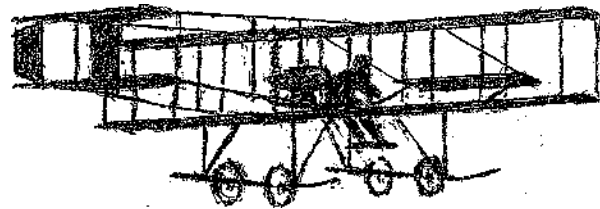


Greater Wigston Historical Society

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

BULLETIN 72



Farrnan Biplane 1911

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS - JUNE 2005 TO FEBRUARY 2006

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 17th August 2005**

Visit to Royal 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.

Wednesday 19th October 2005

History of Bruntingthorpe Airfield - Geoffrey Pool
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 16th November 2005

Development of Walnut Street & Infirmary area in slides - Colin Hyde of EMOHA
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 21st December 2005

Christmas Social with quiz, games & supper
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 18th January 2006

South Wigston 'Then and Now', a visual presentation - Peter Clowes
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 15th 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.

****Please disregard the piece in Bulletin 71 about needing to register for this visit. It has recently been confirmed that the Royal Infirmary Museum is still in place at Knighton Street and our visit can go ahead as planned.**

* * * * *

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. LE18 3RX.

FRONT COVER

Jim Colver's drawing for this Bulletin features a Forman Biplane flying in 1911. The men waiting look as if they expect it to land and have come prepared with their cameras or binoculars. My own father born in Wigston 1905 used to describe how unscheduled landings of these early flying machines in the surrounding fields sometimes occurred and caused huge excitement to small boys. He would dash off in the general direction they appeared to be coming down and sometimes be rewarded by meeting the pilot and being allowed to look inside the cock pit. They were not accidents as such, there was no crash, just something had happened which meant the flight had to be aborted.

FEBRUARY MEETING

The society held its Annual General Meeting when approximately 40 members were present. The evening commenced with:

- 1) Apologies for absence being recorded from Sue Woolley.
- 2) The secretary, Tricia Berry, reading the minutes of the February 2004 A.G.M. which were then agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.
- 3) The Treasurer, Brian Bilson, explaining the year end accounts. He noted these showed a surplus of £113 43. After various adjustments for sundry debtors and creditors, which nearly cancelled each other out, the true surplus became £107 43. The meeting agreed the accounts be passed. It was proposed to donate £100 to the FWK museum this year instead of the usual £50 00, and that subscriptions for the coming year should remain unchanged at £7 (full) and £5 (concessionary).
- 4) The Chairman, Edna Taylor, reported another successful year with meetings well attended and speakers enthusiastically received. The Bletchley Park open meeting at Cross Street Methodist Church in October proved very enjoyable and made a useful profit as well as serving to raised the profile of the society. She reported with sadness that our January speaker on Calke Abbey, Mrs. Gillespie, had died within two weeks of her visit to us. All Officers were thanked for their work over the year and also all members for their support, without whom there would be no society.
- 5) The membership Secretary, Stella Tweed, saying that the membership currently stood at 80, (15 full, 63 concessionary and 2 honorary). Seven new members had joined during the year. Average attendance at meetings was 34, the maximum number being 43.
- 6) Election of Officers: In the absence of any nominations it was proposed and agreed that all be re-elected.

7) Any Other Business: The Blue Plaque scheme was mentioned and an update of progress so far given by Colin Hames.

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

The second part of the evening was taken up by our Vice Chairman, Tony Lawrance, giving a very sophisticated computer presentation on the life of Gertie Gitana. Starting with her birth in modest circumstances in the pottery town of Longport. Her progress as a child entertainer and marriage to local man, Don Ross. Through to her success as music hall artist, saxophone player and singer, (she was known as the 'Tommy's favourite songbird' during WWI), to her appearance in 1948 at the Royal Variety Performance, her death at her home in Hampstead in 1957 and burial at Wigston cemetery.

After some questions and discussion, the Chairman, Edna Taylor, then thanked Tony for a most interesting talk.

GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

Receipts and Payments for the year ending 31st December 2004

| Receipts | | Payments | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|----------------|
| Opening Balances as at 1/1/04: | | Lecturers' Fees & Expenses | 35.00 |
| Cash in Hand | 4.83 | Donations | 60.00 |
| Current A/c | -18.37 | Bulletin printing | 124.60 |
| Deposit A/c | 1099.16 | Room Hire | 112.00 |
| 1085.62 | | Secretarial Exes | 54.00 |
| Subscriptions | 407.50 | Visits: Barrowden | 483.00 |
| Donation | 5.00 | -do- Harboro (Pd in 2003) | |
| Collections | 61.54 | -do- Rockingham (for 2005) | |
| Visits: Barrowden | 522.00 | 50.00 | |
| -do- Harborough | 72.00 | FWK Museum | 100.00 |
| Christmas Social | 285.02 | Programmes | 3.74 |
| Bank Interest | 13.01 | Bank Charges | 21.24 |
| Bletchley Park Open Meeting | 333.00 | Christmas Social | 274.06 |
| | | Bletchley Park | 268.00 |
| | | Closing Balances as at 31/12/04 | |
| | | Cash | 4.83 |
| | | Current A/c | 529.61 |
| | | Deposit A/c | 664.61 |
| | | | 1199.05 |
| | 2784.69 | | 2784.69 |

MARCH MEETING

This month the society welcomed Robin Jenkins from Leics. Record Office who gave a most informative and well received talk on the Crimean War 1854/56.

He explained the conflict was between Britain, France and Turkey on the one side against Russia on the other. It was so named because most of the military operations took place in the Crimea, a peninsular in the Black Sea where Russia maintained a fortress, arsenal and navel base at Sebastopol. The cause was the decline of the previously powerful Turkish empire and the fear by Britain and France, for their own different reasons, that this weakness would allow Russia to expand into the Mediterranean. In particular Britain viewed such expansion as a threat to its sovereignty in India. Russia had attacked Turkey at Sinope Bay in 1853. If Sebastopol could be destroyed Russian power would be severely crippled.

Allied forces were dispatched to the area. Britain sending 27,000 men, the largest contingent ever sent abroad at the time. The Battle of Alma was won in 1854 after which it was decided to destroy Sebastopol, but the campaign under Lord Raglan was poorly organised. It culminated in the Battle of Balaclava and the tragic Charge of the Light Brigade in which 673 horses charged and 475 were killed. Then the Russian winter arrived, supply ships were destroyed, roads were impassable, baggage animals died of cold, hunger and illness, as did 16,000 men.

Nine months later under a new British Prime Minister things improved and Sebastopol was finally stormed 7 June 1855. This ended hostilities and a peace agreement was signed 29 April 1856.

The war is particularly remembered for the outstanding contribution of Florence Nightingale, who having obtained £30,000 of Government backing went out to the Crimea with a team of colleagues to practise her revolutionary nursing skills.

After some questions and discussion, Edna Taylor, thanked Robin for a most interesting talk given in an easy, helpful manner.

APRIL MEETING

In April we had a very detailed and thoroughly researched talk on Thomas Lord Grey of Groby (1623-1657), Aristocrat and Regicide, by Prof. Jeff Richards, which was based on the biography he wrote in 2000.

This colourful and controversial member of the Grey family was born and brought up at Bradgate, the eldest son of Henry Grey, 1st Earl of Stamford and his wife Ann nee Cecil. The family were initially committed Royalists and in 1634, when Thomas would have been aged about 10, received Charles I and Henrietta Maria at Bradgate on a

Royal Visit. Attitudes were to change however. Firstly this was due to the general unpopularity of the King within the country, who dismissed Parliament when it disagreed with his extravagant spending and the need to raise ever higher taxes to fund it, together with his toleration of Catholics in sympathy with his wife who was herself a Catholic. (Parliament and the Greys were largely non-conformist).

Secondly the bitter animosity which existed between the Greys of Bradgate and, the other leading county family, the Hastings of Ashby, who remained committed Royalists. And thirdly the influence of a relative, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, (later to become commander of the main Parliamentary army during the Civil War), and who being childless himself, acted as a surrogate father to the young Thomas. These factors influenced both father and son to initially support the Parliamentary side, though Henry changed his opinion as the War progressed, but not so, Thomas.

In 1640, when aged only 17, Thomas was returned as MP for the Borough of Leicester in the Long Parliament. When the Civil War started two years later he joined the fighting, receiving his commissions from the Earl of Essex. He worked quickly to secure Leicester for Parliament and in December 1642 was appointed Major General of the Midland Counties Association. The following April he was given authority to confiscate lands from local Royalists. His many campaigns included, notably, Newark and Newbury. After the hostilities he played a leading part in Pride's Purge (purging Parliament of remaining Royalists sympathisers, so that the death sentence could be passed unopposed).

