

Walk No 13.2: Rushcliffe Country Park

Walk/Photos taken 3-9 Sept, 2020

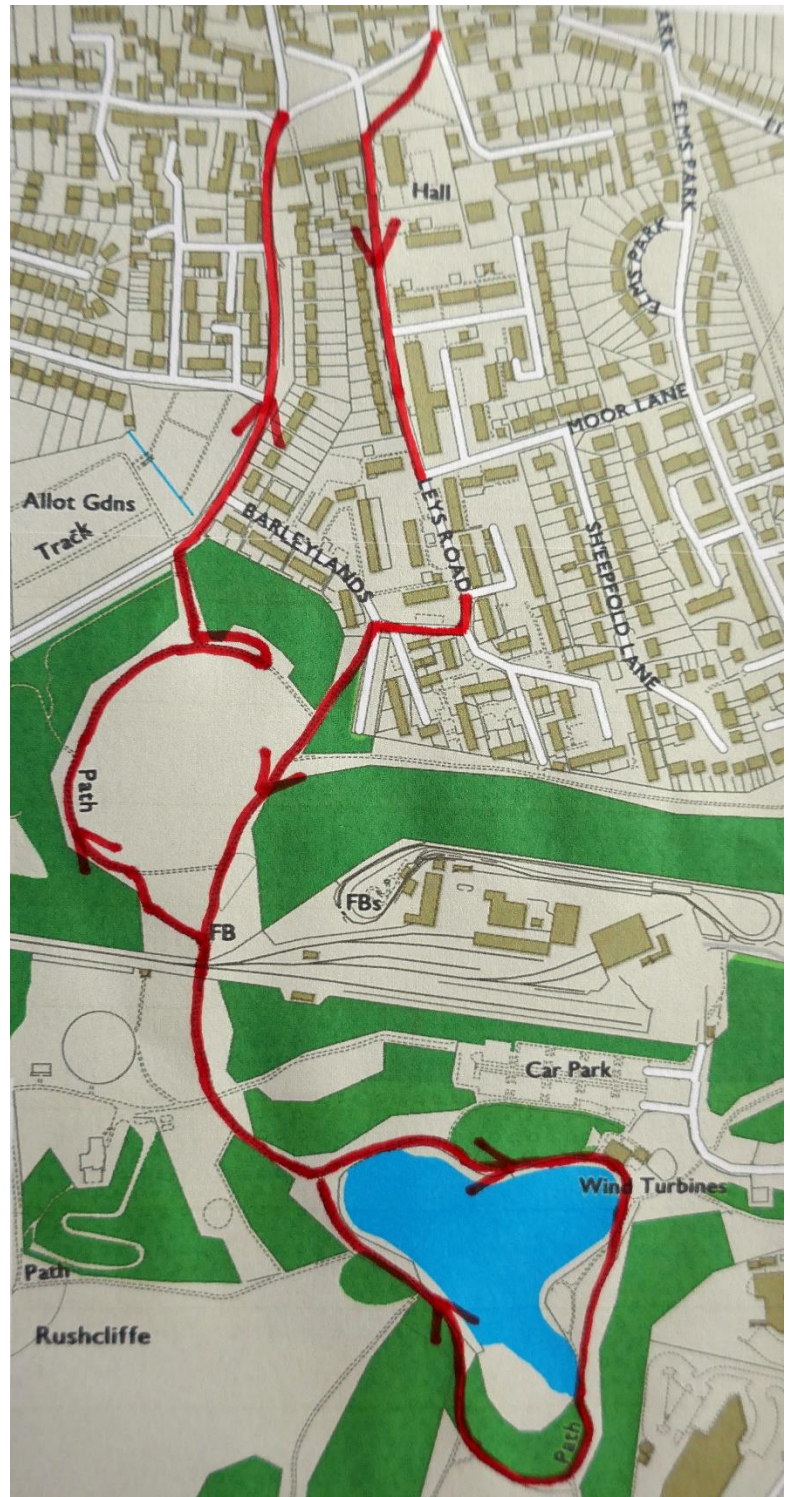
This is the second part of the Ruddington Walk.

This walk, of about 3Km, starts at The Green, Ruddington, at the end of Walk 13.1, goes south to the Rushcliffe Country Park, looking at its history from the WW2 Ordnance Depot to the leisure amenities today. It returns to The Green where Walk 13.3 'Ruddington (The Green) to WB' starts.

