



# Special Edition

## Bulletin 100

NOVEMBER 2014

*GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY*



*The Village Feast c. 1790*

**PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS – NOVEMBER 2014 TO JUNE 2015**

**Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

Groby Old Hall – Peter Liddle

7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

**\*Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2014**

Christmas Social with drinks, nibbles, quizzes & pictures – Mike Forryan & committee members  
Plus ‘A Christmas Cracker’ with readings, monologues & potpourri – Marion Morley

7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

**Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2015**

Boys & Girls of WWI (underage soldiers & nurses, some with local connections) – Peter Cousins

7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2015**

AGM followed by video footage of the 1930s – Mike Forryan

7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

30 Years with Leicestershire Constabulary – Richard Pollard

7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

Arming a Knight – Jed Jaggard (in costume)

7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

Day Coach Trip to Ely Cathedral – Depart from Age UK 9a.m. More information at January meeting, with booking and payment starting in February.

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2015**

Evening guided walk in Burbage followed by meal in local pub, own transport with lifts as required, venue & times to be advised.

**Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2015**

The Jewel in Leicestershire’s Crown (Bradgate Park) – Robert Gregory

7.30p.m. The Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

**\*Please note:** £2 per person will be collected on the evening to cover costs.

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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, Tricia Berry, three clear weeks before publication date please.

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

Chairman, Mike Forryan’s e-mail: [chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

## ISSUE No: 100 AND THE FRONT COVER

The Society has gone a bit special with the bulletin this time to celebrate the fact that this is the 100<sup>th</sup> issue. Committee members thought this milestone should not pass without being marked in some way. The Greater Wigston Historical Society was actually founded in 1980, thirty four years ago, and the idea has been to dig out the old records and review how and why it was started, and by whom. What has been achieved along the way, and how we might plan to go forward into the future. There are a number of articles within which follow this theme.

The cover this time features a painting, The Village Feast, by Kirk. It shows a Wigston scene with St. Wistan's Church in the distance and local folk really letting their hair down. It is believed, judging by the style of clothing to depict a scene from c.1790s and that the occasion is the feast held on 1<sup>st</sup> June each year to commemorate the death of St. Wistan. Prince Wistan had been due to inherit the Kingdom of Mercia from his father King Wigmund, but was murdered in 849 at Wistow by a close relative who also aspired to rule. St. Wistan's Church, Wistow was subsequently built at the site as a memorial.

Wistan's body was taken to be buried at the family mausoleum at Repton, Derbyshire. The procession rested at several places on the way, including Wigston. At the spot where the body was placed, a small shrine and chapel was built to commemorate the occasion. This was later upgraded to a church.

The Kirk family, as well as a talent for painting, were architects, builders and stonemasons who lived in Wigston for about 60 years, from 1770s to c.1830. The family home stood pretty much where the roundabout in Wigston is now situated. They did many repairs and alterations to churches including All Saints' Wigston, and also inscribed gravestones and made plaster head and shoulder busts. The picture should not be taken too seriously, it is like a cartoon. Under a good magnifier it is possible to make out that the landlord of the public house is 'Mr. Guzzleworth', and the pub sign hanging from the tree shows an animal which looks like a brown cow. There used to be a pub named the Black Horse in Wigston in those times!

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### AUGUST 2014 MEETING

For the opening meeting of the new season we knew we were in for a first rate talk by the name of the speaker, Derek Seaton, his subject 'A Walk Through Victorian Leicester'. As we have come to expect, Derek's talk was full of interest and detail. The 'walk' began in London Road, then New Walk, Belvoir Street, Town Hall Square, The Market Place, The Clock Tower, Granby Street and back onto London Road. I'm fascinated and tired already but of course we were looking at slides of the buildings rather than walking the route. Here is a selection of the buildings he spoke about.

#### Brookfield, 266 London Road

The building we see today is not the original, which had been erected in 1846 by the Burgess family. They sold it to the Fielding Johnsons in 1870 who rebuilt it in 1876/78 incorporating a black and white half timbered style to the front elevation, the first time it had been used in Leicester. The architect was the well known Leicester firm of Goddard and Paget. The Fielding Johnson family were exceptional benefactors to the City who donated the land and original buildings to form the University of Leicester, have a hospital named after them and gave Brookfield to the Diocese of Leicester for the use of the newly established bishop in 1926. The Diocese leased the property to the Red Cross in 1940 (the Bishop by then living in a more

suitable house in Springfield Road). In 1946 it was sold to the Royal Infirmary to become the Charles Freer School of Nursing and more recently it was sold to Leicester University and it remains empty today.

#### Thorncroft, 244 London Road

This house was built as a retirement home for the travel pioneer Thomas Cook in 1879. Sadly this was the house where his only daughter died, just a year later, from fumes from a gas water heater in the bathroom. Thomas himself died there in 1892, and both are buried in Welford Road cemetery.

#### New Walk

New Walk was first laid out in 1785 as a pathway up to the racecourse which was then on Victoria Park. It followed the old Roman road which came into Leicester along the Gartree Road through Oadby. It was originally called 'Ladies Walk'. The first houses were built in 1819. The museum opened in 1837 as a non-conformist school to rival Collegiate College for Anglican boys, opened in 1836. The museum was designed by Joseph Aloysius Hansom of Hansom Cab fame who also designed the Belvoir Street pork pie chapel (now being renovated for use as a public hall). The school closed in 1847 and the building was purchased by the City Council and opened as the first city museum. Going down New Walk on the right towards the end is the 1880 Sunday School Memorial Hall by James Tate built for a sub group of the Friar Lane Baptists.

#### Welford Place

We cannot avoid the statue of John Biggs, former Mayor and local MP who was born in 1801 and buried in Welford Road cemetery in 1871. The statue has been moved and turned around many times on this spot, (which, in the after war years, was the terminus for the L1 and L2 Midland Red bus routes which I used, and was generally referred to as 'single to John Biggs please'). Also on this corner is the former Leicestershire Club of 1876/77 designed by Joseph Goddard (whose descendant we visited at Newton Harcourt in June), for the gentry of the town with rooms for overnight stays. The club closed in 1990 and after several subsequent occupiers the building is now empty.

