

GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

White Gate Lodge, 97 Newton Lane, Wigston Magna, Leicester



BULLETIN 119

1st March 2021

BROCKS HILL COUNTRY PARK



Visitor Centre, July 2015



January 2016



February 2016

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of Leicester De Montfort

REMINDER

Hello everyone,

I thought I would advise you that our committee have agreed to cancel our meetings on Wednesday 17 March 2021 and Wednesday 21 April 2021 at the Wigston College. I will advise you accordingly on our other meetings nearer the time.

I am starting to organise our monthly meetings for 2022 and hope to be able to rearrange the speakers that we had to cancel during the 2020 Covid period.

I hope you are all well and I send you my best regards and keep safe.

Ann Cousins

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS MAY 2021 – DECEMBER 2021

19 MAY

MEDIEVAL PAINTINGS
(POWERPOINT & PICTURES)
DR MIRIAM GILL

16 JUNE

GUIDED TOUR OF LUTTERWORTH
CHURCH FOLLOWED BY A WALKING TOUR
OF HISTORIC LUTTERWORTH

18 AUGUST

MEDIEVAL TOUR BY DE MONTFORT
UNIVERSITY, GATEWAY STREET,
LEICESTER FOLLOWED BY
AFTERNOON TEA

15 SEPTEMBER

BLACKSMITHS? THEY SHOE
HORSES DON'T THEY?
(POWERPOINT & PICTURES)

20 OCTOBER

LIFE IN THE SIGNAL BOXES
OF WIGSTON JUNCTION
(POWERPOINT & PICTURES)
JOHN STEVENSON

17 NOVEMBER

THE CUNNING WOMEN OF
PAGAN MERCIA
(POWERPOINT & PICTURES)
DOUGLAS CLINTON

15 DECEMBER

*CHRISTMAS PARTY & QUIZ
WITH NIBBLES & DRINKS
CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS
(POWERPOINT & PICTURES)
VIRGINIA WRIGHT
DAVID JAMES

Our Christmas Party for members will be £2.00 on the night towards refreshments,
guests will be charged £3.00.

Society's website: www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk
All enquiries to: secretary@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

The bulletin is published three times a year on the 1st of March, July and November. Articles etc. (which are always welcome) should be submitted to the Editor, Hannah Evans at bulletineditor@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk four clear weeks before publication date.

BROCKS HILL COUNTRY PARK A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The Oadby & Wigston Borough Council website describes Brocks Hill Country Park as 'Set in a 67-acre country park, Brocks Hill is an established part of the community providing an area for relaxation and recreation, while promoting rich and diverse wildlife habitats including: woodland, meadows, ponds and a community orchard, which are all laid out with access friendly paths.'

'Since opening in 1999, Brocks Hill Country Park has received increasing interest as a place for informal recreation and now attracts over 150,000 visitors per year. It is also an extremely important greenspace for wildlife in Oadby and Wigston Borough.'

'The Country Park used to be a mixed farm called Grange Farm with the land being influenced by farming practices for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Evidence of Bronze Age activity has been found within the area, as have medieval shards of pottery. Brocks Hill contains many features that were once widespread in the Leicestershire landscape, including medieval ridge and furrow fields, hay meadows, small ponds, mature trees and woodland compartments. The southern ditch and hedge boundary of the site form part of the original boundary between Oadby and Wigston before they were combined into one Borough.'

Lucas Marsh lies within the country park on the north eastern edge of the site, it is a Local Nature Reserve. The reserve is leased and managed by Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. This reserve, although covering only 2 hectares, is a haven for wildlife with a diversity of habitats, including a reed bed and a scrubby area for nesting birds.

The Friends of Brocks Hill Country Park is an active, independent Friends Group to the park. The aim of the Friends is to improve the park. Objectives include: to promote the health and well-being of all residents in the area; to involve local people; to carry out and promote environmental and practical conservation; to educate, encourage and support the local population in environmental practice working with statutory and non-statutory agencies; to promote community recreation and play areas.

The Friends was formed in late 2010. Since that time, they have arranged events including Bird, Bee and Butterfly Days, a Healthy Living Day and Food Fayre Days. A programme of guided walks and lectures is held each year. The most recent project has been the installation of new interpretation boards at several locations within the Country Park.

A YEAR AT BROCKS HILL COUNTRY PARK

Between July 2015 and June 2016 members of the Rotary Club of Leicester De Montfort recorded images of Brocks Hill Country Park. These included photographs taken from a selection of precise locations so as to monitor the changes in views; flora and fauna over the course of a year and to record some of the events held at the Park. At this time, the Visitor

Centre and the educational programmes were managed by staff from Oadby & Wigston Borough Council who were based in the centre. The project was stimulated by the site manager commenting that although the Council held many images of the Park and had active social media pages, there was not a well-documented photographic record of the changes that occur during the course of a year. The final collection of images was made available to the staff to use as an education tool and as a reference for future changes.

The guidelines for the project were kept simple:

- viewpoints to be selected in conjunction with staff at the Visitor Centre;
- all images to be taken handheld, i.e., without cameras mounted on tripods or monopods;
- all images to be recorded in a single format (i.e., as .jpg files);
- there should be no post-processing (i.e., No cropping or Photoshop editing);
- the target is to record images every week throughout the duration of the project.

It is important to recognise that the images were not intended to be photographic competition standard nor suitable for publication in magazines or journals. The images are merely a record of changes to selected parts of the Country Park over a specific time.

The copyright of the images is held by the Rotary Club of Leicester De Montfort. The Club has kindly agreed to make the collection available to the public via the Greater Wigston Heritage Centre in conjunction with the Greater Wigston Historical Society.

