



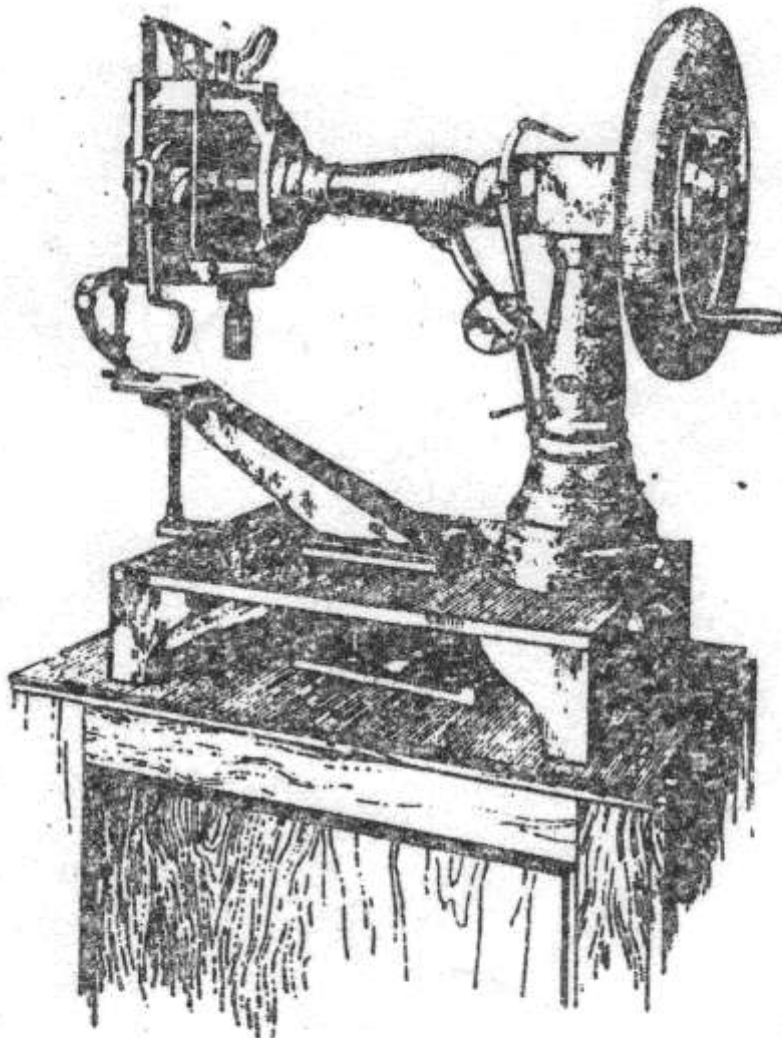
# Greater Wigston Historical Society

White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna Leicestershire

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## BULLITIN 11

## FEB '85



*Shoemaker's sewing-machine, developed by W. S. Clark  
in the 1860s*

## Notices

16th January Wednesday 7.30 pm.

"Wigston and the 1881 Census."

A workshop session for everyone.

20<sup>th</sup> February Wednesday 7.30 pm

A.G.M. Meeting

plus Members Evening...photos, slides, treasures bring them along for others to see.

20th March Wednesday 7.30 pm

to be arranged....

THESE MEETINGS AT WIGSTON LIBERAL CLUB, COMMITTEE ROOM 7.30pm.

17<sup>th</sup> April Wednesday 7.30 pm.

Visit to All Saints Church, Wigston.

Meet in the Church Yard or if wet in the Church porch.

15<sup>th</sup> May Wednesday 7.30 pm

Evening Coach Tour

Leicestershire Villages and Countryside

Guided by Duncan Lucas

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## **SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Subscriptions for 1985 are due at the A.G.M. meeting in February. At this meeting it will be discussed whether to increase them or keep them at the present rate. Members will be informed in due course.

I am preparing some notes on Wigston Pubs, Inns and Beer houses. If anyone has any reminiscences anecdotes, name changes, information about landlords and 'character's please jot them down for me or get in touch. My thanks in advance.

