

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

**BULLETIN 109**

1<sup>st</sup> November 2017



A rear view of The Elms, Bushloe End, Wigston from a Post Card c.1913. The little girl (born in 1906) is Jane Ellen Broughton and next to her is her sister Beatrice. They were both the daughters of J D Broughton, hosiery manufacturer, of Bell Street. The identity of the lady on the right is not known. This area is now the car park of The Elms.

## PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS – NOVEMBER 2017 TO AUGUST 2018

### **Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

Norman & Underwood – repairs to Windsor Castle or sealing Richard III's coffin, they have done it all! – John Castleman

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

### **\*Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2017**

Singalonga Christmas – Lizzy Rushby (in costume) plus picture quiz, nibbles & drinks etc – Mike Forryan & the committee.

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

### **Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2018**

Castle Park & the Honor of Leicester – Caroline Roberts

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

### **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2018**

AGM followed by a quiz – Virginia Wright, Blue Badge Guide

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

### **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018**

Leicester City Football Club, Part II, with Wigston Connections – John Hutchinson

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

### **Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2018**

Some Wind & Watermills of Leicestershire – Dr Susan Tebby

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

### **Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2018**

Queen Eleanor of Castile – Julie Ede

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

### **Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2018**

Visit to Melbourne, Derbyshire for guided walk starting 5.00p.m. followed by evening meal at the Blue Bell Inn at 7.30p.m.– own or shared transport, more details nearer the time from our Secretary

### **Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> August 2018**

Visit to the Cooke Private Motor Museum, Nr. Kibworth for guided tour starting 6p.m. followed by evening meal at the Queen's Head, Saddington starting 8.30p.m – own or shared transport

\*Please bring £2 on the night towards the cost of refreshments, guests will be charged £3.

The Bulletin is published three times a year on 1<sup>st</sup> 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](http://www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

Chairman: Mike Forryan's e-mail: [chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

## **AUGUST 2017 MEETING PICTURES OF WIGSTON**

For the first meeting of the new season we welcomed 'one of our own', in fact our hard working Chairman, Mike Forryan, who had selected a wide range of pictures from the Society's extensive archive. Mike stressed from the start that he had included places, events and PEOPLE and hoped that some of the faces may be recognised. Committee Member, Roger Whalley introduced the speaker and perhaps for the first time for many of us we learned a little of Mike's own interesting and international life and work history.

The extent of the picture archive meant that those on show came from many parts of the area with no actual links between each one. The first image was of Harcourt Road (1909) at the top of Welford Road hill and showed Wignall's grocers shop on the Harcourt Road corner (not Mercers which still exists further up the hill). We jumped to Central Avenue c1905 with the start of the Infirmary Parade for that year. Clearly visible was Avenue House now the vet's surgery on the corner with Long Street, and the fence across the then end of Central Avenue a few yards into the street. This was followed by a further shot of around 1918 with the Avenue terminating a little further up where the entrance to Willow Park has been created. Opposite this is the Black Pad leading to Station Road and also where the council housing constructed in the late 1940s now starts. Gas street lights were noticeable and a member contributed that there was an air raid shelter at this point.

We then moved to the Europa Building at the bottom of Newton Lane. This factory was originally built by William Holmes for his hosiery business in 1888. This continued through several generations of the family until 1970 when Europa Sports took it over hence the building's name. More recently after a period of mixed use and some neglect it has now been acquired and thoroughly renovated by Just Hype Ltd a very successful global fashion house. Mike and others had recently toured the building and we saw some interesting before and after images.

We then looked at Kings Drive (off Aylestone Lane) in the 1920s before moving along the Lane to the Nautical William. Clearly not an old building (probably late 1950s) but possibly soon to be demolished to make way for a block of flats. We then jumped to Spa Lane conservation area to see Kimberley House built by John Goodin (the father of Thomas the ginger beer maker) in 1880. The family had recently returned from Africa and were there when diamonds were discovered at Kimberley hence the name of the house. More pictures followed of Apple Pie Corner, where Spa Lane meets Mowsley End. The image looks down the End to the Bull's Head public house on Bull Head Street. The pub (dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century) was sadly demolished when the street was widened.

A swift move then to South Wigston and Jack Hill's two shops (both of them) showing the phone number on their advert of 'Wigston 5041'. We then returned to Rectory Farm House near to All Saints Church seen in 1963, not long before its demolition to make way for Birkett House School (which is to be relocated to a new school next to the former Guthlaxton College in September 2017). Amazingly there was a photo of a business card for Deeming Bros, Printers, dated 1908: the firm still exists today.

We then saw photos of street parties for VE Day in Timber Street and the 1977 Jubilee in Burleigh Avenue. There were several views of Leicester Road, very much residential with a few shops such as Bradbury's (where the Arcade now is) and Doris's wool shop premises now a bakery. Magnet Stores on Bushloe End, well known as Pete Clowes the coalman's shop, where you could also buy

sweets on the way to school. We saw a photo of 'Tony' and 'Albert' in the level crossing signal box at South Wigston with an appeal for full names if anyone recognises them.

The picture archive always acknowledges the source of the photos, many of which come from collections owned by individuals and donated to the Society.

