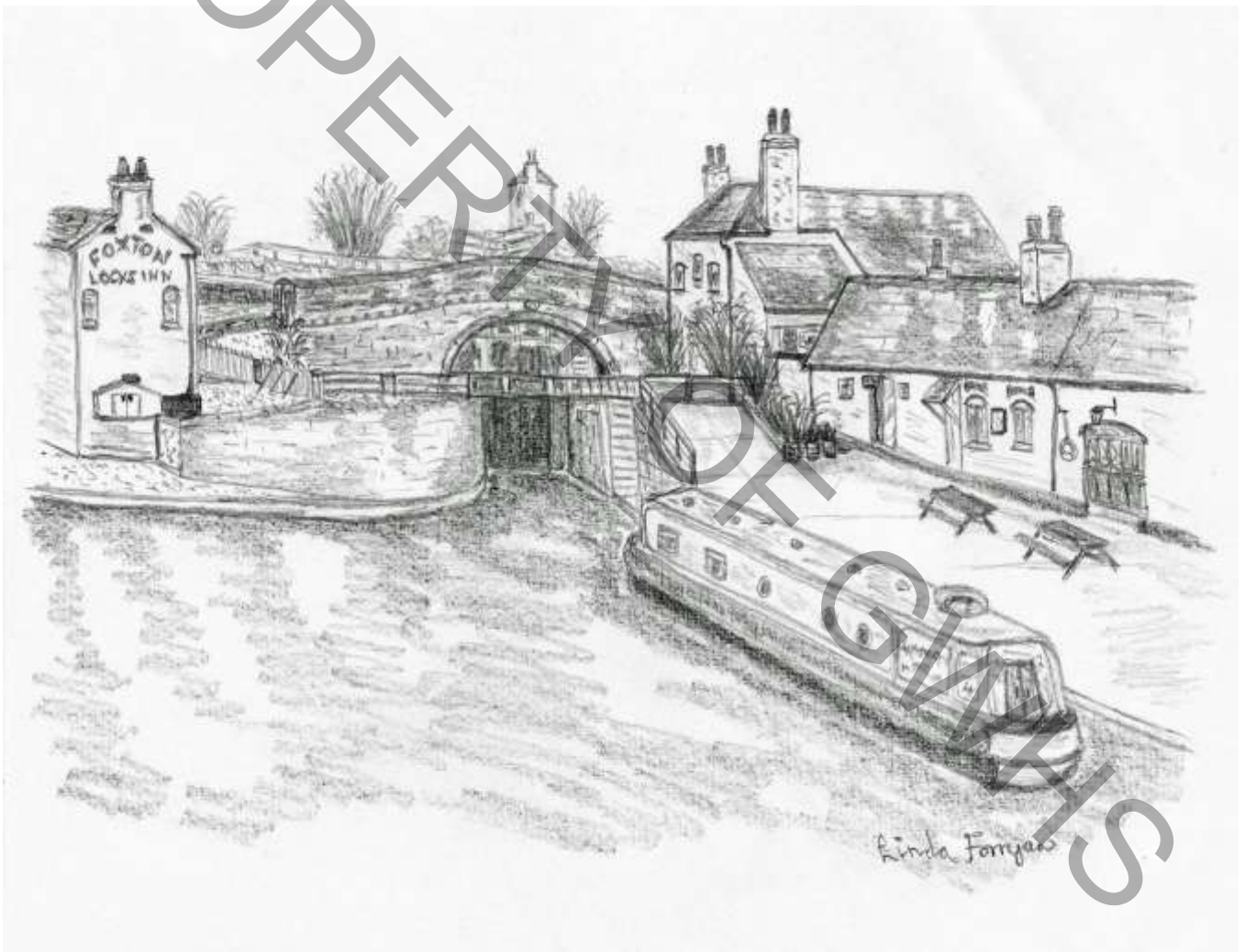


GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
White Gate Lodge, 97 Newton Lane, Wigston Magna, Leics.

BULLETIN 105

1st JULY 2016



Foxton Locks Basin by Linda Forryan

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS – AUGUST 2016 TO JUNE 2017

Wednesday 17th August 2016

Leicestershire & Rutland Photographers 1839-1939 – Mark Gamble
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 21st September 2016

The History of Leicester Prison – Richard Foster
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 18th October 2016

Leicester City Football Club, with Wigston connections – John Hutchinson
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 16th November 2016

Leicester in World War II, Hidden Histories – Vince Holyoak
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 21st December 2016

Victorian Christmases in Leicester – Cynthia Brown
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 18th January 2017

Rise & Fall of Leicester's Trams – Malcolm Riddle
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 15th February 2017

AGM followed by a Quiz - Virginia Wright, Leicester Blue Badge Guide
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 15th March 2017

Belgrave Churchyard, Living Memories – Sandra Moore (in costume)
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 19th April 2017

The Victorian Army, the men & campaigns – Jed Jaggard (in costume)
7.30p.m. the Dining Room, Age UK, Paddock Street, Wigston

Wednesday 17th May 2017

Coach Trip – To be advised

Wednesday 21st June 2017

Guided Walk – To be advised

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

Society's website: www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

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

MARCH 2016 MEETING: KING RICHARD III, ONE YEAR ON

There was a good turnout of members to welcome the Revd. Pete Hobson, Director of Leicester Cathedral Common Ground Project, to give us the inside knowledge on the reinterment of King Richard III which finally took place on 26 March 2015, very nearly one year ago and two and a half years since his remains were found in September 2012.

