

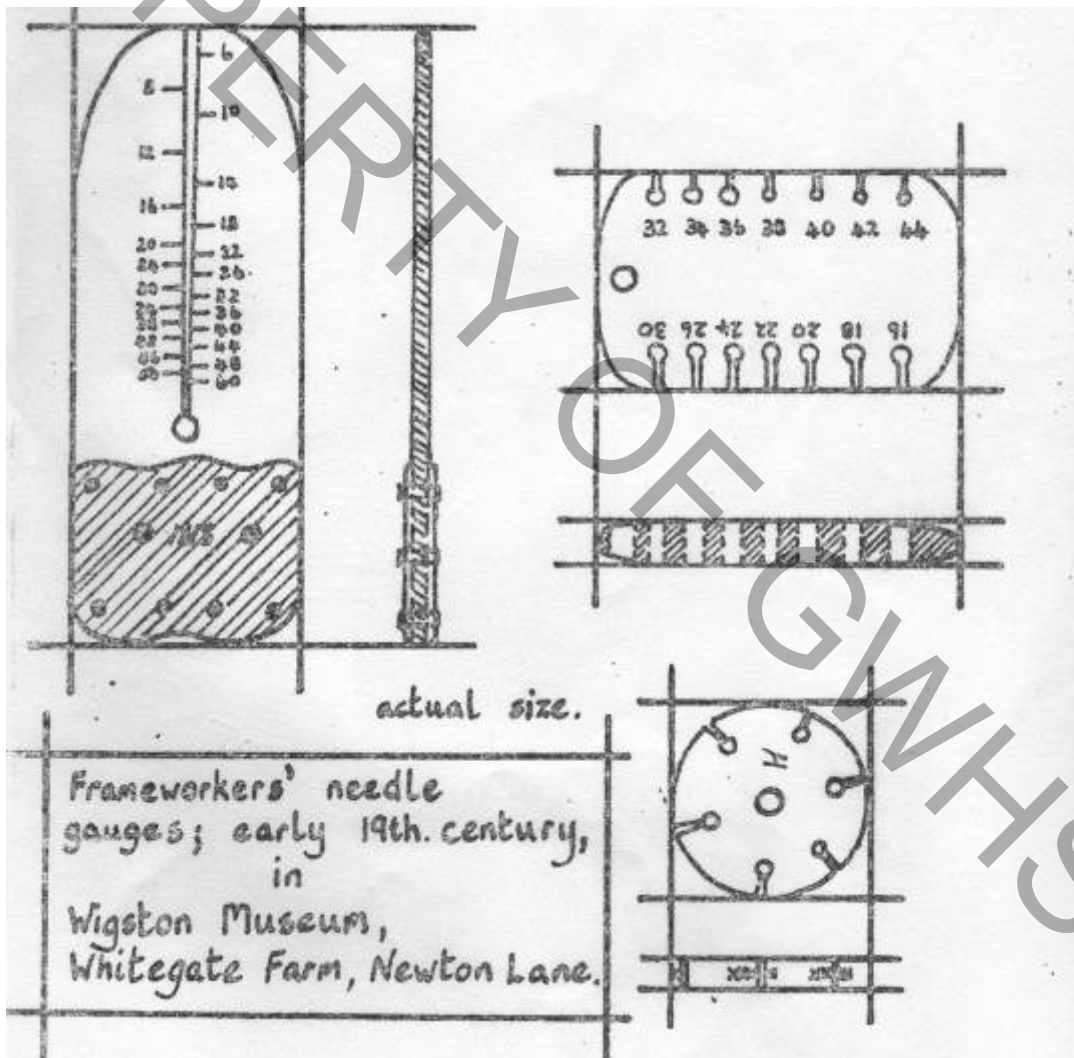


# Greater Wigston Historical Society

White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna Leicestershire

Jun '84

bulletin 9



## Notices

### Programme

#### 16<sup>th</sup> May Wednesday

St. Wolstan's Gravestone Survey. Meet at St. Wistan's Churchyard for 7.30pm

#### 20<sup>th</sup> June Wednesday

Wigston Wander with Duncan Lucas. Meet at White Gate Farm, Newton Lane for 7.30pm  
(Tythorn Hill, Cooks Lane Area)

#### July & August

Holiday Months No Meetings

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### Subscriptions 1984

Subscriptions remain unchanged at £2.00 and £1.00 for O.A.P.'s and those under 18 years of age. Brian Bilson the Hon. Treasurer and Membership Sec. will be pleased to receive any outstanding subs. either at the monthly meetings or by posting to him.....

