

# Recent Publications

## *Edited by Cynthia Brown*

### LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND

#### **BELLS AND BELLFOUNDING: A HISTORY, CHURCH BELLS, CARILLONS, JOHN TAYLOR & CO., BELLFOUNDERS, LOUGHBOROUGH, ENGLAND**

Michael J. Milsom

The Author, 2nd rev. ed., 2018, 309pp, illus., ISBN 9781547239153, £21.95

Michael Milsom was Bellmaster at Taylor's bellfounders Loughborough from 1977 to 1988. He came to this role with a varied background – he wasn't 'born and brought up' in the trade whereas 'every member of the Taylor family had lived and breathed it for over 200 years'. Being a Bellmaster involves overseeing the production of the bells, including probably the most important aspect of all, their tuning, to make sure that they sound well, not just singly, but also as part of a group of bells. A nasty vibration, or a bell seriously out-of-key with the rest of its companions in the belfry, can lead to complaints, non-payment of invoices and a permanently damaged reputation for the business. He highlights his ability as a chorister at Southwell Minster, along with his time as an audio engineer, as being key to his progression by training his ear to a fine degree. He first joined the tuning office, 'the nerve centre' of the whole Taylor's operation, and he pays fulsome tribute to the later guidance of Paul Taylor, the last of the direct family line linking with the foundry's origins, as his mentor and friend until his death in 1981.

Taylor's is a jewel in the crown of Loughborough's industrial history, going back to Robert Taylor in 1780 and continuing to this day to create bells of all sizes and weights for churches, cathedrals and buildings all around the world. It also produces carillons such as Loughborough's own First World War memorial carillon with its freestanding tower, installed in Queen's Park in 1919. The book is well illustrated throughout with photographs of the buildings housing Taylor's most famous bells and scenes from the factory floor. It surveys the history of bells and carillons before going into the technical detail about the science behind the making and tuning of bells, and proceeding to give the reader an overview of where Taylor's bells are to be found all around the world. It includes the making of 'Great Paul' for St Paul's cathedral (the heaviest swinging bell in England at nearly 17 tons) which was transported to London by road in 1881 on a low truck pulled by a steam traction engine. Also 'Great George' for Liverpool's Anglican cathedral - cast in 1940 but not taken to Liverpool until 1951

because of wartime disruption. When it was tuned, nearly two tons of metal had to be machined off so that it would be in harmony with the existing ring of 12 bells. Perhaps the most unusual story is of the casting of a one ton bell for the rock band AC/DC for use during their worldwide tour in 1980. It appeared on stage during their 'Hells Bells' number!

The author would be a wonderful after-dinner speaker, because he has a fund of amusing anecdotes and experiences to tell about his time at Taylor's, including the time he tried and nearly failed to get through US customs with 'Bellfounder' as the occupation on his passport (it wasn't on the list of approved trades), coupled with what appeared to be an offensive weapon in his luggage (a clapper)! His intention is to present his subject 'in a somewhat humorous fashion that will hopefully generate a smile and to make it interesting to people who know nothing about bells, rather than a dry recital of facts'.

Margaret Bonney

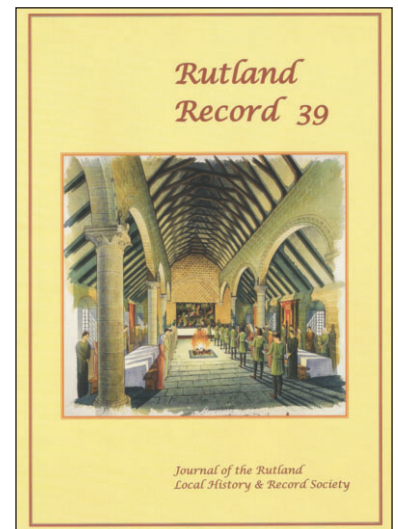
#### **RUTLAND RECORD: JOURNAL OF THE RUTLAND LOCAL HISTORY AND RECORD SOCIETY, NO. 39**

Various authors

Rutland Local History and Record Society, 2019, 46pp, illus., ISBN 9780907464600, £6

The main focus of this edition of the *Rutland Record* is on archaeological themes and buildings. It begins with an update by Elaine Jones on Upper Palaeolithic worked flint found during field walking by the Rutland Local History and Record Society's Archaeological Team. Although the finds are described as 'sparse',

two 'nationally interesting' sites have been found at Glaston in Rutland and Launde in Leicestershire, to add to those in Rutland, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire from which material has already been recovered. Each of these nine findspots is identified on a map, individually described, and illustrated with images of the finds. The article also includes



a time chart of the Upper Palaeolithic period, a section on its likely landscape, and an extensive bibliography.

