

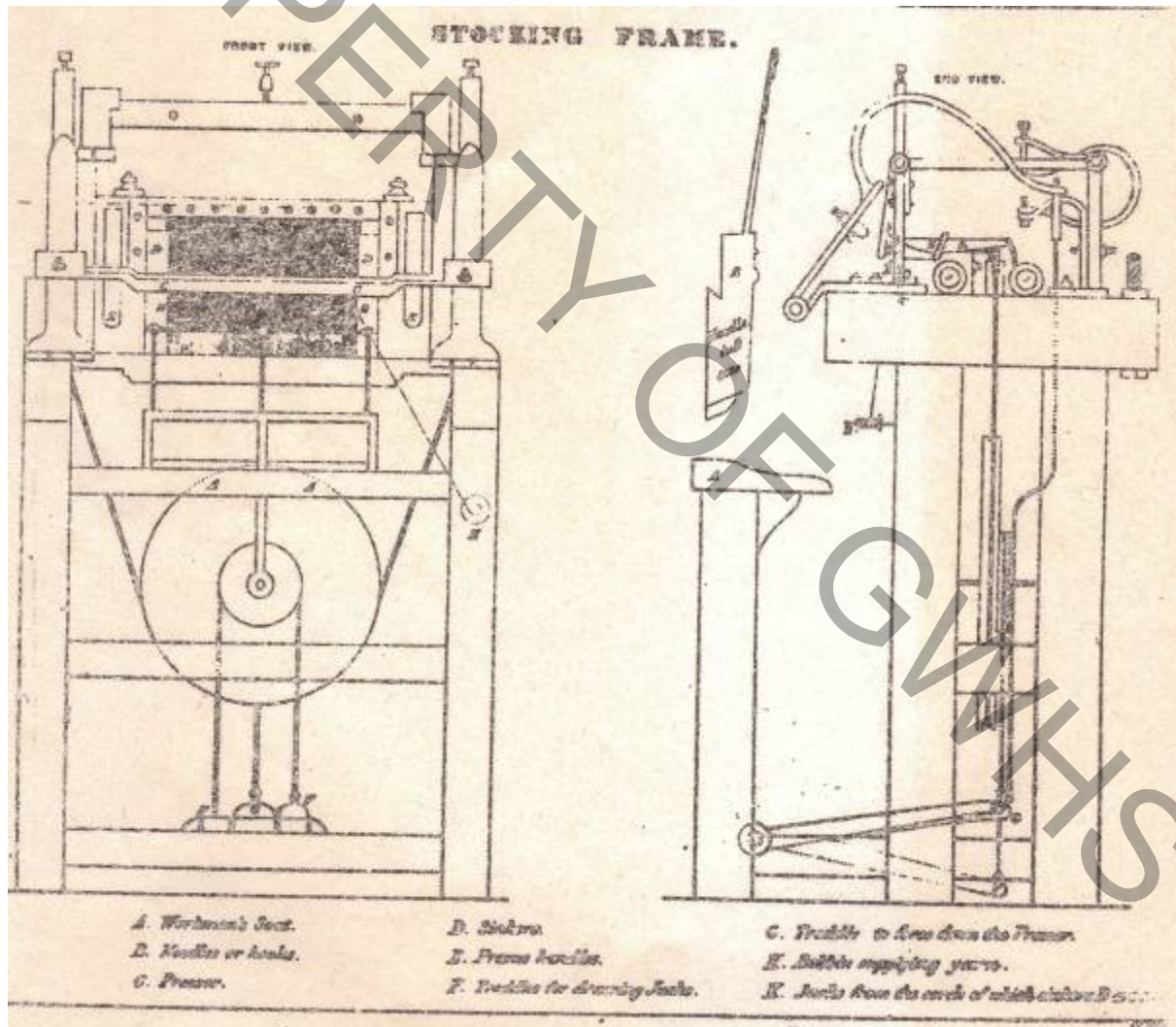


# Greater Wigston Historical Society

White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna Leicestershire

Feb '84

bulletin 8



## NOTICES

### **Programme until Easter**

Feb. Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup>

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

+ Wigston Video and Members interest corner....

(Bring along an antique or anything of interest.)