#### Belvoir Street

Phoenix House does not look Victorian but it was built in 1862 by William Flint whose style was classical. It was occupied by the Leicestershire and Midlands Fire and Life Insurance Company and originally had stables at the rear. It was purchased by the Council for the Town Clerk, Samuel Stone, who wrote a famous and still used manual for the Justices. Opposite is Fenwick's shop previously the well known Joseph Johnsons, designed in 1844 by Isaac Barradale, and the only surviving Victorian shop in the city. On the opposite corner of Market Street is a building which was the Granville Hotel built by our very own Orson Wright.

#### Town Hall Square and Bishop Street

The Town Hall by Francis Hames (built in 1874/75/76) in the Queen Anne style in brick with Ketton stone quoins. Opposite is the fountain paid for by Israel Hart in 1876 at a cost of £2000. The Sun Alliance building of 1891 in the Flemish style by Goddard and Paget, now the TSB bank. In Bishop Street is the 1885/88 Leicester Liberal Club by Edward Burgess, which, unusually, is not symmetrical. It has been visited by Winston Churchill.

#### The Clock Tower

Designed in 1868 by Joseph Goddard, the Clock Tower thankfully was built instead of a proposed gentlemen's urinal (would this have lasted until today we ask ourselves?). Overlooking the Tower is the Eastgates Coffee House by Edward Burgess in 1885.

#### Granby Street

We looked at several buildings in this area including the former Nat West (National Provincial) Bank in an Italianate style, the former Leicestershire Banking Company building (Midland and HSBC) by Joseph Goddard in Venetian Gothic red brick style and now used as a temple; the Victoria Coffee House of 1888 in French Renaissance style across the road from the General

Newsroom on the corner of Belvoir Street, again by Goddard and Co. in the Baroque style, a unique building in Leicester. We then came to the wonderful Grand Hotel (thankfully the original name has recently been restored) of 1897 and 1898 by Cecil Ogden and Amos Hall with, once again, Orson Wright being the builder and, we understand, a shareholder.

#### London Road

We then moved back into London road to see the railway station and the bridge parapet opposite, both recently restored, and further up on the right to end our tour, Top Hat Terrace of 1864 showing the many disguises of Tanky Smith, the town's first detective.

All in all this was a fascinating and very informative look around the many building styles used in Leicester in the mid to late Victorian period.

### **SEPTEMBER 2014 MEETING**

The programme listed this month's subject as the Loughborough Carillon Tower and War Memorial but the speaker cancelled and we were very fortunate to obtain the services of former County Council archaeologist Peter Liddle. He gave a fascinating and detailed talk about the evidence of the Anglo Saxons' time in Leicestershire generally, but with special reference to Wigston.

However it is necessary to start with the Romans, and Leicestershire, and particularly Wigston, is full of Roman remains. They are easy to spot when digging takes place, with today's older houses even covering them up. Anglo Saxon remains are more difficult to find. They came over the North Sea from Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands but found opposition from the Romans who were still in occupation. However when the Romans left early in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, there was no opposition and the Saxons spread southwards and in Leicestershire the earliest date of discovered remains is about 475.

At Stonton Wyville near Hallaton lots of remains have been found but many are Roman rather than Anglo Saxon. But what is clear is that many who counted themselves as Roman went with the flow and adopted Anglo Saxon ways as they took over the country. Locally, Nichols History of Leicestershire shows what was found when gravel digging took place near the present day cemetery. There were many skeletons with grave artefacts such as horse harness, jewellery and lots of pottery. These actual pieces have been photographed and redrawn lately, confirming the high standard of the work in Nichols. The digging of graves in the 1930s and further excavations by Duncan Lucas on the nearby rugby ground revealed more Roman and Anglo Saxon pottery and other artefacts such as long brooches, key rings, girdle hangers and wrist clasps worn by rich inhabitants. This can be deduced because they were too heavy to be worn by working people. In the 1950s at the site of Stonehill School in Birstall a spear head, bridle and shield boss were found.

There were many Anglo Saxon remains discovered during the construction of Rutland Water. There were 14 burials but with few grave goods. Some were actually Pagan and other skeletons showed illnesses of the bone but these people were buried in the traditional way. On the west side of Rutland Water there were several burials in a line, as if along a road or boundary, the skeletons being laid out as if the deceased was asleep rather than being laid straight as in a Christian burial.

At Glen Parva a burial of a lady was found in 1860, it was so well preserved it was at first thought to be a modern murder victim. However it was proved to be over 1500 years old and the lady herself was about 21 when she died. She was wealthy as shown by the glass vessel (very rare and expensive), a bronze brooch with the shape of a bear on it (but there were no bears in

Leicestershire) and traces of linen, not wool found with her remains. Anglo Saxon people wore animal claws and bones for luck and an ivory bag ring was found in the grave.

At West Langton the TV's Time Team were involved in a dig where a burial contained amber and glass beads and 5 brooches of bronze and gold plus skeletons of both a man and a woman. These items are on display at Market Harborough Museum.

Some cemeteries contain both burials and cremations but the reason for this mix is not known. In Norfolk 3000 cremations were found but these could have been transported there from far and wide. Cremated remains have been found at Rutland Water and Thurmaston. Some cremation plots have contained animals possibly pets and handmade, highly decorated pots, antler combs, razors and tweezers as well as hair. Did the deceased have to be shaved before cremation? There were further finds at Eye Kettleby, near Melton Mowbray during the construction of the Samworth Brothers factory. These were related to a deserted village and numbered 144 pieces. There were traces of Gruber Houses (partly underground to get height without high walls), these were developed over 100 years or more, they were not living quarters but tool stores.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century things begin to change as the Kingdom of Mercia was established. The Sutton Hoo site in Suffolk was created at this time as was the Staffordshire Hoard which was a cache not a burial. The person probably intended to return to recover it later but didn't, why? Did he die, was he killed or did he forget where it was? In Leicestershire a sword fitting of high quality was found near Earl Shilton. About this time coinage began to be used, coming to Britain from Northern Europe. And of course Christianity spread. At Breedon on the Hill church there are Anglo Saxon carvings. At Rothley there is a 9/10<sup>th</sup> century cross and a burial area from 680 to 10<sup>th</sup> century across the road from the church, which may indicate a shrinking churchyard.

