

Tomb and Tiles adjoining Barrow Gurney Church.

BY FRANCIS WERE.

MR. MARTIN GIBBS having personally supervised the resetting of these tiles during 1910, their present appearance becomes matter for history and therefore ought to be chronicled. In the early eighties, during the laying out of the Court grounds, the tomb and tiles were discovered at the west end of the Court Chapel and south of the old tower; they were buried under four feet of earth and on the top grew laurels. In the course of laying out the terrace a scaffold-pole destroyed the middle of the tomb; and previously some of the old inhabitants knew of their existence whilst making a water-drain, which caused havoc near the same spot. To preserve them Mr. Gibbs built a house over, and boards being laid across, the house was used as a vestry during the restoration of the Church. They lie exactly in a line with the east end of the Chapel, and were no doubt, being on the same level with its floor, part of the nave of the Nun's Church.

In the Rev. J. A. W. Wadmore's "History of Barrow Gurney" (published by the Northern Branch in 1897), there is a plate of the sketch taken of them, which gives a fairly accurate view of their position then; though since I have found the punctuation was with the letter on the tile and not on separate tiles; in this you will notice the sad havoc caused by drain and scaffold-pole across and below the middle of the tomb. The Rev. H. M. Scarth contributed on the last page

of Vol. XXIX of the Society's *Proceedings* an account of them, to which I shall have occasion to refer.

The sketch shows the black bordered edges of the tomb, inside which is the inscription, "Dame . . Joane . . Dactone . . Gyst . . Icy . . Dieu . . De . . Sa . . Alma . . eyt . . Mercy . .", in Lombardic capitals; and inside that, a cross

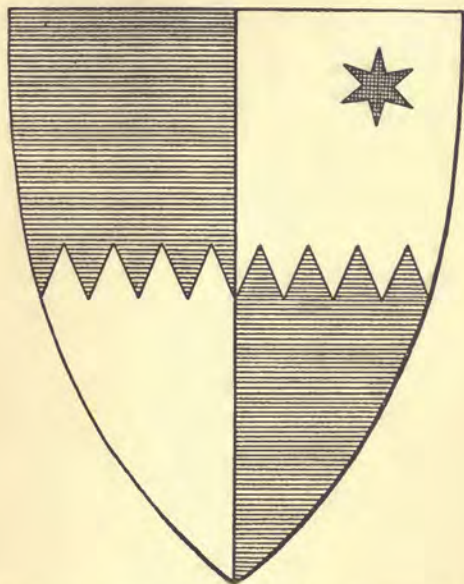
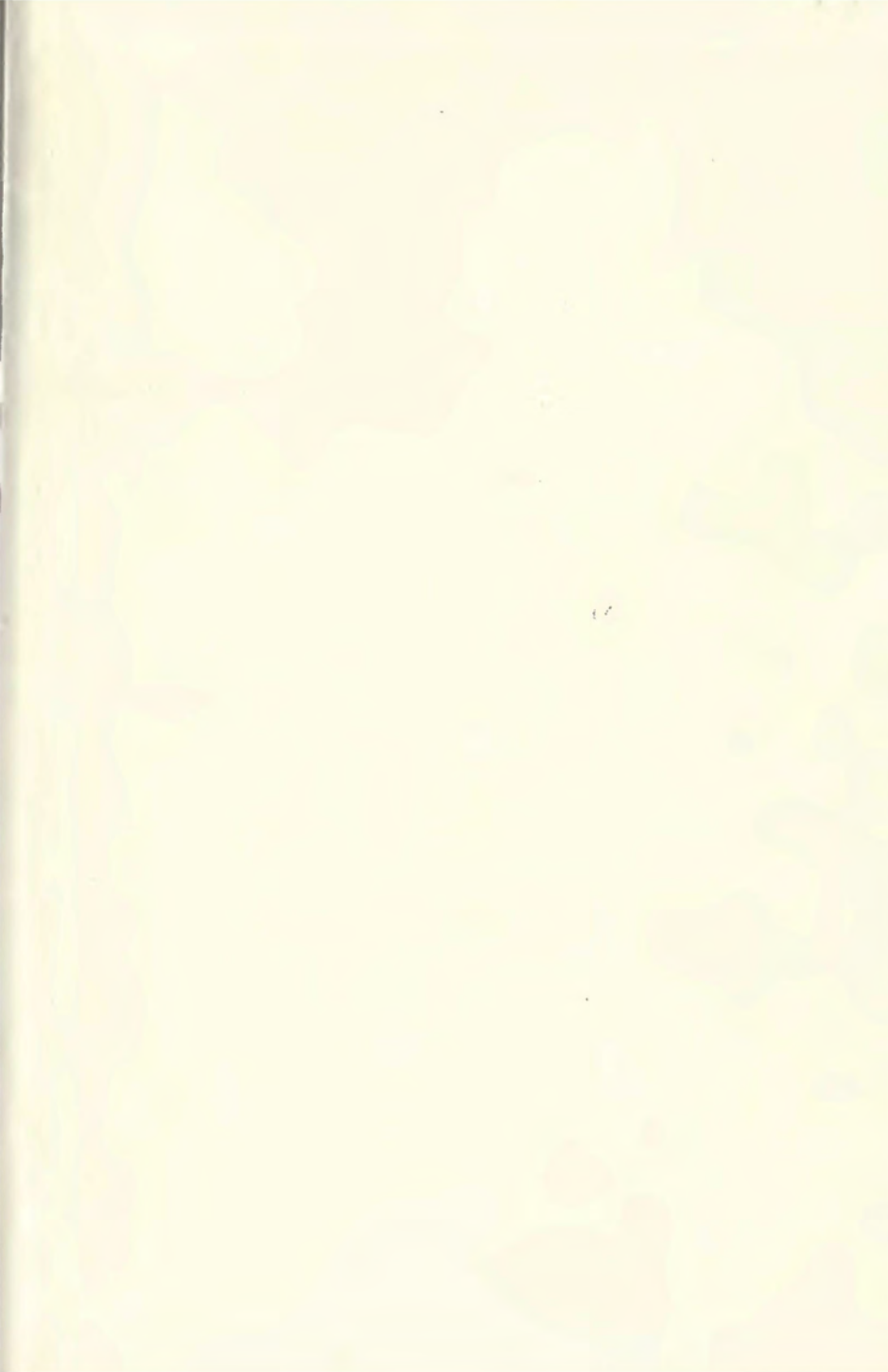


