

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

BULLETIN 112

1st November 2018



This lovely picture by Duncan Lucas was taken near Peatling in 2014. The carriage and four were taking part in a fund raising event for the Armed Forces. The route took them castle to castle along the quiet roads from Warwick to Belvoir.

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS – NOVEMBER 2018 TO SEPTEMBER 2019

Wednesday 21st November 2018

The Story of the Unknown Warrior – John Sutton

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

***Wednesday 19th December 2018**

The Very Highly Strung ‘Unikulele’ Band

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

Wednesday 16th January 2019

200 years of Methodism in Wigston Magna – Liz Ward & Bill Boulter

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

Wednesday 20th February 2019

AGM followed by Tommy’s Mail, the Postal Service in WWI – Peter Cousins

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

Wednesday 20th March 2019

The Little Theatre, Past and Present – Mike Bull

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

Wednesday 17th April 2019

Leicestershire in the 1940s and 1950s – David Bell

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

Wednesday 15th May 2019

Cathedrals, Rooftops and More, restoration of old buildings – John Castleman

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

Wednesday 19th June 2019

Afternoon Visit to Leicestershire Aero Club and Airport, Stoughton – Anne French

With refreshments, own or shared transport, more details nearer the time from our Secretary.

Wednesday 21st August 2019

Afternoon Guided Walk round Ancient Leicester – to be advised

Optional afternoon tea at Wygston’s House, own or shared transport, more details nearer the time.

Wednesday 18th September 2019

The Rise & Demise of the Country House – Glenys Janes

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

Please bring £2 in December towards the cost of refreshments, guests will be charged £3.

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 email: chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

AUGUST 2018 MEETING VISIT TO COOKE'S MOTOR MUSEUM

This meeting was the second part of our experiment with summer visits whereby we ventured out in June and August instead of May and June with the hope of having better weather, indeed this proved to be the case this month although June was only marginally better than usual.

A total of 39 members and friends followed their travel instructions to arrive at an ordinary looking farm that turned out to be like a Tardis, containing a magnificent display of bygone motor cars and other transport memorabilia. We were met by John Cooke, current owner and son of the founder. He explained that his father bought the farm in 1971 and spent the following years converting barns and sheds into workshops and storage facilities for an ever increasing collection of vintage and classic vehicles. The first car we saw was a Morris, registration number NY6889, bought from a Leicester owner. It was in pieces so a second car was bought, DF281, so the two could be combined into one roadworthy vehicle. The collection first opened as a museum in 1975 and is run alongside the well established Wigston firm of Cookes Patterns who also have a foundry at Thurmaston. The first building we saw was in fact a store room containing hundreds of spare parts, many collected from auto jumble sales, but as John said, you never know when something will come in useful. We then saw the workshop with several cars clearly part way through a renovation. One had been in the work shop for many years with the owner requesting more work to be done as and when he had some spare cash. There were lathes, drills and lifts, all the equipment making the shop an engineer's paradise.

We moved on to the first display area. The museum contains mainly 1920s cars and has a strong collection of Morris 7 or Bull Nose/Flat Nose Morris vehicles. The centenary year for Morris was 2013 and the oldest car in the display was a 1914 Bull Nose which is still capable of achieving a run of 175 miles over two days. The star of the show in this area was a 1920s Rolls Royce, at the time it was built the engine and chassis were made by Rolls and the body by an independent body works specialist. The interior was sumptuous, at least for the passengers if not the chauffeur, and no two vehicles looked exactly alike. There was also a 'Darling Buds of May' type Landolette and a 1949 Bentley Mk 6 convertible owned by a local GP.

The second display was dedicated to about 20 motor cycles, some with side cars. All the big names were represented such as: Matchless, Norton, Brough (a superior 'a la Lawrence of Arabia'), Triumph, BSA, Douglas, Excelsior, Rudge, Velocette and Sunbeam with a boat shaped sidecar. There was also a small collection of traditional children's pedal cars made by miners in South Wales who had retired through ill health. The walls were surrounded by old fashioned enamel motoring signs.

The third display area took us back to some more amazing vintage cars including: Buick, Alvis 3 litre, Bugatti Tourer with a Corsica body, a 1914 Rolls Royce Silver Ghost with a Hooper body used by King George V to inspect troops in France. It was so low geared that a driver could pull away in top gear, and there was no power steering.

In the early days of car manufacturing there were 60 to 70 factories in Coventry but the Morris was made in Cowley, Oxford. Early cars sold for £100 reduced from the full price on £106, John explained that he had driven many of the cars in the collection including in the London to Brighton rally in which cars must be older than 1905, when the Red Flag Act was abolished, meaning that cars no longer needed to be preceded by a man waving a red flag. Such 'cars' included motorised trikes and quads, examples of which were also on display.

It was a fascinating visit surely enjoyed by all, and brought back many memories of when different makes of car could be easily distinguished, and when certain names provoked thoughts of luxury and speed. John Cooke's added anecdotes revealed some details of the eccentric owners. An amazing evening viewing a wonderful collection only open on rare occasions.

