

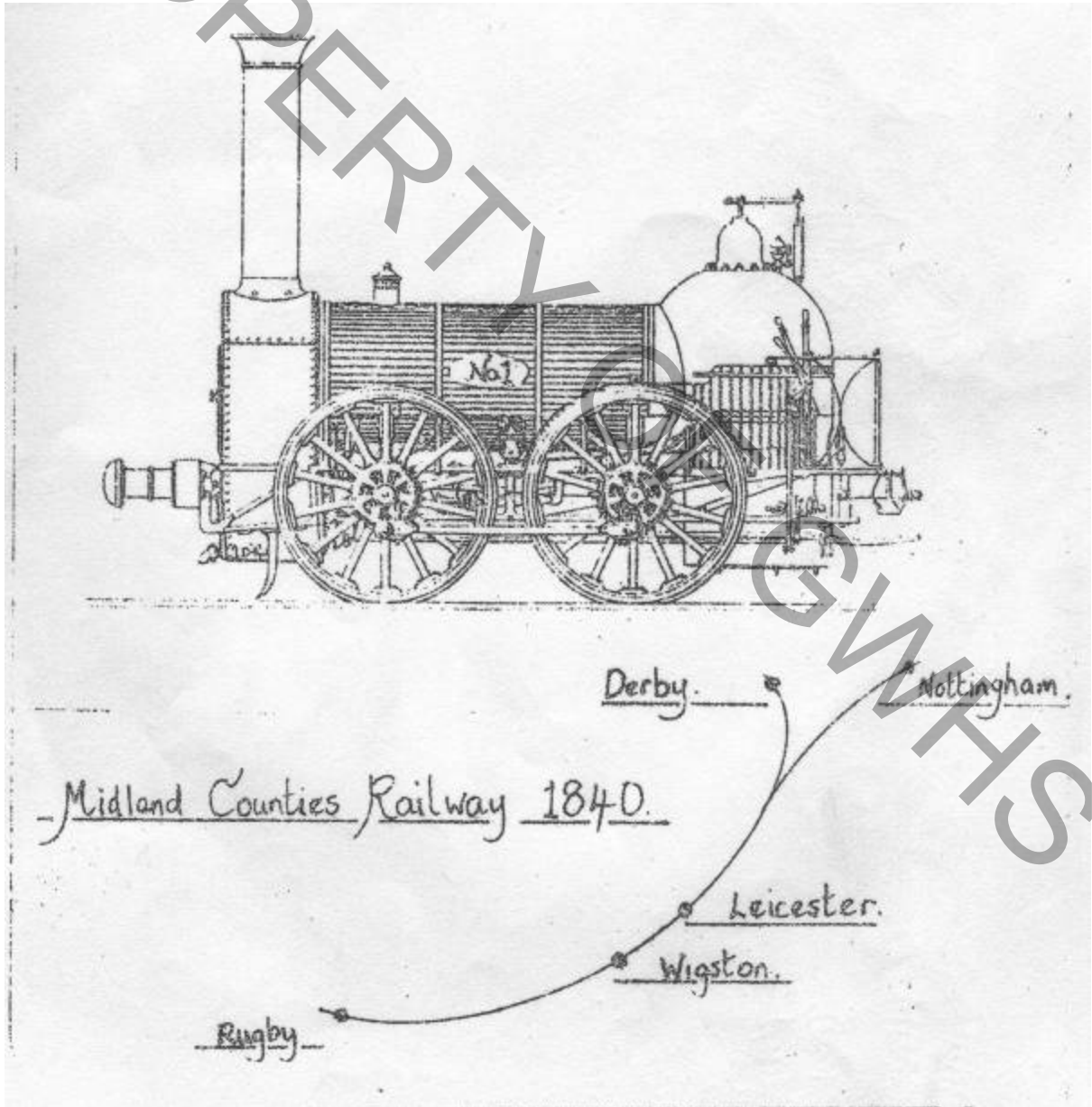


Greater Wigston Historical Society

White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna Leicestershire

Bulletin 6

June 1983



Notices

Hon. Membership Secretary reminds all members that the subscription for 1983 is now due, and remain unchanged at £2.00. Cheques should be made payable to Greater Wigston Historical Society and sent to Mr. B. Bilson, 23, Thirlmere Road, Wigston, and Leics.

