



W F K M

# WIGSTON HERITAGE

GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

21 Blakesley Road, Wigston Magna, LE18 3WD

And

WIGSTON FRAMEWORK KNITTERS MUSEUM

42/44 Bushloe End, Wigston Magna



**“Something Evil This Way Comes”, Witches in Wigston, see page 7**

**BULLETIN 124**

**1<sup>st</sup> November 2022**

## FROM THE CHAIRMAN

### What's in a Date?

No not the sort that you eat. I well remember history lessons at school when we had to learn the names of Kings and Queens and the dates relating to each. I hated these and could not understand why we had to learn them.

Sixty odd years later Linda and I were on the Wirral in our motorhome visiting Liverpool with Ann and Peter Cousins. I now know why I should have paid attention at school. Everything has a date attached to it and most of the buildings or events were directly linked to monarchs of the time. It is like being back at school but this time I have an interest in the dates and how they relate to people and places.

About fifteen years ago, before I became Chairman, I started to make a list of dates and events as they related to the history of Wigston and the surrounding area. This list has grown over time and is available for all to see at the Heritage Centre or on our website. Please have a look and see if you can add to it. We want to know more recent interesting items and their start or ending dates. For instance, one could be the date when O&WBC started to charge for parking in Wigston.

If you have any items, please let Mike Forryan have them.

Mike Forryan

## OBITUARIES

### Jean Lucas

We sadly announce that Jean Lucas, wife of Duncan Lucas passed away on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July this year aged 91. Jean was a great supporter of the Society since the beginning in 1989. She will be sadly missed.

We send our thoughts and condolences to the Lucas family.

**Society's website: [www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)**

**All enquiries to: [secretary@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:secretary@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)**

**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**

**email: [bulletineditor@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:bulletineditor@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)**

**four clear weeks before publication date**

# IMPORTANT - PLEASE NOTE

## CHANGE OF MEETING VENUE AND CHANGE OF DAY

As from September 2022 the Greater Wigston Historical Society meetings will now be held at:

**THE MENPHYS HUB, BASSETT STREET, SOUTH WIGSTON,  
LEICESTER, LE18 4PE.**

Parking is available on site via Timber Street or on the Countesthorpe Road car park. Doors will open from 6.45pm and the meeting starts at 7.15pm. Please remember that our meetings will now be on a **TUESDAY** evening.

We look forward to seeing you at our meetings.

**TUESDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2022**

FOXTON LOCKS AND INCLINED  
PLANE (POWERPOINT & PICTURES)  
MARY MATTS

**TUESDAY 13 DECEMBER 2022**

CHRISTMAS EXTRAVAGANZA  
MARKET HARBOROUGH  
SINGING GROUP "OLD FRIENDS"  
WITH *FREE MEMBERS ONLY*

The Christmas meeting on 13 December 2022 will be an evening of music and song performed by the Market Harborough "Old Friends". There will be a **FREE** buffet supplied to members during the evening, as well as wine and soft drinks. The hall will have round tables to sit at, and the buffet will be placed on these tables, saving you having to queue for the food.

The buffet is **FREE** for members, non-members and guests £5 per person. To enable us to order the correct amount we need to know if you would like to attend the evening. If you would like to attend, can you please let the Secretary Ann Cousins know.

E-mail [secretary@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:secretary@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)



### Car Share to and from GWHS Meetings at The Menphys Hub Bassett Street

We had a great turnout, 59, for our first meeting at The Menphys Hub in Bassett Street, but we just wondered if there were any members who would have liked to attend but don't want to drive at night. There might also be members who do attend the meetings who would be willing to offer a lift to others. In either case, please contact a committee member and let us have your details and we will see what we can do.

## MEETING REPORTS – September 2022 By Steve Marquis

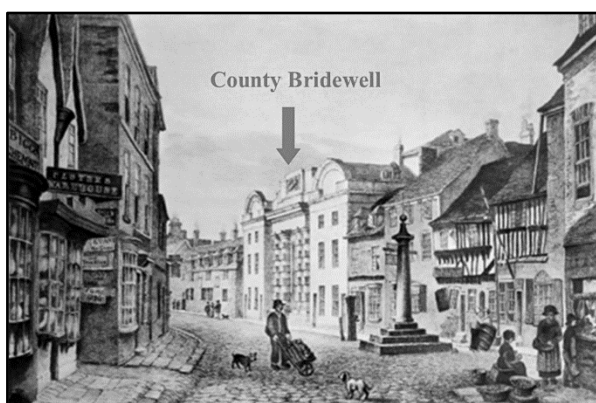
This was the first meeting held in our new home, the Menphys Hub, Bassett Street, South Wigston. There was an excellent attendance and most of the audience seemed to have found the talk on Daniel Lambert especially interesting.

The talk was presented by Phillippa Massey, who, until it was closed, was the curator of Stamford Museum with responsibility for the museum's Daniel Lambert collection. Lambert died there in 1809 and is buried in the local church of St. Martins. At his death he weighed 52 stones.

Daniel Lambert was born in Leicester in 1770, his father was keeper of the County Bridewell in Highcross Street, one of the county's two prisons. The wider Lambert family were mainly involved in the various animal blood sports throughout the county, in which Daniel himself would be an active participant, particularly cock fighting, for most of his adult life.

