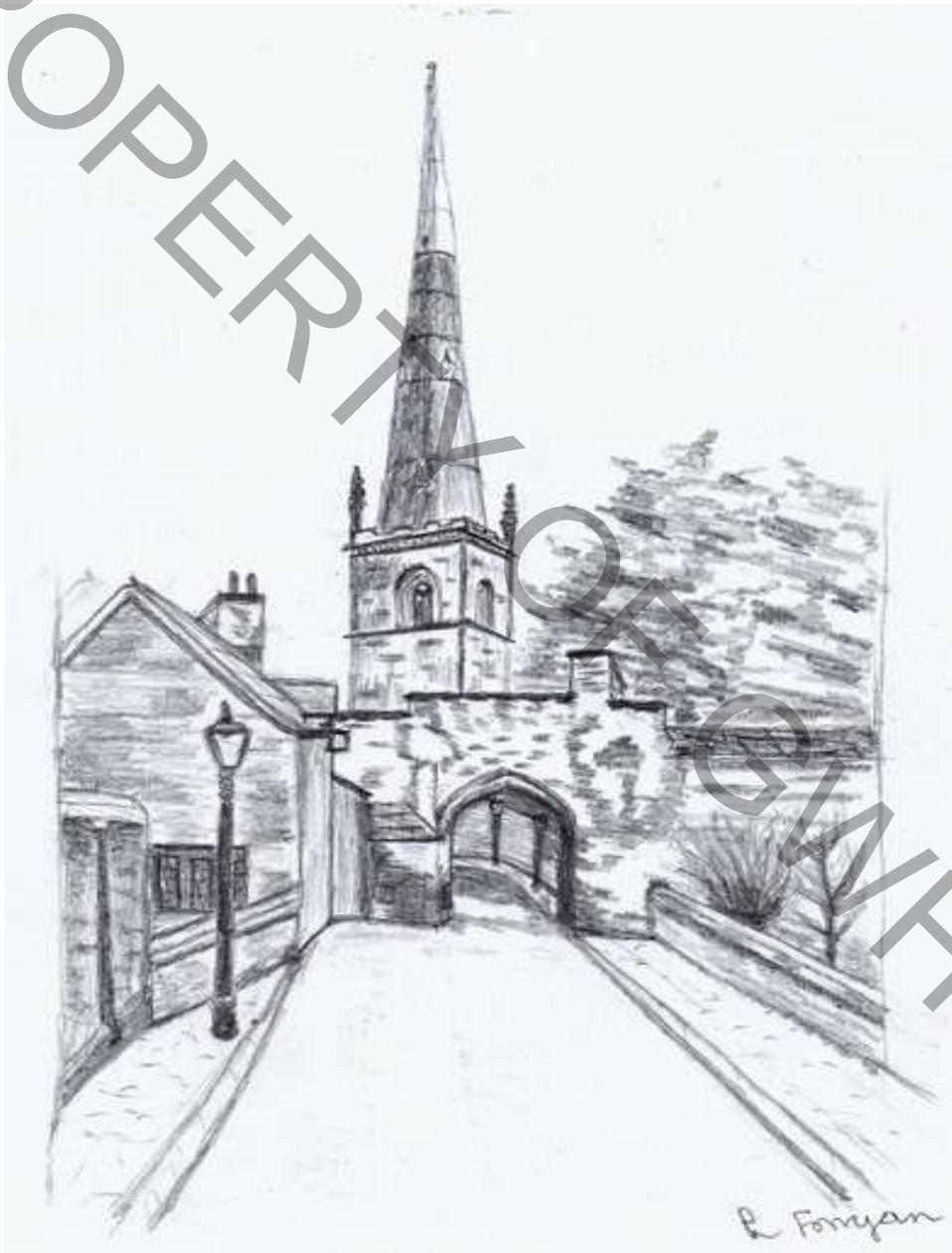


GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
White Gate Lodge, 97 Newton Lane, Wigston Magna, Leics.

BULLETIN 110

1st March 2018



Prince Rupert's Gateway & St Mary De Castro Church, Leicester – 1955

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS – MARCH TO DECEMBER 2018

Wednesday 21st March 2018

Leicester City Football Club, with Wigston Connections (Part Two) – John Hutchinson
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 18th April 2018

Some Wind & Water Mills of Leicestershire – Dr Susan Tebby
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 16th May 2018

Queen Eleanor of Castile – Julie Ede
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

***Wednesday 20th June 2018**

Evening guided walk around Melbourne, Derbys, followed by a meal at the Blue Bell Inn
Booking essential, own or shared transport, meet at 5pm outside the parish church. Members may like to arrive in Melbourne earlier & perhaps visit the church (recommended)

***Wednesday 15th August 2018**

Visit to Cooke's Motor Museum, Nr. Kibworth, followed by meal at The Queen's Head, Saddington
Booking essential, own or shared transport, meet at the museum 6pm

Wednesday 19th September 2018

Origins & Operation of the Leicester to Swannington Railway – Malcolm Riddle
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 17th October 2018

Every Home Should Have One – domestic history of the 20th century – Felicity Austin
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 21st November 2018

The Story of the Unknown Warrior – John Sutton
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 19th December 2018

The Very Highly Strung 'Unikulele' Band
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

*Our Secretary, Ann Cousins, will take bookings, note menu choices, collect payments and arrange if people would like a lift to Melbourne and/or Kibworth at the March, April and May meetings.