Membership entitles one to Free Admission of the Wigston Museum.

NOTICE OF EVENING VISIT ...THIS MONTH.....

On Wednesday, June 22nd. 1983 there will be a visit to Peckleton, near Desford. Over many years Mr. Sevan has gathered together an extensive collection of Rural Artifacts, and he has kindly agreed to show them and talk about them to the Society.

Please meet at Whitegate Farm, Newton Lane for 6.45pm. Lifts can then be arranged for those without transport, and some doubling up, to cut down on the number of cars, can take place. A prompt start for Peckleton will be made at 7.00pm.

Those people wishing to make their own way, please meet outside the Brown Horse Inn, in Peckleton at about 7.30pm. And wait for the arrival of the main group.

This should be an interesting evening, do please make an effort to support it.

WINTER PROGRAMME

A programme of speakers and workshops, starting in October 1983 is now being drawn up. Full details will be printed in the next Bulletin. For Your Diary....

Meetings will be on the Third Wednesday of each month and the venue will be the Wigston Liberal Club.

Leicestershire Local History Council Summer Meetings

Monday 13th. June. Walk round Western Park with Mr. A. A. Huscroft. Meet at 7.30pm. by the Main Gates on Hinckley Road, Saturday 13th. August, Market Harborough walk about, and Museum, with Mr. S. Mullins. Meet at new Council Office / Library / Museum building at 2.30pm.

Make a Suggestion

1. Fund Raising Events, or ideas for some kind of Xmas get together.
2. Visits and or speakers for future meetings.
3. Articles or possible subjects for the Bulletin, or any comments. to the Bulletin Editor. Ian Varey, 150, Welford Road, Wigston, Leics.

Hawthorn House.

Suggestions were sought for the naming of the Age Concern Centre, My suggestion is 'Hawthorn House'. Why? - You may well ask.

Well the Centre is very near to 'The Bank', and that was the meeting place for the people of Wigston for countless years.

"Long ago when the country was wild beyond belief, the population sparse and communication maintained by a series of track ways in the land, certain old Thorn trees, often in a solitary or conspicuous setting, became land-marks and focal points for meetings among people. Here the 'Hundred Courts' were held, lovers would meet and religious sects, both Pagan and Christian, assemble. All mark-site Thorns were considered sacred. To deface one was a serious offence, even to the extent of plucking a leaf."

In 1637, on the 22nd December, reference is made in the Court action, Boulter v Moore, of the fight taking place 40 paces from the 'May Greene Tree' - which of course was the Hawthorn.

On March 7th. 1392 reference is made to the common way called 'Hawthorne gate' on the West of Wigston (Murder and Sudden Death in Wigston by Hoskins.).

The 1886 O.S. map of Wigston shows 'Hawthorn Field', where Abington House stands. Thomas Ingram or more popularly Lawyer Ingram lived in 'Hawthorn' House. This man had a keen sense of history and regard for the past. He was one of Wigston's greatest benefactors; indeed the existence of St. Thomas Church is due largely to his efforts. It would be fitting if some late tribute was paid to Lawyer Ingram by using name Hawthorn House.

The Hawthorn Tree grows to a very old age, it has many branches and side shoots, it is beautiful in both blossom and fruit. It has symbolised throughout history, a traditional meeting place so I feel that the humble Hawthorn could well add its name to our Meeting Place, there by retaining a local name, so many of which have been lost.

Duncan Lucas.

OPEN DAY AND A.G.M. FEBRUARY 25TH. 1983.

Following the success of the Open Day last year, a second Open Day was arranged to coincide with the A.G.M. The venue once again was the Wigston Liberal Club. As well as displays connected with local history in Wigston, it was decided, this year, to invite local artists to exhibit their work. On Thursday night a group of Society members erected the displays and set up a book stall, in anticipation of a large number of visitors.

