

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

BULLETIN 111

1st July 2018



The old windmill at Crow Mill Farm, c.1900. This is a post mill where the structure is centrally pivoted and by means of the long curved pole above the ladder could be turned to face the prevailing wind. It was demolished in 1906.

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS – AUGUST 2018 TO MAY 2019

Wednesday 15th August 2018

Visit to Cooke's Motor Museum, Nr. Kibworth, followed by meal at The Queen's Head, Saddington
Booking essential, own or shared transport, meet at the museum 6pm

Wednesday 19th September 2018

Origins & Operation of the Leicester to Swannington Railway – Malcolm Riddle
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 17th October 2018

Every Home Should Have One, domestic history of the 20th century – Felicity Austin
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 21st November 2018

The Story of the Unknown Warrior – John Sutton
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

***Wednesday 19th December 2018**

The Very Highly Strung 'Unikulele' Band
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 16th January 2019

200 years of Methodism in Wigston Magna – speaker to be advised
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 20th February 2019

AGM followed by Tommy's Mail, the Postal Service in WWI – Peter Cousins
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 20th March 2019

The Little Theatre, Past and Present – Mike Bull
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 17th April 2019

Leicestershire in the 1940s and 1950s – David Bell
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 15th May 2019

Cathedrals, Rooftops & More, restoration of old buildings – John Castleman
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

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 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

MARCH 2018 MEETING LEICESTER CITY FOOTBALL CLUB – PART 11

John Hutchinson, the club archivist, first visited our society in October 2016, when he spoke mainly about his job. This includes preserving and filing the club's ever expanding collection of memorabilia which dates back to the 1880s (and for which he has four rooms at the club reserved for the purpose). It also involves a fair amount of travel around the country to interview past players for the oral archive. He has also written two books, and in 2014 was involved in the production of a film about the fifteen players who lost their lives in the First World War.

This second visit was to concentrate more upon the club itself which was founded in 1884 as Leicester Fosse by a group of old boys from Wyggeston School. They played on a field bordering the Fosse Road, hence the name, but later moved to Victoria Park and then to Belgrave Road Cycle & Cricket Ground. The Club joined the Football Association in 1890 and moved to Mill Lane, then playing for a while at the County Cricket ground before moving to Filbert Street in 1891, joining the Midland League in the same year. They were elected to Division Two of the Football League in 1894 after finishing second. In 1919 when League football resumed after the war, the club was renamed Leicester City Football Club, appropriate as the town had recently been granted City status. The club moved away from Filbert Street in 2002 to the new 32,500 all seater Walker's Stadium (named after Walkers Crisps). In 2011 it was renamed the King Power Stadium by the new owners.

The club have been FA Cup finalists four times, in 1948-49, 1960-61, 1962-63 and 1968-69. This is a tournament record for the most defeats in the final without having won the competition! They have several promotions to their name, two play-off final wins, and one League One title. In 1971 they won the FA Community Shield, and in 2016, they were runners up. The club has also won the League Cup three times in 1964, 1997 and 2000, as well as being runners up in 1965 and 1999. Additionally they have competed in European football, with their appearances coming in the 1961-62 European Cup Winners' Cup, 1997-98 UEFA Cup, 2001-02 UEFA Cup, and most recently 2016-17 UEFA Champions League, reaching the quarter-finals of the competition in that year.

Over the years many talented players have made their contribution to the club, the following being some of the most noteworthy. The dates in brackets denote their time at Leicester:

Gordon Banks (1959-67) 356 Leicester appearances, won 1966 FIFA World Cup, player with the most England Caps. Went on to gain international honours, awarded OBE and entered in Hall of Fame.

Adam Black (1920-35) 557 Leicester appearances, 4 goals, second highest total of Leicester appearances, highest for league games only.

Arthur Chandler (1923-35) 419 Leicester appearances and their record goal scorer with 273, joint club record for most goals in a single match.

Graham Cross (1960-76) 599 Leicester appearances, a club record.

Gary Linaker (1977-86) 209 Leicester appearances, 103 goals, English Golden Boot winner in 1986. Went on to gain international honours including the FIFA Fair Play Award for no yellow or red cards, awarded OBE and entered in the Hall of Fame. Also helped the club when in financial difficulties.

Arthur Rowley (1950-58) 321 Leicester appearances, 265 goals, record number of career goals in English League Football, second highest Leicester all time scorer, Club record for the most goals in a single season.

Sep Smith (1929-49) 373 Leicester appearances, Leicester's longest serving player and captain, gained international honours.

Keith Weller (1971-78) 262 Leicester appearances, 37 Goals, described as one of Leicester's greatest ever players, and gained international honours. Emigrated to USA but sadly died in 2004 aged only 58.

