

September 2015 Walk – Church and Chapel Bramptons



Birdsong awaited us, after a wrong turn or two. Relieved to have arrived, we ‘booted up’.

Once only few ventured here, for long ago this was heathland. A hoard of six polished flint axes was found, close by. Their owner having forgotten quite where he had left them. Things have changed. The landscape is now manicured. The land, though unsuitable for farming, being ideal for a golf course.

The day was fine. The air soft. A September mist had vanished, as Linda our walk leader, told the gathered twenty-five or so Shamblers that in the Domesday Book the nearby villages were once known as “Brantone”.

Barriers barred our way. Circling did not work. Luckily a four digit code did. The barrier slid aside, and soon we were on our way.



Along Golf Lane, bordered by spacious houses, eerily there was no sound of children playing. Over the last hundred years, houses here have quadrupled in size, yet the number of occupants has fallen from an average of five and a half, to two and a half. Luckily, we were spared the sight of a statistical ‘half-person’.

An aptly named sign reminded us of that day's news as thousands migrate across Europe, and people walk across entire countries, to escape from troubled lands.



St Botolph's Church, built with golden sandstone, graced the next corner. Its gargoyles' stone-cold eyes glaring dispassionately as we walked through the graveyard, though we had nothing to fear though, St Botolph being the patron saint of wayfarers.



Thatched cottages along Church Lane were a delight. Yet the people here once hid used shoes in spaces beneath their attics to serve as magical charms against ghosts and witches.



On a grassy bank, 'orange hawkweeds' bloomed. 'Fox and Cubs' being the local name for the way this particular wildflower shelters its buds. The hunt once passed here. Open ground all the way to Abington, meant horses could galloped across the 'Racecourse' before chasing their quarry back along a lane that crossed the Nene. Horses from the nearby riding school passed us, thankfully not galloping.



We crossed into open fields. Had any gargoyle in the form of a dragon taken to the skies, then beneath him he would have seen a landscape pitted with earthworks dating from prehistoric times. One field still bears the name 'Cringleholme', Old Norse for 'round shape'. At the highest point, Hill Farm, a favourite landing place for dragons, treasure was discovered: a bead and a plain bronze bracelet. Here, around the year 1400 BC, fires hotter than a dragon's breath burned during an ancient cremation rite for twenty-five individuals. Twenty-five Shamblers shivered in a sudden chill breeze, and those with jackets zipped them up.



In 1888, there was little treasure left for a farm labourer toiling in these fields. According to the witness of the local priest, the wage was 2/6 a week, making survival a struggle. He appealed to Earl Spencer for help. However, the 'Red Earl' as he was known for his distinctive long, red beard, was not interested in such statistics relating to 'half people'. He was far more concerned about buying a monument to honour his horse 'Merry Tom' whose neck he had just broken after riding him too roughly over the River Nene. The kindly priest subsidized the poor families himself.



Our path took us into Chapel Brampton. A small village now uncertain as to where its chapel once stood. In the spring of 1888, its elderly labourers, walked 14 miles a day to find work, whilst those over seventy were on a 'wood faggotting' scheme; as it was deemed by their 'betters' that they still had ten to fifteen years of good work left in them. Such was the fate of former loyal Althorp Estate workers. It was either that, or the workhouse, or even worse, migration. Those who lived on in the Earl's cottages and fell into rent arrears were also forced to migrate. For the Red Earl, despite being a millionaire six times over (in our terms) was poor in pity; so that it was no surprise when the Red Earl also cancelled the traditional Christmas gifts of bread and meat for the poor.

We passed 'The Spencer Arms' where by the fire two chilly ghosts from the seventeenth century, Jack and Emily still sit, briefly warming themselves before embracing an unknown fate.

Shortly afterwards, we found ourselves walking along a footpath bordered by a fence, behind which dogs snarled as we passed. Brambles choked the space builders had begrudgingly bequeathed as we followed this footpath's labyrinthine course.



A couple of styles later, we were safely back at the golf club. The only task remaining that of remembering the code, so that we could return to our homes, hide away our boots in some crevice or other, to stave off demons, or perhaps so that we too would always have footwear at the ready should we ever one day be forced to make a migrant's journey of our own.

With many grateful thanks to Linda and backmarker Pat for an inspiring walk through a landscape of such changing fortunes.

