

Chapter Four: The island parish - Staffordshire Edingale

That part of our civil parish that is not within Croxall or Oakley manors is, in a sense, the ‘true’ Edingale. But, as we have seen, this part is the minority of the parish as a whole, and is also the smaller half of the present-day village of Edingale. This area belonged directly to the manor of Alrewas, so whoever was Lord of Alrewas was Lord of Edingale.

Taking the Norman conquest as our starting point, Alrewas – thus Edingale – was held directly by the monarch. Perhaps one reason for this was Alrewas’s ancient connection with the forest of Cank (now Cannock). This was once much larger than the present Chase, stretching from Penkridge in the west to the Trent/Tame boundaries in the east. Again, the boundaries meant that Alrewas was inside the forest – and thus subject to strict forest law – but Edingale was outside the boundaries. However, the Alrewas court rolls seem to imply that both Edingale and Croxall were subject to forest law. This code was strict – and at times very brutal. In William’s time, the punishment for taking a deer was to be blinded. Dogs that lived in the forest had to have one front paw cut off or the claws pulled so they could not chase deer. Sheep were not allowed anywhere near the forest (they would offer grazing competition for deer): cattle, and in the autumn, pigs, could only be grazed in the forest after their owners made relevant payments (known as ‘pannage’ for pigs).

In 1204, King John (of Magna Carta fame) sold the manor of Alrewas to Sir Roger de Somerville, Baron of Wychnor, on payment by him of 60 marks and two horses. De Somerville lived in a moated manor house at Wychnor below St Leonard’s church on what is now the flood plain of the Trent. Although not far away, crucially neither he nor his successors lived within the boundaries of the manor of Alrewas until 1661. No Lord of Alrewas has ever lived in Edingale. Stubbs contends that this distance from manorial authority fostered, “*an independent spirit in local people.*”

In 1287, another Somerville, Sir Robert, was granted the right to hold a weekly market in Alrewas (on Tuesdays), to hold various fairs on saints’ days and to construct gallows in order to dispose of criminals. Along with the requirement to attend manor courts, these events would have meant that the human traffic from Edingale and Croxall to Alrewas would have been considerable and the connections of community between them of the highest order. Around this time, the Somervilles let land in Edingale to the Ridwares, who in turn let some or all of it to the Gresleys. They were ‘a bad lot’. The three sons of Sir Peter Gresley were each accused of murder; one, Sir Robert, was accused of four murders, three charges of robbery and two of riot and one of trespass between 1320 and 1348. But in return for military service to the king, he was given a general pardon of all felonies.

The Somervilles remained superior landlords, and the next two generations were either priests or soldiers and saw little (or nothing) of their local possessions. In 1337, Sir Philip Somerville returned to Wychnor to find his manor house dilapidated by thieves and gangs of discharged mercenaries. He set about consolidating – and extending – his hold on the area and obtained for Alrewas, the status of a borough. However, this was not a ‘golden’ time as the whole area was being decimated by successive waves of the Black Death. It is almost impossible now to imagine the dislocation caused by at least three waves of the

plague in the fourteenth century: a disease until then unknown in Britain. So many people died that it was difficult to find tenants to take on the obligation of land holding. Perhaps the plague took its toll on the Somervilles, for on Sir Philip's death in 1355, the manor passed to the Griffith family, relations through the female line, who held it until 1661.

The Griffiths spent very little time in the area, and only one, Thomas, is buried in Alrewas church. They were wealthy enough, however, to rebuild their seat at Wychnor (not the present hall) and James I spent some time there in 1621.

In 1646, the last Griffith died, and Alrewas manor, Edingale, and all the rest of their possessions passed to Francis Boynton, a nephew, who in turn sold them to William Turton in 1660. Turton had prospered by being 'on the right side' during the Civil War, and he was more of a bourgeois owner, than a member of the high aristocracy. He paid £3,130 for the manor containing, "*one capital messuage (big house) with appurtenances, 12 other messuages, 2 cottages ... with divers lands belonging to respective tenants, and also those streams ... known as Trent, Tame, Mease ... with ... free fishery and all the swans ... and all other messuages at Alrewas, Fradley, Orgreave, Edingale and Kings Bromley.*"

Turton's son, Sir John, lived in Alrewas at what is now Manor Farm – recently redeveloped for housing. His grandson, also John, moved the principal residence to Orgreave Hall, and, in doing so, diverted the 'Salters' Way' that cut through his front lawn at Orgreave to the long, straight road we see today between Alrewas and the gas pumping station at Orgreave.

