

# Development of the Village

## The Changing Face of Great Houghton

### Introduction

The Chapter on the history of the village illustrates that Great Houghton had a noteworthy past and has been long established. People who lived in the village in the past probably thought that they saw dramatic changes to the village during their lifetime. But records show that the most dramatic and significant changes have happened in the 20th century with the development of medicines, transportation, communications, essential services and the other facets of modern life.

The development of Northampton Town has been enormously influential on Great Houghton, as it has on the other surrounding villages.

### 11th to 17th Centuries

The people of the village in these earlier centuries mainly followed occupations for which there was a need in the local community within which they lived. Activities in general were kept within the village and surrounding farms.

The area around the village had many watermills and windmills, a number of the former being mentioned in the Domesday Book.

Around the 14th century occupations included millers, labourers, tailors, yeomen and masons. The register of baptism in the early 15th century showed villagers employed as clerks, shepherds, husbandmen, carpenters and milliners (not in the hat trade, but odd job men). Even “Gentlemen” were mentioned, but perhaps the most significant entry was that of “school teacher”. This is important, because it shows that there was a school actually in the village, because at that time people lived close to their work. The teacher, one John Willowbed also worked as a constable and a churchwarden.

### 18th Century

The parish register for the first half of the 18th century has entries for people known as “Woad People”. Woad was grown for its blue dye (extracted from its leaves) and also to cleanse the soil of the crane fly and click beetle larvae. The Woad People were outsiders and lived on the southern edge of the village.

A track called Blue Lane (now disappeared) crossed the fields in this area, although some older maps refer to the lane running from Saucebridge Farm towards Wootton as Blue Lane. The Woad People would supply the dyers in Scarletwell Street in Northampton with their blue dye. No doubt the villagers of Great Houghton would trek the three and a half miles to get their wool dyed.

There were millwrights, graziers and shoemakers in this century, but also weavers and a woolmaker, suggesting that the village may have boasted a small wool cloth industry at this time.

## 19th Century

The 19th century saw a wide range of occupations in the village, particularly from the middle of the century onwards when the building of the railway added to the employment statistics. With carriers regularly going to Northampton, people moved more freely out of the village, most notably shoemakers, who took their shoes to the town to be “closed” at the shoe factories. Most employment was centred on farming, domestic service, the railway, and boot and shoe manufacture.

## 20th Century

By the 1930s 80% of the working population of the village worked in Northampton, perhaps an indication of the onset of the dormitory status of the village. Although some people were prepared to walk into town, with an omnibus servicing the village and the bicycle becoming more popular, people were more willing to travel into Northampton to seek work especially as it was only three miles away. The town itself was growing, both in size and importance.

Improvements in transport facilities continued. Knights ran the bus service in their little white charabanc-type vehicles, which bounced and rattled along between Yardley Hastings and Northampton. Often, when arriving at Great Houghton the bus would be too full to pick up all those waiting to travel into Northampton, but the driver would cheerily shout “Stay there, I’ll come back for you” (must have played havoc with the time-tables). The starting place for the return journey was in Victoria Promenade, near to the bottom of Albion Place, or one could catch it at Beckett’s Well. In the late 1930s the Eastern National started to run one or two buses each day, and gradually took over completely as the years went by. Eventually a large bus station was built in Derigate, and United Counties took over routes in Northamptonshire and the surrounding areas. Few people owned their own cars, and during the war years and for some time afterwards, there was a chronic shortage of petrol,

hence more and more people used the buses for work and shopping. It was not unusual for the early morning buses to be packed full to capacity on reaching Great Houghton, and there was no alternative but to start walking to get to work.

York's of Cogenhoe currently run a Cogenhoe-Northampton Monday to Friday service of several buses each day into the village with Goodes providing the service on Saturdays. United Counties (now part of Stagecoach) run an almost hourly Bedford-Northampton service, which stops at the junction of the High Street and Bedford road. United Counties also provide the school service to Wollaston during term time, which can also be used by the fare-paying public.

