



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

BULLETIN 33



Wigston United Reformed Church. Long St. Wigston Magna.

J. R. Colver

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS JUNE 1992 TO FEBRUARY 1993

Wednesday 17th June 1992

Visit to Brixworth Church. Conducted Tour.
Coach from Wigston Liberal Club Carpark, 6.40p.m.

***Wednesday 19th August 1992**

Visit to Wistow Hall & Church.
Meet at Wigston Liberal Club Carpark 7.00p.m. to share transport.

Wednesday 16th September 1992

A Basketful of Legends - Lynne Mellor (Leicester Tour Guide) .
7.30p.m. Wigston Liberal Club.

Wednesday 21st October 1992

Visit to New Record Office Premises.
Meet at Record Office, Long Street, Wigston.
7.30p.m.

Wednesday 18th November 1992

Hadrian's Wall - Dennis Manton.
7.30p.m. Wigston Liberal Club.

Wednesday 16th December 1992

Christmas Party - Games organised by Jim Colver.
7.30p.m. Wigston Liberal Club.

***Wednesday 20th January 1993**

The Baptist Movement - Rev. A. Thacker of Oadby.
7.30p.m. Wigston Liberal Club.

Wednesday 17th February 1993

A.G.M. & short talk on Early Jet Engines - Brian Bilson.
7.30p.m. Wigston Liberal Club.

* These two meetings to be confirmed. Please note the visit to the new Record Office has been re-scheduled due to delays in the building work and will now take place in October, not August as previously planned. The new August venue has yet to be confirmed, as has the proposed talk by Rev. Thacker in January 1993.

The Committee have tried to obtain larger premises for the Christmas Party this year as we are generally rather crowded, but no suitable date was available. We will try again for next year.

Joint Editors

Mrs. Chris Smart, Firtree House, Broad Lane, Markfield
Mrs. Tricia Berry, 7 Wensleydale Road, Wigston.

FEBRUARY MEETING

The Society held its A.G.M. & Members Evening when approx. 40 people were present. After apologies for absence the evening commenced with:-

- 1) The Chairman Edna Taylor reading the minutes of the last A.G.M. These were agreed and signed as correct.
- 2) The Treasurer Brian Bilson explaining the year end accounts. He reported a balance in hand of £936 39. After some discussion it was, however, decided to raise the subscription to £5 00 and £3 00 concessionary because of future production costs of the Bulletin and Programmes. It was also decided that the £700 00 printing costs of the forthcoming book on Long Street Board School should be born by the Society. This money hopefully to be recouped as copies are sold.
- 3) The Chairman reporting a successful year with membership continuing to increase. All meetings were well attended and all speakers enthusiastically received. The summer trips were also enjoyable and self financing. Members were invited to suggest any speakers they would like to have at future meetings as the Committee are anxious to maintain the current interest and support. It was decided to continue to hold meetings at the Liberal Club but to look at other possible venues for the Christmas Party because of a shortage of space.
- 4) The present Officers and Committee being all re-elected unopposed.

The second part of the evening was the usual members spot.

Brian Bilson showed with the aid of slides of various maps, the development and change in the Wigston area from Prior's map of 1777 showing just a small village with four streets right through to the early Ordnance Survey maps illustrating railway lines and the beginnings of South Wigston. Then on to the 1960's and 1970's when the estates were built and Bull Head Street was widened to create the fast thoroughfare we have today.

Bernard Elliott gave a partly humorous and partly serious account of some of the early fox hunting gentlemen in the Quorn and Fernie Hunts. Their exploits turned this into a ghost story and Bernard swears he can feel a 'presence' each time he visits a field near Grace Dieu Priory to this day!

Colin Towell announced that the friendly skittles match between the Society and the Friends of the Framework Knitting Museum had, after a close finish, resulted in a win for the Friends who retain the shield for another year.

The meeting closed at about 9.15p.m.

March meeting

On Wednesday the 18th of March the society met to hear Steph Masteris speak on Agriculture in the Welland Valley. Thirty two members were present. He commenced by giving some background information on the Market Harborough Museum and some of the projects on the Welland Valley undertaken by the Museum. He detailed the progress of agriculture from beef fattening pasture to the more diverse agriculture of today.