At the age of fourteen he was apprenticed to Benjamin Patrick, a diesinker (engraver) in Birmingham's jewellery quarter. He returned to Leicester in 1791, possibly as a result of Patrick's business being destroyed in the infamous Joseph Priestley riots of that year. Lambert became an assistant to his father at the Bridewell and after his father's death in 1797, takes over his role as keeper. He would do this job until the Bridewell was closed in 1804. Although receiving a pension of £50 per annum, Lambert was soon in financial difficulties. It was at this stage that his weight began to increase exponentially, reaching 49 stones by 1804. He had apparently been very robust and energetic in his youth and actively engaged in several sports and remained so until 1801 or 1802 when his massive bulk forced him to stop.

In order to raise funds, Lambert began in 1806 to exhibit himself as a kind of freak, not in one of the very popular 'freak shows' of this era, but by inviting paying guests to see and converse with him in a private room. His first venture was in London and seemed to have been very successful and lucrative. He would periodically undertake these exhibition tours for the last few years of his life, and this is why he was in Stamford in 1809.



**Highcross Street, 1800**



**Most iconic image**

## **BITS AND BOBS FROM WIGSTON PAST – NUMBER 3**

### ***A story in the Illustrated Police News - Saturday 6 April 1912***

A collier from Blaby, who was being escorted to the Leicester Asylum, escaped and ran to Wigston. He broke into Woodbine House, 62 Central Avenue, and ran upstairs, removing all his clothes, attacking engine driver Robert Butlin and his wife Sarah, and hitting Sarah over the head. Eventually, two constables came, and after a lengthy struggle, the collier was secured and transferred to Leicester Asylum.

The family had an adopted daughter called Ellen Loakes, one son Ernest and a daughter, Constance. Robert died in 1915.

### ***Morrison Electrical Workers Trip to Skegness***

The story goes that four of the workers decided it might be a great idea to take one of the electric vehicles to Skegness for the day, it would have the range on one battery charge. They calculated that it would last the whole journey so decided on a date and set off. They had a great day in Skegness and started the journey home. On the way they realised that they had miscalculated when the battery ran flat. Oops. What a long push up all the hills and a rest gliding down.

It would be interesting to find out more about the story, so if anyone knows anything please let me know.

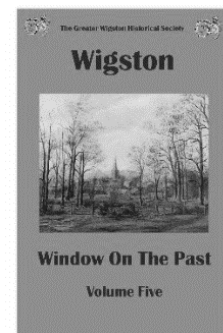
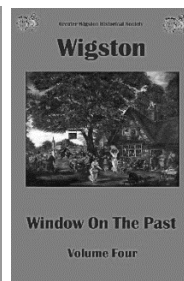
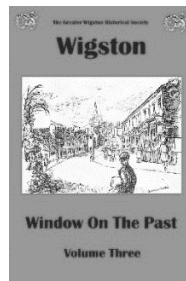
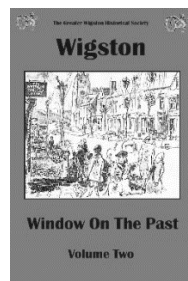
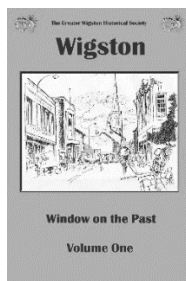
**Mike Forryan**

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## **G.W.H.S. Books: *Wigston – Window on the Past* Series**

**Available Now**

**Out in November**



**Details at: [www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk/GWHS-ONLINE-STORE.htm](http://www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk/GWHS-ONLINE-STORE.htm)**



## **Extract # 2 from ‘The Household Guide of 1894’**

### **Practical Rules for Bathing**

1. Bathe at least once a week all over, thoroughly. No one can preserve his health and neglect personal cleanliness. Remember, “Cleanliness is akin to Godliness.”
2. Only mild soap should be used in bathing the body.
3. Wipe quickly and dry the body thoroughly with a moderately coarse towel. Rub the skin vigorously.
4. Many people have contracted severe and fatal diseases by neglecting to take proper care of the body after bathing.
5. If you get up a good reaction by thorough rubbing in a mild temperature, the effect is always good.
6. Never go into a cold room or allow cold air to enter the room until you are dressed.
7. Bathing in cold rooms and in cold water, is positively injurious, unless the person possesses a very strong and vigorous constitution, and then there is great danger of laying the foundation of some serious disease.
8. Never bathe within two hours after eating. It injures digestion.
9. Never bathe when the body or mind is much exhausted. It is liable to check the healthful circulation.
10. A good time for bathing is just before retiring. The morning hour is a good time also, if a warm room and warm water can be secured.
11. Never bathe a fresh wound or broken skin with cold water; the wound absorbs water and causes swelling and irritation.
12. A person not robust should be very careful in bathing; great care should be exercised to avoid any chilling effects.

**Extract by Mike Forryan**



# ‘Something Wicked This Way Comes’

## Witches in Wigston



16<sup>th</sup> century woodcut

If the number of trials of supposed witches is a true guide, then it appears that Leicestershire, including Wigston, was inundated with witches and devil worshipping covens during the late Middle Ages. In fact, the very last indictment for witchcraft in an English secular court arose from events in Wigston during the summer of 1717.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of August that year, Jane Clarke of the village of Wigston Magna

along with her son and daughter, Joseph and Mary, were dragged before the court in Leicester by twenty-five of their neighbours who were convinced they were witches. The villagers accused the Clarkes of harassing them with black magic, causing illness and even the death of one villager, Mary Hatchings.

Witnesses told the court, presided over by Justice Ashby, how the witches' victims were suddenly stricken with unnatural seizures. The 'supernatural' nature of their illness was further reinforced when they began to cough up dirt and stones. At night, the witches gave their victims no peace as they manifested before them, in either human or animal form. When the local church Minister failed to break the curse, the villagers were forced to turn to a local 'white witch' Thomas Wood for help. Wood attempted to remove the curse and identify the witches by boiling the victims' urine. This curious remedy summoned ghostly apparitions of the Clarkes into the room where they grimaced threateningly at him before vanishing up the chimney.

