

1077

# The Story of Monks Kirby

1977



## **THE STORY OF MONKS KIRBY**

**Gerald Seaston, M.A.**

1. Beginnings.
2. The Monks 1077-1414.
3. The Feildings of Newnham Paddox.
4. Sir Thomas Malory and Newbold Revel.
5. After the Reformation.
6. Schools at Monks Kirby.
7. The Church of St. Mary and St. Edith.

## **THE STORY OF MONKS KIRBY BEGINNINGS**

The very centre of Roman Britain was the point where the Fosse Way and Watling Street meet. Here the Romans had a posting-station called Venonae, and today the place is called High Cross. In a nearby garden stand the remains of a monument erected in 1712 by Basil, Earl of Denbigh, with a defaced Latin inscription ending "...here the most celebrated ways, crossing one another, extend to the utmost boundaries of Britain."

Four miles south in a small valley just off the Fosse Way lies the village of Monks Kirby, dominated by its large church and hallowed by over a thousand years of Christian history. To-day the village is a small one, its houses clustered around a tiny Green by the Church and extending a small way in four directions. The village street runs from the parish church to the park gates of Newnham Paddox, for five hundred years the seat of the Feilding family, Earls of Denbigh.

Sir William Dugdale, our county historian, in his **Antiquities of Warwickshire** (1656) was the first to describe "that great Parish of Monks Kirby, containing ten petty villages or hamlets besides the town itself, viz. Brockhurst, Street Ashton, Stretton-subtus-Fosse, Walton, Easenhall, Paylington, Newbold Revel, Copston Magna, Newnham Paddox and Cestersover." The word "town" suggests that Monks Kirby was a more populous and important place in his day than now. As to the site, Dugdale writes of foundations of old walls, Roman bricks and even burial urns, as evidence of some sort of Roman occupation, perhaps a villa. The Saxons made a settlement here and built a church. No trace of it remains but it was obviously important enough to give its name to the place, for this was the Chirchberie of Domesday Book (1086) and Dugdale believed it was identical with the Cyricbyrig founded in 917 by the great Ethelfleda of Mercia, daughter of Alfred the Great.

Alfred had made Watling Street a rough "frontier" between the Saxons and the marauding Danes, but the latter must have infiltrated into this area and in time predominated, for Churchbury was soon to become Kirkby. There are many variations of the name in old documents – Kirkebiria, Kirkberie, Kyrkeby Monachorum, Monken Kirkeby, Kirby Moynes, and so on.

### **THE MONKS 1077-1414**

Recorded history begins in 1077, with the arrival of monks from the Benedictine monastery of St. Nicholas at Angers, capital of Anjou in France. Their mother-house was founded in 1020 by Fulk Nera, Count of Anjou, ancestor of the Plantagenet Kings of England. The man who invited them to send a "colony" to Warwickshire was Geoffrey de la Guerche (de Wirce), a follower of William the Conqueror, who came from a place on the borders of Brittany and Anjou. La Guerche in Breton means 'la Vierge', The Virgin.

After the Conquest, Geoffrey received from the King vast tracts of land from Warwickshire to Lincolnshire. He took over the manor of Kirby (Kirkbury) from the dispossessed Saxon thegn Lewin (Leofwine), but softened the blow by marrying the heiress Alveva (Aelfgifu). He rebuilt the ruinous church in honour of the Blessed Virgin and St. Denis, and gave it, with its two priests Frano and Osgot and a rich endowment of lands in various places, for the foundation of a priory of monks, to be subject to the mother-house of St. Nicholas at Angers. Such a foundation, not being

independent, came to be called an 'alien priory', and so Monks Kirby remained until suppressed.

The text of the charter by which Geoffrey made his donation has been preserved, and it was signed here at Kirby on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1077. From it we learn not only the names of the local priests and the Saxon heiress (who consented to the deed) but also the fact that the dedication of the priory church to the Virgin and St. Denis took place in the presence of Peter the Bishop. This makes clear that it was a great religious and civic occasion. Peter, a former chaplain to the Conqueror, had become the first Norman Bishop of Lichfield in 1066. He was known at this time as Bishop of Chester, having temporarily removed the see of the great Mercian diocese to that larger city.

