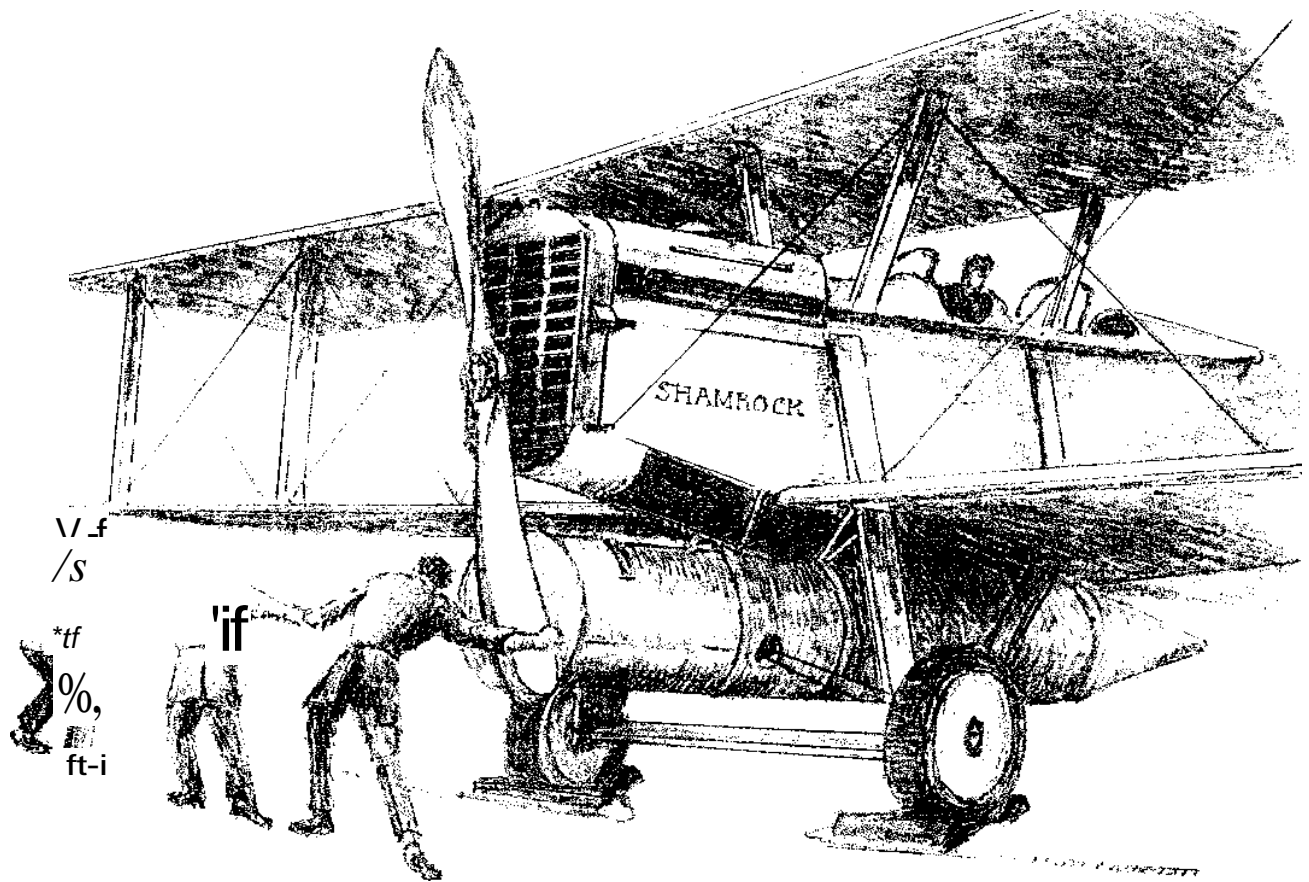


Greater Wigston Historical Society

White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna, Leicester.

BULLETIN 78



SHORTS BIPLANE PREPARING FOR A TRANSATLANTIC FLIGHT 1919 J R COLVER

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS - JUNE 2007 TO FEBRUARY 2008

Wednesday 20th June 2007

Guided walk around Broughton Astley with coffee/tea & homemade cakes in the church - Dr. C. Thomas

Meet 6.45p.m. Paddock Street Car Park to share transport.

Please note 7.15p.m. start for this evening.

