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The Poyntz Family

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THE POYNTZ FAMILY.

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Read at Cheltenham, July 9th, 1879.

THE restoration of Iron Acton Church has once more drawn the attention of archæologists to the monuments of the Poyntz family, which have existed there for many generations; and I am glad to be allowed to speak to you to-night about the ancient family which erected them, and which, though still surviving, is no longer connected with this county.¹

From very early times the family of Acton had held the manor of Iron Acton. Sir Robert Atkyns says that it came into their possession soon after the Norman Conquest. At all events, it had descended through several generations to Sir John Acton, who died without issue in the 17th year of Edw. III. (1344). His estates passed to his cousin Maud; and Maud was the second wife of Sir Nicholas Poyntz, second Baron of Cory Mallet in Somersetshire, who had served in the Scottish wars in the reign of Edward I., and who died in the 5th year of Edw. II (1312). Sir Nicholas Poyntz had, therefore, been already dead for many years when the Iron Acton estates came to his family, and Maud, who died in 1362, was an elderly woman; but the estates passed, through her, to her son Sir John Poyntz; Sir Nicholas leaving the Cory Mallett estates to Hugh, his eldest son by his first wife. The family of Poyntz, then, first became possessed of the manor of Iron Acton in 1344; and from that time onward they continued, son succeeding father, till the death of another Sir John Poyntz in

¹ The writer desires to acknowledge the great assistance he has received from the Rev. Frederick Brown, of Beckenham, who has generously allowed him the use of his MS. notes on the Poyntz family, representing the labours of many years. He has also gained much information from the Rev. Newdigate Poyntz, of Little Drayton, and Mrs. Blandy Jenkins, of Llanharan.

1680, at whose decease without issue the manor was sold to William Player, Esq. Thence it passed by purchase to Sir Samuel Astry, and afterwards to Sir Philip Parker, from whom it descended to the family of Long, of Rood Ashton. Walter Hume Long, Esq, the present lord of the manor, married, in 1878, a daughter of the Earl of Cork; and thus, as will be shewn later on, has once more connected the Poyntz family with their ancient property. But, as the family of Poyntz was already venerable and famous when it first came into possession of Iron Acton, so it has maintained its existence in spite of the termination of the Iron Acton branch in the 17th century; and at the present time, there is a little boy, Newdigate Poyntz, born in 1875, whose direct descent can be traced by thoroughly good evidence through seventeen generations, up to Maud the heiress of the Actons, and Sir Nicholas Poyntz her husband; and beyond that again, if we may accept the testimony of Dugdale and the authorities quoted by him, as far back as the fifth year of Stephen. There is little doubt that a far higher antiquity can be rightly claimed for the family, and a direct connection established between them and Rollo, Duke of Normandy. In the "Collectanea Cliffordiana," by Arthur Clifford, Esq. (Paris, 1817), their earlier history is thus given. William, fifth son of Richard *sans peur*, (Grandson of Rollo) was Count of Hiesmes, but levied war against his brother Richard (*le Bon*), was besieged at Hiesmes, taken prisoner, and confined by Richard at Rouen for five years. He escaped from his imprisonment, but ultimately threw himself upon his brother's mercy, who treated him well, and on the death of Gislebert, son of his brother Geoffrey, Count of Eu, he made over to William the county of Eu, and gave him in marriage Esseline, daughter of Count Turchetil. From this marriage four sons were born, the youngest of whom was Pouts. This Pouts, like his eldest brother Robert, Count of Soissons, went over to England at the Conquest. He was the father of three sons, Richard, Drogo, and Walter. Walter is said to have been Lord of Lea, in the Forest of Deane; Richard was the ancestor of the Clifford family, and grandfather to fair

Rosamund Clifford (*"rosa mundi, non rosa munda"*), the mistress of Henry II. The second brother, Drogo, was the ancestor of the Poyntz family. His son, Osbert Fitz Poyntz, is said to have been Sheriff of Gloucestershire in the 5th year of Stephen, and Hugh Poyntz, son or grandson of Osbert, is said to have attended King John into Poitou, and to have married Heloise, daughter of William Mallet, of Cory Mallet in Somersetshire. He was thus the first Poyntz of Cory Mallet, and was grandfather to the Sir Nicholas Poyntz, who married Maud the heiress of the Actons.

