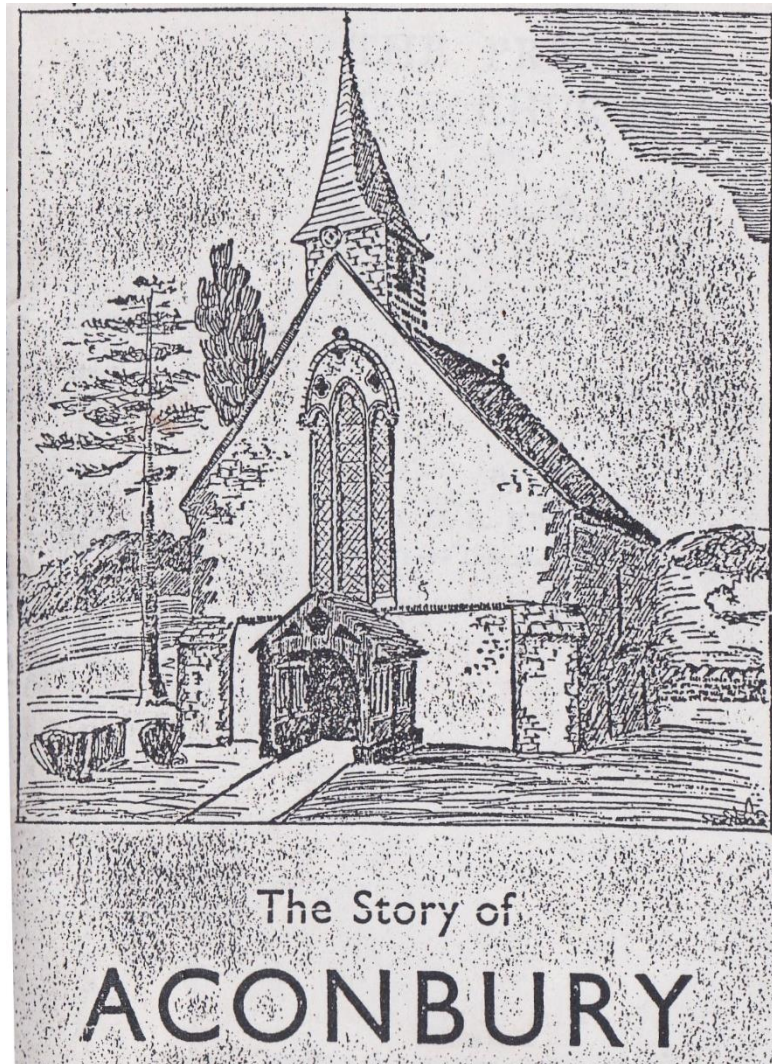


**The Story of Aconbury**

**By the Rev. D.E. Jones**

Kindly donated by Alan Lilwall of Aconbury Court, March 2023



# ACONBURY:

THE PRIORY  
THE CHURCH  
AND  
THE CAMP

By

REVD. D. E. JONES, B.A.

*(Vicar of Little Dewchurch and Aconbury).*

PRINTED BY

ADAMS & SONS (PRINTERS) LIMITED, HEREFORD

# CONTENTS

## THE PRIORY

	PAGE
THE FOUNDATION ... ..	5
DEDICATION ... ..	5
THE SITE ... ..	6
PRIORESSES ... ..	7
LANDS AND POSSESSIONS ... ..	9
DISSOLUTION OF THE PRIORY ... ..	9
REPUTATION OF THE PRIORY ... ..	10
TYPICAL EXPENSES ... ..	11
AFTER THE DISSOLUTION ... ..	12

## THE CHURCH

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT ... ..	12
THE OAK PORCH ... ..	12
THE WEST WINDOW ... ..	14
GENERAL IMPRESSION OF INTERIOR ... ..	14
THE CLIFFORD TOMB ... ..	15
THE MORTIMER TOMB ... ..	15
LOST TREASURES OF ACONBURY ... ..	16
ANOTHER EARLY TOMB ... ..	16
THE CHANDOS VAULT ... ..	17
DOORWAYS IN THE SOUTH WALL ... ..	17
THE SQUINT ... ..	18
THE PISCINA ... ..	18
THE ROYAL ARMS ... ..	18
THE BELL ... ..	18
HAUNTED ... ..	19
LIST OF VICARS OF ACONBURY ... ..	19

## THE CAMP

POSITION OF CAMP ... ..	20
"LEYS" BEARING ON THE CAMP ... ..	20
NATURE OF THE CAMP ... ..	21
EARLY PREHISTORIC HISTORY ... ..	21
FIRST MENTION IN HISTORY ... ..	22
ACONBURY IN THE CIVIL WARS ... ..	22
TO-DAY ... ..	23
TWO LEGENDS OF ACONBURY ... ..	23

