

Leicestershire VCH News

Issue 10

September 2019

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Marking 120 years of the VCH

The Victoria County History project, to research and publish a history of every parish in England, began life in 1899. It derives its name from the then monarch, Queen Victoria, who gave the work its title, and accepted its dedication.

Although still incomplete, the project is in good heart. Work is underway in 23 English counties, thanks to the efforts of many people who donate cash and time towards the production of further parish histories.

To mark this year's anniversary, counties were tasked with filling a 'big red box' with objects which tell the history of their county. The contents of each box will become part of an online exhibition, and will be on display at, and after, an event to be held in London on 20 November.

We wanted to include objects that represented different parts of the county, several periods and various themes within the county's history.

We appealed for ideas on social media and by email, and aimed to take up the suggestion to include something quirky, or which might surprise



**Leicestershire's History
in a Red Box**

those unfamiliar with the county's history.

We are very grateful for all the suggestions we received, and only sorry that we could not include every one. We are also immensely grateful to those who lent objects to us. We eventually settled on 14 items, stretching in time from prehistory to the 21st century. These are shown above, with the box, and are being described individually within a series of posts on our Twitter and Facebook accounts which will run twice -weekly until mid-October.

Our 14 items are: a photograph of a 'cheddar point' and a broken scraper fashioned from flint c.14,500 years ago at Bradgate—yes, we know there was no such thing as Leicestershire then, but they are connected to our local landscape (we thank Lynden Cooper, University of

Leicester Archaeological Services and Leicestershire County Council Museum Collections for letting us photograph these), a postcard of the 1936–9 excavation of the Jewry Wall, a piece of Potters Marston ware, a copy of the order of service when King Richard III's body was received into the Cathedral, a piece of Swithland slate, a wooden cleave for splitting osiers (lent by Delia Richards), some soot from the Glenfield tunnel (provided by Chris Hossack), a box for a Melton Mowbray Pork Pie, a last for a child's shoe, needles from a Griswold knitting machine (lent by Mary Hawkins), a Ladybird book, knitted fabric swatches by Stibbe (with thanks to Natalie Hayton and De Montfort University Special Collections), a postage stamp celebrating the invention of the jet engine (developed in Lutterworth) and a piece of sari fabric, representing the place of modern multi-cultural Leicester in the county's history. Items where no acknowledgment is given above were lent by members of our committee.

We have enjoyed filling our box, and look forward to seeing what the other counties have put in their boxes.

A Red Book for Loughborough

There was broad agreement that we should produce a 'Red Book', and also a paperback history, perhaps as an interim measure.

A new volunteer group has now begun to research Public Health improvements

Loughborough was one of the 35 towns and villages studied as part of the Charnwood Roots project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) between 2013 and 2017. It was always our aim to write up and publish this research as separate parish histories in three or four large 'Red Book' volumes. That said, we knew before the project got underway that the HLF would not fund the writing and publication costs, and because the Charnwood Roots research was only following four themes, that there would be further research to do to produce the parish histories.

We started fundraising for the first of these Red Books in 2018. This first volume will focus on the town of Loughborough. The date of publication will depend on how soon we can raise the £80,000 required.

We held a meeting in

Loughborough in May to help us formulate our research plans. This was open to anyone with an interest in the town's history. Chris Dyer, Pam Fisher and David Holmes outlined in broad terms the topics which are included in every VCH volume, and showed attendees copies of both the traditional VCH 'Big Red Books' and also the shorter paperback series, in which we have published histories of Castle Donington and Buckminster and Sewstern.

Those present then formed themselves into three groups, to flesh out the bare bones of the topics outlined, and tell us what they thought was important or distinctive about Loughborough, or had been omitted from our outline.

There was broad agreement that we should produce a



The groups debate topics to be included in the book

'Red Book', and also a paperback history, perhaps as an interim measure. All accepted that not everything could be included in a paperback, but there was insufficient time to agree which aspects of the town's history it should contain.

Several people thought the topic of Public Health would be interesting to research and was important to the growth of the town in the 19th century. A new volunteer group has now begun to research this topic (see next page).

Charnwood Roots Databank

All the research produced by our Charnwood Roots volunteers was intended to be uploaded into a computer database, and made available to the public after the project ended. This has not proved as straightforward as we had hoped.

Initial problems with software incompatibility when the database was transferred to a new host have largely been resolved. It is now possible to add the many pieces of information

which were gathered by volunteers but not included within the database before the project ended.

If there are any former Charnwood Roots volunteers reading this who are familiar with the database and would be willing to help by uploading some of this information, please let us know. We would be very grateful for any help you could give.

