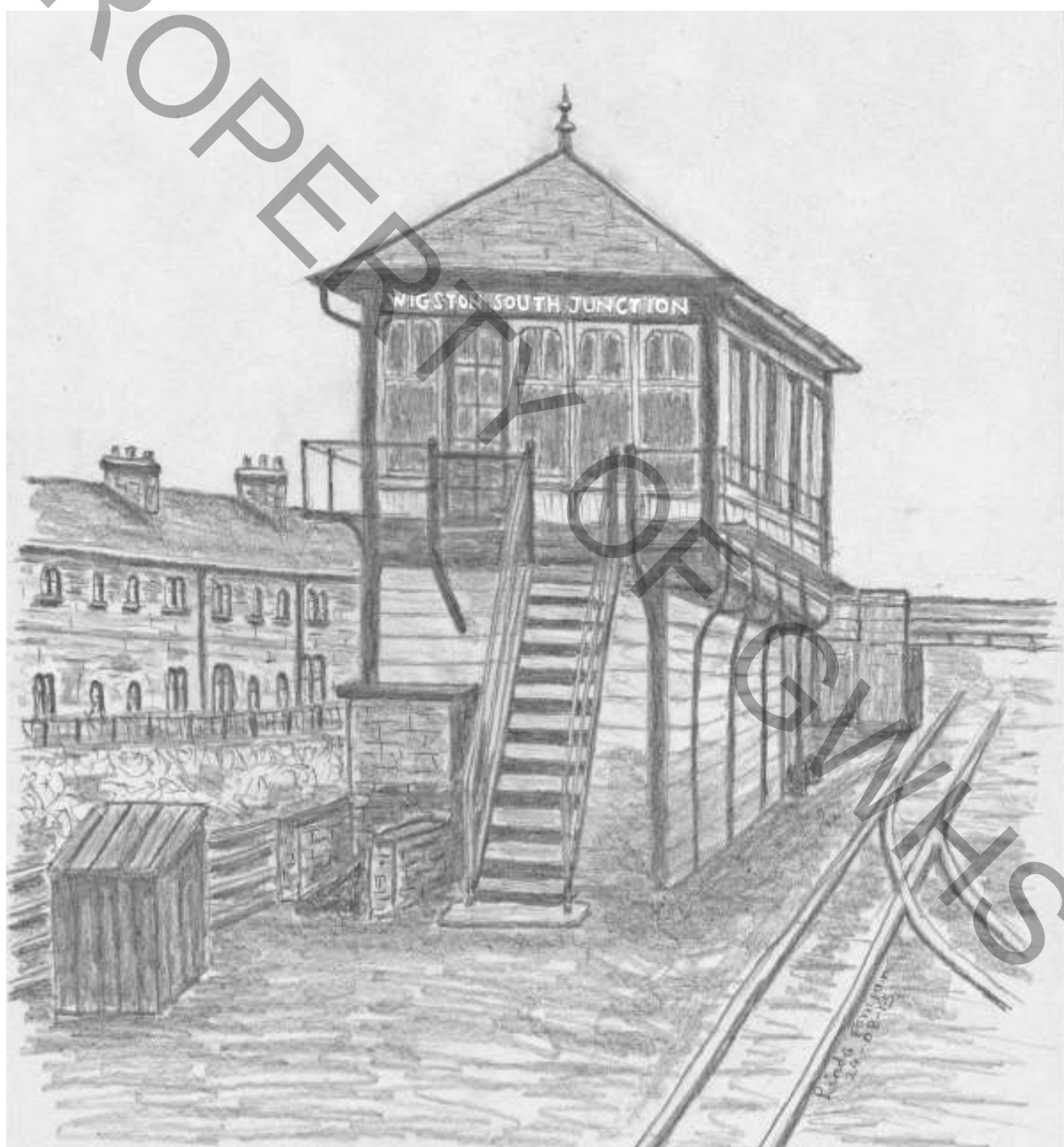


GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
White Gate Lodge, 97 Newton Lane, Wigston Magna, Leics.

