



Greater Wigston Historical Society
White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna Leicestershire

BULLETIN 40



The Bell Leicester Road Wigston Magna

J R Colver

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS OCTOBER 1994 TO FEBRUARY 1995

Wednesday 19th October 1994

A Wistow Evening - Bernard Elliott. 7.30p.m. Wigston Liberal Club.

Wednesday 16th November 1994

The History of Lighting - Dr. Jim Coaton (former Technical Director at Thorn Lighting).
7.30p.m. Wigston Liberal Club.

Wednesday 21st December 1994

-
Christmas Party.
7.30p.m. Wigston Liberal Club.

Wednesday 18th January 1995

The Grantham Canal - Richard Harrison. 7.30p.m. Wigston Liberal Club.

Wednesday 15th February 1995

A.G.M. followed by short talks from members on the theme - Wigston People.
7.30p.m. Wigston Liberal Club.

FRONT COVER ILLUSTRATION

Jim Colver's drawing for this issue of the bulletin features The Bell Inn on Leicester Road. It was built c!860 and has suffered few alterations except for its outbuildings. The licence was transferred from The Bell Inn in Bell Street, a coaching inn which lost its trade with the arrival of the railways and was converted into 'Shipps¹ drapery shop.

Drake's Directory first mentions the present Bell Inn in 1861 and gives the landlord as James Tabberer. Subsequent directories list William Cook 1870, Thomas Burbidge Potter 1875, Simeon Pole 1884, Charles Ward 1888, Edwin Varnham 1894-1908, Henry Boothaway 1916-1925, Walter Hipwell 1928 and Ernest E. Garnett 1932-41.

The Bulletin is published three times a year on 1st February, June and October. Articles etc. (which are always welcome) should be submitted to either of the Joint Editors three clear weeks before the publication date please.

Joint Editors; Mrs. Chris Smart, 197 Queens Road, Leicester.
Mrs. Tricia Berry, 7 Wensleydale Road, Wigston.

JUNE MEETING

This meeting took the form of a coach outing to Thrumpton Hall near Nottingham. Thrumpton is a privately owned country estate which includes a 17th Century hall with gardens, park, home farm, most of the houses in the village and the chancel and advowson of Thrumpton Church. The owner, Mr. George Fitzroy Seymour, sadly died very suddenly about 3 weeks before our visit. His widow, Rosemary, was absent from home to be with her grand-daughter who was 4 years old that day. The couple have a son who lives in America and a daughter, the writer, Miranda Seymour.

We had tea and biscuits in the old kitchen before dividing into 2 groups to tour the house and grounds. The present house, on the site of a previous one, was built in 1609. It is of a lovely mellow brick with typical Elizabethan style chimneys. There is a particularly fine carved Charles 11 staircase designed by Webb who was a pupil of Indigo Jones. In the oak panelled drawing room there is a carved plaster rose in the ceiling. This was a sign that confidential matters could be discussed there and is where the latin term *sub rosa*, under the rose, comes from. Off this room is a priest's hiding hole and secret staircase built into the chimney breast. We saw several beautifully furnished rooms with Hepplewhite chairs and notable paintings. In the red bedroom was a Jacobean bed decorated with stump work embroidery. A signed photograph of Queen Victoria was a present to the late owner's mother who was her goddaughter.

In the grounds there is a rose garden, fine lawns, ha-ha wall to separate it from the park and many specimen trees, some planted to commemorate Royal anniversaries. There are also the marked graves of much loved pet dogs.

The property has been owned by 3 different families. Firstly, from the 12th Century, by the Powdrills who had it confiscated for their involvement in the Gun Powder Plot. It was then conveyed by the Crown in 1607 to Gervase Pigot whose son, also Gervase, assisted Thoroton when he wrote the first county history of Nottinghamshire. The second Gervase married an heiress and spent much money improving the property, too much, for when he died his mother, who outlived him, had to mortgage the property. The mortgage was taken up by John Emerton who eventually foreclosed and took possession in 1696. It has remained in that family ever since.

