

**Wigston & District**

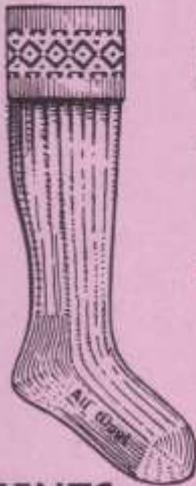
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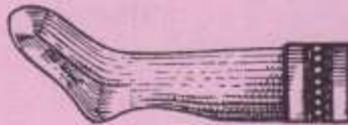
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Near Leicester

# Wigston and District

## *Industrial and Development Guide*

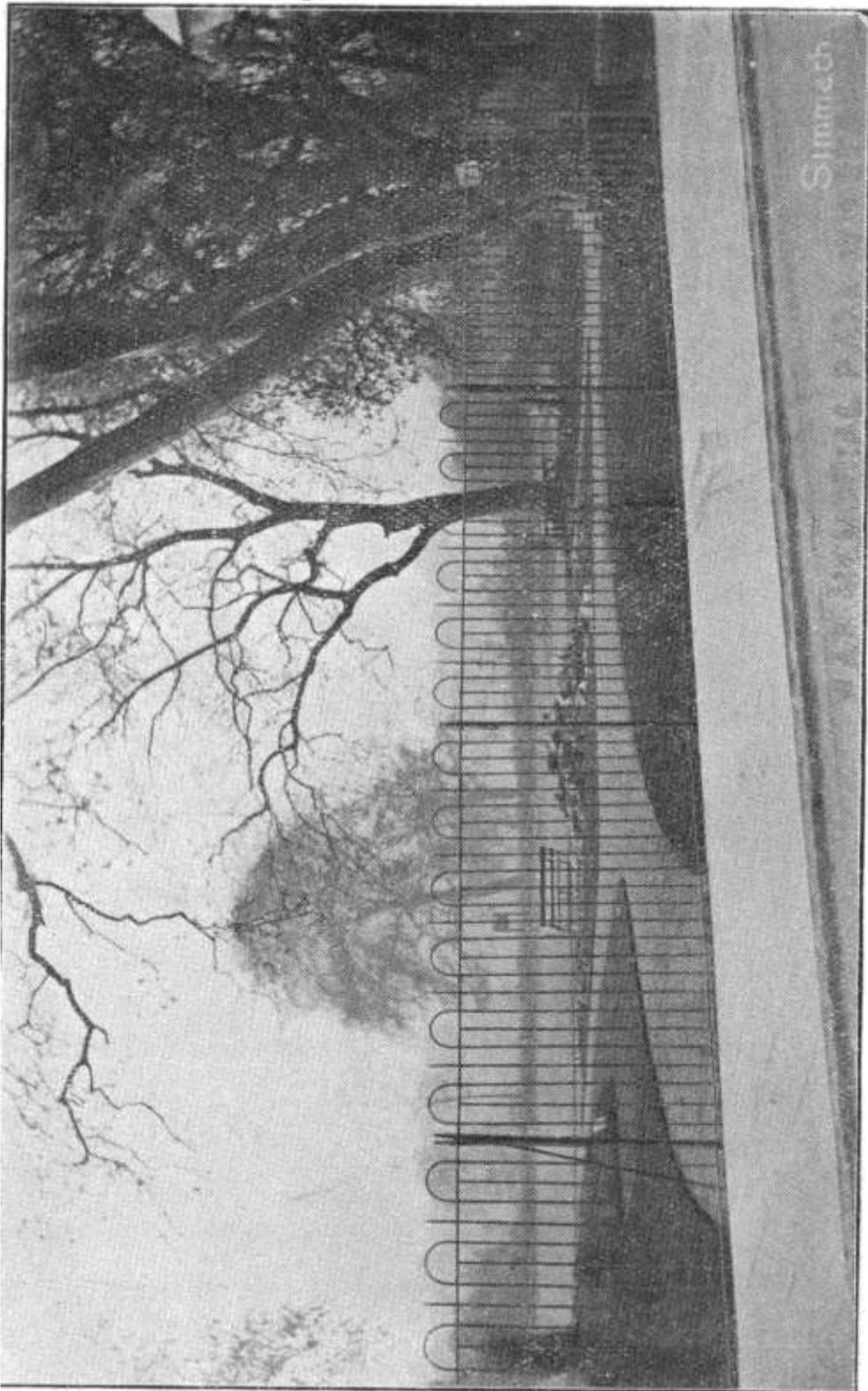
By BERNARD M'QUILLIN (" The Wanderer ")

