

ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2021

www.alcesterhistory.org.uk



Floods in
School Road,
Alcester c1950
[ADLHS
Archive]

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

For the third time we are in a lockdown. The rate of vaccinations is still increasing and very soon those of our members in their 60s and 70s should be receiving their 'jab'. This gives us all hope that the virus will be under control by the autumn and that we shall be able to commence meetings at St Benedict's again. In the interim, the Society is again holding a virtual meeting using Zoom and I hope as many of you as possible will join this talk on Wednesday 10th February. Details are shown at the end of the newsletter. Using this software is very easy to use, but if you are not sure how connect to a Zoom meeting, please email me. Stay safe and well.

Alan Godfrey

LAST MONTH'S MEETING ON ZOOM

January's illustrated talk on Zoom was entitled "**The Battle of Stow**" and the speaker was Simon Marsh of the Battlefield Trust. Simon began by explaining the background to the first English Civil War between King Charles I and Parliament from 1642. In December of 1645 Jacob Astley was appointed as the King's commander in the West Midlands. Early in 1646 he went to the Royalist stronghold of Worcester to start to raise an army to relieve the King at Oxford. He managed to collect 3,000 men from various garrisons and set off southwards. He was aware that Parliamentarian forces under Colonel Thomas Morgan and John Birch were waiting for him in the Cotswolds. Another Roundhead army under Sir William Brereton was in the north of Warwickshire heading southwards. Astley sent a small force to Evesham, while turning his main force towards Droitwich and from there through Feckenham, Inkberrow and Alcester, before crossing the River Avon at Bidford on Avon and moving down Buckle Street towards Honeybourne, Chipping Campden and Blockley, in order to head towards Stow-on-the-Wold. Meanwhile, Morgan had taken a force to Evesham, before realising Astley had outwitted him, and he then moved his force towards the Cotswolds.

Morgan sent a band of 500 mounted soldiers to skirmish with Astley's troops to slow him down near Broadway, but it was too dark to fight. Astley pushed on to Donnington, near to Stow to make his last stand. Meanwhile the three Parliamentary forces joined and surrounded Astley's forces. Battle commenced at first light on 21st March 1646 (about 5.00am). Astley's Royalist forces

fought bravely, but were forced to retreat towards Stow. The fighting continued in the streets, but eventually Brereton's army proved to be too strong and Astley surrendered. The whole battle had only lasted about an hour. Astley was quoted as saying "You have done your work, boys, and may go play, unless you will fall out among yourselves." This proved to be the last major battle of the First Civil War and King Charles, himself, surrendered just two months later in May 1646.

Simon's fascinating talk discussed not only the actions of the two opposing armies, but also the resulting aftermath of the battle, the composition of each force, the possible sites for the final battle and the archaeology of these sites. An audience of 43 members and visitors showed their appreciation for this talk.

Alan Godfrey

THE ALCESTER TURNPIKE GATE

The office block adjacent to the roundabout at King's Coughton is named "Turnpike Gate House" - a reminder of the turnpike gate, or tollgate, which stood close to this site. This was erected by the turnpike trust set up in 1754 to manage roads from Alcester to Feckenham (the present Droitwich Road) and to Tardebigge (the present road to Spenal - Crabbs Cross-Bromsgrove). Turnpike trusts were empowered by Parliament to: raise loans for road repairs, build tollhouses, erect gates and milestones and each trust would often consist of a local lawyer (as clerk), a treasurer and a surveyor, together with many of the landowners through whose land the road passed. In 1813, William Jones was Clerk to the Alcester Turnpike Trust and he was succeeded by attorney, Robert Bartlam, until his death in 1821.

At first there were no permanent tollhouses and the gates were closed at night, but once it became apparent that the turnpikes were not temporary, then tollhouses were built at road junctions with a clear view of the gates and roads. However, there were still complaints that gates were found locked because the keeper was missing or that he was drunk or asleep. The wages of 9s per week did not always encourage the right sort of staff. This changed in the 1770's when the operation of the turnpikes was

"farmed" out to the highest bidder at auction (an early example of privatisation). This meant that the "farmer" paid an annual rent to the trust, but kept the tolls collected. He would either run the tollgate himself or appoint a gate-keeper.