Once identified, the Clarkes were set upon by a mob of angry villagers. They were stripped and searched for witch's marks and bled to try and break the spells. In his book, titled *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951*, Owen Davies writes that the Clarkes may have undergone the 'swimming test'. This meant lowering the accused into a pool of water via chair or rope. If they floated it would be a signifier of guilt. If they sank, the person would be deemed innocent and allowed to live, unless they had already drowned during the test which was not unheard of. Each of the Clarkes, apparently, floated "like a cork or an empty barrel" according to one witness statement at the trial. Judge Ashby, however, was not convinced and threw the case out of court. By this stage, very few trials of witches resulted in guilty verdicts. However, the verdict would likely have been markedly different a century earlier.



‘Swimming Test’ for witches

## Other Witchcraft Incidents in Leicestershire

In an age of superstition and life very precarious, a poor harvest or periods of rapid economic and social change created fear and resentment, especially amongst those facing hardship. Scapegoating ‘outsiders’ invariably followed, which during the Middle Ages usually meant Jews. However, from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries also frequently took the form of allegations of witchcraft against those who were seen as ‘other’ or ‘nonconforming’ in some way. Between 1542, when the Witchcraft Act introduced capital punishment for those found guilty of ‘diabolism’ (devil worship) and 1736, when this law was abolished, thousands of people in England were accused of being witches and would have suffered hideous torture with up to 1,000 executed, 90% of whom were women. The last known execution for witchcraft in England occurred in Devon in 1685.

Witch-mania reached its peak in this country during the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, sparked by two major events: Guy Fawkes’s attempt to blow up Parliament in 1605 and the Civil War (1642-51) which left a population devastated after almost a decade of bloodshed, hunger, disease and loss of livelihoods in which an estimated one in ten people died. Into this national mood of foreboding arrived the infamous Witchfinder General, Matthew Hopkins, who, along with others, exploited the fears of a traumatised population. Hopkins first significant intervention was at Chelmsford in 1645 where 23 women were accused of witchcraft, of whom 19 were hanged and four died in prison. Of course, Hopkins charged handsomely for his services, it cost Chelmsford



£23 - (£4,000 at today's prices). His clearly extortionate costs and dubious methods of identifying witches, even by the standards of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, were soon met with resistance and Hopkins ceased operating in 1646, he died a year later.



**Matthew Hopkins, Witchfinder General**



**Frontispiece from Matthew Hopkin's *The Discovery of Witches* (1647), showing witches identifying their animal familiars**

James Stuart arrived as King following the death of Queen Elizabeth but with much of population indifferent or even hostile, he was already paranoid about his safety even before the attempt to blow him and the rest of Parliament to smithereens in 1605. In fact, he had feared for his life since a young boy when his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, had abandoned him. Out of this heightened insecurity developed his obsession with witches and demons to such an extent that he even wrote a book on the subject called *Daemonologie* and is suspected of having personally overseen the torture of accused witches. This book would have a profound influence on the hunt for and how subsequent trials of supposed witches were conducted for the next century, not only in England but across a growing Empire; the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 being the most famous example. King James believed the terrible storm he encountered on his return from Denmark, with his new bride, was caused by witchcraft, resulting in the infamous Berwick Witch Trials of 1590, which led to ninety-six people being accused of 'diabolism', ninety of them women, of whom seventy went to the stake.

Following the Gunpowder Plot, a period of almost hysterical anti-Catholic feelings led to largescale persecution of suspected Catholics, including increasing numbers of mainly women being accused of witchcraft as part of the general moral panic. It was in this frenzied atmosphere that the notorious Pendle witches' case (in Lancashire, a strong Catholic area) occurred in 1612, eventually resulting in ten people being executed, mainly from two families headed by eighty-year-old matriarchs, both of whom were well-known local 'Cunning women' i.e., traditional folk healers and mid-wives. Of the ten who were found guilty eight were women, their fate largely sealed due to the testimony of one of the condemned women's own nine-year-old daughter.

Most of the devil worshipping cases during this period were driven by ambitious politicians or churchmen seeking career advancement, or in the case of Hopkins, financial rewards. In the Pendle incident that person was local JP Roger Nowell who hoped his prominent role would get him promoted out of that remote backwater. It appears that Jennet Device, the child witness whose testimony would send her grandmother, mother and brother to the gallows, had stayed with Nowell's family in the weeks leading up to the trial. Ironically, twenty years later, Jennet herself would be accused of being a witch but was found not guilty after spending over a year in a filthy prison.

Events in Pendle seem to have strongly resonated in Leicestershire, where two famous witchcraft trials took place shortly afterwards.

## **Witches in Belvoir Castle**

One of the most renowned incidents involved Frances Manners, sixth Earl of Rutland, who claimed to have been the victim of witchcraft at the hands of Joan Flower and her two daughters, Philippa and Margaret. The three servants at Belvoir Castle who had been dismissed sometime in 1613 – just a few months after the events in Pendle – were accused of various forms of "lewd" and 'irreligious' behaviour.

Soon after, the Earl and his wife became very ill and their two sons, Henry and Frances, died, presumably from the same illness, which was hardly uncommon at this time. It seems the Earl saw it differently and had his recently dismissed servants arrested and taken to Lincoln for 'examination'. Under torture Joan Flower died and her daughters unsurprisingly confessed to many of the usual stereotypical 'witches' practices' also implicating three other women as members of their 'satanic coven'.