It had been a long and tortuous 30 months, partly because of changes in personnel at the cathedral in the early stages but mainly because of the challenge to the process brought about by the so called Plantagenet Alliance. This group of Richard's supporters from York, claiming some unspecified connections to the king, considered that he should be buried in York Minster where, by coincidence the Very Revd. Vivienne Faull, the Dean of Leicester in the early days of the search for Richard, had recently been appointed Dean. However those people involved in Leicester, from the University, the City Council and the Cathedral always felt that Leicester had a very strong case and proceeded with the huge task of arranging the reinterment in the Cathedral for which, of course, there was no modern precedent.

The Revd. Pete, who had recently completed the project management of the conversion of the former Leicester Grammar School next door to the cathedral into St Martin's House, was appointed Acting Canon Chancellor, with the specific task of leading the Cathedral team, under Bishop Tim Stephens and the newly appointed Dean, The Very Revd. David Monteith, which was to organise the reinterment.

The team was assembled in the period May to July 2013 and consisted of people who were involved in communications, IT, administration, marketing and money raising. Clearly there would be a cost to the exercise, a bit of an unknown factor, but a figure of £2.5 million pounds was decided upon as a likely figure. This had to be raised because Leicester Cathedral is not well endowed with ancient funds and the Diocese, a separate entity from the cathedral was not well off financially either. However, the latter did agree to donate £500,000 to the funds and other contributions came from the City and County Councils with a large percentage coming from private individuals and trusts.

During the period summer 2013 to spring 2014 the detailed planning began to take shape and sub groups were formed to deal with certain aspects such as: finance; events; fabric; liturgy; communications and legacy. Much early discussion and even disagreement was about the form and the place of reinterment. Matters such as where in the cathedral the reinterment should be, and whether it be a ledger stone or tomb. Many interested parties needed to be satisfied and most important of all the Cathedral Fabric Commission of England must agree on any changes to the building. Eventually an 'ambulatory tomb' was agreed upon to be placed under the tower crossing (in earlier days the Chapter House of the cathedral) and where there would be sufficient space to walk or ambulate around it. The interior of the Cathedral needed much alteration and improvement to cope with the tomb, some of these changes were already planned and would have been carried out in the future anyway.

During this time the Judicial Review was going slowly ahead. In August 2013 a judge agreed that there should be a hearing. This took place in November 2013, and was adjourned until March 2014 so that an additional interested party, the City Council, could be heard. It was not until 23 May 2014 that the result of the Judicial Review was finally announced, confirming that the terms of the original licence to exhume, and that the reburial of any remains, should be in Leicester Cathedral.

Once the legal green light had been given, the City and County Councils offered financial and practical help and the Lord Lieutenant was also involved from a ceremonial aspect. In August 2014 the building contractors moved into the cathedral to commence the reordering and the construction of the tomb. In fact the tender for the work had gone out before the legal decision was known on the basis that Leicester considered its case was solid. During this work many much earlier burials were discovered, including those of the Vaughan family several of whom had been Vicars at St. Martin's Church before it became the Cathedral. These and other bones, 13 boxes in all, had to be moved to another area in the cathedral. Apart from the construction of the tomb for Richard one of the principal tasks was to move the heavy (in weight and looks) Victorian screen from the west side of the tower to the east side. A new altar, Bishop's Chair and choir stalls were delivered just before the week of reinterment services.

The reconstruction work was carried out while the cathedral was in daily use, and was completed in January 2015 with a date set for the ceremony on 25 March 2015. This was difficult to fix because it had to be before Easter, as after Easter would coincide with the general election in May 2015. The heat was now really on to conclude the arrangements for the three main services, the service of Compline on the Sunday when the coffin left the University for its last journey to Bosworth and back to Leicester. The service of reinterment on the Thursday and the service of Reveal of the tomb on the Friday. Much work had to be done with regard to the content of these services for which some timely help was received with the discovery of an ancient book of the period. There was also the music to choose, and who would be present and who would take part. This activity excluded the TV involvement led by Channel Four who had their own temporary studio set up next to the Cathedral.

