

## Gretton – April 2019

The walk this Sunday was from Gretton, a village situated at the northern border of Northamptonshire with spectacular views overlooking the Welland Valley and the County of Rutland. It was originally the third largest village in the Rockingham Forest, and although primarily an important agricultural village within the forest since the Middle Ages, the rich veins of ironstone in the surrounding land have played a vital part in the village's development.

Most of the earlier houses, some from the 17th century, are built of local limestone and roofed with thatch or Collyweston slates.



There are stocks and a whipping post found on the village green. The last known use was in 1858 when a villager was put in the stocks for 6 hours after failing to pay a fine for drunkenness.

Talking of alcohol, we were assembling in the car park of the Hatton Arms, the second oldest pub in Northampton. As such it is built of limestone and supports a thatched roof. Ducking beneath the low beams we ordered our Sunday lunches and after a brief resume of the walk, the party of 22 walkers set off out of the village in an easterly direction.



The path, or more accurately a track, took us a fair way before the green of fields was reached. A sign warning of cows with calves was displayed on the swing gate, but we need not have worried as the herd like a bovine 'murmuration' took flight across the field on our approach. Reaching the summit of the next field the view of Kirby hall came into view.



After catching our breath we descended to the grounds of the Hall. Kirby Hall is an Elizabethan country house once owned by Sir Christopher Hatton, Lord Chancellor to Queen Elizabeth I. It is a leading and early example of the Elizabethan prodigy house and construction on the building began in 1570. Presently the building and gardens are owned by The Earl of Winchilsea, and managed by English Heritage. They were used in the filming of Jane Austen's Mansfield Park though not the interior as many of the roofs, other than the main hall and state rooms, have collapsed.

After a welcome break, coffee and tea being available in a small café there, fortified we departed away from the hall, skirting what was a medieval village to the Kirby Road over which we crossed into what appeared to be a well-fortified establishment. High wire fencing, concrete anti ram raiding bollards and nests of security cameras told us we were not welcome there.

Fortunately, the path between this and an adjoining Pocket Park allowed us to make our way to the Gretton Road and a steep ascent through fields of oil seed rape to re-join the track on which we had left. Along this route we stopped to admire two impressive bulls that seemed totally unbothered by our attentions.



Very soon we were back in the pub car park and eager for our Sunday roast. Although it took time for the main meal to follow the starters, everyone was pleased with what they had.