Part two of the evening was the launch of the revamped Society website at [www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk) Members should now have received an email from our newly appointed webmaster, Peter Cousins, asking if they would like to be issued with a password to enable them to access the more detailed members only sections of the site. Members are asked to explore the site and suggest further improvements or additions.

For the third part of the evening Mike asked for suggestions of subjects such as street names or events or people under which the picture archive can be accessed. We looked at the content of the archive for Cooks Lane, Church Nook and Leicester Road, the latter of course with many photos of the road extending from the Royal Oak and Horlock's nurseries opposite (on the boundary with the city) up to the Star and Garter and into Wigston itself.

The whole evening was well interspersed with knowledgeable comments and anecdotes from our worthy President and lifelong Wigston resident, Alderman Duncan Lucas!

### **SEPTEMBER 2017 MEETING HAPPY BBC ANNIVERSARIES**

For our September meeting there was a warm welcome from a good turnout of members and visitors to hear a local favourite, Dave Andrews DL of BBC Radio Leicester.

Dave has had an interest in history since boyhood when he had seen one of those tins given to soldiers in WWI as a gift from the King and Queen. At an early age he learnt the names and dates of the kings and queens of England and he demonstrated that he can still read them off. After gaining a degree in history at York he trained as a teacher and moved to Leicester. However on becoming a deputy head he was actually doing less teaching than he wanted to and realised if he was appointed a head teacher there would be even less. So having done some broadcasting he decided in 1993 he wanted to join Radio Leicester full time in 1993, making next year his own 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in radio. His first broadcasting job was, being at the last moment, asked to report on the Remembrance Sunday event at the War Memorial on Victoria Park. In recalling this Dave reminded us that Remembrance Day, 11 November, will be on a Sunday in 2018 which is very appropriate as it will be the exact centenary of the signing of the Armistice on 11/11/1918.

There are several notable anniversaries in 2017 such as:

95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the BBC.

50 years since creation of Radios 1, 2, 3 and 4 from the Home Service and the Light Programme.

50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of BBC Radio Leicester which was the first local radio station created by the BBC.

50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Down to Earth programme on Radio Leicester of which there have been 2,500 editions. Dave, despite his lack of gardening knowledge has been the question master on this programme for many years.

In addition there have been many centenaries of events in WWI and the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WWI events in 1993.

We were reminded of some of the key BBC events over the years:

1932 was the year of the first ever Christmas message broadcast on radio by King George V

1936 was the first television broadcast

1942 was the first Desert Island Discs with Roy Plumley

1946 Woman's Hour (radio) and Muffin the Mule (TV) began

1948 Radio Newsreel first broadcast

1953 The Coronation with commentary by Richard Dimbleby

1955 The Archers first regular broadcast was in January 1951 with the death of Grace Archer in a fire in 1955 to coincide with the launch of ITV

1963 The first Doctor Who with Norman Hartnell

1965 The funeral of Sir Winston Churchill

1967 The Forsyte Saga (in black and white) on Sunday evenings (it even caused the times of evensong to be changed)

1967 John Arlott started Test Match Special

Radio Leicester was the first local radio station to go on air. It first broadcast on 8/11/1967 on 95.05 mhz from the newly built Epic House at the North end of Charles Street, where it occupied the top three floors. At this time we had Dr Finlay's Case Book on TV and Come Dancing, no 'Strictly' in those days, but lots of Westerns (cowboy films). There was a special insert inside the Radio Times about the formation of Radio Leicester and Dave has his own copy now falling to pieces with age. In 2004 the station move to purpose built premises on the corner of Guildhall Lane and facing what is now Jubilee Square. Dave showed a picture, which I had never seen before, of the excavation of the cellars on the site showing the walls of an earlier medieval house now covered by a glass floor. The glazed tiles built into the façade of the earlier shop on the site (Wathes Electrical) have been preserved inside the new building.

We then heard a fascinating history of listening and recording from wax cylinder and phonographs through vinyl, CDs and now downloads. From reel to reel tape recorders to cassettes and modern microphones which we see interviewers using today and which have inbuilt recorders in that block on the microphone handle, and also of course on mobile phones. Editing has moved from cutting tapes with razor blades to downloading and computer editing. The radio car has moved from that extending aerial to dish aerials and now to ipads and iphones, but there are the same problems with signals that we still suffer with our mobile phones.

Dave talked about some highlights of his career, which were undoubtedly, the discovery of Richard III and his re-interment in the Cathedral, the Radio Leicester 'Ruby Rainbow appeal' which raised £650,000, more than 50% more than the original target, for the Rainbows Hospice, and visits of the Queen as part of her Jubilee Tour and again for the Maunday Money distribution.

He works with Jennifer, Lady Gretton, at various charitable events and showed us a photo of himself in his new uniform which he had made especially to fulfill his recently awarded role as a deputy Lieutenant of the County.

History is alive, we heard, and very much so in Wigston not only with GWHS but also the Family History Society, all encouraged by his own radio programmes and TV ones such as Time Team and Who Do You Think You Are?

An altogether fascinating run through the 50 years of local radio broadcasting through one man's eyes with some national events mentioned as well.

**OCTOBER 2017 MEETING  
ST PANCRAS STATION - GATEWAY TO LONDON FROM WIGSTON, LEICESTER  
AND THE CITIES OF THE EAST MIDLANDS**

On a gloomy, cold and wet evening it was a pleasure to welcome one of our members, John Stevenson, to give us another of his railway talks, this time concentrating on St Pancras Station, the London Terminus of what we now call East Midland Trains. John's subtitle was 'A Railway Journey Through Time from Wigston to London'.

