



An Aldcliffe recollection by Nick Webster

I first came to Aldcliffe as a boy with my parents in 1959. Although it was by then 15 years after the end of WW2, there were many wartime restrictions still applying. Up until that time it had been very difficult to purchase building land and even more difficult to obtain the materials to build a house.

However, controls eased and supplies improved slightly and my parents bought a plot of land on the carriage drive to Aldcliffe hall. However, it remained almost impossible to find a builder to put up a house, so my father (an oil company manager) decided to act as builder and employ tradesmen in their spare time.

The summer of 1959 was long, hot and dry and the house progressed splendidly, rising quickly from its footings through the many processes of construction to its eventual satisfactory completion. Not so the fate of Aldcliffe hall, standing derelict a stone's throw from our land.

Although empty and forlorn, the hall and its grounds held a great fascination for me and at every opportunity my black Labrador and I set off to explore.

Physically, the hall had presence but somehow lacked charm. The walls of the building were cement rendered with a pseudo stonework pattern picked out in the wet material with a trowel – a type of Stucco. Apparently, the stone, from the quarry behind the village, became porous during heavy rain and this was the solution, but somehow it was not very attractive. Standing on a raised terrace, the hall looked out over sunken, walled gardens (now Oaklands court) to the wood beyond (now Craighlands court). What a wood that was! Edward Dawson was famous for his collection of trees, which were the result of his contributions to the great plant hunting expeditions of the Victorian era. Landed Gentlemen who contributed to these expeditions received in return either seeds or cuttings of the rare and wonderful plants the great British explorers discovered on the continents of the world, and Aldcliffe hall grounds abounded with them. Rare Rhododendrons and thickets of Bamboo thrived.

To the right of the hall was the lawn tennis court and below that was situated the enormous, heated, lean-to greenhouse, which leaned against the back wall of the barn of Home farm.

In front of the greenhouse was a formal garden surrounding an elegant rose arbour, which arched over a tinkling ornamental fountain. From there, a path led slightly downhill to a solid, wooden door set in a high wall which divided the gardens from the wood. Also in this wall, to the right of the door, was built an arched stone alcove, painted white and reserved for the lady of the house to enjoy the warmth of the sun and the pleasure of her garden whilst being sheltered from the wind. As I sat in Miss Dawson's arbour I could imagine what a pleasant retreat it must have been as the gardens had been maintained until quite recently. The plants had become straggly and the beds overgrown but the layout and the peace of the place was still evident, protected by its tall, stone walls and sheltered by the mighty, spreading arms of a magnificent Cedar of Lebanon tree. The Cedar of Lebanon is still there, I am glad to say, courtesy of my mother who flew to its defence when the developers proposed to fell it – it was and still is a protected tree but the philistines needed reminding.

Once through the door in the wall, the wood beckoned. To the right a five-barred gate opened into the fields and the back of home farm.

To the left was a copse of evergreen Yew trees, under which were family graves, often adorned with a posy of fresh woodland flowers. The villagers were frequently to be seen in and around the grounds and still held the Dawsons in high regard.

Those old Yews were of a great age and one could imagine that they might have once marked the site of some ancient sacred place. There was certainly some superstitious talk in the village when the bodies in the graves were exhumed for reburial. To the surprise of the undertakers, all the skeletons were discovered to be without either hands or feet. In a dignified manner, at night, and in the presence of the Police, the bodies were quietly taken away and reburied at Scotforth cemetery and no more was heard about their missing appendages. However, it is probable that the chemical nature of the local soil was the real cause of the disappearance of such small bones rather than the work of dark forces.

Mr Woof, the retired head gardener, continued to, as he put it, “bring on a few plants” for himself in the corner of the greenhouse until vandals from the Marsh area of Lancaster smashed the windows and began the final destruction of the old order.

Up until then the hall and its environs had lived a charmed life as an elegantly decaying time capsule. However, there must have been problems with vandalism in times past as both the hall grounds and the wood were protected by a nine foot high stone wall topped by broken bottles – not at all permissible today but no doubt very effective.

Deeper into the wood one was struck by its elegant design and variety. Wide walks had been cleared and sunlight warmed the still air, which always seemed filled with birdsong. On a spring morning, the dawn chorus at Aldcliffe was deafening. In fact it was so loud and continuous it was impossible to stay in bed. Sadly, that tremendous volume of birdsong is no more. The trees were felled to make way for houses and the birds lost their green cathedral.

