

Into the Heartland of Alford Heritages:
Alford Village

Crossing the Bridge of the River Dee, after Holt, we drove north three miles, passing Farndon. Another three miles brought us to the town limit of Aldford. We had reached the end of a pilgrimage and there before us was one last low hill (complete with flag pole) for us to surmount. We shared a feeling Charles Kuralt often expressed from behind the steering wheel of his motor home as he traveled the back-roads and country communities of America: That feeling of Eager Anticipation: "Let's see what's around that next bend in the road up ahead!" At the crest of the hill the road curves slightly left and we were in the charming once medieval, but now mid-Victorian Village of Aldford.



Aldford is simply a square bounded by four roads on north, south, east and west. That would be all, but one other road bisects the square south to north. It's called "Middle Lane (it figures). There's a rarity and quaintness about the village. It is tiny, I mean, "pulled-in", almost "Lilliputian" (not dimensionally, of course). (Credit: "Gulliver's Travels").

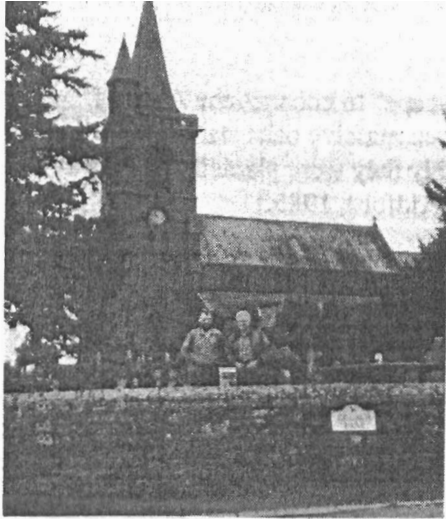
We entered from the south on Road B-5130, east boundary of the square and went straight to the Church at the north end of Aldford Square. Turning left (west) on Church Lane we came to our Second Stop at the open gates of Aldford Church of St. John the Baptist and its cemetery court.

The Church dates back as far as the 14th Century when it had rectors and "looked" medieval. It has an illustrious history of service and has always been the spiritual-social center for the community. Before Aldford was built there was a church as early as 1100 A.D.

About the large cemetery of Aldford Church. One must wonder what treasures, secrets and stories it might divulge. As with Holt, we didn't take the time for serious and closer exploration and investigation. And now we know it!



"Middle Lane," to the north tee's with "Church Lane" and Aldford Church. On the northwest corner is the Post Office and Village Store, across from Aldford Church.



Aldford Church, its tower and spire (tall enough to be seen from any point) and the cemetery. By the mid-19th Century the church had deteriorated badly. The Marquis of Westminster, Sir Richard Grosvenor, as a gift to the community had the church rebuilt. Then he rebuilt the entire village from the medieval to mid-Victorian style.

The Marquis, whose close-by Eaton Estate includes Aldford and many other lands in Cheshire and Wales, gave the community a new Look, bringing Aldford Church and Village into the 19th Century.]

The Church and Village can be exceedingly glad. They were given a "face-lift" and new life in 1868.

The charitable Marquis of Westminster died in 1869.

We know now we should have given ourselves an extra day for seeing the two ruin sites, a day for Holt and a day for Aldford.

Our walk to the entrance door to Aldford Church bisects the cemetery, so we were right in the center of a lot of history. No one appeared so we walked across the road to the Post Office. We met the Postmaster, R.E. Ellaby and J. Ellaby, his wife. We inquired about the ruins. We learned that the earthworks, the motte and bailey for the Castle de Aldford were available to be visited, photographed and explored. The site was just south of and closely adjoined with the church. It was a short walk to a large fenced area of open meadows where a sizeable herd of dairy cows grazed. The wide swing-gate is never locked and we entered the area.

Immediately before us there was a column of seven large, really massive oak trees on a long raised ridge. On the right was a large low flat-topped hill having the general shape of a triangle. It lay along the west side of the Church. The bailey to our left was a deep and wide trenched ditch that circles a higher but not as large hill, also flat-topped. This was the castle motte, the raised man-made mound upon which the ancient Castle of Aldford was built and stood for long centuries. The large trenched ditch was the circular course of the castle moat, once filled with water channeled from the River Dee close by. Bevis Sale and Rick Turner, who made an extensive survey and study of the motte and bailey Castle at Aldford with a published Report in 1985, sheds more light on the subject: "The circuit (moat) seems to have been complete and held water until sometime in the 19th Century.



The "dry" moat and the long-abandoned castle motte raised to its high, flat level. The first of 7 oaks estimated to be older than 250 years, even 350. The tree sits on aerial roots raised high above ground. Woodhouse Farm, left, built in 1867, continues as an industrious dairy business. It maintains a large herd of dairy cows that graze the motte and bailey's grass meadows.

“The Motte”, called Blobb Hill by the locals, “was planted with trees as a landscape” to enhance the Aldford approach ...only a lonesome pine and oak survive. Older than these trees are seven massive oaks standing lined along the east ridge of the bailey ditch. These trees must be over 250 years old. Probably they were planted to create a village park for Aldford Village (Sale & Bevis, The Motte and Bailey Castle at Aldford, 1985.)



Good view of right arm of the castle motte, showing “lonesome pine” and mature oak, only survivors of an earlier planting.

Another View: Aldford is a quiet town. It’s even quieter at this long-abandoned site. There is that “lonesome pine” and solitary oak, both survivors. Time slowsinsects drone and fly.....



A wide angle view of the heart, soul and history of Aldford, Aldford Church, longest standing structure and highest; the Castle Bailey, long, level hill across the base of the west wall of the Church; the Castle Motte with concentration of tall trees (center of picture) dairy cows grazing the slopes and top of higher hill. We are walking west from the earthworks towards the Dee and the old iron bridge.

1160 A.D. - Turn back the clock 840 years. Robertus de Aldford has taken command of the castle and the Old Ford that bridges the Dee 1/4 mile up river (left). The Lord of the castle and the manor walks by. Villagers stop, look up and smile. “Robertus, Robertus” they call out and give hearty waves and salutes. Then, as if bidden and without a word, they turn and look towards the Old Ford. (Alde Ford) All know the Ford is well-guarded and vigilantly kept at all times and everyone is in a state of readiness.....they complete their work with renewed purpose and satisfaction. Enjoy the living for all is well .