

Rutland Local History & Record Society

Registered Charity No. 700273



Ashwell Village Walk September 2002 (updated 2020)

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INTRODUCTION

Ashwell Village takes its name, according to W G Hoskins, from the Ash lined stream nearby, but its 11th century name of Exewelle probably points to an alternative but unknown origin.

As this walk will confirm, the village has a great deal to offer, particularly to local historians. The earliest recorded Lord of the Manor was Earl Harold before 1066. The Manor then descended through the Earls of Chester and the Touchet and Palmes families. In 1699 it was sold to Bartholomew Burton and thereafter it descended through the Dawnay family, the Viscounts Downe. In 1865 the estate was purchased by Westley Richards of Birmingham, a wealthy gun maker, who in 1869 built a second Ashwell Hall about half a mile south of the village. The estate was finally split up when it was sold at auction in 1912.

Other notable names in the history of the village include William Butterfield, an eminent Victorian architect who designed a number of houses in the village and restored the church in 1851, the Reverend James Adams, the first Clerk in Holy Orders to receive the Victoria Cross, Beryl Markham who was born in the village in 1902 and who, in 1936, was the first person to fly the Atlantic Ocean from east to west, and Major Whaley who was in charge of the Rutland Home Guard during the Second World War. Also, Sir Richard Levett, son of the Rev Richard Levett, minister for Ashwell during the Civil War, was Lord Mayor of London in 1699 and owner of Kew Palace.

The village was well known for the Cottesmore Hunt Kennels, now converted to housing, and Ashwell Prison. These are the first large buildings one sees when travelling towards Ashwell from Oakham. The prison was about 2 miles south of the village but was actually in Burley parish. Previously the site was a Second World War US army base and home to the 82nd Airborne Division. It closed in March 2011 and is now Oakham Enterprise Park for office and light industrial use.

The population of the parish was 269 in 2011.

THE VILLAGE MAP

The map with this walk is based on the Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 25 inch to one mile map of 1904. Consequently, later buildings, extensions and demolitions

are not shown. Numbers in the text, for example [12], refer to locations shown on the map.

Please:

Respect private property.

Use pavements and footpaths where available.

Take great care when walking alongside or crossing roads.

Remember that you are responsible for your own safety.

THE WALK

The walk starts at Ashwell Village Hall [1]. Built in 1926, it was the theatre for the village Dramatic Society which flourished through the 1930s when the company won a county award for '*Maria Marten or the Mystery of the Red Barn*'. During the Second World War, American GIs based at the camp at what was later to become Ashwell Prison, were frequent visitors to dances held here. Social evenings continued into the early 1960s with '*meat salad meals, trifles and apple pies to die for!*'

On leaving the Village Hall turn right and walk along Oakham Road. On the right, but difficult to see behind the wall is Ashwell Lodge [2], a house of 18th, 19th and early 20th century construction, with stone at the front and red brick at the rear. The Lodge, with its stables to the east, was converted from a former farmhouse and barns. It was once the home of Major Whaley who was in charge of the Rutland Home Guard during the Second World War. He was a somewhat irascible character who is once supposed to have discharged his shotgun into the Lodge ceiling. Major Whaley's headstone memorial can be seen in the churchyard to the south west of the church door.

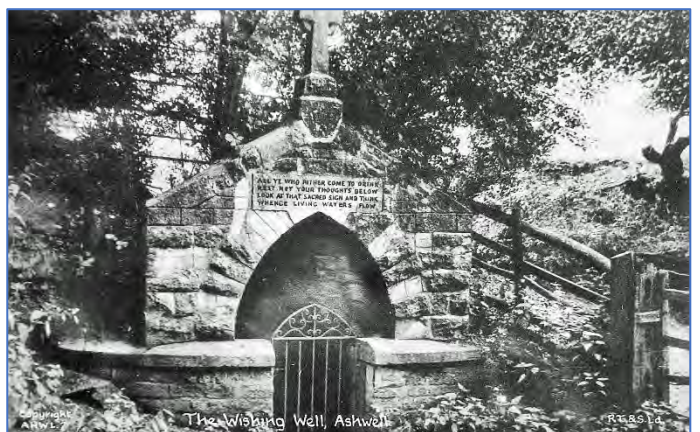
At the bend in the road, on the opposite side and near the junction with Langham Road is Ashwell Wishing Well [3], a mid-19th century conceit with a religious message:

All ye who hither come to drink

Rest not your thoughts below

Look at that sacred sign and think

Whence Living waters flow.



