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Coalville 150 issue

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The Leicestershire Historian, which is published annually, is the magazine of the Leicestershire Local History Council and is distributed free to members. The Council exists to bring local history to the doorstep of all interested people in Leicester and Leicestershire, to provide for them opportunities of meeting together, to act as a co-ordinating body between the various Societies in the County and to promote the advancement of local history studies.

A series of local history meetings is arranged throughout the year and the programme is varied to include talks, film meetings, outdoor excursions and an annual Members' Evening held near Christmas. The Council also encourages and supports local history exhibitions.

The different categories of membership and the subscriptions are set out below. If you wish to become a member, please contact the Secretary, who will also be pleased to supply further information about membership and the Annual Programme.

GROUP, Organization £3.00
DOUBLE, Husband and Wife £3.50
INDIVIDUAL, Person under 65 £2.75
DOUBLE, Senior Citizens £2.50
SINGLE, Senior Citizen, Student £2.00
EDITORIAL

William Stenson ‘the founder of Coalville’ and Coalville Station at the turn of the century on our cover proclaim this as our special ‘Coalville 150’ issue, spanning the place’s brief history from a frontier mining village on a new railway to a mature town with diverse economy, now losing its main traditional industries.

The Leicestershire coalfield was being exploited centuries before the appearance of Coalville. It is interesting to find that Gabriel Holland, the eighteenth century coal-master working at Swannington, shewed in his appeal for funds that he had to contend with exactly the same problems as the nineteenth century industry, albeit on a smaller scale.

Jeffrey Knight, lecturer in Production Engineering at Nottingham University, has been well rewarded in his search for the original naming of the new town and is relieved to find that it coincides with the date adopted by the festival committee for the origin of the town. Dr Stephen Royle, who teaches in the Department of Geography in the Queen’s University of Belfast, responded in record time to a request for his account of conditions in the mining village of the 1840s. Denis Baker, who teaches at Coalville Technical College and is the local expert on the history of the town, completed his article for us in spite of his heavy commitment in organizing the ‘Coalville 150’ celebrations and in producing his own book. We are very grateful to these authors who have so generously contributed their writings especially for this issue.

The essay chosen this time from the *Leicestershire Historian* reminiscences competition is appropriate, and not only because it starts on a topic that will remind readers of the recent strike by water board employees. We published Mr C S Dean’s previous entry, an account of the killing of the family pig, in our 1975 issue, when he wrote; ‘These events were commonplace at that time, when nearly all the cottagers kept pigs in this area. I based the story on memories of my childhood in Hugglescote where I was born, though it is now looked upon as part of Coalville’. 
The Leicestershire Local History Council is following up its policy of keeping in touch with local groups throughout the County and is planning further conferences and exchange of information and experiences. Mrs Dickson has recently circulated all the groups known to the Council with a newsletter giving notes on twenty of the most active of them. As a result we are able to publish our list of names and addresses brought up to date. We are always anxious to hear from groups with news of their activities and their publications. We understand that there are plans to form a group in Coalville to carry on the work started by the ‘Coalville 150’ organizing committee.

We are grateful to Richard Black who not only prepared the illustrations for the article by Denis Baker but also designed the cover. The picture of William Stenson is based on a print ‘William Stenson Engineer, Leicester, July 5th 1841’ in the Leicestershire Museums collection.

Postcard view of the centre of Coalville in 1915, the Market Place, looking east along Station Road (later High Street)

D Baker
SWANNINGTON COAL-MASTER SEEKS CAPITAL:
Gabriel Holland in 1760

To my Acquaintance, Customers and Others, in the Towns and Counties of LEICESTER, NORTHAMPTON, RUTLAND, and elsewhere, whom it may concern.

I GABRIEL HOLLAND of Swanington in the county of Leicester, take this method and liberty of informing them touching my concerns at Swanington, as COAL-MASTER there: with a relation among other things since happening, to my entering upon the said Coal-Works, all which I purpose briefly and truly to set forth in a clear light, by means of the following lines; together with the usage and treatment, by which I am affected; and the various combinations, and contrivances heretofore, and now taken to injure my credit and property, ever since I undertook the said concern; and at the same time to shew, how by the artful contrivances of designing men, they are bro’t into the unprofitable situation in which they now are, and have been since the fifth day of February last.

AND, I do not think it materially necessary for me, to enter minutely into every circumstance that might be bro’t into this account, which is hereby submitted to the perusal of the PUBLIC, who are (according to my apprehension) interested in the affair now under consideration, much more than possibly they may be aware of, at present.

IN the year 1751, I first engaged in this very extensive as well as expensive undertaking; and I would not be understood as having either ignorantly, or unadvisedly set about it; without first looking carefully into, and making some proper comparisons (notwithstanding some Coalmasters have said the contrary), of the consequences, and material events of what might probably happen: for as my own capital, could have but little power in the carrying on what I purposed, my supply depended chiefly on the indulgence of my wive’s mother, then residing with me who, together with a person previously knowing of my engaging in the affair solicited me, to accept of him as a partner: signifying to me, that he had 500 l. to spare: which I thought would be very material to the purpose intended; and he further strongly urged me to proceed, and make the necessary agreements, in order to procure the proposed property; which I accordingly did: but, on further application to him, and withal informing him I had articulated, and taken such steps as were necessary; he then unexpectedly signified to me, That he had altered his mind, and by the advice of some people thought proper to decline having any concern at all in the affair.
Under this grievous disappointment (as his proposal had been the inducement of my engaging) added to my Family concerns in Swanington; I became inclined (notwithstanding as before) to make my case known to an acquaintance, (viz.) ISAAC DAWSON Attorney at law in Ashby-de-la-Zouch, who had friendship enough to encourage me to proceed in so promising an undertaking; and said he would assist me with money, which according to promise he did; and hath for a considerable time since, been the principal support in carrying on this expensive, though at the same time prosperous work.

I WOULD not be thought so vain, as to assert, that no unprofitable attempts have been made; there have been considerable sums of money laid out, which will not return at present; but those attempts had at that time, and still have their reasonableness, and natural tendency to advance the works; tho’ the profits then seem’d to lie at a distance; which, when I found to be really so, I left off for that time; and set about seeking for the present valuable DEEP COAL, never before attempted or sought for in this liberty; which with the desired success I found; and have since proceeded to lay a plan, and accordingly fix’d a durable foundation, having several hundred acres of coal to get, all which may be drained by the new erected FIRE-ENGINE.

I HAVE likewise built several new houses; and good stabling for above 40 horses; which are a great accommodation to the works: & also compleated soughs or drains; pointing out to my self, future and agreeable benefits; and adapted the whole concerns of my family in the liberty of Swanington and elsewhere, purely for the promoting of the coal-works; well knowing how durable they would prove from the great quantity of the best [deepest] coal lying under the present foundation; as also the continuance of the same stratum or bed of coal throughout the liberty: together with three other valuable kinds of coals, peculiar (in perfection) to Swanington liberty only: and which are called by the names following (viz) the NETHER-COAL, the STONE-SMUTT, and the RIDER; all which are extended in large and uninterrupted quantities; as are intelligibly and fully experienced in a COMPLEAT PLAN of the whole liberty or manor of Swanington lately laid down, and purposely designed to illustrate at one view to a demonstration, the quantity of coals contained in the same; and the proved and undoubted certainty of their goodness; also their advantageous situation for getting and selling: likewise their well known quantity, far superior to any other Coal-Works in this country; and which will, without any contradiction, continue for ages and generations yet to come; and are at this time (with a few necessary preparations) capable of producing a very large and sufficient quantity of coals; and as many hundred pounds, a year less expense than any other works that I know of.
I THINK it necessary to inform my readers, That there are two Coal-pits, which have been worked for some time; and from which I have gotten a considerable quantity of the deep coal; and as I have revived the practice of waggoning under ground, which proves extremely suitable and profitable to this work; on account of its being dry, and also a good floor and roof; great quantities of coal are still capable of being produced from those pits, without any more charge in sinking.

THERE is also a new pit in an elliptical form (which I prefer to all others) set with bricks, and sunk within about three or four ells, of the same deep coal, and part of the under ground works prepared and in readiness; also a new pit-frame and pulleys; together with a gin wheel, and roof set up; and what remains to be done in order to compleat and set this pit to work; may upon occasion be done in one month, and at a very trifling expense.

I HAVE before-mentioned in this account three different kinds of coal peculiar to Swanington only, which I have likewise made considerable preparations to work occasionally; and have made proof of one of them on the common (viz.) the Stone-Smutt, or Sleck; which is of excellent use for most common business; and particularly in the burning of brick, lime, &c.

I THEREFORE think it needless to enumerate much more in relation to the Coals in Swannington Liberty; there being numbers of evidence, even from the working Collier, to the most extensive capacity in Mineing, to prove the truth of what is herein but faintly advanced, and also the richness of the Coal-Work.

SINCE I engaged in this undertaking, I have all the while been contriving with the utmost diligence and attention, to form a compleat Work; and be accommodated with every thing materially necessary, and do imagine that not many unprejudiced persons who have seen my concerns, will call my application or industry into question.

THE latter end of the year 1759 I had procured most or all the valuable materials for the works in readiness to proceed (after so many years expense) in expectation of some returns, and had the two pits before mentioned completely at work, and a considerable quantity of coals stacked on the bank; my men all engaged by bargain, hiring, &c. for the ensuing season, and in an undoubted condition to get a large quantity of coal; I having for that purpose about the time last above mentioned, made an agreement with Hugh Platt of Osgathorpe, in our neighbourhood, by article, (as I understood it, to furnish me with 600 l. for the getting and stacking of coals;) a copy of which, with one other article at the same time given; and he being required at the time of signing, gave a positive promise to ISAAC DAWSON already mentioned (and party along with myself to both instruments) should immediately be granted
when required; notwithstanding which, he directly after, (viz.) on the 6th of February, absolutely refused, on my sending an acquaintance THO. PEAT, of Nottingham, schoolmaster and surveyor, in company with WILLIAM KEENE, to take copies of them; but all the arguments at that time made use of by them, and by others since, (more immediately concerned in my affairs) cannot prevail with him to fulfil his promise, and be so good as his word, and before I had received 300 l. of the above sum, without any breach of mine, he on the 1st of February last, to my unexpected and unparallel'd disappointment and loss, as well as my creditors, broke his article by refusing to pay me agreeably thereto; having deceitfully obtained my receipt for part thereof at my own house where he lay that night, by promising to assist me with the money for that receipt the next morning; but did compel, and insist upon my allowing him 10 l. as a stoppage against James Lenton, who he said was indebted to him more than that sum for malt, which I did accordingly: On the next day (the 2d) in the morning he left my house soon after breakfast (in company with Joseph Jones of Winster in the county of Derby, who had been present at the settling of our accounts, and returned home with him the next morning,) taking himself abruptly away, upon which, I sent my acquaintance William Keene of the city of Coventry house carpenter with Hugh Platt's note of hand, given me the preceding night in lieu of the said receipt and the balance arising: And on William Keene's overtaking Hugh Platt in his way home, and signifying his message, after some conversation relating to the subject; Hugh Platt told him he would part with no more money to me, till he know whether he was safe; and that being the last day of the week, and a reckoning day, the disappointment aforesaid, occasioned, and promoted by himself, proved to be an alarming circumstance, not only in the coal-field, but in the country also. On the 4th he came to me with his attorney, and desired I would give him possession of my COAL-WORKS: and, as I could not see the reasonableness of any such proposal, I refused complying with it; however, he being anxious after his prey, came next morning, (viz.) on the 5th accompanied by his attorney, and one Joseph Bailey, a servant to a neighbouring coal master (and who obtained leave of his master for that purpose) to attend on them in my field, where they came, with an imaginary authority (as I apprehend) and immediately interrogated some of my men, whether they would not exchange (i.e. leave) their old master, to serve Mr Platt: The unexpected and disagreeable sound, presently descended more than 100 yards deep into the bowels of the earth: The consequence of which was; the coming up of a company of useful and brave fellows into the open air: amazed and wondering, what cou’d be the matter upon the black surface which they had so lately left in a more agreeable manner.