The Revd. Pete gave us insights into the week of events: twenty thousand people queued to view the coffin lying in repose between Monday and Wednesday night; a bible which had belonged to Richard having been found in his tent after his defeat at Bosworth was kindly lent by Lambeth Palace and used in the services; the involvement of the Roman Catholic Church in the week; serving soldiers using a false coffin containing sandbags to practise handling the real thing; Richard's bones laid in the coffin packed in unbleached English wool to keep them reasonably in place; the tension while the heavy tomb was brought into the Cathedral and inched into place overnight after the Thursday service and in time for the Friday service of Reveal and finally, the beautiful Friday evening Leicester Glows firework and candle event around the Cathedral and Jubilee Square.

An altogether fascinating and well presented talk from someone at the very centre of events, recounting an amazing historical event in our town of Leicester, in our time. The Revd. Pete Hobson's book about the whole event and the time leading up to it 'How to Bury a King' is now available from the Cathedral and St Martin's House bookshops as are other books and a DVD on the subject.

APRIL 2016 MEETING: THE BUILDINGS OF ARTHUR WAKERLEY

It was good to welcome back Neil Crutchley to give what we knew would be a fascinating 'tour by powerpoint' of buildings designed by the well known Leicester architect Arthur Wakerley, the Orson Wright of the Highfields and Crown Hills areas in the city!

Local author, Peter Ashley, called Wakerley the unsung hero of English Architecture. Apart from his professional interests and commitments Wakerley was a politician (he knew Ramsay MacDonald) and was Mayor of Leicester when aged only 36; he was a philanthropist, a lifelong Methodist and President of the Leicester Society of Architects. He was born in 1862 in Melton Mowbray. After school he joined his father's brick and tile business and at the age of 16 joined local architect James Bird who laid out many of Leicester's new housing areas. By the age 22 he had set up his own architectural practice and by 30 was a well established and recognised local figure. His first offices were in Mere Road and later in Imperial Buildings in the town. He was married and lived firstly in Highfield Street where his daughter Gwendolen was born and later 46 (now 58) London Road which is currently under threat of demolition. His other daughters were Margaret, Dorothy and Constance all of whom live on in street names locally. His only son John known as Jack was killed in action in 1917.

He not only bought land as often as possible for development especially in the Spinney Hills area but he was appointed by other local landowners to lay out and design estates. He bought Gedding Hall near Bury St Edmonds as a holiday home and became well known in Suffolk (it is now owned by Bill Whyman of the Rolling Stones). This name, Gedding, also lives on in a Leicester road name. His eventual home was Crown Hill House at the top of Gwendolen Road (still in existence). He was an early conservationist, and dismantled a building in High Cross Street in the town to re-erected as High Cross House in the grounds of his own house in Crown Hills, as a home for one of his daughters. The High Cross itself had been moved to the grounds in front of the Crescent buildings in King Street, and he purchased the Crescent to obtain the High Cross and had that removed to his garden too.

Wakerley designed the first Council Houses for Leicester Council for £299 each and the design was adopted by many other local authorities. The unusual shape can still be seen today in homes off Abbey Lane and Welford Road with their steep pointed roof and a window in the point of the front gable.

Apart from numerous individual and terraces of houses in the Highfields area he was the architect for many churches and public buildings such as; Belgrave Hall Methodist Church, Humberstone Road Congregational Church and Knighton Public Hall (now a church for the Chinese community), St Stephen's vicarage, Wesley Hall Institute (but not the church itself), the Synagogue in Highfield Street and the St Paul's Methodist Church on London Road (which was demolished to make way for London Road Station).

The North Evington area was his vision of a self contained town attached to Leicester. He designed the Market Hall, Asfordby Street police and fire stations, a number of the factories in Halstead Street which feature special embellishments such as pillars, pediments and curved door and window heads, the Corona Machine Tool works and many more, including Gents original factory. He was responsible for a number of the Margaret Road buildings for the Institute for the Blind including the special gardens. He built the former Floral Hall in High Street and Bond Street Working Men's Club, the Wyvern Hotel where Elizabeth House now stands next to the Railway Station and several buildings in High Street most notably the Singer Building, and in Granby Street the famous Turkey Café, now happily in use as a café again.

His domestic work was numerous and his distinctive designs can be seen in many areas of south east Leicester and London Road. He liked to decorate the external facades and used Arts and Crafts embellishments. On Mere Road individual houses in a terrace were stepped so that windows faced along the road and in another property on Mere Road there is stained glass,

stone banding and stone window mullions. On St Saviour's Road there are first floor wooden balconies over front doors with ball finials and Greek house names emblazoned on the front walls. Cartouches are frequently used with angled corner balconies on the corner of Gwendolen Road/East Park Road.

All four sides of Spinney Hill Park have a distinctive house called Park View and rows of terraced housing can be seen with more substantial houses for works managers at each end. There were pictures of so many individual houses or groups of houses too numerous to mention, but which could be the subject of a conducted and very informative evening stroll in the future. Or even try it yourself one Sunday afternoon.

