



W F K M

WIGSTON HERITAGE

GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

And The

WIGSTON FRAMEWORK KNITTERS MUSEUM

42/44 Bushloe End, Wigston Magna



Glen Parva Barracks during WW1, see article page 5.

BULLETIN 125

1st March 2023

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Ex Chairman's Comment



Stepping down as Chairman of the Historical Society has been a big decision for me but it was a necessity if the society is to continue and prosper. Many Societies have disappeared over the years because there was no continuity planning. As the committee gets older and people

leave it is often too late to find younger people who are willing to serve and continue the growth for members. By stepping down now there is plenty of time to recruit new committee members.

I have full confidence in our new Chairman, Peter Cousins, and the rest of the committee to find younger members to continue the development of the Society and the Heritage Centre. Linda is also leaving the committee, but we will both be very active with the Heritage Centre, and I will continue with the management of the Digital Archive and the Facebook pages.

14 years in the position of Chairman has flown by but I was very pleased to be able to serve the Society. Thank you to everyone for supporting myself and the Society.

Mike Forryan

I'm sure every member of the GWHS would wish to express their thanks and gratitude for the tremendous service both Mike and Linda have given the Society over those 14 years and more recently to the Heritage Centre. It is also great news that Mike has agreed to carry on with his vital contribution in managing the Digital Archive and Facebook pages.

Steve Marquis

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

ALL ENQUIRIES TO: secretary@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

The Bulletin is published three times a year on 1st March, July and November.

Articles etc., (which are always welcome) and should be submitted to the Editor.

email: bulletineditor@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

four clear weeks before publication date.

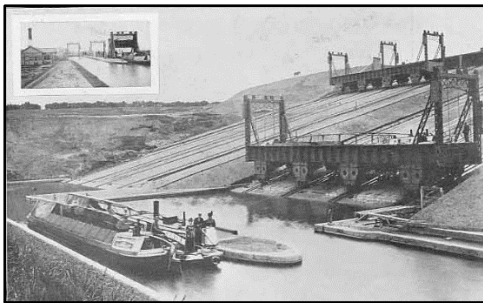
RECENT MEETINGS

October 2022



Bridget Blair gave a very entertaining talk about her time as a Radio Leicester journalist. Her talk was full of amusing anecdotes, including one about Nellie, aged 92, who suffered from severe arthritis in her hands and found a novel way to massage them.

November 2022



A very detailed presentation by Mary Matts on Foxton Locks and its Inclined Plane. Built in 1900, the inclined plane was a commercial disaster and was closed after only ten years. It was finally dismantled in 1926.

December 2022 – Christmas Do



A very pleasant evening which was enjoyed by all. The entertainment was provided by the Market Harborough folk group 'Old Friends'.

January 2023



An excellent presentation by Jed Jaggard on the Home Guard. He brought along many interesting artifacts from WW2. Incredibly well-informed not only on the Home Guard but BBC's Dad's Army as well.

The question: How do you stop a tank with an ordinary ceramic plate? Had everyone stumped.

FUTURE MONTHLY MEETINGS

THE MENPHYS HUB, BASSETT STREET, SOUTH WIGSTON, LE18 4PE

Parking is available on site via Timber Street or in 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 21 MARCH 2023

Found As a Missing Person –
Lynett Watson

TUESDAY 18 APRIL 2023

Witchcraft in 17th Century
Leicestershire – Len Holden

TUESDAY 16 MAY 2023

No Greater Enemy: Leicester and
The Influenza Epidemic of 1918 –
Cynthia Brown

TUESDAY 20 JUNE 2023

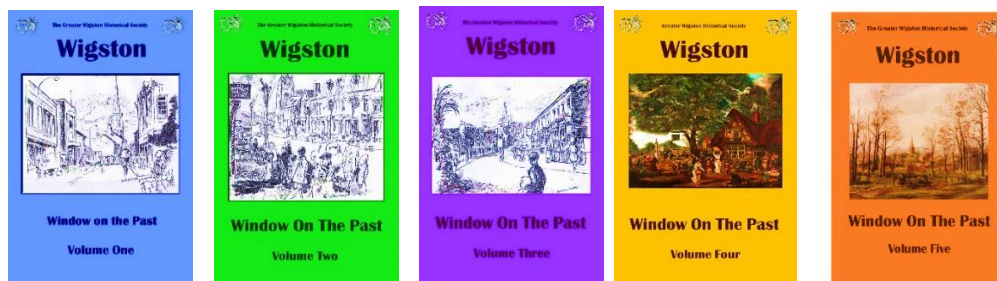
Outing: DMU, Leicester Guided
Tour – Castle (Great Hall),
Trinity Chapel and Heritage
Centre

OBITUARY

We sadly announce the recent passing of one of our members, Hazel Heath, who was a longstanding member of the Society and attended our monthly meetings regularly. Hazel had a keen interest in the local history of Wigston, Oadby and Leicester.

Our thoughts and condolences go out to her family.

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



Available at the Heritage Centre and By Post From The Website

GLEN PARVA BARRACKS



Entrance to Glen Parva Barracks, during WW1

THE entrance to Glen Parva Barracks is seen from Saffron Road. Inside the grounds, in addition to the Victorian barrack blocks, were tennis courts, a cricket pavilion, gymnasium, reading room, billiards room, flower gardens, catering for the social and recreational needs of the soldiers and their friends.

Most of us had family members who fought in the Great War and a great number of those relatives would have passed through the gates of their local barracks. In the case of the Leicestershire Regiment this would have been Glen Parva Barracks. With the current interest in the First World War, it was thought that members who don't live locally may be interested in a little information about the Barracks at Glen Parva and a few pictures of what remains of the barracks today.

The barracks, to accommodate around 500 soldiers, were completed in 1880 on a 20-acre site. They were bordered by Glen Parva Grange to the north, Saffron Road to the east, the old Midland Counties Railway line to Burton on Trent to the south and fields to the west.

The buildings were built of red brick and surrounded by a high red brick wall. As you entered the gates the Guardroom was on the left and the Orderly Room/administration block on the right, this adjoined the Quartermaster's house, the next building was the huge Keep, where all the weapons and ammunition were kept and the Quartermaster's Store, beyond that were the Officers' Mess and their accommodation. The last building on that side was the Hospital, this had two wards and much later an isolation ward was added at the rear.



