

GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
White Gate Lodge, 97 Newton Lane, Wigston Magna, Leics.

**BULLETIN 101**

**1<sup>st</sup> March 2015**



Groby Old Hall by Linda Forryan

## PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS – MARCH TO DECEMBER 2015

### **Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

30 years with Leicestershire Constabulary – Richard Pollard  
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

### **Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

Arming a Knight – Jed Jaggard  
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

### **\*Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015** (Full Day Outing by coach to Ely Cathedral – Booking Required)

Visit to Ely Cathedral with time to explore the town  
Depart 9.00a.m. from Age UK

### **\*Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2015** (Normal Evening Outing using own transport – Booking Required)

Evening guided walk round Burbage & Church followed by meal at Chequers Inn  
Meet at Chequers Inn 7p.m.

### **Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2015**

The Jewel in Leicestershire's Crown, Bradgate Park – Robert Gregory  
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

### **Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

From Earl Shilton to Waterloo – Paul Seaton  
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

### **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2015**

The Railways of Wigston – John Stevenson  
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

### **Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

God's Acre, a presentation about Wigston Cemetery – Bill Boulter  
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

### **Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2015**

Christmas Social with nibbles & drinks - Beaux & Belles handbell ringers, also quiz, pictures etc. by Mike Forryan and the committee  
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

\*Please see our Secretary Ann Cousins who will be taking bookings, payments & meal choices at meetings. She will also arrange lifts to Burbage if required.

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The Bulletin is published three times a year on 1<sup>st</sup> March, July and November. Articles etc., (which are always welcome) should be submitted to the editor, Tricia Berry, three clear weeks before publication date please.

Society's website: [www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

Chairman, Mike Forryan's e-mail: [chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

## NOVEMBER 2014 MEETING

Following the noisy firework season we settled down to be transported back into the mists of time by listening to the excellent Peter Liddle on work at Groby Old Hall and the visit by Time Team.

Firstly he explained a little of how Time Team works. It had been running for 20 years with 13 programmes each year (the last programme was broadcast in 2013 when one of its mainstays, Mick Aston died). Each year local archaeologists would be asked to put forward a few schemes as possible subjects. Peter had suggested Groby Old Hall among other interesting sites many times, with no result. However the hall and adjacent church yard wall did eventually get chosen. Peter thought this might be because he mentioned that Elizabeth Woodville (wife of Edward IV) had once lived there.

John Doherty's map of 1757 shows 'GROOBY' with just the motte, of a motte and bailey castle, with a strange shape alongside that looks very much like a cruciform church. The 1790's engraving by John Nichols of the building shows a brick and stone house much as we see it today and this is repeated in John Flower's painting of 1820's, which also shows a ruined tower and a dovecote (although thought not to have been built as a dovecote originally). There are also towers within the building in this painting. An aerial photo taken in the 1950's shows the house, the motte, and the current church, and an even more modern aerial photo shows the same features with the strange shape in the ground and the new A50 bypass. After the Burrows farming family, who had occupied the house until early this century left, it lay empty for a few years before being purchased by new owners who have carried out a thorough renovation under the auspices of English Heritage.

Peter's talk was well illustrated by photographs and plans which cannot be reproduced here. The tower range which is separate from the house is interesting and gives clues as to the date of construction. The black bricks in the wall form the coat of arms of the Ferrers family who lived there before the Greys so this indicates a building date before 1460 and if this is the case it would mean that Groby Old Hall is the oldest brick building in the county although Kirby Muxloe Castle, built by the Hastings family (we visited it in 2012), also has a claim in this respect. The plans indicate that originally this tower range could have been a gate house. John Leyland touring the country to report back to the Henry VIII in 1530 described the site as a partly built house and towers.

After the churchyard wall collapsed, and because it is listed, there needed to be an excavation before rebuilding. This revealed 13/14<sup>th</sup> century tiles and a wall foundation. These suggested a chapel or great hall of a house. When the church we see today was rebuilt in the 1840's old walls were found under the chancel which could have been the kitchens to the great hall of this house.

Time Team used all this evidence and carried out the usual underground radar surveys which suggested some big walls on top of the motte with lots of underground activity surrounding the motte where the bailey would have been. They dug 8 trenches one of which showed a staircase within the thickness of a wall. It is known that in 1173 the King's forces slighted the castle at Groby and this is possibly when the motte was reduced. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century the motte was called Tower Hill and in 1530 Leyland reported that there was no stone to be seen.

In a dower document of 1370 which still exists today, Lady Margaret de Ferrers describes in some detail what was in existence at Groby at that time.

All in all, Time Team discovered sufficient remains of foundations, quality stone work and such things as masons' marks, to allow experts to envisage a large medieval manor house on the site.

