

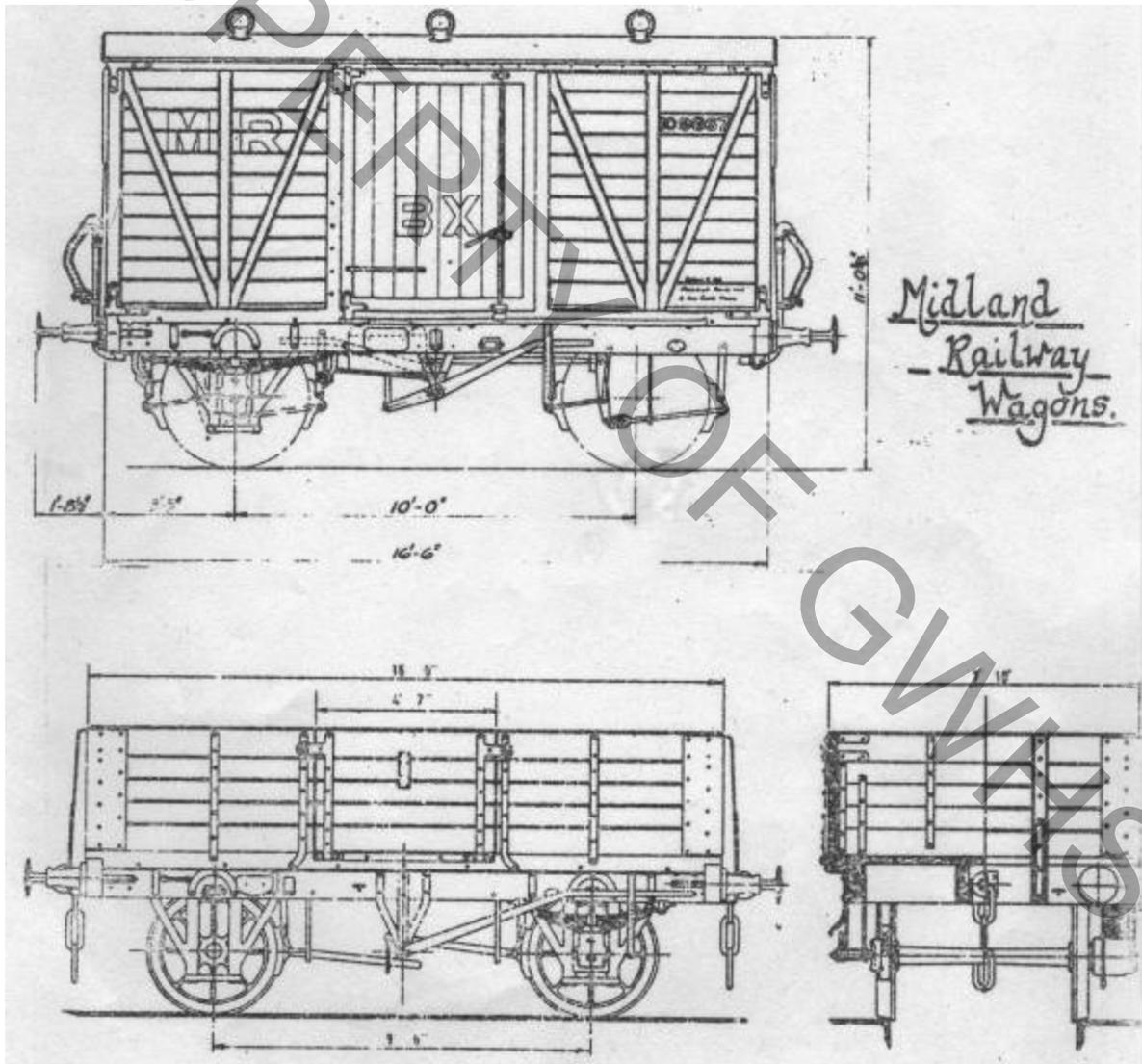


Greater Wigston Historical Society

White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna Leicestershire

Bulletin 7

October 1983



Winter Programme

Wednesday 19th Oct 1983 Wigston Slide Quiz and Members Evening

Wednesday 16th Nov 1983 'Wigston Through the Camera' - Bill Ward

December Not Yet Fixed

Wednesday 18th Jan 1984 'Frame Knitting' – Dr Marilyn Palmer

Wednesday 15th Feb 1984 A.G.M.

