

A Visit to Aldford, England

Sign at the entrance to Aldford, England.



Landon Alford in front of the remains of the castle at Holt, where Alford lived at one time.



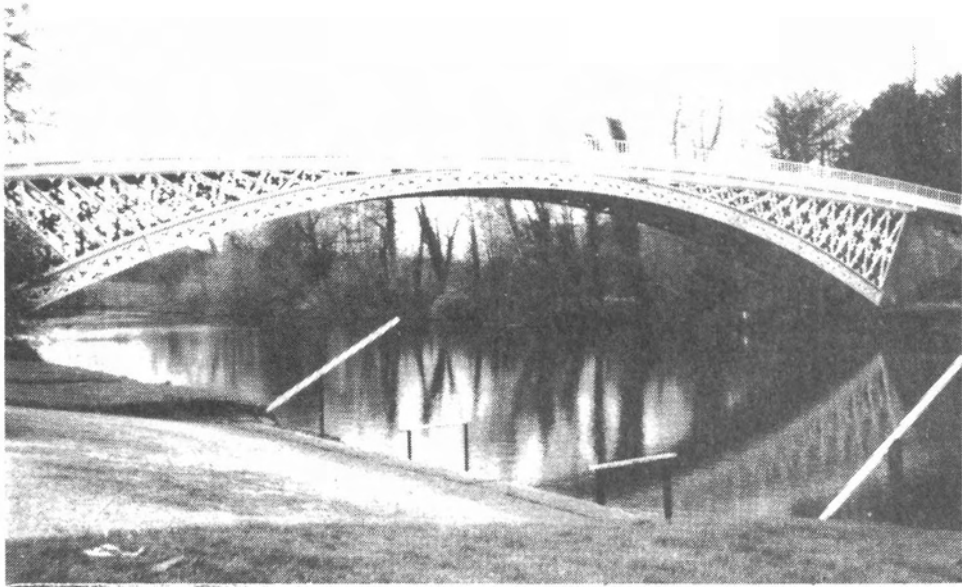
Landon Alford AAFA #2, and Bess Alford Rayford AAFA #131, cousins from Henderson, TX, visited the town of Aldford, Cheshire County, when they were in England in March 1992. Aldford is just south of Liverpool near the border of Wales, and is the site where our name probably originated. Josiah Alford visited Aldford and wrote about it in his book, *Alford Family Notes*. As you read the following text from the book, you can visualize the site with the help of these wonderful pictures than Landon shared with us.

From Josiah Alford's *Alford Family Notes* (1908)—these excerpts were originally published in *AAFA ACTION* in the March and June 1989 issues.

Pages 1-2:

The lords of Aldford are mentioned in the Cheshire Domesday Book, and from the Aldford in this county that family took its name. "There was in ancient times a castle, the chief seat of the family of Aldford, who had large possessions in Cheshire." The earth-work remains of Aldford Castle are still visible, overlooking the old ford across the river Dee, about four miles above Chester.... The immediate vicinity of the then hostile and wild Welsh tribes shows at once the importance of the position from a military point of view.

In 1160 the command of this Castle was given to "Robertus, miles, a descendant of de Bigot, probably by



Cast iron bridge near Aldford, England, within 50–75 yards of the old stone ford.

female descent”, who thus became lord of Aldford, and the founder of the family that has since borne that name.

The command of the Castle appears to have been regarded as hereditary, for Robertus de Aldford was succeeded by his son.... Aldford Hall was built, a neighbouring mansion, afterwards used as a farm house, and now rebuilt. It was, however, “for many generations the seat and manor of the ancient family of the Aldfords, who acquired it by grant from one of the Earls of Chester”.

Although these early members of the family were thus Lords of Aldford, they were not barons or peers, but “tenants in chief of the crown by military service”. The title, therefore, was dependent upon the office, and was not hereditary.

Pages 11–12

The only remains of Aldford Castle are the earthworks, which are extensive and interesting. They occupy an angle formed by the junction of a tributary stream with the River Dee, about four miles above Chester. An iron bridge has of late years replaced an old ferry across the Dee, which ferry had replaced the old ford (Alde-ford), from which the family name originated. when visiting the place some years ago, a man of 75 stated to the writer that as a boy he remembered this ferry, and that when the water was low the ferry-boat had to avoid a stone course crossing the bottom of the river, doubtless the remains of the ancient ford.... The village of Aldford lies just to the south of the Castle; and about three



The church at Aldford, looking from the town side.