By special request we had asked the speaker to include players with Wigston connections:-

Mal Griffiths (1938-1956) 420 appearances, 79 goals. Mal was born in Merthyr Tydfil in 1919. After retirement from football he became landlord of the Queen's Head in Wigston. He died in 1969 at Wigston aged 50.

Howard Riley (1955-1965) 233 appearances, 47 goals. He has two FA Cup winner runners-up medals. Howard was born into a sporting family in Wigston in 1938. When he retired from football he worked as a teacher at King Richard III School and also at Westcotes School. He then spent two years at Wigston College before returning to Filbert Street in 1999 to work as welfare officer for the Club's Youth Academy. Now retired and enjoying playing golf he still lives in Wigston.

Eddie Russell (1953-58) 101 appearances. Eddie became an integral part of the second division title winning side of 1953-54 and later played an important part in consolidating the club's position back into the top flight. He was born near Sleaford in 1928. After retirement from football he continued to live in Leicester and worked as a PE teacher at Guthlaxton College before making a successful career as a sales representative in the printing industry and then returning to teach English at Soar Valley College. In 1988 he moved to Cornwall where he died in 2017, aged 89.

Alan Woollett (1967-1978) 245 appearances. He was a member of the 1969 FA Cup Final side, runners-up. Alan was born in Wigston in 1947. When he retired from football he worked as a prison officer. He lives nearby in Knighton.

John gave a most interesting lecture on a subject obviously close to his heart. There was not time to include more recent happenings or the unforgettable Premier League victory in 2016, but hopefully everyone still has clear memories of that momentous occasion anyway.

Tricia Berry

APRIL 2018 MEETING

SOME WIND AND WATER MILLS OF SOUTH LEICESTERSHIRE

On the hottest day since last summer, 80 members and visitors welcomed Dr Susan Tebby to talk on a subject close to our hearts but which we probably know little about, wind and water mills. The area covered was the 'Guthlaxton Hundred' (oh for the old names), Dr Susan's home district.

When we refer to 'mills' in our minds I think we usually see windmills but there are other mills such as water mills and their forerunners, various grinding tools such as pestle and mortar and querns. The former being a pounding action and the latter being a grinding action of stone on stone and more akin to windmills. Using a grinding stone it could take an hour to create enough flour for a loaf of bread. The original grinder was, of course, our molar teeth for grinding food.

The earliest mills were water mills and a count in the Domesday Book revealed 123 mills in the whole of Leicestershire in 1086. William the Conqueror ordered the count as part of his survey of

his new kingdom because he was concerned about the ability of the country to produce sufficient food. His calculation was that 1 pair of grinding stones would provide enough flour for 50 families for a year. In fact the figure of 123 may have included some double counting, most were in East Leicestershire although as the population moved westwards more mills were built in those areas. In the town of Leicester there were 4 mills, all on the River Soar. One was at what we now call North Mills. A later miller was by the name of Hitchcock now the name of the nearby weir. The staircase from the former Georgian miller's house was reinstalled in Fenwick's shop (I wonder if that will survive). The mill race and leet is still visible and are owned by the City Council. It can be seen from records that the Hitchcocks were very wealthy and the miller himself is buried in Kirby Muxloe churchyard with a very ornate and well carved gravestone.

There were several different types of watermill depending on the flow of the water, a millwright was a very exacting profession requiring a good knowledge of watercourses and engineering.

The first windmills were constructed in the 12th or 13th centuries, there is some debate about the actual time. These were post mills of which Kibworth mill is a good example and the only post mill surviving in Leicestershire. It was originally owned by Merton College Oxford. The next development in windmills were tower mills. In Leicestershire these were often paid for by subscriptions from local people. There were fears in the early 1800s there would be a shortage of wheat because of the activities of a certain Napoleon Bonaparte. So people clubbed together to pay for mills to be built, there were several in Leicestershire and the Lutterworth mill cost £1290. Ullesthorpe mill cost £800 and about 20% of shares were paid for by women. Indeed some millers were women. By the turn of the century most of these subscription tower mills were not needed because the threat to wheat supplies was over and there was improved transport due to the railways meaning that wheat and flour could be moved around the country more easily and reliably. There was a constant threat of fire in windmills, often caused by lightning strikes or friction and sparks from the stones and moving timber parts. The source of grinding stones was important because different qualities of stones made different types of flour, some even came in sections from France and were fixed together by iron bands. The moving parts caused huge vibrations needing very thick strong walls and in some cases 10ft deep foundations.

