

From Ian Wilson's Shroud History Notebooks:

The first of a series of short articles on intriguing items with an historical or other association with the Turin Shroud

1: The Tombstone of Geoffrey II de Charny at Froidmont



From the century of the Shroud's known ownership by members of the de Charny family (c.1355-1453), there survives just one portrait with some serious claim to its being a reliable de Charny likeness. This is of Geoffrey II de Charny, the knight whom Bishop Pierre d'Arcis described in 1389 as causing him 'great scandal' by holding up the Shroud to assembled crowds 'with his own hands on a certain solemn feast.' This showing of the Shroud by Geoffrey apparently took place in his 'home' church in Lirey, near Troyes, 'using the greatest possible reverence, with lighted torches, and upon a lofty platform constructed for this special purpose.'

On Geoffrey II's death in 1398 he was buried in the church of the Cistercian abbey of Froidmont, in the Picardy district of northern France, with his effigy engraved on his tombstone, as was the custom of the time. The church was blown to bits during the First World War, and any identifiable traces of the tombstone disappeared amidst the debris.

More than two centuries prior to this destruction, however, a French antiquary, François Roger de Gaignières (1642-1715), had gathered together a monumental collection of materials pertaining to French history, which in 1711 he presented to 'Sun King' Louis XIV. Much of this collection is

today preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and included in it is a wonderfully detailed drawing of Geoffrey II de Charny's tombstone as this had survived at Froidmont – apparently in near pristine condition - down to de Gaignières' time.

The drawing shows Geoffrey clean-shaven, and with refined, monk-like features, though in full armour, except for any helmet. He carries a large sword slung on the left side of his body, and a dagger on the right. The de Charny heraldry of three inescutcheons, or shields, decorates his surcoat. His figure is surrounded by a richly sculpted doorway, as of a Gothic church, complete with figures of angels and saints. Surrounding this doorway a very legible inscription reads in translation 'Here lies the noble man Monsieur Geoffroy de Charny at one time seigneur of Thory, in the district of Beauvais, who died the 22nd day of the month of May 1398. Pray God for his soul.'

There is a Thory in the department of the Somme, near Mondidier, about 50 kilometres northeast of Beauvais. It is unclear why Geoffrey II de Charny should have chosen to be buried at Froidmont, in Picardy, rather than somewhere in his more native Burgundy. In personal correspondence on this matter the late Noel Currer-Briggs suggested that Thory might have been a seigneurie of the de Poitiers family, and that Geoffrey was a seigneur in right of his wife Margaret de Poitiers. But this is an aspect needing further research.



I personally visited Froidmont during the late 1970s. A local landowner kindly showed me the partially-buried ruins of the abbey in his garden, and allowed me to photograph these. The destruction seemed to be very extensive. Even so might a future archaeological excavation reveal at least fragments of the abbey church's original effigies, including Geoffrey's? If any BSTS member happens to find himself or herself travelling through Picardy, it could be interesting to learn the present state of those ruins.

Correspondence on these and similar historical topics will be welcomed:

Ian Wilson

76 Bozzato Place, Kenmore Hills, Queensland 4069, Australia

email: ian.wilson@hotmail.com