

ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2025

www.alcesterhistory.org.uk



The Three Tuns in Alcester's High Street looking at its best in 2020. The devastating fire that destroyed the building happened on Saturday 21st April 2021. At the present time the listed building still has not been restored to its former glory, let's hope the rebuild will get moving in 2025.

This photo was shown as February in the Cancer Research UK calendar for 2021.

(Photo: Steve Godfrey)

FROM THE CHAIRMAN:

This month there is no report of last month's meeting. Unfortunately, the facilities management company for St Benedict's chose, unilaterally, to cancel our December meeting with just two days' notice, to make way for a school carol concert. This meant we had no time to organise another date or an alternative venue. I apologise to those members who turned up anyway, without being aware of the cancellation. Our Christmas meeting is always a popular meeting for our members to get in the mood for the festive season and I am sorry we will have to wait another twelve months until the next one.

Alan Godfrey 07818 633001

A VIEW OF FRANKPLEDGE AND OTHER MATTERS

Having just (March 2013) finished indexing the late Edward Saville's notes on the records of the Alcester's Manorial Court, I feel almost confident enough to write a short article about it all for our loyal readers. We will start with the manor itself.

What was a Manor? A manor was an area of land, an estate owned by The Lord of the Manor.¹ This gentleman was often a peer of the realm but was not necessarily so. Lordships of the Manor are nowadays often bought and sold; you can find them advertised on the internet and I recently saw one going for £4,500 or thereabouts. Rumour has it that some purchasers think that they will be getting a peerage for their money and are

sadly disillusioned once they have handed over the cash, when they find that no coronet, robes or ermine are coming their way.

The manor of Alcester was more or less the same in extent as Alcester parish, as shown in Figure 1, and although it first appears in records in the reign of King Henry I in the 1100s, when he gave it to Sir Robert Corbet of Salop, it seems possible that as an area of land it goes back to Roman times, and maybe even before, but there is no direct evidence one way or the other.

There were various complications of the lordship when it became divided into two parts, one falling into the ownership of the Beauchamp family in the person of Walter de Beauchamp in 1272. In 1444 the Beauchamp lord bought the other part from the Botterell family who had held it for the previous 250 years and it was held as a single unit from then on. Various noble families held the lordship, including, in succession Willoughby, Greville (later to be Earls of Warwick) and eventually Conway-Seymour which family, in the person of the Marquess of Hertford, holds the lordship to this day. The manorial system is at present extinct, and has been since the 18th century. But how did it work in its heyday?

How the Manorial System Worked The manor was intended to be run for the profit of its lord. He was entitled to various dues, such as market tolls, rents and other payments. The inhabitants of the manor had a set of rules and regulations to live and work by and these rules were enforced by penalties.² The lord was empowered to keep two courts for controlling the system. One of these was the Court Baron and the other was

the Court Leet. All manors originally ran a Court Baron. It enforced the customs of the manor, including the use of the common fields and waste and the rights of lord and tenants. It also appointed, by election, various officers. The Court Leet dealt with offences such as breaking the assizes of bread and ale (intended as a system of quality control), common nuisances (such as washing horses in the town's wells or depositing animal dung in the streets) and failure to repair highways and ditches. More serious offences were referred to the assizes, in Alcester's case, at Warwick.

The court kept records of its proceedings on the Court Rolls and in Alcester's case these have survived from 1424 onwards, but from 1570 the Court Baron ceases to meet and its functions are carried out by the Court Leet. These records were in the Warwick Castle Archives because the Earl of Warwick was the Lord of the Manor of Alcester until 1813. They were offered for sale by the then Earl of Warwick in the 1970s and were saved for Warwickshire people (and others of course) by public subscription. They are now held in the Warwickshire County Record Office, where anyone may read them.

The Flavour of the Times The best way to get an idea of what the life of the manor was like is to read through the Court Rolls and see what was going on in the courts. Fortunately, the late Edward Saville made extensive notes on the records of Alcester's manorial court and these notes are in the possession of ADLHS so I will look at some of these to give you some idea of what went on.