A map of 1779 shows many mills in the Guthlaxton Hundred both of the wind and water type. At Countesthorpe, which had cost only £50 to build, William Ponton was the miller. He also ran Blaby water mill, later a chimney was added there because the mill was converted to steam power which overcame the problem of low water levels in the dry summer months when grain could not be ground. The whole complex was big with a family home for the miller now converted to a private house but the chimney is still in place and visible from the surrounding area. Another miller at Blaby was Mr Vice, an old word for a boundary. The name is preserved in Vices Bridge on the canal at bridge 93. It is known that in 1926 the Vices also owned Crow Mill at Wigston which was originally a water mill, later converted to steam. A post mill was built but was demolished in 1906. On an 1835 map these mills were described as 'Union Mills'. The earliest reference to a mill in Wigston is 1169 but this may not have been Crow Mill (what about the mill on Mill Close off Welford Road at the top of the hill near the cemetery?). This earlier mill was a co-operative consisting of 12 people and was typical of many community mills.

The talk was fascinating and very professionally delivered, it contained many related anecdotes and was followed by several interesting questions, one of which was from a visitor who now lives at Crow Mill.

Dr Tebby reminded us that the weekend of 12/13 May was national mill weekend when Ullesthorpe mill would be open.

MAY 2018 MEETING QUEEN ELEANOR OF CASTILE (1241-1290)

For our May meeting we welcomed Julie Ede to talk on Queen Eleanor of Castile.

Henry III (reigned 1216 -1272) had taken his son, Prince Edward, to Castile to negotiate with King Ferdinand III over the ownership of Gascony. As part of the deal the king suggested that his daughter Eleanor should marry Prince Edward as long as she could have the revenues from estates in Grantham and Stamford. The two young people, who had not met, accepted that the marriage was for political reasons.

It was agreed and Eleanor was brought to England, aged only 10, and taken to Canterbury where she was shown the shrine of Thomas a Becket. She then went on to Westminster Abbey where her future father in law took her to see the new Shrine of Edward the Confessor (reigned 1042-1066). Prince Edward and Eleanor were married in 1254 when she was only 12 years of age and he was 16. This was a normal age for marriage at the time as couples needed to get on with the child bearing process which started as soon as the bride reached puberty. However, after the marriage they fell in love and were very devoted. They were also very rich. Everything they did and said was written down in chronicles.

Although her fertility was doubted at first and although Prince Edward was often away fighting, their first daughter was born in 1262. We know what the happy couple looked like because there are statues of them on the west wall of Lincoln Cathedral. Eleanor accompanied her husband on his campaigns and visits to family members throughout Europe. In 1272 when Henry III died they were crowned King Edward I and Queen Eleanor at Westminster Abbey. This was a splendid occasion and to celebrate the local conduit was made to flow with wine instead of water and a new golden spoon was made to anoint the new monarchs with oil, this is still in existence and was used at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

Eleanor became a good business woman but was also compassionate, helping the poor whenever she could. On her travels she always displayed her shield as does the monarch today.

In 1288, while in Spain, Eleanor became concerned about her health but on her return to England she went on the annual progress with the King travelling by litter and not on horseback because of her situation. On 28 November 1290, aged 48, she died at Harby in Lincolnshire, having had 16 children by this time although many had died in infancy. The King was devastated.

It was arranged that her body should be taken to Lincoln for burial but the king was adamant that she should be taken to London. This would take about two weeks and he decreed that wherever the cortege stopped for the night, a cross would be erected in her memory, and to remind the local people to offer prayers for her soul. First her body was taken to Lincoln where the Black Friars prepared the corpse for the journey. Her internal organs were removed and buried but in 1645 the parliamentarian forces destroyed the memorial. However it had already been drawn by William Dugdale and so could be rebuilt when the time was right. On 4th December 1290 the cortege left Lincoln.

As well as Lincoln, Crosses were erected at the following places:

- Grantham, no remains.
- Stamford, remains were found by William Stukely the archaeologist who also excavated Stonehenge.
- Geddington, the cross still exists, it is triangular in shape and has three statues of Eleanor.
- Hardingstone, Northampton, the cross still exists and has four statues.
- Stoney Stratford, now destroyed.
- Woburn Abbey, no sign of the cross.
- Dunstable, destroyed in the Civil War and the site is now under the road surface but there is a memorial plaque.
- St Albans, the cross still exists but is overshadowed by modern buildings. William Stukely was again involved and after surveying it noted that it was often hit by local carriages, so four oak posts were erected to protect it. There are three statues but those seen today are not original.
- Waltham Abbey, destroyed in the Civil War.
- Cheapside, London, destroyed in 1643.
- Charing Cross, the body was taken to Blackfriars where a tomb was prepared for her. A cross was erected at Charing Cross as the nearest topographical point, today's cross is a replacement.

