

The Kingswear milestone

Introduction – What is highway history?

There are certain items of highway history which are easily recognisable, such as any three-fronted toll house by the road, a milestone or a commemorative plaque on a wall. But there are many others which, although not actually hidden, have to be looked for on all levels and which tell us how life was once lived very differently, at a different pace with different objectives to those which we have now.

It is possible to show just a few examples here of what can be seen beneath your feet and overhead. From kerb stones hewn from local quarries, kicking stones on the sides of buildings, drainage channels made locally, mounting blocks, to the imposing War Memorial at Slapton, all are examples of street furniture or, what is more appropriate for the AONB, of highway history.

Distribution

Obviously a greater number of highway history items are to be found in town and villages than in the countryside. However, milestones and toll houses belong to the open road, milk churn stands can still be found by farm entrances and there are many boundary stones sleeping peacefully by the roadside waiting to be rediscovered.

Function

A lot of what we see has to do with the provision of public services. There are those for the provision of water, sewage and drainage services.

Then there are those for the provision of gas and electricity. Most public services providing all of us with these essentials date back to the Public Health Acts of 1875, anything which happened before that was often provided by local benefactors, usually a local land owner.

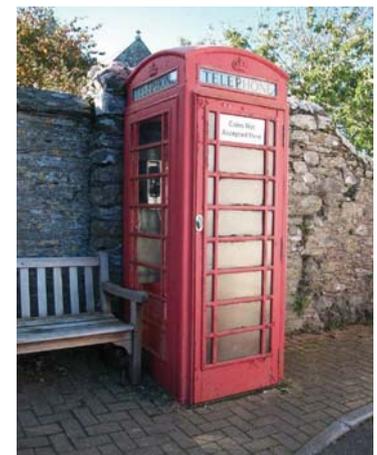


You are constantly reminded of your benefactor here every time water is taken from this conduit in Modbury (**pictured above**).

The evolution from horse drawn to petrol driven transport has left behind many reminders of when we all moved about on foot, horseback or in vehicles pulled by horses. When talking about the capacity of a car we still refer to its horse power.

Advances in communications and educational standards brought a variety of letter boxes and telephone boxes both in our towns and villages and out in the countryside.

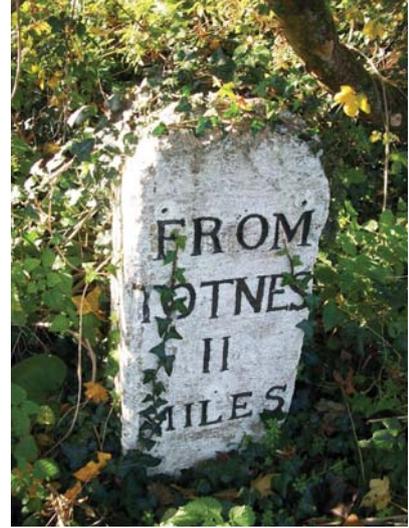
**Telephone box,
Malborough**



There remain those items of highway history and street furniture which have their own stories to tell;

**Below: Kingswear stand pipe (left) and
Dartmouth stink pole (right)**





reminders of a where a railway once ran, Randle's ride to death at Aveton Gifford, the slaughterhouse stone at Yealmpton.

History and Development



Yealm Bridge Toll House

- **Toll houses and milestones**

Let's start with those which really do belong to the highway, the most obvious of which are toll houses and milestones.

The first Turnpike (fee-paying road) to be constructed in the area ran from Totnes to Modbury in 1759. They were called turnpikes because originally you were stopped at their beginning by a man standing in the road with a spiked metal bar which he turned when you had paid your toll. By 1827 all the roads today which are labelled 'A' in our area had been constructed by Turnpike Trusts.

The trustees who set them up were usually worthies and merchants living in towns who wanted to see the roads maintained in order to keep trade rolling. Up until this time roads had been maintained by mainly voluntary labour under Statutes set out in the reign of Elizabeth I. The new Trusts gave roadmen, and not just surveyors, paid employment.

The new turnpike system worked well initially but in this rural area the many exemptions from toll paying literally took their toll. Those exempt included Sunday church goers, coffin bearers and those carts carrying building materials. The toll houses were manned by those who often still kept their former jobs as farmers,

quarrymen, spinners and weavers. Both men and women were employed by the trusts and there was usually just enough room in the yards attached to keep pigs and poultry.