Wednesday 15th August 2007

Some Famous Leicestershire Ladies - David Bell

7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 19th September 2007

William Morris & the Arts & Crafts Movement - Rowan Roenisch 7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 17th October 2007

Countesthorpe in the 19th Century, a Disorderly Community? - Dr. Michael Thompson
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys, Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 21st November 2007

The Slave Trade, Nationally and the Local Connections - Dr. Margaret Bonney
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys, Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 19th December 2007

Christmas Social with supper & quizzes. 7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 16th January 2008

Newsreels from the 1940s - Mike Forryan & Tony Lawrance 7.30p.m. U.R. Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 20th February 2008

A.G.M. followed by a Bring & Tell 7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Please see note about this evening on page 2

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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 the editor three clear weeks before the publication date please.

Editor: Tricia Berry, 7 Wensleydale Road, Wigston. Leics. LE18 3RX.

FRONT COVER

Jim Colver's drawing this time is of a Short's biplane preparing for a Transatlantic flight in 1919. The Short brothers, Oswald, Eustace and Horace, started in business at Battersea in 1898 making balloons. In 1908 at Leysdown, Isle of Sheppey they established the first British aeroplane factory and the following year under licence from Wilbur Wright (of Wright Brothers) manufactured six Wright aeroplanes. They later went on to design and make their own. By 1916 they were also making dirigible airships at Cardington, Cambridgeshire. This picture does not illustrate the plane used in the first successful crossing of the Atlantic by Alcock and Brown which took place on 14/15th June 1919, as this was achieved in a twin engined, converted Vickers Vimy bomber.

NOTE REGARDING FEBRUARY MEETING

The idea for this evening is that members are invited to bring along an interesting historical object and give a short talk about it. This could involve what it is, how they came by it (perhaps a family heirloom), why it is special to them, maybe its value. We need eight people to take part, and each talk will be restricted to five minutes. We will need to know who wishes to do this, and what they are intending to bring, so that we end up with the right number and no duplication of objects. Please give it some thought and if you feel you would like to contribute to the evening, let the secretary, Tricia Berry know.

OADBY AND WIGSTON BOROUGH COUNCIL - CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Congratulations to member, Pam Ward, who is to be the Council's new Citizen of the Year. She was chosen by a panel of judges because of her work in the community. This includes her instinting lobbying to get South Wigston Railway station re-opened, and her continuing support as secretary of the Supporters Group. Her truly worthwhile book *Wigston at War* which researched the backgrounds of the men of Wigston and South Wigston who lost their lives in the two world wars. And finally her work with the Royal British Legion where she has been a poppy seller since the age of 16. She was due to receive her award on 15th May. Congratulations Pam.

FEBRUARY MEETING

The Society held its Annual General Meeting when approximately 50 members were present. The evening commenced with:

1) Apologies for absence being recorded from Brian Bilson, Mike & Linda Forryan & Anne Brown.

2) The Secretary, Tricia Berry, reading the minutes of the February 2006 A.G.M. which were then agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

3) Matters Arising - none.

4) The Auditor, Colin Towell, (in the absence through illness of the Treasurer, Brian Bilson), handing out copies and explaining the Income & Expenditure Account for the year to 31/12/2006. It was proposed that the annual donation to the Framework Knitters Museum should be increased to £150 00 and that the subscriptions should remain at their present rate of £7 (full) and £5 (concessionary).

5) The Chairman, Edna Taylor, reporting another successful year with meetings well attended and quality speakers enthusiastically received. The summer trips to Bruntingthorpe and Welford were also very enjoyable, though somewhat marred by bad weather. The former evening very cold and the latter it poured with rain. She thanked the Committee for their work, our Auditor, Colin Towell, and all members for their loyalty and support.

6) The Membership Secretary, Stella Tweed, reporting that the current membership stood at 79; made up of 17 full members, 61 concessionary and 1 honorary. This total is five down on last year. Attendance at meetings was lower too, with a maximum of 38 and a minimum of 29. She felt the possible reasons for this should be discussed, and members encouraged to let committee members know of their interests and make suggestions for future speakers, so that all tastes can be catered for as far as possible.

7) Election of Officers: After nineteen loyal years as Chairman, Edna Taylor, had previously made it known she wished to retire. It was unanimously agreed that the current Vice Chairman, Tony Lawrance, be elected Chairman in her place. As no nominations were forthcoming for a new Vice Chairman, this position was left vacant.

All other officers were re-elected. An invitation to members to offer themselves for election to the committee was made by Tricia Berry who proposed Mike Forryan be elected in his absence subject to his future agreement.

