



W F K M

WIGSTON HERITAGE

GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
White Gate Lodge, 97 Newton Lane, Wigston Magna, Leicester

And

WIGSTON FRAMEWORK KNITTERS MUSEUM
42/44 Bushloe End, Wigston Magna



Heatherley House, A Ghost Story – see page 8

BULLETIN 122
1st March 2022

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS March 2022 – JUNE 2022

16 MARCH

WILLIAM FLINT –
LEICESTER ARCHITECT
(POWERPOINT & PICTURES)
MARK MITCHLEY

27 APRIL

A STORM IN A TEASHOP: THE
WAITRESSES' STRIKE OF 1908
(POWERPOINT & PICTURES)
DR ANN FEATHERSTONE

18 MAY

THE HISTORY OF MILESTONES
(POWERPOINT & PICTURES)
HELEN CRABTREE

15 JUNE

GUIDED TOUR OF LUTTERWORTH
CHURCH FOLLOWED BY A WALKING
TOUR OF HISTORIC LUTTERWORTH

Society's website: www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

All enquiries to: secretary@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

The Bulletin is published three times a year on 1st March, July and November.

Articles etc., (which are always welcome) should be submitted to the Editor

email: bulletineditor@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

four clear weeks before publication date.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Hello and welcome to our March 2022 Bulletin. You will no doubt have noticed already some changes, the main one being the new name. The name 'Wigston Heritage' signifies a combination of Historical Society news and Framework Knitters news all in one Bulletin.

With the retirement of Tony Danvers from the role of FWK Bulletin Editor it was agreed that the two organisations should combine their publications to provide a more diverse content to a wider audience and at the same time make, all important, cost savings. We hope you enjoy the new format.

Mike Forryan

HAVE YOU ANY STORIES TO TELL?

Please get writing and send your articles to:
bulletineditor@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

OBITUARIES

Tony Atkins.

We sadly announce that one of our members, Tony Atkins, has recently passed away. Tony had been a member of the Society for 12 years and he and his wife Jackie regularly attended our meetings. We send our thoughts and condolences to his wife Jackie and her family.

William (Bill) Brown.

We sadly announce that one of our members, William (Bill) Brown has recently passed away. Bill had been a member of the Society for 9 years and attended many of our meetings. We send our thoughts and condolences to his family.

David Boulter.

We sadly announce that one of our members, David Boulter has recently passed away. David and his wife Gill have been members of the Society for over 9 years, and both have attended many of our meetings and outings. We send our thoughts and condolences to his wife Gill and to the family.

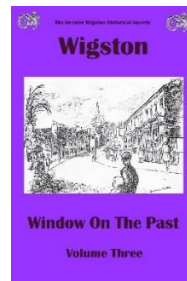
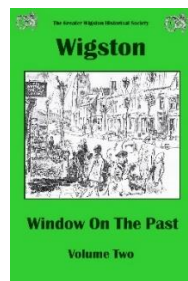
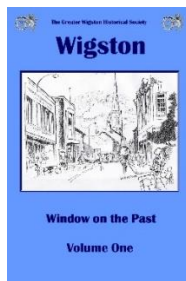
Orson Duncan Lucas

It is with great sadness that we mourn the passing of Duncan Lucas, President of the Greater Wigston Historical Society, who passed away in the early hours of Monday 7th February 2022. Duncan founded the Society in 1980 with a group of like-minded historians, and over the years the Society has been blessed with his leadership.

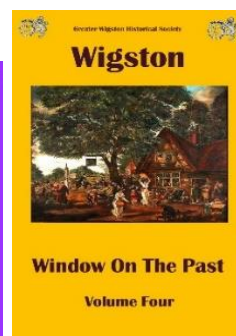
Our thoughts and condolences, at this sorrowful time, are with his wife Jean and family. He will be greatly missed.

G.W.H.S. Books: *Wigston – Window on the Past* Series

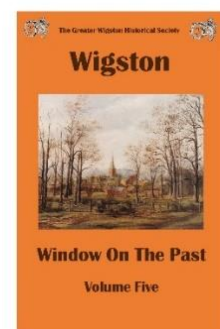
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MEETING REPORTS — ALL REPORTS BY COLIN TOWELL

OCTOBER MEETING, 2021 – THE COUNTRY RAILWAY STATION

Our speaker for this meeting was local man and good friend Brian Johnson who many may remember from his talk on 'prefabs' some years ago. This time he covered a wide range of implications arising from the spread of the railways from early in the 19th century. The initial impact of the railways was that there was huge capital expenditure thereby creating wealth and putting money in peoples' pockets. The early railways cost about £40k per mile to build if it was a mainline and £5k for a branch line (£3.75m and £0.485m today respectively).

It was soon recognised that a national time needed to be set so that all stations, wherever they were in the UK, said the same time. Farmers, newspaper owners and manufacturers soon found that the railways were a more efficient and speedy way to move the goods they produced to their markets. That initial purpose of moving goods was soon expanded to moving people although at first in rather primitive wagons rather than anything like the carriages we have today. Suddenly it was possible to get to holiday destinations and football matches and home again in one day. The military also made use of the new railways which, in times of war, were to prove so valuable.

Stations, especially those on main lines and at termini, were quite grand to give the impression of stability and wealth. Branch lines, unlike main lines, often did not pass directly through villages because they often followed the valleys or at least the contours and so the station was often some distance away from the village, e.g. Great Glen is over a mile from its station. Occasionally a landowner, rather than saying he did not want a line on his land, would say the line could be built as long as a station was provided for him on his land. Brooksby is an example of this.

Originally country stations were built of timber unless there was a good supply of stone (in Rutland) or bricks (Wigston) available. Stations were usually built on a company standard design and up to 1870 a station master's house was built adjoining the booking office and other station buildings alongside the platform. However, after then, more grand designs were built on separate land for the man in charge. A common feature of country stations was the garden (Glen Parva is a good local example) this was tended by station staff who had the time and opportunity between trains, there was also competition between stations for the best garden. Cottages for railway employees were built near to the track (a good example is 'Twenty Row' alongside the track near the former Wigston station) but this often meant that the railway staff living there were very isolated from the local village and its amenities. Within the railway community there was a hierarchy from boys as young as twelve years up through porters, ticket and goods clerks, to signalmen and station masters. At more central stations there were knockers-up (to wake men up for the early shift), engine cleaners, fireman and engine drivers, the latter two jobs being graded for different responsibilities. Railway companies encouraged their staff to go for promotion. Station masters and signalmen were in very responsible posts and were respected in the community but were often not well educated having started work at 12 years old. People in railway jobs were very mobile, moving, to get a better job with accommodation provided, to different parts of the country, this can be clearly seen from a study of the census over the years.

