady chapels were located at the Risbygate (BSERO Osbern f.125; Hawlee ff.60, 86), the Westgate and the Eastgate bridge, while a chapel dedicated to St. Thomas could be found outside Northgate. There was also a chapel dedicated to St. John the Evangelist at the Southgate, BSERO Hawlee f.76. By the early 16th century there was a St. Nicholas chapel at the Eastgate, PCC Prob. 11/15 f.93.

⁷⁷ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.156-7.

⁷⁸ See Margaret Odeham's will for the chapel in the gaol, BSERO Pye f.8.

⁷⁹ BSERO Hawlee f.95.

⁸⁰ BSERO Hawlee f.219.

⁸¹ PCC Prob 11/16 f.171. Part of the revenue from the almshouses is to be used to maintain the chapel.

⁸² BSERO Hoode f.115.

⁸³ 50% of testators founding chantries between 1346 and 1417 had no surviving children to make bequests to, while in the period 1452-93 it was 45.7%. For the same periods the percentage of testators

There were at least five perpetual chantries operating in Bury: those of John Smyth at the St. John's and St. Mary's altars of St. Mary's;⁸⁴ that of Margaret Odeham founded in 1492; that of Robert Eriswell dating from the mid-15th century;⁸⁵ and that of Adam Newehawe founded in 1496.⁸⁶ All of these founders were substantial members of the town's elite, and all were involved in the public affairs of the town. The stipend paid to Bury chantry priests seems to have been fixed at eight marks, despite the fact that it had been fixed at seven marks by archbishop Sudbury in 1378.⁸⁷ It is perhaps striking that there are no examples of any chantry being founded in the church of St. Edmund's.⁸⁸

	1346-1417	1452-93	Total
Total no. testators	582	332	914
Testators founding chantries	61	92	152
% of total	10.5%	27.7%	16.6%
Male testators founding chantries	53	72	124
Female testators founding chantries	8	20	28
Testators with no surviving spouse	23	35	58
Testators with no surviving children	30	42	72
Testators with no surviving spouse nor surviving children	18	20	38

Table 3.8: Testators founding chantries in Bury St Edmunds c.1346-1417 and 1452-93.

The support for the parish life of Bury shown by the secular community extended not only to the parish clergy, but also to the buildings, and new works and repairs are evident in the Bury wills.⁸⁹ An interesting aspect of these contributions to church building works was that parish boundaries do not seem to have been a factor in donations; so that during the major reconstruction of St. James' that took place between 1491 and 1530, approximately a third of

with no surviving spouse nor heirs was 30% and 21.7% respectively. See Tables 3.8 and 3.9.

⁸⁴ See pp.200-2.

⁸⁵ Eriswell's chantry does not appear in Tables 3.8 or 3.9: it is mentioned in the will of Thomas Hert of 1478, BSERO Hawlee f.245.

⁸⁶ BSERO Pye f.49v. William Warde chaplain of Bury in his will of 1417 required that his executors and the executors of Roger Rose, once alderman of Bury and also the 'master' of Warde, were to found a chantry at the St. Michael altar of St. James' church for the souls of Warde, Roger Rose, Agnes and Katherine his wives, and Agnes the servant of Rose. The duration of the chantry is not stated but as it is to be funded from the sale of lands belonging to Rose, with the moneys to be kept in a chest with keys given to the executors of Warde and Rose, it is likely that it was intended to be perpetual; BSERO Osbern f.145v.

⁸⁷ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.699.

⁸⁸ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.712.

⁸⁹ Of course the lifetime contributions of the parishioners to the upkeep of their churches was probably more substantial than that which is evident in their wills. For a detailed discussion of the works undertaken on St. James' and St. Mary's, and the bequests made to them, see Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.390-9. See also Paine, C. *St. Mary's, Bury St Edmunds* (Bury St Edmunds, 1986) *passim*; and Statham, M. *St. Edmundsbury Cathedral* (Pitkin pictorial guide; 1993).

donors to the project were parishioners of St. Mary's.⁹⁰ The visual splendour of the parish churches also seems to have been a concern of the secular community, as a number of Bury testators made bequests to edify the church buildings, or to provide new furnishings, equipment or images.⁹¹

	1346-1417	1452-93	Total
Total no. testators	582	332	914
Testators founding chantries	61	92	152
% of total	10.5%	27.7%	16.6%
No. of testators founding 1 chantry	53	85	138
No. of testators founding 2 chantries	5	6	11
No. of testators founding 3 chantries	1	1	2
No. of testators founding 6 chantries	1	0	1
Total no. of chantries founded	72	100	172
No. of chantries lasting ½ year	1	3	4
No. of chantries lasting 1 year	47	54	101
No. of chantries lasting 2 years	13	20	33
No. of chantries lasting 3 years	4	5	9
No. of chantries lasting 4-10 years	6	14	19
No. of chantries lasting 11-20 years	1	0	1
No. of perpetual chantries	1	4	5

Table 3.9: Number and duration of chantries founded by Bury testators c.1346-1417 and 1452-93.

Donations made by testators to St. Edmund's, like those to the parish priests of St. Mary's and St. James', declined from the mid-15th century.⁹² At the same time donations made to the Franciscan friary at Babwell increased in frequency.⁹³ What support the abbey did receive in the 15th century came from either the town's secular clergy,⁹⁴ or from the wealthier burgesses of the town, who needed the legitimisation of St. Edmund's official authority, and indeed who often had family links with the monastic community.⁹⁵ Many of the wealthiest burgesses became members of the abbey's lay confraternity. The ritual of the White Bull procession seems to have been somewhat uncharacteristic of the normal state of relations between town and abbey, as the preparation and enactment of the event relied upon co-operation between

⁹⁰ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.396-7.

⁹¹ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.399-404.

⁹² Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.430-3.

⁹³ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.443.

⁹⁴ Secular clergy provided twice as many donations to St. Edmund's as laity. Many of the secular clergy were employed by St. Edmund's; Dinn *Popular Religion* p.437.

⁹⁵ For example Margaret Banyard left cash and rosary beads to her son Thomas Bonysaunth, monk of St. Edmund's; BSERO Hawlee f.320

the monastic and secular communities, and effectively symbolised the idealistic unity of the two. In relation to this, it is perhaps also worth noting that despite the history of violent opposition between town and abbey, and the fact that the sacrist (the chief proponent of abbey authority in the town) was the recipient of all tithes paid to the parishes, there is no record of any tithe dispute taking place in Bury.⁹⁶

Various cults seem to have been important within the religious interests of the secular community, especially the cults of the Trinity,⁹⁷ Christ and manifestations of the crucifix,⁹⁸ and various Marian cults.⁹⁹ The latter seem to have been the most popular in Bury: both parish churches had chapels and altars dedicated to the Virgin; and as there were no Marian relics anywhere in the town, the secular community may have relied upon images (some of which may have accrued the status of relics themselves).¹⁰⁰ The popularity of the Marian cult among the town's laity can be seen in the fact that the Virgin constituted the most popular dedication of Bury's guilds, as well as of the non-parochial chapels whose dedications are known.¹⁰¹ The dedication of the Candlemas guild, Bury's most exclusive social guild and the town's *de facto* civic government is perhaps an indication of the extent of the popularity of Marian cults, and the feast of Candlemas seems to have been significant and publicly celebrated in the town.¹⁰²

Other cults that appear to have been popular in Bury include the purely local, such as St. Edmund king and martyr, and 'St. Robert', the Bury boy supposedly murdered by Jews at the end of the 12th century.¹⁰³ In the 15th century there was some kind of 'revel' associated with one of the two feast days of St. Edmund,¹⁰⁴ for which John Benale in 1493 and Thomas Pykerel in 1509 left costumes in their wills.¹⁰⁵ Part of the St. Edmund's feast day celebrations also included the 'White Bull' procession, a ritual where sterile wives of Bury laid hands on

⁹⁶ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.387.

⁹⁷ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.184-6.

⁹⁸ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.196-203. Especially popular were cults connected with the Holy or Sweet Name of Jesus, the Five Wounds, and Corpus Christi. Bury had a Corpus Christi procession and pageant by 1477 which was sustained by the town's weavers; BSERO B 9/1/12.

⁹⁹ Gibson, G.M. 'Bury St Edmunds, Lydgate and the N-Town cycle' in *Speculum* (no.56, 1981) pp.71-4.

¹⁰⁰ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.200-2. Both churches also housed lights dedicated to St. Mary. References to Marian images in all three churches in Bury can be found at: BSERO Osbern ff.90, 92; BSERO Hawlee ff.9, 67, 82, 95, 108, 113, 116.

¹⁰¹ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.204-5. This popularity was also perhaps a reason for the support of the St. Mary priest and the Mary mass in the parish churches: see Table 3.7.

¹⁰² See Appendix II for the feasts to be held on Candlemas day by the Candlemas guild.

¹⁰³ Dinn points out that the vast majority of preambles in the Bury wills make no reference to specific saints other than St. Mary, *Popular Religion* p.213. Lydgate wrote a verse prayer to St. Robert which emphasises the local nature of the saint; MacCracken *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate* p.139. The 1520 shrinekeeper's accounts show that there was a St. Robert's guild and a celebration on his feast day; BSERO A 6/1/17.

¹⁰⁴ The feast of his martyrdom on November 20th, and of his Translation on April 29th.

the specially reared bull in the hope of becoming fertile.¹⁰⁶ There were two guilds dedicated to St. Edmund in the 14th century, although none in the 15th century; and it is perhaps significant that there were no altars or chapels dedicated to the saint in either parish church. The most popular cult of non-local saints was that of St. John the Baptist: both churches had altars dedicated to him, and there were five guilds in the 14th and 15th centuries.¹⁰⁷ The cult of St. Nicholas may not have been very popular in Bury as there were no altars or lights dedicated to him in the town, but the prestigious Dusse guild was dedicated to him, and the town is known to have conducted a 'boy-bishop' ritual.¹⁰⁸ The bishop St. Botolph provided a number of relics for the abbey as well as a guild which was one of the most popular with the town's testators.¹⁰⁹ Other saints with masses, chapels, altars or guilds dedicated to them included Saints Thomas Becket, Anne (an East Anglian patroness and Bury's most popular female saint), Lawrence and Peter.¹¹⁰

The religious experience of the townsmen seems to have been of a most entirely orthodox manner. Bury had some experience of eremiticism, at least in the 15th century: the record of the enclosure of Emma Cheyne, 46 year old anchoress of St. Peter's Cornhill in London, alludes to the fact that she had been the wife of Peter Cheyne of Bury St Edmunds who had been known as a recluse.¹¹¹ Peter Cheyne was enclosed by the abbot in a newly built structure adjacent to St. James' in March 1429.¹¹² Similarly there seems to have been little evidence of heresy in the town: apart from the very interesting trial of Robert Berd chaplain in 1429 for his possession of the text *Dives and Pauper*;¹¹³ and the residence in Bury of the supposedly inspirational mother of the early 16th century Colchester Lollard John Pykas,¹¹⁴ there seems to have been no record of any widespread heterodoxy in the town.

¹⁰⁵ BSERO Pye ff.25, 208.

¹⁰⁶ The White Bull procession continued in Bury until 1533. The bull was led by monks from the abbey meadow at Haberdon (near the Southgate) to the gates of St. Edmund's, with the women stroking its sides as they went. The wives then entered the abbey church to pray and offer at the shrine of the saint. 15th and 16th century leases of Haberdon manor record that the tenants were responsible for providing a white bull for the festival; Gibson, G.M. *Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 1989) pp.45-6. The sacrist's accounts for 1429 records a payment of 11s 8d connected with the White Bull procession; BSERO A6/1/6 p.2.

¹⁰⁷ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.224-5. There are also several references to images (especially 'heads') of St. John: for example BSERO Hawlee f.219, BSERO Pye f.169, BSERO Hoode f.97.

¹⁰⁸ The sacrist's accounts for 1419 and 1429 record 12d payments made as part of the ceremony: BSERO A6/1/5 p.9; BSERO A6/1/6 p.7.

¹⁰⁹ Wills with bequests to the St Botolph guild include BSERO Osbern ff.16, 23v, 74, 84, 96v, 104, 114v, 122v, 123v, 127v, 145v, 177, 263v; BSERO Hawlee ff.32v, 59v, 69v, 87, 146, 210, 236, 302v, 303, 325; BSERO Pye f.146v.

¹¹⁰ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.229-32.

¹¹¹ CPR 1446-52 vol.5 p.304. I am grateful to Paul Lee for drawing my attention to this reference.

¹¹² BL. Add. 14848. He died shortly after this.

¹¹³ See below pp.248-9. The trial is recorded in Tanner, N.P. *Heresy trials in the diocese of Norwich 1428-31* (Camden Society fourth series; no.20, 1977) p.98.

¹¹⁴ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.264. She was supposed to have taught her son Lollard doctrine against the sacraments, and gave him a copy of Paul's Epistles in English.

Religious attitudes seem to have been expressed and disseminated within the context of the family, with personal elements of religious activity being reserved and transferred to family members: thus the will material indicates that testators donating religious images or beads, for example, usually did so to immediate family.¹¹⁵ At a personal level, it appears that some individuals may have had appointed places in their parish church where they were accustomed to sit during services.¹¹⁶

Dinn views the religious experience of the secular community of Bury as largely being one of institutional orthodoxy coloured by local tradition and diversity, with the blend being essentially dynamic in nature.¹¹⁷ He also detects a transition in religious authority from the monastic community to the secular in the 15th century, as the latter adopt and support various institutionalised aspects of Bury's religious life (such as the St. Mary priests, the endowment of the College and so on).¹¹⁸

The difficulty of discussing pre-mortem charity in a religious context extends equally to charity in social or civic contexts, especially in an urban setting like Bury where lifetime charity could have been facilitated by the various guilds of the town, as well as the works of St. Edmund's (particularly through the office of the almoner). Dinn's analysis of charitable bequests in his selection of Bury wills suggests a few general trends: that gender was probably not a factor in gift giving; that the richer testators were more likely to make charitable bequests than the poorer, as they had greater disposable wealth as well as a greater spiritual need for justifying that wealth; and that in general the recipients of charity in Bury reflect the spiritual concerns of the testator rather than any local social condition.¹¹⁹ The frequency of charitable bequests declined at the beginning of the 16th century in Bury, and this may have been a purely local development.¹²⁰ Many of the testators making bequests to the poor of Bury are careful to stipulate that the recipients are either working, or are not homeless, in order to avoid making general doles to 'unworthy poor'.¹²¹ Sometimes the poor recipients are further categorised, such as poor clerks, scholars, maidens, prisoners and so

¹¹⁵ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp. 275, 278; see his Table 7.9, p.282. Dinn also points out that the donors of images and beads are more often women, pp.271, 278.

¹¹⁶ See for example the will of John Baret BSERO Hawlee f.95; and also BSERO Hoode ff.42, 63; BSERO Mason f.1.

¹¹⁷ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp. 217, 506-7. See also Gibson *Theater of Devotion* p.46.

¹¹⁸ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.165.

¹¹⁹ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.633-40.

¹²⁰ During the same period charitable bequests increased in frequency in London, while in Norwich there seems to have been no perceptible change in the frequency; Dinn *Popular Religion* p.635.

¹²¹ Wills that designate the types of poor to receive charity (such as poor clerks, prisoners, local poor, poor lying in their house, sick, and so on) include: BSERO Osbern ff.2v, 13, 30, 32v, 41v, 46v, 55, 60v, 63, 73, 80v, 96v, 110v, 115v, 121, 124, 127v, 131, 133, 142v, 154, 156, 168v, 174, 174v, 176; BSERO Hawlee ff.73v, 95, 156, 164, 219, 285v, 325; BSERO Pye ff.8, 123; PRO PCC Prob. 11/11 f.142; PRO PCC Prob.

on.¹²² Interestingly Dinn considers the sick and the town's hospitals to have been neglected by Bury's testators, although it is possible that he underestimates the extent to which they were remembered.¹²³

Provision for the poor in Bury in the form of almshouses seems to have been quite pronounced for a population of its size. As one would expect of people with property to dispose of, the testators providing almshouses (or mentioning almshouses they had provided before making their will) were among the richest in the community.¹²⁴ The houses themselves were to be inhabited at no cost by the poor, or rented out with the proceeds being used to support the local poor.

3.iii.c. Conclusion.

The nature of the dispute between the secular and monastic communities of Bury St Edmunds, which under went a transition from the violence of the 14th century to the political and social reorganisation and representation by the townsmen in the 15th century, was such that to a large extent it became self sustaining. In other words the resistance offered by the secular community to the authority of the abbey after the 13th century became 'traditional', an aspect of the communal identity of the townsmen. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to describe the common perception of the traditional mode of relations between town and abbey in terms of a potential store of identity which could be activated in particular periods of crisis, such as the national upheavals of 1327 and 1381. This aspect of Bury's communal identity may well be seen as a process of dramatised self representation, with the 'self' here corresponding to the perceived and symbolically represented secular community. The outbreaks of violence, and the prolonged political machinations employed by the townsmen throughout the period become almost symbolic in themselves when viewed in this light. This is perhaps especially the case in the violence of 1327, where the rebels and their demands were couched in very symbolic terms. The identity of opposition to the monastic community

11/15 f.93; PRO PCC Prob. 11/16 ff.171, 256v; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.137.

¹²² For poor clerks see BSERO Osbern f.80v; BSERO Hawlee f.64; BSERO Pye ff.103, 183. For poor scholars and maidens see BSERO Pye ff.162, 164; BSERO Hoode f.141; BSERO Mason f.26. For prisoners see pp.119-20.

¹²³ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.646. Bury wills that remember hospitals, or employees or inmates of hospitals, can be found at: BSERO Osbern ff.3, 8v, 21, 21v, 22, 36v, 39, 41, 45v, 52v, 57v, 69, 81, 81v, 85v, 89v, 115v, 127v, 157, 163v, 168v, 183, 200; and BSERO Hawlee ff.6, 26, 35, 45v, 55v, 91v, 145v, 183v, 210, 264 and 272. See also Tymms *Bury Wills* p.137. Bury wills making bequests to the sick, lepers or specifically *bedridden* poor can be found at: BSERO Osbern ff.8v, 20v, 25, 27, 30v, 32v, 33v, 34v, 40v, 41, 41v, 46v, 51, 60v, 63, 74, 80v, 96v, 127v, 131, 133, 137v, 142v, 154, 157, 157v, 163v, 195v; BSERO Hawlee ff.95, 156; and BSERO Pye ff.8 and 123.

¹²⁴ Examples of almshouses can be found in: BSERO Hawlee f.35; BSERO Pye ff.74, 214; BSERO Hoode f.45.

suggests that a constituent element of the animosity was a sense of history: this is an aspect of the identity that could be exploited at times of political crisis, remaining latent until re-introduced into the discourse by the community's leaders at appropriate times.

Understanding the symbolic nature of the dispute, that factor which allowed its perpetuation throughout the period, makes it possible to see the connections between the dispute and communal identity; and, from this, the relationship between the dispute and individual identity.

Relating identity to the symbolic nature of the dispute forms a vital part of the process of considering the reality of the internal conflicts in Bury, as one has to be aware that the large body of material surviving from these events is effectively an exercise in representation. This is as true of the smaller number of records emanating from the secular community as it is for the registers, chronicles and legal records produced by the monastic officials. It is necessary to read against the accounts of events as produced within the discourse itself, as motivated polemical interest clearly informs the description. In other words one has to bring an awareness of the forms of representation brought to the production of the material *from within Bury* to the material: it is perhaps ironic that in a study of identity one has to read against the active constructions of identity encapsulated in the sources, so as to gain a more transparent understanding of the *mentalités* behind the constructive processes.

Chapter 4: A Model of Communal Identity: the Elite of Bury St Edmunds.

4.i. Identification and reconstruction of the elite of Bury St Edmunds.

4.i.a. The reasons for constructing models of identity.

Reconstructing the identity or identities of individuals from the past is one of the most difficult activities faced by the historian, and yet it is probably at the root of every type of historical examination which involves people and their interactions. When we look at how particular events happened we are implicitly concerned with *why* they happened as they did; and to understand this it is necessary to conceptualise the behaviour of the events' protagonists in terms of the meanings they attributed to their relationships with their culture and other individuals, and the identities they derived from them. For the purposes of this study it is an important step to arrive at a perception of what it meant to be a townsman in Bury St Edmunds, both to the individual and to those from within and without the community he interacted with, as from this one may be able to speculate about motivation and agency, and thus the construction of identity. To theorise the symbiotic relationship between culture and individual identity is ambitious, but ultimately it is a necessary exercise firstly because there is no way to separate the two, and secondly because apart from culture (as manifested in the behaviour of other individuals) there is no other referent from which an individual's identity can be drawn.¹ When the culture in question is only intermittently realised to us through glimpses of individual behaviour within institutional structures like those of 15th century urban communities, the difficulties are multiplied.² In other words the lack of direct experiential evaluation of a culture necessarily inhibits the commentator's attempts to say anything about his subject. On the other hand it can be argued that the alienation of culture and commentator might actually facilitate the use of sociological and ethnographical methodologies in appreciating his subject without being 'too close' to it. Culture is 'visual and public', and what is obvious to contemporaries should be occasionally

¹ Communities, and the culture that pervades them, are where individuals 'learn' social relationships. People understand others' relationships by referring to their own, and thus to some extent impose their own meanings on others' behaviour; Cohen, A.P. *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London, 1985) pp.15, 40, 70-4.

² "... the past is utterly alien to the present, ... the citizens of sixteenth-century Rome or Bologna were as different from us as are the tribes of the New Guinea highlands."; E. Muir 'Introduction: Observing Trifles' in Muir, E. and Ruggiero, G. eds. *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore and London, 1991) p.xi.

apparent to us.³

So from this position we need a means by which the investigation into the construction of identity can be opened. One of the more immediately applicable methods which combine elements of qualitative and quantitative techniques might be the manufacture of sociological models of individuals based upon what can be known about their social status, personal wealth, religious affiliations and so on. Despite the difficulties involved in the process of describing a putative model, as a unit of analysis it constitutes a useful 'foundation' from which a discussion can be started. Essentially the model's utility as a tool comes from the potential it provides as a norm against which examples derived from the evidence can be studied in contraposition. If the artificial model is in some way a sociological amalgam of individuals in a given community, a kind of ethnographically derived *homunculus* or Frankenstein's monster, then individuals can be placed alongside it and assessed in a qualitative fashion. Divergence from the model may be taken as evidence of individuality (although clearly no specific individual case will exactly match the 'typical' model); and it is from this divergence that we can explicate case studies of the construction and dissemination of identity.

In the case of late medieval communities there is a tendency for the process of modelling the townsmen to incline towards the community's elite, in apparent contrast to the ethos and goals of microhistory.⁴ This is an unavoidable corollary of using material that is often more concerned with the higher social ranks: it is a truism that the more prominent and publicly involved an individual is among his or her community, the more likely it is that they will appear in contemporary records.⁵ There were elements of identity that marked out urban elites from their communities which were intricately bound up with contemporary perceptions of urban and civic living, and which form the visible result of processes of identification and assimilation of culture by those individuals aspiring to elite status. A model using information taken from large series of data is likely to emphasise this inherent bias. While this is an underlying trend that ought to be borne in mind, it is perhaps an asset to this current study, because as an investigation into issues surrounding the construction and promulgation of identity and authority, it is likely to rely upon studies of individuals numbered among the elite. This is largely because it was the individuals from the top of the

³ Phythian-Adams, C. *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1978) p.112.

⁴ "The ideal result would be a prosopography from below in which the relationships, decisions, restraints, and freedoms faced by real people in actual situations would emerge". Muir 'Introduction: Observing Trifles' pp.ix-x.

⁵ That is, we simply know more about the elite of any community; Sacks, D. *The Widening Gate: Bristol*

social pyramid that were involved in affairs of a conspicuously public nature, through their civic social interaction. Consequently concerns with reputation, which is intimately interconnected with identity and authority, are likely to have been most prominent among those individuals favoured by the evidence. In other words, while it is true that the 'lost people' that microhistorians aspire to locate would also have been aware of their identity insofar as the socially binding concept of reputation was concerned, it is more likely that the elite would have had the opportunity to be actively engaged in the conscious design and enactment of identity. They certainly would have had more access to the mechanisms of urban communal life (such as the civic offices and ceremonial events) as well as the financial security which would have been crucial to enacting their reflexive designs of constructed identity.

As far as a model is concerned what is required is a mechanism that allows the identification and reconstruction of the elite over a period of time, and at any given specific moment. In other words the model constructed has to be flexible enough to accommodate changes over time in the social and economic context of the community being examined. This means that the categorisation of data for the purposes of establishing norms has to be as generic as possible, so that the same terms or categories can apply during any period. The aspects of the model's public life might include information regarding ranges of wealth, civic office and legal reputation (i.e. whether he appears in any instance of legal or civic reprimand); while the private life may be abstractly represented, for example, through indicators of religious or literary interests. Networks of social connections would likely figure in both representations. The model is also likely to be limited by gender, simply due to the relative obscurity of women in the material. Where women do appear in the evidence as anything other than recipients of bequests, they are often of a particular social type, characterised by wealth, multiplex connections with important burghal families, a wide range of types of contacts, and a pious inclination. In Bury St Edmunds the model is also likely to reveal an unrepresentative identity in terms of life-cycle, as the majority of evidence (effectively in the absence of any other) has been taken from testamentary material,⁶ with the result that the individuals represented are usually older and at the latter end of their social, economic and occupational careers. However this would constitute a more serious problem if models were to be manufactured of townsmen from different communities using different types of data; as it is, the process is a community-specific one, and this must be taken into account when comparing models built for different communities.

and the Atlantic Economy, 1450-1700 (London, 1991) p.161.

⁶ Other sources such as calendars of royal records, abbey rentals and accounts, gild and civic customs have also been used, although these enable further detail to be added to the model only at times when they are available.

The following model employs a range of criteria to determine the elite of Bury St Edmunds, in order to avoid relying too heavily upon a single factor. Such reliance in effect pre-determines those individuals who are included in the elite in any discussion of community. For instance, Dinn relies upon high altar bequests to divide his sample of testators, in order to discuss religious practices that he identifies in Bury in terms of the elite or popular: any practice undertaken by those who leave the largest amounts to the high altar he takes to be an elite custom. By examining a range of areas of urban experience which are both easily accessible from the testamentary material, and likely to be influenced by social status, this chapter seeks to avoid such prescriptive divisions. The approach taken here is rather that elite status is likely to be perceived by contemporaries as the fulfilling of a significant number of a wide variety of criteria, and that the historian seeking to reconstruct the nature of this group of individuals should be sensitive to as wide a range of different indicators as possible. This approach is particularly important in Bury, where the lack of a list of office-holders removes one of the most readily-available gauges of the relative social status of individuals. However, the additional subtlety which it permits can be seen as being desirable even where such evidence is available.

4.ii. Identity in Bury St Edmunds.

4.ii.a. Facets of identity: evidence.

This section will present a number of aspects of identity that are specific to late medieval Bury St Edmunds, although the means of arriving at them are not. The intention is to construct a 'jigsaw' of identity that pieces together various elements of individuals' lives across the period in order to build a composite picture of a 'typical' Bury townsman. The model thus produced will provide some indication of an individual's identity as perceived by his contemporaries: the model will illuminate trends in certain aspects of life as lived in Bury St Edmunds, and the relation of any given individual to these trends should prove informative regarding his standing within the community. In other words, comparison of a real, historical individual from Bury with the composite model of a Bury townsman will elicit similarities and differences, and those similarities and differences can be used to speculate about that individual's interaction with his community, and how he was perceived by that community.

The first element to be considered in reconstructing the elite of Bury comprises a reference for the extent to which an individual was immersed in the public affairs of the town. A table might be drawn up which indicates the number of instances in which an individual appears in the records.¹ When someone is recorded in any form of document it marks an interaction between his social activities and the legal and institutional structures that bound that person into the community. Frequent appearance in the records might indicate an active public life, either in terms of involvement in institutional structures of communal life, or in terms of commercial or occupational activity. Appearance in the testamentary material indicates membership of different networks, although the types and extent of those networks cannot usually be determined from single wills. What is more, frequent appearance in the material used for this model (ie primarily testamentary) suggests a high social profile and perceived authority. For instance, a testator is likely to choose as an executor a local figure of status with the capacity and connections to facilitate your will.

Within the scope of the material examined for Bury it appears from Table 4.1 that the vast majority of individuals only appear in a single document, and while this is more likely to say something about the evidence rather than the scale or frequency of social interaction, it is not

¹ This aspect of the model is of course contingent upon the nature, scale and diversity of material examined.

very helpful as a means of differentiating individuals within a community. However, it may prove that examining the number of documents in which an individual appears is the crudest of means by which the elite can be identified from the rest of the community. It is logical to assume that the elite, almost by definition those with a vested interest in taking a prominent role in the town's affairs, would appear more conspicuously in the records of those affairs.

No. of appearances in records by same individual	No. of individuals ²	% of total no. of individuals	No. of appearances in records by same individual	No. of individuals	% of total no. of individuals
1	6940	76.65%	16	6	< 1%
2	1056	11.66%	17	10	< 1%
3	407	4.5%	18	4	< 1%
4	208	2.3%	19	6	< 1%
5	114	1.26%	20	11	< 1%
6	71	< 1%	21	2	< 1%
7	44	< 1%	22	5	< 1%
8	32	< 1%	23	2	< 1%
9	33	< 1%	24	2	< 1%
10	24	< 1%	25	1	< 1%
11	23	< 1%	26	3	< 1%
12	13	< 1%	28	2	< 1%
13	14	< 1%	47	1	< 1%
14	11	< 1%	59	1	< 1%
15	8	< 1%			
Total no. of individuals: 9054					

Table 4.1: Number of documents in which each Bury St Edmunds inhabitant appears c.1346-1493.

4.ii.b. Facets of identity: occupation.

A further mode of individual interaction with a community is through the experience of occupation. Social and economic activities may have been most commonly conducted through an occupational framework, and so this element of individuals' identity may have underpinned much of their interaction within the community.³ The instances of occupations connected with the manufacture, finishing or marketing of wool and cloth products recorded from Bury St Edmunds are an indication of the importance these industries for the town.⁴ Taking the period as a whole, occupations within the entrepreneur/textile marketing, textile

² The 9054 individuals have been taken from all wills registered in the sacrist's court of St. Edmund's between 1354 and 1493, as well as all other documents examined from that period, excluding those wills registered in the archdeacon of Sudbury's court which involve Bury inhabitants.

³ Sacks, D. *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450-1700* (London, 1991) p.117.

⁴ See also the table reproduced in Dinn *Popular Religion* p.111. From 1439 to 1530 Dinn finds that over a third of testators specifying an occupation were involved with textiles; while Gottfried considers six out of seven of the most common occupations were textile orientated; *Bury St Edmunds* pp.101-2, 107-21.

manufacture and clothing/furnishing manufacture categories account for 34% of all secular, craft based occupations. Table 4.2a suggests that Bury's textile workers were principally involved in trades connected with finishing cloth and marketing it, rather than in producing either the raw material or completed items of clothing.

The other substantially prominent category is that of specialist, professional and retail occupations, within which 24% of individuals with specified occupations fall across the period. As with the categories concerned with the manufacture and marketing of textiles products, there seems to be a small increase in the proportion of Bury inhabitants involved in these occupations from the 1430s onwards.⁵ The occupations listed under professional, specialist and retail are those which illustrate the urban nature of Bury, as they are the types of occupation that one would expect to find pursued in a large settlement that performed cultural and economic roles within the wider region. Even the less specialised small scale retailers listed in this category are those which would be more common within a large population where many depended on others for subsistence needs.

As Gottfried suggests,⁶ it would appear that the leather industry was in decline in Bury from the early 15th century, with a quite dramatic drop in the numbers of individuals involved from the 1440s.⁷ Occupations concerned with the provision of food and those from the building crafts employ the same proportion of Bury's inhabitants across the period, although the early part of the 15th century seems to mark differing trends for each category, with the

⁵ 25% of Bury's population were involved in occupations within this category from the 1430s onwards.

⁶ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.114-5.

⁷ Between 1346 and 1439, 23% of specified occupations were connected with leather and animal skins, while between 1440 and 1493 only 11% were.

Occupation	1346-59	1360s	1370s	1380s	1390s	1400s	1410s	1420s	1430s	1440s	1450s	1460s	1470s	1480-1	1492-3	Year unknown	Total
Entrepreneur and textile marketing																	
Draper	1	3	5	2		5		2		6	2	5	5	1	1	5	43
Grocer								1	1	4	2	3	5	2			18
Haberdasher												1					1
Linen-draper							1										1
Mercer			1	1	1	2	2	2	2	4	7	8	28	3	1	5	67
Merchant										2	1	1	1				5
Woolman										2	1	5	4	1			13
Textile manufacture																	
Embroiderer								1				1					2
Clothmaker												2	1		1		4
Dyer							2		2	1	2	2	1	1	1		12
Fuller				1	5	10	4	3	1	4	3	5	8	1		1	46
Sewster											2						2
Sherman				1			1				1	1	1			1	6
Weaver									3	3	5	13	15			1	40
Webster			1		2	9	5	5	4	3	1					3	33
Clothing/furnishing manufacture																	
Bedweaver											1	1	3	1			6
Collarmaker											3	3	4				10
Coverletweaver						1			2		1						4
Hatmaker													1				1
Heyre maker						1											1
Hosier			1									3	5	1			10
Tailor		1		1	4	2	2	4	5	3	8	11	16				57
Metal																	
Bell-founder													1				1
Blacksmith					3	3	3	1									10
Bladesmith										1		1	2				4
Cardmaker							1	1		1			2				5
Cutler				2			1	2		2	2		1			1	11
Fourbour																	1
Ironmonger	1											1				1	3
Lorymer									1		1						2
Pewterer										1							1
Plumber											1						1
Smith		1			5	4	1	1	2	1	1	3	4			2	25
Spurrier						1					1						2
Wiredrawer												1	1				2

Occupation	1346-59	1360s	1370s	1380s	1390s	1400s	1410s	1420s	1430s	1440s	1450s	1460s	1470s	1480-1	1492-3	Year unknown	Total
Food																	
Baker	2	2		2	5	2	2	2	2	3	6	3	10	1	1	5	48
Brewer										1							1
Butcher				2	6	6	3	3	3	4	2	4	7			1	41
Cook							2	2	1	1	2	3	1				12
Fisherman		1		2	2					1						3	9
Fishmonger												1	1				2
Husbandman												1	1				2
Malster												1	1				2
Leather/skin																	
Barker		1			3	4	1		5	5	7	6	1	2		1	36
Cordwainer		2	2	1	14	3	2	2	7	5		1	2			6	47
Corvisor										3	6	5	3	3		1	21
Currier					4	3	2				2	2					13
Glover					1	1	2		2	2	1		1				10
Leather dresser																1	1
Pelter				2													2
Saddler				2		4		1	2	1	1	1	2		1	1	16
Shoemaker													3				3
Skinner				1	1	1		1	1		3	1	2			1	12
Tanner																1	1
Building/wood																	
Brasier						1		1			1		4				7
Carpenter		1				1	1		1	2		5	6	1		2	20
Carver								1		1	1		3	1			7
Cooper								1				1	4				6
Glazier												2	2				4
Labourer										2	2		1				5
Mason					1	2			1	3	4	4	7	2			24
Netmaker													2				2
Roper										2		1	1				4
Roughmason													2				2
Stonemason																1	1
Thatcher							1										1
Tiler									1			1	7				9
Wheelwright						1			1			2					4
Wright					1	1	1	3	1	1	3		1				12
Official																	
Alderman				2	1		1						2				6
Bailliff		1		3	2												6
Churchwarden						3		1									4
Professional/specialist/retail																	
Attorney						1											1
Barber	1				3		1			2	8	8	8	2		1	34
Bowyer									1		1		1				3
Chandler	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	11			3	33

Occupation	1346-59	1360s	1370s	1380s	1390s	1400s	1410s	1420s	1430s	1440s	1450s	1460s	1470s	1480-1	1492-3	Year unknown	Total
Chapman			1														1
Clerk	1	1	3	1	5	13	5	4	5	13	7	18	31	10	3	9	129
Fletcher						2		1		1	1						5
Goldsmith									1			1	6			1	9
Hardwareman													1				1
Horner							1										1
Leech				1						1							2
Locksmith										1	1	1	6				9
Lymnour									1	1			1				3
Painter									2	1	1	1					5
Parchment maker							1	1	1	1							4
Paten maker										1							1
Physician													1				1
Potter					1												1
Public Notary						1		1									2
Scholar										1							1
Scribe/scrivener						2			1			1	3				7
Spicer					1		2		3		1	3	1			3	14
Other⁸																	
Apprentice						2	2					4	2			2	12
Pauper							2	2		1							5
Religious	30	41	15	31	82	87	72	54	68	72	84	94	116	18	4	57	925
Servant	10	14	3	5	22	21	28	2	1	8	7	31	29	3		15	199
Total of all non-other occupations	8	15	16	28	72	91	52	50	68	100	109	151	256	33	9	62	1120
Total of all occupations	48	70	34	64	176	201	156	108	137	181	200	280	403	54	13	136	2261

Table 4.2a: Occupations in Bury wills.⁹

⁸ This category has not been included in any of the calculations of occupational structures below.

⁹ The numbers given indicate the instances of occupations given for every *individual* (not name) in the wills of Bury testators from 1346-1493: that is, I have not just provided the occupations of testators. Instances of specified occupations have not been included from documents other than Bury wills. All the individuals whose given occupation has been included were inhabitants of Bury St Edmunds, while I have chosen not to include the non-Bury inhabitants named within Bury wills. The probate register for 1482-91 is lost.

Occupation	1346-59	1360s	1370s	1380s	1390s	1400s	1410s	1420s	1430s	1440s	1450s	1460s	1470s	1480-1	1492-3	Year unknown	Total
Entrepreneur and textile marketing																	
Category subtotal	1	3	6	3	1	7	3	5	3	18	13	23	43	7	2	10	148
% of all non-'other' occupations	13%	20%	38%	11%	1%	8%	6%	10%	4%	18%	12%	15%	17%	21%	22%	16%	13%
Textile manufacture																	
Category subtotal			1	2	7	19	12	9	10	11	14	24	26	2	2	6	145
% of all non-'other' occupations	0%	0%	6%	7%	10%	21%	23%	18%	15%	11%	13%	16%	10%	6%	22%	10%	13%
Clothing/furnishing manufacture																	
Category subtotal		1	1	1	4	4	2	4	7	3	13	18	29	2			89
% of all non-'other' occupations	0%	7%	6%	4%	6%	4%	4%	8%	10%	3%	12%	12%	11%	6%	0%	0%	8%
Metal																	
Category subtotal	1	1		2	8	8	6	5	3	6	6	6	11			5	68
% of all non-'other' occupations	13%	7%	0%	7%	11%	9%	12%	10%	4%	6%	6%	4%	4%	0%	0%	8%	6%
Food																	
Category subtotal	2	3	0	6	13	8	7	7	6	10	10	13	21	1	1	9	117
% of all non-'other' occupations	25%	20%	0%	21%	18%	9%	13%	14%	9%	10%	9%	9%	8%	3%	11%	15%	10%
Leather/skin																	
Category subtotal		3	2	6	23	16	7	4	17	16	20	16	14	5	1	12	162
% of all non-'other' occupations	0%	20%	13%	21%	32%	18%	13%	8%	25%	16%	18%	11%	5%	15%	11%	19%	14%
Building/wood																	
Category subtotal		1			2	6	3	6	5	11	11	16	40	4		3	108
% of all non-'other' occupations	0%	7%	0%	0%	3%	7%	6%	12%	7%	11%	10%	11%	16%	12%	0%	5%	10%
Official																	
Category subtotal		1		5	3	3	1	1					2				16
% of all non-'other' occupations	0%	7%	0%	18%	4%	3%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Professional/specialist/retail																	
Category subtotal	4	2	6	3	11	20	11	9	17	25	22	35	70	12	3	17	267
% of all non-'other' occupations	50%	13%	38%	11%	15%	22%	21%	18%	25%	25%	20%	23%	27%	36%	33%	27%	24%
Other																	
Category subtotal	40	55	18	36	104	110	104	58	69	81	91	129	147	21	4	74	1141
% of all occupations	83%	79%	53%	56%	59%	55%	67%	54%	50%	45%	46%	46%	36%	39%	31%	54%	50%

Table 4.2b: Occupations in Bury wills: summary by category.

Occupation	1346-59	1360s	1370s	1380s	1390s	1400s	1410s	1420s	1430s	1440s	1450s	1460s	1470s	1480-1	1492-3	Year unknown	Total
Abbot St. Edmund's					1	2	1	1					3		1		9
Anchoress												1					1
August friar							1		1			1					3
Bedeman					1												1
Canon							4	1		1	2	2	2			1	13
Canoness										1							1
Carmelite friar							1										1
Carthusian monk													1				1
Chaplain	14	27	8	16	49	56	43	31	34	45	43	35	52	7	1	41	502
College custodian				1													1
Confessor		1															1
Dominican friar	1															1	2
Franciscan friar	1				1	1	1				1		1				6
Friar	1	3	3	2	6	11	10	2	2	3	12	9	9			3	76
Hospital chaplain		1			3	1		1				1		1			8
Lyster							2										2
Master of hospital									1	1			1				3
Monk	2	1		1	2	2	5	10	16	9	4	13	13	4		4	86
Nun							5	3	4	4	4	10	6	2			38
Parish priest	1	1			1	4					3	7	5	1			23
Parson	2	1	1	1	3			1	1		2	2	1			1	16
Priest				1	2			1				3	6	1		1	15
Prior St. Edmund's												2	3		1		6
Rector	1	4		2	4	2		1	5	4	2	3	5	2		1	36
Sacrist St. Edmund's	3	2	2	5	4	3	1	1	2	3	4	3	6		1	3	43
Sacrist St. James'					2	2										1	5
Sacrist St. Mary's	2					1			1				1				5
St. Mary priest St.	1				1			1	1		1	1					6
St. M priest St. Mary's	1					1				1	6	1	1				11
Vicar			1	2	2	1											6

Table 4.2c: Religious occupations in Bury wills.¹⁰

numbers involved in food provisioning in decline, and those in building trades increasing.¹¹

A significant porportion of specified occupations fall into the 'other' category, and this is primarily due to the high number of religious occupations that appear in the Bury wills.¹² Just as the specialist occupations act as an indicator of Bury's urban status, so the high incidence of religious occupations highlight the town's role as a devtional and ecclesiastical centre. That

¹⁰ See note for Table 4.2a. Minor offices held in St. Edmund's have been elided into the category of 'monk'.

¹¹ In the period 1346-1429 'food' occupations accounted for 14% of specified trades, which dropped to 9% from 1430 to 1493. In the same periods the figures for building trades were 5% rising to 12%.

¹² See Table 4.2c.

such high figures for religious occupations are recorded from the townsmen's wills also indicates the high exposure to and experience of Bury's religious institutions.

Taking Bury's secular community across the period, it is possible to feed this information into the notional model of identity. A Bury townsman would be increasingly likely to be involved either in some process of the textiles industry, or else in one of the professional/specialist (or 'urban') trades. In the period 1346-1439 50% of Bury's inhabitants with specified occupations can be located within these categories, while between 1440 and 1493 the proportion is 58%.

If we are seeking to identify the town's elite then it is perhaps within these occupational structures that we should be looking, as it is within the 'majority' occupational group that success is likely to be reflected in (and rewarded by) status. Without the standard of office holding in Bury against which to assess status and 'success' it is of course difficult to match occupational life-cycle with social status and official authority. However of the 41 known Bury aldermen for the period 1347-1472, 14 can be identified as a mercer, merchant, draper or grocer,¹³ and 9 others, given the nature of their connections, might have pursued one of these occupations.¹⁴ These individuals are found within the entrepreneurial and textile marketing category, and so when identifying the Bury elite we should be flagging these occupations as potentially a facet of elite status within the secular community.

4.ii.c. Facets of identity: office holding and authority.

A significant factor in the construction of identity was the authority and status that came with office holding. The holding of an office, or service on a commission, can be seen as an outward sign of social and economic success.¹⁵ In Bury office holding (such as it was) was

¹³ Theobald Denham (alderman in 1348) draper, BSERO Osbern f.34v; Richard Charman (1368) draper, Osbern ff.1, 31; Richard Rougham (1375) draper, Osbern ff.11v, 36; John Osbern (1380) draper, Osbern f.38; James Marham (1392) merchant, CCR 1360-4 p.248; John Notingham (1406) grocer, BSERO H1/5/21 p.3, Osbern ff.180v, 182v, 244v, Hawlee f.95, CCR 1435-41 p.180; Richard Kyng (1421) mercer, Osbern 255v, Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.145; John Smith esquire (1423 et al) mercer, see below section 5.iii; John Edward (1432) merchant, Osbern 253v, Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.143; William Rycher (1436) draper, Hawlee f.253v, Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.147; John Thurston (1452) mercer, Hawlee ff.64v, 80; John Ayleward (1453) grocer, Hawlee ff.29v, 62, 83v, 192v; John Redgys (1455) grocer, Hawlee f.83v, Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.147; Walter Thurston (1468) mercer, Hawlee ff.125, 145, 192v, 232, BSERO H1/5/18, PRO PCC prob 11/6/32.

¹⁴ William Noreys (1361) Osbern f.1v; Adam Poyk (1362) Osbern 16v; Adam Waterward (1386) Osbern ff.54, 127v; John Tollere (1391) Osbern ff.46v, 61v; Giles Pyrye (1398) Osbern 68v; Roger Frampton (1403) Osbern f.79v; William Methwold (1410) Osbern f.225v, Hawlee f.30; Roger Messenger (1431) Hawlee f.39v; John Forster (1472) CCR 1476-85 p.329.

¹⁵ Sacks *The Widening Gate* p.162. Civic office might be seen as a sign of 'real status', where wealth and status are 'fused together in a social institution'; Phythian-Adams, C. *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1978) pp.116, 123.

reserved to the most substantial burgesses,¹⁶ but of course this was limited by the lack of official civic governmental structures and therefore offices. Nevertheless the inhabitants of Bury served on their own commissions of the peace and gaol delivery.¹⁷ The holding of civic office in any town would have been a clear indicator of high social status, probably of good reputation within the community, and certainly of wealth, all of which characterise membership of the burghal elite. In Bury the heightened symbolism attached to the office of alderman, enriched with the dynamic of dispute between town and abbey, must have served to invest the office with a degree of status and authority perhaps lacking in other towns for equivalent offices. The office of alderman had a further dimension in Bury as an institution that was secular in its provenance, notwithstanding the abbot's customary and oft-disputed right of veto, unlike the more functional monastically controlled office of bailiff.

Two other sources might also be usefully employed to model official status within Bury's secular elite: the enfeoffments made by John Smyth esquire in the late 15th century, and the records of the processes of reconciliation and retribution that took place after the major 14th century uprisings in the town.¹⁸ Admission to the enfeoffment of John Smyth esquire was reserved to the 24 most substantial burgesses of the town, and promotion to this status was regulated by quasi-civic ordinances.¹⁹ Involvement in the enfeoffment also meant the participation of the feoffee in many of the ceremonies of the exclusive Candlemas gild, as indicated in the latter's ordinances. The burgesses chosen to make pledges and bonds in the aftermath of the risings of 1327 and 1381, as well as assessing and collecting the fines imposed by the king and the abbot of St. Edmund's, were so nominated by reason of being the most substantial of the community.²⁰

For the model of the Bury elite it is necessary to identify contemporary replacements for the role of office holding as an aspect of identity and indicator of status, due to the lack of civic governmental structures in the town. While it is possible that surrogate civic 'offices' were built around hierarchies within gild structures, the evidence for this is sketchy. However, it is possible to identify three groups of candidates: the aldermen, the 15th and 16th century feoffees of John Smyth esquire and Candlemas gild brethren, and those induced to act as intermediaries between town and royal and monastic authority in the 13th and 14th centuries.

¹⁶ Lobel *The Borough* p.92.

¹⁷ MacCulloch, D. *Suffolk and the Tudors: Politics and Religion in an English County 1500-1600* (Oxford, 1986) p.27. Records of such commissions appear in the CPR and CCR.

¹⁸ For more details of the former see pp.209-18; for the latter see pp.104-7, 110-12.

¹⁹ See Appendix I for a list of feoffees of John Smyth's grants; and Appendix II for the Candlemas gild ordinances from BL. Harley 4626 containing the regulations for the transfer of the enfeoffment.

²⁰ For example see Lobel 1381 pp.211-12 for details of a large number of substantial burgesses appearing

4.ii.d. Facets of identity: gild affiliations.

	1346-1399	1400-1449	1450-93 ²¹	Total
Total no. of testators	376	691	573	1640
Testators making bequests to gilds	23	31	49	103
% of testators making bequests to gilds	6.12%	4.49%	8.55%	6.28%
Testators making bequests to:				
1 gild	19	21	32	72
2 gilds	4	3	13	20
2 gilds incl. 1 or more outside Bury	0	2	0	2
3 gilds	0	4	1	5
3 gilds incl. 1 or more outside Bury	0	0	1	1
4 gilds	0	1	1	2
4 gilds incl. 1 or more outside Bury	0	0	0	0
5 gilds	0	0	0	0
5 gilds incl. 1 or more outside Bury	0	0	1	1
Total	23	31	49	103

Table 4.3: Bequests by Bury testators to gilds 1346-1493.

Testamentary bequests made to occupational or social/religious gilds or to the members of gilds have been taken to indicate membership on the part of the testator.²² Membership of gilds must have comprised one of the most concrete delineators of identity in urban communities, as it brought the individual into contact with others on various overlapping occupational, economic, social, civic, symbolic and spiritual levels. Participation within these groups in Bury was perhaps more closely regulated than in any other sphere of public life, as they may have served to compensate for the lack of the socially cohesive force of a civic government. The formal nature of relationships within gilds (particularly at times of ceremonial observance) prescribed by ordinances and overseen by officials, provided a structure within which individuals could rise and progress as a result of enduring membership or occupational and financial success. Roles within the gilds were apportioned according to status, and in a town lacking an official governmental hierarchy this must have had an effect upon the explication of identity and status. Furthermore, gild membership was not only an indicator of status, but was also a vehicle to developing status, through the multiplex nature of social connections that gild membership engendered.

at Chancery to make recognisances for the fine levied; or Lobel 1327 p.224 for the most substantial burghal families spared from excommunication during the 1327 rising.

Table 4.3 suggests that only a small proportion of Bury inhabitants belonged to guilds, and that certainly only a few belonged to more than one guild. However the testamentary evidence for guild membership certainly under-represents the reality of the situation, as guild involvement in the funeral and remembrance rituals of dead brethren were often regulated by the ordinances of the guild and so would not be requested in the will.²³ Guilds certainly did play a role in the public life of Bury: in the late 14th century there were at least 18 craft and socio-religious guilds active;²⁴ and in the late 15th century a high level of membership is implied in the ordinances of the weavers' and coverletweavers' guilds.²⁵ Of course as far as guild membership enhancing status was concerned, membership of the Candlemas guild marked entry into the elite of the secular community. However the model would indicate that guild membership was not a component of identity for every inhabitant of Bury by any means, and it has been suggested that it was generally the province of Bury's wealthier testators.²⁶ This is probably a safe assertion as the commitments incumbent upon the guild member included often significant and regular financial contributions; and indeed membership usually relied upon the achievement of certain levels of status in a craft or social structure. It is unlikely that the model townsman of Bury would be a member of more than one guild, and very unlikely that any but the wealthiest townsman would belong to a guild outside Bury.

4.ii.e. Facets of identity: religious identity.

The use of testamentary materials to model identity is much more suited to modelling the spiritual or devotional aspects of the subjects' lives. Wills can often provide substantial information regarding the individual's experience and preferences of religious institutions, practices and trends.

In Bury a number of general trends can be ascertained with regard to the religious element of the townsmen's social experience. The parochial clergy of St. Mary's and St. James' were among the most common religious recipients of Bury wills, with almost every testator remembering the parish priests and parish clerks.²⁷ This was complemented by local support for the St. Mary priests, and Table 3.7 indicates the local support for the Mary mass cult and the secular clergy that administered it, although as the period progressed the popularity of

²¹ A probate register covering 1482-91 is lost.

²² Indeed testamentary bequests were often a condition of guild membership; Dinn *Popular Religion* p.324.

²³ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.325. See also Toulmin-Smith, L. and Brentano, L. eds. *English Guilds* (EETS old series no.40, 1870) pp.35-8.

²⁴ The 1389 Chancery guild certificates, PRO C 47/45/400, C 47/46/401-17.

²⁵ BSERO B 9/1/7, B 9/1/2.

²⁶ At least this is the picture presented in the wills; Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.329-32.

²⁷ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.141-4, 385-90. Dinn found bequests to the parochial secular clergy of Bury in

the St. Mary priests seems to have declined.

The cult of Jesus was less popular in Bury, and Dinn had suggested that it was principally supported by the town's elite.²⁸ Similarly Tables 3.8 and 3.9 suggest that the provision of chantries, especially those of long duration, was reserved for a small number of Bury's most substantial inhabitants. In contrast to the popularity of the secular clergy with the townsmen of Bury, attitudes to St. Edmund's were considerably less congenial, as Table

No. testators making one or more bequest to buildings, shrine, convent or specific personnel of St. Edmund's ²⁹	1346-1399	1400-1449	1450-1493
	94	91	87
Total no. of testators	376	691	573
% of total testators	25%	13.17%	15.18%

Table 4.4: Bequests to St. Edmund's by Bury testators c.1346-1493.

4.4 indicates: the laity of Bury were much less likely to remember St. Edmund's in their wills as the town's secular clergy.³⁰ Indeed it appears that the popularity of St. Edmund's among the secular community declined during the 15th century from the already quite low levels of the 14th century, and this deterioration in fact continued on into the 16th century as the secular community became more prosperous and the obedientiaries became more strict and desperate in the pursuit of their privileges.³¹ The social composition of those who made bequests to St. Edmund's was concentrated mainly among the wealthier burgesses,³² and many of the town's elite may have had familial connections with the personnel of the monastery.³³ Many of those who supported St. Edmund's may have been members of the monastery's lay confraternity as part of their fraternity obligations. Similarly those individuals who chose to be buried within the precincts of St. Edmund's rather than in the town's cemetery were among Bury's wealthiest. The wealthiest testators were more likely to choose a burial place in one of Bury's churches rather than in the town's cemetery,³⁴ with

94% of his sample of Bury wills.

²⁸ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.320-2.

²⁹ A probate register covering 1482-91 is lost. Bequests to the sacrist of St. Edmund's for forgotten tithes have not been included.

³⁰ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.437-42. 40% of bequests to St. Edmund's were made to the convent rather than the obedientiaries; and the almoner was the most popular recipient among the higher officers after the abbot, sacrist and prior.

³¹ MacCulloch, D. *Suffolk and the Tudors: Politics and Religion in an English County 1500-1600* (Oxford, 1986) p.136.

³² See Dinn's tables of wills making bequests to St. Edmund's and their relative indicated wealth, *Popular Religion* pp.430-33.

³³ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.142.

³⁴ Even within this there was a hierarchy, as the wealthiest testators desired to be interred in the 'holiest' locations of the church, including (in the 15th century) the aisles built by John Smyth esquire in St. Mary's: see pp.205-8.

those requesting St. Edmund's among the richest of the group.³⁵

	1346-1399	1400-1449	1450-1493
Total no. of religious bequests	1754	1650	1547
Total no. of religious bequests outside Bury	435	530	576
% of total religious bequests	24.8%	32.13%	37.23%
No. of testators making religious bequests outside Bury	155	224	254
% of total testators	41.22%	32.42%	44.33%
Total no. of testators	376	691	573

Table 4.5: *Bequests made by Bury testators to religious institutions outside Bury c.1346-1493.*³⁶

If we turn to the experience and knowledge of the Bury inhabitants beyond their town then one sees that 38.6% of Bury testators across the period made bequests to religious houses or individuals, or parish churches elsewhere (see Table 4.5). The proportion of religious bequests made to external recipients rather than those within the town rose during the 15th century as testators gave to increasing numbers of recipients outside the town. Dinn suggests that the giving to the large regional religious houses was, perhaps unsurprisingly, the prerogative of Bury's richest testators.³⁷ The experience of lives and communities outside of Bury, both in terms of religious giving and also in terms of property holding, is important to the model because it is largely through the experience of other communities that inhabitants of Bury may have perceived their own. In other words, understanding the structures and inter-connecting relationships that frame one's social life is facilitated by knowledge and experience of other communities and the mechanisms that regulate them.³⁸

This section therefore indicates further distinctions between the elite of Bury and their fellow townsmen. The provision of chantries, certain cults, charity to St. Edmund's and religious houses further afield all mark out an individual as a potential member of the elite.

³⁵ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.595-606. 14th century examples of testators being buried in St. Edmund's can be found at BSERO Osbern ff.6, 6v, 27v, 82v; 15th century examples at BSERO Osbern ff.215, 240v; BSERO Hawlee ff.64v, 144.

³⁶ A probate register covering 1482-91 is lost.

³⁷ Dinn *Popular Religion* p.475.

³⁸ See Cohen, A.P. *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London, 1985) pp.12-14. Just as "Travel, communication and the accentuation of real differences" may have been crucial to the methodologies of community studies, (Calhoun, C.J. 'Community: toward a variable conceptualization for comparative research' in *Social History* vol.5 no.1 [January, 1980] p.106), so too they may have been the means by which individuals' own communities could be brought into focus by experiencing others'.

4.ii.f. Facets of identity: ranges of wealth.

Perhaps one of the most important and immediate aspects of identity in urban communities was wealth. There are several reasons for this: firstly wealth was a key component in locating an individual within the social stratification of his community, although the relationship between wealth and status has never been simple or constant. Secondly, an individual's range of wealth determines the type of contacts he has within the community and beyond, and these act as referents or resources for the individual's modes of interaction and ultimately his identity. Thirdly, wealth can play a direct role in an individual's identity as it determines the resources with which active, self-conscious constructions of identity can be pursued, when the individual so chooses. Range of wealth as a determinant of identity is perhaps the most difficult of all aspects to gauge, and analysis of it has therefore to be relative to the community as a whole.

In studies exploiting testamentary materials a number of ways of extracting data have been employed to try to arrive at a means of comparatively aligning people within a community according to their relative wealth. Some have used cash bequests made to the high altar of the testator's parish church for tithes and oblations forgotten as a marker of personal wealth, while others have suggested that estimates of the total value of all the bequests made in the will should be used.³⁹ Using the overall value of bequests made and property owned in the will to assess the testator's relative wealth is a risky enterprise for a number of reasons: very often, when details are not provided, one is forced to estimate the value of possessions and belongings using incomplete information; and there is always the problem associated with pre-mortem arrangements made outside the will. Similarly the *residuum* of a will may obscure much that would be included in a computation of the testator's wealth, or may be no more than a formulaic means of drawing the document to an end. The use of high altar bequests may be even more problematic, as it is unclear exactly why they were made: it is possible that they were, as the testators claim, compensation for forgotten tithes, or it may have been that payments to the high altar of the parish church was a customary practice.⁴⁰ The frequency with which they appear in the Bury wills has led Gottfried to assert that high altar bequests "by legal statute were supposed to represent a fixed portion of an individual's liquid wealth",

³⁹ See Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.59, 63. Using the Bury wills Dinn prefers the latter method while Gottfried uses the former.