Groby was let by the Greys from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century when they built another house at Bradgate, and thereby hangs another tale.....

Altogether a fascinating story of the interpretation or records, drawings and photographs from long ago, supplemented by the modern ground radar and trowels of Time Team.

## **DECEMBER 2014 MEETING**

December means our Christmas meeting and this year it was the usual Christmas cracker of quizzes, a raffle and a talk accompanied by wine, mince pies and nibbles.

Over sixty members including several visitors took part and the evening commenced with a quiz format not seen since Edna Taylor's days as Chairman several years ago. Clues in picture or word form were displayed on large sheets of paper fixed to the wall. There were five subject groups such as music and country houses and seven questions in each group. This format was a good opener as members started as soon as they arrived and worked mostly in pairs with each pair helping others and therefore talking and mingling.

There were two winning teams on 26 marks each (out of 35), they received chocolates but the booby prize of a pair of marigold washing up gloves was given to the team with least marks. The opening quiz was followed by our speaker, Marion Morley, who gave a pot pourri of Christmas related poems and prose. Marion is an experienced speaker who has been deeply involved in directing and producing at the Little Theatre for many years. Although originally from the North of England she was able to vary her accent to suit the piece which included items by Gervaise Finn, the Yorkshire school teacher, an extract from Shirley Valentine and an amusing report by a local on the Huddersfield Choral Society's performance of The Messiah. Other pieces were a variation on the 'Twelve days of Christmas' suggesting how to serve leftover turkey differently each day until twelfth night; a soldiers Christmas poem, and the Parents' night before Christmas about assembling toys at the last moment and forgetting that 'batteries are not included'. All in all a real treat for the festive season.

The next part of the evening was in the now traditional and entertaining form of a picture quiz put together by the Chairman using a power point presentation on the new projection equipment installed during the year in our meeting room, and partly paid for by the Society. The pictures were all Wigston scenes taken mostly from the Society's archive. There were the usual difficult ones such as a series of anagrams of local places; the whereabouts of a stone lion on a rooftop (on the last house on Burgess Street overlooking Bullhead Street) and what was the blanked out shop on Leicester Road/ Bell Street corner? (Shoe Zone). This was enjoyed by all playing roughly in teams of four (including our speaker who lives in Great Glen but had good Wigston knowledge).

For a bit of fun we were invited to identify a couple of photos of 'well known Wigston people' taken in their youth. Nobody had any idea who these were, but it turned out to be a young and carefree teenage Colin Towell, and Mike Forryan taking part in a fancy dress competition while on holiday, in drag!!

The evening concluded with the drawing of the raffle, this year excellently organised by Jane Callis who also cajoled members into buying tickets while the proceedings were going on.

The Chairman concluded the excellent evening's entertainment by thanking all the committee members for their hard work in organising the meeting and wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

## **JANUARY 2015 MEETING**

For our first meeting of the new calendar year, we welcomed our old friend and family history expert Peter Cousins to talk on the subject of 'The Boys and Girls of WWI'. The first world war is a subject in which Peter is particularly interested and in which he is very knowledgeable, having made annual visits to the battlefields and cemeteries in Europe for some time. There was a good turnout of 59 people for such a relevant topic on a cold and damp winter's night.

Peter stressed that there were underage soldiers and nurses on both sides. At the outbreak in 1914 there were 256,000 troops and 225,000 reservists in the British army and the Germans had 3.8 million troops, more than 7 times the British force. However many of the German troops were very young and inexperienced.

In Britain the rule was that a man could volunteer if he was fit and willing and over 18 years of age. There were many thousand recruitment posters displayed around the country, one or two of which became very well known and remain so today. By the end of September 1914, just under two months after war was declared 750,000 had enlisted, and by January 1915 the figure was over 1 million, with an estimated 300,000 being under 18. The rate of pay for a private was 1 shilling per day and 3 shillings and 2 pence per day for a sergeant. Recruitment sergeants received half a crown for each new recruit signed up. A recruit had to be between 19 and 38 but could join up at 18 for service at home, they needed to be at least 5 foot 3 inches and a 38 inch chest. The reason that many gave for wanting to sign up was that they believed it would be a big adventure and, of course, they all thought it would be over by Christmas (1914 that is).

However the reality as we all now know was very different. In the 143 days between the declaration of war on 4 August 1914 and 25 December that year, an average of 1560 men were killed per day. Throughout the war 16 million were killed, an average of 10,000 per day, and 21 million wounded on both sides.

There was no understanding of men's feelings or mental state. The Order of the White Feather was set up and white feathers were handed out to those who looked fit to fight but were not in uniform. Men were executed for cowardice, one case mentioned was a boy of 18 who was shell shocked but who was executed as a coward.