Prior to 1840 the only form of passenger transport was coach and horses using coaching inns on the main roads for overnight stops and to change horses. But then the Midland Counties Railway opened a station at Wigston enabling locals to travel to London albeit having to change at Rugby and proceed on the Birmingham line. This terminated at Euston Station with its impressive Doric Arch which was sadly demolished in 1962 because it was 'in the way'.

In 1857 Wigston passengers had a second choice of routes to London, when the Midland Counties extended the line from Wigston via Market Harborough, but at Harpenden the new line joined the Great Northern line into Kings Cross Station which had opened in 1852. This arrangement lasted until 1862. By 1868 St Pancras Station had been completed, but there had been problems because the line from Wigston when it arrived at Bedford had to cross the Regent Canal before it could enter the new station. The canal was crossed by an overhead bridge rather than by going under it as the Great Northern had done. The result was that the line was at a high level and arrived at St Pancras at what was in effect first floor level leaving a ground floor basement/cellar from which numerous iron columns supported the platforms and lines above.

Another problem that had to be overcome was that the line ran through old St Pancras churchyard and many sets of bones had to be dug up and reburied elsewhere. Thomas Hardy, before he became a famous author, was involved in organising this work.

Henry William Barlow was the engineer responsible for building the new station and the huge arched roof over the rails and platforms is still referred to as Barlow's train shed. It was said to be the largest structure in the world at the time. The basement/cellar was used to store beer brought by train from Burton on Trent for sale in London.

The Midland Hotel next to the station was built in 1873-76 by the architect George Gilbert Scott and is actually an entirely separate building. It was constructed to the highest standards and was the lap of luxury at the time, there were 150 bedrooms with many public rooms, hydraulic lifts and an electric bell system. It was solidly built with concrete floors which proved to be a problem in later years when it was found to be too difficult and expensive to modernise by bringing plumbing into each bedroom. It was closed in 1935 and converted into offices for the London Midland and Scottish railway.

Overhead photos demonstrated the size of the station, the hotel and the goods and coal yards to the west and north of the main platforms. During the war the station was hit three times, two bombs went through the concourse end of the platform and landed in the cellar causing much damage to the building and to trains standing at the platform, but did not explode. Another bomb severely damaged the ticket office but repairs were carried out very quickly in both cases. The glazed arched roof was also destroyed and later replaced by other material making the platform area very dark and dismal. Overhead photos demonstrate the size of the station, the hotel and the goods and coal yards to the west and north of the main platforms.

By 1970, after the effects of Dr Beeching's line closures there was a threat to close St Pancras and divert trains into Kings Cross station next door. After the loss of the Euston Arch there was an outcry that such an amazing and famous building as St Pancras and the Midland Hotel might be lost. The Victorian Society with the help of the poet laureate, Sir John Betjeman, fought a battle to save the station and as we now know they were successful, Sir John's statue, on the concourse, commemorates his involvement.

Despite the demolition of the yards, in later years the modern flat roofed extension to the train shed to accommodate the channel tunnel trains, makes it still a huge complex. The restoration of the station was not completed until 2011 with the updated hotel opening soon afterwards. John showed some wonderful photographs of the restored station and hotel and reminded us that Kings Cross Station had also been refurbished including Harry Potter's platform 9¾. The adjacent Great Northern Hotel had also been brought up to modern standards.

Meanwhile on return to Wigston Magna, we were reminded that the station had been rebuilt in 1902 when the level crossing which had been used until then was replaced by the Spion Kop Bridge with the platforms below. Mr John W Grundy was the stationmaster at this time.

All in all, a full house including many visitors, were treated to a wide variety of photos of St Pancras and the Midland Hotel as it was, and as it was built, to St Pancras and the hotel today with lots of interesting railway engine pictures in between. A very impressive gateway to London, then and now. Thanks John.

### **PROGRAMME FOR 2018**

With this edition of the Bulletin you will also receive details of the programme for 2018. I hope that you will agree that it is a very good selection of topics with something for everyone. On the two occasions when we do not have a specific topic, the AGM in February and the Christmas party night, there are very interesting extras in the quiz organised by Blue Badge Guide, Virginia Wright for the former, and the Unikulele Band for the latter (wait and see).

A change next year relates to the summer outings. These will take place in June and August rather than in May and June. Doing it this way we hope to be blessed with better weather than we have often experienced in recent years.

The June event is an early evening trip to Melbourne just over the border in Derbyshire. This is a very interesting large village with a fine Norman church with a real wow factor as you walk inside and see the sturdy round chevron carved arches, clerestory windows and wall passage. There are the remains of a triple apsidal east end and the west end is big and solid with an unusual (apart from cathedrals and abbeys) double tower arrangement. Don't forget to look around the outside as well as inside the church.

Away from the church the village is very interesting and there is the hall with Lord Melbourne (of Queen Victoria's Lord M fame) with Robert Bakewell connections and many small shops. The hall gardens close at 4.30pm and the church closes at 5.30pm so if you can, go early in the afternoon to look at these places of interest. We meet at 5pm for a conducted tour of the village and then we have a meal in a village pub at 7.30pm. It is not more than one hour's drive to Melbourne, more details nearer the time.

