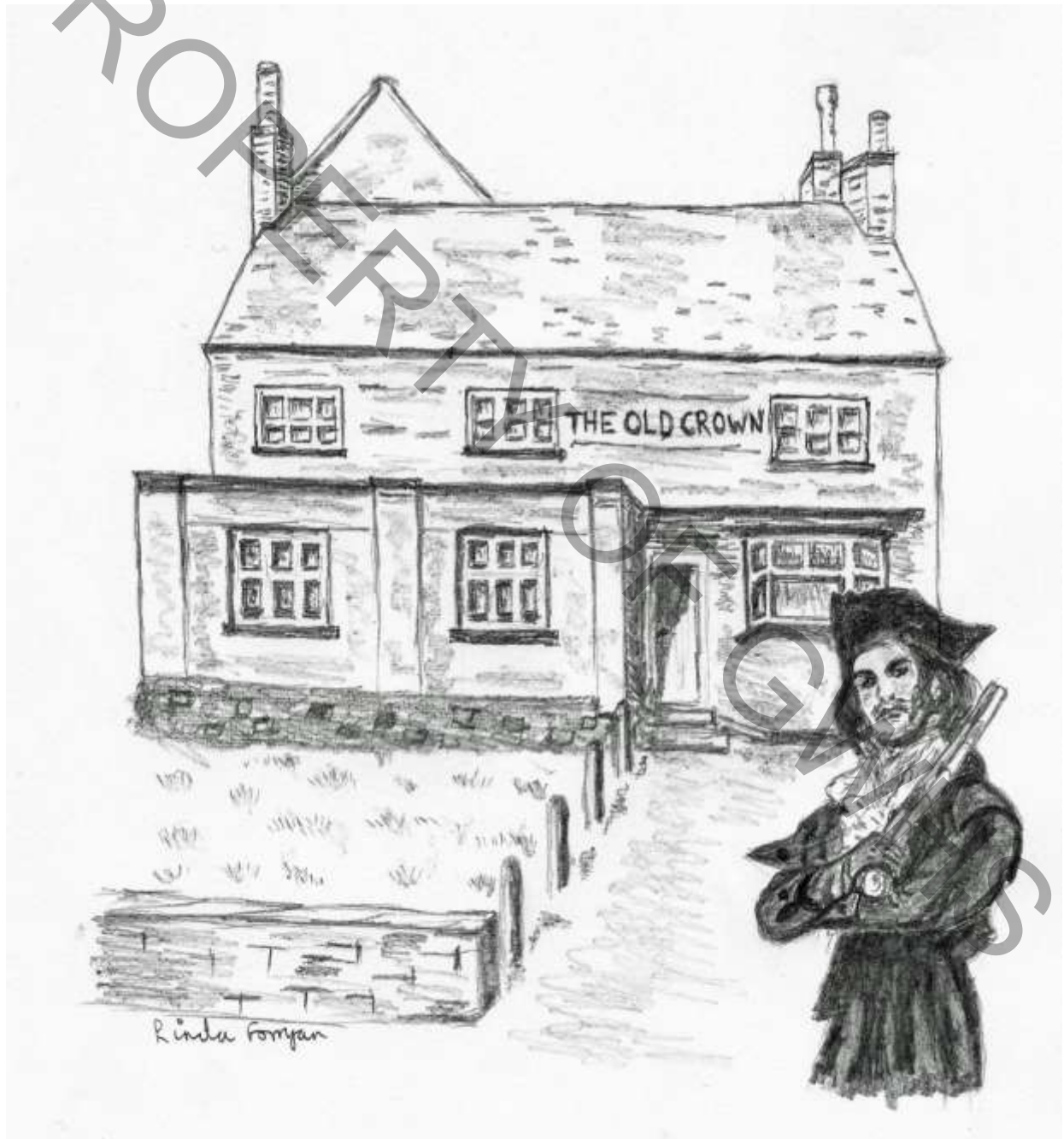


GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
White Gate Lodge, 97 Newton Lane, Wigston Magna, Leics.

BULLETIN 104

1st MARCH 2016



Linda Forryan's great interpretation of George Davenport, the colourful local highwayman, outside one of his favourite haunts, the Old Crown, Moat Street. Inspired by Judith Proctor's talk at the January meeting.

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS – MARCH TO DECEMBER 2016

Wednesday 16th March 2016

King Richard III - One Year On – Rev. Pete Hobson Director of Leicester Cathedral Common Ground Project

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 AK, Paddock Street, Wigston

****Wednesday 18th May 2016**

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

****Wednesday 15th June 2016**

Evening Guided Walk around Market Bosworth, followed by a 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

Wednesday 21st September 2016

The History of Leicester Prison 1828-2012 – Richard Foster

7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 19th October 2016

Leicester City Football Club, the Wigston Connections – John Hutchinson

7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 16th November 2016

Leicester in World War II, Hidden Histories – Vince Holyoak

7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 21st December 2016

Victorian Christmases in Leicester – Cynthia Brown

Also Quiz & Pictures, nibbles & drink – Mike Forryan & the Committee

**Our Secretary, Ann Cousins, will take bookings & payment, note menu choices & whether people would like 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

NOVEMBER 2015 MEETING: WIGSTON CEMETERY

For this meeting we welcomed our very own Bill Boulter to talk about Wigston Cemetery and some of the well known local people buried there. There was a record attendance which included 16 visitors. It became clear as Bill's presentation went on that not only is his knowledge of the history of Wigston very broad but that he also has a good knowledge of the people who have lived here over the years.

