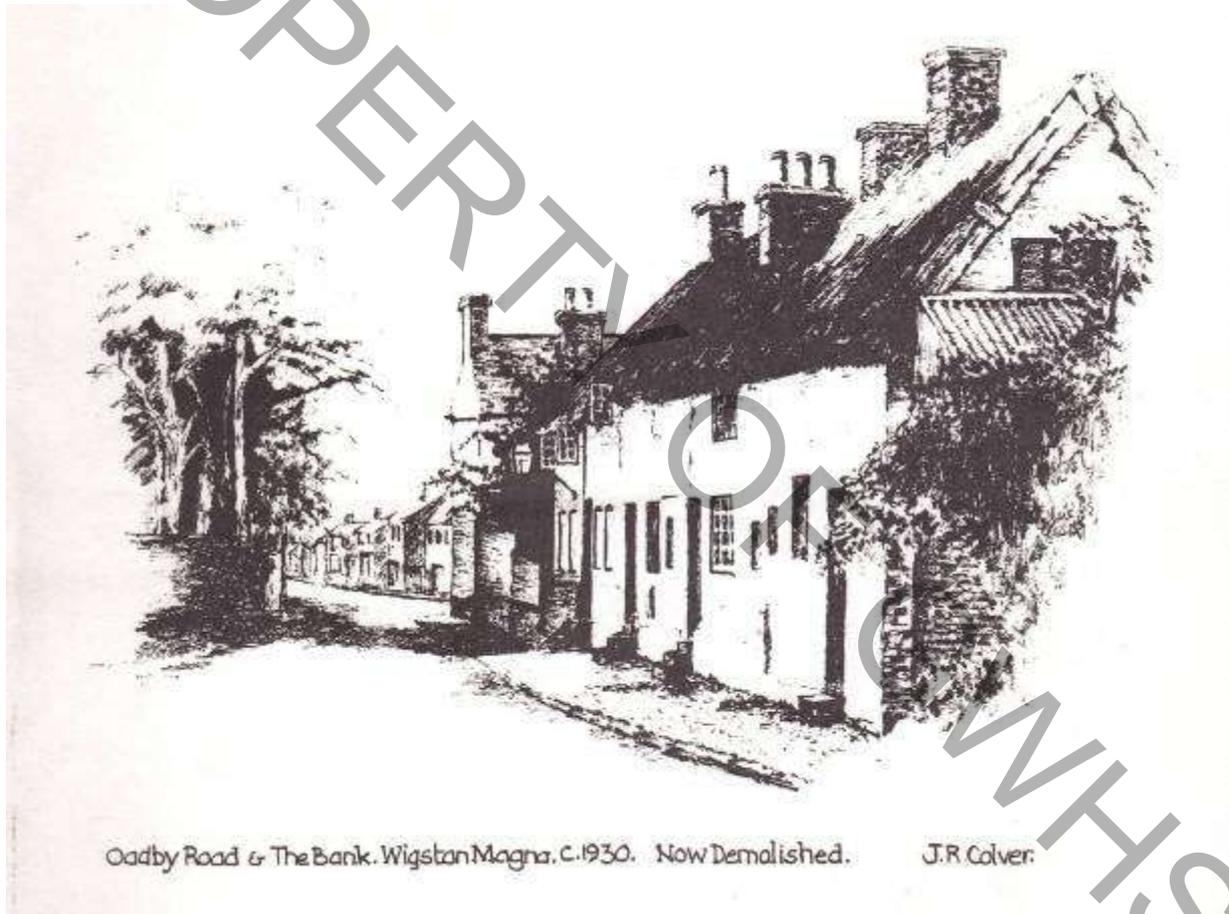




Greater Wigston Historical Society  
White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna Leicestershire

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## BULLETIN 35



Oadby Road & The Bank, Wigston Magna, c.1930. Now Demolished.

J.R. Colver

**PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS FEBRUARY TO AUGUST 1993**

**Wednesday 17th February 1993**

A.G.M. & Member's Evening. Talks, slides etc. for approx. 10 minutes.  
7.30p.m. Wigston Liberal Club.

**Wednesday 17th March 1993**

Visit to new Leics. Record Office.  
Meet 7.30p.m. at the Office, Long Street.

**Wednesday 21st April 1993**

History of early jet engines - Brian Bilson.  
7.30p.m. Wigston Liberal Club.

