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The Newsletter of the Sleaford and District Civic Trust



*Aswarby Park on a hot summer's evening*

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**Editor's comments**

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Welcome to our Summer newsletter ...and after such a prolonged spell of long, sunny, hot days it seems that Summer really is upon us. I hope you've all kept well through the heat.

In this issue we're including three articles on some very special Sleafordian characters. John Dale has kindly provided us with a potted history of William H Wright (the subject of our latest Blue Plaque), Dr Simon Pawley has written an article for us on Charles Ellis (whose life we will commemorate during August) and Nigel Ogden takes a look at the life of Thomas Parry of Kirk and Parry.

If you're wondering why I've chosen to take a photograph of Aswarby Park, all will become clear when you read Mike Turland's wonderful article on The Aswarby Elephant. The photograph was taken from the Tally Ho and that's another clue. Our thanks to Mike for his permission to publish his work.

We also have our usual offerings from regular contributors, including our very own 'Secretary's Ponderings' and Mark's Museum update.

Enjoy the read.

*Editor: Paul Hart*

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## Chair's update

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**Effects of a Unitary Authority** – As reported in the Spring Newsletter, the Civic Trust was approached by the Town Council asking if we could support the Town Council in exploring whether they can take on more local facilities to ensure better day to day management. However, following a committee meeting, we have decided to keep the Civic Trust out of “political matters”, but we are happy to continue working with the Authorities on preserving our town.

**The Blue Plaque Project** - The latest plaque unveiled celebrates William Wright and is mounted on the Pygott and Crone building by the entrance to Paul Wetherill’s Butchers. At the unveiling, we heard how William Wright became one of the richest men in Canada. Faith has arranged for the next blue plaque to celebrate the well known builder Charles Kirk - this will be unveiled at the Mansion House on Southgate (which is now known as the Girls High School) on August 11th at 10:30.

**Sleaford Castle** - Much has happened with the Castle Project run by the SCHG, with the Castle Exhibition at Navigation house showing off the model of Sleaford Castle, exhibition boards and a new booklet on the Castle. The model now has pride of place in the Museum window and has attracted a lot of attention. Work is now underway at Castle Field on the new pathway for visitors.

**AGM** - This was held at the Church Rooms on the 8th May, the same day as the William Wright Blue Plaque unveiling. The Committee remains in place with the exception of Our Vice Chairman – Harriott Brand who has stepped down after 6 years of valuable support. Garry Titmus now follows Harriott as our Vice Chairman. With The AGM speedily over with refreshments served, John Dale gave a presentation on William Wright interleaved with specially written songs about Sleaford by our very special guests Winter Wilson (see photo).



**The Bristol Water Fountain** - With the fountain now working again after the Market Square work, our attention is now drawn to the lack of general maintenance of the fountain under NKDC.

**Civic Trust Banking** - Our Accounts continue to look healthy with our long-term investments giving good returns.

**The Eastgate Almshouses Chapel** - The special visit to the Chapel for Civic Trust and Museum members went well, with Simon Pawley giving a most interesting presentation on the Carre Family.

**Heritage Open days 2025** - This year the Eastgate Almshouses Chapel will be opened to s'the general public on September 13th. There will also be a talk on the Carre Family at St Denys' Church by Simon Pawley on September 20th. Admission to both events is free, please do come along.

*David Marriage, Chair*

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## Secretary's Ponderings

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At our recent Summer Social we were superbly entertained by Sleaford's very own Folk Duo, Winter Wilson. It was amazing to hear their self written songs about Sleaford and especially the song 'Call Me Lucky' about William Wright who is the subject of our most recent Blue Plaque which is now in place on the side of the Pygott & Crone building on Southgate.

We were so lucky that Winter Wilson were able to come along to sing for us. We had a memorable afternoon. It also prompted discussion about the history of Sleaford and snippets of local information were shared.

Listening to Winter Wilson got me thinking about the power of music and the part it can play in our lives in so many ways. It can make us happy or sad. It can evoke memories and discussion and I know that music is used as a means of reminiscence in many Nursing Homes. Some people like to have a good old sing along whether it be songs from the wars, hymns or songs we remember from our younger days etc etc. Other people like to just listen to the music. Music can bring so many people together even if they can't speak the same language. I have seen this happen so many times at live music concerts.

Music is high up there as part of our history and the Winter Wilson songs about Sleaford help us to remember our local history and some of the characters from the past.

