Agnes de Monceaux and Crewkerne School

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As early as the time of Thomas Gerard, who compiled his *Particular Description of the County of Somerset* in or about the year 1633, John de Combe was regarded as the founder of Crewkerne School (*S.R.S.*, xv, 67). A document, quoted by the Rev. R. Grosvenor Bartelot, F.S.A.,[1] makes it clear that de Combe certainly endowed the 'Free Grammer Scoole' in 1499, and, at the same time, placed the management of the trust, which he created, in the hands of feoffees and 'sixe of the moste discreeteste men of the Town of Crukerne'.

It has been suggested that the 'Free Grammer Scoole' was an existing chantry school, and that the lay governing body which controlled de Combe's trust, became its governing body after 1548.

The Somerset Archæological Society visited the Old School House on 11 July 1939. In the course of an address delivered on this occasion, Mr. Bartelot drew the attention of his hearers to the theory of an earlier origin for the foundation than the endowment by John de Combe in 1499. This theory has been developed by Mr. A. F. Leach in two books on ancient scholastic establishments in England, and by a writer in the *Victoria County History of Somerset*, since the publication of Mr. Bartelot's book some forty years ago.

The following notes have been collected with the aid of Mr. Bartelot to illustrate what is now thought to have been the origin of the school, and to elucidate the story of Agnes de Monceaux, who should, perhaps, be regarded as the founder.

[1] *History of Crewkerne School*, 25.

Enough evidence survives in the Patent Rolls to enable those who are curious in such matters to gain some insight into the forceful character of the great heiress, Isabella de Fortibus, through whom Agnes obtained her property in Crewkerne ; and there are indications that the personality of Agnes herself was not without interest, but the meagre references in contemporary documents are too slight to convey a clear impression of her as an individual.

An entry occurs in the *Calendarium Inquisitionum ad quod damnum*, 2 Ed. II, relating to a chantry in the Church of Crewkerne. If this was the chantry of the Holy Trinity, mentioned in the Survey of 1547–48,[1] Agnes de Monceaux may indeed be regarded as the founder of the existing school, as will be shown below. Little, however, is known of the history of the Trinity chantry. There are no entries in the bishop's registers regarding the institution of chaplains. The chantry certainly received endowments after the fourteenth century, and may even have been founded after the life-time of Agnes. Mr. Willis Watson quotes an interesting reference to this chantry from the Patent Rolls, 28 Elizabeth. It relates to property lately belonging to ' the gild or fraternity of the Holy Trinity in the Church of Crewkerne '. In 1547 the chantry had become ' the Free Scole ', ' sometyme callyd the Chauntrie of the Trinitie '. A request was made that the free school should be continued, and part at any rate of the endowments of the Trinity chantry, and possibly also of those of the chantries of Our Lady within the Churchyard and of Our Lady within the Church,[2] were transferred to the use of the school. The property at Pillsdon in Dorset, sold to meet the cost of erecting the present school buildings, had been one of the endowments of the Trinity chantry.

Collinson quotes the entry from the *Calendarium* ; ' It was found not to the King's detriment to grant Agnes de Monceaux a licence settling the sum of 4*l*. 4*s*. 3*d*. rent in Crewkerne on a certain chaplain in this church to celebrate mass daily in perpetuum.'

[1] *S.R.S.*, II, 7, 178.

[2] No institution of a chaplain to this chantry is recorded before 1344.

In the *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 26 August, 3 Ed. II (1309), there is recorded a

> Licence, upon fine, for the alienation in mortmain by Agnes de Munceaux of 8 messuages, 65½ acres of land, and 21*s.* 4*d.* of rent in Crukerne, co. Somerset, to a chaplain to celebrate divine service daily for the soul of Isabella de Fortibus, countess of Albemarle, and for the souls of her own ancestors, in a chapel to be founded by her in honour of the Blessed Mary in the cemetary of the church of Crukerne.

A second licence to Agnes de Monceaux is found in the *Calendarium*, 7 Ed. II, and concerns her chapel in the churchyard—

> Agnes Monceaux pro cant' in Cruke.
> Cruke 18 (? 8) messuag' 65 acr' terr' & 21*s* redd'
> Crafte
> Mynsterton et
> Hywysshe infra maner' de Cruke £40 terr'

The next reference to this chapel is in the *Register of Bishop John de Drokensford* (*S.R.S.* i, 106),

> Bp. to Rich. de Turbevile, Pr. Letter dated London, May 5, 1316, instituting him Chaplain in the Chantry newly endowed by Agnes Moncaux (with consent of Rector, &c.) in the Lady Chapel in the Churchyard of Crewkerne ; rights of parish Ch. and Bp. saved.

