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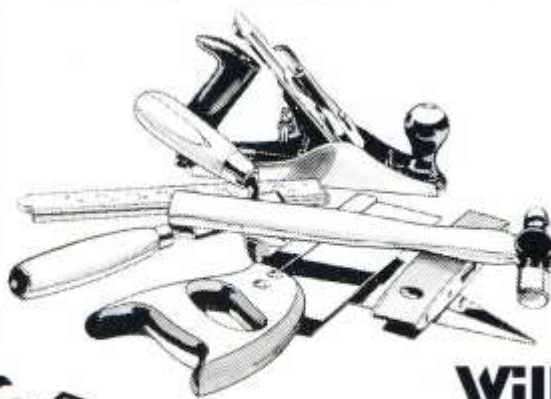
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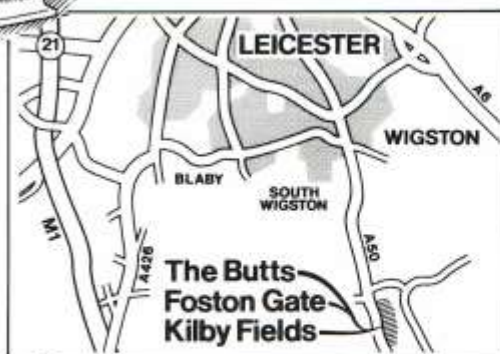
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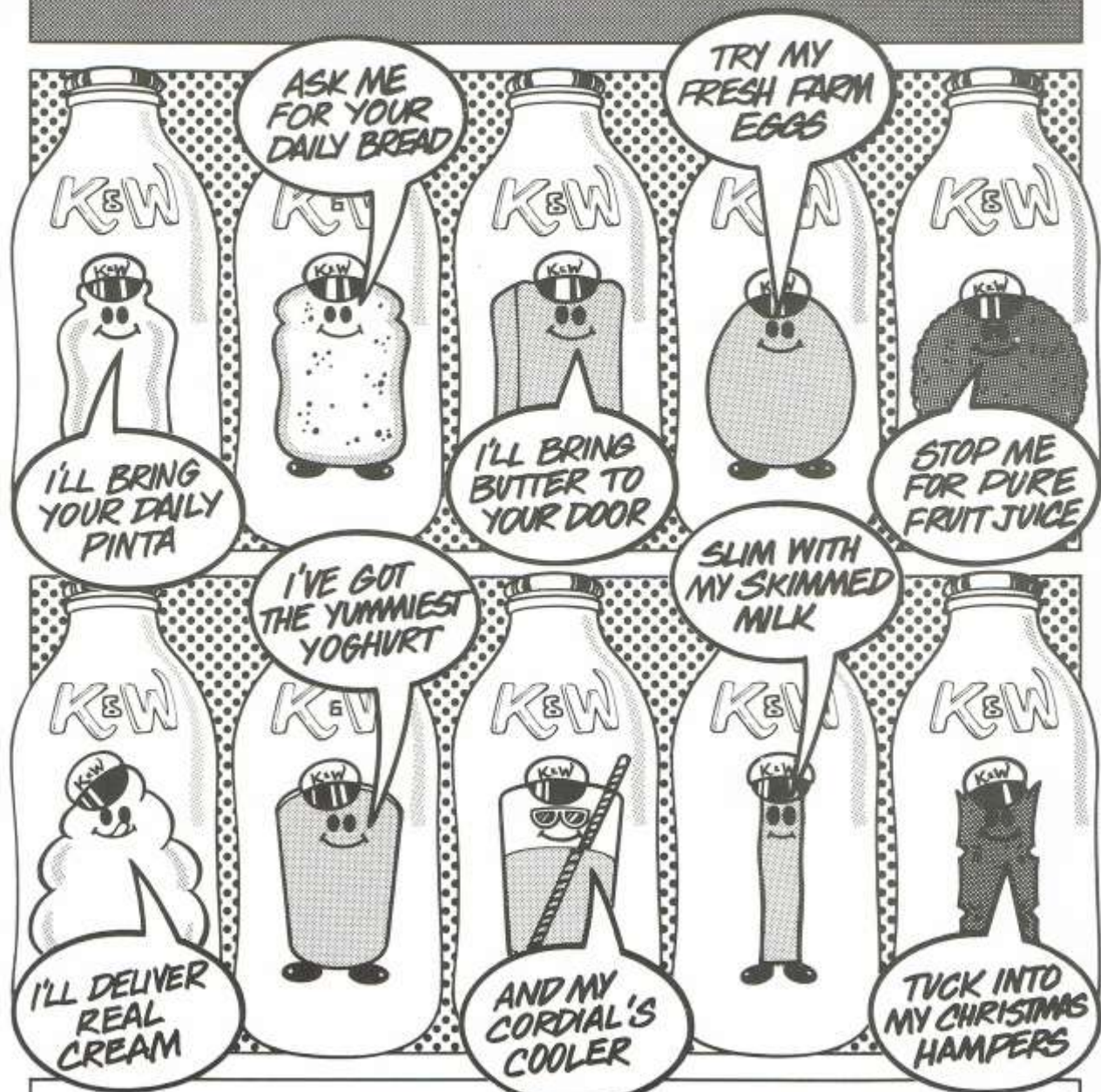
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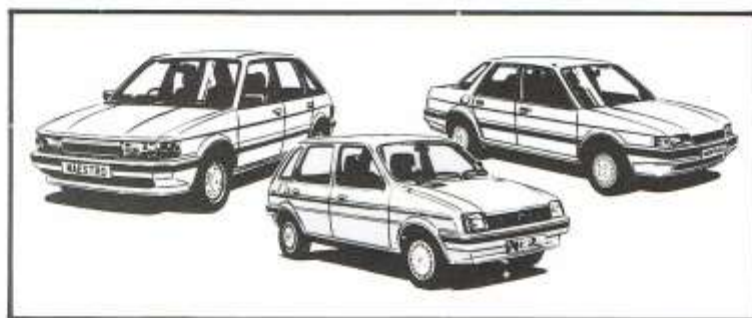
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# WIGSTON HARCOURT

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Thanks too for the support given by the Advertisers

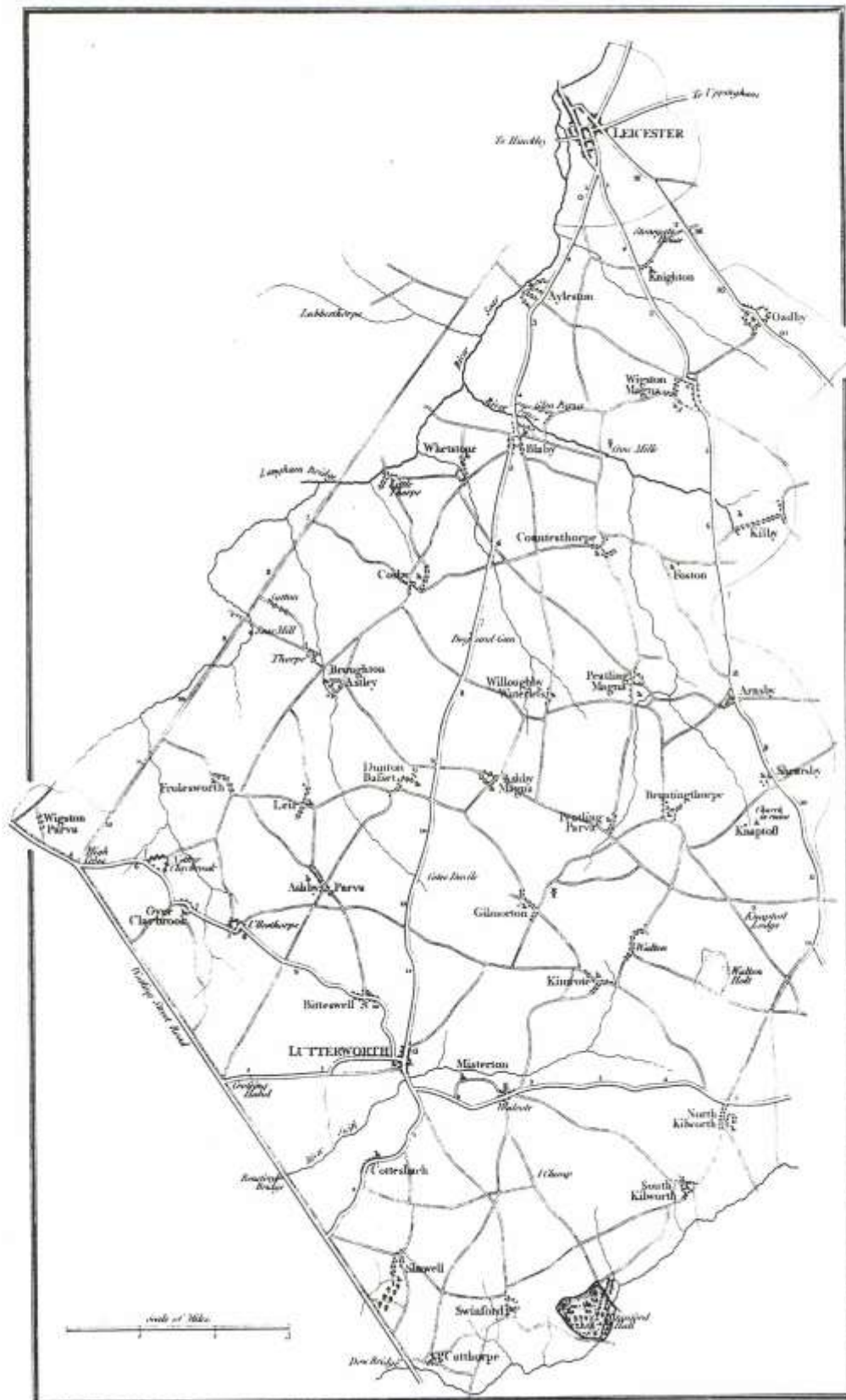
Printed by AB Printers Limited

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Published by

O D Lucas, White Gate Farm, Newton Lane,  
Wigston, Leicester

This is a detailed historical map of the Leicestershire and Rutland area, showing the River Great Ouse and its tributaries. The map includes numerous place names such as Leicester, Lutterworth, and various smaller villages. It also shows the railway network and a scale bar at the bottom.



## THE NAME OF WIGSTON — HOW AND WHY

May I first quote Jill Bourne in her publication *Place-names of Leicestershire and Rutland*.

'The understanding of place-names depends on the interpretation and comparison of early spellings. In a few cases names are recorded in documents of the Anglo-Saxon period, although they rarely appear more than once or twice. For most places, the name is first recorded in Domesday Book — 1086. When looking at these Domesday forms it is important to keep in mind that the scribes who compiled the book were Norman-French, and one can see the struggle they had to render the name they were given for a place into a form that had an equivalent in their own language. We can imagine these Norman-French royal clerks, cultured and literate, riding around this foreign land trying to make sense of the guttural utterances of the rough Anglo-Saxon and Viking peasantry they would have encountered.

