

Romsey Local History Society

[LTVAS Group]



*Decoy Site, Baddesley Common in World War 2
(See article on page 3)*

Spring 2023



Another view of the decoy site on Baddesley Common

CONTENTS

Title	Author	Page
Military Use of Baddesley Common In the 20 th Century	Ray Cobern	3
Outline Notes for the History of the North Baddesley Manor House	Ronnie Munday	8
Musing over a Photo – Gertrude’s Sunday School Treat	Ray Metters	15
Was Romsey Nunnery Founded in 907? The traditional version of the founding of Romsey Abbey	Ian Clark	20

Military Use of Baddesley Common in the 20th Century

by Ray Cobern, 26 June 2004

In 1901 the population of North Baddesley was 245 and most of the land now built upon was heathland, and it was in 1904 that this area was first used by the Military during the 20th century.

About 10,000 men with 2,700 horses from the 1st Army Corps, based at Aldershot, descended on Southampton for manoeuvres in the first week of September 1904. Southampton Common being overcrowded, several Squadrons of the 8th & 14th Hussars with their 700 horses camped on Baddesley Common. About 2am on Sunday morning, 4th September, a Vet had to put down an injured horse, but used an ordinary pistol because the humane killer refused to function; this panicked some of the horses, who broke free and in turn caused most of the other horses to bolt over and through a barbed wire fence on to the Botley Road, causing absolute mayhem in the camp.



The stampede horses became wedged in Southampton

Many of the horses, in a compact body, headed for Southampton and stampeded down the Avenue and thoroughly alarmed the encamped soldiers and residents of the area. They raced on through the town and many were injured wedged in the narrow Bargate and then finally stopped at the Town Quay. 200 horses ended up in Winchester and 1 reached Basingstoke. On the following Tuesday, Romsey Railway Station witnessed a sad sight as 370 officers and men brought their injured and crippled horses from Baddesley Common to return to Aldershot by rail¹.

Ten years on, in the early battles of the 1914-18 Great War, the 7th Division of the British Expeditionary Force had a casualty rate of 80%, so the 8th Division was formed from twelve Infantry Battalions brought home from overseas stations. It began to assemble on Baddesley Common in September 1914 before moving to Hursley Park and then to Southampton Docks on 5th November for embarkation to France - 12,000 troops were involved.²

It is thought that South African troops were also camped in the village during the Great War. In 1919, General Louis Botha, the first Premier of the South African Union, was travelling with Jan Smuts to the Versailles Treaty of the Nations via the port of Southampton. He took time out to visit North Baddesley and personally thank Jane Smith for her assistance to the large number of South African troops stationed in the area during the war. Jane Smith ran the only grocery shop in Baddesley at that time (at 125 Botley Road)

The troops were likely to be the Infantry Brigade of the South African Overseas Contingent, recalled from Egypt in 1915, who embarked from Southampton to France in April 1916, where they suffered nearly 3000 casualties in the first two weeks of the Somme battle. Later, 10,000 Native African troops embarked for France as a Labour Squad behind the French lines. These were under the command of General Louis Botha's brother-in-law, General Cheere Emmet and may have also camped in Baddesley. Then, on the 21st Feb, 1917, 800 of these Native African troops were on their way to France as a Labour Squad. This was on the SS Mendi; but it collided with the larger SS Darro and sank. Only 195 of these men survived. (A memorial to the 615 dead is in Hollybrook Cemetery.)

Jane Smith was the daughter-in-law of William Smith, who built the Mission Hall in Nutburn Road c1887, and was the leading light here. So it may be assumed that her assistance to the white troops and the Native survivors was both practical and spiritual.

Few signs of military use were left in the area after the First World War and up to WWII. Recent information has told us that the black wooden hut behind 100-

110 Botley Road shown in *The Changing Face of North Baddesley*, page 52, was built to house Officers sometime between 1914-18.

The Street End area to the older generation was always known as 'The Barracks'. This was possibly because the permanent army staff for the local camps were based there.

The only signs on the Common were traces of old trenches on what was known as the 'Island', where the only tree - a small willow - grew in isolation in the middle of moor grass and reeds: this was in the 1940s and very unlike today.

In 1939, at the start of the WWII, a Searchlight Battery was set up on the side of the A27, where the large white office block opposite Emer Close now stands. As the war progressed, the original small light with sound predictor and single Lewis gun, were upgraded to a very large blue master searchlight with radar and nearby anti-aircraft rocket projectiles.

Many years after the war it became apparent that this site was part of the Decoy Site System set up all around Southampton to decoy German bombers away from the city.

One of these sites was constructed on Baddesley Common behind the Searchlight Battery, circa 1940, and was manned by RAF personnel. It consisted of quite a large acreage with pig arks filled with combustible materials and other easily lit devices to decoy enemy aircraft.

On the night of 22nd June 1941, this decoy site was successful as far as Southampton was concerned but North Baddesley suffered the worst episode in its history. During a long air raid the decoyed aircraft dropped 9 large parachute mines, many H.E. bombs and thousands of Incendiaries on the village, destroying 39 homes and damaging practically every building in the village^{3 & 4}.

The last part of the actual site, the air raid shelter with attached generator house, was demolished in the year 2000, but the gravel track to the Decoy from Green Lane is still there⁵.

Another episode to cause excitement in the village was when the famous actor, Ralph Richardson, later Sir Ralph but then a pilot in the Fleet Air Arm, crashed his Fairey Swordfish on the Common, fortunately without damage to himself, though his crewman, Naval Airman A. Todd, was injured. The aircraft from 755 Squadron based at Worthy Down, had to be dismantled before recovery ('Own

up, who pinched the propeller?!') He had just taken off from Eastleigh (then Fleet Air Arm base, HMS Raven) to return to Worthy Down near Winchester when his engine caused trouble. This was on the 22nd November, 1939. The location of the crash was near Blackwater Pond, known locally as Blackmoor Pond.