A committee was formed which looked for a suitable site and settled on some land up Welford Road, at the top of Giliver Hill. It was later to become apparent that this area had been used for burials by the Anglo Saxons and Romans when all sorts of artifacts and some bones were discovered. In one respect it was not the best of sites because the ground turned out to be very sandy and with several underground springs so that occasionally when double or treble plots were re-opened for another burial it was discovered an existing 'occupant' had moved sideways over time.

Bill's first local VIP for whom RIP is now appropriate was Orson Wright who died in 1913. Members are already well aware of Mr Wright's achievements due to the extensive published research by Peter Cousins, husband of our esteemed Secretary. He was of course the businessman who built the original houses in South Wigston and he was a generous benefactor to the local churches.

Charles Moore died in 1962. He was a well known musician who opened his first shop on Station Road in 1912 after which he eventually had his famous County Music shop on Blaby Road where J Hoots chemist now stands. He founded the Wigston Temperance Band as a breakaway band from the Wesleyan Methodist Band. He was Choirmaster at Blaby, Cosby and South Wigston Churches. His collection of brass band instruments is currently held by the University of Leicester.

Alonzo Harry Broughton died in 1954. He built his factory on Bull Head Street (now the Kings Centre) having started his own business in 1911 in the back garden of his home in Junction Road. He was one of the signatories when the land was purchased for the Peace Memorial Park in memory of the dead of WWI, and was much involved in its planning. The park rules are very strict and only certain activities permitted, to ensure it remains a quiet peaceful place. Thus tennis and bowls are allowed but no football or childrens' swings etc.

Hiram Abiff Owston died in 1905. He was solicitor and purchased Bushloe House (now the Council Offices) in 1866 for cash. He held many important positions on community committees and was a generous local benefactor. There were several tragic deaths at Bushloe House including his coachman who hung himself when he heard a rumour that the family were intending to give up the carriage horses and purchase a motor car. The house was sold to the Wigston UDC in 1942 but the Christopher Dresser fittings are still in place and are well worth seeing.

Gertrude Mary Astbury, better known as Gertie Gitana, died in 1957, and her husband Don Ross, in 1980. Gertie is associated with Wigston because her husband was a Wigston man, and they are buried in adjacent graves in the Cemetery. Her most famous music hall song was 'Nellie Dean' which she performed at the former Clarence Hotel. Don succeeded David Niven

as King Rat, He was the son of Samuel Ross, the Headmaster of the National School for 33 years. A plaster memorial to Samuel was on a wall at the school for many years but is presently in storage, but it is hoped it can be returned to Wigston soon.

Curtis Weston died in 1982. He was a builder, undertaker and preacher at the Church of Christ in South Wigston. He had special permission when serving in the Seaforth Highlanders to wear shorts under his kilt which was on display at the now closed Snibston Museum. He was a great champion of the elderly and a local care home is named after him.

Benjamin Toone Snr was a boot and shoe manufacturer and had his factory on Saffron Road where Jasmine Court now stands. The factory had a dedicated room for bible study groups to meet. He gave the oak panelling installed in the former Congregational Chapel in South Wigston. This congregation now meets in South Leicester College which was built in Canal Street on the site of the chapel.

Others mentioned were: Samuel Henry Marshall, coal merchant and haulier; William Holmes (great grandfather to Bill), his son John Henry Holmes another champion of the elderly; Eli Bailey (grandfather to Peter Clowes) and Samuel Shipp, draper.

Altogether a fascinating tour round the well known local people buried in our cemetery, many of whose detailed lives are recorded by one of the Blue Plaques jointly erected by the Society along with Wigston Civic Society. Members may wish to purchase the booklet accompanying the blue plaques trail for £3 from Tricia Berry or Colin Towell.

DECEMBER 2015 MEETING: CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

In no time at all it was Christmas party time again. The past year seems to have flown by. There had been much planning by the Committee, and when members and guests, 59 in total, started arriving they were greeted by an invitation to take part in the first quiz of the night.

This consisted of a number of sheets of clues on the walls around the room. Members were handed answer sheets and pencils and wandered round at will, very often discussing answers with others. Such 'cheating' was generally encouraged to start the ball rolling and get people talking to each other and lightening up the atmosphere. There were 6 sets of clues on such topics as: pictures of Wigston, film stars, the buildings of Leicester, royalty, history and films. There were about 8 questions per topic. No prizes were awarded but some of us improved our knowledge, even on things close to home.

The Beaux and Belles Handbell Ringers provided the next piece of very seasonal entertainment. The group has been in existence since 1986 and consists largely of members of All Saints Church, but they currently practise in the private house of one of the members (I was assured the neighbours do not hear a thing). Over the years the group has built up the collection of bells which is now worth quite a sum. As with the real thing the handbells are made at one of the two bell foundries in the country, Whitechapel in London or Taylors, well known to us, in Loughborough. They are made of a mix of 80% copper and 20% tin. The clappers are on a pivot and the straps by which the bells are held are of leather. Experts can ring as many as four small bells with one hand but the larger bells are usually rung singly.

