

**A HISTORY AND
DESCRIPTION OF THE
PARISH OF WHITNASH**

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A history and description of the parish of Whitnash by James Reynolds Young

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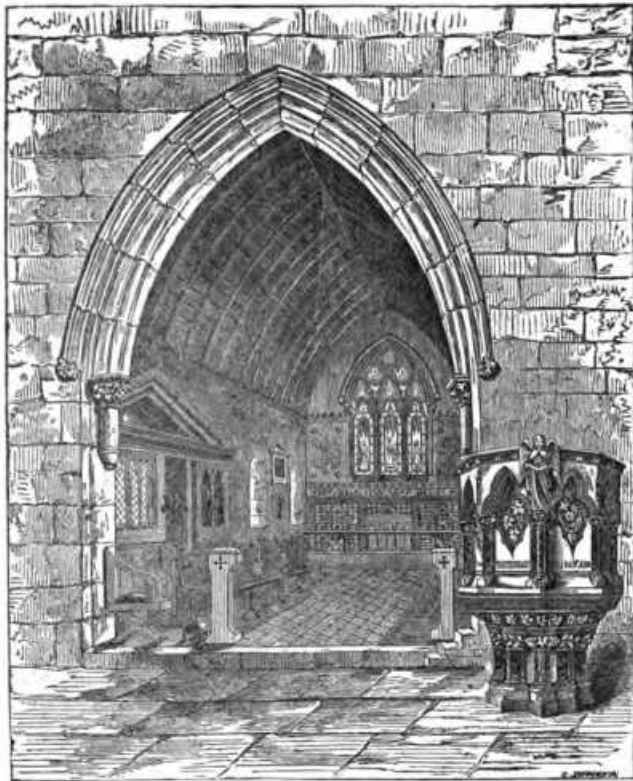
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JAMES REYNOLDS YOUNG

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THE CHANCEL OF WHITNASH CHURCH,

A History and Description
OF THE
PARISH OF WHITNASH.



WHITNASH CHURCH, WEST END.

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A HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION
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Whitnash is a secluded rural village, about one mile south of Leamington Priors, and three miles south-east of Warwick. Until the enclosure in the year 1850, it had no direct road leading to it, and could only be approached by lanes and paths across the cultivated fields.

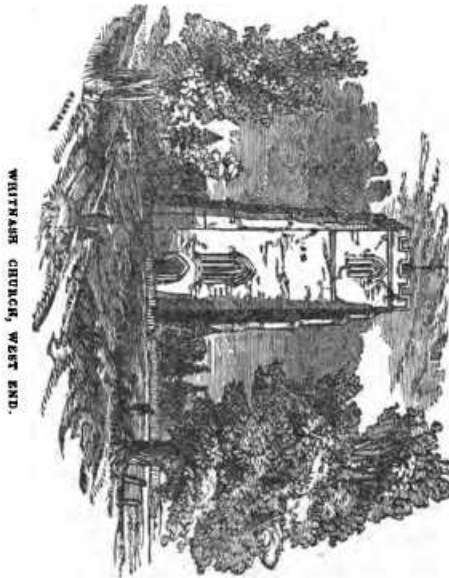
Whitnash was, in all probability, a village of the Britons in the time of the Romans, as the parish is bounded on its southern side by the Roman Fosse Road, and its name is derived from two Celtic words, *Coit*, *Quit*, *Whit* signifying a wood, and *Nes* or *Nas*, which means near. It was called in very ancient times *Witenas*, or the place near the wood. Roman coins of an early date have been recently dug up from the stone work of a house at the south-western corner of the parish, within half a mile of the Roman camp at Chesterton—(*castra* camp, and *ton* or *town*). Chesterton was one of

the Roman stations on the great Fosse Road, which led from the South Coast near Bridport, by way of Cirencester, right across the Island to Newark, Lincoln, and the Humber. Consequently, Witenas, or "the place near the wood" was on the great highway by which the Roman armies marched, and by which the commerce of the time penetrated to the interior of the country. The wood itself, which gave the name to the place has disappeared, but the luxuriant growth of trees throughout the parish, especially of elm trees, shews that in ancient times, before the complete enclosure and cultivation of the land, the name must have been most appropriate. The woody slopes of Whitnash, as seen from the direction of the Fosse Road, must have formed a prominent feature in the landscape, and thus likely to give a name to a collection of huts, erected by a native tribe on the borders of the great Roman Road. And even now the houses and cottages of the village as they are approached from almost any direction, peep out from the midst of embowering trees, as if to vindicate the right of the village to its ancient name—"The place near the wood."