After the visit we adjourned to a local pub for a very enjoyable meal.

SEPTEMBER 2018 MEETING

ORIGINS & OPERATIONS OF THE LEICESTER AND SWANNINGTON RAILWAY

For the first meeting after the summer break and outings we welcomed back Malcolm Riddle to speak on The Origins and Operations of the Leicester & Swannington Railway. Some may not have appreciated that we had such an historic piece of engineering in Leicester especially as there is now practically no trace of it. However it was a pioneer of steam hauled public railway services:

In 1825 the world's first public railway opened, it was George Stephenson's Stockton & Darlington line.

In May 1830 a six mile length of railway opened from Canterbury to Whitstable in Kent, locally called the 'Crab and Winkle line' but it was partly hauled by cables and a winding engine and partly by a locomotive named Invicta.

On 17 July 1832 the Leicester & Swannington line opened and became the third ever steam hauled passenger service in the world.

But why in Leicester? The answer was coal, which was desperately needed to feed the growing number of factories and domestic dwellings for the workers. At the time most coal came from Nottingham and Derby, by canal, at 13/- a ton. Coal from the west Leicestershire coalfield came very slowly by packhorse at 16/- a ton. Cheaper fuel was needed. The term railway had first been used in 1796 but it was not until 1825 that the idea of a steam hauled railway was mooted and in 1828 William Stenson and John Ellis visited the Liverpool & Manchester Railway to ask George Stephenson if he would consider building a railway here. In February 1829 a company was formed with Robert Stephenson (son of George) as engineer and a 16 mile line was proposed at a cost of £75,000. By the day of the formation £58,000 had been raised and George guaranteed the rest. Royal Assent was given in June 1830 and work started that October. There were to be 9 bridges and 16 level crossings, with a branch to Groby quarry, the gauge was to be 4ft 8.5 inches which became the standard in due course. However there was a need for an incline at Bagworth as the locomotives at the time were not powerful enough to pull the full trucks up the steep slope towards Leicester.

The data mark for the whole track was laid first, in the form of a slate doorstep to the offices in the west end of Leicester. There were no platforms or passenger shelters along the whole length of the railway. Apart from the Bagworth incline the other major obstacle was the need for a tunnel at Glenfield. Work started there in 1830 and it opened in 1832. It was just over one mile long and had to be lined with bricks at an extra cost of £7,000 because the route ran through a hill of sand. There were gates at each end to control entry, and no signals until later.

There were nine stops: Glenfield; Ratby; Desford Lane; Merry Lees; (where the world's first woman rail employee worked); the Stag and Castle; Bagworth incline (originally the end of the line); and later to Bardon Hill; Coalville and lastly Whitwick Colliery. After the line was extended from the incline to Coalville, passengers travelling to Leicester had to walk up the slope and rejoin the train again at the top.

The incline was a dangerous place, three trucks were pulled up at a time but on occasions the rope broke and with trucks running free down the slope there were fatalities. The winding engine is now in the railway museum at York.

The engine pulling the train on opening day was 'Comet' which had been brought to Leicester from the North East, where it was made, by sea and canal. The train was made up of one open wagon for the Directors, one second class carriage, and ten coal wagons fitted with wooden seats for passengers. It travelled only to the top of the incline at Bagworth and took six minutes to travel through Glenfield tunnel where the engine's tall chimney was damaged because the track had been raised too high. It was also narrow and smoke could not escape and with open carriages passengers were covered in soot by the time the train emerged, so they stopped for a wash in Rothley Brook! On the return journey four extra wagons of coal and granite were added and when going through the tunnel, passengers sang the national anthem. On arrival in Leicester they adjourned to the Bell Hotel for a dinner.

Although the line was built to carry coal the company soon found that they received a greater income from passengers and therefore improved the carriages to encourage passenger numbers. A ticket was in the form of a brass token and originally was priced at a penny farthing per mile. Coal was sold at 10/- a ton compared with the 13/- for coal from Derby. By comparison a new engine cost £900. The first accident on the line was on 4 May 1833 which resulted in the development of the steam trumpet (whistle).

By 1840 after seven years of growth and success a threat emerged. The Nottingham and Derby mine owners decided to build their own railway to Leicester. By 1846 the Swannington line was in dire financial trouble and was sold to the Midland Railway with John Ellis becoming its chairman. As a result a new line was built to Burton on Trent using part of the Swannington line but avoiding the Glenfield tunnel. This opened in 1849, however trains still used the old line and the tunnel until 1964. A new station was built at King Richards Road and in 1900 a bridge was built to cross the Fosse Road. The last passenger train from West Bridge was on 22 September 1928 and the last train ever on the line was in April 1966.

A final use for the tunnel which was dead straight was when the Marconi Company tested their laser equipment there, but the public can still have a conducted tour on Heritage Open Days. A most fascinating talk, well illustrated and well presented.

