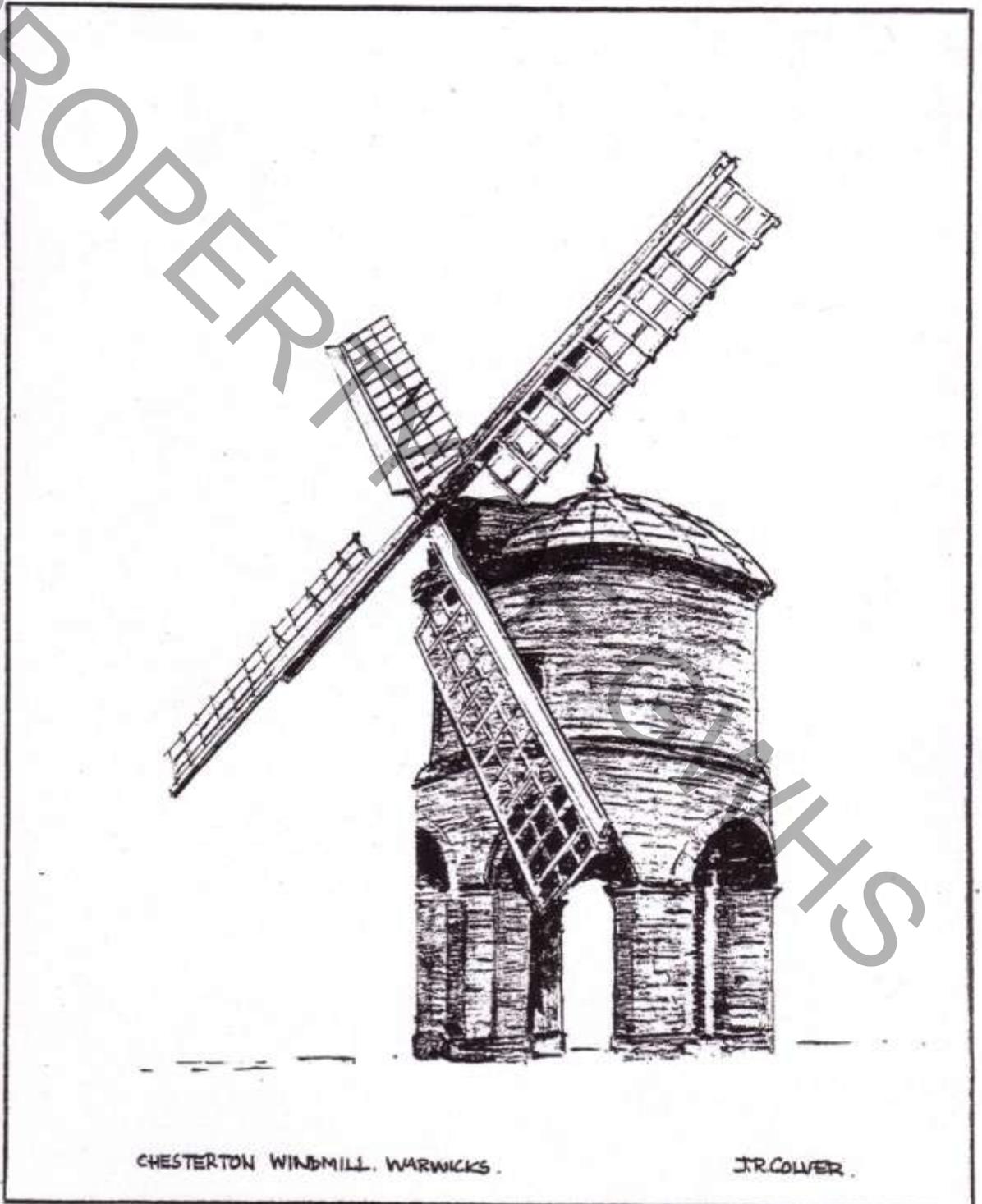




Greater Wigston Historical Society
White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna Leicestershire

BULLETIN 52



PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS - OCTOBER 1998 TO FEBRUARY 1999

Wednesday 21st October 1998

The Chesterfield Canal - Richard Harrison
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 18th November 1998

"The Demon Drink" - Cynthia Brown
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 16th December 1998

Christmas Party with quiz etc.
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 20th January 1999

The late Dennis Taylor's slides of Wigston 1960/70's - Peter Clowes
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 17th February 1999

A.G.M. followed by 'Conquest of CB II'-Colin Knowles & Chris Smart
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

CANCELLATION

Please note the audio visual slide show "Still on the Western Front" planned for 11th November has had to be cancelled. This is due to unforeseen circumstances affecting the presenter. We are sorry to disappoint those who were hoping to attend this event.

FRONT COVER DRAWING

This drawing shows the unusual tower windmill at Chesterton in Warwickshire. It being a circular domed structure standing on six great stone legs. It was erected in 1632 from a design attributed to Inigo Jones, by Sir Edward Peyto, of the family that occupied the manor house for centuries until its demolition in 1802. The mill was modified in 1860 & was last used in 1910. Most of the gearing is of timber & originally there was a central wooden structure containing a staircase & the lower bay of a hoist. The millstones are on the first floor set on an oak frame; unusual in this country but the sails are of the common cloth type. The cap is turned into the wind by a hand operated geared winch mounted on the framework in the cap, which engages with a rack, located on top of the tower.

Jim Colver

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

Joint Editors: Mrs. Chris Smart, 197 Queens Road, Leicester.
Mrs. Tricia Berry, 7 Wensleydale Road, Wigston.