Mr B Bilson. 23, Thirlmere Road, Wigston, Leicester.

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### Leicestershire Local History Council Programme

#### Monday June 11<sup>th</sup>

Braunstone Walk with Mr John Pilgrim. Meet at 7.30pm at the junction of Braunstone Lane and Braunstone Avenue. Parking at the Shakespeare Inn, and supper.

#### Monday August 13<sup>th</sup>

The Newarke to Northgate, along the towpath. Meet at the corner of The Newarke and Western Boulevard at 7.15pm.

#### Saturday September 1<sup>st</sup>

Ashby de la Zouch Church and Museum. Meet at the church at 2.20pm. Parking in South Street.

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Monday 4<sup>th</sup> June 1984

Duncan is giving a guided walk around Wigston Village, for the local W.I. Any member wishing to join this walk is most welcome. Meet at All Saint's Church at 7.30pm

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**Advance notice .....**

The Society has been asked to put on a small display at Guthlaxton School in September. Suggestions or volunteers to man the display please contact Duncan.

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**MEETINGS.**

Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> February A.G.M. held at Wigston Liberal Club

The minutes of last year's A.G.M. were read and signed as correct. There then followed the election of officers for the coming year, with the following results.

President... Duncan Lucas

Chairman, Mr. M. Bingley. Vice-Chairman .Mr., P. Clows,

Secretary, Doris Chandler. Treasurer. Mr. B. Bilson.

Bulletin Editor Ian Varey. Membership Sec. Mr. B. Bilson.

Membership has increased during the year and this is very pleasing.

The Treasurer's Report followed and showed that the Society's assets stood at some £350. It was proposed and seconded that the financial Report be accepted. A warm vote of thanks was given to Mr Hulls, the retiring Treasurer. It was further agreed that subscriptions for the coming year should remain unchanged; that is £2.00 and £1.00 for O.A.P's and those under 18 years.

The President then reviewed the year. He said that the Society was in good heart and enjoyed good, support. The highlight of the year was the re-opening of the Museum at White Gate Farm. This had proved popular, especially with school parties, but more visitors were needed and different ways of publishing the Museums existence must be sort. The most recent noteworthy find was a Bronze Age funeral urn..... Only the second to be found in the County... unearthed during the preparatory work on the Wigston Harcourt Estate,

The meeting then turned to a discussion about next year's programme, and it was left to Ian Varey to finalise this.

The formal part of the meeting over there was a short break for members to look at the great variety of articles that had been brought in and put on display. These ranged from Goss China, to books, a flintlock pistol. There was a fold down 1st, W. War lantern, an eighteenth century clock mechanism, a visual display of the Georgian House in Long Street and a display of Neolithic Axe Heads. All these articles produced a great deal of conversation and discussion.

After this break the members settled down to watch two videos. First 'The Vanishing Village' a documentary about Wigston Made in the 1960'S, and the second an episode of 'One Man's England', about Mr. Goddard of Newton Harcourt Manor.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm.

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> March 1984

Some 25 members were present at this, the last Winter Meeting of the Year, held in Wigston Liberal Club.

Ian Varey gave an illustrated talk on 'Dating Small Village Houses in Leicestershire'. A good selection of slides covering the major building materials, all of which are to be found in Leicestershire, were shown. The audience was taken through the different building styles associated with both the historical time scale and the different social classes of the periods, with pointers to the different dates.

As Ian pointed out, dating houses is far from an exact science, while shapes, brick sizes and bonds and the occasional date stone, all help to suggest possible dates, such visual evidence should whenever possible be verified by documentary evidence.

It was with some regret that so few of the examples illustrated were of Wigston. but then there is little left in Wigston of the early periods. What a great deal has disappeared, forever, in just the last twenty years! I can hardly remember the old Bull Head Street or what Bell Street or the old Fredrick Street looked like. Can you?

After a warm vote of thanks to Ian, for an extremely interesting talk, the meeting closed at 9.30 pm.

