

Milestones and Wayside Markers in Fife

by *Walter M. Stephen*

Few Scottish counties have so many types of milestones and wayside markers as Fife, or so many actual survivals. In total, there remain 148 complete milestones, 28 stones without their cast iron tops, and 11 wayside markers at road junctions. Not all of these are indicated on Ordnance Survey maps. The purpose of this account is to enumerate and describe the various types; in addition, an attempt will be made, in those few cases where the name of the manufacturer is given, to give some of the background details of their provenance.

An examination of the individual reports of the Old Statistical Account indicates that, although the machinery for the provision of good roads existed on paper,¹ its operation was confined to a few areas of the county.² Real progress began in 1790³ and from that date many lines of road were turnpiked and their surfaces improved. Legislation ensured the proliferation of trusts until, in 1841, 23 bodies were responsible for the upkeep and administration of roads and bridges wholly or partly in the county of Fife. There were four statute labour bodies, five bodies concerned with bridges and fourteen turnpike trusts.⁴ The Fife Statute Labour Acts of 1797 and 1807 provided the trustees might erect milestones,⁵ while the General Turnpike Act of 1831 stipulated that milestones and direction-posts were to be erected.⁶

The surviving milestones are to be found along the former turnpike roads, while the wayside markers are confined to the St Andrews District of the Fife Turnpikes and are situated at the junctions of turnpike roads or of turnpike road with statute labour road. Bench marks are to be noted on many milestones.

MILESTONES

Fig. 1 shows the lines of road along which milestones are now to be found, complete milestones being shown by a short bar on the appropriate side of the road. There is clearly a marked contrast between the mainly rural north and east of the county and the urban and industrial south and west. Generally speaking, milestones are to be found on the same side of the road throughout the length of that road, as between Cupar and Kirkcaldy (A92); in two cases, however, the milestones change from one side of the road to the other and then change back. The first three milestones from Crail along the B940 to Cupar are on the S. side of the road, the next ten are on the N. side and the last three milestones are once more on the south. From Kirkcaldy to Dunfermline (B925–A907) the first two milestones are N. of the road, the next two are on the S. side and three more are again N. of the road. The unclassified road between Strathkinness and Peat Inn has two

¹ 26 Geo. II, cap. 91 and 12 Geo. III, cap. 83.

² For example, *Stat. Acct.*, x, 513 (Inverkeithing – ‘well made’); iv, 329 (Aberdour – ‘generally bad’); ii, 411 (Culter – ‘nearly in a state of nature’); i, 451 (Auchterderran – ‘inaccessible on the north for six months in the year’).

³ 30 Geo. III, cap. 93.

⁴ William Pagan, *Road Reform* (Edinburgh, 1845), 105–60.

⁵ 37 Geo. III, cap. 52, section LIV and 47 Geo. III, cap. 12, section lxvii.

⁶ 1 and 2 Will. IV, cap. 43, section xciii.

