



# WIGSTON HERITAGE

**GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
AND  
GREATER WIGSTON HERITAGE CENTRE**



**Turnpike Roads, see page 10**

**BULLETIN 129**

**July 2024**

## FROM THE CHAIRMAN



## IMPORTANT NOTICE

Everyone will be aware of the looming closure of the road between Wigston and South Wigston due to major Midland Mainline electrification works being carried out by Network Rail. Many of you will have already been affected by road closures and diversions around Kibworth, Fleckney and surrounding villages. In the absence of any firm dates or information from local sources, we contacted Network Rail directly, and they have told us that the work at so-called Spion Kop Bridge is scheduled to begin in June 2025, with preparatory signage and the planned temporary foot/cycle bridge works beginning ahead of that.

Given this impending major disruption, plus the continuing problem of difficult acoustics at the Menphys Centre, the committee have for a while been searching the area for a suitable alternative venue - and we have found one:

**Little Hill Primary School,  
Launceston Road,  
Wigston Magna, Leicester LE18 2GZ  
(See Map on The Next Page)**

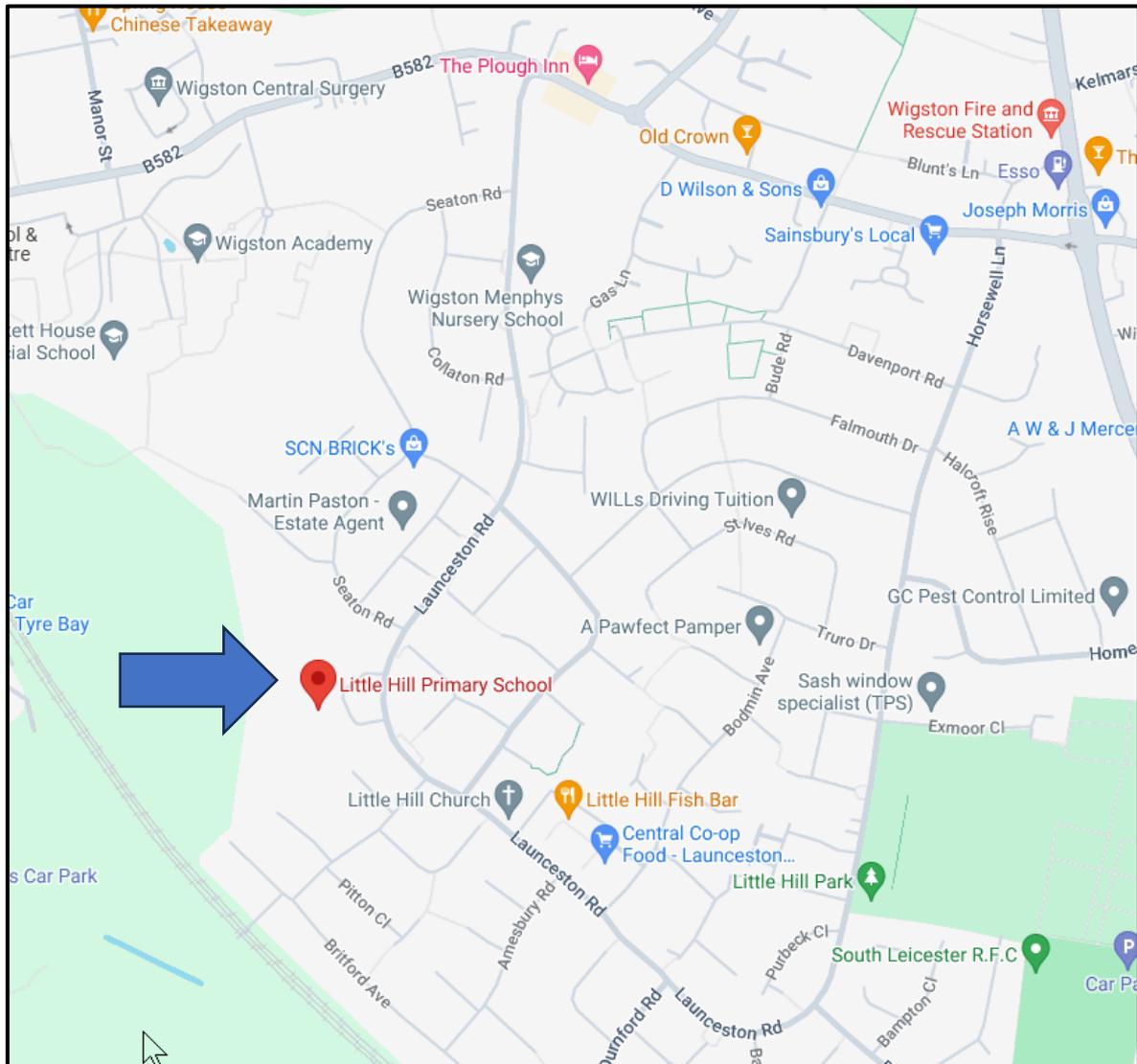
In terms of size, availability, furniture, acoustics, car parking, caretaking support (we won't have to stack chairs!) and, importantly, the cost, the school is nigh on perfect. It has its own PA and audio-visual projection system, use of which is included within the hire cost. So, at the Committee meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> April, it was agreed unanimously that with effect from the meeting scheduled for **Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2024**, we shall be moving permanently to Little Hill Primary School. We will have a location map available shortly if you aren't sure where the school is situated.

We sincerely hope that all members will continue to support the Society by coming along to this excellent new venue.

*Peter Cousins*, Chairman

E-Mail: [chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

# THE VENUE FOR GWHS MONTHLY MEETINGS FROM 17<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2024 IS THE LITTLE HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL, LAUNCESTON ROAD, WIGSTON LE18 2GZ



**THE SCHOOL IS ACCESSIBLE EITHER VIA LAUNCESTON ROAD  
OR HORSEWELL LANE. PARKING ON-SITE.**

Society's website: [www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

All enquiries to: [enquiries@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

The Bulletin is published three times a year on 1<sup>st</sup> March, July and November.

Articles etc., (which are always welcome) should be submitted to the Editor.

email: [bulletineditor@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:bulletineditor@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

four clear weeks before publication date.

