



GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN 15

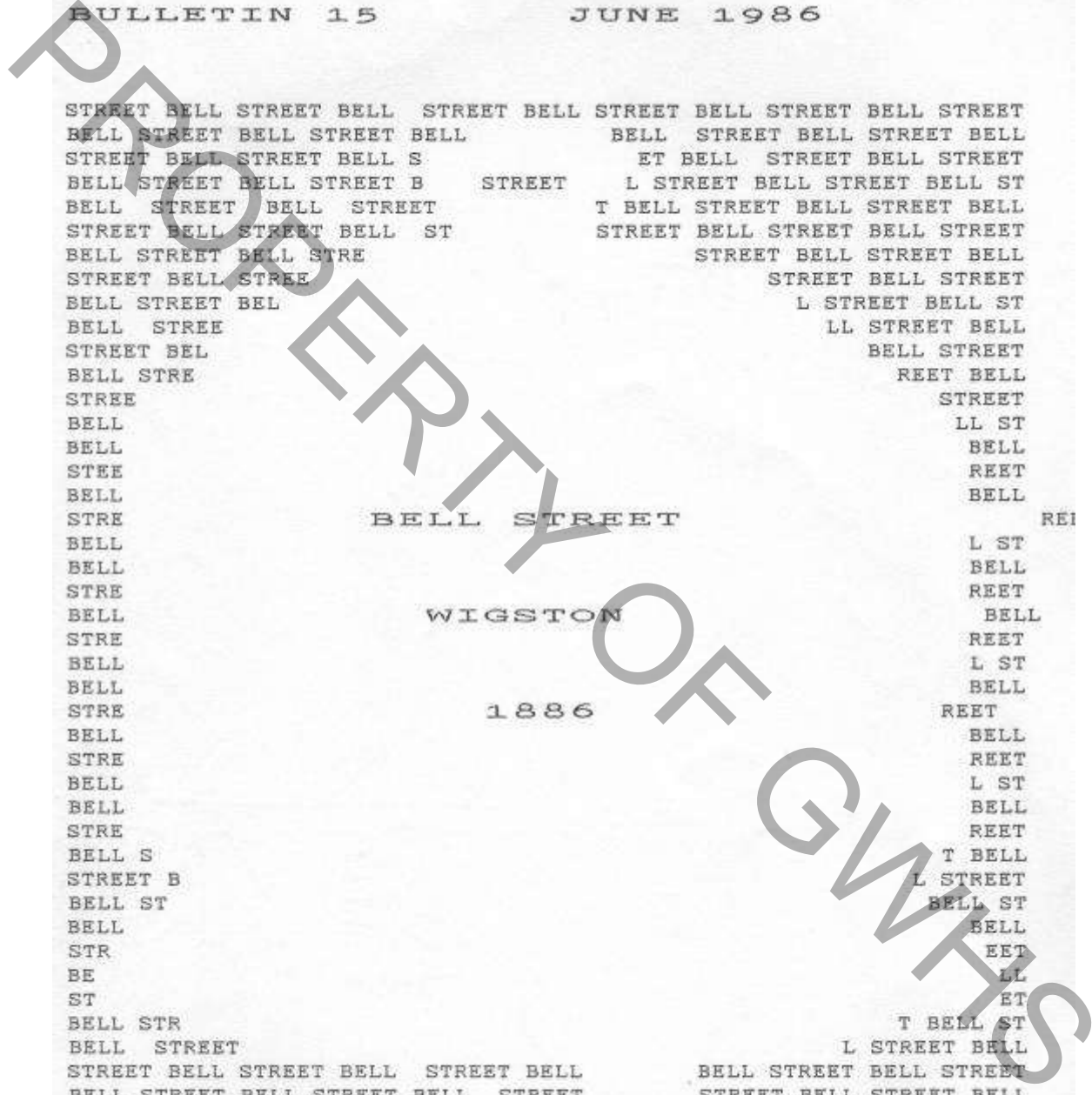
JUNE 1986

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WIGSTON

1886



NOTICES

PROGRAMME

WEDNESDAY, 21ST. MAY 1986

Pedestrian Treasure Hunt around Shearsby Village.

Arrive Shearsby Church from 7.30pm to collect question sheet.

Finish and prizes about 9.30pm... Charge of 25p to cover prizes.

THURSDAY 19th. June 1986

Visit to Foxton Locks and Boat Trip.

Meet at Foxton Bottom Lock Boat leaves promptly at 7. 30pm.

Cost of Boat trip £1.50 per person.

There is room for &5 people and a minimum charge to the Society of £35-00.

