



WIGSTON HERITAGE

GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

AND

GREATER WIGSTON HERITAGE CENTRE



The Green Bicycle Murder Case, 1919, page 9

BULLETIN 133

November 2025

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



There has been a lot happening over the last few months.

Firstly, the surprise resignation by the Chairman Judith Proctor for "personal reasons". She has also subsequently left the Society completely. At a recent Committee meeting, I offered to become Acting Chairman until the AGM in March 2026, which was accepted by the Committee.

The next shock is that we were given notice by the Pharmacy in South Wigston to vacate the area we have as the Heritage Centre by the end of November. This has now been extended until the end of December. We are actively looking for new premises again, and for storage for our assets currently in the Centre if we do not find new premises.

This request to vacate the premises is because the pharmacy now needs the space for new clinics.

If you have any ideas about suitable premises, please contact me or a committee member.

We will also have some vacancies in various roles. If you are interested in joining us, please contact me for an informal discussion of the various roles we need to recruit.

Peter Cousins, Acting Chairman

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All enquiries to: enquiries@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

The Bulletin is published three times a year on 1st March, July and November.

Articles etc., (which are always welcome) should be submitted to the Editor.

email: bulletineditor@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

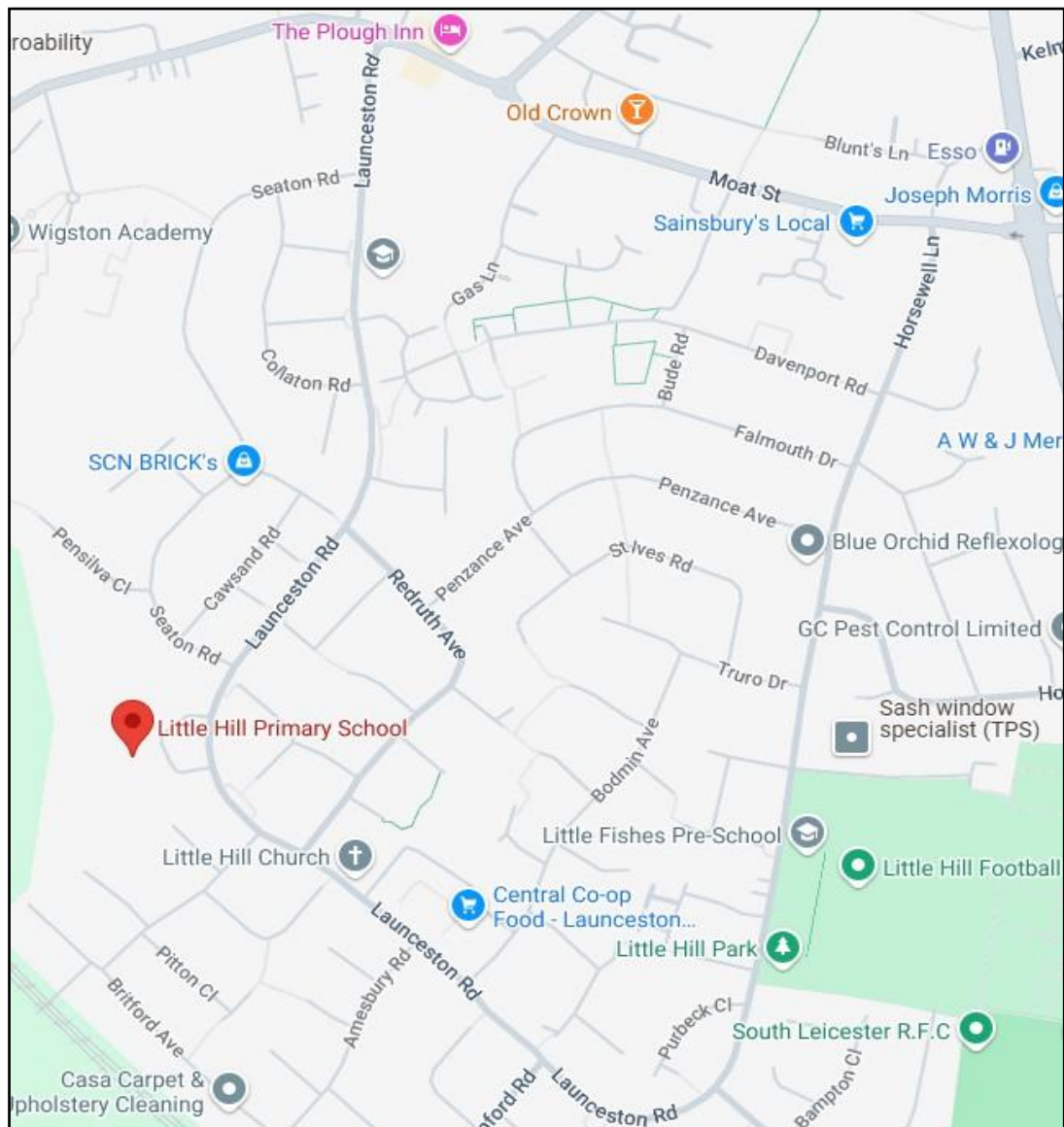
four clear weeks before publication date.

GWHS Future Meetings

Little Hill Primary School, Launceston Road, Wigston LE18 2GZ

Accessible from Launceston Road or Horsewell Lane

Parking is available on site.