John Emerton left the property to his great nephew William Westcomb. It continued in the Westcomb name until Lucy Westcomb married the 8th Lord Byron who was a relation of the famous poet. Lucy had inherited the estate when she came of age. She died aged 88 in 1912. She had lived at Thrumpton and ruled it, like Queen Victoria had ruled England, for nearly 70 years. She is remembered with awe but also with affection. The estate was left in 1949 to George Seymour by his Uncle the 10th Lord Byron. However, death duties forced the trustees to sell the property but he managed to raise the money to buy back what should have been his anyway. By judicious sales of some of the farms he managed to repay the mortgage and make the estate pay.

After many thanks to our helpful guides and a message of condolence to Mrs. Seymour we returned to Wigston.

August meeting

On Wednesday the 17th of August the Society met in the Paddock Street car park to be taken by coach to Uppingham for a visit to Uppingham School.

The School was founded by Archdeacon Johnson in 1584. It was originally housed in a single schoolroom (now the Art School) near to the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in the Market Place.

In the late eighteenth century students were provided with individual study rooms, innovative for the period.

Edward Thring was appointed headmaster in 1853, and this heralded a period of expansion. In twelve years the school increased from 23 boarders to over 300.

Thring was an enlightened head, convinced that the good influence of comfortable and pleasant surroundings was preferable to the spartan regime found at other schools.

The Library is the most obvious remnant of Johnson's original hospital. It has an attractive ceiling and a circular vestibule with a distinctive war memorial.

The school chapel has been extended and new and old blend curiously together. The war memorial chapel commemorates Old Uppingham pupils killed during World War II.

We were then shown the old school hall now divided into two parts but time forbade us from seeing all of the buildings and houses which spread throughout the town.

This was a most interesting visit, made memorable by our charming and knowledgeable guides. We left Uppingham to travel, to the Langtons for an informal supper, before returning to Wigston.

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Following our visit to the New Walk Museum in March, our hostess on that occasion, Amanda Wadsley, the Keeper of Fine Art, helped us start the winter programme in excellent form with a most enjoyable talk illustrated with slides. Her subject was the artist & photographer George Moore Henton (1861-1924). Nationally, even inter-nationally known for his soft, Pre-Raphaelite style water colour landscapes, he was one of the four main Leicestershire artists - the others being Ferneley, Fulleylove & Flower.

He was born at 64, Regent Street, Leicester, the son of George Henton, a bank clerk, and his wife Sarah. In the 1870's the family were living at 15, High Street over Pagets Bank where his father had become head clerk. The family had relatives who farmed at Ragdale Hall, which was leased from Lord Ferrers, & a part of his early life was spent there. He was educated at Mill Hill School & studied art under Wilmot Pilsbury the first head of the Leicester Art School. He exhibited at the Royal Academy from the early age of 24.

He lived for a time at Windsor and various views of that area exist together with some of Eton, Henley & the Thames Valley. The great majority of his work, however, features Leicestershire topography. He was a member of the Leicester Society of Artists & the Archaeological Trust for whom he took many photographs. These, some 2000 in number, are on display in albums at the Record Office. Comparing these photographs with some of the paintings suggest he used them to aid his memory when completing work back at the studio.

He was known to be rather dominated by his mother & did not marry. In later life he lived with her at Charnwood House, Victoria (later University) Road. He died aged 63 in 1924.

His work gives valuable glimpses of the county between 1881 & 1923. There is no known painting of Wigston but examples of his work turn up from around the world so one might well exist. The Museum has 80 of his paintings & plans an exhibition in Spring 1996.

The Chairman, Edna Taylor, thanked M/s Wadsley for a most entertaining evening during which she answered many questions. After a few announcements the meeting closed at approximately 9.00p.m.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Two new local history booklets have been published recently by our members.

Bernard Elliott has been very busy with the 1891 Census for Wigston and supplies a mass of information on the residents of 100 years ago, with some interesting comparisons to entries made in 1881. Wigston in 1891 costs £2 50.

Jim Colver has put together a collection of his marvellous drawings of Wigston buildings. Some 50 are featured from the parish church to the 'Prims' cricket pavilion each with short descriptive text. All profits will be donated to the F.W.K. Museum.

Wigston Magna, Its Buildings Extant, Altered or Demolished costs £2 80.

Both booklets can be obtained from their respective authors or the F.W.K. Museum Shop.

LEICESTER'S VICTORIAN HERITAGE

The Fund Raising Committee of the F.W.K. Museum have arranged a slide show to be given by Mr. Derek Seaton on Victorian Leicester. It will be held on Saturday 19th November 1994 at 7.30p.m. at Cross Street Methodist Church. Tickets costing £2 each can be obtained from Colin Towell (Telephone 889638) or other committee members.