Because of this problem with the language any Domesday spelling needs the support of later forms (or earlier, if they exist) before we can say with any certainty what the name means. Some of the more important sources of early place-names are: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*; old wills; legal writs; land charters; market charters; Pipe Rolls; Patent Rolls; Assize Rolls; ecclesiastical and manorial records; private archives (such as the Duke of Rutland's papers), and the Leicestershire Survey to name but a few.

Many people believe that place-names are easily interpreted. This is seldom the case. If we want to be sure of the meaning the name had when it was first given, all the early spellings need to be examined as both the spelling and pronunciation of a name have usually changed so much over the centuries that the modern form may, at best, bear only a slight resemblance to the original and, at worst, be completely misleading.

Often names that are identical in their modern spellings are totally different in origin. Wigston Magna and Wigston Parva, separated by only a few miles, are good illustrations of this. All the known early forms of both these places are given here in order to show how the original difference in meaning became obscured over time.

In Domesday Book Wigston Parva is recorded as 'Wicestan' and Wigston Magna as 'Wichingestone'. Wigston Magna is first recorded in its modern form in 1453 whilst Wigston Parva does not arrive at its modern spelling until 1610.

### *Domesday Book*

|                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Wicestan        | Wichingestone   |
| Wiggestan       | Wichingestona   |
| Wigestan        | Winchingestun   |
| Wichestain      | Wikingeston     |
| Wiggenston      | Wykinggestonne  |
| Wyggeston       | Wigingeston     |
| Wiggeston       | Wykigstone      |
| Wykeston        | Wixton          |
| Wikeston        | Wigston (Magna) |
| Wigston (Parva) | 1453            |
| 1610            |                 |

The meaning of Wigston Parva is not entirely straightforward. The second element is clear; it is the OE [Old English] *stan* which means a 'stone'. As the settlement is only half a mile from the Roman settlement of Venonae the 'stone' could be a Roman milestone or perhaps a gravestone. It is the meaning of the first element that is in some doubt; it could be the personal name Wicg or Wicga — 'Wicga's stone' or it could be derived from the OE *wigga* which has various subtleties of meaning, one of

which is 'a beetle', the other being 'something which wiggles'. If this were the case then the 'stone' might have been a 'logan stone', that is a stone which is easily rocked or moved. This latter interpretation is a fascinating one, but the former, that the 'stone' was connected in some way with the Roman settlement seems the more likely. The discovery of a fort here seems to add weight to this interpretation.

The meaning of Wigston Magna is straightforward, it is a personal name — Vikingr's tun (settlement). This name is derived from the OE word *viking* meaning a 'pirate'.

By the 16th century, the difference in meaning of the two Wigstons' was no longer obvious in either spelling or (it would be reasonable to assume) pronunciation, this led to the suffixes Magna and Parva coming into use.

The above example gives some idea of the care which needs to be taken in determining what a place-name means... each one of these (different early) forms needs to be studied carefully in the light of both the development of the Old English and the Old Scandinavian languages and their dialects, and of our knowledge of the national and local history of the various peoples who settled in this country.

In addition, the topography of the area being studied is often vital in leading to the final decision as to the meaning of the name given to a place by those first settlers between a thousand and fifteen hundred years ago.'

This gives a clear indication of how the modern Wigston Magna achieved its name, but other variations were used bearing in mind the two villages one Saxon and one Danish.

Two villages so two churches. One at 'Old' Wigston called St Wistans, then St Wolstans for 400 years, now back to St Wistans; the other church at Wigston Magna called All Saints. This was very clear when I was a boy in the 1930s, Old Wigston was always around St Wolstans; the All Saints area was Magna.

Two Manor Houses one in Newgate End and one in Long Street, one Manor named Turville and one named Oxford, in 1140 King Stephen confirmed gifts of the Church (note plural) of Wickingeston and Wiggeston to the priory of Lenton confirming the two villages.

Other spellings were the name Simon de Wykyngeston who in 1344 was an 'ernemongere' and also went under the name Simon le Baylif showing how confusion in names occurred. Henry Wygston in 1432 William Wigston of 1512 — Wigston with Two Steeples in 1529 — Henry VIII's time. Use of the name has a poignant phase as in 1590 on February 3rd a beggar was delivered of a baby. Parishioners named him Wigston. He died on February 22nd.

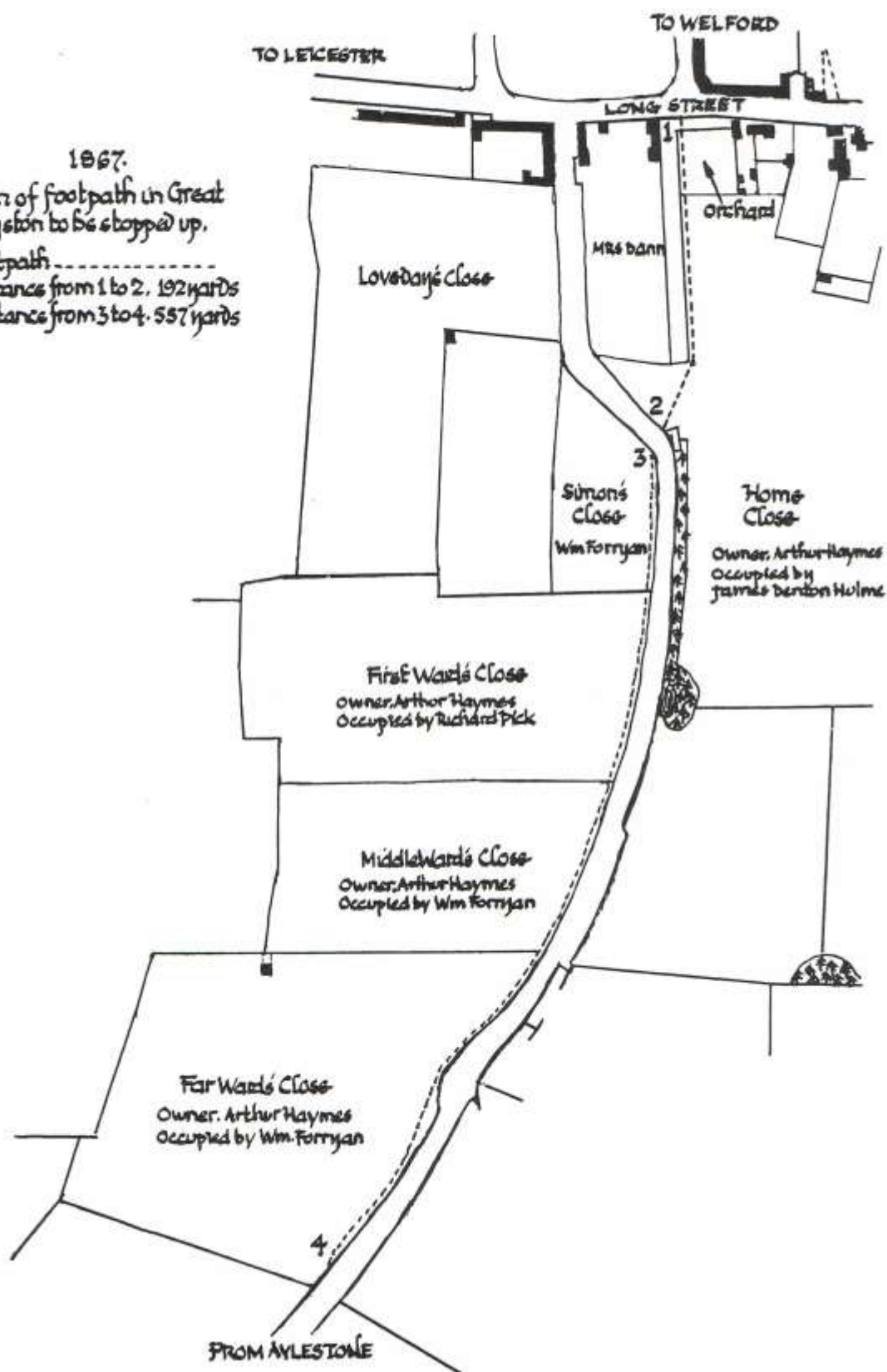
One of the actual names of Wigston was sanctified for all time by the Wigston Hospital Charters.

These records which deal with a lot of Wigston's history help in no small way to give us arguably the best set of Village records in England. (See *Transactions of the Greater Wigston Historical Society*.)

The earliest charter dated 1170-80 and when William Wigston of Leicester, a descendant of the Wykyngeston family who left Wigston about 1340 purchased land in Wigston in 1516, and along with other Wigston lands created an estate here, the rents of which went to his hospital for twelve poor people in Leicester. The Wigston Hospital grew and flourished and is still in business in Leicester.

The original farm was in Bullhead Street and the land ran after the enclosures from Bullhead Street up to and across Newton Lane along the boundary hedge of Wigston Harcourt running parallel with the top portion of Cooks Lane over the railway and canal. The police station site was theirs. Wigston's first playing field was leased from them in the late 1800s between Welford Road and Hornewell Lane. Numerous cottages and properties were owned and only recently was most of this sold off.

1867.  
 Plan of footpath in Great  
 Wigston to be stopped up.  
 Footpath -----  
 Distance from 1 to 2. 192 yards  
 Distance from 3 to 4. 557 yards



Plan of footpath in  
Great Wigston to be  
Stopped up. 1868

Footpath -----

Distance from 5 to 6. 42 yards.

Distance from 7 to 8. 885 yards.

Lovedays Close; John Cooper

Waterside Lays; occupied by several.

Smarts Close; occupied by Rich. Pick

Mill Bank; occupied by Wm. Evatt

Little Drawings; occupied by Wm. Evatt.

