

ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2018

www.alcesterhistory.org.uk



The 'Coffee Pot'
standing in
Alcester Station
1901
(ADLHS
Collection)

JANUARY MEETING:

The speaker at our last meeting was Neil Cook, head gardener at Hanbury Hall since 1988. His talk was "The Recreation of the Formal Gardens at Hanbury Hall". He explained that the work to recreate the original gardens at Hanbury came about almost by accident. The National Trust was gifted Hanbury in 1953, but the house was occupied by tenants until 1980s. By now visitor numbers were declining, down to 20,000 per year, and the National Trust considered 'mothballing' Hanbury. The gardens were felt to be dull and uninteresting with a large statue blocking the view of the house. However, money was found from the European Union, along with a number of bequests, to restore the house and gardens and the property closed for 9 months for the work to be done. The Hall had its ceiling paintings by Thornhill restored and some of the original furniture and paintings were acquired by the National Trust and returned to the house. Hanbury Hall was built by Thomas Vernon, chancery lawyer, in about 1706. The original formal gardens were laid out in the early 1700s by George London and incorporated a parterre, fruit garden, wilderness, grove and bowling green. All this was swept away in 1770 when the natural landscape style of garden pioneered by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was introduced. No trace of the formal garden remained.

The donated money allowed the formal gardens to be gradually restored from 1993. A geophysical survey provided information on the original layout, which together with the garden survey of the distinguished surveyor James Dougharty from 1731-3, allowed Neil and his team to recreate the formal gardens. The parterre was constructed mostly with plants and flowers which would have been available in the eighteenth century and the ribbon borders were made using a frame with measured squares (The only public garden to have used this method). Neil was rather scathing of the work of Capability Brown in a humorous way, describing him as "a one-trick pony". The forecourt to the hall was also returned to its original form allowing the front of the building to be seen to its best advantage. Neil Cook's talk was both humorous and informative based on his first-hand knowledge of this project and was much enjoyed.

SUBSCRIPTIONS 2018

Annual subscriptions are now payable for 2018. The amount remains unchanged at £5 per member. Please put your payment inside a sealed envelope showing your name and address and bring it to the next meeting. Alternatively send by post to: Sue Fisher 37 Corinthian Court Alcester B49 5AY.

ADLHS CALENDAR 2018

We still have a few Society calendars remaining. The photographs include Alcester and the local area drawn from the Society archives. The price has now been reduced to **HALF PRICE AT £3** (reduced from £6) and calendars can be purchased at our meetings, or from our website (delivered free in B49 & B50 postcode areas or postage will be £1.30 extra).

MUSEUM SCHOOL VISIT VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Volunteers are needed to assist with school visits at the Roman Heritage Centre and talk to the children. Visits take place on Tuesdays and help is needed from 9.15 to 12.45. Each school party is split into two groups of about 20 pupils, with at least two teachers and two museum volunteers. There is a basic safeguarding check, but not the full CRB/DBS. Anyone interested should contact the Alcester Heritage Trust secretary Graeme Hewitt at graemehewitt50@yahoo.co.uk

FEBRUARY MEETING: At our next meeting on **Wednesday 14th February** we will be holding our **Annual General Meeting** followed by the talk. The speaker for the evening will be our vice-chairman, Steve Godfrey. His subject is "**The Story of Alcester's Railways**". This talk looks at how Alcester railway lines: the Alcester Railway (later GWR) and the Midland Railway developed until the closure of the Alcester station in 1962. Meetings are held at St Benedict's RC High School Sixth Form Centre and commence at 8.00pm. All are welcome to attend.

Alan Godfrey

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