



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

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**Bulletin 24 April 1989**



## Programme of Meeting June 1989 to February 1990

### **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> June 1989**

Coach Outing to Borough Hill followed by Supper  
Meet 7pm in Liberal Club Car Park

### **Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> August 1989**

Barbecue at White Gate Farm, Wigston  
Joint meeting with the Civic Society.

### **Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> September 1989**

Victorian Wigston – Bernard Elliott  
7.30pm Wigston Liberal Club

### **Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> October 1989**

Local Scenes on Old Picture Postcodes – Tricia Berry (Might be changed to  
November, See Below)

### **Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> November 1989**

To be confirmed (this speaker when chosen might come to the October Meeting  
Instead)

### **Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> December 1989**

Christmas Party  
7.30 pm Wigston Liberal Club

### **Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> January 1990**

Canals Mr Stephen Howse  
7.30pm Wigston Liberal Club

### **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> February 1990**

AGM  
7.30 Wigston Liberal Club

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**STOP PRESS ... STOP PRESS ... STOP PRESS ... STOP PRESS**

### **EARLY SETTLEMENT IN LEICESTERSHIRE**

An evening of local history : with speakers:- Peter Liddle, Paul Bowman and aerial  
photography for the Leicester Mercury : Organized by Derek Lewin

Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> June Guthlaxton Hall 7.30pm  
Refreshments Music Admission Fee to be charged  
All proceeds to Wigston Framework Knitting Museum

Editors Notes ...

GWHS is very pleased to have received a 'highly commended certificate' from the  
newly created Annual Heritage Award Scheme, for our bulletins and transactions. A  
very welcome recognition to all members who have contributed to these over the

years, We were represented at the award ceremony by Doris Chandler and Edna Taylor.

In 1988 winner for the best non – County Council project was Rutland Railway Museum, Cottesmore. Also highly commended was the Bell Foundry Museum, Loughborough and the Hallaton Museum. Some interesting places to visit during the summer.

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The Bulletin is published three times a year on 1<sup>st</sup> February, June and October. Articles etc. should be given to either of the joint Editors three clear weeks before publication date please.

Joint Editors:-

Mrs Chris Smart 16 Maidwell Close Wigston

Mrs Tricia Berry 11 Hayes Road Wigston

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### **January Meeting .....**

On Wednesday January 18<sup>th</sup> 24 members of the Society met at the Liberal Club to hear Mr D W Howse of the Family History Society give a talk on “Your Family Tree”

Using his own family tree as an example, he told the Society how he came to start tracing his family free and then led us through the primary and secondary sources available to any budding genealogist.

Most family tree historians start their search with a family bible and then using birth and marriage certificates and Parish Registers (the primary sources) attempt to add their family tree.

Secondary sources such as census returns, old photographs, old directories and wills etc. can add “flesh to the bones” of bare dates and help the researcher to have an insight on the lives of his ancestors and help to see them as real people. Mr Howse pointed out the many pitfalls that might be encountered and that luck as well as hard work played a part.

Mr Howse’s talk was both interesting and amusing and everyone agreed that genealogy is an exciting and satisfying pursuit. Finally he gave a few words of advice: firstly, name and Date all the old photographs in your possession (do this even if you never get round to doing anything else) Your ancestors will thank you. Secondly, write an account of your life to pass to future generations: Thirdly, the best time to start tracing your family tree is NOW!

After a vote of thanks by our chairman and a few words from Duncan Lucas the meeting closed at about 9.30pm.

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### **February Meeting**

On Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> February, 23 members of the Society met for the Annual General Meeting.

The minutes of the last AGM were read and signed as a correct record of the proceedings.

Edna Taylor gave her Chairman's report of the last year and said that all events had been a success and a variety of speakers had been heard at the monthly meetings. Brian Bilson, as Treasurer reported a healthy Bank balance. Subscriptions were fixed at \$3.00 (£2.00 for OAO's and under 18's)

No nominations for officers had been received so that following were re-elected unopposed:-

Edna Taylor	Chairman
Bob Wignall	Vice Chairman
Doris Chandler	Secretary
Brian Bilson	Treasurer

Doreen Bouter has resigned from the committee on health grounds. Tricia Berry and Chris Smart, as Bulletin Editors were invited to join the committee and accepted.

The Committee members are:-

Tricia Berry	Bulletin Editor
Chris Smart	Bulletin Editor
Jim Colver	
Peter Clowes	
Ian Varey	

AOB. Several matters were discussed, including the purchases of a tape recorder. It was agreed that we might start making some Oral Histories.

It was reported that the museum at White Gate Farm is moving to the new Stoughton Farm Park at Easter.

Most discussions entered around the town Trail including the cost of publication, the route it might take and items of interest to be included.

