

# ASTLEY CASTLE

By Peter Lee



It is hard to imagine that this evocative landscape exists so close to Nuneaton, only about five miles away. Astley was immortalised as “Knebley” in Mr. Gilfil’s Love Story in ‘George Eliot’s Scenes of Clerical Life’. It is also one of the ghost ‘hot spots’ of the area. Even boasting a ‘haunted telephone box’ in the village. It is more often associated with the ghost of Lady Jane Grey who was executed in 1554. There have been no reported sightings since the castle was badly burnt in the fire of April 1978. Is it really 30 years since you could visit Astley Castle for a drink or a fine dinner? I wonder when the castle is rebuilt, if it will be possible to see, once again, the ghostly image of a grey lady in a Tudor dress, wafting about the corridors and grounds of the castle at the dead of night.

The manor of Astley derives its name from a pre-conquest owner – Alsi. After the conquest vast areas of the Midlands including the manor of Astley was granted to the Earl of Leicester and it later devolved to his descendents the Earls of Warwick. It was then granted by feudal tenure to a family which took their name from the village, the Astleys. The last of the senior male lines of the Astleys died in 1420 and before he died Sir William Astley’s daughter married Reynold, Lord Grey of Ruthin, so the castle came into the Grey family estates. Lady Jane Grey and her father the Duke of Suffolk were both executed in 1554. The manor was then granted to the Chamberlain family. They retained it until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century because when Sir Richard Newdigate died in 1678 he owned the castle. The Newdigates have enjoyed ownership ever since. Parts of the castle date back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and it was substantially rebuilt about 1620. However, the castle has now become one of the most famous buildings in the land having been rebuilt recently by the Landmark Trust and it won this year’s Stirling Prize for Architecture. It puts this idyllic part of North Warwickshire on the Map.