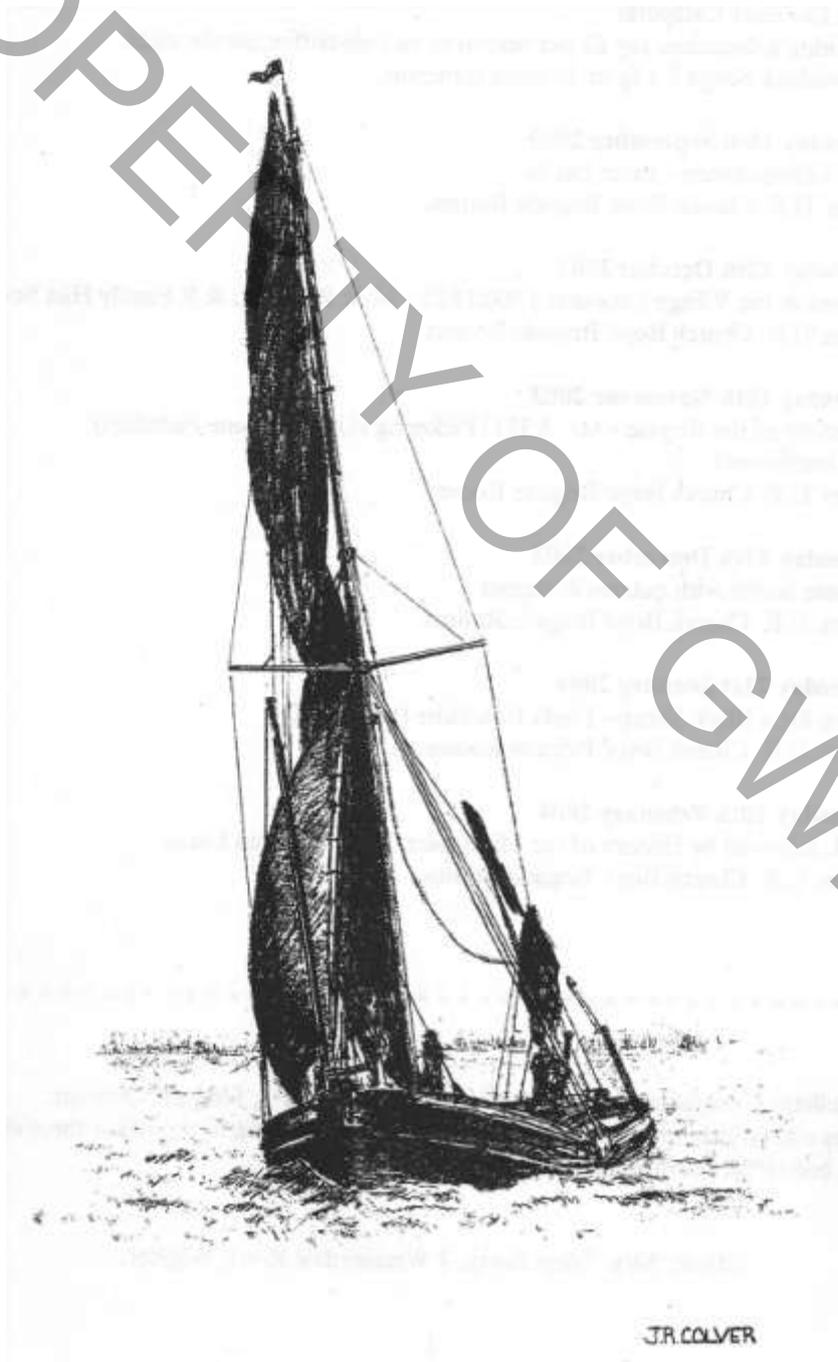


Greater Wigston Historical Society

White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna
Leicestershire



BULLETIN 66



PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS - JUNE 2003 TO FEBRUARY 2004

Wednesday 18th June 2003

Visit to Appleby Magna, tour of church & Sir John Moore's School, with mention of the almshouses & Manor House, tour to include cup of tea. Coach from Paddock Street 6.30p.m.

Wednesday 20th August 2003

Visit to Leicester Cathedral
Please bring a donation, say £2 per person to include coffee, on the night.
Meet Paddock Street 7.15p.m. to share transport.

Wednesday 16th September 2003

Roman Leicestershire - Peter Liddle 7.30p.m.
U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 15th October 2003

Enclosure & the Village Labourer 1760/1832 - Mick Rawle (L & R Family Hist Socy)
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 19th November 2003

The History of the Bicycle - Mr. A H C Pickering (Desford Lane Pedallers)
(To be confirmed)
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 17th December 2003

Christmas Social with quizzes & supper
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 21st January 2004

Looking for a Black Sheep - Linda Hotchkiss (Lines. R O)
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

Wednesday 18th February 2004

A.G.M. followed by History of the Millennium Park - Duncan Lucas
7.30p.m. U.R. Church Boys' Brigade Rooms.

