

Rutland Local History & Record Society

Registered Charity No. 700273



Morcott Village Walk September 2016 (updated 2020)

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INTRODUCTION

The name Morcott apparently derives from the Old English (OE) 'Mor' (moorland/heathland) combined with the OE 'Cot' (a cottage or shelter). Hence *'The cottage on the moorland'*. It appears in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as *Morcot*, in Close Rolls of 1255 as *Morkot* and *Morkote*. in Assize Rolls of 1263 as *Morecote*, and an Episcopal Court Book of 1514-20 and thereafter as *Morcott*.

From its name, it is essentially an extension westward of the heathlands of Luffenham (Luffenham Heath still exists) and Barrowden, which extend along both sides of the ridge carrying the A47. The Domesday Survey describes it as being a hamlet of Barrowden Manor, consisting of 4 hides, 8 carucates (ploughland) lying in the Hundred of Wytchley.

There is a possibility that the present village was located on a Roman road, running from Casterton which is on Ermine Street, via Tickencote, Empingham, North Luffenham and Morcott, to a crossing point on the Welland at Turtle Bridge. This would line up with Harborough Hill just south of Gretton which is recorded as a barrow. Harborough is considered to be derived from OE *Bar* (a boundary) and OE *Beorg* (a mound/hill) signifying a boundary barrow.

After the Domesday Survey of 1086, Morcott's population must have increased sufficiently in the next 70 years to justify the building of a church. The tower is Norman, of *circa* 1150, as is the nave, most probably built in the reign of King Stephen. Records are sketchy as regards who held the Manor, established in 1185 for Alice de Bidune/Bihune, the sister of William Maudit.

This William Maudit was Sheriff of Rutland in 1180, but there are no other records showing him as owning the Manor. The next definite records are:

1309 Thomas De Beauchamp Lord of Morcott

1471 Edward Dodingsels holds the Manor of Morcott

In 1561 land is held by Simon Digby, and Roger Digby his son and heir, and the parish consisted of 6 messuages (houses with outbuildings and land), 1 cottage, 134 acres of land (arable), 8 acres of meadow and 34 acres of pasture. Lord of the Manor at this time is Joseph Herrendine, although apparently not resident in Morcott. He is not mentioned in the Military Survey of 1522, nor the Lay Subsidy of 1524-5. These value the land of the parish at 40 shillings, and the goods at £20.

The Manor was most likely tenanted by the Overton family at this point. This family can be traced in the village with certainty from 1539. There is possibly an earlier connection, given that the tomb of William de Overton exists in the Church. This suggests they were here in medieval times.

Early in the 19th century the manor passed to Samuel Richard Fydell, son of Thomas Fydell of Boston. On his death it passed to his great niece Caroline Frances Lindsay who married George Dawson Rowley of Priory Park, St Neots, Huntingdonshire. In 1900 Morcott passed to their son George Fydell Rowley, whose son Owsley Vincent Fydell Rowley became lord of the manor.

THE VILLAGE MAP

The map attached to this guided walk is based on the 25 inch to one mile Ordnance Survey 2nd edition map of 1904. Consequently, later buildings, extensions and demolitions are not shown. Numbers in the text, [12] for example, refer to locations identified on the map.

Please:

Respect private property.

Use pavements and footpaths where available.

Take great care when crossing roads.

Remember that you are responsible for your own safety.

THE WALK

The walk starts at the Village Hall [1] in Station Road. This was originally a Baptist Chapel. The present building was constructed on the site of a much earlier building, which had served as a Nonconformist chapel since 1732. One notable visitor during that era was Sir Isaac Newton who attended a sermon given by the Revd William Whiston, translator of the works of the Roman historian Josephus.



The old Baptist Chapel circa 1900. (Jack Hart Collection)

The new building was endowed with a grant by W F Goodliffe, a prominent Baptist with strong connections to the village. It was completed in 1902 and was built by John Joyce & Brothers in the then popular Arts and Crafts style using Ketton stone and Collyweston slate.