Many local lines never reached their full potential and were then being overtaken by the more practical omnibus and heavy lorry to transport people and goods. And so the long

running closure of lines began even before the Beeching cuts of the 1960s. Prior to WWI there were 103 stations in the county and Rutland, now there are 15.

Closed branch lines and country stations have been put to many uses. Lines being bought by farmers for cultivation or, in the case of a cutting, for landfill. They have been sometimes converted to cycle tracks and footpaths. Station buildings have been converted to offices, desirable houses and hotels, the latter sometimes with the addition of a former carriage converted for use as self-catering accommodation or for camping. Many photos were shown of station conversions.

Brian's talk was well prepared and well presented, covering social, industrial and economic history.

NOVEMBER MEETING, 2021 – LIFE IN THE SIGNAL BOXES OF WIGSTON JUNCTION

For this meeting one of our members, John Stevenson, talked on his favourite subject, railways, and not only that, local railways. Those with only a minor knowledge of the subject will know that Wigston is a major railway junction developed over a number of the early years of railway history and that the area that became known as South Wigston was originally built by Orson Wright, principally to house railway workers of which 300 were identified in the 1891 census.

First, we had a brief introduction to the signals themselves and how they worked. The first signals were of the semaphore type (that is, an arm which is raised, at 45 degrees to the post to mean carry on or at right angles to the post to mean stop) with the facing side of the arm painted red to mean stop or painted yellow telling the driver what position the next signal will be at, allowing him to start to slow down if necessary. The reverse side of the arm was painted white. Signals were operated by wires, chains, rods and pulleys connecting the signal or a point (which could be several hundred yards down the track) to the levers in the box. It would need a lot of strength to pull a lever for a signal some way down the line. Both men and women worked in the boxes, usually, outside the capital, one at a time. Although basic signals had oil lights to show drivers what position they were in at night, it was not long before actual coloured signals were introduced in the London area followed by electric motors to assist in the operation of signals and points at a distance from the box. It was the job of the signal man or woman to service the oil lamps often at great height from the ground.

The expansion of the railways meant that the telegraph was also developed, this was the system of sending a coded message (similar to morse code) along telegraph wires alongside the tracks between signal boxes. This allowed the signal man to communicate by code to the next box to tell it what type of train was on its way. All train movements had to be recorded in a book in each box.

Signal boxes were built only at junctions and eventually, as the railways around Wigston developed, there were nine boxes in total. The first station in Wigston was in open fields at Wigston South, built in 1840. This was situated on what we now know as Blaby Road where the line to Rugby from Leicester crossed the road by a level crossing. The health centre and college are situated on the site now. At that time this line was the only railway route from Leicester to London where its terminus was Euston. In the early 1850s the Midland Railway decided to construct a direct line from Wigston to Hitchin and then to London. This resulted in the opening of the second station in Wigston in 1857 and its adjacent signal box at Wigston North in 1860, this was a very busy box.

Around the turn of the century the lines and associated sidings increased on massive scale in Wigston. The sidings were to accommodate coal trains and wagons awaiting repair in the works. Employment increased to cope with the increase in traffic and Cherry Street was built in 1905 to house the workers. Before the Spion Kop bridge was built (1900-1902) over the main line, there was a level crossing on Station Road controlled by the nearby Wigston South box which was built at the same time.

The third station Wigston station was actually in Glen Parva, hence the station name. This was built in 1882 on the line to Nuneaton and Birmingham mainly to cope with the army personnel at the adjacent new barracks. A signal box was built to control not only the sidings but also the junction with the south curve onto the main line.

Kilby Bridge did have a signal box but not a station, this box was not counted as part of the Wigston complex, it was demolished and re-erected on a preserved railway in Derbyshire. The Wigston stations and associated signal boxes continued to be very busy until the slow decline of the railways leading up to the closures resulting from the Beeching report of the 1960s. John's was a very interesting, illustrated talk on a subject of **very** local interest.



Glen Parva Station



South Wigston Station Signal Box, 1960

DECEMBER 2021 – CHRISTMAS PARTY

Because of the increasing number of Covid cases it was decided, almost at the last moment, to cancel the Christmas party meeting. The programme included a talk by Virginia Wright on 'Christmas Customs' and the eagerly looked forward to Quiz compiled by our Chairman. Some items of drink, food and prizes had already been purchased but these were sold off and only a small loss was incurred.

JANUARY 2022 MEETING – WITCHCRAFT IN 17th CENTURY LEICESTERSHIRE

For the first meeting of the new year Dr Len Holden was due to give what looked like a very interesting talk. Sadly, with Covid cases remaining high, the meeting was cancelled, and the speaker was unable to deliver the talk by Zoom.

However, the Chairman's quiz lay unused on his desk and so several members joined in a Zoom meeting to try our hands at this slightly delayed annual event. The eventual winners were Colin and Sue Towell. Following the quiz, Peter Cousins, the Vice Chairman played the first few minutes of the latest GWHS DVD on Wigston Cemetery. This is available to purchase at future meetings or at the Heritage Centre or online, price £10.00.

BITS AND BOBS FROM WIGSTON PAST – NUMBER 1

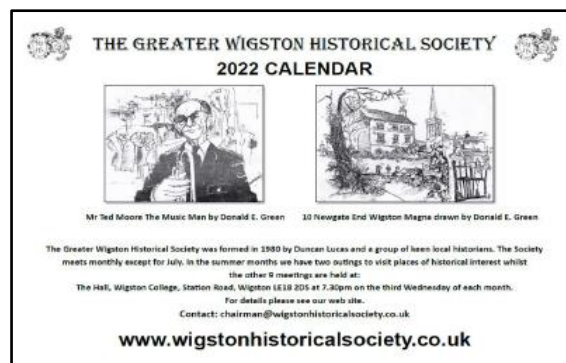
by Mike Forryan

Leicester Chronicle - 19 December 1885

'Alarming Gas Explosion at Wigston - On Wednesday evening a serious explosion of gas occurred at the large new factory occupied by Messrs. B Toone & Co, boot and shoe manufacturers, Wigston South. It appears that the Wigston Gas Company are laying down mains from the works to Wigston South, the old ones being too small to supply this rapidly-increasing district, and at about 4.15 had stopped the flow of gas while their men connected the two pipes for the night. While doing this, air naturally got in the mains, and the rush of gas and air combined caused the meter (one of 250 light capacity) to explode with terrific force, and at the same instant flames burst out with great fury. As may be imagined, the tremendous report, the fierce flames, and the showers of glass, wood, and portions of the meter, made a scene of indescribable confusion.