June meeting

In March 1998 Caroline and Anthony Wessel had visited the Society in Wigston to talk to us about the history of Beaumanor Hall and the Herrick family.

On Wednesday the 17th of June the Society met in the Paddock Street car park for a coach journey to Old Woodhouse.

This later visit was to enable to us to see the Hall and grounds. Caroline and Anthony met us there and were to act as our guides for the evening.

Beaumanor Hall which was built in the 1840s for William Perry Herrick, has played many roles over the years. Originally built as a grand country home, it was signals unit during the Second World War. It is now owned by Leicestershire County Council and is used as a conference centre. Ornate ceilings, exquisite wood carvings and elaborate stone and plasterwork feature in the main ground floor rooms. The galleried landing, grand staircase and stained glass window dominate the entrance hall.

Caroline reminded us of the history of the house, the Herrick family and the people who used to work for them. The slides which we had viewed in March did not do justice to the magnificence of the stained glass window at the top of the first flight of stairs. The window has 21 panels each representing the coats of arms of the Herricks and their spouses.

We divided into two groups for the tour of the house. We visited the main ground floor reception rooms and kitchens. This was followed by a visit to the cellars. Some of the cellar rooms contained displays of domestic implements from years gone by others were empty but their original functions were explained.

Refreshments were served and some members took the opportunity to have a look around the grounds. This was a most fascinating visit which was enhanced by the knowledge and enthusiasm of our guides.

JULY MEETING

In July the society made a return visit to Olwen Hughes' lovely home in Stonegate. In spite of having only returned from America the previous day she seemed her usual bright, energetic self! She began by giving us a short talk about Thomas Birch the woodcarver whose house she now occupies. It had been designed for Thomas in c1895 by the Leicester architect Isaac Barradale.

Thomas Birch was born in Stretford, Nr. Manchester, where his father & brother had established a woodcarving business. The John Ryland Library has some notable examples of their work as has Barwell & Bottesford churches in Leics. Thomas married Amelia Fleetwood who was from another Manchester craft family. They came to live in Leicester to a property at the rear of Spa Place, Humberstone Gate, before moving to Evington Road. When Amelia inherited some family money they built the Stonegate House which they named 'Fleetwood' (her maiden name). Thomas had a studio behind The Hind public house on London Road. However, with the failure of the Manchester Ship Canal they lost a lot of money and had to move to a more modest home on Clarendon Park Road.

They had four children, Harry who went to Canada, Edna who followed him, Mary who stayed at home, & Alan who went to Stonegate School & Leicester School of Art. He was the only artistic one & had a studio in Market Place. His only daughter Mona opened a cafe in Loseby Lane- before joining the R.A.F. during W.W.II & making meals for Lancaster Bomber Pilots. In recent years Olwen has made contact with Mona, who lives at Countesthorpe, & the two are planning a museum of her grandfather's work.

Olwen's husband then took us in two separate groups on a tour of the house. We were able to see examples of Thomas's work, particularly on fireplaces & the banister with its carved lion on the newel post. There was a display of the history of the house in maps & documents researched by the Hughes'. We then returned to the garden room for a delicious supper minus the sausage rolls which met an unfortunate end! We were then shown more most beautiful items of carving, embroidery & painting. It is obvious that anything artistic is a delight to her.

She revealed that the Leicester Mercury had now published 1000 of her drawings & went on to describe some of the Millennium projects she is involved with. These include an arched window to the shopping precinct with stained glass to be made by De Montfort University students depicting themes from history such as Magna Carta, Lady Jane Grey, Wolsey, Mary Queen of Scots & the Clock Tower & with banners down the sides designed by the School of Design. A Millennium mile of architects & plaques & also the

Cathedral who are planning a book of church development in Leics. over 1000 years. She offered to design a project for Wigston should we feel inspired to do something here.

Eventually we had to go, it being nearly 10.30p.m! Tricia Berry, in the absence of the Chairman, gave Olwen & her husband a warm vote of thanks for their wonderful hospitality. Also Bill Woodward a family friend who came to help them cope with us, & who she revealed, had offered to do the entire evening should our kind hosts not have arrived back in time.

August meeting

On Wednesday the 19th of August the Society met at All Saint's Church in Wigston for a guided tour conducted by the Rev. Green.

The main body of the church was built 1280-1350. Later it was extended, the North aisle, with its rounded pillars and plain capitals, first. The South aisle, with its octagonal pillars and decorated capitals, second. Later extensions formed the chancel and the tower and crocketed spire. In 1637 the roof was replaced. The original would have been wooden shingle or thatch. The line of the old roof can still be seen. At the same time the pitch of the roof was altered to a shallower pitch and the clere storey was added.

In the early nineteenth century a major restoration was carried out. New church furniture was provided by the local solicitor Hiram Owston who lived nearby in Bushloe House. In 1942 the Lady Chapel was restored in memory of his daughter. The restoration of St. John's Chapel was carried out in 1963.

Unlike many churches All Saints suffered little damage at the hands of Cromwell's army. Even so they destroyed figures and the rood screen and stole the church silver. The present silver was donated by George Davenport in 1661. His infamous descendant was George Davenport the highwayman.

Patronage was an important consideration in the Middle Ages. Pre reformation the church had been in the hands of the Prior of Lenton in Nottinghamshire; post reformation it lapsed to the Crown. Elizabeth the 1st appointed Thomas Thornton to what was one of the richest livings in the County. It then passed to the Velde family who lived at Lenton Priory. The Company of Haberdashers in London are patrons currently and each year the Rev. Green attends one of their lunches in the City.

