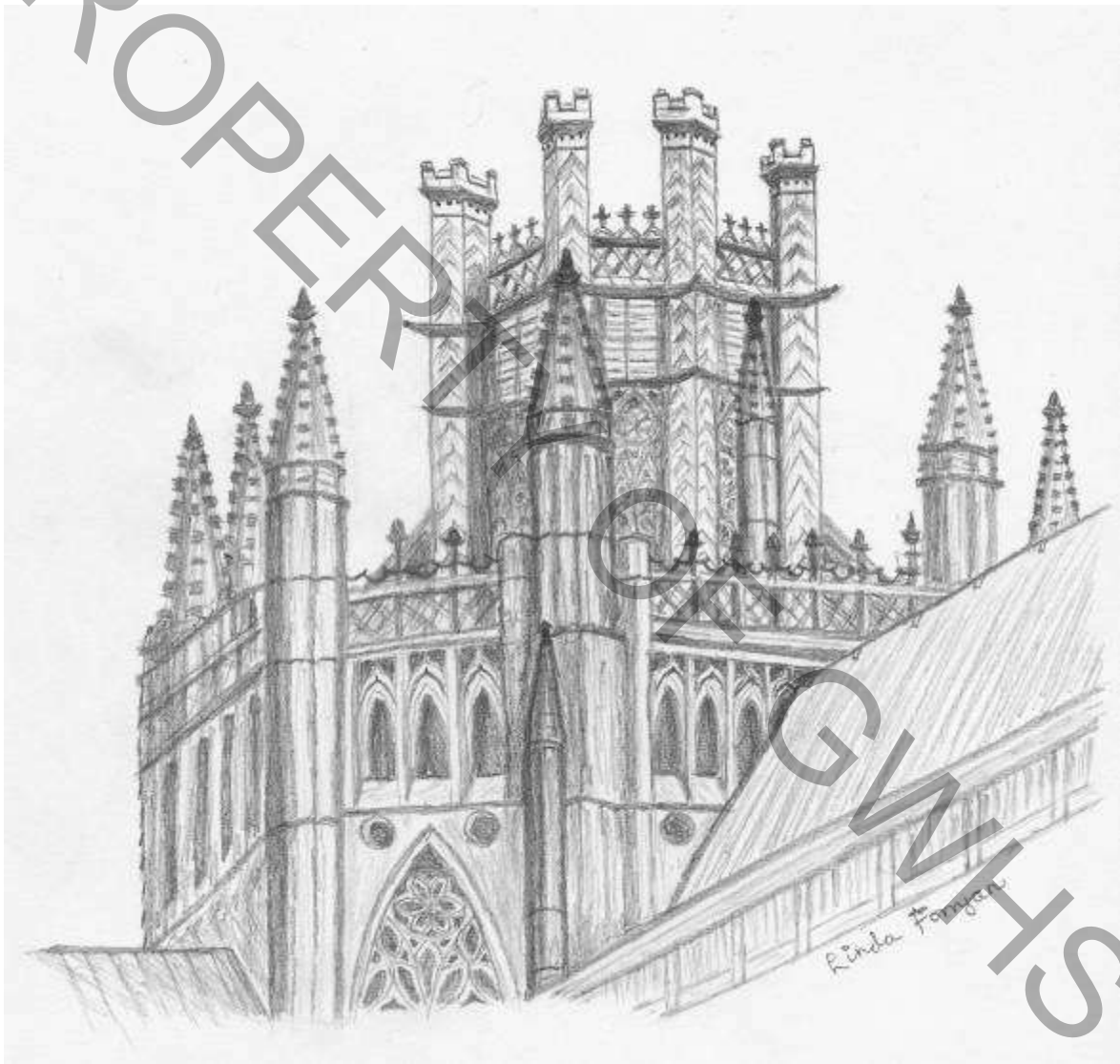


GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
White Gate Lodge, 97 Newton Lane, Wigston Magna, Leics.

BULLETIN 102

1st JULY 2015



The Octagon Tower, Ely Cathedral

Although not the tallest the Octagon, crowned by its Lantern Tower in wood, lead and glass is rightly considered the jewel in the Cathedral's crown. Built in the 1320s in the wake of the collapse of the Norman Tower, it is a masterpiece of medieval engineering and a continuing delight to the eye.

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS – AUGUST 2015 TO MARCH 2016

Wednesday 15th July 2015

No meeting this month

Wednesday 19th August 2015

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

Wednesday 16th September 2015

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

Wednesday 21st October 2015

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

Wednesday 18th November 2015

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

Wednesday 16th December 2015

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

Wednesday 20th January 2016

The Highwayman of Wigston – Judith Proctor
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 17th February 2016

AGM – Mike Forryan followed by 15 minute talks by members
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 16th March 2016

King Richard III - a representative from Leicester Cathedral (to be confirmed)
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

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, Tricia Berry, three clear weeks before publication date please.

Society's website: www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

Chairman, Mike Forryan's e-mail: chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

MARCH 2015 MEETING

The Society was pleased to welcome Councillor Bill Boulter, Chairman of the County Council, to the meeting.

