

THE ENGLISH MEDIAEVAL RECLUSE

Darwin, Francis Darwin
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E x t r a c t s f r o m

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by

Francis D. S. Darwin, F.R.Hist.S.

(Pages 48, 49, 57, 58
and 59)

Paternity. Given at Thorntone on the twenty-third of December A.D. 1435'. . . .¹

'Richard Pates—Canon of the Church of Wells, Vicar General in Spirituals of the Venerable Father in Christ the Lord Henry [Bowett], by Divine Grace Bishop of Bath and Wells, engaged in distant parts²—to the discreet men Masters William Sture of Whitstanton, John Battyn of West Cokyr—rectors of churches—and John Wall, proctor: greeting conjointly and severally in the Saviour of all! Considering the laudable purpose of Dom Robert Cherde—monk of Ford Abbey of the Cistercian Order, in the diocese of Exeter, who appeared personally before Us on the twenty-seventh of the month of October in the year 1402, in the chapel of St. Mary the Virgin near the cloister of the cathedral church of Wells, exhibited letters of discharge³ from his Abbat of Ford, and in our presence made choice humbly of a solitary and anchoretic life in a certain house constructed for such a person near⁴ the parish church of Crukern [Crewkerne] within⁵ the cemetery at the western portion of the same church, and made instant supplication for admittance by Us to live perpetually the solitary life in the said house—We, desiring to be certified⁶ as to the life character and conversation of the said Robert after diligent inquiry into the truth of the aforesaid, have admitted and examined

¹ I.e. 23 January, 1436—December being an obvious slip for January. There follows the licence, from the Prioress of Staynfelde, for Beatrice's migration to the Anchoretic life. C.Y.S., XVII., pp. 113–15—abbreviated here (1915).

² 'In remotis agentis'.

³ 'Litteras dimissionis'—instead of the usual 'litteras dimissorias'.

⁴ 'Iuxta'.

⁵ 'Infra' for 'intra' here, as often.

⁶ 'Certiorari'.

carefully the witnesses produced herein by the same Dom Robert under the form of oath for witnesses to be sworn; through whom and other proofs ¹ We have found Dom Robert of laudable life and honest conversation—constant, fit, and suitable for admission to the solitary life. And accordingly—after previous reception, from the same Dom Robert, of a bodily oath touching the faithful maintenance of chastity and other observances due—We have admitted his supplication aforesaid as consonant with reason; and we decree that Dom Robert be introduced into the said house—according to the manner, form, and custom usually practised in such [cases]—and that he be shut up in the same perpetually, without any egress whatever, as justice counsels.² To you therefore conjointly and severally—touching whose fidelity and industry We have full trust in the Lord—We commit Our powers to introduce and enclose Dom Robert Cherde canonically into the said solitary house of Crukern, to tarry or abide perpetually in the same *without egress* from that time—this with the usual solemnities, together with power of any sort of canonical coercion. And of what you have done in the aforesaid—after expediting the business in question—take heed to inform Us, when requested on the part of ³ the said Dom Robert . . . Given under the Seal of Our Office, &c'.⁴

'John [Thoresby], by Divine Pity Bishop [of Worcester], etc., to the beloved son Master John Severley Our Archdeacon of Worcester: grace and benediction.

¹ 'Documenta'.

² 'Absque egressu quocumque, justitia suadente'.

³ 'Per partem'.

⁴ *Commission to Shut up John Cherde*, ed. Hearne, ap. Trokelowe, *Annales Edwardi*, II., pp. 263-5—abbreviated here (1729).