Some technical work also needs to be done, as the search facility is not working correctly. We do not wish to grant public access to the databank until people can find out what it contains which might interest them.

As soon as we have uploaded all the remaining data and have fixed the fault with the search function, we will make this research freely available. Please bear with us on this while we work to get this resolved.

Public Health in Loughborough

Our first piece of new research towards our Loughborough parish history (see previous page) is on public health improvements in the town between 1840 and 1930.

We are delighted to welcome Paige Emerick to our team, who will be leading and supporting a group of volunteers as they research this topic over a period of 10 weeks. Paige is a currently researching for a PhD at the University of Leicester. Our new volunteer group met with Paige for the first time in Loughborough library on 10 September.

The aim of this project is to produce a set of research notes from a wide range of sources. These will be used to write up our Loughborough book, and more immediately in an exhibition which will be held in the local studies library in Loughborough in July and August 2020.

Public health can be defined as the steps taken by a government or community to prevent disease and prolong life. It became a government concern in England from 1837, when the introduction of a national system to register births, marriages and deaths drew attention to widely differing mortality rates across the country.

Parliament passed a Public Health Act in 1848, during a cholera pandemic. This created a General Board of Health, to provide advice on disease prevention. Local boards were to be set up in towns where the annual average mortality rate over seven years exceeded 23 deaths per 1,000 population, or upon the request of 10% of ratepayers.

Loughborough met both criteria in 1848, and William Lee was sent

by the General Board of Health to inspect the town and make recommendations.

To modern eyes, Lee's report makes grim reading. It also provides us with several vignettes which could form the basis for the exhibition, as well as the contextual background for the improvements which followed. His recommendations were for piped water, sewerage, the replacement of privies with water-closets and the sale of liquid manure to local farmers.

It is a timely project. Next year marks the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Nanpantan reservoir, which provided a source of clean water for the town, and the completion of the Fearon fountain in Loughborough's Market Place, which was provided by Loughborough's then rector, Revd Henry Fearon.

Our work will be feeding into the plans that are being made locally to mark this anniversary. This will involve collaboration with the Loughborough Local Studies Library volunteers, who are skilled at both research and at putting together exhibitions in the library, with Loughborough Archaeological and Historical Society and the Old Rectory Museum in Loughborough (housed in Revd Fearon's former parsonage, and who are also holding celebratory events) and with Charnwood Borough Council, who own the Fearon Fountain and whose support has enabled us to start this research, for which we are very grateful.

We hope to produce an exhibition leaflet. A walk between the three sites (Fearon's house, the fountain

and the exhibition in the library) is also being considered.

The different strands of this research will examine the provision of piped water and drainage, the opening of the Nanpantan and Blackbrook reservoirs and the fountain. Public health improvements were controversial in the 19th century, and generated debate about the cost, who should pay, and how. We shall therefore also be looking at local elections, and the views of the different candidates.

Other public health topics, such as river pollution, cemeteries, housing standards, the location of the livestock market and vaccination will be examined at a later date.



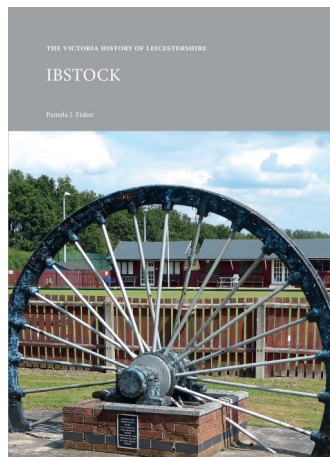
The Fearon Fountain

To keep up to date with our research, events and plans, sign up to join our electronic mailing list at https://mailchi.mp/ca85fa2fa3cb/subscribe_leics_vch_mailing_list, or follow us on Twitter or Facebook @Leicsvcht

Our Next Book and its Cover Story

Our paperback history of Ibstock is now being finalised, and the book will be published next year.

The committee visited the completed facilities at Battram in 1930, and considered it to be one of the most used and best managed institutes they had funded in Leicestershire.



Our paperback history of Ibstock is now being finalised, and the book will be published next year. The land behind the winding wheel and fence in our cover image formed part of the Miners' Welfare sports ground. It is currently the home green of Ibstock Bowls Club.

The purchase of this land for sport was made possible through the Mining Industry Act of 1920. This required the owners of coal mines to set aside 1d. for every ton of output over the following five years, to create a fund to be used to provide recreation facilities, better living conditions and mining education for coalminers.

Local groups could apply for grants from this fund. The Leicestershire District Miners' Welfare Committee was formed in

1921 to consider grant applications, and make recommendations to a national committee.

