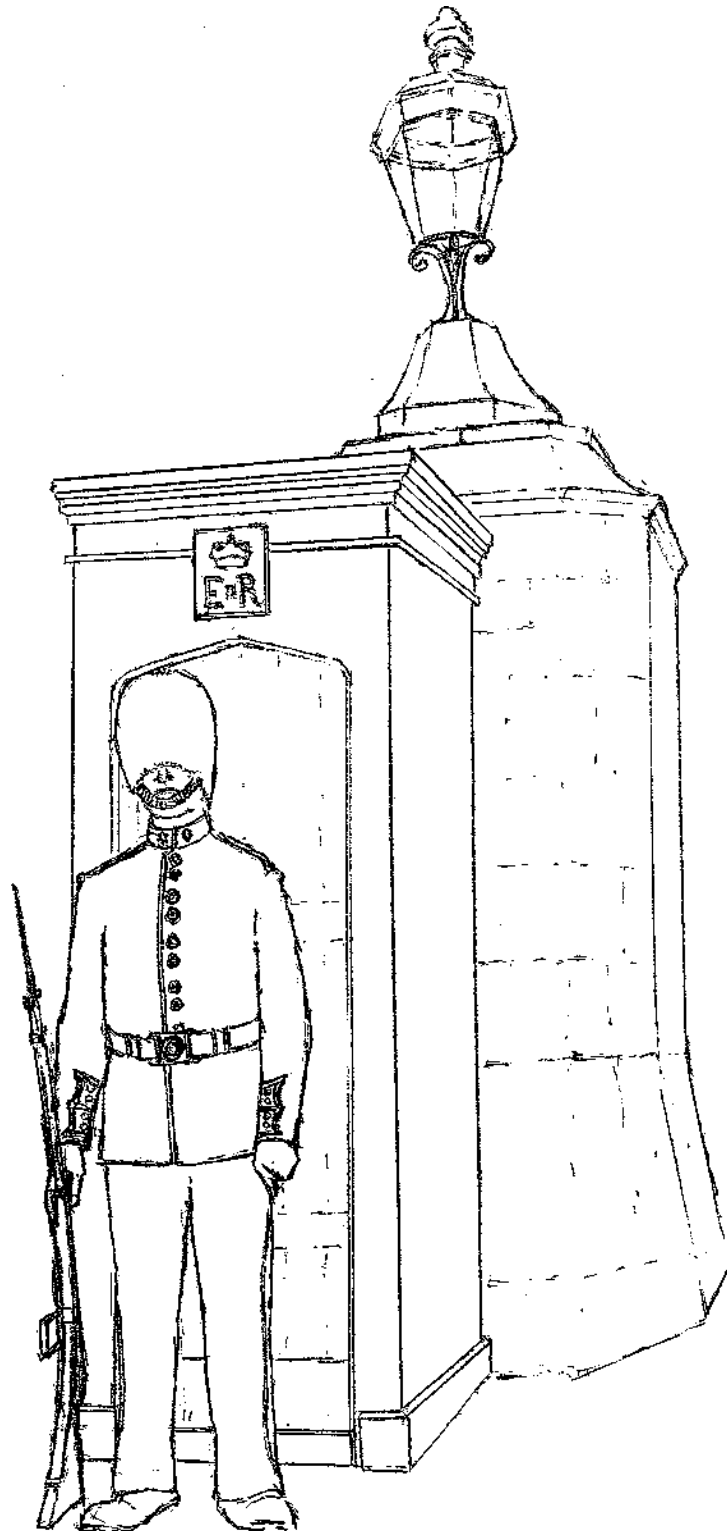


# *Greater Wigston Historical Society*

White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna, Leicester.

## **BULLETIN 74**



**PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS - FEBRUARY TO SEPTEMBER 2006**

**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2006**

A.G.M. followed by Forryan family research on & off the internet - Mike Forryan  
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2006** Slides of Old  
Oadby - Martin Sharp 7.30p.m. U.R. Church  
Boys' Brigade Rooms.

**Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2006**

Leicester Suffragette Alice Hawkins - Peter Barratt (her great grandson)  
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2006**

Guided walk around Welford - John Haynes  
Meet 6.45p.m. Paddock Street Car Park to share transport, see below.

**Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2006**

Visit to Bruntingthorpe Airfield with supper in old control tower - Geoffrey Pool &  
Olwen Hughes  
Meet 6.30p.m. Paddock Street Car Park to share transport.  
**Please note 7.00p.m. start** for this evening, see below.

**Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> August 2006**

The Pre-Raphaelites - Tom Kelly  
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2006**

The South Leicestershire Hoard - Vicki Priest  
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

**Please note** - members will need to register and pay a modest charge for the May and  
June evenings. A list will be compiled for this at the March & April meetings. Also  
available will be an information slip about access to the airfield.

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

Editor: Tricia Berry, 7 Wensleydale Road, Wigston. Leics. LE1 8 3RX.

## FRONT COVER

The front cover this time features Jim Colver's drawing of one of Her Majesty's foot guards. He is on duty outside Buckingham Palace wearing full dress uniform of red tunic and bearskin. These guards can be drawn from any of the 5 remaining regiments of foot, but are usually from the Household Brigade. When the Sovereign is in residence there are four guards on duty otherwise there are only two. The Changing of the Guard ceremony takes place daily at 11.30a.m. in summer and alternate days in winter. It lasts 45 minutes and is a very popular tourist sight.

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## OCTOBER MEETING

In October the Society welcomed Geoffrey Pool who gave a most interesting talk on the Bruntingthorpe Airfield. It was opened in November 1942 with a fly-in of 28 Wellington Bombers and consisted at that time of three runways, with hangars and workshops spaced around the site, away from the main buildings, as a precaution against enemy attack. Personnel used bicycles to move from place to place. Outside the perimeter on the Walton side was a huge bomb dump, traces of which can still be seen. The airfield was classed as an advanced operational unit for Wellington and Lancaster Bombers for the rest of WWII, while nearby Bitteswell was a satellite airfield.

On the Peatling side Sir Frank Whittle occupied some space for aerial testing of his experimental jet engines in Meteor aircraft, one of which crashed near Blaby Church. Sir Frank had been born in Coventry but was friends with the owners of a Lutterworth factory. When he needed more space the Government built him the present Alstrum factory site at Whetstone. After the war the Whittle flight of four planes remained at Bruntingthorpe for a year before moving over to Bitteswell.

In 1946 flying went dead, though some gliding took place, and it became a German POW camp for two years. It was also a Polish Officers resettlement camp until that closed in 1949. It was then unused until 1953 when it was leased to the U.S. airforce. They rebuilt the runways from 6,000 feet to 2 miles long with 30 foot foundations, the rubble for which came from the demolition of slum houses in the Wharf Street area. They built two massive hangars and nuclear bombers were stationed there for six months during the height of the 'Cold War' period.

When the Americans withdrew in the mid 1960s the Ministry of Defence split the site and sold off part for industrial use. The 48 officers' houses were also sold. The remainder was bought by Chryslers for vehicle maintenance and testing, but on condition they made no alterations to the site and planted 180,000 trees around the perimeter to help mask sound and improve visual impact. Due to a subsequent merger the site was no longer required and on 1/8/1983 it was bought by the Walton family who ran a land drainage business. It is currently used for commercial purposes, such as

vehicle spraying and storage, and corporate entertainment events, but is perhaps best known for its vintage aircraft collection. This all began in 1984 with the acquisition of a small museum of aircraft previously based at N.E.M. Airport. More have arrived since and there are currently 38 planes of which 10 can taxi, and do so regularly, on special open days.

The largest example is the Vulcan which flew into Bruntingthorpe in March 1993. For the last seven years the 'Vulcan to the Sky' project has been very active in raising funds in order to restore it, the last remaining one in the world, to airworthiness. This has been aided by Lottery funding and the restoration is now underway in a designated hangar. The smallest is the Iskra a two seat Polish training aircraft. Both of these and most but not all of the planes are known as 'Cold War Jets' and are military aircraft which were in service during that dangerous time 1945-1991. A notable exception is an early Boeing 747 passenger plane currently being converted for use as a static conference centre.

After some questions and discussion the Chairman, Edna Taylor, thanked Mr. Pool for a most fascinating talk.

(Some members subsequently suggested the airfield would be an interesting venue for a summer trip and this has been arranged for 21<sup>st</sup> June starting at the earlier time of 7.00p.m. There will be a chance to go inside the Vulcan hangar, then tour the airfield, followed by supper in the Control Tower. The airfield is of course huge and we shall drive from place to place in convoy in our own cars).