After the talk we were able to look at many of the interesting monuments inside the church. A few members braved the wooden, spiral staircase to be led into the bell ringing room in the tower and learnt a little more about this aspect of the church's history from Richard Carter.

Many thanks to the Rev, Green for an interesting and entertaining talk.

SEPTEMBER MEETING

For our first indoor meeting of the new season we welcomed back a previous speaker, Mrs. Garton, who told us in her own inimitable way, about her experiences working in a department store in the 1930's. Aged 16 & just finished school in Lincolnshire she started on 10/- a week less 8d. National Insurance. The working day was from 9a.m. to 6p.m. each week day except Thursday when they finished at 1p.m. & 9a.m. to 7p.m. on Saturday.

The first year she had to wear brown, the second year navy, & the third year a black dress with white Gardenia. No jewellery, still less an engagement ring & definitely no rouge! She likened the shop to Marshall & Snelgrove & implied the T.V. programme "Are You Being Served?" was a fair representation.

Her description of being sent to the home of a titled lady with some underwear "on approval" & of her assisting her to try them on was indeed amusing. As was her tale of being caught by her boss trying on a Russian Sable coat during a quiet spell. She was only a stock assistant at this time but was told she must now sell the coat. This she managed to do, to the same titled lady who had only come into the shop to buy a hat! Other mishaps she also seemed to have the ability to turn to her advantage & she was promoted to first sales assistant & learned window dressing. It was suggested she go to London, to one of the big stores such as Harrods, to widen her experience "but mother wouldn't let me & you did what your mother said in those days."

After the war she moved to Leicester & worked for Richard Shops & Charles Scotney, where she described serving Cabinet Ministers Lord George Brown & Mr. Stonehouse, as well as famous footballers & gamblers. She even managed to get involved in cooking the Christmas Dinner & making 14 dozen mince pies. She then

had a spell as a store detective at Marks & Spencer where she had no special training but an instinct for those up to no good. Other episodes included taking a young girl who was trying to terminate her pregnancy in a cloakroom to hospital, & spending an entire Sunday touring Coventry trying to find a woman who had conned the shop manager into letting her have a dress which she would pay for next week!

In later years she became involved in antique fairs, became one of the original Blue Badge Guides, went on Radio & researched the Leicester Ghost Walks. She is currently writing a book!

After some questions & discussion with this petite but larger than life lady who "can talk but cannot knit or sew" & was therefore not a success in the haberdashery department, Edna Taylor thanked Mrs. Garton for a most entertaining evening.

PROPERTY OF GWHTS

GEORGE DAVENPORT M.A.

George Davenport was a member of a family of great antiquity who had lived at Davenport in Astbury, Cheshire for many years. In 1553 a Thomas Dampont was Mayor of Leicester. He was a merchant of the staple of Calais & had succeeded to the business previously carried on by William Wyggeston.

The name of Davenport is first mentioned in the parish registers of Wigston in the 16th century. The earliest recorded Wigston Davenport is Richard who was a churchwarden in 1603 & 1611. Richard & his wife Alice were the grandparents of George. Their 6th child John & his wife Elizabeth were his parents. The exact relationship between the Cheshire & Leicester Davenports & the Wigston ones has not been established but their arms & choice of Christian names make it almost certain they are all of the same family.

George was baptised at All Saints' Church, Wigston on 12/1/1631, his parents already having two other sons, John, who was to be ordained in the Church of England, & serve as Rector of West Rasen, Lines, & then Vicar of Wigston from 1693 to 1706, & Stephen, who moved to the Newarke, Leicester where he was described as a Gentleman. There was also a daughter Abigail who died in infancy. The family lived at the old moated Manor House which had its own chapel & was situated to the south of Moat Street around the site of the present Davenport Road.

George was admitted to Emanuel College, Cambridge on 1/5/1646 & matriculated the following year. He gained a B.A. in 1649/50 & an M.A. in 1653. He also decided to enter the church &, like his brother, was one of the young men who trained during the "troublous times of the revolution [Civil War] under Bishop Ralph Brownrigg of Exeter & the Rev. William Sancroft." The two brothers became lifelong friends of William Sancroft (who was later to become Archbishop of Canterbury) & many letters between the two & the future church leader survive, giving an interesting insight into life at that time. Bound handwritten transcripts prepared in the late 19th century are kept at the Leics. R.O., the originals, signifying their national importance, are at the British Museum.

The letters show that George travelled extensively, some being sent from London, Paris. Ipswich, Lincoln & the Bishop's Palace, Durham, as well as Wigston. Mostly the correspondence is about church matters but sometimes personal news is mentioned as when from Wigston he writes that his mother is very frail & he expects his next letter will bear news of her death, and from Lincoln in 1657 that he is staying on to conduct the marriage ceremony of his brother John to Sarah Thompson.

After George was ordained a Deacon & Priest he became Rector of St. Peter's, Cheapside, London. In 1662 he was offered the lucrative position of Rector of Houghton-le-Spring, Nr Durham, which was then held by his friend William Sancroft. He wrote: "Your living I like wonderous well - ye church stands in ye midst & ye extremities are about 3 miles distant everywhere...ye chancell is in good repair, but wants beautifying...The outhouse, as barns, stables, cowhouses, kiln, grannaryes, dove houses. I like wonderous well being of stone, & well slated & a strong wall about ye house...but ye house I like not. It shows very well at 2 miles distance but very ill it is

contrived - all ye stairs are stone & winding, ye windows small, ye walls of it thick & ye doors low & ye floors from room to room not even, but by steps. The chappell is prepared only by a floor which must be taken down..."