OCTOBER 2018 MEETING

EVERY HOME SHOULD HAVE ONE, DOMESTIC HISTORY OF THE 20TH CENTURY

For this meeting Felicity Austin brought her collection of 20th Century domestic gadgets to show us. However, for her first example she did not have the actual object, it was a washing machine!

Many of us recalled our mothers doing the washing, on the traditional day, a Monday, using a dolly tub or perhaps a copper with a dolly stick. Although a form of washing machine had been in use since the mid 1800s in America, the user had to turn the paddles by hand. An electric version was not available there until 1908, and in the UK in the 1920s when they were sold by Hotpoint. Even then, their use definitely depended on which social class the user was in, the washing machine was very much for the well off only, with them not being affordable by the general population until the mid 1950s and by 1960 still only 60% of the population in the UK possessed one.

Prior to 1945 many homes did not have electricity and did their washing using a copper tub heated by a coal fire underneath or by gas. Once washed the clothes were put through a manually operated mangle or wringer before being hung out on a line to dry off (depending on the weather of course). The next development was for these two appliances to be electrified and then came the twin tub in the 1960s despite the fact that they were in existence during the war years but again only for the very rich.

The need for a special form of soap for use in washing machines was realised in the early years of the 20th century and in 1907 a German Company invented Persil, described as a self-acting laundry detergent. At first this was too soapy, adversely affecting the drains, and so a low soap version was introduced. The name was derived from the ingredients: sodium PERborate and sodium SILicate.

The Bendix Company invented a washer dryer in the 1930s and they were made to last and even then could be repaired, but they were not liked, partly because they vibrated so much they were bolted to the floor and people went back to the twin tub version. Automatic washing machines and tumble driers were introduced in the 1990s and of course even they were eventually combined into one machine. As far back as the 1930s a combined 'clothes and dishwasher' had been brought out, but not surprisingly, was soon discontinued.

One of Felicity's first examples was the Gourmet Vegetable Slicer as an example of the type of gadget often found at the much loved annual Home Life Exhibition. We were told 'you could not manage without one' but you had to mind your fingers!

Gramophones were the next bit of nostalgia mentioned, those 'bigger the better' amazing low long cabinets for the turntable and radio were a major piece of furniture in any self-respecting living room in the 1950s. These had a separate section for the storage of records. An earlier, taller, wind up version for the turntable only, but still in a wooden cabinet, by HMV cost £20 in 1914 and a box of spare needles was always included.

The Kodak Brownie box camera, introduced in 1901 for 5/-, was the start of family photos as opposed to studio portrait photography. In 1947 a more modern Brownie 620 was introduced but was comparatively expensive because of trade tariffs. The electric hair dryer had been introduced in the States in 1911 but often overheated, even at 100 watts compared to those today which consume 2000 watts. Early driers were plugged into the light socket!! They came to the UK in 1939 at 20/- each, however production immediately ceased because of the war. We were reminded of Pam Ayres' poem of the 1960s about heated hair rollers. A very expensive 'Rolls' electric shaver was then shown.

More eccentric items such as a Buccaneer button sewing on gadget and Lawrence Staminator physical exercise appliances were displayed, not to mention regular cartoonists, such as Giles, subject of the door to door salesman trying to persuade housewives to buy vacuum cleaners and such like.

The first electric iron came out in 1911 in America again very expensive with a steam iron being introduced in 1953. Irons could be purchased to run on Calor gas and town gas when a user had to ignite the gas being fed into the base of the iron. English Electric fridges came out in the 1950s. We were then led in some community singing with a rendering of 'How Much is that Doggy in the Window' as an example of the radio (previously called, of course, 'the wireless' for obvious reasons).

Turning away from electricity, the popular ‘Tupperware’ brought back memories of parties for the women present. It was invented in America by a Mr Earl Tupper, it arrived in the UK in 1953 and finally went out of production in 2003. Melamine table ware (which caused a decline in china crockery sales) and formica surface material arrived in the 1950s. We then heard mention of stainless steel; thermos flasks; ball point pens; electric bed warmers; under and over blankets and after a quick run through the history of TV and interlude pictures we were reminded of Pyrex ware, 1932; Gillette razors, 1950s; Parker pens, 1960s; the cine camera, 1920s; Ercol chairs, 1950s and such strange things as a pineapple corer; a press only big enough for trouser seams and a mystery object which one member (who shall remain nameless!) suggested was a calf castrator. This member’s final contribution was to mention the invention with a local connection, White Soap by Henry Davis Pochin in the mid 1800s.

A pleasant evening walk down memory lane. Note: all money values expressed in pre-decimal currency.

All reports by Colin Towell

WIGSTON CIVIC SOCIETY – 40 YEARS OF LOCAL ACTION

This year Wigston Civic Society is celebrating the 40th anniversary of its foundation in 1978. At that time Bell Street was a two way street being the main A50 road southwards from Leicester to Northampton and also leading to the road to Oadby. There was a junior ‘Board’ school on a site which developers wanted to purchase to demolish and use the site for shops. The origins of the Society are in an action group formed to save the school. This battle was lost and Sainsburys was built on the site. But the Society has continued as a watch dog on what is being proposed for Wigston, South Wigston and Kilby Bridge with particular emphasis on planning applications in the six Conservation Areas within these settlements.