Morcott station just before closure in 1966. (Jack Hart Collection)

Station Road, as its name suggests, once led to Morcott station. The line was opened by the London and North Western Railway on 2nd June 1851 as part of the branch from Rugby to Stamford, but the station was not opened until 1st December 1898. It closed on 6th June 1966 and the site is now occupied by a private dwelling.

Walk along Station Road towards High Street. On the left is Walnut Tree Farm [2]. The farmhouse which faces the road displays many of the features typical of older houses in the village. The house and farmyard behind it formed part of the Manor House farm which was given over for development in the 1970s.

On the eastern corner of Station Road/High Street are a pair of cottages [3] with a date stone of 1854. These were constructed on land known as Brooke Poor. As charitable trust, the cottages were built as accommodation for the tenant farmers who worked the land adjacent to the cottages and along the A47. Note the Air Raid Warden plate above the door of the left-hand cottage.

Turn left along High Street and walk towards the South Luffenham Road. On the right is a large green space, once the site of a handsome house and adjacent cottages known collectively as The Grange. Demolished in the 1960s, they are believed to have dated from the 17th century.



'The Grange' on the left. (Tony Martin)

At the end of the High Street stands the former White Horse public house which closed about 2013 [4]. Active since the mid-1700s, it was a changeover point for the London to Oakham Post Coach, as well as being a popular watering hole, standing as it does on the junction of two busy turnpike roads. Two triangular cast iron turnpike markers can be seen near the paddock wall.



The White Horse about 1911 when Albert Weare was the publican. A notice on the right gable end states 'GOOD ACCOMMODATION FOR CYCLISTS'. (Jack Hart Collection)

Retrace your steps back along High Street, passing over the deep cutting which marks the route of the former Rugby to Stamford railway line. This is best seen on the left where,

although now obscured by trees, the horseshoe-shaped entrance to Morcott tunnel is situated. It is 448 yards long and the only tunnel on this line. In the 1980s, it was offered by British Rail for conversion into a nuclear fall-out shelter, potentially accommodating 400 people, but the plans were eventually dropped.

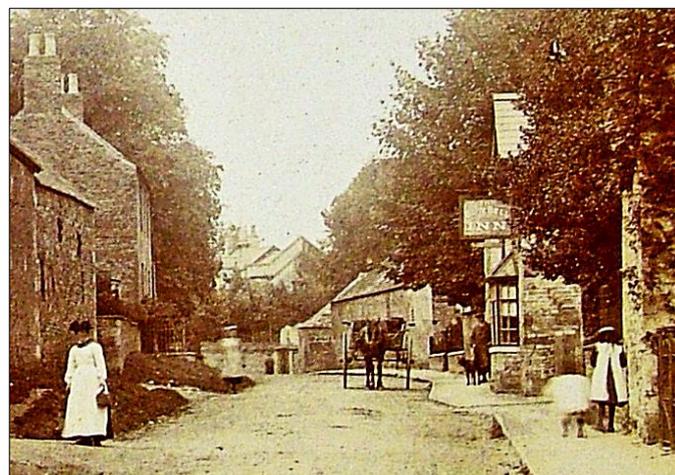
Opposite the junction with Station Road is a double-fronted house, now called St Anthony's [5]. The original house formed the right-hand side, the left-hand side being added in 1848 (note the date stone) by William Tyler, a farmer and butcher. The premises served as a butcher's shop and later E B Horn's Boot, Shoe and General Stores, as well as being Morcott Post Office. It reverted to a butcher's shop in the 1930s and was converted into a private dwelling in the 1960s.



This postcard of circa 1913 shows E B Horn's Boot, Shoe and General Store and Morcott Post Office on the left. Note the thatched roof. (Jack Hart Collection)

At the right-hand corner of High Street and Mount Pleasant is a private house [6] that was originally a barn, forming part of the farmyard behind. For many years, the barn served as the village function room, complete with stage and flooring that could be laid out for dances. The original door can be traced in the frontage. Opposite stands the former Blue Bell Inn [7], which closed in the early 1960s. It is believed to date from the early 18th century and is one of very few buildings in Morcott with a cellar. The wrought-iron arm for the pub sign is still evident.