# ACONBURY:

## THE PRIORY, THE CHURCH AND THE CAMP.

---

### THE PRIORY

#### THE FOUNDATION

The church of St. John the Baptist, Aconbury, standing at the opening of a defile into the surrounding hills, is all that is now left of what was once a magnificent Augustinian priory, a female religious house of great possessions and influence. Aconbury people will always be able to say one good word for King John, for it was he who gave permission to Margery, the wife of Walter de Lacy, to found here a priory for the souls of her father and mother, William and Matilda de Braose, and William, their son. Though the actual date is uncertain, John's reign (1199-1216) was the period when "three carucates of land were grubbed up for making a religious house" at Aconbury. Here, for the sake of protection, religion and a certain amount of education came the daughters of those families of Herefordshire and South Wales, who were already landed. That the reputation of the house was soon considerable may be gauged from the fact that its privileges were readily increased by Henry III, who "released and freed the nuns from all wast, regards and jurisdiction of ministers and officers of the Forest."

#### DEDICATION

The steps which lead down into the church, symbolising the descent into the river for baptism, point to St. John the Baptist as the original dedication. One authority gives St. John of Jerusalem, but the list of possessions of Knights Hospitallers of St. John in Herefordshire makes no mention of Aconbury Priory. From the fact that the common seal of the house shows the prioress with the cross in her hand, it has been thought that the Priory was dedicated to the Holy Cross, but of this there is no further evidence. One can understand the name of St. Catherine

being put forward, she being "the local goddess of these parts." Even into the nineteenth century the church has been referred to as the church of St. Catherine, but for this association of Aconbury and St. Catherine there appears to be no justification.

#### THE SITE

The site, safe and secluded, was well-chosen—a knoll of about four acres, leading into the defile of a forest, with a semi-circle of hills looking down from north, south and west.

A lake in the form of a wide moat protected the Priory on three sides. By land the only approach was a deep, waterless channel from the west, where the road now runs down from the Callow.

Care was shown in the choice of a site, while timber and stone were at hand from neighbouring wood and hill. Utility and beauty combined to suggest Aconbury as a natural choice for a home of religion.

As the house grew in wealth and reputation, new developments took place. Fishpools were made, embankments thrown up to conserve water, and water-wheels erected to grind corn from the overflow from these reservoirs. Much of the plan or site of the boundary walls has now been destroyed, chiefly in the west and south, but traces show that the outline can still be determined on the north and south-east.

Mr. George Flower, whose family resided at Aconbury Court for many years, writes on this point to the following effect: "From the N.W. corner of the Churchyard wall take four or five paces N. This will show the foundation of the original wall or building. The line continues practically due E. to the corner of the present garden wall, and again take measurements. From this point about ten or twelve paces at an angle will bring you to a point of high ground, where the remains of building still exist under the turf.

"Turning S.E. and measuring again from the wall about thirteen paces will show a trench more or less parallel, from which building stone was removed. From the end of this trench the ground has been disturbed, and traces lost with the exception of the site of the water wheel."

#### PRIORESSES

Of the ladies who presided over this happy and thriving combination of domestic and religious life in the seclusion of the Aconbury hills the following are known with certainty:

1280	...	...	Beatrice de Gamages.
1288 and 1326	...	...	Catherine de Genevyle or Geynvill.
1346-48-53 and 58	...	...	Matilda de Grandison.
1399	...	...	Joan of Ledbury.
1415-17-21-22-25-	...	...	
26-37 and 46	...	...	Ann Barry.
1452-65	...	...	Agnes King.
1474	...	...	Joan Draper.
1481	...	...	Cecily Mason.
1489-91 to 1534	...	...	Isabella Gardiner.
Last	...	...	Joanna Scudamore.

A writer in *The Topographer* for May, 1789, records a tradition that Isabella, the daughter of Henry Plantagenet, and great grand-daughter of Henry III, became Abbess of Aconbury. She is referred to as the Abbess Almesbury, mistakenly for Alcornbury.

The little we know about these ladies is enough to make us wish to know more.

Catherine de Genevyle was probably the daughter of Godfrey de Geneville, one of the French favourites of Henry III. She was evidently no stay-at-home. When, at the Feast of the Purification in February, 1297, Lady Joanna de Valentia, Countess of Pembroke, entertained a big crowd of guests at Goodrich Castle, Catherine de Genevyle was among them. She was there again on the Sunday after Easter, and was yet once more on a visit to the Countess about a month later, two days after the Feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross. These social and religious engagements, however, did not prevent her from looking after the interests of the house. We read, for instance, that she disputed with John de Gamel and others the right of possession to a common in Bishopstone.

