

CATH BENNETT

PART 1: SLADE LANE TO HIGHFIELD ROAD VIA TRITTIFORD MILL POND

Rising around Kings Norton Golf Club, to the South of Birmingham, the River Cole was once a source of much-needed water for generating power and supporting the industry of the day. It's now variously a collecting place for discarded rubbish, a much-needed green corridor for urban wildlife, and, in parts, a well-used green space for local populations.

We chose to follow the path by the River Cole from Slade Lane to the Stratford Road – 2 ½ of its 25 mile course.

True to the challenges of capturing a Birmingham path during January and February, our first photography day was a very grey, miserable Sunday (12th Feb). All but one of my photos are from our second visit, Thursday 23rd Feb, with some welcome winter sun!

A. Start – off Slade Lane. View towards and across the River Cole.

The ford here is now blocked off for motor vehicles.

B. Muddy path by the river.

The path alongside the river here is through scrub and woodland – 'Slade' apparently meaning a little valley. Plenty of people were walking the path on the Sunday morning, despite the dismal weather. Along the bank a heron was lurking, quite undisturbed by passers-by. On our second visit, more maintenance and clearance work had been done and a rusty supermarket trolley now lurked on the bank.

C. Scribes Lane, at the start of Trittiford Mill Pool.

We emerged at the bridge on Scribes Lane, with its colourful reminder to, 'Stay safe near water!' I don't know how long it's been here, or whether it's related to the tragic death of four boys who fell into a frozen lake at Solihull earlier this winter, but it's a clear and powerful message as a feeder from the river runs into the popular Trittiford Mill Pool.

D. End of Trittiford Mill Pool, exit onto Priory Road.

The river runs alongside Trittiford Mill Pool but is almost completely hidden off to the side. The path by the lake is tarmacked and well used with numerous families, joggers, cyclists and dog walkers out in force. Many birds call the pool home; two Canada Geese followed us for

a while, clearly hoping for food. A tiny detour from the path allowed us a welcome break from our journey at Billsedge Café on Highfield Road.

PART 2: HIGHFIELD ROAD TO SAREHOLE MILL.

E. Through the Dingles.

The Cole runs alongside the Chinn Brook for a while, with a quieter grassy path through the Dingles. Here, the medieval 'ridge and furrow' landscape is a reminder of past rural life in the midst of our city.

F. Bridge over the Cole, the Dingles.

The River was calm and shallow on both our visits, but a large pile of debris and tree branches piled up mid-stream against the bridge showed that this is not always the case.

G. Coleside Avenue.

Eventually, the path emerges onto Coleside Avenue, close to Four Arches Bridge and a development of modern, accessible housing. We quickly reached Brook Lane (the busy A4040), where the row of prefabs on Wake Green Road can still be seen.

H. John Morris Jones Walkway.

Crossing the main road, a square wooden 'arch' leads you onto the John Morris Jones Walkway, with a clear path through the trees. Gardens back onto the river and we passed clumps of snowdrops growing amongst broken terracotta pots, an abandoned deck chair frame with a perfect view over the water, discarded tyres – and a grey wagtail bobbing for insects along the shallows.

There is a brief glimpse of the tower of Sarehole Mill across the field before we emerge onto Swanshurst Lane (B4146) and Sarehole Mill Museum. 'Pizza in a Pod' provided a tasty break from our walk!

PART 3: SAREHOLE MILL TO STRATFORD ROAD

Tree-works were evident along the path of our walk on both visits. By our second trip, the team had reached Sarehole Mill and we ate our pizza to the sound of branches being felled.

I. The Ford at Green Road.

Passing the Ford, a (previously) lovely mosaic fish at the entrance to the next section of the path has all but vanished, leaving only a fish-shaped hollow in the tarmac and a few remaining tiles. Sad.

We passed two sets of stepping stones – no one using them to cross the river – and quickly arrived at Greet Mill Meadows where a large flock of noisy gulls were enjoying discarded chips. Our second visit was during half term and boys were playing football on the field.

J. The Stratford Road.

The path emerges from Greet Mill Meadows onto the busy Stratford Road (A34). A second mosaic – a heart containing a dragon-like creature – survives just before the exit from the meadows.

From here, we caught the bus home but the Cole continues its journey. Passing to the East of the city centre, it crosses the M6 & the M42 at Coleshill (where the remains of medieval Coleshill Manor and late 16th century gardens have been excavated during HS2 works), before heading north-east to join the River Blythe (briefly) then the Tame, flowing through Tamworth, joining the Trent, heading North to the Humber and carrying its memories of Birmingham out into the North Sea.

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