Ashwell Wishing Well in 1910. The present cross is a recent replacement for the one shown here. (Jack Hart Collection)

The field behind the Well was originally the village cricket field, complete with pavilion [4]. In its day, this was a real centre of village life with visiting village teams playing matches throughout the summer months. Lavish

teas prepared by the ladies of the village were served in the Village Hall.

Walk north along Oakham Road. On the right, just before the crossroads, is the driveway to the Georgian Rectory [5] which is now a private dwelling named Ashwell House. This house will be seen from the churchyard later in the walk. At the crossroads, on the corner of Whissendine Road and Teigh Road, is Manor Farm [6].



Ashwell Rectory, circa 1920, now Ashwell House. (Jack Hart Collection)

About half a mile along Whissendine Road, but not part of this walk, is Ashwell Grange, originally Westfield House, the birthplace in 1902 of Beryl Clutterbuck who lived here until her family moved to Kenya when she was four years old.

In 1936, as Beryl Markham, she was the first person to fly solo, non-stop across the Atlantic from Britain to North America.



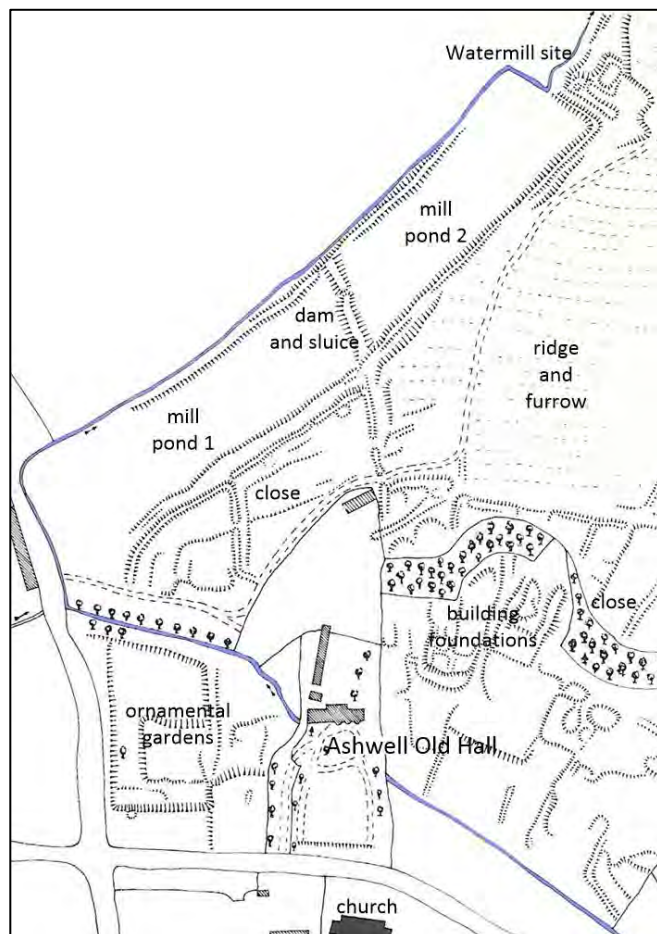
Beryl Markham, Ashwell's most famous daughter?

Turn right into Cottesmore Road. On the left, now behind a new limestone wall, is Ashwell Old Hall [7], one of the most interesting buildings in the village. It is now referred to as Ashwell Old Hall as another Ashwell Hall was built, in the Tudor style, about half a mile to the south of the village by Westley Richards in 1879.

