

The Local Studies Collection at Market Harborough Library, formerly housed in the Kirby Room and now expanded into improved accommodation in the main body of the library in the November 1998 refurbishment, has been developed over approximately thirty-five years. Most of the work was done by myself but with a great deal of help and encouragement by other staff members and support of senior management. When I was appointed Branch Librarian of Market Harborough in September 1956 the library occupied a two-storey purpose-built library on The Square (now Changers cafe). This had been built in 1938 on a site left to the town for a library by Miss Fanny Kirby who kept a private school there. The Market Harborough Historical & Archeological Society's collection of artefacts, which now forms part of the Harborough Museum's collection, was housed in glass cases on the first floor. This collection was moved into storage when severe overcrowding necessitated expansion of the Reference Library and staff work area in the 1970s. The services of the County Library grew to much of what is available today. These additional services included setting up the WRVS housebound service, provision and exchange of book collections at homes and clubs for the elderly, children's story-times and school visits, talks to local groups and the beginning of a local studies collection.

Developing the Local Studies Collection at Market Harborough Library

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Market Harborough Library became group headquarters for libraries at Kibworth, Fleckney and HMP Gartree and for the mobile library providing a service to the Leicestershire villages in the Harborough area. The Information Service was extended and also covered Tourist Information. Collections of sound recordings were provided in the larger libraries in the county. The library staff had grown from a Branch Librarian and two part-time Assistants to a Group Librarian, Senior Assistant Librarian, Driver/Assistant, Children's Librarian, Senior Library Assistant and full-time and part-time Library Assistants by the early 1970s. The hours of opening had increased from 37 hours a week to 50 hours. The structure of staffing was changed throughout Leicestershire Libraries in the mid 1970s when the librarians were organised into area teams to cover professional services to the local communities. The day-to-day running of the libraries became the responsibility of Senior Library Assistants. Although I had received no formal training in local history I had always been interested in the Harborough Area, particularly as I was born and brought up in Market Harborough, so I was pleased to take responsibility for Local Studies in the new team, together with adult



fiction, sound recordings, services to homes and housebound, HMP Gartree and information work. Various Leicestershire libraries initiatives such as regular meetings of librarians with special responsibilities to exchange ideas and information encouraged the development of Local Studies Collections throughout the County. The increasing public interest in their local areas created a demand for more information. The Leicestershire Studies Librarian, Aubrey Stevenson, gave advice and expertise to help with enquiries and in the creation and building of collections locally.



FORMER LIBRARY - 1981.

Market Harborough Library benefited from Miss Kirby's will when a further sum of money which had been held in trust was used to purchase an early edition of Nichols Leicestershire⁽¹⁾ in eight handsomely-bound volumes. This set of

⁽¹⁾ John Nichols, The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester (1795-1815) 8 volumes.

Nichols was used to produce the facsimile edition by SR Publishers Ltd. in collaboration with Leicestershire County Council. Books and other materials such as local newspapers on microfilm⁽²⁾ were purchased as funds allowed. Some of the older books were repaired and rebound by specialist binders to conserve them.

To provide 'history for the future' all the local newspapers were scanned regularly and items cut out and either mounted or later photocopied and filed. The files that have been created are a valuable source of material for researchers, students and anyone interested in local and family history. The files cover Market Harborough, divided into many subheadings such as churches, schools, people, streets etc. and a file or files for each Leicestershire and Northamptonshire village within about a ten-mile radius of Market Harborough. Over the years the number of enquiries from personal visits, letters and telephone calls increased and led to my compiling a card index to help staff and public. Enquiries such as 'the ghost story of Papillon Hall', 'the pig of Harborough', 'the Judith stone', and 'the siege of the Three Swans' seemed to be repeated every few years and I will tell you something of them in a future article. Answering enquiries and the detective work involved was a particularly enjoyable and satisfying part of my work.



ORIGINAL PLAQUE, FROM FORMER LIBRARY, NOW DISPLAYED IN PEN LLOYD LIBRARY.

Further very useful additions to the Local Studies Collection have been the Parish Records of Baptisms, Burials and Marriages for Market Harborough and nearby Leicestershire villages on microfiche and also the 1891 Census for the area. The Market Harborough branch of the Leicestershire Family History Society kindly loaned a complete set of the International Genealogical Index on microfiche for use in the library. I had felt concerned that many of the old and more fragile books, particularly local directories were becoming worn with use so produced 'village packs'. These are loose-leaf binders containing photocopied references from Nichols, Victoria County History and directory entries. Other information was added to these 'village packs' such as place-name meanings and population figures and provision was made for further references to be added as they became available. Arranged alphabetically by village name they create a useful reference source which can be more easily photocopied than the original books which are also protected from over-handling. The Local Studies Collection also has a printer/reader which can be used to read and print, if required, microfilm and microfiche. There are also additional microfilm and microfiche readers. To help customers find books about a particular place the local studies books were categorised under subject headings, e.g. MH for books on Market Harborough, whilst retaining their Dewey classification numbers.

⁽²⁾ Harborough News (5 Oct 1861-26 Dec 1863, 1864) Market Harborough Advertiser (1854, 1869-1968) with some gaps, Harborough Mail (1969 to date).

The Library moved from its premises on The Square to its Adam & Eve Street site in the Harborough District Council Offices in November 1981, the library taking the name Pen Lloyd Library to commemorate Col. PH Lloyd of Stone House, Blaston, a former Chairman of the Leicestershire County Council.

The Local Studies Collection was housed in the Kirby Room, named in memory of Miss Fanny Kirby. The plaque from the old library detailing her bequest was displayed there and has now been moved to the wall next to the library entrance. With the opening of Harborough Museum there was an opportunity for the museum and library staff to co-operate, especially the answering of enquiries. Further co-operation came when Steph Mastoris developed the 'Steph and Jane Show' when we talked to parties of sixth-form students from Robert Smyth School about how the collections and facilities of the Museum and Library Local Studies could help them with their studies. I retired from the library in August 1995 leaving much still to be achieved but confident that I had left the foundation of a useful Local Studies Collection which would be further developed in the future.

Photographs by Michael Brown for Leicestershire Libraries.



DOOR OF FORMER LIBRARY 53
THE SQUARE, MARKET
HARBOROUGH 1981.