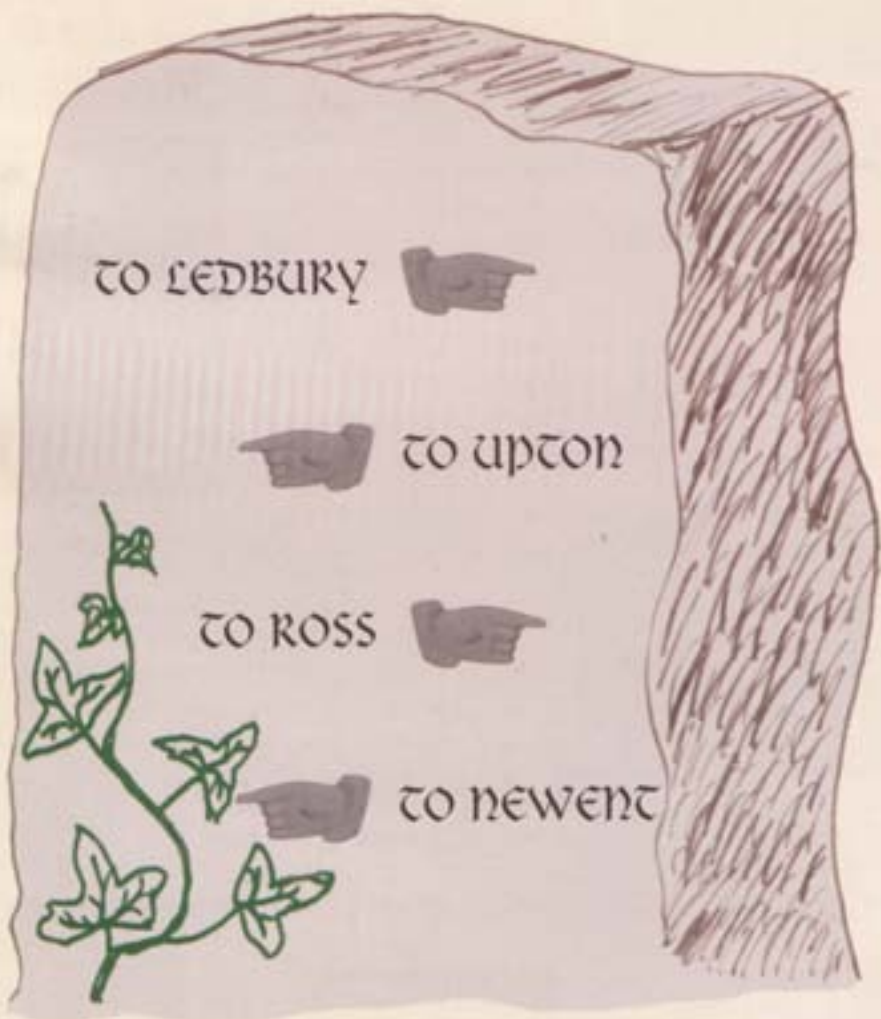


MILESTONES

A survey of four routes
north & west from Gloucester



MILESTONE SURVEY

some routes from Gloucester

During 2001, Hartpury Historic Land and Buildings Trust, as part of a Local Heritage Initiative project arranged for a survey of surviving milestones to be done by Staunton and Corse Rangers. Four routes were selected, these were Gloucester to Upton-on-Severn, Gloucester to Ledbury via Hartpury, Gloucester to Ledbury via Newent, and Gloucester to Ross, which were all important elements of the turnpike system connecting Gloucester to Worcester and to Hereford. In the course of this survey one stone was found



decapitated, presumably following verge cutting. This has now been restored by Hartpury Historic Land and Buildings Trust. Two others were discovered to have been uprooted, one has since been re-erected by Gloucestershire County Council and it is hoped Herefordshire Council will soon attend to the other. In many instances the surrounding soil level was found to have risen substantially, sometimes obscuring some detail, however it was felt that these should remain undisturbed.

