

S1: The Story of Josiah Gilbert, 1866-1916

S2: Let's set the scene. Briefly, the locations which feature herein are:

Belton, an agricultural village 6 miles west of Loughborough. In 1861 there were 781 inhabitants, and this remains similar today.

Breedon-on-the-Hill, a small village around 11 miles from Loughborough. The population in 1863 was around 650, and today this has risen to just over 1,000.

Markfield is just over 6 miles south west of Loughborough. In 1086 it comprised 2 households. In 1863 the village had just begun quarrying local stone, and housed around 1,400 inhabitants, while today just over 5,500 people live there.

Osgathorpe had 8 households in 1086, and is an agricultural village 8 miles west of Loughborough. In 1863 there were 351 inhabitants, and this is increased slightly to just over 400 today.

Loughborough in 1086, comprised 39 households. In 1861, the large manufacturing and market town, had a population of around 11,000, which has risen to in excess of 60,000 today.

In 1916 the country is in the midst of the First World War.

S3: William Gilbert had been born in Osgathorpe in 1819 and his wife, Jane Barsby, in Rothley in 1823. They were married at Breedon in 1848. William and Jane's first child, Sarah Ann, was born the following year, and son, James, in 1850, both born in Osgathorpe. At the time of the 1851 census, William was a blacksmith and the family were living in Osgathorpe.

S4: There followed the birth of another two daughters, Mary Jane and Elizabeth, and another son, William. Josiah Gilbert was baptised on 6th May 1866 in Osgathorpe, the sixth child of William, listed as a farmer, and Jane. Sadly, Jane died in 1866 and William married Elizabeth Hodgkinson two years later and the birth of Thomas and Lucy followed. Sadly, Elizabeth appears to have died around 1870.

S5: The 1871 census return for Osgathorpe lists the widower, William, a blacksmith and farmer, living with six of his eight children. Sarah Ann had married and was living just down the road, and James, now 21, was living with his uncle, a grocer and grazier, on Long Street, Belton, where James was the grocer's apprentice. The three older children, Mary, Elizabeth and William, were listed on the census return as scholars.

S6: By 1881, the family was living on what was listed as 'Village Street' Osgathorpe, where daughter Elizabeth was housekeeping for the family, son William was now working as a railway clerk, and the three younger children were scholars. Meanwhile, James had risen to the position of assistant grocer at his uncle's grocery shop in Belton.

S7: By 1891 Josiah was living with James and James's family – wife, Harriet and 4-month-old daughter, Harriet Ethel – on Long Street, Belton, where James was a grocer and baker, and Josiah was his older brother's assistant.

S8: In 1901 James and Harriet's family had grown, to include another daughter, Gladys Elizabeth, and Josiah, now aged 35 was still assisting his brother in the grocery and bakery business.

The 1901 census was taken on 31st March, just three weeks before the first banns of marriage between Josiah Gilbert and Sarah Newbold, both born in Osgathorpe, was read. Following the posting of a further two banns, on 28th April and 5th May, the couple were married: Josiah was aged 35, and Sarah, 30.

S9: Josiah and Sarah celebrated the birth of their son, William Handley Josiah Gilbert, on 23rd February, 1902, in Markfield, the birth being registered at Market Bosworth.

S10: In 1903 Josiah was listed on the electoral register as the owner of a dwelling house on Main Street Markfield. This listing continues into subsequent years, until 1911, and the family appear on the 1911 census return, living on Main Street, Markfield, where they live and work from the same property. The business is a grocery and bakery store, where Sarah assists her husband, while son William is a scholar. Sarah's place of birth is noted as Belton, rather than Osgathorpe.

S11: In 1912, Josiah appears on the register of electors as he now owns a dwelling house, no.29 Cumberland Road, Loughborough. His ownership of no.65 Cumberland Road is confirmed by an entry in the local register of electors for 1913.



S12: 29 Cumberland Road,
Loughborough

S13: 65 Cumberland Road, Loughborough

S14: On 16th January 1913, Josiah Gilbert, baker and grocer, now of no.65 Cumberland Road, makes a will, leaving household furniture and effects, money in the bank (Notts and Nottinghamshire Bank, and Barclays in Leicester) the property on Main Road, Markfield (which he held on mortgage) as well as all other properties 'wheresoever and whatsoever' in his name, to his wife, Sarah. This will was witnessed by neighbours on Cumberland Road – Samuel Ward at no.55, and immediate neighbour, Isaac Stedmanees, at no. 63.