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War Memorial Park Wigston

Photograph by W G Hall

# Wigston and District

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LEICESTER, the county town, is the hub of the wheel. From it radiate in all directions, great highways leading to the other populous centres throughout the shire. Of these, **Wigston Magna, Great Wigston, or Wigston Two-Steeples**, which ecclesiastical appellation has given name to a widely known brand of hosiery, is a community with a population of over 10,000, situated only four miles from the county town (now again a city).

## WHEN DANES WERE BOLD.

Of Anglo-Saxon origin, **Wigston** was in existence before the great Danish invasion of 870 when these fierce sea-rovers, in their shallow draught war-galleys, penetrated up the Humber and Trent into the heart of the Midlands.

By tacit arrangement between the invaders and the natives it was agreed that Danish settlements could be established on the eastern side of the old Roman **Fosse Way**, that long, straight streak extending from **Saltfleetby** near **Mablethorpe** (Lines.) to **Bath, the "Aqua Solis"** ("Water of the Sun") of Roman Britain.

**Wigston** being already a settlement of long standing, remained on the Danish side of the Fosse, hence it is surrounded by "Bys" of Danish founding—**Oadby, Cosby, Blaby, Kilby, Arnesby, Shearsby**, etc.

An ancient myth declares the building of its two churches was undertaken by two brothers—**Wiking and Wygge**.

In the Domesday Survey (1080-86) the manor of **Wyggeston** —(the original wording) was held by **De Grandmesnil**, a Norman from **Mesnil**, a tiny village on the highroad to **Paris**. This newcomer was a land-collector, who was overlord of sixty-seven manors in the county.

The addition of "**Two Steeples**" is derived from the possession of two churches, the oldest, **St. Wolstan's**, its tower and spire still in their original situation, is rarely used, the parishioners now attending **All Saints**, itself a building of respectable antiquity with a graceful crocketed spire.

The first rector was Simon **de Penne** (1230); vicars dated from 1534.

Some extracts from the church registers give interesting sidelights on early village happenings. Here are a few :

" Gave to the men coming from Jerusalem, having the Admiral's licence, to gather for the ransoming of their seven sons, £i." (1612).

" New Bible, £2 ; for the selling of the old one, io/-." (1620).

" Taking of 16 dozen sparrows, 1/4."

" Three books, ' God and the King,' 1/6." ( 1621.)

" CLEA and BROWN married before Mr Justice BEAUMONT, at Stoughton Grange Hall." (1655).

" JOHN PUCHIN (now POCHIN) and Mrs JANE FRYER of this Towne, married in church before the congregation, without banns." (1663).

" New bells for ye church—the married men gave £43, ye *Batchelors*, £12." (1682).

" Buried, JONATHAN KISS, poor boy, and apprentice to HAD AN DAN, aged n years. He was kicked and the *Rim* of his belly was broken."—(*Rim* is old name for diaphragm). June 15, 1771.

The parish celebrated the victory of **Culloden** by giving the ringers five shillings for the peals when the news came through. (1746).

The enclosure of the common lands (some 3,000 acres) in 1764 caused trouble. The agent of the Duke of St. Albans refused to pay the usual tithes of *fy* per annum, demanding proof of the vicar's rights, whereupon Mr Samuel Davenport produced vouchers extending over 109 years—right back to 1655—to prove the payment justified. Two years later, the duke paid up.