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

Editor: Mrs. Tricia Berry, 7 Wensleydale Road, Wigston.

FRONT COVER

The cover this time features a Norfolk Wherry. These distinctive, heavy, sailing barges were designed for commercial use in inland waterways and harbours and were once very common on the Broads.

* * * * *

FEBRUARY MEETING

The Society held its Annual General Meeting when approximately 40 members were present. The evening commenced with:

- 1) Apologies for absence being recorded from Ruth Harper.
- 2) The secretary, Tricia Berry, reading the minutes of the February 2002 A.G.M. which were agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.
- 3) The Treasurer, Brian Bilson, explaining the year end accounts. He noted there was a small surplus of £46 38. It was therefore agreed to leave the subscriptions for the coming year unchanged at £7 (full) and £5 (concessionary). It was proposed to donate £50 to the Framework Knitters Museum as in previous years. It was noted that one of the summer trips had made a loss, a trend repeated over the last few years. The reason being insufficient numbers to fill a coach. Some discussion followed and it was agreed that these outings should continue but the situation needed to be monitored. An increase in the charge to participants to offset any future shortfalls could be introduced but must be kept modest or it would prove counterproductive.
- 4) The Chairman, Edna Taylor, reporting another satisfactory year with meetings well attended. She thanked everyone for their help and support and noted that this was the 15th year she had made the annual report. Bulletins were well received and the Editors, Illustrator and all contributors warmly thanked. She regretted that Chris Smart had stepped down as joint editor and recorded grateful thanks to her for her work over the last 14 years.
- 5) The Membership Secretary, Stella Tweed, saying the membership currently stood at 80, 5 less than last year. 75% now pay the concessionary rate of subscription. Attendance at meetings varied between 32 and 53.
- 6) Election of Officers: In the absence of any nominations it was proposed by Bob Wignall that all officers be re-elected and this was carried unanimously.
- 7) Any Other Business: It was reported nothing further had been heard about a proposal to restart the Victoria County History series. Bob Wignall asked about current ideas for the use of his father's legacy. It was agreed to ask Peter Clowes if he was still considering a new slide projector. Colin Towell also suggested another use might be to publish a book of Tricia Berry's Who's Who articles.

Mr. Pollock recorded the meeting's thanks to the Treasurer and Auditor and other officers for their work throughout the year.

It was agreed that the Christmas Social was enjoyed in its existing format and no change was thought desirable.

Members were reminded that renewal subscriptions were then due and should be paid that evening if possible.

The second part of the evening was taken up by Vice Chairman, Tony Lawrance, who kindly completed his talk on Potters Bar begun at the previous AGM.

A very old settlement with finds dating back to 5000/6000BC, Roman Kilns and clay pipes from 1600s. The name Potters Bar was recorded in 1509 as Potteries Bar and is thought to have meant Forest Gate of the family of Potter.

He reminisced about his time in the fire service during the war, when they were supplied with a trailer but no van to pull it. This meant it had to be dragged for one and a half⁰ exhausting miles! The water supply was hard, like Wigston's, causing white water after each practice and the residue to accumulate in the taps. There were two prisoner of war camps in the locality and the prisoners were allowed to wander about freely. He brought the story right up to date with mention of the dramatic train derailment which occurred in 2002.

GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

Receipts and Payments for the year ending 31st December 2002

Receipts		Payments	
Opening Balances as at 1/1/02:		Lecturers' Fees & Expenses	115.00
Cash in Hand	4.83	Donations:	
Current A/c	178.40	FWK Museum	50.00
Deposit A/c	757.03	All Saints, Leicester	25.00
	940.26	Bulletin/Prog printing	86.45
Subscriptions	436.00	Room Hire	112.00
Collections	63.06	Visit - Newbold Revel	180.00
Visit - Newbold Revel	155.00	Visit - Somerby	387.50
Visit - Somerby	393.50	Christmas Party	259.20
Christmas Party	231.00	Secretarial Exes	61.98
" Raffle	34.60	Postage	5.29
Bank Interest	15.64	Closing Balances as at 31/12/02:	
		Cash	4.83
		Current A/c	118.00
		Deposit A/c	863.81
			986.64
	2269.06		2269.06

Checked & in accordance with the books & vouchers presented.

Colin Towell, 18/2/03

MARCH MEETING

In March the society welcomed a local speaker, Joan Poultney (she lives in Wigston), who gave a most fascinating and humorous talk on the Women's Land Army.

