

**July 6, 1998**

**Chester of Cheshire County, England**

While having breakfast at our hotel, we met Joseph Finigan, of Dublin, on vacation from his accountant work in London. Eating alone, he overheard our conversation and sensed our concern for arranging bus transportation to the old castle sites. He introduced himself, and we explained the ancestral "hunt" thing that brought us so far from home. We could see he was captivated.

We thanked him for our pleasant time and started to leave, whereupon he quickly stood and said he had the day free and asked if he might join us. We three could go in his car to the ruins at both places.

I exchanged quick glances with Aloma. Without hesitation we gladly agreed! We quickly grabbed our backpacks and camera and hopped into Joseph's waiting car. He drove us south from Chester, taking us across the national boundary into Wales, along the eastern edge of Wrexham County. Briefly we luxuriated in the picturesque countryside and then, suddenly, we were at the little Town of Holt, right up to the border bridge at the River Dee.

The Dee has its headwaters in the eastern mountains of Wales' Snowdonia National Park. It flows eastward across Wales, then turns northward past Holt to the natural boundary of Wrexham, Wales and Cheshire, England. It flows past Farndan, Aldford, then past Chester where it enters the north Irish Sea.

*A "bi-lingual" Welcome! The Welsh are proud of their cultural heritage and their language.*

*Holt is in Wrexham, not Denbighshire (if you trust signs), as reported in Josiah Alford's Family Notes, 1908. Two official maps of Great Britain uphold the credibility of this border sign.*

*This question might be explained if there was a later division of Denbighshire County for creating a "new" County of Wrexham. It happens!*

*Anyone out there know of it?*



Here at Holt we knew we were in "Alford Country." Beyond the Dee the road followed the course of the river through the valley of "The Green and Pleasant Land" as described by Norman Marsell in his book by the same title. Here at Holt was our First Stop alongside a highway welcome sign to greet travelers entering Wales from England. And a charming sign it was, first in Welsh and then in English. We only wanted to find the old Holt Castle. Luckily, there was a national heritage sign just steps away, and another, bi-lingual marker which read: Castell Holt Castle.

Included was a compendium of just the kind of facts we wanted: History; Castle Design, the Castle Today, and Geology. And, luck again, we were informed we were standing right smack dab at the trail head to the Castle of Holt itself!

More and more, it was a fair day. We rejoiced in our spirit.