Peter Liddle gives a detailed account of the excavation of a Roman temple complex at Thistleton between 1959 and 1963 by the then Ministry of Works, in advance of ironstone working by Stewarts and Lloyds, owners of the steelworks at Corby. The temple was first seen from the air in 1957, when a series of photographs showed two stone buildings inside a ditched enclosure. When these were excavated in 1961 and 1963, a long sequence of buildings was discovered beneath them, the earliest being three concentric timber circles, each with an entrance on the east side. While interim reports on all the sites were published at the time, they were never drawn together into a full report. This article gives an overview of the Ministry of Works findings, including the transition from timber to stone buildings, and the aisled ('basilican') temple that replaced an earlier 'impressive' stone structure around the late 3rd or early 4th century. A longer version of the article, co-authored with Dr Jeremy Taylor, will be published in the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*.

Nick Hill presents his recent research on Oakham Castle hall in a detailed and very well illustrated article, demonstrating that the principal features of this twelfth century aisled hall survive 'in remarkably intact condition'. For example, he concludes that all the evidence of the Oakham decorative scheme, including its shallow raised relief and the round Romanesque form of its arch, points toward it being the original decoration of the 1180s, a very rare survival, 'especially in secular rather than ecclesiastical buildings'. There were alterations nonetheless, and these are also covered in detail, including the close examination of the west and east gables. This gives an insight into structures originally attached to the ends of the main hall, both in the nature of 'lean-to' buildings.

A final short article by Robert Ovens presents some transport connections from the Jack Hart collection of over 2,300 picture postcards, dating from the early twentieth century and held by Rutland County Museum. Each of the 11 images is accompanied by a commentary placing it in its wider context. For instance, that of the Grade 2 listed Welland Viaduct around 1925 shows the timber walkway and pedestrian handrail in an area of the valley that was frequently under flood - with a woman and six children sitting on the walkway, dangling their feet in the flood water. The Raphael Tuck postcard of the 'Cottesmore Council Estate', posted in 1950, also shows the Cottesmore Toll House at the eastern end of Main Street, with its angled window to give the keeper a better view of the traffic. The journal concludes as usual with an invaluable overview of Rutland history and archaeology in 2018, including

fieldwork and discoveries, historic building recording, and reports on the activities of Rutland local history groups and societies.

Cynthia Brown

### **Other recent publications**

#### **50 GEMS OF LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND**

Michael Smith  
Amberley, 2020

#### **THE PLACE-NAMES OF LEICESTERSHIRE: PART EIGHT – RIVERS, ROADS, FOLK, ANALYSES, OVERVIEW, INDEX**

Barry Cox  
English Place-Name Society, 2019

### **LEICESTER**

#### **CHILDHOODS ARE FOREVER**

Tony Muddimer  
Austin Macauley, 2019, 135pp, illus., ISBN 9761528901758, £8.99



than from my parents'. He recalls walking to the shop in Humberstone village on a Sunday morning to buy a farthing's-worth of sweets - the walk being as much a 'treat' as the sweets themselves; and of buying his favourite triangular ice lolly from the Walls ice cream tricycle that visited his street. Other early memories are of adult reactions to events such as the abdication of Edward VIII, a 'momentous furore' when family and friends 'talked about nothing else for days on end', and children sang 'Hark the Herald Angels sing, Mrs Simpson pinched our King'. He later watched the parade in Leicester for the Coronation of George VI, sitting on his father's shoulders in Charles Street: 'such merriment and excitement in those far-off unsophisticated days'.

This very readable book is written in a year by year format, with historical information presented alongside his own memories. Most of it relates to ‘what it was like for a young boy having to live through and experience a world war’, and he has vivid memories of that time, including food shortages, German bombing raids, and the large class sizes at his school due to the number of teachers called up to serve in the armed forces. Although he lived in Leicester for most of the war, he was evacuated for a short time with his family to Tenby in South Wales, where his father was stationed. He also writes of his father’s war service as one of the first men to be accepted for 30 Assault Unit, a British Commando unit originally formed in 1943 to gather intelligence - in which the author Ian Fleming also served, and whose dangerous missions were said to be the inspiration for his James Bond character.