The foundation was for seven monks and a prior, and no doubt they would soon set about the erection of monastic buildings, cloister, refectory, dormitory, kitchens, infirmary. These would be on a modest scale, and there is now no trace of them, though the blocked door and high windows in the north aisle of the present church are indications of a cloister. How quickly the French monks settled down in a Saxon/Danish community we do not know, but they must have been a civilising and cultural influence on the people. There would be a priory school, from which they might recruit novices, and one of their main duties was to care for the poor and the sick. The greater monasteries were often renowned for their efficiency in agriculture and estate-management.

It would seem from later developments that all went well for the priory of Monks Kirby for about two hundred and fifty years. The Mowbrays, lords of the manor after Geoffrey had died childless, confirmed them in their rich possessions (these Mowbrays, lords of the Isle of Axholme in Lincolnshire, were to play an important part in English history, and to be largely responsible for the dissolution of Monks Kirby priory at the end).

The Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield showed his good will towards the monks in 1217 by confirming their possession of the parish churches of Monks Kirby and Newbold-on-Avon, adding pensions of 40 shillings and 20 shillings from Withybrook and Wappenbury. The monks brought prosperity to the village, which grew into a small town, as is clear from the grant by Henry III in 1266 of a weekly Wednesday market and a three-day midsummer fair. By 1291 Monks Kirby had become one of the wealthiest of the alien priories.

But as happened elsewhere, too much wealth and comfort undermined the ideals of the religious life. About 1330 complaints were laid against the prior, accusing him of wastefulness and neglect of his duties. The Lichfield Episcopal Register gives details of the visitation ordered by Bishop Northburgh, after which the prior was ordered to correct many abuses, for most of which he was held personally responsible.

For external reasons also bad times were in store for all the alien priories. There were over fifty of them, subordinate to various mother-houses in Normandy and France. In 1337 began the Hundred Years' War, which put them under strain. Their French monks would be withdrawn and not easily replaced, so that numbers dwindled; and it vexed the King that part of their revenue should be going to France in time of war. They were often put under royal 'custody', the crown exacting fixed payments to the royal exchequer. This is what happened repeatedly at Monks Kirby. About this time also the dedication of the Church was changed to "Our Lady and St. Edith". St. Denis was patron saint of France, and no doubt opinion decided that a

local saint (Edith had been a Saxon Princess of Mercia and Abbess of Polesworth) would be more patriotic during the French Wars!

Then came the Black Death in 1349, a terrible plague which killed half the clergy in Warwickshire. During the difficult aftermath the church at Monks Kirby had to be rebuilt, and now comes evidence that it had become a shrine of Our Lady, and even a place of pilgrimage. In 1360 the monks were supported by the clergy and people of the Lichfield diocese when they petitioned Pope Innocent VI. They claim that "Christ has wrought many miracles in honour of His Mother in the church of the said priory, which is old and in danger of ruin;" and they beg an audience for the penitents who visit the said church on the four feasts of the Blessed Virgin and at Easter and Pentecost, and give a helping hand to the fabric. The indulgence was granted and the people must have been generous, for the church was rebuilt very much in the size and style that we now see. But all was not well. The costly war with France dragged on, the French monks became unpopular and their servants clashed with the townsfolk. There was friction even with the mother-house at Angers, which came to terms with Thomas Mowbray, Earl of Nottingham, whose ancestors had endowed Monks Kirby.

This great nobleman, cousin to the King, Earl Marshal of England, and future Duke of Norfolk, now wished to found a Carthusian monastery on his own estate in the Isle of Axholme; and to this end in 1396 he secured the consent of King Richard II, Pope Boniface IX and the Abbot of St. Nicholas, to transfer the priory of Monks Kirby with all its manors and other properties, to the Carthusian house at Axholme. This was done, but three years later an abrupt change of policy by the new King Henry IV gave Monks Kirby a reprieve. It was not until 1414, under Henry V, that the transfer took effect, and Monks Kirby priory was finally suppressed, with all other alien priories.