Mar. Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup>

“Dating Small Houses in Leicestershire”

An illustrated talk by I R Varley.

Apr. Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup>

MUSEUM SPRING CLEANING

The April meeting will, of course, be at the museum at White Gate Farm on Newton Lane. Other meetings will be held at the Wigston Liberal Club starting at 7.30pm.

### **Subscriptions for 1984**

These will be due in February at the AGM. It will help Brian Bilson, the Membership Sec, if you pay your subs. at the AGM. Subscription is £2.00 and £1.00 for OAP's and under 18 years. (Unless they are changed at the AGM.)

Please make an effort to come to the AGM. We have tried to make it an interesting evening as well as getting through the business part! Can you bring a friend along? We are always looking for new members..... Do you know a neighbour or anyone else interested in local history????

### **Articles etc.**

Anyone with an article or a notice for the Bulletin please get them to the editor three weeks before the publishing dates.

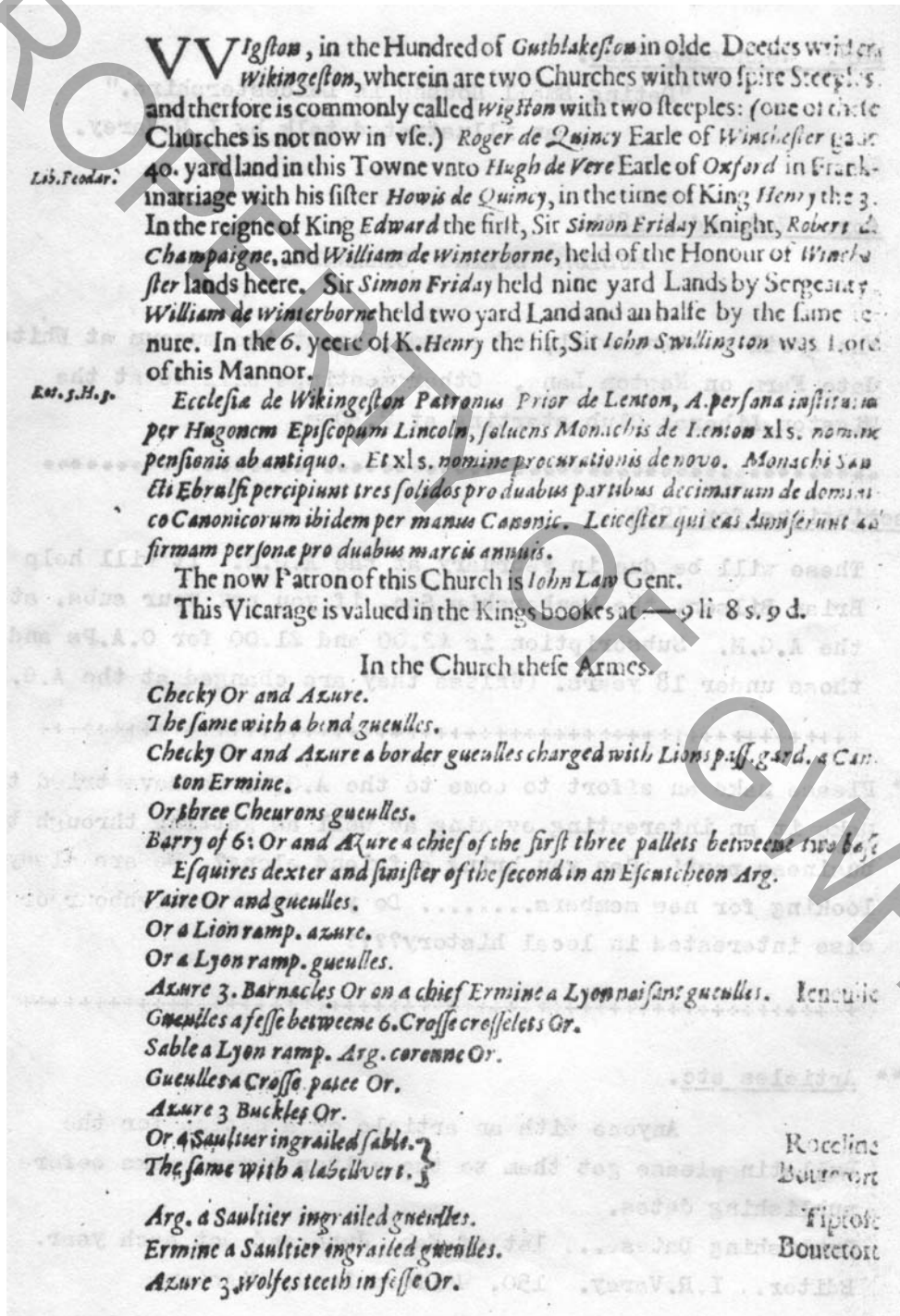
Publishing dates... 1<sup>st</sup> of Feb. June and Oct each year

