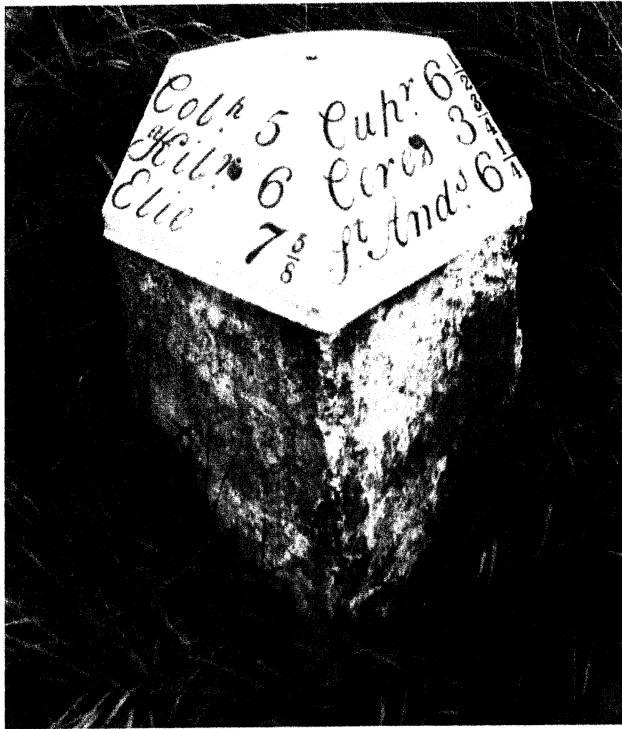
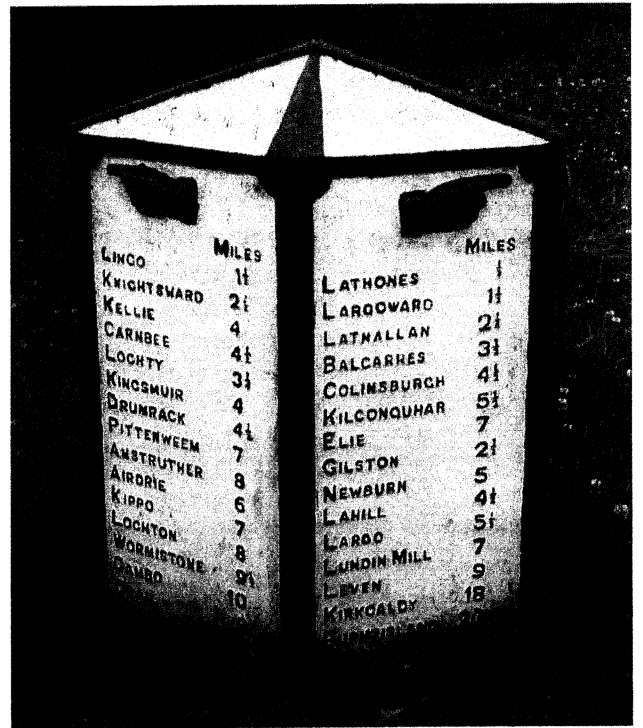
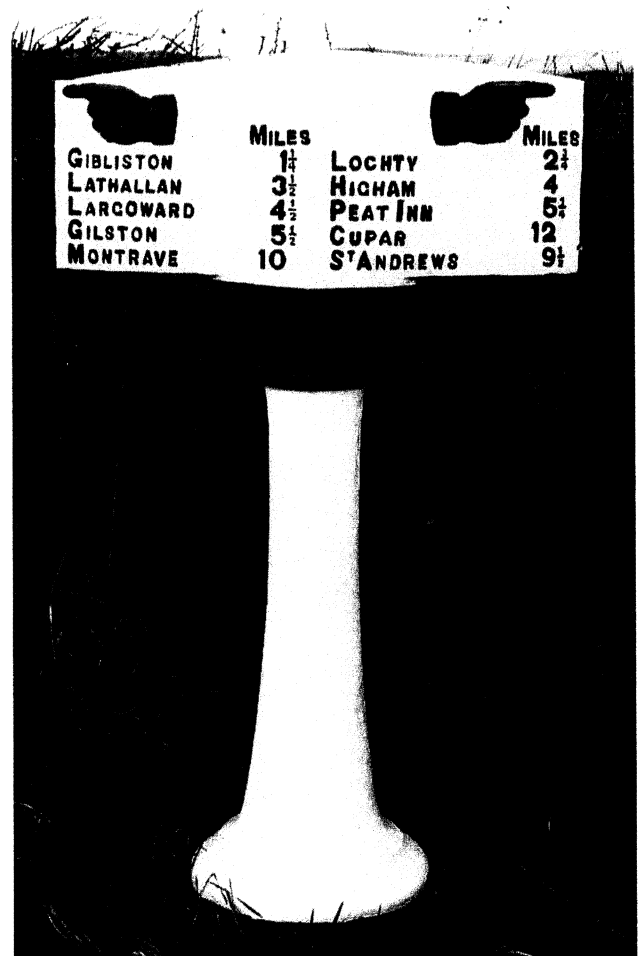




Illus 1 Typical Fife milestone, showing abbreviations and fractions on cap.



