

Abbess Alicia de Wyntereshulle (1315 - 1315)



Alicia de Wyntereshulle, created by
North Baddesley Junior School

A grave misfortune happened to the Convent when Alicia de Wyntereshulle was appointed; she survived only a few months as she was poisoned! How and for what reason the crime was committed does not appear.

In her 1989 publication, *Hampshire Nunneries*, Diana K. Coldicott tells us that the state records provide several nuns names, particularly during the 13th and 14th centuries, when it was the custom for two nuns to be sent in person to inform the king whenever the abbess of one of the Benedictine houses (e.g. Romsey Abbey) died. These ladies were then given the royal *congé d'élire*, the licence permitting the convent to elect a successor, and this was recorded on the patent rolls with the names of the two messengers. This custom may well have been older than the start of the rolls but it is only known from 1230.

News of the death of Alicia de Wyntereshulle was taken to King Edward II by the nuns, Alice de Roffa and Margaret de Middleton, who were issued the *congé d'élire* on 11th May 1315. On 28th May, the king issued a court of oyer and terminer (a commission issued to judges on a circuit to hold courts) "*touching the persons who killed Alicia de Wyntereshulle, late abbess of Romsey, at Romsey . . .*" The commission consisted of Henry le Scrop, John Dabernoun, and John Bluet. On 11th July, John Randolph took the place of John Dabernoun and the patent referred to the commission "*touching the persons who, plotting the death of Alicia de Wyntereshulle, late Abbess of Romsey, caused her to be intoxicated [drugged].*"

Nothing else is recorded about the commission but in Bishop Henry Woodlock's register there is an undated letter, which he wrote to the archdeacon of Winchester, ordering the excommunication of anyone found guilty of spreading the slander that the abbess had been poisoned:

"To our beloved the Archdeacon of Winchester. We have heard with horror a story propagated by some unknown sons of iniquity, as scandalous as it is malicious and false, defaming our convent of Romsey in general, and especially the good memory of Alicia de Wyntereshulle, late Abbess thereof, accusing them of plotting her death by drugging, whereby these vile detractors have incurred the punishment of the greater excommunication. We therefore, in order to put a stop to such malicious and defamatory attempts in future, order that they be excommunicated accordingly in the said monastery as well as in other churches in your Archdeaconry, and in the vulgar tongue, to the intent that the matter may be fully understood by all, at the time of the solemn Mass, by ringing of bells, lighting of candles, and again extinguishing them, each Lord's day and festival. You shall denounce them and cause others to do likewise."

The only explanation that can be given is that the abbess died through the machinations of some miscreants, but that she and her sisters and the officials and servants of the convent were not only guiltless of ill-doing, but also of any scandalous living.

The family of this lady cannot be exactly identified, but the Wyntereshulles, at this time, held property at Bramley near Guildford, Surrey, and one of them was Sheriff of Southampton in 1259, and another, probably his son, in 1270-72.

Alicia to Wyntereshulle had succeeded Clemencia de Guldeford who died in December 1315. She was elected January to February 1315 and died in May 1315. She was succeeded by Sybil Carbonel whose tenure lasted 18 years – probably what the nunnery needed after the sad and brief rule of Alicia to Wyntereshulle.

Reproduced from "Records of Romsey Abbey" by Henry G D Liveing, published in 1906. The full text is available on-line at https://archive.org/stream/cu31924028057226/cu31924028057226_djvu.txt (click on "See other formats" to view text in book form).