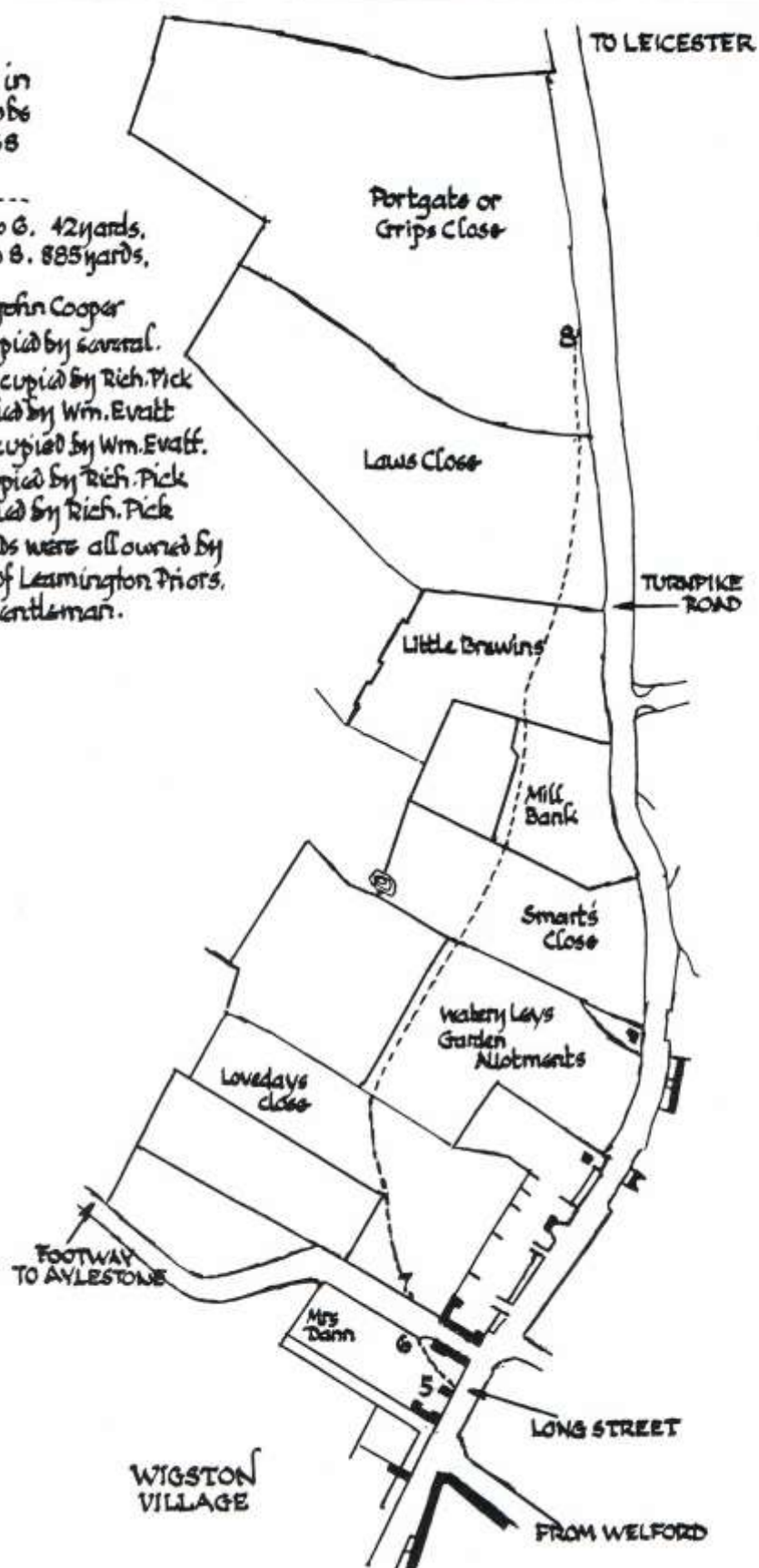
Laws Close; occupied by Rich. Pick

Portgate; occupied by Rich. Pick

The latter six fields were all owned by

Arthur Haymes of Leamington Priors,

Warwickshire, gentleman.



EXTRACTS FROM A PLATE IN NICHOL'S *History of Leicester* (1810), SHOWING FIG 6 IN ALL SAINTS — 18 TO 25 SAXON FINDS BROOCHES ETC.

In Throsby, a Leicestershire Historian, writing to Nichols in 1795 says: In the Plate, fig. 8, 9, 10 represent the different parts of a fibula, or clasp. Fragments of this form I have several, all of which have been washed with gold. These, with some other copper furniture, overlaid with gold also, were the only things that had resisted the decay of time. Fig. 11-15 imperfect fragments of other fibulae.

Fig. 16 a pin of copper, on a wire. Of these there were several; some with the points broken off.

Fig. 17 a ring, with knobs. Two were found exactly similar.

Fig. 18 Fragment of a glass urn very curiously wrought, and ornamented with ribs. Of these fragments I have several.

Fig. 19 an urn of pottery; its form perfect, but the sides perished.

Fig. 20 A spear-head with two points, one of which is 10, the other 2½ inches long. This is in a tolerably perfect state.

Fig. 21 an iron instrument, very much corroded.

Fig. 22 a massive broad instrument, which, though in a state of much decay, appears to have been formed like the top of a javelin. Part of the scabbard (if that be not too modern a name) adhere still to the perished iron.

Fig. 23-24 the rim and part of a helmet; of which I have several fragments; but the upper part in the drawing, which was a metallic substance, may be crumbled to pieces with the fingers.

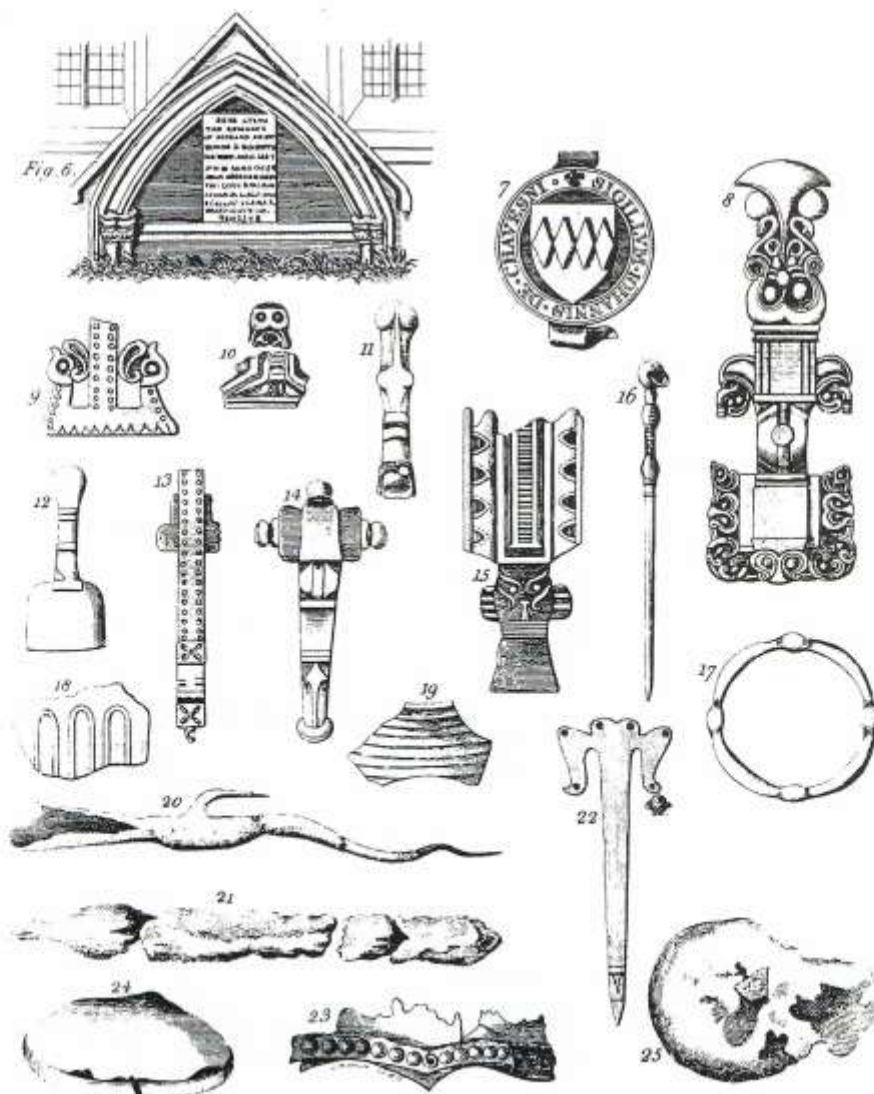
Fig. 25 a fragment of iron, five inches over.

The plot of ground where these things were found has not, it must be allowed, those external marks of a tumulus which generally denote them, although it is the highest ground thereabouts; but as it lies near a populous ancient village, it must have been in tillage many centuries since the deposit, which must, in consequence, have materially altered the face of the earth.

In the churchyard, on a tombstone near the north porch, see fig. 6, is this inscription:

'Here lie the remains  
of Richard Brewin senior,  
and Goodith his wife,  
aged 152 years; Jan. 21, A.D. 1718

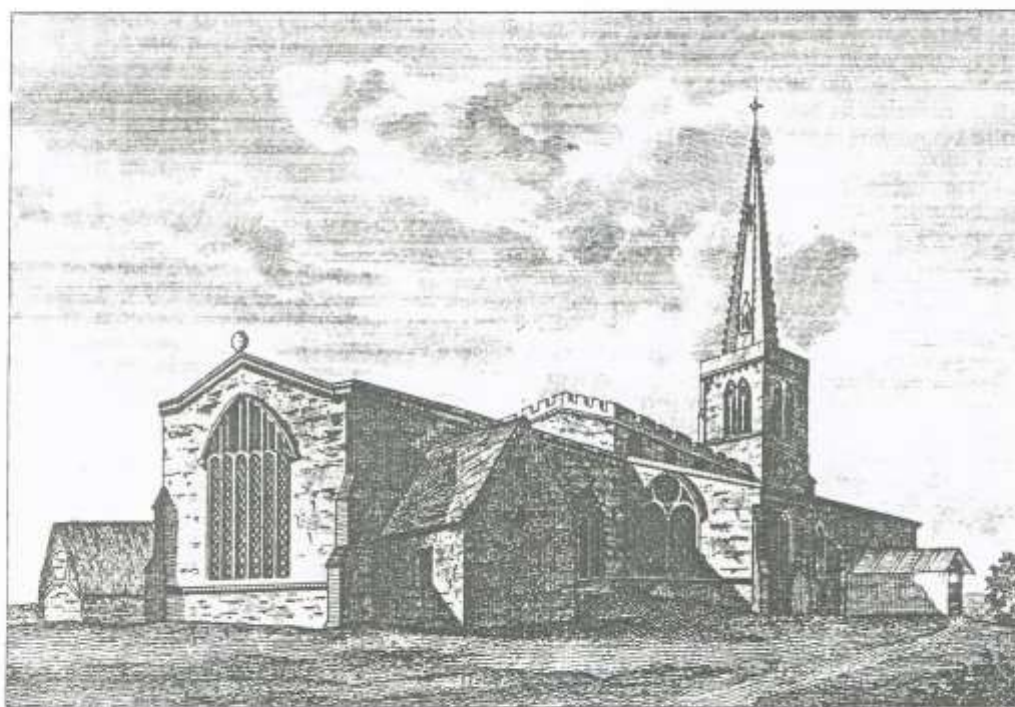
Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years. Gen. xxv. 8'

