

# A visit to Ewyas

*By David Eaves, September 2001*

**D**URING mid-September 2001, whilst in the course of a family holiday to South Wales, I took the opportunity of visiting the area of Ewyas, on the England-Wales border.

There is a strong case, which many Eaves researchers strongly believe, that the Anglo-Norman Ewyas family were the ancestors of the Eaves family of the UK.

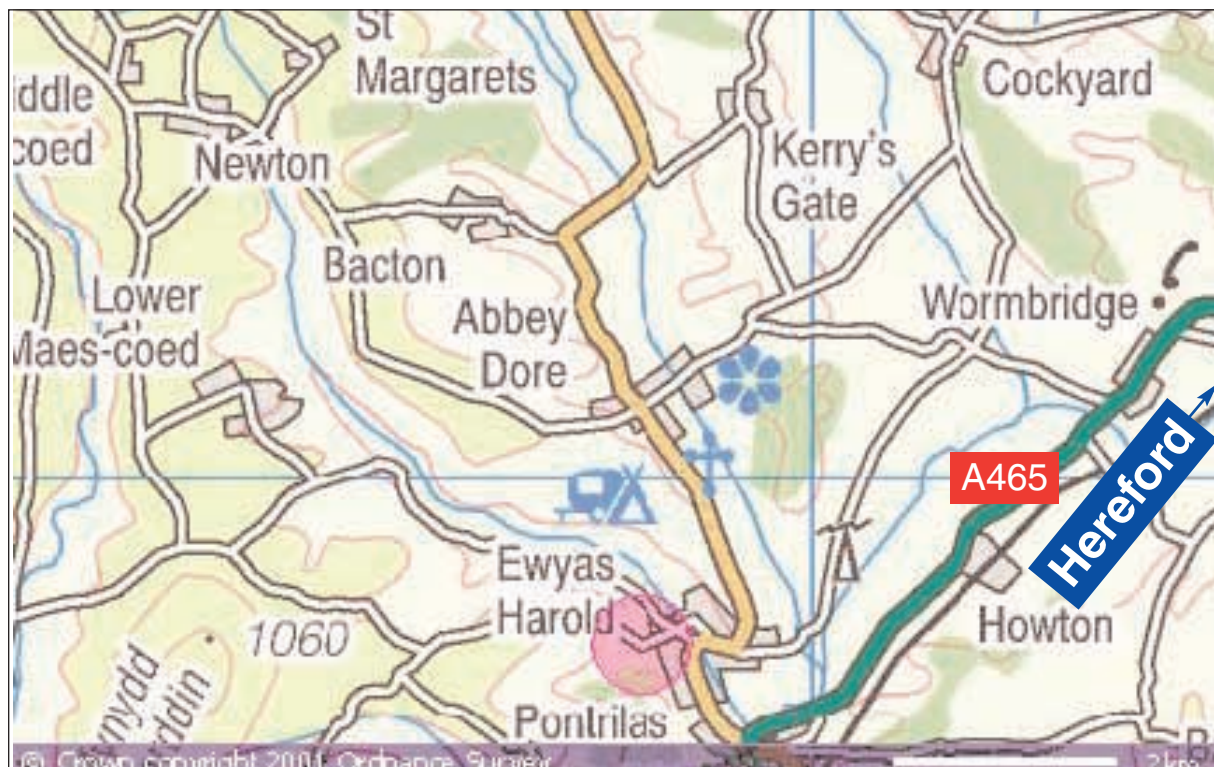
For a fuller explanation of the connections the reader should refer to the Eaves/Eves website for more detailed information. But as a means of introduction, the outline of the connection is that in 1042 the new King - Edward the Confessor - upon his accession to

the English throne was accompanied from Normandy to Winchester by family and friends.

Among the delegation was Edward's 30 years old nephew, Ralph, the son of Edward's sister, Godgifu and her husband, Dreux de Mantes.

As was the custom, upon his coronation Edward rewarded his family and friends with riches and titles - to Ralph he granted the Earldom of Hereford and an area on the Welsh

● Below: Ewyas Harold is located approximately 15 miles south west of Hereford, just off the A465 road heading towards Abergavenny.





