

# Meridian Walk Report

Extracts from Weekly Reports during walk by David Pott  
(Photographs by the BBC)

## Week 1: 01 March – 4 March 2007

There has been widespread media interest which has been generally positive both in this country and from Australia, Canada, Japan, France and BBC Arabic Service - one of the Belfast students with us was able to speak to them in Arabic! There is an article in the Independent on Sunday today. William Wilberforce's descendant Kate Davson was just amazing! She probably walked more than anyone else in the chains on the first two days and we were so sad when she had to leave us late on Friday. William Wilberforce was with us on the first day and was also so thankful and described it as "a deeply moving and humbling experience." He hopes to join us again later on the walk.



We had two days of orientation while we stayed on N/Y Next Wave (A Youth With a Mission Yacht) and final team members did not arrive until late on Wednesday. The commissioning service at Holy Trinity on Thursday morning was quite a media event, but we were also able to commit ourselves to the task. It was special to be anointed with the sign of the cross by the Bishop of Hull as we ventured out into the wind and rain. It was certainly a challenging start to the March of the Abolitionists! The mood is well captured in the photo which was picture of the day on the BBC website! After a chilly lunch stop at the Humber Bridge Visitor Centre, we walked over the bridge - an exhilarating experience - we were glad that the wind and rain were now coming from behind us! We had a great reception from the mayor and other people from Barton Council in their superb visitor centre near the bridge.

Friday was a glorious crisp sunny day which began at Bowmandale Primary School where all the pupils came out to hear us explain our mission and then watch as we put on the yoke and chains. As we walked off, they just stood in stunned silence gazing at us! You knew it would be something they would not forget. We walked over Horkstow Wolds - one of the few hills we will encounter! - and then descended for a wonderful coffee break at Horkstow Hall. We then walked on to Winterton. The Lienaus and Celine had had an excellent time in another primary school in Barton and they also shared at the Winterton primary school. The afternoon walk to Scunthorpe included a particularly muddy stretch. We stayed the night at St Hugh's church. The vicar there is South African and before we left we had Morning Prayer with a South African flavour including readings speeches and writings by Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. One of our team Vonetta Winter encountered some racist comments when she went to the shops early on and we spent some time reflecting on that - indeed there were several times of thoughtful reflection yesterday on the experience of slavery and what it means for descendants today.

The next few nights we have spent in Epworth which we have come to because of John Wesley's very significant contribution to abolition with his influential pamphlet against slavery in 1774, as well as the last letter of his life encouraging Wilberforce to keep going. It has been great having the students from Belfast with us. They leave tomorrow and we will then only have 6 people to do all the walking in yokes and chains. The biggest disappointment is that Joseph Ankrah from YWAM Ghana has been refused a visa. He has travelled widely including with us to the Caribbean last year, but they still do not think he is a genuine applicant.

We have much to be thankful for. Hospitality has been excellent and we are in good heart.

## Week 2: 04 March – 11 March 2007

We have had excellent walking weather - only one shower on Monday and plenty of sunshine after that. The paths are drying out nicely! There have been some great times in the schools - the teachers and pupils are appreciating the DVD a lot. Hospitality has been of the highest order - we are so grateful. The media interest continues. Russian Newsweek came on the 10th and we have especially warmed to the two from Japanese TV who come quite often. On Friday we had a crew from the Politics Show and that footage was apparently used on the 11th. Jenny Stimpson from BBC stayed with us in Lincoln and shared some team life and was deeply moved by the experience. We get encouraging toots from cars as we walk along. Once a group of punks stopped to say they'd seen us on TV and to encourage us to keep going. At Billingham, a lovely guy called Noel insisted all 25 of us come in for a drink in his house. He and his wife Tracy were just so thankful we came in - "Thanks for coming and blessing our house" he said as we left.

Two team members Brenda Smiley and David Fieldsend left this week - they became so much part of the family which Andrew Winter has called 'The Fellowship of the Coffle.' We miss them and they miss us.