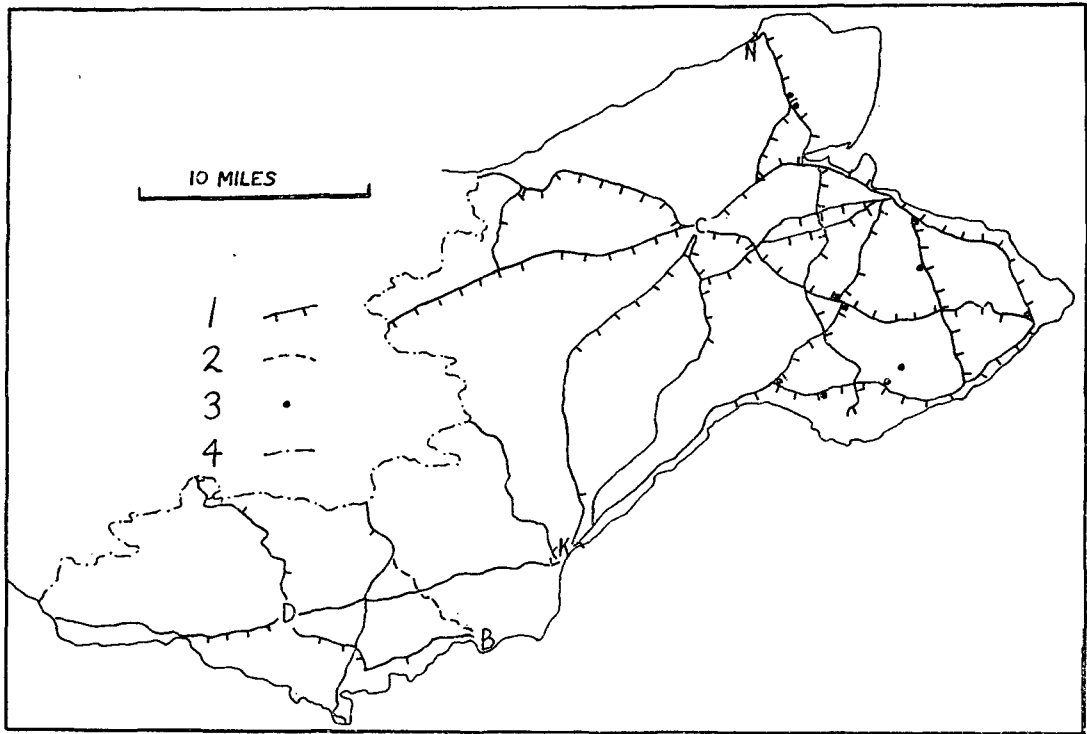


FIG. 1. Complete milestones in Fife. Legend:

1. Road with complete milestone shown by bar. 2. Road with incomplete milestones only. 3. Wayside marker. 4. County boundary. B - Burntisland. C - Cupar. D - Dunfermline. K - Kirkcaldy. N - Newport.

separate milestones on the opposite side of the road from all the others. The writer has been unable to find any explanation for these anomalies, except perhaps mistakes in casting the indicator plates. The changes certainly do not occur at trust, or even parish, boundaries.

The commonest type of milestone by far (Type A) is shown on Pl. 20a. No fewer than ninety-one complete examples remain and there are twenty-one without tops; they are to be found along thirteen roads in all districts of the county. Height above ground level varies according to the extent to which the road has been built up, but is not above 3 ft. The cross-section of the stone is square, with a 16-in. side; the corner away from the road is rounded. The cast-iron plate is made in one piece and is secured to leaded holes in the stone by two flat-headed screws. Distances are given in miles and eighths while the need to fit six names into two faces measuring 10 by 8½ in. each means that abbreviation is necessary. In the example illustrated the places named are Kirkcaldy, Dysart, Burntisland, Leslie, Lochgelly and Auchterderran. Other abbreviations found are Ken (Kennoway), Coln^h (Colinsburgh) and Kil^f (Kilconquhar). The milestones of the Cupar-Craik road noted above differ slightly from all others of the type in having a 2 in. figure on the top surface, this figure being the distance in miles from Craik.

The stones are made of tough whinstone and are virtually indestructible. It was not possible to examine an excavated stone in the course of the survey but details have been obtained of a milestone excavated during road widening on A6 near Bamber Bridge, Lancashire, in October 1962.¹ Above ground the stone was 22 in. high, with a breadth and thickness of 13 and 6 in. respectively - roughly one-sixth of the volume above ground of a Type A stone. The total length

¹ The writer is indebted to Mr Ian McNeil, Helensburgh, for this information.

of the stone was 6 ft. 2 in. and 4 ft. from the top the stone thickened out to form a kind of Indian club of cross-section 18 by 14 in. The estimated weight was 1,000 lb.

Three other types are variations on Type A. Type B, illustrated on Pl. 20b, is of the same dimensions and shape as Type A, save that the corner of the stone furthest from the road has become more rounded. The principal difference lies in the Roman capitals of the town names, and in the restriction of these to principal towns only. This type is confined to the A913 Cupar–Perth road (Fife Turnpikes, Cupar District). There are nine complete examples and one incomplete example. Types C and D have lettering similar in style to Type B, the stones are smaller with sides of only 12 in. across. Type C, with thirteen complete and one incomplete examples, is found on the A91 Cupar–Kinross road. The panels are inscribed ‘To Kinross 13 To Cupar 6’. Type D differs only in minor details of letter and figure proportion, the inscription reads, ‘To Auchty 2, to Newb^{gh} 3³’. Only two complete examples survive on the A983 Auchtermuchty–Newburgh road of the former Auchtermuchty and Pitcairly Road trust.

