



NEWSLETTER NO. 97 SEPTEMBER, 2020

Corona Virus Edition No. 4

Dear Historical Society Members and Friends

We are not resuming activities i.e. face to face meetings this autumn and the situation will probably pertain into the new year. We are continuing to monitor the situation. A returning spike is predicted and already the virus is spreading given the loosening of lockdown controls. The situation remains unpredictable and fluid.

As stated in the last two newsletters we propose to postpone annual membership renewal for 2020-21 until further notice.

Our annual journal '*The Harborough Historian*' will be published and distributed as usual this coming October.

We hope you maintain your interest in local history and history in general. Below are some news items and snippets from local history and some suggestions for restricted museum visits and online viewing and reading.

Member's Contributions to the Newsletter

In order to keep members actively involved we are asking if you have any snippets even longish articles you might like to contribute to the newsletter. These could be on anything of local historical interest or your family history. Topics such as buildings, your house, stories from memory, life in Harborough and surrounding district, churches and chapels and religious themes, myths, legends, transport, cultural and political life, farming, gardening etc etc. So long as it has an historical bent.

The length can be variable from a paragraph or so to up to a 1,000 words. Illustrations such photos, maps, sketches, drawings etc would be good but optional.

Just send to me. Len Holden, and we will do the rest in terms of lay out and type setting.

Tel: 01858 -446067 Email: leonard.holden@ntlworld.com

NEWS

* Harborough Museum Re-opens

Tim Savage, the Harborough Museum Officer, writes 'I am very happy to say that Harborough Museum has reopened with new hours from Wednesday to Friday: 10am – 12.30pm, 2pm – 4pm and Saturday: 10am – 3.30pm. You will need to book a slot in advance. Your time will be 45 minutes. If you would like to book you must book on our website: www.harboroughmuseum.org.uk or by phoning 0116 305 3627.

* Other Leicestershire Museums New Opening Times

Melton Carnegie Museum, Melton Mowbray

Melton Museum will be reopening from Thursday 10th September 2020. You must pre-book your visit and wear a face covering inside the museum. Their new opening hours are Thursday to Saturday, 10am - 4.30pm. Visit their website <https://www.meltonmuseum.org/> for advance booking.

If you are unable to book online, please phone 0116 305 3680 during opening hours, and a member of staff will take your booking.

* Charnwood Museum, Loughborough

The museum will now be open Wednesday-Saturday, 10am-12pm and 2pm-4pm. The last admission will be 30 mins before closing at both sessions. These opening times and sessions will change for the Winter months so please check their website before making a visit.

NO BOOKING is required but a queueing system will be in operation. You are required to wear a face covering. The Queens Park Cafe will be open.

Tel: 01509 – 233754

* The 1620s House and Gardens , Donnington le Heath

The house and Gardens s now open by booked visits from Thursday to Saturday 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. with safety systems in place. The tea room will be open from 17th September.

Tel: 01455 – 290429, Email: dlhmanorhouse@leics.gov.uk

Address; Manor Road, Coalville, LE67 2FW

* Launde Abbey

Launde is welcoming guests to use the covered outdoor cafe for morning coffee, lunches and teas. Places for Sunday roast dinner and Launde High Teas are limited and must be booked in advance.

Launde Abbey, East Norton, Leicestershire LE7 9XB
Telephone: 01572 717254
Email: info@launde.org.uk

* **Harborough Historian Index Page**

Dudley Brown, the Harborough Historical Society Webmaster is daily adding links to the Harborough Historian index page of the website. This enables downloading or viewing of past articles. Link here https://www.marketharboroughhistoricalsociety.org/body_historian_index.html

* **British Newspaper Archive**

The British Newspaper Archive is a wonderful source for local and national history. There is a fairly complete run of the *Harborough Mail* throughout the 20th century and 21st century. There are also copies of the *Leicester Mercury* stretching back into the 19th century as well as other newspapers some now long defunct. You can have limited access for free but for more detail searches you would need to subscribe. The website address is: www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

SNAPPETS

* **Agnes Bowker: The Woman who gave birth to a cat!**

It was claimed that in 1569 one Agnes Bowker aged 27 years old of Market Harborough gave birth to a cat! In today's world such a story might feature as a news curiosity in a tabloid for general amusement and be quickly dismissed as a hoax. In the Tudor world it was taken very seriously and reports reached Queen Elizabeth's Privy Council, William Cecil, the Queens Principal Secretary and the Bishop of London.

