

Sir Nicholas Brembre, Lord Mayor of London c 1375

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Brembre, Sir Nicholas (d 1388)... "...lord mayor of London, was the chief supporter among the citizens of Richard II. The 'worthie and puissant man of the city' of Grafton (who wrongly terms him a draper), and 'the stout mayor' of Pennant, he was a son of **Sir John Brembre** (HASTED, ii. 258), and, becoming a citizen and grocer of London, purchased in 1372-3 (46 Ed. III) from the **Malmaims** family the estates of Mereworth, Maplescomb, and West Peckham in Kent, (*ibid.* I. 290, ii. 258,268). He first appears as an alderman in 1376 (*Letter-book H*, f.xliv), sitting for Bread Street Ward, in which he resided (HERBERT, I., 328). The citizens were at this time divided into two factions, the party of **John of Northampton** supporting **John of Gaunt** and **Wycliffe**, while that of **Walworth** and **Philipot** supported the opposition and **Courtenay**. On the fall of **John of Gaunt** and his partisans at the close of **Edward III's** reign (1377), **Staple**, the then lord mayor, was deposed and replaced by **Brembre**, who belonged to the opposite party. He took his oath at the Tower 29 March 1377 (STOW, *Annals*), and was also re-elected for the succeeding year (1377-8). His 'Proclamacio...ex parte...Regis Ricardi' in this mayoralty (as shown by the sheriffs names) is given in the 'Cottonian MSS'. (*Nero*, D. vi. fos. 177b-9). In the parliament of Gloucester (1378) **Thomas of Woodstock**, the king's uncle, demanded his impeachment as mayor for an outrage by a citizen on one of his followers, but the matter was compromised (RILEY). He now became for several years (at least from 1379 to 1386) one of the two collectors of customs for the port of London, with **Geoffrey Chaucer** for his comptroller, his accounts being still preserved (Q.R. *Customs Bundle*, 247). The party to which **Brembre** belonged had its strength among the greater companies, especially the grocers, then dominant, and the fishmongers, whose monopoly it upheld against the clamours of the populace (*ibid.*). It was oligarchical in its aims, striving to deprive the lesser companies of any voice in the city (NORTON), and was consequently favourable to Richard's policy. At the crisis of the rising of the commons (15 Jan. 1381) **Brembre**, with his allies **Walworth** and **Philipot**, accompanied the king to Smithfield, and was knighted with them for his services on that occasion (*Letter-book H*, f. cxxxii; FROISSART, cap. 108). He is mentioned as the king's financial agent on 21 Dec. 1381 (*Issues of Exchequer*), and as one of the leading merchants summoned 'a treter and communer' with parliament on supplies, 10 May 1382 (*Rot. Parl.* iii. 123). His foremost opponent, **John of Northampton** (T. WALS. ii. 111), held the mayoralty for two years (1381-3) in succession to **Walworth**, but at the election of 1383 **Brembre**, who had been returned to parliament for the city at the beginning of this year (*Return*, I. 215), and who was one of the sixteen aldermen then belonging to the great Grocer's Company (HERBERT, i. 207), 'ove forte main...et gnt multitude des gentz...feust fait maire' (*Rot. Parl.* iii. 226)."

" **Dr. Stubbs** calls attention to this forcible election as possessing 'the importance of a constitutional episode' (*Const. Hist.* iii. 575), but wrongly assigns it to 1386 (*ibid.*). On the outbreak of **John of Northampton's** riot in February 1384, **Brembre** arrested and beheaded a ringleader, **John Constantyn**, cordwainer (T. WALS. ii. 110-1). Our main knowledge of Brembre's conduct is derived from a bundle of petitions presented to parliament in October-November 1386 by ten companies of the rival faction, of which two (those in the mercers and cordwainers) are printed in 'Rot. Parl.' iii. 225-7. In these he is accused of tyrannous conduct during his mayoralty of 1383-4, especially of beheading the cordwainer for the riot in Cheapside, and of securing his re-election in 1384 by increased violence. Forbidding his opponents to take part in the election, he filled the Guildhall with