Fortunately, the damage is confined chiefly to the offices, and one window which was blown into the street, parts being 50 yards away. As it happened, the work people had left off work for tea, and many had gone outside, and there being no one in the immediate neighbourhood of the meter no personal injury was done except to the cashier, Mr Foster, who was cut on the forehead by the glass. On seeing the flames, three of the foremen, at once ran with water, to extinguish them, and to these men great praise is due, as had there been a moment's delay much more damage would have been caused by fire. One of the men, Mr Adams, especially showed great pluck by dashing through a broken window and at great risk to himself turning off the supply tap. The damage is estimated at about £150, and is, we believe, covered by insurance'.

DON'T FORGET TO GET YOUR GWHS 2022 CALENDAR AGAIN AT ONLY £5 PER COPY



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Or call 0116 2884638 for collection in Wigston.



THE OLD LADY OF HEATHERLEY HOUSE

The following report was published some years ago in an article of ghostly appearances in Wigston.

It was on a September morning in 1987 when I had my first encounter with the ghost of Wigston College. I was working, cleaning the back stairs on the middle level, when I was called by my first name. I went to find out who had called me going to every floor finishing on the ground floor. By this time, I was quite annoyed because of the wasted time.

When I asked the caretakers, they explained it was the Old Lady. I thought they were joking but when I asked my workmates, they told me it was true. As time went by, I came to realize it was true as she tried to distract me many times.

It was about 2 years later, about April time, she excelled herself one morning by making all sorts of weird noises. I think she must have been very cross, but I was in a hurry that morning and I told her to go away, I hadn't got time for her fun and games. I carried on working. Next day was very peaceful and quiet on the stairs. I was taking my time mopping the stairs. I got down to the middle landing and was facing the windows looking down the pathway alongside the workshops. I straightened up to stretch my back, still looking out of the windows. To my amazement I saw the lady of the old house come out of the workshops and across the path through the wall into the mobile. It wasn't until she vanished that I realized that I had just seen a ghost.

I ran down the stairs to find my workmates and the caretaker to tell them what I had just seen. I described the lady as wearing a long, black dress and a belt round her waist with a bunch of keys hanging from it.

A few weeks after this incident I was talking to an old lady, who lived in Manor Street, about what I had seen. She told me that the last housemaid who worked at Heatherly House was still alive and could tell me all about the old lady of the house. What was also interesting was that she had lived very near to me.

Arrangements were made for my husband to go and visit the housemaid. During that visit photographs were produced of the old Heatherly house, the grounds and the lady of the house. The photograph of the lady was exactly as she had been seen at the college.

During conversations with the old housemaid an interesting story emerged. Heatherly House being one of the four big houses in Wigston was owned by a Cigar Manufacturer and his wife. When the wife was taken ill a nurse/companion was employed to keep her company while her husband was away on business. Unfortunately, the wife died. The companion was asked if she would stay on at Heatherly House as housekeeper, which she accepted.

Over the future years love blossomed between them and they married. When the husband died the wife stayed on at the house. She took on a housemaid to help her with the upkeep of the house.

Many years later the County Council asked if they could buy the house and grounds to build a college this was flatly refused, never would an education building be on her grounds, she would curse it. That is how things stood until the old lady was taken into care in a hospital, too sick to care for herself anymore. The house and grounds were sold by the guardians of the estate, and the college was built. Since then, many a person has spent time looking round

rooms and corridors to find out who called out their Christian name or looking to see who tapped them on the shoulder. She meant what she had said, she still hinders and wastes our time.

P.S. Mrs. Gudgeon, the house maid whose husband was gardener, told that the lady of the house was a lovely lady who would hurt no one.

Prior to the house being demolished she visited it and saw the lady sitting on a chest of drawers at the top of the stairs. She smiled and was gone. Also, the good lady was buried in her Warwickshire village, but not in the spot she expressly desired and spoke about in her lifetime. A tormented soul...

SO, WHO WAS THE GHOST OF HEATHERLEY HOUSE?

The occupants of the house after 1901 are shown as Edgar Reeve, a cigar manufacturer of J. Reeves & Son, Burleys Way, Leicester. The 1911 Census, shown below, shows Edgar aged 58, born in Leicester, and his wife Clara, aged 56, also born in Leicester. Clara's maiden name was Owen, they had married in the Halifax area in 1899, Edgar being 36 and Clara 34. As far as can be found they do not appear to have had any children.

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Number of Families 165
(to be filled up by the Enumerator)

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.

The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE last Birthday and sex	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE		PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Person aged ten years and upwards	BIRTHPLACE of every person.	NATIONALITY if every person born in a Foreign Country.	DEFERMENT.
			Single	Married				
1. <i>Edgar Reeve</i>	Head	58	Married	72	Cigar manufacturer	Leicester, Leicestershire		
2. <i>Clara Reeve</i>	Wife	56	Married	12		Leicester, Leicestershire		
3. <i>Ellen Wright</i>	Daughter	24	Single			Leicester, Leicestershire		
4. <i>Alice Clayton</i>	Daughter	20	Single			Leicester, Leicestershire		

(To be filled up by the Enumerator)

Copy this—	Total	0	2
Males	Females	3	4

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling.)

Write below the Number of Rooms in this Dwelling (Kitchens, Parlours, or Apartments). Count the kitchen as a room but do not count outhouse, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom, nor washhouse, office, shop.

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature: *Edgar Reeve*
Postal Address: *Heatherley, Milton, Leicestershire*

Edgar's wife Clara died in 1925 aged 71. Just one year later, in 1926, Edgar married Elizabeth Walker Crewe, in Stafford. Edgar by this time was 73 years old, his new wife, born in 1873, making her 53 years old, a 20-year age difference. They continued to live at Heatherly House, where Edgar died in 1931 aged 78. His probate shows his wife as Elizabeth Walker Reeve, who he left his estate to. He was worth then £28,000, in today's value £1.3 Million. Elizabeth died on 3 March 1965 at Ava nursing home Ratcliffe Road, Leicester aged 91 leaving £14,400, today's value £195,000.

So the ghost must have been second wife Elizabeth Walker Reeve!

Peter Cousins



BOYHOOD MEMORIES

Remembering my early childhood is like stepping back into a different world. When I was a small boy growing up in Wigston Magna during the 1950s the place bore little resemblance to how it is today. There were no housing estates, very little traffic and our homes and streets were lit by the pale yellow glow of gas lamps. It was the time of the rag and bone man, who travelled the neighbourhood perched on his horse and cart collecting everyone's household rubbish. We could tell he was coming by the sound of the 'clip-clop' of the horse's hooves and his ear-piercing cry: 'Any rags and bones, bring out your rags and bones.' All the kids would race out of their houses armed with buckets and shovels, collecting the smelly steaming horse droppings their parents would use to fertilise their gardens.