Among the nuns were her own nieces, Matilda and Beatrice, the daughters of Peter de Genevyle, both of whom appear to have died within a year or two of their aunt.

Names of other prioresses occur in various leases. In 1399 the Mother Prioress, Joan Ledbury, leases a curtilage with appurtenances in the suburbs of Hereford in a street called Aboveneyne; in 1425 Dame Ann Barry signs the lease of a house in le Vyshams Rowe; in 1437 a lease from Elizabeth, Prioress, gives John Herbert, mercer, a certain third part of a house in the city of Hereford in le Gebyn Rowe, opposite Goodknaves' Inn, for forty-one years; and in 1474 Joan Draper assigns for eighty years "a messuage situate in Rangia Piscator, between the house of John Barre, Knight, and Henry Chippenham.

Dame Isabella Gardiner appears in a polite and interesting transaction. For the annual rent of a red rose, to be demanded on the Feast of St. John the Baptist, Thomas Gardiner, mercer, leased to Isabella Gardiner, Prioress, "a stabull set and lying in the street called Wroughtall." This lease has the seal of the Mairaltic of the City of Hereford. The same prioress also leased a close at Shokenhill under an annual rent of 4s., a rose and a bottle of wine, to be paid on the Feast of All Saints.

Dame Isabella had the instincts as well of a good housewife as of a good abbess. She grew medical herbs for the house, and from the saffron at Blackmarston distilled an aromatic cordial, which gave the rich yellow and orange colour to the sweetmeats and cakes on the nuns' table. As it took six crocus blossoms to produce one grain of dried saffron, one realises that the ladies who came to the religious seclusion of Aconbury had no idle time of it.

It was Dame Isabella Gardiner who brought to Aconbury the Dwarf Elder, which has since grown here in such wild abundance. This plant, which in its other names, Danewort and Deathwort, speaks

"Of old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago,"

was also a plant of manifold utility to the home. A dram and a half acted as a strong cathartic; its leaves boiled in oil yielded a powerful liniment; a gentle distillation gave a powerful lotion; its berries produced a blue dye; and its fresh leaves, with their strong odour, when scattered over granaries or mole runs, drove away both moles and

mice. To anyone with the least imagination, the berry of the elder at Aconbury is a mirror through which one may catch glimpses of good women, busy not only at their devotions, but at a hundred and one household tasks.

Of the nuns themselves there is, apart from the nieces of Catherine de Genevyle, mention only of one. In 1354 Joanna Blount received a special dispensation to pass into holy orders.

#### LANDS AND POSSESSIONS

King John's original grant was the Royal Forest of Aconbury, with the exception of Athelstan Wood, but this also came to the Priory in the time of King Henry. Other properties followed in rapid succession. Lands in the immediate neighbourhood at Caldicott, Merrivale Hill and Much Birch; tenements and parcels of land in the city of Hereford; further afield in the county, land, buildings and the mill at Rolston, the acre-meadow at Stoke Edith, lands at Weston-juxta-Stoke Edith, Shokenhill, Pembridge, Peterchurch, Stokelys and Vowchurch, and in 1280, 1281 and 1287 the churches of Bridge Sollars, Wolferlow and Malmeshall Lacy; and beyond the county, the land and manor of Bourley and Ludlow, Salop, tenements at Monmouth, Kempsey and Tetbury, and the tithes of Penalee in far-off Pembroke.

A hint of the existence of a chantry-priest is found in Catherine de Lacy's gift of land to support a chaplain to say mass daily for the souls of her mother, the foundress of the Priory, and her other ancestors. Of another kind was the gift of Margaret, widow of Walter de Clifford, who in 1260 left her heart to the Priory, with 15 marks sterling for its proper burial.

#### DISSOLUTION OF THE PRIORY

When, in 1539, the Priory was dissolved, the total value of its estates was estimated at £75 7s. 6d. Joanna Scudamore, the Prioress, received a pension of £9. One may hope that the nuns who had hoped to find in Aconbury their last kind home received a proportionate generosity. The ill wind that tore rudely through their corridors and cloisters blew gently to Wolferlow. In 1541 the repairs of the chancel of this Herefordshire church were charged on the confiscated revenues of Aconbury Priory.

REPUTATION OF THE PRIORY.

Duncomb has the following note: "The esteem in which this nunnery was held appears from a letter written by Rowland Lee, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, to Thomas Cromwell in 1536. The Bishop was President of the Council of Wales, and he represents to the King's Vicar General the anxious wish of the people of South Wales and the Priory that Aconbury Priory should be spared the fate which was overtaking houses of religion throughout the realm.

