

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

## BULLETIN 96



Sowell Workhouse in Nottinghamshire, by Linda Forryan  
One of the destinations for our outing on 15<sup>th</sup> May

**PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS – JULY 2013 TO APRIL 2014**

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2013**

Mystery Coach Tour – Duncan Lucas

Leaving Paddock Street 6.30p.m. (At the time of going to press there were 4 unsold tickets, please call Ann Cousins 0116 2884638 to check availability if you would like to go)

**Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2013**

History and Work of the Shuttleworth Clarke Foundation – Alan Norman

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

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2013**

The Sinking of the Titanic with local connections – Derek Seaton

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

**Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2013**

Who do you think lived in a house like that? – Brian Johnson

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

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

Sex, Lies and Parchment – Jess Jenkins

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

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2013**

Christmas Social with picture quiz and street views – Mike Forryan  
(Light refreshments, please bring £2 on the night)

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

**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014**

Wartime Farm – Dr. John Martin

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

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

AGM followed by Newsreels from 1929

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

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

Royal Lifeboat Institution – Derrick Young

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

**Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2014**

My Life as a Tiller Girl – Margaret Hudson

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

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

Society's website: [www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)  
Chairman, Mike Forryan's e-mail: [chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

## **BRING AND TELL AT THE AGM 20 FEBRUARY 2013**

It was my intention to speak at the Bring and Tell session after the 2013 AGM but at the very last moment I was unable to attend.

My talk was to be on two selections of items. Firstly, I had selected a number of instruments and books relating to my father's career as a surveyor. He worked for the Leicester firm of Snow and Astill all his working life from 1926 until 1975, apart from six months when he left to work for Alexandra Stone near Ratby. This clearly didn't suit him as he soon returned to S&A. The firm still exists in Leicester as Sturgis Snow and Astill, based in New Walk.

I first knew his office when it was in Oxford Street near the Magazine Gateway, roughly where the new DMU building now stands. Before then it was at 10 Pocklington's Walk where my Dad first met my Mum who was a secretary working for John Ellis and Sons next door. The offices then moved to the bottom end of Newarke Street when it was two way and used as a bus terminus. Many people used to comment to us that they had seen, my father, Fred at his drawing board while they were sitting on the top deck of a bus waiting at the traffic lights.

I had selected two sets of drawing instruments in sectionalised boxes. These were used along with a drawing board, 'T' square and various plastic set squares and 'S' curves to draw plans onto tracing paper. This was long before computers and CAD software was developed. There are a number of note books containing meticulously drawn 'sketch plans with measurements and notes and drawings done at night school in his early working life in the 1920s. One of the last entries was a 1980 sketch plan of a house that Sue and I bought in Avondale Road, Wigston. I had also selected a framed pencil drawing of Merton Tower, Oxford dated 1932. A similar drawing and another unnamed street scene had hung in my parents' house for as long as I can recall and are still proudly displayed in my house today. I think he did these as part of his night school course.

My second selection was to have been a number of items relating to my days in the 60<sup>th</sup> Leicester, St Peter's Braunstone cubs and scouts. My late sister was 'Baloo' in the cubs and my Dad and brother in law were scout leaders for a time. I had a number of metal badges, a Wolf Cub woggle and a lanyard with a bosun's pipe attached which was worn by patrol leaders in the scouts.

We were a nomadic group (unlike our neighbours, the 4<sup>th</sup> Leicesters who had their own barn on Braunstone Lane), and met at the Old School on the Lane (now a private house), the Old Hall Farm in Braunstone and St Peter's and St Boniface Church Halls all now demolished. We had monthly Church Parades, assembling in Balmoral Drive, marching across The Lane and over the field path to St Peter's Church, we dismissed after the service on the Parish Hall car park in Woodshawe Rise.

We had great camps at Kimcote, Johns Lee Wood, Ullesthorpe and further afield in Derbyshire, East Grinstead and near Belvoir Castle, travelling to these in the back of a furniture lorry.

I didn't keep my brimmed scout hat which had to be steamed to get it flat, I wished I had.

