

Stamford Local History Society

Melancholy Walk



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

By Eugene Perrett

Step back in time with us as we explore the intriguing origins of a stunning locale. The 1797 Burghley map first mentions what we now know as Melancholy Walk on the Bank, a name that evokes a sense of mystery and nostalgia. Picture the fog sweeping across the meadows, creating an atmosphere that felt both haunting and inhospitable, far from the warmth of the town's protective walls. It's easy to imagine the somber beauty that would have characterized this area—dark, misty, and inviting contemplation. Join us to uncover the stories of such evocative places, as we delve deeper into Stamford's rich history.

There is no definitive answer to why the name was chosen, but these are two theories:

1) *The Executioner's Route:* The path was the final route taken by prisoners being led from the town to the gallows outside the town's walls. The name captures the 'melancholy' state of the condemned individual on their way to execution. The problem with this theory is that the gallows were situated up on Tinwell Road, so this would have been rather a long diversion. Unless, of course, it was just a clever convict who wanted to live a little bit longer...

'Dark, misty, uninviting, going nowhere'

2) *Melancholic Contemplation:* The path goes below the ruins of the Austinian monastery and monks were renowned for being contemplative. In the Middle Ages, 'melancholy' was often referred to as the 'monk's disease'. And Robert Burton's bestseller 'The Anatomy of Melancholy', first published in 1621, would have been at the height of its popularity when the current millstream was built (and presumably the path alongside it) in the 1630s. Nature, for Burton, was key for alleviating symptoms of melancholy.

I'll let you decide which of the above you prefer!

Personally, for me it's the second theory.