The Flower sisters were burnt at the stake, but the other three women were acquitted and set free. Earl Frances's tomb in St Mary's Church, Bottesford, is apparently the only one in this country that makes reference to witchcraft, it includes the inscription: "two sonnes, both who died in their infancy by wicked practise and sorcerye".



Earl Frances Manner's tomb



Relevant part of the plaque on Francis Manner's tomb, the only one in the country to make a reference to witchcraft

## Nine women hanged after boy accused them of witchcraft

A second and even more bizarre and shocking witches' persecution occurred in Husbands Bosworth in 1616, again, largely as a result of the testimony from a child. Multiple women were accused of witchcraft by a 13-year-old boy named John Smith, who had been having fits and seizures. This case is referenced in a letter published in Vol. 2, Part 2 of John Nichols's *The history and antiquities of the county of Leicester*, published in 1798. The letter is penned by Alderman Robert Heyrick to his brother Sir William Heyrick in 1616 states: -

*"Although we have bene greatly bufyed this 4 or 5 days paft, being fyfe tyme, and a busy fyf speacyally about the araynment of a sort of woomen, Wytches, 9 of them fhal be executed at the gallows this foruone, for bewitching ot a younge gentellman of the adge of 12 or 13 years old, beinge the soon of one Mr. Smythe, of Husbands Bofworth, brother to Mr. Henry Smythe, that made the booke which we call Mr. Smythe's Sarmons."*

In short, this details that nine women had been accused of bewitching a 13-year-old boy and subsequently were to be executed. It is also stated that the boy had been having the "most terrible" fits that were indeed so strong that multiple men had been unable to hold him down. He even began hitting himself, sometimes hundreds of times without causing damage. The nine women, who were never named, were blamed for causing these fits through witchcraft. Six of the accused women were also said to have had animal-like spirits that tormented the child and this is also detailed within the same letter where it says: -

*"6 of the witches had 6 feverall fperits, one in the lyknes of a hors, another like a dog, another a cat, another a pullemar, another a fifhe, another a code, with whom evary one of them tormented him...."*



All nine of the convicted women were hanged on the gallows in Leicester. This wasn't the end of the story, a few months later six more women were accused of committing similar demonic acts against Smith. Fortunately, for five of the six women, a pardon was given from the "highe-sherive"; one had unfortunately already died in prison. It seems that the pardon had been directed by the intervention of King James I, who had arrived in Leicester to review the case. Even the witches and demons fixated Monarch could see that John Smith was a fraud. It is not known what happened to the young 13-year-old boy or whether he was punished for his false accusations.



**The public hanging of witches in Scotland. Coloured engraving, 1678**

Leicestershire's last recorded witchcraft related incident occurred in Great Glen, just a few miles from Wigston in 1760, when two old women accused each other of being a witch and even agreed to being subjected to the swimming test, where one sunk and one floated, thus 'proving' her guilt. A sort of local frenzy followed, and several old women were attacked for being witches. Witchcraft was no longer a criminal offence by 1760 and the only court case to arise from this event involved some of the rioters receiving small fines.

In 1735, the Witchcraft Act made it illegal for a person to falsely accuse another of witchcraft. Fraudulently claiming to have magical powers was also made punishable by a fine or a prison sentence under the act. The last known case of a person being imprisoned for 'sorcery' in the UK was a woman named Helen Duncan in 1944, who it was said could produce ectoplasm. It was later found that the ectoplasm was cheesecloth.

Most people today would, often in a slightly condescending way, view this whole episode as a result of Medieval ignorance and prejudice, a reflection of a long-lost world of trepidation and superstition. Yet it seems that the psychological

driving forces behind the witchcraft hysteria are still with us, even if today they take on a different form. I think most people would be surprised how many exorcisms of supposed 'evil spirits' are still carried out in this country, in fact, they have risen significantly in recent years, including by the Church of England. The release of the film *Exorcist* in 1973 had a significant impact in highlighting this issue. There have been several cases of children being abused, even killed, in rituals to drive out 'demons', especially in some of the evangelical churches with links to Africa.

Scapegoating people who are foreign, different or 'other', especially in times of crisis, has hardly been confined to the dustbin of history.

The torture and persecution of thousands of women as 'witches' throughout Europe during this period, is perhaps history's most extreme example of misogynistic brutality but hardly unique. As I write this article, misogynist behaviour in Parliament is dominating the news; the forcing of unmarried teenage mothers to give their babies up for adoption as late as the 1970s, was also a recent news story as was the Magdalene Laundries scandal in Ireland; not to mention the almost daily murders of women and girls, mostly by men known to them. The recent murder of Sarah Everhard by Metropolitan policeman, Wayne Cousins, perhaps the most shocking. Mass rape as a gratuitous military strategy is increasingly being adopted in numerous conflicts around the world, most horrifying of all, of course, was the atrocity against Yazidi women by ISIS and more recently the women of Tigray in Ethiopia and now Ukraine, revealing that the brutal abuse of women continues unabated.

With the arrival of the Age of Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution, such Medieval superstitions were increasingly undermined by our greater understanding of the Universe and the natural laws that govern it. Amazing discoveries and advances in every branch of science and the obvious benefits of rational thinking – the application of science to modern medicine being the most obvious example as shown during the Covid pandemic with the miraculous development of safe, effective vaccines in record time. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with mankind on the brink of travelling to Mars and beyond, the appeal of the 'unknown' and belief in the 'supernatural' is still very attractive to many people, which is great news for novelists and film makers working in the horror genre. The 2015 film *The Witch* and the recent sitcom *Witchfinder General* and endless numbers of vampire, zombie books and films reflecting this widespread fascination with the 'paranormal'. Harmless enough, but more questionable is the willingness of so many people to believe the most ridiculous conspiracy theories – especially since the arrival of the internet – for instance, those which surfaced during the recent pandemic, including misinformation around vaccines; the assertion that 5G mobile phone masts were responsible; even that the pandemic was a lie, suggests that the Medieval mindset still thrives in many quarters.

