



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

Bulletin 28



The Old Crown, Next St. Wigston Magna.

J.R. Colver.

Programme of Meetings October 1990 to February 1990

Wednesday 17th October 1990

Slides of Bygone Wigston with commentary – Bill Ward

7.30pm Wigston Liberal Club

Wednesday 21st November 1990

Battle of Waterloo: 175th Anniversary, talk with medals and uniforms

Mr R Cooper

7.30pm Wigston Liberal Club

Wednesday 19th December 1990

Christmas Party with Quiz

7.30pm Wigston Liberal Club

Wednesday 16th January 1991

Old Leicester: rare archive film from 30's, 40's and 50's – Mr R Foxon

7.30pm Wigston Liberal Club

Wednesday 20th February 1991

AGM & Members Evening. Your chance to show slides or talk for 10 minutes or so.

7.30pm Wigston Liberal Club

Bulletin

The Bulletin will be published three times a year on 1st February, June and October. Articles etc. should be given to either of the joint Editors three clear weeks before publication date please.

Joint Editors:-

Mrs Chris Smart 16 Maidwell Close Wigston

Mrs Tricia Berry 11 Hayes Road Wigston

June Meeting

On Wednesday 20th June the Society met in the Liberal Club Car Par to get the coach to travel to Rutland Water for our Annual Outing/ In spite of an initial downpour the weather kept fine.

On our arrival at the Whitwell Car Park of Rutland Water, our pleasure cruiser 'The Rutland Bell' was waiting for us to board.

The boat cruised around the reservoir and the Captain gave us an interesting commentary and pointed out all of the main points of interest.

After cruising around for an hour we were returned to the Car Park to disembark and get the coach to return to Wigston.

A most enjoyable evening was had by all.

August Meeting

On this occasion about 30 members travelled out to Hallaton. There we were met by Ian Varey who took us on a walk round this very pretty village. He pointed out various interesting features including part of an old wall. He explained how to date the older buildings, including the Church, by noting architectural style, building methods and materials typically used at different periods. It was noted that there is a mound of a castle close by and a local museum, both of which would be interesting to see on a future visit.

Edna Taylor thanked Ian very much on behalf of everyone and the evening came to a pleasant conclusion with a drink at the Fox Inn.

September Meeting

On Wednesday the 19th of September 31 members of the Society met for a video and slide evening.

In the 1960's Granada Television had produced a documentary called 'The Vanishing Village' and the village used to illustrate the decline of agricultural economy and the development of an industrial / customer economy was Wigston.

The film is now an historical document in its own right and Peter had ingeniously produced up to date slides to illustrate the changes that had taken place since the film was originally made in the early 60's

Peter Clowes and Duncan Lucas gave us an interesting commentary on both the slides and the video, the two being shown simultaneously.

We were then shown a video of Cockrofts cine film taken in the late 1930's. These showed the carnivals held in Countesthorpe, South Wigston and Wigston in aid of the Leicester Infirmary. We were then shown a film of the 1939 school sports led in Oadby and then a film showing the demolition of the Quaker Meeting House in Bull Head Street and the subsequent development of the Paddock Street Car Park and the Bull Head Street dual Carriageway.

Lastly we were treated to a delightful video of Mrs Beasley aged 103 visiting the Framework Knitters Cottage in Bushloe End.

The meeting closed at about 9.45pm after the chairman had thanked Peter for all his work and giving us all a most enjoyable evening.

Housewives Work in Wigston in 1881 Part 2

Cleaning methods were generally uniform throughout Britain at this time. Most Wigston women cleaned their floors and fireplaces with strikingly similar mops, brooms and brushes. Often these were homemade: the mops out of woollen rags, the brushes from hog's bristles and the brooms from birch or heather. Moreover, most Wigston housewives used the same cleaning agents. Floors and stairs for example,

were kept clean with sand. It soaked up grease and droppings, as well as mud and dirt brought in from outside, In fact, the most heavily trodden floors were usually kept sanded all the time, the sand being swept out and renewed on Saturday. Before the sand was renewed, however, the housewives usually washed and scrubbed the floors and stairs with cold water. Where women lived by the seaside they would usually fetch fresh supplies of sand themselves. Inland, the sand was brought to the doors in sacks by special hawkers called sandmen.