Lincoln was extraordinary. We had a huge sense of battle when we arrived. There was confusion and we were quickly made aware that both historically and even today Lincoln is a place of power and contention. The next morning we were so blessed to have the gracious Bishop of Lincoln join us and walk with us in the yoke and chains. He spoke so effectively to the media - find out more of his reactions at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/lincolnshire/6428937.stm>. The most moving moment was when we were standing outside the cathedral and about to go in the side door when suddenly the great west doors opened and allowed us in! We were reminded of Psalm 24. Monette spoke of the sins of the church in regard to the slave trade and released pardon and we felt it was all very significant in relation to the Anglican apology.



## Week 3: 11 March – 18 March 2007

We have reached Royston and are now only 60 miles from our destination! We have been very fortunate with the weather and in the last week have only occasionally encountered muddy patches! On our rest day today the weather is changing suddenly and we have had snow flurries and it sounds as if this will continue in the coming days, but at least the wind should be at our back.

Here are some brief snapshots

- On Monday night strange things happened. Both Andrew & Vonnie Winter and Monette had bad dreams about their youngest children (Eloise and Michael) being snatched away. The Lienaus had an accident leading to flooding in the motor home and their youngest, Joshua, was also unwell. It helped us to identify with the horror parents experienced when their children were snatched away into slavery. Later in the day we stopped at St Wendreda's Church in March, which is famous for its marvellous 500 year old hammer beam roof with 118 carved angels. I was reminded that our scripture for the day was Psalm 128:3 - "your children will be like olive shoots round your table." We gathered all the children around the altar and the adults surrounded them and prayed blessing and protection. I looked up and saw all the angels, so as we left the church we sang out "*All night all day, angels watching over me my Lord.*" These 'team only' moments outside the fairly constant media interest are so important.

- On Wednesday, we shared at five different schools. On our way out of Chatteris a group of older pupils had been told we would be passing by in their lunch break and were waiting for us. There was no teacher there and some of them were a bit uppity! However we were glad to share with them. One girl spoke up and said that she really admired what we were doing and led some applause - it took a lot of courage to do that and that affirmation meant a lot to us.
- That afternoon we heard that Roberto Gonzales, who has travelled widely before has been refused a visa to join us - this in addition to the visa refusal for Joseph Ankrah from, Ghana who even has a multiple visa entry to USA. Anger and frustration are expressed - it's hard.
- On Thursday, John Inge, the Bishop of Huntingdon met us and walked in the yoke and chains with us to Ely Cathedral - a gracious and thoughtful man and we learnt from each other. *Saying our liturgy for taking off the chains in the cathedral was amazing especially the way the marvellous words from Isaiah 58:10-12 echoed in that glorious place! An excellent lunch followed.*
- On Thursday night we stayed in Soham, where the great African abolitionist, Olaudah Equiano, was married to Susannah Cullen. Pete Adams affirmed Soham as a significant place where an African who fought for the freedom of his people married an English woman who stood by him in his calling - may Soham be a place where the same kind of partnerships are encouraged in today's multi-cultural context.
- Friday was a personal highlight for me as my wife Pam with Katie, Ben and grandchildren Esther, Aidan & Olly joined us along the Fen Rivers Way to Cambridge!
- We arrived at St John's College while the choir were rehearsing - we stood in awed silence drinking in the sound. A short time later we were shown the beautiful college library where Thomas Clarkson would have spent many hours researching and writing. He found his discoveries to be so disturbing that he could barely sleep. We paused to reflect on the personal cost and to honour him in that place.
- On yesterday's beautiful walk from Cambridge to Royston, we had lunch provided at Barrington Parish Church. The bells rang out for us as we left! There was also a photographer from Royal Mail there who took photos of us holding large pictures of the new stamp designs of the abolitionists to be released on Thursday.

So here we are in our last week of a very memorable time. I was struck by a Latin saying I read while we were in Soham - *Solvitur ambulando - It is solved by walking*. May that be true for us in this ministry of reconciliation!