**Wednesday 19th May 1993**

Visit to Cadeby Light Railway - Trip & light refreshments. Coach from Wigston  
Liberal Club Car Park, meet 6.45p.m.

**Wednesday 16th June 1993**

Visit to Ashley Church, Northants - meal at George Inn, Ashley. Coach from Wigston  
Liberal Club Car Park, meet 6.45p.m.

**Wednesday 18th August 1993**

Museums without walls - Tim Shadla-Hall (Head of Leics. Museums)  
7.30p.m. Wigston Liberal Club.

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**Annual General Meeting**

Members are reminded that the annual subscriptions are due in February. The  
Treasurer, Brian Bilson, will hope to collect these at the A.G.M. when the rate for the  
new year has been decided.

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**FRONT COVER DRAWING**

Jim Colver's drawing for this issue shows an Oadby Lane changed beyond  
recognition. The view looks towards The Bank and on to show the houses that stood  
on the west side of Bull Head Street. These last were demolished in the 1970's for  
road widening purposes.

Church Nook is just off the picture to the left. The one remaining feature is the walled  
garden of St. Wolstan's House.

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The Bulletin is published three times a year on 1st February, June and October.  
Articles etc. (which are always welcome) should be submitted to either of the Joint  
Editors three clear weeks before publication date please.

**Joint Editors**

Mrs. Chris Smart, 66 Foxhunter Drive, Oadby  
Mrs. Tricia Berry, 7 Wensleydale Road, Wigston.

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**OCTOBER MEETING**

After some tables had been removed to make more space for everyone, a truly packed house settled down to enjoy one of Bill Ward's ever interesting slide and talk shows.

Bill commenced by stating that this was his 130th presentation, his 4th to this Society. He began by showing some shots of the Wigston Fields/Knighton area, the Welford Road where it crossed over the Washbrook, Brinsmead Road a mere cart track and the Royal Oak as it once looked before it was rebuilt. The Grange was shown with detail of previous occupants> Frederick Burgess, a wealthy woolstapler & Albert Hill, a hosiery manufacturer who occupied the large factory in Bell Street where Sainsbury's is now situated. The Shipp family & their drapers shop in Bell Street with the Strict Baptist Chapel which their forebears, the Levesleys, built at the back. Samuel Broughton Matthew's home in Leicester Road from where he ran his paperhanging, glazing & monumental masons business. S.B. Matthews played an active role in village life in his day & was responsible for the building of a village hall in Frederick Street. He served as its secretary for many years. Junction Road before the area was cleared for the present flats & car park.

We took a look down Bell Street at Forryan's Corner, P.G. Forryan's Garage, J.D. Broughton & Sons Ltd., hosiery factory, Bell Street Infants School & the 'time capsule' bottle which was prematurely removed & some of the contents stolen, the rest damaged before they could be examined & evaluated, Snowdens needlemakers & Mr. Barber's distinctive house facing down Bull Head Street.

We moved on to Hardy's shop, in both Long Street & Moat Street locations, The Midland Bank, formerly Hassell's premises on the corner of Paddock Street, the dairy in Bushloe End, Mr. Thomas Ingram in his garden at Abingdon House, Mr. Osmond Hilton delivering bread, a framework knitters workshop in Spa Lane & the Bull's Head Inn, Bull Head Street.

We ended with a tranquil look at rural Newton Lane & Cooks Lane before The Meadows & Wigston Harcourt Estates were built.

There was much more - this is just an impression. After an enthusiastic round of applause Bill was thanked by The Chairman, Edna Taylor, who then gave out various announcements, including an invitation to a Civic Society Meeting to hear John Banner in November. Duncan Lucas spoke of his plans to produce a local history booklet on Wigston's two churches, All Saints & St. Wistans, and asked for help with this project. The meeting closed at approx. 10 00 p.m.

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**November meeting ...**

On Wednesday the 18th of November, 38 members of the society met to hear Mr. Manton talk about Hadrian's Wall. Mr. Manton had worked for the Ministry of Works as a stone mason on the Wall in the 1950s. Mr. Manton illustrated his talk with slides of the Wall and the surrounding area.

Hadrian arrived in Britain in A.D. 122 and he decided that the northern frontier of the Roman province should be defended by a wall. The wall took about eight years to build and is about 76 miles long and about 15 ft. high and for the majority of its length it follows the terrain of the land. Forts were built along its length and within a typical fort, barracks, stores, stables and workshops occupied two-thirds of the area, the remainder being taken up with headquarters, granaries, commanding officer's house and perhaps a hospital. Outside the gates extensive civilian settlements grew up attracted by the soldiers' steady wages.

