

Abbess Matilda (Maud) Lovell (1417 – 1462)



Matilda Lovell, created by
North Baddesley Infant School

On Sunday, 19th September 1400, the Suffragan Bishop, Henry of Annadown, received the following ladies as nuns: Margery Camoys, Alice Warennere, Joan Stratford, Alice Northlode, Alice Forester, Elizabeth Sampson, Maud Lovell, Katherine de la Mare, Alice Chamberlyn, Isabel Lekforde, Alice Artone, Juliana Shirnham, and Joan Umfray. That thirteen nuns should have been received at once seems to indicate either a number of deaths or an improvement in the financial state of the Romsey Abbey.

"The profession (*the taking of vows upon entering a religious order*) of nuns," says Mr. Fosbroke in his *British Monachism*, "could be done by an Abbott or Visitor of the House after the year of probation and change of habit, and could be applied to any woman . . . Nuns were usually professed at the age of sixteen years." The entries relating to Romsey, which have been quoted from the Episcopal Registers, seem to refer to profession. There was another and a very elaborate service for the consecration of a nun, which could only be performed by the Bishop, and could not take place until the sister was twenty-five years old.

Seventeen years later, one of these thirteen nuns, Matilda (Maud) Lovell, was destined to succeed Abbess Felicia Aas on her death in October 1417, but the Episcopal Register fails to help in fixing the date of election, the second Register book of Bishop Henry Beaufort, for the years 1416 - 1447, having been lost. This Register, says a note in the Bishop's first book, was lent to the King, who it may therefore be supposed omitted to return it!

The Patent Rolls, however, show that Abbess Maud's election took place in 1417, and that the proceedings lasted from 25th October to 18th November.

A great deal of information about the business of the Abbey may be learnt from its Manor Court Rolls, a large number of which, relating to Romsey Extra, are preserved in the Public Record Office. Some interesting

facts may be obtained from the earlier series of Manor Court Rolls that belonged to the Halmote, or Court Baron of the Manor, that is, the meeting of the tenants of the Manor for the transaction of business. The business consisted of "the transfer of land to tenants, the making of bye-laws for the regulation of the village communities, and the exaction of penalties for the breaking of rules." The Romsey Court Rolls exhibit a great variety of detail.

For example, in respect of mills, the letting and repairs of which were matters of much importance, the rolls provide a glimpse of life at the time of Abbess Maud Lovell:

In 1434 John More of Asshfold agreed with the Abbess Matilda Lovell and the Convent to take their four mills. Two of the mills were in a building called Townmill, and the other two in a building called Medmill. He was to have all the fishings of eels. His lease to be for seven years at a rent of £10 6s 8d, to be paid quarterly, together with 450 eels called shaftelynges and 30 large eels called skyveres. Elaborate conditions as to repairs are added, together with a clause binding the miller to grind for the Lady's household and for the horses.

Maud remained Abbess of Romsey for nearly 45 years, a longer period than any, either of her predecessors or successors. When she died, before the end of April 1462, her rule had exceeded the next longest abbacy, that of Abbess Isabella de Camoys, by about a year. This is in addition to the 17 years spent as a nun at Romsey Abbey meaning that this lady devoted nearly 62 years of her life to religious service.

Johanna Bryggys succeeded Matilda Lovell in 1462, the proceedings connected with her election lasting from 26th April to 30th May.

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