In 1649 he was appointed to the Rump Parliament to govern after the execution and in 1651 was again in action against the Prince of Wales at Worcester. He was rewarded generously by Parliament for his services but by 1653 was becoming out of favour. His behaviour caused Oliver Cromwell to see him as a rival and he was arrested at Bradgate in 1655 and imprisoned at Windsor for six months. He was then implicated as a member of the Fifth Monarchy Men (an extreme Puritan Group conspiring against Cromwell) and imprisoned again. He was released upon payment of a large fine but died in 1657, probably of gout, aged only 34, leaving a wife, Dorothy nee Bouchier, whom he had married in 1646, a son Thomas, and two daughters.

Thomas's signature on King Charles I's death warrant is the second name, after Oliver Cromwell's. He was the only aristocrat who was also a regicide. After the restoration in 1660 of Charles II there was terrible retribution of those responsible for his father's death. Perhaps it is lucky for Thomas he did not survive until this time. His burial place is not known, but it is said his father, by then a Royalist, used his influence to prevent his son's body being dug up and degraded as happened to other deceased regicides. Jeff Richards believes it most likely he was buried or reburied secretly at Bradgate in the chapel with his ancestors.

Thomas's son, also Thomas (1654-1720) succeeded his grandfather Henry to become the 2nd Earl of Stamford.

Unfortunately there was no time for questions, so after Edna Taylor had thanked the

speaker for coming all the way from Southampton, the meeting closed.

MAY MEETING

The Society's main summer trip this year was to Rockingham Castle. Thirty two members and friends arrived by coach and were divided into two groups for a conducted tour. We learned the castle dates from the Norman Invasion of 1066 and was built on a rocky outcrop site previously occupied as an Iron Age Fort, followed by Roman colonisers and then Saxon tribes. It was built to a standard design with outer bailey, containing great hall, chapel and garrison's living quarters, surrounded by a massive curtain wall and entered between two square towers protected by a portcullis. Inside the wall stood the keep and a fortified mound, approached across a drawbridge which formed a second line of defence. A second bailey 200 yards to the south west has now gone, and the whole complex was capable of housing up to 3000 people when the king was in residence.

Throughout the 12th Century Rockingham was visited regularly by successive kings who administered the country this way by travelling from castle to castle with their aids and followers. In 1276/91 it was modernised with windows and fireplaces being installed in the great hall, a bedroom built into the eaves for Queen Eleanor and the massive round towers built on the original Norman gatehouse.

By 1400 government became more centred on London and Henry V in 1422 was the last king to use Rockingham as a Royal residence. It fell into disrepair until 1544 when Edward Watson obtained a lease of the castle and park and began converting it into a comfortable Tudor residence. It was at this time that the domestic area known as the 'Street' was formed, with kitchen and servants quarters built between the curtain wall and great hall. Edward Watson's grandson bought the castle in 1619 from King James I and continued the improvements only to see it all largely demolished 12 years later when Lord Grey of Groby (whom we heard all about last month) captured and held it for the Parliamentarians, against repeated Royalist attack, during the Civil War. It was returned to Sir Lewis Watson afterwards but was so badly damaged he spent the rest of his life restoring it and claiming compensation from the government.

It was not used again as a regular family house until Richard Watson did major modernisation from 1836. His son George built a substantial square tower onto the library wing and this now forms the basis of the Saunders Watsons' private apartments.

Among the many treasures in this beautiful place, are a round topped iron chest said to have been left at Rockingham by King John and many reminders of Charles Dickens who was a personal friend of Richard Watson. He dedicated 'David Copperfield' to Richard and his wife Lavinia, and drew on his visits to Rockingham when describing Chesney Wold in 'Bleak House'.

After a very pleasant supper and vote of thanks to all concerned we returned to Wigston at about 10.45p.m.

OBITUARY

It is sad to report the death on 2nd February of Phyllis Dunkley of Bushloe End. She died at Leicester Royal Infirmary after a short illness. We send our sincere condolences to her family. Phyllis had been a member of the society since at least 1988.

RECOGNITION FOR PETER LIDDLE

Peter Liddle, Leicestershire's Chief Archaeologist, is travelling to Buckingham Palace in early June to receive an MBE from the Queen. This is for his services to unearthing the county's past and for instigating the setting up of community archaeology groups. Peter has twice been speaker at our meetings, the most recent time was September 2003 on Roman Leicestershire and previously on Donington Manor House. I am sure all members who heard these talks will remember him and be really pleased that he should receive this honour in recognition of his hard work and commitment.