We might start with the earliest surviving court record dated for the 3rd year of the reign of King Henry VI, which met on the feast of St Simon and St Jude. The Courts were always dated by regnal years, that is years of the king's reign; Henry VI came to the throne in 1421 when he was one year old, so we know that his third regnal year was 1424. Apparently, there was not much business for the court. All it did was to take a View of Frankpledge, elect William Tyckehull as Bailiff and elect an unnamed man as a taster. Whether he was a taster of flesh or fish is not stated. And the Abbot of Alcester was presented (a presentment was a report by the jury of an offence brought to its notice) for allowing one of the Abbey's ditches to become blocked. Now for a few selected court roll entries. All these have the Warwickshire Record Office reference CR1886 and a record number. The words in italics are my comments:

No. 202, Date 1525: Appointed two baylies (bailiffs), two bread and ale tasters. two headsilver gatherers (headsilver was money paid by tenants to the lord), two fish and flesh tasters, two leather tasters (a mystery; can they really have tasted the leather? Could it have meant 'testers'?), John Eyre has layed net puchins (eel traps), Foreign (i.e. from another manor) tanners may only buy hides at the place assigned by the church stile.

No. 205, 1528: Nicolas Stanley is to make the pillory and geme (?) stool. Nobody is to water horses nor wash clothes at wells in the street. No horse to be tied between the cross at Spetull (Spittle) Brook and Alymore stile.

No.210, 1532: Ordered that bakers shall sell four loaves for a penny, no man to keep beasts in the meadow until harvest be done, all swine to be ringed by Holy Rood day.

No. 213, 1543: No dung to be laid at Gonell's Brege (Gunnings Bridge).

No.1324, 1573: Bakers to sell two loaves for a penny and thirteen to the dozen. Brewers to sell new ale three pence to the gallon and stale four pence to the gallon. No man who is not a freeholder or burgess shall keep cattle on our commons. Inhabitants of Coughton to keep their cattle clear of Alcester commons. Henry Lord to clean the market place every Wednesday. Only inhabitants to give the pygard (he was in charge of the pigs) food and wages according to the old

custom. No foreign artificer to sell in our town except on Tuesdays. No inhabitant to keep any woman in his house. No dung to be laid between the common dunghill before Edward Dunstale's door to John Beller's house in Cole Brook lane (now Gas House Lane).

No. 1331A, 1579: presentments ; Phillip Yocksall for selling of 'mesell' (probably measly, i.e. infected with tapeworm cysts) pork; Avery Greenaway and Thomas Gower for making bread contrary to the order; Richard Atwick for making afray (sic) upon a tinker; Foulke Madley for abusing the Constable.

No. 1331A, 1577: Presented for not doing suit of court according to their tenures, 42 names including Sir Robert Throckmorton who was fined 12d (suit was a duty of service to the Lord of the manor). Six were fined for not carrying their dust and filth out of the street. Thomas Badger was fined for suffering his swine to go abroad in the street. Thomas Gower the younger was fined for receiving ill women to his house.

No. 1338B, 1596: Richard Jakeman presented for harbouring boys and whores in his barn.

No. 1345, 1600: Six found to be common hedgebreakers and to sit in the stocks twelve hours.

No 1346, 1600: Thos Palmer presented for killing a bull and baiting him in the East Field and not baiting him in the town (baiting was thought to make the meat more tender and nutritious; the baiting was done by dogs – 'bulldogs' possibly).

No 1347, 1601: Donybant Kitchen did bloodshed on John Hemyng as he was sitting in his master's shop. Donybant being a stranger and could put in no surety we gave him imprisonment for it.

No. 1352, 1603: appointments of two aletasters, two fleshtasters, two leather sealers (they stamped the leather with a die if the quality was right), headsilver gatherers, a hayward (he inspected the hedges and fences and impounded straying cattle), wellkeepers for wells at High Cross, Bullringe (the southern end of the High Street), the Huckerhurst (now Swan Street), King's Board (now part of Church Street), the Shambles (northern part of High Street).

