

Greater Wigston Historical Society

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

BULLETIN 71



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PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS - FEBRUARY TO SEPTEMBER 2005

Wednesday 16th February 2005

A.G.M. followed by A Look at Gertie Gitana - Tony Lawrance
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 16th March 2005

Crimean War - Robin Jenkins of Leics. Record Office
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 20th April 2005

Lord Thomas Grey of Groby; Aristocrat & Regicide - Prof. Jeff Richards
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 18th May 2005

Visit to Rockingham Castle, tour followed by meal in their restaurant Coach
from Paddock Street 6.30p.m.

Wednesday 15th June 2005

Visit to Medbourne, tour of the village - Michael Cooper
Meet Paddock Street Car Park 6.45p.m. to share transport.

Wednesday 11 August 2005

Visit to Royal 11th Infirmary Museum, tour with Dr. Aubrey Stewart, Hon.
Curator. Meet Paddock Street Car Park 7.00p.m. to share transport.

Wednesday 21st September 2005

Building of the Great Central Railway - Fred Hartley of Leics. C. C. Museums Service
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

**Because of the layout of the Royal Infirmary museum building Dr. Stewart would prefer we kept numbers to a maximum of 30. Also there is a possibility the museum might have to move to another site and be closed in August. For these reasons we shall need to keep a note of who intends to come on this visit. A name list will be compiled at the March and April meetings, at the same time as names and cash are taken for the other summer trips. Late decisions for the Infirmary Museum visit are fine but please telephone the Secretary (0116 2880156) beforehand to confirm details.
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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.

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motor cycle courier to Bletchley for de-coding and translation. Each service branch, the army, navy and airforce had its own Y Stations and Beaumanor Hall in Leicestershire was the chief one for the army. Some operatives worked in chilly and cramped conditions in the basement while others were located in specially constructed huts in the grounds. These were cleverly built to look from the air like the normal buildings you might expect to find in a country house grounds such as a cricket pavilion, stables, dairy etc., they are still there today.

At Bletchley up to 10,000 people, mainly specially selected, gifted young women, worked during the war observing the greatest secrecy, aware that the lives of thousands of allies depended on their skills and discretion. Churchill referred to them as the geese who laid the golden eggs but never cackled. The men were mostly mathematicians and language experts recruited from Oxford and Cambridge Universities. All worked in hastily constructed concrete huts in the grounds which offered poor conditions, being overcrowded, too cold or hot, stuffy and badly lit. The work was monotonous but also required great concentration; shift work made people tired and they lived in lodgings far from home and family. In spite of all this most look back on those years with pride and nostalgia and know that they were a part of something unique.

Hitler and his inner circle communicated with their generals in the field by means of Enigma machines. These looked much like typewriters but were constructed so that a different letter was printed on the paper from the one typed in on the keyboard. A vast range of different combinations could be chosen by selecting different settings from wheels attached to the machine. A message was thus typed in and the resulting coded range of letters broadcast by radio in Morse Code. The intended recipient who had previously been advised of the settings would type the coded letters into his Enigma machine and the message would appear in 'clear'. To cope with the ever increasing complexity and workload, data processing machines known as bombes were developed. Later still to cope with ever more sophisticated coded communication techniques, Alan Turing and other leading Bletchley code breakers conceived the idea of the computer. They approached Tommy Flowers a Post Office engineer from Dollis Hill who was developing telephone exchanges containing valves, instead of the old fashioned relays, to see if he could make one for them. Ten months later Colossus, large enough to fill an average sized room, and the world's first programme-controlled computer was delivered, and rattled its way into the history books.

It is generally believed that the achievements at Bletchley shortened the duration of the war by 3 years. When it was all over some equipment was transferred to the new GCHQ site at Cheltenham but much was destroyed on the orders of Churchill. The work done at Bletchley remained top secret until quite recent times, and it was left to the USA to independently invent and exploit this remarkable technology. The Bletchley site has now been developed as a museum.