However, in spite of these reservations he accepted the appointment, with effect from 23/12/1664 when only 33 years of age. He soon embarked on a long series of improvements, one of which, perhaps not very surprisingly, was to rebuild the rectory house. The new version is described by Nichols thus:- "a handsome stone ediface, standing within a court, having a porter's lodge at the entrance; and the chapel, which is slatted & wainscoted with Irish Oak. He also rebuilt the garden walls, and repaired the extensive out-offices." George also built a school for the village & added a south wing to the almshouses which bordered the churchyard. This became known as Davenport's End & has the following inscription: "All things come of thee, O Lord; and of thine own we have given thee." The armshouses & church gate both bear his arms. During his time at Houghton he often stayed at the Bishop's Palace, Durham, where he acted as Bishop Cosin's secretary.

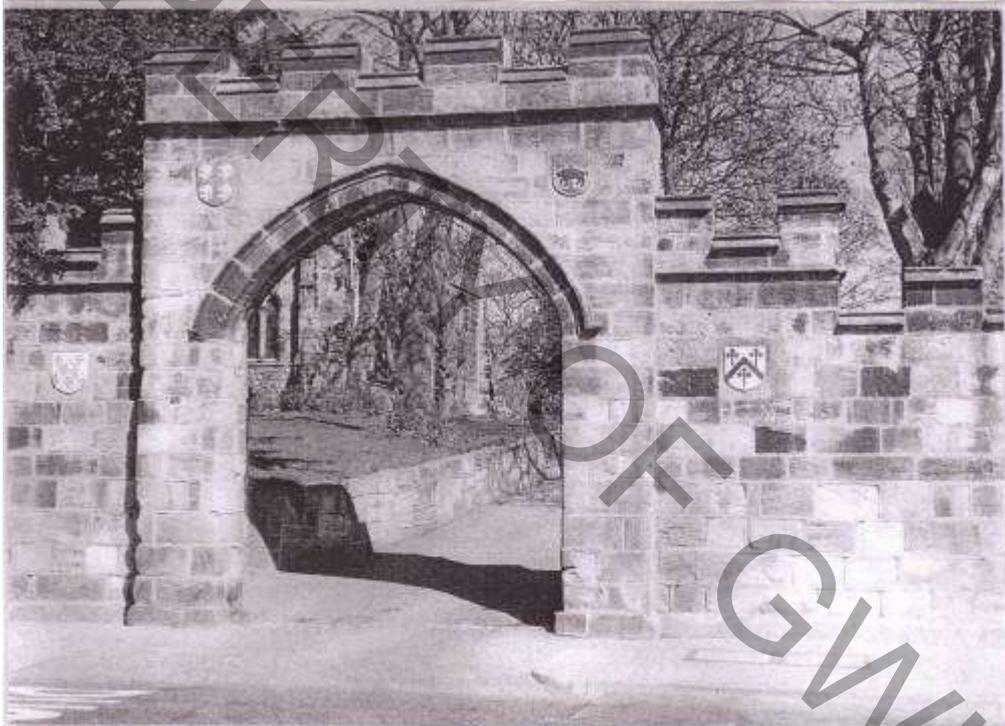
George lived through troubled times. During the rule of Oliver Cromwell many valuables belonging to parish churches were stolen or sold. Such was the case at Wigston where the communion silver disappeared. After the restoration of Charles II in 1661 he presented his home parish with replacements. A silver paten inscribed "Ecclesiae de Wigston dedit Georgius Davenport Clericus natus ibid" & a chalice which bears his arms & crest.

Two more letters in the collection previously mentioned illustrate the issues of the time. On 20/9/1665 William Bancroft writes to George about the plague - "Dear Friend. My legend is too long & my danger too many to tell it all. God be thanked I am at last come safe (I hope) to my brother's house, where I shall stay, till either it please God in mercy to open us a safe return to London, or my superiors command me away, it being now so dangerous to travail & to lodge in public houses..." The other dated 31/3/1666 from George writing from the Bishop's Palace, Durham - "I am glad to hear that there is so considerable decrease in ye plague the last week...This County is about to advance [lend] a whole years [income?]together before hand for his majestyes service. Particular persons lend the money (as my Lord £1000 & ye Dean £500) & receive it again of ye country..."