Furthermore, the Society has been working to make the area a better place in which to live, work and shop by carrying out a number of projects, some of which have been worked on jointly with GWHS. These include: creation of a garden at the corner of Station Road and Launceston Road; erecting a number of Blue Plaques to local people of prominence; creating the 10 mile Two Steeples circular walk as a millennium project; erecting the plaque to commemorate the link between the diamond jubilees of Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth II on Bell Street, organising the ‘Wigston Remembers’ concert and replacing a lost plaque to commemorate the reopening of South Wigston Station in 1976, and most recently this year, erecting an information board and plaque as a reminder of the history of the site of the new housing scheme on Moat Street.

The Chairman of Greater Wigston Historical Society, in sending his congratulations said: “From little acorns grow big oaks, and this is what has happened over the last 40 years. Your Society does not stand idly by and although some battles have been lost there has been tremendous good that has emanated from this small but effective Society.

We have enjoyed a very close relationship over the years and many joint projects have been implemented and brought to fruition. Long may this continue. Good luck for the future.”

If you would like to know more or be a part of this interesting group go to:

www.wigstoncivicsociety.org.uk

NEW CALENDAR FOR 2019

The society has produced a unique calendar for 2019 containing 12 A4 full sized historical photographs of Wigston Magna, South Wigston and Kilby Bridge. Each calendar page is also A4 with room to write your appointments etc.

This is a limited print run as it is the first time we have produced a calendar, so don't delay and miss the opportunity to obtain one – it makes an excellent Christmas present! Only £5 each, including a card backed envelope enabling you to post one to a friend or relative. They will be on sale at the November and December meetings of the GWHS at Age UK in Paddock Street, Wigston subject to availability.

They are also available from Ann and Peter Cousins. Tel: 0116 2884638

Or e-mail: webmaster@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

Or they are also now available by post on the website :

www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk/Wigston_Calendar.html

THE GWHS WEBSITE www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

5 October 2018 saw the first anniversary of the launching of the updated GWHS website which I was asked to take over and run from Mike Forryan. In that 12 months the site has had a steady stream of visitors, averaging over 100 hits per week. I suggested, in submitting this article, to explain some of the facilities of the site to those who do not use it to its full potential.

The main home page gives a summary of the foundation of the society, along with many links to items of interest, and notes about the history of Wigston.

There is a link to the “Wigston - Remembering the Past” Facebook page, a closed members only page started by Mike Forryan thinking we may get several members interested in the area. The current membership is over 3,000! Worldwide.

On the home page there is a menu down the left-hand side of the site, which I will work my way down during this explanation.

I hope this guide is of use to you, but if you have any queries or difficulty in using or accessing the sites, links and facilities, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Peter Cousins

E-Mail: webmaster@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

HOME PAGE - this will take you back to the home page whatever page you are on.

MEMBERSHIP - full details of subscription rates for joining the Society. You can also download a membership application form in either Word or Adobe .pdf formats.

MEETINGS - contains details of the Society's monthly meetings held at AGE UK in Wigston, and the outings during the summer months.

GALLERY - this page contains, in slide shows, pictures of some of our past outings.

HELP US - from time to time we get queries about Wigston, and also, we are striving to update our own archives of information and photographs.

IDENTIFY PHOTOS - a lot of the photographs of people and places in and around Wigston in our archive are unnamed. We would very much like your help to discover new information on them.

MEMBERS AREA - contains access to files in the GWHS archive - articles, transactions, and an index of previous GWHS meetings. These files are only accessible to members who have been issued with a user name and a password. If you do not have a user name and password for access, send an email to me at webmaster@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk and I will issue them to you.

DOCUMENTS - in this area will be supplied to non-members who apply using the on-line request form, stating what use they will be put to.

PHOTO ARCHIVE - now contains over 8,000 historical photographs of the Wigstons and Kilby Bridge. Copies can be requested by anyone using the on-line request form and detailing the reason for the request.

SOUND ARCHIVE - contains audio files of various interviews and radio shows which the Society has taken part in over the years.

STREET NAMES INDEX - is the recent project undertaken to pull together information from multiple sources with the objective of recording the names of the Wigston Streets and the origin of their names.

RESEARCH PROJECTS - The Society is involved in a number of research projects each dealing with a specific subject. We need to collect general information for each project and would like your help in adding to the history of the Wigston area. Current projects are detailed on this page.

BOOKS - details the many books about Wigston have been produced over the years. Some can be found in the Wigston Library on Bull Head Street, Wigston Magna. Others may be held in the GWHS archive. If you are interested in any of them, please contact: chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk

BULLETINS - this area contains the GWHS bulletins that have been produced since 1 November 1980. They are all downloadable in Adobe .pdf format. You will need Adobe Reader software on your computer/tablet to read them.

