

Report for the June 2015 meeting of the Malvern Civic Society

On Friday 10 June local historian Cora Weaver gave us a thought-provoking, illustrated presentation entitled "*The Holy Well at Malvern Wells*". Cora has lived in Malvern for thirty-seven years and has studied much about the springs, spouts and wells of this area.

Given that the Malvern Hills have existed for millions of years, Cora asserted that the Holy Well spring will have also been there for a very long time, and had made a study of pinpointing the date when it was first mentioned in historical documents. There was no acknowledged evidence to confirm that it went back to either the first people who lived on the southern end of the hills or indeed to the later time of St Oswald, Bishop of Worcester in the tenth century. However, the records relating to a sick man who had travelled from Leicester in the seventeenth century confirmed that he must have known that it would do him good to drink water there. In the 1080s the parish of Hanley in which the well was situated was by then a major settlement and so Cora concluded that the well could have already been named by then.

The significance of the words "holy well" and the suggestion that a "holy" well was originally a "healing" well was explored in addition to the location of holy wells generally. A good proportion were said to lie away from settlements yet at the same time were to be not so far removed from ordinary life, a point made in Jeremy Harte's book on English holy wells.

In 1599 a soldier had quoted the well's healing powers and felt inspired sufficiently to write a poem about it. The well is also mentioned in a book by Dr John Wall, who conducted the first scientific experiments on the Malvern waters in the 1750s. In May 1866 the Malvern Advertiser reported that a family called Wallace had a deplorable accident en route for the Holy Well, having been diverted down Church Street in their carriage whose brakes had failed. Their unfortunate trip highlighted the fact that there was no hospital in Malvern at the time so the first hospital opened in Hospital Bank the following year.

Cora's talk is complemented by her latest publication, "*The Holy Well at Malvern Wells*", which gives more details about this well's history, including the rescue of its derelict buildings by John Parkes in the 1970s and its purchase by Mike and Marion Humm, who restarted bottling water after John Parkes had stopped. At a cost of just £2.99 this is an interesting and informative publication.

On Civic Society business, Clive Hooper announced the publication of the June issue of the society's quarterly magazine, *Bandstand*, as well as the publication of this year's programme for Civic Week (11 – 18 July). On the subject of the current proposals to re-develop the Old Community Hospital he advised that the Civic Society endorses the approach to preserve the fabric of the building as well as a lot of the interior. He therefore encouraged anybody with relevant archive material that would help prevent the demise of the building to contact Louisa Davidson either by email (heritage@malverncivicsociety.org.uk) or by telephone on 01684-568322.

Denise Preston
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