Bells in church towers are rung by the change ringing method; the handbells being used on this occasion are rung by the tune ringing method which led us nicely into a series of wellknown

Christmas pieces including Jingle Bells, Walking in the Air and carols such as In the Bleak Midwinter and Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

Finally members were invited to 'have a go' and under the supervision of the group there was a splendid rendition of Good King Wenceslas which received loud applause. Those who did volunteer proved that the bells can be rung by reading numbers as well as reading music.

A huge thank you was given to the leader, Angela Pitches, and her group.

Members continued to partake of nibbles and drinks as the final raffle tickets were sold prior to the draw for some excellent prizes arranged by Jane Callis.

The final part of the evening consisted of one of the Chairman's famous picture quizzes consisting of 10 questions all about Wigston, which was won by Tricia Berry. The images were projected onto the screen using the equipment jointly bought by the Society during the year. If only I was better at anagrams!!

A vote of thanks was given to all involved in organising another splendid Christmas party after which some members bought last minute Christmas presents of either the DVD of Wigston Two Steeples or the guide to the Blue Plaques of Wigston.

First two reports by Colin Towell

JANUARY 2016 MEETING: THE HIGHWAYMAN OF WIGSTON

Our fellow member Judith Proctor was the speaker this month, telling us about one of Wigston's more notorious residents, George Davenport, a footpad and highwayman of some notoriety. He has been described as a thug and also as a kind, generous person, and it appears he could be either, a true split personality. He was born in Wigston in 1758 the son of William Davenport and baptized at All Saints Church on 5th November the following year.

The Davenport family was one of great antiquity who originally came from Cheshire. A branch moved to Leicester in 1553, and a Thomas Dampont was once Mayor of Leicester. In Wigston the earliest Davenport recorded was Richard who was a churchwarden in 1603 and again in 1611. The family prospered and were large landowners and farmers. In 1752 Samuel Davenport built himself a new house, The Elms in Bushloe End, until recently occupied by the British Legion.

George and his father William were related to these Davenports but were not so successful in life. William is said to have been a farmer but later sold ale in Wigston for a living. George was apprenticed to a framework knitter at the age of 13. He was considered quite clever and hardworking but as he grew up he became too fond of pubs, heavy drinking, and mixing with the wrong company. One of his tricks was to climb on the roof of the Old Crown in Moat Street and entertain his friends with a dance. Before the age of 20 he joined the Leicester Militia where he was appointed a corporal, but was de-moted for stealing a silver tankard and charged for being absent without leave and sentenced to a court martial. He enlisted in the 40th Regiment of Foot, pocketed the King's shilling and immediately deserted. He once boasted he had done this trick 40 times!

George married Elizabeth a girl from Loughborough and they had seven children but even this did not improve his behaviour as he was away dodging authority so often his family had to claim parish relief. At the same time he would share his spoils with those in need. It is said he worked in collusion with Thomas Ross who ran an inn on London Road, Oadby. During a visit George would keep his horse saddled behind Ross's house in readiness for a quick get-away over Brock's Hill if necessary. Many of his crimes were committed between Oadby and Wigston and he regularly held up coaches at Stoneygate on the main London Road.

At one point he went to London and took lodgings in Cow Cross Street near St. Paul's, this being the heart of the thieving fraternity. He used a false name, George Freer, and stayed eighteen months, returning with nothing, having been conned out of his share of the plunder in a game of cards. Mr. Barnes, landlord of the Old Crown, finally apprehended him and he was charged on 22 July 1796 at the Assizes with Highway robbery but the victims didn't recognize him and he was acquitted.

The crime which eventually caused his downfall was poaching fish at Blaby. Fined and unable to pay he was remanded, recognised and placed in solitary confinement. A previous victim, a Mr. Sutton, was called to give evidence and he was tried on 11th August 1797. It took just ten minutes for him to be found guilty and sentenced to death. While awaiting his fate he found peace and wrote a poignant letter to his wife who was expecting her seventh child at the time. He was taken from the County Gaol to Red Hill gallows and died converted and believing. Afterwards his brother Thomas is believed to have brought his body back to Wigston to be buried among his own in All Saints' Churchyard, but there is no gravestone and no entry in the parish burial register.

FEBRUARY 2016 MEETING: AGM FOLLOWED BY CONTRIBUTIONS FROM MEMBERS

This meeting, the AGM was again well attended with 66 present. The Chairman, Mike Forryan, opened the proceedings by welcoming everyone. The agenda was as follows:

1) Apologies for Absence – Barry & Janet Horsley, Graham York.

2) Minutes of February 2015 AGM – read by the Treasurer, Colin Towell, & signed as correct.

3) Matters Arising – None.