In the middle of the wood, roughly where the old hall would have been, stood a low rectangular building. Inside its broken doorway, smelling sweetly of rotting apples and dry rot, one encountered a white painted interior with a frieze of religious verse picked out in gothic script, perhaps a small private chapel or meeting room?

Beyond the chapel and to the left, and outside the protective wall, was West Lodge guarding the riverward defences. Back away, on the bend of the road as it rises uphill, part inside and part outside the wall, was the gardener's cottage (now Ivy Cottage).

To the right of the Chapel and at the far North Westerly edge of the wood one came across a shallow, ornamental pond surrounded by water-worn limestone rockery, - roughly where the circular turning area has been built at Craiglands Court. Smelly and muddy, the pond had by then fallen into decay but when maintained must have been a delightful "surprise view" when coming out of the edge of the wood. Not quite the surprise the developer's JCB driver had when beginning to clear the pond. His workmates saw him start his day's work only to immediately jump from his cab and run off to the boss's office in a high state of agitation. Apparently, his first manipulation of the JCB's arm had revealed the menacing shape of a Crocodile residing in the primeval sludge. Unbeknown to the driver, however, the previous day his co-workers had been investigating the hall's under-croft and had come across the animal and had placed it in the mud for him to find. Fortunately for the JCB driver, the reptile was nothing worse than a fine example of the taxidermist's art. However, it made a fine story for the local paper.

Most people who entered the hallway of Aldcliffe hall were shocked and alarmed by what they encountered. There was no electricity and what little light that managed to filter through the cracks between the closed window shutters seemed only to accentuate the oppressive nature of the place. There was dust and rubble underfoot which crunched on the coloured tile floor and all sorts of creaks and knocks could be heard as the old house eased its tired bones. But the thing that finally sent most folk hurrying from the hall, never to return, was the awesome presence, looming out of the gloom beside the stairway, of an eight foot high stuffed bear which stood challengingly upright with its massive paws raised, claws extended, jaws agape - a wonderful deterrent to the unwelcome visitor. Even welcome visitors must have viewed this goliath with some trepidation and I believe the staff hated it.

The living rooms, which led off the hall through elegant, tall, double doors, were high and spacious and protected from the cold at night by pitch-pine window shutters. However, the rooms seemed bleak and unwelcoming without the comfortable furnishings that would have once embellished them in the latter part of the 1880s when my Great Grandfather, Capt., William Nelson Greenwood, came to visit his friend Edward Dawson.

They were both members of the Lancaster Scientific and Astronomical Society and following on from my Gt. Grandfather's lecture to the International Congress of Hygiene and Demography at the Royal Albert Hall in London in 1891, Edward Dawson suggested that he have his researches into the effects of the Sun and Moon upon tide phases printed up in book form for the benefit of a wider public.

I include a facsimile of the title page below:-

THE LIFE OF A WAVE

FROM ITS

CRADLE TO ITS GRAVE.

A MEMOIR

READ BEFORE THE LANCASTER PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY,
ON THE 22ND MARCH, 1888.

It was repeated by request of the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce, in the Lecture
Theatre of the Storey Institute, Lancaster, on the 26th November, 1900.

BY

CAPTAIN W. NELSON GREENWOOD, F.R.MET. SOC., F.IMP.INST.,
ETC.,

*Dockmaster to the Commissioners of the Port of Lancaster,
at Glasson Dock.*

Lancaster :

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1901.



TO

EDWARD B. DAWSON, LL.D., THE LATE PRESIDENT,

AND TO THE

SURVIVING MEMBERS OF THE LATE LANCASTER PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY,

I DEDICATE THIS LITTLE BOOK.

Upstairs in the Hall, the family bedrooms were equally large and an elegant fireplace heated each. But it was the views from their windows that were their main feature. In fact, the views from the staff bedrooms on the floor above were even better. It was clear, from the quality of the remaining decoration and fitments, that the Dawsons had treated their staff well, as each bedroom was provided with attractive, well used, fireplaces sporting beautifully painted glazed tile surrounds.