All in all this was a very interesting and informative talk and leaves many places in our minds which need to be investigated further when we are out and about or, as Peter suggests, by forming a local field walking group.

## **OCTOBER 2014 MEETING**

We were expecting Gareth King to speak at our October meeting on the Medieval Village (in costume). Unfortunately, Gareth was ill and so Peter Cousins kindly stepped in at the last minute with his talk about Joseph Merrick (the Elephant Man), his family and his illness.

Joseph Carey Merrick was born on 8 August 1862 at 50 Lee Street in Leicester. By 1871 he was living at 161 Birstall Street and there is evidence to show that his deformity was just beginning to become evident at aged 7 or 8. By coincidence living close by at 143 Birstall Street was our old friend and local man made good, Orson Wright, aged about 18. Joseph died in hospital in London on 11 April 1890 aged 27.

Joseph's father was Joseph Rockley Merrick and his mother was Mary Jane nee Potterton. They had four children of which Joseph was the first, followed by a daughter Marion Elizabeth who died aged 24 and was disabled followed by two further children who both died at a young age. Some said that Mary Jane was disabled, but there is no evidence of this, she died aged 36 on 19 May 1873, when her son was 10 years old, and is buried in Welford Road cemetery in Leicester. His father and step mother are both buried in Belgrave cemetery.

Joseph's step mother made his life a real misery. He became a hawker but people would not open their doors to him because of his disfigurement. In 1879/80 aged 17 he went into a workhouse and stayed there for 4 years. He contacted a showman named Sam Torr with the intention of exhibiting himself and he was first in a show at a variety hall in Wharf Street in Leicester. Joseph's 'fame' spread and he travelled to London and joined Tom Norman's show and was exhibited all over the UK and Europe where he was robbed and left destitute.

In London he was noticed in a shop opposite the Royal Free Hospital from where staff came to see him. Dr. Frederick Treves took a specific interest and gave him his business card. On his return to London in 1885 from Europe he was again mobbed and the police found the doctor's business card on him and took him to the Royal Free where Dr. Treves took Joseph under his wing. Holidays in the country were arranged for him. The Chairman of the hospital board, Frances Carr Gomm started a public appeal for funds which raised sufficient money to keep Joseph for the rest of his life. Dr. Treves wrote a paper about Joseph for a medical journal and confirmed that he was a gentle soul in a tortured body, he was affectionate and had no unkind words for anyone. He was intelligent and wrote and quoted poetry; he made a cardboard model of a church. However, it is said that Dr. Treves made more of a monster of Joseph than did the showmen who exhibited him to the public.

Joseph's cause of death was suffocation. He was never buried although there is a campaign to have his bones laid to rest. Joseph himself believed that his deformity came from his mother whom he said was injured by circus elephants when she was pregnant with him.

A documentary made by a New Zealand research team has tried to find out about the cause of his deformity. They concluded modern medicine and practice could have improved Joseph's appearance but could not have cured or prevented his illness. A death mask was made and this has been found to contain traces of his hair. It is hoped that DNA evidence will provide more clues, but he is thought to be one of a kind and that there is minimal risk of his condition recurring in the wider family.

The research resulted in the Leicester and Rutland Family History Society being asked to trace living family relations. This is a harder exercise than looking for ancestors. Joseph's mother's maiden name was 'Potterton' and there are today families by this name in Ashby de la Zouch and Syston. Letters were sent to all those who could be identified in the phone book and the search was publicised on radio and in the press. Pat Selby whose maiden name was Potterton came forward, she is the oldest living relative. It was reported that Joseph was deleted from his family history as relations were ashamed of him; even those family members who could not prove their relationship denied his existence. Relatives today say how they were taunted when they were young.

The talk and showing of the documentary made a fascinating if somewhat uncomfortable evening, especially for those who had not seen the feature film about the Elephant Man. It brought together a well known Leicester name and the DNA process developed in Leicester which has been so successfully used in another recent case involving a Leicester connection, King Richard III.

## **OBITUARY**

Sadly we have to report the death of a member. Peter Clowes died on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2014 and a number of society members attended his funeral at All Saints' Church. He had been a member for many years and was always active and involved until ill health started to take its toll. His slide shows and huge knowledge of old Wigston filled a number of memorable bygone meetings. Peter's great commitment was to the Framework Knitters Museum and he will surely be greatly missed by the officers there. He was made an MBE a few years ago in recognition of his service to the museum.

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## **REVIEW OF THE RICHARD III VISITOR CENTRE BY COLIN TOWELL**

Recently I visited the new Richard III Centre in Peacock Lane. I think that the displays are very good and informative and they cover a wide spectrum on the subject. The transformation of the building is impressive, especially the entrance area, the first exhibit and the grave. My only criticism is that there are several audio presentations and these are rather loud and a visitor can hear more than one at once in different parts of the building (we were advised that this is being dealt with). But there is a very good café!!!

I am sure that outside all will be completed in time for the re-interment but at the moment the unfinished street works in the area and the ongoing works at Jubilee Square do take the shine off a visit.

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## **LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY FAIR**

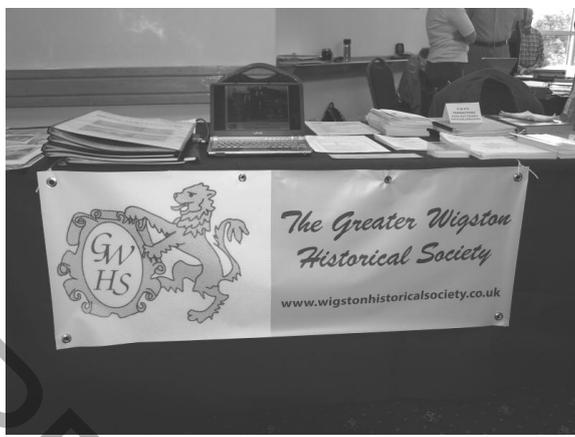
On Saturday 20 September 2014 our Society attended the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Fair of the Leicestershire & Rutland Family History Society at the Racecourse in Oadby, Leicester. The doors opened at 10.00am and the show was immediately busy, with visitors from all over the county and further afield.

50 tables of local and national history societies and commercial genealogy companies were kept busy all day along with the LRFHS Help Desk, either answering queries from family historians stuck on their research, or new members just starting out on a journey of discovery.