Neil very generously donated his fee to the George Grey Memorial Trust which assists aspiring young choristers. Mr. Grey was the organist at Leicester Cathedral from 1929 – 1968.

MAY 2016 MEETING: VISIT TO FOXTON LOCKS

It was an overcast, wet, dismal and rather cool afternoon when 41 members and friends gathered at the lower car park at Foxton Locks at about 2.45pm. Not only was it a wet day but the point of our visit was to enjoy a water based activity!!!!

The first part of our visit was a 'voyage' up 'the cut' from the bottom of the locks to Debdale Wharf, a journey lasting about 50 minutes. Our boat was a wide beamed barge named Vagabond. It had tube train like seats, a roof but open sides. Therefore, those who drew the short straw and sat in an outside seat got a little damp. Despite the rain (heavy at times) the trees and fields were a lush green colour. There were plenty of ducks swimming around but sadly no flash of the blue of a kingfisher and no other boats on the canal. Having been on canal holidays I was impressed with the boatman's ability to turn a 70+ foot boat round in a winding hole without going into reverse.

In case people got bored Roger Whalley had prepared a 'canal quiz'. But we didn't get bored, so it was not used and will be saved up for the Christmas party.

On our return to the bottom lock the party split unofficially into two. Some went into the pub for a warm drink (or otherwise) and others went to the Foxton Inclined Plane Museum (which of course was the plan). Recently the museum has been redesigned using lottery money and there are now several interactive displays intermingled with some traditional canal scenes and a life size narrowboat cabin. This was so tiny it really does make you wonder how the canal people managed, it must have been a very hard life.

The main exhibit allows the visitor to stoke the boiler with make believe coal and when the required pressure is reached the model of the famous inclined plane begins to operate. There was plenty of historical detail to be absorbed and a good stock of things to purchase in the museum shop.

The final part of the afternoon allowed the museum visitors to rejoin the pub party for an early evening meal at the Foxton Locks Inn. Our tables were set out in the nicely warm conservatory which overlooked the basin at the bottom of the locks. We had pre-ordered our meal which was served on time and proved to be very tasty. One of the puddings turned out to be interesting. The menu had stated Eton Mess and profiteroles. The inn had mis-typed this as one dish but of

course it should have been two separate dishes, nevertheless, they stood by their word and those who made this choice were glad that they had.

We departed for home at about 7.30pm much appreciating the organisation by our Secretary of a quite complicated trip with three elements.

JUNE 2016 MEETING: EARLY EVENING VISIT TO MARKET BOSWORTH

Our record of poor weather for the summer trips was not broken on this occasion, in true Historical Society manner it was duly wet and miserable for our visit to Market Bosworth, just 15 days into the meteorological period of summer! Never the less in true 'Brit' style we wrapped up, kept calm and carried on. Or at least most of us did, but one or two cut the walk short and went to the pub early.

We were hosted by three members of the Market Bosworth Historical Society who each led a small group of about 10 people, 30 in all, on a conducted tour of the Town. I call Market Bosworth a 'town' because it is indeed a market town and described as such in the very useful 'Town Trail' booklet we were given at the end of the tour. Otherwise it is easy to think of Bosworth as a large village and it is in that category that it has won so many awards in the Britain in Bloom competition.

Starting from the Rectory Lane car park, the site of the cattle market until 1996, we were shown the former nail makers workshop, the former rectory, the second of three rectories in the town and the bowling green, bowls having been played in this area since 1721. Passing the memorial garden and parish field we halted in Park Street to note the house once used by the English master at the grammar school, the former C of E primary school, now private houses, and many period houses some of which were once shops.

We walked up to the church (some groups going inside) and noted several graves of prominent local people in the churchyard, then hearing the startling tale of a man being buried alive. This resulted in a rule that in future a string must be attached to the corpse leading to a bell on the surface, giving rise to the saying 'saved by the bell'.

We admired Bosworth Hall, it or earlier versions, being the home of the three squire families of the area, the Harcourts from the 12th century, the Dixie family when Wolstan Dixie a former Lord Mayor of London and successful fur trader bought the estate in 1589. The Dixies then sold it to Charles Tollemarche Scott in 1885 and it was finally broken up in 1918, and has more recently been converted into an hotel. The Dixie family had moved to Windsor but retained connections in area and did return to live in the town. We then moved on to Church Street looking at a group of houses with tunnels and large cellars, some inter-connected. Some also had new walls added in front of existing frontages in the fashion of the time, with the result that the new windows were higher than the ceilings of the rooms inside.

The route briefly took us into Barton Road where just outside the village Roman remains have been found, but more prominently we could not miss the Dower House, an imposing three storey and double depth house on the site of the former George Inn. Here again the windows were interesting being 'blind' on the right side of the front door.