No. 1354, 1606: Constables' presentments, Thomas Palmer, John Waldren and Edward Watton offend by opening their shop windows. Constables went to the house of William Edwards to test the bread, but his wife resisted them.

No. 1362, 1608: Presentment of William Edwards. 'We came demanding what corn his bread was made of and how much barley he did put into the same batche and he wolde not tell us but lafte us to scorne'. Report by John Walderne of Huckerhurste. No. 1400, 1628: Aletasters present four innkeepers and twenty-three other alehouse keepers for failure to sell a quart of ale or beer for a penny. John Walderne, butcher, emptied beasts' bellies in the street.

No.1420, 1649: Six people presented for selling herring which were not sweet (since the fish could only have come from the sea at a slow pace, it is hard to see how they could have been otherwise, unless they were salted, in which case the charge seems unreasonable).

No.1466, 1677: Citizens are not to allow children or servants to play in the streets or elsewhere on the Sabbath Day. Innholders and alehouse keepers are not to allow anyone to sit drinking or tipping on the Sabbath Day.

No. 1490, 1689: Widow Ffrisson has kept a disorderly house and entertained persons tipping there.

I think that these extracts should be enough of give you a picture of what went on. But what of The View of Frankpledge mentioned in the title? Every meeting of the Court Leet started with the View of Frankpledge so we had better start with an explanation of Frankpledge itself.³ It was a system of ensuring good behaviour on the part of the people of the manor. They were divided into groups of ten men, called 'tithings'. Each

member of the tithing had to stand security for the good behaviour of the others. In the event of crimes being committed, the other members of the tithing were expected to apprehend the offender and bring him to the appropriate court. The View of Frankpledge was a twice-yearly check by the authorities that all was well with the Frankpledge of the manor and could be depended on to work if needed. I wonder if meetings of the Alcester Court Leet still start with the View of Frankpledge. Finally, we have to remember that the Lord was subject to the customs of the manner just like everyone else, and could be presented in the same way as ordinary citizens. This happened on at least one occasion. In October 1683 (No. 1471), the Jury laid a fine on the Lord of the Manor in the following words:

'We lay a fine of five pounds on our landlord, the Right Honourable Lord Brooke, Baron Brook of Beauchamp Court for not giving the jury a dinner according to the ancient custom.'

This fine would have been about £500 in modern values. Whether His Lordship ever paid up is not recorded.

Notes and References

1. For the basic information on the Manor of Alcester, see the Victoria County History of Warwickshire, Vol. III. There is a copy in Alcester Public Library, or you can view in on the internet – search 'British History Online'. There is also an excellent, but much shorter, account in Alcester – A History, edited by G.E. Saville for ADLHS and published by Brewin Books of Studley in 1986, page 26.
2. Alcester – A History, page 32, gives a good account of the manorial courts
3. There is a good explanation of Frankpledge in The Local Historian's Encyclopaedia by John Richardson, published in 1974 by Historical Publications, Ref B29, page 39. The book also gives a good glossary of many other manorial terms.

Cyril Johnson

[This article first appeared in Local Past – June 2013]