Before major work was carried out in the 1970s to change the course of the main flow of the River Nene, the melting of snow or prolonged heavy rain would cause the river to burst its banks turning the road around the Rushmills area into a deep torrent. The few houses there plus the Britannia pub would be awash. This made getting to work something of an adventure for not only was it almost impossible to get through the water, but the roads would be jammed with vehicles stuck or trying to turn around. The best plan was to try to get a lift on the back of a lorry or a tractor-trailer, which many managed to do more than once.

Regarding the growth of the village, it seems that in the late 1920s and early 1930s a number of old village cottages were beginning to fall into serious disrepair. Several either fell down or were demolished, and these included cottages in Cherry Tree Lane (where the Cherry Tree pub car park is now). A row of small cottages situated opposite the present bus shelter at The Cross became very unsafe and had their roofs and bedrooms removed, leaving ground floor walls standing for a considerable number of years - ideal for children's games of hide-and-seek, etc. Council houses in middle High Street and in Willow Lane were erected between the two wars, and were specifically for local village families.

Electricity had been installed in the village in the early 1930s, but the villagers had to wait until the early 1950s for the luxury of having both piped mains water and the main sewer installed. For months the village looked like a bombsite as roads and paths into houses were dug up for the installation of pipes. There were very few complaints, as now, at last, gone were the days of emptying the 'privy' bucket into the garden (made extremely difficult in the winter when the ground was rock hard with frost!). Street lighting didn't arrive until the late 1950s and there was even longer to wait for gas, which did not arrive until the 1980s.

Because of the war, no building whatsoever took place during the 1940s. The building trade took some time to recover, but in the early 1950s, six more

council homes were built at upper High Street on the site of an old orchard. A number of private houses were also built on the East Side of lower High Street together with more council homes.

Further expansion of the village began with new bungalows in Willow Crescent by the building firm of Adkins and Shaw. Mr Eric Adkins and his family were, by this time, resident in Great Houghton House, which he purchased on the death of Mrs Paget. He also had houses built along Glebe Lane and Willow Crescent. Also, about this time, old cottages on both sides of the lower end of Willow Lane were demolished to make way for a number of small bungalows, specifically for the retirement of elderly village people. More bungalows were also built at The Green.

With the expanding population it became imperative that a Village Hall was established. Various options were investigated but the final solution came with the purchase at auction, by the Parish Council of what is now the playing field. It had been hoped to build a permanent hall on the site soon afterwards but a compromise solution was the only option at the time and two second-hand post war 'pre-fab' houses were erected as one unit and which still act as the Village Hall even after almost 30 years.

Our village continued to grow in the 1970s and 1980s with the 'Great Houghton Heights' estate of houses and bungalows creating what are now Atterbury Way and Dobson Close. 'The Green Estate' established a further 59 homes in Keats Close and Wymersley Close and Lime Farm Way. Further small developments at Paget Close and Cherry Tree Lane continued into the 1980s.

This considerable amount of new building has brought many young families into the community and with them an injection of new life and spirit that we hope will long continue.

It is hoped that the village will remain separate from the town, and that although it lies within the Borough boundary, it does not become another "swallowed-up suburb". Already the Brackmills industrial estate has spread alarmingly near to our village and has continued to grow although some element of segregation has been established by earth mounding and planting of trees, which will eventually completely obscure the 'warehouse' landscape from the village. Years ago a popular family walk on a warm evening would be 'around the ford'. This would start at the gated road by Martin's Farm, the lane winding round in a circle, passing what is now 'Little Norway' and coming back to the Bedford Road near to the Britannia pub. Here there were level crossing gates on the Northampton to Wellingborough railway line. Children were always hoping to arrive in time to see Mr Butler emerge from

his small cottage to unlock the gates, opening them for a train to pass through - a great thrill.