BUT to proceed; at the same time, Hugh Platt, addressing himself to my principal Carpenter Thomas Griffin, gave him instructions to buy no more wood, without his immediate orders for so doing; likewise his attendant Joseph Bailey, gave directions, to my sawyers; Charles Breward and partner,
that no more wood should go down into the pit, till measur'd: There was a like further piece of assurance transacted the same day, and done by the before-mentioned Baily, by his pressing my men to take money from him: He also went to John Slater my Ground-Bailiff, and told him, he would come in the evening, and draw the boxes, by Mr. Platt's order (which boxes are the places, where the moneys taken daily at the pits are lodged) and the said Bailey came accordingly, but my men had taken the moneys out before; however he demanded to know what money had been in them that day; and a full account was given him of all the cash and trust of that days sale (which is a very memorable day to me) and, from the injury then done, must needs affect my creditors, tho' they have hitherto taken no notice of such his unprecedented steps; and it appears, by a fair and justifiable calculation made by a competent judge in Coal-Works, that I am above 2000/, sufferer already, in consequence of the artful combinations then carried on, for my men being greatly alarmed as aforesaid — and at the same time under high degrees of inticement elsewhere, I had it no way in my power to keep them together in any valuable number; (tho' not a man of them was in the least a sufferer for want of his due pay) by which means my works were stopped, except a few men whom I prevailed upon to remain with me in order to prevent the works from being injured; and to preserve and promote the value of them; by doing some necessary works designed by me before hand; as also to frustrate and disappoint the schemes pre-meditated by them, in order to become masters of Swanington Coal-Works as before hinted, which I am well assured was, and still is, the anxious desire of those who are endeavouring to monopolize both coals and lime; in which, if they do succeed, I presume the consequences will soon be sensibly felt, in certain degrees, by the industrious farmer; as well as those in more exalted stations in these parts.

IF I therefore; as an individual, have as before related, interested myself in these valuable concerns; which have already demonstrably benefitted the Publick; and were then at the point of making proper returns (which would in a short time have enabled me to have discharged any obligation I lay under) may be tho' worthy of timely assistance, by advancing of moneys at this juncture, (and for which I would be accountable) to purchase at the time of sale, or otherwise: Or to unite in a well chosen company in partnership to engage in the whole concern (of which partnership I shall endeavour by the assistance of my acquaintance to make ONE; and contribute to lay a lasting foundation, to preserve SWANINGTON COAL-WORKS from any sort of connection, or shadow of concern, with any other COAL-WORKS; being manifestly capable of IT SELF, to procure large supplies for the country; and to prevent any exorbitant dispositions from imposing upon them for the future.

I HOPE I may be allowed the liberty of relating TRUTHS, and informing my creditors and acquaintance, that it is my anxious desire to pay my debts; also my
attachment and inclination, to continue and contribute to promote the publick good; as well as to assist in any further improvements on the turnpike roads; in which I cannot think myself inconsiderable; as being the first who proposed and plan'd that profitable and useful road from LEICESTER to Ashby-de-la-zouch: clearly discovering at that time its great utility to the publick; as also its certain advantage to my Coal-Works; which, together with the number of useful roads since that time promoted, and now surrounding the liberty of Swannington; contribute greatly to the value of the work, by reason of their natural situation to each road, and manifest their certainty of continuing so for time to come.

IT is likewise my opinion, that it is exceedingly necessary for my creditors closely to attend this in particular, and to the country in general (viz.) speedily to set about, and prevent by some means, or other that no such combinations as have been already hinted, should have any possibility of success, against this well grounded scheme: And the most effectual method, that I have at present considered and do recommend to some abler hand for improvement; is, that by the approbation and consent of my creditors, and after their due inspection and consideration of my affairs, whether at this time it may be so advantageous to them to hasten the sale of my Coal-Works, as to accept, of an equitable composition; or contrive and promote some other more agreeable way, as they may think proper: For, taking it for granted, that the Coal-Works must in time be sold; there being the greatest reason to say, they will each year they are kept from sale much increase in value. By reason, (as before hinted) that the turnpike roads improve; and coals elsewhere are a decaying article, and will in the limits of a very few years, beyond all contradiction, be bro't to an undoubted period in several places: And if so, I ask the question (as it is all I can do in this case) why should my creditors suffer themselves, with their eyes open, to be losers? and not reasonably prevent, any such disagreeable events as I have mentioned, and which will certainly be the case; unless immediate care be taken, to put some well digested method into execution for that purpose: And, as far as I am in any wise capable, in my station to be instrumental, to the promoting my concerns (and the public good) am willing and ready at any time to wait on any person or persons who shall think what is herein related worthy of their further inquiry and notice; and shall endeavour to give them more particular and satisfactory proof than can be expected within the compass of this letter, &c.

I AM not willing to omit my acknowledgements, to those persons who have with a considerable degree of publick spirit, thought me worthy of being recommended by their notice, thro’ the channel of several of the LEICESTER JOURNALS: and more particularly that of the 20th of September last; calling on me, or any in my favour for a plan or scheme, to set forth. How money raised, might be properly and strictly applied to the publick benefit; and to
prevent its being made use of to my former credits? To which I answer; that no creditors could with propriety, have any such expectation in the nature of things; neither can I pretend to take upon me to determine what their dispositions would be in such a case: But I have great reason to believe, that the bulk of my creditors, who have taken any pains to inspect into my affairs, are fully convinced of the hard usage with which I have been treated; and the full certainty there was of my concerns answering every demand on me.

I DO not think myself equal to the task propos’d (viz.) to direct the publick. How moneys proposed to be raised, shall, or may be applied to their satisfaction; and therefore must desire some abler hand to take it into consideration.

I HAVE in the compass of this letter endeavoured to explain and set forth the state of my Coal-Works &c. And where I may have been deficient, am ready on occasion to give all further satisfaction, either publick or private, as the nature of the case may require, when reasonably called thereto; and hope what is herein inoffensively set forth will not be slighted by my friends and acquaintance to whose consideration it is hereby submitted.

GABRIEL HOLLAND.

Notes:

In 1760 Gabriel Holland published this appeal for support for his coal-mining enterprise at Swannington under the following title:

To The Inhabitants of Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Rutland, &c.
A Letter,
By Gabriel Holland, of Swannington.
London: Printed, by Isaac Watson, MDCCLX.

Two extracts were printed by John Nichols in 1804. Printed here is the complete text, retaining the original spelling and punctuation.

The vigorous and urgent writing of this pamphlet gives rare insights into an eighteenth century coal-master’s reactions to three main problems, the technical difficulty of sinking and draining new pits to reach ever deeper seams of coal, the difficulty of transporting the coal to its markets and the need for large sums of capital to be spent on establishing workings before winning any returns.
Holland claims to be the first to have worked the deep coal in Swannington. He mentions his practice of moving the coal in wagons underground and a new pit of elliptical section lined with bricks. Shallow workings could often be drained simply by gravity along soughs taking the water to lower ground but deeper mines required pumping. Holland's 'new erected FIRE-ENGINE' was not the first steam engine to be used here for drainage and a water wheel had been used before. Nichols had in front of him 'a large... plan (taken in June 1760, by Thomas Peat, of Nottingham, surveyor)', evidently the same as Holland's 'compleat plan of the whole liberty or manor of Swanington lately laid down'. The 'explanation' on it listed not only 'The new Fire Engine' but also 'The Place where the old Fire Engine and Water Wheel Engine, and the Place where a new Fire Engine stood about the year 1720...' 

Mining in this area was not able finally to expand until the opening of the railway to Leicester. Even before the canal age, however, there was room for improvement in road transport. The opening of the turnpike from Ashby-de-la-Zouch to Leicester no doubt speeded the change over from pack horses to wagons. Holland claims that he had been the first to propose it.

Holland's letter exposes the dilemma of the speculator at pains to justify himself and win sympathy for his past and present failures while at the same time trying to inspire confidence in his success just round the corner. In spite of the optimism of his appeal he in fact became bankrupt within two years.

Sources:

We are grateful to Bodley's Librarian for permission to publish the text from the copy of the pamphlet in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Gough Leicestershire 7 (13)). It bears marks shewing it to have been the copy used by Nichols.

J Nichols, The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester, III ii, 1804, pp 1125-6*  
R A McKinley, 'Mining' in Victoria County History, Leicestershire, III, pp 35-6
THE NAMING OF COALVILLE
J A G Knight

The meaning of the name Coalville for a town in North West Leicestershire needs no explanation. It was founded by the efforts of William Stenson, an original partner in the Whitwick Colliery Company (formerly known as Long Lane Colliery, sunk in 1828 (1)) and George Stephenson, who sank the Snibston Colliery in 1832 (2). It is indeed a coal town. Several attempts have been made to explain how the name came into being. The first piece of evidence used is an area called Coalville Place, situated between Whitwick Colliery and Snibston No 1 Colliery, which comprised the Colliers’ Cottages of Club Row, Stone Row and Mammoth Street. All of these streets are recorded in the 1851 Census of the Coalville Ecclesiastical district. The second piece of evidence is the house which William Stenson built on Church Street, now known as London Road. This house, which stood on the site of the present car park of the North West Leicestershire District Council offices, was known as Coalville House. The 1841 Census does not record a Coalville House, although the house with Stenson living in it is listed in 1851, indicating that it was built sometime between Stenson’s importance in the development of the town was aptly expressed in his obituary notice, which said of him; ‘No man can question but that he was the founder of Coalville’(3).

Two historians of the origins of Coalville, Edgar Hawthorn and Sarah Wise, have both argued that Coalville House was the source of the name. C R Clinker, in his article on the Leicester and Swannington Railway, states that the name did not appear in the Company records until 1841, up to which date it had been known as Long Lane. W Cox, in his study of Leicestershire Place Names, traced an early written record of the name on a rate return dated 1838 (4).