Details of the manufacture of these milestones have not been found, but it may not be without significance that one J. Alexander prepared a Plan of Roads of Cupar District in 1832¹ and by 1841 was Surveyor of Cupar District Statute Labour, Cupar District turnpikes, Cupar and Kinross Road and Auchtermuchty and Pitcairly Road, at a total salary of £150, later increased to £200.²

Type E, shown on Pl. 20c, has only one complete survival, at NT 153935 on A90, and three stones without tops. The overall height of the milestone is 33 in., the sides are 13 in. long and the two sides of the pillar away from the road are rounded so that the pillar, in plan, approaches a quarter-circle. The inscription ‘KIN. 6 N.F. 10’ reflects the importance of this former Great North Road from the North Ferry at Queensferry to Perth, by way of Kinross. The toll-houses on this road at Friarton (NO 119213) and Gairney Bridge (NO 128988) were each rented for over a thousand pounds in 1841.³

Two incomplete stones are to be found on the A909 between Cowdenbeath and Burntisland at NT 236861 and NT 179900. The original line of road from Burntisland inland undulated across the dominant E.–W. ridges of south Fife. It survives today in stretches of road, metalled and unmetalled, in muddy footpaths or as a broad strip between field-walls. The Pilkham Hills (NT 1889) at a height of 600 ft. O.D. are attained by a steep climb of 1 in 15. The A909 follows the line of the new road of 1840–2, built to serve the new deep-water pier at Burntisland. This route is no shorter but by sweeping curves, a 700 yds. long embankment and a 250 yds. cutting the maximum gradient is kept at 1 in 30 and the highest point attained is 527 ft. O.D.

Seven examples of Type F remain along two roads (B 916 and A994) formerly in, respectively, Aberdour and Duloch Trust and Dunfermline General District Trust. Projecting 2 ft. from ground level, they are square in plan with 12 in. sides. The abbreviated inscription is cut in block capitals on the angled panels. The example shown on Pl. 20d reads ‘DUNFER^e 2 ABER^r 5½ B^t I^d 8¾’, and was seen at NT 115862. The place-names are, respectively, Dunfermline, Aberdour and Burntisland.

Two sets of cast-iron milestones are to be seen in Fife. Forming a fine sequence along the ‘great road through Fife’ (A91–A92) are the milestones of Type G (Pl. 21a). These measure 3 ft. in height, 2 ft. in breadth with a 4-in. deep edge. The face has a slightly convex curve and the lettering is very clear, giving distances in complete miles to Pettycur, New Inn, Cupar and Newport, the first and last being the ferry ports for the passages over the Firths of Forth and Tay respectively. Nineteen complete milestones mark the 20 miles of road between Newport and New

¹ Held by County Surveyor, Fife County Council.

³ Pagan, *op. cit.*, 158.

² Pagan, *op. cit.*, 105–7, 124–8, 150–5.

Inn (NO 285050), the toll-bar at the boundary between the Cupar and Kirkcaldy Districts. The missing milestone stands in the garden of a house in Pollokshields, Glasgow, having been purchased 'many years ago' from a Cupar scrap-merchant.¹

The scroll-top of each milestone bears the inscription 'Alex' Russell Kirkcaldy Foundry 1824'. Russell's foundry in Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy, carried on a flourishing trade in cast-iron goods from the beginning of the nineteenth century. On 24th November 1832 the *Myrtle* unloaded 36 iron plates from Glasgow at Kirkcaldy harbour for Russell; the *Eliza Burns* on 12th December brought '1 cask lead, 32 bags shot, 40 kegs paint, 21 beams, 40 sock moulds and 6 anvils' from Newcastle.² At a later period, Russell's ran their own copper-bottomed clipper schooners of 150 tons, *Gazelle* and *Aletta*, before failing in 1850.³

South of New Inn there remain only one complete milestone (at NT 293957) and the stone housings for two others. Superficially, the complete milestone resembles the series N. of New Inn but, instead of Pettycur, the distance to Burntisland is shown. The inscription is 'J.B. & Co. 1844'. The change in destination and in manufacture reflects a startling change in the fortunes of the Forth ferry ports. Steamers were introduced on the passages about 1821; the early 1840s saw the completion of Granton pier and a deep-water pier at Burntisland, while in the years 1842-3 the beautifully-graded coast road between Kinghorn and Burntisland was constructed. The supremacy of Burntisland over Pettycur was confirmed when the North British Railway Company acquired the ferry rights and Burntisland pier in 1849, to run the world's first train ferry from 1850.⁴ The eclipse of Pettycur was complete.

