

Monday July 16th 2018, “ Take the train for a pub walk” with Penny and Paul Kurowski

You might think Sowton an improbable destination for an OVA walk; the name brings to mind the uninspiring functionality of a trading estate and serried ranks of motor cars on acres of bitmac at the Park-and-Ride, with a constant accompaniment of traffic noise. However, Paul and Penny were to demonstrate that the village that gave its name to these eyesores is in fact a haven of rural tranquillity.

Boarding the train at Exmouth, we skirted the sunlit glassy waters of the Exe estuary to alight at Newcourt station, opened three years previously to serve the housing development on the former naval depot site. At Paul’s invitation we introduced ourselves (*nice touch that*): fourteen in all, plus Buster the dog, then set forth down Old Rydon Lane to the medieval bridge and causeway at Clyst St. Mary.

The bridge was already 300 years old at the time of The Prayerbook Rebellion when 6,000 Cornish and Devonian rebels attempted to hold it against the King’s army. They were routed, with over 1,000 killed and more drowned in the marshes; 900 prisoners were massacred later that day, and the village of Clyst St. Mary was burned.

A footpath from Clyst St. Mary took us across the fields to Sowton, with its Heavitree stone church - grade I listed, despite being significantly rebuilt in the 19th century.



Here a chance encounter with the trustee of the village hall enabled us to visit the charming stone brick and thatch grade II listed former school, and gain an insight into community life within the village.



Heading on in a circular route back to Clyst St. Mary, we enjoyed tantalising glimpses of Bishop's Court behind trees beyond the fields; another grade I listed building, this country house was originally the Palace for medieval Bishop's of Exeter, since significantly altered in Victorian gothic style. Not for the first time I reflected that had the OVA been around at the time it would have howled in indignation at building alterations we now recognise as worthy of merit.



We reached the Half Moon Inn at Clyst St. Mary in time for refreshment and lunch from where it was a short postprandial walk back to the railway at Digby Sowton station. Many thanks to Paul and Penny for leading this walk.

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