The Romans had a paid, disciplined army who carried everything including three weeks rations and were capable of marching 15-20 miles a day. Approximately 11,500 men were stationed along the Wall.

After notices the meeting closed at about 9.30p.m.

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**DECEMBER MEETING**

About 50 members gathered for the Society's annual Christmas Party. A competition had been organised by Jim Colver. The company were divided into groups each with a leader. When given the word, question-cards were opened and answers hopefully completed. Margaret Ward's team turned out to be the winners and each team member received a small prize.

A raffle was held during the evening with several prizes on offer.

A delicious buffet supper had been prepared by Mavis Bingley, Maureen Lanston & Barbara Brown. The Chairman, Edna Taylor, thanked them for this and mentioned that next years Christmas Party would be at the same venue but in the larger room downstairs.

Duncan Lucas reminded members of the heritage fortnight to be held at his museum from 16th to 31st January as part of the 'run up' to the opening of the Record Office on 8th February. He asked for volunteers to help with this.

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**January meeting ...**

On Wednesday the 20th of January, 35 members of the Society met to hear the Rev. Anthony Thacker talk about the Leicester Baptists.

The main part of his talk was about the history of the Baptist movement in general. The Baptists had sprung from the Reformation when people, such as Martin Luther, had started to ask questions. Some felt that the Reformation, that is the split from Rome and the setting up of a Protestant denomination, had not gone far enough. The Ana Baptists were the radicals of the Reformation and they introduced adult or believer's baptism rather than infant baptism. In the 16th century many were martyred for not being part of the State church. In 1607 a separatist movement had been started in England by John Smyth, the Pastor of Gainsborough, and Thomas Helwyss. For a time they continued despite severe restrictions but in 1608 they fled to Amsterdam where radical Protestantism was allowed. Eventually they returned to England, to the Spitalfields area of London where they pleaded for universal religious liberty.

By the time of the civil War there were many Baptist congregations in Leicestershire. These were General Baptists. The other group of Baptists, known as the Particular Baptists had started in the early 17th century and both groups had emerged simultaneously.

The Baptist group in Oadby had been started by Elizabeth Waldron, a woman of means and great conviction, in 1795.

Rev. Thacker conclude his talk with a lively question and answer session and he was invited to return to tell us more about this fascinating subject.

After notices the meeting closed at 9.15p.m.

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#### **WIGSTON WHO'S WHO NO: 4 GERTRUDE ROSS NEE ASTBURY**

Gertie Gitana, the famous music hall artist, was born in 1888 at 7, Shirley Street, Longport, Staffs. She was the first child of William Astbury, a pottery works foreman, and his wife Lavinia, nee Kilkenny, a teacher at St. Peter's R.C. School, Cobridge. When Gertie was 6 weeks old the family did a "moonlight flit" to 50, Price Street, Burslem as they were unable to pay the rent. At the age of 3 Gertie's family moved again to Frederick Street, Hanley, where her mother kept a greengrocers shop. This street was renamed Gitana Street in 1957 in her honour. Gertie had two younger brothers, Jim who settled in Montana, U.S.A., and Johnnie who died when aged 3 years. Her father died at about the same time as Johnnie of silicosis and her mother eventually remarried and became Mrs. Bob. Burden. They kept the Swan Hotel in Silverdale.

Gertie was a child prodigy who first appeared on the stage at the age of 4, with Tomlinson's Royal Gipsy Choir (a touring concert party) working as a male impersonator. Her stage name was Little Gitana (Spanish for Gipsy). When she was 8 she was adopted by Belle and Jim O'Connor (he was half of a comedy duo O'Connor and Brady) and there followed 6 years of bill topping in the provinces.

In 1901 Jim O'Connor took Gertie to London. She appeared at the Lyceum Theatre in 1905/6 and was one of the few variety artists to succeed there. She then played the Royal Holborn Empire where because she was growing up she was persuaded to

change her stage name (gradually so that people would still recognise her), first to Little Gertie Gitana and then to Gertie Gitana. Her repertoire of songs included 'Silver Bell', 'When the Harvest Moon is Shining', 'Sweet Caroline' and 'Never Mind'. She first sang 'Nellie Dean' the song for which she is chiefly remembered when she was 16. She also played the saxophone.