The Land Army movement was first introduced during WWI when Britain had just three weeks supply of food in reserve and was restarted in June 1939 before the second war was declared. Girls who joined had a minimum of training and learnt mostly as they went along. They tackled the full range of farm tasks, including hand milking, tractor driving, potato setting and the miserable job of mangle chopping from frozen clamps. They were housed either within the farmhouse or more usually in hostels which might be a good bike ride away from their farm. Pay was 22/6d per week for the over 18s with one weeks holiday a year and one hah⁰ day off per week. A 48 hour rail warrant was supplied together with the uniform. Most were well treated, others not so well, but there was the opportunity to complain and be moved if they were really exploited.

A separate section called the Timber Corps, felled trees for pit props, telegraph poles, coffins and to make landing craft for 'D' etc. The movement was disbanded in 1950, by which time one quarter of million had served. It has always been a source of some discontent that no resettlement allowance or service medals were awarded to the girls though one won the VC for her bravery in stopping some runaway horses and averting a serious accident.

Joan Cross of Croft as she then was, joined in August 1943 and worked firstly at Frisby, then Harwell, Thorpe Satchville and finally Somerby. She has many happy and amusing memories of the fun shared by the girls, going to local dances (back by 10.30!), meeting GI's, working alongside Italian and German prisoners of war and the oddities and eccentricities of some of her farmer bosses. Despite the hardships she and 5,000 others stayed on after the war, in Joan's case until she got married.

Many of the 'girls' have remained in touch and Joan's involvement is at National level. This has given her the chance to be a part of some very notable occasions, such as the 1988 reunion attended by the late Queen Mother (their President) and riding in straw filled pick-up trucks in the parades to celebrate her 90th and 100th birthdays. She has attended remembrance services, marched past the cenotaph, joined in the VE & VJ Day celebrations, been present at Westminster Abbey for a 40 years of peace service and visited Highgrove as guest of Prince Charles (who arrived by helicopter), as well as attending Royal Garden Parties and a Guildhall banquet complete with gold cutlery!

Joan brought along a sample uniform, many photographs, cuttings and other memorabilia. She was warmly thanked by the Chairman, Edna Taylor, for a really entertaining evening.

APRIL MEETING

In April we welcomed back a previous speaker, Robert Gregory, who with 22 years as a Blue Badge Guide under his belt, was well qualified to talk on Leicester the Walled Town.

He reminded us that the area of the old walled town formed a rectangular shape, its north wall ran east from the River Soar in a straight line, a little within, from the present Soar Lane and Sanvey Gate to near the top of Churchgate. The east wall continued south from this point and followed the line, but a little within, from Churchgate and Gallowtree Gate to Horsefair Street. The south wall ran west and followed the line, but a little within, from Horsefair Street and Millstone Lane ending back at the river at a point in or near St. Mary's Churchyard. It is currently believed there was no west wall, the river and its watery meadows creating sufficient barrier to deter unwelcome visitors from that direction.

Near the centre of each wall was an entrance gate, the north one was at the angle of Cumberland Street and Northgate Street, the east one somewhat north of Eastgates and the south one towards the end of Millstone Lane. These gates were removed in 1774 because they became obsolete, were in poor repair and their low arches prevented the passage of loaded wagons.

The old town was bisected from the South Gate to the North Gate by the old High Street (now known as Southgate Underpass and Highcross Street). It was bisected from the West Bridge to the East Gate by Applegate, Hot Gate and Swines Market (now known as St. Nicholas Circle and High Street). Where these two roads met at the top of the present High Street at its junction with Highcross Street (its lower part) was regarded as the centre of Leicester and marked by the High Cross. This was a large structure with six columns and a conical roof which later caused an obstruction and was moved to various sites. One column survives and is now located in Cheapside.

As the town grew development took place outside the walls and the Angel Inn in Gallowtree Gate had the distinction of having one entrance within the walled town and the other one outside it.

Mr. Gregory then described some of the surprisingly large quantity of buildings and remains which survive from within the walled area, ranging from the complete St. Mary de Castro Church, to a mere fragment of wall in the basement of De Montfort University's Hawthorn Building belonging to the Church of the Annunciation, and from the Guildhall, to the Jewry Wall.

Afterwards a vote of thanks was given by the Chairman, Edna Taylor, for a most interesting and instructive evening. She then reminded members that there would be no more indoor meetings until the Autumn and that names should be handed to Mary Mason of those wishing to go on the summer trips.

MAY MEETING

Forty two members and friends set out by coach for a visit to St. Mary & St. Hardulph Church, Breedon-on-the-Hill. When we had all settled into the box pews our guide, the Churchwarden, Mrs. Ida Wright, outlined the history of this interesting building and pointed out the main features of note.

