

## A SHORT HISTORY OF BRANDON AND...

### THE MAYOR OF LONDON

The year is 1395, and Amy Eyre is in her Brandon home, giving birth to a baby boy. Amy and her husband, John, name their new born son Simon. They do not know it, but from his humble beginnings in their small Suffolk town, Simon will grow into one of the most influential men of his time. His is a story demonstrating social mobility beyond their wildest dreams.

A few years later, as a teenager, Simon makes the bold move to live and work in London. Initially, he finds employment as an apprentice to a man selling second hand clothes, but Simon has aspirations beyond this. By 1419 he has become a draper, a career move that proves to be a profitable one, one that sees him go into the countryside buying cheap fabrics and then return to London to sell them to the city's wealthy residents. He can even count royalty among his patrons. Simon spots another opportunity when Italian merchants are forbidden to sell their wares in London, so he buys up their dyes and spices, which again he sells at great profit. For him, supply and demand makes him money, lots of money. Despite his growing wealth, Simon remains humble, seemingly uncomfortable with his status in the city. However, his ascendancy does not go unnoticed and six years later, aged 30, he is elected to the very prestigious position Master of the Drapers Company.

In 1434, Simon's peers suggest he stand for the position of Sheriff of London, but he is less than enthusiastic about the idea, claiming his wealth is not enough to sustain such a role. One Alderman overhears the discussion and challenges Simon on this point, claiming he had also heard Simon say he "ate at a most precious table", one he would never part with. The Alderman, accompanied by another Alderman and the then-Mayor of London, visit Simon at his home to question him about his perceived lack of wealth despite having a table that was so precious. Upon their arrival, Simon asks his wife to prepare the table for some refreshments. Simon's wife initially protests, perhaps through embarrassment, but eventually gives in to her husband's request. She sits down upon a low stool, lays a damask napkin over her lap and puts a venison pasty upon it. Simon proclaims to his visitors, "Behold the table which I would not take a thousand pounds for!"

In 1445, Simon's good work is recognised when he is chosen as the new Mayor of London. By this time, he had already used his wealth and influence to do much charitable work. One particular project he financed was the rebuilding of Leadenhall granary, which he had hoped to convert into a public space or even a free school.

At the time of his death, in 1458, Simon's estate was estimated to be worth £5,000 - £7,000, about £2.5 million in today's money. Despite all this he remained grounded and use his wealth to benefit good causes, perhaps never losing sight of his humble beginnings in Brandon.