● The overgrown site of Harold de Ewyas' motte and bailey castle at Ewyas Harold.

border called Ewyas. Ralph took the name of Ewyas as his surname.

Ralph's son, Harold, constructed a motte and bailey castle at a strategic point on a mound overlooking the entrance to a fertile plain called The Golden Valley from which he could overlook and, if necessary, fend off a Welsh invasion. Over the following years a community by the name of Ewyas Harold grew up around this fortification. Harold and his son Robert de Ewyas founded a church at Ewyas Harold and also an abbey at Abbeydore, which they bequeathed in 1094 to a group of Cistercian monks.

The purpose of my visit was to see at first hand just what remains of these particular antiquities and any other physical structures or monuments that may be found in connection with Ralph, Harold and Robert de Ewyas.

### **Ewyas Harold village**

The village of Ewyas Harold is a short distance off the A465 Hereford-Abergavenny road, and can be accessed via the B4347. Ewyas Harold

could be considered, as what we in the UK call a "commuter village" for the larger town of nearby Hereford. It has a number of fine 18th Century cottage-type properties at its centre and is surrounded by a prosperous modern residential area. The centre piece of the village is the River Dore which flows alongside the main road, principally by the local pub, post office and ancient village church.

### **Ewyas Harold church**

St Michael's, Ewyas Harold, is an ancient church but no trace remains that can be dated earlier than the 13th Century. It is believed, however, that a structure existed on the site from as early as 1100 when Harold de Ewyas gave lands and tithes to the monks of Gloucester. The monks were to serve the church and provide a chaplain for the chapel of St Nicholas in the Castle of Ewyas.

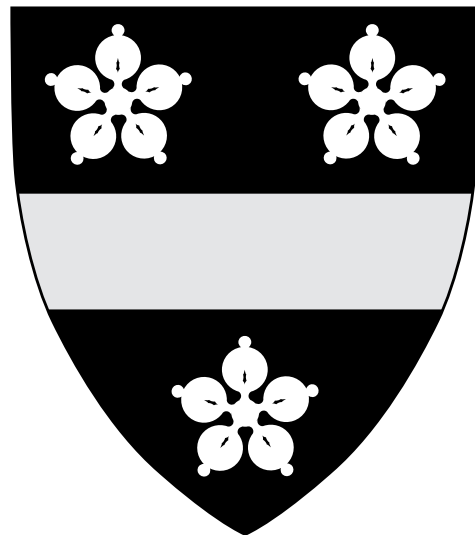
The church is approached via the road passed the post office through a traditional lych gate which leads into a well cared for churchyard. Most of the gravestones and

monuments are of 19th Century origin, however, there is a Medieval preaching cross that was re-erected in the 1840s by a former vicar with an interest in church history and local antiquities.

The church itself is dominated by a 13th Century square bell tower, which at one time also served as a protective fortress for the villagers. The interior of the St Michael's is both plain and simple, and at first glance there is not much for the Eaves researcher. However, on closer inspection there are two 13th Century lancet windows in the south wall with trefoil and quatrefoiled leaded lights - the trefoil and quatrefoil can both be found on the Ewyas family coat of arms. Is there a connection?

On the north wall there is a 14th Century tomb recess with an effigy of a woman, believed to be Clarissa, daughter of John Tregoz, Lord of Ewyas and a descendant of Robert de Ewyas.

At the back of the church there is also a framed note detailing the gift of the church by Harold de Ewyas to the monks. But apart from



● The arms of the Ewyas family showing the quintrefoil heraldic flowers. Other branches were known to use trefoil and quatrefoil devices.

these three items, there is little else to show a connection with the Ewyas family.

The church does have many other antiquities, most of which, are from the 17th Century and later, and no doubt are of great



● St Michael's Parish Church, Ewyas Harold

— THE ABBEY OF GLOUCESTER —

in the year 1100 A.D.