The Poyntzes of Cory Mallet survived in the male line for only five generations ; for Sir Nicholas Poyntz (who died in 1369) left no son, but only two daughters, both of whom married. The Iron Acton branch comprises eleven generations, beginning, as I have said, with Sir John Poyntz the son of Maud, and ending with Sir John Poyntz who died without issue in 1680, and who lies buried with his ancestors in Iron Acton Church ; the first and last of that long line of whom it is recorded in the Parish Register that he was buried "in woollen only, according to the directions of an Act of Parliament made and provided in that case."

But from the Iron Acton stem two important branches issued, to which I must now call your attention.

Nicholas Poyntz, who died in 1451, had two wives ; and by his second wife, Elizabeth Hussey, daughter of Henry Hussey, a Sussex gentleman, he had issue a son Henry, who was the founder of the family of Poyntz of North Ockenden in Essex. This branch, in the 7th generation, was represented by Catherine, daughter of Sir Gabriel Poyntz, and she married Sir John Morrice of Chipping Ongar who assumed, with her fortune, the name of Poyntz, and died in 1618. Her son and grandson, James and Richard, succeeded to the estates ; and on the latter dying unmarried at Montauban, in 1643, the property passed to the Littleton family, who assumed the name of Poyntz in addition to that of Littleton. The church of North Ockendon contains many monuments of the Poyntz family, including the brasses of

Sir William Poyntz (ob. 1504) and Elizabeth his wife (ob. 1502), sister of Sir John Shaw, Kt., Lord Mayor of London in 1501.¹

This was one branch from the Iron Acton stem. The second, and far more important one, issued two generations later. Those who know the church of the Gaunts (or Mayor's Chapel) at Bristol, will recollect the very beautiful chapel, partially paved with Spanish tiles of exquisite design,² which is associated with the name of Poyntz. It was built by Sir Robert Poyntz, who died in 1520, and lies buried there. In his will he directs that he "be buried in the church of the Gaunts, beside Bristol, in the chapel of Jesus, which latter I have caused to be new edified and made, of my cost and charge, on the south side of the chancel of the said church, and the overpart thereof, behind the Presbytery there . . . The said new chapel, which I lately edified, is not in all things perfected and furnished yet according to mine intent, that is to wit, in glazing of the windows thereof, and making of two pews within the said chapel in the lower end of the same. Mine executors shall finish and perform all the same things being yet undone, and also shall garnish the same chapel with certain images, and the altar of the same with altar cloths, vestments, book, and chalice, and with all other things thereunto necessary. . . ." (After mentioning certain manors) "The Master of the house of the Gaunts to take the issues of the same, to provide an honest and considerable priest to sing mass at the altar in the said chapel of Jesus. . . The said priest to have for his salary six pounds. A solemn *obit* for my soul to be kept in the said church of the Gaunts on the day of my departing; in the evening '*Placbo*' and '*Dirige*' by note, and on the day following Mass of Requiem by note. And four tapers of wax, every of them a pound weight, be brenning upon my herse about the crucifix at all times, during

¹ Thomas, son of this Sir William Poyntz, was a merchant, resident at Antwerp. Tyndale, the martyr, was his guest there for nearly a year. By treachery Tyndale fell into the hands of the Emperor, and was condemned to the stake, having first been strangled, 1536. Thomas Poyntz escaped with much difficulty to England, and died in Essex, 1562.

² Sir Francis Poyntz, 3rd son of Sir Robert, was agent to Spain in 1527. Perhaps the Spanish tiles were brought over by him to decorate the chapel where his parents were buried.

the said Dirige and Mass. And six and eight pence stirling to be distributed in alms to the poor. The said priest shall always be tabled and lodged within the same house of the Gaunts."