## **Future Monthly Meetings**

# **Our New Venue - Little Hill Primary School, Launceston Road, Wigston Magna.**

Doors will open from 6.45pm and the meeting starts at 7.15pm. Please remember that our meetings are on a **TUESDAY** evening.

**JULY – NO MEETING**

**TUESDAY 20 AUGUST**

Hallaton Village Walk including visit to ‘Tin Tab’ Museum

**TUESDAY 17 SEPTEMBER**

“Sidney’s War” by David Humberston  
Chairman Leics. & Rutland Western Front Association

**TUESDAY 15 OCTOBER**

The History of Wyggeston and Trinity Alms-houses by Theresa Phillips

**TUESDAY 21 NOVEMBER**

‘Some Mother’s Son’ (in costume) by Sandra Moore

**TUESDAY 10 DECEMBER**

**Christmas Party plus ‘That’s Magic’ by John Constantine**

**Refreshments & Wine Included £4 per Member, £5.00 for visitors/guests**

**Most talks are illustrated with PowerPoint and pictures.**

**PLEASE NOTE TIMES FOR ALL MEETINGS:  
DOORS OPEN AT 6.45PM, MEETINGS START AT 7.15PM**

Admission to meetings free to members - **Non-Members £4 per person**

Any enquiries please contact – [enquiries@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

# Recent Greater Wigston History Society Meetings

## FEBRUARY

Annual General Meeting followed by a talk on Medieval Wigston by Steve Marquis.

## MARCH – Quorn and Woodhouse: The Story of a Station by Jack Straw



The Quorn and Woodhouse Station opened in 1889 and was mainly built to facilitate easier access for the well-to-does to attend the Quorn Hunt. It had between 2,000 and 3,000 visitors during its first year.

D.H. Lawrence was a regular visitor in order to court his girlfriend, Louise Burrows, the school mistress of Quorn's school. They apparently became engaged whilst on travelling on the train in 1910. During the 1920's around 300 passengers a day used the station. The Station was closed in 1963 as part of the Beeching Axe that radically reduced the railway network. In 1959, a group emerged that would gradually restore the Leicester–Loughborough Central Railway line.

## APRIL – Leicester Cathedral Revealed by Matthew Morris



Some of the skeletons located so far

The church was built on the site of Roman ruins and is dedicated to St Martin of Tours, a 4th-century Roman officer who became a Bishop. It is almost certainly one of six churches referred to in the Domesday Book (1086) and portions of the current building can be traced to a 12th-century Norman church which was rebuilt in the 13th and 15th centuries.

In the Middle Ages, its site next to Leicester's Guildhall, ensured that St Martin's became Leicester's Civic Church with strong ties to the merchants and guilds of the town. In 1927, St Martin's was dedicated as Leicester's Cathedral when the diocese was re-created, over 1,000 years after the last Anglo-Saxon Bishop of Leicester fled from the invading Danes.

The current archaeological dig started in 2021. The main finds include 125 skeletons in a mass grave from the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. Around 900 burials in all over 800 years, the last being in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A small Roman shrine dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, possibly part of a Roman Temple.

## MAY – The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie by Mark Temple



Agatha Christie came from an upper middle-class family with no obvious background in writing. In fact, Agatha was never formally taught to read and write being largely self-educated. Although her sister was a Roedean girl, Agatha didn't attend school until the age of 15 when she was sent off to France to finish her education. Nevertheless, she has remained in the best-selling book-charts since the publication of her first novel, 'The Mysterious Affair at Styles,' in 1921 (1920 in the U.S.) until her final novel, 'Postern of Fate' came out some 52 years later in 1973.

We were taken on a chronological journey through her writing pausing only to hear about some noteworthy events in her equally mysterious private life. She wrote 66 crime novels and over 100 short stories many of which featured one of her two infamous amateur sleuths: Hercule Poirot or Miss Marple. Although the books made her a household name, many have become fans of her work only due to the popularity of the television and film adaptations made since the author's death in 1976 at the age of 85. Ironic as Agatha made no secret of the fact that in her lifetime she was bitterly disappointed at the many ways her stories had been 'murdered' when reinterpreted for the stage or screen. In her lifetime a few productions did meet with her approval (notably the film version of 'Witness for the Prosecution') but by and large she wasn't a fan of what others did with either her stories or characters. She wasn't around to pass judgement on the Poirot productions in the 1980s (with David Suchet) and the numerous portrayals of Miss Marple on TV. However, it cannot be denied that they have allowed new audiences to appreciate her genius in storytelling.

Even in this world of hobbits and boy wizards all her novels are still in print and continue to out-sell all popular authors, other than the Bible and Shakespeare.

**Judith Proctor**

### OBITUARIES

**We sadly announce the recent passing of some of our members:**

**Margaret Elliott.** Our thoughts and condolences go out to her family.

**Kate Morton.** Kate was a member of the Society for over 15 years. Our thoughts and condolences go out to her family.

**Jean Haywood.** Jean was a member of the Society for several years. Our thoughts and condolences go out to her family.

**Dick Gilbert.** Who, with his wife Ann, have been members since 2017. Our thoughts and condolences go out to Ann and family.



# Heritage Centre News

*This is a new section which will provide members with up-to-date news and happenings at the Centre, plus details of future events.*

## **Heritage Centre Report**

As your librarian I come across assorted items old and new, I would like to tell you about 3 books 1 old and 2 not so old.

### ***"The Bye-Laws of Wigston Magna 1897"***

This is one of the older books we have. It is a small sized 86 page book, in a poor condition but it is well worth looking at. The index will show you a world from Victorian time, which we know little to nothing about. For example: Privy Construction. It must be at least six feet from the house or public buildings and thirty feet from a well, spring or stream. The floor must be flagged or paved with non-absorbent material, with an inclination towards the door. Also, the seat and ventilation requirements as shown. I don't think you want to know the rules for the night soil man, so I'll move on (if you do consult the book). You will find *Bye-Laws for Buildings, Footways and Offensive Trades*. Yes, we had some of those in Wigston including Fat Melter, Tallow Melters, Tripe Boilers and others.