At the Battle of Loos, 50,000 men were killed on the first day of which 3,600 were under 19 years of age. During this battle many shells did not explode, with one third being dud, one third missing the target and only the remaining third causing damage and death. The empty shell cases were stored, the site eventually becoming a war cemetery.

Many VCs were awarded during the war, one to a man thought to be 19 but was in fact only 15. Lord Ashcroft now owns 183 Victoria Crosses thought to be worth £250,000 today.

The youngest soldier to actually reach the front was aged 12 years and 5 months but his mother managed to have him sent home. Boys lied about their age and gave all sorts of excuses including one who being told he was too young, threatened to obtain his birth certificate so was told that he was in. The recruiting sergeants did not really care about the age as long as a person was fit. There were several examples of men joining up underage but surviving the war and going on to live to a great age. The Crown Prince of Belgium at the time was only 13 but was forced to sign up to set an example, but after a narrow escape he was returned home.

One well known name was Victor Sylvester who signed up at 14 and lived until he was 78. At the age of 17 he had to execute one of his own friends for cowardice. During the whole war 306 under age soldiers were shot for cowardice. There is a memorial for executed soldiers at the National Memorial Arboretum. Douglas Haig was the enforcer of the death penalty and although there was an appeal procedure the time scale meant that any successful plea for clemency arrived too late.

Sir Arthur Markham led a campaign to stop under age recruitment but died before a result could be obtained, however, when conscription was introduced in January 1916, recruits had to produce a birth certificate. The first British soldier killed in the war was aged 16 and he is buried opposite the last soldier to be killed.

Volunteer women served in the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD). They were not trained nurses but middle/upper class girls with a sense of duty and looking for adventure. They had to be 23 years of age with 3 months experience to go to the front. There were 38,000 VADs who served throughout the world during the war. Other uniformed women's groups were the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) and the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry Service (FANYs). These groups carried out their vital work often on the front line in tented hospitals and first aid posts. They also handled the postal service at the front delivering 12,000 letters a week, on time.

Peter showed a photo of a group including a local woman, Edith Mary Boswell of Glengate South Wigston, who was a VAD and who, it turned out at the meeting, was the Great Aunt of our member Richard Carter. She was serving at a hospital at Boulogne where Henry Bradshaw was recovering from dysentery. Bradshaw recovered and lived to the age of 95. He was the Great Uncle of our Secretary, Ann Cousins; a photo was shown of him taken in the mid 1950s holding Ann as a baby.

In another local connection, Orson Lucas, father of our President, Duncan Lucas and Mr T Harper (of the former wallpaper shop in Wigston) were both under age at signing up. Another member present, Ian Richardson related the experience of his father who had signed up at 16, gone over the top and was injured, he lay in no man's land for four days before being rescued, he recovered and lived into the 1970s.

Peter concluded by showing the words of a poem called PLUCK dictated by a wounded soldier to a nurse and read by Dave Edwards of Radio Leicester. Altogether a fascinating talk, full of facts, too many to mention in detail here, and well illustrated with pictures and maps delivered by an expert on his subject. The talk will be given again on Friday 29 May at 7.30pm at Blaby Road Methodist Church.

These three reviews by ColinTowell

## **FEBRUARY 2015 MEETING**

This meeting, the AGM was again very well attended. The Chairman, Mike Forryan, opened the proceedings by welcoming everyone. The agenda was as follows:

**1) Apologies for absence** – Liz Ward, Caroline Wademan, Shirley Moxey and Margaret Gee.

**2) Minutes of February 2014 AGM** – read by the Treasurer, Colin Towell. These were signed as correct.

**3) Matters Arising** – None.

**4) Chairman's Report** – Mike reported another very successful year with meetings well attended, an enjoyable programme of speakers on a wide variety of topics, & trips to Market Harborough and Newton Harcourt Church & Manor House. On behalf of the membership & himself he thanked the committee for their work & support throughout the year, especially when he was unable to 'talk'. The Society had provided support & information for the Plaque in the mini park at the top of Bell Street & will be providing data & pictures for the Information Board that is still to be completed. We also continue to promote the Society through Borough notice boards, libraries, our website and the press & we have attended a number of open days/exhibitions where we have been invited to take a table. All this continues to generate new members & visitors. As agreed at the last AGM we have, in conjunction with the Leics. & Rutland Family History Society bought & installed an overhead projector & screen in our meeting room for the use of all parties. The website continues to grow with 2,000 'hits' this year. More photographs & some new Transactions have been added, much material provided after a request to members, which is greatly appreciated. As agreed at the last AGM subscriptions for 2015 are being held at 2014 levels. He concluded by thanking all members for their support & especially mentioned Peter Cousins who stood in twice when booked speakers were unable to attend & did sterling work behind the bar at the Christmas Social.

