

CHANGING APPROACHES TO LOCAL HISTORY

WARWICKSHIRE HISTORY AND ITS HISTORIANS



EDITED BY
CHRISTOPHER DYER

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*Edited by
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Foreword

The Dugdale Society celebrated its centenary in 2020, or rather in 2021, as the COVID lockdown prevented the centenary conference from taking place. We waited until 2021 and decided to have the papers presented by Zoom. Although people were prevented from gathering in celebration, perhaps a little to our surprise the two-day conference on Zoom was a great success. This was thanks to the organisational prowess of Christopher Dyer and the patience of our speakers, who stuck with the delays in the programme and coped with whatever damage it may have done to their diaries. It was also due to the large numbers of people who joined the event, most of them for the whole two days. I had the honour of closing the conference and I am especially proud of being asked to write the Foreword of this book. I would also add that it would not have been possible without the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, who hosted the Conference online and who do so much to support the activity of the Society. Particular thanks are due to Tim Cooke, Paul Taylor and Elinor Cole. The conference programme was decided by a small group from the council of the Society, Nat Alcock, Bob Bearman, Chris Dyer, Cathy Millwood and Christine Woodland. Cathy Millwood with her usual skill arranged the publicity and registered those taking part. If a conventional conference had been held, she would have managed the event with her usual efficiency.

Since the virtual event the book of the conference has been assembled and now can be presented in this handsome volume. It is a tribute to the enthusiasm and efficiency of all involved that it can be published after a relatively short interval. We owe special thanks to Boydell & Brewer, and especially Peter Sowden, who have produced a book of such quality and without delays.

The Dugdale Society was named after my ancestor, as his *Antiquities of Warwickshire* showed how local history could be compiled and presented. The Society's aim over the last hundred years has been to publish edited transcriptions of Warwickshire's records, making them accessible to as many as possible. I also believe that they named it after him as he was an incredibly diligent hard worker, writing reams on all sorts of subjects. He was voracious for information and gathered it wherever documents could be found. Indeed he chose as the family motto, *Pestes Patria Pigrities*, meaning that 'sloth is the enemy of our fatherland'. His industry and the fact that everything was of interest to him is mirrored in the qualities of our Society. One can see this by looking at the array of main publications and occasional papers published over the last hundred years, let alone the fascinating collection of papers in this book.

Foreword

We heard in the conference of the ebbs and flows in the Society's activity, but what is clear is that the original necessary, though rather dry, aims of publishing records have been much enriched over the years, and this book traces the development of our Society and its changing approaches.

Looking ahead to the next hundred years I think we can be optimistic. We have a talented and hard-working team, firm foundations and are solvent, with a stream of publications in full flow. We are also lucky in having such dedicated and talented people who are active in the society, and in those who help our work in many ways, and most of all in our county, which provides us with such a varied and fascinating history that engages the interest of people all over the world.

The Society is looking forward to continuing its work for the next hundred years, and this book is a staging post both to mark past achievements and to point the way forward.

Sir William Dugdale Bt
President

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The editor wishes to thank the group named in the Foreword for working together to organise the conference on which this book is based, and in particular Cathy Millwood for unfailing support in many aspects of this centenary project. Susan Kilby helped to prepare the final typescript, and Jenny Dyer compiled most of the index.

Contributors wish to thank those attending the conference for their comments and questions, which have often led to improvements to the chapters now presented for publication.

The editor and the Dugdale Society thank Peter Sowden and the staff of Boydell & Brewer for preparing this book for publication.

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Abbreviations

BAH	Birmingham Archives and Heritage
BL	British Library
HER	Historic Environment Record
IHR	Institute for Historical Research
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
PRO	Public Record Office
SCLA	Shakespeare Centre Library and Archives, Stratford-upon-Avon
TBWAS	<i>Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society</i>
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
VCH	Victoria County History
WCRO	Warwickshire County Record Office

Introduction

CHRISTOPHER DYER

Historians should be aware of their own history. Members of the Dugdale Society noticed in the second decade of the twenty-first century that they were approaching the hundredth anniversary of the Society's foundation in 1920. Everyone agreed that this milestone should be recognised, and various proposals were debated, but it was soon decided to award prizes to students and independent researchers, and to hold a conference. This event was intended to be a festive celebration of past achievements, but also an appraisal of the present state of historical studies of Warwickshire, aimed both to attract local people and to inform a wider public. Our resolve to embark on potentially costly events was encouraged by a generous bequest from our genial and always supportive president, Sir William Dugdale, who had died in 2014. After more discussion the theme of the conference was agreed: contributors would be invited, from the perspective of their periods and specialisms, to consider different aspects of the history of Warwickshire studied during the century 1920–2020, and explain how and why interpretations had changed. So the conference was called Warwickshire's Changing Past, a deliberately ambiguous title covering the unfolding events and processes over the centuries, and the perception of those developments by modern scholars. Potential speakers were asked to send in proposals for papers, with the intention of including a wide range of contributors. A committee had the difficult task of selecting contributors from the many proposals submitted. In order to accommodate as many topics as possible the time allocated for each speaker was reduced to the minimum. A programme was decided and publicised.

