

# ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2024

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



Postcard of Alcester Station showing the 'Coffee Pot' on the platform. The card was posted in 1911.  
(From ADG Collection)

### FROM THE CHAIRMAN:

There is no doubt that computers have done much to make the life of the local historian easier. One aspect is the ability to search digital newspaper archives by date and keyword. Previously it was necessary to manually search microfilm or microfiche. The British Newspaper Archive (BNA) gives free access to over 2.4 million pages. The BNA's partner 'Find My Past' provides its subscribers with access to 76 million searchable pages from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Alcester Chronicle is just one of those titles and gives access to editions from 1864 to 1912. It's an amazing resource!

**Alan Godfrey**

**07818 633001**

### LAST MONTH'S MEETING

The speaker in March was Society vice-chairman, Stephen Godfrey. His talk was "*The Alcester Railway Company – the Story of the 'Coffee Pot' Line*". He began by describing how communications developed before the railways were built. Early local roads were green lanes and unmade roads; cart tracks made wide enough for carts with a standard wheel gauge. Turnpikes improved the quality of road surfaces, although travellers were charged tolls to use these roads. This enabled coaches to carry passengers faster around the country; reducing the time to London to 10 hours. By the mid-1800s the Great Western Railway took just three hours to reach London from Leamington.

Goods were carried by horse drawn carts until the advent of the canal. James Calcott was one of Alcester's carriers working in the year the Birmingham to Evesham railway line opened. Haines' Fly Van served long distance routes from Leamington to the south-west. Work on the Stratford on Canal began in 1793 and the horse-drawn Stratford and Moreton Tramway opened in 1826, part of a scheme to link Birmingham

and London by canal, horse tram and river barge, but which was never completed.

Most of the area's railway lines opened between the 1840 and the turn of the century. The Alcester Railway Company was incorporated in 1872. This followed encouragement from the Great Western Railway, which could see the advantage of joining Alcester, already on the Evesham-Redditch Railway line (and operated by the Midland Railway), to Leamington Spa, via Bearley Junction. The new line was 6¾ miles long running on standard gauge track from Bearley to Alcester, with one intermediate station at Great Alne. Building of the line started in 1874; with the line being dug by hand and the soil carried away by carts or the contractor's engine. In 1876 the completed line was inspected by the railway inspector, Colonel Hutchinson, who stayed overnight at Ragley Hall, ready to make an early start the next morning. He was satisfied, and a week later a special train carried the Earl of Yarmouth and his party to Birmingham Musical Festival. Following this, the first public train left for Leamington. Seven trains a day were laid on each way (Monday-Saturday). The engines used on the line had a brightly polished brass dome, which gave it the nickname of the "Coffee Pot". Services on the line were operated from the outset by the Great Western Railway, who from 1877 took over maintenance as well. A full take-over of the company by GWR was completed in 1883. Separate Station Masters were appointed for each railway company (MR & GWR) at Alcester. Extra trains (with an extra carriage) were laid on for Stratford mop day. Before World War One 25,000 passengers were carried each year. When war broke out the services were suspended and the track was lifted in 1917 to help the war effort.

The track was re-laid in 1923 and services recommenced. An engine with an auto-coach was used. This enabled the train to be driven from either end, regardless of whether the engine was at the front or rear of the train. There are relatively few remains of this line still to be seen today. The iron

bridge over the River Arrow carries a footpath today. The station at Great Alne is now a private house, although the platform canopy remains. A new station halt had been built at Aston Cantlow in 1922, some way from the village, but no trace remains today. Goods wagons were attached to passenger trains, rather than run as separate services.

As soon as war was declared in September 1939, services were immediately suspended. Between July 1941 and July 1944 services between Bearley and Great Alne recommenced following the building of a new 'shadow' factory for the Maudslay Motor Company in Great Alne. It enabled workers from Coventry, to be transported to the new site, via Leamington. After July 1944, a bus service was introduced to replace the train service. Goods services on the line continued until 1947, and the line officially closed on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1951. It continued to be used for storing redundant wagons until 1960, when the track was lifted once again.

Steve was warmly thanked on behalf of the Society by Chairman, Alan Godfrey, for an enlightening talk on a subject which the audience had all heard of, but knew little about.

**Alan Godfrey**

### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Running almost straight as a die from south to north, the line of one of the six most important old roads in England serves as the common denominator that links the three main communities in the area of our Society.