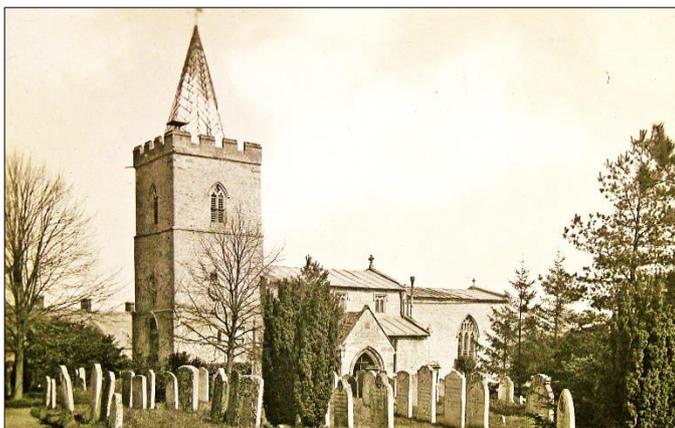
Walking west, on your left and set back from the road, you will see a handsome stone house with a pantile roof [8]. This is another of the many old farmhouses in the village. Originally called Laxtons Farm, it formed part of the farm complex to its left. Another farmhouse, Hall Farm, stands to its right.



The Blue Bell Inn on the right, about 1910. (Jack Hart Collection)

On the opposite side of the High Street, is yet another farmhouse [9]. This bears the date stone 'RW 1686' and was standing at the time of the window tax. RW is believed to be Robert Weatherall, a yeoman farmer originally from Yorkshire.

Take some time now to explore the church of St Mary and the surrounding headstones [10]. 12th century in origin, the church contains some beautiful Norman stonework, and originally sported a leaded spire. This was replaced with cedar tiles, and the external tower walls were rendered in the 1960s. Note the 17th century sundial in the gable of the porch which would then have been the main source of time for the parish.



St Mary's Church circa 1914. The original clock bell can be seen above the crenellated parapet at the corner of the tower. It was removed in 1921 when a new clock by John Smith and Sons of Derby was installed as a war memorial. (Jack Hart Collection)



The former St Mary's Church clock bell. It was cast c1620, probably by Richard Holdfeld of Cambridge, and is thought to be a former Sanctus Bell. It is inscribed (in Latin) 'While on the swing I warnings bring'. (RO)

Walking down School Lane you will see the Old School House on the right [11], standing on the left-hand corner of the school yard. The original school bell still hangs above, although its position has been changed. It originally hung on the left-hand gable, with the rope conveniently hanging down the roof into the school yard for easy access by the staff. Look into the yard and you will see the Reading Room at the far end, endowed by the Rowley family in 1904. Their ancestor Samuel Fydell endowed the original school building in the 1840s.

Continue down School Lane and enter Pingle Lane which contains a small number of old houses. The lane finishes at a footpath which crosses the tributary of the River Chater at the bottom of the valley and leads to South Luffenham. A property to note is Glebe Cottage to your right as you descend the hill. This occupies part of the church glebe land lying behind it and was traditionally the home of the Curate.

Retrace your steps and stop at the bottom of Church Lane to admire Sundial House, Morcott's oldest dated house [12]. The combined sundial/date stone of 'WC 1627' is believed to refer to the Revd William Collison who was the incumbent at the time and used the house as his Rectory. The small window at the top of the left-hand gable was blocked up until very recently, another example of the effect of the window tax.

Walking up Church Lane, you will see several more interesting properties, including one constructed almost entirely of red brick. This was apparently built at the time of the construction of the railway and served as a shop for many of the navvies who were lodging in the village. Further up the hill is a yard containing the house and barn where the Joyce brothers plied their trade as builders and stonemasons.

