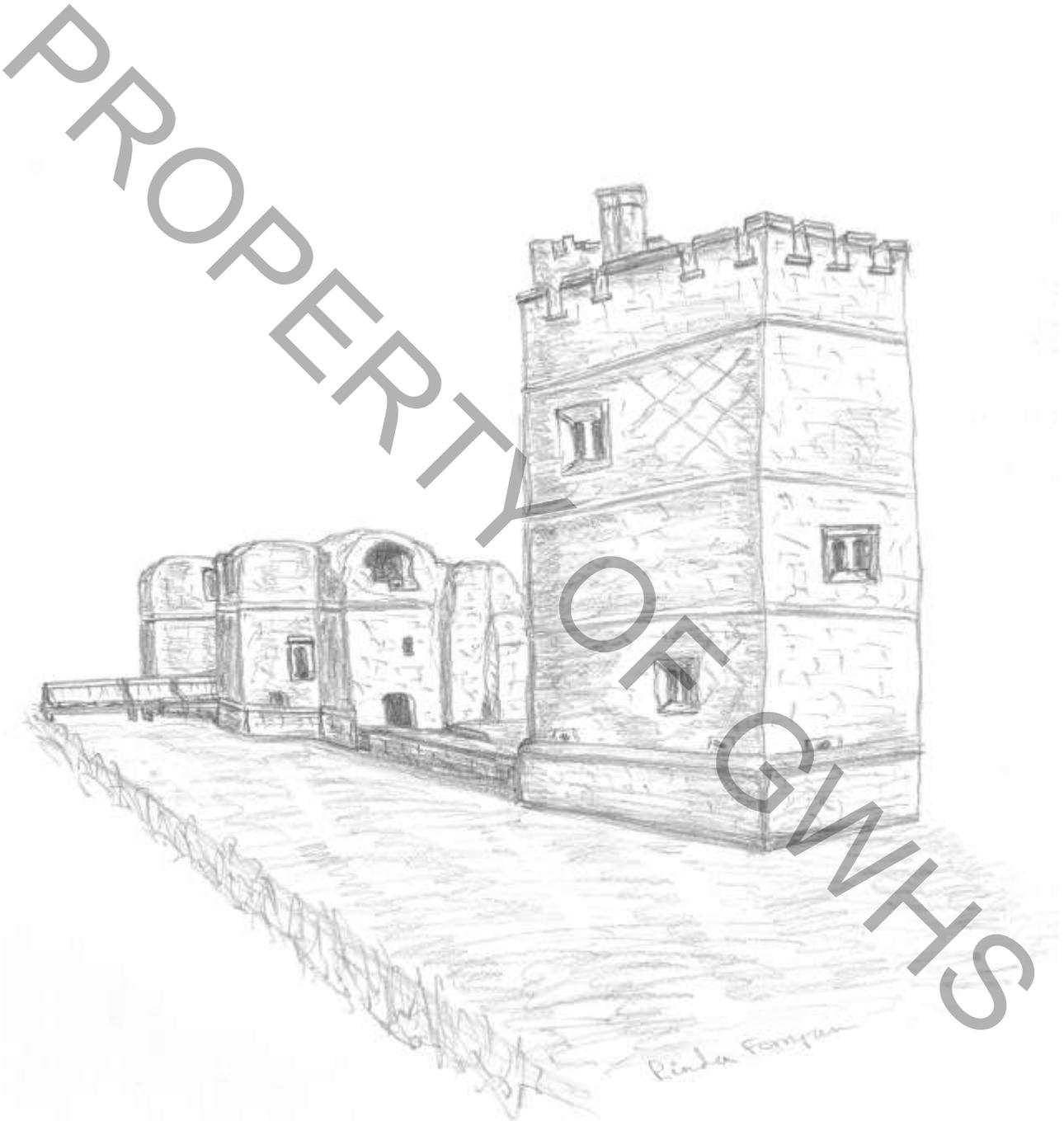




GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
White Gate Farm House, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna, Leics.

BULLETIN 94



Kirby Muxloe Castle by Linda Forryan

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS – NOVEMBER 2012 TO SEPTEMBER 2013

Wednesday 21st November 2012

Lost Houses of Stoneygate – Neil Crutchley
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age Concern, Paddock Street.

Wednesday 19th December 2012

Christmas Social with quiz & street views (Long Street) – Mike Forryan
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age Concern, Paddock Street.

Wednesday 16th January 2013

A Victorian Gentleman – Gareth King
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age Concern, Paddock Street.

Wednesday 20th February 2013

AGM followed by members' Bring and Tell
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age Concern, Paddock Street.

Wednesday 20th March 2013

The Morrison Story (Electric Vehicles made in South Wigston) – Ernest Miller
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age Concern, Paddock Street.