The meeting Closed at about 9.30pm

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### **March 1989 Meeting**

This was a real D.I.Y. event with members speaking for about 10 minutes each on a subject of their own choice. This produced quite a variety of topics and presentation and covered a time span from 2000BC to the 1940's.

**Stella Tweed** – played a tape, full of atmosphere and suspension, which she had made describing a night spent at Bushloe House while on fire watching duty in 1943. Rumours of the ghost of a coachman who supposedly committed suicide on the premises earlier in the century became much easier to believe after midnight.

**Bob Wignall** – took us back to the time of the Romans with the aid of a wall chart gave us a very detailed and thoroughly researched talk entitled “*The Men Who Killed Caesar*”.

**Colin Towell’s** project is research into the life of Simon de Montfort. He told us many facts about the man that Leicester has rather claimed as it’s own Son. Other towns i.e. Lewes (Sussex), Oxford, Evesham, Kenilworth, Amory (France) and Gascony also have a big part to play in this eventful life.

**Tricia Berry** brought along three albums of mostly Edwardian Postcards showing scenes of old Wigston, other Leics. Villages, Leicester City and some Norfolk. Other examples were greeting cards, comics and Daily Mail WW1 official Issues. She gave a brief account of the history of postcards since they were first used in America in 1869.

Bill Ward began with a truly excellent recitation from the works of William Shakespeare. He then proceeded to talk about his favourite men from Wigston’s past, John Thomas Proctor. A solicitor’s clerk, he came to Wigston in 1872 and soon became much involved in local life, mainly through the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel and the schools. He was a talented artist and Bill brought along some examples of his paintings and the minute writing of which he was such an expert sitting in his garden at Abingdon House.

A vote of thanks to all was proposed by Mrs Edna Taylor.

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### **April 1989 Meeting**

Member Brian Bilson gave a very interesting lecture on maps illustrated with slides. He told us early maps were made by Clergy to illustrate the Bible, the currently topical Mappa Mundi being an example.

We saw the works of Saxon, Smith, Speed, Blaeu, Carey and Moule and others. It was fascinating to note the different methods of showing land features which evolved. Hills in the earlier maps being shown as little “mole hills” and then in later years the layer colouring we know today.

An enlargement of the Wigston area from Prior’s 1777 map followed by various Ordinance Surveys, showed the change from rural village to the town we have today. A warm round of applause and vote of thanks by Edna Taylor was given.

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### **May 1989 Meeting**

We were honoured to host this year’s AGM of the Leics. Local History Council. We put a small exhibition of our work and served refreshments, beautifully prepared by Mavis and Maureen.

After some Council members had toured the FWK Cottage everyone assembled at 7.30pm and quickly dealt with the business side of the AGM.

Announcements Included:-

1. Their President Prof. W G Hoskins has sadly had to move to a nursing home in Dorset.
2. There are now 42 groups affiliated to the Council and attractive commemorative tea towels were on sale.
3. The Bishop, Dr Rutt is giving a talk on knitting on 21/11/89 to the friends of the Record Office and anyone is welcome to attend. Dr David Wykes of Leicester University then gave us a most interesting and informative talk on the FWK industry. The origins can be traced to Leicester and he described why the previously domestic occupation of handknitting became a means of survival for the country peasants who were disposed by the enclosure of farmland. They migrated to larger open parishes such as Hinckley, Narborough by Whetstone and Wigston and when the frame knitting machine, invented by William Lee, became available this added considerably to the output. The first frame in Leics. Can be traced to before 1640 to William Iliffe of Hinckley a forebear of Nichol's wife.

A vote of thanks to Dr. Wykes concluded the evening.

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**Quotes of the Month**

It has been said that.....

“To have been alive with him (Sir Winston Churchill) was to have dined at the table of history”

Quoted in A. Andrews Quotations for Speakers and Writers.

“Cassandra” (Sir William Connors)

“A splendid moment in our great history and in our small lives”

(On the unconditional surrender of Germany, 1945)

Winston Churchill.

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**The Mills of Wigston .....**

“Behold a giant am I.  
Aloft here in my tower.  
With my granite Jaws I devour  
The wheat. The maize, the rye  
And grind them into flour”

Well, the giants have all gone and not just from the Leicestershire landscape but from most of Britain. Few windmills remain but there are two close by Wigston. The restored Tower Mill at Arnesby and the Post Mill at Kibworth, still give an impression of that which has been lost. Throughout the county more water Mill have survived. An increasing number have been restored to working order, many others converted to desirable residences.

What you might wonder is the story behind the Wigston Mills? How did our ancestors grind the corn to make their daily bread? ..... The story of Life.