EVENING TALKS

Tuesday 18th November

Mid-century Leicester - by Neil Crutchley
An illustrated tour of Leicester City Centre in the
1940s, 50s, 60s, and 70s

Tuesday 9th December

CHRISTMAS PARTY plus MYTHS OF MIDDLE EASTERN
DANCE Dancing Talk & Demo Refreshments & Drink -£4.00 for
Members, £5 for Visitors/Guests

Tuesday 20th January

Barber Surgeons - their role in the Wars of the Roses
by Eddie Smallwood

Tuesday 17th February

Enduring Legacy, the story of Hinckley
by Philip Yorke

Most talks are illustrated with PowerPoint and pictures.

PLEASE NOTE TIMES FOR ALL MEETINGS:

DOORS OPEN AT 6.45 pm,

MEETINGS START AT 7.15 pm

Admission to meetings is free to members

Non-Members £4 per person

Any enquiries, please contact –

enquiries@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

DAYTIME TALKS.

**IN THE PAVILION, THE PEACE MEMORIAL
PARK, LONG STREET, WIGSTON.**

**THURSDAY NOVEMBER 13TH @ 3.00 PM
SHACKLETON'S LOST AND FORGOTTEN MEN
BY STUART MUCKLEJOHN**

Ernest Shackleton was the leader Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition (1914-1916) which aimed to cross the Antarctic from the Weddell Sea to the Ross Sea.

This unsuccessful venture, which culminated in the famous voyage from Elephant Island to South Georgia in a small boat and thence to the rescue of all the party who had set sail on Endurance, is described in numerous wonderfully written books. However, the full account of the men who courageously struggled to lay food and fuel depots from the Ross Sea towards to Pole for the trans-continental party has only recently come into the public domain.

These men suffered enormous hardships in completing their task and had to wait until early 1917 to be rescued and returned safely to New Zealand.

2026

**THURSDAY JANUARY 8TH @ 10.00AM
SIMON DE MONTFORT by Steve Marquis**

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 12TH @ 10.00AM

**CORNER OF A FLANDERS FIELD
by David Humberston**

Talks, still at £4 per person, can be booked at:

bookings@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

RECENT MEETINGS

TUESDAY 16TH SEPTEMBER – THE LIFE AND TIMES OF NOEL GODFREY CHAVASSE VC & BAR



Peter's presentation uncovered the history of Noel Godfrey Chavasse, the only soldier in World War 1 to receive the honour of the Victoria Cross twice. The son of the Bishop of Liverpool, Noel Chavasse, was a medical doctor who left behind his work at the call of King and Country in the autumn of 1914.

Although he was an officer in the Royal Army Medical Corps, he was attached to the Liverpool Scottish Battalion - joining as second Medical Officer - and threw his whole heart and soul into the duty of caring for the men in his unit. He saw action on the Somme in 1916, where he won his first Victoria Cross, and then in 1917, he took part in the Battle of Passchendaele, where he was awarded his second Victoria Cross.

During the Battle of Passchendaele, he was wounded multiple times but never gave up rescuing and treating wounded soldiers until his own wounds overcame him. He passed away at Brandhoek casualty station on 4th August 1917, exactly 3 years from the start of the war.

THURSDAY 11TH SEPTEMBER – LEGAL LEICESTER : THE STREETS AND VOICES OF LEICESTER GREYFRIARS by Iain Jones

Iain gave us a virtual walk-through of the Greyfriars precinct, from Richard III's burial in the friary choir stall to dissolution and then redevelopment in the 18th century. In a research project, 25 interviews were conducted with members of the legal profession who told some of their illuminating and varied stories. The talk was about both the buildings of Greyfriars and the people who worked and lived there in the second part of the 20th century, before it was again redeveloped this century.

THURSDAY AUGUST 14TH

The talk advertised on Simon De Montfort by Stephen Marquis was postponed because the speaker was not available, but Brian Johnson stood in for us with his presentation on Arthur Wakerley, the very well-known architect. A very well-illustrated talk showing many of Wakerley's buildings, some well-known by members of the audience. An excellent virtual tour of Leicester buildings. Stephen's talk on Simon De Montfort will now be on January 8th, 2026, at 10am in the Pavilion in the Peace Memorial Park in Wigston.

Peter Cousins

‘GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER’

The Green Bicycle Murder Case, 1919

In the GWHS April evening talk, Richard Warren provided an account of his time as a beat police officer in Highfields and Stonegate, during which he mentioned the Green Bicycle murder case, which became a cause célèbre, generating widespread interest across the whole country. In this article, I provide members with a more detailed account of the tragic death of local girl Annie Bella Wright, aged just 21.



