

CHANGE OF



A single act at the beginning of the twentieth century altered the fortunes of the small town of Wragby for ever

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Down Your Way

IN JUST TWO DAYS during the First World War, the peaceful little town of Wragby underwent a dramatic change which was to alter its fortunes and character for ever. For 250 years it had been an 'estate village' belonging to one of the biggest land-owning families in the county. But in August, 1917, all the land, farms, houses, pubs, shops and woods across six parishes went under the hammer in what has subsequently been dubbed 'the sale of the century'.

Its secure past was gone forever and Wragby had to undergo phenomenal changes to adapt to twentieth-century life.

Situated half way between Lincoln and Horncastle, this small town had grown up at the meeting point of five routes. The first major road was built by the Romans and sections of this straight highway still remain today along the A158. This Roman road continued past Panton, Belchford, Tetford, Ulceby and Burgh le Marsh to the coast.

A Dane named Wraghi probably founded a hamlet here at the meeting place in the wapentake of Wraggoe. Earthworks and ditches on the edge of the town indicate the presence of either a manor house or small castle. The Normans came and built a church but sadly, that has now virtually all gone. Three Norman arches of its north arcade were removed to Sudbrooke Hall and its ruined chancel stood in fields to the south of Wragby until the 1980s. A Nor-

man pillar piscina, probably from the original church, was found in a garden in Wragby and placed in the present church, All Saints. This church was built in 1838 on a site a quarter of a mile north-west of its predecessor. It was restored in 1897 and had a new roof in 1907.

With its prominent position on the transport route, for centuries Wragby was a natural trading centre for the district. However, it did not have an official market charter until the seventeenth century when Charles II granted one to his favourite, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham who was Lord of the Manor after the Duke of Rutland. The Thursday markets are no longer held but the wide market place is still there and used as a car park. Wragby also held several cattle and sheep fairs a year right up to the last century.

It was also during the reign of Charles II that Sir Edmund Turnor bought the estate from the Duke of Buckingham. It

DIRECTION



is supposed the family made their money from merchanting activities, enabling them to build up a great estate in Lincolnshire, reputed to be the second largest in the county. Sir Edmund had been a loyal follower of Charles I and held a number of offices connected with the royal household in the time of Charles II. The Turnors made their home in the hamlet of Panton about three miles to the east of Wragby and owned land over six parishes in Lissington, East Torrington and East Barkwith as well as most of Wragby.

For 250 years as squires and landlords, they ran Wragby and the surrounding districts with a benevolence which was remembered with great affection. Although it is almost a century since any Turnors lived in Wragby, their legacy still remains in some of the town's buildings.

In 1690, Sir Edmund Turnor founded a chapel and twelve almshouses, six for widows of clergy and six for lay widows

or widowers of Wragby. He endowed the foundation in 1708 but in 1840 the original buildings were condemned and replaced at a cost of £2,000. In 1908 a further £400 was spent on them and they were completely modernised in 1967. Their number was reduced from twelve to ten and the remainder made larger and fitted with modern kitchens, bathrooms and heating.

Until the 1967 renovation, the almshouses were described by their warden, Mrs R Grantham, as 'absolutely primitive'. There were no water closets and three almshouses shared one earth closet between them. There was no running water of any description indoors and residents had to carry in their cold water from an outside tap.

However, they were paid £4 a year to live there although one of their conditions of tenancy was to attend church at 9am every day; absence incurred a penny fine.

Everywhere in Wragby and the sur-

rounding area there are plaques on former estate workers' houses: CT 1864 in Victoria Street, ET on a terrace in Bardney Road, after Christopher and Edmund Turnor. John Turnor and his sister, Frances, erected the town's first elementary school in 1839 and Christopher gave premises to be used rent free as the town's reading room and library.

The Turnors themselves continued to live a little way out of Wragby. In 1720 their great mansion of Panton Hall, was built by a pupil of Sir John Vanbrugh on a 'fine wooded eminence' according to a past directory, about a mile north of

- 1: *The Almshouses in Turnor Square*
- 2: *The Turnor Arms*
- 3: *The Market Place is now used as a car park*
- 4: *The Turnor coat of arms on one of the buildings in the Market Place*
- 5: *Panton Hall before its demolition*
- 6: *E H Thorne's Beehive Works*
- 7: *The Ivy Club in the Market Place was a saddler's shop before the great sale*

Wragby. It was surmounted by a balustraded parapet while the whole interior was in the Adam style with bold marble mantelpieces.