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

NOVEMBER 2017 MEETING A RIGHT ROYAL CHRISTMAS

Our planned speaker for this meeting, John Castleman, whose subject was to be the restoration of old buildings, could not attend at the last minute, so we were very lucky to obtain the services of John Whitehead instead to talk about 'A Right Royal Christmas'. John is an experienced local guide doing some work at Bosworth Battle Field.

The Queen has an accommodation problem (as of course many of us have). There is enough room at Sandringham, where she spends Christmas, for only 27 guests although she has about 60 family members, so on the Wednesday before Christmas she hosts a big house party at Buckingham Palace for everyone, and then the closer family are invited to Sandringham as well.

However this in itself creates something of a problem especially for the local police force. Guests often arrive at the palace straight from work and in unexpected forms of transport. So the gate officer needs to be able to recognise, even the more distant members of the royal family and associated VIPs. To test us, John showed a selection of photos of the younger and lesser known ones and we didn't do too well!

Sandringham was purchased by Edward, Prince of Wales in 1862 for £220,000. It was originally an estate of 20,000 acres, but now reduced to 7,000 acres. At one time there was a railway station at Wolverton close by, but after this closed the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh now travel by a normal service from London to Kings Lynn. The house and estate was handed down to Edward VIII who wanted to sell it on the open market but was persuaded to sell it to the Queen's father and it was then handed down to the Queen.

There is a tradition that the guests start arriving about two days before Christmas and in strict order of the youngest and most distant first with the last being Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall on Christmas Eve. They all bring plenty of warm clothes as the house is not known for its efficient heating system. At afternoon tea on Christmas Eve all guests are given a timetable of events, then presents are exchanged. It is a tradition that these are well wrapped but modest in price, and often practical or humorous. Then follows a black tie dinner.

After a full English breakfast on Christmas morning the family attends church where the Queen sits in the choir stalls. After the traditional Christmas lunch the staff are released and the family relaxes. Boxing Day is the Duke of Edinburgh's event when he organises a shoot on the estate. Originally the estate would shoot 20,000 birds a year but these days it is a wild shoot and birds are not bred specifically for the shooting. After a buffet lunch guests begin to depart on a last in first out basis, with Prince Charles going to Birkhall in Scotland while the Duchess of Cornwall goes to see her family in Gloucestershire before joining her husband.

John then gave us a few historical facts about Christmas. The Roman Empress Constantine (244-330AD) was the first head of state to recognise the meaning of, and to celebrate Christmas. William the Conqueror (1066), King Stephen (1135), and Charles II (1660), were all crowned at Christmas time. Henry I in an effort to stop the debasing of silver coinage invited the many owners of mints to Winchester at Christmas 1125 and those found guilty had their right hand cut off and were castrated. Henry II had Thomas a Becket murdered in his own cathedral of Canterbury on 29 December 1170. Oliver Cromwell, of course, was not a believer in Christmas celebrations and people had to work on that day instead. But it was noticed that Christmas was formally recognised in the prayer book and so Cromwell ordered that part to be deleted. The Prince Regent didn't like to celebrate with his

parents so he decamped to Brighton for a good time and Bonnie Prince Charlie was born at Christmas 1720. Queen Charlotte, wife of George III was the first royal to import a Christmas tree but it was Queen Victoria and Prince Albert who popularised it, and Albert's friend, Henry Cole who sent the first Christmas card.

The Monarchs' Christmas Broadcasts are, to many, a central part of the Christmas celebrations. The Queen now pre-records hers and actually listens to it in a room separate from her guests. The first broadcast was by George V in 1932. The BBC wanted to start an 'Empire Service' and it was thought that a message from the King would be a good thing, the King was not keen but was persuaded to oblige. The first speech was written by Rudyard Kipling. It was broadcast live from Sandringham and relayed to the wireless station at Daventry and then to the Empire, it was estimated that it was heard by 20 million people. George V died on 20 January 1936 shortly after his Christmas message. Edward VIII planned not to broadcast in 1936 but he abdicated beforehand. George VI, as we know, had a bad speech defect and did not broadcast a message in 1936 or 1937 but he restarted the tradition in 1938 with a brief message. In 1939 his speech just after the start of WWII was a huge success.

