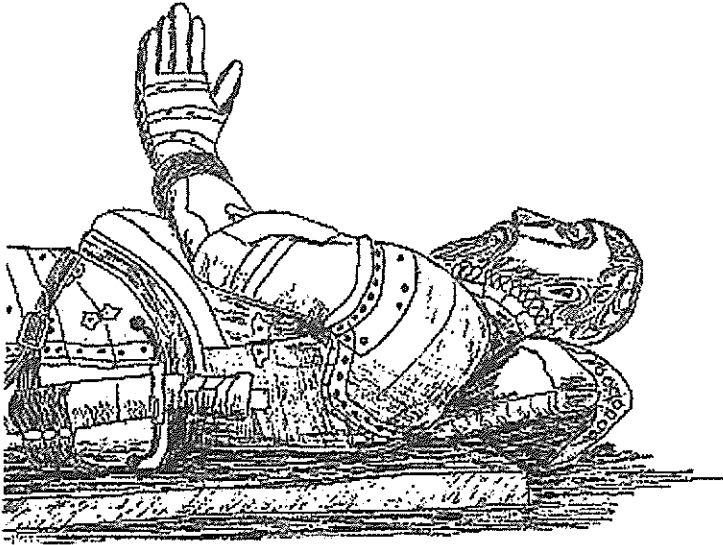


# **'Along the Roman Road in the footsteps of Elizabeth I'**

*by Janet Morris, 2003*

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The tomb of Elizabeth's host Sir Giles Alington, in Horseheath Church  
Drawing by Amy Morris

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Well, perhaps not in her footsteps but possibly in her horse's hoof prints!

Beyond Mark's Grave, the Roman Road may well be 'little more than a farm track' and therefore not very exciting ecologically speaking (Roger Lemon, Feb 2003 issue) but there are beautiful views and it does pass through a landscape with an interesting history - you simply need to employ a little imagination. As you walk along the Roman Road from Horseheath to Withersfield you have to picture the surrounding countryside, not as you see it today as cultivated arable fields, but how it was at any time from about the middle of the fifteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century - as an enclosed grass park land with trees and grazing deer. For you are crossing the site of Horseheath Park, the domain of the Alington family and their successors, the Bromleys, of Horseheath Hall.

The Alingtons first appear in Horseheath records in the late fourteenth century and were obviously a family on the up. They had already acquired, through marriage, the hereditary office of cup-bearer at the monarch's Coronation when William Alington obtained a licence from Henry VI in 1448 to enclose 320 acres of arable, meadow and woodland in Horseheath and West Wickham for a park in which to keep and kill deer. Venison was the food of the high table and a deer park was a status symbol which was apparently somewhat superior to having a moat around your manor house.

The family seem to have been adept survivors. Having found favour with Henry VI, they supported the opposing Yorkist side in the Wars of the Roses. An Alington died fighting for Richard III at Bosworth while his son was cup-bearer at the Coronation of Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon and again at the Coronation of Anne Boleyn. During the Civil War, the Alingtons favoured the Royalist cause but do not appear to have been penalised under the Commonwealth and once again provided a cup-bearer at the restoration of Charles II. However, surely their most gratifying (and nerve-wracking) moment of royal approval must have been the visit of Elizabeth I to Horseheath Hall in 1578.

In September of that year, Elizabeth was on her way back to London from a royal progress to Norwich. It was usual for monarchs to leave London in the warmer months to avoid the plague; but Elizabeth, always politically astute, was also particularly well aware of the value of keeping a personal eye on her subjects and being seen as the people's queen. Her hosts on the journey were expected to entertain her handsomely, although not necessarily to bankrupt themselves. Whilst the wealthiest and more ambitious put on lavish and extravagant entertainments or even built grandiose houses especially, this was not expected of those of more modest means such as Sir Giles Alington. Suitable accommodation was required for the Queen and her immediate staff and the rest of her large retinue were boarded out in the surrounding villages. Elizabeth was accompanied on her progress by her Council, who regularly met to discuss affairs of state. They did so at Horseheath but the Queen is unlikely to have attended, probably preferring to go hunting instead - a pastime of which she was particularly fond (hence the hoof prints on the Roman Road!).

But where did Elizabeth actually stay? Where was Horseheath Hall? Unfortunately, that remains a mystery for the time being. It has been suggested that it was on top of the hill to the right of the Roman Road

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opposite Hare Wood, the site of a later Hall; but the consensus of opinion seems to be that it was most likely to have been nearer the village and church (where the Alington family tombs inside are well worth a detour). However, we do know something about the Hall from family papers. It seems to have been quite modest, with a hall, parlour, bedrooms, a chapel, kitchens and a dairy. Outside there were stables, coach house, kennels, dove house and other farm buildings. Some indication can be had of the pride which the Alingtons had in their ancestry from the fact that the Hall was decorated with some 40 heraldic shields displaying family connections. So, what happened to the Hall? Did it fall into decay, was it demolished or is it still there in some re-modelled form and as yet unidentified? What we do know is that some 85 years after Elizabeth's visit, Sir Giles's descendent, William 3rd Lord Alington, decided to build a prestigious new Hall in Horseheath Park, but that is a tale for another time.

August 2003

**Further reading**

Catherine E. Parsons 'Horseheath Hall and its owners' , *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* XL1 1948 pp 1 - 50  
 Zillah Dovey *An Elizabethan Progress: The Queen's Journey into East Anglia 1578*  
 Alan Sutton, Stroud 1996

Both of these can be found in the Cambridgeshire Collection, Central Library



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