The comments of a 19th century cleric about Sutton Park and other local observations

by Roy Billingham

Francis Kerril Amherst (1819-83)

Francis Kerril Amherst, who was born in London on March 21, 1819, became an English Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton. He was the eldest son of William Kerril Amherst of Little Pardon in Essex and of Mary Louisa Turville-Fortescue of Bosworth Hall, Leicestershire. One or both of his parents hailed from recusant families.

Francis and his younger brother William were sent to study at the Roman Catholic College of Our Lady at Maryvale, Oscott, from September 1830 until 1838. The intention was that Francis would be prepared for the Catholic priesthood, but after completing his studies he left with no intention of pursuing this religious vocation.

However, three years later he returned to New Oscott, Sutton Coldfield, where the College had by then relocated, to do theological studies and he was ordained a priest by Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman on June 6, 1846. Shortly afterwards, he joined the Third order of Saint Dominic. He returned to New Oscott College once more, in 1855, this time as a professor.

Francis Kerril Amherst D.D. Lord Bishop of Northampton

After eleven months in this position Amherst was appointed to the mission of Stafford. Following the resignation of Bishop William Wareing of Northampton, he was named by the Holy See to head that diocese. He was consecrated on July 4, 1858, and was honoured with an appointment as an Assistant at the Pontifical Throne on June 8, 1862. He resigned his see in 1879, due to ill health, and the following year was given the Titular See of Sozusa.

Amherst died at his residence, Fieldgate, in Kenilworth, Warwickshire, on August 21, 1883, aged 64. His autobiography, *Memoirs of Francis Merril Amherst, D.D., Lord Bishop of Northampton*, had been principally written at the request of his sister Mary Caroline Elizabeth (Caroline), in religion Dame Mary Editha, a Benedictine nun at St. Mary's Priory, Princethorpe.

Chapter II, 'OSCOTT', of the Memoirs from which the following extracts are taken deals principally with his life as a student at Maryvale Roman Catholic College at Oscott and latterly with his time after the College moved from Oscott to a new site that was subsequently renamed New Oscott. In his free time Francis would often walk with his friends to Sutton Park and he formed a close attachment to it and in later life whenever he visited St. Mary's College he would take the opportunity to revisit his favourite spots within the Park.

I have selected extracts from this primary source that relate both to Sutton Park and to matters of local historical interest. The extracts have been annotated, where appropriate, in bold typeface and include illustrations where these have some relevance.

The following extracts are taken from Chapter II – 'OSCOTT' of Francis Kerril Amherst's Memoirs.

"We posted (September 1838) from Malvern to Dee's Royal Hotel, Birmingham, where we stayed overnight."

Francis is relating here the first journey that he and his brother made from their home in Worcestershire to Birmingham to start their education at Oscott. The phrase 'posted' simply means travelling probably by post-chaise rather than stagecoach. Dee's Royal Hotel and Posting House was situated in Temple Row, Birmingham, opposite the Blue Coat School, where House of Fraser is now. It was advertised as 'for families and gentlemen' and boasted of its royal clientele. Its owner at this time was Frederick Dee, Posting Master and wholesale wine and brandy merchant. The coaching era was still at its height in 1838 but was to prove short-lived once it was usurped by the railway mania that began from about this time.

FREDERICK DEE,
BY APPOINTMENT,
POSTING MASTER
TO HER MAJESTY.

DEE'S ROYAL HOTEL,
AND
POSTING HOUSE,
For Families and Gentlemen,
TEMPLE ROW, BIRMINGHAM.
PATRONIZED
BY HER MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY THE QUEEN.
Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent.
Their Royal Highnesses the Dukes of Sussex, Cambridge,
&c. &c. &c.
FREDERICK DEE, Wholesale Wine and Brandy Merchant.

In the latter half of the18th century this hotel was called Dadley's Hotel and was the scene on the 14 July, 1791, of the start of the Birmingham Riots when the notorious dinner to celebrate the second anniversary of the French Revolution was held here under the chairmanship of Lunar Society member, Capt. James Keir, a moderate Anglican and West Bromwich engineer and soap manufacturer. A mob gathered outside the hotel and broke some windows but were persuaded to move on once they learnt that Dr. Joseph Priestley had not been present at the dinner. These major disturbances later became known as The Priestley Riots.

