



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

BULLETIN 54



PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS - JUNE 1999 TO FEBRUARY 2000

Wednesday 16th June 1999

'Visit to Stanford Hall' - conducted tour followed by tea & biscuits
Meet 6.45p.m. Paddock Street Car Park to share transport.

Wednesday 18th August 1999

'History of Wigston U.R. Church' - C. Clr. Duncan Lucas
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 15th September 1999

'Pilgrim Fathers in England, Holland & America' - Malcolm Dolby M.A.
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 20th October 1999

'150 Years of Leicester's Museums' - Cynthia Brown of Museum Service
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 17th November 1999

The Work of the National Trust' - David Freer of National Trust
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 15th December 1999

'Christmas Social' with supper, quizzes, raffle etc.
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

NEW MILLENNIUM - A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL

Wednesday 19th January 2000

'History of Leicester's Cinemas' (to include Oadby, Wigston & South) - Brian Johnson
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 16th February 2000

A.G.M. followed by The Peace Memorial Park Improvements' - David Toseland
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

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FRONT COVER DRAWING

The cover of this issue portrays an Edwardian lady cyclist. Her hat might well suggest a safe way of bringing home the bread!

Jim Colver

The Bulletin is published three times a year on 1st February, June and October. Articles etc. (which are always welcome) should be submitted to either of the Joint Editors three clear weeks before the publication date please.

Joint Editors: Mrs. Chris Smart, 197 Queens Road, Leicester.

Mrs. Tricia Berry, 7 Wensleydale Road, Wigston.

FEBRUARY MEETING

The Society held its Annual General Meeting when approximately 45 members were present. The evening commenced with:-

- 1) The Acting Secretary, Tricia Berry, reading the minutes of the February 1998 A.G.M. which were agreed and signed as correct.
- 2) The Treasurer, Brian Bilson, explaining the year end accounts. It was noted that there was a balance in hand of some £150 less than the previous year. To address this situation it was agreed to donate only £50 to the Framework Knitters Museum in the forthcoming year and to increase the subscriptions to £7 00 (full) and £5.00 (concessionary). As no final choice had been made on an appropriate use for the late Ralph Wignall's legacy it was agreed (Bob Wignall having already given his approval) to purchase a good quality slide projector. Peter Clowes to go ahead with this, possibly with the additional help of a donation from the Framework Knitters Museum, which would enable him to use it for their events occasionally. Brian mentioned that the accounts had not yet been audited due to lack of time but would be handed to the Auditor, Colin Towell, very shortly.
- 3) The Chairman, Edna Taylor, reporting another good year with meetings well attended and speakers and visits enjoyed. The record attendance being for Caroline Wessel's talk on Beaumanor Hall. The change of venue had been a success with no regrets. The Bulletins continued to be well received. She invited members to suggest ideas to include in future programmes. She mentioned that Bob Wignall had been replaced as Vice Chairman by Tony Lawrance during the year and that Tricia Berry was standing in as Acting Secretary due to Doris Chandler having moved to Curtis Weston House. Sue Whyment was welcomed onto the Committee having filled the vacancy caused by the very tragic loss of Peter Mastin.
- 4) The Membership Secretary, Stella Tweed, reported that the membership currently stood at 91. Six new members having been welcomed during the year. The average attendance at meetings was 45.
- 5) The present officers and committee being re-elected unopposed.

Colin Towell on behalf of all members thanked the officers for their work throughout the year in running the society. This was gratefully acknowledged.

Members were reminded that renewal subscriptions were now due and should be paid this evening if possible.

The second part of the evening was taken up with offerings by members Anne Brown and Tricia Berry. Anne playing a very gentle and nostalgic tape she had prepared of the memories of the late Mrs. Johnson about farming at Kilby Grange after the 1914/18 war. While Tricia recounted something of her research into the life of James Hodges (1827-1889) and how South African diamonds came to fund a number of building projects back in Wigston.

MARCH MEETING

On Wednesday the 17th March the Society met to hear Suzanna Smith of the National Trust talk about the history and restoration of Southwell Workhouse.

Suzanna began by giving us some background to the work of the National Trust which is an independent registered charity founded in 1895. She then continued by giving us background information on the formation and founding of workhouses. Up to the dissolution, the poor were cared for in the community by the monasteries. After the dissolution various laws were passed to deal with the problem of the poor. In 1834 there was a change in the law which resulted in a change of attitudes. The poor were to be dealt with in a much harsher way and many workhouses came out of these changes.