The images are complemented by a database detailing the time, date, location and subject of each image. The entries are further categorised by subject. This database is being updated to make it easier for people to search for a particular set of images. Thus, users will be able to search the collection and extract, for example, how views from locations changed throughout the year and how some trees progressed from bud, to flower, to fruit, to shedding leaves and back into their dormant state.

The collection and index will be available later in 2021 for viewing at the Heritage Centre.

The Brocks Hill Visitor Centre is now managed by Everyone Active, the operators of Parklands, the Borough's leisure centre. Similarly, the education programmes are coordinated through staff at Parklands.

OTHER REFERENCES AND FUTURE WORK

The Brocks Hill Story, which describes the history of the site back to pre-historic times, written by Duncan Lucas, is available to view at the Heritage Centre (Book D055.doc).

The authors are preparing a transaction for the Greater Wigston Historical Society describing the background to the establishment of the country park and its subsequent development. If readers were involved with the early days of Brocks Hill Country Park or if they have recollections of its planning, construction or tree planting schemes, the authors would be pleased to hear from them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank Libby Gluyas for her enthusiastic support and constant encouragement throughout the original project.

Duncan Lucas kindly helped the authors with his recollections of the early stages of the planning and development of Brocks Hill Country Park.

Stuart Mucklejohn, Judith Proctor and Colin Towell.

MEMORIES OF TRAVELLING BY BUS TO GUTHLAXTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL FROM GLEN HILLS

I was born in 1948 in Leicester and we moved to a newly built house in Glen Hills in 1955. We lived on the corner of Needham Avenue and Westdale Avenue. Our house was at the far end of the estate and backed onto what is now public open space and with a footpath between the houses. That used to be a lane down to an old farmhouse where my brother helped out now and then.

The Great Central Railway, long since closed, ran along the bottom of our garden. If the wind was blowing in the right direction, there would be black smuts on the washing. It is now a cycle path/walkway for some of its length and beyond that is the Grand Union Canal and then the River Soar.

I went to Glen Hills Primary School until 1959 when I transferred to South Wigston High School.

In Leicestershire in 1957 secondary education was reorganised initially in two areas of the county. This meant the abolition of the 11+ and most pupils were to attend Primary School, High School, then Grammar School. So, I didn't take the 11+ and went to the High School for 3 years then to Guthlaxton Grammar School, as it was then known, until July 1964. The name Guthlaxton came from the Guthlaxton Hundred of Leicestershire.

I cycled to High School from our house off Needham Avenue, along Leicester Road towards Blaby, past the County Arms and along Little Glen Road and I used to cycle home for lunch. I don't think I would risk cycling along there now.

My brother, who is 5 years older than me, went to Guthlaxton while the builders were still finishing off the construction. I was there during the freezing winter of 1962/63 and remember the playground, which sloped down to some temporary classrooms, being a sheet of hard packed snow and ice but I don't recall the school being closed, not something that would happen today.

When I was at Guthlaxton College there were children from Braunstone Town, also from Thurnby, Bushby areas as there was no senior school nearer. I used to go by bus when I changed to Guthlaxton school as it was further from where we lived. Not so many children were taken to school in cars then as not many people where I lived had cars. I imagine there was a big senior school building programme to cope with raising the school leaving age and all the baby boomers!

Amongst the teachers one I remember in particular, Aubrey Burl, taught History and Latin at South Wigston High School. He was quite a character and eventually left teaching and obtained an MA at Leicester University with a thesis on stone circles and then became a well-known archaeologist. This was before the era of Time Team, but he published around 30 books about prehistoric standing stones of north-west Europe before turning to writing literature in later life. He died in 2020 at the age of 93. There is more information online about him.

I was taught by Miss Vann – her first name was Molly and in my school reports from South Wigston Girls High School her initials appear next to Religious Knowledge. I recall one of the Mildred brothers was at Guthlaxton when I was there – it could have been Alan – but the problem was that the boys were always known by just their surname. I remember the railway line through South Wigston, not far from where the Tesco is now, as my parents had friends in Rugby, and we used to visit them by train from Leicester to Rugby. My father worked for the railways, so we travelled to see my aunt and uncle near London and my grandmother at Holland-on-Sea, Essex. It wasn't free travel all the time, but I believe my father had 6 free passes a year for all the family and the rest of the time it was quarter fare. We could not have afforded to go to see our relatives very often without this.

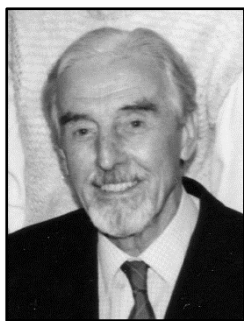
As we didn't have a car, we mainly shopped at the grocery shop near to where we lived. My mother used to go into Leicester to buy fruit and vegetables from the market. We also used to walk into Blaby which was over 2.5 miles from where we lived to go to the doctors and other shopping.

I remember Eric Holmes Cycle Shop and my brother having his first adult cycle from there then riding it home to our house in Glen Hills.

I went to a lecture about Orson Wright and the building of South Wigston a few years ago which was very interesting and probably given by Peter Cousins. I sometimes drive through South Wigston on my way to visit friends in other parts of the county and a great deal of it is largely unchanged.

R.J . Collidge, Earl Shilton, Jan 2021

A WIGSTON MAGNA HISTORIAN AND PHOTOGRAPHER



BILL WARD: 1911 – 1999

'What do they know of Wigston who only

Sainsbury's know?'

