

[2007]

# [Blue Plaques in Wigston Magna and South Wigston]



**The Wigston Civic Society**

**The Greater Wigston Historical Society**

The Civic Society first considered the idea for a Blue Plaque Scheme in 2002 when discussing a vision for Wigston which included several other ideas that would hopefully make the area a better place in which to live.

A working group was formed consisting of Tricia Berry and Tony Lawrance from the Historical Society, and Colin Hames, Colin Towell and Margaret Ford from the Civic Society who would manage the project and follow through to implementation.

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## OVERVIEW

The Civic Society first considered the idea for a Blue Plaque Scheme in 2002 when discussing a vision for Wigston which included several other ideas that would hopefully make the area a better place in which to live.

A working group was formed consisting of Tricia Berry and Tony Lawrance from the Historical Society, and Colin Hames, Colin Towell and Margaret Ford from the Civic Society who would manage the project and follow through to implementation.

A lottery Grant was obtained and the process begun. Full details of the process and history behind the project can be found in a booklet celebrating some of the notable local people of the past.

### **Blue Plaques in Wigston Magna & South Wigston - Wigston Civic Society £3.00**

## WIGSTON MAGNA

This village can be traced back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century and in the early days was centred on what we now call the Lanes area bounded by Long Street, Moat Street, Bull Head Street and Bell Street. One of the plaques commemorates Professor Hoskins who wrote *The Midland Peasant* which describes the changes from the self sufficient agricultural village of medieval times, entirely separate from Leicester, to the 20<sup>th</sup> century town, which through industrial and housing growth has become virtually a suburb of that city.

It was once often known as Wigston Two Steeples, because of its two churches of All Saints' and St. Wistan's. There were also a number of non conformist chapels but some of these have been demolished or are now used by other congregations. The United Reformed Church in Long Street and the Methodist Church in Cross Street happily remain, and also some new churches have been established more recently.

Wigston became a centre for framework knitting in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The knitting 'frames' were initially operated at home but later in special 'shops'; small purpose built workshops with long rows of windows to maximise available light. A few of these still survive, notably at the museum in Bushloe End. The hosiery industry dominated the area until the 1980s when it went into sharp decline. The other traditional industry was the manufacture of boots and shoes, but this too, has now disappeared leaving many central brownfield sites ripe for redevelopment. The population of Wigston Magna at the 2001 census was over 25,600.

## SOUTH WIGSTON

This part of the Borough is almost unique in the Midlands as it was built over a seven year period by one developer, Orson Wright another plaque subject, mainly to meet the housing needs of men employed at the nearby railway locomotive depot and wagon repair works.

The staple industries of hosiery and boot and shoes soon became established alongside those of biscuit and pie making; percussion instruments and electric vehicle manufacturing. But here again a decline has led to a need for regeneration and this is being led by the new Tesco store which opened in 2005.

There are many places of worship including St. Thomas's built in 1893; Methodist, Baptist, United Reformed and a Catholic church. The population of South Wigston at the 2001 census was nearly 7,500.

## **PLAQUE No: 1**

### ***ORSON WRIGHT (1853-1913)***

"South Wigston originated through the enterprise of Orson Wright JP, brick maker, builder, contractor, iron founder, stonemason, blacksmith, wheelwright, joiner; boot and shoe, hosiery and elastic web manufacturer; electrical engineer, hotel proprietor and hat and cap maker" states the 1923 *Official Guide to Wigston and District* "who realised the great commercial possibilities of the area served by three railway stations and two main lines and set about encouraging manufacturers to establish their works amidst country surroundings yet within easy distance of Leicester."

He was born in Dunton Bassett on 23/7/1853, the second of the six children of Joseph Wright, labourer and later grocer, and his wife Maria nee Greenwell. Aged eight years he scared crows and led plough horses before entering an apprenticeship with a Leicester carpenter and joiner. He was working at the bench in 1874 when he married Ada Harris daughter of Thomas Harris, a wheelwright. The couple had six children.

He started in business, initially with a brother, but was soon working alone, building estates in Aylestone Park, Highfields, Spinney Hill, Crown Hills, Woodgate, Newfoundpool, Fosse Road and Knighton Fields. He promoted and built the Grand Hotel, Leicester, and was one of the five contractors to work on the Derwent Water Scheme in Derbyshire.

He purchased the South Wigston estate in 1883 and within a few years 600 houses and many factories had been completed, together with the Grand and Clarence Hotels. He named two streets Dunton and Bassett after his home village and others Orange, Water (later renamed Park), Railway, Irlam, Garden, Healey and Timber, to spell out his name. He established his own premises, Perseverance Works and home Venetia House, in Canal Street (the house now part of the Grand Hotel), before finally moving to Ashbourne House in Blaby Road.

He served as a Conservative councillor for Leicester City, the County and Wigston, was Vice President of Leicestershire County Cricket Club and a generous supporter of Leicester Fosse (City) Football Club. He was a life governor of the Infirmary and helped organise its sports days.

He died on 10/4/1913 and there were many glowing tributes. All businesses closed and hundreds attended his funeral at St. Thomas's Church or lined the route to Wigston Cemetery. His children presented two stained glass windows to the church in memory of both their parents.

