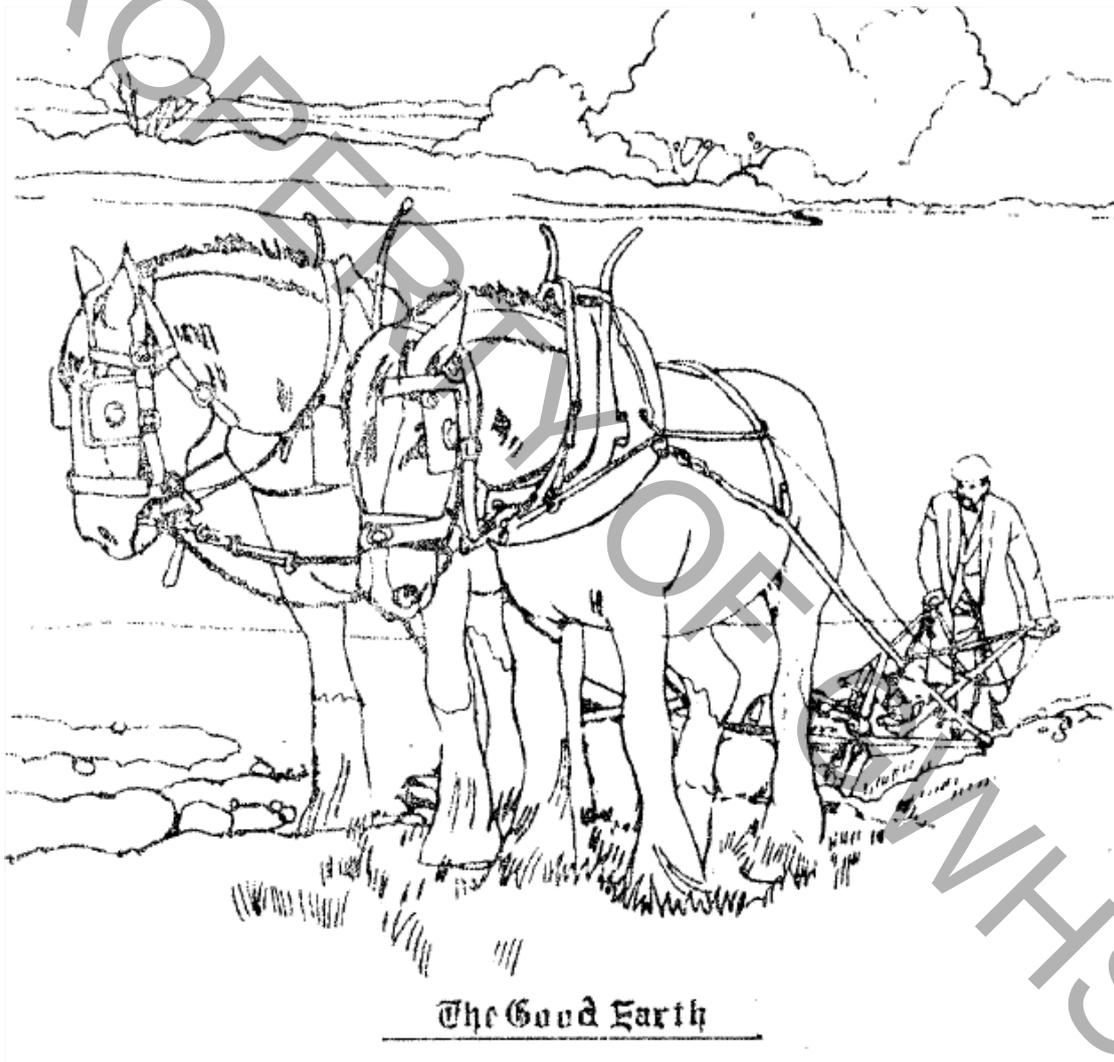




Greater Wigston Historical Society
White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna Leicestershire

Bulletin 18

JUN '87



NOTICES ... NOTICES ... NOTICES ... NOTICES ... NOTICES

Wednesday 17th June 1987

All members to meet at the Bushloe End Framework Knitters Cottage for 7.30pm when we hope to be shown over the place.