*Fairey Swordfish
As flown by Sir Ralph Richardson*

Although outdated by the beginning of the Second World War, it continued in useful action for the duration of the conflict. Today, there is just one serviceable Swordfish in existence.

Richardson, who joined the RNVR at the outbreak of the war as a sub-lieutenant was already a qualified pilot but after the above episode, picked up the nickname 'Pranger'. His fellow actor, Laurence Olivier, who had also joined the RNVR as a sub-lieutenant in April 1941, was even less of a natural pilot than Richardson - wrecking one plane and damaged two others whilst taxiing on the runway for his first flight at Worthy Down. At about this time, both actors were allowed to return to their acting careers by the Navy, who obviously worried about the attrition rate of their aircraft^{6 & 7}.

In the months before D-Day, 6th June 1944, a live-firing Mortar Range was set up where Baddesley Close is now, with, the target area at the lower end of the Double Bank. The actual targets were large sheets of steel which flew through

the air for long distances if hit, and sometimes a bit too close to us teenagers viewing from the fir trees on the lower slopes of Scragg Hill.

After the war, the Army built houses on the part of the Common now known as Baddesley Close. These houses were for officers and men stationed at Marchwood but now, of course, are in private possession.



End Notes/Sources:

¹ Eric Wvyeth Gadd, *Stampede*, -Hampshire Magazine, April 1992

² Len Peach, compiler, *Merdone, The history of Hursley Park*, 1972

³ Ray Cobern, *Baddesley Common Decoy 1941*, Hampshire Magazine, March 2002

⁴ North Baddesley school log

⁵ Southampton Civil Defence Report. June 22nd 1941

⁶ Ray Sturtivant, *Fleet Air Arm Aircraft 1939-1945*

⁷ John Miller *Ralph Richardson - The Authorized Biography*

Outline Notes for The History of North Baddesley Manor House
by Ronnie Monday



Baddesley Manor House, 1992

Pre-Saxon Roman bricks in the church indicate that there may have been Roman building in vicinity.

1086 Domesday Book - Ralph de Mortimer (Norman Incomer) held the manor.

1304 The Knights Hospitaller acquired the church, already present, opposite the Manor House but maintained their own chapel in the Manor grounds.

1305 King Edward I stayed with the Knights Hospitaller in North Baddesley on 17th February. The previous day was Ash Wednesday and the King's entourage stayed in Mainstone just outside Romsey and so it is possible that he visited the Abbey for a service and may have held a banquet in the hall of the building known today as *King John's House*.

1348 **The** Black Death arrived and the Knights Hospitaller's base in North Baddesley became their Headquarters in Hampshire.

1458 William Tournay or Tournour became Preceptor of North Baddesley Cell and in 1472 became Grand Prior of the Knights in England. He died c1476 - is he buried in the Church tomb in the chancel?

Wars of the Roses, 1455 and 1487 No known history of Baddesley Manor House during this period.

1495 Robert Peck, Preceptor of North Baddesley, witnessed the will of John Terbock. John and his wife are interred in the church, probably in the central aisle under a slab with a carved heart shape. John Terbock is mentioned in Liveing's book¹ as acting as a Steward in Romsey Abbey during the tenure of Elizabeth Broke (1472 to 1502). The Abbess was subject to severe criticism following a visitation under the auspices of the Bishop of Winchester. She was said to have come under the evil influence of John Terbock in running up debts and allowing nuns to visit taverns in the town without leave.

1518 William Weston became Preceptor of North Baddesley and Grand Prior of England (of the Knights Hospitaller) in 1527 - he died in 1540 after the Reformation.

c1530 Thomas Foster, father of John Foster (see below), joint receiver of Romsey Abbey acquired the lease of the Abbey estate's home farm which was in the area where Broadlands House now stands.

1536 North Baddesley Preceptory fell to the Crown following the Reformation and was immediately granted to Sir Thomas Seymour (Queen Jane's brother)

1539 Thomas Dingley, the last Preceptor of North Baddesley before the Reformation, was executed on Tower Hill on the 10th of July 1539.

1543 John Foster, who had been a key official at Romsey Abbey during the final troubled years of the nunnery, oversaw the dismantling of the Monastery. He was the incumbent at North Baddesley in 1543 and quite possibly moved into the Manor House with his wife Jane Wadham, a former nun at Romsey Abbey and niece of Sir Thomas Seymour.

1546 Sir Francis Fleming, lieutenant-general under Sir Thomas Seymour, acquired Broadlands. On his death in 1558, Broadlands passed to Sir William Fleming who was married to Jane Foster, daughter of John Foster.

1548 Thomas Seymour was tried and executed for high treason and the manor reverted to the crown.

1552 Edward VI granted the Knights Hospitaller's preceptory to Sir Nicholas Throckmorton.

1553 Queen Mary ascended to the throne and restored the Preceptory to the Knights Hospitaller.

1558 Queen Elizabeth ascended to the throne, and the Knights Hospitaller were once more disbanded and the North Baddesley Manor estate was restored to John Foster.

1576 John Foster died and his son, Andrew Foster, inherited the Manor. Andrew Foster who died in 1596 was reputedly an extravagant man. His son, Barrow Foster, had to sell the manor to Sir Thomas Fleming in 1600.

1593 The rental lease for a house in Mill Street (now Bell St) Romsey, between the owner Andrew Foster, son John, 'of Baddesley Manor', and lessee Agnes Morris, a widow, includes a requirement for her to clean and scour the Foster armour. A book by the 19th-century historian vicar of North Baddesley, Reverend John Marsh, recorded that the armour was still present in the Manor Farm House (not actually the Manor House) in 1808.