If you do not have the software, you can download a free copy from <https://get.adobe.com/uk/reader/>

LOCAL LINKS - gives you access to sites of local history and other useful historical sites.

OUTINGS AND TALKS - this link gives you details of any forthcoming outings and trips and talks arranged by the GWHS or other historical groups.

WIGSTON CIVIC SOCIETY - gives you details of your local Civic Society and a link to their website.

CONTACT US - gives you the email contact list for the Society Officers and Committee. You can find telephone numbers for the Committee on your yearly programme guide issued with your November Bulletin.

SITE SEARCH - enables you to search the whole website for a name etc. Results will give you links to the place in the website where the item you are searching for occurs.

BUSINESS INDEX - Since 1800 there must have been many hundreds of Wigston businesses that have come and gone for various reasons. We have included all of the businesses that we know about from our pictures and archives - but if you have any more information please send it to us to include in the database. There is a response form on the page for you to submit new information.

VISIONS OF WIGSTON - contains four maps of Wigston with interactive “pop-up” historical photographs. Clicking on one of the small blue house icons will display historical pictures of that particular place or building.

PREMIER DRUM - shows the sad demise and demolition of this Wigston iconic building, to be replaced by Lidl and Wickes stores. It also includes a video of the final demolition.

FREE BOOKS - this area contains free downloadable historical books on Wigston and South Wigston written by local author Tony Danvers. Each book can be viewed on-line or saved as an Adobe .pdf file.

You will need Adobe Reader software on your computer/tablet to read them. If you do not have the software, you can download a free copy from <https://get.adobe.com/uk/reader/>

FACEBOOK - this link takes you to the “Wigston Remembering the Past” Facebook page, a “closed” page set up by Mike Forryan for anyone interested in Wigston history. As at 1 October 2018 the page has over 3,000 members contributing memories and photographs, which will be added to the GWHS archive.

LETTERBOX - has copies of the Oadby and Wigston Council’s quarterly Letterbox newsletters from the Spring 2016 edition. Each copy can be viewed on-line or saved as an Adobe .pdf file.

You will need Adobe Reader software on your computer/tablet to read them. If you do not have the software, you can download a free copy from <https://get.adobe.com/uk/reader/>

CENTENARY OF THE END OF WWI

To mark this important anniversary Duncan Lucas is putting on an exhibition of memorabilia at the United Reformed Church, Long Street, Wigston. Opening hours are Saturday 10th November 10.30a.m. to 5.00p.m. with refreshments served all day, and soup lunches from 12.00 noon. On Sunday 11th November 12.00 noon to 4.00p.m. with refreshments. There will also be a concert on the Saturday evening starting at 7.00p.m. when you can sing along with the Magna Music Band and others, again with refreshments. Entrance is free but there will be a charge for the refreshments.

WIGGY'S CHILD 1926-1939

(Part four of Doreen Boulter's childhood memories)

SAT'DAY PENNY

Come Shrove Tuesday or Pancake Day as it was known to us, we would play shuttlecock and battledore and whip and top. I couldn't get on with the "carrot tops", they looked like a bulky carrot in either a sage green or cerise colour, and no way could I get mine to spin. I was well away with the mushroom shaped tops however; in plain wood, with blue and red rings painted on the top, these were the "flyers". Mine flew alright, straight through Mrs. Casswell's front bay window!

My whip and top was confiscated, Mrs. Casswell had to be faced, and Father said I would have to pay towards the cost of a new window out of my pocket money. As my pocket money consisted wholly of a weekly Sat'day penny, it would take me years before I finished paying for that window I thought gloomily.

To qualify for my Sat'day penny I had errands and "jobs" to undertake throughout the week. These were many and varied. Errands to take the accumulator to be re-charged or we couldn't listen to the wireless. Father's stiff white collars to be delivered and collected from the laundry each week. Frequent visits to 'Luds' corner shop for a new gas mantle. Those mantles were so fragile, sometimes Father used words under his breath in some kind of foreign language when he accidentally knocked the new mantle he was fitting, and he had to wait while I fetched a replacement from the shop. Then the whole procedure had to gone through again.

Dusting the front room was my Sunday morning job before I went to Sunday School. I would have to remove every vase, ornament and photograph from the dresser and over mantle. Father's pride and joy, a stuffed fish in a glass case stood on top of the gas meter cupboard flanked by two tall vases filled with artificial flowers. The table in the window held a large aspidistra, and periodically the leaves were spread with a film of olive oil "to keep them pliant and soft" explained Mother. The day I used castor oil in error caused consternation. Nevertheless, it certainly got that plant moving! I also had to polish the brass fender and fire irons; as our front room was used only on Sundays, Christmas and Funerals, it seemed to be a lot of work just to be able to sit there on Sunday afternoons, reading my religious tract brought home from Sunday School.

I would help Father on his allotment; loading up the old 'barrer' with vegetables, we would return home, the iron wheels rattling along. The dog would sit in the 'barrer' all the way home, guarding

the produce. No-one was taking liberties with the cabbages while he was around. “That dog” said Father “is as wet as a two mile pond.” – Not so wet, he was riding, we were walking!

