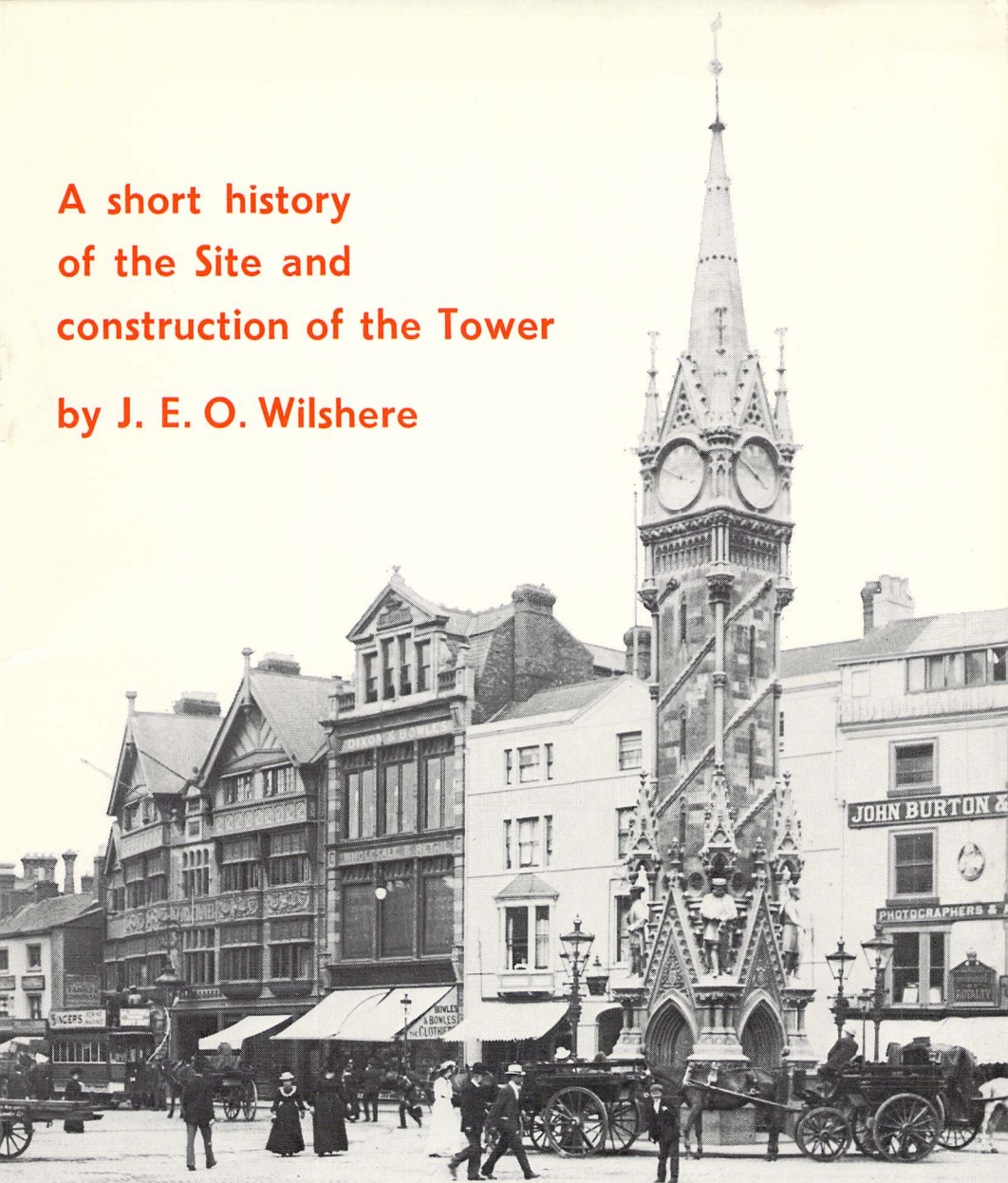


**A short history  
of the Site and  
construction of the Tower**

**by J. E. O. Wilshere**



# **Leicester Clock Tower**

# LEICESTER CLOCK TOWER

## *Introductory Note*

*Leicester Clock Tower* is a revised and more fully illustrated version of *Leicester Clock Tower, 1868-1968*, issued as a centenary booklet in April, 1968, which is now out of print.

The photographs of the Haymarket obstruction (one of the earliest photographs by John Burton), the foundation stone laying and the Clock Tower in 1902 were drawn from the photographic collection of Leicester Museums at Newarke House and were originally reproduced by permission of the then Director of Leicester Museums.

The photograph of the Shenton and Baker design appeared in the Leicester Mercury on 24th August, 1965, and has been copied from that source. The illustration of the Clock Tower in the 1930s is from the author's post-card collection. The photographs of the Littlewoods' development and the thwarted Haymarket Piazza Scheme were supplied in 1967 by the then City Planning Department and were originally reproduced by arrangement with the then City Planning Officer, Mr. W. K. Smigielski.

J. E. O. WILSHERE.

*December, 1974.*

Price: 45p.

Cover photograph: "View of Clock Tower in 1902"

## Some Impressions of the Clock Tower

"Your Committee feel justified in asserting that 'The Haymarket Clock Tower' will long stand as a significant record of the talent and artistic ability of the Architect, the contractor and sculptor . . . a grateful remembrancer of the eminent men depicted thereon—and a substantial evidence of the spirit and good taste of the subscribers at large."

*The Haymarket Structure Subscribers' Committee,  
4th September, 1868.*

"The Clock Tower obviously pretends to be the centre but its claims are more apparent than real . . . The hub of Leicester—a hub with only one decent spoke\* . . . the rest of the wheel is rubbish. As a piece of architecture it is too foolishly insignificant, and there is too much merely Victorian in its design."

*From "Leicester Mercury," 15th July, 1929.  
(Article by G.T. entitled "A Stranger within our gates.")*

\* Seemingly "London Road beyond Gallowtree Gate."

"At the death of Queen Victoria Leicester was not in appearance very different from what it is today . . . while the Clock Tower had established itself in not a few hearts as the hub of the universe."

*"The Plain Man's History of Leicester"  
(Florence E. Skillington), page 114 (1950).*

"It is a piece of ripe mid-Victorian Gothic: dignified, well-proportioned and as thickly encrusted with ornament as a child's birthday cake."