I had intended to also show a number plate, GJU 207, of the sort that is fixed onto the front mudguard of a bicycle, in this case my Dad's motorised bike. The motor had a friction drive onto the back tyre, these were called 'Minimotors', there were also 'Cyclemasters' in which the motor was in the hub of the rear wheel, both were popular during the 1950s.

Colin Towell

## MARCH 2013 MEETING

The March meeting was (for me) the long awaited 'Morrison Story' told by Ernest Miller who is a grandson of A.E. Morrison, one of the owners of the business. My own interest is that my late father in law, Ted Huckerby, worked for Morrisons after his return from the second world war. He retrained there because his war injury prevented him from going back to work as a knitting machine mechanic. My wife was born in Irlam Street near to the factory and she was told that as a two year old she often stood by the factory gate in the evening waiting for her Dad to come out.

Great grandfather, Charles Morrison, was the landlord of the Dover Castle pub in the 1850s and also a policeman, Ernest has a memento of his service in the form of a 'life preserver' or a truncheon. In 1896 Charles lent his son £20 to start a business and he allowed him to use the pub's outbuildings as long as he also helped out in the bar. The business involved the manufacture of bicycles. These early bikes cost between £7.10.0d and 12 guineas and a 1904 catalogue explained exactly what you got for your money. A copy of a hire agreement (not hire purchase) was shown detailing a down payment of £3.10.0d and then 15/- a month.

Motorised tricycles with a gas engine and an exposed passenger seat at the front were made, these required a running start with the rider jumping on when the engine fired. A motorbike side car was available with a special spring, which they had invented, under the side wheel to cope with the very bumpy roads of the time (does anything change?). A few three wheeler open top cars were produced.

With the introduction of motor cars they made an oil dispenser and sold petrol which was supplied in 40 gallon drums. When the price of petrol reached 1/- (5p) a gallon it was feared that drivers would stop buying it so they stopped making these dispensers.

Morrisons produced electric generators. These were used to power coloured bulbs hung in Dover Street to celebrate the relief of Mafeking, also to charge radio batteries and batteries in individual houses for lighting before mains power was supplied to remote country houses. A 1kw generator cost £145, quite a lot at that time.

When sound systems were starting to be used in cinemas a machine for sound on disc was developed, then followed by sound on film equipment. At one time 15% of UK cinemas had installed Morrisons sound equipment costing £260 cash or £2 a week. Neon signs soon followed as used on the Empire Cinema in Loughborough.

A chance remark on the golf course by a certain Mr. Squires that an electric vehicle would be cheaper than a horse for delivering bread led to these vehicles being developed in 1931. These early vehicles had wire spoked wheels.

After a dispute with his partner Morrison took £2000 out of the business and moved first to Gartree Street near Conduit Street and then to the Grace Road area and then to the Brunswick Works in Garden Street, South Wigston which was a former elastic web factory. Electric vehicles became very popular and Kirby and West bought their first 10 vehicles from Morrisons but then made their own.

In 1931 regulations required both a driver and a mate to drive a lorry so it was agreed that electric vehicles were not classed as a lorry and so were cheaper to operate because only one man was needed. In 1934 chassis' were exported to Australia and left South Wigston by the train load.

In 1938 Morrisons joined with Electricar in Birmingham who made larger electric vehicles for users such as Royal Mail. One reason for the amalgamation was the cost of research which could not be funded by one small business.

The South Wigston works closed in 1968 when production transferred to South Wales where there were many government incentives to encourage relocation. In Wigston there was a shortage of skilled labour and planners would not give permission to expand. But in 1983 production in South Wales also ceased, though a part of the business was bought by Crompton Parkinson.

Ernest gave us a fascinating and well illustrated talk on a firm which we thought was local and made only milk floats, but which was international and even made cinema equipment. It was well peppered with family stories and anecdotes.

Colin Towell

### **APRIL 2013 MEETING**

Early arrivals to the April meeting would have noticed two things, firstly there was no speaker getting ready and secondly, that the chairs were arranged with two aisles, as if on an aeroplane. All soon became clear when our speaker, Trevor Parr, whose subject was An Apothecary in the 1600s, entered the room with great flair and ceremony in full period dress and much flamboyance, with his chest of potions and instruments which he then proceeded to display on the table.