In Southwell the Rev. Thomas Beacher was very involved in this process and in 1808 the first workhouse was founded. At this time George Nichols was the overseer of the poor in the Southwell union. In 1823 the parish incorporated to build a new workhouse. It was the first purpose built establishment and the layout was influenced by prison design. It was governed by a governor responsible to the parish. This person would later be known as the Guardian. The internal arrangements were focused towards a deterrent regime - supervision, classification, segregation. The building was vertically divided so that that each class e.g. the old and infirm or the unemployed would never meet. The system employed at Southwell was judged to be successful and was held up as a model for other workhouses to follow.

After the Poor Law Reform Act the workhouses were handed over to local authority control and this continued until 1948 and the introduction of the welfare state. Most workhouses then became institutions such as hospitals or old peoples homes.

It was in this context that the Historic Monuments Commission did a survey of old workhouses. Southwell was in the top six and fulfilled three of the most important criteria - original features, rural setting and archive evidence. It was therefore a superb example for preservation and restoration and it was with this in mind that it was purchased by the National Trust in 1997 for £180,000 with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Since then work has begun on the restoration and preservation of the property. Research into the documentary archives will provide the background material for public displays supplemented by oral history. Fortunately the interior has retained its original layout and features, including multiple layers of paint, provide clues as to how the interior would have looked.

Suzanna was able to give us a visual tour of the building using slides and photographs of some of the inmates, masters and matrons. The regime was harsh by today's standards and the documentary evidence remaining amply illustrates this point.

This was an informative and interesting meeting. Many of our members remembered the Leicester workhouse which became the Hillcrest Hospital before its demolition several years ago.

APRIL MEETING

The situation that all chairmen of meetings dread occurred this month when the booked speaker was ill and unable to attend. What made it even worse was that he had asked a colleague to notify us but this was overlooked and we were not made aware of any problem until 6p.m. the same evening leaving no time to attempt other arrangements! Into the brink stepped Peter Clowes who was part way through the process of assembling the second half of the late Dennis Taylor's slides for a future showing. He brought these along, full of apologies that his commentary was not prepared. He need not have worried; his detailed knowledge of Wigston left you wondering what additional information the prepared commentary would have contained! We are very grateful to him for turning what would otherwise could have been a non-event into a most interesting evening.

This second half of slides, like the first which we saw in January, was taken in the 1960's and 1970's, but this time featured the Bushloe End/Newgate End area with Moat Street and Long Street, and the fields which were to be developed into the Little Hill Estate. This land belonged mainly to Rectory Farm, (next to the church), the Manor House, Yew Tree House and Forryan's Farm. There were shots of the old Rectory Farm house and yard, now the site of Birkett House, and of the old gas works. We heard when this last area was developed previously abandoned clinker was discovered causing some to think they were working on the site of a volcano!

Views taken from the church tower gave a very good idea of the layout of the fields. We could see an old track where the Co-op cows from Rectory Farm used to walk to a tunnel under the railway. The present Seaton Road was constructed following the line of this same track.

Although this area of Wigston, particularly Newgate End, has perhaps suffered least change over the years it was still very sad to note how much had been lost. Of the fields there is now but one tiny orchard belonging to the Manor House remaining.

The Chairman, Edna Taylor, thanked Peter very much for a truly fascinating and nostalgic evening. She then showed two toys which members expecting to hear Philip French's talk had brought along. An inherited teddy of unknown age and a really well used example of Pip the dog, one of the characters from the cartoon series Pip, Squeak and Wilfred. She mentioned with regret that the society had recently lost two members, Bill Ward and Millie Moore, both of whom would be well known to most of us.

MAY MEETING

On Wednesday the 19th of May the Society met for a trip to visit the Hinckley and District Museum.

The Museum is housed in a row of restored seventeenth century thatched cottages once used for framework knitting. The cottages are timber framed. The original wattle and daub infill has been replaced by brick nogging. This property and several others in the vicinity were bought by Messrs Atkins the local hosiery manufacturer in the 1920s. The others were demolished and the land given over to car parking, but the three cottages which constitute the museum were fortunately left standing.