The conference was to be held in May 2020. In March the final preparations were being made. So many people wished to attend that we were forced to put some of the applicants on a waiting list. Then COVID-19 arrived, and the conference had to be postponed. Eventually it was held as a virtual event in May 2021. All of the speakers making substantial contributions to Warwickshire history participated, and the event attracted more 'attenders' than would have been possible had there been a 'face to face' occasion. Another advantage of the new technology was that there was

more time for comments and questions, enabling speakers to improve their subsequent written papers to take account of points raised. The technology worked well, thanks to the staff of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. The chapters of this book represent the papers given at the conference, with the addition of the fifth chapter, which was omitted from the conference for lack of time.

The individual contributions will collectively give readers a general picture of the changes in historical approaches over the century of the Dugdale Society's existence. It might be helpful here to mention some of the general trends which impacted on local historical enquiries during the Society's century.

History emerged as an academic subject in its modern form in the nineteenth century, and priority was given by scholars, especially in Germany, to the establishment of accurate published texts of important historical documents. The past could be understood only if we had high-quality written sources widely available. In Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries private-enterprise volumes appeared, such as Dugdale's *Monasticon* and Madox's *Formulare Anglicanum*. A systematic programme for the publication of documents began in the early nineteenth century with the Record Commission, followed by the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts from the 1870s, and in the 1850s the Public Record Office began to produce calendars (summaries) of documents in its care. The Rolls Series published texts such as chronicles, beginning in 1858. Scholarly societies edited documents of national importance, notably the Camden Society (from 1838), and the Pipe Roll Society and the Selden Society (for legal records), both founded in the 1880s. Publishing societies were established to edit local documents as early as 1834 (the Surtees Society), and a cluster of county record societies were founded towards the end of the nineteenth century.¹ The Dugdale Society arrived rather late on the scene.

Behind this effort to publish documents lay the idea that the study of history was a science, and like the natural sciences it should be evidence based. Part of that mindset was the belief, prevalent at the beginning of the twentieth century, that historical writing should be objective and impartial, and its purpose was 'to show what actually happened'. The *Victoria County History* (VCH) was an early venture in local history which pursued an ideal of objectivity, but its parish histories focused on topography (typically a village and its houses), the lordship of the manor from the eleventh century to recent times and the (Anglican) parish church. In the early volumes no reference was usually made to enclosure, the Poor Law, occupations or nonconformity, suggesting an elitist version of history, which was certainly not impartial.

¹ E. L. C. Mullins, *Texts and Calendars* (London, Royal Historical Society, 1958).

Growing up alongside the movement to publish records, the branch of history known as economic history which expanded between 1882 and 1914 was especially popular with the early adult education movement represented by such bodies as the Workers' Educational Association.² From its inception this subject was closely associated with the social sciences, and shared with mainstream history a desire to publish evidence and establish facts, but had a marked tendency to advance hypotheses, to engage in debate and to change interpretations. The subject expanded between 1882 and 1914. To indicate its approach, a question central to Warwickshire's past asked if the enclosure of common land was a step forward to economic efficiency and higher output. Or did the movement have limited benefit for productivity, damage the smaller landowners and lead to poverty and an exodus from the villages? Both positions could be advanced and defended, and still are. Those writing mainstream history became increasingly aware that the 'facts' and impartial judgements were difficult to establish. Like the economic historians, they framed questions, and sought to solve them with arguments based on evidence, but they were aware of alternative interpretations.

A record society cannot be compared with a work of historical interpretation such as the *VCH*, as it is concerned with making available primary sources from which history can be written. A programme of record publication is limited by the documents that are available, and there is an inbuilt tendency to publish sources relating to institutions, because they created and maintained archives. The Dugdale Society reflected this orientation by publishing six volumes of the records of King Edward's School in Birmingham, and six volumes of the minutes and accounts of the corporation of Stratford-upon-Avon. In recent times the Society has broadened the range of the documents selected, reflecting the interests of the wider local history community. For example, the records of a tribunal dealing with requests from Warwickshire men for exemption from military service in the First World War threw light on public opinion during the war, and in particular the attitudes of those reluctant to join the armed forces. The volume on the religious census of 1851 did not coincide with the religious bias of the early *VCH* because it demonstrated large attendances at nonconformist churches, which in many parishes greatly exceeded those in the pews of the established church.

In the individual chapters that follow the developments in historical interpretation of particular themes and periods will become apparent, as the constitutional preoccupations of the early twentieth-century historians gave way to economic, social and cultural explanations of the past. At the same time history became more inclusive, in the sense that those below the ranks of the aristocracy became legitimate subjects for historical investigation. Historians were initially influenced by the portrayal of ordinary people in

² N. B. Harte, *The Study of Economic History* (London, 1971).

documents produced by those in authority, but in recent years they have taken more interest in the attitudes and opinions of the poor, the peasant or the shopkeeper. An important skill that historians have developed has been a critical approach to evidence. At its most extreme we know that documents could be forged, and medieval charters in particular have become notorious. But we have to ask of every piece of writing how and why it exists, who wrote it, what purpose it serves, what is omitted and whether it can be misleading. The tendentious character of political or journalistic writing about the English Civil War or colonial slavery is easily recognised, but supposedly objective documents such as manorial surveys, probate inventories or apprentice indentures need to be handled with great caution.