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The church was founded in 676 when a charter from Peterborough was granted to establish a monastery on this old former Iron Age hill fort. It prospered and attracted the attention of leading Anglo-Saxon craftsmen who carved some magnificent images and friezes, believed to be the largest and finest surviving collection in the country. Two notable examples of the images are, in the South aisle, a half length female figure holding a book and, in the bell ringing chamber, the Breedon Angel, a full length figure with flowing robes and holding a cross headed staff. Both are giving a Byzantine style blessing with their right hands. The friezes feature birds, beasts and vines and various patterns such as the Greek key.

After the dissolution of the monasteries Francis Shirley of Staunton Harold purchased the church from King Henry VIII for use as a family burial place. The local parishioners then petitioned that this priory church should also become their parish church since their existing one was in poor repair, this was granted. There are three Shirley tombs carved from Chellaston alabaster. The earliest to Francis and his wife was worked in 1571 and bears their effigies with pairs of mourners at the base. The second is to John Shirley and his wife, worked in 1585, and is similar in format and decorated with pillars and shields. The third, much more imposing was worked in 1598, and runs the whole length of the north wall. It is decorated with the achievement of arms and has effigies of George Shirley and his wife, two babies in cradles, and two sons and a daughter behind. The whole column enclosing a carved skeleton or cadaver symbolising the fate of all mortals.

These monuments and a huge enclosed wooden family privacy pew dating from 1627 are all situated behind a formidable heavy iron grill which is very overbearing and unsuitable to its surroundings.

After wandering round to admire these treasures at close quarters, thanking our kind guide, and taking a quick look at the spectacular views from this high vantage point, and the sharp drop to the quarry below, it was time to board the coach and head for the Three Horse Shoes where supper awaited. This was very welcome and enjoyable but apologies to those whose expectations were falsely raised by the addition of dessert spoons on the tables!

A LOOK AT WIGSTON LAUNDRY

There were three generations of the Tharp family involved with this company: Henry Walter Tharp (HWT1) the grandfather, Harry Walter Tharp (HWT2) the father, & Henry Walter Tharp (HWT3) the son (the present Mr. Tharp and father of Antiques Roadshow expert Lars).

The laundry was opened 20/9/1892 by HWT1 and Edward Sutton Crow, who were brothers in law, HWT1's sister Louisa being the wife of E S Crow. At the time E S Crow was a commercial traveller living in Granville Road, Wigston, whereas the Tharps lived in London & HWT1 worked in the office of the West Ham Gas Company. A series of letters written by Mr. Crow to HWT1 during the setting up of the business make it clear that Mr. Crow was the "hands on" man and HWT1 provided

the finance. Mr. Crow was greatly assisted by Thomas Judd, who before this time earned his living as a gardener, but was subsequently to prove he had many other talents as well.

The partners rented the site from J & W H Vann who were builders (father & son). It consisted of a three quarter acre orchard with a good brick & slate building 38' x 20' and formed part of their premises at 63, Bull Head Street. The Vanns agreed to modify and extend the building as required and let the whole for £30 per year for 3 years with the option to extend if requested.

The business took off well, though the first few months were very stressful, especially after the Christmas break when severe frosts caused burst pipes in the boiler. Messrs. Crow and Judd made frantic attempts to repair the damage quickly so that promised delivery dates could be kept. The company flourished and in 1895 new buildings were added including the chimney.

Then in 1898 E S Crow left very suddenly. It is believed he had a restless nature and also some sort of disagreement probably occurred. HWT1 had to hastily move to Leicestershire to run a business whose day to day activities he knew little about. He relied heavily at this time on the loyal Mr. Judd who was promoted to works manager, a post he held until retirement.

The business continued to prosper with major enlargement and rebuilding in three phases in the 1920s and 1930s and the purchase of additional adjoining land. HWT2 took over when his father died in 1925. At its peak the company employed 150/200 people.

The second World War was a watershed. Up until then only the domestic market was served and horses were still used for some work. In 1939 Appletons Laundry in South Wigston was acquired and with it the lovely Snowdrop name and logo, which was put on the vehicles in place of the word Wigston, when this was banned under war time regulations. In 1940 dry cleaning was introduced and also a garment hire service to industry.

In 1950s it was made a limited company and HWT2, his wife, HWT3 & his sister were the first directors. The decline in domestic market gathered pace. Changes from starched white linen and lace to easy care nylon, no servants and the introduction of small home washing machines & laundrettes, caused the company to look more and more to the commercial side for custom which sustained them for some time. In 1982 the company merged with the Belgrave Laundry relocating to its Roughton Street, Leicester site and leaving the Wigston premises upon which the B & Q store now stands. The combined company was finally closed in 1989.

Thomas Grant was manager in 1930s and Jim Wharmby spent his entire working life there, also becoming manager and then a director, retiring at the same time as HWT3 in 1989.

Tricia Berry

Sources: Business Records at LRO 5D59/1-46 also most grateful thanks to Mr. H.W. Tharp (HWT3) for his considerable and very willing help.

