

# ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2016



The Railway Inn  
Birmingham  
Road, Alcester  
  
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[www.alcesterhistory.org.uk](http://www.alcesterhistory.org.uk)

**MARCH MEETING: Victorian Village Life** was the title of our most recent talk when our speaker, Ann Langley, took us back to the village of Stretton on Dunsmore near Rugby, though it could have been any Warwickshire village, during the reign of Queen Victoria seen through the eyes of the village school master. Mrs Langley had chanced upon the Victorian school log-book whilst working as a volunteer at Warwick Museum and quickly realised that the book provided a, perhaps unintended, social history of Victorian village life recording as it did the lives of, not only the children of the school but also, the lives of their families and the village itself.

The village was, of course, totally different from the villages that we know today in that most of the adults not only lived in, but worked in the village itself and so their lives were lived almost entirely within the boundaries of the village, few having any need to venture further.

There were no telephones, televisions, electricity or gas but the village contained all that was necessary for daily life at that time, providing a grocer, a butcher and a baker. Men were mostly employed as agricultural labourers but craftsmen, such as coopers, cordwainers, blacksmiths and hurdlers, also found their customers in and around the village. The usual jobs for women of the village were as servants, cleaners, teachers or nurses and many local women worked in the fields during the harvest, as did practically every other able-bodied person.

In short, most villages were a self-contained world which provided all of life's basic needs.

The school log-book showed that children were put to work at what we would consider, a very early age, working in the fields during the harvest, as chimney boys for chimney sweeps, they ran errands for a few coppers and acted as beaters during the shoots on local land.

Not surprisingly, illness featured often in the school log-book – chicken-pox, colds, whooping cough, TB, lice, bugs and ring-worm were all common afflictions brought about by primitive sanitation, poor food and overcrowding in small, damp cottages.

However, there were high days and holidays such as bonfire night when a half day holiday was given from school. Games like marbles and hopscotch, top spinning, pitch & toss and football were all played in their season, around the school playground.

This talk provided a marvellous evocation of a time now gone when life was, perhaps simpler, but also harder for many and when to live in one small village for a lifetime was not unusual and provided a unique support system of its own.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS:** A reminder that subscriptions for 2016 are now overdue. The new subscription rate is £5 per person and those who receive a newsletter by post should include the cost of 2<sup>nd</sup> class postage for the year, £6.60, in addition. If you are unable to get to meetings regularly, please send your subscription to me, Sue Fisher, by post to 37 Corinthian Court, Stratford Road, Alcester, B49 5AY

**SUMMER OUTING:** Our summer outing this year on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> June will be to the beautiful and historic town of Shrewsbury. We plan to leave Alcester at 9.00am, returning by approximately 6.00pm. Bookings will be taken at the April and May meetings. The cost will be £11 per person, strictly payable on booking and full details are given on the attached sheet.

**NEXT MEETING:** Our speaker next month will be Derek Bull who is a volunteer garden guide at nearby Hidcote Garden, near Mickleton. His talk is entitled **Hidcote – One of England's Finest Arts & Crafts Gardens – Past & Present.**

Derek Bull is also chairman of Bearley Garden Club and Secretary of Bearley History Group.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> April, as usual at St Benedict's Sixth Form Centre, Kinwarton Road, Alcester, commencing at 8.00pm. All are welcome.

**SUE FISHER**