BULLETIN 103

1st NOVEMBER 2015



Wigston South Junction Signal Box, looking south, with Midland Cottages to the left and Spion Kop Bridge in the background

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS – NOVEMBER 2015 TO AUGUST 2016

Wednesday 18th November 2015

God's Acre, a presentation about Wigston Cemetery – Bill Boulter
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

***Wednesday 16th December 2015**

Christmas Social with nibbles & drinks – Beaux & Belles handbell ringers, also quiz, pictures etc., by Mike Forryan & the committee
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 20th January 2016

The Highwayman of Wigston – Judith Proctor
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 17th February 2016

AGM – Mike Forryan followed by 15 minute soundbites from members & committee
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 16th March 2016

King Richard III - One Year On - a representative from Leicester Cathedral
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 20th April 2016

Buildings designed by Arthur Wakerley – Neil Crutchley
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

****Wednesday 18th May 2016**

Afternoon Boat Cruise from Foxton Locks starting 3p.m. followed by evening meal at Foxton Locks Inn. Booking essential

****Wednesday 15th June 2016**

Evening Guided Walk around Market Bosworth, followed by meal at Ye Olde Red Lion
Booking essential

Wednesday 17th August 2016

Leicestershire & Rutland Photographers 1839-1939 – Mark Gamble
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

*Please bring £2 on the night towards cost of refreshments.

**Our Secretary, Ann Cousins, will take bookings, note menu choices & if people need a lift at the March & April meetings.

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, Tricia Berry, three clear weeks before publication date please.

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

Chairman, Mike Forryan's e-mail: chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

FRONT COVER PICTURE

The caption to Linda Forryan's lovely drawing of the Wigston South Signal Box mentions the Spion Kop Bridge in the distance. This is indeed its name, though perhaps only unofficially. Some members may not be familiar with the name or be puzzled as to its origin. The bridge was built in 1900/02 to raise the road and carry traffic over the railway lines, replacing the previous level crossing. During this time Britain was fighting the Boer War and SpionKop was the name of a prominent hill in an otherwise flat area in South Africa where the British fought, and lost, a battle against Boer farmers. Returning soldiers named stands at their football grounds Spion Kop or just the Kop in memory of their fallen comrades (notably Liverpool). Because the new bridge made the road rise it was also given this name.

AUGUST 2015 MEETING: THE JEWEL IN LEICESTERSHIRE'S CROWN, BRADGATE PARK

For the first meeting of the new season we welcomed Robert Gregory who gave a power point with pictures presentation on Bradgate Park. This jewel in the crown is of course well known to almost all members and so the task facing Robert must have been quite daunting, however as a retired teacher and blue badge guide since 1979 he had plenty of experience and ample time to build up a reservoir of knowledge, and many good photographs often made more interesting by the weather conditions at the time.

It is perhaps a good strategy to start a talk with a confession and Robert's was that originally he did not mention Old John or Lady Jane Grey in his talk but after many complaints from audiences he nowadays always includes these two key elements at the beginning of his presentation.

Old John Tower is a much loved symbol of Leicestershire which can be seen from many parts of the county. Its origin is widely thought to have been as a monument to a miller and family retainer of the Grey's. The story goes that a huge bonfire was built on top of the hill in 1786 to celebrate the 21st birthday of the 5th Earl of Stamford's son. A large pole fell from the fire, which hit and killed the miller whose name was John. The miller was fond of his pint of ale and the tower was built in his memory in the shape of a beer mug and named accordingly. However, our speaker pointed out that the hill was already shown as Old John Hill on a map dated 1784 and Grey family estate accounts record the tower was also built in 1784, two years before the big birthday celebration. It is much more likely it was just built as a folly, and useful shelter for an observation point. There is evidence that horseracing once took place round the base of the hill, and it would have made a useful viewing point for the races and shelter for picnics etc., This is rather backed up by a very similar folly called Mow Cop in Shropshire on land at Dunham Massey, another of the Earl's country houses.

Lady Jane Grey was, as we all know, declared Queen of England, aged just 16, on 10th July 1553, but nine days later, on 19th July 1553, she was in the Tower of London and Mary Tudor, Henry VIII's daughter had been declared queen instead. Jane and her husband Lord Guildford Dudley who had also been imprisoned in the tower, were both executed on 12th February 1554. Her reign and death were due to the plotting of her father, Henry Grey, Duke of Suffolk, who was also beheaded 12 days later on the orders of the new Queen Mary. The sad Jane had to be helped to find the block at her execution but she died declaring herself a true Christian woman.