Aldford village store



Bess Rayford and Landon Alford at the remains of the moat of the castle at Aldford, England. Bess and Landon are grandchildren of Egbert Benson Alford (1858–1933).

quarters of a mile still further south, near the road to Farndon and Holt, stands a new farm-house, which replaced the old Aldford Hall, which was pulled down in 1883.

... Holt Castle came into the possession of Thomas Alford, second son of Robert de Alford, probably by his marriage, about the year 1500.... The little town of Holt is less than three miles from Aldford, but being on the opposite bank of the Dee it is in Denbighshire. The position of the Castle of Holt is remarkable. It was perched upon a red rock, almost a pentagon in shape, surrounded by a moat filled from the River Dee, which runs but a few yards distant and formed a natural defence upon the eastern side. The other sides of the Castle were protected by the sharp rise in the level of the ground in each direction, cut away artificially so as to form a perpendicular face of the cliff....

Four generations of the Alford family held the Castle of Holt, the fourth—John Alford of Fawley Court—selling it shortly before his death in 1600.

The photographs in this article were taken on March 25, 1992, but Landon Alford and his family have made several trips to Aldford. The following report is from a December 1985 trip; a version was previously published in Gil Alford's *About Alfords*:

Landon and his son Ben made the trip from London to Chester, Cheshire County, on December 27, 1985. Since the town had no tour guides, they arranged to be driven from Chester to Aldford by an employee of the local car rental business. They drove south from Chester, upstream along the River Dee, along what was said to be the old Roman road. They arrived in town about 1:00 P.M., taking only a few minutes to drive the one U-shaped street, leaving the highway and then reentering it about 500 feet down from where it had left!



hidden by the pipes of an organ that had been installed many years before.

Holt Castle is across the River Dee and off the road, down a footpath. The castle had been occupied by Alford until about 1600. There was more of its remains than at Aldford Castle. An archway and stone steps still remain on the motte.

They then stopped at the local inn, the Grosvenor Arms. When they asked whether anyone knew something of the history of Aldford and Aldford castle, a man of about 35 walked up stating he was very interested in the town and that he was the farm manager for the Duke of Westminster. He said the Cheshire County historian had recently done a survey of the old Aldford Castle grounds and directed them there, just beyond a church they had seen on the short tour of the town.

He also told them about an old iron bridge across the River Dee, located at or near the location of the old ford from which the name Alford eventually evolved. He said the iron bridge was actually on the old Roman road, a different road from the one they had traveled from Chester, which proved not to be the Roman road. The real old Roman road actually runs through the Duke of Westminster's estate, which occupies quite a bit of the property between Aldford and Chester. He gave them permission to go on the property and look around and invited them to visit him at his home later.

Landon and Ben then went to the grounds of the old Aldford Castle, walked through the gate next to the old church, and saw the remains of the moat that surrounded the castle and the motte on which the castle stood. [Editor's note: I couldn't find "motte" in the dictionary.] The foundation of the old castle was visible where soil had been dug from around the rim of the motte. Landon was able to get three sandstone rocks from the ruins as souvenirs.

The old iron bridge across the River Dee could be seen about a quarter mile away. It was built about 1824 and is painted a light blue and white.

The road to Holt Castle, about six miles from Aldford, passes by the town of Farndon. Landon remembered that there was a church there in which a plaque had been mounted commemorating the marriage of Ann, daughter of Richard Alford of Overton, to John Puleston. They found the vicar, who unlocked the church and let them go in. They found the plaque partially

From there, Landon and Ben went on to the attractive two-story home of the farm manager. The home goes with the job of managing the farm, a 4700-acre dairy farm with 900 cows. The farm manager, a chartered CPA, worked for Peat, Marwick and Mitchell before working for the Duke. The Duke owns all of Aldford, a good bit of Chester, and much of the Mayfair district of London, including the Grosvenor (his family name) House Hotel. He is also building skyscrapers in San Francisco, Austria, and Australia!

After leaving the farm manager's home, they toured the old Roman road again, crossed the old iron bridge, and found an old Roman marker. After arriving back at Chester, they toured a unique shopping mall known as "The Rows"—the first enclosed shopping mall ever built. Parts of the mall are over 600 years old. There is an old Roman wall around Chester, but time and darkness would not allow them to see it. They had to catch the train back to London, where they arrived before midnight. ♦