*"The City of Leicester: A Guide to Places of Interest"  
(Jack Simmons), page 18 (1st Edition, 1951)  
—City of Leicester Publicity Department.*

" . . . a square and very Gothic structure, bristling with canopies and wavy with crockets. Special spice is added by spiral mouldings round the square shaft to indicate the staircase inside. Also some shafting of pink granite . . ."

*"Leicestershire and Rutland" (Nikolaus Pevsner), page 155  
(Penguin Books, The Buildings of England Series, 1960)*

## The Site before 1859

The open space just outside the East Gates of the town appears as early as 1260 in the Borough Records as "Berehill" and was probably the ground a few yards to the west on which the Clock Tower now stands. The view of the nineteenth century local antiquarian, William Kelly, that "Berehill" most probably indicated that there was once a bearpit nearby, must, for lack of substantiation, be discounted but the opinion of Billson (expressed in *Mediaeval Leicester*), that the word derives from the Saxon word meaning agricultural produce in general, and barley in particular, is respected. The proximity of the Haymarket makes this derivation a plausible possibility, though Billson is quick to point out that, in Devon, the meaning is "orchard."

When the town Wards were divided in 1484, the fourth began at St. Margaret's church "unto the corner at the little bridge without the East Gate and Belgrave Gate on both sides unto the corner forgeinst the Berehill Cross." Clearly then, the mound surmounted by a cross was a "land-mark" and in 1493 it is known that St. Margaret's Guild owned "Roundel," an alternative name for Berehill, and one that is still found three centuries later in the Borough Records as the "Round Hill." Stocks, pillory and cage were sited beneath or near the cross and these places for punishment also existed elsewhere in the town. Due no doubt to slovenly Leicester speech, "Berehill" became "Barrell," for a cross of this name was demolished in c. 1575, the stone and timber sold and two men engaged to pave the spot. The cage was also removed but a Common Hall in 1600 decreed "that there shall be a cage presently made and to be set up in the old place in the place called the Barrell Cross or near thereabouts."

Yet another alternative name was in regular use from about 1700 onwards—Coal Hill, for it was outside the East Gates that coal used to be brought for sale in panniers on mules and packhorses. Since the area was so freely used by traders coming into the town, a primitive labour exchange was centred here. Further evidence of the importance of this part of the town is provided by the number of Proclamations read on Coal Hill, for it was one of three places (the others being the High Cross and the Market Place) designated for this purpose.

Mr. John Bass in 1750 erected an Assembly Room on the site, which necessitated paying one shilling rent for permission to place "four or more columns upon which the floor rested on Corporation ground at the East." This building was used for public dances, concerts, meetings and entertainments with the Raceweek Balls probably its greatest events, though it was put to frequent use when the Suffolk Militia were stationed in the town in the winter of 1759. It is as a rather crudely converted "temporary" theatre, under the auspices of basket-maker Chamberlain, that some of its most noteworthy productions took place, and it was here that Mrs. Siddons appeared in Shakespeare as an "unknown" in 1774 and her brother, John Philip Kemble, played in 1776 and 1781.



The Assembly Room building also incorporated an accommodation machine for weighing coal and wood brought into the town for sale, and John Bass by his will in 1764 left £5 yearly from this machine's profits to provide coal for the parish poor of St. Margaret, and this was carried out until 1828.

Demolition of the East Gates took place in 1774, leaving a passage 54 feet wide and the untidy "spread" of the Cattle Market up High Street expedited its removal to Horsefair Street. In 1790, during Election riots, the music library and instruments stored in the Assembly Room were wrecked, removed and burnt. Three years later, Thomas Pettifor of the nearby *Stag and Pheasant* and William Whitehead introduced hackney coaches with a stand on the Coal Hill—one shilling (not exceeding four persons) to any place within Leicester, and 1s. 6d. for five or six persons.

By 1801, consequent upon the opening of the new Assembly Rooms in Hotel Street, the old building became redundant, and "the old Playhouse" (as it was by now generally called) was converted into separate shops and sold as such in 1805, the colonnades having been filled in. (It is probable that there had always been a shop at the west end). The Assembly Room itself was put to various uses, including a hay and straw store and a furniture showroom!

In 1848, the Poor Law riots were quelled near the Coal Hill—a further small episode in its history, but the old building, never of architectural merit, became more and more dilapidated as the years went by. Returning visitors, former inhabitants and the townspeople themselves continually expressed, by written and spoken word, dismay and not a little annoyance that such an eyesore and inconvenience as "The Great Weighing Machine Nuisance" should be allowed to remain.

## The Years of Inaction: 1859-1867

On 3rd June, 1859, Mr. John Markham at a meeting of the Highway and Sewerage Committee drew attention to the pending sale of the East Gates block. It was ultimately bought "for improvement" by the Corporation, but, to the disgust of many, no attempt was made to clear the site. Amid reflections and grumblings, "not loud but deep," pressure for the removal of what was now termed "The Haymarket Obstruction" mounted and on 13th September, 1861, a deputation, backed largely by property-owners in the vicinity, was therefore made to the Highway Committee. The chairman, Alderman Joseph Whetstone (Mayor of Leicester in 1839), stated that "on £1,000 being subscribed by owners of property and others, the Committee would recommend the Council to accede to their petition."

Whetstone (of the important worsted hosiery firm of Brewin and Whetstone) was regarded as the shrewdest man of business in Leicester and, being the Council's authority on money matters, had been appointed Chairman of the Finance Committee, set up in 1836, to investigate the dubious operations of the old Corporation. In the words of Patterson (*Radical Leicester*) Whetstone "made it his special concern to check anything that he considered extravagant misuse of public money."

Although a Memorial to the Council followed, it was not successful despite 400 signatories. This gives some indication of Whetstone's influence at this time.

Leicester's first recorded traffic census took place at the congested East Gates on Saturday, 23rd November, 1861, from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. The resultant figures were Pedestrians 54,300; Vehicles 2,960; Drivers and passengers 5,900; Total 63,160. Horses, cattle, sheep and pigs were reported to have passed in large numbers, unenumerated.

On 21st February, 1862 "the improvers" tendered £400 to the Highway Committee as representing "the utmost amount they were able to command towards the object." Thankfully, it was sufficient to move the Corporation, for demolition was decreed on 9th March and the East Gates building was sold for £235. It was 16th June when "the first brick had been disturbed towards the complete removal." A "demolition dinner" (the words of Mr. Councillor T. Angrave) was held the same day at the *George* in the Haymarket when forty gentlemen attended "whom," the chairman, Mr. T. Moxon, said "met with a great deal of pleasure to celebrate the demolition of that great nuisance in the East Gates, which the old Corporation might have removed 30 or 40 years ago at one third of the present cost."

