

ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY  
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER  
SEPTEMBER 2016



Alcester High  
Street, pre- 1914  
(ADLHS Archive)

[www.alcesterhistory.org.uk](http://www.alcesterhistory.org.uk)

**AUGUST MEETING:** Little did the assembled audience at our August meeting realise that our speaker for the evening, Lt. Colonel Gerald Lesinski, was about to deliver one of the most entertaining talks we have had for many years!

Gerald Lesinski's talk focused mainly on the visually famous Lord Leycester Hospital in Warwick of which he is the 'Master' or superintendent. He explained that, in this case, the word 'hospital' had no medical connotation at all – the word 'hospital' sprang from the words shelter, hospital and hostelry. Its purpose now, and when originally founded, was to provide shelter for old and wounded soldiers when their active service ended. Previously these men would have been cast off and become homeless beggars.

The stunning medieval buildings in the heart of Warwick which form the Hospital date from the fifteenth century and the adjoining Guild chapel dates from 1126, although it was rebuilt in the late 14th century by the twelfth Earl of Warwick.

It was Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, close companion of Elizabeth I, who took over the old Guild buildings in 1571 and established a retirement home for elderly and wounded soldiers. There was to be room for 12 brothers or brethren and a Master and Queen Elizabeth drew up an Act of Parliament establishing the Hospital in law.

Lt. Colonel Lesinski described with great humour the daily routines established at the Hospital including the continuing daily meeting for a service of prayers - set down by Robert Dudley 445 years ago. As the chapel is unheated and lit only by candles, gales of laughter met the description of the prayer services in winter when hats and gloves were a necessity!

The Hospital and Chapel have been open for over 400 years and receive many visitors and is almost entirely self-funded, receiving no money from the public purse. To help remedy this, the beautiful buildings have featured many times in films and television programmes requiring an authentic historical backdrop. Programmes and films such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Moll Flanders*, *Tom Jones* and *Dr Who?*, *The Shakespeare Code* - all feature the beautiful Hospital as a vital ingredient and provide much needed funds to help with the upkeep of the building, as do the many weddings and receptions held there throughout the year.

It is difficult to convey just what an excellent speaker and raconteur Gerald Lesinski was as his talk ranged far and wide in

addition to the main topic! Thus we heard about an 'interesting' encounter with Fiona Bruce during an Antiques Roadshow episode; his duties as a soldier on great ceremonial occasions in London and the unearthing of an old photograph of Richard Dimbleby to pass on to his son, David Dimbleby, the equally famous television personality.

This was a wonderfully entertaining talk given by a large than life speaker who is surely a master of the art.

**OVERSLEY CASTLE:** Many will be aware of the controversy surrounding the impending demolition of the well-known and well-loved local land mark, Oversley Castle at Wixford.

At the time of writing it would appear that, as the building is not listed, the owner is entitled to demolish the building and has notified Stratford on Avon District Council of his intention to do so.

Our Chairman has made a written representation to the SDC planning committee and made comments which are available to view on-line on the SDC website, under 'Planning'.

**HERITAGE OPEN DAY:** This will take place on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September and at least three Alcester buildings will be open to the public including Alcester Roman Museum, St Nicholas Church and Church House in Butter Street.

The Society will again be mounting a display culled from our photo archive, on the upper floor at Church House where the bones of this ancient building can be clearly viewed. So do come along between 2.00pm and 5.00pm – and have a look round!

**NEXT MEETING:** Our next meeting on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> September will focus on **Selly Manor, Bournville**, a beautiful cruck framed building of the 14<sup>th</sup> century in the heart of Bournville village, and originally the Manor House of Bournbrook, near Birmingham. Speaker Gillian Ellis is Heritage Manager for Bournville Village Trust, a qualified museum curator and member of the Museums Association. Meetings are held at St Benedict's Sixth Form Centre, Kinwarton Road, Alcester and commence at 8.00pm. All are welcome.

**SUE FISHER**