At Maryvale, "We had glorious opportunities of skating, there being several fine pools in the neighbourhood, and one – Powell's Pool – from its great extent afforded abundance of scope for non-scientific skaters."

Amherst's use of the name, Maryvale, is interesting in that he is referring to the location of the college at old Oscott. The name Maryvale was only applied to the building by Father John Newman in 1846 some years after Francis had left the establishment. (see note below)

Oscott was first recorded as Oscote from Old English *Osa's cot* meaning 'Osa's cottage'. The hamlet of Oscott (anciently Auscot) stood in the valley of Oscott Brook at the junction of Old Oscott Lane and Old Oscott Hill in the Perry Barr township and lay in the north-eastern corner of the ancient parish of Handsworth.

The Act of Toleration of 1689 allowed Christians other than Anglicans to openly profess their faith. A Roman Catholic mission was set up by Fr. Andrew Bromwich on Old Oscott Hill. One of a family of wealthy landowners in the district, he bequeathed his home, Oscott House, to pay for a Roman Catholic priest in the area.

At the instigation of Bishop Thomas Hornyhold the house was rebuilt in 1752 as St. Mary's Institute, a plain three-storey brick building in Georgian style which still survives as a Grade II* listed building. In 1758 a new chapel was built in neo-classical style; the stone colonnade was added in 1816.

In 1791 Roman Catholic chapels were legalised and schools were permitted. In 1793 a group of local Catholic nobility and gentry set out to establish a school for the education of their sons and the clergy in an English atmosphere.

The Oscott buildings, previously intended for the bishop's residence, were accepted for the projected institution by agreement with Bishop Thomas Talbot, Vicar Apostolic of the Midland District. One year later St Mary's was formerly opened as a college for boys and ecclesiastics. The building was soon extended and the number of boys rose to thirty-five with further additions being made including the Sacred Heart chapel of 1820 which was designed in the gothic style, the stained glass made by Birmingham glassmakers Egintons.

When Oscott College moved to New Oscott in 1838, the old college became its preparatory school for a few years. In 1846 Fr. John Henry (later Cardinal) Newman and Fr. Faber and his fellow converts settled there and Fr. Newman named it Maryvale.

"Perkins's Pool, as we called it, in the midst of Sutton woods, was a favourite skating-place for the elder boys. Its sloping, well wooded banks, cheerful even in mid-winter with evergreen hollies, had a pleasing appearance; and its sheltered position made the ice here fine and smooth, besides being out of range of mischievous stone-throwing boys."

Perkins' Pool is better known as Blackroot Pool. In 1757, 48 acres were granted to Simon Luttrell of Four Oaks Hall by Act of Parliament and later that year, on September 26, came the Blackroot Pool grant. The pool was made by building a dam across the valley using material excavated from the adjacent quarry, and the pool was completed by 1759 when Mr. Duncomb became a partner with Mr. Dolphin and Mr. Homer.

In that same year the Warden and Society allowed Joseph Duncomb to install a water wheel for a mill to be used for dressing leather and the pool became known as Duncomb's Pool. Sheds were also constructed for the storage of skins and these were used for many years.

Perkin's Pool (Blackroot Pool) ,sketched c.1863 by Miss Bracken

The reason that it was also known as Perkins' Pool is that in 1802 the previous lease of the pool in the names of Messrs. Duncomb and Ingram expired and S.F. Perkins, in whom the lease became vested, applied for its renewal. The Warden and Society were restrained by an order from the Court of Chancery from granting further leases, and Perkins became the tenant until 1864. Then the Warden and Society paid Mr. Perkins £210 to give up his tenancy of Perkin's Pool with its boat and boathouse. By this time the leather dressing mill was redundant and from thereon the pool was used solely for boating and pleasure. The new

tenants paid the Corporation rents of £100 per annum compared with the one shilling rent paid by Dolphin, Duncomb and Homer 100 years earlier.