## **PLAQUE No: 2**

### ***GERTRUDE MARY ASTBURY (GERTIE GITANA) (1887-1957)***

A very well loved music hall entertainer, who sang, danced and played the saxophone, Gertie Gitana was described in reviews as "a youthful artiste possessing a well developed voice and a most winsome style". A forces sweetheart during World War I the "Tommies' Favourite Song Bird" raised several thousand pounds for war charities with her concerts and the sale of signed postcards. She made the song 'Nellie Dean', which she first sang in Plymouth in 1905, her very own.

She was born Gertrude Mary Astbury in Longport, Staffordshire on 28/12/1887, the eldest of the three children of William Astbury, a pottery foreman, and his wife Lavinia Agnes nee Kilkenny. Talented from an early age she was noticed dancing in the street by members of Tompkinson's Royal Gypsy Children's Troupe. She joined the Troupe and by the age of four was travelling with them billed as 'Little Gitana' (Italian for female gypsy). She later joined Jimmy and Belle O'Connor's music hall touring company, and made her professional solo debut at the Tivoli Theatre, Barrow aged eight. Belle became an 'honorary aunt' for the rest of Gertie's life and lived with her following the death of Jimmy.

During a long career, she appeared in virtually every theatre in the country including the Palace Theatre, Leicester. She also played at the Clarence Hotel, South Wigston where the concert room was named in her honour. She had two musical shows written especially for her 'Nellie Dean' and 'Dear Louise'. The latter was where she met her future husband Don Ross who played the leading man. She toured in partnership with George Elliott and Ted Ray. A regular star of pantomime, she is particularly remembered as the saxophone playing Cinderella. Between 1911 and 1916 she recorded 40 tracks on 78rpm records. She retired in 1937 but was tempted to make a comeback in 1948/50 to appear in her husband's old time music hall revival show 'Thanks for the Memory'.

She died of cancer at her home, Neldean, Hampstead Heath on 6/1/1957. After a celebrity funeral at Brompton Oratory, she was laid to rest at Wigston cemetery where a distinctive marble angel marks the spot. Her step-father Robert S. Burdon was buried nearby in 1959. Frederick Street, Hanley where her family moved when she was three, was renamed Gitana Street in her honour, and a memorial seat, the gift of friends, placed in Princes Street, Edinburgh.

## **PLAQUE No: 3**

### ***CHARLES MOORE (1878-1962)***

Born in Wigston on 11/5/1878, Charles Moore was the sixth child in a family of ten. His father was Paul Moore, a framework knitter and his mother was Elizabeth Ann nee Dexter who was born in Normanton, Nottinghamshire. After leaving school at the age of eleven he entered the hosiery industry.

Coming from a musical family he took lessons from Edward Matthews of Oadby, a professional cornet player. He played in the evenings with Edward at the Opera House, and also fulfilled lunch and tea engagements at Winn's Oriental Cafe, where he played the cello in a trio. In 1903 he married Kate Matthews, Edward's daughter.

Helped and influenced by his father-in-law he started his music business in 1912, initially at 46, Station Road, Wigston. A year later it moved to 56, Blaby Road, South Wigston and again, by 1920 to 117, Blaby Road, where it remained until the shop was sold in 1972.

'Charlie Moore's Band' as it was traditionally, but unofficially, known was formed in 1902, when a breakaway group from the Wesleyan Mission Band, invited him to be their conductor. As the Wigston Temperance Band he guided it to the Championship Section at the Crystal Palace competitions in the 1920s. This led to the name being changed to Wigston Temperance Silver Prize Band. It is now The Wigston Band.

He helped to form and train at least eight local bands and others in Norfolk and Warwickshire. He was a founder of the Leicestershire Brass Band Association and was involved in the National Association. He was choirmaster at Blaby and Cosby churches, and at St. Thomas's Church for twenty five years, where he also played the organ. He was involved with the Church Lads' Brigade in Leicester and taught wind instruments at Alderman Newton's Boys' School during World War II.

His many band arrangements were used widely but sadly never published, though some were recorded on gramophone records. One of his pieces, a march called 'Hurricane', was played by the band at their 90<sup>th</sup> birthday concert in 1992. His unique collection of old wind instruments now form the major part of a collection held at Leicester University.

He had a son Edward, known as Ted, who followed him into the business and the band, and three daughters. He died 18/3/1962 and is buried at Wigston Cemetery.

## **PLAQUE No: 4**

### ***HENRY WALTER BATES (1854-1948)***

Described in an obituary in the Leicester Mercury as an "artist, traveller and philanthropist", Henry Walter Bates was all of these and much more. He was born in Leicester on 2/7/1854, the second child in a family of nine. His father was Frederick Bates, a brewer, who founded the Leicester Brewing & Malting Company, and his mother was Ann nee Orange, the daughter of David Orange, a lambs wool spinner and landowner, from Crow Mill. Orange Street commemorates the name. He was named after his uncle Henry Walter Bates (1825-1892), the naturalist and friend of Charles Darwin, who went to the Amazon for eleven years, returning with about 8,000 previously unknown species, mainly insects.

He took control of the family hosiery business upon the death of his uncle Samuel in 1898, it having only recently been moved from King Street, Leicester to Station Street, South Wigston. The following year he was made a Freeman of Leicester. The company made men's socks and in 1908 was known as Bates & Pickard. By 1923 it had become Henry Bates & Co. Ltd., and had acquired a telephone No: 7, thus one of the earliest in the district to do so. The business remained in the family until 1967 when rather than diversify into nylon stockings it was sold to A. Wayne Ltd.