A presentation of inscribed bronze statuettes of Reynolds and Hogarth was made to Mr. John Burton in appreciation of his indefatigable services as Honorary Secretary of the East Gates Improvement Committee by whose exertion the removal of the block of buildings in the East Gates was mainly effected. Burton, in expressing his thanks, stated that "£6,300 was no small amount to spend for a circus, for a little more surface, to make a more safe passage through that central part of the town!" There had been formidable opposition in Mr. Whetstone, "whose principle was that if public improvement was to be effected, the parties who participated in them a little more than others should be mulched of a certain amount of money." The East Gates Committee (chairman, Mr. J. Allen, vice-chairman, Mr. G. Harrison) had accomplished their object "despite Mr. Whetstone's conviction and adherence to a false principle." Burton added that "in furthering the cause of improvement, it was found that contributions of names were a great difference to contributions of money."

Councillor T. Angrave in proposing "The East Gates Committee" considered it was one of the greatest improvements ever brought about in Leicester. The old Corporation could have purchased for £600, of which sum £500 would have been given by the neighbours in East Gates, but for the sake of £100 nothing had been done. Then later on, the Highway and Sewerage Committee had at one time opposed the scheme, but finally Whetstone, despite his valuable work over the years and "who normally had nine-tenths of the Corporation with him, found himself with five others alone in their opinion." "The East Gates improvement was clearly not his 'hobby horse'." Angrave would like to see a fine column erected—"for very few persons come into the town but had to pass the East Gates."

The site was quickly levelled and paved, but the daily hay and straw market was allowed to remain and was all the more conspicuous and untidy. "An Old Ratepayer" writes, in December, to the local press, pointing out that six months had elapsed since the building was cleared, and the promised removal of the Haymarket had not taken place. In consequence a lively correspondence—"a nice little entertainment"—ensued on "The Public Haymarket Question." Yet still nothing was done. It was not until 9th May, 1865, that "The Leicester Lunatic Asylum and Improvement Act, 1865" received the Royal Assent and there was a faint glimmer of hope. Yet on 18th June, 1866 "Indignation" complains that the move to Humberstone Gate was still not effected, but it seems this letter did not pass unheeded. Now a new problem arose. The transfer of the Haymarket resulted in a naked space in the East Gates and an ill-regulated tangle of horse traffic was a source of constant confusion, irritation and danger. How could pedestrians cross the wide and busy junction in assured safety when they had no refuge to resort to? Some avoidable personal injuries were the not unexpected consequence and the number of narrow escapes was alarming, as any bystander could witness for himself.

Things were brought to a head by the rumour that an illuminated clock was to be placed on the London Road at the Belvoir Street junction whereas "Observer" writes on 4th September, 1867, with concern, that "a more eligible and central place than East Gates does not exist." He advocates "a clock with a cluster of lamps and a fine colossal statue of that unparalleled benefactor Sir Thomas White."

A petition went the rounds of several public houses, where it met with amused indifference since the proposal "to erect a statue or two in the middle of the road at the East Gate" scarcely fired the imagination, when, as was suggested, a public urinal was more sorely needed. Even an ornamental fountain would be preferable to a useless statue or ornamental lamp-post! Nevertheless there were 195 signatures on the petition received by the Town Council at its meeting on 1st October, 1867, which stated that "This memorial respectfully sheweth that your memorialists in view of the imminent removal of all the wagons, carts and agricultural produce to the new market in Humberstone Gate are strongly impressed with the conviction that it will be found necessary to place an object upon the open space in the Eastgates so as to form an easement and protection to the cross currents of traffic in that locality.

In consideration of the kind of structure to be there erected your memorialists would respectfully submit that an excellent opening presents itself of placing there a bold illuminated clock, the convenience of which in so central a situation to the public in general and to travellers cannot be over-estimated . . . "

The Memorialists also submitted that the Royal Agricultural Show to be held in Leicester in 1868 "offered an opportunity of manifesting to the country at large artistic taste in the adoption of the subject," and that in consequence it should be "prosecuted with as little delay as possible." What they were suggesting appears to have been "a sort of Gothic square tower . . . on the four sides of which there should be in

high relief medallions in stone.” The men to be thus honoured were Simon de Montfort, William Wigston, Sir Thomas White and Gabriel Newton.

The Watch Committee chairman, Alderman Whetstone, appeared in favour, since a subscription was to be launched and public money was not involved, but there was much heated discussion. Alderman G. Holmes considered a building 20 feet square with gas lamps at each corner would be almost as great nuisance as the Haymarket was. He thought it would be better to leave the street empty: “It would be a great pity to provide what would very soon become a lounging place for idlers.” Councillor T. F. Johnson wanted to see a definite plan before any decision was taken, but his amendment to hold over the matter for three months was defeated notwithstanding the warning that “he would not want something put up that would make other places laugh at them.” A further comment in the same vein, “We are not very celebrated in matters of taste: I should be sorry to see another mistake made\*,” came from a former Mayor, Alderman Samuel Burgess. Another Alderman, Richard Harris, wanted “a handsome group of lamps which would look better and be of more convenience to the public,” but Whetstone considered that the main consideration was the necessity “to provide an island of sanctuary and security—somewhere to stand to prevent people being run over crossing the street” (a view endorsed by Alderman S. Viccars). The Memorialists thus won the day.

## Action at last 1867-68

An inaugural meeting to discuss Subscription arrangements was held at the Temperance Hall on 25th October, 1867, but was poorly attended, though the following gentlemen had agreed to head the Subscription list with 20 guineas each—Mr. J. D. Harris, M.P.; Mr. T. T. Paget; Messrs. T. W. Hodges and Sons; Messrs. Evans and Stafford; and Mr. Samuel Makin.

On 30th October, the Hon. Secretary of the Subscribers’ Committee, John Burton, arranged for the issue of Public Notices relating to “The Haymarket Structure.” In addition to a notice requesting subscriptions, the following request for Designs was also circulated:

“It is proposed to erect an ornamental structure on the old Haymarket Site, in height from 35-40 feet to contain four illuminated Dials, four statues or Medallion Busts of ancient benefactors to the town, with a Platform around about 18 feet square, and Lamps as a safeguard to passing pedestrians.