The range of tools for understanding the past was also extended, as it was appreciated that specialists in social anthropology, cultural theory and psychology helped historians to understand the way that people behaved in the past.

The organisations and institutions within which historians worked have changed radically. In 1920 Warwickshire historians had few publishing outlets. The Birmingham Archaeological Society's *Transactions* contained articles relating to the county. Otherwise, items about Warwickshire might occasionally appear in the publications of societies with a national scope, such as the Royal Historical Society or the Society of Antiquaries. Like the local societies, the membership of these scholarly organisations consisted mainly of enthusiasts and supporters who were not employed as historians or archaeologists. Those active in the Dugdale Society had professional qualifications in such fields as the law, medicine and architecture, and applied knowledge and skill to the study of the past.

From the 1920s until the 1960s the University of Birmingham was the only university in the county; it taught history, and at least two members of its staff at times during the 1930s were local historians, and that interest persisted after the Second World War. Experts in local studies were also active in the University in the fields of economic history, historical geography and archaeology. History was taught in the county's schools, but the syllabus consisted mainly of national history with an emphasis on constitutional themes; however, local subjects engaged the interest of some individual teachers. From the 1960s new universities were founded (of which Warwick was the first), and others were created by upgrading existing institutions. By 2020 there were eight universities operating in the county, and at least two hundred of their staff were teaching history. They covered a wide range of subjects, and only a handful took any interest in local history or Warwickshire history, though academics from outside the region and from overseas did research on the county. A major contribution to Warwickshire history came from two inspirational academics at Birmingham who recruited research students to work on local history (see chapter 5). The expansion of higher education and the funding of research in local historical subjects

by staff and postgraduate students did not necessarily diminish the contribution of those outside the academic world. Some of the research students gained academic posts and continued to promote the county's history, but others employed outside universities after graduation could make a contribution as part-timers. A good number of theses on Warwickshire subjects were written by mature research students, who again continued historical activities after completing their degrees. University MA courses designed for part-timers played an important part in stimulating interest among enthusiastic mature students. Another fruitful interaction between universities and the community resulted from the work of extra-mural or adult education departments. Some staff of the Birmingham extra-mural department in the 1950s and 1960s recruited adult students into research with well-defined objectives: Victor Skipp was a hands-on supervisor of groups exploring village histories in Sheldon, Bickenhill and Solihull, which resulted in valuable publications. In chapter 8 Nat Alcock points out that adult education departments throughout the country promoted vernacular architecture as a subject, while it attracted only limited interest in history or archaeology departments. The same could be said of the early work on landscape history. With the decline and eventual removal of continuing education from universities, independent groups have continued to do research, sometimes with advice from academics and sometimes with the support of the National Lottery. In other words, the tradition of the 'expert amateur', so strong in the 1920s and 1930s, persisted and even expanded in the different circumstances that prevailed in the days of burgeoning history departments in universities from the 1960s. No better indication of this has been the foundation of the Warwickshire Local History Society in 1965 and its subsequent success, providing an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and information, not least in the articles in *Warwickshire History*. The vitality of general interest in local history has been demonstrated by the formation of many history societies and heritage groups in towns and villages throughout the county, many of which were mainly concerned with organising talks by visiting speakers, but also sometimes stimulated research projects and programmes of publication.

Research depends on archives and libraries. The sources available in the 1930s are apparent from the footnotes of volume 3 of the *Victoria County History* edited by Philip Styles of Birmingham University. The County Record Office at Warwick was developing in the 1930s, and looked after the diocesan archives of Coventry. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust at Stratford was already well established as a record repository. A large manuscript collection was available in the Birmingham Reference Library and church records could be read at Worcester. Coventry's record office was also established before the Second World War. Private archives were preserved in country houses, and church records (such as parish registers) were often kept in their parishes, but these were gradually being transferred

to more accessible public collections. So many of the records we take for granted were available to researchers, but one suspects that they were not always easily accessible. The deposit of private collections in public repositories accelerated in the post-war period, sometimes involving archivists taking the initiative to save an archive (in the case of the Archer collection, now at Stratford). An appeal for funds allowed the County Record Office to acquire the Warwick Castle documents. By the 1980s the bulk of the major collections, including parish records, were available in record offices or libraries. The growing number of archivists did not just make sources available to readers, but some did historical research, edited texts and taught students, to the great advantage of local history. The archives expanded their holdings, carried out conservation work and also provided services for readers with finding aids, photographic and photocopying facilities and microfilm collections. In the digital age catalogues and also calendars and reproductions of documents became available online, notably through the initiative known as A2A (Access to Archives). The National Archives' Discovery catalogue and the Manorial Documents Register enabled researchers to locate documents. Historians have always needed access to printed sources, but also to the books and periodicals with their interpretations, enabling contexts to be understood and comparisons to be made. Again, resources expanded in the form of large public libraries and university libraries, though both have suffered from spending reductions since the 1980s. Some relief has come from the proliferation of electronic versions, though access to these is restricted, and the 'expert amateur' who is not a privileged holder of a university identity card is at a disadvantage. At least the locally produced journals and series: *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society*, *Warwickshire History* and the main series and Occasional Papers of the Dugdale Society are available in paper form in a number of libraries to all readers. The recent constraints on library and archive services have not been helpful for local history researchers. Record offices have been afflicted by staff shortages and restricted opening hours. The Library of Birmingham is an extreme example of the troubles of the twenty-first century, as it moved into a striking new building, resulting in a temporary closure of the archive, which then reopened with a service much inferior to that previously available.