The church and parish of Kirby for a hundred and twenty years continued as a vicarage under the patronage of Axholme. The latter was suppressed by Henry VIII in 1538, after its saintly prior Augustine Webster had been executed. The rectory and patronage of Monks Kirby with the properties attached were granted by the King in 1546 to his new foundation, Trinity College Cambridge, and so remain.

The manor of Monks Kirby was granted in 1539 to the ex-Prior of Butley, Thomas Mannyng, Bishop of Ipswich. By a complicated line of descent it returned to local ownership in the person of Basil Lord Feilding of Newnham Paddox, created Earl of Denbigh in 1622, in whose family it remains.

### **THE FEILDINGS OF NEWNHAM PADDIX**

The Feildings came into possession of the estate of Newnham Paddox, one mile from Monks Kirby, in 1433, by virtue of a marriage with the daughter and heiress of Robert of Newnham, last in male line of the family previously in possession. Before that date and perhaps for a hundred years afterwards, their chief associations were with Lutterworth where they lived and were buried, and the adjoining parts of Leicestershire and Northamptonshire where their older properties were situated. They enlarged the estate by purchase of land from the Axholme Carthusians, who remained in possession of all that had belonged to the former Benedictine Priory, right up to their own suppression by Henry VIII in 1538.

There seems little doubt that from the thirteenth century down to Tudor times the Feildings produced good soldiers, who generation after generation with few exceptions were knighted for their services in war. Much interest still attaches to the

extraordinary claim once made on their behalf, that they were descended from the Hapsburgs of Germany. Sir Geoffrey, first of the line, was reputed to have been the dispossessed son of an Earl of Hapsburg, Lord of Laufenburg and Rheinfelden, who had been ruined by a family feud. Coming into England as a soldier of fortune, he fought for Henry III against Simon de Montfort and the rebellious barons, and was rewarded with a knighthood and rents and properties at Lilbourne, Yelvertoft and Swinford. He married Maud Colville, a local heiress, who brought him property in Lutterworth, and then took the surname Felden or Feilding, either by adapting his father's title of Rheinfelden, or because Feilding was the family name of his wife's benevolent step-mother.

Whatever be the historical truth of the matter (and it has only been questioned in recent years) the story is both interesting and plausible. It was accepted by Dugdale, writing about 1640, who could well have said as he did in another context, "Should we be so conceited as to explode with it, all history of those times might as well be vilified."

Nichols the historian of Leicestershire quotes copiously from "the uncorrupt monuments of truth and venerable antiquity which myself have seen and perceived," meaning of course the manuscript documents still preserved in the family archives. The pedigree was long accepted by Burke's Peerage and other authorities, and down to this present century the Earls of Denbigh were accepted as kinsmen by the Hapsburgs of Vienna. But in 1896 the authenticity of the supposed fourteenth-century manuscripts was ruthlessly attacked by the redoubtable historian J. Horace Round; and since then, as one of the family wittily put it, they are content to be Perhapsburgs.

The first Feildings known to be buried in Monks Kirby are Sir William and his son Basil, of the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth. Their handsome tombs, with recumbent effigies of themselves and their wives, are to be found in the north chapel of the chancel, which was no doubt adapted for this purpose after the final departure of the monks. Later Feildings are buried in the vault.

A fortunate marriage led to the ennoblement of the family in the reign of James I. Sir William Feilding's wife, Susan, was the sister of George Villiers, who later became the powerful Duke of Buckingham. Feilding profited by his brother-in-law's advancement, and soon became first Baron, then Viscount Feilding of Newnham Paddox. He was made Master of the King's Wardrobe, and finally in 1662 Earl of Denbigh.