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Wednesday 18th April 1984

Museum Spring Cleaning -

A group of members met with dusters, brushes etc. to help get the Museum ready for the Easter opening.

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Publicity re- the existence of the Museum has been stepped up with both adverts in Local Papers and posters in shops, schools and other organisation.

This effort has been rewarded as attendances at the Museum over Easter and May Day Bank Holiday are up on last year.

Please continue to spread the word - the Wigston Museum is well worth a visit.

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Part 2.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the population of Wigston grew steadily

1700 200 families some 1000 people

1801 354 families some 1600 people,

1831 480 families some 2200 people.

This growth rate increased still further as 1900 dawned.

At the same time as the population was increasing the number of agricultural workers, traditionally the main employer, was falling. The fall was due to both the Enclosure of the Great Fields in 1766, and more significantly because of the change from arable farming to pasture. By 1800, less than 20% of the population worked on the land. The surplus labour of Wigston and the families which moved into the village, because they themselves had been enclosed, were easily absorbed into the growing cottage industry of Frame knitting. With new families moving into the village, building speculators were quick, to build many new houses, often in yards and closes off the main streets. Many of the same businessmen would then rent out the necessary knitting frames. By 1800 there were over 500 frames at work in the village.

However, the years after the Napoleonic Wars saw widespread depression in agriculture and, due to the change of fashion namely that men began to wear long trousers, the collapse of the long hose market. The suffering and plight of the vast majority of Wigston's inhabitants during those years can best be seen from the Poor Rate statistics.

Every year in the early 1800's the Landowners of the Parish had to pay approximately £1 an acre to the Poor Rate Board, this was on top of other taxes. Of the 480 families in the Parish, 208 were in regular receipt of Poor Rate Relief and a further 150 families were in occasional receipt of Relief. Even working 10/12 hours a day, if work could be found, the Frame Knitters could not make a living wage and so had to get Poor Relief.

In 1831 the 'Truck Act' was passed, this made it illegal to pay workers in kind or in tokens that could be spent in the employer's shop. This fact seems not to have percolated through to Wigston until about 1845. At this time all the Wigston Hosiers were middlemen for the big Masters in Leicester. The largest employer in Wigston seems to have been Geo. Loveday, who was also a shopkeeper. Employees were regularly allowed bread during the week and on Saturday they were paid the difference between the work done and the goods received, if any!

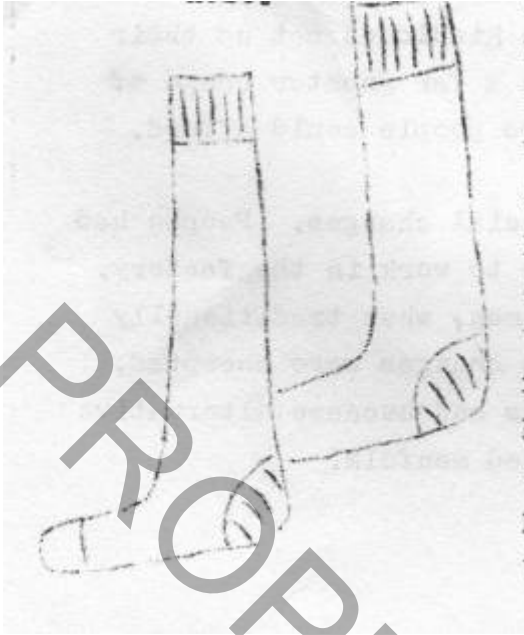
It appears that Loveday's business was taken over by the Holyoak Brothers. In 1851, Lovday disappears from the Wigston scene and Edward Holyoak, who owned a bread shop and John, who had a butchers shop, are given as the biggest Undertakers, employing 170 frameknitters between them.

The poverty among the Frameknitters was so bad that in 1845 a Royal Commission was set up to look into their condition. By this time the village population was 2300, of whom 25% were frameknitters, Samuel Hurst and William Wyatt, both Wigston Knitters, gave evidence to the commission.

Samuel Hurst.....

