



No 50

MHG NEWSLETTER

Group Notes and News

The next Evening Talk is **“The Church in a Hillfort”** about the Priory Church of St Mary and St Har-dulph at Breedon. This remarkable place has evidence of activity back to the Mesolithic period. It is one of three Iron Age hillforts in the county and in the 7th century became the site of a major Mer-ci-an monastery, then an Augustinian priory and finally a parish church. Despite its importance more than half the hill has been quarried away without any significant excavation.



The talk, given by former County Archaeologist, Peter Liddle, will piece together the history of the hill and its church with an emphasis on the remarkable collec-tion of Saxon carvings.

Mountsorrel Memorial Centre

Tuesday 8th March at 7:30pm.

Admission: Members £3, Non-Members £4

Equipment

The Group has recently benefitted from a Ward Councillor Grant from Charnwood Borough Council to improve audiability of our monthly talks and also access to the electronic Archive in the Muse-um. Our thanks to Borough Cllr Leigh Harper-Davies for supporting the grant bid and to MMC staff for their help is setting the audio gear up for our February talk.

Navins Wildflower Meadow

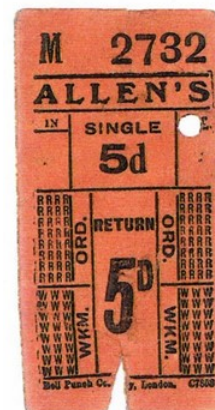
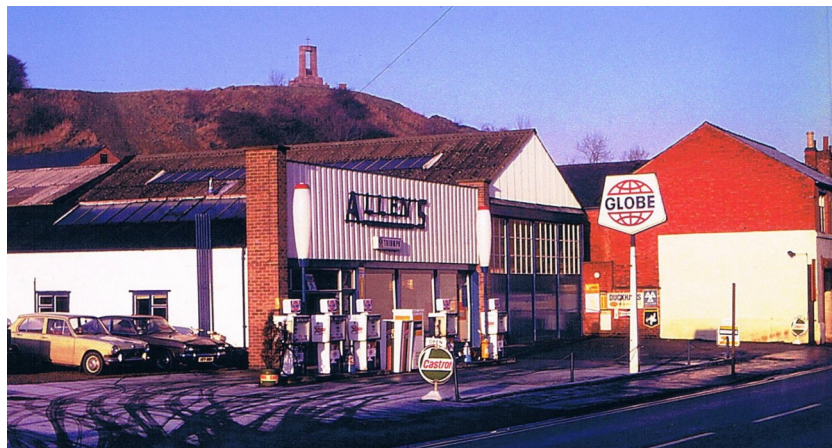
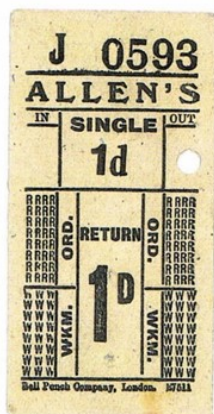
In Newsletter 45 (available on our website see <http://mountsorrelarchive.org/newsletters-2021/>) we reported on the stone that TARMAC had delivered to act as a plinth for the information board we designed with the help of children from Christ Church & St Peter’s School. TARMAC have now included information and photos on their website. See [Rock-solid marker heralds a haven of natural beauty thanks to a Tarmac donation | Tarmac](#)

Group Facebook Page

Since last November we have been posting a “Fortnightly Photo” on the Group Facebook page. Thank you to everyone who has commented and added snippets of information. Those additional items of information are really welcomed and are being added to the Archive.

Fares Please

The Mountsorrel Heritage Group has recently been given a booklet containing the memoirs of a lady called Muriel Houghton (a.k.a. Mary Cheeseman), who spent 32 years working as a bus conductress. Her career “on the buses” began in 1942 when she joined Allen’s bus company as her contribution to the war effort. Allen’s were based at what is now the Top Gear garage.



Allen's Garage c1970

Muriel’s many years working as a conductress were very happy and gave her a real insight into people’s lives and habits. Below we publish some extracts from the booklet which isn’t too long, but if you wish to read it, come along to the museum one day and ask to have a look at it.

