

The Lost Yards of Ratby

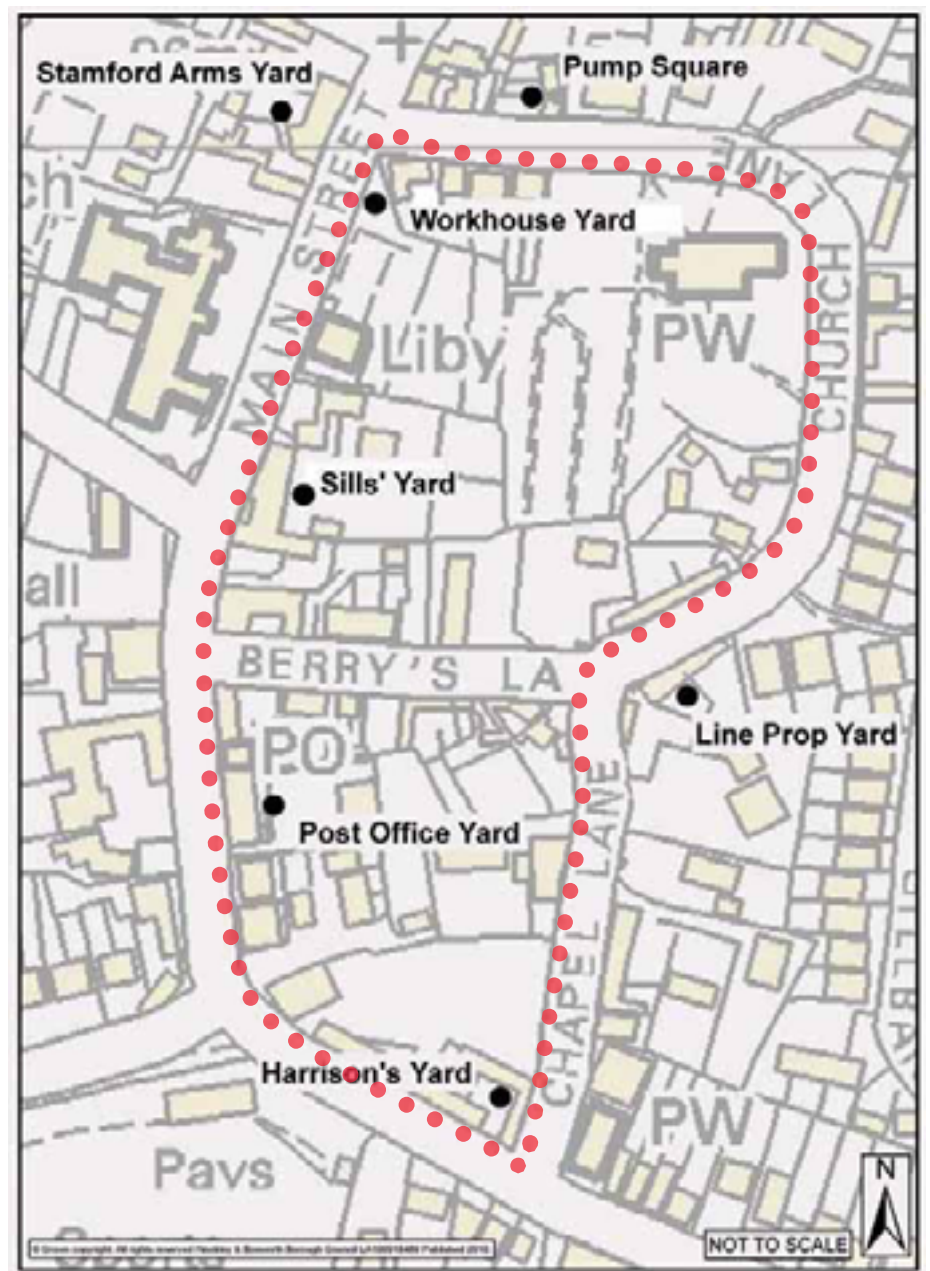
The purpose of this leaflet is to give an insight into Ratby's lost yards and why they were built. The Borough Council together with the Ratby Local History Group has installed nameplates at a number of locations in the village to indicate where yards were known to exist. The map of Ratby's village centre on the rear page of this leaflet shows the sites of seven of the yards linked to a heritage trail which you are invited to walk to view the locations for yourself.



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●●●●●●●● Heritage Trail

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The Lost Yards of Ratby

The population of Ratby increased dramatically during the 19th century. It tripled from 480 in 1801 to 1429 in 1901. This growth was caused mainly by the arrival of the 1832 railway connection with Leicester and beyond, which helped the establishment and expansion of local industries such as framework knitting, hosiery, the shoe industry and granite/slate quarrying in the area.

According to the censuses, the number of households increased from 135 in 1841 to 218 in 1891. These extra families had to be housed somewhere. However there was little room for housing outside the village because most of this land was still in full agricultural use. The only solution was to build small cottages inside existing yards. The 1773 Enclosure Map shows that, by then, land inside the village was already subdivided to form yards and gardens of varying sizes. These were attached to farmsteads or workers' cottages alongside the main streets of the village. It was in these enclosures that the new cottages were built.