Thus the money question, the ultimate and inevitable background of cases such as these, was evidently a consideration of the first practical importance for a Recluse. And here we are confronted by the subject of endowments; of which it would be hard to find a more letailed specimen than that setting forth the provision made, on 6 December 1361,¹ by Henry Duke of Lancaster for the support of an anchorage in the graveyard of Whalley parish church—the very anchorage already mentioned as coming to such utter grief some eighty years after its foundation: provision, that is, through an indenture² effected with the local Cistercian Abbey—whose community was apparently to play a part corresponding to that of the modern executor and trustee combined into one. In comparison with the results which it was expected to yield, the endowment itself appears somewhat exiguous—though the land may have been highly productive, or otherwise valuable; nor is it clear whether the beneficiaries were to be one anchoress or two. Two cottages, in any case, and 670 acres of land were to form a basis for the provision of ‘sufficient convenable sustenance for a Recluse dwelling in a place within the cemetery of the parochial church of Whalleye, and for the Recluses her successors dwelling there for all time; as also for two women servants to the said Recluses and to each one of them—to pray for the said Duke, his ancestors, and his heirs. That is, to pay to the said Recluses and to the Recluses their successors seventeen conventual loaves each week of the year, seventeen loaves of the second sort, three pence for their food eaten with bread,³ and

¹ ‘L’an due regne du roy Edward teirz . . . XXXiiii’—equated by Whitaker, for some mysterious reason, with 1349!

² ‘Sealed by Abbat, convent’, and witnesses on 2 January, 1362.

³ ‘Pur lour companage.’ See Du Cange.

eight gallons of the better conventual beer.¹ And to find and pay on the feast of All Saints, to the same Recluses and their successors, ten hard fish called stock fishe,² ten leure fish, a bushel of oatmeal, two gallons of oil to light their lamps, a weight³ of tallow for candles, six cartloads of turf, one cartload of faggots for fuel—conveyed by the said Abbat and his successors to the place of the Recluses; and to keep up all houses and enclosures built there for the abode of the said Recluse and her successors—besides repairing them whenever it be necessary, at the cost of the said Abbat and convent and their successors. And to find there as chaplain a monk of honest conversation from the same Abbey, and a clerk to minister there at Mass, for the singing of Masses each year perpetually in the chapel of the said Recluse and her successors there—on behalf of the said Duke, his ancestors, and his heirs for all time. On the occasion of voidance of each Recluse—whether through death, or any other cause—the said Abbat and Convent and their successors shall receive, without contradiction or opposition, another at the nomination mandate or order of the said Duke and his heirs—to have all things as above. For the said Mass, vestments chalices bread wine and lights and other ornaments necessary shall be found by the Abbat and Convent and their successors perpetually. An annual rent, besides this, of sixty-six shillings and eight pence sterling for all time shall be paid by them—at two terms of the year—to the said Duke and his heirs.⁴

¹ If this was a ménage à quatre—two Recluses and two maids—the allowance of beer would come to the fairly reasonable amount of about a pint a day each.

² I.e. cured cod; cf. O.E.D.

³ 'Piere: poids de valeur variable selon les lieux'. Godefroy, VI., p. 151.

⁴ Dugdale, *Monasticon*, V., pp. 645-6—abbreviated here and in Whitaker's *Whalley*, pp. 72-3.

The true inwardness of this document is not very easy to fathom. It is clear, however, that the Duke gained (1) an annual rent equivalent to some £70 in modern money; (2) the nomination of an anchoress on the occurrence of a vacancy—a right which lapsed presumably to the Crown, and with deplorable results, on the accession of the Duke's grandson Henry IV to the throne; (3) prayers for himself and his family, on the part of the anchoresses and their chaplain. The gain to the Abbey would include, no doubt, any surplus values from the land left over after provision had been made by the monks for the inmates of the anchorage—as also after payment of rent to the Duke: though the continued payment of rent to the latter shows that he had not alienated the land, there was nothing in the indenture to debar the monks from building and drawing rents from the tenants of such buildings—the Duke remaining the ground landlord, with no further reversionary rights. A speculation for the monks, for the Duke the transaction wears the guise of a safe investment. Whether the bargain would ever have been struck without the introduction of the anchoresses is another question. But in the Middle Ages no line was more apt to be blurred almost out of existence than that supposed to be drawn between the spiritual and the temporal. And charity ever called for at least a religious veneer.

Testamentary bequests to Recluses personally, as distinct from endowments of their anchorages, were by no means unknown; though such as have been published are far from being so numerous as might be expected—as in the case of Archbishop Chichele's register, which yields (as far as printed) but nine bequests to Recluses (scat-