Working our way back up Main Street towards the Square we passed Ye Old Red Lion Hotel where we were later to have a meal, this is an original 16th century timber frame building with

modern (1896) exterior facades. In the early 20th century ale was brewed on the site and the first petrol pumps in the village were installed. Another pub, The Dixie Arms is situated in Main Street.

The next port of call was The Square from where we had splendid views of many ancient buildings around the edge of the area including the Dixie Grammar School, now a private school but known to me personally as a state school which I attended in the late 1950s and by my brother before me. Clearly the outside of this prominent building has not changed since it was built in Tudor style between 1827 and 1829. The school was originally founded in 1320 and re-founded by the Dixie family in 1601. Indeed, in my time, the annual prize giving was attended by the slightly eccentric Sir Wolston Dixie, the last of the line, as despite petitioning for a change, his two daughters were not allowed to inherit the title.

We admired the fine looking buildings in the square, many of them 'gentrified' by Charles Tollemache Scott in the late 19th century. There were constant reminders all around of the Battle of Bosworth with many street name plates carrying the emblem of the white boar of Richard III or the red dragon of Henry Tudor. There were also shields high up on the walls of the properties commemorating the various noble families who fought on that day. After hearing a little about these fine buildings we wended our way back to the Red Lion for badly needed alcoholic fortification and a well earned meal.

Grateful thanks were offered to our guides who handed out free copies of the Town Trail for use on our own individual return visits to this exceedingly interesting and historic town. They were long standing local residents full of knowledge about their town and with many interesting and sometimes humorous anecdotes.

We were extremely sorry to hear that Ailsa Whalley and Janet Mills who had planned to be on the visit were unable come because of an operation and illness. We wish them a speedy recovery. Finally thanks are due to our Secretary, Ann Cousins, for once again very capably organising our visit, including her, now famous, little white cards reminding us of our food orders.

All reports by Colin Towell

OBITUARY

It is with great sadness that we report the death on 1st June of our member Sue Klan, aged only 57. Our thoughts are with her husband and fellow member Carl, and the wider family at this very difficult time.

We have also learned of the death, on 29th April of Anne Brown. Anne was a loyal member for a long time but had to resign some years ago due to failing health. She will be fondly remembered by some of our older members.

TWO STEEPLES WALK

At the millennium Wigston Civic Society unveiled its Two Steeples Walk. This is a ten mile circular walk starting at St Wistan's Church on Bull Head Street and leaving Wigston by the Meres Walk, across the golf course, through Newton Harcourt, Wistow church and garden centre, Kilby, Kilby Bridge and then along the towpath and across double rail lock and the Rally Bridge, through Little Hill estate and arriving back at All Saint's Church, hence the name Two Steeples Walk.

The Society relaunched the walk on 1st June which was appropriately St Wistan's day when about 18 people started off in dull and cold but dry weather. The walk is easily split into stages which end at refreshment places (Wistow tea rooms and the Navigation pub with the Dog and Gun pub at Kilby village in between) and from which a return walk or a bus can get people back to their starting points. Each stage is about three to three and a half miles long.

The familiar yellow painted sign posts on footpaths have additional 'Two Steeples Walk' arrow pointers so the direction is easy to follow. A full leaflet giving the route and background information can be downloaded free from the Society's website at www.wigstoncivicsociety.org.uk.

Try it sometime!!!!

BLUE PLAQUES IN WIGSTON MAGNA AND SOUTH WIGSTON

In the two or three years leading up to 2007, the Society joined with Wigston Civic Society to create and erect a trail of traditional Blue Plaques commemorating the places where well known local people lived. There are 14 plaques in all with four in South Wigston and the rest in Wigston Magna including one, relating to the historian W G Hoskins as far out as Sandy Rise, nearly in Oadby.

Others commemorated include: Orson Wright, Gertie Gitana, Charlie Moore and Don Ross. The plaques are in the traditional round style and are easily spotted in their blue colour. Most are visible from the road but two are on buildings set back from the public highway. These are on Abington House for Thomas Ingram and Bushloe House (the Council Offices) for H A Owston.

Abington House stands between the former Bushloe and Guthlaxton schools now renamed Wigston Academy and Wigston College. The property is currently fenced off by contractors building a new link between the two schools and a new school for Birkett House. Initially it was thought that it would be demolished but new plans were drawn up to enable this not to happen and hopefully the house will find new uses when building works are complete. The plaque on Bushloe House can be seen from the car park to the council offices during office hours.

One plaque, at 9 Central Avenue, commemorates Wigston's Victoria Cross winner Sgt. William Ewart Boulter who showed 'conspicuous bravery though wounded' at Trones Wood in the 1st Battle of the Somme on 14 July 1916. A memorial stone to Sgt. Boulter will be unveiled

on the 100th anniversary of the event on 14 July 2016 at 12 noon in the new pocket park at the end of Bell Street.

