

Greater Wigston Historical Society

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

BULLETIN 80



PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS - FEBRUARY TO SEPTEMBER 2008

Wednesday 20th February 2008

A.G.M. followed by a Bring & Tell 7.30p.m.
U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 19th March 2008

Leicestershire Stained Glass - Paul Sharpling
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 16th April 2008

A Look at Langham Village in Rutland - Mike Frisby
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

***Wednesday 21st May 2008**

Visit to Beeby church, & Manor House (where in 1875 Thomas Nuttall founded the first Stilton Cheese making factory) - Arthur Howell
Followed by supper in a local pub
Meet 7.00p.m. Paddock Street Car Park to share transport.

***Wednesday 18th June 2008**

Visit to Launde Abbey, tour followed by tea/coffee & biscuits - Rev. T. J. Blewett
Meet 6.45p.m. Paddock Street Car Park to share transport.

Wednesday 20th August 2008

Memories of Wigston during WWII - Colin Hames & Marion Daetwyler
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 17th September 2008

Mock Trial - the law in action led by Ivor Sutton J.P.
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

*** Please note** - members need to book and pay for the May and June visits. A list will be started and money taken at the March & April meetings. Slips with suggested route and parking, and meeting points, will be available at Paddock Street on each evening. If drivers have already arranged their passengers and are planning to travel direct, please telephone Tricia (2880156) the week before for these directions.

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

Jim Colver's drawing this time shows a cricket match in progress at Rugby School in 1890. The school is of course better known for inventing the game of Rugby, when in 1823 a local lad William Webb Ellis, first picked up and ran with the ball. But in summer cricket was the sport.

Rugby School was founded in 1567 by Lawrence Sheriff, a purveyor of spices to Queen Elizabeth I, as a free grammar school for the boys of Rugby and Brownsover. In 1777 the school moved from the middle of the town to occupy a manor house on the present site of school house. The most famous head was Dr. Arnold (1828-1842) who rid the school of its 'fiashmans' and treated his senior boys as gentlemen, increasing their power and duties so that they shared the responsibility for moral tone as well as technical discipline. He is buried beneath the chancel steps of the chapel. In 1975 girls were first admitted into the 6th Form, and by 1995 Rugby had its first female head of school. There are at present approx. 800 pupils. In 19th century Thomas Hughes wrote Tom Brown's School days which recently received the latest of many screen adaptations. In this, Stephen Fry plays Dr. Arnold and 200 of the boys act as extras.

In the last Bulletin (No: 79), the Front Cover piece was on the subject of gas masks - a query has been raised as to whether officials really did wait outside schools and factories and throw tear gas bombs to catch out people who had not got their masks with them. It does indeed seem rather harsh. Has anyone else heard or even experienced this?

The story came from an archive on the web of WWII memories written by the public and gathered by the BBC. This particular memory was contributed by a lady called Patricia who was aged 12 in 1939. Some of the content was her own experience, and some what her mother had told her. The location was Carlisle. The site URL is: www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/03/a2369603.shtml.

OCTOBER MEETING

Our speaker, Dr. Michael Thompson, opened his talk with a brief outline of Countesthorpe in the 19th Century. The railway came in 1840 and a gas supply from Narborough Gas Company was available from 1876. There were 5/6 landowning farmer/graziers and 1,000 inhabitants living within 300 yards of each other.

A Disorderly Community? Was the intriguing title of his talk. The episodes recounted were the more serious incidents as reported in local newspapers. They invariably started in a similar way with a group of likely lads having too much to drink at the pub and then setting off bent on mischief. Some were general acts of anti-social behaviour such as damage, fighting, shouting and knocking pan lids together to annoy neighbours. One lad who was generally disliked was stoned out of the village.

More serious episodes resulted in loss of life, such as in 1836 when a group went into Mr. Humphrey's field to watch a bare knuckle fight for a wager of one guinea. After 12/14 rounds they heard the police were coming and stopped, moving to Foston which

was in another police district. When one of the contestants was seriously injured he was carried home and a surgeon sent for. He later died of a brain haemorrhage. His opponent was charged with manslaughter but later found not guilty.