Our President, Duncan Lucas, hosted the evening due to the chairman, Edna Taylor, having a bad throat. She sat quietly at the back with a bottle tucked into her handbag to deal with any fit of coughing. She assured us this contained only water! Duncan

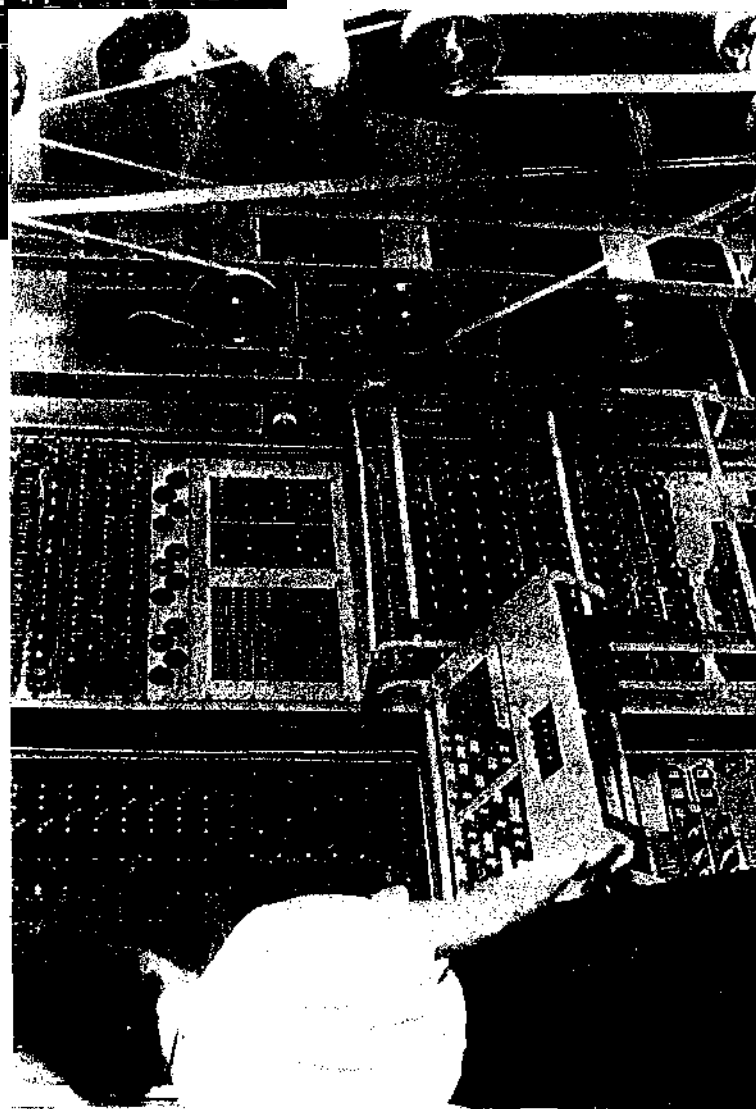
welcomed the many guests present, and afterwards thanked Hugh Davies very much for a truly fascinating evening.



Top: Celebrating 50th anniversary of VJ Day at Bletchley Park

Bottom Left: An Enigma Cypher Machine

Bottom Right: Colossus the world's first electronic programmable computer



NOVEMBER MEETING

This month we welcomed Malcolm Elliott who spoke to us on the history of the Quakers. Being a prominent member of the Friends himself helped to give his talk a personal as well as a very knowledgeable edge.

The Quaker movement started in Leicestershire with George Fox 1624-1691 of Fenny Drayton. His father was a churchwarden and he was apprenticed to a weaver when he heard an inner voice and began preaching in the 1640s when aged about 21. It was the time of the Civil War, which caused much change, and people were dissatisfied and receptive to new ideas. In 1652 George went to the North of England and the movement really took off and from then on spread all over Europe and America. William Penn, who emigrated to USA and after whom Pennsylvania was named, was a prominent convert. After the restoration of Charles II the Quakers in England came to be seen as a threat and were cruelly persecuted. The Quaker Act was passed making holding their meetings illegal.