The subject of our next Blue Plaque will be The Mansion House which was built by Charles Kirk the Younger. It will be his 200th anniversary on 10th August and we will unveil the Plaque on the 11th August. Maybe we can persuade Winter Wilson to write a song about Charles Kirk for us - who knows.

*Faith, Civic Trust Secretary*

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## Town Plaques Project

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The latest Blue Plaque was unveiled on May 8th to celebrate the life of William Henry Wright ...definitely a case of local lad made good! The plaque is located on the side of the Pygott and Crone building on Southgate, by the entrance to Paul Wetherill's Butchers.

The plaque was unveiled by pupils from the William Alvey School with a presentation on the life of William 'Bill' Wright by our researcher John Dale (see next article).

The unveiling was well attended and I think William Wright's fascinating history was news to some who attended!

We managed to track down the owner of the Southgate building where Bill grew up, a Rev Dominic Grant, of Barnet, who attended the unveiling ceremony.





*Faith, Blue Plaque Project Lead*

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### William H. Wright

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I used to spend my Saturday mornings researching in the Sleaford Library, working my way through the Sleaford Gazette and Journal, which at the time were only available on microfilm (the Gazette is now available online).

In 1923, William Henry Wright travelled to London on business from his home in Canada. Whilst there, he was interviewed by a Daily Telegraph reporter because Bill, as he was known, was the second-richest man in Canada, whose life story reads like a Hollywood movie. A story headlined Butcher's Boy to Millionaire that started with "born in Sleaford in 1876" subsequently made its way into the local papers and was read by me about a hundred years later!!

It caused quite a stir at the time, with some locals recalling that Bill was born in the building on Southgate now occupied by Pygott & Crone.

Bill started his working life as an Apprentice Butcher, working and staying with his mother's brother at his Westgate shop, his mother had died when he was 9. It's here Bill is said to have developed his love for horses, looking after the firm's horse and cart. Seeking adventure, at the age of 19, he joined as a Trooper in the 8th Hussars, spending time in India and Egypt before landing in South Africa on the day the 2nd Boer War started. A few days later, he's under siege in Ladysmith for 122 days.

1909 - He returns to Sleaford, his father dying whilst he was away, he joins his sister Frances in Richmond upon Thames and opens a Butchers business with her husband, Edward Hargreaves. With things not going too well he decided to emigrate to Canada, landing in Toronto 118 years ago in 1907. Doing jobs ranging from being a groom to painting houses, Bill was joined 2 years later by Frances and Edward in 1909. Trying their luck at prospecting, 360 miles north of Toronto at Kirkland Lake, Bill and Edward are out hunting rabbits for their supper. After becoming separated, Bill, hearing a pistol shot and thinking Edward might be in trouble, rushes to his friend, stumbles over a rock and finds **GOLD**.

1916 - He's a millionaire and 40 years old. He joins the Canadian Infantry and heads back to Europe to serve during WW1, being known as the richest private in the army.



1919 - He returned home to Haileybury, Canada, a multimillionaire and owner of one of Canada's biggest gold-producing mines.