This snapshot of bygone Wigston can be found in the Book Stands book No. 259.

### ***"Photographic Memories of the Old Wigston Stations"***

A more recent book is *"Photographic Memories of the Old Wigston Stations"*, printed in 2015 and based on an exhibition of photographs at the Bassett Street Library, South Wigston 2014. There are 138 pages of wonderful photos. There are photos of all three stations, the Motive Power Depot, Crow Mills Viaduct, and sites as they are today, and photos dating from 1885. There are photos of South Wigston Station and its footbridge and Wigston Magna Station with the level crossing, before the overbridge was opened.

### ***The old quarry that was alongside Wigston Glen Parva Station.***

This little book has a varied album of photos, spanning about a 100 years, showing stations, men at work, passengers, trains, and a lot more. It is not just for the rail enthusiast. You will find this book in Railway Corner Book No. 97.

**Elaine French**

## **Documents on Wigston History held at the Heritage Centre**

For many years we at the Greater Wigston Historical Society have been collecting documents which have been either donated or lent to us so we can turn them into text files for indexing, allowing us to search them for specific pieces of data relating to the local area.

We now have over three hundred such documents covering the period from 1700 to 1990. These include property deeds; wills; abstracts; mortgages; land transfers; business letters; business documents/invoices; assignments; personal certificates; church attendance certificates; school play leaflets; scrap books, and many other documents relating to Wigston and the local area.

Each document contains many details of people, places and transactions which help us to build a clearer picture of the history of life in Wigston and the local area.

Many of the above are just thrown away after relatives pass on, which is a great shame as they are lost forever. The Heritage Centre is happy to receive these and add them to our collection of local heritage documents that can then be researched by others in the future.

**If you have any such documents please, please, please, don't throw them away, we would love to have them. Send me an email and I will contact you to collect them, or you can drop them into us at the Heritage Centre on Station Road Wigston.**

Remember these documents are the history of Wigston and the local area.

Thank You

**Mike Forryan**

**E-Mail: [president@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:president@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)**

**All information provided is Free of Charge and funded through donations. If you would like to donate to support the archive you can do so at: -**

**[www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk/Heritage\\_Centre.html](http://www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk/Heritage_Centre.html)**



**THE DONATION BUTTON IS AT THE  
BOTTOM OF THE WEBPAGE**

## **GWHS CENTRE THURSDAY TALK 25 April 2024**

### **THE BOYS AND GIRLS OF WW1 by Peter Cousins**

The rules of enlistment stated that males must be 18 or over to enlist but they could not be sent abroad until aged 19. When war was declared the British had 256,000 regular troops and 225,000 reservists whilst there were 3.8m German troops including many young people because Germany had benefitted from an extremely high birth rate. The British Expeditionary Force was in Belgium within 5 days of the war starting on 4 August 1914 and the famous phrase 'it will all be over by Christmas' soon spread. By the end of September 1914, 750,000 volunteers had enlisted and by January the next year the figure was 1 million including, it was thought, 300,000 under 18s, half of whom had already been wounded or taken prisoner. Underaged recruits had used false names and ages, excuses often being accepted by recruiting officers who were being paid for each recruit enlisted.

There were many reasons for men, whatever age, joining up: we will be back by Christmas; what an adventure; we get paid; friends and workmates were enlisting. Many groups of men signed up in PALS and CHUMS battalions or just because they were from the same street. As we know, the casualties were horrifying, in the Battle of Loos, 50,000 were killed or wounded including 3,600 who were underage. In the Battle of the Somme, on the first day alone, 500 underage boys were killed and 2,000 were wounded.

Of the 628 Victoria Crosses awarded in WW1, one was awarded posthumously to 18-year-old Private Peachment whose body was never found. Canadian underage boys also signed up, one being only 13 but he was forced into it by his father. Young boys from France enlisted too. Sadly, the first person killed in the war as only 17 years old.

Turning to women and girls they were in the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD). In 1914 there were 74,000 members of the VAD including existing St John's Ambulance nurses who automatically transferred. New recruits needed proper training, and this was delivered by existing trained nurses, often overseas. VADs often performed normal domestic jobs rather than actual nursing but also drove field ambulances. Women and girls also enlisted in the Munro Flying Corps.

Peter gave numerous examples of individuals with their family history, date and place of death and photographs. This talk was full of facts and shows how much can be found by the keen researcher and was, of course, very well delivered and illustrated.

**Colin Towell**

### **The Heritage Centre Thursday afternoon talks: -**

The July talk on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> will be given by Steve Marquis on *Notorious Leicestershire Outlaws*. Open 2.30pm, talk starts at 3.00pm.

## Turnpikes and Bendy Roads



Over the years I have been asked many times why our roads in the UK are so random and very bendy. It does make one wonder why so many roads twist and turn so many times especially in the countryside, then out of nowhere comes a long straight stretch.

The answer goes back to the time when our ancestors walked everywhere and cleverly picked the route of least resistance by walking around objects such as trees, boulders, and soggy / muddy patches of land.

Over many years these pathways became defined as rutted and clear ways through the countryside. Later after domestication of horses the pathways became more defined but still followed the trails of old. Later still when wagons became common for transporting food and other materials, the pathways became wider and more rutted. Often in winter these pathways became impassable for horse drawn vehicles.

It was at this time that many villages started to stabilise pathways close to themselves utilising any hard material locally available. It was not until the Romans came to Britain in AD 43 that formalised road construction began. The Romans needed to move men and material through their occupied lands quickly, so they built roads made from many layers of stone that linked their outposts in straight lines. (or as straight as possible). There are many examples of this type of road, but one good example is the Fosse Way. These roads were built with great skill utilising local stone and bordered with drainage ditches. There were few villages on these routes as they were built to move troops from one military camp to another. From the time the Romans left, AD410 until the late 1600s, there was little change to the road system.

However, after the late 1600s most of Britain's more important roads were straightened, widened, and given a hard surface. In order to pay for these changes a toll system was introduced. People who didn't want to pay or could not afford to pay found other routes instead, but these made the journey longer and harder. These alternative routes still exist today and is another reason Britain has so many winding roads.