Ian Varey 150 Welford Road, Wigston. Leicester. LE8 1SN

## **NEW MEMBERS**

New Members are always welcome, so, just come along to the meetings and make yourself known. You will be sure of a warm welcome, Ed.

## **LEICESTERSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY COUNCIL. 1985 PROGRAMME.**

Early Railway Architecture with slides

Mr, F. Hartley, Leicestershire Museum Service.

Monday March 11th 7.30 pm

The Restoration and Care of Archives

Mr. G, Bloodworth, Assistant Keeper (Conservation) Records Office.

Monday April 13th 7.30 pm

Adult Education and Local History

Mr, R. Greenall, Adult Education Dept, Leicester University.

Tuesday May 21st 7.30 pm .

A.G.M. at Desford, by courtesy of the Desford Local History Group,  
Leicestershire and the Battle of Bosworth.

Dr. D. Williams. History Dept, Leicester University.

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### **Report of the Society's October Meeting,**

Seventeen members heard Mr Ian Varey give an illustrated talk on Heraldry. He traced the early history and development of Heraldry and went on to explain how the 'art form' became a 'science' with the formation of the College of Heralds in 1483 a body still in existence today.

With the help of some printed hand-outs, we were then introduced to some of the rather complex Rules of Heraldry, such as colours, geometric designs, mythical beasts and family differences all with Old French names.

After the talk there were many questions and comments, indicating that much interest had been aroused. A vote of thanks was then given to the speaker for a most interesting and colourful talk, and the meeting closed at 9.15pm.

### **Report of the Society's November Meeting,**

This meeting was moved from our traditional Wednesday date to the third Friday of the month, to enable us to hold the Magic Lantern Show in the

Concert Room of the Wigston liberal Club. It was a wise move, for there was a good sized audience, made up of Society Members and the general public, Duncan had dusted off his splendidly large and antiquated Epidiascope and treated us to some excellent black and white glass transparencies, on a variety of County subjects, dating from the 1890's up to sometime just after the Second World War. The County windmills as they stood in the 1930 's made a fine section as did the various pictures of the Fire Brigades, both in action shots and as set pieces showing off both men and machines.

The well informed audience was able to add many additional comments and facts to Duncan's excellent commentary as both village-scenes and long gone Leicester streets were shown and identified.

It was with some disappointment that the last slide was shown, and after a vote of thanks to Duncan the official meeting closed, Only to carry on for some time afterwards unofficially in enthusiastic conversation due to the memories evoked by those old pictures!

### **Report on the Society's December Meeting**

Only fourteen members were able to attend our first Christmas party, which was a pity as those present had a very good evening. A big thank-you to Mrs Bingley and Mrs Lanston who bought and prepared the food and wine. Just before the evening got underway they and the other lady members set out a splendid buffet, Ian had organised some traditional party games and quizzes including one on Wigston which is printed in this Bulletin for those people who were unable to attend.

Midway through the evening to the accompaniment of seasonal music the buffet was consumed and there was much enjoyable conversation such as these member's evenings always seem to generate. Those present resolved to spread the word so that next year the attendance might be greater.



## **Boots and shoes in Wigston**

Up to the 1850's the people of Wigston, like the rest of the population walked the streets and lanes in 'Handmade' boots and shoes. They were bought and often made by the local cobbler, who was to be found in every village and town. If the footwear was not of local origin, it would almost certainly have been made by Northampton shoemakers, who were organised by middlemen into a system of outworkers similar to our own Frame Knitting industry. Between 1850 and 1900, there was a period of slow mechanisation and gradually a factory based production system overtook the industry. The resistance of the Northampton workers to accept the new machines and factory systems was one of the major reasons for the emergence of the Boot and Shoe industry in Leicestershire.