In 1752, the manor changed hands to its last 'great family' – Admiral George Anson, ancestor of the present Lord Lichfield. Alrewas, Edingale and all the rest thus became part of the extensive estates eventually run from Shugborough Hall. Admiral Anson relieved first the Spaniards, and then the French, of considerable amounts of ship-borne booty and thus could afford estates in many parts of the country. His nephew and successor was MP for Lichfield – a post also filled by his son, Viscount Thomas Anson, who built Shugborough. His son, also Thomas, became the first Earl of Lichfield. Rather confusingly, three more Thomases followed him before the present Earl, Patrick, succeeded in 1960. In fact, we can find no evidence that the Ansons actually owned land in Edingale during this period. By the time of the inclosure settlement in 1794, Ansons were not mentioned as landowners here. So it is unclear how great the influence of a distant lord would have been in Edingale in the latter half of the eighteenth century if he owned no land. Perhaps very little?

The story of the break-up of Shugborough's remaining estates after the previous Earl's death in 1960 is reasonably well known. In fact, his residual holdings in Alrewas manor were sold prior to this, on 11th June 1953.

Only one Edingale asset then remained in the Anson's hands, the honorific title 'Lord of Edingale'. Through the 1980s, the Earl of Lichfield sold a number of such titles, including both Alrewas and Edingale. Mr Alan Smart, a Canadian businessman, who still has occasional contact with the village, bought the title Lord of Edingale.

Holy Trinity Church



Holy Trinity Church by Helen Pilgrim

Edingale church stands on one of the best sites in the village. Clearly, our Anglo-Saxon forefathers took into account the elevated position, overlooking the river and the broad sweep of the Mease valley. There have been at least three, and possibly four, church buildings on the site: two of Anglo-Saxon origin, a Georgian building, and the present church, dating from 1881.

For Anglo-Saxon the founding forefathers certainly were, although the first documented reference to our church was in 1191 when, as we saw earlier, Alrewas church and its chapelries were brought under the control of Lichfield cathedral, the building long predated that reference. As evidence of this, we have the detailed commentary of the Reverend Charles Cox in 1880, just prior to the demolition of the Georgian building, and a series of remarkably clear photographs of the previous church held at the William Salt Library. The photographs give us pictorial evidence of Cox's assertion that the previous church, although completed in 1736, incorporated significant elements of two Saxon predecessors, especially in the chancel. Cox took the trouble to verify his opinions with J T Irvine an authority on Saxon architecture.

What Cox and Irvine agreed upon was that the stone base and almost six feet of wall above foundation level in the chancel of the Georgian church was of the early Saxon period. While churches of this period were mostly of wood and thatch, they were constructed on a wide stone base – and it is the base still evident in the photograph. The small Saxon window and associated stonework (still preserved in the present vestry) is of a later Saxon

architecture, probably dating from the first attempt to build walls up from the stone base rather than replacing the wood and thatch with more of the same. This may date from after one of the Viking destructions.



*Chancel of Georgian Church showing Saxon walling and window
– courtesy of the Trustees of the William Salt Library*

Cox drew further evidence of Saxon origin from the three narrow chancel arches in the 1736 building. He contends that these would not be common in the ‘classical’ architecture of the 1700s (and indeed, as the interior photograph later shows, must have been restrictive in terms of sight lines and movement). Instead, he thinks that they were constructed to match their Saxon predecessor. He also points to the unusual fenestration in the chancel – a south-facing low window of the late thirteenth century was almost certainly an aperture to enable the ringing of the sanctus bell at the time of the consecration during the Mass. As the last piece of the jigsaw, Cox suggests that the square stone work around the windows of the brick chancel was cut out of much earlier arch or trefoil-head windows dating from around 1500. The windows and the ‘sanctus aperture’ are just visible on the photograph overleaf. By 1714, a visitation by Dean Kimberley commented on the poor state of the church “*the floor in the chancel to be levelled, the font to be cleared.*” Soon after this, the building of the Georgian structure began.