Wednesday 21st Mar 1984 'Dating Small Houses' - Ian Varey

Wednesday 18th Apr 1984 Spring Cleaning Session – At the Museum

+ A Film Evening to be arranged

All meetings (except April) to be held in the Committee Room at Wigston Liberal Club, Bull Head Street, Wigston.

A short business meeting at 7.30pm will be followed by the main programme at 8.00pm.

Please do your best to support these meetings

Any suggestions for further meetings please let me know.

Ian Varey.

Hon Membership Secretary wishes to remind some members that their 1983 subscriptions are still outstanding. The subscription remains unchanged, at £2.00. Cheques should be made payable to Greater Wigston Historical Society and sent to Mr B Bilson. 23 Thirlmere Road, Wigston, Leics. Or bring them along to the October meeting.

We are always on the lookout for new Members!!!

If you know anyone interested in Local History, tell them about the Society or better still bring them along to the next meeting!!!!

LEICESTERSHIRE LOCAL HISTQRY COUNCIL MEETINGS.

Monday 10th October. From Long Lane to Coalville, 150 years of Progress

Mr. D. Baker.

Monday 14th November. A Day in the Life of a Museum Curator.

Mr. S. Mullins.

Monday 12th, December. Members Evening.

Meetings are at 7.30pm at Community House, 133, Loughborough Road, Leics.

MUSEUM REPORT

After the initial opening of the museum, with the accompanying good publicity, attendance figures have steadily fallen. It was originally envisaged to open both Saturday and Sunday and all the Bank Holidays. However demand was not sufficient to maintain such a schedule. During the last two months the museum has been open on Sundays only, and even this has barely covered opening expenses, let alone overheads. The Museum is now closed until Easter, except by special arrangement with Duncan Lucas.

Between now and Easter we need a rethink about finances, manpower and general organisation. If you have any suggestions, or can help in any way please come along to the monthly meetings or let someone know about your ideas.

To have a Local Museum in Wigston is a real asset to the community.....How can we get our existence across?

How can we get people to visit the Museum?

If just one person in a hundred, from Oadby and Wigston, visited the museum that would be some 500 people a year, and nowhere near that number have been during this Summer Season!

WHAT CAN WE DO? IDEAS PLEASE! !!

JUNE '83 SUMMER VISIT.... TO MR. SEVAN'S MUSEUM IN PECKLETON.

On a warm summer evening, some fourteen members met outside the Brown Horse Inn in Peckleton village. Mr Bevan met us, and while the introductions were taking place, our eyes were wandering over some of the items exhibited in the garden. These included a mill stone brought from Barwell, various drinking troughs, a water pump, a stone from a cheese press, numerous saddle stones and many more objects. Mr. Bevan, now in his eighties, got the collecting bug early, and over many years he has amassed a fantastic collection of rural artefacts, things that were once so common and are now quite rare.

The collection is displayed in three areas, the first that we visited contained items connected with milk. Among the many dairy things, there were the other utensils used for processing milk. Butter churns, milk separators, butter rollers, butter pats and even the scales for weighing out the pounds of butter were on display. A variety of cheese making equipment was particularly interesting. It dates from a time when most farms were unable to sell all the fresh milk and so turned the surplus into cheese, which kept well until sold at some market or fair.

To make cheese, rennet was added to the milk, after some ten hours a thick curd would have formed and the watery whey was drained off. The curds would then be broken up and packed into muslin lined moulds, many of which Mr. Bevan had on show. If it was to be Stilton cheese nothing more than turning twice a day was done, as the cheese ripened naturally. If it was to be Leicester Cheese, colouring was added and the cheeses put into presses. Pressing produced a hard cheese which kept very well. Historically many tons of Leicestershire cheese was sold annually to the Navy. Just think, Nelson might well have had Red Leicester for his tea, on board H.M.S. Victory.