The history of Ruddington Village is mainly covered in **Walk 13.1 'WB to Ruddington (The Green)'**, with some in 13.3 '**Ruddington (The Green) to WB**', which also includes a bit about future growth of the village, and there is also the important part the village played in the history of knitting, covered in **13A 'Framework Knitting in Nottinghamshire – from invention to dissension'**.

Combining this walk with Walks 13.1 and 13.2 makes a longer walk. Taken on its own, or in combination with bits of the other walks, it requires a bus or other means to and from Ruddington.

To simplify the actual walk description I have put the history of the Country Park at the end.



From the southern end of High Street, cross diagonally over the green to its centre where there is an interesting arrangement of numbers inlaid in the paving – a human sundial



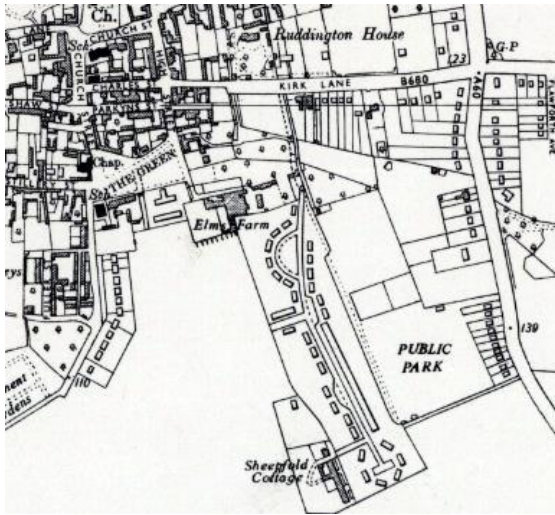
The figure eight in the middle has months marked. You stand on the appropriate month, facing the village centre (north). The sun is from behind you and casts a shadow across to a number which gives you the time of day.



Continue across the Green and turn left and go through the gap onto Leys Road. This is part of an area of council housing, started in the 1950s.

In the second half of the C20th a considerable amount of council housing was built in Ruddington; in the north-east (Rufford Road and Packman Drive area), west (roads off Clifton Road) and here in the south east (Leys Road and Elms Park area).





In this map, published in 1955 based on surveys in the 1930s, with some additions in 1950, there is addition of housing south of Elms Farm along what is now Elms Park, part of the old council estate which included Leys Road. This indicates that the house building started soon after the war. (Elms Farmhouse is now a private residence and the farm buildings are converted to another residence - The Yard House).

Today, there are still around 470 registered social housing properties in the village.

Along Leys Road there is a mix of size and style, with plenty of green space.

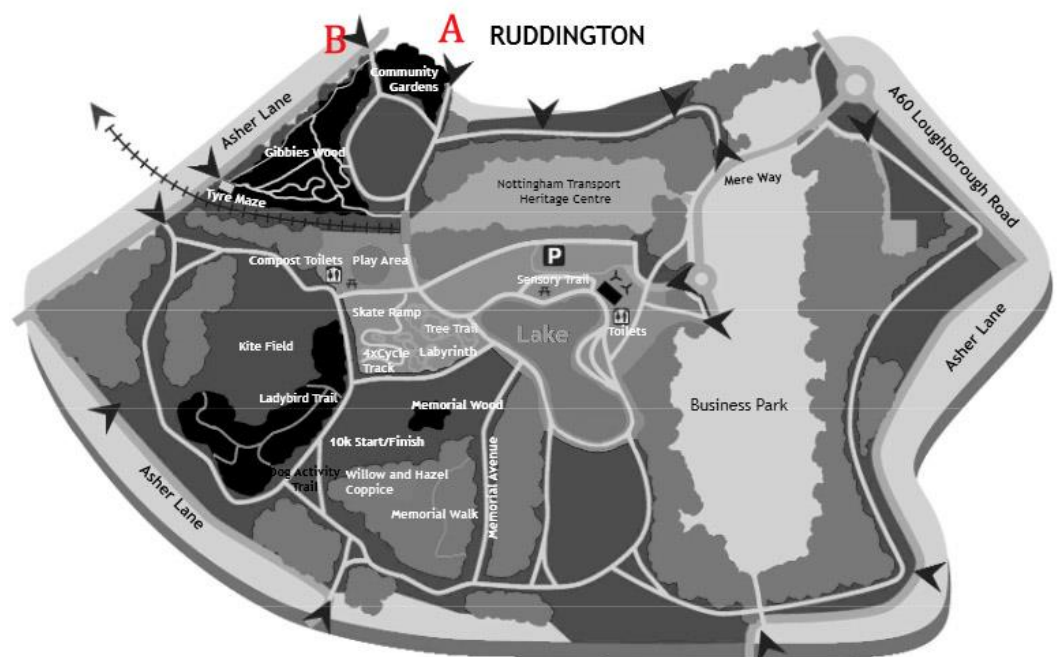


At Barleylands, turn right and then go left, through the gates into Rushcliffe Country Park.