Cynthia Brown

### **THE LIFE STORY OF DR DOROTHY FRANCIS, MBE: AN AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN BUSINESS WOMAN IN LEICESTER**

Kiyotaka Sato

Research Centre for the History of Religious and Cultural Diversity, Meiji University, 2019, 296pp, illus.

The latest booklet in Professor Sato’s ‘Memory and Narrative’ series, based on oral history interviews, presents the life story of Dorothy Francis, who was born in Jamaica in 1961. Her memories begin with her maternal grandparents, subsistence farmers who brought her up until she was able to join her parents who had moved to Coventry in 1962 to work. Like many migrants from the Caribbean, she recalls how shocked her parents were ‘at how cold it was in Britain, because they had never experienced cold in their lives... For the first time in their lives they had to buy coats, boots, socks, gloves, scarves and a hat to keep your head warm, instead of a hat to keep the sun off your head. It was a big culture shock...’. The racism they experienced was also unexpected - they had ‘never had to deal with people taking an instant dislike to them because of the colour of their skin’ - but as Dorothy relates, she experienced it for herself on many occasions.



She also talks of her childhood, her schooldays, and the hard work and lengthy journeys involved in being able to buy the Jamaican food that her father insisted on having. Her first

job was as a telephonist at the Post Office: ‘a good job because in those days the GPO was a prime employer. In those days if you got a job with the GPO people felt that they had made it, especially for people from my background’. She left it to study English language and literature at university, feeling that ‘it would equip me for a lot of things in general’. A career as a business advisor in the social enterprise sector was not among the options she considered at the time, but this was the path she eventually took after moving to Leicester around 1984. The success with which she has pursued it is reflected in such honours as the MBE, an Honorary Degree from the University of Leicester School of Business, and the Queen’s Award for Enterprise Promotion (Lifetime Achievement Award).

This is a particularly interesting part of her life story, where she reflects not only on the nature of the work but also the co-operative principles that underpin it: ‘It is a way of work which I subscribe to, and I know that it is a way of working which brings empowerment, and you see, for black people that is an important thing because we are still not empowered as much as we could be’. She brings the same thoughtful approach to the education of African-Caribbean children, and to her religion and family life. She married her white British-born husband Kevin in 1990, and he contributes a short memoir of his own to the book. This informative and very readable addition to Professor Sato’s ‘Memory and Narrative’ series also provides a wealth of context in which to better understand Dorothy’s individual experiences as an African-Caribbean businesswoman in Leicester.

Cynthia Brown

### **ERNEST GIMSON: ARTS & CRAFTS DESIGNER AND ARCHITECT**

Annette Carruthers, Mary Greensted and Barley Roscoe  
Yale University Press, 2019, 372pp, illus., ISBN 9780300246261, £50

‘Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful’, said William Morris, the father of the Arts and Crafts Movement. This book, published to mark the centenary of the passing of Leicester-born architect and furniture designer Ernest Gimson (1864-1919), excels in both respects; and it will perhaps establish Gimson’s claim to be, creatively, William Morris’s twentieth century heir. As lifelong students of the ‘decorative’ arts and craft traditions, former fellow curators in Gloucestershire where Gimson spent most of his working life, and (in the case of Roscoe) a Gimson family member, the three authors are steeped in the world they are describing. They have also collaborated before. Annette Carruthers and Barley Roscoe each contributed chapters to

Mary Greensted's 1993 study *The Arts and Crafts Movement in the Cotswolds*, and this new book is clearly indebted to Greensted's earlier work *Gimson and the Barnsleys: wonderful furniture of a commonplace kind* (published as Mary Comino in 1980).