The August outing is nearer home, to Kibworth, to see the Cooke's motor museum. This is a private collection not open to the public so it will be a great opportunity to pay a visit. We meet in the early evening at 6pm to be followed by a meal at 8.30pm at the Queen's Head, Saddington.

Although the subjects for the meetings are a committee decision, taken from many ideas put forward, the work in actually making the arrangements is time consuming and needs patience and organising ability, our thanks are due to our highly efficient secretary, Ann Cousins, for all her efforts in this respect.

If you have any ideas for speakers and outings in the future please let a member of the Committee know.

All reports and this window into next year's programme by Colin Towell

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### OBITUARIES

It is sad to report that our member Pat Connolly passed away on 30<sup>th</sup> July. Pat had been a member since about 1990, joining with her husband and then continuing after his death. Her funeral at the new crematorium in Great Glen was very well attended, a popular lady who belonged to several groups.

Our condolences to member Doreen Boulter, the author of the Wiggle Maggie books, which we have just started to serialise in the bulletin. Her husband Sydney Oliver George Boulter died on 20<sup>th</sup> September.

Also to member, Angela Pitches, whose husband Ronald (Ron) died on 28<sup>th</sup> September. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of all three at this sad time.

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### ADOPT A PHOTO

It has been decided to wind down the Adopt a Photo scheme, and the committee would like to thank all members who have taken part. Please would those who have research and/or photos not yet handed in please return them as soon as possible, preferably at the next meeting to Margaret, Tricia or any committee member. Thanks.

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### A DAY TRIP TO CASTOR AND DUROBRIVAE – 7<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2017

Earlier this year, Colin Towell, our treasurer, who is a member of the Oadby & Wigston Fieldworkers Group suggested a visit to the recently excavated Must Farm, Nr. Peterborough, this following a short presentation to the Group by a member who had been lucky enough to visit. A joint trip by the Fieldworkers, Historical, and Civic Societies was envisaged. In the end the Must Farm site was not available for group visits, so the alternative site of nearby Castor and Durobrivae was suggested. The details were arranged by Bob Gale, the Chairman of the Fieldworkers and Colin dealt with the bookings, although was not able to attend on the day. The following report is by our member, Judith Proctor.

We started this visit at **Water Newton** with coffee and cake in the **Church of St Remigius**, which is in the Nene Valley. The church is in an idyllic setting and has some interesting features, including a Roman coffin in the churchyard.

<http://www.robschurches.moonfruit.com/#/water-newton/4519796230>

We were introduced to Professor Steve Upex, who is an expert on the area and recently directed excavations at a Saxton site in Northamptonshire, as well as contributing to several Time Team programmes for Channel 4, and has just finished filming a programme on Roman Godmanchester. Professor Steve gave us more information about the church and village, before taking us to the nearby Roman site, some of which is on private land and not normally open to the public.

We were provided with some excellent information, including the “Route Plan” for the Castor Roman walk which suggested this would be “largely a walk of the imagination” as Roman Emperors travelled across the fields we would cross, although the evidence of Roman occupation of the area is very largely buried. We also received a detailed booklet about this walk, which was invaluable, as Professor Steve used this to guide us through the pages and really made this story “come to life”. Indeed, without his input and guidance, this booklet was really just some 24 pages of maps and photographs, and (for me at any rate) didn’t make a great deal of sense, until he patiently explained each page.

The name **Durobrivae** means “fortress by the bridge” and began as a small 5-acre fort built shortly after AD 44, at the point where Ermine Street crossed the River Nene. Gradually a town grew up to serve the needs of the fort and of travellers on Ermine Street, and was enclosed by ramparts in the late second century. At least three other roads joined Ermine Street at or near the town, and the River Nene was navigable. This meant that Durobrivae was within easy reach of London, East Anglia, the Midlands, and the North. The main industries carried on here were ironworking and, most importantly, pottery making. There were also many Roman villas or farmsteads in the Nene valley region.

Durobrivae sits south of the River Nene on a stretch of land about 2km long and 1km wide. The walls and central street are still visible as bumps in a field and aerial photography has provided strong indications of the layout of streets and buildings within the town.

The most extensive excavations of Durobrivae were undertaken in the 1820s by **Edmund Tyrell Artis** who was steward to Lord Fitzwilliam at Milton. He identified buildings within the town, its suburbs and the wider area. By the standards of the time these were well recorded and in 1828 Artis published “The Durobrivae of Antoninus”, a volume of beautifully engraved plates of his excavations, illustrating the buildings, mosaic floors and many other artefacts he had discovered. Apart from some limited excavations in the late 1950s, the site has been little disturbed since.

The most striking feature is Ermine Street which runs through the centre of the town and is visible as a raised feature. It felt quite surreal to be standing on Ermine Street knowing that it would have been the road taken by Emperor Hadrian when going north to supervise the work on the wall named after him! The aerial photographs reveal not only the pattern of streets but also individual buildings in considerable detail. Houses or shops of varying size and plan line Ermine Street and the side streets. In the northern half of the walled town there are two substantially larger, possibly public, buildings.