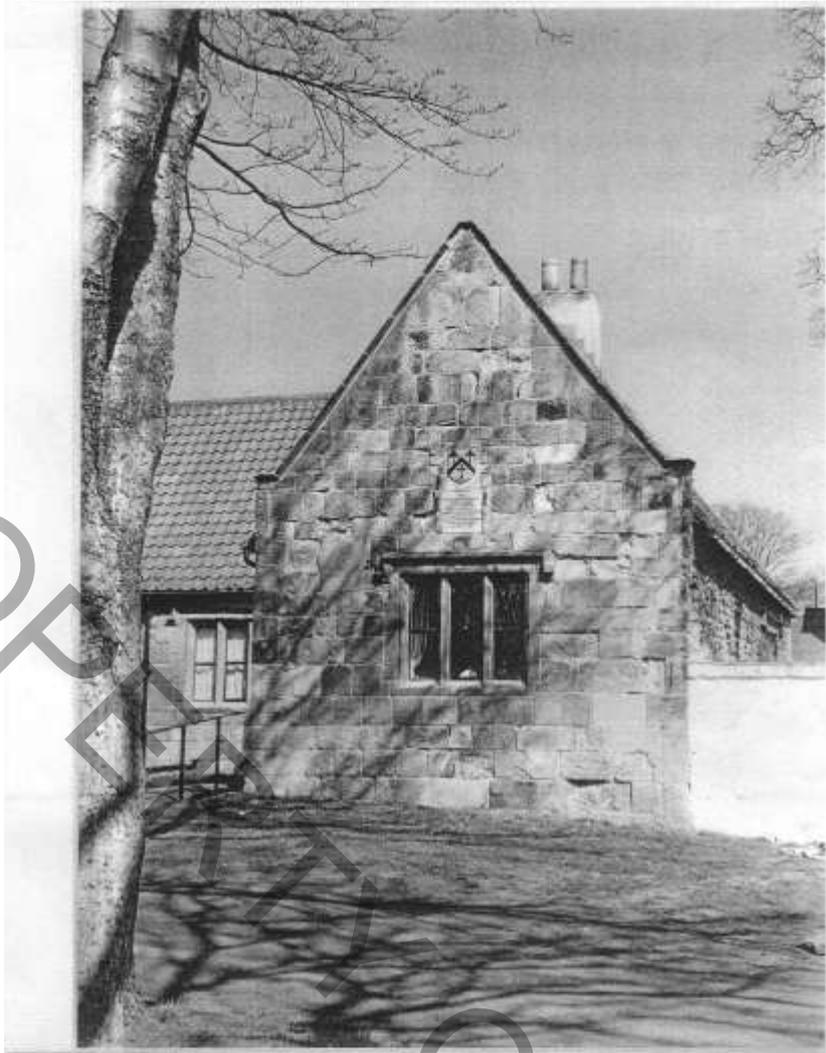
George died unmarried on 6/7/1677. By his will dated 17/9/1676 he left £20 to the poor of Wigston, his lands at Bushby & Wigston & his books & manuscripts to his brother John. Other bequests, relevant to Houghton, are listed on his memorial. He appointed his nephew John, son of his brother John, as executor & residuary devisee & requested no preaching at his funeral & that the cost should not exceed 20 marks. He was buried in the chancel at Houghton church & on a flat black marble monument erected in his memory it reads:

"Here lyeth the body of the revered and charitable Mr. George Davenport, late rector of this church, who died July the 6th, 1677.

He re-built the parsonage-house, the chapel, and the walls about the garden, and repaired the out-houses,



ALMSHOUSES AT HUGHTON-LE-SPRING BUILT BY GEORGE DAVENPORT
TAKEN 1997/8



He built one-half of the hospital in the church-yard; and bequeathed, for the maintenance of three poor people in it, 160L.

Also 20L to the poor stock, and 20L to be given to the poor at his death.

He was a great benefactor to the Bough [sic] church; and gave 71 manuscripts to the Bishop's Library in Durham. 'If the soul's transmigration were believed, You'd say good Gilpin's soul he had received;

5

And with as liberal hand did give, or more, His dailie charity unto the poor:

For which with him. we doubt not, he's possest, of righteous men's reward, eternal rest.¹

The righteous shall be in eternal remembrance.

Ps. cxii.6."

In 1850. nearly 200 years after George's death his kinsman, who still had Wigston connections. Mr. Henry Devereux Davenport (the designer & builder of Diamond Cottages), repaired the window in All Saints' Church over the family pew, near the Lady Chapel, & dedicated it to George's memory.

George had died at the relatively young age of 46. It seems likely given his early promise, the influential people he knew, & the high esteem in which he was obviously held, that he would himself have been appointed to high office within the church had he lived to a greater age.

Arms: Argent a chevron between three cross-crosslets, fitchy sable.

Crest: A man's head couped at the shoulders, with a halter about his neck, all proper.

Motto: Tu ne cede malis.

Tricia Berry

Sources: Nichols Leicestershire, Vol iv pgs 387/88. Leicestershire Pedigrees & Royal Descents, W.G.D. Fletcher, 1887. Alumni Cantabrigienses, J. & J. A. Venn. 1922. The Davenport copy letters L.R.O. DG1139/2-3. Lecture given to the society by Father Green. Vicar of All Saints' Church, in Aueust 1998.

NORAH MOORE

It is with great sadness that we report the sudden death on 16th June of Norah Moore. She, like her sister Millie, was *a* daughter of the late founder of Wigston Band, Charles Moore. She had lived in South Wigston all her life & having virtually run her father's music shop at one time was very well known locally.

With her sister she was *a* devout member of St. Thomas's Church, much involved in the Girl Guide Movement & greatly interested in anything to do with the history of her beloved "village." The pleasure she derived from this last came to the knowledge of Rev. Peter Day, who at her funeral, offered prayers for the work of our society as well as the doctors, nurses & others who had cared for her in recent years.

Our sincere condolences to Millie & the rest of the family at this very difficult time.

'Family' and the history of Leicestershire's monasteries.

Patronage - the support given or the custom brought by a patron

Endow - to provide with or bequeath a source of permanent income

Endowment by a patron was the crucial ingredient in the foundation and continuing prosperity of the majority of medieval monasteries. The reasons for the truth of that statement are more complex than its simplicity suggests. The key factor in assessing the impact of Anglo-Norman families on monastic history is their relationship with the monastic communities concerned.

