

Kirby in the 18th Century

I've recently been watching the repeat television series by Michael Wood called "Story of England", first broadcast a decade ago. It has lost none of its fascination. The premise of the programme is simple – find a village in England whose historical records have survived and use them to illustrate the history of the whole country. The village chosen by Michael was Kibworth in Leicestershire, so many of us will already have some familiarity with the location. The presenter explained the circumstances that resulted in Kibworth being almost unique in the extent to which their records have survived back to medieval times.

Now although Kirby cannot claim to be quite as fortunate as Kibworth, I would say we are luckier than most! Many of our parish records from the 18th and 19th centuries have survived and can be consulted by anyone at the Country Record Office (CRO), currently at Wigston but due to move to a new site near County Hall at Glenfield. We in KMLHG also have copies of most of these in our archives, thanks to the generosity of the CRO in allowing us to photograph them, so I thought it might be interesting to tell you a little about life in Kirby in the 18th century, as gleaned from these records.



I need to start with a bit of background about the parish system in general. The way in which a parish should be administered had been laid down in Elizabethan times and changed little until the New Poor Law of 1834. It centred on the Parish Church, so the Rector of St. Bartholomews would have a vestry of officers. These would be "selected" from the village and would serve for a term of a year. Since they were unpaid posts, no-one wanted to do the jobs, but the people who were considered to be responsible persons would take it in turns to do each of them. They could at least claim expenses and it is mostly their account books that we can read today. There were a few other perks of the job too. The Surveyor of Highways was responsible for the maintenance of Kirby's roads, so he might decide that the ones in most need of work just happened to be those around his farm! Other farmers were unlikely to object, as they knew their turn would come.

The Churchwarden was responsible for the upkeep of the church, so we can see that John Chesterton, the blacksmith, submitted his bill to the Churchwarden for 4 shillings to take down the "cockel", clean it, black-lead it (another thruppence) and put it back up.



Other, less skilled, villagers would be paid for cleaning the church. They would often be paupers who could earn money in ways like this, to avoid going "on the Parish" for benefits. Payment for work often included a part-payment in ale, so we find

frequent payments to Dame Boyer, the local alehouse keeper, for the supply of this.

The Overseer paid out money to the poor, as well as buying them clothes, coal, etc. He also had expenses, such as in August 1796, when he attended an inquest into the death of John Moreton, a child who had drowned in a well in Ratby. The following year, we see a payment "to Clement Winstanley esq. for ye Poor Houses on the Waste – a years rent". I wonder where they were?

The Parish Constable had the kind of tasks that you might expect, and a few you might not! His contribution to pest control in the village was to pay young boys to bring him dead sparrows. Sixpence for two dozen appears to be the going rate when he paid young William Clarke.

We've heard the phrase "hue and cry" meaning that all able-bodied men, upon hearing the shouts, were obliged to assist in the pursuit of the criminal. This had been in force since the 13th century, but by the 18th century, its meaning had changed somewhat, since our Parish Constable, John Kirk, charged 4d for "carrying 2 Hue and Cryes to Glenfield". These were magazines with lists of wanted criminals – he was not leading a posse!

One way of limiting the parish costs for poor children was to apprentice them out. So Kirby paid for James Farmer, aged "near twelve years" to be apprenticed to Thomas Cramp of Ratby, cordwainer, which meant that he was a shoemaker. Thomas would take the lad in, feed and clothe him and teach him the trade of cordwaining, until he reached "his full age of 21". Did James then, as a qualified cordwainer, return to Kirby? More research needed!

MG

Joseph Bassford

We recently received an enquiry about a Joseph Bassford, who lived in Baron Park in the 19th century. He appears to be a man of independent means, but we know very little about him. Do any of our readers recognise the name? Can you tell us any more? If so, please contact a member of the committee or email us using the address below.

