# RAILWAY BOUNDARY MARKERS IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

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Recently the author became aware of some railway boundary markers on the streets of Gloucester. Subsequent investigation has revealed that little is known about such markers though many railway companies appear to have used them. This article is intended to bring these markers and their associated problems to the attention of the industrial archaeological community.

**Types of Marker**

So far, six different marker types are known, and the author has proposed a typology designating them Types 1, 1a and 2-5. The Type 1 markers resemble a flat-head pin with a disc head on a vertical shaft. The shaft is typically a 1.22m length of old 'bridge' rail while the disc is a separate cast-iron item, 200mm in diameter and 70mm thick. A short length of angle iron is riveted 'tee' style onto the base of the shaft. The Type 1a are similar except that the shaft did not have a tee on the base of the shaft (1). Another difference is that the head is thinner (only 60mm thick) and the lower half is tapered (making them resemble a flat-head countersunk rivet). Both have bas-relief inscriptions on their top faces. Around the outside there is usually the name of the railway company while across the centre there is the word 'BOUNDARY', a year date or both. These markers can be set at various heights in the ground, from 1m high to being flush (making it impossible to distinguish between Type 1 or 1a). In terms of construction, the heads were cast onto the rail as two halves. These markers were used by GWR and with a name change they were also used by its successor, British Rail's Western Region (2). GWR markers were originally painted with black oil tar (3) while BR examples were painted white (4). Examples at heritage railways and public places are usually painted white with black lettering.

The Type 2 markers are triangular cast-iron posts, around 1.22m long with front facing sides of 100mm and 140mm at the rear. They have a flat base plate about 300m by 400mm and are generally set with around 60mm protruding out of the ground. Examples seen by the author have the initials of the railway company cast in bas-relief vertically on the two front faces of these markers, though some have the word 'BOUNDARY' on one side instead. So far examples from the GWR and the Forest of Dean Central Railway ( FDCR ) are known. This type was seemingly adopted by the GWR in 1880 after they took over the Monmouthshire Railway & Canal Co., which used an identical design (4). These were cheaper to make than Type 1s and also reduced the need for old 'bridge rail' (which was in demand as fence-post strainers). GWR markers were painted white with black lettering, while the FDCR's were black with white lettering.

The Type 3 markers have a vertical shaft of bridge rail with an oval or circular plate about 240mm in diameter and 20mm thick on top. The plate had the letters 'GWR' cast on the front face, an integral spine (designed to slot into the gap in bridge rail) and was secured to the rail by blind countersunk bolts. These are thought to be the earliest type of permanent boundary markers being known from the 1840s and 1850s. The disc was painted black with a white edge while the letters were white. No examples are yet known from Gloucestershire. The Type 4 markers are broadly similar to the Type 3, except that they have an oval plate brazed or forged onto a length of 'double head' rail. These markers have the initials of the railway company in bas-relief on the front face. In Gloucestershire they are known from the

Midland Railway and the Wye Valley Railway (5). The arrangement beneath ground is unknown but it seems probable that there is some type of 'foot' to prevent removal. No colour scheme is known for the Wye Valley but the MR markers were painted white with black lettering (6). The Type 5 markers are half-moon or circular brass tablets set flush into the ground (their beneath ground arrangement is unknown). They are urban markers, and similar to boundary markers used by the Church of England to delineate parish boundaries in large cities. None are yet known from Gloucestershire.

### Surviving Examples in Gloucestershire

As can be seen from Table 1, the most common markers so far recorded by the Author in Gloucestershire seem to be those belonging to the GWR.

#### Table 1: Gloucestershire Railway Boundary Markers Recorded by the Author

| Location | OS Grid Reference | Marker Type | Company | Date | Usage | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bullo Pill (Box Meadow Wharf) | SO6907 0978 | Type 2 | GWR | No | Redundant | Alongside field |
| Bourne Mill, Brimscombe | SO8730 0212 | Type 1-Proud | GWR | 1909 | Current | On canal towpath |
| Bourne Mill, Brimscombe | SO8731 0211 | Type 1-Proud | GWR | 1909 | Current | On canal towpath |
| St Mary's Crossing, Chalford | SO8866 0223 | Type 1-Proud | GWR | No | Current | On canal towpath |
| St Mary's Crossing, Chalford | SO8868 0226 | Type 1-Proud | GWR | No | Current | On canal towpath |
| Gloucester, London Road | SO8354 1878 | Type 2 | GWR | No | Current | By bridge retaining wall |
| Gloucester, Park Street | SO8333 1900 | Type 1-Proud | GWR | No | Current | On pavement |
| Gloucester, Park Street | SO8333 1899 | Type 1-Proud | GWR | No | Current | By bridge retaining wall on street |
| Gloucester, Worcester Street | SO8340 1894 | Type 1 or 1a – Flush | GWR | 1900 | Current | By bridge on garage forecourt |
| Nailsworth Station | SO8496 9999 | Type 4 | MR | No | Redundant | At rear of old station in private garden |
| Newnham-on-Severn, Station Road | SO6883 1223 | Type 1 – Proud | GWR | 1881 | Current | Top of cutting. Temporarily removed Feb 06 |
| Rudford | SO7796 2165 | Type 1 - Proud | GWR | 1911 | Redundant | In field |
| Stonehouse (Grove Farm) | SO8133 0498 | Type 1 - Proud | GWR | No | Redundant | In hedge on track on top of railway cutting |
| Stonehouse (Grove Farm) | SO8125 0500 | Type 1 - Proud | GWR | No | Redundant | In hedge on track on top of railway cutting |
| Stonehouse (Grove Farm) | SO8140 0495 | Type 1 or 1a – Flush | GWR | No | Redundant | In hedge on track on top of railway cutting |
| Stonehouse Station | SO8076 0530 | Type 1 - Flush | GWR | 1889 | Current | By station embankment wall |

This is probably to be expected, given the extent of the company's network in the area, and it is likely many more are waiting to be found. However it is also likely that more Midland Railway markers exist and, also some 'exotics' - be found. It is probable that there are more Midland Railway markers around and, in the Forest of Dean.