Glen Parva Barracks buildings

Officers' Mess

Returning to the gates. Just behind the Guard Room was a small 'Fire Station' where a Mobile water pump and hoses were kept. Immediately after the Guard Room was the Parade Ground and large accommodation blocks that reached down to the southern wall. Also in this area was the Gymnasium, Cookhouse, Post Office and Barber's Shop. The large sports field was next and behind this was the 30-yard firing range, pigstyes and vegetable gardens. St Thomas' Church just down the road in South Wigston became the Garrison Church.

During the First World War Glen Parva Barracks were so busy many were billeted out to live with local families. It became a regular sight to see troops marching to the railway station and wounded soldiers returning. After 1918, life at the barracks returned to some normality, until the build-up of troops in preparation for World War Two. At this time a large, hutted camp was built onto the west side main barracks. This was accessed through the main barracks. This extension doubled the size of the barracks and crossed the railway via a steel footbridge, reaching right down to Little Glen Road. The road entrance to this section being what it is today, the driveway to the left of the telephone exchange building (opposite Richmond Drive). The footbridge is still in use today as a public right of way.

Orderly Room

After 1945 some normality once again returned to the Barracks due to the merging of regiments. Montgomery's WWII Grant Tank was at Glen Parva in 1960 and was mounted on a concrete plinth close to the main gates. At about this time Glen Parva Grange was acquired and demolished to make way for the Sergeants' Mess

and Married Quarters, only the two gate lodges were spared, but due to further Government defense changes, Glen Parva Barracks closed in the late 1960's. The name Leicestershire Regiment has also disappeared through regiments merging. The gates to the Barracks were bricked across and many of the buildings were demolished.

Some new buildings were erected, and a new road named Tigers Road was put through to the new Young Offenders Institution which was built on the site of the hut encampment. Some of the buildings on the Barracks site were taken by the Army Pay Corp, and the TA occupied the old Officers' Mess. Various other Government Departments moved onto the site, but many of these have now changed or moved and the buildings sold. In recent years even the regiment's sports field has been built on.

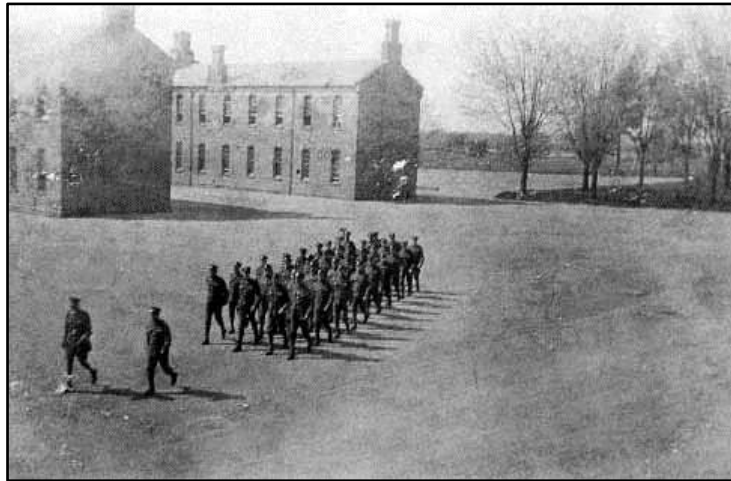
Brian Johnson, June 2015, From the GWHS Archive

Extract from *Wigston at War* by Pamela Ward

In Leicester the holiday mood was changing. June and July 1914 were memorable months in the county. From Glen Parva Barracks in South Wigston, detachments went on parade at Victoria Park in Leicester to join a battalion with band and drums heralding recruitment.

On the 10th of August 1914, the *Leicester Mail* was reporting on events in South Wigston. 'RESERVISTS LEAVE GLEN PARVA DEPOT'. 'At midnight on Saturday about 800 reservists paraded at Glen Parva Barracks and marched to the railway station, entraining in two specials for, it was stated, Portsmouth. They were given a hearty send-off by a large crowd, their relatives and friends having been permitted by the officers and staff to assemble at the barracks in the afternoon. On Sunday evening more reservists left the Depot, to the strains of Mr. Charles Moore's Temperance Band.

With the dark days of the First World War came a special poignancy for the people of South Wigston. The village paid the price of losing its quota of young men in the fields of Flanders as did every other town and village in Britain: but with the presence of the barracks many men from other parts of the Country marched through South Wigston to the station, some never to return. There were many charitable appeals throughout the Kingdom at this time, and South Wigston contributed its share. One in particular that brought the tragedy of the times home to the village was the South Wigston and Glen Parva Belgian Relief Fund. Some of the proceeds from this were used to rent three houses, one each in Blaby Road, Irlan Street and Healey Street, where refugees from the battle areas were housed.

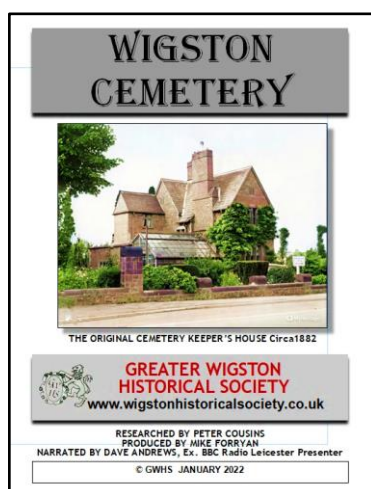


Troops training during WW1



Lighter moment as the medical corps prepares for war

DVD's AVAILABLE AT THE HERITAGE CENTRE And By Post from the Website



DVD1 WIGSTON WITH 2 STEEPLES

A Walk Through Wigston Magna

DVD2 BRIDGE TO BRIDGE

**From Kilby Bridge to the "Spion Kop"
Bridge On Station Road**

DVD3 A MIX OF MEMORIES

Video & Cine Footage Of Wigston

DVD4 FROM FIELDS TO A TOWN

The Development Of South Wigston

DVD5 WIGSTON CEMETERY

**The History Of The Cemetery And
Some Of The People At Rest There**

ALL £10 per copy

BITS AND BOBS FROM WIGSTON PAST – NUMBER 4

Richard Mason and his daughter, Rachel Harrison, popped into the Heritage Centre before Christmas and brought along a package of photographs and documents for us to copy. In the package was an interesting piece of research by John Marlow which I thought might be of interest.