The new toll roads were often referred to as Turnpike Roads and got their name from the turnpikes or toll gates which barred the way until the road user paid the regulated toll fee. These turnpikes were placed at strategic points along the road where it was difficult for the travellers to evade paying, such as bridges or where the lay of the land constricted the roadway.



One such turnpike road was from Welford to Leicester and was created as a Trust by an Act of Parliament in the year 1765. This passed through Wigston Magna and for a time was the main mail coach route from Leicester to London. The Blue Bell Inn which stood in Bell Street was a noted coaching hostelry. Leicestershire had 13 such Trusts maintaining main roads in the

county.

The first such Act of Parliament in 1663 was the Great North Road between Wadesmill in Hertfordshire and Stilton in Huntingdonshire. At the peak in the 1830s over 1000 trusts administered around 30,000 miles of turnpike roads in England and Wales, taking tolls at almost 8,000 tollgates and sideboards. Turnpikes declined with the coming of the railways and then the Local Government Act 1888 gave responsibility for maintaining toll roads to County Councils and County Borough Councils.

The introduction of tollgates had been resented by local communities which had freely used the routes for centuries. Early Acts had given Magistrate powers to punish anyone damaging turnpike properties, such as defacing milestones, breaking turnpike gates or even avoiding the tolls. Opposition was particularly intense in the mountainous regions where good routes were scarce. In Mid Wales in 1839, new tolls on old roads sparked protests known as the Rebecca Riots. There were separate outbursts of vandalism and violent confrontation by gangs of 50 to 100 or more local men and gate keepers were told that if they resisted, they would be killed. In 1844, the ringleaders were caught and transported to Australia as convicts. However, the result was that the tollgates were dismantled, and the trusts abolished in the six counties of South Wales.

In some areas of Britain such as East Anglia, the roads are not straight for a different reason. Once much of it was under the sea. As the land was drained roads were gradually built. Unfortunately, no one thought about the final layout, so they do not follow any form of logic.

In some instances, where land was hilly, the early pathways followed contours in the land to minimise steep gradients. Railways and canals later followed many of these routes and can still be seen today.

## **Mike Forryan**

Of course, it was the building of the new turn pike road from Welford to Leicester in 1795 that led to the discovery of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery which later became the site of Wigston's new cemetery in 1882.

## My Dad and his Gong



My father, William Osborne Richardson, was born March 1897 at 19 Manor Street, Wigston Magna. He died in December 1979.

After several attempts to join the army and failing medicals on grounds of things like flat feet and a damaged retina of one eye, he was accepted as a recruit in the 176<sup>th</sup> Company (City of Leicester) Royal Field Artillery Regiment. Founded by Sir Jonathan North, Lord Mayor of Leicester, on Leicester Tigers Rugby Football ground in 1917.

While serving in France during 1918 my father was awarded the Military Medal.

I understand that official citations of medals of the Royal Artillery were destroyed by bombing in World War II. For this reason, I would like to put on record how my dad won his medal as he told it to me:-

“In the spring of 1918 many extra men and weapons became available for Germany due to Russia now being out of the War. A final attempt to win the War with a great offensive in the West (i.e. in France) was started”.

My father’s Howitzer battery found itself getting very close to the advancing German army. The first thing was to get the guns out. This was done successfully, but a lot of ammunition and equipment was left behind. It was decided to take limbers drawn by pairs of horses back to the vacated gun site under cover of darkness to recover this equipment.

En route my dad said, “they encountered an officer directing people using a bright lamp. This he thought was seen by the enemy who opened up with gunfire. They proceeded to the gun site and started to load their wagons. The enemy gunfire continued and shortly after my father found himself with one horse dead in a harness and one very frightened horse. The RSM came over to assist but he was little help in releasing the dead horse. My dad after a while told the RSM to B\*\*\*\*\* Off and let him sort it out. This he did. All the other teams loaded and left, and Dad was on his own. Eventually he was able to release the dead animal and move the wagon clear. He set off with one horse going as quickly as possible. On the way he had to cross a bridge which had been mined and was about to be blown up”.

When he got back to his Company, he found that nobody expected that he would make it back. They thought they had seen the last of Bill Richardson. Dad expected to be in trouble when he got back after his behaviour with the RSM. He seems to have got away with that and was eventually given the Military Medal.

After the War finished, dad was selected to go to Germany as part of the army of occupation of the Rheinland. Only the best equipment, horses and men were sent to show that the victorious British Army was something special. They were ordered that they must not fraternize with the German population. Dad was based at a town on the east side of the Rhein, called Siegburg, between Cologne and Bonn. After demobilisation dad returned to the hosiery trade. He worked at Deacon's in Bell Street (located on site of Sainsbury's) and for many years at Holmes & Son at the bottom of Newton Lane, where he was in charge of knitting and the trim shop.



**Bill Richardson with hand on gun barrel**



**Bill Richardson, third from left**

**Ian D. O. Richardson**

## Wigston Teachers Remembered

*This is the third in the series on Wigston Teachers Remembered from the 1950s and 60s. We all have teachers that either inspired us or terrified us. In the last Bulletin we were presented with three examples of inspirational teachers by John Marquis. This remarkably well remembered and researched contribution by John Ellis is an example of the latter. He gives us his account of being terrified in the maths lessons of Mr W As someone who was also scared stiff of Mr W, who was certainly the most terrifying teacher I ever encountered. SM. Because of the nature of the contents of this article I have decided to only use the first letter of the concerned teacher's name. But for any Society member who was taught by Mr W, they will certainly know who he was. To end on a more positive note, I pay tribute to the only two teachers that stand out in my memory (although, a third, Mr Widdowson is remembered with fondness but was memorialised in the last Bulletin). SM.*

**Members are invited to send in their own memories of any teachers who impacted their lives for better or worse.**

### The Punishment Fits the Crime

The words of the title may be familiar to older readers of this essay who in the mid-1960s suffered the same misfortune as me in being assigned to Mr W's Maths Set at Guthlaxton Grammar School (so called). At Guthlaxton there were three Maths teachers of various ages and length and breadth of teaching experience: Mr Czentek, a Polish gentleman with a heavy Eastern Europe accent who taught the highest grades of students, Mr "Abdul Smith", so called for his mop of greased and swept back jet-black hair and looking for all the world like an Arab, who taught students of above average Mathematical ability and Mr W who although he also had a Degree in Mathematics, was a relative rookie as far as teaching experience was concerned and he was left with the residue which included me. Mr W's fellow teachers were mostly older than him at the time and are probably all deceased by now.