No meeting in July

Wednesday 19th August 1987

“Oadby / Wigston Walk”. Meet at 7.30pm at Duncan’s Oadby Farm Buildings ... Drive up the lane immediately after the Oadby Town Football Ground. On the right hand side as you are going into Oadby from Wigston.

Wednesday 16th September 1987

Visit to Mr Bevan’s Museum at Peckleton.
Meeting in the Liberal Club car park at 7.00pm prompt. When people who need lifts have been sorted out we will drive to Peckleton in convoy.

Winter programme starts in October and will be held at the Liberal Club on Bull Head Street in Wigston.

SUBSCRIPTIONS are now due and should be sent to the Hon. Treasurer or given to him in person at the next meeting. After several years at the same rate the last AGM agreed to increase the subs to £3.00 per year and £2.00 per year for OAP’s and people under 18 years of age.

Editor’s Note

The publishing dates for the Bulletin are the 1st Feb, 1st June and 1st Oct. Please let the Editor have articles three clear weeks before those dates.
New Address .. 2 Paget Court, Paget Street, Kibworth, Leics.

NEW MEMBERS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME

Anyone interested in joining the society should either contact the Hon. Treasurer: Mr B Bilson 23 Thirlemere Drive, Wigston or turn up to one of the monthly meetings and make yourself known to Mr Bilson or Ian Varey

G.W.H.S A.G.M. February 17th 1987

The A.G.M. was held in the Liberal Club and some two dozen members were present. After the reading of the minutes the Chairman gave a resume of the years activity and expressed his delight at the way the Society was living up to its stated aims. Membership he said was holding constant and meetings were well attended.

The President of the Society then said a few words and gave us all an update on the Bushloe End situation. The treasurer then presented the Balance Sheet for the year. The Society was in credit by some £167.06 cash and several hundred pounds worth of publications and Museum mementos. The £1677.10 held by the Society for the Bushloe End appeal appeared on the balance sheets, but this sum was to be transferred to the Trust's account shortly. The Treasurers report was accepted. There was then a recommendation that subscriptions should be increased to £3.00 and £2.00. After it was pointed out that the Society's expenses were increasing and that the rate had remained unchanged for four years it was agreed by the meeting to alter the subscriptions in line with the Treasurers recommendation.

The Officers of the Society were then re-elected en bloc with the exception of the position of vice chairman, here Peter Clowes stood down in favour of Edna Taylor.

President ... Mr O D Lucas
Chairman ... Mr Ian Varey
Vice Chairman ... Edna Taylor
Secretary ... Mrs Doris Chandler
Treasurer ... Mr Brian Bilson

There was then some discussion about a change of date and due to the increase in room hire, a change of venue. Finally it was decided to stay at the Liberal Club and to keep the Third Wednesday in the month as the regular meeting date.

Duncan then suggested that the management committee should meet bi-monthly as there was rarely enough time to cope with various issues that come up from time to time, in the monthly meetings. It was agreed that this was a good idea.

Suggestions were then invited to help in drawing up next years programme. Various ideas will be followed up.

There being no other business the formal meeting was ended at 9.00pm. Although people continued talking for some time after.

MEETING WEDNESDAY MARCH 11th 1987

This meeting was a combined Civic Society and Historical Society meeting held in the Community Lounge of Guthlaxton College. There were about 60 people present. By way of an introduction Ian Varey said a few words about the Greater Wigston Historical Society, its aims and various activities that the Society engages in. Mr Kind then spoke the aims and objectives of the Civic Society and about some of their successes and failures over the years.

Duncan Lucas then spoke about the Bushloe End Framework Knitters Cottahe. He explained about the formation of a Trust and the part the Council was playing in acquiring the property. This knid of project will depend to a very large extent for its success on willing volunteers and it is hoped that the people at this joint meeting will form the core of such a group.

Over coffee and biscuits both Society's then got to know each other. The evening was a great success and everyone present thought that it was well worth repeating in the not too distant future.

The Latest News ...

Bushloe End

Legal technicalities are holding up the completion by the Council. This is expected to be finalised by early June. The Council will then enter into an Agreement with the Oadby and Wigston Building Preservation Trust and lease the property to the Trust. At the moment there seems to be on hiccup after another. The launch of the Appeal has been all set for some time ... and June is beginning to look like the time, watch out in the local press and hopefully Midlands T.V.