For information about the park's origins go to **Further Info 1**. 'Historical Information about Rushcliffe Country Park' at the end of this paper.



There are many activities in the park, with a network of over 8 kms. of footpaths. This map shows all the footpaths – so, if you are doing 13.2 as a separate walk, you can chose one of the many routes through the park.



If you are doing the full route from West Bridgford and back (13.1 + 13.2+ 13.3), then I suggest you just go from the entrance off Barleylands (point A) to the bridge over the railway, round the lake, back over the bridge and out onto Asher Lane (point B) – the route shown on the map at the start of this walk.

From the entry gate (A), go straight ahead, through the trees and along the edge of a large field – named 'Field of Hope' in support of Marie Curie Cancer Care



At the top, the path crosses a bridge across the railway line that previously served the Ordnance Depot and is now the preserved line of the Great Central Railway - Nottingham (GCRN). Formally known as Nottingham Transport Heritage, the GCRN offers classic steam / diesel hauled rail services running almost 10 miles through the South Nottinghamshire and North-West Leicestershire to Loughborough.



Entirely staffed by volunteers, the site houses a large number of rail vehicles - steam and diesel locomotives, carriages, wagons, vans and other rolling stock and a collection of vintage buses that originally operated for local bus companies. It also has a model railway, miniature railways and railway workshops.

Continue over the bridge, with a children's play area on the right, and follow the path curving to the left to reach the lake





Go around the lake, watching for wildlife...

A majestic heron, ignoring the other birds.



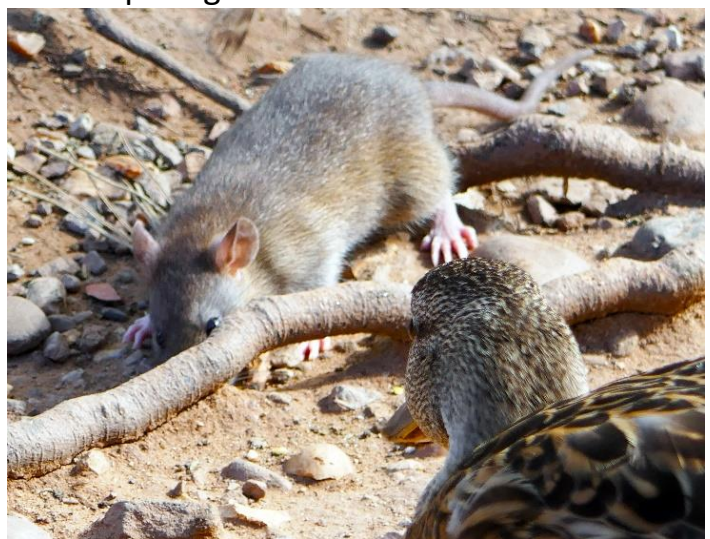
Cygnets rapidly growing into adults, their plumage turning white.



An adult brown rat with two pups (pinkies or kittens?)...



....competing with the ducks for food..



There are many interesting wood carvings, willow weavings and other sculptures of insects and animals – practical or just entertaining



Go back to the bridge and turn left immediately after crossing, down a path towards the woods.



At the bottom is another carved seat – a dragonfly (like the one in Gamston, Walk 11)



Beyond the dragonfly, bear right (not into the wood) and then go clockwise around the edge of the Field of Hope



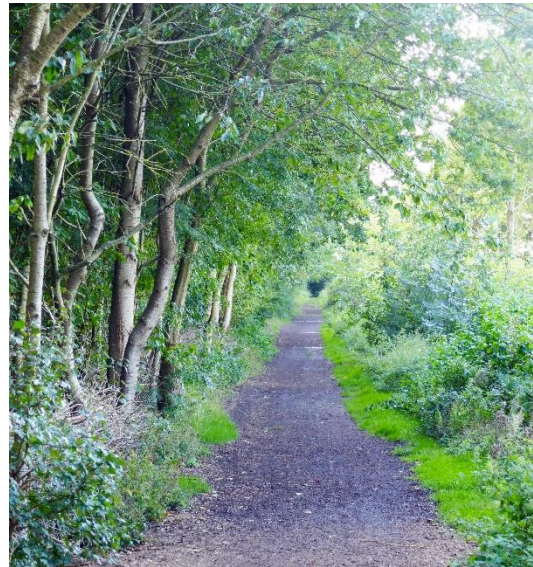
Where the path divides, go a little way to the right where there is a pleasant seating area under the trees and, inlaid in the path, some mosaic pictures of flowers and animals



