A little known history of the Manor of Aldrington

The prehistoric origins of Aldrington and the proceeding Roman period

There is some activity in the area during the prehistoric period. Brighton museum has some polished stone axe-heads that had been dug from the soil of the parish[1]. These would date to the Neolithic period, at or around 4,000 B.C. In 1898 workmen digging a trench opposite Aldrington House, found a small, socketed, bronze axe alongside a lump of unwrought bronze that contained a high percentage of copper[2]. These Bronze Age artefacts are now in Lewes Museum.

There is also evidence of Roman occupation of the area during the Romano-British period although very little is known of this. Old Shoreham Road is generally accepted as having been a Roman road, with possibly older origins[3].

In 1879 some Roman artefacts were discovered in Aldrington, although unfortunately the precise location was not recorded, but it was most probably in the brickfields. The objects were donated to Brighton Museum and included half a Samian Ware basin and the base of a platter, fragments of flagons and the base of a Grey Ware vessel[4].

Aldrington in the Anglo-Saxon period

The English Place Name Society describes Aldrington as being "the farm of Ealdhere's people" which derives from Anglo-Saxon. Other nearby place-names which are also Anglo-Saxon include 'Knoll' or "*cnoll*"; a round hill and 'Wish' or "*wisc*"; a meadow" which refers to the area around Wish park[5]. The Domesday Book mentions that prior to the Norman Conquest, Aldrington gave name to a *Hundred*, of which the eastern half comprised the parishes of Aldrington, Hangleton and Portslade and the list description reads as follows:

"*IN THE HALF HUNDRED OF ELDRETUNE. Godfrey holds Eldretune of William. It lies in Beddings, a manor of King Edward, and William de Braoise now holds it in his rape. Godfrey holds 7 hides and half a rod. There is land for seven ploughs. It does not pay geld. Villeins held it in the time of King Edward. There are 41 villeins and 10 bordars with 7 ploughs. In the time of King Edward, and afterwards, it was worth 4. Now 6.*"

A few yards west of Boundary Road, which runs between Portslade and Hove, a Saxon cemetery was discovered.

The monks of the great Cluniac Priory of St. Pancras, Lewes, owned land in the parish "at Estfield juxta Aldrington". There is no evidence of any earlier ecclesiastical buildings in Aldrington other than St Leonard's Church.

For some interesting information and questions/answers from more recent residents of Hove, go to: https://www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk/topics/topicent/pubs-2/aldrington-2

"*It is possible that a church stood on this site in pre-Conquest days, and if that were the case, then it was probably a wooden structure. In 1402, the church at Aldrington was dedicated to St Leonard, a French hermit of the 6th century, who became the patron saint of sussex and of prisoners; a pair of heraldic leg-irons or shackles are depicted on the Hove coat-of-arms to represent Aldrington[6]*".

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[1] *Barr-Hamilton, A, 1952. The Story of Aldrington. Sussex County Magazine Volume 26.*

[2] *Middleton, J. 2001 (revised 2020). http://hovehistory.blogspot.com/2018/04/aldrington-history.html?m=1*

[3] *Barr-Hamilton, A, Ibid*

[4] *Middleton, J., ibid*

[5] *Barr-Hamilton, A, 1952. The Story of Aldrington. Sussex County Magazine Volume 26.*

[6] Judy Middleton

Aldrington in the Medieval and early Post-Medieval period

The church of St Leonard was built in the mid 12th century. It is certainly the oldest building in the area. There would have been a medieval settlement associated with the church but all of these buildings and traces of settlement have gone.

Some time before 1397, the church of St.Leonards had its own ecclesiastical hermit, known as an anchorite. He was the Rev. William Bolle, formerly the Rector of St. Leonards. He was immured in his cell, which was purpose built within the graveyard living on the plainest food and dressed in the simplest clothing[7]. See below for possible sightings of William in the 20th century!

For further information on this story go to: http://scm.pastfinders.org/scm_03_aldrington.htm.

The earliest parts of the church fell into a ruinous state during the 16th century.

For those of you that may wish to learn more about the history of the village of Aldrington, go to https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/sussex/vol7/pp275-276 and for further information about the church building, visit Judy Middleton's most excellent blog spot: http://hovehistory.blogspot.com/search/label/Aldrington%20-%20St%20Leonard%27s%20Church?m=0

The Gentleman's Magazine of 1792 reported a local tradition of French raids with cottages in Aldrington being burned down. It is well known that the French conducted raids on Brighton and the neighbourhood in 1514, when Brighton was burnt to a cinder, and again in 1545[8]. In fact my father once unearthed a canon ball in the garden of No.70 St.Leonards Road.

An excellent web-site containing many early paintings and other depictions of the area can be accessed at: https://www.shorehambysea.com/13834-2/.

The 're-growth' of Aldrington

The Victorian housing development in Aldrington was built on fields mostly belonging to Red House Farm, although they originally belonged to Aldrington Manor. Red House Farm was situated in what later became Station Road, occupying the site now covered by the United Reformed Church and part of St Aubyn's Road. Hugh Fuller was initially the tenant and later became the owner of Red House Farm. It later became a private school up until 1909.