### **Week 3: 19 March – 24 March 2007**

**Monday 19<sup>th</sup>:** We set off from Royston on a very cold but gloriously sunny day. It was good to have the support of Roger Wyatt and his friends who helped a lot with planning the Hertfordshire stretch. The wide expansive views were particularly impressive on this day. That night we stayed at Anglican Church in Buntingford which is the oldest brick church in England. It was built as a "Chapel of Ease" and we certainly found it a very refreshing and relaxing place to be in. We were wonderfully provided for by the church.

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup>:** The sun had gone this was a very cold day indeed. At lunch time it was difficult to find anywhere to shelter but someone allowed us to use their garage and Celine & Rowina did really well in bringing hot spaghetti & meatballs to revive us. The weather improved for a while especially while we were at the Clarkson memorial where he was called by God to give his life to the Abolition of Slavery. As we entered Ware at the end of the day there was a huge hail storm and blizzard, but the team were in good heart.

**Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup>:** Roberto Gonzales from Colombia finally got his visa and it was lovely to have him with us. We spoke at 2 schools in the morning and also called at All Nations College in Easneye where we had a very warm welcome and an excellent presentation on Thomas Fowell Buxton. We had experienced a lot of media attention throughout the journey, but this day it increased

dramatically and it included reporters from Finland and South Africa as well as the BBC and Sunday Times. In the evening I was on the Moral Maize.

**Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup>:** We began with Morning Prayer in Waltham Abbey Church who had organised our accommodation for us. We were also delighted to have Brenda Lockard arrive today. When we arrived in Walthamstow the atmosphere was immediately different as the area we walked through was predominantly African descent. We walked by a place where pupils were leaving two secondary schools and they crowded round to look at the yoke and chains with huge curiosity. When I explained we had walked 230 miles from Hull to remember what happened to their ancestors, they were very responsive. We had a warm reception at the Vestry House Museum and we were very well taken care of members Cornerstone and Gateway churches.

**Friday 23<sup>rd</sup>:** We began with an assembly for pupils and parents at Seventh Day Adventist Highland House School - 100% of African descent. This was very special time and I think many of the team would say it was the most memorable schools visit of them all. At the end of the presentation the head teacher asked 3 pupils to come up and share what they felt about what we had shared. This is what they said:

*"I feel very sad that my ancestors were taken away from African like this."*

*"I've learned that black and white people really are equal before God"*

*"God is really pleased with what you are doing"*

As we left the school children crowded at the school fence waving and encouraging us on our way.

At the end of the day we all assembled at the Northern end of the Greenwich foot tunnel and we enjoyed singing "Freedom" in that *echoey* tunnel. We were met at the other side by John Austin MP, Greenwich Councillors and school children and were then taken to an excellent reception at Queen Anne Gate in the Royal Naval College.

Highlights from a memorable evening included:

- Queen Quett from the Gullah/Geechee Nation whom we had met in Charleston in 2004 singing a very powerful spiritual and giving a presentation to me.
- Performance by the Woolwich Polytechnic dance group.
- The Greenwich council put us up at the Ibis Hotel that evening.

**Saturday 24<sup>th</sup>**



About a 100 people joined us on the mornings walk between Cutty Sark and Whitehall. It was a good morning. When we arrived at Whitehall Place we were surrounded by cameras, reporters etc. We have been used to media attention, but this was a different level! When the procession which was led by the Archbishops reached the abolitionists monument near Lambeth Bridge, only the team members in the coffle were allowed to go through because of protocol. One of the hardest moments was hearing our team shout "David" and I could do nothing being in the yoke and chains. This incident shows what a tremendously close and united team we have been and it was very, very hard to be separated at this point.

However although this was very hard on the team think that there were good consequences. The Archbishop of the West Indies released us from the Yoke and Chains. Here are two of the many images which were in the newspapers on the next couples of days.

The evening we had a really good team time, honestly sharing what we have found painful on the last bitterly cold day and a significant time of affirming each other. We were so grateful for the wonderful final meal which was prepared for us by Nick & Gill Russell-Smith and other staff from the YWAM London DTS.