His first question was, ominously, 'how are you'. He then explained that he covered many areas, a chemist, doctor, dentist, entrepreneur, marriage guidance counsellor, optician, money lender and 'conning people'. His motto was 'kill or cure' but his record was, regretfully, more of the kill and less of the cure.

He explained that he had been born in 1588 in Holland into a family of apothecaries. He had been to university in Holland and been awarded a degree in Greek, Hebrew and Latin. He was then apprenticed for 7 years to his father but there was not room in Holland for him to set up his own business so he came to England, joined the Guild of Apothecaries and purchased an area in which to practise more or less coinciding with what we know today as the East Midlands. Being the time of the civil wars there was plenty of custom but his dress, very fine too, indicated not where his loyalty lay but his status in life.

The need for the way in which the room was laid out then became apparent, Trevor wanted the evening to be one of audience participation. Each time he spoke about a particular substance or tool he sallied forth down one of the aisles so that people could touch and smell the example. This was brilliant. His cures included:

Molasses: best taken when already on the toilet and very quick acting; mustard: draws poison when applied as a poultice; charcoal: when powdered down it settles the stomach and absorbs poisons; fennel: when dried and put into hot water, swells in the stomach and makes you feel full, no side effects, can't overdose on it and has its own flavour.

Sea salt goes further than mined salt and is used as a healer. The saying 'to rub salt in a wound' came from the fact that it did hurt but it did heal as well. Generally speaking the more something hurt or tasted foul in the healing process the more good it was doing. During the wars there were less men available to mine or refine salt so the price went up. It could take 1000 barrels of salt to cure enough food for one winter in a large country house.

Peppercorns (causing sickness to get rid of poisons) and cinnamon sticks were very costly, the latter having no medical purpose but used to show wealth when decorating food. Nutmeg was even more expensive. Juniper was used for making strong beer and whisky, it also wards off evil spirits. Cloves were good for toothache and for sweetening the breath (no toothpaste then). Rosemary was good as a gargle for sore throats. Bay leaves used up to three times a day were good for blood disorders and sage was used for promoting brain cells hence its name. Even egg shells had their uses for pregnant ladies and as calcium in bones.

So by selling these remedies the apothecary was a very rich man and was able to operate as a trader to bring these herbs and spices from far off countries. He could even afford to have his own regiment of a thousand men to look after his safety.

Substances which today are rank poisons (and were then but still used) such as digitalise, for dilating the pupils to make women look more alluring; mercury for curing sexually transmitted diseases; lead, when in a paste for making the skin pale (a beauty treatment) and arsenic in the correct dose as a cure all.

Trevor then explained several tools and instruments for amputations, cauterising (hot flesh smells like pork), bloodletting, leach containers and a bucket for examining urine and faeces. An apothecary would 'do his best' for a patient, but this often meant letting them die and sometimes hastening it. The mortality rate was 80% for 1 to 2 year old children and for women, life expectancy was 21 or their 3<sup>rd</sup> child. Trevor then went on to explain the use of charnel houses for storing the dried bones of the dead so that graves could be reused. Clearly, recycling is not new. He also pointed out that his containers were not labelled, although they were of different colours and shapes, this way people did not steal the contents, and if they did they probably poisoned themselves.

All in all this was a very interesting evening which flew by. We only hope that all those present will return in good health for our next meeting.

Colin Towell



Our Apothecary, Trevor Parr, by Mike Forryan

## **MAY 2013 MEETING**

### **FULL DAY OUTING TO SOUTHWELL MINSTER AND THE WORKHOUSE, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**

The days leading up to 15<sup>th</sup> May were reasonably dry, bright and warm but on waking up on the Wednesday morning it was clear that it had been raining all night and was still raining, oh dear, wet weather gear to the fore in readiness for our first Historical Society full day outing. This was, to some extent, an experiment to see if a full day, rather than just an evening, gave an opportunity for a visit to a place of historical interest further afield. In choosing Southwell there were two places of interest in one location and it was within a ninety minute coach journey.

