

## CHRISTINE CARPENTER

*First Entry, Inquiry for enclosing a woman.*

JOHN, by divine permission Bishop of Winchester, to the Officials of the Archdeacon of Surrey, we greet you with grace and blessing.

Christine, daughter of William called the Carpenter of Schire in our diocese, has besought us by her humble petition, that whereas, desiring not feignedly, but of truth to remove herself to the fulfilment of a better life, she wishes to vow herself solemnly to continence and perpetual chastity and to let herself be shut up in a narrow place in the churchyard adjoining the parish church of Schire, that therein she may be enabled to serve Almighty God the more worthily, we should consider her worthy to be granted our favourable assent and consent.

We, observing the all too easy downfall of human frailty and that the Tempter, who by this is always gratified, is just as many times displeased by piety in our lives, and scarcely knowing the condition of the said Christine, and desiring to take care of the rights and indemnities of the Rector of the church of Schire and the parishioners there, and of any other persons who may be concerned in this matter; we commit and command you that, having first summoned to the said church of Schire, in person, the said Christine, the Rector and the parishioners of the said church more especially, and in general any other person whom it may concern, you shall apply yourself to seeking out the truth diligently, as to whether the aforesaid Christine is of such good life and conversation that she is likely to make a success of this proposal for a more sanctity life, and whether she is free or espoused to anyone or joined in marriage, and whether in the opinion of the Rector of the said church and the parishioners thereof or of anyone else who may contribute in any way, the said Christine shall be enclosed in the manner and for the reasons aforesaid by trustworthy men, having full knowledge of the said Christine and of these things above mentioned, being sworn formally by law and examined one by one.

Given at Farnham, the 11th day of the Kalends of July in the year of Our Lord 1329, and in the 7th year of our consecration.

*Second Entry: The Bishop's consent for her enclosure.*

To all those whom this concerns or in the future may concern, JOHN, by divine permission Bishop of Winchester, greets the Saviour of all.

The petition lately exhibited to us by the godly Christine, daughter of William called the Carpenter of Schire in our diocese, sets forth that, whereas she desires for the fulfilment of a better life to remove herself, and spend her life in the service of God and in all sanctity and chastity in the churchyard of the parish church of Schire aforesaid, alongside the church there, striving with her whole heart to endure henceforth perpetual enclosure; we are pleased to grant her our consent in this matter, having therefore diligently made enquiry into her

life and conversation of the said Christine and all other things right and necessary therein; and because by this enquiry we have found no cause for deciding that the said Christine should not be permitted to be enclosed there; we, observing the praiseworthy purpose of the aforesaid Christine, and with the consent also of Sir Matthew the present Rector of the church of Schire aforesaid and the parishioners thereof, have thought fit to grant licence to the said Christine that she may be enclosed there in the manner and for the reasons aforesaid, that thus laid aside from public and worldly sights, she may be enabled to serve God more freely in every way, and having resisted all opportunity for wantonness may keep her heart undefiled by this world.

In witness whereof we have caused our Seal to be attached hereto.

Given at Waleton, the 14th day of the Kalends of August, in the year of Our Lord 1329, and in the 7th year of our consecration.

*Third Entry: The re-enclosure of the anchoress of Shere.*

JOHN, by divine permission Bishop of Winchester, to the Dean of Guildford; we greet you with grace and blessing.

Christine of Schire having approached us on the eighth day of October last, to whom as is elsewhere set forth, having the consent of the Rector and parishioners there, and being moved by certain legitimate causes in this matter we had granted a licence for her enclosure, she having by solemn act and observance taken herself into a certain enclosure adjoining the church there, now however having as we have been informed withdrawn herself from such enclosure, she has brought us the below-written letters.