8) Any Other Business. Colin Towell gave an update on the Blue Plaque Scheme. Lottery funding of £4988 00 has been received, but as the number of plaques has been increased, from those originally chosen, a fund raising event is planned to cover the additional cost. A booklet giving information on the people being commemorated is also to be produced. He thanked all officers for their work during the year and particularly thanked Edna Taylor for her long and committed service as Chairman.

Members were then reminded their subscriptions were due and should be paid that evening if possible.

The second part of the evening was taken up with member, Elizabeth Ward, giving a very well received power point presentation of some of her late father Bill Ward's slides. She had been assisted in the digital copying of the photographs, which are stored at the Record Office, by her cousin John Gillam, who also came to the meeting. She was assisted with the presentation by Tony Lawrance. Elizabeth had chosen street scenes from the 1950/60s, reflecting her own early memories of a very different Wigston. She was warmly thanked by the new Chairman, Tony Lawrance.

GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL

ACCOUNTS

Receipts and Payments for the year ending 31st December 2006

Receipts		Payments	
Opening Balances as at 1/1/06:		Lecturers' Fee & Expenses	160.00
Cash in Hand	4.83	Donation to O&WBP	100.00
Current A/c	-3.49	Bulletins/Programmes	68.10
Deposit A/c	1292.36	Room Hire	224.00
Subscriptions &		Secretary's Expenses	67.92
Donations	454.00	Visits	285.00
Collections	82.18	Christmas Social	181.76
Visits	287.00		
Christmas Social	187.51	Closing Balances as at 31/12/06:	
Bank Interest	29.40	Cash	4.83
		Current A/c	139.79
		Deposit A/c	1102.39
			1247.01
	2333.79		2333.79

Due to an invoicing error an overpayment of £56.00 in Room Hire was made in 2006. Therefore, although the above figures show a loss for the year of £46.69, when this over payment is taken into account there is actually a small profit of £9.31.

CHANGES TO OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

After the A.G.M. Mike Forryan confirmed that he is willing to join the Committee and has also accepted the position of Vice Chairman. We thank him very much for this and welcome him 'on board'.

Also following the sudden death of Brian Bilson, (who is commemorated elsewhere in this Bulletin), Colin Towell has agreed to retain the Society's books, which he was already holding for the annual audit, and serve as Acting Treasurer. Thanks also to Colin for helping the Society out in this way.

MARCH MEETING

In March the Society welcomed Colin Reynolds who gave a most interesting talk on the electrical manufacturing company Gents of Leicester. During 43 years service Colin rose, through continuing study and an apprenticeship, from shop boy to Scientific Instrument Maker, to manager of Research and Development, to Quality Assurance and Testing and Certification. His involvement with the British Fire Protection Systems Association and British Standards, gave the opportunity for world travel, representing the UK and Trade Association in Fire Standards and Regulations.

The founder of the company was John Thomas Gent, born 1841, in the Wharf Street area of Leicester. After an apprenticeship he started his own business as Whitesmith, Bell Hanger and Gas Fitter, in the same area. He later moved to Halifax and worked with others gaining experience and experimenting with electrical engineering. He formed a partnership, and then his own company, before moving back to Leicester to a house and premises at 50, Friar Lane. In 1865 Gent had patented his Electric Indicator, it was an electric version of the call system used in large houses and hotels for summoning staff. Other uses were for signalling in mines and tramcars, for fire, frost and burglar alarms, for connecting offices with their works and calling attention to speaking tubes.

As business expanded the company moved in 1877 to King Richard's Road, and then in 1892 to Braunstone Gate. Production came to include telegraphic equipment, liquid level indicators, batteries, generators, dynamos, door bells, radio sets and transmitting equipment and clocking-in machines. In 1889 a promising apprentice, Isaac Hardy Parsons, was taken into partnership, and other talented personnel were appointed to cope with expansion. In 1894 J.T. Gent retired and moved to Birmingham. At about this time a Tell Tale Clock or Watchman's Recorder was patented. This mechanical clock had a chart fitted and when an electro-magnetic coil was activated from a remote point it marked the chart and recorded the time this happened. In 1897 a patent for an Electric Pendulum Master Clock was the start of a manufacturing line for which Gents is perhaps best known.