The fort just outside the walls of Durobrivae occupies a slightly raised spur of land surrounded on three sides by the River Nene and the Billing Brook. It would have been adjacent to the bridges over these rivers. This fort was constructed from wooden palisades behind the three defensive ditches, and could accommodate about 600 men, whose task was to protect the river crossing. An excavation of the fort site in 2012 suggests that it may only have been active for a matter of months before the Roman army moved north.

<https://peterborougharchaeology.org/peterborough-archaeological-sites/durobrivae/>

We then returned to the coach and travelled to **Castor** for an excellent lunch (home-made quiche and salad followed by cake – Yum!) and were then introduced to historic Castor which is known internationally among archaeologists as the center of an important Roman settlement along the Nene valley west of Peterborough. The Roman palace (c. 250 AD) or Praetorium (underneath the churchyard and surrounding area) was the second largest Roman building in Britain replacing an earlier first century villa. Again, the guidebook became extremely useful to help us fully understand about the church, which is built on the site of the Roman courtyard. Incidentally, the Roman Praetorium was abandoned in around AD 450. There were other Roman buildings here as well, including a substantial Roman bath-house, with a hypocaust or under-floor heating system. There are still some thin orange coloured tiles and bricks in the walls of the church which are pieces of Roman building materials such as “pilae” or bricks from the piers of the heating system. In the rear walls of the church you can also see what looks like round bricks, which are parts of small Roman columns which have been cut up and used in these walls.

We learnt that in 650 AD St Kyneburgha, daughter of King Penda of Mercia, founded a double convent (men and women) on the site in the Celtic tradition bringing monks from Lindisfarne and was the first Abbess. The current **Church of St Kyneburgha** at Castor stands in what was the courtyard of the Praetorium and is the most complete Norman Church in the county of Cambridgeshire. This was excavated in 1957 and evidence was found to suggest that the convent had been sacked by the Vikings at some point.

To the left of the entrance to the church is the grave of Edmund Artis (mentioned earlier) who did so much to discover the Roman remains in this area in the 19C, and we also saw a copy of his book, containing some of the engraved plates and mosaics from his excavations.

Inside the church itself is a Roman altar in the north aisle. This had been re-used by the Saxons, but is typical of the sort of domestic altar that a Roman family might have used to make offerings to their household gods.

As you walk out of the churchyard towards a gate, you come to Stocks Hill, where there are two clumps of old stonework emerging from the wall opposite. These are the remains of the Roman foundations of the Praetorium, which was built in the “herringbone” style. Carrying on up Stocks Hill, we paused at the crossroads as this would have been the site of the Praetorium. This was a single building over 110 m. wide and 20 m. deep with a central range, and two “wings” that faced down the hill. The size of the foundations indicate that this would have been at least 3 stories high, with many different rooms, but despite its size and importance (and subsequent work by Time Team!) we are still not sure who lived here, or what its purpose was. The best guess is that it was the residence and headquarters of an important Roman official, whose job would have been to administer a large area of the fenland and ensure that all the profits were retained for its owner – the Emperor.

And so, back to the coach and home after an interesting and enjoyable day, where we learnt so much about the Roman occupation of this area. Thanks to all who were involved in organising this visit and for all their hard work in ensuring it was such a success.

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In 1986 our member Doreen Boulter decided to put pen to paper and record her early life in Wigston. This she did in three books each providing a wonderful insight into an era now gone forever. Her easy and humorous style of writing is just right for the subject and with the addition of Peter Wilford's clever drawings they make a very entertaining read. The books are of course long out of print and the committee thought newer society members would enjoy reading them too. Our thanks to Doreen and Peter for permitting us to reproduce them in the bulletin. The first part of Wiggys Child follows:-

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### **WIGGY'S CHILD**

**1926 – 1939**

**By Doreen C. Boulter with Illustrations by Peter Wilford**

#### **SYNOPSIS**

Doreen Clara Boulter was born to Naomi and William White on a bleak January day in 1926, the 22<sup>nd</sup> to be precise. Blind Dr. Briggs and his assistant Miss Margaret, the midwife and Aunt Clara completed the quartet in attendance during the confinement. Mother was no longer a young woman in medical terms, she would attain her fortieth year in February. After the tragic death of a tiny son two years previously, it was an anxious time for all concerned.

However, Doreen Clara thrived, and this is the story of the trials and tribulations of a small girl growing up in an age where Feast Sunday, Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide were celebrated joyously at home. Brought up according to the Ten Commandments and The Beatitudes (Beautytudes I called them) the virtues of right and wrong were rigidly applied. Schooldays, holidays, Sunday School and Sunday Walks and life in between is the story of "Wiggys Child". I hope you will enjoy this gentle and humorous story of a world now lost to us forever.

#### **SEPTEMBER MORN**

My small back bedroom window overlooked the slate roofs of the coal place and the lavatory, hard by stood Father's hut where he mended our shoes on a cobblers last, mackled up his seed boxes and kept his gardening tools in an immaculate condition. Taking no chances, Father had his initials carved into the handles of all his tools, including his wheelbarrow. The garden was divided by a cinder path which led to the hen run and the rabbit hutches situated right at the bottom near the boundary hedge. Beyond this lay the open fields.

