Milestones

a very short history of the B1368 milestones

from Puckeridge to Barley

Compiled by
Marty Kilby
from a Hormead Parish viewpoint

INTRODUCTION

Like any other country parish, Hormead is criss-crossed with lines of communication trodden out by human foot, later by oxen and horses, and then some of them widened by the passing of carts and wagons. Finally a few of these ancient walkways have been adopted as roads for 20th century traffic propelled first by steam, then by the petrol engine.

Throughout the ages some lines of communication were always more important due to their geographical position and the use made of them. We have streets and roads, also lanes and ends, and these names tend to reflect the degree to which they have been used as main or minor routes.

The Romans used *Braughing* as a station along the trunk road where their horses could be changed and the soldiers and traders accommodated for the night. *Braughing* was on a major Roman Road from Great Chesterford, via Meesden and Brent Pelham to *Great Hormead* Park and *Braughing*. The great Roman Road to York, later called Ermine Street (then the Old North Road and A10) bypassed *Braughing, Hare Street, Barkway* and *Barley*, and the now B1368 at last became a subsidiary local road. This alternative route takes the traveller further east into the barley and wheat growing area of east Hertfordshire and it is the importance of these crops, and their use to support the growing population of London, that has influenced the amount of traffic on the road through *Hare Street*.

From the 13[th]C when Cambridge established its university and developed its colleges after the first charter was granted in 1231, students would use this road from the south. Much later a very famous graduate of Magdalen College, Samuel Pepys, certainly passed through *Hare Street* for he says in his diary that he sometimes chose the route through *Puckeridge* to *Barkway* (eg August 1661).

> ### *Nothing to do with milestones – I just liked this*
> *By 1570 goods traffic had become a permanent feature on the roads and one of the 16[th]C pioneers of this traffic was Thomas Hobson who operated a service between London and Cambridge. He was especially licensed by the University whose letters he carried. Thomas developed a lucrative second line of business by letting out saddle horses complete with harness, boots, bridle and whip. His stables in Cambridge housed 40 horses which the students hired for their journeys to and from the University. Hobson insisted that they take the horses in strict rotation and did not allow them to choose their own mount. This gave rise to the ironical term "Hobson's Choice".*

From Roman times up to 1555 each manor had been responsible for the upkeep of its roads, but after 1555 the onus passed to the local parish, which had to supply the King (technically Philip of Spain, because Mary I was on the throne at this time, had married Philip in 1554 and Philip did not leave England and his wife until August 1555) with the work of several able-bodied men for a few days a year, and nominate a surveyor to determine when work was necessary.

This was not a satisfactory solution for there were increasing demands made of the roads and when the parishes were unable to maintain them the roads fell into disrepair and in the 18th and 19th centuries Turnpike Trusts were established that used the revenue from the tolls paid by travellers to maintain the roads. These flourished until the advent of the railways from 1830 onwards, which offered a much faster and more comfortable alternative. The next period of road construction was the post-war era to serve the motor car.

The Turnpike Trusts

In 1600 the advent of the Royal Mail with staging points focused attention on the roads. The post riders had to make good time, specified clearly, and milestones came into their own to measure progress.

The establishment of the Turnpike Trusts improved the condition of the roads by levying tolls for their upkeep and *Hare Street* shared in this improvement after the road from *Puckeridge* through *Barkway* to the county boundary at *Barley* was included in the Wadesmill Trust in 1733. The road from *Barley* to Cambridge had been turnpiked in 1724.

The extraction of gravel from local gravel pits was an important item in the budget of the Turnpike Trusts. Payments were made by them to the owners of such pits and recompense

made after the gravel had been extracted from pits such as the one behind Girton House, *Hare Street*, through the 19[th]C and into the 20[th]C.

For non-turnpike roads, the Highways Act of 1835 substituted a rate for compulsory labour, but the responsibility of the vestry to maintain the roads and bridges in its parish remained until 1888. Most of the existing roads in the countryside are therefore on foundations of gravel and chalk and stones collected from the fields and put down by local and pauper labour.

In order to provide for their maintenance, Hertfordshire roads were some of the first to be turnpiked in the 17th and 18th centuries. As in other counties, the majority of the milestones and mileposts in Hertfordshire were put in place by the Turnpike Trusts. Around 100 of the Hertfordshire milestones and mileposts are still in existence

One of the earliest roads with milestones from this time is the Cambridge to *Barkway* road which was the start of the coach road to London. Surveyed by a Cambridge professor, most of this Trinity Hall series still stands on the B1368.

Placed during the times of the pedestrian, the horse rider and the carriage, the milestone has a fascinating story to tell of how our roads came to be. Because they were often locally produced and there was no standard design, milestones come in a fabulous range of types and designs, each route and region with its own character.

The Wadesmill Turnpike Trust

The Wadesmill Trust was composed of local gentry, parsons and farmers. The turnpikes were at *Wadesmill* and *Barkway*. Mail coaches (none of which had names and none of which came the B1368 route but ran from *Puckeridge* to *Royston* via *Buntingford*) were exempt from tolls, but stage coaches had to pay them. Anyone living in these villages wishing to travel in the faster mail coaches had to go to *Buntingford* or *Royston* where they had the choice of three per day up to London.