They were acquired by the Museum in 1993. The museum illustrates aspects of the area's history from prehistoric to modern times. The Museum has also got a lovely cottage style garden, tea-room and shop.

For any members unable to make this trip, the Museum is in Lower Bond Street, Hinckley and is open Easter Monday to the end of October, Saturdays (10-4), Sundays (2-5) and Bank Holiday Mondays (10-4), admission is 50p. Tel. 01455 251218.

THE SOCIETY SECRETARY

Doris Chandler, who has not been in the best of health lately has decided to retire from the post of secretary. An office she has held very successfully since February 1984, some fifteen years. We would like to put on record our gratitude to her for this sterling service. A thank you card and vase (to hold the flowers she often receives) has been sent to her as a gesture of appreciation from us all. We hope to see you Doris at future meetings when you feel like venturing out.

This leaves the post of secretary vacant. Tricia Berry is filling in as acting secretary at present but the committee are anxious to find a more lasting solution as she does not want to do it permanently. She already puts in quite a lot of time as joint bulletin editor and in any case believes it is not good for the society to have its management in too few hands. We should be very grateful if members would consider this .It is not a big job and we are open to any suggestions, such as two people doing it jointly, or someone perhaps sharing it with Tricia.

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THE BULLETIN

This issue should have a smarter more co-ordinated appearance. It is due to all items being produced by computer.

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GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

Receipts and Payments for the year ending 31st January 1999

Receipts		Payments	
Opening Balances as at 1/2/98:		Lecturers' Fees & Expenses	84.00
Cash in Hand	.40	Donations (£100 FWK Museum, rest for speakers where no	
Current A/c	427.89	charge made)	293.90
Deposit A/c	446.56	874.85	
Subscriptions	388.00	Postage	39.50
Collections at Meetings	122.75	Beaumanor Visit	221.91
Donations	15.00	O. Hughes Visit	157.50
Beaumanor Visit	231.00	Christmas Party	202.95
O. Hughes Visit	157.50	Bulletin Printing	106.65
Christmas Party	205.00	Room Hire	147.00
Sale of Publications	20.00	Secretary's Expenses	35.00
Bank Interest	10.45	Programme Printing	18.75
		Closing Balances as at 31/1/99:	
		Cash in Hand	5.82
		Current A/c	239.77
		Deposit A/c	471.80
		717.39	
	2024.55		2024.55

BEREAVEMENTS

Sadly we have to report the recent deaths of two members.

Firstly, on 25th March, Millie Moore, the last of the children of Charles Moore the well known founder of Wigston Band. Millie died in Yorkshire where she had gone to live last year following the death of her sister Norah. She was brought back for burial at Wigston Cemetery.

Millie had a great interest in local history, particularly Wigston's, and was something of a fan of our bulletin, always telephoning after receiving a copy to say how she had enjoyed it! She was also a devoted member of St. Thomas's Church and a long serving member of the Wigston Trefoil Guild.

Secondly, on 3rd April, Bill Ward, a very long standing member of this society and known to many people, around Wigston and beyond, through his work for the Methodist Church and local history.

Our thoughts are with the families of both at this difficult time.

Bill has been chosen as a fitting subject for the Who's Who biographical article within this bulletin.

WIGSTON WHO'S WHO NO: 23

WILLIAM ARTHUR WARD

William Arthur Ward (Bill to practically everyone) was born on 20/12/1911 at the family home, 8 Aylestone Lane, Wigston. He was the second child of Fred Ward, who was originally from Lincolnshire, and his wife Annie, who was from Leicestershire. The couple already had a daughter Evelyn and were later to have another son, Kenneth. The family came to Wigston because of Fred's appointment as a signalman with LMS railway. A job he was to do for the rest of his working life, based mainly at Wigston North Junction.

When Bill was aged 3 the family moved to 29, Gladstone Street. He was educated firstly at Bell Street Infants School and then Long Street Council School, leaving at the age of 14. He enjoyed all aspects of school life and, inspired by his teacher Robert Kind, developed a particular love of literature, especially poetry and Shakespeare. He learned to recite long passages by heart and this ability came to the notice of Dr. Briggs, the well known blind doctor, so that Bill and a friend were sometimes invited to the house to entertain the doctor's dinner guests. Bill was also good at sport and captained the shield winning school football team. He later became founder member and first secretary of his school Old Boys (COB's) Football Club.