'J. B. & Co.' probably refers to James Brown of Kirkcaldy. The firm was founded in 1791 when Brown, an Auchtertool millwright whose ancestors had preceded him in the occupation for generations, moved the 4 miles to Kirkcaldy to begin business in premises near the shore. Two new developments occurred in 1828, the casting of iron was begun and the first Kirkcaldy-built steam-engine was installed, a 6 h.p. unit used for driving lathes and other machines in the foundry - still in operation in 1872.⁵ The above-mentioned *Myrtle* also brought 40 tons of pig iron from Glasgow for Brown's. The enterprise thrived, expanding to new premises and specialising in printing presses, agricultural machinery and machinery for the local potteries, before ceasing to operate because of the First World War.

Pl. 21b shows the other cast-iron milestones type, Type H, with five survivals on the A823, one of the roads of the former Outh and Nivingston Trust. This is a free-standing milestone 3 ft. in height above ground level, with a maximum overall breadth of 21 in. The example illustrated has been broken at the supporting pillar and repaired with cement. The indicator panels show the distance to Dunfermline and Rumbling Bridge, moulders' numbers can be traced on the reverse side of the panels and on the base just above ground level is the inscription 'Bonnybridge Foundry'.

The firm of Smith and Wellstood was founded in 1858, specialising in American free-standing stoves; in 1860 a foundry was set up in Bonnybridge, making stove parts and castings for Singer sewing machines. The foundry manager, George Ure, founded the Bonnybridge Foundry to concentrate on sewing-machine castings but in 1890 the foundry was amalgamated with Smith and Wellstood. An undated catalogue held by Smith and Wellstood (Mfg.) Ltd. shows an example of Type H, priced at '44 shillings each, plus one penny additional for each Letter and Figure on Direction Plates'. The illustration shows that the section of the milepost below ground was 18 in.

¹ The writer would like to express his gratitude to Professor S. G. E. Lythe, University of Strathclyde, for this item of information.

² Kirkcaldy Harbour Records, 1832-4; manuscript.

³ John Bryson, *Industries of Kirkcaldy and District* (Kirkcaldy, 1872), 93.

⁴ G. W. Ballingall, *Historical Collections regarding the Royal Burgh and Parish of Kinghorn* (Kirkcaldy, 1893), 20-2.

⁵ Bryson, op. cit., 93-5.

long. The catalogue states that the standard types of milestone were 'nicely Painted and Stove Dried, and the Letters, which are Raised, are picked out in white on a black ground'. Obviously the colour scheme has been reversed for the remaining milestones.¹ These milestones are not shown on the First Edition of the Ordnance Survey 6-inch map of 1855, showing their late manufacture.

WAYSIDE MARKERS

Wayside marker is the term used to describe the ten cast-iron indicators of four types confined to road junctions in the St Andrews District of the Fife Turnpikes. The cast-iron plates are fastened to their stone backing with iron clips, with one free-standing plate supported from behind by an iron bracket sunk in stone.

Two markers exist as Type I, at NO 524153 and NO 608083, headed respectively 'St. Andrews' and 'Crail'. Both are 3 ft. high, 1 ft. 11 in. across and 4 in. in depth. They stand at Y-junctions and the left and right sides give the names of farms, villages and towns along each road in order. In Pl. 21c the places on or near the A918 appear on the left panel and those accessible from A959 on the right. 'Robert Douglas, Engineer, Cupar' is the legend along the top. Douglas was born at the Manse, Kilbarchan, Renfrewshire, in 1822 and set up business in Cupar in 1846 or 1847. Douglas moved to Kirkcaldy in 1855; beginning by manufacturing shot and shell during the Crimean War, he branched into the construction of paper-mill machinery, steam engines and, by the early 'sixties, Corliss engines.²

A visit to Calcutta by Douglas led to the development of rice-milling machinery. A partnership with Lewis Grant was formed in 1873 and under the name of Lewis C. Grant Ltd., the enterprise founded by Douglas continues to manufacture rice-milling machinery and grain dryers, giving employment to some eighty men.