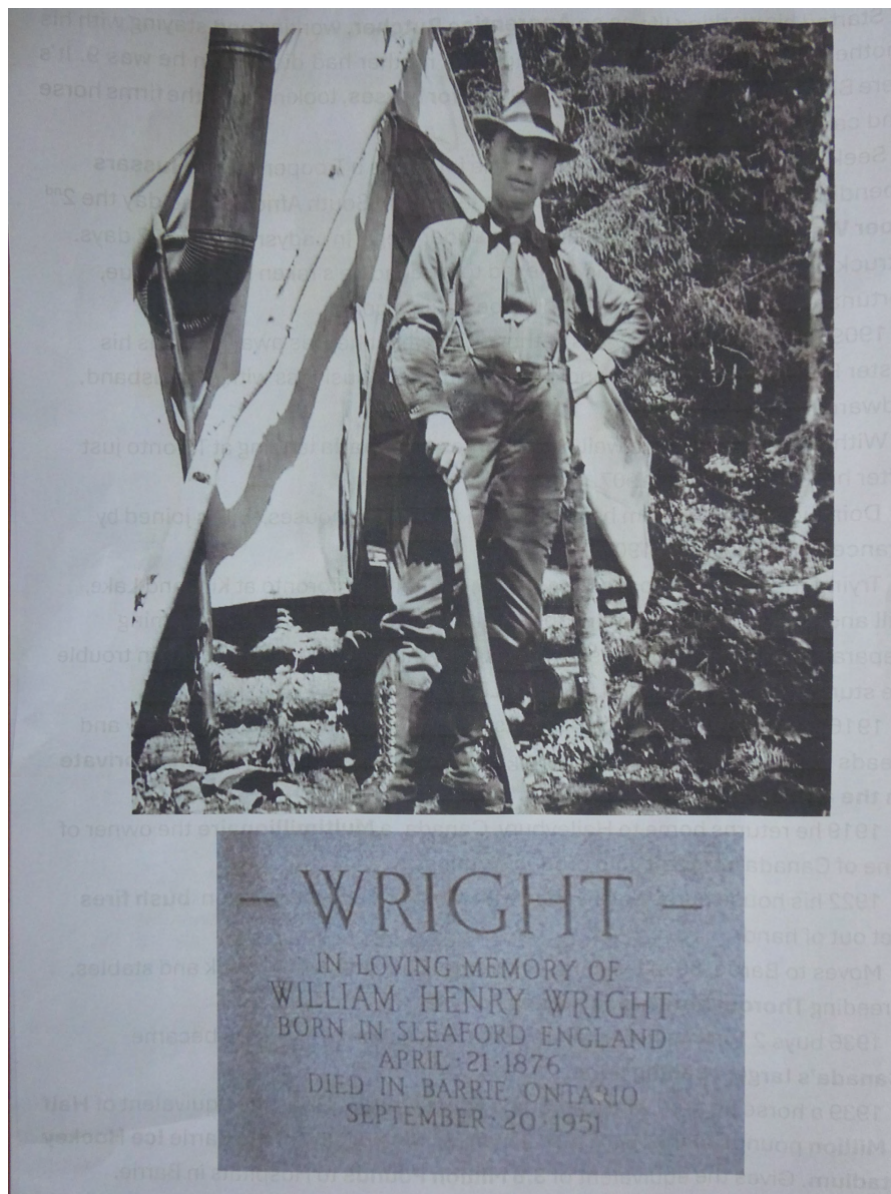
1922 - His house burns down along with most of Haileybury, when bushfires get out of hand. He moves to Barrie, 60 miles north of Toronto, and buys a racetrack and stables, breeding Thoroughbred racehorses.

1936 - He buys 2 Toronto newspapers and merges them. The Globe became Canada's largest selling paper.

1939 - A horse he bred won Canada's Triple Crown.

Over time he gives the equivalent of half a million pounds to the Red Cross and finances the building of the Barrie Ice Hockey Stadium. He also gives the equivalent of 3.6 million pounds to hospitals in Barrie.

1951 - 'Bill' dies on September 20th in Barrie, Ontario



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## RiverLight 2025 - Gallery

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*The Giant Wheel - Autin Dance Theatre*



*Some colour on the Market Place*



*Youth Dance*



*The finale parade - stilted lady and umbrella. Yes, we actually had some very brief drizzle to freshen the air!*

*Photos by Ed.*



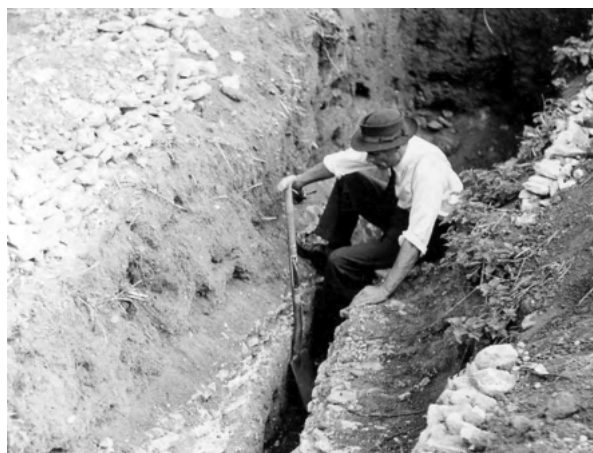
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## Charles Ellis

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Charles Ellis was born in 1913 in Brighton and moved to Sleaford from a prep school in Middlesex to become history master at Carres Grammar School in 1946. Despite his original intention to move back south he put down roots in the town and taught generations of local boys at the school, retiring in 1976. He always said he was a student as well as a teacher because there were always new things to learn. He taught me history when I was at Carres and also Mike Turland a few years before me. One of his great historical heroes was Otto von Bismarck, the famous “iron chancellor” of the German Empire, whom he admired as a supremely clever politician. Bismarck held office for an extended period before Kaiser Wilhelm dismissed him in 1890. Charles joked that after 30 years at Carres he had outlasted Bismarck, who could only manage 29 as chancellor. Better still, he had retired while Bismarck had been sacked.

