

ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2020

www.alcesterhistory.org.uk



Peace Pageant for Missions procession outside the Golden Lion Inn in Priory Road, Alcester on 25th September 1919 [ADLHS Archive]

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

We are facing the likelihood that our meetings will not reconvene until 2021. All our speakers have been warned accordingly and all have agreed to speak to us next year instead.

This edition of the Newsletter includes an article especially written by Ian Greig on the disease outbreak that afflicted Alcester in 1875. We often say 'history repeats itself'!

If you have any suggestions for subjects you would like me to include in this newsletter, please email me.

I hope everyone will continue to take care, keep safe and I look forward to seeing you at a meeting again soon.

Alan Godfrey



The Hertford Memorial Sanatorium and used as Alcester's isolation hospital with the matron's house. Erected 1884. [ADLHS Archive]

SELF-ISOLATION AND EPIDEMICS - IS THERE ANYTHING NEW?!

In the present strange times of global pandemic, we are getting used to concepts like self-isolation, emergency hospitals and business problems. But Alcester has seen it all – well, a lot of it – before. Smallpox was a continuing problem until 20th century, generally on a limited scale but occasionally breaking out into epidemics, even if only small and localised.

In 1875 it became sufficiently prevalent in Alcester to merit the term 'epidemic'. On 23rd January the Chronicle reported a hastily arranged meeting of the Alcester Rural Sanitary Authority, in response to the number of cases of the disease in the town. It was suggested that a wooden building owned by the contractors building the Alcester to Bearley railway would make a suitable temporary isolation hospital. Unfortunately for that idea, it was found that they couldn't spare it because it was currently being used not only to house the contractor's horses, but also as living accommodation for the horse-keeper, his wife, and several others. Whatever you think of Boris Johnson and Matt Hancock with their "Nightingale Hospitals", at least they didn't have to decide between horses and people when setting them up! Mr Fosbroke, the Medical Officer of Health, strongly recommended that such a hospital be built, and a sub-committee was formed to attend to it. This had been done by the middle of February, when the new hospital contained 19 patients.

On another page the paper had a headline "ALARMING SPREAD OF SMALLPOX AT ALCESTER", and described how there were fresh cases every day. Eighteen people were ill and there had been two deaths, despite which the people were being "told that generally the disease is not of a very virulent type". The paper urged inhabitants to help the authorities stamp out the disease, by using disinfectants and other measures, and avoiding contact with infected persons and houses where there had been cases. Is any of this starting to sound familiar from the early days of Covid-19?! At least there are no records of the High Bailiff being stupid enough to suggest people take bleach as way of curing it...

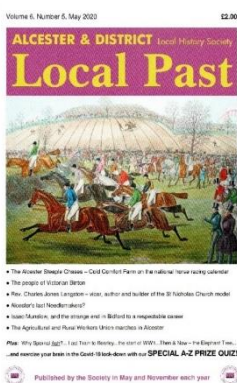
The big difference from Covid, of course, is that even in 1875 vaccination against smallpox was an established and successful procedure. The problem was to make sure as many as possible were vaccinated, and by the end of the outbreak an extensive vaccination programme had treated several hundred people. There were other parallels with today. The workhouse children were no longer sent to school because of the prevalence of smallpox. The authority discussed what to do with people discharged from the temporary hospital; take them to the workhouse infirmary was one suggestion. Fosbroke said he did not think it was "safe to bring convalescents from the hospital until the infection had quite left them". If only today's authorities had taken the same attitude over discharging patients from hospital into care homes...

He went on to point out that the houses of the sick should be regularly visited, so that their shopping needs could be satisfied and the patients kept in their houses to avoid spreading the disease. Of course, some people then, as now, ignored the regulations. An Alcester tailor was charged with being in a public place whilst infected when "the pustules were thick on him" and fined 10 shillings. Another infected man was up before the bench after he went into the Turk's Head for a half pint of rum...disguised as a woman!

In another parallel, the Chronicle told how many of the town's businesses were suffering from lack of trade. It blamed this on the prevalence of rumours and fear in the surrounding districts, far in excess of the severity of the disease which, in many cases, was said to be very slight. There were no state grants or furlough scheme then, of course – in fact this was considered very much a local problem, and up to the local authorities and community to manage. The landlord and landlady of the Dog & Partridge had suffered badly from the drop in trade, and successfully applied for a special licence extension so that they could hold a benefit dinner organised by their friends to raise money for them. By June things were pretty well back to normal, and Fosbroke was able to report the success of the temporary hospital, without which Alcester " would not have been so quickly freed from such an alarming epidemic".

Even though the scale is very different, it's actually rather interesting to compare the 19th-century situation with the present pandemic, and there will be an extended version of this note in the next issue of *Local Past*.

