



A Milestone Society Warwickshire Project

Shipston on Stour Picture House in 1908 with Milepost and its direction board outside

Warwickshire members are working on a project to restore the six surviving “Gaslamp” style cast iron Mileposts on the Stratford on Avon to Long Compton Turnpike. They are believed to be nationally unique, and for that reason are of more than just local interest. We are seeking support from interested bodies, not least the Heritage Lottery Fund, which has expressed interest in the project, and we have already had offers of help.

Turnpikes were set up from the late seventeenth century to take over from parishes and landowners the maintenance of important routes. They had been failing to meet the strain placed on communications by, among other things, the Industrial Revolution then gathering pace. Acts of Parliament laid down rules governing who could be a Turnpike Trustee, where they had to meet, and how they should organise themselves. Records of their Meetings and Accounts had to be kept, and these largely survive for the Trust in question, in the Warwickshire County Archive. It was set up by an Act of 1730, and modified by subsequent Acts of 1744, 1774 and 1818. The last Act included provisions for the length of the Turnpike to be extended from Long Compton to the Inn at Chapel House, just south of the Banbury-Chipping Norton crossroads along a new stretch of road also sanctioned in the same Act. By coincidence, one of the contractors for the new road, completed in 1825, was

one John Roe (or Rowe), who was also a contractor for the Moreton in Marsh to Stratford on Avon Tramway, constructed at around the same time. He received large sums from the Trust, recorded in the Accounts but without any detail. Did his work include providing and erecting the new Mileposts? There was certainly much communication between the Turnpike Trustees and the promoters of the Tramway since they shared some of the route. Another helpful pointer has come from the Victoria and Albert Museum, who have dated the acanthus leaf design of the decoration on the Mileposts to “1810 to 1840”.

The Turnpike system nationally fell into decline as transport and communications changed with the arrival of railways. The Stratford on Avon to Long Compton Trust ceased functioning in the 1860s when responsibility for roads passed to Highways Boards and then to County Councils. It was wound up finally in 1877.

Unfortunately, despite much effort we have failed so far to find documentary evidence for just when these cast iron Mileposts were actually installed, or where or by whom they were made. The only mention of Mileposts in the six Accounts and Minutes Books of the Stratford to Long Compton Turnpike Trust (Warwick Record Office) we have been able to find is contained in a Minute dated 13th March 1790, “Ordered that Triangular Mile Posts be set up along the road with two iron plates to each of them setting forth the distance from London and Oxford” This obviously does not describe the Mileposts in question, and we have not found any other helpful mention of them. At least we can say they are later than 1790.

There are now six surviving Mileposts, and the project is to restore all of them back to their former glory. Four are still in position, in various states of decay. One of these is listed Grade II by English Heritage. It is north of Broadmoor Lodge near Little Wolford at Grid Ref. SP26456 36203. Of the other two, one was in a local museum and another is also in private hands after being rescued after roadside damage.

The plan is to have the five incomplete or damaged posts uplifted and delivered to a specialist cast-iron restorer. They will be completely stripped and new parts will be made and attached as necessary, using surviving parts as patterns. New distance boards for all six will have to be made, as none survive. Finally, they will be finished with a four coat paint system before being delivered back to their sites and re-erected.

The ownership of milestones and mileposts remains with County Councils, who have responsibility for their care. However, Warwickshire state that they have no plans or finance for restoration, and have given their blessing for our project, with a promise of technical assistance such as the locating of underground services where necessary. We have also sought and received support from the Parish and Town Councils along the way, and some have become actively involved in the project. Tourist bodies and the local press have been kept informed and have expressed their interest in seeing the project brought to a successful conclusion.

If you would like any more information about the project please get in touch. We hope you will support our project for rescuing such a unique set of reminders of how our countryside looked to travellers in the days long before the cars and traffic we are so used to.

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