Ashwell Old Hall is a house of early 18th and 19th century construction with a stone front elevation, a red brick rear elevation, a Collyweston slate roof with stone coped gables and ashlar chimney stacks.

The remains of part of Ashwell medieval settlement, a watermill, mill ponds and gardens associated with a

medieval manor house adjacent to Ashwell Old Hall are Scheduled Ancient Monuments. All are on private land.



Scheduled Ancient Monument sites adjacent to Ashwell Old Hall. (Hartley, Medieval Earthworks of Rutland)



Ashwell Old Hall in 1907. (Jack Hart Collection)

Walk along Cottesmore Road. On the right, note the Grade II listed north gate to the churchyard with its Gothic arch. All the churchyard walls are also Grade II listed.

Continue along Cottesmore Road for some distance and turn left into Croft Lane. From near the end of this cul-de-sac there are good views of William Butterfield's L-shaped terrace of 1858 [8] which comprises three houses. These, and two pairs of cottages in Woodside [9], were designed by William Butterfield for William Dawnay, the 7th Viscount Downe, who, as landowner, undertook many improvements to the village between 1850 and 1859. He recognised the importance of religion, education, the provision of charity and of good quality housing for his tenants.



Two of William Butterworth's cottages seen from Woodside. (RO)

Butterfield's design for the cottages includes half-hipped roofs, dormers, sash windows and decorative blue/black zigzag patterns in the brickwork. It is also possible to see the old pigsty and brick privy which stand in the generously sized garden of each cottage. These cottages were considered palatial for their time and can be compared with Prince Albert's design ideals for workers' housing which were built and displayed in Knightsbridge Cavalry Barracks for the nearby Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park, London. They were later demolished and re-erected at Kennington.

Walk back to the junction of Croft Lane and Cottesmore Road, passing The Croft [10] on the left, a red brick house, mostly of 1811. This house was once the home of the Wiggintons, a well-known Methodist family. Turn left into Cottesmore Road. The building, now a garage, standing in the garden of The Croft is the old smithy [11].

Next on the left is the former Primitive Methodist Chapel [12] which was erected in 1915. It is now a private dwelling. Round its base are the names of local Methodists involved in its foundation, including the Watsons, the Wiggintons, and Lord Ranksborough.



The Primitive Methodist Chapel soon after it was built in 1915. (Jack Hart Collection)

Continue along Cottesmore Road and turn left into Woodside to see in more detail the two pairs of Butterfield semi-detached cottages [9] noted above.

Retrace your steps back to Cottesmore Road and turn right towards the church. Continue past Water Lane on the left.

Further along on this side is the only green space [13] left in the central area of the village where sheep grazed until recent times. Next is a thatched property known as Middle Farm, or Allen's Farm [14]. This early house, which has a largely untouched interior, is thought to be circa 1700.

Just beyond is the former village shop and post office [15] which was an addition to the side of the almshouses. It is now a private dwelling.

Next are the whitewashed and part timber-framed former almshouses [16], complete with their original lychgate, referred to in former times as *Widows' Yard*. They were built in 1858 by William Butterfield, to his unusual L-shaped design, for Viscount Downe. Look through the lychgate to see the five small dwellings that originally overlooked a central courtyard. They are like the almshouses at the Butterfield-designed Downe village of Baldersby St James in Yorkshire.

The small, elongated triangle of grass near the almshouses is the village green [17]. Two trees were planted here to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of George V in 1935 by the Wigginton and Watson families, but the trees died and the plaques commemorating this event have been lost. Only one replacement tree survives.

Another tree was planted by Mrs Augusta McRoberts of Ashwell Old Hall behind the limestone wall on the opposite side of Cottesmore Road. This was to commemorate HM Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee.

