

August 2015 - Our walk from Lavendon



At Lavendon, on a warm summer's day, after 'booting up' in 'The Horseshoe' pub's carpark, Ruth warned us about perils ahead: a busy road we would have to cross twice, a couple of dodgy stiles, and also a field full of horses! Finbarr listened attentively, his T-shirt revealing complete faith in our guide!



We left Lavendon along a no-through road: a road going nowhere, though once it did. Castle Road once led to the motte and bailey of Lavendon Castle, first recorded in 1192, and likely built by Baron John de Bidun.

The Abbot of Lavendon used to ride along this road in order to conduct services in the chapel twice a week. The sound of his horse's hooves have long since faded away, and by 1530 the castle had gone too, leaving just humps and bumps hidden behind Castle Farm.

Consequently, we had a peaceful quiet beginning to our walk, as there were no former castle guards with watchful eyes and waiting arrows to be disturbed by our chatter.



The earth we walked on is Jurassic. Its topsoil known by farmers as 'cornbrash' and indeed the fields we passed, if not already harvested, were full of ripe wheat. Things were no so good in the summers of 1829 and 1830, when following poor harvests agricultural workers here became involved in the 'Swing Riots', uniting behind 'Captain Swing' (a made up name) by setting hayricks alight in protest against new threshing machines which threatened their livelihoods.

Later as times became even harder, some Lavendon men resorted to crime, stealing from those crossing Olney Bridge.

Luckily for us, the smoke from those troubled times has blown away, leaving the air fresh; and no locals accosted us along the broad dry paths. Paths which were delightfully soft underfoot after recent rain.

Beyond fields, whose bordering hedgerows were full of blue-bloomed ripening sloes, we skirted 'Three Shires Wood'. The edge of this wood peacefully keeping secret of its past, when cock fights and prize fights took place here, and even non-conformist religious services. For at this point where the boundaries of three counties meet (Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire) the jurisdiction and control was seen to be somewhat hazy, making it the ideal place for practices frowned upon by general society.

Perhaps there were even older practices here once, for its former name recorded in 1227 was "Tynnokeswade" meaning "Ten Oaks Wood" (later corrupted to Tinick Wood).



Leaving the fields north of the road behind we re-crossed the busy A428 and soon we were walking in single file through a pathway bordered on either side by trees.



This path led down to the former abbey of St. Mary and St. John Baptist. John de Bidun, the sheriff of the county in 1154, probably founded it. It had a troubled existence. In 1339 the abbot, John of Lathbury rescued back cattle from his neighbour, Simon of Norwich, by breaking down doors and assaulting him.



A month later, this same abbot impounded Simon's sheep, intimidated his labourers, by having them swear an oath, making them afraid to work on Simon's land, and then, just for good measure, buried Simon's fishing boat together with all his nets!

Beside such disputes, by 1397 the abbey was in debt. Being close to the high road meant travellers constantly took the path we walked along, to make demands upon the abbey for hospitality. By then the abbey's lands were barren. The Great Pestilence: *Y. pestis* carried by fleas on the back of rattus - rattus had ravaged Lavendon, leaving few alive to till the fields.



In 1536 the abbey was dissolved and William Gales, its last abbot, received a £12 pension. Lavendon Grange was built almost a century later, re-using the abbey's stone. The ruins were by then a rabbit's warren. At one time Isaac Newton also came here to visit his family members who lived at The Grange.



After puzzling over what could be the Abbey's former fish ponds, and possibly even a moat, we then crossed fields, before tackling the dreaded stiles!

Back in Lavendon dogs welcomed us back, showing a very keen interest in our boots. Happily, the horses could be won over with a few mints.



Just around the corner on a wet October day the Jarrow March passed through the village protesting about hunger. A thousand years earlier the Normans after their conquest similarly passed through.

Unlike the Jarrow Marchers these Norman invaders wasted the area leaving villagers to starve. We were hungry too. It was time to return to The Horseshoe pub for lunch.



Those that later drove away, perhaps passed the stone rubble house where an illiterate lace-maker once lived. While her son was away at sea, to prove he was still alive he carved lace bobbins for her and sent them home. One touchingly inscribed with his name: JACK.

All of us would like to thank Ruth and Alan and our back markers Mike and Chrissie for a lovely peril free, leisurely walk through what is now very peaceful countryside indeed.