Extracts from Muriel’s Memoir

During the war buses were not allowed interior lights, apart from when passengers got on or off the bus, as part of the air-raid precautions. So that the conductor/conductress could see to issue tickets and take fares, they would wear a small lamp on a strap around the neck.

Buses were a vital part of enabling people to get to work, go shopping and visit relations but they were at that time quite uncomfortable – having wooden slatted seats instead of the padded ones we know today. They were also not as powerful as modern vehicles and Muriel recalls that if the bus – which was usually full – came to a steep hill, several passengers had to get out and walk to the top, to lighten the load!

Most buses at the time were single decker, with one door at the front. The conductress would have a “bell-punch” ticket machine to clip a hole in the passenger’s ticket – this is why conductresses were often known as “clippies”. Bus drivers were usually men, but many conductresses worked on the buses from wartime onwards.



Allen's Buses Town service Bedford Utility, Leymington St Loughborough 1940s



Allen's Buses Leicester to Loughborough via Woodhouse, and Cropston

As bus design improved, double-deckers became more common throughout the county and these generally had an open platform at the back where people got on and off. This sometimes led to dangerous situations when passengers leapt off before the bus was fully stopped or when someone tried to jump on to an already-moving bus. These open platforms also caused some amusing episodes too – such as the one concerning a lady who was knitting whilst sitting on the side seat at the rear of the bus. She dropped her ball of wool and it rolled along the aisle and straight out of the back door, following the bus for about 100 yards before snapping off.



Allens Buses at St Margaret's Bus Station Leicester

The predecessor of today's Arriva 127 service—Allen's Leicester to Loughborough via Rothley and Mountsorrel at the terminus in Packhorse Lane Loughborough



During the 1950s buses were very busy and were often full at peak times and on market days in various towns. The rule was that children between the ages of 5 and 14 could travel at half-fare as long as adults were not having to stand. Muriel remembers one mother and daughter who got on the bus at a very busy time. Later in the journey, Muriel told the mother that the child should give up her seat to one of the adults standing or pay full fare which the mother chose to do. However, when the bus began to empty and there were several free seats, the woman demanded the half fare back!

Muriel recalls that the buses often carried mail bags and parcels from one town to another. A postman would lock the bags onto the pole on the rear platform, usually on the last bus of the night, and another postman would be waiting at the other end of the trip to unlock them. For some years, buses would carry newspapers to the outlying villages on their route. They were brought by van to the bus terminus before the journey and collected by the paper boys in each village. Even medicines were sometimes delivered by bus. Although using the buses as delivery vehicles proved very successful, there were occasionally a few hitches – such as the time when Muriel delivered some funeral wreaths to the wrong village!

School buses often presented a bit of a challenge, such as the time when four boys let out two white mice on one of the seats. Muriel, bravely hiding her terror of mice, solemnly told the boys that all animals travelling on the bus had to be paid for, so the joke was on them. A regular trick that schoolchildren got up to concerned bus passes. Some pupils had a pass, but others had to pay to travel to school so those who had a pass would get on first, show their pass and then put it through the window for one of those without a pass to use as they got on. To hide the fact that the pass-less children were using someone else's pass, they would put their thumb or forefinger over the name when showing it. (The fact that Muriel recounts this strategy shows that it probably didn't work very often!). Another way of avoiding paying was to hide under a seat on the upper deck till the conductress had done her rounds to inspect passes.

Bad weather was never an excuse for the buses to stop running and Muriel says that digging the bus out of a snowdrift with a shovel was by no means unknown. It seems that bus drivers and conductors were more flexible in their duties than present-day staff. Muriel tells about one night when there were snowdrifts and very bad conditions, but they had to get to an outlying village before returning to the terminus. Arriving at the last village there was one young lady still on the bus and she lived about a quarter of a mile further on, so the driver decided to get her home rather than her struggle through the snow in the dark. Grateful for their help, the girl offered them a hot drink which they gratefully accepted – until that is, the girl's mother charged them a shilling for the drinks!

Attempting to pass through floods was no obstacle – even if the bus broke down and had to be towed back to the depot, as happened after one trip along a flooded road which, Muriel and her driver had been assured, the bus could easily get through. Fog was another common hazard and if it was very bad, the conductor/tress would walk in front of the bus to guide the driver.