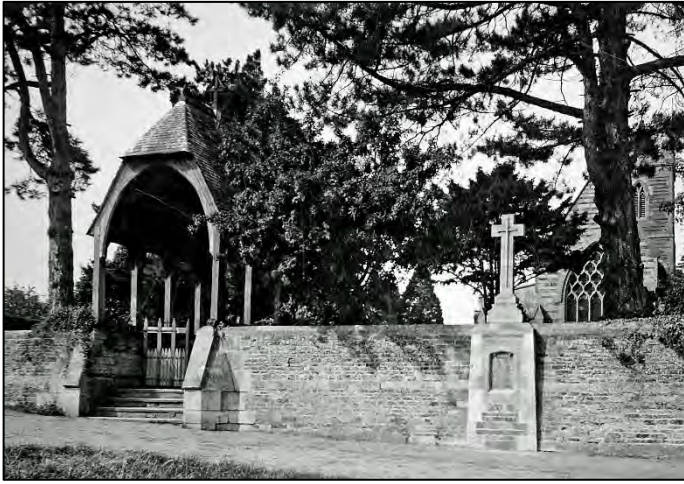
This paddock behind the stone wall was once the site of village allotment gardens. New allotment gardens were later established to the west of the village on the north side of Langham Road.



George Henton's view of the church and village green in 1914. (Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland)

Walk towards the church lychgate [18]. To the right is the village War Memorial which was the subject of controversy when it was being planned. Some villagers felt names should be in alphabetical order rather than by rank, but they were overruled.

Enter the churchyard through the Grade II listed lychgate which was designed by William Butterfield and erected about 1851.



The lychgate and the War Memorial in 1923. (Jack Hart Collection)

To the left of the path, towards the Old School wall, is the headstone of Mademoiselle Gabrielle Quinaux, daughter of Major General Quinaux who came to this country after the fall of Belgium in the Great War. He brought with him the Belgian State Coaches which were stored in the Riding School, Oakham, now Rutland County Museum. Local historian and raconteur Caroline Aston recalls being told that her grandfather was responsible for keeping the heraldic paintings and trim on the coaches in good order until they were returned to Belgium.

Further along the path, again on the left-hand side and just before the south porch, are several early headstones, the oldest being 1655.

Beyond the porch is the churchyard cross of 1851 by William Butterfield, and the headstone cross of the Reverend James Adams, the first Clerk in Holy Orders to be awarded the Victoria Cross. This was in 1879 for gallant action in the Second Afghan War, and a copy of the citation is displayed in the church.

Also in this area is the headstone of Major Whaley of Ashwell Lodge. From here the old Rectory, now Ashwell House, [24] can be seen. This impressive red brick dwelling was built in 1812, probably by John Dawnay, 5th Viscount Downe and Lord of the Manor, for his youngest brother, Thomas Dawnay, who was instituted Rector of Ashwell in 1803. A new rectory was built in the 1950s on Langham Road, but this is also now a private dwelling.

St Mary's Church [20], which is normally open, was restored by William Butterfield in 1851 for William Henry Dawnay, the 7th Viscount Downe, in memory of his brother, Thomas Dawnay, Rector of Ashwell, who died in 1850. Butterfield took down the clerestory, raised the roof pitch in the nave and chancel and decorated the chancel roof. He also removed the pinnacles from the tower and replaced the plain parapet with battlements. The tracery of the decorated east window was renewed and filled with stained glass. This window, by the Irish glaziers Michael and Arthur O'Connor, is a memorial to Thomas Dawnay.

Butterfield was also responsible for all the fittings including the stone font, which has an ingenious counter-weighted lid which rises at the touch of a hand, a carved oak pulpit, chancel screen, lectern, inlaid marble and alabaster reredos, altar candleholders, tiled floor (many of the tiles having the Viscount's shield), and pews. He also restored the

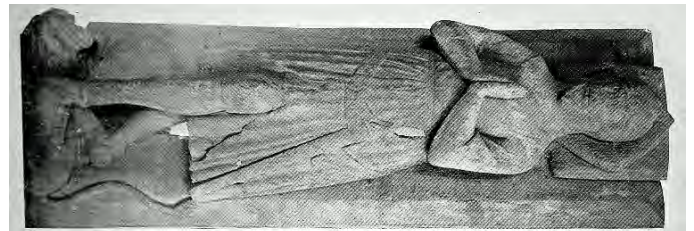
south porch. The work is considered to be the most interesting of the nineteenth century Rutland church restorations.