This Sir Robert Poyntz married Margaret Woodville, daughter of Anthony, Earl Rivers. He was a wealthy and powerful man, and we read of him at the court of Henry VII. and Henry VIII. He is mentioned among the Knights Bachelors present at the tardy coronation of Elizabeth of York in 1487. He accompanied the King in the expedition to Exeter against Perkin Warbeck. Henry VII. dined with him at his house at Iron Acton in 1486. He was at a later date appointed to take part in the reception of Catharine of Arragon, and he was in attendance upon Henry VIII. at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. He was the father of eight children. His eldest son Anthony succeeded to the Iron Acton estates, and John, his second son, became Lord of the Manor of Alderley in Gloucestershire. We may notice the importance of the Alderley branch of the family, both on account of the famous men belonging to it, and because it serves as a point of departure for the other, and still existing branches of the family.

John Poyntz of Alderley married Catharine, daughter of Sir Matthew Browne of Beckworth, Surrey; and it is to be noticed that the name Matthew, now appearing for the first time in the pedigree, was borne by the great grandson of this John, the famous lawyer Sir Matthew Hale, whose body lies in Alderley churchyard. To the same line belonged Robert Poyntz, who died in 1566. He was educated at Winchester and New College, but gave up all hopes of a career at home by embracing the Roman Catholic religion. He became a student of Divinity at Louvain, and published a small work (Lovanii, 1566), entitled "Testimonies for the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, set forth at large and faithfully translated out of six ancient Fathers, which lived far within the first six hundred years, together with certain notes, declaring the force of those testimonies, and detecting sometimes the Sacramentaries false dealing." The six fathers chosen are Chrysostom, Cyril,

Cyprian, Hilary, Augustine, and Ambrose. The chief interest of the book lies in the curious narratives of the power of the Holy Eucharist in the exorcism of devils.

The manor of Alderley continued for only four generations in the Poyntz family, being sold to a Mr. Rogers by Robert Poyntz, who died without issue at the close of the 17th century. But from the first Lord of this Manor, John Poyntz, issued another and more durable line of the same ancient family; for his youngest son William, who died in 1601 at Reigate, and married Elizabeth Newdigate (the name Newdigate now first appears), was ancestor of two very considerable branches of the family; the Benefield and Hexton branch on the one hand, the Midgham and Cowdray branch on the other. His wife was the daughter of a Surrey gentleman, Thomas Newdigate, and this seems to have brought him to Surrey, where his sister Alice also settled, as wife of John Skynner, one of the Clerk Controllers of the household of Queen Elizabeth. His son John united the Alderley with the Iron Acton branch by his marriage with Ann Sydenham, whose mother Mary was a Poyntz of Iron Acton; and John's son Newdigate, of Benefield, Northants, by his two marriages, founded the Benefield and Hexton house, and also the Midgham and Cowdray house.

From this Newdigate Poyntz, by his first wife Sarah Foxley, comes the little Newdigate Poyntz who was born in 1875—seven generations having intervened between them; and from the same ancestor, by his second wife Mary Perkins, came, in the third generation, the first Lady Spencer, mother of the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire; and in our own days this line is represented by the present Earl Spencer, through his mother Elizabeth Georgina Poyntz; by the present Marquess of Exeter, through his mother Isabella Poyntz (both daughters of William Stephen Poyntz, of Cowdray Castle), and by the present Earl of Cork, through his grandmother Isabella Henrietta, daughter of William Poyntz of Midgham.

The marriage of the 1st Earl Spencer (then Mr. Spencer) with Georgina Poyntz is full of romance. She was very beautiful, and he had resolved to make her his wife on the very day of his

coming of age. She was staying at Althorpe at the time with her mother and two sisters (her father had died in 1750), and the marriage was celebrated quite privately, in one of the rooms, on the evening of December 27, 1775; the persons necessary for the marriage withdrawing quietly from the company, and the guests in the house being for the most part quite ignorant of the event till some days afterwards. Horace Walpole sneers at the rich Commoner's marriage with "the daughter of a nobleman's tutor;" but not only was Miss Poyntz herself a person of singular beauty and goodness, but her father, the Right Honourable Stephen Poyntz of Midgham, besides boasting a long ancestry, had been a distinguished diplomatist. He had been Minister Plenipotentiary in Sweden, and one of the English Commissioners at the Congress of Soissons (1729). The foundation of Horace Walpole's sarcastic comment was the fact that Stephen Poyntz, after leaving College, had travelled for a time as tutor to the Duke of Devonshire, and had been afterwards Governor to William, the bloody Duke of Cumberland.¹ Lady Spencer survived her husband many years. She died in 1814, and is buried at Brington, Northants.