Sources of archaeological information also expanded greatly from the 1970s, with more staff being employed by the county and the foundation of a Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), now a major resource renamed the Historic Environment Record. After the imposition of the West Midlands Metropolitan County in 1974 a separate SMR was established, but since that authority ended Birmingham and Coventry have been served by separate facilities. Local authorities have recently reduced staffing, but the service has been maintained because archaeological and environmental information is needed for their own planning processes.

Additional information can be obtained from the National Record of the Historic Environment, together with the large collection of air photographs, both administered by Historic England, and located at Swindon. Archaeological work in the county is published in the *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society*, occasionally in national archaeological journals, in monographs published by the Council for British Archaeology and Society for Medieval Archaeology or in the 'grey literature' produced by Archaeology Warwickshire or the contractors who carried out particular excavations.

New ways of gaining access to the recent past include oral history, which has developed its own methodology and has the capacity to provide vivid insights into subjects poorly covered or even unmentioned in conventional written documents. Photographs have been collected and curated, for example in the Birmingham Library, and films are collected in the Media Archive for Central England.

Before inviting readers to embark on the chapters exploring changes in approaches to its past, 'Warwickshire' needs some definition. It does not coincide with pre-Roman and Roman provinces, nor with early medieval kingdoms, nor the dioceses founded in the seventh century. The county was formed for administrative convenience by the late Anglo-Saxon state, taking some account of older boundaries, such as the line of Watling Street which had been chosen to define the frontier of the Danelaw in the late ninth century. It survived as originally devised for centuries, with some rationalisation in the south in the 1930s, but was dismembered in the west in 1974. The Warwickshire about which the authors of this book are writing includes some parishes in the south-east which formerly belonged to Worcestershire, notably Alderminster, Shipston and Tredington, and in the south-west former parts of Gloucestershire such as Long Marston, Quinton and Welford-on-Avon. Mollington in the east is now in Oxfordshire. A tract of territory between Birmingham and Coventry, including Solihull, was taken out of the county in 1974 to make a new metropolitan county of the West Midlands, and all of this area is regarded here as part of historic Warwickshire. Birmingham grew in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and extended over adjacent parts of Staffordshire and Worcestershire. Historic Warwickshire contained Birmingham, Edgbaston, Aston, Witton and Castle Bromwich, but not Yardley, King's Norton, Northfield, Harborne or Handsworth (see Figs 5 and 7).³

The chapters published here are designed to reflect as fully as possible the various influences and trends that have affected research and writing of the history of Warwickshire over the last century. Two chapters have been included which directly address the editing and writing of history for

³ F. A. Youngs, *Guide to the Local Administrative Units of England*, 2, *Northern England* (London, Royal Historical Society, 1991), pp. 433–57, 749–55.

publication. One, chapter 1, is Robert Bearman's history of the Dugdale Society, which celebrates the achievements in the first two decades of such figures as Wellstood, Humphreys and Cooper, who gave the new society a firm foundation. As in other counties after 1945, the Society faltered and advanced only slowly, a hiatus that was prolonged in Warwickshire into the 1960s. The Society surged forwards in the present century. John Beckett's account in chapter 11 of the *Victoria County History*, to which a number of Dugdale Society historians contributed, also falls into three periods, firstly the volumes published in 1904 and 1908, when authors mainly from outside the county were commissioned by the London editor to write chapters on county-wide themes such as political history. The four topographical volumes were written in 1930s and 1940s, and belong to the period before the revolution which introduced such topics as economic history, social history and education for each parish, though in the case of Warwickshire, especially volume 3, occasional small-scale moves were made in that direction. The last two volumes, of 1964 and 1969, on Birmingham and Coventry, form part of the transformation of the VCH nationally, which as a normal practice began to devote whole volumes to large cities.

