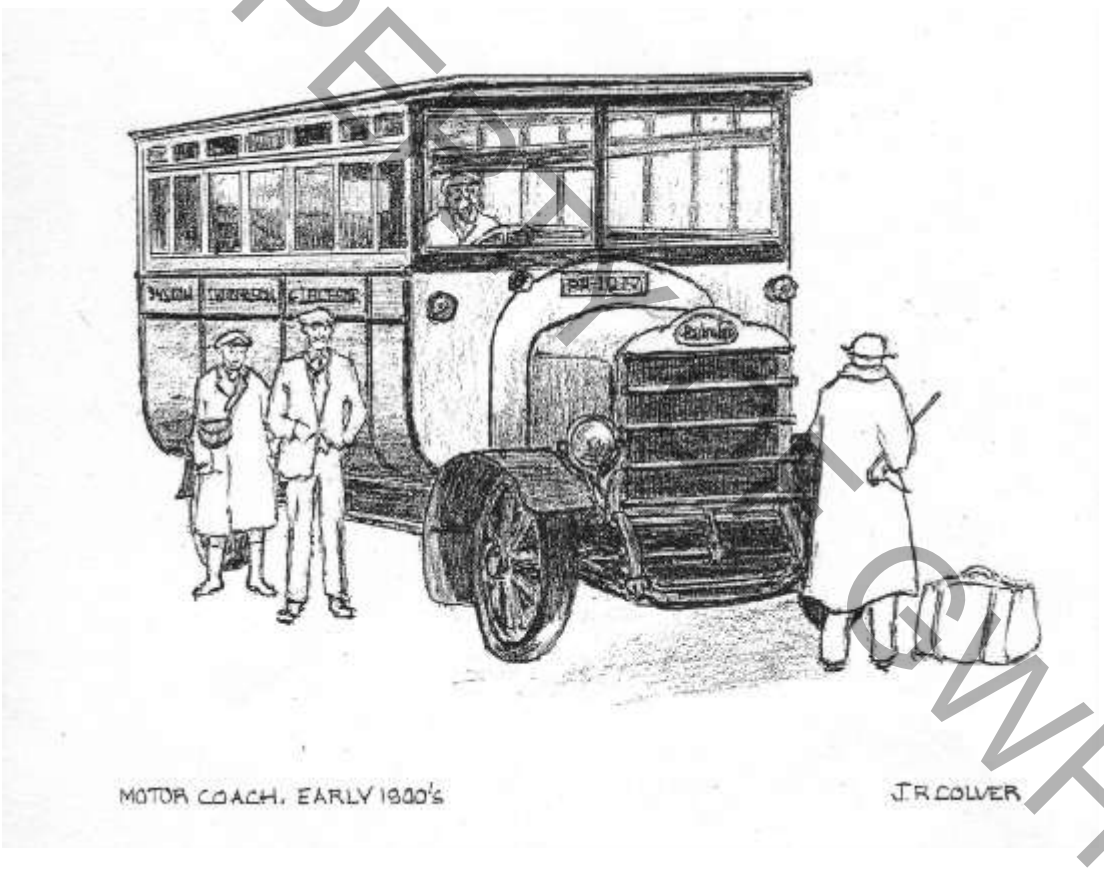
Greater Wigston Historical Society

White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna Leicestershire

BULLETIN 62

PROPERTY OF GWHS



MOTOR COACH. EARLY 1900's

J.R.COLVER

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS - FEBRUARY TO AUGUST 2002

Wednesday 20th February 2002
A.G.M. followed by:
Some History of my Home Town & its parallels to Wigston - Tony Lawrance
7.30p.m. U.K. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 20th March 2002
The Road to Welford (slides by Katherine Taylor) described & shown by Peter Clowes
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 17th April 2002
History of the Co-op Movement, both Nationally & in Wigston - Malcolm Hornsby
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 15th May 2002
Visit to H.M. Prison Museum, Newbold Revel, Nr. Rugby
Licensed bar will be open on site (not included in price)
Bus from Paddock Street 6.30p.m. Please notify the
Secretary by 30th April to reserve a place.