King Edgar, strongly influenced by the continental Benedictine reform which had its heart at the Abbey of Cluny in Burgundy, used Dunstan, Athelwold and Oswald as engineers of his plans. The old religious communities were cleared to make way for new men adhering strictly to the Benedictine rule. Edgar established alliances with the new men and thus they enabled him to divest the monasteries of the powerful influence of the old families. King Edgar established the Regularis Concordia which was an English version of the Benedictine rule. The King and his Queen became the superintendents of monasteries and nunneries and prayers to them became a central part of monastic worship. The tenth century reformation of the monasteries had little impact on Leicestershire. The seventh century monastic foundation at Breedon, although possessing lands, was not significant enough to be affected.

Monasticism in the Middle Ages took a variety of forms. In Leicestershire it ranged from a small community of hermits, such as the one founded at Charley in 1190 which had just three brothers, to the Augustinian Abbey of St. Mary de Pratis in Leicester which became one of the largest houses in the County.

The importance of religion in the Middle Ages should not be underestimated. The calendar of religious events made sense of the year. During this period the monasteries played a more significant role than the parish church. The church was responsible for the care of its parishioners not only in their earthly life but also in the life to come.

In the Middle Ages the church went hand in hand with the aristocracy. The hierarchy existing within the monastic order was a mirror image of the hierarchy of secular society. This reflection of status must have appealed to the Norman Lords, anxious to secure their place in heaven. The monasteries provided access to learning, culture, wealth and artefacts and a network of enlightenment that spread beyond the confines of the cloister or the manor house.

Many of the Norman Lords were instrumental in the establishment and endowment of monasteries in Leicestershire. The Beaumont family were by far the most prolific founders in Leicestershire, however, the main thrust of their foundations was over by the end of the twelfth century.

The family was descended from Humphrey de Audemar (or de Vielles), a trusted servant of King William and advisor to Queen Matilda. Humphrey's son Roger was prominent in the invasion of England. The three succeeding generations were Robert de Beaumont, 1st Earl of Leicester (also Count of Meulan); his son Robert le Bossu, 2nd Earl of Leicester and his son Robert, 3rd Earl of Leicester, sometimes known as Robert Blanchmains.

Blanchmains married Parnel de Grandmesnil, thus re-uniting two great dynasties. Parnel's ancestor Hugh de Grandmesnil was the greatest Norman landowner in Leicestershire immediately after the Conquest. He and his brother had refounded the Abbey at Saint Evroul in 1050 and he continued to endow it from Leicestershire. He was typical of the Norman Lords during the period of adjustment and transition following the Conquest. He continued to look after his interests in Normandy whilst taking full advantage of his position of castellan of Leicester. Hugh died in 1098 and his body was shipped back to St. Evroul to be buried.

Hugh's son Ivo inherited the de Grandmesnil possessions, however he made a fatal political error. His lands were mortgaged to Robert de Beaumont who shrewdly had supported William Rufus and Henry I. On Ivo's death Robert took possession. He had thus put himself in an advantageous position and in 1107 he was created Earl of Leicester. The same year he established his only monastic foundation of St. Mary de Castro in Leicester, presumably to save his conscience. He died in 1118 and was buried at Preaux Abbey. However it is said that on his deathbed, when urged to give back the lands he had dubiously acquired, he is alleged to have said,

I will rather give all to my sons and they shall do works of mercy for the health of my soul (1).

During the eleventh century the Norman link with Rome was strong. At the time of the Norman invasion, the Pope was being influenced by the Norman King of Sicily. In 1059 the fourth Council of Rome was held. Groups of clergy were encouraged to adopt the Augustinian Rule which was less rigorous than the Benedictine Rule, and thus, was more suitable for the clergy. After its introduction in 1090 it became very popular. It was a more relaxed order whose time was not so precisely allocated. Families of moderate means could modestly endow old foundations and introduce small bodies of canons following the Augustine rule. The Leicester house at St. Mary de Castro is an example of this practice.

The Augustinian house at St. Mary de Castro was a pre-Norman foundation possibly founded by Ethelfreda, Queen of the Mercians, which was resuscitated by Robert de Beaumont in 1107. According to Leland before the Norman Conquest it had been a collegiate church of prebends *intra castrum*. The register of Leicester Abbey records that Robert (de Beaumont) de Meulan rebuilt the church which had been destroyed during the reign of the Conqueror. This new foundation was for a Dean and 12 secular canons (2).

Garendon was founded by Robert le Bossu in 1133. It was his first foundation and the only Cistercian foundation in Leicestershire. It was founded after Robert had possession of the de Grandmesnil lands. These lands had come from the great Royal ville of Barrow. The monastery church was typically Cistercian in style, thin and narrow and without embellishment. The Cistercian order, had started in the eleventh century when the feeling abroad was that the Benedictine rule was too complex and interfered with the essentials of monastic life.

As the status of the Beaumont family increased, they could afford to endow and patronise new monasteries on green field sites such as the richly endowed Leicester Abbey of St. Mary de Pre (or de Pratis, meaning in the Meadows). It was founded by Robert le Bossu in 1143, although Crouch (3) dates it slightly earlier. It became one of the largest houses of the Augustinian order with a community of at least 40 canons and several lay brothers. The first grant of Robert le Bossu to Leicester Abbey was the church of St. Mary de Castro, his father's generous foundation near to Leicester Castle, and he incorporated all its lands in his new abbey's endowment (4).

By 1153 Robert le Bossu had founded the hermitage at Ulverscroft and by 1174 it had become a priory. It followed the fashionable Augustinian Rule. It is the best preserved of all the monastic foundations in Leicestershire.