The chapters of this book dealing with the Middle Ages take as their starting point the work of Mary Dormer Harris, who wrote about Warwickshire in general and Coventry in particular between the 1898 and 1936. In chapter 2 Peter Coss praises her wise insistence that the publication of Coventry's early documents was essential to understanding the city. He takes a critical approach to identifying forged charters, and guides the reader through the controversy about the city's division into two halves. He shows that the twelfth-century earls and bishops promoted urban growth. In chapter 3 Richard Goddard focuses on Harris's account of the oppression of artisans in the fifteenth century, especially in cloth making, through regulations by the city government which promoted the interests of the merchants. Goddard advocates empathy in appreciating that the governors of the city saw it as a body politic, meaning that everyone had a common interest in the quality of Coventry cloth. Andrew Watkins shows in chapter 4 that the small towns of the county had been a rather dark corner in the pre-war period, but they were illuminated by the replacement of a dry constitutional approach with examinations of their society and topography. He discusses their religious culture, including church music. In chapter 5 Christopher Dyer finds in looking at rural society that Dormer Harris, as was normal at the time, gave priority to lords' treatment of tenants and, especially, their serfs. Out of the flourishing of medieval social and landscape history, in the post-war years social science, including human geography, was used to open up such themes as social mobility, gender and social security. The landscape of villages and hamlets and the surrounding countryside was analysed.

In chapter 8 Nat Alcock bridges the late medieval and early modern periods. He finds that the study of 'ancient' timber buildings had a prehistory

before the 1950s, but that enquiries blossomed with the formation of the Vernacular Architecture Group in 1954. Advances in understanding came with the more accurate dating of houses, and the combination of evidence from the buildings and documents.

Three chapters on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries complement one another. In chapter 6 Cathryn Enis explores the many dimensions of the mustering of the county militia in 1569 in response to the Northern Rebellion. The names of the individuals reveal them to represent many sections of society. They were led by Ambrose Dudley, who presented his family as the heirs of the Beauchamp tradition. He also stood for the defence of a Protestant monarchy. In chapter 7 Susan Cogan takes up the theme of unity, showing that the group of antiquarian gentry in the early seventeenth century gave priority to their shared interests, and acted as friends and colleagues across religious divides. Antiquarian research into the ancestry of leading families legitimised the gentry's claims to act as a ruling elite. Ann Hughes in chapter 9 sets the study of the Warwickshire gentry in the seventeenth century in the context of eight decades of work on the Civil War. Now that the 'rise of the gentry' can no longer be accepted (nor any other economic and social explanation of the conflict), and now that the 'county community' approach is regarded as outmoded, attention has shifted to 'state formation'. Instead of being preoccupied with the gentry, lesser people operating at the level of the parish can be included. Members of all sections of society were drawn into the war, as is vividly reflected in the records of claims for compensation for war damage.

Jon Stobart follows the progress of historical understanding of the eighteenth-century aristocracy, demonstrated by three leading families, in chapter 10. Historical interest in landed society in the mid-twentieth century was focused on wealth, income and political allegiances. He analyses the management of the succession to great estates, and finds a number of expressions of indifference to serving as an MP or attending the House of Lords. Cultural interests played an important part in the lives of the landed elite, with their large libraries, antiquities acquired on the grand tour and much attention to building their houses, furnishing them and laying out landscape gardens.

Sarah Richardson devotes her chapter 12 to the political life of Birmingham in the long nineteenth century, which has attracted a succession of historians, all of whom until recently have neglected the role of women. A new generation have discovered female support for the anti-slavery movement, Chartism and other radical causes, culminating in the demand for the extension of the franchise in the early twentieth century.

In chapter 13 Catherine Richardson tackles tourism and the Warwickshire landscape, mainly in the period between 1780 and 1913. Founding members of the Dugdale Society would have been familiar with the flow of visitors, but they would probably not have thought of the history of tourism as a

subject for research. The guide books, as Richardson shows, projected an image of an idyllic countryside, full of literary allusions. These writings provide an insight into cultural history, and also into the 'hospitality industry' as it is now known.

Readers are invited to embark on reading these chapters. Those with a specialist interest in Warwickshire will find much that is new. Anyone seeking insights into local history will gain a sense of the unfolding of the subject over a hundred years, and will learn much about the approaches, concepts, methods and sources now being applied to the study of the past.

The Dugdale Society: Its First Hundred Years

ROBERT BEARMAN

On 22 January 1920 a meeting was held in the Small Lecture Theatre at the Birmingham and Midland Institute with one item on the agenda: that 'a Society (to be called the Dugdale Society) should be formed for the publication of manuscript material throwing light on the history, topography and antiquities of the County of Warwick'.¹ Warwickshire was not a pioneer in this sort of venture. Across the country over twenty English counties had established a record-publishing society by 1920, some from well before. Durham and Northumberland had from 1834 been catered for by the Surtees Society, which by 1920 had produced an astonishing 131 volumes, and Warwickshire's near neighbour, Worcestershire, with a society founded in 1893, had thirty-five volumes to its credit by 1920.² In Warwickshire there had been a number of false starts. The first was the *Warwickshire Antiquarian Magazine*, launched in 1859 under the editorship of John Fetherston of Packwood, a founder member of the Harleian Society, who saw eight issues into print over the next seventeen years, reflecting his interest in the lineages of landed families.³ By 1872 he had already edited two volumes for the Harleian Society and, as principal contributor to his *Magazine*, he published sections of the heralds' 1619 visitation of Warwickshire which appeared later under his editorship as a Harleian Society volume.⁴ This was also the year of the final issue of the *Magazine*, Fetherston dying three years later.