⁴⁰ In Bury the sacrist of St. Edmund's was the recipient of all tithes paid by the townsmen, but it is only in a small number of cases where the testator leaves the high altar bequest to the sacrist for tithes forgotten: examples include the wills of William Kyrtylunge cordwainer, BSERO Osbern f.68; Adam Stanton fourbour, BSERO Osbern f.70v; and John Tollere, BSERO Osbern f.85v. In virtually every instance the bequest is left to the high altars of St. Mary's or St. James'.

which is perhaps questionable.⁴¹ Dinn agrees, although somewhat reluctantly, that high altar bequests can be used to determine relative wealth, although he attempts to corroborate his rankings with other indicators of wealth such as subsidy assessments, for example.⁴²

If high altar bequests can be used as an abstract reflection (or, if Gottfried is correct, a percentage) of a testator's wealth at the time of the drawing up of the will,⁴³ then they might be used as a component in the model of Bury townsmen in an equally abstract manner. Using the figures in Table 4.6 a strict mean high altar bequest for all Bury testators regardless of gender, occupation or period, of 7s 1d can be determined. This bald figure is clearly very high, and indicates the unbalancing effect upon the calculation of a small number of very large high altar bequests made in the 15th century. However, for the sake of reconstruction based upon pragmatic, 'common-sense' considerations it may be useful to eliminate from the data in Table 4.6 the least common values of high altar bequest which cause the imbalance. If the values of bequest made by ten or fewer testators are left out of the calculation, then a mean bequest of 5s 9d is arrived at. Other ways of approaching the data in Table 4.6 can be adopted to achieve 'average' values for high altar bequests: for instance the median value is 3s 4d while the modal value is 12d. Similarly, distinctly popular values are evident, particularly (as one would expect) 12d, 20d, 2s, 3s 4d, and 6s 8d, and it may be that a single value ought to be extracted from among these denominations only.⁴⁴

For the purposes of designing an abstract model of an artificially 'typical' member of the Bury elite in relation to his contemporaries, a value must be chosen. The most convenient and therefore practical value for the 'typical' Bury townsman is 3s 4d, as it is somewhere near the averages achieved by exposing the data to the different calculations, and is a concrete figure actually chosen by many testators rather than an odd amount dictated by mathematical calculations. We might expect to identify the elite as those individuals making bequests above this level.

⁴¹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.260. Gottfried states that high altar bequests appear in 94% of Bury wills, while Dinn finds them in 95% of lay wills between 1380-99 and 1439-1530; Dinn *Popular Religion* p.64.

⁴² Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.64-70. Dinn examined the wills of 32 Bury townsmen assessed for the 1523/4 subsidy for whom wills are extant and concluded that the relative rankings of the townsmen according to their subsidy assessment and Dinn's estimate of their total testamentary wealth correspond closely; *Popular Religion* pp.3-4.

⁴³ As Dinn points out, if high altar bequest were a fixed proportion of total wealth then they may still be unreliable as they may have been assessed after pre-testamentary grants and assignments were made, thus providing an incomplete picture of lifetime wealth; Dinn *Popular Religion* p.66.

⁴⁴ The mean value would be 3s 1d.

Value of high altar bequest	1346-59	1360s	1370s	1380s	1390s	1400s	1410s	1420s	1430s	1440s	1450s	1460s	1470s	1480-1	1492-3	Year unknown	Total
X			1		4					2		1	1			4	13
% of all testators	0%	0%	9%	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	3%	1%
2d						1	1						1				3
4d										1	1	2	4				8
6d	2	4			2	1				4	4	1	6	1			30
8d		1						3	2	2	1	6	8	1			24
12d	5	8		5	8	14	11	5	25	32	29	33	67	3		17	262
2d-12d total	7	13		5	10	16	12	8	27	39	35	42	86	5		22	327
% of all testators	54%	36%	0%	21%	10%	15%	11%	8%	22%	31%	34%	34%	40%	26%	0%	18%	24%
14d														1		1	2
18d	1	1			1					1			1			1	6
20d					3	2	3	8	11	15	11	22	24	3			102
2s		4	1	4	11	14	15	7	18	9	8	5	14	1		18	129
13d-2s	1	5	1	4	15	16	18	15	29	25	19	27	39	5	0	20	239
% of all testators	8%	14%	9%	17%	15%	15%	16%	14%	23%	20%	18%	22%	18%	26%	0%	16%	18%
2s 4d							2										2
2s 6d								1									1
3s			1		1		1			1	1		1				9
3s 4d		4	1	2	24	25	24	23	24	24	15	19	43	4	1	15	248
2s 1d-3s 4d	0	4	2	2	25	25	27	24	24	25	16	19	44	4	1	18	260
% of all testators	0%	11%	18%	8%	25%	24%	25%	23%	19%	20%	16%	15%	21%	21%	50%	14%	19%
4s		1					2	1		1		1				1	7
4s 5d								1									1
5s			1	1	3	1		1		2		1		1		4	15
6s			1					1									2
6s 8d	2	4		4	13	22	21	25	22	21	20	18	27	2	1	20	222
3s 5d-6s 8d	2	5	2	5	16	23	23	29	22	24	20	20	27	3	1	25	247
% of all testators	15%	14%	18%	21%	16%	22%	21%	28%	18%	19%	19%	16%	13%	16%	50%	20%	18%

Value of high altar bequest	1346-59	1360s	1370s	1380s	1390s	1400s	1410s	1420s	1430s	1440s	1450s	1460s	1470s	1480-1	1492-3	Year unknown	Total
10s		1			5	6	7	4	5	2	4	2	1			9	46
12s								2									2
13s 4d	2	4	2	2	6	4	5	8	5	4	2	5	6			5	60
6s 9d-13s 4d	2	5	2	2	11	10	12	14	10	6	6	7	7	0	0	14	108
% of all testators	15%	14%	18%	8%	11%	10%	11%	13%	8%	5%	6%	6%	3%	0%	0%	11%	8%
16s			1														1
20s	1	2	1	4	11	12	11	10	10	3	3	6	5	2		13	94
13s 5d-20s	1	2	2	4	11	12	11	10	10	3	3	6	5	2	0	13	95
% of all testators	8%	6%	18%	17%	11%	11%	10%	10%	8%	2%	3%	5%	2%	11%	0%	10%	7%
26s 8d			1	1	2						2		2			1	9
30s					1	1											2
40s		1		1	5		4	4	2	1	2	1	3			3	27
£2 13s 4d					1												1
60s							1										1
£4		1										1				2	4
20s 1d-£4	0	2	1	2	9	1	5	4	2	1	4	2	5	0	0	6	44
% of all testators	0%	6%	9%	8%	9%	1%	5%	4%	2%	1%	4%	2%	2%	0%	0%	5%	3%
£4 13s 4d												1					1
100s						2	2			1						2	7
£10									1							1	2
£4 1d-£10	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	10
% of all testators	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	2%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%	1%
Total of all testators	13	36	11	24	101	105	110	104	125	126	103	125	214	19	2	125	1343

Table 4.6: High altar bequests from Bury testators c.1346-1493⁴⁵

⁴⁵ I have extracted the figures only from wills registered in the sacrist's court (that is, all the wills of Bury testators), although those for the 1480s are skewed by the loss of a probate register covering 1482-91. 'X' indicates where the amount bequeathed was illegible.

As a means of allaying anxiety over the unreliability of high altar bequests as indicators of personal wealth, other means might be taken into consideration to corroborate or substantiate the impressions gleaned. One such element could be the holding of property. In Bury the majority of property and land was held of one of the obedientiaries of St. Edmund's, either the sacrist or cellarer, and was directly rented from them by the burgesses.⁴⁶ As with all the components of this model of a typical Bury townsman a statement of the 'average' level of property holding in the town oversimplifies what was undoubtedly a very complicated situation, and taken singly probably does not tell us very much about what it meant to be a member of Bury's secular community. Yet taken in conjunction with the other facets being presented, the information may serve to complement the aggregate concept of the model.

Table 4.7 indicates the level of property (i.e. buildings as opposed to land) holding by Bury testators between 1346 and 1493. It is assumed that the holding of greater numbers of distinct properties with all their appurtenances constitutes an indicator of proportionally greater disposable wealth.⁴⁷

No. of properties held By Bury testators	No. of testators			Total	% of total testators
	1346-1399	1400-1449	1450-1493		
No properties mentioned	170	315	282	767	46.77%
1 property in Bury	97	253	182	532	32.44%
1 extra-mural property	2	5	8	15	0.91%
2-3 properties in Bury	85	82	68	235	14.33%
2-3 properties incl. 1 or more extra-mural	2	12	8	22	1.34%
4-5 properties in Bury	12	7	8	27	1.65%
4-5 properties incl. 1 or more extra-mural	2	10	8	20	1.22%
6+ properties in Bury	4	5	4	13	0.79%
6+ properties incl. 1 or more extra-mural	2	2	5	9	0.55%
Total	376	691	573	1640	100%

Table 4.7a: Property holding by Bury testators c.1346-1493.

It is assumed that some percentage of wills not referring to any properties do not in fact indicate the lack of property holding, but rather that testators often dealt with property via some vehicle other than their will. Therefore the number of holdings cannot be ascertained

⁴⁶ Lobel *The Borough* p.17. A small amount of property belonged to the manor of Maydewater as part of the honour of Clare.

⁴⁷ Although it is understood that the holding of property can come about in a number of different ways, and does not necessarily have to be the result of active commercial enterprise.

for these individuals, and these wills have been left out of the calculation of typical property holding in Bury. It would seem therefore that typically Bury's testators in the period held a single property, which was located within the town's boundaries.⁴⁸ Property holding on a scale larger than this very rapidly becomes the domain of a smaller proportion of the community, and so property holding on a large scale should be seen as a further signifier of elite status.

No. of properties held by Bury testators ⁴⁹	% of testators per period			
	1346-1399	1400-1449	1450-1493	1346-1493
Total no. of testators	376	691	573	1640
No properties mentioned	45.21	45.59	49.21	46.77
1 property in Bury	25.8	36.61	31.76	32.44
1 extra-mural property	0.53	0.72	1.4	0.91
2-3 properties in Bury	22.61	11.87	11.87	14.33
2-3 properties incl. 1 or more extra-mural	0.53	1.74	1.4	1.34
4-5 properties in Bury	3.19	1.01	1.4	1.65
4-5 properties incl. 1 or more extra-mural	0.53	1.45	1.4	1.22
6+ properties in Bury	1.06	0.72	0.7	0.79
6+ properties incl. 1 or more extra-mural	0.53	0.29	0.87	0.55

Table 4.7b: Property holding as percentage of Bury testators c.1346-1493.

The inclusion of properties held by Bury testators in other towns and villages as a separate category serves to indicate either mercantile or commercial uses of property above and beyond a simple household accommodation and local occupational basis; or else indicates familial connections beyond the town. This latter is interesting as it may represent either the origins of some generation of immigrant families into Bury, or else on the contrary it may indicate the social aspirations of wealthy families attempting to set up a position for themselves in other urban communities or indeed in county or gentry circles.⁵⁰ Later in the period the distinction between urban industrialists/merchants and gentry became diffused, as the two societies became elided,⁵¹ and this development may have been a reflection of the close association between urban and rural elites that had always existed.⁵² 4.02% of testators in the period who referred to properties had holdings outside Bury, and it is probable that

⁴⁸ 'One property' is both the median and modal value.

⁴⁹ In Tables 4.7a and 4.7b, the figures for the 1480s are skewed by the loss of a probate register covering 1482-91.

⁵⁰ Many townsmen had been immigrants themselves and had been raised in the country; Reynolds, S. *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977) p.89.

⁵¹ Carus-Wilson, E. *Medieval Merchant Venturers* (London, 1967) p.79; Bridbury, A.R. *Economic Growth: England in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1962) p.98.

this section of the community should be numbered among the town's elite, as such estates are indicative of substantial capital and implicit commercial uses for the holdings.

There are a number of other elements that could be factored into an explication of the ranges of wealth within a community. For instance, while late medieval book ownership was more widespread in towns, it was still the province of the wealthiest burgesses.⁵³ Regardless of the relationship between book ownership, literacy and status, books were non-essential objects of household equipment, and as such might be seen in the context of luxury or conspicuous household consumption. This appears to be a particularly appropriate indicator of elite status in Bury, as less than 3% of wills in the period 1346-1493 indicate testators' possession of books.⁵⁴ In comparison, 12% of lay and clerical testators in Norwich during the period 1370-1490 owned books at the time of their death.⁵⁵ The smaller level of book ownership for Bury might suggest that it was much more the province of the elite.

The experience of textual material among the secular community was more than likely facilitated by the presence of the abbey, as not only did St. Edmund's possess one of the greatest libraries in the country, but there is also a suggestion that its contents were loaned out to the elite:⁵⁶ the last entry in abbot Curteys' register before the index is a letter of admonition from the abbot demanding the return of all books to the abbey within fifteen days.⁵⁷ Other sources of textual material that may have been available to the townsmen come

	1346-1399	1400-1449	1450-1493
Lay men	5	4	11
Lay women	3	1	4
Secular clergy	5	8	6
Total no. book-owning testators	13	13	21
% of total testators	3.5%	1.9%	3.7%
Total no. testators	376	691	573

Table 4.8: Numbers of Bury testators owning books 1346-1493.⁵⁸

⁵² Clark, P. and Slack, P. *English Towns in Transition 1500-1700* (Oxford University Press, 1976) p.120.

⁵³ Reynolds, S. *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977) p.85.

⁵⁴ See above Table 3.7; Dinn also concludes this, *Popular Religion* p.268.

⁵⁵ Tanner, N.P. *The Church in late Medieval Norwich 1370-1532* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies; Toronto, 1984) appendix 6, pp. 193-7.

⁵⁶ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.211-2; Lobel *The Borough* p.120.

⁵⁷ BL. Add. 7096 ff.216v-217 (later foliation). Although Arnold in his transcription of this letter translates the addressee as the monks of St. Edmund's, those possessing the abbey's manuscripts are the 'confratribus', and these might well have been the lay confraternity of the abbey within the town. *Memorials* vol.3 pp.278-9. The confraternity of St. Edmund's in the 15th century included many aristocratic and indeed royal individuals, but also many burgesses of Bury could be found among them.

⁵⁸ 'Book-ownership' here has included explicit references to any written document already in existence

	1346-1399	1400-49	1450-93
Total no. of wills	376	691	573
No. of testators with servants	50	48	53
% of total no wills	13%	7%	9%
Testators with 1 servant	37	31	40
% of wills with servants	74%	65%	75%
Testators with 2 servants	9	11	9
% of wills with servants	18%	23%	17%
Testators with more than 2 servants	4	6	4
% of wills with servants	8%	13%	8%

Table 4.9a: Bury testators with servants 1346-1493.

	1346-1399	1400-49	1450-93
Total no. of wills	376	691	573
No. of testators with specified servants	4	5	10
% of total no wills	1%	1%	2%
Wills with 1 specified servant	3	3	10
Wills with 2 specified servants	0	2	0
Wills with more than 2 specified servants	1	0	0
'Specified servants':			
Apprentice	2	5	8
Bailiff	1	0	0
Clerk	1	1	1
Chaplain	2	1	0
Physician	0	0	1

Table 4.9b: Bury testators with specific servants 1346-1493.

to light in the wills. The testamentary material does not provide much evidence of widespread book ownership among the townsmen of Bury (see Table 4.8), with only 47 (2.9%) from the 1640 wills made between 1346 and 1493 indicating the lifetime possession of texts.⁵⁹ But the wills do indicate a knowledge of existing texts in the community around the testator. In 1479 Ralph Hulloke chaplain left several books to the College of Bury St

and in the pre-mortem possession of the testator: thus references to collections of deeds, debt-books and court rolls have been taken as indications of 'textual experience' and probably book ownership on a wider scale. The figures for the 1480s are skewed by the loss of a probate register covering 1482-91.
⁵⁹ In Norwich 12% of lay and clerical testators between 1370 and 1490 indicated book ownership; Tanner, N.P. *The Church in late Medieval Norwich 1370-1532* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies; Toronto, 1984) appendix 6, pp. 193-7.

Edmunds,⁶⁰ a foundation that throughout the 15th century had a close association with prominent townsmen. In 1459 Edward Galyon left all his books and 'codicello' to his son William, but also left his 'Psalter Glosatum' to the library of St. Mary's church for the soul of his dead son John.⁶¹ St. James' church also seems to have had a stock of texts that the townsmen presumably had access to as part of their parish life.⁶² Other testators indicate the desire to perpetuate and enhance existing public textual resources;⁶³ and part of this process might be reflected in the number of wills that refer to personally created texts of one kind or another, but most commonly of a functional nature.⁶⁴ The wills also indicate the presence of secular individuals who may have pursued a career involving the creation of textual material,⁶⁵ which suggest that such written documents were a part of communal life in Bury.

Testamentary reference to servants of an individual or a household might also be factored into the model of the ranges of wealth existing within a community. The existence of servants within a household need not indicate substantial wealth on the part of the employing testator, particularly within kin and fictive kin networks where junior members of households were 'exchanged' into service. In other words the maintenance of servants need not have been an indicator of great size or complexity of household so much as a sign of participation in a social network of households. Nevertheless, not every householder employed servants, and doing so did signify the availability of a certain level of resources.

Across the period 9% of Bury testators refer to named servants in their employ.⁶⁶ Usually the references are bequests to their named servants, often with the condition that they remain in service to the testator until his death, or to the household for a period after the death of the testator. Of these testators the vast majority refer to a single servant only,⁶⁷ suggesting that the provision of multiple servants was reserved for a only a very small number of Bury's

⁶⁰ BSERO Hawlee f.284. Hullok also gave William Mathew the parish priest of St. Mary's a book of the miracles of the Blessed Virgin; and John Cranewys chaplain a primer with 'dyrgeboke'.

⁶¹ BSERO Hawlee f.66v.

⁶² BSERO Osbern ff.28v, 69; Hawlee ff.146, 222v; BSERO H 1/2/1 pp.35, 52.

⁶³ BSERO Osbern ff.66v, 95; Hawlee ff.87, 121, 164. See below pp.244-80.

⁶⁴ See for example BSERO Osbern f.66v; BSERO Hawlee ff.95, 156, 229; BSERO Pye ff.123, 146v; BSERO Holland f.50v; PCC Prob. 11/17 f.256, Prob. 11/11 f.142; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.137.

⁶⁵ Individuals involved in the writing and decorating of texts, as well as in the production of parchment and paper, are mentioned in the following wills: BSERO Osbern ff.71v, 100, 107, 119v, 146v, 167, 193, 217v, 234, 235v, 241v, 261; BSERO Hawlee ff.20v, 68, 95, 151v, 170, 172v; BSERO Pye f.158v; BSERO Hooode ff.15v, 97; BSERO Holland f.61; PCC Prob. 11/16 f.171. These do not include references to 'clerks'. Other references to Bury people with similar occupations appear in other material: CCR 1435-51 p.349; the 1526 sacrist's rental BSERO A 6/2/1 p.57; the sacrist's accounts of 1419 BSERO A 6/1/5 p.7; the sacrist's accounts of 1429 BSERO A 6/1/6 p.5; *Adam and Margaret Newehawe's obit* BSERO H 1/5/21 p.2; and *Fishe Gift* BSERO H 1/5/18 p.2.

⁶⁶ A further 1% of Bury testators across the period refer in their will to one or more unnamed servants in their employ. Servants in the employ of someone other than the testator have not been included.

⁶⁷ See Table 4.9a.

households.

When it comes to the employment of 'specified servants', that is those with specialised offices, we can see from Table 4.9b that once again this was the province of only a small number of testators in the period. In this instance, the role of 'apprentice' should perhaps be seen in distinction from the other specified offices, as the nature of the relationship between employer and apprentice was probably different from that between employer and the other specified servants. The apprentice's role was a traditional component of industrial and economic structures within the community, with the arrangement establishing certain indicators of status to both apprentice and master. With the other specialised services (one might almost say 'professional' services by the 15th century), the consequences for status on the part of the employer may have been quite different. In other words a testator employing an apprentice in his workshop was probably displaying a different kind of status from the individual retaining their own chaplain, physician or clerk: while the former had social and economic ramifications, the latter had far more pronounced consequences for how the individual was perceived in the community. Servants therefore, and particularly those with specialised functions, seem to have been within the purview of Bury's elite.

4.ii.g. Facets of identity: extra-mural connections.

A final element of identity that can be modelled from testamentary evidence is one which is in many ways difficult to quantify. In late medieval towns, while the ideological differences between town and country were accentuated by the architecture, population density and direct administrative policy of town leaders, the connections between townsmen and the world beyond their banleuca remained strong. These connections with people and places in the wider region may have had a significant impact upon the way in which that individual was perceived by those around him. The best example of this may be seen in the case of recent immigrants to a town: such individuals clearly maintained as yet unbroken links with the rural parish of their origin and their family and erstwhile society there, and these links marked the individual as immigrant with all the attendant consequences for status within the town. A significant proportion of individuals in a town such as Bury had originated from elsewhere, and so the passage of time and the generations must have been a crucial element in the perception of status of individuals. In other words 'immigrant status' must have diminished only over time.

Paradoxically connections with the wider region probably worked to enhance status as well,

and indeed could be actively pursued as part of a process of consciously constructed identity. Here we are considering the tendency of late 15th century townsmen to integrate themselves into the gentry society of their region. This commonly took the form of townsmen returning to generating income from landed estates in the hinterland rather than through industry or commerce, of marriages into county gentry families, and of styling themselves as 'gent' and so on. Indeed the end of the 15th century in Bury saw a number of prominent burgesses taking up residence in rural parishes as part of this process.⁶⁸

Both of these processes, that of the immigrant integrating himself into Bury's social structures, and that of the burgess entering gentry society, would have been an important element of an individual's identity. Both would have involved the individual in conscious modes of behaviour, a 'strategy' for achieving their respective aims; and yet neither would be a simple matter to elucidate statistically from series of data. Nevertheless one might add qualitative indications of extra-mural connection and concomitant status to the quantitative model of identity in Bury. Such indications might include evidence of estates and active family ties beyond the town; other non-commercial or industrial contacts in the region; the adoption of 'gentry' style titles and so on.

4.ii.h. Conclusion.

Testamentary materials enable us to reach these 'typical' values amalgamated into the putative model, partly because they are often formulaic in their presentation. Quantitative analysis provides the only access we have to broad trends of behaviour in the light of which individuals perceive their own identity. These quantitative analyses can and should be complemented by a qualitative assessment of other types of evidence, however. The qualitative analysis provides a qualification for the broad trends in terms of particular contexts. In other words it makes it possible to understand the general as it relates to particular circumstances and times.

⁶⁸ Particularly within families like the Drurys, who had maintained rural estates throughout the period.

4.iii. The model of Bury townsmen.

4.iii.a. Introduction.

This section brings together the broad trends depicted in the model as elicited from quantitative means, and qualitative material drawn from sources other than the wills used above. It does this in order to refine the general model by making more sensitive to general developments in social and economic conditions within the community. The overall period has been broken down into three smaller periods, each with their own distinct characteristics, and from each period an individual has been chosen in order to indicate a typical member of the Bury elite as suggested by the model. The characteristics of these periods are specific to Bury, and so the material from section 3.i has been briefly summarised for each period.

In order to illustrate the potential use of a model of identity for a community, this section will present a description of three individuals (one from each of the three periods discussed above) from Bury St Edmunds who correspond reasonably closely to the fore-going model of the town's elite. This is not intended to constitute a detailed case-study, but rather is provided to form a counter-point to the individuals analysed below in chapter 5. In other words the conscious construction of identity displayed by John Baret, John Smyth and the other individuals in chapter 5 is to be perceived in the context of the following three individuals who are to be taken as representative or 'typical' examples of the Bury elite. To summarise aspects of what might be considered 'elite' identity from the model described above:

Evidence	Appearance in more the one document places the individual in the minority, but appearance in 3 or more places the individual in a group comprising 10% of the community
Occupation	Likely to pursue occupation within the textile or specialist/professional ('urban') categories; most likely to be categorised in the 'Entrepreneur and textile marketing' group
Office holding/authority	Elite identity involves the holding of any office/serving on a local commission; involvement in the enfeoffment of John Smyth; or identification as leading burgess or family for the purposes of levying fines arising from the dispute between town and abbey
Gilds	Membership of a number of gilds, and especially of gilds beyond Bury, signifies significant status; this is especially the case if the gilds in question are socio-religious ones such as the Candlemas gild or the lay fraternity of St. Edmund's
Religious affiliation	Elite religious affiliations include: the cult of Jesus; the provision of chantries; the activities, personnel and shrines of St. Edmund's; burial in one of the parish churches or the precincts of the abbey rather than the town cemetery; and the large regional religious houses

Wealth	Elite status is signified by: substantial high altar bequests; the ownership of multiple properties; the ownership of properties outside Bury; the provision of servants, especially multiple or specialist servants; and book ownership
Extra-mural connections	Significant connections with local gentry, or with estates/gilds/businesses in the region also indicate elite identity, although this has to be judged in context to determine whether the individual is a recent immigrant to Bury rather than an 'outward looking', socially mobile member of the town's elite

Table 4.10: Summary of aspects of elite identity in Bury St Edmunds

4.iii.b. Model Bury elite over time.

C.1346-99:

The overriding demographic context for this period is one of dramatic population decline, although some have argued that the loss was assimilated within urban communities without much disorder.¹ In the mid-14th century Bury was a market community of regional significance, surpassed in size, wealth and organisational complexity by several other towns in the Suffolk, and even in West Suffolk.² Economically it was of relatively minor importance compared with its East Anglian rivals Ipswich and Norwich, and it even appeared to suffer as a result of competition with the smaller Sudbury; and this was a condition of Bury's economic life throughout the century. Long before the 14th century, urban demographics had always been characterised by high mortality and immigration rates, the latter depending essentially upon the local region for recruitment; and many towns had large resident alien communities.³ Its population had reached its peak (of somewhere in the vicinity of 7000) at the start of the century, had dipped in the 1310s and 1330s as the result of severe famines, and had regained its height shortly before the Black Death struck. Abbey rentals indicate that the Eastgate ward was the poorest area of the town, while Southgate ward was the richest; Risbygate ward was the most populous and commercial area, while both Westgate and Northgate wards were sparsely populated, although the properties located in the latter were often prestigious. The Black Death brought mortality rates of approximately 40%, though by the time of the 1370s poll taxes the community had recovered somewhat, surpassing other East Anglian towns (like Ipswich) which had also suffered catastrophic population loss. By the end of the century

¹ Dyer, A. *Decline and Growth in English Towns 1400-1640* (London, 1991) p.14. Indeed population decline may not have been so endemic in urban communities: Phythian-Adams claims that the population of Coventry actually increased during the 14th century despite the Black Death; Phythian-Adams, C. *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1978) pp.30-5.

² This is a summary of the more detailed discussion in section 3.i above.

³ Reynolds, S. *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977) pp.70-2. Gottfried finds that 60% of his identified immigrants (based on topographical surname analysis) originated from within a twenty mile radius of Bury; *Bury St Edmunds* pp.68-70.

the richest and most populated topographical area of the town was centred around Southgate and Risbygate Streets and Goldsmiths' Row; the population of Westgate ward was also increasing. Areas around the town's walls, and particularly around the gates, were also being settled with increasing frequency. It was during this period that the worst of the violence in the town/abbey dispute surfaced in Bury, and indeed urban unrest was evident elsewhere in this period.⁴

The late 14th century townsman of Bury St Edmunds is still most likely to appear in only a single document. Using the high altar bequests presented in Table 4.6 we see that for this earlier period both the modal and median value was 3s 4d, while the blank mean using all levels of bequest arrives at 9s, as compared with 7s 1d for the whole period. Using only the most common bequests (12d, 20d, 2s, 3s 4d and 6s 8d) the mean value is 3s 2d, again slightly above the average obtained for the whole period using the same values. This slightly higher average value might reflect an increased level of personal wealth following the radical depopulation of the town in the latter half of the century. This might also be suggested by the information available concerning property holding in the town:⁵ the proportion of individuals holding no or one property is lower compared with the sample of the whole period, while the proportion of people holding 2-3, 4-5 or 6 or more properties is higher.⁶ This tentatively suggests that a smaller number of individuals were holding more properties in Bury in the late 14th century than later in the period; but what is equally significant (and slightly more pronounced) is that the proportion of the community holding properties outside Bury is smaller than for the sample size as a whole.⁷ The two trends might reflect an improvement in economic conditions in the town after the Black Death, with wage increases benefiting wage earners (perhaps resulting from the steadily improving local profitability of the textile industry); and depopulation leading to lower rents for those holding property. The fact that fewer people were inclined to hold property outside Bury suggests that St. Edmund's may have reduced its rents in order to compensate for the presumable loss of income in the initial aftermath of the Black Death.

The townsman from the 14th century was characterised by a greater propensity towards testamentary charity to the works, personnel, shrines and buildings of St. Edmund's than

⁴ It has been commented upon that this period of unrest coincided with a period of improving wages and standards of living; Bridbury, A.R. *Economic Growth: England in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1962) pp.15-16.

⁵ See above Table 4.7.

⁶ Those holding 2-3 properties comprise 22.61% of the community compared with 14.33% for the whole period, and those holding 4-5 is 3.19%, almost twice that for the whole sample (1.65%).

⁷ In each extra-mural categories of Table 4.7 for the period 1346-99 (except the 6+ category) the proportion of the community represented is less than half that indicated by the sample for the whole

later in the period.⁸ Indeed the proportion of Bury testators giving to St. Edmund's in the second half of the 14th century was double that of the first half of the 15th, and considerably higher than that of the latter half of the 15th century. This suggests that the popularity of the monastery was in decline later in the period. Similarly Table 3.7 suggests that the popularity of the St. Mary's priests and their liturgical charge was higher among late 14th Bury townsmen than their later counterparts, and that their support for the cult declined steadily throughout the 15th century. Tables 3.8 and 3.9 suggest that fewer testators took the opportunity to found chantries in the late 14th century than in the late 15th century,⁹ and that of those that did, a slightly greater proportion of them had no spouse or heirs.¹⁰ With regard to testamentary evidence of religious attitudes more generally, Table 4.5 indicates that a smaller proportion of religious bequests were made at the end of the 14th century to religious institutions and individuals outside Bury than later in the period; although the proportion of *testators* making such bequests was substantially greater than in the first half of the 15th century, and approximately equal to that of the latter half of the 15th century. What this indicates is difficult to suggest: it might simply be a function of the survival of fewer wills in the 14th century than later in the period.

Gild membership in the late 14th century seems to have been more or less at the rate attained for the whole of the period, but somewhat higher than the early 15th century, and lower than the second half of the century.¹¹ What is noticeable is that no testator from the period was a member of more than two gilds, and none were members of gilds outside Bury. This lack of contact with the region outside of Bury seems to be a feature of the model of the Bury townsman in the late 14th century, as in terms of property holding, religious bequests and gild membership the inhabitants of Bury in this earlier period seem to have been content to restrict themselves more than their later counterparts to the town.

The first of our representative individuals from the Bury elite is Richard Charman draper who died in 1390.¹² The fact that he was a draper and the fact that he held the office of alderman in the late 1360s both locate him squarely in the category of elite according to the criteria of occupation and office holding; and his appointment as a royal tax collector in 1379 draws Charman into an exclusive group in Bury.¹³ Similarly his appearance in at least 13

period.

⁸ See above Table 4.4.

⁹ 10.3% as opposed to 27.7%.

¹⁰ Dinn suggests that those founding chantries in the 14th century tended to belong to wealthier social groups than those in the 15th century; Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.691-2.

¹¹ See above Table 4.3.

¹² BSERO Osbern f.58.

¹³ CFR 1377-93 p.152.

documents marks him out as a prominent individual in the community.¹⁴ Other indicators of elite status include the fact that he was a book owner, his testamentary high altar bequest fell into the highest category, and that he made a cash bequest to the personnel of St. Edmund's. His connections with the senior personnel of St. Edmund's may have included a number of land and property deals.¹⁵ A more significant marker of Charman's status was the fact that he retained his own chaplain, an individual by the name of Richard Gurnay.¹⁶

Charman served as executor to a number of prominent Bury testators, and in a number of cases this was to involve acting as agent in the sale of substantial lands and properties.¹⁷ In terms of his own land and property holdings, Charman qualifies for elite status in terms of the scale of his ownership.¹⁸ In 1354, in return for his role as executor, Charman receives from John Osbern 5 acres of land in the fields next to Bury, which abut upon lands already held by Charman.¹⁹ In the 1360s we learn that he held properties in the prosperous Gildhall and Churchgate streets, with at least one other property;²⁰ and lands in Bury's Westfield near the holdings of St Peter's hospital.²¹ By the end of his life Charman was still in possession of the Churchgate street house, although his chief property (which he inhabited) was located nearby in Whytyng street, adjacent to another of his properties there. He was also in possession of a parcel of 40 acres of land near the Chevingtonway, a parcel in Westgatefield called le Pulteresland, and 3 parcels totalling 19½ acres in the location known as 'Pies Pettle'.²² Ten years prior to his death, Charman may held even more property in Bury, as he and his son William obtained a licence of mortmain to alienate to the prior and convent of St. Edmund's 4 messuages in Bury.²³ Thus at any stage in the last 30 years of his life, Charman was in possession of 6-10 properties in Bury, a fact that signifies his membership of the elite. It is surprising however, that there seems to be no evidence of him holding property outside Bury, which comprised another feature of elite identity. Nevertheless Charman was not without commercial contacts in west Suffolk, as a record from 1380 indicates,²⁴ and although the exact nature of these contacts is unclear, the fact of their existence is suggestive of the kinds of

¹⁴ BSERO Osbern ff.1, 9v, 19 (x2), 19v, 29v, 30, 31, 58, 102v; CFR 1377-83 p.152; CPR 1377-81 pp.411, 440.

¹⁵ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.137.

¹⁶ BSERO Osbern ff.1, 58.

¹⁷ See for example BSERO Osbern ff.1, 29v.

¹⁸ Gottfried suggests that he was "the most successful property speculator in the history of late medieval Bury St Edmunds", and that he "held more property than any other layman in late fourteenth-century Bury", *Bury St Edmunds* pp.136-7. Gottfried portrays Charman as a *rentier* accumulating land and property for rent yield, thus making him highly unusual for the period.

¹⁹ BSERO Osbern f.1.

²⁰ BSERO Osbern ff.9v, 19v, 30.

²¹ BSERO Osbern f.29v.

²² BSERO Osbern f.58.

²³ CPR 1377-81 p.440. In return for the properties Charman was to have a wax taper burning for him before the Virgin in the chapel of St. Edmund's during mass.

²⁴ In that year one John Joce of Chevington had received a pardon for his outlawry, inflicted for not

regional connections that characterised the Bury elite.

1400-1449:

Throughout the late 14th and early 15th centuries the demographic decline in Bury St Edmunds was perpetuated by the combination of low marriage, progeny and replacement ratios, and the continued and frequent outbreaks of various plagues and epidemics. By the 1440s the town's population may have neared half of that immediately before the Black Death. The population base was probably maintained as high as it was by high levels of immigration into the town, especially after the turn of the century when Bury was developing its production and marketing roles in the textile industry, and especially cloth from the 1440s. Towns provided a better opportunity for employment, as well as a more diverse range of employment than the local origins of most immigrants;²⁵ other immigrants were motivated to move to towns to fulfil social aspirations or to seek charity.²⁶ From the point of view of the urban communities immigration was essential to replenish the depleted workforce.²⁷

The town's economy was growing steadily throughout the 15th century, and indeed Bury found itself in close proximity to a prospering industrial region, adjacent to the wealthiest hundred in one of the country's wealthiest counties. Standards of living continued to improve, particularly for wage earners.²⁸ By the time of the 1433 *hadgovel* rental Southgate ward had begun to recover its prosperity, and rents in this sector of the town remained high. Northgate ward had had a large population increase since the late 14th century, and Eastgate ward appears to have suffered some depopulation.

The high altar bequests from the first half of the 15th century (Table 4.6) indicates that the modal and median value is again 3s 4d as it was in the second half of the 14th century; and the overall mean using all the values of bequests is 7s 6d, which is slightly higher than the average for the whole period, but is lower than that for 1346-99. Using the most common values the mean high altar bequest for the period is 3s 4½d, which is still slightly higher than the same figure for the entire period, and unlike the figure derived from using all the bequest values, is higher than that of 1346-99. In other words the higher values here may reflect the increasing prosperity developing in the town as a consequence of Bury's advancing role in the local and regional textile industry; and yet the fact that the levels indicated are not

appearing to answer to Charman for a debt of 10 marks; CPR 1377-81 p.411.

²⁵ Reynolds *Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* p.87.

²⁶ Clark, P. and Slack, P. *English Towns in Transition 1500-1700* (Oxford University Press, 1976) p.92.

²⁷ Dyer *Decline and Growth* p.17. In Coventry during the mid-15th century the need for immigrant labour was compounded by large scale *emigration* from the town; Phythian-Adams *Desolation of a City* p.35.

significantly higher than in the previous period suggests that the rise in relative wealth within the community was not substantial. This may have been a consequence of the demographic condition of Bury in the first half of the 15th century, which was still unstable and still in (albeit decelerating) decline.

The picture presented by Table 4.7 regarding the holding of property requires careful elucidating. The proportion of the community mentioning no properties in their wills is essentially the same as for the period 1346-99. However the section of the population referring to a single property within Bury is substantially higher than for the second half of the 14th century.²⁹ The figures for the other categories of property holding *only within* Bury are all lower than for the period as a whole, and a marked decline from the period 1346-99 can be seen in the holding of more than one property in the town.³⁰ Indeed it would seem that the section of the community holding more than one property in Bury was approximately half that from the latter half of the 14th century. As for property holding outside the boundaries of the town, with the exception of those in the category of holding only a single property or six or more properties including one or more outside Bury, the proportion is higher than for the period overall (c.1346-1493).³¹ In relation to the latter half of the 14th century, the extra-mural property holding of the townsmen of Bury in the first half of the 15th century seems to have been a more common practice for those inhabitants with up to five properties, but less frequent for those with six or more properties.³² This seems to suggest that fewer individuals (by about half) were holding more than one property in Bury than earlier in the period, but that more (again by about half) were in possession of property beyond the town walls. It is possible that this reflects the presence of a number of developments within the town, among them a process of rack-renting by the officials of St. Edmund's as continued depopulation affected the abbey's income along with so many of the country's great *rentiers* in the period. If rents had been increased it would explain the popularity of property outside the town. This popularity may also be a consequence of the increased status enjoyed by the town in the regional industrial development, as ties between Bury and its hinterland (especially in the industrial towns and villages to the south) would have been strengthened as individual

²⁸ Dyer *Decline and Growth* p.14.

²⁹ The proportion holding one property in Bury St Edmunds in the period 1346-1493 was 32.44%; in the period 1346-99 it was 25.8%, and in the period 1400-49 it was 36.61%.

³⁰ The proportion of Bury inhabitants holding 2-3, 4-5 and 6+ properties respectively in 1346-99 were: 22.61%, 3.19% and 1.06%. In 1400-49 they were: 11.87%, 1.01% and 0.72%.

³¹ The proportion of Bury inhabitants holding 1, 2-3, 4-5 and 6+ properties (including one or more outside the town) respectively in 1346-1493 were: 0.91%, 1.34%, 1.22% and 0.55%. In 1400-49 they were: 0.72%, 1.74%, 1.45% and 0.29%.

³² The proportion of Bury inhabitants holding 1, 2-3, 4-5 and 6+ properties (including one or more outside the town) respectively in 1346-99 were: 0.53%, 0.53%, 0.53% and 0.53%. The proportion of Bury inhabitants having one to five properties including at least one outside the town in the period 1400-49 was thus approximately double that of the last half of the 14th century; while the 6+ category was almost

commercial interests were established. Thus the model of the early 15th century townsman of Bury might be characterised by an increased personal knowledge of the communities beyond the town, and possibly by commercial or property interests in Bury's hinterland.

As for the devotional aspects of the model in the first half of the 15th century, Table 4.4 indicates a marked decline from the previous century of the popularity of St. Edmund's among testators, perhaps a result of its policies regarding the political and demographic crises in the face of improving economic and commercial conditions for Bury's secular community. Nevertheless the peaceful (if not cordial) relationship that existed between the monastic and secular communities of Bury in the first half of the 15th century, particularly during the abbacy of William Curteys, suggests that the absence of testamentary charity towards St. Edmund's during the period 1400-49 may not have been due to increased active animosity on the part of the townsmen, but simply to a lack of interest. In other words part of the reason that the violent antagonism between the abbey and town dissipated at this time was that the relative balance of power was shifting toward the latter as the result of economic conditions favouring industrialists as opposed to landlords: the townsmen did not need to resort to conflict as their position was rapidly improving. However in this middle period testamentary charity towards the St. Mary priests, which had been very popular among the secular community, was also in decline, as indicated by Table 3.7. This trend seems to have continued throughout the 15th century, and may mark a change in attitudes towards the cult. Table 4.5 indicates that approximately one third of Bury testators in the period 1400-49 made bequests to religious institutions or individuals outside Bury, and although the proportion of testators so doing is down from that from the last half of the 14th century, the proportion of religious *bequests* to external recipients is up. In other words fewer testators were supporting religious centres outside Bury in their wills, but those that did endowed a larger number of recipients than their late 14th century predecessors. Similarly a smaller proportion of early 15th century testators indicate gild membership in their wills than in the late 14th century, although a few of them seem to have belonged to a greater number of gilds than their earlier counterparts.³³ Also in contrast to the townsmen at the end of the previous century, slightly more than 6% of testators indicating gild membership seem to have belonged to organisations outside Bury. This may well have been another aspect of commercial and industrial links between Bury's townsmen and the surrounding towns and villages, but it may also be an indicator of the increasing levels of immigration experienced by the town's secular community in response to declining population and increasing industrial opportunity provided by the urban centre.

half that of the earlier period.

³³ See above Table 4.3.

From the early 15th century a representative member of the Bury elite might be seen in the person of John Notyngnam grocer, alderman in 1407 and 1425-7. Notyngnam appears in at least 25 documents taken from the sample, many of which indicating the prominent role he took in the administration of testamentary business.³⁴ In many cases he was to supervise the disposal by the testator's family of significant land and property holdings.³⁵ Notyngnam's presence in the material is easily sufficient to place him within the 'elite category' for this aspect of identity, as does his occupation. In terms of property ownership, his own will of 1437 indicates that he was a significant player in Bury's property market, although like Richard Charman from the late 14th century he does not seem to have been in possession of any holdings beyond Bury.³⁶ However he enjoyed enough property to find himself in the top category of ownership, and indeed the circles he mixed in during the course of some of his dealings were exalted.³⁷ In his will Notyngnam refers to a great chest in his possession which is filled with deeds and muniments, a tantalising reference to the scale of his property ownership. Indeed Notyngnam's reputation and identity in Bury may well have been intimately tied up with the extent of his property holding: in the sacrist's rental of 1526, almost a century after Notyngnam's death, properties in Le Mustowe and Northgate street are referred to as once being in the possession of John Notyngnam.³⁸ Similarly, the early 16th century records connected with the obit of Adam Newhaw and his wife contain a reference to a transaction whereby the executors of one John Plomer spicer quitclaimed to John Notyngnam, Richard kyng and John Redgys and their heirs the estate of Plomer as it appeared in his 1425 will.³⁹

Many other elements of Notyngnam's will can be located within the sphere of elite status. His high altar bequest of 40s, for example, places him well beyond the average levels attained in the community. Not only does he display the elite's awareness of the major regional religious houses at Thetford and Babwell, but he also makes bequests to named members of those communities, displaying concrete relationships with those houses. Similarly he not only leaves substantial cash sums to the officers and convent of St. Edmund's, but he also

³⁴ Indeed the regularity with which Notyngnam appears as executor in the wills of Bury testators between 1399 and 1437 is unusual: many of those he performed this role for were clearly his peers, but others were much more modest individuals. See for example wills at BSERO Osbern ff.92v, 102, 110, 127v, 133v, 137v, 141v, 145v (x2), 149v, 151, 155, 168v, 175v, 180v, 182v, 183.

³⁵ For example, BSERO Osbern ff.92v, 137v, 145v, 149v, 183.

³⁶ BSERO Osbern 344v. Gottfried suggests that Notyngnam had property in London and elsewhere in Suffolk; *Bury St Edmunds* p.139.

³⁷ Deals were struck with members of the knightly Le Straunge family, as well as with John Baret esquire, BSERO Hawlee f.95. See also Osbern f.210. John Baret also receives a further two properties in the will of John Notyngnam.

³⁸ BSERO A6/2/1 pp.41.56.

³⁹ BSERO H1/5/21 p.3. Redgys and Kyng were both aldermen and members of the early 15th century Bury elite. Indeed Richard Kyng mercer was from of Bury's wealthiest families; see Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.145-6.

indicates kinship bonds with at least one of the convent. This perhaps more than any other component of Notyngham's will suggests his position within the community. Although Notyngham makes gifts of images, books and vestments to both parish churches, St Mary's receives a substantial bequest which may have been connected with the porch that he had attached to that church.⁴⁰

Like Charman and the majority of Bury's elite, Notyngham pursued commercial interests outside Bury, often in conjunction with other members of his peer group. In 1419 for example, a Nicholas Selby clerk of Great Yarmouth was pardoned for his transgression for not answering Notyngham, the widow of former alderman Adam Waterward, and current alderman William Methewold for a debt of £40.⁴¹

1450-93:

Finally the model of the Bury townsman can be determined for the latter half of the 15th century. From the middle of the century Bury's population began to increase, as although mortality rates were still high, replacement ratios were improving.⁴² From the 1480s the demographic upturn was more pronounced as immigration increased and mortality rates finally dropped;⁴³ and at the end of the century marriage and progeny rates also increased, further strengthening the population increase. By the time of the lay subsidies in the 1520s Bury's population stood at between 4000-5000.⁴⁴ The middle of the 15th century also saw a rise in the general levels of prosperity in Bury as a result of the developing cloth industry;⁴⁵ and by the 1520s Risbygate ward, in which much of the population was occupied with cloth manufacture and finishing, was the richest in the town. Gottfried suggests that by the end of the 15th century the secular community of Bury was not as wealthy as its counterparts in Norwich or Ipswich, but that it was characterised by a broad distribution of the levels of wealth.⁴⁶

This late 15th century increase in wealth among the inhabitants of Bury is not reflected in the data of Table 4.6. The modal value of high altar bequests was 12d, the median value 20d,

⁴⁰ See the will of John Baret esquire; BSERO Hawlee f.95.

⁴¹ CPR 1416-22 p.161.

⁴² This seems to be the trend generally among urban communities; Bridbury *Economic Growth* p.24.

⁴³ By the end of the 15th century immigration was a crucial factor in the maintenance of urban populations; Clark and Slack *English Towns in Transition* pp.82-6.

⁴⁴ Dinn has the figure at nearer 3000, and has the town's population steadily declining between 1380 and 1522. Gottfried has the population recovering from the middle of the 15th century, while Dyer suggests that it was relatively stable between the late 14th and early 16th centuries. See above section 3.i.

⁴⁵ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.123-30.

⁴⁶ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.129. Lobel agrees to some extent, and suggests that the gap between the

while the mean value is only 4s 5½d: all three values are substantially lower than the corresponding values for the period 1400-49. Indeed using only the most common high altar bequest values the average attained is 2s 9d, again substantially lower than the preceding periods in which averages in the vicinity of 3s 4d were derived. At this stage it is probably appropriate to acknowledge the relative lack of material available for the period 1450-93: the data for approximately a decade of the period is absent due to a lost probate register. It may be the case that in trying to establish *average* (as opposed to total) levels of various features of the testamentary material in some way mitigates the loss of the missing wills.

As for property possession, Table 4.7 indicates that the levels of holding property within Bury were generally the same as for the previous period (1400-49), although perhaps the slightest of increases can be determined.⁴⁷ The same is largely true for the possession of property outside of Bury, and this seems to be particularly so for testators falling into the category of six or more properties. In other words by the end of the 15th century the large property holders, presumably the wealthiest burgesses of the town, were almost three times as likely as their early 15th century counterparts to be in possession of property in communities other than Bury.

The devotional profile of the late 15th century townsman is relatively similar to that of the townsman from the first half of the century. Table 4.4 suggests a very slight revival in the popularity of St. Edmund's among Bury's testators, perhaps as a result of the more peaceable relations between the monastic and secular communities throughout the century. Similarly the St. Mary priests and the Mary masses seem to have continued the decline in their fortunes witnessed in the first half of the century. Tables 3.8 and 3.9 suggest that the foundation of chantries in the latter half of the 15th century was a more frequent occurrence in Bury wills than in the period 1346-1417, with over a quarter of testators (predominantly male) finding the resources for so doing.⁴⁸ As well as there being a larger proportion of chantry founders in the later 15th century, there also seems to have been a greater appreciation of chantries (or perhaps simply more available wealth) as larger numbers of testators chose to have longer running chantries in the later period. Awareness and experience of religious institutions and individuals outside Bury may have been increased in the last half of the century, as not only were a higher proportion of testators making religious bequests to recipients outside Bury, but the percentage of all religious bequests made to such receivers is also higher. Finally,

richest and the poorest townsmen was probably not as great as elsewhere; *The Borough* p.93.

⁴⁷ The proportion of testators holding a single property in Bury is the exception as it seems to be smaller in the latter stages of the 15th century.

⁴⁸ As in the period 1346-1417 almost half of those testators founding chantries had no heirs, while over a third had no spouse.

Table 4.3 indicates that a higher proportion of Bury testators indicated membership of one or more guilds in their will than in the previous periods. Once again this may be a reflection of the developing industrial organisation underpinning Bury's participation in the local and regional cloth trade.

Finally, from the later mid- and later 15th century, we can turn to John Ayleward grocer, who held the office of alderman in 1453. Again his occupation and office holding characterise him as a member of Bury's elite, as do some elements of his will of 1476.⁴⁹ Ayleward appears in at least 14 documents, and he is involved as executor or recipient in a number of Bury's wealthiest and most prominent individuals' wills.⁵⁰ Among many of his bequests to the cults and religious personnel of the town, Ayleward includes a gift to the Jesus mass, which seems to have been a prerogative of the elite. His high altar bequest of 6s 8d, while above the average levels determined for the community as a whole, is perhaps below that one might expect for a member of the Bury elite. Similarly the indicated level of property ownership might also fall below the standards required for elite identity, although Ayleward refers to them generically as 'all my property at...' which perhaps masks the extent of his holdings. However, the locations of the holdings *are* characteristic of elite status, as apart from a tenement in Bury's Spicer Row, the bulk of Ayleward's holdings are found beyond the town. Indeed they are located in three contiguous parishes in Essex, and the holding of estates outside of Suffolk by Bury inhabitants is reserved for only the most prosperous of individuals.

Here is an instance where the evidence suggests two possible alternatives. The first is that Ayleward is a member of the Bury elite investing the wealth attained through commerce in land in order to achieve a greater degree of financial stability and perhaps with a view to establishing himself and his family in local gentry society. This was a common process in late 15th century Bury,⁵¹ although the choice of Essex rather than Suffolk as a family seat is more unusual. The second alternative suggested by the evidence is that Ayleward (or his parents, perhaps) were recent immigrants to Bury, and who still maintained their local connections with their place of domicile. This suggestion is strengthened by Ayleward's will when he leaves modest cash sums to repair the fabric of two churches from the parishes where his holdings are located, thus indicating his personal experience of the area.

⁴⁹ BSERO Hawlee f.232.

⁵⁰ For example the wills of aldermen John Redgys spicer, and Richard Kyng mercer; and family members of aldermen such as Denise Redgys (widow of John), Katherine Kyng (widow of Richard), John Redgys grocer (son of the alderman John), Robert Rose chandler, Margaret Thurston widow; BSERO Osbern ff.232v, 255v, Hawlee ff.29v, 62, 83v, 140, 164. For other wills Ayleward was involved in

The solution as to which alternative applies to John Ayleward is best achieved by the context of the other information that we have for him. There can be no doubt that Ayleward found himself at the centre of Bury elite society by the 1470s if not before. Principally this can be identified by his inclusion in the enfeoffment made by John Smyth esquire to the town, and the consequent membership of Bury's unofficial civic government the Candlemas gild.⁵² Indeed Ayleward was one of the original feoffees in the lands given by Smyth to the town, and the involvement by Ayleward in the affairs of perhaps the most significant burgess of Bury throughout the 15th century is further indicated by the fact that Smyth acted as executor for Ayleward. Such involvement was almost a definition of elite status in the latter stages of the 15th century.

From the testamentary evidence, Ayleward was probably not the equal of individuals like Richard Charman and John Notyngnam in terms of wealth and social status, but when the model is applied to him and draws upon other sources, he certainly displays the characteristics of elite identity. Because of the breadth of criteria that the model constructed in this thesis applies to these individuals, men like Ayleward can be added to our conception of the town's elite. This allows for a closer understanding of the Bury elite than the undefined identification of individuals proposed by Gottfried.⁵³

4.iii.c. Conclusion.

The changing economic and demographic conditions acting upon the secular community of Bury St Edmunds throughout the 14th and 15th centuries were such that life within the town was likely to be unstable. With high levels of mortality throughout the period, even after the mid-15th century when the town's population began to revive, coupled with presumably high levels of immigration into Bury, it is probable that social contacts would be made and severed frequently. Social structures would thus be relatively fluid affairs, with a degree of mobility facilitated in terms of status: in fact, social mobility was probably a primary motivation for immigration into urban communities.⁵⁴ Indeed it is possible that the degree of social mobility in Bury was considerably greater than in towns with a more complex civic organisation where high status was achieved via a progression of lesser stratified (although not necessarily

administering see Hawlee f.112v, 192.

⁵¹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.165.

⁵² See below pp.213-30 for the enfeoffments of John Smyth and the Candlemas gild, and Appendix I for a summary of Ayleward's participation in them. See also the will of John Smyth BSERO Hawlee f.304; *Janlyn Smyth's Book* BSERO H1/2/1; the statutes of Bury's Candlemas gild BL. Harley 4626; and *Bury's Feoffment Documents* BSERO H1/6/1.

⁵³ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.131-66. Gottfried does not include John Ayleward among the elite.

⁵⁴ Reynolds *Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* p.80.

concretised) ranks.⁵⁵ It is also likely that the elite of Bury St Edmunds were in continual transition in terms of composition between 1300 and 1500, with families coming and going within a few generations depending upon the fluctuations in economic and demographic conditions in the town.⁵⁶ Indeed such was the transitory nature of success in an urban context that it is possible that families that endured for a number of generations accrued some prestigious identity or authority which confused the more organised structures of subdivided social ranks.⁵⁷

Of course in order for the models described above to be of any practical analytical use they must be approached in terms of their unreliability: that is, while they are *representative* of that which they seek to portray, they are unlikely ever to match exactly any specific case study example. In other words when examining a particular townsman from Bury, the models examined in contraposition will enable the placement of the case study within the context of his community.⁵⁸ By reference to the models it will be possible to know the individual's wealth, social connections, religious attitudes and so on in relation to an amalgamated 'average' of his peers. It is also important to describe individual townsmen from Bury who constitute distinct counterpoints to the models, particularly as this study is concerned with the construction and dissemination of identity. It is possible that such distinct identities that contradict the models are rooted in the individuality of their authors, and so provide the opportunity for examining the processes involved in projecting and perceiving identity, either by the individual rising above the social constraints of his community, or by the exploitation of the same.

As there has been no attempt to construct similar sociological models of any other town it is difficult to judge the extent to which this effort should be seen as being specifically tied to Bury St Edmunds. The nature of the material used to construct the model is unique to Bury, just as the evidential profile of any community is distinct. The purpose of the model, therefore, is the provision of a comparative structure within which specific examples can be

⁵⁵ For example in Coventry it was customary for townsmen to occupy a number of lesser civic and guild offices before they could attain the highest positions in the community; Phythian-Adams *Desolation of a City* pp.117-27, 145-52. Similarly in Bristol social mobility was limited by the small number of official ranks which could be occupied, as civic authority was concentrated in very few hands; Sacks, D. *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450-1700* (London, 1991) pp.118, 161. Gottfried suggests that social mobility would have been easier in Bury during the 14th century than in the 15th; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.145.

⁵⁶ Clark and Slack *English Towns in Transition* p.117. The wealthy mercantile burgesses of Bristol experienced highly unstable livelihoods with the result that success or failure were never certain; Sacks *The Widening Gate* p.61.

⁵⁷ Reynolds *Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* p.76.

⁵⁸ Just as individuals judge and identify themselves and their community in contraposition to others, so we can examine the individuals in contraposition to the models; Calhoun, C.J. 'Community: toward a

placed: so that the general can illuminate the particular. In other words without such models it is difficult to see how to locate individual identity within the cultural and social contexts of their community; biographical and even prosopographical studies of individuals would merely have their subjects suspended freely in a vague and amorphous generality.⁵⁹ As a method for achieving a sense of how the individual may have fitted into his community, and how that identity was perceived by himself and his peers, this model structure has the advantage of combining the quantitative and the qualitative, with the former delineating the contextual or communal identity, and the latter superimposing the individual. This combination of the general and the individual is a key component of understanding the relationship between identity and its construction, as it indicates to the observer when an individual is somehow 'different' from his community; and it is only from this position that questions as to the 'how' and 'why' of self representation can be asked.

variable conceptualization for comparative research' in *Social History* vol.5 no.1 (January, 1980) p.111.

⁵⁹ As can perhaps be seen in Gottfried's studies of the Barets and Drurys, *Bury St Edmunds* pp.153-66.

Chapter 5: Public and private lives: the construction of identity by communities and individuals.

5.i. Construction of identity at the level of the community.

5.i.a. Construction and display of identity in the community of Bury St Edmunds.

This chapter brings together a number of case studies of the construction of identity in Bury St Edmunds. The first case study is drawn from instances of identity constructed by the 'community of Bury' in the guise of the town's elite; following this are studies of the mechanics of identity in Bury at the level of the family and the individual.