Our speaker this month was Richard Pollard, with his talk on '30 Years in the Constabulary' his career in the Leicestershire Police Force from 1966 to 1999, during which time, in accordance with his own choice, he retained the rank of constable. Most of us recall the TV favourite (in black and white) of Dixon of Dock Green and it was this programme that inspired Richard as a boy growing up in Anstey to want to join the police force.

Interviews in those days were certainly less formal than they are in 2015 and the 'who you know' rather than the 'what you know' was all important. This was not to say that Richard knew his interviewer, who was Chief Constable James Anderton in his HQ at 420 London Road. Richard had declared on his application form that he was a member of the Boys' Brigade and as local Commandant of the Brigade, Mr Anderton accepted him straight away. However another applicant had said that his ambition was to captain the police rugby and cricket teams but this didn't have any effect and he was rejected.

In his early days as a constable Richard came across many famous personalities including several actors who of course spent some time rehearsing their parts, but Richard pointed out policemen did not have the chance to rehearse an incident as each one was unique and you never knew, each day, what you were going to have to deal with.

However he became a tutor constable training new recruits and moulding them into the way of doing things (this of course was the rehearsing but it was never how it actually happened). New recruits were advised that the public did not know they were on their first shift so 'lets just get on with it'. New recruits had good handwriting in their note books but often could not spell too well (no word processors and spell checks then).

One constable in his first days stopped a car to talk to the driver but left his helmet, torch and glove in the car when it was driven off. They turned up in a different case later. Richard stressed that good PCs tell it straight, are honest and do not get caught out.

The Operation Tiger case was mentioned, this involved students from Sheffield stealing credit cards on the trains coming down to Leicester. The case of the murders of Linda Mann and Dawn Ashworth was also mentioned, it being the first time that the new DNA test had been used to convict a criminal. The book on the case, called The Blooding, explained that Colin Pitchfork was caught after his friend was overheard by the landlord's son, who was a policeman, bragging in the Cradock Arms pub in Knighton about the DNA test cover up. (In the recent television programme 'Code of a Killer' it was a female customer at The Clarendon, West Avenue, who overheard this conversation, so some confusion here.)

In his early days Richard reminded us that the Police National Computer did not exist and doing vehicle checks was by no means instantaneous. A policeman on the beat had to find a phone or police box, call into HQ who then had to phone (or at nights and weekends call round) to the local car taxation office, there being one for the city and one for the county, to find the registered owner. When the computer did arrive it dealt only with stolen cars at first. Clearly Richard had spent some time at the courts and he recalled Cyril Hadley who as Chairman of the Monday magistrate's bench had been instrumental in reducing football

hooliganism which was so rife at that time. Richard appealed to members to attend the courts to see justice in action.

In response to a question he explained that the flashing red and green lights, which were positioned on the top of the front of the former police station in Charles Street, were switched on when there had been a fatality in the city.

APRIL 2015 MEETING

With high expectations, the long awaited Jed Jaggard arrived, full of fighting spirit, to give the talk at our April meeting on 'Arming a Knight'. Jed had a good knight's CV with 15 years experience in living history with performances on film and TV as well as many actual re-enactments in all periods from the Ancient Greeks to the cold war; in fact he owns a cold war bunker that is open to the public, (See www.upanatemhistory.com). For our talk he included the period of 1066 to 1485; both dates that struck horror into schoolboys in their history lessons.

Jed arrived at the meeting clothed in 15c hose complete with cod piece and boots, a padded army jacket with lily pipe hood, the longer the droop (the lily pipe) of the hood the more important you were. The table at the front of the room had been set up, not for the officers of the society at the AGM but to set out many pieces of armour and helmets as well as weapons. Jed used the technical, often French or Latin, names for each piece of armour and members will forgive me, I hope, if I don't repeat them here. He pointed out that armour as well as weapons were being developed all the time as technical knowledge improved and as it was realised that better protection could be obtained. There seemed to be a distinction in the category of what we might call armour between body armour and helmets. There were many of each item on display which were passed around the members (some having difficulty with the weight, especially with the helmets and chain mail) to handle and examine closely.

After the early simple padded cloth tunics which could slow down arrows or spears, chain mail was introduced for those who could afford it and who could carry the weight. There could be 30,000 chain links in one piece, each link closed by pliers; sand and vinegar were used as cleaning agents. The Romans were the first to use this type of armour which was very hot to wear but good for dispersing the blow from a sword, and difficult to penetrate. Chain mail to protect the head and shoulders was developed and later this incorporated an iron helmet over the top of the head, with the nose protector and eye slits too. The eyes, brow and nose being very sensitive areas were heavily protected often to the detriment of being able to see. It was said that if match sticks were invented they could be shot through the eye slit and kill the enemy.

The development of helmets was interesting as we recall early iron helmets with flat tops, but these soon became rounded over the head to deflect sword blows, as early swords were used for slashing the enemy rather than stabbing. Swords were broad and flat becoming thinner and shorter later on when they included a 'fuller', an indentation along the length to make them lighter (and to let the blood run out I was always told).

Jed also demonstrated the way in which shields developed. The early, long, diamond shaped ones used by the Romans were made of layers of wood (like modern plywood) with a leather

covering and padding round the edges. Later the Vikings and Normans used round shields again made of wood with leather covering and padding, these were more versatile. It was explained that the linen surcoat worn over the armour was just to show which side a man was on. We recall the crusaders wearing surcoats displaying the cross of St George. It was better to capture a knight than to kill him as then he could be 'sold' back to his supporters for a cash ransom. A soldier would not impersonate a knight on threat of the death penalty.

