

## HERITAGE TRAIL



## WALES COTTAGE

William and Martha Wale were engaged in the Framework Knitting business from this cottage. Manufacture of Knitwear was once one of the most important industries in Leicestershire from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.



In 1589 William Lee a Clergyman living in Woodborough invented the stocking frame. After a patent was refused by Elizabeth I, Lee took his invention to France in 1608 where he died penniless in 1622.

In 1811 there were tens of thousands of knitting frames in small workshops throughout the East Midlands. At this time larger powered machines capable of making multiple garments at a time, suited to factory production were developed and undercut the Framework Knitters. This resulted in a secret protest movement called the Luddites, their mythical leader was Captain Ludd. They protested against the poor conditions faced by the workers, destroying the new knitting frames at night. Riots ensued which were savagely put down by the authorities, raising the militia. John Mynors Bulstrode of Worthington was a captain in the Leicestershire Yeomanry cavalry militia used in this area.

In 1843 over 25,000 framework knitters signed a petition to Parliament complaining about wages, unemployment, new machinery, frame rents and imports of knitted goods. A Royal Commission interviewed workers, visiting Osgathorpe. Most Frames were rented on a weekly basis from a Hosier, who supplied the yarn, while the rent continued to rise, the yarn was supplied for a few days work. The industry continued to decline.

The census statements for Wales cottage demonstrates how William and Martha's occupations changed to adapt to change:-

- 1851 census William Wale aged 35 occupation *Stocking makers, cotton and thread*, his wife Martha was a *stocking seamer* finishing the garments. The description of their trade suggests that they were buying and selling thread and owned the frames that the garments were made on.
- 1861 census he has further diversified describing his occupation as *Family Hosier and Designer*, employing four men and is now engaged in retail.
- 1871 census his occupation is *Druggist and Licensed Pharmaceuticals* but still there is a *stocking seamer* and *Framework Knitter* living at the property.
- 1881 now 65 Wale is described as a *Chemist*. At the time Doctors were only affordable by the rich, and Dr 'John' Wales as he was known would have supplied an affordable alternative.

William and Martha Wale, daughter Annie (who died at 14yrs old), son in law and mother in law, are all buried in Griffydham graveyard.