

Mrs. Doreen Agutter. B.A.
"Rodwell"
263 Station Road
BALSALL COMMON
Coventry
CV7 7EG

Tel: 0676.33378

April 23rd 1991

Dear Mr Sidwell,

Thank you for your order. I hope you will enjoy reading something about Meriden's past, though Alsopth Hall will be written up for Part II, currently being compiled. I have a selection of interesting facts about it including the unlawful felling of trees on the premises in 1520's & the rent in the era 1613-39 (varying from 2/- to 4/- a year!); in fact details up to 1920.

I assume you must have lived at the farm after the Dale family left & purchased 'Village Farm'. I enclose SAC in case you would like to tell me something about it in your day were the Hollicks there at the time? I suppose you haven't any photographs of it have you suitable for reproduction? Philip Dale the son of the earlier tenants is still alive & also lives in Worcs

I know Sidwell is a 'local' name, the main area for it in previous times being Foleshill / Exhall etc, but we also had the well-known Sidwell family in the village who kept the Post Office, at that time an old stone building on the main

Holyhead (B'ham to Coventry) Rd. The Sidwells were famous
photographers in their day & have been collecting their
post cards of T. i. den - neighbouring villages. Maybe you were
related to them as well?

I do hope you'll be willing to correspond.

Yours sincerely, Doreen Agutter (Mrs)

BREDON SPRINGS,
PARIS,
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Mrs Doreen Agutter
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26 April 1991

Dear Mrs Agutter

Thank you for sending your delightful book so promptly and also for the most interesting letter. This raises so many points that I had better take them in turn. First about myself.

As you say Foleshill was the main home of the Sidwells. I was born in Foleshill. My paternal grandfather came from Arbury but moved to Foleshill and became foreman at Bretts Stamping, a drop forging firm of repute.

I was born in 1909 and early in the First War my father, with a flair for the ostentatious, exchanged 182 Broad Street for Alton Hall, Allesley. We shared this house with Gutteridges who were tenant farmers. Shortly after the end of the war Gutteridges retired to South Devon and that was when we moved to Alspath Hall to live with the Hollicks. My father, you will note, still had his eye on an impressive address although we had little else.

I studied botany and went into horticulture. I have been a college lecturer in horticultural botany and a private consultant for most of my working life, retiring three years ago.

I have no known relationship with any other Sidwells other than a nephew in New Zealand. Doubtless a few generations back there would be a connection.

You ask about photographs. My elder brother, who died a few months ago, did quite a lot of photography and his son, my aforementioned nephew, has at least one photo of Alspath Hall among a lot of stuff which he showed me when he was up here for the funeral. I will write to him and see what he can find.

My memories of Alspath Hall are wholly botanical or apertaining to wild life. The field behind the house had huge areas of wild daffodils which visitors picked for six pence a bunch and masses of meadow saxifrage and green winged orchid. Tom Hollick was very proud of the field. He considered that it had not been ploughed for several centuries at least. He took care to take a late hay crop and do the least to damage the plants. In this he was half a century ahead of his time. I wonder what it is like today. The bottom pool always had two pairs of coots and one pair each of dabchick and mallard as well as occasional visits from swans. The large marsh area at the pool entrance contained many uncommon plants and the nearby arable field had its visiting pair of corncrakes every year.

Still on the subject of the Hollicks, their son, Alfred, a few years younger than I am is, I think, a historian. I have not had any contact with the family for over fifty years. Have you?

I no longer drive a car which means that I am unlikely to see the Meriden area again but if you are in this district I would be pleased to meet you. We have a wild garden which is open to the public under the National

Gardens Scheme to help the nurses. I live alone with my dog and still hope

to get two more books finished before I cease to operate my word processor.

Do let me know if there are any points you think I can help with.

Yours sincerely,

Ron Sidwell

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30th May 1991

P7

Dear Mr Sidwell,

Thank you so much for finding time to answer my letter in such detail. I found many aspects of your letter quite fascinating, especially the wonderful description of the meadow, which I undoubtedly was.