Illus 2 Restored marker at Higham Toll.



Illus 3 Guidepost at Arncroach—recently believed stolen.

East Neuk milestones—a personal view

Alex Darwood

The Kingdom of Fife probably has more surviving milestones than any other part of the country. The historic and aesthetic importance of these remarkable old highway guides, of which there is a particular proliferation in the East Neuk, should not be underestimated and their preservation and maintenance should be actively promoted.

In the eighteenth century roads in Fife were, if at all, very poorly maintained. During the winter they were hazardous and often impassable and it was not uncommon for travellers to lose their lives on relatively short journeys. Towards the end of the century many turn-pike roads began to appear and toll houses were erected. The money charged for the use of the roads went towards their development and upkeep. Various acts of parliament were passed making it obligatory to appoint trusts to maintain roads and bridges and ultimately to provide direction markers on roads and at junctions. Three main types of direction marker were erected in Fife, namely milestones, markers and guide posts. Milestones are of whinstone with a cast iron cap, and were produced in a variety of styles and sizes although generally the stone was two to three feet above the road surface. The place-names appear in a clear, 'hand written' style and sometimes were abbreviated due to lack of space. The abbreviations are perhaps not always easily identifiable unless the reader has a familiarity with Fife names. For example, L is Largo Pier and BI is Burntisland. An unusual marker in Kilconquhar on the churchyard wall bears the legend "Kilconquhar 0 miles", perhaps portraying a sense of humour on the part of the inscriber. An interesting feature of the milestones is the use of fractions, including halves, quarters and eighths to indicate distance (Illus 1).

Markers are made of cast iron and contain the names of farms as well as places. Some have hands, painted black, pointing the way (Illus 2). There are good examples of markers at Higham (Heecham) Toll, St Andrews, Crail and near Kellie Castle.

Milestone caps (Illus 1) along with the cast iron markers were manufactured at various foundries including St Andrews, Kirkcaldy (Russells of Kirk Wynd) and Cupar (Robert Douglas). The latter was the son of the minister of Kilbarchan in Renfrew and came to Cupar as a young man to start an engineering works in the mid nineteenth century, later moving to Kirkcaldy.

Guideposts are an unusual type of milestone that can still be seen in Fife although the best example near Arncroach has recently been stolen (Illus 3). Similarly to the markers guideposts also have painted hands that point the way.

At the start of the second world war the government ordered that all direction markers throughout the country were to be removed in case of invasion. In many parts of the country they were destroyed or mutilated. In Fife however, the then County Surveyor Mr Tom McCallum decided to save the metal caps and markers and they were replaced after hostilities ended. At that time also Professor Allan and students at the Physics Department of St Andrews University, to their credit, carried out restoration work on milestones.

My own interest in milestones began as a small boy in the nineteen twenties when I sat, watching the world go by, on a milestone in the garden of the aptly named Milestone House in Wemyss. In 1989 I undertook a photographic survey of milestones for the East Neuk Preservation Society and as a result of this work several were restored and a programme of maintenance agreed by the then Fife Regional Council. Increasingly however, these milestones are under threat from the construction of new roads and building developments, from increasingly large lorries and farm vehicles and from souvenir hunters and collectors.

In recent years there have been successes and failures in the attempt to save and protect milestones. For example, I learned that the milestone at Abercrombie had been missing for about thirty years but recognised its cap surviving in a garden rockery in St Monans. The house owner agreed to the cap's return to its rightful place and this was achieved by a generous donation enabling a new stone to be cut by the sculptor J Y Thomson of Leven. In similar circumstances a milestone missing from Anstruther for twenty five years was replaced but the stone was subsequently uprooted by a car and the cap has not been seen since. In two other cases however, where milestones were uprooted by lorries or cars the caps were saved and the milestones restored.

Preservation of the milestones is an ongoing challenge and is becoming more and more urgent. As more people become aware of the milestones then the greater their chance of survival. There are however some important issues to be considered for the future, not least to decide what action is required and by whom? Should missing caps be replaced if found or should they be kept in museums? Perhaps appropriate organisations in Fife might take the initiative by jointly co-ordinating the debate and subsequent action. With this latter thought in mind the author is in the process of setting a conservation group in Fife with the express aim of ensuring that these milestones are protected. I hope very much that this short, personal article will stimulate and broaden interest in an important and fascinating part of Fife's heritage which we must hand on to those who follow us.

Abstract

The survival of this important group of waymarkers is discussed and suggestions made for their continued protection.

Keywords

East Neuk
guideposts
milestones