

# ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

MAY 2015



The Common,  
Studley, c1929  
(ADLHS  
Collection)

[www.alcesterhistory.org.uk](http://www.alcesterhistory.org.uk)

**LAST MEETING:** Our April meeting featured as speaker Roger Pringle, Director of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust from 1989 until 2007, authority on Shakespeare and the author of several books on the life and works of William Shakespeare. On this occasion he focused on the playwright and his local connections and the influence those connections brought to bear on his work.

Roger Pringle began by emphasising that, at the time of Shakespeare's birth in 1564, Stratford was not an insignificant rural backwater. It possessed the only river crossing for miles around, Clopton's stone bridge over the Avon which had replaced the original old, wooden bridge. It was an increasingly bustling town drawing people in from the surrounding countryside for trading and markets.

Shakespeare's father, John, had moved into the town from nearby Snitterfield, setting up trade as a glover in premises in what is now Henley Street, eventually becoming prosperous and wealthy. He also became a wool dealer and accrued more wealth. Shakespeare was definitely *not* from a humble family. His father was financially successful and 'on the make' rising to a position on the town council.

The countryside and its rhythms and rituals were part of Shakespeare's life from boyhood and Roger Pringle spoke of how the sheep shearing feast in "A Winter's Tale" referenced Shakespeare's knowledge of sheep shearing and wool gathering as he had seen it taking place on the farms around Stratford.

Repeatedly, throughout his work, there are references and rural descriptions. There were acute observations of animals, plant-life and weather patterns which are patently real and not imagined.

We know that in the late 1580's Shakespeare, by this time married with three children, left Stratford for London.

Roger Pringle surmised that regular visits from groups of famous travelling players to Stratford, for which there is recorded evidence, had produced an 'itch' that had to be scratched.

Shakespeare achieved instant and early success in this theatrical world both as actor and playwright. However, as Roger Pringle explained, during the next twenty-five years which the playwright spent in London, part of each year was spent back in Stratford – in fact, he 'commuted' regularly between London and Stratford. He made a lot of money during these years and invested that money in houses and

property in his home-town; the most notable of these being New Place, originally built by Hugh Clopton.

This was a superb talk by an eminent Shakespeare scholar and historian which focused on William Shakespeare, man of Stratford and jobbing playwright who made good in the wider world yet never forgot his roots.

**PHOTO SCANNING PROJECT:** As a Society we are anxious to continue preserving photographic records of our town's past and of the past lives of Alcester's residents. If you have any old photographs of Alcester and/or its residents we would like to scan them for preservation in our, already extensive, photo archive. **We do not wish to keep the photographs**, they will simply be scanned and returned to the owner. Committee member Steve Godfrey can either do this at meetings or arrange a different venue. For more information please contact Steve Godfrey either at our next meeting, by phone on 01789 765536 or by e-mail on [s.godfrey@alaunaweb.co.uk](mailto:s.godfrey@alaunaweb.co.uk)

**JULY EVENING VISIT:** For information about the evening visit to Winchcombe, please see the attached sheet. The price will be £7 per person and we will be leaving Alcester at 6.00pm and returning at approximately 10.00pm.

**OXFORD VISIT:** Our Oxford visit on May 23<sup>rd</sup> is now almost fully booked with only two places remaining. The cost is £12 per person. Please phone me on 01789 763121 if you would like to take these two places.

**NEXT MEETING:** Our speaker on 13<sup>th</sup> May will be the Rev. Dr Julian Davey who many will know as a long-time resident of Alcester, for some 40 years, in fact. During this time Dr Davey has been both a General Practitioner and a member of the clergy team of Alcester Minster. His intriguing talk will be entitled **Richard III and the Alcester Connection**. To find out what this connection is please come along to hear what will certainly be a fascinating talk. Meetings are held at St Benedict's 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre, Alcester and commence at 8.00pm. All are welcome.

**SUE FISHER**