Indeed, my Sat’day Penny was well earned. There was no further remuneration, birthday money or donations from relatives had to go straight into the Co-op Penny Bank. “Birthday money was not to be used for frivolities.” said Mother. Fat chance, I didn’t know of any shop that sold these “frivolities” anyway.

EASTER TIDE

The Easter holidays were almost upon us. “There is a Green Hill Far Away” was our morning hymn before we broke up for our holidays. Alfred was sent to the Headmaster for dipping Margaret’s sister’s pigtails into the inkwell during ‘Silent Reading’. Not a very auspicious start to the holiday. In the school yard we were playing a breathless game of ‘tick’. “Tick, you’re on.” yelled Mary thumping me on the shoulder. We all tore round the yard. “Scroggs!” shouted Marion holding up both hands with index fingers and fore fingers crossed. “Scroggies!”

“What’s up now?” I queried. “I’ve got summat in me eye,” said Marion. Producing my hanky, I poked away. “Pull your eyelid down on your cheek,” instructed Mary. We were ringed by interested spectators. “My brother got summat in his eye and had to go down the Infirmary and they took his eye out,” said one comforter. We took Marion into teacher who magically removed the “foreign body” from her eye. Accompanied by a watery eyed Marion we returned to the school yard.

“Ave you had your ‘ot Cross Bung yet?” asked Joyce. Marion was of the opinion that Joyce had got “polypussies” in her nose, ‘cos she always spoke ‘bunged up’. “We’ve got to wait till Sat’day,” said Mary. “I’m having a big Easter egg on Sunday, my Uncle’s bringing it from Macclesfield,” announced Betty. I considered myself lucky to receive a small Easter egg in a mug or an egg cup. The chocolate egg was broken up and Mother doled out a piece daily. I would smooth out the silver paper covering my egg with the back of a spoon until it resembled a piece of satin, and placed it between the pages of a book. Coloured, patterned silver paper was much sought after, and we often swapped pieces with friends, along with the ‘silk’ fag cards; greatly prized treasures were these items, they didn’t come our way very often.

Eastertide, we always used the Best China Tea Service. This was lavishly decorated with violets. Mother’s Easter Cake was the same as her Feast Cake and Christmas Cake. She didn’t believe in marzipan and icing her fruit cakes. “Messing about with good food,” she always maintained. So we had burnt currants on the top instead! I would surreptitiously pick off the little charcoal currants and hide them in my hanky to be disposed of at the first opportunity.

CULINARY DELIGHTS

It was plain wholesome cooking in our household. Mother believed in laying down good solid foundations, especially during the winter months. Her suet puddings, spotted Dick, Jam Roly Poly and Treacle Roll, were each wrapped in a cloth, tied tightly with string and boiled in the big black saucepan on the stove. When she lifted them out they looked like miniature bolsters as they thudded, steaming on the plate! These puddings would keep you grounded for days!

Stewed Pigs Trotters, Tripe and Onions, Pea Soup (you could stand a fork up in her pea soup), and Rabbit Stew with Dumplings, cooked in the brown earthenware stew pot, were all guaranteed to rivet your innards and keep the winter chills at bay.

The nearest thing we had to what Mother regarded as “Fancy Stuff” was a table jelly, or a tin of pears, eaten with the obligatory slice of bread and butter, as a special treat at Christmas, Birthdays, and Feast Sunday. Sometimes, she would scoop a tablespoon lightly across the top of the milk for a “cream topping”. As this “took the goodness out of the milk” it was a rare concession!

Fruit pies and tarts, from rhubarb through to blackberry and apple were baked without sweetening and I ate these stoically with one eye closed, they were so sour! Custard was not a success in our house, it either appeared thick and burnt, or thin and powdery. I didn’t question this - it was a fact of life!

Biscuits were considered a luxury, there were two sorts; Osborne and Arrowroot, bought in strict rotation and stored in the fancy china biscuit barrel with the daffodils on. Not being airtight, they invariably went soft, nevertheless, no more biscuits were purchased until the last soft, stale, biscuit disappeared. Usually inside the dog, or sneaked out for the “Spuggies”.

As a keen gardener, Sparrows and those “Blasted Starnals” were the bane of Father’s life. It was quite some time before I discovered “Blasted Starnals” were not a different species to the Starlings in my bird book!

OUTDOOR PURSUITS

Father’s allotment was situated right along Newton Lane. The gate leading to the allotments was near the wooden bungalows, just before the road dips towards the little copse at the bottom, where yellow “may-blobs” were to be found.

The garden path was bordered on both sides with “Ladies Needlework” Father’s name for “London Pride.” Those delicate pale pink flowers with the minute yellow spots and tiny cerise markings on the petals, which looked like embroidery stitches hence “Ladies Needlework.” In June, the massed flowers resembled a delicate lace border.

