

Cogenhoe – October 2016

Cogenhoe, pronounced in many ways but spelt in only one, is situated on a hill to the south of Northampton. People are believed to have lived here for at least 4,000 years. Bricks were made in the brickyard in the 19th century and bricks with the name ‘Cogenhoe’ inscribed on the side still have a habit of reappearing. Later during that century, shoemaking was making its mark and a small factory making high quality boots was built by the Mann family and continued to employ local labour until it closed in the late 1940’s.

The Royal Oak public house car park, being the start of our walk, was deserted other than the lone car of Mike and Chrissy who were the leaders for the day. Not surprising with early heavy rain only the hardy would venture out on such a day when they could be tucked up warm and dry in their beds. The Shamblers are a hardy bunch and soon the car park was filling and waterproofs and boots had been donned. With Sunday lunches booked for the return of the walk, fourteen set off downhill out of the village. The descent was short lived as a right turn through a gate took us up a very steep grassy gradient designed to get the blood circulating and evaporate the rain from our hot faces. The dogs in Cogenhoe must be very large, as traps they had laid in this short stretch required the side stepping skills of a premiere league footballer to be avoided.



Reaching the summit the going became easier until we reached a copse where we ascended steep steps (known as the Jerusalem Steps or Hallelujah) to an area called the Firs. The evidence from the undulating paths, spoil heaps and a now redundant access road showed that this was once a quarry.

On descending the track down to Whiston we had a chance to appreciate the extensive views laid out across the Nene valley to the distant village of Earls Barton. With the warmth of the sun now shining through large patches of blue sky, coats were quickly removed and stowed away. Whiston, though small, has a church, St Mary the Virgin, reminiscent of many of those found in Northamptonshire having a short spire on each corner of the bell tower. Situated on Combe Hill to the side of the village, it remained visible for the rest of our walk.

Crossing a road, we joined a track to Whiston Lock and, after enjoying a short stop for energy snacks, set off again on what is the Nene Valley Way





We followed the river and canal cutting through thickets and nettle beds until we stepped out into open fields to the sight of Cogenhoe village nestled on the top of the hill in the far distance. I did say Cogenhoe was on a hill, and the long climb up and across an arable field with the footpath no longer visible gave us all the feet of giants, as the clay clung to the underside of our boots.



The outskirts of Cogenhoe were finally reached and we wended our way through the back streets until the welcome sight of the Royal Oak came into view. In spite of the wet start, this enjoyable walk had turned out to be both varied and repeatable, followed up by an equally wonderful meal at the pub.