

## Kirby Muxloe British Legion

The British Legion was first formed in 1921 and celebrates 100 years this year. It is a charity providing financial, social and emotional support to members, veterans of the British Armed Forces, their families and dependants.

Kirby Muxloe opened their own branch at this time and held their meetings and social events in the room upstairs at The Royal Oak Public House. A Royal charter was granted in 1925 which was accompanied by invaluable patronage from Royal circles. By 1950 there were 3 million Royal British Legion Members, but that number declined to half a million elderly survivors by 2003.

Ladies of the village had always helped with Legion work and the Poppy Appeal, but it wasn't until the end of WW2 that they formed a Women's section in 1946.



Marching through the village 1946  
Alice Ball, Standard Bearer, Mrs Henson, Mrs Ward,  
Billy Henson & David Hunt

Success came very quickly, with many dedicated ladies, and by 1956 the group had 304 members on the register. They won numerous cups at both county and area level, including the Chairman's Cup at the National Conference. The first standard bearer was Alice Ball, followed by her daughter Muriel Price, and later by Kath Snow, all of them being successful in county standard bearer competitions.

In September 1970 the Royal Oak was demolished and replaced by the Spanish Blade, and the Legion lost their meeting room, starting the decline in both branch and women's sections. The ladies started to meet in the Primary School, with the committee meetings being held in the homes of members. One example of this was in the home of Ann Forman on Main Street where regular fund raising bingo sessions were held. All available rooms in the bungalow seemed to be filled with people, whilst the bingo caller occupied a central position in the hall.

Following school cutbacks, a new venue was sought for meetings, and for a while they were held in the Church Hall, but when the Youth Group was formed, yet again the ladies were without a meeting room.

The Chairman at this time was Mrs Dorothy Fowkes, (Dotty) who was trying to keep the group going, but as her fellow officers lost interest, she announced the closure of the Kirby Women's section at a Secretary's Reports meeting in 1980. It was then that Joan Bloomfield and Kath Snow stepped in and contacted Mrs M Brutnell, the

county chairman, who suggested a meeting of the members be called at their home, Wisteria Cottage. This meeting was attended by 12 members, who all wanted the group to continue, so a recruiting drive then began and membership gradually increased, with members still meeting at the home of Kath & Joan. Their first open day was held in 1981 in the garden of Wisteria Cottage, and the group were thrilled to have raised £117.00. Interest blossomed, and members began to attend county events.

There had been a poppy appeal in the village since 1921 and when the men's branch closed in 1984, Joan became the Poppy Appeal organizer for Kirby Muxloe and District, and continued until 2012 when Graham & Ellen Hillier joined her with the task.



Wyn Day, Nancy Ward, Joyce Surch, Clarice Collins,  
Joan Bloomfield, Kath Snow & Maisie Toon

Royal British Legion Fete, St Peters' Court, Syston 1989  
This photograph was used for the national  
publicity poster in 1992

In 1987 the group hosted the county conference and continued with their annual open day. In August 1994, the group hosted the county purse presentation in the community centre, and over 200 county members attended.

By this time, the group had outgrown Kath & Joan's upstairs flat, and after holding coffee mornings in the homes of various members, which split the group considerably, they hired the parish council chamber. This proved to be a very successful move with 23 members attending the first meeting. This number quickly rose to 38, with many more ladies showing an active interest.

The British Legion Women's Section celebrated their 50th anniversary on 19th September 1996.

By 2001 when Kath & Joan moved to Carey Gardens, the group was very small, and they joined the Market Bosworth Women's Section. Following their closure, Kath & Joan, being the only two remaining members, joined the holding branch at St James, London.

