

The Cricklestone and Thor's Stone: parish boundary markers on Thursley Common

Maps of Thursley Common (centred SU 910 420) based on pre-war surveys (eg OS 1:25,000, 1961), show that one short section of the boundary between the parishes of Thursley and Peper Harow was marked by a series of stones (shown as 'BS' on the maps). This portion of the boundary seems to form a distinct southerly extension to the parish of Peper Harow (fig 1). Most of the stones have now disappeared, either destroyed during military training in the Second World War or removed for use elsewhere at some other time. Two stones, however, still remain *in situ* and it has generally been assumed that one is the 'Thor's Stone' mentioned in Baring-Gould's novel *The Broom-squire* published in 1896, while the other is the one known locally as the 'Cricklestone' (Lasham 1895, 153).

Although a note has been published on the stones (Inwood 1955), there seems to have been confusion as to which stone was which, or whether both names were used to refer to the same stone. In recent years, even the location of the second of the boundary stones had been lost, as woodland has covered the area.

English Nature now manages the common and has commenced a programme of removing pine trees and stripping areas of topsoil to encourage the regeneration of the heathland. While admirable in every other way, this work caused slight concern, insofar as it might affect archaeological sites and in particular remove or damage the 'missing' boundary stone.

While there was no doubt as to the location of the first of the two stones — clearly visible at the corner of a boardwalk by Pudmore Pond (fig 1) — several site visits by the author failed to locate the second, despite its position being shown on earlier maps. Fortunately it proved possible to take Mr Inwood on to the common and, after an hour or so of searching, he managed to locate a large stone (SU 9133 4066), part of which just showed above the needle litter in a pine plantation. It lay about two-thirds of the way up the north face of the ridge that overlooks Ockley Common at this point and just to the east of a small gully that runs down the slope.

With the permission of English Nature, the overburden was cleared from a length of about 10m of the stone, which continued on eastwards under the needle litter for at least another 10m or so. It was soon apparent that, just as described by Mr Inwood in his note, the surface was covered by numerous graffiti (figs 2 and 3). Mr Inwood, in his paper, had also mentioned that local tradition held that it was lucky to carve one's initials on a first visit to the stone. The earliest date visible on the cleared section however, was 1919 and the latest appeared to have been cut by soldiers during the Second World War.

The stone itself, presumably unlike its now missing neighbours, turned out to be an entirely natural outcrop of the soft local sandstone, which just emerges from the hillside at this point. The exposed section of the stone rather resembled the back of a whale, with a curious ridge, possibly the origin of the name (see below), running along the length of its upper surface. At this point therefore, the parish boundary makes use of a distinctive natural feature, as indeed it does at other points along its length.

Having established the location of the second boundary stone, which lay at a point where the parish boundary doubled sharply back on itself, it remained to try and decide which, if either, of the two stones was the Cricklestone and which the Thor's Stone and indeed whether either name was of any antiquity or were rather the result of artistic licence by Baring-Gould and Lasham. In general, parish boundaries are likely to have been established by the 12th century (Blair 1991) and indeed elsewhere, the line partially follows the course of the much older boundary between the hundreds of Farnham and Godalming.

