

**DEPOSITIONS TAKEN BEFORE THE  
MAYOR & ALDERMEN OF  
NORWICH, 1549-1567; EXTRACTS  
FROM THE COURT BOOKS OF THE  
CITY OF NORWICH, 1666-1688**

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Depositions Taken before the Mayor & Aldermen of Norwich, 1549-1567; Extracts from the Court Books of the City of Norwich, 1666-1688 by Walter Rye

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**WALTER RYE**

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DEPOSITIONS TAKEN BEFORE  
THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN OF NORWICH,  
1549—1567.

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EXTRACTS FROM THE  
COURT BOOKS OF THE CITY OF NORWICH,  
1666—1688.

Norwich, Eng.

DEPOSITIONS

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1549—1567.

EXTRACTS

FROM THE

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EDITED BY

WALTER RYE.

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## Early Depositions taken before the Mayor and Aldermen of Norwich.

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THESE depositions before 1549 were from time to time entered on the Court Books (*see* specimens in Appendix), but at that date a separate book was begun. The entries in it do not run in strict sequence of date but are of very great interest, and put before us the life led, both in city and county, in a very vivid way. My attention was drawn to them by the City Archivist, Mr. J. C. Tingey, F.S.A., to whose energy and ability I have been indebted on this and many other occasions.

Possibly the entries of the greatest interest are those relating to Kett's Rebellion. Some few of them have been already printed in the Rev. F. W. Russell's excellent account of *Kett's Rebellion in Norfolk*, 1859, pp. 162-3.

Shortly after the rebellion, and before Kett was executed, one man said that before Kett should be hanged it should cost a thousand men's lives (p. 19); another, that he did well in keeping Kett's camp, as he thought nothing but well of him, and that he wished to see a new day for such as he was (p. 19). After Kett's execution, two men threatened that they would have no more a lying (down) camp, but a running camp.

The exposure of Warwick's badge, the ragged staff, on the doors of various prominent citizens seems to have given great offence, and Alderman Bacon was especially picked out for obloquy. In February, 1549-50, it was said that there were over forty people much offended by this retention of the badge—"it was not meet that there should be more king's arms than one," an obvious suggestion that Warwick's ambition was to assume kingly power. Two or three country men were looking up at Kett's body as it swung from the castle, and one said, "O Kett, God have mercy on thy soul," and hoped that the King and Council would allow the body to be taken down, and not "hanged up for winter store."

Prophecies were rife: for example, in February an Earlham man said that 500 of the Mousehold men had gone to the Great Turk, but would be back again by Midsummer.

In the following June a weaver prophesied as hot a summer as ever was, and as evil and busy a one as the last summer was. Another weaver spoke of pulling down the Warwick arms, and said he had no thanks for his labour and coming down here to suppress the rebellion; while yet another, speaking to a friend, remembered it was a merry world when they were out in Mushold Wood eating mutton.<sup>1</sup>

A year later (in June, 5 Edw. VI.) a Ranworth man volunteered a statement that those who were slain on Mousehold in the commotion time were honest men, and so was Robert Kett (p. 25).

<sup>1</sup> It will be remembered that the rebels took many sheep from Mr. Pratt of Ryston, and left their skins and the following rhyme behind them:—

"Mr. Pratt, your sheep are very fat,  
And we thank *you* for that.

We have left you the skins to pay your lady's pins,  
And you must thank *us* for that!"



An interesting little bit of description can be gathered from the entries on p. 31, when a smith tells how one Thomas Keteringham, had six horses being pastured on Mousehold at the time of the "conflict," all of which were lost or slain—one of them upon the heath, another above the limekilns, the two blind horses being seen lying dead.

The "conflict" or "commotion" long proved a date by which occurrences were remembered (*see* pp. 30, 40, etc.).

The enclosures, which played so important a part in Kett's Rebellion, still rankled in men's minds in May, 6 Edw. VI., when one man who was drinking with others at the Cross Keys in "St. John's upon the Hill" (St. John Timberhill) vowed that if the Town Close were not thrown open in four days, he would be one of eight who would do it, whereupon another of the company pointed out that two pairs of gallows had recently been erected at Beccles, and, as I read it, hinted that they were for a fellow who had put down a gate and a fence of a dyke, but that another made light of it.