On 17 December 1290 after a journey of 160 miles Queen Eleanor was buried in St Edward's Chapel at Westminster Abbey. 500 Italian florins were used to provide the gold to cover her effigy and following her burial there were so many pilgrims coming to the Abbey that a Clerk had to be appointed to look after the money they gave.

The crosses were constructed of local stone (except Charing Cross which was of Caen stone) and were built within three years at the King's expense. They were painted in bright colours originally. A fascinating talk expertly delivered.

JUNE 2018 VISIT MELBOURNE, DERBYSHIRE

Members used their own cars for the one hour journey to Melbourne, the latter part of which was very pleasant passing near to Staunton Harold and Calke Abbey Park. Some arrived during the afternoon to visit the Hall Gardens or the ancient parish church of St Michael with St Mary before having cake and a cup of tea in the yard outside the Hall tea shop. We then gathered outside the church at 5pm for our guided tour for which the 25 members present were split into two groups. The weather was fine and warm but rather cool later on 'nearly' braking the curse of the weather for the Society's summer outings. However after returning home there was a brilliantly colourful sunset on this the day before the longest day of the year. During a tour lasting about two hours (except for those who returned to the pub early!!), it was difficult to record all the information given by our extremely knowledgeable guides and so here are a few snippets, but go again and have another look. (the Hall is open every day except Mondays in August).

The Melbourne Pool was originally a mill pool to provide a head of water for the Melbourne Mill which closed in 1968 and is now a private house. The Hall itself was built in the 12th to 14th centuries as a rectory house for the Bishops of Carlisle who took refuge there when they were under attack from the Scots when at home. The Hall was sold after the reformation to the Coke family and is currently the home of their direct descendant Lord Ralph Kerr. Lord Melbourne, Queen Victoria's first Prime Minister, inherited the house in 1828. The city of Melbourne in Australia is named after him.

The church is one of the finest Norman parish churches in the country, built in a cathedral like pattern probably by Henry I. Most of the stonework is original both inside and out although there

were major alterations in the mid 17C and again in the 1860s when Sir George Gilbert Scott did some sensitive renovations.

There were two tithe barns but the one nearest the church was used for malt not corn. As in Wigston the enclosure acts led to farm houses and buildings being built in the fields themselves and the village farms gradually became converted to domestic dwellings. Despite being what we would call today a picturesque village, in the past it was considered an up and coming small market town. Industry developed and there were framework knitting cottages and silk mills as well as boot and shoe manufacturing. This led to a more modern (Victorian) area of the village which today is where most of the village shops are located. In 1832 there was a Luddite riot in the village. Much of the industry has disappeared but one factory and its chimney have been retained and now houses a design company. One row of eight framework knitters' cottages was constructed in a very unusual style and was funded by a 'Sick Club' in 1795. As one cottage is occupied by one of our guides, we were allowed to visit the extensive garden on the opposite side of the house to the street! Was this the back or the front?

A famous 'son of the village' was Thomas Cook who was born in Melbourne in 1808. His legacy is a close of 14 cottages in an almshouse style together with a bake house, wash house, laundry and mission hall. The original rent was 1 old penny per week and the cottages are still administered by the original Trust. Cook was a Baptist and attended chapel in the village which was closely connected to the Baptist chapel at Barton in the Beans near Market Bosworth.

Apart from the ancient parish church there was another church said to have been for the poorer villagers. This is now lost but with the graveyard is still a place of serenity. Other churches included Methodist, Quaker and Congregational Chapels (now URC) and the New Jerusalem Church following the doctrinal writings of Swedish scientist and theologian, Emmanuel Swedenborg. This closed in 1977 and was converted to flats.

There were of course many pubs including The White Swan and the Roebuck, most of which have now closed, some quite recently, but one that remains open is the Blue Bell Inn where we completed our tour with a delicious pre ordered meal.

All in all a delightful afternoon and evening outing with much left to see on another visit. See photos on the GWHS website.

Last three reports by Colin Towell

OBITUARIES

Sadly two of our members have passed away in the recent past. Pam Woolley who joined the society c.1998 with her husband John had been in poor health for some time, but still made it to meetings until very recently. Some of us may remember the excellent mince pies she used to make regularly for our Christmas Parties. Our sincere condolences to John. Beryl Tompkins joined the society in c.2004, but did not attend meetings so we never really got to know her. We were very sad to learn she had passed away at Amberwood Nursing Home.