Type J has three examples, 3 ft. high, 2 ft. 6 in. across and 11 in. in depth. The example on Pl. 21d stands at NO 509037 and, as with Type I, the panels indicate settlements lying along each road. A refinement made possible by the broader panel is the indication of whether a settlement is left or right of the chosen road. Two sizes of name are used to stress larger settlements.

Type K, illustrated in Pl. 22b, has five handsome examples remaining. These are 3 ft. 6 in. in height, 2 ft. 9 in. across and 9 in. deep. The panels measure 3 ft. 3 in. by 1 ft. 5 in., and, as with the previous two types, each panel shows places which can be reached from the chosen road. Distances are given in miles and quarters and a pointing hand completes each panel. 'St. Andrews Foundry' is given as the place of manufacture. This is listed under the name of 'David Blyth' in incomplete series of local directories between 1872 and 1928.³ The only other products of this foundry known to the writer are the metal parts in a blacksmith's forge at Kilrie (NT 246894).

Type L is shown in Pl. 22a and has a solitary example at NO 439233 on A92. At the roadside is the bulky freestone housing, 5 ft. in height above the road surface, 4 ft. across and 2 ft. 6 in. deep with a coping to protect the indicator plates. These are 2 ft. high with an overall breadth of 3 ft., each plate has a slightly curved face and is fastened to the stone structure by four bolts.

Without any evidence of manufacture or dating definite assertions are dangerous, but it seems possible that this plate may reflect a struggle for supremacy between Woodhaven and Newport similar to that between Pettycur and Burntisland. The construction of a new turnpike road from Woodhaven S. to Cupar via St Michael's Inn (NO 442228) in 1790 gave the lead to

¹ Information kindly supplied by Miss Liversidge, County Librarian, Stirling, and Smith and Wellstood (Mfg.) Ltd., Bonnybridge.

² Bryson, *op. cit.*, 96.

³ *Fife and Kinross Register* (Cupar, 1872) to *Fife and Kinross Trades Directory* (Edinburgh, 1928).

Woodhaven. The line of the present A92 from Newport to St Michael's Inn was laid down in 1806 giving an easier route to the S., and in 1822 the ferry traffic was concentrated at Newport.¹ The wayside marker under discussion is at the junction of the (unclassified) Woodhaven road and the later Newport road; it is suggested that the marker may have been installed in an attempt to steer traffic towards Newport rather than Woodhaven.

PRESERVATION

Finally, it would be appropriate to consider the question of the survival and preservation of the fine selection of milestones and markers displayed in Fife.² During the Second World War the tops were removed but were replaced after the cessation of hostilities. The milestones with carved inscriptions were dug up and taken into the Roads Depots, instead of being defaced, as in many other areas. Again these were reinstated after the war. The County Surveyor, Mr T. McCallum, takes pride in the county's milestones – which still, of course, serve a useful purpose. The Divisional Surveyors have instructions that painting be carried out when required and maintenance be given regularly. Nevertheless, it is a subject for concern that, even over the period of this survey, milestone tops have been removed by vandals or souvenir hunters.

¹ *NSA*, ix, 512-3.

² A complete list of milestones and markers, with Grid

References and records of inscriptions, has been lodged with Fife County Library, Kirkcaldy.



