

“ The Legend of St Catherine’s Well ”

Andrew Mckay February 2008

A short story written from the research of local history sources and produced as an audio work. The piece was commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council for the development of the successful £1.3m Heritage Lottery bid to renovate historical features within Sconce & Devon Park, Newark, Nottinghamshire.

SCRIPT

Production notes:

The story will be spoken by a female voice supported by a simple atmospheric audio soundscape to add a sense of drama and journey.

Female Voice

“ The Legend of St Catherine’s Well ”

On the outskirts of Newark, close to Sconce Hills and the peaceful River Devon lies the source of a dark and violent legend set in medieval times.

It is told that during the 14th century the young and beautiful Lady Isabel lived in Newark Castle with her father Alan de Cauldwell. Nearby lived two childhood friends – Sir Guy Saucimer and Sir Everard Bevercotes, Lord of Balderton - two knights who often challenged each other with chivalrous deeds. Good friends though they were, there was one secret they never shared which would cast a shadow over their lives for many years to come. For, unbeknown to the other, each knight privately sought the hand of the Lady Isabel in marriage.

One evening, it is said that Sir Guy had arranged to meet his friend in a church only to find it empty. Later, on seeking Sir Everard in the medieval streets of Newark, Sir Guy witnessed him secretly enter the castle to meet the Lady Isabel – something she had previously denied. So overcome with jealousy was Sir Guy that he resolved to lie in wait outside the town gates to challenge Everard to explain his apparent deceit.

As the moon rose, he waited, trying to contain his rage. Time passed, then suddenly a sound as the town gates opened and Everard innocently strode homewards.

Suddenly, Sir Guy sprang from the darkness before him. “ Blind and oblivious, and with a single stroke of his sword he struck Everard down. With blood rushing from his wound like a torrent, Everard stared in disbelief at Sir Guy – then fell at his feet a murdered man. ” For a moment, Sir Guy stood transfixed at the body in the clear moonlight and then, as he gazed, he saw a spring of clear water

gush forth from the ground - the two streams - one clear and one red with blood - mingled together flowing onward “. ([St Catherine's Well was born and Sir Guy's fate was sealed.](#))

Overcome with guilt and realising the enormity of his crime could only mean the hangman's noose, Sir Guy fled to Nottingham. Wrestling with the need to escape and a troubled conscience he wandered aimlessly before joining a group of pilgrims heading south to Rome. Beset by poor food and shelter he became weak as the pilgrims first walked to London, then Dover and by boat to Calais. Unable to travel further the Pilgrims left Guy in France where he wandered ceaselessly wrestling with his guilt. Some say that whilst here he heard news that on learning of Sir Everard's death, the Lady Isabel, was inconsolable and that she left Newark to die of a broken heart.

To add to his sorrows his body became afflicted with leprous sores which he saw as god's punishment for his dreadful deed. Rejected by all, Sir Guy hid himself away in the forest of St Avold where he lived frugally and in feverous torment until the night he had a strange dream where St Catherine appeared to him “ bathed in shining light”. The vision urged him to return to England, saying that that only the water from the spring where he had slain his friend would cleanse his sores. On his return to England It is said that he confessed his sins in the first church he found, gaining full absolution and consecration as a hermit.

He then set forth to Newark where he bathed in the spring, praying daily for forgiveness. Miraculously his malady was slowly cured and he became a changed man carrying out good deeds for local citizens. Living a simple, pious life he kept his vow as a hermit and became known as St Guthred.

Many years passed by and he died of old age, but not before he had built a chapel near the spring where over the altar he engraved an image of St Catherine and then he enclosed the spring in a carved wall of stone naming it St Catherine's Well.

Optional Conclusion:

[Whether fact or legend, Newark Parish Church records show that a chantry was founded for St. Guthred and centuries later the spring was found close to Sconce Hills surrounded by the curiously carved wall of stone. It is recorded that for many years Newark Citizens believed it had healing powers and spoke of miracle cures.](#)

[In the 20th century a Newark Doctor, out of curiosity, went to test the waters. He was amazed to find that it did indeed have healing properties. To this day a spring of clear water can be found in the grounds of a private house in Newark between the Queen's Sconce and the River Devon. It is still known as St Catherine's Well.](#)