The Quakers do not have priests, their services are literally meetings where groups gather and participate as they wish. Sometimes they sit in silent prayer for part of the time. There is however much contact between groups who travel to other areas to attend special quarterly meetings. In the past this was a good way of meeting a suitable partner because marriage outside the faith was disapproved of and resulted in offenders being barred from membership.

George Fox married a widow, Margaret Fell, from Swarthmore Hall, Nr. Morecambe Sands and she was responsible for much of the early organisation. The Hall is still in use by the Quakers today and is their spiritual headquarters though the administrative one is in London. The Quaker motto "Swear not at all but yea or nay" means that members do not take an oath, they affirm. They maintain that as they always tell the truth to swear on oath implies that they sometimes do not. The movement has always kept very full and accurate records of their births, marriages and deaths and consequently was granted exemption, along with Jews, from the provisions of Hardwick's Marriage Act 1754 which laid down that no marriage might be performed in England and Wales except by a clergyman of the Church of England.

Their persecution or sufferings included being banned from public life and a university education. This encouraged efforts in self help and many schools and businesses were founded by members. Some of these company names are still familiar today such as Cadburys, Rowntrees and Dents gloves. These were established as complete communities with houses, schools, medical care etc. all provided on a village like site. A good example can still be seen at the 'Cadbury Village' in Boumeville, Birmingham, where also, Cadbury Hall, Bristol Road was given as a Quaker College. In Leicester the Ellis family were actively in business in coal mining, slate quarrying, chemicals etc., and John Ellis was the man responsible for bringing the first railway to the town.

This talk inspired quite a quantity of questions and discussion after which Edna Taylor thanked Mr. Elliott for a really interesting and enlightening evening.

DECEMBER MEETING

Christmas seems to come round so quickly and once again it was time to enjoy our annual social.

Edna's picture quiz again proved a good way to start the evening off, with joint winners this year, Mrs. Pollock and Diane Baines. Well done to both! We then divided into groups of four for a Beetle Drive. This proved good, light hearted fun with a guest, Ann Wardle, emerging as the fastest beetle artist. Many thanks here to Robin & Sue Woolley for setting this up for us.

There followed an excellent supper by Annie's Patisserie and then came the raffle draw. One table whose occupants shall be nameless then proceeded to bag at least half the prizes amidst much friendly banter from the rest of us!

JANUARY MEETING

This meeting was booked as a talk on Calke Abbey by National Trust representative, Mrs. Gillespie. It was as someone rather aptly said later, different!

Mrs. Gillespie explained that the building's name included the word abbey because it was built on the site of a monastery. The present house was constructed in the early 1700s by a member of the Harpur family, one of whom married a Miss Crewe, at which time the name was hyphenated to Harpur-Crewe. The Crewes owned land in Staffordshire and there are notable memorials to them in the church at Flash. There is also, some 5 miles to the north east, close to Buxton, a Harpur Hill suggesting that the family land stretched over the border into Derbyshire.

The last member of the family to live in the house was Sir Vauncey Harpur-Crewe an eccentric bachelor who in later life ran short of money and offered his home to the National Trust in exchange for a life tenancy there. This was agreed but caused some controversy within the Trust because of the run-down condition of the building and general disorder of the contents. The Harpur-Crewes were borders on a grand scale, and as there was plenty of space so there was plenty of room for clutter. When Sir Vauncey died a decision was made to retain the contents as they were. This was probably the only choice because many of the things, throw away items in their day, were now too rare and unusual to discard. The effect though is to give the house a gloomy and despondent air, all stuffed birds and animals, trays of eggs etc. There are however some gems, for instance a Georgian bed complete with all drapes, still in its packing case and never even opened, the fabric as bright as the day it was made. This has been assembled and is displayed in a specially constructed protective case.

