

ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2022

www.alcesterhistory.org.uk



Henley Street,
Alcester, from
School Road.
The houses on the
left of the
postcard were
demolished in
1960s and
replaced by mews
houses.
[ADLHS Archive]

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I am sometimes asked "What is the point in studying local history?" From a personal point of view a number of things spring to mind:

- *It enables you to join the dots and form a picture. Anyone who has visited the Alcester Heritage Centre and looked at the archaeological finds will be able to appreciate the importance of doing this.*
- *It reveals the past contributions of civilisations. All those peoples who have come to Britain over the centuries, have made us what we are today.*
- *It connects the past to the present. According to the Bible: "There is nothing new under the sun". Every new generation faces similar problems to those in the past.*
- *It helps us to recognise patterns. Towns and villages across the country exhibit many similarities, which we can use to interpret our local settlements.*

COVID-19

We would ask everyone to be considerate to other members of our audience and our speaker and use common sense to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 at meetings.

With the relaxation of Government requirements, we would suggest that you follow these precautions:

- Use hand sanitiser when entering or leaving the hall – it is available at the door;
- We recommend that you wear masks when moving around;
- Keep your distance from other people when chatting;
- Try to sit away from other people when possible; Move away from the counter when you have collected your drink;
- We will improve ventilation by leaving some windows open (whenever the weather allows this). Stay safe.

Alan Godfrey

LAST MONTH'S MEETING

At our last meeting, the speaker was our committee member, Richard Churchley, who told us of **Plague, Pox & Pestilence** in times gone by.

The Great Plague of 1665 is probably the most familiar instance of the plagues which regularly visited the country when the cry in the streets of 'Bring Out Your Dead!' was only too familiar. People thought that their town or village had offended God in some way and had bought the plague upon their population as a punishment.

On one occasion following an outbreak of plague, a suffering Alcester witnessed a riot on market day due to the lack of food availability and the cost of the food that was available. The great diarist, Samuel Pepys, complained frequently of bladder problems, in his famous diary and he knew that an operation to cure him might also kill him. Eventually, he agreed to an operation and survived.

Bubonic plague, also known as the Plague of Justinian, quickly became a deadly epidemic. The Black Death of 1349-50 halved the population and the later plague of 1361 killed many children in its wake. From Tudor times onwards various plagues and diseases became common across Europe, with 150,000 people killed by the Great Plague in Seville, Spain between 1647-52, a quarter of the population.

In 1665 the Great Plague reached London, but it was also recorded all over Europe as late as 1772. How it was spread was much argued about. Rats and fleas were suspected; black rats were, in particular, blamed of spreading this disease. The chaotic means of dealing with the outbreaks of disease were often worse than the original onslaught itself. The journal of the plague year of 1665 recorded that 15% of the population died of plague.

In the Decameron of 1353, Boccaccio wrote that several wealthy people decided to move themselves to the mountains, expecting to be out of reach of disease and so, were protected. A home-made curative to fend off disease was to carry herb cuttings as a protection.

Richard described some of the more prevalent diseases which infected people. One of these was the 'Sweating Sickness' of which there were outbreaks in 1507, 1517, 1528, 1551, and

1578. Symptoms would be delirium, sweating, and, often death. This disease has still not been identified.

Scrofula, or the King's Evil, a bacterial infection, it was said required 'the touch of a King' to bring about a cure, thus, those cured were few!

In Alcester in 1684 many burials were recorded, probably due to an outbreak of disease. In Alcester and Arrow in 1725-9, it was recorded that there were 'a terrible amount of deaths'. The population always suffered worse in a bad harvest year. Alcester was badly damaged and the local economy collapsed. In 1741-44 Worcester fell victim to bilious fever (a.k.a malaria). Smallpox, then became the great killer. Pox on the skin was very obvious, disfiguring and unsightly. In the 1880's in the village of Ashton-under-Hill 45 people died, probably of smallpox.

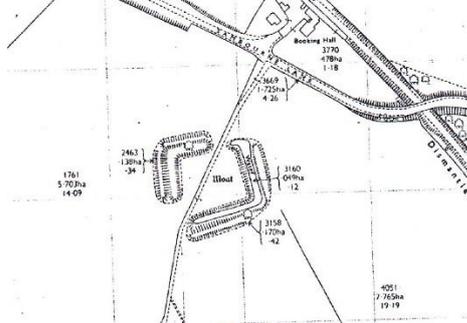
Other diseases, often fatal, preyed on many people in a way that is rarely heard of nowadays. Louse-borne typhus in 1779 killed 10% of the population. Typhoid spread by a lack of hygiene.