Originally it ran from the Fosse Way near to Bourton-on-the-Water, over the northern escarpment of the Cotswolds, through Alcester, Birmingham and Chesterfield, terminating at Templeborough in South Yorkshire. If its route is unmistakable, its name has been debatable. Ryknield Street, we are assured, is its correct title; the perhaps more popular Icknield Street being no more than an erroneous confusion with the Icknield Way - the prehistoric trackway that connected The Wash with Salisbury Plain.

What names - if any - the Romans gave to their roads that made up a network of over 5,000 miles, we just don't know. The names we describe them by today date from later times and are generally of Old English origin.

An interesting view of the derivation of Ryknield Street is given by Professor Kenneth Cameron in his book on English Place Names, first published by Methuen in 1961. Those who attended Margaret Gelling's talk on Place Names in the Landscape, given to the Society in 1996, may recall that this was one of her recommended books on the subject.

Professor Cameron relates that the name Ryknield Street was first used by Ranulf Higden in the early 14th century, although the alternative Icknield Street is found in documents from the end of the 12th century.

He suggests that the change in name is probably due: *...to the fact that in the Middle English phrase at ther Icknield Strete the final "r" of the definite article has been mistakenly assumed to belong to the following syllable.*

So, what some regard as the "proper" name may be no more than a corruption of the other.

Two sections of the road within our area have their own local names. South of the river crossing at Bidford, to the point where it ascends the Cotswolds, it is known as Buckle Street.

The modern word street derives from the Old English *strēt*, itself borrowed from the Roman *strata*, meaning a "paved road", more particularly a paved Roman road. Buckle, Professor Cameron ventures, is perhaps named from Burghild, a daughter of Cenwulf, king of Mercia (796-821), thus giving us "Burghild's Roman road" as its meaning.

From the top of Coughton Hill, where the original alignment of the road is at its most obvious, its continuation to Spernal Ash is known as Haydon Way: literally "head way", i.e. chief way. Commanding the ridge that so dramatically separates the converging valleys of the Arrow and the Cain Brook, Haydon Way thus rendered makes immediate sense.

**GRAHAM DOWNIE**

*[This article first appeared in Local Past in June 1998]*

### MRS LILIAN GREIG

Mrs Lilian Greig, who died at the beginning of December 1997, was the second wife of David Greig of Oversley Castle, who owned a chain of grocery shops before he retired. He gave the money to build the Greig Hall in Alcester, in memory of his first wife, Hannah Susan Greig.

Mrs Lilian Greig was the last of the family of George Clark, who set up a coach building firm in Arrow, and later moved the business (as a garage) to Alcester with his son Leslie, who died several years ago. Her maternal grandparents were Mr and Mrs Cooper, who kept a butcher's shop in The Priory. I remember many years ago being taken to tea with Mrs Cooper in The Priory, by my great aunt, who was her friend.

Eventually, after Mr Cooper's death, Mrs Cooper went to live with her daughter and son-in-law, George Clark in Arrow. The shop was let for some years to a coal merchant, but when the premises were knocked down, Clark's Garage was built and later sold to Coulters, and is now Brooklyn Motors. *[Editor: Since demolished to allow access to Waitrose from Priory Road]*

Lilian was trained at Arrow village school in 1924, before qualifying as a teacher, and several of her former pupils attended her funeral. She was very interested in the garage and driving, and there are many photographs of the village and Clark's Garage at Arrow in the records.

**Alice Godfrey**

*[This article first appeared in Local Past – December 1998]*



*Geo. Clark & Son showroom (advertising BSA motorcycles among others) in Priory Road opposite the Globe Inn [ADLHS Archive]*

### FUTURE MEETINGS:

10<sup>th</sup> April – On the Way to London: Local Roads from Anglo-Saxon Tracks to Turnpikes – David Ella

8<sup>th</sup> May – The Palaeolithic & Ice Age Environments of the West Midlands – Nick Daffern

12<sup>th</sup> June – Warwick the Kingmaker: Richard Neville 16<sup>th</sup> Earl of Warwick 1428-71 – John Reid

### NEXT MEETING:

Our next meeting to be held at the **Sixth Form Centre, St Benedict's High School, Kinwarton Road, Alcester B49 6PX** on **Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at 7.30pm**. The Meeting begins with the **Annual General Meeting**, followed shortly after by **"On the Way to London: Local Roads from Anglo-Saxon Tracks to Turnpikes"** and the speaker is **David Ella**.

**Annual Subscriptions were due on 1<sup>st</sup> January. The cost remains unchanged at £5.00 per member. If you have not paid, please put your subs in a sealed envelope, bearing your name and address and bring to the meeting.**

**Alan Godfrey**

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