## **NOVEMBER MEETING**

For November Colin Hyde gave a very well received talk with fascinating slides, many from the 1920s, on the history of the Walnut Street area of Leicester. Colin works within the East Midlands Aural History Archive based at Leicester University. The department has recently published a book based on interviews with people who have clear memories of living and working there in the past.

The area covered by the talk is south of the old town of Leicester and east of the canal and River Soar comprising Freemans Common and part of Southfields. Included was the Infirmary, Leicester Fosse Football and Tigers' Grounds, the Granby Halls, Cattle Market, Welford Road Cemetery, Victoria Park, Wyggeston School, the University, Fire Station, Prison and Recreation Ground and, on Aylestone Road, the old Power Station with huge gasometers and ornate former nurses' homes on the Filbert Street corner.

The residential streets to the west of the area were laid out in 1880 with housing kept as far as possible away from the water. This was because it was realised such areas were unhealthy; studies of other places demonstrating that families living closer to water suffered progressively more illness than those living further away.

Many of the streets were given the names of nuts such as Filbert, Hazel, Brazil, Almond, Walnut and Chestnut but whose idea this was seems to have been lost with time.

Colin then answered a number of questions after which the Chairman, Edna Taylor, thanked him for a most interesting evening.

## **DECEMBER MEETING**

Christmas seems to come around more quickly each year and this month it was time for the annual social.

Edna Taylor put on a general knowledge picture quiz to get things started. We then sat in groups to tackle Stella Tweed's Leicestershire quiz which was really enjoyable with a good mix of the fairly easy and the quite challenging. It was then time for the buffet meal from Annie's Patisserie which as usual was very good.

After this it became apparent that poor Stella was not well, and it was decided that an ambulance should be called. Many thanks are due to Shirley Hensman, Pat Parsons, Marion Daetwyler and May Hilton who all assisted by comforting Stella, contacting the ambulance and Stella's nephew etc. Happily it turned out to be nothing worse than a fainting attack and after various checks by the paramedics, and a much better looking patient, it was decided she did not need to go to hospital. Stella is now fine and sends her grateful thanks to all, she will thank people personally when next she sees them.

We carried on in a rather subdued fashion to hear the answers to the quizzes, however when it came to the Leicestershire one it was forgotten to check for a winning group so no prizes awarded for this.

Afterwards the raffle was drawn, and things cleared away, with the evening ending about 10.30p.m.

## **JANUARY MEETING**

This month our member, Peter Clowes, gave a very well received slide show on South Wigston his knowledgeable commentary sprinkled with amusing stories.

He began by reminding us that the construction of the township had been started in the early 1880s by Orson Wright, a speculative builder, who was already responsible for several large building schemes, notably in Knighton and Woodgate, Leicester. He could see the potential of an area with three separate railway lines passing close by. He bought farmland as it became available and was away; a grid of streets with 600 houses and several large factories appearing in the following six years.

We were shown pictures of the clay pit in Saffron Road which Orson bought from a

Mr. Healey so he could produce his own supply of bricks locally. This site was later taken over by Constone Concrete Products. It had its own branch railway track into the complex to facilitate distribution. It is said that when the line was discontinued one of the trains was bricked up under a railway bridge near Kirkdale Road, and remains there to this day. The pit became a hazard with several drowning accidents and was eventually filled in. Industrial units now occupy the site.

There were photos of the railway triangle, three stations, ivy clad barracks which was built 1878/80, St. Thomas's church, floods in the fields around Crow Mills and demolition of the old wooden trestle viaduct and its masonry replacement, which itself was demolished in 1960s. We moved on to The Grand Hotel and Clarence Hotel, the former sadly boarded up at present. The Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist and Congregational Churches and many more features.

Peter spoke of some of the businesses; a photographer named Porter who occupied 13, Blaby Road. Mr. G.W. Hall who continued the photographic business at the same address and introduced stationery and greetings cards and Mr. Hall's daughter Primrose Wray who added cake decorations and accessories. The same items are still sold at these premises today. Mr. Deeming was another photographer and also printer. Jacobs biscuits which was formerly Dunmore's which suffered a catastrophic fire in 1904. Premier Drum a London firm, bombed out during WWII, settled here firstly at the top of Canal Street on the old foundry site before moving to the present prestigious premises on Blaby Road. ABC Garage on Saffron Road corner selling petrol at 72p per gallon, Huddleston's Garage and Eric Holmes Cycle Shop on the corner of Countesthorpe Road. A nostalgic shot of The Grange, Glen Parva, home for many years of Sir John and Lady Rolleston, a land surveyor and MP.