He was a keen amateur archaeologist, founding a school archaeological group (including both Carres boys and High School girls) which undertook excavations at Old Sleaford in the summer of 1960. They were looking for the lost medieval church at Old Sleaford and uncovered not just the church and churchyard but important Roman remains, including a fully-excavated Roman corn dryer. It was this discovery that led to the much more extensive archaeological work by Margaret Jones in the following years, which in turn unearthed the famous Iron Age mint site at Old Sleaford.



*Charles Ellis at the 1960 excavation*

After Charles retired, he taught local history WEA classes to a group of adult students whose work over the course of four years grew into a project that culminated in the book “Mid-Victorian Sleaford” in 1981. This was a pioneering piece of local history research by the people who had attended his classes, using all kinds of original documents to examine what the town was like in the nineteenth century. One of the contributors was Mike Turland, who was thus taught by Charles Ellis both as a boy and as an adult. The book was edited by Charles Ellis (who also wrote several of the chapters) and was published by the Lincolnshire Library Service.

Ellis died on 20th December 1986 aged 73, although it was widely reported in the press as being early 1987 and widely accepted as such!

On August 11th, immediately after the Blue Plaque unveiling at Mansion House at 10:30, there will be a ceremony to commemorate Charles Ellis.

Mike Turland and I will unveil the commemorative plaque, affixed to one of the renovated town signs in Monument Gardens by the Museum.



*Simon Pawley*

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## The Aswarby Park Elephant Burial Site - an unresolved mystery?

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In "Lincolnshire Country Houses and Their Families, Part One", page 43, published in 1990, T. Leach says ...

"In 1892 a circus was travelling from Sleaford to Bourne when the elephant died on the road near the Tally Ho Inn at Aswarby. A local fell-monger tried to skin the animal but gave up in despair after two hours. The problem of what to do with the large corpse was solved when Sir Thomas Whichcote sent six horses and gear. A hole was dug in the park, and the elephant was buried."

This account is repeated verbatim in "Lincolnshire Lost Country Houses Vol 611, by Pacey, of 2010 - with the addition of...

"The mound can still be seen from the road."

Unfortunately, in neither case is a source stated. Over the years Simon Pawley and I have tried to find it, without success. In modern times, "enhanced" versions of the event have appeared, again without sources ...including an assertion that Tayleur's Great American Circus was involved. The issue is complicated by the presence, about half a mile north of the Tally Ho on the western edge of the Park, of a mound. This is an Ancient Monument, identified as a barrow (or a windmill mound; or an elephant burial?). There was a heated, but polite, correspondence between the Ministry of Works and the Kesteven County Planning Officer in the 1950's, the latter stressing the elephant theory! His deputy, and archaeologist A R Fennell, noted in 1956... "a local legend not necessarily true".

Simon and I have had full access to all the official records of the Monument; but they do not provide answers - plenty of snippets of information but no primary sources. However, we have managed to talk to the current custodian of the story ...to which we will return.

### *Issues with the burial*

(1) the date, 1892. The Bourne railway line opened in 1872. Would a circus not have taken advantage of rail travel in 1892? A visit of Tayleur's Circus took place in this period, but to Grantham - what would it have been doing on the A15? A note on the National Monument Record, from MW Barley, suggests the elephant event had taken place a hundred years previously – this note is dated 1955; another note, from 1931, mentions a large Oak on the mound. This is unlikely to have grown since 1892! Indeed, Kelly's Directory of Lincolnshire 1885 says "In the park is a circular mound and on its summit is an oak tree several centuries old"....so a big question over the alleged elephant burial, seven years later!

(2) Ordnance Survey: the Two Inch to One Mile of 1814; and One Inch of 1824; both appear to show the mound - well before its alleged use for elephant burial.

