

River Dee and Old Iron Bridge: Leaving the earthworks we walked out across the meadows on a gradual downgrade towards the Dee. Looking back the wide-angle view of the castle site was outstanding, our best of all.

The tall spire and clear-cut lines of Aldford Church, the old bailey level that runs along laterally past the visible side of the Church, the high lifted-up escarpment that “once upon a time and long, long ago” was crowned with a grand view of the Castle of Aldford.

The first reference to the Castle de Aldford is in 1276 A.D.(Dodgson, 1968), probably more than 120 years after its construction. By quick calculation, the Castle of Aldford was built ca. 1156 A.D. Those earthworks we saw at Aldford are about 845 years old! We chanced upon the entrance road into the Eaton Estate and walked it until we came upon the Old Iron Bridge. As we stood on the bridge just a quarter of a mile away, the church, motte and bailey could still be easily seen. England has many beautiful rivers that are further enhanced by the beautiful land they flow through. None could hardly surpass “this green and pleasant land” of the Dee. We pondered the stories we have read and heard: that the Roman Road still “lives” and is in good usage. It was built by the Romans to extend, strengthen and establish the imperialistic designs of the Roman Empire and they employed local labor to build expeditiously.

Standing on Old Iron Bridge we pondered over the Bridge itself. It’s the completed link that joins the two endings of the Roman Road, making them one. Thus, in a sense, the Bridge is the Roman Road.

The first known means for crossing the Dee was the old stone ford. At some time (when?) there were some people (just who?) that hauled huge stones, set them in place across the river-bottom and built it up, stone upon stone as a lined course that traversed the Dee from shore to shore. They chose stones for level and flatness. They raised the course high enough for fording, that is, wading the river. The Roman Road was joined, opened both ways. For horses, carts, cattle, merchants, travelers, emigrants, roving tribes, armies with heavy weaponry, the ford became the crossing point. In no time it was a place of strategic importance for those who could own and defend it. It figured then that a castle-fortress would stand close by the ford to repel invaders and provide security and assurance to the community.

We also pondered the fate of Old Ford (Alde-ford), the name Anglo-Saxons gave to it. Is the Old Ford still there? Have the stones, or some of them been removed? In the 1890's Josiah Alford visited Aldford. He talked with a man of 75 years old who, as a boy, remembered how the old ferry (that long since had replaced the old stone ford) had to exercise great care in avoiding the course of stones far below the river's surface while steering between ferry-landing points. The day came when the ferry was replaced with a wooden bridge, which in time was replaced with a cast iron bridge in 1824.

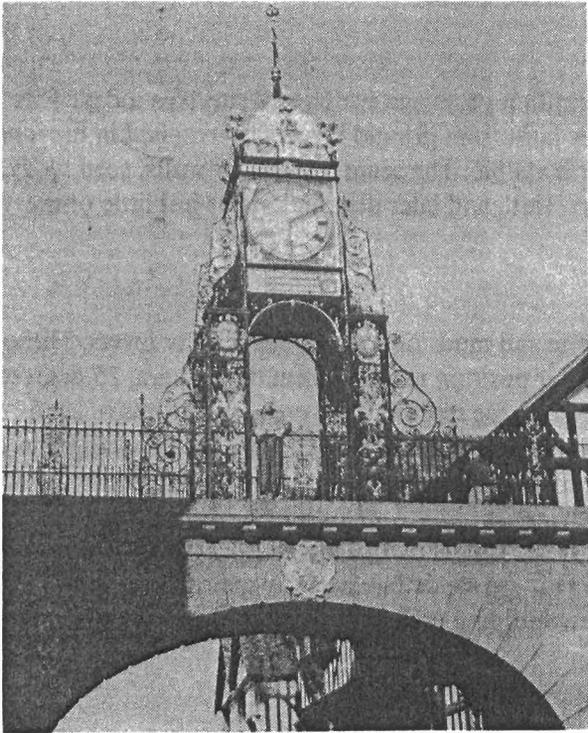
We looked downstream, 50-75 yards, where according to one source, one may still have "sightings" of that legendary course of rocks. We squinted hard and saw nothing. Aw shucks!

It was past 2 P.M. We stopped at the Grosvenor Arms on east side square and ordered three "Ploughman's" lunches. Back at our hotel we said our good-byes with Joseph Finigan. That closing scene from "Casablanca" flashed before me. Humphrey Bogart (casino owner) and Claude Rains (French prefect of police) were walking (out of our lives) together. In a sudden sense of camaraderie Bogart draped an arm across Claude's shoulder and ventured, "You know, Henri, this could be the start of a beautiful friendship!"



*"Turning out the lights" and shutting everything down after one of the great eventful days of our lives. We end it all with this display of ritualistic symbolism. A 2 P.M. "Ploughman's Lunch" at the Grosvenor Arms Inn & Pub on the east road of the Square. Joseph Finigan, our "host" and benefactor seemed subdued and especially thankful "for what he was about to receive": large wedge of cheese (your choice); stewed tomato, cooked onion; fresh whole apple, tea, butter and roll. Substantial, not so great!*

We left Chester, that great old city with its ancient Roman Wall for people to stroll upon, to look down upon a modern scene, with a feeling of satisfaction. Much like being rewarded and self-fulfilled, Chester is only four miles north of Aldford, and for Alford's in particular, there is a bonding relationship that "ties the two together traditionally in both history and culture." In the minds of Alford's, Chester might well be fixed as the northern "Gate" to Alford Country.



*Chester's distinctive clock, built upon the arched overpass bridge of the old Roman Wall around the Old Town. A main thoroughfare runs under the arch. One of Europe's most famous clocks and perhaps the most photographed.*

The in-depth investigative work of Bevis Sale and Rick Turner (the motte and bailey Castle of Aldford, 1985) led them to understand that the Alford's who were the lords of Aldford Castle nevertheless leased, that is, paid for lodging for themselves and their families at the St. Bridget's Church in Chester up until 1224 A.D. We have to wonder about that, especially since there is an apparent contradictory report by Josiah Alford in his book *Alford Family Notes*, 1908. He tells in glowing words how Robertus de Aldford's son succeeded him and (the?) Aldford Hall was built, a mansion neighboring Aldford Castle, and how it was "for many generations the seat and manor of the ancient family of the Alford's, who acquired it by grant from one of the Earls of Chester."