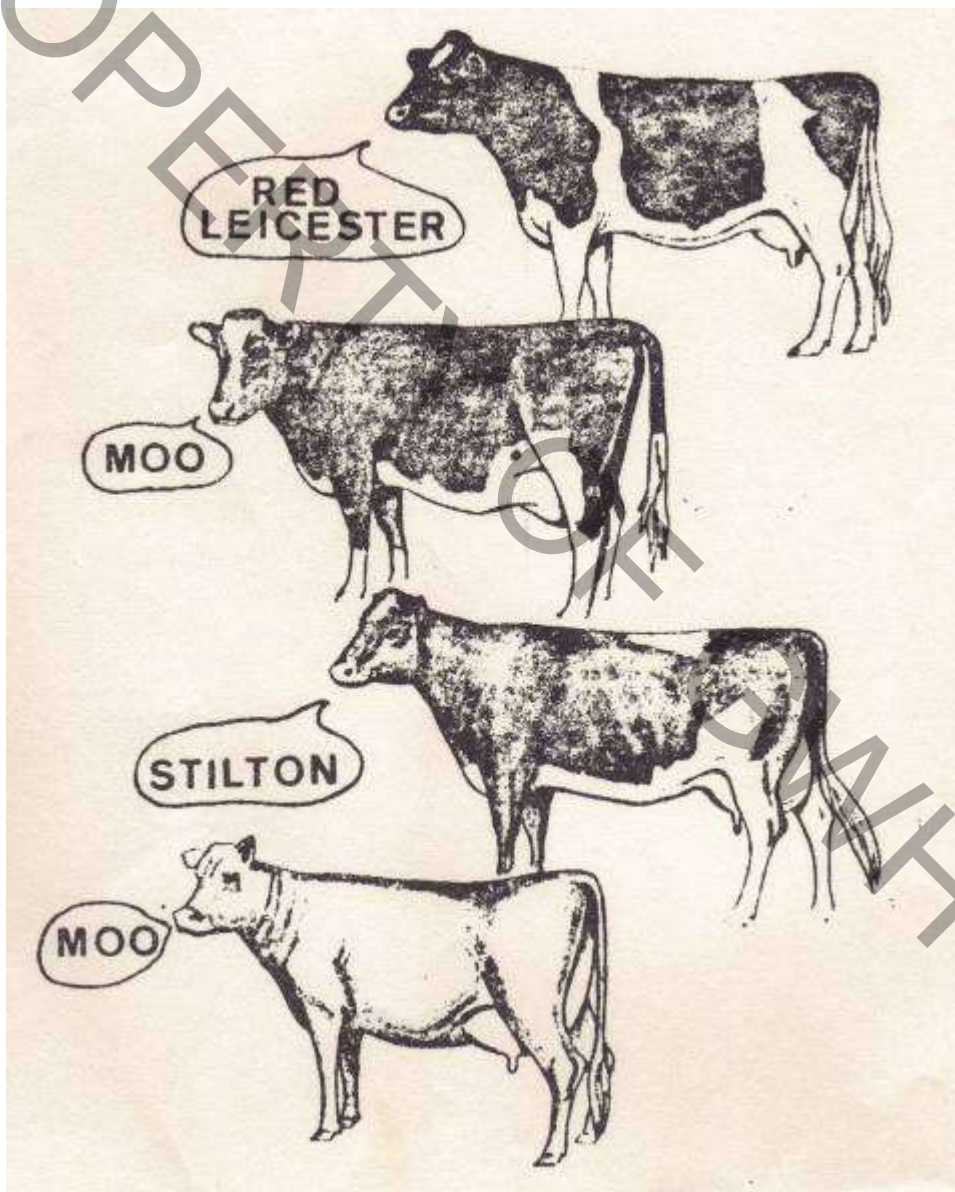




Greater Wigston Historical Society
White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna Leicestershire

Bulletin 21

JUNE '88



NOTICES ... NOTICES ... NOTICES ... NOTICES ... NOTICES

Programme

Wednesday June 15th 1988

Trip Out To PECKLETON MUSEUM

Leave Liberal Club Car Park at 7 pm

Transport by Private Cars. If you need a lift it will be arranged on the night.