Editor I R Varey, 150 Welford Road Wigston.

**William Burton**  
**Description of Leicestershire**

William Burton, born 1575, died 1647, was persuaded by his friends to publish in 1622. He considered it incomplete and by 1627 had prepared a second edition which would have been twice the length. Publication of this was overtaken by the Civil war and the Mss. Is now lost.

Burton's format, a general description followed by individual accounts of each village has been widely followed, included in these are Nichols and the Victoria County History.



## RATHER MORE THAN A COINCIDENT!!

Roland Robinson, just before his death, told me a ' tale about his father who was the grave digger at Welford Road Cemetery which was opened in 1880. "Many a time when my father was digging he made historical finds and the artefacts were presented to Leicester Museum.

On one occasion he found a broken sword, on another a smashed skull surrounded by stones. He found numerous bits of pottery and beads. Armour and bits of harness were also unearthed. Roland continued, my father said that,

*'It was .lust as if a battle had taken place there! '*

Next, remember the County Historian, Nichols, he tells of the finding of Saxon Brooches in the same area when the Turnpike Road was being made.

BROOCH.

From the Anglo Saxon Chronicles we know that the Danish Army capture Leicester in A.D. 875/6, Wigston was burnt by the Danes. Could the present Cemetery site be the site of a battle? or the mass grave of those killed in the sacking of Wigston? or was this the original site of Saxon Wigston, whose name has since been lost. Could Horsewell Lane, Welford Road and the old track which still runs by Tythorn Schools and use to lead to Rawlin's Farm, be the street pattern of the old burnt village?

The present village, based on the hollow square ( A Ring Fenced Village ), was built by the Danish settlers and the Saxon survivors, but was it built on a new site, and is that why it was given a new name 'Vikingstone!. But enough of the speculation.

In August 1981 a woman and her son travelling from Nottingham to Basingstoke with a car and caravan, had the misfortune to break down, Her car needed two days to achieve repairs and they parked in the fields opposite the Wigston Magna Cemetery to await the offending vehicle's return.

Mr. Peter Wilford spoke to her after her first night's stop and she told him of her fear of the site. 'I'm Psychic' she said 'and this is an evil spot. I heard shouts and shrieks groans and the clashing of metal, just as if a battle was being fought!' Peter said nothing, wished her well and trusted she would sleep the second night. 'I will,' said the lady' I have got some sleeping pills.'

Peter, knowing the history of the area, decided to return the following morning to find out how the Caravaners had got on. 'Did you sleep? ' Peter asked.

Yes was the reply but the lady went on to 'say that she was awakened by whom she thought was her son shouting, 'Get up! Get up!' Half awake the poor lady was confronted by a youth of pale countenance dressed in a white robe, which then vanished. 'My son' said the lady, was still sleeping in the bunk opposite, totally unaware of our visitor.' Looking out of the caravan window she said 'It was dawn and everywhere was covered in mist. 'Look here's my car, I can't get away quick enough,' Peter never told her of the facts he knew regarding the area.

Perhaps we can find this lady one day.

The Leicester Search Society who have helped so much in investigating the area, has as its leader Mr. Husgrove, His wife, without this knowledge, declared the area evil!. She cannot explain her feelings but Said that she was very uncomfortable when she visited her husband while he was surveying the area.