The right type of skilled labour, due to the decline of Frame Knitting, was available, as were the small workshops, which once held the frames. There was no resistance to new methods and so as the various shoemaking processes became mechanised purpose built factories with the latest machines were built. This did not exclude the small handmade trade, nor the small workshop specializing in just one process. In Wigston all these aspects of the industry were represented, from factories to individual craftsmen. This move into larger factories, by the industry, coincided with the development of South Wigston in the 1880's and 1890's so the shoe factories were located there, while the smaller workshop concerns were in Wigston where the old knitting frame workshops were found.

It is interesting to note that mechanisation enabled shoemakers to change styles and fashions more easily and yet maintain volume production. Probably for this reason Leicestershire became the centre for ladies and children's shoes, while Northampton retained the men's trade. For the last 100 years Boot and Shoe making has been a major Leicestershire industry, second only to the hosiery trade.

In many Leicestershire villages boot and shoe making became the dominant industry, Earl Shilton, Anstey, Sileby, In Anstey for example between 1860 and

1900 over 20 shoemaking firms of various sizes opened. They totally replaced the once dominant Frame knitting industry of the village

**1841 Census Returns    Wigston Magna    Boot and Shoe Workers**

Cordwainers and shoemakers

**1851 Census Returns    Wigston Magna    Boot and Shoe Workers**

Cordwainers and shoemakers

**1861 Census Returns    Wigston Magna    Boot and Shoe Workers**

Boot and She makers	10
Binder	2
Closer	1
Finisher	1

**1871 Census Returns    Wigston Magna    Boot and Shoe Workers**

Boot and Shoes Maker	13
Shoe Rivitter	3
Boot Nailer	4
Bonds Shoes	1
Boot Closer	1
Finisher	1
Warehouseman	1
Clerk in Boot Warehouse	1
India Rubber Worker	3    (in Leicester)
Thomas Smith    Bell Street	Shoe Manufacturer:    4 men

**1881 Census Returns    Wigston Magna    Boot and Shoe Workers**

Shoe Maker	20
Machinist B/S	2
Clicker	2
Rivitter	2
Nailer	6
Fitter	1
Thomas Smith    Bell Street	Shoe Making Master 3 men, 1 boy, 1 Girl
Robert Day    Granville Road	Shoe Manu@ 31 men, 13 women, 3 boys & 3 girls

For various reasons the Boot and Shoe industry in Wigston was rather more low key for while the industry was economically important it never dominated as at Anstey or Earl Shilton. In Wigston, Frame Knitting as an important industry, continued well into the second half of the nineteenth century. This was achieved by increased diversification, increased mechanisation and an early move towards factory methods of production. Secondly alternative employment was available for the men folk, both at the Midland Railway Wagon Works and Sidings and in the brick making and building trades, both of which were rapidly expanding to build both South Wigston and Victorian Wigston Magna.

The Census figures from 1841 to 1881 show a gradual increase in the number of shoemaking jobs, which is indicative of a move away from the individual craftsman to the factory. The sewing machine invented in the 1850's was the first machine to be used by the industry. This was followed nailer's and riveters invented in the 1880's. Examples of these early machines and many other artefacts connected with the Boot and Shoe Industry can be seen in the splendid displays at Northampton Museum. Another interesting fact arising from the 1881 census are the differences between the firms of Thomas Smith and Robert Day. Thomas Smith is described as a master employing five people. He lived at 50 Bell St. (Where the present Co-op Supermarket is now) and on the Wigston map of 1886 you can see his workshop in the back garden of his house. Almost certainly they would be making shoes using the old craft method, perhaps with the aid of a sewing machine. Robert Day on the other hand with 50 employees would have been in a factory using the latest machines. What is interesting is that in this transition period to the factories there was room in the Market for both kinds of production.

The making of shoes involved five distinct stages.

### **1. CLICKING.**

Patterns are placed on dyed leather and are cut out with sharp knives, N.B, the upper of just one shoe may be made from as

many as twelve separate pieces of leather.

## **2. CLOSING.**

This is the stitching of the pieces together to make the Upper.

From 1860 on adapted sewing machines.

## **3. ROUGHSTUFF MEN.**

These cut out the heavier leather insoles, soles and heels and matched them into pairs.