The following is a copy of the letter:

*S.P.D. Hen. VIII, Vol. XI, No. 1370 (1536).*

Right honorable and my singuler goode Lorde after my most hartly recomendac'ons hit maye please the same to be advertised that I am requyred by dyverse of my loving ffrends in thies parties to write unto your lordeshipp in ffavor of the poor house of Awconbury which house is of honest disposic'on and stonndith by the Citie of Hereford and is adioynng to the marches of Wales. In the which house the gentlemen of Wales as of Aburgeveny, Ewas Lacy, Talgarthe W<sup>th</sup> Brecknock with all other adioynng, and the dor sayde Citie and Shire have had comonly their women children brought upp ther in vertue and lernyng. Hit myght therfore please your Lordeshipp of your Charitable goodenes to tender the same with your lawfull favor, and to be a meane to or Souveraigne Lorde the Kings grace to take the same to Redempc'on and grace. Wherin truste ye moste surely my good Lorde ye shall adqyre both lawde and love of thies parties as knowith the holy-trynytie Who long pr serve your goode Lordeshipp in honor ffrom Wygmor the xxvj<sup>th</sup> Daye of December.

Your lordshippes Most  
Bounden  
Roland Co. et Lch.

(Endorsed)

To the right Honorable the Lorde Crumwell  
Lorde Prevy Scale.

This appeal was of no avail. Nonetheless, it remains a wonderful tribute to the great and good work done by the ladies of Aconbury

TYPICAL EXPENSES OF THE PRIORY

The following expenses of the Priory made on one day are typical. The quotation is from Duncomb.

"The expenses made by Dame Joan la Galesch de Bonshull Sunday next after the Feast of St. Michael in the 15th year of the reign of King Edward the Third after the Conquest (1342).

Firstly. Paid for 5 yards of blanket for the shoes of the Convent. 3s. 9d.

Also for three quarts of grease 7½d.

Paid for freshening the leather, 8 hides. 2d.

For currying the leather, 1d.

Paid for cutting out and making 30 pairs of shoes 2s. 6d.

Paid to two women for their hire 7d. (delet).

Paid to Dame Emma de Ludlow for her shoes 6d.

Paid for one household loaf 3d.

Paid to two women for [ ] the flax 6d.

In meat bought for the sewers and tailors, and for women who watered our flax 8d.

In cheese 2d.

In eggs 2d.

In 8 gallons of ale 7d.

In meat for my woman in Advent 1d.

In 1 gallon of ale 1d.

In bread 1d.

Paid for a Keler (a shallow tub) for the friars' room 1d.

Paid for a herring bought in Lent 4d.

For 3 gallons of ale 3d.

In bread for their watering 2d.

Paid for 3 ells of thick twill to border the loaned surplices 16s.

For 342 rods (verges, a measurement) bought at Hereford fair in summer, for coats for the convent, 26s. 6d.

Paid for shearing the said cloth 8d.

For [ ] 30 yards of thick cloth for Dame Joan.

For [ ] 30 yards of thick cloth for Dame Joan.

For [ ] 30 yards of thick cloth for Dame Joan. 4d.  
["The friars" for whom the keeler was bought "were probably Fransiscans from Hereford, who acted as the nuns' confessors extraordinary, coming for that purpose at stated intervals." It is interesting in this connection, to note that in the next Parish of Little Dewchurch is an old house "The Friars," which some take to be the site of an old monastery.]

The list continues with a miscellany of expenses for such various items as the cost of various vestments, the price of grease for polishing boots (3d.), wages for tending the geese (6s.) and for tending the cattle (18d. and again 12d.), and respective payments of 3s., 10d. and 9d. for iron, a ploughshare and three iron nails.

#### AFTER THE DISSOLUTION

The Priory with all its tithes and land went first to the mayor and burgesses of Gloucester, but it was soon in the hands of Hugh of Harry ap Parry. Through his daughter Elizabeth Parry who married John Pearle, in 1600, it came to this family so long connected with Aconbury and Dewsall.

Through the marriage of their daughter to Sir John Brydges, the Priory came to their descendants, the Dukes of Chandos and Buckingham, for whom it served as an occasional summer residence.

In 1730 the mansion, now the present substantial farm, became with the church the property of Guy's Hospital. In 1863 the church was restored by Sir Gilbert Scott, and in 1940 many valuable repairs made under the direction of Mr. H. K. Foster.

### THE CHURCH

#### THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

Mrs. Walker, who looks after the church so carefully, tells me that many valuable goods and ornaments belonging to Aconbury have found their way to Rome. This is a local tradition which I cannot discredit. Much has certainly disappeared. Clues, nevertheless, remain sufficient to take us down the trails of the past. Such, for instance, on the south wall of the Church is the very definite evidence of the springs of arches and corbels, which carried the floors of the rooms and cloisters of the western ranges of the Priory.