Wednesday 17th April 2013

An Apothecary in 1600s – Trevor Parr
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age Concern, Paddock Street.

Wednesday 15th May 2013 (Full Day Outing by Coach - Booking Required)

Visit to Southwell Minster & Workhouse (National Trust Members bring your ticket for free admission to workhouse)
Coach leaves Paddock Street 9.15a.m.

Wednesday 19th June 2013 (Normal Evening Outing using own transport - Booking Required)

Visit to Ashby-de-la Zouch, walk & buffet supper with tea/coffee
Meet 6.00p.m. Paddock Street Car Park to share transport. (Note 7p.m. start at Ashby)

Wednesday 21st August 2013

History & Work of the Shuttlewood Clarke Foundation – Alan Norman
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age Concern, Paddock Street.

Wednesday 18th September 2013

The Sinking of the Titanic with local connections – Derek Seaton
7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age Concern, Paddock Street.

The Bulletin is published three times a year on 1st March, July and November. Articles etc., (which are always welcome) should be submitted to the Editor, Tricia Berry, three clear weeks before publication date please.

Society's website: www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk
Chairman, Mike Forryan's e-mail: chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

FRONT COVER

The building of Kirby Muxloe Castle was commenced in 1480 by William, First Lord Hastings (c.1430-1483), though it was never completed. It is a fortified manor house, one of the last quadrangular castles to be built. It is also one of the earliest buildings in England to be constructed in brick, another early example being Bradgate House within Bradgate Park. The moat is also lined with brick and filled with water from a nearby brook. The drawbridge would have been of timber.

Only one of the four corner towers was built and this has a number of gun ports in the base. One storey of the gatehouse survives and carvings and black diamond patterns can be seen in the brickwork. The initials W.H. and the Hastings coat of arms are also present over the entrance. The castle is now in the care of English Heritage and is open at certain times to the public.

William Hastings owned the Manor and Lordship of Ashby among many others. During these troubled times of the 'Wars of the Roses' he had like his father, been a member of the Royal household and supporter of the Yorkist side.

When the future Edward IV won the crown for the Yorkist side at the Battle of Towton, Nr. York in 1461, William Hastings was among several loyal supporters who were knighted by the victorious king on the battlefield. The King ruled 1461-1469 before being forced to flee to the Low Countries, accompanied by Hastings, when other supporters changed their allegiance. However Edward was able to return to England and reclaim the Crown in 1471 after a decisive victory at the Battle of Tewkesbury. To ensure no future trouble his Lancastrian opponent Henry VI was put to death in the Tower of London.

Edward IV died in 1483 leaving two young sons, Edward aged 12, and Richard aged 9 (the Princes in the Tower). Edward was declared King Edward V, but was never crowned and was of course too young to rule. A real power struggle then ensued between Elizabeth Woodville (the Princes' mother) and Richard, Duke of Gloucester (later King Richard III and the late King Edward IV's younger brother). Hastings initially supported the Duke, but changed his mind when he realised Richard, who was acting as Protector, had ideas of usurping his nephew's throne. When Richard realised this he tricked William Hastings into attending a supposed meeting of the Council at the Tower of London where he accused him of plotting treason with the Dowager Queen and was then beheaded on Tower Hill. The two princes simply disappeared.

So the building of Kirby Muxloe Castle stopped abruptly, following the death of its owner. The finished parts were lived in by the family for a time but it was subsequently left to become a ruin.

With all obstacles now removed the Duke of Gloucester became King Richard III but only reigned for two years until his defeat at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485. This brought to an end the long succession of the Plantagenets. The victor, became King Henry VII, the first of the Tudors. He was married to Elizabeth of York, Edward IV's daughter, and thus successfully united the warring factions of York and Lancaster under the combined red and white Tudor Rose logo. He gave England stability and prosperity and started off its course of exploration and foreign trade.

Recent discovery of the probable remains of Richard III in the New Street Car Park in Leicester is the reason for adding this interesting background to Linda's picture.

Tricia Berry

Sources: *William, First Lord Hastings (c.1430-1483)* by Bernard Elliott 1984 (late member of our Society) & *Who's Who in the British Monarchy* by David Hilliam 1996 Pocket Reference Books Publishing Ltd.

JULY MEETING

Our Mystery Coach Trip on the evening of 11th July, led by Duncan Lucas was as usual most enjoyable, and also blessed with lovely weather. We travelled around the Leicestershire/Rutland borders taking in such wonderful but very different sights as Eye Brook Reservoir and the Harringworth Viaduct, finishing with a welcome drink at the Rose and Crown in Tilton.

