

MILE STONES RESTORED

The Cirencester Archaeological & Historical Society in 1981 a Turnpike Study Group to investigate and record what remained of the relics of the turnpike and coaching age in the area round Cirencester; and in the last few months of 1987 this Group has been busy clearing grass and undergrowth from around the surviving milestones on the A417, the old London road from Cirencester through Fairford to Lechlade, and repainting the inscriptions on the cast-iron plates which show the distances from Cirencester and from London.

In the past few years survey parties from the Group have visited hundreds of sites of old milestones along what were the turnpike roads, as evidenced from old maps and records, and have verified and recorded some 200 milestones still in existence. For example, in 1983 and 1984 working parties undertook the repainting of the milestones on the roads between Cirencester and Cheltenham, Birdlip, Stroud, Tetbury, and Stow as far as Northleach. The road to Stroud which, until the early part of the 19th century ran over Minchinhampton Common and on through Rodborough, was found to have the most complete run of surviving milestones, only one plate being found missing between Cirencester and Minchinhampton Common. The Society accordingly commissioned a replacement plate from a local foundry and refitted it to the stone near Chapman's Cross. The oak milepost near Deerpark School, which had been knocked down by a snowplough, was also replaced with the help of the County Council.

The Cirencester Archaeological & Historical Society was more ambitious in 1987 and commissioned 4 new replica milestone plates to replace those missing from the surviving stones on the road from Cirencester to Lechlade. The last of these has now been fitted on its stone, and the work on this road completed.

There were originally 13 milestones between Cirencester and Lechlade Bridge, of which only 8 now survive. Two of these were found lying flat on the ground by members of the Turnpikes Study Group, and thanks to the co-operation of Mr. Robert Luck, the County Council's Divisional Surveyor, these have now been re-erected, one near the Red Lion in Ampney St Peter parish, and the other at Claydon Fields near Lechlade. Incidentally this latter stone, whose plate bears the words CIREN^R 11 LONDON 79, is an interesting one, as it is a different size from any of the others and is the only one to bear traces of an incised inscription predating the cast-iron plates, which suggests that it could have been earlier than the rest, even perhaps one of the original milestones erected by the Cirencester & Lechlade Turnpike Trust, which had been set up in 1727 in the reign of George I, when the first tollhouse in Cirencester was built in London Road at the corner of Grove Lane. Tolls collected from passing traffic at the gate there and at Clayhill, near Lechlade, were used to pay for much-needed repairs to the road.

Exactly when the milestones on the Lechlade Road were first erected is not certain, but they were probably put up in the mid-18th century when their use became compulsory by law. They were certainly there by 1816 for they are shown on the local preliminary drawings for the first Ordnance Survey map

being prepared at this time.

A PUZZLE?

What remains of the old inscription on Milestone 11 at Claydon Fields is a puzzle that the Society would very much like to solve. It is too badly damaged now to be truly legible, but a few letters can be made out above the plate which could be read as "...e.er" or "...e.en". The spacing of the letters, however, does not seem to allow for either "Cirencester" or "Ciren." to have been written. Could it have been some other abbreviation for Cirencester, even "Ciceter"? If any reader known what was on the stone before it became so defaced, the Turnpikes Study Group would be grateful for a call. So ring John Hartland, 31 Corinium Gate, Cirencester GL7 2PX, Cirencester G4485 if you have a clue, however small!

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John Hartland 1987