Ian Greig



THE MAY 2020 EDITION OF 'LOCAL PAST'

The latest edition of LP is still available. Local Past is available from MACE - Hills Retail (formerly Ross' Garage), PSW in Alcester and PSW in Studley. We can also deliver your copy **free** in Alcester, Bidford or Studley (postcode areas B49, B50 & B80) or by post. Go onto our website to order your copy or call Sue Fisher on 01789 763121. The price remains a bargain at £2.00 (plus postage if needed £1.00)

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SPECIAL CORONAVIRUS LOCK-DOWN A-Z PRIZE QUIZ!

In an attempt to raise the spirits of our members in the absence of any meetings, here is a special A-Z quiz. The answers begin with the relevant letter of the alphabet.

Entries have started coming in for this prize quiz in the current issue of *Local Past*, although not yet in the flood that the Editor was expecting. The quiz is now open to Newsletter readers. Do get your thinking caps on and send your entries in. The deadline is the end of October, so there is still plenty of time.

It's worth sending something in even if you've got a few blanks or queries. (None of the entries will be checked until after the deadline, so we don't know how good the entries already received are.)

Just send a list of your answers with your name and address to the Editor: editor@alcesterhistory.org.uk or to **5 Kinwarton Road, Alcester, B49 6QT**, cross your fingers and wait to claim your two-years' worth of free *Local Past* and first pick of the Christmas raffle prizes, which always includes chocolates, wine and biscuits. Let us know which you prefer, or suggest a few other options, and we'll put something aside for you. If Covid restrictions are still in place and we can't hold the meeting, we'll announce the winner (and draw the name if necessary) in time to be published in the next *Local Past*, and arrange something with you about the non-raffle raffle prize. The Editor's decision is final.

WARNING! This quiz, compiled by Edward Saville (but lacking the 'X' and 'Z' questions) appeared, with a prize, in an early edition of *Local Past*. We trust our famously honest members not to go through their back-issues to find the answers! ADLHS committee members are not allowed to enter. (Or help anyone else...) The answers will be published in the next *Local Past*.

- A. 22 parishes round here were joined together under the 1834 Poor Law to form this. (2 words)
 - B. Most cemeteries attached to religious buildings originated round parish churches. There are two in this area (in Alcester and Studley) which did not. What type of buildings were these associated with? (2 words)
 - C. Near the end of the 17th century a protestant mob from Alcester vandalised the catholic chapel here. (2 words)
 - D. Wyke on the Coughton-Sambourne lane was one; Burnells Broom probably was. What were they? (3 words)
 - E. This place was part of the manor of Oversley (1 word)
 - F. In 1902 the Alcester one got a steam engine to replace the manual one. (2 words)
 - G. This family got the manor of Alcester because the previous owners ran out of male heirs. (1 word)
 - H. The 'Mop' was originally one of these. (2 words)
 - I. These are often found with wills up to the mid-18th century in probate records. (1 word)
 - J. These men formed the Quarter Sessions (4 words)
 - K. This is the only mill we know of in our area which was constructed specifically for the needle trade. (2 words)
 - L. Farmers hereabouts give this name to remains of the old ridge-and-furrow system. (1 word)
 - M. In the early 18th century Kinwarton church was well-known for large numbers of these. (1 word)
 - N. It started in Studley in the first quarter of the 17th century, and spread to Sambourne and Alcester where it eventually became very important. (1 word)
 - O. Before the poor law guardians, these men looked to the needs of the poor in each parish. (4 words)
 - P. He had charge of the parish or manor enclosure where stray animals were put. (1 word)
 - Q. A meeting house behind the High Street in Alcester once belonged to them. (1 word)
 - R. The court of Quarter Sessions at Warwick, particularly in the 17th century, usually gave this name to the papists of Coughton, Oversley and other places. (1 word)
 - S. The writing which we find in wills and other documents of the 16th and 17th centuries, and many people find difficult to read today, is called by this name. (2 words)
 - T. This was sometimes another name given to a parish constable, especially in small places. (1 word)
 - U. The destroyed chapel down Bulls Head yard in Alcester at various times accommodated three sects. Presbyterians and Congregationalists were two – what was the other? (1 word)
 - V. This was published between 1904 and 1969, and deals with every parish in Warwickshire. (3 words)
 - W. Its tollhouse is one of the three still standing in the area covered by ADLHS. (1 word)
 - X. The Midland Red Evesham-Alcester-Birmingham 148 bus service was replaced in 1977 by this. (letter + number)
 - Y. In the social scale in previous centuries he came between a gentleman and a husbandman. (1 word)
 - Z. The god Jupiter would have been worshipped in Alcester, Roman Alcester. What was his Greek equivalent? (1 word)
- [Sorry, stretching it a bit far, but 'Z' is tricky!]

Good Luck!

Alan Godfrey

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