**Steve Marquis**



## The 'Spion Kop' Bridge

We all know the Spion Kop Bridge between Wigston Magna and South Wigston, but why was it built and how did it get its name?

In the picture below we see the level crossing, circa 1885, before the bridge was built. The old road ran across the front of the Midland Hotel which became 'The 1852 Brewery Company'. With the increase in traffic between Magna and South Wigston and the increased frequency of trains on the Leicester to London rail line, the level crossing caused delays and restricted the road traffic flow.



To alleviate this problem plans were made and implemented to build a bridge over the railway. This was built on the southern side of the existing road, 1900 - 1902, where the Wigston Magna station was situated. To accommodate all the proposed changes, it was necessary to redesign the station and access point to the platforms. The access was incorporated into the new bridge with stairs leading to both platforms.

These next two photographs from circa 1908 show the view from Wigston Magna with the Midland Hotel on the right-hand side. The original road can be seen in the picture on the right and the old road is still there today, used as the access road for Midland Cottages (20 Row).



During the period the bridge and new station were being built, the main news topic was the war in South Africa. A specific battle was in progress on the 23rd – 24th January 1900 on the hilltop of Spion Kop, some 38 km west-southwest of Ladysmith. The battle was between British forces and the two Boer Republics – the South African Republic and the Orange Free State. Many troops were homeward bound after this battle, and some came via the Midland Railway into Wigston Magna station and then on to Glen Parva barracks. Being so much in the news the local people nick-named the new bridge ‘Spion Kop’ after the above battle and the name has stuck for well over 100 years.

**Mike Forryan**



**Early 1960's**



**September 2022**

## EPISODE 15                      WIGGY'S CHILD

(As written and punctuated in 1998)

### THE PICNIC



IT wasn't our fault Violet fell into the cow-pat. We cleaned her up the best we could with hankies dipped in the canal water. Her pinafore fared the worst, so we took it off and laid it out on the grass to dry off.

"What will me Mam say?" sobbed Violet.

"What she 'allus' says, tell the truth and shame the devil," said young Albert, philosophically.

Whether the Devil could be shamed, we had no means of knowing.

Violet continued to wail. "Oh, do give over, come on, if you pick some daisies, we'll make a daisy chain before we 'ave our tea. We were not having our picnic in Railway Field spoiled by such trivial details.

The boys raced off kicking their 'football' made from a rolled-up ball of newspaper tied with string, between times running back to the railway fence as the signal creaked upwards. We could see the signalman in his box along the line pull the levers, and we would listen to the distant rumble as the train approached along 'the straight'!

As the great engine thundered past, belching smoke and steam, we would wave to the men on the footplate, sometimes, to our delight, a "whoo-oo" on the whistle sounded in acknowledgement. We watched as the signal clanked down, only the smell of the train smoke lingered in the air. The boys returned to their game of football, and we girls set about preparing our tea.

Violet, now festooned with daisies, laid out our jam sandwiches and, one arrowroot biscuit per head, while I poured cold tea into the handle-less cups we were allowed to use for picnics. I shouted the boys who had wandered off down to the canal at the bottom of the field. "Come on, you lot, tea's ready."

Wolfing his jam sandwich, Reggie peered into his cup. "My tea's got a 'wobbie' in it," he announced.

"Chuck it out then, it won't sting yer if it's drowned," said Albert, "you can still drink it."

Waste not Want not was our watchword!

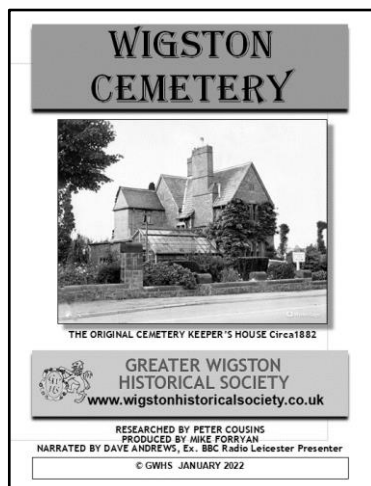
After tea, we would walk down to the canal, over the stile, on to the towpath and along to "Turnover". If we were lucky, a horse drawn barge would come through. We would watch fascinated as the horse was unhitched and led over the bridge, while the Bargee would place a wooden plank (pirate fashion) from the side of his barge, lie on his back along the plank, lift his feet and "walk" the brick bridge to propel the barge through. The patient horse would be hitched up again, ready to continue towing the barge towards Kilby Bridge. Before we returned home,

we would pick a bunch of buttercups and dog-daisies for Mother, hoping to avert her wrath when she saw Violet's pinafore.



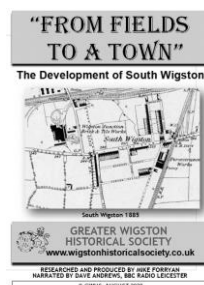
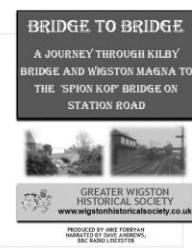
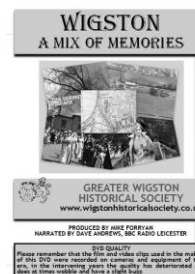
Doreen Boulter, 1988

## NEW DVD AVAILABLE



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Available at meetings, at the Heritage Centre, or by post from the website  
[www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk/GWHS-ONLINE-STORE.html](http://www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk/GWHS-ONLINE-STORE.html)



The main aim of this section is to encourage and provide the opportunity for members to directly engage with the Society's Bulletin. Letters on the article below or any other subject would be very welcome, especially personal memories on any topic regarding Wigston and district's past. General articles are also welcome.