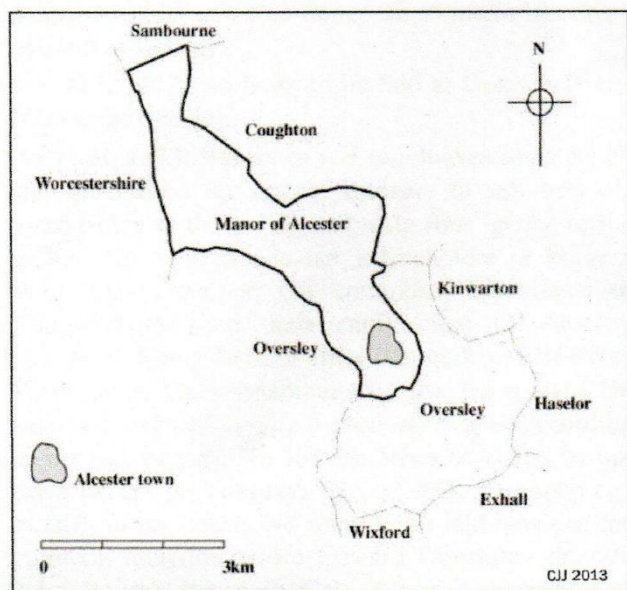
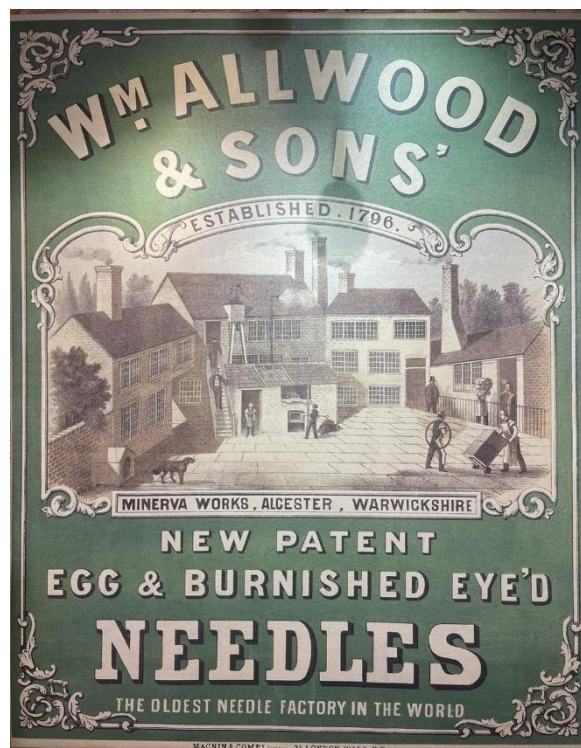


Fig. 1: The manor of Alcester and surrounding parishes

FUTURE MEETINGS:

- 8th January – Salt Routes – Anthony Poulton-Smith
 12th February – In Defence of Neville Chamberlain – Andrew Reekes
 12th March – **Annual General Meeting**, followed by:
 Royal Visits: Policing Special Occasions – Alan Benjamin



An advertisement for William Allwood & Sons Needles. The building illustrated does not appear to resemble the Minerva Works in Station Road today (shown above).



I would like to wish all our members a very Happy and Healthy New Year!

OUR NEXT MEETING:

Our next talk will be held at the **Sixth Form Centre, St Benedict's High School, Kinwarton Road, Alcester B49 6PX** on **Wednesday 8th JANUARY 2025** at 7.30pm. The talk is: "Salt Routes" and the speaker is **Anthony Poulton-Smith**.

Alan Godfrey

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PROGRAMME 2025

8 January	Salt Routes	Anthony Poulton-Smith
12 February	In Defence of Neville Chamberlain	Andrew Reekes
12 March	Annual General Meeting, followed by: Royal Visits: Policing Special Occasions	Alan Benjamin
9 April	Murder and manslaughter: Strange Deaths in Worcs/Warks History	Richard Churchley
14 May	The Limits of Empire: How Drake's Circumnavigation Changed History	Justin Newland
11 June	Warwick at War 1939-1945	Graham Sutherland
9 July	Afternoon Visit - TBA	-
13 August	Ralph Sheldon and his Wonderful Tapestry Map	Maggie Wood
10 September	Sulgrave Manor and the Washington Family	Martin Sirot-Smith
8 October	Umberslade Baptist Church & the Muntz Family	Peter Coulls
12 November	The Witchcraft Murder on Meon Hill	Adam Wood
10 December	Alfred The Great: A King Who Rode Good Fortune?	Max Keen

FOR MORE INFORMATION SEE OUR WEBSITE: www.alcesterhistory.org.uk

MEETINGS ARE HELD ON THE SECOND WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH
IN THE SIXTH FORM CENTRE, ST BENEDICT'S RC HIGH SCHOOL, KINWARTON ROAD, ALCESTER B49 6PX
COMMENCING 7.30pm (UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED)
VISITORS WELCOME