Exhibits included a marvellous display of the Lucas/Forryan family history going back to the 1870's, but told through photographs, documents and heirlooms. By skilfully combining these different relics, Duncan enabled one to see the real people, rather than a mere pictorial representation of them.

There was a display of metal artefacts all found or dug up in Wigston, and many of them dating from the Victorian period. Among the keys, stirrups and spurs there was a set of Victorian handcuffs. On another board there was an interesting display of Hosiery Knitting Needles many of which were over 100 years old and made for the old hand frames. A Mystery Object Quiz had been organised, and was well received. Indeed some of the items were a mystery to the organiser, and despite several plausible suggestions, from visitors, they are still a mystery.

In pride of place was a display of the pot shards and other items recovered from last year's Archaeological Dig. As a complete contrast, Bill Mead, a keen local Radio Ham, G5YY, had on show a superb display of early radio equipment, including valves and transmitters going back to 1932, Many of the pieces of equipment had been built by himself.

How easy it is to forget that History has no boundaries, and that many objects from the 1960's and 1970's are in need of conservation and preservation, let alone items which are 50 or more years old.

Many local artists hung paintings, in all some 45 paintings were on view, a large number of which depicted local subjects. There was also an extremely interesting display of embroideries by Irene Chapman, many using a very effective 3D technique.

Courtesy of Kembles of Wigston, we were able to show the video of the T.V. Documentary, "Vanishing Wigston", a few copies of which are still available, price £12.50. The bookstall contained all the Society's publications to date, which include the Bygone Wigston books, the Wigston Wander book and copies of all the 26 Transactions.

During the Open Day some 120 school children visited the display, but there was a very low and disappointing turn out of adults. The reasons for the poor attendance might have been the weather, poor advertising, or perhaps staging an event too much like last year's. Whatever the reason it was decided, at a subsequent meeting, that perhaps a new approach was needed for next year.

Ian Varey. A.G.M.

The business part of the day, the evening A.G.M. was attended by some thirty members.

The President in his annual address thanked everyone for their support during the year, and commented upon how active the G.W.H.S. had been during the year. New Transactions continued to be produced at regular intervals, during the summer there had been a very successful dig and the items recovered were now being recorded. His most gratifying news was that the Museum would be ready for opening during Easter 1983.

The Treasurer then presented his balance sheet and this was accepted unanimously. The election of officers then took place, with the following results.

President.... D.Lucas.

Chairman J.Colver,

Secretary.... Mrs. A. Hulls.

Memb. Sec.... B.Bilson.

Vice Chairman... M.Bingley.

Treasurer..... Mr. M. Hulls.

News Bulletin Ed. I. Varey,

The Ad Hoc. Committee would continue, so that all members who to attend meetings could do so.

Subscriptions are to remain unchanged at £2 per year, £1 for juniors and O.A.P.

There was a recommendation that future meetings should have a fixed date... this was fixed at the third Wednesday in every month. There being no other business the Meeting closed.

Ed.



A SPRING EVENT AT WHITEGATE FARM FOR THE OPENING OF THE WIGSTON MUSEUM

On the evening of Tuesday March 29th 1983, the President of the Society, with his family, members and distinguished guests, met at the Farm Shop, adjacent to the Museum building for the official opening of the 'Wigston Museum'.

Mrs York, aged 101 years, and thought to be the oldest resident in Wigston, together with Mrs Mary Beasley, nee Annie Wignall, aged 93 had willingly accepted an invitation to perform the Opening Ceremony.

At an appointed time, the two guests of honour were assisted from the Farm Shop, in the fading light, and through a persistent April drizzle, to the Museum door. Here amid the flashes and clicks of many cameras, an elaborate red satin ribbon was ceremonially cut. After many months of work, the Museum was now officially opened, and the assembled party left the evening gloom for the brightly illuminated interior. The

two celebrities were given comfortable seats by a warm fire, while the rest of the party gathered for the speeches.

The President introduced the Rev. Kevin Swain, of the United Reformed Church Long Street, and asked him to offer a prayer of dedication for the Museum.