To create extra production capacity another move in 1898 was made to custom built premises at the new North Evington estate in St. Saviour's Road. The place was virtually destroyed by fire in December 1901, but production soon re-started using factory space loaned from nearby premises. Within 18 months all was rebuilt to a safer design and production back to normal. At the same time, in 1903, the business was incorporated a limited liability company. In 1910 the company was asked to create a four dial clock for the Royal Liver Building, facing the harbour at Liverpool. It was named Great George, and the senior staff famously held a dinner at the Free Trade Hall, St. James' Street, using one of the 25 foot diameter dials as the dinner table.

During World War I production concentrated on military needs and field telephones, signalling and detection devices were made. In World War II power units for supplying current for VHP radio communication between pilots during the Battle of Britain, anti U-boat detectors, switching units for blind aircraft landings, air-raid sirens and Morse key sets for training radio operators were all made. Security was vital, staff had ID cards, and many operatives never knew the end use of the components they were making. Several Directors received honours for their contribution to the war effort.

After the war new clocks for Westminster Abbey for the Coronation and a call system for the Royal Yacht were notable orders. In 1991 the company moved to the Hamilton Business Park. In recent years there have been a number of mergers and takeovers and the company is currently part of the American Honeywell Corporation. It is nice that the name of Gent has been retained.

After some questions and discussion the Chairman, Tony Lawrance, thanked Colin for a most interesting talk.

APRIL MEETING

Our April meeting opened with a minutes silence in memory of the Treasurer, Brian Bilson, whose sudden death had shocked so many. It was agreed that £25.00 should be sent to the FWK Museum in his memory.

There followed an evening of the mysterious and unusual as Virginia Wright took us on an 'armchair walk, around the highly respectable district of Stonegate. Here are a few examples of the tales she recounted. The Croft Hotel on the corner of Stanley Road, and the Carisbrooke Dental Practice building on the opposite corner, were built to an identical design by Isaac Barradale for two sisters who apparently did not wish to live together. Eastfield was once the home of a Charles Robinson who worked for the Leicester Gas Company. He had the garden redesigned and it was later noticed unusual rocks, which were a bi-product of gas production, had been used. He also lived at The Shrubbery whose garden again had the same type of rock features. Thorncroft, the home of Thomas Cook, where his daughter tragically died in her bath, due to a leak from a faulty gas water heater. The Cedars where Elizabeth Frisby lived. She was the first lady Lord Mayor of Leicester and an active campaigner for votes for women. One of her tactics was to light a bonfire on a golf course.

Lyndhurst was the home of Canadian business man Ewen Cameron who founded the Bostik company. Springfield Lodge where a murder took place outside. A pair of semis known as Knighton Lodge where a Mcnamara family once lived and whose photograph mysteriously turned up in Canada. No: 1 Alexandra Road the home of William Kelly the historian and writer. The Regency Hotel, once the home of Denzil Jarvis, who was travelling to USA on business when he drowned in the Titanic. The bookshop in Francis Street where once lived 'Tanky' Smith the private detective who discovered the fate of the missing son of the Earl of Winstanley from Braunstone Hall.

Afterwards the Chairman, Tony Lawrance, thanked Virginia very much for a most enjoyable evening. He also announced that the Leicester Archaeological & Historical Society was holding a History Fair at Vaughan College, 10am. to 4p.m on 27th October to which we are warmly invited. Admission is free.

MAY MEETING

Our summer trip this time was to New House Grange Farm, Sheepy Magna. We gathered in the tithe barn for a welcome glass of wine, or home made elderflower cordial, from our hosts Mr. & Mrs. Poulson. Then a look at a display of the history of the farm, in photographs, maps and documents. We took a walk outside and looked across the fields to get an idea of the location of the farm in relation to other features in the landscape.

Back in the bam Rita Poulson told us something of the history of the farm which was bought by Mr. Poulson's grandfather in 1945. It had in Medieval times, together with several others in the area, belonged to an order of Cistercian Monks from Merevale Abbey. The farms would have been managed by lay brethren who lived on site, and were generally established to be within a days travelling distance of their abbey, which in this case was about six miles away, the Abbey being in Warwickshire, to the west of Atherstone. It was established from one in Reading and endowed by Robert Devereaux, Earl Ferrers. The churches of Mancetter and

Orton were connected with the Abbey. The most notable Cistercian Abbey in England is Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire.

The farm's huge tithe bam is 143 feet long by 37 feet wide. It has seven board trusses and six bays and is constructed with vast timber supports which rest on stone blocks about one foot clear of the ground. The roof may originally have been thatched, and there is evidence it was once slated. The brick infill of the walls is of more recent date, originally these would have been timber clad. Test borings of the timber date the barn's construction to c.1506. At the farm yard end, attached to the barn and accessed by a stone staircase, is a Reeve's office which has tally marks scratched in the woodwork. Two doors leading from this office open into the barn about 12 feet from the ground, giving the Reeve a good view of what was happening inside.