In the early days most armour was imported from France, hence the French names, but Henry VIII set up the Royal Armouries. A suit of armour was made to measure, often by a knight sending a look alike to the armoury. The rich polished (or blued) their armour and some painted it for identification purposes but others allowed it to go rusty which caused it to lose weight. The strength of a fighting man was important, this was increased through manual work and fighting rather than through diet. The average height for a man was 5' 8" - now it is 5'11" to 6'1". Jed described and passed around the meeting the many individual parts that make up a full suit of armour.

After a battle had ended local people plundered the dead and injured for their weapons and armour as well as any other valuables and so for this reason these remains can rarely be found by modern metal detector searches. In very early battles the dead were known to remain standing, held up by their very rigid armour.

As time went on swords became thinner to get through the gaps in the armour. Examples of the poleaxe, the axe, the spike, the halberd and a hammer to break up the rivets in the armour were shown. A 6' long bow was demonstrated made from ash or yew. It took 10 years to train an archer, which was far too long but arrows were quicker to fire than an early gun for which a gunner could be trained in a day. Cross bows were invented, with various ways of drawing them, a bolt could penetrate armour at 200 yards and cross bows took 3 minutes to fire. It was cross bows that were used to fire from arrow slits in castle walls.

Jed concluded by discussing ways of treating wounds saying cauterising is the safest but the most painful. Altogether, a fascinating talk full of facts and with examples of the real thing to see and touch.

MAY 2015 DAY TRIP TO ELY CATHEDRAL AND TOWN

As we turned into Paddock Street at 8.50am we could see that there was one of Wood's new luxury coaches waiting to take us on our outing to Ely. We were nearly the last to arrive despite being 10 minutes early so were able to make a prompt start to our journey with a very welcoming and cheerful driver.

Ely is not an easy place to get to from Leicester but the driver chose the A14 route joining it from the A6 at Rothwell. The journey time was about 2 hours, the last few miles being on quite narrow twisty roads across the fens.

We arrived at the doors to the great cathedral, the 'Ship of the Fens' because it stands out for miles around as a guide to travellers in the vast flatness of the fens. We were split into two groups for our guided tour. Our own group had a very knowledgeable guide who managed to steer us around the many other groups visiting that morning and an exhibition of local business which was taking place in the nave and lady chapel. This shows how the space in cathedrals is being put to good and sometimes unexpected use in these modern times.

The lady chapel was our starting point and in the case of Ely is somewhat unusual. Whereas usually the lady chapel is a small side chapel within the church itself and often reserved for private prayer, at Ely it is a magnificent standalone building of large, light and airy proportions, the largest such chapel attached to any British cathedral. It is dominated by a modern (2000) statue of the Virgin Mary, somewhat too blue, blond and modern for many eyes, situated above a modern wrought iron altar and rail.

The other significant feature at Ely is, of course, the Octagon. Originally a Norman tower, it collapsed on 13 February 1322 when amazingly no one was killed or injured. Because the original foundations were weak the rebuilding was on firmer ground further out from the original pillars and the idea of an octagon surmounted by a lantern was conceived. The internal height is 142 feet and the total weight is 400 tons. This needed innovative engineering involving timber taking 20 years to complete. The octagon principle is symbolic because the eighth side represents the eighth day, the day beyond our earthly seven days.

After a fascinating tour we went our separate ways for lunch, for ourselves, we headed to the Almonry restaurant which, as its name implies is part of the former monastery where monks gave out food and other gifts to the local poor. After lunch and despite some rain we headed to the riverside (the Great Ouse) where we were given a display of boat race type rowing by the local schoolchildren. From there we headed back through the delightful town to Cromwell's House, now a museum of his life. This as its name implies was Oliver Cromwell's home before he became famous as soldier, politician and leader of the country. It was well presented with lots of information boards and a couple of video presentations, for us, filling in a few gaps in our knowledge about the civil war.

It was then time to return to the cathedral café for cake and tea and a quick visit to the shop before getting back onto the coach for the return to Wigston which we reached, kept awake by one of Ann and Mike's excellent travelling quizzes, at about 6pm.

On reflection, despite the fact that my guide book says that there is little of distinction at Ely apart from what is described above, we would return to take a closer look at the Cathedral and its surrounding buildings and enjoy the riverside on a better day weather wise.

JUNE 2015 EVENING OUTING TO BURBAGE

Our summer evening outings over the years do not seem to attract weather appropriate to the longest day of the year. This year, even though the date was some 4 days before the 21 June, the weather was no exception with very overcast skies and some light rain, although it was reasonably warm.

We assembled, as arranged, outside the church of St Catherine at 6.45pm and were divided into two groups denoted by different coloured cards (a cunning plan devised by our efficient Secretary) which also indicated our menu choice for the pub supper later. This was to enable more comfortable conducted tours of the village and the church with the groups changing places half way through the evening.