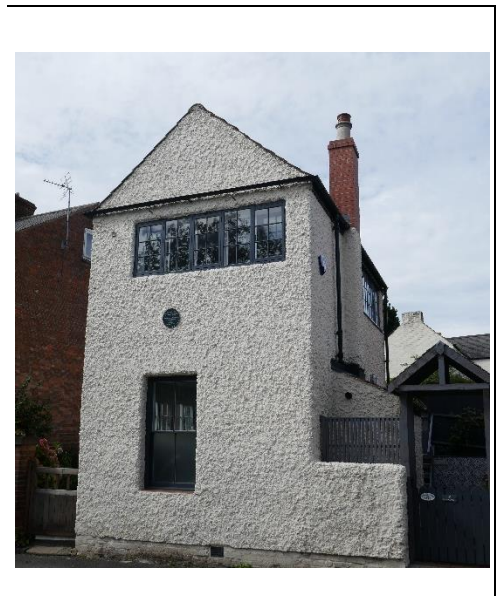
Go back to the junction of paths and go right, towards the exit, ignoring the tempting paths through the woods – this one, on the left of the path, is called Gibbies Wood, named after Arthur Gibson who drained the marshland back in the C18th.

Go out through the gates onto Asher Lane (point B on the map of the Park).

Turn right and go up towards the village.



Asher Lane continues up to The Green. Most of the housing is from the second half of C20th but on the left side there are a couple of terraces of older housing and a white building – Rose Cottage. This is a nineteenth century framework knitter's cottage which was renovated by the Nottinghamshire Building Preservation Trust in 2007. The Trust notes that the earliest documented conveyance for the building was in 1858 but a building appears in this location on Sanderson's Map of 1835. Like other stockings' cottages, the floor joists are substantial and closely spaced as they had to support the heavy machinery that would have been on the first floor.



On the opposite (right) side is the Grade II Listed Ruddington Free School building. A plaque on the front wall states that the school was originally founded and endowed in 1641 by James Peacock and rebuilt in 1875 in memory of Charles and Ellen Paget.

The name James Peacock is still significant in the village - the James Peacock Infant and Nursery school is on land adjacent to Manor Park (see Walk 13.3). The schools website provides a little history, taken from 'James Peacock's Free School' by Margaret Lawson: James Peacock was born around 1585. At the age of fourteen he was apprenticed to Thomas Smith a Master Skinner in London. James became a very successful business man but when he died in 1641 he had no children to leave his fortune to. In his will he left money to help the sick and poor. He also left a farmhouse in Ruddington to be used as a school and house for the school master.

In 1875 the school moved to the building on the corner of Asher Lane and The Green, the new building being built in memory of Charles Paget MP and his wife Ellen who lived at The Grange (see Walk 13.3) and were drowned by a freak wave at Filey Brigg, Yorkshire, in 1873.

The building is now named 'The Old School' and is the premises of Adlard Print & Reprographics Ltd.

On the left at the end of Asher Lane is Distillery Street. Looking along it you will see the end of a white building, sticking out into the road. This is now residential but used to be a distillery – hence the street name presumably.

Intriguingly, it used beetroot as its raw material for distillation – see **Further Info 2**.



That is the end of Walk 13.2.

If that is all you wish to do today, you can get a bus back to West Bridgford from the stop on the edge of the Green (or back to your car).

If you want to continue walking round the village and back to West Bridgford, go to 13.3 Ruddington (The Green) to WB – the walk continues from outside the old Wesleyan Chapel, near the north-east corner of the Green.

