

## Rambles

A very long walk from home to the top of Kingly Vale. I live between Portsmouth and Chichester in a place called Havant; the sea is near to the South, the Downs near to the North.

I walk along the shoreline at the bottom of the lane, always more murk and always less green. The row of tamarisk is missing another tree. In its place is a strange piece of concrete sheet, the kind that sets hard in situ and makes no effort to aid its appearance. The sea defence takes me to Emsworth which has a tradition for all things maritime. Sir Peter Blake, environmentalist and circumnavigator of the globe, lived in the area and the harbour housed a buoyant fishing and boatbuilding industry before WW2, when the area and its resources were used to support troops. It's now home to very expensive houses and two very expensive sailing clubs with very expensive harbour moorings, all that remains are the cabins in the distance on the further shore, houses for those whose lives were built around the town.

Quite a boring phase until Westbourne although the path does take you past some old workers' cottages, a pleasant reminder of lives more essential. Westbourne is the archetypal village, Parish Church (home to supposedly the oldest yew avenue in the country), a jumble of architectural styles, an old square swallowed by cars (I must remember to stop using the car). It's alive still though.

Up the path to Stansted Park, home to an Edwardian house built to designs by William Talman in 1688 (rebuilt in 1903 after fire damage). The house itself is nothing particularly special, but there is a stable block with a bit more weight to it. Made of Bath stone forming a long thin central courtyard, it gives a sense that it's happy with its use fulfilled. I've always meant to join the cricket team that plays on the green but they're an elusive bunch. There's a herd of Highland Cattle, presumably purchased as a visitor gimmick for those at the garden centre, that adds something rather idiosyncratic to the scene otherwise typically English. I wish there were more like Lord Bath (sadly deceased) to make scenes of this fashion a bit more fun.

The path that leads to Walderton and Stoughton follows the meander of an old footpath. Workers at the house from the nearby villages must have left imprints on the land that are long forgotten, sometimes seen. Things are more rural, I think by that I mean more purposeful, as the countryside opens up. Land is in use, it's quiet but working, waiting to be worked. There's a pervasive and growing notion that these are the parts that deserve development. Enhancing one use for the sake of another lacks an understanding of the importance of this space. Useless land is harder to come by, it doesn't exist here. I'm sure dominant suburbia muddies the clarity of image I'm seeing now.

Concurrently, I have a permanent sentiment is that the landscape is home. Not that it feels like it, but that it is certain, and I'm not sure if this is a healthy connection for this generation and a few before it. Perhaps a century ago I would've toiled and all my energy and motion would cultivate the land, my muscles would pass their strength into the ground over the course of a life and I'd feel rewarded for doing so. Can I ever reach this sort of feeling now as someone with no past connection to the land? A tractor would cost more money than I've ever had pass through my hands, as would all the seed or livestock I'd need for a single season. This fantasy might be corrupting for both myself and wider communities on every scale, for its allure lies in unquestionable virtues often surrounding 'health'. Unless made concrete, this dream draws effort from other outlets with a current societal relevance. Best left here for now, it exists on both terms.

Up the farm track, previously the Monarch's Way linking Winchester and Chichester. I like that it's covered in cow shit now. The smell is a nice reminder of its purpose. There's a lot of flint in the Downs, flint deserves more use. So does corrugated sheet. With accommodating measurements it could look like a continuous surface. The last path is rather nice, with dense Pine forest to the South and heavy Beech to the North. The only noise is local, visible causes making elongated pulses. If you're lucky there's the occasional Skylark that warrants a lingering perch.

C.



A view from the side of the Vale.





The shoreline between Langstone, Havant and Emsworth



A squiffy repair job on the sea defences. Concrete Sheet and Tamarisk Trees.





Westbourne Workers' Houses



Westbourne Parish Church Yews





Stansted House (no sign of the cricketers)





Marked Map of the Walk from Home to Kingly Vale



Another view from the Vale.