

Rutland Local History & Record Society

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Ridlington Village Walk September 2008 (updated 2020)

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INTRODUCTION

Ridlington lies on a ridge overlooking the valley of the River Chater to the north, and the valleys of two un-named streams to the south. One flows eastwards to join the Chater, and the other flows westwards to join the Eye Brook.

The name Ridlington is of Scandinavian origin, probably derived from *Hridlan's town*. It is first mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086 when it was known as Redlinctune. Later names include Redlinton and Ridelinton (12th and 13th centuries), Redlington (13th to the 18th century.), and Ruddelyngton (16th century).

However, the area has been occupied from prehistoric times, and the village has the only scheduled prehistoric settlement site in Rutland. Archaeological finds in and around Ridlington include late Iron-Age flint tools, a Bronze-Age stone axe, slag from Roman iron smelting furnaces, Anglo-Saxon pottery fragments, and medieval ridge and furrow can still be seen in some fields.

There was also a medieval deer park here. Ridlington Park, a royal deer park, was located to the south-west of the village. Its outline can still be traced on large scale maps, and the earthwork remains of the park pale can be found along some parts of its perimeter. Records show that the park existed in 1255 and for over four hundred years it occupied an important place in the administration of the royal forest of Rutland, later known as Leighfield Forest. The farm at its centre, the site of the park lodge, is still known as Park Farm.

Ridlington is a quiet and pleasant backwater, usually free from the noise of traffic since there are no through roads. It now has about 80 dwellings, 3 working farms, and a population of about 300. The map of 1759 shows that its layout has not changed a great deal since then.

However, in other respects, it has changed dramatically in the last hundred years. Originally, like most Rutland villages, it was a self-sufficient agricultural community with its own butcher, baker, provisions shop, cobbler, Post Office, carpenter, blacksmith, public house, reading room, church and school.

Today, Ridlington is a commuter village with none of these facilities, except the church and the former school which is now the village hall.

Apart from the church of St Mary Magdalene and St Andrew, there were two other places of worship. A Quaker Meeting House existed near Park Farm until towards the end of the nineteenth century, and records show that the former Reading Room, now Chimney Cottage, was once used for Baptist meetings.

THE VILLAGE MAPS

The map with this guided walk is based on the 25 inch to one-mile Ordnance Survey 2nd edition map of *circa* 1904. Consequently, later buildings, extensions and demolitions are not shown. Numbers in the text, for example [12], refer to locations shown on the map. A map of the village in 1759 is also included.

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

Main Street

The walk starts at the church of St Mary Magdalene and St Andrew [1] at the junction of Main Street and Church Lane.

The church is basically early 13th century with later additions. The oldest parts of the present fabric are the pillars and arches on the south side of the nave and the chancel arch. It had become sadly neglected by 1860 when it was virtually rebuilt by Thomas Halliday of Greetham. In the church, look for the musical instruments which were regularly used in the church until the middle of the 19th century, the tympanum over the vestry door, and the monument to Sir James and Lady Harington in the chancel. Other points of interest are noted in the church guide.



Ridlington Church in 1839, before restoration. (Uppingham School Archives)

Main Street

On leaving the church, turn left and follow the footpath towards Main Street. The thatched cottage at the corner of Church Lane [2] is mid-17th century and Grade II listed. An early photograph shows a small thatched cottage attached to the right-hand side as shown on the 1904 walk map. This map also shows that the Post Office was located here, but it had probably moved to 5 Main Street by this date.

Continue along the footpath on the south side of Main Street. On the right, just before the telephone box, is Chimney Cottage [3], also Grade II listed. It was formerly a range of cottages. A serious fire gutted the cottage in the 1950s, but a timber, wattle and daub fireplace was saved. The part fronting on to Main Street was originally the Working Mens Club and Reading Room '*complete with billiard table for the recreational use of the youth of the village*'. This part was demolished in the 1970s

when the cottage was modernised. Note the datestone in the gable: GI (or J) A 1771.

The next property [4], a modern thatched stone cottage was built in the 1950s by Joe Glenn, the proprietor of a garage in Ayston Road, Uppingham. It replaced the thatched cottage shown on the 1904 walk map and in the image below.



Main Street, looking towards the church, in 1914. The mid-17th century cottage [4] to the left of the village pump [5] was demolished and replaced in the 1950s. The former Working Mens Club and Reading Room [3] is to the right of the pump. (Jack Hart Collection)

The village pump [5] was in regular use until the early 1950s when the public water supply and mains drainage came to Ridlington as part of the Dove Water Scheme.