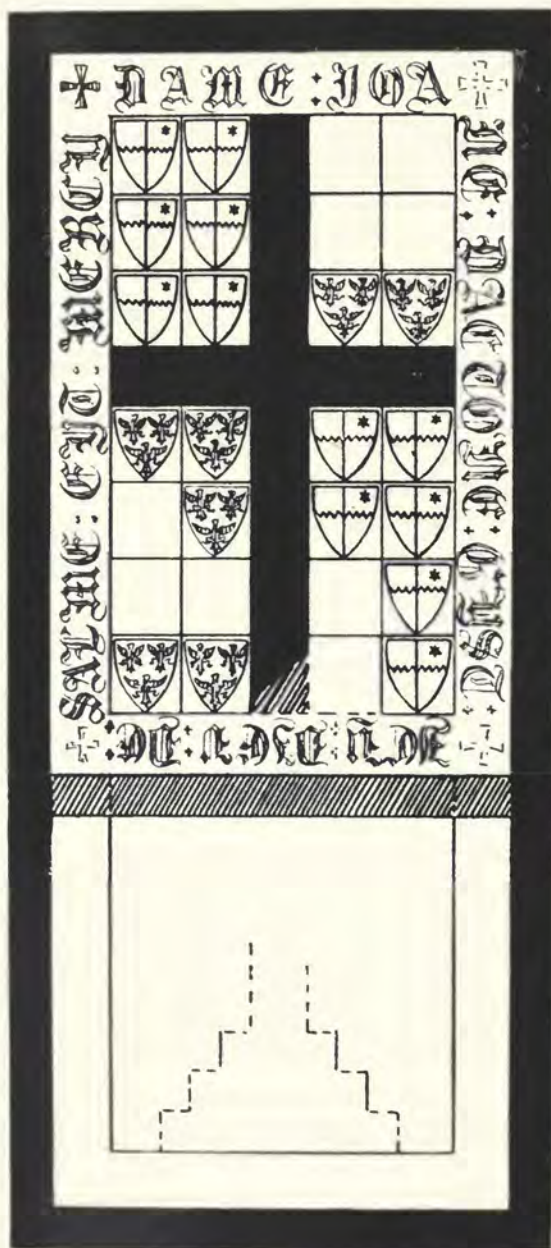
Fig. 1. ? ACROX. Horizontal lines, grey blue. Cross bar lines, black.