## A LOCAL METHUSELAH.

A tombstone in **All Saints'** churchyard runs thus :—

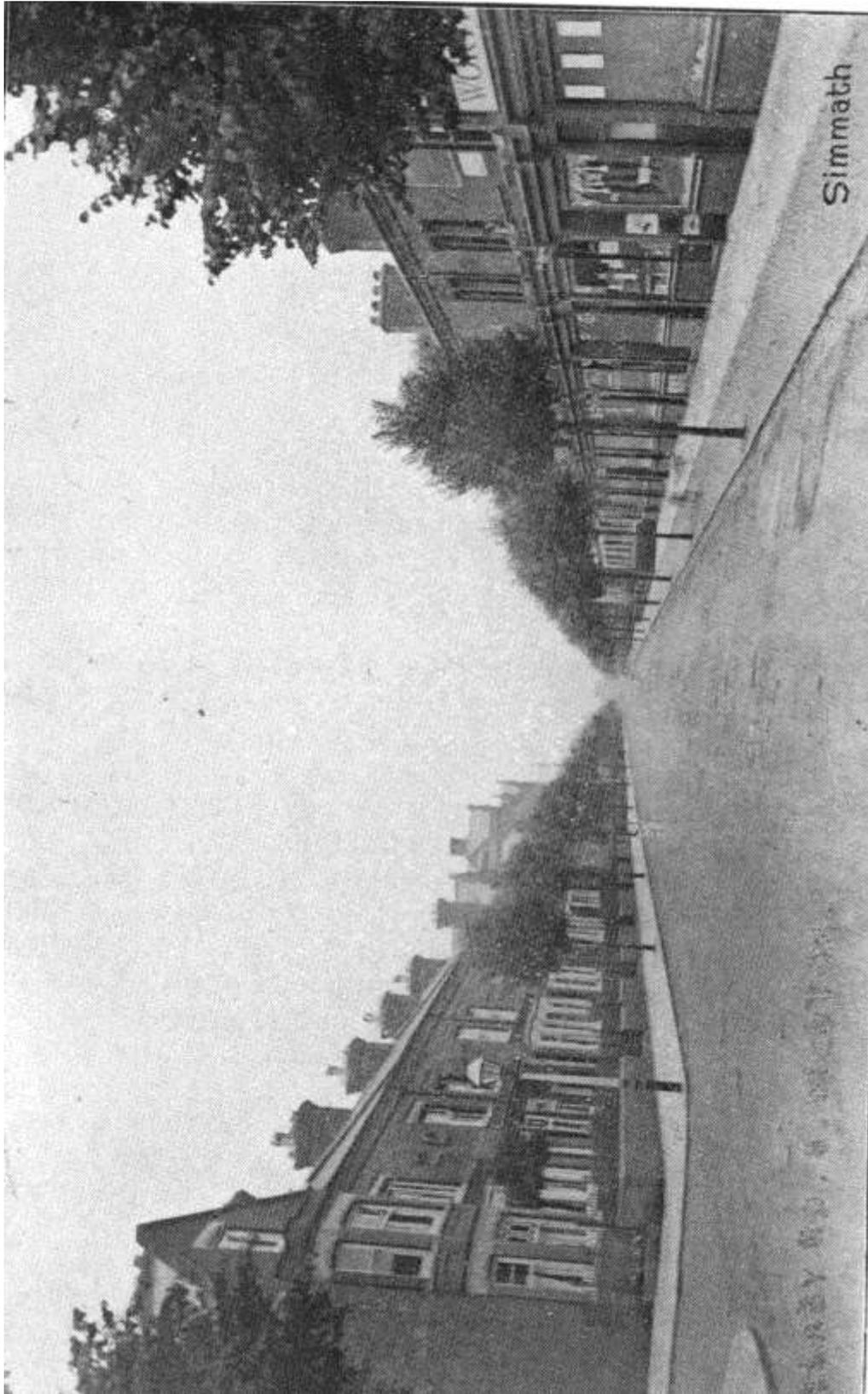
" Here lyeth the remains of RICHARD BRUIN senior and GOODITH his wife, aged 152 years, Jan. 21 Anno Do. 1718."

" Then Abraham gave up the ghost and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years."

An early overlord was **Robert de Vere**, first marquess and " Duke of Ireland."

Mediaeval **Wigstonians** were notorious for being short-tempered—as evidence the following incident mentioned in a document in the archives of the City of Leicester :

" And there was a fray in Parchment Lane (now "Bond " Street, Leicester) with the men of Wigston, ever of evil disposition



Blaby Road South Wigston      Photograph by W G Hall

and quarrelsome ; and they foughten with swords and clubs and in the fray one of them was slain, whereon the men of Wigston fled away."

In 1336 William Pyrye held one hundred shillings rent in Wyggeston from William of Harcourt (of Newton and Kibworth Harcourt) on payment of a yearly tribute of one red rose.