Late medieval communities, as well as individuals, were able to consciously construct identity. The example of Bury is perhaps complicated by the lack of official constitutional structures to order the secular community,¹ as this effectively prevented the town's elite from producing the kind of documentation that was often, along with visual ritual and symbolism, the chief medium for the construction of identity.² This lack of administrative autonomy effectively deprived Bury's secular community, and particularly the town's elite, from the freedom of action that was enjoyed by their counterparts in other, constitutionally independent towns. To a large extent this was the underlying grievance held by the townsmen throughout the period of resistance to St. Edmund's. But at the same time, however, this lack of independence may also have been perceived by the secular community as a lack of social and civic responsibility. In terms of burghal pride, the desire to provide and maintain favourable economic conditions for trade and industry in Bury, and the ambition to attain a degree of independence, it is clear that responsibility for these communal sentiments was adopted and taken seriously by some groups in the town; but with the burden of the daily routine administration of the town in the hands of another authority, the townsmen may have felt free to participate in other activities, among them the construction of communal identity. In other words, by not having to concern themselves with matters of civic government, the townsmen's leaders could consider the community in political, ideological and philosophical terms, thus generating a sense of communal identity.

¹ See above pp.76-117 for Bury's administrative context.

² In other words the kind of texts that may have constituted ordinances or bye-laws designed to alter the civic administration.

The lack of independent administrative structures also raises a number of questions regarding the commercial and industrial activities of the secular community. The considerable prosperity of the townsmen was accrued through their connections with the town's industrialised hinterland,³ and it must be assumed that the official links between Bury and these other centres must have been conducted by monastic authorities. It was probably the case that the officials of St. Edmund's were responsible for maintaining the town's trade structures, as the monastic community drew a large proportion of its income from the town's trade. In this respect Bury's mercantile links with London ought to be remembered, as well as the connections the town's merchants had with their counterparts from overseas, particularly Ypres, Bruges, and elsewhere in Brabant and Flanders.⁴ The material suggests that much of this overseas trade was conducted by Bury merchants acting in joint ventures with what Gottfried refers to as "their more sophisticated and better organized counterparts from London, Norwich and Ipswich". This suggests, along with the fact that Bury's merchants were dependent upon ports administered and dominated by their regional rivals, that the town's mercantile (and perhaps therefore its social) status was perceptibly beneath that of its East Anglian rivals.⁵ In most cases it would seem that merchants from elsewhere came to Bury to conduct business, rather than Bury's merchants travelling to other markets. To some extent this indicates that Bury's integration into the commercial networks of East Anglia, and particularly the region's larger urban settlements, was somewhat limited. This has implications for the nature of any communal identity produced by the townsmen of Bury, as an awareness of regional standing in terms of trade contacts and industrial links with the hinterland would have undoubtedly affected the way in which the townsmen saw themselves, and the ways in which they constructed an identity for others to consume.

Nevertheless the fact that the secular elite of Bury were powerless to *enact* ordinances which may have shaped the communal identity of the town did not actually prevent them from producing such documents, as can be seen in the 1470 ordinances of the alderman Robert Gardiner, and the 1478 bill of complaints against the abbot of St. Edmund's.⁶ Indeed the very fact that these documents were produced, presumably to represent the perceived needs of the community, when there was little hope of the demands being met (given the history of conservative government by the monastic officials) is an indication of the artificial and self-conscious nature of the attempt to construct an identity for the town by its self appointed and unofficial leaders. The identity that these documents were trying to construct was clearly

³ See above pp.53-7.

⁴ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.85-6, 90-1.

⁵ This is treated in more detail above, section 3.i.a.

⁶ See Trenholme *EMB* pp.98-104; and Lobel *The Borough* pp.182-5 for the abbot's response to the articles of complaint. See above pp.113-21, 122-42 and Table 3.6 for details of the contents of the documents.

political in nature, and may well have been occasioned by the developing relationship between the secular community of the town and their monastic lords. The first half of the 15th century had seen peaceable relations between the town and abbey, the need for conflict diminishing as the latter lost its capacity to restrict the economic development of the town; and what these documents indicate is an attempt by the civic elite, led by their spokesman the alderman, to recreate the political identity of the town in the image of other existing, constitutional incorporated towns. The office of alderman, always intended by the officials of St. Edmund's as a representative rather than administrative functionary,⁷ was central to the civic ambitions attested to in these two sets of documents.

While the 1470 ordinances and the 1478 articles may well have been conservative, as Lobel has stated, and not constituted any new demands against the abbey's customary rights,⁸ the fact that they were drawn up at all makes manifest the resurgent desire by the town's elite for political recognition and independence at a time when in essence this had already been established. The motivation behind the construction of these documents must therefore have been the desire for *recognition* as an independent political entity. The 1470 ordinances not only represented an attempt to gain the formal political recognition enjoyed by other urban communities, but they also made the appeal to the past that is such a common indication of the explicit construction of identity.⁹ The reality of the political context of the townsmen was such that by the 1470s they enjoyed more self-determination than ever before, a situation that displayed itself in a number of expedients less formal than the 1470 'constitution', but much more effective.

Primarily this identity of a prospering, politically and civically self conscious secular community in control of its own social organisation was founded upon the institutional structure of the Candlemas gild. The gild was endowed with various (usually substantial) gifts of land and property with which to defray the public costs of the town,¹⁰ a program which had been begun by John Smyth II in the 1460s and 1470s, and which was subsequently built upon for at least two centuries. The circumvention of the statute of mortmain was not the only service the gild provided for the townsmen, however, as it was responsible for

⁷ See above pp.122-42.

⁸ Lobel *The Borough* p.160; Dinn *Popular Religion* p.126. Gottfried suggests that throughout the period the burghal elite of Bury was 'staid and conservative'; *Bury St Edmunds* pp.91, 136.

⁹ Not only by erroneously referring to the town being an ancient borough with the king as its lord, Trenholme *EMB* p.98; but also by its attempts to revitalise the portman-moot which had been the chief legal organ of the townsmen but which had been circumvented by the abbey's efforts to enforce its jurisdictional privileges. For an example of the appropriation of the past by a civic elite aiming to reconstruct itself, see Merry, M.L. 'Ricart's *Kalender*: urban ideology and fifteenth century Bristol' (University of Kent at Canterbury M.A. dissertation, 1994) section 4.

¹⁰ Particularly the most unpopular expenses, such as royal taxes and the 'Abbot's Cope' payment.

certain aspects of the religious life of the town, such as administering chantries and obits, overseeing masses and so on.¹¹ The gild's organisation in many ways resembled the structures of the civic governments found in other urban communities: the gild's statutes (drawn up in 1471) couch the regulations for membership of the gild in terms of managing the enfeoffments placed in its care (specifically those of John Smyth II and Margaret Odeham), with the number of feoffees restricted to 24.¹² This resembles a council such as would be found in other towns in the period, and other indications of this, such as an informal body of 32, appear elsewhere in the Bury material.¹³ Similarly the annual meeting, church services, accounts making and ceremonies stipulated in the 1471 ordinances resemble the activities of a civic government more than those of a socio-religious fraternity.¹⁴ In effect the Candlemas gild had become the unofficial town government, and had become a body constructed by the town's elite which they could employ to direct (and pay for) communal activity.¹⁵ The gild was probably intended to be used by the elite as a means of exercising political autonomy for the town as a whole, and a reflection of this might be seen in the way that unlike most of the gilds in Bury, the Candlemas gild held its services and ceremonies in *both* parish churches, as well as the gildhall.¹⁶

There may have been other elements to this political identity which may not have been so self consciously designed, particularly as they would only have been able to develop over a long period. Other elements of the identity may be seen in the struggles that the townsmen undertook to wrest control of certain institutions of the town from the officials of St. Edmund's: the hospitals, the gildhall and the gaol for example.¹⁷ Others may be seen in the social and civic charitable trends of the town as certain practices became more common. These include the facets of individual identity described above in Chapter 4, where the putative norms may be taken to indicate abstract concepts of identity at the communal level: so that testamentary support of the town's Marian cults and social charity reinforced certain presuppositions about how the community identified itself. The existence of St. Edmund's in the town may have had an inadvertent role in the development of a communal identity: the town's wealth, age and close relations with the crown over the period, and especially in the 15th century, all derive from the presence within it of one of the country's largest foundations,

¹¹ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.452-5.

¹² BL. Harley 4626 f.24v, the copy of the will of John Smyth II. See also BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book*, BSERO Hawlee f.304 (John Smyth II's will) and BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents*.

¹³ Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.120-1.

¹⁴ BL. Harley 4626 ff.21-24v; see Appendix II. Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.322, 435.

¹⁵ The gild itself had been founded in response to the punitive abolition of the town's Gild Merchant, the erstwhile vehicle of the town's drive for political independence.

¹⁶ In other words its affiliations did not lie with one topographical area; Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.322, 452.

¹⁷ See above pp.122-40; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.177.

even in the house's period of decline.¹⁸

Of course given the nature of political relations between town and abbey throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, a substantial factor in the communal identity of the secular community must have been the opposition that the townsmen shared to St. Edmund's. Gottfried has suggested that this opposition acted somehow as a cohesive social force within the community, serving to bind the townsmen together despite the social and economic distinctions between various groups in the town.¹⁹ While this may have been the case at particular periods of crisis in the town's relations with St. Edmund's, Gottfried possibly over emphasises the socially binding nature of this identity. The wealthier members of the secular community always supported the abbey, as suggested in their will making strategies, as well as their membership of the abbey's confraternity, and requests to be buried in the abbey grounds. Little is known about the ceremonial life of the town, but details do survive of the procession of the White Bull that took place annually, and which indicate that relations between town and abbey could be close even at the symbolic level, where unity (and not monastic superiority) could be expressed.²⁰ Similarly a unified identity of the community may have been more of an ideal than a reality in Bury's secular community in other areas too, as there are a number of instances of where disputes between townsmen have come to the fore.²¹

¹⁸ The loyalty of the townsmen in the latter half of the 15th century, insofar as it was ever evident or could be generalised as such, lay with the Lancastrians. In the first half of the century Henry VI shared particularly close relations with the abbey, and thus indirectly with the town; Lobel *The Borough* pp.52, 65, 92-4, 114.

¹⁹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.131.

²⁰ For details of the White Bull rituals see Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.217-9.

²¹ For example in the levying of the fine payable by the townsmen in 1385; the disassociation of the elite from the rebels throughout the 14th century and so on. See also Lobel *The Borough* p.88 for examples of prominent townsmen disputing between themselves over financial and political matters.

5.ii. Public identity in Bury St Edmunds: a model family.

5.ii.a. The Chapmans of Bury St Edmunds.

To test the applicability of the model described in Chapter 4 it is necessary to apply it to a family that was not centrally integrated into the secular elite of Bury to see whether its categories of identification are generic enough to enable the comparative analysis of individuals and groups at all social ranks. In other words it is necessary to see whether the mechanics of the model are geared to examining the elite, or whether the classifications it uses can be used on material involving less prominent people which frequently provides less detail than the corresponding records for the wealthier elements in society. For this the Chapmans of Bury have been chosen, as they constitute a family with limited connections within the upper echelons of the town, and with almost no county connections, but are reasonably well represented in the material.¹

The earliest Chapman for which there is material is Richard I cordwainer of Bury St Edmunds, who died in the mid-1380s.² His will is the only appearance he makes in the archive as is the case with the majority of individuals, but the document itself stimulates interest considering the social status of the testator and the date. Richard I makes a high altar bequest to St. James' of 40d which is the average value across the period, and 12d to the parish priest of the church; unlike many Bury testators he does not remember the Mary mass or its clergy. However in many ways Richard I emulates the testamentary behaviour of his social superiors, as he not only provides substantial social charity on the day of his burial,³ but he encourages the attendance (and thus intercession) of large numbers of clergy with cash bequests to priests and clerks. The acts of social charity that Richard I provides for are also presumably very public: apart from his funereal charity the (within the context of the wealth indicated in the will) large sum of 10s is to be given to the hospital of St. Thomas in Bury; and a highly individuated act is to be perpetrated by Richard I's son William Chapman I.⁴ The latter is to distribute 100 pairs of shoes to the poor of the town, a bequest which clearly ties in with the testator's occupational context, but also one which must have required preparation and advanced forethought. Much like the civic and social giving of the town's patrons John Smyth II and John Baret II, the act of providing shoes for the town's poor would have tied the public memory of Richard Chapman I to a *specific* act or gift, which may have served to fix

¹ The Chapmans of Bury are not to be confused with the Charmans of Bury, who throughout the late 14th and early 15th centuries are firmly ensconced in the town's elite.

² BSERO Osbern f.52v.

³ 13s 4d is to be distributed to the poor on the day of his burial.

that memory in the minds of the community.⁵ The other way in which Richard I's will resembles those of the wealthiest testators is the descriptive detail that he employs in his bequests, even though he in fact makes very few gifts. However Richard I's will does not contain the indicators of really substantial wealth or social status, as indeed one would expect of a testator whose occupation was located in the leather industry which was already declining by the late 14th century:⁶ there are no references to book ownership, chantries, large cash bequests, association with the personnel of St. Edmund's, or office holding. There are also no indications of gild membership, although given his occupational craft setting such membership might well be assumed.

All Richard I's lands, properties and the residue of his goods are to be divided between his wife Christine and his son William I to sustain them. He also held a shop in Bury, a mark of the standing he had reached within his occupation, as his nephew Henry I receives all the goods and tools that are kept in it. Little is known about Richard I's son William Chapman I, except that like Geoffrey Wolman, his relative by the marriage of his cousin Henry I, he was actively involved in the disputed abbatial election of 1379 and the subsequent uprising. In 1379 he and a number of other Bury townsmen, including Thomas Halesworth and John Clake, were summoned to appear before the royal council at Westminster on pain of 1000 marks to answer for their involvement: it was alleged that it was they that had read out and executed the illegal papal bulls solicited by Edmund Bromfeld the provisor.⁷ It was subsequently revealed that William I's involvement had been central, as it had been he who had written to Bromfeld in Rome to inform him of the abbot's death and to advise him to procure papal support and orders. He had also furnished Bromfeld with money for this purpose.⁸

Henry I is identified as the 'brother' of John Wolman of Bury St Edmunds in the latter's will of 1401,⁹ and it is from this reference that we learn of his marriage to Alice Wolman. This marriage was probably a significant factor in the status that Henry I enjoyed in the town, as Alice's father Geoffrey Wolman was a leading member of the secular community, claiming burghal status as well as holding a number of offices in the county.¹⁰ He appears in a number

⁴ See Appendix VI for the Chapman family tree.

⁵ For Baret and Smyth see below sections 5.iii-iv.

⁶ See above p.66.

⁷ CCR 1377-81 p.269; CPR 1377-81 p.420.

⁸ CPR 1385-9 p.100.

⁹ BSERO Osbern f.111v.

¹⁰ Geoffrey Wolman is mentioned in the will of Richard Chapman I as owning a property adjacent to his; BSERO Osbern f.58; he also held property in the Littlebrakelond, BSERO Osbern f.59v; see also BSERO Osbern f.114v. In 1380 Wolman was commissioned to collect taxes in Bury, CFR 1377-83 p.232. He appears to have been caught up most of the public affairs of the town at the end of the 14th century;

of Bury wills as executor in the first decade of the 15th century;¹¹ and in some of these as well as his own will he is identified as a cordwainer like his brother John I and his uncle Richard I.¹² His marriage to Alice Wolman may be reflected in the testamentary wealth he manifests at least in terms of his high altar bequest of 10s to St. James'. Unfortunately this is the only real reference in this will which provides any indication of his wealth: Henry I has a property in Risbygate Street which is to be sold, with ten marks of the income to go to his son John II when he comes of age, and the rest going to his wife Alice I immediately. Henry I also has a shop, and his servant John Prykke is to receive all the goods and tools contained therein. Thus, as far as the model is concerned, Henry I is comfortably 'above average' in terms of social status: he appears in a number of documents; he owns more than one property; he leaves a substantial high altar bequest and so on. He also requests his executors to provide for a priest to travel to Rome and to sing at the Curia there for a year, which is a significantly uncommon provision among Bury testators. Henry I's wife Alice I unfortunately died intestate in 1436.¹³

The occupational context of Richard I's will was clearly something of a kin association as well, as the will of his other nephew John I describes the latter also as a cordwainer. We know a little more about John I's property holding: we know that he held land in the Eastfield of Bury in the early 1390s;¹⁴ and that he had sold a tenement to Robert Salman butcher of Bury before 1393.¹⁵ His own will of 1394, when compared with the model, suggests a similar social context to that attained by his uncle. His parochial religious bequests are modest (in fact below average),¹⁶ but like many Bury testators he did remember the Mary mass of his parish church.¹⁷ Indeed the relative wealth of the testator as represented in his cash bequests is small, but his holdings may have been significant. In Bury, his wife Matilda I received a property in Northgate Street for the term of her life, as well as all her husband's household goods; and his son Robert I receives a property in the Longbrakelond, as well as personal goods. The latter also receives a parcel of land by the church in Fornham St. Martin, and these extra mural holdings distinguish John I from the majority of Bury testators. This is particularly so given the series of bequests which enfeoff John Drenkeston and Robert Wryghte his executors in all the lands and properties that John I held in Bury and Fornham St. Martin. This might suggest that John I had moved his wealth into property at a time when the leather industry in Bury was waning.

CPR 1381-5 pp.13, 586; CCR 1385-9 p.19; CPR 1385-9 pp.3, 56.

¹¹ BSERO Osbern ff.112, 120v, 131.

¹² Henry I's will of 1411 is at BSERO Osbern f.133.

¹³ BSERO Osbern f.219.

¹⁴ BSERO Osbern f.64v; referred to in the will of John Bedyngton spicer of Bury St Edmunds.

¹⁵ BSERO Osbern f.67v.

Henry I's son John II died c.1457 and his will identifies him as a weaver.¹⁸ This might indicate a response on the part of the Chapman family to the changing economic conditions prevailing in Bury by the mid-15th century, where the cloth related industries had begun to dominate, and other traditionally prosperous occupations (such as those associated with leather) had declined. However, this adaptation does not seem to have been altogether beneficial to John II, as the will does not reflect any great leaps in wealth or status compared with his father. His high altar bequest to St. James' is 3s, beneath the average level among Bury testators, and apart from the will of his father he appears in no other records, so John II's participation in the public life of his community seems to have been limited. His only bequests are to his family: his wife Agnes II receives the household goods and utensils and the house they inhabit in Garlond Street; while his son John III receives personal goods from his father.

John Chapman III, also a weaver,¹⁹ was much more prominent among the secular community than his father, however. His active participation in the public life of his peers can be seen in the way in which he served as witness or executor to a number of the town's testators.²⁰ His own will indicates a comfortable status perhaps not quite bordering on the elite: his high altar bequest to St. Mary's of 3s 4d is the average for Bury testators, but there are elements of his testamentary behaviour that are more representative of elite status. For instance he leaves his wife Joan II, along with the household goods and all goods and tools associated with his profession,²¹ £6 13s 8d (presumably from the stipulated sale of their property in Bury) which indicates not insignificant levels of wealth. She is also to receive a property with a garden called 'Gryseyerd' which lies near the parish church of Little Horningsheath; and a garden with two acres of land in Great Horningsheath, which lies near the road called the 'Clareweye', adjacent to land of the convent of St. Edmund's and a property of the abbot's. The holding of land and property in towns and villages in Bury's hinterland is an aspect of elite status in the town as indicated in the model, and as far as John III is concerned it is not the only indication: he leaves eight marks per year for two years for a chantry to celebrate for his soul. The fact of the chantry and that it was to last for more than a year places John III in a minority of Bury's testators. The final distinguishing feature of John III's will is the individuals he assigned to witness and execute it: his executors were the prominent cleric William Loveday and the feoffee John Sergeaunt chandler;²² while his witnesses included

¹⁶ The high altar of St. James' receives 2s, the parish priest 6d and the parish clerk 2d.

¹⁷ Which received a humble 6d; BSERO Osbern f.71.

¹⁸ BSERO Hawlee 56v. There are a number of John Chapmans in Bury in the first half of the 15th century, and it is difficult to distinguish them: BSERO Osbern ff.166, 194, 240v; Hawlee f.32v.

¹⁹ As indicated in his own will of 1478; BSERO Hawlee f.257v.

²⁰ BSERO Hawlee ff.70, 109v, 132, 139v, 164, 222, 243v.

²¹ The leaving of occupational tools seems to have been a recurring element of Chapman wills in the period.

²² See Appendix I.

William Mathue clerk the parish priest of St. Mary's and Robert Rynggold from an established Bury family.

The occupational adaptation of the Chapmans to the changing economic conditions of Bury in the 15th century can also be seen in the will of Simon I tailor of Bury made in 1461.²³ Like that of John III, this will also indicates a slight rise in wealth and social status from the Chapman wills of the late 14th and early 15th centuries. A high altar bequest of 6s 8d to St. Mary's places Simon I in the higher wealth categories, and while the other aspects of his will provide little indication of anything other than modest social status as defined in the model,²⁴ his religious bequests suggest that he may have considered himself to have been on the fringes of elite society. His knowledge of liturgical forms and services is evident as he leaves 10s for a trental of masses and 6s 8d to the mass of the Holy Name of Jesus in St. Mary's, the latter being reasonably unusual in Bury;²⁵ and interestingly he leaves 20d to the image of his namesake St. Simon in the church of St. Mary's. Simon I's executors included Robert Barbour of a substantial Bury family and William Campyon chaplain, the parish priest of St. James'.

The will of Isabel Chapman I widow of Bury, like that of Simon I, refers to a number of Chapmans living in Bury that cannot be incorporated into the family tree.²⁶ However it is clear that she is not of the same level of wealth or status as Simon I or John III, although again this may be a reflection of the model's inherent inability to incorporate gender into its functioning. She leaves only 12d to the high altar of St. James', and although like a large proportion of Bury testators she remembers the St. Mary priest of her parish, she leaves him only 4d. She does however leave 3s 4d to the Babwell friars, and a further 10s to Robert Broun (probably a friar at Babwell) for a trental of masses. There is no indication of property or experience of communities other than Bury, and no socially prominent contacts are referred to.

The application of the model to the Chapmans of Bury, a substantial family of the town that never quite approached the ranks of the elite, suggests some of the possible uses of employing such a model beyond identifying an individual's social identity and relative status within his community. By examining a number of individuals, in this case a single family, it

²³ BSERO Hawlee f.73v.

²⁴ For example, he only appears in the material in his own will, and his stated property consists of a single tenement in the Cook Row which is to go to his wife Alice II. Similarly there is no evidence of gild membership, experience of religious houses or communities outside Bury, social charity within Bury, or gild membership; there is also no indication of any association with St. Edmund's. The bequest of five marks to his daughter Katherine is a substantial amount, but it is the only cash bequest in the will.

²⁵ See above pp.128-37, and Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.196-203.

²⁶ BSERO Hawlee f.77; see Appendix VII.

might be possible to discern patterns of a general nature. For example the process of occupational adaptation undertaken by the Chapmans, moving from the leather to the textiles industry in late 14th and early 15th centuries is indicative of economic conditions in Bury in that period. Similarly the efforts of a number of the Chapmans, particularly Richard I and William I,²⁷ to emulate their social superiors can be seen through the application of the model. Indeed, it would perhaps be considerably more difficult to identify such activity without the communal context constructed by the application of such a model. That is to say, without having an idea of what constituted elite identity in a given community, it would be difficult to notice examples of identity or behaviour that aspired to it.

This latter is an example of the applicability that a model such as that suggested might have in the scope of community studies. It is possible that broad bands of social stratification might be identified through the processes of quantifying identity in a community, and this would allow the location of individual identity within that context. It would also be possible to trace the processes of social mobility within such a model if, for example, a family or other group of individuals was examined over a period of time: one would be able to note the movement of individuals within the modelled structures. Finally, both in Bury St Edmunds and in any other distinct community, the sociological model has implications for a study involving the notions of self, identity, and the representation of both. One might wonder, for example, that by fragmenting or disassociating aspects of individual identity into quantifiable components in order to be able to locate specific individuals within their communities, are we in fact reproducing in a much more clinical and rigid form the same mental processes activated by the individuals themselves as they attempt to find their own identity and connect it to those in the community around them?

²⁷ The former with his detailed will and distinctive social charity; the latter with his central involvement the political positioning of the disputed monastic elections of 1379.

5.iii. Public identity in Bury St Edmunds: John Smyth esquire.

5.iii.a. Explicit construction of public identity.

This section is intended to provide an example of the ways in which a localised, community specific public identity can be appropriated, adopted and adapted by an individual in the pursuit of public life. The example of John Smyth esquire in the latter half of the 15th century is by no means typical, but it does show that 'compliance' with the prevalent facets of identity within the community could lead to success within that community; and that further, in this instance, those facets of identity could be re-modelled by an eminent enough individual for a variety of communal purposes.

The secular community of Bury St Edmunds enjoyed a period of steadily increasing economic prosperity throughout the 15th century, a trend which was directly associated with the financial decline (compounded by mismanagement) experienced by the offices of St. Edmund's abbey.¹ During this century the relationship between the townsmen and the monastery became increasingly stable and peaceable: the 15th century to a large extent saw no return to the outright violence that flared during the 14th century. The origins of this stability may be partly found in the personalities of several of the early 15th century monastic officials of St. Edmund's, most noticeably the conciliatory abbot William Curteys,² but it is likely that general developments played a more important role. The disturbances of the previous century had been the inevitable result of a number of economic, regional and national political developments; but, as in other monastic boroughs, the townsmen of Bury had further reason to dispute the political authority of their lord. As the town developed in its role as a centre for the supply, production and marketing of wool and cloth, bringing increased prosperity to the ever growing numbers of Bury individuals involved in the industry, the demand for the machinery for political expression naturally developed as well. The townsmen had never been granted any form of incorporation, and the rights that they had accrued since the eleventh century were held more or less at the sufferance of the abbot and sacrist of St. Edmund's. The lack of political self determination, and the jealous guarding of prerogatives and customs on the part of the abbey, was always likely to engender friction within the town, despite efforts to subvert the political authority of St. Edmund's through the unofficial representation of the secular community via its figure-head officers and social

¹ See above, pp.53-75; also Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* chapter 3, especially pp.86-127.

² Lobel *The Borough* p.159. Indeed the role that abbot Curteys played in bringing about stability in relations with the townsmen might be indicated by the renewal of the secular community's claims for increased political independence after his death in 1457; Elston, J.W. *William Curteys, abbot of Bury St*

gilds. In keeping with the difficulties experienced by the great landowners in the late 14th century, particularly those that did not adapt to the economic conditions that developed after the Black Death and subsequent epidemics, the officials of St. Edmund's followed the short sighted policy of alienating and dispersing its vast holdings in an attempt to recoup its losses. With the continual reduction of its landed power base, in effect the ultimate source of its authority within the Liberty of St. Edmund's and the town of Bury, the secular community in the 15th century had no need to wrest increasing privileges from the abbot and sacrist: the officers of the abbey were involved in a process of granting concessions as a matter of financial policy at a time when the town was consolidating its economic strength.

This created the opportunity for the townsmen of Bury to relax their struggle against the political domination of St. Edmund's, although, as we have already seen, in terms of the legal and jurisdictional extent of their authority very few new privileges were gained during the 15th century.³ The rise of the secular community's political independence may have been linked to an increased freedom in self-expression more generally, both at the level of the individual and of the group, particularly during the second half of the century.

If we turn to the promotion of individual interests, however, and to the expression of identity at the level of the individual, then Bury St Edmunds has much to offer in the later 15th century. Part of the reason for this may be found in the increased independence enjoyed by the townsmen at this time; and part of it may reside in just the lack of political machinery that such expressions may have been intended to subvert. In other words while the expression of ideology and identity (at any level) may have been an attempt to attain a position of authority by identifying the individual or group with a particular set of interests, the effort could only flourish in a context where the promulgation of a conceived identity was not prescribed by existing structures of political and social expression. It was perhaps the unofficial nature of the civic structures in the town that produced so many instances of conspicuously 'individual' townsmen in Bury St Edmunds, or in some cases enabled the production of the documents that recall individuals. Whatever the reason may have been, there was in the latter part of the 15th century a number of distinctly remarkable individuals within the elite of Bury St Edmunds.

An example of such an individual within the town walls can be found in John Smyth, mercer and alderman, who died in Bury in 1481.⁴ Lobel claims that he occupied the office of

Edmunds 1429-1446 (University of Berkeley PhD thesis, 1979).

³ See above pp.76-117; Lobel *The Borough* pp.160-8.

⁴ Hereafter John Smyth II.

alderman at least five times,⁵ while Gottfried suggests that he held the position nine times from the 1420s.⁶ Gottfried indicates that Smyth was alderman in 1423, 1440, 1441, 1442, 1443, 1454, 1459, 1460, 1461 and 1462, with the office holder for the years 1444 to 1451 unidentified. It may be that Gottfried over emphasises the extent of John Smyth's office holding in Bury, temporally if not politically: to have held the office in 1423 and then lived until the vigil of St. Peter's in 1481 would have made John Smyth II a very young representative of the town's established elite early in his civic career. John Smyth II's father was also John,⁷ and it is possible that it was he, rather than his son, who held the office in the 1420s and 1440s. Nevertheless the fact that Smyth certainly did hold the office of alderman more than once at various stages is an immediate marker of the position he held in 15th century Bury.

The will of John Smyth II indicates the level of wealth and civic participation he attained in his life.. The probate register Hawlee contains a copy of the will made 12th December 1480 and proved 20th September 1481, and at Smyth's request has annexed copies of several indentures (at least one of which dates from 1473) detailing various enfeoffments.⁸ *Jankyn Smyth's Book* contains an abbreviated copy of a version of a will made in 1477, reproducing clauses primarily concerned with the enfeoffment of the Candlemas gild brethren in Smyth's lands and properties, ff.1-5.⁹ The copy of the ordinances of the Candlemas gild drawn up in 1471 also contain clauses taken from a presumably earlier version of Smyth's will, and earlier indentures, as part of their schedule,¹⁰ as well as a summary of what happened to Smyth's feoffment in subsequent years.¹¹ Similarly the manuscript known as *Feoffment Documents* contains not only several copies of Smyth's will, but also of what is called his 'second', 'third' and 'fourth' wills, which are in fact copies of different indentures enfeoffing Candlemas gild members in various additional grants,¹² as well as a brief account of the subsequent fate of the

⁵ Lobel *The Borough* p.161.

⁶ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.141, 271.

⁷ John Smyth II names his father in his will, BSERO Hawlee f.304.

⁸ BSERO Hawlee f.304. A copy of this version is printed by Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.55-73.

⁹ BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book*. This document, drawn up at the end of the 15th century, is essentially a detailed and presumably definitive list of the properties and parcels of land left to the Candlemas gild on behalf of the town by John Smyth II and Margaret Odeham. The numerous parcels of land detailed in this manuscript are an exact reproduction of those that appear in BL. Harley 4626 ff.33-37v. The 1477 will also appears at f.23v of Harley 4626, while the 1480 will (the version in Tymms *Bury Wills*) appears at f.26v.

¹⁰ BL Harley 4626 ff.23v-29v, 33-39. Ff.23v-26 comprise a copy of the 1477 will, while ff.26v-29 is an indenture of 1480. These 'wills' of John Smyth II (and of Margaret Odeham, which also appears in this manuscript) are added to what is obviously a later copy of the 1471 ordinances of the Candlemas gild, but it is possible that the requests and intentions of the various documents were known in 1471 by the individuals drawing up the gild's statutes.

¹¹ BL Harley 4626 ff. 39v-41. The clauses taken from this document are not a *verbatim* copy of those taken from Hawlee, but the variations are largely insignificant.

¹² BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* ff.12-36.

lands and properties.¹³

Smyth's interest in and knowledge of both Bury's churches and their clergy are evident throughout the will. His instructions regarding the positioning of his grave indicate an awareness of the spatial dynamics of his parish church. Smyth requested that he be buried in the north aisle of St. Mary's before the "dore of the awughter" of St. John.¹⁴ A pre-existing gravestone commemorating Smyth and his wife Anne was to be moved from his tomb to the South or Lady chapel,¹⁵ a location frequently used for gild and chantry services.



Figure 5.1: The brass traditionally of John Smyth II and his wife Anne in St. Mary's, at the east end of the Lady Chapel.¹⁶

At his funeral service the parish priest of St. Mary's attending the dirige was to have 3s 4d (unless it should be a clerk by the name of William Mathewe, a feoffee of Smyth, who was to receive 6s 8d) while the St. Mary priest was to receive 6s 8d for his participation. Every priest of the College of Priests in Bury was to have 20d for their participation in the funeral services.¹⁷ Master Henry Hardman's gift of 3s 4d was not conditional upon his attendance at Smyth's funeral. Hardman, apart from serving as feoffee to Smyth in his grants to the Candlemas gild,¹⁸ appears in over twenty wills and other records in his capacity as clerk from the early 1460s until 1480,¹⁹ and in 1465 held the position of St. Mary priest of St. James'.²⁰ By

¹³ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* ff.36, 42, 46, 56, 59-61, 73, 77-83, 88, 95, 98, 103-5, 110, 115 and 128.

¹⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.55. It was at this altar that Smyth intended his one of his chantry priests to sing, BSERO H 1/6/1 ff.22, 25.

¹⁵ Paine, C. *St. Mary's, Bury St Edmunds* (Bury St Edmunds, 1986).

¹⁶ Reproduced in Paine *St. Mary's*. Any inscriptions are lost.

¹⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.56.

¹⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.57, 64; BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* ff.22 and 30.

¹⁹ BSERO Hawlee ff.95, 80, 89v, 91v, 94, 105v, 113, 135v, 146, 155, 164, 177, 189, 196v, 219, 225v, 264, 270v, 285v, 295v and 304. He also appears in BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* ff.22, 25 and 30.

1480 Hardman was a priest of the College in Bury, an institution that had been founded by Smyth.²¹

Smyth's position in the community might be reflected in the contact he had with the senior personnel of St. Edmund's. The abbot, sacrist and prior all served as witnesses to Smyth's will and indentures, while the sacrist John Swaffham, the chief landlord of property within the town walls, was to perform a more direct service:

And for *perfitte* wittenes and know lege that this is my very will and intent by me the seyde John Smyth made uppon the seyde feffement and that it shuld be undouted to all men I have to this *present* writyng putto my seel and subscribed it with my owne hand And for as moche as my seell to many folkys is unknowen therfor at my request the Secristen of the Monasterie of Bury Seynt Edmund Ordinarie of the same place, to this *present* writyng also hath putto his seell²²

Swaffham received a bequest of 20s, while every brother of the convent received 6s 8d if they were also a priest, or 3s 4d otherwise.²³ The prior²⁴ was given Smyth's "beste stondyng cuppe of sylver and gylte",²⁵ a bequest that is perhaps somewhat ambiguous in its provenance. On the one hand the nature of the gift might suggest a personal acquaintance, as though something more personal and perhaps more emotionally significant (at least for Smyth, if not for the prior) than a simple cash bequest was required to mark the type of relationship between testator and recipient: Smyth's best standing cup would presumably constitute a direct link to the giver, causing the prior of St. Edmund's to reflect on his relationship with Smyth whenever it was used. On the other hand the fact that Smyth requires the cup to revert to the prior's successors clouds the picture of a personal acquaintance somewhat, and transforms the bequest into something altogether more symbolic. The standing cup, probably ornate given its designation as John Smyth's 'best', and possibly employed at feasts and other ceremonial occasions, becomes a 'prop' that associates the *memory* of John Smyth with the *office* of prior at times of heightened symbolic awareness. Given the role that Smyth asks the prior of St. Edmund's to play in the administration of his will and the foundation and perpetuation of his two chantries, it might be possible to identify an attempt by Smyth to establish a kind of symbiotic relationship with the abbey, or more particularly with the prior: a relationship which enhances the prestige of both, and at the same time constructs a

²⁰ See BSERO Hawlee f.89v.

²¹ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.25.

²² Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.67-8.

²³ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.55.

²⁴ In 1480 this was probably William Mildenhale, although at the time of Smyth's earlier indentures (1473) the office was held by a John. William Mildenhale is named in BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.56 as a witness to John Frense's instructions regarding the leper house at the Risbygate; and in the 1479 will of Thomas Cranewys chaplain and parish priest of St. Mary's BSERO Hawlee f.285v.

²⁵ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.55.

supposedly ever-developing and interlinking identity for both.²⁶

The religious interests and knowledge of John Smyth II extended further afield in Suffolk, as perhaps one would expect given the extent of his holdings outside Bury St Edmunds. Houses of friars at Babwell, Sudbury, Clare and Thetford are remembered, as are nunneries in Redlingfield, Thetford, Bruisyard, Soham, 'Icklyngton',²⁷ Ixworth and Campsey.²⁸ The financial value of the bequests reflect Smyth's wealth, although perhaps the bigger bequest to the nuns of Bruisyard is coloured by the presence among the convent of one dau[n] Margaret Yaxle, who is to receive 10 marks: the Yaxle family maintained a number of connections with the Smyths in the latter half of the 15th century, particularly through the marriage of John Smyth II's daughter Rose to Richard Yaxle gentleman sometime before 1468.²⁹

These houses comprise a checklist of those most commonly named in Bury wills throughout the 15th century: John Smyth neither remembers an unusual religious house nor fails to recall a house that his fellow townsmen favoured; and like the majority of his fellow townsmen, his primary interests as far as pious charity are concerned revolve around the parish, its building, clergy and services. In other words it might be said that Smyth's religious interests and knowledge both within and beyond Bury were typical of his community, and perhaps even indicate an awareness of *exactly* the kind of religious interests that community had, thus manifesting an acute consciousness of the religious knowledge and interests of the Bury elite.³⁰

John Smyth II also founded two chantries in St. Mary's, and the College of Priests. His will forms the end product of what must have been extensive negotiations regarding the inception of these institutions, particularly in the case of the College for which Smyth might have had a building constructed during his lifetime.³¹ The chantries were founded on the enfeoffment of large land and property holdings. The first chantry was for a priest to sing at the altar of St. John in St. Mary's for the souls of John Smyth and his wife Anne, and for all Christian souls

²⁶ The prior of St. Edmund's was also responsible for the collation of the chantry priest celebrating at the altar of St. John in St. Mary's, and had custody of one part of the tripartite indenture detailing the instructions regarding this chantry, pp.57, 64.

²⁷ Possibly Icklingham in Suffolk.

²⁸ All these houses are in Suffolk, except the two friaries and nunnery at Thetford which is in Norfolk, and Soham which is in Cambridgeshire. The Franciscans at Babwell are given £14, while the friars at Sudbury, Clare, both the Dominicans and Augustinians as well as the nuns at Thetford, the nuns of Soham and Icklyngton all receive 20s. The nuns of Bruisyard receive 66s 8d, while those at Redlingfield, Campsey and Ixworth receive 40s. The bequests are usually accompanied by a request for prayers.

²⁹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.61. Richard Yaxle gentleman also served as supervisor to Smyth's will.

³⁰ See the tables presented in Dinn *Popular Religion* pp.429-34.

³¹ "... the colage of preestes newe bildid within the town of Bury," Tymms *Bury Wills* p.65.

according to a tripartite indenture already in existence.³² The chantry was to be maintained through the enfeoffment of his manor of Brettys in Hepworth with its attendant lands, rents, services and tenements in Barningham, Stanton, Ixworth, Bardwell, Wattisfield, Thelnetham, Weston and Coney Weston.³³ The collation of this chantry was originally given to the prior of St. Edmund's, but by the time Smyth came to write his final will he had changed his mind.³⁴

Additionally the feoffees in the manor of Brettys were to hand over the estates to the master of the College once it had been incorporated, so that the chantry could be perpetuated. The chantry priest was to have an annual stipend of ten marks from the revenues of the manor of Brettys; the residue of the income from the manor was to be received by the chantry priest for the keeping of an annual obit for the same souls.³⁵ The chantry priest was also responsible for distributing the residue of income arising from a piece of meadow enclosed at the 'Turret' in Bury St Edmunds to the poor of Bury on the day of the obit.³⁶ The St. John chantry priest was given authority to require the feoffees in the manor, should they diminish in number to six or eight, to enfeoff another 20 at least of the most substantial inhabitants of Bury. He was also to make a yearly account of the moneys received from the manor which was to be examined by the prior of St. Edmund's.³⁷

The other chantry, at the altar of Our Lady in St. Mary's, was to be maintained with the income arising from Smyth's manor of Swyftys and its appertinences in Preston, Kettlebaston, Brent Eleigh, Monks Eleigh, Brettenham, Thorpe Morieux and Cockfield.³⁸ This manor was enfeoffed to Henry Hardman clerk, William Duffeld clerk and others for the use of the College,³⁹ and it was to remain in the feoffees' hands until the College had been incorporated, when, like the manor of Brettys, it was to be handed over to the master of the College. In the meantime the feoffees were to give the master of the College all the issues of the manor and were to provide Smyth with an annual pension of 10 marks during his lifetime; the rest was to be used to maintain the College. After Smyth's death the 10 marks were also to go to the master of the College to maintain a chantry priest, and the other part

³² Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.57-8.

³³ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.61.

³⁴ The master of the college, the chaplain of the Holy Name of Jesus gild, and his other chantry priest were to take this responsibility; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.58.

³⁵ Another charge that is to be borne by the revenues from Brettys manor is the payment of 2s to the prior of the gild of the Holy Name of Jesus and to the prior of the gild of St. Nicholas, or *Dusse* gild, for their help in the supervision of the chantry priest's use of the revenues; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.62.

³⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.62. The meadow at the Turret was to be used primarily to maintain and repair the new aisles of St. Mary's church which had been recently built by Smyth.

³⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.63.

³⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.64. These 'townes' all lie between 6 and 12 miles south east of Bury St Edmunds.

³⁹ John Smyth had held this manor jointly with Robert Webbe and John Stevenson clerks; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.65. See Appendix I.

was to be used for the upkeep of the College, and other works of charity.⁴⁰ These charitable deeds were to be at the direction of the College master and four or five of the most substantial of the feoffees of the manor, and with the advice of Smyth's executors. The structures regarding the perpetuation of the enfeoffment, and especially those to maintain the number of 24 feoffees, are similar to those put in place for the Brettys manor enfeoffment;⁴¹ this was to last until the College was incorporated and then the feoffees were to transfer the manor over to the master. The collation was in the hands of the prior of St. Edmunds until the College was incorporated when it would revert to the master, the St. John chantry priest and the chaplain of the gild of the Holy Name of Jesus.⁴²

Neither the Candlemas gild statutes or the *Feoffment Documents* refer in any detail to John Smyth's chantries, although they do refer to the anniversary which is to be kept for him by the alderman and burgesses of the town, and feoffees of Smyth's endowment.⁴³ Both concentrate instead upon the charitable and civic bequests made to the town's inhabitants. Within the *Feoffment Documents* there are a number of extracts from the 1473 indenture which refer to the chantry at the St. John altar of St. Mary's maintained by the manor of Brettys in Hepworth and supervised by the prior of St. Edmund's;⁴⁴ and a copy of the 1480 will⁴⁵ details the changes in the procedure for the collation (namely that it should be transferred from the prior of St. Edmund's to the master of the College, Smyth's other chantry priest and the chaplain of gild of the Holy Name Jesus). It also recalls the enfeoffment of the manor of Swyftys for the chantry at the altar of Our Lady in St. Mary's.⁴⁶

Another contribution made by John Smyth II toward the religious life of Bury St Edmunds was his foundation of a College of Priests, sometimes called the Jesus College.⁴⁷ The foundation of this institution had taken place before the drawing up of Smyth's 1480 will⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.65-6.

⁴¹ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.66-7.

⁴² Indeed this occurred not long after as a licence for incorporation was granted on the 5th November 1481, CPR 1476-1485 p.259. The licence also granted the provision for the erection of a new building, and indicates that it was dedicated to the Holy Name of Jesus.

⁴³ BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's book* ff.2-2v.

⁴⁴ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.21.

⁴⁵ That which appears at Tymms *Bury Wills* p.58.

⁴⁶ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* ff.21-2. This collection of documents includes the an account of the inquisition into Bury's chantries that took place in 1548, which recorded that the St. John altar chantry priest had 'operated' according the instructions laid down until 1534, when the manor entered the possession of a Roger Reve who kept the incomes and effectively dissolved the chantry. However the feoffees of the manor apparently undertook to pay for the chantry priest at their own expense "as a thing done of there ffreewill And not established by any Corporation or any assurance by will or other devise"; *Feoffment Documents* ff.77-8.

⁴⁷ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.73. In the margin a note reads: "The Colledg of Preists called Jesus Colledge in Colledge streete in Bury given by Jankyn Smyth for ye dwelling of ye preists".

⁴⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.65; BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* ff.20-2, 30-1.

but is not mentioned in either the 1473 indenture,⁴⁹ or in the 1477 version of Smyth's will, although this is an abbreviated version only concerned with land and property bequests for the use of the town, and so may not have included any references to the College.⁵⁰ The VCH asserts that the College was founded in 1480, citing the indentures annexed to Smyth's will transferring Brettys and Swyftys manors to the master, as well as letters patent of Edward IV the following year which gave licence for a chantry and perpetual gild of the Holy Name of Jesus, but this was probably not the case.⁵¹ There are certainly references to such a gild in Bury before the 1480 will of John Smyth II,⁵² and there are also mentions of a College dating from the early 1430s. In 1432 John Redgrave chaplain of Bury St Edmunds bequeaths 13s 4d for a breakfast to be enjoyed by the priests of the College.⁵³ In 1439 the will of the Bury chaplain Robert Berd, suspected heretic and chaplain to the mother of leading townsman John Baret, left 6d to each priest in the College.⁵⁴ Similarly William Swift chaplain of Bury in 1465 and John Norman ironmonger of Bury in 1467 both remember priests from the College in their wills;⁵⁵ while in 1442 a clerk called John Mose from Denham, a testator not from Bury who happened to be in the town when his will needed to be made, left 12d to each priest of the College of 'Bury St Edmunds'.⁵⁶ John Coote provides for a feast for the priests in the College at his month's mind; and leaves 3s 4d to the gild of St. Nicholas, or *Dusse* gild, which is kept in the College by this time.⁵⁷ The *Dusse* gild had previously been kept in St. Mary's,⁵⁸ and most of the town's significant clergy seem to have belonged to it: indeed for twenty years after William Coote's provision of the messuage for the College in 1473 the institution only appears in the wills of prominent Bury clerics.⁵⁹ From the early 1490s, after the death of John Smyth II, the College began to feature in the wills of leading members of the secular community of Bury. In 1493 the dyer William Honybourne, who had had several business dealings with John Smyth II and had served as feoffee in some of the latter's gifts to the town, left 12d to the gild of the Holy Name of Jesus which was being kept in the College.⁶⁰ This was

⁴⁹ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.68-73.

⁵⁰ BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* ff.1-5b.

⁵¹ VCH ii pp.141-2; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.142, 190. The gild was to consist of six chaplains and a warden who were to live together and pray daily for the souls of Smyth and others; CPR 1481, p.259.

⁵² Indeed Dinn asserts that this gild was "by far the most popular" in Bury, Dinn *Popular Religion* p.320. There are 23 references to a Jesus gild in Bury St Edmunds, falling in the years 1457-80: BSERO Hawlee ff.57, 60v, 61, 78v, 86, 87v, 89v, 92v, 117v, 118, 123, 124v, 133, 156, 182v, 222, 259v, 269, 275v, 281, 293v, 302 and 317. The gild in Bury is referred to as the gild of the Holy Name of Jesus in most cases: three times it is called the Sweet Name of Jesus gild; and on two occasions it is called the High Name of Jesus gild. Fourteen of the references stipulate that the Jesus gild is kept in St. Mary's church: its transference to the College may have been at the design of John Smyth II.

⁵³ BSERO Osbern f.202.

⁵⁴ BSERO Osbern f.240.

⁵⁵ BSERO Hawlee ff.87, 113v.

⁵⁶ BSERO Osbern f.260v.

⁵⁷ BSERO Pye f.123.

⁵⁸ For example, BSERO Hawlee f.285: will of Thomas Cranewys chaplain of Bury St Edmunds in 1479.

⁵⁹ Apart from those mentioned the College appears at BSERO Hawlee ff.264, 284v.

⁶⁰ BSERO Pye f.19v.

probably the Jesus gild 'founded' by Smyth. In 1496 Adam Newhawe requires that his feoffee William Duffeld is to transfer a parcel of land over to this gild in the College, and is to enfeoff 'twelve of the spiritual and twelve of the temporal as shall be thought good and honest' in the parcel. It was then to provide 13s 4d for a priest from the College to say a daily *De Profundis* for Newhawe and his wife Margaret, with the residue going to the gild.⁶¹ In 1535 the will of Edmund Lee esquire leaves 6s 8d to the company of the Jesus College for their stock of salt fish.⁶²

The 1548 inquisition into chantries, hospitals and guilds in Bury records that the messuage called the College had six tenements pertaining to it; the capital messuage had been put in feoffment by William Coote clerk:

to continue forever to the Intent that in the said capitall messuage nowe called the Colledge All the Preists of the parish churches of St. James and St. Mary in Bury should continually keepe and have their lodginge⁶³

Of the six tenements, four were to be used for the dwelling of four poor men, and the remaining two were to be let to pay for the maintenance of all six houses. The inquisition noted that College was being used, and had always been used since "the said devise", according to this intent;⁶⁴ although it is not at all clear that the 'devise' was that of John Smyth II. In fact the relationship between Smyth and the College and the Holy Name of Jesus gild is generally quite obscure. We know that something called the College existed in Bury before 1480, as did a Jesus gild, and we know that William Coote was instrumental in provisioning it with property for its charitable duties (the four houses for four poor men). We also know that Smyth was associated with the activities of the College, and judging by the demands made of the master regarding the administration of Smyth's chantries this relationship may well have been that of founder and presentee. It is possible that Smyth was in some way rejuvenating an existing foundation, or in some way renewing or commandeering its identity. By the 1548 inquisition the College had become firmly associated with Smyth, and once again, as with the maintenance of his chantries, this may have had little to do with the original reality of any

⁶¹ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* folio unnumbered, and f.58.

⁶² BSERO Holland f.32v.

⁶³ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.73. Coote's will was made in 1473 and proved in 1475, BSERO Hawlee f.196v, and records that he was rector of Fornham All Saints (the *Feoffment Documents* gives details of his various livings and incomes). He bequeaths to a John Coote a tenement opposite the College, and also instructs his executors (which include the very prestigious John Clopton esquire, as well as Thomas Heigham, sometime bailiff of Bury St Edmunds) to sell his property called 'le Colage' to find the stipend for a priest living there. This may have formed part of the feoffment referred to in the *Feoffment Documents*.

⁶⁴ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.73. The inquisition also mentions the existence of an inventory which values the household contents of the capital messuage at 77s 2d. An endnote refers to various lands enfeoffed by William Coote for the 'master and college' to say mass for his soul; f.74.

foundation, and more to do with a manifestation of civic response to the perceived and remembered identity of John Smyth II.

A final aspect of John Smyth II's identity constructed through pious beneficence can still be seen today in the alterations he commissioned to St. Mary's church. Smyth's 1480 will suggests a close association with the parish church, with valuable bequests made to the high altar and to named priests of the church, as well as the establishment of the two chantries at the altars of Our Lady and St. John the Baptist. In the indentures attached to this will Smyth refers to the residue of revenues coming from

a pece of medewe inclosed at the Turret in Bury Seynt Edmunds abovesaid, whiche is assigned to the reparacion of the newe eles in thaforseyd chirche made by me thaforseyd John Smyth⁶⁵

and Margaret Statham suggests that he was responsible for building the chancel aisles and the sacarium of St. Mary's.⁶⁶ John Smyth II was responsible for the north chapel or 'Jesus Aisle', which had been constructed by 1463, as well as for the south or Lady chapel which was completed a decade later. These two chapels housed the altars of St. John the Baptist and Our Lady, where his chantry priests were to celebrate. He may also have been involved in the refurnishing of the sanctuary at the end of the 1470s: the sanctuary and the crypt beneath it had probably been added by Smyth sometime before 1479.⁶⁷ The stonework of the east windows in the north and south chapels were reused from the existing east ends of the aisles that the chapels effectively elongated, and part of this procedure in the south or St. Mary's aisle involved the destruction of John Baret's carefully designed chantry chapel at the east end of that aisle.⁶⁸

Apart from providing concrete evidence of the wealth of John Smyth II the mercer, his funding of works in St. Mary's serves a number of other purposes, one of which is to direct the responses of both historian and his contemporaries to John Smyth II the man. The type and scope of the works undertaken at Smyth's costs would have required official and communal involvement at many different levels, ranging from the highest obedientaries in St. Edmund's who held the advowson of St. Mary's, through to the clergy of St. Mary's, the master mason involved in the construction work,⁶⁹ the local suppliers of materials, and the

⁶⁵ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.62.

⁶⁶ Statham, M. *Jankyn Smyth and the Gildhall Feoffees* (Gildhall Feoffment Trust Bury St Edmunds, 1981) p.2.

⁶⁷ Paine *St. Mary's*.

⁶⁸ See pp.244-67.

⁶⁹ Possibly William Leyer, or more probably his pupil Simon Clerk. Clerk took over from Leyer as

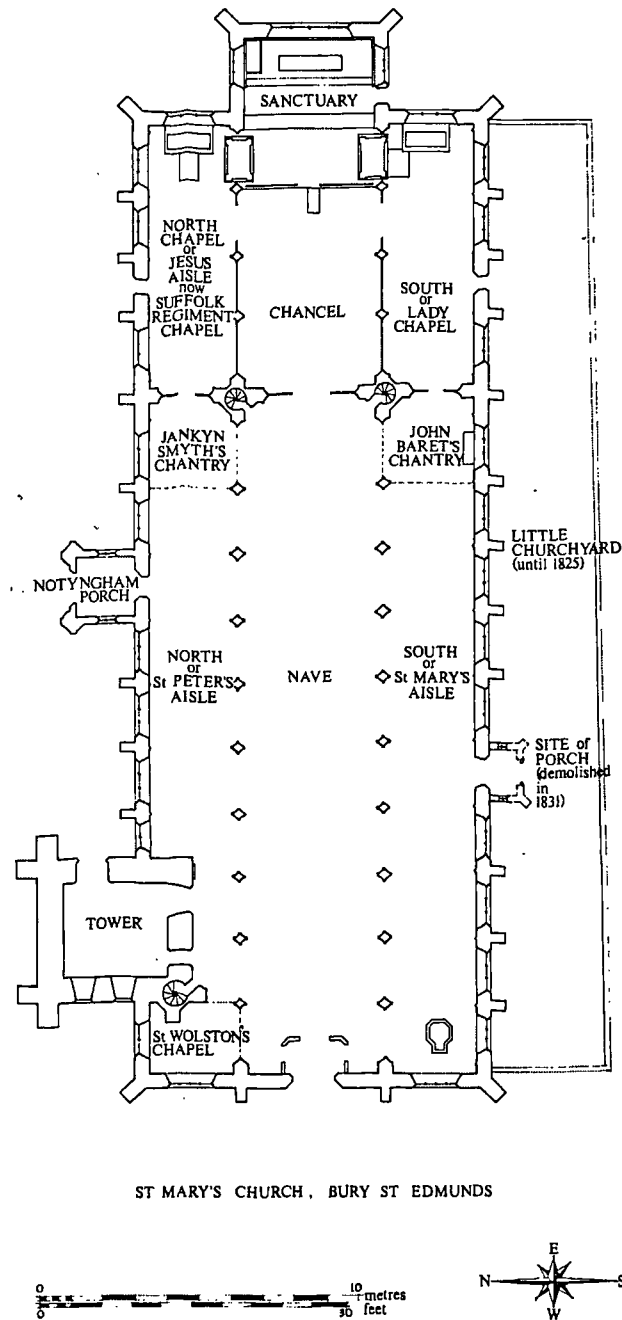


Figure 5.2: Plan of St. Mary's church, Bury St Edmunds

labourers drawn from the area. This would have increased the publicity of Smyth's activities, and possibly even beyond the confines of Bury St Edmunds; and as the undertaking extended over a period of more than a decade, the works must have constituted an addition to Smyth's existing fame, despite the fact that rebuilding St. Mary's had been a perennial activity of Bury's townsmen throughout the century. The sanction of the authorities involved must also

master mason of the abbey; Harvey, J. *English Mediaeval Architects: a Biographical Dictionary down to 1550* (Gloucester, 1984 reprint) pp.55-60, 172. Harvey claims Leyer designed the nave of St. Mary's between 1424 and 1444 when he died.

have been significant to Smyth's peers, as wealth alone would not have been enough to enable Smyth to make the changes he did with all the consequent disruption to the congregation and clergy.

While the construction of the new north and south aisles may have been a feature solely connected with and in preparation for the foundation of Smyth's chantries, they may have been, like the work undertaken in the sanctuary and crypt, provided with civic intention: the alterations made to St. Mary's were probably motivated by a desire to benefit the parish as a whole, as part of an on-going process of enlargement and embellishment. It might be possible therefore to see Smyth's financing of the refurbishment of St. Mary's as meeting a need of the community while at the same time undoubtedly serving more private purposes, connected with interests concerned with religious perspective, civic reputation and public identity. The interests of the parish of St. Mary's, the level of communal involvement and the appropriation of official approval may have been arranged, acknowledged and enacted through a process of consultation. That an element of consultation took place is perhaps suggested by the instructions regarding another chantry chapel in St. Mary's left in the will of John Baret.⁷⁰

Despite the fact that elsewhere in his will Baret requested that his chantry chapel and the works in it should not be tampered with except with approval of the town's alderman and most substantial burgesses, these instructions clearly indicate that he expected new works to take place in the south aisle of St. Mary's: indeed, as John Smyth II did not complete the south chapel until 1473 these alterations may have been in progress when Baret died in 1467. At the very least this clause in Baret's will suggests that the plans Smyth had for the church were public knowledge, even if no process of consultation actually took place; and this public knowledge must have had a role in the way that Smyth was 'known' by the inhabitants of Bury, both before and after his death. A process of consultation undertaken by Smyth is also indicated by the alterations he required regarding the administration of his chantries, particularly the transfer of the collations to the master of the College once it was incorporated; and it is likely that this consultation in effect comprised an invitation for the community to participate in the making of decisions concerned with both its own future and with the future commemoration of John Smyth II. It is also probable that the population of Bury St Edmunds, at least figured by its most substantial townsmen, took a very direct part in negotiations concerning Smyth's gifts of land and property to the town.

⁷⁰ BSERO Hawlee f.95; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.15-44. Baret's will was drawn up in 1463, and so the testator would already have seen Smyth's north chapel completed or near completion. After a long and detailed series of instructions regarding the physical composition and appearance of his own chapel, Baret stipulates that no alterations are to be made to the window or arch of the chapel; pp.38-9.