WIGSTON HALL

The Hall was demolished by Wheatcroft Homes in 1961, to make way for Elizabeth Court flats. It had stood for well over 100 years, on a site that was part of a large estate between Bushloe End and Aylestone Lane, held by John Clarke. John did not build the Hall, however. His daughter, in her middle years, had married Captain Charles Holland Baddeley, of the East India Company, and he built the Hall and adorned it with orchard, glasshouses, pond and stables in 1834. Across the road was a paddock for the captain's horses on the site of the Peace Memorial Park. Hence the name Paddock Street.

According to Duncan Lucas, in his book 'A Wigston Wander', the captain was a public benefactor and served on the old parish council in 1850s. In Wright's Directory of 1880, there is mention of a beautiful stained glass window at the east end of All Saints Church, the gift of Captain Baddeley. A street name, Baddeley Drive, off Aylestone Lane, preserves the name. Professor W.G. Hoskins observes that Wigston had never possessed a squire. And it fell to an army captain to provide the semblance

at this late date.

After 1855, the captain's name does not appear in the directories, and in 1863 a Mansfield Turner is shown as the occupier, but I can find nothing about him. By 1870, White's Directory cites Alfred Cooper JP of Leicester as the occupier, and his name and Alfred Allan Cooper's name, fanner, and Dr. Alfred Cooper MD, seem to alternate in the directories right up to 1890. They were probably the same family.

There is an item about Mr. Cooper the JP in the Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury of March 1871, extracted by Bob Wignall for Transaction No: 8. It seems Mr. Cooper had some restoration done at the hall before he moved in, and at the end of it, the workmen were invited to a supper provided by Mr. Murrell of the King William IV, "who sustained his reputation in that line. Mr. Sharp, head of the building firm employed, occupied the chair, and toasts were "enthusiastically drunk".

On the next evening, at Leicester, the tradesmen were regaled with a similar entertainment at the Town Arms. On each table was a motto sent by Dr. Cooper, "live and let live". Perhaps he was a brother or son of Mr. Cooper JP?

In Duncan Lucas's 'Bygone Wigston' Vol. II there is a lovely photograph of a wedding party, dated 1886. Francis Freckingham married Edith Cook, and after the ceremony they were photographed outside the front entrance to Wigston Hall, by invitation of the owner, Mr. Alan Cooper. There is a good view of the white stucco work of the facade, and the presence of the pointed arch gives us a clue as to why some books call it 'gothick' in architectural style, i.e. not genuine Gothic.

The Hall was stone built, with three storeys, the top one having square rather than long windows, in the Georgian fashion, along with the tall chimneys. Add the castellated bay at the far end of the facade, and we have an interesting mix of building styles.

By 1890, the Hall had returned to military occupation, with the Uttersons living there for the next ten years, with their eight children (the first seven, girls!) and six servants. The Major General had seen service in the Crimean and Afghan Wars and in 1888 was appointed to the command of the 17th Leicestershire Regiment. One can imagine that the birth of their eighth child was a great relief to all, and that their large staff of servants - nurse, cook, waiting maid, housemaid, nursemaid and kitchen maid - was very necessary.

Kelly's Directories chart the occupancy of the Hall after 1900, starting with Henry Thorpe Hincks, fanner and land agent, with connections to the legal family of that name. One entry in Kelly's Directory lists the occupier in 1916 as Hincks, farmer, 30 Long Street. So the Hall has descended to having a number along with other houses. Perhaps this is because so much of the land had been sold off by now, some to the Wigston Co-operative Society in the Central Avenue area.

After years of occupation by military and farming people, the Hall, in 1923, came into

the hands of a manufacturer, as befitted the times. Thomas Birkett was the son-in-law of Benjamin Toone of Toone and Black Ltd, in Saffron Lane, and was himself a boot manufacturer. For a time the Toones and the Birketts lived together in separate parts of the Hall well into the 1940s. War time regulations required properties to be fully, used, and perhaps this was the time the hall was first divided into two parts, the north east side known as Hallcroft, and then later The Old Hall, the south west side known as Wigston Hall, home of the Birketts.

Mr. Birkett let The Old Hall (NE side) to George Picton-Bayton, a fashion designer. He opened workrooms employing around 15 local girls. These exclusive garments were beautifully made, much of the stitching being done by hand.

By 1946 the Picton-Baytons took over the whole house, living in the south side and using the north side for the flourishing court dressmaking business. Family members were living together, a sister Elizabeth married to a French military man Monsieur Parroy, and brother Brian Picton-Bayton who managed the business. There are pictures of the girls at work.