Whilst exploring the church, notice also the finely preserved double sedilia left by Butterfield behind the organ, and nearby the three-light window of 1905 by Ninian Comper, dedicated to the memory of Emily Montagu Ritchie who died in 1903.



Part of the Ninian Comper window showing St Cecilia holding a portable organ. (RO)

Two two-light windows in the south chapel are by Alfred Gerente and were originally shown in the Paris exhibition of 1851. They are said to be an attempt to replicate French medieval stained glass. Also in this chapel is the late 13th century wooden effigy of a knight crusader.



The wooden effigy of a knight crusader in the south chapel of Ashwell church. Originally it would have been painted in heraldic colours. (Jack Hart Collection)

Also here is a flat marble slab with incised figures. This slab is a memorial to John and Rose Vernam, the parents of John Vernam. He was Rector of Ashwell in 1465 and his life-size alabaster effigy is in the north chapel.

The west window was a memorial to the 7th Viscount Downe who paid for the church restoration and who died in 1858. It was again by Michael and Arthur O'Connor and depicted Noah with a model of the Arc and Solomon with a model of the Temple. It was paid for by the parishioners and was an indication of the high esteem in which the Viscount was held. Unfortunately, it was damaged in a storm and never replaced.

On leaving the church, take the path back to the lychgate, noticing that the church guttering bears Viscount Downe's coronet and initials. Turn right into Church Close. The first building on the right is the former Church of England school [21], another contribution by the

Dawnay family. It was built *circa* 1850 and closed on 18 July 1969. It provided education for the children of both Ashwell and Teigh. Constructed of local ironstone with rich brown colouring, it has gothic shaped windows set too high for children to see out of. The original bell at the rear can be seen from the churchyard.

Continue to the end of Church Close then follow the signed footpath to Oakham Road. Turn right and then right again into Brook Dene.

Walk along Brook Dene to Water Lane. Immediately in front of you, on the east side of Water Lane, are four old stone cottages [22], properties which once housed four families and now altered to provide accommodation for two. The large modern house next to this group covers what was once a large communal garden area which boasted a now long-vanished pump for the cottagers.

Walk south along Water Lane and the first property on the left is Home Farm [23], the oldest building in the village. It was built in the early 17th century on the foundations of a house which was at least 100 years older, extended *circa* 1636, altered in 1840, and restored in 1990. Inside, there are chamfered timber beams throughout, and a large 17th century stone fireplace. The dates 1636 and 1637 are etched into the plaster walls. The house and farm stand on the site of a Saxon settlement and considerable assorted pottery dating from the 9th century onwards has been found.



Home Farm in Water Lane. This photograph was taken by George Henton in 1914. (Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland)

This is the end of the walk. Return to the Village Hall via Brook Dene.

Acknowledgements

Caroline Aston, Elizabeth Bryan, Sheila Sleath and Rutland County Museum (Jack Hart Collection).

Robert Ovens

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Not seen on the walk:



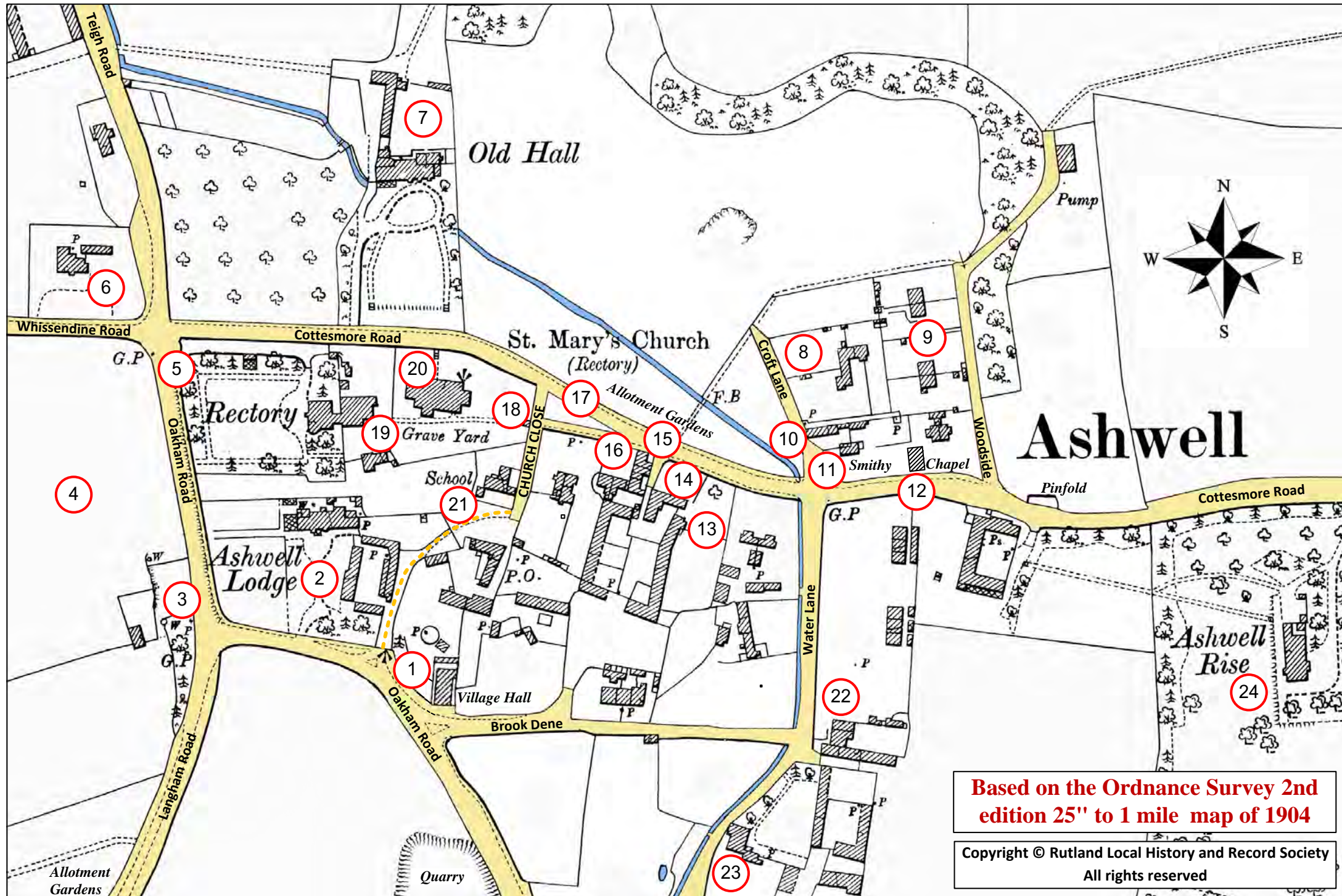
The Rise, or Ashwell Rise, [24] on the map, is a large Arts and Crafts style house which was built circa 1900. (Jack Hart Collection)



Ashwell railway station on the Syston and Peterborough Railway in 1914. It was opened by the Midland Railway on 1st May 1848 and was just outside the village on the Whissendine Road. It closed on 6th June 1966 and the station buildings and platforms were subsequently removed. However, the signal box was saved and survives today in much the same condition as it was when it was built. (Jack Hart Collection)



Ashwell railway crossing keeper's cottage in 1925. It stood on the Langham Road on the east side of the Syston and Peterborough Railway. The family members are Emily, William, Winnie and Marjorie Bottom. Today, the cottage has gone and there are barriers controlled by a remote signalman and wicket gates for pedestrians. (Jack Hart Collection)



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

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