After what seemed a very short time all was finished and Peter was thanked for a most entertaining evening by the Chairman, Edna Taylor.

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### **OLD PARISH DIARY**

Following on from Bulletin 73 here are some more entries from what is believed to be Thomas Burgess's diary:-

**1854** -Died at Great Wigston on 21<sup>st</sup> [no month given] of Consumption aged 17 years, Emma daughter of widow Baker.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> [no month given] after a protracted and painful affliction, Elizabeth the wife of Sidney Stanyard, in her 55<sup>th</sup> year.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> November Mr. John Wade, aged 75 years [died]. On

the 27<sup>th</sup> November Mr. John Dand, aged 71 years [died].

On the 29 Elizabeth Pawley widow aged 68 years [died].

On the 30<sup>th</sup> Sarah wife of Thomas Chance after a long and severe affliction, aged 34 years.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> December At Great Wigston in her 80<sup>th</sup> year Elizabeth Warner, spinster.

Burglary at Great Wigston - Between the hours of twelve and one on Sunday night the house of Mr. Jas Mason in Moat Street, Great Wigston was entered and the following articles stolen therefrom. A new top coat, a new hair brush, a silk handkerchief, two shirts which were only part made, with the cotton etc. that was wrapped in them, a bag of linen that had been recently washed, and was put therein ready for mangling, in the bag were three table cloths, three shirts, several towels, handkerchiefs, ?, sheets and other linen, they also took about 41bs of mutton that was hanging up. The burglars effected an entrance by getting out the key of the front door and then picking the lock. Mrs. Mason heard them & gave the alarm, but before her husband & son could get down the villains were off. The son's cap was found on the stop of the door, and is supposed to have been dropped in their precipitous flight.

Ann Garner a feeble old woman of 75 years.

**1855** - January. Died at Great Wigston on 13<sup>th</sup> inst. Mr. Thomas West, who has for the last 16 years been a servant of the Canal Company as lock tender, aged 62 years.

On the same day at Wigston Wharf in the Parish of Wigston, Mary the wife of Robert Chapman, aged 24 years.

Married at Great Wigston on 21<sup>st</sup> by the Rev. T.G. Gallwey, curate, James Moore to Mary Miner.

At the same church on 22<sup>nd</sup> by the Rev. T.G. Gallwey, John Vernon ?man to Jane Bennett.

Died on 23<sup>rd</sup> inst. at Great Wigston in her 81<sup>st</sup> year, Mrs. Jane Hill, widow.

On 25<sup>th</sup> John Cawthom aged 74 years.

Died February 2<sup>nd</sup> Wm. Mattock aged 68 years.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> inst. Martha Baker of Consumption aged 15 years.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> inst. Eson Smeeton aged 61 years.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> Peninnah? Wife of Josiah Ward aged 73 years.

Died March 15<sup>th</sup> Milicent Johnson aged 26 of Brain Fever.

Died April 6<sup>th</sup> Elizabeth Simons aged 71 years.

Died April 9<sup>th</sup> found dead in bed, John Smart, aged.....

Sudden death on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> April. ? Gregory Esq. held an inquest at the Queen's Head, Wigston upon the body of Mr. Saml Eggleston, farmer, who died on the previous evening. After viewing the body the following evidence was given. Mr. Wm Eggleston said "my Brother ate his supper and appeared as well as usual." Mr. Saml Pochin said "I was at Mrs. Eggleston's on Thursday night for about an hour, the deceased seemed to be in his usual good health. I got up to come away and while I was standing at the back of his chair he seemed to fall into a does [sic], shortly after he gave a moan, we then thought he had fallen into a swoon, but upon looking into his face we began to be apprehensive that it was something more serious, and I ran for the Doctor, but before he arrived he was dead." Mr. Hulme, surgeon, said "I attended the deceased and I have no doubt that the cause of death was disease of the heart."

[the Egglestons lived at St. Wolstan's House and Dr. Hulme at the Manor House in Long Street so it is easy to picture Samuel Pochin's dash up Bell Street to summon help. Poor Samuel Eggleston must have had a weak heart as he was only 39 years old].

Died April 16<sup>th</sup> Rebecca Freer in her 92 year.

