



Greater Wigston Historical Society

White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna Leicestershire

BULLITIN 10

OCT '84



Notices

Programme

Liberal Club, Wigston at 7.30pm

17th October Wednesday

“Heraldry”

Illustrated talk by Mr Ian Varey 7.30pm

23rd November Friday

“Magic Lantern Show”

From Duncan Lucas 7.30pm Non-Members 50p

December 12th Wednesday 7.30pm

Christmas Party see page 2

16th January Wednesday

“Wigston and the 1881 Census”

A Workshop session for every one..... 7.30 pm

20th February Wednesday

A.G.M. meeting 7.30pm

Subscriptions

Subscriptions remain unchanged at £2.00 and £1.00 for O.A.P's and those under 18 years of age. Brian Bilson the Hon. Treasurer and Membership Secretary will be pleased to received subs from existing members or new members, either at the monthly meetings or by posting them to him

Mr B Bilson 23 Thirlmere Road, Wigston, Leicester

New Members

New members are always welcome as are new ideas and activities for the Society to undertake. All the winter meetings are held at the Liberal Club, Bull Head Street, Wigston, on the third Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.

Bulletin

The Bulletin appears three times a year, Oct, Feb and June. Items or articles for inclusion should be sent to the Hon Editor at least three weeks before the publishing date which is the 1st of the month.

Leicestershire Local History Council

1984 Programme

Monday Oct 8th The Leicestershire Oral History Archive
 Mr N Newitt, Project Co-ordinator
 7.30pm Leicestershire Records Office

Monday Nov 12th Tour of Leicester University Library
 Special reference to the Local History Section.
 Meet inside main entrance of Library at 7.30pm

Wednesday Dec 12th Members Evening 7.30pm at Community House
 133 Loughborough Road, Leicester.

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Local History Evening Monday October 15th 7.30 to 9pm

An open invitation to this evening put on by the Oadby Local History Group and Oadby Library Service. Venue is Oadby Library in Sandhurst Street. There will be files and videos on the history of Oadby and a special display to launch the "Learn with Your Library" leaflet on Local History.

Our Societies Christmas Party

This year for the first time we have decided to have a Christmas get together. At the moment we have booked the Committee Room at the Wigston Liberal Club, but should there be a big response we may have to look for an other venue!!

As well as members, family and friends of the society are warmly invited. As well as games, diversions etc. there will be a buffet with wine. We hope that you feel that the £1.00 charge is reasonable.

All profits will go to the Society fund.

** To help with catering would you please fill in the reply slip and together with your remittance hand them in at the Oct or Nov meetings or post them to Brian Bilson, no later than the 23rd Nov.

GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY CHRISTMAS PARTY 12th DEC 1984

Name..... Number Attending

Address.....

Tel:-

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 specialized 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 dependant 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 one storey 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. Over all 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 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, where as 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 pound 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 place 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 blacksmiths shop was in Bull Head Street, on the site of what is now Adcock's Garage. How many other blacksmith shop sites, I wonder, are now garages..... Showing an interested functional community.