This time, however, the focus is squarely on Ernest Gimson. It is a much more ambitious publication which seeks, through meticulously detailed research and well-chosen illustrations, to reveal the extraordinary quality and breadth of Gimson's design genius: from embroidery and bookbinding to bespoke inlaid furniture, from metal candle sconces and fire tongs to the architectural stone and timberwork of Bedales School library and Stoneywell cottage. As you would expect, it covers all the influences: William Morris, the Art Workers' Guild and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and the attraction of Socialism and 'alternative' lifestyles. Most importantly though, it does all of this by studying the evolution of Gimson himself: his family life and formative years in Leicester; the famous meeting with Morris in January 1884; the subsequent move to London; the influence of J. D. Sedding and the Barnsleys; and his relationships as a son, brother, colleague, businessman and husband. The book is tightly organised and edited, extensively annotated and referenced, and wonderfully illustrated with high-quality colour and monochrome plates. It is itself both beautifully crafted and serviceable: a highly readable, scholarly account of its subject's life and work.

Nick Knight

**WILLIAM FLINT, LEICESTER'S CLASSICAL ARCHITECT**

Mark Mitchley

Fuzzy Flamingo, 2019, 294pp, illus., ISBN 9781916114708, £12.99

Some of William Flint's contributions to the architectural heritage of Leicester include such familiar buildings as the lending library on Belvoir Street, Charles Street Baptist Church, the Corn Exchange (with Charles Wickes), and West Bridge spinning mill - along with the townhouse in customary Classical style in Upper King Street in which the author himself once lived. While Flint was described as 'an amiable, unassuming and esteemed man', the same could not be said of some of his associates. They included his first partner, who led a life of crime as 'an utterer of forged cheques', and a pupil who had plans to canalise the streets of Leicester with wooden troughs. Another pupil became master to Ernest Gimson, father of the English Arts and Crafts movement. All in all, the book offers a rounded and absorbing account of a man who was, in the author's own words, 'rather splendid but rather overlooked'.

Please note that this is a summary of the book, based on information published elsewhere. It was not possible to provide a review in this edition of the *Leicestershire Historian* due to the coronavirus lockdown earlier this year, but it is hoped to publish one in a future edition of the LAHS Newsletter.

Cynthia Brown

**Other recent publications**

**THE BROTHERS YORK: AN ENGLISH TRAGEDY**

Thomas Penn

Allen Lane, 2019

**RICHARD III: THE SELF-MADE KING**

Michael Hicks

Yale, 2019

**JOSEPH ROBERTS: A GROCER OF DISTINCTION**

Brian Johnson

The Author, 2019

**THE SONG OF SIMON DE MONTFORT: ENGLAND'S FIRST REVOLUTIONARY**

Sophie Therese Ambler

Picador, 2020

**TOWNS AND VILLAGES**

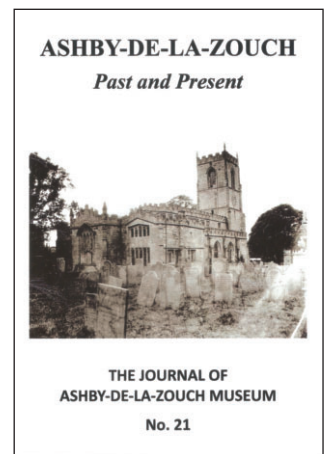
**ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH PAST AND PRESENT: JOURNAL OF ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH MUSEUM, NO. 21**

Various authors

Ashby-de-la-Zouch Museum, June 2019, 40pp, illus., £4

Two schoolboy memoirs of wartime evacuation to Ashby feature in this edition of the journal. Mr Hooley writes about the evacuation of his school from Aston in Birmingham, whose pupils were billeted around the town in the Manor House and St Helen's House as well as in private residences. His own stay in one of the latter was not much to his liking:

'Bread and butter OR bread and jam, but never the trio should meet'. He also recalls the bomb that fell on Ashby, playing table tennis and board games, and roaming the surrounding countryside. Barrie Cross was also evacuated from Aston to Ashby - 'a place we had never heard of', with some striking differences from Birmingham, not least the weekly market with its 'steady stream' of farmers attending the auctions. He also recalls the time he was billeted in



Measham, from where he and other boys were taken to Ashby in a ‘creaky and squeaky’ bus whose driver did not take kindly to the suggestion that it had a ‘very big mouse’ on board.