My bedroom was furnished with a single brass bedstead, complete with flock mattress and flock filled pillow encased in a dark grey and white striped material. I would make a satisfactory "well" in the mattress so I could snuggle right down when the wind rattled the sash window. A small white china "po" lurked underneath the bed. (Mother's chamber pot was very grand, tastefully painted

with sweet peas, it matched the jug and basin in the washstand). “I would be able to have a set like that when I grew up”, said Mother, “in the meantime, I was to be satisfied with what I had”.

A plain wooden dressing chest and a straight cane chair completed the furniture, there was no room for anything else. A gas bracket on the wall had a little white opaque globe which protected the fragile gas mantle. On the wall above my bed hung a religious text, suitably framed, which proclaimed – “THY WILL BE DONE”. On the opposite wall, a companion text thundered “THE ONE ABOVE SEES ALL” and for good measure, on the dressing chest stood “Faith, Hope and Charity” – a large china effigy of three ladies in long flowing robes, their names picked out in gold lettering on the bottom hem. Above this hung “September Morn”.

“September Morn” was a grey and white picture of a maiden with long flowing tresses, wearing veil-like drapery, with bare feet dangling over a pool as she sat on a rock in what looked like thick fog! Books or toys had no place upstairs, and it was advisable to be in bed before the nine o’clock ‘osses came around. Those fiery black steeds with flashing eyes that galloped round the streets of Wigston looking for children who were not yet abed.

After Father had warmed my bed with the warming pan (what bliss to jump into a warm bed after kneeling on the cold linoleum to say my prayers), turned down the gaslight and left the bedroom door open slightly, I would contemplate “September Morn”. Even after deep and prolonged thought, I could not understand why she was allowed to sit about like that. In my case, at the first hint of September mist, I had to wear my thick underwear and my liberty bodice, while Mother forecast the dire consequences that would befall all those who were foolish enough to continue to wear their summer clothes into the Autumn. It was well known that “chills could strike right through to your insides, and where would we all be then? Everlasting at the doctor’s, that’s where”. I could only surmise that “September Morn” would undoubtedly meet an untimely end, either from pneumonia or consumption.

### OWEN WILLIAM

In 1924, after twenty years of marriage, Mother had a baby son. Owen William lay in the white lace draped treasure-cot. The joy and delight of Father and Mother knew no bounds. Aunt Clara joined in the jollifications wholeheartedly. She had several children and her help and expertise were welcomed. Oh! The plans that were made. Three days later, he died. He died as the midwife was bathing him downstairs, quietly, no fuss, just died, and poor Aunt Clara had to go upstairs to Mother, a message sent to Father at work.....

In 1926 I was born on a bleak January day. Mother was given chloroform and took some time to recover from my birth. Once again, Aunt Clara took over, and I too, occupied the white lace treasure cot. When, at six months, I had the measles, Father was a tower of strength. Since “the wind was hardly allowed to blow on me” Mother couldn’t think where I got it from. I was just lucky, that way!

When Father and I visited Owen’s tiny grave in the cemetery, Mother would never come with us. She didn’t enlarge on the event, when answering my questions regarding my tiny brother who died before I was born. I wasn’t very old, but I knew there were some things, best left alone.

We lived in the end houses of “Candlelight Row” so called because our landlord built the red brick houses at night to save money, so the story goes. “Chestnut Cottages” proclaimed the plaque on the

wall in the middle of the row. Not a lot of people knew that! Only Aunty who lived in Fleckney, who always addressed her correspondence to “Chestnut Cottages” Bull Head Street, Old Wigston.

### AFTERNOON TEA

It was a lovely summer afternoon when I decided to pay a visit to Mother’s friend who lived in “The Navigation” at Kilby Bridge. Walking along the Welford Road, past Cooks Lane and on to Monkey Row (the cottages just before the Railway Bridge), no, they didn’t keep monkeys there, Father said so. Anyway, I was just walking underneath the bridge when I heard the steady clip-clop of horses hooves. Looking round, I saw several gipsy caravans approaching, buckets and cans swaying and clanking underneath. As they drew level, the swarthy skinned men gazed at me, solemn faced. I gazed back equally solemn. Tales of children being taken away by the gypsies came forcibly to mind. What was that song we sang? “The Raggle Taggle Gypsies-O”? I was glad to reach the yard gates.

Mother’s friend expressed surprise on my arrival, not being informed of my impending visit. She looked thoughtfully after the gipsy caravans as they disappeared over the canal bridge. I was eating a very nice tea, when a very angry, if relieved Father arrived. A message had been sent via push-bike to Wigston, informing my distracted parents of my whereabouts. Father had tied a little cushion to the cross-bar of his bike, and perched on this, I was pedalled home to Mother who was “all of a tremble” and said shakily, “I was a wicked bad girl to go off like that on my own, and it would have served me right if the gypsies had taken me away”. I couldn’t understand what all the fuss was about. I just went out to tea, and I remembered my P’s and Q’s before coming home. How was I to know the uproar it would cause, as parents and relatives scoured Wigston, distraught, looking for a ‘lost’ six year old. Mother’s friend did!

### NASHES

I stood in the school yard holding tightly to mother’s hand. Together with the other new children and their mothers, we waited in a group outside the big arched doorway. The elastic band which kept my hat on was cutting under my chin. I had told mother it was too tight before we started out. I wondered where the lavatories were. Suppose the chain wouldn’t pull? – if there was a chain, remembering Aunt Annie’s privy at Fleckney. “Teacher will tell you all about that when the time comes” said mother in response to my anxious enquiries. Presently the door was opened by a tall lady and we were ushered into a cloakroom and shown where to hang our hats and coats. Mothers were not encouraged to linger, and suddenly, we found ourselves left to face our first day at school.