The identity constructed in the religious elements of John Smyth II's wills and indentures is clearly one that is very public in nature: apart from the chantries (which may not have included much of the community in their commemorative activities), the yearday observances and masses attended by the alderman and most prominent townsmen in effect achieved the participation of Bury's ruling body in the design and continuance of a civic 'image' of John Smyth II. Indeed the involvement of the alderman even at this largely ceremonial and symbolic level was probably a defining feature of how Smyth was remembered after his death. The foundation of the College, with its conspicuous collection of buildings, the charitable deeds of its brethren and the activities of the Jesus gild, would also have served in the construction of Smyth's identity as perceived by the community of Bury as a civically orientated body. Finally the physical alterations made to St. Mary's, especially the building of a new chapel, would certainly have contributed to the public identity of John Smyth. It must be assumed that these efforts were intended by Smyth to build on an identity already established in Bury during his prolific and active public life in the town, rather than trying to transform a completely non-descript or otherwise different public image.

It is also clear that to a large extent this public identity of Smyth was one that was very 'Bury-esque' in nature: when the sociological model of Bury St Edmunds of section 4.i (see above) is applied to John Smyth II, in terms of his interests, he corresponds with the artificial 'norm' almost exactly. That is to say that while his obvious wealth and large-scale property holding place him at the top of the social structures of the town, the beneficiaries of his testamentary charity both within Bury and beyond correspond exactly with the most popular charitable targets for the community as a whole. This may well suggest an acute awareness of the disposition of the Bury townsmen towards certain religious and social causes on the part of Smyth, in which case the desire to be seen to be corresponding with these popular views is suggestive regarding the construction of identity he was enacting.

5.iii.b. The perpetuation of the construct.

Perhaps more central to the public identity of John Smyth II, and ultimately why he was remembered and commemorated so carefully by generations of Bury inhabitants, were the gifts he made to the town's Candlemas gild on behalf of the population as a whole. Smyth made enfeoffments of several groupings of lands and properties, two of which appear most prominently in the records: an enfeoffment of everything he held in the south, east and Vine fields of Bury, as well as in the towns and fields of Berton, Fornham St. Martin, Rougham and Nowton; and an enfeoffment of a messuage, eighteen pieces of arable land, a piece of meadow and a piece of wood with liberty of a fold course in Rougham. Less frequently

recorded enfeoffments include a grant made by Smyth in 1463 to John Walshe which provided a parcel of land to the north of Eastgate street in order to provide a payment of 2d at Easter and Michaelmas to the alderman.⁷¹ The *Feoffment Documents* also record a grant (possibly made on the 10th September 1470, although it is equally possible that it is an earlier indenture) of a messuage and fifteen pieces of land comprising 82 acres in the fields of Berton and Fornham St. Martin.⁷² A number of the named parcels of land and properties in this grant appear in the more general gift of everything held by Smyth in those places and elsewhere, so it is likely that this record is either a more detailed description of Smyth's holdings in these areas, or, as there is some doubt as to the date of its provenance, is a reflection of an earlier gift.⁷³

The 1480 will of John Smyth II refers to an enfeoffment made in an indenture of August 1473⁷⁴ of all messuages, lands, tenements, rents and services in Bury St Edmunds (in Eastfield, Southfield and Vinefield), Berton, Fornham St. Martin, Rougham and Nowton. This enfeoffment of 1473 may have had something of a history: a similar enfeoffment had been made in September 1470, and records of this survive in several places.⁷⁵ Two copies of the 1473 indenture are found in the *Feoffment Documents*, although they do not list the feoffees as the 1480 will does.⁷⁶ As Appendix I indicates, the feoffees in both the 1470 and 1473 versions of this grouping of lands and properties are composed of the same individuals, many of whom can be credited with membership of the Candlemas gild, and all of whom are prominent in the records. Many of these feoffees were past, present or future aldermen of Bury,⁷⁷ and the surviving testamentary material suggest that all were men of considerable wealth.

The other main group of holdings given to the population of Bury St Edmunds was enfeoffed on July 20th 1473, and comprised a messuage, eighteen pieces of arable, a piece of meadow, and a piece of wood with liberty of a fold course in Rougham.⁷⁸ The feoffees in this indenture

⁷¹ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.12. A marginal note says that the rent is to be delivered to the 'feoffees'.

⁷² BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.13. See Appendix I, no.3.

⁷³ The list of feoffees named in this indenture is identical to those found in the different copies of both the 1470 and 1473 enfeoffments of everything held by John Smyth II in the south, east and Vine fields of Bury St Edmunds, as well as in Berton, Fornham St. Martin, Nowton and Rougham. See Appendix I.

⁷⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.68.

⁷⁵ BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* ff.1-1v; BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.16; BL. Harley 4626 ff.23v-24.

⁷⁶ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* ff.20, 27.

⁷⁷ See Gottfried's list of aldermen, *Bury St Edmunds* pp.269-71.

⁷⁸ There are at least five copies of this indenture: Tymms *Bury Wills* p.68; BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* f.1v; BL. Harley 4626 f.24; BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* ff.17, 34. Fold courses were very valuable resources in the region; see M. Bailey *A Marginal Economy? East Anglian Breckland in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

were largely the same that were to serve in the other main grant with a small number of differences.⁷⁹ The reasons for this are unclear. It may be that the enfeoffment made of Smyth's holdings in Berton *et al* only took place in fact in 1470, and that the reference to it being made in 1473 at Bury St Edmunds (in Smyth's registered will of 1480⁸⁰) is incorrect: the other references to this indenture all place it at Berton in 1470. This would at least explain the absence of Banyard and Rose from the Rougham enfeoffment made in July 1473: the wills of Banyard and Rose were both proved in Bury in 1471.⁸¹ Whatever the causes of the inconsistencies between the lists of feoffees in the various versions of the same enfeoffment, it is likely that John Smyth II made two clearly distinct gifts to the prominent townsman of Bury on behalf of the inhabitants as a whole: that made at Berton on 10th September 1470 of all his land and properties in the south, east and Vine fields of Bury St Edmunds, as well as in Berton, Rougham, Nowton and Fornham St. Martin; and that made at Rougham on July 20th 1473 of a messuage, eighteen pieces of arable, a piece of meadow and a piece of wood with liberty of a fold course, all at Rougham.⁸² *Jankyn Smyth's Book* and the Candlemas gild statutes drawn up in 1471 both reproduce the same list of eighty parcels of land in the fields of Berton, Rougham and southern Bury St Edmunds comprising 222 acres and 24 rods, a number of messuages and tenements, a garden and a piece of meadow given by John Smyth II to the inhabitants of Bury.⁸³ How this list corresponds to either the 1470 or 1473 enfeoffments is unclear due to the latter's lack of detail, but it is possible that this list forms something of a definitive summary of everything John Smyth II gave to the town.

The 1470 enfeoffment was made so:

that alle the issuez and *profites* comyng and grovyng of the seid meeses, londes, and tenementes schulde be houly *convertyd* and applyid to thuse and *profityz* of thynhabytauntys of the seid town of Bury and of their successourez for ever to discharge certayn *ymposicionez* and *charges* wonte to be boryn be the seid inhabitauntez⁸⁴

while the 1473 enfeoffment, we are told, was made:

unto the releve & helpe of the alderman burgeyses and of alle the *commynalte* and poore inhabitautes of the seyd Toun of Bury and unto the supportacion of the *Chargis* dayly lying on them that they theire eyres and successours may specyally pray *evermore* for

⁷⁹ See Appendix I. There are no men serving in the Rougham enfeoffment who were not also enfeoffed in the holdings in Berton, Bury St Edmunds, Rougham, Nowton and Fornham St. Martin; but there *are* a number of feoffees of the latter who are not listed in every version of the Rougham indenture.

⁸⁰ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.68.

⁸¹ BSERO Hawlee ff.156, 140.

⁸² BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* f.1v clearly indicates that all the components granted as part of this enfeoffment were at Rougham.

⁸³ BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* ff.12-24; BL. Harley 4626 ff.33-37v.

⁸⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.57, 68.

the helth of my soule and for the soule of Anne now late my wyff⁸⁵

Smyth's concern seems to have been quite specific: his gifts to the town were not to serve just as a focus for the remembrance of a wealthy townsman, but were alleviate the "chargis dayly lying" on the whole population of the town, including the poorest. The will of 1477 produced in *Jankyn Smyth's Book* provides more details of Smyth's wishes regarding his enfeoffments. After his death the alderman and burgesses of the town, as well as Smyth's feoffees, were to 'solemnly and devoutly' keep his yearday at St. Mary's for his soul and the souls of his wife Anne, their parents, their benefactors and all Christian souls.⁸⁶ On the vigil of the anniversary the priests and clerks were to sing *Placebo* and dirige, and on the yearday itself a requiem mass was to be conducted with other prayers. After these civically attended celebrations of John Smyth II's life, the

residue and overpluse of the issues and profitez of the said mes londes tenementes medowys boses rentes services and of all the premisses with the pertinences be reservyd and keyyd savely and suerly by the said alderman burgez & feoffes for the tyme beyng to that entent that whansoever and howoft soever in tymes to come the abbey of Bury seynt Edmund schalbe vacant of an abbot be the deth of the abbot and a new abbot therre after his deth schall lawfully be chosyn I wyll thanne that of the sayd issues and profitez be payd to the sayd newe abbot for the tyme beyng as moche as may be reservyd and keyyd therof in to a satisfactyon and a recompensacion of a certeyn summe of mony wont of custom to be payd to the newe abbot by the inhabitantes of the sayd toun of Bury seynt Edmund ... Also yf any thyng therof remayne over the said charges I wyll that it be applyed and disposid to the paymentes of tenthis and fyftens taxis tallagys and of alle odir maner charges the which xalbe exact & put to the burgesses and comynalte of the sayd toun in to the releve and discharge of the burgesses & comynalte of the sayd toun of alle and syngler forsayd chargys⁸⁷

The customary payment made by the townsmen at the installation of a new abbot was that known as the 'Abbot's Cope' and was usually 100 marks, and had provided a tangible target of civic antipathy throughout the violent conflicts with the abbey throughout the 14th century. While the financial burdens implied by the charges specified by Smyth cannot be said to be 'daily', they were technically those that had to be borne by the community as a whole.

As part of his enfeoffment Smyth instituted a mechanism for its perpetuation in an attempt to protect the revenues coming from his lands and properties. Essentially this was to comprise a continual process of re-enfeoffment: when the 24 feoffees were reduced to 14, 12 were to release their right in the enfeoffment to the two eldest, who would re-enfoeff them and others of the most substantial of Bury to return to the number of 24. The newcomers would be

⁸⁵ BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* f.2; BL. Harley 4626 f.24.

⁸⁶ BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* f.2v; BL. Harley 4626 ff.24-24v.

⁸⁷ BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* ff.2v-3; BL. Harley 4626 f.24v; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.70.

chosen by the alderman and burgesses.⁸⁸ Smyth entrusts the enfeoffments always to the most substantial townsmen of Bury to administer on behalf of the town, to be overseen by the most senior burgesses under the supervision of the alderman. Therefore the list of feoffees in John Smyth II's grants to the town constitutes a convenient starting point for an investigation into Bury's civic elite for any given time where such a list exists.⁸⁹ The current and future feoffees were obliged to take an oath before the town's alderman and burgesses to fulfil the intentions laid out in Smyth's wills and indentures.⁹⁰ Each year after Smyth's death the alderman and burgesses were to choose four "provyd men & abyll" from the feoffees to supervise the enfeoffments, receive the revenues, fulfil Smyth's will regarding the yearday observances and make account to the alderman.⁹¹ The significance of these mechanisms is that the responsibility for the perpetuation of the income so generated for the benefit of the town lies with the town's leaders.

The relationship between Smyth's gifts, the population of Bury St Edmunds and the mediation between the two by the Candlemas gild is crucial to both an understanding of why Smyth made his grants, and of how the secular community of the town managed its affairs. The enfeoffments, as they are represented in both the 1477 will produced in *Jankyn Smyth's Book* and the 1480 registered will, make no mention at all of the Candlemas gild, at least by name.⁹² Later references made to Smyth's lands and properties suggest that the role of the Candlemas gild in the perpetuation and administration of the enfeoffments was central, and probably originally implicit. Later on in the administration of the enfeoffments the connection with the gild becomes clearer, as parcels of Smyth's lands in Berton change hands. For example, the *Feoffment Documents* records the transfer of 18 acres land and a pightel of 1 rod in Berton, and the property in Bury St Edmunds called 'Recyes' (once belonging to John Smyth II) in 1491, 1517 and 1534;⁹³ the record of the 1491 transfer states that the holdings are:

ad usum & proficium Inhabitantu~ villat de Bury predicti per Avisamentu~ & concensu~ frater~ Gilde purificacion beate Marie virgin~ vocat Candlemas guild⁹⁴

⁸⁸ BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* ff.3-4; BL. Harley 4626 ff.24v-25v; Tymm's *Bury Wills* pp.70-2.

⁸⁹ See Appendix I for instances of such lists later in the 15th century and on into the 16th.

⁹⁰ BL. Harley 4625 f.25v; BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* f.4; Tymm's *Bury Wills* pp.70-2.

⁹¹ Smyth requires that the revenues received from the enfeoffments are to be kept in a "hotche" to prevent them being used for any purpose other than those stipulated in the wills and indentures. BL. Harley 4625 f.25v; BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* ff.4-4v; Tymm's *Bury Wills* pp.70-2.

⁹² Except in so far as they refer to the 'alderman'. See above p.87 for the ambiguity of the title, which may have been used to refer to either an alderman of the town, or of the Candlemas gild, or both. Lobel believed that whereas the alderman of the town's Gild Merchant had always been the alderman of the town as well, the alderman of the Candlemas gild and the alderman of the town were distinct offices; Lobel *The Borough* p.148.

⁹³ See Appendix I nos.17-19.

⁹⁴ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* ff.35-6.

while the 1517 record indicates that the enfeoffment of the same holdings is to be:

ad opus & usu~ ac ad *proficium* ffratru~ Gilde *beate* Marie infra villam de Bury *sancti* Edmundi⁹⁵

While there is an interesting and subtle difference between these two statements of policy regarding the administration of the property of John Smyth II, the involvement of the Candlemas gild in the process is evidently central, at least by the end of the 15th century.

This is suggested by the fact that the ordinances of the Candlemas gild (drawn up on Candlemas 1471) were framed around the structures of the enfeoffments.⁹⁶ It is not difficult to imagine that there would have been a process of consultation between Smyth and the gild regarding the administration of the feoffment: not only did Smyth's grants provide the revenue necessary for the gild to operate in the representation of Bury's population in relations with St. Edmund's, but the feoffment also put in place the structures around which the Candlemas gild could maintain itself.

The consultation and implied interdependency between Smyth and the Candlemas gild becomes obvious early on in the gild's statutes. The first statute describes the gild's rules regarding the obedience of its members to the alderman, dye, auditors and 'holders' of the gild, and the swearing in of new brethren:

In the fyrste, the Statute is by asente and wyll of all the fraternytie that everye ffeoffe that nowe is or shalbe from hense forward he shall sweare uppon the booke of statutes that he shalbe obdedyent to the alderman dye Audyttors and the fowre holders of the fore sayde guylde And that he shalkepe the constitutions and charges of the guylde terme of his lyef.⁹⁷

It is noticeable and significant that new entrants into Bury's most exclusive gild are referred to as 'feoffees'. This may indicate that from 1471 John Smyth II's feoffees and the members of the Candlemas gild were to be synonymous. Even if this was not the case the phrasing is suggestive, and if it was to be so then the level of joint planning and consultation that must have taken place was considerable: if the gild had previously existed as a body which represented Bury's secular community only as the least concession made by St. Edmund's to its tenants, after September 1470 the situation would have been very different as a result of the substantial landed wealth it suddenly acquired. The grants made by Smyth to the town

⁹⁵ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.36.

⁹⁶ See Appendix II for a transcript. The ordinances were recorded just over four months after John Smyth II made his 1470 grant and a little under a decade before he died.

⁹⁷ BL. Harley 4626 f.21.

gave the Candlemas gild a structure on which to base any authority it may have aspired to, and the machinery designed by Smyth to perpetuate the feoffment would also have served a similar purpose for the gild. The gild statutes qualify the procedures of membership in the same manner as Smyth specifies the process of enfeoffment, by stipulating that promotion to the gild is reserved for men of good name, fame and conversation and then only with the assent of the whole gild; and that the number of brethren is to be maintained at 32.⁹⁸ The number of feoffees required by Smyth's indentures was to be 24 *at least*, and the establishment of a definite limit to the membership of the gild resembles an attempt at the creation of an assembly or council that acted as official civic governments in other towns in the period.⁹⁹

The second statute confirms this connection between the activities of gild and the feoffment. Part of the process of being sworn in as a brother or sister of the Candlemas gild was to involve an oath to fulfil the will of John Smyth II:

Also we wyll and ordeyne theat everie brother coming into the sayde guylde shalbe sworne to fulfill the will of John Smythe Esquyer as it appereth by a Trypartyte Indenture concerning the same wyll wrytten in Englishe in this booke¹⁰⁰

perhaps satisfying the request made by Smyth for such an oath to be taken by his feoffees.¹⁰¹ Smyth's will is to be read to the whole gild every year at their principle meeting and dinner on the feast of the Purification of Our Lady;¹⁰² and once again the gild is to enact a feature stipulated by Smyth for the administration of his feoffment:

Also ordeyned and statuted that every Candlemas day be chosen fowre of ffeoffes the *which* be feoffed in the lands and tenementes sumtime of John Smithe Esquire to have the supervision & governaunce of all the saide landes and tenementes according to John Smythes wyll and therof trewlye accounte make everie yeare abowte Candlemas tyme to the residue of all the cofeffes *which* other for the tyme being.¹⁰³

These four are also to ensure that the yearday observances (including dirige and requiem) take place at their appointed times. The book of statutes then goes onto record a copy of John

⁹⁸ BL. Harley 4626 f.22.

⁹⁹ It may have been that the 24 feoffees of Smyth's grants were chosen from the pool of individuals created by the 32 members of the Candlemas gild. Some kind of semi-official body of 24 may have existed in Bury before this time, Dinn *Popular Religion* p.120. In 1385 the fine imposed upon the town after the rising of 1381 was to be assessed and levied by Roger Rose, the alderman, and 23 burgesses; CPR 1381-5 p.586. All are from substantial families, and a number are past or future aldermen, see Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.269-71.

¹⁰⁰ BL. Harley 4626 f.21.

¹⁰¹ BL. Harley 4625 f.25v; BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* f.4; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.70-2.

¹⁰² This feast is to include a religious commemoration of Smyth; BL. Harley 2626 f.21.

¹⁰³ BL. Harley 4626 f.23.

Smyth's will and a detailed description of what has been given to the town.¹⁰⁴ The version of the document as it survives in Harley 4626 was clearly drawn up later than 1471 as not only does it contain the 1477 will and indenture of Smyth, but also indentures made by Margaret Odeham gentlewoman in 1477 and 1483 incorporating land and property of her own in Smyth's enfeoffments.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless the statutes themselves indicate an awareness of not only the general intentions of Smyth among the civic elite of Bury in 1471, but specific details as well.

That these intentions (and the original documents displaying them) were incorporated into the constitution of the Candlemas gild is significant for several reasons, as it alludes to the way in which the mechanisms involved in a number of social and civic processes may have operated. It suggests, for example, that the successful exercise of political authority in a community that had no official structures for such activity could depend upon the behaviour and personality of individuals, particularly as in the case of John Smyth II, extraordinarily wealthy and prominent individuals. It also suggests that political and social policies at the communal level could be conducted through the personal consultation of individuals, beyond the structures that existed for these purposes. In other words the individuals whose public lives took place within these civic and public spheres did not cease their public behaviour and social/civic policies as soon as their councils and assemblies were adjourned. In Bury St Edmunds in the late 15th century, the political world of the town's secular community was transformed through the interaction at a personal level of John Smyth II, a man who had held no public office for at least eight years by 1471, and his social peers among the membership of what was formally a social and religious institution; neither the man nor his colleagues had any *official* authority, and yet it is likely that what was achieved had a considerable impact upon the communal life of the town. Smyth and the Candlemas gild achieved this within the relatively informal context of an unrepresented secular community closely governed by a great monastic landlord; but the processes involved probably took place in the more elaborately structured urban communities of other towns as well.

The identity of John Smyth II that one can extrapolate from the goals he pursued in the last decade of his life is very much a public one. Very little of Smyth's private life is reflected in the material. His final will of 1480 provides almost no clues about his life away from his civic activities: of his family we learn that he was survived by a son (John III) who was to inherit all

¹⁰⁴ The copy of the will and the property breakdown are the same as those in BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book*.

¹⁰⁵ BL. Harley 4626 ff.29v-33. For details of Margaret Odeham's role in John Smyth II's enfeoffment to the people of Bury St Edmunds see below, pp.215, 259.

his father's lands and properties in Thorpe Morieux, Felsham, Gedding and Rattlesden;¹⁰⁶ that his parents John I and Hawise were both dead;¹⁰⁷ and that the soul of a daughter Rose was also to be remembered.¹⁰⁸ The Yaxles, Smyth's relations through marriage, are remembered in his will, and the sons of Richard Yaxle are referred to in order of their birth.¹⁰⁹ We learn also that Smyth had a servant by the name of Elizabeth Theloth or Tyllote, possibly related to the Thomas Tyllote that witnessed the 1473 indenture of Smyth,¹¹⁰ that he presumably valued as she was left the large sum of five marks in cash.¹¹¹ Ralph Duke, an executor of the 1480 will and a feoffee in Smyth's enfeoffments, receives 6s 8d as well as the bequest given to the other executors, possibly signifying some other relationship with the testator. This is the extent of what can be gleaned about John Smyth II's private life in the 1480 will and the other surviving records directly instituted or influenced by him: there are no indications of close personal relations with either family or friends, and no bequest is made that is anything other than entirely conventional and prosaic.

What survives of John Smyth II indicates no 'multiplicity of domains' such as one might expect from an individual wealthy and prominent enough to have complex social interactions with those around him, and who appears markedly in the records: all we can perceive is the public individual whose identity is constructed by the appropriation and re-alignment of existing social and civic structures. The use of his will and indentures as public instruments of his (and by extension, his peers') civic policy rather than as a vehicle for displaying any kind of individuality might explain the almost extreme typicality it indicates in terms of his religious, charitable and civic interests.

The identity is very much of a man able and willing to serve his community practically, in terms of direct financial support, as well as perhaps less directly by providing a means by which the community (as represented by the Candlemas gild) could begin to construct its own distinct identity and attain some authority. Before Smyth's enfeoffments the secular community had largely been characterised by and derived its identity from its opposition to St. Edmund's; but during the first half of the 15th century this cohesive feature of public life in Bury was becoming dissipated as the relative balance of authority switched from the abbey

¹⁰⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.56. All these parishes are located to the south east of Bury St Edmunds, between the roads to Stowmarket and Lavenham.

¹⁰⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.61.

¹⁰⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.61.

¹⁰⁹ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.56-7. Richard's heir John Yaxle is to receive Smyth's messuage called Redecastyll, with all lands, properties, rents and services in Pakenham. Richard's second son Robert is to receive everything given to John Smyth III in the event of that line failing; and after Robert's death the bequest is to be divided equally between his sisters Alice and Philippa.

¹¹⁰ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.73.

¹¹¹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.57.

hierarchy to the mercantile and industrial leaders of the town. Smyth's grants may have provided new foundations for a communal identity which was more positive and forward looking than what it replaced.

Any public identity that can be affixed onto what we know of John Smyth II was clearly a product of a lifetime of activity in the public sphere of political, social and civic life of Bury St Edmunds; and can probably be attributed to a high degree of conscious self-imagining and imaging during his lifetime. It is possible that the effort of self-promotion within the community may have been one of the chief causes of Smyth's success. The impact that Smyth may have had upon the civic and political ambitions of Bury must have been significant: as long serving alderman and certainly one of the town's wealthiest individuals he must have been involved in all political and public affairs, and it is possible that during his lifetime his personality may have imbued communal activity with a sense of *how* such affairs were to be conducted. Moreover, the public identity that this particular individual constructed during his life may have had a dramatic effect upon not only the mode of political activity in the town, but also the political aims of Bury. The machinery he put in place to fund public affairs via the Candlemas guild in effect enabled structures to be set up so that the community, always under the supervision of the town's 'best', could express itself *as* a community, something it had not been able to do before.

5.iii.c. The results of public identity.

The previous section indicated the mechanics of the construction of public identity in the instance of John Smyth II, now we can turn to the consequences of the construction. It would seem that whatever John Smyth's priorities were when he made his decisions regarding his grants to the population of Bury, the perpetuation of all the various elements was among his priorities; and consciously or otherwise this indicates a concern with the memory of Smyth being held in high acclaim by his erstwhile community after his death. In other words the 'success' of John Smyth II's attempts at the construction of a public identity may be judged by how the individual was remembered by successive generations of Bury inhabitants.

The conscious construction of a public identity presupposes the existence of some form of motivation; and goals such as social or occupational advancement during life, or commemoration after death may have provided such purpose. Ultimately the consumption of a constructed identity, while as difficult to analyse and extrapolate from as the construct itself, constitutes the only means by which the 'success' of any given self-consciously

manufactured identity can be judged. In the case of John Smyth II, the lifetime success of the public identity he created for himself can be judged successful by several criteria: the acquisition of wealth and property; the repeated holding of the highest civic office; membership of the most prestigious social body; conspicuous involvement in the provision of religious 'resources' for the town; county holdings and contacts; social networks incorporating the most prominent individuals of both town and region; armigerous status; marked appearance in the extant material and so on.

That his peers remembered John Smyth in the years following his death is suggested by the ordinances of the Candlemas gild, which if followed, would have put have Smyth at the centre of the gild's ceremonial activities, particularly at the annual Candlemas feasts and at the attendance of the gild membership at the yearday observances. The administration of Smyth's feoffment would also have clearly brought Smyth to mind for the elite of Bury involved in the lands and properties, even if they had never known him personally.¹¹² While the town's elite were responsible for the administration and exploitation of Smyth's bequest to Bury's population it was inevitable that he (or his public identity) would be remembered by them.

But it is also clear that the Bury elite, as represented by the Candlemas gild, were at pains to have Smyth explicitly remembered as the benefactor of the town by the population as a whole, and to have him directly associated with the financial liberation theoretically enjoyed by the community:

It is to be called and reduced to the *Perpetuall* memorye and remembraunce of thinhabytauntes of this Toun of Burie *Sancte* Edmund this great bounteus and *profytable* gifte of that honorable person John Smythe late of Burie *Sancte* Edmund Esquyre specyall lover and preferrer of the polytike and comon weale of the same Inhabytant whom god assoyle *which* deceased in the vygill of *sanct* Peter the xxvij^{te} daye of June the yeare of *our* Lorde god a thowsand foure hundered foure scoure & one Of his landes *tenementes* rentes services and other *commodityes* lyeng in the Tounes of Barton Rougham And the feldes of Burie *with* other made and geven to the burges and comynaltie of the same Toun of Burye and to ther successoris to the relefe supportacion and ayde of all charges Imposicions taxes & tallages to the said burges and Comonatie in tyme to come to be put to and speciallye for the dyscharge of a *summe* of monye wonte of custome to be payde to the abbot at his creacion speciallie in tyme to come *with* the

¹¹² *The late 15th and early 16th century references to new enfeoffments being made in Smyth's lands and properties indicate that the machinery for the perpetuation of the grants was successful, at least initially: BSERO H 1/6/1 Feoffment Documents ff.35-6. However by 1584 the picture had changed: a commission was initiated after Bury's inhabitants complained about the activities of the feoffees. The commissioners found that the feoffees were not abiding by the conditions of the original enfeoffments, that they "had been in the habit of electing new colleagues on their own responsibility, and had been accounting to themselves instead of making a yearly account to the burgesses ... They had maladministered the property and had been guilty of peculation."* Lobel *The Borough* p.168.

renewes of the sayde landes & tenementes to be borne and payde¹¹³

The account in Harley 4626 then proceeds to describe a number of re-enseffments to new and existing feoffees and Candlemas gild brethren.¹¹⁴ The provenance of this document may well have rendered the call for Smyth to be remembered by the inhabitants of the town as a great and bounteous benefactor impractical, as only those of the highest social status would have had access to it; but the fact that such an instruction exists among the ordinances of the unofficial secular government is significant. It is also interesting that Smyth's avowed intention of aiding the whole population of the town with their economic burden is echoed here, in his identification as the 'specyall lover and preferrer of the polytyke and comon weale'.

This call for remembrance among the 'official' records of the secular community can be found elsewhere. Perhaps the most unusual is the verse which appears in *Jankyn Smyth's Book*:

John Smythe

The whiche John this lyvelode hath geven passed to god he is
 On the peters even at mydsummer as goddis wyll is
 In the yeare of *our* lorde a thowsand fowre hundred fowre score & one
 Lette us all of charytie praye for the soule of John
 We putte you in remembraunce that ye shall not mysse
 The keping of his dirige and also of his messe
 On the peters evin his evin the dirige shall be seyde
 And on the peters evin the messe *with* manie a good beyde
 We put you in Remembraunce all that the othe have made
 To come to the dirige & the messe the soules for to glade
 All the Inhabitauntes of this Toune ar bownde to do the same
 To praye for the sowle of John & Anne ellis they be to blame
 The *which* John afore rehersed to this Towne hath bene full kinde
 Thre hundered markes for this Toun hathe payde no penie unpayde behinde
 Nowe we have informed yow of John Smythes will in wryting as it is
 And for the gret gyftes that he hath geven god bring his soule to blysse.

Amen.¹¹⁵

The verse contains a call for those who have made the oath (presumably the oath taken by the feoffees in Smyth's lands to fulfil his wills and indentures) to attend the services in

¹¹³ BL. Harley 4626 ff.39v-40.

¹¹⁴ The latest re-enseffment is dated 28th September 1484.

¹¹⁵ BL. Harley 4626 f.26; BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* f.5-5v. The reference to the 300 marks given by Smyth to the town is obscure, although Margaret Statham has suggested that the sum corresponds to the three 100 marks 'Abbot's Cope' payments that would have been charged to Bury's population during Smyth's later life at the installation of three new abbots: Robert Ixworth, Richard Hengham and Thomas Rattlesden; Statham *Jankyn Smyth and the Guildhall Feoffees* pp.4-5.

remembrance of Smyth on the vigil and anniversary of his death; and even though Smyth's wills only call for the alderman, Candlemas gild and most prominent of burgesses to take part, the author of the poem claims that all inhabitants of the town are obliged to act in a similar way. This may have been intended as an attempt to draw in the wider community into participating in the acts of remembrance of Smyth within the structures that already existed and were applied to the town's elite. It is possible that the verse is in such a form as it was meant to be read aloud in the streets of Bury St Edmunds at an appropriate time before the eve of the feast of St. Peter. Indeed, the very existence of *Jankyn Smyth's Book* is significant, as it constitutes a record of several important developments within the secular community in the later 15th century: the rise of an unofficial non-monastic civic government; the impact of the public role, reputation and memory of rich individuals upon the community as a whole; and the ability of a particular interest group (the burghal elite) to organise themselves into a quasi-constitutional body in the face of the declining authority and resources of St. Edmund's. It originates from within the secular elite, and serves to celebrate the activities of these individuals, with John Smyth esquire as their figurehead; and the projection is designed to represent those activities of the elite as being on behalf of the whole town, rather than just in their own interests.

These specific calls for Smyth to be remembered by the people of Bury must be seen alongside other forms of commemoration and recognition, which may also be useful in judging the extent to which his public identity construct had been promulgated and absorbed during and after his life. Most significantly it can be seen that the memory of Smyth's civic beneficence created a convention for contribution to civic 'causes'.¹¹⁶ This is not to say that before John Smyth II there was no civic charity in Bury; but that Smyth's enfeoffments provided a structure to which subsequent benefactors could attach their own grants to the population. At this stage it is necessary to set Smyth in the context of significant civic benefactors of Bury.

A number of examples appear in the early 16th century. In 1503 the will of John Salter of Bury leaves a property in Northgate street and two acres of land in the Risbygatefield to his daughter Isabel; after her they revert to the brethren of the Candlemas gild to be administered according to the regulations left by John Smyth for the perpetuation of his feoffments.¹¹⁷ It is

¹¹⁶ In effect providing the basic framework for what is now the Gildhall Feoffment Trust in Bury St Edmunds; Statham *Jankyn Smyth and the Guildhall Feoffees passim*.

¹¹⁷ BSERO Pye f.141. He was a feoffee of John Smyth II: see Appendix I. A copy of the will appears at BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.52. Lobel cites the will of John Salter as evidence of the 'close relations and confusion' between the feoffees of John Smyth II, the brethren of the Candlemas gild, and the alderman of the town: Salter left his property and land to the Candlemas gild in accordance with the

not clear whether Salter meant his grants to be actually joined with those of Smyth: as no explicit use of the revenues from the grant is provided it is difficult to identify what his intentions were.

Thomas Edon is referred to as 'gentleman' in numerous instances in the documents between the 1470s and 1520, is involved in the will of many significant townsmen and women in that period,¹¹⁸ and takes some role in every major civic bequest or grant of land and property to the inhabitants of Bury.¹¹⁹ In 1519 he made his own grant to the people of Bury utilising the administrative involvement of the Candlemas gild.¹²⁰ Twenty-eight feoffees, all drawn from the membership of the Candlemas gild, were entrusted with two pightels of land¹²¹ that Edon had been granted by John Frense, master of St. Peter's hospital in 1494. The members of the Candlemas gild are to hold the two pightels

for ever that is to set alwey to them that be brethern of the Gilde of the Purificacion of our lady seynt marie called Candelmes Gilde of bury ... to thuse & profyte of the sike leperes & lazares abidyng without the Rysbygate in Bury forseid at thende of the strete callid Rysbygatestrete in the house ther ordeigned for men & women of Bury forseid¹²²

The leper house was to receive the profits of the two closes according to the terms of the will of the erstwhile master of St. Peter's hospital John Frense, which also required the closes to remain always in the hands of the Candlemas gild. The surveyor was to disburse the residue of the farm: 1d to each brother and sister of the leper house every Friday or Sunday as far as the income would stretch, when the inmates were charged to pray for the soul of John Frense.

The gift of these two closes was closely tied to the administrative machinery and civic perspectives of the Candlemas gild by Thomas Edon. He not only provided his grant for the purposes of achieving the (quite specific) charitable aims of John Frense, but he also sought to further the intentions of John Smyth while at the same time securing his grant in a process that was likely to perpetuate his gift. Edon requires that:

structures of Smyth's grants, and yet Smyth's lands and property went to 24 individuals (not explicitly Candlemas gild members) on behalf of the town. Lobel *The Borough* p.149.

¹¹⁸ BSERO Hawlee ff.95, 144, 149, 195, 210v, 225v, 264, 292v, 304; and BSERO Pye 8.

¹¹⁹ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* ff.30, 42, 45-6, 52, 55, 61, 64, 123; BL. Harley 4626, BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book*, BSERO H 1/5/18 *Fishe Gift*, Thomas Edon's grant to Purification gild BSERO H 1/5/19, and Adam and Margaret Newehawe's obit BSERO H 1/5/21. He was a feoffee of John Smyth II: see Appendix I.

¹²⁰ BSERO H 1/5/19.

¹²¹ One of two acres of pasture and heath at Stanywerpe bridge north of the kings highway and south of a common water course there; the other by Spyntalmellefield near Risbygate street between land of the convent of St. Edmund's and land of St. Peter's hospital, measuring 14 perches long by 11 perches broad.

¹²² BSERO H 1/5/19.

asoftyn as ther shalbe made ony transmutacion of the landes & tenementes sumtyme John Smyth Esquyer so often to be made a new feoffament of the seid ij pightelles or closes over unto the same feoffes of the landys & tenementes late of the seid John Smyth by a pleynd dede of feoffament¹²³

As the first stage of the transfer of the two closes Edon's attorneys, Roger Barbour and Thomas Stacy, were to enter the two closes, expel all others and take peaceable possession, and then enfeoff the 28 Candlemas gild members in Edon's name.

A further example is provided by the 1514 will of Richard Kyng II of Bury St Edmunds.¹²⁴ Kyng was a very prosperous mercer of Bury, the grandson of Richard Kyng alderman, and nephew of Edmund Kyng who served as feoffee in the grants of John Smyth II.¹²⁵ Kyng's wealth is immediately apparent from his will: among the legacies he leaves are lands and properties in Bury, Fornham All Saints, 'Southhalsted', Great and Little Saxham, Barrow, Ixworth, Newmarket, Cheveley, Sapiston, Dutton and Ixnyng; and further afield in Norfolk at Caston, 'Compston', Griston and Stow Bedon. Kyng had also inherited from his grandfather Moyses Hall, perhaps one of Bury's best known (and certainly best preserved) buildings from the period.¹²⁶ Apart from providing for his son and daughters the main preoccupation of Kyng's will seems to have been with religious and charitable giving, and large sums were donated to parish churches and the poor both within Bury and further afield in Suffolk.

Kyng's great wealth stretched to civic matters as well. The house of Franciscans at Babwell was given the income generated from a parcel of land, with the arrangement that after sixty years the parcel was to pass to the brethren of the Candlemas gild. More significantly, he made a reversionary bequest regarding all his lands and properties throughout East Anglia: if any recipient of Kyng's lands and properties should die without an heir, then their inheritance was to pass to the alderman and brethren of the Candlemas gild.¹²⁷ The gild was then to provide 100s for the poor and imprisoned of Bury; annual services for Kyng's soul;

¹²³ BSERO H 1/5/19 *Thomas Edon's Land Grant*.

¹²⁴ PRO PCC Prob 11/17 f.256.

¹²⁵ See Appendix I. His son Thomas also served as a feoffee in Smyth's lands, but he himself does not seem to have been involved.

¹²⁶ PRO PCC Prob 11/17 f.256 ff. Moyses Hall had been built at the end of the 12th century and is of the 'hall-and-solar' type. Traditionally the Hall is said to have been used as a synagogue, or else the residence of a wealthy Bury Jew, and was the largest building outside of the abbey precincts. The hall was certainly one of the most impressive in Bury, and served as an inn. The *Depraedatio Abbatiae* of 1327 records the feasting of the outlaws by Bury townsmen at Moyses Hall, at which a terrible vision was witnessed by a woman; *Memorials* II pp.349-50. For details of the architectural legacy of Moyses Hall see Margaret Wood's 'Bury St Edmunds - Moyses's Hall'; and 'Moyses Hall: A Description of the Building'; and also Maltby, H.J.M. 'Moyses Hall: A History of the Building and the Museum Collections' all found in *The Archaeological Journal* (cviii, 1951).

¹²⁷ PRO PCC Prob 11/17 f.256 ff.

and 33s 4d per year for the upkeep of the gildhall.¹²⁸ The residue of the income from the lands and properties was to be kept in the gildhall by the alderman and Candlemas gild, and used by them as a contribution to tenths, fifteenths and other tallages and taxes. The lands and properties were to be kept in feoffees' hands, and the 'covenant' in place for the renewal of John Smyth II's feoffment was to be invoked for the re-enfeoffment of Kyng's bequest.¹²⁹ Kyng also required that copies of his will and indentures were to be kept in the gildhall, and that his will was to be read in the gildhall by the clerk of the Candlemas gild at the time when the wills of John Smyth II and Margaret Odeham were read out.¹³⁰

The grant to the townsmen of Bury that has come to be known as the 'Fiske gift' (more properly 'Fishe gift') made by William Fishe and his wife Elen was similarly attached to provisions laid out in John Smyth II's wills and indentures.¹³¹ William Fishe in his will of 1499 bequeathed all his lands in Bury St Edmunds to his wife Elen for the term of her life;¹³² a year following her death they were to pass to William Darotte, Thomas Clerke, John Aleyn and 'others of the brethren of the Candlemas gild' in order to contribute towards the customary payment levied on the townsmen at the installation of a new abbot to St. Edmund's (the 'Abbot's Cope'), as well as the 'Taske' of the town in general.¹³³ Both the will and the *Feoffment Documents* specify that the use of the revenues accrued from Fishe's lands are to be used in accordance with the instructions of John Smyth II. The latter manuscript also provides a summary of an 1503 indenture between Elen Fishe and eight named members of the Candlemas gild with others,¹³⁴ by which Elen in accordance with the will of her husband assigns all the lands in the South and East fields of Bury to the Candlemas gild. It is presumably implicit that these Candlemas gild members are also the feoffees in the grants of John Smyth II, as it is stipulated that the feoffees in Smyth's legacy are to perform the wills of William and Elen Fishe in return for the gift of lands.¹³⁵ The duties to be performed are to

¹²⁸ Kyng does not specify how much of his land and properties have to come into the Candlemas gild's hands before these expenses apply. For all of Kyng's lands and properties it would have merely required the death of his son Thomas without legitimate heir for the entire patrimony to pass to the gild.
¹²⁹ Kyng requests that the alderman and brethren of the Candlemas gild elect annually an individual to supervise the enfeoffment.

¹³⁰ BL. Harley 4626 f.21; PRO PCC Prob 11/17 f.256 ff.; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.78. Gottfried claims that like the wills and indentures of John Smyth II and Margaret Odeham, that of Richard Kyng III was appended to the Candlemas gild's statutes in Harley 4626, but I have been unable to locate it there; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.146-7, 187.

¹³¹ BSERO H 1/5/18 *Fiske Gift* is a bundle of deeds and indentures detailing the transfer of lands and properties to and from William and Elen Fishe and others.

¹³² BSERO Pye f.85.

¹³³ BSERO Pye f.85 ff. There are several inconsistencies between this will and the summary of it that appears in BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.59.

¹³⁴ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.59. It is not a copy of any of the indentures surviving in BSERO H 1/5/18 *Fiske Gift*, but the date is the same as four of the twelve deeds in that bundle. It may be that the 'copy' in *Feoffment Documents* is actually a summary of a number of separate indentures, some of which survive as *Fiske Gift*.

¹³⁵ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* ff.59-60. The named Candlemas gild members made a separate

include an annual 'sangrede' for the souls of William and Elen in both parish churches of Bury, as well as an annual obit for them in St. Mary's at which the feoffees are to spend 4s in the same manner as they observe at Smyth's obit.¹³⁶ 8d is to be delivered to the Candlemas gild every year for a gallon of wine at their feast, and 2d is to be paid to the clerk of the gild for the reading out of the wills of William and Elen Fishe to the brethren.¹³⁷ The residue of the profits coming from the Fishe gift are to be used to benefit the inhabitants of Bury according to the will of William Fishe.

The indentures made by Elen Fishe in 1503 indicate that the will of her husband regarding the grants to the Candlemas gild on behalf of the townsmen was being enacted, and that it was can be seen in Harley 4626.¹³⁸ But Elen Fishe was by no means the only woman contributing to the civic well being of her community by adapting the feoffments of John Smyth II, as the civic beneficence of Margaret Odeham indicates.¹³⁹ Margaret was the wife of John Odeham a wealthy draper and burgess of Bury St Edmunds, who, after his death in 1469¹⁴⁰ received a considerable endowment of land and property in Bury, Berton, Nowton, Great and Little Horningsheath and Westley. Her will was proved in 1492, and depicts a woman of considerable means as well as substantial local and regional experience.

But in the context of her connection with the civic activities of John Smyth II the most important element of her will is the indenture dated 12th January 1478 that forms the bulk of the text.¹⁴¹ By this indenture a property in the Skinners Row of Bury St Edmunds, and all

indenture dated on the same day agreeing to fulfil the wills of the Fishes; they also agree to pay Elen a pension of £3 17s 10d every year, and to her assigns for a year after her death, to be paid on the day after Candlemas (that is, the day after the gild's main ceremonial meeting and feast).

¹³⁶ The summary here cites the 'Book of the statutes of the gild' as evidence for the procedures at Smyth's obit, although it is not clear whether reference originates from the compiler of the *Feoffment Documents* or from the Fishes.

¹³⁷ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.60.

¹³⁸ The last entries in the manuscript comprise a list of lands in the Vyne field of Bury given to the inhabitants of the town by Elen Fishe, BL. Harley 4626 ff.41v-42.

¹³⁹ The role played by Margaret Odeham in the development of Smyth's feoffment was central. Indeed in many ways she was a more remarkable individual than John Smyth II, not least because of her gender, and it is only for the sake of brevity that she is not treated in equal detail here. Gottfried refers to the business dealings of Margaret Odeham in East Anglia and in the Low Countries, citing journeys she made to the latter and the provision of a pilgrimage to the Netherlands after her death.

Unfortunately he does not provide any reference for these aspects of her life, Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* pp.149-50.

¹⁴⁰ BSERO Hawlee f.129v.

¹⁴¹ As with the documents produced by John Smyth II, those created by Margaret Odeham appear in several (sometimes slightly different) versions in several documents. Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.73-81 reproduces BSERO Pye f.8, the will of 1492 incorporating the 1478 indenture; BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* ff.6-9v reproduces the 1478 indenture, and provides a detailed list of the properties and parcels of land given to the Candlemas gild ff.25-30v. BL. Harley 4626 reproduces the 1478 indenture (f.29v) and a part of a will dated 21st July 1483, which includes grants to the Candlemas gild that do not appear in the 1478 document; it also reproduces the list of lands and properties as it appears in *Jankyn Smyth's Book* (f.37v) as well as lists of rents payable on Margaret's holdings (f.39v). BSERO H 1/6/1

Margaret's lands in the East, South and West fields of Bury, as well as in Berton, Nowton, Great and Little Horningsheath and Westley were enfeoffed to 26 of the most prominent burgesses.¹⁴² During the rest of her life Margaret was to receive the revenues of these holdings, and once she was dead they were to be exploited in a number of ways.¹⁴³ Every Sunday and on the principle feasts a chantry priest was to say mass in the chapel of Bury's gaol, and every Sunday he was to deliver to the prisoners 'holy bread and water'. Margaret also stipulated that from the revenues of her endowment the prisoners of the Long Ward in the gaol were to receive weekly between Halloween and Easter seven faggots of wood (at 3s 6d per 100 faggots) which were to be stored in the house in Skinners Row. The residue of the income is to be spent on works of mercy and charity.¹⁴⁴

Attached to the enfeoffment was another regarding two tenements in Churchgate street and 'diverse' properties in the 'Market sted', and the feoffees were again probably all members of the Candlemas gild.¹⁴⁵ An addendum to the list of lands enfeoffed by Margaret provides information about certain rents owed on a number of her holdings, one of which states that 2s 5d was owed to the sacrist of St. Edmund's for two tenements on Churchgate street, with halfpenny owed for *hadgovel*;¹⁴⁶ and in 1526 these properties were still in the possession of the Candlemas gild as the sacrist's rental for that year indicates that 2s 6d was owed by the holders of the gild, although the properties are identified as three shops late of Margaret Odeham.¹⁴⁷ The revenues from these properties were to pay for a number of specific requests: every year on the day following Candlemas the Franciscan friars of Babwell were to celebrate a dirige and placebo, while on the following day they were to perform a requiem mass in their church for the souls of Margaret, her husband, parents, children and brethren and 'susteryn' of the Candlemas gild.¹⁴⁸ Every year 20s in bread was to be doled out to the poor and needy at Bury's gildhall for prayers for the same souls, and an annual 'sangrede' was to

Feoffment Documents has copies of the 1478 indenture (p.37), the 1483 will (p.42), and two copies of an indenture of 1480 that is substantially the same as that of 1478 (pp.45-7).

¹⁴² Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.75-6.

¹⁴³ A lamp was to be kept burning night and day forever before the Holy Sacrament in St. James' church; and her feoffees were to find a stipend of nine marks a year for a priest to perform chantry duties at the St. Lawrence altar in St. James' for the souls of Margaret, her husband John and her two daughters and their husbands as well as a number of others; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.76-7.

¹⁴⁴ Margaret also desired that all her feoffees and tenants, as well as all the brethren and sustren of the Candlemas gild "be partyners of the sayd merytes of the sayd lampe founde be fore the Sacrament and preest perpetually synggyng and of the almesse yoven in to the gaole afor sayd and othyr dedys off mercy that shall be dysposid of the seyd yssues growyng of the seid londes in tyme to come for *evyrmore*" Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.77-8.

¹⁴⁵ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.79. It is this part of the 1478 indenture that is dated 1480 in BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* ff.45-7.

¹⁴⁶ BL. Harley 4626 f.39v.

¹⁴⁷ BSERO A 6/2/1 p.33.

¹⁴⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.79. The convent was to receive 6s 8d from the alderman and dye of the Candlemas gild for these services; and each friar was to get a halfpenny loaf, p.80. The friars were to keep a copy of Margaret's will.

be sung at St. James'.¹⁴⁹

Margaret very deliberately associated her enfeoffment with that of John Smyth II:

Also I wyll that the same ffeoffees the whyche arn and her after shall be in the hows londes and tenementes yoven to the town of Bury by John Smyth esquier shall also in lyke wyse be enfeoffed in all my londes and hows above rehersed wyth ther appertenaunces and the alenacion of that oon always to folowe that othyr¹⁵⁰

and the connection with Smyth's enfeoffment is reinforced by the assignment of the responsibility for the administration of the endowment to the membership of the Candlemas gild. The alderman, dye¹⁵¹ and auditors of the Candlemas gild were to supervise the chantry and the revenues of the enfeoffment, with the collectors of the revenues being suitably rewarded from the incomes; and those brethren made feoffees were to take an oath to fulfil Margaret's will before those already sworn to fulfil the will of John Smyth II.¹⁵² The officers of the gild were forbidden from selling off any of the enfeoffment. The clerk of the gild was to receive 4d for reading Margaret's will at the annual feast when he was to read the will and indentures of John Smyth II; and whenever it was necessary for the brethren of the gild to meet to discuss Margaret's enfeoffment then each was to receive 6d from the revenues to drink.¹⁵³ The Candlemas gild statutes also reflect the connection between the gild brethren and the enfeoffments of both Margaret and John Smyth II:

And also the wyll of Margaret Odham gentlewoman to be fulfilled as it appereth by a payre Indentures wrytten in Englysshe concerning the same will And that these twayne willes ben red everye yeare in the feaste of the purificacion of blessed marye vyrgin before the Bretherne of the same guyld at dynner And when they have dyned that the same Brothers say for the sowles of the sayde John Smyth the wyef of the sayde John John Odham and Margaret the wyef of the sayde John and for all ther benefactors this psalme de Profundis with the preres that longe therto that it maye be pleasing to god & profet to the sowles¹⁵⁴

Margaret's wish that her lands should always be alienated and enfeoffed along with those of Smyth was also enrolled in the statutes.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.80.

¹⁵⁰ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.77. Indeed 25 of the 26 feoffees listed at p.76 appear as feoffees in the lands of John Smyth II.

¹⁵¹ The meaning and origin of the term 'dye' are obscure, although the predecessor of Bury's Candlemas gild (the Gild Merchant) also had officers called 'dyes'; Lobel *The Borough* pp.75, 79.

¹⁵² Tymms *Bury Wills* p.77. If the gild failed then the supervision was to fall to four of the likeliest feoffees, p.78.

¹⁵³ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.78.

¹⁵⁴ BL. Harley 4626 f.21.

¹⁵⁵ BL. Harley 4626 f.23.

Thus through the organisation and personnel of the Candlemas gild Margaret Odeham directly adopted, adapted and enlarged the enfeoffment made to the population of Bury by John Smyth II for the purposes of her own public charity, and perhaps the construction of public identity. Although both specified the provision of a perpetual chantry, and both required the spending of any residue on deeds of charity and mercy, the 'target' for her benevolence may have been different from that of Smyth: the income generated from his endowment was to meet the costs of civic existence, both general (taxes and tallages) and specific to Bury (the 'Abbot's Cope') and thus benefiting the majority of the community; whereas Margaret was more concerned with the poor and marginalised of the town, and particularly those incarcerated in the town's gaol. However, by choosing to attach her own significant endowment to that of Smyth she was not only providing security for her enfeoffment (which it must be remembered directly benefited the health of her soul) but also embodied some of the civic aspirations indicated by Smyth. Margaret Odeham's enfeoffment served to reinforce and to some extent concretise the memory of John Smyth, and as her will may not have been enacted until late 1492, the timing of her endowment may have proved decisive in establishing the 'civic patron' image of John Smyth II within the community soon after his death.¹⁵⁶ That others were involved in the same process suggests that the Smyth's peers and successors saw the enshrining of his identity as a part of public and civic affairs of the late 15th century.

However the question remains as to whether Smyth was in fact remembered as a civic benefactor in practical terms, or as some kind of model townsman in an ideological sense. It is likely that the latter identity may have developed among subsequent generations of Bury townsmen as the secular community accrued further self-determination and independence from seigniorial authority, which may have been seen to have germinated from the enfeoffments of John Smyth II.

5.iii.d. The role of the community in the construction of public identity.

It is clear that regardless of the degree of self-consciousness involved in the construction of a public identity, the longevity of such an enterprise depends almost entirely upon the support of the individual's community. In the case of John Smyth II this would appear to have been especially so as the public identity constructed through his endowment to the inhabitants of Bury needed and received the direct *practical* administration of the most influential

¹⁵⁶ There is also the possibility that Smyth and Margaret Odeham consulted with each other over their respective endowments: this is suggested by the chronology of the documents produced by both; and by their joint inclusion in the Candlemas gild statutes.

individuals among the community. The relationship between the public identity of Smyth and the identity of what was the *de facto* civic government of Bury was in many ways reciprocal: the Candlemas gild (as the source of feoffees) perpetuated the memory and identity of Smyth both among those that knew him and among later generations through the administration of his lands, the fulfilment of his wishes and the ceremonial acknowledgement of his achievements and charity; while Smyth's enfeoffments and the machinery to maintain them provided the Candlemas gild with a structure upon which it could base its own hitherto largely symbolic organisational identity. The choice taken by many individuals to adopt, adapt or refer to Smyth's enfeoffments as a model for their own acts of charity points to a situation where the construction of a specific public identity had developed in the years following Smyth's death into a model civic identity, a kind of ideal 'citizenship' that should be the aspiration of all those who considered themselves a member of the secular community.¹⁵⁷

Indeed it is easy to understand why such a development would have been encouraged by the civic elite of Bury (with the 'encouragement' being evident in the proliferation of references to Smyth in the records produced under the auspices of the Candlemas gild). The identity constructed by Smyth was one that ultimately supported the determination of the elite to achieve political independence founded on their increasing economic prosperity: it may have been that the community was inclined to view Smyth as a founder, and something of a symbol of, the political identity and desired authority that was the goal of the Bury burgesses at the end of the 15th century. To some extent it might be possible to suggest that the Bury elite had a vested interest in supporting the public identity constructed by Smyth, not only because they had aided in its inception, but also because it endorsed the identity that they as a specific interest group within the community were trying to attain.

In other words the 'official' support, perpetuation and embellishment that Smyth's public identity received from the leading townsmen may have been a response to the fact that what this public image achieved was the embodiment of, for want of a better description, a 'party-line'. In the case of John Smyth II the effects of the construct may have been more significant, as it is possible to suggest that his public identity *established* the 'party-line' for the town's elite, rather than just advertised and endorsed it. Smyth's attempts to construct his own public identity in effect established the political identity of the elite of Bury, and perhaps that

¹⁵⁷ It is perhaps also significant to note the lack of any response to Smyth's overt construction of a peculiarly public identity on the part of the senior figures of St. Edmund's. It is possible that the legal disputes between the abbey and townsmen of the 1470s may have constituted such a response, especially as part of the wrangling involved the abbot refusing to return John Smyth II as alderman sometime around 1478, Lobel *The Borough* pp.160-3.

of the secular community as a whole. The mechanism for doing so was the invention of a tradition; and the success of this tradition may have marked a turning point in the townsmen's struggle for civic and political independence.¹⁵⁸

5.iii.e. Public identity as a mode of restriction.

One aspect of the design and enactment of a 'corporate image', in terms of a communal identity constructed for the purposes of attaining political independence for the civic elite of Bury, is that in order to advance within that corporation the individual has to adapt to the structures and espouse the principles of the group. For this to happen the public identity of an ambitious individual, if it is to be an entity that is *designed* and intended to fulfil the goal of personal advancement, has to correspond with the identity that has been displayed by the dominant group within which he hopes to prosper: he has to toe the 'party-line'. The need to impress the urban elite of Bury in order to gain favour and social advancement within the town may have acted to restrict the freedom of any display of public identity, as outward modes of behaviour, the public expression of opinion and the processes of social interaction would all have been prescribed to some extent. In other towns these restrictions upon the forms of public life could be imposed through the provision of and adherence to custom and civic or gild ordinances;¹⁵⁹ but in Bury St Edmunds, where these structures were not under the control of the townsmen themselves, it is possible that the only means by which the public identity of individuals could be directed was through a publicly disseminated communal identity.

But for an individual to prosper within a community like that of Bury to the extent achieved by John Smyth II it would have been necessary not only to impress one's peers within the town's elite by embodying the group's self-professed identity and interests, it would also have been essential to be noticed by those other groups within the town outside the civic elite. Essentially, as indicated by the career of Smyth as industrialist, entrepreneur, public officer and civic benefactor, the method for achieving this would have been to epitomise the principles expressed as being representative of the group the individual hoped to advance within; while at the same time making oneself conspicuous to the community as a whole.

¹⁵⁸ The efforts taken by John Smyth II and Margaret Odeham to construct public identity through charity to the town's focus of burghal activity may have had a long standing tradition in Bury. From the 13th century there survive a number of deeds detailing quitclaims of various holdings to the Gild Merchant of the town, an organisation which closely associated the social and mercantile elite of Bury with the officers of both town and gild; Lobel *The Borough* pp.75-80 for the Gild Merchant.

¹⁵⁹ See Phythian-Adams, C. *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1978); and Sacks, D. *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450-1700* (London, 1991) for examples of legal structures restricting the expression of public identity.

While Smyth was evidently instrumental in the initial design of the identity adopted by the elite of Bury St Edmunds, it is certainly therefore the case that he embodied the values of that group. Perhaps the level of success attained by John Smyth II in his public career suggests that the most productive means of immersing one's own identity within that of the town's elite in the attempt to epitomise their declared principles and yet simultaneously be conspicuous was to constitute an extreme example of the model that the group aspired to, thus standing apart from his peers in the eyes of those within and without his peer group while at the same time embodying what the civic elite of Bury represented. In other words as part of the invention of the tradition of John Smyth II, he had to embody the model of values constructed by the elite at that time, but to be as successful as he was, he need to *more* than embody it. Smyth not only had to begin the process of establishing the model and therefore what should be 'typical' behaviour for the people of Bury: he had to appear to be 'super-typical', an extreme example of the identity that was being promulgated. Paradoxically this may have been an example of someone expressing their individuality through extreme compliance with an artificially constructed norm.

5.iii.f. The element of self-consciousness in an individual's construction of public identity, and public perception of the individual.