The rain had stopped by the time the coach, with 38 of us on board, left Paddock Street at 9.15am and we journeyed through Leicester to the A46. Going through the city was interesting for those who usually drive a car as we were able to note buildings and sites that we cannot usually take in when driving. The A46 is now a wonderful dual carriageway all the way to Newark although we turned off to Gunthorpe Bridge over the Trent and then up to Southwell, arriving at 10.30, just time for a coffee in the Minster Refectory and a quick look at nearby shops before we assembled in the Minster for our guided tour for which we split into three groups.

Our guide was a most interesting lady who was able to point out items of interest with her walking stick and to whom we really had to listen hard to the amazing amount of useful information which she regaled us with. The first impression of Southwell Minster is actually gained on the coach when approaching the town as you glimpse between the trees the unusual twin pyramid capped pepperpot towers at the west end and the central main but stumpy tower. Inside the unfamiliar architecture is impressive with the massive pillars supporting rounded Norman arches and the clerestory windows helping the smaller lower round topped windows flood the interior with light. The huge seven light west angel window is comparatively modern compared with the Norman architecture.

However, we first had a history lesson in so far as the Minster, originally so called because the priests went out into the locality to 'minister' to the people, has been, since 1884, officially a Cathedral. A more recent change is that Cathedrals, some of which, including Southwell, had Provosts, now all have Deans as the senior priest, (the recently appointed Dean of Leicester, The Very Reverend David Monteith was installed on 18<sup>th</sup> May). The modern nave chancel furniture complemented the architecture well and the illuminated figure of Christ suspended high up on the east nave wall overlooking the nave chancel was stunning. Evidence of Roman floor tiles have been found in the Minster and are on view as well as evidence of Roman wall paintings recovered nearby. The east end stained glass windows are also stunning having been rescued from a European demolition site in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. There was not time to visit the chapter house which we were told has some internationally important stone carving. A poignant chapel was dedicated to the men of the Polish Air Force who served with the Royal Air Force in the war and which contained a memorial to those who were killed at Katyn in Poland.

There was plenty left to see inside and outside here on a future visit.

After lunch the coach transported us the short distance to the former Workhouse, now in the care of the National Trust. The coach park is about 100 metres in front of the building and as with the Minster, there is a major first impression (quite honestly of doom and despondency). We were quickly equipped with our audio tour and after a short live introduction and a video we worked our

way around the House at our own pace. Clearly life was hard and the work that inmates did was often not productive or necessary. But they had a roof over their heads and were given food, if only rather basic gruel and bread. The walls of the small exercise yards, one for each of the groups of able bodied men, women and children, are well pointed and the ground covered with tarmac, but in the days when these were in use they must have been dismal places where the occupants could not see over the wall to the fields and green trees beyond. The top floor rooms had been left just as they were found with patchy paint on the walls and cracked floors and ceilings. It was amazing to go into one room which had been furnished as it was last used, as recently as the 1970s, by the local council to house homeless families. There were iron bedsteads, a basic cooker and cooking equipment but there was a TV and record player.

We returned to the coach after a good cup of tea (and for some, cakes) at 3.45 arriving back in Wigston at 5pm.

Colin Towell

## **JUNE 2013 MEETING**

On a perfect warm summer evening members travelled to Ashby de la Zouch and assembled at the Museum before being divided into two groups for a guided walk. We learned that Ashby is a market town, formed from a number of hamlets which merged over time. It is in two distinct parts which are plainly visible on old maps, which show the long narrow burgage plots along Market Street contrasting with the earlier Anglo-Saxon, square and rectangular ones, along Wood Street.

The market and Ashby's position at the junction of the main roads linking Nottingham with Birmingham and Leicester with Burton on Trent, resulted in many visitors and travellers. This led to a larger than usual number of hotels and inns, some of which survive today. Many of the buildings in Market Street are timber framed, and their beamed ceilings and quaint interiors can be glimpsed through the shop windows. Most have had Georgian brick facades added. Mill Lane has a former Baptist Chapel, which was later occupied by Methodists, and has housed a printing works for many years. Close by a shop premises which was once a candle makers and still retains the hooks in the ceiling from which the candles were hung.

