



Rofta House, Thorp Arch, Nr Wetherby, North Yorkshire.

Rofta House is named after the original Royal Ordnance Factory Thorp Arch (Rofta) and is built on a 1-acre site on the northerly edge of what once was a 450-acre munitions factory.

The onset of the Second World War increased the need for munitions production and in 1940 the Ministry of Supply identified the site between the villages of Thorp Arch & Walton in West Yorkshire as fitting its criteria.

The original Rofta was completed in 1942 and opened by King George VI. It took 30 months to build at a cost of £5.9 million and was encircled by its own railway. In total the 450-acre site included 25 miles of railway (4 stations) and 9 miles of roadways.

At its peak Rofta employed 10,000+ people (mainly women) who worked in over 500 buildings in 3 shifts, over 24 hours, 7 days a week. Classified as a 'filling' factory output included rifle bullets, Navy shells, 20mm Spitfire cannon shells and 1000lb bombs.

Part of what made the original location attractive to the Ministry of Supply is what attracts businesses to the location, specifically; 30 minutes from Leeds & York railway station, 30 minutes from Leeds Bradford airport and exactly halfway between London & Edinburgh. The need to be well inland and not easy prey for enemy bombers is less relevant although being situated on a Roman Road which runs parallel (north of Rofta House) to the A1 is an advantage.

The inland location meant that Rofta drew little attention from enemy bombers during the war although a lone German aircraft did circle the factory, dropping a single bomb which fell harmlessly into an earth mound surrounding Rofta. The aircraft was subsequently shot down near Filey on the east coast.

Security was a major concern at Rofta not just because of the dangerous materials but because of the threat of enemy attack. Air raid shelters and gun emplacements still exist on the site, indeed one is visible on the open ground at the rear of Rofta House. With regard to the dangerous materials, local folklore has it that a farmer blew himself and his dog to pieces simply by jumping a fence and landing on some residue which caught fire and exploded!

In 1945 at the end of the Second World War, production at Rofta ceased and it became a military store for surplus war materials before reopening for the Korean War in 1950-53. Subsequently the site was decontaminated and a number of alternative uses were considered ranging from an Atomic Reactor site to a trading estate. Fortunately the trading estate was the chosen option.

Rofta House is located on the northern edge of the site on land which was sold off from the main site some years ago. As such it is no longer part of what is now known as Thorp Arch Trading Estate which comprises of approximately 100 employers accounting for in excess of 2500 jobs. It is also worth noting that Rofta House only has a pedestrian access to the trading estate.

(This material has been put together from the book 'Thorp Arch – The History of a Township' by David Cummings.)