To walk around each part of the trail would take about 30-45 minutes and would make a pleasant weekend or evening stroll at this time of the year or in the winter when country footpaths are wet and muddy. A booklet giving details of where the plaques are and about the individuals who are commemorated can be obtained from Tricia Berry or Colin Towell priced £3.

Previous two news items by Colin Towell
Civicsocietynewsletter

DUNCAN'S MUSINGS

With the recent proposals to demolish Abington House [now happily not going ahead] childhood memories flowed back and here the ramble starts.

Roger Pask lived at 82 Moat Street, his house adjoining Long Lane and his paddock stretching down to Peacock Row [local name for the terrace of properties nearer the cross roads]. His other nearby field was where Sainsbury's convenience store has been built. "Yes" indeed I remember seeing cattle on those two fields. But Roger's main farming was around Abington House, about 40 acres. He also had a field up Newton Lane on the right next to the Kilby footpath, with some 28 acres on the left of Newton Lane "Damn it I must produce a map!" It was known as Coverdales after its owners (another tale).

Back to Abington farm which I often visited and the fields where most public events in Wigston were held. The buildings included the old Leicester Conduit which was used as a bull pen. The other buildings were of granite and had numerous gargoyles attached. I suspect they were from some redundant church or possibly monastic. When the farm buildings were demolished they were tipped into a well! All bar one which I saved. I took it to County Hall for evaluation and safe keeping but over time it became "lost".

I was in the 28th Leicestershire Scouts and during the war "Holidays at Home" were the vogue with galas including field sports and fruit, flower & vegetable shows. Huge marquees were set up and to us lads fantastic examples of the local produce were on show. We slept in the tents as guards. When some lads discovered that opposite on Station Road in the old council offices (they had moved to Bushloe House by this time) the ATS girls were lodging and the trees opposite were crowded by lads hoping to glimpse something revealing. Education had started on the site. Concerts etc., occurred and I remember a Home Guard sergeant major and a police officer discussing crowd dispersal if an air raid took place. Mrs. Mortlock, an elderly lady who lived there, was so generous in lending the farm for these occasions. A Mr. Harrold was her driver and general factotum. Just after the war we had "Freedom from Hunger" events at Abington similar to "Holidays at Home". Both events had Charlie Moore's Band playing. Parades for Warship week and National Savings week ended at Abington.

Then the County Council bought the farm and the house was occupied by the playing fields superintendent for the county a Mr. Abbott (Bud Abbott we called him after Abbott and Costello the film stars). The stable yard attached to the house became the depot for ground maintenance machinery.

Mr. Pask moved to Marston Trussell to farm there and Paddy Merriman came in with massive machines and altered the landscape. Giant D8's worked 23 hours a day, 1 hour to refuel. The machines were on daily hire, Paddy had a large family and as one lad did his 8 hour shift another one jumped on. He went on to have a very successful business.

The schools, Guthlaxton after the Ecclesiastical Division, Bushloe plus Abington were built. Many trees were saved but Hanging Hill Field, of Saxon origin and name, had changed forever.

My maternal grandfather William Forryan was a friend of Thomas Ingram [who built Abington House and lived there for many years]. He helped Mr. Ingram plant many trees on the property specializing in walnuts. They challenged each other on longevity and Mr. Ingram won. He lived to be 99 and if he had made it to 100 a new peal of bells had been promised! [Thomas is said to have made a tour of the south coast in a landau when in his 80s, this is quite likely, as he remained fit and active until shortly before his death and was known to visit his great-nephew Rev. Charles Frederic Mortlock and his wife in South Bersted, Sussex regularly. Charles Frederic was later to inherit Abington in 1909 when Thomas died].

Duncan Lucas

THE BEGINNINGS OF GRANVILLE ROAD **The How, Why and When it was established**

The Original Granville Road site occupied an area of land of some 11 acres 1 rood 15 perches (11.34 acres). It formed part of a larger parcel of 17a 2r 19p whose history can be traced to the enclosure of Wigston in 1766. At that time it was allotted, in lieu of half a yardland held in the open fields, to John Smith, Gentleman, a hosier and grazier who lived at Knighton. The land was divided into three small fields of 5a 0r 29p, 2a 3r 25p and 3a 1r 1p. It was bequeathed to John's sons before being bought on 23rd May 1778 by John Frisby, a Leicester baker who was a member of the same family. It came into the ownership of Vincent Smith Frisby who died a bachelor on 18th December 1845 and left it to his brother William Frisby of Liverpool. Nine years later it became available for sale and was purchased by the Leicester and Leicestershire Freehold Land Society in the names of Samuel How, a hosiery manufacturer trading as Fielding and How in West Bond Street and William Baines, a hatter, hosier, furrier and shirt maker trading as William Baines & Company at 32, Market Place.