**Be**

It known to all that I, HAROLD of EWYAS, have given to God and St. Peter and the monks of Gloucester the church of St. Michael, of Ewyas, with its lands and tithes and all things pertaining thereto, together with the chapel of St. Nicholas in my castle, on condition that the monks provide a suitable chaplain to serve it; also the whole tithes of the demesne of the manor of Ewyas, viz., the tithes of corn, hay, apples, and other fruits of my trees, also of honey, cheese, wool, linen, cattle, pigs, calves and of the fuel of the harvest, and of all the things of which a Christian ought to give tithes. I grant also to the monks who serve God in the church of St. Michael the tithes of my lands ..... viz., ..... all of which I confirm to them to be held freely and quietly from all secular service and exaction, by the impression of my seal.

This gift I made in the Chapter of Gloucester and held it on the altar of St. Peter, and afterwards I confirmed it by the hand of the venerable Bernard, Bishop of the church of St. David's, in the Chapter of Ewyas; and so by their confirming this, in the presence of his brethren, and his parents, and in the presence of many persons, married and lay.

( This above is a translated extract from the Gloucester Cartulary. )

● A note displayed in St Michael's Church, Ewyas Harold, commemorating Harold's gift of the church to the monks.



● The Parish Church of St Mary, formerly Abbey Dore.

interest to anyone interested in the religious history of England and Wales, particularly of the Civil War period. Indeed, there is a story connected with the church that tells of one Sunday morning during the mid-1660s, when within the vicinity of the churchyard a violent attack by Parliamentarians took place and a number of local Royalist were killed and at least one was strung up on a tree nearby.

### **Dore Abbey**

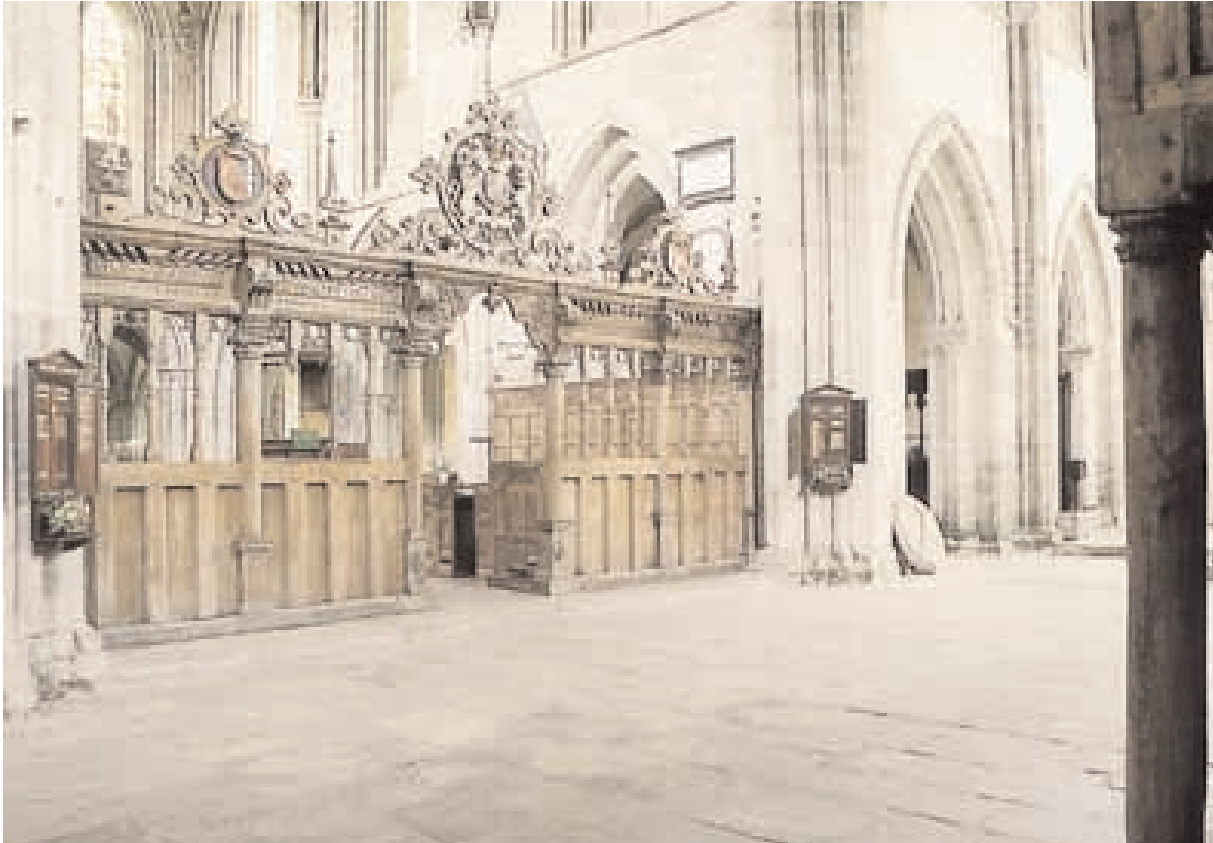
The parish church of St Mary, formerly known as Dore Abbey, is located five miles north of Ewyas Harold, beside the River Dore, on the B4347 road towards Hay-on-Wye. The church is accessed through a lych-gate and is hidden from the road by two high walls. The abbey is surrounded by a graveyard – most of the graves dating from the 19/20th Centuries – and various low ruined walls dating from a period before the 16th Century. The Abbey was caught up in the Dissolution during the reign of Henry VIII and as such the building and its contents were ransacked during the 1500s; and