MEMORIES OF A VAN MAN

The 12 year old pushed his wheel barrow up Bull Head Street, passed the Bell Street fountain and on towards Burgess Street and Oadby Lane, calling at various houses on the way. The year was 1917 and this was Cecil Mawby's first paid employment with Wigston Laundry. He worked afternoons delivering newly laundered stiff collars and collecting soiled ones for the next wash; for this service he was paid 5/- per week.

Cecil was born the youngest child in a family of two boys and one girl. His mother did home work for a local hosiery factory and his father worked at the Wigston Foundry, Canal Street, South Wigston. Their house was in Bull Head Street almost opposite the laundry.

He first attended Bell Street Infant School where he was a diligent pupil, achieving the title of "Best Pupil" on one memorable occasion, and given the honour, for that day, of ringing the school bell. At 7 years he transferred to Long Street Council School, which was still known locally as the "Board School".¹

He grew up familiar with the comings and goings of the laundry, and from 10 years old spent time after school and at weekends helping in the stables. There were three horses which pulled vans for collection and delivery of laundry, visiting villages as far out on the eastern side as Burton Overy and Kirby Muxloe to the west. The stables were beyond the laundry buildings, near the orchard and next to Long Lane, a footpath well used by Wigston residents. During summer the horses were taken every evening to a field near the allotments and small bungalows in Newton Lane and collected every morning at 7.30a.m.

At 12 years old, because of difficult family finances, Cecil was allowed to finish school at lunch time each day and work afternoons at the laundry. In addition to collecting and delivering stiff collars he was employed as a van boy to William Norman, travelling with him on the horse drawn van, helping to deliver the laundry service.

When he was 13 years old he was allowed to finish school and work full time at the laundry. Although the official leaving age was 14 years at that time, because he had passed all the required educational standards and had a job awaiting him, Cecil was given the necessary exemption certificate issued by the Leicestershire Education Authority and he commenced working full time with Mr. Norman for a wage of 11/-per week.

Working on the vans was very uncomfortable at times, particularly during the winter as there was no screen and protection from the weather. There was one occasion, near Kirby Muxloe when the snow was so deep and the road so slippery the horse had to be left overnight in the Red Cow Inn stables with Cecil and Mr. Norman making their way home by walking most of the way, except for a short distance by tramcar, until that too was stopped by the snow.

In 1920, Mr. Norman was transferred from the horse drawn van to a motorised vehicle and Cecil was then interviewed by the works manager, Mr. Judd, who considered him sufficiently competent and responsible to offer him his own van and round and so he achieved his ambition of progressing from 'Van boy' to 'van man'. In the beginning his round was mainly in the Clarendon Park, Western Park and Narborough Road areas. There were few motor vehicles in those days and they, and even the trams, had to give way to horses. Imagine the 15 year old, travelling through Leicester at a smart trot, feeling 'King of the Road!'

When Mr. Norman took charge of a new van, Cecil aged 17 years was promoted and inherited the old 10 cwt 'Bellsizes' van and an increased weekly wage of 25/-. After familiarising himself with gears and brake and demonstrating his competence with a few manoeuvres in the yard, his first trip was to the licensing office in Bowling Green Street where, with no test to prove his road worthiness, he paid the annual fee of 5/-. This new transport, with a glass screen, gave protection from the weather and enabled him to travel further afield. His rounds now took him into the villages of east Leicestershire calling on some of the owners of Leicester's leading industries, i.e. Chilprufe (hosiery), Stibbes (engineering), Folwells (pork butchers) and Kirby & West (milk supplies).

With the increasing use of petrol driven transport, the laundry service's range of customers continued to increase with Cecil, in his smart green uniform and driving his distinctive green van, travelling as far out as Market Harborough, collecting from wealthy, often well known families en route.

There were three grades of service available:

- 1) Float iron, with the clothes washed, dried and folded for a charge, in the late 1920s of 1/6d for five pounds weight.
- 2) Wash and iron, each item separately charged.
- 3) Delux service which usually came from the large households of the wealthy customers and arrived in skips. It included the family's personal clothing, with delicate fabrics being hand washed, and uniforms of male and female servants, some of which required special finishing, i.e. crimping of the maids' caps and goffering their frilled aprons.

The progress of the laundry through the system started with Cecil unloading his day's collection at the wash-house. In the days before major rebuilding took place in the 1930s, the labour intensive process involved poor working conditions for employees and much handling of large quantities of wet clothes as they had to be lifted from the washing drums into tubs for transfer into the driers. The floor was continually awash with water and the men's hands always wet. This system continued until rebuilding and enlargement allowed the installation of modern machines which combined washing and drying, so removing the need to handle wet materials.