Mr, Bill Ward, an, ardent Wigston Historian told me of a lady living in Homestead Drive who confided in him one day saying. 'Bill I've had a vision, I saw men in ancient costume, armour' The lady asked Bill to accept her confidence again, as she thought! no one would believe her. As I looked out of my window towards the cemetery it was misty and I saw an army or a large number of 151 with spears and shields and armour walking or marching through the mist. They were gone as quickly as they appeared, I don't know the lady's name, but I know and trust Bill Ward, Peter Wilford and Mrs Husgrove

Well this is my tale to you, Is there a message coming across the centuries from this ancient spot? What do you think?

Duncan Lucas

P.S. A building site worker was killed in a trench in this area sun Wednesday 21st September, 1983

### **THE EAST MIDLANDS HOSIERY INDUSTRY PAST & PRESENT**

Hosiery and Knitwear has been one of the major industries of the East Midlands for over two centuries, but neither in the past or the present has it been an entirely stable one. This day conference will consider the origins, development and structure of the industry and will include a field visit to study its impact on one particular community.

The cost of the Conference is £2.50, to include coffee during the morning and at lunchtime. Participants are asked to bring a packed lunch and a bar will be open. Private cars will be used for the afternoon visit.

- 10. 00. am Coffee
- 10.30. Dr. Marilyn Palmer (Loughborough University) :  
PROBLEMS OF THE PAST : THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF FRAMEWORK  
KNITTING IN THE EAST MIDLANDS.
- 11.45. John T. Millington (Editor, Knitting International) :  
PROBLEMS OF TODAY ,: THE MODERN HOSIERY AND KNITWEAR INDUSTRY.
- 1.00.pm. Sandwich lunch.
- 1.45. Introduction to the field visit.
- 2,15. Visit to John Scott-Nichol , hosiery manufacturers of Shepshed, to see  
working demonstration of knitting frames.  
This afternoon will also include a walk around the village looking at the  
surviving buildings associated with its important hosiery.

Please book by February 27th. A map will be sent with the receipt for conference fees

N.B, Cheques should be made payable to Loughborough University

Please return this Booking Form, together with Conference fee of £2.50 per person, to Dr Marilyn Palmer EMSU History Department Loughborough University, Loughborough Leicestershire. LE11 3TU by February 27<sup>th</sup> 1984.

NAME/S .....  
ADDRESS .....  
.....

**October '83 Meeting!**

"Wigston Slide Quiz."

The opening meeting of the Winter Programme, at a new venue, the Wigston Liberal Club, proved to be very successful in attracting new members.

The Quiz was carefully planned with colourful slides of the Greater Wigston area,' Some 24 slides showing buildings in part or in whole, and some photographed from unusual angles, were used. House names, street names and a rather special lamp standard, all took on new meaning by the well posed questions. Everyone recognised the public house on the Bank

until 'Which Queen's Head is shown on the sign?' Perhaps more readers than quiz participants will know the answer!

It was a thoroughly enjoyable meeting for a lively interest was maintained throughout. All thanks due to Ian, for much time spent in talking photographs and in setting the questions and even to providing the prize. This was won by a young visitor, well done Jane. The runner up was a new member who had only joined the G. W.H.S. that evening. So watch out folks!!

November '83 Meeting.

"Wigston through the Camera."

Mr. Bill Ward entertained us with a really first class slide show.

Some two dozen members readily joined in with Mr. Ward's commentary, as he moved from one Wigston landmark to another. Each house and building had a story, either remembered or collected by Bill, or a member of the audience. This of course is the pleasure in such an evening, for photographs invariably bring back many of those almost forgotten memories. For the relative newcomers it provides a flashback to old Wigston.

One of the highlights was a series of old Wigston Photographs which Bill had made into slides, from the originals; these took us back to nineteenth century Wigston. A more serious outcome from such a meeting was the feeling of sadness at the loss of so many old buildings, especially in Bull Head Street. Groups such as ours need to be vigilant for modern Wigston seems to grow at the expense of old Wigston, rather than in harmony with it. The meeting closed at 9.3pm. with a warm vote of thanks to Bill.

January '84 Meeting.

"Frameknitting"

We were indeed fortunate to have as our guest speaker Dr. Marilyn Palmer. Dr. Palmer is Head of the History Department at Loughborough University and she is an authority on Industrial Archaeology. She has just finished writing the Shire Book on Frameknitting and it was on this subject that she spoke to us.

