



The site of St Kynemark Priory lies about one mile north-west of the centre of Chepstow, close to the road to Monmouth – adjoining what is now Kingsmark Lane.

The history of the Priory is very uncertain. It was a small foundation, and many of its records have been lost. Its name is given variously as St Cynmarch, St Kynemark or St Kingsmark. The latter spelling is most widely used locally, for instance in street names. In Welsh, the name is usually given as Llangynfarch.

It may be the site of the oldest church in the area. The church of St Cynmarch is first mentioned in the mediaeval Book of Llandaff, recording that it was given by Arthrwys, the king of Gwent, to the see of Llandaff in the seventh century. However, the exact location of that church is unknown.

St Cynmarch or Cynfarch is said to have been a local Welsh Christian prince, a disciple of St Dyfrig (or Dubricius).

The name also appears in church dedications at Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd in Denbighshire and Hope (Yr Hôb) in Flintshire, but they are thought to refer to a different Cynfarch.

The Priory was founded at an unknown date before 1270. The Augustinian canons, or “black canons”, followed the Rule of St Augustine of Hippo, and led a quasi-monastic community life, without the rigours of strict discipline.

The Priory church was dedicated to St John the Baptist, and its lands extended to the south-east as far as The Mount. The Priory also held the rectories of churches at Porthcasseg and St Arvans.

The last prior was John Pinnock, who died in 1537 shortly after Henry VIII’s suppression of the monasteries. When it was dissolved, the Priory was recorded as being worth £8 4s 8d (£8.23) per year. According to the historian Sir Joseph Bradney, its chapel was sometimes still used for baptisms as late as 1642.

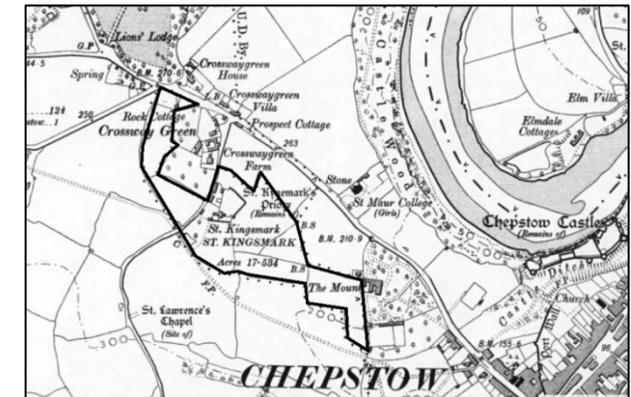
Excavations in 1962-65, before the houses on Kingsmark Lane and Normandy Way were built on the site, found traces of 13th and 14th century buildings, including west and east ranges where the canons lived.

The stone-built ranges were aligned north to south, separated by a courtyard some 40 feet (12 metres) wide, but no formal cloister. Some of the buildings seem to have been destroyed in the early 15th century, around the time of the Glyndŵr Rising. There were also burials on the site.

The archaeologists were puzzled that no remains of a church or chapel were found, though this may have been located nearby.

Much of the Priory’s building stone was re-used in later farm buildings on the site and at Crossway Green, but parts of the medieval boundary wall still existed above ground until the 1920s.

The area around the old priory was, until the early 20th century, a separate parish to Chepstow. It was small in area, extending over some 17.5 acres, on the land sloping down to the Deans (or Danes) Fields, as shown below.



Kelly's Directory for Monmouthshire, 1901

ST. KINGSMARK, or Kynemark, is a parish, formerly extra parochial, 1 mile northwest from Chepstow railway station, in the hundred of Caldicot, union and county court district of Chepstow, and, for ecclesiastical purposes, included in the parish of St. Arvans. Here was once a small priory, founded before 1291. Its history is involved in obscurity, but some fragments of wall yet remain to mark its site. There was also a church here, every vestige of which has now disappeared.

The Duke of Beaufort is lord of the manor. The land belongs to Mrs. Smith, of The Mount, Chepstow. The area is 18 acres; rateable value, £90. The population in 1891 was 5.

Much of the material in this leaflet comes from the report of the archaeologist, L.A.S. Butler, "St Kynemark's Priory, Chepstow: an interim report on the excavations from 1962-65", published in the *Monmouthshire Antiquary*, vol.II, part I, 1965.

The Priory is also mentioned in Sir Joseph Bradney's "A History of Monmouthshire, Vol.4 part 1, The Hundred of Caldicot", p.42, first published in 1929.

The text of this leaflet has been written for the Chepstow Society by Guy Hamilton and Keith Underwood.

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In 2020, a ceramic plaque was installed beside the footpath on the edge of the Priory site at Kingsmark Lane, by the Chepstow Society, with the agreement of Chepstow Town Council and Monmouthshire County Council.

It was designed by local historian Keith Underwood, and made by local potter Ned Heywood.

It shows a prior in his black robes, and the seal of the Augustinian order. The border shows medieval tiles, of which a fragment was found on the site.



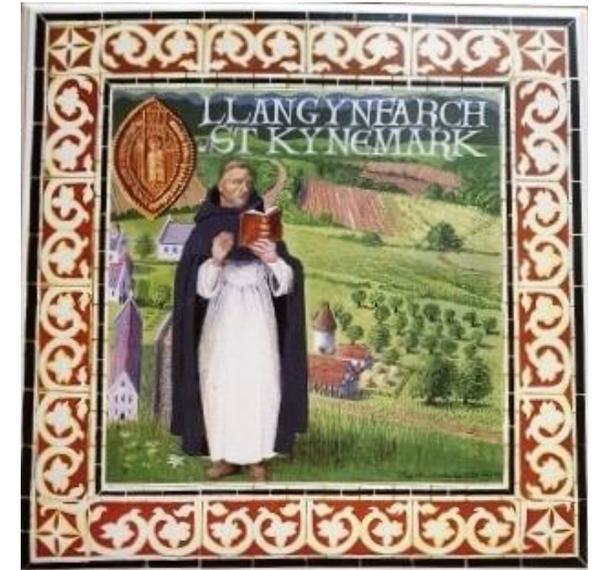
The Chepstow Society

was formed in 1948 as a local history and civic society. It seeks to improve local amenities, while safeguarding the heritage, character and charm of the town and its surrounding area.

www.chepstowsociety.co.uk



The Priory of ST KINGSMARK, CHEPSTOW



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