Annie Bella Wright, aged 21

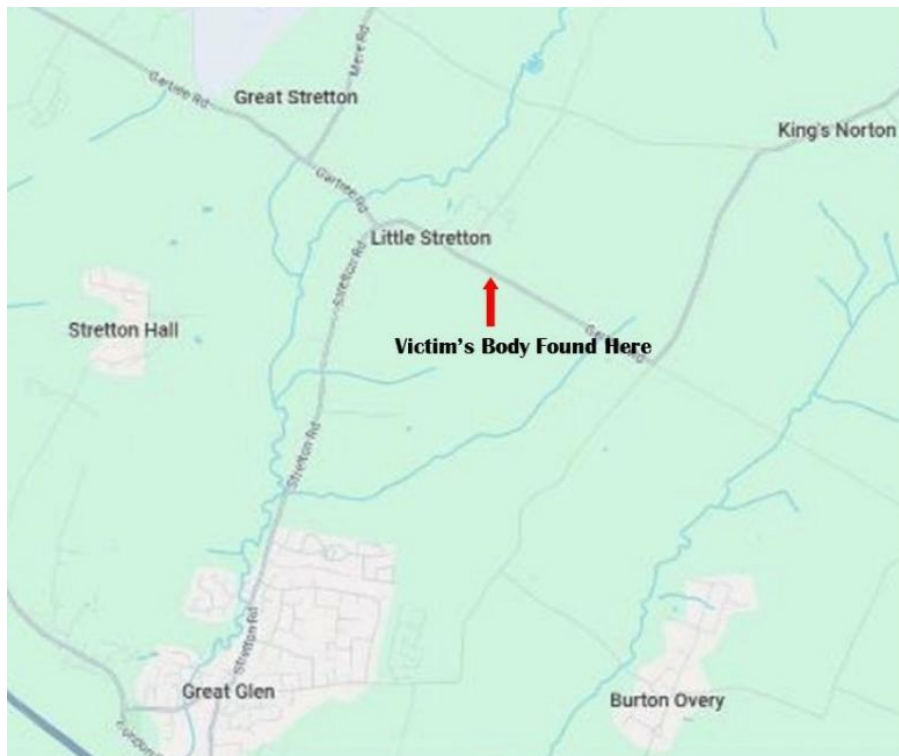
Bella Wright's body was found alongside her bicycle on Gartree Road near Little Stretton at around 9.20 pm on 5 July 1919. At first, it was assumed that Bella must have had some kind of accident, perhaps being hit by a passing motorist. She had been found by local farmer Joseph Cowell, who then alerted the nearest constable, Alfred Hall, stationed at Great Glen. They returned to the scene and moved Bella's body to a nearby unoccupied house.

Dr Williams was called, and he, too, assumed her death was the result of an accident. However, Constable Hall had a suspicion that all was perhaps not so clear-cut. He returned to the site of the incident the next morning and, after much searching around, found a bullet fragment. There were also traces of blood on top of a nearby gate. When informed of this, Dr Williams re-examined the body and discovered a small bullet wound below Bella's left eye: this was now a murder case, and an investigation was launched.

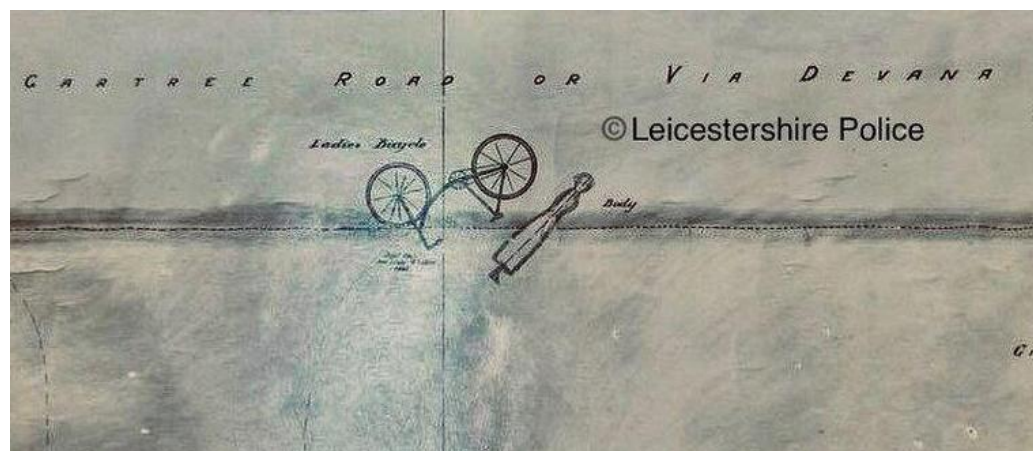
Annie Bella Wright was born in 1897 in Somerby, but at the time of the murder, she lived in Stoughton. Eldest of seven children, her father was an illiterate farm labourer. Like most children from a poor family, Bella was allowed little schooling, leaving at the age of 12 to work as a domestic servant. She later found work at Bates & Co.'s rubber factory in Leicester. Bella usually travelled the five miles to work on her bicycle. At the time of her death, Bella was described as a good-looking girl of good character. She had just got engaged to a Royal Navy stoker, Archie Ward. However, Bella had recently informed her mother that an army officer had shown a romantic interest in her. For a working-class girl like Bella, attracting the interest of a wealthy army officer may well have ignited reciprocal, if starry-eyed, romantic feelings.

Saturday 5 July 1919

Bella decided to visit her uncle, George Measures, who lived in Gaulby, and was travelling along Gartree Road when she met Ronald Light, a retired army officer, aged 33. Light later claimed that they met by chance at around 6.45 pm when he stopped to help Bella with her bicycle, which he said had developed a loose wheel. Light then offered to accompany her to Gaulby. He remained outside her uncle's cottage while Bella visited and left with her at around 8.45 pm. Measures then heard Light say, "Bella, you have been a long time. I thought you had gone the other way." Light's subsequent testimony stated that they parted near King's Norton.



Map of Area



Police image of the murder scene and location

This is pure speculation on my part, but the fact that Bella seemed so comfortable in the company of a 'complete stranger' and apparently somewhat keen to maintain that contact, plus the statement by her mother that she had

recently met an army officer, raises the possibility that their meeting wasn't accidental but prearranged, in fact, a potential romantic liaison. It is even possible this wasn't their first meeting.

Ronald Light



Ronald Light, in 1920

Ronald Vivian Light was born in 1885, the son of a wealthy civil engineer who managed the Coalville colliery. After attending Oakham School, he obtained a degree in civil engineering from Birmingham University. His first job in 1906 was as a draughtsman at the Derby Works of the Midland Railway Company. On the outbreak of the First World War, after several months of training, he was promoted to second lieutenant in the Royal Engineers and was sent to the Western Front.