A Transaction at the Navigation Public House – December 1887 [A Quart of Beer Bought for 15 (old) Pence]

From the 'Leicester Chronicle' and Leicestershire Mercury

Sat 7th January 1888, page 6

County Public Office, Wed. 4th Jan 1888, Before Colonel Seddon and Colonel Bellairs.

WISTOW

John Marlow, shoe hand and Edwin Wignall, trimmer, Great Wigston, were summoned for stealing a lame duck, value 2s. 6d., the property of Sir Henry St John Halford CB, Wistow Hall on the 29 December 1887. Mr Hincks defended. George Geary, gamekeeper to complainant, said on Thursday night, when he got home he heard that a duck had been killed on the pond. When he fed them in the morning there were nine, but on going again there was one short. The one now produced he could identify as the one that was missing, it being lame, and not able to fly many yards. James Ross, Wigston, said on Thursday last he went to the pond in Wistow Park, and when coming home overtook the defendants.

Marlow said that they had got a duck from off the pond. When they got to Wigston, Marlow suggested they should sell the duck, which he was carrying underneath his coat. They all went to the public house at Kilby Bridge into which Marlow went alone. On his return he said he had made 1s.3d. of it, out of which they had a quart of beer.

To Mr Hincks, defendants said it was a wild duck, and he thought so too whilst admitting the facts, Mr Hincks said his clients thought the duck was a wild one. It had been shot by someone, and they unfortunately got hold of it. He asked their worships to dismiss the defendants of any felonious intent. Both the youths had good characters and respectable parents and he asked the bench not to convict. Dismissed on payment of costs, 15s. 5d. each.

Mike Forryan

WIGSTON'S MEDIEVAL MURDERS



BETWEEN 1299 and 1390, seven murders were recorded in Wigston – one of the victims being killed away from the village – and in every case the perpetrators were granted full pardons. It is from the documents issued in the awarding of those pardons that these events are known to us today. Pardons were only available to people with high level connections or wealth, so it is no surprise that in all seven cases, victims and assailants alike, were members of the village's elite families.

Adam Herrick fled the village after killing Simon Wyggeston clerk of the village but was granted a royal pardon on 14 May 1299, following a recommendation by Robert de Vere, Earl of Oxford, then feudal lord over the largest of Wigston's three manors. The Herricks were amongst his most important tenants.

On 22 January 1302, "John son of John Swan of Wigston" received a royal pardon for "the death of John Symond of the same [village] and to any subsequent outlawry." The pardon was issued at Linlithgow in Scotland, during an English invasion and was presumably granted for his service in that campaign.

Fifty years later members of the Swan family were again involved in criminal acts, when John Swan, Richard Swan and Henry Swan with several others were accused in a "complaint by Thomas Fox of Evington that Robert Faukus and others assaulted him at Wigston and took him and imprisoned him at Leicester and detained him until he made fine with them for his deliverance and carried away his goods at Wigston." Those "others" comprised of the three mentioned Swans and eight further Wigston men, including a chaplain called John de Tongue. It seems likely that a William de Horselegh was killed in this incident because on 20 September 1352 a royal pardon was granted to John Swan for the death of Horselegh by Edward Prince of Wales (the Black Prince). Again, it appears that Swan had joined the army in the hope that his service would be awarded with a pardon.

In the same year, 17 October 1352, John Amy received a royal pardon for the death of Roger Noreys and six weeks later his goods that had been seized by the King were given back to him. There must have been some kind of problem with this case because two years later Amy received another pardon for killing Noreys.

Richard Astell was charged with murdering William de Kylby, both of Wigston, at the neighbouring village of Newton Harcourt and was transferred to Leicester Gaol but was granted a royal pardon on the grounds of self-defense on 20 November 1339.

The only woman accused of murder, Alice, daughter of Roger de Walton, was granted a royal pardon for murdering Adam Godewyn on 20 September 1343. Apparently, Alice had accompanied the King on a campaign in Brittany, although in what capacity is not mentioned. Clearly the Waltons had important connections, including William de Bohun, Earl of Northampton, who testified in support of Alice's petition. The Godwyns were one of the few families with Anglo-Saxon origins to retain their lands as free tenants after the Viking occupation of the village.

In 1360, John Fytoun of Shawell, a small village in Leicestershire, was pardoned for the killing of Richard Herrick which appears to have occurred in the village of Milton, Derbyshire. Fytoun received his royal pardon whilst fighting in France for the stealing of a horse and other thieving offences during which Herrick was presumably killed.

The final and most drawn-out affair occurred in 1390, when Adam de Sutton was murdered by Richard Baker, again over a disputed inheritance. A fight occurred on 13 November 1390 outside the Plough Inn in Wigston Harcourt (the original name for Bushloe End) after which Baker fled. Adam de Sutton was the second husband of Baker's mother Emma, and it seems that Baker was about to lose his expected substantial inheritance to his stepfather. It was Emma who discovered the body of her husband recently murdered by her son – her property was close to the Plough Inn. On 24 July 1394, Baker managed to secure a royal pardon for reasons not stated. Inheritance issues arising from this incident surfaced again over fifty years later in 1442.

It is no surprise that arguments over land tenure were the cause of these violent clashes, as land was the only real source of wealth and status during the Middle Ages. As well as these incidents there are numerous accounts of serious land disputes having to be resolved through the courts. Hoskin's writings on the history of Wigston relied almost exclusively on documents related to tenancy transfers or disputes, the only documentary evidence from Wigston to have survived from this period. This means that all other murders or violent crimes that might have occurred have gone unrecorded. So just how violent was Wigston during the 14th century? A question I'll return to after looking at the law-and-order situation in England at that time.

Just nine years before the first homicide in 1299, Edward I had re-affirmed the Crown's acceptance and commitment to the legal principles established in Magna Carta, which had been forcibly extracted from his grandfather, King John, in 1215. The middle of the century also saw the establishment of the first Parliaments following Leicester's Simon De Montfort's rebellion. So, by the time of the first killing in Wigston a new legal framework had been established.

Magna Carta is one of those major iconic and symbolic events that tend to become somewhat mythologized through historical hindsight. The document signed at Runnymede in 1215, was in itself merely an agreement forced upon the King after a rebellion, with the sole intention of protecting the narrow concerns of the Church hierarchy and feudal Barons against royal abuse.