4) Chairman's Report – Mike reported another successful year with meetings very well attended and an enjoyable programme of speakers on many topics, ending with a friendly, lighthearted Christmas social in December. During the summer there was a day trip to Ely Cathedral with time to explore the town, & a guided walk followed by a meal in Burbage. On behalf of the membership & himself he thanked the committee for their work & support throughout the year. We continued to promote the Society through the Borough notice boards, libraries, trade magazines, our website and the press, but have had to reduce this somewhat lately, as on occasions the attendance exceeded the capacity of the room. We have also attended a number of open days/exhibitions where we have been invited to have a table, to promote the Society. After a year's work of research, preparation & final completion his Wigston With Two Steeples DVD was finally ready. He thanked Duncan Lucas, Tricia Berry & Alan Freckingham for their work in proof reading & correcting the story board. It has proved

a great success with sales to the end of the year reaching 272. Having enjoyed & learnt so much from the project he is now busy with another one. The website continues to prosper & he thanked members who had searched out & lent documents & photographs to add to the archive. We have now had over 7,000 hits which, for a small organisation is impressive. We have had 15 specific requests for information & in all cases have been able to supply a raft of information and some photographs which is very rewarding. As agreed at the last AGM subscriptions for 2015 were held at 2014 levels. He finally thanked our president, Duncan Lucas, and the Committee for their hard work during the year & members who have turned out on some awful nights to support our meetings.

5) Treasurer's Report – Colin Towell took us through the accounts (printed on the back page of this Bulletin) noting Income: subscriptions, visitors' fees and donations showing a healthy increase and Expenditure: being less paid for speakers this year. Special one off expenses were the purchase of the roving mic & lapel mic for £84 90, both of which are proving very useful. Further income of £872 65 net. was generated by the sale of Mike Forryan's highly successful 'Wigston with Two Steeples DVD'. We also received £100, being our share from the Wigston Remembers event, and there were also profits from the summer trips. In total the profit for the year was an amazing £1,594 47.

6) Membership Secretary's Report – Mike read this on behalf of Linda. Another very successful year with 10 new members joining, but 4 did not renew for various reasons. Sadly, one member, Ken Beesley also died. We started the year with 126 members and ended with 131, made up of 112 concessionary, 17 full, 1 student and 1 complimentary. 63 visitors were also welcomed.

7) Election of Officers – As there were no resignations it was agreed the present officers should be re-elected, with the addition of Roger Whalley who had recently agreed to join & was elected during the meeting. Also Tony Lawrance had returned during the year after a period of absence. The Committee now comprises:

Chairman: Mike Forryan, **Vice Chairman:** Vacant, **Secretary:** Ann Cousins, **Treasurer:** Colin Towell, **Membership Secretary:** Linda Forryan, **Bulletin Editor:** Tricia Berry, **Auditor:** Gary Davies, **Committee Members:** Jane Callis, Margaret Gee, Paul Knight, Tony Lawrance, Roger Whalley, Sue Woolley

8) Any Other Business - It was confirmed that Gary Davies was willing to audit the accounts again for 2016. It was agreed to hold subscriptions for 2017 at the present rate of £12 full membership, £9 for concessionary & a student membership for youngsters of £5. Members of the committee are currently providing content for an information board at the pocket park in Bell Street, and a second one for the pinfold. Members were reminded that new material was being added regularly to the website including some new transactions. The Chairman also asked if members would be willing to 'adopt' a photograph from the archive & try to research some information about it.

There followed some short presentations:

Tricia Berry showed a selection of her postcards & spoke about them & the stories associated with them.

Mike Forryan showed an up to date presentation about the Framework Knitters Museum for Paul Knight who was unable to attend.

Mike then showed us some examples of the many photographs which have now been added to the society online archive.

LOSS OF A MEMBER

It is very sad to have to report that our member Ken Beasley passed away on 10th November 2015. It was a great shock as Ken together with his wife Val, had only very recently joined the society. A number of members who knew him attended his funeral at All Saints' Church. We send our sincere condolences to Val and her family and think of her at this very difficult time.

MISSING PLAQUE

Some years ago the council placed a plaque in the footpath within the lanes where Long Lane crosses Blunt's Lane. It was a really nice piece of work marking the centre of the old medieval village, and designed to show various aspects of its history. It is now missing! And enquiries at the council reveal it was first noticed as stolen about six months ago. Happily it is going to be replaced but this may take a while as a different design is going to be used.

DUNCAN'S MUSINGS

King Richard III is now well and truly buried, God rest his soul, but his bones lie under a Black Kilkenny Marble slab, with a huge block of yellow limestone on top.

Looking down on him it struck me of the connections between Leicestershire and Kilkenny counties. They were/are twinned and when I was County Council Chairman several visits were made and on one occasion I was gifted a Black Kilkenny marble clock. This I in return gave to the Mayor of Oadby and Wigston, Peter Valentine, as he was brought up in Kilkenny Town, went to school there, and in that tolerant society had to learn Galic to be allowed to attend.

So was it a coincidence the choice of Black Kilkenny Marble with no knowledge of the local links or a practical use of a lovely mineral?

OADBY AND WIGSTON CIVIC ORCHESTRA

This year the Orchestra celebrates its 50th season and a golden anniversary concert took place 50 years to the day (apart from one day) on 6 February 2016. Many orchestras have been in existence for a lot longer than half a century but what makes our 'Civic Orchestra' unique is that the same man has conducted more or less all of the four or five concerts per season for every one of the 50 years, nearly 250 concerts in total. That man is Keith Smith.

Keith was born towards the end of the war and was brought up in South Wigston where he was well known as a boy treble. He sang in All Saints' Church choir and can well recall the

overwhelming power of the incense used at services at that time. He was educated at Kibworth Grammar School and received piano and violin lessons and played the latter in the Leicestershire County and National Youth Orchestras. He continued his education at Leeds University, the Royal College of Music and Surrey University.