In the president's address, he paid tribute to his father, Mr Orson Lucas, and his uncle, the late Mr Lesley Forryan, for their encouragement in, and the development of, his awareness of the local history of Wigston. Thanks were given to the members of G.W.H.S. for their help and support. Many other people were named and thanked for their contribution to the Museum, either for their donations for display or for their help in getting the museum ready.

At the end of the President's speech, Mrs York and Mrs Beasley each received a lovely basket of flowers, from the two youngest G.W.H.S. members, and I might add the most diligent workers in preparing the Museum. The Chairman then presented the ladies with an illuminated scroll, as the memento of the occasion.

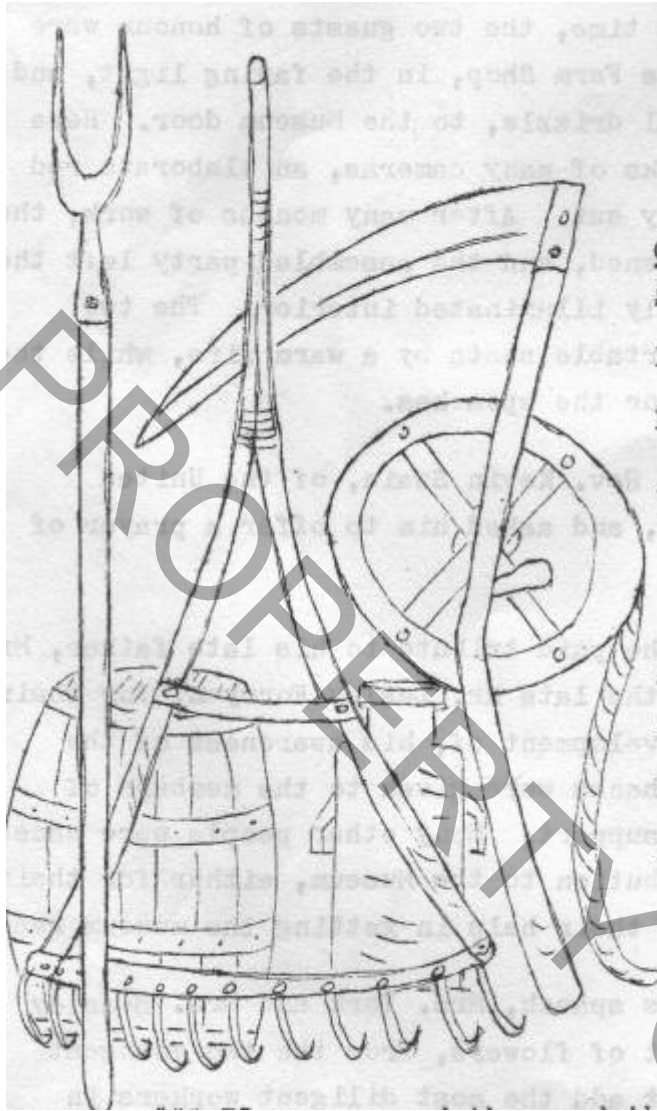
With the Museum well and truly open, there was an opportunity for the guests to view the exhibits, many of which have a particular local significance, and so stimulate many memories and stories of bye-gone days.

Radio Leicester reporters recorded a number of interviews and local Press made reports and took photographs, which were later published and so will help to publicise the museum.

The party then made its way back to the Farm Shop where a generous buffet with wine, awaited us. The organisers of which deserve a special thank you.

Many congratulations and good wishes were given to Duncan, for his enthusiastic and deep interest in Wigston's past and for bringing together such a superb collection. The Museum is well worth visiting and deserves the fullest support from the whole community.