Market Harborough is a small market town mostly developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's. The Welland Valley starts at Sibbertoft and continues to Stamford. Today the agriculture is corn, oilseed rape and peas — arable with some pasture; local memories are of mostly pasture i.e. the changes have happened in the last 50 years. Store cattle were brought in by graziers from the Welsh Marches for fattening and then took to market.

How did it all start? There is evidence of strip farming, enclosure of common fields heralded the changeover to the pasture/ grassland era and the landscape changed as a result.

What ended it? There was some forced ploughed in World War I but much more in World War II, when land was ploughed for potatoes and wheat. All these new arable techniques had to be learnt i.e. ploughing, harrowing, sowing, reaping. This was followed by a move away from meat consumption. Pasture farming has not returned.

How did these changes affect other things e.g. people, artefacts, landscape? New skills e.g. haymaking, raking, hedge laying had to be learnt. Before World War II there were few mechanical aids e.g. tractors etc.

Major agricultural change such as that which took place in the Welland Valley altered landscape, technology and people: roles and expectations change and that in itself results in further change.

Steph illustrated his talk with slides and artefacts. After notices this most interesting talk ended at 9.45 p.m.

APRIL MEETING

Approx. 36 members settled down to hear Mr. Nesson Danahar give a talk, illustrated with slides, on the Irish Community in Leicester. A second generation Irishman himself & in the History Section at "Soar Valley Community College", he is well placed to be an expert on this subject. He outlined the areas of the County where the poor Irish Catholics settled. Notably Loughborough, Hinckley & particularly Whitwick as well as in Leicester itself, where there was a concentration in the Abbey St/Green St district. They founded the St. Patricks Church in 1837 & Club next to St. Margaret's Bus Station. The St. Patricks School was used by Snaithe the decorators as a temporary warehouse after the huge fire at their premises. Now that it is empty again there is hope of it being restored.

In 1836 Parliament ordered a report on the poor Irish in Great Britain & the Rev. Loxly at Holy Cross had a detailed questionnaire to complete for this locality.

Most had modest occupations such as navies, brickyard labourers, rag & bone men & hawkers & keepers of marine stores or lodging houses. They have not managed to progress in this Country as they have in U.S.A. The Kennedy Family perhaps the best known.

Many went into the Leics. Regiment & in 1852 no less than 55% were of Irish origin. Between 1780 & 1922 this Regiment was continually on duty in Ireland.

Tom Barclay (1852-1933) was a bottlewasher. He lived in Woodboy St. & by hard work & determination obtained an education by attending evening classes. He became well known as a social commentator & wrote a book, in nearby Britannia St. a building still stands which was built as a hostel for immigrants. It is decorated with 4 statues which depict an Englishman, Scotsman, Irishman & Welshman in national costume & with appropriate emblems.

After questions & further discussion particularly with Bernard Elliott who has done much research himself into Catholic matters, Edna Taylor thanked Mr. Danahar for a very enjoyable evening.

May meeting ...

On Wednesday the 20th of May the Society travelled by coach to Ashby de la Zouch to visit the Ashby Museum. Ashby Museum is housed in the old school building which it shares with the Library, Tourist Information and Citizen's Advice Bureau. It is run by a band of local volunteers and funded by a number of grants.

An introductory talk on the history of the Museum and comments on some of the exhibits was given by Mr. Kenneth Hillier. We were then invited to have a look around.

The exhibits ranged from the earliest geological finds through the Roman, Saxon, Norman and Medieval times to topical exhibits on 18th century local government, transport development, education and war.

In addition to the mock up of an early 20th century shop and a model of Ashby Castle there was a very interesting display of material about the Edwardian parachutist Dolly Shepherd.

All too soon this part of the visit was over and we reboarded the coach to travel to the Coach and Horses at Field Head for a very enjoyable supper.

Many thanks to Doris for organising another most enjoyable outing.

WIGSTON'S FIRST SCHOOL?

While searching for something else I found the following advertisement in the 30/12/1808 issue of the Leicester Journal.

Tricia Berry

LADIES ACADEMY - WIGSTON

Mrs. Tanner takes this Opportunity to inform her Friends and the Public, that her school will open January 23, at Great Wigston nr.Leic, for the reception of young ladies from 4 Years & upwards. The best Masters are engaged for Music, Dancing, Writing & &. The terms will on enquiry be found very moderate.