We now come to The Old Rectory [13], a handsome property believed to date from the 1820s. A date stone of 1826, visible from the lower gate, adorns the old coach block, and the stables (now much altered as a private house) stand directly behind. The main house lies just beyond, and despite some cosmetic changes, remains intact. The wrought-iron gate is a modern addition, but the original route to church taken by the incumbent would have been through the lower gate and up a set of steps (now blocked up) into the churchyard. An identical set of steps is still visible in School Lane.



The Rectory (right) with Morcott Hall behind (left). From a postcard of circa 1915. (Jack Hart Collection)

Turning back into the High Street you will see Morcott Hall [14] directly opposite. The home of Lady Chaplin (eldest daughter of the 8th Earl of Exeter) until the early 1800s, the house has seen many alterations and additions and is now owned by the Rowley family. Following the Second World War it became a girls' boarding school. The school closed in the 1980s when it reverted to private ownership.



Morcott Hall in 1917. (Jack Hart Collection)

Walking west along the High Street you will see on the right two small stone cottages bearing a date stone of 1809 [15]. Known as Pochin's Cottages, these were built at the behest of the Revd George Pochin as an addition to the original rectory complex which occupied the site. In later years, the cottage fronting the street functioned as a boot and shoemaker's shop and the original fold-down shop front is still evident.

On the opposite side of the street stands the Manor House [16]. This occupies what is believed to be the original site of the Manor of Morcott and is partly Elizabethan. For many years, the Manor was the principal farmhouse to the Rowley estate, before being sold into private ownership in the 1970s.

During renovations in 1976, a carved stone panel was discovered which bears a poem by the Elizabethan poet Walter Haddon (1515–1572), as follows:

VIRTUTE NON VI.

Vis trahit invitos, virtus facit esse volentes

Vis furit, at virtus cum ratione movit

Corpore vis regnat, virtus in mente triumphat

Vis pecudes, virtus non facit esse viros

Vis igitur valeat, virtus super Omnia vincat

Ut vis virtutem, servi sequatur liberos

Translation:

BY VIRTUE, NOT BY FORCE

Brute force compels, virtue persuades

Force imposes tyranny, but virtue appeals to the mind

Force rules with might, virtue succeeds by reason alone

Force reduces men to mere animals, virtue restores humanity

Banish brute force, let virtue triumph over all

Put force behind virtue and bar the bonds of violence

There is a similar quotation on a stone tablet dated 1562 at Apethorpe Hall.

Crossing back to the other side of the street you will see through a gateway The Priory [17]. It was named as such by John Swift, a Baptist Minister who resided here between 1891 and 1911. It has a date stone with 'C E F 1736'.



The Priory from a postcard of circa 1905. A note on the reverse states that it is 'Tyler's House'. (Jack Hart Collection)

Opposite the junction with Willoughby Road is the original village bakehouse [18], now much altered. The date stone WD 1850 refers to William Drake who made this addition to the original house and whose descendants continued to run it until the early 1950s. The building immediately to its left is believed to have been the Red Lion public house from 1851 to 1870.



The Bakehouse in 1910 (arrowed). The former Red Lion is immediately to the left. (Jack Hart Collection)

Land at the west end of the village and the former quarries and sandpits in the north of the parish were once owned by Earls of Ancaster.

Now turn down Willoughby Road, passing Corner House on your right, a fine example of Ancaster architecture. The land here was almost exclusively owned by the Ancaster family, until individual plots were sold off for building. Willoughby Road is named after Lord Willoughby de Eresby, the 2nd Earl of Ancaster, who lived at Normanton Hall, his main country residence until it was sold, along with the bulk of the Normanton Estate, in 1924-25.