After school he attended Clark's Commercial College on London Road, Leicester, before taking his first job with Thomas Firth & Co, the Leicester supplier of buttons and trims to the garment trade. He continued his education in the evenings studying Economics, French and Mathematics at Leicester College of Art and Technology for the next four years.

He later obtained a job with Leeds Permanent Building Society in St. Martins, and on 1st April 1935 moved to the Leicester Permanent Building Society in Welford Place, where he was to spend the rest of his working life, eventually becoming advances manager. His career was interrupted during the war when he served with the Royal Corps, of Signals mostly overseas in Persia and Iraq.

In May 1947 he married Margaret Hobday, a teacher, and the daughter of Charles Hobday and his wife of Long Street, setting up home in Kingsmead Road, Knighton. They had two children Elizabeth and David, and grandsons Joe, Jack, Luke and the late Sam.

Bill's parents had always worshipped at Frederick Street Methodist Church and he continued this tradition, joining the choir when aged 11. His love of music especially choral music, increased when he became choir master in 1939, a post he held until 1967 when he handed over to a qualified successor. By then he was secretary of the Trustees and a chapel steward. He also served as treasurer and the financial knowledge and standing he brought to committee meetings was greatly valued by Rev. Kenneth Wilson when he first came to Wigston as an inexperienced minister. Bill also worked at circuit and district level and as a result became well known over a wide area. In 1985 he wrote 'Through all the Changing Scenes' to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the church building. When his church combined with Moat Street Church to become the Wigston Magna Methodist Church, Cross Street, his loyalty continued and he remained a member of the choir for the rest of his life.

Bill had many interests; when younger he enjoyed tennis and was a member of Miss Howe's Club in Aylestone Lane. He loved the countryside, gardening and walking, especially in the mountains, and achieved an ambition when he got his son David onto the three highest peaks in Great Britain, Ben Nevis, Sea Fell and Snowden before his 16th birthday. He was a founder member of the Wigston Civic Society and when he retired he and Margaret did voluntary work including helping with the Meals On Wheels service.

But perhaps his greatest interest, apart from his church, was local history, particularly Wigston's history. When this society was formed he was one of the first members. In 1986 joining with Duncan Lucas to research the book 'Wigston Harcourt' which explained the old names of some of the people and places connected with Wigston, many of which were then used for the road names of that housing estate. When the Framework Knitters Museum was set up Bill became one of the founding trustees.

At the early age of 13 he had taken up photography, initially with a simple box Brownie Camera. He began to make a record of the buildings and street scenes around Wigston especially where development was threatened. Over the years these photographs together with others he collected built up into a valuable and quite fascinating record of Old Wigston and how it had changed. He researched these scenes and acquired an impressive local knowledge. He then began to give slide show presentations which became much in demand, the proceeds invariably being donated to the Methodist Church or the Framework Knitters Museum.

Bill died on 3/4/1999 aged 87. After a private cremation a very well attended Thanksgiving Service was held in Wigston Magna Methodist Church. The Wigston Mail quotes Duncan Lucas as saying "Those who knew him will miss him. Most of all, he was a proud and genteel Christian." A statement with which all who knew him would surely agree.

Tricia Berry

Sources: The great majority of the information within this article was very kindly supplied to the author some years ago by Margaret Ward for another project which in the event did not happen.

Additional information from Wigston Mail 29/4/1999, and an address given by Rev. Kenneth Wilson at the Thanksgiving Service.

THE AMERICAN CONNECTION

As a member of the Leicester Victorian Society, I receive their newsletter giving details of buildings they are trying to get listed or have repaired and so on. The last paragraph of the most recent newsletter caught my eye. It said:

"We recently received a telephone call from an antique dealer planning a Christopher Dresser exhibition in New York in the year 2002. He says that Bushloe House, Wigston, contains furniture by Dresser, and that the house may be dated as early as 1867. Does anyone have information relating to this building, its date or architect?"

I remembered that we had made a visit to Bushloe House two years ago and that Christopher Dresser's name had been mentioned by our guide. In preparation for the visit, Tricia Berry had written two of her excellent 'Wigston Who's Who' articles, one on Stephen Fry, architect of Bushloe House, the other on Hiram Abiff Owston JP who later bought it and lived in it for nearly 40 years. I asked Tricia's permission to send off her articles, which she gave, and I took them along to the Victorian Society's chairman. We were very warmly thanked for our prompt response and Tricia was praised for her articles. I asked to be kept informed about the exhibition.