The prosecution at Light's trial, however, painted a very different picture of the real character behind the person who appeared on the surface to be like any typical, respected, middle-class retired army officer. In fact, they catalogued a litany of criminal behaviour from a very young age, and more disturbingly, a history of pedophilic-like tendencies. He was expelled from Oakham School in 1902, at the age of 17, for "lifting a little girl's clothes over her head". In his thirties, he attempted to seduce a 15-year-old girl and admitted to engaging in "improper conduct" with an 8-year-old. He was also an arsonist, having been sacked from two jobs for setting unwarranted fires. Light was even forced to resign his commission in the Royal Engineers on the recommendation of his commanding officer and was eventually court-martialed in 1917 for falsifying transfer documents. By this time, he was diagnosed with severe shell shock and was sent back to England to receive psychiatric treatment.

He demobilised in January 1919 and went to live with his mother. He would later claim to have been "sent home a broken man." His mental state wasn't helped by the fact that his father had committed suicide in 1916, ostensibly over concerns about his son's situation in the trenches. It was this very disturbed and dangerous man whom Bella Wright would unfortunately encounter just a few months after he left the army, "a broken man".

Investigation

George Measures' mention of Light being with Bella on the day of the murder, and the fact that witnesses had seen Bella being accompanied by a man fitting Light's description, riding a distinctive green bicycle. The same witnesses also stated that they had seen no one else in the area at the time of the murder. Light,

therefore, immediately became the prime suspect, but the police lacked sufficient evidence to arrest him. Light initially denied being in the area of Bella's murder or even owning a green bicycle. At first, he hid the bicycle in his attic and burned the clothes he was wearing on the 5th of July.

However, the evidence against Light mounted over the following months. On 10 July 1919, Harry Cox, a cycle repairman, came forward and told the police that he had repaired a green bicycle on the previous day, and his description of the cycle owner fitted Light. Cox later identified him in a police line-up. Continuous public appeals for information, especially about the whereabouts of the green bicycle, began to increasingly unnerve Light. In October, he removed the bike from his attic and attempted to erase the serial numbers from the frame. Light then dismantled it and dumped the separate parts into the River Soar Canal. Unfortunately for Light, he was spotted doing this by labourer, Samuel Holland, who had been walking to his night shift at a nearby mill.



The police handling Light's green bicycle after it had been retrieved from the canal

The real breakthrough came when the frame of the green bicycle was dragged up from the bottom of the canal by a barge towrope on 23 February 1910. Light had failed to eradicate the serial numbers, and they were traced back to his original purchase of the bike in 1910. His mother's maid now stated that Light had returned home at 10 pm on the 5th, claiming his cycle had broken down and he had to walk home. He was arrested on 4 March 1920 at Dean Close School, Cheltenham, having secured a position there two months earlier. On 19 March, an army pistol holster, conclusively identified as having been issued to Light, and a dozen live .455-calibre bullets, precisely matching the spent bullet from the crime scene.

Trial

The trial of Ronald Light began in Leicester Castle on 8 June 1920. The notoriety of the case attracted some of the leading legal figures of the period, including the famous defence barrister, Sir Edward Marshall Hall, who had built a formidable reputation for being able to win supposedly 'impossible' cases. The prosecution presented to the jury an enormous amount of evidence, which, even though largely circumstantial, included the incredible lengths Light went to in destroying any evidence linking him to Bella and the numerous lies he told the police, not to mention all the physical evidence like the gun holster and bullets, all clearly pointing to Light's guilt. Two girls, Muriel Nunney (14) and Valeria Caven (12), also testified that approximately three hours before Light had encountered Wright, he had pestered them as they rode their bicycles close to where Wright's body was subsequently found.



Ronald Light arriving for his trial, the large crowd reflects the intense interest in this case



Sir Edward Marshall Hall

Marshall Hall's strategy was to portray Ronald Light as a war hero who had endured great suffering in the service of his country. Light proved an excellent witness in his own defence, articulate and skilled at providing plausible explanations despite the evidence, a talent required after a lifetime of deception and obfuscation in an effort to avoid the repercussions of his own criminal conduct. An especially effective approach in a country still traumatised by war and lamenting its victims like Light.

Here is an example of his well-conceived answers: -

"When Bella Wright was murdered, I knew from newspaper reports the next day that she was the girl I had been with just before she died. I knew the police wanted to question me. I became a coward again ... I never told a living soul what I knew. I got rid of everything that could have connected me with her [because] I was afraid ... I see now, of course, that I did the wrong thing."

Marshall Hall also employed his well-tryed strategy of presenting imaginative alternative scenarios to address awkward facts. He stressed to the jury that his client freely admitted the truth of their testimony before emphasising the lack of a motive for killing Wright, adding that the two had not known each other before their chance encounter on the evening of her death, and she had not been robbed, attacked, or subjected to any form of sexual assault. After only three days, Light was found not guilty; some in the public gallery actually cheered.

Aftermath

Wright was buried in the churchyard of St Mary and All Saints, Stoughton, on 11 July 1919. In what must have been a devastating ceremony for her family and friends, not only had they lost a loved one, but they were also, at this stage, unaware of who and why she had been murdered.