His first job was as music teacher at Guthlaxton College (now Wigston College) and while there he was asked to form and conduct the first concert of the then called Wigston Civic Orchestra. He went on to teach at Banbury School and then to work as Staff Conductor for Hampshire County Council, where his Southampton Youth Orchestra went on to perform worldwide. Keith has conducted Leicester Symphony Orchestra, Leicester Philharmonic Society Chorus, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony and many other orchestras internationally. He continues to adjudicate at music festivals throughout the country.

The first local concert was in 1966 at the suggestion of the well known late Councillor Don Mobbs, and took place in Bushloe School (now combined with Abington School as Wigston Academy). Although the first concert was by a small string ensemble, this was soon joined by the full range of instruments so that the repertoire could be widened. There was, and still is, a policy of inviting promising young players to perform solos and many of these musicians have gone on to international careers.

The original local authority funding faded out in the 1990s but the orchestra continues to provide first class performances, mostly at the newly named Wigston College, but occasionally at St Thomas' in South Wigston and in Oadby. There are annual Viennese and 'last night of the proms' concerts as well as theme concerts where well established and modern masterpieces are performed.

The next concerts are on Saturday 9 April at Wigston College and on 11 June at a venue to be advised.

Source: The Golden Jubilee Concert programme notes.

ABINGTON HOUSE

Abington House is one of the two great houses on Station Road owned by Victorian Solicitors practising in Leicester. They probably located themselves there because of the convenience of the railway station to ease their journey into their offices in Leicester. The other, more well known house, was Bushloe House which later became the offices of Wigston Urban District Council, now Oadby and Wigston Borough Council. Bushloe House was owned (but not built) by Hiram Abiff Owston.

Abington House is on the opposite side of Station Road slightly to the west and well set back from the road, sandwiched between the former Bushloe and Guthlaxton schools and well known to students of those schools in the early days of their existence. Indeed it was the grounds of Abington House on which the schools were built in the 1950s. Abington House was built in about 1862 by Thomas Ingram and he lived there until his death in 1909.

Both Mr Owston and Mr Ingram were highly respected solicitors, public spirited men and benefactors.

Towards the end of 2015 it became known that a planning application was being submitted to build new premises behind Bushloe School to replace the existing Birkett House School on Launceston Road. The application involved the demolition of Abington House which is listed as a building of local significance, but is NOT on the Heritage England list of protected buildings.

In view of the importance of Abington House as the only remaining stone built house in Wigston and because of its importance to local history, it was decided to submit an application to Heritage England to have it listed. Unfortunately notification was received early in the New Year that the application had not been successful because of the high number of similar buildings throughout the country. However the building continues to be on the local 'Significant' list.

The original application was in fact withdrawn and a new application has recently been submitted. The new application avoids the demolition of Abington House and the objections to its demolition are noted in the documents accompanying the new application. However there are concerns about the number of trees that will be destroyed and objections will be made about this.

The Historical Society's archive contains much material about the creation of Abington House and its owner Thomas Ingram. There is a Blue Plaque to his memory on the house, which is currently used as education offices by the County Council's music and arts departments.

**WINGS OF PEACE MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR
SIX POLISH AIRMEN WHO DIED AFTER THEIR PLANE CRASHED IN
WIGSTON ON 4 FEBRUARY 1946**

It has become an annual event, established many years ago, for the children of All Saints' Church of England Primary School to hold a memorial service to remember the six Polish airmen who died when their Lancaster bomber crashed on the site of their school, which was then open ground between the rear of the former Board School (now the Leicestershire Record Office) and the Manor House opposite the end of Paddock Street. This year is the 70th anniversary of that tragic event. It was concluded that the aircraft, which was on a training flight and had taken off from its base at Faldingworth in Lincolnshire, had crashed during a severe thunder storm, having been struck by lightning.

Many local people recall the day vividly and there are several pieces of wreckage and other information on display in the school. There is also a small memorial garden and tree and this year a flag pole has been erected. A large number of visitors assembled at the memorial garden for the service led by the Revd Canon Peter Mackintosh. Also present were the Chairman of the County Council and his wife, the Mayor of Oadby and Wigston Borough Council, Alderman Duncan Lucas, WO Barry Tanswell from RAF Wittering and Officers and Cadets from Welbeck College who provided the bugle performance and the flag ceremony. There were two special guests of honour who had travelled from Poland. Zofia Mikula-Rang and Peter

Mikula who are relatives of Flight Serjeant F Mikula, the flight engineer, who was aged 25, when he died in the crash.

The event commenced outside with the act of remembrance including a two minute silence and a salute to the Polish Flag. The children laid two wreaths and there followed the unveiling of a new plaque inside the school by Mrs Mikula–Rang. We then were treated to a delightful Collective Worship in the school hall by the children who acted out the fateful day in the form of a radio news report and a splendid rendition of the Polish National Anthem and other hymns. There were inspirational speeches by WO Tanswell and Mr Mikula.

The Head Teacher, Mrs Marshall, thanked everyone for attending and invited the visitors to tea and sandwiches in the Lancaster Lounge.

This was a very moving occasion and we should be very proud of the pupils and appreciative of the work put in by the staff. It is one of those events that the children will remember for the rest of their lives, just as those do who were there on the day the crash happened.

