

Sulgrave – October 2019

Our October foray this month was from the village of Sulgrave in the south westerly region of our county. In spite of weeks of miserable weather, the day was fine though tempered with a cool breeze. The Star Inn, an 18th century hostelry, provided an adequate car park and meeting point for the start of the walk. After the normal formalities departure was almost on time.



Sulgrave village has its origins dating back to Saxon times. At its West end, excavations in 1960 and again in 1976 unearthed remains of a Saxon timber framed Hall and its later replacement by a 12th Century Norman stone structure.

Sulgrave village has a strong communal spirit. The village shop, taken over in 2004 and run by volunteers, has been a benefit as an amenity and a source of local produce. Sulgrave however is best known for its Manor.

After the Norman Conquest in 1066, Sulgrave was one of the Manors given by William the Conqueror to his French noblemen. Later in the 12th century it became St Andrews, a Priory for the Cluniac - an order of French Monks. Here it remained until 1538 when, during the dissolution of the Monasteries, it was returned to the Crown. Two years later it was sold to a Northampton wool merchant by the name of Laurence Washington. Being handed down to John Washington, it was sold again by him before his emigration to America.

The Manor still holds a strong connection to the Americans as John Washington was a predecessor of George Washington, who was to become President of the USA, hence the America interest and financial tie with Sulgrave. Over the years the buildings fell into dereliction until 1914 when the property was bought by Public Subscription. After the war it was restored between 1920 and 1930 and is now open to the public.

There were three places of worship in the village, a 19th century Baptist church, now demolished, a Methodist Chapel, now a house, and a 13th century grade two listed building Church of England Church which is still in use. Close by on the village green are 19th century Stocks and the Village hall, once an 18th century Church school. South of the village is the remnants of an ancient artificial Rabbit Warren or Farm known as a Pillow Mound.

Leaving the village past the aforementioned manor, we left the minor road to walk down an infrequently used farm track. The field ahead led up a slight rise to the embankment of a now disused railway track. The

tunnel passing beneath had been boarded up as being unsafe, but surprisingly a rather extravagant alternative route had been constructed as a diversion over the top.

Our path now took to the edge of a wooded stream and a confining fence which kept us away from the muddy expanse of the field to the side. When the walk was reconnoitred the footpath, past a disused quarry and through a farmyard, had found the stile into the village of Weston decked with barbed wire and deemed unsuitable for our passage. To this end we now took a deviation from the original path by taking the uphill stretch of minor road into the village.



Now at the halfway point, we congregated for a snack and rest beneath the spreading boughs of a large Lime tree adjacent to the Crown Inn. All was quiet bar the clippity clop of the hooves of a passing horse, and the hum of the pub extractor fan pumping out appetising aromas of their lunch time menu.

Setting off refreshed, a narrow road passed allotments and a brightly painted lime green residence back into a succession of fields of sheep. Now back onto a minor road, we walked for a quarter of a mile before a welcome finger post directed us back down hill in a field to the railway embankment. This time we would be able to pass beneath through a short tunnel, but the approach was with some trepidation as previously the way had been barred with an electric fence and a substantially padlocked gate. With some relief the fence was gone and the padlocked gate was now secured with twine that was easily removed and replaced once everyone had passed through.



Leaving the field with the remnants of a derelict railway wagon to our left, we emerged onto a narrow concrete track for the return to Sulgrave. Fourteen of us had booked a meal at the Star Inn where we were quickly seated for what turned out to be both a tasty and elegantly presented Sunday Roast enjoyed by all.