a Type A



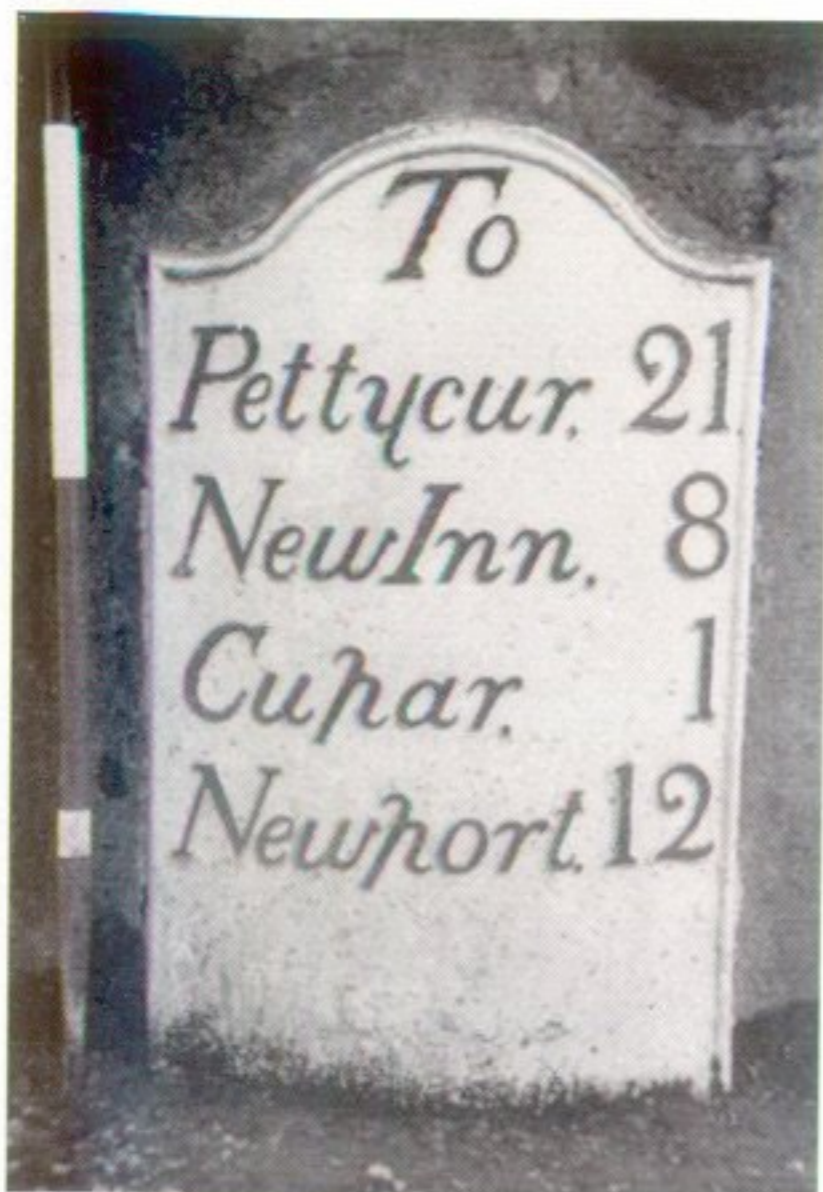
b Type B



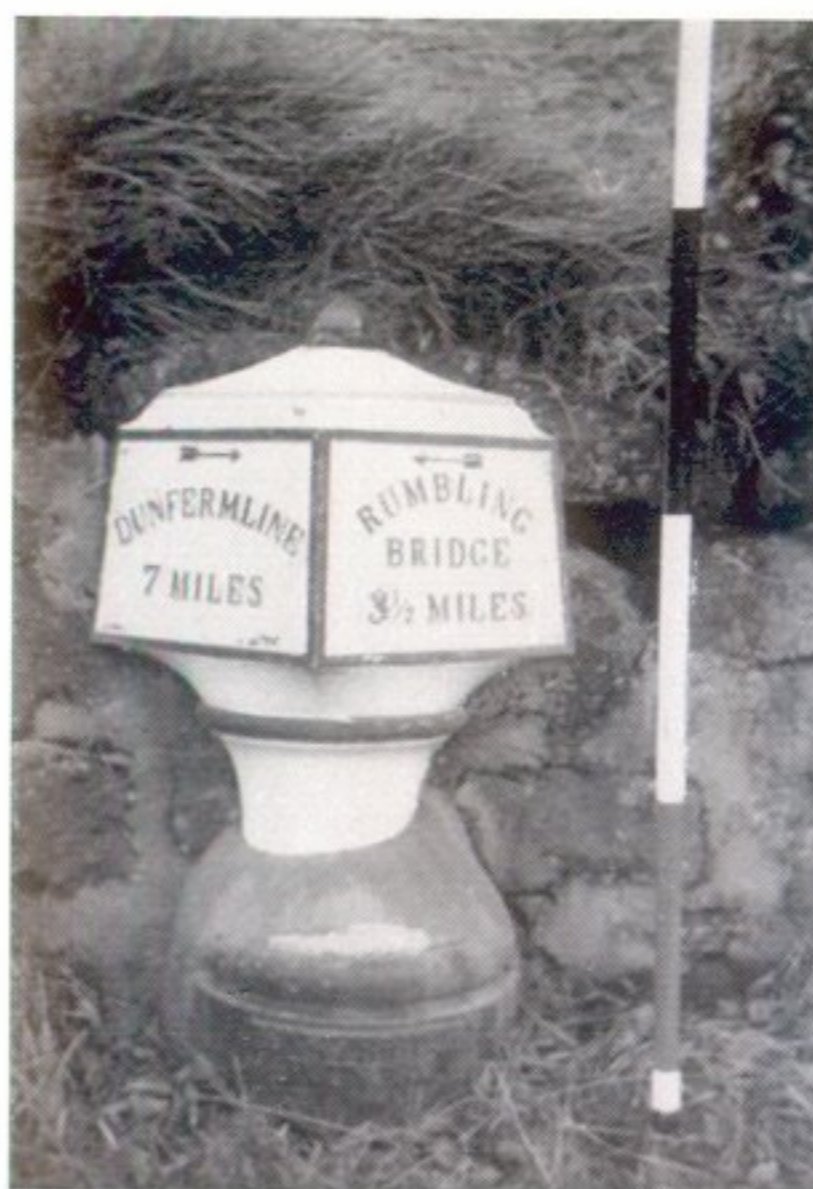
