

The Origin of *A Revelation of Purgatory**

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Assessing the late Middle English religious vision *A Revelation of Purgatory*¹ as an 'extremely vivid otherworld vision which deserves further study', Morton Bloomfield particularly noted the 'local flavour' of the piece.² While the vision fails to reveal the names of either the female visionary or the priest to whom she recounts her revelations, we are given other personal names and place names that argue for the vision's origin in Winchester at St. Mary's Abbey, or Nunnaminster.

The purgatorial spirit, Margaret, whom the visionary sees on St. Lawrence's night, 10 August 1422, first directs the visionary to 'send to' (156r.28) the recluse of Westminster, who is to advise a second priest of the request. The recluse of Westminster has been identified as one of two recluses living at the Benedictine abbey in 1422, John London and William Alnwick.³ The second priest, Peter Combe,⁴ was active in the abbey from 1363, his death in 1422–23 supplying a *terminus ad quem* for the *Revelation*.⁵

In contrast to her directions to *send* to Westminster, Margaret simply directs the visionary to 'bidde' three priests to say masses for her: the first, later identified as 'Maister Fforest' (157v.26), the second and third, 'Sir Richard Bone' and 'Don John Pery' (156v.4, 6–7). Similarly, she tells the dreamer to 'go to thy gostly fadyr, Sir John,' later named 'John Wynbourne' (156r.25, 157v.28).⁶ The visionary, in fact, reports that on the following day she went to Master Forest and Sir John Wynbourne, and she summarily reports that all the other priests granted the requests. The identification of the four priests accessible to the visionary argues strongly for composition in Winchester.

Both John Pery and Richard Bone appear in the ordination records of William Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester (1367–1404). John Pery, a monk of St. Swithun's Priory, graduated from acolyte to subdeacon,

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deacon, and priest in the years 1387–89.⁷ The September 1393 entry in Wykeham's register names Richard Bone among the acolytes in the 'city of Winchester'; the subsequent ordinations as subdeacon, deacon, and priest (1393–94) place him in Winchester at St. Mary's Abbey, or Nunnaminster.⁸

Master Forest of *A Revelation of Purgatory* is John Forest, who received the first of his many appointments in 1390 and died on 25 March 1446.⁹ As early as 1405–06 he was treasurer of the household of Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester (1407–47).¹⁰

The honorific 'Master' is attributable to his position as Master of the famous St. Cross Hospital, Winchester, from 1410 to 1444.¹¹ His concurrent appointment as rector of Wonston (8 May 1412–14)¹² speaks for his presence in the Winchester area, but more significant is his active role in the affairs of St. Swithun's; a lifetime pension granted to him in April 1414 by the priory 'for his esteemed counsel and help on many past occasions' suggests that John Forest was a member of the prior's council.¹³ In 1417 Cardinal Beaufort appointed him his vicar-general, a position he still held in 1425.¹⁴ That John Forest served as Archdeacon of Surrey from 1414 until at least 1422, and possibly until his death,¹⁵ is further evidence of his preeminence in the Winchester diocese at the time of the *Revelation*.

The fourth priest to whom the visionary goes is John Wynbourne, who, at the time of *A Revelation of Purgatory*, was the prior of Christchurch-Twynham, a house of Austin canons in the diocese of Winchester.¹⁶ Bishop Wykeham's ordination of John Wynbourne as acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, and priest is recorded through the years 1393–98.¹⁷ In 1402 John Wynbourne was one of seven canons who, 'animated by a devilish spirit, entered into a conspiracy' to overthrow the prior; this 'grievous rebellion' culminated in disciplinary action taken against the canons.¹⁸ The incident is recalled in 1412 in a papal letter to the prior of Christchurch-Twynham, mandating absolution for the offending canons (among them, John Wynbourne) in response to their petition.¹⁹ Wynbourne's career did not suffer as a result of this notoriety. In 1416 he served as the personal chaplain of Thomas Beaufort (d. 1427), Earl of Dorset and brother of Bishop Henry Beaufort; in a letter of 1416, the prior and convent of St. Swithun's granted Thomas Beaufort 'Confraternity ... on account of his special devotion to and affection for them,' and Thomas Beaufort's written reply acknowledges that, 'His chaplain, *sieur* John Winbourne ... informed him of their loving kindness toward him ...'.²⁰ John Wynbourne's rise to the position of prior in 1420 doubtless increased his presence in