However, most passengers probably noticed there was a problem before we started. A coach to seat 50 passengers with a crew seat had been ordered, but in the event a 49 seater with crew seat was sent, making us one seat short. I wish to put on record my thanks to Ivor and Maureen Sutton who offered to forego their planned evening out and return home.

Taking the matter up with the coach company was less than satisfactory. They wouldn't say the booking instructions were misleading, but neither would they accept any responsibility themselves, saying only that their contract which we had to sign on behalf of the Society was 'open-ended'. Isn't the whole purpose of a contract to make a watertight agreement? We planned to take this further but the recent headline accounts in the Leicester Mercury of the company being taken to court and fined thousands of pounds for keeping inaccurate documentation of service inspections and drivers' hours, make it seem pointless. There is a real possibility that their operating licence might be revoked.

Tricia Berry

AUGUST MEETING

At our first meeting after the summer outings and holiday we welcomed Max Daetwyler, the husband of our long term member, Marion. Max read from his recently written memoirs of his involvement during the war and afterwards with Sir Frank Whittle's Power Jets at Whetstone, under the title 'Jet Propulsion In Leicestershire' and, as he added during his introduction, 'in Germany'. He had been persuaded to write down his story by the particular interest of his grandson Benjamin who is a Captain in the Australian Army.

Max said that he found it puzzling that local people knew so little about what happened at Lutterworth and Whetstone and he was pleased that a recent interview was so well reported in the Mercury. He confirmed that some work on the jet engine was carried out at the Two Steeples factory in Wigston.

Max had already served three years in the RAF as a fitter when in 1943 he was stationed at RAF Hornchurch on 242 Squadron of Hurricanes. (A year earlier, Douglas Bader had been the Commanding Officer there). He was repairing some airframe damage suffered on a sortie the night before when he was told to report to the office immediately where he was posted without notice to Power Jets at Lutterworth, Leicestershire. The officer in charge had no idea why, and suggested that it was a training course and that he would be back at Hornchurch within a couple of weeks. On arrival at RAF Connelly in Warwickshire, Max was met by a very posh car to take him to Lutterworth. Such luxury was highly unusual for a lowly fitter and he was really wondering, by this time, what he was in for.

What he found was a strange mixture of very clever men, including Sir Frank Whittle, working in a dump of a building on top secret work – the jet engine. This means that there was no conventional propeller but the engine produced thrust instead. Incidentally, in those days 2,000lbs of thrust was the norm, today jet engines produce 100,000 lbs of thrust such is the progress that has

been made. The first jet actually flew at Cranwell in 1941. Max's job was to strip down and reassemble the engines, the parts for which had been made by civilians.

Sir Frank insisted on using RAF personnel as well as civilians. His office was at Brownsover Hall near Rugby. He was very approachable and always had time for his men. It was amazing that the secret was so well kept. Later, the company transferred to a purpose built factory at Whetstone.

At the end of the war Max transferred to work on the jets on test beds initially in Munich, Germany. Not only this but he also married Marion who was a typist at Whetstone; they went on honeymoon and were two days late returning home. Max was of course AWOL but he got away with it and was flown out specially to Munich later to join the rest of the group. Alone with the pilot on the journey in an Avro Anson he could see the utter devastation on the ground in Germany.

The tests were carried out in the American zone in Munich and civilian workers in the team had to wear uniforms as civilians were not allowed in the area. They used the American canteen where the quality of the food was very good. After two months of tests a vital part broke down and while repairs were carried out the team went sightseeing during which Max had a bad experience with a horse which put him off the animal for life. The tests were carried out in Germany because the test bed was at high altitude and was the only one of its type in the world and could end up in America where the British would not wish to use it. Such was the amount of electricity used that tests were carried out at night when consumption elsewhere was low.

The Germans were actually ahead of the British in jet technology but this was never used to full effect partly because their engines suffered metal fatigue which they could not put right. Whittle had overcome this by using heat resistant steel, but the Germans restricted the flying hours of their jet planes instead. Another universal problem was the control of the fuel supply at high altitude which is why tests were carried out in Munich. Originally to get altitude, engines were tested out in Lancaster bombers but the Munich facility avoided this.

Max was demobbed in 1946 after six years of service. Power Jets then employed him as a fitter at Bitteswell but gradually the firm was deprived of Government grants. In 1952 it was Nationalised, renamed National Gas Turbines and moved to the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnsworth. Whittle became disillusioned and moved to America. Max went to work at Rolls Royce where he was a technical author for 27 years writing instruction manuals for jet engines. Former workers at Power Jets formed a reunion group calling themselves the 'Reactionaries' although this was disbanded in 2002 due to dwindling numbers. Sir Frank Whittle died in 1996 and Max and Marion were invited to his memorial service in Westminster Abbey.