Wool & Wigston Evening at Guthlaxton Community College, on May 19th was a great success. About 90 people attended and had a very informative evening about the development of the woollen trade from Handknitting to Frameknitting.

Thank you all, Society Members who attended, for your support

Ruddington Frame Knitting Museum

As a follow up to the Wool and Wigston evening 40 people visited the museum on the evening of the 27th May. Everyone was very impressed by the displays and demonstrations of Framework Knitting and began to realise the potential and the possible lines of development that might be followed at Bushloe End.

Some notes about pre-Enclosure agriculture in Wigston

Up until the late eighteenth century our forefathers were engaged in subsistence agriculture. More accurately one degree better than that for they had to find enough surplus to pay the rent. A few Wigston farmers made it to this big time in that golden age of the late fifteenth early sixteenth century. The Herricks and the Wyggestones were two of the families that moved out of the village environment and into the emerging Merchant class of the early Tudor Period. Most however remained sons of the soil, the Yeoman, or should it be peasants of England.

Whilst Wigston was not unique in its predominantly free and self determining peasantry it was sufficiently different from the more usual serf society to be worthy of the attention of the eminent historian W. G. Hoskins, whose book the 'Midland Peasant' is required reading for all Greater Wigston Historical Society members.

Pre-Saxon times agriculture was of singular importance to a host of different people. The South sloping slopes of the River Sence were gradually cleared and cultivated by

both Bronze Age and Iron Age peoples. At the time of the Roman conquest there was probably some small settlement of the Coritanil in what we now call Wigston. In the Roman period the estate was probably sufficiently well run to produce enough surplus to send tribute in the form of agricultural produce to London and thence even to Rome.

The present village site of Wigston is however Saxon and it was in this period that the clearing and the establishing of the open fields took place. There was created what we call the Manorial System, a system of agriculture that was to last until the enclosure of the great fields in the late eighteenth century.

In its simplest form the Manor, often coinciding with a modern day Parish, was owned by the King, a lord or knight, or an individual freeman. The land owner, the Lord of the Manor owned his own piece of land and allowed freemen and serfs to cultivate other pieces of land in return for certain duties.

Serfs or peasants would be granted 'x' acres to cultivate themselves in return for 2 or 3 days work per week on the landlords land, plus other small commitments. Freemen would have their own land and lease additional land in return for a rent or workdays on the Lord's land, the Demense. In addition all had to pay one tenth to the church each year ... i.e. the Tithe.

Wigston was different to the usual pattern in several important ways and this gave the inhabitants much more autonomy and control over their own destiny and may account for the present day characteristics of the indigenous Wigstonian, an independence of spirit.

Wigston was an amalgam of two manors and two races of people. Both manors had through their history absentee landlords and this left the predominantly freemen great control over their own destiny, and that of the village. There were so many freemen that there was little chance of them being brought out and so the great open fields remained right up until a rather late enclosure in 1766. In Wigston there was no monastic upheaval in the 16th century. Out of 96 Virgates in the parish only one was owned by a religious organisation.

The two peoples were the Saxons and the Danish settlers each keeping to their own part of the village for many generations. At the time of Domesday the twin manors were firmly established The Winchester Fee and the Leicester Fee. The latter representing about one quarter of the total acreage. The two manors had lands scattered throughout the three great fields. The peasants, free and serfs farmed holdings scattered through out the great fields ... e.g. Richard Dann's Farm in 1577 ... A cottage and half a virgate of land. (That is some 13 acres) A total of 47 roods in the three fields. 13 in Tythorn, 16 in Goldhill, 18 in Muckloe.

By the 1300's all the available land in the Parish had been cleared for agriculture, the last area being Shakerdale. Very little of the available 3000 acres were not under the plough! The remnants of this style of farming have all but disappeared under a sea of housing estates. But the great ridges and furrows can still be seen in the fields off Newton Land, marking the ancient strips that once formed part of Tythorn Great Field.

Freeholders were always buying and selling parcels of land in addition they frequently leased land for 'x' number of years. Much of this activity was to try and consolidate holdings within the Great Fields in order to make their farming more efficient. Each day an army of workers would leave the houses in the village and move out to work in the fields, often at opposite ends of the Parish.