‘To the venerable Father in Christ, by the grace of God Bishop of Winchester, or his vicar spiritual, Brother John of Wrotham Primarius of the Lord Pope, sends greetings in the Lord. His sister Christine, an anchoress of Schire in your diocese, the bearer of these, has by humble confession shown us that whereas at one time, as is known to you, choosing enclosure in the life of an anchoress, she made a solemn vow of continence, promising to remain in that place; now forswearing this life and conduct that she assumed, she has left her cell inconstantly and returned to the world. Now, with God's help changed in heart, wishing to return to her former abode and calling, she has humbly petitioned us that she may be treated mercifully by the Apostolic See in this matter.

Therefore we, who strive for the salvation of the souls of her and of all mankind with fervent longing, wishing to take care of her soul send you, according to the form of the Church, absolution for her by the authority of the Lord Pope, from the excommunication usually promulgated against such persons (if she incurs one for this reason and by her transgression of that vow), committing her to your circumspection by the same authority and beseeching you in the Lord Jesus Christ that in the manner of good father of a family

rejoicing in the finding of a lost sheep, and the said anchoress having come to you humbly within the space of four months from this our order, you shall cause her to be re-enclosed in the same place, or elsewhere if she would not be safe there, lest by wandering any longer about the world she be exposed to the bites of the rapacious wolf and, which heaven forbid, her blood be required at your hands.

And after she has been re-enclosed there and has for some time conducted herself in a worthy manner, you shall enjoin upon her by the aforesaid authority, a salutary penance in proportion to her sin; if, however, she neglects to come to you within the aforesaid time, without any legitimate excuse, henceforward she shall relapse into the sentence of excommunication (if she was bound by such), and these present letters shall be absolutely no moment. Given at Avignon, the 6th day of the Kalends of August, in the 16th year of the Pontificate of the Lord Pope."

Concerning which, we order and command you that the said Christine shall be thrust back into the said re-enclosure, and that with suitable solicitude and competent vigilance you shall take care to guard her, thus enclosed, in due form, that she may learn at your discretion how nefarious was her committed sin, and that thereafter dedicating herself worthily to God, having first offered to God that which is inflicted on her by us, she may be enabled to achieve her salvation, nor shall the said Christine wander from the laudable intention otherwise solemnly undertaken, and again run about being torn to pieces by attacks of the Tempter, which heaven forbid, on repeated occasions, objectors and rebels in this matter being canonically repressed by the censures of the Church.

Given at Farnham, the 10th day of the Kalends of November in the year of Our Lord 1332.

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# St. James' Church, Shere

## CHRISTINE CARPENTER

### THE ANCHORESS OF SHERE

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#### THE DISCOVERY OF THE DOCUMENTS

There is a reference in the "Victoria History of Surrey" to entries in the Egerton MSS (which are in the British Museum Library) which relate to the enclosure of Christine Carpenter, the Anchoress of Shere. Following certain clues the late Mr. F.E. Bray and I were led to the Episcopal Register of John Stratford, who was Bishop of Winchester from 1323 - 33.

At Winchester we were shown the actual Register of 1329, but could make nothing of its crabbed black-letter, quite indecipherable except by an expert. We got help from the British Museum in obtaining a translation; photographs of the original entry, together with the translations from the Latin, have been framed and are hung on the North wall of the Chancel near the original place of Christine's cell.

D.M. SURREY DANE.

#### EXTRACT FROM SHERE PARISH MAGAZINE, OCTOBER 1972

By evidence seen recently in the Bray papers at Guildford Muniment Room by Sir Jack Sutherland-Harris, Chairman of the Shere and Gomshall Local History Society, it appears that William Carpenter, father of Christine lived where are, now, the old timber-framed houses called Ash and Willow Cottages in Lower Street, Shere. There were "two acres and a message" (i.e. house) formerly called "Stiles" in the Manor of Shere Vachery. The Manor had been granted to John (or John FitzGeoffrey) Lord Lieutenant of Ireland by Henry III who died in 1272. Richard, son of John, Lord of the Manor, granted Stiles to William the Carpenter before the end of the 13th Century.