In 1870, a new trend had been set with the establishment of an archaeological section of the Birmingham and Midland Institute. Renamed the Birmingham Archaeological Society in 1898, it had been publishing an

¹ Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive (SCLA), DR 405/1/1: minute book, 1919–38, with miscellaneous printed items pasted in, particularly concerning the preparations for the inaugural meeting.

² Conveniently summarised in E. L. C. Mullins, *Texts and Calendars: an Analytical Guide to Serial Publications* (Royal Historical Society, London, 1958), pp. 289–505.

³ *Warwickshire Antiquarian Magazine*, eight issues, 1859–72.

⁴ John Fetherston (ed.), *The Visitation of the County of Leicester ... 1619*, Harleian Society, 2 (1870); John Fetherston (ed.), *The Visitation of the County of Cumberland ... 1615*, Harleian Society, 7 (1872); John Fetherston (ed.), *The Visitation of the County of Warwick ... 1619*, Harleian Society, 12 (1877).

annual volume of transactions from 1871.⁵ Not surprisingly, given the remit of its sponsoring body, contributions covered not just the city but the counties of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire, on which 'greater' Birmingham was beginning to encroach. Its aim was not to publish edited texts of historical source material (though some did appear), but it did set a tone that persisted well into the twentieth century, that Birmingham was the natural focal point for local antiquarian research affecting the midlands. This was reflected in the setting up of a successor to the *Magazine*, namely the *Midland Antiquary*, which ran from September 1882 to July 1887, edited by William Fowler Carter of Birmingham.⁶ Carter, born in 1856, was a lawyer, called to the Bar in 1880 following education at King Edward's School, Birmingham, Lincoln College, Oxford, and the Inner Temple. How actively he pursued a legal career is far from clear, but was not so extensive as to prevent him, in 1882, aged only twenty-six, from founding the *Midland Antiquary*. This was very much a compilation of short pieces, mainly genealogical, of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire interest, but, amongst the more useful documents to appear, was Carter's own edition of the early registers of the parish of Aston, eventually published in volume form in 1900. The journal also contained the Warwickshire fee farm rents associated with the Act of Parliament of 1650, and the survey of Birmingham of 1553, again published separately in 1891.⁷

The *Midland Antiquary* folded in 1887, partly because of competition from the Archaeological Section of the Birmingham and Midland Institute, whose annual volumes were made up of contributions covering very much the same topographical area. After a gap of nine years another body emerged – this time a true predecessor of the Dugdale Society – namely the Midland Record Society, which between 1896 and 1902 produced six volumes dedicated solely to the publication of historical records.⁸ The project remained Birmingham-based. William Carter resurfaced as chairman of a council of eleven with the secretary and general editor combined in the person of William Wright Wilson, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Surgeons, Edinburgh, who had worked as a doctor in a series of Birmingham hospitals from 1868. Warwickshire documents included in this new series were a number of Birmingham wills, a collection of Warwickshire Sacrament

⁵ Originally published as *Transactions, Excursions and Report – Birmingham and Midland Institute. Archaeological Section*.

⁶ *Midland Antiquary*, 16 issues, 1882–87. For a tribute to Carter, following his death, by Philip B. Chatwin, see Geoffrey Templeman (ed.), *The Records of the Guild of Holy Trinity ... Coventry*, Dugdale Society, 19 (1944), pp. vii–viii.

⁷ W. B. Bickley (ed.), *Survey of the Borough and Manor or Demesne Foreign of Birmingham: Made in the First Year of the Reign of Queen Mary, 1553* (Birmingham, 1891); William F. Carter (ed.), *The First Volume (1544 to 1639/40) of the Registers of the Parish Church of Aston-juxta-Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1900).

⁸ *Transactions of the Midland Record Society*, six issues, 1892–1902.

Certificates, the Warwickshire subsidy roll of 1327, edited by Carter himself, and a description of the Sutton Coldfield Corporation records.