Wednesday 19th June 2002
Visit to Old Brewery Inn, Somerby, Nr. Melton Visit to Old Brewery Inn, Son
Tour of Brewery & Buffet (included in price), drinks extra on the day
Bus from Paddock Street 6.30p.m.
Please notify the Secretary by 31st May to reserve a place.

Wednesday 21st August 2002
Visit to All Saints' Church, Leicester - Rev. David Cawley
Meet at Paddock Street 7.15p.m. to share transport.

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FRONT COVER

Jim Colver's drawing this time shows the Syston, Thurmaston & Leicester motor coach registration PR 1017. Close inspection reveals it to be a Daimler. Running probably in the 1920s those solid tyres must have made for a rough ride. Note the conductor on the left with shoulder bag for the cash.

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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.

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OCTOBER MEETING

In October the Society welcomed Mr. Maes, a retired lecturer from South Fields College, and owner of his own decorating business to talk on the history of wallpaper.

He told us that paper was first produced in China and the idea then brought up the North Coast of Africa. The first printing press was invented in 1472 by Gutenberg of Germany. It was brought to England in 1476 by Caxton. Early non book printed paper was black on off white, about 3 feet square and called a piece. It was initially used more for lining cupboards and drawers than hanging on walls. Before the use of machinery paper was block printed one colour at a time with a boy employed to jump on the end to give extra weight.

The early designs were taken from those used in Moroccan leatherwork and to this day the pomegranate is still a very common element in many wallpaper patterns. Other influences came from needle-point and black work. It was of course very expensive and only used in the houses of the rich.

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Walls were previously covered in skins or tapestry and when paper was first introduced it was nailed to the wall in the same way. Later flour and water paste was used then hot paste. Early wall plaster, which was needed to make a smooth surface for the paper, was Plaster of Paris made from French Gypsum.

Like most decorative things fashion has always played an important role. Flock was popular in the 16th century and in 1880 it was embossed designs. 1750-1828 there was a Chinese influence. 1890-1914 it was Art Nouveaux. 1920s very heavily patterned, 1930s very plain, embossed and dull. During the war very little wallpaper was produced and people were only permitted to spent £15 per year on any decorating work. In 1950s emulsion paint came from Germany and so began the fashion for the ever popular and versatile woodchip and anaglypta types, followed with the development of plastics, by vinyl.

Painting and paperhanging were once separate occupations. Paint used to be very basic with limited colour choice. A 1936 colour chart offered just three alternatives, cream, brown and green; now there are simply thousands of different tones available.

Mr. Maes has accumulated an impressive collection of samples and showed us lots ranging from the outrageous to the very stylish. Also unusual types such as silk or wool or cork on a paper backing and grass on a rice paper one. As a finale he showed some made specially for the Royal residences with the Queen's initials ER on.

After some questions and discussion the Chairman, Edna Taylor, thanked Mr. Maes for a most interesting evening.

NOVEMBER MEETING

Queen Victoria: a look back in this centenary year of her death.

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On Wednesday 21st November 42 members of the society met to hear Derek Lewiris talk on Queen Victoria.

The 22nd January 2001 was the 100th anniversary of the death of Queen Victoria. She reigned for 64 years during which our economy changed from being agricultural to industrial. She acceded the throne at the age of 18 when the monarchy was at a low ebb. The four Georges and William, the Hanoverians, had had a stable goverment but were not held in high regard.

She was the daughter and only child of Edward, Duke of Kent, who died when she was 8 months old and the Duchess of Kent (her second marriage). Victoria and her mother lived at Kensington Palace, their household was controlled by Sir John Conroy. As a child she had no opportunity to mix with other children. She was accomplished, fluent in French and German, a dancer and a pianist and she could draw. She was also kept away from court. On 20th June 1837 William IV died. Right from the outset Victoria was determined to be sovereign in her own right and not under the control of her mother or Conroy.

Her first Prime Minister was Lord Melbourne. Victoria saw him as a father figure. After a change in government her next Prime Minister was the Tory Robert Peel. Victoria did not find him so easy to get on with as Melbourne. She refused to change her Whig Ladies of the Bedchamber, Peel resigned and Melbourne came back. The Ladies were eventually changed and the Bedchamber crisis was over. At this point the government was keen to see Victoria married and producing an heir to the throne. Two brothers, Albert and Ernest Saxe Coburg Gotha were introduced to her (incidentally they were both her first cousins on her mother's side).

