

VCH Leicestershire draft text

LEIRE**Social History**

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 VICTORIA
COUNTY
HISTORY

Leicestershire

Social Structure

Of the 19 people enumerated in 1086, only two were free tenants.¹ However, by 1279, there were 18 free tenants on the land of John of Leyre, four free tenants on the land of the bishop of Lincoln and four on the land held by the Prior of Canwell.² The lay subsidy assessment of 1327 shows a fairly flat social structure among those listed, with the highest assessment just 2s. 6¼d. and the lowest 12d.³

The first reliable estimate of the extent of poverty comes from the 17th century hearth taxes. In 1670, one-third of the 51 householders was excused payment, a higher than average proportion for the area.⁴ A small group of wealthy residents had also emerged. Of the 28 people who paid the tax in 1666, 20 had either one or two hearths, five people had three hearths, Richard Picke had four, John Carte had five and Mr Hill had six.⁵ William Cart, linked by marriage to the Grey family, lords of the manor,⁶ had purchased over 220 a. of land in Leire in 1629.⁷ In 1648, John Cart married a granddaughter of Anthony Grey, Earl of Kent (lord of the manor 1639-43). The Cart family appears to have been involved and respected in village life: John Cart was regularly an assessor of village probate inventories in the 1670s.⁸ Yet although a few families may have been dominant, 20 yeomen of Leire were consulted and involved with the decision to enclose land in 1699.⁹ In the 18th century Goodacre and Smith came to the fore as the most significant landholders.¹⁰

Friendly Societies

Leire Friendly Society was founded in 1828 and in 1846 the Trustees purchased property in the village.¹¹ In 1899 there were 45 members and funds stood at £345. Between 1913 and 1916 the sick club was the owner of four houses which the trustees then sold, two of the houses having been

¹ A. Williams and G.H. Martin (eds.), *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation* (London, 2002), 629, 639, 641

² J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, IV, 240

³ W. G. D. Fletcher, ed. "The earliest Leicestershire lay subsidy roll, 1327." *AAS Reports* 19 (1888-9), 130-178, 209-312

⁴ *VCH Leics* III, 172

⁵ G.F. Farnham, *Leicestershire Medieval Village Notes* (Leicester, c. 1928), III, 182

⁶ Memorial tablet on west wall, St Peters, Leire

⁷ Farnham, *Leicestershire*, III, 181, citing Fine, Easter 5 Charles I.

⁸ For example, ROLLR, PR/I/78/154; PR/I/79/41; PR/I/79/90; PR/I/81/106.

⁹ ROLLR, DE2/24/1-2, EN/198/1-2

¹⁰ Leire Inclosure Award, 1780, ROLLR, DE144

¹¹ *Report of Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies* (Parl. Papers 1901 (35) lxxii), p.75; Abstract for conveyance dated 11 Sep 1925, private papers

described as empty for the whole period.¹² The society was dissolved in 1916, due to falling membership.¹³

Leire Alexandra Female Friendly Society was founded for women in 1863 to assist during any illness whereby the recipient was confined to bed or unable to earn any money or to attend to her household duties. Women aged between 15 and 40 could apply for membership subject to meeting the health and moral requirements of the Committee of Management. In 1911, a monthly contribution of 10*d.* entitled a member to 5*s.* a week for 52 weeks and a further 52 weeks half-pay if required. Any member who had an illegitimate child or who was, in the opinion of the majority of members, leading a dissolute life would be expelled. The appointed doctor received 4*s.* a year for every member within five miles of Leire Church. The accounts for 1928 showed that there were 41 members, four of whom lived in other villages. £6 5*s.* had been paid out to seven members in that year and the Society had assets of just over £500.¹⁴

Social Housing

Houses were bought and let by the parish in the 19th century. In 1842 most tenants in the 11 houses paid 6*d.* per week at four weekly intervals.¹⁵ The tenants were mainly long term occupants over the ten years of the accounts.