(3) "Sir Thomas Whichcote": there were three baronets so named during the 19th Century, two dying in the 1820's. There was a Thomas from 1812 to 1892 - but the last died in January 1892 in Bournemouth, where he had been resident for some months - and therefore very unlikely to have been involved with an elephant at Aswarby.

(4) the earliest account we have traced is in the Sleaford Standard of April 26 1947, an interview with the landlord of the Tally Ho Inn since 1932. His account is brief: no date; several horses to move the elephant; and a mystery mound, which is not where the elephant is buried. (This report not previously known about).



(5) a note of a local interview in the National Monument Register of 1965 reveals local memory of an elephant by the side of the "A15" and not in the park. Expert advice is that, by now, any burial would have flattened out. If the death was "near the Tally Ho", why bury it nearly half a mile to the north? (unless "near" is being used very loosely).

#### *Authors Comments*

- If an elephant died it was most likely mid-19th Century not 1892. (Circuses were then frequent visitors to Sleaford, but no press report of an elephant death has been found).
- If it was buried with the help of Sir Thomas Whichcote, it was definitely not 1892 because he was deceased.
- Any burial site is unlikely to be the mound with the oak tree ...but a location nearer the Tally Ho?

#### *An explanation*

The newly-published Guide to St Denys' Church, Aswarby, says...

"The pear-shaped mound in the west of Aswarby Park is not, as thought, used as a cover over the body of an elephant belonging to a 19th Century travelling circus! This circus spent the night in the park when the elephant died and it was buried near the gate onto the A15, south of the mound. It is more probably an ancient burial mound.. listed as a "barrow".

Further discussion with the current source of the story reveals that he was told it when a boy (in the 1940's). There is no definitive date for the event but it is thought to involve one of the Sir George Whichcotes (1892-3; 1893-1946 - not 1949 as Leach says in his book), most probably the latter. The "gate" mentioned above is that leading to the cricket pitch, the elephant burial to the south of it. (Did the circus in fact camp on the cricket pitch - much of the Park is otherwise well-covered in trees? MJT)

Circuses were regular visitors to small towns such as Sleaford - indeed a Victorian/ Edwardian child was far more likely to have regularly seen elephants and other exotic beasts than a modern child.

*Author's note:* in my experience, local tales of this sort are usually found to have been inspired by an actual event - in this case it is improbable that we shall ever discover when this was...The Leach/ Pacey account is best described as "imaginative"!

*Michael Turland  
revised May 2020 copyright*

Author's acknowledgement - many thanks to the Playne family for their help.

Footnote: there was an archaeological hunt for an elephant burial in 2011, at Tregaron, Ceredigion. Nothing was found - but at least they had a press report source - from 1848!

*For those interested in the wider history of Aswarby Park, you'll find some very useful information, maps and history timeline on the Heritage Lincolnshire website entitled 'Extract from a site survey'. Ed.*

### VE Day display - Swords beaten into ploughshares

Our VE display featured something a little different as we told the story of the humanitarian operations close to the cessation of hostilities in Europe.



### Operation MANNA and Operation CHOWHOUND

Operation MANNA and Operation CHOWHOUND were humanitarian food drops to relieve the Dutch famine of 1944-45 in the German occupied Netherlands, undertaken by Allied bomber crews during the last 10 days of the official war in Europe.

Manna (29 April–7 May 1945), which dropped 7,000 tonnes of food into the still German-occupied western part of the Netherlands, was carried out by squadrons from the RAF, the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) and the Polish Air Force (PAF).

Chowhound (1–8 May 1945) dropped 4,000 tonnes and was undertaken by the United States Army Air Forces. In total, over 11,000 tonnes of food were dropped over the 10 days, with the acquiescence of the occupying German forces, to help feed Dutch civilians in danger of starvation. Fighting ended in the Netherlands with the overall surrender of Germany on May 8th 1945.

The first of the two RAF Avro Lancasters chosen for the test flight on the morning of 29 April 1945 was nicknamed *Bad Penny* as in the expression '*a bad penny always turns up.*' This bomber, with a crew of seven young men (five from Ontario, Canada, including pilot Robert Upcott), took off in bad weather despite the fact that the Germans had not yet agreed to a ceasefire. *Bad Penny* had to fly low, down to 50 feet (15 m) over German guns but succeeded in dropping her cargo and returning to her airfield. So, as well as describing the celebratory events in Sleaford for the 8th May 1945, we used a model Lancaster, constructed by Andy Brett from rustic and scrap materials, to tell this important story.