### **Do the terms 'heritage' and 'history' mean the same thing?**

The Chairman's excellent piece in the last Bulletin looking at how the history of big events is portrayed through the eyes and experience of local communities, set me thinking about what the main guiding principles and purpose of local historical societies should be in preserving and presenting the history of their own communities.

We are members of an 'Historical' Society, and our Bulletin is called 'Wigston Heritage' as is the Centre. Most people do not differentiate and readily interchange both terms but do these two words, in fact, have the same meaning? It seems to me that there are subtle differences in the way the terms 'Heritage' and 'History' are generally interpreted and used.

For me, 'Heritage' describes a process that tries to preserve and tell the entire story of a geographical place and/or culture, race, religion. It generally implies a more descriptive rather than an interpretive approach. For example, political events are recorded merely as incidents with a tendency to try to avoid or playdown any controversial issues such as 'political', or perhaps more accurately, 'party political' developments, which in today's climate needs to be managed carefully. The proscribing of overtly party political (especially contemporary) issues by the *Wigston Remembered* website seems to me to be a sensible and appropriate requirement.

That said, it must be remembered that political and religious conflict have been integral influences and determining factors in most historical events and cannot be simply airbrushed out and excluded altogether. The selection of what is included or excluded from the narrative on the past is in itself a political act. There is always the danger of romanticising and glorifying the past and avoiding more disturbing even villainous episodes. For instance, there has been much discussion recently within



the National Heritage Society concerning how it should deal with the more controversial history of some of its sites.

The concept of 'History', whilst for me at least, should also primarily be about telling a story, but with a narrative that is as far as possible honest, truthful and contains every aspect of the past, 'warts and all'. Every nation's story is a combination of positive and negative aspects, good and evil, which is inevitable because a 'nation' is merely an extension of the collective human nature – with all its contradictions – of a group of people living in a particular geographical area.

Having an honest and open discussion about their past is something every country has difficulty in confronting. For example, Belgium has only recently acknowledged its genocidal behaviour in the so-called Belgian Congo; Japan is still reluctant to fully acknowledge its murderous actions in Korea and China; Turkey continues to refuse to confront its brutal treatment of the Armenian people at the end of WW1. USA and Australia have both had difficulties in coming to terms with the virtual destruction of their indigenous peoples. This is largely because history is tied to 'national identity' and notions of 'patriotism' will inevitably become a propaganda weapon in political arguments over defining a national story.

In Britain, recent controversies over the legacy of slavery and the British Empire in general have ignited a fierce national debate, which is becoming increasingly politically divisive and acrimonious – to a large extent exacerbated by Brexit and the Black Lives Matter Campaign – reinforcing a tendency for the political discourse to become little more than a shouting contest resulting in two very different national stories.

Some people may wish to avoid covering more controversial subjects altogether, but this, in my view, would mean presenting a sanitised and false account of the past, and surely a disservice to our ancestors by ignoring many of the beliefs, political views and battles they passionately supported and thought so important at the time.

For me, the main question is how to both celebrate the past and deal with the more contentious issues in a calm, objective, constructive and generally acceptable manner.

**Steve Marquis**

## A bit harsh!

### Oadby and Wigston amongst the most unhappy places to live in England

So declared the magazine, *My London*, in a recent article informing potential house buyers wishing to vacate the Capital of the most desirable places to move to. Using a survey carried out by the *Daily Telegraph*, which put Oadby and Wigston, along with Melton, just above Boston in Lincolnshire at the bottom of the list and below Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Barrow-in-Furness, as the worst locations to live in England. The survey based their conclusions on several factors, including household income, crime rates, employment and access to green spaces.

**Or is it? Any responses welcome.**



## From the Past

### Wigston One Hundred and Two Hundred Years Ago

## 1922

**First BBC Radio broadcast** – On 14 November 1922, the BBC began daily radio broadcasts. Not only the first in Britain but the whole world. The first programme, at 6 pm, was a news bulletin, supplied by news agencies. This was followed by a weather forecast, prepared by the Met Office. They were read by Arthur Burrows, Director of programmes. Burrows read the bulletin twice, once fast and then slowly, so that listeners could take notes if they wished.

The BBC was initially restricted in what and when it could broadcast, amid fears from the government that it would drown out official communications, and from the newspapers that it would steal their readers.



## **From the Leicester Mercury, 1922**

**Price of Gas** – The Board of Trade fixed the price of gas at 15d per therm (the Wigston Gas Company asked for 17d) in 1922. Today the price per therm is £149.49, with average annual cost of gas for a typical three-bedroom house around £1,000 (June 2022). A hundred years ago that would have been roughly £18 per annum, taking inflation into account, £18 would equate to approximately £1,150 today, which surprised me.

**Crime wave in South Wigston** – four boys charged with breaking into factories in South Wigston. Bertram Brewin (14), Ernest Lomas (15) both shoe workers, Oliver Belben (14), Samuel Wynder (11) both still at school.

Factories broken into were: J.W. Black & Co., £2.4s plus 2 penknives stolen; Orson Wright's Shoe Factory 7s stolen; Dunmore and Sons biscuit factory 7s stolen. Brewin was sent to Borstal for 3 years. Wynder, despite being the youngest, was still seen as a ringleader and sentenced to 3 years at Desford Industrial School. The other two were bound over for a year.