The announcement about the exhibition intrigued me to such an extent that I began to ask questions. Why an exhibition in New York? Who would have heard of Christopher Dresser across the Atlantic when most people here have not? What was special about this furniture? A few books yielded some of the answers, and I append a some notes on this seemingly under-rated designer.

Christopher Dresser 1834-1904

Christopher Dresser was born in Glasgow, son of a Yorkshire excise officer and his wife. When the family was posted to Sussex, Christopher was educated at the Government School of Design at Somerset House in London.

These Government Schools of Design had been set up in 1835 to encourage collaboration between the arts and industry as mass production of goods began to take over from traditional crafts. It was thought necessary to raise standards of design to help Britain to compete with other European countries. The students at the schools were goldsmiths, jewellers, furniture makers, lithographers, pottery makers and draughtsmen of the day.

While at Somerset House, Dresser developed interests in botany and oriental art, which were consistent sources of inspiration throughout his career. He also came under the influence of some eminent men, teachers who greatly furthered his ambitions. Owen Jones, architect and designer, enlisted his help by inviting him to submit a page of illustrations for his book called 'The Grammar of Ornament', a huge pattern book of designs from many media and cultures, emphasising flat patterns and geometrical forms. Dresser's page was of flowers which he thought were a prime source for transforming natural forms into ornamental ones. William Morris, of the Arts and Crafts Movement, was indebted to this book when he carried its principles into the field of book design.

Another of his teachers was Henry Cole, reputed originator of the Christmas Card, who served on the Managing Committee for the Great Exhibition of 1851. The profits from this were used to create the Science and Art Department at South Kensington, with Henry Cole as secretary. It was possibly Dresser's former contact with Cole that gained him the Chair of Botany applied to the Fine Arts at the Department, in 1860. Dresser was disappointed when his application for Chair of Botany at London University was unsuccessful, but in the same year he was awarded a doctorate from Jena University in Germany. He was very proud of this, and insisted on being

called Dr. Dresser. In 1862, he published *The Art of Decorative Design*, important as the first popular book on design to show readers how to create designs themselves.

It must have been about this time that Dresser came to the attention of Hiram Abiff Owston of far-away Bushloe House in Great Wigston. A man of wealth and taste, Hiram Abiff had in 1866 bought the fine house, originally built in 1850, for his new bride and had the walls of the staircase painted in frieze and dado with abstract sunflowers and roundel work in geometric patterning. The books say this is 'attributed to Christopher Dresser'. It is certainly like his style. Some of the furnishings in the house were designed by him, and at the subsequent sale of the house, 'the Bushloe House furniture' went to the Victoria and Albert Museum, though when Tricia visited there recently, they could only show her one small chair.

During the 1870's Dresser's career began to take a new turn as his botanical interests faded and his respect for Japanese and oriental design increased. On his way to a visit to Japan, he went to the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 and also lectured at the new Pennsylvania School of Industrial Art. His theories of design were regarded as revolutionary and influenced certain American designers, and he was commissioned to make a collection of Japanese artefacts for Tiffany & Co., an American glass firm, while he was in Japan. He subsequently published *Japan: its Architecture, Art and Art Manufacturers* in 1882.

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the Arts and Crafts Movement was at its peak, and the name of William Morris, a principal founder, was known on both sides of the Atlantic. Christopher Dresser gained inspiration from it, yet he never fully accepted its ideals as a way of life. He was a universal artist, working in metalwork, glass, wallpapers, ceramics and furniture, but unlike Morris, who had a horror of capitalism and industrialisation, he saw the importance of co-operation with industry in bringing well made objects within reach of the widest possible public. Morris's hand made objects were expensive and only bought by an elite. It is a paradoxical position for a committed Socialist, as Morris was.

For William Morris, medieval craftsmanship expressed the happy spirit of the society that produced it, and he became a major force in the revival of the craft tradition to improve both design and society. Dresser made a point of using modern materials such as cast iron and linoleum, and modern techniques such as electro-plating. Far from preaching the craft ethic when in America, he insisted on secular design using national characteristics in the present. This more forward looking point of view would probably appeal, which might be why Dresser is well regarded there.