Another bad incident happened in 1868 when seven men, again after a night drinking, decided to walk to Wigston and poach fish at Crow Mills. The miller, George Keene, who had been troubled by trespassers before, was alerted by his dog and went out with his shot gun. Hearing noises he was alleged to have shouted a warning to keep still or he would shoot, but one of the group, Thomas Gilham, ignored this and stepped forward. He was shot and later died. The prosecution claimed the shooting was deliberate, the defence that it was accidental. The deceased was a married man with nine children. He had been caught poaching in the district before, and been imprisoned for sheep stealing, but had never assaulted anyone, except his wife! The miller was charged with murder but found not guilty, though cautioned against taking out firearms.

After some questions and discussion our speaker was thanked very much by Vice Chairman, Mike Forryan.

(Bob Wignall, who has transcribed many items of news relating to Wigston from local newspapers, has added to this story the fact that the miller spent so much money on his defence that he was later declared bankrupt. By 1869 the mill premises were empty and a new tenant was being sought.)

NOVEMBER MEETING

For November the Society welcomed Dr. Margaret Bonney of Leicestershire Record Office who gave a very thought provoking talk based on the recent exhibition, *The Long Road to Freedom*. This was put on by the Office to commemorate the 200th Anniversary of the Act of Parliament which abolished the slave trade, though sadly slavery itself was not made illegal, and was continued well after 1807. The Act covered all British Territories with other countries following later.

The slaves were mostly natives of Africa who were shipped in dreadful conditions to work on the sugar plantations in America, the Caribbean and North Coast of South America. Leicestershire & Rutland had a surprisingly large number of links and estate records from the Halford family of Wistow, (who acquired plantations by marriage), the Palmers of Wanlip and the Shirleys of Staunton Harrold were used for illustration. Items included plans, maps, business accounts and actual inventories of slaves giving their names, ages, duties etc.

Some owners brought slaves back home with them and it became fashionable to have a coloured servant. One such lad, 19 year old Rasselas Morjan, originally from Abyssinia (Ethiopia), died in 1839 and is buried in Wanlip churchyard. His gravestone erected by the Palmer family shows the regard they had for him. Another slave Edward Juba of Kirby Muxloe became a Freeman of Leicester in 1768. His descendants still live in this area and have visited the exhibition.

Leicestershire also featured prominently in the abolitionist activities which preceded the passing of the Act. Thomas Babington and A. Macauley were close friends of William Wilberforce MP and the three spent much time at Babington's home, Rothley Court, putting together evidence to make the case for abolition which

Wilberforce then presented to Parliament. In Leicester the activists Susannah Watts and Elizabeth Heyrick, with friends, worked tirelessly to raise awareness and ran a campaign to persuade people to boycott sugar. Pamphlets were produced which circulated in America as well as Britain.

After some questions and discussion Margaret, and her husband who ably assisted her, were thanked very much by Colin Towell.

DECEMBER MEETING

This month's Christmas social started with one of Edna Taylor's popular picture quizzes. We were then entertained by Tony and Di Lawrance who recited a fictional conversation between Lord Nelson and a politically correct Hardy, as they discussed tactics for the impending battle of Trafalgar. This was very amusing but at the same time rather disconcerting and brought home how attitudes have changed over time.

We then worked in groups to try and solve a very interesting general knowledge quiz set by Tony and Di. After a delicious buffet meal from Annie's Patisserie the evening was rounded off with a raffle before we departed about 10.00p.m.

JANUARY MEETING

The January meeting covered more recent history with Tony Lawrance and Mike Forryan showing old newsreel from 1942. The war of course dominated what proved to be a pretty eventful year. The broadcasts were very revealing, not only for the momentous events covered, but the style and content of commentary.