The Committee appointed to prosecute the above will be happy to receive Designs from Architects for the contemplated structure, the cost of which to be about £750 exclusive of the Clock, Lamps and Lighting arrangements. Designs to be sent in to the Committee not later than the 30th of November next.”

\* A reference perhaps to the controversial Corn Exchange of the previous decade.

The celebrated Leicester musician, Mr. Henry Nicholson (a disinterested party), arranged a Concert on 21st November, the net proceeds of which (£43) went towards the Subscription Fund, which after a month, had reached £488 5s. A correspondent to the local press suggested that "If all in receipt of Sir Thomas White's loan were to contribute a guinea upward, the subscription would be the sooner accomplished." A later writer regrets that Alderman Newton's beneficiaries unlike those of Sir Thomas White's charities had not assisted greatly.

The "Committee to determine the character of the proposed structure" consisted of John Barclay, Esq., M.D.; Major Brewin; Messrs. John Allen, Henry Lankester, Matthew Maxfield, W. Kelly, F. J. Mott, Joseph Goddard, George Viccars, James Spencer, T. D. Paul Junior, John Morley, E. Marshall, F. Hames, Alfred Spencer, J. W. McAlpin, Thomas Colman Junior, H. Norman, S. Mather, P. Wardle, A. Gill, Samuel Bown, H. S. Gee and F. R. Morley.

105 "eligible" designs were received and these were exhibited for seven days during December in the Market Place galleries of Vice and Moon. A short list of seven or eight were chosen and these were reduced to three designs (by Giles and Bevan of London, Millican and Smith of Leicester and Henry Goddard and Son of Leicester) for submission to the Town Council for final choice. At the meeting on 1st January, 1868, it had become a straight fight between the two Leicester firms, though the Goddard design had been amended slightly. The pinnacles were modified and the iron collar on the top section of the Tower was removed. There was some passionate advocacy for both designs but the more "modern" Goddard style was preferred to the older Perpendicular of Millican and Smith by 30 votes to 14. Henry Goddard died on 29th July, 1868, aged 76 years and Joseph was largely responsible for the design. Goddard, perhaps best known for many local church restorations, was equally at home designing in brick or stone, as is evidenced by his Leicestershire Bank (now Midland Bank) building in Granby Street. Millican and Smith's National Provincial Bank (1870) is their best memorial.

Millican and Smith did not take kindly to the Clock Tower decision, particularly as their design had had a majority of 24 when subscribers were asked to vote on the entries when they were on public display. In a letter of disgust, they gave full details of the alterations in measurements of the statues and dials which had had to be enlarged on Goddard's plan, not to mention the re-modelled base. The inference was that some of these alterations in their rival's design had been directly influenced by their own. Millican and Smith also requested that those who had not yet subscribed should withhold their payments in disgust.

Dr. Barclay later said that in choosing the best designs, the Committee had excluded drinking fountains ("sloppy wet things"), and had required the statues to be placed sufficiently high to avoid accidental or malicious damage, and the four dials of the clock face to be easily visible from all angles. However, it appears an exception was made in the case of Giles and Bevan since their design incorporated a 62ft.