N.B.A. Teacher is Wanted

WIGSTON UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

Jim Colver's drawing on the front cover of this issue is of Wigston United Reformed Church in Long Street, Wigston. The current building dates from 1841 but the history of the congregation goes back much further.

A group of non-conformists existed in Wigston as early as Charles I's reign (1625-1642). These early dissenters were the fore-runners of the Independents Who date their origins from 1666 when a group occupied part of the ruined St. Wolstan's Church (St. Wistans) for a rent of £3 per annum. This congregation was formed by the Rev. Matthew Clarke who had previously been the Parish Priest at Narborough. He suffered a great deal in the cause of religious freedom & died in Norwich in 1708.

By 1731 they were able to build their own chapel on the site of the present one in Long Street. The growth of the congregation is illustrated by the following figures. In 1676 non-conformists accounted for about 4% of the total population of Wigston. By the 1720's this was about 16% & according to a return made to Parliament in 1829 it had reached 40%. With the Methodists & Baptists removed from the 1829 figure the percentage was 25% of total population which represented 520 people.

The original chapel was too small so in 1841 the present chapel was built on the same site. Brickwork from 1731 was incorporated in the South wall. Nikolaus Pevsner describes it thus: "Four bays, two storeys, brick, with round-arched windows & a portico in antis with fluted Greek Doric columns - In the forecourt, a monument with Neoclassical sarcophagus to William Pochin 1850."

The name has been changed several times over the years. Originally it was the Meeting House, then the Independent Chapel, later the Congregational Chapel & in 1972 it became the United Reformed Church.

In 1991 celebrations were held to mark the 150th anniversary of the current building. Church members believed a foundation stone containing various mint coins & other interesting treasures was laid somewhere in the structure but despite much searching & study of documents were unable to discover where this was placed. An appeal for possible information was made to the public. I have not heard if anything has yet been discovered.

The architect employed was James Wykes & the builder a Mr. Coleman. The building cost £1070 and there was seating for 650 people. The illusive foundation stone was laid on 3/8/1841 by George Davenport, a grandson of Samuel Davenport who had taken a leading role in the building of the original chapel.

Tricia Berry.

Sources: Various Directories, Hoskins' Midland Peasant, Pevsner's Buildings of England (Leics & Rutland), Articles in Leicester Mercury.

'RECORD' SALES

The booklet "For The Record", which tells the story of Long Street School, Wigston, was put on sale in March and has already sold 250 copies. This means that, with a grant of £300 from the Society, the original printing and publication costs have been met, and any future takings can be handed back to the Society.

There are 5 outlets for the book in Wigston: Oadby & Wigston Mail Office, the Library, the Framework Knitters' Museum, Duncan's Garden Centre and John Burton's Newsagents Shop. The star salesman of all, however, as with the Town Trail, is Ralph Wignall. He, with a bit of help from Bob, has sold 90 copies!

We were helped by 2 good reviews in the Leicester Mercury, which boosted sales, and can look to a little more publicity in the autumn, when the new Record Office opens. Mr. Carl Harrison, the County Archivist, was very pleased with the book and very taken with the photographs. He has asked for the originals, so that they can be copied by the Museum staff, for their photographic collection.

He has suggested that we as a Society mount a small exhibition on the history of the new Record Office when it opens, probably in September. We can use some of the photographs from the book, and any others that people can find. If you have any ideas for display material to do with the history of the Record Office building, please let me know. It will all provide publicity for the Society.

Incidentally, Mr. Harrison has said they will be pleased to sell the book in the new building.

What a grand co-operative effort the book was! Let's hope we can make a start on another one quite soon.

Edna Taylor

LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - HERITAGE AWARDS 1992

Four members of G.W.H.S. attended the award ceremony this year which was held at the Leicester Museum, New Walk on 25th March. The event was sponsored by the Leicester Mercury as in previous years & the managing director Mr. John Aldridge made the presentations.

There were 5 entries:

- 1) Lutterworth Local History Society - New Museum opened 1991.
- 2) Rutland Railway Museum - Restoration of Salmon Train.
- 3) Kegworth Local History Society - Restoration of 1850's barn to house local history collection.
- 4) Ashby Museum - 1991 Local History Display.
- 5) Gas Museum Leicester - WW I & WW II Exhibitions.