c Type E



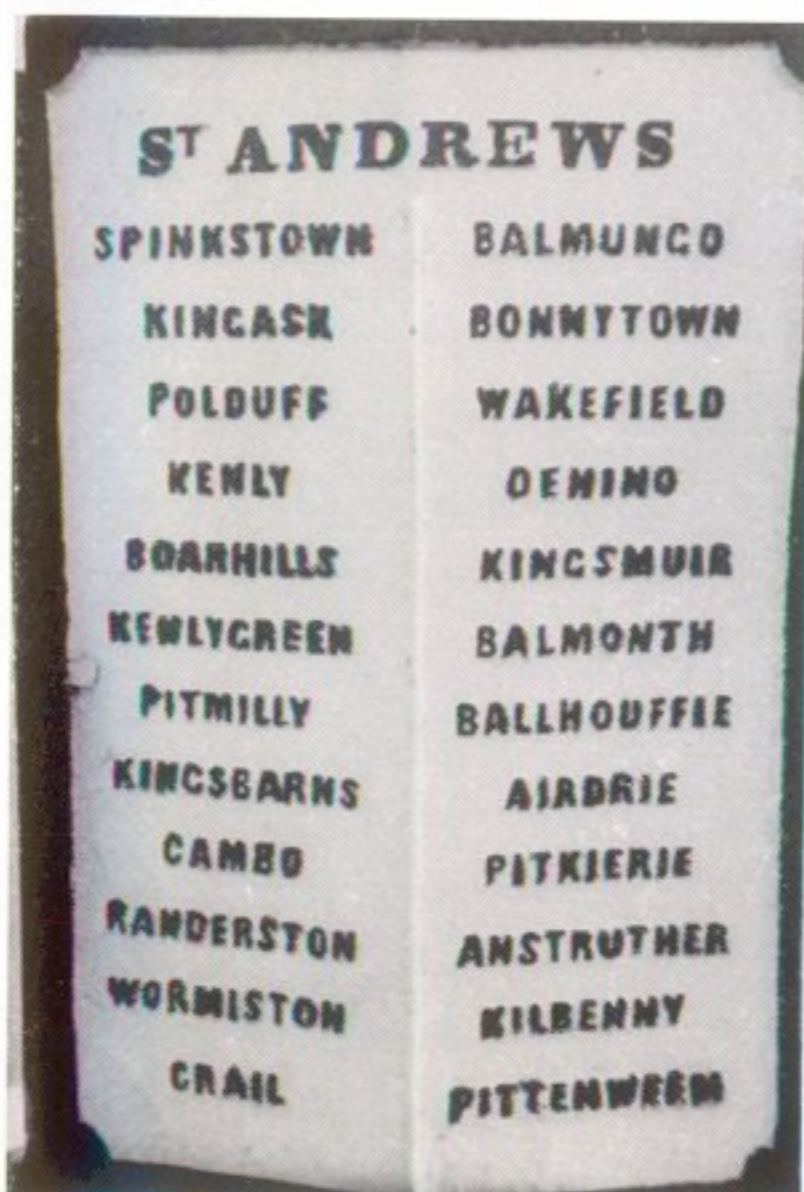
d Type F



a Type G