America and Japan had now entered the war and events were truly global. The Russians drove the Germans from their country at the Battle of Stalingrad; the Japanese were being driven from their recently captured strongholds in the South Pacific in the Battles of the Coral Sea and the Solomons and others. Then there was the 8th Army's great victory in North Africa at the Battle of El Alamein under General Montgomery. After this last the Axis forces were in full retreat, Rommel on the run, and 9,000 prisoners taken on the first day. Referring to this Churchill's speech was to include the memorable words...."now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning". Churchill had previously made a highly secret visit to North Africa and while inspecting a line of Australian soldiers, one made the never to be forgotten exclamation "Gripes! Its old Winnie". It was also the year of the mass murder of Jews at Auschwitz. Churchill's visit to America where he addressed the Senate and House of Representatives, referring to his half American heritage. A highly secret visit to Britain by Molotov who signed a 20 year Mutual Assistance Treaty with Britain. He then travelled to America to make it a triple alliance. Mrs. Roosevelt visited London as guest of the King and Queen and toured around the capital taking back goodwill and information for the president. Sir Stafford Cripps visited New Delhi, there was an allied raid on Dieppe and the RAF civilian bombing campaign so angered Hitler that he ordered all the British cities in the Baedeker Guide to be destroyed.

At home the King and Queen made many visits to bombed areas and Princess Elizabeth celebrated her 16th Birthday. This day was designed as a coming out occasion, where she took the salute from a march past of troops and was officially photographed with them. After three years of defensive action the Allies' war had

now turned on the offensive and married women as well as single were encouraged to join the forces, training for jobs such as flight mechanics in the WAAF. Everyone was encouraged to holiday at home to reserve transport for official use.

After some discussion Colin Towell thanked Tony and Mike for a very interesting evening.

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OBITUARY

We have recently learned that Mrs Elizabeth Gordon passed away on 15/7/2005. Elizabeth who lived in Scotland was a grand-daughter of H.A. Owston, solicitor, of Bushloe House. She had very fond memories of the house where she often went to stay during her childhood. She retained a great interest in the house and her family history and used to visit Wigston on occasions. After receiving a bulletin which featured them she decided to join the Society. She let us have copies of the diaries kept by her mother and aunt in the 1890s. These are a wonderful illustration of the social history of the time, and excerpts have also featured in past bulletins. Our belated condolences to her family.

BLUE PLAQUE BOOKLETS

At the November meeting 10 booklets were put out for sale with a ticket showing the price of £3 00 and a small pot for the money. When it was collected up afterwards there were 4 booklets left and £15 00 in the pot. So can members please cast their minds back and if you did forget to pay, let me have the missing £3 00 as this is owed to the Civic Society. Thanks - Tricia Berry.

CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

This year's Christmas Social was as always an enjoyable and friendly occasion, but it has to be faced that the attendance has reduced considerably of late. For instance in 2004 there were 42 present, in 2005 there were 39, in 2006 there were 27 and this year 24. If it declines any more it will have an affect on the atmosphere. There are a number of options for Christmas 2008:

- We could plan the same event as usual hoping to attract at least the same number as in 2007.
- We could have a 'normal' meeting in December, but with a Christmas theme, and serve say mincepies and a drink afterwards.
- We could have a 'normal' meeting in December and those who wanted could go out to a restaurant as well.
- Or we could have no meeting in December, but those who wanted could still go out to a restaurant.
- Some people were also disappointed we did not follow up the fish and chip idea. Would it be nice to have a social evening with fish and chips brought in say in October instead of a speaker?

These ideas will be discussed at the next committee meeting (usually held in April). We would like to hear which of these options, or any other suggestions, members

would prefer. Please do make your views known to the Chairman, Tony Lawrance, or any committee member.

DISPLAY BOARD AT WIGSTON LIBRARY

Duncan Lucas reported at the January meeting that he had obtained a £200 grant for a 5'X 4' display board at Wigston Library where the staff are planning a Local History corner. It is for the use of our Society, the Civic Society and the Framework Knitters Museum. It could prove very valuable for raising the profiles of these organisations. Thanks to Duncan for going to the trouble of obtaining this facility for us.

WHITE SOCKS & BLUE SATIN SASHES

I was brought up as a strict Methodist. On Sundays - Church in the morning, Sunday School in the afternoon, and Church again in the evening.

All my leisure activities were focused round Wigston Frederick Street Methodist Church - Concerts, Sewing Class, Junior Choir and later on Youth Club and Church Choir. And then the famous Girls' Choir under the direction of Bill Ward our lovely Choir Master. Looking back I realise how terribly naive we were, but none the worse for that!