The village tour led by the Burbage Heritage Group was based on the central part of the village with particular attention being paid to the buildings on which the Group had erected Blue Plaques to commemorate local people of importance (much like our own scheme in Wigston).

This area of the village around the church is clearly very old as shown by the ancient houses Archer Cottage and The Manor House and round the corner in Aston Lane; Burbage Hall and The Grange. The latter looking most interesting and dating from 1608 and which is described by Pevsner as having the best interior for a house of its period (which, of course, we were unable to see). We moved down Church Street passing the elegant three storey Tong Lodge, built in 1845 and which was the birthplace of Charles Chamberlain Hurst an eminent pioneer of genetic science. The highly prominent war memorial was replanted with locally named roses in 1999 to mark the 75th anniversary of the Royal British Legion. We moved down to the lovely Horsepool, which was, as the name implies, a drinking place for horses and a place to clean the wheels of horse drawn waggons. It is now a lovely garden much used for wedding photographs and by schoolchildren on nature walks. It is overlooked by The Croft, formerly the Roebuck coaching inn used by travellers passing along the nearby Watling Street.

We then returned to the church via Pughe's Paddock, a small garden area with rose planting recalling the prominent horticultural activities of eminent rose growers in the area in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Local people to whom Blue Plaques had been erected included: Kinard Baghot de la Bere (1837-1932) of Burbage Hall who as an engineer and agriculturist who invented 'water glass' to prevent eggshells becoming porous enabling eggs to be preserved over several months; Herbert Robinson (1884-1977) a rose grower and hybridist; Edward Crump (1878-1956) an engineer who brought clean drinking water to the previously unsanitary parish; Charles (1855-1934) and Stanley Higham (1883-1947) father and son, prominent local school teachers and Roger Cotes (1682-1716) a mathematician who was a contemporary of Isaac Newton.

The church of St Catherine was described to us by long term chorister and Church Warden, Martin Mellor. At first glance the interior is somewhat plain but unusual. The old pews were removed a few years ago and replaced by modern bench seats over a very level York stone floor, which covers underfloor heating powered by ground source heat pumps in the church yard (to a depth of 300 feet). Did they disturb the churchyard inhabitants and do they keep them warm too I wonder? This was an innovative solution to the usual problem of heating drafty old churches. Another aspect of the interior was the unusual symmetry, there being an equal number of arches, all the same shape, to the aisles each side of the nave and a very wide but open chancel. Another recent addition is a hall built onto the north side of the church where the church school rooms originally stood and which can be entered from the nave through three arches cut into the original north aisle wall. Despite being extensively rebuilt in 1842 by the Victorians, there are traces of Saxon foundations in the tower and a date of 1633 carved on the main door. The registers date from 1562 and there are references to the church dated 1209.

There are a few interesting memorials and unusually a complete list of previous rectors some of which had lively careers. The living is currently vacant but the last incumbent was in post for 21 years.

We all then decamped to the Chequers Inn on Lutterworth Road for our pre-ordered supper. The Village guide says that this pub has changed little over the last 200 years but our advance party of spies found differently and it is now a modern but homely and friendly village pub serving good food.

Our visit did not touch on the industrial past in Burbage which involved framework knitting which changed from a home industry to a factory industry, a story we know so much about in

Wigston. This is fully described in the village heritage trail leaflet published by the Burbage Heritage Group and could be the subject of a private visit by individuals who are interested in such subjects in the future.

Reports by Colin Towell

THE MUSINGS OF DUNCAN

On 30th January 2015 I went to the funeral of Tom Montfort, at All Saints Church, to say goodbye to him, along with a goodly crowd of elderly naval veterans.

Looking around the church once again I noted the large number of gargoyles, I believe the largest number in a parish church in England. A lot of them are of the Victorian Era and recently I learned that the Kirk Family were stone masons in this area.

Now a Kirk in the 1790s painted ‘The Wigston Feast’ which resides in the locality. I saw that large painting with the brother of the owner who was caretaker at one time at the property. Neville Chadwick photographed it and the late Ralph Wignall painted a copy for me. My painting, 30” x 36” is large but small compared to the original.

Did the Kirks make and erect the Gargoyles?

So you see what is going on at a funeral, and what looking around does for a fertile mind, or a mad one like me.

Further ramblings!

Just as one steps through the North door on the right is a small lump of sandstone with a name on it. W. E. Simons, June 23 (no year), badly chipped on its face, a tomb stone it is. Someone on the Bank had been using it for chopping sticks. I took it to the Rev. John Green and suggested it belonged in one of the two churches. Put it there lad – I’ll find a place for it! It’s never moved since.

Attached to the wall is the wonderful hatchment of William Wygston of Leicester painted by Liberty Daly a local lass. In 2013 it was the 500th anniversary of the founding by William of the Wyggeston Hospital in Leicester, a retirement home for deserving cases. As part of the celebrations the trustees were proud to commission the hatchment to mark this important milestone and also William’s family connections with Wigston.

Duncan Lucas

OADBY AND WIGSTON FIELDWORKERS GROUP

Many members will recall late last year announcements from Roger Whalley about the formation of a Fieldworkers Group for our area. This came from remarks during one of his talks by Peter Liddle who is the co-ordinator of the Fieldworking organisation in Leicestershire.