The Queen's first message was in 1952 before her Coronation, and the first televised speech was in 1957. There was no speech in 1969 following the investiture of the Prince of Wales and the release of a documentary on the Royal Family. It was considered that there had been enough Royal exposure, but this caused an outcry. The Queen writes her Christmas message herself and, therefore, it is very personal.

John concluded his very interesting and entertaining talk by giving us the history of the Stone of Scone, or is there more than one?

DECEMBER 2017 MEETING CHRISTMAS PARTY NIGHT

Christmas meeting time and happily the snow and severe frost both before and after the evening, was not around just then, which meant the committee were unhindered in transporting the food, drinks, glasses, puzzles etc and wondering if the entertainer would be able to make it.

The evening was similar to previous ones, in that there were various puzzles and quizzes, some excellent light snacks and drinks and a raffle. Some of the committee wore various amusing fancy dress items, some making them unrecognisable, which added to the relaxed atmosphere.

For part of the evening we very much enjoyed a series of well known and popular songs from the past, very nicely sung by Lizzy Rushby. She brought her own digital music accompaniment, and was dressed in costume. It really stirred the memories.

JANUARY 2018 MEETING CASTLE PARK & THE HONOR OF LEICESTER

For our first meeting of the New Year a full house of members and visitors welcomed Caroline Roberts to talk about the historic heart of Leicester, the castle. Caroline is one of a diminishing number of Blue Badge Guides in the city and concentrates on giving free conducted tours of the Town Hall, including the former court rooms and cells.

We were first reminded not to (as many newcomers do) confuse the castle with the prison on Welford Road! The real castle is situated to the east of the canalised River Soar in the centre of the medieval area of town near the Holiday Inn, and Castle Park itself is on the river bank. Nearby are the Church of St Nicholas, the oldest church in Leicester, The Jewry Wall and Roman remains and notably St Mary de Castro Church, or St Mary of the Castle, this being the private chapel for those living in the castle at the time. St Mary's was built within the walls of the castle and until recently had the tallest spire in the city, but it had to be taken down a few years ago when severe cracks were found and it was declared unsafe. The tower itself is notable because it is built within the church as opposed to being situated outside at the west or the south sides, this was because of a lack of space.

The area around the castle has been found to cover Roman remains including several significant pavements. Many years ago a local resident charged 6d (2.5 new pence) for visitors to view an example in his cellar. Most have now been removed and until recently one was on display in the Jewry Wall Museum (currently closed). Only in the last year new remains were found on the former Stibbe factory site and the old brewery site on the opposite corner of High Cross Street these have been removed for conservation and future display. There are other pavements still buried under the premises of Ginns and Gutteridge, the funeral directors on Vaughan Way.

The castle is of a motte and bailey type although the top of the motte is now some 15 feet lower than when originally constructed as the Victorians reduced it and levelled the top for use as a bowling green! It is possible to walk up to the top on a recently constructed pathway. After the conquest in 1066 William gave large parts of the East Midlands to his second in command, Hugh de Grantmesnil who had the castle built (similar in design to Oakham). There were only two entrances, Castle Gateway which adjoins the Castle House (now a very comfortable but rarely used residence for judges sitting at the Crown Court) and the Turret or Rupert's Gateway. The latter name after Prince Rupert who damaged it when he retook the town during the civil war.

The area in front of the Castle where Castle Green is situated is the Honor of Leicester. It remains part of the Royal Estate. The castle became the property of the Dukes of Lancaster (the Queen is the present 'Duke'). At the time John of Gaunt was the Duke, he lived there as his summer residence, and a cellar is named after him. The sister of his 3rd wife, Katherine Swinford, married Geoffrey Chaucer in St Mary de Castro, in the Royal part of the church which was shielded from the lower levels of society. However, they were inquisitive and made holes in the wall which eventually collapsed making the church one nave only. Chaucer's characters are incorporated into the iron work of the West Bridge. The Dukes employed priests to pray for their souls, the priests lived in the Chantry House which is now part of the Newarke Houses museum. The boy King, Henry IV was knighted in St Mary de Castro.

In 1483, Richard III stayed at the castle but when he travelled down from Nottingham in August 1485 to meet Henry Tudor at Bosworth, the castle was not ready, so he stayed at The White Boar in High Cross Street, roughly where the Travelodge building is now. After his defeat the landlord quickly had the sign painted blue and renamed The Blue Boar in order to be on the winning side. It was very unfortunately demolished in 1838.

Castle Gardens were originally the garden attached to the castle and contained fishponds which are still visible, and a windmill where the Richard III statue stood until recently. The Newarke area includes the Chantry House and Skeffington House (now both being parts of the Newarke Houses Museum) and the Trinity Hospital (rebuilt several times) which are all outside the castle walls. The hospital was founded by the Dukes of Lancaster. Another church, which was later destroyed by Henry VIII was The Church of the Annunciation. It is said to have been larger than Norwich

Cathedral. The foundations still exist and once contained the burials of many members of Royal families, which have mostly since been destroyed, though one survives in the Trinity Hospital Chapel. King Richard III's dead body is believed to have been displayed in this church before its hasty burial below. Two arches from the church do survive in the basement of the former Hawthorne Building of De Montfort University and can be viewed at certain times. The church was on a pilgrimage route from Europe and contained a thorn from Christ's crown of thorns.