One of the first actions of the local committee was to estimate how much money was likely to be available at the end of the five years. This total was divided by the number of Leicestershire miners living in each village to determine the maximum grant which could be awarded to each community.

Two grant applications for sports grounds were submitted from Ibstock. The one favoured by the committee had the backing of the parish council, which agreed to contribute towards the initial costs and ongoing maintenance.

This application sought £4,500 from the fund to purchase seven acres of land off Leicester Road for football and cricket pitches, tennis courts, a bowling green and a pavilion for indoor games, which would also hold a library.

After much deliberation, the committee agreed to provide £3,737 for the land and the outdoor facilities, but nothing towards the pavilion. The land purchase was made and the outdoor facilities were laid out.

A second application was made in 1928 for a grant of £1,300 to provide the pavilion. This was now agreed. The total grant was the second highest sum agreed from the fund in Leicestershire.

The village of Battram, on the south-eastern edge of Ibstock parish, is also included in our book. Battram received a grant of £850 from the Miners' Welfare Fund for a tennis court, bowling green and 'institute' for indoor recreation, for miners living in Battram and Ellistown. The site was just off Wood Road. The committee visited the completed facilities at Battram in 1930, and considered it to be one of the most used and best managed institutes they had funded in Leicestershire.

Plans to undermine the sports ground at Battram were announced in 1979. A meeting between the district council, the Colliery Industry Welfare Organisation and the National Union of Mineworkers agreed that the facilities should be moved, as subsidence was likely. A new site was provided on Ellistown Terrace Road, where Battram Bowls Club and Ellistown & Ibstock United Football Club now play.

Ellistown colliery

When new mines were sunk, and houses built for their workers, they paid no attention to the location of parish boundaries.

Ellistown colliery and brickworks, eight houses built opposite for senior staff, and terraces built for miners and brickyard workers known as Ellistown Terrace and West Ellistown Terrace, are all within Ibstock civil parish, as was a Primitive Methodist chapel built at the end of one of the terraces.

Their history therefore features in our forthcoming Ibstock paperback.

The village known today as Ellistown (originally Whitehill) is not covered by our book, as it was historically in Hugglescote and Donington civil parish (and is now in the modern civil parish of Ellistown and Battleflat).



Ellistown colliery and its houses in 1885

Ellistown colliery takes its name from Colonel Joseph Joel Ellis, the owner of Nailstone colliery, who bought Ibstock Lodge Farm in 1873 as a site for a new colliery. Mrs Ellis took the spade and ceremoniously removed the first soil.

The red marls under the surface

were 100 yards deep and full of water. The newspapers reported that 'they seemed to have tapped all the springs of the neighbourhood'. The water proved very valuable. A contract was signed with Leicester Corporation in 1893 to supply 400,000 gallons a day to Thornton reservoir, where it would be treated to become tap water for the city.

Beneath the clay was rock, 'almost as hard as a diamond, and on which the highest tempered tools could hardly make an impression'. Other mine owners were invited to watch the application of a McDermott drill to create a bore, which was filled with dynamite. It blew out 4 feet of rock. Top Main Coal was reached in 1875, at a depth of 768 feet.

Fireclay, a specific type of clay which resists heat and is used for furnace bricks, lay immediately above and beneath the main seams of coal, and the red marls above the coal could be used to make household bricks. A fireclay works opened alongside the colliery in 1879, with four downdraught kilns, each capable of holding 25,000 bricks or 12 tons of pipes, two oblong kilns to hold 30,000 bricks each, an 'experimental' kiln with a chimney in the centre for 4,000 bricks, and three drying sheds. The works were capable of handling 100 tons of fireclay daily, for fire bricks, furnace linings, quarry tiles and sanitary pipes.

The miners were lucky to escape with their lives when a serious fire took hold at Ellistown colliery on 27 May 1902. Two seams were being worked, with No 1 shaft going to the bottom seam (950 ft) and no 2 shaft to the upper seam (780 ft). At around 2.30 pm, with

nearly 600 men and 53 ponies underground, the wooden headstock above the No 2 shaft caught fire.

Coming just four years after the Whitwick colliery disaster, which had claimed 35 lives when a fire broke out underground, people may have feared the worst when they saw the flames.

The surface and office workers tried to extinguish the fire and get word to the men below to come out. As the headstock burned through, the two cages crashed down, but thankfully the men working the seam had seen burning timbers coming down and managed to get clear of the danger in good time. There was a drift (a sloping underground road) between the two seams, and the men working the upper seam were able to pass along this so they, and the miners working the lower seam, could be brought up in the cages of the No 1 shaft. The entire mine was evacuated, but it was a slow process to bring the 600 men to the surface, as the cages could only hold 14-15 men at a time. The pit-ponies were left underground.

