

### April Talk

Tues 10th at 7.30. in the Memorial Hall

#### **'The Transformation of St Pancras' by Nigel Lowey**

*This talk is for anyone with an interest in history, world-class architecture, elegant engineering, or a great story; it describes how the fantastic mid-Victorian Gothic railway cathedral came to be built, and how the long-neglected building underwent a breathtaking transformation.*

### *Blast from the Past*

The start of the railway connection between the East Midlands and London began in 1836. The Directors of the Midland Counties Railway brought a Bill before Parliament, to enable the construction of a railway line through Nottingham, Derby, Loughborough and Leicester and on to a junction with the London and Birmingham Railway at Rugby, thus connecting the whole region with London Euston and the west of England. (The Midland Railway finally obtained its own independent route to London St. Pancras in 1868.)

The necessary Act of Parliament received the Royal Assent on 21st June 1836. The original plans included three branch lines, one of which was a branch line to the Mountsorrel stone quarries. The proposed route of the Mountsorrel branch line did not cross the river, as it does today, but terminated opposite the Duke of York (now The Waterside) But due to various objections the plans for the three branch lines were abandoned.

However the Midland Counties Railway agreed to pay the expense of obtaining Parliamentary powers should others be inclined, at a later date, to build the branch line at their own expense.

This offer was taken up, and in 1858 an Act of Parliament was passed for a new rail line over the River Soar to be called the Mountsorrel Railway. It was paid for by the Earl of Lanesborough, at a cost of £18,000.

Work started towards the end of 1858 and was completed in 1860. The track started from the quarry on a 20 foot high embankment and crossed the turnpike by an iron girder bridge of 39 feet span. It passed so close to the Wesleyan chapel that it darkened the interior of the building. The map and the painting show how close the bridge was to the chapel, which was later demolished so that the bridge could be widened.

A hundred yards further on the track passed over the Soar, by a brick bridge of five arches. Owing to a bend in the river at this point, it was necessary, in order not to interfere with the navigation, that the bridge should cross the river without any intermediate support, giving it a span of eighty feet—the widest brick span it is said, in the Midland Counties. On each side were two other arches, of much smaller span. This is, of course, the 1860 Bridge sometimes called Echo Bridge because of the fantastic echoes especially when the river is high.



Part of the bridge can be seen on the left of this painting of the Wesleyan chapel

At first horses were used to pull the wagons across to Barrow. In 1868 they were still used when the steam locomotive was in for repair. It was in that year that Joseph Adcock, a shunter with the Mountsorrel Granite Company, started from the Mountsorrel end with four trucks of stone and an empty wagon, drawn by four horses to take them to the Barrow junction. When he arrived at the siding he failed to unhook the wagons which resulted in him somehow being struck and killed.

In the same year George Hall put up for sale *nine useful working horses in consequence of the Contract with the Mountsorrel Granite Company being now completed.*



## Mountsorrel in the Great War

The WWI studies team of the Heritage Group has, for over two years, been researching the lives of the men and women of Mountsorrel who were involved in the Great War. The end result of this research is a book, to be published later this year.

The Publicity Launch for the book will be from the 7th to the 10th April.

On Saturday 7th April there will be a Mountsorrel Memorials Walk led by John Doyle starting at 2:00pm from the Memorial Centre. The Walk should take about 90 minutes and includes one steep hill.

We hope to raise the money to publish the book by a sponsorship project in which we are asking as many members as possible, and others, to take part. The idea is that each participant will visit as many war memorials in Leicestershire as they are able to do over a period of three months from April to June and ask their family /friends to sponsor them. To get to the war memorial you can walk, run, cycle, catch a bus or drive.

We will be asking people to send us details of their visit, including a photo to help us publicise the book.

We have already received details of one visit, from Jean Alexander, who sent us this photo of the memorial in the Market Harborough Congregational Church.



### Mountsorrel in the Great War



A view of the village and people 1914 -1919



## The 5<sup>th</sup> LEICESTERS AT CRICKET.

This is taken from an article which appeared in the Loughborough Echo on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1915

Mr. W. W. Jones, Headmaster of S. Peter's School, Mountsorrel, writes as follows:—At our Empire Day celebration we had a collection for the purpose of sending presents to the “ Old Boys ” of the school who have joined the colours. Our Roll of Honour contains about 90 names. Two have been killed, and one is a prisoner in Germany. The late Major W. F. Martin was a manager of the school. The following letter I have received on behalf of 28 old scholars serving in the 5th Batt. Leicester Regiment.