#### THE OAK PORCH

The fine oak porch, leading to the massive Early English doorway, takes us back five hundred years. On the centre pillar of each side hangs a two-foot figure of an angel

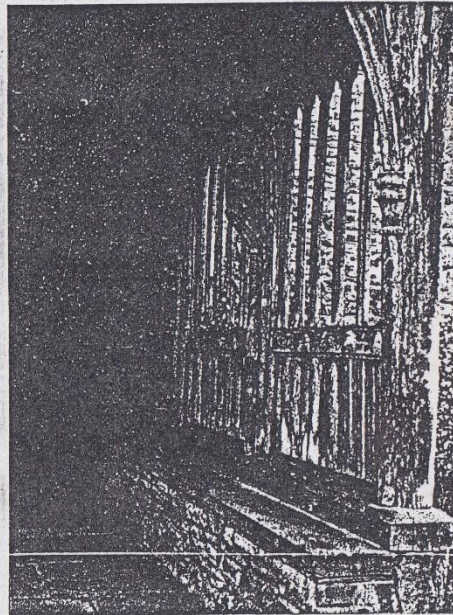


Photo: F. C. Morgan, F.L.A., F.S.A.

*Aconbury Church :  
The Oak Porch*



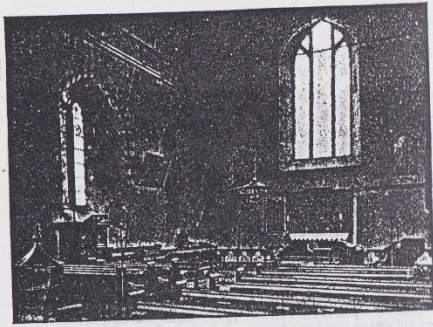


Photo: F. C. Morgan, F.L.A., F.S.A.

*The Interior and  
West Window*

with a shield, rescued in 1843 from a house on the side of Aconbury Hill.

#### THE WEST WINDOW

Above the porch, and under a pointed arch, is the seven-hundred year old triple lighted west window. It is one of the finest instances of its kind, though its plain severity will not appeal to everyone. Writing in all charity, it is a pity that the sportsman who a few years ago missed his bird and shattered some of this valuable glass has not been discovered and, to say the least, taught the value of sobriety to the good marksman.

Below the window two heads, representing the foundress and her husband, remain; and, watching from above, the stone face of a nun.

#### GENERAL IMPRESSION OF INTERIOR

The visitor steps down into a lofty building, of fine proportions, with neither column, nor aisle, nor chancel arch, and having an undivided nave and chancel of equal

window does not reveal that it was once the pulpitum of the nuns' chapel, but the deep splay of the three lancet windows in the north wall show a great fortress-like thickness, evidence enough of a church built in an age of war as well as storm.

#### THE CLIFFORD TOMB

Under the window nearest to the doorway is a deeply arched, sepulchral recess. In front of it is a coffin lid, decorated with a cross incised with beautiful oak foliage and two shields and a deeply-cut inscription. The one shield, "cut checky, with a fesse," shows it to be a tomb of the Clifford family. The difficulty of deciphering the inscription was finally cleared up in 1885 by the Rev. F. T. Havergal, father of Miss Havergal, the hymn-writer, who discovered that the early mason had laid the paper copy down on the stone the wrong side up; thus, when read from behind through the rubbing all the inscription not effaced by time becomes clear. It read as follows:

CI GIST DAME MAHAUD DE GURNEYE COMPA(GNE)  
SIRE ROGER DE CLIFFORD PRIEZ POUR L'AME.  
(Here lies Dame Maud de Gorneye. Partner of Sir  
Roger de Clifford. Pray for Her Soul.)

Some have suspected that the name is "Sir Walter de Clifford, and not Sir Roger. The inscription is not now easy to trace, and it is a point which awaits a final solution.

Dame Maud de Gorneye was the eldest daughter of Roger de Vipont, Lord of Westmoreland. When this vault was opened many years ago, a skeleton of gigantic size, with a smaller skull beside it, was discovered. They were left undisturbed and the vault reclosed. This Clifford tomb belongs to the earliest Norman times. The only earlier example in Herefordshire is that of Bishop Swinfield's father at Bosbury.