Charities

In 1735 Mrs Jane Cart had given Bloodacres Close to the parish,¹⁶ the rent money to be used to provide six threepenny loaves for the most constant attendees at Sunday worship.¹⁷ Between 1816 and 1836, £10 of surplus rent was given to support ten poor children at the village school.¹⁸

Allotments were part of village life in the 19th century, and there were several pieces of land within the parish used for allotments at various times. Initially, 12a. of land appears to have been divided into 48 allotments,¹⁹ then in 1845 a further 36 plots were created from 4a. of land in Bloodacres Close,²⁰ with 26 of these plots held by agricultural or railway labourers or framework knitters.²¹ The other part of Bloodacres Close was known as Poors Meadow and let annually. Regulations for the use of the 'vegetable gardens' included the threat of expulsion for lifting potatoes on the Sabbath. The allotments remained in use until 1966.²² In 1979 the land was sold to a private individual.

The charities of 'Bryan and others' gave a total of £35 to the village.²³ A benefaction of five pounds made in 1695 by William Bryan, confectioner in Cambridge is recorded in the earliest parish

¹² Leire Parish Council Chest, Parish Rate Books

¹³ *London Gazette*, 28 July 1916, p.7510

¹⁴ ROLLR, L334.7

¹⁵ ROLLR, DE1425/132, Rent book

¹⁶ Memorial stone on west wall, St Peter's, Leire

¹⁷ ROLLR, DE1425/126

¹⁸ ROLLR, DE1425/144

¹⁹ *Report to enquire into the condition of the framework knitters* (Parl. Papers 1845 (609) xv), p.126).

²⁰ ROLLR, DE1425/127

²¹ TNA, HO 107/598/13, 1841 census

²² Allotment Account books, Charities box, held by rector

²³ *Report of the Commissioners for inquiring concerning charities in England and Wales* (Parl. Papers 1839 [163], xv), 318

register.²⁴ Other benefactors were Revd. Robert Hill, Penelope Hill and Nicholas Evans. The commissioners were told that, around 1686, £20 had been spent on buildings on waste land and their rents had been added to the cloth fund. The remaining capital had been given to the church and was generating 15s. a year for the cloth fund. A stone set in the west wall of the church belfry records the charitable giving of Mr Brian of Cambridge, Robert Hill rector of Sharnford and Thomas Seagrave (mentioned below).

Moor's Charity derived from the will of Benjamin Moor, signed in 1786, in which fifteen pounds were to be invested to generate funds for purchasing cloth.²⁵

John Mason left £20 to the poor of Leire.²⁶ The interest was added to Moor's Charity and the total was to be distributed by the churchwardens and overseers. In 1792, Susannah Smith bequeathed £50 to be invested in Government stock or land and the interest to be given on St Thomas' day to poor parishioners deemed to be most deserving.²⁷

Horseman's Charity applies to the neighbouring parish of Frolesworth but one third of the interest was to be given to the rector of Leire for the poor of the parish.²⁸

In 1835 In an attempt to reward the 'sober and industrious', Thomas Walker gave a field known as New Inclosure, later Blanket Close, to the rector and Churchwardens so that they could use the rent to buy flannel and blankets.²⁹ Ten guineas were spent in 1837 on the first distribution of goods to the poor.³⁰ The land was used as allotments for more than 60 years and then for agriculture until 1979, when the Parish Council agreed to pay an annual rent of £50 to the Parochial Charities so that the land could be converted to a playing field.³¹ The Charities continue to receive rent for the field from the Parish Council, who maintain it as village playing fields.³² Eight allotments were provided on a plot at the junction of Station Lane and Back Lane until they were replaced by six bungalows for older residents.³³ Three allotments administered by the Parish Council remain on the north side of Frolesworth Lane on a narrow triangular plot beside the road.³⁴

The Leire charities were combined in 1917, and payments continued to be made by the trustees.³⁵ Assistance with fuel costs replaced the earlier gifts of clothing and bread. In 2009 the Leire Parochial Charities ceased to be registered with the Charity Commission. All land apart from the playing field has been sold and the proceeds have been invested. One further charity came from a bequest of Captain Arthur Hart Gurney Richardson, a son of the rector, Henry Kemp Richardson. In 1887 he left £100 to provide coal and blankets for the most deserving aged poor of Leire, being members of the Church of England, at Christmas each year. This charity was not included in the Leire Parochial

