

R O A D W O R K S

(1) THE HANGMAN'S STONE - WHERE IS IT NOW?

The parish of Preston, wrote Samuel Rudder in his New History of Gloucestershire of 1779 (p 606) "is bounded to the westward by the Irminstreet, one of the Roman ways passing through Cirencester; and at the distance of two miles from the town, but in this parish, there stands an ancient, rude stone, about four feet high, lately painted and marked as a milestone. This is vulgarly called Hangman's Stone, because, it is said, a fellow resting a sheep thereon, (which he had stolen, and tied its legs together for the convenience of carrying it) was there strangled, by the animal's getting its legs round his neck in struggling. But this does not account for the stone's being placed there, and considering the common propensity of inventing stories to obviate names and things not properly understood, I have sometimes been of opinion that all this is fiction, and that the right name of the stone is Heremanstone, so called, like the Roman way upon which it stands, from Here-man, a soldier, and that the stone is an ancient monument for some military person."

Mr. J. Hartland of the Turnpike Study group within the Cirencester Archaeological & Historical Society, writes that this stone has not been seen for some 40 years. Some 2 miles out of Cirencester on the Cricklade road, it had been re-used as a milestone when that road was turnpiked in 1758. Can anyone give any hint as to what has happened to it? (And incidentally the Rodborough/Hampton parish stone on the roadside above the Bear Inn was thought by a local vicar, the Rev. C. E. Watson, to have been a 13th century 'Horestone', perhaps of the former 'North Woodchester Manor'.)

The Cirencester Turnpike Study group was formed in 1981 to do research into the local turnpike roads and to try to find and preserve such remains as milestones and toll-houses. To date, 250 sites have been visited and 173 stones located. Surviving plates have been painted, one has been replaced by the group. Verge clearance has been undertaken and several toll-houses located. All this has been done with the permission of the County Council, but at the initiative and expense (and work!) of the group's members. The secretary's address is: John Hartland, 31 Corinium Gate, Cirencester (tel: Cirencester 4485).

Readers west of the Severn might like to know that a group in Drybrook Parish is attempting similar work; also that David Bick is continuing a study of the turnpike road towards Hereford. We hope to be able to publish the results of his research in a later issue.

(2) CERTAIN CAST-IRON PARISH ROAD POSTS

In 1864 parishes were required by the Government to group themselves into 'highway districts' in an attempt to bring some order into the chaotic road administrative system: parish roads, that is, paid for by a road rate - turnpike roads were

in theory paid for by revenue from tolls, though parishes had also to pay a 'composition' fee to these roads too. One such district was that of Wheatenhurst south of Gloucester, which in 1864 ordered a number of cast-iron posts from J.M. Butt, Ironfounders of Gloucester. For although parishes were clumped together, the individual units of the new districts were still responsible for the repair and financing of roads within their boundaries. So parish markers were set up where parish met parish on the highways. The formation of local highway boards in the 1870s and also in the 1890s of urban and rural districts, rendered most of these posts redundant, but a considerable number survived until quite recently, only to disappear with widening and re-alignment of local roads. Time, and the upward growth of turf, have nearly hidden some of the survivors; but a few of those in most danger have had the encroaching vegetation cut back and the posts revealed in such a way as to minimise accidental damage.

In 1982, G.N. Crawford and C. Cox "revived" a Woodchester/King Stanley post along Water Lane north of North Woodchester; and a year later, in autumn of 1983, J. Clayton and C. Cox did the same for one near Manor Farm, Pitchcombe. A third post behind Edge Church at the corner of the lane to Harescombe was not only damaged at the top, but almost completely buried in a pile of road grit. The Divisional Surveyor kindly had this grit removed, and the post has now been dug out (having been buried in turf to half its original height) and re-set so that it is now standing proud, and clearly visible. It is intended that another post on the scarp slope east of Gloucester, which is thought to be in some peril from traffic and neglect, will be placed for safe-keeping and study in the Stroud Museum.



Post near Manor Farm,
Pitchcombe



Highways
District
POST.

Such posts are still the official property of the County, and permission should be obtained from the County Surveyor before any action is taken to refurbish or rescue them. They are of cast-iron, with the parish names on the two front sides (the rear is hollow) and with the 'District's' initial on the triangular sloping top: G H D or W H D, for Gloucester, or Wheatenhurst, Highways District. C. Cox, who is hoping to have an article published later on parish boundary markers, would be glad to know of other survivors from outside the area of the Stroudwater valleys.

C.C.