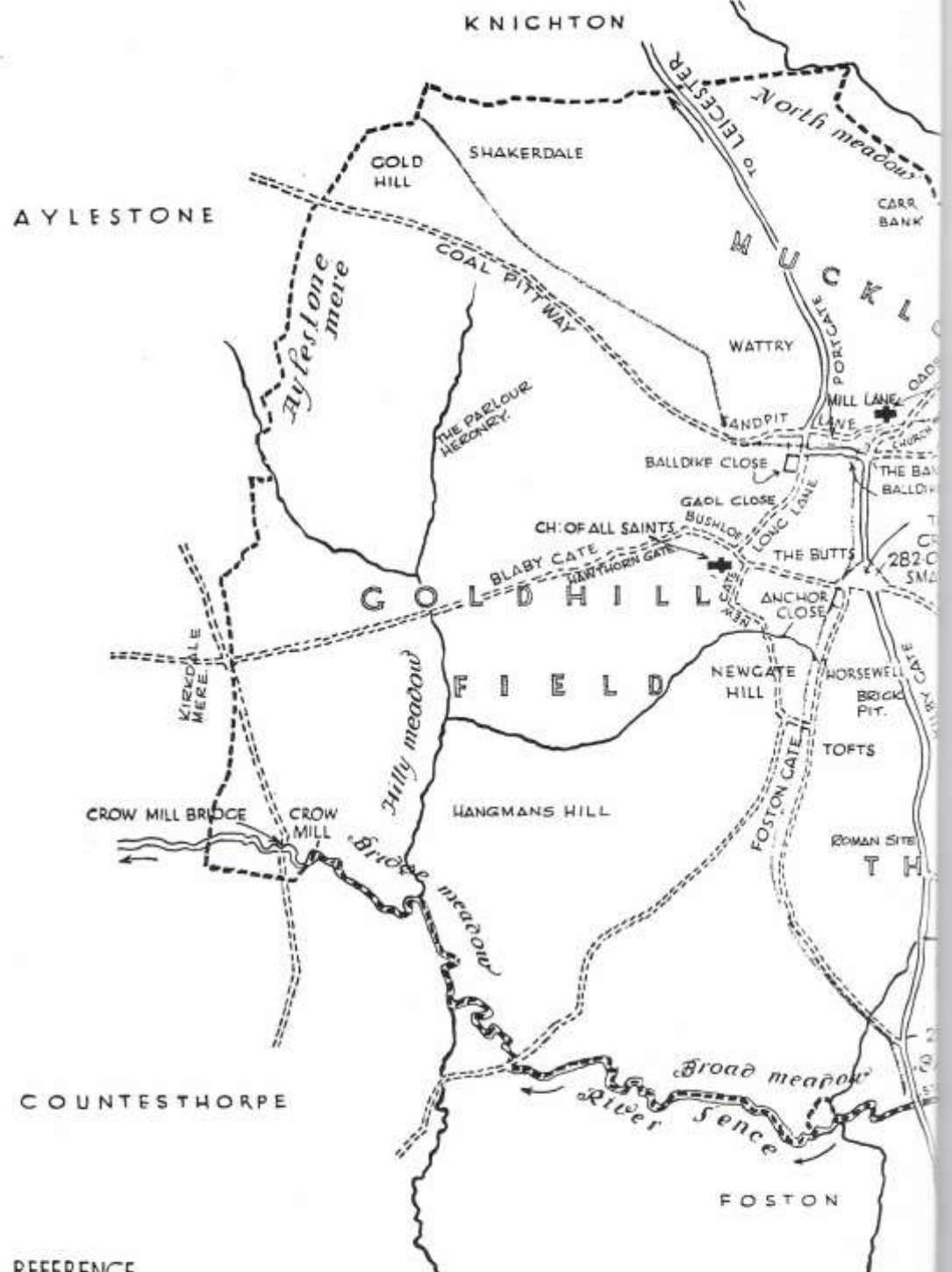


ST. WOLSTAN, S.E. 1790



ALL SAINTS, N.E.





REFERENCE,  
PARISH BOUNDARY,  
BOUNDARIES OF THE  
THREE FIELDS,  
ROADS,  
PATHS.

shown thus



AREA OF MUCKLOW FIELD

- - - THYTHORNHILL -

- - - GOLDHILL

938

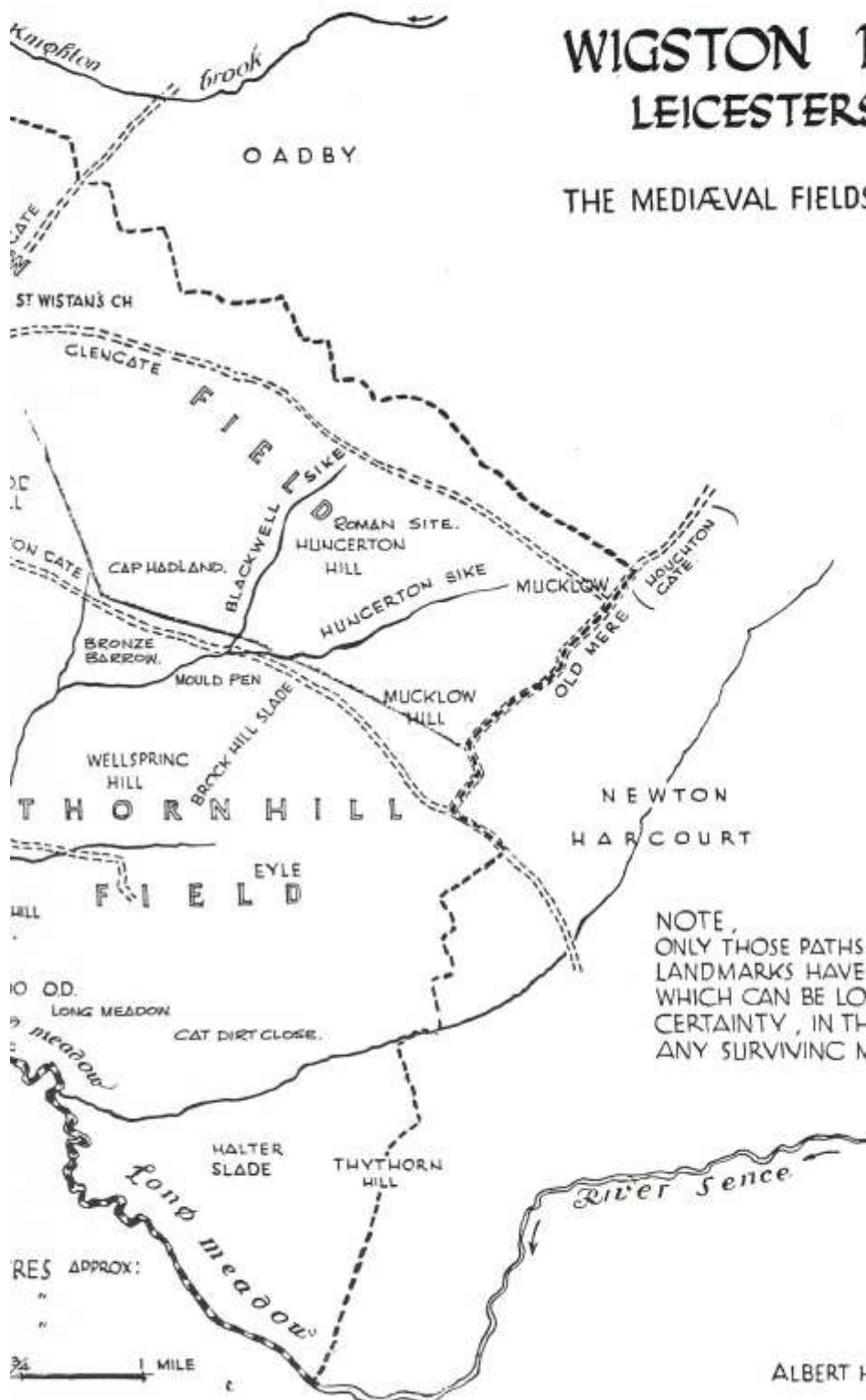
946

1279



# WIGSTON MAGNA LEICESTERSHIRE.

THE MEDIAEVAL FIELDS AND PATHS.



NOTE,  
ONLY THOSE PATHS, CLOSES AND  
LANDMARKS HAVE BEEN INDICATED  
WHICH CAN BE LOCATED WITH  
CERTAINTY, IN THE ABSENCE OF  
ANY SURVIVING MAP OF THE PARISH.

ALBERT HERBERT *B.S.A.* 1938

## WIGSTON HARCOURT

When development was envisaged at what is now named Wigston Harcourt, someone called the area Wigston East.

However, old Wigstonians who regretted losing fields which were near and dear to them were compensated in a small way by the promise to get Wigston names recorded for posterity by naming the roads after places and people of Wigston.

East Wigston incidentally was an area which broke away from the Parish of Wigston Magna in 1894 as the farmers and locals feared higher rates because of the industrial developments at Wigston Magna. They held Parish Council meetings at Kilby Bridge. The boundary of East Wigston ironically was the hedge to the east of Wigston Harcourt, and now the boundary between the houses and fields.

Why Harcourt? The area should have been correctly called Little Hill as the village green still with its site shown by Cross Street, Moat Street, Newton Lane and the front of the 'Horse and Trumpet' — with its street name Little Hill still there (the A50 cuts straight through the triangle).

Walk up Newton Lane and it is a 'Little Hill'. Further up and one finds a bigger hill at Highfield Farm, this was called Mucklow or Saxon for big hill.

A traditional Wigston name was sought and as where Little Hill Estate now stands was once called Wigston Harcourt, why not do a switch? With the compliance of Messrs Comben, Davis and Jelson, one of the vendors of the land wrote into the contract that the estate be named Wigston Harcourt and all road names be Wigston nominated in conjunction with the council, the developers and the Wigston Historical and Civic Societies. Unusual but so practical. All residents can then know, how or why their road, was so named.

First how did Wigston Harcourt arrive? To this end, we borrow information from works of W.G. Hoskins, Wigston's Historian extraordinaire.

In *Midland Peasant* Hoskin's refers to a family of gentle descent who held lands at Newton Harcourt and Kibworth Harcourt and prior to 1118AD rented land at Wigston. They swapped land at Brackley for the Wigston land and it became known from 1236 as Wigston Harcourt. Harcourt's held the land from the early 13th to the mid 15th Century. They regranted four virgates of land to the Wykngestons in 1301 from John de Harcourt by the service of one barbed arrow.

To confirm more of Wigston Harcourt Hoskin's *Murder and Sudden Death in Medieval Wigston* records the following.

'Finally, in 1390, there occurred a clash at Wigston which left faint echoes more than fifty years later. The story begins in the Coroners' Rolls for Leicestershire, which are preserved at the Public Record Office.