A group finally came together earlier this year and the inaugural meeting took place at Brocks Hill (a room being kindly provided free of charge) on 12 January, led by Peter with about 25 people attending. There were subsequent meetings during which training was given to help newcomers identify finds and a dry fieldworking run was held so that we could understand the grid system used to actually walk the fields.

Key personnel are Elaine King who has taken on the role of Secretary and Pete Wilford who is the man who knows the fields from long experience of working on them and who most importantly knows the farmers. For myself, I am the Plan Watcher in my capacity as Secretary of the Wigston Civic Society

The ground and crop conditions were finally right for our first venture into the fields on 16 March when we walked the first field on the right going up Newton Lane past Bronze Barrow Close. We novices were paired off with an experienced walker and each pair walked up and down 20 metre strips of field. Half the field was covered in the morning and the other half in the afternoon. Being on the afternoon shift we found quite a few items but we were assured that the morning had been more fruitful. Finds are bagged and labelled with the grid reference, date and field number on the bag. Each walker then takes their bags home and washes their finds with soapy water and a tooth brush. At the next meeting the finds are formally identified by an expert and then logged so that hot spots of each type can be identified. It really is amazing that the smallest bit of broken pottery can be identified as 'Roman' 'pre med' 'med', 'staffs purple' or 'panshion ware'. But we were all convinced that the Roman finds had been dropped earlier by an expert for some novice to find and get excited about (only joking) there really were some Roman finds.

A second date was abandoned because of bad weather and a third outing to the fields was further along Newton Lane at Glebe Farm when there were less finds, but some of which were later identified as very interesting. I have to say that one of the joys of 'field walking' is just being outside in a large brown field and seeing the lambs in the next door green field.

Joining the Leicestershire Fieldworkers Group allows access to lots of information and advance knowledge of many related events, such as a trip taking in Henry Tudor's route to Bosworth Field via Merevale Abbey and Archaeology Fortnight, which this year is from 11 to 26 July. The Group is fairly inactive during the summer because the fields are not available but the next meeting will be on 17 August at 2pm at Brocks Hill. Come and join us.

Colin Towell

175 YEARS OF RAILWAYS IN WIGSTON (1840 - 2015)

On the morning of Monday 29th June 1840, a small group of Wigston residents would have been observed walking from the village along the dusty unpaved road towards Glen Parva, but their destination was only a mile to the west where a new brick building had been constructed in the past six months. It was the station for the new *Midland Counties Railway* (MCR) which had been built from Derby and Nottingham via Leicester to connect with the *London & Birmingham Railway* (L&BR) at Rugby. They didn't have long to wait before a highly decorated special train appeared from the direction of Leicester and, after slowing down to acknowledge the cheering crowds at Wigston, it would have accelerated away towards Rugby where the directors of the MCR would have no doubt met up with their opposite numbers from the L&BR at a suitable hostelry in Rugby for a glass or two of bubbly.

The following day saw the first public service on the new railway, and things would never be the same again for the once quiet village of Wigston which, for many generations before, had existed on agriculture and framework knitting. Now the railway opened up a whole new world to the residents who for the first time had a much faster and more reliable means of transport to many more places. Travelling in search of work or just visiting family and friends, had become so much more accessible to the ordinary folk of Wigston.

But it might not have worked out like this if the original plans for the MCR route south of Leicester had come about. Indeed, the first plans submitted by the MCR had two routes to connect with the L&BR, and neither came anywhere near Wigston. One option would have gone in a more south easterly direction towards Northampton and the other alternative route was further to the west following the River Soar out of Leicester towards Lutterworth. The MCR, however, chose a third route which came out of Leicester and cut through the high ground at Knighton before passing just to the west of Wigston, and so it was our village that had a station and not Oadby or Whetstone.

To say that the coming of the railway had a significant effect on Wigston is true, but in fact this didn't really happen for another 20 or 30 years, and for this we have to thank the successor to the MCR. When the *Midland Railway* (MR) came into existence in 1844, it was formed from an amalgamation of three early railways centred on Derby and one of these was the MCR, so they inherited the route to Rugby as their principle connection to London. What happened next is probably just as important as the original decision of the MCR to route their line close to our village. In 1857 the MR decided to construct a more direct route to London and so avoid the congestion at Rugby, and they chose Wigston as the start point for their new mainline. Now Wigston could call itself a junction. Because the new route initially went to London via Hitchin and the *Great Northern Railway* into Kings Cross station, it was officially known as the *Leicester & Hitchin Railway* (L&H). As the result of this, Wigston acquired its second passenger station. It's probably the one we remember the most, as it was built even closer to the centre of Wigston and gave the residents many more options to travel further afield. Yet the station we recall in our times, was only the second station on this site, and the much loved 'Spion Kop' bridge did not exist in 1857. Because at this time the MR only built a double track line, the road to Glen Parva passed over the two tracks by means of a level crossing, and so it remained for the next 45 years. It was only in the early years of the 20th century that the MR widened their line south of Leicester to include additional tracks for goods traffic, and this necessitated a complete rebuild of the original Wigston (L&H) station, and the new station opened in 1902. At the same time, they took the opportunity to construct a bridge to replace the

level crossing and take the road over the quadruple tracks and this probably came just in time as the level of road traffic was increasing every year as the new motor vehicles became more widely used.