We then went on to consider the splendid gates at the Newtown Linford entrance. These show the coats of arms of the city and county together with what looks like some sort of ancient workman's tool but in fact it is a sleeve or mulch being the emblem of the House of Hastings who were the bitter enemies of the Greys. In fact there is no sign to represent the Grey family in Bradgate itself.

Until the 1500s there were no stone walls at Bradgate, the deer being kept in by fences and ditches. The remains of these ditches, called a deer leap, can be seen today. Later walls were constructed to a height of 8 feet to keep the deer in. Eventually a wall divided the park to provide two separate herds of deer of about 200 each for morning and afternoon hunting.

A custom was to keep at least one white hart in the park which could only be hunted by royalty, just in case a royal should arrive, but one never did during the times when hunting was popular.

The park was put up for sale in 1926 and was purchased two years later by Charles Bennion the Managing Director of the British United Shoe Machinery Company, a huge and well established manufacturing company in Leicester. He presented it to the city and county of Leicester *"to be preserved in its natural state for the quiet enjoyment of the people of Leicestershire forever."* The Bradgate Park Trust was set up to be in overall charge, and land agents from Leicestershire County Council's Rural and Agricultural Department managed it, liaising with the head ranger onsite. About eighteen years ago it was decided to transfer the management to Bradgate, and one of the council's land agents who had been responsible for the park for many years, re-located to work within the park, answerable directly to the Trustees, but still retaining strong links with County Hall. Today the post holder position is known as director.

Many exotic trees have been planted in the gorge area near to Newtown Linford often referred to as Little Matlock on maps. Some of these trees, especially the Cedar of Lebanon variety, had to be cut down because they were too top heavy for the shallow soil. There are two types of deer at the park, Red Deer (large, rich chestnut coloured animals) and Fallow Deer (smaller more dainty creatures, with lighter brown/cream coats, often with spots). The deer eat the lower branches of the trees, and the browsing line up to which the tallest can reach is plain to see. For this reason newly planted trees have to be protected with metal fence like guards until they are a certain height and well established. The park is currently divided into seven zones each maintained by a park ranger.

Apart from the natural landscape the main feature of the park is the ruins of Bradgate House. This was an early undefended house built of brick in 1520, only 40 years after Kirby Muxloe Castle which was also built of brick, but is well fortified with a moat, drawbridge and towers. This suggests society had become safer and more civilized between these dates. The two properties were amongst the earliest brick buildings in the county. The clay for Bradgate was extracted from the Cropston reservoir area. Both buildings contain attractive blue brick patterns in the brickwork. Thomas Grey had to clear a settlement to create space for his house, and the villagers of Bradgate were moved up the road to Newtown Linford (to a new town on the River Lynn). At the time of the Civil war there were 200 people living in the house when it was attacked by Lord Hastings (Royalist) because it was believed that Henry Grey, Lord Stamford (Parliamentarian) was storing arms at the house. Lord Stamford was Lord Lieutenant of the county, with the county militia under his command. Their arms were kept at the Magazine in the Newarke, but for safety some had been distributed around the county. It is believed only a

small amount was taken in this raid. The house was abandoned in the 1720s as the lady of the manor at that time wished to live in a town house.

Among the many interesting tit bits which Robert mentioned were: the old graffiti high up on the stone quoins of the ruins; the memorial to the Leicestershire Yeomanry and the toposcope on Old John; the walled groups of trees to keep the deer out and provide safe nesting for birds and rabbits; the wishing stone at the side of the road in the Little Matlock area; the wishing well spring at the side of the road near to the ruins (used by me to drink from on bike rides in my youth); the park keepers house, the original one standing on the site of the reservoir and now rebuilt within the park; Queen Adelaide's oak and the nearby Mulberry tree said to be one of 15 trees brought to this country by Sir Walter Raleigh.

Altogether a fascinating talk about a subject very familiar to many members, well delivered with good humour and well illustrated with slides. There was a record attendance of 79.

SEPTEMBER 2015 MEETING: FROM EARL SHILTON TO WATERLOO

For this meeting we welcomed one of our own members, Paul Seaton, resplendent in period uniform, to talk about his family history research which took him to the recent bicentenary events for the battle of Waterloo in 1815.

Paul's project had taken off so much that he and his research group had successfully applied for a lottery grant in accordance with which he was now touring local groups with details of the research.

