

ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

JULY 2015



Clark's Carriage Works at
Arrow. From the George
Clark Album.

(ADLHS Collection)

www.alcesterhistory.org.uk

LAST MEETING: Our last meeting in May featured a return visit from the excellent Max Keen who last spoke to us two years ago on the subject of Sir Francis Drake.

On this most recent occasion Max's talk was entitled **Oliver Cromwell – Our Chief of Men or, Royal Murderer?** As before, we were treated to a marvellously vivid talk which truly brought the times of the Civil War to life. This was aided by the fact that Max Keen addressed us in the costume of the period, throughout. Having once been an enthusiastic member of the Sealed Knot, Max was able to vouch for the historical accuracy of his outfit. Contrary to popular myth, both Cavaliers and Roundheads dressed in exactly the same manner in battle. Not just the cavaliers wore feather trimmed floppy hats or lace collars and all of the men at that time wore hair *long* – none had short hair. In order to distinguish one side from the other during battle and amidst the smoke of firearms and cannons, the sides wore sashes, from shoulder to waist, in differing colours.

Cromwell himself, perhaps surprisingly, came from a comfortable, landowning family in Huntingdon, where he was educated at the town's grammar school. In 1620 he married Elizabeth Bourchier and they went on to have nine children. Cromwell made a living as a farmer and at about the time of his marriage he was elected to parliament representing Huntingdon and converted to Puritanism, subsequently moving in 1636, to Ely.

Puritans, Cromwell amongst them, believed in removing Catholic practices from the Church of England. They hated the rule of the Bishops and idolatry and practised strict observance of the Sabbath – all views directly opposed by the King, Charles I, whose own wife was a Catholic. The story leading up to the execution of the King as told by Max Keen was characterised by two men of very different ideals, not aided by the stubbornness of the King who believed the Royal Prerogative came directly from God and who managed to alienate almost everyone. Yet, right until the execution itself, there was no strong desire to bring about King Charles's death and there was widespread revulsion both at home and abroad when it actually came about.

This was a wonderful and descriptive talk describing the swirling events of the time – the battles, the armies, the commonwealth itself and the subsequent years of misery endured by ordinary people up until Cromwell's death. It was a story of two very different men, both inflexible and determined and whose clash brought about huge changes in England.

ALCESTER STREET MARKET: Once again the Society had a stall at this year's Hollywood themed street market. The team of committee volunteers saw a lot of interest from the passing crowds and good sales of our publications. The small photographic display featuring the famous 'coffee pot' train standing at Alcester station also aroused a great deal of interest.

It was felt that our aim to raise the profile of the Society on a day when the town was thronged with visitors was amply achieved.

WINCHCOMBE TRIP: To those going on the evening trip to Winchcombe on Wednesday July 8th, please note that the Johnson's coach will depart from Priory Road, opposite the library, **promptly** at 6.00pm. We will return to Alcester at approximately 10.00pm after a guided walk hosted by the Winchcombe Walkers around Winchcombe itself including the church and ending with a brief drink in any of the several hostelries to be found in Winchcombe, before the return journey.

NEXT MEETING: Please note that there will be no meeting or evening talk at St Benedict's in July.

Our next meeting at St Benedict's takes place on Wednesday 12th August when our speaker will be Gay Hill whose fully illustrated talk is entitled **West Midlands Struggle for the Vote – Suffragettes and West Midland Electoral Reform**. Gay is a teacher of family and local history and is also Chairman of the Wyre Forest Historical Research Group, so this should be a fascinating and well researched talk.

Meetings are held at St Benedict's 6th Form Centre, Kinwarton Road, Alcester, and commence at 8.00pm. All are welcome to attend.

SUE FISHER.