1600 Thomas Fleming held North Baddesley for only a short time before buying the manor of North Stoneham and selling North Baddesley to John More (who had already purchased the Romsey estate from Barrow Foster in 1598). Surprisingly, despite Thomas Fleming's short tenure and the date of his departure from the manor, the initials *TF 1602* appear on the rood screen in North Baddesley church. It is believed, however, that this rood screen came from the North Stoneham church.

1600 to 1620 John More and his wife, Dowsabell Paget, widow of William Paulet, grandson of 1st Marquess of Winchester, were occupants of the manor from 1600 to 1620. John More was the lawyer/recorder who welcomed James I to Winchester in 1603. In 1607, he was also named as Romsey's court recorder in the royal charter of that year. His wife, Dowsabell Paget, was the great niece of Baron William Paget (1506 to 1563), Privy Councillor to Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary.

1620 John More died (an imposing memorial to him can be found in the North Baddesley church) and his daughters, Dulcibella and Anne, and son, John, were his beneficiaries though John junior died of smallpox just a year later. Dulcibella (married to Samuel Dunch) appears to have inherited the manor of North Baddesley while Anne, married to Edward Hooper, inherited the Chilworth estate as well as the Romsey estate.

1668 Samuel Dunch was resident until his death in that year. He was a staunch puritan and ally of Oliver Cromwell. Most of his bequests were to dissenting ministers. His son, John Dunch, was married to Anne Major whose father owned Hursley manor. John's brother-in-law was Oliver Cromwell's son, Richard, who married another Major daughter, Dorothy. Both Samuel and son John died within months of each other. Whilst not necessarily living in the Manor House, it is worth mentioning that the vicars of the church opposite between 1652 and 1662 were staunch Puritans. Henry Sewall's family (vicar until 1659) were part of the Protestant emigration to America in the 1630s. Indeed, Henry had returned to England with his wife and family in the late 1640s but they had all returned again to America by 1661, presumably disillusioned by the return of Charles II to the throne.

1668 Maijor (or Major) Dunch, son of John Dunch, was the next resident. He had married Margaret Wharton, the daughter of Lord Wharton, an ally of Oliver Cromwell. He died in 1674 and his initials and Dunch arms appear on the Bell Tower of the Church opposite.

1705 Maijor Dunch's heir was Wharton Dunch who died childless in that year. During Wharton's minority, Robert Thorner inhabited the manor. Robert lies in a prominent tomb in the churchyard. He was an enthusiastic dissenter and established several charities for educational purposes and also almshouses in Southampton. He died in 1690.

1705 On Wharton's death, the estate passed to his sister Jane Dunch who had married Francis Keck of Great Tew in Oxfordshire. They occasionally resided at the house.

1728 On the death of Francis Keck the estate passed to John Keck, his son, who only survived him by one year. John's widow, Margaret (died 1741), married John Nicholl in 1730 and the ownership of the estate passed to John Nicholl via a complicated marriage settlement. John Nicholl, who died in 1747, was mentioned in Reverend John Marsh's book of 1808 as having been much respected in the parish and had lived in the Mansion House for part of the year. On his death, his daughter, Margaret Nicholl, became a very rich heiress aged just 13 years. Her story could have been written by Jane Austen as she was placed in the care of seemingly cruel relatives and she was much sought after as a marriage partner. Her story was told in the published letters of Horace Walpole². She eventually married James Brydges, the 3rd Duke of Chandos

and Gentleman of the Bedchamber of George, Prince of Wales. Margaret died childless in 1768.

1747 After John Nicoll's death, the Baddesley estate reverted back to Jane Dunch's nephew by her husband Francis Keck. This was Anthony Chute, MP, of the Vyne. His mother was the sister of Francis Keck. Anthony died childless in 1754 and the estate passed to John Chute his youngest brother and friend of Horace Walpole, the famous writer. John Chute had been involved in a plot with Walpole to marry off the heiress Margaret Nicoll to Horace Walpole's nephew, Lord Orford, in 1752.

1767 John Chute sold the Baddesley estate for £5500 to Thomas Dummer (1740 to 1781) who already owned Cranbury Park near Hursley.

1772 A fire broke out in the Baddesley Manor house while William Chamberlayne (Solicitor to the Treasury and the Royal Mint) was in residence. According to the newspaper report in the *Salisbury Journal* of 24th August 1772 Chamberlayne was renting the house from Thomas Dummer and the house and furniture were destroyed. It is believed that the Manor House was rebuilt after this event.

1781 Thomas Dummer died and left Cranbury and North Baddesley manors to William Chamberlayne, (a friend, of whom he was a client) with a life interest to his widow, Harriet Dummer (nee Bisshop)

1783 Harriet married Nathaniel Dance-Holland, the famous portrait painter. When he was knighted Nathaniel Dance took the name of 'Holland' from Lady Charlotte Holland who was a cousin of Thomas Dummer. It is said that Harriet preferred to live in London with her high society friends in Piccadilly rather than at Cranbury.

1785 William Chamberlayne entered into a legal dispute with Harriet over the cutting down of trees on the Cranbury Park estate.

1809 sometime around this year or before, an East India Company law officer, George Taylor, came with his family to lease the Baddesley Manor House. His wife was the niece of a famous London barrister, Sir William Garrow.

1825 Harriet Dance-Holland died and William Chamberlayne Junior (MP) as the beneficiary of the will of his father, William Chamberlayne, Treasury Solicitor, inherited the Cranbury and Baddesley estates.

1861 to 1871 the last of George Taylor's unmarried children moved out of the Mansion House and Captain Henry C Talbot, an Army Officer, moved in with his family. By 1881 his family was replaced by 84 year old Sir Thomas Read, a retired Army General, with his family of four together with six servants.

1891 The Manor House was occupied by a widowed magistrate, George Shadwell, with his four servants and also a coachman and his family living in rooms over the stables.