Magna Carta

Of its 63 clauses all but a handful were directly related to the particular interests of the Church and Barons. It was those few clauses that aimed to guarantee basic freedoms for the ruling elites against arbitrary royal power that unintentionally established the key principles that would ultimately become the main foundations of modern democratic government. The most important of these principles was the notion that no one was above the Law – especially the Monarch – and the second, that no subject should be imprisoned without due legal process i.e., Habeus Corpus. Other important provisions included the right to trial by one's peers and that any taxation needed the consent of Parliament. Although these lofty principles would eventually play a vital role in the future system of British governance, they would have very little meaning for the vast majority of the population for centuries to come.

During the Middle Ages over 80% of the population lived in small villages and were directly engaged in agriculture, of which only about 12% were freemen (paying rents), the rest were unfree villeins or even slaves (whose tenancies were paid for mainly by their labour) with virtually no rights, in the case of the latter, no rights at all. The 60 to 70 percent of the populace who were unfree peasants were mere chattels of their feudal lord, from whom he claimed up to three days per week unpaid labour on his own designated land. He could also demand a large portion of what a villein family might produce themselves, including paying fines (produce) for permission to marry or for a family to keep their tenancy when the head of the family died, even to sell any surplus in nearby markets. If there was only a daughter to succeed, then the lord claimed the right to choose her husband, and he would normally offer her hand to the highest bidder. A feudal lord could beat his peasants but not murder them or disable them so they couldn't work, but it is doubtful that they would be punished if they did. In Wigston, the number of free tenants was probably higher than the average and were often the descendants of Vikings. Hoskins estimated that in the Guthlaxton and Gartree Hundreds (most of south Leicestershire) the proportion of free and unfree tenants was roughly 43% to 57%.

At least these unfree men were mentioned, as far as the Magna Carta was concerned, half the population didn't exist. Peasant women were even more vulnerable than their menfolk having no legal rights whatsoever, therefore, no meaningful protection outside the family from male violence, including rape. Numerous 'letters of pardon' from men accused of rape were invariably granted. It was socially acceptable for a man to physically chastise his wife, the term 'rule

of thumb' refers to the width of a stick a man could supposedly use on his wife and children.



A 'scold's bridle'

It was a crime for a woman to commit adultery but not a man, and if found guilty of murder she could be burnt at the stake. One particularly cruel and humiliating punishment reserved almost exclusively for women was the use of a 'scold's bridle' for those that 'gossiped or spoke too freely'. It went over the head and had a metal gag that went into the mouth.

Of course, the churchmen and barons who drew up the Charter had no intention of granting those freedoms they awarded themselves to their own unfree tenants who provided most of their income; although free tenants did have their limited rights at least more clearly defined and protected – the right to jury trial perhaps being the most important, which, of course, wasn't available to their unfree neighbours.

The Year 1215 was also very important to the people of Wigston and the rest of the population for another law and order event when the Pope issued a Papal Edict demanding priests no longer assist in the carrying out of 'ordeals' as a means of settling criminal guilt or innocence. Since Saxon times, trial by ordeal essentially passed the judgement of innocence or guilt over to God – so at least some form of equal justice. There were four main ordeals that the accused could be put through: Trial by Fire (or hot iron) in which the defendant would hold a red hot iron bar for so many seconds. Trial by Hot Water in which the accused would retrieve an object from the bottom of a pot of boiling water. In both cases, if after three days their wounds were healing it was considered that God had protected them and they were innocent, if their wounds were infected God had forsaken them. Trial by Cold Water in which the defendant was thrown into a local pond or river. Water represented purity, therefore, the guilty would be rejected and would float; unfortunately, the innocent would be accepted into the pure water and would occasionally drown. Trial by combat was only available to feudal elites. The 1215 Edict led to trials by ordeal being replaced by trials by jury.



Another important step on the road to human rights (irony here), in 1275, a law was passed that no one could be tortured except by permission of a court. However, a very significant change in the legal situation did occur in 1354, when the Magna Carta was re-written and re-issued. It now stated that “no man, of whatever estate or condition he may be” could be punished without “due process of law.” Again, only men are mentioned, although wealthier women landholders (usually widows, especially after 1349) had gained some access to the courts.

Jury trials, however, didn’t change the brutality of most punishments given for criminal acts. Thieves might have their hands cut off. Public floggings were used as punishment for a wide variety of crimes, including vagrants (homeless people) for being homeless, thieves who stole goods worth less than a shilling and those who refused to attend church could all be whipped. Being branded with a hot iron was another common penalty. Offenders were also locked in stocks to be pelted by whatever objects onlookers decided to throw at them. Anyone caught illegally hunting in royal parks had their ears cut off. Executions by hanging could be applied to crimes other than murder, whereas beheading, being hung, drawn and quartered or burnt at the stake were usually reserved for crimes against the state (treason) or church (heresy) and increasingly for witchcraft. All executions were public events and often occasions for communal celebrations.



There were very few prisons as they cost money and local communities were not prepared to pay for their upkeep. It was cheaper to execute someone for serious crimes so avoiding upkeep costs or mutilate them for lesser offences as a deterrent and then let them go. Most towns had a gibbet outside their confines where the condemned were hung and their bodies left to rot over the weeks as a warning to others. Leicester’s gibbet was sited at today’s Red Hill roundabout, and is where Wigston’s notorious highwayman, George Davenport, met his end.

Serious crimes like those murders committed in Wigston would have been dealt with in the court system as it was. Generally, law and order were the responsibility of the local parish and administered by the village annual moot (meeting) and enforced by two locally appointed village constables. The office of constable is thought to have originated in the twelfth century, but the manorial accounts and other evidence for Wigston from the Medieval period have been lost. In fact, the first known Wigston constable was Robert Freer in 1653. How constables were chosen is also unknown but would almost certainly have gone to one of the larger free landholders. Obviously, a difficult job and whilst giving

them status and authority, using, or abusing their powers might make constables very unpopular with their neighbours and perhaps even their wider families. They had to uphold the King's peace whilst trying to remain on good terms with the community in which they lived and worked. Dealing with crime at the local level likely meant that laws were inconsistently applied, the creation of the office of Justice of the Peace (three per county) in 1361, was intended to give central authority more say in how justice was administered.