broken at its lower limb, which no doubt was a cross calvary finishing at its base with its three grades, whilst heraldic tiles cover the remaining space. Outside, forming the floor, were at the head of the tomb a large quatrefoil enclosed in a succession of circles, the spaces being studded with quatrefoils or crosses, whilst at foot and around were groups of shields and patterned tiles; with again, outside these, wider black borders enclosing inscriptions, the letters being jumbled up together so as not to be readable, most probably memorials of nuns or patrons; and outside these more patterned tiles.

The heraldic tiles are given without their blazon by Mr. Scarth as Acton (?), Rodney, Clare, Patton (?), Berkeley, De Mohun (?). Those round the cross on the tomb by their position seem to point out that they were quarterly with the cross, *viz.*, that the first quarter was Acton (?); the second, Rodney (you will notice there are four blank spaces here; these Mr. Gibbs has filled in with Acton (?) shields and so has changed the symmetry); the third, though mixed, Rodney extending to the base; the fourth, Acton (?), extending to the base. The question is, whether these tiles have been re-laid before this time, and instead of being quarterly, were arranged, the dexter side of the shaft of the cross with Acton (?), and the sinister side with Rodney, in which case Joan would be a Rodney married to an Acton; but if quarterly, it would only prove that an heiress of Rodney at some time or other married an Acton. These Acton (?) shields (Fig. 1) are remarkable, since they are the Acton coat reversed, which is the reason of Mr. Scarth's query, since they read, "Quarterly per fess indented tincture (pale black) and metal (most like argent) with a six-pointed mullet in the chief of the second quarter (black) sable." Whereas the true Acton (Fig. 2), as given by Collinson, II, 312, in the window over the altar, before the Gore's remodelling of the Church, was, "Quarterly per fess indented argent and azure in the first quarter a mullet gules." The six-pointed mullet in the Acton (?) shield, generally called by the older historians "a starr," is really a cadency mark denoting a third son, and as these tiles would be *circa* Edward III, it is likely to be an early example of its use. When I first saw these tiles I thought they might have been quarter small ones fitted together by an unskilful hand to imitate a whole Acton (?) instead of the true Acton, but at present they are whole tiles; so that one can only conjecture that the fault was the potter's, who made his stamp correctly and forgot that when stamped it would be reversed.

Mr. Gibbs has now pushed the border with its inscription





THE GRAVE OF JOAN D'ACTON,
AS RESTORED.

close up to the broken part of the shaft of the cross, so that the tomb has lost its adult character (see Plate).

No Dame Joan Acton has at present been found; "Richard Dacton (thus in will) miles," in his will, dated 1388, names his wife Margaret—she may have been his second wife; but there are a great many "M's" and "R's" scattered amongst the

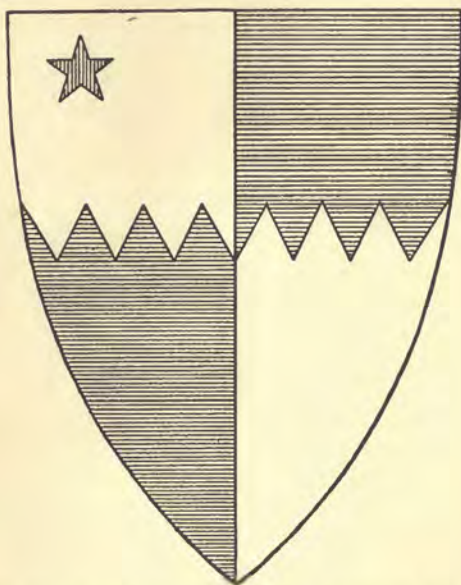


Fig. 2. ACTON. Vertical lines, red. Horizontal lines, blue.