1901 The census states that the Manor House was unoccupied. But by December 1901 Reverend Gaisford-Bourne had taken up residence to be followed on his death by Reverend Hunton Oliver in 1908. The stables continued to be occupied by coachmen and servants. By the 1921 census, another vicar, Reverend Harry Hubert Heap, had moved in with his family.

1923 Reverend Vernon Ashby Busbridge moved into the house when he became vicar. He appears to have been separated from his wife in the early 1900s and was living with a male 'companion', Major Cundall, in the 1920s. Rev. Busbridge was responsible for the commissioning of the Church Chancel stained glass windows.



*Reverend Busbridge leading a procession
from the Manor House to the church*

1936 Reverend Busbridge moved to another parish but was buried in the North Baddesley churchyard in 1939. He was replaced by Reverend Rollo Pierce Butler who was incumbent until 1947. Prior to World War II, he appeared to

have a rather colourful background for he was a member of the British Union of Fascists and supporter of Oswald Mosley. However, by this time the Manor House appears to have moved back into secular hands. In the 1938 Evening Telegraph edition 12th July it was reported: 'Members of the house party of Captain Sidney Cordington Nation at a historic manor at North Baddesley near Eastleigh, Hampshire, helped to put out flames which threatened to involve the building. Firemen discovered the cause to be a centuries old oaken beam which had been smouldering under the fireplace for three weeks. Captain Nation seems to have been still resident in 1939.

1940 to 1945 A colourful outline of the house during the war was written by John Hibberd, who, aged 15 years, had come to live at the Manor House. His father's firm, J R Wood and Co, had been bombed out of premises in Southampton. As suppliers of fuel, the company held priority status and had been granted a lease on the Manor House by the Chamberlayne Estate. John's father was the firm's chief clerk and was asked to live on site with the added responsibility of fire watching. The rest of the staff were bussed in daily. John's father was also sergeant in the local branch of the Home Guard, so was very busy throughout the war. John, himself, had the dubious pleasure of sleeping with Home Guard ammunition under his bed.

Present date – it is unclear when the ownership of the Manor House switched from the Chamberlayne family. The current owner of Cranbury Park is Mrs Penelope Chamberlayne-Macdonald whose family are patrons of the North Baddesley church. Mrs Chamberlayne-Macdonald was christened in the church in the 1930s. The Manor House is now privately owned.

End Notes

¹ Henry G D Liveing, *Records of Romsey Abbey 907 to 1558*, Warren and son, Winchester 1906 pp 218 to 228

² Horace Walpole, *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orofrd*, including numerous letters published from the original manuscripts in four volumes (Volume 2, 1749-1759)

Sources:

Romsey Local History Society

Websites (details available on request)

Musing over a Photo - Gertrude's Sunday School Treat

by Raymond Metters

One annoying aspect of old photos is often the absence of a clue identifying any person in the frames. It is a relief when not only one, but several clues occur.

A nostalgic review of two photos from a LTVAS publication dated 1975, *A Slice of Old Romsey*, appears to offer an abundance of clues. We have a surname, the Christian names of two girls, a residence in Kent, and an event occurring in 1910 - one year before an ever-useful census record. This suggests an easy solution, lying either within the 1911 Census of Romsey or its equivalent for Tunbridge Wells. Yet, this proves to be over optimistic.



Picture postcard with arrows indicating crosses on two girls

Page 36 of the LTVAS booklet shows the subject. It involves a picture postcard, featuring a photo of a school procession, with the supplementary photo showing the back with the message sent from Romsey more than a hundred and ten years ago. How many readers have wondered about the circumstances of the two girls with crosses added on their frocks?

The reference to school treats hints at the popular national Sunday school treat days. Sunday schools were well-established in Romsey by the start of the 20th century, with the nonconformists forming the Romsey District Sunday School Union, led mainly by the Reverend G Brown of Cadnam, until his untimely death in 1910¹.

The annual treat for the Church of England schools was on a different day than the other churches. In July 1910, the event did not follow the usual format of

assembling at Broadlands. It was unavailable, but Mrs Gavin allowed Whitenap Park to host the event. So, the procession is shown against the houses of Winchester Road approaching the junction with Botley Road. Whitenap had acted as a venue for public events for decades, including school events. They had been common throughout the residency of the Fryer family at Whitenap Farm. The earliest English census records can trace the Fryers back to the 1841 census. It shows Martha Fryer managing Whitenap Farm with her young family, the eldest being her daughter, Martha (20).

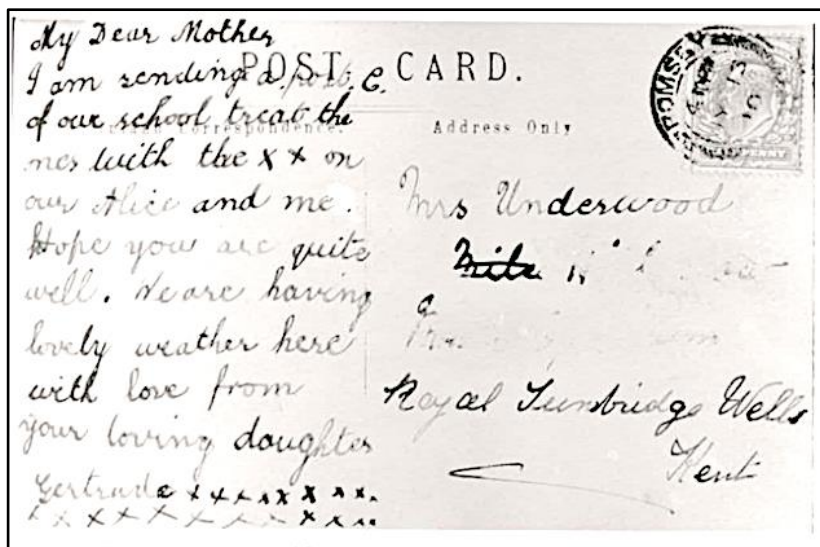
Martha (senior) died in 1845: Charles Fryer and his sister, Martha junior, then managed the farm jointly. It was later, following Charles' death in 1854, that the much-loved cricket ground was created. Martha's younger brother, Frederick, joined her in organising the farm, and he batted and bowled on the wicket he created. The Romsey club had played Lymington at Greatbridge in 1854². From 1855, it moved its fixtures to Whitenap, the first match being against Winchester³.

