



complete with ever hungry ducks. There is a seat here, and if the sun is out then the temptation to linger is very strong.

But if, like I did, you still have a distance to walk you will reluctantly heave your weary body up, turn your back on sunny Scopwick and set off across fields and tracks towards Digby and its old stone clapper bridge across the stream. Don't cross just yet though; turn right for a short distance and you will spot a most unusual stone building, shaped a little like a small, squat pepperpot. It dates from the seventeenth century and although its original function has been lost, it is known as the 'lock up'.

This is a delightful stretch of the trail, with wide views over a patchwork of gently rolling fields. In dry weather the paths are good, but whilst walking to the next village of Dorrington on my most recent Spires and Steeples challenge event I was confronted by several wet, muddy ploughed fields where my feet slid and gathered so much mud that I found it hard lifting them to take the next step. I was more than ready to stop for a rest and hot coffee from my flask on the stone bench in the company of the 'Dorrington Demons' sculpture, designed by Nick Jones.

The Demons sculpture recounts an old legend as to why Dorrington's church, the Church of St James and St John, stands in

isolation from the village. There are two versions of this legend; both recount how efforts to build the church in the village were undone by demons each night until it was finally built on its present spot. As there are earthworks quite close to the church, it is far more likely that the village has gradually migrated downhill away from the church over the years – although I find the legend of the demons a far more interesting explanation.

Ruskington is the largest village passed on the trail; in fact it is the largest village in Lincolnshire by population. People have lived here since ancient times; signs of prehistoric occupation have been found from as long ago as 5,000 BC. Ruskington's All Saints' Church is built on the site of a former Saxon church and a Norman tower arch from the original stone building still survives.

Ruskington beck dissects the High Street and by tradition no aspiring resident can be considered a true 'Ruskingtonian' until they have fallen in!

Once Ruskington is left behind the rest of the trail feels somewhat different in character. There are no more pretty villages to pass through or sculptures to find. Instead the route crosses fields to reach a secluded path through trees by the Sleaford Navigation. Apparently it's a navigation and not a canal because it utilises an existing river – the River Slea – rather than

digging out a new channel.

The Navigation is now your companion all the way to Sleaford. The path skirts a private house before leaving the trees behind and following the water on a raised embankment. Look out for Cogglesford Water Mill as you approach the town with its early eighteenth-century buildings. Once in Sleaford I always enjoy walking past three detailed mosaics set into the tarmac path commemorating the use of horse, wind and man power to move the barges on the Navigation. The finish for the challenge event is just a few yards away at the National Centre for Craft and Design at Sleaford rather than St Denys' church, where successful walkers can claim a T-shirt and a certificate for their efforts. The church is nearby and it is worth walking that little bit further to complete the official Spires and Steeples trail.

Detailed route descriptions and transport links are available at the Spires and Steeples website at <http://www.spiresandsteeples.com>; you can even sign up for the challenge event if you are feeling fit. If you don't fancy walking the whole distance in one day then why not lace up your walking boots and sample a small section of this delightful walk?

5 Scopwick Beck

6 City view along the River Witham from the bridge

7 Local schoolchildren created the Nocton cow artwork