"The smell of fern carries me back to a spot in Sutton Park first visited 47 years ago…"

"Walking, bathing and fishing parties were got up for our play days, our walks leaving little of the surrounding country, within reach during the allotted time, unknown to us. My favourite one was to Sutton Woods, where we were allowed to ramble at will, subject to meeting at a place of rendezvous, summoned thither by a horn. The beauty of these woods, the pools lying amongst them, the neighbouring extent of the heather-clad park, the oaks, mountain ashes, hollies, gorse, ferns and the song of birds, gave me a taste for woodland rambles I have never lost."

"It is melancholy to ancient Oscotians to see the changes time has wrought in the park and woods. In these degenerate days the trains bring hundreds to wander beneath the trees or lounge on the banks of the pools, so that police surveillance has invaded the wilds, and one may expect to be called upon to exhibit one's authority ticket. ……But the railway has been guilty of a monstrous thing, for, not content with Sutton Station, it has poked and bored its way like some irresistible reptile right through the wood, puffing, whistling and screaming its odious triumph in a way that sorely tries my heart. …… Just above the cutting in days of yore was a wild-duck's nest; there a pair of kestrels lead their home; there was the haunt of the beautiful smaller pied woodpecker, so rarely seen."

The Oscotonian Society was founded in 1863.

His description of the railway refers to the Midland Railway line through Sutton Park and Walmley that opened in 1879 and connected that railway company's Black Country lines with its East Midlands network at Water Orton. His comments were written towards the end of his life. This line clipped the north-western side of Blackroot Pool (Perkin's Pool) as well as the southern extremity of Pool Hollies and diagonally cut through the northern half of Darnel Hurst. It was mainly a goods line for through traffic but there were some passenger trains to Birmingham from stations at Streetly, Sutton Park, Sutton Town and Penns (Walmley).

The pied woodpecker, I think, refers to the Lesser-spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos* minor) which is still a rare species and smaller than the Great-spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos* major) which is currently flourishing in the Park and local gardens.

"Those woods! I love them; none of the others have come up to my ideal as they did. These we might wander all afternoon, meeting no one but our own party, or did Swift the gamekeeper, who had very little game to keep, I believe, for every one in Sutton parish had the right of sporting. He, however, was above the common prejudice against magpies, jays, hedgehogs; even the owls were exempt from hostility on his part, but an occasional hawk fell before his gun, possibly that he might show some zeal in the case of his masters, the Corporation. Not only the woods have suffered, but in the park a space formerly clothed in heather and golden gorse has been 'civilized' into a racecourse! This spot I knew as the resort of the lapwing, lark, pippet, bunting and even snipe. It lies between Rownton (sic) Well (vulgarly called Rotten Well), over which still rises a tall wooden cross, and what we called Warwick Wood, which skirts the old Chester Road. As for the Coldfield, a large extent of heather which in old times joined Cannock Chase, it is now under cultivation."

John Swift was a head ranger and park gamekeeper employed by the Warden and Society to protect the game birds in the Park from poachers. He lived in the Park cottage adjacent to Four Oaks entrance to the Park. This cottage and adjacent piece of land was just outside the Park and is marked on the 1789 map of Sutton Park. The cottage still exists but in a much modified form.

The racecourse referred to was situated in Longmoor Valley and was active from 1868-79 before it became a military long-range rifle range (1881-95) following the first Boer War. [Refer to The Proceedings of the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group, Vol. 10, Autumn 2012, pp. 6-11]

Amherst's 'pipits' would have been Meadow Pipits (*Anthus pretensis*) which can still be found in the Park, particularly on Rowton Bank. It is characterised by its ascending song flight followed by it parachuting downwards on half-spread wings not unlike a Skylark.

The tall wooden cross at Rowton Well was a direction finger post. This was necessary because the approach to it was, and still is, over rough terrain and the well is only visible at close range as the land between the path and the well slopes downwards towards the Longmoor Brook.