The Whitenap innovation was so successful that, in March 1859, they changed the name of the Romsey Cricket Club to Whitenap Park Cricket Club⁴. A newspaper referred to this venue as the *famous ground with beautiful landscape*⁵. Special days for school children and cricket matches were not the only events, as the park held shows, with the Romsey flower show becoming a popular event later in the century under the Allan family.

Mrs Alice Gavin's helpful offer to the school children of 1910 occurred three years after her energetic husband's death at 42 years. This gentleman farmer, who had operated from his luxury home in Durban House, was an ambitious man with an uncanny penchant for acquiring not only farmland but whole farms. He mixed with local political dignitaries, served as a councillor, and attended his duties regularly. Harry Douglas Gavin relished physical activities in his spare time, and he *punched his weight* as vice-captain of the team that, by then, had resumed the name of the Romsey Cricket Club.

The Town and Volunteer Band set the mood for the young walkers on that fine day in July 1910. Most of the groups were from Romsey but Ridge, Lee, and Crampmoor children also took part. A magnifying glass clearly reveals the name of Lee Sunday School on the placard behind Alice in the photo. 460 walked, and they transported others in vans.

At the park, a Punch and Judy show awaited, with a steam roundabout and a cinematograph show. There was also an array of sporting activities, with many prizes for successful competitors, followed by tea⁶.



The reverse of the postcard with Gertrude's message

Gertrude Underwood, who wrote the postcard to her mother, is missing in the Tunbridge Wells census of 1911, but listed in the census for Romsey. The 14-year-old girl is boarding in the home of Thomas Martin, a postman, and his wife Emily. They have two young girls.

The Romsey census shows Gertrude's birth in Ventnor in 1897, while the Isle of Wight census for 1901 adds the sad fact that Gertrude was even then lodging as a boarder when aged four. She shared her Ventnor home with a Romsey-born man, George Edwards, and his wife, Sarah. However, the house was close to Gertrude's mother, Eliza, who lived two buildings apart with her brother, Henry Milligan, his wife, and young sons.

An earlier census for Ventnor in 1891 explains how Gertrude came to Romsey. George's and Sarah Edwards' daughter, Emily, married Thomas Martin of Romsey in 1902. It was obviously more suitable for Gertrude to live with the Martin family. It would certainly be closer to her mother by then living in Kent.

A baptismal record from 1897 shows Gertrude's christening in March, and it names the father Abraham Lincoln Underwood. He married Eliza in August 1896 in Boston, Suffolk, Massachusetts. There appear to be no records for Abraham Underwood in England except his name on children's baptismal certificates, but several records exist in the USA, including his death details in New York in 1965⁷.

The only possible reference to Eliza Underwood in the 1911 census is the name shown in the Tunbridge Wells census. It recorded Eliza's occupation as a maid. She was visiting a boarding house. Her place and year of birth, Ventnor in 1870, and the number of years married, both agree with the information in the 1901 census for Ventnor.

Perhaps the postcard appears a little formal, despite the superfluous kisses. For example, 'My dear mother' and 'your dear daughter'. Alice's behaviour seems strange. There is no message from her or a signature. Surely the girls would not send a card each and double the stamp costs? It is puzzling to see two lines of the address obliterated, unlike the clarity elsewhere. Gertrude also crossed out the first word in the address. It starts "Mil". Did she begin her own address by mistake? She lived at Mill House, Crescent Road, Romsey.

The 1939 Register is crucial for revealing further links. It shows a grown-up Gertrude living with her daughter and mother in Southborough Road, Tunbridge Wells. Gertrude and Eliza appear as widows, despite Eliza's husband being alive in the USA. Gertrude's daughter, Joyce Winifred Underwood, a manageress of a tobacco shop, is 21. She became Mrs Arthur William Davis when she married in 1940.

It is interesting that both Gertrude and Joyce abandoned the father's surname. Joyce's 1918 baptismal certificate bears the name Joyce Winifred Adams⁸. To complicate matters, Gertrude's husband, Frank Adams, had changed his name by the time of Joyce's birth to Albert John Adams. Gertrude wedded Frank Adams in Tonbridge, Kent⁹.

Gertrude named her other child in loyalty to the American connection, as he was called Harold Stanley Lincoln Underwood. His probate papers show he died only a few months after his grandmother's demise in Tunbridge Wells. Eliza died in October 1943 and Harold in May 1944, while on war service. Both had lived in the house comprising flats in Garden Road, Tunbridge Wells.

Gertrude continued living in Kent. The probate papers for her list both surnames, Adams and Underwood. The Romsey whiff of hops did her little harm, as she almost made the age of ninety. Her cremation occurred in Kent in September 1985.

The main difficulty with the account is Alice, who remains unknown. No record with this name matches the situation at Romsey on that day of treats in 1910. Gertrude's only sibling was Harold Underwood, who died on the Isle of Wight in the year he was born, 1898. The likely explanation is that Alice was a close friend of Gertrude's, and obviously known to her mother.

One remaining puzzle is, how did a postcard despatched to Royal Tunbridge Wells in 1910 fall into the hands of the LTVAS group at Romsey almost fifty years ago? Most of the early team has passed on, so we are unlikely to know.



