
COLWALL VILLAGE SOCIETY

Newsletter

January 2007

Hear about the history of the Elms School

at our next meeting on **Monday 15 January**
at **7.30 pm in the Village Hall**

Historian Pamela Hurle returns to the Village Society for the next open meeting to talk about the Elms School, Colwall – an institution with a surprising history and the subject of her recent book.

It was in 1973 that Mrs Hurle published, privately, her first book. It was on the village of Welland where she then lived. Five years later came her history of Hanley Castle, and in 1979, 'Upton, Portrait of a Severnside Town'.

Many believe her outstanding book to be 'The Malvern Hills – A Hundred Years of Conservation'. This is both a general history of the ridge that forms a symbolic barrier between Herefordshire and Worcestershire, and the first detailed account of the work of the Conservators since their creation by Act of Parliament in 1884.

Her talk on the 15th will undoubtedly be full of interest. Admission for members is free, guests £2. There will be refreshments afterwards.

Did you know ...

... there is a memory of a Goose Pen near the British Camp Hotel.

... the first honorary librarian of Colwall Free Library was Mrs Challinor, the wife of the local doctor. The library was set up in 1898 by the Parish Council under the Chairmanship of Fred Ballard. It was opened in spring 1899 by John Percival, Bishop of Hereford.

Source: Millennium Room Archive copy of 'Rural Library Provision in Herefordshire: the early twentieth century' John C Crawford, Library Review Winter 1985.

Dates for your diary

Saturday 17 March

Village Spring Clean.

Meet 9.30 opposite the Stone

Monday 23 April

AGM, followed by talk on

Coddington Vineyard

7.30 pm in the Village Hall.

Malvern and Abberley Hills Geopark – Trail Guide

You may remember that the Geopark was mentioned by John Payne during our open meeting on the geology of the Malvern Hills almost a year ago – you may even have picked up a leaflet about it. The Geopark is an area that has been designated with a geological heritage of international significance. This geopark stretches from Bridgenorth to Gloucester, from the River Severn westwards for about ten miles to include Bromyard and Ledbury. Hence Colwall lies right at the centre.

Just starting is a project to create a trail guide for a new long distance trail over the whole length of the park, with route maps and interpretations on how the geology has created the landscape and how it has influenced land use and history. Colwall as a parish covers a very wide range of geology and associated land use with quarries, wooded ridges and farmland, not to mention the water!

We as locals have been invited, indeed encouraged, to contribute to the production of this guide in many different ways. We could suggest a route which would take in many of the most interesting sites, or check out the conditions of individual footpaths and bridle paths. The Purlieu seems to be high up the list of places to be included. Do you have any local history knowledge that should be included be it social, industrial or natural? If you have any ideas on these things and would like to get involved come and speak to me at the January meeting or [REDACTED] and I will ask the project manager or community Liaison Officer to come and visit us to get us started.

Deb Turnbull

OLD COURT NURSERIES, Colwall – Two families, three generations
by Paul Picton

Ernest Ballard was born in 1871, the youngest son of Stephen Ballard of The Winnings, Colwall. In December 1899 he married Ella de Quincy, at London. They made their home at The Court, Colwall (later to be called Old Court). The early years of Ernest's working life were concerned with the family fruit growing and cider vinegar production business.

Throughout his life Ernest had a deep interest in all things natural and, by 1900, was a knowledgeable amateur botanist and gardener. Among many other good plants the garden at The Court contained drifts of Michaelmas Daisies in all the pale shades of colour available in early Edwardian times. Ballard saw the potential for creating much more variety in colour, height and shapes of the flowering sprays and soon had lots of seedling plants growing in his vegetable garden. In 1905 he was able to buy the land opposite The Court, on the West side of what is now called Walwyn Road. In the spring of 1906 the central area of the new land had been cleared, ploughed and planted up with several thousand young Michaelmas Daisy plants. From these, promising improvements were looked for with a skilled eye, in September and October. Mr. Ballard's Michaelmas Daisy nursery was in operation. But, it was not a commercial nursery in the early years. Before the start of the First World War, the demand for traditional cider vinegar had collapsed in favour of the acetic variety and the Ballard business was sold in 1914. It was around this period that Ernest decided to become a commercial nurseryman and 'Ernest Ballard's New Asters or Michaelmas Daisies' soon became famous in the horticultural world because of the remarkable results he was achieving by his patient selection of seedlings. The onset of World War Two prompted Ernest and his family to set up a limited company called Old Court Nurseries and this is the name still carried by the nursery, growing Asters on the same piece of land.

Over the years some additional fields had been purchased for the purpose of growing the vast amount of seedling Asters raised by Ernest Ballard: these fields were known as Nabob, Masons and Bakers. Many of them were turned to food production in the war years and the main nursery suffered through lack of workmen. By 1948 Ballard was nearing 80 years old and felt unable to cope with the task of re-generating the nursery business after the years of decline. He employed Percy Picton as nursery manager with the remit to get the business back on its feet. Within three years the place was looking ship shape and the production of Michaelmas Daisies was greatly above that achieved even in the heyday of the 1930's. In common with his employer, Picton had immense interest in growing plants of all sorts.

Ernest Ballard died in 1952 and his widowed second wife, Marie, ran the business for a short time before selling it to Percy Picton in 1956. In the late 1960's interest in Michaelmas Daisies suddenly became non-existent and the business only survived by doing landscape gardening and diversifying into a wide range of unusual hardy plants. This more general plant production continued until the early 1980's when Percy Picton's son, Paul, assumed the reins with the help of his wife Meriel.

Paul and Meriel Picton decided to bring back the Michaelmas Daisies and an NCCPG National Collection was established in part of the nursery which had become the Picton Garden. Percy died in 1984 and the garden was named to commemorate him and grow some of the many lovely plants he had collected over the years. The Picton Garden at Old Court Nurseries is open each autumn for the National Gardens Scheme and has become very well known through television, magazine and newspaper features. Paul Picton has written "The Gardeners Guide to Growing Asters" as well as numerous articles for magazines and the Aster sections in plant encyclopedias. Old Court Nurseries now grow such a wide range of Asters that they have returned to their original status of occupying at least 90% of the production of the business.

Contributions, corrections and additions to the information in newsletters are always welcome.

Newsletter editor: Susan Bond, [REDACTED] or c/o Colwall Library