This land society was the largest of several which were established in the town and county at various times in the mid to late 19th century. Wigston actually had its own land society but this was on a much smaller scale. It was responsible for the setting up of the Frederick Street and Victoria Street developments in 1876/78.

Land societies were the forerunners of building societies, but differed from them in that members actually bought land rather than houses, and were then free to have their own house built or use the land to create an allotment garden. The member could buy his land much cheaper this way because the society would buy larger areas of land and divide them into plots which were then sold on virtually at cost. There was also a strong political motive involved because one of the main qualifications for being eligible to vote in elections was to be a freehold landowner so this was a way of widening the franchise.

The Leicester and Leicestershire Freehold Land Society was officially formed on 23rd August 1849 when the first meeting of shareholders was held in the Mayor's Parlour. This parlour was a part of the present Guildhall which at the time was Leicester Town Hall. The main business was to appoint the officers, which were as follows:

President - John Biggs, who was probably the most prominent citizen in Leicester at the time. He owned, with his brother William, a large hosiery manufacturing business in Belvoir Street, was three times mayor of Leicester and a member of Parliament for the Borough. His statue, erected by public subscription, still stands in Welford Place today. It is the second version, the original marble one, having been badly damaged by a tram in 1928.

Vice Presidents - Joseph Whetstone, William Biggs, John Dove Harris and John Collier.

Trustees - Edward Shipley Ellis, Alfred Burgess, John Manning, Charles Billson, John Baines and Richard Harris Jnr.

Directors - Edward Gittins, George Smallfield, William Scott, William Charlesworth, Thomas William Viccars, William Mowbray, Claypole Inchley, Samuel Carter, William Parker, John Burton, James Preston, James Thompson and W.L. Harris.

Bankers - Pares Leicestershire Banking Company, St. Martins.

Solicitor - George Stevenson, Silver Street.

Surveyor - William Flint, Friar Lane.

All of these people were leading citizens in Leicester, heading their own companies. The majority in some aspect of the hosiery trade, though John Burton and George Smallfield were notable exceptions being joint proprietors of the Mercury Newspaper. Alfred Burgess had strong Wigston connections having been brought up at The Grange, Leicester Road, where his brother Thomas still lived.

Many of them were also city councillors, at least ten having served as mayor, William Biggs like his brother John, three times. They were also predominantly Liberal in politics and non-conformist in religion. The previous somewhat corrupt Borough Council whose members were largely Tory, and established Church, having been completely swept from power in a landslide election in 1836.

At the next meeting of the Land Society on 10th September 1849 applications for the post of Secretary were considered. The officers present held a ballot to choose the preferred candidate and John Henry Davis was duly appointed. By 1863 the busy J.H. Davis of 11, Friar Lane, was also described as a stockbroker, accountant, insurance agent and secretary to the Infirmary and the Temperance Hall Company and to the Sutton Charity. The close ties between building and freehold land societies can be seen when by 1877 the Leicester and Leicestershire Freehold Land Society and the Leicester Permanent Benefit Building Society both operated from 14, Friar Lane, with Samuel Davis, very likely a son of John Henry, living next door at number 16 and being manager of both as well as Secretary of the Temperance Hall Society.

The early years of the Land Society were considered satisfactory though progress was not as rapid as had been anticipated. A fair number of people joined up and then failed to keep up their fortnightly subscriptions. The discipline of saving, and also the risks of borrowing the balance to buy a plot, and being charged interest, were new ideas for many people, who were understandably cautious and held back to see how others fared.

The Society started by buying a few small parcels of land in the town where perhaps one to four houses could be erected. They also purchased larger areas which were referred to as

estates. The first such estate was in the Guthlaxton Street area, the second on Humberstone Road, the third in Knighton and the fourth in Stoneygate. Interestingly, a plan survives of this Stoneygate Estate showing its location. It is the area bordered by Stoneygate Road, Stoughton Lane, Francis Road (later Street) and the Evington brook. Allandale Road is not marked, probably because it did not then exist, but its position is within the area covered by the plan.

However it is with the fifth estate that this article is concerned. At a meeting of the Society held on 3rd August 1854, five years after its foundation, it was reported in the minutes that the Chairman, a Mr. Jarrom, "had secured for £1,600 seventeen acres of land on the Welford Road near the third milestone." The negotiations had been conducted through a neighbouring farmer, Mr. Yates, who as part of the deal was to "be allowed to buy at cost four to six acres [from the Society]. Messrs. How and Baines [were to] be empowered to purchase this land on behalf of the Society." It was further reported that "there was a small close [field] of four acres in front of the above belonging to Mr. Manning of Knighton which it would be desirable to buy if possible." It was agreed "to buy it for not more than £150 per acre."

At a meeting on 31st August 1854 it was reported that Mr. Yates "was to take six acres [including the timber] and that Mr. Manning wanted £200 per acre" for his four acre close. As some of the Stoneygate land was purchased for £250 per acre Mr. Manning's price does not seem too unreasonable but nothing further came of this proposed purchase.

