

1854 to 1899

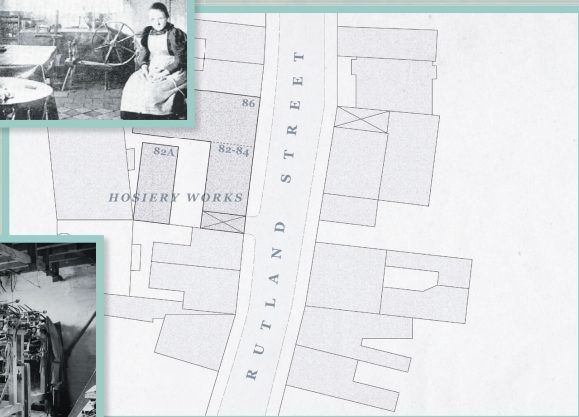
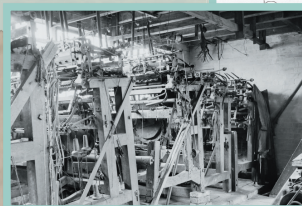
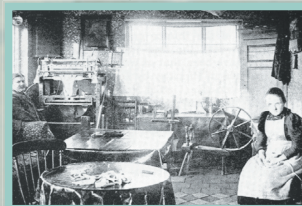
Makers Yard.

Makers Yard tells the story of the hosiery industry changing from a domestic industry to the regulated factories we see today.

Framework knitting was traditionally done by domestic knitters in their homes. They would rent their frames from their employer and be given a set amount of yarn with instructions on what to make. The finished products would then be collected as the next set of yarn was delivered. John Brown built the first part of the Makers Yard, 86, in 1854 as a warehouse for his goods. He would have employed domestic knitters and rented the frames to them.

Employers like John Brown began to build small factories to house their frames and have more control over the knitting process and their employees. He built 82A in 1860 to house his frame shop.

In 1862 Brown completed the complex of buildings with 82 - 84, another warehouse, which was connected to the existing warehouse at 86. To protect the finished garments from fire the warehouses were not connected to the factory. Instead small gangways linked the first floors of the warehouses to the factory as well as a strong fire door on the top floor.



Knitting a glove on a frame.

"It took three frames and three knitters to make a glove.

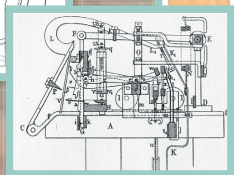
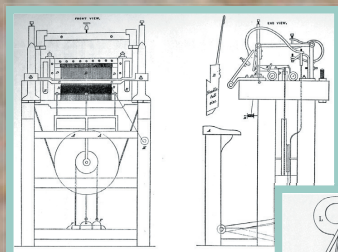
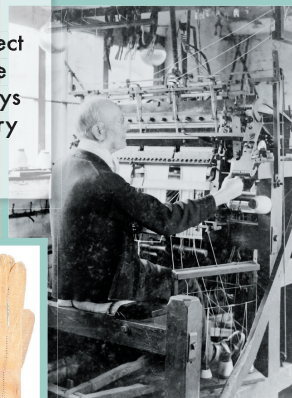
The first knitter formed the cuff of the glove, which was then passed to the next knitter and attached to their machine to add the palms.

It was finally passed to the last knitter who knitted on the fingers and thumb, one at a time.

The glove was then seamed together by hand to form a complete glove.

One knitter with their machine could make five gloves at once. At any one time 15 gloves would have been in production."

Peter Clowes, curator
Wigston Framework Knitters Museum



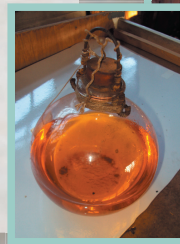
The conditions at J. Brown & Sons.

John Brown went into business with his sons James and Charles in 1867 becoming J. Brown & Sons. Their factory wasn't powered so the conditions in the frame shop were intense.