It had nine principal bedrooms, and spacious reception rooms on the ground floor. The servants' quarters were in the basement along with the kitchen, scullery, servants' hall, large store rooms, five big cellars, a larder, boot house and a cellar which held eighty tons of coal. The hall even had its own butcher's shop, bake house, wash house and game larder. Outside, there was stabling for twenty horses along with cow byres, piggeries, greenhouses and kitchen gardens.

The Turnors remained the major landowners at Wragby until August 15th and 16th, 1917, when the whole estate, covering six parishes, was sold by auction. Christopher Turnor had returned to live at Stoke Rochford long before the First World War and it was time to disperse the estate.

The auction went on without a break for two days during which time farms, fields, shops and pubs went under the hammer. There were at least sixteen farms, two small-holdings, more than thirty-three houses and cottages, not counting the ones included on the farms, fields, paddocks, grassland and nine plantations of woodland. The Turnor Arms in the Market Place went for £3,500, the brick-built tower mill in Bardney Road fetched £50 and the great house, Panton Hall, sold for £15,000.

In 1919 Panton Hall became a Franciscan college and friary. The stable block was converted into dormitories and classrooms with the remaining classrooms, refectory and preparatory school situated in the Hall. Three years later there were extensive alterations to accommodate a further 100 students. By the late 1930s the college had closed and in 1937, Sir John Denton Marsden was in residence. Panton Hall was finally demolished in the 1950s.

The sale of the estate and the departure of the Turnors, one of the most important events of the century in that

part of Lincolnshire, also marked the end of an era. Until that time Wragby had been alone among the semi-urban places of the county in being owned in its entirety by a single family. This social structure might have been remembered with affection by many but with its roots firmly in the eighteenth century, it stifled the emergence of a middle class and many believed it led to an absence of ambition. That is not to say that Wragby was not prosperous. It operated as a market town, had been an impor-

However, the sale of the estate had created new opportunities for people. One of these, Edgar Thorne, had followed in the footsteps of his father who had been a joiner working for Sir Edmund Turnor. A request from an Arthur Mumby for a beehive led to the formation of a company which is now the longest-established manufacturer of apiary equipment in the UK. It is still family run and employs forty people. Much of the equipment is made on the Wragby site.



Wragby's former tower mill can be seen from miles around

tant coaching stop in the days of the turnpikes and later had a rail link with Lincoln and Louth. However, the industrial revolution had largely passed it by.

In the early years of its independence, it would appear as though Wragby was in something of a decline. Between 1871 and 1931 the town's population dropped from 581 to 454. The old Thursday market had become extinct and increasing mechanisation in farming meant fewer people worked the land, thus reducing the population of the town and its surrounding hamlets.

Another resident, Mr J E C Holmes, left school at the age of twelve at the end of the nineteenth century and soon became an apprenticed joiner and wheelwright in Ludford. He went on to found his own joinery business in Wragby and the company, Holmes Joinery, is still in existence today.

When Mr Godfrey Holmes was worried about the great heaps of sawdust piling up and wanted to find a use for them, he suggested they were used in the production of plastics. Soon a plastics company was founded at Wragby and in the 1960s, the firm was taken over by a Birmingham company after which its output doubled and it became the biggest employer between Lincoln and Horncastle. McKechnie Plastics still flourishes in the town today with premises on Bardney Road. At the last count, the population of the town stood at 2,040 but as with many Lincolnshire towns and villages, there is much building in progress with new estates under construction within the

town and on its boundaries. To the west of the town, the Millbrook Business Park, a joint initiative between Lincolnshire Development and East Lindsey District Council, is being developed.

Modern Wragby is a popular home for people working locally as well as in Horncastle and Lincoln. It has a primary school, health centre, town hall, bowling club, pubs and societies. But its wide market place, rows of cottages with their coats of arms, and Victorian church remain as evidence of its past days. □