A peculiarity of the hall was the curiosity of the vanishing date inscription. When the viewer looked down from the upper windows at the front of the hall, the

letters and figures of an inscription could be clearly seen on the terrace directly below. However, when that same person descended to the terrace, the inscription had strangely disappeared.

After careful and protracted inspection it was just possible to make out how the trick had been done. The mason had spelled out the letters and numbers using tiny marble chips spaced very far apart. Close-to these small chips appeared to be part of the cement mix of the terrace surface. However, when viewed from high above, the chippings resolved themselves into the words and letters E.D. 1880.

At the rear of the building, facing northeast was the forbidding kitchen. Cold and empty then, it gave little indication that it was ever a warm or welcoming place situated as it was alongside a broad ramp that sloped downwards under the house to the cavernous, arched, under-croft. Dark, eerie and forbidding, this massive space would have stored provisions for an army.

From the kitchen, the back stairs serviced every floor and led out onto the roof between the gables where the bell was situated. Used for calling the workers in from the fields for meals and for signalling the end of the working day, this relic of the past was to cause quite a stir one summer's night in 1960.

It was a still, velvety, moonless night in late Summer and everyone in the community was preparing for bed when the bell could be clearly heard mournfully tolling – an unnerving sound. The peals didn't last long, perhaps three or four rings and then silence.

The following day people began to meet and talk about the strange “goings on” of the previous night. None of us newcomers had ever heard the sound before and there was suspicion that it could have been a prank.

Girding our loins, Colin Martin (from “Munisouth”) and I set out to investigate, and what we found was just as strange as the happenings of the night before. The bell, a great heavy thing, about the size one would see in a small chapel, was firmly bolted to its bracket on the roof, but, puzzlingly, there was no clanger. Try as we might we could find no means of ringing the bell. There was no rope leading to the bell from below. Whoever rang it in days gone by would have had to climb the stairs and step out onto a small flat area on the roof in order to call in the hands from the fields. Without the clanger all we could do was strike the bell with a stone, but it did not make the resonant sound we had heard the night before – it needed metal for that. Whoever had rung the bell that night would have needed not only a steel implement but also nerves of steel to navigate those broken and rotting stairs in the pitch black to perpetrate such a stunt. Then again, it may have been some ungodly member of society removing the lead from the roof. We will never know. However, there were those in the village who were convinced that the bell was tolled by the ghost of a serving wench who, in times past, had been molested by the Lord of the Manor and had then fled to the roof in order to ring the bell for help; help that never came. Cornered on that high place by her randy Lord and Master, she chose to fling herself off the roof rather than to submit to his desires.

There is further evidence of strange happenings at Aldcliffe Hall. Just before we moved to Aldcliffe, an erstwhile neighbour, then in her eighties, said that she had been born in the crossing keeper's cottage at Aldcliffe. (Demolished now, but one can just make out its outline adjacent to the crossing gates, to the left of the old railway line, heading north.)

As a teenager, she had been employed as a maid at the hall and for her first job had been set to work cleaning the main stairs. Halfway up, on the first landing, she was surprised to meet a finely dressed gentleman who stopped, smiled graciously and

then went on his way. Later, she asked the housekeeper, “Who was that gentleman I just met on the stairs, wearing a big hat and funny old clothes?”

“Oh don’t bother about him, my dear!” came the reply. “That’s just the old cavalier! Our ghost. He’ll not bother you again. He just comes to see what the new maid looks like. He was a fine one for the ladies, they say.”

Behind the greenhouse, and sharing a wall, was the barn of Home Farm. Not a good site for farm buildings as it faced northeast and was always a frost pocket in the winter – animals did not thrive there and it was abandoned in recent years for that reason.

Parallel with Home Farm, but less gloomy, was the coach house. Four massive double doors enclosed two enormous garages for the coaches, and adjacent were stalls for the coach horses. Next came the tack room and then a fully tiled loose box for the owner’s hunter. Above the loosebox was a spacious hayloft; whilst above the garages was a flat for the coachman. One can imagine the clatter of hooves on the cobbled yard as farmhands helped the coachman manhandle the coach from its garage and then struggled to back the horses into their shafts and traces. Up until the early sixties Mark Airey, the farmer at Bank Farm, still worked horses on Aldcliffe’s fields.