**Death of Crimean Veteran** – Charles King aged 84 of 34 Saffron Lane, Glen Parva. He joined the Grenadier Guards in 1854 and took part in the siege of Sebastopol. King had lived in South Wigston for many years, working on the railways until he retired.

**Diphtheria Epidemic** – 27 cases in January, all local schools closed.

## **1822 From the Leicester Chronicle**

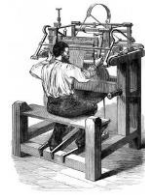
**Didn't quite make it** – Mr Swain having taken ill in South Wales, where he then lived, attempted to return home to Wigston to see a local doctor who he highly respected. Unfortunately, he died in the Bull's Head in Hinckley, just a few miles from home.

**Marriages** – Mr Thomas Vann to Miss Spriggs. Mr James Jackson to Mrs. Goodrich.

**Early Deaths** – John Burrell, aged 6 and Miss Earp, aged 19. Modern medicine, thankfully, has profoundly transformed this sad situation.

**Steve Marquis**

# Wigston Framework Knitters Museum



W F K M

## Brief History of Framework Knitting – Part One

### Chapter 1 – The invention of the Knitting Machine

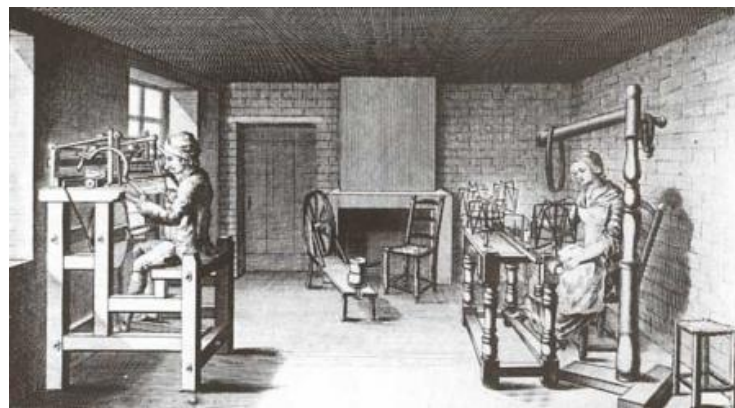
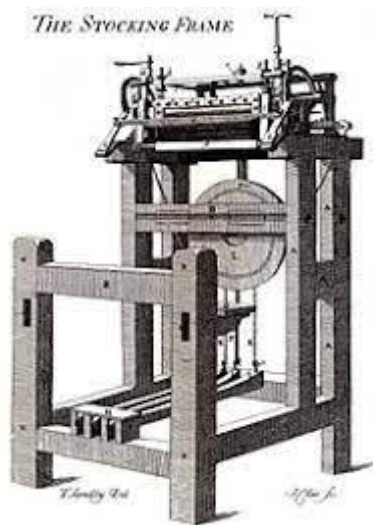
The Knitting Machine was invented in 1589 by the Rev. William Lee of Calverton in Nottinghamshire, who must be considered as being one of the very few original inventors to have lived. Many inventors are usually the improvers of machines already in existence. No knitting machine had ever been constructed before Lee made the stocking frame. He had to develop the idea and work it out in practical terms without any guidance from past experience.



There are many conflicting stories surrounding the life of the inventor of the first framework knitting machine. What prompted its invention and the background of its inventor are shrouded in doubt and mystery. One such story, published by Gravenor Henson in 1831, is well worth relating. Gravenor says that his account of Lee and his invention was derived from old people that he had talked to no doubt adding some embellishments of his own. “The invention of the knitting machine (since better known by the name of the stocking frame, and the workmen as framework knitters) owed its origin, as is universally agreed, to a singular circumstance, the disappointed love of the inventor, the Rev. William Lee, curate of Calverton, in the county of Nottingham. This gentleman, it is said,

paid his addresses to a young woman in his neighbourhood, to whom, from some cause, his attentions were not agreeable; or, as with more probability it has been conjectured, she affected to treat him with negligence, to ascertain her power over his affections. Whenever he paid his visits, she always took care to be busily employed in knitting and would pay no attention to his addresses; this conduct she pursued to such a harsh extent, and he vowed to devote his future leisure, instead of dancing attendance on a capricious woman, who treated his attention with cold neglect, in devising an invention that should effectually supersede her favourite employment of knitting”.

A rather different account of Lee and his invention had been noted by John Aubrey who, sometime after 1656, wrote the following about William Lee: ‘Mr. William Lee, MA, was of Oxford (I think Magdalene Hall). He was the first inventor of the weaving of stockings by an engine of his contrivance. He was a Sussex man born, or else lived there. He was a poor curate, and, observing how great pains his wife took in knitting a pair of stockings, he bought a stocking and a half, and observed the contrivance of the stitch, which he designed in his loom, which (though some of the appendant instruments of the engine be altered) keeps the same to this day. He went to France and died there before his loom was made there. So, the art was, not long since, in no part of the world but England. Oliver Protector made an Act that it should be a felony to transport this engine’.



**18<sup>th</sup> century framework knitter's cottage**

However much such stories may differ it seems fairly certain from contemporary accounts that William Lee invented a knitting machine in 1589. After perfecting his machine, it appears that William Lee moved to London to set himself up in business, due to local animosity. There was strong opposition to Lee's machine from the hand-knitters at first, and Queen Elizabeth herself understood and sympathised with their anxieties. When Lee's patron, Lord Hunsdon, asked her to grant the inventor a patent, she refused. ‘My Lord,’ she said, ‘I have too much love for my poor people who obtain their bread by the



employment of knitting, to give my money to forward an invention that will tend to their ruin by depriving them of employment, and thus make them beggars'. Despairing of success in his own country, William Lee went to France and with the patronage of the French King set up in business in Rouen.