By coincidence on the same night as Max's talk, there was an interesting article on Mr Leicester's page in the Mercury about Bitteswell and the jet engine with a photograph of people involved including Max himself. There is currently (end of August) a programme on TV about the development of the jet engine.

Colin Towell

SEPTEMBER MEETING

The St. John (not St. Johns) Ambulance Brigade Past and Present was the subject of a very interesting illustrated talk at our September meeting by Gary Musson.

Gary, until recently the Divisional Commander for the East Midlands, gave a very professional talk with a well organised power point presentation. He was clearly used to giving talks but as he admitted at the start this was the first time he had addressed an Historical Society. Nevertheless he had researched his subject well to give a fair balance between the history of the organisation and its present day form and activity.

Between 600AD and 900AD people began going on pilgrimages to the Holy Land and, as now when a crowd gathers, some people fell ill and needed medical care. So a hospital was set up in the monastery of St. Mary of Latins in Jerusalem. Wealthy merchants from Italy and possibly even the Pope were involved. It was purely coincidental that there was a church next to the monastery dedicated to St. John, but in 1099 The Blessed Gerard founded an unofficial order of the Hospitalers of St. John. In 1113 Pope Paschal I issued a Papal Bull to formalise the Order which developed into a military Order to gain lands. During the crusades injured Knights gave land and money to the Order in thanks for their care and gradually great wealth was accumulated.

During the Crusades the Knights Templar and Knights Hospitaler were the main defenders of the Holy Land and all Knights had to take turns of duty in the hospital.

By 1187 Jerusalem was lost by the Christians and so the Order moved to Palestine. By 1291 the Muslims had total control of the Holy Land and so the order then moved to Cyprus. In 1310 it seized Rhodes where it stayed until 1530 when it was expelled by the Ottoman Turks and moved to Malta where the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, charged a rent of one falcon per annum.

After 270 years, Napoleon was on the scene and in 1798 he expelled the Order from Malta; the Knights dispersed and eventually came together again in 1820 to form the basis of the organisation we know today in England.

However from the 12th century, the Knights had formed cells in England, these could be found at Swinfield in Kent; the St. John Commandery in Clerkenwell, London; and at Rothley Temple in Leicestershire. Land was owned at Old Dalby and at Heather Priory, Beaumont Leys and the Procurators House at Stonesby.

In 1312, the Pope decided to close down the Knights Templar and much of their lands were transferred to the Order of St. John. The Order owned land in many towns and became very rich. A local transfer was the Leper Hospital at Burton Lazars in 1487. But in the 1540s Henry VIII confiscated the Order's lands as part of the dissolution when the Pope refused to grant him a divorce. From then onwards the order remained dormant for 300 years.

In 1820, when towns and cities in England were growing, some European Knights decided to reform the Order as a charitable hospital. In 1877 the St. John Ambulance Brigade was formed to give first aid when needed and in 1888 Queen Victoria re-established the Most Venerable Order of St. John of Jerusalem. A key date occurred as recently as 1968 when the Brigade and the Association were merged and became St. John Ambulance.

Gary continued by describing the way in which the organisation works in the present day including uniforms, how it sells its services to the NHS, helps out during national emergencies, treats 200,000 people and trains 800,000 per year.

This was a very different evening but extremely informative both from an historical and practical point of view. Gary was warmly thanked in the usual way.

Colin Towell

OCTOBER MEETING

This month we welcomed Brian Johnson whose topic was the Houses of the West End of Leicester.

Dannet's Hall – once the home of Walsh Hall was rebuilt by Dr. Watts, a founder of the Infirmary & after whom Watts' Causeway was named. A later owner Dr. Joseph Noble disappeared during a visit to Spain and detective 'Tanky' Smith was sent to investigate, finding he had died of cholera.

Westcotes Hall – originally a manor house belonging to the Ruding family. Later the home of Thomas Freer of Freers & Blacks, bakery, then Joseph Harrison a solicitor.

Braunstone Hall – built c.1766 was the seat of the Winstanley Family. Family member James also disappeared while abroad and 'Tanky' discovered he had been drowned in a lake. Compulsorily purchased in 1925 for the Braunstone estate, the house became a school but its future is uncertain.

The Lynces – in 1841/51 the home of Rev. Charles Berry, prominent minister at the Great Meeting Unitarian Chapel in Bond Street. Later of Thomas Harrison a solicitor. Demolished in 1889.

St. Mary's Fields – in 1871 home of William Bates the owner of a rubber manufacturing company at nearby St. Mary's Mills. This was later sold to Dunlop.

New Found Pool House – owned by Isaac Harrison, a market gardener, who in 1851 built a Hydropathic Establishment in the grounds. His nephew sold the estate to Orson Wright who converted the Hydropathic building into the Empire Hotel and built many terraced houses with the streets spelling out the name I. Harrison.

