

Rutland Local History & Record Society

Registered Charity No. 700273



Ryhall Village Walk September 2015 (updated 2020)

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INTRODUCTION

Ryhall is a parish of irregular shape lying 3 miles to the north of Stamford and is first mentioned in Domesday Book. The name Ryhall derives from *a nook on the bend of a river with rye growing there*. The village does indeed lie either side of a meander in the River Gwash and is bordered on its west by the road from Stamford to Bourne, a former turnpike road.

The areas of the village north and south of the river are linked by a three-arched stone bridge and causeway built in 1650. The land is mostly low-lying, falling from Ryhall Heath towards the Gwash. The Gwash rises near Knossington and is a tributary of the River Welland. Flooding of the Gwash used to be a regular occurrence in the village, but since the creation of Rutland Water the flow of the river through Ryhall has been more controlled.

Ryhall is a beautiful village despite many of the older limestone buildings having long since disappeared. However, several Grade II listed buildings do remain, including Church Farm to the north of the church, and many of these will be seen in this walk.

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 shown 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]**. This was originally the National School, built in 1838 on land provided by Michael Pierrepont, the then owner of Ryhall Hall. It closed in 1963 when a new school next to the Vicarage was built. The village hall was opened in 1970.

Leaving the village hall, turn to the right. Immediately on the right is a **STONE DOVECOTE [2]**. Originally this would have been at the rear of Ryhall Hall when its main entrance was on the north side.

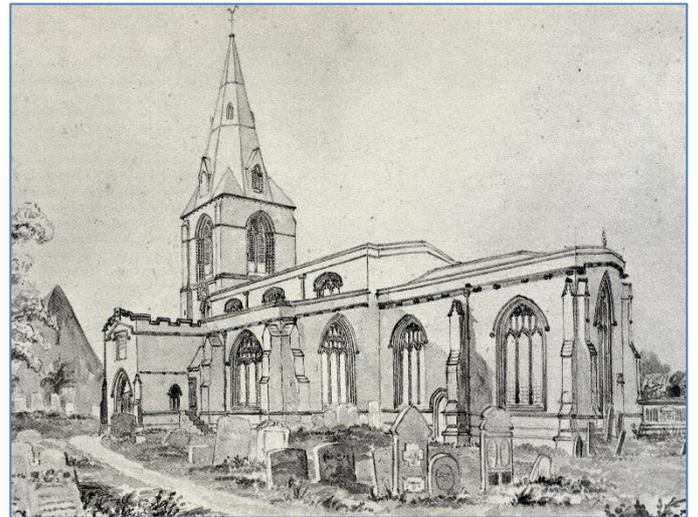
Continue to the right and walk to the entrance of the main drive to **RYHALL HALL [3]**. From here there is another view of the dovecote and a good view of the Hall.

The Hall is first mentioned in 1587. In 1591 Sir William Bodenham built a large house on the site of a former hall house

of the Netlam family. This Sir William was made High Sheriff of Rutland in 1603. His son, Sir Francis, was MP for Rutland in 1625. In 1643 Sir Wingfield Bodenham fought for the king in the Civil War and as a result spent some years as a prisoner in the Tower of London. It is thought that Sir Francis is the person most likely to have hidden the Waterside Lane coin hoard mentioned below.

In 1763 the Hall passed to the Rev. Thomas Foster and from him in 1800 to Michael Pierrepont, who refashioned the house in the Georgian style we see today. An unusual weathervane, which can be seen from here, is a feature of the house. The outside vane had a shaft leading to a bathroom ceiling, on which the points of the compass were marked. The wind direction could thus be noted whilst taking a bath!

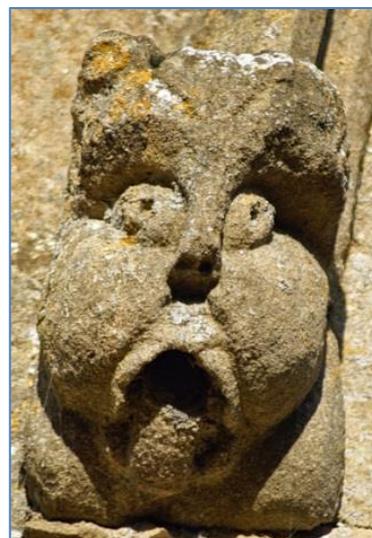
Walk back to the Village Hall and continue along Church Street to the **CHURCH [4]**, dedicated to St John the Evangelist.



