

Turmoil in a Tudor town Orford and its 1579 Charter

The beginning of the troubles

The new charter obtained by the town in 1579 enhanced the previous charters, but why was it required by the burgesses at this time? The seeds of the disputes between Lord Willoughby of Parham and the townsfolk of Orford are explained in Chapter Two of Dairmaid MacCulloch's *Suffolk and the Tudors*.

William, Lord Willoughby of Eresby, died in 1526 and a bitter family dispute erupted between the potential heirs. Willoughby's brother, Sir Christopher, was the heir apparent, but the childless peer remarried after his wife's death and had a daughter, Katherine, with Mary de Salinas, one of Queen Katherine's Spanish ladies-in-waiting. Sir Christopher's case was legally strong, but Mary could count on the Queen to press her case with Wolsey.

In 1529 Sir Christopher staked his claim to Orford, but was met with resistance from the townsfolk who were favourable to Lady Willoughby. The matter was settled in Star Chamber in 1531 and by an Act of Parliament five years later. By this time Sir Christopher's son, William, later Lord Willoughby of Parham, was in possession of Orford. It would appear that he began to exact revenge for the favour given to Lady Katherine by the town. A ship named the *Katherine Willoughby* was built for the King's fleet in 1532, presumably named for Lady Katherine and showing the Queen still had some influence within the Realm not long before the annulment of her marriage to Henry.

There were disputes between the townsfolk of

Orford and Willoughby within a short while after he became the lord of Orford Manor in about 1536. Depositions were taken from local men and others who knew Orford well in 1540 concerning fishing rights and shackle. One of these was Thomas Spicer, born in Hollesley in 1507. The former issue was exacerbated by the narrowing of the river near Havergate Island probably due to silting, sea level changes and storm damage. Fewer stall boats could be accommodated, and this led to a dispute with William Forth of Butley, who purchased the Priory lands and the fishing rights pertaining to them in 1546.

Although local fishermen gave evidence in 1540 they seemed to accept that it was not possible to have as many stall boats in the river as in the past. What did concern them was that Willoughby was preventing them from running their sheep, after the harvest was taken, on certain fields as they had previously done. The practice was known as shackle. Clearly the dispute had begun before 1540 because a number of the burgesses, led by the butcher Robert Pawling, had sold articles from the church to finance their case, that is 'to maintain the liberties of Orford' against Willoughby. Although some, such as the 70 year-old Orford yeoman John Garnon objected, a 30 cwt bell was sold to a London salter for 20 shillings a hundredweight, and a silver-gilt cross and chalice were also parted with for a further £20 or more.

Acting for Willoughby was his bailiff Thomas Spicer, who, stirred up the inhabitants over the next 15 years to such an extent that he was physically attacked and even marched to Melton Gaol during