New Parks House – built in 1825 was the home of Thomas Stokes. The estate was compulsorily purchased for the New Parks Estate and the house is now a special school.

New Parks Farm – was owned but not occupied by John Mellor. The farmland is now Western Park.

Arundel House – in 1905 was the home of Edgar Wand, chemist, who had a factory in Wellington Street and a number of shops.

Westleigh House – was the home of Archibald Turner a large elastic web manufacturer with factory named Bow Bridge Works nearby.

Ruding Villa – was home to Luke Turner, son of above, who had his own web factory in Deacon St.

Ashleigh House, Glenfield Road – where William Gimson, timber merchant, lived. He also built Gimson Villas nearby.

Westcotes Grange – the home of Samuel Harris a solicitor.

Sykefield – home of Frederick William Harris, son of above, who provided the Martyrs Church, school, library and dispensary to the area.

Danehill House – one time home of Charles Bennion owner of the BUSM Co., which once employed 3,500 people. He gave Bradgate Park to the people of Leicester & County for ever.

Many of the local streets were named after these grand houses and their owners. This account is necessarily brief and hardly does credit to all the fascinating information which Brian had researched for this most interesting talk. He was duly thanked by Acting Chairman, Ann Cousins.

Mention was made of our summer trips (see programme on page 1). The Southwell full day outing costs £22.00 (less for National Trust members) and the Ashby evening £8.00. As numbers are restricted members are welcome to add their names to the lists which will be available at each meeting. Money will be collected in the New Year.

Also on 11th November at 10.30a.m. a service will be held at the United Reformed Church, to dedicate a genuine Flanders Poppy which Duncan Lucas found pressed in his Uncle's WWI prayer book. The poppy and some information about it is to be kept in a glass case at the Church. Visitors to this occasion would be most welcome.

Tricia Berry

THE DIAMOND JUBILEE DRINKING FOUNTAIN

The article on 'Royal Diamond Jubilees' in Bulletin 93 was of course most timely as it came just after we celebrated our own Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The article gave fascinating accounts of the events in 1897 when the country celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, and many interesting background details painstakingly researched, as usual, by Tricia Berry.

Here in Wigston the main event was the 'opening' (or should it have been 'the turning on') of the drinking fountain which had been given by Mr. S D Pochin of Croft, a former Wigston man, and which stood in what was then called the Market Place and which we know today as the 'top of Bell Street', that is, the area outside the Bell Fountain pub. Many members will know this area as The Bank, which, before the Wigston relief road was built in the early 1970s, was a 'T' junction at the end of Bell Street where traffic turned left from Bell Street to travel to Oadby and right to travel to Kilby and Husbands Bosworth. There was a well known fish and chip shop, Rays, on the corner and it was the central bus stop in Wigston.

Our President, Duncan Lucas, suggested that the Civic Society may wish to take up his idea of a plaque being erected on The Bank to feature the fountain and link the diamond jubilees of Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth II. This has been instigated and hopefully before long a plaque featuring an engraving of a photograph of the fountain will be fixed to a piece of granite donated by Bardon Quarries and placed on the Bank. It is hoped to unveil it before the year is out.

While doing some research myself about the fountain I came across the minutes of Council meetings during 1897. On 1st June that year it is noted that "the Local Government Board orders that any reasonable expenses of the council in the preparation of any address to Her Majesty in connection with public celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Accession be allowed". At the same meeting it was noted that train tickets to Leicester in Jubilee Week would be 1/9d (about 9p).

The minutes go on to say that Mr. S D Pochin of Croft, (a native of Wigston) had offered to present to the Parish a drinking fountain in commemoration of the celebration of the Queen's long reign and that the offer be accepted. The fountain would be placed in the open space at the junction of Bell Street and Bullshead Street. They went on to say that the "Highway Committee be authorised to have a suitable inscription placed upon the fountain and to have it properly fixed and water supplied to it".

On 6/7/1897 it was minuted that "on 22nd June Mr. S D Pochin unveiled the drinking fountain which he had given to the parish and which had previously been fixed near to the Jubilee Lamp". The minute continued "a generous offer of £10 received from Samuel Mather of Leicester (referred to in previous article) to a fund for planting trees near to the fountain to be accepted". (These must be the trees that appear in the 1930s photograph which is now being engraved onto the plaque).

On 7/9/1897 it was reported that a letter had been received from the Home Secretary saying that "the Queen was very graciously pleased to receive the dutiful address sent by the Council" and at the same meeting that "the local Jubilee Committee has presented the parish with 5 icon seals one of which has been fixed in each of Aylestone Lane, Leicester Road, Oadby Lane, Welford Road and Station Road".