There are 13 toll houses still standing in the AONB. **(Go to the end of this information sheet for a full list with OS Reference Numbers.)**

One of the more unusual ones is the Dunstone toll booth at Dunstone Cross near Yealmpton **(pictured right).**



The Kingsbridge Trust employed John, the son of the famous John Loudon Macadam.

The milestones which were put up along these routes come in a variety of shapes and sizes, but unfortunately many have now disappeared.



Left to right: milestones at Stumpycross, Yealmpton and Malborough

Consult the Popular Edition of local OS maps dating from c.1907 or go further back to the original 1809 editions available in libraries and record offices to find more.

One of the best routes to take to get a feel for these turnpikes lies through the Gara valley from Totnes to Modbury. It dates back to 1759 but the bridge over the Gara itself appears in an Anglo-Saxon Charter of a much earlier date. The materials for the surfaces of the turnpike roads were provided by stone breakers who not

only had to quarry the stone but split it into small stones measuring two and a half to four inches round.

Horse-drawn transport was king in the turnpike age and it is still possible to find reminders of these days in the coaching entrances lining our towns and villages.



Horse reminders, left to right: coaching entrance, Modbury; mounting block, Modbury; hitching ring, Malborough

These entrances often appear next to coaching Inns along with mounting blocks. There are still a few hitching rings around which show where horses were tethered outside public houses or hostelries. However, drinking troughs for the horses were often placed far away from Inns but temperance societies, such as the one in Newton Ferrers.

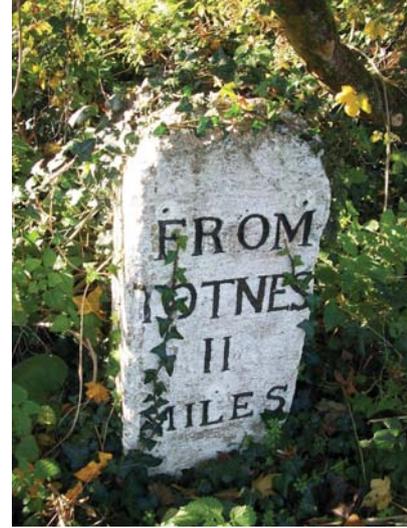


Tying platform, Aveton Gifford

Another piece of highway history left over from this age is found in Jubilee Road, Aveton Gifford (above). A cast iron tying platform is now embedded in the concrete. This was where the iron hoops were fitted onto wooden wagon wheels. Carriers, ponies, carts, butts and

wagons were used on the roads until tarmac came along in the 192s.

The competition amongst stage coaches to cover distances in the shortest time was well known but outside the pub at Aveton Gifford there is a barely decipherable remnant of a race which took place between two traders on donkeys in 1769 (pictured right).

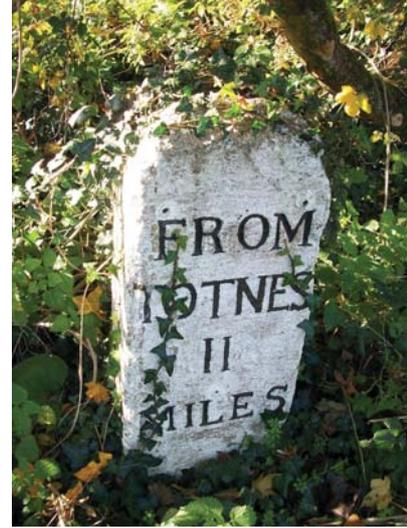


The traders raced each other back to Aveton Gifford from Kingsbridge market but unfortunately one of them, a Mr. Randall, went straight over the wall and broke his neck!



Kicking stones, Malborough

Kicking Stones often appear at the base of a building. They were to protect it from the iron wheels of vehicles as they passed. They are



found at entrances to bridges too, where they would have knocked dished wheels back into true before they crossed the bridge.

- **Waterworks**



It was not really until 1875 with the passing of The Public Health Act that safe forms of drinking water and sewage provisions were given to everyone. Those ironmongers who supplied gully channels and manhole covers used them to advertise their wares.



In the country 'buddles' and easements were essential drainage channels which were made along the side of the road and looked after by the parish lengthsman, an old office which has returned to Devon again under a national scheme.



This gully cover at Malborough (**bottom left**) is placed at right angles to the kerb. This shows it to

be older than others. The coming of the bicycle changed this.

Humble, everyday water supplies were provided by the many village pumps and stand pipes such as the one at Ringmore (**below left**).

Some have legends attached to them such as

the Wishing Well at Kingswear near the Lower Ferry.

Then there is the beautiful little Marwell (St. Mary's Well) at Ringmore with its obvious religious connotations (**below centre**).