Please support this one. ... bring a friend along

July and August 1986 no planned meeting.

Small groups or individuals may decide to do their own thins or work up at the Museum.

WEDNESDAY 17th. SEPTEMBER 1986

We are trying to arrange a visit to Mr. Sevan's Museum at Peckleton. Please check the Library and the 'Oadby and Wigston News' for details nearer the time.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

At the A.G.M. it was decided to keep the same rate as last year, that is £2 per person but £1 for O.A.P. 's and those under 18 years. 1986 subscriptions are now due. Will those people who have not paid them please pay at the next meeting or send them to .Hon. Treasurer. Mr. B. Bilson. 23. Thirlmere Road, Wigston, Leicester.

Editor's Note

Publishing dates for the Bulletin are the 1st. Feb. 1st June and 1st Oct. Please let the editor have any articles three clear weeks before those dates...

Editor.. Ian Varey. 150, Welford Road, Wigston, Leicester.

MEETING WEDNESDAY 19th. FEBRUARY 1986.

“Placenames”

Jill Bourne, a University lecturer in Local History, came to talk to us about the origin of Leicestershire place names and in particular those relating to the old Saxon estate of 'Glen'.

Some thirty members listened to an outline of early settlement in the County. How successive waves of settlers left their mark on the landscape and more especially in the names of their settlements, most of which survive to this day. Jill encouraged interruptions and comments, and so people were able to add their observations to the talk.

The speaker then went on to talk specifically about the Royal House of Mercia. The place names, topographical and ecclesiastical evidence all suggest that the lands along the River Glen, (known to us as the Sence), had been an important Royal Estate. Just which of the modern parishes had contained the major settlement was still unknown. Written evidence from this period in history, the ninth century, is virtually nonexistent. An indication of some of the small Jigsaw pieces of possibles and probables will serve to show what a difficult task Jill has set herself, in trying to establish the existence of this estate.

The series of interlinking; daughter parishes all along the course of the river. . . their relationship and their development.; placenames. . . Kilby, Children's - By, were these royal children?; Countesthorpe, was this an outlying farm belonging to a Royal Mercian Countess?; The Wistan story... Why should a Royal Prince be here, unless of course it was an important place; The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles... several tantalising references to meetings of Mercian Lords at Glen; Great Glen and Glen Parva on the same river!.... This is just some of the evidence that is being considered.

The views of some of the Society's members about continuous occupation in Wigston; its importance as an Anglo-Saxon settlement; and the doubts about the currently accepted origin of the Wigston place name.. . led to a lively discussion and many questions were put to the speaker.

This is a subject that the Society has spent some time on over the last year and having a expert speaker such as Jill Bourne has improved our understanding greatly. It is a fascinating subject and one that we may well return to in the future. The speaker was formally thanked and the meeting closed at 9.45

Meeting, Wednesday 19th. March 1986

A.G.M. 1986

Some 20 members attended the Annual General Meeting of the Society. The formal part of the Meeting took place first. After the apologies the Minutes of the last A.G.M. were read and signed. The treasurer then presented the financial report. Some five hundred pounds of the Society's money is at present tied up in promotional gifts for sale at the Museum and in Duncan's latest book 'Wigston Harcourt'. As these are sold a healthy profit will be added to this outlay. It was also decided that this year's subscription should remain at £2 and £1. The chairman then gave a brief report. He reminded everyone of the aims of the Society when it was first formed. He then reviewed the year's activities and concluded by commenting upon the slight rise in membership and the continuing good attendance at the meetings.

The business then moved on to the election of the Committee. The officers were re-elected on block, and so remain.....

President... Duncan Lucas.

Chairman... Ian Varey. Vice-chairman... Peter Clowes.

Secretary... Doris Chandler. Treasurer... Brian Bilson.

Some discussion then took place about the programme for next year, and members wishes will be taken into consideration.

With the formal part of the evening at an end, members broke up into small groups, to talk over points of interest and to look at various things that had been brought in.

Peter Clowes had with him his Video equipment and a recording that he had made of Duncan showing a group around the Museum. This provoked a lot of interest and some suggestions of how this commentary might be improved, so that it might become a permanent record for the future.

There was a collection of Medicine Glasses and Apothecary's Measuring Glasses, an old kitchen mincemeat machine with all its blades and fittings and an old newspaper from the 1930's. This people found particularly interesting.

This informal talking went on until 9.30pm when the meeting closed.

Meeting. Wednesday 16th. April 1986.