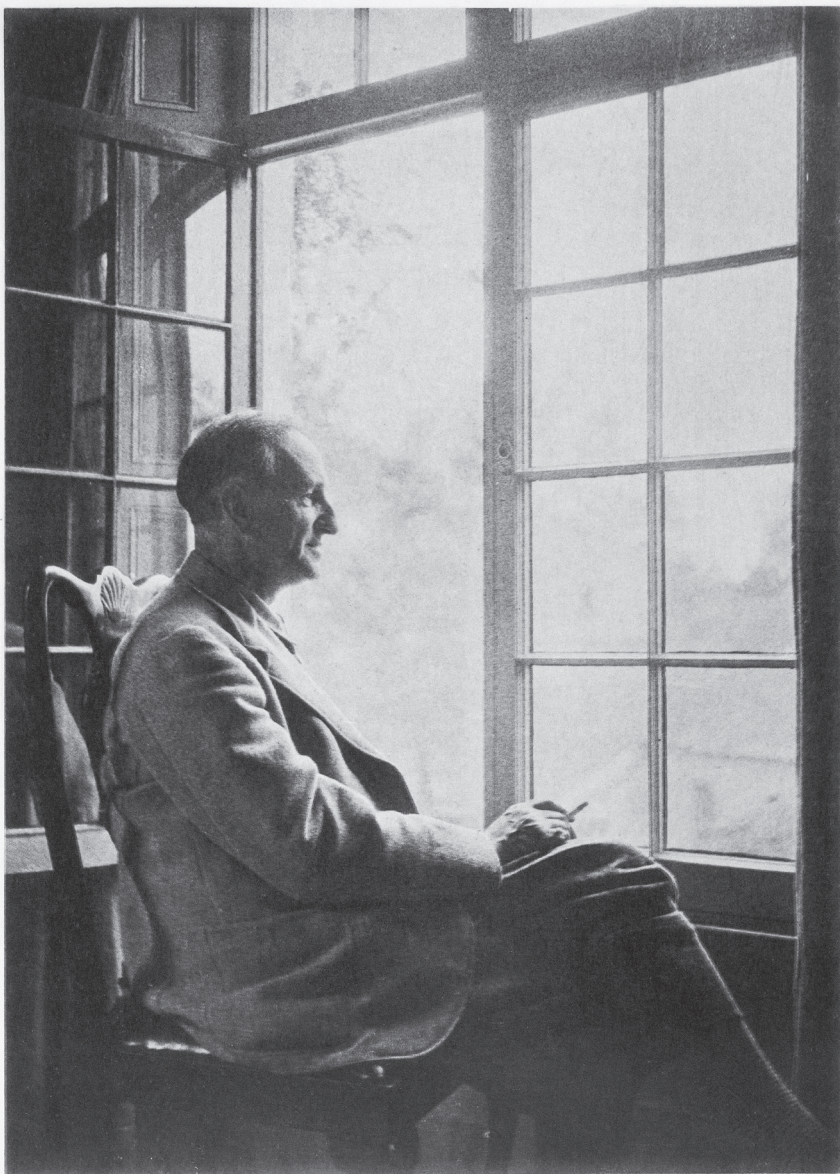
The Midland Record Society produced no further volumes after 1902, followed this time by a longer delay until thoughts turned, this time specifically, to the needs of Warwickshire. This delay is partly accounted for, of course, by the First World War, but the other two counties included under the 'midland' umbrella, Worcestershire and Staffordshire, already had their own record-publishing societies, Worcestershire since 1893 and Staffordshire since 1880.⁹ A society more obviously linked to the historic county of Warwickshire may therefore have been seen as a natural complement to these.

The driving force for the establishment of such a society came not from the existing network of local antiquarians with its Birmingham bias but from the young Frederick Christian Wellstood, born in Oxford in March 1884, the son of Charles James Wellstood, a college servant. He was educated at New College School, but with his father unable to manage the prohibitive costs of subsequent admission to one of the Oxford colleges, the young Wellstood matriculated instead at the Delegacy of Non Collegiate Students in Oxford, a body specifically set up to admit to the University young men from less privileged backgrounds.¹⁰ Wellstood proceeded to BA in 1906 and MA in 1908, whilst living at home and working as an assistant at the Bodleian Library. On graduation, he was promoted to the post of superintendent of the new Upper Reading Room, and two years later, in 1910, aged only twenty-six, he was appointed Secretary and Librarian to the Trustees and Guardians of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon, on a salary of £200, with accommodation included, a post he filled until his death in 1942 (Fig. 1).

Wellstood's duties in this role involved him in a good deal of administrative work, but his interests, experience and training clearly inclined him towards academic activities, not simply in his role as librarian but also as the custodian of the Trust's extensive archive collections which had been presented to, or deposited with, the Trust since the 1860s, in particular those of the Stratford-upon-Avon Borough Council, which included material dating back to the thirteenth century. By 1919 the lord of the manor of Henley-in-Arden, William J. Fieldhouse – and a wealthy

⁹ Until 1936, the Staffordshire volumes were published in the name of the William Salt Archaeological Society, of which Carter himself was a founder member and a contributor to its publications.

¹⁰ A tribute to Wellstood, by William Cooper, with brief details of his early career, was published in: Lucy Drucker (ed.), *Warwickshire Feet of Fines, Volume III (1345–1509)*, Dugdale Society, 18 (1943), pp. vii–ix. For Wellstood's years at the Delegacy, see the records of St Catherine's College, Oxford, founded in 1962 as an eventual successor to the Delegacy, in particular, references in the ledger/register of matriculations and degrees conferred, and the Non-Collegiate termly magazine. I am very grateful to Barbara Costa of St Catherine's College Library for her help with this. For Wellstood's family background, the censuses of 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911 have been used.



FREDERICK CHRISTIAN WELLSTOOD

FOUNDER OF THE DUGDALE SOCIETY, IN THE STUDY AT LOXLEY, 1941

Figure 1: Frederick Christian Wellstood, Secretary and General Editor of the Dugdale Society, 1921-42, in his study at Loxley the year before his death. Lucy Drucker (ed.), *Warwickshire Feet of Fines, Volume III* (1345-1509), Dugdale Society, 18 (1943).