Some thirty members and friends listen to the historical development of this industry unique to the East Midlands and which played an important part in the daily family life of many of the inhabitants of old Wigston. With the help of some splendid slides, we not only

followed the growth of the industry, but were fascinated by the mechanics of how knitting frames actually worked.

An article on Frameknitting appears in this bulletin and to a large extent it is based on Dr. Palmer's talk.

There is also a notice about a forthcoming Saturday lecture and visit to do with Frameknitting, for anyone who is interested.

After the vote of thanks there was a short business meeting to decide the format of the February meeting. As well as the formal A.G.'M. it was decided to show the Wigston Video as many new members had not seen it. Members are also invited to bring along an antique or other items of interest which would be of interest and stimulate comment and discussion.

Please bring along any suggestions for future meetings, for it is time to start planning next year's programme!!!!

#### **1861 Census Returns - Wigston Magna Master Hosiers**

Thomas Cooper	Bull Head Street	5 Men
James Poole	Bull Head Street	16 Men
Thomas Layley	Bull Head Street	20 Men and 5 Boys
Joseph Mould	Spa Lane	57 Men, 14 Women & 1 Boy
William Abbot	Moat Street	30 Women & 10 Boys
John Simpson	Moat Street	Manufacturer of Children's Socks

#### **1871 Census Returns - Wigston Magna - Master Hosiers**

James Brewin	Bull Head Street	16 Men, 4 Women & 6 Boys
William Wyatt	Bull Head Street	10 men & 2 Boys
Thomas Lewin	Church Nook	3 Men
William Simpson	Bell Street	12 Men, 4 Women & 3 Boys
William Abbot	Bell Street	12 Men, 2 Women & 5 Boys
Ambrose Lee	Bell Street	19 Men & 37 Women
John Heard	Bushloe End	10 Men & 2 Boys
Samuel Glover	Moat Street	12 Men, 8 Women & 6 Boys

#### **1881 Census Returns - Wigston Magna - Hosiery Masters & Manufacturers**

James Brewin	Bull Head Street	Hose and Shirt Manu.
Caroline Lewin	Moseley End	Hosiery Manu.
Ambrose Lee	Bell Street	Children's Socks Manu. 87 hands



John Wignall	Bell Street	Frame Knitting Master 2 men & wife
Joseph Mould	Bell Street	Hose Manu: 20 men & 3 Boys
William Abbot	Arthur's Villa	Sock Manu. 40 men & 8 Boys
Benjamin Brewin	Leicester Road	Mitten Frame Knitter
Edward Lee	Gladstone Street	Sock Manu:
Charlotte Westbury	Long Street Court B	Manu: of Hosiery
George Pickard	Blaby Lane	Hosiery Manu
John Carr	Welford Road	Rib Top Manu: 11 Girls & 2 Boys
Joseph Goodman	Little Hill	Hosiery Manu
John Orton	Newton Lane	Manager of Hosiery Frames
Henry Hill	Moat Street	Hosiery Manu: 10 Men & 4 Women
Samuel Glover	Moat Street	Hosiery Manu: 20 Hands
Elizabeth Barber	Bell Street	Yarn Winder Mistress 4 Women 1 Man 1 Girl
Henry Hurst	Bushloe End	Fancy Hosiery Manu: 10 men & 4 Boys

### Notes on Frameknitting

In Tudor times worsted spinning and the knitting of hose was wide spread in the East Midlands. It was organised as a cottage industry with middlemen and factors in charge of the cottage based workers. The knitting machine was invented in 1589 by the Rev. William Lee of Calverton, Nottinghamshire. One of the stories claims that Lee invented this frame-knitting machine so that his paramour would spend less time at home knitting and more time with him. The new invention was not readily adopted by the Handknitters of the East Midlands thinking that it might take away their jobs. Lee and his brother James took the frame to London, but they failed to get Royal approval from Queen Elizabeth I basically because this early machine produced hose of rougher quality than that which could be made by hand. So the brothers moved to France.