Allen's Leicester to Loughborough service leaving The Green c1950

Once Upon A Time In Mountsorrel in March

12th March 1814 - Leicester Chronicle

Two new erected houses at Mountsorrel – To be sold by Auction by Mr Ball

At the house of Mr Thornton, The Black Swan, in Mountsorrel, on Tuesday the 22nd day of March instant, between the hours of five and seven o'clock in the afternoon, agreeable to conditions of sale then to be produced;

Two desirable new-erected BRICK and SLATED HOUSES, pleasantly situated on the Green near the Turn-pike road, in Mountsorrel. In the tenures of Joseph Noon and William Hunt, who will shew the same.

Also a leasehold House, with stocking-makers Shop, to hold ten frames, in the tenure of William Winterton.

For further details apply to Mr. Lockwood of Mountsorrel aforesaid.

Leicester Chronicle 27 March 1842

Loughborough Petty Sessions, Thursday March 18th before the Rev. W. Acworth.

Ratcliffe of Mountsorrel was charged by William Place with doing wilful damage and spoil. The complainant stated that on Thursday last, the defendant came and pulled down a privy, and carried away the greater part of the materials “thereby” as complainant said “disannulling him of that very necessary appendage”. The defendant said that the complainant was a tenant of his, and that he lived next door. The privy in question was a great nuisance where it stood, and he had determined to pull it down and remove it to a more suitable situation. Complainant did not rent the garden but had a right to use the privy. Had intended to rebuild it immediately but had been obliged to be out of town. Mr Acworth considered that the complainant had been put to a great personal inconvenience, and therefore ordered defendant to pay the costs and he dismissed.

Nottingham Review and General Advertiser for the Midland Counties 3rd March 1843

The Presbyterian Meeting house in Mountsorrel, once the principal dissenting place of worship in that neighbourhood, has of late years been used by the Unitarians, but owing to the decline of the cause in that place, the trustees have recently made a present of it to the General Baptists, who, last week, took possession. On Sunday morning last, service was performed in it by that body for the first time, when the Rev. A. Smith, pastor of the General Baptist church, at Quorndon, preached to an attentive congregation from the 2nd chap. 2nd ver. 1st Corinthians.

Note: the building is now Breward’s Coffee Shop, part of Holmefield College

14th March 1846—Leicester Chronicle

Deaths - On Monday, aged 49, Mr. John Brown, for many years keeper of the Post-office at Mountsorrel.

21st March 1846—Leicester Chronicle

The respectable inhabitants of Mountsorrel are about petitioning the Lords of the Treasury to remove the Post-office to the centre of the town. The town is nearly a mile long, and the present Post-office is in the south part which causes great inconvenience to the northern part of the inhabitants. The messenger has from thirty to thirty-five letters a night.

Note: John Brown had also been the Landlord of the King William IV Inn and on his death the Post-office did move to a building in what became known as Post Office Yard, adjacent to St Peter’s church.

8th March 1851—Leicestershire Mercury

A foot race came off on Shrove Tuesday afternoon near Mountsorrel South End, on the Turnpike-road leading for Leicester, between Thomas Twigg, of Mountsorrel, and Edward Betts, of Sibleby, for one sovereign, which was easily won by the former. The distance, half-a-mile, was accomplished by Twigg in two minutes and a quarter. So many persons from the adjacent villages assembled, that there were supposed to be nearly two thousand spectators present.

3rd March 1916 - Loughborough Echo

The Quarries – Work has been suspended for a day or two during the past week on account of the heavy fall of snow. These works have been, in common with many others, affected by the war, the men of the village having responded loyally to the [call](#).

The Transportation of Convicts to Van Diemen's Land

The transportation of convicts overseas began in the early 18th century to the American colonies this ended with the start of the American Revolution and an alternative site was needed to relieve further overcrowding of prisons and hulks. In a solution to two problems, that of needing to pre-empt the French colonial empire from expanding into the Pacific region and relieving the shortage of prison space at home, Australia was chosen as the site of a penal colony. In 1787, the First Fleet of eleven convict ships sailed for Botany Bay, arriving on 20 January 1788 and founding Sydney as the first European settlement on the continent. In 1803 the initial penal colony was established in Van Diemen's Land, now Tasmania.