That the name was in popular usage at an earlier date is shewn by a newspaper report of the laying of the foundation stone of Christ Church in March 1837; ‘On Tuesday last the interesting ceremony was performed at Coalville in the parish of Ibstock’ (5). Further evidence is a report of a wedding between John Stenson and Elizabeth, ‘eldest daughter of Mr James Stephenson of Coalville in this county’ and an advertisement which offered for sale a bakery ‘near to the Red House, Coalville’, both in February 1836 (6). Although the records of the Railway Company do not include the name before 1841, the Company was using it well before that date. An advertisement announcing that ‘All trains from Coal-Ville or Long Lane would now convey passengers throughout the Summer’ appeared in March 1836 (7).
All this evidence is against the widely held belief that it was Stenson’s Coalville House which gave the town its name. Conclusive evidence is a report in the *Leicester Chronicle* of the 16th of November 1833:

Owing to the traffic which has been produced by the Railway and New Collieries on Whitwick Waste, land which 20 years ago would not have fetched £20 per acre, is now selling in lots at from £400 to £500 per acre, for building upon. The high chimneys, and numerous erections upon the spot, give the neighbourhood quite an improved appearance. We hear it is intended to call this new colony “COALVILLE” – an appropriate name.

The area referred to is undoubtedly the Colliers’ Cottages of Coalville Place. These are known to be some of the first buildings erected in the town, which was to grow and gain its intended name, Coalville.

References:

1. Letter from W T Stenson to Rev S Smith, 27 March 1865, Leicestershire Record Office DE 1760/48/55
2. *Leicester Chronicle (LC)*, 2 March 1833
3. *Loughborough Monitor*, 5 December 1861
5. J Knight, ‘New Information on the Town’s Origin’, *Coalville Times*, May 1982. Christ Church is situated in part of the old parish of Hugglescote, which was a township of Ibstock.
6. *LC*, 19 and 4 February 1836
7. *LC*, 4 March 1836
The history of Coalville in the nineteenth century can be broken down into three periods. Firstly there was the agricultural phase when the settlement, then Long Lane, with one hundred people, was apparently unknown to anybody living more than three miles away. Lastly there was the mature industrial town, in 1901 head of an urban district of 11,222 people with a reasonably diverse economy of engineering, railways, railway wagon building, brick making, textiles, elastic web manufacture and commerce to add to its coalmining component. In between these phases, from the 1820s to the late 1860s and early 1870s, Coalville was little more than a pit village. In 1851, when the first reliable occupation structure can be calculated from census returns, 65% of its workforce were miners, compared with only 52 1/2% in 1871, when brick making and commerce had become more important. Coalville had one of the country’s first railways but few passengers used it; it was for coal. In 1838 the line carried 433 passengers per week, the London-Greenwich line, 26,697. Before the late 1840s there was not even a proper station; the Railway Hotel had to be pressed into service as waiting room and booking office. Everything in the town, even its name and especially the lives of its miners, seemed dedicated to winning and transporting the coal from the ground, truly the town’s motto _ex terra opes_, from the earth wealth, was well chosen.

During the preparatory work for this, the Leicester-Swannington railway, Stephenson became convinced of the possibility of finding further coal near Long Lane and he was obviously well aware of the opportunities for successful marketing of coal once he had completed the railway. Before the line was opened — in two stages in 1832 and 1833 — Stephenson obtained his father’s and partners’ consent and bought the Snibston Estate. This was in 1831 and the
two Snibston Collieries, Numbers 1 and 2, were opened shortly afterwards, in 1832 and 1834. No other successful pits were opened in Coalville and in fact the first Snibston pit was almost given up when the local diggers found drainage problems to be defeating them and Stephenson had to import experienced men from Durham to complete the shaft. A further difficulty was a 22 foot seam of hard greenstone which had to be breached before the main coal with its six foot seam was reached at about 220 yards. Snibston Number 1 was on the railway; Snibston Number 2 and Whitwick Collieries were connected to it by branch lines. Snibston Number 1 closed in 1882, its land being taken over by Stableford’s railway wagon works.

Before the railway had guaranteed Coalville’s product proper access to a market the local mining operations were very small. A note appended to the 1831 census recorded only 72 miners in the whole of Whitwick Parish, an area which included established mines as well as Stenson’s new venture. However, by 1846 Coalville’s population had reached about 1,200 from the 100 of 1820. In 1842 one of the Snibston pits alone employed 250 men.

Many details of the mining operations in Coalville’s pit village phase can be found in an 1842 report of the Children’s Employment Commission. Although principally concerned with children’s work, the Commission’s reports inevitably contain a good deal of information about conditions and working practices in general within the industries investigated. Some of the tales which the 1842 mining report records are harrowing in the extreme. The Commissioner for the East of Scotland coal mines was moved to conclude, after reviewing the situation of child and female labour there:

> when the nature of this horrible labour is taken into consideration, its extreme severity, its regular duration from 12-14 hours daily which once a week at least is extended through the whole of the night, the damp, heated and unwholesome atmosphere in which the work is carried on, the tender age and sex of the workers, when it is considered that such labour is performed not in isolated incidents selected to excite compassion, but that it may be truly regarded as a type of everyday existence of hundreds of our fellow creatures — a picture is presented of deadly physical oppression and systematic slavery which I conscientiously believe no one unacquainted with such facts would credit the existence in British dominions.

In the Leicestershire coalfield, however, rather different conditions were to be found; the commissioner, Dr James Mitchell, enthused about mining in the area: ‘The mining population . . . is scattered over an extensive agricultural district and the coal works with their lofty chimneys adorn instead of disfiguring (sic) the landscape.’

The Coalville mines were operated on a system of sub-contracting. The proprietors hired the ‘holers’ or ‘butties’; these were the skilled face workers.
The butty was responsible for forming his own ‘small company’, hiring and paying teams to ferry his coal from the face to the shaft. In the Whitwick pit it is specifically recorded that the holers worked from 2 am to about 2-3 pm and that their team of ‘fillers’ (who put the coal in the baskets or ‘corves’) and ‘horse boys’ (who guided the horses which pulled the corves from the face to the shaft) started their twelve hour shift at 7 am in order for the holer to have had time to form a pile of hewn coal ready to be tranported. In all Coalville’s pits the filling of seven hundredweight corves was carried out by young men but, in contrast to the Whitwick pit where advantages was taken of the thick seams to use horses to draw the corves, in the Snibston pits two boys were used by the butty to ferry his coal on tramlines to the main underground railways. One boy pushed, the other pulled and, once at the main railway, the corve was lifted by crane onto a horse drawn carriage to be led to the shaft’s foot. The Coalville system contrasts with that of some Halifax mines where young boys and girls were chained to 2-5 hundredweight wheeled corves and pulled them along unrailed passages sometimes, it was stated, as low as 16 or 20 inches. In Coalville boys employed by the proprietors rather than the butties were used only to control ventilation doors, sweep the passageways, lead horses and run errands. The proprietors were responsible for the machinery, the winding gear, mine ventilation and mine safety and also put constraints on the labour the butties could use. Neither company would permit females of any age to be hired and Stenson would not allow boys under 10 to work in the Whitwick colliery. One witness to the report, the ground bailiff to Snibston collieries, spoke of boys starting work there at 7 but the Snibston book-keeper stated that of the 250 employees in 1842 only six were under 13 and none were less than 10. Stenson’s policy of simply not permitting boys under 10 to work was highly praised: ‘This is just what ought to be and is an example worthy of imitation in the other collieries of the Ashby district and all the coal districts of the Empire.’

Earnings in Coalville’s pits ranged from 8d per day for a young boy (or 6d for those paid directly by the proprietors) through to 1s 5d or 1s 8d when ‘the boy is able to walk with the horses’ to 3s 0d per day for the adult fillers plus 10-12 cwt of coal per month and ‘a little favour shown them in the rent of their cottages’. Stenson reported that butties at Whitwick could earn as much as £1 8s 0d per week. The 1842 report does not record miners’ outgoings for Coalville but at nearby Moira a collier with a non-working wife and three children under five would spend 12s 5½d on food, 1s 6d on rent and the remaining money on clothes, shoes, beer at the public house and ‘other extra charges’. The Coalville miners worked twelve hours per day, 5½ days per week, with half an hour for dinner and just public holidays off.

The Coalville mines’ safety precautions excited much praise from the Commissioner, particularly the Snibston system where only four men or five or six boys were allowed in the shaft at a time and they were protected by an iron
'umbrella' or 'bonnet' from objects falling down the shaft: 'such ought to be the system in every coal mine.' The Stephensons insisted on daily inspection of the 'ropes, bull chains and tacklers by which the men descend' and one of the smiths had to examine the headgear and machinery daily. The company took care to have a 'steady man at the (winding) engine'. Stenson reported that at his pit ropes rather than chains were used for lifting operations because only ropes will 'tell a tale before breaking.' Such care and favourable geological condition helped the pits to have good safety records in the mid-nineteenth century. The inspector of coalmines for the Yorkshire, Derby, Nottingham and Leicestershire coalfields recorded 113 mine deaths from July 1853 to June 1854 and 4 of these were of Coalville miners, all killed by roof falls. This is perhaps the most difficult type of accident against which to guard and the inspector did not single out any of these deaths for special comment as he did with a number of others where negligence or improper practices might have contributed to the accident.

In sum, the Coalville pits were 'exceedingly comfortable', the thick seams enabled everybody to work in a position not 'fatiguing or disagreeable', there was no water found below 100 yards and good ventilation controls were carried out by lighting fires at the bottom of each upcast shaft to cause a strong current of air to pass through the workings, such that the miners had to be careful of their candles blowing out. However, Coalville's conditions were commendable only by contemporary relative standards. The health of the miners was reported to be good, the Ashby-de-la Zouch surgeon considering them to be in better condition than agricultural labourers of similar age; but 'on account of the rocky hardness of the coal and the great weight of the pieces in which it is got the labour is extremely severe and none but the strongest constitutions can bear it long'. Most miners were 'finished' between 45 and 60, usually about 50, worn out by their efforts and in the Snibston operations by occasional bad air which 'on some constitutions . . . takes considerable effect'. The only prolonged break from the 'severe' labour came during bouts of summer unemployment, although the proprietors 'in merciful consideration of the workforce' kept up some employment throughout the summer to lay in stocks for winter 'but of necessity the people cannot have full employment at that time'. This passage on unemployment was entered under the heading of 'holidays'.