A prolific artist in oil and water colour, he is said to have painted more than 15,000 pictures, winning many prizes, and is thought to have exhibited at the Royal Academy. He travelled in Britain and abroad to capture the scenery and to copy Old Masters, and locally, often by bicycle, to record the Leicestershire countryside. He also held art classes.

A devout Christian he gave very generously to local places of worship. He founded a children's mission in Leopold Street which later moved to 'Holiness Hall' in the grounds of his house named 'Bryncrug' in Countesthorpe Road. Local children would attend after Sunday School and were given illustrated scripture cards. The house is still there, next to the car park, now converted into flats.

He married Rose Lavinia Bland in 1882 and they had two sons and a daughter. She died in 1933 and in 1944 he married again, at the grand age of 89, to Jessie Howe nee Herbert. He owned, in 1904, one of the first motor cars seen in the county and was still driving to his cottage in Wales in 1948 when aged 94 years. He died later that year on 27<sup>th</sup> November and is buried at Welford Road Cemetery, Leicester.

## **PLAQUE No: 5**

### ***THOMAS INGRAM (1810-1909)***

He has been described as Wigston's greatest benefactor, and this could well be true. During the 45 years or so he lived in the area his generosity included a new south porch, stained glass window, boundary wall and a sixth bell for All Saints' Church. The tower and eight bells, the organ, the pulpit and £1000 towards the nave for St. Thomas's Church. Plus for St. Wistan's Church, land to extend the churchyard, the boundary wall, and a new porch and bell.

Thomas Ingram was born in Little Bowden on 31/3/1810, the second of the two children of Thomas Ingram, senior, a partner in a Market Harborough law firm, and his wife Mary nee Horspool. About 1830 his father moved to Leicester and started his own practice. Thomas became articled to him and in 1842 took over the practice.

He was solicitor to the Poor Law Union for 55 years and Registrar of the High Court of Justice, Leicester Division, and Registrar of the Leicester County Court, combined, for 42 years. His obituary in the Leicester Chronicle & Mercury states "his decisions were rarely if ever reversed on appeal and in fact an appeal against his judgement was very rare". He was the Leicester Law Society's first treasurer in 1861, and their president in 1868. In 1855 he was a founder member and first secretary of the Leicester Archaeological Society.

In about 1862 he moved to Wigston, acquiring 70 acres of land to the south of Blaby Lane, the present school base site, and building a house of granite which he named Hawthorn Field. He was to lend the grounds for many public celebrations over the years, when thousands would take part in races, games, dancing, singing, amusements and firework displays. He served as churchwarden for All Saints' Church and acted as chairman of many local committees.

He married Frances Dowley Jackson, daughter of Benjamin Jackson, a Leicester draper, at St. Martin's Church in 1837. The couple had no children. He died on 23/3/1909 just before his 99<sup>th</sup> birthday. His funeral at All Saint's Church was attended by many mourners, including ten members of the clergy, and many from the legal profession. As the cortege passed St. Thomas's Church on the way to burial at Welford Road Cemetery, Leicester, a half-muffled full peel of bells was rung. His name lives on in the present law firm, Harvey Ingram.

## PLAQUE No: 6

### ***HIRAM ABIFF OWSTON (1830-1905)***

Hiram Abiff Owston was born at Snareston Hall, Leicestershire on 7/3/1830, the younger of the two children of John H.A.W Owston, gentleman, and his wife Mary Sharpe nee Spencer. His life changed in 1844 when his father, when inebriated, fell from his horse and was killed, leaving the family in relative poverty. This experience led to him becoming a total abstainer for life. The widow and son moved to Leicester where Hiram secured a position as articled clerk to Richard Toller.

He qualified in 1852 and started his own practice concentrating on the new limited liability company law. He became a director of the Leicestershire Banking Co., local board member of the Commercial Union Insurance Co., and was for 25 years legal adviser to the two local canal companies, negotiating their amalgamation with the Grand Junction Canal Co., in 1893. In 1883 he was president of the Leicester Law Society and was Justice of the Peace for both the Borough and County Courts. He wrote two books *The Law Relating to Highways* and *Duties of Overseers*. He was an active supporter of the Conservatives in Harborough constituency and also in Leicester where in 1861 he acted professionally in returning a party member for Leicester, the first since the Reform Act.

In 1866 he bought Bushloe House, with 2 ½ acres of ground, enlarged the house and employed Christopher Dresser to design the decoration and furniture. A life member of Leicester Drama Society he set up an open air theatre in the grounds. The next year he married Elizabeth Walley Varley, at Parsley, Yorkshire. The couple had six children. He married secondly, in 1884 at Olney, Buckingham, Ann Vann Stone.

He was instrumental in securing UDC status for Wigston Council and was chairman for many years. Together with Thomas Ingram and Orson Wright he helped to establish St. Thomas's Church and gave the chancel screen to All Saints' Church. He set up a land society in Horsewell Lane, enabling locals to purchase their own plots, and was chairman of Wigston Floral Society. In 1887 he led local celebrations for the Golden Jubilee and again in 1893 for the marriage of the Duke of York.

He died on 18/10/1905 and after a funeral at All Saints' Church, was buried at Wigston Cemetery. His family placed a commemorative plaque in the church and two notable Mother of Pearl mosaic panels specially commissioned from James Powell & Sons of London.