For an individual to accomplish success in public life within a framework of social, moral and political structures as complex and deliberately contrived as those at work in Bury St Edmunds at the end of the 15th century, a fundamental requirement would have been a considerable level of self-consciousness. 'Self-consciousness' builds upon social knowledge, which provides more or less defined goals and motivations. In order to understand how it was necessary to behave to achieve personal success, it would have been essential to know the basic arena in which public lives were enacted. Apart from possessing the ability to perceive, analyse and assess the values and structures operating in the community that an individual needed to navigate as part of a public career, he would also have required an objective sense of self, and by implication, of those he interacted with in the course of his public career. Alongside the need for this 'social knowledge' the ambitious individual would have needed some kind of goal, defined or otherwise; and underlying this would be the issue of motivation. These are areas of an individual's life that ultimately the biographer can never expect to explicate, but it may be possible to surmise about what drives his subject. It is also possible that the relationship between the activities of an individual and that individual's cultural context can be employed by the historian the other way: that something can be said about the culture from the individual. If an understanding of John Smyth II's cultural heritage is sought then perhaps it is permissible to examine the public identity he constructed with a

view to 'discovering' his ultimate goals: one could assume that the design and enactment of the construct in some way reflects the aims he pursued, and therefore upon the social and cultural environment in which he conducted his public life.

5.iv. Connecting public and private identity in late medieval Bury St Edmunds.

5.iv.a. Explicit construction of identity at the level of the individual: John Baret esquire.¹

As the last section has demonstrated, John Smyth constitutes an example of the construction of a public identity through the application of social knowledge to the generic aspects of identity shared by his elite peers. The manipulation of this model identity was ultimately enacted in such a way that Smyth was subsequently symbolised as a civic benefactor, and was closely aligned with the emergent independent town leadership that was founded upon his enfeoffments. In other words Smyth actively produced a public identity which resulted in developments beneficial to the community. It is clear that Smyth was not typical of Bury (or elsewhere), and the construction of identity for many late medieval townsmen must have been a less public affair. An example of a more private construction of identity can be seen in the person of John Baret: like Smyth he too formulated identity for himself based upon a perception of 'model' identity among his peers, but for different reasons and probably with different results. Rather than placing himself at the centre of progressive civic affairs as Smyth did, Baret, the son of an immigrant, was more concerned with having himself and his family accepted within the society of Bury's established elite.

With Baret, we have an instance of an extraordinary and explicit construction of identity, the processes and implementation of which were carefully designed and enacted deliberately. The mere existence of individuals like John Smyth II and John Baret II seems to contradict Gottfried's assertion that the burgesses of Bury St Edmunds "took a low public profile, and submerged their individuality in the amorphous personality of the larger corporate group".² The principle source for his imaginative construction of an image of himself as a burgess of Bury is his will,³ but other textual and non-textual evidence is also available. The will was written in 1463, but like the wills of many other wealthy townsmen engaged in an active public life as Baret had been, it probably required careful consultation and planning before it could be drawn up into the document that survives.

The time and energy spent drafting a will, particularly when its provisions were likely to

¹ Hereafter John Baret II.

² Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.150.

³ The will can be found at BSERO Hawlee ff.95-105v; and it is also reproduced (with a number of minor inaccuracies) in Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.15-44. References will be given to the latter.

affect the public life of the town in some way so that the whole community would be directed to considering the life of the testator, must have included several processes of analysis and evaluation on the part of the testator. The testator would have to decide upon a number of practical issues, such as the question of family heirs, the potential for charitable and religious giving based on the extent of his wealth, the payment of debts and so on. But decisions of a less practical nature may also be necessary by testators in general, and are certainly apparent in the document drawn up by John Baret II. Testators drawing up their wills have the opportunity to address issues of status, reputation, image and memory, and the processes would have involved fundamental and personal considerations: the testator would have the chance to design his will so that he could be reasonably confident that he would be remembered the way he wanted to be. I have worked from the methodological premise that on some level this would involve assessing his life and career, and at the same time trying to envisage how others would judge his life, a process that is effectively an exercise in 'imaginative reconstruction'. The will of the later middle ages display cultural differences which allow us to begin this process. The operation would be encompassed within contemporary sociological concepts of the mechanics of community, as well as contextual layers of culture, religious tradition and social inter-relations. The process involves not only self-reflexive analysis of one's career and life, but also an attempted estimation of how *others* have viewed the testator's life and contribution to the community. Once a man like Baret had an idea of how others may have reflected upon his life, then it would have been possible for him to construct his will with a view to either reinforcing the perceived image of his career, or else modifying it in some way.

In any event we should think less of 'processes of analysis' and more of internal awareness of status and social convention as the root of individual conscious construction of identity. Instead of a public figure like John Baret II actively trying to identify how others had perceived him throughout his life, his representation of himself may have been constructed via mechanisms other than reasoned analysis. Such mechanisms may have been, for example, the series of symbols and conventions that informed social interaction, whereby individuals (particularly those involved in public life) were constantly made aware of their position in society by the ways in which the society worked. It is probable that in the 15th century, where public success in urban communities was measured in terms of the various social groups an individual belonged to and participation in the various rituals concerning the thresholds between such groups, that the institutional aspects of life would play a greater role in the demarcation of social status, and so would enable a more precise understanding of how others in the community perceived a public person.

The production of a will does potentially provide us with an opportunity to witness the act of creating an identity in a calculated and concrete way. The will as a document enables an individual to consider actively how they would like to appear to others in a way that living and working in a community never could. Furthermore, testamentary activities are very public affairs, both in the way in which the legal machinery of the community is drawn into action as a vehicle for the recorded wishes of the testator, and in the way that other people are brought into contact with the testator either through receiving bequests or by acting in the administration of the will. To those who would wish to take advantage of this opportunity the thought may have been particularly appealing as once the will was fulfilled and the testator dead, the identity created was protected and enshrined by law.

While it is necessary to admit that only a certain social type of testator will have been in a position to enact such conscious self-representation, it is possible to demonstrate that such wills afford us the chance to examine the role of social identity within a community, and the ways in which identity was displayed and consumed. In other words an instance of the explicit construction of identity allows us to witness the processes involved in the way that people saw themselves and their communities, and the way in which they saw themselves *within* their community. By examining how a particular individual tried to construct an image of themselves through the provisions of a will, one can explore how that person saw themselves in the context of their community, and thus get some idea of the way in which their social imagination may have informed and influenced their life at various stages. In the case of John Baret II, an attempt will be made to identify areas of his will that might represent examples of the exercise of self-reconstruction.

5.iv.b. The Baret family.

The Baret family were immigrants to Bury St Edmunds in the second half of the 14th century, although there may have been a family of that name, possibly the same family, present in the town from earlier in the century.⁴ Baret's father Geoffrey came to Bury from the parish of Cratfield,⁵ and in his will he requires a six year chantry to be kept in the parish church to sing for his soul and the souls of his parents and the recently deceased William, abbot of St.

⁴ See BSERO Osbern f. 43 for the 1377 will of Bartholomew Baret draper of Bury St Edmunds. He refers to a wife Basilie, and a son John. It has not been possible to connect these individuals with the main Baret family. For a detailed account of the Baret family, see Appendix IV.

⁵ Cratfield is approximately 30 miles northeast of Bury, and is located in a very rural area far from any large settlements. That the Baret family moved to Bury from this distance places them within a minority of immigrants, as most immigrants identified by Gottfried originated within a 20 miles radius; Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.70.

Edmund's.⁶ William Exeter was abbot of St. Edmund's between 1415-29, so it is likely that the abbot who is recently deceased and whose soul is to be remembered is William Cratfield, who was in office between 1390-1415. The surname is suggestive of a link with the Baret family, and it is easy to imagine the arrival of the family in Bury as being somehow connected with the support of an abbot who was personally known to them. This at least would explain the Baret's presence in Bury, and the initial success that Geoffrey I must have made in integrating himself into the social and commercial structures of the secular community. The links with Cratfield appear throughout the wills of the family, but more prominently, as one would expect, in the wills of Geoffrey and Joan Baret the parents of John II.⁷

That Geoffrey founded a chantry in Cratfield and not in Bury contributes to the suggestion that his family were not long established in Bury.⁸ Geoffrey's wife Joan in her will of 1424 interestingly makes no reference to Cratfield nor identifies any of her beneficiaries as residing in or originating from the parish,⁹ which suggests that *her* family did not originate from Cratfield but came from some other place, so that she did not feel any sense of attachment. John Baret II, in his will of 1463, continues the links with the rural origins of his family despite the fact that he was almost certainly born in Bury and was firmly ensconced in the higher social groups of that community. Similarly John II's great nephew and heir William Baret II indicates in his will the continuing connection between his family and their country home.¹⁰ He also leaves to his wife Anne and her heirs all properties, lands, meadows, pastures, woods, feedings, rents, and services in Cratfield and Linstead in Suffolk. That he, as the holder of the main Baret patrimony, has holdings in Cratfield is indicative of the continuing association with the parish. As the will of John Baret II refers to two living relatives still living in Cratfield, and his will and the wills of his parents refer to no land in Cratfield (meaning that John Baret II's heir William must have come by his holdings there by some other means), it seems reasonable to suggest that the Baret's still maintained a presence in that parish. Indeed, it may well be that the Baret's that settled in Bury were a minor branch of the family. In other words the Baret's of Bury were initially without the range of social connections within the town that were necessary for a family to remain among the elite for more than a generation or two: as immigrants they were without the supportive networks that were only

⁶ BSERO Osbern f.142v.

⁷ Geoffrey leaves money for the vicar and church buildings of Cratfield, as well as to its roads, its poor and some of its named inhabitants.

⁸ There is nothing in Geoffrey I's bequests of land and property to suggest that he ever had any life or interests anywhere other than in Bury St Edmunds: see Appendix IV.

⁹ BSERO Osbern f.168v.

¹⁰ "Item I will myn executors shall fynde a prest to go to the court of Rome and there to prey for my sowle and the sowle of Geffrey Baret my ffader as oder preestes do that go to Rome and whan he comyth hom from Rome I wil the same prest shall kepe and make up a yeer servyse at Cratfeld ther to prey for the seid soules after his comyng hom"; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.93-4.

constructed in towns over long periods.

A concern with conforming to local testamentary patterns of Bury testators combined with an expression of a wider social experience of county community can be seen in some aspects of Geoffrey Baret's will. His civic giving, for example, strike a careful balance: 20 marks are left to repair the roads of Bury, while 10 marks are given for those of Cratfield, and another 10 marks for the roads between Bury and Chevington. But Geoffrey was clear to favour his adopted community when it came to making charitable bequests which had potential public repercussions.¹¹ While the need for poor provision may have been greater in the urban setting of Bury than in Cratfield, the audience of social charity would also have been larger. Consequently the impression of Geoffrey Baret created in his will may have influenced his reputation and identity among the population of Bury, and this would clearly have been a conscious decision. It may have been a reflection of the extent to which Geoffrey considered himself and his family were integrated into Bury society; or alternatively the attempt may have constituted an element of Baret's strategy regarding the future of his family's participation in Bury society.

This strategy may also have been either a symptom or a cause of the testamentary provision made by Geoffrey Baret for his family. Geoffrey's son John Baret II inherits all his land and property, either directly or via his mother Joan, except for a parcel which went to Geoffrey's daughter Alice Whitwell. Thus the Baret patrimony was concentrated in the hands of a single son. Yet it is almost certain that Geoffrey had another son, William, who was probably substantially older than John II, and was probably Geoffrey's eldest son.¹² If William Baret I *was* the eldest son of Geoffrey and Joan Baret, then the questions as to why he was not their heir to the patrimony, and why he is not ever identified as the son in the will of either parent have to be answered. A £15 debt owed to his father may be an indication of some disagreement between the two; or perhaps it was the result of unsuccessful occupational or business enterprises on the part of William which discouraged his father to trust him with the patrimony. Alternatively, the explanation for the patrimony passing to John II might be found in the latter's will in the above reference to his brother, who is identified as "my brothir of Cratfeld". It is quite possible that by 1463 William is dead as he receives nothing from his younger brother, but the reference to him as being of Cratfield might suggest that he never left the family home to move with his parents to Bury. Indeed, as an individual established in

¹¹ The lepers of Bury were to receive 13s 4d while those incarcerated in Bury's gaol were to receive 13s 4d to 'redeem' them, as well as 100s in food to be shared with local poor. The able bodied poor of Bury were to be given 10 marks in cash; BSERO Osbern f.168v.

¹² See Appendix IV. William I already had children before John Baret II reached majority, and was dead and had grandchildren by the time John Baret II made his will in 1463.

his occupation and with a family, it is likely that he would not be expected to move.

If this were the case then it is very suggestive regarding the perspective held by Geoffrey Baret regarding the position he and his family occupied in Bury. It is possible that William stayed in Cratfield and occupied the family holdings there and that they were formally delivered to him in a pre-testamentary transfer, which would explain the lack of reference to any land or property outside Bury in Geoffrey's will.¹³ This would make John Baret II's role as principle heir more explicable, and would indicate that Geoffrey was concerned with establishing a branch of the family firmly within the social structures of Bury. In other words, John Baret II *needed* to be Geoffrey's heir in order to constitute his family's 'foothold' in Bury, especially as the Barets, as immigrants, were in a precarious position in terms of their social and economic stability and reputation within the community. In the 1424 will of John Baret II's mother Joan,¹⁴ William receives considerably less in value and quantity than his younger brother John II, a fact suggestive of a consequence and continuation of the 'policy' of Joan's husband Geoffrey. John II was given all things necessary to establish his household in Bury and maintain a sufficiently prosperous and stable economic position within the higher status groups of the community. William had probably already achieved this in the established region of his family's influence further to the east of the county, and so did not need testamentary provision to the same extent.

In John Baret II's will of 1463, he seems to have adopted and intensified his parents' concern with the establishment of the Baret family and its reputation in Bury. The crucial issue here is that John Baret II had no children of his own to inherit the Baret patrimony. Therefore, the main collection of John Baret II's lands and properties were left initially to his great nephew William II.¹⁵ Along with the personal belongings and household goods bequeathed to William II, he also receives Baret's "signet of gold with a pellican and my armys grave ther in"; and all the bequests made to William II were not made as John Baret II's great nephew, but as his chief heir. In other words, the majority of bequests made to William II stipulate that they are to go to William II or "to hem that shal be occupyers of my hefd place for the tyme".

The succession to the patrimony is carefully explicated by Baret, and it is from this that much of what is known about the younger generation of Barets is derived:

... wiche v^{xx} and xiiij acrys of lond I wil William Baret have with the hefd place and

¹³ It would also explain the lands and properties given to John Baret II by his mother Joan in her 1424 will which are not mentioned in his father's will.

¹⁴ BSERO Osbern f.168v.

¹⁵ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.24-5. For details of the patrimony, see pp.240-4.

qwhite rente above wretyn to hym and to his eyris male lawfully be goten of his body beryng yeerly dyverse charges according to þe seid wrytyng and undir diverse condycionys that he stonde welle and cler in the kynggez grace and be gentyl to my executours and in my wil fulfylling And he be obstinat or froward then I wil he have noon of all but that my executours set John [III] his brothir he to have as William shuld have to hym and to his eyr male ... and for the defawte of eyr male of the seid John than Robert [II] his brother and his eyrys male to have it And for defawte of eyr male of the seid Robert than Thomas [II] brothir to þe seid John and Robert to have it to hym and to his eyris male And for defawte of eyr male of the seid Thomas than wil I John [IV] the sone of Robert Baret [I] my neve have it to hym and his eyrys male And for defawte of issew male of the seid John than to his oldest brother and his issew male And so fro oon to anothis as longe as ony yssew male be comyn of the said Robert Baret my neve And for defawte of yssew male of the seid Robert than I wil John Baret [V] sone of old Jeffrey Baret [III] of Cratfield dwellyng *with* the Abbot of Seynt Benyghtys have it to hym and to his eyres male as longe as they laste¹⁶

Various duties befall William II or any other occupier of the patrimony, particularly with regard to John Baret II's annual memorials and the alienation of parts of the patrimony.¹⁷ We know from sources other than William II's will that he was firmly established within the secular elite of Bury during his life time. We know for example that he was a feoffee of both John Smyth II and Margaret Odeham,¹⁸ and that he was a member of the Candlemas gild. We also know that he was involved in the public administration of lands for charitable and civic purposes for other Bury benefactors who modelled themselves upon the feoffments of John Smyth II, including Thomas Edon, William Fishe and sir John Frensshe, priest.¹⁹ As far as William II's property is concerned, the sacrist's rental of 1526 refers to a number of properties that were once in the possession of William II;²⁰ and the wills of other prominent Bury townsmen suggest that property dealing was an aspect of his commercial interests, just as it was for John Baret II.²¹

The property dealing and testamentary strategies of John Baret II's parents indicate the processes undertaken by immigrants in urban communities as they attempted to integrate themselves into the community of Bury. It is possible that the success that they and their son enjoyed was a reflection of the relatively undefined nature of the social and constitutional structures in the town. The processes involved in adapting to the structures of communal life in Bury must surely have required some reflection upon the nature of conducting oneself in

¹⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.24-5.

¹⁷ See below pp.240-58.

¹⁸ BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book*; the will of Margaret Odeham BSERO Pye f.8; BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* pp.30, 45-6; BL. Harley 4626.

¹⁹ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* pp.55, 59; BSERO H 1/5/19 Thomas Edon's land grant. There is also a record of the issuing of a writ of *dies clausit extremum* in May 1503, which may be an indicator of status; CFR 1485-1509 p.335.

²⁰ BSERO A 6/2/1 pp.43, 63, 64, 67. The properties mentioned include a tenement in Le Mustowe, five separate shops in Smith Row and a shop in Skinners Row.

²¹ See for example the will of John Hedge of Bury, 1504; BSERO Pye f.146v.

public, and so to some extent the reconstruction of identity that this probably resulted in might be reflected in what we know of John Baret II and his parents.

5.iv.c. Land and property as facets of identity.

The Baret patrimony was clearly a significant factor in the John Baret II's attempts to integrate himself and his family into Bury society. His will, and those of his parents and his heir, suggests that not only did he enlarge the family holdings within Bury, but he also strove to base his identity as a Bury figure around the patrimony. It was not just a question of Baret's wealth (indicated in the acquisition of properties within Bury) maintaining his position within the secular elite of the town, but rather that his property dealings immersed him in eminent social and economic networks of the most significant individuals and families in Bury.

Several of the properties John Baret II was connected with in Bury St Edmunds were also connected with the town's chief landlord, the abbey sacrist. His own chief place (which still stands in a heavily disguised form) was situated in Churchgovel street directly opposite the abbey's Norman gate, in a square known as the Escheker, or Exchequer.²² John Baret II's great nephew William II is nominated as his principle heir, being bequeathed his chief property in Churchgovel street as well as several other properties and considerable land in Bury St Edmunds and in other parishes.²³ William II, or the occupier of the testator's chief property, also receives John Baret II's right to seven acres of land in two pieces, which was given by Geoffrey I to Alice Whitwell (and which is currently in the possession of Jenete Whitwell and Katherine Drury) in the event that the latter have no issue.²⁴ The heir of the chief property also receives a piece of void ground outside the town's Westgate where Baret's barn and dovecote stood; as well as the garden with the "long tyld hous" in Punches Lane.²⁵ William II or the chief heir is to receive the lease held of the convent of St. Edmund's for another property in Punches Lane, also with a garden with a rent owed for 3s 4d.²⁶ The holder of the chief tenement is to have possession of Baret's 'cornell' house in the Cook Row to help with

²² Gibson, G.M. *Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 1989) p.72.

²³ William is to have John Baret II's chief property, with the garden, barns and dove house that the latter added, as well as 113 acres of land in the Westgatefield of Bury, Great and Little Horningsheath and Westley; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.24.

²⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.31.

²⁵ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.31. Part of the garden is reserved for the use of a property called the 'hert of the hop' until the latter is sold, when Baret's executors are to receive it back to the use of the house in Punches Lane.

²⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.32. Part of this property is to be reserved for the use of John Baret II's niece Joan Cratfield, see below.

the expenses incurred in the fulfilling of certain duties that are to fall to the heir.²⁷ Finally William II or the principle heir is to have the reversion of Baret's tenement bought from John Notyngnam and in which John Sadeler and Thomas Watton live, after the death of Jenete Whitwell who is to have it term of her life.²⁸

This constitutes the chief Baret patrimony, and William Baret II is to come into it under the condition that

he stonde welle and cler in the kyngges grace and be gentyll to my executours and in my wil fulfylling And he be obstinat or froward I wil he have noon of all...²⁹

Whether or not there was any reason for John Baret II to be anxious that his great nephew should be in the king's favour, or more likely in good standing in the eyes of the law, this reference concerning the status and reputation of the chief heir of John Baret II should alert us to his characteristic anxiety regarding both the Baret name and the success and endurance of the family's status in Bury St Edmunds. It is likely that William II had been chosen by Baret to inherit the patrimony for his position as the eldest son of John Baret II's eldest living brother rather than for any particular relationship the two shared.³⁰ In the list of lands, properties and personal items given to William II, as well as the duties incumbent upon him, John Baret II is at pains to refer to William II or the occupier of his chief property: in other words it is not William II as an individual that is chosen as the principle heir to the Baret patrimony, but the first Baret of the youngest generation. While this may be a conventional situation in testamentary contexts, it is perhaps significant as John Baret II's father certainly chose not to devolve his entire estate upon his eldest heir. This perhaps indicates a change in testamentary strategy regarding the provision of the Baret family in Bury. This concern with perpetuating the wealth and status of the Baret line through the patrimony is suggested by the naming of a large number of other male Barets descending from his brother's line who are to succeed to the patrimony if any heir should die. If the Barets run out of heirs then it is to pass to his in-laws the Drurys, and if some catastrophe claims all the Barets and all the Drurys then the patrimony is to be administered by various public personages of the town for the good of St. Mary's church and its priests, a contingency requiring well over two folios of instructions. Baret is clear about his desire for the patrimony to stay in one piece and in the hands of a Baret, although he is not happy about just anyone in his family inheriting it:

²⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.22, 241-2.

²⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.34.

²⁹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.24. There then follows two pages of reversions for the patrimony following strict and clearly delineated lines of succession.

³⁰ See Appendix IV.

But I wil that in no wyse noon ydiot nor fool occupye the seid goods but refuse hym and take anothis that is next the seid name of Baret may contynwe goodly as long as God wochesaffe³¹

Jenete Whitwell, John Baret II's niece, is to have her living in Baret's chief property, and she is also to keep the seven acres of land that she holds near the 'Herdwyk', which she holds with Katherine Drury, another of John Baret II's nieces.³² Jenete also receives for the term of her life a property that John II bought from John Notyngham in which John Sadeler and Thomas Watton are tenants. She is to be responsible for paying the rent and for repairs, and after her death the property is to return to William II or the heirs of the chief patrimony.³³ Jenete also receives some copylands in the meadow at Babwell, in return for paying 6s 8d to the abbot of St. Edmund's for the farm, and for rewarding "my man and my child with wiche clothes and garnementys as I have be syde".³⁴ Baret's other nieces Katherine Drury and Joan Cratfield are each associated with his lands and properties: the former, with her husband, is to comprise an heir to the chief patrimony in the event of the male Baret line ending, and also has joint possession of the seven acres near 'Herdwyk'; while the latter is to receive her living in the Punches Lane tenement, including:

the halle the ij chambrys with the soler above in the ende of the halle toward my gardeyn and a part of the gardeyn with the prevy

In other words she receives everything of the Punches Lane property that does not go to William II.³⁵

It becomes apparent John Baret II was substantially involved in the property market of Bury, in terms of holding, buying, selling, letting and renting. It is also quite clear that Baret had enlarged the patrimony that he had come to from his father. The advantages for Baret that this had in terms of his standard of living and the maintenance of his social status are two-fold: firstly the sheer commercial benefits of property ownership would have complemented the already substantial textile business interests that he enjoyed; and secondly, and more importantly, the holding of property roots the holder in a literal, physical and essentially visible sense within the community. That Baret's holdings were impressive in quantity and

³¹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.25.

³² Tymms *Bury Wills* p.31.

³³ The property is let for 64s a year, "and but ijd of rente to the Petaunseer" of St. Edmund's; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.34.

³⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.34.

³⁵ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.32. There are also a number of properties that Baret holds which are not bequeathed in his will: a chamber at Elmswell, probably in the abbots' palace there; three inns (one called Popishead, and another called Hert of the Hoop, the latter in Le Mustowe); and a new house built adjacent (and possible adjoining) Baret's chief property which is to be used to house the St. Mary priest

quality (given the size, location and purported use of some of the properties) establishes the fact that he was located within the higher echelons of the town's social status groups as determined by commercial and professional activities.

That the latter was a reality of Baret's occupational career is indicated by the contacts he made in relation to his property dealings, and even those contacts elicited by his will are impressive. Robert Nunstede, who was involved in a rent payable on Baret's chief property, was involved in a number of eminent Bury burgesses wills in the latter half of the 15th century, most notably that of John Kyrton whose executors included William Thweytes and John Drury gentlemen.³⁶ The three individuals nominated by John Baret II as advisors regarding the inheritance of the patrimony were all prominent men in their own right,³⁷ and had wide ranging influence and connections in county society as well as in Bury. William Jeney was appointed a tax assessor for Suffolk in 1463 on a commission that also included John Hopton,³⁸ while in 1477 he was involved in a transfer of the manor of Houghtonhall manor in Oulton, in the record of which he was described as sergeant-at-law.³⁹ Less is known about master Heydon, but both a Thomas Heydon and a Henry Heydon appear in the royal records of the second half of the century as involved in large transfers of estates in Suffolk, Essex, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire.⁴⁰ As for Thomas Heigham the younger, he is prominent among Bury wills between 1463 and 1483, acting as executor or witness in many important wills;⁴¹ and indeed he appears in every major document relating to the civic activities of the town, especially those recording enfeoffments to the town.⁴² That three such eminent individuals should be chosen by Baret to advise him and after his death his heirs on the administration of the patrimony is testimony to the place the family estates had for Baret's plans for the future of his family in Bury St Edmunds.

The property bought from John Notyngnam indicates dealings with another of Bury's leading

of St. Marys in return for his designated services; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.20, 234.

³⁶ BSERO Hawlee f.293v; Thweytes was a feoffee of John Smyth II (see Appendix I) while John Drury was a member of one of Bury's leading families.

³⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.27.

³⁸ CFR 1461-71 p.100. For John Hopton's life, career and contacts see Colin Richmond's excellent account, *John Hopton: a Fifteenth Century Suffolk Gentleman* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

³⁹ CCR 1476-85 p.62. There are two Oultons in East Anglia: one in Suffolk just to the west of Lowestoft; the other in Norfolk approximately sixteen miles northwest of Norwich. Jeney was also extremely active in the politics and careers of the Pastons, as a glimpse at the index of Gairdner's edition of *The Paston Letters* (Gloucester, 1983) p.283 indicates.

⁴⁰ CCR 1468-76 p.329; CCR 1476-85 p.411.

⁴¹ Such as those for John Smyth II 1480, Elizabeth Drury 1475 and William Coote rector of Fornham All Saints 1473; BSERO Hawlee ff.196v, 219, 304.

⁴² BSERO H 1/5/21 *Newehawe's obit*; BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents*; BSERO H 1/5/18 *Fishe Gift*; BSERO B 9/1/2 weavers' ordinances of 1477; BSERO A 6/2/1 sacrist's rental of 1526. He also appears in the royal records: CCR 1468-76 p.285; CCR 1476-85 p.303.

individuals,⁴³ and indeed with someone that shared a number of interests with Baret.⁴⁴ Notyngnam was alderman of Bury between 1406-7 and again in 1425-7, and was a grocer by occupation. Given the date of Notyngnam's death, Baret must have purchased this building from him early in the latter's career. Notyngnam appears as executor, supervisor or witness in a number of wills between 1399 and his death in 1437, as well as a number of other records.⁴⁵ As for the tenants of the same property, Thomas Watton appears in the Bury material as a mercer whose will indicates substantial wealth;⁴⁶ while John Sadeler appears in a number of wills, including that of magister John Croftys clerk, in which he appears alongside a number of Bury's secular and ecclesiastical elite.⁴⁷

5.iv.d. Religious identity.

As a member of the secular elite of Bury St Edmunds, Baret sought the recognition and sanction that came with close association with St. Edmund's and its officers. In this he may have followed the example of his parents, particularly his mother, who had had personal links with at least one abbot, and who had cultivated their more formal relationship. Baret's links with the monastery and its personnel were both formal and personal: in his will he remembers the abbot's chaplains who are each to receive a purse of silk and gold containing 12d, and

every gentyman of my lord abbotes wiche be comyng and goyng as officeres and menyal men longyng to the household of my felashippe

are to get the same.⁴⁸ What this fellowship may have been is unclear, but it is known that Baret had entered the lay confraternity of St. Edmund's, an honour enjoyed in the 15th century by such eminent personalities as Humphrey duke of Gloucester (who 'died mysteriously' in St. Saviour's hospital in Bury at the end of February 1447 when a parliament convened at the abbey), Richard Beauchamp earl of Warwick, William Paston, Elizabeth de Vere countess of Oxford, the earl and countess of Suffolk, and Henry VI himself.⁴⁹ It is also likely that Baret performed some function in the administration of St. Edmund's, and Samuel Tymms has

⁴³ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.34.

⁴⁴ Notyngnam was responsible for building a porch on St. Mary's church; see above Figure 5.2. His will of 1437 indicates a close association with his parish church, with the clergy and buildings receiving gifts; BSERO Osbern f.244v, Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.5-11.

⁴⁵ BSERO Osbern ff.92v 102, 110, 127v, 133, 137v, 141v, 145v, 149v, 151, 155, 168v, 175v, 180v, 182v, 183, 210 and 244v; CCR 1435-41 p.180; CPR 1416-22 p.161; BSERO A 6/2/1 sacrist's rental of 1526; BSERO H 1/5/21 *Netwehawe's obit.*

⁴⁶ BSERO Hawlee f.63v.

⁴⁷ BSERO Hawlee f.264; see also Hawlee f.113.

⁴⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.16.

⁴⁹ Pearsall, D. *John Lydgate* (London 1970) p.27; Gibson *Theater of Devotion* p.73.

suggested that he may have acted as a lay treasurer.⁵⁰ Like many of the wealthier townsmen of Bury John Baret II held property directly from some of the monastic officers. John Baret II's association with the monastery extended even to its patron:

Item I geve and be qwethe to Seynt Edmond and his schryne my hevy peys noble wich weyeth xx s and my best herte of gold with aungellys and a ruby with iiij labellys of white innamyl The seid noble and the seid broche herte of gold to be hange naylyd and festnyd upon the shryne on my coste by the avys of my executours wher they and the ffertrerys thynke and fynde a place moost convenient to the wourshippe of God and Seynt Edmund⁵¹

His links with specific members of the monastery community, generally the more senior obedientaries, are made explicit right at the start of the will. The unnamed abbot (John Bohun) receives

a good purs and vj s and viij d ther in and for a tokne of remembraunce my bedys of white ambyr with the ring of sylvir and ovir gilt longyng therto and my gilt stondyng cuppe to hym and to his successours after hym

The prior receives a good purse with a halfpenny of gold in it, "with a dowbill seel with two prentys hanggyng by a cheyne of sylver". John Wulfpet, the sacrist although only his name and not his office is provided by Baret, is bequeathed Baret's best powder box of silver;⁵² while the monk who will go on to succeed Wulfpet is also remembered towards the very end of the will:

Item j yeve and beqwethe to Daun John Kertelynge my silvir forke for grene gyngour⁵³

Other monks who either hold high offices or who soon come to hold high offices either in the abbey or in one of the town's other religious institutions receive bequests: John Ixnyng receives Baret's "tablees of ivory with the combe and a peyre spectaclys of sylvir and ovyr gylt"; John Crymplesham gets "my smale tablys of ivory gravyn with ymages wiche were the pryour hooly John of Bredlyngtone" and 6s 8d;⁵⁴ William Boxforde receives "my knyves that I veryd my selfe";⁵⁵ John Colchestre receives jet beads with silver and gilt *paternosters*; John

⁵⁰ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.233. The office Baret held may have been that of *camerarius* or *thesaurarius*.

⁵¹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.35.

⁵² Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.15-6.

⁵³ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.40. Wulfpet had been sacrist from at least 1454, BSERO Hawlee f.51v; while the earliest mention of Kertelynge as sacrist occurs in 1471, four years after Baret's death, BSERO Hawlee f.153. Perhaps the bequest appears at the end of the will because Baret suspected that Kertelynge would hold the office after his will had been originally drawn up.

⁵⁴ This amounts to a relic: John of Bridlington, born in Thwing in the East Riding of Yorkshire, became a monk and then prior of the Augustinian house at Bridlington after studying at Oxford. He died in 1379 and was canonised in 1401 after miracles occurred around his tomb; Attwater, D. *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints* (3rd ed.; London, 1995) pp.199-200.

⁵⁵ In the sacrist's account for 1429 William Boxforde receives 6s 8d for his travelling to London on abbey

Rattlesden gets amber beads and a silver ring; John Harlowe and John Attylburgh each receive a pair of amber beads.⁵⁶ These were obviously members of the convent that were personally known to Baret, as he also specifies that every monk in the house is to have 12d and a pittance of a 'french loaf' and a quart of wine. In other words those recipients from the abbey named in the first folio of Baret's will are singled out from their brethren. The nature of the bequests strengthen the impression that the relationship that Baret shared with these named individuals was a personal one: the gifts have an air of being carefully chosen and suited to the recipient, either as something they may have wanted, or else as something that would have particular resonance for the receiver. Items that are clearly second hand may have been especially significant to giver or receiver. In other words the personal and even idiosyncratic nature of the bequests may have been intended by Baret to serve as evocative triggers of remembrance, calling to the recipients' minds the giver, perhaps in specific circumstances, or in the context of a particular conversation or social event.⁵⁷

Baret's acquaintance with prominent local clerics was not confined to St. Edmund's, and his will indicates familiarity with many of the town's leading secular clergy as well as indeed those from other parishes. John Nichole, the parson of Fornham All Saints who regularly appears as witness, executor or recipient in Bury St Edmunds wills throughout the second half of the century, for example, receives a small token of remembrance.⁵⁸ Within Bury, clergymen such as master Thomas Cranewys,⁵⁹ and master Henry Hardman are remembered by Baret;⁶⁰ and both at one time or another served as parish priest or St. Mary priest in one of the town's two parish churches. Less prominent clerks are also remembered by Baret, such as Master John Pike, who receives amber beads with a gold ring 'wretyn and innamelyd' for a

business; BSERO A 6/1/6 p.7.

⁵⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.15-6, 40. John Harlowe receives cash in the 1429 sacrist's accounts, BSERO A 6/1/6 p.7. He was probably the same John Harlowe that served as master of St. Saviour's hospital between 1444 and 1474; Harper-Bill, C. ed. *The Charters of the Medieval Hospitals of Bury St Edmunds* (Suffolk Charters no.14; Woodbridge, 1994) pp.21-2.

⁵⁷ A benefactor wishing to impress an important monk that is not known personally would not, I suggest, consider a silver fork designed for green ginger as an immediately obvious choice of gift.

⁵⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.42. He receives jet beads with a ring of laton and gilt, with a stone and red lace and a lace 'knoppe'.

⁵⁹ He receives "my bende for an hat of balk sylk and silvir", Tymms *Bury Wills* p.41. Cranewys appears as executor, supervisor or witness to numerous wills between 1436 and 1479 when he died: BSERO Osbern ff.228v, 231, 240, 244v, 252, 259v, 260v, 263v; BSERO Hawlee ff.10, 15, 15b, 18v, 19, 24 (x2), 29v, 30v, 33, 35v, 38v, 40, 45v, 49v, 50v, 55, 57, 58v, 60, 60v, 68v, 70 (x2), 76, 81v, 84, 85, 87, 87v, 91, 112v, 116, 122v, 123, 146, 180, 181, 193, 222, 224v (x2), 243, 245v, 259v, 264, 269v, 285v. He also appears to have been active in property dealing, CCR 1441-7 p.66; CCR 1476-85 p.130. The former close roll relates to a transfer of personal property by John Gervays gentleman to Cranewys and others, including Edmund Tabor in 1442.

⁶⁰ Hardman receives a black gown for Baret's funeral and a crucifix of silver and gilt; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.41. He too is prolific in the Bury wills in the period 1463-80: BSERO Hawlee ff.80 (x2), 91v (x2), 94, 99v, 105v, 113, 136v, 146, 155, 164, 177, 189, 196v, 225v, 264, 270v, 285v, 295v, 304; he was also a feoffee of John Smyth II and was resident in the College, BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* pp.22, 25, 30.

token.⁶¹ The fact that the more obscure clergy of the town were known to Baret by name and well enough for the latter to make a bequest of a personal nature probably indicates Baret's interest in the clerical, not to say spiritual, affairs of the community. That this interest was taken seriously, and that it may have formed an aspect of elite identity within the community, is suggested by the fact that John Baret II was a lay member of the Dusse gild, otherwise known as the gild of the Translation of St. Nicholas, the town's elite socio-religious fraternity of clerks.⁶²

John Baret II's religious connections stretched beyond Bury, as did his knowledge and support of religious houses.⁶³ Dame Joan Stoonys, a nun of the house of Campsea, for example receives:

iij s iij d and myn book of ynglych and latyn with diverse maters of good exortacions wretyn in papir and closed with parchemyⁿ⁶⁴

That Baret knew this Suffolk nun and other inmates of local religious houses is as suggestive of Baret's position within the local gentry networks from which convents drew their members, as it is of his interest in spiritual matters.

Similarly dame Margaret Spurdaunce of Norwich was clearly well known personally to Baret. Margaret Spurdaunce, or Purdans, has been identified as a key figure in the 15th century recluse community of Norwich, and was known to have owned an English copy of the mystic St. Bridget's 'Revelations'.⁶⁵ Her will of 1481 indicates book ownership on a large scale, and the majority of her bequests are made to local hermits and anchoresses. Baret's bequests to this prominent figure are worth quoting at length, because they demonstrate such a particular concern with personal context and value:

Item I geve and beqwethe to dame Margarete Spurdaunce of Norwiche my crucifix wiche is in my white chambyr and the selour of cloth on loffte with the valaunce of scripture abowte the ymage be nat remevyd ne had away And I wil there be maad on my cost such anothir crucifix to be set up in the white chambir ther the tothir crucifix was Item I geve and beqwethe to the seid Dame Margarete a doubyl ryng departyd of gold with a ruby and a turkeys with a scripture wretyn with inne for a remembraunce

⁶¹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.41.

⁶² "Item I yeve and be qwethe on to the gilde of the translacion of Seynt Nicholas othir wyse callyd Dusgilde where inne I was a brothir xij s iij d" Tymms *Bury Wills* p.35.

⁶³ Baret remembers: the Franciscans of Babwell, including friar Thomas Lakenham; Master Osbern Augustinian friar of Clare; the nuns of Thetford and Campsea, including the prioress of the latter and ame Joan Stoonys; and both houses of friars at Thetford; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.35.

⁶⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.35. Joan Stoonys, or Stone, appears elsewhere in the Bury material: BSERO Hawlee ff.19, 51v.

⁶⁵ Tanner, N. *The Church in late Medieval Norwich 1370-1532* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies; Toronto, 1984) p.62; Gibson *Theater of Devotion* pp.78, 112.

of oold love vertuously set at alle tymes to the pleseer of God Item I geve and beqwethe to the seid Dame Margarete a peyre of bedys with pater nostris of gold and on eche syde of the paternostris a bede of coral and the Ave Maryes of colour aftir marbil with a knoppe othir wyse callyd a tuftt of blak sylke and ther in a litalnowche of gold with smal perle and stoonys be sekyng the seid Dame Margarete to prey for me And that she wil vovchesaf if hire doughtir leve longere than she to have the said bedys aftir hire dissees⁶⁶

This extraordinary bequest is clearly one of great sentimental value to Baret; and the detail with which he describes it suggests that the crucifix, double ring and beads hold great significance for both him and Spurdance in terms of the context of their relationship. The double ring in particular is reminiscent of the kind of token passed between lovers.⁶⁷

In these connections one can identify an interest in the burgeoning phenomenon of mysticism, although this conclusion requires something of a leap of enthusiasm. However it is possible that Baret's family had experience of novel ideas in the context of lay devotional practices. His mother, Joan Baret, who wrote her will in May 1424, left her best missal to one Robert Berd chaplain, in return for him overseeing the execution of her will; Berd was also to have the responsibility for disposing of the *residuum* for the health of Joan's soul.⁶⁸ This was probably the same Robert Berd chaplain of Bury St Edmunds who was tried for heresy at Norwich in 1429, after being caught up in the agitated crack-down on lollardy that took place in the decade after Oldcastle's abortive rising.⁶⁹ William Curteys, the abbot of St. Edmund's at the time, was furious that a member of the parochial clergy that he had personally chosen to hold office should be arrested by bishop Alnwick, claiming that such action constituted an invasion of St. Edmund's' peculiar jurisdiction;⁷⁰ but such was the religious climate that he was ignored. Berd was accused of 'notable depraved heresy', as well as associating and consorting with known heretics such as daun John Poleyn. He was also accused of publicly preaching that tithes should not be paid to clergy in a state of sin, that no honour should be offered to images of the Cross, Blessed Mary nor any other saint, and that no pilgrimages should be made.⁷¹ Berd denied these charges, and indeed all the others levelled against him

⁶⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.36.

⁶⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.36. Baret, like Richard Ferneys hermit of Norwich in his will, pairs Purdans with one dame Julian Lampett, an anchoress of Carrow, who is to receive a simple cash bequest of 20d; Gibson *Theater of Devotion* p.78.

⁶⁸ This may well have been a substantial undertaking given the wealth of Joan and her husband Geoffrey I.

⁶⁹ Tanner, N. *Heresy trials in the diocese of Norwich 1428-31* (Camden Society fourth series; no.20, 1977) pp.98-102 has a record of the trial; see also Dinn *Popular Religion* p.264; and Gibson *Theater of Devotion* pp.30-3.

⁷⁰ Thomson, J. *The Later Lollards 1414-1520* (Oxford, 1965) pp.120-1.

⁷¹ Tanner, N. *Heresy trials in the diocese of Norwich 1428-31* (Camden Society fourth series; no.20, 1977) p.100.

except for one, which accused him of possessing a copy of *Dives and Pauper*.⁷² Berd responded by claiming that the heresies that were found in it were of 'new writing' and had been added after the copy had left his possession.⁷³ Berd was allowed to purge himself in the chancel of St. James' church,⁷⁴ and thereafter was obliged to exhibit to the bishop of Norwich every book in English that came into his keeping upon pain of the greater excommunication.

It is possible Berd's exposure to new ideas about religion and lay participation in it (although not Lollardy) brought about by texts such as *Dives and Pauper* may have influenced the devotional perceptions of Baret's mother, who clearly trusted the chaplain when it came to providing for her soul. So too John Baret II may have been influenced, perhaps as a child in the presence of Robert Berd, or perhaps through his mother,⁷⁵ to appreciate devotional ideology, iconography and rituals in a particular way. This way need not have been heterodox to any extent, and indeed in John Baret II's case the affinity was strongly orthodox and Marian in tone.

This affection for Marian elements of lay piety is readily apparent throughout the will, and it is most noticeable in the alterations Baret made to the Lady chapel of St. Mary's in order to house his chantry,⁷⁶ and the duties that the clergy of the town's Mary masses were to undertake on his behalf. These instructions form the basis of the whole will and consequently Baret spends considerable time explaining and clarifying them. Baret's body was to be

beried by the awter of Seynt Martyn named also our Ladyes awter in Seynt marye chirche at Bury under the *percloos* of the retourne of the candilbeem be fore the ymage of oure Savyour and no stoon to be steryd of my grave but a pet to be maad under the ground stille ther my lady Schardelowe was wont to sitte the stoolys removynd and the body put in as neer undyr my grave as may be wythoute hurt of the seid grave⁷⁷

That Baret had a precise knowledge of the layout and decoration of the church is manifest. He

⁷² It was claimed that this book was outlawed for being full of errors and heresies.

⁷³ Berd claimed to have bought the copy from a man whose name he did not know near Hitchin; he then gave the book to a Dominican friar at Sudbury called Nicholas so that it could be copied for the use of Andrew Boteler knight. Friar Nicholas began to make the copy, which was finished by one Robert Dykkes of Bury, who had previously been suspected of heresy in bishop Alnwick's investigation into heresy in Bury St Edmunds in December 1428; Tanner *Heresy trials in the diocese of Norwich* p.99.

⁷⁴ Berd's compurgators were six rectors from local rural parishes.

⁷⁵ As Rob Lutton suggests, religious attitudes were transmitted through kin; Lutton, R.G.A. *Heterodox and Orthodox Piety in Tenterden, c.1420-1540* (University of Kent at Canterbury Ph.D thesis, 1997) pp.1-32.

⁷⁶ See above Figure 5.2. What is marked as the Lady Chapel in this figure is the *current* Lady chapel: in the 15th century the Lady chapel was in the area marked as John Baret's chantry.

⁷⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.15. The *percloos*, or screen, to Baret's chantry chapel was believed to have been 'newly discovered' in 1850, and Tymms reproduces a woodcut of a coat of arms believed to be that of John Baret II; p.238.

is aware of where Elen Shardelowe had been used to sitting before her death in 1457.⁷⁸ Baret too had a usual place in the church, in the Lady chapel facing the image of Mary Magdalene;⁷⁹ and his descriptions of the images especially in the Lady chapel are observed in great detail.⁸⁰ For example, he desires that:

the ymage of oure lady that Robert Pygot peynted be set up ageyn the peleer next þe percloos of Seynt Marie awter with the baas redy therto and a houel with pleyn sydes comyng down to the baas and in the myddes of the baas my candylstykke of laton with a pyke to be set afore a tapir I have assygned unto þe v taperes longgyng to the natyvite gyldre wiche stant alofte be fore the aungelys with chymes to be sette abowte our lady at the peler⁸¹

which indicates both that Baret knew who was responsible for certain decorations made in the church, and that he was aware of the institutional ritual employment of different areas in the church.

Baret's chantry was to be created in the existing Mary chapel in St. Mary's, on the south side of the chancel, connected to the south or St. Mary aisle.⁸² His instructions are detailed, voluminous and specific to a degree that occasionally obscures clarity rather than promoting it. The chapel already had an altar dedicated to saints Mary and Martin set against the east wall of the chapel, behind which was a reredos decorated with images of the Magnificat; there were also statues of saints Mary, Martin and Vincent. Nearby there were images of the Magi and of the Tree of Jesse.⁸³ Baret's tomb, which originally stood on the north side of the chapel but now stands on the south side, was to form the centrepiece of the chantry chapel, and is still striking even today.⁸⁴ It is a *memento mori* tomb, with an effigy of a decaying corpse in a ragged shroud providing a potent reminder of the transitory nature of human life. The tomb has a cornice of Purbeck marble, and Baret specified:

Item I wille þat there be wretyn on þe fore pat of iren abowte my grave soone aftyr my dissees these vers Sis testis xp̄e tumulus non hic manet iste Corpus ut ornetur sed sp̄us ut memoretur And in sum convenient place by the day and yeer of oure lord of my departyng from this wourld and the pardon the wiche I purchased to be wreten therewith Item the bulle and the busshoppes seelys the wiche I get be set in a loker of burde for brekyng of the seelys and curyd ovir after a loker on the syde ageyn the plombe of lede þat it may be redde and knowe to exorte the pepill rathere to prey for

⁷⁸ BSERO Hawlee f.57.

⁷⁹ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.38-9.

⁸⁰ See the description of Baret's chantry chapel below.

⁸¹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.19.

⁸² See above Figure 5.2. The chapel to the east of Baret's chantry (labelled South or lady chapel) had not been built in 1463.

⁸³ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.39.

⁸⁴ See below Appendix V, Figure 5.5a.

me⁸⁵

The verses combine with dramatic representation of mortality to form a warning to onlookers. The 'pardon' would probably have been some kind of indulgence, and the fact that Baret wanted these written documents near his tomb for people to be moved to pray for him is significant. Like the relic of John of Bridlington, the papal indulgence is an indication of someone who took their participation in orthodox lay piety very seriously; and used their resources and leisure to appropriate and exploit the 'advanced forms' of practice.

This interaction of text and image becomes more deliberate and obvious if we return to the reredos behind the St. Mary altar, which would have formed one wall in the chapel surrounding Baret's tomb. The screen itself seems to have had some triptych where the Magnificat picture took up the central panel. The wings, or 'lowkys' as Baret calls them, were to be used in another way:

And in the enner part of þe lowkys *withinne* there be wreten the balladys I made therefore and the pardon wretyn there also with other thinges wiche I graunte to Seynt Marye preest his chargees and his rewardys expressyd as folwith aftyr in writyng

Although "the balladys I made" might suggest that he commissioned them rather than produced them himself, Baret did have literary connections from which he may have acquired the skills to write them himself.⁸⁶

The tomb itself was to serve a similar purpose of combining the immediacy of image with the resonant formality of text. The 'formality' is underlined by some of the inscriptions appearing in formulaic Latin. Beneath the head of the effigy and along the side of the body in red with blue initials one can read (in translation):

Lord do not judge me according to my acts there is nothing for you to see but evil
Therefore I pray to your majesty oh God that you will wipe out my iniquities John Baret

Inscribed on the winding sheet around the effigy's head:

I now sleep in dust

Under the head of the effigy in the blue and red is written:

⁸⁵ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.19.

⁸⁶ See below pp.244-53.

John Ho that wil sadly beholde me with his ie Baret
 May se hys owyn merowr *and* lerne for to die

The east end of the tomb there are three panels, the centre of which contains an *Agnus dei* bearing the inscription:

God have mercy on my sins

Finally, around the pedestal of the tomb directly beneath the corpse:

Wrappid in a selure as a ful rewli wrecche
No mor of al myn good to me ward wil strecche
From erthe I kam and to erthe I am browht
This is my natur for of erthe I was wrowht
Thus erthe on to erthe to gedir now is knet
So endeth each creature *Quod* John Baret
Qwerfor ye pepil in weye of charite
With your good prayeris I prey yu help me
For lych as I am right so schal ye all be
Now God on my sowle have mercy & pite AMEN⁸⁷

The sentiments expressed in these inscriptions, and particularly those within the 'from earth to earth' tradition, are fitting in conjunction with the visual imagery of the unadorned corpse of the tomb, presenting as they do a picture of the humble nature of human life and the worthlessness of Baret's own condition. It is also worth noting that they are very personal in that they are concerned not with the glory of God but with the misery of the supplicant, although the sentiments obviously fall within a conventional mode of expression. This may indicate that Baret's religious perspective was informed by a brand of almost meditative reflection focused on the individual.⁸⁸

Along the north side of the tomb, which is divided into seven panels each decorated with motif or monogram constructed out of a 'j' and 'b' crossed and encircled by interlinking 'ss',⁸⁹ appears Baret's motto 'Grace me governe'. The 'me' of this phrase is held by a carved figure in the expensive dress of a 15th century merchant, who is wearing a collar or chain comprising the interlocking 's' pattern, apparently signifying Baret himself. In his will Baret refers to "bothe my colers of silvir the Kyngs lyfre",⁹⁰ and Tymms identifies these as being livery collars of the house of Lancaster, which were composed of 'esses' and which had no pendant

⁸⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.234 has a partial transcript of the inscriptions on the tomb.

⁸⁸ Sentiments such as appear on Baret's tomb find echoes in the writings and beliefs of Lollardy, although in no way could he be identified as such. Perhaps here we may be seeing the influence of Robert Berd.

⁸⁹ See below Appendix V, Figure 5.5b.

⁹⁰ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.41.

but only a trefoil ring, as worn by the figure on the tomb.⁹¹

Above the tomb, Baret instructs that:

Item I wille there be made a goodly newe crowne of metal gylte or ellys wel doo in tymbyr for the ymage of oure lady in the housyng of þe reredos of Seynt Marie awter and iij merours of glas to be sette in the myddys of þe iij woytez above my grave wiche be redy with my other glasys and dyverse rolles with scripture as Henry Peyntour can sette hem there they shalle stonde⁹²

and the decoration of the ceiling still exists, although I am not entirely sure that it corresponds to Baret's instructions, particularly concerning the mirrors. There are six brightly coloured panels each bearing the monogram of the crossed 'j' and 'b' within the interlocking 's' collar;⁹³ and each panel contains the 'Grace me governe' motto with elaborately decorated initials. The monograms are connected by gilt stars with small pieces of glass at their centre, and the panels are connected by shields bearing the Baret arms.⁹⁴ There are some last excerpts of text at various locations around the ceiling. At the northwest corner of the chapel can be read (in translation) "Rejoice my soul in the Lord"; and in the northeast corner "Praise the glory of the Lord". Over the arch separating the nave from the choir is written in particularly decorated lettering "Pray for the soul of John Baret", while over the nave arch itself reads "Our sweet son of the Blessed Virgin Mary Amen".⁹⁵ The location of these inscriptions was such that they would be visible from the main body of the church without having to enter the Lady chapel itself.

John Baret II thus made an impact upon the visual presentation of St. Mary's church by altering the Lady Chapel to his own purposes. But he was also responsible for other elements of the church's decoration. In the roof of the nave were (and still are) a series of angels carved into the hammerbeams which formed a procession leading to the high altar, and which Baret had some part in commissioning:

... alle the werk of the aungellys on lofte wiche I have do maad for a remembraunce of me and my frendys...⁹⁶

Baret also leaves ten marks to the painting of the reredos and table at the St. Mary altar with

⁹¹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.249.

⁹² Tymms *Bury Wills* p.20.

⁹³ See below Appendix V, Figures 5.4a and 5.4b.

⁹⁴ The arms are: Argent, a bend sable, between three square buckles gules; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.237-8.

⁹⁵ Presumably the two inscriptions are to be read together.

⁹⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.39. For an explication of the angels see Paine *St. Mary's*. See below Appendix V fig. 5.3.

the story of the Magnificat.⁹⁷

Baret's funeral reflects his knowledge of scriptural and liturgical forms as well as his emphasis upon the visual in his religious perspectives. Baret desires that William Hussher and John Hert play a role in the burial service, with their rewards being ascertained by his executors. The various clergy of St. Mary's are to have cash payments for their participation in the funeral;⁹⁸ and the other clergy and participants receive payments too.⁹⁹ Master Thomas Harlowe is to preach the sermon at Baret's burial, although if he is not available then he is to advise on a replacement from Cambridge.¹⁰⁰ There is to be charity to the local poor and imprisoned, although there is to be no common dole.¹⁰¹ At Baret's burial, dirige and requiem mass he requires:

v men clade in blak in wurshippe of Jhus v woundys and v wommen clad in whith in wurshippe of oure ladyes fyve joyes eche of them holdyng a torche of clene wexe

and that

my executoures my kynrede my frendys and my *servauntes* have gownys of blak as many as ben expressyd be name in this my seid wille ¹⁰²

thus establishing the dramaturgical quality of the funeral which would ultimately have ended with something approaching a *tableau* at the cadaver tomb.¹⁰³ The stipulation that Baret's friends and relatives don the costumes effectively brings the audience of his funeral into the action itself, and this participation in turn probably constituted involvement in the construction of the identity and memory of John Baret II that his will attempts.

The sacrist of St. Mary's was to have food and 12d for his ringing during the services, and on

⁹⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.19.

⁹⁸ The St. Mary priest is to have a black gown; the parish priest 6s 8d; the parish clerks of the ward Baret lives in (probably Westgate ward) get 12d.

⁹⁹ Each priest present at the dirige and burial is to have 4d, each parish clerk 2d, and each child with surplice 1d. Each priest at the exequy is to have a pair of beads and a purse with 4d in it; friars and "alle other that hath take the ful ordir of preesthod", including Bury's two parish priests and two St. Mary priests, are to have 6d; each colet, deacon, subdeacon, parish and ward clerk is to have 2d, and each child with surplice 1d for attending the exequy; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.16.

¹⁰⁰ In the will of the prominent Bury chaplain Godwin Shipdam of 1471, Harlowe is referred to 'magister theologie', BSERO Hawlee f.146. Harlowe does not appear in Emden's registers.

¹⁰¹ On the evening of the dirige each poor man and woman present at the ceremony should have 1d, and in the morning of the same day each bedridden man or woman that can be found in Bury is to have 2d to pray for Baret's soul. The prisoners in the gaol are to have 1d and a day's food and drink, and the gaoler is to have 2d; while Bury's lepers are to have 2d and bread.; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.17.

¹⁰² Tymms *Bury Wills* p.17. The ten poor torch bearers were to have 2d and bread and meat. The two bellmen were to be among the torch bearers, and were to have their gowns provided for them.

¹⁰³ Certainly a convention of contemporary drama, such as appears in *Everyman*. See A.C. Cawley ed.,

the day of the burial itself, a sung mass of prick song was to take place at the Mary altar

in wurshippe of oure lady at vij of þe klokke be the morwe or sone aftir þat þe messe of requiem may begynne forthwith whan yt is doo to spede the tyme for is doo to spede the tyme for þe sarmon¹⁰⁴

There is then to be a Mary mass at which his family and executors make an offering, which is to be conducted by the St. Mary priest who is to wear a white vestment “wiche is redy made ageyn þat tyme bought and payd fore” which bears Baret’s arms and his motto ‘Grace me governe’.¹⁰⁵ The order of the dirige, Mary and requiem masses and interment is carefully spelled out in order. On the day Baret dies the St. Mary priest is to say a Mary mass at the St. Mary altar in the same white vestment,

and after the gospel to stonde at þe awter is ende and rehearse John Baretys name opynly seyng De Profundis for me for my fader and my moder and for alle crysten sowles and to have mynde on us and on Edmond Tabour in his memento¹⁰⁶

after which is to follow a requiem mass for the same souls. On the day of the burial, the St. Mary priest is to begin with a mass by note, and is to say the *De Profundis* after the gospel, and is to rehearse Baret’s name and say a requiem, as on the day of his death.¹⁰⁷

The final aspect of Baret’s religious identity is constructed in the chantry and other duties he devolved upon the St. Mary priest of St. Mary’s, which were to be recorded in public view in the screen by his tomb. These duties are numerous, and were to begin with the funeral services just described. The priest is to have 6s 8d twice yearly for fulfilling his duties, as well as the specified chambers in his new property adjacent to his chief tenement, the enacting of which requires that he

be chargyd with no mo messys be note but the day of my internement and a messe of oure lady eche wykke¹⁰⁸

In other words the St. Mary priest was only to say a Mary mass once a week for Baret, and is not to undertake any other such commission. In return for the lodging in Baret’s house the St. Mary priest of St. Mary’s was to pray for Baret’s soul at every “meel mete or sopeer”, and if he says grace or *De Profundis* then he is to rehearse Baret’s name openly

Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays (London, 1990 ed.) pp.205-34.

¹⁰⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.17.

¹⁰⁵ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.18.

¹⁰⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.18.