Caroline included many other facts about this and other parts of Leicester which made her talk, although not illustrated, exceptionally interesting and a great start for a very promising programme for 2018.

The first three reports by Colin Towell

FEBRUARY 2018 MEETING AGM FOLLOWED BY QUIZ WITH VIRGINIA WRIGHT

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

- 1) **Apologies for Absence** – Liz Ward, Shirley Moxon & May Hilton
- 2) **Minutes of February 2017 AGM** – read by the Treasurer, Colin Towell, & signed as correct
- 3) **Matters arising** – None
- 4) **Chairman's Report** – Mike reported another successful year with meetings very well attended & an interesting programme of speakers on many topics. Two enjoyable summer outings & a friendly lighthearted Christmas social with great entertainer, though this latter was not so well attended this year. He was pleased to report that the two DVDs are still selling well (700 sold in total) thus making a useful contribution to society funds, Age UK and Rainbows. Another DVD is planned this time featuring events/occasions with more collaboration from other members. Promotion of the society continues via Borough notice boards, libraries, trade magazines, the website and the press. The society has also been represented at open days/exhibitions. The Facebook page called "Wigston Remembering the Past" has been a resounding success & so far the Closed Group has some 2,686 members. This group has generated a massive amount of new information and photographs about the area which is being absorbed into the Society Archive thus attracting much more interest from the general public. The 'Adopt a Photo' only generated moderate interest and has been closed with new information and & photos added into the Society Archive & incomplete pieces added to the work in progress. During the year Peter Cousins very kindly agreed to be webmaster and was co-opted onto the committee. The new website, thanks to Peter, has been a great success allowing our Society to make the photographic archive available to all on line. New projects have been started and their availability has attracted a wider audience and hence more input. These include "Street Names", "Inns & Pubs" & "Shops & Businesses", all of which are proving popular. Mike concluded by thanking our President, Duncan Lucas, and the committee for all their hard work, and also the members for their support over the year.
- 5) **Membership Secretary's Report** – Linda's report was read by Mike. 2017 was another healthy year with 14 new members joining, but unfortunately losing 16 for various reasons & sadly 2 who passed away. The year began with 141 and ended with 137. The membership is made up of: 119

concessionary members, 17 full members & 1 complimentary member. There were 56 visitors throughout the year, quite a lot more than the previous year.

6) Treasurer's Report – Colin talked us through the accounts (printed on the last page of this bulletin) noting all 3 ongoing sources of income: subscriptions, visitors' fees & donations combined were £48.00 more than last year. This increase largely due to more visitors to the railway talk. Lecture fees were a bit less, but bulletin costs rose slightly due to more members & increasing postal costs. There was a deficit of £30.95 on the two summer trips, some website costs, purchase of a new sign board & an increase in room hire. A useful net amount of £293.59 was generated from the sale of Mike's two DVDs after deductions of £1 each to Age UK & Rainbows from each sale had been deducted. The Society's total profit for the year was £583.80.

7) Webmaster's Report – Peter has completed a huge job in transferring all data from the previous website onto the current one, which is more versatile and has much more capacity. He has added metatags (search words) to each page making Wigston history searchers find the site more efficiently. By Googling Wigston History our website comes up second or third, only beaten by Wikipedia! He updated us on how it grows by the day and has received 3,300 hits since October. The archive of 8,000 photographs are now all online as are the complete set of bulletins from 1980 to date, plus much more. Some of the site is available to members only who should apply for a password for full access.

8) Election of Officers – As previously mentioned Peter Cousins was co-opted onto the committee during the year. Subsequently he was asked, and agreed, to fill the vacant post of Vice Chairman. This was confirmed unanimously at the AGM. All other officers were willing to continue and as there were no nominations or volunteers, were re-elected. The committee now comprises:

Chairman: Mike Forryan, **Vice Chairman:** Peter Cousins, **Secretary:** Ann Cousins **Treasurer:** Colin Towell, **Membership Secretary:** Linda Forryan, **Webmaster:** Peter Cousins, **Bulletin Editor:** Tricia Berry, **Committee Members:** Jane Callis, Margaret Gee, Tony Lawrance, Roger Whalley.

