

Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire – September 2021 (Away Day)

It had to be an earlier start than usual on this Sunday morning as the journey to the Cotswolds would be longer due to the 140,000 spectators converging on Silverstone for the Grand Prix. A circuitous route through minor roads to avoid the A43 got us to Chipping Norton by 10am ready to start our walk at 10.30am.

Chipping Norton is a rather picturesque market town, the highest town in Oxfordshire. Chipping is derived from an Old English word 'ceapen' meaning market. Alternatively, the meaning comes from the medieval word 'Chepyng' meaning long Market Square. There has been a market here since the 13th century and was a major wool-trading town in the 15th century; the great 'wool' church of St Mary, built in perpendicular style, testifies to its prosperity.



We met up in a free car park right in the centre of the town. Due to the predicted temperature of 30 degrees plus a small number had cancelled and the walk was reduced to between three or four miles.

A hardy group of 15, some may say foolish, set off from the car park equipped with sunhats, water and sunblock. We followed our walk leader, Finbarr Finn as he led us safely through the town.

Crossing the road from the car park through narrow streets and alleyways we headed downhill.

A plaque on the wall of terraced thatched cottages commemorated pilots that had been lost in 1942.



On reaching the church of St Mary the Virgin there were already signs of preparation for the morning service.

Chipping Norton castle was noted here on our map, but all that remains of this Mott and Bailey structure is the mound on which it stood.

Before leaving the churchyard, those not wishing to tackle the steep climb ahead were shown a different shorter route and we would meet up again soon after. The rest left the church yard beneath shady boughs of sweet smelling lime trees and started the steep ascent away from the town. The path was strewn to either side with meadow flowers, butterflies danced around the Knapweed heads, yellow Lady's Bedstraw scrambled between Cornflowers and Oxeye Daisy as we continued the climb.



Looking back the town could be seen laid out on the opposing heights in the morning sun.

The tinny sound of the church bell tolled eleven as we reached a farm track that would deposit us into the picturesque village of Over Norton.

The village square was our resting spot in the shade of a bus shelter where the other group were waiting for us.

Close by was the now defunct village pump over which was built the Fountain Monument of Over Norton. It was erected by the four surviving children of Colonel Henry Dawkins and his wife Emma, who both died in 1864.



After sustenance, the return walk was mostly downhill through wooded paths and meadows aside a meandering stream. The church once again came into sight where we gathered as a group so that Finbarr could explain our options.



Some of the group wished to continue a walk to the Bliss Tweed Mill on the West of the town.

Chipping Norton was at the centre of the wool industry in the middle ages and one of the wealthiest parts of England. This wealth is reflected by the number of medieval buildings present around the town. The mill was converted to flats when it ceased working in 1980.

Others ascended the narrow road back up the hill to the town centre for a chance to get to know the town a little better and appreciate the historic architecture. Sandwiches on a Park bench in the shade of a tree or a pre ordered Sunday dinner in a local Pub heralded the end to a perfect but rather hot day.