Still without success Lee died in France in 1610, and James moved back to London. Improvements were made to the frame and it was used to make silk hose. Growth was slow and in 1650 there were only some 100 machines in the whole country,, In 1657 the Hand Frame Knitters were incorporated. Trade was regulated, apprentices vetted, quality of work maintained and import bans enforced.:

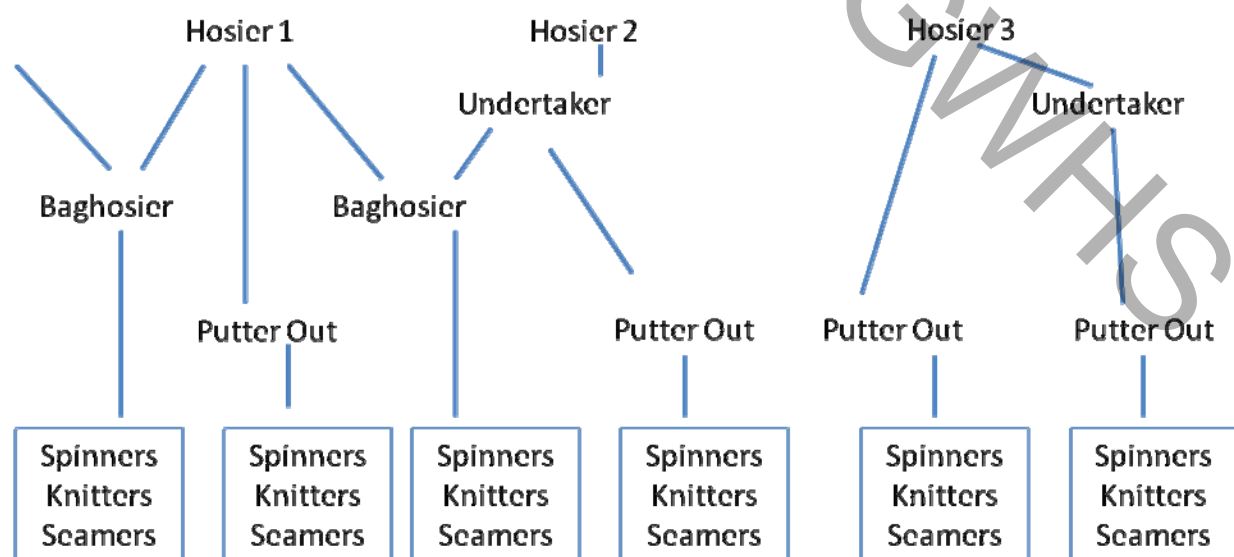
At about the same time the first frames were working in Leicestershire, at Hinckley and shortly afterwards in Leicester. Just when the first frames came to Wigston is not known, but in a will dated 1680 four knitting frames valued at £10 are mentioned. The industry was well established in Wigston by the mid eighteenth century when about one in five worked knitting frames.

Regional distinctions were evident from this early date. The area around Derby concentrated on silk work, Nottingham on cotton and Leicester on worsted (woollen), Wigston an off shoot of Leicester, was primarily knitting long woollen hose, which, the gentlemen's fashion of the period demanded, to accompany the knee length breeches.

The Frame Knitting industry fitted easily into the organisation which already existed to operate the hand knitting industry. The knitting frame although mechanised relied for its operation upon human muscle power. It was therefore quite possible to site individual frames in cottages and houses. Frequently windows had to be enlarged to allow more light into the work area. Many new house were built with large, long windows specifically so knitting frames could be used.

In the late eighteenth century a knitting frame cost about £10, this of course was far too expensive for most ordinary families to buy. Frames were rented from a Master Hosier or a Middleman, for some 2/- to 2/6 a week. This became a valuable source of income for many people. The Hosier or Middleman also supplied the yarn for knitting and then collected in the finished goods and sold them. In fact everything belonged to the entrepreneurs, the Knitters were simply paid for the knitting that they did. The Truck System also operated in many areas. This involved paying the Knitters with tokens, which could only be spent in certain shops, where prices might be kept high. The Knitters and Seamers were very much at the mercy of the Hosiers and Middlemen. Many of course were decent and honest men but the system was easily open to abuse by the unscrupulous, especially when times were hard.

There were many variations in the way individual Master Hosiers organised their businesses. The following examples show some of the more common practices.....