9) Any Other Business – It was confirmed that the auditor, Gary Davies, was willing to audit the accounts again for 2018. It had been agreed that the subscriptions should remain the same for 2018. These are: £12 full membership, £9 concessionary & a student membership for youngsters of £5. In view of the somewhat lower attendance at the Christmas Social the Chairman would welcome ideas for changing the format. Perhaps having a normal speaker, on a Christmas theme if possible, and serving a glass of mulled wine and mincepie or similar? Other suggestions welcome. This would be for 2019 onwards as the 2018 programme is already booked. In order to defray rising postage costs there was some discussion about inviting members who use the internet to consider receiving their bulletins online, or members with or without internet picking up their bulletins at meetings. This will be discussed at a future committee meeting.

For the rest of the evening we welcomed Virginia Wright who presented her very interesting and (occasionally challenging!) picture quiz. Questions were grouped under headings: what, who, why, when and where with corresponding images of well know local people, places and objects. The audience had to call out the answers, sometimes it went a bit quiet! Virginia who is a Blue Badge Guide, historian and family history researcher knows her Leicester and county.

CORRECTION TO PIECE IN BULLETIN 109

At the end of the article on the founding of the Co-operative Society I said that Langton Road, Little Hill was built on part of Brick Kiln Close, this is not the case. Brick Kiln Close was quite small, only about 3½ acres and situated at the cross roads between Welford Road and Moat Street. On its east side it bordered Welford Road up to approximately midway between Wistow Road and Harcourt Road on the opposite side. On its north side it did not quite reach Moat Street, a space being left for a row of houses with gardens. Similarly on its west side it did not quite reach as far as an important footpath, the space this time being used to widen the path to become Horsewell Lane and build more houses.

At the time of the enclosure awards in 1766 the close was allotted to Wyggeston Hospital and leased to John Cooper. In 1838 a rate assessment based on the value of land was taken in the parish. At this time the close was still owned by the hospital, but by then leased to John Kirk who had sublet it to John Willey who operated the windmill on the other side of Welford Road. (The small road named Windmill Bank marks the area. The windmill was owned by Joseph Willey and Mr Willson of Knaptoft. John Willey also occupied a house, bakehouse and garden in the village, which was owned by Mr. Willson of Knaptoft.

Sources: Various Enclosure records & also Valuation Book 1838 (DE384) both at ROLLR.

Tricia Berry

THE PINFOLD

Even some long term Wigston residents may not appreciate that the small paved area on the corner of Moat Street and Newgate End (opposite the corner of All Saints churchyard) was the site of the Pinfold. In former times when animals were more likely to stray most villages had a pinfold, a small building or fenced area where animals could be kept safely until claimed by their owner.

Although in later times the site has been surfaced in brick and a seat placed there it was considered by the Pride of the Borough team that it could be made more attractive and informative. They have designed a scheme to fit the site that incorporates a seat, a planted trough and an information board.

The seat will have an agricultural design incorporated into its back rest and is similar to one installed in Oadby opposite St Peter's Church which has a WWI design. The planted trough is to be created from an authentic redundant cattle trough and the information board will contain historical detail provided by the Historical Society.

The total cost will be in the region of £2,500 of which Wigston Residents Forum has agreed to pay £900, the Historical Society £100, the Civic Society £50 with the rest, about £1,450 coming from the Pride of the Borough's own funds (mainly resulting from the sale of the loyalty cards).

It is hoped that the eye catching scheme will be installed in time for the Britain in Bloom judging in the summer of this year.

Colin Towell

WIGGY'S CHILD
1926 – 1939

NASHES (Continued)

(Part two of Doreen Boulter's childhood memories)

“Dick Nurse” is coming tomorrow” announced Marion at playtime. She always found out these choice items of information, from which source we could never discover, but she was infuriatingly correct. So the next day found us standing in line waiting our turn as the school nurse looked into each pupil's hair and wrote busily in her notebook. Sometimes a pupil would have to take a note home, and we all knew what that meant. In the nineteen thirties nits and head lice were nothing new.

When it was time for a visit from the school doctor, forewarned, of course, by Marion, tension mounted in the classroom. Mothers were requested to attend at the appointed time. I sat waiting, anxiously watching the door. Suppose my name was called before Mother arrived? It was whispered by Those Who Had Gone Before, that girls wore only their knickers and the doctor looked down them! As for the school dentist. Such stuff were nightmares made of!

The day the gas tar boiler caught fire up Newton Lane, the news spread like wildfire through the school. Although it was dinner time, it was a sight not to be missed, such excitement rarely came our way. There were many sore and aching bottoms that afternoon in school. The result of irate and worried mothers and grandmas, the dinner rapidly cooling on the table, who waited for errant children to come home.

It was the first morning of the winter term, and a new girl occupied the desk next to mine. I noticed she wriggled about a lot and at playtime Marion informed us that she suffered from “St. Vitus Dance” whatever that was. Anyway it wasn't catching or anything, else she wouldn't be at school. Where did that girl get her information from?

The new girl came across the school yard to join us.

“What did you say your name was?” asked Joyce

“Ariadna?” replied our new recruit.