It all began in 2011 after Paul's grandmother, Eva Beryl Almey, had died. Although there had been an Almey's Lane in Earl Shilton since 1771 local people were unaware how the lane had got its name. A search of the newspaper archive around the time of Waterloo revealed reports of three Almeys living in Leicestershire, in particular, Nathaniel, Samuel and George. The latter was listed on the Waterloo medal role but the other two were not. This was reported to the Waterloo Committee which informed Paul that his ancestors were probably telling a yarn in order that they could get free beer, a privilege awarded to Waterloo veterans at the time.

Paul had discovered that all the men served in the Royal Horse Artillery 'G Troop' and this led him to the army pay list records at Kew. There was George serving in Paris and the other two had their surnames spelt as Omeys and had served for over 14 years and were now Bombardiers. Both had joined up at 16 years of age for unlimited service although they said they were older. Nathaniel transferred to G Troop in 1803 on a pay of £2 4s 6p, more than framework knitters were getting back home in Earl Shilton.

Research into the battle was assisted by a very extensive diary kept by the captain in charge of G Troop, Capt. Alexander Cavalier Mercer. Troops were ferried over to Ostend in preparation for the battle. The British were supported by the Dutch, German and some Royalist French troops, and of course the Prussians under General Blucher. The troops, numbering about 6,000 men, were reviewed by the Duke of Wellington and General Blucher with G Troop being said to be 'well turned out'.

G Troop arrived on the battlefield on 16 June but with the British in retreat, Napoleon tried to ensure that the British and Prussian troops could not join up. Capt. Mercer recorded that he got

a good view of Napoleon. Some of the retreating British were led down a dead end and had great difficulty in turning round the waggons by hand before they were attacked. The next day was very wet and food was in short supply but Nathaniel Almey, being an experienced soldier, was sent out to find food and he returned with potatoes.

The next day, 18 June, being the morning of the battle, the rain had stopped but G Troop were kept in reserve in the 2nd line. In 1815 the way in which battles were fought was for the infantry to form themselves into squares with the attacking forces of cavalry troops trying to get inside the square to kill or capture the defenders. In the second attack the French were allowed to get inside the square and were brought down by the defending British all round them. It was so ferocious that Capt. Mercer reported that the smoke from musket and canon fire was so thick that he could not see what was happening and so it is highly likely that the Iron Duke was having a similar difficulty. On the third attack G Troop easily picked off the remaining depleted French troops who turned back. By this time 20,000 men had died but in the case of G Troop, while most of the men survived, many horses were dead and there was no way that G Troop could leave the field. After battles it was well known that local people flooded the battlefield to actually kill injured men, steal their weapons and jewellery and even pull out gold filled teeth from the dead. The British did not continue fighting but left the Prussians to finish off the French.

The Waterloo Medal was the first issued to men of the ranks who also received 2 years pay as extra pension and a share of the battle prize money which for the surviving Almeys was £2 11s 4p (Capt. Mercer received £80).

Nathaniel was discharged as a Corporal in 1819; Samuel died in 1824, George died in 1826. There is a memorial to G Troop at Mercers Ridge on the battlefield and G Troop still exists as G Battery (or Mercers Battery) in 3 Para into which the Royal Horse Artillery was merged. There is also a splendid new memorial to the Almeys in Earl Shilton which was created as a result of this research.

Paul concluded by announcing that he had located the following as men born in Wigston who had fought at the Battle:

Thomas Langham	30 th Foot
Joseph Langham	30 th Foot
Alexander Metcalf	2 nd Foot Guards, Coldstream Guards
John Tailby	12 th Dragoons

First two reports by Colin Towell

OCTOBER 2015 MEETING: RAILWAYS OF WIGSTON, 175 YEARS (1840-2015)

For this meeting the speaker was again one of our members, this time John Stevenson, to tell us about the history of the railways in Wigston, which over the years made such a big impact on the area. There were three separate lines which all converged just to the south of Wigston, some crossing each other, and thus creating a small triangle of land completely cut off, being surrounded by railway lines. All three lines had their own local stations, Wigston South, Wigston Magna and Glen Parva. Thus Wigston became quite an important junction, with good connections to most parts of the UK.

