



# HANLEY MATTERS

the newsletter of  
The Hanleys' Village Society

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## FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

### 27 March 2009

Talk by Andrew Smith  
on Railways of  
Worcestershire.  
Village Hall, 7.30 pm.

### 20 June 2009

Local History Open  
Day.  
Village Hall, 10 am - 5  
pm.

### 18 September 2009

AGM & Talk by Becky  
Lashley on Ancient  
Trees.

## THE COMMANDERY

At the Society's November meeting, Worcester city heritage manager Amanda Lunt gave a polished talk about that fascinating building in Worcester known as The Commandery. Said to have been founded in the 11th century by Bishop Wulfstan as a hospital just outside the city's Sidbury gate, it was built on the site of a Saxon chapel. After Wulfstan was canonised in 1203, it provided a place of refuge for pilgrims arriving too late to be admitted to the city. Around 1350 it acquired its present name, although no one knows why, but possibly to do with the Knights Templar who met in commanderies.

The earliest story connected to the building concerns one Thomas of Eldersfield who, in 1221 following an affair with a married woman, was forced to fight a judicial duel with her husband and lost. Sentenced to be blinded and castrated, he was left bleeding on the ground, but was rescued by a lay sister who brought him to the hospital where, legend has it, he prayed to St Wulfstan and was restored to health.

The Commandery was rebuilt over the period 1460-80, but in 1540 it suffered the fate of other monastic institutions dissolved by Henry VIII and was sold, as it happens, to the inspector of monasteries. He made a fortune selling the building and its extensive lands of about 30 acres, extending as far as Whittington, to a wealthy cloth merchant, Thomas Wylde. Thomas's son Robert, a sometime mayor of Worcester with a reputation as a miser, died in 1607, leaving a full inventory of everything in every room.

During the Civil War, the building served as HQ for the 21-year-old future Charles II and his chief of staff, William, Duke of Hamilton. The Duke brought 15,000 Scots with him, 3000 of whom were highlanders speaking only Gaelic. They were billeted in households throughout the city and were regarded as a foreign invading army by the inhabitants. At the Battle of Worcester, Hamilton was wounded, but refused the attention of a Parliamentary surgeon, later dying of gangrene. Before he died, he wrote his wife a tender letter, which still exists in the archives of The Commandery.

In the 18th century the Wylde family sold up to John Dandridge, who turned the outbuildings into workshops. Of his seven children, only two survived to adulthood and their descendants live today in Tasmania.

In due course, The Commandery came into the hands of the Reverends Blair and Forster, who established a college for blind boys, the first time children with a disability had been provided with an education. By 1881, 17 boys at the college had gone on to university.

From 1905 until 1973 the building housed Littlebury's printing business, after which it was bought by Worcester City Council.

Following a £1.5 m refurbishment with the help of Heritage Lottery money, The Commandery now provides a fascinating window on the history of Worcester told by means of an audio guide covering six key periods: the monastic hospital in 1480, the Wylde family in 1550, the Battle of Worcester in 1651, the 1800 makeover, the College for the Blind in 1888 and Littlebury's print works post-1945.

## MILESTONES

Milestones might have been rather a dry subject for a talk, but Terry Keegan kept members entertained with a fund of stories about these familiar but little known markers.

It was the Romans who first began putting up milestones in Britain, their mile being *mille passum*, or a thousand paces - roughly 1600 yards.

The length of a mile was not standardised at 1760 yards until 1595, although the Scots and Irish continued to use their own measure. Confusing the number of pounds in a ton with yards in a mile, the Irish insisted that a mile was 2240 yards long and only fell into line with England in 1824. But their stones continued to show Irish miles until the 1860s.

Even today the Irish have their own idea of distance. Terry told a story about holidaying in Ireland and looking at a fingerpost that was marked in km. When he asked what that stood for, he was told charmingly that it was "a kinda mile".

In 1663 the turnpike system was introduced, but it was not until the 1700s that Turnpike Trusts began to improve road conditions. By the end of the century there were over 1000 turnpikes in the country, each on average responsible for 23 miles of road.

In 1767 the installation of milestones became mandatory and the early ones resembled miniature gravestones. But these stones soon weathered and by the early 19th century cast iron plates were being fixed to illegible stones. It was not long before markers were made entirely of cast iron.

The coming of the railways marked the beginning of the end of turnpikes and in 1888 the county councils were made responsible for maintaining the roads.

Traditionally, milestones were looked after by the lengthsmen of the parish, who gave them a regular limewash treatment. After World War II, milestone markers were gradually abandoned.

Terry Keegan developed an interest in them and founded the Milestone Society in 2000. It works to restore missing markers, using the 1890 OS map which identified them all. The Worcestershire group's next project is to renew the stones from Worcester to the Gloucestershire boundary at Eldersfield, including one near Hanley Castle post office.



*Milestone in Roberts End*

## THE COMMONERS OF HANLEY

The Society has acquired an interesting document that identifies exactly what rights villagers used to have to an area of land known as Hanley Common that, until 1815, existed behind the pond in Hanley Swan.

Since the disafforestation of Malvern chase in 1629, the rights of commoners to pasture their animals and collect windfall wood [eastovers] on common land had been disputed by the larger landowners in the area, particularly the Hornyolds and the Lechmeres, who wanted to enlarge their estates for greater farming efficiency.

These landowners were responsible for pushing through the Enclosure Act of 1795, whereby Hanley Castle became the first parish in the chase to be enclosed. But an area of almost 99 acres was retained as common land.

The Act gave every owner of a cottage with an annual rental value of less than £5 per annum a piece of this land of between 2 and 4 acres.

Sixty-three cottages qualified and the occupiers were entitled to put out to pasture a specific number of animals, namely:

- \* 1 cow or 2 yearling beasts, or
- \* 1 yearling beast and 3 sheep, or
- \* 1 2-year-old and 2 sheep, or
- \* 6 sheep with lambs, which after 1 August were deemed to be sheep, or

- \* 9 sheep until 1 November

In 1815 Thomas Charles Hornyold, keen to add this common land to his estate on which it bordered, paid for an amendment to the Enclosure Act. Introduced ostensibly to clarify whether the soil of the land belonged to the owners or occupiers of the cottages, the Act decreed that it belonged to the owners, who were, of course, entitled to sell or exchange it, which they had already agreed to do to ...Thomas Charles Hornyold.

And so the last area of common land in the Hanleys passed into private ownership. The 22-page Amendment Act, published in 1817, has now been added to the Society's archives and is available for inspection.

## YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU

Volunteers are needed to help with several projects, starting with one to photograph every property in the parish marked on the OS map of 1883. There are about 300 of them, but that works out at only half a dozen photos each, if half the membership helps.

Digital or film, it does not matter what sort of camera you have.

Emma Hancox of the county Historic Environment Service will talk to all volunteers about what is involved at a meeting at Pyndar Lodge, Roberts End, Hanley Swan, on Friday, March 13 at 11am. Please let me know if you can come or, if not, whether you would would like to help.

*Malcolm Fare*