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[7] *Sir William Bull; A Sussex Hermit. Sussex County Magazine Volume 3 1929.*

[8] Judy Middleton; http://hovehistory.blogspot.com/search/label/Aldrington%20-%20St%20Leonard%27s%20Church?m=0

For more information about Red House farm go to: http://portsladehistory.blogspot.com/2015/01/station-road-portslade.html?m=1

"In 1086 Aldrington had a population of 73 and this remained the highest figure until 1881 when the population had risen to 144. From 1801 to 1831 nobody lived in the parish at all and the one person recorded in 1841 was most probably the toll-house keeper. Apparently, he had a peg leg and so it could be argued that Aldrington had three-quarters of an inhabitant[9]".

The London, Brighton & South Coast Railway was built in 1844. Copperas Gap was later renamed Portslade by Sea.

Kelly's Directory also noted (in 1867) that "a canal and floating basin (in connection with Shoreham Harbour) were constructed for the convenience of the coal and general trade of Brighton and its neighbourhood. The population in 1861 was 7. The area is 776 acres, nearly the whole of which belongs to Hugh Ingram, Esq. J.P[10]."

<div align="center">Image 5</div>

<div align="center" style="color:green">Painting *c.*1850 "View of Hove" looking west, by George Hilditch, showing Hove's Old Parish Church of *St Andrew's*. The open land beyond is Aldrington which was virtually depopulated up to the boundary with Portslade copyright © Royal Pavilion & Museum, Brighton & Hove</div>

"The population began to grow in the 1870s when new houses were built, and by 1891 the population had risen to 2,238. In 1891 a poll was taken to decide whether Hove and Aldrington should be amalgamated[11]". This was passed and took place on 26 September 1893.

<div align="center">Image 6</div>

<div align="center" style="color:green">This drawing based on a late 1850s map shows the *Parish of Aldrington* virtually depopulated and showing a detached area of the *Parish of Portslade* in the centre of Aldrington.</div>

The coat of arms of Hove Council includes emblems of Hove; the first quarter shield is dedicated to St Andrew's church, the second quarter shows shackles on a red field denoting St Leonard the Patron Saint of all prisoners. The lower section of 'arms' represent the de Warrene family, the Rape of Lewes and six martlets the emblems of Sussex. The ship represents a 16th century French galley commemorating French attacks on the coast of Hove. The motto was **'FLOREAT HOVA'** - *'May Hove flourish'[12]*.

At the end of the 19th century stood a Gibbet where now the easternmost houses of Elm Drive stand. A man called James Rook was hanged here for robbing the Mail coach nearby. The story of the efforts of his distracted mother to collect his bones and bury them in Old Shoreham Churchyard is apparently well known, through Tennyson's "Rizpah[13]" .

<div align="center">Image 7</div>

<div align="center" style="color:green">The construction of St Leonard's Road and the house building programme began in the early 1890s before the amalgamation with Hove, copyright © G. Osborne.</div>

<div align="center">Image 8</div>

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[9] Judy Middleton; http://hovehistory.blogspot.com/search/label/Aldrington%20-%20St%20Leonard%27s%20Church?m=0

[10] Kelly's Post Office Directory of Essex, Herts, Middlesex, Kent, Surrey and Sussex, 1867.

[11] Judy Middleton

[12] Judy Middleton

[13] Barr-Hamilton, A, 1952. The Story of Aldrington. *Sussex County Magazine Volume 26.*

Image 9

Yeakell and Gardner's map drawn between 1778-1783.

Image 10

Tithe map of 1844 TD/E78.

The 1875 map shows some development plots drawn up but no houses built yet. Redhouse Farm dominates the landscape at this point in time in Boundary Road and two brick fields are named.

Image 11

Ordnance Survey map of 1875.

Image 12

Ordnance Survey map of 1898.

Image 13

Ordnance Survey map of 1911.

Image 14

Ordnance Survey map of 1932.

Ghost stories and other excitement at No.70 St.Leonards Road.

We grew up in a haunted house make no mistake! There was a particular line through the house where sightings were often seen. This included a rope, stretched out across the hallway which was not seen until the very last minute when it was too late to stop.

Upstairs I encountered my own visitation one night, waking up in the early hours I needed to go to the toilet. Getting out of bed I didn't want to put the hall light on as I knew it might wake people up so I slowly walked onto the landing and stopped near the top of the steps that lead down to the lower landing as I could see a vague movement. There must have been a bright moon that night as my brothers bedroom door was open at the end of the hallway, letting in a little ambient light. I let my eyes slowly accustom to the dark and peered up the spot where the lower ceiling drops in height and I could see a movement, like a swinging motion. It appeared to be the outline of a head but not a sharp outline, as if the head had a hood on or something else far more sinister like a bag. It was at a much higher height than I; I looked down towards where the feet should be but it was too dark to see anything below. To all intents and purposes it looked like a person swaying or perhaps more dramatically; swinging. Being a fairly confident kid my curiosity got the better of me; I reached my hands out in front of me wondering what a ghost would feel like. I walked down two steps towards the apparition before being engulfed by a sharp coldness that overcame me and then the fear kicked in and I ran back to bed to hide under the blankets. Could this be a flash back to an ear when the gibbet was used further up the road? I didn't know back then that there had been such an object of terror nearby.

Courtesy of

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