**Problems associated with railway boundary markers**

There are a number of intriguing questions regarding these markers, all revolving around why they were used. At present, the most likely hypothesis seems that they were used where a dispute over land ownership existed, where the potential for dispute over land ownership was high or where encroachment was likely to occur. In connection with this they may have been used where it was impractical to fence the railway (which was required by Statute) or where land was acquired for subsequent widening that never progressed. In the latter case, the original line would have been fenced (according to statute) but as there would have been little point in fencing the newly acquired land, boundary markers may have been placed to delineate the new boundary. In addition to this, two other questions arise; what determined the type of marker used and why was the date used on some markers and not others.

**Conclusion**

Little published information on boundary markers exists despite the mass of railway literature. Where they are mentioned, most publications only acknowledge their existence and show a photograph. None of the major railway archives appears to hold anything and neither does Network Rail. No archival material relating to the markers has yet been identified, which means that the reasons why markers were used and the associated questions raised in this article remain unanswered. Given this situation remaining markers should be identified and recorded where possible before they are lost.

**Acknowledgements**

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**Bibliography**

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             (Winter 1992), Great Western Trust, p31.
2    Grey, p31.
3    Slinn, J. N., 1978, *Great Western Way*, Historical Model Railway Society, 1978, p160.
4    Grey, p160.
5    Handley, B. M., 1982, *The Wye Valley Railway,* Oakwood Press,, contains a
             photograph of an unidentified Wye Valley marker.
6    Whitehouse, P. B., 1975, *Railway Relics and Regalia*, Country Life (Hamlyn), p65

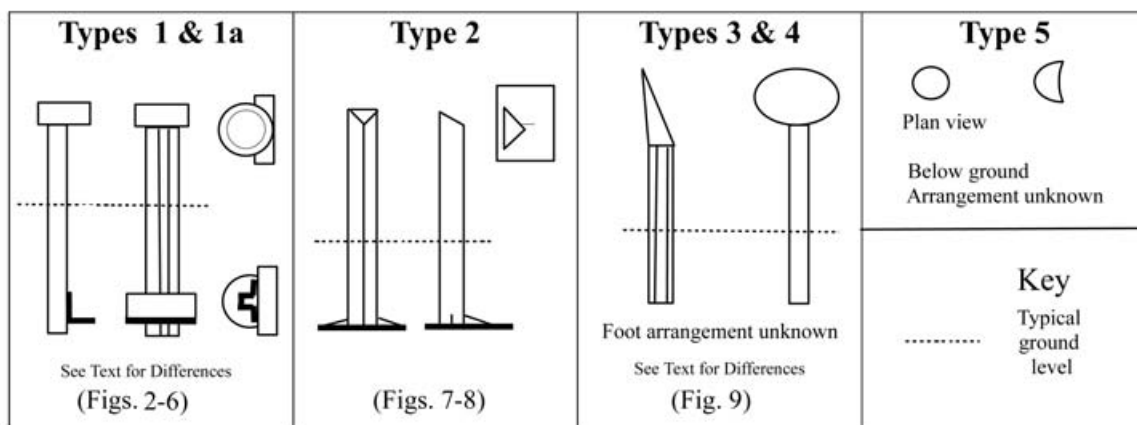Fig. 1: Schematic Showing the Main Features of the Different Marker Types

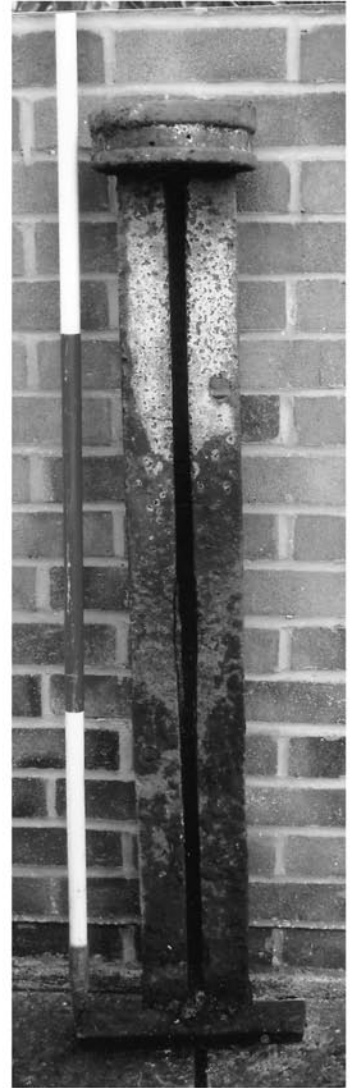Fig 2. Type 1 Tintern Station (Gwent)

GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY COS' BOUNDARY 1900

Fig 3. Type 1 Tintern Station (Gwent)

Fig 4. Type 1 Newham on Severn

Fig 5. Type 1 Newham on Severn

Fig 6. Type 1 Tintern Station (Gwent)


Fig 7. Type 2 Bullo Pill

Fig 8. Type 2 London Road Gloucester

Fig 9. Type 4 Nailsworth Station