¹⁰⁷ Everyone singing ‘prick-song’ on the day of Baret’s burial is to receive 2d, and the ‘pleyers at þe orgenys’ are also to have 2d. In the evening there is to be a feast.

¹⁰⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.18.

that they þat here it may sey God have mercy on his soule wiche greetly may releve me with here devout preyours¹⁰⁹

The owner of the Baret patrimony and chief property was to ensure that the St. Mary's priest fully enacted his responsibilities; and was also to

dewly and yeerly ... fynde ij tapris of wax oon right ovir my grave anothir be fore the ymage of oure lady at the pelir and bothe taprys to be light o day eche wyke in the yeer suyche tyme as the preest seythe messe eche yeer at my yeerday at wich yeerday I wylle the owener of my place pay eche yeer viij d to the resurreccion gilde that viij taperis may be light at the dirige and the messe the same tyme¹¹⁰

The yearday itself involved the principle heir, with the advice of the parish and St. Mary priests of St. Mary's and the prior of the Dusse gild, finding five other priests, so that all eight clergy can perform a dirige by note and a requiem mass by note. Baret is clear that the rewards going to each priest for their participation should be delivered *after* the requiem:

this mony not to be delyverid to noon of hem tyl the messe of Requiem be endyd¹¹¹

At "twelve of the klokke at noon" on the day before Baret's yearday the sacrist is required to

do the chymes smythe Requiem eternam and so to contynwe sevene nyght aftir tyl the utas of my yeerday be passyd and even al lenton Requiem eternam¹¹²

and almost as an after thought, Baret asks that the *requiem eternam* be rung by the sacrist of St. Mary's on the day of his death, and 'day and nyth' for the next thirty days. The most concrete duty of the St. Mary priest, and that which really constitutes the chantry, is that he is to say a Mary mass on the day of the week that Baret dies every week, and is to say the *De profundis* for him and his parents. For this the priest is to be paid 10s a year.¹¹³

Religious institutions other than the St. Mary priest of Baret's parish are remembered in the

¹⁰⁹ The St. Mary priest of St. James' was to have his lodging there too in return for a weekly mass for Baret; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.21.

¹¹⁰ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.21-2. This instruction is repeated by Baret later on, p.28.

¹¹¹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.27. The parish and St. Mary priests of St. Mary's and the prior of the Dusse gild are to have 6d each, and the other five priests 4d. Each are to have 1½d to offer at the mass. On the yearday 4s 2d worth of farthing white bread is to be delivered to poor folk "stondyng in the strete abowte my place", bedridden poor, prisoners in the gaol, and lepers at the Risbygate. The sacrist of St. Mary's is to receive 12d for ringing the bells, and the bellmen are to have 4d for going about the town ringing for his souls and the souls of his parents.

¹¹² Tymms *Bury Wills* p.28.

¹¹³ One year chantries in St. Mary's are also founded by Baret for the souls of others: including his parents, Edmund Tabour and his wife; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.28, 30, 38.

will. 13s 4d is left to sustain the Jesus mass,¹¹⁴ for example, and William II is to

paye yeerly to the sexteyn of the monasterye of Bury ... iij s iiij d for a sangrede that my soule my fadrys and modrys sowlis and my frendys may be preyd fore in the pulpet on the Sunday and the parysh preest to do as moche as a sangrede requerith¹¹⁵

Similarly the steeples of the parish churches of Rougham and Little Rickinghall receive cash bequests.¹¹⁶ The “reparacion of my lordys werk and to the chirche”, presumably of St. Edmund's the church of which burnt down very near to the time Baret's will was drawn up, receives the substantial gift of ten marks.¹¹⁷

The sheer expense of Baret's provision for spiritual and liturgical interests is staggering, and the appropriation of the St. Mary priest of St. Mary's (who was effectively funded by the charity of the community and not St. Edmund's) must have caused considerable disruption in the order of services for the parish. John Baret II clearly had a knowledge of liturgy and devotional forms and images, as well as an acquaintance of local leading religious personnel. Similarly evident is Baret's devotion to the cult of Mary, which he made public for all to see, even those who did not enter the church where he was buried:

Item I wil with the avys take of such meen as my executours wil calle to hem that the Rysbygate wich is moost roynows of the town be amendid and maad of my coost with fre stton and bryk archyd and enbatelyd substancyally to endure And a twyx the batilment and the arche in the myddys I wil have an ymage of oure lady sittynge or stondyng in an howsyng of free stoon and remembraunce of me besyde ...¹¹⁸

Indeed it is this public aspect of Baret's religious identity, the self-conscious *display* that is involved, that constitutes the most characteristic element of this aspect of his will.

5.iv.e. Social identity.

This section is intended to place John Baret II in his social context within the circle of prominent Bury burgesses of the mid-15th century, in terms of his kin and social connections. In order to assess Baret's construction of identity it is necessary to establish his position, as the son of wealthy immigrants to Bury, in relation to the town's established social structures.

¹¹⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.38: this is a very brief reference, almost as if Baret's interest in the mass was conventional or somehow obligatory for one of his standing.

¹¹⁵ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.30.

¹¹⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.41.

¹¹⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.42.

¹¹⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.37. Gibson *Theater of Devotion* p.75.

Baret's main connection with the secular elite of Bury was achieved with his choice of marriage. His wife, who is named in his will as 'Elisabet Drury my wyf', belonged to perhaps the most eminent family to come from Bury St Edmunds.¹¹⁹ The connections between the Barets and the Drurys in fact extended to several intermarriages during the 15th century, and more particularly towards the end of the century when both families had attained a solid position in gentry society. The careers of several Drurys indicate considerable financial and political success, and it is likely that Baret's connection with the family would have enlarged his own prestige to some extent. Indeed the importance of this connection to Baret is suggested by the clauses in his will determining the inheritance of his chief property: after an incredibly detailed list of the male Baret heirs who are to inherit the property in order of precedence, Baret stipulates that in the event of the male line ending it is to pass to the male heirs of his nephew Thomas Drury and his wife Katherine. The significance of this may lie with Baret's identification of the Drurys as suitable social peers to inherit the Baret patrimony; or alternatively he may have viewed them as appropriate trustees for the reconstructed memory of himself that he wished to remain after him. Either way it is unlikely that Baret actually envisioned the *patrimony leaving his brother's line*.

Baret's business pursuits were mainly concerned with cloth; a reference in the calendar of patent rolls indicates his involvement in the wool trade in 1460,¹²⁰ but he was also interested in steadily accumulating land and property to add to the holdings left to him by his parents. By the time of his death in 1467 John Baret II had probably become one of the leading burgesses of the town: he had armigerous status and considerable wealth, although he evidently had never served as alderman. Despite this, it is certainly true to say that he mixed in circles that contained a large proportion of the town's known 15th century aldermen, including men like John Notyngam,¹²¹ Simon Clerk, and the town's enduring civic hero John Smyth II.

Indeed many of the town's laity remembered by Baret also figure among the burghal elite. Apart from these aldermen, others include members of the gild of the Purification of Our Lady, otherwise known as the Candlemas gild. Baret knew evidently John Smyth II, and may have known Margaret Odeham (or her husband John),¹²² the two major benefactors of the

¹¹⁹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.35.

¹²⁰ CPR 1441 p.199.

¹²¹ Baret refers to the property he purchased from John Notyngam grocer, who served as alderman twice, in 1406-7 and again in 1425-7; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.34.

¹²² John Baret II and Margaret Odeham had several pieces of land abutting on each other, although if this provided any contact between the owners, it may well have been between John Baret II and John Osbern until the latter's death; BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* p.55. For a detailed identification of which parcels of Odeham's land neighboured John Baret II's, see BL. Harley 4626 ff.38v-39v.

Candlemas gild.¹²³ Membership of the Candlemas gild was probably synonymous with being a feoffee in the grants of John Smyth II and then later the others who added to his grants, originally at least, and a number of those who went on to become feoffees of Smyth appear in Baret's will. For example,¹²⁴ Thomas Edon of Bury St Edmunds, John Ayleward grocer, Simon Clerk the master mason of St. Edmund's, and John Elys identified by Baret as 'wrytere'. The acquaintance of Baret with these individuals whose elite status was to be concretised ten years after Baret's will was drawn up by their role in Smyth's enfeoffment establishes him within their ranks; particularly as the nature of the relationships he shared with them were such that frequent face to face contact would have been required.¹²⁵ Baret also knew others who play active parts not only in the society of Bury's elite, but also in the town's public life. Adam Newehawe, for example, seems to have made a habit (and possibly a living) out of administering civically orientated bequests, as not only was he chosen by John Smyth as one of twenty-five feoffees for his manor called 'Swyftys', but he also had a special role in the execution of Baret's will:

And for as moche as maister William Qweyth and Adam Newehawe¹²⁶ be inhabytyd and dwellyng in Bury I wil the mony þat is resid and reseyyvd be delyveryd and reste in the handys and keypyng of þe seid maister William Qweyth and Adam Newehawe tyl suche tyme as there felas [Baret's other executors] come togedyr to make a rekenyng as right and good concyens wil requyre¹²⁷

This was the same Adam Newehawe who made large gifts of lands and properties to the town in his own right.

In terms of his social and familial life then, Baret was well connected in the town. His acquaintance with prominent townsmen was not only confined to Bury St Edmunds, however, but also stretched to the rural parishes in the archdeaconry of Sudbury. His most notable 'country cousin' was a man called John Clopton esquire from the parish of Long

¹²³ John Baret II himself was a member of the gild as indicated by his bequests made to the brethren and also his request that they attend his yearday; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.27, 30. Inserted at the foot of folio 32v of BL. Harley 4626, the Candlemas gild ordinances of 1471, is: "Be it Remembred of a goode benefactor late passed to god. John Barret Esqyre. on whose sowle god have mercie. The *which* to this guylde for to be Remembred gave a gallon of red wyne or elles eighte pence therefore".

¹²⁴ See Appendix I for the feoffees and the grants in which they were involved.

¹²⁵ Edon and Ayleward are given peculiarly personal gifts, the latter receiving a bequest whose significance lies precisely in the fact that it is old and evidently second hand: "Item to Jankyn Aylleward iij old keryng knyves with white shaftes harneysid withe silver". Clerk is responsible for several construction and design projects for Baret; and Elys is responsible among other things for the chimes in St. Mary's that Baret has such an interest in; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.20, 37, 41.

¹²⁶ Two of Baret's executors.

¹²⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.43. John Coote gentleman, one of the other executors, is to be "redy in rydyng goyng and laboryng to the *performyng* and *executyng* of my seid testament and last wil in alle things *perteynyng* therto".

Melford who was chosen by Baret to act as the supervisor of his will.¹²⁸ In fact Clopton constitutes a useful lynch-pin in a study of the networks involving Baret's connections, as he seems to have been involved in one capacity or another in the wills of most of the elite families of Bury. A brief examination of the wills in which Clopton acted as witness, executor or supervisor throws up a list of surnames that consistently appear in Baret's will: in many cases the same individuals can be identified. In 1457 Clopton acted as executor for the widow Elen Shardelowe of Bury St Edmunds, probably the same individual who provides the topographical signpost for the placement of Baret's tomb.¹²⁹ Clopton also acted as supervisor for the Elizabeth Drury that may have been Baret's wife in 1475,¹³⁰ and as executor for John Smyth who is remembered in Baret's will.¹³¹ Clopton also appears acting in the wills of various members of the Coote and Fest families, both of which are represented in Baret's will.¹³²

Like most prominent Bury townsmen with commercial interests, John Baret II also had London connections. In his will he refers to his niece Jenete Whitwell's having been in the service of Isabel Bussy of London, which might suggest a family connection with the latter;¹³³ as well as leaving Robert Basset clerk of the 'Weyhous' at London his best brooch (after that left to the shrine of St. Edmund) with a gold heart and some serpentine knives.¹³⁴

Baret also had experience of a number of literary contacts, which must have had a bearing upon his ability to conceive and express his identity. The role of the written word seems to have been an important one in the construction of Baret's identity, and can be seen throughout the building of the will and the instructions it relays. The chantry chapel that he set up in St. Mary's church to house his tomb is littered with scriptural texts, and his tombstone itself includes several inscriptions, and it has been suggested that these were

¹²⁸ Clopton and his family was enormously prominent in the urban and gentry communities throughout East Anglia; they owned vast amounts of land and property, and conducted business with gentry, aristocracy and even royalty from all over the country. John Clopton's will of 1494 indicates that he was a lay brother in the religious houses of St. Edmund's, Babwell, Clare, Sudbury, Hounslow, Sion, Charterhouse and others. Clopton himself constructed an identity which is as interesting as that of John Smyth II and John Baret II, and but for space would have found himself the subject of examination in this study.

¹²⁹ Elen Shardelowe's will is at BSERO Hawlee f.57.

¹³⁰ BSERO Hawlee f.219.

¹³¹ BSERO Hawlee f.304.

¹³² John Coote gets a white bone hat band and green beads, and is also named as an executor; Richard Fest of Bury St Edm receives: "my beedys of jet with ij paternostris of crystal and a ryng with a stoon hangyng on the lace for remembraunce of old good felashipp"; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.36, 41, 42. See also BSERO Hawlee ff.176, 196v.

¹³³ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.23. It is just possible, but unlikely, that Isabel Bussy was the Isabel daughter of William Baret I; but had there been a family connection between her and John Baret II it is likely that the latter would have acknowledged it. See Appendix IV.

¹³⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.35.

possibly inspired or even written by the monk John Lydgate who was at St. Edmund's abbey in the first half of the century. It is claimed that Lydgate was responsible for introducing or popularising the 'Dance of Death' tradition in England after translating the verses inscribed on the walls of l'Elgise des Innocents in Paris, especially after John Carpenter had them painted alongside the murals in the chancel of St. Paul's in London; and it is not altogether unlikely that the inspiration for Baret's cadaver tomb originated from Lydgate.¹³⁵ Baret certainly knew Lydgate: not only does he give sir John Cleye, cousin and priest, his "boke with the sege of Thebes in englysh" which had been written by Lydgate between 1420 and 1422, interestingly being the only text he wrote without an identifiable patron;¹³⁶ but a more definite link can be established in royal records. In 1439 Lydgate wrote to Henry VI requesting that half of the royal pension paid to him should be given to Baret, and there are a number of accounts up to 1449 from the sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk's office recording due payment to Baret.¹³⁷ Baret certainly did not need the money that this provided for him, and the relationship remains obscure. However, both men shared a strong sense of marian devotion,¹³⁸ and so Lydgate may have played the role of some kind of religious mentor to Baret. Alternatively, the relationship may have been literary: Baret specifies that near his tomb copies are to be made of "the balladys I made therefore". This is ambiguous, and could refer either to verses he had written, or else verses he had had commissioned, and of course may be entirely unconnected to Lydgate; but the possibility of Baret being a literary disciple of the monk is tantalising.

Baret certainly knew other literate and educated individuals. His other contacts from within St. Edmund's would come into this category, as does master Thomas Harlowe who is to "sey the sermon at my interment ... And if he may not do it be his avyce anothir to be chose at Cambridge to make the sermon".¹³⁹ One can infer that Harlowe was himself a Cambridge graduate, and it is not certain whether or not he was normally resident in Bury St Edmunds or Cambridge, or indeed anywhere else, which would have implications for the determination of Baret's range of connections. Other graduates mentioned in Baret's will include John Attylburgh monk of St. Edmund's, Thomas Cranewys, master Henry Hardman bachelor of civil law, and master Robert Lawshull.¹⁴⁰ Others he may have known *via* his

¹³⁵ Gibson *Theater of Devotion* p.74; Schirmer, W.F. *John Lydgate: a Study in the Culture of the Fifteenth Century* trans. Keep, A.E. (London, 1961) pp.127-9; Pearsall *John Lydgate* p.177.

¹³⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.35; Pearsall *John Lydgate* p.151.

¹³⁷ Gibson *Theater of Devotion* pp.74-5. For a transcript of the documents see Steele, R. ed. *Lydgate and Burgh's 'Secrees of Philosophers'* (EETS extra series no.66, 1894) pp.xxvi-xxx. See also CCR 1441-7 p.6, for an order issued to the sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk in 1441 for John Lydgate and John Baret II to be paid annually £7 13s 4d and then to the longer liver, in consideration of their 'good service'.

¹³⁸ Gibson *Theater of Devotion* p.75.

¹³⁹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.17.

¹⁴⁰ Emden, A.B. *A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to a.d. 1500* (Cambridge University

family connections include sir Robert Drury and John Hardehed chaplain.¹⁴¹

John Baret II also refers to someone called John Elys styled 'wrytere', who was once a servant of his. Elys receives a bequest of 3s 4d and a black gown for the burial, and is requested to oversee the maintenance of the chimes at the St. Mary altar of St. Mary's.¹⁴² He is also listed among Baret's witnesses, and his presence at the writing of the will might be an indication that he was actually responsible for the writing up of it. Indeed Elys appears as witness (and therefore possibly scribe) in several other wills, particularly those of substantial burgesses and churchmen, up until 1473 when a John Elys scrivener records his own will.¹⁴³

The self-conscious nature of Baret's construction of identity is to some extent engendered by the provision he makes for his family. It is clear that the need to make such provision has a role to play in focussing his attention upon his familial identity. His association with his family has further ramifications, of course, for how Baret was perceived in the town. It is evident that he was at pains to recall all his family in his will, even instructing his executors to give to those he has forgotten. It may be more accurate to say that he is anxious to remember all those it is appropriate to remember in his bequests, although the issue here may be 'appropriate to whom': to Baret as a private individual with emotional and social connections; or to Baret as a public figure anxious to represent himself in a certain way. A reason for asking this question may arrive from the bequest to his wife: it is effectively a token bequest, consisting merely of "a ryng of gold with an ymage of the Trinite",¹⁴⁴ and given Baret's wealth and status, and the fact that his wife may have outlived him by at least eight years, it is inconceivable that no arrangement was made for her livelihood. As is so often the case with testamentary material we can only assume that such matters were organised in advance of the will; and perhaps Elizabeth Drury's future was another aspect of Baret's life that was negotiated externally to his will. Whether or not this is so it seems unlikely that Elizabeth would have been expected to depend on her family for her living after her husband's death, even if that family was amongst the richest in Bury St Edmunds.

Baret is more explicit in his will concerning the futures of other family members, and in

Press, 1963) pp.23, 112, 286, 355. The latter was given by Baret his "book called Disce Mori", probably the poem by Hoccleve; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.41.

¹⁴¹ Emden *A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge* pp.195, 286. Drury, of the family of Baret's in-laws, may have been born after Baret's death. Hardehed was involved in the administration of the goods of John Hawkeshed rector in 1444, along with John Baret II and John Croftys, who also appears in Baret's will; BSERO Hawlee f.6.

¹⁴² Tymms *Bury Wills* p.19.

¹⁴³ See for example BSERO Hawlee ff.118, 135. His own will is at Hawlee f. 170.

¹⁴⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.35.

particular two of his nieces, Janet Whitwell and Joan Cratfield. For both Baret apparently felt responsible, and indeed in Joan's case there was a legal and financial element to this responsibility in the form of an agreement made with her brother and another member of his family:

*Item I wil she have x marcs that I hadde of here brethren and certeyn obligacyons of othir x marcs that Jeffrey Baret and Robert Baret owyn to me for hire by a composicion and accord maad a twix hem and me for a yeerly pencyon of xx s wiche that the seid Jeffrey and Robert shulde a payed to the seid Jone her sustir terme of hire lyf accordyng to here fadrys wil to whom I was executour unto for wiche pencyon they agreyd to paye xx marcs...*¹⁴⁵

Janet Whitwell receives a number of chambers in a property Baret identifies as his new house as well as a great deal of personal and household goods. Joan Cratfield is given the choice between a set of rooms in a house in Punches Lane, or several chambers in Baret's chief place. She too receives a long list of household belongings taken from Baret's chief property, including:

*ij sponys of silvir, a long grene coors of silke harneysid with silvir, and my steynynd cloth with vij agys, and a competent bed with ij peyre shetys and stuffe longyng to a bed, such as my executours wil assigne and delyvuer accordyng to here degre, and othir stuff of housshold as they thinke necessarye for hire*¹⁴⁶

as well as goods taken from a coffer standing in his 'chamber at Elmswell', apparently in the house kept there by the abbot of St. Edmund's. Both nieces receive considerable space in Baret's will, and while a large number of Baret family members receive a mention, it is only these two that are given anything more specific than simple cash bequests or token gifts. William Baret receives a good deal of household goods as part of the patrimony, and which are to go to the heir of the patrimony whoever it is.¹⁴⁷ Thomas Drury, Baret's nephew, gets a silk purse which is to contain £20 when the cash can be raised, and Baret's best ring of gold after his signet

*therin is wretyn Grace me governe with lettris of J and B accordyng to my name innameid and a byl the beste he wil chese of ij that stonde in my parlour*¹⁴⁸

His wife Katherine receives a ring inscribed with a devotional exhortation,¹⁴⁹ John and Anne the children of Thomas Drury receive carefully described jewellery.

¹⁴⁵ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.32-3.

¹⁴⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.33.

¹⁴⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.25.

¹⁴⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.37.

¹⁴⁹ "In nomine Jhu signo me signo tab"; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.37.

It is noticeable that Baret considers it appropriate to number his servants among those whom it is important to remember in his will. His niece Jenete Whitwell, in return for a piece of meadow at Babwell, is to reward Baret's 'man and child' with clothes from his personal store, except for the three best gowns which are to go to the chief heir of the patrimony.¹⁵⁰

Furthermore, Baret gives to

John Aleyn my chyld my beste hors with sadil and brydil with alle the beste harneys for oon hors longyng thertoa peyre bootys and sporys a coverlyte and a peyre shetys with blankettes therto and vj s viij d *Item* if he wil be a preest or a prentys to a craft I wil my executours helpe hym therto with my goodes and there is a tester with ij costeres smale palyd of bukram blew and better blew with an ymage oof oure lady in gold papyr that I used to trusse with me I wil he have hem and the selour longyng therto *Item* I wil my executours rewarde hym and my man also with other stuff that longith to my body and my man a testir of reed and greene¹⁵¹

Baret's concern with the future of his servant John Aleyn's career is matched by his acknowledgement of individuals who had been in his service in the past.¹⁵²

John Baret II's connections were thus impressive; and it would seem that part of the impression of his will's great length and detail comes from the fact that he diligently remembers those he knew, particularly the important individuals. These people, like the members of the Drury family, his mercantile elite peers and the senior personnel of St. Edmund's, were remembered by Baret because they were the people he interacted with, perhaps not on a daily basis, but probably quite frequently in the pursuit of his public life. They were also essential to the construction of the identity that Baret's will was attempting. This can be seen in the way that the formal elite of the town were to take part in Baret's funeral and yearday ceremonies. On the day of his burial, Baret requests that:

the Alderman Burgeys gentilmen and gentilwommen have a dyner the same day that I am enterid with other folkes of wourshippe preests and good frendys and also my tenaunts to wiche I am moche be holde to do for hem alle for they have be to me ryght gentil and good at alle tymes and therefore I wyl eche of hem all have iiij d to drynkke whanne they pay her ferme *Item* suche personys as my executours wylle bydde to dyner be syde I fully commytte it unto there discrecion *Item* for asmoche as I levyd wele evyn I wyl they have i now and that they fayle noon ay my dirige ne at mete¹⁵³

At the yearday celebration of John Baret II's life, or public identity, the alderman and other officials of the Candlemas gild, along with the alderman of Bury and the heir to the chief

¹⁵⁰ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.34.

¹⁵¹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.34.

¹⁵² John Elys 'wrytyre', who had once been Baret's servant, is made responsible for a number of duties connected with Baret's chantry; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.19-20.

¹⁵³ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.18-9.

patrimony, are provided with for the offering of the service; and the alderman of the town is to have a gallon of wine "for a remembraunce to se my wil executyd".¹⁵⁴ A small feast is to be held at Baret's chief property in Churchgovel Street for the participants of the yearday observations. The sacrist, prior and abbot of St. Edmund's are to have cash or wine at their choice on the yearday; and the Candlemas gild brethren are to have wine or cash to their drinking on the occasion. In the same way the final devolvement of the Baret patrimony was to draw the secular elite of Bury into the perpetuation of the constructed identity of John Baret II. The chief heir was to involve the abbot and sacrist of St. Edmund's, the prior of the Dusse gild, the alderman and "sum thrifty man" of the parish of St. Mary's in any alienation of part of the patrimony. In the event of the patrimony passing out of Baret or Drury hands through lack of heirs, then the sacrist of St. Edmund's, the prior of the Dusse gild, the alderman and the parishioner of St. Mary's are to sell the patrimony swearing the purchaser to fulfill the obligations that were assigned to Baret's heir as part of the patrimony.¹⁵⁵ In other words the most prominent and influential members of the secular and religious communities of Bury St Edmunds are either to be directly involved in the celebration of Baret's yearday, or else are to receive a gift likely to call the benefactor to mind.

The design of how Baret wished to be remembered is, therefore, explicitly public and communal. The public commemoration of Baret, as with John Smyth, extends beyond his personal connections and the religious observances connected with his anniversary, however. He wished to associate the memory of his life with the fabric of the town, particularly with high profile communally used structures. The Risbygate, the western entrance to the town with direct access to and from Bury's famous Great Market, was one of the most prominent secular features in the town that Baret could have chosen. As it was the "moost roynows of the town", it offered him the opportunity to associate himself with the improvement of the town's image. In his will, Baret instructs that it

be amendid and maad of my coost with fre stoon and bryk archyd and enbatyled
substancyally to endure And a twyx the batilment and the arche in the myddys I wil
have an ymage of oure lady sitting or stondyng in an howsyng of free stoon and
remembraunce of me besyde

In much the same way that Baret 'attaches' himself to Bury's established elite society, he wishes his embellishment of the gate to be built onto the existing structure:

¹⁵⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.27, 30.

¹⁵⁵ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.25-6. The money raised from the sale of the patrimony was to be distributed between the reparation of the St. Mary altar and chimes/bells of St. Mary's, as well as the reparation of the property Baret gave for the lodging of the St. Mary priests. Money is also to be used to repair the Cross outside his house as well as the decorations made on the Risbygate.

And that the sydes of the old gate stonde stille for they be sufficient to stonde and bere such anewe werk oon lofte God forbode and they be steryd for summe myght fortune to make avers fundacion than that is And if my executours thynkke that brykke be not sufficient to endure lete it be maad with calyon and moorter but and the brykke be sewr and good it wills be more comounly welle wrought wiche I put in the discrecion of my executours and that they take avys of Symkyn Clerc mason of this¹⁵⁶

The involvement of Simon Clerk in the project to renovate the Risbygate indicates not only the level of expense Baret intended to meet with regard to the repairs and decoration, but also the level of social engagement he had attained at the end of his life. Clerk lived in Bury St Edmunds from 1445 until his death in 1489, and was the master mason of St. Edmund's. He was master mason at Eton College 1453-61; and between 1477-85 was master mason in charge of the works at King' College chapel.¹⁵⁷ Among other extraordinary social attainments Clerk was also a feoffee of John Smyth II,¹⁵⁸ was a member of the Candlemas gild and served as alderman of Bury.¹⁵⁹ Clerk was also the supervisor of Thomas Ide's will in 1479. Ide, also a craftsman of St. Edmund's, was responsible for the Cross that Baret wanted built outside his house. The employment of such prestigious local craftsmen as Simon Clerk, Thomas Ide, Henry Peyntour,¹⁶⁰ and Robert Pygot,¹⁶¹ served to give greater status to the various elements of Baret's construction. Firstly their involvement ensured the quality of the visible artifacts left to record Baret's identity; and secondly it cast him as a local patron, a role which was the province of the civic elite. Ultimately, Baret's civic bequests are essentially and characteristically expressions of his identity, and as such are consummate examples of display.

These civic projects, like many other areas of Baret's will, had public repercussions which would have necessitated prior official consultation and detailed planning, and formal approval. Such negotiation is in fact made explicit on occasion. For example, the complicated details concerning the inheritance of Baret's chief property had certainly been discussed before the will was made. He requires that

¹⁵⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.37-8.

¹⁵⁷ He held the manor of Hessett from the abbot and convent of St. Edmund's, and was paid a stipend of £10 annually, as well as receiving a livery from the sacrist. He was probably responsible for rebuilding the west tower of the abbey church after it collapsed in 1430/1, and bequests were still being left for the tower in 1460, shortly before the abbey church burnt down in the middle of the century. During the office of Thomas Derham sacrist (1441-9) Clerk acquired a house on the west side of the Horsemarket which he proceeded to enlarge in subsequent years by acquiring the two neighbouring properties *via* the will of Adam Prentys of Bury; BSERO Hawlee f.205. Harvey, J. *English Mediaeval Architects: a Biographical Dictionary down to 1550* (Gloucester, 1984 reprint) pp.55-60.

¹⁵⁸ As was his son Clement and another master mason of Bury, John Forster: see Appendix I.

¹⁵⁹ Harvey *English Mediaeval Architects* p.57. Unfortunately Clerk's will falls into the years of the missing probate register, 1482-91. His son Thomas in his will stated he was to be buried in the Jesus chapel of St. Mary's, probably in a tomb containing his father.

¹⁶⁰ Peyntour was to construct the ceiling above Baret's tomb; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.20.

¹⁶¹ Pygot had painted an image of the Virgin which Baret wanted near his tomb; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.19.

in alle maters rehersed before with other folwyng that myn executours comown with William Jeney if he vowchesauf *with* a vys of Heydon and to yonge Thomas Heigham to wich personys I have spoke to in the seid matere And if thei wil consente I wolde the londe howsyng and rente shudde reste in xij or xvj feffes handys that if my wil be nat deuly executydd in eche part they to have pouer to distreyne wherupon I wil my executours take here avys and be here counseyll and such other as they wil calle to hem to examyne alle the seid materis undirstonde and comowne alle the dowytyngs and pereilyngs therof and be there avysement and discrecion to fynde remedyes and weyes as by there wittes may be fownde moost sewr in the lawe perpetually to endure¹⁶²

Baret obviously trusted these men, stating as he does that they should be responsible for clearing up any misunderstandings or errors regarding his wishes. Pre-testamentary negotiation is also presumably an underlying factor in Baret's instructions for the changes to the building, decoration and personnel of St. Mary's. While such discussion, explication of ideas and desires was essential to Baret in terms of his will actually achieving what he wanted, it was also a further means of drawing the community into the process of the construction of his identity. This was done not only by Baret informing his advisors of his ideas, but indeed by allowing them to contribute their social or technical expertise to the construct, in effect allowing pre-conceived notions of local conventional attitudes to affect the design of the identity being displayed. In other words, Baret was either confident that these men were conversant with the letter and spirit of his wishes; or else was prepared to accept their handling of his identity due to their background in the appropriate status groups.

5.iv.f. Conclusion: John Baret II and the construction of identity.

Inevitably in using a will to discuss a testator's identity the detail in which bequests are recorded is a key factor in the extent of the analysis that can be undertaken. A glimpse of Baret's particularity has perhaps already been provided by some of his instructions concerning religious matters, and the list of potential heirs to his property.¹⁶³ The possessions bequeathed to his niece Jenete are worth quoting in full to demonstrate the extent of Baret's particularity:

And anoon aftir my interment I wille my executours delyvere hire certteyne stuffe of ostilment that I be qwethe hire That is to seye my grene hanggyd bedde steynyng with my armys ther in that hanggith in the chambyr ovir kechene with the curtynez the grene keveryng longgyng therto another coverlyte ij blanketts ij peyre of good shetes the trampsoun the costerys of þat chambyr and of þe drawgth chambyr next tho that be of þe same soort a greet pilue and a smal pilue the fethirbed is hire owne þat her maistresse gaf hire at London and a basyn and an euer of laten cownterfet therto and more stuff I have not occupyed of hers Item I wil she have a long nareuh table of Esterych burde *with* ij

¹⁶² Tymms *Bury Wills* p.27. As mentioned above these were very significant individuals to have as advisors.

¹⁶³ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.24-5.

trestlys j pleyn boordclooth j shorth washyng towayle vj napkyns Item my flat pece enchased to make with a saltsaler of sylver the grettere hol basyn of ij smale basynes ij lowe candylstikkez of a sorth and the rowndde table terme of hire liff and aftyr to remayne to the owenner of my place Item a chayer iij footyd stoolys iij of the cusshonys in the parlour and iij of the olde grene kusshownes that lyn in hire chambyr withe the costerys old grene wonostede withe the grene testir and grene keveryng therto wiche been hire ownne And I yeve here the selour and the steynynd clooth of the Coronacion of oure lady with the clothes of myn that longe to þe bedde that she hath loyen in and the beddyng in the draugh chambyr for hire servaunth to lyn in and a banker of grene and red lying in hire chambyr with the longe chayer and a stonyng coffre and a long coffre in the drawth chambyr And as for the prews coffre alwey I wille remayne to my hefd place and iij of þe fotynd stolys therto Item I wille that Jenette my nece have ij ale stonyng a greet erthin potte þat was my moderis vj trenchowrs a doseyn plateris viij dysshes and viij sawsers of old vessell and a chargeour of the myldel syse Item a potel pot and a quart pot of pewter ij smale spetez oon of hem for birdes a droppyng panne j bras pot a chetill a panne a litell chafour with a beyl and a lyd of laton a mortar a trowd a gredyle a peyre tongys and a peyre belwys a litil ladyll of laton the boord clothes to the rownd table ij stonyng cuppys of erthe the toon keverid a barell with wergoys and a botel for wyne¹⁶⁴

In most wills this would probably have been covered by a general phrase regarding household stuff: but Baret is almost obsessive in the intensity of the detail he sees as necessary. This may be a reflection of Baret's status as a prosperous merchant, as Gail Gibson suggests: she claims that as attention to detail was such a crucial part of business practice, it is not surprising that such experience becomes apparent in the will.¹⁶⁵ Indeed there are many instances of such inclinations. There are a number of instructions for Baret's executors to keep annual accounts of expenses incurred in the satisfaction of his will, particularly for his yearday and chantry celebrations.¹⁶⁶ Baret in fact helps his executors out with this by providing his chief heir with an estimate of how much he expects the annual expenses connected with his yearday celebrations and the St. Mary priest chantry to be and then giving him a parcel of land bequests to cover them:

... the hoole summe of alle these parcellys of chargys abowe wretyn comyth but to evene yearly xliij s iij d ... wiche summe the v^{xx} and xiiij acrys of lond an acre lete for xii d wil a quyte and bere out alle charges and lx s cleer yearly comyng to hym that shal have the lond for his labour¹⁶⁷

These all indicate the thought processes of a man who has spent his life engaged in commerce. What certainly does reflect a life spent in negotiating business transactions is the impression given by the will that Baret sees his bequests as buying something: in other words he expects to get something in return for his gifts. There are several examples of this,

¹⁶⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.22-3.

¹⁶⁵ Gibson *Theater of Devotion* pp.72-80.

¹⁶⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.31, 42-3.

¹⁶⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.31. The 113 acres of land refers to the holdings associated with the patrimony of Baret's chief property.

including when he stipulates that the rewards going to the priests attending his yearday services are “not to be delyverid to noon of hem tyl the messe of Requiem be endyd”,¹⁶⁸ presumably fearing that they might otherwise leave half way through the complicated collection of masses requested by Baret. There are also a number of occasions when Baret emphasises that the costs of his charitable and civic projects should be kept to a minimum.¹⁶⁹

While it is true and inevitable that elements from Baret’s professional life are reflected in his will, the detail cannot be solely explained away in this manner. I think that there are other reasons which are rather more connected to Baret’s cultural experience than his own personal habits. One such reason might be that he simply enjoyed recounting items and events in his life, and had a writer’s eye for detail: in many cases he could easily have summarised clauses but chose not to. The detail explicated in the will is not in any way systematically organised or ‘efficient’, and may not reflect the processes involved in mercantile practices. In addition the will is clearly testamentary in its discourse, and the extent to which this discourse echoes commercial practices might simply be a matter of degree when compared to other wills. The opportunity the detail affords for self-representation must also be considered. The results of the self-representation served by the detail will now be addressed.

Baret carefully chooses a series of texts and images, some of which already exist and some of which he has made, and then repositions everything to his own specifications. Baret must have spent a large amount of time in the Mary chapel before it became his chantry, and in the construction of this as elsewhere in his will, a certain amount of research is evident. We have seen that he was wont to sit by the pillar next to the image of Mary Magdalene; and he tells us in his will that his tomb has already been constructed (possibly in the workshops of Simon Clerk) at the time of writing, so that it could have served as an object of contemplation. This may have enabled him to visualise the changes he wished to make. It might be claimed that what Baret in effect achieves is the construction of something akin to a stage set, where the juxtaposition of text and image could be manipulated to create a desired effect. The links between religious observance and ‘drama’ in its broadest form, as indicated in the activities of Baret’s will, suggest that the forms and practices of religious observance and drama overlap so as to be inextricable.

But what is clear from Baret’s chantry is that one would be justified in asserting that he was acutely aware of his own identity, and that he was concerned with the representation of that

¹⁶⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.27.

¹⁶⁹ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.38, 40. The references to the spinning house attached to his chief property in Churchgovel Street may well also indicate his commercial activities.

image. Otherwise it would be difficult to explain both the extent of the provisions he made regarding the chantry, and the detail with which he relayed them in his will. One can approximately identify the kind of image that Baret's social imagination may have found desirable and probably flattering, although such an identification would have been more exact to his contemporaries who would have been more conversant with the ideas behind the texts and images he chose. The image of Baret created by his chantry is one of a man with a strong sense of marian devotion, a humble awareness of the sin and misery of the human condition, and a reasonably sound working knowledge of the more intricate aspects of Christian doctrine and practice. This last aspect is also seen in his provisions for particular masses, Psalms and rituals (down to the colour of vestments worn by specific clergy) specified in his instructions concerning his funeral arrangements. The self-representation also seems to indicate a man concerned with imparting his knowledge to others: hence the mortal warnings inscribed on his tomb.

Paradoxically, however, Baret's chantry also displays a much more worldly aspect of the man. The lavish nature of the decoration and the sheer expense involved in the construction speaks volumes to the onlooker about the status and taste of the patron, and this clearly belies some kind of social aspect to an attempt to represent a particular image of a public person. In other words the chantry serves to create a representation of Baret elaborating on (and perhaps embellishing) his religious and social contribution to the town. Whether or not the representation is precise in its terms or realistic in its intentions, it is significant that it is one that has been chosen and designed by Baret through the processes of social imagination.

This image is developed and rounded out by Baret's non-religious bequests. The determination to avoid the Baret patrimony leaving the family, the civically minded gifts to repair roads, and the provisions for the Risbygate all bear witness to concern with how the testator is remembered by the community he leaves behind. The Risbygate is particularly eloquent and concise in its presentation of a civically active and devotionally orientated individual: with its marian image and remembrance of Baret attached to what is for any town a ritually important physical and ideological boundary.

It is also apparent that everything about John Baret's will occurs in the realm of visual experience; that is, both his instructions and the way in which they are recorded are intended to bring about a response to some kind of visual effect. As suggested before, Baret's chantry would have stimulated a response resembling that elicited by a stage set, but many of his other instructions are similarly concerned with the construction of pictures, images or

montages: the statues on the Risbygate; lights and tapers in various places dedicated to various institutions at several times of the year; the numerous rings and beads with images and mottoes attached given to friends as mementoes.

That Baret had life-time interest in visual means of communication is clearly indicated by the multitude of images and stained cloths and so on that are counted among his possessions.¹⁷⁰ While the detail involved in describing them in the will would have aided the precise identification of various objects, it may also have enabled them in some way to attain greater significance, particularly to the testator. It may have been the case that the detail employed in the description of his personal possessions contributed to the construction of the identity of John Baret that begins to emerge from the other aspects of the will. It may have done this by emphasising the wealth and quality of possessions Baret had at his disposal. It would also have required a detailed knowledge of the possessions he actually owned, and one might infer that some time was spent by Baret examining his household goods and personal items just to see what he had. This was probably a reflexive process, perhaps a sentimental, meditative exploration of his past through his possessions and the people he associated with them.

The cultural context for this process may well have been informed by an element of visual symbolism. This latter may provide an explanation for the proliferation of the colour green in Baret's will beyond the fact that he just liked the colour; and symbolic features can certainly be seen in some of his funeral arrangements, such as the five men and five women dressed in black or white. In this instance, as Gail Gibson suggests, the human body becomes an aid to meditation on the Incarnation, but for my purposes it is enough that it is essentially a visual aid.¹⁷¹ It would seem that Baret relied heavily on image and visual stimuli for his world view, and that he was able to use his experience of these in the construction of his own designed image.

A way of drawing together some of the ideas of social imagination, the public reconstruction of image and the importance of visual communication in the perception of the world may be found through an examination of the attitude towards time found in Baret's will. He explicitly places himself in a temporal structure, reflecting upon his past and anticipating his

¹⁷⁰ There is Baret's tomb; a stained cloth with an image of the Coronation of the Virgin; a stained cloth with an image of the 'seven ages'; a blue tester with an image of the Virgin in gold paper; the enamelled brooches to be nailed onto the shrine of St. Edmund; tables of ivory with engraved images and images of gold; the statue of Our Lady on the Risbygate; as well as the numerous objects and jewels engraverd with text or scripture; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.23, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37.

¹⁷¹ Gibson *Theater of Devotion* p.79.

future. Indeed Baret's concept of the passage of time is a crucial factor in the structure of his will, and thus by extension, the construction of the identity he wishes to leave behind him. His attitude to his past seems essentially to be one of contentment and satisfaction at his considerable successes, both in his professional life and in his religious life. This is not only reflected in the wealth and possessions he displays, but also in the people he knows and chooses to remember. This success is largely what colours the self-representation that Baret plans on creating in his will; and it is perhaps understandable that an individual of his public social standing should wish to be remembered for his position as far as is possible by the community as a whole. But this more public aspect of Baret is complemented by references to incidents from his past that affected him at a purely personal level. This was obvious in his tenderness toward his elderly niece, and it also appears amidst his reflections on his mercantile life:

Item I wil that there be fownde with my good a preist a yeer to synge in seynt Marie chirche for the soulys whoos bodyes¹⁷² I have causyd to lese sylvir in ony wyse in my lyve at ony tyme and for alle the soulys of alle the personys man woman or chyld generally that ever I medlyd with or hadde of ony silvir or good litil or mekyl ... as wel hem that cam nought to my mynde as tho that have or shal come to myn mynde at ony tyme that God for his mercy they ner I bere nevir no pereel neythir for the geving ne for the reseyyvving for ony matyr that ever I hadde to do with fro the beyynnnyng of the wourld in to my deth preying Almyghty God that they have part of every good dede I have do ... or shall be do affir my dissees for me in messis syngyng almesse gevyng or ony good dede doyng that they have part therof as wil as my self in relevyng and comfort of here soulys and myn¹⁷³

This guilty prayer finds echoes in several places in the will, most noticeably when Baret instructs one of his Lancastrian livery collars to be sold to pay for the soul of one Edmund Tabour, in recompense of

broke silvir I had of his to oon of the colerys and othir things with othir stuff be syde wiche I took to myn owne use¹⁷⁴

While these sentiments are clearly engaged with conventional contrition about the morality of an acquisitive life, the particularity of Baret's construction suggests a more personal and

¹⁷² This is a very interesting phrase: perhaps has something to do with perception of death as some kind of 'liminal phase'; or as seeing the dead as an 'age-group' that has to be accommodated within society. R. Dinn *Death and Rebirth in Late Medieval Bury St Edm* in S. Bassett ed. *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead 100-1600* (Leicester University Press, 1992) pp.151-165.

¹⁷³ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.38.

¹⁷⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.41. Elsewhere, Baret stipulates that if any goods or money belonging to Edmund Tabour is found among his goods, then it is to be used to find a priest to sing at Redgrave for a year for the soul of Tabour, his wife and friends; p.38. Similarly Tabour's soul is to benefit from the *De Profundis* and *Requiem* said on the day of Baret's death, p.18. Similarly the son of Thomas Valeys dwelling with Thomas Cook in London is to receive 6s 8d "in recompence of a pece weyed more than my dewte cam to as Roger Cheney knowith"; p.41.

reflexive response to his past.

Baret has certainly designed his will with a view to creating an identity of himself for the sake of posterity, with one eye on the future; and the identity is to be a public one. The last folio of the will is taken up with a codicil which deals with some of Baret's extra requirements for the activities of his executors:

Item I wil that my executours ... shall make a clere declaracion and a trewe accountys yeerly whil they occupye of alle such goodes that they reseyyve of myn by vertu of this myn intestement ... And I wil and charge my seyde executours that noon of hem presume to do ony thyng alloone with ony of my seyde goodes withowte the avys of alle his felaas or at the leste of the most part ... *Item* I wil they do make a book of papyr to wryte in expensis what mony is reseyyvyd disposid and payid and that maister William Qweyth and John Coote jentilman wryte sumtyme one of hem and summe tyme todyr alle maner parcellys of resseyt and paymentes desiryng John Coote jentilman be þe avys and supportacion of þe surviour and my executours to be redy in rydyng goyng and laboryng to the performyng and executyng of my seyde testament and last wil in alle things perteynyng therto¹⁷⁵

A typical Baret trait manifests itself at the end of this codicil when he displays his anxiety about the future survival of this addition to his will:

Item for asmoche as this wrytyng is in a bille annexid to myn testement and last wil therefore I wil it be wretyn woord for woord in the rolle that my testement and last wil is in aftir the probat be maad wiche probat I wil have sewirly set to the one part and gynnyng of myn testement and last wil and he that registerith it to have a competent reward for his labour and that this forseyd wrytyng be registerid also¹⁷⁶

It appears that the endurance of this image is uppermost in his mind, and he constantly includes clauses in his will that are intended to secure the perpetuation of his instructions. At the most basic level, this includes the simple act of writing his instructions down: there are repeated references made to copies of instructions being deposited in appropriate places, and to lists of duties being recorded separately, for instance. Wherever possible Baret provided for the continuance of his various bequests, an example of which can be seen in the almost touching insistence that the chimes of the Mary altar in St. Mary's should always be maintained:

for my wil is that the chymes shal never fayle for defawte of helpe¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.42-3.

¹⁷⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.43.

¹⁷⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.29. Baret clearly had particular interest in the chimes, or bells, of St. Mary's. Baret wants chimes to be set up around the St. Mary altar in the Lady chapel which are to be supervised along with the chimes in the steeple by John Elys scrivener and formally Baret's servant. Elys is also to "make a newe barell wiche is redy and to make plumbys of leed and newe lynes and ropys and alle

even if they require land to be set aside for their maintenance. The concern over the endurance of bequests made by Baret, particularly those connected with his property, his tomb, his chantry and the offices of the St. Mary priest of St. Mary's church, all indicate an anxiety that the future might eventually forget him. This anxiety seems acute, and it is possible that Baret had some experience of major changes going on around him at the time of writing his will. For instance the abbey church was completely gutted by fire late in 1463/4 (the year the will was written), resulting in a number of changes both institutional and religious in nature.¹⁷⁸ Similarly in 1463 a change occurred which may have had a more immediate impact upon Baret in particular, given his attachment to St. Mary's church. John Smyth, civic patron and alderman, had the construction of his north aisle completed; and it is conceivable that Baret may have conferred with Smyth about his plans for the church, because ten years later Smyth constructed a south aisle and a new Lady chapel which abutted on the east end of Baret's chantry chapel, requiring the removal of a wall and several windows.¹⁷⁹ Baret almost certainly knew that this was going to happen, as at the end of his will he specifies what he wanted to happen in the event of such changes being made:

Item I wil if ther be maad an ele ther the vestry is on the south syde of the chaunsell as is on the tothir syde that thanne my executours to do remeve seynt Marie awter just to the wal on the south syde where as Marie Mawdelyn stonidith and that ymage to be set just ageyn the peeler there I was wont to sitte his visage toward the Savyour And if that place be not mete to sette here ageyn the bowtell there hire light stant and to have the seid light abowte hire And if the seid ele be made and performyd I wil that in no wyse my kynrede ne my executours suffir neyther awtir reddos ne arche of the wyndowe to be steryd but the glas and the foorme of stoon that longith unto the same wyndowe be vyse of good masonys clene to be savyd and take outh and the arche to stonde stille with alle the werk of the aungellys on lofte wiche I have do maad for a remembraunce of me and my frendys and nevir to put the paryssh to no cost And wher as the glas stonidith

thing sewr that longith therto and substancyaly to endure". If Baret's chief property has to be sold through default of heirs, then some of the money raised is to be put to the use of maintaining the chimes at the St. Mary altar and in the steeple of St. Mary's. From noon on Baret's yearday, the sexten of St. Mary's is to ring *Requiem eternam* for Baret's soul for thirty days; he is also to receive 8s a year to "kepe the clokke take hede to the chymes wynde up the peys and the plummys as ofte as nede is". If the sexten refuses to take this responsibility then the principle heir of the Baret patrimony, and the parish and St. Mary priests of St. Mary's are to nominate one of the parish to do so, but Baret would rather the sexten does it because "his wagys be but smale". The St. Mary priest is to receive annually from the chief heir 3s 4d to maintain the chimes, and he is to keep whatever is not spent on repairs, but is to contribute if the cost comes to more. He is also to have a special key made so that access can be got to the 'candilbeem' so that these repairs can be effected. Finally, the bearer of the 'paxbrede' is to have annually 8d to keep Baret's tomb clean, as well as "the chymes and Seynt Marie awter to wynde up the plumme of led as ofte as nedith and to do the chymes goo at þe sacry of the messe of Jhu at the sacry of oure ladyes messe on the Subday and in lik wyse at the sacry of Seynt Marie messe þat Seynt Marie preest seye or do seye for me and for my fadir and modir o day in the wyke ... and the seid chymes to goo also at the avees at the complyn eche Saturday Sunday and hooly day thourgh out the yeer"; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.19, 26, 28-9.

¹⁷⁸ *Memorials* vol.3 pp.xxix-xxxiv. Arnold reproduces an account of the fire (*Incendium Ecclesiae*) from BL. Cotton Claudius A.XII, *Memorials* vol.3 pp.283-7. Contemporaries blamed careless plumbers who were engaged in repairing the church roof. The account attests to the miraculous survival of the shrine of St. Edmund's despite the utter devastation of most of the church.

¹⁷⁹ See above Figure 5.2; and Paine *St. Mary's*.

now that place to be opyn and stonde voyde that men may se throught out the chirche into the neue ele and my stool at the graves ende with the deske and percloos by to be avoydid and the ground maad as lowe as the chirche floor streyght by the grave to the awter wher I wil my executoures do make a substanciall and a squar dore of free stoon and if nede be to reyse up the rerdoos a foote or ij heygher and to sette the ymage of oure lady in the myddes of the awter alofte and an aungell on eche syde and Martyn and Vincent be syde and that the dore may bere the bem there the iij kynges be and the Jesse set undir our lady with the virgenys afore hire And the seid dore to be maad as large of wydnesse as may be fro the ende of the awter whan it is remevyd as wil streche to the syde of the savyour And if the parysh lyke to go processyon thourgh the north ele and so forth before the hih awter that thanne they may kepe here coors thourgh the same dore in to the chirche ageyn and to lowe þe grownd that the dore may be of a resonnable heyghte that they may passe with the cros in goodly wyse¹⁸⁰

Baret clearly understood the layout of the church, and that he expected dramatic changes to be made in its structure is evident too. By turning the window at the east end of his chapel into a doorway into John Smyth II's addition to the church, and then having the door and the floor adjusted so that the parish could process through it, Baret was effectively acknowledging his inability to prevent Smyth from disturbing his construction, and at the same time associating himself with the legacy of Bury's greatest civic hero. Baret also requires that his executors (and their executors after them) as well as the heir to the chief patrimony are to prevent the

seynt Marie awter tabyll rerdos ne retourne of the candilbeem grave ymage aungelys chymes ne selour to be remevyd fro the place they stonde on contrarye ageyn my wil reheryd before but that our Lord and our Lady and Seynt Martyn and Seynt Vyncent and Marie Mawdelyn may be wourshepid there as of longe contynuaunce out of tyme of mynde hath be usyd And if ony wil laboure the contrarye, to calle comfort and helpe of the lordshippe the aldirman with othir of the most notable and wourshipful men of seynt Marie paryssh, with weel avysid men callyd to of the town¹⁸¹

However it is ironic that the man who chose to build next to Baret's chantry in 1473 *was* the alderman, and so much of Baret's chantry chapel was moved around and even removed from the chapel and appropriated for the new Lady chapel. Baret's tomb was moved to the south side of the chantry, where it now stands; and the colourful brochure that can be picked up in St. Mary's church now records rather laconically that "It was turned round in 1844 in order that the inscriptions could be read".¹⁸²

Thus it is possible to suggest that a public figure in 15th century Bury St Edmunds took active measures to determine the memory of himself that was to remain with his community. The

¹⁸⁰ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.39. The existence of Baret's tomb at the time of the will being drawn up is suggested by this passage. The prospect of a stool and desk being assigned to the tomb is fascinating; perhaps it was intended for use by consumers of the texts and images that Baret set up?

¹⁸¹ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.39-40.

main difficulty of discussing such an idea lies in the attempt to decide how far a person is able to scrutinise 'self' to arrive at the image of themselves as perceived by their community; and beyond this, how far individuals are able to adapt this image and impose their design for the sake of posterity. 'Image' misrepresents what Baret was trying to achieve because it implies the attempt to construct something that was, like a picture, a one-off, designed representation. In effect if Baret had been trying to create an image of himself for the townsmen of Bury to remember him by, he would have been trying to represent himself in a form that was static. This does not sit easily with Baret's intentions as suggested in his will, if only because it requires that he was able to come to a final reckoning of what this static image of himself as a public or private figure should be, a feat of considerable reflexive analysis.

Perhaps a more useful term to employ would be sign or symbol, viewing Baret's instructions as an attempt to lead the community (as an audience) to remember him in certain ways. These signs are to act as triggers to stimulate responses, and while they are carefully designed and enacted, they are more dynamic than a simple 'image' would have been. They are also more flexible, as over time the responses stimulated by the provisions of Baret's will would change according to the context in which they were experienced. This flexibility would also have had to accommodate different kinds of audience, encapsulating the public and private aspects of Baret's memory, so that burgesses might respond to his enacted will in a different way from a close member of his family.

To some extent this flexibility was in itself a response on the part of Baret to the changes that were likely to occur, at least to the physical composition of his tomb and chantry chapel. The clauses in his will that are designed to perpetuate his instructions might therefore be seen in terms of maintaining the flexibility of his identity, so that although changes could be assimilated, the memory of him would endure. This stability may also have come from the provisions of non-visual means of representation, despite Baret's attitude to the perception of visual detail. Whereas the visual aspects of his representation, as images, are the most static aspects, the commensality, the ritual use of chimes and the provision of property for public servants are much more likely to retain their significance over the passage of time. While Baret may have been remembered in a different way at each feast every year, it is much more likely that his memory will have been invoked at all by these than by the images in his chantry that would have become familiar after a short time.

Thus it is perhaps more helpful to dispense with the idea of Baret using his will to try to

¹⁸² Paine *St. Mary's*.

construct an identity for himself, and instead regard the will as providing a series of stimuli for the purpose of evoking different types of memory of the man. The responses would have changed over time given different situations, and the triggers themselves would have been presented in a complex series of displays, starting with the reading aloud of the will after Baret's death, to the public execution of the will's instructions in the months and possibly years afterwards. I think one must also be aware that to talk of a person's singular 'identity' is inappropriate because in Baret's case the term does not allow for the apparent inconsistencies of character that are suggested. There is a tension, for instance, between the worldliness he displays and the profound devotion he felt. This is neatly depicted by his tomb, with its humble sentiments of worthlessness and pleading for forgiveness expressed in the text around the sculpted corpse, beneath which stands the carved figure of Baret in all his mercantile glory. Just as we recognise the inconsistency of this, so would Baret's original audience have had to come to terms with it, and it is here that the flexibility of a dynamic series of signs as opposed to a static construction of a single image may prove more appropriate.

In order to attempt to reconstruct the *mentalité* of an individual from the past, one has to accept the impediments presented by the interpretative problems raised by the nature of the evidence. In the case of John Baret II, the detailed will and testament that he produced is an unmistakable effort of reflexivity and self-appraisal, and as such it can be seen to function at a number of levels, such as a record of a public career; a statement of principles and interests; and a testimony to the accoutrements of an active social life that a successful individual understood to be important to him. Underlying this are the questions of consciousness, agency and motivation. With Baret it is fair to say that the quality of (often technical) detail and description he uses to construct his will, as well as the palpable enjoyment of text, indicate a high degree of self-consciousness; so that the presentation of his personality and beliefs is a deliberate attempt to construct an identity that is both public and private, according to a carefully conceived plan pieced together over a long period.

It is clear from the will that Baret spent time considering what should be represented in his will. He was in his late sixties when the document was drawn up,¹⁸³ and as he did not die until early 1467, he was not facing imminent death when he wrote it. It is possible that the will was occasioned by an illness, or simply by awareness of old age, in which case the leisure and opportunity for reflection for a man of Baret's wealth and introspective nature would have been considerable. We know that his tomb had been designed and built prior to

¹⁸³ John Baret II was born between 1393 and 1400.

September 1463, and we also know that he was 'wont to sitte' in the Lady chapel presumably within sight of his grave. Baret clearly had a heightened awareness of his own mortality, even by the standards of his culture that was accommodating high mortality rates into its social mechanisms. We can see this from the visual appearance of his tomb, from the verses and other texts deployed around the Lady chapel, from the carefully emblematic symbolism of his funeral, and even from his personal reading material. He possessed a copy of Hoccleve's *Disce Mori*, a text concerned with preparing for death, for example.¹⁸⁴ This awareness, natural perhaps for one of advanced years, was compounded by the past that was his career and the future that was his family's success in establishing itself once and for all within the elite not only of Bury, but also of West Suffolk gentry society. Two factors may have been important in his contemplations, perhaps sitting in his Lady chapel surrounded by the images and scripture he refers to in his will. Firstly, the fact that he has no children of his own must have been central to the design of the identity he wished to have remembered by the community he spent his life among: the testamentary 'policy' of John Baret II's parents to establish the family in Bury required him to establish a solid family presence in the town, which meant that he was forced to draw in heirs from the branch of the family that had remained in Cratfield at the end of the 14th century.¹⁸⁵ Secondly, Baret may have had to reflect upon the mechanics of social and political status and his position within the structures in Bury, as despite all his successes in integrating himself into the commercial, religious and social communities of the town, he never held the office of alderman. Perhaps as the son of immigrants to a town with no formal constitution regarding freedom or 'native' status, Baret was destined to be restricted to the fringes of the elite and prevented from being involved in civic activities.¹⁸⁶

This is not to say that Baret considered himself to have failed in any way. Indeed it is easy to detect in the will an acknowledgement of his successful career, as well as satisfaction at the life he has led:

*Item for asmoche as I levyd wele evyn I wyl they have i now*¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Similarly, Baret's connections with Lydgate may have not only exposed him to contemplative experience of issues of mortality through the poet's interest in the *Danse Macabre* tradition; but also may have brought Baret an awareness of autobiographical writing. Many consider Lydgate's *Testament* to be an exercise in didactic but also poignantly personal autobiography; Pearsall *John Lydgate* pp.5, 17, 34, 45-7, 148-9, 183, 191, 255, 288, 294-5.

