



Two walks around Helpston



1806

Then

The swifts dash across the roof-tops as you set off down Woodgate one evening in July 1806.

The road is quiet. Helpston is an isolated and tight knit community. There is no road across to Glington. A few carts returning from the fields pass by, but little else.

Having passed the Bluebell Inn you turn along Broadwheel Road, and into Royce Wood. An old wood of ancient oaks and many wildflowers. At dusk nightingales sing and a cuckoo calls loudly before flying over the fields of Long Close.

Turning south you walk beside the wood and look out over one of the three main fields, divided into many strips each farmed by different families. A corncrake is calling in the distance.

The field is full of people, working hard to bring in the harvest. Everyone has their job to do, even the youngest children. Their lives revolve around the natural cycle – this is the busiest time of their year.

At the top of King Street you pause at Swordy Well. To the north is the open field, to the south the common land and Emonsdales Heath. Swordy Well's gentle slopes are full of flowers. A gaggle of village boys play chase across its 'roly-poly ups and downs'.

Walking back down mud-covered Heath Road a nightjar calls in the distance. The rector passes on his horse, wishing you a good evening.

Back in the village all is quiet and very dark. The villagers have settled down in their small, damp cottages, ready to rise early again for more work in the fields.

Now

2006

The swifts dash across the roof-tops as you set off down Woodgate one evening in July 2006.

Careful where you walk, a stream of cars pass by. The level crossing gates on the main road to Glington must have gone up. You can hear the high speed train in the distance.

Having passed the Bluebell Inn you turn into Broadwheel Road and into Royce Wood. The old oaks were cut down long ago and no nightingales sing. Long Close is surrounded by the houses on Crossberry Way. Some children are roller blading on the traffic-calmed road.

It's quiet as you emerge into the fields. Large, enclosed fields run up to the horizon where you can just make out the clay pigeon tower. A pheasant calls and you can hear a red-legged partridge near Hilly Wood – both introduced game birds.

The fields are empty around apart from a single farmer in a combine working the fields along Heath Road and a solitary dog-walker.

On to Swaddywell, past the electricity pylons and the flat, set aside field that covers many tonnes of household waste from when this and several other fields were land-fill sites. As you walk up King Street, the cyclists from Peterborough Cycle Club rush past.

Walking back down Heath Road a little owl calls from the fields. Two horse-riders wearing luminous yellow jackets pass you just outside the electricity sub-station.

Back in the village the street lights are on. In their houses people watch TV and prepare for an early morning start at their office in Peterborough or London.