WIGGY'S CHILD
1926-1939

CHRISTMAS DAY (Continued)

(Part three of Doreen Boulter's childhood memories)

Very early on Christmas morning I would move my feet cautiously down the bed and feel the weight of the parcels at the end, oh! The lovely crinkly noise those brown paper wrapped parcels made. My fingers were all thumbs trying to untie the string, and the bulging wool stocking hanging on the end of the brass bedstead: although stuffed mostly with crumpled paper, treasures were to be found inside. Orange, shiny apple and a new penny in the toe, sugar mouse, a chocolate 'clock' wrapped in silver paper, a celluloid doll with feathered skirt or a wind-up tin lorry.

My special present each year turned out to be a doll, no matter what I had asked Santa for, apparently Santa had a surfeit of dollies, "and since my dolls were continually beset by one misfortune after another, it was just as well" said Mother. 'Pot' dolls had a tendency to smash when dropped; those with eyes that opened and shut invariably got stuck in the 'shut' position, trying to unstick them resulted in both eyes dropping inside the hollow head. Arms and legs came apart due to the constant dressing and undressing. By the end of the year I ended up with an eyeless, rattling, one armed, legless doll!

As I unwrapped my other gifts, I knew beforehand what they were. Each Christmas I would receive a pair of black shiny wellies together with a pair of fluffy grey slipper socks to wear inside them. "Ready for the snow" said Mother. New slippers and a wool jumper suit; the wool skirt was attached to a sleeveless cotton top, the matching wool jumper worn over the top so that it looked like a dress. This was for Christmas Day and only to be worn on Sundays for the rest of the winter.

Every alternate Christmas I received a new dressing gown. It had a twisted silken cord with tassels on the end, either red or blue. Always two sizes too big, the bottom trailed train-like on the ground, while the sleeves had to be turned back to the elbows. "I know it's a bit on the big side now" said Mother, "but you'll soon grow into it." How many times did I hear that remark throughout my growing years, when the chosen garment hung down to my ankles and the sleeves flapped up and down beyond my fingers.

Breakfast on Christmas Day consisted of toast and porkpie. Mother had enough to do cooking the Christmas dinner, without cooking breakfast. The table was laid with a white damask cloth, the best cutlery, and the silver condiment set. The best fruit set was ready for the Christmas pudding, when it was served. Father carried in the home reared cockerel, done to a turn, brussel sprouts and roast spuds were served in the best vegetable dishes, and gravy was poured from the matching gravy boat. We dined in style on Christmas Day! There were no paper hats, Christmas crackers, or frivolities of that nature. In the afternoon, we would sit in the front room in the firelight; on the dresser there was a bowl of fruit and a box of tangerines, some wrapped in silver paper. In the little silver nut-bowl would be a selection of walnuts, and hazelnuts, those walnuts defied all efforts with the nutcrackers, they must have been made of cast iron! Another concession for Christmas was a box of Fry's Chocolate Creams. These were tiny chocolates about the size of a thumbnail, each row contained a different flavour cream. Mother brought a large box, and I was allowed to choose one from each row.

On Boxing Day, a great treat was in store. Wigston Temperance Band, better known to us as Charlie Moore's Band, toured Wigston playing a selection of carols. "Christians Awake" resounded through the streets, as the 'push-me-off-the-corsey's (Trombones) played with gusto. Any Christians still asleep were rudely awakened as Charlie marched down the street, the big drum always went through me, right down to my toes! We did enjoy a good band! Boxing Day morning, the hunt met 'up the road' which meant anywhere past Wistow and beyond. Father would sometimes go off on his bike, with a hunk of porkpie in his pocket "to follow on foot" while Mother and I remained comfortably by the fire, listening to the wireless.

WINTER PASTIMES

With the wireless tuned in to Radio Luxemburg I would listen avidly to the 'Ovaltineys'. We had Auntie Mary, Uncle Jack, Uncle Monty (Monty Ray) and Uncle Phil to entertain us with their songs and stories, and the Adventures of Elsie, Winnie and Johnnie, narrated by Harry Hemsley. Being an 'Ovaltiney' I was the proud possessor of a badge and rule book, and deciphered the 'Secret Code' with great relish.

On Saturday night, Father would take down the football results. I dare not utter a word or turn a page in my book in case it distracted Father and stopped him winning the pools. When the announcer reached 'Hamilton Academicals' I breathed a sigh of relief, I knew we were on the home stretch!

Sometimes we listened to the dance bands, Henry Hall, Roy Fox, and Jack Payne, as they played Foxtrots, Quicksteps, the Waltz and the Tango to the latest songs. There was the comedy duo Flotsam and Jetsam, and Jack Buchanan singing 'Goodnight Vienna'.