The second building was devoted to Farm Machinery and Farm Tools. One wall contained over forty different hand tools, each a wooden shaft with a variety of metal ends..... each one over the years evolved to do a specific job on the farm. Spades, dibbers, billhooks, thistle grubbers, drainage tools, log turners and hedging tools, to name but a few.

What was amazing was the wide range of tools, and the fact that Mr. Bevan not only knew the use of all the tools, but had actually used most of them himself, in earlier days.

As well as hand tools there were various pieces of harness, ploughs, harrows, one of which probably dated from the early nineteenth century, chaff cutters, root pulpers, one connected up to an early small petrol engine, and a wide variety of riddles, rakes, wheel jacks and drills for seeds.

Four seeds to a hole, said Mr. Bevan.....,

One for the pigeon, one for the-crow,

One to rot and one to grow.....

In the final building one corner had been partitioned off to make a typical Victorian Cottager's living room, complete with furniture, peg rugs, kitchen range etc. In fact a display of Victorian household items as good as could be found in any professional museum. Another part of the building was set out with blacksmith's and wheelwright's tools, including a Wheelwright's treadle lathe.

The list of items on display would take up many pages, it is suffice to say that each one, having been collected personally, has a story attached to it and Mr. Bevan's excellent recall and storytelling held us all spell-bound.

At 9.00 his wife and family called us in for coffee and biscuits, this was a very kind gesture and much appreciated. After Duncan had congratulated Mr. Bevan on having such a fine collection, and expressed our thanks for showing it to us, we took our leave.

This collection in Peckleton is well worth a visit..... Fascinating!

A final word must be said, I feel , about the lack of help from the County Museum Service to such small private museums. Yes financial resources are short but surely some effort could be made by the professionals to help the deserving amateurs!

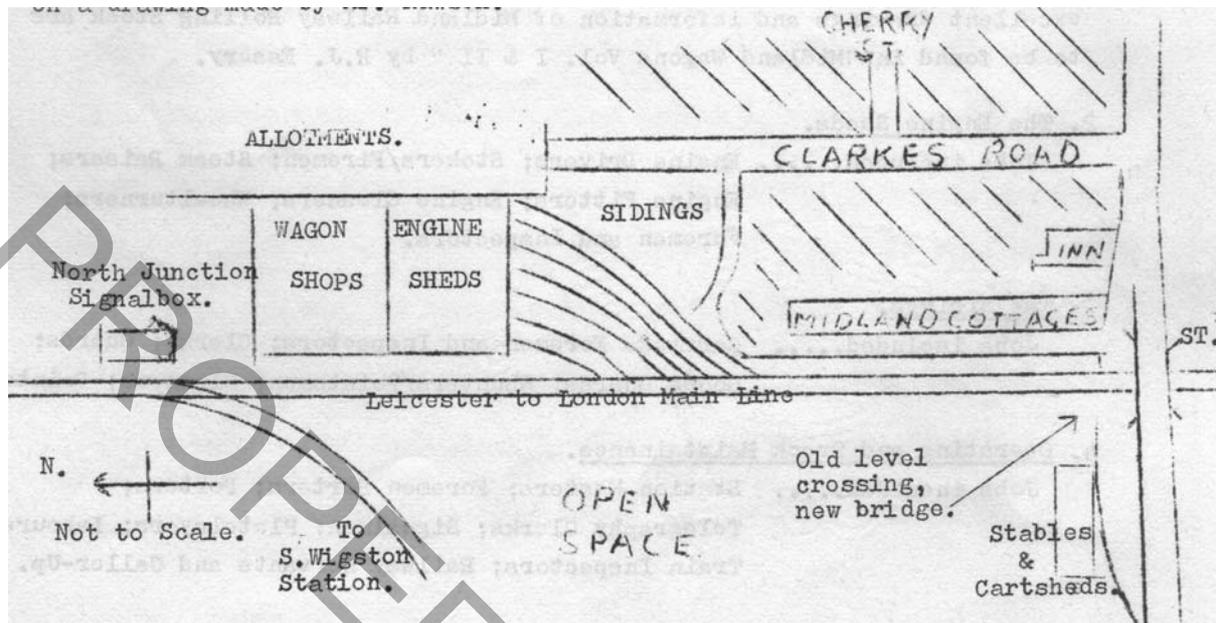
WIGSTON A RAILWAY TOWN.....Part Two.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the traditional Frame-flitting industry of Leicestershire, once the chief employer of labour, had declined to a small rump of an industry. The main Hosiery industry had moved into small factories with powered machines, and employed a largely feminine workforce. There might have been a serious male unemployment problem, not only in Leicester but in many of the county's industrial villages, if the spread of new Boot & Shoe factories and a growing engineering Industry to service the new factories, had not developed to fill the job vacuum. Anstey during this time changed from a frame knitting village to the second most important Boot & Shoe centre in the county.