Throughout the day lectures took place on researching military and local history, and after the Mayor of Oadby & Wigston, Councillor Mrs. Sarah Dickinson, arrived at 1.00pm for a tour of the show, the main event, watched by over 100 invited members and guests, took place in the form of a "Who Do You Think You Are" style presentation on a Leicestershire celebrity. The well-kept secret celebrity was in fact Rosemary Conley, who, along with her husband and daughter, enjoyed a 60 minute well researched presentation on her family history given by LRFHS Vice-Chairman Brian Johnson.

The show closed at 4.30pm, with all exhibitors expressing their thanks to the Chairman Peter Cousins for a busy well organised day.

Ann Cousins & Tricia Berry manned the GHWS stand for the day, resplendent with our new society banner, as you will see in the photo below. If any member would like to help at any future events please let one of the committee members know.



**A report with pictures of the event can be seen on the LRFHS website at [www.lrfhs.org.uk/fairreport.html](http://www.lrfhs.org.uk/fairreport.html)**

Ann Cousins

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**TO COMMEMORATE THE 100<sup>th</sup> BULLETIN, A LOOK BACK, AND ALSO FORWARD**

**The remainder of the Bulletin contains contributions from members and friends, in no particular order**

**CONGRATULATIONS FROM LRFHS**

I would like to send congratulations from the Leicestershire and Rutland Family History Society to the GWHS on the publication of your 100<sup>th</sup> bulletin. Our quarterly Society journal, normally around seventy six A5 pages, started life as just a double-sided A4 newsletter very similar to the original GWHS bulletin. We started life with just 12 members, with the ultimate aim of no more than 50. Our current membership is over 2,200 worldwide!

Shortly after joining the LRFHS I became the editor of our journal, so I fully realise the trials and tribulations that your editor Tricia Berry has in producing your bulletin.

I am sure that the GWHS bulletin will go from strength to strength, as your membership and resources seem to be doing. I feel that our Society now has a very good relationship with the GWHS, and long may it continue.

Peter Cousins, Chairman, LRFHS

## **PRESIDENT'S COMMENT**

Many moons ago when the earth was young, or so it seemed to us then, I had a letter from a certain Jim Colver. Someone had pinched my White Gate Farm sign, he had found it at the back of Welford Road Pavilion. Thank you Jim. About that time early 1980, my museum was growing and I wanted to appeal for help, now my writing is awful, but Jim's? Well its magnificent so I sought his help for my appeal and whether Jim suggested an Historical Society or I did is irrelevant as we started one.

I selfishly thought it was the way to a flood of museum volunteers but life doesn't work like that, help did arrive, but that's another story.

Newsletters were written and these became the forerunners of the Bulletins and they have certainly presented the History of Wigston in a very readable way. Stalwarts such as Ian Varey, Brian Bilson, and dedicated detailer Tricia Berry to name but a few. We cannot pass by the late Bob Wignall whose head down detail was fantastic. His copies of Wigston items from the 1800s newspapers written longhand on old desk diary pages have been a researcher's delight.

Then I nearly forgot Edna Taylor that quiet dedicated lady who kept the Society going over a long period.

But I still feel the greatest achievement was the help in securing 42/44 Bushloe End for future generations to enjoy. This the Society did with credit due to all.

The future of our "Greater" Wigston Historical Society is very bright under the leadership of Chairman, Mike Forryan and his so active committee - miss a meeting and it's like losing a tooth.

Here's a toast to the next 100 Bulletins and pride in our past which guides our future.

O. Duncan Lucas

## **CHAIRMAN'S COMMENT**

I never thought in 1989 when I was invited to join the Society, by Marion Daetwyler, that I would end up as Chairman. 25 years later I look back with fond memories to the key players in the Society who made the meetings and bulletins so interesting and informative. There is so much about the Wigston area that is fascinating and important to record for future generations.

History is a wide subject encompassing literally everything from the past. Each of us has likes and dislikes relating to history, but we all have one common interest, and that is to look back in wonder at the state of affairs and speculate what it was like then. Our Society aims to fulfil this need through the widest range possible, which includes our website, the photograph archive, oral recordings, Bulletins, Transactions and our meetings. All of these blend together to provide an interesting and hopefully enjoyable look at history.

My thanks go to the committee who work tirelessly on behalf of the Society members to provide the varied programme.

I hope that we can continue to develop the Society and record more Wigston history.

Quotation:-

***'WHOEVER WISHES TO FORESEE THE FUTURE MUST  
CONSULT THE PAST; FOR HUMAN EVENTS EVER  
RESEMBLE THOSE OF PRECEDING TIMES.'***  
***- MACHIAVELLI***

Thank you one and all – Mike Forryan

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### **A CHALLENGE TO MEMBERS**

The History of Wigston is made up of people, places and events of the village residents. Wigston has grown over the years with many more people moving into the area. In future years residents will look back at the period between 1960 and 2014 and comment that there is little recorded about the families and events. Perhaps members may like to rectify this and write a short outline history of their families revolving around Wigston.

The Chairman is happy to assist in your efforts and to collate all of the submissions into a Transaction for the Society.

As a guide perhaps some of the following items may be included:-

- Family name and when you arrived in Wigston
- Where you lived and a description of the road / area
- Your views of Wigston as a village and shopping centre
- Changes you have witnessed and your views of them
- Events you have witnessed and comments about them
- Schools and activities of the children
- Membership of Societies and events supported.

The above are only suggestions the world is your oyster allowing you to comment about Wigston. I do hope you will all consider supporting this initiative. If you decide to add to the history project then please let your Chairman know.

Thank you -Mike Forryan

## SOCIETY MAJOR PROJECTS

The Society has always been hands on which is a credit to the members who have given their time and energy to safeguarding the recorded history of our village. Listed below are some of the projects and works produced by Society members.