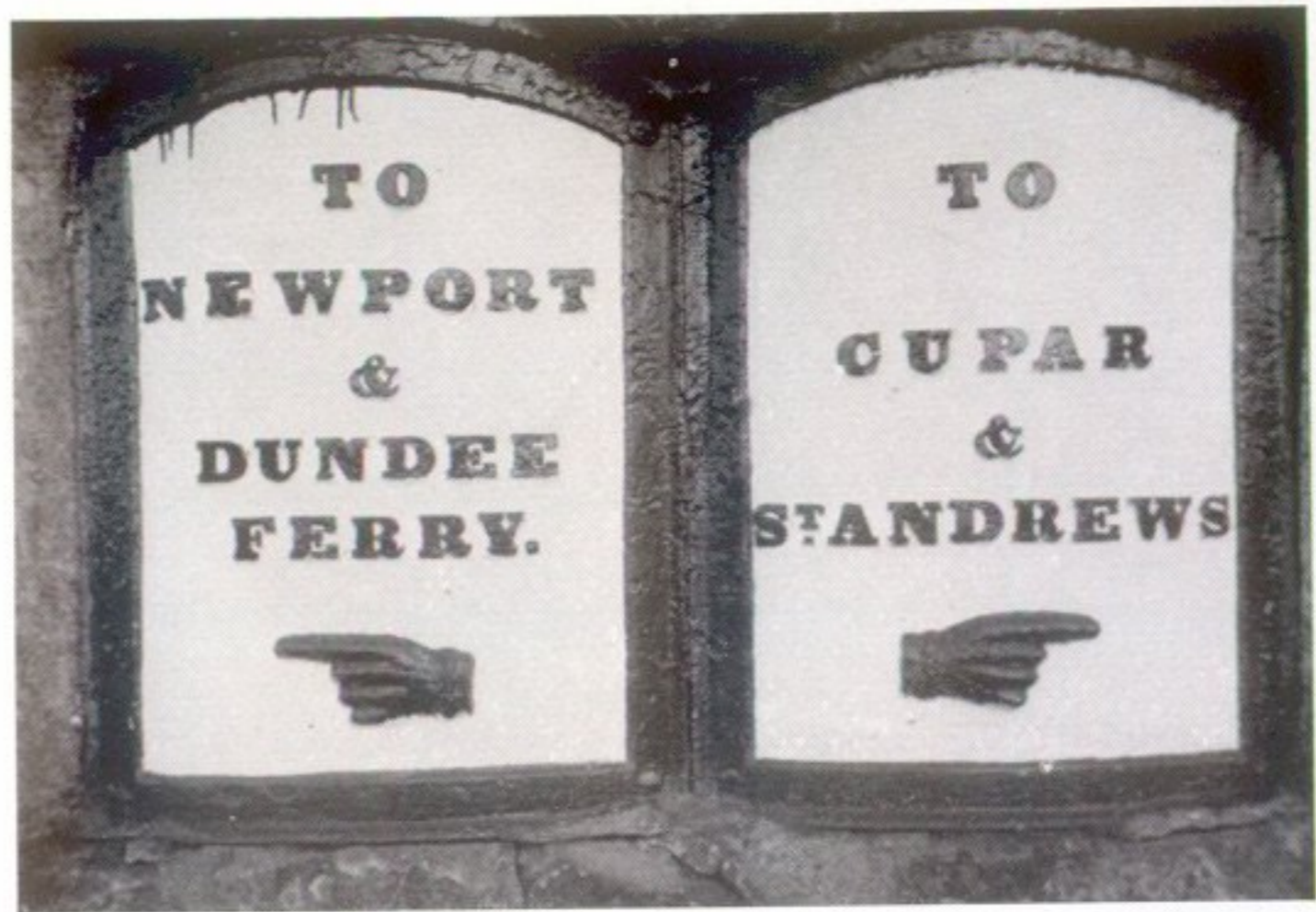
b Type H



c Type I



d Type J



a Type L



b Type K