For hundreds of years up to the twelfth century the good women of the village , and the young girls, would spend many hours a week grinding on hand querns part of the carefully stored corn extremely hard work but a recognised part of the housewife's routine.

The stone use for querns had to be hard to with stand the wear. In antiquity the local source for hand querns was the areas exposed granite around Mountsorrel. Indeed the derivation of the place name Quorne is from the word "Querne" i.e. the place where they were made.

Water power utilised though the waterwheel was known and used by the Romans, but the dissemination of the knowledge was a long time a-coming to Wigston! Of the dozens of mills listed in the Domesday Book for Leicestershire, Wigston does not appear. The women of the village had to continue with the hand querns for another hundred years or so. Hoskins speculates that the reason for this is not because Wigston was too small to have a watermill. (it was in fact one of the largest villages of the period) But because the village's development between 1000 and 1066 had been N and NE towards Oadby, and not towards the River Sence, the only possible source of water power.

Clearance and expansion towards the present site of Crowe Mills on the S. Wigston / Countesthorpe road did not occur until the mid twelfth century and that is why the mill did not appear until about 1200. This explanation by Hoskins is all very well but it fails to give reasons why a mill was not built on a different part of the River Sence, say around Kilby Bridge area, which would have been a lot closer to the village centre.

I suggest the reason why this was not so was because of the nature of the River. In relation to river length there are relatively few potential mill sites. The drop of the river from Wistow to its confluence with the soar is such that any mill would have to be severed with an 'undershot wheel'. Such s wheel depends heavily on volume of flow rather that the consistency of flow demanded by an 'overshoot Wheel'.

It is not until one is down stream in the region of Crowe Mills that there is enough water to turn undershot wheel efficiently. A further point is that the River around Kilby Bridge is liable to flooding and too much uncontrolled water is a bad as not enough water.

It is the case that within the whole Parish of Wigston the optimum site for a water mill is Crowe Mills and that is why it was built there. Clever these ancients weren't they?

Mills were one of the Lord's (or the Manor) most important perk. He had Soc Rightss which meant that he could insist that all the manor's inhabitants had their corn ground at his mill and paid the charges that he set. From 1100 to well into the 1500's (by antiquated law until the 18<sup>th</sup> century) had mills were banned in England, thus making sure it was the Manor mill was used. Corn keeps longer as corn, so most people would

only take small amounts at a time to the miller. Millers were generally mistrusted as payment was usually in corn or flour. There was always the feeling that more was taken than should have been ... human nature really!

Who these first millers were we do not know. What the first mill looked like we do not know although it was almost certainly an undershot wheel.

In areas without water power hand grinding continued for longer periods. Wind power was not commonly used until the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The tradition is that returning crusaders brought back the technology from the Middle East and the Mediterranean region. The first windmills were simple Post Mills. As the name suggest a central massive post supported the mill and sails. The whole structure could be manhandled and turned into the wind. The Kibworth mill is a late derivative of this type of mill and is well worth a visit.

The first windmill in Wigston was a simple post mill close to the Crowe Mills water mill. One can only speculate on the reasons why it was built. The power from an undershot waterwheel of the size that could be used on the Crowe Mills site would not be great. The quality of flour produced would always be limited. By the early 1600's when the post mill was built population in the village was rising sharply. It is possible that the water mill could no longer meet the demand.

“Nichols in 1810 shows an engraving of a watermill on the Sence with a windmill a little North of it .. Presumably the one newly erected by William Langton before his death in 1602”

Hoslins. Midland Peasant.

I have called this the first windmill in Wigston but it might not be, for there are at least two other sites of windmills in the Parish. Both sites, (One in Welford Road at the top of the hill here Windmill Close is now and the second east of St. Wistan's Church Close is now stands), appeared to be simple post mills and could date from what is interesting is that both of these sites are in the Turville Manor, whilst the Crowe Mills site is in the Oxford Manor. Both no doubt keen to exercise their Soc Rights!

Hard facts are few and far between about either the mills or the millers until the nineteenth century when one can turn to the census returns and the Victorian Trade Directories. What these documents reveal is that the Crowe Mills site changed hand with great regularity. I have been unable to find mention of the other two windmill sites.

In the 1846 White's Directory George Perkins is given as the Miller at Crowemills. Alfred Achurch is also in the directory as Millwright. His address is Bull Head Street.

In 1852 during a serious Autumn flood part of the Viaduct at Crwoe Mills collapsed and a rail disaster was only averted by the prompt warning of the miller at Crowe Mills. Unfortunately no name is given .... County History of Leicester Vol 3p 125

In Kelly's 1855 Directory George Perkins is given as the miller.