What happened next is again wide open to conjecture but it seems that William Lee died in Rouen and the widespread use of the framework knitting machine in London was due to the efforts of his brother James Lee. By the end of the seventeenth century what has been described as the most complicated piece of machinery employed in the preindustrial world was in increasingly extensive use in England and also in various European countries.

Hosiery making with the use of Lee's stocking frame took root in the East Midlands partly because of the Lee family's association with Nottingham but also because of the growing use of wool, and later cotton, in a market that had originally been confined to silk. As the product became cheaper so the market extended. The demand for labour in the growing hosiery trade stimulated the move from London where the rules of the Company of Framework Knitters limited the number of apprentices that could be employed.

Leicestershire's first stocking frame was set up at Hinckley in 1640 by William Iliffe, and within twenty years fifty frames were at work in Leicestershire, compared with Nottinghamshire's hundred. Leicester itself did not have its first frame until about 1680, but early in the following century, the number of frames in Leicester had overtaken the number in Nottingham, providing the earliest large-scale answer to the problem of 'setting the poor to work', and beginning that slow but steady flow of people into the towns from the outlying villages and hamlets.

By the end of the 17th century, the detailed lists of possessions William Lee the inventor of the knitting machine in many Leicestershire wills, show that framework knitting was relatively widespread in the countryside. One of the earliest will's that mentions a stocking frame is the inventory of George Hogsonn of Dishley Mill, dated 4 February 1660. One hundred years later framework knitting was even more widely spread throughout the Leicestershire countryside; in the latter part of the 18th century, it is evident in 118 of the county's villages and hamlets.

Wills from the 18th century show that it was usually combined with farming. The will of William Lester, a Shepshed stockinger, who died on 19th November 1755, left several parcels of arable land, meadows and pastures in three of the Town Fields as well as other parcels of land at Frogghole and Dorkin meadow situated in Shepshed. He also left his daughter Mary the not inconsiderable sum for that day and age of £42.

## **Tony Danvers**

In the next chapter - The Beginning of the Decline in Framework Knitting

## **The Secret Garden Autumn 2022 Update Wigston Framework Knitting Museum**

Firstly apologies, I wrote this article to go into the summer edition of the bulletin. but missed the deadline. I have reworded some of it and brought it up to date. Over the winter further planting has been carried out, but the dry spring meant we had to water to keep the plants alive. I have also planted a bee friendly selection of plants, doing our bit to encourage more bees into the garden.

In February we had our usual “Snowdrop Sunday”, the weather was a bit damp, so I took the decision to have another the following Sunday. The weather was even worse, but overall, we had a reasonable turnout. The bluebells, forget-me-nots, were a ‘blue haze’ as Monty Don says. Aquilegias, lupins, digitalis and delphiniums etc. all put on a wonderful show.

During June and July, we opened again for the National Garden Scheme, as last year we had many visitors, and most were amazed we had a large walled garden. Getting ready for any garden opening can be a bit of a challenge and full of anticipation, you want the garden to look at its best for paying visitors. I had every confidence in all the gardeners and the garden again looked stunning. These events are important to the museum in terms of publicity and of course revenue. I am just planning next year’s open dates.

This year we welcomed 2 new volunteers to the gardening group, Bernadette and Mehmet. Mehmet is younger than all of us so gets the heavy jobs! We now have a reasonable number but always room for others.

We have a new addition to the garden, a fruit cage for our soft fruits. Last year the birds stripped all the fruit but not this year. The cage is made of bamboo canes which I thought more in keeping than a solid wooden or metal frame structure, which would dominate. I planted broad beans, lettuce, carrots, beetroot, peas and runner beans, which gave mixed results because of the hot dry weather, the produce was available to the gardeners, free of course. All the apple trees now have engraved signs on them to give visitors information.

At a recent meeting a former gardener said he thought the garden was different but the same, I take that as a positive as we have done much replanting over the past 2 years but kept to the spirit of the garden, higgeldy, piggeldy.

Like any garden we will evolve over time and with the help of the volunteers we will maintain the garden to a high standard for our visitors to enjoy for years to come.

During the past 2 years we have opened the garden on Wednesday afternoons during the summer months, but have seen disappointingly few visitors and will not repeat this next year.

## **Archaeology**

You may remember in 2010 a TV programme called The Story of England where over 50 test pits were dug in Kibworth to find the history of the village. Based on that I have undertaken a test pit dig in the garden, this was over 6 Sunday afternoons. I had no expectations on what I might find but it was an interesting experiment, with interesting finds of pottery, dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century, it brought in many visitors especially young children who were fascinated, and some even had a dig themselves. The excavated soil had to be sieved, a tedious job so my thanks to all who helped, including visitors. All the finds will be logged and dated and displayed next year with a story of the dig, it all adds to the story of the museum.

## **Afternoon Teas**

During June, July and August we organised afternoon teas in the parlour including a tour of the museum and garden. This was pre bookable only as cakes/sandwiches were made to bookings, this has proved so popular we have had to limit how many we do, there are plans to do 4 dates in December with the parlour suitably decked out as Victorian Christmas. Thanks to Linda Boulter for coming up with the idea.



**If you have any questions or suggestions for the garden, please get in touch.**

**Chris Huscroft**

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