



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

Bulletin 16

OCT' 86



St. Wystan's c.1800

NOTICES ... NOTICES ... NOTICES ... NOTICES ... NOTICES

PROGRAMME

Our winter meetings will be held on the third Wednesday of the month in the Committee Room of Wigston Liberal Club, on Bull Head Street. Meetings start at 7.30pm

Wednesday 15th October 1986

“Wigston of Old”

Slide show by Bill Ward

Thursday 19th November 1986 (Note Change of Date)

“Development of Church Architecture in Leicestershire”

Slide Show and Talk by Ian Varey.

Wednesday 17th December 1986

“Christmas Evening”

Our third Christmas Social

Wednesday 21st January 1987

“Bygone Leicestershire on Film”

Film show and talk by Rob Foxon.

Wednesday 18th February 1987

“A.G.M. and Workshop Evening”

Wednesday 18th March 1987

“Combined meeting with Wigston Civic Society”

Details yet to be finalized.....

MEMBERSHIP / SUBSCRIPTIONS

New members are always welcome.... Just come along to any of the meetings and make yourself known.

The subscription is £2 a year, or £1 for O.A.P.'s and those under 18 years of age. The treasurer Mr. Brian Bilson of 23 Thirlemere Road, Wigston is able to sort out membership enquiries and receive subscriptions.

Editor's Note

The publishing dates for the Bulletin are the 1st Feb, 1st June and 1st Oct. Please let the Editor have articles three clear weeks before those dates.

Editor.. Ian Varey, 150 Welford Road, Wigston, Leicestershire

MEETING OF THE GWHS AT WIGSTON LIBERAL CLUB 17/9/86 7.30pm

Some thirty members were present, also Mrs Gulliver, Secretary of the Wigston Civic Society. Ian Varey was in the Chair.

The meeting was called to discuss the imminent sale of the Master Hosier's House and Workshop on Bushloe End, Wigston.

The meeting opened by discussing the situation as it stands at the moment.

The property is available for purchase before it goes onto the open market. A time factor is involved but no specific date has been set! The asking price is £55,000 but the property is in need of repair, especially the roof and upper floors. If it can be acquired the additional funds would be needed before it could be opened as a Museum of Frameknitting.

The Leicestershire Museum Service has been approached but they have no funds available to help with our purchase price.

So far Duncan Lucas has started circulating businesses and other likely sources for donations and pledges of support. This letter was read out to the meeting and a copy was placed in the minutes.

After some discussion among members as to the importance of this building and its potential, the chairman asked if the Society was prepared to commit itself to the project. That is trying to acquire the property along with other interested bodies and giving our whole hearted support to raising money to such ends. The proposal was passed unanimously.

There then ensued a "think tank" organizations or individuals who might be asked for donations or help. Emphasis was placed on keeping the project low key for the time being and not going public at this time... a) for fear of losing the building on the open market, b) to prevent vandalism which is a major problem.

Possible contacts...

Leicester Historic Fund	Hosiery Union
Hosiery Manu. Association	National Heritage Fund
Frameknitters Livery Comp. London	E.M. Tourist Board
Architectural Historical Fund, 17 Carlton House Terrace??	
Fludes of Hinckley ... Charity Trust	
Sketchleys PLC	Sainsburys PLC
Co-Op	Wolsey
Pecks	Roy Kemp family
Ellis family H W Donnisthorpe	

Contact the following and ask for further suggestions....

Dr. P Boylan Leics. Museums
Dr. M Palmer Leics. Industrial History Society
Ruddington Museum Notts.

Oadby and Wigston Council, Policy and Resources committee have already discussed in a preliminary was this matter and have asked John Burton to look into this matter and report back.

It was resolved that the Society should write to John Burton asking that the officers of the various societies meet with him at the earliest opportunity.

Some discussion followed about ownership on acquisition... a Charitable Trust seems the most like possibility. Repairs, upkeep, maintenance, public safety were all briefly mentioned. It was agreed that this was vital but some way in the future at the moment.