Warwick Wood that Amherst refers to is almost certainly Westwood Coppice, the woodland alongside Chester Road North that extends from the Banners Gate entrance to the south as far as the Royal Oak Gate entrance to the north. The name Warwick Wood is a mystery because on the first map of Sutton Park, dated 1789, it is quite clearly labelled Westwood Coppice, the most westerly woodland in the Park. There is also the doubtful possibility that he refers to Warden's Belt which is adjacent to the northern end of Westwood Coppice.

The Bunter Pebble Beds which underlie Barr Beacon and Sutton Park have proved inhospitable for cultivation. For a long time they were good for nothing but heathland, and this area west of Sutton was branded the 'Coldfield' because it was so barren.

"A number of letters written about this time are extant, one of which, dated August 1832, speaks of the severe ravages made by cholera in Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall and Bromsgrove."

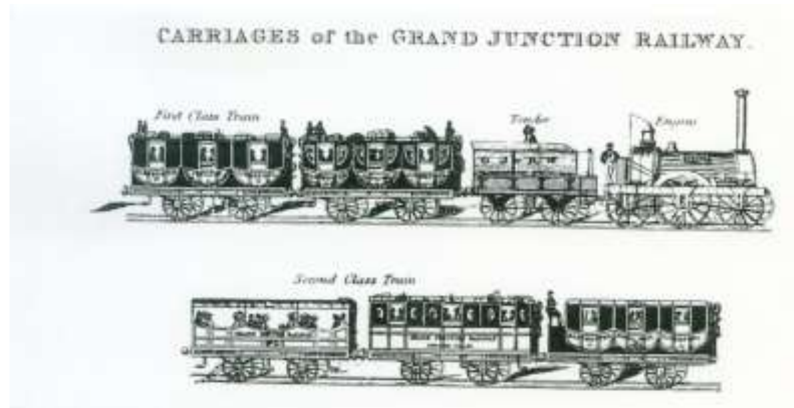
"In 1832 Asiatic cholera first made its appearance in England. Cholera in its worst form was raging within a few miles of the college but never reached us."

The pandemic of Asiatic cholera spread westwards from the Baltic ports and gradually affected England and Wales. The West Midlands was badly affected during August and September of 1832 and Bilston suffered perhaps more than any other place in the country, for out of a population of 14,492 it lost 742 by this dire disease. Bilston was called the "Epidemic centre of the Midlands coalfield" and September 12 that year was kept as a Day of Humiliation.

"Our first railway journey was to Stafford from Bescott Bridge, then the station for Walsall, and in 1838 we went by rail to Coventry on our way to Kenilworth, when I remember asking for *outside* places. In that year the line was opened to Rugby, whence one was conveyed by coach or omnibus to Denbigh Hall, in Buckinghamshire, and thence by rail to London."

The Kenilworth Station did not open until 1844 when the Coventry to Leamington (Milverton) single branch line was opened on 9th December of that year.

The first railway coaches were like stagecoaches with outside places for passengers and luggage as illustrated below. Each L & B carriage, as on other lines at the time, resembled three road coaches grouped together to form one longer unit. Luggage and the guard travelled on the roof which was well within what was then a generous loading gauge.



A Grand Junction train of 1838 with outside passengers and luggage in the stagecoach style

The original *Denbigh Hall* was a coaching inn on Watling Street (A5) dating from 1710 and previously known as the *Marquis of Granby*. The inn no longer exists but Network Rail continues to use this name for its marshalling yards north of Bletchley railway station, near the site of the inn. The West Coast Main Line bridge (No. 158) that carries the line over Watling Street near here bears a plaque that explains that the first phase of the London and Birmingham Railway line terminated here. An article in the April 9, 1838, edition of *The Rugby Advertiser* states:

> **'The line from London to Denbigh Hall was opened to the public, - (Denbigh Hall is a little hamlet about two miles north of Bletchley station, and was no doubt selected for a temporary terminus as the Holyhead coach Road crossed the line at this spot). Immense crowds of people assembled along the newly opened portion of the line to see the first train pass. The line between Birmingham and Rugby was opened on the same day. Owing to the delay in finishing Kilsby tunnel and Roade cutting, the line between Rugby and Denbigh Hall is not completed; and the Company have therefore arranged with Messrs Horne and Chaplin, the coach proprietors, to convey passengers by road over the intervening 36 or 37 miles between the two places.'**