The policy of refusing to hire women and young children must be regarded as praiseworthy but there remains a niggling doubt that this was because there was only a limited amount of work for such persons to do. Coalville coal was very hard and came from the face in large masses too heavy for children or women to manage. Also the Coalville seams were thick enough everywhere for there to be sufficient space for the stronger and more cost-efficient men to manage the loading; 'children and boys of ordinary strength could be of no use
in moving such immense blocks of coal as are here brought to the foot of the shaft’. Potential fillers were not usually strong enough to work until 18 and few under 20 worked the faces. There was only a limited number of doors to control, horses to lead, errands to run or passages to sweep, the usual employment for boys in Coalville, except for the pushers and drawers of Snibston. In the now strangely quaint statistical conventions of the Victorian age the 1842 report records that in Leicestershire only two sevenths of the country’s mining workforce were under 18, a smaller proportion than any area other than the West of Scotland and far below such areas as the East of Scotland where various districts had ‘approaching two-fifths’, ‘nearly two-fifths’ and even two fifths itself in East Lothian. Further, although the Whitwick pit ran a day school for boys, neither colliery company ran apprenticeship schemes (not necessarily a bad thing; such schemes could be abused) and there was a trade in pauper boys ‘carried away’ to be bound to butties in the less favourable conditions of south Staffordshire’s pits. Coalville boys were not on the whole badly treated but even in the report a mercenary reason for this can be detected: ‘independent of the good feeling which accentuated proprietors and their agents not to allow oppression . . . boys and lads if ill-used in one pit could easily find shelter in another’.

The colliery companies were largely responsible for the building of Christ Church which was started in 1836. This could be seen as an act of philanthropy but there is a suggestion that the church was started in response to strife between Irish Catholics and others in Whitwick over employment and an Anglican church was needed to help bring stability and maintain protestantism in the area. The Whitwick Colliery also provided the site for the Baptist Church.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century many employers built houses to rent to their men and this was the case in Coalville. Stenson had built Coalville Place, Club Row, Stone Row and Mammoth Street off Whitwick Road and Marshall’s Row in High Street; the Stephensons provided property on Mantle Lane and Ashby Road. The Stephensons’ houses were of better standard. They had seen slums and back-to-backs in Northeast England and determined that they were not going to inflict such dreadful conditions on their men and so provided solid slate roofed terraced cottages of four or five rooms with each having its own garden. Cottages were let at only one shilling per month. The Whitwick houses were not as good, the Leicester Journal in 1842 describing them as ‘cramped, dirty, damp and squalid with muck heaps and dirty windows’. In 1857 a public outcry finally forced the company to drain the land on which its houses stood after an outbreak of typhoid started in Coalville Place. Even in 1891 Mammoth Street did not have piped water or a proper sewerage system. It would seem that the Whitwick Colliery was not a very caring landlord. Nor was it always a model employer. This company owned
brickyards and in Coalville's yards young children were employed to carry about huge lumps of wet clay. The philanthropist 'George Smith of Coalville' was manager at a Whitwick Colliery brickyard from 1857 to 1874 and, inspired by the hardship he witnessed among brickyard children, took up their cause and refused to employ any under thirteen in his yard — yet still made a profit. When his campaigning made him unpopular with other brickyard managers his employers demanded that he concentrate his efforts on his employment in the brickyard or resign. He resigned and went on to further good works elsewhere. Smith's effigy was burnt in the streets of Coalville.

Thus, it would seem that, despite the fairly rosy picture of working conditions in Coalville pits and living conditions in the Snibston houses, philanthropy was not necessarily an overwhelming guiding force for the town's major employers and alternative explanations, usually touching at least indirectly upon finance, can be put forward to explain some superficially philanthropic acts. One wonders, therefore, whether the 'exceedingly comfortable' working conditions underground owed more to the geological chances of thick seams of hard coal and few drainage problems than to the public spiritedness of the proprietors. What would the 1842 report have made of Coalville's pits had their seams, like many others, been only two feet high and of friable coal?

Sources:

Children's Employment Commission, First Report of the Commissioners (Mines) with Appendix, British Parliamentary papers 1842 (380, 381, 382) xv, xvi, xvii
At the beginning of the nineteenth century the area of land which Coalville now occupies was a waste between the four settlements of Whitwick, Hugglescote, Swannington and Snibston. Crossing this waste was a rough track called Long Lane or Ditching Lane, which ran west to east, between Hoo Ash on the Hinckley to Melbourne Turnpike Road and Hill Top on the Leicester to Ashby Turnpike Road. A second road, the Hugglescote Lane, passed through the area from north to south, crossing Long Lane at the site of the Old Red House (see map, fig 1).

The parish of Whitwick also included the village of Swannington, which had been involved with coal mining for many centuries. The coalfield of which this is a part extends as far as Newhall in Derbyshire in the north west and Desford in the south east and has its eastern boundary along the line of the Charnwood Hills. The coal seams dip downwards from the north west to the south east so that from Swannington onwards they are concealed by an increasing depth of Lias.

Early mining took place in the northern, exposed part of the coalfield by ‘adits’ and ‘bell pits’ into the shallow seams. Evidence of this type of working can still be seen in the area around Smoile Woods at Lount and on Swannington Common. As the shallow coal was worked out difficulties were encountered in draining the deeper levels. Records can be found of the construction of considerable underground channels, ‘soughs’, in the sixteenth century at Coleorton and in the late seventeenth century at Silver Hill in Swannington, in attempts to reach deeper coal. A water-wheel pumping engine was used at Swannington to deal with the problem and by 1720 steam pumping engines, presumably Newcomen atmospheric engines, were installed at Coleorton and Swannington, only twelve years after the invention of this new machine. Investment of this sort helped in developing and modernizing the mines, but could not overcome the second major problem which bedevilled the local industry, the lack of adequate transport to the markets of Leicester and other developing industrial towns.

From the earliest times coal was transported to Leicester by pack horse, via Ibstock, Bagworth, Desford and Kirby Muxloe to Aylestone. Here the track crossed the Soar by means of a pack horse bridge before entering the town and thence to Coal Hill (or Berehill), a site now occupied by the Clock Tower. The cost of transport was considerable; in 1603 coal purchased at the pit-head for 1s 7d a ton sold for 10s in Leicester. This method was still being used in the early nineteenth century. Higglers purchased coal from stock yards at Swannington by the pack-load. Throsby gave a vivid picture of the heavily
laden horses, 'groups of crawling beings, enfeebled by oppression, and often
sinking under their loads, subject to the execrations and violent kickings of their
masters'.

In the seventeenth century an attempt had been made to canalise the Soar from
its junction with the Trent and in 1776 the Loughborough Navigation Company
was set up to construct the waterway to enable coal to pass from the Erewash
Valley coalfield in Derbyshire to Loughborough. This proved to be a consider­
able financial success and Loughborough prospered at the expense of
merchants in Leicester, who still awaited the provision of bulk supplies of coal
to enable them to set up steam mills.

After much argument and intrigue the Leicester Navigation Company was set
up to construct a two part canal system. One part, the 'Forest Line', involved the
construction of a system connecting the Coleorton and Swannington coalfield
with the Loughborough Navigation and the other part, the 'River Line', required
the Soar to be canalised or deepened between Loughborough and Leicester. A
provision was included in the Act of Parliament which prohibited the passage
of coal from the Erewash collieries to Leicester along the River Line until
Leicestershire coal had been transported there via both Forest Line and River
Line. The Forest Line comprised a canal built on the 300 foot contour between
Thringstone and Nanpantan, with horse-drawn tramroads at one end to the
mines at Swannington and Coleorton and the limestone quarries at Barrow Hill
and at the other end to the Loughborough Navigation basin at the Rushes in
Loughborough. The whole system was opened in 1794 with the passage of a
boatload of coal from Burslem’s mine at Coleorton; but it also opened up the
Leicester market to Erewash Coal.

The Forest Line was expensive to operate and many problems arose even
before disaster struck in 1799. Following a February thaw the canal’s
Blackbrook Reservoir dam burst, emptying the reservoir in eleven minutes and
inundating the surrounding countryside. By the time the dam had been
reconstructed the coal markets in Leicester were firmly in the hands of the
Erewash suppliers and the Swannington coalfield moved into a further period
of stagnation.

Leicester, now supplied with coal in bulk from Derbyshire, was developing in
prosperity but was required to pay heavy tolls to the canal companies for
transportation. Pressure to improve transport from the Leicestershire coalfield
increased, especially when collieries were sunk into deeper concealed coal
measures. A farmer named William Thurlby sank the mine at Ibstock in 1825
and Viscount Maynard did likewise on his manor at Bagworth in 1826. A
Coleorton born mine engineer, William Stenson, sank the mine in Whitwick
parish on land belonging to a relative. Stenson’s knowledge of mining and
Fig 1 Sketch map of the area later occupied by Coalville, c 1830
geology must have been considerable, as he went against established local opinion in starting his mining venture. The tradition was that there was ‘no coal below stone’. Local miners seem to have known of a sheet of Greenstone over the coal measures, so that when he started boring for coal he was ridiculed. He met the sixty foot thick layer of Greenstone but broke through it to very valuable reserves of coal and thus had the last laugh on his tormentors.

Stenson was then faced with the problem of transporting his coal to Leicester and was reported to have admitted that ‘our carting beats us’. He therefore travelled north to Durham to investigate recent developments in steam powered railways. He was so impressed with what he saw that he returned to Long Lane and proceeded to survey a route for a possible railway to Leicester.

Having used most of his own financial resources in the sinking of his mine he approached a Leicester landowner, John Ellis, for his opinion on the best way to finance the railway and the latter seems to have used his Quaker connexions to arrange a meeting with George Stephenson, who at that time was engaged in the construction of the Liverpool to Manchester Railway. George and his son Robert came south to inspect the proposed line and, liking what they saw, agreed to give it their support on the understanding that Robert would take charge while George was retained in an advisory capacity. The Leicester and Swannington Railway Company Act was passed on the 29th of May 1830 and the Company was set up with a capital of £90,000, raised mainly in Leicester and Manchester, under the chairmanship of John Ellis.

The railway ran from Swannington village via Long Lane, Bagworth, Desford, Ratby and Glenfield to West Bridge in Leicester, where a large coal wharf was built alongside the canal. A number of tramroads and private railways connected Swannington’s Calcutta and Calift Collieries, Whitwick Colliery, Snibston Colliery, Ibstock Colliery, Bagworth Colliery and the granite quarry at Groby with the line. Later connexions were made with Bardon Quarry, with Peggs Green and Newbold Mines and with the Breedon and Cloud Hill lime works (see map, fig 2). Construction began in 1830 and involved the mile long Glenfield Tunnel, a self-acting rope-hauled inclined plane at Bagworth and a steam-engine wound inclined plane at Swannington. It was opened ceremonially on the 17th of July 1832 along its lower level to the foot of the Bagworth Incline. A train comprising the engine and eleven wagons carried four hundred passengers to a ‘grand collation’ at Thornton. It returned pulling in addition two wagons of coal which were especially let down the incline for the occasion. Construction of the upper level from Bagworth to Ashby Road (later Bardon Road) was completed by January 1833 and to Long Lane (later Coalville) by April 1833. The first passenger train journey to Leicester from Long Lane took place on the 26th of April 1833. By November coal was passing up the Swannington Incline and being carried the whole length of the line to
Fig 2 Sketch map of the Leicester and Swannington Railway and its connecting railways
Leicester. The age-old problem had been finally solved and Leicestershire coal could at last compete with Derbyshire coal.

