

Orton on the hill

Last village in Leicestershire reaching all the way to the county boundary. A natural vantage point with panoramic views down into Warwickshire and beyond. Unmistakable on the skyline, Orton Church “stump” is the third known spire. The first was struck by lightning in 1797, was repaired and raised to a graceful, tall spire which stood until c.1950 when it was deemed unsafe, taken down and rebuilt with as much money and stone as was available!

The church is dedicated to the local Anglo-Saxon Saint Edith of Polesworth, first abbess of the nunnery there. Allegedly to avoid Viking activity, the nuns set up a community at Orton in 1003. After the Norman conquest it became a tiny fragment of the spoils of war given to Henri de Ferrers whose grandson, Robert then gave it to Merevale Abbey in 1148.

Dominating the local area for the next 400 years, the Cistercian “farming” monks built granges encircling Orton including New House Grange and Moorbarns which occupied the site of the lost village of Weston. Could the long, stone tomb with mounted horseman at one end, in the south aisle of the church have connections with the Knights Templar and also Temple Farm at Sibson? The peaceful agrarian Order of St John is known to have associations in the area.

Treason – Rev William Paul, vicar of Orton from 1705 was heard preaching a sermon in support of the Jacobites and was dragged off to London as a traitor where he was hung, drawn and quartered at Tyburn in 1715.

Lord of the Manor, Samuel Steele Perkins rebuilt his ancestral home, the medieval Orton Hall as a modern Georgian mansion in 1786. He was also responsible for much of the church’s surviving Georgian interior and also for taking down the decaying north aisle and creating a family tomb. This makeover inadvertently preserved a medieval window which was discovered during repairs over 200 years later and the small painted glass is now at the top of the east window of the south wall of the church.

The Blue Plaque commemorating the birth of brewery founder, William Worthington, is appropriately located at the Unicorn pub (formerly the Perkins Arms) and takes its name from the family crest still visible on the stone pillars at the entrance to the once elm-lined carriageway to Orton Hall. The hall was sold in 1918 after 250 years in the same family and completely demolished in the late 1960s.

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