The house is handsome and situated in beautiful surroundings with interesting underground passages to explore and a spectacular orangery with huge dome on the roof. This had crashed through to the ground but amazingly escaped almost

undamaged except for its glass panels. This along with virtually everything else has been restored. The property is close for Leicestershire people to get to and while one could agree with Mrs. Gillespie in not particularly liking it, it is still indeed very much worth visiting.

The speaker was thanked very much by our Chairman, Edna Taylor.

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OBITUARY

It is with sadness that we report the death of member, Jane Pitches, who fell victim to the dreaded breast cancer on 22nd October 2004. She died in St. Ann's Hospice, Heald Green near her home in Manchester. Our condolences to her husband Ronald and son David. Jane was a native of Wigston, being the daughter of Bill and Ruth Horlock who for many years ran a nursery and garden centre at Wigston Fields. Until overtaken by illness she still came regularly to Oadby to visit her parents and then latterly just her father who survives her. During these visits she occasionally managed to come to one of our meetings, and might also take part in a ramble, another of her interests. She maintained a great fondness for the area where she grew up, and its history, and her funeral was held appropriately 'back home' at All Saints Church.

* * * * *

HOUSE HISTORIES

Researching the history of houses is a growing pastime and is catching up, to some extent, with the popularity of family history. This is not surprising as most people will have at least a passing interest in who previously lived in their home or owned the land on which it was built. To the local history enthusiast, not perhaps so interested in any particular property, it can still be a very worthwhile exercise, providing a route (sometimes the only route available) to acquiring more information on the parish of interest.

I have been fortunate enough to be allowed access to two such sets of deeds recently. One set relates to an older property situated in the heart of Wigston with previous owners and occupiers documented back to the 19th century, the other set relates to a fairly modern bungalow situated in Wigston Fields on land not developed until the 1950s. Both make a fascinating study.

In each case the current properties were bought as plots of land on which the new owners had dwellings built. Deeds are more concerned with land ownership; any buildings on the land being of secondary importance. So when a house was built on a plot of land the deeds were not amended at the time to include this. The first reference to any building does not come until the first sale after construction takes place which

could be many years later. So it is often not possible to determine the exact date of building from the deeds, though in most cases it would be fairly soon after purchase of the land.

No: 1A Moat Street

This property is located on the south side of Moat Street on its corner with Newgate End in close proximity to All Saints Church. The earliest date recorded on the surviving deeds is 24/8/1839 being when the owner, John Wood, made his will. At this time there were two messuages (dwellings) on the site which were let to tenants. They are described thus: "All those two messuages, tenements or dwellings with the outbuildings, yard, garden and appurtenances thereto belonging situate standing and being in Great Wigston aforesaid and in a street there called Moat Street formerly in the several tenures or occupations of Thos Allen, Wm Hill the elder & Wm Hill the younger and then of Wm Coltman & Wm Baker & then of Sml Moore & Benj Powell." This description implies the yard and garden were shared between the two properties.

John was a retired maltster, a man of means, who warranted the description Gentleman, and who owned and lived in the adjoining house 2, Newgate End (currently Mrs. Freckingham's home). John Wood died in 1848 and left instructions that his property should be sold and the proceeds divided between his children. His daughter Ann Wood bought 2, Newgate End and the two cottages for £640 from her father's executors.

In 1885 Ann described as, spinster of Leicester, died and willed 2, Newgate End and garden to her sister Elizabeth Wood, and any other property she might own jointly between her said sister and their brother James Wood. There is a note to the effect that "the two messuages have been pulled down a considerable time ago and their site used as a garden to the adjacent messuage at Newgate End". Elizabeth was appointed the sole executor of Ann's will but she herself died intestate only three months later before she had finished settling her sister's affairs so the girls' brother James Wood of Leicester, Gentlemen, as the heir to both was granted Letters of Administration and became the owner. At this time the combined property was let to John Cooper and his under tenant. John Cooper was also a maltster and a butcher who was long associated with the Shoulder of Mutton public house in Long Street.