I am convinced that Mr W resented being in the position of having to teach students with ability way below his own and with precious little hope of any improvement to their mathematical skills and abilities within their natural limits which may have been, well, "limited". Mr W's attempts to teach us a level of Maths way above our ability and the *need* of the majority of our average to low intelligence Maths "Set" were futile and benefited nobody, not even Mr W himself.

"You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear". We may all have been above average in other subjects: It's a case of horses for courses. For example, if someone is tone deaf you would be hard pushed to transform them into a chorister or professional musician. Perhaps Mr W, who was an undisputed expert in Mathematics, was also useless at other subjects or practical pursuits? We are all

individuals, and we are all quite different. If we weren't we'd all be the same; all geniuses, all as thick as a brick, or all somewhere in between; how boring that would be.

Mr W wore an academic gown; possibly the same one as he had graduated in at university in 1960, but such an elitist robe did not fit to a modern comprehensive school, and it was not even uniform as only a handful of teachers wore such antiquated and meaningless mantles. Mr W obviously had a high opinion of himself and a low opinion of us and he maybe thought that we should revere him as some kind of superior being, which he certainly was not.

Sitting at our desks in the right-hand half of the semidetached wooden hut directly opposite the Sports Hall on the opposite side of the playground, we could clearly see Mr W leaving the main building and striding across the playground towards the hut with his charcoal grey academic cloak swirling around like Batman's cape in the breeze which he and his determined passage created. Having ascended the steps into the central vestibule and cloak room between the two classrooms Mr W would then explode into the classroom, shouting the command "Stand!" We would all stand to attention, petrified and in absolute silence until his lordship was seated at his desk, at which point he would shout the counter command "Sit!" The lesson would then commence in silence, apart from his domineering voice. Whilst we were working away at our calculations, we kept one eye on the page of our exercise books, or Logarithms and Anti-Logarithms and the other eye on Mr W as he crept silently around the classroom peering over the shoulder of every pupil in turn.

A feeling of terror came over me as Mr W approached from behind my right shoulder. He stopped just behind me like an overblown bat and peered disparagingly over my shoulder at my calculations. It then became painfully obvious to me that my calculations were incorrect when Mr W suddenly lurched forward, gripped my right ear between his thumb and forefinger, gave my ear several painful twists back and forth and then slapped me hard around the side of the head knocking me sideways into my classmate sitting to my left on the same row, denouncing me before the whole class of petrified students who were witnesses to this outrage, as a "Stupid Boy!" I admit to the "boy" label due to my age at that time, but "stupid" I am not. Not a recommended or effective teaching strategy, I think.

Mr W's physical assaults and his unsolicited and quite frankly unprofessional personal insults were painful, demoralizing and counter-productive but it seemed to have given Mr W some kind of perverted satisfaction at the time. Mr W never once showed me any kindness or sympathy with my mathematical struggles. He never explained where I had gone wrong, or how I might get it right next time, so how could I possibly improve or progress? I know that I was not his only victim.

The only other student in my Maths set that I can definitely remember was Fay Brennan, a quiet girl who was not in my form and I never knew her socially. Fay sat at a desk closer to the windows overlooking the playground and sports gym beyond. I sat nearer to the centre of the classroom. Mr W wrongly informed Fay

that her surname meant "burnt hand", a medieval form of punishment for habitual thieving, which persisted as late as the Victorian era. Fay was visibly upset and offended by the suggestion. The surname Brennan has nothing to do with the German word "Brennen" meaning 'to burn' anything combustible, but which has nothing directly to do with hands or the sadistic excesses of the English penal system of former times. Brennan: Gaelic spelling Braonán is an Irish name which according to most sources stems from the Gaelic "broan" meaning tear(ful), or sorrow(ful). I know how they felt whenever I was in the presence of Mr W.

Mr W also appeared to possess and delight in his all-too-appearing morbid interest in medieval punishments involving physical torment. He loved the phrase "The punishment fits the crime"; a pre-Christian era concept and phrase established by Marcus Tullius Cicero 106-43 BC in his "De Legibus" (on the Laws), the term popularized via Gilbert and Sullivan's "Mikado" of 1885 and often quoted by the Victorian judiciary; a judiciary which metered out punishments which never did "fit the crime" but were way in excess of the severity of the crimes committed. That mentality persisted into the 20<sup>th</sup> century so that Mr W was in many respects a throwback from the Victorian era, if not earlier.

Mr W was also a Methodist lay preacher which I had suspected for some time and which I have quite recently discovered to be fact. He was also an oppressor and a bully who ruled by fear. Was there method in his madness or madness in his Methodism? In his capacity as lay Methodist preacher Mr W no doubt preached the patience, charity, love and forgiveness of God and Jesus Christ on Sunday but Mr W himself never displayed any of those virtues in his weekday academic teaching. Mr W. you should confess your own sins and apologize before God to your several victims. I personally would accept such an admission and apology, but at the final reckoning it is not me to whom you shall be answerable.

In former times teaching staff were allowed to administer corporal punishment upon students for specific misdemeanours but in my case, there was no misdemeanour on my part, just an inability to grasp mathematical concepts in the form and manner in which Mr W presented them, which is at least as much a failure in his inability to teach effectively to all levels of student ability. I can imagine and to an extent understand Mr W being frustrated at a student's incompetence in what was Mr W's subject specialism, which was not necessarily the student's chosen specialism. Maths in schools has always been compulsory, but make it *practical*, more generally useful, and less specialized theoretical Maths at this stage.

The old school Methodist mantra was "spare the rod and spoil the child" which encouraged what was then considered by such phoney Christians to be the reasonable (?) physical beating of minors by parents and teachers alike and which was still legally tolerated up to 1970 and going back into historical obscurity. My mother and the paternal line of her family were brought up as Methodists and she and I in turn felt the sting of that injustice on countless occasions, so I have an inborn dislike of Methodism and Methodists.