Staunton and Corse Rangers began recording in the winter of 2001/2. The routes surveyed contained just three simple sorts of markers - stone, stone with metal plates, and triangular metal posts - but nevertheless all worthy of recording, and hopefully this booklet will encourage more interest in conserving these and others, for the future.



Introduction

Although the Romans were known to have marked their tracks with stones every thousandth two-pace step, it was not really until the improvement of roads, and the turnpike system in the eighteenth century, that most of the milestones we now see were erected. Turnpike trusts were set up by Acts of Parliament. These created new roads as well as assuming responsibility to maintain existing ones. They charged tolls for using the roads, and from 1766 they were required to mark every mile with a stone.

Milestone history



Early milestones were usually square stones, which were placed sideways on to the road. As the traffic increased, they became angled towards the approaching stagecoach. Roman numbers gave way to Arabic - again for ease of reading, and when cast metal became available, the marker was able to contain more information than just the simple distances.

Mile 'stones' have many varied forms and designs, with an area often having its own style. Some incorporated mounting blocks, whilst ones at cross-roads were occasionally inscribed on four sides, and there are even obelisks, and 'tomb-style' ones against walls. The use of metal gave rise to even more varying designs - cylindrical, flat like a book, shields on posts and so on. Again, as with the stone ones, each area has its own peculiar type - probably being manufactured by the same iron-foundry.

Although most stones measured just in miles, fractions of $\frac{1}{2}$ and less are found. Numbers gave rise to some confusion - especially when some stones had a mixture of both Arabic and Roman numerals on the same one! Some even declare that there are '0 miles' to a place! Other markers exist which just have a letter 'C' - which seems to indicate 100 yards to a river crossing by ford or bridge. The earlier carved stones also showed the illiteracy of the craftsmen - with spelling mistakes and bad spacing - even at times running out of space and having to put just one letter on the next line. Occasionally a stonemason would also carve his mark or name.

During the war it was thought that the markers would be too useful to the enemy forces, and many were buried or removed. They should have been replaced by 1943, but it was not always done. So the survival of stones has largely been a matter of chance - many have been lost under road widening

schemes, and with the proliferation and uniformity of modern signs, they have been neglected by County Councils. Inscriptions have worn away, stones have eroded and the metal ones which survived the war, have become rusted. Verge cutting by machines has also been responsible for loss and damage. The recording by Ordnance Survey is confusing - some stones are marked as MP, when they are clearly MS's, and some are recorded that don't exist and visa versa.



In recent years there has been a renewed interest in milestones of all types, and many are now actually listed 'buildings'. There is now a national Milestone Society who seek to record as many as possible of the existing stones and see that they are cared for in the future.

Development of roads

The muddy tracks, poorly defined and unsignposted, that had been sufficient in earlier times, deteriorated with the rapid growth of trade in the Tudor period, so that travel became difficult, and in winter, near impossible. In 1555 a statute was passed which required parishes to elect an unpaid Overseer of the Highways, who was empowered to raise local rates and became responsible to the Justices of the Peace for the maintenance of the highways. The work of filling ruts, clearing ditches and repairing bridges was by local unpaid labour, since every householder was obliged to work (or pay someone else to) for 4 days a year under the supervision of the overseer. This 'statute labour' formed the basis of road maintenance for the next two centuries, but often the increasing traffic churned up the roads far quicker than they were repaired. The situation only improved when the Turnpike trusts took over the most important roads, although even then 'statute labour' continued to supplement the turnpike road workforce, with parishes required to perform 3 days work each year. The new marking system made a great improvement, not least for stage coaches who could begin to price and time their routes accurately!



1726 saw an Act of Parliament for the repairing and widening of the roads from Gloucester and authorised the charging of tolls for their use. This empowered trustees to improve various roads as turnpikes, and to set up stones or posts every mile showing the distance from Gloucester. The penalty for defacing these markers was 20 shillings!