WIGSTON REMEMBERS

Many members and friends attended the Wigston Remembers evening at Abington School on 31 October last year. This was a joint project between the Civic Society, the Wigston Historical Society and the Family History Society. We heard excellent contributions from Banjo Des, the Harmonics Choir, Dave Andrews and Robin Jenkins all on WWI themes. There was audience participation with some well known war time songs and the evening concluded most poignantly with a DVD of the Menin Gate Memorial Service and the Last Post.

Many hours were spent by the organising group and other helpers to bring the event to a very satisfactory conclusion. There was a greater attendance that was expected which resulted in more profit so after some deliberation between the organisations it was decided to retain £100 each to cover expences, so that the balance of £202.15 could be donated to the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal, this was in addition to the £83.81 that was collected from poppy sales on the night. Many thanks are offered to all helpers and to the audience.

Previous four items by Colin Towell

THE BEGINNINGS OF WIGSTON CEMETERY

The large attendance for Bill Boulter's talk on the cemetery together with my regular weekly walks through it as part of the school run, gave me the idea of taking a further look, this time concentrating more on the 'why, when and by whom' it was set up.

It is well known that All Saints' churchyard had reached capacity and closed to further interments many years ago. By 1853 the ground surrounding St. Wolstan's Church (known as St. Wistan's now) had already been enclosed, at great expense by the parish, and was in use as the churchyard. By 1880 this was also reaching its capacity and on 13th November that year a special Vestry Meeting was held to discuss the way forward. At a further meeting on 18th

November, Mr. T Tebbutt reported: *"I am one of a group asked to go round the various burial places in the parish to inspect them and ascertain what accommodation there is for interments. It was found there was not room for more than 100, and as the deaths in the parish average 70 per year we are compelled to have a cemetery."* Following this a written declaration was produced about the meeting, explaining it was held *"for the purpose of determining whether a burial ground shall be provided for the said Parish...and the appointment of not less than three, nor more than nine persons being rate payers of the said Parish to be the Burial Board of such Parish."* It was signed by Thomas Ingram and William Eggleston the churchwardens and by Charles E Sharp the overseer.

The vicar at this time was the Rev. William Romanis, and he wrote to the Home Office in Whitehall to seek permission to proceed. He explained the situation the parish was in and what had been agreed at the meeting. He added that the Medical Officer of Health for the Blaby Union (which included Wigston) *"had certified that further interments at St. Wolstan's would be injurious to health...and under the circumstances it seems desirable there should be no delay in carrying out the Resolution of the Vestry."*

An open Parish Meeting was then arranged to be held in the vestry in late November. However, so many attended, it was quickly adjourned to the Board School, nearly filling its largest room. The main business was to decide how many people should sit on the new burial board and who they should be. Mr. J G Forryan proposed and Mr. A Lee seconded, that the board should consist of nine members, which was carried. Mr. H A Owston then proposed the following for the new Board: Rev. Romanis & Messrs. T Ingram, H A Owston, E P Miles & J Cooper. Mr. J Hassall then proposed: Messrs. J Hassall, W Johnson, J G Winks, T Boulter (Leicester Road) & J Hodges. This made ten people and there was unfortunately quite a lot of wrangling and unpleasantness, with arguments between the church members and non-conformists. The latter believing they were not getting a fair representation on the board. Some offensive remarks were made to the Vicar by several dissenters (which newspapers chose not repeat). He was clearly angry saying: *"I have lived in the parish 17 years, and thought the way in which I have conducted the burial ground in my charge, would have commended itself to your judgment. I only allowed my name to be put forward in the interests of peace, and to avoid a contest on such a subject in the parish, and I thought it would be a pity if out of this large meeting we cannot find nine gentlemen to form the board without a contest, in the event of which, I should retire."*

Some people objected to two lawyers standing on the Church side, so eventually Mr. T Ingram's name was withdrawn, and Mr. T Boulter (of Bell Street) added instead. Mr. J Hodges name was also withdrawn to make the number the agreed nine people. Mr. S B Matthews then proposed that these nine should form the board, which was seconded by Mr. J G Forryan, and carried by a large majority.

By early May 1881 some land on Welford Road had come on the market and the Board was meeting to consider the answer made to their offer to *"Mrs. Hambley's Trustees"*. Apparently the trustees wanted a higher price and a small group of board members were appointed to try and reach agreement. In the meantime Mr. John Goodacre, a Leicester architect and surveyor, was to be asked to survey the land and report as to the drainage. A letter was read by the Vicar, received from the Local Government Board, stating that: *"Dr. Hoffman would visit the parish on 17th May to inspect the burial ground at St. Wolstan's churchyard and the grounds belonging to the chapels."*

On 30th June 1881 meeting the Vice Chairman Mr J G Winks, who was in the chair, read Mr. Goodacre's report, certain forms concerning the number of burials in the last 10 years were ordered to be filled up. It was recorded that nothing more could be done until the Commissioner from London came down and gave his report.