Two points for further research come out of the above:

1) No other mention of the Jubilee Lamp was made, where was this fixed and was it placed for the 1897 Diamond Jubilee or some other jubilee?

2) What were the icon seals, do they still exist anywhere?

And of course, to repeat the plea in Tricia’s article does anyone know where the fountain itself is now?

More news of the unveiling of the Jubilee Plaque will be given by the Civic Society in due course.

Colin Towell

DIAMOND JUBILEE EXHIBITION

The Diamond Jubilee exhibition was successful attracting nearly 200 people. However it closed a little earlier than planned. Donations more or less covered costs. The organising committee consisting of representatives of the Historical Society, Civic Society and Framework Knitters Museum would like to thank all those who loaned items for the exhibition, and those who visited, for their support.

This joint venture was a good example of the local heritage organisations, and increasingly local members of Leicestershire & Rutland Family History Society, working together and helping to make Wigston a more interesting and pleasant place in which to live and work. A very recent example was the Family History Fair on our doorstep at Parklands at which the three groups had a joint stand, so many thanks to the Family History Society.

Colin Towell

BOOK CORNER

Since I wrote last, I hear that a Drama Series is being made of WOLF HALL and BRING UP THE BONES, books I wrote about last time.

For the last few weeks I have been reading books by C.J. Sansom, The Shardlake Series. It consists of five books, each telling its own exiting story. Matthew is one of Lord Cromwell’s commissioners. He is a lawyer with his own chambers in Lincoln’s Inn, a bachelor with a humped back, a deformity that at the time was considered to bring ill luck.

1) DISSOLUTION tells of the period when Cromwell was given the task by Henry VIII to destroy the monasteries taking their lands and treasures. In 1537 Lord Cromwell sends his commissioners to the monasteries at Scarnsea on the Kent coast to make inventories and also to look into any form of malpractice. One of them is killed whilst carrying out his duties and Matthew, together with his clerk is sent to discover the culprit. Matthew is a Reformist but is blinkered as he believes the wealth will be used by the king to benefit the poor by building schools and providing rations for the needy, which is not what is going to happen.

Lord Cromwell is not quite the same character as in Wolf Hall. He must have been a cruel schemer to accomplish his tasks. He had a network of informers spying on innocent people, opening mail etc. The wrack was in constant use in the Tower. This book tells of the dissolution of Scarnsea Monastery.

2) DARK FIRE - It is now 1540. After Queen Jane dies Henry is looking for a new wife as he must have a male heir. The task of finding a suitable princess is left to Lord Cromwell. It proves difficult but at last he finds Anne of Cleves. Holbein is dispatched to paint her portrait.

When she arrives she speaks little English and Henry takes an instant dislike to her. She is no oil painting! Lord Cromwell is then in the Dog House. Not wanting to be sent to the Tower he looks for ways to get in favour again. He hears that an ancient formula for Dark Fire had been discovered. To make this would ensure that the English Fleet would remain supreme. It was used in a flame thrower by the Byzantines against the Arabs in the 7th Century. The task of finding the formula is given to Matthew who is already involved in a case of a young girl who is in the Tower awaiting death for a crime she did not commit.

If you have enjoyed these books you will be eager to follow with:-

3) SOVEREIGN – By now, Henry is married to Catherine Howard, Norfolk’s niece. He decides to lead a Royal Procession to York with his wife and a very large retinue. Matthew is now working for Archbishop Cranmer. He is sent to York to escort a prisoner to the Tower.

4) REVELATION and 5) HEARTSTONE complete the series.....

FIRST STEPS IN FAMILY HISTORY – PART IV

Internet for Family History

The Internet has grown at a tremendous rate over the last few years, with an estimate of over 100 million sites now in use. Along with this growth there has been an incredible rise in the amount of resources available for the family historian to help your researches. Although it is very convenient being able to download and print source material in your own home, it is still nothing like the thrill of seeing the actual original documents which you should always do whenever you can. Many of the sites for genealogy require a subscription or payment, but there are quite a number of very good free sites also available. To make it easier for you I have listed all sites I have included at the end of this article.

Familysearch – The Mormon, or Church of the Latter Day Saints’ website, has one of the largest collections of free family history and genealogy records available on the Internet. It has a complete transcribed searchable database of the 1881 British Isles Census, the 1880 United States Census and the Canadian 1881 census. It also contains the International Genealogical Index of parish register information and deposited pedigrees. You may well pick up a family tree deposited on this site which will fit on with yours. The parish register information is not complete, as not all churches allowed their registers to be used, and there is quite a high error rate in the transcriptions, but nevertheless it is still a very good resource, especially I find for baptisms.

