

ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

JULY 2016



Peace
celebration
street party
1919 (ADLHS
Collection)

www.alcesterhistory.org.uk

LAST MEETING: Our most recent talk focused on the restoration project surrounding Shakespeare's last home in Stratford, New Place, which stood in the heart of Stratford.

Our speaker, though not as advertised, is himself deeply involved in the New Place project and is, in fact, the assistant Project Manager. Dr. Nic Fulcher has a background in English and European history and prior to joining the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust was the curator of Leeds Castle in Kent.

The first part of Nic Fulcher's talk focused on the history of the house itself whilst in the second half he described the extensive restoration of the site which is currently taking place.

The house originally built on the site and known throughout its history as 'New Place' was built by Hugh Clopton in 1483 and was called by him 'his great house'.

Until 1563 the house passed to various Cloptons until it went to one William Bott. It was always referred to in local documents as a very large house in the centre of the town.

William Shakespeare himself bought New Place in 1597 for about £120 – a huge amount at that time.

It was well known as the largest house in the borough of Stratford and fitting for a local son who had made his fortune in London and returned to this grand house in his home town to spend his twilight years. He owned the house until his death on the 23rd April 1616.

Nic Fulcher emphasised that it is difficult to convey just what a large and impressive house New Place was – a new and grander entrance was built and the house is recorded as containing at least twenty rooms and ten fireplaces. Shakespeare was able to rent part of the property out to a family friend, his wife and two children – a further indication of the size of the house.

The only drawing of New Place was done in 1737 and is actually a drawing of the house which replaced the house Shakespeare had known. Again, in the hands of the Cloptons, one John Clopton had demolished New Place in 1702 and built 'New House' in its place using the prevailing, modern style of the time.

Those familiar with the site in Stratford will know that nothing now remains of New Place, only its site and the much loved

New Place Gardens.

The work currently taking place aims to reimagine the site with symbolic features representing the house itself, the playwright's work desk, a new Elizabethan Knot Garden, completely replanted in its original layout and symbols from the plays interspersed throughout, plus a new exhibition space housed in the adjoining Nash's House.

At the time of writing the re-opening of New Place to the public had again been delayed due to the recent heavy rains.

It is obvious that the New Place project is ambitious and should be impressive and perhaps, controversial, when it is finally completed. Nic Fulcher gave an excellent presentation and overview of this exciting and ambitious project.

ALCESTER STREET MARKET: Our stall at the recent Alcester Street market proved very successful and attracted much attention from many visitors, despite the weather. A photographic display of the various street parties held in Alcester in the past from 1911 onwards was put together by Ian Greig and drew many to the stall. We also sold a number of our range of publications and handed out information leaflets and programmes.

EVENING VISIT TO WORCESTER (THE HIVE):

Our evening visit to the Hive at Worcester on the evening of July 13th replaces our usual meeting at St Benedict's, for this month only.

At the time of writing there are still a few places available so if you would like to take advantage of the chance to visit the repository of archives for Worcestershire and have a 'behind the scenes' tour of the facility not normally available to the public then please contact me on **01789 763121** or by email: sue_fisher@hotmail.com as soon as possible.

The trip and guided tour costs £9 per person and the coach will leave Alcester from Priory road at 6.00pm prompt returning by approximately 9.45pm.

Our next meeting at St Benedict's will be on Wednesday 10th August at 8.00pm. Full details will appear in the next Newsletter.

SUE FISHER