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Albert, her consort, was Germanic, political and accomplished and viewed with some suspicion. As Prince consort he came into his own during her nine pregnancies. He set about re-organising the Royal households, purchased Balmoral Estate and built the present castle, and Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. In 1851 he organised the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace.

In 1861 Albert became ill. Their eldest son, Albert Edward, was giving them cause for concern by having affairs with actresses and other activities of which they disapproved. Albert got back from confronting his son at Cambridge, caught typhoid and died. Victoria mourned his death in seclusion for the next 20 years.

During the second half of her reign Victoria would not appear in public. The people began to get tired of her absence. Amongst other things Victoria missed Albert's opinion on constitutional matters. During this period her prime Ministers were Disraeli for the Tories and Gladstone for the Liberals. She liked Disraeli, who flattered and played up to her. Gladstone was quite different, he had a great intellect and Victoria felt in awe of him and came to dislike him.

In 1876 she became Empress of India. With her ministers she tried to get her own way with threats and manipulation. She disliked Reform and felt that it might lead to socialism and civil unrest, she feared Republicanism. She was against women's rights and had little to do with the lower classes except for her workers at Balmoral.

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Her main interest was with European affairs. Wilhelm of Germany was her grandson, the Tsar of Russian was married to her granddaughter, other granddaughters had made alliances through marriage to Greece, Norway, Romania and Spain.

For the last 40 years of her reign the underlying theme of all that she did was the absence of Albert. Her relationship with John Brown helped. Her relationship with her son, the nature Edward VII was not good, to her disappointment he was not another Albert. He showed more of the characteristics of his Hanoverian ancestors. However, Victoria during the years of her reign set an example that succeeding monarchs have followed.

Thanks were given to Derek for a most interesting and absorbing talk.

DECEMBER MEETING

The Christmas Social this year followed the same pattern as previous years with some not too serious qizzes which hopefully provided entertainment and fun without much serious effort. Edna Taylor and Brian Bilson set up a picture quiz to start off, this proved quite tricky especially identifying those churches from drawings done over two hundred years ago! In spite of this there were some impressive scores and the winner was Chris Smart. Next we had Stella Tweed's great mixture of local history and general knowledge questions which had to be collected one at a time from a box across the room. Good way of working up an appetite this one! The final winners were Colin Towell's team.

There followed an excellent supper prepared by Ann Key of Naseby, our usual caterer not being available this year. We retained some wine in our glasses for a toast afterwards because 2001 proved to be the 21st anniversary of when the Society was formed in 1980. The President, Duncan Lucas, said a few words outlining the early activities, when just a handful of really dedicated folk set it up, to the present time with a membership of 80 plus. There are still a number of the original members who belong now. A scrapbook of photographs and memorabilia put together by Tricia Berry to record events up to this milestone was passed around during the evening. A collection of photographs was also taken, the raffle prizes drawn, and a very pleasant evening closed at about 9.45p.m.

JANUARY MEETING

For our first meeting of the new year we welcomed back Diane Courtney who gave us a very fascinating and detailed talk on that most controversial of monarchs Richard III.

Richard was born on 2/10/1452 at Fotheringhay Castle, Northants, to Richard third Duke of York, and his wife Lady Cecily Neville. He was one of 12 children and the youngest boy. At about the age of nine he was sent to Middleham Castle, North Yorks, where he was taught to ride and lead men, skills in which he became particularly proficient. Probably because of this early residence in the North of the country it was here that most of his support was later to come from rather than the South. Richard was created Duke of Gloucester and wished to marry his childhood

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companion Ann Neville but his elder brother King Edward IV would not permit it. Richard fathered three illegitimate children, Richard, John & Catherine (the latter born in Leicester) before Edward IV changed his mind and allowed the marriage to Ann who had one son, Edward, before she died of T.B.

King Edward IV died very suddenly in 1483. He and his wife Elizabeth Woodville had six children including two sons the Princes Edward and Richard. Elizabeth Woodville had strong Leics. connections through her first husband who was John Grey of Groby. When these two young princes, forever to be known as The Princes in the Tower' who were the rightful heirs to their father's throne were found murdered the crown passed to their Uncle who became King Richard III. So was he an evil ambitious monster who murdered his two nephews? He certainly had a very strong motive but there were others who for reasons of benefit or revenge would have liked to see their demise too.