Continue to walk along the footpath and follow it round to the right. On the left is Noel Cottage [6], 12 Main Street, a Grade II listed property overlooking the village green. It was built in three main sections. The left hand gable end is early 17th century and has stone mullioned windows. The middle section is 18th century, and the right hand gabled addition which balances the 17th century work is probably 19th century.



The Noel Arms [7] about 1908. It was then described as a beer house. James Jones was the landlord. (Jack Hart Collection)

Walk up to and through the gate between the buildings (this is a public right-of-way). On the right is the former Noel Arms public house [7], named after the Noel family, the Earls of Gainsborough, who owned the Ridlington Estate until it was sold at auction in 1925. From then on, it was owned by Ruddles Brewery until it closed in the 1960s. White's Directory of 1846 records that Francis Davis was the proprietor. He was also a blacksmith and still victualler here in 1877.

The row of buildings on the left [8] originally included a blacksmith's shop, a brewhouse and a carpenter's workshop.

Walk up the driveway, now known as Noel Lane, towards Top Road. On the right is the former stackyard to Fig Tree Farm, now a small housing estate.

Top Road

On reaching Top Road, turn right and then right again just beyond the bus shelter. Walk down to the gate to see Fig Tree Farmhouse [9] which is Grade II listed.

Return to Top Road, turn left and walk beyond the entrance to Noel Lane. The modern houses on the left are built on the former orchard to Noel Cottage (12 Main Street). The earlier house amongst this group [10] was the last location of a Post Office in the village.

Continue along Top Road. Ahead can be seen an estate of former council houses, all now privately owned. They were built on a triangular field known as Hannah's Field about 1950. Before this estate was built a pair of thatched cottages [11] stood at the western end of the field.



Former thatched cottages [11] at the western end of Hannah's Field in 1905. The small building on the right was used by a visiting cobbler by the name of Sharpe. (Jack Hart Collection)

The field [12] on the south side of Top Road, opposite Hannah's Field, was originally reserved for the village allotments, but it has now reverted back to normal agricultural use. However, the boundaries of individual allotments can still be seen as crop marks on aerial photographs.

From Top Road turn left in to East Lane.

East Lane

East Lane runs in a northerly direction, linking Top Road and Main Street.

Most of the ironstone houses and cottages either side of East Lane are 18th century. Note in particular Mackleys [13] and Bank Cottage [14] on the left-hand side.



Twitch-hill Farm in 1905, now Beckendale House Farm [15]. (Jack Hart Collection)

Opposite is Beckendale House Farm [15]. It is shown as Twitch-hill Farm on the 1904 walk map. A photograph of the farmhouse in 1905 is shown above. It is evident that there have been some dramatic changes in its recent history.

Beckendale House Farm was owned by the Lount family who farmed in the village from the middle of the nineteenth century. Continue to the end of East Lane and turn left in to Main Street.

Main Street

Main Street runs the whole length of the village, from East Lane to West Lane. Originally, it was known as Town Street, and fields at both ends of the village were once known as Towns End Close.

Even before 1904, there had been some significant changes at this end of Main Street. Two rows of cottages, one either side of the street, which are shown on the village map of 1759, had been demolished by 1904. The pair of semi-detached cottages shown on the north side on the 1904 walk map [16] have now been joined by two new houses

Looking to the north between the houses, there are fine views across the Chater valley. This part of the valley was due to be flooded in the late 1960s to create a second reservoir to Rutland Water, but it was eventually decided that it was a step too far.

Continue along the north side of Main Street passing, on the right-hand side, a row of Victorian terraced houses [17].

Next on this side is the former Ridlington School [18], now the village hall. It was built in 1873 at a result of the Education Act which obliged local authorities to provide schools for village communities. Prior to this, school lessons were in the Reading Room (see [3]). The new school was part-funded by the Earl of Gainsborough, the lord of the manor, who contributed £50 towards the building costs. It was erected on a field known as Bulls Yard Close and when it opened there were 37 pupils and one classroom.

The school finally closed in 1962 when the pupils were transferred to Uppingham.



Main Street, looking east, in 1905. The school [18] can be seen on the left. (Jack Hart Collection)

The next house of interest on the north side of Main Street is 'The Manor' [19]. The map of 1759 shows this house to be much larger than it is today, and it is thought that much of the original house, known as Ridlington Hall, or Old Hall, was destroyed by fire towards the latter part of the 18th century. In 1908, the *Rutland Magazine* reported that, 'On the north side of the church, in a meadow, are some high walls supported by strong boldly projecting buttresses, which apparently enclosed a mansion, probably the seat of the Haringtons', suggesting that there have been two manor houses here. These walls have survived and are now in the rear garden of 21 Main Street.