Detail from postcard showing close-up of the two girls

END NOTES

¹ Hampshire Independent, 28 May 1910

² Salisbury and Winchester Journal, 16 July 1853

³ Hampshire Advertiser, 30 June 1855

⁴ Dorset County Express and Agricultural Gazette, March 29, 1859

⁵ Hampshire Advertiser, 9 May 1868

⁶ Hampshire Independent, 9 July, 1910

⁷ The death information comes from the Long family in Ancestry's Public Family Trees

⁸ East Sussex Church of England Births and Baptisms 1813-1920

⁹ The Civil Registration of Marriages for 1915 (Oct-Nov-Dec section, 2a 2458).

Was Romsey Nunnery founded by King Edward the Elder in 907? The traditional version of the founding of Romsey Nunnery

by Ian Clark

Over the last couple of centuries more than 20 authors have provided us with written accounts of the earliest days of Romsey Nunnery. Almost all of them follow the same basic structure, a story in two distinct stages:

1. In the early 900s (the year 907 is often mentioned) King Edward the Elder probably founded a monastic community in Romsey, possibly with his daughter Elflaeda as Abbess. There are then no further surviving records of this community for six decades, so most authors presume it must have become defunct, until...
2. In 967 King Edward's grandson King Edgar (re-)founded Romsey as a Benedictine nunnery under the Abbess Merwenna.

As an example, I will quote from the scholarly *Victoria County History of Hampshire* (VCH), published in 1903 as the definitive version of events at that time:

The statements with regard to the early foundation of Romsey are confusing and conflicting, but it would seem probable that Edward the Elder founded this house about the year 907, and that his daughter St. Elflada became abbess and was buried there. In 967 Edgar, grandson of Edward the Elder, reconstituted the abbey, dedicating it to the honour of St. Mary and St. Elflada, and placed there nuns under the Benedictine rule over whom he appointed Merwenna as abbess. (VCH Hampshire, vol 2, page 126, Romsey Abbey)

Well over a century later, the current Abbey website says:

Traditionally, the Abbey Church of St Mary and St Ethelflaeda can trace its origins back to 907AD, the year in which King Edward the Elder, son of the Saxon King Alfred the Great, first settled some nuns here under the charge of his daughter Elflaeda. King Edgar refounded (or, quite possibly, founded) the nunnery in 967 under the rule of St. Benedict.

This paper argues that the first stage of this reported Nunnery history (foundation by Edward in the early 900s) is based on several assumptions derived from two unreliable sources written centuries after the supposed events, or on misinterpretation of a phrase in a royal charter. I conclude that this part of the story is essentially a myth, possibly developed by the Victorians to provide the Nunnery with a second royal founder.

How do historians assess the credibility of different documentary sources?

All professional disciplines have commonly accepted standards and tests to assess the credibility of theories and results. For example, in financial matters there are independent audits; in science the results of experiments need to be replicated when carried out by different scientists in different locations using different equipment. One common test used by historians is known by the acronym WRAP:

- **When** – how long after the events was it recorded?
- **Reputation** – who wrote it, and what was their reputation like?
- **Accuracy** – how well do the details agree with other sources?
- **Purpose** – why was the source written? how biased?

We will use the WRAP criteria to assess the credibility of the accounts of Edward's foundation, assigning equal weights (ie 25%) to each factor.

The case for a foundation by King Edward the Elder

The first document which mentions a connection between Romsey and King Edward comes from Norman times over two centuries later. John and Florence, monks from Worcester, wrote their manuscript ***Chronicon ex chronicis*** in Latin in the early 12th century. The extract shown below is from the *Florentii Wigorniensis monachi Chronicon ex chronicis*, edited by Benjamin Thorpe in 1848 (p141):

Rex Anglorum pacificus Eadgarus, in Monasterio Rumesige, quod avus suus rex Anglorum Eadwardus Senior construxerat, sanctimoniales collocavit, sanctamque Mærwynnam supr eas abbatissam constituit	A.D. 907 Nuns at Romsey S. Mærwyn abbess
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------

A translation was provided by Thomas Forester in 1854 *The chronicle of Florence of Worcester*, p103

[A.D. 967.] Edgar the Pacific, king of England, placed nuns in the monastery at Rumsey, founded by his grandfather Edward the Elder, king of England, and appointed St. Mærwyn to be their abbess.

Quite what the Worcester monks' source for linking King Edward to Romsey is not clear. Their basic chronology is mainly based on the popular work of an 11th century Irish monk, Marianus Scotus (d1086) who spent most of his adult life in European monasteries, but they clearly used other sources, now lost, as well. Several later medieval chroniclers (Symeon of Durham, Roger of Howden, Roger of Wendover, and John Leland) copied the Worcester annal.

Note that the Latin word '*monasterio*' can also be translated into (Old) English as 'minster' – generally a large church serving a wide area, more like a Hundred (or modern District) than a parish in size – staffed by clergy and laity rather than monks or nuns.

2019 research (currently unpublished) of Romsey Abbey's Norman floors using ground penetrating radar (GPR) appears to show a church-shaped structure underneath the known late Saxon church. According to Scott's 1996 archaeological report, direct archaeological excavations have shown an ecclesiastical presence on the site from the 8th to 11th centuries. But it is unlikely that King Edward was involved in any Romsey minster foundation, as he restricted his ecclesiastical gifts to those institutions with direct connections to the royal family (eg the Old and New Minsters in Winchester) or favoured senior bishops. No charter from Edward the Elder for Romsey has ever been discovered.

Using the WRAP test, the Worcester chronicle scores low for recency, say 5% out of a possible 25%; for reputation reasonably high at say 20%; for accuracy moderate (say 10%), as there are no sources mentioned or corroborating evidence; and high for purpose, which does not appear overtly biased (say 20%). This leads to a moderate overall rating of 55%.