Ryhall Church in 1839. (Uppingham School Archives)

The church, which is normally open, has many interesting features and it is worth spending a little time here to look at some of them.

Walking up to the church through the churchyard one of the first things to notice is the abundance of 15th century heads of monsters and foliage decorations that adorn the church just below the roof line. Many of them are very amusing and are clearly the work of more than one sculptor.



One of the label stops at Ryhall Church. (RO)

Enter the church via the south porch, which has a room above, originally used as a schoolroom. The first church here was built in 1108, occupying the site of the present nave with a small chancel. It was rebuilt early in the 13th century and the north aisle was added at this time, with the south aisle shortly after. The chancel was added in the 15th century when both aisles were widened and the clerestory added. The Perpendicular style windows give the

church a symmetrical look and a remarkably airy interior which is enhanced by the large aisles and wide arcades.

Inside the church, note the following:

- The Commandment boards above the chancel arch.
- The figure of St Christopher on the north arcade. The Saint has lost his arms and only the legs survive of Christ who was originally on his back.
- The fine double Sedilia with ogee arched canopy and crocket decorations.
- The memorial in the chancel to the memory of Samuel Barker who died in 1696 at the age of 2 years and 15 days. *He was a child of admirable sweetness of temper, of an erect and comely body, of a most pregnant wit, even beyond what could be imagin'd ...*
- The squint which allowed a view into the church from what was once an anchorite cell on the west wall of the north aisle.
- The three-light east window of the south aisle by the Victorian stained glass designer Charles Elmer Kempe. It was installed in 1901 and cost £140. Notice the wheat sheaf which was Kempe's trademark. This window was given by the Gann family who lived at The Poplars in Foundry Road.

On leaving the church, turn right at the porch entrance. Here, set into the grass, you will see the old octagonal stone clock dial. We can see that this was for a single hour hand as the hours are divided into quarters inside the numeral ring. This dial was originally on the south face of the tower, facing Ryhall Hall. It was probably installed at the same time as the clock which is signed *William Bird, Seagrave, 1771*. The present dial is on the north face. A sundial, now lost, was originally over the south porch. This would have been used to regulate the clock.



The old stone clock dial in the churchyard. (RO)

Walk round the tower. On the west face of the north aisle you will see the outline of a small room, known as an anchorite cell, which was originally here. Note the roofline, the niche on the left and the squint on the right.

Anchorites were religious recluses, and usually women. They were protected by the Bishop and looked after by the local community. One who lived here was a follower of St Tibba.

Ryhall Church is traditionally associated with the legend of St Tibba, the patron saint of hunting. She was the niece of King Penda of Mercia and is said to have lived in or near Ryhall in the 7th century. Originally buried in the churchyard, her remains

were removed to Peterborough Monastery in 963 by Abbot Elgin. It is said that she used to bathe at Tibba's Well, thought to be near Stableford Bridge at Belmesthorpe, a small settlement within Ryhall parish.

Continue walking round the outside of the church. Just beyond the north boundary of the churchyard is **CHURCH FARM [5]**. It occupies part of the site of a manor house built by Hugh Despenser in about 1250. Henry III had granted the manor to his father in 1227. Hugh was the Knight of Rutland called to attend the first Parliament at Westminster. He was a close ally of Simon de Montfort and was killed at the battle of Evesham in 1256. The Despensers held Ryhall until 1326. On the chimney of the farmhouse can be seen a date stone with the initials and date *JWE 1685*. The initials are those of John Walleth and his wife Elizabeth who owned the estate at that time, when the house was called Hallyard.



Church Farm. (RO)

Leave the churchyard by the north gate and walk down to **RYHALL SQUARE [6]**. A sycamore tree has been a feature of the square since 1837. The first one was planted to commemorate the coronation of Queen Victoria and the present tree was planted in 1980 to celebrate the Queen Mother's 80th birthday.

On the west side of the square can be seen **THE GREEN DRAGON INN [7]**. This is probably on part of the site of the Despenser manor house. A vaulted 13th century cellar under the inn is all that remains. Directly opposite the Green Dragon Inn is **THE OLD FIVE BELLS [8]**, a late 17th century house and one of the oldest surviving houses in Ryhall. Since it was built the thatch has been removed and the roof raised. The Five Bells Inn closed in 1914, one of the five public houses in the village that have now closed. The name is a reference to five bells in the church tower, four of which were cast by the Norris bell foundry in Stamford. A sixth bell has been added in recent years. The other closed public houses were The Wheat sheaf, The Foundry, The Crown and The Tally Ho.