**5) Treasurer's Report** – Colin Towell took us through the accounts (printed elsewhere in this Bulletin) noting Income: subscriptions up due to the increase in members & visitors. Expenditure: lecture fees increased due to us attracting good quality speakers, other 'one off' costs were the half share purchase of the new projector & screen & higher bulletin costs due to the larger No:100 edition. The loss for the year of £301 38p. was to be expected and modest in view of the expenditure.

**6) Membership Secretary's Report** – Mike Forryan read this on behalf of Linda. Another good year with 18 new members joining, but unfortunately 7 did not renew for various reasons. Sadly, two members also died, Peter Clowes and Glenys Shuter. We started the year with 117 members and ended with 126, they are made up of 106 concessionary, 18 full and 2 complimentary. 75 visitors were also welcomed.

**7) Election of Officers** – As there were no nominations and no resignations it was agreed the present officers should be re-elected. Namely:

**Chairman:** Mike Forryan, **Vice Chairman:** Vacant, **Secretary:** Ann Cousins, **Treasurer:** Colin Towell, **Membership Secretary:** Linda Forryan, **Bulletin Editor:** Tricia Berry, **Auditor:** Garry Davies. **Committee Members:** Sue Woolley, Paul Knight, Jane Callis & Margaret Gee.

**8) Any Other Business** – Following an appeal for members to join the committee Margaret Gee had very kindly agreed to do so & was officially elected in her absence. Other volunteers to serve on the

committee would be very welcome. Marion Daetwyler proposed a vote of thanks to all the officers & committee for their work during the year. It was agreed to hold subscriptions for 2016 at the present rate of £12 full membership and £9 for concessionary. Also to introduce a student membership for youngsters of £5. It was confirmed that Garry Davies was willing to audit the accounts again for 2015. Mike mentioned his challenge to members to submit memories of life in Wigston, their family etc., for the archive. One from Alan Kind, actually not a member, is really interesting & has already been made into a Transaction which can be viewed on our website. Lists were circulated for members to suggest subjects for future lectures.

Seats are available on The Family History Society coach to Birmingham on 18<sup>th</sup> April to the 'Who Do You Think You Are' event, the first time it has been held outside London. The County Council had sought suggestions of suitable people to commemorate in their 'Green Plaque' scheme. Duncan Lucas had put forward Henry Davies Pochin, Wigston born and brought up, he became a noted industrial chemist inventing two key processes, how to make Aluminous Cake used in dyeing and papermaking, and the purification of brown resin used in soap to enable a fancy white version to be produced. He became Mayor of Salford and retired to Bodnant Hall, near Mount Snowden, the noted gardens now opened by the National Trust. There is a tomb to his memory in front of the United Reformed Church. The bid was not successful this time but will be considered in the next round.

There followed a film of news clips from 1930, which was extremely interesting.

There was severe poverty and unemployment following the great depression and Wall Street crash the previous year. Gandhi came to prominence in India, Miss Winifred Brown became the first woman to win the King's Cup air race, and Mr. William Hill emerged battered but alive having gone down the Niagara Falls enclosed in a barrel. The German battle cruiser Hindenburg was finally brought to the surface at Scapa Flow, after several failed attempts, and towed to Scotland for salvage. Work started to build the Dagenham car plant, the Empress of Britain passenger ship was launched by the Prince of Wales and King George V and Queen Mary travelled in the state coach to open Parliament.

There was also fascinating footage of airships, sea planes and a rocket propelled train! Motor racing was very popular, as was sailing, skating and bob slay racing at truly alarming speeds, as well as football, tennis and horse racing etc.

Tricia Berry

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### **JOHN HENRY GOODWIN – GROCER, CHURCHMAN AND SCOUTMASTER**

John Henry Goodwin was born on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1902 in Elbow Lane, near All Saints' Church in Leicester. He was the youngest boy in a family of thirteen children, seven boys and six girls. Later the family moved to just off the Narborough Road in Leicester.

He left school aged 14 to become a delivery boy for Worthington's Grocery Store in Narborough Road. His elder sister took him for his interview for "a delivery boy with a bicycle". She told the manager "he hasn't got a bike but he can run fast".

He went on to become a Sunday School superintendent. He also helped found a Boy Scout troop – the 44<sup>th</sup> (Holy Apostles).

In July 1930 he married Enid Spencer who played the piano for the Sunday School. They were to have two children, Alan born in 1933 and Enid in 1935. Six weeks before their marriage he took his first shop in Highfields in Leicester.