The second documentary source that is claimed to show Edward's link to Romsey comes from the *Liber de Hyda*, a collection of important mediaeval documents preserved in the records of Hyde monastery in Winchester. When the Normans knocked down the Old and New Minsters in central Winchester to make way for their enormous new Cathedral in the early 1100s, they created a

new Hyde monastery on the outskirts of the city. The *Liber de Hyda* collection contains several royal wills and charters about Hyde.

Contained within this collection is a *Chronicle of the Affairs of England from 455*. The earliest copy we have is from the 14th century. This chronicle stops abruptly in 1023, as though later pages in the manuscript have been lost. This history particularly traces the development of Hyde monastery and its predecessors (the Old and New Minsters), extolling their various benefactors. Even the Victorian editor (Edward Edwards) of the government-funded Rolls edition of this work (1886), commented on how careless the original monastic authors were, particularly about dates, which often differ by several years from those set out in other sources like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* or royal charters. Clearly the monks had to rely on other accounts of events centuries before, but they appear to have taken little care to cross-check among reliable documentary sources. Writing in Latin, when most of their sources would have been in Old English, their transliterations of personal names are idiosyncratic, as the following example demonstrates.

Romsey gets mentioned once in Edward's time in this *Hyde Chronicle*. It comes in a discussion about King Edward's family with his second wife Elflaeda:

The other children of Edward.	Ex prima uxore sua, videlicet Elfelmi comitis [filia], nomine Elfleda; genuit duos filios, videlicet Ethelwardum, virum in literatura instructum, qui tum non diu vixit, et Edwynum; et sex filias, scilicet, Elfledam sanctam, et Deo dicatam, quæ apud Romeseyam requiescit; Edginam, quam dedit Karolo, regi Francorum, filio Lodowyci, filii Karoli Calvi; Etheltildam, Deo dicatam, quæ Wyltoniæ requiescit; Ethyldam, quam dedit pater Hugoni Capet, regi Occidentalium Francorum; Edgitham et Elginam misit Henrico, Alemanorum imperatori, maritandas, quarum secundam ille locavit filio sui Othoni, alteram cuidam duci juxta Alpes.
-------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

After two sons, Ethelward and Edwyn, six daughters are listed. The Latin forms of each of the girl's names differs from those mentioned in other records: Eadflaed, Æthelhild, Eadgifu, Eadhild, Eadgyth and Ælgifu. The first of these is "holy *Elfleda*, dedicated to God, who rests in Romsey". Unfortunately, all the other records of Edward's family do not mention a daughter Elfleda, but only Aedflaed, a female name with a rather different meaning in Anglo-Saxon. When Edward divorced Elflaeda c920, the other medieval chroniclers (notably William of Malmesbury) have the Queen retiring to her family's estates in Wiltshire. Her two unmarried daughters, Ædflaed and Æthelhild, went with her and became

nuns at Wilton, a typical outcome for unmarried Anglo-Saxon princesses, where all three were buried.

A note on the Benedictine Reformation

By 900, the number and quality of monastic communities had sharply declined, probably mainly because of the Viking attacks of the previous two centuries, with the remaining institutions following different practices (eg married priests rather than celibate monks/nuns). From about 930 three leading churchmen – who subsequently became bishops – Dunstan of Canterbury, Aethelwold of Winchester and Oswald of Worcester & York – decided to improve matters by trying to standardise practices, based around the Rule of Benedict and the best liturgical practice from Carolingian Europe. King Edgar (who had been taught by Dunstan, and who used Aethelwold as his official secretary for some years) readily backed their plans. Aethelwold translated the *Rule of Benedict* into Old English for use in each monastery. Sometime in the 960s or early 970s a Synod was convened where the bishops agreed on a common framework for the conduct of the monastic communities, the *Regularis Concordia*. Whilst this preserved the role of the King and Queen as Guardians of monasteries and nunneries respectively, it removed royal or episcopal power to appoint the heads of monastic houses after their foundation. Subsequent heads (abbots and abbesses etc) were to be elected by the local community of monks or nuns (Rule 64 *Election of the Abbot*, in the *Rule of Benedict of Nursia*).

Quite why the authors of the Hyde *Chronicle* carelessly buried Aedflaed in Romsey rather than Wilton is a mystery. My supposition is that they relied a lot on oral traditions rather than written sources, and muddled the name of Ædflaed first with Elflæda, then perhaps centuries later, confused Edward's daughter with Romsey's Abbess Ethelflæda, who lived at least five decades later in the late 10th century. Though only 10% of the people mentioned in surviving Anglo-Saxon documents are women, these three female names are reasonably common, so later historians could easily have become confused. The key academic database of Anglo-Saxon persons (PASE <https://pase.ac.uk/>) lists 32 different women called Æthelflæd, 26 different Ælflæds and 7 different Eadflæds.

Using the WRAP test, this Hyde chronicle appears to have had several authors over the centuries, and appears to have relied on oral as well as documentary sources. The unknown author of the final version we now have appears to have

been pretty casual with his dating, and idiosyncratic with names, managing to mis-identify a royal princess and muddle her with a Romsey abbess from two or three generations later. The overall purpose of this chronicle was to glorify the main benefactors of Hyde monastery and its predecessor New Minster, sometimes attributing them with semi-miraculous powers and glossing over their defects. So, I suggest an overall low WRAP score (W=5%, R=10%, A=5%, P=10%) of perhaps 30%.

Some modern authors quote a third document to suggest that a nunnery existed in Romsey before King Edgar (re)founded it in 967. They use the phrase 'previous privileges' from Edgar's c967 charter establishing the Romsey Nunnery to infer that there must have been a previous monastic institution in Romsey, presumably the one founded by King Edward. But closer examination of the charter suggests a very different interpretation of this phrase:

I, Edgar, grant the eternal freedom of the monastic privilege to the nuns who regularly reside in the monastery, as soon as after the death of the abbess Merwenna (in whose time the restoration of this freedom was granted by the favour of Christ), which the whole congregation of the aforesaid nuns elected for themselves in a council according to the regular rule of the blessed Benedict, by electing an abbess justly from the same company of sisters, [Christ] shall establish the freedom of this privilege, thereafter let it be held in perpetuity by all . . . and let the college of the same convent perpetually glory in the privilege of the aforesaid freedom, which by our Catholic predecessors, that is to say, the Kings have long been held to use the privilege.

