

Yesterday Cliff led another walk for the [local walking group](#), 15 miles over the open fields where Cambridgeshire, Essex and Suffolk butt up against each other. I was in a quandary – walking in temperatures over 24C and we don't mix! but I wanted to give Cliff my support, after all I'd walked most of the paths when Cliff devised the route and I knew it would be a good day out.

Casting aside the sensible option, and trusting the BBC weather forecast of cooler temperatures with cloud and breeze, I got up early on Sunday morning, made our packed lunches and decided not to leave my car at the lunch point because I was up for the whole distance.

We set off from Castle Camps, over the lumpy fields which hide the ghosts of the medieval village and strode out along wide tracks into Essex. Through my new sunglasses the fields glowed with fiery light, as if we were walking through a landscape painted by [Jean-Francois Millet](#).



*'The Gleaners' (1857) by Jean-Francois Millet*

*Musée d'Orsay, Paris*

This photograph is taken through the lens of my sunglasses . . .



The heat got even more intense and the last mile into Helions Bumpstead were just too hot for me to enjoy the walk. We ate our sandwiches and then went to the Three Horseshoes pub for refreshing pints of bitter-shandy. The unusual village name could well have referred to the sun god [Helios](#), it is in fact named after a Norman knight who came to England with William the Conqueror in 1066, from Hellean in Brittany.



Although I now felt refreshed, I decided that another 6.5 miles wasn't for me, I'd walked 8.5 miles and I was happy with that. On the [Ordnance Survey Explorer Map](#), Cliff showed me an option of a short cut where I could rendez-vous with the group near the 'three-counties' point, if I hadn't turned up he'd drive back to Helions Bumpstead and meet me at the church (mobile phones often don't get signals in this area so we have to plan ahead).

Off the group marched and I sat under a tree in the churchyard before deciding to saunter slowly along the short-cut route . . .



. . . yes, that's the route! It goes straight to that electricity pole and then continues gradually uphill to the trees on the far horizon. There is a cut path through the crop but the rape is so big and heavy it leans down over the track. You can see how dry the ground is, we had a sharp thunder shower on 19 June but apart from that there has been no rain at all for more than two months.



I soon got fed up of fighting through the seed-heavy crop, sticky with black aphids and spiky with hidden thistles – I opted for plan B and retreated to the cool haven of [the village church](#).



What a lovely surprise, the church door wasn't locked and inside it was light and cool. Unlike most English churches and reminiscent of Scandinavian ones, the walls and pews are painted in cool shades of white with accents of red and blue.



I sat in a big oak chair at a desk in the back of the nave and read through the book that records who embroidered the kneelers and why they chose their design – touching snippets of local history.



The creamy-white carved pews are obviously uncomfy for long services, there is a wonderfully diverse collection of cushions on the seats! I particularly liked these two . . .



Fragments of stern words from centuries long past are preserved on the walls, I'm not sure what this one said, or what solemn feast day it referred to . . .



This simple carving is on the wooden seat near the font just to the left of the main door – isn't it a lovely simple design?



I found a stub of conté crayon in my back pack and some discarded envelopes at the back of the church, so I sat in the churchyard and sketched the north wall of the nave, with its mish-mash of field stones, flints and bricks; blocked up doors and windows and perpendicular tracery.



I was sketching some stubborn little cherubs which seemed to be the fashion on the 18th century gravestones, when Cliff arrived after finishing the walk. He had a great idea . . . we could buy scones and cream at the supermarket on the way home and eat them with our freshly made gooseberry jam in our garden.

And that's just what we did :-)

POSTED BY MAGIC COCHIN ON [MONDAY, JULY 05, 2010](#)

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