Richard ruled for just over two years before his well documented death at the age of 33 years at the Battle of Bosworth on 22/8/1485, when the crown was claimed by his Tudor rival, Henry VII. Henry had a tenuous claim to the throne through his mother Margaret Beaufort a member of the family of the illegitimate Beaufort line of Edward Ill's son John. Richard's dead body is believed to have been brought to the Church of the Annunciation (some remains of which still exist in the basement of the Hawthorn Building, De Montfort University), then buried in the Greyfriars Monastry, St. Martins. His bones were later thrown into the River Soar. A scull with serious injuries has been dredged up and it is thought with modern techniques it will one day be possible to establish whether this is indeed Richard's.

So was he an ugly deformed character? Yes, according to Shakespeare but he lived during the Reign of Elizabeth I whose grandfather had taken the throne from Richard. So he would not have wanted to upset his monarch. A portrait of Richard III showing him looking much older than 33 years and with various deformities has appeared under X-ray examination to have been tampered with and these unflattering features added later.

' Diane made it clear she believed Richard to be a handsome good man, the innocent victim of slander. She put forward a very convincing case, but it seems there will always be a nagging doubt. Can the truth ever be established after so many years have elapsed?

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MISSING TAPE RECORDER

Way back in 1989 it was decided the Society should purchase a tape recorder so that an Oral History Project could be started. Some tapes have been made (and very good they are too) but in these cases members used their own machines. Recently an East Midlands Oral History Archive has been established and this has led the committee to realise that they have no idea where our Tape Recorder is. It was last mentioned in the AGM minutes in 1992 when it was stated to be underused. Does anyone who was a member then have any suggestions as to where it might be? Did anyone borrow it to do any recordings? Who kept it when not in use? Any help very much appreciated.

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JUST IN **TIME**

A traveller journeying through Wigston at the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign would have found it a depressed and depressing village. It had passed, like the rest of the country in the 1830s, through troubled times.

The main street pattern, a rectangle of four main roads, was much as today. There were some elegant buildings of the 18th century, such as the Manor House in Newgate End and The Elms in Bushloe End, while the other Manor House, later to be almost universally known as Dr. Longford's, and Wigston Hall both in Long Street had been recently re-modelled. Fronting the streets were some timber-framed and brick-built farmhouses of the 17th and 18th centuries, now abandoned as such and divided up into 2 or 3 parts as homes for separate families, while here and there in yards and ends were short terraces of red-brick cottages built by speculators to house those who had come to seek work as framework knitters. The two churches, an Independent chapel of 1731, and a row of Georgian alms-houses lent an air of solidity to the village, though St. Wolstan's church was in a bad state of repair with a barn and stable built into its nave and its spire leaning dangerously over the cottages that surrounded the churchyard.

Our traveller would have a choice of 15 public-houses and beer shops in which to quench his thirst, and if he had entered one of them, he would have overheard the gossip and exchanged the news of the day. Undoubtedly this would have been a tale of woe from most of those present, for they had much to complain of, and times were hard. Unemployment was widespread, and with it poverty and disease, especially consumption, and the high infant mortality. Of the 483 families in the village, 208 were in regular receipt of Poor Rate relief and 150 of occasional relief.

Some blamed the Enclosures which, in their grandfathers' days, had taken much common grazing and woodland from the peasants forcing them to sell out to new men who enlarged their farms and in place of grain put down grass for the more profitable sheep. That started the unemployment, for now 40 labourers could cultivate Wigston's 3,000 acres, whereas three times as many were needed for the old open-fields, with both grain and grass.

In order to support the unemployed, landowners had to pay poor rates at roughly £1 per acre to the Poor Rate Board, as well as other taxes. They were then so impoverished that they could not afford to hire labourers to keep their land in order. Who would want to buy or rent land so heavily rated? The whole parish, despite its land of excellent quality, was going out of cultivation. There was not even enough corn to feed the village.