This caused grave concern to the Derbyshire owners, who pressed for a reduction of tolls on the canal and, after several years of intense competition, were instrumental in the inauguration in 1840 of the Midland Counties Railway which connected their coalfield with Leicester. As the Midland Railway Company developed, the Leicester and Swannington Railway was taken over and improved by the construction of a deviation from Desford to Knighton Junction, of a deviation by-passing the Bagworth Incline and of an extension from Coalville to Burton on Trent.

During the construction of the Leicester and Swannington Railway Robert Stephenson noted that the Snibston estate was available and informed his father who, together with two associates from the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, purchased it in 1831 and immediately started to sink Snibston No 1 Mine near to Stenson's Whitwick Mine. He encountered a layer of Greenstone and managed to break through. He subsequently sank a second shaft on Snibston No 2 site in a successful attempt to avoid this material. The sinking appears to have taken about nine months and the new method of 'tubbing' shafts were employed, that is lining them with cast iron segments which, when bolted together, kept out the water. Mining was carried out in his mines by 'bord and pillar' working, contrary to the accepted local practice of the 'long wall' method.

George Stephenson appears to have found difficulty in recruiting from the locality miners capable of working these new methods with which he became familiar during his Durham experiences. He therefore went north to recruit men, assuring them of a job with prospects, good accommodation and a large garden. If they were unhappy with their new surroundings he also offered to pay their return fare. Contemporary writers saw both Stephenson and Stenson as generally good employers who were concerned with the welfare of both their men and their families. The Snibston Colliery Company built several rows of houses for its new employees and it was largely this community which became the embryo of the new hamlet of Coalville. The township developed along Long Lane, which in 1830 had only two public houses and two farms beside its whole length.

Samuel Fisher, writing in 1832, recorded that the principal house in the district was the Old Red House, which was recognised in neighbouring counties as the identifying marker for the district. This public house, known also as the Cradle and Coffin Inn, stood at the junction of Long Lane and Hugglescote Lane. A further hostelry was situated at the junction of Long Lane and Constables Lane (the modern Broomleys Road) and the two farms, Holly Leys and Spring Farm,
Fig 3 Sketch map of Coalville in 1841
were also situated beside Long Lane, towards Leicester. On Hugglescote Lane stood the ancient farmstead of White Leys but there appears to have been no other building except the Gate Inn which stood near the Leicester-Ashby Turnpike (see map, fig 1).

Most of the Whitwick Colliery employees seem to have lived in Whitwick and Swannington villages but a small group of houses was built for some of them on Long Lane at the junction with the modern Whitwick Road. To house the miners employed in their No 1 Colliery the Snibston Colliery Company built two rows of cottages off Whitwick Road, which became known as Coalville Place and Stone Row. When the No 2 Colliery was sunk on Long Lane (now Ashby Road) in 1833 the company built five rows of houses. The first of these, George’s Row (or Deputies’ Row), housed the mine officers and stood alongside the Snibston New Inn. Next to this stood Hetton’s Row (or Barrack Row), back-to-back houses which probably had large communal rooms on the upper floor. A Colliery Company school was constructed for the use of the employees’ children during the week and to serve as a Primitive Methodist Chapel on the Sabbath. This still stands as the rear part of the Ebenezer Baptist Chapel. Next to the school there was Snibston Upper Buildings, a row of cottages which led down to a group of larger managerial houses, known as Jamie’s Place, where George Stephenson’s brother James lived. Short Row stood between Jamie’s Place and the Colliery entrance, beyond which stood two further Long Rows separated by a drive which led to Snibston Grange. This house was occupied by George Vaughan, the Colliery manager and former manager of the Leicester and Swannington Railway. Two Railway Inns were built, on Long Lane and Ashby Road (Bardon Hill), to provide coaching facilities for passengers and a number of railway workers’ cottages were built off Station Street (the present High Street) (see map, fig 3).

In 1835 the Whitwick Colliery Company gave land for the erection of a Baptist Chapel and British School at the junction of Whitwick Road and Long Lane. Although the developing hamlet was under the jurisdiction of both Whitwick and Ibstock parish churches in those early days, an Anglican church was constructed between 1836 and 1838. It was not endowed until 1840, by which time the population was approaching 1,200. From then onwards the town developed in prosperity and an increasing variety of shops could be visited for provisions and services.

As the collieries developed the coal was used to fire the clays of the district to make bricks, tiles and terra cotta of excellent quality from several brick and tile companies. These employed a number of women and small children. At the Whitwick Colliery Brick Company the manager was so concerned about the appalling conditions found in most brickyards that he led a nation-wide campaign to bring these manufacturies under the Factories Act. After many
difficulties he managed to influence the passing of the Factories Act (Brick and Tile Yards) Extension Bill of 1871. George Smith of Coalville, the name he liked to be known by, subsequently led campaigns aimed at improving the conditions of women and children on the British canal network and families living on the road in gypsy caravans. The effect of his first campaign was to release female labour for the new and diverse industries which were being set up in the town. Manufacturers of elastic web, clothing and boots and shoes had built their new factories by 1890, providing opportunities for the growing population.

From 1846 trade increased as the Midland Railway improved their network and provided access to markets in Burton, Derby and London. Shops, public houses and beer houses increased in number to take advantage of increased wages. The Midland Railway constructed its first station, a terrace of workers' houses and a station master's house. Local builders began to build on plots along Long Lane and Hugglescote Lane between 1860 and 1880. Side streets off the main thoroughfares were constructed between 1870 and 1920 to provide accommodation for the new inhabitants of the town. Several local tradesmen, including the Gutteridge, Hewes and Pickering families, were responsible for many of these developments.

Diversification of industry took place from the 1860s with the setting up of engineering companies and iron foundries by J. W. Stableford in 1865 and Wootton Brothers in 1876. J W Stableford probably took over the saw mills and engineering works of the Snibston No. 1 Colliery Company but handed over control to his brother W D Stableford, who enlarged the works in 1881. The company manufactured railway wagons by the thousand for customers as far away as India. It employed a thousand men and boys at one time and when it went into liquidation in 1924 the town was shattered by the news. Wootton Bros manufactured colliery equipment and brick-making equipment, specializing in the manufacture of colliery screens, clay-processing machines and steam engines. Their advertisements claimed that their equipment was capable of producing bricks at a rate of four thousand an hour. T & J Jones Elastic Web factory, opened in 1874, was enlarged in 1878 and again in 1898 before being sold to John Burgess Ltd, when it was employing four hundred workers. Bardon Hill Quarries, on the edge of the town, were set up in 1857 and were soon sending quantities of their excellent roadstone along the railway to all parts of the country. This company built its own industrial housing estate, including a schoolroom nearby.

The mines continued to develop despite the recession in trade in the 1870s and 1880s. Whitwick Colliery sank further shafts, after encountering extreme financial difficulties in 1879. Snibston Colliery's No 3 Mine opened in the 1850s, was closed in 1880 but was reopened in 1890 for a further five years before its
final closure. The South Leicester Colliery Company, who were also the proprietors of Snibston Colliery, opened their new South Leicester Colliery in 1876.

In the old coalfield the Midland Railway’s provision of an extension to Burton on Trent persuaded both the Coleorton Colliery Company and the Swannington Colliery Company to redevelop their mines in the 1850s. After a period of profitable working, however, they ceased production by 1884 and Calcutta Colliery was converted into a pumping station to drain the whole of the district, including the Coalville mines. A Robert Stephenson Company engine, capable of pumping three thousand gallons a minute, was installed there in 1872 at a cost of £13,590 and operated until 1947, when it was replaced by an electric pump (see photograph, figure 4).

With its excellent communications Coalville grew in importance and in 1892 gained its own Local Board status, replacing the former Whitwick Local Board. In 1894 the Urban District Council of Coalville was inaugurated, containing both Whitwick and Hugglescote as wards. The new council began to improve the town with enthusiasm. The main roads, which had previously been neglected owing to their being on parish boundaries, were improved. In 1898 they began negotiations to take over control of the Whitwick Gas Company, for which they eventually paid a price of £45,000. It took the council many years and much expenditure, however, to provide satisfactory supplies of gas for the whole district. A water works to supply the town with good water was commenced in 1903 and by 1930 approximately twenty five miles of mains had been laid in the district. Construction of the main drainage and sewerage system was commenced in 1899 and by 1923 it was claimed that three quarters of the district had water closet facilities.

At the beginning of the new century the variety of shopping facilities was considerable and served a district population of fifteen thousand. There were three Baptist chapels, two Methodist chapels, one Congregational Chapel, two Anglican churches and a Roman Catholic church in the town. The British School had closed but there were National Schools and one non-denominational school. Football and cricket leagues provided matches of high quality. Cycling and athletics were widely supported, so that national AAA meetings were held in the town for a number of years. Entertainment by repertory companies was provided in the Public Hall, built in 1876, but this was converted in 1912 into a cinema, the Electric Theatre, the forerunner of two further cinemas which opened in the 1930s (see photograph, figure 5).

The town had a surplus of female labour in the early years of the new century and a Trade Extension Committee was set up to attract new industry. Its first major success was the arrival of a new elastic web manufacturer, Messrs
Fig 4 Photograph of Robert Stephenson and Co pumping engine at Calcutta Pumping Station, Swan-nington, in 1945

Fig 5 Postcard view of Belvoir Road, looking north and shewing Coalville Electric Theatre, 1913
Clutsom and Kemp Ltd, in 1914 and other similar industries arrived shortly afterwards. The war of 1914-18, the subsequent miners’ strikes and the General Strike of the 1920s had a demoralising effect on the town; but during these years of depression the population of the town grew from 18,500 in 1911 to approximately 22,000 in 1931. After the war new industries continued to arrive. Mancrofts Ltd wagon works and Pegson Ltd, who manufacture pumps, stone-crushers and quarry plant, provided further job opportunities in engineering and commerce. In 1937 Cascelloid Ltd moved into a disused billiard hall in Owen Street to bring new technology into the town, producing a range of plastic dolls.

During the first three decades of the present century housing construction expanded into the Highfields area, on Forest Road, Bridge Road, Ashburton Road, Bardon Road and Broomleys Road and construction of side streets was completed. The Secondary School and Grammar School were built before the 1914 war and in 1924 the Mining Technical College was built and funded generously by the mining industry. The Miners’ Welfare Organisation was responsible for constructing the Swimming Baths in the 1930s in a new council housing estate on Avenue Road. It might then have been considered that the Mining Town was complete.

Fifty years on there have been dramatic changes. The railway industry has largely disappeared, although the town is left with the two railway crossings which were present at its birth. Most of the local family shops have been superseded by a new shopping precinct. The Public Library, Day Centre, Police Station and supermarkets now stand where the original inhabitants lived in their neat rows of cottages. The brick industry has completely finished and within the next decade it is likely that the mines will have closed. The old mining community will be replaced by a new community. It is to be hoped that the future is as interesting and as prosperous as the past.