Prior to this the earliest railways were built to transport goods rather than passengers. The first line in Leicestershire, and one of the earliest in the country, was the Swannington to Leicester line. Designed and built by George Stephenson and his son Robert to transport coal more efficiently from the coalfields of West Leicestershire to West Bridge, Leicester, it was opened amid great rejoicing on 17th July 1832 when George Stephenson himself drove 'The Comet' assisted by his son Robert and Driver Weatherburn from West Bridge to Bagworth Station. All the VIP passengers sat in open trucks on benches covered with a cloth, the comfort of enclosed carriages with upholstered seats was some way in the future.

The success of this line led the Midland Counties Railway to initially plan a line to transport coal from the Derby and Nottingham coalfields to Leicester, but some of the financiers involved insisted the line should be made to continue from Leicester to Rugby, and thus to link up with West Midland lines. The first two parts reaching as far as Leicester (Campbell Street Station) were both opened in 1839. The final part from Leicester to Rugby, passing through Knighton Tunnel, past Wigston over the Crow Mills Viaduct and on to Ullesthorpe and Rugby was opened on 30th June 1840 with a special train journey carrying the directors, engineers, contractors and visitors. Its station was Wigston South. The opening must have caused huge interest and excitement in Wigston.

The Crow Mills Viaduct had its problems and twice was overwhelmed by flood water and collapsed. Once the nearby miller is said to have noticed and run up the line to flag down an approaching train and so avert disaster. It is apparently the first line which George Stephenson was not involved with, which makes it likely he might have noticed the flood potential (the canal and River Sence so close) and constructed a stronger viaduct to start with.

By 1857 the Midland Counties Railway had been taken over by the Midland Railway, and this new enlarged company constructed Wigston's second railway line from a junction slightly north of Wigston to Hitchen via Bedford which opened in May that year. Its station was Wigston Magna. Passengers initially had to transfer to another train company to continue to London, but eventually the Midland Line secured its own route into London and built its own magnificent churchlike St. Pancras Station and Hotel.

In 1864 a third line from Birmingham and Nuneaton to Peterborough, was opened by the South Leicestershire Railway (this company was taken over in 1867 by the London and North Western Railway). This station was Glen Parva, but was not used as a full passenger station until alterations were made in 1884 to accommodate the needs of the nearby Barracks which was built 1879/80.

In 1873 the Midland Railway built an engine shed and wagon works, which came to employ 250 people, many moving to the area from elsewhere. This would be the time when Orson Wright began to take notice and start to acquire land in the area. He could see that these railway connections made the area an excellent place to build factories and of course houses for their employees as well as the increasing railway staff, and thus was South Wigston created.

In 1900/02 the Midland Railway widened their line to London which quadrupled the capacity, replaced their Wigston Magna station and built the road bridge over the line (near the 1852 public house) which had previously been a level crossing.

John mentioned that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert passed through Wigston by train in 1843 as did King George V and Queen Mary in 1912. Another important traveller was the United

States President Ulysses S. Grant in 1877, and surely Thomas Cook, many times, when planning and leading his various excursions. Special trains which have also passed through include the Thames/Clyde Express (London to Glasgow), The Palatine (Manchester to St. Pancras) and the Midland Pullman Blue (also Manchester to St Pancras). Special excursion trains have included football supporters to Wembley and Leicester Railway Society to celebrate their 20th anniversary.

The inevitable decline, due mainly to the popularity of motor cars, came to a head in the 1960s. British Rail closed Wigston South Station to passengers on 1st January 1962, followed by the other two stations in 1968, Wigston Magna on 1st January and Glen Parva on 4th March. In 1986 thanks to much hard work and pressure from a local group of enthusiasts British Rail agreed to open a new station in South Wigston on the Birmingham to Peterborough Line, about 300 metres east of the site of the old Glen Parva one.

This meeting created yet another record with an attendance of 82 (68 members and 14 visitors).

Tricia Berry

THE MUSINGS OF DUNCAN

So the two gasometers at Aylestone are to go! I believe they will, so some information about them I feel should be told.

As a Boy Scout off on a hike I saw a German bomber fly low over Wigston, heard the crump, crump of bombs and later that day cycled down to Cavendish Road to see the damage. As we went the gasometers and electric power station were visible and even to a thirteen year old it was obvious that 'Gerry' was after that target. The Good Lord spared Leicester, that day. How many cubic feet of coal gas would have exploded?

