

The Unlucky Lady in Black at Hartshill Castle



The ghost of Hartshill is unidentified, but nobody is in any doubt that she is best avoided. Bad luck dogs those who are unlucky enough to attract her attention, though those who are passed by seem to escape without mishap.

The phantom lady is seen moving slowly about the ruins of Hartshill Castle, which dominate the northern end of the village. The castle was first built in the immediate wake of the Norman Conquest in the 1060s, when the Normans threw up fortified posts to overawe the English. The earthworks date from this period, with their 18 foot deep trenches and towering mounds. Hartshill Castle was never large, but it was secure enough to act as the headquarters of Henry Tudor, soon to be King Henry VII, before the Battle of Bosworth at which he won the crown.

The stone walls that once topped these fortifications were torn down in the 1560s and replaced by a comfortable Tudor mansion. It is this building that is gently falling into ruin, and to which the ghost seems to belong. Her long silk dress and angular headdress point to an Elizabethan date.

One witness who encountered the ghost as he walked along the footpath that cuts alongside the old walls said that she came so close to him that he heard her silk dress rustle. Fortunately for him, she passed him by without a second look. For it is her glance that brings bad luck.

For centuries the enigmatic lady in black has been walking Hartshill. Then, in 1947, came a startling discovery. As the old ruins were being passed from private hands to those of the Ministry of Works, now English Heritage, some archaeological digs were undertaken. Most of what was found proved to be mundane domestic pottery and rubbish, but one excavation revealed a long forgotten cellar. And in the small, shallow brick-lined cavity lay a badly decomposed skeleton.

Is this the last remains of some poor soul done to death long ago in the dank dungeons of the castle? If so it may explain the unquiet wanderings of the lady in black and why she exhibits such animosity to the present-day inhabitants of Hartshill.

This is an extract from the Haunted Places of Warwickshire by Rupert Matthews