Following his acquittal, Light returned to live with his mother in Leicester, where he initially maintained a somewhat reclusive lifestyle. For a time, he assumed the name 'Leonard Estelle'. He was fined in December 1920 for registering under a false name at a hotel where he had been staying with a woman. By 1928, Light was living in Leysdown-on-Sea on the Isle of Sheppey, Kent. In 1934, he married Lilian Lester, the widow of his former employer. Ronald Light died on 15 May 1975 at the age of 89. Light had no children of his own, and his stepdaughter had no notion of Light's trial and acquittal until after his death.

As for Bella, she had been largely forgotten in the spectacle of a trial dominated by Light and Marshall Hall. Cycling historian Roger Lovell, who helped set up a centenary exhibition focusing on her, said: "Everyone was so caught up with Ronald Light and the headlines of the trial that Bella was almost forgotten. She seems to have just been regarded as part of the evidence - her body was, in a way, 'exhibit A'." Lovell wanted to show the "real person" at the centre of the case. "She was the daughter of an illiterate agricultural labourer and lived in a rural cottage," he said. "But by early 1919, aged 21, she had a well-paid job, smart appearance, a good social life and the freedom to move around on her own. The key to this independence was her bicycle, which enabled Bella to commute the five miles from her Stoughton home to her job at a rubber factory in Leicester, and to enjoy her free time." On weekends, according to the Leicester Mercury, "She was often to be seen riding alone. She was never really happy except when enjoying the pleasures of the countryside."

Bella's family were left to cope alone. They could not afford a headstone, so the grave was left unmarked until the 1980s. Bella's great-niece Pam Kelly had

said: "I know that my mum said her mum, Bella's mum, never got over it. The whole family thought Light had done it and got away with it."

I think most people today would agree, and in my opinion, it is doubtful that he would have escaped justice if his trial had been held in 2020 instead of 1920, even if he were innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. Clearly, the timing helped Light, a retired army officer severely impacted by the war just months after it had ended, must have generated a great deal of sympathy and empathy from much of the population who had suffered their own bereavements.

I don't think class prejudice can be ignored as a factor, with Bella coming from an impoverished background, yet representing in her own way the modern woman, freer from the social expectations of previous generations, a year after some women had voted for the first time (although not the likes of Bella) and a war that had changed the perceptions of women's capabilities and expectations, further undermining traditional attitudes to the role of women in society – the 'roaring twenties' was about to begin. Like any social revolution, many would be unsettled and fearful of change. Tragically, Bella was denied the opportunities opening up for women of her generation and class.



Annie Bella Wright's grave

Postscript

Was murder weapon found in ditch 48 years on?

I HAVE an intriguing postscript to the famous Green Bicycle Murder case.

As readers will recall Ronald Light was accused of shooting dead factory Bella Wright on the Gartree Road, near Little Stretton, but was acquitted at a sensational trial at Leicester Castle court in 1919.

Mr George H Holland, of Wigston, has contacted me to say nearly 50 years later in 1967, he found what was possibly the weapon that killed Bela. He discovered a .45 Great War service revolver in a ditch in Welford Road, which was then the A40, between Wigston and Kilby Bridge, on December 29, 1967.

He says: "I can't quite remember whether I was working clearing out ditches for Lucas Landscapes or rabbiting at the time, but the find stuck in my memory as the item was very corroded and there was no logical reason for it to be where it was - unless it was disposed of for quick reasons that we may never know.

"My wife read about the Green Bicycle murder some years later and seems to think this may be what has been searched for, for so many years.

"We may never know now, but if Light had decided to cycle home from the murder scene cross country he could have used a route via Stoughton, Kilby and Narborough to Leicester on the old roads and along the way dumped the revolver.

Mr Holland has sent me a copy of the certificate he received at Wigston Police Station on January 2, 1968, when he handed in the revolver.

LEICESTER AND RUTLAND CONSTABULARY
REPORT OF FOUND PROPERTY
No. 77734
Sub-Inspector's Certificate No. 1/68

Date and date reported to Police Officer: 6.50 PM 2/1/68
Time and date property found: 11.30 PM 29/12/67

Where found: IN DITCH SIDE WELFORD ROAD WIGSTON (IL. ACTING)

Description of property: ONE .45 REVOLVER (RUSTED AND CORRODED) H. UNUSABLE NOT WEAPON.

If retained by Finder, Finder's signature or page No. in pocket book where signature witnessed: NOT RETAINED

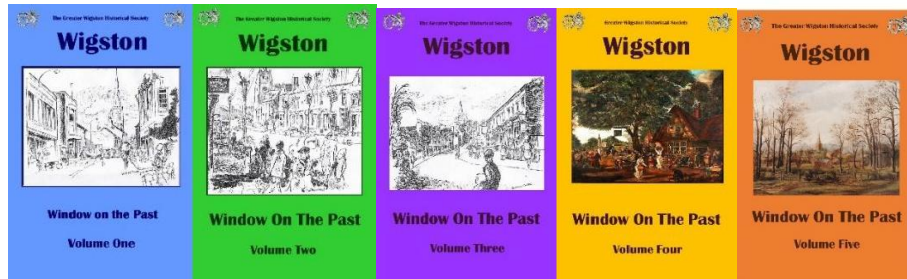
Name and address of Finder: GEORGE HENRY HOLLAND 11 BUNDE RD WIGSTON

Signature, Rank and No. of Police Officer receiving property: B. Bowler PC1190 Date: 2/1/68

OFFICIAL: The certificate recording the handing in of the gun.