This journey by road from Rugby to Denbigh Hall would have taken up to 4 hours. As can be seen from the accompanying time-table there were initially three trains a day from Birmingham to Rugby during the week but eight trains a day from Denbigh Hall to London. So for instance, the 9.00 am train from Birmingham would arrive in Rugby in time to catch the 10.30 am coach from Rugby to Denbigh Hall in order to connect with the 3.00 pm train to London. These trains would only stop at Coventry between Birmingham and Rugby and at Leighton Buzzard, Tring and Watford between Denbigh Hall and London, a total journey time of about 8½ hours. It is important to remember that times given in the time-table are 'London times' for local times were still in common use. Birmingham was seven minutes behind London and although the London and North Western Railway, the L&B's successor adopted London time throughout its system on the day that the Trent Valley line opened on December 1, 1848, it was to be several years before London time was adopted nationally.

LONDON AND BIRMINGHAM RAILWAY.

HOURS OF DEPARTURE,

Commencing 4th June, 1838.

	From LONDON.	From DEN. HALL.	From RUGBY.	
DOWN	7½ a.m.	10 a.m.	2½ p.m.	to BIRMINGHAM
	10½ a.m.	12 a.m.	4½ p.m.	to do.
	*11 a.m.	—	—	to DENBIGH HALL.
	1 p.m.	3½ p.m.	8 p.m.	to BIRMINGHAM.
	*3 p.m.	—	—	to DENBIGH HALL.
	*5 p.m.	—	—	to do.
	7 p.m.	—	—	to do.
	8½ p.m.	—	—	to do. (Mail)
	From BIRMINGH.	From RUGBY.	From DEN. HALL.	
UP	—	—	4 a.m.	to LONDON. (Mail)
	—	—	*7 a.m.	to do.
	—	—	*9½ a.m.	to do.
	—	—	*1 p.m.	to do.
	9 a.m.	10½ a.m.	3 p.m.	to do.
	—	—	*5 p.m.	to do.
	12 a.m.	1½ p.m.	6 p.m.	to do.
	1½ p.m.	3 p.m.	7½ p.m.	to do.

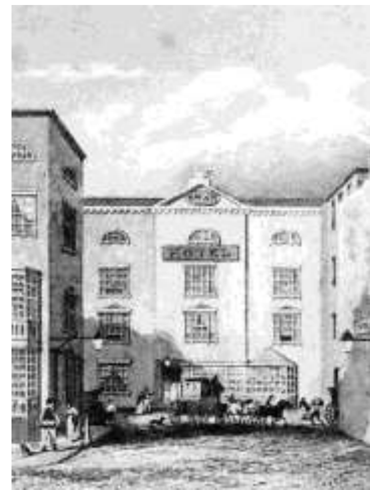
ON SUNDAYS.

	From LONDON.	From DEN. HALL.	From RUGBY.	
DOWN	7½ a.m.	10 a.m.	2½ p.m.	to BIRMINGHAM
	*9½ a.m.	—	—	to DENBIGH HALL.
	*3 p.m.	—	—	to do.
	8½ p.m.	—	—	to do. (Mail)
	From BIRMINGH.	From RUGBY.	From DEN. HALL.	
UP	—	—	4 a.m.	to LONDON (Mail)
	—	—	*7½ a.m.	to do.
	—	—	*5 p.m.	to do.
	1½ p.m.	3 p.m.	7½ p.m.	to do.

[illegible]

Once the construction of the Kilsby tunnel south of Rugby had been completed then the 35 miles of line between Denbigh Hall and Rugby could be opened. The first train from Euston Station, London, to the Curzon Street terminus in Birmingham ran on September 17, 1838. As a general rule, 1st and Mail trains were fast (five hours for both morning mails) and called only at principal stations, while the mixed trains were much slower (up to eight hours) and called at all stations. First Class single fares from London (Euston) to Birmingham were 30 shillings (£1.50) rising to 32s/6d (£1.62) for the night train. Second Class single fares cost 20 shillings (£1) in a day carriage with open sides, rising to 25 shillings (£1.25) in a night carriage, fully enclosed. There was, as yet, no 3rd Class on the L&B.