During World War I Gertie became known as the "Tommy's' Favourite Songbird", She raised several thousand pounds for comforts for the troops with her concerts and the sale of postcards (one of which is pictured below).

In 1926 she scored another success in the musical 'Dear Louise' with the song 'Let me call you Sweetheart'. In 1928 her connection with Wigston began when she married Donald Ross the juvenile lead in 'Dear Louise' which played at Sheffield Hippodrome. Donald was the son of Alfred Ross for many years headmaster of All Saints C of E School, Wigston.

Gertie often appeared on stage in Leicester. She retired in 1938 but made a come back in 1948-50 to star in an old time music hall revival 'Thanks for the Memory' presented by her husband. The Company performed at the Royal Variety Performance at the London Palladium in November 1948.

She was reputed to be wealthy and shrewd with investments. She once owned the Kilburn Empire before selling it to a cinema company.



She died, aged 68, of cancer at her home 'Neldean' on Hampstead Heath on 5/1/1957. Her funeral service at Brompton Oratory was attended by many famous people. Afterwards her remains were brought back to be interred at Wigston Cemetery after a short service at St. Mary's Catholic Church. The striking monument erected by her husband in the form of an angel with a verse from and the words:- is inscribed 'Nellie Dean'

"The curtain's down, the show is done,  
And we are home again Dear One".

Don outlived Gertie by over 20 years. He was a successful theatrical agent with many

well known personalities on his books and premises in Shaftesbury Avenue. With the decline of the music hall he ran a night club on the Costa Brava for a time and organised cabaret on the liner Queen Elizabeth II. Known as 'Mr. Showbusiness' he succeeded David Nixon in 1977 as 'King Rat' of the 'Grand Order of Water Rats.' He died in February 1980 and after a funeral at St. Paul's Church, Covent Garden was buried alongside Gertie at Wigston.

Tricia Berry

Sources:

Who's Buried Where in Leicestershire by Joyce Lee.

People of the Potteries, Vol I, 1985 by D. Stuart.

Also additional information kindly supplied by the Local History Dept., City Central Library, Hanley, Staffordshire.

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**We quote,**

The writer does the most, who gives the reader the most knowledge and takes from him the least time.

C.C. Colton, Lacon, Preface

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### **ALL SAINTS CHURCH**

In Bulletin No: 34 we illustrated a postcard photograph taken C1905-1925 of the interior of All Saints Church with a montage of the incumbent. We asked if anyone could supply his name. This came to the attention of the current Vicar of Wigston, The Rev. Green, who was able to tell us that the photograph was of the Rev. Robert Cecil Palmer who was vicar of the Parish between 1902 and 1912.

Rev. Green also very kindly gave a brief history of the patronage of the Parish of Wigston Magna which we thought would be of interest.

### **THE PATRONAGE**

All Saints and St. Wistans were both appropriated to Lenton Priory, Nottingham (which has now been converted into a house). A monk would be detached for two years service here and then replaced by another etc.

In 1539, during the dissolution, the patronage lapsed and passed to the Crown. It was taken up by Henry VIII and then by Elizabeth I. Queen Elizabeth appointed two incumbents; they were offered Wigston (which was a good living) as a reward for services to her. During this time she visited one of them here and the West Door of All Saints is consequently known as the Royal Door. A square flat area on the north side of the tower remains from where the Royal Coat of Arms was displayed. The Weld family were friends of Queen Elizabeth and she subsequently gave the

patronage to them. In 1623 they bequeathed it to the Governors of Christ's Hospital, London.

In 1631 Sir James Stonehouse sold the inappropriate rectory to the Haberdashers' Company and it was held for a long time by them on lease by the Dukes of St. Albans. The patronage came to belong to the Haberdashers' Company and Christ's Hospital alternately.

The Worshipful Company of Haberdashers are now the patrons though they could not appoint the Rev. Green. He was the choice of the then Bishop of Leicester, Dr. Ronald Williams. The connection with the Haberdashers' Company entitles the Rev. Green to attend the annual dinner held at Haberdashers' Hall near St. Pauls, London. This is an all male Livery Club where dress uniform peculiar to their craft is worn. The Hall has oak panels, a specially woven carpet and a painting of the Haberdashers. The diners use gold cutlery amid a scene that has not changed in hundreds of years.

Tricia Berry

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**We quote ...**

An impossibility does not disturb us until UB accomplishment shows us what fools we are.

