

New Parks House

I recently had the pleasure of being asked to talk to the children of Parks Primary School in Leicester, some members may remember this as the old New Parks Junior School. The subject of the talk was the history of New Parks and New Parks House, the old White House Infants School in the 1950s & 60s. I have a particular interest in this area as this was where I grew up and these were the two schools I attended in the 1950s before moving on to New Parks Boys School.

New Parks was originally part of Leicester Forest, which was quite separate to the Charnwood Forest. Leicester Forest was 5,000 acres in area, 14 miles long by 4 miles wide and curved round the western side of the town. The forest was an important source of wood for the people of Leicester, not only for building but also for fuel, and they were permitted to go into the Frith area of the forest to collect wood for their fires, returning along 'Woodgate' into the town. It was also a popular hunting venue for the King and the Earls, there was a forest lodge called Birds Nest Lodge. Kings Stand Spinney (near Desford Cross Roads at Leicester Forest West) stands where the King had a clearing where he could stand, perhaps on a raised platform, and aim at the deer as they were herded past by his men.

The name New Parks first appears after the enclosure act of 1526 and the area was divided into two. The south-west part was bought by John Mellor, and in 1897 sold to Leicester Corporation to create Western Park, the large farm house and some of the farm buildings still remain in the park.

Thomas Stokes, a Leicester Hosier, bought the other half of the estate and built himself a mansion in 1845 which he called New Parks House.

Thomas was born 6th February 1784 at Kingston on Soar, where his family lived in the Manor House. He appears to have settled in Leicester about 1809.

Thomas married Mary Joyce, daughter of Thomas Joyce, on 2nd April 1822 at St Margaret's Church in Leicester, Thomas was 39 and Mary was 22 years.

Sadly, their happiness was very short lived as Mary died 6th February 1823, age only 23 years. The baptism registers from St Margaret's Church show their daughter Mary Joyce was baptised 23rd February so Mary may have died in childbirth.

The 1841 census shows Thomas Stokes '*Hosier*' living in Welford Road but after purchasing the North-East portion of the New Parks Estate he built New Parks House in 1845 in a prominent position on a wooded hill overlooking the River Soar and the town of Leicester. The front door of the house was on the south-west side of the house with double doors on the south-east side leading onto the lawn. Stables and a coach house were adjoining at the rear in an 'L' shape to form a three sided courtyard.

As there were no roads through the estate access to the house was gained via a driveway from Groby Road, at the point of the sharp right hand bend (present day junction of Garland Crescent and Stokes Drive). This drive involved a civil engineering project as it had to first of all go down and under the Leicester to Swannington Railway, then the driveway curved up the steep hillside to the house. A Gate Lodge was built at this entrance, although it doesn't appear on the O/S maps until the 1904 edition, but I believe it was built before this date.

Thomas Stokes was twice Mayor of Leicester (1838 & 1841) and High Sheriff in 1850.

The 1851 census describes Thomas as a '*Magistrate & Retired Manufacturer*'.

In 1858 Thomas's daughter Mary Joyce married Hugh Henry Robertson Aikman at St James Church Westminster.

In 1861 Thomas is a '*Farmer of 178 acres employing 11 men and 3 boys*'. His daughter and her husband, Hugh Aikman, and one of their children are also in residence, along with eight members of the house staff.

Thomas Stokes died at New Parks House, on 12th October 1867, aged 83. He was described as "respected by a large circle of friends. Of him it has been said that he manifested great independence, originality of view and sentiment. He read and thought for himself in reference to all matters".

He was interred in the family vault in the churchyard at Kingston on Soar.

Thomas's 31 page Will reveals even more about him, the executors of his will were Joseph Whetstone of Leicester, Thomas Tertius Paget of Humberstone and the Rev. Robert Martin of Anstey Pastures.



A Trust Fund of £30,000 (the equivalent of about £2,348,316 today) had been set up and as can be expected, his daughter Mary was well provided for with an allowance of £600 twice per year, this would be about £100,000 per year today. He also provided for his son-in-law and his brother, as well as his grandchildren and two nephews. His servant George Collier received a total of £70 (£5,600 today) and named servants, housemaids, coachman, groom and Waggoner all received £10 (£780 today) each. Even the Sir Thomas White Charity got a mention. As well as owning New Parks, his will also showed Thomas owned land at Leicester Frith, Dunton Bassett, Sutton in the Elms, Broughton Astley, Broughton Astley Farm and the Mill Meadows, Frisby by Gaulby, Billesdon, Laughton and Mowsley as well as Nuneaton and Stretton Baskerville in Warwickshire. He also left money to educate the poor children of Dunton Bassett. His daughter and her husband were living at Dunton Bassett Manor House.

In 1933 New Parks Estate was purchased by Leicester Corporation to provide much needed housing. After the concrete roads were laid the plans were put on hold due to the outbreak of World War II. During the war the roads were used to store military vehicles and equipment in readiness for D-day. Between 1946 and 1959 over 3000 council homes were built on the New Parks Estate. The prefabs were erected first, using POW labour, then the BISF steel houses, Easiform concrete houses and brick houses, finally the Aikman Avenue flats.

In 1950 New Parks House became the White House Infants School, today it is used by the Special Needs Teaching Service

Brian Johnson

Thomas Blount of Harby & Kirby Bellars; Who Do We Think He Was?

Well I know he was my 3xgreat grandfather.

Thomas was baptized at St Mary's, Harby in 1799, the youngest child of William & Ann (previously SIMPSON, nee BESTLAND), who were tenant farmers in Hose Lane. I guess he was part of a fine upstanding family, his mother being from landowning stock. Land tax and other records show that parcels of land in Beck Field within the Liberty of Harby had journeyed through Ann's maternal side to herself and her sister Susannah, and this was occupied by William from 1803, a fortuitous marriage I think! Prior to this William worked land belonging to Joseph BLUNT - until it was advertised for sale in the Leicester Journal in 1801 and again in 1803!