Now with two passenger stations serving the village, Wigston prospered and when in 1870 the MR also selected Wigston for further development, things only got better. Land to the east of the new mainline was acquired and used to build a complex of repair and maintenance facilities for the railway. An engine shed and wagon works were constructed which, along with the stations and associated signal boxes, created 250 new jobs. It was at this time that the MR constructed the impressive row of terraced houses for their employees that we now refer to as '20 Row'. Wigston had never experienced anything quite like this. The prospect of new jobs was welcomed by many local men and women, but there was also an influx of new residents attracted by the prospect of relatively well paid work, and it was this demand for new housing that prompted Mr Orson Wright to plan and build the township of South Wigston in the 1880's.

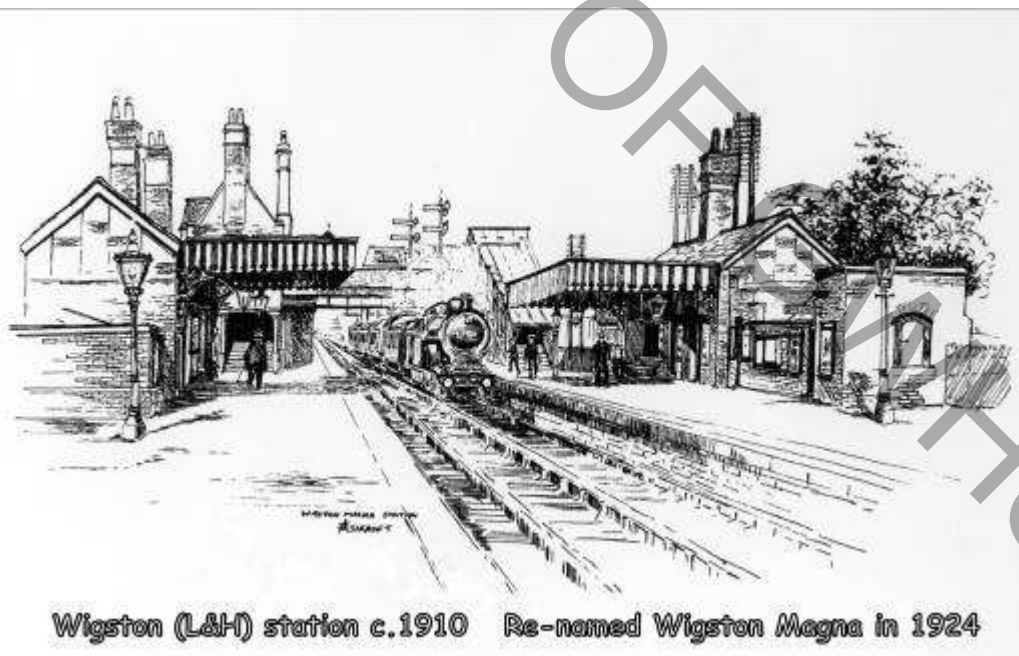
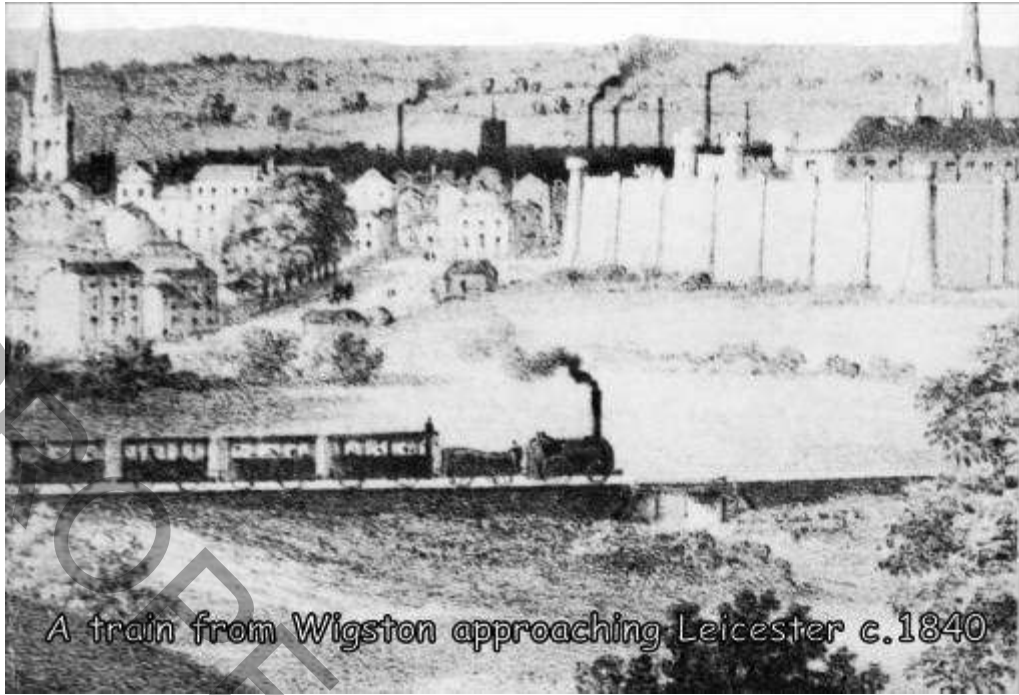
While the MR was developing Wigston as a principle point on their railway, another railway company came along with similar plans. The *South Leicestershire Railway* was keen to build a line connecting Nuneaton and Hinckley with Leicester and after coming to an agreement with the MR in 1864 for running rights, they joined the Midland Mainline at Wigston. Now Wigston was not only a junction but an important one. This new line brought about the creation of our third and final station at Wigston Glen Parva, although the new Army barracks on Saffron Road was the initial driving force behind this, but it didn't take long before the civilian residents of the growing South Wigston saw the potential for journeys to Birmingham and points west. The station, now under the *London & North Western Railway*, came into general use in 1884.

