

## A NOTE ON THE EARLY HISTORY OF CRANBROOK SCHOOL.

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THE foundation of Cranbrook School has been generally ascribed to Mr. Simon Lynche, a wealthy clothier of the town, who in 1576 was instrumental in obtaining Letters Patent from Queen Elizabeth for the purpose. For the real origin of the school we have, however, to go back some sixty years before that date.

The earliest notice of a school in Cranbrook that I have so far come across is in the will of Richard Baker in 1504 (P.C.C., 20, Holgrave). He was the father of the well-known Sir John Baker of Sissinghurst, and left a small legacy to "John Baker, scolemaister in Cranbrok and to Elizabeth wife of the said John." This John Baker was no doubt one of the family, and the mention of his wife shews that he was a layman. He, with Mr. Richard Wilson, the Vicar, and others, witnessed Richard Baker's will. In the will the executors are desired "to pay to Johni my sonne [afterwards Sir John] yerely till he come at the age of 24 yeres to fynde hym to scole as well in recompence of the lands in Stapulhurst by my father assigned to hym and of my bequest to fynde hym to his lernyng in Court." Possibly this notorious man was one of John Baker's scholars.

We hear no more of a school until the year 1518, when there died one John Blubery, a yeoman of the King's Armoury. In his will, which was proved 22 March 1518 (P.C.C., 6, Ayloff), he desired to be buried in Austen Friars in London, but he left several bequests "vnto my parishe church at Cranbroke," and to the chapel of the Holy Trinity at Millhouse (now Sissinghurst). But the chief interest to us to-day is a clause in which he left the "chief mansion place of my lond to my wife during hir

life and then to the childe of my daughter yf it be a man childe and if it be not a man child that then this my chief place and residue of my lands to be at the disposicion of William Lynche to founde a frescole howse for all the pour children of the towne of Cranbroke aforesaid after the decesse of my wife, and the scolemaister to be chosyn and admitted by the said William Lynche." His wife Joane and William Lynche were executors.

What immediately followed, or how long Mrs. Blubery survived her husband has not yet been ascertained, but it is clear that the hoped-for heir never arrived, and that the property mentioned came into William Lynche's hands, and it would be interesting to ascertain whether he at once appointed a "scolemaister" as desired by John Blubery. William Lynche died in 1539, leaving Simon Lynche his son his residuary legatee (will, P.C.C., 34, Dyngley), but no mention is made of the Blubery bequest. His will, however, does not deal with all his landed estates, which were probably settled—as was not unusual at the time—by deeds of feoffment, and it may, from what followed, be surmised that the Blubery lands were passed to Simon Lynche in this way.

In 1525, Cardinal Wolsey having obtained permission to annex certain smaller religious houses for his new foundations at Oxford, considerable discontent arose at Tonbridge owing to the suppression of the Priory there, and Archbishop Warham's correspondence (*Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. I., pp. 31 to 33) shews that although Tonbridge was offered a "free scole of grammer for 40 scholers and they afterward to be promoted to Oxford," the inhabitants appear to have made it known that they would prefer that the Priory should remain. Cranbrook seems, according to one letter, to have been of the same mind as the Tonbridge folk, but "submit themselves holely to the Kinge's graces pleasir and yours." Tonbridge, as we know, got its school in 1553 by the generosity of Sir Andrew Judde.

Whether the school at Cranbrook had been in some sort of existence all this time is, as we have said, uncertain; but in 1564 (twelve years before the Letters Patent) Simon

Lynche, "for a certain consideration him thereunto moving," conveyed certain property to trustees for the perpetual maintenance of a grammar school at Cranbrook. But note the description of the property. It runs, "all that our messuage or tenement with garden adjoining commonly called *Blewberryes*, situated, lying and being in the parish of Cranbrooke in the occupation of Thomas Goode, and also all that our other messuage or tenement in the parish of Horsmonden with all and singular the lands, meadows, etc., thereunto belonging."

From this it seems therefore quite clear that part, if not the whole, of the property so conveyed by Simon Lynche was that bequeathed by John Blubery in 1518 to William Lynche for the purpose; and it will be observed that the Letters Patent of 1576 state that Simon Lynche's action was due to his desire to carry out the intention of William Lynche, his father.

At the meeting of the Commissioners to enquire into educational endowments in 1818, held at Cranbrook on 7 November of that year (Parliamentary Reports), the Governors stated that there was no property then in their hands called "*Blewberryes*," but that they possessed a house called "*Pest House*," which they presumed was that alluded to. The *Pest House*, however, seems from the parish records to have existed under that name before Lynche's time. Is it possible that the site of the school itself is that of the "*chief mansion place*" mentioned in John Blubery's will?

Of this well-wisher of Cranbrook's youth I have so far only gathered a few details from the State Papers and other sources. Thomas Barow of Cranbrook, in his will dated 5 April 1507 (P.C.C., 23, Adeane), left to his wife Johane "the house and land John Janyns otherwise Haumwell dwellith in nowe lying in the strete of Milkehouse and the use and profits of the howse where John Blewbery dwellith for the terme of hir life," so that at this period he seems to have been living in Cranbrook parish. He would appear to have got into trouble at the end of Henry VII.'s reign, as he, with some others, was exempted from the general pardon

issued by Henry VIII. on 30 April 1509, on his accession (State Papers, Henry VIII.). On 17 December, however, he, with other "prisoners for misdemeanors in the late reign," was released on finding sureties to appear before the justices of the King's Bench next term.

From 1511 to 1513 his name occurs (*ibid.*) several times as "clerk of the King's Armoury," which was at Greenwich, or in a position of one responsible for providing armour and "harness" for the king and the troops. He had to fit out 4000 men. In 1511 there is a charge in the accounts "to John Blewbery for provision to be made by him in Antwerp for stuff to make harness £36. His costs in Antwerp 40s." How he came to be employed in the Armoury may be inferred from the fact that "M<sup>r</sup> Edward Gylleforde squyer" (a family of position in the Cranbrook district) was "master of the Kynges Armery" at the time.

While, therefore, we give to Simon Lynche the honour due to him for faithfully carrying out the trust, and for his part in obtaining the Royal Charter from Queen Elizabeth, let us not forget the good yeoman of the King's Armoury, John Blubery, who originated the scheme and provided a fair portion of the endowment.