It is hoped that future 'planners' will recognise that Great Houghton, lying so attractively on the rise of a hill, should be left intact, surrounded by a border of green fields.

## **Building Development**

Great Houghton is pleasantly surrounded by fields, which are given to both arable, and livestock farming, a situation well illustrated by the aerial photograph of the village taken in 1993.



The physical growth of the village has been very much a mix and match development with the building of a variety of housing types. It must be said, however, that generally the newer dwellings rest comfortably with the older and historic buildings. The village has maintained a lot of character and is well provided with grass verges, trees and well-tended gardens, with few houses standing directly adjacent to the road. Now that the bridge over the disused railway has been modified, a pavement on at least one side of the road ensures that a person can walk from one end of the village to the other without having to walk on the road. This option does not, of course extend to the parish boundary, which is beyond the built-up area.

The village, being quite compact, provides a pleasant walk through its roads and lanes although at times it is uphill. There is an opportunity to view all the variances in housing styles, old and new, historical to modern, the eye-catching gardens and the general village environment and also perhaps a moment or two to dwell in either of the two hostelries for an enjoyable beverage.

The major visual change to the village was the dramatic housing development that was at its height in the 1970s and 80s, when, according to the appraisal survey, about 50% of the houses in the village were built. The 'before and after' photographs illustrate the dramatic nature of this change.



Main Street or Lower High Street probably late 1930s



Lower High Street 2002

## Dwellings

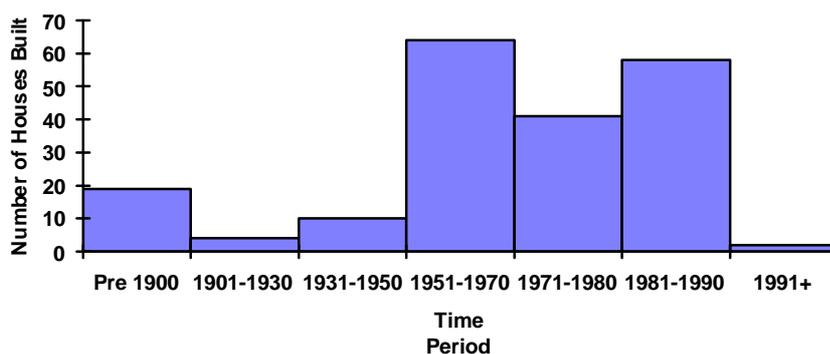
There is a great diversity in both the age and style of housing in the village, although over three-quarters of all the houses are detached. The building styles are themselves a chronicle of the village's history. Building developments have been single developments, small-scale projects of six or seven houses, or small estates. The south end of the village has seen the bulk of the most recent developments. According to the 1993 survey, 61% of villagers thought that the amount of the development in the village had been about right. This may have seemed a little odd until it is realised that the majority of these people live in the new houses that have been built! 23% of the population thought that too many houses had been built in the past ten years.

There remains little scope for further significant development with the western edge of the village being designated 'green space', although there is perhaps the possibility of further limited 'in-fill' building. Unsurprisingly, in 1994 the prospect of further development was, and probably still is, very unpopular with 68% of those surveyed at the time saying that the housing stock of the village should remain the same during the next ten years, which essentially it has done.

The survey found that around eleven people were planning to move away from the rest of their household and the village. It is perhaps a matter of concern that very little property within the village is of the 'low cost - affordable housing type. To those who are just starting adulthood requiring independent housing, it can be assumed that they will be forced to seek housing elsewhere until they have an improved financial position. This clearly will affect the continuity of life in the village from 'cradle to grave'.

It is interesting to reflect that in a few years' time the young professional couples who moved into the developing village in the last twenty years will be reaching retirement age. Their children will have moved away because there was no affordable housing for them. In 1993 only 8% of the village saw a demand for housing for elderly people. It is a safe bet that this figure will have increased significantly by now and even more in twenty years' time.