(Bill, with apologies to Rudyard Kipling)

In 1908 a young, newly married couple, Fred and Annie Ward, moved into their first home in Aylestone Lane. Fred, a railway man, transferred from Leicester to begin work at the Wigston North signal box and being a Wesleyan Methodist Local Preacher, he and Annie worshipped at the Frederick Street Chapel. They had three children, Evelyn born in 1910, William (Bill) in 1911 and Kenneth in 1915, by which time the family had moved to Gladstone Street. Apart from his war service in the Middle East, Bill lived in Wigston and Knighton for the whole of his life...as he often said, 'within a mile of the centre of the village'. He was educated at Bell Street Infant School and the Wigston Council School (now the Record Office of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland) and although qualifying to go onto one of the Grammar Schools, he left school at 14 to work in commerce, initially at Thomas Firth Ltd, a button and trimmings merchant in Millstone Lane, then briefly at the Leeds Permanent Building Society in St Martin's before moving to the Leicester Permanent Building Society in Welford Place. In the evenings he attended Gregg's Commercial College where he studied shorthand and typing and book-keeping.

In his teens he was given a Box Brownie camera and thus began a lifelong interest in photography and in the recording of the local area, often going out on his bike and exploring the villages around Wigston. Following WWII, the village expanded greatly with many of the old buildings being demolished. He recorded some of the changes that were taking place and over the next forty years built up an extensive collection of photographs supplemented with photographs and postcards which he copied with the kind permission of their owners.

He was passionate about Wigston Magna, its people, buildings, history and development, and following his retirement in 1972, shared his enthusiasm by giving illustrated talks and encouraging others to record the changes that continue to be made.

Whilst at the Council School, his love of the English language and literature was nurtured. He delighted in poetry, sometimes writing his own, and always had the ambition to write 'A History of Wigston Magna'. Unfortunately, that was not to be. But.....

Bill was a lifelong member of the Methodist Church, his deep Christian faith underpinning all he did, and so in 1985 he wrote the history of Frederick Street Methodist Church, entitled 'Through All the Changing Scenes' to celebrate the Centenary of the 1885 building. As the

title suggests, this history is set within the context of the changing social and economic face of the village and required much research which he thoroughly enjoyed. Shorthand and typing skills certainly came to the fore and Margaret, Bill's wife, lived with the perpetual clatter of the typewriter in the background until the book was published!

In the early 1970's, there was news that the Bell Street School and adjoining factory sites were to be redeveloped.... a Sainsbury's Supermarket was to be built. Shock and horror for many! A group of activists, needless to say including Bill, began a campaign to save the school building for the community. Unfortunately, this vigorous campaign was not successful and sadly, in 1979, the buildings were finally demolished.



Bell Street School: 1960.



Sainsbury's built on the Bell Street School and adjoining factory site: Sept 2011.

This group of like-minded 'Wigstonians' became the Wigston Civic Society which still exists today, celebrating its 40th Anniversary in 2018. One amusing aside to this: The Ward family did not shop in Sainsbury's for quite a while after it opened but supported the long-established Co-op, also in Bell Street!

In 1980 members of this group also founded the Greater Wigston Historical Society, meeting as now for monthly talks and discussions. The face of Wigston was changing so much that there was a burning desire to preserve, research, record and gather as much information as possible about its history and its people before it was forgotten and disappeared into the mists of time.

The village was becoming a town. So it was that the Wigston Folk Museum was established, and the Framework Knitters' buildings were saved to begin a new life as The Framework Knitters' Museum.



The Framework Knitters' building, Bushloe End: 1976.



The Framework Knitters' Museum: 2011.

Bill was an influential founder trustee of this latter project and a life member of the Friends of the Museum. The last two talks he gave in 1993/4 raised over £1000 towards the upkeep of the museum.

'Mr Wigston' as he was to some, wanted to share his love for the village, and his knowledge of its buildings and its people with everyone. To that end, he bequeathed his collection of photographs to the Record Office. His substantial Wigston archive is also deposited there and together form The Ward Collection.

www.record-office-catalogue.leics.gov.uk and then search DE5700.

Hopefully sometime in the future all the photographs will be made more easily accessible online. Bill was delighted that the Council School, 'my university' as he called it, became the County Record Office and followed its development with interest.

The opportunity for all to 'know more of Wigston than only Sainsbury's' continues today through the work, the talks and lectures, the exhibitions and publications of the Civic Society, the GWHS, the FWK Museum and the Wigston Heritage Centre as well as the County Record Office and other equally enthusiastic individuals. Bill would be delighted that so many others are also passionate about this 'village'.



The Bank, Bell Street: Nov 1935: This photograph was used for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee plaque in the garden area that is now on this site.

(The early photographs were taken by Bill and are in the archive held at the Record Office. The later ones were taken by his nephew, John Gillam, and used with kind permission.)

Liz Ward, January 2021

WIGGY'S CHILD – THE DAY OF WORRYING

Mother's Fox Fur stole, and Father's bowler hat were kept safely on top of the dresser in the Front Room. Father's bowler hat was kept strictly for funerals, whereas Mother wore her fox fur every time she 'Went out'.

Coming home from school one afternoon, I noticed the front room door was open. This was unusual to say the least. Apart from going through to collect the post and the evening paper from the letterbox, our front room door was kept firmly closed.

Peering in, I noticed bits of fur floating about in the air, I was puzzled, where on earth did those bits of fur come from? Looking round the back of the sofa, I saw to my dismay, the remains of Mother's beloved fox fur; the pup had made a satisfactory job of worrying her fur stole. Stricken at the enormity of it all, my one thought was to hide the pup before Mother returned.