The Alcester gate was farmed out for the following annual rent:

1770	£154
1789	£300
1800	£352
1816	£371

There were still complaints on some roads about the state of the road surfaces and much depended on the integrity of the trustees. Tolls were originally based on the size of a vehicle (and number of horses drawing it) or the number of animals in a drove. However, it soon became evident that the size of vehicle was not the only factor in causing damage to road surfaces and Acts were introduced to charge tolls based on the weight of the load and a weighing machine was installed alongside the Alcester gate. This allowed a ticket to be provided indicating the weight of the vehicle which could then be produced each time a vehicle passed through a gate subsequently. By coincidence, the public weighbridge remained close to this site until demolished after the closure of Three Counties Agricultural Supplies warehouse and the acquisition of the site by Blakes of Loxley. The original tollhouse was situated alongside the Roebuck Inn until replaced in 1839 by a new tollhouse at the junction of the roads to Feckenham and Studley and this remained until demolished after World War Two. Today, the only visible reminders of this aspect of local history are the black and white posts of the tollgate which are now sited at the entrance of the driveway leading to Beauchamp Court.

After 1821, the rights to operate three turnpiked roads were auctioned together (Stratford to Alcester, Droitwich & Bromsgrove; Alcester to Wootton Waven and Alcester to Evesham) and raised these annual rents:

1822	£ 935
1838	£1,490
1846	£1,050

The Alcester-Evesham and Alcester-Wootton Waven Trusts were separate trusts from that of Stratford to Droitwich and Bromsgrove.

Thereafter, the successful bids for the nine gates progressively reduced with the increase in the use of the railways in place of road transport. In 1850 the three local trusts were amalgamated into "The United Road Trust". Finally, the responsibility for highway maintenance passed to the parishes' highway boards and ultimately to district and county councils under the Local Government Acts of 1888 and 1894.

Alan Godfrey

[This article first appeared in *Local Past* - Summer 1992]



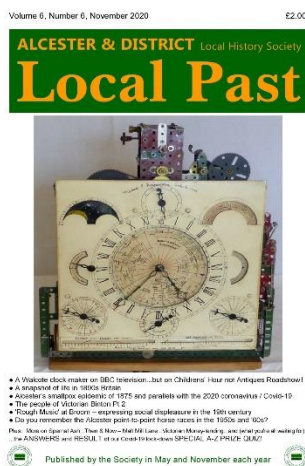
Sketch of the Alcester Turnpike Gate, which was built in 1839 and demolished in 1950s.

ADLHS PROGRAMME 2021 (FEBRUARY- APRIL)

These meetings will be held online by Zoom, unless circumstances change in the meantime.

10 th February	The Photographer's Gaze: Viewing Warwickshire since 1839	James Ranahan
10 th March	A History of Billesley	Alan Bailey
14 th April	The Hugely Huggable History of the Teddy Bear	Dr Gillian White

Edward Fox 's photography premises in Stratford upon Avon. As featured in James Ranahan's talk on Wednesday 10th February.



The November edition of 'Local Past' is still available from the usual outlets: Mace – Hills Retail (was Ross Motors) in Evesham Street, PSW in Market Place, Alcester and PSW in Studley or online through our website. For FREE delivery in Alcester, Studley, Bidford etc. call Sue Fisher on 01789 763121
Price is still £2.00

Our next 'VIRTUAL' meeting will be held by ZOOM on **Wednesday 10th February 2021 at 7.30pm**. The subject of the talk is **"The Photographer's Gaze: Viewing Warwickshire since 1839"**. The speaker is **James Ranahan**. If you wish to join this talk, please email me *as soon as possible*. **If you signed up for previous Zoom meetings, you will automatically receive an invitation for this meeting.**



Which family used this Coat of Arms?
Answer in next month's newsletter

Alan Godfrey

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