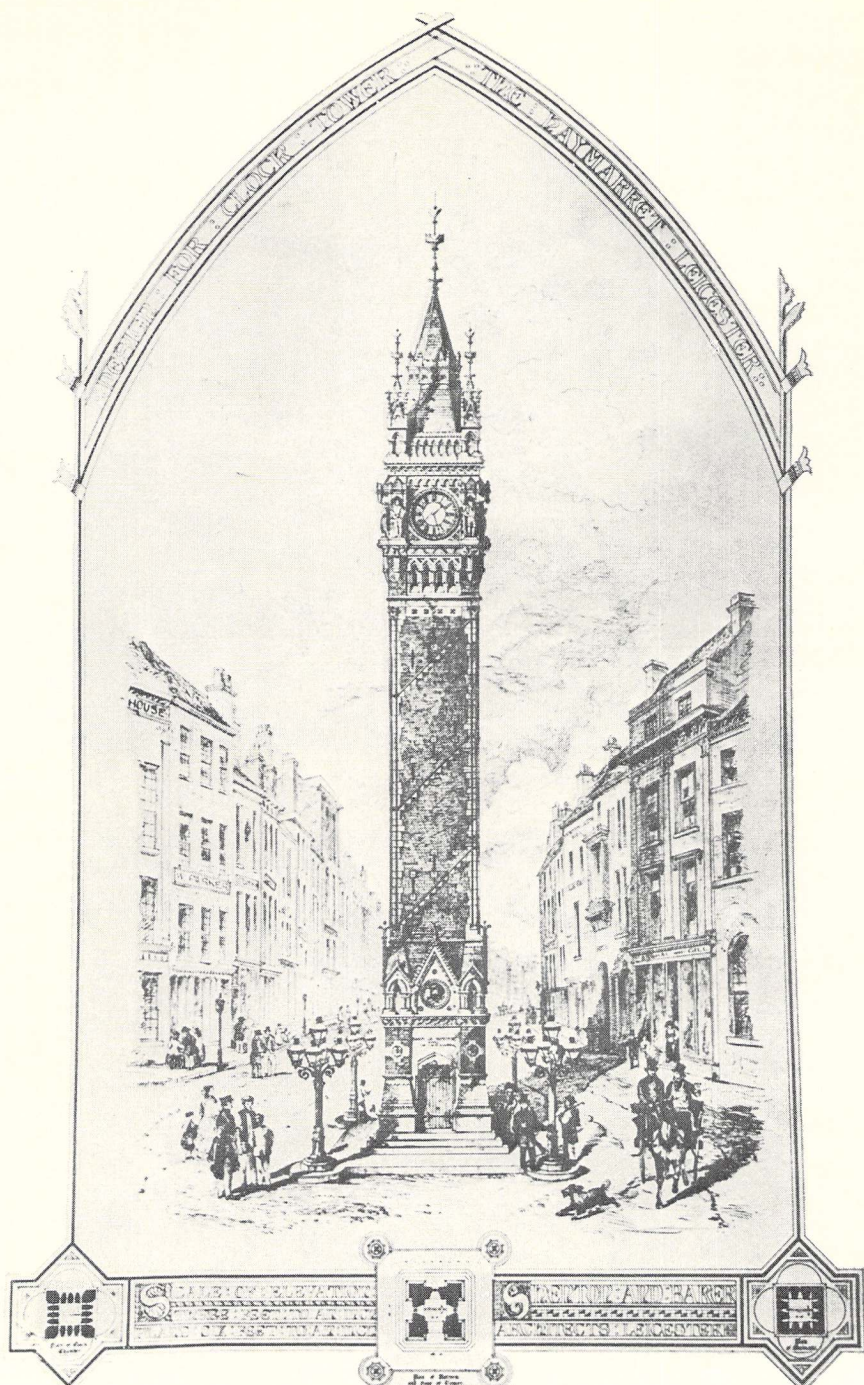


1. The "Haymarket Obstruction" prior to demolition, 1862.

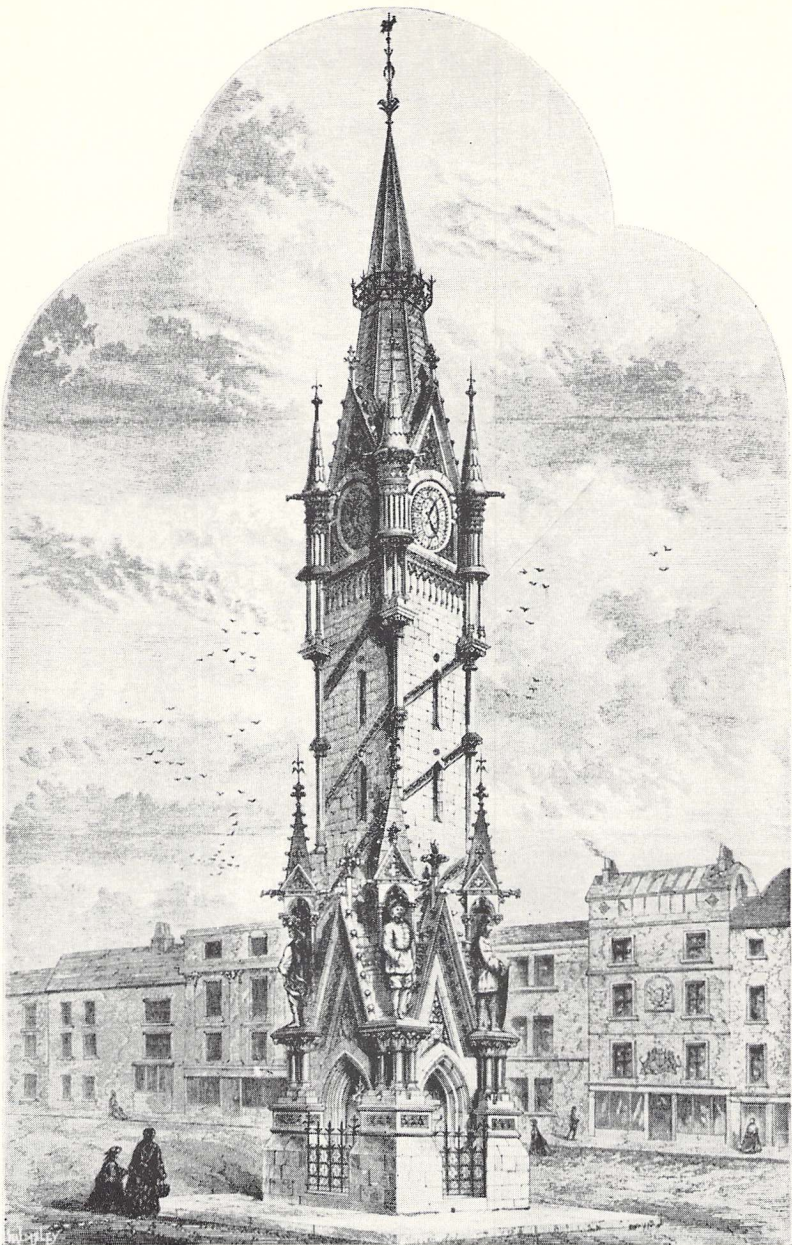


2. The Foundation Stone Laying, by John Burton, 16th March, 1868.





3. The unsuccessful *Shenton and Baker* design.



4. The successful design shows the Clock Tower as the architect, Joseph Goddard, conceived it; note the iron collar round the spire and the four elaborate pinnacles at the corners. The revised design has a more slender and less dated appearance, and may, therefore, be considered preferable.





5. The Clock Tower in the early 1930s, viewed from Haymarket.  
(Note the absence of the Lewis' tower landmark).

drinking fountain, though their entry was probably finally discarded on this ground.

The correspondence columns continued to be active on the subject. Since the competition had been advertised in a national magazine, *The Builder* (the prize-winning design was later published in that periodical), could not all the unsuccessful candidates be given a consolation prize? Could not the competitive design of Millican and Smith be put to good use in the Market Place, Sanvey Gate or at the High Cross? Could not the clock be "on the Electric Time Ball Principal" in connection with Greenwich observatory "so that there could be uniform time in the town?"

John Burton, not without a professional motive, moved fast as soon as the winning design was announced. On January 3rd the following notice is issued from 3 The Haymarket:

#### "THE HAYMARKET MEMORIAL STRUCTURE

JOHN BURTON AND SONS

Having secured the copyright of the successful Design of the above structure by Messrs. Goddard and Son are preparing to issue photographs at the following Prices: Albion size 5s. Cabinet 2s. Carte 1s."

A further press notice stated that the Committee had "undertaken to discharge all expenses of Advertising, Printing, etc., to pay successful Architect premium and to hand over to Corporation £700." Approximately £650 had been received, but £120 was yet needed.

The cost was later increased due to the substitution of polished granite and serpentine and marble shafts for stone throughout the building. The elongation of the spire by an extra five feet added £85 and an Appeal for additional subscriptions was launched. The structure was to have a base of Mountsorrel granite, the rest (subject to the embellishments of the shafts already mentioned) was to be of Ketton stone, with the statues of Portland stone. It was to be over 70 feet in height with a base width of 11ft. The external diameter of the shaft was to be 6ft. 6in. (internal diameter 4ft. 2in.). The statues (between 6ft. and 6ft. 6in.) were to be erected 10ft. 8in. from the base platform.

Tenders were required before 25th January and the architects accepted that of Samuel Barfield, of Welford Road, for £546, exclusive of statues and ornamental stonework. The other firms tendering were Osborne Bros. (£940) and Wm. Neale (£880).