The Civil War brought family conflict, for whereas Denbigh was loyal to King Charles, his eldest son Basil favoured Parliament, and father and son fought on opposite sides at the battle of Edgehill. The Earl died in 1643, of wounds received in a skirmish at Birmingham, and the extant letters of Susan Denbigh, wife and mother, reveal her anguish. Her own career is full of interest. She was Lady of Honour to Henrietta Maria, King Charles' Queen, and became her life-long friend and companion, sharing her fortunes and misfortunes to the end of her life. Exiled in France she met the poet Crashaw, whose devotional poems are dedicated to her, and like him she became Catholic before her death in Paris in 1652.

The rebellious son Basil, now second Earl, had served King Charles before the war as diplomat and art-collector in Venice and elsewhere. After the King's execution he returned cautiously to his royalist allegiance, and at the Restoration was reconciled to Charles II without loss of titles or property. He ended his eventful life (1608-1674) living quietly at Newnham, and though married four times left no children, so that titles and estates passed to his nephew William, Earl of Desmond.

The second Earl was ambitious, widely travelled, and personally acquainted with the nobility of Central Europe. The historian Horace Round suggests that it was he who first publicised the family claim to a Hapsburg pedigree. True or not, it does not seem to have inspired the Feildings of the eighteenth century, though they did produce the novelist Henry Fielding, author of **Tom Jones**. He was reported to have said he was the first of the family who knew how to spell! Successive Denbighs served at Court and were close to the royal family. The seventh Earl in 1840 for reasons of economy (he had ten children to educate) wished to lease Newnham Paddox. His friend Queen Adelaide found him a house at Bushey Park, and a tenant for Newnham in the person of Napoleon's brother, Joseph Buonapart, ex-King of Spain.

The mid-nineteenth century, like the seventeenth, brought internal family strife. This time it was a matter of religious allegiance, of the controversy surrounding the Oxford Movement and the conversion of Newman and others to the Roman Church. It was a great shock to the devoutly Protestant seventh Earl when in 1850 Rudolph, his eldest son, was converted to the Catholic faith. The story is told in full in the **Feilding Album** by Lady Winefride Elwes. There was warm-hearted reconciliation before the old man's death, and in 1869 the eighth Earl brought the Catholic Church to Monks Kirby, founding the present parish and St. Joseph's Convent and school. He had married as second wife Mary Berkeley, of an old Catholic family, and the parents' piety and devotion to the Church were shared by their many children, one of whom became a nun and the youngest son a priest. Newnham Paddox soon became an important social and intellectual centre of English Catholicism.

The eighth Lord Denbigh died in 1892, and was buried beside his first wife Louisa Pennant in the church they had built at Pantasaph in North Wales, where also his second wife Mary was buried in 1901. His son Rudolph, the ninth Earl, already married to Cecilia Clifford of Chudleigh, was no less devoted than his father to the Catholic faith, and was in addition a successful soldier and man of affairs, serving often as Lord-in-Waiting to Queen Victoria. His sister, Lady Winefride, married the singer Gervase Elwes, Elgar's ideal interpreter of **Gerontius**.

The ninth Earl was a man of much gaiety and high spirits, but his long life brought some sorrowful and tragic bereavements. His youngest brother Basil the priest was drowned in an accident at Rheinfelden (of Hapsburg memory), two of his three sons were killed in the 1914-1918 war (during which Newnham was a military hospital), and finally the surviving son Lord Feilding and his wife both died in 1937, before the father. The old man himself reached the venerable age of 80, and with his death in 1939 Newnham ceased to be the Feilding family home. There were crippling death-duties to be paid, and the old house and church, handsomely rebuilt in 1880, could not be maintained. Both were demolished in 1952. The dowager of the tenth Earl resides at Pailton House and the other Feildings live in the parish. But apart from the famous wrought-iron gates, Newnham Paddox is no more.

### **SIR THOMAS MALORY AND NEWBOLD REVEL**

Newbold Revel, the other large manorial estate in the parish, was originally Fenny Newbold. It belonged before 1066 to Lewin, a rich Saxon nobleman, and after the Conquest passed to Geoffrey de Wirce and later to the Mowbrays. It took its present name from the Revels of Swinford in Leicestershire, who held it throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. From then it passed by marriage to the

Malorys of Winwick in Northamptonshire, and Sir Thomas Malory succeeded to the estate in 1433, the very year in which the Feildings came to Newnham.

