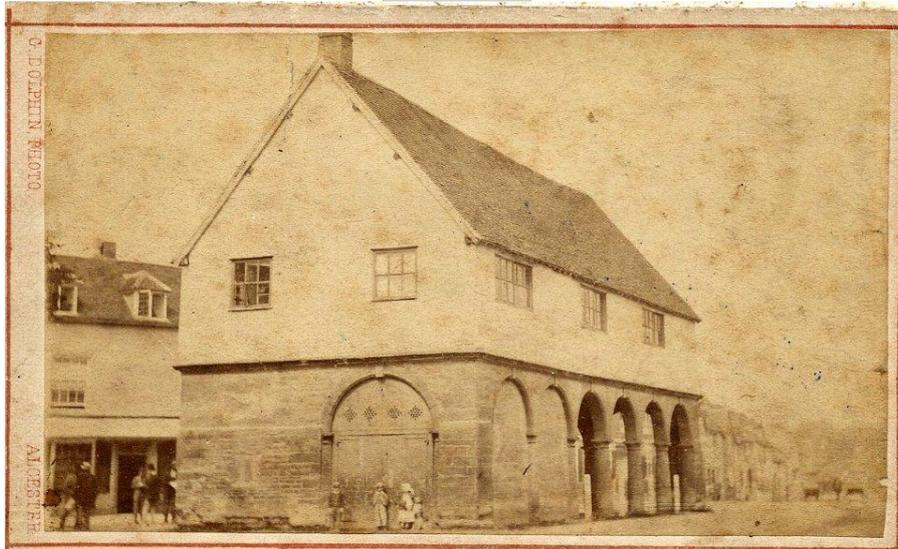


ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2018

www.alcesterhistory.org.uk



Alcester Town Hall
c1870 before the
gaps between the
columns were filled
in. The large doors
indicate where
Alcester's fire
engine was kept.
(ADLHS Collection)

AUGUST MEETING

The speakers at our last meeting were Jon Goodson and Vince Williams who told us the story of the “Idle Women”, one of the lesser-known branches of National Service for women during World War II. The women who chose to work on the inland waterways, in particular the Grand Union canal from London to Birmingham, found the work was extremely strenuous with its own language and way of life, so different to their own. Most of the girls were well educated, whereas the boat people were usually uneducated and often unable to read or write. Groups of friends were encouraged to join together. New recruits were given training to guide two boats (a motorised narrow boat towing a ‘butty’ boat), along the canal and through the locks. Hatton with its long flight of 21 locks was particularly daunting. One of the first lessons was that boats do not have a brake, but rely on reverse gear to slow down and stop (a difficult manoeuvre). After successful training the girls would receive a badge showing “I W National Service”, the initials which gave rise to the derisive: “idle women”. Each pair of boats would carry a crew of three girls. The 20 tons of cargo carried by each boat would comprise vehicle and aircraft parts, heavy equipment or armaments, produced in the midlands and carried to London to be distributed to where it was needed for the war effort. Private space on the boats was in short supply. A very efficient Epping stove produced heat in the cabin and for cooking and would burn all day with only a small amount of coal. The tiny cabin contained everything the girls needed. The toilet was a bucket, known as a ‘fill up and chuck it’. Compared to European canals, England’s canal system was narrow and winding, following the contours of the landscape. As such, it was considered by the Axis powers to be of little use to the British war effort and, as a result, suffered very little bombing by enemy aircraft. The “Idle Women” have never been officially recognised for their contribution to the war effort. This was a brilliant talk and presentation by our speakers.

PHOTO-SURVEY 2018

Our Photo-Survey 2018 has now concluded. If you have not already returned your memory stick, please return it to Steve Godfrey at the September meeting. If you need help to download your photos or need further assistance, contact Steve on 07773-293968.

FULKE GREVILLE FESTIVAL

The talented Elizabethan poet, dramatist and statesman, Sir Fulke Greville (1554-1628) was a native of Alcester and was responsible

for giving the town £300 to build a market hall in 1618. Now, in the Town Hall’s 400th anniversary year, this month there is a festival to celebrate his life and work. The Festival comprises a series of talks / lectures and walking tours:

28th September 7.30pm “The Life & Times of Sir Fulke Greville” - Alcester Town Hall £5 (Lecture)

29th September 10.00am-12.00pm “Fulke Greville’s Warwick” - Warwick Town Centre £15 (Walking tour)

29th September 3.00pm “Fulke Greville’s Poetry & Plays” - Alcester Town Hall £7 (Lecture)

29th September 7.30pm “Sonnets & Song – A Celebratory Concert & Recital” – Alcester Town Hall £10 (with wine & canapés)

30th September 10.00am “A Walking Tour of Beauchamp Court” – Beauchamp Court £5 (Walking tour)

30th September 2.00pm “Warwickshire’s Elizabethan & Jacobean Gardens” - Alcester Town Hall £5 (Lecture)

30th September 4.00pm “Politicians & Film Stars – the Other Fulke Grevilles” – Alcester Town Hall £5 (Lecture)

26th September 2.00-4.30pm “Fulke Greville’s London” – Holborn, London £15 (Walking tour)

If you would like to book any of these events or find out more, see the website: www.fulkefest.org.uk

HERITAGE OPEN DAY – SUNDAY 16th SEPTEMBER

Once again, the Society is taking part in the national Heritage Open Day programme. We will be putting on a display of photographs from our archive in Church House from 12.30 to 4.00pm. In addition, there is to be a display by Maureen Harris on Civil War Alcester, also in Church House. Other locations in the town taking part are: Alcester Town Hall, St Nicholas Church and Alcester Heritage Centre.

NEXT MEETING: Our next talk will be on **Wednesday 12th September** the speaker for the evening is Graham Sutherland. His subject is “**Warwickshire Crime and Criminals**”. Meetings are held at St Benedict’s RC High School Sixth Form Centre and commence at 8.00pm. All are welcome to attend.

Alan Godfrey

(alandgodfrey@hotmail.com)