I would now like to take you through the delights of the Sunday School Anniversary or Sermons Sunday, which was always held on the second Sunday in May. The excitement when we started to practise six weeks before. Herbert Garratt the Choir Master choosing the soloists, I always had the honour of reciting a poem. The wooden gallery being put up on the Thursday night before. Herbert Garratt, who was also the Sunday School Superintendent, sorting us in our places. Boys one side and girls the other. Hilda Kirby placing the Primary Class on little chairs at ground level, rising in order of seniority to the joy of being a Top Junior with your head nearly touching the ceiling.

Then the Day - white socks and shoes, new frocks, hair in beautiful ringlets having spent the night in 'Oss Gobs - you know, rolled round bits of sheeting and tied in a knot at the top; most uncomfortable to sleep in. When taken out the next day your hair twirled round like a spring. The boys in new suits with shining shoes and faces, looking as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, and singing like little angels. Sunshine if you were lucky. One dress that stands out in my memory was made of blue satin with pink rosebuds printed on it and a little Peter Pan collar, very swish.

My sister Joyce and I were lucky as our mother was a professional dressmaker and made all our dresses along with those for half the girls in Wigston. One girl who came for a final fitting and collection of her sermons frock looked at herself in the mirror and uttered the never to be forgotten words "Ooh Mrs. Atkins, ain't it luvly".

At this point I must explain that my father was in the RAF for the whole of the second World War, and I was only five when, in 1940, he was posted overseas to South Africa, there to remain until the end of the war. He wrote us long letters enclosing

beautiful hair ribbon which of course you couldn't get in this country at that time.

To conclude the evening Sunday School Anniversary Service we always sang that lovely hymn by John Ellerton - *The Day Thou Gavest Lord is Ended*.. ..when we came to the verse:

*The sun that bids us rest is waking
Our Brethren 'neath the Western sky,
And low by low fresh lips are making
Thy wondrous doings heard on high.*

I thought of my father waking up over the ocean in South Africa. After the service we would go for a walk, then home and write a letter to Dad, telling him all about our wonderful day and enclosing Forget-me-nots picked from our garden. That was the end of another beautiful Sermons Sunday, as I remember it.

As a post script to my memories of those long ago Anniversaries, as I mentioned before, when we were in our early teens many of the chapel girls were formed into a choir (to keep us out of mischief, successfully I hope!). Conducted by Bill we sang round the county of Leicestershire and entered competitions. I remember one concert we did in 1950 at the Magna Cinema, Wigston, to raise money for the British Troops Comfort Fund in Korea. Some years ago when Bill was 80 the choir met again for a Very Secret Birthday Party. Bill had no idea what had been arranged for him until he walked into the church with his daughter Elizabeth and saw his 'Young Ladies' and their partners waiting to greet him. Some coming from as far away as New Zealand. We sang together after 40 odd years, it was as though the intervening years had never been. You could have cut the nostalgia with a knife.

Eileen Rawson

TERRIBLE ATTACK AT WISTOW

The last Bulletin featured an account from the Leicester Journal of 1/8/1873 of the brutal killing of Thomas Monk, Sir Henry Halford's farm bailiff at Wistow Hall. The victim had gone out at 4.00a.m. with his gamekeeper son John, and the under gardener, Enos Atkinson, to drive off poachers they could hear on their employer's property. The staff followed the four poachers to the cross-over bridge at the canal where a pitched battle ensued. Not content with disabling the staff and escaping, they beat up all three and then shot Thomas leaving him fatally wounded and the other two severely injured.

Duncan Lucas has subsequently added to the story that he believes Sir Henry forbade the sale of alcohol in Newton Harcourt as a result of this incident. I decided to look in subsequent issues of the Leicester Journal to see if the poachers were ever caught. The following takes the story forward:

Leicester Journal 15/8/1873:

Wistow Murder - "hi connection with this affair a man named Henry..... was yesterday morning brought before Mr. T. T. Paget at the County Public Office, charged with being concerned in the murder of Thomas Monk, in the recent affray with poachers at Wistow. The enquiry was conducted with closed doors, but we have

reason to believe that the prisoner was apprehended in consequence of having made use of expressions to several individuals, which led them to suppose that he was one of the persons wanted on account of the serious offence which had been committed. It is however, doubted whether what he said of himself had any foundation, except in his own distempered imagination. He was remanded till Monday." [As nothing further is reported about this arrest, it appears to have been a false alarm, so the full name of the suspect has been omitted.]