#### THE MORTIMER TOMB

A writer in *The Topographer*, May, 1789, makes mention of a tomb of the historic Mortimer family. "Concerning the tomb of one of the Mortimers I have little to say, only I have seen the trunk of the body of a man in hewn stone, which some of the ancients believe to be one Mortimer

width and height. The wall below the unstained east but I believe it to be quite broken now." A stone immediately under the sepulchral arch is the probable location of this tomb of the Mortimers, of whom it has been oddly remarked that they are never found where you expect to find them, and rarely anywhere else.

#### LOST TREASURES OF ACONBURY

On this same arch once hung several shields, among them that of Henry Plantagenet, Earl of Lancaster and Derby. All of them, together with the lamp "kept kindled and flaming . . . to assist with lights, those whom death had blinded" are among the most valuable of the lost treasures of Aconbury. *The Topographer*, May, 1789, speaks of the following "almost deleted coates . . .

"Barry of 10 pieces, A, and G, changed with 10 martlets sable either in urne or 4, 3, 2, 1. 3 or 4 times expressed — Chaworth. and G 3 lions passant O. over all a bend Blue as many times reiterated, which were in memory of Henry Planta Jenet, Lord and Baron of Monmouth, who after his eldest brother's decease, was Earl of Lancaster and Derby."

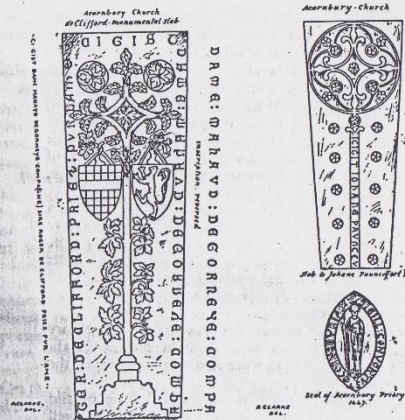
A fine image of the Blessed Virgin with the Holy Infant in her arms which stood at the western end is another. The Hill MSS. of 1715-27 speak of it as a piece of excellent workmanship.

#### ANOTHER EARLY TOMB

At the north corner of the chancel floor is another early slab. This has a floriated cross and is cut short at the foot. The Norman-French inscription reads:

ICI GIT IOHANA PAUNCEV  
(Here lies Johana Paunce [foot].)

Two other early incised stones at the south corner of the chancel give no name. A black marble records the death of Sir Henry Barnard, in 1680, and small stones in the chancel the deaths of John and William Brydges in 1672, of Barnard Brydges in 1676 and of Dame Mary Powell in 1682.



#### THE CHANDOS VAULT

This is immediately under the altar. It was built by that considerable benefactor to the church, James, Lord Chandos when he repaired the church at the beginning of the eighteenth century, adding the altar rails and new roof, in place of the old wooden roof which was removed to the barn opposite the church. Lord Chandos was buried here in 1714.

#### DOORWAYS IN THE SOUTH WALL

The two blocked doorways in the south wall, one leading into the nave and the other into the extreme end of the chancel, are interesting indications of the old monastic days of Aconbury. Through these doors one may picture the nuns coming from the convent cloisters to keep their hours and to offer their devotions.

#### THE SQUINT

Did the Lady Abbess watch them as they trooped in? It is possible. High in the south wall near the west end of the church is an opening about two feet square, always something of a mystery.

Anyone who cares to take a ladder and climb up about thirty feet will see inside the opening a small chamber with a stone seat facing east. This chamber, set thus within the thickness of the wall, was entered from the first floor of the western range of the monastic buildings by a doorway, now blocked.

It has been suggested that the chamber may have been used as a pew of the guest-house, or that it may possibly be the head of the night-stairs from the dormitory. The guest-house would probably have occupied the upper storey of the western range, while the same building may have formed the dormitory. There are, however, no actual remains of the staircase.

Another theory holds that this was part of the Priory Infirmary, from which an invalid might take a distant part in the service, while another that this was part of the Prioress's room.

My own view, for what it is worth, is that an invalid ill enough to be taken to hospital would hardly be well enough to sit on this stone seat and enjoy the service. It would have been a convenient and commanding place for the Lady Abbess's room.

The visitor is still free to investigate and come to his own conclusion. Was it for Guest, Invalid or Abbess?

#### THE PISCINA

This stone basin for carrying away water used for rinsing the chalice deserves notice. It is a trefoil-headed instance of early date built into the south wall.

#### THE ROYAL ARMS

On the north wall of the chancel hangs the Royal Arms of Queen Victoria. Such an example in so late a reign is extremely rare.

#### THE BELL

So out again, noticing at the door the bell-rope and the

fourteenth-century bell with its inscription, "Omnes sancti orate pro nobis."

#### HAUNTED

Aconbury is one of England's few haunted churches. An old book records the fact, and a lady, for who has lived in the parish for many years, tells me that she would not care to enter the church at night. This is not, of course, entirely conclusive. The story is this.