Walk along Bridge Street towards the Gwash bridge. On the right, note the interesting cartouche style date stone with TR 1906 on **PROSPECT HOUSE**. Also on the right is **THE MILLSTONE** public house [9], named after the former nearby watermill.

On the left is Waterside Lane. In February 1987, workmen digging a trench in the back garden of Meadowbank in this lane came upon what would prove to be one of the largest hoards of Civil War coins ever discovered, consisting of 3,263 coins with a face value of £160 1s. The coins, most of which were

shillings of Charles I, had been buried in a wooden box. They were declared Treasure Trove following an inquest at Oakham Castle. (*Rutland Record* 9, pp305-11)

At one time a loop in the river ran along the side of Waterside Lane. Ryhall Feast was celebrated every year in this area, in the third week of October. The lane would be full of stalls, side-shows and amusements. All the inns would be busy and people working away from home made an effort to return during feast week.

Walk along the causeway and over the narrow **STONE BRIDGE [10]** to Foundry Road, keeping to the marked walkway. Before the construction of Rutland Water in the 1970s water levels were often much higher and the River Gwash flowed under all three arches of this bridge. As a result, the river extended to the edge of Foundry Road immediately to the east of the bridge **[11]** and this area was used as a cart wash. It has now been filled in.



The cart wash in Foundry Road. (Jack Hart Collection)

The long house set back from Foundry Road and opposite the bridge is **BRIDGE HOUSE [12]**. It was once two properties, the Wheatsheaf Inn to the left and a bakehouse to the right. There is a dovecote above the former bakery, and a date stone above the front door is inscribed TR 1791.



Bridge House. (RO)

Turn right and walk along Foundry Road. The narrow passage **[13]** to the right of Melbourne House leads to Backside Lane. It was known as **THE JITTY** and was used by railway workers as a short cut to Essendine station. Further along Foundry Road is **THE OLD FORGE [14]**. This 17th and 18th century house takes its name from the former workshop of the blacksmith and wheelwright to the left front of the property. Next is the former **PINFOLD [15]** where stray animals were kept until claimed by their owners. In the 19th century **THE POPLARS [16]** was owned by the Gann family. Members of this family

were butchers, publicans, shopkeepers and carpenters. John Gann provided the wooden pews in the church and the stained-glass window in the south aisle by Charles Elmer Kempe was given by the family.

On the opposite side of Foundry Road is **IVY COTTAGE [17]**, all that remains of a row of four cottages. Almost opposite is **OLD MANOR FARM [18]** with Collyweston slates and stone mullions. It is dated 1679, but it is considered to be a much older hall house. The Gann family also owned this property when it was known as Manor Farm.

Foundry road was named after **RYHALL FOUNDRY** which was located at **[19]** on the map. The site is now a housing estate either side of Gwash Close. The foundry was started by the Downs family in the early 1800s. The 1851 Census Return records that Richard Downs was a plough maker employing six men. His son, Elijah Downs, iron founder and machine maker, owned it in 1877. The foundry specialised in casting fire surrounds and figures, one of which, a bust of William Shakespeare, was found in the garden of Bridge House.

Now turn left into **BACK LANE [20]** and walk along it to Essendine Road. Turn left into Mill Street. On the left, immediately inside Mill Street, is **MILL FARMHOUSE [21]**. The rear of the house is the oldest part. Additions were made in 1844 and part of the kitchen was used as a butcher's shop.

Opposite Mill Farmhouse is the site of **RYHALL CORN MILL [22]** which was demolished in the 1950s. It had an undershot wheel and part of the floodgate structure remains. Two Domesday mills are recorded at Ryhall and osier beds formerly occupied the land between two branches of the river, which today flows in a single channel.

Continue along Mill Street and turn left into Crown Street. On the corner is the **WESLEYAN CHAPEL [23]**. Dated 1877, it replaced a much earlier chapel in Waterside Lane, known as Chapel House, which belonged to John Christian, carpenter. It was licensed in 1810 as a place of worship for Methodists and is recalled in its name of Wesley Cottage.

Also in Crown Street you will see another a square **DOVECOTE [24]**, and **CROWN LODGE [25]**, the former Crown public house.

Return to the village hall and the end of the walk via Bridge Street and Church Street.

