

St. Mary's Monnington

Monnington on
Wye, Hereford
HR4 7NL

Norman times

Records of Monnington go back to the Domesday Book and earlier. The manor of Monnington on Wye was held by Harold Godwinson until 1066, when he famously lost at the battle of Hastings and his possessions were redistributed. Monnington was passed to Ralph de Tosny, a former standard bearer for William the Conqueror. Ralph's undertenant was Roger de Mussegros, or Musgrave; there is some suggestion that he is the one directly behind William I (with a hawk) in the Bayeux tapestry (below). Ownership of the manor can be traced from that point onwards.



The first record we have found so far of a rector of Monnington comes in 1285, when the patron was Sir John Giffard. We therefore know that there was a church on the site at least by that date, but it seems likely that the manor house would always have had a church or chapel.

Monnington also has links with St Katherine of Ledbury. Katherine was born in 1271, the daughter of Sir John Giffard and Maud de Longspee, a great-granddaughter of King John. As a teenager she married Nicholas de Audley. Both father and husband were dead by 1299, however, and she became an independent woman of very considerable wealth, including the manor of Monnington. It is speculated that she retired to a secluded religious life in Ledbury to avoid being married off to someone not to her taste, and she has become something of a cult figure as a result. The chapter house of St Michael and All Angels, Ledbury, is reputed to have been built as a shrine to Katherine.

Owain Glyndwr

In 1415 the "last Prince of Wales", Owain Glyndwr, disappeared, after a decade and more of fighting the English to assert and defend his title. It is not known where he died or is buried, but his daughter Margaret was married to Sir Richard Monnington. There is a long standing belief that he is buried to the west of the porch at Monnington on Wye, but the Monnington near Vowchurch in the Golden Valley is another likely candidate. It is unlikely we will ever know the truth.

The civil war and the Tomkins family

By the early seventeenth century, the manor was in the possession of the Tomkins family. James Tomkins became MP for Leominster in 1623 and the planting of the famous yews and Scots pines of Monnington Walk is thought to date from about 1628, to mark the occasion of his election. The Tomkins were very much Royalists, however; James was hanged in 1643 for raising a troop against Parliament and his son Thomas was knighted in 1661 as a mark of his loyalty following the restoration of Charles II. There is a fine Charles II coat of arms on the south wall of the church.



It is to Thomas' son Uvedale that we owe the current appearance of the church. The nave was rebuilt in 1679 (the tower remains mediaeval) and you will find many references in the church to this time and to Uvedale Tomkins' marriage to Mary Caple of How Caple. Very little has been changed since that restoration, so the church is as good an example of a seventeenth century church interior as can be found, all the woodwork and decoration being unchanged.

Uvedale Tomkins and Mary Caple had no children and she survived him, so the eighteenth century history of the manor is of the Caple family. Ownership passed back closer to home at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the manor was sold to Sir George Cornwall of Moccas Court, and it remained with the Cornwall family until the 1960s. In the early 1960s the road bridge to Moccas was washed away, leaving no access to this side of the river from Moccas Court, and so the manor house and surrounding farmland was sold to Bulmers, which accounts for the cider orchards in the village today.

Revd Francis Kilvert

Readers of Revd Francis Kilvert's much loved diary may recall that his sister Thermathis ("Thersie") was married to the Revd WR Smith, rector of Monnington, and he was a frequent visitor to the rectory. Little seems to have changed:

"Sunday, 13 April 1876

One of the quiet peaceful Monnington Sundays. I like a Sunday at Monnington, it is so calm and so serene. There is no hurry, no crowd, no confusion, no noise."