“Arry what?” said Eileen, between mouthfuls of dripping sandwich.

“Have you got another name?” I asked hopefully.

“My second name is Penelope, why do you want to know?” replied Ariadna belligerently.

There was a stunned silence. We'd never heard the like: ‘Ariadna Penelope’ what a mouthful. As is the way of all children, a name would be shortened or a nickname found, no matter what baptismal name went down in the register. A remedy was soon found, “Arry” she became for the short time she remained with us at “Nashes”.

When “Nashes” school bell clanged, late comers fled through the streets and the Lanes, passing the almshouses with their diamond paned windows, tore past the Co-op butchers, by the Working Men's Club, the boys sounding like cart-horses in their heavy steel-studded boots, coming to a sliding stop at the school entrance, sparks flying out from the studs in the soles. It was no wonder they slid about so much, with skinny legs encased in those large boots, they could hardly lift their feet off the ground! The din as they clattered over the foot scraper at the classroom door was deafening.

At eleven years of age we left “Nashes” and went ‘up’ to “Boardies.” Wigston Board School, the senior school, until we were fourteen. The two schools, known to generations of children as “Nashes” and Boardies” were both situated in Long Street. There was much rivalry between the schools, and given the opportunity we “Nashes” would chant:

“Boardy bugs and fleas how do you sell your peas?”

to any passing “boardies” children. They in turn would yell back:

“Nashy bugs and fleas, how do you sell your peas?”

At this juncture, it was advisable to put as much distance between the opposing faction as possible!

WIGSTON FEAST

The arrival of the fair at Wigston Feast in November brought great excitement to the youth of the area. It usually coincided with Bonfire Night and a merry time was had by all. Sometimes not appreciated by our elders.

On Friday evening I would wait patiently for Father to eat his evening meal, hopefully watching the clock, then I would ask if we might go to the fair. “You’d better put your wellies on then, it will be ‘up neck’ said Father. Wellies came in two colours, black shiny and black dull, and you could buy grey slipper socks to wear over your stockings to counteract the damp. It was always ‘up neck’ on the fairground despite quantities of straw laid down. [The fair was held in Wakes Road on the site of the present McDonald’s Restaurant].

As we approached the fair through the jetty alongside Bell Street Infants School, [still there between Sainsbury’s and Fonefix], and along Junction Road, the glow in the sky from the lights, the thunderous noise from the great traction engines, the smell of sawdust and the hurdy gurdy music made my heart thump with excitement. Turning the corner, there was the fair in all its glory. The man at the entrance selling whistling birds on a stick, you whirled these round and they “whistled” and the silver paper balls in multi-coloured net on a piece of elastic; much loved by us children; opposite was the stall selling celluloid dolls dressed in crepe paper crinolines, edged with silver, and bonnets to match, all in lovely colours. Small dolls on the bottom shelf up to large crinoline “ladies” at the top. How I loved those dolls, I wished specially for the one dressed in white with silver edging, she looked like a fairy princess. Only once was I allowed a small one dressed in yellow (no bonnet), money was not plentiful and I had to forego my ride on the dodgems with Father, it was either one or the other, not both! The small children’s round-about came next, then the dodgems, Noah’s Ark and the Hey Dey Thriller. The swingboats were at the back. A quick look round the stalls, and we came home.

On Saturday night, relations arrived and out came the Feast Cake and Parsnip Wine. After an early tea, and this time accompanied by Mother and our relations, we had another session at the fair. Looking at our threepences and sixpences, trying to decide between the coconut shies and the roll-a-ball stall. If you won a prize “Anything off the bottom shelf” bawled the stall holder. I can never recall anyone winning a prize from the glories on the top shelf!

We would pluck up courage to have a ride on the Noah’s Ark. As we hung on for dear life, how did those fairground men keep their balance as it whizzed round? Standing there with their hands in their pockets. When it reached top speed, a klaxon blared and lights flashed on and off amid frenzied shrieks from the riders. Climbing off on jelly legs, trying to locate the whereabouts of my stomach, ‘coz’ and I rejoined our parents.

We would go and look at the huge traction engines, ablaze with lights, their highly polished brass name plates bore splendid names “Victory” and “King George V”. Mother would buy a bag of brandy snap and some white spicy biscuits, and I would be allowed a bag of monkey nuts in their shells, which I shared with ‘coz’. We would split open the shells carefully, these made tiny “boats” if split longways, and monkey nut shells placed on finger tips could beat out a loud tattoo on the table, this practice was not advisable however, when grown-ups were about!

THE FESTIVE SEASON

We started our Christmas preparations in early December with Mother making mincemeat and puddings. The ordinary mixing bowl was by no means adequate so the large china bowl from the best water set was brought down from the marble topped washstand in the front bedroom. It was never used in its ordinary capacity, I hasten to add, it was merely for decorative purposes. The bowl was thoroughly washed, and we commenced.