I took him next door to Aunt Clara, explained what had happened and made her promise "cross my heart and hope to die," to keep him safe until Mother calmed down, if ever. Aunt Clara vouchsafed that he was doomed anyway.

The hours that followed Mother's discovery of her mangled fox fur were grim indeed. Impassioned speech against the keeping of either fur or feather within the confines of the home was lengthy and prolonged. The fate of "that animal" if she ever laid hands on him was awful to contemplate.

"Well, I'll go to the foot of our stairs, how did that happen?" declared Father, when he was shown the sad remains on his return from work. "You may Well ask," said Mother ominously.

Several cups of tea later, the inquest commenced. It was obvious, the fur had slipped down, as had happened on a previous occasion, and with the door being open, the pup had inquisitively shoved his head round, saw a furry 'thing' dangling invitingly from the dresser top and had a delightful time worrying "his rabbit."

It was never ascertained how the door came to be left open. Father was at work, I was at school, only Mother remained at home that day, and she had "only nipped up to Luds shop a minute," she vowed. Yet when I arrived home, the damage had been done. So, there you are. You pay your money and takes your choice!

The pup survived, he had to spend several days in the shed before Mother relented. Perhaps this was helped by the acquisition of a new Fox Fur, a gift from Father.

ANOTHER AGE.....

The second World War was declared on a fine warm sunny September morning, in 1939. This was six months after I had started at Bell Street School. The school had a roll of 316. Eventually in the 1st year I was one of 62 which included 15 evacuees.

Today the countryside has been pushed further and further out. Take for instance, where now stand the Police and Fire Stations, there once was a field from where the cattle would saunter across the road, twice a day to the farm opposite, to be milked.

My mother took me to school on the first day. After that I was on my own. On each school day I would run twice home and back, down Long Lane, passing, on fine days, the lines of drying washing at the back of the laundry and only pausing to press button B in the crossroads telephone kiosk. Home was on the Welford Road hill, nearly opposite Crabtree's Newsagents which stood on the corner of Harcourt Road.

At the outbreak of war, at school, I wore my Identity number on my wrist (RFMO161/3 still imprinted on my mind). My gas mask hung handy nearby. We wrote on slates and had 1/3 pint of milk daily. The mounted artillery would clatter along Bell Street pulling guns. We watched films shown from a rear projection van positioned in the brickyard opposite. We missed a few frames when a bus went by. Sadly, a schoolgirl was fatally injured by an accident with a bus in Bell Street. I remember her name to this day.

War went on, windows blacked out, often awakened by the siren when searchlights from Foston would scan the Wigston sky and food rationing. It was all the norm. Even the new role for the neighbours was norm. A knock at the door "That will be Arnold". And there stood Arnold Boulter, with black tin hat, telling us a chink of light was showing...Street Warden. Two doors down lived Alf Bishop. Sunday mornings Alf became Sergeant Bishop, off to the Guide Hut to collect his troop. Marches them to the brow of the hill where Officer Crabtree (newsagent) with baton under arm would inspect the Home Guard. They marched off to the field, rear of our house. A smokescreen was laid, and manoeuvres began. Great fun for us. The Herefords, with tails erect, also joined in.

At Kilby Bridge there was a Home Guard outpost. Over the brow of the hill the houses had cesspits which were emptied into a tank; horse drawn. One day the horse bolted. As it

passed through Kilby Bridge the Home Guard took chase! They caught up with it just beyond Kilby Turn.

After Bell Street School I moved on to Long Street C of E. I had my first bike. This gave me a new life. Soon exploring lanes of south east Leicestershire. Though on hot sunny days it was not so good to sit beside the road scraping tar and gravel off the tyres. Avoiding further tar I returned by the canal tow path. Passing the basin above 'turnover' and 'the concrete' below Tythorn where, with so few barges, the water was clear enough to see the bottom, we swam uncluttered. Tythorn farm once stood just a top of the field above 'the concrete'. It was a rather remote rambling place where it was said in earlier days, they had lively parties. Was 'the concrete' at Tythorn's request when the canal was constructed? On hot summer moon lit evenings what a party attraction!

In the traffic free air, the put...put...put...of the occasional steam driven barge could be clearly heard in Wigston.

There over the hedge was a Wellington bomber just a bike ride away at Bruntingthorpe. There we would eat sandwiches and chat to the crew. In case of attack the planes were scattered around the airfield but we, nor anyone else, seemed to consider how vulnerable we were.

It was from Bruntingthorpe that Mr. Knight came every week to Wigston with his pony and trap with on board a fire and steaming vat of tripe and cow heels. A popular man was Mr. Knight. Groups of ladies would wait with basins and jugs. Though I never tasted cow heel, the tripe was good.

Navy pit was often a place for a group of us. In those days it was, though not realised at the time, an introduction to the natural world. It was a haven for nature with swans and moorhens nesting, birds, butterflies and even a grass snake. But the site's main attraction was the adjacent train line. To tick off a first-time seen engine in the Ian Allen book made the day. Blackberries for Jam, crab apples for jelly we picked and also, requested nationally, rose hips for vitamin C. Take them to the chemist for a nominal payment. We picked enthusiastically and filled several bags. The chemist did not have the same enthusiasm. But we persisted and reluctantly he paid us, but I doubt if they ever made any vitamin C.