Taking comfort from each other, we filed into the classroom. A large fire burned in the grate in the corner, surrounded by a brass topped fireguard. In the centre of the room stood rows of small wooden chairs and tables; a large sand tray occupied one side of the room, Teacher’s desk stood at the front, and a blackboard and easel stood to one side. The high arched windows had long sash cords tied in a figure of eight round a hook in the wall. Teacher opened or closed the windows with the aid of a long pole with a hook at the end.

We were allocated our places. “Sit down children, hands in laps, when I call out your names, hold up your hands and say ‘present Miss’. So the register was called. Teacher continued, “Those children who have brought lunch packets to school will come forward and place them on my desk, I shall write down your name on each packet, and I will give them out at playtime”. In the rush that followed, her voice rose sternly, “one at a time, children, and quietly, please”. Unfortunately, the morning was somewhat marred by one new pupil who spent his time spread-eagled against the

locked back door, aiming a hefty kick at it at intervals, crying miserably to be let out. So commenced my school days at “Nashes”.

Back in 1929 “Nashes” was known as the Church Day School, Mr. W.L. Harrold was the headmaster, and Miss Hobley had charge of the infants. However, we all knew it as the National School, after a few weeks at “Nashes” we had settled down into school routine. As infants, we knew our place, and lack of knowledge was soon rectified by the older children who delighted in telling us imaginative tales of lessons and punishments in the offing for those who transgressed, which we believed implicitly. As we progressed through the school, we, in our turn, told the new intake, the same stories with great relish.

We would sit at our desks chanting our times-tables, Miss, keeping time with her ruler. I always got ravelled up with my eight-times, and eleven-elevens were NOT eleventy-leven said Teacher sternly, stopping us in mid-wave, and we had to start all over again. One night, Mother found a ‘nit’ in my hair. Out came the “Derbac” soap, my hair was washed and then combed over and over again with the special tooth-comb until my head was sore. My hair was blond, so our tooth-comb was black. “It showed ‘em up” said Mother. “Who did I sit with at school?” asked Mother. The girl who sat with me had beautiful hair; long, wavy and unwashed. She came to school each day in the same mucky frock and battered plimsolls, her fingers blue and red with chilblains. I often shared my lunch with her and she generously shared her ‘nits’ with me!

Mother gave me a letter to give to the teacher, and I waited by her desk while she read it. Teacher looked across the classroom, “Go and sit in the desk over there” she said, indicating a vacant desk at the back of the room. At playtime, I was besieged by one and all, “why have you been moved?” asked Mary. “What was in that letter you gave teacher?” said Betty. “I don’t know.” If teacher thought fit to move me, who was I to argue. At the end of afternoon school, teacher gave a sealed note to my previous companion to take home to her mother. She was absent from school the next day. The following day she came back to us with all her lovely hair cut short like a boy. Somehow, it seemed to be my fault.

As Christmas approached, we got stuck in making paper chains from gummed coloured strips joined together, these were strung across the classroom, often falling apart as we strove to pin them up. Paper lanterns were fashioned from stiff coloured paper, we cut out pictures of snowmen, robins, and skaters from old Christmas cards, stuck them on oblong pieces of cardboard, and attached small printed calendars on the bottom with two small strips of ribbon. Mine always fell off. On the last afternoon before we broke up, we were allowed to bring a book or jigsaw puzzle to school, a great concession. After school finished, we would take our calendars and paper lanterns home, to be displayed among the other decorations.

One good thing about being a fully fledged schoolgirl. During the winter, I no longer had to wear those fine leather leggings which buttoned from ankle to over the knee. Giving a deft twist with the button hook, Mother fastened the row of tiny buttons, often pinching my skin, unmoved by my cries of “ouch” and “ooyer Mam” as she worked her way upwards. I sported two little rows of button bruises on both legs during the winter months. I also lost my long curls at the same time. After yet another tearful session, combing out the tangles and “cotts” Mother finally lost patience, and with terse instructions to “put your hat and coat on, I’m taking you straight up the barbers” we walked, at a fine turn of speed, to the hairdressers. There, perched on a chair, my long curls were shorn.

I was highly delighted. Not so, Father. When he returned home from work. I had never seen him so angry. He stared at my fringe and “Basin cut” with horror. “What have you done, Omy?” he

stormed, “you’ve cut all her lovely hair, and it’s gone ‘as straight as a yard of pumpwater’, she’s lost all her curls.” Mother defended her action admirably. It would be easier to comb and keep clean now I was at school, not to mention the antics she had had to contend with, washing, combing, getting it dry and forever putting it in rags, and another thing, what about them ‘nits’? Children were always getting them at school, and with long hair, she’d never get them out. It fell on deaf ears, and the fact that one long curl had been placed in the Big Family Bible on the shelf underneath the aspidistra in the Front Room, was no consolation whatsoever. It took father a long time to come to terms with my short hair. Then, Father didn’t have to suffer all the pulling and tugging as the comb was dragged through tangles, or the sting of soap in your eyes, despite the flannel pressed tightly to your face, as Mother tried to separate your hair from your scalp during the twice weekly shampoo.