Father was very disparaging about that new crooner on the wireless. "Call that singing" he exclaimed, "What's he supposed to be, a crooner? Boop-a-dooping, forgot the words more likely, and what kind of a name is that? Bing Crosby? – Bing! proper daft".

Well, I thought he was a Wow, and unwisely said so.

"You want to listen to proper songs, my gel" said Father.

Father's 'proper' songs were 'Jerusalem', 'Keep right on to the end of the Road', and 'Where my Caravan has rested' and for light relief, the old Music Hall songs. 'Show me the way to go Home' and 'I'll be your Sweetheart' were much favoured, and Father, rendering, 'If you were the only Girl in the World' brought tears to your eyes!

Father, now well launched on his subject, told glowing tales of Gertie Gitana and Vesta Tilley, "now, they were singers, you could hear them right at the back of the Hall, and every word as clear as a bell" enthused Father. (Gertie Gitana's grave is in Wigston Cemetery; engraved on her memorial are the words of the song she made immortal – 'Nellie Dean'.

Another task undertaken while listening to the wireless, entailed cutting out squares of newspaper, making a hole in the top and threading a hefty batch on string ready to hang on the back of the privy door. Ours were posh, I cut fringed edges! "You might be listening to that wireless" said Mother handing me the Brasso, "but there's no call for you to be idle, remember, the Devil makes work for idle hands."

‘Old Nick’ didn’t have much chance with my hands, they were always occupied, doing summat!

THE POISONER

Father was bad in bed, he was proper ‘middlin’ and Mother had even lit a fire in the grate in the bedroom “he were that badly”. Old Dr. Briggs had been called in, and as the Doctor was blind, Miss Margaret always came with him on his rounds.

The Doctor diagnosed Pleurisy and prescribed medicine and some ‘linctus’ for Father; patted me on the head and offered me a scented cachou from a little black box. He told Mother “it would take it’s time, but Father would indeed recover” and then both Doctor and Miss Margaret departed.

Downstairs we could hear Father coughing and hacking away.

“Just listen to him” said Mother. Go Upstairs and give your father a dose of his linctus – save my legs a bit, running up and down those stairs fair does me in; your legs are younger than mine.”

Off I went upstairs. Father had a camphorated oil flannel on his chest and the bedroom reeked of the stuff. Carefully, pouring out the clear liquid, I spooned it into Father. He immediately spat it out. “You’ve give me camphorated oil” he gasped, choking and spluttering.

I fled downstairs.

“I’ve poisoned Father” I quavered “I’ve given him the wrong stuff” and burst into tears. Mother rushed upstairs to find Father, puce-faced, and still with us. I took some convincing, however, that Father wasn’t lying cold and still with the sheet pulled over his face. From that day, Father made a remarkable recovery. He always reckoned it was the camphorated oil that did it. A great believer in camphorated oil was Father!

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE LEICESTERSHIRE AND NORTHAMPTONSHIRE UNION CANAL

With the advent of some warm weather at last, my husband Clive and I decided to walk along the tow path and note down the names of the various bridges within the urban district of Wigston. Some reflect a nearby feature but most of them display the names of bygone farmers whose land whether rented or owned was suddenly divided by the creation of the canal and who needed these bridges to access and work their land and move grazing livestock etc.

It all goes back to 30th April 1793 when the Leicestershire & Northamptonshire Union Canal Company (the LNU) received approval by Act of Parliament to begin work on a proposed canal from the West Bridge, Leicester to the River Nene in Northamptonshire. The project to canalise the River Soar from Loughborough to West Bridge was almost complete and was known as the Leicester Navigation. The LNU’s Act authorised it to make the River Soar navigable from the Leicester Navigation “now making” near West Bridge, as far as the old pack horse bridge near Aylestone, and from there to cut a canal following fairly closely the line of the River Soar and further along the River Sence, and to include a branch from near Lubbenham to Market Harborough before continuing to the River Nene in Hardingstone parish.

It was agreed that the work would proceed from the Leicester end only and advertisements were displayed for bricklayers, brickmakers and diggers, and by December of that first year all posts were filled including 300 diggers (known as Navvies). The Act laid down various rules such as permitted hours of work, not to waste water and the sides of the canal to be puddled to prevent leakage into the land of certain individuals. The tow path had to be on the side opposite Wistow Hall unless the Countess of Denbigh (who lived there at the time) agreed otherwise. The time of cutting through her land was optimistically limited to 12 months. The upheaval must have been enormous but in spite of all the inevitable troubles, the canal had reached Kilby Bridge during 1794. A wharfinger was appointed at Blaby and a house built for him. The same was done at Kilby Bridge, with the wharfinger, William Bellamy being paid 50p per week. To encourage the start of business a delivery of fifteen boat loads of coal was ordered for Kilby Bridge Wharf.