Many evenings Peter and I would spend time at Rawlins farm at the far end of Horsewell Lane. It was mainly a pig farm which relied on a well for water. After milking a cow, we harnessed the pony into a cart and down to Kilby Bridge to fill churns with water for next day's swill. The pony was then saddled, and we took turns riding around the fields. After coughing and spluttering over a couple of De Mauriers in the stack yard Mrs Rawlins would give us a mug of fresh, yes very fresh, milk.

During holidays or at weekends Peter and I would be out and about with Wilf Mason. Out in his truck bringing back dead or live animals to his slaughterhouse in Cooks Lane. Wilf was a gentleman with trilby, tie, and a khaki dust coat. We also went 'rabbiting' with him to a warren at Newton Harcourt, using dogs and ferrets. I remember trudging back, through deep snow with anything up to thirty rabbits. Peter and I were given a couple each. That evening, in our kitchen, using my slaughterhouse skills, I would prepare them for the pot. The rest would appear, the next week, on hooks outside the Bell Street Co-op.

My grandfather had a double share Aylestone Lane allotment. For vegetables he was self-sufficient. On either side of the path down the middle he grew flowers. On Friday afternoons my mother would come home with her cycle basket full of flowers for church decoration and cemetery. I would sometimes accompany her to the cemetery to put flowers on my sister's grave. It was one evening in May 1945 that as we came over the brow of the hill, I saw a sight that has still remained with me. For the first time in my memory the street gas lamps down Welford Road and into Bull Head Street were lit.

Here in Wigston----- The WAR was OVER.

Colin Hames

YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL DURING THE WAR

The above heading was the title of a letter which appeared in the June 1995 edition of 'Oadby and Wigston Voice' which was a monthly publication 'by local people for local people'. This edition was issue 14, so presumably it was started in April 1994 but how long did it last, does anyone know?

The letter was from Wiggy Maggy, the pen name of Doreen Boulter, whose books are now being serialised in the Bulletin. It seems appropriate, having just discovered its existence (with thanks to our President, Duncan Lucas), that the letter is reproduced here in the same edition of the Bulletin as we formally record her death.

The letter reads:

During the War Years, make-up was practically non-existent, and we girls went to great lengths to beautify ourselves. Melting the last bit of "Tanges" lipstick in the tube for rouge. Using a solution of sugar and water and winding our hair round Dinkie steel curlers, we achieved cardboard curls. It was also used to keep our Page-Boy Hairstyle rigid. Rigid. It was lethal if you turned your head quickly! Dabbing self-raising flour on my nose (in the absence of proper face powder) crushed raspberry juice on the lips, sugared hair and liquid paraffin on eyelashes, I resembled a fruit tart!

Evening in Paris scent took on the aspects of the Holy Grail and I carefully saved a tube of Phul-Nana Face Cream for my wedding day in 1944. My Wedding gown, courtesy of Father's clothing coupons, needed a long underskirt, lengthened by long ribbon straps, so my bosom hung around my waist had to do, and a borrowed veil completed my finery. Flowers were not rationed or on coupons, so bouquets became large to compensate any shortfall.

Unkindly referred to as "Mother's Bush" when the family album is brought out. Not that photographs were numerous. Only the maximum of six black and white photographs were allowed, and all crammed into one taxi (fuel rationing) – Bridal Party and guests, crushed but not bowed.

Yours Sincerely

Wiggy Maggy

SOUTH WIGSTON – THE MODEL FOR A FICTIONAL TOWN

I would never have guessed when I grew up in South Wigston that one day I would draw on my memories to invent the fictional town of Billingbrook. As some of you will realise from my surname, I can trace my roots deep into the foundations of South Wigston and am lucky enough to still have my parents living in the same house that my grandfather had built in 1930. Before Saffron Road, where I grew up, my family was rooted in Leopold Street and Orange Street amongst other places, but I shall come back to that on a future occasion. We've been there about as long as the place itself. Whilst I have not personally lived there for some while, I do hold it in great affection.

I left South Wigston as a resident in 1983 and until 2005 followed a fairly traditional business career. It was only then that I had the opportunity to follow my passion of writing. You'd be forgiven for asking why I'm telling you all that. At the time, I was tracing my family tree in my spare time and on my desk, there was a birth certificate. I'd ordered a copy of the certificate very easily and it made me start to think. What if a birth certificate was passed off as belonging to someone other than the original baby? What if the birth certificate that you'd always thought of as your own really wasn't? From that thought spun my first novel, *The Appearance of Truth*. Because the book covers some difficult issues, such as the abduction of a baby, I didn't want to choose a real location in case anyone thought it was based on a real case. I needed a fictitious location and so I invented Billingbrook.

Billingbrook in its fictional setting is in Lancashire. In the real-world parts of it are very definitely in Leicestershire and more specifically South Wigston. You wouldn't recognise all of it, and indeed I've made Billingbrook rather larger than where I grew up, but at one point in the story the characters go on a walk around the significant places from, the lead character, Lisa's childhood. It's a childhood that those who know me well might in part recognise.

They walk along by some of the terraces with names slightly tweaked from those I knew so well in South Wigston. Pete's house was at the end of a row backing onto another matching row of terraced properties. They were all built of dark, weather worn brick, in a regular pattern of houses and passages between. The one thing to differentiate the mirror images was the little name plaque at intervals along the rows, 'Porchester Villas 1898', 'Rose Villas 1901', 'Ivy Villas 1897'. The terraces had all been built at the turn of the twentieth century when the railway had first come to Billingbrook. Now the railway was long gone, but the terraces remained as a legacy of an era of steam trains and quarry workers.