## **Our next talk - the Sleaford School of Art**

A great friend of the Museum, Robert Turner, will speak on the little known but very influential Sleaford School of Art. This is a fascinating story which links the Town to the wider art movement in the country. As usual, the talk takes place in the St Denys' Church Rooms, and is on Tuesday 29th July, 7pm for a 7.30pm start.

## **RiverLight 2025 / North Kesteven Walking Festival**

During the 'Fringe' period of RiverLight 2025 (June 14th - June 20th), we conducted three guided heritage walks all starting at the Museum as part of the North Kesteven Walking Festival. These walks included a walk into town along East Road, Southgate and from the Market Place to Sleaford Castle.

The finale of RiverLight 2025 took place on June 21st and we used our new performance space in Monument Gardens to run a programme of displays and activities.



The centrepiece of the day was a multimedia performance from the students of St George's Academy funded and supported by the Museum's involvement in the county-wide three year project, 'Future of the Past'. A full report and photos will appear in the next issue of the Newsletter.

*Mark Bamford, Chair, Sleaford Museum Trust*



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## Thomas Parry

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Thomas Parry was born on 23 February 1818 and was the son of William Parry of Lincoln and his wife Mary, the daughter of Henry Stanley. He became an articled clerk to Charles Kirk the elder, later becoming a partner in the firm which then became known as Kirk and Parry.

Parry married Kirk's daughter Henrietta on 9th June 1842 at Quarrington St Botolph's church, later building the family's Westholme House in 1849.

Thomas took a keen interest in politics and at the 1865 general election, standing as a Liberal, he was elected as a Member of Parliament for the Borough of Boston. However, an election petition was lodged and on 21 March 1866 the result was overturned in favour of the other Liberal candidate Meaburn Staniland.

Staniland resigned from the Commons on 8 March 1867 and at the resulting by-election on 16th March 1867 Parry was returned unopposed in his place. He did not stand at the 1868 general election but was re-elected in 1874. That result was the subject of another election petition which led to 353 of Parry's 1,347 votes being struck off, thereby making John Wingfield Malcolm the winner of the second seat.

Thomas died in Algiers on 23 December 1879 and his remains were later interred at Quarrington.



*Thomas Parry's Home - Westholme House*

*This introduction to Thomas Parry forms part of my wider research project into Kirk & Parry. I will be presenting this research at the Museum Talk 'Kirk & Parry, Builders of Sleaford' on Thursday, September 18th - please note the new date.*

*Nigel Ogden, Museum Researcher*

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## Future Events

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Tuesday, July 29th	<b>'The Artist Mary Wedd and the Sleaford School of Art'</b> , presented by Robert Turner, local historian. Presented in St Denys' Church Rooms, off the Market Place in Sleaford. The talk starts at 7.30pm and lasts approximately an hour. Refreshments are available and there is a raffle. £3 for non-members and £1 for members.
August 11th (2 events)	Blue Plaque unveiling at Charles Kirk's Mansion House, Southgate, Sleaford at 10:30 followed immediately by the unveiling of a commemorative plaque celebrating the life of Charles Ellis in Monument Gardens by the Museum.
Saturday, Sept 13th	<b>Heritage Open Day - Almshouses Chapel.</b> The Bede Houses on Eastgate, Sleaford from 13:00 - 16:00. Talks by Dr Simon Pawley on the history of the Almshouse Chapel start at 13:30, repeated at 14:30.
Thursday, Sept 18th <i>Note the change of date</i>	<b>'Kirk &amp; Parry, Builders of Sleaford - The men, the buildings, the legacy'</b> , presented by Nigel Ogden, Sleaford Museum researcher. Presented in St Denys' Church Rooms, off the Market Place in Sleaford. The talk starts at 7.30pm and lasts approximately an hour. Refreshments are available and there is a raffle. £3 for non-members and £1 for members
Saturday, Sept 20th	<b>Heritage Open Day - The Carre family of Sleaford.</b> St Denys' Church, Market Place, Sleaford from 14:00 - 16:00. A talk by Dr Simon Pawley on the history and impact of the family in Sleaford. Please note the tour starts at 14:00.

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## Corporate Members

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We would like to thank our Corporate Members for their renewed support this year



CARRE  
HERITAGE



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## Blast from the Past

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Some people collect Catalogues or Football Programmes ...but we have other ideas!