## **4. LASTING.**

The uppers are joined/stitched to the soles and heels.

## **5. FINISHING,**

Shoes are trimmed, polished, matched in pairs and boxed.

To cope with these stages, factories took on a distinctive, functional design. In Northamptonshire buildings are often three storeys high in Leicestershire generally only two storeys high. A most distinctive feature is the half cellar. Here the cool, slightly damp dark conditions are conducive to the storing of the sheets of leather, known as 'butts'. The butts were hoisted to the top of the building where the Clickers worked and the Closers, who only needed light sewing machines. (In the taller N'ton buildings the Clickers were on the top floor and the closers were on the first floor.) The Rough stuff men and the Laster's with their heavier machines and presses were on the ground floors as were the finishing rooms and warehouse.

In Canal St. South Wigston this arrangement of cellar and two storeys can clearly be seen in the old Stamford Shoe Works of John Gamble and sons, built about 1890.

For information after 1881 one must rely on the various trade directories. By the First World War the translation of the industry to factories was virtually complete and this is reflected in the decline of named individual makers. Even

within the list of individuals few would be shoemaking craftsmen, completing finished shoes! No most would be sub contracted workers concentrating on just one of the five stages of production. As the Shoe Closers did in the old Frame Knitting Shop at 5 Moat Street, Wigston.

Finally the Directories show a period of decline; by 1936 there were four factories, all now closed. The most recent, was the smallest, in the old Frame Knitting Shop on Spa Lane, trading under the name of Orchid Shoe at the time of its closure some two or three years ago. However despite the closure of these older factories the industry is still represented in Wigston by two firms on new industrial estates E.P. Shoes on Clarks Road and W. Marlow & Sons on Gloucester Crescent.

Ian Varey

**SHOEMAKERS WIGSTON & SOUTH WIGSTON 1887 to 1936**

NAME	LOCATION	1887	1896	1904	1912	1936
Henry Ward	W	1	-	-	-	-
Joseph Harrison	W	1	-	-	-	-
Joseph Crane	W	1	-	-	-	-
Jesse Farmer	W	1	1	1	-	-
William Hurst	W	1	1	1	-	-
Joseph Sampson	W	1	-	-	-	-
William Smith	W	1	1	-	-	-
Elias Byford	W	-	1	-	-	-
Thomas Colver	W	-	1	1	-	-
Alfred Goodman	W	-	1	-	-	-
William Pearce	W	-	1	-	-	-
Thomas Callis	W	-	1	1	-	-
John Woolman	W	1	-	-	-	-

Co-Op x 2	W	MANU	MANU	New Factory	At Knighton	
Groves & Foulston	W	MAKER	MAKER	MAKER	MANU	-
Thomas Smith	W	MAKER	MAKER	MAKER	MAKER	-
Rowley & Cooper	W	-	-	MAKER	MAKER	-
Amzo Silverwood	W	-	-	MAKER	-	-
Samual Phipps	W	-	-	MANU	MANU	Orchid?
Walter Bruin	W	-	-	-	MANU	-
James Chaimberlain	W	-	-	MANU	-	-
George Bray	SW	1	-	-	-	-
John Grant	SW	1	1	1	1	-
William Brooks	SW	-	1	1	1	-
James Knight	SW	-	1	-	-	-
Henry Lief	SW	-	1	-	-	-
Thomas Pearce	SW	-	1	-	-	-
Troone & Co	SW	MANU	MANU	-	-	-
Alfred Daltons	SW	-	MANU	-	-	-
John Gamble & Sons	SW	-	MANU	MANU	MANU	MANU
Wright & Crocketts	SW	-	MANU	MANU	MANU	MANU
S.Wigston Shoe Co.	SW	-	-	-	MANU	-
J W Black & Co	SW	-	-	-	-	MANU

\* Wright & Corkett in 1904 became Orson Wright & Sons

\*\* Thomas Smith in 1912 becomes Walter Smith .. .. his son?

W... Wigston SW... South Wigston 1... Individual

MAKER... small but more than an individual

MANU... Manufacturer