

May 2015 – Evening Walk starting at Brafield

Thirteen Shamblers gathered for the first evening walk of the year at Brafield on the Green, as elsewhere millions of people cast their votes in the General Election.

Beneath the gaping mouths of gargoyles set high on St Lawrence's Church; whose expressions would soon be aped by disappointed, unelected candidates; Josie our guide, with confident strides led her followers off into the countryside. The air was fresh after early morning downpours, but happily the ground had soaked up the rain and paths were dry, as a setting sun broke through clouds. Leaving the village behind, we passed grazing sheep with black-legged lambs; and then all too quickly we were striding beside fields of bright yellow oilseed rape; which happily, perhaps from the rain, had lost its sickly odour of dead tramp's pants.

Above us, skylarks, like political pundits rose up in sonorous alarm as we followed a maze of paths through the open landscape, enjoying fresh, clean air and open views, before we filed singly and silently into the silvery depths of Cogheno's pocket park.

Here, as we walked over sturdy wooden bridges that re-crossed a stream, trees crowded near, humped-backed with burdens of ivy. Ivy much beloved here by *kissophagus hederæ*, a nationally rare beetle, that with its kiss betrays its love.

Elsewhere half-hidden, a fungus shaped like an ear, eavesdropped on an occasional word. 'Jew's Ear' being its present name.

Abram Smythe Palmer in his delightfully named book: 'Folk-Etymology: A Dictionary of Verbal Corruptions or Words Perverted in Form or Meaning by False Derivation or Mistaken Analogy' which he wrote in 1882, explained (obviously at great length) how its politically incorrect name had actually been derived from an older origin, namely, 'Judas' Ear'. For this fungus, he wrote '...grows usually on the trunk of the elder, the tree upon which Judas is traditionally reported to have hanged himself.'

Perhaps we should have paused and gathered some, for in 1562, Bale wrote:

'For the cough take Judas eare,
With the parynge of a peare';

and later Sir Thomas Browne in the seventeenth century explained how: "Being dried it will keep a good year. Boyl'd in Milk, or infus'd in Vinegarm 'tis good to gargle the Mouth or Throat in Quinsies, and other inflammations of the Mouth and Throat. And being infus'd in some proper Water, it is good in Diseases of the Eyes." Darker commentaries added how it was also useful in the treatment of strangulation!

Gasping for air, we left the pocket of the park quite empty; and then after a short climb, we were rewarded with extensive views. In the distance, like a political question mark, a hot air balloon hovered over the land. Its rainbow colours smudged to grimy-blues by distance; as unbeknown to us, a Judas nation, with stuffed ears, betrayed party leaders with stark black crosses.

Our leader, Josie, fared much better; gaining a huge tick from us, for leading us down, and not up the 'Jerusalem Steps' which descend into former quarry workings.

Later, when tracks diverged, and laughter and companionship had caused us to be just a little forgetful of the practice of following a leader; it was backmarker Phil who ensured all took the correct path home.

Regrouped, we then walked back into the village, and passed its pond, where bulrushes stood like exclamation marks waiting to burst and release a million fluffy ballot seeds of news; but we took little heed of such portents, for before us rose the Red Lion which could hopefully serve 'proper Water'.

Happily, all returned safe from 'Coughes' and 'Quinsies'; and also once refreshed hopefully found their way back home; for unbeknown to us, and sat navs alike, the political landscape was being redrawn.

With many thanks to Josie and Phil for a lovely evening walk.