*Dear Sir,—I received your letter and would like to thank you on behalf of the lads out here. I distributed the parcels equally amongst them, and each one expressed his thanks to the children of the school for their noble effort.*

*We feel proud of the children for the dutiful manner they have behaved to us. I can assure you that the duty of the lads out here has been remarkable, and this we feel is the result of our training in discipline at the “ Old School.” We are still taking our part in the trenches, and sometimes under very trying circumstances, but here again duty is the only thing that keeps one at it.*

*Before going in the trenches the last time No. 9 Platoon played No. 10 Platoon at cricket, and many of the players were old St. Peter's boys. The match was played near the camping ground, previous to going in the trenches, and was looked forward to with the keenest interest by each platoon's supporters. No. 10. having first knock, made a total of 37. Of these, J. T. Holmes was responsible for 12. Taking over the willow, No. 9 settled down to some good batting, and soon made the result in their favour. J. Emmerson made his 26 in brilliant form, with some remarkable strokes. Fortunately the game was decided before Joe Wardle brought a speedy finish with his trundlers.*

*We are all looking forward to the time for home-coming, and hope it will not be long. Again thanking you and the children on behalf of the lads out here, for your kindness, and with every good wish*

*I remain Yours sincerely,  
J. E. Burnham.*

This letter was written on 30th June and Sergt. Burnham was killed in action in Flanders just three months later on 25th September.

On 22 October 1915 a memorial service was held at the Wesleyan Chapel in his memory. Some of the tributes paid to him at that time are:

He was not a man of many words, but of stern, manly qualities.

His late employer spoke of him in the highest terms as a good workman, conscientious and thorough in all he did.

In a letter Lieut. Col. Martin paid a high tribute to his sterling and soldier like bearing

Officers and men alike spoke of his high moral character while in France and Flanders, and united in saying that as a soldier and a man they never knew a better.

### Cricket Match Results

#### No. 10 Platoon.

Sergt Blunt, c Birkin b Burnham	4
Pte. Gartshore, b Heap	5
Pte. Wardle, b Burnham	2
Pte. Harper, b Heap	0
Pte. J. Hall, b Burnham	0
Pte. J.T. Holmes, c Cuffin b Boobyer	12
Pte. Darby, run out	1
Pte. Warrington, c Kirch b Boobyer	0
Pte. Summers, b Burnham	2
Pte. Alf. Holmes, not out	0
Pte. E. Foulds, b Burnham	0
Extras	11

#### No. 9 Platoon.

Pte. J. Cuffin, c Hall b Harper	4
Pte. C. Heap, b Darby	2
Sergt. Burnham, b Harper	5
Pte. J. Birkin, b Darby	1
Ptc. J. Emmerson, st Hall b Wardle	26
Pte. A. Kirchin, st Hall b Wardle	0
Ptc. Boobyer, b Wardle	0
Pte. Baum, b Wardle	3
Pte. Brewin, b Wardle	0
Pte. Braybrooke, not out	3
Pte. Lovett, st Hall b Wardle	0
Extras	4

## The 5<sup>th</sup> LEICESTERS AT CRICKET (cont'd)

From the 22 players only 10 survived the war, with only 4 of the 11 Mountsorrel men returning.

### 10 Platoon

**Pte Joe Wardle** of Mountsorrel. He was wounded but returned to service and later promoted to Warrant Officer II (Company Sergeant Major) and awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. He survived.

**Pte Johnny Hall** of Mountsorrel was killed in action on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1915

**Pte John Thomas Holmes** of Mountsorrel, died of Wounds on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1917

**Pte William Bruce Darby** of Mountsorrel, died of wounds on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1916

**Pte Alf Holmes** of Mountsorrel. He was later promoted Corporal and awarded the Military Medal. He was transferred to a Royal Engineers Quarry Company in 1917. He survived the war.

**Pte Ernest Foulds** of Mountsorrel. Shortly after being promoted to Sergeant and being awarded the Military Medal he was killed in action on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1916.

**Sgt John Vickers Blunt** of Breedon on the Hill. He was later commissioned and served as a Captain with South Staffordshire Regiment. He survived the war.

**Pte Walter Gartshore** of Quorn was killed in action on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1916

**Pte Jack Harper** of Coalville. He was later promoted Sergeant but killed in action on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1917.

**Pte John Warrington** of Oakham he died of gas wounds on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1917

**Pte Sidney Summers of Hugglescote** was killed in action on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1918

### 9 Platoon

**Sgt John Burnham** of Mountsorrel was killed in Action 25<sup>th</sup> September 1915. His brother William also died in the war.

