

## Olney – October 2017

Olney, pronounced with or without the 'l', was the start of our walk this week. The town of around 6,500 people had, at one time in the mid-18th century, almost as many Inns – well, 27 to be precise. Times were better during that time as it serviced the Kettering to Newport Pagnell turnpike road. However, things then went downhill in the 19th century - employment in poorly paid jobs brought poverty and associated Cholera and Small Pox. The town today is a bustling community with many assorted retail outlets. One thing Olney is proud of is its Pancake Race. Started in 1445 it has been held every year so a lot of pancakes have raced down the Main Street. Today the event is twinned with a similar event in "Liberal" Kansas USA in an attempt to keep tradition going on both sides of the pond.



Our assembly point, the Two Brewers pub, was situated halfway along the busy main street. Chevron car parking either side of the road seemed to direct us onwards to the small group of eager walkers gathered beneath the hostelry's swinging sign. Slowly the group was assembled and, after choosing our Sunday roast followed by a comprehensive account of Olney's history by our walk leader Chrissy, the allotted departure time of 10.30am arrived and 19 of us set off.

The first quarter of a mile was beside the busy A509 so conversation was muted by the sound of heavy traffic noise. On approaching the outskirts the road crossed over the river Great Ouse and we made a turn into the tranquility of Emberton Country Park. To the right was an expanse of water, one of a number of lakes which have been turned over to activities such as fishing, sailing and wild water swimming. The latter probably not being everyone's choice. In spite of the relatively early time there was much activity from joggers and dog walkers.



Leaving the park we entered the quieter village of Emberton. The road, on taking a rise, led us to a deep depression in the ground. This pit was formed in earlier times by the extraction of clay. The caldera, being filled in with fertile top soil at a later date, now functioned as a very productive allotment. This green oasis is the home of a thriving population of hedgehogs and the gardeners are intent on keeping it this way. A sign board at the entrance prohibits the use of all slug pellets due to the harmful effect they have on hedgehog population.

Leaving to one side of the allotments, we were accompanied by two chocolate Labradors. With the possible prospect of food from us these inherently greedy animals were difficult to shake off. Finally, open fields were traversed and on reaching the crest of the incline a splendid vista stretched far into the distance past the hamlet of Weston Underwood. Well, it would have done but the presence of a slight mist precluded this. The view or lack of it pre-empted a refuelling stop and the chance for a group photo.



Descending downhill we re-entered Emberton Country Park where the sweet smell of decaying autumnal leaves met our nostrils as we passed through leafy glades of Poplar and Willow before skirting the way back round the perimeter to our original point of entrance. The road was even busier now and it seemed that Russian roulette was our only means of crossing to the Lynch Gate entrance of the Church of St Peter and Paul.



The back road from the Church yard led us along a short walk to the rear of the Two Brewers. The interior of the pub is a bit of a maze consistent with establishments of this age. We were deposited in the upper events room accessed by a steep staircase. The meal was excellent, though we did have sympathy for the waitresses who had to navigate the steep ascent with each and every meal.