'Corner House' from a postcard of circa 1938. (Jack Hart Collection)



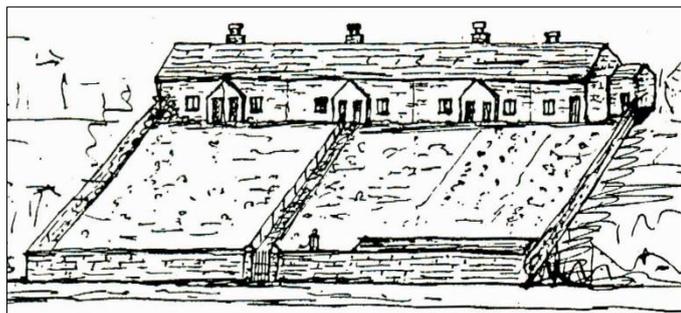
The view down Willoughby Road from High Street, about 1910. (Jack Hart Collection)

On the opposite corner is Firdale House, originally the farmhouse for the complex lying behind it. This once belonged to the Clarke family, one of the few freehold farmers in the village. Just beyond it is the house of John Joyce [19], master mason and builder in late Victorian times. The ornate date stone '1886' gives us the original build date. John Joyce did much work for Lord Ancaster and was able to purchase several parcels of land along Willoughby Road as a result.

Further down the hill is the old Wesleyan Chapel [20]. Now a private house, it was originally housed in three old cottages, purchased from the Earl of Ancaster in 1891 for £10. The present building was erected in 1901-2, but by the 1930s had fallen into disuse and was duly purchased by the Labour Party for use as a labour hall. It became a private house in the 1970s.

Retrace your steps back up the hill to High Street and turn right, walking west. Opposite the junction with Fydell Row you will see the site of the original Gilson's Hospital founded in 1612 by George Gilson for six poor unmarried men or women. No trace of the original almshouses remain. They were demolished to make way for the modern buildings that now stand there, but the charity still exists and has additional houses on the left-hand corner of Fydell Row.

For those who would like more information on this charity, *The History of Gilson's Hospital, Morcott* by David Parkin was published by the Society in 1995. Although this is now out of print, it can be read on the Society's website.



A drawing of the original Gilson's Almshouses in 1891 by William Good. (David Parkin)

Slightly further along Wing Road the house on the right constructed in fine ashlar stone is Crown House [21], once The Crown public house until it closed in the 1930s. Carry along on what has now become Wing Road, and you will see a well-built stone house set back from the road. Sycamore House [22] was originally built in 1849 by Walter Lambert, another freehold farmer, as his principal farmhouse. The date stone WL 1849 testifies to this.



Fydell Row about 1910. The original Gilson's Almshouses are visible beyond. (Jack Hart Collection)

For the final part of the walk, turn back and walk up Fydell Row. The Terrace on the right [23] gives the road its name, and as you will see by the date stone, was constructed between 1862-68 by Samuel Fydell as tenants' cottages. Originally a terrace of four, the house nearest the High Street served for many years as the village policeman's house. Later conversions have reduced the terrace to three and they are still owned by the Rowley family.

Ahead you will see an area known as The Cockpit, named after the fields to your left, Cockpit and Cockpit Close. Turn left into Back Lane heading east. The buildings to the left were originally part of the large farm attached to the Manor House. Further along are the grounds of Morcott Hall. The old building fronting the road is believed to have served as a stable block, and accommodation for servants working at the Hall. Beyond that are more old farm buildings which once belonged to Hall Farm and Laxtons Farm respectively. As Back Lane takes a sharp left turn it becomes Mount Pleasant Lane. Originally called Workhouse Lane, this was the direct foot route via Seaton to the workhouse at Uppingham on the Leicester Road. Here you will see a row of cottages [24] stretching along the original line

of the footpath. These were once the premises of the Veazey family, master carpenters and wagon makers who have a long association with the village. Their large timber workshop once stood at the far end.



Members of the Veazey family outside their premises. (Tricia Williams)

Finally make your way down Mount Pleasant Road, passing the old blacksmith's shop on your right before emerging back on the High Street. Turn right then left to return to the Village Hall in Station Road and the end of the walk.