lettered tiles, which Mr. Scarth attributes to the Virgin Mary, to whom the Priory was dedicated, and one of the inscriptions seemed to read, "Miserere mei Deus Matilda." Collinson gives several instances of Sir Richard Acton's benefactions to the nunnery, both in 1362 and 1370; whilst in his account of Chelvey, he says "that he was a great benefactor to the monastery (a slight lapsus) of Barrow"; but no mention is made of this Joan or her connection with his family.

The Rodney tiles are "metal (more like or) three eagles displayed 2 and 1 tinctured" (on some a trace of gules).

Among the other heraldic tiles, some forming patterned groups and others singly, are the Royal Arms, the three lions passant guardant in pale; they form a nice pattern enclosed in quatrefoil, and as they are not accompanied with the fleur-de-llys of France, possibly represent Henry III, or the first two Edwards. Berkeley, "Gules a chevron between ten crosses pattée argent" (owners of Barrow from Edw. III to Hen. VIII). One or two bear "Argent three chevrons sable," query *Archdeacon*; which Mr. Scarth has given as Clare, but that is "Or three chevrons gules." Two or three bear a "tinctured field with a metal maunch." This I take to be Mr. Scarth's De Mohun (?), but it is not the Mohun maunch and hand, and is more likely Hastings or De la Mare. The most interesting is the group of four between the tomb border and the wider line on the left of the sketch just above the circle enclosing the cross crosslet; this reads, "Per fess (though it may be per chief) metal and tincture (pale black), six cinquefoils pierced, three in chief and 2 and 1 in base counterchanged" (Fig. 3). It has been suggested that the cinquefoils are roses and that the coat is *Adelmare*, when it would be "on a chief," but the date is wrong, as that was Elizabethan; also to be that of *Palton* (which, I suppose, is Mr. Scarth's *Patton*, an uncorrected type error), but that has no party line. My reason for blazoning the charges cinquefoils is that they are "pierced," which is more common with such than with roses whose middle is "seeded"; besides, there are tiles with their still perfect enamel sable field and single metal cinquefoil scattered amongst the rest, which seem to point to some connection. I can only surmise that it might be the coat of Gilbert Hareclive, who is stated by Collinson, II, 310, to have been a patron of the nunnery in 1400, and so might reasonably be represented along with the Actons and Berkeleys; the name Hareclive proves him to have sprung from the neighbourhood, as the present Hartcliff rocks on the border of the parish gave that name to the Hundred combined

with Bedminster, in which Barrow Gurney is situated. The Rev. F. W. Weaver, Mr. E. A. Fry, and the Bodleian, have tried their best to find out more about him, but without success ; as if only his family could be found it might afford negative proof whether he bore such a coat.

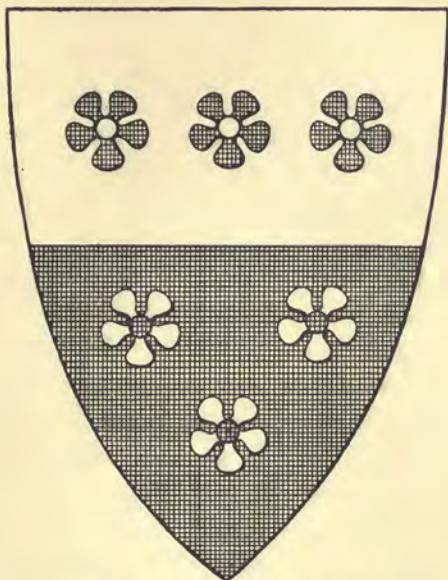


Fig. 3. Query. White, a pale yellow. Cross bar lines, black.

I would add, why is it that the coats of Gournay and Ap-Adam do not appear, as they were owners of the parish when the nunnery was in being ? Can it be that Barrow Minchin was extra parochial and therefore they would not support it ?

The tiles are now well set in cement and cannot be easily damaged or spoilt, for which Mr. Gibbs is to be congratulated.