²⁴ ROLLR, DE1425/1

²⁵ ROLLR, PR/T/1787/128, Will of Benjamin Moor

²⁶ *Report concerning charities*, 319

²⁷ ROLLR, PR/T/1793/158, Will of Susannah Smith

²⁸ *Report concerning charities*, 319

²⁹ Leire Parochial Charities, papers held by rector

³⁰ *Report concerning charities*, 319

³¹ Leire Charities ledger, held by rector, 197

³² Leire Charities ledger, held by rector, 243

³³ *Lutterworth Mail*, 2 May 1991

³⁴ OS Map 1:25000, sheet 233 (2000 edn)

³⁵ Leire Parochial Charities, papers held by Parish Council

Charities and the small annual income has been added to the rector's discretionary fund since the 1990s.³⁶

Community Organizations

A branch of the Women's Institute ran from 1936 to 1939 and became active again in 1972.³⁷ Monthly meetings are held in the village hall, formerly the old schoolroom. In 1964 the school was leased to provide a room for village social activities.³⁸ It is owned by the Church Commissioners but its daily organization and maintenance is carried out by a committee of villagers. It is used by a pre-school group, Brownies and for parish council meetings, private and public functions and as a polling station.³⁹



Figure 6: Leire village hall, formerly the school

A village cricket team has flourished intermittently. In 1904 Leire was the winner of the Lutterworth and District Challenge Cup and was similarly successful from 1908 to 1910 inclusive and in 1930. The team was briefly revived in 1977.⁴⁰ Skittles teams have taken part in local leagues, using tables sited in the two remaining public houses.

Since 1992 a week of events in June, echoing the Leire Feast week of earlier times, has culminated in a garden fête, raising money for church funds.⁴¹ An annual produce show has been held in late summer since 1970.⁴² Villagers exhibit garden produce, domestic crafts and home cooking in the village hall in competition for a number of prize cups.

³⁶ Leire Parochial Charities, papers held by rector

³⁷ Parish Chest Leire News, Issue 1

³⁸ *Leicester Advertiser*, 7 August 1964

³⁹ Village hall committee minutes, private papers

⁴⁰ Parish Chest, *Leire News*, Issue 5

⁴¹ *Harborough Mail* 27 Aug 1992, Letter of appreciation

⁴² *Lutterworth Mail*, 3 September 2001

A short-lived village newsheet was published by a small group of villagers from 1977 to inform and involve the recently-arrived residents of new housing developments.⁴³ A list of organizations, business advertisements and social events suggests a lively community at that time.⁴⁴

Community celebrations

National events have been marked by village parties, the earliest recorded being to celebrate a jubilee of Queen Victoria. A photograph shows bunting and a banner strung across the main street in preparation for the festivities.⁴⁵ School closures were permitted for royal weddings and for Leire Feast.⁴⁶ The latter lasted for a week in the 1870s, but later was reduced to a Monday and Tuesday close to 29th June. Photographs show gatherings and processions in the first half of the twentieth century.⁴⁷ Street parties took place in 1977, 1995, 2002 and 2010 to mark anniversaries of Queen Elizabeth's accession and V.E. Day, and in 2010 for the wedding of the Duke of Cambridge.

Education

The rector of Leire between 1674 and 1725, Thomas Seagrave left 10s. annually to encourage the children to come to church to be catechised.⁴⁸

There were two Sunday schools in 1819. One attached to the day school (below) had 75 pupils, while the other, supported by subscription, had 60 pupils.⁴⁹ In 1835 the Church Sunday school had between 80 and 90 children.⁵⁰

Revd. James Farmer, who was ejected in 1662, was owed money at his death for the education of the son of Mr Oneby of Hinckley, but there is no evidence of a school in Leire.⁵¹ Revd. Seagrave conducted a petty school between 1680 and 1699.⁵² Four of his pupils, who all came from other villages, progressed to St John's College, Cambridge.⁵³

A permanent school was funded by subscriptions as a 'permanent Commemoration of the Peace, signed in 1814'.⁵⁴ Just under £180 was collected and a schoolroom was erected on the south side of Frolesworth Lane. Five trustees were appointed and the Madras monitorial system of education used by the National Society was adopted.⁵⁵ In 1819 there were 25 weekday scholars.⁵⁶ Thomas Johnson gave £20 of which the interest was to be used for the day school or the Sunday school, excluding any repairs to the windows, and this charity is mentioned in a promissory note of 1829.⁵⁷ Between 1815 and 1840 at least eight different teachers were employed, with eight or nine of the

⁴³Parish Chest, *Leire News*

⁴⁴ Parish Chest, *Leire News*, Issue 8,

⁴⁵ ROLLR, DE 3736, Box 53

⁴⁶ ROLLR, DE 5905/1

⁴⁷ ROLLR, DE 5905/3

⁴⁸ ROLLR, Will dated 17 September 1724.

