

Yardley Hastings – August 2019

Menacingly black clouds hung over The Red Lion car park where we slowly assembled for the August Sunday walk. The occasional spit of rain did not in still confidence in the weather forecast that had predicted clear skies by ten o'clock. However, as the walkers assembled, signed in and ordered their meals the skies began to clear.



The Red Lion pub does not itself hold much to fame, but the fields to the rear would have had the riotous roar of a Greyhound track between 1934 and 1949. Meetings with a crowd of 500 were held twice weekly and Saturday afternoons.



Following our walk leaders, Stuart and Ruth Emerson, we set off through this typical picturesque Northamptonshire village, decked with floriferous gardens and thatched roofs, and trundled our way past the 13th century church and the neat retirement homes with their 'Residents Only' parking signs to the right and Wilsons Wood on the left. A slight gradient to the right took the footpath past the Sewage Works and its associated aroma, then down what appeared to be an 'Alice in Wonderland' rabbit hole. The undergrowth, sustained by the summer sun and rains, pressed from every side for what seemed an eternity.

Breaking out into bright sunlight the way ahead was clear. At this time, waterproofs were discarded and layers removed as the sun was now very warm on our backs. After negotiating a narrow bridge, a flock of sheep ahead took flight at our appearance. After a field, now harvested of its crop, the pleasant back road to Castle Ashby village was taken.



Walking towards the Livery Stables, one of the horses in the nearby field came over in the hope of an apple, but was sadly disappointed and made do with a handful of grass.



To the left, a thickly wooded copse held a small building that was hardly visible through the thicket, its floor reputedly made with sheep's knuckle bones. At this end of the estate were a number of estate cottages. Only one remains now hidden behind tall trees, the rest having been pulled down as they were be seen as an eye sore from the Castle Ashby house.

Castle Ashby is the seat of the Marquess of Northampton, The Earl Compton. The house and formal gardens are Grade 1 listed. The original mansion was castellated in 1306 by Walter Langton the Bishop of Coventry, then rebuilt in 1574 prior to the visit of Queen Elizabeth 1 in 1600. The house had 83 household servants, four Chaplin's and three musicians.

Later the 'Dutch influence' inspired the planting of a mile long avenue of trees to the front aspect, this later to be 'naturalised' by the renowned Capability Brown after chopping many down. However he did enlarge the ponds to lakes and added a menagerie and temple. During the fifties the lakes provided an unofficial summer picnic spot with swimming for the locals. This was stopped at a later date by the addition of fencing across the access.

Hitting the rise into the village, the old fire station came into view with its red doors covering the expanse ahead. All the houses with their neatly clipped bushes and pots overflowing with Geraniums are owned by the estate. A pause outside the entrance to the Barn Tea shops was taken for snacks and refreshment. More menacing black clouds were scurrying across the sky at this time, but fortunately did not drop any rain on us.



On leaving the road out of the village, we crossed two fields where a number of mushroom Fairy Rings, some in excess of three metres were found. These mushroom can form rings of great size in undisturbed pasture land.



The penultimate stile brought us to the mile long tree lined avenue leading to the castle. Here a group photo with the Castle behind was a must. And so up and away from the Castle, onwards to find a small well-hidden stile in the hedge leading us back to Yardley Hastings. At this point, we converged with another walking group also heading for Yardley Hastings but they were on a linear walk from Ecton.

The view stretched far into the distance below with a now blue but blustery sky. Only the sound of Stock Car racing in the far distance was heard over the silent air.



Passing through the picturesque village The Red Lion came into sight and the end of the walk. Here we tucked into what turned out to be a substantial Sunday Roast.