The Judges said it was very hard to choose winners because all the entries were excellent but in the end they chose 1st Ashby Museum, 2nd The Gas Museum & 3rd Lutterworth Museum. The other two entries both received Highly Commended Certificates.

Afterwards we were entertained to some excellent Al Jolson music on the piano followed by refreshments.

Slides were shown of all the entries and these proved that all would make very interesting places to visit during the coming season. Indeed G.W.H.S. is going to Ashby Museum for its May Outing.

WIGSTON'S OWN WHO'S WHO

The Editors would like to begin a regular series in the Bulletin of biographical articles about anyone connected with Wigston/South Wigston areas past. Any person who has made a noteworthy contribution to life could be included whether this was through their job, as an employer, in entertainment, a benefactor, sportsman or through council or church work. As well as true natives, Wigston born people who achieved recognition elsewhere are eligible as are those who arrived from other areas to make their mark locally.

It is thought desirable that such a collection should be made as a record for the future. It should, hopefully, prove interesting reading as well. We should like to encourage anyone to help with this who, could do so. Particularly those who might have information not generally available, perhaps about a member of their own family. Would anyone willing to help please notify us as soon as possible to avoid duplication of work. The contributions could be written out text ready for publication or just in note form for us to edit. Or it could be in the form of a conversation when notes would be taken.

We would like to include the article on W.E. Boulter V.C. in Bulletin No: 32, so that will be referred to as the first in the series. The following will therefore be No: 2.

HENRY WALTER BATES II

H.W.B.II was the managing director of Henry Bates & Co. Ltd., Station Street, South Wigston. I refer to him as H.W.B. the second to distinguish him from his famous uncle of the same name after whom he was called.

Uncle H.W.B.I (1825-1892) was born at 16, Waterloo Street, Leicester and became a very famous naturalist who specialised in the study of insects. In 1848 he and a friend left for South America to research the wild life in the rain forests. The friends parted after a while to pursue different objectives. H.W.B.I was away 11 years, only returning when deprivation and lack of suitable food undermined his health. He collected thousands of specimens, many of which were then unknown to the rest of the world. Most were donated to the British Museum. He has been described by a Professor of Zoology at the University of Leicester as "perhaps the most distinguished man Leicester has ever produced". After his return he moved to London, married and had 5 children. He wrote the two volume work 'The Naturalist on the River Amazons' and became a close friend of Charles Darwin. He is commemorated in Leicester by a plaque on the wall of The New Walk Museum.

The rest of the Bates family, though nearly all interested in Natural History, were occupied nearer to home earning their living mainly in the hosiery trade. The tradition went back a long way. H.W.B.II's great-grandfather Robert (1770-1837) was a trimmer & dyer, as was his father before him. Robert married Mary Donisthorpe, who was a member of the Donisthorpe family of Friars Mill, Leicester, worsted yarn spinners at the time, now hosiery thread manufacturers. Mary in turn was the g.g.g. grand-daughter of William Iliffe of Hinckley the man who first introduced the framework knitting machine to Leicestershire.

Robert & Mary lived and ran their business at West Bridge House on West Bridge. An impression of this house is available today thanks to the Leicester Artist John Flower (1793-1861) who was also connected by marriage to the Bates family.

It was Robert & Mary's second son Henry who founded the hosiery company. This Henry (1794-1870) & his wife Sarah had 4 children, H.W.B.I, John Oscar, Frederick & Samuel. They lived as previously mentioned in Waterloo Street, later building a house in Queen Street. By 1862 they had moved to 21, King Street where it appears they lived and traded from the same address. Of the 4 sons only Samuel worked in the hosiery business. H.W.B.II's father Frederick went into brewing & founded The Leicester Brewing & Malting Co. Ltd.

Samuel died in 1898 having never married & just before this time the business moved to Station Street, South Wigston. The new premises not only provided much needed extra space for the expanding company but also excellent distribution for finished goods via the 3 local railway stations. In 1900 Mr. G.H. Peck was in charge. He lived in Blaby Road. Shortly afterwards Samuel's nephew H.W.B.II took over control. H.W.B.II moved from Leicester to be close to the new premises settled in Countesthorpe Road. He was a colourful character. A talented amateur artist in both oils & watercolour, he had a special studio built at his home in which to pursue his hobby. His ability was first noticed, when, in his twenties he won a Queen's Prize for still life at a Kensington Exhibition. One of his pictures is believed to have been exhibited at the Royal Academy. In 1884 he was a founder member of the Leicester Society of Artists. He is thought to have completed some 15,000 paintings during his life time.