Many happy hours were spent helping Father on his allotment. His preference for “Little Marvel” and “Onward” peas remain engraved in my memory. Instructed by Father, I learned my gardening the practical way. I never saw him read a gardening book, but we never lacked for vegetables. Apart from vegetables, Father grew Sweet Peas in every hue, and I picked many a bouquet of these sweet smelling flowers and sprays of Gypsophila to take home. Mother was very fond of “Gypsyfilly” with her Sweet Peas. “It sets them off a treat in the “vorse” she declared.

Mother used either a “vorse, vase or varse” for her floral arrangements, depending on the season. Christmas “Chrysant’s” were displayed in a “varse” whereas Spring Flowers filled a “vase.” Questioned on this phenomenon, Mother said it all depended on the size, and hadn’t I got anything better to do than stand about asking questions, when she was “up to her eyes” making pastry turnovers. I withdrew, before The Devil found something to do with my idle hands!

Many an afternoon I spent with Aunt Clara going a’sticking. Taking a big basket and some string, we would gather sticks and branches from underneath the trees and tie them in bundles. They made excellent kindling, and the small sticks were ideal for the copper fire. Sometimes I would find a shiny brown “Cheggy” in the grass. Gleefully I took it home, made a hole through, and threaded string with a good knot in the end through my prize, ready for a game of “conkers”.

Father would take me across the fields mushrooming. Wild mushrooms were plentiful in the fields, and we knew all the right places to go. Those mushrooms, accompanied by rashers of bacon from Levi Sampson's shop at the bottom of Newton Lane, and a thick slice of crusty bread from Ross's bakery "made a breakfast fit for a King" said Father.

We went blackberrying up the Meres, filling our baskets with black fruit jewels. Why are the biggest and bestest always at the top of the hedge? Coming home with stained fingers and purple mouths, arms and legs scratched up. A painful session with the iodine followed.

Our medicine box contained five essentials.

Camphorated Oil, Caster Oil, Wintergreen, Vaseline and Iodine. These were supposed to take care of all our ailments.

Camphorated Oil was the cure for chests and snuffles.

Castor Oil relieved each and every one!

Wintergreen eased the "Screws" and "Rheumatics".

Vaseline took care of sore parts.

Iodine covered the rest!

Anything beyond that meant a visit to the Doctor.

JOHN ELLIS MP (1789-1862)

Following on from Bulletin 111, this is a look at the quite remarkable life of John Ellis. His family were originally farmers from South Yorkshire. They were members of the Society of Friends (Quakers), a religion which had spread rapidly since George Fox, a Leicestershire Puritan from Fenny Drayton, had started the movement c.1650. John's grandfather James decided in about 1782, soon after the death of his wife Anne nee Shipley, to move to Leicestershire with just one of his children, Joseph. The reason might have been to be near other relatives, the Shipley's from his late wife's family and the Burgesses, both families being also of the Quaker faith.

Father and son leased Sharman's Lodge, a farm in Leicester Frith near Groby Road where the General Hospital now stands. On 13th September 1788 Joseph married his cousin Rebecca Burgess the daughter of John Burgess of Wigston, a farmer and his wife Rebecca. They were "married in a publick assembly of people called Quakers at Wigston", perhaps in the Quaker Cottage which once stood on the west side of Bull Head Street, about opposite Spowtewell Cottage. There is a picture of it in the 2019 calendar mentioned elsewhere in this bulletin. Joseph and Rebecca lived and farmed at Sharman's Lodge where their six children were born. As the children grew up an adjoining farm was also leased at Beaumont Leys. This consisted of an old manor house and about 370 acres of land. Their eldest son John, the subject of this piece, was by then 18 years old and took over the management of this farm.

John married Martha Shipley daughter of John Shipley of Uttoxeter in 1816, but she tragically died the following year soon after the birth of their first child Edward Shipley Ellis, who survived. John married again in 1820 to Priscilla Evans and the couple went on to have three sons and seven daughters all born at Beaumont Leys. During this time John started his business career with his brother Joseph, and they appear for the first time in the 1827 Leicester trade directory as corn

dealers and maltsters in St. Nicholas Street, later moving to Sanvey Gate. He still however continued to live at Beaumont Leys and was described as a grazier. In October 1828 he was approached by William Stenson who asked for his assistance in promoting a railway to bring coal into Leicester from the North West Leicestershire collieries including Stenson's recently opened mine at Whitwick. This would help undercut the high price of coal in Leicester that currently arrived by canal at West Bridge wharf mainly from Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. There was much talk about these revolutionary railways at this time due to the opening in 1825 of the Stockton & Darlington line and the current building of the Liverpool & Manchester one.

To check the viability of the proposed Leicester Line, Ellis agreed with Stenson to approach George Stephenson who had engineered the first two railways. He already knew Stephenson well through another Quaker, James Cropper, a shipping merchant who was co-promoter of the Liverpool & Manchester Line, and also uncle to John's second wife Priscilla. George Stephenson was supportive and agreed with the idea of what was to be known as the Leicester & Swannington Line. He helped raise the finances but was too committed elsewhere, so could only act as consultant and arranged for his son Robert to be the engineer. Both George and Robert were occasional guests of John's at Beaumont Leys as was James Cropper. George and Robert also opened Snibston Colliery during their time working on the railway and George bought a house in the area, Alton Grange near the present Coalville. The line was opened amid huge celebrations on 17th July 1832, travelling only to Bagworth, as the rest was not completely finished. As well as the railway John also became a share holder in Snibston and Whitwick Collieries.