By the end of 1796 trouble was brewing when three of the contractors working on Saddington tunnel were having financial problems. A fourth one had downed tools and left the job, before his situation became worse. More trouble followed when it was discovered that the tunnel was out of straight, but fortunately not by much and modifications put it right. A young bricklayer 15 year old Thomas Hill Herbert suffered a fatal injury when "struck by a culch" (block of masonry) during construction of the tunnel. He was buried on 19 July 1796 in St. Mary's Churchyard, Willoughby Waterless. A distant relative found by chance when researching my family tree!

After a further call for funds Debdale Wharf was opened for public traffic from 7th April 1797, but progress was then paused again due to lack of money, though trade was good, with slates and coal being the main products handled along the route. After another appeal for funds it was decided to tackle the shortage of water which was often a problem in the summer, so in 1800 land was purchased for a reservoir between Saddington and Gumley. This was open and functioning by 1805.

The work continued to Foxton when further money problems meant the company were unable to proceed with the next section from Foxton to Northampton. The Directors then applied for a variation of the Act to construct instead from Foxton to Market Harborough, and when this was complete the shareholders voted in favour of ending their canal at Harborough. They made all papers etc. in their possession available to any company willing to undertake the extension and very soon the Directors of the Grand Junction Canal offered to make the link between their canal and the LNU. This new canal was to be aptly named the Grand Union Canal and gained Royal Assent on 24th May 1810. It was to leave the LNU in Gumley parish and was to run via Lubenham, North Kilworth, Yelvertoft, Crick and Watford to join the Grand Junction in the parish of Norton, Northamptonshire.

Notable people involved with the LNU canal in these early days were Thomas Telford (engineer) who did some of the surveying, Joseph Cradock of Gumley Hall who was a big supporter and was known for supplying luxury food for the various celebrations held to mark construction milestones and George Wartnaby of Market Harborough, who was the LNU solicitor and fore-runner of the present firm of Wartnaby & Hefford. Much later in 1866 when the railways were well established the struggling LNU and GU (Grand Union Canal) asked Hiram Abiff Owston of Bushloe House, Wigston to take on the job of Clerk. He managed to keep the businesses stable until 20th July 1894 when by Act of Parliament they were both taken over by the Grand Junction Canal.

THE CANAL BRIDGES

Bridge No: 87 – Kilby Bridge carries the Welford Road over the canal. We descended to the tow path and walked easterly in the direction of Wistow and Newton Harcourt.

Bridge No: 86 – Ellis's Bridge is named after the Ellis family who worked the nearby lime delphs, and also farmed in the district. This remarkable family have a separate page below.

Bridge No: 85 – Clifton's Bridge is named after Charles Clifton. He was born in 1807 in South Croxton, but spent most of his life at various addresses in Braunstone and Leicester, where he is described as a porter and later a provision dealer. He and his wife Mary nee Padgett had four children. He shows up in Wigston in the 1871 census when he was aged 63, living at Clifton's Lodge, and is described as a farmer of 25 acres. However he returned to Leicester and died in 1881, aged 74, and is buried at Welford Road, Leicester Cemetery.

Bridge No: 84 – Tythorne Bridge is named after its situation. Tythorne was the name of one of the three great open fields in Wigston before the enclosure. This Act of Parliament ordered the fields to be divided as we know them today, and grouped into complete farms, instead of farmers having small strips in several different places as in the past. Tythorne Bridge is situated within the old Tythorne Field and the name has also continued in a farm and the primary school.

Bridge No: 83 – Langham's Bridge initially caused some confusion as the next bridge was No: 82. There was no Bridge 83 or any noticeable trace of where it might have been. However recourse to an old map showed there was once a No: 83 named Langham's Bridge. William Langham was born c.1795 in Wigston and he and his wife Ann lived in Bull Head Street with their family of eight children. He was a farmer/grazier of 351 acres employing 12 labourers, his land was mainly in the previously mentioned Tythorne area. He ran a successful business selling beef to the London market. He died in 1851, aged 56, and is buried in Wigston.

Bridge No: 82 – Turnover Bridge takes the foot path over to the other side of the canal at the request of the Countess of Denbigh as previously mentioned.

Returning a few days later we again started at Kilby Bridge this time descending to the tow path and walking westerly in the direction of South Wigston.

Bridge No: 88 – Kilby Lock Bridge is presumably named after the nearby lock.

