

Colton History Society



Bellamour Hall 1892

From Sketches in and Around Lichfield & Rugeley

From a Book SKETCHES IN AND AROUND LICHFIELD AND RUGELEY

Written by Alfred Williams PRINTED in 1892

BELLAMOUR

The large estate at Colton known as Bellamour belonged some centuries back, to a family of the name of Aston, the same, we presume, which formerly lived at Colton Hall. The name of Aston is frequently met with in local histories, and some members of the family appear to have been of some considerable repute. In 1628 we find a Sir Walter Aston residing at Colton Hall, and a few years later there was a Sir Arthur Aston who is described as a brave commander of the royalist troops in the reign of Charles I, who greatly distinguished himself at the battle of Edge Hill, and was governor of Drogheda in 1649, when the town was taken by Cromwell. Lord Aston, in 1651, held the right of presentation to the living of Colton, which remained in the family for many years, but it was earlier in the century that Herbert Aston fixed his residence at Colton, after his marriage, and erected the old mansion known as Bellamour Hall. This was in the year 1638, and it is said that he derived possession of the property from his father, "his house being in a great measure finished by the benevolence and affection of his friends", who chose to designate it by the appellation of "Bellamour", the French for "good love". So taken was Mr. Aston with this name that he appears to have adopted it in its English form as a pet name for his young wife, who seems to have well merited the encomiums passed upon her character. He had the misfortune to lose her in 1658, living himself until 1689. This loving pair are buried at Colton, but no inscription is to be found recording the memory.

Who were the next tenants is uncertain, but in 1796 we find that Lady Blount, who had probably held possession of the estate for some time, caused a larger house to be built close by the old mansion for her second son, Edward Blount, this being the present hall, or rather that portion of the same which is built of stone. This gentleman, however, appears to have required additional accommodation, for he shortly afterwards caused numerous alterations to be made, including the erection of a new wing, which is constructed of brick and faced with stucco. Lady Mary Blount was, in 1805, unfortunately burnt to death while on a visit to her youngest son at Basford, a spark from the fire igniting her dress and causing the terrible accident. Twenty years after this the property passed into the hands of Mr. James Oldham, a retired Indian Judge, whose name is still venerated in the village of Colton, and is not likely to be speedily forgotten. In Colton Church are to be seen several stained glass windows to the memory of the Oldham family, the large east window being erected by Miss Helen Oldham to the memory of her father, and another window in the north aisle by the inhabitants of the village. There is also a window in memory of Mrs. Oldham and a tablet to Mr & Mrs. Oldham and their grandson.

At the death of Mr. Oldham, in 1857, the property was purchased by Mr. T. Horsfall, M. P. for Liverpool from June 1853, to November 1868. It may be mentioned that Mr. Horsfall was returned for Liverpool in 1853 in the Conservative interest, by a large majority, as he was also at successive elections, each time standing at the top of the poll. Previous to being elected for Liverpool he sat for the borough of Derby, for a short period. During his lifetime he made considerable additions to the estate, and

greatly improved its general appearance. In the village itself he was greatly esteemed and beloved for the interest he took in the welfare of the inhabitants, and the large amount of good he accomplished both publicly and privately. The village schools were erected at his expense, and were also endowed by him, while the new Cemetery adjoining was presented by him to the village as a free gift. The Reading Room further along the village, which is a very commodious building, was also built by Mr. Horsfall. He also took a very active part in the erection of the District Hospital at Rugeley, and it was largely through his instrumentality that this noble and useful institution was raised. Not only did he head the subscription list with a handsome donation of £250, but he entered his name as an annual subscriber, and in every way exerted himself to render it a building worthy of the neighborhood. He likewise took a very active part in the formation of the local company of volunteers. There were many other ways in which he displayed his interest in the welfare of Colton and Rugeley, and his name will ever be held in the highest respect all over the district. Mrs. Horsfall and her family have, since the decease of the late owner, continued to reside on the estate, and we are not saying too much when we state that the interest taken by the lady in question in all pertains to the benefit of the villagers generally is thoroughly appreciated by the inhabitants.

There is not very much to dwell upon in describing the hall and its surroundings. The estate is a large one consisting of about 500 acres, but nearly four-fifths of this appears to be farmed off reducing the space actually reserved for the park, pleasure grounds and gardens to about 10 acres. The lake running through the grounds also takes up considerable space, but there is plenty of room left for the requirements of the owner. The park is situated to the south of the village of Colton, and on the north bank of the Trent, and comprises some fine old trees, well laid out shrubberies and a broad stretch of meadow land. From the hall a very fine view is obtained of the surrounding country, the prospect being very picturesque, while the situation must be very healthy.

It is approached by lodge gates at different sides of the park, the more pleasant route being from the lodge in Colton lane. Upon making for the hall by this entrance the visitors attention is first directed to the stone mansion erected by Lady Blount, which is square in form, with large windows of plain but imposing appearance. The style of architecture is of Grecian simplicity, a lofty porch being supported by doric pillars. There is nothing in the way of ornamentation but there is an air of massiveness about the structure which cannot fail to impress beholders. Adjoining it is the brick wing added by Mr. Edward Blount which is a trifle more varied in design, and accords well with the remainder of the mansion. At the back of this is the old mansion—that originally erected by Mr. Herbert Anson, and now occupied by Mr. Morrall, the steward of the estate, whose thirty-four years service in the employ of the Horsfall family has justly entitled him to the respect of all who know him.

The old mansion, with its gabled roof, its ancient porch, and what remains of its mullioned windows, is an exceedingly interesting object. Although enlarged and improved some years after its erection, it can hardly be called an extensive mansion, but it possesses a genuine appearance of antiquity, and numerous cracks in the wall betoken its gradual decay. It would appear that it was at some time or other used as a private chapel, the porch being furnished with side seats, over the entrance being inscribed the text “The Lord bless thee and keep thee”. The old hall is almost hidden

by the foliage which shelters it from the wind and from prying observation, and, judging by its position, it must be delightfully cool in summer and correspondingly warm in the winter. The well ordered flower and kitchen gardens, together with the green houses are all well worthy of inspection, while a stroll about the park in fine weather cannot but impress the visitor with the natural beauty of the position and the charming character of its surroundings. Bellamour Lodge close by, should also be mentioned as having been built by Mr. Oldham in 1851, for his daughters and now occupied by Mrs. Harland, the house being of modern style and the grounds tastefully laid out.