Around 1300, Wigston's population would have peaked at between 1,000 and 1,200 people putting pressure on land usage of the parish's available 2,900 acres. By this date all of those acres had been developed. During the second half of the 14th century Wigston's population would have declined by up to 50% due to the Black Death of 1349 and further outbreaks of plague creating different social tensions. Before the Black Death Wigston was the largest settlement in the county apart from the borough of Leicester itself (hence the 'Magna' in its name), but by 1400 it was only the sixth largest. Within a century, tax revenues had fallen by 40% compared to pre-plague years, one of the largest declines in Leicestershire. The 1300 level of population wasn't reached again until the mid-17th century.

So, does this relatively high number of murders (and these were the only ones whose records have survived) suggest that Medieval Wigston was a particularly violent place? It must also be remembered that these conflicts were caused by arguments over land and rents and involved only the elite families. So how many murders occurred for the more typical reasons? We will never know. There is, however, another clue as to the threat of lawlessness Wigston might have faced implied in the name 'Shakresdale' or 'robbers' valley', as the area on the northwest boundary of the village was known during the 14th century.

Historian Lawrence Stone believes that homicides in England during the Middle Ages were probably ten times higher than in more recent times. In 2011, the murder rate in this country was around one in 100,000, in Oxford during the 1340's the equivalent homicide rate was 110 per 100,000. In 1202, the town of Lincoln had 114 murders (perhaps 1% of its then population), 89 violent robberies and 65 people were wounded in fights. Only two people were executed for these crimes, so it can be concluded that many got away with their criminality.

With no police force, poor transport and communications and little by way of national government or administration, it must have been relatively easy for criminals to escape retribution by fleeing the scene. Joining the army appears to have been one well-used escape route. Travelling the roads was particularly dangerous with many outlaw bands roaming the thick forests that covered much of the country (and likely less magnanimous than Robin Hood). Famines and plague plus internal conflicts like the War of the Roses, which were particularly dangerous for ordinary people when whole villages might be put to the sword and burnt to the ground, made the 14th century perhaps the worst ever period in English history. For many in Medieval Wigston, life would have indeed been "...poor, nasty, brutish, and short." (*Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes).

Steve Marquis



EXTRACT # 4 FROM 'THE HOUSEHOLD GUIDE OF 1894'

How to make Children Healthy, Vigorous, and Beautiful

1. The physical conditions and development of the child should be as carefully watched as its health, for the beauty, strength and health of a child depends largely upon the care and instruction of the parents.
2. Hereditary tendencies to disease must be carefully considered. If there is heart disease, consumption, or other constitutional diseases in the family, the children should be taught early to take regular and vigorous exercise every day, and as much of it outdoors as the weather and circumstances will permit. There is nothing that overcomes hereditary disease in children so successfully as vigorous exercise and well-ventilated sleeping rooms.
3. Give the children nourishing food, and until six years of age they should live mostly upon a milk diet.
4. From the earliest infancy, children must have an ample supply of pure air. Keep the bedroom well ventilated.
5. Never let children younger than fifteen years of age wear stays of any kind. During childhood the bones yield easily to pressure, and very many injuries and deformities have their beginning by bad methods of dress, and all forms of artificial bandages, corsets, garters, waist-strings, or an excess of weight hanging from the hips, should be avoided. All garments made for children should hang from the shoulders.
6. Children who play out-of-doors in cool and damp weather should wear good heavy shoes with thick soles.
7. It is excellent practice for families to secure a good textbook on gymnastic or calisthenic exercise, and when children are five years of age to begin and give them regular systematic training every day. This will develop their muscular strength, give grace to their figures and gestures, develop their lungs, and strengthen the constitution in general. Both girls and boys should be trained by taking regular physical exercise daily, or taught to perform some daily tasks, which will answer the same purpose.
8. Indulge children in all kinds of outdoor games, croquet, lawn tennis, etc., and your children will enjoy happiness and health.
9. Be sure and give children plenty of sleep. They should retire early and not be disturbed in the morning but be permitted to enjoy their full desire to sleep.
10. Children should never drink coffee, tea, cocoa, or chocolate, for it will make the skin thick and yellow and often produce other serious disorders. Milk and water should be the only drink of children.

Mike Forryan



The main aim of this section is to encourage and provide the opportunity for members to directly engage with the Society's Bulletin. Letters or emails on the piece 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.

History and Unintended Consequences

The past is littered with events that resulted in major unintended consequences the original participants could neither have possibly anticipated nor usually wished for. Magna Carta, which I discussed in the Medieval Murders chapter above, is clearly such an occasion. I think it is fair to say that King John and those representatives of the ruling elites would have been horrified at the long-term ramifications of their actions at Runnymede in 1215. It was also an example of how historical hindsight tends to create certain emblematic events which take on a massive symbolic importance as they are reinterpreted to reflect the predominant themes and attitudes of the particular time that history is written.

The Declaration of Independence of 1776 that established the Constitution of the newly created United States of America is another glaring example of an event taking on a life of itself way beyond the original intentions of those responsible for its creation. In fact, the American Constitution was heavily influenced by a reenvisioned and romanticised version of Magna Carta, and both have attained almost religious-like status in modern America. Like the Great Charter, the Declaration mainly served the interests of the people who drew it up: "All men are created equal and there are certain unalienable rights that governments should never violate. These rights include the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The person (apart from Thomas Paine) most responsible for these sentiments was Thomas Jefferson soon to be the third President and a slave owner, like George Washington, as were most of the other founding fathers. Talking of fathers, Jefferson had several children by one of his slaves, Sally Hemmings, a 'relationship' which began when she was fifteen and he in his early forties. "All men..." it seems only meant white men of property, hence the initial exclusion of a majority of men without property from having the vote, not to mention that women, native Americans and 20% of the population made-up of black slaves were not included or even acknowledged.

Whilst not denying the historical significance of either Magna Carta or the American Constitution, both show how reality can also become blurred into myth or even nationalistic propaganda.

Steve Marquis



FROM THE PAST

Wigston One Hundred and Two Hundred Years Ago

1923



16 February 1823 – Howard Carter unseals the burial chamber of the, until then, largely forgotten Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamun, whose short reign lasted from 1332 – 1323 BC.



28 April 1923 – The first Wembley FA Cup Final, known as the 'White Horse Final'.

Vast crowds estimated at 300,000 gained entrance into the stadium far exceeding its official capacity of 125,000 and the terraces overflowed onto the pitch. 'Old Billie' the white horse who helped control the crowd became the image of that final.