*** NO JULY MEETING HOLIDAY MONTH

Wednesday August 17th 1988

Combined Meeting with the Civic Society

MEETING OUTSIDE BLABY ROAD METHODIST CHURCH SOUTH WIGSTON

At 7.30pm for a walkabout to discover South Wigston. Supper after the walk, so if you have not given your name to Edna Taylor. Please do so as soon as possible. Her address is 3 Wimborne Close Little Hill Wigston.

Wednesday September 21st 1988

Making Oral Archives

Liberal Club Wigston at 7.30pm

The speaker will be from the Oral History Society.

This might give us the encouragement we need to start our own Oral History Library

Some people from this Society have not yet joined the Friends of Wigston Framework Knitting Society!!!

Here is the most direct way that you can help. Single subscriptions for the year is £5.

Family is £8 and OAP £3

An application form is enclosed in this bulletin. If you are already a member please pass the form onto a friend. Thank You

The Bulletin is published three times per year. 1st February, June and October.

Articles etc. to the Editor three clear weeks before please.

Editor Ian Varey 2 Paget Court Paget Street Kibworth Leicestershire LE8 0HW

February Meeting

On Wednesday 17th February the AGM was held at the Wigston Framework Knitting Museum. It was a tight squeeze but 28 members filled the front sitting room.

The formal part of the business was over very quickly. Last years minutes were read, agreed and signed. The chairman Ian Varey gave a short review of the year and noted

that the Society was in good shape, presenting an interesting and varied programme. He was also pleased to note that the membership was up on last year.

The treasurer recommended that the subscription should stay the same for the next year i.e. £3 and £2 for OAP's and those under 18 years. Subscriptions are now due for the year 1988.

Ian Varey then initiated some discussion about the overlap of Historical Society, Civic Society and the newly formed Friends of the Wigston FWK Museum. Several people are heavily committed to two or all three of these organisations and so is it appropriate to consider amalgamation? After a short discussion the majoritory of people expressed a wish to maintain the autonomy of the GWHS and this was agreed.

There then followed the election of Officers. Ian Varey as he indicated last year, stood down as Chairman. Edna Taylor was elected Chairman. Bob Wignall was elected as Vice Chairman. Doris Chandler was returned as Secretary, Brian Bilson as Treasurer and Membership Secretary and Ian Varey as Bulletin Editor.

Edna Taylor thanked Ian Varey on behalf of the Society for all his hard work during his years as Chairman.

At the close of the formal business, Ian Varey gave a short slide show and talk about Wigston FWK Museum to bring everyone upto date.

The Meeting close at 9:40pm.

March Meeting

This was a joint meeting of the GWHS and the Civic Society in the Community Lounge of Guthlaxton Community College.

About 50 people were present. Members of the Civic Society had prepared a Wigston Quiz. The room was divided into two teams, irrespective of the Society that they belonged to.

There were some very searching questions on a variety of local subjects. The evening ended with a cup of coffee and a chance for members to meet and talk with each other. Our thanks to the Civic Society for an enjoyable evening.

GEORGIAN FARMHOUSE – Now Known as the ‘CHESTNUTS’ Spa Lane

The original house is probably very early 18th Century. The windows have mainly casement openings and slightly curved tops to the frames which are typical of the period. The house comprises cellar below ground, a ground floor, a split level upper floor and an attic above. The construction is of brick chiefly laid in the ‘Flemish Bond’ style, with a Swithland Slate Roof.

The internal ground floors are of lath and plaster with rush infilling. A glance at the outside shows that many alterations have been made over the years. A Square of farm

buildings once surrounded the farm yard and where Fisher's Garage now stands there was a walled stack-yard which was reached by passing through the large barn.

The East part of the house seems to have been added in 1740. This date and the initials

I
R K

Can be seen carved into a stone and set into the brickwork near the street entrance on the West wall. This newer part of the building is of similar construction to the old but it is only on two floors and the ceilings are much higher. The windows of the newer part are of the sash type and the internal floors are of wooden boards. This reflects the change of style and is typical of the mid 18th century. Interesting hinged wooden shutters are fitted to the inside of the downstairs bay windows. There is an open well staircase which rises with a graceful sweep to the landing above.