Wigston, an industrial village almost entirely dependent on frame-knitting, saw similar fundamental changes during this period. A few Boot & Shoe factories did emerge as elsewhere in the county, but the future growth and prosperity of Wigston was assured, primarily, by the presence of the Midland Railway, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century the railway became a catalyst for growth.

The Midland Railway, itself, became the largest single employer of labour in Wigston. The presence of the railway, and its transport potential led to the building of new factories and small service industries.....this in turn led to a house building boom to provide homes for the many families moving into the area, because of the new jobs. To appreciate the change in the anatomy of Wigston, during this period, one must look at each of these aspects in turn.

The extent of the Railway's operation can be seen in this sketch map, based on a drawing made by Mr. Rawson.



Originally the road to S. Wigston, from Wigston (Station Road), crossed the railway by means of a level crossing. The piece of original road leading to the level crossing still exists as a small service road in front of the Railway Inn, now the 1852 Brewery Co. (What a name!!!). An old photograph in Mr. Lucas' collection shows the main line station, the level crossing and the Railway Inn, circa 1890. From this photograph and local memory, the station, now demolished, appears to be of the same design and proportions as Great Glen Station, which still survives and is now industrial premises.

By 1900 the level crossing was becoming increasingly inconvenient, due to the increase in the volume of traffic between Wigston and S. Wigston and so the present road bridge was built. Completed in 1901, the bridge is known to the locals as Spion Kop, after the Boer War battle of the same year. The main railway workshops were to the North of this bridge, beyond '20 Row' i.e. Midland Cottages.

From the job descriptions of the railway employees it is possible to determine the range of activities undertaken at Wigston, prior to the First World War, when the Railway complex was at its peak.

There seem to have been four main areas of activity.

1. The Wagon Shops.

Jobs included,... Wagonsmiths; Wagon Builders; Wagon Lifters; Wagon

Repairers; Wagon Painters; Blacksmiths and Strikers; Wagon Foremen and Inspectors; Brake Repairers and Storekeepers and clerks.

(The wagons on the cover would be a familiar sight in Wigston.... other excellent drawings and information of Midland Railway Rolling Stock are to be found in "Midland Wagons Vol. I & II " by R.J. Essery.

2. The Engine Sheds.

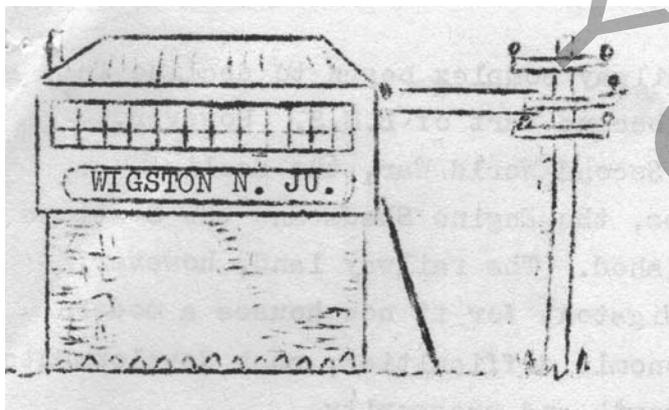
Jobs included..... Engine Drivers; Stokers/Firemen; Steam Raisers; Engine Fitters; Engine Cleaners; Wheel turners; Foremen and Inspectors.