About 1950, George Picton-Bayton, moved to an apartment in Belgravia, London, with a workroom and salon for fashion shows to display his Spring and Autumn collections each year.

By 1953, only the workroom at the Hall was in use, with five employees. Garments were cut out and packed in tissue paper in brown boxes in London, and sent by rail from St. Pancras to Leicester station, collected and brought to Wigston to be prepared for fittings on the clients back in London, back and forth maybe three times!

The workroom in Wigston Hall closed in 1957 and positions were offered in London. Madame Parroy had opened a finishing school in 1954, and a vivid account of a visit to it by an Evening Mail reporter is included. Some people mistakenly think the Hall was used as a factory, during the war, but this article in the mail shows it definitely was not.

The plans of the Hall on the outside and on the inside give some idea of the layout of the lovely rooms.

Workrooms - All first floor rooms on the north side, at some time were used as workrooms up to early 1954. Then the remaining four employees moved down to a large ground floor room on the far south side of the Hall. A single storey room with shuttered windows on the south west overlooking the lawns was pleasant but very cold in winter. The workers had to enter through the scullery door, then through the green baize door into the hall to their workroom. That room closed in 1957.

Salon - A lovely room with double doors under an arched porch on the front of the house, used for fashion shows. Clients would view each new season's collections here (up to 1952).

Dance/Small Ballroom - In 1953 unused and empty, but the polished floor remained. It was a very light room, with French windows opening onto a small garden enclosed by a trellis. In the late 1940s, a Ball for employees and friends was held here. Madame Parroy's finishing school used all the north side, which was beautifully decorated and carpeted. It was sad to realise how short a life it had.

Outside, the frontage boundary has changed. There used to be a high wall and narrow pavement on Long Street and the road has not been widened. Some of the mature trees near the Post Office boundary were cleared, though a few pines remain to remind us of the large and secluded estate that once belonged to Wigston Hall.

Sources:

Brian Bilson's fantastic collection of directories from which he listed all the Hall's occupants with dates, and got me started on the article. Tricia Berry - article on the Hall in Transaction 32. Bob Wignall - extract from Leicester Chronicle in Bernard Elliott's Wigston in 1891 (Transaction 8). Duncan Lucas - various books quoted in the text. Especial thanks to the court dressmakers who once worked at the Hall for much valuable information for this article but who wish to remain anonymous.