With thanks to Joan Bloomfield for information and pictures. KT

### Our Website and Email Address

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[info@kirbymuxloelocalhistorygroup.org](mailto:info@kirbymuxloelocalhistorygroup.org)

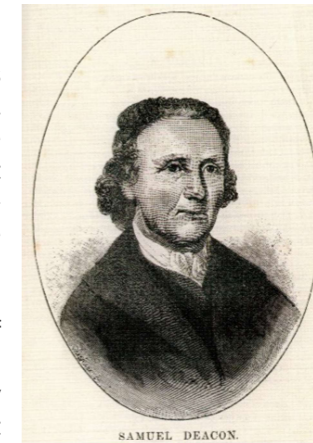
## The Modest Clockmaker

If one day you find yourself admiring a splendid antique grandfather clock and you notice that the name inscribed on the dial is Barton, you may wonder who the talented Mr. Barton was. Well, I have to tell you that he never existed! For the name that you see is not that of a person, but of a place - Barton-in-the-Beans, some 9 miles to the west of Kirby. The illustrious clockmaker was a man named Samuel Deacon and it is said that the reason for the unusual "branding", using his place of work, instead of his own name, is that Samuel was a devout Baptist and believed that only God should boast about His work. That seemed a reasonable explanation until I discovered plenty of examples where Samuel had inscribed "Deacon of Barton" on his products, so who knows?

Our story starts with Samuel's father, also a Samuel, who was born in Normanton, Leicestershire, in 1714 but eventually settled in Ratby in about 1741. Soon afterwards, an outdoor preacher named David Taylor visited the village. His sermon made such a deep impression on Samuel Deacon senior that he left the Church of England and became a Baptist preacher, eventually becoming a Baptist Minister at Ratby. He married in 1742 and he and his wife, Ann, went on to have three children, although only the middle one, Samuel, our clockmaker, would survive infancy. We have not been able to find Samuel's marriage to Ann in the Ratby Parish Register, but there is a gap for a few years, so that probably explains why.

Samuel Deacon junior was born in Ratby in 1746. His mother died when he was around 5 years old and from then, his only schooling was from an elderly lady, whose name is not recorded. When he was old enough, he was employed in farm work, but he did not take to it. He became interested in mechanical things - both how they worked and why. He built a series of sundials in the fields in which he had to work, probably to inform him how much longer he needed to toil before the end of the working day. The reaction of his employer to these endeavours can only be guessed!

Then one of those serendipitous events happened that would change his life. An acquaintance of his employer was travelling from Derbyshire to London and stopped off for an overnight break. After supper, a bowl of nuts was handed round, but a nutcracker could not be found. Samuel was asked if he had one, and fortuitously, not only did he have a pair, but they were wooden ones that he had made himself. The acquaintance, whose name we do not know, was much impressed by Samuel's inventiveness and craftsmanship. Although he said nothing to Samuel at the time, shortly afterwards, his employer received a letter offering Samuel an apprenticeship with Joseph Donisthorpe, a renowned clockmaker. Samuel



SAMUEL DEACON.



Deacon Musical Clock  
made in 1775

accepted immediately, of course, and at age 16, started his career in clockmaking at Normanton-le-Heath with his new employer.

Unfortunately, it was not to be the idyllic life for which Samuel had hoped. Donisthorpe was very protective of his skills and only taught Samuel the minimum needed to do the tasks that he had been given. He explained nothing of the engineering and scientific theory behind the operation of clocks and watches. At the end of the 7-year apprenticeship, Samuel was happy to move on and found a position working for Thomas Lindley, who had married Donisthorpe's daughter, Elizabeth.

Samuel now took rooms in Union Street, off High Street in Leicester. Not only did he start to learn more from Lindley, but he also came into contact with the Rev. William Ludlam, who was somewhat of a mechanical and mathematical genius. Ludlam had been on the committee that examined John Harrison's award winning H4 marine timepiece, famous in the story of "Longitude". He took Samuel under his wing and not only taught him the theoretical side, but also gave him practical advice on how to improve his clocks. The combination of Samuel's flair for invention and Ludlam's teaching would eventually give rise to the renowned "Deacon of Barton" business, with a reputation for quality and reliability.

To be continued ...

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### Stroll around Kirby (continued from front page)

and a number of houses will be built on a road named Hewitt Drive.

④ Now, crossing over the entrance to Linden Lane we come to the railway bridge. This bridge was built when the railway came to Kirby Muxloe in 1859. In its heyday, the train carried as many as 28,000 passengers a year. However, with the popularity of the motor car, passenger numbers will diminish and the station will be closed in 1964.