Mr. Seaton is a Leicester City Guide with Wigston connections -his grandparents were framework knitters in the village. This should prove to be a most interesting evening.

WIGSTON WHO'S WHO NO: 9 ORSON WRIGHT J.P.

Orson Wright was born on 23/7/1853 in Dunton Bassett, the second child in a family of 4 boys and 2 girls. His father Joseph was a labourer at the time, though later he changed his occupation to butcher and grocer. His mother Maria Wright nee Greenwell was, like her husband, from a family long established in that village.

Orson was apprenticed as a carpenter and as a young man worked at the bench. He moved to Leicester and was a joiner when on 25/5/1874 at St. Margaret's Church he married Ada Harris, daughter of Thomas Harris, a wheelwright. Both bride and groom were 20 years old at the time and lived in Birstall Street. Orson signed his name in the register but Ada made her mark X.

By 1877 he had gone into partnership with his eldest brother Charles as Wright Bros., joiners, bricklayers, builders & contractors. The two lived and traded in All Saints' Road. They worked on many building projects around Leicester, notably in the Knighton Fields, Highfields and Spinney Hill areas. The partnership however did not last and by 1881 Orson and family had moved to Onslow Villas, Knighton Lane, Aylestone where at the age of 27 he had a daughter, Ada Ann aged 5, and three small sons, Albert, Herbert & Orson. He was described as a builder employing 25 men and 2 boys, and was then in partnership with another brother, Joseph Jnr, who was also a beer retailer and shopkeeper. This partnership did not survive either, though, and Charles & Joseph later worked on their own as builder and shopkeeper respectively at various addresses in Leicester.

It was in 1883 that Orson turned his attention to South Wigston. Essentially a speculative builder he bought land and moved his business there, no doubt attracted by the space to expand, the good rail links afforded by the 3 stations and the potential for development which arose when the Midland Railway decided to site an engine repair works there with the prospect of 300 jobs. He established his main business O. Wright & Co., contractors & joiners in his Perseverance Works in Canal Street, together with his Wigston Foundry Co. He bought the existing Wigston Junction Brick & Tile Works which was situated on the

corner of Saffron Road and Blaby Road, (now a garage) from a Mr. Healey which he ran in conjunction with the Knighton Junction Brick Company which he already owned. He became completely self sufficient in building materials, only needing to 'import' slates which came by the train load into his own sidings from North Wales. In 7 years he had built 600 identical houses to the south of Blaby Road, each 3 up and 3 down with outside toilet attached to a skullery and coalshed. They were well built if rather monotonous and much appreciated by their new inhabitants. He named two of the new streets Dunton and Bassett after the village of his birth, and others Orange, Water (later re-named Park), Railway, Irlam, Garden, Healey and Timber because they spelt his name O. Wright.

The family moved from Onslow Villas in about 1884 to Venetia House, Aylestone Road before moving to South Wigston about 1886. His home, Ashbourne House, on Blaby Road occupied a site from the present Quicksave to the T.S.B. and was an impressive building with tennis court in the garden. It was later to become the home of successive doctors and was demolished in 1962. The family expanded, another son Shirley had been born in Aylestone and two more, Sidney and Orson, in South Wigston. The previous little boy named Orson had presumably died.

Development continued apace. The north side of Blaby Road was built as was both the Grand and the Duke of Clarence Hotels and even the band stand in the park at a cost of £7. 10. 0! He did not however build St. Thomas' Church. He took the Chair, supported by Mr. T. Ingram, of the committee which organised the project, gave the land, and jointly with his wife, £60 towards the chancel fund, but did not secure the contract to build because his tender was considerably more than that of a Mr. Bland who did get the job. The meeting expressed regret that Orson was not to be the builder but economic considerations had to prevail.

His building activities were not confined to South Wigston. He was responsible in 1885 for the construction of a substantial part of Frederick Street Methodist Church in Wigston and in 1895 he built and endowed a village hall for Dunton Bassett. He developed extensively in the Newfoundpool area of Leicester and also in North Bridge where in 1897 he gave the land for the Woodgate Library. Dunton and Bassett Streets are also to be found there. He had great confidence in the economic future of the town and promoted the idea of the impressive Grand Hotel and Kings Hall in Granby Street which he built in 1896/8. Between 1907/10 he was one of the five contractors working on the huge Derwent Water Scheme in Derbyshire. He was responsible for the Ambergate covered reservoir and part of the aqueduct. For this he had to purchase 2 narrow gauge locomotives to help with the pipe laying, 2 standard gauge locomotives and a 60cm tramway at Heage.