28 members met at the County Record Office, on New Walk in Leicester for 7.00pm. We were greeted by Mrs. Jones one of the assistant Archivist and shown into the main Search Room. Here we all signed in this is a requirement of all Records Offices.

After the introductions, Mrs. Jones started the evening by explaining the function of a Records Office and the range of material/documents that they held. She then went on to some of the 'Rules of the House'... such as only using pencils; no eating or drinking; no taking documents out of the building etc. all designed to protect the documents most of which are unique and so irreplaceable. She then went on to explain how they got documents, i.e. either given or loaned. We were also told of the work by a full time staff of repairers and restorers who work on the documents in their care.

Next it was explained how the documents were catalogued and each individually coded. The filing drawers were the usual place that one started, either the Parish name or subject name or personal name. From these one could go to more detailed files with specific list of documents. By filling out the requisition slip with the code number, the actual document could then be examined.

The party then divided into two groups, while one examined the filing system and various document relating to Wigston that had already been left out for us, the other group visited the Strong Room where the documents are store. In a fire proof, damp proof, air-conditioned Strong Room were shelf after shelf of boxes, books and documents, each one unique, each one written by a real live person albeit decades or centuries ago. It was an awe inspiring sight.

Back together we examined maps, documents, microfilms of the Census Returns and some of the many reference books held by the office. In no time it was 9.00pm and time for us to leave. Everyone was most appreciative of this opportunity of looking behind the scenes and after offering our thanks we left.

For those members who had not been to the Records Office before I hope this introduction might encourage them to visit again and make full use of the vast store of information that is held there.

BELL STREET 1886

Just how much can a village change, and how quickly can that change occur? A very reasonable question to ask when one thinks of Wigston Magna. The village nucleus with its small development stretching away towards what was the railway station and the satellite settlement of South Wigston, has been surrounded a series of post Second World War housing estates. The most recent and the last in the ring being the new Wigston Harcourt estate. Oadby and Wigston together now have a combined population in excess of 58,000 and to many a visitor Wigston is one of those seemingly uniformly dull uninteresting New Towns.

This perhaps is the answer to how quickly the character and appearance of Wigston has changed. In a generation most of the old buildings, even those from Victorian times have been cleared and replaced by late twentieth century blandness. It is therefore important to remind ourselves and the new-comers and visitors of Wigston's proud past and perhaps shame the planners into a more sympathetic approach with the few old buildings that remain, so that people will not mistake Wigston for just another new town.

Sadly the block of buildings at the corner of Bell St. and Bull Head St. are beyond saving and will like so much over the last few years have to be pulled down and so lost forever.

It was the fate of this group of buildings that made me look at Bell St. and realise that its development over the last thirty years has changed completely the whole character of the street.

The plate glass windows the red brick and concretea returning local would not recognise the place! Where is the Bell St. School, where is Shipp's and where are the houses! The Bell St. of old had as many people on the street in the evening as it did during the day. Today 1986, evening sees a deserted Bell St. with just the odd police patrol to scare off the vandals. So, how has the street changed in the 100 years from 1886 to 1986?

When 49 Bell St. is demolished along with the old County News shop, there will be just 3 buildings left of the 70 plus buildings that were in the Bell St. of 1886.

The Census Return for 1881 gives 278 people living in Bell St. many of whom actually worked in the street as well..... Today I do not think there is a single inhabitant who actually lives in the street.

The trades and jobs in Bell St. have not only changed but have been greatly reduced in number. Today it is exclusively a shopping street, a hundred years ago there were shops, factories, cottage industries, crafts men, a pub, a school, a doctors, a Post Office and many house from humble terraces to the rather grand Arthur's Villa, which still survives.

The actual road way itself, but for new tarmac, remains the same: shape and same width, for Bell St. was always an important thoroughfare. Today of course the Bull Head St. end has been blocked off to wheeled traffic. In 1886 the road was some 300

yards long, but road improvements have robbed it of some yardage... two or three houses stood after the present limit of what was the Co-op Food Supermarket. At the other end Bell St. and Leicester Road formed a 'T' Junction rather than today's sweeping curve with shops such as Sketchleys and the Leicester Building Society Office.

Another major feature which has been lost are the Bell St. Courts A. B. & C. Court A on the South side was down the passageway between the present Gas Showrooms at La Croix. Of the five, houses a hundred years ago, two were lived in by bakers and their families. The bakehouse was on the North side of Bell St. at no. 18 and owned by Hannah Preston. As well as bread and general provisions her daughter Thirza had a milk round.