Our Website and Email Address

www.kirbymuxloelocalhistorygroup.org
info@kirbymuxloelocalhistorygroup.org

Are you enjoying our Newsletters? Are there any history-related subjects that you would like us to cover? We welcome feedback, either directly to a Committee member or by email – see right:



Newsletter No. 4 August 2020

Hi and welcome to our fourth Kirby Muxloe Local History Group Newsletter

Since the Covid-19 virus pandemic continues, we've produced another newsletter to keep in touch with you. We hope to return to "normal" (whatever that turns out to be) as soon as we can, but for now, we hope you enjoy reading this.

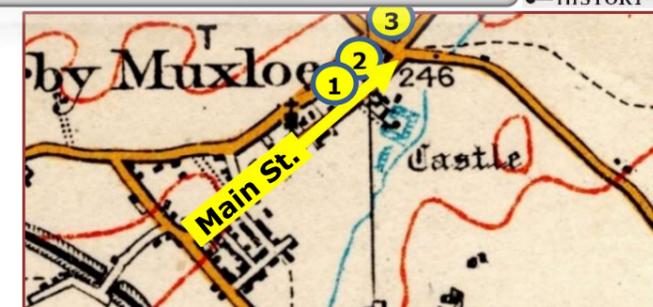
So please accept it with the compliments of our Committee:

- Mike Gould (Chair)
- Val Knott (Secretary)
- Kate Traill (Treasurer)
- Judith Upton (Archivist)
- Kerry Burdett

We start by again turning back the clock and continuing on our virtual walk around 1945 Kirby

① The Poplars stands to the right-hand side of the entrance pathway leading up to St Bart's church. By 1945, the house has been owned by several members of the Blenkin family. In fact, the house was originally purchased in 1900 by William Lakin, the great uncle (by marriage) of John Blenkin, a gentleman who will become well known in the village for many years. John Blenkin lives at the house with his parents Alfred and Kathleen. John's mother Kathleen will continue to live in the house until shortly before her death in 1999. The Grade II listed building is one of the oldest in the village, having been built between around 1705 and 1710, and is described as a "Queen Anne farmhouse". During WWII, the cellars were used by several residents of the village as an air raid shelter. Now in 1945, they still bear the remnants of hurried arrivals and departures: a discarded blanket, a child's toys and other wartime memorabilia. The cellars are quite dry but it is thought that in later years the cellars will become damp, possibly due to a change in the water table. By 1947, the whole roof will be replaced, as the original Swithland slates are extremely heavy and when the bombs dropped on the village in 1940, they were dislodged. By the 1950's, we will see the original poplar trees felled for safety reasons.

② The Zion Chapel. Now, in 1945 the chapel has already had many uses. Originally built in 1881, it was the first purpose-built premises of a non-conformist church. During the 1930's, it served as a Technical School, where girls were taught the art of cooking and boys learned practical woodwork. In the last few years, the W.I. have used the premises for preserving and bottling fruit. They even have their own canning machine! After the bombing in 1940, it was suggested that in the event of further bombing, the building should be used as a decontamination unit (in case of poisonous gas) and also as a temporary mortuary if fatalities occurred. Fortunately, the building was not required for these uses.



③ As we round the corner at the end of Main Street and turn left, we can see the Parson's House, which was originally Kirby's first National School. The current incumbent is the Rev. G.E. Simms-Reeve, or "Simmy" to the villagers. Famous for his limitless capacity to drink cups of tea, he has been an Air Raid Warden for Kirby, complete with whistle, gas mask and tin hat! He was a "blue" at Cambridge and supports all the local sporting activities. After the Free Church had been demolished by enemy bombs in 1940, he was quick to share St. Barts with their congregation, until they were able to find an alternative. He is soon to move on and be replaced by the Rev. H. Paige Hudson. N.B. In last month's newsletter, we said that Jones and Overton occupied 34, Main Street. It has been pointed out that they actually had an office upstairs, above the shop. Before 1941, the plumber Harry Ireland ran his business from the premises. Thanks to Anon for pointing this out.