“Before that time our journeys were made by coach after a good breakfast at the Swan Hotel in Birmingham.”



The *Swan Hotel* (pictured right in 1829) stood on the corner of New Street and High Street with the coach-yard entrance in High Street above the Bull Ring and was for centuries Birmingham’s premier coaching inn. It was also the home from 1778 of the Birmingham Library for some years until the Library outgrew the rented premises in the yard. By the 1830s its status as Birmingham’s premier coaching inn had been overtaken by the recently opened *Hen & Chickens* coaching inn that stood in New Street next to the Free Grammar School.

“Letters in those days never cost less than a shilling, which could not be prepaid; and private individuals in extreme cases went to the expense of sending an express. One method of obtaining quicker delivery of a letter, if the residence of the receiver lay on the road, was by tying a string round it, thus making it a parcel, when the guard or coachman would for a shilling or so engage to give it out on the road.”

“The coach from Birmingham to London was £3, exclusive of dinner on the road and gratuities. Some of the coach proprietors prided themselves on the smartness of their ‘turn-out’. The horses of the ‘Tally-ho’ often wore foxes’ brushes, and many had fine bouquets of flowers. The ordinary pace was eight miles an hour; ten miles was considered good going, but some coaches attained a pace of twelve and fourteen miles by means of capital horses, good drivers and frequent relays.”

Two ‘Tally-ho’ coaches outside St. George’s Tavern in High Street,

Benjamin Worthy Horne (B.W. Horne & Co.) inherited the prosperous coaching business of his father William, owner of the Golden Cross in Charing Cross where there were 700 horses in its stables. He subsequently took over the Cross Keys in Wood Street and the George and Blue Boar in High Holborn. Horne joined forces with W. Radenhurst & Co. of Birmingham to run the London-Birmingham service with the *‘Tally-Ho’* safety stagecoach. This coach service took 11¾ hours to complete its journey from the Golden Cross to the Nelson Hotel in the Bull Ring, Birmingham. It left The Nelson every weekday morning at 7.00am arriving at The Golden Cross at 9.00pm the same evening. The Nelson Hotel had formerly been called The Dog Inn but changed its name following the erection of Nelson’s statue (now at the top of the Bull Ring) opposite the Hotel in the Bullring.

In 1818, when her husband died, Sarah Ann Mountain took over the ownership of the Saracen’s Head and the coaching business to form S.A. Mountain & Co. They operated a London-Birmingham service, also named *‘Tally-Ho’,* and claimed that their *‘Tally-Ho’* coach was the fastest to travel between London and Birmingham doing the 109-mile journey from the Saracen’s Head in Snow Hill, Holborn, to the Castle Hotel and St. George’s Tavern, both in High Street Birmingham, in just eleven hours. This led to acrimonious advertising in Aris’s Gazette by both parties. Despite being first on the scene with the original *‘Tally-Ho’*, Horne and Radenhurst changed the name of their coach to the *‘Independent Tally-Ho’* stressing the safety features of their coaches over those of their competitors.

“The patent safety coaches came in 1829, the safety consisting in placing the heavy luggage underneath, so as not to render the vehicle top-heavy. Severe accidents were not uncommon, especially when opposition coaches took to racing, laden as they were with the heavy luggage piled

up on the roof; they swayed from side to side of the road in a fearful manner as the horses tore along at full gallop. In point of comfort, the English coaches were far inferior to the *diligences* of France, and those who could afford it posted with their own carriages."