Winchester. In a legal action in 1424, in fact, he is named as a co-executor of the estate of a citizen of Winchester.²¹

That the four priests are found in Winchester argues that the purgatorial spirit Margaret and the visionary with her were sisters at one of the three Benedictine houses in the Winchester area, Romsey, Wherwell, and Nunnaminster.²² Because Wherwell and Romsey are ten miles to the northwest and southwest of Winchester, Nunnaminster is the clearest choice. That John Pery was a monk of St. Swithun's suggests Nunnaminster, since the priory and abbey had a history of contact,²³ and Richard Bone's position as priest at Nunnaminster supplies even more convincing support.²⁴

A Revelation of Purgatory thus brings together religious men and women of three long-standing Winchester institutions, Nunnaminster, St. Swithun's, and the Hospital of St. Cross. Just as John Wynbourne brings Christchurch-Twynham into the sphere of reference, the allusion to the pilgrimage 'to Southwick,' which the visionary had taken on Margaret's behalf (164v.6), extends the topographical references to include another house of Austin canons in Hampshire, Southwick Priory, where the shrine to Our Lady was located.²⁵ While the visionary fails to identify herself-she, in fact, inadvertently teases us with the detail, 'sho ... named my name' (157v.19–20)-these references to persons and places, which surely deepened the interest for a contemporary audience, reduce our sense of the anonymity of the visionary and encourage our acceptance of the work as that of a religious woman experienced in such 'shewings'.

Notes

1. The work survives in three manuscripts: Longleat MS. 29 (fols. 155r–165v); the Thornton Manuscript (fols. 250v–258r), and Bodleian MS. Eng. th. c. 58 (fols. 10r–12v). All quotations, identified by folio and line number, come from Longleat 29, an early manuscript; unlike the Thornton version (which lacks oneleaf) and the Bodleian fragment, Longleat 29 is without serious physical defects. For a printing of the Thornton text, see Carl Horstman, *Yorkshire Writers*, 2 vols New York 1985, 1, 383–92. The most recent summary description is to be found in Frances A. Foster, 'Legends of the After-life,' in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English*, ed. J. Burke Severs, Vol. 2, Hamden, Connecticut 1970, pp. 456–57, 648–49.