He invested the money he made from building into other ventures in South Wigston. He owned or had an interest in several companies, notably Orson Wright & Sons, Boot & Shoe Manufacturers, Wigston Hat & Cap Company and Harris Wright & Co., Hosiery Manufacturers. He was chairman of the Wigston Gas Company and of the Leicester Hotels Company.

He was no less active in public life. A staunch Conservative, when the County Council was established in 1889 he became the elected representative for Dunton Bassett. In 1894 he represented Fairfield Ward on Wigston Council and in 1895 he was elected to serve Abbey Ward on Leicester Council. He served as a magistrate, was Vice President of Leics. County Cricket Club and a generous supporter of Leicester Fosse (later City) Football Club. He was a life governor of Leicester Infirmary and took an active part in organising the Infirmary Sports. He was thought to be a Trustee of Higgs' Bequest which made possible the erection of the Swithland Convalescent Homes in connection with the Saturday Hospital Society.

On 18/6/1908 his wife, aged 54, died "after a long and painful illness, patiently borne....She was of a retiring disposition and took no part in public life, but in a quiet unostentatious way she had done much useful and philanthropic work in South Wigston where she was held in great esteem." She was buried in Wigston Cemetery. On the grave is inscribed "To live in the Hearts we leave behind is not to die."

Orson did not survive his wife by many years. He died on 10/4/1913, aged 59, having suffered "cardiac trouble of an alarming type" two years earlier. He was buried with his wife. Their daughter, Mrs. Ada Ann Oliver, who also only lived to be 55 is buried with them. The 6 children gave two stained glass windows in the south side of St. Thomas' Church in memory of their parents. The building company appears to have died with its owner but the other companies were run by his sons, and a further one, Burn & Orson Wright Ltd., Electrical Factors, of Yeoman Lane, Leicester was to be added in the future.

The following extracts from a newspaper account of his death give a little more information about him. "The late Mr. Orson Wright was in many respects one of the best known men in the town and county. Essentially a self-made man he combined distinctive personal qualities which made both for business success and for some prominence in public life, whilst in private circles he enjoyed in a large degree the respect and esteem of his friends and also of his political opponents.....it was not perhaps all smooth sailing even in the early days he aimed at big things and there was an element of ill-luck about some of his pet schemes not the man to be deterred by any such obstacles endowed with a dogged perseverance and a tenacity of purpose that enabled him to overcome most difficulties more than once described as the local Cecil Rhodes to whom he bore rather a striking resemblance."

Tricia Berry

Sources: Birth & Marriage Certificates. Gravestone in Wigston Cemetery. Various Directories. Census Returns for Dunton Bassett, Aylestone & South Wigston. Leicester Chronicle & Leicestershire Mercury 12/4/1913 & 20/6/1908. G.W.H.S. Transaction No: 19 & 24. Urban Study of Wigston & its relationship with Leicester by Alison Tummins. South Wigston & its Parish Church (to commemorate the centenary) by P.G. Holmes, P. Ward & M.E. Nobbs. Midland Peasant by W.G. Hoskins.

Leicestershire Husbandry and the Chase

Each in its turn: can any spot of ground,
 Tho¹ we search Albion through, more rich be found
 Than what LEICESTRIAS fertile realms afford
 With cattle, corn, and herbage amply stor'd
 Twere most ingenerous here and most unfit
 Thy commendation, Bakewell, to omit,
 Whose judgement, skill, and well digested thought
 Our cattie's' breed have to perfection brought.

Had Dyer at this later period liv'd,
 What praises had our ample fleece receiv'd
 Whose worth let Halifax and Leeds proclaim,
 And love the country whence the treasure came.

Ye sons of Nimrod eager for the sport,
 Here to your aged master pay your court,
 The science of the chase by Meynell taught,
 Its pleasures here enjoy with health unbought.