My apologies for having your letter a month already. I am normally a prompt correspondent, but may have mentioned that I am nursing both my elderly parents, one with stroke paralysis, the other with serious heart complaint which is quite time-consuming for a person herself with a degree of physical handicap. Also, I wanted to ask about the meadow before replying.

I went to see a friend who has just resigned the chair of the parish council visited her husband (born in the village in 1921) if he could remember. As it happened, strange coincidence, they saw Mrs Faulconbridge the farmer's wife at Aspath Hall now only 2 days later & related what I'd said. In reply she told them that the previous week, 2 elderly ladies had called at the farm asking if there were any wild flowers now for sale in the meadow as they used to buy daffodils! Grace & her. My friends say that the

fields were ploughed up in 1940 & they are sure the meadow suffered this fate (war time food production). I know where there still are 3 fields of wild daffodils at Kinwasey & some wild violets, primroses & snowdrops, but in my life time have never seen any orchid. What a tragedy.

Last weekend we had a flower festival at the Church. My husband & I did a couple of hours stewarding & one of my childhood friends turned up by chance at that point. She like me as a young child lived on the Hampton side of the Parish, but she said there was a similar wild flower patch near their cottage which she recalled being ploughed up when the farmer sold his shares about 1955.

I often wonder, despite the grim, disease & dirt humans create, what beauties of nature say Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims could view & indeed Michael Drayton & Wm Shakespeare in Warwickshire. We have lost a lot in my own life time. There were beautiful Kingfishers & others in the Blythe when I was small (<1950). I used to paddle & swim with the others! and took it all for granted.

I enclose a piece of OS map for the Abpath Hall section of the village (1886). I wonder if your memory would enable you to ^{mark} ~~note~~ the exact meadow(s)? At present I am writing up all the known Medieval deeds & trying to reconstitute the village in the Middle Ages. The field names are known from late 15th & some deeds give alternative names. Several of the Abpath Hall fields were named after medieval farmers. In the book I did mention 'Honest Jordan' corruption of Annis (Agnes) Jordan's field. There is also one after the Falke family who farmed in early 1200's! & "Agnes Perkyne" as yet not placed or dated.

We have a friend called David Hollick who is a keen genealogist. He has a record of 100's (1000's probably) of "Hollicks" on computer, so I asked him if he could trace any of Tom's family. Tom had the farm until the late 1930's by the way. He said he died in Coventry (1979).

but had no record of marriage or death for 'Alf'. I will try to find out as he could have been a war casualty. If not, unless he emigrated, he ought to be alive, though 80th I assume.

Tom Hollich married one of the Pounton family from Holyberry End and I shall be visiting the contemporary Pountons soon to discuss their house & its history. I need to do the same at Aspath Hall too, so more information may turn up. I will let you know.

If we have a chance to visit your area I would be most interested to see your wild life garden. Though 'City educated,' I am really in background inclination a Country woman & would include in my interests a considerable interest in birds & wild flowers, though no deep expertise. Thank you for saying we might visit. We should not come without warning though.

You mention Millicent's Wood. Yes, it has a variety of earlier spellings 'Myllysens', 'Millisons' etc. It is a corruption of the name 'Millicent', though whether someone's Christian name or surname is not clear. There are early 16th references. I constantly seek to 'push back' into earlier times to locate origins. You may recall the "Shatts" near Aspath Hall. The name means 'Sprigs' & I have now found it called "Shattes or Springe Wood" in early documents dating to the First Elizabethan area.

I shall look forward to hearing from you when your time allows.

Good wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Doreen Agutter.

Mrs Doreen Agutter

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CV7 7EC

2nd June 1991

Dear Mrs Agutter,

Thank you for your letter of 30th May. I have read its contents with interest. Please accept my sympathies with your domestic problems. I represent the other side of the story. I live alone with the early stages of Parkinson's disease. At the present time I can cope with all the necessary jobs but I am increasingly aware that I will become a burden to somebody eventually. My next door neighbour is a dear and keeps a watchful eye on my activities !

