
COLWALL VILLAGE SOCIETY

Newsletter

September 2004

The Germans have landed!

If you had been motoring from Suckley to Knightwick 64 years ago you would have found a body lying in the road just opposite Suckley station. It was wearing a long leather motoring coat, 1900 vintage, goggles and strapped on its back a 12-bore Purdey shotgun. That body was me. In 1940 I had joined the Knightwick platoon of the LDV (Local Defence Volunteers) commanded by Dr Clark who lived at Knightsford Bridge. I owned a 350cc New Imperial motor bike so I was made platoon despatch rider. If the Germans landed, my job was to distribute ammunition round the members of the platoon – shot gun cartridges, as I think we did not own a single rifle. We had no uniforms, only an LDV armband.

Early one morning Dr Clark telephoned to say that German parachutists had landed near Birmingham and I was told to distribute ammunition immediately. At first the bike would not start and then I failed to negotiate the bend by Suckley station. I went over the ditch through the hedge and back into the road. I heard a car approach, slow down and then accelerate away. I was told afterwards that it was a local farmer, who thought I was a German parachutist.

The LDV's job was to guard the river crossing at Knightsford Bridge and to keep watch over the countryside from a view point three-quarters of the way up Ankerdine Hill. The view of Worcestershire was magnificent. Guard duty was in pairs, two hours on and four hours off. We had a hut beside the road where we rested when off duty. I remember Capt. Twinberrow coming to inspect us during the night. The whole guard was turned out – whether we sloped arms with our shotguns, history does not relate! On another occasion Mr. Jack Clift turned up to inspect us.

At weekends parades were held usually beside the river Teme on the lawn outside Dr. Clark's house. We were taught to construct Molotov cocktails (bottles full of liquid tar and petrol with a fuse in

the neck of the bottle). We practised hurling the bottles at an old water tank in the middle of the river.

At this time I had a second LDV appointment. Lord Sandys, Colonel Wiggin and Major Taylor ran the Worcester LDV office in Silver Street. Lord Sandys was tremendously enthusiastic and his favourite expressions were 'when the balloon goes up' and 'when the party starts'. He instructed me to practice finding my way in the blackout to the various LDV headquarters in North Worcestershire. All signposts had been removed. I would leave Suckley as soon as it was dark and report to each HQ. I would get home about 4 a.m.

That was almost the end of my LDV career, for soon afterwards I was called up and eventually sent to North Africa. There the Germans really had landed.

R.A.H. Lechmere

Next meeting – Monday 27 September
at 7.30 pm in the Village Hall

We are very pleased to have Joe Hillaby to talk to us about St Katharines Hospital, Ledbury, in the middle ages. Mr Hillaby is a well known author and expert on local history and he is sure to give us an insight into a fascinating building at a fascinating time.

Refreshments afterwards. Do come.

Colwall Bird Survey Group

The Group is thriving and the Group's latest newsletter includes the results of the observations made in Colwall by members and news of interesting events, notably the open meeting (2nd Sept.) which included a splendid talk. Members of the Group and those who wish to join – please note the AGM which will take place on October 7th at 7.30 pm in the Village Hall, when a talk will be given by Brian Draper about 'Wildlife in the City'. The Bird Survey Group always welcomes new members.

History of an Upper Colwall cottage

One Saturday morning back in the summer, the Village Society's honorary secretary, Lis Kirkness, received a phone call with the offer of a collection of legal documents relating to the history of a cottage near the Wyche, Upper Colwall. The documents went back to the early 1800's. For the most part they deal with the raising of loans against the freehold of the property, and are either mortgages or indentures. An indenture is more often used today to designate an apprenticeship or, possibly, a specified period of service abroad, but these were bonds through which money was loaned at a certain percentage of interest. Three of these are impressively framed and display the "indentured" edge of the document which joined it to the paper given to the other party in the deal. When they were drawn up, they were joined and it was easy to check that the terms were identical for both lender and borrower.

For nearly 100 years – until 1914 – the name that occurs in all the documents is Rodway, hence the name of the road – Rodways Bank or Pitch. Among other names in the documents, however, are Stephen Ballard and Fred Ballard, both described as 'gentlemen of Colwall in the county of Hereford'.

Of enormous assistance in making one's way through the story of the cottage is a family tree of the Rodway family. It starts with a William Rodway and Elizabeth Redin being married at Bromsberrow on 2nd February 1704 and gives nine generations up to the birth of a baby girl in Worcester in 1990.

There is an interesting array of local solicitors involved in the various legal transactions, including the Masefields of Ledbury – the family that produced a poet laureate. Conveyances of the property when it changed hands, especially during the late 20th century, indicate the leap in property prices. Something over 30 years ago, the right to make a tarmac road was purchased from the Malvern Hills Conservators, and a statutory declaration was obtained from an old lady then living in Brighton that there had been vehicular access to the property for over 40 years.

The future home for these documents will be discussed with the Hereford Record Office, with the intention of making originals or copies available in the Millennium Room Archive.

Update on Milestones

In a previous newsletter, we noted the presence of "forgotten" milestones within the Colwall boundary. It can now be revealed (to utter a popular cliché) that one of these at least has been reset alongside the highway. We believe that this stone was located originally on an ancient part of the highroad. Part of this, West of the Malvern Hills, is now a by-way following the construction years ago of a new improved road and presumably this milestone was relocated at that time. It was recently found, half buried and collapsed in the verge. Thanks are due to Susan Keene who drew attention to the stone, to Colwall Parish Council for follow-up and to Mr Carless in particular who himself saw to the resetting of it.

Those among our members who read "Historic Environment Today" will have seen the report, in April 2004, that the Herefordshire Branch of the Milestone Society has now been launched. Tony Boyce has taken on the task of Co-ordinator, in addition to his role as national publicity officer of the Milestone Society. If you would like to join, or need more information, why not contact Tony Boyce [REDACTED], or ask a member of the CVS Committee.

News from Dr Birkett

Ray Birkett writes from Thurlestone, Kingsbridge:

"We have settled in this part of the world and can't believe it is a year since we left Colwall! We have a pleasant bungalow with country and sea views across the golf course.

Bea is not able to get about too well, but we have a lovely outlook and our son, Andrew, and his wife and family are near, so we see them and the children often.

Please pass on our good wishes to all our friends in the Society – we have so many happy memories."