In today's more enlightened Western society Mr W would have been suspended immediately for his physical and verbal abuses and the matter investigated at as pace. Found guilty he would have been dismissed from his post without compensation, financial or otherwise, and with no teacher's pension. He would be banned from further teaching and banished from schools for life. He could not even have returned as a school caretaker. Nowadays, at least and at last, "the punishment fits the crime".

Apart from the physical assaults on my person Mr W also once gave me 100 lines "The punishment fits the crime". I remember the lines but not the "crime" which would not have amounted to very much. What crime or sin did I ever commit? Apart from being moderately limited in the Algebraic department of Maths.

One sunny weekend or evening I took an unusual route home on foot from Leicester Road Wigston, along Victoria Street and down a rough track off of Gladstone Street with garages on either side and through a footpath, public or otherwise, which has since built over. The footpath led me through to Ramsdean Avenue en route to my home. To my surprise (and his) I saw Mr W on the front of his semi-detached Jelson house washing his car. For the first and last time ever in my experience of Mr W he behaved like a normal human being. He smiled at me in a friendly way, said hello and asked what I was doing in his cul-de-sac and where I was heading to. I told him that I lived on Willow Park Drive and was on my way home. So, Mr W had a split personality; at home he was almost normal, but as soon as he donned his academic cloak he was metamorphosed into a domineering bully, for want of a better term.

Were teachers in those far off days required to log punishments in an official "Punishment Book"? though there would have been no check that they had done so on every occasion. If such a book still exists for Guthlaxton covering the years in question, could it provide incriminating evidence or confirmation of Mr W's misdeeds to which I and others could testify to? To my knowledge Mr W never caned or slipped children and he would hardly write an entry "twisted right ear and smacked right side of head causing victim to collide sideways with his neighbour".

Nowadays it is terrible to think that there must have been official suppliers of e.g., canes for the purposes of punishment and correction and that trainee teachers must have been instructed in their use. The stick or the slipper were approved by the Education Authority as was the slapping of the back of the exposed calves with the open hand, but not twisting ears and slapping the sides of heads.

Mr W's damning verbal insults and putdowns did not improve my Maths skills one iota. Over the course of my state education, I came to the conclusion that schoolteachers were there first and foremost to earn a living for themselves which many would struggle to do in the real world outside of an education system which did not to provide children with any useful educational knowledge, or to prepare students for a future life as adults.

Why am I writing this? Because it forms part of my series on Heroes and Villains I have known in my lifetime. I wanted to delve into Mr W's background in an attempt to discover what made him tick and to expose and exorcise the demon that he was but hopefully now isn't.

It has taken me a long time and a lot of research via publicly accessible sources to find out enough about our Mr W to positively identify him. I could have asked the Teachers Union of which Mr W was surely a member, but they would no doubt have claimed "data protection" and "member confidentiality", as did Guthlaxton College when I asked them. They like to protect their own of course, but they failed miserably in protecting me and others from the excesses of Mr W. and his like. I do not invent these accusations; I only wish to record the truth of Mr W's outrageous injustices and this without malice on my part.

**John Ellis**

## **My Favourite Teachers**

There were only two teachers in my largely miserable school career that I had any time for. The first was my form tutor for the two years I attended Guthlaxton College, **Mike Minchin**, a newly qualified biology teacher in 1964 and expected to earn his stripes by undertaking missionary work amongst the heathen plebs. As a council house lad who hated school and certainly wasn't welcome in what was still in ethos a grammar school. Mike also had the dubious honour of teaching his students the 'facts of life'. I would meet him again years later at NUT meetings after qualifying as a teacher, when I would jokingly accuse him of personally failing me in that crucial task (I became a father aged 18). A larger-than-life character, one of the main inspirational figures in my life, he was someone you felt privileged to have known. He later moved to the newly built and the then revolutionary and progressive Countesthorpe College. It was a terrible shock when he suffered the heart attack that snuffed out his life in his early forties. Hundreds of teachers and ex-students crammed into Countesthorpe Church for one of the most poignant and saddest funerals I've ever attended.

The second was my physics teacher **Mr Frazer**, a subject I hated and was useless at and yet somehow enjoyed his lessons. He introduced me to the pleasures of sailing, taking the school sailing club onto the water every Sunday morning. It was this teacher who took me to my first political event, he had organised a school trip during the 1966 General Election to a Labour Party Rally addressed by Harold Wilson at the Granby Halls. Not sure a teacher would be allowed to take their students to a political rally today? Unless of course, they were Eton pupils being taken to a Tory Party Conference for family reunions.

**Steve Marquis**



## From the Past

### Wigston One Hundred and Two Hundred Years Ago

1924



**Eric Liddell**

**1924 Summer Olympics in Paris** – British runners Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell won the 100-metre and the 400-metre events, respectively. Liddell refused to compete in the 100-metre dash because it was held on a Sunday, and he was an observant Christian. Their stories were depicted in the 1981 movie *Chariots of Fire*.

Douglas Lowe also won the 800-metre competition.

Swimmer Johnny Weissmuller won three gold medals in swimming and one bronze in water polo. Weissmuller later starred in 12 Tarzan films.



**Grigory Zinoviev**

### **The Original ‘Red Scare’ – Election Dirty Tricks**

Dismayed that the Labour Party could actually form a government in January 1924, the Establishment turned to using dirty tricks. The Foreign Office released the Zinoviev Letter on 24 October 1924 which was published in the following morning's *Daily Mail*. This letter purports to be a directive from Grigory Zinoviev, head of the Communist International in Moscow, to the Communist Party of Great Britain ordering it to engage in seditious activities. It stated that the normalisation of British–Soviet relations following the Revolution under a Labour Government would radicalise the British working class and put the CPGB in a favourable position to pursue a Bolshevik-style uprising. It further suggested that these effects would extend throughout the British Empire. It was later proved to be a forgery.



**Stanley Baldwin**

Four days later saw the fall of the first Labour Government under Ramsey MacDonald and the return of the Conservatives and Stanley Baldwin.

## Wigston in 1924 – Leicester Mercury

### LOWLY ORIGINS IN HOSIERY.

Once Unable to Meet  
14d. Rent.