My tale rolls on, when as a young man I started farming up Newton Lane in Wigston and one day I spoke to a man leaning on my gate. His name was Ernie Munton, he was working on the retorts at Aylestone Gas Works and was fearful of his health from the gas fumes, which did go on to affect him towards the end of his life. He used to spend his spare time helping me on the land and telling many tales of the gas works.

Of winter times and heavy snow when men went on top of the holder to sweep off the snow because the holders had to rise when newly formed gas entered them. The weight of the snow would have prevented that movement. The sections of the gasometers as they rose or sank twisted like a giant corkscrew. They stand over a massive hole and when one was demolished I visited the site to see it. Of the painting of the vast structure, a huge job. I can't remember if camouflage was painted on them, and the cooling towers at the electric works next door.

He told of the huge masses of rats which lived in the area which when on the move sent shudders down the spine. Of a Wigston man, a Mr. Vann, whose job was smashing with a sledge hammer the pitch (a by-product) all day long and loading onto a rail wagon. Of accidents when men were gassed and when a boiler fire flashed back. Of men acquiring blank

wage slips which they filled in showing a lesser amount, pocketing the difference before handing over to the missus an un-opened wage packet.

He taught me how to operate my small vertical boiler with which I boiled the pig swill and which I collected from homes, hospitals and schools in an old Wigston laundry van. How I was concerned that my boiler had no insulation and we obtained sacks of asbestos, yes asbestos, and proposed to mix it with water in an old bath and spread it over the boiler. Time pressed and we never got round to doing the job. The Good Lord smiled on me then.

I enjoyed his lessons to me, and his help with the construction of my farm buildings. He told of being unemployed and taking a small square of wood, putting it in his cap, borrowing a ladder and some bricks, balancing them on his head and winning a job as a bricklayer/labourer – self trained man indeed, enterprising too.

Duncan Lucas

ABINGTON HOUSE

Members who are long term residents of Wigston who passed through the education system or those who remember Wigston before the three secondary schools of Abington, Bushloe and Guthlaxton were built will know about Abington House. For those who don't know, Abington House is situated between the Abington and Bushloe buildings, set well back from Station Road and hidden from the road by trees and bushes. The building is currently used by a day nursery and as offices for Leicestershire Arts and Music organisations. It is owned by the County Council.

The Society's joint scheme with Wigston Civic Society in the years leading up to 2007 for the establishment of Blue Plaques to record the residences of 14 prominent Wigston and South Wigston people, included a plaque at Abington House to record Thomas Ingram who lived from 1810 to 1909. He was a solicitor in Leicester and a generous benefactor to Wigston and South Wigston as well as holding several positions of importance in the Legal and Civic systems in Leicester and Wigston. He allowed his land to be used for many village celebrations.

He purchased the land on which what is now known as Abington House stands, and had it built in about 1862. It is substantial and incorporates a coach house and other outbuildings, which are all constructed of granite with a Swithland slate roof. He named it Hawthorn House after the local name for the fields which he had bought. On his death the house was left to his nephew Revd Charles Frederic Mortlock M.A. who was educated at Oxford near the town of Abingdon which may explain the new name for the house, even though a different spelling.

Members will also have heard of Birkett House special school presently situated between Launceston Road and Newgate End. The County Council which runs the school is proposing to move the school to new buildings which it wants to erect behind Abington and Bushloe schools which will entail the demolition of Abington House.

The proposal to demolish this prominent local house which is on the list of significant buildings in the Borough is not acceptable and Wigston Civic Society has submitted an application to Heritage England (formerly English Heritage) to have the building listed which, if approved, will almost certainly prevent the demolition. It should be noted that the Society is

not against the construction of a new school for Birkett House in itself, but it is against the demolition of such an important local building.

Whilst on the subject of the local secondary schools, members may already be aware that the former Abington and Bushloe schools are now one school for 11-16 year olds which is named 'Wigston Academy'. The former Guthlaxton College is now named 'Wigston College' and is for 16-18 year olds. Both schools are managed under the Wigston Academy Trust. The transition will take place over a period of time.

Colin Towell



Abington House (formerly Hawthorn Field) was built by Thomas Ingram in c.1862 for his own occupation. He lived there until his death in 1909. A leading Leicester solicitor, he founded his own practice which later became Harvey Ingram and is now absorbed into the current legal firm Shakespeare Martinique. He was a generous benefactor to the area which 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, pulpit and £1,000 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.