As an only child with no brothers or sisters to play with, there were times in my early years when I felt lonely. While my mother taught me to amuse myself with books, toys and games, I sometimes yearned for the company of other children my age and I soon joined a local gang of boys. Fortunately, at that time in the mid-1950s, the word 'gang' did not have the more sinister connotation it has today. Our gang was simply a group of lads who wanted nothing more than to explore the local area, have some 'adventures' and sometimes cause a little mischief!

Unlike today, our village offered a safe playground for children. The population was small, there was hardly any serious crime and very little traffic on the narrow roads. Our gang would roam free – rushing out of doors after school to play games in the street and in the long summer evenings not returning home much before sunset. In those days we were not content to stay caged indoors. Our playground was the village's streets, fields, parks and laneways.

In our two-up, two-down terraced house in Moat Street my upstairs bedroom faced south, overlooking a shared backyard. While my room was nothing special, it did have a window with idyllic views over acres of lush farmland, with cattle grazing lazily in the distant meadows. A public footpath ran for miles through corrugated green fields all the way to the bridge spanning the London-Midland railway line and then on to the locks at the Grand Union Canal. As an energetic lad this seemingly endless expanse of countryside offered the tantalising prospect of fun and freedom for myself and my tribe of daring young friends.

It wasn't long before we managed to transform this place of peace and tranquility into a site for boisterous boyhood activities. There was a stream running through the fields, which was so narrow in places that it was easy for us to leap across from one bank to the other. This watercourse became the focus for many of our games. We built simple sailing ships using material from trees. Bark for the hulls, twigs for the masts, and leaves for the sails. After some careful construction we proudly launched our vessels upstream, competing with each other to see how far we could sail them.

One of us had the bright idea of building a dam made out of mud and stones to stop the flow of water and see how high the level would rise. While this might sound like a most laudable scientific experiment, it was certainly not our objective. We excitedly looked forward

to the moment when we destroyed our beautifully constructed dam and cheered as we watched the cascade of water flooding over the banks!

The stream became the dividing line for pitched battles when we split ourselves into 'baddies and goodies' to re-enact the fights between cowboys and Indians we had seen in western films at the Magna Cinema's Saturday afternoon matinees. Of course, the Indians were always the 'baddies'. I can't help reflecting on what impact those entertaining 'cowboy films' have had on impressionable young minds over the years, with their emphasis on guns, shooting and frontier conflict. To us kids our battles across the stream were so realistic that in our heads we really believed we were the Lone Ranger, Roy Rogers or Robin Hood. We were happily oblivious to the fact that our 'weapons' of plastic toy guns, bows and arrows made from tree branches, and catapults carved from wooden sticks were representations of real weapons that could really kill and injure people.

During the time we were busily waging war in the fields we were always being watched by an audience of bemused bovines. Every so often these beasts would raise their heads and stare at us, as if to say: "What do you lads think you're up to in our field?" and then nonchalantly go back to their grazing. Unfortunately, our animal companions posed some serious threats to our enjoyment. The lush meadows were full of cow-pats, which for the uninitiated are flat round pieces of cow dung. Invariably these droppings were liquefied, so our excitement was often cut short when we found ourselves slipping and sliding in stinking animal waste.

Sadly, the scene of our sailing ship races, dam building and film fantasies is now a distant memory. The picturesque pastoral setting of my childhood has been transformed into a monotonous suburban housing estate. Several years later, looking from my bedroom window at the mass of houses and a sea of identical rooftops, the view reminded me of the words of a popular 1960s song by Malvina Reynolds:

*Little boxes on the hillside
Little boxes made of ticky-tacky
Little boxes on the hillside
Little boxes all the same.*

Sadly, the peaceful country village of my childhood memories has disappeared. It is now a bustling suburban town with traffic congestion, crowded shopping centres and the fondly remembered sites of historic buildings that have been bulldozed to make way for car parks and supermarkets. A whole world away from the fond memories I have of my boyhood in the fields of Wigston Magna, playing wild war games to the sounds of a gently flowing stream.

Ron Chapman

AS A CHILD I GREW UP IN NORTHFIELD AVENUE

We used to play football in the street with coats as goalposts because in those days there was very little traffic and no one in the street owned a car. We used to play cowboys and Indians in the field behind our house. It was towards the end of the Second World War, I seem to remember our next door neighbour, Mr Somerscales, being in the Home Guard and bringing home his rifle which he stood in the corner of the room way above my head. I also remember a neighbour coming home from the war not as a war hero but as a lonesome soldier walking up the quiet street coming home to his family.

The field at the rear of our house was a good playground. We formed gangs pretending to be Robin Hood and his Merry Men. Climbing trees having secret meetings, one tree I remember we called 'Hampton Court', we sat on different branches and discussed our plans for the day. Another tree we called 'Animal Tree', we named each part and branches after animals. One branch we called 'Rabbits' Burrow', which was a long thick branch with smaller thin branches growing from the side upwards along the main branch to form an imaginary burrow. We also had 'Eagle's' nest, which of course was high up! Good job my mother never saw me, she would have had a fit. The days seemed long and adventurous, going out in the morning with a bottle of water – the bottle was an orange juice bottle government issue to give all kids vitamin C – we only came home when we were hungry.

Going to school we had to walk to Bell Street Infant School and later to the National School in Long Street. Doing that journey four times a day. I didn't stop for school meals as I was put off when I found a grub in my salad. The toilets at Bell Street were outside with an open doorway each end and a window above the urinals. The girls would run through in one door and out the other while we were standing there minding our own business – nothing changes. I remember the floors in the classroom were on the slope so that those at the back could see the teacher; one young girl had an accident when she hurried down to the front.

On the way home we would call at the 'cob shop', we would pull out the soft middle with our grubby little fingers or buy lemon sherbet and suck it with a yellow finger. I have often wondered since what state it was in before I sucked it clean. Later I went to the 'Nashes' (National School) walking up Aylestone Lane and then through Willow Park coming out at the top of the old part of Central Avenue. At that juncture there was an air raid shelter that was below ground. Walking down Central Avenue towards Long Street we used to have a game to see if we could get down to the other end of the road without going on the pavement by going along the top of the low boundary walls and jumping across the gateways. One day I didn't quite make it – I've got the scar to prove it.