It is probable that in very early times the habitations of Whitnash, were chiefly confined to the southern limits of the parish near the Fosse Road, within easy reach of the Roman station of Chesterton; and that it was only in Saxon times, when the kingdom of Mercia had been established, and the king and people had been converted to christianity, that a Church was founded at the northern end of the parish as being more accessible to Warwick, Kenilworth, and Offa's Church and Bury, places of some importance in Anglo Saxon history. In Domesday book, drawn up by William the Conqueror, Hunfridus is said to be possessed of the Manor of *Witenas*, and his son or grandson, Atrop Hastang, gave eighteen acres of

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land to the Church, on the day of its dedication, in the reign of Henry I., (A.D. 1100 to 1135). The previous Church was probably a meaner structure, composed of rough timber and unhewn stones. In all probability the remains which were discovered in the course of recent restorations belonged to this early Church of Atrop



Hastang—viz., the narrow deep lancet window, high from the ground, without a trace of glass, and other evidences of great antiquity. This Atrop, Hastang, not only endowed the Church, but gave its patronage to the Monks of Kenilworth, by whom it was held

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until the reign of Henry VIII. It is thought from traces in the mouldings of the windows, &c., that the nave of the Church was restored about a century after its erection, (circa 1240), in the reign of Henry III.; and again by Sir Thomas de Haseley, in the reign of Edward I., and during the incumbency of Henry de Compton, who was Rector of Whitnash, from A.D. 1302 to 1326, a period of twenty-four years. The Tower is of still later date, and appears from its mouldings and tracery to have been built A.D., 1350 to 1370. While some of the restorations may be as late as the time of Benedict Medley, whose monument is fixed on the south wall of the Chancel, and who apparently took great interest in all that concerned the Parish. The masonry, however, of the side walls of the Church and Chancel, was either very imperfectly finished, or else the foundations were very improperly laid, or graves were allowed to encroach within the proper distance, for within a few years it became necessary to build stone buttresses for support. Two such stone buttresses are still to be seen on the north side of the Church. And, notwithstanding these buttresses and others of brick, which were subsequently added, the walls of the edifice had so far swerved from the perpendicular at the time of its recent rebuilding—that the Chancel was twenty-eight inches wider at the wall-plates than at the pavement. The walls of the nave or body of the Church have not given way to so great an extent, although from the inequality of the style and courses of the masonry, they must have stood in need of frequent repair at irregular intervals. When part of the south wall was taken down to make way for the stone pulpit and new arch, A.D. 1862, a narrow lancet window was discovered upwards of seven feet from the ground; and a careful

examination shewed that no glass had ever been inserted in it. This is a proof of its great antiquity—since up to the period of its being walled up, glass was not commonly used for village Churches.

The irregular “herring bone” work at the side of the porch, in the opinion of Mr. Gilbert Scott, the Architect, may date as far back as the Saxon period, as it was not unusual in rebuilding a Church, to leave some portion of the earlier Church standing. Thus the Norman Church of Atrop Hastang, A.D. 1200, might retain the south door of its Saxon predecessor.

In the year 1851, in consequence of the threatening state of portions of the chancel, the present Rector called in Mr. George Gilbert Scott, of London, to inspect and report on the building. His opinion was, that though the Chancel might stand a few years longer, its state, on the whole, was such as nothing but a complete restoration would ever make it permanently suitable to a place of worship. Preparations were consequently made, during the next few years, for the work of re-construction.

The re-building of the Chancel having been decided on, and plans of a careful restoration on the original foundations, with the addition of a Vestry, having been furnished by Mr. G. G. Scott, a faculty was obtained by the Rector, and Service with Holy Communion was celebrated for the last time in the old Chancel, on the evening of Whit-Sunday, 27th May, 1855. On the following morning the work of pulling down the old building was commenced; and the first stone of the new Chancel was laid on the 3rd July of that year, with a special service of prayer for God's blessing on the undertaking.

During the progress of the work, very many friends contributed most kindly and liberally to the restoration