Inquest taken at Wykngeston in the presence of Thomas de Queneby, one of the coroners of the King in the county of Leicester, on the Tuesday next before the feast of St. Hugh in the year written above (15th November, 1390) on the view of the death of Adam de Sutton of Wigston by the neighbouring wills, namely, Wigston, Oadby, Knighton, Glen, and Aylestone, and upon the oath of John Friday, Henry

Harecourt, Thomas Hutte, Peter Eyryk, William Smyth, John Bryge, Robert Pollyng, Richard Magson, Alexander Bocher, John Smyth, William Draper and John Faukes, who say on their oath that on the Sunday before the aforesaid feast of the year written above (13th November, 1390) Richard Baker clerk of Wigston Harcourt met the said Adam at night in the highway in a certain place called Abouetheslowe in Wigston, coming from an inn, and the aforesaid Richard, because of various quarrels which had arisen between them, struck the said Adam on the head with a staff worth one penny, whereby the said Adam within a short while afterwards died without the rites of the church. And they say that Emma Baker first discovered him. And the said jurors say that Richard killed Adam feloniously on the Sunday in the said year at Wigston. And immediately he had done this he fled. And he has no goods or chattels. The body is viewed by the coroner, but Richard is acquitted by the charter of the King in the presence of William Thirngy and Richard Sidenham the justices assigned to the gaol delivery on Thursday in the vigil of St. James in the seventeenth year of the reign of Richard II (24th July, 1393).

The patent rolls inform us also that on March 7, 1392, pardon was granted on the supplication of Nicholas Monketon of Wiltshire to Richard Baker of Wigston Harcourt (The Harcourts were chief lords of certain property in Wigston from an early date, and this part of the village, mainly, I think, in the neighbourhood of All Saints' Church, was known as Wigston Harcourt, a name which has long since disappeared) for the death of Adam de Setton of Wigston, killed there on Sunday before the feast of St. Hugh the Bishop, 14 Richard II'.

In a document of 1442 among the Hastings Manuscripts at Ashby Castle, copied by Mr Farnham, we find the story completed and we catch the dying echoes of the crime on that November night, fifty-two years before. The document begins prosaically enough by recording the receipt of a penny rent from a house in Wigston, held in free tenure, and then proceeds to unfold a tale of old, unhappy things.

The yearly rent paid by the hands of Robert Hutt, to wit one penny at Christmas from Alice Grendon, kinswoman and heir of Richard Mabyll, now deceased, for a certain tenement and four acres of land which Richard Hutt and Amice his wife, the daughter of Richard Mabyll, lately held of Roger Mabyll in chief at a rent as aforesaid besides foreign service to Sir John Fryday, knight, which said tenement lies in Bysserow streete in Wikingeston between the cottage of Henry Harcourte on the east and the common way called Hawthorngate on the west'.

Death without rites of the Church was very serious. Was Bysserow St., anything to do with Bushloe End? Was the inn or pub the Plough Inn? And until modern times Station Road was named Hawthorngate and Abington House was called Hawthorn Fields.

Generally speaking, the more permanent names are those given for some natural characteristic such as the quality of the soil or the lie of the land rather than those called after a particular owner. Springs, especially, were named early, and their names were

most permanent of all, as we should expect. Among these we have 'the foul spring', 'the cold spring' (though this occurs only once), 'the horse spring', 'the black spring', 'the holy spring' and 'the spring in the copse' (Wellspring). One of these can be found today. The 'black spring', far out over the eastern slopes of the parish, still bubbles out of the earth by the Glen footpath, into a reedy pool that is dark even on a sunny April afternoon. We see it today exactly as it welled out seven hundred years and more ago, just as the villein of the thirteenth century saw it when he gave its name to the remote fields that slope down to it from either side.

The topography of the fields naturally suggested many names. Early settlers, and their descendants into medieval times at least, were sensitive to the slightest rise and fall in the level of the ground, and gave many names to hills that we having nearly lost the practice of walking in fields, would not perceive. In Wigston each of the long slopes of the rolling clay-land had its name, as did each minute stream that flowed in the hollows. Most of these slopes cannot be detected even on the six-inch map; one must walk over the ground itself to see them. Thus 'Water mill hill', where South Wigston now is, was not thirty feet above the river meadows: Newgate hill, rising southwards from the brook that bounds Newgate

End, is not much higher, nor are most of the slopes that were given the title of 'hill' in medieval times. Other topographical names in Wigston are Flatt close, Little Hill, Little Dale, Halterslade ('the hidden slade'), Hilly meadow, Long meadow, Broad meadow, Mucklow, Bushloe, Two brooks, 'the hanging slope' (le Hauggaud in 1395), 'the shining pool' (Sherpol), and the lost 'copse with much thicket' (Wethegraue or Wortegraue).

Then we have 'gold hill' and 'golden meadow', from the gorse on the one and the buttercups in the other; the 'thick thorn hill' where the flowering thorn drew dense; and another 'hawthorn hill' somewhere in the west field. Moseho, now Bull Head Street, a fifteenth century street in Wigston, was 'the mossy or boggy hill', in Rudegres grew the reedy grass that suggested the name of this corner of the fields; on Taselhill teasels grew in the fourteenth century, and on Thakkerhill, probably, grew the reeds that the thatcher looked for.

Some quality of the soil frequently suggested a name. In Wigston we have 'black earth' (Blakemilde), 'the dungel land', (Cakerforlong and Muckeland), 'the clayey sike' (Cleysike), 'the hungry ground', of Hungerton hill, 'the moory field' (Moriwong), 'the stony pastures' (Stoney leyes) and 'the watery pastures' (water leyes).

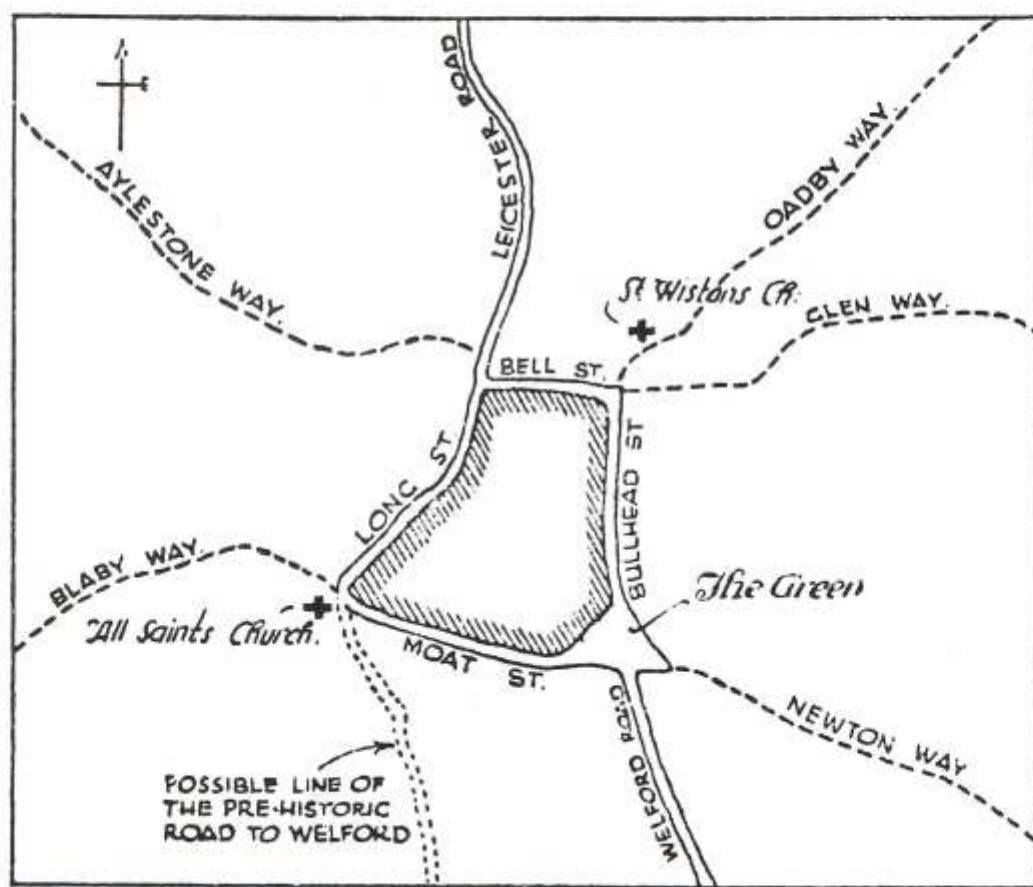
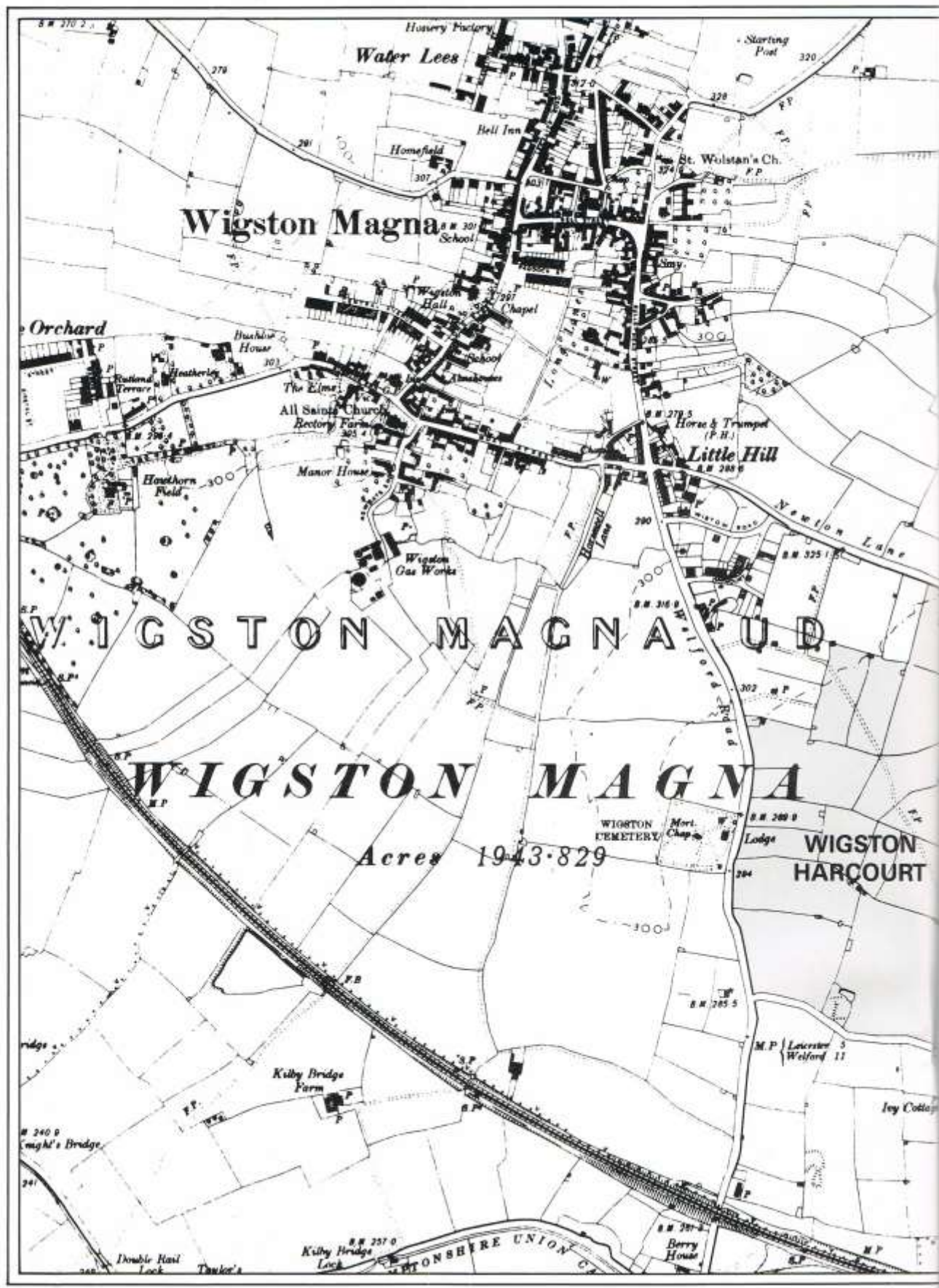
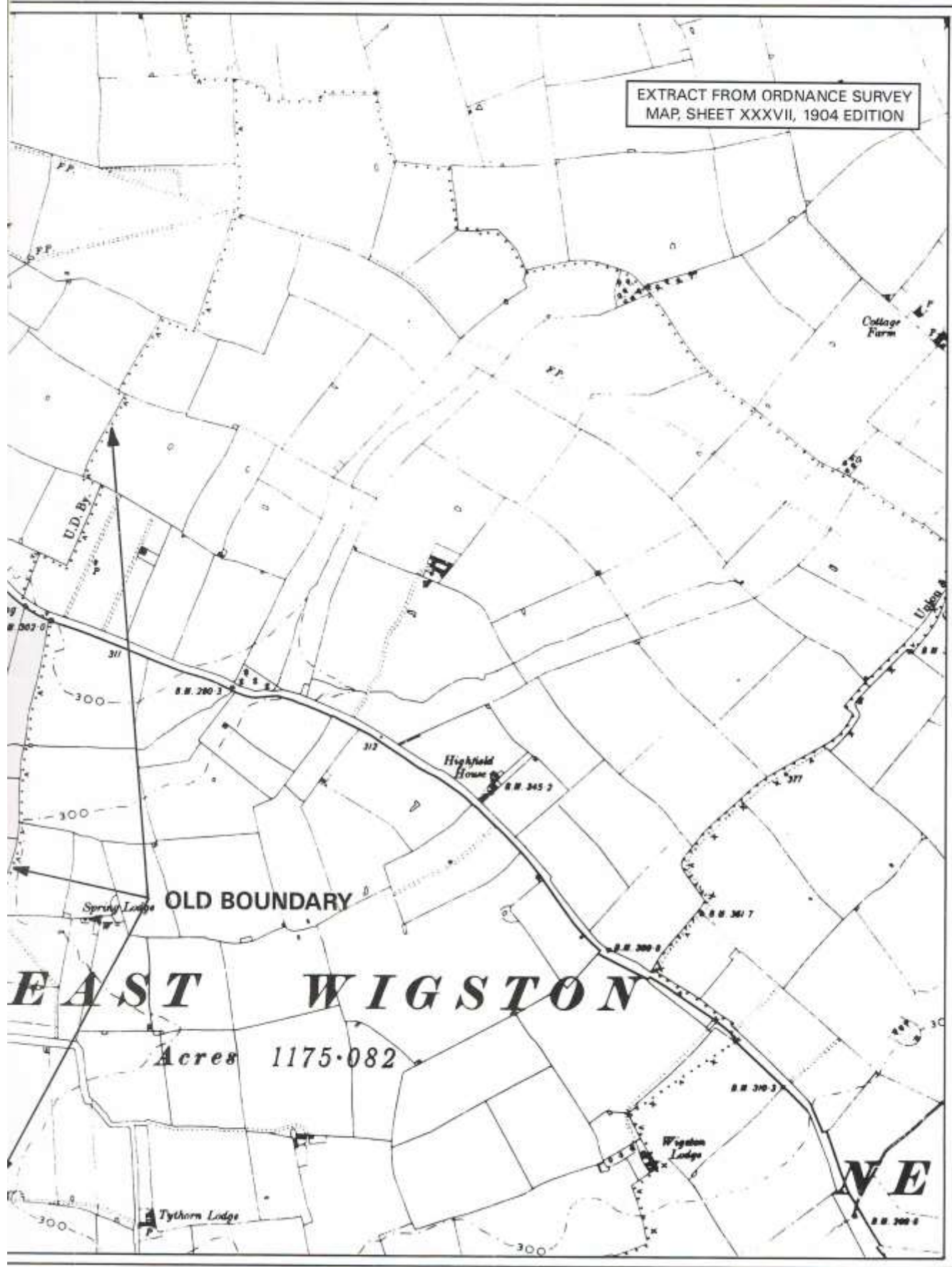