Notices appeared in the local press on 7th February, signed by the Town Clerk, Samuel Stone, on behalf of the Borough of Leicester, requesting Clock Makers to submit tenders before 10th March in these words:

"Persons desirous of tendering for a first rate Clock to be placed in a Tower on the site of the Old Haymarket in Leicester may obtain a specification thereof by applying to the Public Office, Silver Street, Leicester on or after 10th February.

Clock to go eight days, with once winding, to have four illuminated dials of 4ft. clear diameter, and is not to strike."



# The Construction of the Haymarket Memorial Structure 1868

In early February, excavators were “now at work digging foundations” and some intricate work was necessary. A culvert crossed the site 18ft. deep and a second one diagonally 9ft. below the surface. The upper sewer was diverted and the lower one encased with rings of extra brick work. Concrete was then thrown in to within three feet of ground level for the site was above the town’s most important sewer junction which led to Beaumont Leys. The public were able to inspect the spacious sewer chamber on two open days in 1972.

On 2nd March the Committee paid over £700 to the Corporation and handed the premium of ten guineas to the architect. The first brick in the foundation was laid by Robert Kempin at 2 p.m. on the following day and the foundation stone was laid by John Burton at a ceremony on a bright Monday morning, 16th March. He adjusted the corner stone and then checked the accuracy of the adjustment, after which some of those present repaired to Mr. Burton’s house. King Vann (later described as “a very prince amongst stones”), as foreman of the thirty-two masons engaged on the work wrote an appreciative letter for the monetary gifts placed on the foundation stone by those attending the laying. It had enabled the men to spend an enjoyable evening out at, appropriately enough, the *Stonemason’s Arms*. Others were not so satisfied, for the newspapers carried some adverse comment that not all the subscribers had been invited to the stone-laying: some indeed had not even known when it was taking place. Furthermore, no record of the event by the deposit of coins or documents in the foundations had been made. This complaint was remedied, to some degree, by preparing a bottle containing copies of the local papers, current coins and a narrative of the Haymarket Improvement movement together with the names of the chief officers of the town and council. This bottle was deposited with the top stone, which on 8th June—only twelve weeks after the stone-laying—“was placed at half past 12 o’clock by George Ernest Barfield, aged 6 years, youngest son of the contractor and sculptor of the work. Three hearty cheers from the company assembled on the platform followed the ceremony and presently banners were seen floating in the breeze from above the spire and scaffold poles around.” All the workmen engaged on the structure were invited to a dinner in the *George Hotel*’s large room that evening. The usual speeches, lightened by glees, provided the entertainment and Mr. Burton was presented with the trowel he had used to lay the foundation stone.

In mid-June the Editor of the *Leicester Chronicle* visited the sculptor’s studio to view the statues. He describes them thus:

*Simon de Montfort*: “the Great Baron of the Middle Ages standing erect in his chain armour with noble countenance and majestic port.”

*William of Wigston*, "the Leicester merchant of Henry VIII's time . . . a homely benevolent honest face and burly form."

*Sir Thomas White*: "the London Alderman" was "more delicate in lineament but expressive . . . habited in the graceful costume of his age."

*Gabriel Newton*: "the Leicester Alderman . . . portrayed in Georgian costume with venerable mien and countenance, looking down upon the spectator."

Hope was expressed that Simon de Montfort would be in his place to give a welcome to the Royal Agricultural Show visitors in July but this was not to be. The scaffolding was, however, removed on 18th July to coincide with the big event. The marine blue glass dials with numerals in gold were by now fixed.

Discussion in the local press and elsewhere raged for some weeks over the renaming of the area. Suggestions included *Beneficent Cross (Place)*, *Five Gate Cross*, *Guerdon Tower (Place, Square)* while that well known lecturer on medical and local matters, Dr. John Barclay, preferred *New Cross*. In his lecture to the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society on 13th April "*Four Benefactors of Leicester and the Haymarket Memorial*" he also expressed the wish that the unpronounceable *Gallow-tree Gate* might be more simply named. It was decided that the names of East Gate and Haymarket were to remain: traders in the area would be inconvenienced if these were changed. *Guerdon*, seemingly the most popular alternative with its distinctly Victorian flavour, was summarily dismissed as being "not suitable to the *locale*." All this must have disappointed at least one correspondent, Thickhead Jnr., who on 28th June, after quoting Shakespeare's "What's in a name?" wrote

"We have built up a clock case of stone,  
And are somewhat at fault for a name,  
In order that it may be blown  
Far and wide through the trumpet of fame.  
Master Burton it seems is the man  
Who conceived this 'structure' so nobby,  
Then instead of deranging the plan  
Name the toy, as it is—*Burton's Hobby*."

At a Committee Meeting on 4th September, 1868, at the Temperance Hall, the whole background was summarised: the Committee "appointed to raise the necessary funds and prosecute the undertaking have much satisfaction in being able to announce the fact that both objects have been satisfactorily accomplished." Tribute was paid to John Allen, the chairman of the committee, who had also been chairman of the 1861-2 committee formed to effect removal of the obstruction. "His discreet direction and aid" supported by John Burton, Hon. Secretary for so long, whose "zeal combined with sound judgment and incessant working have mainly led to the accomplishment of the object." Due acknowledgment was also made to the Hon. Treasurer, Edwin Clephan.

The final number of subscriptions (with five or six exceptions all inhabitants of the town itself) was 472 totalling £872 2s. 9d. The balance of the cost of £1,000 plus about £200 for the clock was the Corporation's responsibility.

It was also recorded that during the protracted course of events, death had removed a number of subscribers and supporters. Alderman Joseph Whetstone had died at his home, Highfield House, on 13th January, 1868, aged 68, and other past Council members similarly lost included Alderman Francis Lane, and Councillors Thomas Moxon, Thomas Angrave, James Cooke, John Markham, Thomas Hull, Thomas Holland, and George Holmes. Mrs. S. Atkins, who had contributed £50, had also died.