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Fig 6 Postcard view of the Birch Tree Hotel in 1925, formerly the Hill Top Toll Gate on the Leicester to Ashby Turnpike Road
Instead of going to the tap for some water either for washing or drinking, it was a journey to the spring, the well, or occasionally to a pump, carrying two buckets on a yoke on your shoulders. It will be realized that two buckets of water did not go far, so there was little waste in washing ourselves, washing up the pots, floors, clothes, etc. Bathnight meant the dollytub in front of the fire. Two buckets of water heated over the fire. Big children first, followed in order of size. This enabled enough water to be left in the tub for the little ones. By then sending the children to bed, their clothes could be washed and dried for morning. Few of us had a complete change of clothes.

Carpets were not the order of the day. Usually bricks, occasionally tiles or quarries. Just think of the roads and paths with several inches of mud and muck. Boot-scrapers and besoms moved some dirt but much was still carried into the home. Each journey to the privy meant a journey up the garden path and this was unpaved. No outside electric light but perhaps a lantern or candle after dark.

When a new arrival was expected in the family it was not the Doctor you fetched but Granny Smith. She knew how to handle those jobs; for that matter, she was the one who cured all our aches and pains. A dose of ‘jollup’ for constipation, ointment made with herbs of the field, or what we call ‘nature cures’. Unfortunately my pains of toothache she could not cure. A plaster of brown paper soaked in vinegar, liberally sprinkled with pepper, tied on with a scarf, gave warmth and a little relief. Bad teeth meant a visit to the blacksmith. He had specially made pincers. A quick pull and out came your tooth.

Mother’s routine job was the making of clothes, not from lengths of new cloth but old cast-offs of the bigger members of the family. Father’s trousers were cut down and made into clothes for the boys. All sewing was done by hand; no machines in those days. It must have been a nightmare, sewing by candlelight, using old material and old newspaper patterns. Another tedious job was the knitting of the woollens, since it was the usual, ‘used before wool’. Even the candles had to be made. Wicks placed in the mould and then molten tallow poured on; and didn’t they smell when burnt, stuck in the neck of old bottles for candlesticks. Another regular job was the boot repairing. All had hob-nails and many were knocked out by the rough roads. None of the present day flimsy footwear but solid boots, laced or buttoned up.

Youth clubs were usually connected with the various religious orders, or such organisations as the Band of Hope, a temperance organisation, drink being one of the social evils of the day. There we used to sing hymns, recite, or perform
little plays. Once a year we had a ‘Treat’ (Concert). A real concert followed by a tea, bread and jam and a piece of cake; even jelly, but that ‘wobbled’, so was not so popular. Then when dark a magic lantern show. At Christmas time at school we were given an orange, cardboard saws on string, papers which traced a design when a hot wire was applied to a certain spot. I still have a ‘Symington Soup’ cube puzzle from one of those ‘treats’.

The poor and needy at this time often found a rabbit or pheasant tied to the door handle, the gift from the poachers. Contrary to the general opinion of these people they had a very high standard of morals. Helping the needy from what they sincerely believed belonged to hungry people. People with well stocked larders look at this with different views, but I can only say, having known many of them, they were honest and straight men, even though they would not accept man-made laws relating to the countryside.

The ‘Bums’ (bailiffs) were regular visitors in our streets. They evicted people who could not pay the rent — no dole, no work; how could they pay with no income? Their scanty possessions were put out into the street. Neighbours usually managed to give shelter of a kind until somewhere else could be found. This was a regular occurrence. With the offer of ten pounds and a free passage to the Colonies, many emigrated. Between 1910 and 1914 no less than 754 people left our district (official figures from the Shipping Agent) to the Colonies.

Transport was mostly horse drawn; stone from the quarries, coal from the pits, farm produce, goods and merchandise all horse drawn. People went to market in brakes, but chiefly by foot. To walk to Leicester and back — 24 miles in all — was common. Local preachers used to walk such distances each Sunday.

Entertainments — there were plenty. We made our own. Whist Drives and Dances, Concerts and Choirs, above all good conversation, Spelling Bees and games in the school-rooms in an evening. Also we had at intervals travelling theatres, better known as ‘blood-tubs’. For a penny we could see ‘Maria Martin’, ‘Sweeny Todd’, ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ — with little Eva — sob-stuff and thrills all for one penny.

The roads were now being tarmacadamed. Gas lamps began to appear in our streets. Motor-cars made an appearance. An aeroplane even arrived, but above all a box of wires called ‘wireless’. These have led to the present day affluence, but left us with happy memories of ‘the Good Old Days’.
LEICESTERSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY COUNCIL COMPETITION
‘The Street where I live’

At our Conference in autumn 1981 we launched a competition for an essay on ‘The Street where I live’ and in October 1982 the prizes were awarded, after the three judges had made a difficult choice from some very interesting entries.

We had a splendid group entry from Form 3b at Avenue Road School, Leicester. Each pupil had drawn a picture of a house in the road and the whole was assembled as a huge map, measuring about six feet by five. Two entries in the Under 14 Class received prizes. Charlotte Lount wrote about her village, Fleckney, and Louise Price about Cecilia Road, Clarendon Park. Both these entries were illustrated with photographs.

Of the Class I entries the winner was Mr H Limbert for his evocative picture of his childhood spent in Martin Street, near Catherine Street, one of the many Leicester Streets which were like villages in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The second prize went to Miss M R West, who actually lived in the Newarke. These entries were not illustrated, but of outstanding interest. Two similar entries received a Highly Commended prize, Mr George Hill for his description of Stony Stanton and Mr H Widdowson for a delightful picture of Markfield.

There were three excellent entries in the form of scrap books, very well researched and lavishly illustrated. Mrs K M Robinson received the prize for presentation for her study of Mill Lane, Arnesby. Highly Commended were Mrs R Root for her work on Church Street, North Kilworth, and Mrs J M Pick for her album on Thrussington. One group which intended to enter was the Castle Donington Local History Society. They became so interested and did so much research that they held an exhibition and then wrote a whole book about Borough Street. Although it was too long for an entry, they kindly presented us with a copy for our library.

Harry Limbert says ‘Come with me’ as we leave the house in Martin Street on a cold wet morning in February in the 1920s. He takes us through a week in the tight knit community, through the eyes of the boy he then was. His street was as full of drama and ‘happenings’ as it was of shops and itinerant salesmen with horses and carts, selling all manner of goods. One gets a picture of much kindness and humanity and, despite some hardships, of happiness and security.
Miss West’s childhood in the Newarke was full of history, of which she was fully aware. She attended the beautiful St Mary’s Church of the Trinity Hospital Chapel and went to school at St Mary’s School. From her window in the Bridge House much could be seen, processions to St Mary’s on Trinity Sunday, garden parties at the Vicarage and the Magazine with its living quarters for the soldiers. There was also a cinema and skating rink round the corner in the Boulevard. Again a little enclosed world and at that time a very quiet and peaceful one.

Mr Widdowson’s description of Ashby Road, Markfield, was perhaps the most useful to local historians, as he takes each house and lists its occupants and history. Markfield was the usual busy village, traffic-ridden in later years, and now Ashby Road and others are by-passed by the new A50. It is good to read of so many splendid village ‘characters’ with appropriate nick names and particularly interesting to see the beginnings and growth of the bus service.

George Hill, ‘72 years young’, was born and bred in Stony Stanton and his street, Station Road, was unique in being composed largely of the entrances to the great complex of workshops, plants, engines and wagons of the Mountsorrel Granite Company. A street alive and very busy at first with horse and cart traffic, and later with motor cars, lorries and garages. It seems that all life in the village centred round the Granite Company and millions of tons of stone passed down George’s Street. Although the quarry closed in 1957, other industries sprang up and Station Road seems no less busy today.

EMD

BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL HISTORY

The Standing Council for Local History, under which our Leicestershire Local History Council served as a County Committee, came to an end last year. In its place a new national organization, the British Association for Local History, has been formed. We have had a visit from the new Field Officer and are now affiliated to this organization. Individual members can also join for a subscription of £4 a year. It remains to be seen how this change will affect our status and what the new association can offer us in the way of help and advice.

Mary Mason and Betty Dickson went to a Local History Conference at Birmingham arranged by the Association on the 20th of November 1982: but so far there is no further news of future policy. However, they enjoyed a very interesting series of lectures on various aspects of local history.

EMD
LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETIES

a. Periodicals
b. Occasional publications
c. Affiliated to Leicestershire Local History Council

b Anstey Historical Society
   Mrs A Penny, 15 Bencroft Close, Anstey
Ashby Wolds and District Study Group
   Mrs Chaplin, Moira County Primary School, Blackfordby Lane, Moira

b Barkby Local History Committee
   Mrs Pick, Manor Farm, Barkby Thorpe

b Highcliffe County Junior School
   Greengate Lane, Birstall

bc Castle Donington Local History Society
   Mr B M Townsend, 7 Borough Street, Castle Donington

b Desford and District Local History Group
   Mrs Cocker, 36 Grace Road, Desford
Diseworth Local History Society
   Mrs D Jones, 43 The Woodcroft, Diseworth

b East Midlands Studies Unit
   Dr M Palmer, Department of History, University of Loughborough

abc Frisby-on-the-Wreake Historical Society
   Mr R N F Pinfold, 2 Hall Orchard Lane, Frisby-on-the-Wreake
   NEWSLETTER

ac Glenfield and Western Park District Archaeological and Historical Group
   Mr A A Huscroft, 50 Chadwell Road, Leicester
   NEWSLETTER

Groby Village Society
   Mrs J Thornton, 7 Chapel Hill, Groby

abc Hinckley Local History Group
   Mr D F Allison, 97 Leicester Road, Hinckley
   THE HINCKLEY HISTORIAN: Magazine of the Hinckley Local History Group
   Mr H A Beavin, John Cleveland College, Hinckley

ac Houghton-on-the-Hill
   HOUGHTON NEWS
   Mr J Hum, 27 Ingarsby Lane, Houghton-on-the-Hill

abc Husbands Bosworth Historical Society
   Mrs A Burton, 6 Highcroft, Husbands Bosworth
   BYGONE BOSWORTH

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Kegworth Village Association
Mrs B Moore, April Cottage, New Street, Kegworth

Kimcote and Walton Village History Society
Mrs H J Allaway, Poultney Lane, Kimcote

Friends of Knaptoft
Mr D McQuone, 14 Shanklin Avenue, Leicester

Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society
Mrs C Cameron, 48 Desford Road, Kirby Muxloe

Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society
The Guildhall, Leicester

Leicestershire Industrial History Society
Dr M Palmer, 54 Chapel Street, Measham

Leicester Local History Council
133 Loughborough Road, Leicester

Leicestershire Libraries

Loughborough and District Archaeological Society
Mr J P Brownlow, 31 Cowdray Close, Loughborough