**Housing Development in Great Houghton**



## Grade II Listed Buildings

Great Houghton has seventeen listed buildings; most of them located in the conservation area. This section features some of the listed buildings, and at the end of the chapter there is a table showing all of them.

### Great Houghton House

This imposing building stands in the High Street and is now owned by a firm of architects who use it as offices. The building dates from the 17th century, but it was altered in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is made of coursed



rubble with a slate roof. There were stables in the grounds - listed as outbuildings, which have now been converted into apartments. The garden wall to this house is listed, along with three carved stone vases, all from the 18th century. Great Houghton House has been used in the past as the village polling station where, at one time the entrance hall housed the polling booth, but an outbuilding was pressed into service later on.



The house used to stand on a much larger piece of land and also contained a tennis court, but much of this has been sold off for modern housing in what is now Paget Close and The Green

### Number One, The Green

This cottage, known as 'Sunnybank' is owned by John and Vicki Hall, and lived in by them and their three children. The building has belonged to the same family for many years and is greatly cherished. It is a long building, set at right angles to the main road, on the edge of the green. A number of trees in the garden are protected by preservation orders.

Mr John Sidney Hall rented Sunnybank from Mrs Paget in 1936, eventually purchasing it in 1955. During this period there were no changes to the fabric of the cottage. In 1955 the building was connected to the mains water supply for the first time. Prior to that all water was drawn from a well in the garden by a pump in the kitchen. In 1968 a garage and a downstairs cloakroom were added. In 1982 John and Vicki Hall bought the cottage from Mrs Christine Hall. In that year the orchard at the side of the cottage was sold for building land. This is now number 1a The Green. In 1983 a number of modernisation works were carried out inside the cottage, although it is worth noting that the cottage retains its original windows. The cellar, too, is unaltered, with a brick floor and a large fireplace. It was probably used as a kitchen. The present kitchen used to be a stable.

The building was two workers' cottages, which have been knocked into one - the date of this is unknown, although the original cottages were early 18th century (there is a date of 1703 on a gable end). The entrance to the first cottage is still evidenced by the lintel on the side of the house. There is now a walk-in cupboard where the stairs used to be. The cottage was originally thatched; evidence of which can still be found in the attic. All the fireplaces seem to have been installed in the 1930s. There were probably inglenooks in the lounge and the dining room. There is an oven damper still in evidence in the kitchen. All the upstairs fireplaces are 1930s cast iron additions.



'Sunnybank' in the 1920s

## 20-22 The Green

The cottage is built of Northamptonshire stone, a soft mellow sandstone with occasional patches of the darker iron stone. The date stone on the end of the house is dated 1675 and marked with a heart and an R,V. However there are 'sooty' marks to be seen on the timbers in the roof and the position of these marks could be signs of an earlier habitation than the above date. It has been suggested that the cottage could have been an old Hall house, a meetinghouse, where folk sat round a central fire and the smoke drifted out through the thatch. Thus giving the building an earlier dating of around 1500. The walls are 22 inches thick including the interior walls and there are two inglenook fireplaces. We do know that the wall with the date stone has been part of an extension at some time. This therefore could be the oldest building in the village and as far as we are aware there are no ghosts lurking in the background.

The building is situated, as was usual for the time, at right angles to the road, and close to a well. The deeds mention access to the well in some detail. The original roof was in thatch, now it is slated. At some time it is said that this was the Bakehouse.

When Margaret Brown bought the property just over thirty years ago she paid £800 for it at auction. There was only one cold water tap and a bucket in the privy up the garden! It now has a bathroom, a shower room and kitchen, all with running water.

It is said that the previous owner, Granny Chapman used to sit on this in the morning and wave to the children when they went to school. Incidentally she was the oldest lady in Northampton when she died.

About 10 years later the neighbours, Mrs. Hawkins at No 20, moved out and the property became one again.

