

Law and Order in Alderbury

Policing Alderbury

Before the establishment of County and Borough police forces, parish constables were appointed locally. In 1839 Wiltshire became the first county in England to appoint its own police force. At that time Salisbury had its own borough force as did other boroughs in Wiltshire. At some time after 1946 this was combined with the county force.

Alderbury had its own constable from the outset but he only lasted a year, dismissed for neglect of duty and misconduct. However, all of his successors in the post all fared better. Their beat covered Alderbury, Whaddon, Clarendon and the Petersfinger toll-gate. From 1845 the post was that of a sergeant and he was responsible for constables in Grimstead, Laverstock, Whiteparish and Winterslow.

We know that initially the Alderbury police station was in Old Road, at the cottage now known as Ivychurch Cottage. In 1931 it was moved to a purpose-built police station in Southampton Road. In the 1990's the present police station was built together with three police houses in Grimstead Road.

Early this year it was announced that the police station at Alderbury was one of a number to be closed as they were "not fit for purpose". It has not been open to the public for some years but had been used by the police for office work and a place to take a break when required. It is to be replaced by a "touchdown point" in Downton Library "where they will work out in the community where the public are" according to the Police & Crime Commissioner.

Crime in Alderbury

The majority of crime in Alderbury over the years has been what might be described as "social crimes" as they involved theft by the poorest members of society of property belonging to the moneyed classes or nobility. Stealing

wood for heating and cooking made up 12% of all Wiltshire Court cases and Alderbury was no exception.

However, two cases stand out as nowadays most would not consider them a crime. In 1696 William London, Joseph's Carter's servant, was convicted of Swearing at Alderbury. Four years later, in 1700, Joseph Carter himself was also convicted of Swearing. A statute of 1623 had made Cursing punishable with a fine of one shilling or time in the stocks in default of payment. Not a pleasant alternative as it involved being restrained by the wrists or feet between wooden timbers on the village green and subject to being pelted with whatever missiles took the fancy of onlookers.

Crimes against the Game Laws formed up to half of all cases heard in the Wiltshire Courts. Under an Act of 1670, only persons with a freehold estate of more than £100 a year, or the heir of a squire, were permitted to shoot rabbits, hares, pheasants and partridges. Under a 1770 Act anyone convicted of killing game between sunset and sunrise, or using any gun, dog, snare or net at night was to be imprisoned for not less than three months. By 1803, any person who resisted arrest could be hanged and by 1816 a person who entered a wood with intent to kill game could be transported.

Two examples of Alderbury men falling foul of these laws: in November 1816 Thomas Fry of Alderbury was convicted for trespass in search of game in Clarendon Park and sentenced to one month in prison. Also John Thomas of Alderbury was convicted in October 1849 with killing a pheasant sentenced to two months in prison with hard labour

The Alderbury Murderer

In July 1939 Alderbury hit the national newspapers when William Hugh Cousins of Clarendon Road, Alderbury was charged with a double murder.

He was charged with the murder of his wife Mary Ann Cousins and also of Miss Edith Jessie Cable. He had been separated from his wife for about ten years and lived with Miss Cable for about that time. He asked his wife to take him back on a number of occasions but she refused to do so. She d also so

refused to divorce him so that he could marry Miss Cable. She refused a divorce as she was a Catholic.

In a statement to the police Cousins said that he had driven to Bournemouth to a convalescent home where Miss Cable was staying. He then drove them to Ringwood where he stopped the car and strangled and shot her. He then drove with Miss Cable's body to his wife's house in Durrington where he had shot and killed his wife.

The case was heard at the Wiltshire Assizes in Devizes. The facts were not really disputed. Cousins was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. However, medical evidence was produced that he had schizophrenia and his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment at Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum.