DIAGRAM PLAN OF WIGSTON MAGNA -  
A RING-FENCE VILLAGE



EXTRACT FROM ORDNANCE SURVEY  
MAP, SHEET XXXVII, 1904 EDITION



**EAST WIGSTON**

Acres 1175.082

**N E**

## THE ROAD NAMES AT WIGSTON HARCOURT

We the Historic and Civic Societies of Wigston have named the roads as follows because we desire to preserve some links with our proud past.

### ASHURST CLOSE

At the time of the enclosures of the Medieval fields of Wigston 'Nichols' in 1810 says there were no trees at all in the fields, no hedges and he recommends that trees be planted in the field corners to make plantations thus not spoiling the hedges as the sadly now lost elms did. In subsequent tenancy agreements farmers had to plant so many trees each year.

On the corner fields of Cooks Lane and Welford Road several plantations were planted and are shown clearly on the land deeds.

The part of one plantation remains at the eastern corner of Lime Kilns.

Ash Pole spinney still exists at the bend by the stream on Newton Lane, and ash did dominate in the small plantations on site originally.

Hurst is an old Wigston family. Cook and Hurst was one of our larger hosiery firms. Thomas Hurst was allotted land in the 1766 enclosure awards as was John Hurst. But we honour also a man called Ashurst who lives in far away Barnsley. Why you ask? Because it was he who guided the Society in our Roman excavations, he showed us what to do, what to look for and where to look for it. He labelled many items, but ill health has stopped his assistance much to our dismay.

The Society's knowledge and work would have shortened without him, indeed might not have started. But also look at any marble bottle that used to contain lemonade, it has 'Made in Barnsley' on it and Mr Ashurst has presented to museum archives his written works on the history of the Codd bottle used by Goodins Mineral Works, Spa Lane, Wigston Magna.

### BLACKWELL

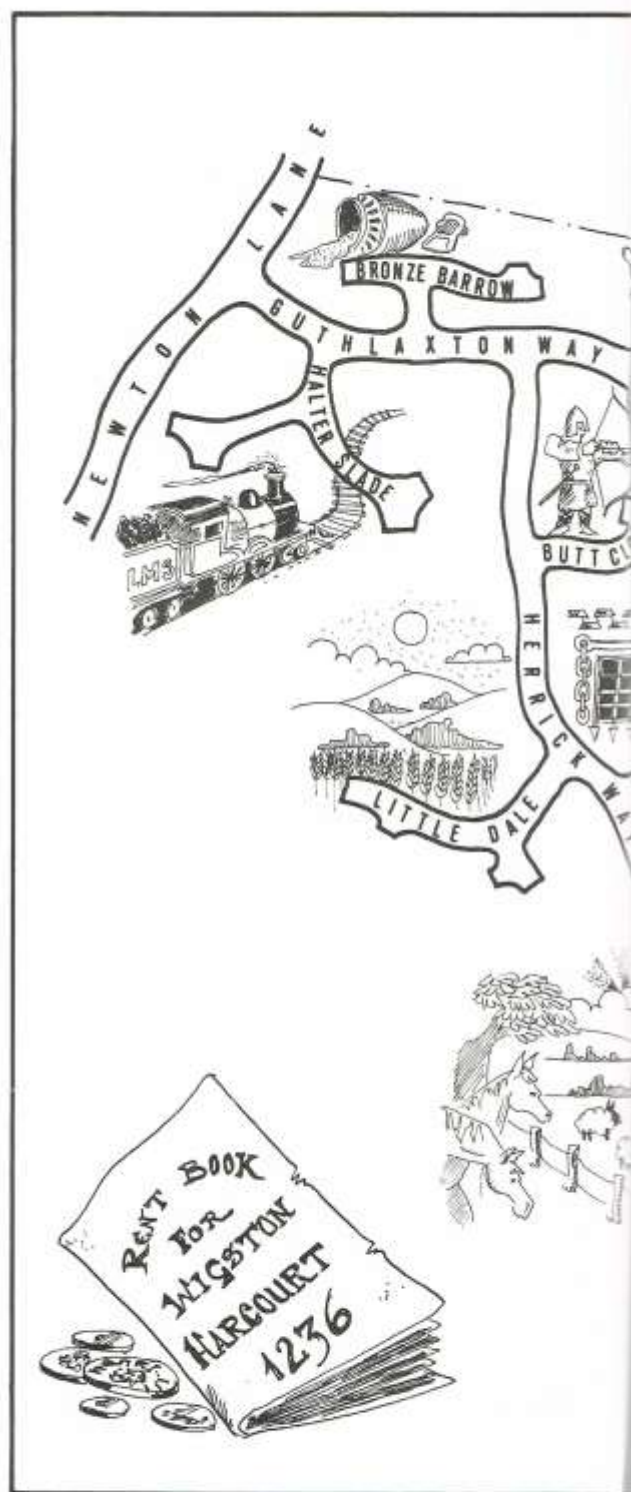
The stream running nearby rises near the Coombe Park, Oadby. A spring called the Black Spring rises just on the Oadby/Wigston boundary close to a Roman Villa site. It has long been referred to as Black Sike, sike meaning rough pasture or strip alongside a stream. Norse refers to sik as a small stream in marshy ground and Old English sic the same. There was a field in 1669 named Blackwellsick Clos owned by John Davenport.

### BROAD MEADOW

Was as it sounds a wide or broad meadow near the River Glen (now 'Sence') never ploughed as it was flood land; it was used not as a common but for shared grazing depending on the amount of plough one owned one was allocated so many grazing numbers of cows and sheep.

### BRONZE BARROW

Whilst walking the site in a constant search for artifacts, I spotted an unusual black circle on the side



of a newly dug dyke. This dyke was on the hedge line of the old East Wigston Parish boundary. Further investigation showed the find to be cremation ash in a clay pot. Although twice damaged, once by a modern digger and previously by Roman or medieval ploughing, it was an early Bronze age burial urn, within a week or two of 4,000 years old. Rare in these parts it added to the theory or proved the theory that the site of Wigston Harcourt and cemetery had been



lived on for a thousand years and more. Near the road is the actual barrow site.

