

## ACTON BURNELL & THE FIRST PARLIAMENT

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Hidden away in a small Shropshire village are the remains of a fortified manor house and the sides of an old Barn. Both buildings have a significant relevance to the history and evolution of modern government and democracy as we know it today. Sometime between 1283 and 1285 King Edward I (the first) called a parliament which was held in the large barn adjacent to Acton Burnell Castle. What made this meeting different was that for the first time commoners as well as nobles (Barons) took part in the event.

This was a landmark decision that would change the nature of politics for both Britain and much of the world. All that now remains of this historic building are the side walls which sit alongside the playing fields of [Concord College](#) in Acton Burnell Hall.



The act that was passed became known as the Statute of Acton Burnell. The choice of the venue had a lot to do with Robert Burnell who was the then Chancellor of England and had a strong bond of friendship with Edward even before he was crowned king. As such he was to become one of the most powerful men in England and was granted many favours including the right to build a fortified manor house – only one of two in the county of Shropshire. In fact, much of the wood used for the building was actually sourced from the king's forests.

The castle was built from red sandstone and is particularly important as it is probably the oldest of its kind in the country. Although it is now somewhat secluded it was once strategically well positioned near the old main route from southeast to northwest known as Watling Street – an ancient Roman road. The fact that it was built first as a Manor with fortifications suggests that some fair degree of stability existed in the area at the time. This had not always been the case. Much of the region bordered Wales and had been disputed territory for centuries.



It was to be a demonstration of power and authority in much the same way that the earlier Anglo Saxon King Offa had built a dyke between England and Wales for much the same purpose. This would have made the decision to allow the creation of Burnell's manor an easy one to make. In 1292, a little after Robert Burnell's death the castle became the property of the Lovells of Titmarsh through marriage.

Over the years it has been the property of the Howard's (the 2nd Duke of Norfolk) and later the Smythe family during the middle of the 17th century. Today the ruins of the manor can be found in an isolated corner of a once grand country estate. A magnificent Cedar of Lebanon tree has grown so large that it towers over even the highest crenellated walls and a couple of hundred ft away the end walls of the "Barn that changed history" now look more like eccentric follies of the more recently built Acton Burnell Hall. It is currently part of English Heritage although there is no onsite office.