Steve Marquis

G.W.H.S. Books: Wigston – Window on the Past Series Available Now



Details at:

www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk/GWHS-ONLINE-STORE.html

Update on 'The Ice Skates Story' and William Chamberlain



In our article titled 'The Ice Skates Story' in Bulletin 128 of March 2024 (see page 8), we stated that William Chamberlain, a Framesmith of Arnesby (born 1819), was convicted of larceny in 1840 and sentenced to transportation for 7 years. We concluded this was why he did not appear in the 1841 census.

While searching for newspaper reports of the 1840 case against William Chamberlain, we discovered details that led us to reconsider the fate of William Chamberlain, the Framesmith: -

From the *Leicestershire Mercury* of 14 March 1840: -

"In addressing the Grand Jury, the Chairman remarked that the calendar was unusually heavy for that period of the year. He, however, did not attribute it to the increase of crime; but to the activity of the new constabulary force. From Jan. 1, 1839 to Jan. 1, 1840, the number of offences committed in the county had been 600; of which 283 were cases of sheep stealing. It was necessary, therefore, that parties convicted of this offence were severely punished."

The *Leicester Chronicle* of 16 March 1840 provided further details about the case, including the outcome: -

WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN (24) was charged with stealing, on the 13th of February last, at Loughborough, a half-quartern loaf of bread and some cheese, the property of Richard Crosher, of that place. The prisoner called for the articles in question, and, when weighed out to him, he took them and ran off. A previous conviction being recorded, he was sentenced to seven years' transportation.

Subsequently, we found the transcript of William Chamberlain's conviction, which stated: year of birth, 1818; convicted on 11 March 1840, aged 22 in Leicester, prisoner number, 1320, sentence, 7 years. The source, via Ancestry.co.uk, was Convict Hulks, Convict Prisons and Criminal Lunatic Asylums: Quarterly Returns of Prisoners.

Further research showed William Chamberlain was on Hulk Register HO 8/67. The hulks are listed, but the document does not detail which prisoners were held at each location. Eventually, we traced the Hulk Register for William Chamberlain. In the muster roll, the surgeon's report states 'Dead', 'Died 8 Feb '41 at ??? (Unfortunately, we have not been able to decipher the next word, which presumably is the location.) Thus, this William Chamberlain is not the William

Chamberlain Framesmith of Arnesby, we have been following in the ice skate saga.



A Prison Hulk

Subsequently, we found details of William Chamberlain's earlier conviction mentioned above. From the Leicester Chronicle of 24 March 1838:
Reports from the County Assizes of 19 March 1838 under Sir James Allan Park.

We are grateful to Steve Marquis for finding the report of this case in the *Leicestershire Mercury* issue of 24 March 1838: -

WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN, 21, indicted for stealing a coat from William Wainwright, of Loughborough, pleaded guilty.—Twelve months' imprisonment with hard labour.

It is interesting to note that the crime was committed on 12 March, and the trial was held only one week later. It seems the most likely year of William Chamberlain's birth was 1817. However, we have not yet found any further details about his birth.

This research took us to an appreciation of the horrors of prison hulks in the 19th century, see for example, 'A floating Hell - Life on early 19th century convict hulks',

<https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/floating-hell-life-early-19th-century-convict-hulks/>



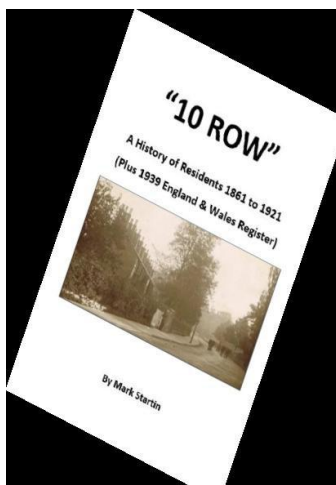
Below deck in a prison hulk

Recently, we have found an entry in the 1841 census that appears to refer to William Chamberlain of Arnesby, but with the spelling 'Chamberin rather than 'Chamberlain'.

This update highlights the pitfalls, challenges, and excitement of local history research, as well as the benefits of being a member of the Greater Wigston Historical Society.

Sharon Hall, Neil Hancock and Stuart Mucklejohn
 Chamberlain_update_Aug25.docx
 SAM 16 Aug 25

10 Row – A History of Residents 1861-1921



A unique and fascinating insight into a part of Wigston history revealing the lives of people who lived at 10 Row between 1861 and 1939.

Researched and written by
 Mark Startin.

Price £10

Available from the Heritage Centre



From the Past

Wigston One Hundred and Two Hundred Years Ago

1925

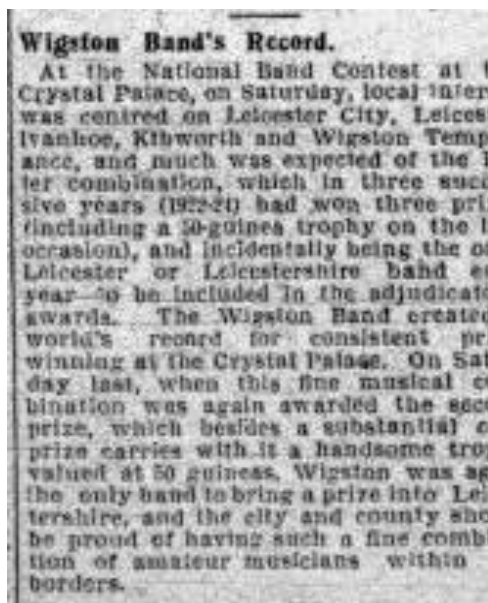


In his laboratory on October 2, 1925, Baird successfully transmitted the first television picture, featuring a grey-scale image of the head of a ventriloquist's dummy nicknamed "Stooky Bill" in a 32-line, vertically scanned image at a rate of five pictures per second. Baird went downstairs and fetched an office worker, 20-year-old Taynton, to see what a human face would look like, and Taynton became the first person to be televised.