Barbed wire can easily tear and permanently mark the flesh of horses and to protect the pristine nature of their coats when turned out into the fields adjacent to the drive, Edward Dawson had installed an elegant system of pressed metal fence posts threaded through with high-tensile steel cables held in tension – unfortunately, rotted away now and replaced with the mundane fencing of today’s animal husbandry.

East Lodge has, sadly, deteriorated over the years since I first knew it. In 1959 it was owned by a Mr Craig, an antique’s dealer. In those days the place smiled; the paint sparkled; the lawns were mowed; the garden borders were neat and tidy and sported rare and attractive plants; the gate swung on its hinges, and Nancy, Mr Craig’s pretty daughter drove her pony and trap down to the river every weekend. Idyllic! East Lodge seemed to be a rose covered cottage straight out of a fairytale, with the warm glow of table lamps reflecting off the highly polished antique furniture that so suited its interior. Sadly, there was and still is a serious downside to East Lodge – damp; rising, penetrating, damp! Owner after owner has been unable to cure the porosity of the local stone. Now, the Lodge is neglected and its garden severely overgrown. It is occasionally let to students but the damp soon overcomes their romanticism and they leave. What will happen to this grade 2 listed building, I wonder? A saviour with plenty of money and architectural sensitivity seems urgently required.

In the field to the North West of the drive there stands a magnificent ‘L’ shaped copse of oak trees. Planted three and four deep, I take this formation to be what is sometimes called ‘Admiralty Oaks’. Apparently, up until the age of steam, the law of the land required every large landowner to plant a number of oak trees for eventual use by the Navy. Planted three or four deep like this the centre trees grow straight and tall while the trees on the outside put out branches only to one side – reaching for the light. These right-angled natural formations were then the ideal shape to be used as the ‘knees’ in building the ‘Hearts of Oak’. The ‘knees’ of a wooden ship grown in this way became the naturally strong ribs of the hull and the ‘secret ingredient’ that gave Britain’s ‘Wooden Walls’ their massive strength.

Across the ‘Padfield’ lane and in the midst of ‘Kendal Pads’ stands ‘Pony Wood’. Not ‘Admiralty Oaks’ these but a grove of mixed deciduous trees presumably planted there as a pleasing visual feature. ‘Kendal Pads’ or ‘Padfields’, acquired their name from being used as paddocks to turn the canal boat horses into at night for much

needed grazing and rest. Between the end of the 'Stage Coach' era and the arrival of the railways a fast 'packet boat' carrying passengers in comfort was pulled by galloping horses along the canal from Lancaster to Kendal and back again –hence 'Kendal Padfields'. One of these boats can be seen in the Maritime Museum on the Quay at Lancaster. There was also a fast 'packet boat' service to Preston but I can find no mention of the name 'Preston padfields'. However, if one looks carefully in the hedgerows alongside the canal towpath between 'Aldcliffe cutting' and 'Deep cutting' one can still see the fenced-over stone gateposts of unusually narrow gateways – perhaps for turning-out tired 'Preston' boat horses into the adjacent fields?

The drive trees are worthy of particular comment. Planted in 1827, they are now in full maturity – although some have sadly succumbed to the ferocious gales that regularly blast up the Lune estuary. Viewed from the 'padfield' lane in spring, one can clearly see the curve of the drive and begin to appreciate the landscape architect's clever planting design with its variety of hues of green foliage arranged to please the eye.

Otherwise, the drive remains pretty much as it was, although there are some missing teeth now and cherry tree saplings and underbrush has become established. Don Waddell of 'Ashlar Lodge' and formerly 'Ashlar House' has been fastidious in continuing to have the verges mown under the trees, almost in the fashion of yesteryear, but then the verges were cut by hand with a scythe. To the South west side of the brow of the drive rise, the residents of 'Cortina', 'Munisouth' and 'Silver Lune' have also "done their bit" by regularly mowing the broad verge that makes the sweep of the drive so attractive.