- Roman Wigston Digs:
- Field Walking / Metal Detecting:
- Initial development, and ongoing support, of the FWK Museum:
- Town Crier Competitions:
- Wigston via the Pencil and Paint Brush Exhibition:
- Magic Lantern Shows:
- Exhibitions such as the URC and Beaumanor Hall:
- Society Website:
- Electronic Picture Archive:
- Oral Recordings:
- Joint Projects with the Civic Society:
  - Blue Plaques :
  - Jubilee Exhibition:
  - Preparation of Significant Buildings List for the O & W D.C.:
- Books written by members:
- Transactions written By Members:
- Bulletins three times per year:



Cutting the cake on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary – LtoR Brian Bilson, Jim Colver, Edna Taylor, Bob Wignall, Doris Chandler, Duncan Lucas, Tricia Berry, Chris Smart & Mike Ward

## WIGSTON FRAMEWORK KNITTERS MUSEUM

Museum Volunteers and Friends would like to congratulate the GWHS for achieving a wonderful milestone. One hundred bulletins, and still going strong. All organisations must look to the future, utilising new technologies without losing sight of their heritage. The museum and the society are treading this path very thoughtfully.

The two images below have been produced by De Montfort University in collaboration with the museum.

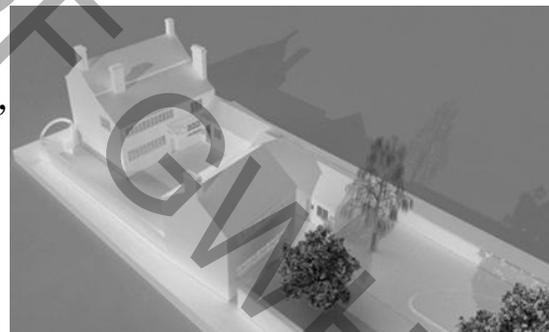
They are stills from a 3D animation which shows the development of the site, from the first farmhouse to the present day museum. This can be found on Youtube. If you have no internet access, then please do pop down to the museum and view the video on the large TV screen in the Yarnroom.

A colourful slideshow of the Master Hosiers House, Frameshop and Victorian garden can be viewed as well. Our friendly volunteers will endeavour to answer any questions you might have.

The museum has played host to school visits and organised tours for many years, these popular ways of viewing the site have now been joined by poetry workshops and ghost hunting visits.

This produces a different aspect of the museum which was not previously

apparent. One of the latest exhibits is a Victorian ‘copper’, this was used for heating water in significant amounts for the Monday washday, the occasional bath, cleaning the house and doing the dishes. This example is made of cast iron and has a wooden lid.



*PAUL KNIGHT*

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[www.wigstonframeworkknitters.org](http://www.wigstonframeworkknitters.org)

# *Greater Wigston Historical Society*

## *Newsletter No 1*

*Nov. 1980*

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Chairman Mr. D Lucas  
Tel. No. 883375

Membership Secretary Mr. B Bilson  
Tel. No. 881715

At last here is your Newsletter.

Due to early enthusiasm, this particular aspect of the society was overlooked. The many enquiries recently received have now made it obvious that a newsletter is a vital piece of work for the Society.

### **AIMS OF THE SOCIETY**

To preserve and protect the heritage of the Greater Wigston area, whether in documentary or practical form to enable all people to benefit from it. The title "Greater Wigston" was chosen to encompass as great an area as possible that has at any time touched on Wigston's past.

### **OBJECTIVES**

To encourage interest in the history of Wigston by means of walks, talks, displays, slide and film shows.

To rescue any items bearing on Wigston's past that might otherwise be destroyed or lost forever.

To establish a Museum of Wigston. This project being very necessary to the furtherance of the restoration and eventual display of all the many items either collected by Mr. Lucas, donated by or loaned by the people of Wigston and surrounding locality.

### **ACTIVITIES**

So far, the kitchen / cooking range forged at the Wigston Foundry has been rescued from 'walling up' in Avenue House and is now in the hands of the Society. The vice chairman Jim Colver and the treasurer Mike Hulls spent a very enjoyable Saturday morning, despite a few headaches etc., caused by the work.

A start has been made on the restoration and a catalogue begun of the many items housed in the temporary premises at White Gate Farm. Several of these items were displayed at the Abington Silver Jubilee Fete and despite the bad weather many people expressed interest in the work of the Society.

Later in the summer a similar display took place at the Meadows Gala and again a successful afternoon was felt to have taken place with several new members joining. Both these events could not have taken place without the loan of a trailer by Mr Lucas.

On November 14<sup>th</sup> an evening of Magic Lantern Slides was held at the Wigston Liberal Club, this venture was also quite successful and no doubt only the first of many future events.

Membership of the Society is steadily increasing both active and passive variety. A nucleus of people has arisen who wish to take an active part in the Society and with the passive support of others, other entertainments of the above variety will become increasingly possible.

#### **A.G.M.**

This will be held in February 1981. The time and place has yet to be decided but all members will be notified in good time and are asked to attend.

This Newsletter is intended not only to inform members of activities within the Society but also to be of interest to members who have any interest in the History of Wigston, therefore any contribution of articles that have a bearing on Wigston's past will be very welcome, for inclusion in subsequent quarterly Newsletters.

(The very first newsletter issued by the society, edited by Ruth Harper and Ann Hulls re-typed as the original is too faded to reproduce)

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#### **SUMMER OUTINGS OVER THE YEARS**

The milestone of the 100<sup>th</sup> edition of the Bulletin presents a splendid opportunity to look back to see how we have spent our summers since edition number one in November 1980. I could of course look at each year but at two outings a year over 34 years it would make a long list. So I decided to look at the usual anniversary editions to see where we have been.

In 1989, when we had the 25<sup>th</sup> edition, the Society played host to the Leicestershire Local History Council meeting, a great honour at the time. In June we visited Burrough Hill on, if I recall, a very cold and windy (especially up there) midsummers day evening. Little did we know what would be found there in 2014 (according to the Leicester Mercury recently).

1998 saw the 50<sup>th</sup> edition being published. In May of that year we visited Lutterworth Church and Museum followed, in June, by a trip to Beaumanor Hall and in July (three outings that year) we called at the home of artist Olwen Hughes to see her drawings and paintings as well as to hear about the history of her Stoneygate house and have a lovely summer evening supper.