The Georgian church opened around September 1736. An entry in the parish register says, “*Sarah Prinsop was received into Edingale New Church September 13th 1736, being the first person received into it and that too before the tower was up.*” Thomas Vaughan was the perpetual curate (vicar) at this time and he served the parish for some 31 years. His predecessor was his father, Griffith Vaughan. During Griffith’s time, the present vicarage was built and during Thomas’s, the new church, so this was a period of major change. Before being appointed to Edingale, Thomas was curate of Oakley in Croxall parish. Thomas was a man of some means and he gifted to the church a brass chandelier, visible in the William Salt photographs.



Holy Trinity Church around 1869 showing Mr Baxter - courtesy of Gerald Collingwood

There are two early drawings of the Georgian church, the second of which, dating from 1837, is below. It shows what became 'Miss Garland's cottage' – a thatched house standing where the greenhouses in the vicarage garden are now situated.



Edingale church in 1837 – courtesy of the Trustees of the William Salt Library

So the Georgian church building provided many more links to our history than the present church. But what a plain – and even shabby – building it had become in the William Salt photographs! The interior is dirty and dilapidated, some window panes are cracked and broken and hymn books are scattered across the benches. There had been a clock in the tower, but this had long since ceased to function and had been boarded up. Clearly, there was some thought of rebuilding as the Revd Cox's pamphlet was subtitled *In aid of the rebuilding fund*. So what then of the fire? Present-day understanding is that the church was hit by lightning and destroyed by the subsequent fire, but much of the fabric was unhurt, including the bells and bell hanging, the altar base, the pulpit and many monuments. The *Tamworth Herald* report of the opening of the present church makes no mention at all of the fire. Perhaps the fire was not so extensive – and punctuated the end of the period of financing the rebuilding. Perhaps it didn't happen at all.



*Interior of the Georgian church showing altar, pews and heating system
– courtesy of the Trustees of the William Salt Library*

The present church was built on the same plan as the Georgian one – with the exception that the bell tower and vestry were constructed to the north of the chancel. It is in the Early English style – and is a much more impressive building than its predecessor. It was constructed between June 21st 1880 and its opening by the Bishop of Lichfield on Thursday 24th February 1881. The incumbent at the time, Edward Brown Charlton, had been in Edingale only two years and was a widower at the age of 35. He dedicated the new building to his late wife, Alice Mary. The church was designed by Charles Lynam of Stoke-on-Trent and built by Youngs of Lincoln. It cost a grand total of £1,910 to build: a clock and various other additions were made in 1884 for a further £240.

The base of the present altar comes from the previous churches and is dated by Cox at around 1620. The pulpit is also from the old church and Cox dates it earlier, from the time of Edward VI, although others consider it to be Jacobean. Monuments to Theophilus Buckeridge (1748-1791) and John Evans (1824-1867) have been re-installed in the present

church, as has the Saxon window. Sadly, no use seems to have been found for the stones of the earlier Saxon foundations. Two bells hang in the church tower. They were re-hung in 1981 – as noted earlier, oral tradition is that they came from the church at Croxall. The font is of Hollington stone.

So, from almost 1200 until 1840, Holy Trinity church was under the patronage of Lichfield Cathedral chapter. Until the Reformation, this meant that the parish of Alrewas, and its chapels at Edingale and Pipe Ridware, provided for a canon at Lichfield. He, in turn, said masses and prayers - or 'obits' - for the people of the parish and their intentions. The chapter appointed a vicar – perhaps best understood as 'someone to act on their behalf' – to Alrewas, and he, in turn, appointed curates to Edingale and Pipe Ridware. Major tithes – such as corn, church collections and so on – were payable to the vicar at Alrewas and he provided for the canon at Lichfield. His tithes included, "*one third of the tithes of swans, half the tithes of wool and lamb and hay from the churchyard*" (1259).