Directly opposite the end of 'Aldcliffe Hall Drive', at its junction with the road to the river, stands a small iron gate set into the stone wall – signposted, 'River Lune'. This gate leads to a 'Grass road' that wends its way between high banks and thorn hedges to eventually end at the old 'high water' line which existed before 'Dawson's bank' was built to hold back the flow of 'Spring' tides. From this point the footpath crosses the open fields until it eventually doglegs and finally arrives at the railway embankment. Originally an 'accommodation lane' for the medieval tenants of Aldcliffe to access their strips of allocated land, it later became a cattle trod for 'Hill Farm'. Today, with its hedges neglected and its banks broken down by wintering sheep grubbing for roots, it has become simply a footpath for the occasional rambler and the local dog walkers.

However, this grassy track had a darker history. A history of nocturnal goings on, silks and brandy and tax evasion. To the villagers it became known as 'Smugglers Lane'

Smugglers' Lane



Although 'accommodation lane' is the scholarly title for our meandering track down to the river, it has a darker and much more romantic name.

Back in 1960, the 'old timers' in Aldcliffe cottages always referred to the ancient farm track as, the 'smugglers lane'. Indeed, this could well be true as in the 18th Century there are documented records of smugglers being apprehended whilst bringing brandy and other contraband ashore not far away at Condor Green.

Imagine the scene. It is a dark and rainy night and two heavily cloaked and masked men lead a reliable farm horse down the track to where it at that time met with the river bank. Quietly, a small rowing boat enters a nearby gully and a mooring rope is thrown to the waiting men. Quickly and silently sacks of expensive lace and a couple of kegs of best French Brandy are manhandled onto the back of the old Mare. Equally quickly, the boat disappears into the blackness of the night as the two men once more lead the willing horse quietly along the ancient lane, her muffled hooves making no sound on the grassy track.

In those days everyone knew about the smugglers and everyone benefitted from their endeavours, including the local gentry, and everyone 'turned a blind eye' as illustrated by Kipling's famous lines, *'Them that ask no questions isn't told a lie, Watch the wall, my darling, while the gentlemen go by'*.

Nick Webster



Farming in Aldcliffe has also changed in recent years. Gone are the tenant farmers, and their farmhouses are now private homes. When Jim Airey of 'Bank Farm' gave up his tenancy in 1987 and sold off his equipment and machinery, it marked a massive break with the past. Today the land is farmed by short-term leaseholders that live some distance away and visit the land by vehicle. Rather than the milking cows and beef stock of yesteryear, the fields are now given over to sheep rearing and grass cropping. Aldcliffe's soils have always been generous but today's new techniques have given rise to a super abundance of grass. Because of the estate's proximity to the sewage works at Stodday, nutrient rich slurry of treated sewage by-product is brought by road tanker and sprayed on the fields to fertilize them. The results are impressive. Within a few weeks the grass is growing strongly and is soon tall enough to crop for silage – a cheap means of feeding cattle over wintering in barns. Within days of this first crop being taken, the whole process starts again with the land turned dark grey by the sour smelling sewage slurry pumped from a holding tank along a flexible hose, which snakes across the fields, to a spray head attached to the back of a tractor. Three, four or even five times this process is repeated a year with its obvious benefits to the farmer.

However, there is a price to pay for this activity and it is the local wildlife that pays it. As the slurry can be pumped onto the land just as soon as the ground is firm enough to stand the weight of the tractor, the fast growing grass is therefore ready to be cropped just at the time the wild birds are nesting. Partridge and Sky Lark are ground nesters and the brave hen bird will stay on the nest to protect her eggs when danger threatens, relying on her camouflage to protect her. Sadly, her dappled plumage is no protection against the whirring blades of the silage machine and another generation is wiped out. Now, the glorious song of an ascending Sky Lark is no longer heard in the fields down by the river and the bobbing heads of the quick-running Partridge is seldom to be seen.

All is not doom and gloom on the avian front. Aldcliffe's maturing gardens, and the growing habit for householders to feed the birds in winter, have given rise to an increase in seed feeding birds and one or two surprising visitors to the bird table. The now ubiquitous Collared Dove arrived here in the 70s and the grey Heron has become a common visitor to garden pools and canal bank. In addition, the once rare Nuthatch has established itself in the drive trees. There is also a growing colony of Great Spotted Woodpeckers that can be heard drumming on their sounding trunks in 'Pony' wood and in the 'Admiralty' oaks.