The same townspeople who had marvelled at the speedy building of the tower as they admiringly watched it grow day by day expressed increasing irritation at the slowness of its completion. The summer of 1868 was the hottest for 22 years\* and its distractions many, but despite pressure on correspondence column space due to Elections and the "Half-Holiday Movement," the state of unrest was summed up by a correspondent on 19th November who asked "Is it not a lamentable consideration that the creditable erection should have been allowed to remain in an unfinished condition now for nearly half a year?" A resultant editorial considered that Mr. Barfield had done well to complete the statues within seven months. Three were now in position. William Wigston would have been erected earlier, but, for fear of damage, he had been held over until the close of the elections. Alderman Newton would be ready within two to three weeks, and the ironwork had been sent away but would soon be in place. The editorial also pointed out the very reasonable cost, £37 10s. each, of the statues. It was only possible for one of them, Sir Thomas White, to be based on a living likeness—as depicted in the portrait owned by the Corporation. Other correspondents were concerned about the "tantalizing tardiness" resulting in the use of the base area as a cab and fly stand, crowded and untidy. The editorial referred to above also attempted to answer the writer who regarded the whole affair as "a personal insult to the hundreds of inhabitants whose money has built up the Memorial Clock Tower."

Samuel Bown wanted the names of those involved inscribed on the structure, and the tablet on the South panel, beneath the Borough Arms, states "Erected by Public Subscription aided by the Corporation of the Borough, A.D. 1868, in memory of four benefactors of Leicester." The names of T. W. Hodges, Mayor, S. Stone, Town Clerk, J. Goddard, Architect, and S. Barfield, Sculptor were also included. If the idea was

\* An entry in the diary of Joseph Goddard, a chemist and Borough Analyst of the day (no known relation to the architect) reads:

"1868. Aug. 6. It rained this afternoon for two hours almost the first time for more than 4 months, the driest Summer since 1826."

Local records show a maximum temperature of 96°F. on July 22nd, and only 2.41 inches of rain for the whole of the four-month period, April to July, representing less than a third of the normal total for those months. Only 0.06 inches of rain fell in July, 1868.

to list the subscribers on the panels, it was not carried out, though in a letter published on 12th December, a correspondent, expressing relief that the grilles, lamps and clock are soon to be in position, draws attention to the blank East and West panels. (The North panel was replaced by the door to the Tower). The figure of a graceful female handing out guerdons on one panel and books to a group of boys on the other was the typically Victorian suggestion which, perhaps thankfully, was not acted upon. Meanwhile, at the December Council Meeting, Mr. Stafford moved successfully that "the centre cab on the stand in the Haymarket be removed, as it blocked up the view of the Memorial Structure and was the occasion of a great many inconveniences being committed." Ultimately, the cab stand was transferred to Gallowtree Gate.

There remained the question of the clock. One correspondent ridiculed the fact that this was having to be made 120 miles away: "Have we no local clockmakers who could have done a quicker job?" By early 1869 Gillett and Bland of Croydon had supplied the clock, whose works were placed on a floor about 12 feet from the ground, connected with the mechanism of the four dials by a single guide-rod.

The final short episode in the whole lengthy business occurred early in March, 1869, when "About a dozen subscribers presented . . . to their late Hon. Secretary, Mr. John Burton, an address of congratulations on completion of the work in which he had been so actively and successfully engaged." They also gave him "a valuable signet ring containing a large sardonyx stone, on which is engraved a view of the Memorial Tower, Mr. Burton's initials and the year 1868—a grateful little memento of the work . . ."

## A Century plus undisturbed

During the century of its history, the Clock Tower has remained a silent witness to continual change around it. It has outlived the whole tram—horse and electric—era (1874-1949), which included major road works in 1903-4 when the complicated line junction system was laid down for the electric tram-service, which was inaugurated before a large crowd assembled near the Clock Tower on 18th May, 1904.

Although the Tower provided Leicester with its first gyratory system—one of the first in the country—there is no recorded instance of anyone claiming to be the first person to motor round the Clock Tower. However, in the early motor days, pre-1914, the burly 24-stone figure of P.C. Stephens was rarely absent from the Clock Tower scene and he may have known the answer!

The cobbled street surface has long since disappeared as has the coffee stall at the base of the Tower, but its attraction for New Year revellers has lessened in recent years with the Town Hall Square fountain proving more popular.

Dismay has been expressed on many occasions that only two of the statues depict "Leicester men born and bred;" others claim that the County should be represented by such a "heroine" as Lady Jane Grey. Over the years, the Clock Tower has been threatened with demolition or removal. As early as the 1930s increasing traffic caused it to be regarded as an obstruction and it was suggested the time was ripe for its departure.

More recently, in the mid-sixties, there were advocates for its removal; it was said to be an obstruction and an unwanted and outdated piece of Victoriana, out of keeping with its environment. A move to Victoria Park was even suggested! For years, the Tower had provided useful service as a coat stand, its projections being used for this purpose by policemen, bus inspectors (a Transport Department telephone was housed in the West panel) and rather later, by traffic wardens too. These same people also found the base area a safe refuge and look-out point.

The inauguration of a traffic light system in November, 1967, more or less did away with the need for Police, and the Tower's backcloth, viewed from East Gates, had changed. Such well known features as the *White Hart* and *George* hostelries were replaced by the rather tasteless concrete and glass symmetry of the Littlewoods' development. The Clock Tower still stood firm (in the best tradition of Leicester's motto "Semper Eadem"). Further alteration to the traffic light system, resulting in a larger pedestrian area around the tower, has meant that it can now be viewed to better advantage than previously. Shortly before the Tower's centenary the figures on the clock dials had been regilded, later the plain dials were replaced with blue glass, with the rather unfortunate result that the clock faces are now difficult to read at night. The clock movement was removed in favour of a labour-free electric one, but when in 1972 the original mechanism appeared in a local jeweller's window with the maker's plate removed, Leicester Museums procured it for the Newarke Houses' Collection.

Plans for the Clock Tower to form part of a gay Haymarket piazza (see plate 7) did not materialise, largely due to delay and procrastination over the future of the Littlewoods' site and indeed, of the whole Haymarket area. In this respect, little had changed from the bitter acrimony of a century before! The Haymarket Centre, completed in mid-1973, represents a rather different conception of the original plan. By the end of the 1960s the proposed cinema complex had already been opened in Abbey Street, before the ambitious Haymarket scheme was under way. However, the new Haymarket Centre does contain a £900,000 theatre and shopping centre, which originally was to have formed part of the piazza surround. The proposed tower blocks, luxury offices and flats, ice-rink, and roof gardens originally envisaged were discarded, as were the coloured lights and advertisements that were promised for the windowless elevation of the top of the Littlewoods' block.

The Clock Tower has been a much-loved landmark in Leicester for more than a century and its future still seems secure. The stonework, last cleaned nearly twenty years ago, appears overdue for attention. When this is done the rich detail of the Tower will be more readily observed and its architectural worth better appreciated.