JU & MG

The Wilshere's of KM (cont. from middle page)

The agreement was that we would stay for one hour only, as she felt that would be sufficient time. However, she actually enjoyed herself so much that when I suggest that it was time to depart, she suggested we remained for another half an hour. One interesting thing that came out of that visit and subsequent visits to Drucilla, was that at one time she produced two books that contained a collection of letters written by Thomas Hardy, of Kirby Muxloe. Hardy was born in the framework knitters' cottage on Blood's Hill and became a preacher of some repute. On reading the books, Mike Gould found letters written to his ancestors, who had walked from Loughborough to Tiverton after the Heathcoat lace factory in Loughborough had been attacked by Luddites in 1816. Subsequently, this helped him to sort out a problem in researching his family tree. After we had read the books, Drucilla asked us to pass them on to Roger Hardy of Anstey, a direct descendant of the original Thomas Hardy. Roger was delighted as there are only a few copies of these books surviving.

As we became more comfortable, Rosamond allowed me to look at the vast collection of family memorabilia stored at her home. This included much of her late brother Jonathan's research work, including many pictures and information relating to Kirby Muxloe. In 2012, Rosamond allowed us to copy all the Wilshere Collection and in return we, the History Group, catalogued all the items for her, recording them on a CD. Rosamond was surprisingly modern in her views and is greatly missed. JU

Landlords of The Royal Oak (continued)

1901 – Philip Bosworth is listed on the census as licensee.

Philip was born in Anstey in 1870, the son of Thomas and Sarah Ann (Simpson). His father was employed in the boot and shoe industry in Anstey and his mother was a framework knitter, but by 1891 Thomas was a beer seller at The Plough Inn at Anstey. He later moved to The Coach and Horses Hotel at Anstey where he is listed in the 1901 census as a publican, with Sarah also working as a waitress in the business. He was still there at the time of his death in 1915.

In 1891, Philip now 21 and his brother Thomas aged 22 had followed in their father's footsteps, starting work as shoe riveters. In 1901 his brother Thomas with his wife Sarah and 6 children were at The Duke of Northumberland public house in Old Mill Lane Leicester where he is listed as a licensed victualler. However, by 1911 he was back in Anstey working again as a shoe riveter.

Philip married widowed Eliza Forman of Ratby in 1896. Eliza (nee Ball) had been married previously to William Forman who had come to Ratby from Stapleton as a plumber and was also publican at the Yew Tree Inn at Ratby. He died in 1893 at the age of 37. Eliza and William had one son Fred Forman who was born in 1885. Fred married Eleanor Hannah Chesterton in 1905, daughter of Jack Chesterton the village blacksmith, and Mary Elizabeth (Palmer).

Philip & Eliza had one daughter, Sarah Elizabeth who was born in 1897. She married George Sharpe a farmer from Earl Shilton and moved out of the village.

In 1901 Philip was a publican at the Royal Oak, Kirby Muxloe. With him are Eliza and "relative" Sarah Richardson. (Sarah Elizabeth age 3 was with her great aunt and uncle, Thomas & Eliza Forman at Earl Shilton). The 1911 census shows that Eliza is now assisting Philip in the business. The family have Aunt Eliza Forman age 76 and a widow staying with them.

Eliza Bosworth died in 1932 and Philip married Beatrice Harris of Ratby in 1933. He was still at the Royal Oak in 1939 where he was listed in the register as a licensed

victualler and Beatrice was assisting giving her occupation as "licensed bar/housewife"

Philip died in 1943 at Spring Gardens, Earl Shilton and following his death Beatrice married Harry Canner in 1944. She died in 1972.

1943 – George Upton followed as the landlord.

