

A MAYOR OF CANTERBURY: WILLIAM WATMER, THE  
CHILDREN'S FRIEND

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IN the long line of the Mayors of Canterbury, extending, as we have lately been reminded, over five centuries, only a few step out from among the scarlet robes to be known with any degree of intimacy. Of these one of the most attractive is William Watmer, as he comes alive in the part of guardian and friend to a family of orphans; with him are several contemporary aldermen and councillors, mayors to be and leading tradesmen in the city's business affairs.

Thomas, Peter, John, Elizabeth and Anne Wynne were sons and daughters of Alderman Robert Wynne, Mayor of Canterbury in 1599. He had lived all his life in the parish of St. Mary Bredman, where he kept a high-class woollen draper's shop, in a house belonging to the Dean and Chapter, on the north side of the High Street, west of Mercery Lane. In September, 1609, when Thomas Wynne was seventeen and Anne nine years old, disaster befell the family. Alderman Wynne died on the 4th, his wife, Frances, a day or two later; they were buried together on the 8th, in St. George's Church, no doubt in a family vault, for Leonard Ashenden the saddler, had the graves paved again and the stones relaid; he also arranged for the funeral sermon. Not until three weeks after Robert Wynne's death did it dawn on the city authorities that he and his wife had been "visited" and their house was infect with the plague—The only certainty about these too frequent epidemics, whether they were bubonic plague, typhus, or even influenza, is their deadly fatality. The outbreak in Canterbury in 1609 was severe. Twice over the Mayor and Corporation paid to visiting companies of actors, Lord Chandos' players, Lord Berkeley's players, a solatium of twenty shillings to leave the city without giving any performances, because of the danger of spreading the sickness when a crowd collected. In fourteen parishes orders were issued to give relief to poor folk "visited."

In the Wynnes' case there was no further delay. At once the magistrates ordered the house doors to be fastened, and a watch kept by night and day to see that no one entered. There were two watchmen, Matthew Woodfall and Robert Keyson, on duty a week about, their salary 8d. a day; the vigil extended from September 26th to November 7th; by then the danger was considered past. At the first whisper of contagion Wynne's Executor, Alderman William Watmer, Mayor in that year of 1608-9 and again in 1629, by profession a Notary Public, a kind-hearted man full of compassion for the orphans "caused the

children to be taken out of the infected house to save their lives." With the five young Wynnes was an orphan girl Sara Effield, the daughter of Christopher Effield, a brewer whose house adjoined the Court Hall. Robert Wynne, co-executor with Christopher Ashenden, a Canterbury milliner, had received under Effield's will £100 for Sara, whom he arranged to bring up with his own children.

Mayor Watmer placed his charges "in an outhouse towards the end of the city, with one good-wife Maple who dwelt therein." By an "outhouse" is probably meant an outlying or isolated dwelling, where the risk of contagion would be small. Actually, for some years past, several houses, built against the town wall at St. Mildred's Churchyard in Green Alley, had been set aside by the city authorities rent free "because such as search and look to those that be visited with the sickness and bury them have the free use thereof." Green Alley may have been the children's refuge.

Good-wife Maple, disregarding her own safety, agreed to take them all in and wait upon them herself. As a further safeguard, before they entered her house, Watmer "caused them all to be stripped and shifted of and from all their old and infected apparel, and caused new apparel to be provided and made for them all." An interesting group of Canterbury shopkeepers supplied these outfits. No fewer than five of them became Mayors of the city once or twice in the next half century. They lived close to the Wynnes, neighbours as well as fellow-councillors of the dead man.—Several were tenants of the Dean and Chapter; others connected with St. Andrew's Church, then standing in the midst of the main street, adjacent to the entrance of Mercery Lane, and the neighbouring parish to St. Mary Bredman's. Evidently a friendly group of intimates, ready to express their sympathy, though they must have known enough of Wynne's affairs to realize their accounts were likely to remain long outstanding. The mercery wares came from Nicholas Colbran's shop, next Christchurch Gate; fustian, canvas, buttons, silk, calico, "bumbase" or cotton wool, and "leere" or tape. William Whiting, a woollen-draper, produced dress material, kersey and "baves" or serge—Richard Lockley readymade goods, shirts, smocks, and bands or turn down collars. Four tailors got to work. The boys' new headgear came from William Clagget, the hatter, of a firm close to the Bull-stake. Richard Mantle sold them shoes and John Meryam stockings from his varied store. Another alderman, Joseph Colfe and his wife supplied fine material for the little girls' needs, bodices, coifs, "cross-cloths"—linen bands worn across the forehead—while two other tailors, Giles Seward and Rowland Dixon, made the cobweb lawn and Scots cloth into small garments.