So by 1914 the railways of Wigston were at their zenith and the village had grown into a suburb of Leicester, yet dark clouds were gathering and one world war was followed by another, so that in 1945 the railways everywhere were in poor shape. At Wigston the engine shed had succumbed to the Great Depression of the 1930's and everything else was run down. The recently nationalised British Railways had to modernise and some of the decisions that were taken had a profound effect on the railways at Wigston Junction. By 1968 all three stations had closed and the original MCR line to Rugby had gone. There had been many local objections, yet these closures still went ahead and for the next decade or so, Wigston did not have a railway station.

It has been a contentious point for many years as to whether these closures could have been avoided and who was to blame for the loss of our stations. Most folk that remember the three stations, engine shed and wagon works will probably have a view on this subject, but is there really a definitive answer?

It's something that will be covered in the GWHS meeting in October later this year, so please come along and be prepared to air your views. Perhaps between us we can come up with an answer and also discover some other remarkable facts, like the day Queen Victoria and Prince Albert came to Wigston, and perhaps only surpassed by the unadvertised visit of US President Ulysses S. Grant. Want to know when and why they came to Wigston? All will be revealed on 21st October at the GWHS meeting ... and at the same time we will celebrate the 175 glorious years of our railways in Wigston.

John Stevenson



Sketch by Judy Ashcroft

HEATHERLEY HOUSE, 130 STATION ROAD, WIGSTON

PLUS SOME NOTES ON ITS OCCUPANTS

The move of several local doctors' practices to their new combined premises on Station Road remind those with long connections to Wigston, of Heatherley House, a rather grand residence with huge greenhouses which once occupied the site. It was the neighbouring property, on the South Wigston side, to Bushloe House (the present headquarters of Oadby & Wigston Borough Council).

The first record discovered of the house, which was then known as Camden Lodge, is the 1871 census when Henry Morgan lived there with his wife Mary and two servants. Henry had been born in August 1808 at St. Pancras, in the Camden district of London, hence the name of the house. It seems likely he had the house built for his retirement and was the first owner/occupier. Henry had in his youth started a drapery business in Leicester, and early success caused him to invite William Squire to join him in partnership, thus forming the fondly remembered company Morgan & Squire, generally known as Morgan Squires in Hotel Street, Leicester.

Henry married Ann Creasey on 21st February 1838 in New Sleaford, Lincolnshire. He married secondly in the March quarter 1855 in Blaby registration district Mary Chamberlain the daughter of John Chamberlain of Whetstone, a butcher. Henry does not appear to have had any children with either wife.

William Squire was born c.1813 in Heckington Lincolnshire. The business was well established by 1846 when the two partners both lived and worked in Hotel Street. By 1849 Henry had moved to 2, The Crescent, King Street while William remained in Hotel Street. By 1863 William had also moved further from work to 34, Lower Hastings Street. The business premises at this time being given a street number 17, Hotel Street.

William also married twice, firstly to Mary A. Squires and secondly to Jane Peak. His eldest son Samuel Squire, was by 1881, living at 1, Salisbury Road, Leicester, and running the business, which he continued to do into the early 20th century. According to a House of Fraser website the company name from 1928-1985 was Morgan Squire Ltd., and it was owned by a number of different trusts and companies during that period, before being acquired by them in 1970.

Henry Morgan died in April 1874, at Wigston, aged 66, and Mary continued to live there alone except for her two servants. She died in January 1888, at Wigston, aged 74, following which the property was put up for sale. Advertisements at the time give the following description: *"a handsome modern built residence, which is detached and retired from the road; contains a spacious tiled hall with vestibule entrance; drawing room 17' x 15' 6" with large bay window; dining room 15' x 15' 6" with large bay window; breakfast room, china closet, kitchen with cooking range by Illston; scullery, dry cellar, four bedrooms, dressing room, good landing, box room and WC. Outside, a stable, coach house and loft, tool house, a large kitchen garden planted with apple, pear, plum and damson trees; a peach or orchid house with half-span roof, 30' x 13'; a brick built and glazed span roof shed (for apricots) with open front and asphalte floor, 26' 9" by 13' 6"; greenhouse and fernery, with heating apparatus 38' 6" by 10' 6"; and large hen pen. The front of the house is enclosed by a brick wall and palisade fence, with carriage entrance; also large lawn with flower borders and shrubs, the whole being just under*

one acre. Within four minutes walk of the station, from which there is a splendid service of trains to Leicester and all parts of the Kingdom. To view, apply to Laundon, gardener, on the premises."

