

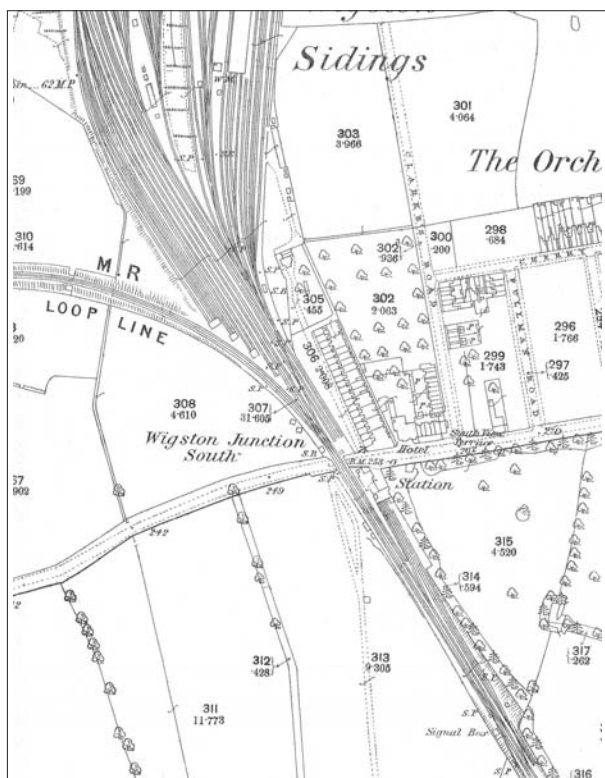
HISTORY OF THE AREA : MIDLAND COTTAGES

> Brief history / archaeology

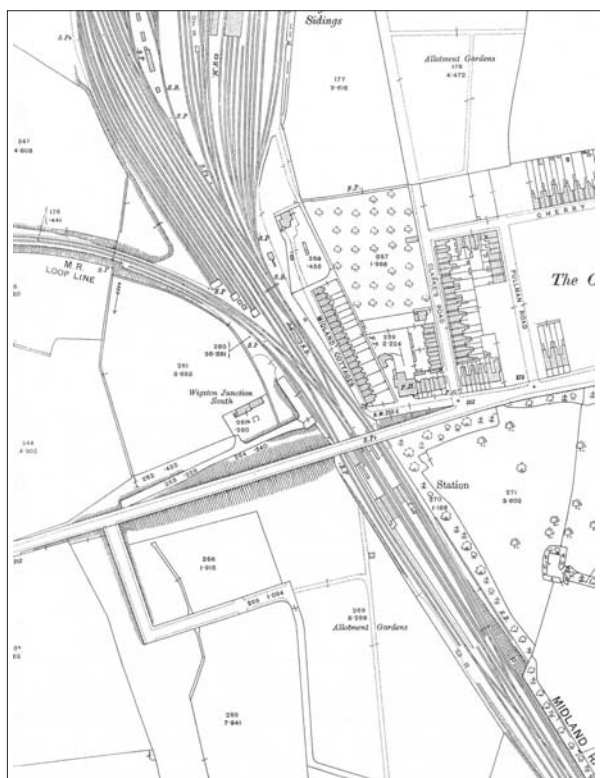
The development of the railway network was one of the most significant events of the Victorian era. Its impacts touched upon almost every aspect of Victorian life and provided employment, directly and indirectly to a huge number of people. The larger railway companies quickly saw the advantages of providing houses as a means of securing high quality staff.

The provision of housing was a sound business investment for the railway companies and also displayed the Company's wealth, prestige and philanthropy to all. The Midland Railway, formed in 1833, was one of the largest providers of housing. The houses that they built were often to a standard pattern with easy to transport bricks for the walls and Welsh slate for the roofs.

The South Wigston Midland Railway Cottages were built between 1871 and 1881 at an important point on the railway network where the loop line from Glen Parva met the main line to Market Harborough and London. Wigston Magna Railway Station, which opened in 1857, stood to the south of the cottages across Station Road. Originally Station Road crossed the railway line at a level crossing next to the cottages and the hotel. In 1901 this all changed with the construction of the Spion Kop bridge, named after the Boer War battle in that year. This meant that the hotel was effectively by-passed with a steep embankment between the old and new roads.



Extract from 1885 Ordnance Survey map



Extract from 1914 Ordnance Survey map

The 1885 Ordnance Survey map reveals that to the north of the cottages stood a large house, possibly for the station master. The hotel at the rear had a U-shaped wing, possibly stables whilst to the north of it was a large area of orchards. Clarke's Road to the east had already been laid out and various houses lined it.

By 1891, the Midland Cottages were occupied by train drivers, who were considered to be the elite of the railway's workforce together with other railway workers. Many other houses in the streets behind the Midland Railway Cottages were also occupied by railway workers and the area must have been something of a 'railway village'.

The railway station closed in 1968 and several of the sidings have been abandoned. The cottages continue to look across the railway lines though a large railing encloses the railway. The other changes include the various alterations made to the cottages, the renaming of the Railway Hotel to 'The 1852 Brewery Co.' and the removal of the steps down from the bridge opposite the old Railway Hotel.