Further Information

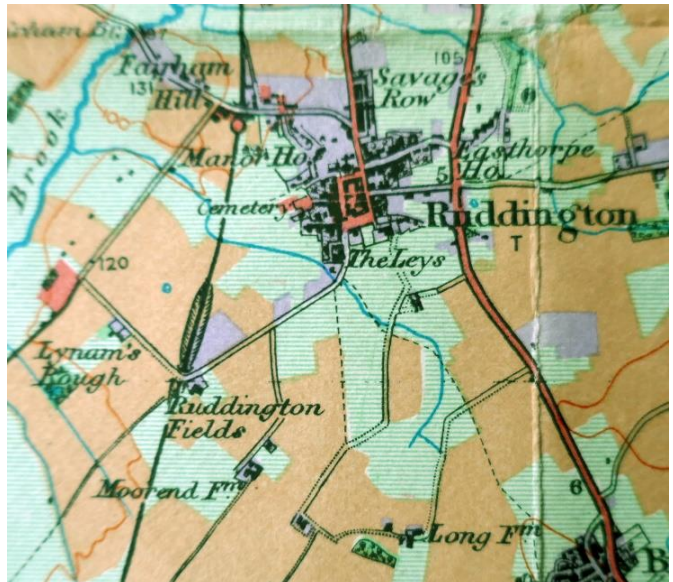
1. Historical Information about Rushcliffe Country Park

Originally this area was a boggy waterland fed by water coming from springs to the south east. In the 18th century it was drained into a stream named Gibsons Dyke and transformed into productive farmland by Arthur Gibson after the Enclosure Act of 1767.

In 1940 Ruddington Depot was built, with a bomb factory and ammunition bunker. The site took a total of 4000 workers 18 months to build and would remain for 41 years.

There is an excellent history of the area from wartime up to when it became a Country Park and Business Park. Published in 2003, 'Bombs to Butterflies', is based on research by the Ruddington Local History Society and the Friends of the Rushcliffe Country Park, and is available via the Rushcliffe website: www.rushcliffe.gov.uk/rushcliffecountrypark

This notes that before World War Two, the Rushcliffe Country Park site was open farmland. *'Arable fields (orange) were interspersed with meadowland and pastures, with hedgerows to define their boundaries (green).... A small stream [Gibsons Dyke] flowed diagonally through...crossed by three public footpaths so that it became a place of informal recreation....[with] a rich variety of wildlife'.*



(map: Land Utilisation Survey of Britain (Nottingham sheet), prepared by the London School of Economics from surveys conducted in 1931-4 by schools in the area.)

This was a time when the armed services and stocks of war material had been run down to a very low level. The threat of war meant there was a need for rapid expansion.

The War Office needed 'filling factories' for making bombs and it was decided that 10 new factories were required and that these should be spread widely across the country. The land south of Ruddington was chosen because it was not immediately close to residential areas (due to risk of explosions) but sufficiently close to a large centre of population to provide the workers (up to 6,000 were planned for), also close to a railway for transport of these workers and the transport of materials in and bombs out and had a plentiful supply of water (the stream).

The land was acquired in 1938 without the knowledge of the locals. When work started in December 1940 “ *the people living in the village watched in bewilderment and astonishment as the farmland to the south of The Green was abruptly torn apart and destroyed for ever*”.

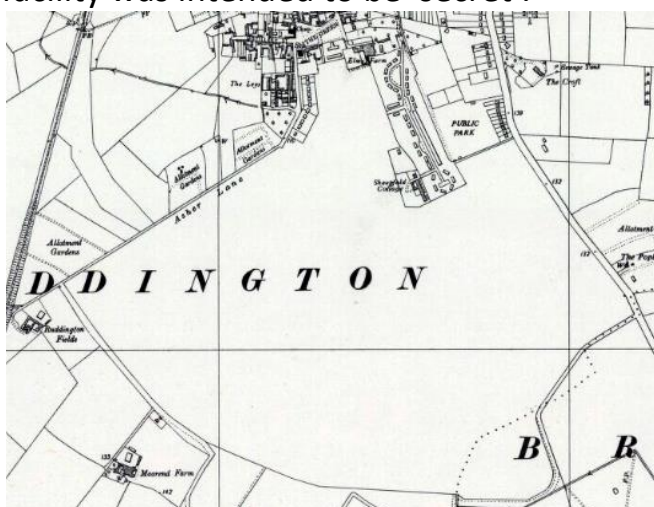
The Ordnance & Supply Depot was made up of two parts: the filling factory (to produce 500lb and 1,000lb bombs for the RAF) consisting of 87 buildings spread over more than half a square mile, and the storage facility for military supplies in over 100 other buildings, all built in 18 months. Roads and paths were laid out and a branch line to ‘Ruddington Factory Halt’ railway station was constructed, with passenger platforms and a large loading bay. The railway opened on 1st September 1941 (the service did not appear in any timetables) and by June 1942 production had begun – 24 hour operation on a three-shift basis.