About this time, I joined the Cubs meeting in various "dens", one was at the back of the Star and Garter, another was in the Constitutional Hall (also gone). Later I joined the Scouts and went on my first camp, aged 10, to Selsey Bill, Bognor. With likeminded kids without parents whoo whee! Having new experiences like catching and cooking eels, digging 'latts' (toilets), setting up the kitchen with wet and dry pits, then leaving the field as if we hadn't been there. We were using ex-army equipment such as bell tents, field ovens, including chimney, and a large marquee with six foot brailings (sides). I remember one night sleeping under the stars using the brailings as a ground sheet all the kids sleeping in a row. The modern day scouting is much more adventurous including sailing, rock climbing, zip wiring and many many more.

Barry Cooper

VISIT TO BUCKINGHAM PALACE

In 1942 at the age of 7 (yes, I am 86) I went to Buckingham Palace to the investiture of my father with the British Empire Medal by the King, George the VI. He was a Warrant Officer, 1st Class. Soon afterwards he was commissioned. In those days only officers received MBE's.

Dad had spent 2 years in the then Gold Coast, now called Ghana. Ghana was known as the white man's grave due to the malaria and other diseases rife in that country. He was Chief Clerk of the Gold Coast for the British Army. There were only 4 British soldiers there and the

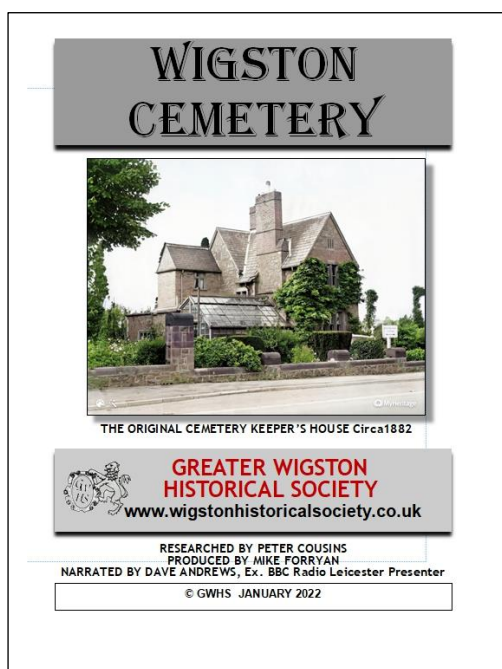
West African Frontier Force. Every few days a German aeroplane would fly over and have a look at the harbour in Accra. No one shot at it as there was nothing to shoot it with!

The North African campaign was in full swing, and the allied troops needed meat. There was plenty of cattle in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, but to get the cattle to the coast they had to go through the central belt called the 'Tetsifly Area'. This meant that every cow that died would have to have a Court Martial Dad made the decision to ignore the rules and regulations and got on with the job of getting the cattle to the port, and the meat onto ships and off to North Africa. He then told the powers that be afterwards how many cattle had been lost due to the disease.

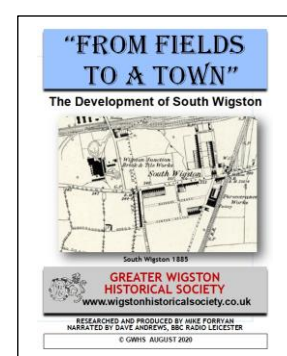
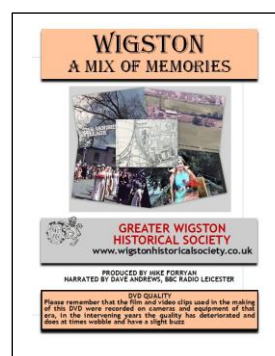
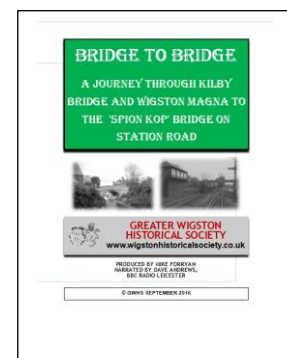
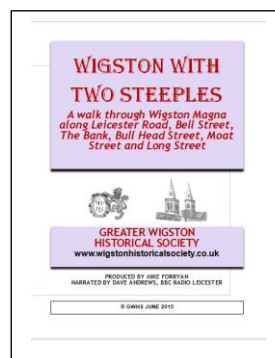
When Dad was awarded the decoration, he was allocated 2 tickets to the investiture. Mum took me and herself. My sister was taken out to ride on the underground and "moving stairs". She was only 4. As I was very small (and I am only 5 foot 6 inches now) a Yeoman of the Guard picked me up and put me on his shoulder so that I could see the King speak to Dad and pin the medal onto his chest. It was a wonderful experience and when Dad retired in 1948, he had served in the army for 30 years. He retired as a Captain and in Leicester he was responsible for the running of the largest pay office in Britain. And that was how I came to live in Leicestershire. His medals I have given to my son .

Leon R. Spence

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EPISODE 13

WIGGY'S CHILD THE PADDLING POOL

I was wearing my white "plimmies" one hot August day during the school holidays. The Bank Holiday had come and gone, and we sat on the step at the bottom of the entry, me and our Eileen.

"Phew! ain't it 'ot? wish I was back at the seaside," I remarked, "wouldn't it be lovely to 'ave a paddle?"

"Well, there's the paddling pool on the big park," said Eileen.

We considered. Willow Park on the Aylestone Lane was forbidden territory as far as we were concerned.

"Eh up, there's a Stop Me and Buy One man coming down the street, let's ask Mam if we can 'ave a Sno-Frute," said I. Miracles do happen, and we rushed back outside to the man on his trike, proffered a penny; "what sort do yer want?" said our ice-cream man, "Orange, please," I said, as he rummaged about among his stock and finally produced the required Sno-frute. Back in the kitchen, we waited while Mother cut through the thin cardboard wrapper and the ice, before handing us half each. It always set my teeth on edge as the knife sawed the ice. Back on the entry step, we speculated once more on the inviting prospect of the paddling pool. Our permitted area comprised; The Square, Moat St, Long St, Bell St, Bull Head St., and in between, The Lanes and "Pauley's Park". Peace Memorial Park was the proper name, on account of the soldiers who died in the Great War. We always kept a wary eye open for Mr. Pauley, the park-keeper, you didn't let him catch you rolling down the bank of the bowling green!

"If we went straight up The Lanes and along Central Avenue to the Recce, it won't take us long," I said. Off we went, through the Recce, past the swings, wooden see-saw and the iron round-a-bout, through into the park and down to the bottom where the sandpit and the paddling pool were situated. We dismissed the sandpit, it was mucky, but the paddling pool was inviting. Taking off our plimsolls and stuffing our socks inside, we went down the steps and waded in.

We had a whale of a time, until I heard All Saints Church Clock striking (the wind was in the right direction). "Come on, we'll be late," I shouted to Eileen. Holding out my hand to help her up the steps, she slipped and fell back on her bottom in the water! Panic ensued; she was soaked! I squeezed her out, there was nothing for it, we would have to go to her grandma's she lived nearest.