Bridge No: 89 – Taylor's Bridge is named after Michael Taylor. He was born c.1829 in Croft. He and his wife Rachel nee Frost were living in Huncote in 1851 when he was described as a carpenter. But about 1853 they moved to Lodge Farm, Wigston, at this time they had four children and Michael was farming 83 acres. He died in 1875 in Blaby RD, aged 46 years.

Bridge No: 90 – Knight's Bridge is named after John Knight, who was born in Kilby c.1816. He and his wife Maria nee Preston lived in Great Glen when first married before moving to Newgate End, Wigston where John farmed about 65 acres of land and ran a dairy. The couple had three children. John died in 1885 in Blaby RD aged 69.

Bridge No: 91 – Pochin's Bridge is named after John Armston Pochin, born in Wigston in 1806. He lived at the Manor House in Newgate End and was a farmer/grazier of 100 acres. John did not marry, he died aged 74, in 1880 and was buried in Wigston.

Bridge No: 92 – Crow Mills Bridge is a road bridge which carries the Countesthorpe Road over the canal. It is named after the nearby Crow Mills.

Bridge No: 93 – Vice's Bridge is named after the Vice family, father and son, who ran the nearby Blaby Mills and 10 acres of land. William Vice was born in 1793 in Gumley. He and his wife Charlotte nee Wright had five children, the family living at Mill Lodge. Blaby Mill was destroyed by fire in November 1857 costing £1,000 but luckily insurance for £750 was in place to cover most of this. William died in 1869 aged 76. Samuel Vice the son continued the business. He was born in c.1828, married Martha Law and the couple had two daughters. Samuel died in 1890 in Blaby RD aged 62.

There was also once a landing stage near the top of Canal Street for the collections and deliveries to a nearby iron foundry.

JOHN ELLIS & FAMILY Bridge No: 86

John Ellis (1789-1862) must be one of the most well known and influential people in Leicester. He is probably known best as the man who persuaded George Stephenson to support his plan for what was to become the Leicester & Swannington Railway, and the fact he lived at Belgrave Hall. I intend to write about his life and amazing achievements in the next bulletin.

This piece is about the business interests of the family. With the opening of the Leicester & Swannington Railway John and his brother Joseph began selling coal brought from the Leicestershire coalfields to the canal side at West Bridge. From there the company was to trade for the next 132 years. The railway also brought lime to the site from Breedon, which was sold along with other lime transported by canal from their lime field at Barrow upon Soar. Following the opening of the Midland Counties Railway in 1840 coal and lime was also sold from the wharves at Leicester and Syston and a further depot opened soon after at Soar Lane.

The lime business did particularly well and in the early 1840s the company (by then John Ellis & Sons) was renting land at Barrow to extract and burn limestone in their own kilns. Barrow lime had been used for centuries and produced a strong mortar, even setting under water, very suitable for seaside pier foundations and used extensively on the London underground. Another commodity traded was Swithland slate.

With the opening of the Leicester & Hitchin Railway in 1857 there were new outlets for coal and lime when wharves were opened at Wigston Magna, Great Glen and Kibworth stations. The lime works in Wigston had been operated on a small scale for some years, but was bought by the Ellis family c.1870. It covered an area of about 25 acres on the east side of Welford Road mostly between the railway and canal. A special rail siding was put in place for the dispatch of lime and receipt of the large amounts of coal required in the burning process (almost a quarter ton per ton of lime produced). The transport was shared with the adjacent canal and coal was traded from Kilby Bridge.

Lime was used for agricultural purposes, sewage treatment, and making plaster and cement. Cement technology was improving rapidly and it was found that good cilica shale that is necessary to produce strong cement when burnt with lime could be shipped from Kilby Bridge area. This led to the core development of the business of John Ellis and Sons – the manufacture of concrete products which started in 1890s. Initially paving slabs, kerbs and sewer pipes were the main products and there followed reinforced structures, components like roof beams, stairways and flooring. Other products were reservoirs, water towers, fence and gate posts, telegraph and signal columns and swimming baths.

To increase the excavation of shale and limestone at Kilby Bridge as the quarrying of lime had ceased at Barrow upon Soar in the early 1920s, a new drag line was purchased in 1925. However a few years later it was found that necessary minerals for producing cement could be purchased more cheaply from Wirksworth in Derbyshire, so the Kilby Bridge site was closed in 1931. The coal trade had already stopped in 1928. The Ellis land at Kilby Bridge including a farm and cottages were sold in 1948. The company thereafter concentrated on expanding the concrete market. The company was bought by Redland Holdings in 1960 but retained the name until 1973. In 1997 Redland became part of Lafarge Aggregates Ltd.

Tricia Berry