James Wood died in 1889 and his executors sold "all that piece of land now walled and fenced out, size 330 sq. yds situate in Moat Street with a frontage of 35' 9" adjoining 2, Newgate End and formerly part of the garden of it" to John Carter a framework knitter for £46. John Carter erected the present house presumably soon afterwards in say 1889/1890.

John Carter died at his home, then known as 1 Moat Street, in 1926, leaving the property to his wife Clara and then to his only child Hilda. Hilda Carter died unmarried in 1927 so the property was conveyed to Clara outright. She re-married to Harrison Hurst in 1930. When Clara Hurst died in 1941 her executors agreed to sell it to Elsie

Sarah Elizabeth Coltman but it was not legally conveyed until 1955. Sometime between 1926 and 1955 some infill building took place in Moat Street and the property was re-numbered 1 A.

In 1957 E S E Coltman sold the property to Violet Moore-Coltman who at that time lived at 16, Moat Street. Violet was a well known musician who gave piano lessons, she was also organist and choir trainer at All Saints Church.

Following Violet's death in 1966 the property was held by her executors until 1970 when ownership was transferred to one of the executors and a beneficiary Lilian Bambury. It had by then acquired a name "Mor-Kott". The present owners moved into the property in 1970, later purchasing it from Lilian Bambury's daughter.

11 Eastway Road

Eastway Road was set out and developed on part of the land belonging to Wigston Grange. The Grange land had been owned by the Burgess family at least since enclosure in 1766 when Joseph Burgess was awarded 84² acres on the east side of Leicester Road. The Burgess family were Quakers and earned their living as yeoman farmers and wool staplers. When Thomas Burgess 1799-1874 the last member of the family to live at the Grange died on 9/10/1874 the estate was put up for sale in 2 lots the following year. What is known after this time is detailed in Edna Taylor's article in Bulletin 68.

The first date mentioned on the deeds of 11, Eastway Road is 19/4/1924. At this time The Grange and that part of the land on the Wigston side was owned by Albert Edward Hill and his hosiery manufacturing company A.E. Hill (Wigston) Ltd. Albert Hill had borrowed money on mortgage from Francis Greenwood, of the London Guarantee & Accident Co. who lived at Knighton Fields House, Welford Road, Leicester. When he fell victim to the very severe depression in the 1920s and went bankrupt it resulted in Francis becoming the unintentional owner the following year in 1925.