A later owner, Squire Baldwin Bugge (later changed to Wil-loughby) who lived about the year 1433, and bore for arms three water bougets (pig-skins used in the East for carrying water), had a rose, one pound of Cumin, and two capons for rents here.

### **AN EARLY BENEFACTOR .**

**William of Wyggeston**, a wealthy woolstapler, a native, dying childless in 1513, bequeathed his riches to found a hospital and a school in Leicester. Both still exist, and perpetuate the old spelling of **Wyggeston**. The school, now a grammar school, is the leading scholastic establishment in the county town, and the Hospital affords comfort and refuge for the sick and the needy of the district.

In 1564 there were only eighty families in **Wigston**. It is recorded that thirty-five years later, there was such a plague of moles that eighty seven and a half dozen were slain and paid for during the year.

The town abounds in open spaces and has consequently one of the healthiest situations in the Midlands.

As early as 1831 its record for salubrity was well-known for in the directory for that year one Joshua Burgess is described as being the proprietor of the lunatic asylum " established some 30 years ago, in a retired and salubrious spot." His name is remembered because of a ghost hoax. Burgess Hill takes its name from the residence at Wigston Grange of the Quaker Burgess Family.

In 1801 the population totalled 354 families living in 336 houses and numbering 1,658, of whom 113 were agriculturists and 1020 were engaged in trade. In 1921, the population had grown to 8,395, while to-day it is over 10,000 for the Urban District.

Within the last decade, the number of inhabitants of the Urban District has increased so much that the council employees are seeking more pay on the grounds that the 10,000 limit has been reached.

During the Civil War, gaol birds from Leicester were housed in Long Street in a field called the Gaol Close. Now devoted



Long Street Wigston Photo by W G Hall

to more pleasing ends, the site is covered by the Peace Memorial Park, where the inhabitants play tennis and bowls " *Out in the sun-kissed open, Under the deep blue sky,*"

with welcome shade bountifully provided by age-old elm trees of patriarchal girth.

In the same street, aptly named " Long," are the **Clarke** almshouses founded by Mrs **Elizabeth Clarke** (1781) for eleven old folk, men, maids and widows, provision being made for them to have Christmas boxes at the great annual festival, coats, and new gowns. The following year, Mrs **Catherine Palmer** bequeathed funds to the vicar and his curate as long as both continued to be *bona-fide* residents in the parish.

## TRANSPORT FACILITIES.

For road and rail transport, the **Wigstons** and **Glen Parva** are particularly favoured.

Wigston itself is on the London main line (L.M.S.) with a very frequent train service both North and South. **South Wigston** has its station on the old Midland line to **Rugby**, and **Glen Parva** has a third on the L.M.S. Railway to Rugby, Nuneaton, etc.

Season tickets issued on either of these lines can be used from any of the three stations.



Long Street Wigston Magna

Photo by W G Hall

In addition to these advantages by which the majority of Wigstonians in business in Leicester come home with ease for their mid-day meal, all three places are linked up in both directions by a five-minute motor-bus service, working a circular route to and from Leicester, both *via* Wigston and Oadby, and through South Wigston, Glen Parva, and Aylestone Park.

### **EDUCATION.**

There are three public elementary schools—one each for boys, girls, and infants, with accommodation for 890 scholars.

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF WIGSTON MAGNA.**

Wigston Magna is an Urban District in the administrative County of Leicester, and is divided into five Wards:—St. Wolstan's, Central, All Saints, Fairfield and Bassett. Three Councillors are elected by each Ward. Estimated Population, 10,100. Rateable Value of District, £35,693. Water is supplied by the Leicester Corporation, Gas and Electricity by local companies. Allotments have been provided by the Council which maintains a Peace Memorial Park of 2<sup>^</sup> acres and three Recreation Grounds of 92, 8<sup>^</sup>, and 3<sup>^</sup> acres respectively, and an open air Swimming Bath. Over 200 houses have been erected by the Local Authority. The Chief Officers are: Mr W. H. Gunning, Clerk to the Council; Mr W. G. J. Clark, Engineer and Surveyor; and Dr J. E. O'Connor, Medical Officer of Health.

## UNUSUAL STREET NAMES.

Amongst these, one may mention " Moat " street, " Bushloe End " and " Bull's Head "—the latter is named after an inn so designated.