"What are we going to do?" quavered Eileen, "What can we do, it's no use saying we got caught in a storm, is it?" I replied, fed up. The sun shone from a cloudless blue sky.

On our arrival, Grandma prophesied Pneumonia at the very least, and dried her vigorously. At this point, Aunt Kate arrived. She would see my Mother later on, she said ominously. She did!

When the dust finally settled, and sentence had been carried out, I will spare you the painful details. "Be sure your sins will find you out, my gel," pronounced Mother with grim satisfaction. They do indeed, we two sinners never attempted a visit to the paddling pool again!

Doreen Boulter

THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH – AND OUR LOCAL STORY

Until modern times the most important craftsman in any village was the Blacksmith. The name derives from 'the man who worked black metal' i.e., iron. The Farrier specialised in shoeing horses, though the term 'Smith' is used to describe either or both jobs.

In an age when the horse provided most of the power and the transportation needs of the community, the blacksmith was regarded with great respect. His skill in shoeing and his rudimentary knowledge of veterinary arts was vital to a horse dependent society. In addition to this the blacksmith was able to make or mend almost all the metal artefacts needed for agriculture, domestic life, and in bygone ages, war.

The forge, blacksmiths shop or smithy are all terms for the smith's place of work, and this changed little over the years. In the Middle Ages the smithy was little more than a covered area open on all sides. By the nineteenth century more shelter was afforded, as can be seen from the picture of the Wigston Smithy in the 'Bygone Wigston' book. There also survives a good description of the Oadby Smithy as it was in the 1880's.

"At the corner of Baker's Lane was the blacksmiths shop, a single-story building of brick with a thatched roof. It was built into the bank or a field, it had no windows, but it had shutters which lifted up and hooked up to admit light during the day. The square where the horses stood to be shod, called the 'Pent', was open to the street on the front. Mr Bassett was the smith..."

The interior of any smithy was a place of wonder and awe! There was a dark heavy gloom through which could be seen the glowing coals, the blue smoke and the white hissing steam. Black bars and rods of iron together with a litter of old and rusty iron scrap lay in tangled heaps on the floor. The strange smell of burning hooves mingled with the fumes from the forge, pervade the air. Overall stands the leather aproned smith beating out on the anvil his rhythmic tune. It is little wonder that our ancestors regarded the smith with awe, even mystical powers, when one considers the environment in which he worked.

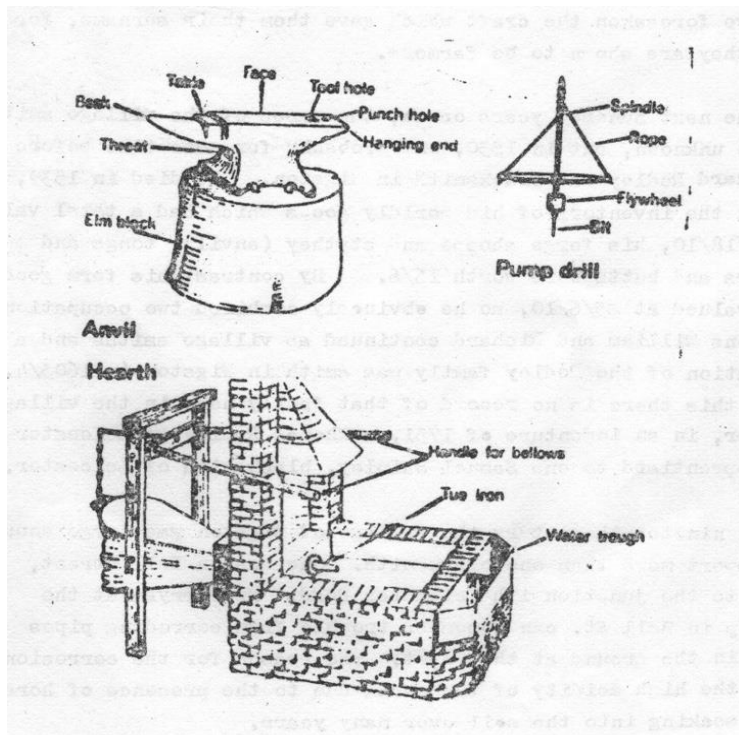
The blacksmith's world may be like an alien domain, but there is logic and order within it. The dark background and the gloomy light are essential in order to judge the colour of the hot metal. It is from this variation in colour that the smith is able to determine the state of the metal and so it's readiness for beating, forging or welding.

The tools and equipment needed by any blacksmith were numerous and varied. The fire, correctly termed the forge, was the heart of any smithy. Originally these were built of brick but by the nineteenth century the use of iron forges had begun to spread. Good quality coal or coke was used as fuel. In front of the forge or close by was the quenching bath. This was a water filled trough into which hot metal could be plunged to cool it down. The clouds of steam which could be produced by such treatment could be prodigious.

Close by would be the anvil. The most common anvil, the one with the square end and the pronounced beak at the other end, is the London pattern. To maximise the advantage of the anvil it was generally mounted on an elm block. " a bad anvil was like jumping into a bed of sand, whereas a good anvil set on a proper foundation was like jumping on a springboard, the rebound from one blow helped towards the next." The anvil was vital for bending and shaping hot metal especially in the making of horseshoes.

In addition, the smiths generally had a metal "Swage Block". This was a piece of iron with different size holes and half rounds, notches and angles cut into it. The swage fitted into the end of the anvil and was used extensively for ornamental work.

Most other tools were actually made by the smiths themselves. Of these the most common would be a variety of tongs and pincers for holding hot metal. Of the many hammers that were used the 2/3 lb. ball and peen hammer was the most common. The larger sledges from 7 to 20 lbs. were used for cutting cold bar iron. Using these large hammers was often the job of the blacksmiths apprentice or assistant who was usually called the 'striker'.



The smelting of iron and the making of iron goods was well known in Roman times and before. It was, when available superior in strength and cutting edge to other metals, relatively expensive though and so available only to the rich and the State. It was not until about 1000AD that it became common to shoe war horses, and from this time the practice gradually spread to other horses. As production methods improved the cost of iron fell, in relative terms, and so the metal was used in a greater variety of household goods.

Until Tudor times the only iron ordinary people were ever likely to see was a plough share, a sickle and scythe and small household knife, and the armour belonging to the knights and lords.

It was not until the Middle Ages as the Feudal System began to break down that the blacksmiths broke the link with the great households and became settled in the towns and villages, usually as Freemen, and of considerable standing in the community.