The thoughtful Watmer sent to Green Alley a truckle bed and mat and some bedding from his own house, and saw to it that good-wife

Maple had plenty of funds to buy food for her household. He employed various messengers on these errands; Francis Hendley, the Town Crier, the wife of Robert Keyson, one of the watchmen, the wife of John Piddler of Wincheap, a timber merchant, from whose yard came large purchases of fuel and faggots, including 200 hop poles, to keep ample fires burning. Goodwife Maple was allowed 30s. for her attendance on the children for six weeks in her house, no extravagant reward considering the risk she ran. Meanwhile the Wynnes' former home was not standing empty; two maids, as well as Mistress Tinsley, perhaps the widow of the Eastbridge schoolmaster and Mistress Judith, wife of Bell White, a Canterbury joiner, who had nursed the plague-stricken couple to the last, were isolated there. Widow Morris, a pensioner of the city, was sent to look to their comfort, and provision of bread and beer made for their needs. The children also had their beer: eight "kilderkin"<sup>1</sup> and a half at 2s. 6d., and six kilderkin at 3s. Walter Glover, Wynne's cowman, carried on with his duties and "served the cattle" and his wife did the milking and brought the milk from Wynne's farm at the Hothe as she had always done. As the close of the six weeks' quarantine drew near, measures were taken to disinfect the house. One Frier provided "three penny-worth of brooms to burn" in the infected chambers; Widow Tinsley took pains to open out and sweeten them and was given 1s. 6d. for her labour. At last all contacts were released; danger had passed and Alderman Watmer began to plan the young Wynnes' future. Peter and John were to board with Rowland Dixon, the tailor; Watmer took Elizabeth and Anne, and Sara Effield as well, to lodge in his own house; while seventeen-year-old Thomas went back to his forsaken home "to looke unto the safety of the goods there."

After five weeks' stay, at a boarding fee of 3s. 4d. a week, Elizabeth was sent to Rochester, to live with Mr. William Bostock, a creditor of her father's. He had expressed a wish to have her, and her friends thought it a good opening. No doubt it was one of those arrangements, usual at the time, by which, at about the age of twelve or thirteen, girls were placed in suitable households and expected to carry out light domestic duties in return for instruction in music or embroidery; in this case perhaps to work off a debt. An outfit was prepared for Elizabeth, including a new frock made by Rowland Dixon of the fashionable "Philizella," some kind of silken material, well set out with whalebone and buckram (linen stiffened with gum) and trimmed with silk buttons and bobbin lace. The practice of giving fanciful names to various kinds of material had already reached provincial Canterbury. In 1619 Purchas in *Microcosmus* speaks of "the new devised names of stufes and Colours, Veletato, Philizello, Paragon." So our Elizabeth

<sup>1</sup> Kilderkin = a cask of 16 or 18 gallons.

was in the forefront of fashion. Furser the Smith (a handy man who kept door and cupboard locks in the Council Chamber in good repair, and wound up St. Peter's clock every week), made a new key for her trunk. At last all was ready, and she set out on a horse hired from Hubbert, the hackneyman, escorted by Wynne's excellent apprentice, John Roberts, some day to be Sir John and himself Mayor of Canterbury. He too rode one of Hubbert's horses; the hire for the two steeds amounted to 4s. 6d. Watmer had thought of everything—Elizabeth carried half-a-crown for pocket money and when they reached Rochester Roberts bought her some hose and a new pair of shoes. Evidently her kind guardian desired her to keep up her music, for a pair of virginals was specially carried to Rochester for her use. Yet, for all his forethought, the plan was not a success. Watmer gives a graphic account of what happened. He says, "Elizabeth Wynne, after she had bene with Mr. Bostocke a few weeks complayned greatly that she was misused there; that Mr. Bostocke had evill illtreated and beaten her, and that she could not have mete and drink sufficiently, or the like." Watmer very sensibly sent someone to Rochester to enquire into the complaints. They turned out to be groundless, but Elizabeth was determined not to remain there and her guardian was "forced to have her away." Once again horses were hired and the wilful girl and her cavalier rode back along the Street to Canterbury, through the April orchards. No doubt she was homesick and missed her sister's companionship. At any rate she got her own way and once more became a boarder at Mr. Watmer's. She arrived back on April 6th, and the virginals returned in her wake. In case they had suffered by the double journey they were re-set, tuned and mended by one Pendleton. Watmer had now to arrange for some instruction for his wards. Mr. Edward Rider, a schoolmaster, was engaged to give the girls reading lessons; as he was more particularly a specialist in calligraphy, copying documents for the Dean and Chapter, and taking apprentices in the art, he began also, rather late in the day, for Elizabeth was now rising thirteen and Anne eleven, to teach his pupils to write. The lessons cannot have been frequent; his fee for twenty weeks' instruction was 6s. 8d. apiece which suggests one hour's lesson at 4d. an hour. His course lasted a year. Then William Tyler's wife took over—at rather less expense, 3d. a week each, and taught the girls reading and sewing. They were not expected to mend their own clothes. It is Goody Justice who darns and foots their hose. The worn stockings and the constant re-soleing of old shoes and purchase of new ones suggest that the wearers were active young people. Their guardian was able to draw on Robert Wynne's stock-in-trade for stuff to make them winter frocks of Devonshire kersey, and cambric for their coifs, worn with "shadows"—stiffened borders which jutted out to screen their faces. Some attention was given to

their health, and Watmer paid "for physick for them, and oyntments to kepe their bodies whole and cleane at several times."