The numerous hostels of this name throughout Leicestershire derive the appellation from the bull's head crest of the Hastings family, earls of Huntingdon, once seated at Ashby-de-la-Zouch castle, now a picturesque, ivy-clad ruin.

## CLUBS.

One of the oldest clubs in the county—the Working Men's, (in Long Street) dates from 1862. The Conservative Club, a well-built structure of recent growth, has a library and a large concert hall. There is a smaller Conservative club in South Wigston.

Its football club is amongst the front rankers in the county playing circles, and has gained the championship several times.

**Wigston Fields**, an outlying suburb of Top Wigston, is increasing so rapidly in population, that with many new houses springing up, and the " Midland Red " Bus Service (called " Red Emmas ") passing the doors, more and more city folks are fleeing from Leicester and making their homes in this highly situated healthy lung of Greater Leicester. Already the Wigston Fields houses nearly extend to the Leicester City boundary. A house with gas, electricity, a good garden, bathroom, and all modern conveniences can now be purchased on payment of a nominal deposit, the balance being paid off as rent.

Oliver Cromwell, on 14th June, 1645, after Naseby, slept at Wigston Manor House, the residence of the Pochins for centuries.

Travellers to Wigston note with amusement that the sign proudly swinging to-and-fro outside the "Royal Oak" Inn is hung on an elm tree !

## SOUTH WIGSTON.

Midway between " Top " and " South," is the mainline station to London (L.M.S.) known amongst old railwaymen as the " L. and H."—Leicester and Hitchin. In earlier days, the Midland only had running powers to Hitchin where it joined up with another line to reach London.

" Spion Kop " is the name (dating from that battle in the South African war) given to the raised roadway taking the place of the former level crossing at Wigston Magna station (L.M.S.).

South Wigston originated through the enterprise of the late **Mr Orson Wright, J.P.**, brickmaker, builder, contractor,

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Contractors to H.M. Admiralty  
Etc.

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COUNTESTHORPE



Church & War Memorial South Wigston Photo by W G Hall

iron founder, boot and shoe manufacturer, hat and cap maker, etc.

Mr Wright, a native of Dunton Bassett, near Lutterworth, a few miles away, early realised the great commercial possibilities of the area—it is served by three railway stations and two main lines—and set about encouraging manufacturers to establish their works amidst pleasant, healthy, country surroundings, yet within easy distance of Leicester.

Thus South Wigston happened. It has no "past."

Messrs Dunmore, biscuit manufacturers, were the first new arrivals. Others rapidly followed.

To-day, Wigston Urban District possesses banks, doctors, amateur dramatic societies, a silver prize band of repute, adult schools for men and women, evening classes, a public open-air swimming bath (thanks to the benevolence of the late **Mr Dun-more**), gas, electricity, and recreation grounds. Then there are three churches, chapels for Wesleyans, Congregationalists, Calvin-ists, Catholics, Primitive Methodists, a Christian's meeting house, a flourishing co-operative society, chemists, dentists, resident magistrates, and a charity committee for organising all charitable efforts, social clubs of political colour, and others of none, and, most important of all, **low county rates.**

The chief industries are the manufacturing of hosiery, boots, shoes, biscuits, and elastic web, and others include an iron foundry, hat and cap works, a dye house, sectional wooden buildings works,

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*See time table.*

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WIGSTON**

concrete slab manufactures but no brick works. The original brick-yard was worked out in the early days when South Wigstonians had to walk 2 miles to obtain milk !

South Wigston has its church—St. Thomas (1893) seating 600 worshippers, 3 schools (public elementary) for boys, girls, and infants, with accommodation for 1,265 scholars.

St. Thomas actually stands in the adjoining parish of Glen Parva. The memorial of the Great War nearby is placed on land given by the Church Council.

Probably the most-talked of Wigston man, although his reputation was one that brought no credit, was George Davenport, a highwayman whose fame in the Midlands was equal to that of Dick Turpin. He was " on the road " for 18 years and when hard pursued by Pease Officers always retreated to Wigston, where he was lost among friends. Ultimately he was caught, tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death at the Leicester Summer Assizes in 1797. Shortly afterwards he was hanged and at his own desire and the request of his relatives, who were influential persons, he was buried in Wigston Churchyard.

## **GLEN PARVA.**

Adjoining South Wigston is a parish lacking a village, in the lordship of Aylestone.