The majority of employees were women and girls, mostly local, and it was at the next stages where they mainly worked, folding, ironing and giving particular clothes the specialised finish which regularly included choir boys' neck frills. From this section the newly laundered articles were transferred to the packing section, and from there to

despatch and the making up of journeys, for Cecil and other drivers to begin then-
rounds, returning the finished laundry to the customers.

Cecil continued to do well and with increasing numbers of customers to call on, he had
a van boy to share the work load. However, his thoughts were not always on work
and it was at the laundry he found his future wife Isobel.

Isobel was a local girl and like many others, on leaving school at 14 years, found
employment at Wigston Laundry. By the time she met Cecil she had been in the ironing
section for sometime and had seen changes in work methods and rebuilding. In her
early days, in the 1920s, the ironing process was no different from that in most
households, with heavy 'flat irons' heated on the large stove at the end of the room, far
from labour saving as the cooling irons had to be continually exchanged for heated
ones. In 1929 gas pipes were fitted round the room which enabled connection of gas
filled irons giving continuous heat. In the 1930s the extension of this section provided
space for the introduction of large heated presses and a steamer so allowing many
items, particularly sheets, a major item for most domestic customers, to be spread flat.
Even with these changes, during the summer, blankets were often hung to dry in the
orchard at the rear of the main building.

It was the policy of the organisation to keep up to date with new inventions and
updated techniques, and to this end senior staff visited exhibitions and other businesses
where new equipment was in operation.

During WWII an airfield was created next to Bruntingthorpe village, approximately six
miles from Wigston. This was taken over, firstly by the Canadian Royal Airforce and
later by the Americans. All equipment required to maintain the establishment was
manned by service personnel and to achieve this, small contingents of staff, were
initially trained at the laundry in the use of the unfamiliar machines. The presence of
attractively uniformed young men set many girls' hearts aflutter and a number of
romantic relationships were formed.

Cecil and Isobel were married in 1932. Isobel continued working, mainly part-time at
the laundry while Cecil remained there most of his working life. In 1992 they
celebrated their Diamond Wedding and the framed congratulatory telegram from the
Queen occupies a place of honour in the living room. After some months of ill health
Isobel died in 1994. Cecil has continued to live alone with support from a nephew and
neighbours. Through TV he maintains a lively interest in sport, particularly snooker
and football, and most evenings he plays dominoes for an hour with his closest
neighbour. Although frail, he has a good memory and enjoys reminiscing about his
years at Wigston Laundry.

Anne Brown

In addition to Cecil Mawby I am indebted to the following long serving staff for the
contribution of their own memories of life at Wigston Laundry: Bill Ellard, Hilda
Chamberlain and the late Ellen Grimsley.

The above will form part of a transaction on the Wigston Laundry which is in course of
preparation.

CROFT HILL

Now that the leaves are on the trees, it is not possible to see Croft Hill from the back bedroom windows. It is possible, though, to see it from some of the higher parts of Wigston, an isolated and distinctive hill about 128m (400') above sea level and rising above the Soar Valley. It lies to the west, where a lot of our weather comes from, and local people say that if you can see Croft Hill it is going to rain, and if you can't, it's already raining!

Some years ago, we nearly lost the hill to the quarrying companies, so great was the demand for granite for roadstone. About half the hill remains. Croft Hill is the last throw to the south of the craggy and ancient hills of Charnwood Forest which are made of some of the oldest rocks known anywhere in England, perhaps 500 million years old.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the growth of quarrying of granite and other hard rock in Charnwood Forest, stimulated by the new use of broken stone for macadam road surfaces such as the turnpike roads. Mountsorrel came first, then Markfield, Bardon, Groby and Stoney Stanton. By 1877, quarries at Enderby, Croft and Huncote were opened and made the county the leading source of hard stone in England at the time.

Demand for granite setts to pave the streets of the rapidly growing cities was huge. Setts were produced by the progressive splitting down of large stone blocks into smaller blocks, then eventually to setts, and sett-making was for long a distinct and highly skilled craft. My butcher, whose family live at Huncote, told me his grandfather worked in the trade and had a large collection of all the different types of setts.

Long before the quarries, however, Croft Hill had its uses. In earlier times, before maps and sign-posted roads, men met on isolated hilltops to transact public business and hold courts. A lone hill would be easily identified from a distance. In the case of Croft Hill, it also is placed in the very centre of the old Guthlaxton Hundred (subdivision of a county), and the Roman Fosse Way runs within a mile of it, making access to it easy.

In the year 836, Wiglaf, king of Mercia (and grandfather of our St. Wistan), held a most impressive assembly at Croft for the granting of land to a monastery. Not only the King and Queen were present, but the Archbishop of Canterbury, 11 bishops, 3 abbots and over 20 other magnates.