Another probable example of the resuscitation of an earlier foundation within the Beaumont family is the Benedictine house at Hinckley. Adjacent to the Hinckley house is the priory of nuns at Nuneaton, a Beaumont foundation in Warwickshire. Together these may be the remnants of a double monastery of an earlier period which was broken up to emasculate the power of the Mercian kings. Hinckley was founded by Robert de Bossu before his death in 1168, as a cell of Lyre Abbey in Normandy. Lyre Abbey and the Beaumont lands in Normandy, had come to them by marriage.

Parnel, wife of Robert Blanchmains, was responsible for the foundation of the Augustinian hermitage at Charley in 1190. It was granted to St. Evroul in Normandy, the monastery founded by her ancestor Hugh de Grandmesnil, on the condition that a prior was maintained there.

The monasteries that received the patronage of the Earls of Leicester were all founded within a period of less than ninety years. The family had been loyal servants of William the Conqueror and as a result had been given and acquired lands in the newly conquered country. They made fortuitous marriages and their association with the Crown continued into the reign of Henry II.

The evidence of medieval patronage can often to be found in the records of burials that took place in the monastery. The best example of this in Leicestershire is the burials that took place at Belvoir Priory. Belvoir Priory was founded by Robert de Tosny (de Todeni) in 1076, at a time when most of his contemporaries preferred to continue to support their houses in Normandy. It was a small Benedictine house built near to Robert's castle at Belvoir. Robert de Tosny and five succeeding generations were, either entirely or partly, buried there.

Similarly to the Beaumont family, the de Tosny family were close companions of King William. Early excavations of the site were recorded by Nichols and several burials of the founding family and their kin are indicated. Robert de Tosny differed from Hugh de Grandmesnil, his peer, in that he chose to be buried at the Priory that he had founded at Belvoir.

The motivation to found and patronise monasteries, both in the case of the multiple foundations of the Beaumonts, and the evidence of multiple burials of the descendants of Robert de Tosny, was the same for both families. From the religious perspective, they were anxious to secure eternity. It was important to them to be buried amongst their good works, preferably at or near the high altar of the church of the monastery. The inclusion of their names in the obit, rolls, their deaths marked and commemorated, ensured that they and their families would be esteemed beyond the grave. They had an expectation of continuing lineage and the expression of their dynasty would be a mausoleum of many generations.

There was a practical aspect to their patronage too. Robert de Tosny had seventy manors in his possession, 16 in Leicestershire, all with churches attached and pastoral responsibilities. For men with many estates, such as de Tosny, and for high ranking Lords, it was easier to hand over responsibility of managing and administering their churches to a religious house. They tried to choose a religious order that was not tied down to prayer, works of education and book illumination. As such the Augustinian order was most suitable to fulfil this function.

The relationship of the family to the church was very close. Close identification is constantly important and this is evident throughout the Middle Ages in the form of mausoleums, family chapels, and monuments in the chancel. A capital endowment of land would provide maintenance and salary for a priest. The church would receive an on going income from tithes, burials and rent from the church lands. The churches, thus set up, could be given to a religious house. The tenants of the Lord of the Manor would feel obliged to give further donations and thus some religious houses became very well endowed. At least eight Leicestershire knights made grants of land to the Earl Robert's Leicester Abbey on becoming canons and requesting burial there (5). Their motives were not entirely political; they were looking for the spiritual benefits of the abbey on their own account.

The monasteries were situated on land granted to them by their patrons. Sometimes the monasteries were sited on land close to the founder's own establishment, such as the priory at Belvoir. Alternatively the patron may not have wished give away good agricultural land and by siting the monastery on marginal land they were satisfying their own self interest and the monks desire to live away from secular society (6). The monastic houses at Garendon, Charley and Ulverscroft are situated in Charnwood Forest, and Leicester Abbey is on the edge of Leicester Forest. Whilst this land was mostly unusable in the agricultural sense it had worth in the timber that could be harvested there.

Unlike the de Tosny family, the Beaumonts stayed loyal to their religious houses in France. Hugh de Audemar had founded the monastery of St. Pierre and the nunnery of St. Leger at Preaux. Hugh died and was buried there, as were his sons Robert and Roger. In the next generation, a son was Abbot of Preaux and two sons Henry and Robert, 1st Earl of Leicester (d.1118), were buried there.

The monasteries, who attached great importance to the burial of their patron within the monastery precincts, saw a burial elsewhere to be an act of disloyalty and the monastery concerned felt justification in their affront. The body of the benefactor was a powerful symbol. Golding (7) suggests that to change the place of burial, once established, was a drastic action with implications not only for the monastery concerned but also for the family who wished to have perpetuity in death. This action was usually only taken where the dynastic continuity had been broken. In this instance the new family could either assume the support the monastery of its predecessors or continue to support its own monastery. A change in the place of burial was therefore more likely to indicate a change of dynasty than a change of religious preference (8).

It is probable that Robert le Bossu broke with his families tradition of burial at Preaux. He died in 1168. It is said that he spent the last 15 years of his life as a canon at Leicester Abbey (9). However, one should not dismiss the local power that he held. Crouch states the point succinctly,

What we are seeing in Leicestershire is what happened when the major magnate of the area, who also happened to carry the personal dignity of an earl, had sufficient concentration of estates and allies, and sufficient influence at court, to enjoy a free hand in its rule (10).