## **PLAQUE No: 7**

### ***SAMUEL DAVENPORT (1708-1775)***

There is a history of the United Reformed Church within a booklet produced to celebrate the 325th anniversary of the forming of the congregation in 1666. It states that in 1731 Samuel Davenport was, "a prominent Anglican until the decision to have the dissenters evicted from the Old Church was taken". The dissenters had occupied the otherwise redundant St. Wistan's Church (then known as St. Wolstan's Church), for many years, without trouble and paying the agreed rent. Samuel was so angered by this unnecessary and uncharitable act, which was executed without notice, that he gave very generous assistance, both financial and practical, towards the building of their own separate church in Long Street, thus establishing Wigston's first Independent church building. He served as a Trustee but by February 1755 it is recorded he had "left the congregation and attends the established church".

Samuel was baptised at All Saints' Church on 5/10/1708, the fourth of the six children of George Davenport and Mary nee Lewis. The Davenport family were wealthy landowners who had lived in Wigston for at least four generations, but whose origins can be traced to Cheshire. Samuel owned the Tythorn estate near the canal. He also owned 42 acres in the Orchards area to the north side of Bushloe End, and a further 7½ acres on the south side where he built a new house, The Elms, in 1752.

In 1764 the enclosure of the farmland caused trouble and a note in the church registers states that "the agent of the Duke of St. Albans refused to pay the usual tithes of £9 per annum, demanding proof of the vicar's rights, whereupon Mr. Samuel Davenport produced vouchers extending over 109 years - right back to 1655 - to prove the payment justified. Two years later, the Duke paid up".

Samuel married Jane Pochin in 1733 at St. Katherine by the Tower, London and the couple had five children. He died on 27/10/1775 and is buried under a floor slab within All Saints' Church. His daughter Mrs. Mary Talbot retained her non-conformist upbringing and was buried at the Independent Church burial ground in 1817.

One of his grandsons, George Davenport, an Oxfordshire banker, returned to Wigston in 1841 to lay the foundation stone of the present church, built on the site of the old one, which Samuel had played such a large part in establishing.

## **PLAQUE No: 8**

### ***WILLIAM EWART BOULTER VC (1892-1955)***

"W. E. Boulter, No. 14603, Sergeant, 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment," won the VC "for most conspicuous bravery though severely wounded in the shoulder" at Trones Wood, France on 14/7/1916, during the first Battle of the Somme. He received the medal at an investiture held by the King at Buckingham Palace on 17/3/1917.

Billy as he was known was born in Wigston on 14/10/1892, the second child in a family of six. His father was Fred Boulter, a framework knitter, who was later manager of Wigston Hosiers Ltd., and his mother was Mary Ann nee Dore who was born in Dunton Bassett. Described as a modest boy, fond of sport, he was working in the haberdashery department of Kettering Co-operative Society when he enlisted in September 1914. After promotion to Sergeant he embarked for France in July 1915. Following the shoulder wound he was transferred back to England and spent some months convalescing, walking with the aid of a stick.

During this time various celebrations took place. His employers gave him a clock and 20,000 people gathered in Abington Park, Northampton, for the presentation of a gold watch and a congratulatory address, from the Corporation. A reception and procession was held at Kettering. At his old school in Wigston, a visit was arranged attended by Captain Brockington the County Director of Education, and Mr. J. W. Black CC, Chairman of the Managers. The children were given a half day holiday. Also at Wigston there was a procession and presentation from the Council of a mounted bronze shield, with the promise of another gift to follow, to the value of about £100, from the residents.

Sergeant Boulter was commissioned a Lieutenant and returned to France but contracted trench fever and was unfit for further active service. After the war he moved to Wimbledon and ran a hosiery business. He served as a Captain in the Air Training Corps and was awarded the Jubilee Medal in 1935. During World War II he was ATC Squadron Commander.

In 1927 he married Alice Irene Toone of Wigston Hall, daughter of Benjamin Toone, a boot and shoe manufacturer (Toone and Black Ltd). He died on 2/6/1955 and was cremated at Putney Vale cemetery, where his ashes were scattered, and a commemorative tree planted. When Alice died in 1988, the couple being childless, his five medals were presented to his old Regiment and are on display at Abington Museum, Northampton.

## **PLAQUE No: 9**

### ***DONALD ROSS (1902-1980)***

Show business actor and acrobatic dancer, theatre impresario and agent to many famous performers, who had his own offices in Shaftsbury Avenue, London, Don Ross filled all of these roles with distinction. Born in Wigston on 20/9/1902, he was the youngest of the five children of Samuel Alfred Ross, headmaster of Wigston National School, Long Street and his wife Kate nee Creasey, born in Thurlby, Lincolnshire.

Much to the consternation of his parents he left home when aged 17 to join Papa Cragg's Gentlemen Acrobats. He took with him just £68, saved from a short spell in journalism, and a year's apprenticeship in stockbroking. In 1926 he was selected to play the male lead in a new revue 'Dear Louise', to star opposite leading lady, Gertie Gitana. The show opened at the Grand Theatre, Clapham, and then played all the London Music Halls, and the provinces the following year. Don's character in the play was named Billy Rodgers and Gertie always called him this, their friends did too, and he even used the name professionally for a time. Don and Gertie fell in love and were married on 24/6/1928, at St. Olaves Church, Finsbury Park, a day earlier than arranged, when it was realised the press had discovered their original plans.

