
COLWALL VILLAGE SOCIETY

Newsletter

January 2004

New history booklets complete

“W James, Builders and Contractors 1889-1977” by Ann Sealy is the latest in the Society’s series of booklets on local history topics. It is an absorbing account of the firm founded and run by Ann’s grandfather and father. The business carried out a wide variety of building projects, locally and farther afield, including individual houses, swimming pools, hard tennis courts (surfaced with Malvern Hills crushed grit, ideal for the purpose), the ‘Aunt Alice’ clock tower and the Humphry Walwyn Library. Their craftsmanship was so good that the architect Troyte Griffith recommended the firm to his clients in Colwall and Malvern. It was employed by the National Trust for the repair of the timber-framed 14-15th century gatehouse and manor at Brockhampton using traditional methods, and constructed a linear accelerator tunnel with three-foot thick concrete walls for the radar scientists in Malvern during the war.

As well as recording building works, the booklet gives a lively description of members of the James family and the many people who were employed by and associated with the family and firm.

The Society is grateful to Ann and Robert Sealy for their enthusiasm in researching, writing and producing this illustrated, computer-printed booklet. It gives a wealth of information for everyone interested in the people and buildings of Colwall in the early 20th century.

Tom Marsh’s research into parts of Upper Colwall continues with three booklets describing Beacon Road, West Malvern Road and the West Malvern industrial complex – the surroundings of the former Royal Well Brewery. Next to come will be further research on the Upper Colwall Trust, which was established at the time of the so-called ‘Battle of Beacon Road’ in 1969.

Copies of all the new booklets will shortly be available for reference in the library and the Millennium Room archive.

**Next meeting – Monday 19 January
at 7.30 pm in the Village Hall**

Archaeology of woodland in the Malvern Hills

In 1998 English Heritage initiated an archaeological survey of the Malvern Hills AONB, to produce a series of new maps of archaeological features. A part of the project is a ground-based survey of woodland, which of course is not susceptible to mapping from the air.

The guest speaker at our next open meeting will be Tim Hoverd, Archaeological Projects Officer for Herefordshire Archaeology who is a major contributor to the woodland survey and will be telling us about some of the remarkable results obtained.

Refreshments will be served, and there will be an update on the Society’s activities. Do come and bring your friends. Everyone is welcome.

Irene Southall

We record with regret the death of Irene Southall in October 2003. Irene was a founder member of the Society and a regular contributor to the newsletter, most recently with the series ‘Rock Bottom’ describing the geology of the Hills.

Irene had an active interest and extensive knowledge of the local area. She served with distinction for 46 years on the Board of the Malvern Hills Conservators, and was Hon. Secretary of its Archaeological Committee 1965-1970 which oversaw the excavations on Midsummer Hill by Birmingham University. She will be greatly missed.

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*How many miles to Babylon? – Threescore and ten
Can I get there by candlelight? – Aye, and back again!*

Someone wrote this verse 200 years ago. Going back still further, our statute mile was organised maybe 400 years ago, when Elizabeth I was Queen: '8 furlongs of 40 perches of 16½ feet each' (1760 yards, to you and me). So milestones came into being. These days, we have come to expect a different type of information about distances. Our lust for speed calls for the familiar big placards on main roads and motorways.

What's all this got to do with Colwall? Sometimes the building of a by-pass or 'road improvement' has reduced an old main road to a more lowly status, even if it might have been originally Roman. Sometimes the milestones remain, often forgotten. Have you ever wondered who takes care of them? Another fact: turnpikes and toll houses were an essential part of the transport scene in Malvern and Colwall, as well as elsewhere, but finally, that system was abandoned in late Victorian times. One of these toll houses still exists near British Camp, the house which has famously been painted yellow. Nearby is a massive stone milestone of uncertain antiquity but belonging to the coaching age, certainly.

We have a problem. There is a milestone society nationally, organised by counties: (www.milestone.society.co.uk). We have been told that Herefordshire has no representation at all – perhaps people are simply unaware. There is certainly neglect of these formerly essential roadside items and we know of two in Colwall that need to be restored. Whereabouts are they? Ah, that's another question.

Why bother? In our time, with advancing technology and super-accurate measurements – including GPS – we don't need milestones any more. But milestones are still a valuable part of our history. An opportunity for volunteer(s) to organise and help with a Herefordshire Milestone Group?

Michael Burke

Colwall Parish Council archives

The Society has been given the chance to look at Colwall Parish Council documents dating from 1950 onwards before they are deposited in the Herefordshire

Record Office. They are known to cover topics such as the Aunt Alice clock and the Village Hall, and may include other specific information. If you have a particular research interest or would like to be part of this activity please contact Susan Bond on [REDACTED].

Mistletoe in Colwall

In nearly every month of the year the calendar of the Herefordshire Nature Trust asks for a survey of some aspect of wildlife. December's subject is mistletoe – an interesting plant and we are right in the middle of its best territory, the border country. Thus inspired, I set out to have a look. Colwall has a fine collection of plants, deriving no doubt from the many orchards we used to have. The best group I have come across is in the orchard between Mathon Road and Stamps Cottage where there are over 300 plants growing, with isolated plants on lime, apple and pear in the vicinity.

Growing without roots, in the high branches of trees and green when other trees have lost their leaves, it is easy to understand how people in old times thought mistletoe had magical properties. Mistletoe is semi-parasitic but probably not very debilitating to its host tree. It is spread by birds. With most berries, birds spit out the seeds, but mistletoe berries have a sticky pulp so the seeds stick to their beaks and the only way they can be removed is by rubbing against a branch – just what the mistletoe wants. This seems to mean that the seed is not spread very far, but a group of plants gradually expands where there are suitable host trees.

In Colwall, mistletoe is found mainly on apple and lime. There are groups along Brockhill Road, probably spreading from the old orchard at the end of Cowl Barn lane, on Mill Lane down by the church and on Walwyn Road by Martin's Orchard. Here there is just one old apple tree now, with 8 or 9 plants on it, but there are about 40 on the limes nearby. It must be over 40 years since there was an orchard here, so the mistletoe is acting as a sort of ghostly reminder of what used to be. *Chris Sennett*

Bird survey group

The next meeting of the group is on **12 February** at **7.30 pm** in the **Village Hall** with a talk by Terry Wall, a naturalist and wildlife photographer. New members and visitors are welcome. Members of the group continue to note the birds seen in their gardens and surroundings; the results are collated periodically and sent to the Herefordshire Ornithological Club. The group's newsletter will be out soon.