Agnes Bowker, an unmarried local servant girl became pregnant. Childbirth outside of wedlock was viewed as a disgrace. In addition promiscuity could be levelled at Agnes as she herself admitted in giving testament to the authorities, that she was uncertain who might be the father. A fellow servant or the local school master! In this climate of moral judgement she attempted to fool the authorities by stating that she had given birth to a cat. The five women who accompanied her at the birth also gave witness that this was indeed true. The principal midwife in the birth was Elizabeth Harrison of Great Bowden, a woman of considerable experience in these matters. In her testimony to the inquiry she related how Agnes had told her that she had seen all strange sorts of creatures in visions, a bear, a dog, a man. The implication being she had sexual congress with some of them, which resulted in her giving birth to a 'moon calf' a mass of malformed tissue believed to be the product of illicit coupling. Six women gave testimony to the delivery of the 'thing' but none could tell what it was or in fact did see the actual birth. It eventually transpired that it was a 'cat,' but they were too terrified to take in the reality of the situation. Obviously an atmosphere of hysteria had overwhelmed the proceedings.



1. Anthony Anderson's depiction of Agnes Bowker's cat, accompanying the transcripts he sent to the Earl of Huntingdon, 1569

The authorities on investigation did not believe that Agnes had given birth to a cat or any other alien creature even though a skinned mature cat was produced in evidence. As Cressey (2000 p.13) states 'monstrous birth demonstrated that the nation was in trouble, with deformities in new born children matching deformities in the body politic.' The alarm that it might be part of 'popish plot' spurred the authorities into action and local landowning dignitaries, such as Sir George Turpin, Edward Griffin of Dingley Hall and Henry Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon were joined by national figures such as William Cecil, advisor to Queen Elizabeth to in set in train an investigation of the events. It was felt that by debunking Agnes's and the women helpers story of a cat birth they would defuse an atmosphere that divine forces were warning of portents of doom in newly created Protestant England. If they could prove the story to be a deception then the view that it was a punishment on the body politic could also not be true. As commentators said at the time if Agnes gave birth to a creature surely it would have been a kitten not a fully grown cat!

Reference: David Cressey (2000) '*Agnes Bowkers Cat: Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England*,' Oxford.

*** LOCAL BOOK SHOPS**

Please don't forget to support local book shops which are still operating via email, telephone and their websites:

*** Quinn's Books (Chris):** Tel: 01858 – 432313, email: info@quinnbooks.co.uk Website: via Facebook

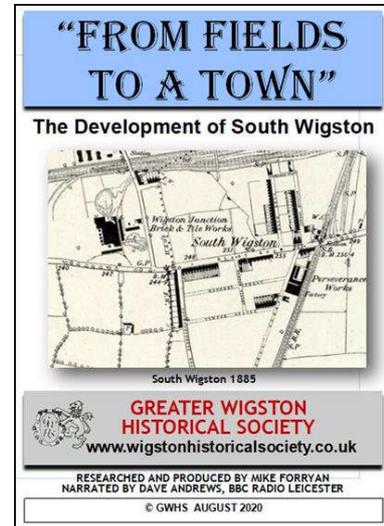
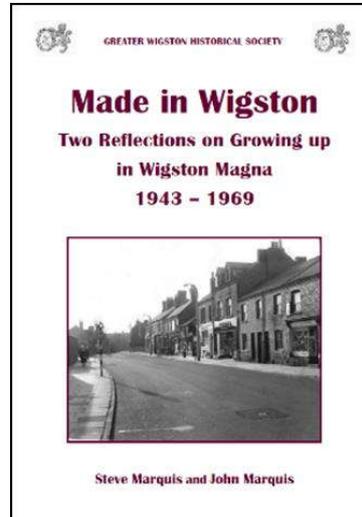
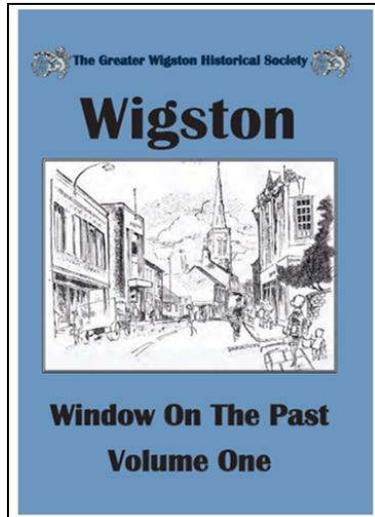
*** Kibworth Books (Debbie):** Tel: 0116 – 2791121; Email: info@kibworthbooks.com ; Website: kibworthbooks.com

They are pretty good at doing fast deliveries.

* NEW PUBLICATIONS

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***Don't forget to visit** the Harborough Museum website (<http://www.harboroughmuseum.org.uk>)

* **A Full Index of articles in the Harborough Historian is now available via the link below:**

www.marketharboroughhistoricalsociety.org/historian_index.html

* **Please visit our website** www.marketharboroughhistoricalsociety.org

For more information contact Len Holden on 01858 – 446067. Email leonard.holden@ntlworld.com
Market Harborough Historical Society was founded in 1931 and became a Registered Charity in 1984 and was re-registered in 2014 Charity No. 1157244