Agnes de Monceaux had died before 1325, as the institution of Walter de Hulle to the Lady Chapel in Crewkerne Churchyard is recorded in the same register, 4 March of that year (*ib.* 245), and Sir Hugh de Courtenay was then patron ; however, she was living in 1315–16, for ' in the quinzaine of St. Michael ', 9 Ed. II, a concord was made regarding the manor of Crewkerne and other property between Hugh de Courtenay, afterwards Earl of Devon, and his mother, Eleanor, widow of the Sir Hugh de Courtenay who had died in 1291. In the fine, the moiety of the manor of Crewkerne which Agnes de Monceaux held for her life is referred to, and the ' concord was made by precept of the king in the presence of Agnes who consented and did fealty to Hugh de Courtenay in the court ' (*ib.*, xii, 53).

In March 1315, the marriage between Hugh, son of the last mentioned Hugh de Courtenay, and Margaret de Bohun, the king's niece, was being arranged, and licences connected with

the marriage settlements occur in the *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 14 March of that year. In these, reference is made to ' the reversion of a moiety of the manor of Crukerne, co. Somerset, held in chief, which Agnes de Munceaus holds for her life of his ' (*i.e.* Hugh de Courtenay's) ' inheritance of the demise of Isabella de Fortibus, sometime countess of Albemarle, his kinswoman, whose heir he is ', to be held ' together with all knights' fees, advowsons of churches, and other things appertaining to the said moiety of the manor of Crukerne '.

Whether many of the priests who served chantries acted continuously, or even intermittently, as schoolmasters ; and whether, indeed, it was the intention of the founders that the priests should so occupy their time, is not known. Nor, although Crewkerne School certainly acquired the endowment of the Trinity Chapel within the Church, does there seem to be any definite evidence that Agnes de Monceaux's chapel in the churchyard was appropriated to the school, although Leland's reference in 1540–42 to the grammar school by the Church may be an indication that this is what occurred. However, after the date of Leland's visit the Trinity Chapel in the Church was still used as the school as late as 1547, as has been shown above. Were, perhaps, both the Trinity Chapel and the chapel in the churchyard used concurrently as school-rooms, and was the chapel in the churchyard enlarged subsequently to accommodate the whole school ? In the absence of conclusive evidence for or against the theory, it may be surmised that the old school on the edge of the churchyard, which was rebuilt in 1636, was Agnes de Monceaux's chapel to which additions had been made during the sixteenth century. The building of 1636 continued to be used for the purpose for which it was erected until 1883.

The identity of Isabella de Fortibus is well established. She was daughter of Baldwin de Redvers, Earl of Devon, and was born in July 1237. She married in 1248/9, William de Forz or de Fortibus, titular Count of Aumarle or Albemarle, Lord of Holderness. After the death of her brother, Baldwin, Earl of Devon, in 1262, she became Countess of Devon in her own right and had livery of his lands. She was better known as Lady of the Isle (*i.e.* the Isle of Wight). Her daughter,

Avelina, married Edmund, Earl of Lancaster, but died without issue in 1274. When Isabella died in 1293, among other properties, her cousin Hugh de Courtenay inherited Crewkerne, subject to the life interest which she had bestowed on Agnes de Monceaux. Crewkerne was part of the de Redvers inheritance.

But who was Agnes de Monceaux ? The clue is given in the *Patent Rolls*, 27 November 1293, in an

> *Inspeximus* and confirmation of a writing dated Caresbrok, Isle of Wythg, all Saints' Day, 10 Edward I (1282–3), whereby Isabella de Fortibus, countess of Albemarle and Devon, and Lady of the said island, granted for life to Agnes de Monceaus, daughter of Robert de Monceaus, her whole manor of Craft and Cruk' with the advowson of the church of Cruk', and of the portions and chapels belonging to the said church, at a rent of 80*l.* (*sic*) a year, the said Agnes to be quit of the said rent after the death of the said Isabella, in case she survived, but after her death the premises to revert to the heirs of the said Isabella.

It would appear that, although the original grant to Agnes de Monceaux was made at Caresbrooke, the confirmation is likely to have been made at Crewkerne as several of the witnesses were Somerset men.