W.P. TAYLOR, 1798

Thanks to Shirley Hensman for supplying the above verse,

Lepers and leprosy in medieval Leicestershire

Now whosoever shall be defiled with leprosy, and is separated by the judgement of the priest, shall have his clothes hanging loose, his mouth covered with a cloth, and he shall cry out that he is defiled and unclean. All the time that he is a leper and unclean, he shall dwell alone without the camp.

' Leviticus 13: 44-46

Leprosy is a chronic infective disease caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium leprae*, discovered in 1854 by Dr. G.H. Armauer Hansen. Modern pathology has identified several types of leprosy, but in history the disease was characterized by disfiguring skin lesions and inflammation, erosion and atrophy of the bone. It was the most feared of all diseases in Europe from the 10th to the 15th centuries.

It used to be thought that the disease was introduced by Crusaders returning from the East, however, earlier evidence of the disease has been found in Scandinavian countries.

The earliest evidence of leprosy in Britain is from the sixth century. Leprosy is mentioned in legal records in both France and Ireland in the eighth century. It is therefore reasonable to assume that it must have existed in considerable numbers to merit legislation. The legislation concerning the segregation of lepers possibly represents a social reaction to the disease, which may at that time have had Biblical associations.

In medieval times the disease was thought of as being a divine punishment for sin, the worse the disfigurement - the more grievous the sin. As a result lepers were social outcasts. The clergy decided if a person was suffering from the disease and they were then banished to live outside the village. Forbidden to eat or drink with the healthy the leper was provided with a bell and a bowl for alms and forced to beg at the wayside for a measly existence.

Leprosy is now known to be amongst the least contagious of all transmissible diseases, with an incubation period of about three years. Medieval medical practitioners had no concept of the incubation period and lepers were treated as if the disease were highly contagious.

The incidence of leprosy peaked in the 13th century, with about 200 leper hospitals in England. It began to die out as the population built up an immunity and other diseases, such as tuberculosis, became the major killers.

The Order of St. Lazarus was founded about 1120 to assist pilgrims to the Holy Land, to defend the faith and to provide succour to lepers. Because of this latter association the order may have been established to cater for knights excluded from the Hospitallers and Templars due to infection with leprosy.

The leper hospitals represented a refuge to lepers. The Lazarites did not; however offer their services for free. A sick person would be taken on condition that a portion of land was conveyed to the hospital to help pay for their keep.

Leprosy hospitals were usually built as a small settlement near to a village, often near to mineral springs, no other effective treatment being known at the time.

In Leicestershire the leper hospital was at Burton Lazars near to Melton Mowbray in the east of the County. It was situated at the top of a hill some distance from the village about 350 yards west of the church.

Earthworks at the site suggest a discernable layout of moats, waterways for curative bathing and a system of ponds possibly to provide fresh fish. A sulphurous spring, used in the eighteenth century as a spa is situated nearby and this may have been responsible for its original siting. At Burton Lazars there was a burial ground, a chapel and a chapter house (where deeds were sealed and business conducted).

In 1913 the site was partly excavated by the Marquis of Granby (later the 9th Duke of Rutland). About 100 medieval floor tiles and some baking ovens were unearthed. The tiles were each about 4 1/2 inches square and were made of red clay with a greenish/yellow glaze, probably made in the 15th century. The designs represented in some cases the Coats of Arms of noble families. The tiles are said to be displayed in the British Museum. Since the 1913 excavation the site has remained undisturbed. Interpretation of such a site will always be difficult; its size and function changing over a two hundred year period.

The Hospital was founded by Roger de Mowbray who granted,

... to the lepers of St. Lazarus without the walls of Jerusalem 2 carucates of land, a house, mill etc. at Burton ...

It was built by a general collection in England for the relief and support of lepers. The date is uncertain but it is unlikely to have been before 1138 when Roger was still a young man and was certainly before 1162.

Roger de Mowbray had participated in the Second Crusade (1147) and during his stay in Palestine he may have become acquainted with the Order of St. Lazarus.

The principal of the hospital was known as the Master. The Master of Burton Lazars exercised control over all establishments of the Order of St. Lazarus in England. The Burton Hospital also had possession of a number of lesser houses including one at Tilton. Its endowment included land and rectories granted by a range of secular benefactors.