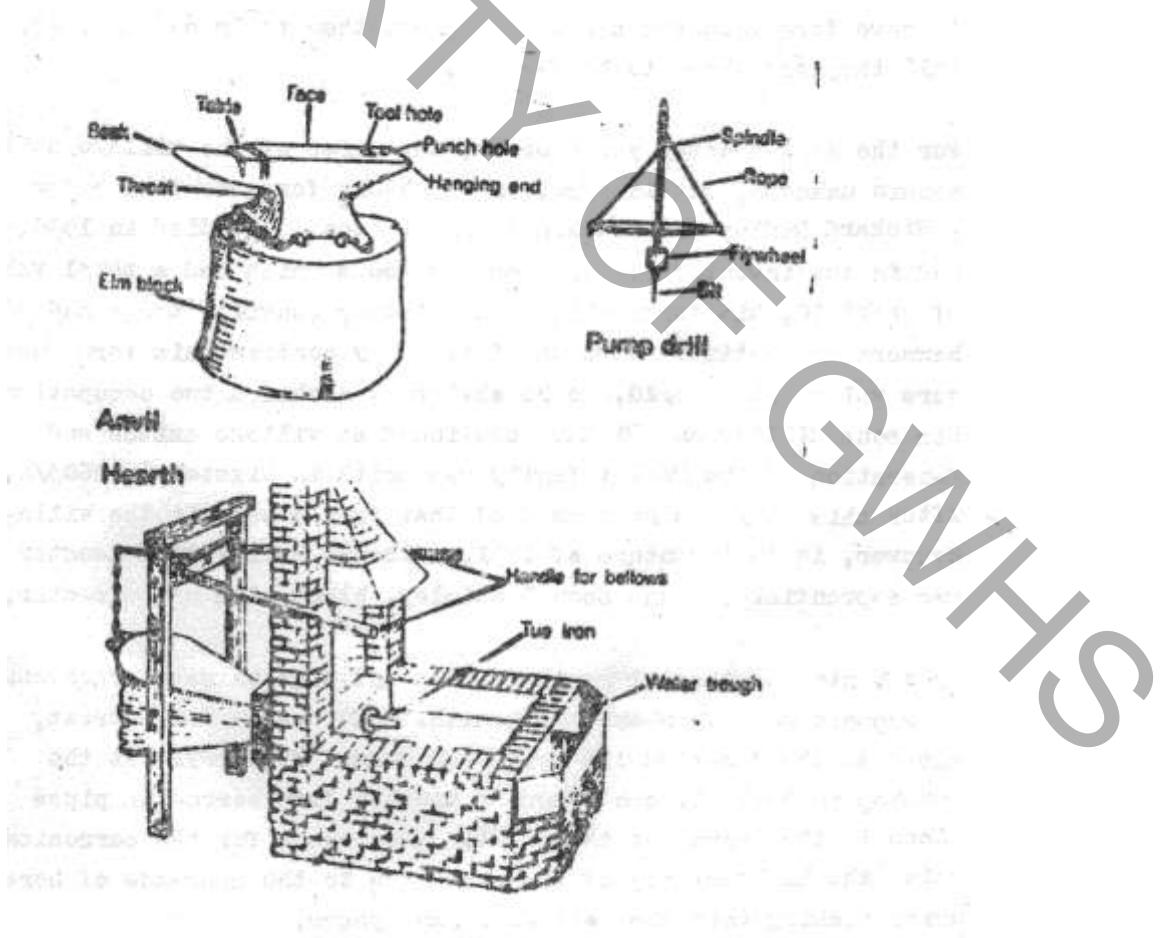
Other blacksmiths in the village were employed by the Midland Railway in both their Wagon Shops and Stables.

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

If anyone has any additional information about Wigstons Blacksmiths I would be delighted to hear about it.

Ian R Varey.



The Domesday Book

1086

The Domesday Book was compiled to give King William 1 a record of holdings, both for taxation and also to establish the title to their lands of the Norman Lords.

The Anglo Saxon Chronicle says

“The King sent his men over all England, into every shire and had them find out how many hundred hides there were in the shire. Also he had a record made of how much land his Archbishops had, and his Bishops and his Abbots and his Earls What or how much everybody had who was occupying land in England in land and cattle and how much it was worth”

Robert Losings, Bishop of Hereford also says

“Other investigators followed the first and men were sent into provinces which they did not know, and where they themselves were unknown, in order they might be given the opportunity of checking the first survey, and if necessary, of denouncing its authors as guilty to the King. And the land was vexed with much violence arising from the collection of the royal taxes”.

The records were gathered together at Winchester, where they were transcribed into one column. Three counties were included in a second volume, and the south-western counties in a third.

The principal landowner in Leicestershire, and Wigston, was Hugh de Grantsmesnil, Baron and Sherriff of Leicestershire. He restored the Abbey of St Evroul and became its Abbot in 1059, was expelled in 1063 and went to Italy. Recalled to Normandy, he was at Hastings. He was left in command of Hampshire in 1067 and returned to Normandy in 1068. In 1088 he joined the barons against William II and carried on war against Robert of Belleme 1091. He died a monk in England.