When Hooley's Estate was built in Lansdowne Grove, South Wigston he bought the grocery shop there which he owned until his retirement. The early years there were very difficult as he had to deal with wartime rationing, Lansdowne Grove received many evacuees from London, and long hours. Apart from normal serving in the shop and buying supplies it was a period when items such as butter and cheese had to be cut up and wrapped, and tea which came in large wooden chests had to be weighed out. Even his one afternoon off was spent delivering orders. Through sheer hard work he went on to own four more shops including one in Queen's Drive, Wigston.

He was a regular attender at St. Thomas' Church and went on to serve as a church warden there for nineteen years from 1946 to 1965.

He founded his second Boy Scout troop – the 46<sup>th</sup> (St. Thomas'). He was to go on to be honoured three times for his services to scouting, spanning 60 years. In 1952 he was presented with the Scout movement's Medal of Merit at the St. George's Day parade in Leicester and received the bar to this in 1966. In 1964 he was honoured by the Leicester South West Division in recognition of his 50 years service to scouting.

When he retired he bought a bungalow in Blaby and attended All Saints' Church there, also serving on its Parochial Church Council.

He died aged 75 in March 1977.

Enid Harrison

Thank you very much to our society member Enid Harrison for this very interesting biography of her father. We should be very pleased to receive any similar contributions about Wigston and its people.

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### **THOUGHTS ON THE REOPENING OF BELL STREET IN WIGSTON**

On a wet Friday morning, 5 December 2014, to be precise, a goodly gathering of citizens of Wigston Magna gathered on the Bank, topside of Bell Street, to witness the unveiling of a plaque commemorating the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. This was near to the spot where a fountain was erected to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria back in 1897. The actual plaque (by Bowers and Freeman of South Wigston) includes an image of the original fountain with words of explanation.

We have an ancient photograph of the 1897 ceremony when the Bank was crowded with people and Mr John Wignall, vice chairman of the council, is shown making a speech, one of several officials to do so on that occasion. It is worth thinking why the fuss of The Bank? The name almost lost in time and why were such ceremonies held there and not on the village green which was adjacent to the junction of Moat Street and Newton Lane? The outline is still evident via Cross Street and Little Hill Lane by the Nag and Bugle (Horse and Trumpet).

My theory is to do with the route of the old highway which for centuries was the main road north. Edward I and II travelled this way to do battle with the Scots. I feel that the road turned left into Bell Street and cut round the hill past St Wistans church. As the road up Bell Street (formerly Ballydyke Street) and turning left into Oadby Lane left a triangle of land in the middle and as markets were held there it was obviously a paved area whereas the village green was grass, so events moved to the Bank.

We know that in 1634 a brawl took place 40 paces from the May Tree (Boulter v Noone court case) near to the late and lamented Bulls Head Inn. Meetings were held under the May Tree (Gartree). So it seems that the Bank was in public use as in 1645 during the siege of Leicester, markets were held there.

A Mr Carter of Harcourt Road told me of stroking a lion on the Bank which raised a laugh, but later I read of Wombwells Menagerie on the Bank so events were held there c.1880. Why the name 'The Bank' some conjecture comes in - the boundaries of the three ancient fields met here?

At the end of WWII, VE Day was celebrated with music and dancing, ale flowing, singing and great joy, which was repeated on VJ Day. A similar scene, though somewhat more restrained, happened in December 2014 when the Christmas lights were switched on. In the now recently restyled Bell Street, I think of the street where I was born and grew up, where I drank from the old chained iron cup on the fountain, and where I saw the first double decker bus. The Leicestershire Regiment and band march through my street of memories and we see a new birth.



The unveiling of the plaque on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1914, with insert, facing in the opposite direction, huge crowds witness the unveiling of the drinking fountain in 1897.

But still cars drip oil on the lovely paving and the gum chewers leave a mess worse than any birds. Stand on the plinth around the granite stone with the plaque on it and read the dates on the slabs around you. A wonderful experience to titillate the enquiring mind to delve further into Wigston's proud past.

Duncan Lucas

For further information please contact the society [www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk) or Wigston Civic Society [www.wigstoncivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.wigstoncivicsociety.org.uk) GWHS Bulletin 93 has an article on the 1897 celebrations for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, both national and local, which includes the unveiling of the Wigston Drinking Fountain.

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### **THE ANGLICAN YOUNG PEOPLES ASSOCIATION (AYPA)**

The recent unearthing of an old photograph (late 1950s early 1960s) by Historical Society member, Peter Holmes, and an earlier request for information from Enid Harrison, nee Goodwin submitted to the Society's Chairman started me thinking about my own days in the AYPA.