The evening was enlivened by Richard injecting a selection of music by the Irish composer Turlough O'Carolan (1670-1738). He had been blinded by smallpox. A third of all blindness was caused by smallpox in those days. O'Carolan was an itinerant musician making a living from composing tunes and playing the harp, especially for wealthy clients. Richard played three of his lovely tunes on his accordion during the presentation, which had attracted a large audience of members and visitors.

Sue Fisher

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES No. VI – WYKE MOAT

This feature, off Sambourne Lane, is well-known to Coughton folk. It was the site of the manor house of Wyke. This manorial estate can be traced back to A.D. 1222, but by the late 15th century it had become incorporated in its larger neighbour, Coughton manor. De Peyto is the main name associated with Wyke manor: as for the house which stood within the moat, its date of origin, like that of Coughton Court, is not known. The depth of the ditches making up the moat show this to be a truly defensive site rather than a mere customary adjunct for a capital house and therefore likely to have been constructed in the early Middle Ages when England was in an unsettled state and when many small manor houses would have been timber built and without the strength of stone walls. Today, part of the moat is still water-filled.



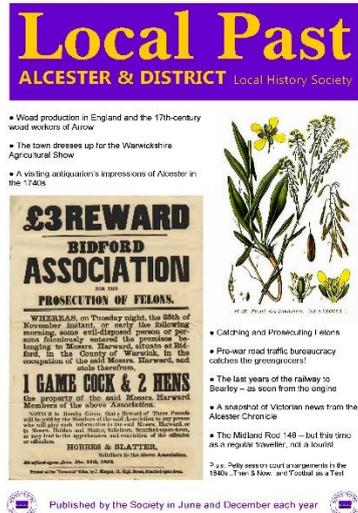
Edward Saville

[This article first appeared in Local Past – Summer 1996]

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

Annual subscriptions are payable from 1st January 2022. The cost remains the same, at £5 per person. **Please put your payment in an envelope, write your name on the outside and bring it to the meeting. Thank You.**

Volume 6, Number 8, December 2021 £2.00



Local Past is available from: Mace Garage (Hills Retail), PSW Alcester & Studley, Alcester Heritage Centre, or by post (see our website www.alcesterhistory.org.uk) The Price is still £2.00.

ALCESTER CENTURIANS VISIT TO WALL (LETOCETUM) & LICHFIELD – WEDNESDAY 22nd JUNE

ADLHS members are invited to join this day trip. Visit the Roman site of Wall, Letocetum, near Lichfield, have tea & biscuits then undertake a guided tour of the site. Afterwards travel to Lichfield where you can explore the city, museums and cathedral. £23 per person. Leaving Globe House 9.00am, returning 5.00pm. If you are interested, contact: fiona.flear@btinternet.com Places are limited.



FUTURE MEETINGS IN 2022:

- 11th May – The Lunar Society of Birmingham – Dr Sally Dickson
- 8th June – From Pillory to Prison Cell – Ginny Davis
- 13th July – Evening Visit [to be arranged]
- 10th August – The South Warwickshire Coin Hoard – Dr Stanley Ireland

NEXT MEETING:

Our next meeting will be held at the **Sixth Form Centre, St Benedict's High School, Kinwarton Road, Alcester B49 6PX** on **Wednesday 13th April 2022 at 7.30pm**. The talk is "The Women's Suffragette Movement in Warwickshire" and the speaker is **Professor Sarah Richardson**.

Articles include:

Wood Works in Arrow; The Warwickshire Agricultural Show comes to Alcester; Rev Jeremiah Milles, FSA and his Impressions of Alcester in 1743; Petty Session Court Arrangements at Alcester, 1845; A Railway Engine Fireman remembers the Alcester to Bearley Branch; Birmingham-bound on the 148; Then & Now – Meadow Road & St Faith's Road; A Week's News from the Alcester Chronicle in the 1890s; Three Men in a Bus; The Alcester Association for the Prosecution of Felons; Football as a Text.

Alan Godfrey

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