Nearly 300 years later, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle describes not a grand scene this time, but a grim one: Ralph Basset and the King's thanes held a wittenmoot on Croft Hill to 'deal out justice' on 44 thieves. Six had eyes and private parts removed, and all were hanged on gallows placed on the hill in the December wind.

About 400 years go by before the hill is recorded again, this time in the Tudor Star Chamber court of 1546/7, when the inhabitants of Croft village accused a

neighbouring squire, Sir William Turvile, of dyking and hedging with quickset (hawthorn), their common pasture. In other words, we are back to the problem of Tudor landowners seeking to enclose the common lands for sheep pastures, to enrich themselves. No result is recorded to this suit, but a later inquisition on Sir William's son does not mention that he was lord of the manor of Croft, only that he had 'certain lands in Croft'. Therefore they probably had lost their claim to enclose Croft Hill.

Mention of the Turvile family brings us to a Wigston connection with them and the area round Croft Hill. At the Norman conquest, a Norman magnate, Hugh de Grentemaisnil, was rewarded by King William with much land, some of it in Leicestershire, including the manors of Thurlaston, Croft and Wigston. In the 12th Century, all had passed to the Earls of Leicester, one of whom granted to his under-tenants, the de Crofts, estates in Thurlaston and Wigston. Thus there came to be formed a group of estates in the above three manors which went together for centuries afterwards.

Robert de Croft died leaving two daughters, one, Alice, married Hugh de Champayne before the end of the 12th Century. When Robert, 4th Earl of Leicester died without issue, his estates went to his two sisters. The Champayne manor went to his younger sister, but this did not affect the tenancy of Alice and Hugh, whose descendants went on to hold their estates in Wigston, Thurlaston and Croft for six generations. After many years the Champayne manor, with a history too complex to relate here, came to the Turviles, to the same Sir William accused of enclosing Croft Hill. I noted only recently that we have a Turvile Close on the Wigston Harcourt estate.

The story doesn't quite finish there. A later Turvile, Henry, in the 1570s and 80s, began selling off ancestral lands at a great rate. Perhaps rising price levels coupled with fixed copy-hold rents led to a squeeze. Certainly he had built a fine new hall at Normanton Turvile and was extravagant. (That fine Elizabethan mansion, destroyed by fire, has grounds you can walk through, with a lovely lake and signs of a moat). The farmers of Wigston, his tenants, benefited by several hundred acres of land coming on to the market all at once and some purchased as sitting tenants. We know from records that they lived and farmed on the east side of Bull Head Street, the site of the old Champayne manor. So the Turvile manor ended and thirteen local men became small freeholders for the first time.

What can we see today that reminds us of the goings-on over at Croft so long ago? There is the hill itself, the fine monuments of the Turviles in Thurlaston church (not Sir William's - his monument is in Aston Flamville church, another of his seven manors), the grounds and lake at Normanton Turvile. And lastly, if we look at the walls of our parish church, we will see much Enderby granite, hauled, possibly by carts, over Aylestone pack-horse bridge from the granite quarry at Enderby, not far from that other quarry at Croft Hill.

Edna Taylor

Sources: *Provincial England* by W.G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant* by W.G. Hoskins, local information from Tim Preston, of Heards the butchers.

**EXTRACT FROM THE DERBY MERCURY. DECEMBER 1732
CAMBRIDGE IN NEW ENGLAND. U.S.A.**

Some time since died here Mr. Matthew Avery, in a very advanced age. He had for a great many years served the College [Harvard University, founded at Cambridge, Mass, in 1639] here, in the quality of a bed-maker and sweeper. Having left no child, his wife inherits his whole estate which he bequeathed to her by his last Will and Testament, as follows:-

The my dear wife,
My joy and life
I freely now do give her
My whole Estate
With all my Plate
Being just about to leave her.

Two Painted Chairs
Nine Warden Pears
A large old Dripping Platter
The Bed of Hay
On which I lay
An old Sauce-pan for Butter.

A Musket true
As everflew
A Pound of Shot and Wallet
A Leather Sash
My Calabash
My Powder Horn and Bullets.

A Greasy Hat
My old Ram Cat
A Yard and Half of Linnen
A Pot of Grease
A Woollen Fleece
In order for your spinning.

A Ragged Mat
A Tub of Fat
A Book put out by Bunyan
Another Book
By Robin Rook
A Skam or Two of Spun-Yarn.

A Chasing Dish With
One Salt Fish If I am
not mistaken

A Tub of Soap
A long Cart Rope
A Frying Pan and Kettle
An Ashes Pail
A Thrashing Flail
An Iron Wedge and a Beetle.

A little Mug
A Two Quart Jug
A Bottle full of Brandy
A Looking Glass
To see your face
You'll find it very handy.