Individual wells recommended their waters for the curing of blindness and physical conditions.

- **Electricity and Gas Supplies, Telecommunications**

Gas was the first service to come into some homes. It made life much easier for everyone who still depended on candles and whale oil lamps to light up their evenings.

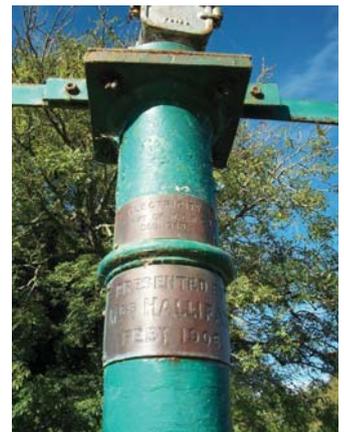


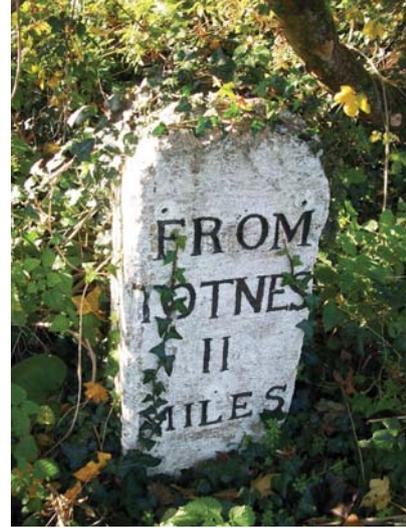
Sugg-style lamp, Dartmouth

Companies were set up, along with coke suppliers, and at Yealmpton there is a manhole cover reading 'P&S Gas Company Limited, the Plymouth and Stoke Gas Company'.

There are many lamp posts belonging to the gas lamp era in the style of Sugg, the company which was involved in supplying the first gas lamps in Pall Mall in 1807. Note the oak leaf design on each corner of the lamp. The cross arms were for the lamp lighter to rest his ladder on when he climbed up to light and extinguish the gas mantle.

Electricity supplies came into towns and villages at the turn of the century but were slow to be brought into many rural areas which explains the lamp post dedication at South Pool (**below right**).





Telephones came to us through the Post Office and there are still some covers which advertise this (left). Below (right) is the electricity box in Modbury High Street which has served as a PLP (Public Leaning Post) for many years too.



On page one there is a picture of a standard K6 telephone box at Malborough. These were designed by Sir Gilbert Scott who designed St. Pancras Station, and the church at nearby Galmpton too.

• Post Boxes

Pillar boxes in towns were introduced in the 1850's. In 1857 smaller letter boxes were tried



out in some villages in Plymouth by the Surveyor of the Western District of England. None survive but you might spot one in an archive photograph of your village.



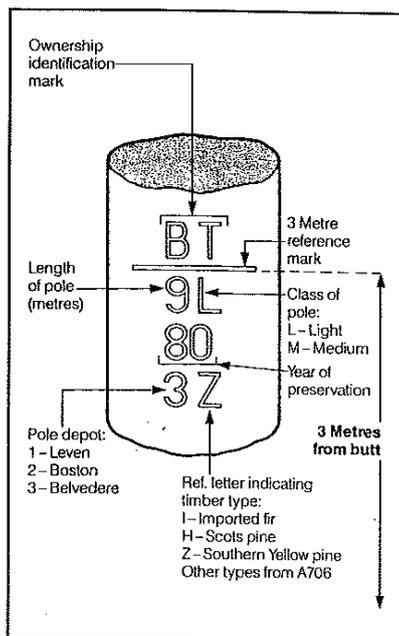
This elegantly pointed finialled telegraph pole in Yealmpton is the last survivor of what was once a whole row along Chapel Lane (left).

The poles also used to carry red and white plaques with the initials PME on them. This stood for Primitive Multiple Earthing – but things have been made safer now.

Examples of the standard Victorian wall box are easy to find (e.g. top left, at Dartmouth) after all she reigned for a very long time but Edwardian ones are few and far between.



This Ludlow style box with an enamel plate shows the royal cipher for George VI but after 1952 the design changed. The 'Telegraph from here' sign is also a rarity. (Left, both at Bantham.)