The ghost is a monk, dressed in a habit and cowl. He was originally, but apparently not finally buried, beneath one of the monuments of the church. The minister of the parish, disturbed by his return, secured the aid of several of his parishioners, and the ghost was laid, confined in an empty bottle, and buried once again beneath the tomb in the church wall, "neither out of the church nor in the church." It is very regrettable that he should once again have escaped. I sincerely hope that his presence will deter no one from entering the church, at least, during the hours of daylight. His motive may be a simple and commendable desire to set a good example. On the other hand, of course, his restless roaming may be due to a tiresome conscience. Then may he, and all such souls, find here or in some other house of God, assurance of forgiveness and peace of heart and mind.

#### LIST OF VICARS OF ACONBURY

##### PRE-REFORMATION

1306	...	John Hobart.
1308	...	Walter of Weston.
1349	...	Stephen Castle.
1357	...	John of Northern.
1367	...	Richard Dewall.
1402	...	Edward Child.
1413	...	John ap Adam.
14—	...	John Snell.
1437	...	William Tomkins.
1441	...	Robert Otter.
1444	...	Andrew Huggyns.
1—	...	Richard of Gloucester.
1516	...	John Gregg.

POST-REFORMATION

1570	...	John Younger.
1611	...	William Higgs.
1664	...	Hugh Owen.
1679	...	Titus Neve.
1733	...	Thomas Willim.
1750	...	Richard Reece.
1767	...	Richard Gomond.
1777	...	William Whitmore.
1792	...	William Henry Barry.
1810	...	Richard Lucas.
1833	...	William Pepperell Hutton.
1835	...	Thomas Phillipps.
1838	...	Henry Hampton.
1850	...	W. H. Joyce.
1851	...	Vernon George Guise.
1852	...	Richard Gorges Foot.
1855	...	Stephen Thackwell.
1883	...	Henry Phelps Marriott-Dodington.
1890	...	William Fitzwarine Smith.
1916	...	D'Arcy Morton.
1932	...	George John Saywell.

THE CAMP

POSITION OF CAMP

To the south of the church the thickly wooded camp rises to a height of 916 feet. This strong entrenched encampment, made when and by whom no one knows, lies almost in the centre of the county. As it overhangs its central roads, one can easily grasp its importance both as a post of observation and as a signal station. From the summit it is possible to see the Clec Hills in Shropshire, the Monmouthshire Hills, the Black Mountains of Breconshire, and the Malvern Hills to the east. What is its present strategic value? This writer cannot presume to say.

"LEYS" BEARING ON THE CAMP

The late Mr. Alfred Watkins, whose book on *The Old Straight Way* should be read for fuller explanation of this paragraph, discovered the following "leys" bearing on the Camp.

First—From The Giants' Cave and Stone, Gospel Oak, Woolhope Church, Mill Ford, Holme Lacy Church and Aconbury Church.

Second—From Castle Farm, Madley, Cobhall Court, mark-stone, Coldnose, Camp Vallum, Little Dewchurch Church and Aston Ingham Church.

Third—Partricio Church, Rowlston and Kilpeck Churches, and Kilpeck Castle mound. St. Devereux Church Woolhope, Cockshoot, Putley, Turnastone, Thrupton and Dewsall.

NATURE OF THE CAMP

The camp consists of about twenty acres in a long oval shape, six hundred and sixty yards long and about two hundred yards wide. A still larger surface of the hill is entrenched. On the north-west side is a short and steep ascent, and on the south-east a long and gentle slope. It may once have been an agricultural camp, a place of security for a tribe and its cattle in times of border warfare.

The Rev. R. A. Chudleigh has noticed the likeness of the camp to the Maori pah, a feature of which is the winding slope to a stockaded enclosure. Its natural strength and position make it unlikely that it was ever unoccupied in time of war.

EARLY PREHISTORIC HISTORY

Much of its early history must be speculation, but there is also much that may reasonably be deduced. The neighbouring hill of Dyndor, for instance, has an old nickname of Oyster Hill, presumably derived from Ostorius Scapula. We may believe that Ostorius would not occupy Dyndor and leave the larger and more important camp at Aconbury unoccupied; it would be desirable, if as nothing more permanent than a summer camp. Some forty years ago several Roman coins of the first to the fifth century were found in that part of Aconbury known as Skippitt Wood, pointing to the probable existence of a posting-station. The "Wall Brook" which flowed past the Priory indicates in its name (wall, vallum) the fact of a Roman occupation.

When the Mercian chief, Crida, sallied from Credenhill, burning the Roman camps and stations, he was not likely to have made an exception of Aconbury. It is probable,

too, that it was occupied by Elyston Glodrydd, the last of the royal tribes of Wales. Athelstan's Wood preserves the name of his godfather.