His beautiful pictures of local scenes are known to many & he would cycle up to 20 miles in search of suitable views. He also produced many of Wales completed when he visited his cottage at Arthog & continental scenes as a result of his travels abroad.

Sometimes he copied famous works by other artists. One of his best was Raphael's 'Start of Christ's Journey to Calvary' which he worked on in Madrid Cathedral. Another which he gave to St. Thomas's Church was 'The Light of the World'.

Until H.W.B.II was 30 he was agnostic. What happened to convert him is not known but from then onwards he was a Christian & gave hundreds of pounds & 7 houses he owned to places of worship. Fifteen years later he founded a Children's Mission. The services were undenominational & took place in the grounds of his home in 'Holiness Hall'. The children flocked there each Sunday & were met by H.W.B.II whom they called 'Father Bates'. Later the Mission transferred to Leopold Street.

In 1908 the Company was known as Bates & Pickard Ltd., but by 1923 & thereafter was Henry Bates & Co. Ltd. Business continued to grow. Between 1903 & 1914 many outworkers were employed making men's socks on Griswold machines in their own homes. In 1930's, 1000 doz. pairs per week of all wool black worsted stockings were being produced, many for export to Canada. During W.W.II the production included Norwegian oiled ski socks for the troops, specially impregnated with creosote. Their war effort was appreciated because they received the following telegram. 'Please display the following message prominently. From Washington, January 1942. For all the labour & devotion of 1941, I send you grateful thanks. Through your exertions, the factories of Britain have been the scene of mighty effort & fine achievement, but the emergency, the war, calls for immense additional endeavours in the New Year. Each of you has a task to perform, a part to play, a record to surpass. I am confident that in the new crisis of mankind you will respond with renewed determination, unflagging energy, remembering always that emergency makes no appointment with leisure. Beaverbrook.'

Henry Bates & Co. Ltd., was unusual in that it had its own dyeing & finishing department, perhaps because of skills passed down from the days of Robert & Mary. In due course H.W.B.II's sons Henry Cecil & Alan Frederick went into the business, followed by grand-son Henry Royden & then great grand-son Henry John. In 1967 when still producing 3000 doz. pairs of men's half hose, per week it was decided to sell up rather than diversify into the production of nylon stockings. The Company was bought by A. Wayne Ltd.

H.W.B.II had been born 2/7/1854, the second child in a family of 9, to parents Frederick & Ann (Nee Orange). He married in 1882, Rose Lavinia Bland. The couple had 3 children.

Eleven years after his first wife's death, when H.W.B.II was aged 89, he married a widow, Jessie Howe (nee Herbert).

He enjoyed motoring & at the time was one of the oldest licensed motorists in the country. He was the owner of one of the first cars ever seen in Leicester & just a few months before his death, at the age of 94, he drove his wife all the way to North Wales in his 16 h.p. Daimler. He was known as 'the grand old man of Wigston' & died 27/11/1948. He is commemorated on a gravestone at Welford Road Cemetery, Leicester which he shares with his grandfather Henry & father Frederick. It reads:

'In honoured & loving memory of Henry Walter Bates, entered into higher service November 27thm, 1948, aged 94 years. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee. Rose Lavinia Bates, wife of Henry Walter Bates, died January 28th, 1933, aged 73 years.'

H.W.B.II's home, Jaffa House, (after his mother's maiden name?) is still in Countesthorpe Road having been converted into flats. The factory in Station Street is currently empty, the last occupants, Hallcroft Sports, having moved to Gloucester Crescent.

Tricia Berry

Addendum –

Henry Bates & Co. Ltd., had a telephone number 7 in 1923, making the company one of the first locally to have a telephone installed.

H.W.B.II was made a Freeman of Leicester on 17th January 1899. This was an honour bestowed on many men in the family, both before his time & afterwards.

Sources:

300 Year Journey,
a Bates family history by descendant Monica Lee,
Various Directories.