The ancient routes through Hartpury to Upton (and Worcester) and to Ledbury (Malvern and Hereford) were combined in one turnpike. From Gloucester they ran together to Crosshands, Corse (which was then the start of uncultivated Corse Lawn) where they split as they do to the present day. The continuing importance of these roads is illustrated by the turnpike from Over through Maisemore being the last of the turnpikes around Gloucester to be abolished (1st November 1879). A final year's extension had been granted in 1878, on the grounds that the traffic was far more than the average and that it would be unfair for the parish to have to make good the wear and tear. In 1888 the Local Government Act transferred responsibility for main roads to the newly formed County Councils.



Other local turnpikes included the road from Gloucester to Ross-on-Wye and that to Ledbury from Gloucester through Newent, where in 1749 the Trustees ordered that stones should be set up every mile.

The turnpiking of the roads to Ledbury led to competing claims as to the best route to Hereford. A 1768 advertisement in the Gloucester Journal by a Post-Chaise operator from Ross was speedily answered by a '*friend to the publick*', from Ledbury, who stated that £2000 had been spent improving the roads to Ledbury. However when writing of the north-western part of Gloucestershire around Newent in 1779, Thomas Rudder comments that '*the roads in this part of the country are so intolerable, that the writer of this account found it necessary to desert his horse, and to travel with a guide on foot from one village to another*'.

Travel at that time had its risks. In 1781, the Gloucester Journal reported that two villains waylaid farmers on the Wooldridge, who were returning from Barton Fair, taking £40 from one and 18 guineas from another and even 1s. and 1s.6d. from two labourers. This and other such incidents led to the Journal warning farmers and others of the risks and subsequently

The road system through Hartpury

Well before Roman times, when the earliest inhabitants settled in farming communities, the need to trade evolved and with it the establishment of tracks between the settlements.

The first tracks passing through Hartpury would have forded the river Severn at Maisemore. The Romans, soon after their arrival, built the causeway west from Gloucester across the marshy river valley. Use of the ford at Maisemore would have declined as a new route to the west developed which forded the river Leadon at Rudford to connect with the old tracks in Hartpury. This led to the development of the settlement at Morewent, whose name derived from the Celtic *maro* and Romano-British *venta*, meaning 'great market' - and reinforces the suggestion that it originated as a trading centre, later recorded in the Domesday survey. The Romans may even have preferred this western route to Worcester, avoiding the succession of brooks and the river Avon on the east side of the Severn. In medieval times the Hartpury tenants of the Abbey of Gloucester were the ones required to transport salt from the deposits at Droitwich, presumably because this was still the easier route.




When Maisemore bridge was built around 1200, the earlier route over the Woolridge to Upton-on-Severn and Worcester would have returned into general use. The Gough map (c.1360) showed the road from London to Hereford by way of Newent, although the route to Ledbury and Hereford passing through Morewent continued to be used. This was the situation until the new turnpike combined the roads through Hartpury to Worcester and Hereford in their present day position, and the ancient settlement around the church that had once been on a principal route from Gloucester to the west gradually became the quiet backwater it is today.

Local Turnpikes

In the 16th century, the importance of the bridge at Maisemore to medieval trade was shown by the numerous Wills leaving sums for its repair (for the '*maintynance of Maysmor bridge 2s*' in 1545, and '*2 bushels of wheat for the rep'n of Maysmore bridge*' in 1547). In medieval times merchants who travelled around the country, became aware of the deficiencies of the highways and frequently left bequests of this kind.

798241	81x35x23		GLOSTER 4 MILES
Woolridge Farm Hartpury			
Right			Incised lettering
Not on OS			Limestone

798225	100x42x20		GLOSTER 5 MILES
Watersmeet Hartpury			
Right			
MS			Limestone

798275	143x30x43		GLOSTER 6 MILES
Conse B4211			Trig mark below
Right			Broken and lying down when found
MS			Limestone