Other suggestions then followed where help may be obtained....

- Russell Bott – Leicester Textile Society
- Firms on the Wigston Industrial Estates eg Brookes, Spillers
- Stephenson’s of Ambergate Derbyshire
- Dr Hoskins should be informed and asked for the use of his name
- Wigston’s Foundation Charities Educational Use.
- Wyggeston Hospital Trust

It was then suggested that Duncan’s Front Letter should exclude the price of the property or increase the figure to include repairs and alterations to a Museum.

Bill Ward asked that the minutes record that some members of the Carter family were present and that their enthusiasm for the project was much appreciated. The rest of the meeting readily agreed with this point of view.

If it became necessary members were then asked if they would support the project financially. The meeting was heartened by the way, most readily said that they would. The view was also expressed that if we had to go public many other Wigston inhabitants would probably support us as well.

There being little else that could be done now, it was agreed that the officers of the Society be given authority to write to or meet anyone who might be able to help or give donations and that a meeting should be called before the monthly Oct meeting if it became necessary. The meeting then closed at 9.15pm.

NOTES ON THE FIRST WIGSTON SCHOOLS

At a meeting of the Churchwardens of Wigston in 1618, the decision was taken to set aside, from the Poor Stock, the sum of £14. “the interest there of to pay for the poor children’s learning forever” This was the beginning of the Free School Money, the annual interest going towards the payment of the School Master. What was the Free School they had in mind, and where it was held?

Since Henry VIII’s time the village had been known as Wigston Two Steeples. Both churches had been kept in reasonable repair until the mid 16th century, when St. Wistan’s fell into disuse.

Why this came about is not known for sure, but it may be as a result of the Act of 1547 suppressing Chantry. The doubt arises as St. Wistan's was not founded as a Chantry, but it was of course a chapel dependent upon mother church of All Saints.

The demise of St. Wistan's continued in the reign of Edward VI when the chalice and ornaments were sold. The church did come back into use, for the short reign of Catholic Mary, but no more services were held after 1577.

A school was in being in the disused nave of St Wistan's by the early 1580's. We know this because of some evidence given at the Archdeaconry of Leicester Court Proceedings in 1633. At this enquiry, Sir William Faunt, Squire of Foston, stated that he had gone to school at St Wistan's 47 to 50 years beforethis gives us a date in the early 1580's.

The same witness, also, told how his schoolmaster had once given him part of an hour glass, broken by a drunkard who had entered the church. The other half the schoolmaster gave to a girl pupil, one of Hall's daughters. Here is proof that girls as well as boys were taught at the school at this time.

Not only the children of the wealthy attended the school. In his will, dated 10th July 1583, an ordinary cottager, John Browne, left twenty shillings to his son Francis stating that he wanted him to remain at school until he could read and write.

The schoolmasters, from at least 1632, were the vicars, with young scholars, just down from the universities, as assistants. A vicar or curate could not teach without a license from the Bishop (the Bishop of Lincoln in those days). To get a license one had to subscribe to the Oath of Supremacy, imposed by Queen Elizabeth I on "all schoolmasters and public and private teachers of children". There are books of these subscriptions to the oath, and they give us an idea of the numbers of schools and the teachers and their qualifications. According to the Canons of 1604 issued from the Archdeaconry of Leicester, they had to give details of where the master intended to teach. England had, of course, become Protestant under Queen Elizabeth and to keep it so, no instruments were more effective than its schools. The signing of the Oath showed that the schoolmaster recognized the supremacy of the Queen in church matters.

Some of the names of the Wigston schoolmasters have come down to us from Subscription Books ...1632. Stephen Pack of Knossington subscribed as schoolmasters. As did Zachery Burrough in 1634 / 35, he had a B.A. degree from Magdalen, he was also the vicar. In 1662 Thomas Johnson subscribed to keep a private school 'chiefly for parties' that is the smaller children.