¹⁸⁵ John Baret II's wife, Elizabeth Drury, possibly *had* had children by a previous marriage.

¹⁸⁶ Baret died three years before the earliest enfeoffment made to the town by John Smyth II and all those that subsequently followed, so one is left to speculate about what his possible involvement may have been in the public activities of the townsmen that took place as part of the late 15th century drive for civic independence.

¹⁸⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.19.

Baret here is referring to the feast that his neighbours, family and friends are to receive after his funeral, but the phrase might suit just as well for a summary of his attitude throughout the will. The role of memory was crucial in Baret's conception of himself; indeed this was an inevitable aspect of looking back over a career. The results of 'memory' are evident in the will in the people and physical objects that have special significance for Baret, like the image of our lady in gold paper that Baret used to 'trusse' with him that he leaves to his young servant,¹⁸⁸ or the "greet erthin potte" that was his mother's that he leaves to Jenete Whitwell.¹⁸⁹ It might also explain the detail apparent in the will, as if by describing people, objects, properties and rituals in careful detail, Baret is fixing the pieces of his identity in his own mind, and also in the memory of the future generations of the elite of Bury St Edmunds.

As with John Smyth II, Baret's act of self-representation influenced later testators from Bury. John Coote gentleman, who made his will in 1502,¹⁹⁰ was one of Baret's executors. He leaves cash to the altar of St. Mary's and to the Dusse guild, as John Baret II did. Like Baret, he leaves explicit instructions for his grave:

I wole after my decesse to have ij crossys goodly of tymbyr one at my hede the tother at my feete wyth my armys *pere* upon and also a wrytyng to pray the peopyll of ther charite to pray for my souyle¹⁹¹

This is very reminiscent of John Baret II's use of text and icons and his arms around his tomb. At his month's mind Coote wills that the priests in the college, with which his family have a connection, have a dinner, as well as all his friends and neighbours: there is also to be 40s worth of bread doled out to bedridden men and women on the day of his burial. Both the feast and the dole appear in the will of Baret, and at the same points in the extended funeral proceedings. There are to be other doles to the poor around the month's mind, and the prisoners in Bury gaol are to receive cash as they did in Baret's will. To me this suggests that at least one member of the Bury elite was a consumer of Baret's identity as constructed in his will, and that the impression that identity made was sufficient to bring Baret to his mind at the end of his own life.

Like Smyth, the will of John Baret II closely resembles those of the townsmen he lived with. In terms of the 'model' developed in chapter 4, they both dispense their wealth among the same recipients as the 'average' Bury testator: the same local charitable causes; the same civic projects; the same local ecclesiastical offices and institutions; the same regional religious

¹⁸⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.34.

¹⁸⁹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.23.

¹⁹⁰ BSERO Pye f.123; also reproduced in Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.91-3.

houses and so on. Unlike Smyth, Baret does not try to adapt the model to fulfill his own ambitions for himself and his community; but rather he attempts to align himself with the model for the purposes of fitting in. Both he and Smyth adhere to the model (except perhaps as a matter of scale in terms of the value of bequests), but for different reasons. For this reason one might say that they are typical of 15th century Bury townsmen to a certain extent, but were perhaps more conscious of what this meant than many of their peers.

¹⁹¹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.92.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.i. Conclusions.

6.i.a. Method.

This study has been primarily concerned with methods of interpretation and reconstruction, particularly in terms of addressing traditional historical concerns from a fresh perspective, with a view to trying to elicit a means of better understanding the processes involved in the representation of communities and individuals. It has also been concerned with examining the means by which the notion of change within late medieval urban communities can be discussed by historians, and was assimilated into the public and private lives of contemporaries. These issues have been approached through an examination of the processes involved in the construction and dissemination of identity in the context of Bury St Edmunds in the 14th and 15th centuries; and this in turn has been attempted through an examination of specific cases of the definition and representation of identity and a discussion of how these might be interpreted. This study's investigation of the processes involved in 'identity' has required the collection of a widespread and diverse number of elements all encompassed within the term: indeed this comprises a feature of the study that could well be developed in future work.¹ Such diversity is especially sensitive to the nature of the material, which can play a substantial role in how one designs the reconstruction of identity in a particular community.

In order to begin the investigation into identity, models of identity have been constructed for the townsmen of Bury St Edmunds which could then be employed to act as foundations for the discussion: that is to say the models were intended to display the discourses of identity active in Bury in the period.² The models provided the context both for the means available to the Bury townsmen for the construction and reproduction of identity, and also for the *types* of identity so formed. This was the principle virtue of employing quantitative techniques to series of data to arrive at putative 'norms' or amalgams of various aspects of identity: it provided the general context, a tangible portrayal of what was achievable within the community in terms of the modes of self representation, against which the qualitative

¹ By discussing identity in terms of a greater number of 'components' than has been possible here: see above section 4.i.b.

² See above section 4.i.

material and distinct cases could be aligned. This allowed the examination of individuals (like John Smyth and John Baret) to be framed within the terms and values of their communities, and at the same time diminished the overt imposition of anachronistic moral and social values. The general and the particular could be examined with reference to each other: it was possible, through the employment of the model, that examinations of community could be informed by an awareness of the specifics of the particular individual's life history and constructed identity; and that the case studies of individuals in Bury could be undertaken with conscious reference to the model's description of the standards of representation within the community at large. Inevitably the case studies involved individuals who were unusual or significant in some way, but the implicit comparison supplied by the construction of the models helped to define the *extent* to which these individuals were distinguished within their community. For example, the extent to which Smyth's wealth or Baret's affinity with text and images were extraordinary in the context of Bury has been brought out by the construction of the models.³ This in turn has provided a means of approaching questions of how individuals like Smyth and Baret were perceived by those around them, which has been necessary for the suggestions made regarding the processes they were immersed in as they disseminated their identity.

However, the construction of models of townsmen to act as a framework for the investigation into identity in Bury has resulted in what might be seen as the relative neglect of the significance of the town's institutions in the processes. This is partly due to the fact that the secular community of Bury had almost nothing in the way of official institutions, except perhaps the almost symbolic office of alderman, which could bring into effect any activation of identity in the town. While it is true that the Candlemas gild had come by the end of the 15th century to exist almost entirely as a vehicle of the expression of civic and communal identity, its function was effectively managed through the actions and interactions of a small group of individuals. Indeed, at the beginning of its function in the representation of Bury's inhabitants, the role was performed and informed by a single individual.⁴ The Candlemas gild and the other institutions under various levels of the secular community's control certainly did have a role to play in the ways in which identity operated and could be articulated and manipulated by individuals and groups in Bury, and perhaps the most concrete example of this might be seen in the opportunity provided by the town's resentment of its ecclesiastical lord. In the case of Bury the institutional structures, ambitions and organs of the monastery and its officers served as a platform upon which the townsmen could both

³ Similarly the extensive and socially impressive range of contacts enjoyed by both men have been suggestively explicated by comparison with the models generated from the whole population: see above sections 5.iii-iv.

⁴ That is, John Smyth; see above section 5.iii.

unconsciously and at times of particular social and political crisis consciously construct identity. This identity was probably both individual and communal, with the former being located within the latter.

This study has focussed upon the townsmen as individuals and as models in order to compensate for the over-reliance upon institutional aspects of social organisation evident in past studies of communities. The traditional methods of approaching social developments within communities, and particularly issues of social change in towns, have involved examining events as the corollaries of demographic or economic patterns in the society, with the almost inevitable consequence that people are understood in the light of their communities. That is to say that social history has often avoided the complex methodological issues surrounding the suspension of the individual within his social, cultural and political contexts by refusing to see communities in any form other than as homogenised groups with single-dimension identities and simple motivating interests. This study has tried to reactivate critical interest in the individual, both in terms of his interpersonal relationships, and the processes involved in the representation of person and self through the mechanics of identity. The reasons for doing so are bound up with the need to reach an understanding of the mechanisms involved in the construction of identity by individuals and how this exerts an influence upon the ways in which communities transmit information, knowledge and the communal consciousness of change.⁵

6.i.b. Identity in Bury St Edmunds in the later middle ages.

Previous works on Bury St Edmunds have tended to focus upon particular aspects of the town's development: Lobel was concerned with the town's political and constitutional progress through the period;⁶ Dinn's investigation was centred upon the religious and devotional morphology of the town;⁷ while Gottfried wanted to trace the social, economic and demographic developments.⁸ This study has examined how the townsmen of Bury related themselves and others to the social organisation of the community, and how this was reflected in and directed by the local practices involved in the construction and presentation of identity. These accounts have in a number of ways contributed to my understanding of

⁵ See below section 6.i.c.

⁶ See for example, Lobel *The Borough*, Lobel 1327 and Lobel 1381.

⁷ Dinn *Popular Religion*.

⁸ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds*. Thomson worked upon the archival reformations brought about by the authorities of St. Edmund's, Thomson *Archives*; while Arnold was concerned to provide an account of political relations between town and abbey until the Dissolution, *Memorials*.

events, trends and structures in Bury;⁹ and to some extent the investigation presented in this study has only been possible because these other studies have been made. The traditional, institutional approach of Lobel and the socio-economic perspective of Gottfried in particular have provided a framework for explicating the specific cases and more general processes of identity in the town, perhaps with a greater degree of sophistication than if such a narrative framework had not existed.

But this thesis has taken a different perspective from these existing studies.

Historiographically this thesis has attempted to redress the imbalance between the role of the institution and the role of the individual in Bury in the 14th and 15th centuries, an imbalance which has seen the latter neglected almost entirely:¹⁰ it has depicted the individual as the central feature of social processes and communal interactions; and this is perhaps especially the case in Bury where its peculiar constitutional organisation effectively debars the exclusive use of the town's institutions as sources of communal self representation.

The history of Bury St Edmunds in the 14th and 15th centuries has been seen in this thesis essentially in terms of a continuous process of political and civic self embellishment, ultimately aimed at autonomy and self determination, and employing a number of strategies in the pursuit of that goal.¹¹ Political relations between the town and abbey moved from the violence of the 14th century to the peaceful expressions of civic identity and *de facto* civic independence of the late 15th century. This has constituted an impressionistic context for the discussion of identity in Bury, partly because it is so evident in the surviving archive, and partly because it must have constituted a fundamental concern for the majority of Bury townsmen throughout the period. Virtually all the non-account material produced by either the monastic or secular communities of Bury is laden with explicit reference to the processes of representation and employment of authority engendered by the political dispute; and to some extent the dates of the material produced are irrelevant: the antagonistic tone and vocabulary of resistance is present throughout. This must have informed the constructions of identity taking place in Bury, as both individual and community strove to assimilate the politicking and assign their own meanings to the culturally embedded symbolic language and modes of representation used by both sides in the dispute. The explication of identity itself became a tool in the strategies of political struggle, as can be seen both in the

⁹ Even when my interpretation of details and developments differs somewhat.

¹⁰ This is a feature of most studies of urban communities, even those like Phythian-Adam's work on Coventry which are concerned with social structures and processes.

¹¹ See above section 3.ii.c for a chronological account of the political relations between the town and St. Edmund's in the late middle ages; and section 3.iii for a discussion of the forms that these strategies took.

organisation of the effectively unrepresented townsmen into bodies such as the Gild Merchant at first, and the Candlemas gild later; and the abbey's tactic of resisting opposition by emphasising not only its recognisable official and traditional identity as depicted in its collection of charters (a constant source of animosity with the townsmen in the 14th century), but also its privileged royal associations. This was a crucial factor in the public identity of John Smyth that was begun by the individual himself and then was perpetuated by the town's elite for generations afterwards.¹² This identity, and its structural and mechanical aspects, concentrated upon the enfeoffments made to the town and administrated by the Candlemas gild, became by the late 15th century not only a means by which a further measure of civic independence could be attained by Bury's elite, but also a central emblem of the discourse. This might be attested to in the way in which the original enfeoffments of Smyth were added to and enlarged by his successors, and in the way many others adopted the regulations he left for the maintenance of the income generated by the grants to their own small-scale civic beneficence.

This thesis has therefore presented a discussion of the environment in which the elite of Bury and individuals comprising the case studies found themselves. The environment, as the store of culture and ideology, necessarily affects the way in which social interaction is conducted. It provides behavioural modes for individuals to engage in interaction, and these modes necessarily change depending upon the relative status of those involved in the interaction. The case studies in Chapter 5 should thus be seen as relative to and informed by the model of the Bury elite suggested in Chapter 4.

The process of surrogate constitutionalism pursued by the secular community of Bury in effect facilitated the development of a communal identity almost accidentally, as if the adoption of such an identification of political polarity comprised an incidental by-product of life in a thriving urban community limited in its ambitions by a conservative ecclesiastical authority. A long running resentment of the abbey's policy regarding the administration of the town provided the context for unconscious accretion of an identity defined almost entirely in contraposition to that disseminated by St. Edmund's; and the outbreaks of violence directed against the abbey at the height of the disputes would have served to concretise the identity.¹³ Indeed these latter points of crisis would have developed the unconsciously (or

¹² See pp.209-30.

¹³ Murder, death, vandalism, theft, and arson within the context of a small close knit community, even if effected by strangers, must have had profound ramifications for the perceptions of the sources of animosity within the town. This must have been especially the case in the ritualistic mock-trials and murders of monastic officers and royal justices in 1381; and the publicly arranged displays of the dead townsmen on the arrival of the national authorities.

perhaps subconsciously) accrued identity, brought it to the conscious awareness of the townsmen, and planted it in a reinvented tradition of relations within the community. In other words the crises of 1327 and 1381 would have galvanised the otherwise implicit identity shared by, and perhaps even defining, the secular community of Bury to the extent that it became both conscious and mythologised. A further aspect of this identity, and one which was perhaps indicative of the heightened awareness of the processes of the identity enjoyed by the elite of the community, was that it could be invoked by the town's leaders almost at will. To some extent the application of this identity by the leaders of Bury and the consequences that the identity must have had for the invention of traditions regarding the disputes between town and abbey was reciprocal, as the invocation of the unconscious communal identity often led to the events which became focal points of the mythologised legacy that constantly informed public activities in the town.¹⁴ This thesis has suggested that an understanding of the conflict between St. Edmund's and the secular community is essential to any methodology of examining social process and the construction of identity in Bury. This should remind us that the individuals comprising the consumers of this identity, in effect the whole secular population of the town,¹⁵ would have had to conduct their private and public lives within the environment that this created.

The reinvention and redefinition of tradition, most probably an ongoing and totally dynamic process which is sensitive and responsive to changing conditions, as well as the mythologising of the events of the past and the employment of symbolic markers in the public life of the community,¹⁶ required in Bury as elsewhere the production of a type of communal memory. This may have been akin to a kind of *local* store of 'symbolic vocabulary':¹⁷ a body of knowledge, propaganda, directed interest and manufactured identities appropriate to Bury and constructed within the community, so that the facets of public life that made up the social experience of the town's inhabitants could be assimilated symbolically by every individual within the framework of communal civic identity but regardless of personal identity or *mentalité*. In other words relations within the town may have been directed by social mechanisms that were infused with general meanings gleaned from symbols and invented traditions comprising intrinsic elements of the civic community's

¹⁴ Such as the repeated and orchestrated attacks made on abbey property during 1381, for which the townsmen's fervour was obtained by the rebel leaders and a number of townsmen themselves.

¹⁵ Although even in the most dramatic and fervent days of crisis in Bury there were always those individuals that resisted the identity that the townsmen were supposed to share: this is why, for example, the rebels of 1381 saw the need to set up an axe and block and use threats of violence to obtain the support of some groups within the town.

¹⁶ In Bury the symbolic markers used by the townsmen to delineate their identity, especially in relation to St. Edmund's, included the office of alderman, the Smyth enfeoffment, and the resented 'Abbot's Cope' payment.

¹⁷ Cohen, A.P. *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London, 1985) pp.11-21, 50-96.

identity, so that the individual social actors engaging in these relationships would have understood the local concerns and discourses operating upon the specifics of their current activities.¹⁸ While this communal memory may not have always influenced the behaviour of individuals within social relationships, it would have added a level of meaning to their perception of public life in the town.

This thesis indicates the potential that was available in late medieval urban communities for the appropriation of the past and the construction of tradition around it. In Bury St Edmunds, we have seen the self-conscious adaptation of communal identity, as defined (and refined) by decades of opposition to St. Edmund's and attempting to attain civic independence. The actual enactment of the adaptation of the underlying identity probably happened not unconsciously over long periods, as with the development of the base or 'root' identity itself, but on specific occasions where the identity was remodelled and put on display as if by the design and with the consent of the whole community. These occasions may well have included the periods of the greatest political upheaval locally in the 14th century,¹⁹ when specific events, even those taking place in an instant (such as the beheading of the prior John de Cambridge in 1381), may have acted as a catalyst for the transformation or development of the civic identity of Bury. Other events may have been less dramatic and instant, such as the extended visit of Henry VI and the parliament held in the town in the mid 15th century. These events became part of the mythologised past, the identifiable tradition, of the town, and as such became a valuable contribution to the community's identity. The identity itself was malleable and could be manipulated to stimulate social change (such as revolt) but was ever present, even if in an unconscious and pervasive form. The unusual constitutional organisation of Bury, and the lack of the restrictive or directorial social and institutional structures placed the secular community of Bury in something of a distinctive position: while it effectively meant that the flagrant expression of individual identity was easier to achieve if so desired, the official means by which communal identity could be displayed (and thus perceived by its participants) were absent. For this reason Bury St Edmunds, with its alternative and unofficial structures of authority and its extraordinary individuals, provides an excellent opportunity for an examination of the processes involved in the construction of identity, particularly at the level of the community.

Within the framework provided by the 'root' civic identity of the community of Bury there

¹⁸ For example, property transactions between townsmen, or indeed any kind of commercial activity, may well have been undertaken in the awareness that at some stage in the proceedings the official (and probably expensive) interference of one or other of the abbey's obedientiaries, as the individual holders of all the property in Bury, would be a necessary event.

¹⁹ And perhaps nationally during the mid- and late 15th century.

existed a number of significant articulators of identity and manipulators of the processes involved.²⁰ This included not only individuals, but also groups with significant and binding shared interests, such as the Candlemas gild and by extension the feoffees of John Smyth's grants to the town.²¹ John Smyth and John Baret should clearly be included in these categories, as their public and private activities manifestly demonstrate the articulation of prevalent communal identity and local civic ideology, as well as the manipulation of the modes of these processes. In the case of Baret and Smyth the expression of identity was both conscious and extraordinary in terms of scale, ambition and construction. Indeed, even within the context of Bury St Edmunds with its fluid and ill-defined social structures and sensitivity to civic identity, it is likely that the self representations produced by Baret and Smyth were highly unusual and impressive. However we can only really say that these individuals were unusual because they can be shown to be so when compared with the model of their peers as a whole. In other words, the model of Bury's elite in Chapter 4 has served to highlight the relative individuality and distinctiveness of Baret and Smyth in terms of their own community and in their own time, and methodologically this is a valuable tool that could find application elsewhere.

However it is likely that these individuals should be viewed as somehow characteristic of late medieval Bury, insofar as they embody certain aspects of the identity and ideology prevailing in the town during their lifetimes.²² The thesis has suggested that both Smyth and Baret, although in slightly different ways, saw themselves as emblematic of their community in the way in which they expressed their identity. Smyth in particular may well constitute a focus of the processes involved in the construction of identity in Bury, as not only does the expression of identity he enacted reflect the civic identity and ideology prevailing in Bury during his lifetime, but it also to an extent *reconstructs* the identity in his own 'likeness'. In other words,

²⁰ The notion of a root identity here involves an implicit notion that Bury in the 15th century was imbued with a distinctive and essentially *urban* identity which informed the way its community organised itself and its inhabitants interacted with each other. To a large extent this thesis has not concerned itself with the ideologies or structures of social life in the town's hinterland, partly because of the limitations of time and space, but mostly because of the ways in which contemporary concepts of communal identity attempted to divorce the urban from the rural in the face of social reality. However, the numerous forms of interconnections between any town (and Bury in particular as a market centre at the heart of a prospering industrial region) and its hinterland cannot be ignored or denied; see above section 5.i for a discussion of the urban/rural dichotomy.

²¹ Perhaps the weavers of Bury in the late 15th century should be included here, given the attempts at the reconstruction of their relative identity in the renewed ordinances they produced in the 1470s; BSERO B 9/1/2 *Weavers' craft gild ordinances* and BSERO B 9/1/2 *Plain and coverlet weavers' writ*.

²² Other towns probably had similarly disproportionately significant individuals as well: Bristol, for example, had Robert Ricart and several members of the Canynges family in the late 15th century. See Carus-Wilson, E. *The Merchant Adventurers of Bristol in the Fifteenth Century* (Bristol, 1962), *The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1967), and *Medieval Merchant Venturers* (London, 1967); as well as Sacks, D. *Trade, Society and Politics in Bristol 1500-1640* (New York, 1985) and *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450-1700* (London, 1991). See also Merry, M.L. 'Ricart's Kalender: urban ideology and fifteenth century Bristol' (University of Kent at Canterbury M.A. dissertation, 1994).

not only did Smyth express his self in such a way as to form a metonymic representation of the community, but his expressed identity and the machinery put in place by him and the town's elite to perpetuate it operated alongside the distinct civic identity of the community within a reciprocal system of reference: Smyth's identity reflects and intensifies that of the community, but at the same time the latter was intended to adapt to align with the idealisation of the communal identity depicted by Smyth. Smyth turned himself into the model townsman for Bury, and in the process of so doing he set up the framework for how the civic communal identity of the town should develop in the late 15th century and into the future.²³ John Baret, on the other hand, had a less political motivation for the expression of identity that he enacted, but his concerns were equally civic in essence. He had come from a family keen to integrate themselves into the community of Bury, and one of the ways in which they attempted to do so was to mimic the forms and modes of identity that they could see operating around them: in other words they adapted their own identities around those active in the secular community of Bury. Baret himself essentially continued this process for himself, by idealising both his own private identity as well as that of the town, again by referring the one to the other. His experience of life within the symbolically rich environment of Bury with its political discourses and cultural fecundity,²⁴ led him by the time of his latter years to impose a moral scheme upon his expression of identity, so that like Smyth, Baret intended that the people of Bury should learn from him. However, rather than learning about how the community of Bury should reconstruct and display itself, Baret's didactic aims were located in issues regarding worldly success, spiritual welfare, and concern for social relationships. Indeed, perhaps a distinction might be drawn between the expressive efforts of Smyth and Baret by identifying the former's principle concern as being for the highly unusually conscious expression of a conceptualised community; whereas Baret was more concerned with the reality of interpersonal relationships within that community.

It is hoped that by providing a contextual model of identity in Bury St Edmunds alongside the case studies of specific examples of the expression of identity, this study has provided an indication of the range of possible processes involved. Within the contextual framework Smyth and Baret's cases indicate an idealised representation of the structures underpinning the construction of identity in the town, and at the same time suggest that the identity that they have enacted was meant to be seen by contemporaries as idealised. It is probably the case that they should be seen as somehow symptomatic of the community from which they

²³ See above 209-33. The concept underlying the projected self-conscious development of the town's identity was clearly the continuing search for civic independence from St. Edmund's, and so an element of the expression of Smyth's identity had to include the structures for funding such ambitions (hence the enfeoffment).

²⁴ In terms of the town acting as a centre of social, religious, textual and artistic expression and

emerge so prominently, but at the same time it should be recognised that ultimately Smyth and Baret represent one extreme of the potential inherent in the processes of the construction of identity. This is why their cases have been included in this study, as they constitute a significant example of what was actually involved in the construction of identity.

This thesis has suggested that alongside the more commonly discussed ambition of the promulgation of oligarchy and self interest that many have seen characterising urban elites, we must place another function of the elite. The role of the elite in urban society was to provide guidance and leadership for the conduct of civic life. This was not only through civic administration, but also by providing a *model* of how life should be lived within the community they operated in. Individuals who were culturally high profile, and who were able to affect trends in their community, were in a position to provide a moral structure for individuals to aspire to, particularly those beneath the ranks of the elite. This is in part what drives the highly self-conscious and didactic representation employed by John Baret.

Therefore one of the most useful reasons for examining the Bury elite in the way this thesis has attempted, is that it helps us see how they constructed ideology for dissemination to the non-elite of their community. Communal identity in late medieval towns was effectively promulgated through the media of official administration and public displays. The role of symbolism and ritual were central to the creation of local ideology and its conversion into local identity. The importance of the elite in this process was simple and central: they controlled the means by which public displays were enacted. In Bury communal identity was a composite hybrid, comprising a mixture of the ambitions of the civic elite with the authoritative and official line of St. Edmund's. The balance of this 'mixture' was constantly changing, and by the late 15th century had changed irreversibly in the favour of the townsmen.

In Bury the ambitions of the elite may well have been the same as that for their counterparts in other towns, but their role in the community was somewhat different. The elite in Bury, thanks to the constitutional position they found themselves in, were peculiarly able to manipulate the symbolic language that underpinned the town's communal ideology. The discourse of dispute, and the symbolically charged issue of civic independence, provided the town's elite with not only a reason for constructing communal identity, but also with the vocabulary for doing so.

production.

If this study has achieved nothing else, then it has indicated that the perception of the elite in Bury may well have been different for the community as a whole than in other towns. Indeed may well have not been a simple matter for late medieval Bury townsmen, quite apart from later historians. For example it would not have been the case that townsmen would recognise an individual as a member of the elite because of his membership of a civic office or assembly, as would have been possible in other towns. 'Elite' probably meant different things to different people: while one townsman might show deference in his interaction with one burgess, another townsman might not. There were probably also subtle gradations within elite status: for example John Smyth was worshipped as a civic hero for at least a century after his death, whereas John Baret was never more than a fringe member of the body of the elite. In other words the question of how an individual manifested his 'elite-ness' is a pertinent one.

We need to think of the elite in terms of a group defining themselves by their public performance: that is, in the public representation of a certain type of locally specific and tailored identity. This identity was that chosen to inspire those of lower status in terms of moral and civic ambition. However in Bury this role and reciprocal relationship were not backed up by the authority of governance that elites in other towns enjoyed. This should tell us that we should not rely solely upon the official and governmental structural aspects of urban life to help us identify urban elites. Instead we should try to analyse the expression of status beyond official structures, which would provide a much more sensitive view of hierarchy than perhaps has previously been presented.

This is where the role of the model comes into play. This study's model of the community provides a basic view of the environment of individuals within Bury: the model throws up trends which comprise the social 'results' of environment, which is perhaps as close to 'context' as it is possible to get. The elite of the community, those with the interest in and means of constructing public identities and by extension public ideology for consumption by the community as a whole, are therefore worthy of interest because they are precisely the individuals who enact self-conscious displays of identity. It is these displays which can provide indications as to how the community perceived itself, and perhaps also to responses to change within that community. Individual case studies, of men like Baret and Smyth, therefore provide excellent opportunities of discussing changes in their communities. However the crucial point is that this can only be done *relatively*: the interest for us that these case studies have is located in the fact of their difference from what the model of the Bury elite has told us is the 'standard' mode of constructing identity. While the fact that Baret bequeathed a green ginger fork to a significant abbey official is intrinsically interesting, it is

only interesting in terms of the community as a whole if we know that nobody else within Bury's elite made such a bequest.

6.i.c. Applicability of the study.

In terms of how this study should inform our understanding of urban communities in general, it must be understood to be primarily concerned with methods of examining the processes of the construction of identity and the nature of civic representations: Bury in effect simply provides the raw material. As a town with a distinctive civic identity and alternative structures of authority based upon unofficial institutions, as well as an archive of material unusual in both quality and quantity,²⁵ Bury might well be perceived to be somehow different from other comparable urban communities. The loosely organised social structures may well have allowed the inhabitants of the town to express forms of identity that were unlike those active in other towns, but I think that to a large extent this is not what was happening in 15th century Bury. While it lacked the structures which in other towns provided the means by which identity could be constructed and disseminated, forcing the Bury townsmen to find new ways of doing so, the identity that they ultimately aspired to was essentially the same as in other urban communities. That is, the ideology of civic organisation that informed the way the Bury elite tried to portray themselves and the community as a whole was essentially the same as elsewhere; and it emphasised the need for civic independence, social harmony and the observation of the structures of authority (as determined by those in possession of such authority). The fact that this construction was enacted through different means to other towns, so that the processes involved *were* distinctive to Bury, is a further example of why Bury provides excellent material for an examination of the processes involved in urban identities.

This study tries to relocate the role of the individual in his community, in an attempt to compensate for the treatment the subject has received at the hands of constitutional and institutional history, or more recently studies that focus upon communities as a set of demographic or economic patterns. Similarly it is an attempt to begin the process of approaching urban history from a new perspective in reaction to the recent almost obsessive concerns of the subjects which revolve around the growth/decline arguments, and the communal aspects of demographic and economic production.²⁶ Even those writers such as Phythian-Adams and Gottfried who concern themselves with social processes cannot avoid

²⁵ See above pp.5-14.

²⁶ See Dyer, A. *Decline and Growth in English Towns 1400-1640* (London, 1991) for an explication of the positions taken by various urban historians within the growth/decline debate.

attaching their investigations to central discussions of the economic and demographic contexts of their respective towns.²⁷ While it is important to identify the *effects* of the demographic and economic conditions upon the inhabitants of the town under investigation,²⁸ it is also profitable to adopt a new perspective upon the subject of medieval towns, especially if we are concerned with gaining a better understanding of the texture of urban society: in other words novel methods applied to traditional concerns may well throw up interesting and significant findings.

In this study this has been pursued by examining how interpersonal relationships inform both the functional aspects of social integration and communal organisation and the mental and symbolic elements of civic life, for both the individual and the community. A concern has been to see if the nature of these interpersonal forms of communal activity can in some way elucidate the nature of change in urban society; and particularly the ways in which the 'community' notices change, adapts to it, and then accommodates its participants' individual perceptions of it. By examining the processes involved in the construction of identity it is possible to see the driving force of change located in the individual: the structures, institutions and ideologies are rendered flexible because the individuals designing and maintaining them are able to assimilate and respond to change at the level of their personal range of perceptions or *mentalité*; and diversity in individual recognitions of change and responses to it are accommodated within the discourses of local communal identity. Thus it is necessary to reinvest the individual as a subject with greater value in terms of agency within the communal dimensions of their town, as in essence it is from individuals that one can read the processes of development within communities: changes are implemented within community by individuals, rather than the other way round.²⁹ This is in effect what John Smyth and his social and civic peers were attempting to achieve in Bury in a much more self conscious and explicit manner than would ordinarily have been the case, and they were only able to do so because of the nature of the town's constitution.

In the 15th century most English towns were relatively small communities. Bury, given its level of population and central function as a regional commercial, industrial, cultural and religious centre, may well be classed together with other similar towns such as for example

²⁷ Especially in the case of Gottfried, who is largely incapable of moving away from the demographic and economic aspects of Bury's development, despite his professed intentions.

²⁸ As has been attempted above in Chapter 3.

²⁹ This also requires that the social networks and interpersonal relationships of individuals, their life histories and range of personal influence become much more significant in prosopographical studies of communities.

Reading, Canterbury and perhaps Coventry.³⁰ These settlements all had considerable regional influence and prestige, and all shared a proximity to London which resulted in contacts and influence significant to the organisation of their civic structures. The wealth and sophistication of economies in these towns were of a degree which imbues their populations with a sense of communal identity, self consciousness and ambition that enlivens social processes and interactions, and informs the mechanical and structural aspects of their administrations. In other words Bury is representative of a certain type of town, and within the vagaries of archival survival among this class of towns the methods employed here can be extended to other towns. The construction of contextual models of identity can be achieved for any town, and indeed it would prove very interesting to discover comparative representations of communal or 'root' identity between towns. Similarly it would be profitable to compare towns whose models were constructed using types of evidence unavailable in Bury, as it is likely, for instance, that a community whose constructed identity was elicited through deposition and court material would reflect different aspects of identity than a town whose model was built using primarily testamentary material. Ultimately, comparative studies of towns using different sources to ascertain as complete a model of identity as possible would provide a new perspective upon the processes of civic representation and the role of the individual within the composition of such efforts by towns to present themselves to others.³¹ This in turn would enable a fresh view of urban institutions, which could then provide a way forward for the examination of change in communities.

This thesis has been concerned with the nature of representation, the processes involved in the construction of individual and communal identity, and the processes involved in the different modes of design, definition and dissemination of identity. The identification of modes of representation should be seen as a method of perceiving change within a society over a period of time; starting from the position that these processes of constructing identity are in fact acknowledgements of and responses to changing conditions. Indeed the analysis of the forms adopted in constructions of identity might provide a peculiarly sensitive means of examining the community's experience of transformations going on around them, and it is crucially this idea of an individual's experience that has been lacking from urban studies in the past. In the 1470s in Bury the processes involved in adjusting identity to pursue a particular set of civic goals (especially a sense of independence) amidst a new set of conditions occasioned by the declining authority of St. Edmund's was explicitly self conscious, and indicated an almost objective awareness of the mechanics of identity, how it

³⁰ Particularly those towns with powerful ecclesiastical involvement in their administrations.

³¹ A 'complete model' would be one which provided as many different aspects (as suggested above in section 4.i) of identity as possible within the body of material available for the town.

could be created and manipulated and finally used towards achieving some goal.³² At the same time Bury's most distinctive individuals were engaged in a process of self representation that not only reflected their interaction with and perceptions of their context, but which also actively altered those contexts for others in the community; and it seems likely that it is in the actions of individuals like John Baret and John Smyth that the texture of 15th century society and the changes taking place within it should be sought.

³² This was true in Bristol as well, and in both towns the processes were reciprocal: both Ricart's *Kalendar* and John Smyth's enfeoffment were reflections of current modes of representation, while at the same time they served to affect the ways in which *future* modes of representation were enacted.

Appendix I: The enfeoffments of John Smyth II

The feoffees in lands and properties given to the inhabitants of Bury St Edmunds by John Smyth II

Enfeoffment no.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
Thomas Andrew																			✓
John Ayleward	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Hugh Babyngton																✓			
Roger Balkey																			✓
William Balkey																			✓
Henry Banyard	✓		✓	✓	✓						✓	✓							
William Baret																✓			
John Basse														✓	✓	✓			
John Bereway														✓	✓	✓			
Thomas Bereve																			✓
John Betyes																			✓
Robert Brett																			✓
Thomas Brett	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Thomas Burne																✓			
Thomas Bunnyng	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
William Buntfyng	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Robert Burgeys	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Reynold Chardero														✓	✓	✓			
Reynold Churche																✓			
Thomas Churche																			✓
Clement Clerk														✓	✓	✓			
Simon Clerk	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Walter Coppynger																✓			

The deeds of enfeoffment of lands and properties given to the town of Bury St Edmunds by John Smyth II:

1 Grant made on the feast of St. Matthew the Evangelist 3 Edward IV (21st September 1463) by John Smyth II to John Walshe of a parcel of land to the north of Eastgate street which is to provide 2d at Easter and Michaelmas for the use of the alderman.¹

2 Grant by John Smyth II of all lands, properties, rents and services in the East, South and Vine fields of Bury St Edmunds; and in Fornham St. Martin, Berton, Nowton and Rougham. Dated 10th September 1470.²

3 Grant made by John Smyth II of a messuage called 'Rerges'³; 1 acre called 'Shepecoteacre'; 59 acres in 7 pieces at Cattishall; 2 acres at 'Stonylond'; 3 acres called 'Sechylond' in the Eldfield; 4 acres in the same field; 2 acres in the same field; 2 acres in 2 pieces at 'Dykespill'; and 10 acres in 2 pieces at Fornham 'Haveheds'. These 82 acres⁴ in 15 pieces were all situated in the fields of Berton and Fornham St. Martin. Smyth had held these pieces of land co-jointly with Richard Alfred, John Baret, John Crofts and John Odeham, and they had been acquired from Thomas Walker the parson of Hadleigh, William Clopton, John Smyth clerk, Augusti Dunton of Hadleigh and Robert Clopton of London by a charter dated 16th September 11H6 (1432). Smyth's grant may have been made on the 10th September 10 Edward IV (1470).⁵

4 Grant by John Smyth II of all his lands, properties, rents and services in Berton, Fornham St. Martin, Nowton, Rougham, and the East, South and Vine fields of Bury St Edmunds. Dated 10th September 10 Edward IV (1470).⁶

5 Grant by John Smyth II of all his lands, properties, rents and services in Berton, Fornham St. Martin, Nowton, Rougham, and the East, South and Vine fields of Bury St Edmunds. Dated 10th September 10 Edward IV (1470).⁷

6 Grant by John Smyth II of a messuage, 18 pieces of arable, 1 piece of meadow, 1 piece of wood and liberty of fold course in Rougham. Dated 20th July 13 Edward 4 (1473).⁸

7 Grant by John Smyth II of a messuage, 18 pieces of arable, 1 piece of meadow, 1 piece of wood and liberty of fold course in Rougham. Dated 20th July 13 Edward 4 (1473).⁹

8 Grant by John Smyth II of a messuage, 18 pieces of arable, 1 piece of meadow, 1 piece of wood and liberty of fold course in Rougham. Dated 20th July 13 Edward 4 (1473).¹⁰

9 Grant by John Smyth II of a messuage, 18 pieces of arable, 1 piece of meadow, 1

¹ BSERO H 1/6/1 Feoffment Documents f.12. A marginal note says that the rent is to be delivered to the 'feoffees'. John Walshe may have been entrusted with this parcel of land as he had a garden and a barn abutting on it.

² BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* ff.1-1b.

³ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.13. A marginal note calls the property 'Recyes'.

⁴ The deed arrives at a total of 80 acres.

⁵ A folio is missing from the manuscript, and the date given appears on the next folio at the end of a list of witnesses.

⁶ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.16.

⁷ BL. Harley 4626 ff.23b-4.

⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.68.

⁹ BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book* f.1b.

¹⁰ BL. Harley 4626 f.24.

piece of wood and liberty of fold course in Rougham. Dated 20th July 13 Edward 4 (1473).¹¹

10 Grant by John Smyth II of a messuage, 18 pieces of arable, 1 piece of meadow, 1 piece of wood and liberty of fold course in Rougham. Dated 20th July 13 Edward 4 (1473).¹²

11 Grant by John Smyth II of all his lands, properties, rents and services in Berton, Fornham St. Martin, Nowton, Rougham, and the East, South and Vine fields of Bury St Edmunds. Dated 10th September 13 Edward IV (1473).¹³

Re-enfeoffment by John Smyth II of all properties, rents, lands and services in Bury St Edmunds, Berton, Fornham St. Martin, Rougham and Nowton which are in the hands of his feoffees. Dated 10th September 1473.¹⁴ The gift is for the benefit of the whole population of Bury.

Grant by John Smyth II of all properties, rents, lands and services in Bury St Edmunds, Berton, Fornham St. Martin, Rougham and Nowton. Dated 10th September 1473.¹⁵ The gift is for the benefit of the whole population of Bury.

12 A 'generic' list of feoffees in the lands and properties given by John Smyth II to the population of Bury St Edmunds.¹⁶

13 Quitclaim to William Buntyng and Robert Burgeys by the surviving co-feoffees of their rights in the land and property grants of John Smyth II, acting in their role as senior feoffees. Dated 29th July 17 Edward IV (1477).¹⁷

14 Re-enfeoffment by William Buntyng and Robert Burgeys to co-feoffees and new feoffees (2nd generation feoffees). Dated 26th July 17 Edward IV (1477).¹⁸

15 Quitclaim to John Forster and Reynold Chardero by the surviving co-feoffees of their rights in the land and property grants of John Smyth II, acting in their capacity as most senior feoffees. Dated 22nd September 2 Richard III (1484).¹⁹

16 Re-enfeoffment by John Forster and Reynold Chardero to co-feoffees and new feoffees (3rd generation feoffees). Dated 28th September 2 Richard III (1484).²⁰

17 The grant of 18 acres land and 1 pightel of 1 rod in Berton, and a property in Bury St Edmunds called 'Recyes' once belonging to John Smyth II. Dated 28th October 7 Henry VII (1491). Lease is to come into effect at next Michaelmas and to last until Michaelmas 1597.²¹

18 The grant of 18 acres land and 1 pightel of 1 rod in Berton, and a property in Bury St Edmunds called 'Recyes' once belonging to John Smyth II. Dated 28th April 9 Henry VIII

¹¹ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.17.

¹² BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.34.

¹³ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.68.

¹⁴ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.20. The recipients of the grant are not given in this copy.

¹⁵ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.27. The feoffees of this grant are not named.

¹⁶ BL. Harley 4626 f.40.

¹⁷ BL. Harley 4626 f.40b.

¹⁸ BL. Harley 4626 f.40b. The date of this enfeoffment may well have predated the quitclaim of Buntyng and Burgeys (no.10).

¹⁹ BL. Harley 4626 f.40b.

²⁰ BL. Harley 4626 ff.40b-41.

²¹ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.35.

(1517).²²

The grant of 18 acres land and 1 pightel of 1 rod in Berton, and a property in Bury St Edmunds called 'Recyes' once belonging to John Smyth II. Dated Thursday after the feast of St. Thomas the martyr 25 Henry VIII (January 1st 1534).²³ Feoffees are not named.

²² BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.36.

²³ BSERO H 1/6/1 *Feoffment Documents* f.36.

Appendix II: British Library MS. Harley 4626.

[Fol.21] These be the Statutes of the guylde of the Pureficacion of *our* Lady made ordeyned and renewed in the deye of the sayd puryfication the yeare of our Lorde a thowsand fowre hundered thre score and eleven, viz¹

In the fyrste, the Statute is by asente and wyll of all the fraternytie that everye ffeoffe that nowe is or shalbe from hense forward, he shall sweare uppon the booke of statutes that he shalbe obedyent to the alderman dye Audyttors and the fowre holders of the fore sayde guylde, And that he shalkepe the constitutions and charges of the guylde terme of his lyef. And when a brother cometh into the sayde guylde he shall paye fowre pence. That is to saye to the Lighte a peny. to the alderman a peny To the dye a peny and to the Clerke a peny and finde² a borowe for to paye ten shillinges when he is deade and the cattell of the guylde If he anye ther of have. And of the foresayde x^s fyve shillinges therof shalbe dysposed for the deade at his dore in breade by the alderman or dye of the sayde guylde.

Also we wyll and ordeyne theat everie brother coming into the sayde guylde shalbe sworne to fulfill the will of John Smythe Esquyer as it appereth by a Trypartyte Indenture concerning the same wyll wrytten in Englishe in this booke; And also the wyll of Margaret Odham gentlewoman to be fulfilled as it appereth by a payre Indentures wrytten in Englysshe concerning the same will. And that these twayne willes ben red everye yeare in the feaste of the puryfication of blessed marye vyrgin before the Bretherne of the same guylde at dynner. And when they have dyned that the same Brothers say for the sowles of the sayde John Smyth, the wyef of the sayde John, John Odham and Margaret the wyef of the sayde John and for all ther benefactors this psalme de Profundis *with* the preres that longe therto that it maye be pleasing to god & profet to the sowles.

[Fol.21b] Also the alderman dye Awdytors and holders shalbe chosen yeare by yeare trewly to rule and governe the guylde aforesayd. And the forsayde holders shalbe chosen by the .owe³ of the names of the sayde fraternytie.

Also ordeyned and statuted is that the guylde of the puryfication shalbe holden always in the daye of the Puryfication.

Also ordeyned and statuted that all the brotherne shall have everye yeare there presens and Speche daye at the Charnell or in the churche yarde in the daye of the *Epiphanie* for the ordynance and profet of the guylde. And if anye be absent of thesayde fraternytie but yf he have a reasonable excuse he shall loose a pound waxe.

Also ordeyned and statuted that everie brother of the sayde fraternytie shall come to the guylde hall anone after Evensong the daye of the Puryfication to the beades bydding and theare devowtly to praye for all the bretherne and systeme sowles that have bene in the guylde aforesayd. And he that cometh not therto but yf he have a cause reasonable he shall loose one pounce waxe.

Also ordeyned when a brother dyeth all the brotherne shall come to his exeque and dirige where the deade is, If he be *within* the Towne of Burye and theare praye for the sowle undre

¹ Margin: *Bury St Edmundes in the County of Suff.*

² Possibly: folio damaged.

³ Might be *Rowe*, i.e. 'roll'.

payne of a pound of wax but he have a cause reasonable to excuse him.

Also ordeyned that the alderman and dye the *which* for the yeare bene chosen⁴ shall beare ten poundes And for the crease of the sayde ten poundes. the alderman and dye shall ordeyne a dynnar to all the brotherne. And the sayde alderman and dye shall bringe up the sayde ten poundes on the daye of the morowe speche. And that same ten poundes shalbe delyvered theare to the Alderman and dye the *which* bene chosen for the yeare folowing in form abovesayd by the said Audytters.

[Fol.22] Also ordeyned that the Alderman and dye of the sayde guylde shall have for theare labour everie eche of them three shillinges fowre pence in money, and everie eche of them one pound and a halfe of wax for a Tortyse,⁵ and the sayde alderman syxe gallons of ale and the sayd dye fowre gallons of ale, and everie eche of the fowre holders two gallons of ale of the best of the guylde aforesaid.

Also ordeyned when a brother dyeth everie brother shall paye to the alderman and dye ob *which* shalbe dysposed and geven in almes to pore folke by the alderman and dye.

Also ordeyned that yf it happe anie brother to be sicke in tyme that the guyld is holden we will that he be vusyted *with* meate and drinke also well as a brother that is present at meate.

Also ordeyned that no brother shall procure no man to be a brother in the foresayde guyld but he be of goode name and fame and of goode conversacion and by thassent of the bretherne and that they excede not the number of xxxij.

Also ordeyned that yf anie of the bretherne fall in stryfe together that they shall not pursue to Iudiciall courte but that they maye notyfie ther cause to the alderman and dye. And yf they maye not bringe them to accorde, then they maye goo to comon lawe.

Also ordeyned that yf it hap anie brother have anie nede of *our* hers or lighte to anie frind of his dead that then we will that he have *our* hers or light for comon profet of *our* guylde, And therefore to make goods. And yf it maye be proved that he take anie other hers or lighte that then he shall paye to the foresayd guylde one pound waxe. [Fol.22b] Also ordeyned by *our* statutes that a Rolle be made from yeare to yeare betwixte the alderman and the dye and the fowre Audytters of all the cattell *profettes* and other necessities and countes of the sayde guylde.

Also ordeyned that if anie brother be rebell and will not holde and kepe the statutes as the more *parte* of the fraternytie doo, he shalbe alyened and putte oute and for no brother be had. And if he have anie cattell of the sayde guylde he shall delyver it to the bretherne of the sayde guylde *with* oute anye gaynesayeng for ever.

Also ordeyned that we shall susteyne fyve tapers one of v^{li} fowre eche of fyve quarters brenning in the churche of Scte James of the *which* one of them shall brenne every yeare at the Sepulchre of *our* Lord that is to saye one yeare in the churche of *our* Lady and another yeare in the churche of St. James.

Also ordeyned that we shall do singe a masse everie yeare on the daye of the Puryficacion at one of the churches aforesayde at *which* masse everie brother shall offer a ferthinge for all the bretherne that bene deade uppon the payne of I^{li} of waxe but yf he have cause reasonable to excuse him.

⁴ That is, probably the outgoing incumbents.

⁵ Margin: ∴, except the pyramid points to the left.

Also ordained that the Alderman shall find a *parte* of the high dayes in the guyld hall. That is to saye all manner naperie to the sayde deyce or table longing, And also all manner stuffe to the first me.⁶ excepte pewter bread & ale. And the dye the charges in the kechen. And the holders all the necessaries longing to the buttry, pantry, and to the sayd tables in the guyld hall excepte breade and ale.

[Fol.23] Also ordeyned and statuted that every brother that hathe anie of the guyld cattell shall come to the guyld hall on Sundaye nexte after thassumption of *our* Ladye. And therefore the alderman dye and Awdytors bringe in the stock of cattell in his hand being and also the Increase of the same ther *with*. And this to be done undre payne of ii^{li} waxe to the guyld.

Also ordeyned and statuted that the alderman and dye shall receyve of two howses lyeng in Wellistreate of the gifte of Jeffery Glemesford ijs yearlye keping the reparacion of fowre almes howses loyning to. And also yearly geving acownte at candlemas counte. And the sayde Officers provyding alwaye that almes folkes by the sayde Officers be *provyded* therto.⁷

Also a Statute is ordeyned that when anye alyenacion shalbe made of the landes and tenementes that John Smythe hathe geven to the Towne of Burie then we wyll and ordeyne that the landes and tenementes that Margaret Odham hath geven unto Candlemas guyld, fulfilling her testamente we will that the one alyenacion folowe thother. And also of the landes and tenementes that longe to Scte Marye Aulter. And also the landes that stand in feoffis handes that longe to Scte Thomas Awlter be in lyke wyse. And also of the almes howses that the state be geven and taken in lyke wyse.

Also ordeyned and statuted that every Candlemas day be chosen fowre of ffeoffes the *which* be feoffed in the lands and tenementes sumtime of John Smithe Esquire to have the supervision & governaunce of all the saide landes and tenementes according to John Smythes wyll and therof trewlye accounte make everie yeare abowte Candlemas tyme to the residue of all the cofeffes *which* other for the tyme being. And also the said fowre feffes shall purveye alwaye for keping of the dirige for the said John Smythe & Anne his wyef on the Scte Peters even^{evon} at midsummer. And on the next daye a masse of requiem as it is rehersed in his will following.

[Fol.23b] Also we wyll and ordeyne that everie brother that hathe keyes of the hutche or of the dore longing to the porche of the guyld hall, That they bringe them in every candlemas daye and delyver them to the Alderman dye and Awdytors for the time being. And they to delyver the saide keyes at the same daye to fowre of the feoffis above rehersed *which* they thinke most able men. They to kepe them for the yeare following.

⁶ Could be *mese, mete, mefe* or *mele*.

⁷ *Sic*.

Appendix III: Computerised data management

Database design.

Document Table	
Document identity number	
Document code	
Folio reference	
Type	
Day	
Month	
Feast	
Year	
Probate	
Notes	

Person Table	
Document identity number	
Person identity number	
Type	
Forename	
Surname	
Sex	
Parish	
Year	
Occupation	
Office/Title	
Place of burial	
Relationship	
Notes	

Bequest Table	
Beneficiary identity number	
Type	
Parish	
£	
s	
d	
Notes	
Document identity number	

Court Table	
Case identity number	
Parish	
Value	
Notes	
Document identity number	

Database entry example: the will of Roger Rose erstwhile alderman of Bury St Edmunds, 1402 (BSERO Osbern f.104).

Document Table.

doc	Doc code	folio reference	Day	month	year	Feast	office	relation	type
650	Os	Osbern 104a	8	Jan	1402				will

Person Table.

doc id	Pid	fname	Sname	Type	s	parish	year	occup	buried	office	relation	notes
650	1999	John	Seler	Exec	m		1402					
650	2091	John	Toft	Exec	m		1402	clerk				
650	3314	Roger	Rose	Testator	m	BSE	1402		cyard St. Edm in parish of St.			last will + testament sep; last will dated Saturday after St. Mathew apostle 1403
650	3782	Thomas	Rose	Relative	m		1402				brother	brother of 3314
650	3782	Thomas	Rose	Recip	m		1403					brother of 3314
650	3782	Thomas	Rose	Exec	m		1402					brother of 3314
650	4213	William	Roose	Friend	m		1402					prob related to 3314; father of 9685
650	4365	William	Warde	Recip	m		1403	chaplain				
650	4365	William	Warde	Exec	m		1402	chaplain				
650	5320	Thomas	Rose	Relative	m		1403				son	son of 3314
650	5320	Thomas	Rose	Recip	m		1403					son of 3314
650	9684	Thomas		Relative	m	Clare	1402				nephew	nephew of 3314; living at Clare
650	9684	Thomas		Recip	m	Clare	1402					nephew of 3314; living at Clare
650	9685	Agnes	Roose	Recip	f		1402					prob related to 3314; daughter of 4213
650	9686	Agnes		Recip	f	BSE	1402	servant				servant of 3314; -daughter- has been crossed out
650	9686	Agnes		Employee	f	BSE	1402	servant				servant of 3314; -daughter- has been crossed out
650	9687	Richard	Oscher	Neighbour	m	BSE	1402					
650	9688	William		Relative	m		1403				nephew	nephew of 3314
650	9688	William		Recip	m		1403					nephew of 3314
650	9689	Katherine	Rose	Relative	f		1403				daughter	daughter of 3314; newpid might = 2280 or 9283
650	9689	Katherine	Rose	Recip	f		1403					daughter of 3314; newpid might = 2280 or 9283
650	9690	John	Baxter	Recip	m	BSE	1403	servant				servant of 3314
650	9690	John	Baxter	Employee	m	BSE	1403	servant				servant of 3314
650	9691	Roger	Salman	Recip	m		1403	clerk				-my clerk-; clerk of 3314
650	9692	John	Barker	Recip	m	BSE	1403	servant				servant of 3314

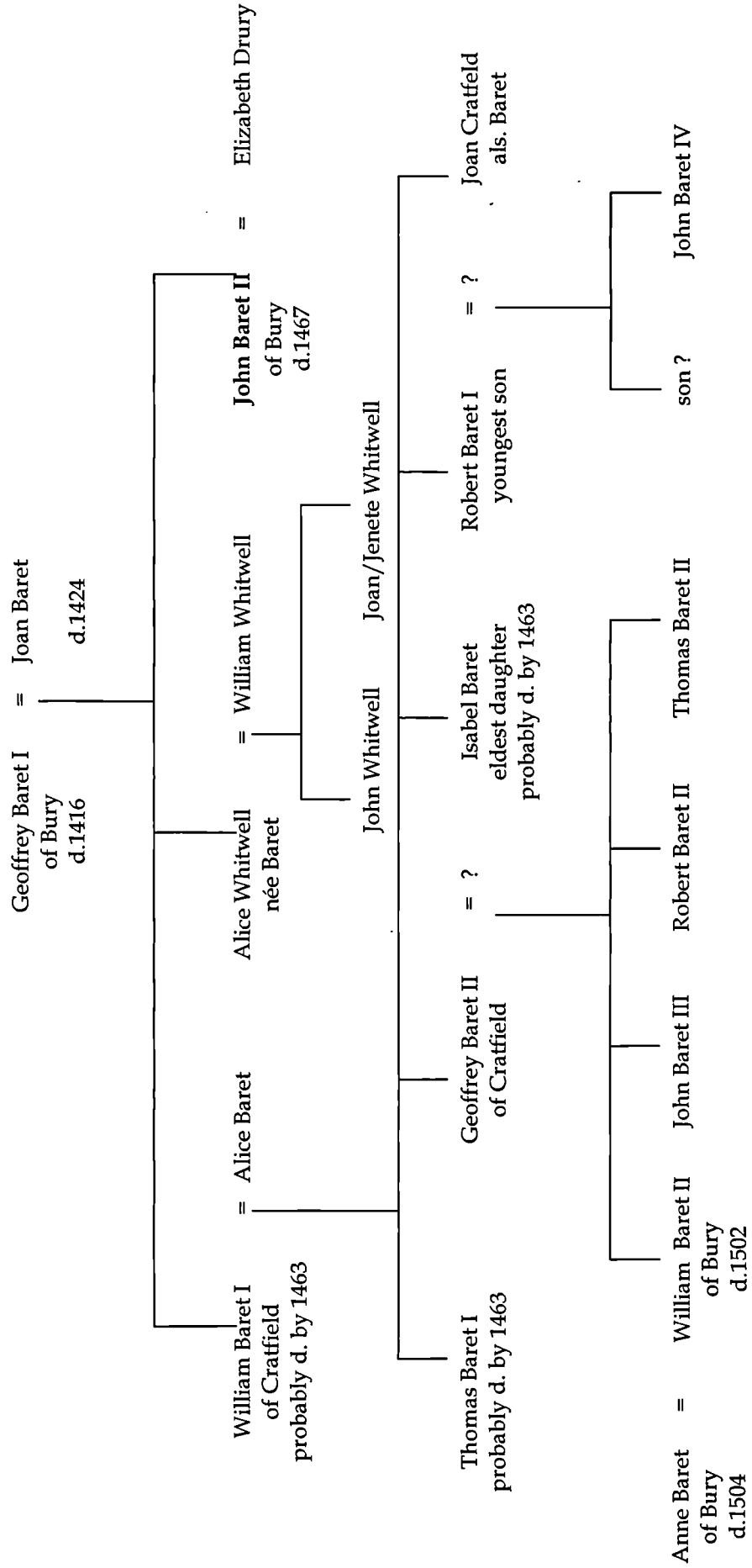
650	9692	John	Barker	Employee	m	BSE	1403	servant				servant of 3314
650	9693	Walter		Recip	m	BSE	1403	servant				servant of 3314
650	9693	Walter		Employee	m	BSE	1403	servant				servant of 3314
650	9694	Katherine		Recip	f	BSE	1403	servant				servant of 3314
650	9694	Katherine		Employee	f	BSE	1403	servant				servant of 3314
650	9695	Roger		Relative	m		1403	friar	nephew			nephew of 3314
650	9695	Roger		Recip	m		1403	friar				nephew of 3314
650	9696	John	Banham	Recip	m		1403					newpid might = 8955
650	9697	Alice	Woode	Recip	m	f	1403					

Bequest Table.

doc	Type	parish	ben	£	s	d	notes					
650	Altar	St. J			100							
650	Relig	St. J				40	parish priest					
650	Relig	St. J				40	St. M priest					
650	Relig	St. J				6	each parish clerk					
650	Relig	St. J				20	each priest to celeb in St. J					
650	Relig					8	each priest at funeral					
650	Cash		9684	3	6	8	5 marks					
650	Personal		9684				goods: 4 -pelu- Rotund-					
650	Cash		9685	1	6	8	2 marks					
650	Property	BSE	9686				2 shops next to Risbygate between a prop of 3314 + a prop of 9687					
650	Cash		9686	6	13	4	10 marks					
650	Gild					20	gild Purification BVM for prayers					
650	Gild					20	Corpus Xist gild					
650	Gild					20	gild St. Botulph					
650	Personal						residue sold to pay debts + funeral expenses					
650	Cash		3782	13	6	8	20 marks					
650	Property	BSE	3782				prop in habits					
650	Personal		3782				household: after death of 3782 to be sold to provide decent stipend for 4365					
650	Property						all prop to be in keeping of 3782: after death of 3782 to be sold to provide decent stipend for 4365					
650	Land						all land to be in keeping of 3782: after death of 3782 to be sold to provide decent stipend for 4365					
650	Relig		4365				all land/prop/household keeping of 3782 to be sold after his death to provide decent stipend for 4365					
650	Relig		4365				missal with chalice + best vestments: clothes					
650	Book		4365				missal with chalice + best vestments: clothes					

650	Cash		9688	5			
650	Personal		9688			goods: best awning	
650	Education		5320			honest sustenance in food + clothes while at school until 18yrs old; -honest~ sustentatione in victu et vestitu eundo ad scolas usqzad etate~ octodecim annorz-	
650	Cash		9689	6	13	4	
650	Personal		9690			goods: £20 worth of goods	
650	Cash		9691			40	
650	Cash		9692		13	4	
650	Cash		9686	6	13	4	
650	Cash		9693		6	8	
650	Cash		9694		10		
650	Relig	Babwell		3	6	8	5 marks
650	Relig	Clare		3	6	8	5 marks
650	Relig		9695	3	6	8	5 marks
650	Property		9696				receive farm of props
650	Cash		9697		6	8	

Appendix IV: The Baret family



The Baret family tree.