**Pte Alfred Kirchin** of Mountsorrel was severely wounded in a gas attack 11<sup>th</sup> October 1915 evacuated home he later died of his wounds on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1920

**Pte George Lovett** of Mountsorrel. He was wounded in action in September 1915 and after recovery posted to 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Leicestershire Regiment. He was killed in Action on 7<sup>th</sup> March 1917.

**Pte Probably Frederick Brewin** of Mountsorrel. He later served in the Rifle Brigade and with Royal Engineers and survived the war

**Pte Probably Amos Baum** of Mountsorrel. He later served with the Labour Corps and survived the war

**Pte John Cufflin** of Leicester. After surviving being wounded in 1918 he was transferred to the Labour Corps. He survived the war.

**Pte Charles Heap** of Sileby. He suffered gas wounds in July 1918 but survived the war.

**Pte Joseph Birkin** of Quorn was killed in action on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1915

**Pte Jabez Emmerson** of Coalville. As a Lance Corporal he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal and later commissioned. He survived the war.

**Pte Sidney Boobyer** of Heather was wounded whilst a stretcher bearer at the Battle of the Somme. He survived the war

**Pte Probably Frank W Braybrooke**, of Sileby. He was wounded in action in August 1915 and subsequently awarded the Military Medal. Later whilst serving as a Sergeant with the Lincolnshire Regiment in September 1917 was wounded. He survived the war.

## From the Website

There were no new posts this month but we did receive a communication from Dr Bryan Higgs in America. At one time the Higgs family lived in Mountsorrel

Bryan was about to publish a book about his Father George's writings and asked for permission to use some of the images from our website.

It turns out that Linda Tyman's mother, Connie once worked for George, and this is what she remembers:

*He came from Coventry to work at the Alvis No. 2 factory in a management role. At that time he lived in one of the bungalows in Church Hill Road (present day Martin Avenue) which had been built for Alvis employees. At the time his wife was profoundly deaf but she later recovered her hearing following an operation. They had one son, Bryan, who I assume is who has contacted you. He went to Yale and presumably stayed in the US.*

*After the war George set up an engineering business with a man called Gordon Hackett, in the garage which still stands next to the Co-Op. My grandfather knew George from working at the Alvis and he obtained a job for my Mum at their engineering works which was known as Kenton Engineering. Mum says they used drilling machines and lathes and there was no heating in the building. After a time the firm moved to premises at the top of the Green, behind the Scout Hut. This area was once a quarry and then a tip before having a Nissen - hut type building erected as a factory. Mum worked at Kenton from 1946-49. The firm moved once again after that to Rothley, next to the old primary school (now demolished).*

*Mum said that George was a good boss and she always got on well with him.*

The following is from Bryan's book 'George Higgs-Born Too Soon?'

George Higgs worked at the Alvis works in Coventry. In an air raid on 14 November 1940 the Alvis works was damaged and the Alvis car factory next door was left in ruins. George applied for a job at the Alvis shadow factory in Linkfield Road. (In 1935, with the threat of war, shadow factories were set up to try to meet the urgent need for more aircraft using technology transfer from the motor industry to implement additional manufacturing capacity.)

He was taken by car to Mountsorrel, interviewed by Mr Ellis and made machine shop foreman. The factory was to make De Havilland airscrews, duplicating what was done in Coventry. One of his tasks was to turn shoemakers into engineers.

After the war he was approached by Gordon Hackett who offered him a partnership in a small engineering firm, Kenton Engineering Co, in the wooden garage at the home of Gordon's father. They then moved to the old quarry at the top of The Green. They purchased it from a builder making caravans, who was selling up because he could not get import licenses for the materials he needed. With it came a small aircraft hanger, two Nissen huts and a new bungalow at the entrance to the site. George moved into the bungalow. The next move was to a purpose built factory in Rothley. The company was later taken over by Brush with George remaining as manager. At that time he invented and patented the 'Kenton Tangiflow Tool Box'.



Bungalow at the entrance to the site.

# Peace garden

The next session on the Peace  
Garden will be  
Wednesday 4th April  
between 09:30 – 13:00.

## Nature Notes

The wild, or at least snowy, weather over the last couple of weeks has put back some of the spring flowering we should expect but as the days lengthen and hopefully warm up we should soon be back to normal. One bonus of the weather has been the bird traffic at garden feeders which makes up for a poor day when we did the Great Garden Bird Watch at the end of January. The migrant birds are starting to slowly reappear with the Ospreys now back at Rutland Water and the first Sand Martins back in the County. To follow the Ospreys have a look at their website <http://www.ospreys.org.uk/> which has live webcams for the really keen!