The grandson of the Right Honourable Stephen Poyntz was William Stephen Poyntz of Cowdray Castle, the father of the late Countess Spencer and the late Marchioness of Exeter. Two tragical events are connected with his life, by one of which he gained possession of Cowdray, and by the other was deprived of the heirs to inherit his name. His wife was Elizabeth Mary, daughter of the 7th Viscount Montagu, and her brother, George Samuel, was the 8th Viscount. He was a young man in September, 1793, when his splendid seat, Cowdray Castle, was destroyed by fire. But news of the calamity never reached him. He was at that time travelling on the continent with a friend, Mr. Burdett, and at the beginning of October, 1793, was at Schaffhausen. While there, he conceived the insane desire to shoot the falls of the Rhine in a small boat, and though the authorities of the place did all in their power to prevent him, and

¹ Mr. Poyntz built two rooms at Midgham House for the special accommodation of the Duke of Cumberland. I believe they are still called "The Duke's rooms."

his own servant seized him by the coat and tore his collar off as he entered the boat, he and his friend pushed off, and were soon beyond reach or help. They plunged into the fall, passed the first descent in safety, and then, while shouting and waving their handkerchiefs in token of success, were carried into the second fall, and there perished. Their bodies were never recovered. By this event Cowdray Castle passed to Elizabeth Mary, sister of Viscount Montagu, and wife of William Stephen Poyntz. Their family consisted of two sons and three daughters; the sons were named William Montagu Browne, and Courtenay John Browne. It might be thought that in these two sons there was fair promise of an heir to the splendid estate so lately acquired; but it was not so to be. In the year 1815 the family was staying at Bognor, and the father one day started with his two boys for a sail in a pleasure boat, leaving the mother and daughters at home, in a drawing room overlooking the sea. They were engaged in studying French with a master (from whose lips my informant heard the narrative), when they saw the boat capsize, at a little distance from shore. Mr. Poyntz was saved; his two sons were drowned. No male heir remained to inherit Cowdray Castle, and soon after the death of Mr. Poyntz in 1840, it came into the possession of the Earl of Egmont.

You will remember that the Poyntzes of Midgham and Cowdray (of whom I have just spoken), were descended from Newdigate Poyntz of Benefield, by his second wife Mary Perkins. They therefore represent the youngest, though perhaps the most prosperous branch of the ancient family. But Newdigate Poyntz had issue also by his first wife Sarah Foxley; and I must now say a few words about this line of his descendants. His brother Sir Sydenham Poyntz must not be passed over without notice, for he was a distinguished Parliamentary General in the Civil War, commanded a large body of parliamentary forces after the battle of Naseby, and routed the king's horse at Chester, in an engagement in which the Earl of Lichfield was killed. A silver medal, struck in his honour, is now in possession of the Rev. Newdigate Poyntz.

Newdigate Poyntz (his brother) had eight children by Sarah Foxley, four sons and four daughters, and from this marriage descend the Poyntzes of Hexton, Herts, allied by two marriages to the ancient family of Taverner, and for two generations Lords of the manor of Hexton. Fifth in direct descent from Newdigate came the Rev. Newdigate Poyntz, Rector of Tormarton, Gloucestershire. His eldest son, the Rev. Nathaniel Poyntz, had one son, Newdigate, who died at Winchester College, aged 18, in the lifetime of his father, and on the very day of his grandfather's funeral at Tormarton. The succession, in consequence of the death of this only son, passed to a nephew, the Rev. Newdigate Poyntz, son of Newdigate Poyntz, Commander, R.N., who was second son of the Rector of Tormarton, and this Rev. Newdigate Poyntz, Vicar of Little Drayton, Salop, is father to the child whose birth occurred in 1875.