Loughborough High School
Lyddington Society
Mr B Matthews, Colley Hill, Lyddington, Rutland

Market Harborough Historical Society
Mrs M Goodwin, 24 Lubenham Hill
Market Harborough

Market Harborough Museum
Mr S P Mullins, Council Office, Adam and Eve Street, Market Harborough

Melton Mowbray and District Historical Society
Mr C Bowes, 7 Palmerston Road, Melton Mowbray
Friends of Melton Mowbray Museum
Mr N H L Archer, 74 Dapcote Drive, Melton Mowbray
c Newbold Verdon Archaeology and Local History Group
   Mr M Harding, 57 Arnold Crescent, Newbold Verdon
Newton Harcourt Society
   Mr J Goddard, The Manor House, Newton Harcourt
bc Oadby Local History Group
   Mrs P Buttery, Oadby Library
a Old Union Canals Society
   Mr R Wild, 1 The Green, Lubenham, Market Harborough
   UNION: Journal of the Old Union Canals Society
   Mr D Goodwin, Harborough Road, Desborough, Northamptonshire
c Preston Historical Society
   Mr G P Chamberlin, The Old Orchard, Preston, Rutland
c Rearsby Local History Society
   Mrs H Jordan, 30 Mill Road, Rearsby
Rutland Field Research Group for Archaeology and History
   Rutland County Museum, Catmos Street, Oakham, Rutland
b Rutland Local History Society
   Mr A R Traylen, Rutland County Museum, Catmos Street, Oakham, Rutland
abc Rutland Record Society
   Mr B Matthews, Colley Hill, Lyddington, Rutland
   RUTLAND RECORD: Journal of the Rutland Record Society
   Mr B Waites, 6 Chater Road, Oakham, Rutland
abc Shepshed Local History Group
   Mr G Wright, 71 Belton Street, Shepshed
Sileby Historical Association
   Mr O Freer, 1 Albert Avenue, Sileby
Thrussington Local History Society
   Mr P Musson, 23 Church Lane, Thrussington
a Vaughan Archaeological and Historical Society
   Miss D C Valentine, 29 Walton Street, Leicester
   THE TRANSACTIONS OF THE VAUGHAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
   Mr B Elliott, 17 Half Moon Crescent, Oadby
a East Midlands Branch of the Wesley Historical Society
   Dr J Waller, 90 Forest Road, Loughborough
   HERITAGE: Journal of the East Midlands Branch of the Wesley Historical Society
   Rev S Y Richardson, 22 Garton Road, Loughborough
ac Greater Wigston Historical Society
   Mr O D Lucas, White Gate Farm House, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna
ac Herricks and Beaumanor Society
   Mr D A Cumming, 18 Victoria Road, Woodhouse Eaves
BOOK REVIEWS
Mrs H E Broughton, J Goodacre, Mrs G K Long, B Elliott

THE ARISTOCRATIC ESTATE: The Hastings in Leicestershire and South Derbyshire
M Palmer ed East Midlands Studies Unit 1982 £4.50

GUIDE TO THE LOCAL STUDIES COLLECTION, Loughborough Public Library
J Dodds and J Petts East Midlands Studies Unit 1983 60p

THE CISTERCIAN ABBEY OF ST MARY, GARENDON
W Humphrey East Midlands Studies Unit, Loughborough University 1982 £3.00

The East Midlands Studies Unit is a new venture at Loughborough University to encourage cooperation between the History, Geography and Economics Departments there and to encourage contact between the University and its local community. Activities include evening seminars and one day conferences and a series of publications has started with these three productions. The volume edited by Dr Marilyn Palmer of the History Department, a leading light in the Unit, consists mainly of the half dozen papers given at the first conference, in May 1982. A distinguished contributor was Dr Claire Cross, the author of *The Puritan Earl: The Life of Henry Hastings, Third Earl of Huntingdon*, whose paper is entitled ‘Dynastic Politics: The Local and National Importance of the Hastings Family in the Sixteenth Century’. Most of the other papers concentrate more on the industrial period and deal with subjects such as Loughborough (Dr Ian Keil), the South Derbyshire Coalfield (Dr Colin Griffin) and the clay and pottery industry (Mrs Janet Spavold). The hundred and fifty pages of A4 typescript (of a rather annoying type face) are clearly reproduced and very reasonably priced. The guide to the local studies collection in Loughborough Public Library, a twenty page leaflet similarly produced, contains brief lists of the range of resources, giving examples and suggestions as to how they may be used.

J G
Although the history of the Cistertian Abbey of St Mary, Garendon, is briefly recorded in many local and general publications, no specific study had been devoted to it alone until the arrival of Mr Humphrey's book. He unfolds the history of the estate from before the foundation of the Abbey in 1133 and describes the extent of its holdings, the layout of the Abbey buildings and the economic and general administration until the fall of the establishment at the Reformation.

The documentary sources and the archaeological evidence, combined with the author's evident sound knowledge of the locality and the subject, have been worked together to produce a most informative and well researched book. Photographs of the Abbey site and archaeological excavations and plans of the buildings and estate provide the illustrations and schedules of the Abbey holdings and lists of sources provide useful appendices. A generous grant from Charnwood Borough Council has enabled the whole to be presented as a handsomely designed and printed book.

HEB

VILLAGE HISTORY IN RECORDS

Heather Broughton    Leicestershire Museums,
Art Galleries and Records Service   1983 £1.50

This attractive booklet gives a general introduction to looking at the history of your village. It then goes on to describe the documentary information which may be available on the land and its use, population, agriculture, industry and trade, communications, local government, education, religious organizations and unusual phenomena, from storms, floods, fires and epidemics to local celebrations. Under each of these heads the main classes of documents which may be found in county records offices and in the central archives are clearly described and some are illustrated in the text with Leicestershire examples. There is an alphabetical check list of records, ranging from Administration of Wills to Window Tax, a bibliography of useful books for the amateur historian and a list of the addresses and telephone numbers of the main central archives in London.

Although the booklet is Leicestershire based, in that the examples used are local, it would be equally valuable for anyone compiling a village history in other English counties. The message for the amateur historian is very clear; first consult your local records office, which is certain to contain some or most of the records referred to in the text and which can usually refer the historian to holdings in other areas.

GKL

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Probate inventories, the lists of possessions of the deceased, with values given, are a very important source of information for the study of the local economy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and provide fascinating details of household furnishings and farm stock. This booklet reproduces typescript transcriptions of the 88 found in the Leicestershire Record Office for this one parish, the majority of them, 72, dating from the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth. A brief glossary of unusual words encountered in them is included.

J G

This book relates the history of fire-fighting in the City from 1575 to 1982. Chapters are devoted to the work of fire insurance brigades, police brigades and volunteer bodies who were responsible, in a very ad hoc manner, for fire protection until 1876, when the Borough of Leicester assumed full responsibility for public fire protection.

The book is enlightening and enjoyable reading both for the knowledgeable and the uninitiated. The facts, particularly in the first chapter where sources on early history are scarce, have been thoroughly researched. There are many informative illustrations and photographs of engines and equipment, fire officers and stations. One criticism is the lack of references to sources listed in credits at the end and the lack of the author’s name at the front.

HEB
Loughborough’s War Memorial Tower, with its carillon of 47 bells, is not only a memorial to the men of the town who gave their lives in the First World War; it also bears witness to the combined effort of the townspeople and local firms, such as William Moss & Son Ltd, the builders, and John Taylor & Co (Bellfounders) Ltd, to raise the enthusiasm and money for the whole project. All this is well documented in Mr Bray’s very fulsome account, which includes a List of the Fallen and the inscriptions on the bells which record their donors. The seventh largest was the gift of the Loughborough Chamber of Trade. This organization, now the Charnwood Chamber of Trade, ‘grew out of the devastations of the First World War when, like everyone else, the town was starting anew.’ Their Diamond Jubilee album contains many miscellaneous facts about the town’s shops and ends with short accounts of the histories of the present members. Over fifty of the old photographs included are of street and shop scenes and one shows the Memorial Tower at an advanced stage of construction.

THE POSTAL HISTORY OF ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH
J Soer
Leicestershire Libraries & Information Service 1982 £1.10

To set the Ashby-de-la-Zouch Post Office in context the author starts with a brief history of the posts up to 1840. He then gives numerous details, from Post Office Records and other sources, of this town’s Post Office, its staff and the arrangements made for the collection and delivery of posts and ends with an illustrated list of the various local stamps and postmarks used. Of greatest interest to the local historian, rather than the postal history enthusiast, is the account of the distribution of the posts in the Ashby area, both up to 1830, when it became a Post Town in its own right instead of dependent on Atherstone or Loughborough, and afterwards, when it was the centre for a wide area of settlements, including the growing Coalville. The typed text does not make this an attractive booklet, but it is well prepared and reasonably priced.

J G
This pamphlet touches on various aspects of Shepshed's special importance. In the early nineteenth century it was the largest village in Leicestershire and also the most intensively industrialized, the industry being hosiery. It falls roughly into three sections, general history of the industry, including working and social conditions, details of 'The Shepshed Riot' of December 1837 and personal recollections of hosiery factories.

The reminiscences give some idea of the changes which have affected the industry during the present century, from socks to outer wear and from wool to synthetic yarns. One firm still competes successfully in the mass market and another manufactures high quality Argyle socks, still making the most luxurious of these on hand-operated Griswold machines.

The 1837 riot was an example of the seething discontent among poverty-stricken textile workers in the Midlands and the North which seemed to threaten revolution in the hungry 1830s and 1840s. It was a reaction against the local implementation of the New Poor Law Act and the rioters gathered round the workhouse when the relieving officer was to distribute relief among the inmates. The young man sent by the Loughborough contractor with the bread was mobbed, his load scattered and his cart broken and thrown into a pond. The police reports copied here are taken from contemporary newspapers, although no references are given and they are arranged in the wrong order.

The first section, occupying two dozen pages, more than half the total, looks like the transcription of a bundle of photocopies of passages in books used by the group for their own study. There are some notes prepared by someone at Loughborough University and long sections from David Levine's book *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism*. Whole stretches of S C Chapman's edition of William Felkin's *History of the Machine-Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufactures* and half a dozen inappropriate illustrations from A J Pickering's book on Hinckley are lifted with neither acknowledgement nor even ascription. Working uncritically in this way has meant that paragraphs are cut off where pages turn in the original and in addition the page order has been muddled. It might have been more useful to flout copyright completely and to have reproduced the photocopies themselves. It is cheeky of the Group to end by claiming copyright for themselves over all this material.

Mr Coleby's group is still at it; but has overdone it this time! Let us hope that next time they can devote more pages to their real contribution here, their own personal knowledge of the village, its people and its industry.