John Macdonald’s article on medieval coal mining in Coleorton sets out the information and insights gained when local historians and archaeologists were given access to workings up to 700 years old during new open cast mining from 1986-93. The physical evidence from the site, along with artefacts recovered from it, challenges the ‘generally held belief that the German mining industry had revolutionised the English mining techniques during the sixteenth century’. He also contributes an article on ‘The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Coleorton Beaumonts’, explaining how the ‘now rather bedraggled’ chair of William Howley, Archbishop from 1829-48, came to be in the church of St Mary the Virgin in Coleorton. One of Howley’s daughters married into the Beaumont family of Coleorton, about whom much is also revealed. Still on an ecclesiastical theme, Julie Denton gives a detailed account of the extension and refurbishment of St Helen’s church in Ashby, a project that began at a public meeting in May 1877 and required a massive fundraising effort. A debt of over £2000 remained when it was completed in 1881, and remained ‘a constant cause for concern and a recurring topic in the church magazine’ until it was discharged three years later. The final item in this edition consists of notes from a talk given by Ken Ward on the history of St Helen’s church rooms in Ashby, opened in December 1902. They were used for a variety of activities, including lunch for local schoolchildren, before being sold in 1977 to Ashby Dramatic Society

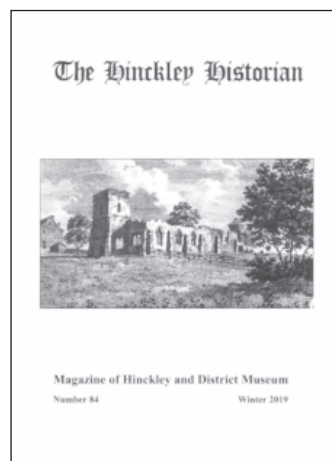
Cynthia Brown

**HINCKLEY HISTORIAN: MAGAZINE OF HINCKLEY AND DISTRICT MUSEUM, NO. 83, SUMMER 2019; NO. 84, WINTER 2019**

Various authors

Hinckley and District Museum, 2019, 43pp, (Summer); 44pp (Winter), illus., £1.50

Captain John Mace Preston of Hinckley joined the merchant navy in the mid-nineteenth century, entering a profession ‘highly unusual’ for one so far from the sea. His career is explored in the Summer magazine by Paul Seaton, using Preston’s Certificates of Competency, service



records, and letters back to his brother in Hinckley. These are placed in the context of the ships in which he served and later captained, the last of them the *SS Delaware*, from which he was swept away by a ‘tremendous sea’ as the ship was lost off the Scilly Isles in a gale in December 1871. Caroline Wessel contributes an article on ‘The Earl of Huntingdon at Lindley Hall, a Palladian mansion on a much older site near Hinckley that was demolished in 1925. For several years from 1911 it was leased to Warner Francis John Plantagenet Hastings, 15th Earl of Huntingdon, who had been appointed as Master of the Atherstone Hunt a few years earlier. Said to be ‘a quietly spoken man, invariably polite’, he ‘loathed parties, disliked town life, and only attended social occasions under pressure’. The article is also very informative about his wife Maud - ‘the complete opposite’ - and their eldest daughter Kathleen, a talented actress, playwright and poet.

Dave Knight’s comprehensive and well illustrated article on the history of Aston Flamville covers the period from its Anglo-Saxon origins to the present, when despite the new housing built between the village and the M69 motorway, it remains possible to ‘experience the picturesque views that still remind us how the village looked in Victorian times’. ‘Pop goes the weasel’ by Alan Briggs focuses on two of Hinckley’s pawnbrokers, Nicholas Eales and Andrew Cooper, and includes Eales’ evidence to the Framework Knitters’ Commission in 1844, when he was the only pawnbroker in the town. Cooper traded as a grocer in Castle Street before setting up as a clothier, jeweller and pawnbroker around 1876, and the family business continued until the 1940s.

Wills and Son, printers and stationers, are the subject of Hugh Beavin’s article. This draws primarily on the Wills Account Book of 1898-1931, with additional research by Dave Knight into Census returns, and offers insights into a range of local organisations who were customers of the firm – from churches and chapels to the Hinckley Co-op, the Chrysanthemum Society and the Burbage Military Band. This edition concludes with images of council housing in Hinckley and Earl Shilton to supplement Paul Griffiths’ article on the subject in 2017. He returns to it in the Winter edition to look at the response in the Hinckley area to the Housing Act of 1919, and the ‘dramatic change of approach’ that this required as local government became the agents of central government policy to provide ‘Homes fit for heroes’. It posed particular challenges for Hinckley Rural District Council (RDC), with a population spread across 11 parishes and no prior experience of providing houses for rent. Against all expectations however, the RDC’s performance surpassed that of Hinckley Urban District Council with a ratio of one new council house for every 79 residents.