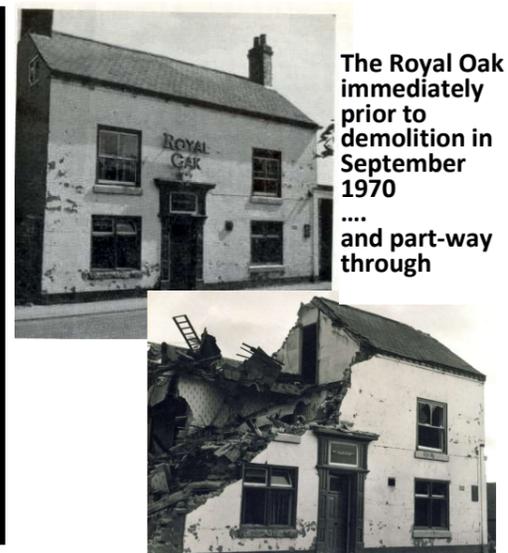
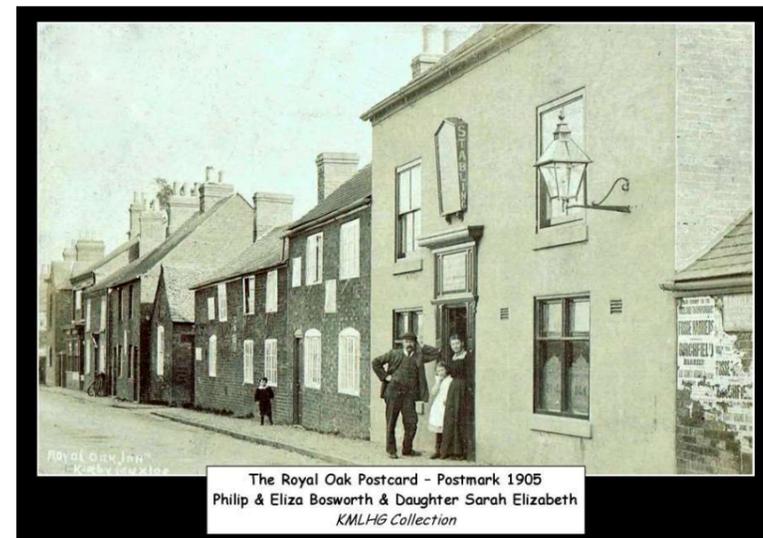
George Harry Upton was born in 1896, one of 6 children born to John and Esther Mary Harrison. (His grandfather was Samuel Harrison the wheelwright). In 1901 John, Esther and family are living on Hinckley Road next to her father. John was a "coachman, domestic." By 1911 the family had moved to Barwell Road, and John is a "groom, gardener, domestic". George is now 14 and is working as a junior clerk.

In December 1915 George joined the army and in April the following year was posted to France as a gunner with the Royal Horse Artillery. He was 19 years 1 month, and gave his occupation as a bakery clerk. He was transferred to the army reserve in July 1919. He married Marion Russell, daughter of Thomas Russell and Elizabeth Ann (Carver) of "Oakdene" Barwell Road in 1922 at Kirby. In 1911 Marion was a domestic housemaid at West Walk Leicester, in the household of Major John Hall Dalwood, the Leicester chief constable.

The 1939 register tells us that George was the steward at Kirby golf club, living with Marion at 12 Station Road with their son David who was born in 1932. He became the licensee of the Royal Oak in 1943 and left in 1963. George was a great practical joker and known in the village as "The Squire of Kirby". He kept his old grey horse called "Nobby" in the field behind the premises. Marion died in 1962 age 67 and is buried at Kirby. George died in November 1981 at Broomhills Farm, Peckleton.

1970 – Rod and Hazel Skelly were the licensees when the Royal Oak was demolished and the new Spanish Blade was opened by James Fisher, Chairman of the Kirby Muxloe Parish Council.

KT



The Wilshere's of Kirby Muxloe (continued)

On to the next generation - In 1925, Owen Wilshere married Margaret Elsie (Margo) Hughes. Margo was the daughter of A. Bradley Hughes and his wife who lived at Walton Lodge, Kirby Fields. Bradley was a hosiery manufacturer. Sadly, when Margo was very young her mother was drowned at Sheringham, Norfolk, and her father was so distraught that he moved away from the family, to live in the U.S.A. Margo was brought up by her aunts, Jessie and May Tyler, who lived just over the road at Elmcroft. At this time, several children whose parents resided in Kirby Fields married one another. This was more than likely due to the social gatherings that took part between the families who lived in the area. We know that there were many tennis tournaments at the tennis courts of the large houses. Notice of a tournament would often be posted on a nearby prominent tree. Afternoon tea parties were also well attended and even in wartime we have evidence of large garden parties where great quantities of strawberries and cream were consumed.