The second manor of Ridlington came into the hands of the Harington family in 1555 when it was acquired by Sir John Harington who already held the first manor. Both then passed

down through the Harington and Noel families. One was recently sold by the Earl of Gainsborough to Deborah Angus, an artist living in Australia. So she is now Lord of the Manor.

Continue along Main Street beyond the church. The Grade II listed property at 9 Main Street [20] is the old butcher's shop, although it has not been known as such within living memory. Opposite is the west churchyard [21] which was first used for burials in the 19th century. It was extended further westwards into the rectory garden in 1922, and there is a photograph of the workmen who carried out this task in the church vestry.

The next house of historical interest on the north side is the Grade II listed Old Post Office [22], at 5 Main Street. Miss Nellie Dicken was the postmistress here in the 1950s, and she had taken over from her mother, Mary, who, when she died at the age of 86, had been postmistress for 50 years. Nellie was very interested in the social history of Ridlington, and she kept a notebook of village events over a long period.



The west end of Main Street about 1907. The Post Office [22] is on the right. (Jack Hart Collection)

Continue to the end of Main Street. The lane to the right continues as a footpath past the site of the former Frog Hall and then onto Leigh Lodge in Leighfield.

Turn left into West Lane.

West Lane

The only scheduled prehistoric settlement site in Rutland is located behind a bank and hedge on the west side of West Lane [23]. It is roughly semi-circular in shape, with earthworks round three sides, the eastern side having been removed, presumably when the present village was extended in that direction. The earthworks vary in height and are most marked on the northern perimeter where the ground slopes steeply away to the Chater valley. They can easily be seen as crop marks on aerial photographs taken in dry conditions. The land is privately owned and not open for public access.

Walk to Holygate Road at the top of West Lane. To the west, Holygate Road leads to the northern end of the former Ridlington Park, a royal hunting park from the eleventh to the seventeenth century. A continuation of this road used to be an Occupation Road leading to Loddington in Leicestershire.

Turn left into Holygate Road.

Holygate Road

Behind the early 18th century Grade II listed wall on the left is The Old Rectory [24], not seen on this walk. Built about 1640, it replaced the original rectory which was at Ridlington House (see [26] below) in 1827.



Ridlington Rectory [24] about 1908. (Jack Hart Collection)

It continued to be the Rectory until after the Second World War when Rev W Ashburner was the last resident incumbent.

Adjacent to the Old Rectory, and again unseen on this walk, is the Dower House [25], a mid-17th century Grade II listed building which replaced earlier 15th century building.

Continue to walk the end of Holygate Road and then turn left into Church Lane.

Church Lane



Ridlington House [26] about 1910. (Jack Hart Collection)

On the right is Ridlington House [26], another Grade II listed property and which was the original rectory. The west (front) elevation is of 16th century origin and is the earliest part of the house. The rest of the house was built during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.



A family group outside 5 Church Lane [28] in 1905. The man near the door is Mr Page, who was a policeman in London. He died in 1982 aged 100 years. (Jack Hart Collection)

The house and its substantial farm were originally part of the Gainsborough estate and were sold at auction in 1925 to Mr Wortley, who was already renting it.

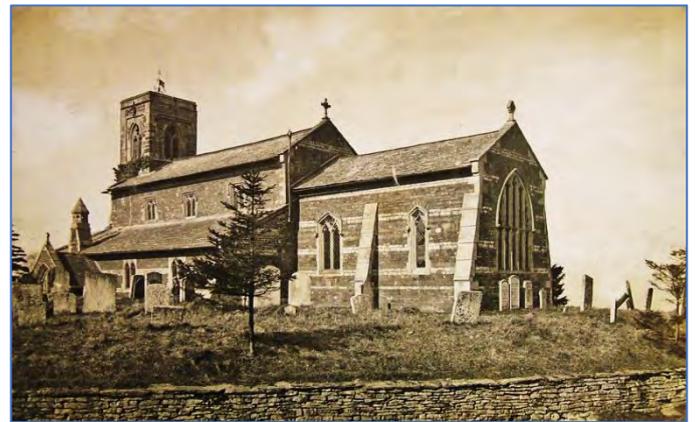
Continue along Church Lane towards the churchyard. The thatched house on the left is Church Farm Farmhouse [27]. Notice the datestone with 'CR 1776' above the front entrance door.

Opposite to the churchyard is 5 Church Lane [28], a listed cottage dated 1708. A large room behind the cottage is the old bakehouse with its original baking ovens. In 1881 the baker was James Sharpe junior. The bakery closed in 1915 when the baker was Thomas Hill.

