

ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2023

www.alcesterhistory.org.uk



Postcard showing Len Parkes and 'The Coughton Triplets'. Cows very rarely have triplets and it was considered such an event that it justified having postcards produced. Len Parkes was the sub-postmaster in Coughton from the 1930s.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN:

This month we celebrate **Heritage Open Days** on **Saturday 9th and Sunday 10th September** across the country. In Alcester and the surrounding area, a number of properties will be open **FREE OF CHARGE**:

St Nicholas Church
Church House
Alcester War Memorial Town Hall
Roman Alcester Museum
Alcester Baptist Church
Coughton Court

The Society will, as usual, be at Church House with a photograph display from our archives, as well as offering our publications for sale. John Bunting is putting on a display of material relating to Alcesterians' experiences from WWII at the Town Hall.

Details of all the properties taking part across the country may be found on the HOD website:

<https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/>

Alan Godfrey

LAST MONTH'S MEETING

The speaker last month at Alcester & District Local History Society was Graham Sutherland, who spoke to us on "*South Warwickshire Inn Signs – Past & Present*". Our speaker promised to provide a pub crawl around South Warwickshire looking at a variety of the inn signs that either could still be seen or used to be seen, and their backgrounds. He explained that in centuries past, since the majority of the population could not read, a visual representation was needed to let the population know the name of an inn. Hence pictorial inn signs were born. Many of the inn names are unique and often represent aspects of the local history in our area.

In Barford the 'Joseph Arch' was named after the agricultural labourer born in the village, who became a union organiser and politician. He was a friend of Daisy, the Countess

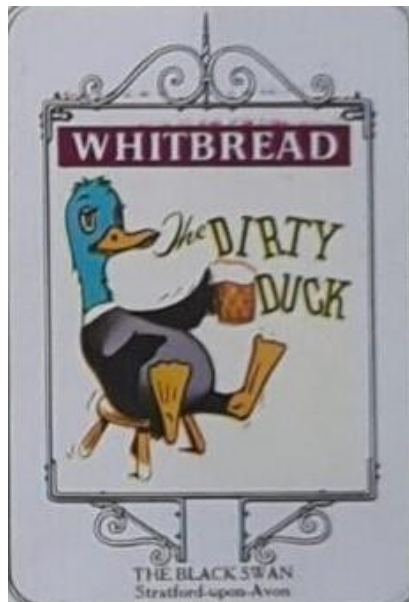
of Warwick, and was even visited by King Edward VII. Hampton Magna has the pub: "Montgomery of Alamein", which was named after Bernard, Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, who served in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. This regiment was based at Budbrooke Barracks, close to Hampton Magna. The 'Wyandotte Inn' in Kenilworth was built in 1868. The name is that of a North American Indian tribe and also the name of a suburb of Kansas City, where the son of the builder settled. In Leamington Spa is the "Fox & Vivian Inn", which was originally the 'Fox'. The name was changed to recognise a winning steeplechaser 'Vivian' ridden by Lord Beecher in 1834. The landlord apparent won a large bet on this race and so changed the name. The 'Blue Lias Inn' at Stockton, near Southam is named after the local limestone and shale rock. The inn sign shows a brontosaurus, as Jurassic era fossils are often found in the stone. The 'Cock Horse Inn' used to be a pub in Rowington (which closed in 2012). Its name came from the coaching days when the 'cock' horse was an additional horse added to a stagecoach to help pull the coach up Church Hill in Rowington.

Stratford-upon-Avon has a pub called the 'Old Tramway Inn' in Shipston Road. The inn sign used to show a horse-drawn wagon on rails. Stratford & Moreton Tramway, which opened in 1826 to carry coal and building materials to the north Cotswolds, used to run just behind the pub. The 'Dun Cow Inn' in Warwick is named after the mythical beast that was twelve feet high and twenty feet long that originated in Shropshire. It is said that Guy of Warwick slew the beast on Dunsmore Heath. There were also a number of other 'Dun Cow Inns' in Warwickshire. Another inn sign often seen is 'The Lord Nelson'. In Warwick the inn of this name (originally 'The Beehive') was named after Horatio Nelson, after he visited Warwick in 1804. His supporters were said to have pulled his coach around the town. The 'Warwick Arms Hotel' is the oldest in Warwick, founded in 1591, and was originally owned by the Earls of Warwick. Although it was burnt

down in 1694 in the Great Fire of Warwick, it was rebuilt in the eighteenth century. Its sign showed a bunch of evergreens, the indication used by the Romans to show an inn. Also in Warwick, there was a pub named 'Hobson's Choice', on Spinney Hill. The inn sign showed two gentlemen in doublet and hose, with a horse. This relates to Thomas Hobson (1554-1631), a Cambridge liveryman who insisted his customers had no choice in the horse they hired, it would always be the horse nearest the door.

Graham Sutherland's talk covered a huge number of local inns and inn signs, of which these are but a sample; he was warmly thanked for a most fascinating and informative talk.

Alan Godfrey



The Dirty Duck (correctly known as the Black Swan) in Stratford-upon-Avon - one of the inn signs mentioned in Graham Sutherland's talk. This sign has recently been replaced.

