

Abbess Christina (circa 1086)



Christina, created by Nursling Primary School

The case of Christina is an interesting one. In his 1906 publication, *Records of Romsey Abbey*, Henry G D Liveing makes reference to this lady but does not elevate her to the position of abbess of the nunnery because, in his extensive research at the time, he did not find a shred of evidence that she was elected to this high office. Therefore, she does not appear as an abbess in his comprehensive list of abbesses in his book.

Yet, take a stroll into St. George's chapel in Romsey Abbey and examine the Abbesses board and there she is, listed on the left hand side, between Elfyfu and Athelitz, albeit with a "(?)" following her name – why?

Well Liveing, in his book, states that in the year 1086, a date made notable by the completion of Domesday, Christina, the daughter of King Edmund Ironside, and sister of Edgar Atheling (the last male member of the Saxon royal house of Cerdic of Wessex) and of St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland, took the veil (became a nun) at Romsey. Her lands are found in Domesday; one estate in Warwickshire had been held by Earl Eadwine; of another it is said distinctly "Rex dedit Christinæ" (the king gave Christina). This lady has been spoken of by some writers as Abbess of Romsey, but there is no evidence whatever to prove the fact, **though her royal descent would make that likely**. So, later Romsey Abbey historians elevate Christina to the position of abbess.

Her presence at Romsey opens an interesting chapter in the Abbey's history. The two daughters of Malcolm Canmore and the saintly Margaret, the King and Queen of Scotland, Eadgyth, or Edith (her name later

Normanised to Maud or Matilda), and Mary, were sent to their aunt Christina at Romsey to be educated. Eadgyth was born in 1080, her godfather being Earl Robert, who is known to have been in Scotland in the autumn of that year. At what date the young princesses came under the care of their aunt is unknown, but there is little doubt that they were with her in 1093 when Eadgyth would have been about twelve years old. Christina seems to have been severe with the young princesses and to have used blows if she thought the occasion required it! In a reminiscence of her young days, Eadgyth recalls how, for an act of disobedience, her aunt was accustomed to hurt and disgrace her by sharp blows and detestable taunts.

But the education received by these young girls was of a high order. The cause of this severe chastisement

was the young princess' refusal to wear a nun's veil, which Christina insisted on placing upon her head as a protection against the rough license of the times.

Eadgyth was later courted by the Norman King William II (Rufus), who saw that a union with a member of the old Saxon royal line would strengthen his position on the throne. The story goes that Christina thought this an unsuitable match, so when William visited the nunnery, she disguised the girl as a nun to protect her from him. During this visit, she took the king into the garden to show him her roses - the first time that roses are recorded as growing in English gardens. The King was convinced that Eadgyth had taken holy vows and abandoned the idea of marriage.

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).