Without doubt the most illustrious and notorious name in Monks Kirby's history is that of Sir Thomas Malory, author of **Morte d'Arthur**. This famous work (first printed by William Caxton in 1486) deals with the Knights of the Round Table, the quest for the Holy Grail and the loves of Sir Launcelot du Lac and Queen Guinevere. Malory compiled his stories from old romantic histories of Knight Errantry, adding much of his own, and no doubt acquired his zest for chivalry while serving in France, under Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, renowned for success in knightly tournaments.

Unhappily he came home to an England in which government was at its weakest and law and order had broken down. Like so many demobilised soldiers he turned to a career of violence, and though three times member of Parliament for Warwickshire he became a flagrant law-breaker. His crimes of violence, committed shamelessly in his own country, even his own parish, include ambush with intent to murder, rape and extortion, cattle-stealing and armed robbery. With a band of men he broke into Combe Abbey by night to steal money and church ornaments, returning the next day to insult the monks and steal more money. At Monks Kirby itself the Carthusian brothers were terrorized and robbed. Arrested and imprisoned at Coleshill, he escaped by swimming the moat and continued on his lawless way, in and out of gaol. Eventually in 1468 he found himself in Newgate Prison on a charge of sedition against Edward IV, and there he probably died. He was buried near Newgate in the chapel of St. Francis Greyfriars, under a marble tombstone, with a Latin inscription reading in translation, "Sir Thomas Mallore, valiant Knight, died 14 March 1470, of the parish of Monkenkyrkby in the County of Warwick."

The **Morte d'Arthur** was completed in 1469-70, and was probably written while Malory was in prison. It is a prose translation from the French, with adaptations from other sources, parts of the Arthurian Legend. Set for ever in Malory's language, the visual image of Arthur and his Knights is unalterably that of the men who fought the battles of the Wars of the Roses. The sense of insecurity, of the existing order of society being destroyed, is echoed throughout Malory's work.

Of the later owners of Newbold Revel, which unlike Newnham has changed hands frequently, the most permanent were the Skipwiths from Cottingham in Yorkshire. From the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century until 1862, for nearly 200 years, they made the Revel their family home. There is a Skipwith chapel in Monks Kirby church, where many of them are buried, and Sir Fulwar Skipwith built the present mansion in the reign of Queen Anne. The best known Skipwith is Lady Selina (born Selina Shirley of Ettington), who as a childless widow was Lady of the Manor for forty-seven years. This admirable woman was held in awe and affection, kept a diary for over sixty years and sat for portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds and Sir Thomas Lawrence.

Of the wealthy families who came into possession of the Revel after 1862, the Woods are the best remembered. They restored the Queen Anne mansion and gardens, patronised sport and games, and entertained lavishly at their cricket weeks in the golden age of W. G. Grace.

To-day (1977) Newbold Revel is widely known as a College of Education, under the Sisters of Charity of St. Paul. Since 1946 St. Paul's College has blossomed into a handsome academic campus around the old house. Much beauty has been preserved, and will, one hopes, survive; but according to the latest change in educational policy, St. Paul's College is doomed to close in 1978.



## AFTER THE REFORMATION

A period of confusion followed the radical religious changes which took place after the death of Mary Tudor and the accession of Elizabeth, her Protestant sister. The Church of England with its new liturgical rites was now 'by law established.' The parish clergy were required to conform, and most of them did so, but many resigned or were expelled. Layfolk who refused to accept the new forms of worship became known as 'recusants', and were liable to be fined for non-attendance. Priests 'on the run' tried to keep the old Mass alive for the Catholic minority, resorting when in danger to their 'hiding holes' in the houses of the gentry. There is a priest's hiding place in Pailton Hall, near Monks Kirby.

