

Saturday 30th June 2018 “Devonshire Heartland Way Part 1 - Okehampton to Sampford Courtenay with Heather Fereday

The Devonshire Heartland Way is a west to east route between Okehampton and the village of Stoke Canon, just north of Exeter, across the county of Devon that uses ancient footpaths, bridleways and some minor roads. The overall distance is 43 miles (69 km) and climbing 1,271 metres.

The logo for the trail has a Spindle Berry Flower on it. According to the ‘bumph’ we should be able to see many Spindle bushes and trees growing in the hedgerows en-route. The Spindle can grow to 6m and its leaves are coloured brilliantly in autumn with the four-lobed coral-pink berries opening in late winter. This exposes the orange seed – one of nature’s daring clashes! The berries are not poisonous and are not attractive to birds. A delousing powder was made from dried berries in Medieval times and the close-grained wood was ideal for pegs, skewers and spindles for spinning wool. Another reason the Spindle was chosen was that this route was designed to help in the recovery of health through walking after the designer of the route had suffered from a heart attack. The person then noticing that when the closed berries are seen in winter, they resemble the shape of a heart.

Penny and I shared a lift with Tony to get to Sampford Courtney and met up with eight others. The wait for the bus on a gloriously sunny morning passed quickly. We were at a disadvantage compared to some of our travellers – we had to pay ... that’s the trouble with being so young! As usual, sitting upstairs provided interesting views across the countryside that we would be enjoying soon. Alighting at Okehampton, we had a trek up a road before we even got to the start of the Devonshire Heartland Way at Okehampton station forecourt.

As the day heated up, we were pleased to walk through a park and then along old train tracks in leafy woodland but then into the heat on bridleways and footpaths in fields. Arriving at the hamlet of Stockley Hamlets, we took an opportunity of having a cool refreshing Sicilian lemonade at the farm-shop whilst others partook of more meaty substances. The promise of a hidden cross and interesting buildings was enough to getting us going again.

We followed minor country roads and footpaths across fields passing the hamlet of Corscombe and Treehill Farm. Given the clear, sunny day, we had far-reaching views over to Dartmoor. The well-deserved lunch break came at 13.20 in a field with a view before tackling a very grassy field with no obvious route. We passed a very noisy, creaky wind turbine that was on the track we took rather than the more direct (correct) way but it provided an interesting photo opportunity! Soon after we found ourselves in a field at the top of a hill with no obvious path and no signs or gates in sight: out came the maps and the sat navs.



The sun was beating down on us as we followed another lane and footpaths across fields to find the hamlet of Halford Manor. The Halford Manor's porch carries a 1613 date-stone with the initials 'T H'. The estate boasted a tannery in the 18th century.



Halford Manor is a Grade II listed building. This Listing states “House, may have been built as small manor house. Dated 1615 and there are no features to indicate an earlier date, partly rebuilt in C19. Partly rendered stone rubble walls. ... This was evidently built as a gentry house of considerable quality and is an interesting example of a one-phase early C17 house whose plan and features reflect its status.”

Walking on heat-reflecting roads, we found the hamlet of Rowden Manor, we saw the Rowden Manor – another Grade II listed building and described as “House originally farmhouse or cottage. Probably C17 origins or earlier but almost completely remodelled and extended in mid and late C20, the earlier work done by Philip Tilden who owned the house in the early-mid C20. ... The true early origins of this house have been virtually completely concealed by C20 extension and re-modelling but these have an interest of their own not only because of the connection with the architect Philip Tilden but also because they incorporated the introduction of several high quality C16 and C17 pieces of craftsmanship.

As an aside, it's worth looking up Philip Tilden as he was "an architect with a talent for restoring old buildings, though of a somewhat lush and luxurious taste" renovating some amazing buildings.



The hamlet of Trecott was uninspiring but we did find the hidden cross and later trudged through a wheat field with church views emerging at a crossroads and into the village of Sampford Courtenay. Arriving at 15.50, most of us entered The New Inn pub to cool down and for cold refreshments. Being there on a Saturday, was no use to Tony according to the Sampford Courtenay website "The Grumpies is an informal gathering of local menfolk convening at the New Inn on a Thursday evening to enjoy each other's company for an hour or so"!

Paul Kurowski