One road in South Wigston and about ten houses in Kirk-dale road are within its boundaries—one knows the limit by the old-fashioned blue brick paving which gives place to modern concrete slabs, where South Wigston parish " takes over."

At Glen Ford, there is a drift on the tiny river Sence, which divides Glen Parva from Blaby. Its disadvantage is the lack of a bridge. Half-a-mile away, is Glen Parva manor. Here, in the drift, in the year 1866, the arms and jewellery of two Saxons of high rank were found, together with the trinkets of a Saxon lady of position. These relics were supposed to date from the sixth century A.D.

In winter, the drift overflows and the road between South Wigston and Blaby is impassable, except by taking to the railway track. For this drawback, the Wigston authorities are not to blame as the area is beyond their sphere of local government.

The parish has a station (L.M.S.) serving the Rugby-Nuneaton area, and is the depot of the " Tigers," the old " 17th " or Leicestershire Regiment, called the Tigers because that animal forms their badge. This depot or the " barracks " as the local people misname it only wakes up to stir and bustle when war is afoot.

W. H. SHARP  
BUILDER

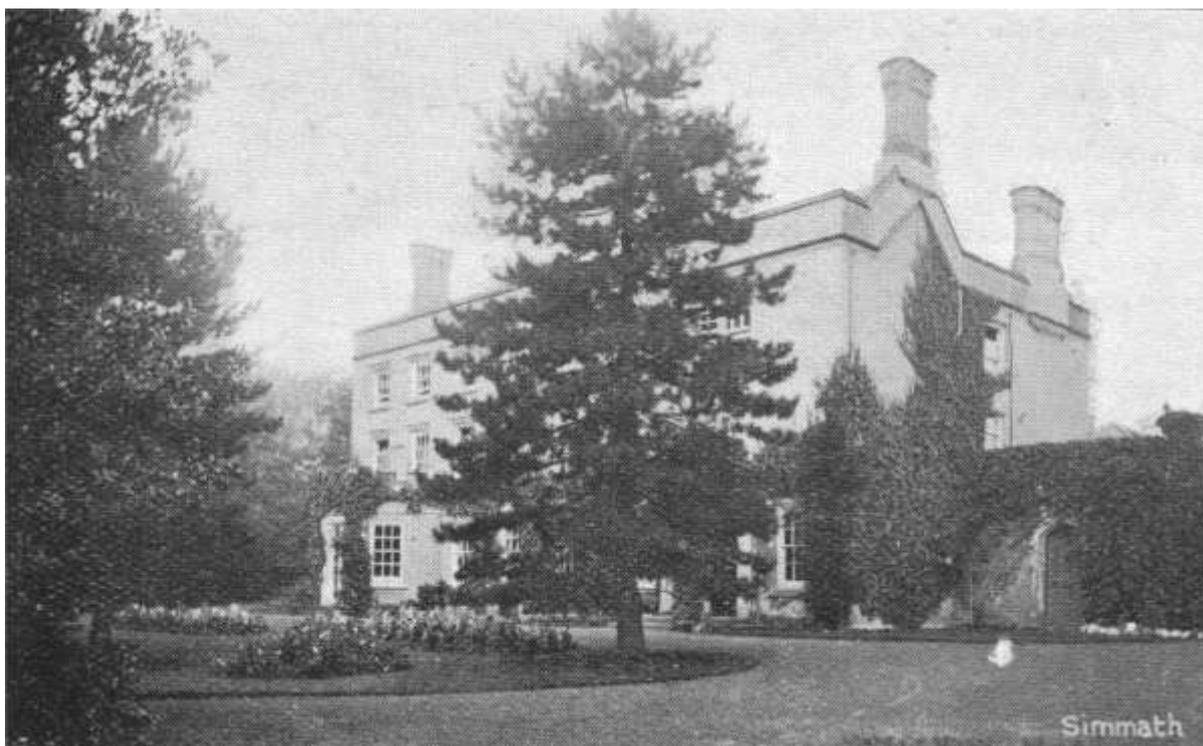
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A.D. 1801

WIGSTON MAGNA

KINDERS

Garage & Haulage Co., Ltd.

BLABY - - Near Leicester



Wigston Hall Wigston Magna Photo by W G Hall

**Blaby**, only three miles from Leicester, on the main Leicester-Lutterworth-Oxford road, is a village much increasing in population. Here again new houses are being built and they almost reach to **Old Aylestone**, which is now in the City.