Between 1803 and 1853, some 75,000 convicts served time in Van Diemen's Land. The peak being 1847 when some 30000 were there but following the ending of transportation numbers rapidly fell and by 1862 only 1000 serving convicts remained.



*Convicts being rowed out to a prison hulk
on the Thames c1820*



The Convict Transport Mount Stewart Elphinstone

Most convicts were transported for what we would judge now to be petty offences with transportation for capital crimes such as rape and murder, only becoming transportable offences in the 1830s. However as most convicted of these crimes were executed, comparatively few convicts were transported for such crimes.

Security and control of convicts was carried out by prison staff, police and regular army units deployed for that purpose. By the 1840's the management of convicts was done through a probation system. On arrival convicts now served a period 'on probation' with stages of punishment. Initially they were imprisoned at a penal settlement, worked in gangs or were sent to probation stations. Depending on their behaviour they passed through stages, with restrictions reduced as they moved towards 'Ticket of Leave' status working for civilian employers until the completion of their sentence. Once free most ex-convicts stayed in Australia and joined the free settlers, with some rising to prominent positions in Australian society.

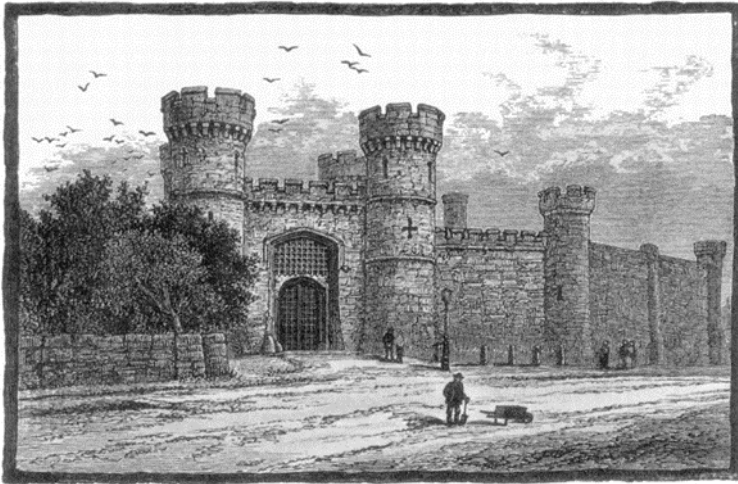


*"A Government Jail Gang
News South Wales"*

c1840

The Mountsorrel Connection

In late August 1839 the local newspapers reported that on Tuesday 20th a sheep belonging to Mr John Peet of Mountsorrel had been stolen from a field in the village and killed with the entrails and skin being found nearby. Three men, William Smith, Samuel Woodford and Thomas Nottingham, were arrested by the village Constable and taken before a Justice of the Peace, Rev'd John Dudley, the Vicar of Humberstone and Sileby, who committed them for trial at the Quarter Sessions. The accused were held at the County Goal until 31st December 1839 when they appeared at Leicester Castle for trial at the Epiphany Quarter Sessions.



THE COUNTY GAOL.

At 10:00 o'clock the bench of Justices, chaired by C. W Packe Esq. M.P. assembled and the jury took their places as the trial of the three commenced.

William Smith, 31, and Samuel Woodford, 35, were charged with stealing a sheep from a field in the parish of Mountsorrel, the property of John Peet. Thomas Nottingham was charged with being an accessory after the fact.

John Brogdale, shepherd to Mr. Peet, stated that he shepherded his sheep on the evening of 19th August; leaving eight sheep in the field. The next morning, he found one was missing and soon found the entrails and skin of a sheep in grass nearby. He also found footmarks leading from the field towards Woodford's house.

