

Abbess Isabella de Camoys (1352 – 1396)



Isabella de Camoys, created by
Romsey Abbey Choirs

There is a whole chapter devoted to Abbess Isabella de Camoys in Henry G D Liveing's 1906 publication, *Records of Romsey Abbey* and this is merely a summary.

Isabella de Camoys was appointed Abbess on 25th November 1352 with the "usual formalities". Some of the official documents are to be found in Bishop Edyndon's Register, but no account of the proceedings in the Church and Chapter House at Romsey is enrolled, and therefore no list of the sisters has survived. Such a list, so soon after the Black Death, would have been of much interest, because it would have shown how far the plague had affected the numbers in the Convent, and would have preserved the names of those sisters who had survived this terrible ordeal.

In her 1989 publication *Hampshire Nunneries*, Diana K. Coldicott describes how, during Isabella's rule, details are recorded of one or Romsey's erring nuns, Marion or Margery de Rye, who seems to have been one of life's rebels. She is first encountered after she had deliberately removed her veil and gone to sit in the nave of the church with lay women instead of sitting in the choir; both there and in other places she gossiped and chatted, not joining in the worship of the church or saying the Hours. In February 1369, Abbess Isabella de Camoys was told by the bishop to admonish her and get her to resume her veil and abide by the Rule (Benedictine Rule). The following month, on 20th March 1368, he appointed John Turke, the rector of Michelmersh, to hear her confession and absolve her from her sins before the feast of St. George. But Margery was not easily tamed! She persisted in her disobedience so that in September the bishop wrote again to Abbess Isabella de Camoys authorising her to use any discipline to compel her to conform to the Rule, providing it did not endanger her life. Poor girl! She was obviously quite unsuited to monastic life, but from the point of view of the abbess she must have been a most unsettling influence in the community.

Again, during Isabella's rule, a vicar caused trouble in the Convent and, this time, the priest was clearly in the wrong. The trouble arose over the blessing of the palms for Palm Sunday, as may be seen by an extract from Bishop William of Wykeham's Register : "It hath been the usage from the time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, that the Sacrist of the Abbey Church shall bless the palms and boughs of other trees used at Mass on Palm Sunday, and that from the High Altar and not elsewhere. Yet so it is, that the Vicar, John Folyot, John Mascal, and John . . . , chaplains, have interfered with the Sacrist in the exercise of this privilege. Wherefore the Dean of Somborn is ordered to inhibit the vicar and chaplains, pending a decision of a cause promoted by the Abbess and Convent against them. Dated 13th March, 1372."

Isabella died in April 1396, having ruled for a year less than the longest serving abbess, Matilda Lovell, at 45 years of service. Lucy Everard succeeded Isabella de Camoys as Abbess, the proceedings took about a month, beginning 17th April and ending 16th May 1396.

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).