The survey of Wigston shows a ‘double vill’. 2 distinct communities, one of 38 men with 8 ploughs and one of 47 men with 5 ploughs. The majority of the 6 ‘double vills’ in the country in that one community has twice the wealth of the other. The individuals are also of a higher standing in the feudal order. This double community may represent the imposition of a Danish settlement on an existing English village.

The Domesday Book was kept in the repository by the side of the Talley Court in the Exchequer. In 1695 it was moved to the Chapter House in Westminster. It was accessible for inspection, at fees of 6s 8d for searching and 4p a line for transcribing. The fees were described as "Antient Fees" in Queen Elizabeth 1st time and unchanged for another two hundred years. The book is now kept in the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane, London, where it can be seen.

Translations of counties have been made since 1673, for inclusion in individual county histories, but the first complete translation was Fairley's Edition of 1783. This was printed by John Nichols using a specially cut type to reproduce the original text.

Nichols also used this type for the Translation of Leicestershire in his history. The type was destroyed in the fire in Nichols's Works. The Ordnance Survey issued facsimile made by an early photocopying process in 1861. The heavily abbreviated text was, to the layman, unusable and, for Leicestershire and Rutland, J & T Spencer published an edition with the facsimile, an extended Latin edition and a translation. Our copy is from this.

A translation was also published in Volume 1 of the Victoria County History and Phillimore Press have recently published a modern translation.

Countess Judith was the Widow of Earl Walthe of Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire, executed in 1706 following the revolt of the Earls, Earl Ralph of Hereford, was nephew of King Edward.

SOKEMAN	a tenant holding land in socage – by certain determinant services other than knight service.
VILLAIN	a tenant holding by menial services – a peasant occupier entirely subject to his lord.
BORDAR	Villain of the lowest rank who rendered menial service for a cottage, held at the will of his lord
SERF	Villain person whose service is attached to the soil and transferred with it
HIDE	The amount of land required for the maintenance of a family tree, with its dependants. Circa 100 acres
CARUCATE	as much land as could be tilled with one plough and eight oxen circa 120 acres
BOVATE	an oxgang, or as much land as one ox could plough in one year circa 10 to 18 acres.

XII TERRA HUGONIS DE GRENTEMUSNIL *in Gvltacistan Wapentachio*
 Hugo de Grentemaisnil tenet de rege WICHINGES-
 TONE. Ibi est i. hida et tertia pars unius hidæ. Terra est xvi. carucarum.
 De hac terra est in dominio i. hida et ibi iiii. carucae et ii. serui
 et una ancilla et xxxii. villani cum presbytero et xii. bordarii habent v. carucas.
 Ibi xxxi. sochemanni cum i. clerico et ii. militibus et iiii. francigenis hominibus
 habent viii. carucas. Ibi L. acra prati. Valuit et ualet viii. libras.
 Radulfus comes tenuit.

XV TERRA IUDITE COMITISSE. *in Gvltacistan Wapentachio*
 Robertus tenet de Comitissa ii. carucas terre ii. bonate minus
 in OLDEBI et WICHINGESTONE. Ibi fuit i. caruca et dimidia.
 Nunc est ibi i. bordarius. Valuit et ualet ii. solidos.

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XIII. THE LAND OF HUGH DE GRENTEMUSNIL.

Hugh de Grentemaisnil holds of the King Wichingestone (*Great Wigston*). There is one hide⁹⁹ (of land) and the third part of one hide. There is land for sixteen ploughs. Of this land there is in the demesne the third part of one hide, and there are four ploughs, and two serfs, and one bondwoman; and thirty-two villanes, with a priest, and twelve bordars, have five ploughs. Thirty-one soke-men, with one clerk, and two knights, and four foreign men, have eight ploughs there. There are fifty acres of meadow. It was worth, and is worth, eight pounds. Earl Ralph held it.

XV THE LAND OF COUNTESS JUDITH.

Robert holds of the Countess two carucates of land, less two ox-gangs, in Oldebie (*Qadby*), and Wichingestone (*Great Wigston*). One plough and a half were there. Now there is one bordar. It was worth, and is worth, two shillings.

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