Freebmd – is a fast growing resource currently containing over 180 million records of births, marriages and deaths which are charged for on most other sites. This is an ongoing project, the aim of which is to transcribe the Civil Registration Index of births, marriages and deaths for England and Wales, and to provide free internet access to the transcribed records. The records already indexed will provide you with reference numbers to enable you to purchase certificates directly

from the government online site. The Freebmd site is part of the Freeukgen site also containing census and parish register information.

Ancestry (UK & Worldwide) – are by far the fastest growing sites on the Internet for family history research. These are subscription sites at £79.95 per annum for the UK version and £199.95 for the Worldwide version. The UK site contains digitised searchable copies of all census returns from 1841 to 1901, birth, marriage and death indexes from 1837 to 2002, WWI and many other military records, ship passenger lists, trade directories, court, land and probate records and much, much more. The worldwide system contains all of the UK records plus USA and Canadian Census returns and many more overseas records. At the Leicestershire & Rutland Family History Society Research Centre (details below) we have a library edition of Ancestry with both UK and worldwide records, available online with FREE access for members, saving you the yearly subscription.

We also have access to **Findmypast**, a rival system to Ancestry.

Did your ancestors go to war? - several sites, including Ancestry, contain very new releases of military records, especially those surviving records from WWI. Many of the army records were damaged by fire during WWII, and the surviving records, previously only available at the National Archives at Kew, have now been digitised and put onto the Internet.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission – is a free, fully searchable database containing 1.7 million records of all war casualties since the start of WWI, with details of their dates of death, place of burial or commemoration, and much more. Even if you think you have no ancestors connected with the armed forces, do check this site, especially for WWI soldiers, as most families were affected by that awful conflict. I have found details of a couple of soldiers born in Suffolk who were part of my ancestry.

National Archives Medal Index – on this website there is an index detailing all medal awards for WWI – each record giving the serviceman's regiment, rank and serial number, medals issued, and theatres of war they were involved in. These cards are downloadable for a fee of £3.50. This is probably the most comprehensive list of servicemen available for WWI.

Did your ancestors go to America? – the Ellis Island site, another free Latter Day Saints' site, contains the details of 22 million immigrants, passengers and crew, who went through Ellis Island and the Port of New York between 1892 and 1924. An estimate of 100 million Americans are directly related to these passengers. I found a "lost" ancestor among these records working as a steward on the passenger liners.

Family History Societies - when you find out that your ancestors came from different counties (or even countries!) it is advisable to look at what information is available on the many family history society websites. There are links to over 200 societies available on the Federation of Family History Society's website – follow the link to the list of members.

Google It – the expression "Google It" is now widely used as the best way to find information on the Internet, and this applies to family history as well. When you come across things such as places, occupations or anything you have not heard of, use the Internet search engine Google to find out about it. Google is getting so powerful that you can nearly always find that information you are seeking. One instance of the power of Google is search for "Somme" and it will return you over 20 million hits!!

The above sites are just a fraction of the resources available on the Internet. There are some excellent books available listing these sites, the best of which is Family History on the Web by Stuart A. Raymond ISBN 1 86006 180 X at £5.95. This and other books are available at the bookshop inside LRFHS Research Centre.

- Mormon/Latter Day Saints: www.familysearch.org
- Freebmd: www.freebmd.org.uk
- Freeukgen: <http://freegenuk.rootsweb.com>
- Ellis Island: www.ellisland.org
- Federation of Family History Societies: www.ffhs.org.uk
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission: www.gwgc.org
- Ancestry UK: www.ancestry.co.uk
- Find my Past: www.findmypast.co.uk
- Certificates online: www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates
- Ancestry Worldwide: www.ancestry.com
- Google: www.google.co.uk
- National Archives Medal Index: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/medals.asp

All of the above sites can be accessed at the Leicestershire & Rutland Family History Society Research Centre at Pilot House, King Street, Leicester.
See the website www.lrfhs.org.uk for details.

Next Time.....Storing and Presenting your Heritage – Genealogy Computer Software.

Peter Cousins

OVER 100 YEARS OF HISTORY..... ON THE BUSES

Whether the bus is red or blue is of little importance, but how did the change come about? From horse to steam, charabanc and to the modern bus of today.

Around Leicester in the 1920s there were some 67 local bus operators. Usually a single bus owned by one man. For instance there was Wallis of Shearsby, Snutch of Arnesby, Hames of Oadby, Underwood (both junior and senior) of South Wigston and Bromley of Fleckney. These buses operated through Wigston. Many others in nearby villages operated in other directions.

But in far away Birmingham in 1904 a bus company was formed called the Birmingham and Midland Motor Omnibus Company (BMMO). Having changed from horse to motor they quickly saw the possibility of expansion. They set up a network of services around Birmingham and then soon established a depot in Nuneaton with services to Hinckley.