The Baret family presented by Gottfried in *Bury St Edmunds* (p.155) is mistaken on a number of points. Firstly, he posits that John Baret II and William I had an elder brother John [I]. There was certainly a John Baret senior of Bury who made his will in 1431,¹ and although his existence adds an element of confusion, I am not convinced that he was the eldest son of Geoffrey Baret I as Gottfried suggests. John I leaves eight marks in his will for a one year chantry for his soul and the souls of his parents, but unhappily he does not name the latter. It is possible that the John named as principle heir in the wills of Geoffrey I and his wife Joan is in fact John I rather than John II, and the fact that he styles himself 'senior' in his will is suggestive at this stage, and this would have made him between 31 and 38 years old when he died given the age restrictions imposed by Geoffrey I on the inheritance of his heir. The crucial factor is that in neither Geoffrey I or his wife's wills appear references to two sons called John, and as the senior John did not die before 1431 and the junior John had to be born (obviously) before the death of both his parents, both would have to have been alive at the same time at the point that at least one of their parents made their will. That no two Johns are differentiated suggests that there was only one. The other important factor is the Baret patrimony as left by Geoffrey I and his wife which is unmistakably described and bequeathed by John Baret II in his will. Gottfried suggests that:

Perhaps John II elected to pursue a mercantile career because the bulk of his parents' estate was passed to his elder brother, John I. But when both John I and Joan predeceased him, most of the family lands did come to John II, making a life of leisure a possibility.²

If this was the case, then why does John I's will make no mention of the patrimony? Similarly, although this is difficult to discuss with any conviction due to the absence of William I's will, if John Baret II came by the patrimony simply through inheriting it at John I's death, then why did it not pass to William I first, as he was older than John II? Gottfried's family tree has William I as a *younger* brother to John I and John II, but the evidence of William I's children appearing in his parents' wills argues against this.³ Therefore I think that it is extremely difficult to locate John I within the family tree, and while it is possible that he *was* the eldest child of Geoffrey I, this scenario would open up a number of difficulties and inconsistencies within the evidence.

Secondly Gottfried's diagram is distorted by his attempt to render William II as the nephew of John II, rather than his great nephew.⁴ This probably arises from the vague nature of John Baret II's reference to "William Baret sone onto Jeffrey Baret of Cratfeld my neve".⁵ Thus he has made William II's father Geoffrey the brother of John Baret II; and he has also elided Geoffrey II and Geoffrey III, once again an understandable act given the imprecise references of John Baret II's will. The latter refers to Geoffrey II on three occasions: the first in the above quotation; secondly over the financial arrangements made for his niece Joan Cratfield;⁶ and thirdly when a bequest is made to him when he is referred to as "Jeffrey Baret my neve of

¹ BSERO Osbern f.201.

² Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.156.

³ See above section 5.iv.b.

⁴ Although Tymms also considers William II to be a nephew; *Bury Wills* p.234.

⁵ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.24. Gottfried has taken William to be the nephew, not Geoffrey.

⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.32-3.

Cratfelde".⁷ Another reference, to "John Baret sone of old Jeffrey Baret of Cratfeld dwellyng with the Abbot of Seynt Benyghtys",⁸ creates the confusion. I consider this Geoffrey to be Geoffrey III, distinct from Geoffrey II, although Gottfried considers them to be the same. The appellation 'old' might serve to distinguish Geoffrey III from Geoffrey II; but more importantly I consider them to be distinct because not only does John Baret II refer to a nephew Geoffrey and not a brother by that name, but Geoffrey III's position within the line of succession to the patrimony is such that it suggests that he and his son John V are a distant branch of the family. In other words, Geoffrey III's line can only inherit after the male lines of Geoffrey II's four sons and Robert I's (minimum of) two sons have all ended, a very long shot indeed. Thus Geoffrey III and John V do not appear on the family tree because, as with John I, I do not know where to locate them.

Thus Gottfried's family tree for the Barets differs from mine in a number of points of interpretation. I feel that mine is 'neater' in that while it fits the relationships indicated in the material, it requires the least number of assumptions, and does not need the existence of kin that are not mentioned by their parents and siblings, as Gottfried's does. However there are a number of instances where Gottfried's figure is simply incorrect. He elides Robert II and Robert I so that the latter's son John IV would be under John Baret II's instructions for the inheritance of his patrimony an heir before his uncle Thomas II. John IV is only mentioned in the will as a successor to the patrimony *after* the heirs of all the sons of Geoffrey II and their male heirs,⁹ so that in Gottfried's reading 'John son of Robert' would have already inherited long before Thomas II, who has to be dead and without issue to inherit, according to John Baret II. Similarly, Gottfried has erred on at least one instance with regard to children of John Baret II.¹⁰

There are a number of other Barets that are known to have lived in Bury St Edmunds in the period, about whom little is known. At the end of the 14th century the will of Bartholomew Baret remains as the only document involving him and his family;¹¹ and in the late 15th century there is a record of an Alan Baret esquire of Bury, who died intestate in 1479. That this latter was a member of the prestigious main branch of the Bury family is suggested by his armigerous status, and by the fact that the administrators of his goods were Thomas Cranewys clerk who participated in the wills of the majority of the Bury elite in the period; and John Swaffham, sacrist of St. Edmund's. However it is impossible to locate him within the family tree.¹²

The wills of the Baret family 1416-1504.

Geoffrey Baret I was undoubtedly a prosperous individual before he settled in Bury, or else

⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.35.

⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.25.

⁹ See above section 6.iii.a, note 58.

¹⁰ See above section 6.iii.b.

¹¹ See above section 6.iii.a note 6. It is impossible to connect him with any of the Barets from the 15th century.

¹² Gottfried suggests that he might be a cousin of John Baret II, but he does not suggest why he thinks so; *Bury St Edmunds* p.155. The will of John Baret II also includes a reference to a cousin sir John Cleye "preest with my maister Prisote", although 'cousin' was perhaps the most generally and vaguely used of all kinship terms, and may here indicate ties of friendship rather than of family. For the Barets connections with the Drurys and the Whitwells, see above sections 4.ii and 6.iii.e.

built up substantial resources at an incredible rate on arriving in the town, as his will indicates a high degree of property holding, moveable goods and liquid wealth. His high altar bequest of 20s to St. Mary's places him within the highest category of testator. All the holdings he bequeathes in his will are located in Bury St Edmunds, and no reference is made to any land or property anywhere else. His son John Baret II receives a property called the 'Inne at Herte' situated in Le Mustowe,¹³ which was probably an inn, as well as a tenement in Ratons Row and a barn outside the Westgate. These are to be held in the possession of a Margery Melton, a tenant in the property in Le Mustowe, until John II reaches the age of twenty four. Geoffrey I's wife Joan receives a property in Churchgate Street between properties of John Coppinger and Thomas Carleton;¹⁴ a tenement with solar and a shop in Spicers Row which had once belonged to Roger Rose who had served as alderman several times at the end of the 14th century; and a property in Punches Lane with two gardens attached to it, lying next to a property of Roger Lardener. A further tenement in Whiting Street bought from John Weston was to be sold by Geoffrey I's executors to fulfill the will. All the property given to Joan was to pass to their son John II at her death or when he reached twenty four years of age. As for Geoffrey I's lands, John II was to receive everything in Bury St Edmunds, again to be kept in the hands of Margery Melton until he came of age.¹⁵ The only exception to this was that Alice Whitwell was to receive seven acres of land in two pieces in the Westfield of Bury, which abutted on the 'Sexteynsmedewe' and lying next to land of John Coppinger and the road called 'Herdwykweye'.¹⁶

However he certainly had a reasonably widespread experience of communities and religious institutions throughout East Anglia. Apart from his bequests to the church at Cratfield he left money to the altars of Ketteringham in Norfolk, Fressingfield, and Linstead. The religious houses he remembers include: the Franciscans at Babwell, including a separate bequest to the named master or custodian of the house; the houses of Dominicans and Franciscans at Dunwich on the Suffolk coast; the priory at Mendlesham ten miles to the west of Bury; and the nuns at Thetford. The prior of St. Edmund's receives 6s 8d while the rest of the convent receive 20d each. The bequests to the houses at Babwell and Thetford, as well as a 6s 8d bequest to the St. Mary priest of St. Mary's locates Geoffrey within the established order of religious charity within the secular community of Bury; but the gifts to the houses at Mendlesham and Dunwich indicate a less local perspective.¹⁷ His east Suffolk origins may be implicit in the choice of religious houses for his bequests, and thus his lack of reference to property or land beyond Bury St Edmunds is consequently all the more interesting: it is as if Geoffrey Baret I was deliberately cutting his ties with his essentially rural origins at the end

¹³ See above Figure 3.2. The name of the property might read 'Juve at Herte'.

¹⁴ Or Churchgovel Street; this was probably Baret's chief property: see below section 6.iii.c.

¹⁵ This Margery Melton may have been the widow of William Melton of the parish of St. Mary's in Bury St Edmunds who had died in 1401, BSERO Osbern f.98b. However in William Melton's will Margery receives the property he inhabits to live in, which makes her residing in Geoffrey Baret's Le Mustowe property fifteen years later a curious situation.

¹⁶ This bequest is crucial from the point of view of identifying Alice Whitwell and John Baret II as the children of Geoffrey Baret I: John Baret II's will of 1463 contains the bequest: "Item there is vij acres lond lying by the hih weye toward the grendyll not ferre from Herdwyk wich vij acres lith in ij pecys the endys abbuttyng to ward the sexteyns medwe wiche lond my fadir gaf to my sustyr Alis Whitwelle..."; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.31.

¹⁷ In other words, the bequests to the houses at Babwell and Thetford, and to the St. Mary priests of Bury, are typical among Bury testators. Only one other Bury will makes a bequest to a house in Dunwich, that of Germain Crysp of 1420, and the testator in this case was originally from Heningham; BSERO Osbern f.160b. Similarly Mendlesham priory is only mentioned in one other Bury will, that of Thomas Wynchester of Mendlesham who was in Bury when he drew up his will in 1391: he wished to be buried in the Trinity chapel in Mendlesham, and left 40s and his great missal with all the furnishings to the church there, as well as cash to the poor of the parish. At least one of his executors was also from Mendlesham; BSERO Osbern f.62b.

of his life, either by not mentioning any possessions held outside Bury and making pre-testamentary arrangements for them, or indeed by no longer having any such possessions.

The nature of the relationship between Geoffrey I and William Baret I is not defined in either the will of the former or his wife, and this, whether it is deliberate or an oversight by the two testators, makes the construction of the Baret family tree somewhat problematic. That William I is elder than John II can be asserted relatively confidently: John II has not yet reached twenty four years of age by the time Geoffrey I makes his will in 1416, while William I has a wife and two children Thomas I and Geoffrey II, who both receive 40s from their grandfather.¹⁸ That William Baret I is Geoffrey I's son, is less certain, particularly as one would expect him to be the principle heir of the testator.

However there are a number of indicators that suggest that he *is* in fact the eldest son of Geoffrey Baret I, although not his heir. Firstly the nature of the bequests he receives from Geoffrey I coupled with the existence of his own family suggest that his initial career has proved successful and stable enough not to require direct large scale assistance from his father. Whereas John Baret II receives £20 in cash to be kept by his mother Joan until he comes of age, Geoffrey I gives his daughter Alice Whitwell and her husband William Whitwell 60s, and William Baret I gets 40s. It is presumed that Alice received a dowry from her father, so that a somewhat commensurate level of financial parental involvement might be assumed in the lives of John and Alice; and indeed a similar degree of pre-testamentary financial help may well have been provided for William I by Geoffrey I. One of the bequests made in the latter's will was to forgive William I a debt of £15,¹⁹ which probably indicates the provision of capital in the setting up of William I's career, or at least some form of investment in the latter's occupational activities, which in itself might be reasonably characterised as the behaviour of a father to a child.²⁰ The disposal of Geoffrey I's personal moveable property further indicates a parity in the relative 'favour' shown towards William I and John Baret II and Alice Whitwell, if such a thing can ever be determined from testamentary evidence. The bulk of the household goods, hostilments and utensils are left to Geoffrey I's wife Joan, while Alice Whitwell is given an assortment of her father's clothing. Her husband, William Whitwell, is given a bow with some arrows, a bequest that is matched by the only bequest of personal items made to John Baret II. William I receives some clothing including Geoffrey I's best furred gown, as well as his 'calaber' and his best dagger, which again suggests a filial relationship. A further indicator that William Baret I is indeed the son of Geoffrey I comes in the will of John Baret II, where he makes a bequest to

Jone Crattefeld othir wyse callyd Jone Baret my nece doughtir to William Baret my
brothir of Crattefeld...

¹⁸ Indeed Geoffrey II may well have been very young in 1416: although he is given the same cash bequest as his brother, the clause in the will doing so is appended at the very end of the document after the customary *residuum* phrases, suggesting perhaps that Geoffrey II was born as Geoffrey I was drawing the will up. By 1424 when Geoffrey I's wife Joan makes her will, John Baret II is old enough to inherit the properties withheld until he came of age, making his year of birth between 1393 and 1400; and William I has another child, Isabel.

¹⁹ This is not the only debt forgiven by Geoffrey I in his will: John Lote and Richard Peyntor are each forgiven 6s 8d, while Margery Lane is forgiven 3s 4d. Only John Lote appears elsewhere in the Bury material, as a testator in his own will of 1448, and then it may be a different individual given the date of the document; BSERO Hawlee f.26b.

²⁰ A similar argument might be applied to strengthen the case for Alice Whitwell being Geoffrey I's daughter: he bequeaths to his wife Joan some silver beads, which are to pass to Alice on her death. This is indicative of a gift of a sentimentally significant object to family members, particularly the female line.

and the only way the various pieces of the jigsaw of the Baret family tree can begin to fit together is if this brother William I is the same relative referred to in the wills of John Baret II's parents.²¹

The role of Geoffrey I's wife Joan as intermediary in John Baret II's inheritance of the Baret patrimony seems to have been an undertaking that was formally fulfilled. In her will of 1424,²² she leaves to her son and his heirs everything that had been bequeathed to him by his father that he should have on her death. Added to this was all land and property held in Bury St Edmunds, Great Horningsheath, Little Horningsheath and Westley. The holdings in these other places are not described in the will, and so identifying them is difficult. It may be that they were holdings of Joan Baret which have come to her through her family, and which she now adds to the endowment of her son by her husband; alternatively they may have been lands of Geoffrey I which he had not intended John II to have as they were not in Bury, but which for some reason were deemed appropriate to be added to the rest of his estates eight years later. Either way, Geoffrey I did not mention them in his will.

As far as we know all land and property held by Joan is transferred to her son John II.²³ The other members of the family are remembered, but as with the will of Geoffrey I the bulk of the holdings pass to John Baret II. Bequests to family, friends and servants take the form of either personal possessions of the testator or cash. John II, for example, receives the household utensils and hostilments, as well as a long list of items including: his mother's best silver bowl; her best wooden chest; her twelve best silver spoons; her best amber beads; pillows; bowls; her two best testers; her four best pairs of sheets; a feather bed; a mattress; a 'purpoynt'; three curtains and a selour for the bed; a linen curtain; eight of her best stools; two tables and a chair; four benches; two jugs and two pewter garnish; a number of plates; a great iron tripod; her three best cups, and two beds. A subsequent clause gives John II all his mother's sheep, and all her belts, silver (including spoons) and jewels. William I receives 40s in cash, a silver bowl and a pair of amber beads. William I's wife Alice receives 13s 4d and Joan's best furred coat; while Joan's daughter Alice Whitwell receives her mother's violet coat with a hood of 'blackoflyre', a ruby kirtle and twenty quarters of malt as well as being forgiven a 40s debt. Joan's grandchildren each receive a cash bequest: William I's son Geoffrey II is given 10s and his (presumably younger) brother and sister receive 6s 8d; while the son and daughter of William and Alice Whitwell receive 20d each.

This similarity in terms of interests displayed in the construction of the wills of Geoffrey I and Joan can be seen in other elements of the latter's will, such as the executors chosen by the testators,²⁴ and particularly when it comes to religious giving. Thus Joan makes

²¹ For the relationships mentioned in all the documents to fit together into Appendix IV one other factor has to be assumed: William Baret II's reference to John Baret II his 'unkell' in his 1502 will has to be understood to be effectively skipping a generation. In other words the identification of kin relationships was inaccurate, and John Baret II was the *great* uncle of William II his heir. See Appendix IV and below.

²² BSERO Osbern f.168b.

²³ The only other holding mentioned by Joan is a parcel of land in Abbotsthorpe, which is to be sold by her executors for charitable works.

²⁴ Both Geoffrey I and Joan chose Walter Bon butcher of Bury St Edmunds and their son John II to act as executor, although Geoffrey I also chooses William I as well. Bon acts as executor in ten Bury wills between 1384 and 1424: BSERO Osbern ff.54, 62b, 86, 108, 118, 142b, 147b, 150b, 168b. The sacrist's account for 1419 records that £4 12s was paid to Bon for 60 sheep bought for the sacrist's manor of Oldhawe, BSERO A 6/1/5 p.7; while in the sacrist's account for 1429, he is recorded as having paid 10s to the sacrist for various pasture. He was also paid 110s for 60 sheep sold at 22d a head. The account

substantial cash bequests (as her husband did) to the high altar of St. Mary's church, the Franciscans of Babwell and the nuns of Thetford, as well as to the St. Mary priest of St. Mary's, and the monks and prior of St. Edmund's. Unlike her husband, however, she also leaves 2s to the sacrist of St. Edmund's, and a gold ring to the abbot; and she does not make bequests to those religious houses remembered by her husband but which were unusual for Bury townsmen in general to remember in their wills. The gifts to the abbot and sacrist, and especially the more symbolically significant gift of the ring to the former, may well indicate a greater sense on the part of Joan of belonging to the community of Bury than her husband, as part of the motivation for such bequests must indicate at least an increased awareness of the authority of the monastic officers over the secular community in the eight years since her husband's death. It may even indicate a direct acquaintance of some kind: this is not unlikely in Joan's case, as she was the widow of a wealthy townsman who had almost certainly enjoyed a personal relationship with the previous abbot.²⁵

As a source for describing his family tree, John Baret II's will is guilty of compounding the difficulties in identifying specific individuals. Firstly, it is necessary to be confident in identifying him as the son of Geoffrey I and Joan. There is the reference to the land given to his sister Alice Whitwell by John II's father, which reverted to John II as his sister's heirs ran out, and which he bequeathes to his niece (and Alice Whitwell's daughter) Jenete Whitwell and his other niece Katherine Drury, who are already in possession of it.²⁶ More conclusively we find among John II's bequests other parcels of land and properties which were bequeathed in the wills of Geoffrey I and Joan Baret to their son John II. The bulk of John II's lands and his chief messuage of habitation are given to William Baret II "sone onto Jeffrey Baret of Cratfeld my neve",²⁷ and among many other enumerated holdings can be found

v^{xx} and xij acrys of lond in the Westgatefeld a part and sum in Mekilhorneygiserd
[Great Horningsheath] Litolhorneygiserd and Westele²⁸

which seem to correspond with clauses in the wills of both parents, and specifically that of John II's mother. There is also a bequest involving a property with a garden which is located in Punches Lane, which has a second garden assigned to another of John II's properties which is called the 'hert of the hop'. This might correspond with the property and gardens lying in Punches Lane next to a property of Roger Lardener that Geoffrey I bequeathes to his son John II.²⁹ Similarly John II gives to his principle heir

my voyd grownd with oute the Westegate where as my berne and duffhous sumtyme

states that he was paid 10s for robes for his office of 'justaur', indicating his ties with the abbey and particularly with the sacrist; BSERO A 6/1/6 p.5. His will of 1434 indicates that he lived in the same parish as the Barets, BSERO Osbern f.210b.

²⁵ As a widow the abbot may have had some involvement in the administration of her lands and property. Joan may also have had direct contact with the abbot of St. Edmund's over a matter of her religious experience and his ecclesiastical jurisdiction; see below section 6.iii.d.

²⁶ See above note 21; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.31.

²⁷ There is obviously the potential here for confusion as to whether William II or Geoffrey II is the nephew. The potential is greatly increased by Tymms who chooses to punctuate his edition and thus often imparts meaning upon the text. Gottfried, in his family tree of the Barets (*Bury St Edmunds* p.155), assumes that William II is the nephew and therefore Geoffrey II is John's brother; and consequently the pieces of the 'jigsaw' are manipulated beyond plausibility in order to fit around this assertion. See Appendix IV.

²⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.24.

²⁹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.31.

stood³⁰

which would seem to be the same patch of land containing the barn outside the Westgate that was part of Geoffrey I's endowment to his son John II, although apparently the barn had been pulled down since Geoffrey I's days. The 'hert of the hop' we learn later in the will is situated in Le Mustowe,³¹ and may well be the same building under a slightly different name as that identified by Geoffrey Baret I as the 'Inne at Herte', also located in Le Mustowe.

One can therefore reasonably assume that John Baret II was the son and heir of Geoffrey I and Joan Baret. As for the rest of his family, Baret tends to confuse the relationships of his kin in his characteristic enthusiasm for descriptive detail.³² As for his female kin the will is relatively straight forward. His sister Alice Whitwell was probably older than John II, as she had two children at least by the time her mother made her will in 1424; and she was almost certainly dead by 1463 as John Baret II's will only refers to her as the mother of his niece Jenete Whitwell, and nothing is left to her. Baret's niece Isabel, daughter of his elder brother William I, is also probably dead by 1463, as she is not mentioned at all in his will, and as he *does* remember three other nieces at considerable length, her absence can only be explained by her death.³³

His niece Jenete Whitwell is to have

hir dwellyng in a part of my hefd place terme of hire lyffe that is to sey I will *pat* she chese if sche will have the chambyr *pat* she hath loyn in *wilth* the drawght chambyr therto or ellys the chambyr abovyn the kechene with the drawgth chambyr longyng therto with the esement of the prevy longgyng thereto³⁴

indicating that she was living with Baret at the end of his life. This 'Jenete' is probably the same person as the 'Joan' daughter of Alice Whitwell mentioned in the will of John Baret II's mother Joan Baret, particularly given his bequest to her of the land she already holds which was given to Alice Whitwell by John's father Geoffrey I in 1416.³⁵ Jenete also receives access to other parts of John Baret II's chief property, including the chapel, the various gates and entrances to the property, the use of the kitchen, and the well and the privy in the yard. She is also to have

a keye of the grete gardeyn gate to go in whan she wille and hire *servaunth* and what ffrende she wille calle to hire and a place of the gardeyn assigned to hire for herbys and for woode to lye in

as well as a very long list of household possessions.³⁶ Jenete is also to receive for the term of her life Baret's property bought from John Notyngnam, in which Thomas Watton and John

³⁰ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.31.

³¹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.40.

³² See below, section 6.iii.f.

³³ Isabel was born between 1416 and 1424, before her sister Joan Cratfield *alias* Baret; see above note 27.

³⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.22. We also learn that Jenete had been in service with one Isabel Bussy of London, p.23.

³⁵ One of John Baret II's other nieces, Joan Cratfield *alias* Baret is also called 'Jonete' seemingly indiscriminately; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.32-3.

³⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.22-3, 25.

Sadeler reside;³⁷ after her death it is to pass into the possession of the heir to the patrimony. Jenete also receives Baret's copylands in the meadow at Babwell; and whoever occupies the lands, properties and goods that are given to this niece are to pay annually to the abbot of St. Edmund's 6s 8d, and are responsible for finding Baret's 'man and child' clothes from the wardrobe of John Baret II.

Baret refers to another niece, Katherine Drury, who receives a share in the lands that she and Jenete Whitwell already possess, as well as (along with her husband Thomas Drury) the ultimate inheritance of John Baret II's main patrimony if all the Baret heirs die out.³⁸ A third niece, Joan Cratfield *alias* Baret spinster, daughter of John Baret II's brother William of Cratfield I, receives accommodation in a tenement and garden in Punches Lane held of the sacrist of St. Edmund's, as well as a 10s pension from the occupier of Baret's chief patrimony.³⁹ If Joan prefers, however, she is to live in Baret's chief property

in the chambyr next the welle with a dore openyng in to the lane with esement of prevy be syde and esement in leeffull tyme to make hire mete in the chymeny and to warme hire *withinne* þe kechene and to have a part of the gardeyn with fre in comyng and out goyng to sette herbis and to fetcche hem whan nede is esement to the welle to drawe watyr as is necessarie⁴⁰

Joan is also to receive ten marks that John Baret II had from her 'brethren' and

certeyn obligacyonys of othir x marcs that Jeffrey Baret and Robert Baret owyn to me for hire by a composicion and accord maad a twix hem and me for a yeerly pencyon of xx s wiche that the seid Jeffrey and Robert shulde a payed to the seid Jone her sustir terme of hire lyf accordyng to here fadrys wil to whom I was executour⁴¹

This somewhat garbled exposition of a familial arrangement to provide for an elderly and unmarried female relative places Joan Cratfield firmly in the line of Baret's main heirs (that is, the children of his elder brother William I). The reference to her brothers Geoffrey II and Robert I establishes Joan's father as the nephew of John Baret II. The loss of the will of William Baret I that John Baret II was the executor for seriously hinders the process of reconstructing this family, particularly regarding William I's children. We know of the existence of Thomas I, Geoffrey II and Isabel from their grandparents' wills, but the youngest son Robert I and youngest daughter Joan Cratfield *alias* Baret only come to light in John Baret II's will. We only know that Robert I is one of William I's children because of the reference to him being one of Joan's brothers; and because in the line of succession to John Baret II's chief patrimony he and his heirs are to inherit after Geoffrey II's youngest son Thomas II and his heirs have died out.⁴²

³⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.34. The property is let to the tenants at 64s a year, although there is a rent of 2d payable to the pittance of St. Edmund's.

³⁸ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.26, 31. For more on the Drury family see above section 4.ii.

³⁹ Alternatively, instead of the 10s pension, the heir to the main patrimony can provide Joan with food and drink, "clothyng and beddyng, hosyn and shoes" for the rest of her life with a pension of 3s 4d; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.32.

⁴⁰ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.32.

⁴¹ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.32-3. Joan is also to receive a long list of household goods taken from Baret's properties.

⁴² Tymms *Bury Wills* p.25. The issue is confused by there being another Robert Baret II, the son of John Baret II's nephew Geoffrey II.

The male relations of the Baret family are somewhat more difficult to pin down than the female, mostly due to absent material (such as the will of John Baret II's brother William I) and the imprecise manner in which they are described in John Baret II's will. Neither of his parents are mentioned by name, although they are to be remembered in the course of various prayers and masses undertaken at Baret's behest.⁴³ Baret's chief heir was

William Baret sone onto Jeffrey Baret of Cratfeld my neve

and it is at this stage that the most confusion tends to creep into the family reconstruction. This phrase is vague as to whether it is William II or Geoffrey II that is the testator's nephew, but in order for the William II to be the nephew, one of two possibilities have to apply: Geoffrey II has to be another brother of John Baret II that has appeared in no other will, including those of his parents; or alternatively that Geoffrey II's father William I has to have been the uncle of John Baret II, rather than the brother that the latter calls him.⁴⁴ I am much more prepared to accept that John Baret II would call his great nephew William II 'neve' than he would vaguely call an uncle (William I) 'brother' as he does. Thus the chief heir to John Baret II's patrimony is two generations below him, which either indicates that Baret was quite aged,⁴⁵ or that William I was considerably older than him. William I was probably dead by 1463, given that he receives nothing from John II and that his grandchildren comprise the latter's heirs. Similarly, his eldest son Thomas I who comes to light in the wills of Geoffrey I and his wife Joan, does not appear in that of John Baret II, and so one must assume that *he* was dead. We might also infer that as John Baret II chose the heirs of Geoffrey II for his line of succession to the patrimony, and the alternatives he chose followed the line of male succession in strict and formal fashion, that Thomas I may have died without male issue. Geoffrey II of Cratfield and Robert I were still alive in 1463, but interestingly Baret does not favour them with the same attention or beneficence that he shows towards his nieces. Both are named as the father of potential heirs to the patrimony, but not as heirs themselves; and while Geoffrey II receives John Baret II's "silvyr harneysyd baselard", Robert I receives nothing at all from the testator directly.⁴⁶ It would seem therefore that John Baret II did not leave the bulk of his land and property to his great nephews because he had no nearer relative alive, but instead obviously *chose* to do so. His reasons for doing so may have been connected with his desire for perpetuation of the family status and lineage, and that by delivering the patrimony to the youngest generation of the family, John Baret II may have hoped that its endurance would be facilitated.⁴⁷

Gottfried in his family tree of the Barets provides Baret with two sons: an illegitimate son called John Aleyn, and a legitimate son called John.⁴⁸ The former 'child' is clearly an error on the part of Gottfried, as the assertion is made based upon the reference made by John Baret II to "John Aleyn my chyld".⁴⁹ It is probable that the reference is merely to a servant of Baret's,

⁴³ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.18, 28, 29, 30.

⁴⁴ From the wills of John Baret II's parents which do not describe the kin relationship of William I, it is possible that William I is the uncle of John Baret II; however the latter's will distinctly calls him a brother. And if William I were John Baret II's uncle, then Joan Cratfield and her brothers Geoffrey II and Robert I would not fit plausibly into the family tree.

⁴⁵ In fact at the time his will was drawn up John II was aged between 63 and 70 years old.

⁴⁶ That is, John Baret states that "if my executours wil rewarde Jeffrey Baret and Robert Baret or any othir persone with ony array or stuff of myn longyng to my body I graunte hem ful power and commytte it to there discrecyon"; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.34, 35. It is assumed that the Robert intended here is Robert I, and not Robert II, although it is not precisely clear.

⁴⁷ See below section 6.iii.f.

⁴⁸ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.155.

⁴⁹ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.34.

especially given its context within a series of bequests made to named and unnamed servants. The suggestion that Baret had a legitimate son may have arisen from a misreading on Gottfried's part of the evidence he was dealing with. Using the 1433 *hadgovel* rental,⁵⁰ Gottfried understands the reference to John Baret II's lay office within St. Edmund's (*thesaurius et camerarius*) as a reference to John II's son John, rendering the latter "effectively treasurer of the abbey hoard, one of the most powerful positions in the monastery".⁵¹ Similarly he refers to this John as living in a property called the Exchequer, the property the *hadgovel* list assigns to John Baret II,⁵² but presumably does not see any inconsistency with a vaulted obediendary of St. Edmund's living in a townhouse among the laity. Essentially Gottfried has assumed that the office held by the John Baret listed in the 1433 rental was monastic, rather than lay, and so in effect invented a son for John Baret II. The problem is, Gottfried plausibly argues that John Baret II does not mention any legitimate children in his will because the latter is a member of the convent of St. Edmund's, and so not eligible to inherit land and property.⁵³ While this is true, given the nature of many of John Baret II's personal bequests, I consider it highly unlikely that he would have made no mention at all to a son in his will if he had one, and indeed no bequests of cash, goods or personally significant items are made to anyone acknowledged as a child.

Thomas II, perhaps as the youngest son in the senior Baret line, or perhaps from some particular bond between them, is singled out by John Baret II from his siblings by making him a gift of "my maseer with a beend and a foot of silvir and ovir gilt".⁵⁴

We are fortunate in the survival of the will of William II made in 1502.⁵⁵ William II was to be buried "in Seynt Mary chirche by the grave of John Baret myn unkell",⁵⁶ and here again the suggestion is that the identification of familial relationships is somewhat vague: that John Baret II was in fact the great uncle of William II. It may even have been the case that William II deliberately closed the generation gap between himself and his great benefactor by referring to him as uncle, as they may have shared a close personal relationship which had caused the patrimony to pass to William II in the first place. On the other hand, although William II was a substantial townsman of Bury in his own right by the time of his death, he may have wished to have been as closely associated with John Baret II as possible in response to the reputation and memory that the latter enjoyed in the town. It is possible that he shared John Baret II's concern with the survival of the family among burghal, and by the early 16th century, gentry society. William II also refers to "Geoffrey Baret my ffader" who is to be remembered in the prayers of a priest sent to Rome.⁵⁷ That a substantial branch of the Baret family remained in Cratfield after Geoffrey I's move to Bury St Edmunds is further suggested by William II's priest being required to "make up a yeer *servyse* at Cratfield" for his father's soul on his return from Rome.

William II's will differs greatly from that of John Baret II primarily in its lack of detail. He

⁵⁰ BL. Harley 58; unfortunately Gottfried once again provides no folio reference, but he was probably referring to f.25.

⁵¹ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.157.

⁵² Gibson, G.M. *Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 1989) p.72.

⁵³ Gottfried *Bury St Edmunds* p.157. Chronologically it may have been difficult for Baret to have a son old enough to act as treasurer for St Edmund's in 1433.

⁵⁴ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.35.

⁵⁵ BSERO Pye f.154; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.93-5.

⁵⁶ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.93.

⁵⁷ Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.93-4.

involves himself in a local concern by contributing 10s to the building of a new steeple for St. Edmund's church, thus at the same time indicating the ever present links that he, as a member of Bury's secular elite, maintained with the monastery.⁵⁸ The religious recipients of his charity also reveal a marked difference from all those favoured by Geoffrey I and his wife and John Baret II: only the house of Franciscans at Babwell receive a gift, and then it is in return for a specific service rather than the more general call to be remembered in prayers.⁵⁹ As for the patrimony, and all William II's other holdings come to that, everything is demised on Anne his wife. She and her heirs are to have all her husband's land and property in Cratfield and Linstead, as well as his three adjacent tenements in the Great Market of Bury with their appurtenances. Anne is also to receive all of William II's other holdings in Suffolk and Norfolk

to dispose in paying of my dettes performing this my testament and last will and to do for my soule and all my ffrendes soules that I m bounde to pray fore as she shall thynke best to the most plesur of God

In other words the entire patrimony of Geoffrey I, as enlarged by his wife Joan and their son John Baret II, is placed in the hands of William II's wife. Like his great uncle, William II had no children, but unlike his benefactor, he chose not to stipulate a long series of contingencies to keep the patrimony intact within a male line of the family. The fate of Geoffrey Baret I's patrimony can be traced as far as the will of William II's wife Anne, made in 1504.⁶⁰ Like her husband, John II and Geoffrey I and his wife, Anne's high altar bequest is made to St. Mary's; and in the same church she endows a twenty year chantry at the Resurrection altar for her soul, and the souls of her husband, her parents, Thomas Lytyll and John Appylby.⁶¹ £6 is bequeathed to the Babwell friars for a glass window or 'twayne'; and she also contributes £10 to the "newe werk at Seynt Jamys churches ende".⁶² The chantry is to be paid for by the sale of lands and property in Watton, which may have been part of the estate of her family as the Baret material does not suggest that they had holdings there.⁶³ After the twenty years of the chantry have passed, Anne's executors are to purchase lands to add to those in Watton to bring the total to the value of eleven marks, from which various charities are to benefit each year.⁶⁴ Twenty feoffees are to administer the lands, and provision is made (remarkably similar to the mechanisms instituted to perpetuate John Smyth II's feoffments)

⁵⁸ An association further suggested by the participation of William Codenham abbot of St. Edmund's as supervisor of the will; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.94-5.

⁵⁹ The friars are to say a "trentall of Seynt Gregory" for William II's soul; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.94.

⁶⁰ BSERO Pye f.162b; Tymms *Bury Wills* pp.95-9.

⁶¹ The Resurrection altar seems to have had particular significance for Anne Baret, as she orders her executors to buy a new massbook, and arrange for curtains, altar cloths and chalice to be kept there; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.96. The chantry is to be undertaken by Anne's godson Edmund Goodbody when he becomes a priest, after he has been found to school with her goods; p.97. Thomas Lytyll was a Bury butcher who died in 1478, leaving a will suggesting considerable wealth and property, BSERO Hawlee f.253; he also held land in the Westfield of Bury next to a parcel enfeoffed by Margaret Odeham to the town, BSERO H 1/2/1 *Jankyn Smyth's Book*. John Appylby died in 1479, and in his will he is styled 'gentleman'. Among his holdings is a tenement in Hatter Street next to a property of Clement Drury, BSERO Hawlee f.289.

⁶² Tymms *Bury Wills* p.95. Like her husband, Anne leaves five marks to the building of the new steeple of St. Edmund's; p.97.

⁶³ Watton is in Norfolk approximately ten miles northeast of Thetford; it is not near to the Baret lands in east Suffolk.

⁶⁴ The prisoners of the gaol, presumably in Bury, are to have four marks at four times in the year; while 40s each year is to be given to poor scholars "to help them to ther exibicion and lernyng tho that be good and honest". Of the residue of the eleven marks, Anne wills that "a part be gevyn to poore maydyns that be honest and good at ther maryage and a parte to be spent in hy weyys"; Tymms *Bury Wills* p.96.

to renew them when twelve of their number are dead. Indeed the features of Anne Baret's will dealing with the administration of this enfeoffment closely resemble clauses in John Baret II's will, and there are similarities besides this.

The Baret patrimony is the last item to be dealt with in Anne's will, and comes after a long list of bequests of large cash sums and personal belongings to individuals and churches, and is dealt with in an almost peremptory manner:

Item I wyll all my tenementes barnys gardeyns and closys that I have *within* the town of Bury Seynt Edmund shall ben sold to the best price thei canne be my executours for to perform thys myn testament and last wyll⁶⁵

Apart from this clause, Anne stipulates that John Plandon has first refusal of a house in Garlond Street for which he is to pay £40. The residue of her moveable goods and jewellery are to be sold for the fulfilling of the will. She requires her executors to "perform my husband Baretty's wyll that ys for to do"; and as with the will of her husband the abbot of St. Edmund's is to act as supervisor. In this way the Baret patrimony was dissipated.

⁶⁵ Tymms *Bury Wills* p.98.

Appendix V: John Baret II's chantry chapel and alterations to St. Mary's church.

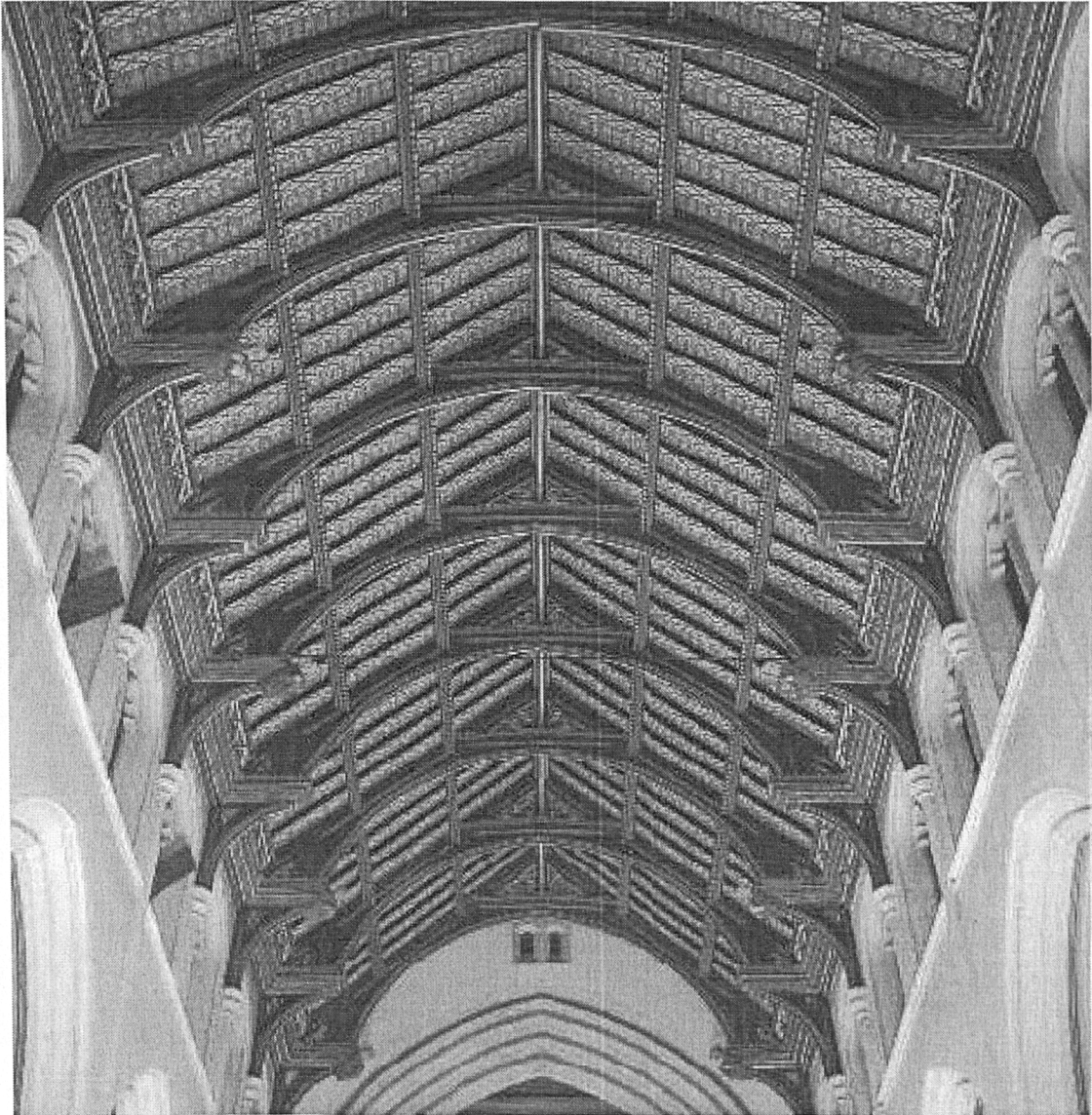


Figure 5.3(a) John Baret II's hammer beam angels in St. Mary's Church



Figure 5.3(b) John Baret II's hammer beam angels (detail)



Figure 5.4(a) Ceiling of Lady Chapel of St. Mary's Church, above tomb of John Baret II



Figure 5.4(b) Detail from Lady Chapel ceiling showing the SS collar and interlocking initials

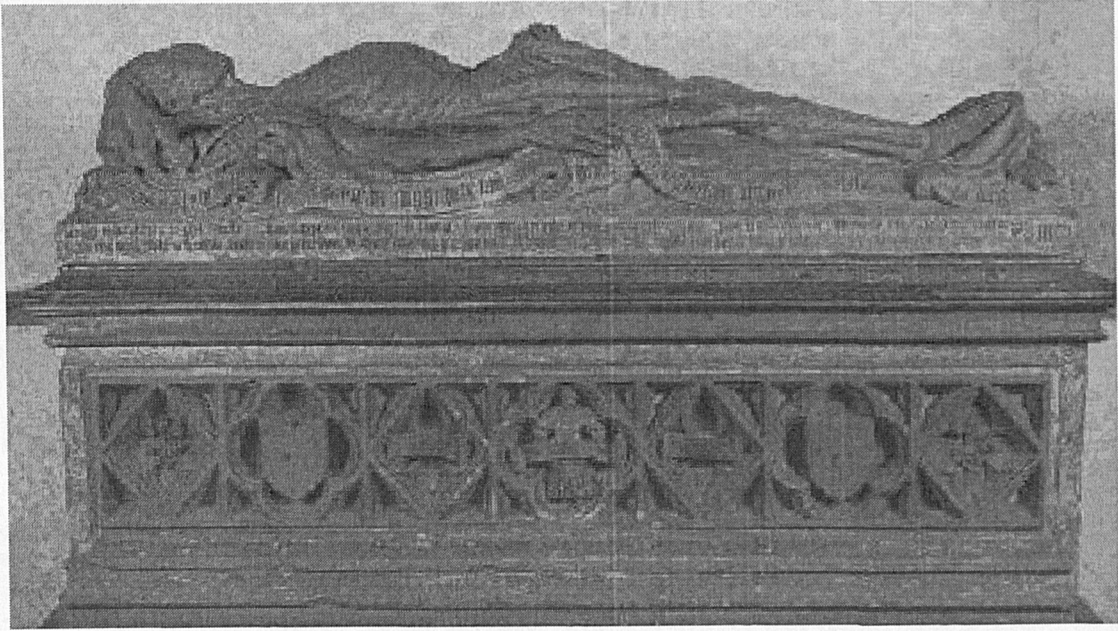


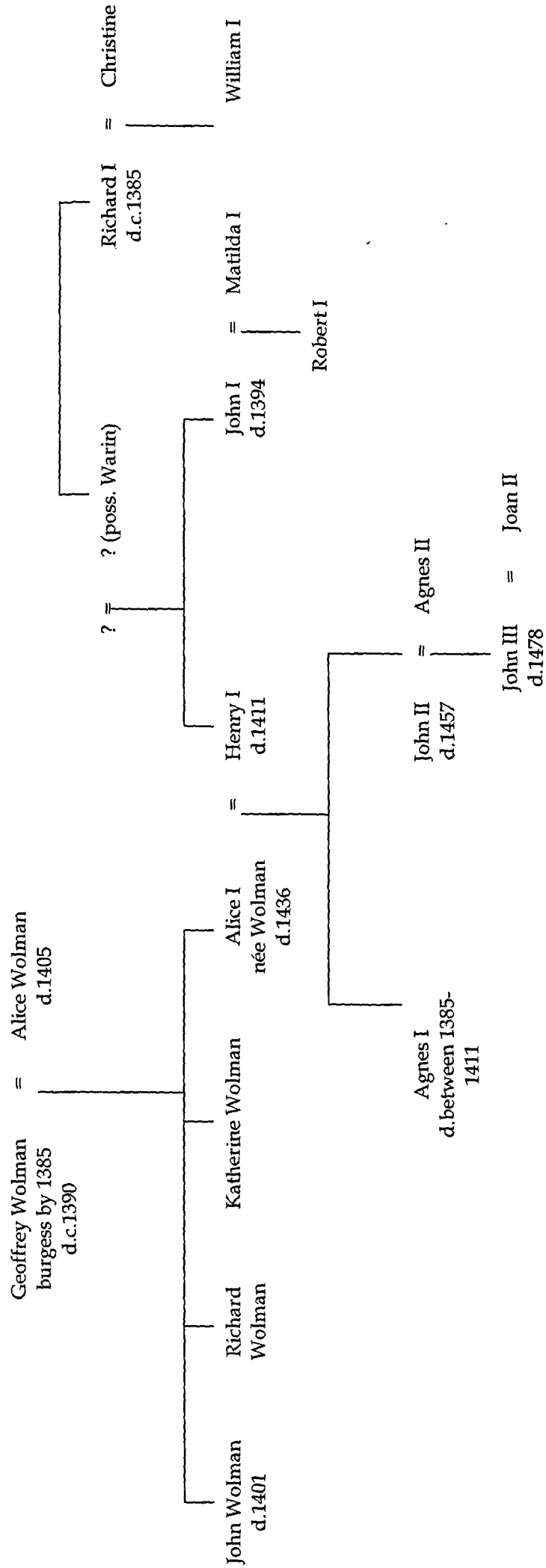
Figure 5.5(a) John Baret II's tomb in the Lady Chapel of St. Mary's Church

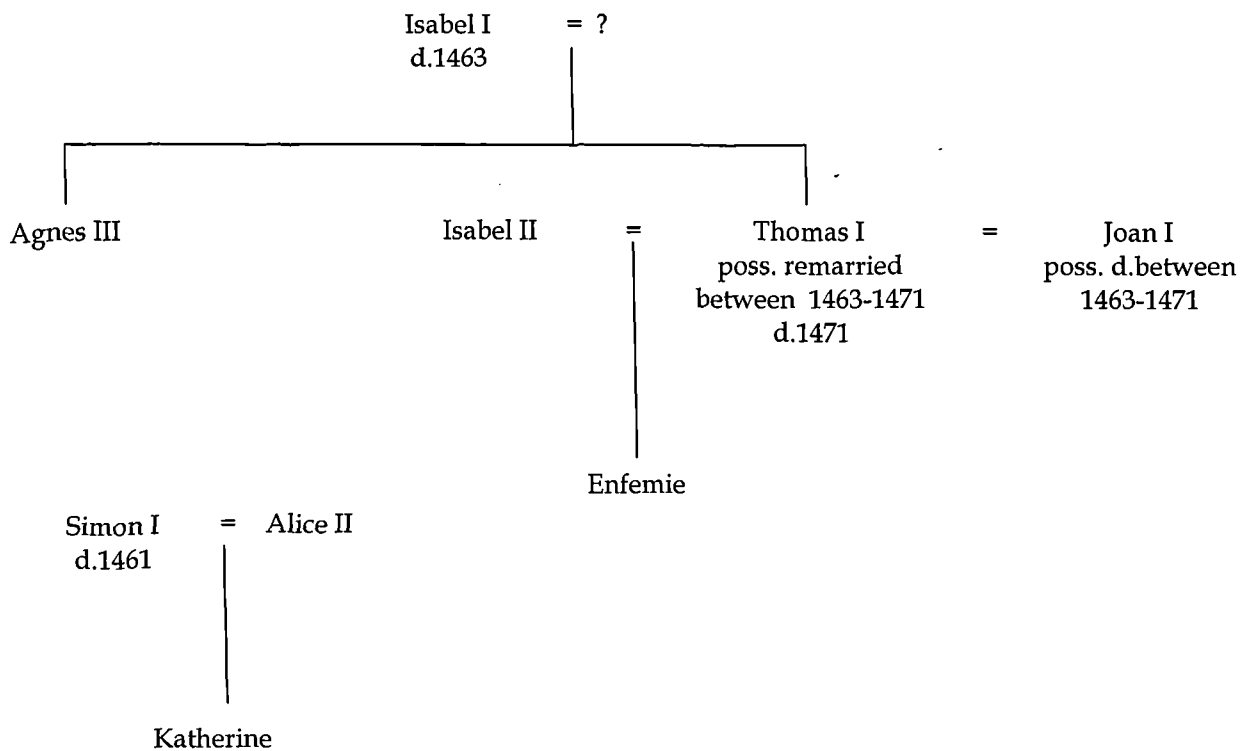


Figure 5.5(b) Detail from John Baret II's tomb, central panel

Appendix VI: The Chapmans

a: The Chapmans of Bury St Edmunds.





b: Other Chapmans.

Simon: in 1341 was one of 47 accused of assault and riot in Mildenhall. The abbot of St. Edmund's, as lord of Mildenhall, had held a Leet court which had found Margaret Claver brewster of Mildenhall and other brewsters guilty of abusing the assize, and ordered them to be punished according to custom by the 'judgement of the tumbrel'. The abbot's bailiffs appointed Thomas Brampton and Robert Alcomberi to execute the judgement, but they were prevented from doing so by the accused, and the bailiffs were beaten by an armed 'gang of evil-doers'.¹

Roger: appears as a recipient in the will of William Methewold of Bury in 1415;² held a property in Le Mustowe in 1436;³ and died intestate in 1439.⁴

Thomas: recipient in will of William Methewold in 1415;⁵ died in 1439.⁶

John: died 1430.⁷

Helen: of Bury St Edmunds died in 1448.⁸

¹ CPR 1340-3 p.316. The 47 accused included a chaplain, an individual from Ereswell and someone from Berton.

² BSERO Osbern f.141b.

³ BSERO Osbern f.224.

⁴ BSERO Osbern f.240b. His goods were administered by Richard Berlyng and John Chapman, an unknown relation but possibly John II.

⁵ BSERO Osbern f.141b.

⁶ BSERO Osbern f.241. His executors included Richard Berlyng and John Chapman, an unknown relation but possibly John II.

⁷ See above section 4.ii.b note 140.

John: died 1450.⁹

Thomas: witness to the 1473 will of John Clynton saddler of Bury St Edmunds.¹⁰

Richard II and wife Alice III.¹¹

William II: of Sudbury 1484, the payment of a debt of £96 13s 4d owed to William Chapman II by William Clopton is to form part of an indentured property transfer involving holdings in Cavenham and Penthowe.¹²

Amy: of Rickinghall, testator in 1485.¹³

⁸ BSERO Hawlee f.24. She left 40d to the high altar of St. James' and cash to the St. Mary's priest of the same church.

⁹ BSERO Hawlee f.32b. See above section 4.ii.b note 140. His goods were administered by his wife Beatrix.

¹⁰ BSERO Hawlee f.173b.

¹¹ See above section 4.ii.b note 142.

¹² CCR 1476-85 p.403.

¹³ BSERO Hervey f.414. She wishes to be buried in the churchyard of St. Mary's in Rickinghall, the high altar of which receives 3s 4d; and she leaves cash to the nuns, Dominican and Augustinian friars at Thetford as well as the Franciscans of Babwell. She owns land near to the gildhall in Rickinghall.

Appendix VII: Clergy of Bury St Edmunds

Name		Year	Occupation
Ralph	Stanton	1354	St. Mary priest of St. James'
John	North	1354-6	Sacrist of St. Mary's
William	Stanton	1354	St. Mary priest of St. Mary's
John	Moriel	1356	Parish priest of St. Mary's
Robert		1361	Parish priest of St. James'
John		1361	Chaplain of St. Saviours hospital
John		c.1362	Clerk of St. James'
Walter	Tottington	1385-7	Master of St. Saviour's hospital
John	Glover	1389	Chaplain of the parish priest of St. Mary's
Nicholas	Fylby	1391	Chaplain/master of St. Nicholas hospital
William	Hardman	1391	St. Mary priest of St. James'
Nicholas	Fylby	1391	Chaplain/master of St Nicholas' hospital
John		1394	Chaplain of St. James'
James		1396	Parish priest of St. Mary's
Richard		1397-8	Sacrist of St. James'
Richard		1398	Chaplain of Maison Dieu hospital
William	L...ham	1400	Parish priest: possibly of St. James'
James		1402-3	Parish priest of St. Mary's
Walter		1402	Chaplain of St. Peter's hospital
John	Walsingham	1402	Parish priest
John	Glover	1406	St. Mary priest of St. Mary's
John	Brende	1407	Sacrist of St. James'
John	Myldenhale	1409	Sacrist of St. Mary's
James	Browster	1418	Chaplain of the Dusse gild
Walter	Browster	1418	Chaplain of the Dusse gild
Thomas	Bover	1420	Chaplain of St. James'
John	Clerk	1422	Clerk of St. Mary's
John	Norwyck	1422	Priest of St. Mary's
William	Sewar	1425	Chaplain of St. Saviours hospital
John	Toft	1429-33	St. Mary priest of St. James'
John	Charlys	1432	Chaplain of St. Saviour's hospital
John	Charlys	1436-44	Master of St. Saviour's hospital
John	Sperlyng	1436	Sacrist of St. Mary's
Thomas	Cranewys	1436	Chaplain of St. Mary's
John	Hardhed	1440	Chaplain of St. Laurence altar
John	Harlowe	1444-74	Master of St. Saviour's hospital
William	Feg	1447-59	St. Mary priest of St. Mary's
Lawrence	Nychol	1448	Master of St. Peter's hospital
William	Campton	1454-68	Parish priest of St. James'
Thomas	Cranewys	1457-65	Parish priest of St. Mary's
Henry	Hardman	1458-65	St. Mary priest of St. James'
John	Burbrygg	1467	Chaplain of Southgate
John	Estwyk	1468	Parish priest of St. Mary's
John	Roughton	1468	St. Mary and Martin priest of St. Mary's
Edmund	Caster	1471	Chaplain of St. John ad Montem
William	Matthew	1475-80	Parish priest of St. Mary's
John	Sygo	1478-9	Parish priest of St. James'
Richard	Froste	1479	St. Mary and Martin priest of St. Mary's

William	Sygo	1479	Parish priest of St. James'
Godwin	Shipdam	c.1480	Priest of St. Thomas altar in St. James'
John	Burbrygg	1481	Warden of hospital of St. John
John	Frenshe	Late 15 th c.	Priest, master & keeper of St. Peter's hospital

Table 3.10: *Secular and parochial clergy and assistants in Bury St Edmunds c.1346-1493.*¹⁴

¹⁴ The table represents the secular clergy of Bury where a position can be identified: in other words clergy entitled 'chaplain', 'priest' or 'clerk' without any other designation have been excluded. As many of the listed individuals were prominent inhabitants of Bury, they appear in many different documents.

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C 47/46/402 (a,b) Corpus Christi fraternity of St. Mary's
C 47/46/403 St. Anne gild
C 47/46/404 (a,b) St. Botolph gild of St. James' church
C 47/46/405 St. Christopher fraternity
C 47/46/406 Purification gild (Candlemas Gild)
C 47/46/407 Gild of the Passion of St. Edmund
C 47/46/408 St. Edmund fraternity
C 47/46/409 St. George fraternity of St. Edmund's
C 47/46/410 St. James' gild
C 47/46/411 St. John the Baptist fraternity of St. Edmund's
C 47/46/412 St. John the Baptist gild of St. James' church
C 47/46/413 St. Margaret gild
C 47/46/414 St. Mary Magdalen gild
C 47/46/415 (a,b) St. Nicholas gild of St. Mary's church
C 47/46/416 St. Peter gild of St. Mary's church
C 47/46/417 (a,b) Fraternity of the Clerks of Glemsford

Cavenham

C 47/46/418 St. Andrew fraternity
C 47/46/419 St. Mary fraternity
C 47/46/420 Holy Trinity fraternity

Gazeley

C 47/46/421 All Saints fraternity
C 47/46/422 St. James fraternity
C 47/46/423 St. Margaret fraternity

Herringswell

C 47/46/424 St. Ethelbert gild
C 47/46/425 St. Peter gild

Icklingham

C 47/46/426 Holy Cross gild
C 47/46/427 St. James gild

Kentford

C 47/46/428 St. John the Baptist gild

Lawshall

C 47/46/430 St. Peter fraternity

Stradishall

C 47/46/432 St. Margaret fraternity

Tuddenham

C 47/46/433 St. John the Baptist gild
C 47/46/434 Holy Trinity gild

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