armed men, who, at their approach, 'saileront sur eux ove gunt noise, criantz tuwez, tuwez, lour pursuivantz hydousement'. In 1386 he secured the election of his accomplice, **Nicholas Exton**, who was thus mayor at the time of the petition, so that the mayoralty was still, it urged, 'tenuz par conquest et maistrise.' While mayor (1384), **Brembre** had effected the ruin of his rival, **John of Northampton** (who had appealed in vain to **John of Gaunt**), by his favourite device of a charge of treason (T. WALS. ii. 116); and though **Gloucester** ('**Thomas of Woodstock**') and the opposition accused him of plotting (T. WALS. ii. 150) in favour of **Suffolk** (the chancellor), who was impeached in the parliament of 1386, and of compassing their death, he not only escaped for the time, but at the close of the year (1386) was, with **Burley** and others of the party of resistance, summoned by **Richard** into his council. Through the year 1387 he supported **Richard** in London in his struggle for absolute power, but was again accused by **Gloucester** and the opposition of inciting the mayor and citizens against them, when the former (**Exton**) shrank from such a plot (T. WALS. ii. 165; *Rot. Parl.* iii. 234). He was therefore among the five councillors charged with treason by the lords appellant on 14 Nov. 1387, and, on the citizens refusing to rise for him, fled, but was captured (in Wales, says FROISSART) and imprisoned at Gloucester (writ of 4 Jan. 1388 in RYMER's *Foedera*), whence on 28 Jan. 1388 he was removed to the Tower (*Issue Rolls*, 11 Rich. II). The 'merciless' parliament met on 3 Feb., and the five councillors were formally impeached by **Gloucester** and the lords appellant (*Rot. Parl.* iii. 229-36). **Brembre**, who was styled 'faulx Chivaler de Londres', and who was hated by **York** and **Gloucester** (FROISSART), was specially charged with taking twenty-two prisoners out of Newgate and beheading them without trial at the 'Foul Oke' in Kent (*Rot. Parl.* p. 231). On 17 Feb. he was brought from the Tower to Westminster and put on his trial.

" He claimed trial by battle as a knight, but it was refused, and being again brought up on the 20th, he received sentence, and was ordered to be taken back to the Tower, whence the marshall should 'lui treyner parmye la dite cité des Londres, et avant tan q'as ditz **Fourches** [Tyburn], et illeogs lui pendre par le cool' (*ibid.* iii. 237-8). This sentence was carried into effect, though he had 'many intercessors' among the citizens (T. WALS. ii. 173-4), but was reversed by **Richard** in his last struggle, 25 Mar. 1399 (*Claus. 22 Rich. II*, p. 2, m. 6, dors.) Stow (*Annals*) wrongly believed that he was beheaded ('with the same axe he had prepared for other'). He was buried in the choir of the Grey Friars, afterwards Christ Church (STRYPE, iii. 133, where the date is wrongly given). Froissart (cap. 108) says that he was bewailed by the citizens, but this must have applied to his partisans. Walsingham (ii. 173-4) narrates the absurd charges brought against him at his fall."

[*Rolls of Parliament*, vol. iii.; *Rymer's Foedera*; *Thomas of Walsingham's Historia Anglicana* (*Rolls Series*); *Stow's Annals*; *Strype's Stow's Survey*; *Cottonian MSS*; *Documents* (*ut supra*) in *Public Record Office*; *Riley's Memorials of London*; *Norton's Commentaries on the History of London*; *Devon's Rolls of the Exchequer*; *Froissart's Chronicles*; *Stubbs's Constitutional History*; *Herbert's Twelve Great Companies*; *Heath's Grocer's Company*; *Hasted's History of Kent*; *Return of Members of Parliament*.]
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