Court B was on the North side of Bell St. and is now part of the Sainsbury's complex. In this court were eleven small houses, and one could walk right through from Bell St. to Fredrick Street, much as one does through Bedam's today. The majority of people were frameknitters or stocking makers and probably worked in Ambrose Lee's factory in Bell Street.

Court C was down the side of the present Oven Door Bread Shop and that car park follows faithfully the outline of the old court. In fact some of the brick foundations can still be seen on the edge of the footpath. Most residents were again knitters although a blacksmith is mentioned and a shoe maker. The latter probably worked at no. 52 for Mr. Smith.

The diversity of occupations and the inter relationships within the street can best be seen by listing the heads of household and their occupations.

North side of Bell Street.

2&4 William Forryan...Butcher
6 Mary Mason...retired FWK
8 John Bird...Factory Overlooker 12
10 Thomas Mould...Sockmaker
12 empty
14 Thomas Allen.... R'way signals
16 William Crane...Labourer
18 Hannah Preston... Baker
20 William Abbott... Sock Manu.
22 Tom Dann...Sock knitter
24 John Woolman...Shoe maker
26 Arthur Mould...Railway Lab.
28 William Mould...Engine fitter
30 Henry Smith...Butcher Street School.

Between these houses was Bell St School

32 Edward Cowchin...G.P.
36 Samuel Shipp...Draper & P.O.

38 Emos Jones... Commercial Trav.
40 Edwin Sharp...Carpenter
42 Robert Sreaton. . . Sch. Master
44 Reuben Heathcote...FWK
46 Joseph Mould... Hosiery Manu.
48 empty
50 Thomas Smith...Shoe Manu.
52 Eliza Barber... Yarn Mistress

Of all these houses/buildings only Arthur's Villa remains, empty at the moment and the Doctors House no.32 & 34, now Emicare and the Co-op Travel Agents.

South side of Bell Street.

1&3 Isaac Clark...Grocer
5 Eliza Harding...Sock Stitcher
7 John Forryan...King Wm. IV 11
9 William Simpson...Hosiery Manu.
11 empty
13 empty
15 James Parson...Grocer
17 empty
19 Ambrose Lee...Hosiery Manu.
21 Thomas Glenn...,Tallow Chandler
23 Edward Seaton...Agri. Lab.
25 Thomas Vann... FWK
27 Thomas Johnson...FWK
29 Sarah Sharp...retired FWK
31 James Sharp...Sec. Wigston Gas Co. & Clerk to Sch. Board.
33 Charles Sharp...Master Builder
35 Mary Wyatt. . . FWK
37&39 William Waldon...Agri. Lab.
41 Thomas Boulter...FWK
43 Eliz. Hargest...Newsagent
45 empty
47 John Wignall... Hosiery Manu.
49 Thomas Basildon...Grocer

The new Nautical William on Aylestone Lane replaced the old King William IV when it was demolished. Of the other houses/buildings none will remain, when the block, where the County News was, is pulled down.

In 1886, the largest family in the street was probably the Mould family. The elderly widowed mother was still alive... one son was in hosiery manufacturing another son was an engine fitter on the Railway. Two households of a third generation can be identified, again working on the railway and in hosiery. A third generation daughter was in service in another house in the street and there were numerous children.

Economically the most important families were the Lee's and the Sharps. Ambrose Lee at 19 Bell Street had a very large hosiery business. He employed well over a hundred people, many of them actually living in Bell Street. The Sharp brothers were involved in building and carpentry. There was a large wood yard on the North side of the street near Forryan's.

Charles Sharp a master builder lived at number 33. Building was just entering a boom period, largely due to the rapid development of South Wigston, which took place throughout the 1880's.

I think the diversity of the old Bell Street is well demonstrated, why there is a butcher, a baker and a candle maker, if not quite a candlestick maker!

This gives some idea of how much Bell Street has changed over 100 years. Change of course, is a continuous process and many of the people mentioned in these lists are unknown to people of 60 and 70 years old today. However the change of old was generally just the people and the buildings by and large remained and so the street scene was relatively static. In the last generation people and buildings have been swept away as the shopping centre was developed for Wigston's growing population. It is only by looking at the old records and some of the old surviving photographs the tomorrows generation can see what the old village of Wigston was like.....and who can say that it was better or worse than today.

Ian Varey.

NEW BOOK

'Wigston Harcourt' priced £2.00 available from Duncan Lucas. This book is not just for people living on the New Estate of that name. It gives a great deal of historical background to this area of Wigston. All the street names on the estate have a Wigston connection and so the information is a glimpse of Wigston History throughout the ages. The maps and illustrations are excellent. Congratulations to the author and other contributors. Well worth buying.