Old barns were then demolished and the stone used to build a kitchen extension. Stairs were removed and the usual 'modernisation' processes have taken place over the years. Interior beams can still be seen, most of which are original. Two original quarry tiled floors still exist; one was replaced but with the same tiles. An effort has been made to keep as much of the original framework of the cottage as possible and now that it is a 'Listed Two' building it is sincerely hoped that future generations can enjoy and live with the past and the present in perfect harmony.



## The Manor House

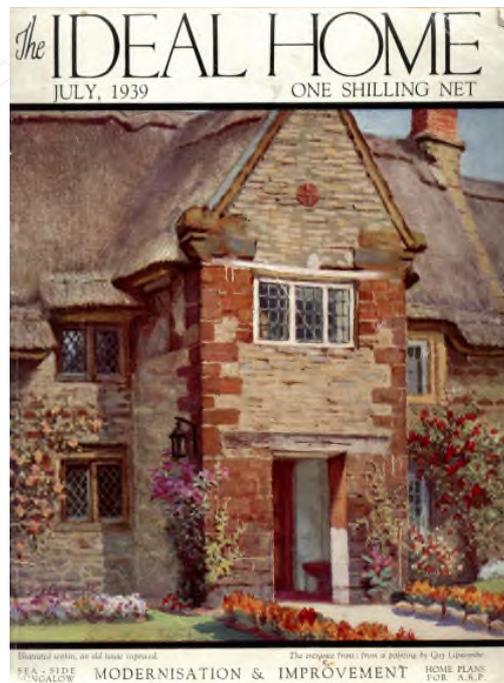


Mr and Mrs Wright have lived in this beautiful old farmhouse for the past thirty years. During this time they have restored it to a very comfortable home, but in its original form, rather than a modernised one.

Original flagstones can still be seen under rugs in the hall. Two large fireplaces, which were once covered over, have been opened up and the original stonework cleaned. Old panelling in the sitting room, previously covered in numerous layers of paint and stain, has been cleaned and exposed to the light again.

In 1939 it featured on the cover of the *Ideal Home* magazine, which shows a beautiful colour picture of the entrance. Unfortunately all the other pictures inside are in black and white but the detail of the interior and especially the stairway can be clearly seen. It is a very valuable record of the property at that time and that it was chosen to be a feature in a prestigious magazine is something the owner and the village can be proud of.

Thirty years ago the grounds were overgrown, but these have been cleared and low stone walls and steps found. The stone-lined well in the outside porch still contains water. It is said that a tunnel may lead from this well to the Old Cherry Tree pub. It is also said that Oliver Cromwell may have used this tunnel whilst in the area. This tale aside, there are apparently no ghosts or spirits lurking in the house.



In the early 1980s the roof was re-thatched with straw. During this job attic windows were found, one of which has been opened up and thatched around.

Although it is called the 'Manor House', this property was probably only a farmhouse and got its name from the fact that it was built on the foundations of an old manor house.

## **Other Grade II Listed Buildings**

### **High Street - West Side**

Buildings, which were formerly the stables of Great Houghton Hall (now the preparatory school). Built in the 18th century and made of ashlar (blocks of stone) with a Welsh slated roof and stone cornice.

An early 18th century Dovecote situated in the Old Rectory garden. This is square in plan and two storeys high.

The Old Rectory was built in 1720 and later altered in the 19th century. It consists of coursed rubble ashlar and some brick. The roof is Welsh slate.

Number 34 was originally a single house which was converted into two, and is now returned to being one. This was one of the village manor houses. It consists of limestone with brown stone corners. The roof is again Welsh slate and there are two chimneystacks to the right and left of centre.

Number 36 is a 17th century cottage which was altered in the 18th or 19th century. This building is also made of rubble ashlar and slate roof with stone coping and kneelers to the gables. This building is part of one of the manor houses.

The garden wall to Great Houghton House is also listed, along with three carved stone vases. They are all from the 18th century.