Cleaning became easier as the 19th Century advance. The advent of piped water supplies and drains in the 1890's made the work much simpler. As did the spread of cheap alkali which enabled floors, kitchen tables and cooking utensils to be cleaned with soda and this item rapidly became a fixture on the average family's shopping list.

One problem that faced Wigston housewives in the 19th Century as it did all housewives was how to cope with bugs. These pests seemed to be greatly on the increase in the previous century and for most working class of women the fight to keep their homes free from bugs was a major task. Bugs were to be found not only in bedding and upholstery, but behind wallpaper, picture rails and skirting boards, in cracks in wood and plaster work, under floor boards and inside nail holes. As soon as the weather grew warmer in summer, the omnipresent bugs appeared in battalions and housewives resorted to all sorts of methods to get rid of them. These included lime-washing and disinfecting rooms and applying blow-lamps to cracks in floor board, walls and ceilings. But often to no avail. In the end, the only way to stop the spread of bugs was, as Wigston women came to realise, by strict and regular attention to household cleaning at all time. Thus, the wretched bug proved a blessing in disguise.

The spread of coal supplies was another development that increased the amount of cleaning a housewife had to do. Coal was much dirtier than wood or peat and was responsible for an enormous amount of household dirt and atmospheric pollution. Wigston housewives did not suffer so much from the effects of coal as did women in large industrial cities who had to wash their windows once a week and their net curtains once a fortnight. In London, curtains became so black that it was necessary to soak them in salt water and when this water was poured away it was as black as soot.

Since the average number of children in a family in Wigston in 1881 was between four and five, clearly cooking occupied much of the housewives' time. One food and water were boiled in an iron pot or kettle suspended over the fire – a wood or peat fire on an open hearth or a coal fire in an iron grate. The cooking pots were suspended from a wooden cross or iron bar high up in the chimney by means of a rope, a wooden stick, an iron chain or an iron rod with a hook at the bottom. This form of cooking died out in the 19th century for most houses in Wigston cooking was then done in an oven, which could be of two types. In older houses, brick ovens built into a side-wall of the fireplace can still be found. By 1881 this type of oven had been superseded by the oven range which usually included side boilers for heating water and ovens for baking, heated by a system of flues. The heated water was either drawn off by means of a tap at the side or ladled out from the top. One reason why the open range became the more usual method of cooking was the replacement of wood by coal in the 19th century.

Some of the richer inhabitants of Wigston may have gone in for the closed range, in which the open fire was covered by a hot plate, ending the need for a suspended pot.

The front of the range usually had a moveable panel which could be used either to shut off the fire or to expose the flames to view. Unfortunately, the close range was always a comparatively expensive apparatus to buy and on the whole it was confined to prosperous households with servants, of which there were several in Wigston. Maintenance of the closed ranges was extremely arduous. It was necessary to get up very early to clean the flues and light the range. It also required regular polishing and black leading to look presentable.

Gas stoves were coming into the market in the 1880's, but whether any householder in Wigston possessed one in 1881 is doubtful. From 1841 to 1878 W E Hutchinson was chairman of the Leicester Gas Company and that may explain why Oadby, where Hutchinson lived, had street lighting before Wigston. Gas was brought into Oadby in 1864 and Wigston followed several years later. For many years gas was used almost exclusively for street lighting and it was not until the 1890's that gas companies introduced penny-in-the-slot meters, which soon became the chief way by which gas was sold for domestic purposes. The reason for this development on the part of the gas companies was the growing threat from electricity which was coming more and more to the fore in the last years of the 19th century.