Bolton beat West Ham 2-0.

Wigston in 1923, From the Leicester Mercury

12 March 1923 – A young girl, Miss J. Smith (12), suffered a broken skull after falling out of a motorcycle sidecar as it crossed the level crossing on Blaby Road, South Wigston.

28 May 1923 – John Samuel Roach (22) of 22 Kirkdale Road, South Wigston, was sentenced to a month's hard labour for stealing a bicycle valued at £5.5s. Roach stated that "I was out of work and took it on the spur of the moment."

6 June 1923 – A meeting of the Wigston Urban District Council presided over by Councilor Mr W. Gamble presented some interesting figures concerning the village population which amounted to a total of 8,890. The birthrate was 2.6 per woman compared to 1.5 today. The deathrate was 9.3 per 1,000, below the national figure of 12.3 in 1923, whilst in 2020, the rate for the UK was 10 per

1,000 up slightly from 9 per 1,000 the year before – which was a surprise to me, pandemic notwithstanding. Infant mortality was high at 80 per 1000 in comparison with 3.5 today, which is perhaps less of a surprise. There were also 43 cases of infectious diseases and 14 of tuberculosis.



Groby Road Hospital

It is worth remembering that as late as the 1950's, when vaccines became available, thousands of people with tuberculosis would have been confined in specialist TB hospitals, which for Leicester, was situated on the Groby Road.

1823



23 January 1823 – William Buckland discovers the first prehistoric human burial found in Britain in the Paviland Cave on the Gower Peninsula. He called the skeleton the "Red Lady of Paviland", having mistakenly identified it as a Roman era woman. It was, in fact, a young male buried some 26,000 years ago during the last Ice Age. The first hominids (*homo erectus*) appeared in the area of today's Britain around 700,000 years ago.

24 March 1823 – Royal Academy of Music opens in London.

17 June 1823 – Charles Macintosh patents the waterproof material later used to make Mackintosh coats.

Wigston in 1823, From the Leicester Chronicle

1 March 1823 – Wednesday 27 February John Earp, a 'grazier', aged 94, died, just a few weeks after his son, also John, who had succumbed on Thursday the 6 February.

29 March 1823 – A young boy aged five died one day after his clothes caught fire. His mother received severely burnt hands in a desperate attempt to save him.

28 June 1823 – William Pochin, grocer, married Elizabeth Hurst, daughter of Mr George Hurst, hosier, and granddaughter of the late Rev, H. Davis.

Steve Marquis

“WIGGY’S WAR” IS THE SEQUEL TO WIGGY’S CHILD.”

Episode One

When the first ominous rumblings of war came in 1938, Doreen Clara [Boulter] was still at school, and so continues the story of family life in Wigston during the war years. So many memories of those wartime days: too many to relate here, when we all had to cope with the day-to-day alarms and excursions in wartime Wigston.

The laughter and the tears, our hopes and our fears as we soldiered on throughout the Second World War, battling with the blackout, rationing, queues, clothing coupons, “moaning minnie” and Air Raid Wardens to mention a few until the joyous jollifications of V E Day and V J Day in 1945.

1938 – The Lesson

The Laundry Hooter had ‘gone’, so had the gas mantle. Father had taken the glass globe off so that mother could give it a good wash and in doing so, caught the mantle with the chains which hung on each side. These chains enable us to regulate the gas jet, high, low, on or off. Anyway, it meant a quick dash up to ‘Luds’ shop on the cross-roads before I went to school. Even when the shop was taken over by Freckingham’s, it was still known as ‘Luds’ (Ludlams) by Mother.

Tearing back home, I collected my newspaper-wrapped lunch, rammed on my navy beret straight down across my eyebrows and fled through The Lanes to ‘Boardies’ (Long Street Board School). I arrived breathless in the school yard as the whistle blew. Nipped to the back of my class line as we moved into school, hitching up my wool stockings enroute. My elastic garters had gone saggy again, therefore any strenuous activity on my part resulted in my stockings coming down in wrinkles. I hadn’t yet graduated to a suspender belt; freedom of movement was my first consideration. I could always obtain stronger elastic for my garters, even if it did leave a red and purple weal around the tops of my legs. I knew some of the girls hitched their stockings to the attachment on their liberty bodices. Bit dicey, I thought, not for me, I’ll stick to ‘laggy’ while I could.

It was about this time that I acquired an Admirer. Opening my desk lid one day I discovered a Magazine and two apples. Uncomfortably aware of the smirks and grins on the faces of my school friends, I gazed around and demanded ‘who’s put these in my desk?’ – more giggles and jerking of heads towards a boy sitting at the other side of the classroom. The poor lad, by this time had turned a fine shade of beetroot red. I glared across at him, marched across the room and returned his gift with a thump on his desk, and marched back to my desk, highly embarrassed.

Boys! I had no time for boys: anyway, Mother had gone to such pains to tell me how I was growing fast and everything, I was to keep away from boys. How I was to accomplish this was beyond me. As I pointed out to Mother at this time, boys were everywhere, always had been, how could I possibly avoid them? I asked this question of father one day when we were up the allotment. Father

leant on his spade, cleared his throat, stared into the middle distance and said I'd best take it up with mother, and resumed his digging. After consultation with the other girls in the schoolyard, as to what, if anything, their mothers had said, and more importantly, what Mary's elder sister had told her, it was sorted out, at least, for the time being.

Came the day we all went to the Magna pictures from school to see an educational film.

"What's it all about then?" queried Joyce.

"It's all about you know what", said Marion.

"Oh that" said Betty on a note of scorn.

All agog, we sat in our seats while a solemn-faced lady told us that what we were about to see was of vital importance to us all. We assumed expressions of solemn and rapt attention. We sat through a dreary diatribe about diseases of one sort or another we were liable to catch if we didn't live a 'Clean and Upright Life'. The climax of the film showed us a woman sitting on a bed in her underskirt; a man came into the bedroom and walked towards her, with a knowing leer on his face, that's what it looked like to us, the camera then switched to a statue of a naked lady and 'THE END' blazed across the screen; the curtains closed with a swish, the lights came on in the auditorium and we prepared to leave our seats.

"Is that it?" exclaimed Mary.

That was certainly 'it' as far as we were concerned.