Following the dissolution of the monasteries the property came into private hands, with the Curzon, Moore (from Appleby), and Vincent families and the Catholic Church being later owners. Rita has done much research at Warwickshire Record Office and seeks other relevant documents through the internet.

The Vice Chairman, Mike Forryan, then thanked Mr. & Mrs. Poulson very much for a really fascinating evening, before we went on to the Black Horse in the village for a very pleasant supper.

* * * * *

OBITUARIES

Sadly two members have passed away during the last four months.

Brian Bilson died on 28th March after collapsing at home. The inquest revealed the cause was atherosclerosis (a build up of fatty tissue within the arteries near the heart).

He was a founder member of the Society, attending the inaugural meeting in May 1980. By 1983 he was Membership Secretary and the following year both Membership Secretary and Treasurer, continuing the post of Treasurer up until his death. A number of members attended his funeral at Gilroes when the President, Duncan Lucas, spoke of the quiet man's life, his many pastimes, his work in purchasing for the Education Department at County Hall, and the care he gave his mother who lived past 100 years.

His many interests included: gardening, jigsaws, being a patron of the Leicester Philharmonic Orchestra, and a regular attender at their concerts at the De Montfort Hall. A founder member of the Friends of Wigston Framework Knitters Museum and their only Treasurer. A member of the Leicester Archaeological and Historical Society and the Society for the Advancement of Science. He gave talks to our Society on two of his special studies: St. Paul's Cathedral and Frank Whittle and the Jet Engine. He was a very keen photographer and collector of cameras. He also collected antiquarian books, documents and maps, attending specialist shops and sale rooms in London as well as locally.

Ray Kirby died on 18th April, at his home after a long illness. He joined the Society in 1991/92. He was well known locally for writing songs and music for bands, music societies and pantomimes. He was very much involved with the

Magna Sunbeams dance group, who put on variety shows and pantomimes. He helped from their formation in the late 1940s until 1964 when he had to give up due to ill health. In 1969 when the founder retired many of the children joined Gwen Spencer's Dancing School. Ray wrote a history of the Magna Sunbeams which featured in Transaction No: 82 of the Society.

OLD PARISH DIARY

Thomas Burgess and his wife of The Grange, ran a British School in Wigston from at least 1844 until 1873, when the children transferred to Bell Street School, which had been newly built by The Wigston School Board. The Board had considered taking over Mr. Burgess's school building but it was thought to be too small. The British School, although interdenominational, would have been established with non conformist children in mind, as an alternative to the National School which was built in 1839 in Long Street, as a Church School. It is believed to have occupied the chapel like building near the top of Bell Street at one time, but certainly by 1867 was located in Mill Lane (now named Frederick Street).

Thomas's diary has been featured in previous Bulletins, and some of the diary pages he had used as a school register. Later these pages had been torn out, but two remained, though stuck together. By gently peeling these two pages apart the following information is revealed. There were also columns for Date of Application and Date of Admission, but only 1844, the year to which the entries relate, is visible.

No:	Name	Residence	Age	Religious	Parents
			Denomination	Occupation	
			Classes		
1	Hurst	Newgate End	Cleaver		
2	Hurst	Bush Lane	14	Thos Mason	
3	Herbert	Long Street	15	Frederic Baum	
4	Thos	Bush Lane	16	Gregory Mattock	
	Herbert	Newgate End	17	Eliza Cleaver	
5	Harriet	Moat Street	18	David Wood	
	Harris	Long Street	19	Samuel Reed	
6	Jacob	Bush Lane	20	Geo Loveday	
	Bryan	Long Street			
7	Samuel	Moat Street			
	Mould	Long Street			
8	John Hurst	Long Street			
9	Sarah	Halls Piece			
	Johnson	Bush Lane Bell			
10	Meshac	Street Hill			
	Sampson	Halls Piece			
11	John Bailey	Newton			
12	Mary	Harcourt 6 ¹ / ₂			
	Carter	Newton			
13	William	Harcourt 11			