In White's 1863 Directory, Thomas Townsend is given as the miller of the Union Mill. Is this Crowe Mills? Is the change of name to do with the introduction of steam power, which seems to have occurred about this time? Thomas Gist, Windmill is also mentioned. Which Windmill? Probably the one on the Crowe Mills site.

In Wright's 1884 Directory the entry reads .... Crowe Mills Mrs. Mary Orange.

In Duncan Lucas' Bygone Wigston green book there are three photographs of the Crowe Mills area. In the 1900's the name Thornton is given for the windmill. Mr Redhead as the miller at the water cum steam mill although the owner of this mill is given as Mr William Vice who also owned the Blaby Mill downstream. In the 1920's picture the broken shell of the old Post Mill can still be seen.

To complete the story in the nineteenth century the watermill must have been improved. The most significant development being the introduction of steam, power as indicated by the large chimney. I have been unable to find an exact date for this. Steam power could supplement the waterpower (though coal was expensive) or in time of poor waterpower take over the running of the mill. The increased power of steam also made it possible for steel crushing rollers to be used as well as mill stones.

The machinery at the mill no longer exists and memories are hazy but the use of steel rollers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century would not be unusual.

If Crowe Mills followed the pattern of other Leicestershire mills it seems likely that around 1900 the undershot wheel would be replaced with more efficient vertical turbines. These were like three giant cups attached to a shaft and produced more power than a wheel. However they needed more water to work efficiently so auxiliary steam power would be essential. An example of these turbines can be seen at Cossington Mill, now a restaurant.

As the population in Wigston and South Wigston started to grow and eventually explode the mills could no longer meet the demands of the people for flour. Larger mills such as the Co-op mill in Leicester took over the market and the local mills turned to producing animal meal before they quietly went out of production and closed. This divorcing of the community from the production of the food that it eats has left us with the problem encountered recently in a class of nine year olds.

QUESTION Where does our flour and bread come from?

ANSWER Sainsbury's!

Ian R. Varey

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#### WIGSTON FRAMEWORK KNITTING MUSEUM OPENING

Saturday May 29<sup>th</sup> 1989

2pm to 5pm

Members of the Friend's organisation free entry and at any time in the future when the Museum is open.

Free Light Refreshments on open day only.

Members of the Public

Admission 75p Children under 16 25p

Residents of Borough 50p and accompanied children free

Opening Times

Every Sunday, April to October 2 'til 5 pm

1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of the month ditto

Bank Holiday Mondays ditto

Parties by arrangement

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### **The End of the Trail .....**

The Town Trail is now in the hands of the printers. I can hear the sighs of relief as you think to yourselves 'No more nagging for Contributions'. We hope it will be ready for when the Framework Knitting Museum opens on 29<sup>th</sup> May, but it is a big job for Maurice Bingley to do alongside his own work, and it may not be possible. Whether it is published in time for that opening or not, and whether it is favourably received or not, I would like to thank sincerely all who have helped to bring it about. Contributions on one or more buildings have come from Tricia Berry, Christine Smart, Ann Browne, Duncan Lucas and Ian Varey. I have drawn for Information on Bill Ward's book 'Through all the Changing Scenes' and on Duncan Lucas's 'A Wigston Wander' and Volumes I and II of his 'Bygone Wigston'

In order to complete 24 superb line drawings Ralf Wignall left digging and planting his garden just at a time of year when it needed it. Bob Wignall gave up his time to photograph all sorts of scenes for Ralph to base his drawings on.

Maurice Bingley and his son are going to wrestle with type-setting and formats against a deadline date. Mavis Bingley has given me cups of coffee and encouragement on my visits to their house.

A big thank you to all of them. Any faults or errors are mine. I have enjoyed it all and learned a lot more about Wigston. It has been a fine effort in co-operation and shows what the society can do. Let's hope it's a success.

Edna Taylor

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### **Letters to the Editor**

The editors have been pleased to receive a letter from one of our members in Canada, prompted by an article in Bulletin No. 22

He writes:-

"Edna Taylor's article "Training about" describes the house of my great – great – great – great grandfather, Samuel Davenport. Welcome as the reference is, I fear he is

in error in thinking that George Davenport the highwayman was grandson of Samuel' Samuel's family is pretty well documented and George the highwayman was not one of them.

Samuel, however did not have a grandson George, but he became a prosperous Oxford banker.

Where George the highwayman fits in is somewhat obscure. My researches place him as the generation of Samuels grandchild but the grandson of William (baptised Wigston 16<sup>th</sup> December 1689). A first cousin of Samuel.

I believe some local research has also been done on Highwayman George but I don't know if their conclusion as to his descent agree with mine".

Martin Davenport

Martin Davenport is the great-great-grandson of George, the Oxford banker

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The editors would be pleased to receive letters / or Comments suitable for publication in subsequent editions of the Bulletin.