I must now go back to the more special subject of my paper, the Poyntzes of Iron Acton, who, as you remember, held that manor from the time of Edward III. to the time of Charles II.

The second owner of the manor, Sir Robert Poyntz, who died in the 17th of Henry VI., (1439) is famous in our parochial annals. Three slabs in the church mark his grave and the graves of his two wives—the first, Ann (I know not of what family), and the second, Catharine, daughter and co-heiress of Thomas Fitz-Nichols, a member of the Berkeley family. This Sir Robert Poyntz is undoubtedly associated with the erection of the unique and beautiful preaching cross which stands in our churchyard; for the shields which it carries have the arms of Acton and Fitz-Nichols incised upon them; the arms of Acton (*quarterly, per fesse dancetté, argent and gules*), borne by Sir Robert Poyntz, as Lord of the manor of Acton; and the arms of Fitz-Nichols (*quarterly gules and or, a bend argent*) borne by his second wife, Catharine. The date of the cross is thus clearly assigned to a period to which its architecture exactly corresponds, the beginning of the 15th century. A more difficult question has arisen with regard to the connection of Sir Robert Poyntz with the existing fabric of the church. Round the verge of his slab runs the in-

scription: "*Here lyth Roberd Poyntz, Lord of Iren Acton and thys stepyl here maked who deyde the fyftene day of Junne, the year of owre Lord MCCCCXX[XIX] of whos soule God have mercy, Amen.*" Lysons, who gives a copy of the slab, naturally infers from these words that Sir Robert Poyntz built the tower of the church. But the tower is of an earlier date than the body of the church, and, if its architectural features can be trusted, it can scarcely have been built during the life of Sir Robert Poyntz. The church itself he might have built; the preaching cross he certainly did build. If the word "stepyl" could be applied to the tall and elegant canopied preaching cross, the difficulty would be solved. Otherwise I am inclined to believe that Sir Robert Poyntz built the tower, choosing a style of architecture already somewhat old-fashioned, or, perhaps, completing a tower which had been begun in the Decorated style some years before.

The slab of Catharine Fitz-Nichols, second wife of this Sir Robert Poyntz, bears a few letters round the verge which enable us to identify it; but it was used two centuries afterwards to serve as a memorial of Elizabeth, wife of Robert Poyntz Esq., who died in 1631. And this name of Elizabeth Poyntz (who was one of the Walshes of Little Sodbury, and a wife for less than four years), brings us by a rapid descent to a group of three monuments, all belonging to the same generation. The first is that of Florence, wife of Edward Poyntz Esq., who died in March 1598, "*juxta computationem Anglicanam.*" These words are added because the New Style had but lately been introduced by Gregory XIII. A similar phrase ("*juxta usitatum ecclesie Anglicane computationem*") occurs on the next slab, that of Hugh Poyntz, who died as a young man in March 1604. The third slab I have already mentioned, that of Elizabeth, wife of Robert Poyntz. The three here named, Edward, Hugh, and Robert, were sons of Sir Nicholas Poyntz of Iron Acton, by his second wife, the Lady Margaret Stanley, daughter of Edward, 3rd Earl of Derby. This Sir Nicholas died in 1586, and in 1575 had enjoyed the honour of entertaining Queen Elizabeth at Iron Acton, on her progress from Greenwich to Bristol. The present ancient

manor house was probably then but lately built, and a fit place for the reception of royalty. His two sons, Edward and Hugh, seem both to have owned the manor of Tockington; but Hugh died unmarried at the age of 24, and Edward, who was twice married, died in 1613. Edward was also connected with Caerleon. His first wife, Florence, who is buried at Iron Acton, was daughter of John Jones, Esq., of Tre Owen, and her son was the first of a Monmouthshire branch of the Poyntz family, one of whom, Rowland, was a Popish Recusant.

The monument of Florence Poyntz is not mentioned in Bigland. About 150 years ago it had been made to serve as a gravestone for a Mrs. Richmond, mother-in-law of the Rev. Thomas Shute, Rector of the parish. She died in the 101st year of her age, and her son-in-law, anxious to show respect for his venerable relative without incurring undue expense, appropriated the Poyntz slab, turned down the ancient inscription with face to the soil, and placed an inscription to his mother-in-law upon the reverse side. The deed was discovered a few months ago, during the restoration of the church; and I regret to say that more than one slab had been treated in the same way by our predecessors of the 18th century.