J G
Leicestershire transport enthusiasts will find material of interest in this picture history of the country's largest independent bus line, which started in Nottingham near the beginning of the century. The firm expanded in the 1930's and again in the 1960's by taking over the businesses and fleets of other operators. These included Randall of Ashfordby in 1953, Allens of Mountsorrel in 1955 and in the 1960's the Leicester coach firms of Provincial Garage, A A Mason & Son and G W Harris (Majestic) and the Syston firm of J R Smith. At least nine of the one hundred photographs were taken in Leicestershire and five more show machines taken over with Leicestershire firms.

J G

The domination of the village of Groby by the granite workings is vividly illustrated by aerial photographs in this book, which show how Sheet Hedges Quarry came to rival its neighbour, Groby Pool, as a spectacular local feature. In the early nineteenth century the working was undertaken by the Earl of Stamford as part of his estate and after 1865 by the Groby Granite Company, of which he was a shareholder and to which he leased the quarries. Transport was a crucial factor and just as the Leicester and Swannington Railway brought coal to Leicester from the coalfields in the Ashby-de-la-Zouch area, so it also brought granite from Groby, via a linking Groby railway line.

This booklet is copiously illustrated with photographs and maps and is attractively printed by a local publishing firm that specializes in engineering and modelling books. Although it goes into some detail about the rolling stock and tracks of the Groby Granite Railway with its various branches serving the different quarries, it is more ambitious than the usual account written for railway enthusiasts. The author has laboured through Stamford family papers and other original documents and has consulted local memories in search of information about the fortunes of the railway and the quarrying company itself and of some of the employees. Unfortunately he does not deal with the sources very critically and the result is a breathless compilation of a mass of information, ill ordered into sections which overlap and repeat. Moreover he gives scant references to his sources (his list of References at the end merely duplicates in part his Bibliography). He rejoices in the discovery of maps dated 1757 and 1816; but reproduces portions with no scale, compass direction or acknowledgement, nor even a caption of any sort to help the reader agree with the conclusions he draws from them – or with his speculations. There is a wealth of detail here of interest to the local historian; but no very clear idea of the inter-dependence of the quarry and its railway throughout its life.

J G
This paper was originally given by Dr Rollason, an authority on Anglo-Saxon saints and their cults, as a lecture at the patronal festival of St Wistan’s church at Wigston Magna in 1981. Proof of Wi(g)stan’s existence is provided by a pre-Conquest text which states ‘Then St Wigstan rests at that monastery of Repton near the river Trent’. Later mediaeval accounts are then sifted to suggest the reasons for the murder of this Mercian prince and for his subsequent veneration.

J G

William Hanbury had the living of Church Langton, the mother church of the five Langtons, from the middle of the eighteenth century until his death in 1778. He was a man of many cultural interests, divinity, history and music, as well as his overriding interest and skill in botany and plant and tree propagation. Indeed it was the success of his nurseries and plantations which was to be the cornerstone of his charitable and visionary schemes, which were to last forever on the capital raised from sales. In the style of his age he circulated his proposals to ‘Gentlemen of honour and integrity’ in Leicestershire and the adjoining counties. One feature of his scheme was the annual church service at Church Langton, with sacred music, which was to precede the annual meeting of the Trustees. From this arose the three music festivals of 1759, 1760 and 1761, at which the Messiah was performed by musicians of national repute. These large scale music festivals came to an unhappy end, although the annual musical service was continued in his lifetime.

The objectives of the original scheme were comparatively simple – the improvement of the church, the provision of an organ and organist and a schoolmaster for the Langtons. The ups and downs of the enterprise, his relations with the Trustees and with the quarrelsome ladies of West Langton Hall are described in detail.
By 1770, when the Trust seemed fairly well settled and had met some of its original aims, Hanbury’s fertile imagination led him to plan a more grandiose scheme. He visualised a new large minster church, a collegiate foundation, with professors of grammar, music and poetry, a school, library and printing press and a hospital (i.e. almshouse) for the elderly poor of the Langtons. At his death his wider visions were still only plans. His son and heir and the Trustees reconstituted the Charity on a more practical basis, using the available funds to build the handsome rectory we know today. It was not until 1974, in the incumbency of the last Hanbury rector, that the core of the school we know today was built, although an earlier school for boys had been set up in 1839. A little money is still available for the use of the Trust for charitable and educational purposes.

In writing of the life and work of this very practical visionary the author has been lucky with his source material, Hanbury’s published works and his manuscript reports of the Society at Church Langton. This is a very detailed account of a unique country parson, sumptuously produced and illustrated by the author in a style which would surely have gratified William Hanbury had it appeared in his lifetime.

G K L

A SON OF THE RECTORY: from Leicestershire to the Somme
A Moore
Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd 1982 £3.95

This autobiographical account of his life was first compiled by Aubrey Moore as a series of notes for the information of relatives and friends. Assembled as a book, these ‘chapters’ describe the various aspects of village life which influenced him as he grew up in the Rectory at Appleby Magna, a village where his family had had important connections for over three hundred years. Accounts of the farming year, village personalities, Christmas, the Choir Supper and a walk round the village, in addition to the author’s recollections of school and family life, are related. The latter chapters describe Moore’s career as a mining surveyor and his subsequent experiences as a sapper during the Great War.

Because of the manner in which the book was initially compiled, the chronology and content is in parts rather confused and repetitive. The informal ‘conversational’ tone of the writing does, however, contribute greatly to the overall atmosphere of the book and makes the whole a very enjoyable and lively account. It is attractively produced with over twenty five black and white photographs and a particularly apt rural scene of the Rectory on the front cover.

H E B

48
THE OPERATION OF THE QUORN HOUNDS 1869-1870: The Diary of Frank Gillard
The Squire de Lisle ed Sycamore Press Wymondham 1982 £90

Frank Gillard was huntsman of the Quorn from 1868 to 1870 and of the Belvoir until 1896. During 1869-70 he kept a meticulous diary of each day with the hunt, detailing the weather, the numbers of horses and hounds, foxes killed and a resumé of the day’s main events. This diary has now been transcribed by Squire de Lisle, himself a member of the Quorn hunt, and supplemented with several appendices and an index. The transcriptions are entered below extracts from the original text, thus making the manuscript version easy to follow.

The work, which is limited to an edition of 350 numbered copies, is bound in red leather-grained rexine with gold lettering. Illustrations include a portrait of Gillard, a print of the Quorn kennels and a map of the Quorn country c 1870, by Brian Hollinshead.

The great merit of this book is that it makes available to a wider audience a manuscript which, being in private hands, would be accessible to only a few. Its presentation is well thought out and, despite its high price, the diary would be a valuable addition to many bookshelves.

HEB

JAMES HAWKER’S JOURNAL: A VICTORIAN POACHER
G Christian ed Oxford University Press Paperback 1978 £1.50

THE LIFE OF A VICTORIAN POACHER: JAMES HAWKER
D Sneath and B Lount Manchester House Fleckney 1982 £1.75

James Hawker was born in 1836, in Daventry, Northamptonshire. Throughout his childhood his father eked out a living for the family from his failing business. James, as eldest child, took to poaching to alleviate the family’s financial situation and to provide food for his nine brothers and sisters. The acquisition of a gun and training by the Northamptonshire Militia provided him with the necessary tools to become a ‘professional’ poacher and this he did, alongside more reputable jobs, until his death in 1921. Such an account hardly seems new: many men born into a background of economic depression, with no secure means of income for a large family, turned to criminal or disreputable occupations to provide the daily bread. Why, therefore, has the life of James Hawker provoked so much interest among local historians?
The publication in 1961 of Garth Christian’s book brought to light a manuscript reminiscence written by James Hawker in later life. Hawker had originally written three volumes and compiled an album of photographs during his years in Oadby. The album and two of the volumes were destroyed but the third was handed by Hawker to his friend John Tudor Walters on leaving the village. It was in his custody that Garth Christian saw the manuscript and recognised its potential for publication. What made it exciting was that it was the living record of a working class man and, even more important, a man who earned his living as a poacher, an occupation many would not have dared confess to, still less write about.

Despite his lowly upbringing and lack of formal education, Hawker was a man of great awareness and intelligence. He saw his poaching activities not only as a means to provide food but also to ‘get one up’ on the local gentry. The excitement of it never ceased to mesmerise him. His upbringing and his outside view of the way of life of the landed gentry made him a working class hero and whetted his enthusiasm for the working class cause. He became a prominent local speaker for the Liberal Party and a particularly zealous supporter of the Northampton MP Charles Bradlaugh. In later life he was elected to the Oadby School Board and to Oadby’s first Parish Council; in both of these he rubbed shoulders with prominent local businessmen and landowners on whose land he poached. Such was his charisma, it appears, that all came to accept him as an intelligent and charming man and a great asset to Oadby life.

The Journal passed from Tudor Walters to his daughter living in Rome. Subsequent to an approach by a private purchaser in Spring 1982, the owner decided to offer the manuscript to the Leicestershire Record Office. The sale was completed and the manuscript received in September 1982. It is a small black notebook, measuring 7” by 4½” and containing 272 pages. It comprises the Journal proper, entitled ‘The Life of a Poacher’ and divided into chapters, a list of which can be seen at the front; newspaper cuttings mainly devoted to political subjects, satirical verse and cartoons; and press photographs of Tolstoy and Gladys Cooper. Loose inside the front cover is a sketch of two rabbits dated 22 Sept 1884. The content of the poacher’s story is fascinating; it is made all the more vivid by the style and manner in which Hawker wrote. In Garth Christian’s book, which purports to be a transcription of the Journal, much of the material has been rearranged, chapter headings altered, punctuation and grammar ‘modernised’ and, in some cases, the meaning of certain phrases completely changed. Much of the atmosphere of the Journal and the character of the man are lost in this transcript and can only be recaptured by returning to the original.
A useful source of information on the life and times of James Hawker is the book by David Sneath and Barry Lount, members of the Oadby Local History Group. Although the authors used Hawker’s Journal extensively, most of the research for the book was undertaken from other original sources. It is a very readable historical account of James Hawker’s life, amply illustrated with photographs of old Oadby, prints and sketches and well presented throughout.

STORIES OF OADBY
B Elliott Oadby Local History Group 1982 £1

This book is the third to be produced by the Oadby Local History Group. The stories in it are based mainly on accounts of court cases which appeared in the local press in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They may be divided into four categories: those connected with the highway, such as the man who drove his horse and cart furiously through Oadby and was heavily fined as a result; those connected with poaching, such as the man who was caught poaching in Stoughton and also fined; those which occurred in the vicinity of Wistow Park, including the story of ‘Dad’s Army’, based on the author’s own experience; and those which shewed the bad effects of drunkenness, such as the alarming story of Eva Mason. She spent one Saturday evening in 1915 completely drunk in Oadby’s main street, to the absolute disgust of Oadby’s nonconformists. Then come three most interesting stories: the fraudulent baker, a nineteenth century wife-beater and the Vicar of Oadby who lost his temper. The final story, the Gilberts of Oadby, is included to shew that many of the people who figure in these stories still have descendents in Oadby in 1982. In all, these stories give the reader some idea of what Oadby was like in the days before the advent of the motor car.
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