In Medieval Wigston, the smith was called upon to witness many of the early land transactions and deeds. From this source we are able to identify the names of some of the earliest blacksmiths in the County. It was a time in history when surnames are far from fixed. People are referred to by their occupation, their place of birth, the geographical location where they lived, or indeed as the 'son of somebody....'

John the Smith, of Wigston, witnessed a deed in 1247. Henry son of John the Smith is recorded as doing the same in 1269. Henry the Smith appears in his own right between 1269 – 1309. Robert the Smith appears between 1318 and 1321, and then William le Smith is found witnessing deeds between 1342 – 1376. Here are four generations of Smiths between 1247 – 1376. The Smith family was still living in the village in the fifteenth century, but they seem to have forsaken the craft which gave them their surname, for in 1418 they are shown to be farmers.

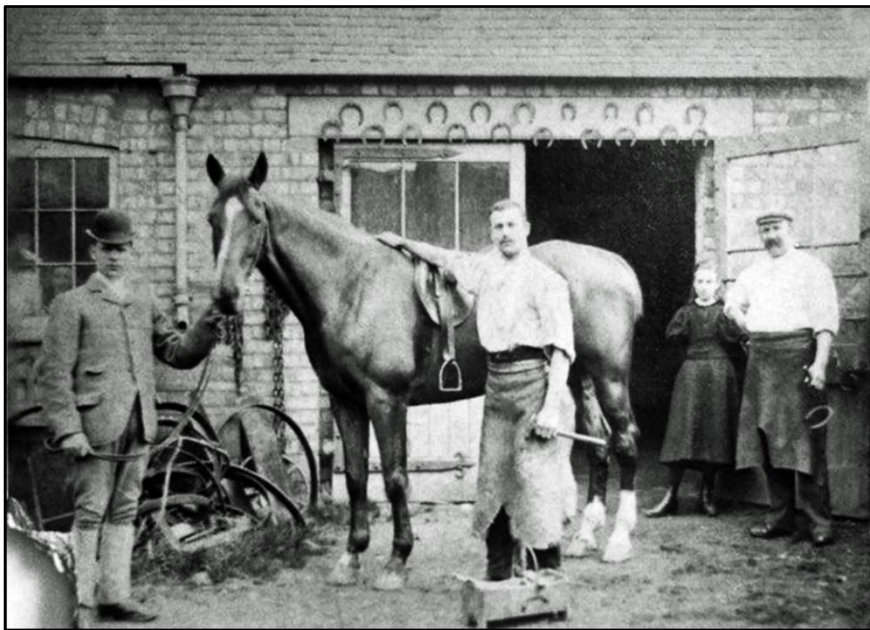
For the next hundred years or so, the names of the village smiths remain unknown, but in 1530, and probably for some time before this, Richard Redley was blacksmith in Wigston. He

died in 1539, and in the inventory of his worldly goods which had a total value of £6/18/10, his forge shoppe and stythey (anvil), tongs and hammers and butts were worth 16/6. By contract his farm goods were valued at £5/6/10, so he obviously combined two occupations. His sons William and Richard continued as village smiths and a third generation of the Redley family was smith in Wigston in 1603/4. After this there is no record of that family name in the village. However, in an indenture of 1731, a Thomas Redley of Leicester was apprenticed to one Samuel Shipley, Blacksmith of Leicester.

By the nineteenth century the village of Wigston was large enough to support more than one blacksmith. One was in Bell Street, close to the Junction with Leicester Road. Mr Forryan at the Toy shop in Bell Street can remember trouble from corroding pipes placed in the ground at that spot. The reason for the corrosion being the high acidity of the earth due to the presence of horse's urine soaking into the soil over the years.

A second blacksmith's shop was in Bull Head Street, on the site of what is now Adcock's Garage. How many other blacksmiths' shop sites, I wonder, are now garages? Showing an interested functional community. Other blacksmiths in the village were employed by the Midland Railway in both their Wagon Shops and Stables.

The Trades Directories for the nineteenth century give two branches of the Sharpe family as the smiths in the village. By 1904 they are noted as being in South Wigston. In Bull Head Street the blacksmith is a Mr Thomas Smith. So, after 700 years a man named Smith is Blacksmith of Wigston again!



Up to the 1930's the Spence family seem to have been the smiths in Bell Street. The most recent Wigston Blacksmith I have been able to find is a Mr Albert Connah at 64 Leicester Road in 1941.

Arthur Fox, blacksmith, Bull Head Street, c1901.

Ian R. Varey

Article by Ian R. Varey re-published from Bulletin Number 10 October 1984



Wigston Framework Knitters Museum

www.wigstonframeworkknitters.org.uk

Henry Walter Bates

Naturalist, Explorer and Framework Knitter

Henry Walter Bates was amongst the most significant figures in 19th century Leicester, one of a group of Victorian England's outstanding naturalist-explorers who came to support the 'theory of evolution by natural selection', led, of course, by Charles Darwin but also included Alfred Russel Wallace, Joseph Dalton Hooker, Richard Spruce and Thomas Henry Huxley.

Henry was born on Tuesday 8th February 1825 at 16 Waterloo Street, Leicester, the first son of, and named after, Henry Walter Bates and his wife Sarah. His father had owned a Framework Knitting and Worsted Yarn business since the 1750s. Later the family moved to Queens Street (1841). From an early age Henry Walter was hooked on natural history, he had drawers full of insects he had collected with his brother Frederick, this was actually encouraged by his father. Henry Walter was sent to Creators Academy School at Billesdon, at a cost of 21 guineas per annum.

He left school at 14 and was apprenticed to Alderman Gregory, a hosiery manufacturer who had premises in Halford Street, Leicester. The working hours were 7am – 8pm, sometimes he had the company of his younger brother Frederick then aged 9, to help sweep the floor and collect bits of string.

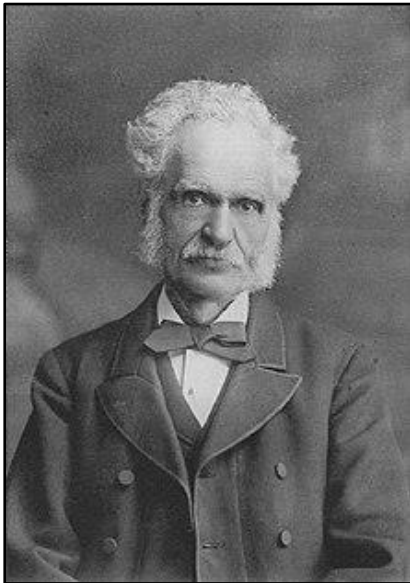
After leaving school he attended night school where he met John Plant – later curator of Salford Museum – John's brother James later a geologist and James Horley an ornithologist. The brothers often went to Bradgate Park, then owned by the Earl of Stamford. Henry Walter had the habit of noting everything down often with drawings. By the time he was a young man he was corresponding to the top naturalists of his day. When only 18 he had his first paper published in the first issue of the Zoologist, in January 1843.