Very little is known of the internal life of the Hospital. There was usually the Master, eight brothers, living according to the Augustine rule, and an unspecified number of lepers. Special attention was paid to food and clothing for the lepers. The lepers had a regular supply of material for their clothing and a tailor to make up the garments. Hygiene was strictly enforced with regular changes of bedding and rushes for the floors. All inmates were supposed to attend church services and to do odd jobs about the Hospital.

In 1404 a cartulary of the house was drawn up to describe its holdings. A traveller of the time described Burton Hospital as ¹¹ "a very fair hospital and collegiate church".

The decline started in the 14th century and may have been connected to widespread famine of the time, and increased immunity in the population. The Black Death decimated the population of England. Lepers, in particular, were susceptible to infection due to their already weakened state. From then on the number of leper hospitals rapidly declined.

The hospital at Burton Lazars existed for at least four hundred years. Having survived the widespread decimation of religious houses by Henry VIII in 1535-40 it was completely surrendered to the Crown on the 4th of May 1544.

Chris Smart

"What strange ideas people have about leprosy, doctor."

"They learn it from the Bible. Like sex."

Graham Greene, A burnt-out case

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A POTTED ENGLISH CHURCH HISTORY

with special attention to All Saints, Wigston Magna

Christianity spread rapidly through Britain from its introduction in 597AD. Previously, it had been known during the last years of the Roman empire, but had been forgotten with the downfall of the empire.

Pope Gregory the Great (C540-604AD) sent a priest called Augustine (later St Augustine) to convert the heathen population, with the aid of 40 monks.

From this period, churches and monasteries began to be built. The churches were for worship by the laity, where marriages, baptisms and funerals took place. In monasteries, nuns and monks lived away from the temptations of the world, serving God by continual prayer, and by taking vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Different to the monks were the friars, who did not shut themselves away from the world, but mixed with the laity, preaching and giving aid. Friars relied upon the charity of other people as they were forbidden their own land, while the monasteries provided a rich income for the monks.

Throughout the Dark Ages and Middle Ages, English churches were part of the Roman Catholic church. Towards the end of the Middle ages, this was causing discontent. Papal taxes were unpopular, as this meant that money from local churches was removed to the bloated coffers of the Vatican, sometimes money which the parish could ill afford to send due to poverty or the disrepair of the parish church, which was judged to be of greater importance than Rome by the peasantry. The Northern aisle of the present church dates from the late 13th century, the Southern aisle, chancel, tower and spire from the early 14th century. The roof fell in during the 17th century and had to be replaced. By this time, Wigston was one of the wealthiest parishes in the country. In the Domesday book (1086), Wigston is mentioned as being the largest village in Leicestershire.

Papal claims of authority were also unpopular. William the Conqueror refused to accept the claim of Pope Alexander II to be his overlord soon after his victory at Hastings.

By the Middle Ages, priests had become lazy and unconscientious. Pluralism, where a priest received the stipend (wage) from two or more churches, but actually preached at only one of them, had become common. Known Pluralists at All Saints include John de Hale (who was a Dean in Cornwall), William Newport (who was Chancellor of Lichfield Cathedral) and Robert Grave. One of the most extreme examples of Pluralism was that of Thomas Wynter (son of Cardinal Wolsey, aide of Henry VIII) who was Dean of Wells, Archdeacon of York and Richmond, Chancellor of Salisbury, Provost of St Peters and rector of various churches in Yorkshire and Suffolk. A Pluralist usually employed an ill-paid preacher (often the son of local landowners) to take the duties of the absent rector.

It is mentioned in *Piers the Ploughman* by William Langland that priests were often unable to read or write. Out of 12 parishes in Berkshire in 1222, 5 priests were unable to understand or say the mass.

"I have been priest and parson for 30 winters past

But I cannot solfa or sing or read a Latin life of saints ...in mass book or Popes edict I cannot read a line"

Another problem in the church was the selling of pardons and indulgences, remission from the penalties of sin for those able to pay for it.

Attached to All Saints was a great deal of land which was profitably farmed. This land was owned by Lenton Priory in Nottinghamshire from the 12th century. In return for the profits from the land, the Priory paid the priests stipend, and for the upkeep of the chancel.