It is interesting to note that Bushloe End derives its name from Bussclow from the Old English byse or bush thicket and hill or low Hill with the thicket. The area is low so it indicates an artificial hill or burial mound, so was another tumulus or bronze barrow at that spot? I suspect other barrows exist over the hedge to the east in the field called Gravel Hole.

#### BROUGHTONS FIELD

A proud old Wigston name. Hosiers until recent years and staunch Methodists at one time. Two Broughton factories employed 400 in Wigston.

They largely sponsored the old Wigston Prims Cricket Team and owned the cricket field which fronted onto Welford Road where the road now runs.

One George Broughton a hosiery hand rose to be a JP and Chairman of the bench.

### FREER CLOSE

Names spelt Frear, Frere, Frear, had Wigston connections back in 1428; sometimes even spelt Fryer. In 1664 Deliverance Freer had a house with four hearths. They were awarded 100 acres at the enclosures.

One of the Freers presented the Poplars on Leicester Road, Wigston Fields to the Council. Freers and Fryers still live around in both Oadby and Wigston.

### FORRYANS CLOSE

One of Wigston's old families. Three members were Council Chairmen. Abraham Forryan was serving on the old Parish in 1835, but his grave was 'lost' in cemetery tidying.

For 130 years continuous family local government service. Butchers and farmers, grocers, chemists, one a publican at the old King William IV in Bell Street. A name dating back to 1377. Owners of part of Wigston Harcourt prior to development. Still a name over a shop in Bell Street, but not a butcher as most Forryan's were. One descendant still growing and selling meat in Wigston, but another name.

### FOSTON GATE

Foston Gate was the name of the track running roughly on the line of Horsewell Lane which ferried the river Glen (now Sence) or joined the Welford Road (Kilby Gate) at Stanbrig (Stone bridge) near where the present bridge stands. Gate or Gata from old Norse meaning road or way.

### GUTHLAXTON WAY

The main road in Wigston Harcourt chosen because the town of Wigston Magna is in the Guthlaxton Hundred the name dating back to Alfred the Great, who divided England into counties, hundreds and tithings. Sometimes Guthlaxton 'Wapentake' was its name. The Guthlaxton College also perpetuates the name and it was also an ecclesiastical division.

St. Guthic Royal mercian blood born AD 673 soldier, originally took up religion, died April 11th 714. Nichols says Hundred Court for Guthlaxton was in 1810 held by the Steward of the Lord Somers in October at Kilby.

### HALTER SLADE (The Hidden Slade)

A field name dating from the enclosures 1766 situated in Thythornhill Field near the canal where it loops towards Kilby. A corner of the Close was sold to the Midland Railway Co., to enable construction of the line. Hoskin's shows it as Medieval in origin to 1319 from the Old English 'hiding place'.

### HEARDS CLOSE

Wigston Historic Society has the old deeds of Heards Closes. They consisted of 13 acres approximately in five fields at the Enclosure Award. Elizabeth Heard had her strips in the open fields compacted at this point. The southern part of Heards Close as the road is called is physical'y on the 1766 layout of those closes. They ran from the traffic island down to the

stream and up the hill to the boundary of Wigston Harcourt.

### HERRICK WAY

Erik, Herych, Eryrek, Eyrig were various ways of spelling an ancient Danish name. One Hilton Herrick was headmaster of Wigston National School during the 1940s. Abigail Herrick mother of Dean Swift (*Gulliver's Travels* fame) lived in Bull Street.

### HOSKINS DRIVE

Professor W.G. Hoskins whilst at Leicester University wrote and wrote about Wigston Magna — *Midland Peasant, Murder and Sudden Death in Medieval Wigston, The Fields of Wigston Magna, Leicestershire Yeoman Families and Their Pedigrees* (mainly Wigston families), are among his works. Whenever he wrote about Leicestershire, Wigston cropped up. We as a community have never given him any Civic honour or reception. The research for details of these road names would be most daunting without his works. Wigston owes a great debt to W.G. Hoskins who 'adopted' the town. What better accolade that a road will identify him firmly to all who live in Wigston Harcourt. Did the Granada TV film *The Vanishing Village* get its inspiration from Hoskins' work? In *Midlands Peasant* he wrote in the early 1940s:

'A few years ago I spent the greater part of a fine April afternoon at the bottom of a newly-dug grave in the modern cemetery at Wigston. This cemetery was opened in 1882, half a mile south of the village, and was by chance laid out almost exactly over a large burial-ground of the heathen Anglo-Saxon period, the cemetery of the sixth-century village. The finding of a few broken pieces of pottery at the bottom of this grave led me to it immediately, to discover in the almost pure sand (a fact of archaeological significance in itself in a clay country like the Midlands) a Roman ditch of unknown purpose, dating from the later years of the first century. (See SAXON DALE)

On emerging from the grave into the bright sunshine once more, I saw all around the visible evidence of the continuity of life in this community whose history I was trying to unravel. Beneath my feet ran the Roman ditch, and within a few yards lay the remains of the old gravel-pit where in 1795 Wigston labourers, digging gravel for the new turnpike road close by, turned up a collection of objects of sixth-century date and so brought to light one of the largest Anglian cemeteries in Leicestershire. (See ROMAN HILL) A few hundred yards away to the north lay the village on its gravel ridge above the colder clays. The sun shone upon the handsome limestone tower and spire of the parish church, built when the village was larger and more prosperous than it was to be for many a generation afterwards; it flooded over the pastures that had replaced the open arable fields in the year 1766, and fell alike on the whitewashed Georgain farmhouse on the edge of the village and the bright red brick of the Victorian villas and the hosiery factories — for today the village lives almost wholly by industry and hardly knows its own fields.

Beneath the modern field-pattern, laid out nearly

two hundred years ago, I saw the rolling succession of ridge and furrow that spoke of arable cultivation for a thousand years before that. Dividing these ridges at intervals one could see the balks and headlands where the medieval peasant drove his cart into his strips or turned his plough, curving his strip as he approached the headland, so that the enclosure commissioners' hedge (the hedge of today) was obliged to follow the same ancient line dictated by the ox-drawn plough; and in one place a broader bank of grass showed where the medieval footpath to Kilby, the next village to the south, clearly ran — Kylebygate in an early fourteenth century charter — until broken by the modern cemetery wall.

Over the cemetery fence, on their allotments, the men of Wigston were turning over the earth for another year — good loam from the sandy mixture nearby and not the usual back-breaking clay — and behind me, for it was a Saturday afternoon, a funeral was going on, another Wigston man gone to the cemetery on the hill where his pagan forefathers had been buried fourteen hundred years before. All this, the long history of this village set in the green Midland landscape, was visible without moving more than a few yards! Roman, Old English, Scandinavian (some of the names on the headstones told of Danish ancestry), medieval and modern, it was all there.'

#### INGRAMS WAY

Possibly Wigston's greatest benefactor. Father and son in the 1800s were lawyers. Built Hawthorn Field later named Abingdon House.

Rebuilt All Saints Church yard wall, involved in St. Wolstan's now Wiston's rebuilding. Legend has it that St Thomas at South Wigston was called as such because of Thomas Ingram's efforts.

Moved the old conduit from Leicester to Wigston but it was destroyed to build schools on Station Road.

A memorial window is in All Saints' Church.

#### LIME KILNS

Messrs Ellis had important lime quarries at Kilby Bridge, and Lime Kilns is only a stones throw from where a kiln stood. The site is now Mr Gee's bungalow on Cooks Lane. It is an oft repeated statement the Wigston lime went to London in the construction of the underground.

#### LITTLE DALE

Means straightforward 'Little Hill' so using the 'heralds pun' we have got the proper name for Wigston Harcourt tucked away in its rightful place and causing no confusion to anyone.

#### LONG MEADOW

There were many long slades or meadows in Wigston. The narrow strip alongside the streams were nearly all called Long Slades. On the site of the Bronze Barrow and Blackwell was a field called Long Slade (Meadow).

#### MABLOWE FIELD

One would not like to live on a road named Muckloe

('it don't sound rite'), but it is one of Wigston's ancient feudal field names.

Mablowe felde (1417). For a time the north field was so called, but soon after this date became Mucklow Field and remained so. Mablowe is probably 'Mabile's hill', the Mables being an early medieval family in Wigston.

Mucklow Field, Mokilhow (1280-92), Mokolow (1393) Mucklowe (1639), Muckloe (1704, 1736, 1799), Mucklow (1731, 1766). Derived from the O.N. [Old Norse] milkill, great, large, and OE hlau, hill, mound (especially a burial mound or tumulus). The site of 'the great hill' It can be identified with almost complete certainty as the high ground at the Old Mere, where the parishes of Wigston, Oadby, and Newton Harcourt meet. Both Grundy and Ekwall consider that hlau, as used in old charters, indicates a burial-mound rather than a natural hill. This would be very likely at Mokilhow, lying as it does within a few yards of an undoubtedly pre-Roman road. Moreover, the fact that three parishes meet here is itself suspicious, for a prominent barrow or tumulus always made an admirable boundary-mark. There cannot be much doubt that hlau here denotes a burial-mound. Hence the proper meaning of the name is 'the great barrow'. Once more we see how ancient barrows, which have survived more or less untouched in open downland country, have been ploughed out of existence in lower-lying arable country.

#### PORTGATE

At the rear of the Star and Garter Inn on Leicester Road was Portgate Close. It is clearly shown on the map prepared for the footpath closure which ran parallel to Leicester Road.

Hoskins shows it as the old Leicester Road and says Postregate in 1271, Pottergate 1348, Porteway 1417.

#### ROMAN HILL

So named because the cemetery (old portion), the South Leicester Rugby Playing Fields and the adjoining fields rear of the layby was the site of a Roman Villa or farm. The items found showed it to be a wealthy one. Iron Age pottery circa 500 BC also found thereon. The theory that the hill top was the first site of original Wigston has not been disproved (see Wigston Museum records).

#### SAXON DALE

Nichols (historian circa 1800) records the Saxon cemetery also on the fields between the Rugby ground and Wigston Harcourt, and from his description which points to directly opposite Cooks Lane, Saxon brooches were found in 1797. They disappeared but news of them was heard when they were sold only a few years ago. Nichols records that:

'Some considerable fragments of antiquity have been discovered in this lordship, as stated to me by Mr Throsby in the following letter:

In June 1795, I visited this sepulchre of antient things; and, with a little trouble, procured from the labourers the principal part of the valuables found therein. It is not material to know that the pit was made to get gravel for the road leading from Leicester to Welford. It is observable, however, that the ground

every way from the spot where the things I am about to notice were taken lies gently sloping and that the labourers in the last month opened the earth on the descending ground, and working upwards, discovered the first human skeleton, at the depth of about two feet, not in, but upon, the bed of gravel. This was succeeded by similar discoveries, attended with nothing more material than that the skeletons lay in different directions, and at various depths. In pursuing their labour, however, they discovered a pile of stones, or boulders, some of which were half a hundred weight; in removing which, they found the remains of four human skeletons; but, although every part might be seen lying in a state of perfectly undisturbed ever since their internment, yet most of them, except the leg and arm bones, were in such a state of decay, that they could not be moved by the hand without dropping instantly to pieces. These four lay nearby side by side, at the depth of a yard below the surface of the gravel, and with them many apparent war trappings; and near one of them part of a skeleton of a horse, and something like a bridle-bit, which I did not see; the men informed me that it was much perished, and in consequence threw it away. Before I describe the most material things found in and near these graves, it may be necessary to observe, that there were found, in all, the remains of about twenty human skeletons, all within a square of about ten yards; and, by most of them, some sort of furniture.'