Before Henry Walter's apprenticeship finished Alderman Gregory died; Henry Walter was left to run the business, but he had other ideas, he worked for a time at Allsopps Brewery in Burton on Trent. A year before leaving for Burton on Trent he met an art teacher at night school – Alfred Russell Wallace. In 1846, Wallace went back to Glamorgan, Wales, to sort out family business and a year later invited Henry Walter to have a holiday there. They spent many hours exploring the insect life around Glamorgan, whilst there, a new book was published by W H Edwoods – 'A Voyage up the Amazon'. They each raised £100 and decided to go the Amazon, which they did in 1848.

To limit the cost of their expedition they arranged for the sale of duplicate specimens and to collect plants for Kew Gardens. They went to Chatsworth to view the collection of orchids already in Britain with the intention to bring back new varieties. They also visited the British Museum where Edward Doubleday showed them species of butterfly captured in Brazil.

Bates and Wallace sailed from Liverpool in a small ship called 'Mischief' it took a month to reach South America. On Sunday 28th May, 'Mischief' berthed at Para, 70 miles from the sea. Henry Walter was to spend the next 11 years in the Amazon. In the first year, he collected 2,200 varieties of insects. Later at a town Ega, he collected 7000 species of insects and 500

species of butterfly and birds. After many attacks of illness (staying in Brazil 7 years longer than Wallace), Henry Walter decided to return to Britain and on the 3 February 1859, he started the long journey home and reuniting with his family in Leicester.



Henry Walter Bates



Illustration of Henry in the Amazon Jungle

On the 19th of January 1860, his mother Sarah died aged 50. That left his father Henry, Henry Walter and Samuel at home with no one to attend to the housekeeping. However, his sister Mary came to look after them. By that time, they had moved to King Street. Mary had only one eye, the other she lost whilst washing up when lightning struck the knife she was washing. Not long after his return to Leicester, Henry met Sarah-Ann, aged 19. On 2 February 1862, Sarah gave birth to a daughter Alice, but there was no record of the marriage until 1863.

In 1859, the same year that Henry Walter returned to England, Darwin published 'The Origin of the Species'. Just beating Wallace and Bates, who were just about to publish the same theory based on their own experiences in the Amazon. Despite this, Henry Walter Bates wrote to Darwin on many occasions and was invited to Darwin's home. The two men became firm friends until Darwin's death in 1882. Darwin encouraged him to publish his own book, which he did, 'The Naturalist on the River Amazon'.

In 1865, Henry Walter became a father again, Charles Henry his second son was born. By this time, he was secretary to the Royal Geographical Society. In 1867 the couples third son, Darwin, was born and four years later a fourth son, Herbert Spencer.

Henry Walter's younger brother Frederick became a very successful brewer. His factory was the Eagle Brewery, Northampton Square, Leicester. He married Ann Orange daughter of a worsted spinner of Daniel Orange and Company, Swan Works Mill Lane.

Bill Boulter

SNOWDON'S HOUSE AND HOSIERY NEEDLE WORKS

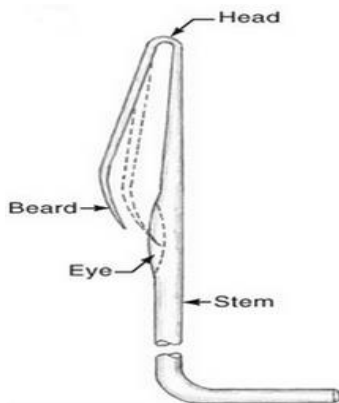
Operated by Harry Snowden, the premises were situated on Bull Head Street near to The Bank. Harry Snowden was a well-known and popular supplier of bearded needles for the Stocking Frame. Examples of the needles made by Snowden's may be seen in the Frame Shop at the Wigston Framework Knitters Museum.



The old Mechanics Institute, home to Snowden's Needle Factory.

The business had been started by John Snowden, who was listed in the 1881 Census but then living on Leicester Road. He had moved to Bull Head Street by the 1891 Census, which might explain why another member of the Snowden family was also a needle-maker, John Snowden, 38, who still lived on the Leicester Road.

The Bearded Needle



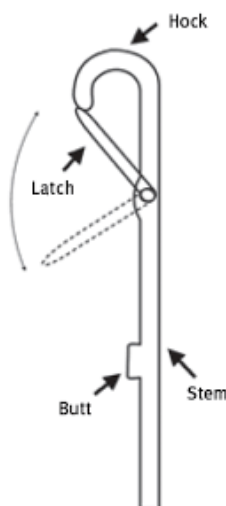
The bearded needle was used on the stocking frame. The design allowed the operator to replicate the actions of hand knitting by moving a length of thread/yarn into the beard of the needle. Pressure is applied to close the beard, which then allows the previous thread on the stem to be slid over the head of the beard to form a new row of stitches on the fabric.



Bearded needles attached to a stocking frame. This photograph shows fabric on the needles, with the top row of stitches inside the beard of the needles. The pieces of thin metal between each needle are called sinkers. During operation of the frame the sinkers are brought down after a length of yarn is laid across the needles. This forms a loop in between each needle. This of course is a very simple explanation as to how Snowdon's needles were utilised in the heyday of Framework Knitting.

The Wigston Framework Knitters Museum has a number of frames in preservation. Sadly, a shortage of volunteers, time and money means they are not all in working order. We have one demonstration frame which is in use. One difficulty is needles! They are in short supply and must be made to order. They are very expensive.

Latch Needle



The latch needle was used on the hand operated circular knitting machines. The machine was commonly known as the 'Griswold'. Although Griswold was an actual make, it is a generic term rather like describing vacuum cleaners as Hoovers. The circular knitting machine was invented in 1816 by Marc Brunel, father of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. The latch needle was developed in 1849. Initially the machines were more popular in the USA than the UK.

Henry Griswold developed the circular knitting machine marketed as a Griswold. His firm was later sold to Berridges in Leicester who continued to use the Griswold name.

The stocking frame and Griswold machines are available for visitors to see at The Wigston Framework Knitters Museum.

Bill Boulter



**Volunteers
Needed**



**Greater Wigston
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**Wigston Framework
Knitters Museum**

**Would you like to learn about
Wigston and Framework Knitting?**

Become a Volunteer and support your community. Both the Framework Knitters Museum and the Heritage Centre need your support. There are many activities where your help would be invaluable. If you would like to help, please contact us.

Mike Forryan 07711 083227 for the Heritage Centre

Neil Hancock 07967 605309 for the Museum.