Henry S. Mask ins

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**ENTERTAINMENTS IN WIGSTON MAGNA, ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.**

The following extracts from the Leicestershire Mercury and the Leicester Chronicle of 1894 show a wide range of venues and some considerable variation of events held in the village. Certainly enough to suggest that the leisure time of the people was well catered for.

**SATURDAY 10th FEBRUARY 1894.**

**THE AMATEUR THEATRICAL SOCIETY -**

On Monday evening gave a performance in the National School, entitled "A Case for Eviction", followed by the amusing farce "The Area Belle". The following ladies and gentlemen represented the various characters:- Mr. J. Tuckfield, Mrs. Viccars, Miss L.M. Owston, Mr. Mosse, Mr. H.L. Croker, Mr. W. Viccars, Mrs. O'Farrell and Miss M. Owston. Miss L.M. Owston gave solos on the violin and piano, and Sergt. Freeman on the piccolo. The performances were repeated on Tuesday afternoon, the school being crowded on both occasions.

**SATURDAY 3rd MARCH 1894. CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL -**

The sketch "The Prince and the Witch" was given in the schoolroom on Tuesday evening by Miss Deeming, Misses Matthews (3), Miss Brown, Miss A. Johnson, Misses Herbert (2), Miss Moore and Miss Greasley. Miss A Ross presided at the

piano. Master Matthews gave a violin solo, Miss E. Wyatt sang "Ora Pro Nobis" and Mr. Matthews conducted. The proceeds go to Dr. Barnardo's Home.

#### **WESLEYAN CHAPEL -**

A service of song, entitled "Primrose Garth", was given by the choir on Saturday evening to a fair audience. Miss Gamble gave the connective headings, and Miss B. Osborn presided at the organ. A collection was made for the Chapel Trust Fund.

#### **ENTERTAINMENT -**

On Monday evening the second entertainment under the direction of Mr. Parker took place, and was very successful, both in point of attendance and the manner in which the programme was carried out. Mr. Owston, who had ever shown himself favourable to these meetings, took the chair, reading in an admirable manner "The Carrion Crow". Messrs. Moore, three members of one of the Wigston Bands, played some capital selections during the evening. Miss Parker accompanied the vocalists on the piano, to the apparent satisfaction of those generally fastidious and hard-to-be-pleased people. A duet on the piano by two little ladies, Misses Brown and Matts - was well done. Mr. Webster of Leicester, sang two or three songs in his old familiar style, receiving undeniable "encores". The piece of the evening was, however, a comic drama entitled "Furnished Apartments", performed by five Leicester amateurs, who, considering the materials used, did remarkably well. Amongst the other executants were Mr. Henry Sharpe, who sang "Far, far upon the Sea", and Mr. Joseph Parker in "Happy by thy Dreams". Mr. Attenborough sang "The Pilgrim of Love" and was "encored". At the close a collection was made in aid of the fund for the relief of the distressed around Paris, resulting in 4s. taken at the door, supplemented by 2s.6d. from the Chairman, 2s.6d. from Mr. Parker, and 3s.6d. from Mr. Albert Carter. It is proposed to make this amount the nucleus of a large fund. The next entertainment was announced to take place in a fortnight, when it is suggested that a scene or two from Shakespeare's play of "Othello" should be reproduced.

#### **SATURDAY 5th MAY 1894 ENTERTAINMENT -**

A most successful entertainment was given on Wednesday evening at the National School, Long Street, Great Wigston, on behalf of the school piano fund. A cantata entitled "The Ghost" was well rendered, among those taking part being the following:- Mrs. Coucher, Miss Blunt, Miss Lees, Mrs. Long, Mrs. Barnley, Miss Neesham, Mrs. J.R. Smith, Miss A. Shipp, Rev. H.R. Briggs, B.A., Messrs. Blunt, E. Shipp, C. Squires and Dr. Howe, together with three children, Misses Ethel Pawley, Lucy Davenport and Master W. Allan. Dr Barnley had charge of the arrangements and the programme was gone through with considerable credit to all concerned. Two songs by Dr. O'Connor of Kirby Muxloe, were encored and Mrs. J.R. Smith also sang, Mr. Cooper presiding at the piano. Two prominent features in the programme were selections from the operas "Bohemian Girl" and "Maritana". Mr. Prentice of Leicester manipulated the lantern. When the tableaux had been given there was a dance.