If the No 1 headstock had also caught fire there would have been a major loss of life, but thankfully the wind blew the flames in the other direction. The ventilation fan was also undamaged. All the miners escaped to safety, but newspaper accounts fail to tell us of the fate of the ponies. Part of the mine had to be closed for several weeks to effect repairs.

Two of Ellistown colliery's four coalfaces were closed in 1986. The mine was merged with Bagworth in 1988. Bagworth closed in 1991.

The first draft of our history of Ibstock is currently online for a short consultation period, at <https://www.history.ac.uk/research/victoria-county-history/county-histories-progress/leicestershire/ibstock>

Sugar, spice and all things nice (and arsenic too)

**... mercers,
grocers and
drapers
carried much
higher levels
of stock, with
inventory
values
generally
over £100**

**The range of
imported
foodstuffs
expanded, as
people
developed a
strong
appetite for
sugar and
spices**

Probate inventories list the goods a person owned when they died. A few of the 191 Lutterworth inventories which survive from the 17th century relate to shopkeepers, and the stock they list formed the basis for a talk which Pam Fisher delivered at Lutterworth in July.

Some shops had a limited range of goods, often made by the proprietor. Some of Lutterworth's saddlers, shoemakers and chandlers (candle-makers) had shops, a hatter had a large stock of caps and hats, and a barber had a stock of wigs. The values of these inventories are generally low – you didn't need much capital to set yourself up as a shopkeeper.

Other shopkeepers, described as mercers, grocers or drapers, carried much higher levels of stock, with inventory values generally over £100 (the median value of all Lutterworth inventories

was £39), although much of that stock may have been financed by credit. Regardless of their role description, all of these shopkeepers sold many different types and colours of cloth, a range of haberdashery items and some household goods, and most also sold groceries, many of which were imported.

The more stable political climate after 1660, and improving transport links to London, may at least partially account for the greater range of stock held in the later inventories, but may also reflect increasing wealth in the town, or among the richest inhabitants, who wanted new and fashionable outfits, and who were developing more adventurous tastes at mealtimes.

The range of imported foodstuffs expanded, as people developed a strong appetite for the sugar and

spices which became more readily available through international trade (and regrettably supported the development of the slave trade). The only item Francis Pope sold in 1626 that enabled people to sweeten their food was currants. His single line of 'pepper and other spices' suggests a limited range, although high in value, at £5. He held no tobacco. In 1666, John Almey's shop contained 49 lb of tobacco, two types of pepper and some ginger, with honey, treacle, 36 lb of sugar and 'almond comfits' enabling people to satisfy a sweet tooth. The customers of Daniel Ogden, who died in 1695, could buy pepper, cloves, turmeric, mace, cinnamon, cumin and fennel seeds. He stocked tobacco and snuff, nearly three hundredweight of sugar (!), as well as honey, treacle, candy and a number of what may have been 'new lines' for Lutterworth, such as rice.



The audience assembling before the talk

Their imports had grown partly from the need to stock different cloths. The range of fabrics they sold is fascinating, and changed over time as international affairs closed some trade routes, and new suppliers were found in other countries. Many of the fabrics were named after their places of origin, although specific manufacturing techniques may have been copied in other places. They included 'Hollond', Sletia Hollond (from Silesia), Cambric (from Cambrai), Holmes Fustian (from Ulm), Lawn (from Laon), Normandy (a type of canvas), 'Musters' (musterdeville, from Montevilliers, in France), Ozenbrige (from Osnabruck) and Troyes (from the French town of that name).

Pope's shop in 1626 stocked 722 yards of fabric, but only 17 yards of this was woollen cloth (mostly 'Musters'), with the remainder being types of linen. 'Musters' had been widely worn in the 15th and 16th centuries, but its popularity had faded by 1626. In grey, it was the cheapest cloth he stocked, the price perhaps having been 'reduced to clear'.

Almey's shop, in 1666, contained a wider mix of fabrics. The ongoing Anglo-Dutch war may explain why he had little 'Hollond' in stock, which had been the main type of fabric in Pope's shop. Almey also had a far greater range of haberdashery, helping people to express their status, taste, personality and individuality through their clothes.

