

# March 2015 Walk - From Welford along the Grand Union Canal and then through the rolling the countryside

Unknown to the Shamblers as they set off on this March walk, at the very same time a version of a fifth century Sanskrit poem, was being read aloud.

The poem, "Salutation to the Dawn" written by Kālidāsa was being intoned over the coffin of Richard III. The last Plantagenet king to die in battle, who three years ago had been dug out of a Leicestershire City car park. The poem chosen to mark the start of a processional journey.



*"Look to this day:"* read the Revd Canon Dr Stephen Foster,  
*"For it is life, and the very breath of life.  
In its brief course  
Lie all the realities of your existence.  
The bliss of growth,  
The glory of action,  
The splendour of beauty.  
For yesterday is only a dream,  
and tomorrow but a vision."*

*"Look to this day..."*

In the future, many will indeed "look to this day" and not know that with very little pomp and ceremony the Shamblers left The Wharf's car park. Well, those who had not accidentally followed the Ramblers' Walking Group instead.



We were following Finbarr, along the 'Mary Gilbert Walk'. Mary Gilbert, according to the information boards, a coal, coke, lime and salt merchant, who had also managed the inn, as well as rearing two daughters.



The *'breath of life'* for such a feisty woman over a hundred years ago, would have been the choking acrid fumes from lime kilns, mixed with a sulphurous stench from burning coal. Smoke would have clouded Welford for any coming along the turnpike from either Leicester or Northampton's direction; marking it out clearly for those who asked, "Are we nearly there yet?"

Luckily, for the Shamblers such industries have long ago vanished, and we instead inhaled fresh, clean, spring air.

*"In its brief course..."*

We followed the brief course of the Welford Arm of the Grand Union Canal. Shakespeare writing of Richard III had him complain that, "dogs bark at me as I halt by them—", but none barked at us, as we went haltingly by, instead they wagged their tails.



*"Lie all the realities of your existence."*

The reality of existence, a hundred years ago, according to Mr Ralph F. Brown was that the "Boat people" often had far "too much to drink". His father, the special constable, having to sort out fights, which were, "sometimes very bloody."

The reality for us as we circled the marina, as smoke puthered from some of the boats' chimneys, was the friendliness of the narrow boat owners. Many of them standing astern by tillers, smiling at our procession.

"£5!" One of them quipped, as we enviously eyed the mug of steaming tea he held aloft.

Even at that extortionate price, though we laughed, we were tempted; little knowing that for the same price back in 1485, King Richard wanting, 'A horse, a horse!' could have had five such fine creatures for that same amount. A purchase which, had he had a fiver in his pocket, and waved it, may well have changed the course of history; but of course, that is also the lie of reality.



*The bliss of growth,*

It is odd to think that the River Avon rises here, and then grows into the mighty river that flows through Stratford. The name 'Avon' of course, derived from the Brythonic word, "abona", meaning simply, 'river'.

We can imagine the scene when the latest invader wanting to learn something of the lie of the land stepping up to a Welford local and asking the name of the piddling stream he, like the Shamblers, had just stepped over.

"That's the abona," the local helpfully explained, and then the name, though slightly misheard, and later misspelt, stuck.

We caught glimpses of this River 'River' as it wove its way through a lower valley beyond the woods.



*"The glory of action,"*

Branches of trees arched over the canal were devoid of leaves, and yet still the birds were active.

"Out on you, owls!" King Richard raved in Shakespeare's play.

Though not one Shambler heard an owl. Ruth heard a Chaffinch. Its short, fast rattling song, best remembered, Stuart explained, by imagining a bowler running up to the crease in a game of cricket and then delivering the ball with a flourish. "Chip, chip, chip, chip, chip - chooipchyoo."

Perhaps our cricketers could learn something from the chaffinch.



*"The splendour of beauty."*

"Let us survey the vantage of the field," suggested King Richard in Shakespeare's play. Unluckily for him, he was surveying what would become a battlefield.

From the top of Hall Lane we too surveyed a splendid vista, one very similar to what King Richard probably saw over at Bosworth, though likely different from the poet Kālidāsa's Himalayan homeland. Instead, we had views over several counties, hedges bordering the green undulating fields, on whose 'peaks' white arms of wind turbines now slowly turned. The sun, making all beautiful, as Shamblers shed a few more wintery layers.



*"For yesterday is only a dream,"*

"I have dream'd a fearful dream!" worried King Richard.  
"What thinkest thou, will our friends prove all true?"

Richard was unlucky for they did not. However, The Shamblers, were much better friends for they waited in a hummocky field together with sheep and spring lambs, for the back-marker Pat and her companions to rejoin the group.



The hummocks proving to be all that remained of yesterday's houses abandoned after the 'Black Death'. The church at the top of the hill witnessing the scene, and no doubt hearing the parson's lament as he wondered who would now bring him fresh carp that he so enjoyed from the large fish pond down below; the remains of which we slowly passed. The Shamblers' pace quickening at the thought of dinner awaiting some of them back at the Wharf Inn.

The car park on our return was just as we left it, and quite free from any archaeologists searching for any remains of lost kings. A few are still unaccounted for, though not Shamblers.

Only those unable to stay, heard the news on Radio 4 about King Richard as they drove away, and heard a recording of someone reading a Sanskrit poem.

The others did not have any need to for such words for during the walk such sentiments had been already in engrained their hearts.

With many thanks to Finbarr and Pat for organising this walk over such gentle terrain.

*"and tomorrow but a vision."*

For those wishing to look further ahead the next walk meets at Harrold Country Park. See you there!