So endeth the Lesson.

Doreen C. Boulter, 1988



Doreen's likely contemporaries, practicing for the arrival of evacuated children from London in 1940. She might even be amongst this group at Wigston's Railway Station.

WIGSTON FRAMEWORK KNITTERS MUSEUM



W F K M

Brief History of Framework Knitting – Part Two

The Beginning of the Decline in Framework Knitting

Initially there was a huge demand for stockings to adorn the legs of men, as well as women and the knitters enjoyed independence and plenty of leisure time. Although their wages were always low the frame-work knitters appear to have been, on the whole, a generally contented body of workers, labouring in their own homes and enjoying their self-determined hours of leisure. There was little education among them, and most were illiterate. The Leicester hosier and amateur musician William Gardiner recalled that. . . .

‘the lower orders were comparatively in a state of ease and plenty. What contributed to their solid comforts was the common and open field, upon which they kept their pig and poultry, and sometimes a cow . . . the stocking-maker had peas and beans in his snug garden, and a good barrel of humming ale. To these comforts were added two suits of clothes, a working suit and a Sunday suit; but, more than all, he had leisure, which in the summertime was a blessing and delight. The year was chequered with holidays, wakes, and fairs; it was not one dull round of labour. Those who had their frames at home seldom worked more than three days in a week’.



Leicestershire's framework knitters enjoyed a long period of prosperity from the 1780s until the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The years of the French Wars made great demands on the industry. Labour was scarce and workers were attracted to the hosiery villages and Leicester from beyond the county's boundaries in Warwickshire and Northamptonshire. ‘As poor as a stockinger’ was an 18th century saying, but times got even worse in the next century.

Deep economic depression followed the victory of Waterloo in 1815 and the ending of the war. Returning soldiers also added to the surfeit of labour.

A parliamentary commission on the framework knitters, published in 1845, showed that between 1815 and 1819 the wages for a full week's work of 15 hours per day had fallen from 14s. to 7s. This was only the beginning of the decline of the rural hosiery industry that continued for the greater part of the 19th century.

Capitalism and exploitation were the early masters in the stocking trade, however, and the climb to the general prosperity of the twentieth century was over

the starving bodies of the framework knitters. By the beginning of the nineteenth century it had become a rarity for a stockinger to own his own frame, which at that time cost between £50 and £60. The stocking frames were owned by the manufacturers and hired out to 'masters' or middlemen, who employed the labourers. These workers, often illiterate, operated the machines in their homes, earning their wages at piece-work rates for the number of stockings they produced. They were completely at the mercy of the masters. There was no agreed minimum rate, and the knitters had to pay weekly frame-rent, the cost of lights during the winter, a wage to a woman 'seamer', oil for the machine; and all this out of the mere pittance they earned in the first place, by sitting at their frames for perhaps thirteen hours a day. They might be lucky, in hard times, to have four and sixpence a week left after stoppages.

The growing iniquities of the masters put intolerable pressures on the knitters. The practices of "truck" and "stinting" became widespread, and then price-cutting appeared, and the situation of the labourers gradually got worse. "Truck" was the system whereby the middlemen, who frequently had other business interests, often in the form of retail trade, used their profits to acquire stocking frames and become owners themselves. They paid the knitters their wages with goods instead of money, and as the knitters relied on the middlemen for their work, they were in no position to refuse. "Stinting" meant that, when work was short, the middlemen spread it out over a large number of frames, instead of just enough to produce the work at full capacity.

The knitters still had to pay their full week's frame-rent. Thus they were contributing to the masters' profits from both retail trade and frame-rents. If the machines broke down, they were expected to be their own mechanics, so that every hour spent on repairs was an hour's less production towards their scanty wages. Growing desperation led them to adopt the only apparent solution to their problems - they rented extra frames and trained their children to operate them. Several native Midlanders testified to the appalling conditions of the knitters during the 1830's and early 1840's, before hosiery manufacturing was transformed into a modern factory industry. General Booth, the Salvation Army founder, born in Nottingham in 1829, wrote: -

‘When but a mere child, the degradation and helpless misery of the poor stockingers of my native town, wandering gaunt and hunger-stricken through the streets, droning out their melancholy ditties, crowding the Union or toiling like galley slaves on relief works for a bare subsistence, kindled in my heart yearnings to help the poor which have continued to this day, and which have had a powerful influence on my whole life.’

Thomas Cooper, the Chartist born in Leicester in 1805, recalled being sent as a journalist to report on a meeting in his native town in 1840, and was surprised, when he emerged at eleven o'clock at night, to see lights in the upper windows of working men's houses, and hear the creaking of stocking-frames: -

‘Do your stocking weavers often work so late as this?’ I asked some of the men who were leaving the meeting. ‘No, not often: work's over scarce for that,’ they

answered, but we're glad to work any hour, when we can get work to do.' 'Then your hosiery trade is not good in Leicester?' I observed. 'Good! It's been good for nought this many a year,' said one of the men. 'We've a bit of a spurt now and then but we soon go back again to starvation!' 'And what may be the average earning of a stocking weaver?' I asked, 'I mean when a man is fully employed.' 'About four and sixpence,' was the reply. 'Four and six-pence,' I said; 'well six fours are twenty four, and six sixpences are three shillings: that's seven and twenty shillings a week. The wages are not so bad when you are in work.' 'What are you talking about?' said they. 'You mean four and sixpence a day; but we mean four and six-pence a week.' 'Four and sixpence a week!' I exclaimed. You don't mean that men have to work in those stocking-frames that I hear going now, a whole week for four and sixpence. How can they maintain their wives and children?' 'Ay, you may well ask that,' said one of them, sadly.

A Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry in 1844, set up in response to a petition signed by 25,000 framework-knitters, heard evidence from John Thurman, a knitter of Shepshed in Leicestershire, who had seven children, and worked for Messrs. Cotton & Hammond, told the commissioner, Richard Muggeridge, how he disposed of his weekly income of £1-2s-3d: -

'The boy and me make four dozen pairs of plain hose in a week. Then I have to pay 2s & 3d frame-rent for the two frames; then I have to pay 2 shillings for seaming, and I have to pay 7 1/2 pence for needles for the two frames; then I have to pay for candles 4d per week. Then there is oil I have to pay 2d for; then I have the materials to buy towards the frame, wrenches, hammers, keys and everything of that sort. My little boy does the winding, which would be 6d if I was obliged to put anybody else to do it. Then I have coal 1s and 3d per week, that is in the summer we do not use as much as that, but in the winter we use fire, that is, for the house and shop and all.