### **High Street - East Side**

The White Hart public house was built in the 17th century but has since been altered. It is made of coursed limestone rubble and has a thatched roof and flanking chimneys.

Lane End is 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century but has been altered. It is of coursed rubble with a Welsh slated roof with flanking chimneys. Its uses included a shop, a smallholding and a co-op before becoming a private dwelling.

## Table of Listed Buildings

Note: All buildings are Grade II except the church, which is Grade A.

| <i>Ref.</i>   | <i>Details</i>   |
|---------------|--|
| <b>24/417</b> | The Cross (East Side) No. 11. Formerly listed as Manor House. 1672 altered.                                    |
| <b>24/418</b> | The Cross (East Side) Barn of No. 11, now a garage. Forms a group with 417. 17th century, altered.             |
| <b>25/419</b> | The Cross (North Side). No. 1. The Farm House. Early 17th century.   |
| <b>25/420</b> | The Cross (South Side). The Old Cherry Tree Inn. 1576 on wall.   |
| <b>24/421</b> | The Green (East Side). No 1. Sunnybank. 1703 on gable end.   |
| <b>24/423</b> | The Green (West Side). Nos. 20 & 22. 1675  |
| <b>25/425</b> | High St (West Side). Outbuilding - formerly stables of Gt. Houghton Hall. 18th century.                        |
| <b>24/426</b> | High St (West Side). Church of St. Mary the Virgin (formerly listed as Church of St Mary). 1754                |
| <b>24/427</b> | High St (West Side). The Old Rectory. 1720, altered 19th century.  |
| <b>24/428</b> | High St (West Side). Dovecote in the grounds of Old Rectory. Early 18th century. Forms group with 426 and 427. |
| <b>24/429</b> | High Street (West Side). No. 34. 17th century.   |
| <b>24/430</b> | High Street (West Side). No. 36. 17th century, altered.  |
| <b>24/431</b> | High Street (West Side). Gt. Houghton House. 17th century, altered 18th and 19th century.                      |
| <b>24/432</b> | High Street (West Side). Garden wall bordering Gt. Houghton House.   |
| <b>24/433</b> | High Street (West Side). Outbuildings, formerly stables of Gt. Houghton House. Forms group with 431 and 432.   |
| <b>24/434</b> | High Street (East Side). The White Hart Inn. 17th century, altered.  |
| <b>24/435</b> | High Street (East Side). Lane End. 17th or early 18th century, altered.  |

## Village Road Names

The names of some of the lanes and roads in our parish have been in existence for hundreds of years and they tell us a great deal of our village's history.

These tracks, as they probably were then, were given names as a means of identification through the trees, plants, and landmarks in the vicinity. Examples of these names include Cherry Tree Lane, Leys Lane, and the Cracknuts (named Rectory Close in 1971, but renamed Cracknuts Lane in 1995).

**Cherry Tree Lane** takes its name from the Cherry orchard, which used to be at the end of the lane and included what is now the Parish Cemetery.

**Leys Lane** acquired its name from the 19<sup>th</sup> century names of fields to the East of the lane, which were called 'The Lee' (1612), 'Leys Ground' and 'Front Ley'.

**Cracknuts** led up to the old village school and several allotments, and along it grew many hazelnut and walnut trees. The origin of this wonderfully-named lane is lost in the mists of time but is probably from the many nut trees, although some have said from the possibility of the cracking of heads as two people tried to squeeze through the old kissing gate which was situated at the entrance to the lane. The name was never formally adopted and when the new houses, including the new Rectory, were planned to be built at the end of the lane in 1971, both the Rural and Parish Councils agreed that it should be called Cracknuts. However they were taken to the Northampton Magistrates court by the developers where they were overruled and the name 'Rectory Close' was established. In 1995 the residents were 100% agreed that they wished to revert to the original name and the Northampton Borough Council Transport committee agreed to the name 'Cracknuts'

The road now known as **Willow Lane** used to be called Back Lane by the villagers, presumably because it was the back way or alternate way to the High Street. However the name change was very apt because the Public footpath leading from this lane to the dip in the fields between Great and Little Houghton was known as 'The Willows'. Unfortunately most of the willow trees have now gone, but the name gives us a picture of what the area once looked like.