Bernard Elliott

We quote

**“The old order changeth, yielding place to the new”
Alfred. Lord Tennyson, 1809 – 1892 (Morte d’Arthur)**

We quote

“He who collects is laudable; for though he exerts no great talent in the work, he facilitates the progress of others, and by making that easy of attainment, which is already written, may give some mind more adventurous than his own, leisure for new thoughts and original designs”.
Samuel Johnson 1709 – 1784

Answers to crossword in Bulletin No.27 (June issue)

Across

1 Samurai 5. Homer 8. Lilliputian 9, Putts 10. Ebrious 11 Corset 12 Pantry
15 Regional 17 Mason 20 Antiquarian 22 Arden 23 Evade

Down

1 Salop 2 Military Guard 3 Reissue 4 Inures 6 Monmouthshire 7 Rearsby
11 Cordoba 13 Arm 14 Plaque 16 Nitron 18 Ninth 21 Ada

**Preliminary Report on Buildings
42 -44 Bushloe End, Wigston Magna**

The building, as seen today, embodies an evolution in development tracing back to the 16th Century. Evident to the street elevation and returning to the right hand side up to the line of the rear lean-to extension is a rubble stone plinth the remains of the earlier building. The plinth or base to the front wall terminates at the right hand jamb of the doorway to No. 42. It would have supported a timber framed structure, parts of which have been incorporated into the present building.

In view of the position of the “cruck” timber built into the West gable wall of No.42, an interesting conjecture can be made. Originally the building now numbered 42 and 44 was shorter in length by 1.1 meters than the present structure, the ‘cruck’ position denotes a stepping back between the front faces of the old medieval buildings, the ‘cruck’ being to the neighbouring building. The short timber at the apex to the ‘cruck’ is not original and may well have been added for ‘effect’ when the nineteenth century cottages which occupied the site were pulled down.

The original plan form of No’s 42 and 44 would have had roughly equal rooms set on either side of an entrance passage. The passage would have given access to the rear the right hand room may well have been a ‘byre’ or barn and the left hand room a living room. Construction may well have been ‘cruck’ with timber framing to walls and wattle and daub panels infilling. It is of interest to note that one of the present roof purlins which is approximately 4.4 meters long is notched to take the feet of rafters, the notches being 100mm wide. This beam was undoubtedly a wall plate. Mortises are also visible indicating the position of supporting posts. Except for one relatively modern purlin, the other timbers supporting the roof have come from different positions in the original house and formed part of the framework. Of further interest is the morticed threshold pieces to the two doorways opening from the second floor landings, these may well have been the cill member between the ‘byre’ and central passage.

During the early part of the eighteenth century, possibly around 1740, the house was reconstructed in brickwork. There is some evidence to indicate that it was the initial intention to retain the building as single storey possible to increase the accommodation with a rear room where the present rear living room is, this would have been a kitchen. At this time the building was extended up to the neighbouring ‘cruck’ cottage and a fireplace and chimney constructed to the front parlour. If the West gable is studied, the ‘imprint’ of the neighbouring thatch roof and front wall can be seen on a line approximately 2’3” back from the face of no.42.

The brick front was constructed in Flemish bond i.e. alternate header stretchers, the headers were of darker colour than the stretchers, this was effected through there ‘clamp’ method of firing brick in the kiln. At first floor level the pattern to the brickwork changes and the brick headers have been formed to a ‘diaper’ pattern. The craftsmanship in brickwork to the first floor is markedly better. than that to the ground floor. Whist this indicates a two stage construction, there is little or no evidence to show that the roof line was other than over the arched window openings at first floor. East and West elevations clearly show the steep roof pitch. The roof may well have been completely slated with Switland slates. To the rear, a two storey extension was constructed forming a ‘garbled’ extension behind the present parlour.

In 1776, by Act of Parliament, brick sizes were set at 8½” x 4” x 2½”.

In 1784 the first brick tax was introduced. The size of bricks to the lower two stories measured to the front and gable ends vary between 2” x 9 5/8” x 4½” x 2¼” x 93/4” x 43/8”

It will be seen that the early brickwork pre-dates these dates.

The Lean-to Workshop to rear of the house was built during the early to mid nineteenth century. At this time the extension forming the kitchen and bedroom over was in part demolished and incorporated into the line of lean-to extension across the whole width of the house. The outbuildings would have been added probably including the workshop and conservatory, now demolished, the foundations for which can still be seen.

The detached brick constructed two story workshop in circa 1880. It is probable that the shop front to No.44 was constructed earlier in the century when the lean-to workshop was added.