Old documents refer to some cottages being pulled down and 'thrown into the garden' at about this time. There were 4 known wells in the garden and orchard area. The water was reputed to be of high quality, hence the name Spa Lane. A century later a Ginger Beer producing company was established farther up the hill to take advantage of the pure water.

The house and farm building were once part of a sizeable estate of approximately 200 acres. It was situated in the old medieval field of Mucklow and extended as far as the Meres, the old Parish boundary between Newton Harcourt and Wigston.

Documentation begins in 1745 when one Robert Iliff of Leicester, Hosier, left a will in favour of his son George. He inherited Bailey Place and three and a half yardlands (112 acres) plus yard, orchard and homestead and Mucklow Close bought from John Pawley. To his daughter Mary, he left land bought from Thomas Noon, William Langton, F Holmes, Richard and Hannah Brewin, Ann Richards, Abraham Hack, James Hurst, Mary and Ann Brewin, William Carr, John Pawley (bricklayer) and John Hackett. To his second daughter, Hannah, he left land at Glenfield and £250 'to make her share equal'.

In 1763 Thomas Wightman of Castel View near Leicester, Woolstapler, and Mary Wightman his wife. (Robert Iliffe's daughter) are the owners of the farm on Spa Land.

At the Enclosure in 1766 the estate created by his father in law passes to Thomas Weightman almost unchanged. The various plots of land had such names as Cap Headland Close, Moles Pen, Furlong Close, New Stye Close and Blackwellsich Close.

On the 18th April 1789 the Weightman's daughter Maria Hannah married Samuel Oliver son of Peter Oliver of Birstall. Maria died childless in 1792 and Samuel later married Elizabeth Lows daughter of Robert Lows of Oxton, Notts. A Marble plaque in All Saint's Church records the burial of Samuel Oliver and commemorates also his wife and seven children. Only the second daughter, Anne, survived to continue the line. I wonder what tragedy caused those deaths at Tours in France.

On the 18th November 1817 the estate was part of the settlement of Anne Oliver on the occasion of her marriage to Dr. William Vassall of Cheltenham. Mr Isle Grant and Mr Samuel Oliver guarantee that Anne's fortune 'be £5000 at least'. This Marriage produced Robert Lowe Grant Vassall and a settlement dated 7th April 1856 passed the estate to him upon his marriage to Matilda Paulina Phillips from Clifton, near Bristol.

The executives of R L G Vassall sold the estate in two separate parts to Ernest Broughton in 1914 and 1917. In due course it passed to his son Ernest Alfred Broughton. In 1914 part of the land was sold and the house divided.

The Upper Farm and part of the house known as 7 Spa Lane was sold to Messrs G T and G E Gardner in 1953. The remaining part known as 9 Spa Lane, The Chestnuts with the garden and orchard was sold to J H Hallam and Sons Ltd., in 1972 who built the houses known as Shearsby Close. The actual house and a much smaller garden was then re-sold.

It is interesting to note that for 172 years the property remained in the hands of the same family, though for the most part, if not all of that time they did not live in it. It was let to a succession of tenants. Interesting among these are, Abraham Hack at the time of the Enclosure, Charles Badderley in 1879, (son perhaps of Charles Holland Badderley of Wigston Hall?), Dr C D Briggs in 1895, Albert G Shipp in 1911 and Arthur Lee, Managing Director of Two Steeples Ltd in 1936. During the Second World War the down stairs living room at No. 7 was used as an APR Centre.

By P. M. H. Berry

N B

A shortened version of this article will be used in a town trail that we are hoping to produce. Can you do a few lines about an interesting feature in Wigston? Check with Edna Taylor on Leics 812891 before you start to ensure no one else is working on our choice!!!

CHEESE MAKING IN LEICESTERSHIRE

Leicestershire is rather unique in cheese making as it is the only English county which has two cheeses of national and international fame.

In the summer months when the grass was lush, many a farmer and even a villager with his cow on the common, was faced with the problem of what to do with the surplus milk. The solution was either to produce butter or cheese. Butter might keep a few days longer than milk, depending on the weather, but cheese, hard pressed would keep for many months and actually improve with keeping. The by-products from processes, whey and butter milk, were valued food sources particularly for pig rearing. Indeed in the Vale of Belvoir the pork pies are as famous as the Stilton.