At the age of thirty he retired from performing and concentrated on administration. He was the sole booking agent for the Palace of Varieties in Leeds for twenty years. He produced pantomimes, writing both the script and music. During World War II he introduced circus acts to the stage. Afterwards he was asked by the Ministry of Works to arrange the Official Peace Celebrations. He staged a three ring circus on the 10/6/1946 at the Empire Pool, Wembley, considered one of his greatest achievements. In 1948 he brought together many retired music hall stars, including his wife Gertie, for the show 'Thanks for the Memory'. This ran for three years and included a Royal Variety Performance in the first year.

With the decline of music hall he ran a night club on the Costa Brava and organised cabaret entertainment on the liner QE2. In 1963 'Mr. Showbusiness' was a joint founder and the first president of the British Music Hall Society. In 1977 he succeeded David Nixon as King Rat of the Grand Order of Water Rats, the entertainers' charity.

He died 6/2/1980 and after a funeral at St. Paul's, Covent Garden, London, was buried alongside his beloved Gertie at Wigston Cemetery.

## PLAQUE No: 10

### ***HENRY DAVIS POCHIN (1824-1895)***

The National Trust now manages the garden of Henry Davis Pochin's magnificent home, Bodnant Hall in North Wales, and they describe it in their handbook as "one of the finest in the world, situated above the River Conwy and looking across the valley towards the Snowdon range".

He was born in Wigston on 25/5/1824 the eldest of the nine children of William Pochin, farmer and grocer, and his second wife Elizabeth nee Hurst of Leicester. After attending the Proprietary School in Leicester he studied chemistry at the Pharmaceutical Society's Laboratory in London and then moved to Manchester. He invented two key industrial processes; how to make Aluminous Cake used in dyeing and papermaking, and the purification of brown resin used in soap, enabling fancy white soaps to be produced. He founded his own chemical manufacturing business, H. D. Pochin & Co., at Salford, which expanded with branches in other towns. Part of this was later to merge with English China Clays, other parts had connections to Boots and Glaxo. His special knowledge and the trust they shared led James Woolley, his business partner, to request that Henry administer the chloroform for his operation in 1858.

The profits from his patents and business enabled him to buy a number of ailing companies, mainly coal, iron and steel, shipbuilding, quarries and railways. These he turned around and converted into limited liability companies often remaining as a major shareholder and director.

He was elected MP for Stafford in 1869, served as a JP, and was Deputy Lieutenant of Denbighshire and the High Sheriff in 1887. While Mayor of Salford in 1866 a serious flood affected 16,000 people. He organised rescue parties saving 700 from their homes and helping victims replenish possessions. He married Agnes Heap, daughter of George Heap of Timperley, Cheshire in 1852. She was an early exponent of women's rights and, in 1855, wrote *The Right of Women to Exercise the Elective Franchise*. The couple had six children and when their daughter Laura's husband Charles B.B. McLaren was raised to the peerage in 1911, he took the title of Aberconway. The family still live at Bodnant Hall today.

As well as creating his garden, Henry saw potential in the nearby little village of Prestatyn. He developed it into a holiday resort and Barkby Beach and Bodnant and Barkby Avenues are a reminder of this. He died on 28/10/1895 and is buried in the family mausoleum at Bodnant.

## **PLAQUE No: 11**

### ***ALONZO HARRY BROUGHTON (1875-1954)***

"One of Leicestershire's best known hosiery manufacturers", states an obituary in the Leicester Mercury. Alonzo Harry Broughton was born in Wigston on 28/1/1875, the second child in a family of six. His father was George Broughton, a framework knitter, and his mother was Rose Ann nee Phipps. Life was hard in the hosiery trade and by the age of eight he was at work as a boy winder. He married Harriet Herbert, known as Hattie, daughter of William Robert Herbert at the Congregational Church, Long Street in 1898, and the couple had three sons and a daughter.

In 1911 he founded his own company in a little shed, probably at the rear of his home in Junction Road. Greatly assisted by his wife he often worked a sixteen hour day to build up the business. By 1915 he had acquired the site of an old public house, the Travellers' Rest, in Bull Head Street, and building work commenced the following year. The company adopted a Bull's Head as their logo and incorporated a carved image of one on the building. Production in the 1920/30s was mainly artificial silk hose, moving on to seamless fully fashioned and support stockings in the 1960s. At its peak 150 were employed at Wigston and a further 80 at a Leicester factory. Sons George and Harry continued the business until 1969, retiring when the firm was taken over by Courtaulds Ltd.

A Christian from an early age, he initially belonged to the Congregational Church, but later joined Moat Street Methodist Church. As a Methodist he was much in demand as a Lay Preacher within the Leicester Plan. However his greatest work was with the Wigston and District Free Church Council which he served as secretary and magazine secretary. In 1910 he spoke at their quarterly meeting in Great Glen on 'The Devil's Trinity - Drink'. In July 1919, by then the president, he read the lesson at a joint Peace Service held at All Saints' Church.

For nine years he was a member of Wigston Urban District Council, becoming chairman in 1922 and again in 1926. In 1921 jointly with two other councillors he purchased, on behalf of the council, the land for the Peace Memorial Park. In 1922 he was a founder member, and the first president, of the Men's Bowling Club which was established there.