Aljough fifteen years before his death he became a canon, and his wife Amicia a nun at the nunnery he had founded in Nuneaton, as justiciario Henry II his duties would have precluded seclusion.

The building of the Abbey church was not completed in his lifetime. His daughter-in-law, Parnel, was said to have built the nave of the Abbey Church at her own expense, even to the extent of giving a rope of her own hair by which a lamp was suspended from the roof of the choir (11). One might speculate, therefore, that Robert le Bossu would have been buried there. The excavation plans of the 1930s show five burials to the north side of the Abbey Church and several more in the cloister and outside.

Presumably the destruction of

the Abbey had precluded and identification of the tombs. However Billson refers to Leland's observation,

that a tomb 'ex marmore calchedonico,' lay on the wall south of the high altar, and questions whether it was that of the founder, or of the countess Petronilla.

and comments,

But as the founder was buried, according to the testimony of one of the canons, on the right, or north side of the choir, the tomb which Leland saw cannot have been his; and Petronilla was buried in the middle of the choir (12).

The choice of burial place also had economic implications for the monasteries. This argument is expanded by Golding (13). A typical pattern would be the establishment of contacts with the monastery, usually by foundation, this would then be followed by a burial of a family member. That is, the pre-existing relationship would determine the place of burial rather than a random choice of burial place establishing the tie. A burial would thus attract endowments, reinforce the relationship with the family and the family would be more likely to maintain an interest in the monastery. The de Tosny family burials at Belvoir Priory follow this pattern. It is interesting to note that Robert de Tosny was thought to be a cousin of Ralph de Tosny (or de Conches) whose family had continued their allegiance to their foundation at Conches for at least two generations after the Conquest (14).

The Beaumont family are not typical in this respect. Robert the 1st Earl chose to be buried at Preaux the monastery of his forefathers, in spite of his foundation of St. Mary de Castro. Robert le Bossu, the 2nd Earl, possibly broke with this tradition and may have been buried at Leicester Abbey. If this is true he presumably chose Leicester Abbey in preference to his other establishments. He had previously given his father's foundation of St. Mary de Castro and its endowments to Leicester Abbey so maybe he was carrying out his father's wishes.

There is no evidence that any of his descendants continued to be buried there, other than his daughter-in-law Parnel, who was herself breaking with the tradition of her forefathers, the Grandmesnils, who had been buried at St. Evroul. Her choice may have been connected in some way with the fact that her husband had pre-deceased her and that her son had impoverished himself (15). Although Thompson (16) states that Robert FitzPernell, her son, took part in the third crusade and died and was buried in Leicester.

Robert Blanchmains, a weaker character than his father and grandfather, had a rather precarious hold on his lands and on his death in 1190 in Greece they passed to his son Robert FitzPernell who died without issue. The earldom and lands then passed to Blanchmain's two daughters Amicia and Margaret. Amicia, who was the widow of Simon de Montfort, held the Earldom. The Earldom then passed to her eldest surviving son, Count Simon de Montfort. His son Simon came to England, married well, and was invested as Earl of Leicester.

If it is assumed that Robert le Bossu and his daughter-in-law Parnel were buried at Leicester Abbey, thus breaking the continuity of his forebears and their burials at Preaux, there is no evidence that the de Montfort family who took over the Earldom of Leicester, through the female line, also assumed the involvement with Leicester Abbey or any of le Bossu's other foundations. In this respect they support Golding's hypothesis. Although Thompson states that

Confirmation by successive earls of their predecessors' gift were accompanied by further grants of land until the day of the second Simon de Montfort, but such additions to the large gifts already rehearsed in the charter of Henry II were comparatively small (17).

Where a change in the place of burial, or an unexpected burial in a different place did occur the mendicant orders, who were less likely to have wealthy benefactors, were often blamed.

According to Paris the friars hung around the deathbeds of magnates and the wealthy so that they made secret wills commending themselves to the friars alone (18).

However it is thought that the monastic reporters overreacted to the threats of the friars as very few wealthy lords or their families were buried in friaries, the notable exception to this was Simon de Montfort who was buried at the Grey Friars at Evesham after his death there in 1265 (19).

Blanchmain's younger son, William the Leper was said to be responsible for the foundation of the Hospital of St. Leonard for lepers, near to St. Leonards Church and the Lazar House dedicated to St. Edmund near to the Chapel of St. John. The orders of Friars, established in Leicester mainly at the end of the 13th century, prospered in the town setting and were recipients of benefactions from the urban elite. Simon de Montfort, as Earl of Leicester, had extensive lands in Leicestershire and was a noted patron of the mendicant orders. However, neither the hospitals, nor the communities of friars were dependant on the 'families' to the extent of the earlier foundations. After the mid 14th century no new houses were founded in Leicestershire until the dissolution

Following Edgar's 10th century reformation, and the period of Harold's conflict with the Danes and the Normans, the monasteries had fallen into disrepair. The advent of the Normans and the resultant stabilisation, allowed the monasteries to be reformed. For this to happen the monasteries had to have grants of land and this was within the power of the Norman Lords who had received their lands in England as gifts of the King. The monasteries could not exist, except as single cell hermitages dependant on alms, without the land that made them economically viable. The monks themselves owed their allegiances to God or their Rule and not to the patron of their monastery. Hence, if for whatever reason that patronage was removed, the monks would have no reason to stay and the monastery could fall into disrepair. Therefore there is no other crucial ingredient in the history of the monasteries in Leicestershire than the 'families'. The families, their patronage and endowments, and their burials and promises of future bequests were crucial to the economic viability of the monasteries in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

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