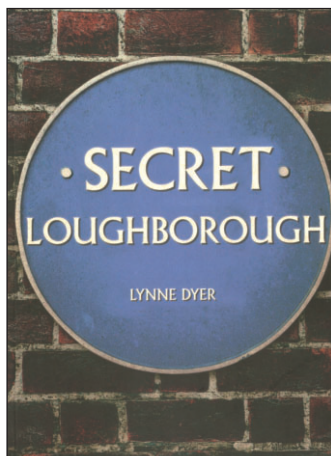
In 'Births and Baptisms' in this edition, Ian Phillpott reflects on 'something of a stampede' to have children baptised at St Mary's in Hinckley on 28th and 30th June 1837, shortly before civil registration of births was introduced. This did not become compulsory until 1875, but he concludes that there was 'a general failure for folk to perceive any distinction between the significance of baptism and registration'. A full list of baptisms on these two days is included in the article. Roy Woods contributes his memories of Brooks Yard in Hinckley, close to where he grew up in the 1940s, and where he lived after marriage. People, houses, shops and other buildings are recalled, among them the grocery shop of Jim Whitmore, 'a pipe smoking member of the Home Guard', who also helped Roy's mother in the family cycle business when his father was away on war service. The final article in this edition is a history of Elmesthorpe 'from the earliest times to 1939' by Dave Knight, who highlights the railway as an important factor in increasing the village population in the twentieth century. Down to 48 in 1891, it grew to 70 by 1901 and to 134 in 1931 - increasing still further with the arrival of families from areas of high unemployment under the Land Settlement Association scheme of 1934. These two editions of the magazine are very readable and have much to add to the history of the Hinckley area.

Cynthia Brown

## SECRET LOUGHBOROUGH

Lynne Dyer

Amberley, 2019, 96pp, illus., ISBN 9781445688244, £14.99



The market town of Loughborough, despite its size and historical importance, is not that well known even within the county. This is a book for dipping into and then going out to explore - when government restrictions allow - and visitors and local residents alike will find much to interest them in its pages. The author's

observational skills and determination to uncover the stories behind Loughborough's streets, businesses and open spaces combine to create a fascinating *pot-pourri* of the mundane and the unusual.

The book is divided into eight chapters: What's in a name?; The Birds and the Bees and the Horses to Boot!; Look up, Look down and Look all Around; Loughborough Firms; People and Visitors; Secret and Not-so-secret

Societies; The University and its Secrets; and Glorious Gallimaufry. As the chapter titles imply, Loughborough's parks, trees, notable people, horses, sporting connections and the University campus all feature, as do the stories behind many of Loughborough's pub names, street names and even street furniture, including signs, railings, mileposts, statues and drain covers. The medley in the final chapter encompasses a major land sale which transformed Loughborough, a church, almshouses, 'ghost signs' on buildings and the culverts carrying the Wood Brook through the town.

The short paragraphs are concise and well-written, hiding many hours of research into Loughborough's people, places, networks and businesses, including foundries, brickmakers, Friendly Societies, freemasons and the borough's former electricity works. The 'secrets' revealed are numerous, and include the granite crosses embedded in tarmac, indicating where Zeppelin bombs fell, the reason for the inclusion of a peacock on the University's arms, and the location of a sign to commemorate Loughborough's best decorated street for the 1953 coronation. One person's 'secret' is another's general knowledge; but there are so many 'secrets' within these pages that even the best-informed local people are likely to discover things they didn't know. Copiously illustrated with over 90 modern photographs, and soundly researched, this book contains much to discover and delight both the casual reader and the urban explorer.

Pam Fisher

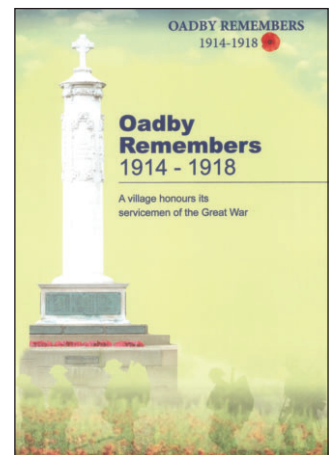
## OADBY REMEMBERS 1914 – 1918: A VILLAGE HONOURS ITS SERVICEMEN OF THE GREAT WAR

Oadby Remembers 1914-18

The Authors, 2019, 169pp, illus.