#### FIRST MENTION IN HISTORY

Aconbury camp first appears in real history in the Scumore MSS., where the following discoveries on Aconbury Beacon are recorded:

"Things belonging to the Beacon appointed by Sir James Scudamor, Knight, to the custody of me, Richard Kidley.

"first, one Iron Potte.  
Itn, Piche and Rosen.  
Itn, Tallowe and Towe."

There is a mention of beacon-money collected by assessment, and brought into the muster-master's account.

#### ACONBURY IN THE CIVIL WARS

In the autumn of 1642 Lord Herbert, for the King, marched from Raglan and occupied the camp, but retired when detected.

The Scotsman Leslie, Earl of Leven, who arrived in August, 1645, did not stay much longer. His unpaid men had to shift for themselves, and eat what food they could find. By the end of August many of these Scots, previously unacquainted with cider apples, were seriously ill.

Of the Earl of Leven's stay in Herefordshire, and more particularly at Aconbury, Webb writes this: "Herefordshire felt every day more and more heavily how disastrous is the pressure of ill-paid, unfed, unrestrained soldiers in actual warfare.

"During the first fortnight in November the troops on the Monmouthshire border, augmenting their numbers and drawing up towards the invaders for observation and attack, or cutting off their resources, had shown themselves in foraging or reconnoitring parties along the course of the River Worm, making their way into places seldom visited by strangers and where they were most unwelcome. . . .

"Thus they penetrated still further towards Hereford, in the hundred of Wormelow, where amidst lovely woods that have enriched the parts from the days, at least, of King John . . . stood the vestiges of the Priory . . . there is little doubt, however, that in these visits, they went principally in quest of those who favoured the garrison of Hereford."

A petition for summary treatment of the invaders which was made to the Earl of Stamford included the name of J. Tyrer, Minister of Cornebury (Aconbury). Help, however, was not far off.

At news of the arrival of the King's forces, panic seized the Earl's army. In the words of the Governor of the City, Barnabas Scudamor, "The Scottish mist began to disperse, and the next morning vanished out of sight." For three hundred years Aconbury has been at peace.

#### TO-DAY

What some consider the one chance in a million arrived eighteen months ago, when a bomb fell within two hundred yards of the church. The only other sign of war came with the Madley Home Guard who, in 1941, made an archway of rifles at the wedding of Miss Ada Paine and Mr. Edward Meredith.

#### RARE FLOWERS

The neighbourhood of the church and camp has always been of great interest to the botanist. The Bee orchis, the Fragrant or Aromatic orchis and the *Gymnadenia Conopsea* have all been found here.

#### TWO LEGENDS OF ACONBURY

On the hillside is St. Anne's Well. The first water taken from this at twelve o'clock on Twelfth Night has been held to be of great medicinal value, being especially good for eye troubles. It was once the custom for Aconbury folk to see who could get the first bucketful, which was then carefully kept by the one who gained it. An interesting circumstance was that at midnight the water bubbled up and blue smoke arose simultaneously from the well. This has been observed as recently as 1909. St. Anne's Well is otherwise unhaunted.

As much cannot be said for the Lady Well in a coppice higher up on the hill. Here, in a fit of jealousy, a poor girl murdered her lover. When she discovered his complete innocence, her heart broke. Now apparently they find comfort in haunting the spring together.

“Omnes sancti orate pro nobis.”

Yes, truly, “Pray for us, all ye saints.”

---

---

### Wayfarer

Who comest to visit this Church, leave it not without a Prayer.

#### Give Thanks

To God for all His blessings; and for all opportunities of worship in His house.

#### Offer Thyself

To His Service and His purposes of Righteousness, Truth and Beauty.

“May the Lord Bless thy going out and thy coming in.”

---

---

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

---

The Woolhope Club Transactions, which have been of the utmost value.

Dugdale's *Monasticon*.

Webb's *History of the Civil Wars in Herefordshire*.

*The Topographer*, May, 1789.

Duncomb's *History of Herefordshire*.

Some valuable notes from Mr. George Flower, formerly of Aconbury Court, and now of Greenhayes, Westmancote, Tewkesbury.

My grateful thanks are due to Mr. George Marshall, F.S.A., for permission to reproduce the sketches of the monumental slabs from the Woolhope Club Transactions, to Mr. F. C. Morgan, F.L.A., F.S.A., for the photographs of the Church, and to Miss A. Kilgour for the drawing of the Church on the cover.

*Sale of Handbook.*

Everything taken from the sale of this handbook will be given to the funds of Aconbury Parish Church.