Ruth Harper



MUSEUM

Opening Times

Sat & Sun 1.30pm to 5.00pm

From Easter to September plus all Bank

Holidays

At other times by arrangement with

Duncan Lucas tel 883375

Admission

40p per Adult

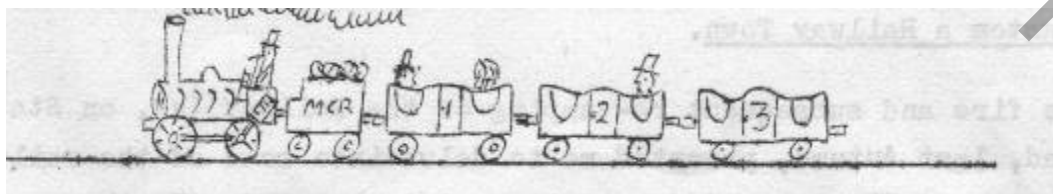
20p per Child or O.A.P.

£1.00 per family

Special Party Rates

G.W.H.S. members Free

Please spread the word that the
Museum exists and encourage people
to visit it.....



Wigston a Railway Town.

The fire and subsequent re-vamping of the Railway Inn, on Station Road, last autumn, prompted me to delve into some of the railway history of Wigston. A fascinating story

emerged. To those people who are cognisant with the railway history of Wigston, my apologies, I write for those who, like myself, were unaware of it.

After a little consideration, it becomes clear that the development of the railways was extremely important to the growth of the village, in late Victorian times.

1. The old Borough coat of arms had a pictorial representation of a locomotive's driving wheel, in gold. This connection has been maintained in the present Oadby and Wigston coat of arms. I quote from the Borough Guide... "On the green quarters are two pairs of narrow horizontal stripes in gold, heraldic railway lines, symbolizing the prosperity brought to Wigston by its long connection with the Railway Industry".

2. Even the most cursory of glances at the land between Wigston and South Wigston, marks it as Railway Land, despite the modern industrial estate. This is a large area and must have represented a significant railway complex.

3. The row of cottages, Midland Terrace, face the railway and are of distinctive railway architecture; and the large inn, formally known as the Railway Inn, clearly had a function greater than merely serving liquid refreshments!

These clues are now the only physical remains of an industry that was so important to Wigston past. In this first article I have tried to review the early history that led the Midland Railway Company to develop Wigston as an important railway servicing depot.

On the 1st. August 1837, just one month after Victoria's Coronation, the Act was finally passed, allowing the Midland Counties Railway Co. to build a line from Nottingham/Derby to Leicester and then onto Rugby to connect with the Birmingham-London Railway Company's line to London Euston.

The third and last portion of this line, extending from Leicester to Rugby, was constructed by the engineer McIntosh. On the 18th May 1840, when only one line of rails had been laid, a special train drawn by the engine 'VIVID' conveyed the directors from Leicester to Rugby and back. The completed railway was formally opened on Tuesday 30th. June 1840 and to the public on the following day. Wigston had entered the Railway Age.

This first railway line went South from Leicester, along the present route, over the Knighton viaduct and through Wigston, then South over the Crow Mill viaduct and on towards Rugby.' At Rugby the Company built a one bay platform for its trains adjoining the London-Birmingham Company's station. Here passengers changed trains for London. In the first week of operating the Leicester- Rugby extension, 7557 passengers were carried.

For the technically minded, the gauge was 4' 8½" and the ruling gradient 1:330. The rails were double headed, in five yard lengths, and weighed 77 lbs to the yard. The rails were placed in chairs and secured by wooden keys, the rail ends were held in joint chairs.

The 1841 Census Return gives six railway workers living in Wigston. One needs to remember at this time, just one year after the opening of the railway, and only eleven years after the opening of the Liverpool-Manchester railway, that jobs in the industry were not yet clearly defined. In the Census, four workers are given as railway labourers, this could mean anything. Another is given as a platelayer, and the sixth, living at the Railway Station House, is called a Policeman. This man was not a policeman in the twentieth century meaning of the word, though one of his jobs was looking after railway property. He was also station master, clerk, signal man and safety officer and generally responsible for all railway matters on his stretch of line. In the absence of any telegraph or proper signalling facilities this was a very responsible job.