Parish life took time to recover. Churches were sometimes left without clergy, and there was much destruction of valuable church ornaments. Monks Kirby probably came off better than most, owing to the protective patronage of Trinity College, Cambridge. The church fabric was well cared-for, the roof renewed, new bells provided and the lack of sacred vessels made good by a handsome gift, from Alice Duchess of Dudley in 1638, consisting of silver-gilt chalice and paten, ciborium and flagon.

During the Commonwealth a Presbyterian 'intruder' displaced the vicar for some years, and when the Independents seceded from the Anglican Church in 1662, 'Dissenters' soon declared themselves. A Congregational chapel was built at Stretton in 1662 (rebuilt 1789) and Baptist chapels were opened in Pailton and Monks Kirby (Bell Lane). But the 'chapel folk', numerous in the mid-nineteenth century, have dwindled and their chapels have long been closed.

The Catholics on the other hand grew rapidly in number after the conversion of the eighth Earl of Denbigh and the founding of their present parish of St. Joseph in 1869. A handsome new church at Newnham Paddox was blessed by five bishops in 1880, but demolished with the old house in 1952, since when the convent chapel has served as parish church. The Sisters and their school have served Monks Kirby for the last hundred years. Sadly, the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy is soon to be closed, but the school will continue.

## SCHOOLS AT MONKS KIRBY

There may have been a school in the time of the monks, and certainly there was a school of some kind with its own schoolhouse before 1625. In that year it was raised to the status of an endowed grammar school by benefaction of Thomas Wale a wealthy citizen of London. Wale had been a packman travelling between Leicester and Coventry, and his bequest was made in gratitude for the hospitality he had received at Monks Kirby, Stretton and Brinklow. Boys from these villages were to be educated free, others at a small fee.

Wales' Charity, as it was called, required the Mayor and Corporation of Coventry to maintain a schoolmaster at £20 a year and an usher at £10. How long the school retained true grammar-school status is not known. In 1771 the appointment as master of a 'dissenting minister', Joel Morris, led to a violent quarrel between him and the usher. The school was left unstaffed for years, until an illiterate and incompetent successor was appointed. Early in the nineteenth century the master's house was rebuilt, his stipend raised to £30, and he was allowed to take boarders and paying pupils.

The final phase of Monks Kirby Grammar School is identified with the name of Mr. Edward Colban, who was appointed headmaster in 1859 and retired in 1912, at the age of 73. After a spate of public meetings and committees in 1858-9, the school was reorganised as a public elementary school for boys. It was to be 'unsectarian', under a certificated master from one of the Training Schools, with an annual examination of the boys. It was agreed after argument to accept the Protestant Dissenting Ministers of Pailton and Stretton as ex-officio members of the new committee. All these proposals were accepted by the trustees of Wales Charity in 1859.

Young Mr Colban, certificated teacher from Battersea College, was appointed at a salary of £65 per annum, with unfurnished house and the whole of the weekly and other payments of the scholars. The fees were, for labourers and small shopkeepers, threepence per child per week (twopence for two or more); for farmers and tradesmen, ten shillings and sixpence per child per quarter. He could take up to six boarders. There were prayers at beginning and end of day, and daily reading of Scripture. Holidays were Saturdays, a fortnight at Christmas, a month at Corn Harvest. The school reopened 6<sup>th</sup> February 1860 with thirty boys; within six months there were sixty one, average attendance forty five, and the master's income from all sources had soared to £20 per quarter.

Colban was a teacher of outstanding ability and a strict disciplinarian. Headmaster for over 52 years, in a number of cases he taught three generations of the same family. He was a 'character' and in later years became somewhat autocratic. Standards declined and a visit by H.M. Inspectors in 1894 produced a critical report, so that a new committee under Lord Denbigh had to fight hard for the school's survival.