⁴⁹ *Digest of parochial returns made to the select committee appointed to enquire into the education of the poor* (Parl. Papers 1819 (224) ix), p. 461

⁵⁰ ROLLR, 245/50/6, An Account of the Parochial Visitation, 203

⁵¹ Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 190, citing will, Aug 1672.

⁵² J.H. Pruett, *The Parish Clergy under the Later Stuarts* (Urbana, 1978), 169

⁵³ J.E.B. Mayor, *Admissions to the College of St John the Evangelist* (Cambridge, 1893) II, 415

⁵⁴ ROLLR, DE 1425/144

⁵⁵ ROLLR, Burials Register 1813-1883 Front pages

⁵⁶ *Digest of parochial returns*, p. 457

⁵⁷ *Report concerning charities*, 320

scholars being charity pupils.⁵⁸ In 1840, Jonathan Bent was appointed to teach eight children whose parents had submitted their names to the trustees for recommendation as free scholars, selected from a list of nine boys and three girls.⁵⁹ Six of those 12 families were tenants of the poor houses in the 1840s,⁶⁰ and nine held a parish allotment.⁶¹ All but one were included in a list of 60 names of those eligible to receive charity cloth in 1841.⁶² In 1870 the school was run by Sarah Jellis, sister of a village farmer.⁶³ In the 1871 census, 72 children were recorded as scholars.⁶⁴



Figure 7: The school of 1814

In 1870 an architect was engaged by the trustees to design a new school and cottage but, following the passing of the Elementary Education Act 1870, new provisions were drawn up.⁶⁵ A site beside the White Horse public house was chosen and a new school built, with the first 27 children, aged between seven and thirteen entered in the admissions register in June 1873 by the newly appointed headmaster, James Herbert.⁶⁶ In 1875 he was replaced by Miss Caroline Goddard (who became Mrs Richardson) from Gloucestershire, who was head-teacher for 45 years.⁶⁷ The average attendance was between 40 and 50 children. The rector visited every week to teach scripture and the rectory governess taught sewing, knitting and singing. The children were divided into groups and a second teacher taught the infants.⁶⁸

⁵⁸ ROLLR, DE 1425/126

⁵⁹ ROLLR, DE 1425/154

⁶⁰ ROLLR, DE 1425/132

⁶¹ ROLLR, DE 1425/127

⁶² ROLLR, DE 1425/126

⁶³ *Harrod and Co.'s Directory of Derbys., Leics., Rutland and Staffs.* (London, 1870), 525

⁶⁴ TNA, RG 10/3222

⁶⁵ Order of the Board of Charity Commissioners dated 7 May 1872, private papers

⁶⁶ ROLLR, DE 5905/1

⁶⁷ ROLLR, DE 5905/1

⁶⁸ ROLLR, DE 1425/157

On Mrs Richardson's retirement in 1920, a lack of suitable accommodation made it difficult to appoint a replacement and the Leire Church of England School was closed by the County Council.⁶⁹ Representations by the Parish Council to Major Sir Keith Fraser, M.P. described the strong feeling in the village that the school should re-open, since the children had to walk two miles to another school.⁷⁰ They were successful and the school reopened in 1923.⁷¹ Numbers on the roll were less than 30 for some years and only one teacher was employed to teach both infant and junior children. It became increasingly difficult to appoint a head teacher, who was unlikely to have an assistant or find suitable accommodation within the village. Despite the opposition of the managers and parents, the temporary closure of 1945 became permanent in 1947.⁷² The building became a village hall, and in 2015 is also used as a pre-school for young children.

⁶⁹ ROLLR., DE 1425/158p

⁷⁰ Parish Chest

⁷¹ ROLLR, DE 1654/1.

⁷² ROLLR., DE 1425/157