### SENIOR PARTNER'S ROMANCE.

"We have known real hardship in our time. My wife and I have been in a position when we literally had not a halfpenny, and, though our house rent was only 14d. a week, we could not pay it."

These words summarise the rise in prosperity of Mr. W. Holmes, senior partner of the Wigston firm of hosiery manufacturers (Messrs. W. Holmes and son), as outlined at the celebration last night of his golden wedding.

#### From Hand-Frame Days.

Mr. Holmes commenced his career as a hosiery manufacturer with a hand-frame in a back room of his small house in 1868, and by economy he gradually increased his business, despite the handicap of never having had a day's education in his life. Since his younger son, Mr. J. H. Holmes, joined the firm some twelve years ago, still greater progress has been made.

Mr. and Mrs. Holmes celebrated the completion of 50 years of wedded felicity by entertaining the whole of the firm's employes.

4 January 1924

### Call from Spion Kop.

Kindly allow me to draw attention through your columns to the dangerous condition of the Spion Kop hill between the two Wigston Stations, should a motor bus skid coming down the hill there is nothing to protect it but a wooden fence. One hesitates to think what would be the fate of one of the large passenger buses should this happen, as there is a steep drop leading from the footpath. The hill should be widened or a strong buttressed wall put up without further delay. The U.D.C. ought to take this matter in hand with the L.M. and S. Railway Co.—**SAFETY FIRST.**

9 January 1924

### Wigston's Spion Kop.

It may interest "Safety First" to know that Spion Kop, Wigston, has been under consideration by the Highway Committee of the U.D.C., but the road in question is under the jurisdiction of the County Council. I witnessed an accident there 12 months ago which might have been fatal to the passengers of an Enderby bus. Luckily no more damage than a few broken rails resulted.

I agree that a substantial wall should be built without further delay, and the Railway Co., County Council, U.D.C. and bus proprietors should be made alive to the present dangerous state of this busy thoroughfare.—**URBAN DISTRICT COUNCILLOR.**

11 January 1924

With the Spion Kop about to be closed next year for work on the electrification of the railway line, the two articles above recall another issue regarding the Spion Kop from a century ago.

## 1824

This year marked the start of a more aggressive phase in the expansion of the British Empire following the loss of the American colonies in 1783 and the war against Napoleon which ended in 1815. Two long-lasting and very costly wars, both financially and in lives, lost began in 1824.

**1. The first Anglo-Burmese War** which began over border conflicts between British India and the Burmese Empire. The war was one of the most expensive in British Indian history. Fifteen thousand European and Indian soldiers died, together with an unknown number of Burmese military and civilian casualties. The high cost of the campaign to the British, 5–13 million pounds sterling

(£500 million – £1.38 billion as of 2023) contributed to a severe economic crisis in British India and was largely responsible for the final demise of the East India Company. After two further wars, Burma was finally incorporated into the British Empire in 1885.

**2. The First Anglo-Ashanti War**



**Defeat of the Ashanti's, by the British forces 11 July 1824**

The 1824 conflict was the first of five wars with the Ashanti on West Africa's Gold Coast. The British, of course, had first established themselves on the coast in order to participate in the slave trade. However, by 1824, Britain was now committed to abolishing the slave trade, which was the main excuse for the final Ashanti War in 1824 made by Major Robert Baden-Powell who fought in the campaign. By this time much of the Ashanti lands had become part of the British colony of Guana. The Ashanti rebelled in 1900 when British representative, Sir Frederick Mitchell Hodgson tried to locate the sacred Golden Throne of the Ashanti Kings so he could sit on it himself as a symbol of British control. The Maxim machine gun made sure the British forces prevailed against mainly spear carrying Ashanti warriors.

**Wigston in 1824 – Leicester Chronicle**

**GREAT WIGSTON.**  
 (BY DESIRE)  
**T**H**E**R**E** will be a **CONCERT** and **BALL** at the **BELL INN**, on **WEDNESDAY**, the 1st instant.  
*Vocal Performers.*  
 Miss **RUSSELL**, Miss **SHARP**, & Mr. **HANDSCOME**  
 In the course of the performance the following much admired Songs will be introduced. "Echo Song," "Sweet Home," "The upbraird," "Bil me Discourse," and "Sweet Home," with a variety of Gleees and Chorusses.  
*Leader of the Band,*  
 Mr. **MAFFRE**,  
 Tickets of admission to be had of Mr. Pochin, grocer, and of Mr. Coltman, Bell Inn, Great Wigston; also Mr. Cockshaw, Printer, Leicester.  
 Gentlemen 4s.—Ladies 3s.  
 Concert to commence at Seven o'clock.

**1 May 1824**

*On SUNDAY, Sept. 19, 1824,*  
**THE ANNUAL SERMON**  
 Will be preached in the  
**DISSENTERS' MEETING,**  
**GREAT WIGSTON,**  
 For the **BENEFIT** of the **SUNDAY SCHOOL** belonging to that Congregation, by the  
**REV. T. MITCHELL, OF LEICESTER.**  
 Public worship to commence at Half past Two o'clock. Three Hymns will be sung by the children and congregation.

**11 September 1824**

*Insolvent Debtors' Court Office,  
No. 33, Lincoln's Inn Fields.*

**P**ETITIONS of Insolvent Debtors to be heard at the Adjourned General Quarter Sessions of the Peace, to be holden at the Castle of Leicester, in and for the county of Leicester, on the 6th day of March, 1824, at Ten o'clock in the Forenoon:—

**THOMAS STOLIER**, late of Coleorton, in the county of Leicester, Farmer.

**JOHN PRESTON**, late of Redmile, in the county of Leicester, Farmer.

**WILLIAM BURBIDGE**, late of Great Wigston, in the county of Leicester, Victualler.

The Petitions and Schedules are filed and may be inspected at this Office, every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, between the hours of Ten and Four. Two days' notice of any intention to oppose the discharge of any of the Prisoners, must be given to such Prisoner, to entitle any Creditor to oppose the same.

**SHEARMAN and WYLLIE,**

73, Gullford-street, Russel-square, London,  
For **BOND**, Leicester.

