

Braunston - May 2021

After a long tortuous wait for the easing of lockdown from the Covid pandemic, we were finally able to meet up for our first Shamblers walk of 2021, starting from the Old Plough in Braunston. This was led by Stuart and Ruth Emerson.

Those who had requested a pub lunch after the walk chose their meals and, after a short walk description and potted history of Braunston, and a welcome to two guest walkers, we set off for the walk of approximately 5 miles.

On leaving the village in the direction of the canal, the road took us past thatched and tiled cottages adorned with wisteria and hollyhocks, typical of many Northamptonshire villages. The end wall of one was exposed to show the traditional cruck construction.



Braunston's All Saints church, known as the Cathedral of the Canals, and the Windmill now devoid of its sails was on our right. The 10th century Norman church was demolished after a number of murders had taken place in its ground and was, as such deemed, an unholy place. Its replacement was also demolished and again replaced 400 years later in 1848 by the

present structure. A further tragedy took place when a hapless sail trimmer fell to his death off the windmill into the graveyard.

A path took us downhill through a field of 'not so gambling' fatter lambs. One unfortunate youngster was trapped behind wire fencing, but willing hands soon released it from its prison leaving it to gamble off to tell its mother of the adventure.

Passing over the hump of the canal bridge it required dexterity to pick our way through a quagmire of mud around the gate descending onto the towpath of the Grand Union canal. The Junction of the GUC and Oxford Canal was soon reached. Here two of the cast Iron bridges built by Horsely ironworks spanned the opening to the Oxford canal to the route we took.



The banks of the Oxford canal in this early stretch, supports a varied community of boats. Some live aboard with their rooftops timber stores and pots of herbs, others, gleaming in expensive painted livery. The eye can but catch the names written on the cabin sides and wonder as to what inspired them. The canal Trust had been out in force maintaining overhanging trees evident from

the number of sawn off stumps pointing skyward.

The well-manicured towpath now meandered through wooded copses and open fields until the bridge taking the track from Sawbridge to Nethercote was reached. After resting here for a break and a group photo we followed the farm track over the canal and up a steady climb to the quiet village of Nethercote.



The road, now of a metalled surface, twisted and turned through open fields to the outskirts of the medieval village of Wolfhampcote. The panoramic view spread out to the far distant horizon where the spire of Braunston church stood clearly against gathering storm clouds a marker for our return. The solitary church in the hamlet of Wolfhampcote only comes to life on Christmas Eve when it becomes the centre for a candle lit service.



A field of sheep and cattle hunkered down against the impending storm brought us back to the busy A45 and uphill to the church. It was just starting to spot rain as we donned masks to enter the pub restaurant and a well-deserved Sunday roast.