It was customary for even small farms to produce more cheese than could be consumed by the family and farm workers. The surplus was sold at fairs and markets

and was a valued source of income. The dairy work was traditionally in the hands of the women folk. The farmer's wife and daughters or dairymaids made the cheese and butter. Different regions of Britain made different cheeses. In Leicestershire it was of course, Red Leicester and the 'King of cheeses' Stilton. Both are in the tradition of hard, strong flavoured, long keeping cheeses for which England has long been famous.

Our county, particularly from the 18th century Enclosures has been noted for its fine pasture. At this time there were two main breeds of cattle, shorthorn and longhorn, The former more numerous in the East of the County where stilton was made and the latter in the West noted for Red Leicester. Shorthorns produced some 700 gallons of milk in a year, longhorns somewhat less. A little more than a gallon ilk is needed to produce a pound of cheese. The 1809 Agricultural Report on the County goes on to state that the average cow produced 4 hundred weight of cheese a year that the average size of the herd in the Hinckley area was 12 to 15 cows (remembering milking was by hand) and that in excess of 1500 tons of cheese were exported from Leicestershire each year. The Navy was one of the chief buyers at £60 a ton.

Could Nelson have eaten Red Leicester on the Victory before the Battle of Trafalgar?

Cheese making is both an art and a craft. Even when expert cheese makers are about their work, there is an element of uncertainty. Temperature is important and judging the amount of Rennet is vital. If the state of the Curds is misjudged the Rennet does not work properly and the cheese will collapse when it is removed from the mould. Milk is a fickle commodity and utensils scrupulously clean. Many a farmer's wife or dairy maid with a collapsed cheese in front of them had to set to and scrub down all the woodwork and floor, in order to prevent the development of harmful bacteria which would undoubtedly spoil the next cheese that was made.

Traditional Red Leicester cheese was made in large, circular flat wheels, usually between 20 and 60 pounds in weight. Just when the 'RED' prefix came into use is not known but it was a well established feature of the cheese in the early 18th century. The redness comes from a red vegetable dye, 'Annatto'. This dye is extracted from the pulpy part of the seeds of a South American plant, Bixa Cheddar, and in Cheshire cheese but in Red Leicester it is used very liberally.

A gradually pressure of eventually up to one ton was then exerted on the cheese in the mould, so that as much moisture as possible was driven out. After pressing the cheese was bandaged in cheesecloth and put into store to begin the ripening process. This took several months in a well ventilated room with an even temperature. Some of the heavy slate block cheese presses can still be seen around the county and there is one at White Gate Farm.

By contract Stilton cheese is a semi hard cheese and is not pressed. In fact this cheese can be eaten within 3 or 4 weeks of being made. This is young "White Stilton" as it is called today. It seems that this cheese when kept for some time occasionally developed blue veins which gave it a distinctive flavour.

Who first tried to produce blue stilton on a regular basis will never be known for sure, there are several claimants. White's Directory of 1846 suggests that Stilton was first

made in Withcote Village, Nicholls the 18th century Historian claims it was made in Little Dalby in 1720. Dr. Hoskins in his book Midland England believes that Stilton was well known by 1720 by its earlier more local name of Quenby Cheese or Lady Beaumont's Cheese, and that it was first made by Mary Beaumont of Kirby Bellars.

What is not disputed is that the reputation and fame of the cheese, together with its modern name 'Stilton' are attributed to Mrs Paulett of Wymondham and her brother in law, Cooper Thornhill. Mrs Paulett sent her surplus cheese down the nearby Great North Road to Cooper Thornhill, who was the landlord of the Bell Inn, Huntingdonshire. He sold the cheese to the Bell Inn on the Great North Road, and as its fame began to spread it became known as Stilton Cheese, though from that day to this the cheese has only ever been made in and around the Vale of Belvoir. By 1727, Stilton was sufficiently well known to be mentioned in his Rural Rides by Daniel Defoe.