Meanwhile two other schools had come into existence, which continue to serve the village and its neighbourhood to the present day. The Catholic convent-school of St. Joseph's was founded in 1873 by the Sisters of Charity whom the eighth Earl of Denbigh had invited for that purpose, giving them a chapel, school and other buildings. The nuns in addition to day-scholars were able to take up to thirty girl boarders, and for boys also a boarding school was opened in Pailton, which however was later moved elsewhere. The eighth Earl's twin sister, Lady Mary Feilding, was the patron of Brockhurst Church of England School, whose picturesque old building known as Lady Mary's School was demolished in 1912 to make room for its successor.

In 1912 the old grammar school was amalgamated with Brockhurst to form a mixed Church of England school in new premises. The old grammar school, enlarged, is now the Village Hall. Old Mr. Colban resisted to the end and "absolutely refused to accept a pension of £60 a year." He was eventually given £100 pension, and the house for the rest of his life, and he is still remembered with affection and respect by the older inhabitants.

To-day the growing movement toward church unity is drawing Christian people closer together. The Anglican and Catholic Schools of Monks Kirby, sited on a common 'campus' at Brockhurst, are ecumenically linked in such a way that each provides for children of all denominations, St. Joseph's being the First School and Brockhurst being the Middle School. They are the first in the country to be so shared, an achievement which will serve the cause of unity in a practical way, and also help to restore the importance of Monks Kirby as the centre of the "great Parish" described by Dugdale.

## THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY AND ST. EDITH

Approached from any direction, the tower of the old Priory Church is still an imposing landmark. The building consists of nave and chancel, north and south aisles (the massive tower being built into the south-west corner), vaulted south porch with parvise or priest's room above. The plain lofty interior is on the grand scale. The fourteenth century nave was widened in the late fifteenth, when the present arcades were built with their finely-moulded arches without capitals. The height of the north aisle windows and a blocked-up door indicate a former cloister outside, and in the chancel are architectural features suggesting a monastic annexe of some kind. After the monks this was remodelled to make a north chapel, in which lie two Feilding table-tombs of alabaster with carved figures, and a vault underneath. There are other Feilding monuments, and the Skipwith Chapel in the south aisle has the tomb of the last Sir Thomas Skipwith and his wife Selina Shirley, with their arms. A mutilated head built into the north wall is claimed to be that of Geoffrey de la Guerche, the founder. An old English inscription in the porch may be deciphered "Ye men and women, pray for your souls."

The fourteenth-century tower originally had a tall, octagonal spire, but this after being shortened by twenty feet was blown down in the great gale of Christmas Day 1701. The tower and other damaged parts of the fabric were then repaired with light-coloured ashlar stonework, which in contrast with the original rich red sandstone, gives in sunlight a delicious effect of 'strawberries and cream'.

To-day the people of Monks Kirby, a blend of old and new inhabitants, are a lively and happy community.

As Church and Village celebrate in 1977 the ninth century of their priory church of Our Lady and St. Edith, they are proud of the past and humbly confident of the future.

### PRINCIPAL SOURCES

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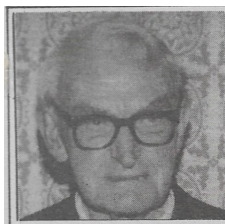
S. M. Stanislaus, **Newbold Revel.**

Cecilia, Countess of Denbigh, **Royalist Father and Roundhead Son.**

Winefride Elwes, **The Feilding Album.**

The writer acknowledges with thanks help kindly given by Rev Anthony Geering and Mr Donald Goldberg.

**GERALD JOSEPH SEASTON, M.A.**  
**1905 – 1989**



- 1905      Born – Manchester.  
            Educated – St Bede’s College, Manchester and Christ College,  
            Cambridge.  
            Studied for Priesthood – Rome – Oscott College, Sutton Coldfield.
- 1932      Ordained Priest.  
            Teacher of Classics – St Bede’s College, Manchester.
- 1938      Professor of Greek – Royal University, Malta until retirement in 1965.
- 1965      University Chaplain – Keele University.
- 1967      Parish Priest – Monks Kirby until his death in 1989.

Special interests included Music, Architecture, History, Travel and Cricket.