Birmingham businessman – persuaded Wellstood to transcribe, mainly from the Trust's collections, a series of court rolls and other documents relating to the manor of Henley covering the years 1326 to 1801.¹¹ Wellstood's editing of these documents reflects a high degree of professionalism, bringing together a collection of texts which can still be profitably consulted today.

This early exercise may have served as the necessary stimulus for the formation of a society dedicated to the publication of further records relating to the county's history. During the summer of 1919 we find Wellstood discussing the idea with Mary Dormer Harris, the editor of the *Coventry Leet Book*, then living in Leamington.¹² At the end of July, local newspapers carried a letter under their joint names inviting those interested in forming a record-publishing society to get in touch. By 1 September Wellstood, sufficiently encouraged by a positive response, circulated a leaflet proposing that such a society be established, making available to a wider audience documents from that 'vast mass of unprinted matter of the highest importance in various public and private collections' concerning which 'there has hitherto been no organised effort to render it accessible to the economic historian, the archaeologist, the historian of the parish, the topographer, the genealogist and others'. He also offered his services as 'Hon. Sec. *pro tem.*' in which role he would arrange a meeting at a suitable time and place if enough offers of further support were forthcoming.

Wellstood's bulging correspondence files for 1919 and 1920 are sufficient testimony to the popularity of his idea, and on 8 January 1920 the inaugural meeting for the formation of the Dugdale Society was announced, to be held on 22 January at the Birmingham and Midland Institute, to be presided over by the Lord Mayor, W. A. Cadbury, with addresses by Wellstood himself and Sir Sidney Lee, from 1891 until its completion in 1904 the sole editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Mary Dormer Harris was also advertised as one of the speakers.¹³ Following introductory remarks by the Lord Mayor, Wellstood reiterated the reasons for the setting up of the Society, adding that 'we as a nation were much behind Continental countries in the interest taken

¹¹ Published in a handsome volume: Frederick C. Wellstood (ed.), *Records of the Manor of Henley-in-Arden* (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1919).

¹² This and much of what follows is drawn from two bundles of letters and other papers concerning the establishment of the Society (SCLA, DR 405/3/1–2). I thank the staff at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust for making the Dugdale Society's archive available in difficult circumstances.

¹³ Sidney Lee, from 1903, had been serving as chairman of the executive committee of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, thus facilitating Wellstood's approach. One or two issues had to be resolved. The Keeper of the Middle Temple Library cast doubt on the wisdom of naming the Society after William Dugdale, arguing that, though Dugdale was a historian of the county of Warwickshire, his national reputation, at least in the Keeper's view, was as the historian of the Inns of Court and for his work as a Herald. Mary Dormer Harris also tried to get out of making a speech at the inaugural meeting by pleading a deadline for a forthcoming book.

in local records; and just as England as a whole was far behind other countries in this respect, so Warwickshire, as a county lagged far behind other English counties'. The meeting ended with a resolution to form the society that Wellstood had described, and to appoint the earl of Denbigh as president, supported by thirteen distinguished vice-presidents drawn from the ranks of the aristocracy, landed gentry and the county's business elite. An executive committee of fourteen men and one woman was also elected, including Wellstood as Secretary, to which the office of General Editor was added the following year. At the first meeting of the committee, chaired by John Humphreys, the 70-year-old retired lecturer in dentistry at the University of Birmingham, it was agreed to set the subscription at one guinea a year, and Wellstood was instructed to draw up a list of rules. These were adopted at the Society's annual general meeting in December 1921, providing for a Council of between ten and twenty members with powers to appoint a Publications Committee. Committee member Walter Powell, also the city librarian, offered a room at the Library for the holding of future meetings.¹⁴

The record-publishing society established as the result of this flurry of activity was, compared to its predecessors, more obviously 'professional'. This is not to criticise the earlier efforts of those behind the *Warwickshire Antiquarian Magazine*, the *Midland Antiquary* and the Midland Record Society, catering for a body of antiquarians keen to share their interests with other local people – and of the same social class – as essentially a pastime, or what we might now call an 'amateur' pursuit. These pioneers were landed gentry or retired or part-time professional men trained in other disciplines. Their interest was genuine enough and their determined efforts to collect data and their enthusiasm to report their discoveries inspire respect. But to move from an essentially amateur magazine towards a more focused approach to the publication of historical texts required a more disciplined approach, and in this Wellstood was a key figure. He was not only university-trained but had worked at the Bodleian Library and now held a professional post which involved the care of a manuscript collection of considerable interest. He himself had just seen into print his *Henley-in-Arden* volume, requiring a knowledge of Latin and legal French, not simply to flatter the current lord of the manor but to make the information the records contained available to a wider audience.

On the other hand, Wellstood's initiative did not break with the assumption that the Society's work was still to be Birmingham-led. As already noted, the inaugural meeting was held at the Birmingham and Midland Institute and, thanks to the offer made by the city librarian, routine meetings were held there into the late 1940s. The Council was also dominated by a group of Birmingham men already known to one

¹⁴ This and much of the detail which follows is taken from SCLA, DR 405/1/1, a minute book covering Council, editorial committee and annual general meetings from 1919 to 1938, with various printed items pasted in.