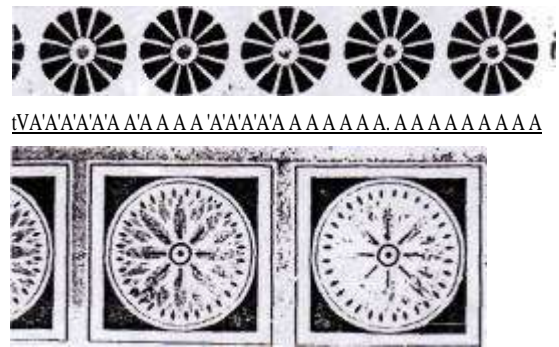
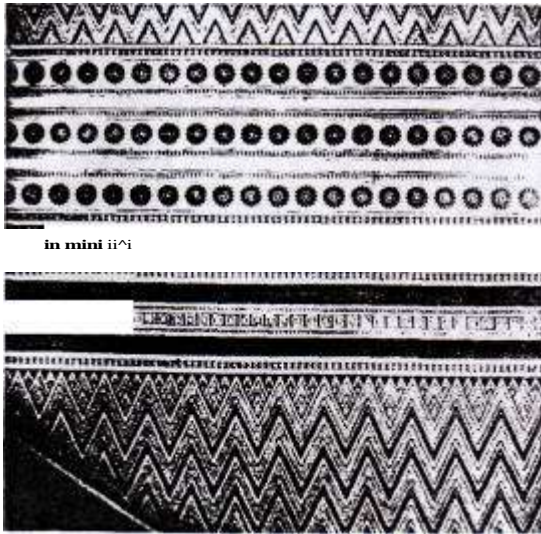
However, Morris's name has lived on as one whose influence on the decorative arts cannot be overestimated, while Dresser's work was forgotten when he died in 1904. That is, until Sir Nikolaus Pevsner in 1937 acclaimed him as one of the pioneers of modern design. Perhaps he is due for a revival, for when I consulted the *Dictionary of National Biography* for information, his name was not in. It was, however, in a supplement called 'Missing Persons' published in 1993, as though he is now thought worthy of an entry.

We can only hope that our antique dealer who telephoned for information on Bushloe House will be able to bring off his exhibition in New York, and that the Victoria and Albert Museum will unearth from storage 'the Bushloe House Furniture' and make sure it is heavily insured for the journey.