Died April 28<sup>th</sup> Ann the wife of Wm. Walker, aged 72 years.

Died June 16<sup>th</sup> Sarah Ann Platts, aged 21 years.

June 17<sup>th</sup> Joseph Carter, aged 36 years.

June 23<sup>rd</sup> Mrs. Mary Phipps, aged 80 years.

On Sunday July 8<sup>th</sup> two sermons were preached in the Parish Church, Great Wigston for the benefit of the Day and Sunday Schools connected therewith. That in the afternoon by the Rev. Wm. Barber, incumbent of St. Johns, Leicester, in the evening by the Rev. John Halford, curate of Cossington, the collections amounted to £24 6s. Od

The heavy rains of the last fortnight have very much beaten down the corn, and the floods in some of the meadows has injured the hay, the thunder at times was very heavy. On Friday the 27<sup>th</sup> July there were some very heavy claps and one about four o'clock in the afternoon was considered the loudest that had been heard for years and a fire ball that attended it had like to have proved serious to Mr. Thomas Carr who was brewing at The Old Crown . He was standing at the brew house door, and saw it when it was 100 yards off, but its velocity was so great, and he was so paralyzed [sic] with fear, that he expected to be killed by it. Fortunately it exploded a few yards before it reached him. It was of the form of an elongated globe of from one to two feet in diameter.

[These accounts of extreme weather, sudden death and crime have a familiar ring, and serve to remind us that many things change with the passing years, but other events will always be a part of life!]

Continued from Bulletin 73 here is the second part of Edna Taylor's account of the, South Wigston Schools. New members who have not received this issue may pick up a copy at the February Meeting if they wish. Please see Tricia Berry<sup>1</sup>

### **ALL ABOVE BOARD CHAPTER III -**

#### **THE INFANT SCHOOL**

Within two and a half years of this confident statement, Mr. Barwick, the headmaster of the new Mixed School, was asking for more teaching help because of the large number of pupils, and Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools, Mr. Blakiston, had noted the considerable influx of new children into the area. The Sixth United Board, now with seven members and with John Wignall as Chairman, had once again to turn its thoughts to expansion.

In November 1889, Arthur Wakerley was summoned by the Board to discuss the best means of providing for the increasing school population. He was asked to report on the largest possible number of children the present school could take if parts of the playground were built on. His views were also sought on the best means of adapting the present school as a Mixed School throughout in case a new Infant School should be built.

The approval of the Education Department was sought for one of these two schemes, once Mr. Wakerley had submitted his plans. A prompt reply came from 'My Lords' that either scheme would do, and that no time should be lost in deciding which to adopt (as the average attendance had greatly increased in the Infant Department, and in the Mixed Department exceeded the accommodation). The first Board School, built for 505, was now trying to house 694 children.

These figures are not surprising when one looks at South Wigston in 1890. By that date, the major part of Orson Wright's original design for the township was completed. Houses had been built in all the streets off Blaby Road as well as Kirkdale Road and Orange Street. They were filled with the families that had responded to the numerous work opportunities in the new town. The Midland Railway was the largest single employer of labour in Wigston, offering jobs in the wagon shops, engine sheds, sidings, coal wharves and goods yards, as well as on the railway itself. The building industry was flourishing, and the presence of three railways encouraged other industries such as Orson Wright's contractors and joiners in his Perseverance Works and Wigston Foundry in Canal Street. In the same street were many shops, Dunmore's biscuit factory and Redshaw's Cash Coupon stores. All these drew people to the town,

from nearby villages and places much further away.

It is no wonder, then, that the Seventh United Board, newly-elected in March 1890, took a rapid decision to have a new and separate Infant School on the other (south) side of Bassett Street, and to have alterations to the first building to make it a Mixed School throughout.

Land was to be bought from Orson Wright for £553 7s 4d, Mr. Burgess to be the solicitor, Mr. Wakerley the architect. Later, Mr. Hackett the caretaker applied for and got the job of caretaker of the new school at £15 per annum. After the conveyancing was carried out, the Board agreed to erect fences, repair half the streets and the whole of the side causeways bounding the land until these should be undertaken by the Sanitary Authority, and "not to permit the sale of wine, ale, beer or spirituous liquors on any part of the land". As though they would! Charles Hurst, builder, tendered and won the contract to erect the new Infant School for £2,632 Os Od and Charles Sharp was to carry out the alterations to the existing school, for which £200 was borrowed.