It was some years before they reached Leicester. On 11th May 1921 they introduced the number 68 service from Birmingham to Leicester. With all the one man buses operating around Leicester, at that time, BMMO must have seen rich pickings. On 22nd August 1922 they opened their first depot in Leicester at Frog Island on the corner of Slater Street. By 1925 a fleet of 35 buses from this depot was operating around Leicester which included South Wigston and Wigston Magna. The

Wigston buses operated from Newarke Street and the Hind Hotel. The single fare was 4d and the return 7d.

Soon more accommodation was needed. A second depot was opened on Welford Road on the corner of Howard Road (now Autoglass). This housed 10 open top double deck buses. On 21st July 1927 these depots were replaced with a depot in Southgate Street with a capacity for 90 buses.

Did the BMMO take passengers away from the small operators or was good compensation paid? Between 1929 and 1931 most of the small operators had been absorbed by this company. Wallis of Shearsby was taken over on 1st January 1931. An exception was Bromley of Fleckney who continued to run through Wigston.

Bromley ran a service from Fleckney through Kilby and Wigston to the Newarkes in Leicester except Sundays when they only ran as far as Wigston. They had one bus, a 25 seater luxury coach driven by Mr. Bromley. By the time it crossed into Leicester it must have had 50 passengers. Mrs. Bromley was the conductor except on Sundays. No tickets were given for the fare but Mrs. Bromley knew exactly who had and had not paid. She looked severe in her all black outfit and left any would be fare dodger thinking better of it. They operated this bus until 1958 when it was taken over by the Provincial Bus Company.

On the Midland Red buses (the trading name of the BMMO), the driver's job was to drive the bus. Passengers were the responsibility of the conductor who had a board of colourful tickets which were clipped according to the cost of the fare. The conductor communicated with the driver by pulling the length of leather cord which sounded a bell in the driver's cabin. One ring to stop, two to go and three full up, so don't stop. Frequently an inspector would come aboard, "Tickets Please". There would be a frantic search for your ticket.

The 1930s were a time of change but the heyday of bus travel was the 1950s with the peak year being 1954.

Services to and through Wigston and South Wigston at that time were as follows:-

- L5 Newarke - Welford Road - Wigston Central Avenue and return.
- L6 Newarke - Welford Road - Wigston - South Wigston - Newarke.
- L7 Newarke - Saffron Lane - South Wigston - Wigston - Leicester.
- L8 Northampton Square - Wigston - South Wigston - Newarke.
- L9 Newarke - Wigston (Exeter Road) and return
- L10 Northampton Square - Oadby - Wigston and return
- L15 Scraptoft - Oadby - Wigston - South Wigston - Enderby
- L16 Leicester - Ratby - Wigston - Scraptoft - Leicester (Saturdays and Sundays)
- L17 Oadby - Wigston - Markfield Sanatorium (Sundays only)
- L18 Northampton Square - Wigston - South Wigston and return
- L78 Northampton Square - Wigston and return
- 638 Leicester, Newarke - Wigston - Shearsby - Welford
- 641 Leicester, Newarke - South Wigston - Shearsby
- 648 Leicester, Newarke - Wigston - Shearsby
- 562 Leicester, Newarke - Wigston - Shearsby - Rugby (Wednesdays and Saturdays)

Buses which started in the county were not permitted to pick up passengers within the city boundary. This prohibition was lifted in July 1984.

It was common for a bus to pass a stop because it was already full. The upper deck would be chokingly full of cigarette smoke. The old open top buses would have been healthier. The double deck buses had an open platform at the rear with a pole. This was useful if the bus was just pulling away. Run fast, grab the pole and a well timed jump and you were on. A mis-timed jump and you could find yourself in a horizontal position being hauled in by the conductor. Dangerous but fun!

A depot for 65 buses was opened at South Wigston in 1957.

On 1st January 1969 BMMO became part of the National Bus Company. On 29th March 1974 the company was renamed Midland Red Omnibus Company. The rear entrance buses were phased out in December 1979. On 6th September 1981 a split was made and this area became Midland Red East which became Midland Fox in 1984. The traditional red buses were then coloured yellow on the front.

In 1987 there was a management buyout and Midland Fox became part of the Drawline Transport Group. This was later acquired by the British Bus Group. In 1996 this Group was acquired by the Cowie Group. In 1997, Cowie launched the new company name Arriva. In 2003 a new group, Arriva Midland, was formed.

Was red, now blue what next? Maybe green!

Colin Hames

With grateful thanks to Arriva for supplying information for this article.



An early (1920s?) Midland Bus standing outside St. Thomas's Church. Note the hard tyres and open top deck.