



The church of St John the Baptist, Butley (photo by Richard Quarrell)

One will, that of John Strik dated 1453, describes the two Butley gilds as ‘*of ancient foundation*’. So the evidence from wills is that these gilds existed from 1449 to 1473, a mere 23 years, although ‘*ancient foundation*’ suggests that they went back before the birth of John Strik. Most likely they were of late 13th century foundation. The need for gilds did not end in 1473, although pressure for their social activities, such as feasts and ales, to be held somewhere other than the parish church may date from around that time. Perhaps funds could not be raised for a gildhall and the gilds ceased to function. In 1484 a Butley parishioner asked to be made a ‘*brother of the chapterhouse of Butley (Priory), and the reward they shall have I put to the discretion of Alice, my wife, she to reward them as she thinketh best for my soul and hers*’. This sounds like a provision for prayers for the souls of the deceased and his wife in the Priory, replacing the gild ceremonies in and around the parish church. The Priory would certainly have the facilities for the secular practices of gilds, so perhaps Butley Priory did just that for a while. However the end of requests for membership of the fraternity after 1484 suggests that this also came to an end about this time.

Bawdsey

There seems to have been only one gild in Bawdsey, dedicated to St Anne. This gild is mentioned in three wills, between 1447 and 1512.

Orford

The gild of St John the Baptist

Bequests to one Orford gild, dedicated to St John the Baptist, appear in wills between 1426 and 1495. However, apart from the earliest will, that of John Osborn, rector of Sudbourne and Orford, the others date from 1482. They are dated 1482, 1487, 1489, 1490 and 1495, the latter also being that of a rector of the two parishes, William Dakke. We know that there was a statue of St John the Baptist in the Lady Chapel of Orford church (John Freer, in his will of 1520, asked to be ‘*buried in the chapel of Our Lady within the parish church of Orford before St John the Baptist*’), so it might be presumed that the gild would hold its services there. However there was a separate chapel of St John the Baptist in Orford which may have been used by the gild. Money and property were left to the chapel in nine wills between 1426 and 1531. The chapel was associated with, or part of, a ‘hospital’ of St John the Baptist, one of two hospitals in Orford². It is tempting to think that the