AYPA was a self governing organisation for young people aged 16-25 in the Church of England. At the same time there was the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs for young people in the Methodist church and a similar organisation for the Baptist youth. AYPA itself was founded in Canada and was brought to St Thomas' in South Wigston in 1948 by the Revd Ken Pickett a curate who had previously served in Canada. From 1951 to 1958 The Revd Dr Harold Lockley was the Vicar and he was a strong supporter of the organisation. He went on to be Archdeacon of Leicester and continued his support for AYPA by becoming Chairman of the national council for ten years.

Soon after a branch was started at All Saints in Wigston Magna by Father Henry Hughes. Pantomimes in the former Constitutional Hall written and directed by Fr Hughes are a fond memory of one Society member today.

Although the organisation existed throughout the Anglican Communion in the UK there was a strong structure led by an All Britain Council (ABC) on which served representatives of the Provincial Councils (Canterbury, York, Scotland and Wales). Each Diocese had its own council formed by representatives of the parish branches. Each branch had an Executive Committee formed from its membership, led by a President, which organised activities and meetings and kept accounts. There was a formal handbook of rules which had to be followed and the parish priest or curate was the Chaplain to the branch.

There were four principles on which the branch formed its activities, these were: worship, work, fellowship and edification. The weekly programme had to reflect these principles and consisted of speakers, working parties, social events such as dances (now called discos), games evenings, tramp suppers, outings and walks. Very often events were tied into the church's calendar. Plays were produced, usually at Easter and carol singing organised in the streets at Christmas. Gardening groups were organised in the churchyard or to help an elderly person and decorating

was undertaken. Speakers could be on any subject much as we have at our Historical Society and even sometimes on a religious or bible study basis.

In Leicester I recall the branches at St Peters, Braunstone, St Pauls on King Richards Road, Holy Apostles on Fosse Road and St Stephens in Highfields apart from the two branches in Wigston. My own branch was at Braunstone where we met on a Monday evening in the Parish Hall on Woodshawe Rise. Although my brother and sister had been members, they had moved on when I joined at about the age of 16, when I felt that I had outgrown the local scouts (60<sup>th</sup> Leicester). I feel that belonging to such an organisation and holding all the main offices at one time or another gave me a good grounding in organising meetings and events. We held many dances at the Shakespeare Inn to raise money for one cause or another and joined in the many fetes and bazaars held by the church. We produced at least three Gilbert and Sullivan concerts during my membership and organised many outings and hikes, usually on an Easter Monday. We usually got together informally after evensong on Sunday and gathered on the park or at a pub in the summer or for coffee and board games (nearly as far back as 'camp coffee' days) in someone's house in the winter.

St Thomas' branch had a strong leaning to drama and Alec Essam and Bob Hawkins will be recalled for their panto roles. Members often also led the Sunday School and Elsie Starmer, Brenda Thurlow and Sue Huckerby took on these roles. Peter Canner and Herbert Fox from St Thomas and Geoff Towell from Braunstone among others were ordained as priests. The St Thomas' branch also met informally in the church hall and the Clarence pub on a Sunday evening. In the summer there were trips in overcrowded members' cars to country pubs such as the Cock Inn at Peatling.



Members of the Leicester Diocesan Council of the AYP A in 1962, L-R back row: Peter Holmes, Laurie Kennell, Colin Towell, front row: Phyllis Holmes, Pauline Bexon (who was blind from birth and died in 2014), unknown (can anyone name this girl?) Stella Green

Because of the Diocesan and national links there were opportunities to meet members from other branches and this often led to cross city personal relationships, and indeed I met my own wife, Sue, at a joint sports day held on Blaby Road Park for the Leicester branches. We went further afield to evening meetings in Cambridge and Wimbourne and for weekend events in Grantham, Bournemouth, Stourbridge and Leigh on Sea as well as for weeklong summer holidays in Winchester and Durham, the latter being reached on my trusty Lambretta scooter. These especially were amazing times with many characters attending who will never be forgotten. In Braunstone our very enthusiastic curate, Derek Sawyer, as well as organising the G&S shows led holidays to Holland, (my first trip abroad, by ferry) and to Lee Abbey in Devon.

AYPA declined in the late 1970s because, Peter Holmes suggests, youth leadership was becoming a professional activity and leaders needed training. The Church of England was appointing Diocesan Youth Officers and there was more of a link to the state education system and youth provision. However, for me, it led to helping the Leicester Diocesan Youth Officer who after Canon Arthur Fielder was The Revd Ian Phelps (of fond memory) who died last year.

So AYPA was a big part in many young lives, leading to joining the clergy, meeting a future spouse, being a familiar club for people moving to new areas, and even for men on National Service far away from home.