Leicester Journal 22/8/1873:

Inquest on the body Thomas Monk - The Coroner and other officials visited the scene of the crime and also viewed the body of Thomas Monk in Wistow Church. The verdict was "willful murder against persons not yet in custody".

Leicester Journal 14/11/1873:

Arrest and brought before court - "Police have apprehended John Lewin Taylor (28) alias Diddlum Taylor on the charge with three others not in custody with the wilful murder of Thomas Monk. He was apprehended on 25th ult. at Capeltown, Nr. Sheffield in the name of William Brown on account of stealing leather from a carriers cart at Claycross Admitted he was one of the men wanted on a bill with a reward of £100 00..... Since been at work at a coal pit at Sheffield earning 9/-d per day..... Charged Diddlam Taylor, proper name John Lewin, and case adjourned until next week."

Leicester Journal 21/11/1873:

Court Case - John Lewin alias Diddlum Taylor was defended by Mr. H.A. Owston (of Bushloe House, Wigston). Mr. W.N. Reeve appeared on behalf of Sir Henry Halford. The following were called as witnesses.

John Monk, game keeper at Wistow Hall, gave his account of the fateful night.

Enos Atkinson, under gardener at Wistow Hall, also gave his account. Said that at an identity parade he had recognised the defendant as one of the four men involved, who were all strangers to him.

John Merryman Fewkes, surgeon of Great Glen, attended the victim until death, then performed a post-mortem. Said there was a gun shot wound in the thigh which had penetrated the femoral vessels and death through loss of blood had been inevitable.

The shot had been fired at close range as there were burn marks on the victim's clothes and some particles of cloth had entered the wound which was 7/8" deep.

There was also a fractured skull.

William Smith, surveyor, had been commissioned to produce a scale drawing of the area.

Sgt. Grainger, of Great Glen Police, attended the scene.

Henry Parsons, Newton Harcourt lock-keeper, was about his work and was alerted by the commotion.

John Woodhouse, boatman, employed by Grand Junction Canal Company, was proceeding along the canal and came upon the scene.

William Grant, described finding a broken gun stock 60 yards away from the scene.

Inspector William Clarke, detective with the County Police Force, said he had known the prisoner for 10/12 years. When he heard later the same morning what had happened "for reasons of his own he suspected the accused's involvement". He visited his house but nobody opened the door. He returned repeatedly but with the same result. He arranged the printing of bills (posters) offering £100 00 reward for information leading to the arrest of the accused and had them circulated around the country. Eventually he was contacted and travelled to Chesterfield where the accused,

a married man, was already in custody under the name of Edward Brown on a charge of larceny. He was told the prisoner had made a confession to the Custody Officer and had admitted he was one of the wanted men on the bills. In the confession he had described how he first fled to London where he met someone he knew who showed him a newspaper cutting which stated he was wanted hi connection with murder at Wistow. This made him decide to 'go on the run' moving frequently and obtaining casual work where he could. The Derbyshire Police waived the charge of larceny and allowed Insp. Clarke to bring the prisoner back to Leicester. The case was then adjourned to be tried at the Assize Court the following March.

Leicester Journal 13/3/1874

The Spring Assizes were held at Leicester Castle before Mr. Justice Blackburn. The witnesses were all called again and repeated their stories. The jury retired for 20 minutes and returned a verdict of "Guilty of Manslaughter". John Lewin was sentenced to penal servitude for life, his Lordship afterwards observing that there was "evidence as clear as could possibly be to bring in the Crime of Murder".

hi the 1881 census John Lewin's address is H.M. Convict Prison, Portland, Dorset. He is described as a jobbing labourer, married and aged 37. He does not appear in the indexes of the 1891 or 1901 census. It is likely he had died in view of the harsh conditions described in the following quote on web site www.dorset.opc.com. "The cruel conditions in the original Portland Prison and its quarries during the latter half of the 19th century were a major catalyst for penal reform in this country Many prisoners died working to quarry the stone to build Portland's Naval breakwater. During the 1870s deaths within the prison ran at nearly one per week."