The setting up of the milestones is recorded in the Wadesmill Trust minutes. A general meeting of the Trust held 2nd October 1741 at the Bell Inn, *Puckeridge* notes:

> "It is ordered that Mile Stones be fixed and placed down at the end of every Mile of the said road to be repaired by this Turnpike – beginning in that part of the said Road that leads from Barkway to Puckeridge one mile distant from the last milestone in Cambridge Road and from Wadesmill to Royston in the northern Road with the numbers of miles from London on each stone.

> And the said Mr Anthony ffage the Treasurer of the Turnpike do take upon himself the trouble of getting and providing the said stones and putting and placing the same in a proper manner".

The Trustees met a year later and the treasurer duly reported:

> "And the said Mile Stones having been putt and placed down by William Goodhall pursuant to the said Order and Expense of the said stones and of putting and placing them down (amounting to twenty pounds seven shillings and four pence) being approved by the said Trustees now present."

Transport along the B1368 – The Cambridge Telegraph

By the time the Cambridge Telegraph was in service in the early 19[th]C the coach left Fetter Lane daily at 9.00 in the morning (except Sunday) and arrived in Cambridge at the Sun Inn at 3.00 in the afternoon. The return journey commenced in Cambridge at 1.00 in the morning and arrived at "9 the same morn". By 1836 the time had been cut to 6 hours and one coach left Cambridge at 10.00 am daily whilst another left Fetter Lane at the same time to travel in the opposite direction.

Ideally there were four coaches called Cambridge Telegraph – two at each end, one in service, and the other in reserve. In late 18[th]C values it cost £4 a month, including the wages of horse keepers and stable hands, to keep a coach horse on the road. The lifespan

of a horse on a stage coach route was only 3 to 4 years after which they were then sold to farmers for lighter duties.

The Bell in *Hare Street* was the stage coach inn on the London to Cambridge route served by the Cambridge Telegraph. The Cambridge coaches changed horses at *Puckeridge* and *Barkway*, only pausing at The Bell to put down and take up passengers.

The Cambridge Telegraph service was withdrawn in the late 1840s when its owner foresaw the threat from the railways. He sold his extensive coaching business and invested in the London & Birmingham Railway to become a very wealthy man. For a few years a rival coach proprietor ran a service from Petty Cury in Cambridge via *Hare Street* and Ware to the Bull Inn, Holborn. The railway finally ended the days of the stage coaches in this district in the mid 19[th]C.

Conservation of Milestones
The Milestone Society suggests that on position and conservation of milestones, these should be restored to the condition and position indicated by the earliest records. Milestones should remain in public ownership with unrestricted public access and good visibility from the relevant road. The presumption is in favour of retaining and repairing the stone to maintain its original position and condition, subject to proper research. There is as yet no official best practice guide for the treatment of old stone and rusting iron, but guidelines are available.

THE MILESTONES B1368
Puckeridge to Barkway

The Old North Road branched at *Puckeridge* with this section of the Wadesmill Turnpike continuing northwards towards Cambridge, following what is now known as the B1368 over an eleven mile stretch. These twelve milestones had metal plates, although some of the plates are now missing or broken.

In June 1940, the government decreed that all place names should be hidden or removed to impede the enemy in case of invasion. Stone milestones, because they were often so bulky and difficult to move, were frequently covered with earth. Signposts and milestones were re-erected or uncovered in 1946, and most of them are there for us to enjoy today.

Puckeridge – London 27: Puckeridge High Street - NGR: TL 3862 2343

Aug 2007

Braughing – London 28: North of junction with Ford Street - NGR TL 3921 2487

Sept 2007

Nov 2007

Braughing – London 29: North of Hay Street - NGR TL 3924 2642

Aug 2007

Sept 2007

Nov 2007

Hare Street – London 30: Dassels Hill – NGR 3933 2802

July 2007

Aug 2007

Hare Street – London 31: Hare Street – NGR TL 3901 2956

July 2007

Aug 2007

Anstey- London 32:   Opposite Silkmead Farm - NGR TL 3922 3110

July 2007

Sept 2007

Anstey – London 33:   Cave Gate - NGR TL 3891 3264

Aug 2007

Nov 2007

Barkway – London 34:   Near Barkway Riding Centre (plate missing) - NGR TL 3855 3414

2004

Barkway – London 35:   High Street, Barkway - NGR TL 3846 3571
(One of the Trinity Stones erected in 17th Century by Trinity Hall Cambridge)

2004

Barkway – London 36:   Newsells Park, Barkway - NGR TL 3931 3698

2004

Barley – London 37:   London Road, Barley - NGR TL 3982 3834

2004   2009

London Road, Barley

Barley – London 38:   Cambridge Road, Barley, near the County boundary - NGR TL 4017 3984

2004

Marty Kilby
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