

**Friends of Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service**

**(FoSSA)**

**You are invited to a talk by Richard Totty**

## **The Bawdy Courts of Lichfield**

**Wednesday January 29 2025 at 2.00pm**

**In the new Hildegard Simon Room, Staffordshire History Centre,  
Eastgate Street, Stafford**

**Free entry to all (talk lasts about 45 minutes with refreshments)**

**For centuries the Consistory Courts of the Lichfield and Coventry Diocese exercised authority over all the residents of Staffordshire, enforcing the Canon Laws firstly of the Roman Catholic Church and then of the Church of England (although the laws were much the same) until the Courts were much reduced in influence in the mid nineteenth century.**

**The Courts dealt with all testamentary matters, including granting probate of wills, and dealing with disputes, and issued marriage licences for those in haste to wed in private. They also attempted to deal with moral issues such as pre-marital fornication with severe penalties for offenders. They also heard cases of slander, many of a sexual nature and it is these last two offences which gave rise to their being described as the Bawdy Courts. Other areas of influence included licensing of midwives, clergy discipline and the granting of faculties for alterations to churches, vicarages, churchyards and monuments, dealing with church seating, and brawling in church. Not paying church rates was another offence. Another area was concerned with the discipline of clergy for offences such as neglecting duties, being drunk and disorderly, assaulting parishioners, neglecting the upkeep of church property, preaching without licences, conducting clandestine marriages and simony.**

**The whole system began to fade away in the 1740s with much organised opposition to their work and allegations of inefficiency.**

**The records are very extensive and not well known or well used. This talk is based on work conducted by a group of volunteers in Stafford during the past few years.**

**Please let us know if you plan to come; e mail [richard.totty4@gmail.com](mailto:richard.totty4@gmail.com)**