2. *The Seven Deadly Sins*, Michigan 1952, p. 221.
3. David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England, Volume 2: The End of the Middle Ages* Cambridge 1955, pp. 219–22, 367. On John London see E.H. Pearce, *The Monks of Westminster*, Cambridge 1916, p. 115; I am indebted to Dr. A. I. Doyle for this reference.
4. While Thornton gives 'Perse Cowme' (252r.1–2) and Bodleian 'Piris Chanon' (11r.22–23), Longleat reads 'Ydorus Combe' (156v.1); the reading 'Ydorus' may well be a scribal misinterpretation of 'Petrus,' the scribe taking initial *p* as *y*, the broken-circle *e* as a looped *d*, and *t* as *o*.
5. Pearce, p. 109.
6. Thornton reads 'Richerde Bowne' (252r.4), 'John Perey' (252r.7), and 'John Wynburne' (253r.15), while the Bodleian fragment shows 'Richarde Romsey' (11r.25) and 'John Parrey' (11r.27–28).
7. *Wykeham's Register*, ed. T.F. Kirby, London 1896, 1, 315–19; *The Comptos Rolls of the Obedientiaries of St. Swithun's Priory, Winchester*, ed. G.W. Kitchin, London 1892, p. 474. John Pery was among those participating in 1404 in the election of Wykeham's successor as bishop, Henry Beaufort. *The Register of the Common Seal of the Priory of St. Swithun, Winchester, 1345–1497*, ed. Joan Greatrex, Hampshire Record Series 2, 1978, pp. 23–25, item 68.
8. *Wykeham's Register*, 1, 329–33.
9. 'Forest, John' in A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500* (1957); I am indebted to Dr. A.I. Doyle for first calling John Forest to my attention.
10. *Common Seal Register*, p. 208, n. 3 to item 107.
11. For a description of St. Cross, see *Victoria County History, Hants.*, Vol. 2, 193–97, and Vol. 5, 417–18; also David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* London 1971, p. 404. The dates supplied in *VCH, Hants.*, Vol. 2, p. 197, are 1426–44; Emden alters the first to 'By Feb. 1415,' offering no termination date. The records of St. Swithun's Priory show that 'By March 1410 he was Master of St. Cross' (*Register*). John Forest was also Master of Godshouse, Portsmouth (1408–still in 1415), likewise in Hampshire (Emden).
12. Emden supplies the date of appointment, relying on *Visitations of Religious Houses, Volume I : 1420–1436*, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson, Horncastle 1914, p. 186. Referring to a list of rectors of Wonston, Rev. V.W. Norriss, Rector of Wonston, gives the resignation date 1414, the time of John Forest's collation to the Archdeaconry of Surrey. Letter received from Rev. V.W. Norriss, 16 July 1982.

13. *Common Seal Register*, p. 50, item 149, and p. 213, n. 1 to item 149. There are further references in the *Register* to Master Forest as jurist (pp. 39–40, item 107) and witness (p. 45, item 126; p. 46, item 130), and as beneficiary of John Fromond, a 'steward of the manors of Winchester College from 1408–20' (p. 214, n. 3 to item 153).
14. *Common Seal Register*, p. 208, n. 3 to item 107; Emden.
15. Emden.
16. On the Priory of Christchurch-Twynham, see *VCH, Hants.*, Vol. 2, pp. 152–60; also Knowles and Hadcock, p. 154. Though *VCH* supplies no dates for John Wynbourne as prior, he evidently succeeded Thomas Talbot in 1420 and was still serving in 1425. Mackenzie E.C. Walcott, *Memorials of Christchurch-Twynham*, Christchurch 1883, 3, p. 70.
17. *Wykeham's Register*, I, 329, 336, 341, 345. The identification of Wynbourne as one of two 'canons of Tichfield' (p. 345) is an error. The manuscript, in the keeping of the Hampshire Record Office, Winchester, identifies Wynbourne, as anticipated, as canon of Christchurch-Twynham, and Thomas Beel alone is a canon of Tichfield (fol. 411v).
18. *VCH, Hants.*, 2, 157–58; *Wykeham's Register*, 2, 535–36.
19. *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters, 1198–1404*, eds. W.H. Bliss and J.A. Twemlow, London 1904, 6, 282.
20. *Common Seal Register*, p. 58, items 173 and 174.
21. *Calendar of the Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office: Henry VI, 1422–29*, Norwich 1901, p. 238.
22. *VCH, Hants.*, 2, 126–32, 132–37, 122–26; also Knowles and Hadcock, pp. 264, 267, and 268.
23. Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, New York 1964,² p. 387.
24. It may be noted as well that there was no dearth of Margarets at Nunnaminster; among thirteen novices inducted on 12 September 1400 are the Margarets Tycheborne, Wodelok, Werkman, and Vowell (*Wykeham's Register*, II, 519).
25. 'Southwik is a good bigge thorogh fare but no celebrate market. The fame of it stode by the priory of the Blake Chanons there and a pilgrimage to Our Lady.' John Leland, *The Itinerary, Parts I–III*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith, London 1907, 1, 284.