I do not know how many employers there are in the village for most are under masters for the Leicester Hosiers. Three of the Wigston Undertakers are very big. Many Masters keep shops as well as frames. They give out work on Holiday or Tuesday and take it in on Saturday. I pay 2/- frame rent, 5d a week taking in and standing time, and 4d a week for needles. My two youngest children wind for me. Some ten years ago I use to get 11/- a dozen for hose but now I only get 6/- a dozen. At the end of a long week, I cannot earn more than 7/- a week by the time all my charges are paid. Some little while back I was ill for five weeks and could not work, but still I had to pay my frame rent, I am lucky that I live in a large cottage that belongs to my wife's family, and so I only pay 1/- a week rent.





William Wyatt.....

I work six days a week if there is work for me, from 6 am, to 8 pm. My frame rent is 2/8 a week; I pay 8d for winding, for my children are all too young and cannot do it for me, 4½d I pay each week for needles, and I am stopped 3/- a week by the Master for bread. ( This is despite the fact that the Truck Act was supposed to be in force) For some time I have only been in half work, but still I have to pay the full charges. Sometimes I am docked a 1/- if my hose is slack. I have tried to get an allotment, but have failed to find one.

From these two accounts one begins to realise the acute poverty which most Wigston families faced, in the early nineteenth century. The average earnings of a frameknitter, after all charges had been paid was between 4/6 and 5/6 a week. It was another thirty years or more after the Royal Commission before things began to improve.

Few villagers in the 1840's can have imagined the impact that the coming of the Railway would have on the life of the village. By the 1870's, not only was the Railway offering employment to Wigston's men folk but it made Wigston in to a desirable location for other industries to set up their business. Boot and Shoe and Light Engineering along with a host of service industries all came to Wigston. By 1900, nearly 1000 new houses had been built in South Wigston, and the old village centre of Wigston was bursting with new houses. The Population had topped 8000, a threefold increase in fifty years.

Between 1870 and 1900 the Hosiery industry had been revolutionised. Steam powered knitting frames had been invented in the 1820's but for various reasons there had been massive resistance to their introduction into Leicestershire by both employers and employees. One worried about the loss of income from renting out frames, the other worried about being put out of work altogether by mechanization, Two outside factors provided the impetus for change. First was the 1870 Education Act which in a few years put all the children into school. This was a tremendous blow to an industry so dependent on cheap child labour. Secondly the Abolition of the Frame Rents by act of Parliament in 1874, removed the reluctance of the employers to introduce a proper factory system to replace the antiquated and inefficient cottage industry.

By the 1880's some of the larger Wigston Middlemen set up their own small factories and began to produce a far greater range of knitted goods at a price which many more people could afford.

The factory system involved two major social changes. People had now to leave their homes every day to go to work in the factory. Many of the new factory jobs were for women, when traditionally men had operated the hand frames. Both changes were accepted, because of a general improvement in wages and because alternative employment was available for the displaced men folk.

Some of these very early factories can still be seen, though now they are used for other purposes.... e.g. In Victoria Street and in Central Avenue, both buildings set back from the road in a gap between the terraced houses.

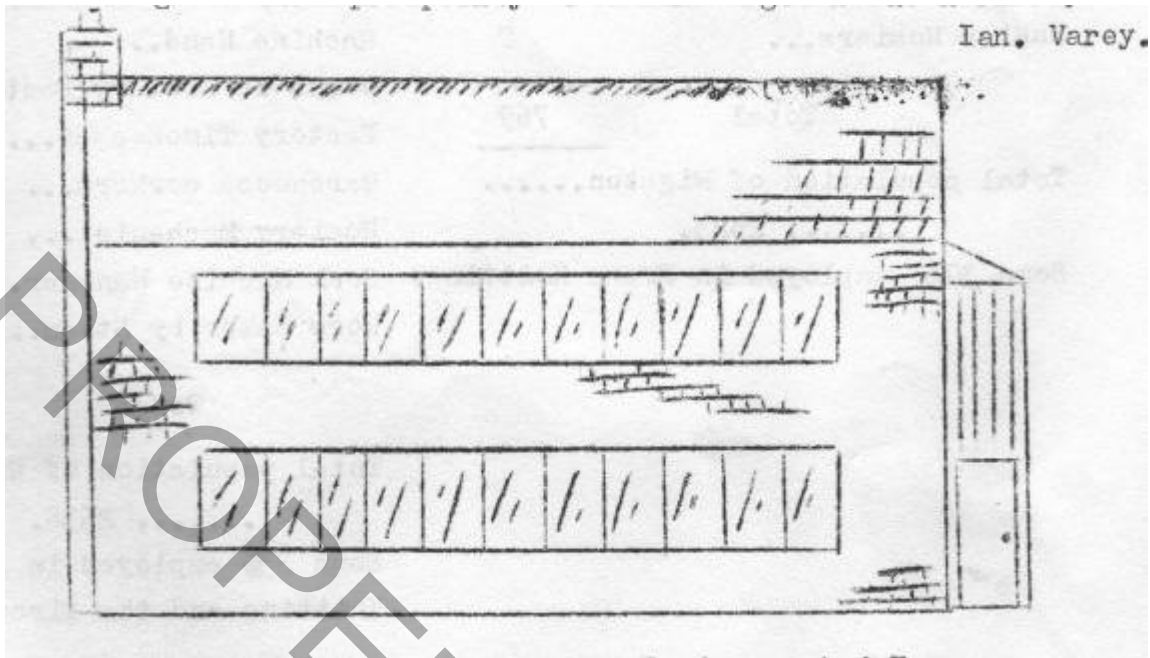
Of course some frame knitting by hand continued well into the twentieth century but it was a contracting trade. Some Hand frames were grouped into small garden workshops, still to be seen at Bushloe End, Moseley End and off Moat Street. If they could specialise and find a gap in the market, such as Glove Making, they too could survive the change for a few more years.