Ashby Castle was originally a fortified Norman manor house which passed by marriage c.1160 to the La Zouche family. It was enlarged by descendants until the line ended in the 14<sup>th</sup> century when it changed ownership several times, then reverted to the Crown before being granted in 1464 by Edward IV to William, Lord Hastings. He extended the building into a castle which included crenellated walls and the massive keep known as the Hastings Tower. He was beheaded by Richard III in 1483 but the lands and title remained with the family, who added to the castle, including landscaped parks and gardens. It became a Royalist stronghold during the Civil War and was slighted by Cromwell so the family moved to nearby Donington Hall. The castle became a famous, much visited, ruin after the publication of Sir Walter Scott's novel 'Ivanhoe' in 1819. Today it is managed by English Heritage.

St. Helen's Church is the original late 15<sup>th</sup> century parish church but was heavily restored c.1880. It contains significant memorials to members of the Hastings family, including the 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Huntingdon and his Countess Lady Selina who is remembered for founding a branch of the Methodist Church. There is also some significant stained glass and the only surviving finger pillory, three hundred years old, and believed to have been used as punishment for absence from or misbehaviour in church.



Mineral Springs were discovered at nearby Moira c.1812 while digging for coal, and baths were established. This small scale venture was popular but the location near a coal mine and with limited accommodation made expansion unlikely. It was decided instead, at huge cost, to transport the water to an underground reservoir in Ashby and build a baths complex in its own grounds, with swimming pool etc. there instead. The project was completed in 1822 and named 'The Ivanhoe Baths'. A few years later the Royal Hotel was built nearby. Large houses were also built in the town in anticipation of the arrival of wealthy guests.

The project enjoyed modest success but never really reached its potential. The coming of the railway brought more visitors for a time, but conversely made travel to the coast easier as sea water bathing became more fashionable. The Baths were closed in 1870s, reopened for a time, used for other purposes, then became derelict and had to be demolished in 1962.

We returned for a really enjoyable buffet supper and a look around the Museum. Mike Forryan thanked our hosts for a most informative and well planned tour and delicious food before we headed back to Wigston.

Tricia Berry

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### **PHOTOGRAPHS OF VISITS**

Mike Forryan has added photographs of the May and June visits to our website which are available for members to view.

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### **GWHS LEAFLET**

With this Bulletin we are delivering/enclosing a copy of a Society leaflet which the Committee have produced. It gives an overview of what we do, and will hopefully be of interest to members and help promote the Society and attract new members. If you know anyone who might be interested do pass it on, more copies can be obtained from the Chairman, Mike Forryan (07711 083227) or Secretary, Ann Cousins (0116 2884638).

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### **AUDIO RECORDING EQUIPMENT**

I am pleased to report that the Society is now actively recording people's memories of Wigston and the surrounding districts. We started in May with a visit to Holmes Court Care Home in South Wigston at the invitation of Fiona Smith – Community Links Development Worker.

Colin Towell and I met and recorded three people in a trial run which turned out to be a great success. Not only were the recordings excellent and the memories relevant but we were giving individuals a great and memorable experience.

We interviewed Barbara Peck, Barry Wetherill (with his wife Betty) and Neil Sivell. If anyone would like to participate in the programme of recordings please contact a member of the committee.

Mike Forryan

## Updated Historical Society Web Site

The web site for the Society has been updated. We have now added selected documents and photographs from our archive to enable members to see the material.

To comply with Copyright laws we have created a “Members Section” that is only accessible to paid up members of the Society by password.

The new Members Section contains:

- Bulletins
  - Selected Documents from our Archive
  - Transactions
  - Society Library
    - Books
    - Videos/Films
    - Oral Recordings
    - Presentations
    - Data Files
- Wigston Time Lines
  - List of Oral History Recordings
  - Photographs
  - J R Colver Drawings
  - Events
  - Kilby Bridge
  - People
  - South Wigston
  - Wigston Magna

Please note that this is not the entire archive as we do not have the space on the server to accommodate everything.

Anybody can access the general site for information about who we are, when we meet and the programme but the “Members Section” is password protected.

[www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

To have access to the “Members Section” you will need to send our Chairman an e-mail at [chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:chairman@wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk) and ask for access.