#### **AN ENTERTAINMENT**

was given in the large Assembly Hall at the Clarence Hotel on Saturday evening by "The Two Fossils and Company", who last season were so popular in this village at the Saturday evening entertainments at the Public Hall. There was a fair audience. Programme:- Pianoforte selection, Mr. E.G. Smith, Song, "The Midshipmite", Mr. W. Harvey, Comic song, "The Future Mrs. 'Awkins", Mr. C.F. Ashby (encored), Song,

"The Sentry", Mr. A.D. Ashby, Selections by Master Charles Freeman, the boy whistler, Comic song, "Hextry Special", Mr. C. Bentley (encored), Knock-about-sketch, Messrs. C. Ashby and H. Weatherilt, Pianoforte selection, "Up to date", Mr. E.G. Smith, Song, "Half-past nine", Mr. H. Weatherilt, Mock melodrama, "The Black Man's reverence", Mr. Charles Fosbrook, Song, "Off to Philadelphia", Mr. A.D. Ashby, Comic song, "English as she is spoke", Mr. C. Bent, Comic sketch by the "Two Fossils".

#### **SATURDAY 11th AUGUST 1894 WIGSTON BANK HOLIDAY**

Athletic sports were held on Monday, under the auspices of the Wigston A.S.R.S., in aid of the benevolent and orphan funds of the society, in the grounds of Mr. T. Ingram, kindly lent. The programme contained nine events, all of which were well contested. 120 yards boys' race, 1) P. Richards, 2) J. Boulter, 3) E. Upton. 120 yards handicap, 1) C. Smith, 2) A. Herbert, 3) W.H. ?. Egg and Spoon race, 1) F. Loyley, 2) W. Bridgeford, 3) H. Mason. 200 yards handicap for railwaymen under 30, 1) A. Elliott, 2) H. Boulter, 3) J. Bodycote. 200 yards handicap for railwaymen over 30, 1) S. Medhurst, 2) J. Turner, 3) J. Knight. 120 yards girls' handicap, 1) Collett, 2) M.J. Copson, 3) P. Hurst. 100 yards sack race, 1) J. Mason\* 2) A. Tomlinson. Kicking the football, 1) H. Mason, 2) B. Richards. Won by three inches. Judges: Messrs. W. Wheelhouse and W. Wilde, Starter: Mr. J. Knight, Hon. Secretary: Mr. H. Gale. At the close of the sports, Mr. Ingram presented the prizes. On the proposal of Mr. J. Walker, seconded by Mr. W. Wilde, a hearty vote of thanks was accorded him for his kindness. Dancing was indulged in on the grounds until darkness set in. Considering the inclement weather during the early part of the day, the sports were a success.

#### **M. CHAPMAN'S COUNTY TEAM v. 22 of WIGSTON IVANHOE**

The Leicestershire County players gathered on Saturday for the first time this season at Wigston Magna, and engaged in a most enjoyable days cricket with 22 of the local "Ivanhoe Club", an organisation which seems quite likely to revive the old glories of Wigston cricket. The weather turned out to be beautifully fine and as the wicket prepared for the match was by no means a bad one some capital cricket was seen by the crowd which at one time during the day must have numbered quite 1,000 people. Indeed it was quite a gala day at Old Wigston, the people being immensely delighted to see Mr. de Trafford, Mr. Stocks, and all the professionals (bar Woodcock, of course) amongst them, whilst the presence of the Wigston Band - (an exceedingly good one, and prize-winners, by the bye) - considerably enhanced the enjoyment of the proceedings in the afternoon. When play began in the morning the County team batted first. Chapman played a characteristically careful game for 36. He was in a long time, and exercised all his old patience. Holland played well for 15, and Plougher and Mr. de Trafford also made some good strokes, but the feature of the innings was a splendidly played 42 by Hassall. Whilst hitting with great power and resolution, he nevertheless played sound cricket, and was deservedly cheered on retiring. Towards the end J. Sturman played steadily and well, and the innings ultimately realised 14. Some of the bowling, notably that of the Boulters and E. Robinson, required a lot of watching, and indeed all round it was much above the average. Several of the Wigston men, too, wanted a lot of getting out. P. Barnes (a well known Wyggeston boy) was in a long time for his seven runs, and showed excellent defence. J. Hurst made several good hits in his 13, and A. Shipp's 21 included several hits to the on. When stumps were drawn at six o'clock the local team had made 85 for 13 wickets.