At the Annual General Meeting on 6th November 1854 in a report of the year's activities it was confirmed that the purchase of the eleven acres at Wigston had just been completed and that the land would be allotted as soon as possible. It is therefore a surprise to read that a month later on 7th December that "Messrs. How and Baines be requested to offer the land for sale at Wigston." An advertisement was placed in the Leicester Advertiser. No mention is made in the minutes of why this decision was taken not to keep the land, but subsequent entries record that the previous owner had not given his tenant notice, causing a delay in the Society being able to take possession and also doubts about whether the site was rather too far away from both Leicester and Wigston. It was the start of a whole series of problems which beset the early days of the Fifth Estate.

On 11th January 1855 it is recorded "no satisfactory offer having been made for the land at Wigston, Mr. Windram [an estate agent] be instructed to auction [it] in one or more lots as agreed upon and a reserve of £104 10 0 (average) per acre to be in place." On 22nd February it is noted that "the land did not sell at reserve so a plan of allotment to be prepared as soon as possible divided so that each lot be £50 including legal expenses." On 13th March "allotment [to be] postponed until possession obtained at Michaelmas [29th September]." No further mention is made of the Wigston land for six months until on 13th September when it was decided "that a road be made twenty feet in width up the centre of the Wigston land" and the Secretary reported that the allotments on the Wigston land had been offered to all the unadvanced shareholders upon the register and that not more than half the requisite number were willing to take them. The Secretary be instructed to inform the President [John Biggs] of the above particulars and ask his opinion as to the best mode of proceeding."

On 27th September the Surveyor submitted estimates for the laying of the road together with necessary drainage and the number and cost of allotments which were to be considered at the next meeting. It was noted that "the Ballot for the Wigston land to take place at the end of the Annual General Meeting."

At the Annual General Meeting on 25th October 1855 it was reported "the Stoneygate land [was] going well. The long delay on Wigston was due to the vendor not giving notice to the tenant so no possession could be obtained until Michaelmas." This tenant was William Wright who was a small farmer and also ran a carriers service twice a week between Wigston and Leicester. He left Wigston at 2p.m. each Wednesday and Saturday stopping at the Pelican Inn on Granby Street. His was not the only carrier service to Leicester. There were also daily ones run by Mary Dand to the White Swan in Market Place or Belgrave Gate (there was an Inn of that name in both places) and John Barker to the Crown and Thistle in Loseby Lane.

The minutes went on to record "the estate [at Wigston] was to be divided into 36 lots averaging 1,500 square yards each which would make a total of 332 shares allotted since commencement [of the Society].

At the end of the Annual General Meeting the Ballot for the Wigston land duly took place. "The regulations for the Ballot were set out as follows:

"The names of the shareholders who are entitled to allotments and have signified their acceptance of the same, are written on counters all of one size. The list will be called over by the Secretary and the counters examined and dropped into the Ballot Box by the Chairman. After the box is shaken the counters will be drawn out in succession by the Chairman and the first name drawn will take Lot 1 upon the plan, the 2nd Lot 2 and so on. If Lot 19 is drawn by a plural shareholder it will be passed over. The allottees will be required to sign the agreement prepared by the Solicitor to take the land at cost price including all expenses and to comply with certain conditions and also to pay interest at 5% per annum upon such portion as shall remain unpaid after deducting the amount standing to their credit in the books. A mortgage of the land to the Trustees must be executed by each allottee as required by the 15th rule [of the Society] as security for the due payment of his subscriptions, except payment of the whole is made at once." In the end 12 people bought 29 of the lots, including John Biggs who purchased one himself. The last 7 lots were reserved, presumably not taken at the time.

Tricia Berry

Main Source: Minute books, subscriber lists and other documents of the Leicester & Leicestershire Freehold Land Society – Leics. Record Office: Ref: 18D70

Our historical society was invited to attend a meeting of the residents of Granville Road on 21st June and Colin Towell and myself went along, both having done some work on this fascinating area. Colin brought some Wigston scrapbooks and spoke about our society and the Wigston Civic Society, also showing a draft copy of Oadby & Wigston Council's updated record of significant local buildings, a fair number of which are situated in Granville Road. I read out an abbreviated version of the above article which I originally wrote many years ago and then put aside when I realised my plan to write about the houses could not happen because many of the older ones had been given different names over time and it proved impossible to work out from available sources which former name related to which property today. I asked the residents if possible to look at their deeds for mention of the old names and I am delighted to say that by the following day I had already been given a photocopied page of one family's deeds plus a plan showing their house was built in the grounds of another named property, a completely different name to what it has today. I also have more leads to follow up so it looks as if my project can proceed after all. A very worthwhile evening.

TB

PROPERTY OF GWVHS