The 75<sup>th</sup> edition was published in 2006 when in May we toured the south Leicestershire village of Welford. If I recall we did the touring by listening to the guide in the Church as it poured with rain that early summer evening. June saw another very cool evening spent at the exposed Bruntingthorpe airfield where we saw and heard about the aircraft collection there which at that time included the enormous and awe inspiring Vulcan bomber during its renovation. This visit, by coincidence, again involved Olwen who provided refreshments in the old control tower and her husband Geoffrey, who along with Billy Woodward (the face on the Mastermind game box), described the planes.

Of course this year we have visited Market Harborough and Newton Harcourt.

Over the years as well as staying local there was a planned visit to Cirencester in the very early days of the Society in 1982 (although this was not actually reported on later) but usually visits have been in the evening to places within Leicestershire so that not too much time was taken up in travelling. However, 2013 saw a major change when we had a very successful day out to Southwell Minster and the Workhouse. A feature of recent years has been the evening mystery coach tours led by Duncan Lucas, these have been very interesting but, on looking back, I see that such a tour also took place as far back as 1985.

All trips which I have been on were very good, sometimes blighted by the weather but always something different and usually local which we may not have visited otherwise. With many thanks to the trip organisers over the years, always a trifle anxious beforehand but well worth it in the end.

Reports on all these trips may be found in the Bulletins, all 99 of which are now on the Society's website. You will need a password from the Chairman to access the members section to be able to see them.

Colin Towell

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## **A LOOK AT THE SOCIETY THROUGH THIRTY FOUR YEARS**

### **AND THOSE WHO SHAPED IT ALONG THE WAY**

#### The First Decade 1980-1989

After the initial contact between Duncan Lucas and Jim Colver in early 1980 (mentioned in Duncan's President piece), all the people who had put their names to an expression of interest list lodged at the library were invited to an inaugural meeting. This took place on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1980 at Duncan's home, White Gate Farm, Newton Lane. Fifteen people attended and it was unanimously agreed that a society to be known as the Greater Wigston Historical Society should be formed. After a full discussion it was resolved to meet again the following week.

At this second meeting a committee was formed with the following elected - Chairman: Duncan Lucas, Vice Chairman: Jim Colver, Secretary: Mrs. Johns, Treasurer: Mike Hulls. The Ad Hoc committee also consisted of Mr. J. Greaves, Brian Bilson, Ruth Harper, Ann Hulls, Gwen Spencer, H.J. Harper and Mrs. Flint, who had power to co-opt. Others involved at this early stage were Mrs. B. Williams, Mr. H. Kirby, Mrs. E. Collins and R. Beresford. It was further agreed that future meetings could be held at White Gate Farm, that everyone would contribute 50p into a kitty to provide initial funds for the purchase of stationery etc., and that subscriptions should be set at £2 for full members and £1 for youngsters still in education and the retired.

The first newsletter was produced in November 1980 and is reproduced within this bulletin. It gives the aims and objectives of the group at this time and some of the early activities.

The first AGM was held on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1981 at the Liberal Club when the following were elected - Chairman: Duncan Lucas, Vice Chairman: Jim Colver, Secretary: Gwen Spencer, Treasurer: Mike Hulls, Membership Secretary: Brian Bilson, News Editors: Ann Hulls and Ruth Harper. Afterwards Peter Liddle who was then the Field Research Officer at Leicester Museums, gave a talk with slides on Archaeology in Leicestershire. A list of members dated 1<sup>st</sup> March 1981 shows the membership had reached 38 at that time. Marion Daetwyler and Peter and Jane Wilford were among those who had joined.

On 19<sup>th</sup> February 1982 the concert room at the Liberal Club was booked during the day for a display of items collected and showings of the film 'The Vanishing Village'. In the evening the AGM was held upstairs in the committee room when the following officers were elected - President: Duncan Lucas, Chairman: Jim Colver, Vice Chairman: Gwen Spencer, Secretary: Ann Hulls, Treasurer: Mike Hulls, Membership Secretary: Brian Bilson, Newsletter Editors: Ruth Harper and Ann Hulls. (Duncan has remained president continuously ever since, but won't be mentioned again to save space).

At this time the society did not have regular monthly meetings with speakers. Instead planning meetings were held as and when required at White Gate Farm, which were not exclusively for the committee. The society became affiliated to the Leicestershire Local History Council and members were welcome to attend their meetings, there were also links with the Civic Society. It was decided to start an official scrapbook, and Jim Colver was working hard on the transactions. Other activities were occasional visits, Field Walks (often led by Duncan Lucas or Peter Wilford), a footpath survey, exploring the suspected Anglo/Saxon site near the cemetery (bring your own spade), and metal detecting in association with Leicester Search Society on Heards Closes prior to house building for the Harcourt estate. At this site two 14<sup>th</sup> century and two 16<sup>th</sup> century horseshoes plus a 16<sup>th</sup> century Crotal bell were among the discoveries, together with a number of mainly George III coins.

The third AGM was held on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1983 at the Liberal Club. The format similar to the previous year with an open day which this time included local history displays, book stall, Lucas/Forryan family tree, metal items i.e. keys, stirrups, spurs and handcuffs all dug up in Wigston. A display of hosiery needles some over 100 years old, a mystery object quiz, and pot shards from the archaeological dig together with early radio equipment c.1932 and embroideries using 3D techniques. Local artists were invited to display their work with some 45 pictures being on view, mostly of local scenes. New officers elected were – Chairman: Jim Colver, Vice Chairman: Maurice Bingley, Secretary: Ann Hulls, Treasurer: Mike Hulls, Membership Secretary: Brian Bilson, Bulletin Editor: Ian Varey.

The Museum, to be known as the 'Wigston Folk Museum' was opened in a specially converted barn at White Gate Farm on 29<sup>th</sup> March 1983. Two of Wigston's oldest residents were invited to cut the ribbon, they were Mrs. York (101 years) and Annie Beasley (95 years). Each received a bouquet of flowers and an illuminated scroll to mark the occasion.

By June 1983 Bulletin 6 was issued, superseding the newsletters which had been numbered 1-5. The content was similar but the bulletin format gave much more space, with opportunities for members to write about their research. One of the news items was that a programme of speakers and workshops, starting in October, was in preparation, and that meetings would be held on the third Wednesday of the month at the Liberal Club. A number of these early meetings were 'in house' occasions with talks and activities led by Ian Varey and slide shows by Bill Ward or Peter Clowes. These regular meetings were very necessary because the membership was increasing rapidly. New names to appear included Maurice and Mavis Bingley, Maureen Lanston, Bill and Margaret Ward, Ian Varey, Ron McPhail (an honorary member who had led the dig), Ralph Wignall, Bob Wignall and Peter Clowes and family. Later in the year Doris Chandler was to join and soon got involved by cataloging archives and sorting photographs.

