

## Alford Family Notes: *Introduction*

In the last issue of *AAFA ACTION*, we printed the Preface to Josiah Alford's *ALFORD FAMILY NOTES*, which was published in 1908 in London. In this issue we will continue with his Introduction, covering some very early English Alford families.

### INTRODUCTION:

Alford is a surname evidently of local origin, the ancient form of which was Aldeford, signifying "Old Ford", whence Aldford, and the modern form Alford. Places thus named are found in Cheshire, Lincolnshire, and Somerset, and it is probable that from these the various families of Alford or Aldford have taken their name. From the western county comes the family to which the compiler of these notes belongs, whose pedigree in the College of Arms dates from 1564.

In early days, however, the Aldford family of most repute was that springing from the North of England. The lords of Aldford are mentioned in the Cheshire Domesday Book, and from the Aldford in this county the 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 Roman road from that city leads straight as an arrow to the ford, and 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 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, Richard Aldford, living in the time of King John, who married Sara, dau. of Richard Fitz-Eustace, Baron of Halton. To him succeeded his son, also Richard de Aldford, who held Aldford, and the manor of Newton, Sussex. By one of these, Aldford Hall was built, a neighboring 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 office, and was not hereditary.

The Castle of Aldford had an ancient claim upon lands at Barrington and Chillington, in the county of Somerset, for the provision of a man to serve at the Castle in time of war.

The direct male line of the family became extinct in 1202, when Margaret, daughter and heiress of Richard de Aldford, last named, married Sir John Arderne. The chief part of the property thus passed to the Ardernes, through them to the Fittons and Grosvenors, and was eventually sold.

Younger branches, however, still continued, in Thomas, who took the name of his wife and her property, and in Robert de Alford, whose descendants for several generations held the manor, though not the Castle, of Aldford, but at length sold it.

His son, Thomas Alford, from whom sprang the various branches of the family, held the castle of Holt in Denbighshire, which is about two miles higher up the river Dee, and upon the opposite bank, the places being thus adjacent, although in different counties. The ruins of Holt Castle are most interesting. It was destroyed by Cromwell's soldiers in 1650, having been sold by John Alford some fifty years before.

In 1604 an enquiry took place at Farndon (a town of some importance in those days, and joined to Holt by a curious bridge across the Dee), in a suit of William Tatton and Roger Puleston, concerning "lord Alford's lands", which included property in Overton and in Norton-Madock. The interest in this is deepened by the reference to the latter property in the will of Robert, Alford of London, 1546, founder of the Sussex and Hertfordshire branch of the family; and also by the marriage of Anne, daughter of Richard Alford of Overton, with John Puleston, recorded on a tablet in Farndon church bearing the Alford arms: Six pears, stalks upward, as for Berks and Bucks.

It may also be appropriately mentioned here, as showing the possible connection of the various families of the name, that "from the Alfords of Holt descended Joseph Alford, author of two religious treatises published in London in 1649" under the titles of *THE SOUL DISPENSATORY* and *THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT*. These books are dedicated to Sir John Brownlow, and Joseph Alford, the author, was born at Winsham in Somerset.

It is worthy of note that the Brownlow family use this name as a title for the eldest son, Viscount and Lady Marion Alford honorably bearing it during the

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last century. The estates of this family lie largely in the eastern counties, where it is interesting to find that "Roger Bigot, ancestor of the Earls of Norfolk, and of the family of Aldford, held the manors of Pulling and of Thurne in the county of Norfolk", both of which rectories were held in the fifteenth century by members of the Alford family.

## Thomas Alford Branches

The various BRANCHES of the family springing from Thomas Alford of Holt must now be noticed.

I. The eldest son, John continued the line which remained at Holt for some years, but became well-known later in Yorkshire, and also in Buckinghamshire and Berkshire.

Launcelot Alford, his youngest son, settled at Meaux Abbey in Yorkshire, "a splendid pile, the pride and ornament of the part of Holderness", of which, unfortunately, there now are scarcely any remains left.

Members of the family also became possessed of property at Beverley, which place they represented in Parliament, and at Bilton in Holderness; but these Yorkshire Alford failed in a male heir, and appear to have died out in the middle of the seventeenth century.

On the sale of Holt Castle, about the year 1600, as already related, John Alford, grandson of John of Holt above mentioned, took up his abode at Fawley Court, in the county of Buckingham. His grandson, Henry Alford, afterwards became possessed of Hall Place, Hurley, in Berkshire, but a short distance from Fawley, the boundary of the counties passing through the lawn of Fawley Court.

Thus the family spread into Berkshire, where we find also Francis Alford,

esquire, of Lambourn, in 1589, and his son, Henry Alford, of Wokingham, in 1619, who were members, however, of the second branch of the family. Thomas Alford of this line was mayor of High Wycombe, and died in 1704, while George Alford held the same office in 1710.

The Bucks and Berks Alford, however, like those of Yorkshire, seem to have become extinct, or to have failed to maintain a position of importance. Particulars of these lines follow in due course.

II. Going back again to Thomas Alford of Holt Castle, in order to trace the second branch, we find that Robert, his second son, went to London, and through his grandson, Edward Alford, of Offington, founded the family settled in Sussex and Hertfordshire. The association with the latter county was merely by marriage; but it is interesting to note that the connection with Sussex was of much earlier date Richard de Alford, whose daughter and heiress married Sir John Arderne, having held the Manor of Newton, County Sussex.

Offington House, the Sussex family seat, is in the parish of Broadwater, near the modern town of Worthing, but passed away from the Alford family in 1744.

This branch ended with the death of John Alford, esq., of Coombs, co. Sussex, "the last of the ancient family of that name".