I had my misfortunes along with the rest. The day in sewing class when I pulled my needle through the square of hessian and upwards just as “Miss” bent forward to inspect my work. The point of the needle struck home. A bright head of blood appeared on her forehead and trickled down her nose. Aghast! I stammered “I’m sorry Miss.” “How many times have I told you not to thread your needle with a long piece of cotton? – stupid girl.” It was a complete accident. As was the incident when the girl sitting in front of me leaned back just as I pulled my chewing gum out of my mouth to see how far it would stretch. “Please Miss, Doreen’s stuck her chewing gum all in my hair,” she exclaimed. Fetched out in front of the class, I stood there while teacher decided whether or not to send me to the Headmaster. After what seemed hours, she decided to keep me in at play time. I was rebellious, after all, I hadn’t done it on purpose. My “victim” was given a hard time at playtime, for “tit-taleing.” No-one wanted to be labelled “Tell-Tale-Tit”.

The only time I fell foul of the Headmaster was the day I took my doll to school. A few days previously, one girl had brought along her doll, beautifully dressed it was. Not to be outdone, the other girls brought their dolls to be admired. This was frowned upon, however, and it was decreed that no more dolls would be brought to school. Either I suffered a mental block at the time or I wasn’t paying attention (a common fault, as I was repeatedly told). I brought my lovely pot doll along for all to admire. After morning assembly and prayers, Headmaster spoke. “All those girls who have brought dolls to school will remain behind in Hall” he said ominously. Quaking, the doll-bringers were lined up by teacher. Headmaster approached cane in hand. As each girl stepped forward, her doll was confiscated and the cane brought down on each extended hand. Hands smarting, eyes filled with tears, I went back to my classroom. Unable to eat at playtime, I gave my lunch to my friend in the mucky frock. She never brought anything to school, but her concern for me that day was genuine.

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## **THE FOUNDING OF THE WIGSTON CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY**

“Officially Registered in the year 1867, the Wigston Co-operative Society commenced business. Long before this date, born out of adversity, a small group of Wigston men conceived the idea of Co-operation. They first met in Brick Kiln Close, off the Welford Road, the meeting numbered twenty. Ways and means were discussed on how to raise capital for this great ideal, which was to improve their standard of living and encourage thrift.

Coppers were collected weekly, until each one had a pound share, with £20 capital, faith and determination their ideals were put into practice. A small shop on Leicester Road, was rented, stocked chiefly with main food commodities such as sugar, flour, lard etc., and staffed by committee men in their spare time during evenings. So successful was this Co-operative venture,

stocks were sold out in the first three evenings, but were speedily replaced. This was the beginning of what is now the biggest retail trading organisation in the Wigston area.

As the business expanded full-time staff were engaged, also the time had come to look around for larger premises to cope with the ever increasing needs of the people. The next development came in 1873 by the building of a shop and bakery in Bell Street, at this stage the business on Leicester Road was transferred to Bell Street. Twenty years later the Long Street butchery shop was built with offices and committee room on the second floor, and a few years later the Moat Street branch was opened.

One of the largest ventures came in 1896 by the purchase of Fulwell Farm and afterwards developed into Central Avenue, the road was made and ten houses built each side for the Society as an investment, the remaining land being sold to members for their own housing needs. In 1910 further extensions were made with the building of Long Street Central Avenue Central premises, this project was the greatest of all capital commitments to date, and was only allowed to go forward after a Special Members meeting, and a hard fight won by the progressive committee men of that day.

Rectory Farm was purchased in 1919 and the retail milk business extended. In 1939 the first model dairy was built and pasteurized milk supplied to members. At different periods and to meet the needs of members new departments were added, such as Coal, Boot Repairs, Hair-dressing etc. Today [in 1953] most phases in the retail trade have been covered by the Society, and the trade of £20 weekly in 1867 had reached the figure of approximately £500,000 yearly, which reflects great credit to the old pioneers.

We shall be pleased to accept new registrations at any time at our GROCERY AND BUTCHERY DEPARTMENTS

Our other services include: Bread, Milk (deliveries to all districts), also Boot Repairs, Drapery, Boots and Men's Outfitting, Furnishing, including Wireless and Television Service."

Notes: This informative piece was placed as part of a full page advertisement in a Souvenir Programme to commemorate the Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. A number of other local companies contributed advertisements, but not with the same interesting historical detail. The programme contains much else of interest as well as listing Church Services and celebrations planned for Coronation Week. It was produced by Wigston Urban District Council.

Brick Kiln Close was on the west side of Welford Road, the present Langton Road being developed on part of it. Fulwell Farmhouse survives today, as the premises of Bell, Brown & Bentley the veterinary surgeons. At the time of enclosure of the open fields in 1766 its land stretched down to the boundary with Aylestone Parish. Rectory Farmhouse, now demolished, was next to All Saints' Church on the west side. Its fields at enclosure stretched down to the boundary with Glen Parva. It is however possible that some of the land belonging to these two farms had been sold off prior to the purchase by the Co-op Society.

Wigston Hosiers of Paddock Street, was also a co-operative enterprise but is not mentioned in the programme, perhaps because it had a completely separate management structure.

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