

Beating the Bounds of Naphill Common on Rogation Sunday – May 9th 2010

What is 'Beating the Bounds'?

In England, the custom of Beating the Bounds at Rogationtide is as old as Anglo-Saxon days - it is mentioned in laws of Alfred the Great and Æthelstan. In former times when maps were rare it was usual to make a formal perambulation of the parish boundaries on Ascension Day or during Rogation week. Knowledge of the limits of each parish needed to be handed down so that such matters as liability to contribute to the repair of the church, and the right to be buried within the churchyard were not disputed. The relevant jurisdiction was that of the ecclesiastical courts. The priest of the parish with the churchwardens and the parochial officials headed a crowd of boys who, armed with green boughs, usually birch or willow, beat the parish boundary markers with them. Sometimes the boys were themselves whipped or even violently bumped on the boundary-stones to make them remember. The object of taking boys is supposed to ensure that witnesses to the boundaries should survive as long as possible.

We did not follow this procedure, particularly the beating of the boys for obvious reasons. Our objective was to try and find the boundary to Naphill Common as it sometimes did not follow a path.

18 people and 2 dogs met at 10am from Naphill Village Hall to walk the boundary of Naphill Common. We started the walk from the new notice board erected only 2 days before (see separate report) at the end of Chapel Lane. (see below)



Admiring the first of 5 new notice boards to be erected.



The obligatory formal photograph

We headed towards the end of Forge Road passing the backs, then fronts of many houses. The boundary is either the back fence or front fence of the properties not the footpath or road. At the end of Forge Road we walked in front of the cottages where the forge used to be and onto the entrance of the allotments. The boundary goes left at the gate into the corner then turns left to the Piggery. We then walked along the footpath under the overhead lines to Willow Pond then round to the Clumps having taken a look at the pastures on our right. Past the Umbrella Tree down the hill to the edge of the Bradenham Estate. Here we turned right to find the edge of Naphill Common (a bank and ditch) crossing the track. It had not been possible to follow the bank and ditch down from the Umbrella Tree to this point. Retracing our steps we turned up the path to the right of the bridleway and track (BW9) to try and locate the boundary with Pimlock's Wood.



Corner of the Bradenham Estate looking towards Hearnton Wood

We followed the bank and ditch but lost it again. We believe it goes behind the Cottages and reemerges at the entrance to Bradenham Hill Farm. On our way we passed the Umbrella tree again. This time we stopped and took another group photograph (see below) partly to show the changes to the tree now that it has been cut back and started to grow again.



Group photograph in front of the Umbrella Tree

The walk now took us past the last remaining Juniper on the Common which despite being badly damaged with the weight of snow earlier in the year and having had to be propped up seems to be surviving. We followed the bank and ditch, as best we could; past Five Ways and Cuckoo Stile to Daisy Pond. Then moving on to Cookshall Lane and taking a short cut to the main path running behind the houses to Pickup's Pond. (opposite the pond is where another of the new notice boards will be erected in the next few weeks). Some 2½ hrs after we started we arrive back at the end of Chapel Lane.

This had been a very good walk which not only showed us where the boundary of the Common was but we were also told of many facts about the Common.

Many thanks to Trevor for leading the walk.