All this organisation took time, and the overcrowding got worse through the next 12 months, so that Miss Ada Lewin, Headmistress of the Infants' had to ask permission to refuse all new entries under 4 years old. Later, the Board applied to the Education Department to be allowed to use the South Wigston Mission room, (the 'tin hut') for classes during the building of the new Infant School. They were granted permission for only one year if there were no more than 100 children and a certified teacher in charge.

On 1<sup>st</sup> September 1891, an Act was passed which made schooling free. The Education Department was empowered to pay a fee grant often shillings per year for each child over 3 and under 15 if the Board so wished. The Board resolved at once to accept, for the grant was roughly equal to three pence per week per child, and a bigger attendance, which they fully expected, would result in more financial resources. Also the Board had gone through many battles with parents who kept their children off school because of poverty, and had spent many hours examining cases of deserved remission of fees. All over the country, the Act was hailed a great step forward for the education of working-class children, as indeed it was. But in 1891 it did not help the plight of South Wigston that attendances shot up to even higher numbers, and that children came to school more regularly than before. Where to put them all?

The staff (now nine in the Mixed Department and six in the Infants') coped bravely, and after much delay the new Infant School was ready by late 1892. Its playground was in granite, not asphalt, with the grates properly guarded with brickwork. Stoves were installed, rather than open fireplaces, and these were also put in the Mixed School as part of their alterations. They were probably made at Orson Wright's foundry in Canal Street.

Four hundred places were now available for infants, and the old school was in process of being altered to take all juniors. Surely now, South Wigston's problems were over and no more building needed to be done. In fact, it was to be five years before any thoughts of further building were recorded, and during those years, the two schools

progressed successfully, usually gaining excellent reports from the visiting inspector.

Many developments in education were taking place in the 1890s. The school-leaving age was raised to 13, with some exemptions, and the quality of teaching was improving. Pupil teachers were required to attend centres such as Alderman Newton's School to improve their own education and more were going on to training colleges. They were also encouraged by the School Board to attend evening classes in technical subjects.

In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, technical education attracted wide public interest, arising from fear of foreign industrial competition. As early as 1881, a book showing how German technical schools enabled their hosiery workers to compete successfully against the British hosiers came to the attention of A.J. Mundella, businessman and an MP for Sheffield. When he became Vice-President of the Education Committee, he appointed a Royal Commission, which recommended far-reaching measures to promote technical education in this country.

The government responded by acting to provide the administrative framework for a national system of technical education. The Local Government Act of 1888 created 62 County Councils and many County Borough Councils., which could pay grants. A year later, the Technical Instruction Act gave them power to raise a penny rate for technical instruction. 'Whisky Money', a tax on spirits, was allocated for the same purpose, and in 1891, counties were allowed to provide scholarships for working-class children to go to secondary schools.

All over the country, counties and boroughs were setting up technical education committees. Leicester City and County were among the first, for the report on German technical superiority had alarmed the hosiers. Wigston was also quick off the mark. In 1891, a committee of 25 met at Bell Street Board School, and with John Wignall as Chairman organised evening lectures to be given at Long Street and Bassett Street Board Schools. The list of subjects at first included cookery, care of the sick, hygiene, theoretical mechanics and geometry. Later, artificial manures, gardening, butter making and an ambulance class were added. All lectures were open to the public at four shillings per session, and all could sit for the examinations set by the South Kensington Science and Art Department. If they passed, they earned grants for their school.

The summer gardening lectures given in the grounds of Mr. Owston's home at Bushloe House, and in Mr. John Rolleston's grounds at Glen Parva Grange were each attended by over 100 people. The lectures were a source of great enjoyment, and for some they proved to be a route to personal advancement.

During these highly successful years for the Board Schools and the Technical Education Committee, the population of South Wigston continued to rise inexorably. Just after Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, in 1897, a committee was appointed by the School Board to consider the purchase of a piece of land adjacent to the Infant School. The Board was being prudent and looking ahead. Just in case....

## CHAPTER IV - THE GIRLS' SCHOOL

The Board's foresight was justified, for by 1900 the school-leaving age for byelaw purposes rose to 14, and the number of school attendances required before taking a job increased. The two South Wigston Board Schools now had a total of 900 pupils between them, and what is more, reached an average attendance of 92.8%. This is astonishing in view of the epidemics that raged through schools at the time.