Bassett Street Girls' School

You'd be forgiven for recognising Bassett Street infant school, transported to Billingbrook, being where, Lisa went to school. "*This is where I went to infant school,*" she pointed to a small road in another part of Billingbrook. "*I remember there were two buildings at either end of the playground. Then there were the toilets between the two.*"

If you continued on the walk that Pete and Lisa take in the book, you would find Blaby Road Park.



Blaby Road Park

“I did play on the swings at the park though.” She pointed to the rusty green railings further along the road. “There was a bowling green on the park. I used to watch the old people playing and wonder if that would be me one day.”

I should perhaps have included the row of poplar trees that ran along the side of the park, shielding it from the wall of the neighbouring factory in Canal Street. I used to love the sight of those trees.

CHARLES MOORE MUSIC SHOP



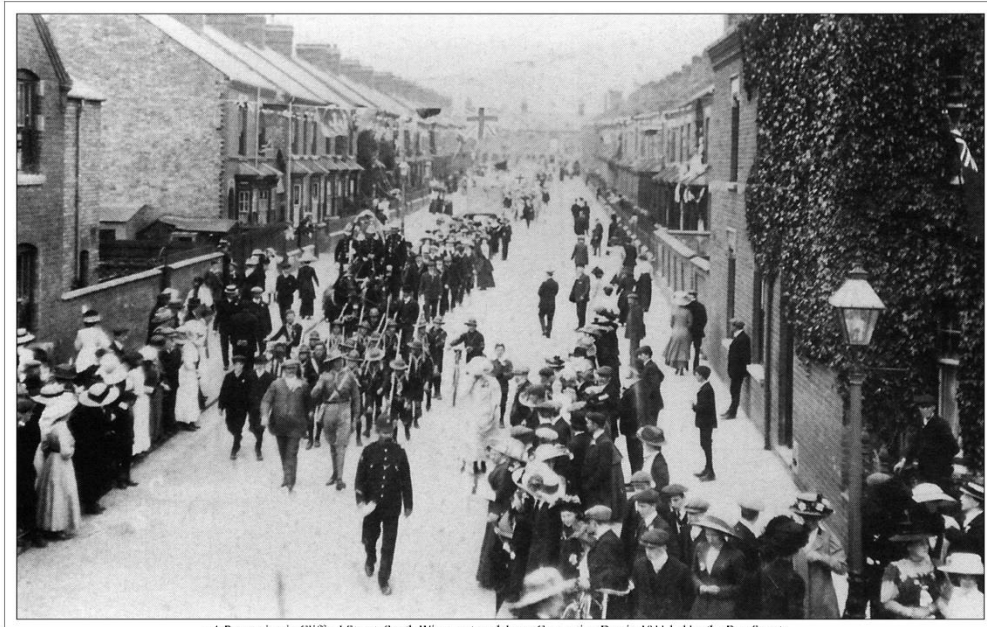
Back in the book, you also find Pete and Lisa stopping outside the bicycle and motorbike shop on the corner of Blaby Road and Countesthorpe Road, Eric Holmes as it was in my day. I think I also give her a memory from Charlie Moore's music shop, on the corner of Blaby Road and Canal Street, a shop I adored in my childhood and from where on my ninth birthday I bought the most fabulous set of mini-bagpipes, but that's another story.

Lisa worked briefly in a baker's shop, which was also taken from Blaby Road and the railway embankment and bridge on Saffron Road definitely appear. The Baptist Church on the corner of Dorset Avenue has a brief appearance from her short stint with the Girl Guides.

You couldn't map South Wigston from the book. Many other places have been borrowed to add to it, but you would certainly recognise the core of Billingbrook as being based on my childhood world.

I never intended to use Billingbrook again. However, it's developed a life of its own. In the book I am currently writing, I've gone back a hundred years and am setting a story there during World War One. This one establishes it very firmly as a Lancashire town and it would be harder to recognise the roots of the place from reading it, although the barracks and the Grange might well make an appearance. At some point I think I'd like to take my stories further back still and incorporate the life of framework knitters into my books but that would predate South Wigston and take me to surrounding areas.

The street pattern, and houses of South Wigston had a big impact on me in childhood. I was always fascinated by how the first letters of the road names on the south side of Blaby Road were taken from the name of Orson Wright, together with the place he came from. (Orange Street, Water Street, Railway Street, Irlam Street, Garden Street, Healey Street, Timber Street and of course Dunton and Bassett Streets).



A Procession in Clifford Street, South Wigston, to celebrate Coronation Day in 1911 led by the Boy Scouts.

Clifford Street

I walked to school, as children tended to do back then. In the years I walked to and from Guthlaxton as it was then called, to break things up I would vary my walk. One day I would walk up Clifford Street, another it would be Leopold Street, then Fairfield Street and on along Albion Street, Glengate and Station Street as well as Saffron Road – and repeat. When it was dark, I'd find some of them less troubling than others. I've always had a vivid imagination, which is never a good thing in the dark!