I have marked your map as follows:-

-  Main daffodil area
-  Other rare wildflowers
-  Bottom or lower pool
-  Front pool
-  Site of small periwinkle and two golden saxifrages
-  Site of Mr Pointon's smallholding
-  Site of Mr Pointon's retirement bungalow.

Notes on above.

The mediaeval meadow. I had expected to hear that this was ploughed up as a war time effort at food production. The south corner could easily have been left without much loss.

Incidentally I was, myself, a War Agricultural Committee Officer but as a horticulturalist I was concerned only with fruit and vegetable production in the intensive market gardening area of the Vale of Evesham where all the land had been under cultivation for 50 to 250 years.

The pools. These were both shallow but supported a wide range of bird and plant life.

The stream after leaving the lower pool passed through a somewhat overgrown area and here were found lesser periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) and the two golden saxifrages (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and *C. alternifolium*). The latter and the periwinkle were quite uncommon in the district.

Mr Pointon. As you say Tom Hollick married a Miss Pointon. Her parents had a smallholding close to that marked Oak Cottage. It could, indeed, have been Oak Cottage. Mrs Hollick always referred to it as Pickford, not

Harvest Hill. She was, to the best of my knowledge, an only child. I cannot

recall the existence of brothers or sisters. Her parents eventually retired to a bungalow at the corner of Showell Lane. Mr Pointon was a grand old character with ample beard and a metal hook in place of a lost forearm.

In addition to Alfred (always abbreviated to Fred) the Hollicks had a daughter Mary, a couple of years older than I was.

I believe the above to be substantially correct but allowance must be made for the wandering memories of an old man !

A few other items occur to me. We were always puzzled by the moat in Showell Lane. Its small size, its excellent state of preservation and the absence of buildings all make it rather a mystery.

In our day we always approached Alspath Hall through the foredrift almost opposite Millison's Wood. The Showell Lane entrance was rarely used. The bypass, of course, has cut this off now.

If I can help with any other items I will be pleased to have a try, digging into recesses of an ageing brain.

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Ron Sidwell

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6 January 1992

Dear Mrs Agutter,

Thank you very much for your letter of 3 January. It is good to hear from you again. I too have a habit of allowing correspondence to build up. I often write letters in my head and deal with them so thoroughly that I can convince myself that they have been done only to find some weeks later that I have no copy and they were dealt with in my imagination only. I now do everything on word processor and all letters are on floppy disc. As my handwriting gets worse and my typing gets better this arrangement seems a good one.

I am sorry to hear that your domestic problems get no easier. My Parkinson trouble is only a slight inconvenience at the moment, in fact I am more than pleased with my progress.

You are welcome to quote from my letters on the subject of Alspath Hall. I hope you will include my complimentary reference to Tom Hollick. He was very attached to his farm and proud of the mediaeval meadow.

The marsh at the entrance to the lower pool contained numerous interesting plants which I have not listed hitherto. I think the following might be mentioned, *Veronica scutellata*, *V. anagallis-aquatica*, *Oenanthe fistulosa*. On the nearby drier banks the two St Johns Worts were to be found, *Hypericum humifusum* and *H. pulchrum*.

I am writing to my nephew in New Zealand on the subject of photographs.

You mention the Wormington brothers. I did not know them. In fact I knew few Meriden people. My contacts were on the Allesley side. I went to school in Allesley and worked there for six years afterwards. I knew the people and the village inside-out.

Your Mr Elvis sounds an interesting man. I did not see woad in the area in my time but I was not so familiar with the Eaves Green side. Woad was originally an escape from cultivation and is rarely found far from old settlements. Incidentally I have plenty of it in my garden. One interesting plant of the Shafts was the wood horsetail, *Equisetum sylvaticum*. This is common to the north and west but not at all common in Warwickshire.

I look forward to the publication of the book.

Yours sincerely,

Ron Sidwell