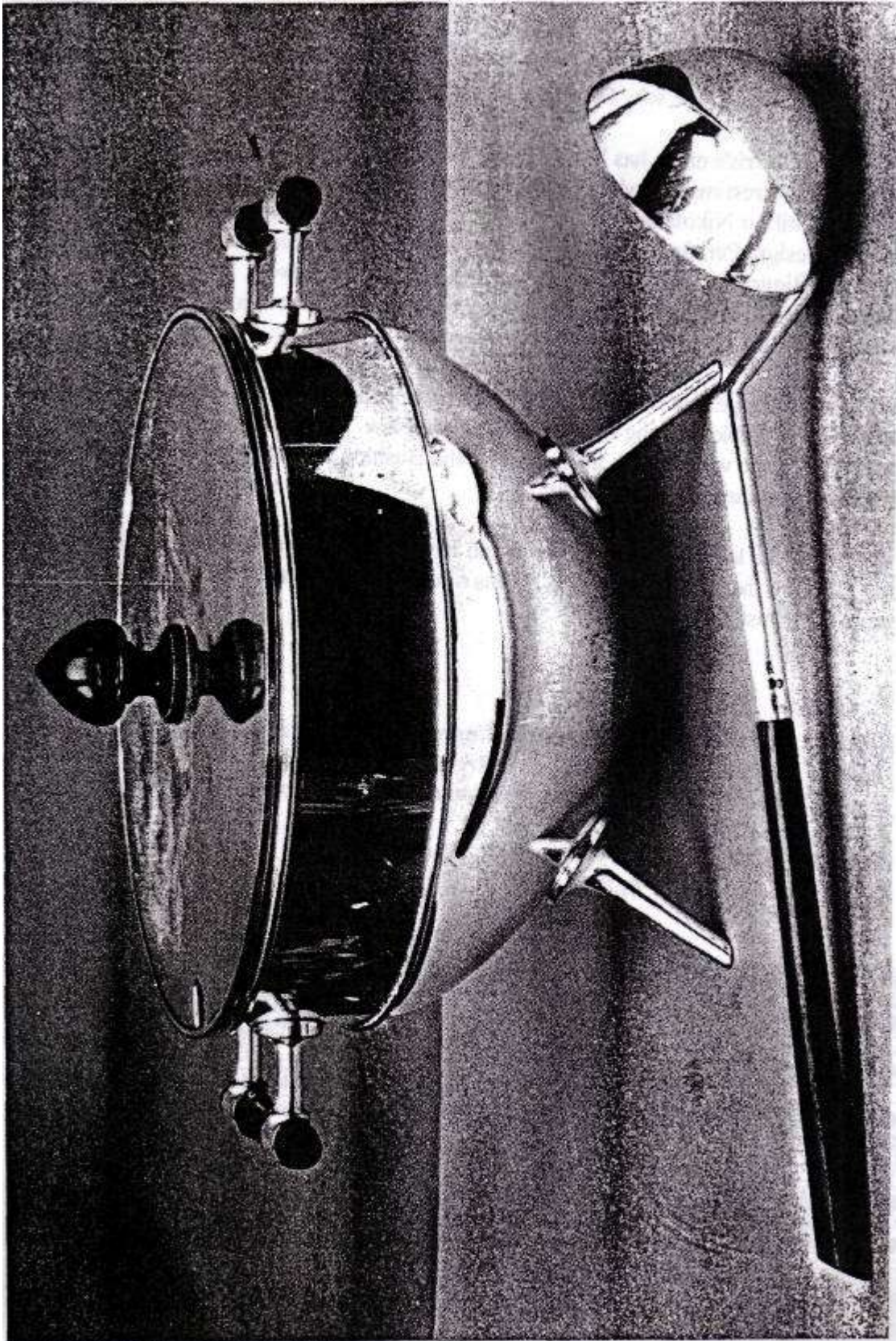
Wouldn't it be lovely if, in 2002, we could have a summer outing to New York to see the furniture that graced the living rooms of one of Wigston's finest houses a hundred years ago? Just a dream

Edna Taylor

Sources: *The Dictionary of National Biography (Missing Persons)*. Isabelle Anscombe & Charlotte Gere: *Arts and Crafts in Britain and America*. Donald Reynolds: *Cambridge Introduction to the History of Art, The Nineteenth Century*.
Tricia Berry: *Wigston Who's Who No: 77 (Bulletin 48) and No: 18 (Bulletin 49)*.
D.S. Hunt: *The Master Builder*.



Detail from painted wall decoration at Bushloe House attributed to Dr. Christopher Dresser. Reproduced from *The Master Builder*.



Soup tureen designed by Dr. Dresser, 1880. An example of how he foreshadowed the functional style of the Modern Movement. *From Arts and Crafts in Britain and America.*

THE WIGSTON WAKE

In Wigston town where I grew up
In the county of Leicestershire
We would go to the Wigston Wake
Our annual local fair.

It always took place in November
Around the time of Guy Fawkes night
An event we kids looked forward to
With excitement and delight.

We'd catch Bromley's bus at Kilby Bridge
And noisily alight at the Bank Where the
usual mob were waiting With the predictable
childish prank.

We'd hurry to the fairground
We could hardly wait
There'd always be a fearful crush
On the far side of the gate.

Our mums would take us kids in tow And our
dads would disappear It didn't take us long to
guess They'd gone for a pint of beer.

Our first stop was the dodgem cars Or the moon
rocket ride Then we'd buy a hot dog With
onions crisply fried.

Huddled in groups together
Steamy breath on frosty air
Waiting for our dads to show
With more pennies for the fair.

We'd have a go at the hoop-la And bash at
the coconut shies If we managed to knock
one off
Well it took us by surprise One last ride on
the ghost train Before wearily wending our way
Home to Kilby Bridge After a perfect
November day.

This poem is from *Seasons of Life, a collection of poetry* by Valerie McKinley. Valerie was born in Wigston, although the first five years of her life were spent in Kilby Bridge. She was educated at Bell Street Infants School, The National Juniors and finally Abington High.

Copies of the book cost approx. £2 plus postage and can be obtained through Brian Bilson, telephone 2881715, though please note that not all the poems are about Wigston.