By 1851, the Census Return gives only four railway workers in Wigston, a Station Master and his assistant, a railway labourer and a policeman. From this one must conclude that Wigston was at this time just a small village station on the main Leicester to Rugby line. No doubt the railway had made some impact upon the local community, making both travel and the movement of goods easier and cheaper. However, in Wigston the chief employers of labour were still Frame Knitting and Agriculture, and there were still no signs of the changes to come. Elsewhere events which were to alter Wigston's future were taking place. In 1844, the Midland Counties Railway merged with the North Midland, and the Birmingham-Derby Junction Railways to become the Midland Railway Company.

Increased traffic and ever increasing tolls paid to the London North Western Railway Company the new owners of the Rugby station and the route to London, forced the Midland Railway to look for its own new route to London. The suggestion was to strike south from Wigston, through Northamptonshire to Bedford and on to Hitchin to join the Great Northern's line to London, Kings Cross. Although an Act was obtained to build the line, in 1847, an improvement in the arrangements with the L.N.W. re- the use of the Rugby station plus using Midland rolling stock on the line to London saw the Act lapse. N. B. If a line had not been built within five years of enactment all rights were forfeit, and should the line be subsequently required, a new Act had to be obtained.

This is exactly what happened with the Leicester-Hitchin line. By the mid 1850's traffic was so heavy that the Midland again decided that it needed an alternative route to London. The Leicester-Hitchin line was re-enacted and work started at Wigston North Junction

Southwards to Great Bowden. Here the route joined the Rugby to Stamford line, thence to Market Harborough and so on to Hitchin to join the Great Northern line to London.

The formal opening was on May 7th, 1857. The first train of eighteen carriages left Hitchin at 7.33am. and reached Leicester at 10.50 am. There were now two routes to London, both passing through Wigston, but both passengers and goods were involved in changing trains.

Wigston must have become a busy junction with travellers to and from Birmingham to the counties South of Wigston, having to change trains here.

The 1861 Census Return reflects the growing importance of Wigston as a railway junction. The number of railway employees rose to twelve. There was now two station masters, the two stations being on the Rugby line and on the new Hitchin line. There were also three porters, two platelayers, three labourers and two railway policemen, for the two different stretches of track.

None of the early railway companies seems to have anticipated correctly the huge amount of traffic that would be generated by their existence. By 1862 all railway traffic had increased many fold and was doing every year. During 1862 over 3000 Midland trains were delayed on the way to London. In the same year the Midland Railway Company had to pay tolls of £193,000 to the London N.W. Company for the Rugby route to London, and £60,000 to the Great Northern Company for the Hitchin route to London.

The Midland Railway decided to seek its own route to London with its own terminus, in Act allowing the building of a line from Bedford (on the Hitchin line) to London, received the royal assent in 1863. This line together with the London terminus, St. Pancras station, was opened in 1868. As the track approached London, the Midland's line closely followed the route of the Great Northern's line. This accounts for the close proximity of Kings Cross, the Great Northern's terminus and St Pancras the Midland's terminus, which incidentally is still the London terminus for Leicester trains.

With the completion of their own route to London, the Leicester-Rugby line, which for thirty years had been the main passenger route to London from the East Midlands, sank back into the position of a branch line. Wigston however, did not decline in importance. There was the availability of cheap land, an all ready complex junction, all very close to Leicester, where room for expansion was less easily available. In fact because of the topography the railway route in Leicester and to the North is constricted by both deep cuttings and embankments. The closest area of flat land, to Leicester is the area between Wigston and South Wigston. This area was ideally suited for a maintenance and servicing depot, for both track and rolling stock. Furthermore there was no shortage of labour.

The Frame Knitting industry a traditional male occupation had declined and many men were either under employed or out of work. The railway began to take on more employees. The 1871 Census Return lists 25 railway employees, the third largest employer of male labour, after Frame Knitting and Agriculture, in the village. Within a decade there was a phenomenal growth in building and repairing railway rolling stock, together with a large engine shed. The 1881 Census Return gives 248 railway employees. The railway had become the largest employer of male labour in the village. There was also the beginnings of a house building boom, which later became South Wigston.

In the next bulletin I hope to show the range of railway work, and to show just how important the railway was to Wigston's development and prosperity, and then to briefly outline its ultimate demise.

Ian. R. Varey.