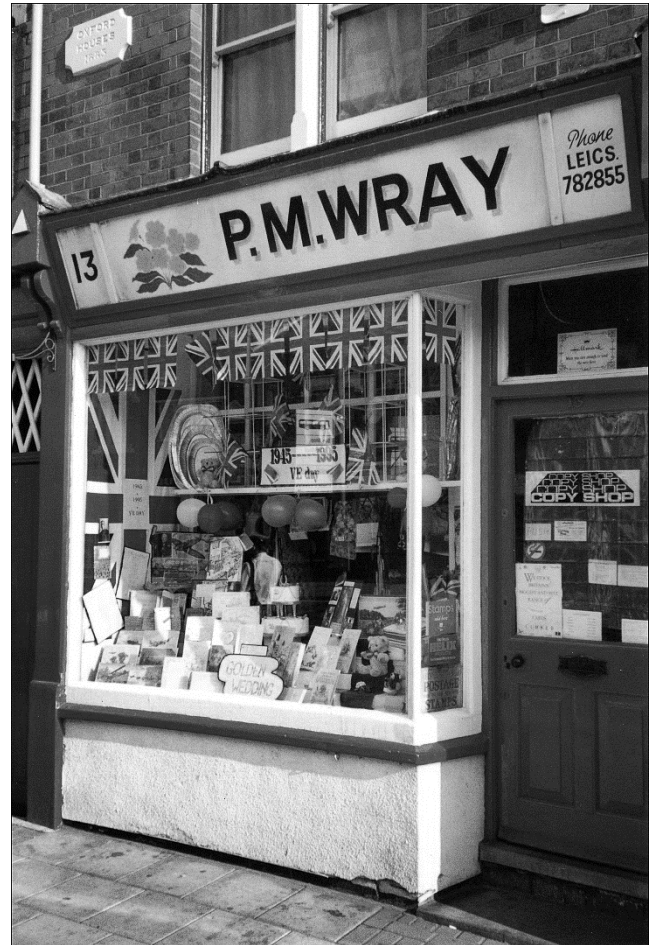
One thing that was consistent, whichever road I walked along, was that I would take in all the details I could observe of my surroundings: the pattern of the alley ways between the houses, the colour of the stone step at the front door, the name plate and date of the terraces, the way the tree roots pushed up the flags of the paving.

I used to say, 'If you've never walked through South Wigston on a dull November day, you've never lived'. It wasn't a compliment or an insult to the place, it was just a statement of what I saw. There was a certain atmosphere. On a foggy day, walking along by the terraces, I could be in any year since they were first built. Some things have obviously changed, but the town is a well-preserved example of a place built around a specific purpose and it's the more fascinating for it. I can picture it now, even as I write this from a little village over a hundred miles away.

More of the shop fronts on Blaby Road were still bay-windowed front rooms of houses in my day. A larger number of the houses still had small front gardens and garden gates. Of course, there were shops and a few of them are still under the same name and ownership, such as Lord's where I had the pleasure of working Saturdays and holidays for several years. However, gone is the greengrocer, Phil Smith, where I once got into trouble with my mother for adding a Mars Bar onto the cost of her weekly order.

Gone too Wray's where we would buy stationery and all manner of things hidden away where no one but the owner would ever find them. Over the years, so much has changed, but I can still see it in my mind's eye.

As a writer you are often advised to write what you know and why wouldn't I repurpose a place that holds such fascination and history?



Rosemary J. Kind
August 2020 www.rjkind.com

RANK, PROFESSION OR OCCUPATIONS FOUND ON THE 1881 CENSUS!

Colourist of artificial fish
Knight of The Thimble
Disinfector of railways
Examiner of underclothing
Invisible net maker
Electric bath attendant
Proprietor of midgets
Fifty-two years an imbecile
Knocker-up of workpeople
Maker of sand views
Gymnast to house painter
Turnip shepherd
My favourite – occupation for a 15-month-old boy: Tormenting the cat.

Emasculator
Sampler Of Drugs
Fatuious pauper
Drowner
Count as female
Fish-bender
Goldfish catcher
Cow banger
Running about
Grape dryer
Beef twister
Random waller

Peter Cousins

GREATER WIGSTON HERITAGE CENTRE SEARCH SERVICE
www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk/Search-Service.php

Although the Heritage Centre has been closed during the lockdowns, several of our online services continue to be well used, including our FREE family history search service, which is for anyone starting out on a journey into their past, or anyone stuck on research where hopefully we can help.

Family history research can become addictive, and for some people during the lockdown, including me, it has been a great way of getting to grips with your ancestry, or catching up on research you had always promised to do, but never got round to. I myself have been re-examining my data collected over many years and added many new “branches” to my history, which now takes me back to my Suffolk born 11th Great Grandfather!

Our searches can cover all aspects of your history, including subjects such as military history, which is my particular interest, connecting families together, or finding the history behind a family heirloom. Another avenue of research we now have is access to national newspapers which can throw up all sorts of fascinating information – including articles like court cases and business histories.

On the website search service page, (link shown above), we have posted some of the findings which include Peninsular War and Waterloo records. We received a request from Australia where we were able to pinpoint the burial plot of an elusive ancestor, and the history of a business from details on a clock.

Last year for an enquirer we were able to locate the unmarked grave of her ancestor in Wigston Cemetery and visited the cemetery with her and her family to mark the spot.

We can also now look at coming forward to find living branches of your family that you did not know existed, or family members you have lost contact with.

If you have thought in the past of starting your journey of discovery, or have started and hit some brick walls, let us try to help you.

How do you get in touch with us? On the search service webpage there is a submission form. Fill this in and send it to us and let us get started on your voyage of discovery!

Peter Cousins and the Research Team.

**GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
TREASURER'S REPORT TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
WEDNESDAY 17 FEBRUARY 2021**

These are the accounts for the year ending 31 December 2020 (Covid19 year with lockdowns) showing comparisons with 2019.

Receipts

Income from subscriptions was slightly higher than last year although the subscription rate was again unchanged. With only one meeting in the year, there were virtually no visitor's fees and donations, as last year, are now accounted for against Heritage Centre costs. However, those people who had purchased tickets for the concert which is now cancelled have kindly agreed to donate the £40 paid. We benefited from a legacy from the will of Stella Tweed of £200.