Do Members have any other recollections of AYPA or their church youth club, send them in writing OR be interviewed for the oral archive.

Colin Towell with the help of the Revd Dr Peter Holmes and Colin Hames

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## BOOK REVIEW

The following is a taster of Vincent Holyoak's recently published book on Leicester during WWII. He lived in Wigston and was a member of the society during the 1980s.

### Reflections on:

#### **“BUT FOR THESE THINGS – LEICESTER AND ITS PEOPLE IN WW2”**

When I was growing up in Wigston during the 1970s and 80s, WW2 was still a relatively recent memory to many people. It might have seemed like ancient history to a young boy, but it's amazing to think now that the events portrayed in popular comedies such as “Dad's Army” and “It ain't half hot mum” were then just over thirty years distant – as ancient to us now as an early episode of “Only Fools and Horses” (which seems like only yesterday). And yes, I did watch far too much television, but time - nonetheless - marches on...

Although my family moved into the newly built Little Hill estate in 1972, we already had some local history in that following their marriage in 1938 my grandparents had a rented house on Kingston Avenue. It seems barely imaginable that in those days Wigston was still entirely separated from Knighton (and from Leicester) by fields. In June 1939, just weeks short of his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, my grandfather was ordered to report for a medical under the Military Training Act, one of the very first to be selected for conscription. Found fit for service he was sent home and told to

await further instructions. Eight months later he was called up into the RAF and following rudimentary training at Cardington he found himself part of the British Expeditionary Force in France.

To give a feeling for the spirit of the times, having survived the chaos of the British retreat, a little later he caught German measles (to which, he reported, on giving him the diagnosis the RAF Medical Officer had exclaimed “Damned unpatriotic, what?”). Following demob in 1946, he often remarked that his RAF Good Conduct stripe had been in recognition of “undetected crime”. Although a common RAF saying, in his case it was possibly a factual statement. Posted to Wilmslow and then later to Morecambe with an Initial Training Wing (the receiving point for recruits). The comings and goings of the recruits meant that the rations never quite matched the number of men under his care. He was therefore a popular man with local farmers whom he let have the surplus for animal feed (and as a result, it was said, never had to buy his own drink in a local hostelry). Similarly, I still have the Merchant Navy red ensign that he scaled Morecambe Town Hall to liberate as a war souvenir on the night of VE day...

But, despite having had what could have been described as a “good war” in comparison to others, I also know that on his return to the city in 1946 he was bitter that his job in the hosiery industry had not been held for him and that others who had not been called up had been promoted above him. Given the national housing shortage, he, his wife and their two children had to lodge with his parents in a small terraced house on Avenue Road in Clarendon Park whilst they sat on a waiting list for one of the council houses that was being built across the city. This was not helped by the fact that my grandmother did not get on with her “in laws”. But in other ways too the war had also changed her relationship with my grandfather, in that she claimed that before his RAF service he had neither smoked nor drank. Their experiences were not unusual of course, and those of thousands of others were far worse, but it was this that in part formed the inspiration for the book.

Until his untimely death in 1974, every Wednesday night my grandfather and my father used to drink at the Navigation at Kilby Bridge. Sometimes conversation in the bar would turn to the efforts of the local Home Guard detachment, who had set up a concrete road block on the bridge to prevent any invading Germans from bringing their tanks up the A50, and who had also (very wisely), chosen the pub as their command post (solely because of its strategic importance). There are a couple of photos taken at Kilby Bridge during a Home Guard exercise in July 1941 shown in Austin Ruddy’s excellent book “To the Last Round”.

Memories were fresh, but there were physical reminders in the locality too. Pete Wilford had taken his metal detector across the fields of what is now the Wigston Harcourt estate, and discovered (along with things such as 17<sup>th</sup> century crotal bells) spent rifle and pistol bullets and the base caps from Mills grenades – he was told that the Home Guard had used this area for weapons practice. Fascinated by these, I lovingly mounted and labelled them on orange card for display in the GWHS museum opened by Duncan Lucas at Whitegates Farm in the 1980s. Also on display in the museum was part of the instrument panel of the 300 Squadron Lancaster that had crashed and exploded in the village during a thunder storm in February 1946, killing all of its Polish crew. Now commemorated by the Lancaster Bell Community Wing of All Saints School (subsequently built on the site of the crash). The fragment of instrument panel had fallen into the boughs of a tree, the tree gradually growing around it until it was firmly fixed in place. Duncan had waited, and when the trees were felled during development, proudly retrieved the piece of wreckage (which I am pleased to see is now displayed in the school). Less dramatically, until the early 1980s the piece of land on the corner of Launceston and Station roads opposite what was then the British Legion was pretty overgrown. After many years of children cutting the corner

(and creating a muddy “desire line” through the trees) the council decided to make it official, and cleared and landscaped the area, constructing a tarmac path, a bench and a bus stop. To my excitement (and if you hadn't guessed already, I must have been an odd child), the clearance revealed a concrete hardstanding dating back to the site's use in WW2 as (if I remember rightly?) a searchlight battery. You can still see it today.

