

March 2022 – Weston Underwood

In the early 14th century, the congregation of Weston Underwood attended services at the nearby church in Olney. After exceptionally heavy rain in the area, the burial of the dead became impossible there due to the flooded ground. To have their own church of "St Laurence" built on higher ground in Weston Underwood, they had to become a separate Parish from Olney and this required an application to the Pope, which was duly granted.

Few buildings remain in Weston Underwood from the 14th century. The Mansion, built by John de Olney in 1381, was demolished in 1827. All that remains now are the Clock House, the Chapel and, what is known as, the Laundry Cottage, now all privately owned residences. John de Olney was buried in dry ground in Weston Underwood church yard in 1405.

In 1446, the estate of Weston Underwood came under the ownership of the Throckmortons, who spared no expense in guarding the land they owned. The entrance to the village was through a stone pillared gateway with manned gates, closed at night to keep out the uninvited. Large pineapple finials surmounted the pillars to represent the wealth the Throckmortons had. These fruit were known by the locals as "the Nobs", probably because they would never have seen a pineapple before.

William Cowper, a well-known poet of the 18th century, came to stay with the Throckmortons in 1768 as a guest, and took up residence in the village in what is known as Cowper's Lodge on the Main Street. He spent much of his time composing hymns and poetry on a site overlooking the village. The Throckmortons had built a Folly here in 1753 and this place gave him peace of mind to compose. It is now called The Alcove, and we would stop off here on our walk.



The Shamblers' walk began after the usual formalities and a preamble by our walk leader, Nick, in warm sunshine in the shelter of the Cowper's Oak pub car park.



Leaving a westerly path out of the village along the Milton Keynes boundary walk, with views over the curving valley of the River Ouse, we took the slight incline through fields of horses down into the pretty village of Ravenstone by the aptly named Horseshoe Farm.



The road through the village passed six thatched Alms Houses built by Heanage Finch, the first Earl of Nottingham. The six men and six women chosen by him to live there had to have strict Church of England views.



A rough farm track took us away from the village North past the stumpy church tower and North End Farm. With hedges to both sides touching and overlapping above our heads, the narrowing path became muddy from a descending stream.



However, about a mile and a half before Weston Underwood the ground became dryer and easier to walk.



Before reaching the village a short diversion was made to the renowned Throckmorton Folly. The Alcove proved to be a substantial brick, open sided building with a wooden roof. Here on the curving seat with views down to the village, we enjoyed a break and our snacks before our group photo was taken.

It was then only a short walk down to the village and Sunday lunch in the pub.