The old wooden field gates are rotted away now and have been replaced with much wider but less attractive galvanised metal fabrications that allow today's massive tractors and agricultural machinery rapid access to the fields. A field that took two or three days to crop just a few years ago can now be cleared in less than one. What would the farmer of yesteryear, restricted to scythe and horse drawn equipment, make of such massive power and efficiency? Perhaps if we listened carefully we could hear a scornful grunt of disapproval or a wistful sigh of envy. However, having met some of the horny-handed sons of the soil who worked Aldcliffe's fields in days gone by, I think the former reaction might apply.

Another small change in local custom occurred one teatime in the late summer of 1968. An elderly man, dressed in a dusty black suit, and smelling strongly of candle wax, knocked at our door. "I've cum fur Bishop's Tith", he said, enigmatically. Apparently, down the centuries, householders living in the Ancient parish of St Mary (adjacent to the Castle) had been required to pay an annual 'Corn

Rent' or Tithe of one old shilling (five new pence) (a 'bob') to the Bishop of Lancaster. The value of this Tithe had diminished over the years and the Bishop was offering all householders an opportunity to redeem it for a total of fifteen shilling (15/-) (fifteen bob) plus one shilling and sixpence (1/6d). My father solemnly handed over sixteen shillings and sixpence (sixteen and six), for which he received a receipt, and we watched the churchwarden squeak away on his ancient, rattling bicycle, never to be seen again. [A photograph of this receipt can be viewed in File C]

Here and there, mostly unnoticed and unremarked, there remain small artefacts of Aldcliffe's past. Opposite the electricity sub station, part set into the angle of the garden wall of "Melrose", is what seems to be a random boulder. However, it had an important purpose. It is in fact a 'wheel stone', designed to nudge a badly steered carriage wheel away from the wall in order to protect the expensive-to-repair wheel hub. Smaller examples of these 'wheel stones', can be seen at ground level in the openings to the 'Wints' and 'Yards' of Kirby Lonsdale and Kendal.

"Melrose" is also graced by Aldcliffe Hall's former gateposts, and a previous owner redesigned the limestone arch, which once spanned the village horse trough, as his side gate.

If one walks Northwards along the railway track and then turns Westward at the "Freeman's wood" junction one comes eventually to the river bank, having rested briefly on the ancient iron seat conveniently placed half way along on the left hand side. This track leads not only to the riverbank but also to what once was an important river crossing point. Here one can still see the landing stage and summoning bell for the small ferry boat that conveyed paying passengers across to the "Golden Ball" Inn where another summoning bell is located. As a small boy, I can remember seeing this ferry in action. An old, weather-beaten man, dressed incongruously in a beige Mac, wearily rowing travellers across the fast-flowing current. As is the nature of such things, when he died, no one took up the job and the ferry service was no more.

The "Golden Ball" was always a popular venue for the serious drinker, as licensing hours suddenly did not apply if a convenient high tide covered the road at "last orders", cutting off the Inn from the influence of authority and the local 'Bobby'. But the Inn has a more sinister name. For centuries it has been colloquially known as "Snatchems". In the time of the "press gangs", the Navy would bribe the landlord to 'spike' the drinks of unwary young men who would then fall asleep over their beer, later to awake to find themselves far out at sea on a 'man-of-war' with little hope of ever returning home.

In the sixties, the river was still a navigable waterway and small Coasters regularly sailed up to 'Marsh Point' on a high tide to unload sand and gravel at the builder's merchants there. However, the river ceased to be dredged and fewer and fewer cargo boats braved the dangers of running aground in the Lune's cloying mud. Now the river is home only to the many varieties of seabirds that prosper on its banks. Latterly, the western bank has become the wintering site for hundreds of geese that fly in from the Arctic Circle every autumn once the Tundra begins to freeze. Their distinctive cries and the visual spectacle as they take off to feed on some inland field are now a part of Aldcliffe's winter scene.

On the east bank of the river, both on the river 'shards' (or 'dubs') and on the flooded fields behind 'Dawson's bank', can be seen the growing herd of Swans. Sixty or so in number at the time of writing, this bevy has gradually increased since the 1990s.

About that time it was discovered that lost lead weights from fishermen's lines were being ingested by the bottom-grazing Swans that bred and fed along the

canals in the warmer months. As soon as the fishermen were made aware that their lead weights were poisoning the Swans, they immediately changed to an alternative substance to weight their lines and the Swan population began to prosper once more.