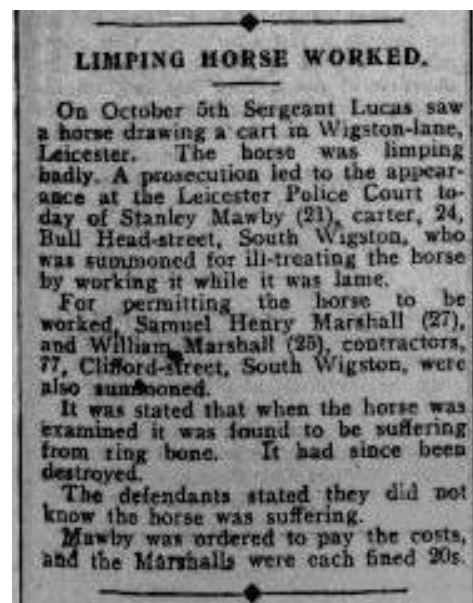


New York City surpasses London to become the largest city in the world. Its population grew by a factor of six from 200,000 in 1900 to 1.3 million in 1930. The Harlem Renaissance flourished during the 1920s, an era marked by Prohibition.

Wigston in 1925 – Leicester Mercury



28 September 1925



4 November 1925

1825

Wharf Street Cricket Ground opened, home to the Leicestershire and Rutland County Cricket Club.



LCC players c. 1870s, Victoria Park

The first mention of cricket in Leicestershire was of the ‘gentlemen cricketers of Barrow’, *Leicester Journal* in August 1776. Framework knitters from towns and villages like Barrow on Soar, could play because their working hours were flexible. The LRCCC was created in 1820 and reformed in 1879 to become the Leicestershire County Cricket Club. The club’s cricket grounds include Wharf Street, St Margaret’s Pastures, the Victoria Park racecourse, Aylestone Road, and the Grace Road Ground, opened in 1877.

Wigston 1825 – Leicester Chronicle

A farmer named Walters, residing at Great Wigston, appeared before the magistrates at the County Public Office, on Saturday last, charged with assaulting a servant man in his employ, and entered into sureties to answer for the offence at the next sessions. It appeared that Walters had just been appointed constable, and availing himself of his “brief authority,” had placed his servant in the stocks for threatening to strike him, where he remained for some time. The servant was so much belaboured about the face and head by the “staff of office,” as to require the assistance of a medical man. A worthy magistrate highly reprehended the exercise of violence on the part of constables, and delivered a lecture on the occasion, which it is hoped will not be without its effect.

29 October 1825

William Crane, framework-knitter, of Great Wigston, was stopped near to Knighton bridge on Tuesday evening last, by two men, one of whom seized him by his arms, while the other rifled his pockets of one shilling and nine pence; they had been observed lurking about some time previous to committing the said robbery. One of them stands about five feet ten inches high, and the other is shorter and much younger. They both have the appearance and dress of mechanics out of employ.

24 December 1825

Beaux Belles Handbell Ringers and the History of Handbells

This is an edited version of an introduction written by Angela Pitches for our Christmas meeting in 2015. Colin Towell

The original team of the Beaux & Belles Handbell ringers was formed 29 years ago, when we started ringing on a one-and-a-half octave set of bells. Over the years, we have rung at many functions and increased our set of bells to over 3 octaves, which are now valued at over £12,000.

We are members of the Handbell Ringers of Great Britain, this was formed in 1967. Our team is connected to the East Midlands Area, which covers Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire Northamptonshire and not forgetting Rutland.

A handbell is a small bell designed to be rung by hand. To ring a handbell, the ringer grasps the bell by its slightly flexible leather strap and moves the wrist to enable the hinged clapper to strike the bell inside. Handbells are made of handbell metal which is approximately 80% copper and 20% tin. To tune a handbell, small amounts of metal are taken from the inside of the bell until it reaches standard pitch. A Clapper is then fitted which works on a pivot and bounces off the Spring Clips. The Straps & Crown are made from leather.

There are only two bell foundries left in England, one being the local firm - Taylors in Loughborough and the Whitechapel foundry in London.

Originally handbells were used mainly by tower bell ringers, to practice their ringing methods away from the church to minimise upsetting the patience of the nearby neighbours!

So we now have two forms of ringing - change ringing and what we are going to show you this evening tune ringing. Handbell ringers do not need any special musical talent. Anyone may join a team, and in a realistic period of time, will often find they can ring competently.

Bell Techniques - Bells can be used in a variety of ways other than straight forward ringing, there is plucking usually done by the lower bells, cutting the note short by flicking the clapper sharply whilst the bell is resting on the table. Thumb damping is a similar sound but the bell is held in the hand and the note cut short by placing the thumb on the metal. Shaking gives a trill sound - look out for these techniques in our next piece.

Alternative to Handbells - The team also have a set of hand chimes. These are tuned square tubes with an external clapper mechanism and have a softer and more delicate sound.

Four in Hand - You may have noticed that particularly with the top bells some ringers are ringing more than one bell in each hand. It is possible to ring four in hand and sometimes more by linking the bells together so one strikes downwards and the other one across. This can become a weighty issue when you get to the bigger bells so these are usually changed on the table as required.