There are no other monuments in Iron Acton church which I can, with *certainty*, assign to the Poyntz family. There exist, however, two recumbent effigies, one of a knight in armour, said to be of the time of Edward III., and the other of a lady. The first is perhaps the figure of the first Sir John Poyntz of Iron Acton; the effigy of the lady is of somewhat larger proportions, and perhaps of a later date. There is also an exquisite canopied tomb (probably of the 16th century), which bears no inscription, but is decorated with three shields with supporters. I had hoped to find coats of arms upon these shields, after the removal of many layers of whitewash; but I was disappointed. Two of the three are blank, and the third contains only the *fesse dancetté* of the Actons, rudely incised. A helmet, with spur and mantlet, hangs against the wall of the Poyntz chapel, and, perhaps, is a memorial of the last Sir John Poyntz. Upon the parapet of the

tower of the church is fixed a half-length effigy of a knight in armour. It was evidently once a complete figure, and recumbent ; and was removed (I know not when) in its present mutilated state, to the lofty position which it now occupies. One more monument should be noticed, though I have no reason to connect it with the Poyntz family. Beneath a plain and nameless tomb, of Jacobean work, on the north side of the altar, has been discovered an oblong slab, 6 feet 8 inches long, in the centre of which is a very beautiful and elaborate cross flory, deeply cut in the freestone, and to the east of this cross a missal and chalice, also deeply incised. Round the verge an inscription had run, but only one letter remains, the rest having been ruthlessly effaced. There is also a depression where a brass was fixed. This slab evidently covered the grave of a priest, one of the pre-Reformation rectors. He had been buried, as was customary for priests, with head to the east, so that he might rise and meet his people face to face at the last day. The date of the slab is not known, and I can only conjecture that it belongs to the end of the fourteenth, or the beginning of the fifteenth century.

The last Sir John Poyntz of Iron Acton died without issue in 1680. He was the son of Sir Robert Poyntz, who was made Knight of the Bath at the coronation of Charles I., and wrote a treatise in vindication of Monarchy. Sir John Poyntz had married Ann Caesar, a Hampshire lady, daughter of Robert Caesar, Esq., whose great grandfather Sir Charles Caesar had been Master of the Rolls to King Charles I., and whose great great grandfather, Sir Julius Caesar, had been Master of Requests and Judge of the Admiralty to Queen Elizabeth, Chancellor and Under Treasurer of the Exchequer, and Master of the Rolls, and one of the Privy Council to King James I. and Charles I.

This Lady Poyntz survived her husband nearly forty years, dying in 1729. She was buried in St. Katherine's Church near the Tower, by the side of her parents and her sister, Mrs. Rampayne ; and it is, perhaps, worth while to quote the poetry which appears on the two tablets now to be seen in St. Katherine's Church in the Regent's Park.

Dame Ann Poyntz's monument bears the verse :

The table next adjoining shews
 How much her sister's death she mourned ;
 And this, how faithfully her love
 Is by that sister's son returned.

and the next tablet bears witness to her devotion to her sister, and her power as a poet—the only poet of whom Iron Acton can boast.

Passenger, stay! This richest grave
 A small delay may justly crave.
 Virtue adorn'd with wit and beauty,
 Religious love, conjugal duty,
 In this small cabinet lies enshrined,
 While glory gilds her purer mind.
 Both her parents near her lie,
 And bear her reliques company.
 Kind death, which us'd friends to part,
 Joins these, who living had one heart.
 Renowned Sir Julius Caesar lent
 Unto them all noble descent.
 Dying she did a son bequeath
 In whom she lives in spite of death.
 Thus when the old Phoenix sweetly dies,
 She new does from her ashes rise.

Her husband's love this monument rears ;
 Her sister writes these lines with tears.

Dna. Anna Poyntz scripsit.

A Pedigree of the Family will be printed hereafter, as soon as it can be got ready.