Moving over the bridge, the next house is named Southfields and at one time was the home of the

Walker family. This property will be demolished in later years and a block of up-market flats will be built on the land. Then over a narrow unnamed road, later to be called Honeypot Lane, we carry on up Kirby Lane, passing a number of houses, most having been built pre-war. It is interesting to note that now in 1945, as we look back over the war years, there seemed to be a large number of people, men and women, on Kirby Lane who belonged to one or the other auxiliary service. Maybe this is because many, but not all of the male occupants were over retirement age. Some of the younger men were in reserved

occupations, so had not gone to war. *Information courtesy of Old (Kirby) Muxloe by Jonathan Wilshere and notes on Kirby Fields donated by the late Sally Pettingell, granddaughter of George Hughes.*

JU



## Sir Edward Wood

The name of Edward Wood is well-known in the history of the city of Leicester and in Leicestershire for his civic role, as an entrepreneur and benefactor but perhaps not so well-known for his links to Kirby Muxloe. He became Mayor of Leicester four times and was the founder of the shoe retailers Freeman, Hardy and Willis and spent several years living in the village in a house he had built in Kirby Fields in 1891, known as "Charnwood House".

His life began when he was born in Derby in 1839 to William and Emma Wood. His father at this time was a printer and then in 1851 a cabinet maker. Sometime later, the family moved to St. Margaret's in Leicester, along with Edward's three sisters, when Edward's father worked as an engine smith. Edward initially worked as an errand boy and was later apprenticed to a draper and outfitter, where he learned skills as a hatter and hosier. He married Annie Sewell, with whom he went on to have three daughters, Annie, Catherine and Elizabeth.

By 1870, he had begun a business manufacturing boots and shoes, joining Annie's relatives at premises in Marble St. in Leicester. By the following year, he was employing seven men and one boy and in 1876 Edward incorporated the business into Freeman, Hardy and Willis. He, as chairman of the company, appointed as company directors Arthur Hardy, an architect, William Freeman, his factory manager and a Mr. Willis, his salesman. Their first retail outlet was opened in Wandsworth, London in 1877 and by 1900, Freeman, Hardy and Willis had become the largest footwear retailer in the world with, by 1903, about 300 shops.

Edward was a devout Baptist and used his Christian beliefs in doing good for the community, becoming a county magistrate and JP and vice chairman of the Derwent Valley Water Board, which ensured a continuous supply of good quality water to the citizens of Leicester. He was a benefactor of the Leicester Royal Infirmary and under his influence a nurses' home and children's hospital were built. As a successful entrepreneur, he created wealth that

everyone could benefit from and he provided good wages for all. He set up a number of trusts and charities which after his death in 1917 still exist today. £5000 was invested in the Edward Wood Bequest Fund for distressed gentlewomen in 1917, the year of his death - approximately £350,000 today.

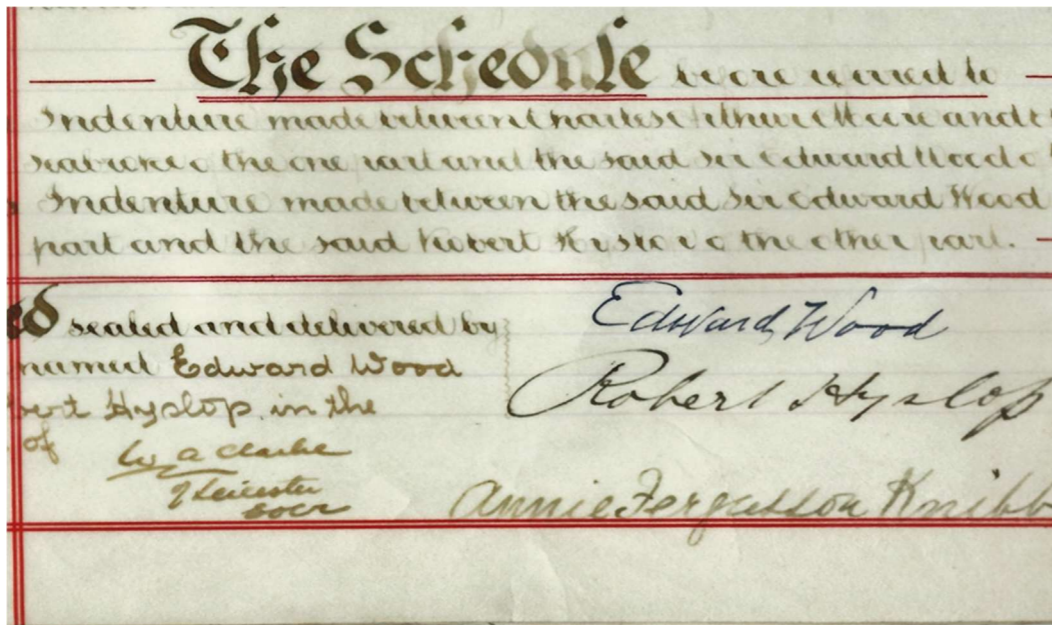
He became Mayor of Leicester for the first time in 1888 and went on to serve three more times in 1895, 1901 and 1906. In 1906, he was knighted in recognition of his philanthropy and civic work. Many will know the impressive building on London Road, Edward Wood Hall,

