

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



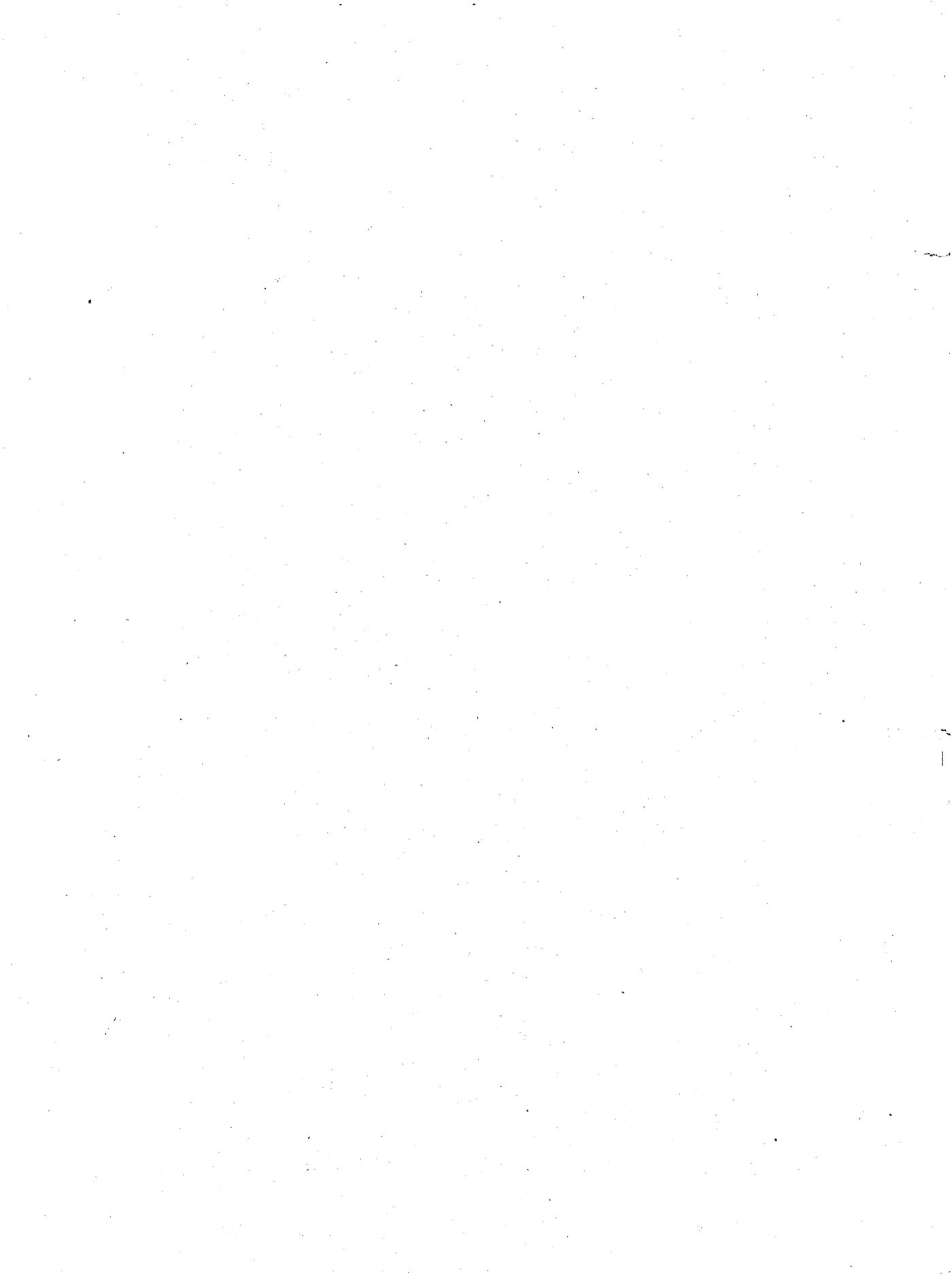
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DEIGHTON BELL

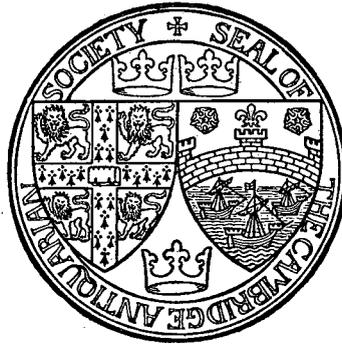
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A MEDIEVAL SQUABBLE

J. F. WILLIAMS

CLOSELY associated with Great St Mary's Church, there was from the end of the thirteenth century a guild known as the 'Gild of St Mary'. Though it is sometimes referred to as the guild of the merchants of St Mary, in all probability it was solely a religious guild.¹ It consisted of an indefinite number of brethren and sisters, and its affairs were controlled by an alderman and three or four 'masters', supported by chaplains, summoners and collectors. In answer to the royal writ issued to all guilds in 1388, the date of its foundation was stated to have been 1379,² though a guild of St Mary is known to have been in existence as far back as 1285 or even earlier. It is possible that the guild, like so many others, fell into abeyance during the period of the Black Death, and was resuscitated later in 1379. It was in good repute and most of the leading burgesses of the town seem to have belonged to it, and it apparently remained in continuous existence until the suppression of all guilds and chantries in 1547.