**The Cross** would seem to have come from its location as a crossroads or meeting point. Six roads converged at this point when East Street (or Lane) existed. Some would fondly believe that it was the site of an old preaching or other cross but no evidence of this has been established.

**Glebe Lane** is so named because it leads to land owned by ecclesiastical authorities. It was put in by the Midland Railway for access to the allotments as the railway had severed the original access lane from Cracknuts to the allotments. At one time many villagers rented plots of land here for allotments, the produce grown being a necessary addition to a family's often very low income. In the evenings and at weekends one would see people coming and going laden with their gardening tools or, often, pushing their homemade wooden barrows (old pram wheels were always in great demand for these). On part of this land was a small orchard of plum and apple trees run by Mr Harry Walker (who had a notable black beard) and his family, and in the spring one would see them coming away with armfuls of daffodils which grew in abundance underneath the trees.

**The Green**, so called because of the village pond and green, a small enclosure in which stray animals were kept until claimed by the owner as first recorded in the village Constables account for 1649. It was also known as Top Green to distinguish it from the green at The Cross

**High Street** was known as Main Road (being the main road through the village) until, for some unknown reason, the name was changed in the late 1940s.

When the village began to grow with the building of a considerable number of new houses and bungalows, an effort was made to choose street names which had some connection with the history of the village.

**Willow Crescent** was an obvious choice as it was a curved road and ran off Willow Lane although today it has priority at the junction.

**Dobson Close**, was named in memory of Mr W.W. Dobson. For 31 years he was Headmaster of Little Houghton Church of England School, which also served the children of Great Houghton. He was also a great athlete encouraging the village children into athletics and scouting. He was clerk to the Parish Council for many years and sadly died in a tragic traffic accident on the Bedford road.

**Atterbury Way** is taken from the Atterbury family who lived in the village from the 16<sup>th</sup> century as Lords of The Manor, owning land and influencing local life and developments for a very long time.

When The Green Estate was first proposed all the roads were to be named after poets, Scott Close, Wordsworth Way and Keats Close. **Keats Close** was assigned to the first phase to be built, but local objections were raised and the need to preserve local identity caused the Parish Council to object. Final agreement was reached on the name **Wymersley Close**, which comes from the "Wymersley Hundred" within which Great Houghton lies. In the Middle Ages the counties of England were divided into 'Hundreds', and each would contain approximately one hundred families and be given an individual name, probably of a leading family. It would also have a specific central place for the holding of public meetings, courts, etc.

**Lime Farm Way**, in place of Wordsworth Way, was the name of the farm on which the estate was built. The farm was agricultural land farmed by Mr and Mrs Spencer Courtman. Where the houses now stand was ground that was the nesting place for dozens of sky larks which when disturbed would rise up singing - never directly from their nests, which were extremely hard to find. The fields were also well known for the several hundred pairs of goldfinches, which used to make it their home.

At one time a Mr Frank Blackwell, who was something of a local character, owned the land on which Lime Farm stood. It is said that he owned numerous properties including many houses in Northampton that, it was alleged, were occupied by many ladies of ill repute. He could be seen riding around, dressed in black, on his 'sit up and beg' bicycle complete with basket, collecting his 'rents'. He would then disappear into the black Dickensian shop he owned in Robert Street. Despite their efforts, the police could never quite 'nail' him. When he died his estate was valued in excess of £100,000 (some ££2million by today's standards).

**Paget Close**, which was built on land forming part of Great Houghton House, is named after the Paget family who owned and lived in Great Houghton House. They also owned other property in the village and had influence on village life.