In addition to all this John was elected to the Leicester Town Council in 1837 and made an Alderman in 1838. The same year as well as being a large shareholder in the Midland Counties Railway he worked for it assessing compensation for farmers affected by the line's construction. He also served as a director of a number of other railways and in 1849 was promoted chairman of the Midland Railway, resigning in 1858. He was presented with a 1,000 guinea testimonial comprising a huge service of silverware and a full length portrait of himself standing by the railway in front of Glenfield Tunnel. At this time he became a county magistrate and was made a director of Pares' Leicestershire Banking Co., was Chairman of the Leicester Savings Bank and a benefactor and governor of the Leicester Infirmary.

He had given up farming in 1846 following a disagreement with a new landlord and moved to a new house in Belgrave near Leicester which subsequently became known as Belgrave Hall. Here there was much more poverty than in the country and the family were very charitable to the local villagers and townspeople of Leicester. John providing a local schoolroom during his first year in Belgrave. His interest in politics grew and he was chosen as Liberal Member of Parliament for Leicester in 1848. Like many Quakers he was an outspoken champion of the Anti-Slavery Movement. In the House he was described as a blunt but sincere and friendly 'character'. His coal and lime business was mainly run by his three sons while he was occupied elsewhere. In 1851 he purchased land in Charnwood Forest containing slate quarries. These was used mainly for roofing. His diverse business interests also included worsted spinning in partnership with John Whitmore. This was a growing industry in Leicester which was becoming more automated to supply sufficient yarn for the hundreds of stocking frames in the area. In 1849 a six storey factory was built on the south side of West Bridge Street. It was at the time the largest factory in Leicester with a 165ft. chimney. It was eventually amalgamated with J & J Baldwin (later Patons & Baldwins). The building was later Grade II listed, and other occupiers have been HTH Peck and more recently the Land Registry.

John died on 26th October 1862 at Belgrave and was buried at Welford Road Cemetery beneath a simple Quaker headstone. Near him was placed his wife Priscilla who survived him by ten years.

Did John ever come to Wigston? Yes, he had strong ties to the village.

(1) John's parents, Joseph Ellis and Rebecca nee Burgess were married in Wigston, and Rebecca was brought up there before moving to Sharman's Lodge following her marriage.

(2) John's eldest son Edward Shipley Ellis married Emma Burgess in 1838. Emma was a daughter of John and Ann Burgess, farmers, who lived at The Grange from about 1810 (probably when it was built). Emma was a sister of Thomas Burgess who was to live at The Grange for the rest of his life. Edward and Emma lived and raised their family in a large house in The Newarke which was on the site of the present Hawthorn Building, part of De Montfort University.

(3) John's nephew James Ellis, son of his brother Joseph, married Louisa Burgess in 1855. Louisa was a daughter of the above Thomas Burgess and was also brought up at The Grange. James and Louisa lived and raised their family in Kirby Muxloe later moving to a big house named The Gynsills in Glenfield.

No doubt one particular visit to South Wigston is one he would always remember for all the wrong reasons. The Leicester Journal issue 19/11/1852 reported that on the Friday night during exceptionally heavy rain great damage was caused to the huge viaduct, 80 feet high in places, which carried the Midland Railway and was situated between the Wigston and Countesthorpe stations. It also crossed the Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Union Canal and a tributary of the River Soar (the Sence). During the night a pier of the viaduct had fallen carrying with it two arches and a portion of the upline rails. The cause was the weight of water rushing down the valley. If it were not for the presence of mind of Mr. Perkins the local miller, who woke a neighbour to help him race to nearby rail stations and raise the alarm, there would almost certainly have been some terrible accidents.

By the following day five more piers, at the Countesthorpe end, had fallen together with six arches, carrying with them both lines of rails, for a length of approximately 50 yards. "This extensive mass of brickwork, earth, timber and iron, blocked up the stream, and caused the inundation of the meadows above to be more extensive."

"The ruins of the viaduct were visited by Mr. Ellis, chairman of the Company, Mr. Hutchinson, a director and numerous officers of the Company, but it was impossible for anything to be done to restore a speedy communication between the sound portions of the line. There was an awful chasm of some 150 feet in width through which a powerful stream of water was rushing over the ruins and falling like a cataract on the land beneath."

However by Monday relays of men were already employed by night and day removing the remains of the fallen portions, blasting with gunpowder large blocks of brickwork, clearing bricks and earth and constructing a wooden footpath across the valley.

Tricia Berry

Sources: Quaker births, marriages & deaths on www.ancestry.co.uk

Acknowledgement to Andrew Moore for his fascinating book - Ellis of Leicester, a Quaker Family's Vocation.