Probably overcrowding helped to spread sickness, for the Board's minutes record frequent outbreaks of measles, scarlet fever and whooping cough, all dealt with by closure and fumigation. The Barracks children were always quickly withdrawn in such situations for quite long periods.

In 1902, after the Eleventh Board had been informed that they should submit proposals for further accommodation, it was resolved that a school for 400 girls should be built on the land acquired next to the Infant School. Mr. Sawday was to be the architect and he would at the same time look at the Mixed School with a view to building a central hall and making provision for cookery teaching. The last is puzzling if the girls were to go to the new building.

By the autumn, permission to go ahead was given and tenders were invited from local builders, it being made clear that the union rates must be paid. Orson Wright's was chosen and the £7,000 was to be borrowed from Public Works Loan Commissioners at 3.5% for 40 years.

Twenty years earlier, the new Long Street Infant School had been built for half that price, so they had problems of soaring costs even then.

These were stirring times in which the Girls' School was being built. The Boer War had come to an end, and Queen Victoria was succeeded by Edward VII. School holidays were granted for both events. Not only that, but the South Wigston football team won the Schools' Shield with no point scored against them.

In the field of education, sweeping changes were being made country-wide as the 1902 Education Act brought the School Boards to an end and handed over education to the Boroughs and County Councils. The day when this took place was 30<sup>th</sup> June 1903 and it was called, somewhat biblically 'the Appointed Day'. An audit was held at Bell Street School and the caretakers took an inventory of all the property on the premises of each of the five schools under the Wigston Magna Board. This was handed over to the Wigston Urban District Council. The Board had carried unanimously a resolution "that a memorial tablet be placed in the Central Hall of the new Girls' School, stating that the school had been erected by the Wigston Magna Board School". Also included was the name of the chairman, Mr. John Wignall, and the number of years for which he had been a member of the School Board. The plaque can be seen to this day, a reminder that Wigston ratepayers' money was used to build that school.

Twelve new managers, unelected now, were appointed for the Wigston Urban District. Some of them, such as their Chairman the Reverend David Dewar, had already served on the School Board. Mr. William Brockington was made the first Director of Education, by the Leicestershire County Council Education Committee. A man of outstanding ability and drive, he was to stay in office for 44 years, much the longest period of any Director. Using a recent invention, the motorcar, he paid visits of inspection to all the 266 public elementary schools under the Education Committee. One of these visits was to discuss the appointment of staffs for the South Wigston Girls' and Boys' Schools, now called Council Schools.

Messrs. Barwick (Head), Carter, New, Bryan, Stone and Wilde were to be the staff of the Boys' School. Miss Hardcastle (Head), with Misses Russell, Wright, Dowell, Breacher and Rollinson were to form the Girls' School staff. Miss Matthews, who had taught at evening classes for some years, was recommended as cookery teacher, while Miss Vegeais was to teach French to children selected from the upper standards of the Wigston Council Schools. They were becoming quite ambitious.

The date for the official opening of the Girls' School was fixed as the 11<sup>th</sup> January 1904, and no doubt many complimentary comments were made about the building, which was the most handsome of the three South Wigston Board Schools. The light coloured sandstone, brick and plaster work of the ornate doorway leading to Bassett Street still give pleasure today. The interior is equally pleasing, with its arched windows and beautifully polished floors.

Yet by May of the same year, a note in the Board's minute book records that the Girls' School was in a poor state, with unfinished buildings, no fastenings to several windows of which the frameworks were defective, and a shrubbery where most of the plants had died. Evidently a distant County Council Committee could not bestow upon the schools as much care as the local Board had shown.

John Thomas Proctor soldiered on as clerk to the new managers up to November 1904, after which the Board's minute books come to an end. A few last entries in the minute book refer to disabled children who could not walk or see, and to children badly treated by their parents. The County Councils were evidently beginning to take the medical state of their charges as seriously as their traditional schooling.

The School Boards, in the 30 years of their existence, had laid a splendid foundation for the children of working class people. Much remained to be done, but without them, nothing that we take for granted today in the field of state education would have been possible. Indeed, as the great historian, G. M. Trevelyan put it, "Without the Boards, England could not have competed in the coming age of machinery, and her people would have sunk into the barbarism of an uneducated city population".



Top: The Girls' School (1904) with Infants' part visible on left. Bottom: The handsome doorway of the Girls' School, now the Bassett Community Centre.