To allow the knitters to work from dawn until dusk there were large windows that ran along the frame shop. However the windows were often smeared with a waxy substance to prevent the glare of sunlight in the workshop allowing the knitters to

concentrate on the whole frame and prevent them from dropping stitches. Hanging around the frames would be glass orbs filled with liquid that would intensify the light from their candles on overcast days or around dawn or dusk.

In each frame shop there would have been at least six frames and yarn winders, which would generate a cacophony of mechanical noise, to drown this out the workers would often sing as they knitted.



1900 to 1959

The World Wars.

The First World War fundamentally changed the hosiery workforce. Factories that were once traditionally male dominated now employed women by necessity to replace the men who had joined up to fight.

Again in the Second World War women and older children took on the roles of the men in the factories. This time many of the factories paid them an equal rate to the men for their labour.



The garments they produced altered as many factories began producing for the forces. Here we see a hosiery worker displaying the spats she had made for the soldiers.



In 1941 this building was narrowly missed by a bomb, which hit and burnt down a nearby shoe factory in Rutland Street.



Leicester's scale of production.

The Leicester hosiery and textile industry was considered to be the largest in the world with factories dominating the city skyline. The streets and lanes were dotted with smaller workshops linked to the larger companies.

Corah, one of Leicester's largest hosiery companies for over a 100 years, had a factory called St. Margret's, which once covered an area of over 36,400m². Over 6,500 people worked there at one time.

The Makers Yard buildings were very small by comparison at about 840m². But this was a flexible space occupied by small subsidiary businesses servicing

the hosiery industry.

In the 1950's Townsend Hunt & Co. had a leather workshop here and Edginton A&G, engravers, were located here as well.

Makers Yard highlights the varying scales of businesses and size of buildings that made up the diversity of Leicester's hosiery and textile industries.



Corah's factory and 2,500 workers.

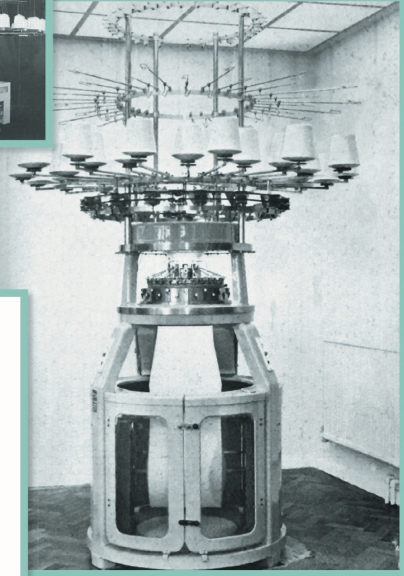
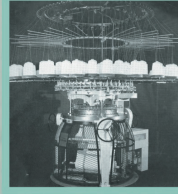
1960 to the present day

A changing industry.

The fashions of the 'swinging sixties' brought a boom to the hosiery trade. Leicester became known as 'the city that clothed the world'.

The hosiery industry was always changing. Steam powered factories were developed in 1866 in Leicester. Before then the knitting frames used here by John Brown's employees hadn't changed for some 300 years.

As machines changed and improved, countries from across the globe were racing to develop the latest machines to supply but also to compete with Leicester's industry.



The building became 'Charnwood Hosiery Factory' in the 1980's, producing fashion, sports and military socks.

"We used to make socks for all the football clubs like Manchester United, Liverpool and Leicester City. We even made a pair for Terry Wogan!"

Mrs Lydia Marshall, employee at Charnwood Hosiery factory

Carrying on tradition.

The building became empty in 2002. Following the work of Dr Skinner on behalf of Leicester's Victorian Society this building was listed Grade II by English Heritage in 2006 because of

"the rarity of this kind of small factory where a number of knitters would work together for the manufacturer and warehouse owner rather than working individually at home".

This building was refurbished to what you see today to create studios for Leicester's designer-makers.