Around the filling factory was an inner high security fence; the area inside known as the ‘Clean Side’ where “*precautions taken were similar to those employed in operating theatres [to ensure sterility]...but the measures taken in the filling factory were to create an environment devoid of anything, or anyone, who might generate a spark and so cause an explosion*”.

The workers (almost exclusively civilians and mainly female) came by train from Nottingham and Loughborough or by bus, cycle or walking from more local areas.

The ‘Bombs to Butterflies’ paper provides fascinating detail of this period – well worth a read.

The site was not defended in any way – no anti-aircraft measures on the site – so it is perhaps surprising that the facility was not bombed during the war (apparently none of the 10 filling factories across the country were subject to enemy bomb damage). The facility was intended to be ‘secret’.



Notable in this map (published in 1955, based on surveys in 1930s with “important” additions in the 1950s) the area south of the village is shown completely blank – no buildings nor any field boundaries – clearly something is ‘hidden’, but rather obviously – it is of course the site of the filling factory, so should have been on a 1955 map if its presence had not been secret.

There is even an odd break in field boundaries on the left between Asher Lane and the railway line – this is where the rail line to the Depot was laid.

The second map, published in 1952, does show the field boundaries but also shows the rail line – coming to an abrupt end at the ordnance site boundary!

The Foreword to 'Bombs to Butterflies' is by Rushcliffe's then MP, Ken Clarke, which includes an amusing anecdote about these auctions:

I am delighted that a team has come together to publish the local history of the Ordnance, Supply and Disposal Depot at Ruddington. Ruddington Depot was a major landmark in Nottinghamshire throughout most of my life and it is interesting to read some of the reminiscences about it.

I only ever joined in a purchase at the Depot surplus sales on one occasion. When I left Nottingham High School in 1959, a group of friends combined to buy a very old Navy ambulance at an extremely knock down price to take us on a holiday to Spain. We survived to tell the tale. A wheel fell off on the road to London, but there were enough of us to hold the vehicle up whilst it was being replaced when we were unable to locate a jack. The rough roads in Spain nearly destroyed the vehicle but we managed to make our way back to England, where its sale for scrap reimbursed a little of our costs. I am sure that many other people got even better bargains there.



An aerial view of the Depot site in 1989, just before demolition began.

With the closure of the Depot, returning the land to agriculture was Ruddington Parish Council's preferred option. The land was in the Green Belt, but there were rumours about

other uses. As time passed, nature took over and wildlife returned. A country park was proposed, and a business park to make the site financially viable.

Demolition began in January 1990 leaving a flat site like an 'American prairie'. The lake was dug out; Severn Trent filled it with water. Workers and volunteers planted over 140,000 trees. Workers moved 60 Norwegian Maple trees (30 years old at the time) and re-planted them around the business park.

Nottinghamshire County Council purchased the land and leased it to Rushcliffe Borough Council. The Country Park opened on 27 August 1993 and since then it has matured and holds a wide diversity of plants and animals.

2. The Victorian Distillery that Worked on Beetroot

An article by Derek Larkin, on the Ruddington Parish Council website, tells us that '*in the mid-19th Century [the building on Distillery Street was] a distillery which used beetroot as its raw material for distillation. [In operation from 1858] the distillery was owned by the squire of the village, Sir Thomas George Augustus Parkyns.*

Thomas George Augustus Parkyns (1820–1895), who at one time lived in Ruddington, was a decendent of the Parkyns Baronetcy, of Bunny Hall. The baronetage was created on 18 May 1681 in acknowledgement of the royalist service of Colonel Isham Parkyns during the English Civil War.

Larkin continues:

'The distillery worked day and night during the winter months employing 28 men and boys. The beetroots sent to the distillery weighed between 3 and 7 pounds each. They were thrown into a washing machine to get rid of the soil and then sliced. Fermenting vats were two thirds filled with water to 120 degrees Farenheit and sulphuric acid added. When the temperature dropped to 84 degrees the sliced roots were put together with a small amount of yeast to produce fermentation. The distillation process was 'delicate and difficult'. It required an array of cylinders, brass pipes and a rectifying boiler. The spirit obtained was 60-70 degrees over proof. The discharge was make through a glass case kept locked by the Excise Officer and from whence the spirit passed into the receiver.

The manager of the plant, a Monsieur Crolard, said that each ton of roots produced 12-14 gallons of spirit, but that it could rise to 20 gallons per ton. The beet residue was sold at 12 shillings per ton as cattle feed.

The distillery was probably not a spirited success, it closed down after 6 or 7 years.'