An Englishman, in 7 Edw. VI., told a Frenchman at Thorpe that he could not have seen the King of France in Paris, for the King of England, "our master," was King of France, whereupon the Frenchman replied that Henry, the King of France, was born in France, and King Henry VIII. was his godfather, and our King Edward was never crowned in France, and therefore had nothing to do there. A very pretty quarrel ensued, one man telling him he talked like a fool; while another called on him to recant, but he said rather than to do so he would be hewed into pieces as small as a piece of orange peel he had in his hand, and that he would die in the quarrel, and if he should so die, nine or ten thousand more should also die—an amusing piece of rhodomontade.

The accession of Mary and the return to the Catholic service of course brought trouble. On p. 80 is the tale

of how one man said that the year will be as troublous a year as ever was, and that he would jeopard his life for the alteration of the service; and that if no way could be found to complain to the Queen and the Duke of Norfolk, though watchers were kept for two years, they should be taken, sleeping in their beds, and killed all in a night; but as the speaker, who was a tailor, said he was of kindred to the Duke, I apprehend he was only vapouring generally.

One man, riding home with another, asked him how he liked his horse, and said he liked him better by 40s. than he used to, for men would have need of such horses presently, and that about Lady Day there would be a great manslaughter, and another battle between Easter and Whitsuntide, and another after Midsummer, and that we should see the King of France in Norwich by that time; also that there was mustering of men at Wyvenhoe Fair; that the French and Scots were busy, and should be more so.

An episode in Wyatt's Rebellion is graphically told on p. 57 by a fugitive who had taken active part in it, and who was full of dire forebodings, and who on his oath made the fearful statement that if the Spanish marriage took place, Englishmen would have no drink but water, and would have to pay a penny a pot for that, and that they would all have to lie in the streets, or in swine styes or caves while the Spaniards had their homes.

It seems that in the thick of the fight he was going up and down in Southwark, apparently looking for a hiding place, when he was accosted by a Norwich man, who had been brewer for Mr. Codd (he of whom, in Kett's time, the grim joke was made that a cod's head should presently be sold cheap), who asked him what he was doing there, and on his telling him and on imploring him to save his life, let him in till "the battle was overshot." He was then

able to take his sword and buckler, pretended to be one of the Queen's retinue, and so got away to Norwich.

From other depositions (p. 85) about the same man, it would seem that he had been working with a farmer of Wyatt's about a month before the rebellion began and had been with Wyatt all the while at Kingston Bridge and at St. James' Field.

Ballads received from a minstrel who played on a harp (a curious survival) at Wymondham, were sung in the streets of Norwich by two of the apprentices of one Wharton, servant of Lord Russell,<sup>2</sup> "against the mass and the godly proceedings of the Catholic faith of the Church." Wharton gave up a "bysekke" (by-sack or knapsack P) which contained some very evil and lewd songs (p. 55).

In the first year of Elizabeth we are told how one Niche. Colman, apparently a lunatic, said he was told by certain visions and dreams in his sleep that certain seditious felons—strangers, such as Scots, Frenchmen, and Spaniards, clothed with silk doublets covered with beggars' cloaks, were coming down in May to July to set on fire divers market towns (including Norwich) and villages.<sup>3</sup>

The growing enmity of the poor for the rich is shown on p. 22, where one man is reported to have said that "as sheep or lambs are a prey to the wolf or lion, so are the poor men to the rich men," but I should think the enmity was more against the farmers and the merchants, for the same man goes on to say that there were

<sup>2</sup> Lord Russell had been created Earl of Bedford on 19th January, 1550, for assisting in carrying out the order of Council against images, and was, of course, a suspect in the reign of Mary.

<sup>3</sup> An earlier example of the rumours of war and of reprisals will be found in the deposition of William Rye in 1545 (p. 93) which incidentally refers to the English exploits in Edinborough, which an unpatriotic talker implied were assisted by the treason of an Edinburgh man who let them in while some were in bed and some in Church.