Acknowledgements

Uppingham School Archives and Rutland County Museum (Jack Hart Collection).

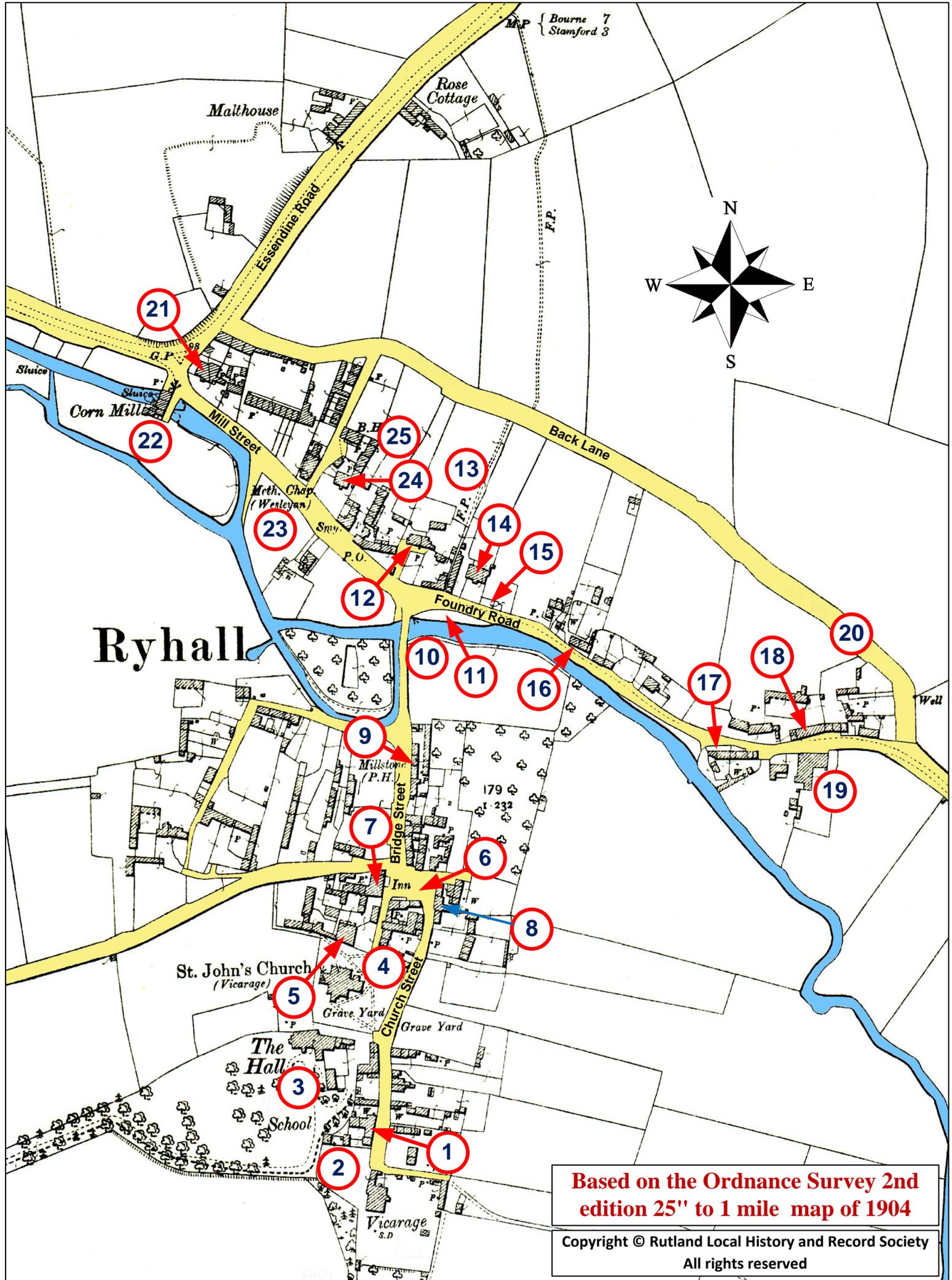
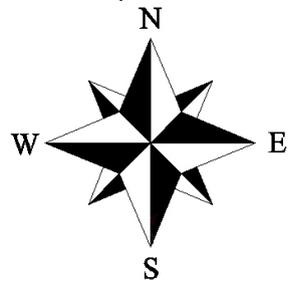
Robert Ovens and Sheila Sleath

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Another of the carved figures which adorn Ryhall church. (RO)

Ryhall



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