The renting of these homes must have been highly profitable because the 1871 census for Ratby already identified 16 separate yards, most carrying the name of the owner of the land (e.g. Cramp's Yard, Richard's Yard, Wright's Yard and Varnham's Yard, all on Church Lane). Invariably there was limited space inside these cottages which often housed large families in cramped conditions. Facilities such as water pumps, outside privies, wash houses and coal houses had to be shared between families. The absence of a damp course and the single brick walls meant that the homes could be very cold in winter, except close to the fireplace in the one living room/kitchen.

It was not until the 1930s that these properties were declared uninhabitable but their removal was delayed by the outbreak of war. By 1950 most had been demolished and families rehoused. Some of the locations of the yards have now been identified by name plaques e.g. Harrison's Yard, Line Prop Yard, Post Office Yard, Pump Square, Sills' Yard, Stamford Arms Yard and Workhouse Yard (see map).

Post Office Yard

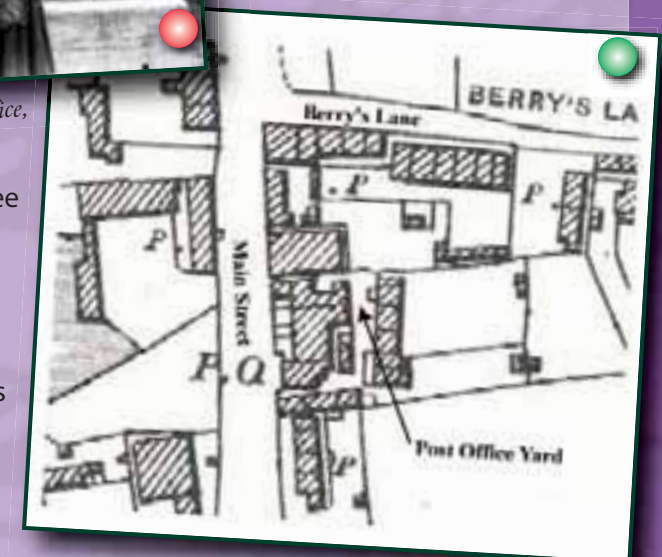
A group of five cottages were built in a yard behind Main Street in the early 19th century. The name "Post Office Yard" derives from the location of the former village post office on the north side of the entrance to the yard. A footpath used to link Post Office Yard with Berry's Lane.



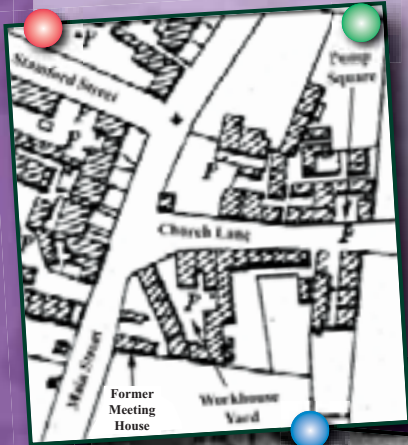
Outside Ratby's Former Post Office, c.1905

Annie Astill was about three feet and six inches tall and was subpost-mistress for Ratby from 1893 to 1922. The post office was in the front room of her house, as shown in the photo. The jitty to the right of the post office led to Post Office Yard which was immediately behind the post office. To the left of the post office was the 'Yew Trees' pub. To the right was the Yew Trees skittle alley, formerly a framework knitters workshop.

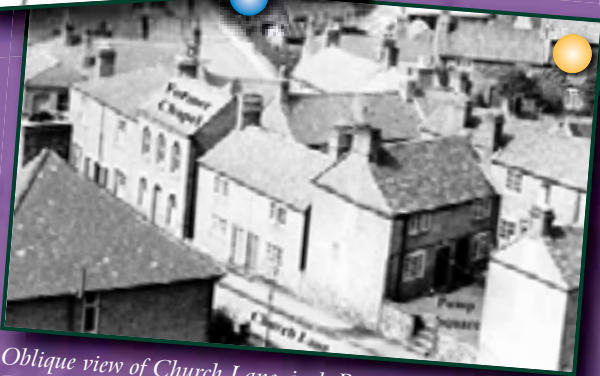
Freddy Astill lived in a double-fronted cottage in Post Office Yard. He was a nephew of Annie Astill and had inherited her small stature. He worked as projectionist at the Majestic Cinema in Ratby.



Pump Square



Pump square comprised a group of three semi-detached, one-up/one-down cottages, now demolished, which formed three sides of a square around a central pump. They were built after the Enclosure Act of 1770, as part of the infilling of "an ancient enclosure belonging to George Keen and Benjamin Judd, tailor".