Its best known rector losing his eyesight when a boy through an accident with a pistol, overcame the obstacles of lack of sight, became a clergyman, held the living and even went a-hunting. Then his clerk would accompany him, riding by his side carrying a bell. When the pair neared a hedge the man rang the bell and the sporting rector took the jump! Somewhat eccentric, this cleric had his own memorial placed on the chancel wall of Blaby church before his demise, with the words . . . " who died in the 18th century." He proved right—the actual year was never filled in—he expired in 1799!

**Newton Harcourt** and **Wistow** park are adjacent pleasure resorts where, in quaint old-world surroundings the inhabitants of Wigston can, if they desire, forget for a time, the increasing importance of the place of their habitation, and dream awhile where little has changed since the days when the late **Sir Henry Halford**, the famous rifle shot dwelt at **Wistow Park**. There can still be seen the great "bull's eye" for his 1000 yards rifle range, each hundred yards having a grass-turfed firing platform, now rarely used. A saddle and bridle, once the property of Prince Rupert who stayed there during the Civil War is still preserved at **Wistow Hall**, now the property and residence of **Lord Cottesloe**, lord of the manor of **Great Wigston**.



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Near Leicester

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This Society was started sixty years ago by a handful of men in a house-shop in Leicester Road, Wigston, with a Share Capital of £20. Now the Society has 3,200 members with a Share Capital of over £105,000, doing an annual trade of over £120,000 in twelve shops. It works the Collective Insurance Scheme whereby all its members are insured according to their purchases. Total paid up-to-date, £5,000. It runs a very successful Small Savings Bank, principally for its members' children, over £5,500 stands in this account at the present time, also a Building Department whereby its members are enabled to purchase their own houses on favourable terms of interest. It has a very live Educational Department worked by voluntary effort and is in charge of elected members. It publishes a monthly periodical called the "Wheatsheaf," and a yearly syllabus of propaganda concerts and lectures, also children's and employees' training classes are arranged for the winter months. A unique feature of the Society is its Poultry Farm which has its headquarters in Bull-Head Street, Wigston, where high-class pedigree, utility, and table birds are bred. Day-old chicks, sittings of eggs, and poultry of every description are sent all over the country.

See Advert, on . . . . . Page 1.

The firm of W. Holmes & Son, Wigston, like most of the other firms in Wigston, had a very humble beginning. In 1888, Mr William Holmes, the founder, purchased a second-hand machine known as the Hand Frame at a cost of £12 20s.

The machine, which is still to be seen in working order was placed in the kitchen of a four-roomed cottage, where lived a family of nine. From this extremely poor beginning Mr Holmes set out with a determination to win through, although it had not been his fortune to receive even one day's education. Many were the ups and downs of business in those days, about which much could be written; but let it suffice to say that progress was made. Machine after machine was added, and a sound, though small, business was established.

In the year 1911 his son joined him in partnership. Up to that time no power machines had been purchased, but the new partner, realising the necessity of up-to-date machinery, at once set about finding ways and means of installing a modern plant. During the last few years, in spite of the many business difficulties, the firm had made rapid progress, and now has a large plant of the latest machinery for producing Children's, Boys' and Men's Golf Hose, and is housed in a pleasantly situated building of modern construction,

The many buyers and friends interested in hosiery manufacture will find the management at the Newton Lane Works very pleased to receive them.

See Advert, on . . . . . Inside Front Cover.

The firm of W. A. Atkinson & Co. was established in July 1923, and specialises in the Dyeing and Finishing of all kinds of Artificial Silk Hosiery. By careful selection of the most suitable dyes, and by keeping in touch with the scientific progress of the trade, the firm has been enabled year by year to extend its premises, and now ranks amongst the leaders of this class of dyeing and finishing. Each year brings new speciality lines to the makers of Artificial Silk Hosiery, and the firm of W. A. Atkinson & Co. is always alert to see these specialities through, and to do all that is possible to assist the manufacturers to create good selling lines. The Proprietors of the firm are quite young men, and new ideas are always being carefully considered to keep the business running on the sound lines on which it has been established.

See Advert, on . . . . . Inside Back Cover.

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of Ladies' Artificial Silk Hose.

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**L E I C E S T E R**

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