The biggest technical advance in coach design was Obadiah Elliot's elliptical springs, called 'Telegraph' springs after the stagecoach that pioneered them in 1804. However, because of a spate of serious accidents in the early 1800s, particularly on the London to Brighton route, a patent safety coach called *"The Sovereign"* was introduced on this route on Sunday, March 21, 1819 from Brighton. It was longer and lighter than the ordinary coach and had smaller wheels. It was five inches broader in the gauge of the axletrees while the weight was placed five feet lower. It carried no outsides on the roof; they were placed in a fore-carriage like the body of a landau, constructed between the box and the body of the coach. Under the box was "a spacious lock-up receptacle for the stowage of luggage". The popularity of *"The Sovereign"* was so great and immediate that the other coach-proprietors lost no time in having "safeties" built. A similar Patent Safety was Matthew's coach. The proprietor of *"The Comet"* adopted it for a time.

The French *diligence* was the equivalent of the English stagecoach – the French mail coach was called a *malle-post.* Research would suggest that Amherst was unusual in his opinion about the comfort of the *diligence* compared to that of the stagecoach. Unlike the British stagecoach, there were rarely outsides on European vehicles. The British abroad did not like the cramped, often stifling, smelly, inside conditions and preferred the fresh air offered by the *coupé*, immediately behind the horses. The *diligence* was further divided into the *berline* holding eight, the *rotonde* holding six, and the cramped *banquette* above the *coupé* with space for three or four. There were two ways of driving both the *diligence* and the *malle-post* – by *cocher* from the box, or by *postillion*, sitting on one of the horses. The French long-distance coaches were slower, cheaper and safer than their English counterparts.

The diligence from Le Havre to Paris was described by an English visitor of 1803, thus:

> ***A more clumsy machine can scarcely be imagined. In the front is a cabriolet fixed to the body of the coach, for the accommodation of three passengers, who are protected from the rain by the projecting roof the coach, and in front by two heavy curtains of leather, well oiled, and smelling somewhat offensively, fastened to the roof. The inside, which is capacious and lofty, and will hold six people in great comfort, is lined with leather padded, and surrounded with little pockets, in which travellers deposit their bread, snuff, night caps and pocket handkerchiefs, which generally enjoy each others company in the same delicate depository. From the roof depends a large network which is generally crowded with hats, swords and band boxes, the whole is convenient, and when all parties are seated and arranged the accommodations are by no means unpleasant.***
>
> ***Upon the roof, on the outside, is the impérial which is generally filled with six or seven persons more, and a heap of luggage, which latter also occupies the basket, and generally presents a pile, half as high again as the coach, which is secured by ropes and chains, tightened by a large iron windlass, which also constitutes another appendage of this moving mass. The body of the carriage rests upon large thongs of leather, fastened to heavy blocks of wood, instead of springs, and the whole is drawn by seven horses.***

This English visitor describes a large version of the diligence but a smaller and more common version was painted by Van Gogh in his 'Tarascon Stagecoach' shown right. One can see the open coupé at the front with seating for three people and its projecting roof. Access to the inside of the coach was from the rear and would hold about six people. To gain access to the impérial (upper deck) meant using a ladder and this would be carried on the side of the diligence as shown in the photograph below.

The diligence photographed in 1899 on Le Pont-Neuf sur la Garonne in Toulouse is pulled by two horses and is surmounted by its canvas covered imperial. The driver is sat over the cabriolet and has his own canvas cover.

"In 1838 old Oscott ceased to be a college."

Under Henry Weedall, president 1824–40, the school and college at old Oscott grew until the buildings could no longer accommodate the number of pupils.

"At last, the commanding site upon which new Oscott stands came into the market. It was on the border of lately enclosed and reclaimed land, formerly a portion of Sutton Coldfield, and the actual site, when I first knew it and when the building began, was a wild piece of common land overgrown with heather and gorse, and having a farm in front."

The farm referred to was called Holford Farm, later called College Farm. This farm was demolished in 1984 to make way for the development of the College Farm housing estate.
The land south of the Chester Road and Chester Road North was part of an extensive area of heathland called The Coldfield. Cook's Farm (pictured below), which was located on Chester Road near to what is now Antrobus Road and opposite the College, was very popular with the young trainee priests as they purchased dairy products from this farm.

"The building was commenced in 1835 from designs by Potter, cathedral architect of Lichfield. The plan nearly followed that of many colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, but the front elevation consisted

of four storeys, the retiring wings being only three; the fourth side of the quadrangle had then unglazed arches. While the house was being built, several acres were being double trenched for the formation of a plantation."