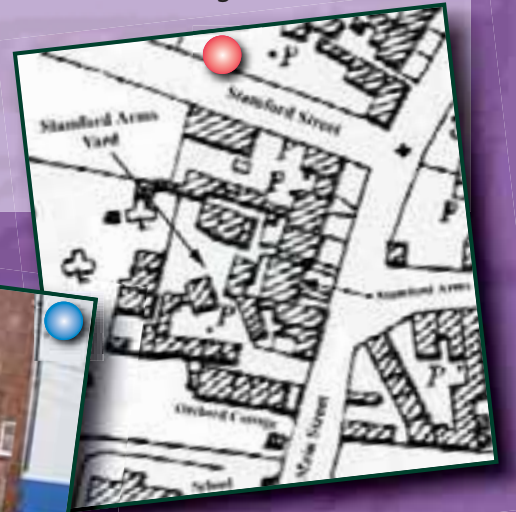
Oblique view of Church Lane, incl. Pump Square c.1950



View down Church Lane towards the former 'Earl of Stamford Arms' inn on Main Street, c.1930



Present day view in Stamford Arms Yard



Stamford Arms Yard takes its name from the former Earl of Stamford Arms inn which stood on Main Street, opposite the entrance to Church Lane. The yard was behind the pub and was accessed via the tunnel which still exists. The yard had previously been a farmyard with stables, barns, blacksmith's shop etc. These were converted into cottages in the early 19th century. On the western boundary stood a group of three-storey dwellings known locally as the "garrett houses".

Workhouse Yard

Workhouse Yard was the name given to the row of five cottages, built on the site of the 18th century village workhouse at the corner of Church Lane and Main Street. Evidence from deeds suggests that the original workhouse was converted into these five tenements and a dissenting meeting house between 1805 and 1822. There is archaeological evidence that before the opening of the school in 1873, the meeting house may have been used as an infant school.

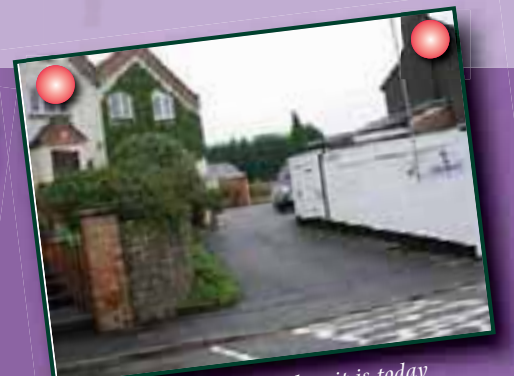
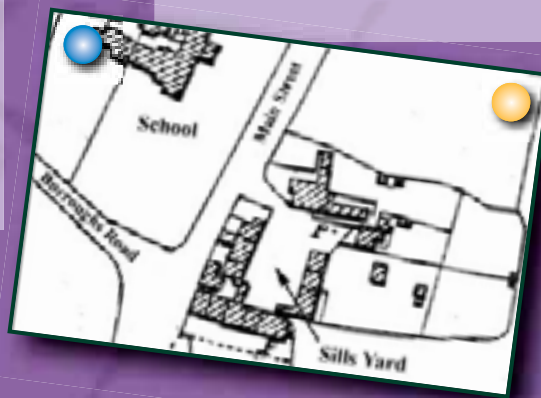


A view of Workhouse Yard from the Bull's Head c.1910

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Sills' Yard

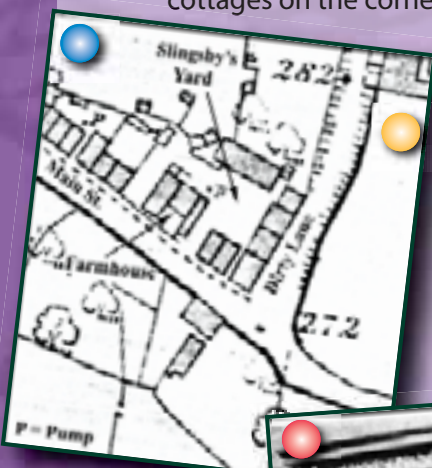
Sills' Yard takes its name from the Sills family who lived there from before 1840 to 1890. Previously the yard had contained stables, barn and outbuildings linked to a grocer's shop on Main Street. William Sills was a 'master carpenter'. He built a detached house which still survives and seven cottages and a carpenter's workshop which have since been demolished. Thomas Preston built a small hosiery factory in the yard in the early 20th century.



Entrance into Sills Yard as it is today

Harrison's Yard

Harrison's Yard, formerly named Slingsby's Yard, was situated behind the cottages on the corner of Station Road and Chapel Lane (Dirty Lane). It took its name from Harrison's Drapery shop which occupied the corner site from 1901 to 1969. It was first created by the conversion of farm outbuildings into six residences during the early 19th century. This explains the complex brick and stonework forming the Chapel Lane wall. There were four framework knitters living there in 1871.



Harrison's Drapery shop on the corner of Main Street and Chapel Lane c.1920



View looking up Chapel Lane from Station Road. The front view of the Harrison Yard cottages is on the left, c.1910

Line Prop Yard

It is not known how Line Prop Yard received its name. It may be that one of the occupants was a laundress, so that the yard was often filled with crisp white sheets on the washing lines.



Entry to Line Prop Yard, Church Lane, 2010. Access was through the archway