A.O. Kind FRIBA

The Rag and Bone Man of Old Leicester 1920's and 1930's

Jobs and money were very scarce in the years immediately after country that was to be made fit for homes to live in and these conditions were responsible for the meanly jobs that men and women turned in to earn a few shillings.

The rag and bone persons (I use this description as one was an old lady) mostly came from the Wharf Street and Bedford Street areas of East Leicester where there were many courtyards or little cottages and the rent for these little cottages was everything from 6/- per week but sometimes even this small rent was difficult to find every week, so it was easy to rent a barrow for the day or week and go out “tattooing” a slang word for rag and boneing.

Some of the regular rag and bone men did very well and they could afford to keep a horse and cart, one called in the street with his little Donkey and cart, but mostly it was a flat barrow or an old pram or bike just to carry the sacks of rags on. It was a common sight to pass a piece of waste ground and see a tatter sorting out a pile of rags. This had to be done as scrap wool paid a bigger price than either materials and the owners of the scrap yards wouldn't buy the rags unless they were separated, even then after walking many miles shouting “Rag – Bone” the reward was only a few shillings.

The collecting of scrap brass, lead and copper was a much better paying method of tattooing, but the bosses of the yards that bought this kind of scrap wanted to know where it came from and the tatter would have to give a name and address for Police checks on stolen property.

The best known and perhaps the most genuine rag and bone man to call in the street as “Arky” Bennett a stoutish man with a loud sharp voice who sat on his cart shouting to bring out their rags and bones (it was very rare for anyone to bring out any bones), his

patter or spiel was a little crude his favourite shout was “Rag-Bonn, pots for rags, bring out your range, you can bring yer old gels draws, but don’t bring the old gel, pots for rags”. He had a scale of pots according to the size of your bundle of rags. Those tatters that used a horse & cart very often lived at premises that had a gateway and yard with a stable for the horse and a yard for the cart. (Steptoe & Son Knew nothing to what these tatters did.)

Another called in the street was old Harry Bell whose “transport” was a little donkey and cart. Harry was deaf and he carried a hand bell and he would pump the bell up and down shouting, “Harry Bell, Harry Bell, peanuts for rags” and the little donkey stood quite placid as Harry shouted and rang his bell. His peanuts for rags was another good bargain for the kids as they were something to eat and it did not take a very big bundle of rag to obtain a bag of nuts. The nuts were pre-packed into white three cornered bags and each bag was folded in the same way with a twist in each corner, each folded bag was exactly the same size so I think that old Harry counted the same number of nuts into each bag, Harry knew just by looking if your bundle was big enough to warrant his parting with a bag of nuts but he very often treated the young ones...

Harry Bell, Harry Bell, peanuts for rags”

A most pathetic sight to come into the street was the old lady who gave rock-apples for rags, she was an invalid and she sat in an upright wicker invalid chair which she propelled by turning two handles fixed to a cog wheel which when turned drove the front wheel by means of a long chain, on the platform where her feet rested there was a large sugar bag in which she placed the rags and on her lap was a tray of toffee apples which again appealed to the kids as a prize for a few rags. She always asked the kids to ask their mothers for woollens if possible, this was understandable as a sack full of wool would pay her well for “driving” her wicker chair round the streets shouting “Rock-apples for rags”, well I said shouting, the old lady has a very soft voice and her street cry would hardly be heard indoors.

“Rock-apples for rags”

The next rag and bone man I called the “newspaper” man and he seemed to make a reasonable living because he combined tatting in the morning with selling “Mercury’s” in the afternoon. He too was a genuine rag and bone man who called for your rags and gave a straight deal in money in exchange. He pushed an old fashioned pram which would carry three sugar bags full of rags; he only dealt in rags as scrap metal tatting would have been too much for his old pram. He worked very hard at both jobs, walking the street all morning then standing many hours on his Mercury pitch selling papers. I am sure that he did very well at his chosen “Trade” because when his children grew up he moved his family into better class accommodation.