This publication is the culmination of a five year project to commemorate the Oadby men who fell during the Great War, which also included exhibitions, public lectures, community activities, a website and a Facebook page. All the project workers were volunteers, among them local and military historians, archivists and genealogists

who have conducted research in local and national archives as well as encouraging local residents to share photographs, letters and other documents, along with family stories. Seventy-three names appear on the Oadby War Memorial on the corner of London Road and Wigston Road. Another ten



were identified from the Adult School Memorial in Oadby Baptist Church and the Oadby Council Senior School Memorial. All of them have an individual illustrated biography covering their family background, education and work before the war, in addition to their wartime service itself. These are arranged chronologically by their date of death, the first casualty being Pte Walter Gregory of the Royal Scots, a Reservist who was working as a coach painter's labourer when he was recalled to his regiment at the start of the war. He died in France on 13th September 1914.

Each entry is also placed in the context of Oadby's Home Front, as well as the major campaigns and battles of each relevant year. This gives a real sense of the day to day challenges of village life in wartime, from shortages of food to the cancellation of evening postal deliveries in 1916 due to labour shortages; but there are lighter moments such as a 'comedy football match' in 1917. This took place on Mr Siddons' meadow behind Chapel Street, and was refereed by George Grainger, who was 'dressed as a Scottish soldier and used an umbrella to direct the match'. Prizes for the best costumes were awarded to three players dressed as a servant, a sweep and 'Uncle Sam'. There are additional sections on the war memorials, including the debate about the form that the village memorial should take: suggestions including a playing field, memorial hall and nursing home, as well as the memorial tablet that was eventually agreed. Oadby's Conscientious Objectors, the role of the 53rd Remount Squadron in caring for war horses on the Racecourse, and how the village readjusted to peacetime conditions, are also covered in this well-researched, engaging and beautifully presented publication, which amply fulfils its aim of honouring Oadby's fallen.

Cynthia Brown

### **FREDERICK MERTTENS: THE LAST LORD OF ROTHLEY'S ENGLISH MANOR & SOKE**

Terry Sheppard with Peter Merttens

Rothley Heritage Trust, 2020, 244pp, illus., ISBN 9781916325104

This is a really enjoyable and informative read, warmly recommended to those with an interest not just in the history of Rothley Temple, but also in the life and times of a visionary philanthropist, Frederick Merttens, who left his mark on this village in a variety of ways. Turn to page 182 for an evocative photograph of this man, taken in 1912, looking very Edward VII-ish with his luxuriant droopy moustache, to put a face to one of the most significant figures in the long history of Rothley - all the more striking, given that the family only lived in the village for a little over seven years at the end of the nineteenth century!

The book has three sections, and the main author, Terry

Sheppard, gives a very useful overview of each in his Introduction. Part 1 fulfils his aim to 'open up an understanding of that long tail of Lordships of the manor and soke that Merttens bought into'. It is no mean feat to make plain the meaning of 'soke' with its rights and liberties, let alone to untangle the long history of the ownership of Rothley Temple, including its connections with the famous Babington family and the fight to abolish slavery in the eighteenth century. The estate had fallen on hard times by 1893 and it was up for auction. Seeing an opportunity to become a 'real' lord of the manor, Merttens, the shrewd and capable businessman, also saw economic opportunities with the arrival of the railway skirting the estate, and acquired this complex bundle of rights and properties for £40,000.

The second part of the book fills out the family history of Frederick Merttens, told through the experiences of various family members and associates, including the history compiled by Frederick's grandson, Peter. Frederick's second wife, Margaret, gives the fullest account of life at Rothley, and the work of the 'squire' to improve the village and its amenities. A large part of their time was spent in renovating the Temple itself, which had not been much touched since Babington's day. It took until 1897 to become habitable, when the Merttens moved in. Over the next three and a half years, Margaret gave birth to three children there, but by 1900 the rural dream was over. Frederick's health broke down, and on doctor's advice the family decamped to Switzerland. The Temple was let, and the Merttens never returned to live in Rothley. He had an agent and later his company to manage the estates, based in Rothley.

