# HISTORY OF THE AREA

> Brief history

According to legend, the name Wigston originated from Crown Prince Wigstan, heir to the Kingdom of Mercia who was murdered in 849AD by Berhtwulf, the Regent King. Shortly after his death, he was declared a saint and a church has been dedicated to St Wistan or (Wystan) ever since.

At the centre of modern Wigston are 'The Lanes' which may well have been the site of the original Anglo-Saxon settlement until it was abandoned when the Vikings invaded towards the end of the ninth century. Two settlements became established with two churches - eventually becoming known as the Wigston Magna District of Two Steeples in 1529.

The Anglo-Saxon community was centred on St Wistan's Church and the Viking community centred on All Saints' Church. The Anglo-Saxon settlement grew along Bull Head Street and the Viking settlement grew around Newgate End. Eventually the two settlements amalgamated forming the rectangular village centre bounded by Moat Street, Bull Head Street, Bell Street and Long Street.

In 1381 Wigston was the largest place in Leicestershire outside the County Town and Magna (meaning 'great') was added to the village name in 1453. As the population increased, communications and markets increased and improved too and the open communal field methods of subsistence farming were brought to an end by the 1764 Wigston Enclosure Act.
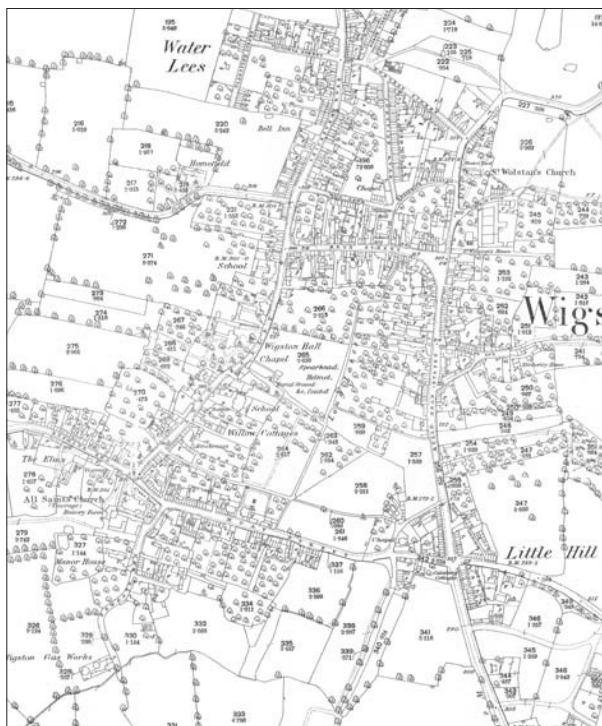
Extract from 1885 Ordnance Survey map
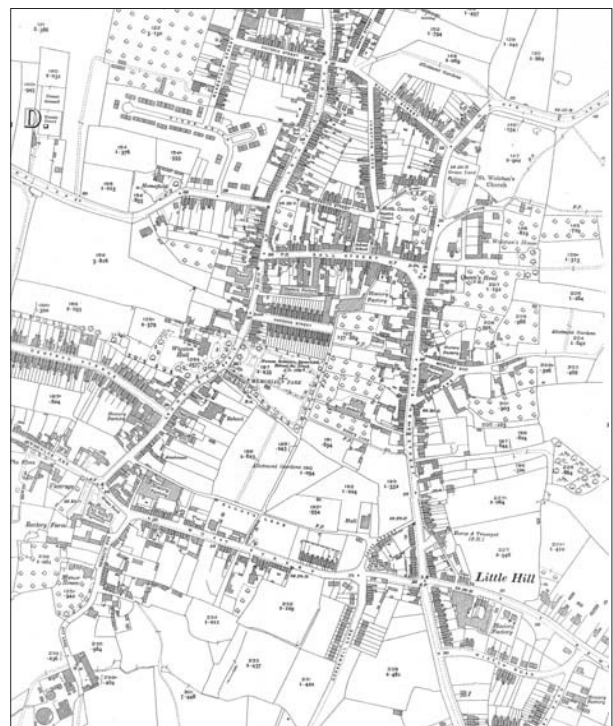
Extract from 1930 Ordnance Survey map

With enclosure, smallholders could not afford to buy land and smallholders of subsistence farming became almost non-existent as peasant farmers diminished and framework knitting became their full time occupation. However, with increased mechanisation and the establishment of the many hosiery factories that characterised the area throughout the nineteenth century, the framework knitter society eventually perished too.

In the nineteenth century, canal and railway developments occurred in the original medieval fields bringing other people to live in what had been a predominately agricultural society. This industrialisation resulted in the expansion of building to meet industrial and housing needs. From the early 1900s until the beginning of World War II, building development continued in several locations within the old medieval fields area.

Although the industrialisation of the nineteenth century saw dramatic changes to the former village that had formed around the two churches, the 'progress' of the twentieth century has been the cause of the greatest changes to the area. Road widening schemes and the development of commercial premises have swept away many historic properties and altered the street pattern of the area.