THE QUEEN'S HEAD INN, BULL HEAD STREET, WIGSTON MAGNA

According to the 'Wigston Spa Lane Conservation Area Appraisal 2006', an establishment bearing the Queen's Head name had been operating from this location since 1846. A Post Office Directory of Leicestershire of 1855 has an entry for The Queen's Head, Wigston Magna, licensee W. Vann, and the 1851 census has an entry for a William Vann, Licensed Victualler, of Bull Head Street, so it could be assumed that they were one and the same.

My grandparents, **Harry and Harriet Hart**, ran the pub from around 1935 (possibly a little earlier) to 1950.

I was born in a nursing home in Clarendon Park Road, Leicester, in April 1942, and the Queen's Head was my first home. I was christened De'ann Elizabeth Hart at All Saints church in Wigston. My parents, Grace and Douglas Hart, were married in 1940 and had been living and working in Coventry – my Dad worked in engineering and was a volunteer fireman during the war. Mr Hitler obviously took exception to this, as he dropped a bomb on their new house, and they went back to live for a while with Doug's parents, Harry and Harriet Hart, at the Queen's Head.

As I recall, at the back of the building were two stable blocks, one of which was still standing when we visited in April 2000. Harry had his butchery and pie-making business in this block (I should mention that the pies were legendary, being individually hand-raised and nothing like the commercially produced efforts we get today) and the other block, demolished by the time of our visit, was used for toilets, storage and dog kennel. The cellar, the exact location of which I can't remember, had metal rails for rolling down the huge wooden beer casks that used to be delivered from the Northampton Brewery Company (possibly by dray, but I'm not sure). Because the barrels were wooden the noise they made sounded like thunder, so I was never afraid during a thunder storm – I just thought there had been an extra delivery! I do remember the fusty, beery smell and the dank chill that rose up whenever the trap door was opened.

Also at the back there was car park and a grassed area with tables and benches for the use of customers, and then a private garden for family use. Beyond that was a walled kitchen garden, and I often used to sit with Grandma under the pea sticks, eating raw peas. As can be seen from the April 2000 photographs, the stable block attached to the house had changed very little, but in place of the other block there was now a pathway leading to blocks of flats which appeared to have been built on the private garden.

Bull Head Street was just a country lane in the 1930's and 40's, but is now a dual carriage-way. Friends of the Harts, Lily Brown, with daughter Doreen (known as "Red" on account of her lovely hair, and another who I think might have been called Sheila or Shirley, lived in a cottage further up the road, where the Williams family (Grace's sister Pip) stayed for a while just after the war. In our family album there is photograph of my cousin Peter and me standing on a haystack somewhere in Wigston - he has memories of hundreds of frogs, I remember a litter of warm brown puppies. Although the area has changed beyond recognition, it looked as though the cottage was still there in 2000. There is also a photograph in the album of Tommy Bull, a friend of Doug's, whose parents also lived in Bull Head Street. Sadly, he was killed in action at the age of 19. Mum was expecting me at the time, and he was going to be a godparent.

There was a racecourse not far away [Leicester Racecourse] and I remember seeing the famous jockey, Gordon Richards, (later Sir Gordon) galloping down the grassy bit outside of the course where we were sitting, beating his horse and swearing his head off – not a pretty sight.

Other memories are rather dim – the clink of ivory dominoes in the tap room, clouds of cigarette smoke, heavy round wooden tables with wrought-iron pedestal legs; black leather seats stuffed with horsehair that scratched my legs; Vimto (which I wasn't allowed), Smiths' Crisps with the blue twist of salt; the children's room at the back (a closed-in veranda); a very dark and spidery outside toilet; the dark wood staircase that used to terrify me – such a long way down, it made me dizzy standing at the top, I imagined that I was floating down; the huge bathroom with the toilet on the pedestal (which I fell down on one occasion), and the large green canvas sheet suspended from the ceiling to catch falling plaster. There was a large kitchen, but I have no memory of the living areas.

I do remember riding round the car park on my tricycle, and one day losing a pretty silver bracelet, which rolled down the drain. (The parents were not best pleased!) There was a shop, I think on the corner over the road, which sold ice creams in rice paper. Other memories are of a cat (whose name escapes me), darling Dusky the spaniel, dying in the stable; brown Dusky, his successor – a totally unlovable Labrador cross, who was so fat that Grandpa would drive to Leicester Market, and make him run home behind the car. The car, of course, a 1936 sit-up-and-beg Ford 8, which kept going right up to 1958. Grandpa sometimes used to take me with him to the market, and buy me a big whirly ice-cream and other goodies to keep me quiet while he went about his business.