On July 14th, 1612, after nearly three years of the Alderman's vigilance, Thomas Wynne, by now a Freeman of the City and looking forward to a grocery business of his own, took over responsibility and placed his sisters elsewhere. The orphan Sara stayed on for another three months with her kind guardian, when she too disappears. Elizabeth Wynne married Paul Maye, a vintner of St. Andrew's parish, on May 18th, 1616. A child of theirs, nameless in the register, was buried in the Wynne grave at St. George's in 1628, and four years later Elizabeth herself, still a young woman. Of Anne no more is heard.

A few words must be said about the brothers' progress to manhood and independence, and first of Thomas, prior to the grocery business. Five months after his parents' death, with 20s. in his pocket, he rode up to London, to be apprenticed there. After a false start with two masters, Mr. Daniell Marsh, a grocer, took him on six weeks' trial and approved of him. He returned to Canterbury to announce the good news, spent three days there and started back to town. On the way misfortune overtook him; he was robbed of his new hat and cloak, and obliged, no doubt crestfallen enough, once more to return home. Two days sufficed to fit him out again, with a new hat, stockings and garters, and his father's best cloak, a handsome garment. A horse was hired from Robert Bridges, lessee of the Woolsack, and once again Thomas sallied forth. Mr. Marsh charged a premium of £45 "for taking Thomas Wynne to be his Apprentice, to make him free of London and also free of the Company of Merchant Adventurers, of which Mr. Marsh Thomas Wynne made choice to be his master." The lad was anxious for the arrangement to go through, and pressed Alderman Watmer not to fail of paying the premium. The indentures and bond were completed and a declaration made before Dr. Newman, the Commissary. A new suit was quickly added to the lad's outfit, the working clothes every apprentice received from his master, and Watmer, thoughtful as usual, sent him small sums from time to time by Parker the Post. This apprenticeship illustrates the perennial inter-relation of the trade of Canterbury and London. The careers of the younger boys, Peter and John Wynne took a different direction. Both, Peter being now sixteen and John fifteen, attended the King's School, under Roger Raven's head-mastership, for about a twelvemonth onwards from the spring quarter of 1610. Their school-fees were 10s. a term apiece, and John had some extra coaching, at 5s., from John Ludde, recently appointed Usher and eventually to succeed Mr. Raven. He was also supplied by the city fletcher with a bow and arrows, costing 2s. 2d., a solitary reference to archery as one of the King's School

sports. Rowland Dixon, who had been their foster-father kept a professional eye on the boys' outfits and from his bills we learn how a schoolboy was equipped under James I; the cloaks of russet cloth with velvet collars; the doublets of Milan homespun, to which cloth hose were attached by "points," long laces with metal tags; the jerkins of grey frieze with flat turn-down collars. The school cap was already *de rigueur*.

We know little more of John, except that like all the brothers, he was a much-married man. But when, after his third wedding he moved to St. Mildred's parish, he is described as "John Wynne, musician"; can he have served in the Cathedral choir, or even with the city waits? Peter left the King's School in 1611 to take lessons of Mr. Rider in court-hand, preparatory to becoming a Notary Public, after Alderman Watmer's example. The Alderman and he rode up to London together "to have him placed with some good master, Apprentice there, and spent in that journey 6s. 8d." Eventually, however Peter got his legal training locally. By 1619 he is Servant to Mr. William Somner, the Registrar—and Canterbury historian—himself a Notary Public. In 1620 he married Martha Coppin of a well-known Canterbury family, at St. Martin's Church, and had a son, Robert, and a daughter, Sarah, both of whom died before their father. He seems to have moved out to Reculver, where he was summoned for non-attendance at that rather inaccessible church, and promised to be at the service the following Sunday and thenceforth, wherever he might decide to live. Thomas, the grocer, survived his brothers by many years, and married for the third time just after the Restoration.

But there is more to be said of Alderman Watmer's kind offices. Robert Wynne's death occurred so unexpectedly he had only time to make a Nuncupative Will on his deathbed, that is to express by word of mouth, and in his own house, his wishes as to the disposal of his property, this expression to be committed to writing within six days.