Return to the church and the end of the walk through the gates off Church Lane.

This original part of the churchyard has changed dramatically since the photograph below was taken in 1905. By 1967 it had become unmanageable with anthills and fallen headstones. It was decided to remove the headstones and place them round the outer edge. The original position and legible inscription of each headstone was also carefully recorded for future reference.

Twenty trailer loads of soil were then removed and the area cultivated and sown with grass seed. The perimeter wall was later rebuilt with drains to stabilise it against frost damage.



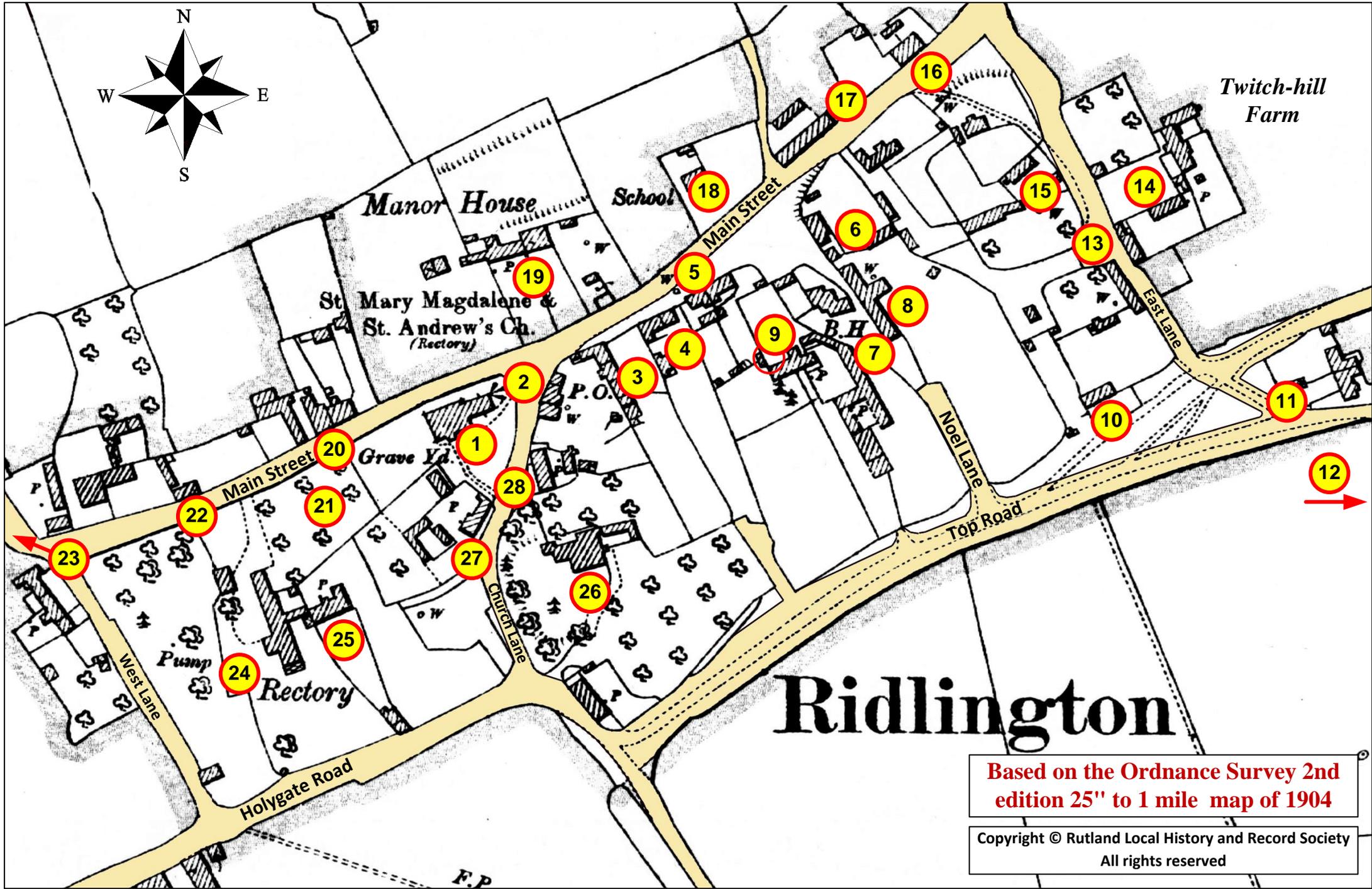
Ridlington Church and its original churchyard in 1905. (Jack Hart Collection)

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Robert Ovens

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

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