At the fourth AGM in 1984 the following officers were elected - Chairman: Maurice Bingley, Vice Chairman: Peter Clowes, Secretary: Doris Chandler, Treasurer/Membership Secretary: Brian Bilson, Bulletin Editor: Ian Varey. In December 1984 the first Christmas Social was organised. This consisted of various quizzes and games and an excellent buffet with wine which was prepared by Mavis Bingley and Maureen Lanston, plus helpers. This was a task they undertook each year for quite a while and was always greatly appreciated.

At the fifth AGM in 1985 the following officers were elected – Chairman/Bulletin Editor: Ian Varey, Vice Chairman: Peter Clowes, Secretary: Doris Chandler, Treasurer: Brian Bilson. The society had been involved in choosing names for the streets for the Wigston Harcourt Estate, and Duncan Lucas and Bill Ward produced a book 'Wigston Harcourt' about this, which was very cleverly illustrated by the very talented Peter Wilford. One of the new members this year was Edna Taylor. By October it was reported that 33 Transactions had been produced, with Bob Wignall and Jim Colver spending many hours transcribing old documents, thus making information more readily available for others.

At the AGM in 1986 all the officers were re-elected. The society made steady progress and membership continued to increase. In September a unique opportunity arose when the Master Hosiers' House and Workshop in Bushloe End became available for sale. Urgent meetings were held and plans drawn up to try and preserve it as a museum of framework knitting. Throughout the rest of this year and most of 1987 there was much anxiety and work going on in the background to sort out financial and legal issues. Then in October 1987 there was good news at last. The property had been purchased by Oadby & Wigston Borough Council and leased for a peppercorn rent (a sock!) to the specially created Oadby & Wigston Buildings Preservation Trust. The building was to become known as the Wigston Framework Knitters Museum.

At the 1987 AGM all officers were re-elected except that Peter Clowes stepped down as vice chairman and Edna Taylor was elected in his place. For the first time it was decided to have a management committee of members in addition to the officers, those appointed were Jim Colver, Peter Clowes, Bill Ward, Ruth Harper and Bob Wignall.

The 1988 AGM was held this time in the front sitting room at the Framework Knitters Museum. Quite a squeeze for the 28 people present. A discussion was held about the desirability of

combining this society with the Civic Society and the newly formed Friends of Wigston Framework Knitters Museum. The idea would certainly have saved much duplication of work in producing bulletins, organising events, keeping records etc., and as many people were involved in more than one group, it did make some sense, but many people were very much against this, so it was not pursued. Officers elected were – Chairman: Edna Taylor, Vice Chairman: Bob Wignall, Secretary: Doris Chandler, Treasurer/Membership Secretary: Brian Bilson, Bulletin Editor: Ian Varey, with members for the committee – Doreen Boulter, Peter Clowes and Jim Colver. At around this time Chris Smart, Colin Towell, Stella Tweed and Tricia Berry joined the society.

Ian Varey being much involved with the new Framework Knitters Museum, made it known he would welcome some help and in a rash moment Chris Smart and Tricia Berry offered to take on this society's bulletin jointly. At the 1989 AGM the officers elected were – Chairman: Edna Taylor, Vice Chairman: Bob Wignall, Secretary: Doris Chandler, Treasurer/Membership Secretary: Brian Bilson, Bulletin Editors: Chris Smart & Tricia Berry, with members for the committee – Peter Clowes, Jim Colver and Ian Varey. During this year Bernard and Jean Elliott and Mike and Linda Forryan were among the new members. The 'Wigston Town Trail' by Edna Taylor with illustrations by Ralph Wignall and contributions from several members was launched very successfully. The society was also delighted to receive a 'highly commended certificate' from the newly created Annual Heritage Award Scheme, for our bulletins and transactions.

#### The Second Decade 1990-1999

During 1990 Peter Mastin and Mike Ward were among our new members. It was decided to create a new post of membership secretary which Stella Tweed agreed to take on. Officers elected at the AGM were – Chairman: Edna Taylor. Vice Chairman: Bob Wignall, Secretary: Doris Chandler, Treasurer: Brian Bilson, Membership Secretary: Stella Tweed, Bulletin Editors: Chris Smart and Tricia Berry – with members of the committee Peter Clowes and Jim Colver. The Christmas Social this year was turned into a double celebration to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the society. Mavis and Maureen served up a special buffet, there was wine and a handsome birthday cake. Photographs were taken and Duncan made a short speech with a toast to the next ten years.

By 1991 there were over 60 members, the officers were all re-elected as were the committee, but with the addition of Mike Ward. A new 'Who's Who' series started in the bulletin which proved popular and featured 30 notable people with Wigston connections. In 1992 'For the Record' a book on the Long Street Board School by Edna Taylor and Bob Wignall was published to coincide with the move into the old school building by the Record Office. The officers and committee were as last year and Sue Whymant and Peter Mastin were among the new members.

A very successful Heritage Fortnight was held at White Gate Farm in 1993 attended by 1,000 people. Tony and Di Lawrance were among the new members. By 1994 the membership had reached 85, in both these years the officers and committee were the same as 1991. In 1995 the society supported Wigston's commemoration events to mark the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Naseby. The June bulletin was dedicated to the Civic War and a number of members contributed articles. In this year it was decided the accounts, which then consisted of bigger sums, should be independently audited and Colin Towell agreed to do this. In 1996 Peter Clowes stepped down from the committee and was replaced by Peter Mastin. The society ran a competition for a town crier but the original winner soon left the district. Joe David a retired

Serjeant Major and former Beefeater at the Tower of London was then chosen, and did a brilliant job at various events in the district for a number of years.