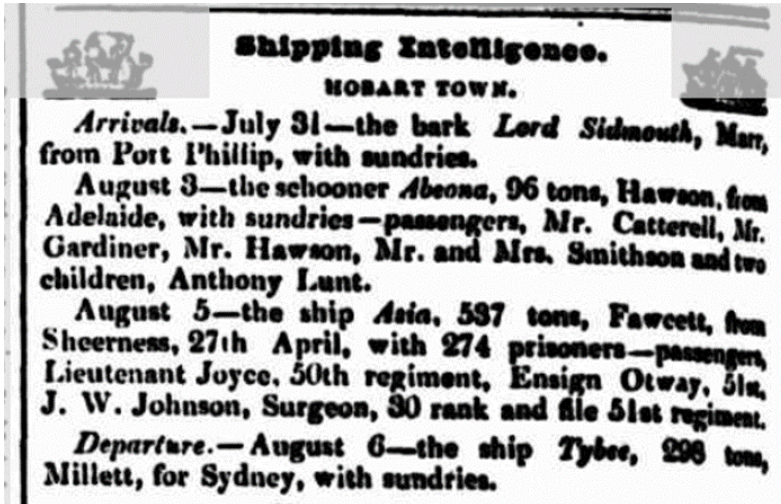
William Clarke, the village constable, testified that he had seen Smith and Woodford at the Anchor Inn late on the night of 19th and that he then saw Woodford at about 6 o'clock the next morning with his clothes marked with blood; he afterwards searched Smith's house, where he found a sheep's head, a shoulder of mutton and some small fragments of fat in the pantry; under the staircase he found a saddle of mutton and part of a shoulder in the oven, all of which were cut up in a very rough manner. Smith was a boatman and had a boat lying at Mountsorrel. Clarke searched that also, where he found a horse's nosebag containing neck and some other pieces of mutton, which fitted the head found in Woodford's house.

Robert Atherley, a Mountsorrel farmer, stated that he had tried to fit all the pieces found into the skin first found in the field and that they corresponded exactly. Catherine Wingfield, who employed Smith to manage her boat said that she saw Nottingham go to Smith's house and come away with a bag of meat, which he took to the boat.

The prisoners all denied the charge; the jury, however, found them guilty and they were each sentenced to fifteen years transportation.

Van Diemen's Land

All three sailed in the 536 ton brig, Her Majesty's Transport, "Asia" which sailed from London on 25th April 1840 and after a brief stop at Sheerness for supplies arrived at Van Diemen's Land on 6th August 1840. In addition to the convicts and crew there was a detachment of soldiers and two officers aboard, men and an Ensign of the 51st Regiment of Foot (Later the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry) and an officer of the 50th Regiment of Foot (later the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment), both regiments had been providing guard detachments to Australia since 1837 and moved to India in 1846.



Hobart Town Courier and Van Diemen's Land Gazette

7th August 1840

"Asia" was regularly used as a convict transport, making seven voyages between 1823 and 1847 and although the report states 274 convicts were on board on arrival it left with 280, 6 having died on the voyage. It was not long though before the losses rose, as on 15th September Samuel Woodford died at the Trinity Parish Hospital, Hobart. The register shows that he had been a quarryman born in Seagrave in 1804.

Of the other two Mountsorrel men, William Smith who was born in Mountsorrel in 1808 disappears from the records.

The eldest of the three, Thomas Nottingham, who was born Melton Mowbray in 1797 can be found in the Convict Registers which show he had been a ploughman, could read and write and was married and that he arrived in Hobart good health. He became a pass holder in 1844 and was employed on a farm in Kensington parish near Hobart.

Although born in Melton Mowbray by 1817 Nottingham must have been working in or near to Mountsorrel as on 24th November, he married Sarah Noon of the South End at Rothley parish church. In 1841 Sarah was living at Twitch Hill with 4 daughters and two sons aged between 15 and 3 years old. She died in 1844 and was buried at St Peter's on 25th December.



Hobart c1840

Wildlife

The recent storms have brought down some of the dead Elm saplings along Cufflin's Pit Lane and a few Silver Birch along Buddon Wood Farm path (the permissive path beyond the western side of the Common. More significantly is the storm damage to some of the trees that form a boundary between the Marshes and the War Memorial Playing Fields. These should of course be avoided until made safe by Council Contractors. Given the damage in other parts of the country we have been really lucky.



Storm damage between the Marshes and War Memorial Playing Fields

On the Navins Wildflower Meadow those few lonely Snowdrops that we reported last month have now been joined by a good few others and hopefully they will bulk up nicely over the next few years. Although it is still a little early the first Primroses and Oxlips are just starting to appear.



Navins Wildflower Meadow