Others would tell the traveller that it had all been made worse by large numbers of people with their big families coming in from other parishes to get work in the framework knitting industry, now the main occupation in the village. Not that you could get a living wage at that, even if you worked twelve hours a day. It had been all right during the wars with the French when knitted garments were in demand for the

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army and the navy, but now that market had collapsed and men's fashions had begun to change to long trousers needing shorter socks, the only alternative was poor relief.

You could do fairly well out of the magistrates at one time, five shillings for men and women, l/6d for each child, but a new Act had said that in future you could only get relief by going into a workhouse and anything would be better than that. Husbands, wives and children were separated, strict discipline enforced and the poorest food provided.

The traveller must have been glad to get away from such human misery, common throughout the land among working people. Yet there were signs of change, and his keen eye might have noticed the beginnings of buildings in 1839 that expressed a desire for a better life: a Mechanics' Institute on the Bank, a single-storey Wesleyan chapel at the top of Mill Lane and a National (church) school in Long Street. All reflected national movements towards change.

If he had gone off to the west, an even more startling change might have met the traveller's eye: a glimpse of the extension from the town of Leicester of the Midland Counties Railway which was to open the following year with a station at Wigston. Neither he, nor the companions he had drunk with could possibly have imagined what benefits were to emerge over the next forty years from that and other similar constructions. Changes were coming to Wigston, and to all England. Just in time!

Edna Taylor

Source: W.G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant*

THE SEARCH FOR A BETTER LIFE

Partly no doubt because of a sense of adventure but more often in a desperate attempt to escape from the depressing circumstances described above many people emigrated. Their destination might be Australia, New Zealand or other Commonwealth countries or that land of such huge opportunity, America. An idea of what could be achieved by a flexible and hardworking person who took this huge step into the unknown is shown in the following piece. It is part of a letter written in 1821 by a man, who had emigrated to Canada, to his sister back home in Scotland. It is included in: *A narrative of the rise and progress of emigration from the counties of Lanark and Renfrew to the New Settlements in Upper Canada*, and reproduced from the January 2002 issue of Family Tree Magazine.

"The land...pretty good...never so happy...not desire to return to Glasgow...for we would have to pay a heavy rent and here we have none. In Glasgow I had to labor sixteen or seventeen hours a day and could earn about six or seven shillings a week. Here I can, by laboring about half that time, earn more than I had. There I was confined to a damp shop but here I have fresh air. There after I toiled until I could toil no more I would have the mortification of being a burden. But here, two or three years labor will give me more than will keep me in sickness as well as health. There it is all dependence. Here it is a fair prospect of independence".

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More for the sense of adventure and with a strong rebellious streak young Tom Agar writes the following account of his voyage and early experiences in America. How could he just go without even saying goodbye?

LETTER TO HIS PARENTS FROM TOM AGAR 17 MONTHS AFTER HE LEFT BARDON, LEICS. IN 1854 FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Indian River,
Off Aligator Creek,
Florida,
United States of America.
Feb. 9th 1856

Dear Father and Mother,

I presume you would be very much put about at my sudden and unexpected disappearance. I can assure you it was not my intention to have left my home when I did, although I had the very strong inclination to come to America that I have often intimated to you, which I hope you are able to say you call to recollection. But still think those-times I allowed the expressions, that I meant not what I said, but Ah! they came from my heart. You might think I was very simple in leaving in such a manner as I did. I wanted for nothing, I was in work, was not short of money, had a good home and the treatment I received from you, I had no fault to find whatsoever.

Did I expect in immigrating to a foreign shore, I could better my position in life or even gain in fortune - no I did not, nor did I dream for one moment I could do anything of the kind. But I left my native land and all that was dear to me solely because I was discontented in mind.

I left home on the morning of the 5th of September 1854, walked to Bardon Hill station to entrain to Burton, then again for Crewe, where I intended staying that night, but meeting with a person of the name of Smith, a midshipman from a village called Wymondham, near Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, who was going to Liverpool that night and he persuaded me to go on too. I did so, arriving at Limehouse St. Station about half past 9pm that evening.

I took lodgings at an Oyster Saloon, convenient to the Sailors' House and staid there until the following Friday and in the afternoon of that day, I went to the office of Messrs. Gunnell & Co. of Waterloo Road and secured a cabin berth and board of the Excelsior, and American vessel, belonging to the Black Bull Line packet ships bound for New York.