named after him, now renamed as Leicester University's Fraser Noble Hall. His portrait by Walter William Outless hangs in Leicester's Town Hall - see it here:

<https://tinyurl.com/34whwcmu>

During the years building his business interests, Edward and his family lived in different parts of Leicester but when Kirby Fields was developing as a desirable part of the county in which to live, he built "Charnwood House" on Stamford Road. He also owned land in Kirby Muxloe, particularly in the Gullet Lane area. It is recorded in our house deeds that the land on which our house was built was owned by Sir Edward Wood and that in 1907 Sir Edward paid £1953-17-6 to A. Moore and C. Seabroke for "all that piece or parcel of land in Kirby Muxloe bounded on the N.E by a lane called Gullet Lane and on the S.E by the Leicester & Burton line of the Midland Railway and was formerly part of a close called 'Kimberlin's Close'. Also all that close or ground enclosed site in Kirby Muxloe formerly called by the name 'Top Kirk's Close' field formerly in the tenure of David Stone". In 1913, Sir Edward sold the land to Annie Knibb to build the house we now live in. Below is part of the deeds related to the sale showing Sir Edward Wood's signature.

Sir Edward continued to live in Kirby for many years but when he died in 1917 he was living in Shirley Lodge, Houghton, accompanied by his daughter, Annie, a widow and two grandchildren - his grandson Robert sadly having been killed in WW1.



He was well-known and respected as a local entrepreneur and philanthropist and was described as having a kind and generous nature and a warm heart.

Thanks to "Building our past - the legacy of Freeman, Hardy and Willis" and to Erica Statham's article on Sir Edward Wood in "Baptists Together". VK

Due to the current Covid situation, it is looking increasingly unlikely that our first indoor meeting will be before September. Mike Gould (chair)



## Newsletter No. 11 March 2021

Hi and welcome to our latest KMLHG Newsletter.

Mike Gould (Chair) Val Knott (Secretary)  
Kate Traill (Treasurer) Judith Upton (Archivist)  
Kerry Burdett

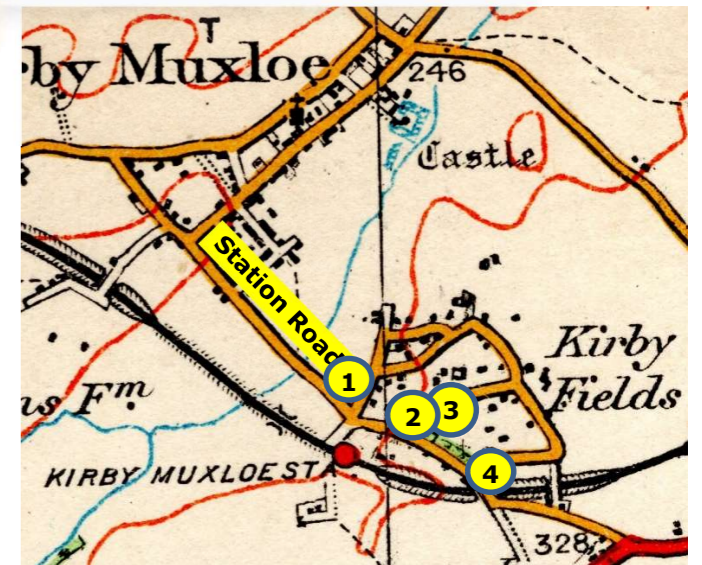
We start by again turning back the clock and continuing on our virtual walk around 1945 Kirby, strolling down Station Road and up Kirby Lane, formerly known as Blue Pots Lane.