> Witnesses : Sir John de Insula, and Thomas de la Haulle, Henry Trenchard, John de Heyno, Thomas de Evercy, knights ; John de Insula, rector of the church of Schaudeflet, Robert Makerel ; Sirs Hugh de Curteneye, John de Meriet, Henry de Ralege, Walter de Furnaus, Walter de Loveny, knights ; John de Urtiaco, Ralph Burnel, Philip Denebaud and others.

The necessity for this confirmation is shown by a pardon, under the same date in the *Patent Rolls*, given to Agnes de Monceaux for her trespass in receiving without the king's licence seisin of the manor of Craft and Cruk' and the other properties mentioned above. Isabella de Fortibus had held Crewkerne in chief, and no alienation should have been made without the king's licence.

The date of the confirmation is very shortly after that of Isabella's death. No doubt the Courtenays could have disputed Agnes's life interest had they chosen to do so. It should be noted that in 1315 it was not the whole of the manor but only a moiety that was held by Agnes.

The Craft of the original grant was perhaps the same as Croft where there was a castle, the site of which is mentioned by Gerard (*S.R.S.*, xv, 66). Here we may suppose that Agnes lived. When the Survey of Chantries was made, the highest item in the rental of the Trinity Chantry, paid for the upkeep of the school, was derived from lands called ' Crafte ' (*S.R.S.*, ii, 7).

> Sir Hughe Paulet Knighte and Henry Cricke holden of the Kinges Matie certayne customary landes pcell of his Graces Manor of Crukerne aforesaide, videlt, too partes of the landes callyd Crafte graunted unto theym by copy of Courte Rolle for terme of their lyves after the custome of the saide Manor to the use of the Trynitie and mayntēnnce of the saide Scole by the surveiors of the late attaynted Lorde m̃ques of Exciter, then Lorde of the saide manor, whiche landes be worthe yerely oṽ and above xl*s.* paide to the Manor of Crukerne aforesaide for the rent and farm of the same landes.

A suggestion is given in *The Knights of Edward I* (*Harl. Soc.*, lxxxii, 240) that Sir Robert de Munces of Lincolnshire, who was living in 1260, was the Robert de Monceaux, father of Agnes. This may have been the case, for the de Monceaux family of Barnston in Holderness and of Lincolnshire held their lands from the counts of Aumale, at any rate as early as the time of Henry I. When Avelina of Lancaster, daughter of Isabella de Fortibus, died, the de Monceaux of Barnston became tenants in chief. Probably they were related to the early counts of Aumale, for Sir Alan de Monceaux, who lived in the reign of Henry I and Stephen, founded the priory of Nun Coton, co. Lincoln, ' more especially for the souls of Stephen, count of Aumale and Hawise, his wife '. Stephen, count of Aumale, died before 1130 ; he was a direct ancestor of Isabella's husband.

On the whole, it would seem likely that Agnes belonged to the de Monceaux of Barnston in Holderness, though her name does not appear in their pedigree in Poulson's *History and Antiquities of the Seigniory of Holderness*, published 1840.

Poulson illustrated seals of some of the de Monceaux and describes their arms—*Or, a cross moline gules.* It seems uncertain whether the de Monceaux who gave their name to Hurstmonceaux, or the William de Monceaux of Quarme

Munceaux in Exton, whose name survives in that of Mounsey Castle, and who is frequently mentioned in Somerset records of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries were of the Holderness stem. Gerard seems to have thought that Agnes was a relation of William de Monceaux of Quarme, for after mentioning her chantries at Crewkerne, he gives her arms, '*gules a manche vare with a hand issuing out of it.* This was taken from the Lord Moynes Coate of Dunster whose neighbour he was at Averne Monceaux'. It is very doubtful whether the maunch in this coat could have been derived from that in the second coat of Mohun. A maunch was borne by other families bearing the name Monceaux, but in a coat of varying tinctures. Unfortunately Gerard does not indicate the source of his heraldic data in this case, so that some uncertainty still remains about the arms borne by Agnes.

The possibility that Agnes de Monceaux was the foundress of one of the oldest schools in England that has survived to the present day makes her identity a matter of special interest. It would appear that she lived at Crewkerne from *c.* 1282 until after 1316, and that she was wealthy and unmarried. The writer is informed that there is no reason why she should not have been a single woman with extensive property, administered in her name and possibly with her active participation. The ordinary rule of inheritance was that if a man died leaving no son, his estates were divided equally between his daughters, and their rights would seem to have been the same as those of a man if they came of age still unmarried; but this occurred so rarely that the circumstances of any exception to the general rule merit detailed examination.