### **SIMONS**

In Wigston museum is a small stone which reads W. Simons Died June 27 1749. It as found in Bullhead Street next door to Adcocks Garage opposite the Quaker Burial ground. Who was W. Simons? How did he live? What was Wigston like then? Open fields we know! Not a tree in the village fields says Nichols in 1810.

There was a Simon Wykyngeston somewhere about 1343, he was an 'ernemongere', before him was a Sir Symon Wykyngeston of Wykyngestone who owned the water mill in 1170/80, he was also Simon le Baylif. We next come to Willam Symon in 1514 who was tenant to W. Wigston.

We run through the years but alas by the closures Sarah Simons had just over one acre of land, but it seems the family was dispersing, Amos Simons went to Trowbridge, Wilts, one went to the Dees as a woolcomber and became a freeman, but Simons Close on Aylestone Lane, where Waterlees House now stands was let to William Forryan in 1867. The name Simons still abounds in various Wigston families.

### **STANBRIG**

One of the earliest recorded bridges in Leicestershire was Stanbrig AD 1280 LE BRODE STANIBRIG (Broad Stone Bridge), its place is now taken by the bridge on the A50 beyond the canal bridge. King Edward I passed over it in 1300. The name means stone bridge. Nearby the original site on the A50 also stood a toll house, the site can still be pinpointed. The A50 was a Turn Pike road, hence tolls to pay for the road and the bridge an obvious point for collection of same. At

the western end of this road now called Stanbrig the brook is piped but many generations crossed the stream on the footpath over a pretty little blue brick bridge.

### **THE BUTTS**

In 1405 Common Green called Le Buttes, now the site of Police Station on Bull Head Street, where archery practise and training took place. Also an ancient land measurement.

### **THE PARLOUR**

Where West Avenue now runs was a large fish pond where herons nested until recent years, was this Hoskins Cranes Meadows?

A small corner of a field called Little Meadow adjacent obviously to Big Meadow now Rolleston Road was a tiny sanctuary barely a 1,000 square yards in area almost surrounded by hedges and the large fish pond, a small stream crossed the grassy slade and it was called the Parlour. Why? Except that it was so inviting, so comfortable to view, no written record is known, but all the farmers knew The Parlour.

### **TURVILLE CLOSE**

Wigston has two manors, two churches, in fact was two villages, All Saints is often referred to as Wigston Magna Saxon village, and St Wolstan's now St Wistan's as OLD Wigston probably the Danish village. Even now old locals refer to St Wistan's as the old church.

In 1140 King Stephen at Nottingham confirmed grants of the Churches of Wiggeston and Wichingeston.

One Manor house faces Paddock Street and the other Manor is in Newgate End.

One Manor got its name from Sir William Turville and the other the, Oxford Manor, because the Earls of Oxford held it.

One Earl lost the Oxford Manor in 1474 but backed Henry Tudor at Bosworth Field in 1485 and so got it back.

At no time did a squire dominate Wigston and this is reflected in the independent spirit of the old Wigstonians.

### **WARDS CLOSE**

There was a First Wards Close, Middle Wards and Farwards Close and the copy of 1867 map is interesting in showing their location.

John Ward had 33 acres and Daniel Ward 8 acres at the enclosures. There are still many Wards living in Wigston.

We like also to refer to a local historian of that name renowned for his photographic collection and his intense pride in his native village (sorry town).

The fields of Ward name! In Wigston museum archives there is an agreement of 1856 for grazing those fields between Arthur Haymes and William Forryan. The tenancy lasted 100 years when descendants of Arthur Haymes sold the land to

Jelsons (Carlton Drive area), and L.H. Forryan grandson of William relinquished the tenancy in 1956.

### WELLSPRING HILL

Named by Hoskin's as hill at top of road but was field name on Thythorn Hill Farm at the Enclosures 1766.

Still a very apt name as spring water still flows from adjoining fields down into the stream.



We could still produce many more names, but we have run out of roads, but we leave with the question — Would you have wanted a field (still there near Cliftons Bridge) name attached to your street? We doubt it. Why? The name in 1766 was and is Cat Dirt Close!



This then is why your road, close, etc, is so named. Many other names were researched but not used, and as this is the result of much work, they are included below.

### BALLE DYKE CLOSE

Another ancient name of Wigston, the Balle Family starts and again we quote Hoskins' *Midland Peasant*. 'As one walks up Bullhead Street, the only street to retain much of its village character, one passes farmhouses whose history can be traced continuously back to the thirteenth century, in one instance perhaps to the very birth of the house on a toft enclosed out of the demesne in the time of Henry III, when Nicholas de Campania, lord of the smaller manor, granted to Ralph Balle and Hysenda his wife, for their homage and service, 'a plot of land in the town of Wykingstone, lying in Hecroft...to enclose, build and inhabit.'

The earliest record is about 1260 AD, numerous records occur for example, a William Balle moved to Penn in Staffs, when he returned years later he was William of Penn which shows how names changed.

The site of the old Balle Dyke Close was between Bell Street and Aylestone Lane and was at the rear of the present Barclays Bank and Wilkinsons. Locals still say on 'Balle Dyke'.

When the orchard and farm building site which was twixt Bell Street and Mill Lane (Frederick Street) developed, the shops were Nos 1a, to 1k Leicester Road. Despite a request to recall the area Balle Dyke all numbers down to the Stage Motel were altered. So we start to use the name Ball Dyke again.

### BIG BREWIN

A large field where Carlton Drive now runs. There was a smaller field called Little Brewin nearby.

A small gentleman lived in Newton Lane and he was emphatic that he was a Brewin, not a Bruin, or

was he a Bruin and not Brewin?, but we called him 'Tissy' because of his size.

I make the point to show how the same name got different spellings through the years.

See the famous Bruin gravestone on the wall of All Saints' Church, was he really 152 years of age?

Mother Bruin of Oadby and Simeon Bruin of Leicester owned land here in 1766. Bruins and Brewins were at Blaby.

Quite a prolific family in and surrounding Wigston, proving the lads got about before they had bikes.

Simeon Brewin in 1770 was a grazier, he probably farmed the Brewin closes. Robert Brewin was a butcher, his house had two hearths and seven rooms, so another worthy Wigston name is recorded.

They still abound, one is still in at the end (he's an undertaker).

### BUMBLE BEE (MEADOW) CLOSE OR BUMBLEBEE SLADE

Adjacent to the River Sence is a large meadow called Bumblebee Meadow. Why it is so called we don't know, but its a lovely sounding name and like others if we don't use them the names get lost.

### CAP HADLAND CLOSE (SLADE)

First recorded in 1247 as Cappehauitland — Chief Headland. Well known area on the other side of Newtown Lane. Locals until recent times remembered the large barrow or headland at the rear of the road now called Rosedale. Ploughed out in the 1939/45 war years.

### COOKS LANE

Cooks Lane running along the southern boundary is obviously after the Coc family. Harry Coc is recorded in 1250, there was a Cockpitts leyes, maybe a cockpit or corruption of Cook. This lane bounding Wigston Harcourt is an enclosure farm road.

### GOLDHILL

One of Wigston's Feudal Fields the name of which has been 'pinched' by Leicester. Goldehil in 1305, the name probably derived from the Golden or Saffron flowers which grew on the hillside at the top of the now Aylestone Lane. Golden meadow Hoskin's says from the Buttercups and Gorse flowers.

### MOULD PEN

Opposite the ash pole spinney in Newton Lane by the Blackwell Stream are several small fields. Known for many years as Mole Pen and still called that name. Wondering why research asked was it full of moles? Did the Molesworthy family own it at one time? Until one day browsing through old records I found reference to Mould Pen. The Mould family or 'Mold' were in Wigston in 1377 and are still here in quantity, they have been large land owners, manufacturers, peasants, all parts of our ancient community and accordingly we preserve even more so an honoured local name.

### SNOWDEN'S END

The Snowden family had a strong influence in the growth and prosperity of Wigston for the last 150 years or so years.

In Wigston Museum is a needle gauge marked 1815 which gives the clue. They were needle makers and factors for the frame work knitting trade. The factory was almost opposite Adcocks Garage and their house was on the old Quaker Burial ground. 'Bronx' Snowden served for years on the Wigston U.D.C., was a teacher and told at the age of 91 how Mill Lane got its name (another tale). Many items of his are in the museum and reference to his needles, etc, is recorded in Shire book *The Framework Knitter*.

### THAKKERHILL

Until the late 1950s hay and corn stacks were thatched. Modern building and bales of hay and straw means that stacks are obsolete. However stacks were 'thakked' not 'thatched' in Wigston until 1960.

Hoskins says the influence of Danish speech is seen in the frequent changing of the Anglo Saxon 'ch' to the hard Scandinavian 'k' sound. Thus Thatchers Hill becomes in Wigston Thakkerhill so we preserve an ancient name and also preserve a local word or sound. The old site was somewhere near the Oadby boundary.

In Wigston the ridge and furrow was called rig and throrr another Wigston phrase.



*There are still more personal, and field names which could have been considered, some of which are given below.*

TURPINS  
CAL DOBSON  
STOCKHILL  
BARN CLOSE  
PIT CLOSE  
PLOUGH CLOSE  
SQUIRES NOB  
SOUTH SLADE  
ABBOTTS GRAVE  
TOFTS  
TEASTE HILL  
BIRKETT  
BARNLEY  
CLEYHILL  
CLIFTON  
COPPICE  
CARTLAND  
HEADLANDS  
LEWIN  
MORLEY  
RAWSON  
RIDINGS  
RIDGEWAY

SIBSON  
SANDHILLS  
SYLVAN  
STONEYLEYS  
SWAN  
WAIN OR WAYNE  
WHEATLANDS  
ANCHOR CLOSE  
BROOKE SLADE  
BADGERS HILL  
CRANES MEADOW  
EYL HILL  
GRES CROFT  
PRIESTS TOFT  
MOORE  
NEWTON MERE  
LOVEDAYS  
FRANKLINS  
SALTIES  
MOUSELAY  
HANGING HILL  
NETHER HANGING  
MEADOW



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