There was no Christmas party, but we sold sundry books.

Payments

Clearly, lecture fees and room hire were much reduced from the previous year. The increased number of pages in the Bulletin and more members caused an increase in the costs of the Bulletin.

Admin costs and officers expenses this year included a number of special one-off items including excess postage costs for the Bulletin and for other communications sent to members not on email during the lockdowns; the Museums Forum fee; a reader to enable the Society to accept card payments and the Zoom licence. Insurance premiums are now shown separately.

Visits

There were no visits in 2020 but we received the refund of £50 for a deposit paid in 2019.

Heritage Centre

There was an excess of income over costs of the Heritage Centre of £714 due to grants and generous donations, these are mainly non-recurring sources of income and as most costs are ongoing, such a surplus may not arise in future years. Many thanks are given to those people who gave generous donations and to those who donated their time.

Information Board and Booklets.

This receipt and cost are the same and relate to the Lancaster Bomber information board and the East Wigston Meadows booklet, both of which were accounted for in the Society's accounts but have no effect on the overall bank balances.

DVDs

The latest DVD, 'From Fields to a Town' was issued in the year and sold 50 copies. The previous three DVDs sold 19 copies in the year making a total of 69 sold with a cumulative sales of 1078 copies. Dave Andrews who reads the script on the DVDs has donated his fee for the year to The Macular Society. The profit for the year on DVD sales was £281.

Books

For the first time this year the Society has published books for resale, altogether three books were printed. The overall profit on these sales was £634 from 279 copies sold.

Calendars

The calendar for 2021 was the third in the series and all 150 copies printed have been sold. Together with the remaining few 2020 copies sold earlier in the year; these sales produced a profit of £232.

Bank balances.

At the end of the year, we had £8956.07 in the bank compared with £7201.81 at the end of 2019. This is an increase of £1754.26 resulting from the net surplus income from our ongoing operating activities.

Summary

All in all, another successful year financially. This reflects a year of hard work by committee members. This team effort is highlighted by the fact that:

One new DVD, one new calendar and three new books has been published, resulting in sales of 69 DVDs, 150 calendars and 279 books (502 sales in all) earning the Society a profit on these activities of £1147. A tremendous effort with thanks to all involved.

The accounts are currently being examined and for approval by Garry Davies. My thanks go to him for his work.

I present these accounts for your approval.

Colin Towell, Treasurer

GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY							
RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT							
YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2020							
RECEIPTS				PAYMENTS			
	2020	2019		2020	2019		
Subscriptions	1496.00	1360.00	Lecture fees	80.00	330.00		
Visitors fees	3.00	192.00	Bulletin & Programme print	235.43	176.88		
Donation for audio equipment		100.00	Room Hire	80.00	370.00		
Sundry	40.00		Admin costs and Officers' expenses	646.02	192.37		
Legacy	200.00		Insurance premium	184.80	172.37		
			sundry		149.53		
			Website fees	50.00	50.00		
total income from meetings	1739.00	1652.00	total running costs	1276.25	1441.15		
Christmas meeting		241.65	Christmas meeting		161.10		
Sale of books	37.00	8.00	Purchase of FWK books	28.00			
Bank interest	1.03	2.00					
sub total	1777.03	1903.65	sub total	1304.25	1602.25		
Visits, this year	50.00	943.50	Visits, this year		1019.00		
	1827.03	2847.15		1304.25	2621.25		
Donations and grants	1715.97	1420.25	Costs of Heritage Centre	1001.61	1396.18		
post on sales	352.35		Post, packing, pp charges	313.20			
Donations for info bd & booklets	1431.20		Info board & booklets	1431.20			
			DVDs made and commission	525.00	1789.35		
			add cost of unsold DVDs bfd	148.00	40.50		
			less cost of unsold DVDs cfd	-264.00	-148.00		
DVD sales	690.00	2487.00	DVDs: Cost of sales	409.00	409.00		
			cost of books	1539.60			
			less cost of unsold books cfd	-557.81			
Book sales	1616.23		Books: Cost of sales	981.79	981.79		
CD Sales	17.00	17.00	Cost of CDs	12.82	8.71		
Calendar sales	779.00	802.00	Cost of Calendars	546.84	583.63		
	8428.78	7573.40		6000.71	6291.62		
Brought forward:			Carried forward:				
current a/c	6874.5	5194.04	current a/c	8096.4	6874.52		
paid in and not credited		152.00	paid in and not credited	30.00			
cheque not presented	-677.33	-321.13	cheques not presented	-161.00	-677.33		
	6197.19		receipts cfd to 2021	-15.00			
				7950.42			
deposit a/c	1004.62	1002.62	deposit a/c	1005.65	1004.62		
	7201.81	6027.53		8956.07	7201.81		
			DVDs/ Books non cash Adj	673.81	107.50		
	15630.59	13600.93		15630.59	13600.93		

Wigston Remembering the Past Volume One – Correction

In the article 'Wigston Historical Walk' on page 56 it was noted that the Meadows Estate was built on land owned by the Co-operative Society. This was noted incorrectly as the land was owned by The Wyggeston Hospital and managed from Wyggeston Farm on Bull Head Street.

OBITUARIES

We sadly announce the passing of one of our members, Doreen Boulter. Doreen had been a member of the Society for many years and wrote many articles for the bulletin under the alias of "Wiggy Maggy". Our thoughts and condolences go to Doreen's family.

We also sadly announce the passing of one of our members, Steve Merrell, who passed away in December 2020. Our thoughts and condolences go to his family.