At the end of the chain were the spinners, knitters and seamers, the three jobs reflect the stages of production. In large families the children who were too young to operate the frames might be employed as cheap labour, for spinning. The spun yarn would then be taken away to be washed. Older daughters and wives were engaged in cutting up and seaming. Husbands and older sons would work the frames. The work was physically demanding and was regarded as men's work. In hard times women had to work frames as well, in order to make a living. All the work was regulated by the Middlemen. They wielded enormous power over the lives of the knitters and seamers who depended upon them for work. If there was no work, frame rents and other charges still had to be paid.

**The Master Hosier** was at the top of the pyramid. He usually had so many frames rented out to knitters that he employed Middlemen to co-ordinate the day to day operations. The Master might concentrate on buying and selling wool and on getting orders and selling finished goods. Many of the finished pairs of hose were packed into pack-horse panniers and sent to the London Markets.

**Undertakers** were much like Master Hosiers in that they owned frames and often employed Middlemen, but they usually operated on a smaller scale. Hosiers might subcontract work to undertakers, or they might be working independently.

**Putter\_Outs** were the people who dealt directly with the spinners, knitters and seamers. Originally they took materials out to the workers at their houses and later in the week collected the finished work. They paid the workers and deducted charges. By the nineteenth century the charges could amount to half of a knitter's pay. N.B. This payment for work done is the origin of 'Piece Work', that is payment for the amount of goods produced, a tradition which has remained very strong in the East Midlands.

**Baghosiers** did the same work as the Putter outs but they were free-lance, that is they worked for more than one Hosier and even for themselves in a small way. When mechanisation came in the late nineteenth century, it was often the Baghosiers who were the first to set up small factories. Olton Harding seems to have survived up to 1932 as Wigston's last named Baghosier.

By the nineteenth century the Middlemen were in such a strong position that they were able to stop going on their rounds from house to house. Now the knitters had to go to them to collect materials and return finished goods.

There was also a move, at this time in Leicestershire, to build small garden workshops often of two storeys and able to accommodate perhaps five or six of the new wide frames. Frames were still hand and foot operated and knitters still paid rent for the frame and the

space it stood in as well as their needles and candles etc. Several of these workshops survive in Wigston and examples can be seen in Spa Lane, Moat Street and Bushloe End.

William Lee's original frame was only capable of stocking stitch. During the period 1750 to 1820 many improvements were made to the knitting frame.

The invention of the 'Tuck Presser' for lozenges and zigzags) and the Derby Rib Frame, enabled a much wider range of 'Fancy work' to be done. These inventions increased the versatility of the knitting frames and so a greater number of different garments could be made. In 1795 the Warp Frame increased still farther the variety of patterns, this machine was also ideal for making gloves.

Wide Frames, as the name suggests, increased the size of the material which could be knitted. These machines also encouraged the first move from the cottage to the small workshop.

In 1808, Heathcoat of Loughborough invented the Traverse Bobbin Net machines this together with the eyelet attachment made possible the development of the Nottingham Lace Industry.

By 1812 there were 25000 Knitting Frames in the East Midlands and by 1844 the number had risen to 44,000 frames, which represented 95% of the National total.

In 1844s Wigston had 550 frames and over half the population was engaged in the hosiery industry. In a hundred years the whole anatomy of the village had changed, from agriculture to industry.

The peak in Leicestershire's Frame Knitting Industry, however, had been reached. The 1840's were a time of severe economic depression. Fashion had changed, gentlemen of the day wore trousers and the market for long hose had gone. The industry tried to diversify but there was over capacity of frame produced goods which were relatively expensive and not what the market wanted. Nottingham built up the Lace industry and began to use powered machines.

Powered machines had been known from the early eighteenth century and some recognised them as the way forward; for they brought down unit costs and could produce a far greater range of saleable goods. The Leicestershire Hosiers resisted the move towards powered machines in purpose built factories. Their motive was of course vested interest. Manual labour was plentiful and cheap, and a considerable income was derived from frame rents

and standing charges. The financial burden of the depression, therefore, fell disproportionately upon the spinners, knitters and seamers.

Next time I hope to give examples of Frameknitting in Wigston in the nineteenth century and follow the story to the Hosiery factories of today.

Ian R Varey

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