The southwest frontage of Joseph Potter's New Oscott College

Plans for the new college were drawn up by Joseph Potter, the architect attached to Lichfield Cathedral, along the lines of Wadham College Oxford. In less than three years the new Gothic building was opened on the site of Holdford Farm near the junction of College Road and Chester Road. The name Oscott was transferred to the new site that subsequently became known as New Oscott.

Henry Weedall was the last rector of the old college and the first rector of the new one working closely with Thomas Walsh in the building of the new college.

"We all took great interest in seeing the future Oscott rise from its foundations. In the spring of 1836 the first stone of the chapel was laid, at which ceremony we all attended. In April 1837, at the ceremony of blessing the chapel bell, Dr. Weedall preached a beautiful and instructive sermon and on May 29, 1838, the chapel was solemnly consecrated by Bishop Walsh."

Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-52) became a Roman Catholic convert in 1835 and from that moment onwards his whole career was directed towards the advancement of the Catholic cause. In 1837 through the influence of the Earl of Shrewsbury, Pugin, the rising star of Gothic architecture, was introduced to the future Oscott (New Oscott). The building was almost complete; Mr. Potter was paid off and Pugin was given a free hand, especially in the chapel (picture right)**. He added to it and furnished it in colourful medieval gothic style and used the college as an early experiment in neo-medieval ecclesiastical furnishing and design. The stalls, candlesticks and raredos are by Pugin, as also are the stained glass windows mostly made by Hardman. Soon after his first visit to Oscott in 1837 Pugin was given a room of his own and established as Professor of Ecclesiastical Antiquities. Pugin also designed the two gatehouses, one sited on the corner of College Road and Chester Road and the other sited in Court Lane adjacent to the entrance to the Oscott College cemetery.**

"The great public opening of both chapel and college took place on May 30. Of course, we were all present with our parents and other friends of Oscott to the number of nearly six hundred and it was not without regret that we felt that we ourselves were not amongst the number of those who would enter the new college after the vacation. Little did I think that in three years I should be here once more, in the cassock and biretta of a divine. I was then in my twentieth year and my brother in his eighteenth, a period of life when young men look forward to being released from the constraint of school."

It was in late November, 1843, at Alton Towers, the home of the Earl of Shrewsbury, that Pugin met probably for the first time Mary Amherst, the sister of Francis Kerril, who Pugin had taught at Oscott and who was a distant cousin of the Shrewsburys. She was nineteen or twenty, intelligent, lively, and very pretty. She was a devout Catholic and much under the influence of the Italian priest, Luigi Gentili, a member of the Institute of Charity, who was her confidant and spiritual adviser. It is certain that at this time Pugin fell in love with her. He frequently wrote to her on general subjects and she answered. In 1844 Mary and her mother were travelling on the Continent and Pugin went with Kerril to join them at Godesberg on the Rhine.

In July 1844 Francis Amherst again went abroad with Monsignor Talbot, Augustus Welby Pugin and Mr. Whitgreave. …… Pugin left them at Ostend.

Following the death of his second wife, Louisa, in 1844, Pugin in 1846 hoped to marry Mary Amherst, Francis's sister, but her mother was adamantly opposed to such a match and to stop it she went to the length of entering her daughter into the convent of the Sisters of Providence at Loughborough.

On June 6, 1846, Francis Amherst was ordained a priest by Dr. Wiseman at St. Mary's College, New Oscott, and continued to reside there as a professor of some of the higher studies until the autumn when he started for Rome. About this time his sister, Mary Barbara (Mary), entered the convent of the Sisters of Providence at Loughborough. By 1858 she was superior of the convent at Loughborough.

Francis Kerril Amherst of the Warwickshire family for whom A.W.N. Pugin had built the church of St. Augustine at Kenilworth in 1841 became the parish priest of St. Austin's in Stafford from 1856 to 1858.

On July 4, 1858, Francis Kerril Amherst was consecrated Bishop of Northampton.

Roy Billingham – March 2013

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