Looking down Station Road circa 1909. (Jack Hart Collection)

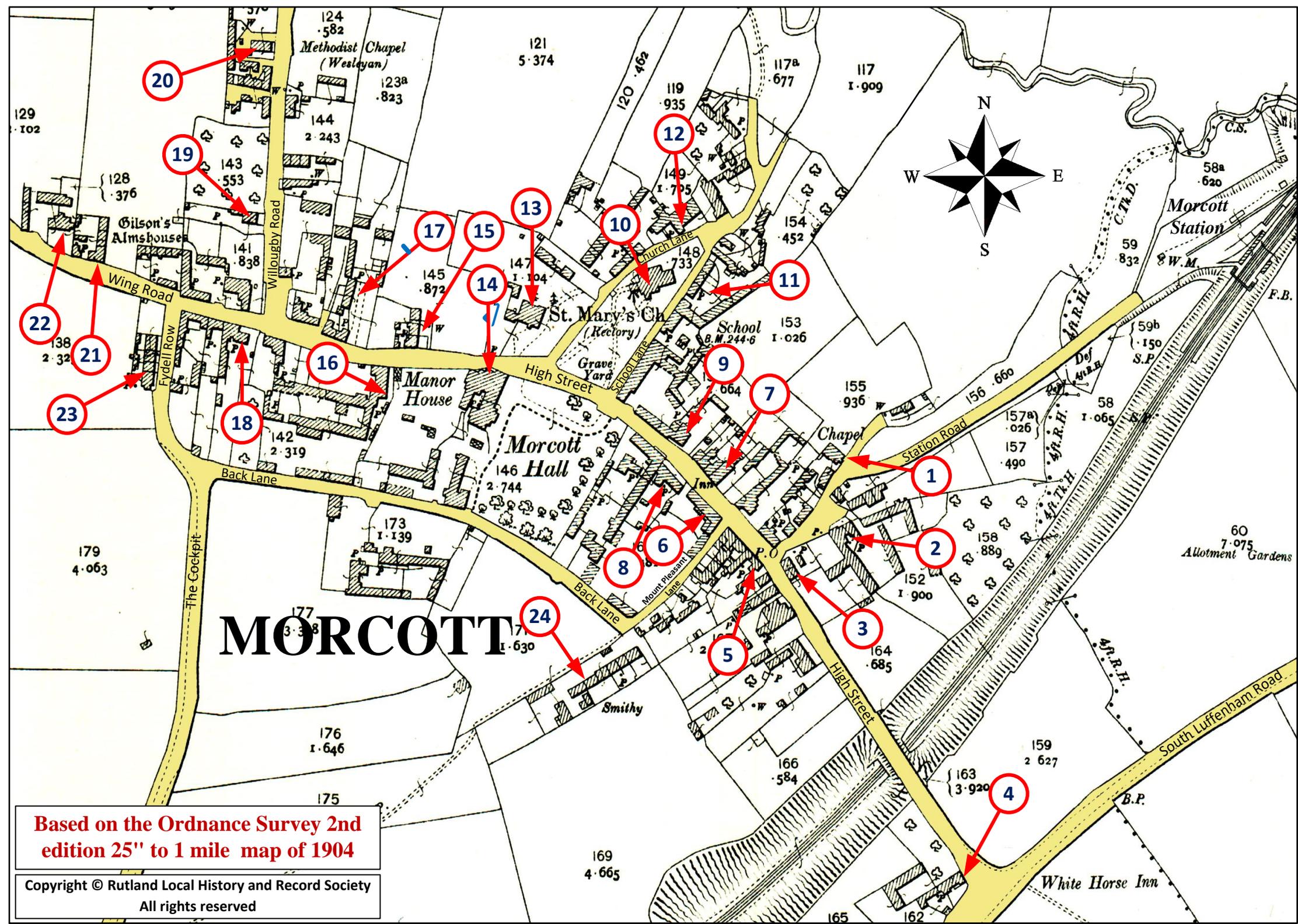


The Baptist chapel in Station Road, now the Village Hall. From a postcard dated 1906. (Jack Hart Collection)

Acknowledgements

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Tony Martin and Robert Ovens



MORCOTT

Based on the Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 25" to 1 mile map of 1904

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