So, from what we have gathered so far, not only is Josiah a baker and grocer, he also seems to be a property owner, clearly owning more than one house.

S15: Then the 1914 local register of electors reveals that Josiah also now has a property on Empress Road, a dwelling house. This property, no.77, is also a shop, and Josiah is still there running the corner grocery shop at the time the 1915 register was taken.





S16: Corner shop at
77 Empress Road,
Loughborough

S17: The houses in the area in which the shop was situated had grown up around the extensive Herbert Morris factory, previously known as Herbert Morris and Bastert, and which had moved to Loughborough from Sheffield in 1897. Between 1890 and 1930 the number of employees rose from 50 to around 2,000, making Herbert Morris one of Loughborough's biggest employers. It is reasonable to suppose that any local corner shop sited opposite such a large factory with so many workers likely to visit, would ensure a thriving business and make a good living for its proprietor.



S18: Part of the Herbert Morris factory

S19: However, the new year of 1916 proved catastrophic for the Gilbert family, as, indeed, it did for many other families and individuals in Loughborough.

S20: At around 8pm on the night of January 31st 1916, a low rumble could be heard in the distance, which became louder and louder, until it reached its height over the town of Loughborough. Although there had been some degree of warning, and the local police had sent word around that all lights were to be extinguished, Zeppelin L20, which was ultimately heading for Liverpool, found its first target of Sheffield – or so the captain thought.

Zeppelins are notoriously difficult to navigate, and given the weather conditions and a troublesome engine, L20 had actually only reached Loughborough, having been completely unaware of the larger town of Leicester, whose lights had been extinguished. Attracted by lights that were still shining in Loughborough, L20 dropped its first bomb close to the Technical Institute, which actually fell in the yard of the nearby Crown and Cushion pub, causing the death of Mrs Martha Shipman.

The second bomb fell on The Rushes, causing complete havoc, and the death of William Adcock, Joe and Alice Adkin, and Ethel Higgs. Making its way from the centre of the town, towards the canal, and attracted by the bright lights shining through the glass roof of a factory that had only recently benefitted from electric lighting, the next bomb dropped landed in an orchard on Thomas Street, thankfully killing no-one. The final bomb dropped by Zeppelin L20 fell closer to the factory, and shrapnel flew into a nearby shop, killing, amongst others, the proprietor.

Leaving Loughborough townsfolk shocked and scared, and considering its job of bombing Sheffield done, the airship departed, heading to Liverpool. However, it actually bombed Burton-on-Trent. The Herbert Morris factory on Empress Road, Loughborough, lying close to the canal, had been the target of the fourth bomb that dropped, killing Mary Anne Page, her son, Joseph, and daughter Elsie, and Arthur Christian Turnill.



S21: Shrapnel marks on Empress Road, Loughborough

S22: In the attack on Loughborough by Zeppelin L20, 10 people were killed, 12 people badly injured and many more suffered minor injuries.



S23: The centenary memorial plaque on The Rushes

S24: Josiah Gilbert, aged 49, was the shopkeeper who was killed by flying shrapnel, dying in the arms of his 14-year-old son, William.

S25: His distraught family posted a piece in the local newspaper, The Loughborough Echo, in February 1916, thanking all their kind friends for their sympathy. Sarah and son, William posted further memorials to Josiah on the anniversary of his death, in 1917, 1918 and 1919 -and probably beyond.

S26: Between 1920 and 1923 Sarah was registered as living at no.65 Cumberland Road.

S27: By 1924, Sarah and William had moved to no.17 Storer Road, where they both continued to live until Sarah's death.



S28: 17 Storer Road, Loughborough (right)

S29: William stayed in the Storer Road property until around 1965 when he went to live at no.1 Beaufort Avenue, Loughborough, where he remained until his death.

S30: On 31st January 1970, William Handley Josiah Gilbert died. This was the 54th anniversary of the death of his father, Josiah Gilbert, on the night of the Zeppelin attack on Loughborough.

S31: Sources consulted:

Due to lockdown, sources have mostly been found online and include:

Census returns, bmd, electoral registers, & newspaper reports accessed via [Ancestry](#) & [FMP](#)
The [Loughborough Echo](#)

A more detailed bibliography is available on request

Lynne Dyer, 29 January 2021, updated 23 April 2021