Another Francis Pope, probably a descendant of the man already mentioned and perhaps trading from the same shop, was described as a woollen draper on his death in 1680. The British woollen industry was growing, and supported by the burial in woollen acts, requiring the dead to be buried in woollen shrouds. His woollen fabrics were listed by their place of origin, and included Devonshires (the cheapest), 'West Countrys', and cloths from Tamworth and Burton-on-Trent. He also had twills, mixed fabrics like baize, and brushed cotton fabrics — flannel and swanskin. Alongside these, he sold haberdashery items and household goods, but no groceries.

Pope's limited range may have been dictated by his means, but he probably also faced strong competition from Daniel Ogden. Ogdens's shop in 1695 held 83 different lines of cloth (28 per cent of the total, by value), 83 lines of haberdashery and ready-made items (40 per cent), 84 lines of household goods (18 per cent) and 55 lines of groceries (14 per cent). His cloth included blue linen, 'coloured' linen, black glazed linen, striped linen and printed linen (presumably block-printed), and calico in black, blue, 'coloured', orange and white. He stocked caps, hose for children and adults (in grey, black or 'blue and white') and printed calico frocks. His haberdashery and household goods included several different kinds of buttons and other fastenings, mohair fringing, mirrors, religious books, packs of cards, corks, soap, sand, arsenic and a 'hanging candlestick' (candelabra).

These inventories help us to visualise the colours and flavours of everyday life in a small market town, many miles from the coastal ports which supplied it with goods.

200 Club winners

The results of our quarterly prize draws have been as follows:

September 2018 (56 tickets in the draw)

1st, No. 66, name withheld,
£140.00

2nd, No. 65, Mr D. De Lisle,
£93.33

3rd, No. 32, Mr R.A.H. Brooks,
£46.67

December 2018 (55 tickets in the draw)

1st, No. 54, Mr. C Saul, £137.50

2nd, No. 51, name withheld, £91.67

3rd, No.56, Mr. M Chamberlain,
£45.83

March 2019 (56 tickets in the draw)

1st, No. 2, Mrs M. Greiff, £140.00

2nd, No. 3, Dr G.T. Rimmington,
£93.33

3rd, No. 32, Mr. R.A.H. Brooks,
£46.67

June 2019 (56 tickets in the draw)

1st, No 30, name withheld,
£140.00

2nd, No. 8, Prof. C. Dyer, £93.33

3rd, No. 65, Mr D. De Lisle £46.67

We are very grateful to all the members of the 200 Club for their support, and to those winning

members who donated their prize back to Leicestershire VCH Trust.

Membership costs £50 per annum, which can either be paid annually or in four quarterly instalments of £12.50. An application form and copy of the rules can be found online at <https://www.history.ac.uk/research/victoria-county-history/county-histories-progress/leicestershire/support-vch-leicestershire> (or please contact us for a paper copy). Net proceeds go to further the work of the Trust in parishes across Leicestershire.

Find us online

The Leicestershire VCH website contains an overview of our project, a work-in-progress section containing draft chapters from parishes where we have been working, links to published volumes, forms to complete to become a Friend of the Trust or join our 200 Club, our data protection privacy notice and our most recent Twitter posts. See <https://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/leicestershire>

Full transcripts of some of the documents we have used in our research are available on the VCH Explore website, which also contains a number of short articles about specific topics. These can be found at <https://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore/>

Our Leicestershire History site is devoted to the county's history. It includes the latest news about the VCH project, facts about the county's history, including details of numerous nonconformist chapels, and a series of research guides to help those who would like to research the history of their local school, parish church or the farms in their parish, or who wish to know more about finding and using historic maps. Find us at <https://leicestershirehistory.co.uk/>

Our Charnwood Roots project was completed in 2017, but the website is still active and includes updates about how we are turning the Charnwood Roots research into published parish histories. The site will

also provide access to the Charnwood Roots research data in due course (see p. 2). It can be found at <https://www.charnwoodroots.org/>

We are active on social media and regularly post on our Twitter and Facebook accounts.



You can find us on [Twitter](#) at @LEICSVCHT, and on [Facebook](#) as LeicsVCHT.



**Leicestershire Victoria
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Leicestershire Victoria County History Trust was launched in May 2009 to support and promote the Victoria County History project in Leicestershire. The Trust works with volunteers across the county to research and publish the history of Leicestershire towns and villages. Training and support is provided free of charge

The Trust relies on charitable donations to support this work. Please consider joining our 200 Club, becoming a Friend of the Trust or making a donation to support ongoing work in Leicestershire. More information is available on our website, at www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/leicestershire, or you can contact us at the address shown in the panel to the left.

Leicestershire Victoria County History Trust is a registered charity (No. 1128575) and a registered company (No. 6683052).