In connexion with this guild there is in the treasury of Queens' College a curious document which throws an interesting sidelight on life in medieval Cambridge. It is a parchment deed, drawn up in the usual letters patent style, and it records the facts of an incident which at the time seems to have caused a considerable stir in town circles. It takes the form of a certificate addressed by the mayor and burgesses of Cambridge, testifying to the truth of certain statements therein related. It is dated 24 February, 4 Edward IV (1465), and to it no less than forty-six seals were originally attached on fifteen tags. At the present day only fourteen of these seals are intact, and of the rest merely an indication of their presence or a few broken fragments remain. They are all of them quite small except the first (now lost), which was that of the mayoralty of Cambridge. The parchment is mutilated in parts, and being much faded is in places difficult to read.

The document begins by setting out in full the names of thirty burgesses who issue the document and vouch for the truth of the facts which follow. They state the existence of a fraternity or guild in the parish of 'Our Lady-beside-the-market' founded in the worship of God, of our Lady, St James and St Christopher, 'for to fynde wyndyng shetes unto all pore folk, in special unto straungers that beth not of power for to be buried with ther own goods'. This emphasizes the charitable nature of the guild, which as Miss Bateson pointed out was by no means a trade guild.

They go on to state that 'at that tyme' (apparently shortly before 1465 when the

¹ For a full account of the guild see *Cambridge Guild Records*, Mary Bateson: C.A. octavo series, no. xxxix (1903).

² See H. F. Westlake, *Parish Gilds of Mediaeval England* (1919), p. 139.

deed was drawn up), Robert Garland, draper, was the alderman of the guild, and Robert Palmer and Custance his wife were members. This Robert Palmer 'by the help and favoure of his freendes'; had been chosen to be one of the wardens, but unfortunately when the time came for him to present his year's account he was not able 'to deliver his part of the goods of the seid gylde that were in his hands', amounting to the sum of 19s., whereupon Robert Garland, the alderman, and the masters of the guild sued Palmer in the mayor's court. On his appearance there he seems, 'of malice tofore the maier', to have applied for surety of peace from the alderman and all the members of the guild, apparently counterfeiting alarm. The mayor, however, urged him to forgo this, considering that Palmer was in no danger of bodily harm, though possibly of malice, and issued the surety only against Garland, and Palmer found himself in prison for the debt.

His wife then came to the rescue and by laying in pledge with John Say, a fellow member of the guild, 'a gowne of murrey furred with conies grey', obtained the 19s. and Palmer was released from prison. Later on Say naturally wanted the pledge redeemed, but Palmer refused to do this, and after 'many and grete dilayes', Say was forced to take action in the Chancellor's court¹ 'by fore ye Maier and John Parmenter at that tyme beyng the Chaunceller's Commissarye'. The gown was officially valued and sold, and Say received back the sum that he had advanced, and the overplus was delivered to Palmer by the officers of the court. Palmer immediately denied the justice of this and countered by accusing Garland in the King's court of having 'spoyled hym of a gowne with a certein summe of money in the trayne of the same gowne, knytte in a kerchief'. What the result of the case was is not stated, and we are left in the air.

Obviously the document was drawn up in defence of Garland and the guild, and (after the examination of twelve other burgesses, whose names are given) the concluding clauses are as follows:

for the more credence to be given to the present writing, I, Robert Coope, Mayor of the town of Cambridge have...duly examined [12 burgesses, named] and they have deposed upon a book that all writing above rehearsed is good and true. In witness whereof to this our present writing, as well the seal of the office of the mayoralty of the Town of Cambridge as the seal of all other persons above rehearsed severally are set, in witness of the premises and unto the declaration of the truth. Written at Cambridge the 24 day of February, the year of the reign of King Edward the 4th, after the conquest of England the fourth.

It may have been a storm in a teacup, but it certainly seems to have created quite a stir in municipal circles to bring forth such a fully attested document as this. Though why it has been preserved in the Queens' treasury must remain a mystery.

¹ For the Chancellor's court see Arthur Gray, *The Town of Cambridge*, p. 57.

APPENDIX

The names of the thirty burgesses who issue the writ

John Erlyche	Thomas Bradwey
Thomas Blakeman	John Bedford
Thomas Rege, weaver	John Smyth, wexchaundeler
John Sayer	Richard Brightridge
William Herryes	William Tanner
William Snowe	Herry Denyson
Thomas Deben	John Curteys
Robert Melford	William Stanbury
John Wareyner	John Joyner
William Cooke, draper	William Halley
John Cel. (?)	Robert Sexon
William Castelford	Richard Hilderston
John Bere	John Huchinn
Richard Smyth	Richard Squyer
William Smyth, mercer	Thomas Hakelete

The names of the twelve other burgesses examined by the mayor

William Roger	Thomas Diche
John Cooke (?) summoner	William Godfrey
William Lolworth	Robert Gravele
William Tomas	William Rouncy
John Hayward	Robert Essex
Thomas Mast	John Trumpyngton

Seals

Tag

1. A large seal 1 in. diameter, now lost (the town seal)	1
2. Fragment: fragment: lost: complete, but illegible	4
3. Broken (a shield): complete (W): broken: broken	4
4. Nearly complete: half only (T): lost: fragment	4
5. Complete (? pelican): complete (garb): fragment	3
6. Broken (? pelican): complete (I): fragment	3
7. Lost: fragment: fragment (H)	3
8. Fragment: fragment: fragment: fragment	4
9. Half only: broken (I): complete, but indistinct	3
10. Complete: complete (animal): complete (fleur-de-lys)	3
11. Complete (? a cup): complete (W): lost	3
12. Broken (R): fragment: lost	3
13. Lost: fragment: lost: fragment	4
14. Complete (rose): lost	2
15. Complete (°): broken and indistinct	2

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