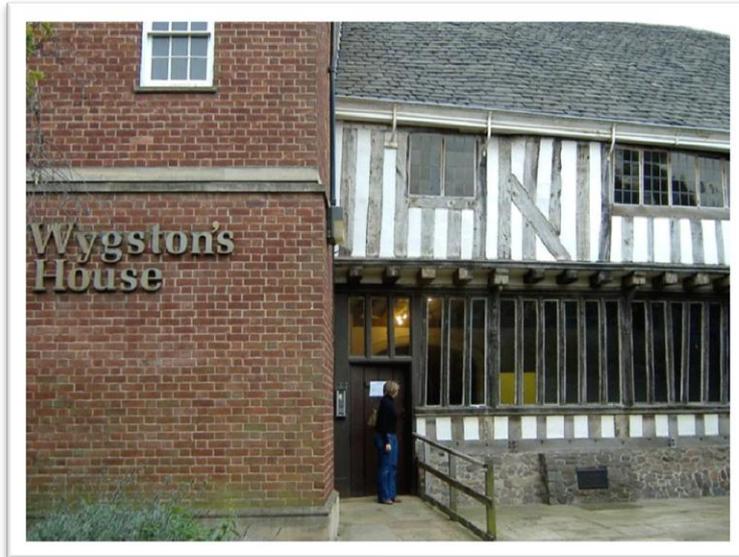


## Wygston's House

Wygston's House is the oldest house in Leicester. It has been here since medieval times and the road it stood on was the widest and busiest thoroughfare in the town, High Street.



We don't know why this house survives when others, which may have been significantly grander, have not. It would have been close to the meeting houses of two powerful medieval guilds, Corpus Christi and St. George, and the house may have had a religious role.

### The House

The house comprises a timber hall of around 1490; a brick block of 1796 which replaced an earlier timber shop and chamber and a Victorian (1800s) wing standing on the site of the medieval kitchen.

The oldest part of Wygston's House, the timber-framed part, comprises a ground floor hall (living space) and upper chambers for sleeping and storage. Originally it had a shop at the front and kitchens at the rear. The upper floor of this part projects out over the ground floor, known as a jetty. At intervals there are ornamental brackets.

The front of the timber hall has a range of windows which were once filled with panels of painted glass, facing onto a courtyard. You can see four of these glass panels dated to 1495-1500 at Newarke Houses Museum.



Glass panels in the ground floor room, indicates the hall was the most important room, but at the end of the 1700s this room had come down in the world and was divided with one of the halves being a kitchen. Glaziers' engravings in the glass tell us it was re-leaded in 1764 and 1796. The date and style of the glass is very similar to the fragments of glass in the Mayor's Parlour at the Guildhall close by.

The painted glass from the windows was removed by Rev. Richard Stephens who sold the house and moved the glass to his new house in Belgrave around 1824.



The upper room of the half-timbered section of the house was divided by four main upright timbers into three bays, each about 5 metres. When the house was reconstructed in the early 1970s, a tie beam was revealed. This was finished internally with laths which were plastered over with mud mixed with grit, hair and feathers. Large flat stones were wedged into slots in the sides of the vertical timbers as infilling on the outer surface, so it was probably an outside wall at one end of the building.

In the roof, rafters from either side met at the top. Each main beam across the room has two uprights or Queen posts supporting the collar beams above. Diagonal braces lie flat against the underside of the roof keeping the structure square. There was wall painting on the plaster of the north and south walls of this upper room but it is now too faint to make out.



## Roger Wygston

The house may have belonged to Roger Wygston, a member of the rich and important local family who were part of Leicester's highest faith and corporation circles in the later 1400s and early 1500s.

Roger Wygston was born about 1430. His father, William, made the family fortune from the wool trade in the first half of the 1400s. Roger was elected chamberlain in 1459 and mayor of Leicester in 1465, 1471 and 1487. He was Member of Parliament for Leicester in 1473 and 1488. He died at Whitsun 1507 and was buried in the Lady Chapel in St. Martin's church. Roger's nephew, William is better known to later generations of Leicester citizens. He founded Wygston's Hospital in 1513 and his money was later used to found the Wyggeston Schools.

The initials RW intertwined appear many times in the panels of painted glass that were in the house – the W more prominent than the R - which could belong to Roger Wygston or to another rich merchant of the period, but the nature of the glass suggests association with the highest levels of Leicester's society, which was certainly true of the Wygston family.



Ownership of Wygston's House can be traced without a break from 1557 when Richard Chettle, constable of Leicester, owned it. It passed to his son Rafe, who became mayor of Leicester. Both men were members of St. Martin's church. A lawyer, William Topp lived in the house in 1708, but paid rent to the Corporation and it is recorded that John Stephens was living there in 1750 and 1813, followed by the Rev. Richard Stephens.

In 1796 the east front of the building in the former High Street was taken down and a fashionable Georgian brick front added instead with an elegant doorway. After the Rev. Richard Stephens, a number of surgeons lived in the house in Victorian times: Robert Wingate, William Ashley Cox-Hippisley and William Pemberton Peake. It then became the antiques emporium of R. B. Renals & Sons. There are objects in the museum collection acquired from the emporium including a parasol and a barometer.

### **Costume Museum**



After restoration, Wygston's House opened as a museum of costume in 1974. The museum contained a collection of costume looked after by Nancie Allen (1909-1984). Nancie was famous for "The Underwear Box" with which generations of curators gave talks about Victorian underwear using real specimens.



The garden of Wygston's House, was established as a memorial garden for Nancie, replanted with evergreens and winter flowering shrubs. A bench bears a plaque to Nancie's memory presented by her friends in the museums community. Objects from the costume collection, including a 1920s draper's shop can now be seen at Newarke Houses Museum.

**For further information**

Wygston's House is administered by Leicester Museums Service, and is open for tours during Heritage Open Days (6<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> September) and starting in October the last Sunday of every month (not December and January). For further information about Wygston's House, contact the Interim Heritage Manager at Leicester City Council on 0116 252 7318.

**[www.storyofleicester.info](http://www.storyofleicester.info)**