

Abbess Anne Westbroke (1515 – 1523)



Anne Westbroke, created by The Romsey School

The last years of the Convent's existence were eventful, but not edifying. A laxity of discipline seems to have crept in, and to have been the occasion, if not the source, of much trouble. Elizabeth Broke was elected Abbess, on the death of Joan Bryggys, in 1472 and on her death, in about June 1502, the convent elected Joyce Rowse as abbess.

However, the lack of discipline continued under Joyce Rowse's rule and she resigned her post in 1515. On 16th September 1515, the royal *congé d'élire* (licence to elect a new abbess) was issued for a fresh election and Anne Westbroke, who was previously "sexteyn" (sacrist of the Abbey), was elected. She had also previously held the position of "mistress of the school".

This lady, the penultimate abbess, continued as ruler of the Convent until 1523, but there is practically no information as to the condition of the Monastery during these eight years. Feasting may be supposed to have had less temptation for one who had been mistress of the school than for one who, like Joyce Rowse, had been Kitchener – as Abbess, Joyce Rowse had been admonished for ". . . *drinking and eating to enormous excess, especially at night . . .*" Her capacity, too, for discipline may be supposed to have been greater. However this may have been, the Convent did not as yet recover from its degradation.

A matter which touches on the external relations of the Abbey, during Anne Westbroke's abbacy, is worth recording. In 1522 Romsey, in common with other religious houses, paid an annual grant for the King's

personal expenses in France, for recovery of the crown. A comparison of payments by different Houses is interesting: Shaftesbury, £1,000; Wilton, £333 6s 8d; St. Mary's, Winchester, £200; Romsey, £333 6s 8d; Wherwell, £133 6s 8d; Syon, £333 6s 8d and Berking, £333 6s 8d.

Anne Westbroke died on Saturday, 21st November 1523, within the precincts of the house, and was buried before the high altar "as is customary." Interestingly, a full list of the nuns of Romsey Abbey, on the day of Anne Westbroke's death is in existence:

21st November, 1523.

*Agnes Skylling, Prioress.	‡Jane Clifford.
*Hawise Hayne, Sub-Prioress.	Christine Dacham.
*Mary Tistede, Cellaress.	‡Agnes Puttenham.
*Agnes Harvy, ¹ Chantress.	‡Alice Gorfyn or Gorsyn. ⁵
*Elizabeth Ruthall.	[These expressly professed.]
†Alice Whittynstall.	Jane Faner.
†Clemence Maryng or Malyng, ² Sextoness.	‡Elizabeth Hyll.
†Jane Kemsall.	‡Jane Wadham.
*Agnes Wellis.	‡Anne Butteler.
†Edith Chekysgrove.	‡Margaret Parkyns.
†Elizabeth Riprose. ³	‡Margaret Dowman. ⁶
‡Edith Banester. ⁴	[These tacitly professed.]
Evelene Ynkpene.	Anne Talke [absent].

¹ Becomes Sub-Prioress, *vice* C. Malyng deposed, 1526.

² Sub-Prioress in 1526, as well as Sextoness.

³ Abbess, 1523.

⁴ Becomes Sextoness, *vice* Cl. M. deposed, 1526.

⁵ Admonished, 1526.

⁶ Sentenced to imprisonment, 1526.

The 24 nuns listed is a far cry from the Convent's total during its heyday, before the arrival of the Black Death in 1349, of around 100 nuns.

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