17 February 1824

*Bull's Head Inn, Wigston.*

**TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,**  
BY **W. DAVIS,**

at the premises, at the **BULL'S HEAD, GREAT WIGSTON, Leicestershire,** on **MONDAY** next, Nov. 22d, and two following days,

**ALL** the useful **HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE,**

consisting of capital brewing vessels, casks, hay, corn, &c., consisting of very good bedsteads and bedding, oak square dining, snap, and other tables, several sets of excellent chairs, two beaufets, corner cupboards, two handsome eight day clocks, several sets of knives and forks, and a great variety of other kitchen requisites; table and bed linen, a good assortment of china and glass, capital long boards, trestles, stoves, stove grates; also, a complete set of large brewing vessels, consisting of one good 200 gallon copper, one 80 gallon ditto, an excellent 20 strike mash tub, capital large boiler, 10ft. 6in. by 4ft. 12in., large good working vat, seven well seasoned 60 & 70 gallon barrels, one valuable 400 gallon ditto, with smaller barrels and other tubs to correspond: also, a capital stack of hay, well got, and in prime order, several quarters of well got wheat, barley, and oats, now thrashed out, winnowing fan, strike, water tubs, one impigged cow, and a fat pig, with a variety of other articles.

Sale to begin each Morning at Ten o'clock.

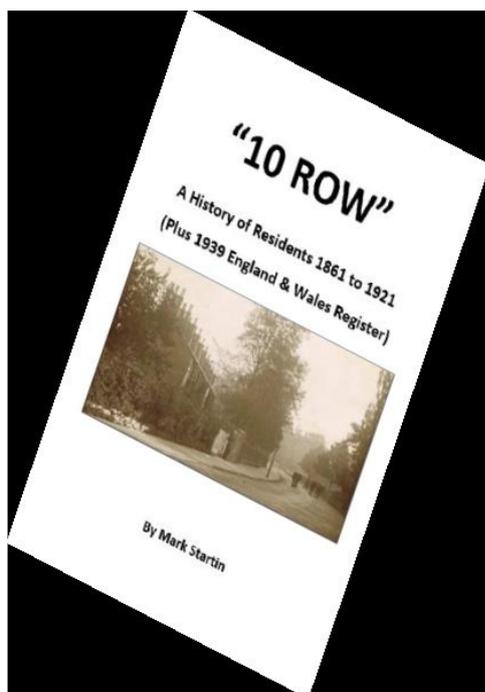
The above goods are in good order, and the brewing vessels are all in excellent condition, and will be found well worth the attention of any person going into the public line business.

Catalogues may now be had of Mr. **MARSHALL**, at the Hotel, Leicester, and at the place of sale, Great Wigston.

20 November 1824

## New Book

### 10 Row – A History of Residents 1861-1921



A unique and fascinating insight into a part of Wigston history revealing the lives of people who lived at 10 Row between 1861 and 1939.

Researched and written by  
Mark Startin.

**Price £10**

Available from the Heritage Centre

# “Wiggy’s War” is the sequel to “Wiggy’s Child”

## Episode Six

### BEADS AND BATH SALTS

Christmas came and went as all Christmases are apt to do. We decorated the Christmas Tree, and it stood as always, on the closed top of the treadle sewing machine in the living room. The Star gleamed in the firelight, and the old clock slowly ticked away the hours; the holly and the ivy stuck behind the pictures on the wall; somehow in our quiet living room, the War seemed far away.

My presents, for the first time, included scent and bath salts, and a necklace from Aunt Flo in Market Bosworth. The scent was called “Evening in Paris”, a small midnight blue opaque bottle enclosed in a Novelty black top hat. This occupied pride of place on the dressing chest together with the jar of rose scented bath salts. I also received a hairbrush, mirror, and comb in a box with a gilt clasp, a present from Mother and Father. Things were looking up indeed.

Before Christmas, Mother and I had been to Leicester on our Saturday shopping expedition, and to my surprise, Mother bought me a lovely new wool frock in deep sapphire blue with long sleeves. I discovered the stones in my new necklace matched the colour of my new frock exactly. A plot between Mother and Aunt Flo, I have no doubt.

We had tea as usual in The Mikado Cafe in the Market Place. I remembered earlier years when, after an exhaustive afternoon traipsing round the stores and the Market, we would take tea in “The Mikado”. The smell of fresh roasted coffee permeated the area as we approached. Through the door, passing the high counter where you could purchase coffee, weighed up to your requirements, and into the cafe beyond. Mother ordered our repast according to the season.



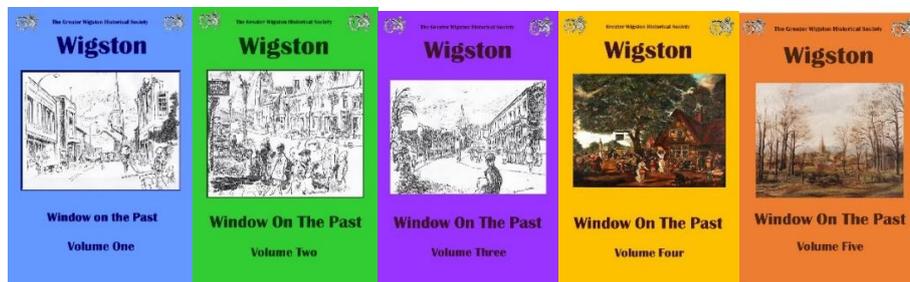
During the summer, it was a pot of tea and a toasted teacake. The onset of Winter, heralded sardines-on-toast: it never varied. On a nearby table, stood a two-tiered cake stand filled with mouthwatering cakes. I was called sharply to order. “It was bad manners to stare at people,” declared Mother, “Anyone would think I’d been dragged up”.

I applied myself to my sardines-on-toast and wondered why such delectable delights never came my way.

**Doreen C Boulter, 1988**

## G.W.H.S. Books: *Wigston – Window on the Past Series*

**£5 EACH OR ALL 5 FOR £20.00**



## HISTORICAL DVD's AVAILABLE



**ALL £10 PER COPY  
OR 2 FOR £15.00**

**AVAILABLE AT THE HERITAGE CENTRE**