“Wigston produced all its own food, clothing, light, power and building materials and nearly all its own heat, out of the most common place natural resources. The parish was not naturally endowed by nature in any single fact except that the clay soils with constant hard labour were capable of producing good crops” Midland Peasant

For building there was clay and boulders Mud walled houses and Wigston had its own lime pits.

Wheat Straw and some reeds for thatching.

Sand pits and gravel pits, and later the clay was found to be good for brickmaking.

Furze and hedgerow loppings provided some heat but fuel for brewing and baking and for smiths had to be imported.

Enough flax and hemp was grown

Wool from its own sheep

Barley, Wheat, Rye, Oats, Peas, Beans from its own fields.

Poultry ... geese, hens and ducks

Vegetable gardens ... Herb gardens ... small orchards

A few beef cows and milk cows

Bees for honey

Wind Power ... 3 or 4 small windmills and water power at Crow Mills

Wigston was not exceptional in practising this high economy of all its natural resources. Indeed it was less fortunate than many villages.

The chief imports were building stone, if it could be afforded, timber, iron, salt and coal. 'Calpit Way' appears in Goldhill field in 1393 and is almost certainly the track way by which the coal was brought by pack horse from Coleorton to Wigston ... part of what we now call Aylestone Lane.

The Wigston people did not only live on the land here about, they were actually part of it!

From between 1529 and 1603, the Inventories of 56 Wigston People survive. These were compiled when a person died and listed all their assets and their worth. They cover all classes within the village from one Alice Pallett, to a wealthy farmer William Lawes whose total assets amounted to £937/15/-. From these Inventories one can deduce that only one sixth of the total was in household goods the rest was in farm gear, crops and stock.

The inventories also show crops grown and the different animals kept Mid 1500's
Pease 50% Barley 43% Wheat 6% Rye 1%

On average flocks of sheep numbered 25, Cattle 6, Pigs $\frac{3}{4}$

Poultry numerous and of all kinds. These numbers are low and reflects the fact that there was very little common land in Wigston for animals to run on.

During the year the various farmers would make temporary enclosures of hurdles within the Great Fields, but everywhere was thrown open on the 1st August so that animals could range far and wide and fatten up before winter or the winter kill.

Due to the fact that the land was owned by absentee landlords the peasants had real self government and they appointed various officers to regulate farming practices and sort out boundary disputes etc etc. The Reeve, The Pinder and the Eveners had the power to make orders, enforce them and to impose fines upon transgressors.

Some of the old terms may be useful at the point

Because of the mixture of peoples in early Wigston we have a mixture of Saxon and Danish terms ...

A Virgate is about 30 acres (the whole parish was 96 virgate about 3000 acres)

A Yardland seems to have been about 120 acres. Each of the three great fields were probably about 900 acres plus the Sykes and Headlands.

A Syke was permanent grazing land by a small stream eg. Blackwell Syke, Cleyhill Syke.

Headlands were areas at the ends of cultivated strips for access.

About 1300 a Wigston Virgate (30 acres) had 37 Selions in it. That is 37 different pieces of land. Pieces of land could be much smaller ... another half virgate had 49 selions.

A Selion is a piece of land and was of varying size depending upon the quality and the topography of the soil.

There is no evidence that the strips were separate by Baulks, that is unploughed bits in between.

From the air the Great Fields must have looked like a chequered tapestry of different small plots. Traditionally each great field contained the same crop in any one year or was left fallow or grew a nitrogen fixer such as peas and beans. After the Black

Death more diversification of crops was to be seen in the fields and this practice increased over the next two centuries.

The custom of Primogeniture was well established, the eldest son inherited ... occasional small plots might be set aside for widows or younger sons but these were invariably for a fixed term and then they reverted back to the main holding.

This ancient system of agriculture served Wigston well enough, until increasing population and more efficient farming practices lead to nucleated farms, the kind that we still have today. The new farming was not compatible with the Open Fields and the scattered holdings. Pressure came from the larger Landowners and eventually in 1766 Wigston was enclosed and the Great Open Fields, together with the Freemen and Peasants, disappeared forever.

Ian T Varey