The Reformation was perhaps the most important event in English Christianity since its introduction in 597AD. Throughout Europe during the 14th-17th centuries, changes began to occur in the Church due to the work of Luther in Germany, and Zwingli and Calvin in Switzerland. The control of the Papacy on the various churches throughout Europe was coming to an end. In England, the Reformation occurred not only because of the preaching of Luther and others, but also because of social dissatisfaction at the corruption of the church, at the fact that services were in Latin, which was not spoken by the laity, and because of the desire of Henry VIII to divorce his first wife and marry Anne Boleyn (this is a very simplified account of the reasons behind the Reformation). England broke away from Rome and the Church of England reformed with Henry VIII as its head. John Edmonds, the last Catholic priest of All Saints resigned in July 1507, and was replaced a few days later by William Reede, the first Church of England vicar. At this time the church was in a state of disrepair due to a lack of funds from Lenton Priory (which was closed down and ransacked a few years later along with the other monasteries in England). By the time Thomas Thorneton became vicar in 1577, All Saints was one of the wealthiest parishes in the country. Thorneton had previously been private chaplain to Elizabeth I, and it is thought that she visited the church although there is no record of this. On the North side of the church tower, below the clock, can be seen a black diamond outline where the board featuring Elizabeth's coat of arms is thought to have been. Thorneton closed down St Wistan's church, also in the parish.

For a time it was used as a school, before reverting back to a church. The monarch of England was now the patron of the church. This continued until the formation of the commonwealth in 1649, when Charles I was executed and Oliver Cromwell became lord protector. It is thought that Oliver Cromwell spent the night in Wigston on 14th June 1645. A parliamentary committee was formed to deal with the funding of parishes formerly under the monarch. In 1652, the community at Wigston contacted this committee;

"The inhabitants of Wigston, being 160 families, ask for £50 for Zachary Burrough, minister of Wigston, he having 10 children and only £10 a year besides [the villagers'] charity."

The £50 was to be taken from Sir James Stonehouse, who was being punished for his support of the king during the civil war. However, creditors had already seized Sir James' property and the money from him did not appear - it is not known whether money was provided from somewhere else. During the years that England was a commonwealth (1649-1660), the radically Protestant Puritans became powerful. Puritans were not in favour of the theatre and church ornamentation such as stained glass amongst other things. A Puritan minister was appointed to churches. At Wigston a man called William Thorpe replaced Zachary Burrough (although not straight away as we can see from the date of the parliamentary record quoted). All Saints seems to have largely escaped the widespread "purification" of churches which occurred at the time although Roundheads (soldiers supporting Oliver Cromwell) stole the Communion silver. The Commonwealth ended in 1660 and Sampson Hopkins was made vicar of the parish in 1665. William Thorpe may have remained for the extra five years or he may have been replaced by Zachary Burrough.

The stolen silver was replaced by George Davenport, one of the large Wigston family who were landowners in the area for over 400* years. There is a stained glass window in the North isle in his memory. 'George Davenport was also a priest of a parish near Durham, where he was buried. His brother John was vicar of All Saints church for 13 years from 1693. From the 18th century, very little of major interest has happened, either in the Church of England or at All Saints. It is thought that some of the later vicars were Pluralists, including Dillingham Boswell who died at Dean in Bedfordshire.

William Romanis, vicar from 1863, was a hymn writer. One of his works which begins "Round me falls the night" can be found in several hymn books.

He lived in the old vicarage with his sisters and was chairman of the parish council for a time.

In 1902, Robert Cecil Palmer became vicar. He was the first vicar to live in the present vicarage, which was built in 1909 for a little over £1000. In 1912 he left his wife and children and ran away to Canada with a young lady and most of the church funds. His wife had all her personal property confiscated to pay for the losses, and the next vicar, Thomas Wright had to make up the difference before he was instituted. During the 1920s, while Wright was vicar, he was assisted by George West, who went on to be vicar at Peatling Parva, near Wigston. West then moved back to Wigston to become vicar of All Saints, while Wright took up West's old position in Peatling Parva. The present vicar, John Green was an assistant to the previous vicar, Basil Tudor Davies.

All Saints church is the oldest and most impressive building in Wigston. It has more carved faces around its windows and arches than almost any other church in England of a similar size - even Leicester Cathedral has fewer. With radical changes

in the Church of England such as the introduction of women priests and the sale of certain buildings it is to be hoped that this fine church is safe for a few more generations, if not longer.

The above very interesting article was written by John Royley who has just recently joined the Society. We understand John is just about to begin a course of study at Liverpool University and wish him well in his new life.

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