By 1997 the upstairs room at the Liberal Club had become too small for the increasing membership, so a move downstairs to a partitioned area of the Concert Room was arranged, meetings having to be held on Thursdays as this room was unavailable on Wednesdays. The officers and committee were again re-elected except for Mike Ward who had resigned. Ralph Wignall passed away in the November and very kindly left the society a £250 legacy. Sadly a permanent home for the Folk Museum could not be found, so the larger items had to be put in storage in early 1998, as Duncan needed the space. Another very successful Heritage Fortnight was held in April/May, this time at the United Reformed Church. A great sadness was the very sudden death of Peter Mastin later in May aged only 51. A huge loss to the society and a great shock to all. The February AGM this year was the last at the Liberal Club, all officers and committee were re-elected. In March the first meeting (back to Wednesdays) was held at the United Reformed Church Boys' Brigade Rooms. There was a big attendance to hear Caroline Wessel's talk on Beaumanor Hall and the Herrick family. During the year Bob Wignall stepped down as Vice Chairman and was replaced by Tony Lawrance.

In 1999 the secretary, Doris Chandler became unwell and stepped down from the job she had done with great efficiency for 15 years. Tricia Berry took on the roll as acting secretary. The bulletin was now produced on computer which gave a much smarter appearance. At the AGM the officers were – Chairman: Edna Taylor, Vice Chairman: Tony Lawrance, Acting Secretary: Tricia Berry, Treasurer: Brian Bilson, Membership Secretary: Stella Tweed, Auditor: Colin Towell, Bulletin Editors: Chris Smart & Tricia Berry with committee members Jim Colver and Sue Whyment.

### The Third Decade 2000-2009

At the 2000 AGM all officers and committee were re-elected, as they were in 2001 and 2002. At the 2002 Christmas social the society's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday was marked with a few words from Duncan and a toast to the next twenty one years. The membership this year stood at 85. During this period a number of very enjoyable skittles matches were played against members of the Friends of Wigston Framework Knitters Museum. In 2003 Chris Smart stepped down from joint bulletin editor due to other commitments. She was warmly thanked for her work over the last 14 years. Sue Whyment also stepped down from the committee. Everyone else was re-elected. Sue Woolley became a member this year.

Disaster was averted in 2004 when the booked speakers failed to turn up on two consecutive months. On the first occasion several kind members gave impromptu accounts of researching their family trees and on the second Edna, mindful of what happened before, had brought a quiz. In October we welcomed Hugh Davies, a guide at Bletchley Park, as speaker. Aware this would be of interest to many non members it had been decided to make it an open meeting to be held in the larger Moat Street Methodist Church. It was ticket only, members didn't have to pay but guests were charged £3. We had 39 members and 111 paying guests, making a nice profit for the society. The same officers and committee served for the year and Garry Davies and Jane Callis were among the new members. At the AGM the officers were – Chairman: Edna Taylor, Vice Chairman: Tony Lawrance, Secretary/Bulletin Editor: Tricia Berry, Treasurer: Brian Bilson, Membership Secretary: Stella Tweed, Auditor: Colin Towell, with committee member Jim Colver.

In 2005 the officers and committee were the same, as they were in 2006, except that Jim Colver passed away in April 2006 after 26 years of loyal service to the society. Sue Woolley then agreed to join the committee in his place. In 2007 Edna Taylor wished to retire having led the society with great success for 19 years. This resulted in the following being elected at the AGM – Chairman: Tony Lawrance, Vice Chairman: vacant, Secretary/Bulletin Editor: Tricia Berry, Treasurer: Brian Bilson, Membership Secretary: Stella Tweed, Auditor: Colin Towell, with committee members Edna Taylor and Sue Woolley. Changes to the committee during the year occurred due to the death of Brian Bilson in March 2007 after 27 years loyal service to the society. Colin Towell took over as acting treasurer, and member Garry Davies agreed to act as auditor. Mike Forryan had been proposed as vice chairman at the AGM in his absence and subsequently agreed to serve. The Blue Plaque Scheme, a joint venture with the Civic Society to place plaques on various buildings in Wigston and South Wigston to commemorate local people of note was completed with a launch in October. Ralph Wignall's legacy and a Lottery grant helped with the funding.

In 2008 Mike Forryan and Tony Lawrance exchanged jobs and the committee then consisted of – Chairman: Mike Forryan, Vice Chairman: Tony Lawrance, Secretary/Bulletin Editor: Tricia Berry, Acting Treasurer: Colin Towell, Membership Secretary: Stella Tweed, Auditor: Garry Davies, with committee members Edna Taylor, Sue Woolley and Ruth Granger. In April our Chairman launched the society website and was pleased with the number of 'hits'. He continues the huge task of uploading the bulletins, transactions and photographs etc., acquired through the years. There was one change to the committee in 2009. After 19 loyal years as membership secretary Stella Tweed indicated that she wished to retire at the AGM. Linda Forryan had very kindly agreed to take her place and as there were no other nominations was duly appointed.

#### The Fourth Decade 2010 – October 2014

At the 2010 AGM the officers and committee were all re-elected. The 2011 AGM was the first meeting in our new venue at Age UK. The officers were again re-elected but Edna Taylor and Ruth Granger stepped down from the committee to be replaced by Ann Cousins and Paul Knight. A digital recorder was purchased with the help of an anonymous donation and proceeds of a mystery coach trip led by Duncan, and recording older peoples' memories is ongoing. The society displays its current programme on notice boards and libraries etc., has featured on local radio and attends historical and family history fairs to raise our profile.

In 2012 the officers and committee were again re-elected. During the year Tricia Berry stepped down after 14 years as secretary to be replaced by Ann Cousins. Tony Lawrance also resigned from the committee and Jane Callis joined. At the 2013 AGM the officers were – Chairman: Mike Forryan, Vice Chairman: vacant, Secretary: Ann Cousins, Treasurer: Colin Towell, Membership Secretary: Linda Forryan, Bulletin Editor: Tricia Berry, Auditor: Garry Davies, with committee members Sue Woolley, Paul Knight and Jane Callis.

At the 2014 AGM all officers and committee were re-elected. The membership now stands at 117. It was agreed that the society should purchase jointly with the Leicestershire & Rutland Family History Society a ceiling projector and pull down screen. This was installed at Age UK during the summer and is proving very successful. We are now up to date. Cheers to the next 34 years, and congratulations and thanks to Duncan and Ruth for their long commitment to the society for all of this time.

Tricia Berry