An account of these Sussex and Hertfordshire branches is given later.

III. Going back once more to Thomas Alford of Holt, we find in his youngest son, Thomas, the founder of the third branch of the old northern stock, the Alford of Hereford and Coventry. Of him some interesting notes will be found hereafter.

Thomas Alford, though his official

positions connected him especially with London, obtained property in Herefordshire. In that part of the country his family maintained their interest for the next hundred years or so at Cawtherhill and Norton Canon, in Co. Hereford, and at Coventry, Tewkesbury and Daventry.

The London interest was of longer duration, but at the close of another hundred years the senior line apparently died out, and though it may be that junior lines continued the family, it has not been found possible to trace their descendants. Particulars of the Alford of Hereford and Coventry follow in Chapter IV.

## Other Alford Branches

Various settlements of the name occur in other counties, which it seems desirable to record here so far as they have been noted, and we may commence with instances Norfolk and Suffolk.

- Roger Bigot, ancestor of the Earl of Norfolk, and of the Alford, held the Manors of Pulling and of Thurne, in the county of Norfolk.
- Thomas Alford was Rector of Thurne, Norfolk, 1438
- Thomas Alford, Rector of Bereford, Norfolk, 1451
- Thomas Alford was Prebendary of Lincoln Cathedral from 1466 to 1485, in which latter year he died and was buried in the Cathedral.
- Richard Alford was Vicar of Burnham, Norfolk in 1485.
- Thomas Alford was Rector of Pulling, Norfolk, 1503.
- Thomas Alford in 35 Henry VIII, i.e. 1544-5, held the Manor of Osmunds, in Sutton, with one hundred acres of land, of the Duke of Norfolk.

The connection with Norfolk may have led to an expansion into Suffolk, for a

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grant of arms to Alford of Suffolk is recorded "on a saltire, between four griffin's heads, a lion passant."

In Nottinghamshire we find from Thornton's *Antiquities of Nottinghamshire* that Henry Alford held the manor of Hockerton in that county, in the reign of Henry VII; and was patron of the living in 9 Henry VII. He married, 1494, Christina Moulton, of Rousby, Lincolnshire. Robert Alford was their only son and heir.

In Northamptonshire occur the following: Thomas Alford, Vicar of Lamport, Northamptonshire, 1463; Thomas Alford was Vicar of Cranford, in the same county, 1488.

The Probate Registry at Northampton, 1510-1520 contains the will of John Alforde, of Clipstone (Bk A, p.1). To the Alford of Northants are ascribed the arms, "a shield fretty".

Lincoln Marriage Licenses supply: 1639, January 15. Zacharie Alford, of Great Grimsby, gent. aet. 35, and Anne Clayton, of same, widow, aet 34; 1669, May 6. Robert Alford, of Great Grimsby mariner, and Katherine Thorold.

Amongst the Wills in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, are: Robert Alford, of Lincoln, 1654. Will, 131 Alchin; Zachary Alford, Lincoln, 1655. Admon; Ann Alford, of Lincoln, 1659. Wil, 12 Pell.

## Alfords in Western England

We now turn to the Alfords of the West of England. Between these and the foregoing family of Northern descent a possible connection has already been alluded to in the claim for service for Somersetshire at Aldford Castle, and also at a later date, with reference to Joseph Alford the author. It appears again in the fact that Thomas Alford, of the present Somersetshire family, was

presented to the Vicage of Weston Zoyland, by the Bridges family, which latter family was connected by marriage with the Alfords of the Northern stock.

The name of Alford occurs in Somerset in Domesday Book, and with the same variety of spelling, which seems to have been a matter of absolute indifference.

The Bruton and Montacute cartularies mention Thomas de Alditheford, and Roger Alditheford, while the name Aldeforde also occurs in these records.

The existence of the parish of Alford, in Somerset, would naturally suggest that the Somersetshire families derived their surname from that place, and it is interesting to note that while no proof is forthcoming of this, the Somerset Alfords cluster in a circle at various distances from the village of Alford.

The name of Alford occurs as early as 1327 in the Subsidy Rolls of Somerset, and by the sixteenth century, when wills were available and parish registers commenced, there were families bearing the name in several parts of the south-west of England, and some of them distinctly in good position in life.

At Mere, in the county of Wilts, we find the family afterwards spread to Stourton. At Winsham, on the borders of Somersetshire, resided a family that continued there for many a year, and also gave rise to the Dorsetshire Alfords who were settled at Lyme Regis. Through William Alford, of Lyme, sprang also the family of Ottery St. Mary. Through John Alford, who died in 1562, came the Alfords of Bridport, in whom the connection with the Mere and Stourton branch is afterwards evident, as also the Devonshire families which sprang up at Bowe, Okehampton, and Wear Gifford. And through Henry Alford, living at Weston Zoyland in the time of Elizabeth, came, with a pedigree recorded

through eleven generations in Heralds' College, the present-day Somerset line.

## America and Australia

This introduction would be incomplete unless it looked also beyond the seas, for in America and Australia are many bearing the name of Alford who will be interested to trace their descent from the old country.

In the United States are some who now spell their name "Alvord", the corruption itself leading back to Somersetshire. It will be seen in the following pages how these are for the most part descended from an Alexander Alford of Whitestaunton, near Chard, who settled at Windsor, Connecticut. Other families however, must seek their descent from a William Alford of London, who settled a little later at Salem, Massachusetts. [It is too bad that he was not aware of Richard Alford who was in Virginia even before those in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Ed.]

With regard to Australia, the connection is of course more recent, and the Somersetshire notes will readily show to some a descent from the "Bishop's branch" of the Alford family of that county.

To be continued