

The Godfrey Tankard (The Loving Cup)

This is not the original one given to Sir Edmund Godfrey by Charles II in 1665, for it bears the London hall-marks for 1675/6, and the inscription states that the cup was the gift of Sir Edmund "to someone who is not named, but most probably to Sir Gervase Elwes, of Stoke College". It would appear that this tankard is one of several that were made to perpetuate the fame of Sir Edmund Godfrey's public services. He was given a knighthood by Charles II for the services he rendered during the Great Plague of 1665 and the Fire of London the next year. The King did present a cup to Sir Edmund in 1665 but also gave him 800 ounces of plate and it has been suggested that Sir Edmund, with pardonable pride, had several of these tankards manufactured out of the royal gift to give to his friends and relations.

It was not known how the cup came into the possession of the Corporation until recently when a draft was discovered amongst the Borough muniments containing allegations made in 1684 against the Mayor, Mr. John Catesby, an eminent attorney in the borough who was unpopular with some of the Burgesses on account of his strong political opinions.

One of these allegations runs thus:

Sir Robert Cordell has been for a long time member for the Borough of Sudbury (1661-1679), and ye Corporation had declared that they would vote for him, but were overpowered by ye continued entreaties and wheedles of Mr. Catesby, and Sir Gervase Elwes, to gratify the Corporation did present thme with a Tankard with some inscription thereon ingraven in latine, relating to Sir Edmund Godfrey, which ye now said Mr. Catesby keeps and brings forth at all Corporation feasts, and in most solemn mannere drinks Sir Gervase his health, and ye said John Catesby hath declared he had made such an interest for Gervase Elwes in Sudbury, as all ye gentlemen in ye County could never destroy it.

The Corporation was grateful for the gift, and at the election in 1679 Sir Gervase Elwes, Bart. of Stoke College, and his son were duly returned together as members for Sudbury.