Source: extracted from the 967 Romsey Charter, taken from the Latin text in the *Electronic Sawyer* database <https://esawyer.lib.cam.ac.uk/charter/812.html#> and translated with the help of Google Translate.

The 'former privileges' mentioned in the Romsey charter were not those belonging to an earlier Romsey monastic institution, but to the King. Royalty was surrendering the power to appoint future abbesses, which was handed to the college of Romsey nuns in perpetuity, following the new Benedictine rules being introduced from Europe. Romsey is one of the earliest English monastic institutions (and probably the first nunnery) where royalty and bishops agreed to forgo their traditional privilege of appointing the heads of houses, and allow elections by their local communities, an early example of the impact of the Benedictine reformation on English monasticism.

Other relevant factors

There are several other factors that suggest Edward would not have founded a nunnery in Romsey in the early 900s, or to have placed his daughter there as abbess:

1. There are no surviving contemporary Anglo-Saxon records that mention Romsey as a place, yet alone one boasting a monastic community, before the 960s. No mention in official chronicles, land charters, wills, correspondence, bishop's registers or similar documents from which we piece together most Anglo-Saxon history. If Edward had founded a royal-sponsored monastic community in Romsey in the early 900s, how plausible is it that it would have been allowed to fail so completely, leaving no documentary trace?
2. Kings Alfred and Edward had a clear policy of developing *burghs* (fortified towns) to act as a defensive shield against Viking attacks. It is unlikely that Edward would have founded any royal institution in an undefended hamlet like Romsey.
3. On ascending the throne in 899, Edward was extremely busy establishing his position. He had to fight off an attempt to usurp him by his cousin Æthelwold, who led a rebellion from the north with Viking assistance that was not put down until 902 when Æthelwold was killed at the battle of Holme. For the second half of his reign from 910 Edward was constantly on the move thwarting various attacks on Wessex and Mercia, in alliance with his warrior sister Æthelflaed, the Queen of the Mercians.
4. After the Viking raids of the previous century, the number of monasteries and nunneries had fallen very significantly, and many of the remainder were in a poor state. The official policy appears to have been to try and rebuild the (male) monasteries at the expense of nunneries, to improve the pool of potential senior clergy – most bishops were former monks. None of King Edward's surviving charters appears to involve a nunnery (except his mother's Nunnaminster), though there are lots of transactions with the New Minster in Winchester, as well as Malmesbury.
5. Both kings Alfred and Edward appear to have fallen out with the then bishop of Winchester Denewulf (who controlled the Cathedral and clergy), and planned a rival New Minster to be staffed by monks under their own control. With Alfred's death, it was left to Edward to build a magnificent New Minster and a royal mausoleum next to the 'Old Minster'. This was completed in 901, and apparently the buildings were so close the two choirs tried to out-sing each other!
6. Edward's mother Queen Ealhswith also started to found a nunnery, Nunnaminster, but died before building could be started. So, Edward completed the project in 903. His youngest daughter Eadburh (by his third wife, born in the early 920s) was brought up in Nunnaminster, and eventually became Abbess.
7. Edward's sister Æthelgifu was already Abbess of Shaftesbury in the early 900s, which would have been another natural home for any royal children.

8. It is not clear when Edward's daughter Eadflaed (or Elfleda) was born, but I suspect she was the eldest daughter, as her name is a combination of her father's and mother's names. If so, she was probably born between 900 and 905, and so very unlikely to have become a nun, yet alone an abbess, before the 920s.

Conclusion

The so-called 'evidence' for king Edward founding Romsey Nunnery turns out to be very flimsy, relying on two sentences in documents written centuries later with no earlier sources quoted. The Hyde author(s) appear to have also been very careless with the details of dates and people. Modern authors who refer to the 'previous privileges' in the 967 charter have simply misinterpreted who held them – it was the King, not a prior monastic community. The king's busyness on other affairs of state, family matters and Winchester monastic projects means that it is highly unlikely that Edward founded a nunnery in Romsey in the early 900s, so this stage of the Nunnery's history should be regarded as a Victorian myth. It is possible that Edward made a contribution to the earlier Minster in Romsey, but there is no documentary trace of this.

Quite where the 907-foundation date came from is a mystery. The earliest mention I can find is by JC Cox on the 1903 Victoria County History, quoted at the start of this article. Sarah Foot has the likeliest explanation, with the VCH author mis-reading the tiny marginal 967 date in the Rolls editions of the later medieval chronicles by Worcester and Howden (see page 2 of this article) as 907, so assigning the foundation to King Edward rather than King Edgar.

A future article will explore what I believe is the 'real' foundation of the Romsey Nunnery about 967 by King Edgar, which is far better attested in different contemporary sources with WRAP scores of over 90%. It will also explore the roles of the different characters who played a part.

The author is indebted to RLHS colleagues who have made comments on early drafts, particularly Mary Harris and Judith Beton for valuable insights. Also to Google Books, Google Translate and the Internet Archive without which many of the documents would be inaccessible to an amateur historian. And to the University of Southampton Library for access to their books on Anglo-Saxon and ecclesiastical history. And to my wife Katy for tireless proof-reading.



NOTE: A very comprehensive list of primary and secondary sources is available on request or on the Society's website.



One page from the report on the Ground Penetrating Radar Survey of Romsey Abbey 2019 by KBGPR

The bright red areas show traces of buildings thought to predate the Saxon Abbey church and the royal blue areas the Saxon church itself