The blueing is a completely natural process and occurs as the spores enter the cheese and multiply. To help this process cheeses are pricked and humidity and temperature controlled to ensure the best conditions for the mould to grow and flourish. Generally, the longer the keeping the more the blueing.

Wigston was associated with the area where Red Leicester was produced. It must have been part of the staple diet of the countless Wigston people for many generations. As in other areas of the county most spring and summer made cheeses, the main production period, was stored and allowed to ripen until the Autumn Cheese Fair in Leicester. The second week in October the wagons would be loaded and two to three tons of cheese, from the average farm would be taken to market, where there would be buyers from all over the County. The farmer in the period 1800 and 1900 would get between 3d and 8d a pound depending on the quality, scarcity and luck.

Even so a considerable income was derived from the production of cheese it was one of the most important cash crops for many farmers. The following accounts survive for Manor Farm at Isley Walton and give one a glimpse of the sort of money involved.

CHEESE ACCOUNTS, ISLEY WALTON. MANOR FARM 1826 – 1842

1826/27	£125/3/10	2.0T
1827/28	£58/19/6	1.0T
1828/29	£301/14/0	4.6T
1829/30	£74/15/5	1.1T
1830/31	£175/6/10	2.8T
1831/32	£538/12/-	8.2T
1832/33	£320/4/3	5.0T
1833/34	£380/13/11	6.0T
1834/35	£412/12/2	6.3T
1835/36	£451/14/5	6.9T
1836/37	£304/17/3	4.6T
1837/38	£265/14/10	4.1T
1838/39	£453/13/5	7.0T
1839/40	£429/11/2	6.6T

1840/41	£431/2/6	6.5T
1841/42	£421/10/7	6.5T

CHEESE WAS SELLING AT ABOUT £65 A TON DURING THIS PERIOD

Year 1838/39 Cheese Account

Month	Income	Month	Expense
Apr 27	£14/12/1	Apr 27	£2/19/5
May 26	£13/15/5	May 25	£2/6/4
July 6	£8/5/11	July 20	£7/6/3
Aug 7	£47/19/7	Aug 17	£4/11/10
Sept 15	£6/1/4	Sept 15	£3/12/10
Oct 12	£12/16/11	Oct 12	£2/3/3
Nov 23	£320/3/4	Nov 9	£3/15/8
Dec 31	£11/10/3	Dec 1	£1/11/8
		Dec31	£2/1/4
Jan 31	£6/3/11	Jan 18	£2/12/6
		Jan 31	£51/13/9
Feb 28	£4/0/2	Feb 18	£4/12/8
Apr 1	£8/8/6	Apr 1	£3/10/3
TOTALS	£453/13/5		£92/17/6

AUCTION PRICES (not new) late v. Green, Normanton le Heath year 1833

Dairy

Cheese Press iron screw and Swithland slate	£2/00/0
Barrle churn	12/0
Salting tub	7/0
Churn and Dash	4/0
Butter tub	1/3
Butter Scales	1/0
Milk Pail	2/1

Store Room

Cheese Rack	5/0
Cheese horse & Selves	£ 1/01/0
Cheese Vats and Shutters	15/6
Brass Cheese pan and covers	10/0
Whey Tub	4/0

Cooper's Account Book Mr Wm Thorpe

1767 a new churn	6/6
1764 a new bottom in a churn	10d
New churn lid	3d

New milk paid	3/3
Milk sive bottom	6d
A cheese tub	10/0
One hoop of a cheese vat repaired	3d

In the table for the year 1838/39 the high income figures for November correlates with the main selling period. Now Leicester Cheese Fair was the second Thursday in October, so this farm either sold the bulk of its cheese at the Nottingham Fair in early November or to a travelling buyer. Several of these buyers, such as Joseph Wilkes of Measham frequented the farms in Oct / Nov to buy up stocks for such markets as the navy. During the rest of the year the income was presumably from sales made at local market. The expenses with the exception of January are colouring neither of which kept well over long periods. The large January figure may have been for new dairy equipment and or cheese cloth etc.

Labour costs are not shown in these accounts and so it is not possible to say how many hands worked in the dairy.

In this same year the income from the sales of cheese was exceeded only by the sale of wheat.