In 1928 he lived at Homefield, Aylestone Lane now the site of Curtis Weston Residential Home, but at the time of his death on 5/2/1954 was living at 2, Sandown Road. He is buried at Wigston Cemetery.

## **PLAQUE No: 12**

### ***WILLIAM EGGLESTON (1813 -1892)***

A memorial plaque within All Saints' Church tells us William Eggleston was "40 years churchwarden of this parish". He had been baptised at Keyworth, Nottinghamshire on 7/8/1813, the third child in a family of ten. His father also named William, was a farmer, and his mother was Elizabeth nee Morley. Tragedy struck in 1828 when his father died leaving William aged 15 and the youngest child but one month old. This loss was compounded three years later when the grandfather died and the family left their farm, probably the victims of a lifetime lease on these two lives.

The widow and children arrived at what was later to be known as St. Wolstan's Farm, Wigston, soon afterwards, to become the tenants of local farmer and landowner John Ragg. When John Ragg died in 1838, the farm was put up for sale and Elizabeth's brother, William Morley I of Derby, a pioneering inventor of lace making machinery, and lace manufacturer, bought the farm and granted his sister a lifetime lease.

William Eggleston ran the 155 acre farm with his mother and four workers. He also took an active part in village life. As churchwarden he was responsible, under the vicar, for dealing with all parish business which included administering local charities. He kept the parish rate book, annually writing up each page in a neat copperplate hand, entering every householder, working out what was due, and noting down when it was paid. He served as enumerator for the ten yearly census returns, and was usually involved in other parish duties as and when they occurred.

When William Morley I died in 1856 his son, William Morley II, of Marsh Haddon, Brize Norton, Oxfordshire became the owner. He immediately set about rebuilding the house and farm buildings, to a design, based, it is believed, on that of another farm in Oxfordshire. It may well have been modelled on his own property but this is unlikely to have survived as Marsh Haddon Farm is now part of Brize Norton airfield. William Eggleston then moved into the new property which was named Hungerton House, after Hungerton Hill, a feature of the farm land. When the hill area was subsequently sold the house was re-named St. Wolstan's.

About 1873 William Morley III inherited the property and came to live at the house. William Eggleston then retired to live at the Rectory Farmhouse in Bushloe End, with three of his sisters. He died unmarried on 20/3/1892 and is buried at Wigston Cemetery.

## **PLAQUE No: 13**

### ***THOMAS BURGESS (1799-1874)***

Thomas Burgess's family had been yeoman farmers in Wigston since at least 1700. Prior to this the family farmed in the Groby area as tenants of the Earl of Stamford. He was born in Wigston on 15/4/1799, the eldest of the twelve children of John Burgess and his wife Ann nee Wilson. He lived all his life at The Grange, running the farm and, jointly with his brother Alfred, a wool staple business at 1, Belvoir Street, Leicester.

Thomas took a full part in local life. Although a Quaker he attended and often chaired the church vestry meetings. He acted as banker to most local clubs and societies, as in 1870, when he received the All Saints' Christmas Day offertory for the War Victims Fund. He foresaw the advantages of gas, and in 1857 became a joint founder and first secretary, of the Wigston Gas Company. He kept a parish diary between 1853/60 which gives a unique insight into the social history of the area.

He owned an inter-denominational British School in Bull Head Street from at least 1844, which later moved to Mill Lane, now renamed Frederick Street. The scholars enjoyed Christmas Parties with a tree and prizes for the games, and each summer an 'outing' to The Grange, when they admired the flowers and "the fruit presented an inexhaustible attraction". He hosted public meetings in the Mill Lane building which, in 1870, included an election address by T. T. Paget and a public tea meeting for the Co-operative Society. A path which led to the school was named Burgess Lane in old maps; it exists today running along the side of Sainsburys. From 1870 new School Boards took over responsibility for education and the pupils moved to the new Bell Street Infants School.

The Burgess family had strong links with the Ellis family who were also Quakers. Thomas's father's cousin Rebecca became the wife of Joseph Ellis, and the mother of John Ellis, who was the founder of the Midland Railway. His sister Emma married Edward Shipley Ellis, son of John Ellis, and his daughter Louisa married James Ellis, Edward Shipley Ellis's cousin. The notable Leicester architect Edward Burgess, was his nephew, being the son of his brother Alfred.

Thomas married Hannah Maria Cooke of Millbank, Liverpool in 1829 and had eight children. He died 9/10/1874 and is buried at Welford Road Cemetery, Leicester. The Grange was sold the following year as his family had moved to Leicester and elsewhere.

## PLAQUE No: 14

### ***WILLIAM GEORGE HOSKINS (1908-1992)***

"Professor William George Hoskins....was the outstanding contemporary historian of Leicestershire....and one of the most original and influential English historians of this century" states Dr. Wykes' obituary in the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society's (LAHS) 1992 Transaction. He was born on 22/5/1908 in Exeter, the son of William Hoskins, a baker, and his wife Alice nee Dymond. He studied at the University College, Exeter and then through what he described as a "fortunate accident" came to University College, (now the University) Leicester in 1931, as an assistant lecturer in economics.