The whole nine of us lie in two beds, and for these two beds we have one blanket for both; and it is out of my power, in any shape whatever, to buy any more without my earnings were more. I can positively say and it is not my wish or principle to state one word of the least untruth, never a week goes by but I have to put my wife to bed for want of food; anybody that could come forward and knew me, would testify to that . . . when I have got my little on a Saturday I pay every farthing I can, as far as it will go - and then when Monday morning comes I have not got 6d to buy a loaf with and there is nothing in the house. Then whatever few garments we have about us we take them and pledge them into the shop to get a bit of bread to go on with during the week, as long as it will last.'

Tony Danvers

In the next chapter - Poverty & Degradation in Framework Knitting

FRAMEWORK KNITTERS AND THE TRUCK ACT OF 1831

What of those who earned their living in industry? The evidence of two Wigston framework knitters before the 'the Commission appointed to enquire into the Condition of the Framework Knitters' in 1845 gives us a complete picture of the industrial side of village life, an even more depressing one than that of the Poor Law enquiry a dozen years before. The village now had about 2300 people, of whom about 500 were employed by Leicester hosiery manufacturers. The meeting of the framework knitters was held in the village with reference to the newly appointed Commission, and Samuel Hurst and William Wyatt were deputed by it to give evidence at Leicester on behalf of all. Their account of the trade can be supplemented by the details of the census schedule of 1851 for the village. Samuel Hurst said there were 500 to 550 frames in Wigston altogether, 'including independents and hosiers'. He could not say how many employers there were 'we have not one of any calculation'. Most of the employers were undermasters, of whom there were several, 'but we have three biggish undertakers'.

Most of the small masters kept shops, generally as grocers or drapers. They gave out work to their men on Monday or Tuesday, who then worked it up at home among their families. The 'largest master in the town' sold bread, grocery, and flour; another kept a grocer's shop, while a third, who can be identified as Edward Holyoak, employing 50 men, 30 women, and 20 boys in 1851 sold bread. His son identifiable as John Holyoak, employing 70 hands in 1851, had a butcher's shop next door and supplied his men with meat. The 'largest master' in 1845 is probably George Loveday, who appears as 'hosiery agent' in the 1846 directory. The Holyoaks, who employed 170 hands between them, had possibly taken over his business by 1851. The only other employers of any size in 1851 were Isaac Herbert (25 hands) and John Heard (15 hands).

Although the Truck Act had been in force since October 1831, the Wigston knitters had been entirely ignorant of the illegality of payment in truck until the last few months. Hurst's own employer had paid his wages in ready money only in the past three months. He had formerly supplied goods during the week and stopped the money on Saturday night, paying the difference between the value of the work done and the goods received 'if any'. When the provisions of the Truck Act dawned upon the Wigston wage-earners, fourteen years later, they immediately formed an anti-truck association 'and most masters have now stopped it. The people can have the money themselves. They can lay it out and do a deal better with it'.

The Wigston employers did not work for themselves but were 'undertakers' or middlemen to bigger men in Leicester. Few knitters supplied direct to the warehouse in Leicester; nearly all worked for a middleman. The latter hired frames from the Leicester hosier and let them out to the village framework knitters at a shilling a week, adding their own charges of fivepence a week for 'taking-in and standing'. The framework knitters also had to buy their own needles. By the time the fixed charge of 1s 5d a week had been met, the knitter could not earn above seven shillings a week. Many young people had given up framework knitting as the earnings were so low and had taken to sewing and stitching gloves, a new trade in Wigston.

Tony Danvers

George Hort and the Fight Against the Truck System

GEORGE HORT was born in the St. Margaret's area of Leicester on 17 January 1783. He would spend the rest of his life as a largely impoverished stockinger but also as an intrepid fighter for the town's framework knitters and other poor working people over four decades. During this period, Hort was one of the foremost leaders of the Leicester Framework Knitters Union, in fact, from 1824 until 1830, the dominant figure during the union's most militant phase.

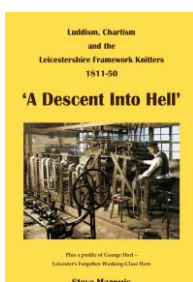
In Wigston Magna and surrounding villages during 1825, a long drawn-out strike broke out and, after weeks of hardship, feelings were running high with things coming to a head in May. Trouble erupted when one employer, William Thompson in Newton Harcourt, tried to restart his frames. Led by Hort "a great crowd of persons", mainly from Wigston (*LC*, 18/6/1825, in the report of his trial), attacked Thompson's workshop and destroyed his frames when he refused to stop work. Hort received six weeks hard labour as a result alongside two others who received a month.

Hort also led two of the most significant and bitter campaigns undertaken by Leicester's working class during this time: the fight against the 1834 New Poor Law and the knitters' union's attempt to finally eradicate the 'truck system'. Yet, I'd be surprised if any readers would have heard of George Hort.

The issue that dominated Hort's activities during the 1840's was the use of 'truck' by some hosiery employers to pay their workers in goods rather than money, even though it had been illegal to do since 1831. Hort clearly led the union's campaign against the payment of truck. Three letters by him attacking free trade in general and truck payments in particular, appeared in the *Leicestershire Mercury* (30/9/1843, 17/2/1844 and 5/2/1848). These letters revealed just how articulate and accomplished the autodidactic Hort was. His letters were remarkably succinct, well-argued and contain none of the elaborate verbosity common in that era.

There are also newspaper accounts of Hort successfully taking employers to court for paying truck such as a Mr Knight, one of the largest hose manufacturers in Leicester with 500 frames, who paid his workers half their wages in bread (*LM*, 25/11/1843) and John Cave who was fined £5 or six weeks in prison, again for paying part of his workers' wages in bread. In a letter published by the *Leicestershire Mercury* (9/12/1843), Hort revealed that he had managed to set up a joint committee of employers, including William Biggs, and the Framework Knitters Union to tackle any use of truck by rogue employers.

Steve Marquis



These extracts come from my book: *Luddism, Chartism and the Leicestershire Framework Knitters 1811-1850 'A Descent into Hell'*. Available at the Heritage Centre.