

The White Lady of Brynfield

By the Rev. J.D.Davies (Rector of Cheriton)

It is said that the apparition of a lady, dressed in white, used frequently to be seen by the old people on the high road near Brynfield House, Reynoldston and sometimes she was seen sitting on the stone stile which was formerly alongside the churchyard gate.

This story can, I think, be made capable of throwing a considerable amount of light upon the history of the house now called Brynfield, in the Parish of Reynoldston. Before the late Sir Gardner Wilkinson improved and enlarged it, it was a house, bearing indications of having been a building of considerable size, parts of which had been pulled down. There used to be an ivy-covered wall projecting westward from the main building, with a blocked up aperture of what appeared to have been originally a window of large size. When Sir Gardner was renovating the old house, he removed some earth and rubbish at the base of this wall, and in doing so he came across fragments of beautifully painted glass. Upon one of the broken pieces the letters E.R. could be made out very distinctly. The evidence of this window, and the painted glass with which it was formerly filled, shows that the house once upon a time must have been a residence of consequence, and inhabited by people of note. Lady Wilkinson was of the opinion that it was originally a religious house, inhabited by a sisterhood of the Order of St Clare, called from their poverty "the Poor Clares". alias the "Poor Ladies" whose habit was grey. Furthermore she informed me that the two cottages adjoining the Churchyard, lately built by her brother, the Rev. J. Ponsoby Lucas, stand on the site of an old thatched house, which went by the curious name of "Maiden's Fancy" and in some old deeds, which she has seen, is called the "White Ladies' Well". It is still known by the name of "Lady's

Well”.

The account of the apparition probably grew out of the sisterhood of St. Clare, whose grey habit was doubtless often seen in the neighbourhood in pr-reformation days.

I do not know whether any documentary evidence exists bearing upon the foundation of a religious community of the Poor Clares at Reynoldston, but from what I have been able to put together as above, it appears not unlikely. The story, however, is not devoid of interest, although it lacks the confirmation of historical proof. The disappearance of the community would date back to the suppression of all the monasteries and religious houses in the time of Henry V¹¹¹.

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