The house was bought by Major William Mogg Rolph and thereafter known as Heatherley House. He was living there in 1889/90 according to Wright's directory. He plainly wanted to be near to Glen Parva Barracks. Major Rolph served in the 17th Regiment, later to become the Leicestershire Regiment. He had been born in c.1843 in Ontario, Canada and his wife Emily c.1854 in Scotland. They had a young family born in different places. During his ownership of the house he made considerable additions, these included a new large dining room, a smoke room, three more bedrooms, another dressing room, a bathroom and "*other conveniences*" also front and back kitchens, butler's pantry, larder and cellars. It was most likely his promotion in February 1890 to Lieutenant Colonel which resulted in the house being offered for sale by auction on 15th April 1890 due to "*the owner, Colonel Rolph, being abroad in command of his regiment*". Acting for Lt. Col. Rolph, in his absence, was his solicitor and neighbour Hiram Abiff Owston of Bushloe House.

It is not known whether the house was actually sold at this time, however, when the 1891 census was taken the house was occupied by Arthur Henry Wentworth Manserge and his wife Bessie. He was a retired officer in the regular army, a magistrate and colonel of the volunteers. He was born c.1845 in County Wrexford, Ireland, and Bessie c.1858 in Bombay. The Manserge family lived in some style, as in addition to their two servants they also had a coachman and a footman. They were still in residence in 1892 but directories for 1893/4 do not mention Heatherley House at all suggesting it was empty for a while. They may have returned to Ireland where Arthur died in 1926.

Kelly's directory 1895 lists Samuel Joseph Viccars at Heatherley. He was born c.1845 in Leicester and was a wool merchant, his company was Howson-Horsfall & Viccars of 5, Newarke Street, Leicester and at Bradford. His wife Mary was born c.1861 in Ashby de la Zouch, and the couple had adult children. They stayed until c.1898 then moved to Smeeton Westerby before finally settling in London where Samuel died in the March quarter 1919.

In Kelly's 1899 Colonel Rolph was back at Heatherley for about a year making it seem likely that the house failed to sell when he went abroad, and was let instead. He then moved to Cheltenham but in time moved to Leicester where he died in 1918.

By the 1901 census Edgar Reeve and his wife Clara nee Owen were resident at Heatherley House with two servants. He was born c.1853 and she was born c.1854, both in Leicester. They married late in life and had no children. By 1911 they were still there, the house then being noted as having 15 rooms. Edgar was a cigar manufacturer, his company J. Reeve & Sons, Burley's Lane, Leicester. Clara Reeve died in March 1925, at Wigston, aged 71, and the following year in 1926 at Stafford, Edgar married again to Elizabeth Walker Crewe. Elizabeth was some twenty years younger than Edgar. He died in October 1931 at Wigston, aged 78 and Elizabeth continued to live on at Heatherley. She can be traced up to 1965 possibly living on her own as no-one else is listed at this address in the electoral registers. She died in a Leicester nursing home in March 1965, aged 91.

Heatherley House, 130 Station Road is not mentioned in subsequent electoral registers and probably stood empty for a while. It was then demolished and Wigston College built on the site, which opened in 1970. The college was later renamed South Leicestershire College and

moved to new premises in South Wigston in 2010. The site was then again cleared to make way for the new combined surgery building and its car park.

Tricia Berry

References: Various directories, census records, BMD & probate records, newspaper archives on www.findmypast.co.uk and <http://www.housefraserarchive.ac.uk/company/?id=c2655>

WIGSTON REMEMBERS

AN EVENING OF COMMEMORATION OF WORLD WAR I

SATURDAY 31 OCTOBER 2015 AT 7.30p.m.

ABINGTON ACADEMY, STATION ROAD, WIGSTON, LE18 2DH

Arranged by The Leicestershire & Rutland Family History Society, The Wigston Civic Society & The Greater Wigston Historical Society

There will be live Music, Songs, Poetry & Readings –“Humour in the Trenches” & “Lights Going Out”

Drinks in the Foyer at the Interval (included in the admission price)

The evening will end with a video of the Menin Gate Last Post Ceremony & Two Minutes Silence

Those taking part include Robin Jenkins (Chief Archivist at the Record Office), Dave Andrews (Radio Leicester), Marion Morley (Who has entertained us at our Christmas Meeting) Derrick Pearce “Banjo Des” and The Harmonics Choir

Tickets cost £7 50 and can be obtained from Colin Towell 0116 2889638 Peter Cousins 0116 2884638 & Jane Callis 07983 614989

From the Leicester Chonicle & Leicestershire Mercury 13th November 1897:-

“Wigston Feast:- On Sunday there was a large number of visitors to the town, and the crush at the railway station on the evening to Leicester was very great. On Sunday afternoon the railway servants held an orphans’ parade, and walked in procession through the streets of South Wigston, afterwards attending a special service at the Congregational Church where a sermon was preached by the Rev. F. E. Perry. Collections were made in aid of the Orphan Fund connected with the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, which realised about £8. The procession was headed by Wigston United Brass Band. At the fair on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, there were the usual attractions in the way of steam horses, sea on land etc., which appeared to be well patronised.”

NEW

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Head Street, Moat Street and Long Street*

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