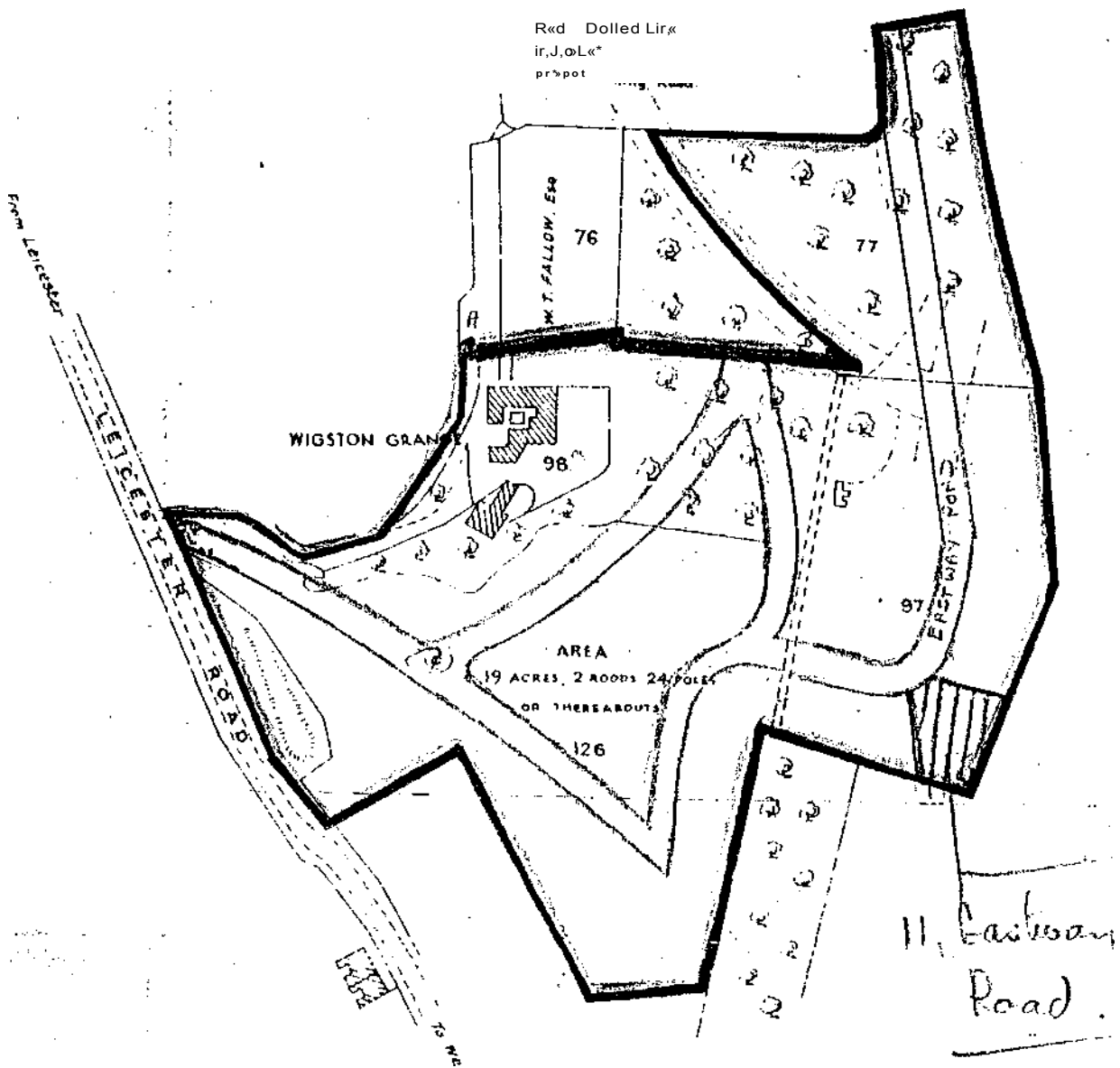
When Francis died in 1945 the house and 19a 2r 24p of land was sold by his executors to Drury & Co. Ltd., the builders for £7,000. Drurys used the house as their corporate headquarters and probably let the land to local farmers because it appears to be some years before development started.

On 2/8/1957 Drury & Co. conveyed for £220 to Kenneth & Delia Mitchell then living at 14, Highfield Drive "all that piece, plot or parcel of land situated at Wigston in the county of Leicester containing an area of 1815 sq yds or thereabouts and having a frontage of 59' or thereabouts to a road called Eastway Road on the Company's Grange Estate". It was a large plot on a corner site situated within a small field known as The Bogs to the extreme south east of the estate. Kenneth Mitchell was a quantity surveyor who worked for Drurys. The company agreed to make up the road and supply all services while the purchasers agreed amongst a whole raft of stipulations to

only build to plans approved by the Company, not to keep pigs or other offensive animals or carry on the trade of beer seller or innkeeper! Plans for a bungalow were approved by the council and Drury's, and believed to have been built by the latter most probably to Keith Mitchell's design.

Mr. & Mrs. Mitchell moved to Worthing in 1963 and the property was then bought by David & Gwendoline Chadwick who had previously lived in Narborough Road, Leicester. Mr. Chadwick was an engineers' pattern maker.

The next owners in 1972 were Sydney & Jean Cavern from Thurmaston. Mr. Cavern was a taxi driver and car dealer. The present owners, Anthony & Sheila Wright, bought the property on 14/12/1973 by part exchange of their previous property in Leicester and a cash balance.