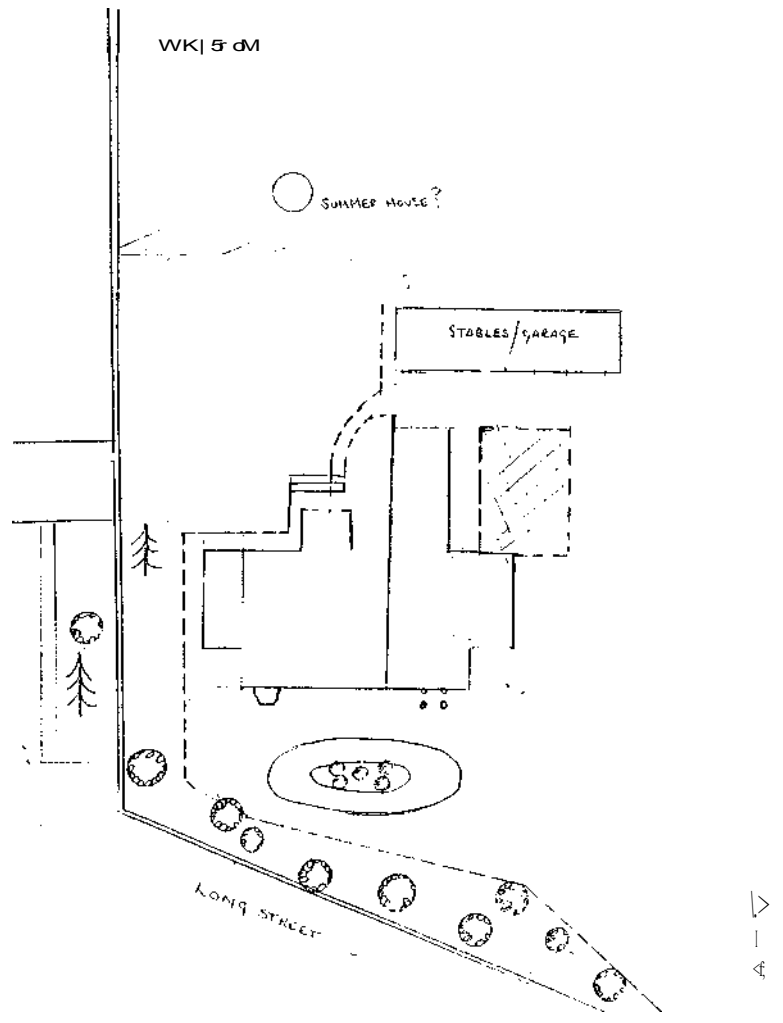
Edna Taylor

Typing up this fascinating article took me back to c. 1961 when I worked at the Midland Bank, then situated on the corner of Paddock Street. Being the junior member of staff at the time it fell to me to run the errands. One mid-morning I was asked to take a sealed package for hand delivery to the hall. I had never been there before except as a child to a garden party held at the back. The first problem was which door to go to, there were several to choose from, two of which were on the front. I chose the nearest, which I remember as being much wider than a normal one, very old, and covered in metal studs. There was a brass knocker and a bell hanging high up which you rang by pulling a rusty chain. I knocked on the door and then rang the bell, no response. Tried again, then waited, wondering if I should try another door, when I heard a faint noise from within. Then a voice shouted could I give a hand by pushing the door. With our combined effort the old door gradually swung open to reveal a confused Madame Parroy wearing a housecoat, having obviously just got up. She apologised for this, saying she had a migraine. I explained who I was and that the package had to be signed for. She asked if I would like to come in for a cup of tea but I dared not accept, as it would have taken too long. She disappeared inside to find a pen, signed my ready prepared receipt, we said goodbye and I returned to work.

I have never forgotten this small incident. I felt sorry for her as I think she lived alone at this time in that huge property except for her son Michel. I believe she and Monsieur Parroy were long since divorced and her brothers had moved away. And I regret to this day that I didn't risk the wrath at work and accept the invitation to have a look inside that impressive place!

Tricia Berry

Plan of Hall and grounds



KITCHEN

U&6&/

Interior layout of Gound floor

HALL

SALON

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WORLD of WOMEN

Academy for social graces

FINISHING school for young ladies. The setting—a charming 18th century house.

Does that sound like something from a Jane Austen novel? The idea is, in fact, completely modern, and the school will be opening here in Leicestershire in the New Year.

—Yesterday I met the woman whose aim it is "to provide the best possible preparation for young ladies about to make their debut" at her beautiful home, Wigston, Hall —Madame Elizabeth Parroy.

Strict routine

HERE, in the heart of Leicestershire, some 25 young girls will equip themselves to take their place in the world.

Emphasis will be on the social graces, with opportunities for visits to London, to art galleries, museums, to the show places of England.

But life will not be all fun and frolic. Oh no! Emphasis may be on the social side of

cooking, about wines, flower arrangement and table decorations, dress making, fashion sense, the art of

The finishing school is the idea of Madame Parroy, pictured here at tea.



being well groomed, deportment and etiquette.

MANY of them will have hunted and have been to hunt balls. They may (have had special courses in music or commerce.

They will have taken a turn at being hostess at monthly At Homes, and, moreover, they will have listened to criticism of their efforts by fellow students the following day!

They will have balanced books on the head and learned good carriage with the aid of shoulder-sticks.

Individuality

DECORATORS were putting a-the finishing touches to landings as I went into one of the bedrooms, crimson-carpeted, with delicate green walls left purposely plain for students to express their own ideas of art. Two students from Paris, two from Norway have already been accepted. Leicestershire spris may be among the 25. An experiment in "living together, as well as in living gracefully.

SIPPING my tea in front of a blazing fire on this typical November afternoon, I thought somewhat enviously of the girls who will be experiencing this country life which, after air, is our heritage. Four o'clock tea. Goodness! Was I doing everything with the correct social grace?



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Evening Mail article referred to in the text

life, but accent will be on WORK.

Here is a typical day's programme:

Breakfast at 8 a.m. (students make their own beds); then fifteen minutes gym; household management classes or cooking; classes in the afternoon, followed by tea at 4 p.m.

After tea, until 6.30 — prep. Yes, good old-fashioned "prep," just like school.

Dinner 7.30, and in every night by 10 p.m. No afternoons off, no weekends off without the permission of parents.

Syllabiis

AT the end of a year, there will be no gauche girls among the 25. They will have learned about English and continental



Dressmakers working on what looks like an ermine trimmed train



Girls from the workroom gather outside the Hall in 1949 to watch a mannequin parade