I paid £5 for my passage and I was ordered to be ready at the Nelson Dock at 5pm that evening as the ship was sailing early the following morning (Saturday). I was then five minutes after the appointed hour, but unfortunately was too late. The steamboat had taken the last load. I had therefore to pay two watermen *51-* or commonly called Liverpool Land Sharks, a very proper name, to take me to the ship.

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I boarded her about 6 o'clock and found a crew not at all to my expectations. It was a most singular one, I can assure you, composed pretty much of all nations, but Irish if anything took the lead.

I went to bed about 9 o'clock, but what with the noise of the passengers arranging their luggage and one thing and another, I could not sleep before half past five the following morning and found that in the night the anchor was up and the steam tug beside us with the pilot on board. The tug left us about half past 10 o'clock. We then set sail with over 600 souls aboard.

We had pretty rough weather in the Irish Channel. Four or five days elapsed before we cleared the coast of England. We last sight of land on the 13th day of September 1854 about 2 o'clock pm. We continued sailing up to the 16th with the wind in our favour.

17th. Weather squally, large flock of sea-gulls in sight. Passengers most of them seasick.
18th. Weather still squally, a child died during the night.
19th. Wind changed. Great number of sea porpoises and sea pigs in sight and many kinds of peculiar fish.
20th. A pretty strong breeze making.....knots an hour. Weather fine. I begin now to sleep the night through, although there are many kinds of games invented for the amusement of passengers, such as Judge and Jury, Free and Easies, etc. I go now and then on the forecastle deck and listen to the ditties of the sailors. Some of them spin real yarns.
21st. Cholera and Diarrhora commenced to play their ravages. The first that was seized was a young Irish girl of about 22 years of age. She was dancing and enjoying herself upon deck between 5 and 6pm and at half past 8pm she met with a watery grave.
22nd. Sickness increasing. There are now 7 cases of Cholera and 4 of Diarrhora and 3 (a man, woman and child) to be thrown overboard tonight. I can assure you it is a shocking sight, is the burial at sea. There's no burial service of any description. After dicing you are merely stitched up in a piece of old wrapper and brought up on deck. A lump of pig-iron or coal tied to your feet and swung backwards and forwards three times and the third time the corpse is thrown into the mighty deep and left, a prey to the marine creatures. I saw, in one instance, the pig-iron given way on the descent and the corpse floated, but it had not floated far before a tremendous large shark seized the bundle and disappeared.
23rd. Weather pretty calm. Not making much headway. We made the Banks of Newfoundland at 51/2am on the 5th October. We passed several fishing smacks. We spoken with the British Mail Steamer bound for Kingston, Jamaica, the following day we spoken with German brig laden with immigrants bound for New York. Sailed from Bremen, she had met with some rough weather. She had lost most of her riggin and part of her bulwarks stove in, she had been out 52 days.

We saw two whales I should think about half a mile distance from the vessel. I saw them several times rise with their heads above water and spout the water to a great height. We also saw a floating iceberg which the Captain supposed to have been floating since the month of January.

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After having been two or three days on the Banks we had very rough weather. It commenced about 10 o'clock am with sudden squalls. It first blew away a part of the fore riggin, it gradually kept increasing. At hah^{0} past 3pm it blew a perfect hurricane. The Hatchways were closed and all passengers kept between decks and a ....place it was. I can assure you. I went to my bunk about half past 9pm. I had not been in it more than half an hour when a cry was raised by some foolish persons that the vessel had sprung a leak. To see the confusion that followed its almost more than I could describe. Them that had got into their bunks rushed from them in maddened despair. Women screaming and calling for help. Children crying and clinging to their parents, able bodied men on their knees offering prayer to their God to still the waves, mingled with the waters cries and shouting of the tars, such a sight would soften the most hardened heart.

A rush was made to go on deck by forcing open one of the hatchment doors and a great many had no sooner reached it, but that they were thrown from one side of the vessel to the other. I went on deck with nothing but my trousers and shirt on and had no sooner seized the pump when 8 or 9 of us were swept 7 or 8 yards. I fortunately caught hold of one of the ropes which saved me from being swept overboard. Sometime elapsed before order could be restored, not until the captain threatened to shoot some of them if they did not go between decks. It was found upon examination that the covering of the fore hatchway got carried overboard. The consequence was, every sea she shipped it down the hatchway into the lower deck.