Plan of Drury's building estate showing proposed new roads. Plot of 11, Eastway Road is bottom right

Acknowledgements: - My very grateful thanks to Bryan & Brenda Towler for allowing me to borrow the deeds to 1 A, Moat Street and also to Anthony & Sheila Wright for similarly allowing me access to the deeds of 11, Eastway Road.

SOME MORE ON DRURY & CO. LTD.

Drury's building company was founded by Ralph Grocock who was supported as it expanded by fellow Directors, Tom Brightman, Harold Suffolk, Bob Charlton, Sydney Chawner and with John Smith as the company accountant. The site would have undoubtedly been bought because of its future potential as building land and we should be grateful indeed that it was decided to retain the house as company headquarters when it would perhaps have been easier for them to demolish it and erect modern offices instead. The fate of so many good buildings at the time.

Ralph Grocock was the son of Thomas Grocock of Billesdon, a self employed plumber. In Kellys Directory 1925 Ralph is listed as working in partnership with his half brother Douglas Day and the two are described as plumbers of Billesdon, most probably having been trained by, and then continued, Thomas's business. By the time Kellys 1936 Directory was published Grocock & Day were still trading in Billesdon but had established headquarters at Mayfield Road, Leicester. The entry and supporting advertisement describes their speciality as "plumbers & hot water fitters, water finders & well sinkers, water surveys for farms & country houses, by gravitation, hydraulic ram, windmill & oil engine driven pumps". Perhaps it was this knowledge of country houses that led to an appreciation which saved The Grange?

By 1966 Grocock & Day were still listed as plumbers *of* 25/26 Mayfield Road, but also had additional premises at Queen Street and ran a Public Works Contractors & Civil Engineers business at 55, Rowsley Street. In addition Grocock & Day (Plant Hire) Ltd., had been established at Sawmill Works, Enderby Road, Whetstone where they were main distributors for earth moving equipment, pneumatic tools, compressors etc, and bulldozers.

Drurys also grew to be a big concern with branches in London, Kettering and Sleaford. They built extensively in Wigston; in addition to the Grange Estate, they worked on some part of the Meadows Estate and probably all the Fairfield Estate at South Wigston. With no obvious successors the directors sold out to Francis Parker Ltd a Colchester building company in 1970s. The plumbing part of Grocock & Day evolved more into a bathroom and heating supplies business and was continued by Doug Day's son Alan.

During the 1960s the directors of Drurys and Grocock & Day often assembled at the Conservative Club in Long Street after work in the evenings, and Douglas Day was the President for a number of years. Wigston is the poorer for their passing.



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THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL

THE GRANGE - WIGSTON FIELDS
L E I C E S T E R

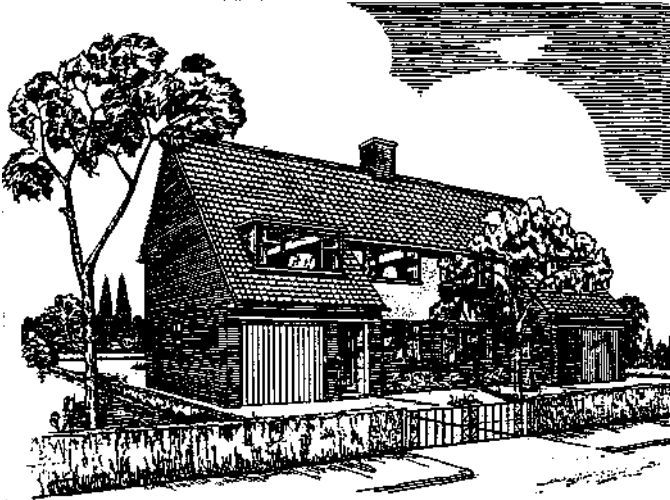
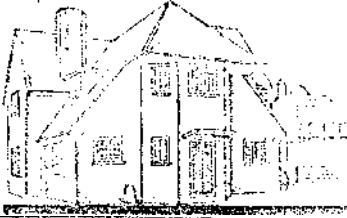
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Above: Drury
letterhead 1963

Left: Drury advert
Fairfield Estate 1960

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