

## SLEA WALKS 9

### CHAPEL HILL AND REED POINT

This walk explores the final two miles of the Sleaford Navigation to its junction with the River Witham. The return section gives extensive views across the surrounding fens and to Tattershall Castle beyond the River Witham.

The countryside here is almost entirely man-made. As late as the Middle Ages fenland stretched inland almost to Lincoln, being habitable only where small islands existed. Nevertheless the area generated considerable wealth, especially for monasteries and abbeys, and nine such establishments are known in the Witham valley (on both sides of the river) between Kyme and Barlings. Important factors were the ease of communication which the river offered, combined with a remote location well suited to sheep farming, the monks' main source of income. The Witham retained its importance over the centuries as it was gradually straightened (work possibly begun as early as Roman times) and embanked into the river we know today. By the late 1700's, at the height of the canal age, it was a bustling waterway following the opening of the Sleaford Navigation in 1794 and the Horncastle Canal in 1802 - this joins the river just two and a half miles further north. The river's new importance now stemmed from the links it provided to the industrial midlands, the north of England via the Fosdyke and the Trent and through Boston to the sea; not only for commodity cargoes but also for passenger packet boats.

The walk begins at Chapel Hill [A]. A short way to the south stands the stump of Pelham's Lands tower windmill [B], which had a 1838 date-stone and is known to have replaced an earlier post mill. Chapel Hill was a part of Swineshead parish – Swineshead being some nine miles to the south - and was so remote that it only had a chapel of ease from around the 1820's. This was replaced in 1884 by the present Holy Trinity church (now a private house), which is passed on the walk. [C]

The last few miles of the Sleaford Navigation are known as the Kyme Eau. This was originally a tidal, though navigable, waterway which terminated at Appletreeness some two and a half miles to the west of South Kyme village. We know that it predated the Sleaford Navigation (which opened in 1794) by several centuries, and that it certainly existed before 1343 when there was a petition to King Edward III from Gilbert de Umfraville (Baron of Kyme) requesting the right to charge tolls in return for dredging, delineating and maintaining the channel. We also know that building materials for Tattershall Castle, begun in 1434, were transported along the waterway.

The navigation had seven locks and Bottom Lock [D] was the first met by barges after leaving the Witham. (The other six are all between Anwick and Sleaford) Bottom Lock has a rise of five feet and, apart from widening and straightening, this was the only major civil engineering structure needed to convert the Kyme Eau into the navigation in 1794. The restoration of Bottom Lock was completed in 1986 by the Sleaford Navigation Society. The lock now has traditional mitre lock gates with balance beams at one end and a modern guillotine gate at the other. Between the lock and the sluice that adjoins the far bank, is an island on which the lock-keeper's house once stood. On the site now is a plaque in memory of Derek Taylor, an enthusiastic member of the Sleaford Navigation Society committee who died the year after work here was completed. The lock has now been renamed Taylors Lock to commemorate the work done by Derek and his wife Pat in support of restoration of the waterway.

From its brickwork and building style Bridge House [E] appears to be about two hundred years old. Both it and the bridge are now in ruins. It probably originated as a temporary summer dwelling or "booth", inhabited only when cattle were brought here for summer grazing, rather like Terry Booth Farm a mile further upstream towards South Kyme.

## CHAPEL HILL AND REED POINT

A circular walk of 5½ miles (9 kilometres) starting at Chapel Hill Bridge, Grid Ref. 207541, along country roads, farm tracks and grass towpath which can be rough in places. This is an easy walk underfoot. There is limited roadside parking near Chapel Hill Bridge.

There are suitable picnic places along the Kyme Eau and on the island at Bottom Lock/Taylors Lock. The Crown Lodge Inn, Chapel Hill has refreshments.

**MAPS :** OS. Landranger 122 (Skegness), Explorer 261 (Boston)

### ROUTE INSTRUCTIONS.

1. Leave Chapel Hill over the bridge across the Kyme Eau and walk south for about a mile and a half to the first "T" junction. Turn right into Cheethams Lane (signed "Maryland and Amber Hill") and when this bends left keep ahead on a farm access road to reach Reed Point.
2. Continue from a footpath signpost along a farm track that gradually curves to the right. When the track bends left by two water tanks turn off right by the waymark onto a wide grass track that passes two barns. Keep ahead at a cross track and in half a mile reach a footbridge and stile below the embankment of the Kyme Eau (Sleaford Navigation).
3. Climb to the towpath on the top and turn right beside the navigation to pass both Bottom Lock/Taylors Lock and the ruins of Bridge House. Continuing on the towpath for a further one and a quarter miles brings you back to the road at Chapel Hill. The Crown Lodge Inn is to your left just over the bridge.
- (4) To complete your walk cross the road and follow the Eau to its confluence with the River Witham. This may be done on either bank. If you wish you can then extend the walk in either direction beside the Witham.