His interest in local history flourished, particularly that of Devon and Leicestershire. Always an advocate of field work he developed a great gift for interpreting the landscape. His membership of the LAHS resulted in sixteen papers being published in their Transactions, several on Wigston. He wrote many books, *The Making of the English Landscape* (1955), regarded as his most influential. Others included *The Heritage of Leicestershire* (1946), and *The Shell Guide to Leicestershire* (1970). He edited two volumes of the *Victoria County History of Leicestershire*. He made a couple of series for BBC television, *English Landscapes* (1973) and *One Man's England* (1976), both of which had accompanying books.

In 1948 on the initiative of his friend and principal, Dr. F. L. Attenborough (father of Lord Attenborough and Sir David) he was made Reader in English Local History and invited to create his own department. Dr. Attenborough's photographs illustrate many of Hoskins' books. In 1951 he moved to Oxford but in 1965 was invited back to Leicester as Hatton Professor of English History where, the following year, he started the first MA course in English Local History. This still continues today.

During the early 1930s he lived in Wigston, which gave the opportunity for serious study of the area. He enlisted the help of the vicar, Canon West, who made the parish records available to him and also helped him with research. He talked to members of long established local families. This laid the foundations for his acclaimed book on Wigston *The Midland Peasant* (1957). His work was recognised with several awards including FBA (1969), CBE (1971) and Honorary Fellow of RIBA (1973).

He married Francis Ethel Jackson in 1933 and had two children. He retired back to Devon and died on 11/1/1992 in Collumpton.

## **WIGSTON CIVIC SOCIETY**

The Society was officially established in 1978 from an informal action group which had been set up two years before to try to save the former Board School in Bell Street which was threatened with demolition. The battle was unfortunately lost and Sainsburys now stands on the site.

The Society was formed under the auspices of the Civic Trust and members annually elect an executive committee. There is a small annual subscription. Meetings are held on the first Wednesday of the month from 7.15p.m. to 9p.m. at Hawthorn House (Age Concern) in Paddock Street and deal with two main areas of work.

Firstly, consideration is given to planning applications received for development within the conservation areas in Wigston Magna and South Wigston together with applications for major developments within the whole Wigston area. The Society receives a copy of each application from the Borough Council and is invited to comment, such comments, along with others received by the planning officers are reported to the Development Control Committee of the Council.

The comments need to relate to planning matters and take into account design, layout, impact on the built environment, the local development plan and planning guidance.

Secondly, it involves general matters of interest relating to the Borough and in particular the conservation areas, these may include a multitude of matters such as: litter, graffiti, cycle tracks, parking, bus shelters, Pride in the Borough Competition; local newspapers, pedestrianisation schemes and crossing facilities, train and road transport matters; design briefs for major sites, listed and buildings of special interest schedules. The Society may draw issues to the attention of the Council or other relevant bodies and then monitor necessary action.

Over the years the Society has been involved in a number of specific projects, most notably, the creation of a garden beneath the large tree on the corner of Launceston Road in memory of Len Phillips, the planting of bulbs in grass verges, litter picks, the establishment of the ten mile Two Steeples Walk with accompanying leaflet and a major exhibition in South Wigston showing 'now and then' photographs.

## **GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

The Society was founded in 1980 when one of the main aims was to establish a Folk Museum from a growing collection of artifacts of Wigston life. This was achieved in 1983 but sadly had to be disbanded after about ten years when new premises could not be found.

In the early days members were very active putting on displays about the history of the area, taking part in archaeological digs, metal detecting with the Leicester Search Society, doing field walks and taking part in a footpath survey. A collection of Transactions was started and has become a valuable and useful asset. An ongoing feature is the publication of a Bulletin three times a year. This contains a fascinating written record of the monthly meetings together with news and short pieces of local research submitted by members.

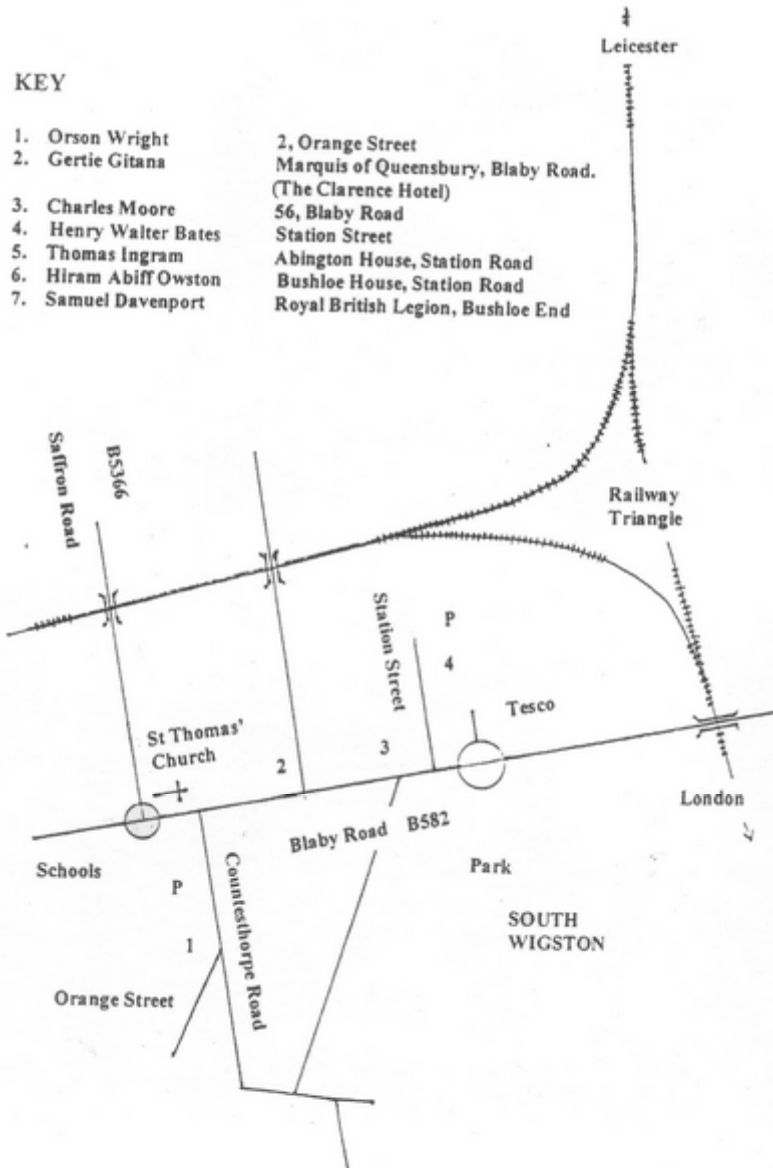
Individual members have produced several books of local interest centred on Wigston Magna and South Wigston. Some are on specific topics i.e. walks, memories, humour, buildings, Long Street School,