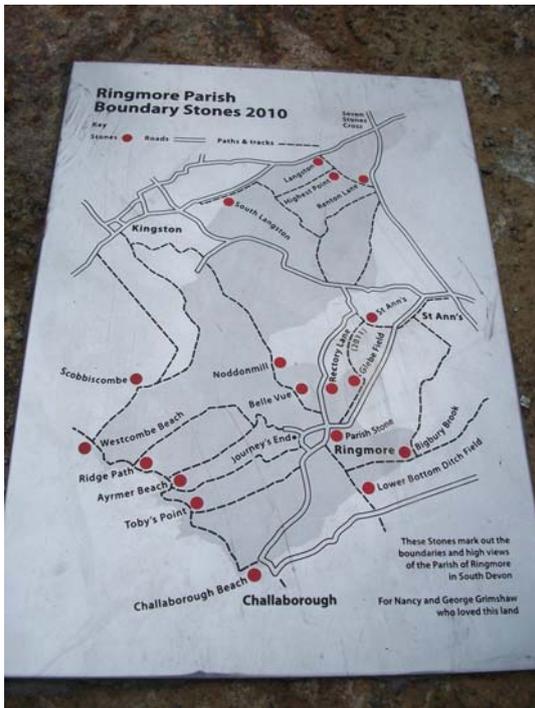


The information cut into a telegraph pole can be decoded if you know how (above).

Look out for a surviving small rounded lamp box in the AONB towards Plymouth.

- **Boundary Stones**

Parish and District boundary stones, such as one at the boundary of Malborough and Salcombe (**left**) can still be found along rural roads and in towns. Many are celebrated in 'Beating of the Bounds' ceremonies. The community came out for the whole day to trace the boundaries and, reputedly, hold a child upside down over the stones and lower him or her down so that they would remember their whereabouts for the next generation.

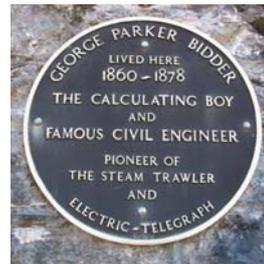
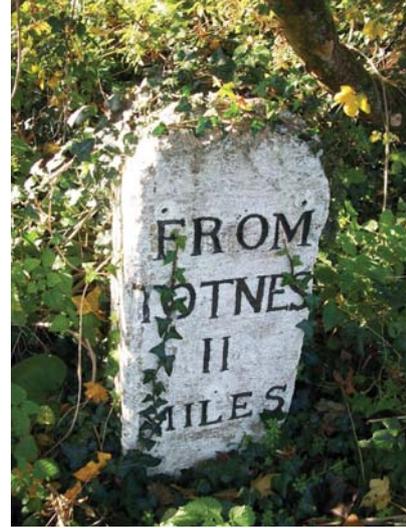


This excellent map (**above**), riveted to a stone opposite the church, shows you where to look for the boundary stones in Ringmore.

- **Commemorative plaques and crosses**

There are a lot of commemorative plaques and descriptive plaques within the AONB, commemorating writers and dignitaries. The many War Memorials merit a separate study so please refer to Todd Gray's book 'Lest Devon Forget.'

The Wayside Travellers Cross at Newton Ferrers is well preserved *in situ*. Has it always been there?



**Left – the Bidder plaque, Dartmouth
Right – Cross at Newton Ferrers**

- **Stone Walling – Fencing – Gateposts**

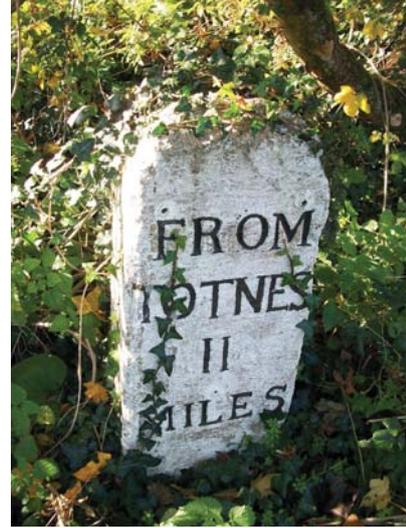
There is a variety of pavement and kerb materials to be found beneath your feet mostly using locally quarried stones.



Left - Angbow gatepost, Yealmpton; Right - Pink Marble walling from Kitley quarries

Out of the towns and villages there are many stretches of stone walling to be admired whether they be as shown (**below**) in the Ditching style to the left and Devon to the right.





Magnificent slabs of slate, known as 'shiners' line the hedgerows in Stokenham **(below)**.



These plaques bring back the age of steam when rollers came to work in the fields on a seasonal basis; but how frustrating must it have been to have to go back and get your written permission to cross the bridge if you had forgotten it. More plaques like this can be found in Modbury and South Milton. The only bridge which carries a date plaque is to be found on the Gara at Bow in Blackawton Parish, (SX807494). It is difficult to read but carries two dates 1687 and widened 1862 by the County.