John Lewin's early life has proved particularly difficult to track down, not least because he appears to have had as many different dates of birth and jobs as he had names. However he does appear on three census returns, hi 1861 he is unmarried, in the Royal Navy and is listed *as a* 22 year ordinary seaman on board a ship named 'Scout' moored at Sandwich, Kent. His place of birth is given as Shanghai, China. In 1871, still unmarried, aged 31 and a shoe finisher, he is living with his uncle and aunt, Henry and Elizabeth Booth and family at 6, Public Wharf, St. Margarets, Leicester. Place of birth China B.S. (British Subject), hi 1881, while in prison as above, his place of birth is again China B.S.

His aunt and uncle married at St. Margaret's Church in 1831 and Elizabeth's maiden name was Lewin. So she would seem to be his father's sister. Her census entries give her birth place as St. Margarets, Leicester.

John Lewin appears to have married between census day in 1871 and the date of the poaching incident in July 1873. The only marriage in Leicester and county which is a possible match is a John Lewin age 25, who is an elastic weaver. He married an Annie Shenton at St. John's Church, Leicester in April 1873. Both bride and groom gave their address as 13, Chatham Street. This address was the home of Annie, and her widowed mother and siblings, suggesting that John Lewin had been a lodger there. John's father is given as David Lewin, a labourer.

hi the 1841 census there is a David 'Luin' a boot maker in Woolwich, Kent, (but born elsewhere), with a wife and son named John of approximately the right age. Woolwich was a town dominated by the army, and the Woolwich Arsenal. The British Army was involved hi China between 1839 and 1860, in the Opium Wars. The

British captured Shanghai in 1842. It seems probable that David 'Luin' spent time with his family in China, perhaps making soldiers' boots and this is how John came to be born there.

When Thomas Monk was so brutally deprived of his life he was 41 years old. His wife Rebecca was 39, and their children ranged from their eldest son John, the gamekeeper, who was 17, to three daughters aged 14,12 and 9, to their youngest child Thomas who was two. They lived at Wistow Cottage. By the 1881 census the family had decided on a total change and had moved to Leicester. Rebecca lived at 2, Wimbledon Street with Thomas, the only child still at home. She also had two lodgers and a boarder. Interestingly her occupation is given as 'annuitant' suggesting that she was in receipt of an income or pension, probably from the Halford family.

Her son John was married with three children and lived at 6, St. George Street. He now had his own business as a furniture remover.

hi conclusion it would appear that John Lewin's family came originally from Leicester. That he returned to the town after his spell in the Navy and lived with relatives. In view of Insp. Clarke's evidence it would seem he had been in trouble before and was well known to the police. I have found nothing to indicate what happened to his widow or whether he was questioned as to the identity of the other three poachers.

Tricia Berry

THE DERBY MERCURY DECEMBER 1793

"A couple of Leicester sportsmen were last week beating the Meadows about Aylestone Field and one of them taking aim at a snipe, brought it down on the other side of the canal which has lately been cut near that place, and contains water breast high. Unable to cross the water and come to their prize, they engaged a working man, for sixpence to strip and carry them over.

The fellow performed his engagement with one of them, and then after carrying the other as far as the middle of the water, he declared he would set him down in that place unless he would give him a shilling. This being positively refused, the man kept his word, and throwing the man off his shoulders into the water, ran off.

The sportsman, who is esteemed a good shot, however took his revenge for as the fellow was mounting the banks he discharged his fowling-piece and lodged the whole contents in his posterior.

The man, we learn is severely, but not dangerously wounded, twenty or thirty of the shots have already been extricated. The sportsman, who is one of the faculty, has generously lent his alliance and having administered a dole so likely to cure the fellow's pranks in future, he is perfectly content with the ducking he himself received on the occasion."

Extracted by the late Jim Colver from an original at Leicestershire Record Office, Ref: PI28/66