I turned that mincer handle until my wrist ached, we made pounds of the stuff. The Christmas puddings were boiled for hours in the copper, and after cooling, dry pudding cloths were tied round each basin before storing them in the pantry. We made scores of mince pies, it was my job to place the pastry lids on each one and make a little hole in the top with a darning needle.

Father raised his own birds, and our Festive Fare was still strutting about his hen run two days before Christmas Eve, unaware of his impending demise!

We didn’t go in for elaborate decorations, just sprays of holly stuck behind Grandma and Grandpa, “Vixen and Cubs” and “Cows at the Waterhole” with ivy leaves draped over the old clock on the wall. On the closed top of the treadle sewing machine stood a small Christmas Tree. It had candle holders on the branches which held the small barley twist candles. Our star on the top of the tree was made from tiny iridescent beads. There were glass birds with long silken tails, a robin perched on a snowy nest; my favourite “shiner” was a tiny church with ‘stained glass’ windows.

Our “shiners” were saved carefully from year to year, any breakages were replaced according to the funds available. To this day, we have a ha’penny “shiner” which is placed on our tree each Christmas. After fifty odd years or more, we reckon to have had our money’s worth!

Butchers shop windows had pigs heads with oranges stuck in their mouths and sprigs of holly behind each ear. Game birds, rabbits and poultry hung upside down in rows suspended from racks in the ceiling. Other shops used vast quantities of cotton wool for “snow scenes” and cotton wool “snow showers” stuck on the window were very popular. Festive notices, bordered with tinsel dangled aloft, wishing “A Merry Christmas To All” and “Join Our Christmas Club”. Frequently small gifts were bestowed upon customers by the proprietors of various emporiums as a token of goodwill.

We went out carol singing. “Mind you keep on the corsey or you’ll get knocked down” said Mother. Most unlikely, unless we met a wayward horse and cart. Anyway we all knew you had to be wearing your clean underwear before you could get run over!

Only the gas lamps lighted the streets with an occasional glow from a shop window, so we usually carried a lantern or a flashlight. Being well organised, our leader would start us off with cultured expression, “Now then, you lot, after three”, giving three hefty thumps on the ground with his heavy

boot. We would launch into “The First Noel” with gusto. At least, we all started together, how we finished was another matter!

We had no end of trouble with “Good King Wenslusslass Leaked Out” so we struck him from our repertoire. Young Albert was a sore trial to us, his rendering of :

“While Shepherds watched, their Turnip tops, While seated on the Ground” played havoc with our vocals, and Reggie couldn’t play his mouth organ for laughing.

Threatened with a clout round the ‘ear-ole’ if he didn’t “shurrip and sing proper”, Albert went home in a huff! Our choir was further depleted when George fell into a thick mud puddle and squelched home, caked up. The next morning, he gloomily told us “I didn’t ‘arf cop it from me Mam last night, she said I’d well nigh ruined me new boots; I had to go bed afore me Dad come in, and I can’t come carolling no more.”

We commiserated with him on the injustice of it all. “If yer’d carried the lantern when we asked yer to, yer wouldn’t ave gone in it, would yer?” was the response of an unsympathetic member of our choir.

I was allowed to choose one special present. “Not anything silly, mind” said Mother, which reduced the choice somewhat. I had to make up my mind before our visit to Leicester to see Santa in his cave, and then of course, it was up to Santa and my good behaviour, whether or not my request was granted.

On Christmas Eve I would sit in my “jamas” by a roaring fire, watching the shadows cast on the ceiling from the bunches of holly and ivy decorating the room, the star on the tree sparkling in the firelight, the old clock slowly tick-tocking away, chiming the quarter and half hours before revving itself up with a wheeze to strike the hour. “Listen” said Mother. We listened. “I’m sure I heard sleigh bells a long way away”. Father nodded in agreement. No one ever moved faster up those stairs, jumped into bed and pulled the sheet over my head. It was unthinkable that Santa should arrive first.

HOUSEFUL AT THE VICARAGE

On the evening of 30th March 1851 when the census was taken there were fifteen people in residence at Wigston Vicarage. The list starts with the head of household William Barber (age 38) the curate, born in Leicester, his wife Harriet (36) born Wymondham, Norfolk, and their four sons, Harby (12), William Edward (8), John Henry (7), and William (4), all born in Wigston. Then came Eliza Sykes Fry (33), a young widow born in Leicester and sister of the curate, followed by her three children, Augustine B (8), Harriet (6), and Ellen M G (3), all born in Leicester. Next there was Aubrey de Vere Beauclerk (13) a visitor born in Ardglass, Ireland. And lastly four servants, all young people in their early 20s.