NAMES & NICKNAMES OF OUR LOCAL VILLAGES

In previous editions of *Local Past*, I discussed names of counties, hundreds, hills, rivers, farms and fields. I now examine the names of the settlements: Alcester and many of its surrounding villages with variations in pronunciation and spelling and alternative names. (Numbers in brackets indicate the date of documents where a certain variation occurs. OE denotes the Old English or Anglo-Saxon word or name.)

Alcester It is well-known to those interested in the history of the locality that Alcester was a Roman town, and this is indeed shown by its name. Many places were dubbed *ceaster* by the Anglo-Saxons denoting a former Roman settlement, (from the Latin *castra* meaning camp or fort). In some cases, this ending changed to *chester*, *caster* or *cester* in later versions of the names: hence Manchester, Lancaster and Worcester. Thus, Alcester is derived from Alencestre (1138), simply meaning the Roman settlement on the River Alne. In modern parlance some people pronounce the town as *Awlsester*, others (including most locals) as *Awlster*. Sometimes the l sound is lost, as indicated by spellings such as *Awcestre* (1584). Variants similar to this occur right through to modern times.

In the early twentieth century Alcester had a nickname, **Caketown**, said to derive from the high number of bakers in the town. This name was told me by a life-long Studley resident in the 1970's, but how long this name had been used or by how many people, I do not know. I would welcome readers' comments on this.

Like Alcester, most village and town names in England date back to Old English from the time of Anglo-Saxon settlement, although elements of the name may indeed be from an earlier time. **Great Alne** (sometimes written *Awne*) and its smaller neighbour Little Alne are also called after the river which, like many river-names, has an earlier, Celtic origin (see *Local Past* June 2000). Great Alne had an alternative name: **Round Alne**, which appears to be a corruption of *Ruwenalne* (1251) meaning *Rough Alne*, more likely because of its wild, uncultivated terrain rather than its inhabitants! Arrow is another

example of a village borrowing the Celtic name of the river on which it is situated.

Many local villages have names ending in *-ley* which indicates that at the time the Anglo-Saxons named them, they were in a wooded area, the *-ley* either meaning a clearing or simply a wood (see *Local Past* Autumn and Winter 1997). This is not surprising as the Alcester area straddles the Forests of Feckenham and Arden. **Henley** means *the high clearing or wood* (from Old English *heah*). **Billesley**, **Ipsley** and **Bordesley** (sometimes spelt *Boresley* or *Bursley*) are called after their one-time owners: *Bill*, *Ippa* and *Bord* respectively. (Although an alternative explanation of Ipsley's name suggests it means *wood by the hill*.) **Kingley** (in Arrow parish) would seem to indicate that it was once owned by an Anglo-Saxon king, although no such connection is documented. **Oversley** (sometimes written as *Owsley*) may be named after an owner called *Ofe*, but it may also mean the clearing or wood on the bank (OE *ofer*), an explanation suited to the local topography. Some places are named after their fauna or flora, so **Studley** was a wood or clearing for a stud or herd of horses, **Beoley** and **Honiley** for honey-bees, **Weethley** a willow or withy wood, and **Ragley** may mean *mossy clearing*.

Settlement names ending in *Green* also suggest a clearing in a wood, probably with a later origin than the names ending in *-ley*. The meaning of **Littlewood Green** is self-evident. **Mappleborough Green** and **Oversley Green** may be settlements which grew up below their respective hills of Oversley and Mappleborough, (the latter meaning a hill (OE *berge*) marked by a maple tree).

The same Old English word for a hill or barrow gives rise to various other names locally. **Inkberrow** (sometimes spelt *Inckbarrow* or *Inkborough* in recent centuries, and pronounced Inkbro') was *Intanbeorgas* (789) meaning *Inta's hills*. **Holberrow** means hollow hill, although there is no obvious reason for the name. (Again, the Green was added later when the settlement grew up below the hill.) An alternative spelling for Holberrow in some documents was *Owlberrow*, which is sometimes confusingly also used to mean **Oldberrow** (near Henley). The latter seems to mean owl's hill, or hill belonging to Ula.

Although **Hillborough** (in Temple Grafton parish) would appear to have a similar derivation, it does not. In 710 the name appeared as *Hildeburhwurthe*, meaning *the farm of a woman called Hildeburh*. The ending *-worth* also appears in Tanworth meaning the farm of a man called *Tanna*.
(*To be continued*)

Richard Churchley

[This is part one of an article that first appeared in *Local Past* – December 2003]

FUTURE MEETINGS:

13th September – The Gunpowder Plot in Warwickshire – Mairi MacDonald
11th October – What did you do in the War, Dad? – Alistair Russell Price
8th November – Medieval England and the Arrival of the Black Death – Ron Gallivan

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 13th September 2023** at **7.30pm**. The talk is "**The Gunpowder Plot in Warwickshire**" and the speaker is **Mairi MacDonald**.

Please remember: Admission to meetings is now £2.00
Annual Subscription remains at £5.00
"LOCAL PAST – JUNE 2023" will be on sale at the meeting, price £2

Alan Godfrey

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