The Reformation saw the dissolution – and ransacking – of the monasteries. This would have had a devastating impact at Croxall with its connections with Repton. However, Lichfield Cathedral chapter was not monastic (unlike, say, its sister cathedral at Coventry or even Lichfield Friary, which were both destroyed in the Reformation) so the buildings, the ecclesiastical seat and its powers were left intact. But the canons were silenced from their 'obits' and vestments, paintings and altar cloths sold – the vicar of Alrewas took the great tithes instead. The powers of the cathedral chapter were only regularised in 1840, when the parishes under the administration of the chapter were transferred to full diocesan control. The Bishop of Lichfield then took responsibility for appointing a 'perpetual curate' to Edingale. Only in 1867 did the 'perpetual curate' take the title of 'vicar'. Edingale had its own vicar for a comparatively short period, for, by 1920, the village was sharing its incumbent first with Croxall, then Harlaston, and from 1991, with all the Mease Valley parishes. The incumbents of the parish post-Reformation are listed at appendix 1.

Some interesting snippets come out of the post-Reformation zeal for order and lists and an inventory was made of every parish. On May 14th 1553, during Mary's brief Counter-Reformation, the 'chapel ornaments' were listed as: "*1 partly gilt silver chalice with paten; 1 saie cope; 3 altar cloths; 3 vestments; 1 wood cross; 2 maslyn candlesticks (maslyn or masln was copper or tin, closely resembling brass); 1 basin and ewer of masln; 2 bells; 1 hand bell; 1 surplice.*" The wardens were John Browne and John Wilson. In the time of Edward VI, there was "*one challes of sylver with a paten parcel gylte.*" This was recorded as being present in 1548, but was later stolen. In the seventeenth century pewter vessels were in use for Holy Communion at Edingale.

The warden, John Wilson, was of a longstanding Edingale family. They had their own pew – with his (Latin) initials 'IW' carved on it in the same manner as the date on the gable front of Church Farm (pictured on page 56). Clearly John Wilson lived here and extended the smaller Jacobean farmhouse.

Church registers also began around this time (pre-Reformation registers were kept – inconsistently – by the cathedral chapter). The registers date from 1575, when the Revd

George Boydell, who seems to have been the incumbent for a quite astonishing 68 years, started them. His spidery writing is clearly evident in the first register (a stiff parchment sheet) through this period. His entries finish just before that of his own burial, in the more polished script of his superior, on 8th May 1643.

*“Georgius Boydell grandaevus curat hujus Capellae sepult est
Octav die Maii 1643 per me Ricardii Martin Vicarii de Alrewas.”*

Richard Martin was vicar of Alrewas from 1637-1646.

The churchyard has its own history to tell. Until 1888, the county boundary ran right through the graveyard. The ‘boundary stone’ – possibly the base of a Saxon cross - demonstrates for how long this situation persisted. The residents of Croxall parish living in Edingale were buried to the west of the boundary, and those of Edingale parish on the east. The vicar of Croxall could not enter Edingale church to perform interments without the permission of his Edingale equivalent. Equally, the curate of Edingale could not let the grazing in the churchyard without the permission of the incumbent in Croxall. There were many disputes about these rights – but they were always maintained.

Two final photographs bring our story into more recent times. The first is of the wedding of Herbert Green and Doris Hill in the early 1930s. This gives a feel for the tranquillity of the village in this period. The barn just visible behind Fred Green’s shoulders was across the road from Church Farm. It was the occasional venue for village celebrations before there was a village hall. The Coronation celebrations of King George VI were held there – and many other events no doubt.



Wedding photograph outside Holy Trinity church - courtesy of Mary Fern

The photograph shows, from left to right – Fred Green, Walter Green, Herbert Green (groom) Doris Hill (bride), Joe Gadsby, Walter Joseph Berry. Seated – Arthur Walter Berry and his wife, Fanny.

The second photograph shows just how quickly regular church attendance has waned in the last 50 of our church's history of some 1200 years. It shows the church choir in 1962 with the vicar, the Revd John Bennion, and the wardens.



Church choir – Holy Trinity church - courtesy of Pam Collingwood

Back Row – standing – Bill Smith, Freda Rowley, Doreen Rowley, Irene Illsley, Elaine Wilcox, Revd John Bennion, Rosemary Wilcox, Christine Fern, Elizabeth Green, Heather Aucote, Arthur Johnson, Jack Dolman

Front Row seated – Denise Wilcox, Pauline Wilcox, Ann Johnson, Mrs Foulds, Anita Rowley, Janet Duggins, Susan Welch, Shirley Potts