Eliza Fry’s story is very sad, she would normally have been living across the road at the house now named Bushloe House (though it was at this time a more modest building with possibly a different name). Her late husband Stephen Fry had been a talented architect and had designed the house for their own occupation. He had supervised its construction on a plot of land previously part of the grounds of Kingswood Lodge where his brother Augustine Fry, the local surgeon lived. Stephen had

suffered an epileptic fit soon after they moved in, from which he never recovered. The Fry family retained the house for some years, letting it to various tenants, before its sale to solicitor, Hiram Abiff Owston. It is now of course the Wigston UDC offices.

So who was Aubrey de Vere Beauclerk (pronounced Bowclue), and why was he staying at Wigston Vicarage on census night in 1851? We do not know of course but the following might offer some clues.

Master Aubrey came from a very distinguished family who could trace their line straight back to Charles II and Eleanor (Nell) Gwynn. King Charles gave their son, also Charles, the surname Beauclerk and created him Duke of St. Albans in 1684. It was this first Duke of St. Albans' grandson George, the third Duke, who had property interests in Wigston. He had through his wife's family become Improrietor of the great tithes of corn, grain and hay, and when the open fields were enclosed in 1766 he was awarded land in lieu of these. His holding was considerable, consisting of 291½ acres in lieu of the tithes, 21¾ acres of meadow in lieu of meadow previously held and 73¾ in lieu of the Glebe land which he possessed in the open fields as proprietor of the rectory of Wigston. In total some 387 acres being 13.4% of the whole parish. It was known as the Rectory Estate.

The land and title passed together through at least two further generations until sometime after 1802 when each descended to different branches of the family. In 1835 Charles George Beauclerk who was descended from the fourth son of the first Duke was the owner of the Rectory Estate. In 1846 it was Charles George's son Aubrey William de Vere Beauclerk (1801-1854) who was the owner. This gentleman was a Major in the 99th Regiment of Foot, and MP for East Surrey. He married Ida Goring in 1834 and the couple lived at Ardglass Castle, County Down, Ireland. It was there on 29th September 1837 that their son (the guest on census night) was born. His arrival was followed by huge celebrations as he was their first son after previously having several daughters. The couple later divorced and in 1841 Major Beauclerk married secondly to Rose Matilda Robinson.

Aubrey de Vere Beauclerk spent much of his childhood in England at other property owned by his family and was a pupil at Rugby School, Cheltenham College and Trinity College, Cambridge. On 1st December 1858 he married Evelyn Matilda Georgina Fitzroy at St James' Church, Piccadilly. Interestingly the Rev. William Barber by then vicar of St. John's Church, Leicester, assisted at the ceremony. In 1861 the couple were living at Salsey Lodge, Hartwell, Potterspury, Northants. They also spent time at Ardglass Castle where he was appointed a Justice of the Peace for County Down. The couple had one child, Sidney de Vere Beauclerk (1866-1903) who died unmarried. In 1895 the parents divorced and later the same year Aubrey de Vere Beauclerk married Katherine Lucy Tucker, the widow of a Royal Navy Captain. The couple spent their later years living with many other people, in large hotels in central London. He died in 1919 at Bath, Somerset.

Back in 1859 the family had decided to sell their interest in the Rectory Estate at Wigston and 376 acres (a bit less than when it was acquired due to some having been sold to build the railway). Members of the Pochin family who already occupied some of the land were probably among the purchasers, it was also likely Edward Holyoak, a successful local hosiery manufacturer was too, as by the 1870's he was described as Improrietor of the rectory.

Tricia Berry

Sources: The Midland Peasant by W G Hoskins, www.thePeerage.com & article on Stephen Fry in Bulletin 48

GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

Receipts and Payments for the year ending 31st December 2017

Receipts

Opening Balances as at 1/1/2017:		
Current A/c	3823.77	
Unpresented chq	-157.80	
“ credit	382.00	
Deposit a/c	1000.88	5048.85
Subscriptions	1163.00	
Visitor Fees	170.00	
Donations	14.00	
Christmas Social	166.00	
Sale of books	5.00	
Visits (2017)	2808.00	
DVD sales	893.75	
Bank interest	.49	

10269.09

Payments

Lecture fees	220.00
Bulletins & Progs/print & post	153.02
Room Hire	352.50
Officer's exes	151.64
Christmas Social	176.74
Web + display board	56.94
Visits (2017)	2838.95
Website Fees	95.49
DVDs	591.16
Less unsold	-90.00
Commission Due	99.00 600.16

Closing Balances at 31/12/2017:

Current A/c	4941.82	
Unpres. credit	116.76	
Unpres. cheques	-427.30	
Deposit A/c	1001.37	5632.65
DVD non cash adj		-9.00

10269.09

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please note that subscriptions for 2018 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.....

Please send to the Membership Secretary: Mrs. Linda Forryan, 21 Blakesley Road, Wigston, Leicester. LE18 3WD.

PROPERTY OF GWVHS

PROPERTY OF GWVHS