The task of administration was complicated by his heavy indebtedness both in his business and his private affairs. But for Alderman Watmer's promptitude and devotion to their interests the Wynne children would have been reduced to beggary. Watmer was not eager to undertake the thankless office of executor. In his own words, after the death of Alderman and Mrs. Wynne "none of his aliance [were] willing to take administration, partly in regard to his debtes, which were great, as also for feare of infeccion." He had, it appears, "written, sent and spoken unto most of the chieffest Allyes and frendes of the Testator," and all, including Robert Wynne's neighbour, Joseph Colfe, who was now Mayor, shirked the responsibility. The action of one of Wynne's London creditors, Richard Wilcox, a draper to whom he owed £138 15s. 9d.,

made necessary an immediate decision. Wilcox wrote for a copy of the will nuncupative, which was not as yet proved, intending to use it to obtain judgment for his debt in the Prerogative Court in London. Watmer persuaded the Registrar not to send the copy for fear Wilcox should press on a sale of Wynne's goods, "which were then infected with the plague, or at least feared to be so infected, that no man would have given neere the value thereof." He also paid for Counsel's opinion and somehow raised the money to satisfy Wilcox in full. But other London creditors, afraid of not being paid, applied to have one of their number, John Maylard, appointed administrator. Sir George Newman, the diocesan Commissary, who was then in London, knowing Watmer's kind heart, wrote to warn him that unless he himself accepted responsibility, Maylard would work havoc with the children's patrimony. Watmer interviewed Maylard, and satisfied himself that he would take no interest at all in the orphans' upbringing, but insist on an auction, a "port sale" so-called, of all the goods, for the benefit of himself and his fellow creditors. So Watmer at last consented and "in mere love and compassion of the Children of the Testator, lest they should have been utterly cast off and left destitute, was as it were forced to take administration."

This entailed a journey to London, to make composition with Wynne's creditors; the collection, with the help of John Roberts and Thomas Wynne, who rode from place to place in all directions, of any monies outstanding; the payment of back rent for Wynne's farm to Sir Moyle Finch; the conveyance to Canterbury, for sale, of oats, peas and tares left neglected in the barn; and much else besides. Taxes and tithe had to be cleared. Even Watmer had a claim for "21 kilderkins of beere at 2s. 6d. a piece." Apprentice's apparel was owed to John Roberts, who received instead a suit of diaper, a bible, a cupboard of Mr. Wynne's and three pounds in cash. Of great import to the children was the sale of Wynne's household effects. All had to be priced, and this was undertaken by four well-wishers, Leonard Ashenden, Rowland Dixon, Robert Bridges and Bell White. Anxious to do their best, they "overprized" many articles which would not fetch the value set on them, and had to be re-assessed by a special commission.

The lease of Wynne's house had by now been transferred to another Canterbury celebrity, Avery Sabine, thrice Mayor, so room for the furniture, including "chestes of writings" had to be found elsewhere. The custom of the city was to have goods on sale cried—"Who will give most?"—in the open streets and market-place by the town crier, and in the French Church (the Cathedral crypt) by the French crier of "lieucopes" ("love-copes" or auctions), at this date one Bastien Monnieu, or Money. The town crier, Francis Hendley, being in public employ, was rewarded only with Wynne's old satin doublet, worth 3s. 6d.

Money had 17s. 8d. " for cryeing and selling upon sixteen several dayes." For so long was the auction drawn out, chiefly on Saturdays, between December 18th, 1609 and April 21st of the following year. The Wynnes' household plenishings, though numerous were well-worn, and often the proceeds on any one day, for linen, or cooking vessels, for wainscot chests, or the children's little chairs, or for red and green cushions, large and small, were but negligible. Only two pictures, one of Queen Elizabeth, came up for sale ; only one book, the Bible, and a map of St. Peter's.

The takings came to £705 8s. 4½d. and with the arrears so assiduously collected by John Roberts and Thomas Wynne, there was a sum of £1,000 9s. 1d. available. But this alas ! did not suffice to cover Robert Wynne's indebtedness, as well as the cost of his children's maintenance ; Alderman Watmer was out of pocket by over £76. Besides this, the High Court of Chancery was sueing for Sara Effield's legacy of £100. And there were legal charges ; and " let of time " about the troublesome execution of the will. In all Watmer estimated his losses at £209 18s. 1½d. But he must have had the reward of a good conscience and, let us hope, of general esteem, and the grateful affection of the orphans he had befriended, to his dying day.

NOTE :

I am indebted to the late Mr. W. P. Blore, Librarian to the Dean and Chapter, for much of the material from the records of the Consistory Court on which this study is based. Other sources are the City Treasurers' books, Parish Registers, Cocks's Diary etc.