

ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2017



Fleet of Midland
Red buses
carrying children
on an outing in
High Street
Alcester 1928
(ADLHS
Collection)

www.alcesterhistory.org.uk

FEBRUARY MEETING:

Following the AGM our speaker for the evening and also our Chairman, Alan Godfrey took the floor. His subject and talk was entitled **Rowland Hill: Genius and Benefactor**.

It quickly became apparent that Rowland Hill, who is probably familiar to most people for his involvement with the postal service, was someone who today would be known as a polymath. His association with the postal service was but one facet of this fascinating midland man of multiple talents and interests who made huge contributions in many ways to the life of our country.

Rowland Hill was born in 1795, one of eight children, in Kidderminster. In 1807 Rowland's father bought a school at which the young Rowland became a pupil-teacher. Hill's School as it was known was very popular and was the very antithesis of 'Dotheboy's Hall' with a very enlightened approach to the education of their pupils. They promoted the values of fresh air and outdoor play as well as learning.

In 1810 Rowland took a part-time job at Birmingham Assay Office and in his spare time studied various scientific subjects which interested him such as astronomy, science and engineering and became a proficient landscape artist.

By 1818 the Hill family had owned three different schools in the Birmingham area, the third, Hazelwood, led by Rowland Hill, had over 150 pupils and the school boasted refinements such as central heating and a swimming pool while promoting an ethos of firmness, kindness and self-motivation. The school offered the study of geography, history, languages, art, music, science and astronomy; as a result the school was studied by educationalists from all over the world. Eventually, several of the twenty-three Unitarian Birmingham Lord Mayors could claim an education at Hazelwood. Rowland married Caroline Pearson, a childhood friend, in 1827. His wife was a great support in all his endeavours.

During these years he became interested in politics, prison reform and the education of felons. He also invented a new method of printing newspapers on a continuous roll of paper rather than the separate sheets. Rowland Hill also invented a device for checking the speed of stage coaches and machinery for carrying out road making.

In 1839 Rowland Hill was offered a post at the Treasury to look into reforming the way in which the Post Office ran. This was the period for which Rowland Hill is most famous and he published his findings in a paper entitled 'Post Office Reform'. Reforms brought the sending of letters within the financial reach of most citizens and removed the entitlement to 'free' postage enjoyed by MPs and peers. Postage was reduced to 1d for up to ½oz and he introduced the iconic "Penny Black" stamp.

At the end of his three year contract, he became the Chairman of the London to Brighton Railway Company. Under his auspices 3rd class tickets were introduced as well as special 'excursion' for trains which brought cheap rail travel to the masses. He left behind a profitable business after he resigned to take a position in the Post Office as Secretary to the Postmaster General, later becoming Secretary to the Post Office.

He originated the numbering of houses to aid the efficient delivery of the post, the introduction of letterboxes and he also made the first suggestion of 'postal codes' for use in London originally, but which is now used, in one form or another, all over the world.

This excellent talk shone a new light on 'the post man' and revealed him to be a son of the midlands who made such a huge contribution by improving the life of so many people in the Victorian era, and of which we still feel the benefit today.

SUE FISHER

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Annual subscriptions for 2017 are due. It would be appreciated if your subscription (still £5 per person) could be put into a **sealed envelope marked with your name and address** and handed in at the next meeting. Alternatively, you can post your subscription to Sue Fisher at 37 Corinthian Court, Alcester B49 5AY. Your membership card will then be available for collection at the following meeting.

NEWSLETTER: Most members receive their newsletter by email, please remember to let us know as soon as possible if you change your email address.

NEXT MEETING: Our next meeting is on 8th March and our talk will be: "**The Runaway Wife, the Bigamous Earl and the Farmer's Daughter**" presented by Professor Rebecca Probert. This intriguing title refers to Henry Cecil, the tenth Earl of Exeter and his tangled love life. The local connection being that the 'runaway wife' of the title was Emma Vernon, heiress to Hanbury Hall, near Droitwich.

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

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