① Before crossing the entrance to Forest Drive, we can see a pretty house named the Grove; much of the garden fronts Station Road. It was built in 1892 and now, in 1945, is home to George Winram and his wife. George is a factory manager and during the war, he was also a member of the Auxiliary Fire Service for Blaby R.D.C. Now we cross over the entrance to Forest Drive and arrive at a house called The Glen, built in 1890. The first occupant was James Turner, who had strong connections with the Free Church. He had originally lived in Leicester and was a devout non-conformist and leading light in the formation of the Free Church in Kirby Muxloe. Over the years, several families have lived in The Glen until the present time (1945), when the occupant is Sidney Murray, of the estate agents Murray and Haldene. In the last few years, during WWII, the house has been requisitioned by the government, but now the Murray family have returned. Family members have been involved in the Auxiliary Fire Service and also the Women's Voluntary Service.

We next reach Forest House and Stamford House, a pair of substantial Victorian semi-detached houses. They were built by William Harding in 1895. Mrs Bertha Price, a private school principal, lives here with another teacher and a flying instructor, who is possibly attached to Desford Aerodrome. Stamford House is the home of Herbert Midgeley and family, Herbert is a leather merchant and also a Returns Officer for the Territorial Army.

② We now arrive at the entrance to Stamford Road. After crossing the road, we can see a large house set in a very large plot of land. The address is Stamford Road, but the garden actually fronts a large section of Station Road. This house is called Highfields, but in times to come, the name will change to Crail Lodge. The house was built in around 1903 on land which George Hughes had purchased from Sir Edward Wood. George died in 1937 and the house is now owned by George's son John. During WWII, John Hughes, by this time quite elderly, has been involved with the village Air Raid Precaution Wardens. The garage to Highfields has been used as a Report Post for the A.R.P.'s and throughout the war, weekly meetings have been held at Highfields and several R.A.F. personnel from Desford have been billeted

Our thanks go to KM Parish Council for financial assistance with the production of these newsletters.



there. The Hughes family have recently been presented with an electric lamp by the village A.R.P.'s, in gratitude for the use of their house for these meetings. Just before the war, the household comprised the family, 2 live-in maids and 2 gardeners. Now, after the war, the number of staff has diminished and there are just 2 daily helps (2 days a week) and 2 gardeners. The gardens are very large, with many varieties of apple trees, an enormous asparagus bed and lots of gooseberries, strawberries and raspberries. In 1936, George Hughes bought some land from Frank Kendall, the owner of the next house, Mayfield, fearing that otherwise the land would be sold off for further building. This land will remain part of the garden of Highfield until John Hughes dies in 1965 and his widow will find the house too large to maintain. In 1967, Mrs Hughes will build a bungalow named High Bank on the land originally purchased from the Kendall family. The Hughes family will leave the village in 1980/81.

Mayfield was built in 1894, by boot and shoe manufacturer Matthew Brady. At one time, it was home to the Kendall family. Now in 1945, it is home to the Osbourne family, who bought the house from the previous owners in 1935. Mr Osbourne is a consulting optician manager and he lives there with his wife and young daughter. In 2 years' time, the Osbournes will move on and the house will be sold to Mr and Mrs Loweth.

③ Arriving at a large expanse of empty land, we can see that it appears to be owned by the very large and imposing house named Walburton, situated on Stamford Road. In the summer, the house is usually adorned by striped awnings. The Hewitt family bought it in 1900, but sadly Mr Hewitt died in 1911. Mrs Hewitt has always been remembered, as she drove around the village in a carriage and pair. By 1922, the Oram family had taken up residence, to be followed by Mrs E.M. Turner. Mrs Turner has lived in the house for some time and will eventually decide to turn this large house into a Nursing Home. However, due to problems with building regulations, this will not happen and in 1962, the house will be demolished

Continued inside