We cleared the Banks the 4th of October. The pilot came aboard on Saturday afternoon of the 15th, from him we heard of the melancholy news of the loss of the steamship Artie belonging to the Collins United States Mail Line by coming into collision with a French steamer in a Fog while on her passage from Liverpool to New York.

We sighted Sandy Hook Lighthouse about hah^{0} past 11pm on Saturday night. The cry of land on the Starboard Tack was heard just at the break of day. Three cheers were given

We anchored off Sandy Hook about hah^{0} past 9 o'clock am on Sunday, waited there about three quarters of an hour until the tugboat came and tugged us off Station Island, about four and a half miles distance from New York.

We then passed the Doctors, sickness had then pretty much cleared up with the exception of two cases, a young woman and a child belonging to a German. Its mother died in Liverpool before the vessel sailed. The woman was taken to the Immigrants Hospital and the child died but still they would not pass the ship, so we therefore had the pleasure of lying in quarantine until the following Tuesday.

There were now, seven vessels lying there, besides ours, all laden with immigrants. One of them (The Star of the West) had lost 73 during the passage from Liverpool from Cholera & Diarrhora. We had 37 cases and 17 deaths with the child that died in quarantine.

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The captain got the ship passed about 11 o'clock on Tuesday morning and we were tugged up to York by two tug boats. I landed on the shores of America on 17th October 1854, about half past 4 pm after a passage of nine and thirty days, with the two days lying in quarantine.

I, a young fellow from Birmingham and two Scotchmen took lodgings at a boarding house in Franklin Square, York. Paid ($3) three dollars each for our board, thats equal to 12/6d British. A dollar is 4/2d.

New York is a very fine city, there are over eight hundred thousand inhabitants. The Theatres, Saloons and Public Places of Amusement are very tastefully got up. They far surpass England in ferry and steamboat travelling. Some of the boats surpass anything I ever saw, you can compare them to floating palaces.

I came across Bill Goulsby in York. He was at work at a shipping store in Fulton Street. I went to.... Gardens Amphitheatre with him. He took me to see another friend, who should it be but Mr. Simmonds that formerly lived at the Fleur-de-Lis in Belgrave Gate, Leicester. He was at that time waiting behind the bar at the Miner's Arms, Front Street, near the Battery, New York, and just before I left York, his brother came to him with Slater's son that formerly kept a pot shop at the corner of Upper Charles Street.

I succeeded in obtaining employment in a publishing office at copying at 9 dollars a week, but I did not remain long at it for I had formed too many acquaintances and I could plainly see that I would never be able to save a cent (that is the value of a half penny) and probably might be worse off at the end.

So I therefore took another notion of going further into the country. I made an attempt to go along with a party (that had formed in York) to California, the overland route, but I found on consideration that I would not have sufficient to purchase an outfit.

I afterwards saw an advertisement in the New York Sun that the ship Ravenswood was to sail in December to East Florida on a Government surveying Expedition and that several assistants were required. I applied at the office and saw the manager, a person by the name of Perry and engaged with him for 5 months at 40 dollars a month and board, signed an agreement to that effect and went aboard the 8th December 1854.

We weighed anchor and put out to sea, the nineth. The weather was bitterly cold and snowed very hard. The ship's crew was composed of Nigger sailors and Spaniards. Five of them got frost-bitten, one of them died during the passage. After being 3 days out, we put into Old Point Comfort in the State of Virginia. I got a pass from the Captain to go ashore until morning. I went to a place called Hampton, a short distance from Old Point Comfort and enjoyed myself first rate I assure you, its not a very large place, the inhabitants are chiefly slave traders. I saw hundreds of slaves, men, women and children.

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We took several more hands on board and put out to sea again on the 13th. We saw great numbers of flying fish. We had pretty rough weather crossing the Gulf Stream and was driven back a good deal.

On Christmas Day, I had a very good view of the Bahamas Islands, there were some queer thoughts come into my head. I thought to myself that I little thought the Christmas before when I went to dine at Mr. Ward's that the next Christmas Day I would be sailing past here.