Wesleyan Methodist Church and Harcourt Estate while others feature archive photographs, both lent by others and collected by members themselves.

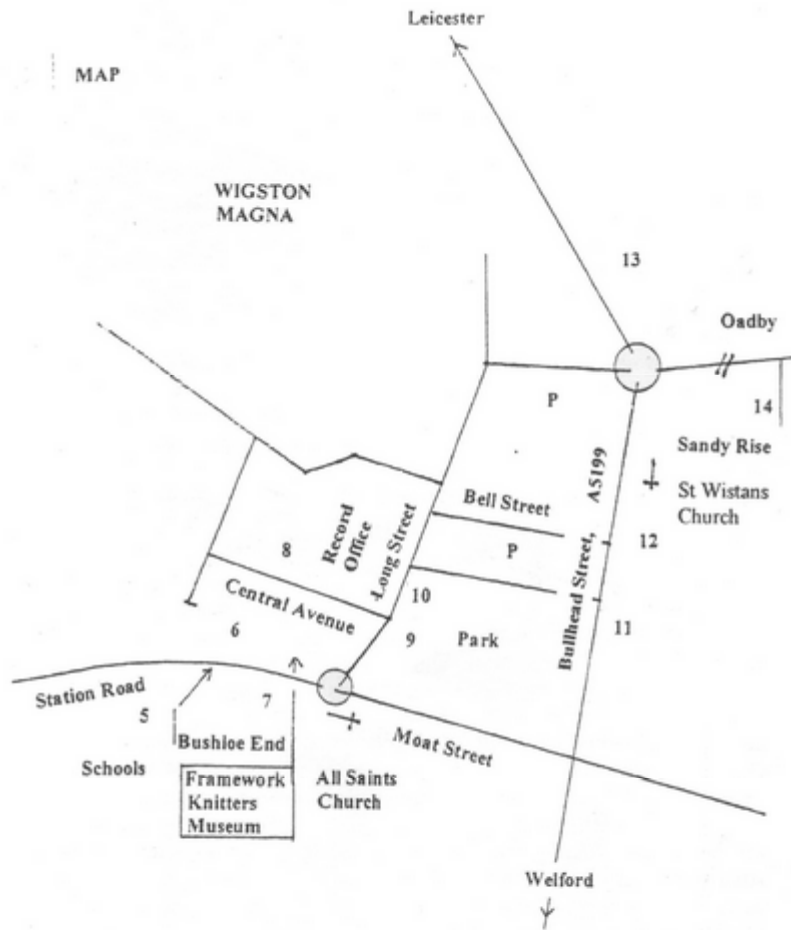
The Society maintains close contact with both the Civic Society and the Framework Knitters Museum which it supports with an annual donation. Many members belong to at least one of these groups too. Currently there are about 80 members and the focus is on the monthly meetings with speakers, and evening outings during the summer. At Christmas a social evening is held with quiz and supper. Individuals continue to carry out research and one recent project was a 'Who's Who' of people with connections to Wigston's past, much of which has been used in this booklet.

The Society's President is local historian, Duncan Lucas, and the immediate past Chairman is Edna Taylor who has just retired after nineteen years service, to be succeeded by Tony Lawrance. It is run by a committee elected annually by the membership which also fixes the annual subscription (£7 in 2007). Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month at 7.30p.m. in the Boys' Brigade Rooms attached to the United Reformed Church in Long Street.

## KEY 1 to 7



# KEY 8 to 14



- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 8. William Ewart Boulter   | 9. Central Avenue                   |
| 9. Donald Ross             | 41, Long Street                     |
| 10. Henry Davis Pochin     | United Reformed Church, Long Street |
| 11. Alonzo Harry Broughton | Kings Centre, Bullhead Street       |
| 12. William Eggleston      | St Wolstans House, Bullhead Street  |
| 13. Thomas Burgess         | The Grange, Bullhead Street         |
| 14. William George Hoskins | 12, Sandy Rise                      |