By August the Government's approval for the site had been obtained, so the board started to arrange the details to get the burial ground ready. It was decided they would have a chapel on site *"wherein to hold the services over the dead, to be used by all denominations on equal terms."* A mortuary, a house for the caretaker and a stone boundary wall. Mr. Goodacre was to be asked to prepare suitable plans for the buildings. *"The Vicar is wisely steering the committee clear of all sectarian feeling in the matter. This is much appreciated by the members, and will no doubt be approved by the people."* Later that month it was noted that the trustees of the Independent and Primitive Methodist Chapels had received notice from the Home Office to *"close their burial grounds forthwith, with no further interments to take place after the receipt of this notice."* Much surprise was expressed by this peremptory closing as when the inspector attended about three months previously he fixed July 1882 as the time for closing them. The board having received notice to that effect. It was concluded the general health of the parish was the reason for the change.

At the Burial Board meeting on 29th September 1881 Mr. Goodacre produced his plans. After much discussion it was decided that: *"the east, front and north boundaries should have dwarf stone walls topped with iron palisades, that Mr. Goodacre obtain estimates for both brick and stone for the west and south boundary walls, and that the chapel and caretaker's house be built of stone."*

By 7th January 1882 things were moving much faster. The seal was placed upon the contracts and the specifications were duly signed. A meeting of the inhabitants was held to approve a salary of £25 to Mr. A H Burgess, a Leicester solicitor, who was appointed Clerk to the Board, and to sanction the borrowing of £6,200 required to set up the cemetery. The repayment and interest to be charged to the rates of the parish. Two auditors, Mr. T Tebbutt and Mr. T Heard were appointed. Mr. A H Burgess, Mr. T Ingram (obviously now restored to the board) and Mr. H A Owston, all solicitors, were appointed to a sub-committee to negotiate the terms of a loan, which they obtained from Prudential Insurance Company.

By 24th June 1882 the board were advertising in the Leicester Chronicle & Mercury for a caretaker to live on site and a gravedigger.

The Leicester Chronicle & Mercury of 5th August 1882 describes the run-up to opening day:

"THE NEW CEMETERY AT WIGSTON - The last monthly meeting of the Burial Board, previous to the opening of the new cemetery, was held on the 27th ult., the vicar presiding. It was resolved that the fees for burial in the cemetery be for a freehold £4, for a common freehold for 50 years for two persons £2, with right of renewal at the end of 50 years; for a common entombment 6s 6d; the old burial ground [St. Wolstan's] to be closed from 31st July and the cemetery to be opened on and from 1st August for burials. The vicar and Mr. Thomas Ingram to procure the necessary furniture and fittings for the new offices. The contractors hope to finish and clear off in about a fortnight."

The whole of the buildings etc., are of a very substantial character. At the chapel everything appears to have been thought of to secure the comfort of persons attending funerals. In the

south-east corner of the grounds is a substantially built and well adapted mortuary, to be used in cases of accidental death, instead of taking the bodies of persons who have been killed to public houses to be left in outhouses pending the coroner's inquest, an arrangement which has often been very unpleasant with publicans and the friends of the dead. The Burial Board will receive the thanks of the public for this thoughtful convenience. Connected with this building are other conveniences which will be thoroughly appreciated by the public.

At the entrance gates stands the clerk's [caretaker's] house, fitted with every accommodation, the room at the north-west corner being the office. The whole of the land has been well drained both for surface and under drainage. For the former a very useful improved grating has been adapted in which is a contrivance to prevent dust and sand from getting into the drains, by which means it is hoped much labour and inconvenience will be avoided. The whole of the under-drains are so arranged that they empty themselves into a cistern four feet square where the water will be filtered before it leaves the cemetery. The walks are well laid out and all round the walls (which are substantially built of granite, with an iron palisading) suitable trees and shrubs are to be planted, which in a few years' time will give the place an effective appearance. The last person to be buried at the old burial ground was Alfred Edwin Orton, infant son of Alfred and Thirza Orton, on 31st July. The buildings were erected from the designs by Mr. Goodacre of Leicester, under the supervision of Mr. J Basford, the clerk of the works. The contractor for the undertaking was Mr. Black of Barrow-on-Soar. The total cost will be about £6,200, which the board has borrowed."

In September 1882 shortly after the opening Thomas Warner, nurseryman, of Leicester, Melton and London, was paid 15/- for grassing half an acre in the cemetery, and in February 1883 it was decided to have a greenhouse erected under the direction of Mr. Goodacre. In the early days there were separate sections for the burial of Church of England and Non-Conformist worshippers, but this does not apply today. Leicester's Welford Road cemetery was similarly divided. Many of the burials are three deep per plot.

Some final additions – After the cemetery was opened the Burial Board met quarterly instead of monthly. The cemetery occupies a very ancient site, a Roman ditch and various Anglo-Saxon artefacts having been discovered in the past. It filled up very quickly (South Wigston has no churchyard or cemetery) and by 1891 the board was already looking at and approving Mr. Goodacre's plan for additional grave space. It was open 9am until sunset except Sundays which were 2pm to sunset. The cemetery has been expanded in two tranches which were used as allotment land until required. The last tranche being brought into use in c.1980. The metal Palisade fencing was handed over for the war effort during WWII. The gates lasted until more recent times and were removed and put in storage after a lorry collided with one of the pillars. The first person to be buried in the new cemetery was Tom Evatt, aged 37 years, in August 1882. A sad irony occurred when Elizabeth Walley Owston, the wife of H A Owston who played such a leading role in setting up the cemetery, died in February 1883, making her one of the early burials.