You will then be added to the user list and then receive an e-mail from the “Serif” secure server giving you your password. Your Username is your e-mail address. Please read the e-mail carefully and then click on the link provided to confirm that you have received the e-mail and to activate the password. As soon as you have done this, you will be able to access the “Members Section” by entering your e-mail address and password.

We hope you enjoy the additional feature and information available to members.

Mike Forryan

## **FAMILY HISTORY SHOULD CARRY A GOVERNMENT HEALTH WARNING !!**

As some of you reading this may know, family history can be addictive, a fact I can definitely confirm, as for the last two and a half years I have been obsessed with research into the family of Orson Wright, the builder of South Wigston, putting research into my own family on the back burner. When I set out on this incredible journey in early 2011, I thought this was going to simply be a story of a local family – how wrong I was!

The Wigston Civic Society asked me to put together a talk for their 2011 AGM about local family history, and to base it on the family of the well known builder Orson Wright. Orson is mentioned in some of the local history books about South Wigston, but he had never been researched in depth. This “local” research has taken me to South Wigston, Wigston Magna, Leicester and many surrounding areas, Stamford, Derbyshire, Suffolk, Sussex, Jersey in the Channel Islands, Australia and Salt Lake City in Utah, USA.

This amazing story starts with Orson Wright leaving school at the age of 8 and ending up with his death and burial in April 1913 when at the time he was worth, in today’s values, £8 million. His business interests in building of houses and hotels, boot and shoe manufacture, hosiery, hat and cap manufacture, brick yards, a wood yard, elastic web manufacture, his involvement in Leicester County Cricket and the Leicester Fosse Football Club, and even to the building of a reservoir in Derbyshire, demonstrate the true spirit of this Victorian entrepreneur, described in a 1924 newspaper article as “a man of many enterprises”.

Along the way I have discovered many interesting family members of Orson, including a Great War soldier who became an officer and was awarded the Military Cross for his bravery at the age of only 19, and an uncle who uprooted his family including 7 children and travelled to Salt Lake City in Utah, USA, to become Mormons, who has direct descendants still there to this day.

The research has been compiled using local archives at the County Record Office in Wigston, by contacting several living descendants around the country, and also from an extremely useful resource the National Newspaper archive available on the Internet.

There is so much I have found out about this amazing man that I have now put it all into print in a book called “Champion Of The People” which was published on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

I hope that this story may inspire you into researching your own family history – you never know what you may find!

**Peter Cousins, Chairman, Leicestershire & Rutland Family History Society.**

Details of the book about Orson Wright can be seen at:

[www.pcgenealogyservices.co.uk/orsonwright](http://www.pcgenealogyservices.co.uk/orsonwright)

or telephone 0116 2929234

## TYLER BROTHERS – BOOT & SHOE MANUFACTURERS & RETAILERS

Leicester and county was once an important centre for footwear manufacture, second only to the hosiery trade. Sadly, like the latter, these once great companies have disappeared over the years with just a few of the well known names surviving in the retail sector. The Tyler brothers who once owned several factories and numerous shops up and down the country seem to have faded from the scene completely. Having discovered that the family had some local connections this research takes a look at who they were and what they did.

The Tyler Brothers' parents were Henry Tyler and his wife Mary nee Peters who were both born in Potton, Bedfordshire c.1799/1802. Henry was a shoemaker, and all of their large family of 10 children were also born in this little town before the family moved c.1848/50 to Wolverhampton. In the 1851 census Henry is by then 49 years old and described as a cordwainer employing 10 men. It seems likely that this move to a much larger, more densely populated and central area was to give himself the scope to expand his business and improve the prospects for his seven sons, who were all to follow their father into the footwear trade.

The eldest son John Tyler c.1826-1914 moved to Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire before his parents and younger siblings had left Potton. Further moves were made to Duddeston in Warwicks, Willenhall, Birmingham and Stafford. By 1886 he had a company John Tyler & Sons, boot and shoe factors, at 26 Charles Street, Leicester and lived at Wigston Fields. He later moved to Meadow House, Uppingham Road, Leicester. He and his first wife Deborah had 10 children. William Tyler c.1829-1909 moved to Northampton, Wolverhampton, Tunstall and Festiniog before a final move to Portmadoc. He and his wife Jemima had 5 children. Ezra Tyler c.1833-1881 remained in Wolverhampton. He and his wife Caroline had 5 children. Thomas Tyler c.1836-1922 started in the shoe trade but emigrated in 1863 to Nebraska, USA and became a stock raiser. He and his wife Amelia had 3 children.