Not only are the Swans prospering along the stretch of Aldcliffe's canal but so too are the Moor Hen and Coot and the now ubiquitous Mallard. An early morning walk down to 'deep cutting' on a spring morning will reveal just what a special place it has become for wildlife.

In the early sixties the railway branch line to Glasson dock saw occasional small trains carrying cargo to and from coastal vessels that visited the harbour. However, that activity ceased when the ICI nitro chalk factory that was at that time at Middleton, near Heysham, dispatched a cargo of bagged fertilizer in rail wagons to be loaded onto a ship moored in Glasson dock. Sadly, the old wooden sleepers and the rail ties nailed to them were unable to carry such a heavy load and the rails spread. Somehow, the emptied rail waggons were hauled back along the damaged line but it was the last journey Glasson branch line would ever see. The line lay abandoned for many years until it was transformed into a linear walk and cycle track for the enjoyment of all.

As the sixties progressed, the bulldozers arrived and Aldcliffe became very different. Lorry after lorry took rubble away from the hall and used 'Long Mile Lane' as a short cut to 'Lune Point'. Unfortunately, the unmetalled 'Long Mile Lane' was not suitable for such heavy traffic and it soon became completely impassable for the light village traffic that had always used it. Heavily rutted and waterlogged, it has remained unusable until its recent rejuvenation as a footpath & cycle track in 2004.

Within a week of the bulldozer pulling the tower down with a steel hawser (later discovered under the lawn of what is now 'River View') the Hall had completely disappeared and the grumbling machine headed menacingly for the wood.

Promises were made by the developers to keep many of the feature trees in the wood. But, once planning permission was given, the promises were forgotten, most of the trees were felled and the Georgian houses of 'Oaklands Court' and 'Craiglands Court' began to rise in their place.

A tasteful development, the Courts soon mellowed as lawns and plants embellished them and Aldcliffe settled into its new way of life – quiet, leafy suburbia.

However, there was serious trouble looming on the horizon and sleepy Aldcliffe reluctantly stirred.

Lancaster City Council decided to build a four-lane bypass within a hundred yards of 'West Lodge'. This proposal threatened the environment, the view and the tranquillity of the people who lived in Aldcliffe – and those people fought back.

Forming 'Aldcliffe Resident's Association', under the leadership of John Rollins and David Hopkins, the people of Aldcliffe, together with 'Friends of the Earth', the 'Greens' and other interested parties, demanded an inquiry.

After much double-dealing and despite the added weight of Lancashire County Council and a dubious Government decision against us, we, the Aldcliffians, fought on and forced a second inquiry. This time, it was decided that the original Government Inspector's report had been correct and the bypass would be constructed to the North of Lancaster thus saving the Bats and Toads and humans of Aldcliffe from acres of noisy tarmac and an irrevocably altered environment. Note the order of preference. Not humans first but last. The whole foolish, time and money-wasting exercise was finally decided upon the needs of Bats and Toads living in the path of the proposed road. A world turned on its head! (John Rollins has written a definitive history of the bypass saga that can be found by clicking on file (C) on the CD).

Will peace descend once more on 'sleepy' Aldcliffe as I write this at the beginning of 2005 or will the remorseless demand for housing force urban sprawl to finally engulf this rural idyll?

Like the Roman sentinel that Mr Bellis believed was stationed here at an early-warning post for the defence of the fort of Lunecastre, we must remain vigilant; danger threatens most when once we relax our guard. Perhaps the battlements that adorned the tower of Aldcliffe Hall were not so fanciful after all?

Nick Webster.

I am most grateful to Denis McCaldin for his encouragement and for the opportunity to copy the b/w photos of Hill Farm. My thanks also go to Gill and Peter Walters for the opportunity to copy not only the 1958 OS maps of Aldcliffe but also the rare watercolour bookplate of Aldcliffe Hall. I must also thank John Rollins for spending considerable time writing up the history of the bypass. Lastly, my thanks go to Mr Philip S. Harrison of Lytham St Annes for generously contributing his father's memories of 'A Life at Aldcliffe', a recollection of local Land Agents, and two wonderful old photographic postcards of his forbears and his old family home 'Inglewood'.