My parents had moved back to Coventry by 1944, and then to South Wigston in 1946 (see separate memories of South Wigston which will be included in another issue), so most of these memories are from return visits when I was a small child. Grandpa retired from the pub around 1950, and later went to help out at the Coach and Horses at Lubenham. He and Grandma finally retired to live with Grandma's sister in Market Harborough, where Grandpa died in 1958. Grandma died in 1968.

A quick drive past the Queen's Head in July 2003 revealed it to be closed and shuttered, with a 'To Let' sign on it; it has since burnt down, been demolished, and a block of flats built on the site.

Ann Brimfield (née Hart)
Isle of Man

November 2013



Top Picture: My Dad, Douglas Hart, standing outside the Queen's Head around 1936 – he would be about 15 at the time.

Middle Picture: The Queen's head 2000. Razor wire on top of the toilet block. The proprietor came out as we were taking photographs, and although we explained why we were there, he made it obvious that we would not be welcome to go inside the pub, so all we had was a quick glimpse through a window.

Bottom Picture: The back of the pub, 2000. The brick extension and the entrance on the left of the picture, also covered in razor wire, has replaced the closed in veranda, which was used as a children's room. The right-hand side of the white painted stable block with the two large doors used to house the butchery and pie making areas.
Ann Brimfield nee Hart

THE MORTLOCK FAMILY AND THEIR CONNECTIONS TO ABINGTON HOUSE

When Thomas Ingram died childless in 1909 it was his late sister Mary Ann Mortlock nee Ingram's son who inherited Abington House. Mary Ann had married Charles Mortlock in 1844 in Leicester. He had been born in Isleham near Cambridge and baptised there on 29th May 1815. Charles was vicar of All Saints' and St. Leonard's Parishes in Leicester and was living with Mary Ann and their first two children, a son and a daughter, in Highcross Street when the 1851 census was taken. By 1861 the family had moved to the vicarage at Ulverston, Pennington, Lancashire, and had four children, three daughters and their son Charles Frederic, who was then aged 11, and had been born on 8th August 1849 in Leicester. Charles Frederic was educated at Queen's College, Oxford where he matriculated in 1868, and from 1869 to 1872 was a Hastings and Rigge exhibitioner and was awarded a B.A. in 1872 and an M.A. in 1881. He was ordained by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1875, was curate of Boughton-under-Blean, near Faversham in Kent from 1875 to 1878, and from 1878 to 1889 he was curate of the nearby parish of Ospringe.

On 8th April 1888 at Hernhill in Kent he married Lucy Elizabeth Sherwood Dawes, by this time he was aged 38, and she was c.24. Lucy was the daughter of Edwin S. Dawes who was born, as was his wife, in Staffordshire, but Edwin was an East India merchant and shipowner, which took him overseas for long spells. His daughter Lucy was born in 1864 in Bombay, India, but by 1871 the family were living in Kingston, Surrey.

In 1889 Charles Frederic was appointed vicar of South Bersted, near Bognor Regis in Sussex, where he was to spend the following 20 years. It is said that Thomas Ingram regularly visited his nephew and wife and his sister Mary Ann Mortlock, the latter having moved to the district to live with or near her son. On one occasion in mid-summer Thomas is said to have driven from Wigston to Bognor in an open carriage and pair. Mary Ann Mortlock died in Sussex in 1904 aged 91, her brother Thomas died in 1909 at Wigston just short of his 100th birthday.

Charles Frederic would have been about 60 years old when he inherited Abington House from Thomas Ingram. According to entries in Crockford's Clerical directory he moved to Wigston quite soon afterwards. He and his wife were presented with a silver tray by their parishioners and friends at South Bersted.

Charles Frederic died on 11th December 1921, leaving his wife rather alone as the couple did not have any children. Lucy continued to live at Abington House for over 30 years until her own death on 7th December 1952. Local directories list Lucy as being one of the largest landowners in the parish, so it appears ownership of the land which Thomas originally bought remained with the house. It is likely the whole was bought at this time by the county council for the three schools – Guthlaxton, Abington and Bushloe.

Tricia Berry

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