The next generation of factories, built after 1900, were on a much larger scale. Many of these buildings still survive and despite various changes of ownership many are still in the Hosiery/ Knitting Trade, e.g. Admiral in Long Street, formerly Cook and Hurst; Mansfield's on Leicester Rd, formerly Two Steeples; Ladies' Pride in Paddock St., formerly the Co-op Factory.

In the twentieth century as Wigston continued to grow the diversification of the industries increased. However Knitwear still plays a major role in the Wigston Industrial scene. It was the introduction of the hand operated knitting frame into the village, in about 1675, that signalled the change from an agricultural orientated village to an industrial one. The complete change took more than two hundred years but by 1900 Wigston was well established as an Industrial township, and the continued growth and prosperity of modern Wigston was assured,

Ian. Varey,





*Early Frameknitting Workshop, for Hand operated Frames,*

**Some Frame knitting Statistics.**

**1861 Census Return for Wigston.**

Male Framework Knitters	263
Female FWK. ...	172
Males under 15 FWK...	20
Females under 15 FWK...	15
Shirt Frame Knitters...	11
Glove Frame Knitters,,,	6
Cotton & Wool Socks...	9
Stitches and Steamers...	184
Glove Snitchers,,,	2
Winding Boys....	39
Worsted Weavers...	21
Woollen Weavers,...	1
Mender of Hosiery,	1
Warp Hand.,,	3
Loon Hand...	1
Shirt Sleeve Hand...	1
Winder Stock...	1

Rib Top Cotton Hand...	1
Woollen Jackets...	1
Cloth Cap Maker...	1
Sock Top Maker...	1
Machine Sock Stitcher...	1
Warehouse Girls,..	4
Hosiers...	2
Master Hosiers...	7
Total	769

Total population of Wigston..... 2523.  
Some 30% employed in Frame Knitting,

#### 1871\_Census\_Return for Wigston

Male FWK...	201
Female...	68
Worsted Knitters...	81
Shirt FK...	4
Glove FK...	2
Mittens FK,..	4
Silk Weavers,..	2
Lace Makers,..	4
Fancy Knitter..,	1
Worsted Sock Weaver...	6
Stitchers & Seamers...	109
Machine Stitchers...	9
Hosiery Menders,..	8
Winding Boys...	31
Broad Hand.,,	1
Circular Hand...	2
Rotary Hand.,,	1
Sock Maker...	2
Sock Cutter.,,	1
Sock Top Maker,,,	1
Silk Winder...	1
Cap Maker...	1
Cuff Maker...	1
Factory Hand...	10

Machine Hand,..	9
Works in Hosiery Fact...	1
Factory Timekeeper...	1
Warehouse workers...	9
Hosiery Mechanic....	2
Sock Machine Manager,.	1
Hose Maker by Steam...	1
Total	589

Total population of Wigston... 2638.

Some 23% employed in Frame Knitting and the first factory:

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