The Burial Board's first accounts for 1882/3 give the following figures:

Income - £6,200 (the loan), £12 2s 6d (burial fees), £400 (from rates), £31 10s 0d (freehold & leasehold grants) = £6,643 12s 6d.

Expenditure - £1196 (purchase of site), £3424 3s 6d (laying out cemetery & chapel), £32 13s 8d (furnishing chapel, lodge & tools for cemetery), £100 10s 0d (legal & other costs), £54 6s 5d (other costs). Leaving £1745 8s 11d to carry forward.

WIGSTON MAGNA BURIAL BOARD.

WANTED a MAN to take charge of the New Cemetery, who will be required to keep the Grounds in good order, superintend the digging of the graves, arrange for funerals, keep the registers, and receive the fees. Salary, £1 2s. 6d. per week, and house rent free.

Applications (in handwriting of applicants) and Testimonials to be sent before Wednesday, the 28th instant, to

A. H. BURGESS,

Clerk to the Board.

Berridge-street, Leicester, 20th June, 1882. wal763

WIGSTON MAGNA BURIAL BOARD.

WANTED a MAN as GRAVE DIGGER for the New Cemetery, one who has been accustomed to dig graves preferred. Further information as to the duties may be obtained from the Clerk to the Board.

Applications, stating payments required, to be sent before Wednesday, the 28th instant, to

A. H. BURGESS,

Clerk to the Board.

Berridge-street, Leicester, 20th June, 1882. wal764

Advertisement from the Leicestershire Chronicle & Mercury 24th June 1882

The wage for the gravedigger was settled at 4/- per grave for 6ft deep plus an extra 1/- for each additional foot.

In addition to the vicar, Rev. William Romanis, the local people who are mentioned as taking part in setting up the cemetery were:

Thomas Ingram, solicitor, Abington House, Station Road, Hiram Abiff Owston, solicitor, Bushloe House, Station Road, William Eggleston, retired farmer, Rectory Farmhouse, Charles Eldridge Sharp, master builder, 33 Bell Street, Thomas Boulter, framework knitter, 33 Leicester Road, Thomas Boulter, framework knitter, 41, Bell Street, Edward Pares Miles, independent, Moat Street, John G Forryan, licensed victualler, King William IV, Bell Street, John Cooper, maltster & grazier, Long Street, Joseph Hassall, farmer, Bull Head Street, William Johnson, grazier, Highfield House, Newton Lane, Thomas Tebbutt, farmer, Newgate End, Samuel Broughton Matthews, painter/decorator & stone engraver, 38/40 Leicester Road, Thomas Heard, workshop manager & rate collector, Moat Street, Ambrose Lee, hosiery manufacturer, Homefield, Aylestone Lane, Joseph Goadby Winks, printer & Baptist preacher, Gainsborough House, Granville Road.

Tricia Berry

Sources: Leics. Record Office, Ref's DE384/75 & DE384/77, newspaper reports of the meetings of the Burial Board available online & my thanks to Bill Boulter for looking up & answering by queries.

GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

Receipts and Payments for the year ending 31st December 2015

Receipts

| | | |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Opening Balances as at 1/1/2015: | | |
| Current A/c | 940.22 | |
| Unpresented chq | -108.26 | |
| “ credit | 98.95 | |
| Deposit a/c | 999.52 | 1930.43 |
| Subscriptions | | 1146.50 |
| Visitor fees | | 168.00 |
| Donations | | 16.00 |
| Christmas Social | | 181.00 |
| Visits (2015) | | 1148.00 |
| Sale of books | | 20.00 |
| DVD sales | | 2468.71 |
| Wigston Remembers | | 921.50 |
| Bank interest | | .68 |

Payments

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|
| Lecture fees | | 160.00 |
| Bulletins & Programme | | 174.46 |
| Room Hire | | 305.00 |
| Secretary's exes | | 111.35 |
| Website fees | | 23.00 |
| Christmas Social | | 142.00 |
| Roving Mic | | 64.90 |
| Lapel Mic | | 20.00 |
| Visits (2015) | | 1007.65 |
| Donation Richard III appeal | | 50.00 |
| DVDs | 1554.31 | |
| Less unsold | -26.25 | |
| Commission due | 68.00 | 1596.06 |
| Wigston Remembers | | 821.50 |

Closing Balances at 31/12/2015:

| | | |
|-----------------|---------|---------|
| Current A/c | 2574.58 | |
| Unpresented chq | -297.63 | |
| “ credit | 289.50 | |
| DVD adjusts | -41.75 | |
| Deposit a/c | 1000.20 | 3524.90 |

8000.82

8000.82

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please note that subscriptions for 2016 are now due. If you have already renewed, thank you very much. Your receipt should be attached to this bulletin.

If you have not yet done so, we would be grateful if you could renew as soon as possible using this cut off slip if you like. The rates are £12 Full and £9 Concessionary. Cheques should be made payable to GWHS. We hope you will continue your membership but if you are not doing so, it would be very helpful if you could let the Membership Secretary know.

Member(s) Name &
Address.....

.....

Please send to the Membership Secretary: Mrs. Linda Forryan, 21 Blakesley Road, Wigston, Leicester. LE18 3WD.

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