An old Sword Blade
A Garden Spade
A Hoe, a Rake, a Ladder
A Wooden Can
A Close Stool Pan
A Clyster Pipe and Bladder.

A small Tooth Comb
An Ashen Broom
A Candlestick and Hatchet
A Covered
Striped down with Red
A Bag of Rags to patch it.

An old Black Muff
Some Garden Stuff
A Quantity of Borridge
Some Devil's Weed
And Burdock Seed
To Season well your Porridge.

A Spinning Wheel One
Peck of Meal A Knife
without a Handle

A Leg of Port
A Broken Fork
And Haifa Flich of Bacon.

A Rusty Lamp
Two Quarts of Samp
And Half a Tallow Candle.

My Pouch and Pipes
Two Oxen Tripes
An Oaken Dish well carved
My little Dog
And Spotted Hog
With two Young Pigs just starved.

This is my store
I have no more
I heartily do give it
My years are spun
My days are done
And so I think to leave it.

Leics. Record Office: P128/16

LEICESTER AND NOTTINGHAM JOURNAL. JUNE 1760

They write from [Great] Glen in this County [Leicestershire] that on Wednesday last, a dispute arose between two old women of that town, one of whom calling the other a Witch, and she affirming that she was no more a Witch than herself, a challenge ensued, and they both agreed to be dipt by way of trial. They accordingly stript to their shifts, had their thumbs and great toes tied across and with a cart rope about their middle, suffered themselves to be thrown into a pool of water. One of them is said to have sunk, whilst the other continued struggling upon the surface, which the mob called swimming, and deemed an infallible sign of her being a Witch, insisting upon her impeaching her accomplices in the craft.

She accordingly told them that in the neighbouring village of Burton [Overy] there were several other old women as much Witches a she was.

These suspicions being confirmed by a Student of Astrology or White Witch who was referred to an account of a young woman said to be afflicted with an uncommon disorder and pronounced to be bewitched, the mob in consequence of this intelligence, on Thursday, repaired to Burton and after a little consultation, they proceeded to the old woman's house on whom they had fixed the strongest suspicion.

The poor old creature on their approach, locked the house door and went into a chamber and from the window asked what they wanted. They informed her that she was charged with being guilty of Witchcraft, which they were come to try her for, by ducking; remonstrating at the same time upon the necessity there was of her giving this proof whether she was a Witch or no. But of her persisting in a positive refusal to come down, they broke open the house, went into the chamber, carried her down stairs and by force took her to a deep gravel pit full of water, tied her thumbs and toes as above, then threw her in, where they kept her during their pleasure. The same day, the mob tried the experiment upon another poor old woman, and on Friday, a third underwent a like discipline.

Several of the ring leaders in this riot, we hear, have been apprehended and carried before a Justice, two of which bound over to the sessions and the others ordered a small fine.

We shall just beg leave by way of gentle admonition to remind persons who have been so very active in discovering who are Witches in Leicestershire (and which we hope may be means of preventing the further trial of this dangerous experiment) to observe to 'em, that no longer ago than the year 1751 at Tring in Hertfordshire, a mob of the same nature as this were determined to try, by ducking, whether or no one Mrs. Osborne and her husband were Witches (two harmless people, aged above 70) who were accordingly tried as above, thrown into a muddy stream, where after much ducking and ill usage, the old woman was taken out, laid naked on the bank, and died in a few minutes. The poor man was also used so cruelly that in a few hours after, he also died.

The Coroner's Inquest brought in their verdict of wilful murder against nine of the persons specified and 20 others whose names were unknown.

Thomas Colley, one of the rioters was brought to trial, condemned, executed and afterwards hung in chains. At the place of execution, he signed a solumn declaration relating to his faith in Witchcraft, which was read at his request.

Leics.R.O. P128/20

**DERBY MERCURY. MARCH 1752 BARRONDEN
(BARROWDEN) IN THE COUNTY OF RUTLAND**

Mr. Edward Munton, Farmer and Grazier in this Parish went to market and brought home some Physick for his children, and at the same time, some Ratsbane to make Sheep Water and tho' cautioned by the Apothecary to keep them separate, yet inadvertently gave them to his wife, without rightly appraising her of the different papers, who locked them up, and on the Sunday following, beat the Ratsbane, and put into Treacle, and gave it to her children, instead of the Physick.

The effects of it soon appeared and it was not in the power of medicine to relieve them, two fine girls and a boy died by eleven o'clock and the two eldest boys, only survived until three in the afternoon, and on the Monday following were all buried in the same grave, to the inexpressible grief of the unhappy parents.

Leics. R.O. P128/21

Thanks to Jim Colver for passing on these old newspaper items. The last two are particularly harrowing and perhaps serve as a reminder that life could be very tough in the past and the 'Good Old Days' were something of a myth in many respects.