The remaining three sons Alfred c.1831-1906, Josiah 1838-1916 and Henry Peters Tyler 1841-1904 are the main focus of this research because as Tyler Brothers they lived and managed their huge business interests in and around Leicester for most of their lives. All three arrived c.1867/68, Alfred having previously lived in Northampton and then Wolverhampton, moved over to Leicester. Josiah having lived in Wednesbury moved to Wigston Fields and Henry Peters, (perhaps the most dynamic brother) who, in 1862, when aged only 21, had founded a shoe manufacturing business in Middlesborough, also moved to Wigston Fields. Sons were born to both Josiah and Henry Peters in 1868 during their time living there, but unfortunately birth records give no exact address, stating only that they were born "in the fields, Wigston". Long before the area was developed and came to be known officially as Wigston Fields.

The first mention in directories of Tyler Brothers in Leicester is in Harrod's 1870, when the company described as boot & shoe manufacturers was trading in Sarah Street, Friar's Causeway. There were no Tylers listed as residents in Wigston by this time. The P.O. Directory of 1876 indicates the business had moved to 14 Belvoir Street and that the Middlesborough branch was still retained. Alfred by then lived at 29 Castle Street, Josiah at Dane Hill Villas, Fosse Road and Henry Peters at 29 New Walk.

In February 1876 Tyler Brothers purchased The Grange estate at Wigston Fields, which comprised the house, gardens, outbuildings, orchards and agricultural land, in all 94½ acres. It was being sold by the Burgess family who had moved to Leicester following the death of Thomas Burgess in 1874. Albert Edward Tyler, not a close relative but surely some connection, lived in the house from about 1877-1886. He worked in administration, and so Alfred Tyler, according to the 1881

census, oversaw the farm and employed 10 men and 2 boys to do the work. At the Wigston Floral & Horticultural Society's annual show held in August 1881 in Dr. Hulme's paddock (Dr. Hulme lived at the Manor House in Long Street), Tyler Brothers exhibited a nice collection of hot house fruits. Also a very fine collection of vegetables was shown by the Wigston Sanitary Committee which had been grown on the Sewage Farm!!

By 1891 Albert Edward Tyler had moved to Devon where he worked as Secretary of a Gas Company. The house was then at various times let to tenants or occupied by a farm manager or left empty. The property remained in the ownership of the Tyler family until January 1922 when the house, garden, two orchards and two small fields were sold to local hosiery manufacturer, Albert Edward Hill. The farmland was disposed of separately at an unknown time.

In due time with each of the three Tyler Brothers having sons entering the business, changes were made. The Leicester Chronicle & Leics. Mercury of 6/2/1886 carried the following announcement:

*“the partnership heretofore subsisting between us the undersigned Alfred Tyler, Josiah Tyler and Henry Peters Tyler carrying on business as Shoe & Leather Factors & Merchants at Belvoir Street, Leicester & in the County of Leicester & elsewhere under the firm or style of “Tyler Brothers” has this day been dissolved by mutual consent.....each of us will in future carry on business at Leicester aforesaid & elsewhere on our own several & separate accounts as follows: Alfred Tyler at Albion Street, Leicester under the style of Alfred Tyler & Sons, Josiah Tyler at Redcross Street, Leicester under the style of Josiah Tyler & Henry Peters Tyler at Belvoir Street, Leicester under the style of H.P. Tyler”.*

The separate companies continued to go from strength to strength. Manufacturing of the boots and shoes was concentrated in Leicester and used to supply a huge number of retail shops throughout the United Kingdom. Regular advertisements for the shops featured in local newspapers, and they appear to have been ahead of their time by running competitions to encourage trade, and displaying footwear on the pavement, thus occasionally having to prosecute people when items were stolen.