was only rebuilt after the English Civil War.

The building is of an imposing design, dominated by a square bell-tower. It was founded in 1147, following a meeting by Robert, Lord of Ewyas, with the Abbot of Morimond, of the Cistercian Order, during the Second Crusade to the Holy Land.

Much of the building dates from the rebuilding period, but the airy interior contains many examples of masonry, effigies, monuments and stone bosses from the earlier period. Once again the church is a delight to the visitor with many outstanding features, in particular, the carved oak screen and Musician's Gallery. The screen displays a magnificent carved coat of arms of King Charles I – a requirement that was made of all churches during the 1500s. There are other coats of arms displayed around the church, but mostly in connection with the Scudamore family and date from the 18th Century.

There are three items of interest to the Eaves researcher: a number of decorated and inscribed tiles of 12th Century origin, with



● The oak screen and arms of King Charles I.



● The altar, Dore Abbey

Norman-Latin inscriptions, and show various coats of arms of families buried within the church. Unfortunately, it is difficult to make out the inscriptions and graphic elements, due to their deterioration but I understand that a study has been made of them and the results can be found in the local Record Office.

The other two items are effigies. These are both rather large pieces of stone, and carved in the shape of a knight in a reclining position, and are from the 13th Century. The oldest one, is believed to be that of Robert de Ewyas, brother-in-law of St Thomas Cantelupe; the other, the notorious Roger de Clifford; they were half-brothers, being sons of Sybillia de Ewyas. The effigies are sited either side of the main altar, but apparently, were originally sited in the eastern chapel, probably with a painted heraldic emblem or tile set in the tomb for identification purposes. Both of these effigies are quite imposing and well worth the visit alone.

### **Further information**

Ewyas Harold and Abbeydore are set in a beautiful part of the English countryside, which has a wealth of interesting features and attractions for the visitor and researcher alike. Further information, publications, directions, church services and opening times regarding the abbey at Dore may be found on its own website - look up Dore Abbey - and details regarding transport connections and accommodation within the Ewyas Harold area are available from the local tourist information office at Hereford.

### **Conclusion**

It is almost 1000 years since Ralph settled at Ewyas, at what was at the time a dangerous outpost, and it would be naive after 10 centuries of destruction and later redevelopment, to think that anything of real significance regarding our family's early history



● Effigy of Robert de Ewyas, Dore Abbey.

still existed. However, what physical evidence does exist, in particular the effigies at Abbeydore, is of the highest quality and as such

should not be dismissed, and is well worth the visit.

*David Eaves, October 2001.*



● Another view of the effigy of Robert de Ewyas, Dore Abbey.

*The author wishes to acknowledge the help of 'The Friends of Dore Abbey' and Ordnance Survey in the preparation of this article.*