Another page of the diary was used for recording gas meter readings. The Society's Transaction No: 40 describes the founding of the Gas Works. It states that a Public Meeting was called on 5th May 1957 at The National School Room, "to consider the practicality of establishing a Gas Works in this village". The Rev. T.G. Gallwey took the chair and Thomas Burgess acted as Secretary. The following week a meeting of the Provisional Committee of the Great Wigston Gas-Light & Coke Company resolved that a Prospectus, "setting forth the advantages attendant upon the uses of gas had been circulated in the village in January last, it may be presumed from the result of the Public Meeting, that the inhabitants approve of the scheme of the establishment of a Gas Works." The Committee proceeded to send out forms by which people could apply to buy the £5 00 shares, which were on offer with an interest rate of 6% per annum. Forms to be returned to the Secretary Thomas Burgess by 1st June. Therefore to have got the entire project built and running with some customers connected, and having used some gas, in a little over a year is pretty impressive.

It is understandable that Thomas Burgess, as the Secretary, would take an interest, and record the meter reading of these early customers. The list illustrated on the next page shows that Bull Head Street was the first street to be connected to the new fuel, and that the occupiers of these six properties were the very first Wigston gas consumers.

BULL HEAD STREET

1859 1858	Meter	Oct 3 rd	Jan 3 rd	Apr 2 ^{Bd}	July 1 st	Oct 1 st
NewbyJohn	AII	730	1630	2230	4400	2725
LaundonSaml	B1/6	2000	3900	5600	6300	7100
British School	Al/	475	1775	3000	3300	3560
SnowdenJohn	AII	1200	1900	2675	2800	2900
Laundon Redfh	Al/	1030	2000	2800	2825	2925
Perkins M.A.	Al/	5600	8500	10875	11800	13000

These six customers all had premises situated close together (as might be expected) at the Bell Street end of Bull Head Street. The 1861 census taken two years after these gas readings were recorded gives some information about the families but not the British School, which as it was not a residence would have been excluded from the census.

(87) John Newby was a 66 year old house agent, born in Burton Overy. He was living with his wife Mary and daughter Ann who was a teacher at the British School.

(86) Samuel Laundon was a 37 year old harness maker, born in Wigston. He lived with his wife Eliza and three sons, Henry, Alfred and George.

(84) John Snowden was a 65 year old needle maker (hosiery needles), born in Wakefield, Yorkshire. He lived with his wife Joanna and had a three year old grandson Thomas staying with him.

(82) Redfern Laundon was a 32 year old harness maker, born in Wigston. He lived with his wife Ellen and five children Savilla, Lucy, Thomas, William and John.

(81) John Perkins was a 24 year old baker, bom in Wigston. He is recorded as head of the



household and has his two sisters Mary Ann (26) and Sarah (20) and a brother James (18) living with him, all three assisting with running the house and the bakery. Also lodging there is John Carter a 20 year old journeyman baker, born in Wigston, and Phillip Barrington a 24 year old schoolmaster at the British School, born in Manchester.

John Perkins' much higher gas consumption was no doubt because of all the bread baking.

The number at the start of each name is the sequence in which the families were listed in the census. It shows that the families lived close together, some perhaps next door.

Note - the M.A. Perkins in the meter reading list would be John's sister who, being older than John, was regarded by Thomas Burgess as head of the household.

An old Postcard view showing the Bell Street end of Bull Head Street. The tall building on the right is believed to have been the British School in 1857/8 when the gas meter readings were taken. The notice on the next building says J.L. Snowden, Hosiery Needle Manufacturer. This side of the road is associated with the Laundon family too. but J. Newby & the bakery may have been on the opposite side.
LEICESTER CHRONICLE & LEICESTERSHIRE MERCURY - 27/4/1867 Local Intelligence from Wigston

A public meeting was held on the evening of 18th instant, to consult upon and find a remedy for a growing grievance in this village viz. the wanton destruction of hedges and fences. The occupiers of land, thus brought together, made great complaints of the injury done to property by persons of all ages who trespass upon the ground, break down hedgerows, and leave gaps for cattle to stray through into the road or other fields. Timber rails, laid to fill up these vacancies, or to protect the quick, have been carried off peaceably, and the enclosed trees destroyed. The meeting was unanimously of opinion that parents could have no excuse for allowing young people to amuse themselves by destroying their neighbour's property, inasmuch as a proper recreation ground has been provided for the parish at the cost of a very liberal public subscription. After some deliberation it was finally resolved to take joint action, and that a notice be circulated - "That anyone found doing damage to the fences, etc., on land occupied by the undersigned will be prosecuted by them". The announcement will be numerously signed.

Nothing changes!!!