Alfred Tyler and his wife Eliza had two children, sons Arthur and Albert. Both went into the business which by 1888 had moved to 18½ Halford Street, before finally having moved again by 1899 to Queen's Building, 41 Rutland Street. In 1900 he retired and the partnership was dissolved by mutual consent, with Arthur and Albert continuing the business alone. In 1906 Alfred Tyler died, by this time he lived at 94 London Road, Arthur lived at Buckhurst, London Road, and Albert at The Lodge, Queniborough. In 1923 the business was incorporated as a limited company. On 24/5/1929 the Western Daily Press, Bristol reported that:

*“Alfred Tyler & Sons Ltd, one of the oldest of the Leicester multiple shoe houses...with a chain of nearly 50 branches was acquired by Lennards Ltd., of Bristol, who will shortly take complete control, the present directors all intending to retire. Some of the Alfred Tyler stores in the big northern towns are exceptionally fine and there will be no competition between the two businesses as geographically the interests of the Leicester house extend northwards of Lennards present field of operations...the deal will secure for Lennards a chain of retail establishments running virtually from Berwick-on-Tweed to Lands End.”*

Josiah Tyler and his wife Martha Emery had thirteen children. His business had moved by 1892 to 36 Belvoir Street, before subsequently moving again by 1895 to Albion Street. He lived at Granby House, 158 London Road. By 1900 the business had been incorporated as a limited company.

Always innovative he was quoted in the Derby Times & Chesterfield Herald in 1896 as saying that his 10/6d boots were made of horse hide, which cannot be equalled for wear, and that the motor car would reduce the value of the horse. Sadly things did not end well because on 20/7/1906 the London Gazette reported that:

*“At an Extraordinary General Meeting of the members of Josiah Tyler Ltd held on 16/7/1906 at the office of Messrs. Whetstone & Frost, solicitors, of 8 Bishop Street, the following Resolution was passed....that it has been proved to the satisfaction of this meeting that the Company cannot, by reason of its liabilities, continue its business and that it is advisable to wind up the same, and that accordingly the Company be wound up voluntarily....”*

Josiah and his wife moved to Stafford where he died in 1916.

Henry Peters Tyler and his wife Elizabeth had eight children. By 1891 his business was situated at 17 Rutland Street on the corner of Colton Street. This was later re-numbered 29 Rutland Street. The building still stands, built in 1875 and Grade II listed, it is described as having Italianate Designs and is clad with buff coloured brick and stone dressings. Henry also owned over 100 branches of his boot and shoe shops around the country, including two in Leicester at 48/50 Market Place and 20 Haymarket. Additionally he was also a partner in a wholesale and retail linen and woollen drapery business with a shop at 34-38 Market Place under the name of Turner and Co., which he was to own outright from 1901. His eldest son Oliver had recently taken over his house in Stoneygate Road and he had moved to Cossington Hall. He died in 1904 at Scarborough where he was staying for the benefit of his health. The Angus Evening Telegraph used the headline “Death of a Boot King”, and continued “He was head of a boot and shoe company which he founded in 1862 and had grown to gigantic proportions, having over 100 shops”. Similar announcements in local newspapers around the country show how well known he had become.

Members of his family continued the company for many years. Right up to 1966 H.P. Tyler Ltd occupied 29 Rutland Street, and also a factory in Pomeroy Drive, Oadby. By 1969 the Rutland Street premises were occupied by Millets and H.P. Tyler Ltd. was just at Pomeroy Drive. It is uncertain when they finally ceased trading.

An 1891 Trade Catalogue gives this description.

*“For 30 years this well known concern has been in active operation and it is at the Rutland Street warehouses that extensive stores necessary for the supply of the branch establishments in connection therewith are kept....Pile upon pile, and stack after stack of boots and shoes of every conceivable style and size to suit every condition....are here displayed to the astonished gaze....and indeed we seriously believe that the warehouse would go a very long way towards supplying each individual inhabitant of Leicester with a pair of new shoes tomorrow. There is no hurry, no confusion, if a gross or so of ladies’ ‘twos’ or ‘eights’ be required they are selected, packed and on their way to the railway station in a very short space of time....considerable space is also devoted to the storage of leather”.*

Tricia Berry

Sources: BMD records, censuses, newspapers, trade directories, Leicester Illustrated 1891.