I have always been fascinated by this period in our history, but I felt that existing books on Leicester – as good as they undoubtedly were – either ignored or glossed over some of the less comfortable aspects of wartime, and I wanted to present a complete picture, good, bad and indifferent. In that context one of the themes explored by the book is that of crime in the city during the war years. Although I was looking for stories relating to the city, whilst carrying out research in the Record Office I also found others which were of interest. One concerned the righteous indignation felt by locals when youths vandalised the open air swimming pool at South Wigston (given more recent occurrences at the swimming baths, it might simply be in the genes). Another was about a Wigston postal worker jailed for food thefts. I already knew that the railway in Wigston had played a prominent part in black market activities - one man I interviewed describing having witnessed meat being stolen from goods vans at Wigston Junction during the blackout - but I also came across an article about the landlady of the Railway Hotel (now the 1852 of course) being prosecuted for infringements of rationing. However, nothing is ever quite as it might initially seem, and it is difficult not to feel the pathos behind this particular incident:

“I know it is against the law, but one can visualise it as a human error” stated Mr A.H. Headley when Mrs Doris Kathleen Ellis of the Railway Hotel, Wigston Magna, charged with clothing coupon offences at Leicestershire County Police Court, stated that she had used coupons other than her own to obtain mourning to attend the funeral of her stepson, a former Leicestershire county policeman who was killed when on operational duty with the RAF in December last year.”

The stepson may possibly have been Sergeant Kenneth Ellis who Commonwealth War Graves Commission records show died on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 1943, aged 21, and who is buried today at Campeltown. He was one of a crew of five who took off from North Wales on a training exercise. Nothing further was heard from them however and two weeks later the wreck of the aircraft was found in Argyll. I came across other even more tragic stories too – such as the death of 16 year old ATC Cadet John Woodward, killed in August 1943 when the bomber in which he had excitedly cadged a ride from Bruntingthorpe broke up in mid air. He was unfortunately not the only local teenager to die in WW2 – 18 year old Marine Raymond Kane of South Wigston drowned on board the torpedoed HMS Royal Oak in Scapa Flow in October 1939 – his body lies within the capsized wreck to this day.

When writing a book I'm always more conscious of the things that I have left out than those I have included, and there are undoubtedly still many stories left to be told. To people who have asked me to summarise it, I've therefore described the contents of the book as “things I didn't know about Leicester in WW2 and was surprised to find out”. In the event, it transpired that there were over 250 pages worth of things that I didn't know about Leicester in WW2 (and it could have gone on further still). It's my fervant hope though that if you read the book, you find it all as fascinating as I did.

Copies of “But For These Things” (normal RRP £14.99) are available from Wigston Framework Knitters' Museum at £10 (with a £5 donation to the museum for every copy sold). For more information on the book go to the website: [www.leicesterinww2.com](http://www.leicesterinww2.com)

# GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

## Receipts and Payments for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014

### Receipts

Opening Balances as at 1/1/2014:		
Current A/c	1263.95	
Unpresented cred	136.50	
Unpresented chq	-97.48	
Deposit A/c	998.84	2301.81
Subscriptions		1042.50
Visitor fees		150.00
Christmas Social		162.00
Donations		71.50
Sale of books		16.00
Bank Interest		.68

**3744.49**

### Payments

Lecture Fees		367.00
Bulletins & Programme		308.26
Christmas Social		120.05
Room Hire (2014)		292.50
Website fees		15.00
Projector/screen at Age UK		618.00
Display Banner		23.15
Visit (Ely 2015)		70.00
Closing Balances at 31/12/2014:		
Current A/c	940.22	
Unpresented cred	98.95	
Unpresented chq	-108.26	
Deposit A/c	999.52	1930.43

**3744.49**

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### SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please note that subscriptions for 2015 are now due. If you have already renewed, thank you very much. Your receipt should be attached to this bulletin.

If you have not yet done so, we would be grateful if you could renew as soon as possible using this cut off slip if you like. The rates are £12 Full and £9 Concessionary. Cheques should be made payable to GWHS. We hope you will continue your membership but if you are not doing so, it would be very helpful if you could let the Membership Secretary know.

Member(s) Name &  
Address.....

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Please send to the Membership Secretary:

Mrs. Linda Forryan,  
21 Blakesley Road,  
Wigston,  
Leicester. LE18 3WD.

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