

The Borough Arms



In 1576 the Mayor and Burgesses of Sudbury applied for a Grant of Arms; this was given on the 20th September by Robert Cooke, Clarendieuex King of Arms. The original charter, on thick vellum, gives first a quaint preamble telling of the origin of the gift, and goes on to describe the arms. The principle charge in the coat, the hound (or Talbot), is taken from the paternal coat of that eminent native of the borough, Simon of Sudbury, while the charges on the chief are brought in from the Royal Arms, to illustrate the ownership of the Manor by the early Norman kings.

Town Coat of Arms

Simon's Dog

The dog featured on the Town Coat of Arms and on the Mayoral Chain of Office is a heraldic Talbot. This early breed of hunting dog is thought to have been brought to England with William the Conqueror and to have links with the modern bloodhound and beagle. This dog was used to enhance the dignity of the Borough of Sudbury when in 1554 it received a Charter from Queen Mary I outlining its rights and privileges. The device of a Talbot was probably taken from the coat of arms of the Theobald family

Around 1318 Simon Theobald or Tebauds was born into this wealthy and important family in the local cloth trade. This brilliant man eventually rose to become Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor. These titles were a great honour not just for Simon but also for his home town of Sudbury: a local man was now the most powerful man in England apart from the King. Unfortunately he was a key figure in a government whose policies raised an eruption of violence rare in English history- the Peasants Revolt of 1381 and Simon took much of the blame. The people had many grievances but they all coalesced around the proposed new Poll Tax of one shilling and three groats to be paid by all people over the age of fifteen.

In 1381 an angry mob of peasants dragged Simon from his refuge in the chapel of the Tower of London and hacked him to death on Tower Green. His head was impaled and displayed on London Bridge, a fate usually reserved for traitors. Somehow it was brought back to his home town of Sudbury and was placed in St Gregory's church, perhaps in the hope that it would make St. Gregory's a place of pilgrimage similar to Thomas a Becket's shrine at Canterbury. His head is still kept in the vestry whilst his body lies in Canterbury Cathedral.

On Christmas Day the Lord Mayor and City Council of Canterbury process to his tomb where the Mayor lays a posy of Christmas roses and the Dean leads prayers. This tribute is in thanksgiving for Simon's rebuilding of the city wall, the Westgate and the Holy Cross Church which is now the Guildhall. This tradition is not upheld in Sudbury.