The Merttens' influence lived on through the management of the estate, and their legacy to the village forms the basis of the third section of the book. Merttens persuaded the railway company to bring the line nearer to Rothley, by providing all the land required for the station and the line. This was vital to his vision for building a 'garden suburb' at Rothley, giving his villagers access to mainline and commuter connections to the industrial cities of the Midlands and the north. Not only would this improve his own journey to his cotton business in Manchester, but it was also about opening up the possibility of the rural idyll to people from increasingly polluted urban areas. He oversaw the building of new roads and the laying out of plots, hiring an architect to design suitable homes and publicising it all in a sales brochure of 1909-10: *Rothley Garden Suburb for Ideal Home Life*. This offered as its selling points 'bracing air, charming scenery, picturesque and historical neighbourhood', and much more.

In order for the Garden Suburb to 'live up to being a suitable place for the homes of gentlemen, then the amenity of a Golf course was a prime necessity', and it was opened with great ceremony in 1912. The growth of his vision was somewhat

interrupted by World War I, and proceeded at a slower pace than he had hoped; but in 1925 he formed a company, the Rothley Temple Estates, to manage the development of the estate, with a local site agent. The book's final chapters trace the history of this company beyond the death of Merttens in 1935, and the gradual waning of the family interests in Rothley until the final sale of the estate in 1973 to other developers who have continued shaping the village today. The book is well illustrated throughout, including photographs, maps and extracts from many of the documents in the Rothley Temple collection at the Record Office, and from the old estate office plans that have been digitised in collaboration with the University of Leicester. These are available online in the 'My Leicestershire' database at: <http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p15407coll8>.

Margaret Bonney

### ***Other recent publications***

WIGSTON: A MIX OF MEMORIES (DVD)

Various film footage

Greater Wigston Historical Society, 2019

### ***INDUSTRY***

WILDT & CO. LTD: LEICESTERSHIRE INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE SOCIETY BULLETIN 23

Wildt & Co. Ltd.

The authors, first published 1934; republished 2019

### ***MILITARY AND WAR***

**WITH VALOUR AND DISTINCTION: THE ACTIONS OF THE 2ND BATTALION LEICESTERSHIRE REGIMENT 1914-1918**

Nigel Atter

Helion and Company, 2019, 262pp, illus., ISBN 9781912866243, £22.50

Nigel Atter's choice of the 2nd Leicesters as the subject of his admirable history is an interesting one. Although mobilised in India and rushed into the line around Ypres in late October 1914, while every other active 'Tigers' battalion served solely on the Western Front, the 2nd Battalion was uprooted again after a year and spent most of its war fighting the Turks in Mesopotamia and then Palestine.

This account of the 2nd Leicesters is the first in over 90 years, since Colonel Wylly's joint history of the two regular battalions. Although Wylly made full use of the battalion

War Diaries and had immediacy on his side, Atter has the advantage of a long retrospect and significant archival resources - such as the priceless correspondence of Captain D. L. Weir - which are deployed carefully and to telling effect.

The book is well illustrated, both with clear maps and most interesting photographs. Although the custodian, professionally, of many regimental photographs, it was pleasing to this reviewer to see an unfamiliar snapshot of the battalion *en route* from their depot at Ranikhet in 1914. The author's own photographs of the 1915 battlefields are also revealing, showing the pancake-flat landscape across which the 'Tigers' were expected to attack. Nigel Atter knows too that this is a story of flesh and blood, of the heroic and less-heroic; of men with faces and names. Some 60 pages is rightly devoted to a Roll of Honour, and several appendices give thumb-nail sketches of the battalion's officers and significant Other Ranks. These include Blackader, of course, and William Buckingham, who was awarded the battalion's sole VC. Once again, the author has done well to include Ernest Beaumont, the only man 'shot at dawn' (and subsequently pardoned).

This is an excellent and valuable book. Helion & Company have once again served their author well, producing a pleasing and attractive volume. Even the cover is a delight, dominated as it is by a group photograph of the battalion's officers - including, in one row, Captains Weir and Romilly, Colonel Gordon, and General Blackader. These are only a few of the characters within, and the merest hint of the stories of this proud battalion.

Robin Jenkins

### ***SPORT AND LEISURE***

**EVEN HESKEY SCORED: EMILE HESKEY, MY STORY**

Emile Heskey with Dean Eldredge

Pitch Publishing, 2019

## **AUTHORS AND PUBLISHERS**

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