“Rag-Bone”

The most colourful cart to come into the street was the one that belonged to the toys for rags tatter. His cart had shelves all on one side and these were full of toys and games which he offered for rags, mind you he wanted a large bundle of all wool rags for the bigger toys, but on the bottom shelf there were boxes of little trinkets and badges etc., and so the prizes increased as the shelves went higher. He always had a crowd of kids around his cart admiring the toys and many were just as excited as

those who had a bundle, they would watch eagerly as the toy man assessed each bundle and then tell the child which shelf he could pick his prize from, if it was a game they knew that eventually they would be asked to play.

“Toys for Rags”

In the late 1940's we lived on the outskirts of Belgrave and our two children were quite excited one day when a rag and bone man came into the street and as our rag bag was getting full we let them take it to him, and very much to our surprise they came back with a live chicken. We could not refuse them when they asked if they would keep it, so I made a coup for it and it lived for a considerable time before we gave it away.

“Chickens for Rags”

We were still living in the same street when the kids came in all excited again as a rag and bone man came into the street this time offering goldfish for rags, and once again the man asked the kids to bring wool rags. The kids duly got their goldfish which they called Cleo after the goldfish in the Disney cartoon “Pinochio”. One year we were going on a week's holiday and we wondered what to do with Cleo, but that problem was soon resolved, we filled the bath with water and put a week's supply of food in it and in went Cleo, It must have thought it was its birthday, but when we came home and out it back in its bowls again it must have thought we had confined it to prison.

“Goldfish for Rags”

In the district where we lived there was a rag merchant's yard on the corner of the next street and his premises consisted of a corner shop, a back gateway. A large yard and an outhouse, he was a relation of a family who owned a large scrap iron firm in the city This rag and bone yard was very handy for one special reason and that was because he bought rabbit skins. Now in the 1920's a fishmonger or game dealer would sell his rabbits at 8d, 10d and 1/- according to size, sometimes he would skin it himself but very often left it to the housewife to do it. We liked it when mother had to skin a rabbit because she would let us take it to the rag and bone yard where we would get 2d for it. Now 2d in the 1920's would buy a ¼lb sweets or toffees, or 5 woodbine fags or better still a 2d seat at the local pictures that made a rabbit skin a big deal for us kids.

The next part of the story is not concerned with Leicester City, I never knew of such an appliance working in town, I saw this contraption actually working in Leeds in the 1920's. You could just imagine the excitement of the kids when a horse drawn roundabout came into the street. It was a hand driven roundabout driven by the man turning a large wheel in the centre, this wheel spun the platform round and round, there weren't many seats on the platform which was understandable as this wheel was quite heavy to turn. The kids all stood around watching the man assemble the roundabout and what a scramble for the first ride when he finished putting it together. When the seats were all full the man went round collecting the fare which was (wait for it) a jam jar just think of it a ride on a roundabout for a jam jar, the kids whose mothers could not afford a jar of jam would go around the streets asking neighbours for empty jam jar's.

I think that the roundabout man would be a ¼d. for a ½lb jar and ½d. for a 1lb jar. It must be that the roundabout. It must have been a good way of living because he travelled the streets with his roundabout for many years,

“All the fun of the fair for a jam jar”

Another regular caller into the street was a rag and bone man but a blind man playing a barrel organ, the organ was on wheels and it was pushed by his helper who I think was his nephew, and as the blind man turned the handle his helper held out a little cloth bag asking for alms. The street was about 600 yards long and the men with the organ would stop in three places and play a couple of times then move to the next street. I think that it was a better way of earning a few shillings than that of the old lady crying “rock apples” from her invalid chair.

After the First War it was a common sight to see 3 or 4 ex services men shuffling along the gutters around the town playing instruments with a comrade on each payment with a collecting box, playing in the town with all the shoppers walking about the old men did very well with their collecting boxes, but it was a pitiful sight to see a man walking down the centre of a terraced street singing for pennies, this less fortunate man was singing for a cup of tea and a cob or the price of a bed for the night. The public disliked the tatter who would walk down the entries and into open yards and then even open gates and enter private yards and if the people of the house were at work they would have a good look around the yard. They always carried an empty sack over their shoulder and they weren't above putting any washing into it that the house wife had placed on the lines in the entry during wet weather. These cheeky tatters got the genuine men a bad name.

“Rag Bone, Peanuts for rags, Rag Bone”

Harry Limbert

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