- **Directional Posts**

The Great Turnpike Act of 1778 introduced 'posts with wings', now called finger posts.

- **Fords and Bridges**

The AONB has five rivers passing through its landscape crossed by bridges both great and small.



'C' stone at Yealmpton

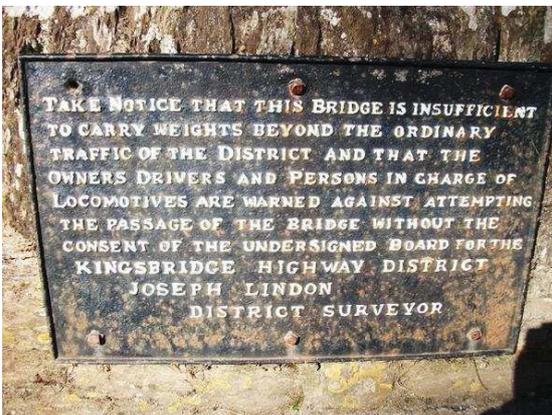
These 'C' stones can be found a hundred yards from the centre of an important bridge and indicate that they were to be maintained by the parish or county after the Dissolution of the

Monasteries by Henry VIII. Before this time it was the responsibility of the church to keep the roads open and repair bridges.



Yealmpton finger post

Since then there have been many variations in design and Devon once boasted 40 different kinds. The 1964 Worboys Report was the first attempt to bring the UK into line with European regulations for signposting. At least we still can boast that crossroads and junctions have their own names.

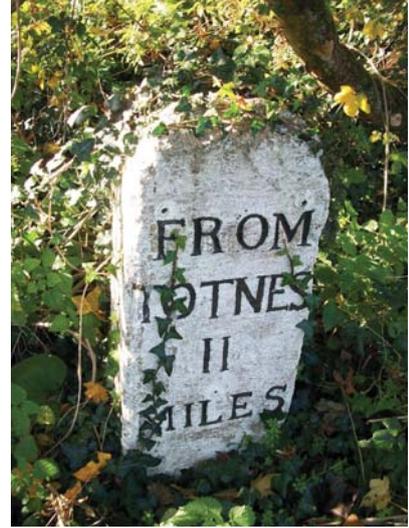


South Pool bridge plaque



Kingston road triangle

Because of the nature of roads in the AONB there are very few road triangles such as shown on the left.



• Anomalies

There are many items of street furniture and highway history which do not fit into any of these categories. There are those connected with the steam railway age and the now closed branch lines at Yealmpton and Kingsbridge. There are gate pillars, rows of Fletton bricks, boundary markers, and cast iron seat ends to be discovered. Railway enthusiasts will readily record these; but the ash recesses, sandstone pillars, red reflector discs, Ordnance Survey bench marks carved on bridges and stiles, Lord Revelstoke's numbered posts on his carriage run at Newton Ferrers are less sought after.

Then there are the anomalies such as the slaughterhouse stone at Yealmpton (**below left**) and the Dunstone Cross statue (**right**).



Where can I see a cluster of highway monuments in one place?

The back streets of Dartmouth give a good opportunity to study a variety of highway monuments.

WHAT CAN WE DO IN OUR PATCH?

Have a look round your local area. Use the **highway history check list** to make an inventory of what you have in your parish. You could get your local history society involved. Then if a monument is looking sadly neglected why not adopt it, scrub it up and give it a coat of paint.

Tollhouses in the AONB

- Dunstone Toll Hut SX594521 on the A379, a rarity, belonged to the Modbury Trust
- Ermington SX639530 on the A3121, belonged to the Modbury Trust.(1859-1879)
- Gara Bridge Toll House SX729534
- Goutford Cross SX631519 c. 1823
- Milton Toll House, SX866509
- Nethway SX898528 on the B3205, belonged to the Newton Abbot to Kingswear Trust
- Prigdon Hill SX654610 Standing on minor road back to Bigbury, belonged to the Kingsbridge Trust, built c.1827
- Stoliford SX664510, 1828, on the A379 belonged to the Kingsbridge Trust
- Strete Gate, SX838464
- Swannaton Toll House SX86950, c. 1824 on the A379
- Townstal SX867514, c.1825
- Torcross SX813427 on the A379, belonged to the Kingsbridge Trust
- Yealm Bridge SX591519, 1809, on the A379. Belonged to Modbury Trust

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