## Short biographical notes on the four benefactors depicted on the Clock Tower

**SIMON de MONTFORT:** (c. 1208-1265). Though French by birth, he became a true "Englander," who was esteemed by both the barons and the common people, being nick-named "the Righteous." He came to England in 1229 and became a favourite of Henry III, marrying the king's sister, Eleanor, in 1238. He inherited his Leicester possessions and later formally became Earl of Leicester in 1239, restoring to the burgesses their lawful rights and remitting such customary payments as gavel pence and bridge silver. In 1255-6 Borough English, whereby the youngest son succeeded as heir to his father's possessions, was abolished in Leicester in favour of the more usual primogeniture inheritance. During his time both the Black and Grey Friars settled in the town, but his religious fervour caused him to expel Jews from Leicester. While responsible for the government of Gascony from 1248 he quarrelled with the king, and this was the start of trouble, for Henry was compelled to conform to the Provisions of Oxford (1258) which effectively put power in the hands of the barons. In 1264 de Montfort won at Lewes, capturing the King and Prince Edward (later Edward I) and virtually ruled England as a dictator. He is generally credited as having formed the First Parliament (1265), but after losing the support of his barons, he was killed in battle that same year at Evesham. This strange, contradictory, pious but arrogant person has but scant connection with Leicester, as his life was spent almost entirely elsewhere.

**WILLIAM OF WYGSTON (WYGGESTON\*)** (1467-1536), a native of Leicester, was a wealthy Merchant, who was four times Mayor of the Staple of Calais, in addition to being Mayor of Leicester in 1499 and 1510. His two marriages produced no children and he therefore devoted his money to charitable works, the chief of which were the founding of a Chantry chapel and a hospital. The Chantry chapel was founded in 1512 in connection with the Collegiate church in the Newarke for two priests to serve at the altar of Our Lady St. Ursula and St. Katherine "where mass might for ever be said for the good estate of William Wigston." The Chantry house has now been incorporated as part of Newarke Houses Museum. In the following year he founded a hospital for 12 poor men and 12 poor women and provided for a chaplain and confrater. This hospital, originally sited to the west of St. Martin's church, was transferred to new buildings (replaced 1966-7) near the corner of Hinckley Road and Fosse Road South in 1869. The old site was incorporated in the playground of the newly founded Wyggeston Boys' School (1877) now used by Alderman Newton's School. The value of the endowments had so increased that they permitted the creation not only of a Boys' School, but also Wyggeston Girls' School (original site—Humberstone Gate).

**SIR THOMAS WHITE** (1492-1567), a native of Reading, became a wealthy member of the Company of Merchant Taylors. In the same year as he founded St. John's College, Oxford, he held office as Lord Mayor of London (1553). Though he had no personal connection with Leicester, he was concerned with trade in Midland towns, and in 1551 he executed a deed to the Corporation of Coventry, whereby £40 of the £70 income per annum arising from lands worth £1,400 was to be devoted to loans for a term of years free of interest to young

\* Although "Wyggeston" has long been the accepted spelling of the name, recent research by Leicester Museum has disclosed that the accepted form in his day was "Wygston."

men "of fair name and fame" to establish themselves in business. Coventry was to have the loan for 40 years and it was then to go to Northampton, Leicester, Warwick, Nottingham and Coventry in rotation. It was on 28th August, 1610 that Leicester received the first £40, which was allocated £10 apiece to George Brookes, Ironmonger; Thomas Moseley, "Weyver"; Thomas Clarke, Shoemaker; and to Daniel Wright, Bonelacemaker. The term of nine years was to begin "the Tenth of March last" and the borrowers were required "to sett the poore on worke in knittinge and spinning of Jersey and weyveinge of Bone lace and such like worke fit for yonge Children." By 1835 when the funds exceeded £15,000, the loans were of £100 and this was later increased to £200 since the value of the endowment and appreciated. Local trustees now administer loans jointly with other charities, the amounts being no longer limited and available for any purpose approved by the trustees. The loans are normally repayable after nine years and are confined to those residing within the city boundary, as defined in 1961.

In the nineteenth century, during the last years of the old Corporation, later investigation showed that between 1822-33, out of 117 loans granted, 76 applicants had voted for members of the Corporation and 36 had not polled at all. A Freeman refused a loan in 1827 was told: "We must serve our friends first."

GABRIEL NEWTON (1683-1762) originally a Leicester woolcomber, took over the *Horse and Trumpet* Inn adjacent to the High Cross, and ultimately retired and lived a gentleman. He had become a Freeman in 1702 and successively a Councillor (1710), an Alderman (1726) and Mayor of Leicester in 1732. He amassed great wealth, largely consequent upon his three marriages. His only son, George, died at the age of 18 and this prompted him to settle real property, valued at £3,250, by deed of settlement and by his will "towards the cloathing, schooling and education of thirty-five boys or as many as my Trustees shall think proper, of indigent necessitous parents of the established Church of England in this town without any regard to a particular parish." By 1835, the funds represented an income of £890 per annum. Schools at Bedford, Buckingham, Huntingdon, Hertford, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Northampton, St. Neots, Earl Shilton, Barwell, Hinckley, Lutterworth, Claybrooke and Lubenham were also supported from his estates at Barwell, Bushby, Earl Shilton, Cadeby and Stretton. He laid down strict rules as to dress, religious instruction and psalmody. Newton, deeply religious, was eccentric in the extreme: he was a stickler for orthodoxy and detail to the last iota, and this brought him into conflict with a wide range of his contemporaries, be they clergymen or bell-ringers. He was afforded a civic funeral and was buried in All Saints' Churchyard.

#### *Note:*

The dates beneath the Clock Tower statues are supposed to represent the year in which each benefactor made his gift, but all are inaccurate.

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## PLATES

Cover The Clock Tower in 1902, viewed from East Gates.

1. The "Haymarket Obstruction" prior to demolition, 1862.
2. The Foundation Stone Laying, by John Burton, 16th March, 1868.
3. The unsuccessful *Shenton and Baker* design.
4. Engraving of the Clock Tower showing it as the architect, Joseph Goddard, conceived it.
5. The Clock Tower in the 1930s, viewed from Haymarket.
6. A new backcloth for the Tower, 1967.
7. The Haymarket Piazza that never was.



6. A new backcloth for the Tower, 1967.

7. The Haymarket Piazza that never was.