After a long honeymoon touring the continent, arranged by Thomas Cook, Owen and Margo set up home in the newly built house named "Greenways" on Gullet Lane. The house had been designed by Ralph Bedingfield and was set in one acre of land. Sadly, the house and the neighbouring property built at the same time were demolished in 2011, to make way for the small development of houses on Abbots Close.

By 1931, Owen's father, Herbert Wilshere, had died, to be followed by his wife Maud in 1933. The Old House on Kirby Fields was then sold off and as Jonathan Wilshere quoted in one of his publications - "The Wilshere's sold to Leslie Lovell Green in 1935, and the extraordinary occurrence of a staunch non-conformist family buying from and selling to a Catholic family was created". The Wilshire family had purchased the house in 1893 from a Catholic family and subsequently sold it to the Green Family, another Catholic family. In fact, the Green family turned the upstairs room over one of the stables into a consecrated Catholic chapel where nuns from Carmel, then a Catholic children's home on Kirby Fields, attended mass every Sunday. The chapel was the first place of worship for Roman Catholics in Kirby Muxloe since the Reformation. In fact, on climbing the stairs in the stable block, we are still confronted by a circular dish set into the wall, which those familiar with the Roman Catholic faith will know is called a "stoup". It is a container filled with holy water, positioned at the entrance to the church. As the worshippers arrived, they dipped their finger into the water before crossing themselves. The stoup was made especially by the fathers of Grace Dieu. After the Green family moved out, the church was decommissioned.

Owen and Margo lived out the remainder of their lives at Greenways and produced three children. Herbert David (known as David), Elsie Rosamond (known as Rosamond or Rom to her family members) and Jonathan Edward Owen. David read chemistry at Cambridge and spent much of his adult life living in

Switzerland with his family. Rosamond trained as a physiotherapist and in 1960, Jonathan was elected a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Insurers.

Jonathan is the most well-known member of the family as he was a celebrated local historian and the author of many books on our village and the surrounding area. Jonathan was born in 1936 and was educated at Rugby School. After a number of years working in the insurance industry, in 1970, he took over Chamberlain's music shop on London Road, Leicester. Many of us will recall visiting the shop to purchase sheet music, often for our children who were taking lessons for various musical instruments. He also became known as Leicester's "weather man" and for many years his weather predictions appeared in the Leicester Mercury. Jonathan was an avid researcher, spending hours in the Leicestershire Record Office, reading very old and intricate documents. These were the days before the internet, before ancestry.com and all the other family history sites. Jonathan's research included travelling far and wide to research his family tree, or else commissioning research from solicitors and other professionals. He also turned his research experience to penning many books, which are now available on the internet at www.andrewwilshere.com/jeow. Many of the books can still be purchased through Albion Press. Around 1970, Jonathan formed Leicestershire Research Services and in 1974, became a founder member of Leicestershire and Rutland Family History Society. He worked on his research in his small upstairs office in Rutland Street, Leicester, until his sudden death on 17th September 1995. He left a wife, Daphne and two sons, Andrew and Nicholas.

Elsie Rosamond Wilshere was initially educated in a small school which was held in the "Little House" on Gullet Lane, almost opposite the family home. Rosamond had fond memories of the school and the teacher Miss Langton. Rosamond said that her teacher was "most encouraging" and that everything was "wonderful", but sadly Miss Langton died not long after Rosamond had joined the school. In later years, she was educated at boarding school, before joining the Radcliffe Infirmary at Oxford and training to be a physiotherapist. During her long tenure at Oxford, she wrote a series of books for the disabled, including "equipment for the disabled" (1973) and "gardening for people with disabilities" (1983). After retirement, Rosamond returned to live in Evington, Leicester, and passed away in 2018, at the age of 89 years. During the last 10 years of her life, I was very privileged to meet her and over the years become a good friend (I hope that is what she felt). I used to visit her regularly and talk about her life as a young girl in Kirby Muxloe and also discuss the antics of "Hop" her friendly pigeon who lived in her garden. We also embarked on a few excursions, once to the shoe shop and another time to visit her cousin Drucilla Armitage in Earl Shilton who she had not seen for many years.

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