3. The Sidings.

Jobs included,... Carriage Foremen and Inspectors; Clerks; Guards; Goods Guards; Shunters/Pointsmen; Cleaners; Painters.

if. Operating and Track Maintenance.

Jobs included..... Station Masters; Foremen Porters; Porters; Telegraphy Clerks; Signalmen; Platelayers; Labourers; Train Inspectors; Railway Servants and Caller-Up.



The Railway by providing hundreds of jobs, set into motion a chain reaction of events. There were more jobs than local people, and so many people from outside Wigston, and indeed from outside the County, moved into the area. This gave rise to a demand for a large number of houses. Building houses, not only attracted more people, but also new industries and

factories. This generated more commercial activity and prosperity, and incidentally more business for the Railway.

One such immigrant, though slightly earlier than this, was the grandfather of a Society member. In 1873 Mr Rawson's grandfather moved, with his wife and family, from Rotherham to Wigston, to become the signalman at Wigston North Junction. This was just one of the many families that moved into Wigston during the next twenty years.

Most of this new development took place west of the railway, and between 1880-1900 South Wigston was built and established as an "Industrial New TOWN", The Development of

which is worthy of further study In Wigston, itself, many of the terraced streets were built, at this time, as the many house date stones and road names suggest. During this period, in practically every house, in the streets around Clarkes Road / Pullman Road, there was someone working for the railway. However, very few houses were built and owned by the railway..., those that were include Midland Cottages, the Station Master's house in Clarkes Road, and a few houses now demolished, near the Railway Inn. The vast majority of houses both in S. Wigston and Wigston were built by local builders and speculators and then rented out.

The population in Wigston between 1880 and 1900 more than doubled. At this time Wigston must have been a place of tremendous vitality and growth. Such rapid expansion must have caused many social problems, but it also produced many beneficial 'spin off' effects. It brought prosperity to a wide cross section of the community and raised Wigston from a village to an Urban status. Among those who benefitted from this growth were the..... brick makers and the building trades, the shopkeepers and tradesmen, the craftsmen and all those involved in the service industries from the Gas company to the Chimney Sweep.

This prosperity is also reflected in Wigston's Public Buildings, especially the churches, Fredrick Street Chapel and School Room, Moat Street Methodist Church and St. Thomas' S. Wigston were all built in the 1880's.

After the First World War, the actual railway complex began to decline in importance. In 1923 The Midland Railway became part of L.M.S. However, apart from increased activity during the Second World War, the decline continued. Over the years the Wagon Shops, the Engine Sheds and the Stations all closed and all were eventually demolished. The railway land, however, brought a second round, of prosperity to Wigston, for it now houses a modern industrial estate, and despite recent economic difficulties, such developments have been vital to Wigston's continued growth and prosperity.

The last link with the railway, apart from the track which still runs through the town, will be broken later this year, Mr Rawson's signalbox at Wigston North Junction is to be closed and the 'operations' centred on a new computerised signal box in Leicester, Close inspection of the area around Clarkes road has revealed a remaining artefact of Wigston's Railway History,..., namely a rusted gas lamp standard. This lump of rusting metal, outside the old Railway Inn, is worth a second look. The lamp post is one of the old Midland Railway designs, which once illuminated all their stations and surrounds, from Carlisle to St, Pancras, and of course that one time railway junction on the main London Line, WIGSTON, Ian. R, Varey.

NOTICE.....NOTICE..... .NOTICE,

First meeting of the Winter.....

October 19th. at 7.30pm, Wigston Liberal Club.

"WIGSTON QUIZ"Prize...A Bottle of Sherry!!

ALL MEMBERS ARE ASKED TO BRING A FRIEND ALONG !!!

Make it a good evening!!..... See you there Wednesday 19th.Oct,

FOOTNOTE

If you have any suggestions for the names of the roads on the new estate...Wigston Harcourt.... Let us Know.,.

Names relating to Wigston Past , or Wigston Worthies might be appropriate..