The History of the Wigston Historical Society Archive

Back in 1988, I came to live in Wigston, where I was quickly recruited to the Historical Society by my cousin Duncan Lucas. I remember watching a presentation of local pictures by Bill Ward, a local man with a passion for photography and local history. These images of old Wigston and places where my relations lived sparked an interest in collecting memories of Wigston in the form of photographs.

One of my hobbies was family history, and I was in the process of completing a One Name Study on the FORRYAN name. Part of this project was to collate images of where they lived and travelled. These two interests started me collecting images from all sorts of places and storing them in digital format. My objective was to be able to search the photographs and to be able, at some future date, to show them on a website.

A lot of thought went into the methodology of storage, indexing and use of metadata. Talking with members of the DMU faculty, it became clear which path I should take. I set up a computer, scanner and printer and set about creating a framework that the images could be stored in to facilitate easy access. Having done this, I started looking for images. Each image had to have a unique reference number and a clearly defined description, which would allow me to deposit the files into directories. The structure I chose was by villages such as Wigston Magna, South Wigston, Kilby Bridge and Glen Parva. Each village was subdivided into Streets, Events, People, Transport, Farming, Maps, and many more. This structure still remains some 30 years later.

Once the Photo Archive was set up, I set about obtaining images and populating the directories. I soon reached a few thousand, at which point I started to expand the use of the metadata, which required me to revisit each image and copy/enhance the date. A worthwhile exercise which enabled me to set up a website for the society and make the images available to all.

Some years later, when I had become Chairman of the Society, Peter Cousins joined us, and with his technical skills, he took over my old website and created an improved version with more capabilities. It was at that time that I transferred the Archive from my private collection to the Historical Society. Over the years, local people have donated images to the Archive, and it has now grown to some 20,000 images.

During the period of building the digital photograph archive, the Society was given documents and books which were originally kept in my garage. There were two problems with this arrangement. One was the space required, and my garage was starting to bulge. The second was information retrieval and keeping track of everything.

It was at this point that Peter and I started to look for storage space, and from this was born the Heritage Centre. However, this did not solve the issue of indexing, viewing and retrieval of the hard copy material. It was decided that all of the material we had should be digitised and put into a searchable format to

allow us to search the Archive as though it were on the web. Again, we needed to define our processes. How to digitise material. How to store the files, and finally, how to search the data and use it. A great deal of time was taken to structure the Archive and how to digitise the material. Scanning was one solution, but this would only work with typed documents, and even then, there were many failures. It was decided that we needed a team of volunteers who could work at home to transcribe documents, ledgers, maps, etc., into a format that we could use. We now have a number of superb people who do this work.

So, how does this all work in practice?

All new material is routed via me. Photographs I scan, number, index and put it directly into the Archive. Documents are routed through me and I pass these out to our volunteers to type them up and they are returned to me and added to the Archive.

The master Archive is kept by me with regular backup copies being held by committee members. The big job is moving the material to our website. This Peter Cousins manages every six months or so as it is a huge undertaking. It is worth remembering that the website can be up to six months behind in adding new files and images. All requests for searching the archive are routed through me and I search the master Archive and reply to every contact.

So, how do we search the Archive?

We have a sophisticated piece of software that enables us to create a file showing where a specific piece of information is found, either in the Archive or the physical copy at the Heritage Centre. We can email this file to people who can then follow up with a visit to the Heritage Centre or ask for further information. Included within our Archive are collections from local people. These include the archives from Duncan Lucas, Gerry Broughton, Tony Danvers, Tricia Berry, and James Freckingham.

The GWHS Archive is now the place to go when you want information about the area. Come and see for yourself at the Greater Wigston Heritage Centre in South Wigston where you can browse the Archive free of charge.

Mike Forryan - President *GWHS* August 2025

Promoting the GWHS

Although Judith Proctor has left the Society, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank her for her contribution in promoting the Society over the last year or so. Judith and I have attended several Heritage Hubs and Historical Fairs, where we have sold our publications and promoted the GWHS. Judith organised our participation and carried the large amount of material to the venues.



Our last event at the Leicester University Heritage Hub in August

I shall continue to carry out Judith's role in organising our presence at these events, but they really require two people. Hopefully, at least one member, preferably more than one, will be prepared to attend some, if not all, of these events.

Steve Marquis

From the Archive

THE GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Butcher's Shop to Come Down In Road Widening Scheme

Another Wigston landmark is to vanish. It is the family butcher's shop at the corner of Newton Lane and Bull Head Street, Wigston, which has some 60 year's association with the local meat trade.

The business was founded by the late Mr Levi Sampson, a butcher, in 1907. His son, the late Mr Philip Sampson, snr. of Aylestone Lane originally acquired the premises as a slaughter house.

Proprietor of the present butcher's shop is Mr Frank Foster of Station Road Wigston who took over the business in 1951. He told me of the plan to widen Bull Head Street to dual carriageway proportions within the next 12 months.

This will entail the demolition of his shop and the adjacent houses, also properties in Newton Lane.



Mr Frank Foster pictured outside the butcher's shop which has stood at the corner of Newton Lane and Bull Head Street Wigston Magna for 60 years and which will be demolished in a road widening scheme

Mr Foster intends to rebuild his business premises nearby. Prominent figure in his trade, Mr Foster is a committee member of the Pork Butchers Association and is also a member of the Beef Butchers Association.

A little slice of Wigston which can never be replaced will disappear when the bulldozers start to clear the area for the big road widening scheme.

It is expected that Wigston Urban Council will re-house residents displaced by the project.