Humphrey Evans subscribed in 1663 to keep a petty school, "within the church deer" Presumably the church porch of All Saints, the main school being in St. Wistan's.

The main subjects taught were reading and writing some arithmetic and probably Latin as well which was still the main language of the academic world at that time.

Wigston in the last quarter of the 16th century was an expanding and prosperous place. There were about eighty families in 1563, according to the Lincoln Diocese Return, and this increased to between 120 and 130 households in 1603. As part of the rising standard of living came the demand for education. This was especially so among the many freeholders who might send a son into the church or commerce and so created a local demand for the tree 'R's and Latin.

No records have been found showing that boys went straight from Wigston Free School to Cambridge, though lists do exist of entrants from Leicestershire schools to five of the colleges. The picture is therefore not complete. However, it is not too fanciful to imagine that a pupil might have begun his education in Wigston and then progressed to a larger school say in Leicester or Market Harborough, and so on to Cambridge or Oxford.

John Dand, for example, who was head of the Free School at Kibworth for thirty years, was educated at Oakham and St. John's Cambridge. But he was a native of Wigston and it is probable that he started his education at the school held in the nave of St. Wistan's Church, Wigston.

There is evidence of other small schools in Wigston that emerged and disappeared in the 18th century ... it was a great period for Charitable Schools. In 1755, for example, Henry Clarke endowed a school for twelve girls at Wigston, with a sum which would bring in an income of £5.

Father Green hints at two other mysterious schools, about which no one has yet unearthed the facts! On a will there is the mention of a Freeschool Lane ... Not the one in Leicester ... but at Wigston Fields, roughly on the site of the present Granville Road. Again a mysterious Lady Wyndham Hanmer, whose solicitors were in Fleet Street London, endowed money for a school in Wigston.

Writing in 1807, John Nichols, in his History of Leicestershire, says of St. Wistan's ... "The east end of it is used as a school house, the other parts for the master's house, fuel store, barn and stables." On page 386 of Volume IV, he includes a plate showing the adapted church, with square headed windows in place of the Gothic arches, and a chimney mid way along the roof.

A National Society list of schools compiled in 1818, shows Wigston as having 90 pupils. It was quite a large school compared with surrounding villages, though one must remember that the village was quite industrialized by then, especially Frameknitting.

Of all the inhabitants who agreed to set aside the £14 as free school money in 1618, none was above the rank of yeoman farmer. Not only was money allocated for the parish school but also there was coal money, bread money and the 'poore stock'. They kept careful account of these funds. The records for the period 1663 -1718 survive. They used to be kept in the parish chest in All Saints Church, but now they are kept in the care of the Records Office. In Nichol's History of Leicestershire he prints a list of the Parish Charities. Such a list used to hang in the Parish Church but is no longer there.

Sums of money for the Parish Fund were either left in wills or raised by levies. These would then be lent out in varying amounts, at six percent interest, to Wigston people or those of neighboring villages. Out of the interest the charities were administered.

Here, then, in Wigston in late Tudor and Stuart times, was a vigorous, self-governing community. Unhindered by a resident Lord of the Manor, with no Monastic house nearby to interfere in their affairs, the free peasant proprietors were able to come to their own decisions in open discussions.

From the Parish Stock they relieved much poverty and educated those of the village children whose parents wished to take advantage of the school, boys and girls, rich and poor alike. In doing so they showed a readiness to respond to the national movement, at the Reformation, towards the beginning of an organized system of schooling, which has been with us ever since.

The schoolmasters at the little school of St Wistan taught the children of every generation to read and write for more than 250 years, until the National School opened its doors in 1839. But that is a story for another time.

By Edna Taylor.

Information

Anyone with information, articles, pictures, and stories about National Schools or with memories of attending the school as a pupil please get in touch with Edna who is very interested in finding out about The National School in Wigston.
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