We landed the owner's provisions on Key Biscayne Island on New Year's Day and the ship went on to Cuba. This is not a very large island, the only inhabitant on it is a lighthouse keeper, a Spaniard. There are a great many peculiar kinds of shells on the island. Cocoa nuts grow wild. There are also plenty of bears, wildcats, panthers and raccoons. We shot a large brown bear and her two cubs. We roasted the cubs the following day and I can assure you they were fine eating.

We will continue with Tom's adventures in America in the next Bulletin.
Thanks to Jim Colver for patiently transcribing from the original which is in Leics. R.O. (Ref: Misc 557). Spelling as originally written.

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SKITTLES EVENING

The Friends of Wigston Framework Knitters Museum have organised a Skittles Evening for Tuesday 19th February at 7p.m. This includes a traditional supper and is always a very pleasant and friendly occasion. For further information and tickets contact Peter Clowes. Tel: 2883396.

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VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY

The last Leicestershire volume was published in 1964 after which work stopped due to lack of finance. The possibility of re-starting again to try and complete the series using a funding formula similar to the one set up in Derbyshire, where work is due to start in January 2002, has been proposed. Basically the idea is that 150 local historians or groups would be needed to subscribe £5 a month to a fund which over four years would accrue to £30,000. Then from the income earned it would be possible to pay the salary of a professional historian for one day a week Brian Bilson attended a first meeting held in October 2001 at Leics. Record Office. He put it to our committee who in principle agreed this worthy cause should be supported subject to approval of the membership. There will be an opportunity to discuss this at the AGM.

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THE HOMECOMING TO LEICESTER 1910

An 112 Page Souvenir Booklet covering the story of Leicester. Historical, Social and Industrial

In 1910 the manager of a Milwaukee USA boot factory, Henry Hill, whose hometown was Leicester, planned what was called a 'Homecoming' from his faraway town of exile. This snowballed into a most extraordinary gathering in Leicester in September of that year.

Although it was Mr. Hill's enthusiasm that made the dream a reality, it was a common-or-garden Melton pork pie, sent by Mr. Edwin Crew as a Christmas present to some Milwaukee friends that started off a chain of events leading to a week of celebrations in the city. During the week over 300 Leicester people - exiles from all over the world came home & attended receptions, public meetings, dances and galas.

So far as Leicester itself was concerned, its streets did not present an unusally festive appearance. Residents evidently had not felt inclined to express a welcome by a display of flags for not more than a dozen were seen in the centre of the town.

On the second day of the week, a parade of gaily decorated trams took visitors on a tour of the town and this was followed the next evening by a torchlight procession with, the reporter said, immense crowds. And to cap this curious account of our historic past, the following telegram was sent by King George V from Balmoral to Edwin Crew. "The King has received your telegram with much satisfaction and interest and desires that you will convey to the 300 Leicester born people who have availed themselves of the invitation of their native town, his best thanks for their loyal good wishes. Both the King and Queen offer them a hearty welcome on their return to the Old Country and hope that their visit will be, in every way, an enjoyable one".

THE WYVERN HOTEL

A Reminiscence of Thomas Cook, the Great Tourist (An item printed in the Homecoming to Leicester).

Amongst the historic associations of Leicester, not the least interesting is the fact that Thomas Cook inaugurated his system of excursions which have extended all over the known world.

In the year 1845 there was no Midland Railway existent. In fact railway enterprise was almost in its infancy. At that time Thomas Cook was a booking clerk at the Junction Railway and his first excursion was the memorable teetotal one to Loughborough in the year 1841.

This system of tours, the pioneer of all cheap railway enterprise, was the outcome of Mr. Cook's association with the Temperance Society in Leicester. Prior to this he had a small coffee house in Granby Street and on the increase of the excursion business and when the coffee house had developed into a commercial temperance hotel, he moved across the street to the premises which became known as 'Cook's Hotel'.

The excursion business developed to such and extent that Mr. Cook ultimately leased his temperance hotel business, also one in London which he had established and retired to Stoneygate, where he died in his 80th year.

Kindly transcribed by Jim Colver from an item at Leics. Record Office. LRO Misc 710.

What an interesting event. Has anybody ever heard of this before?

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