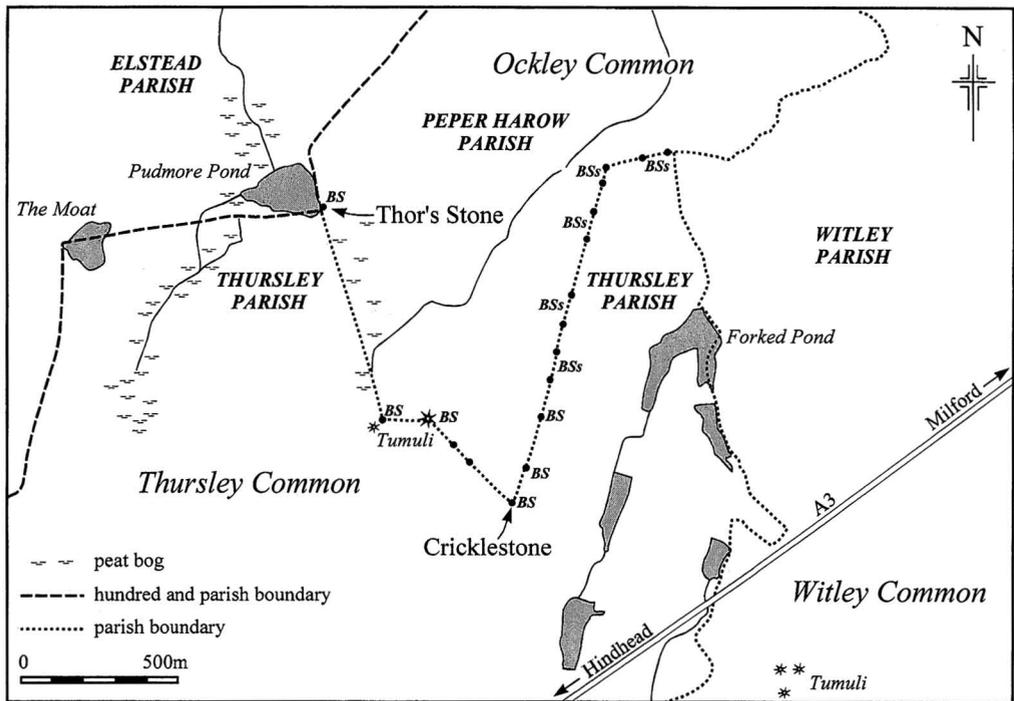


Fig 1 Thursley Common: location map. (Reproduced by kind permission of the Ordnance Survey, © Crown Copyright NC/01/24321)

This latter was described in a charter of Edward the Elder in AD909 (Sawyer 1968, no 823) and presumably followed the yet earlier boundary established by Caedwalla, king of Wessex, in AD685–8 (Sawyer 1968, no 235).

A search through documents held at the Surrey History Centre established that Thursley Common has a long history of peat cutting and that this had often conflicted with other interests, such as those of graziers. Indeed a document (SHC: G5/1/129) issued under the authority of Oliver Cromwell in 1657, during the period of the Commonwealth, had attempted to limit and regulate the amount of peat removed from the bog by commoners. Another document of 17th century date referred to the erection of a marker stone on the common, though the location of this was not given or else formed part of the text that had become illegible (SHC: G5/1/61). It is therefore possible that the curious southern extension marked by these stones was a result of a realignment of the boundary in the 17th century — possibly to reallocate the resources of the common, and particularly the peat, more fairly between the parishes. It is, however, equally possible that the stones were erected to delineate an existing boundary more clearly in an otherwise featureless area.

Most useful, however, was an entry in the records of the Court Baron dated 2 July 1767 (SHC: G53/106) describing the 'Bounds of the Manor of Pepperhara or otherwise Pepperharrow':

Also the homage aforesaid present the bounds of this Manor as follows (viz) from Norney Gate to Shackleford heath; across the heath to Maggot Lane End, from thence below the Blacksmith's shop to the left hand side of Mr Garthwaite's dry wall from thence to Addleford, from thence to Westmead then to Somerset Clappers into Royal Lane from thence to Hookley Corner, from thence across Pudmore by three posts and over the top of a round knob straight to Cricklestone; thence straight to two stones set up in the heath near Lower Hookley corner thence to Hartland Barrs and



Fig 2 Thursley Common:
graffiti on the
Cricklestone
(scale = 10cm)



Fig 3 Thursley Common: the
Cricklestone, 2000



Fig 4 Thursley Common:
‘Thor’s Stone’ in 1912.
(Photograph reproduced
courtesy of Haslemere
Museum)

by the north side of the stream to Bagmoor Corner; from thence across Royal Common under Lord Middleton’s hedge ...

This description of the boundary clearly establishes that the name ‘Cricklestone’ (from OE *cryc* meaning a ridge) pre-dates the 19th century. The name either refers to the ridge or step that runs along the surface of the stone or to the fact that the stone is located on a ridge — either would be appropriate. The boundary reference also fixes the location of the stone — the ‘round knob’ being the easternmost of the pair of barrows (SU 9108 4092) shown on older OS maps and the Cricklestone marking the southernmost point on the boundary. The large natural stone relocated by Mr Inwood and described above, is therefore the Cricklestone. Equally interesting is the fact that again, there are only two further marker stones mentioned on this section of the bounds, both coming after the reference to the Cricklestone. One of these latter may well be the one referred to in the document mentioned above, which describes the setting up of a marker stone on ‘the bounds of Thursley, Being showed so by our forefathers’ and dated 30 April 1638 (SHC: G5/1/61).

It will be noted that none of the other stones shown on the OS maps are referred to and it seems likely that all postdate 1767, including the sub-rectangular stone (fig 4) that still stands 1m high at the edge of the boardwalk by Pudmore Pond in the middle of Thursley bog. This stone is likely to have been Thor’s Stone and was almost certainly given its ‘romantic’ name in the late 19th century — probably by Baring-Gould himself, especially since it is not mentioned by Lasham (1895). Support for the conclusion that this is the case, is provided in *The Broom-squire* itself (Baring-Gould 1929, 137) when, in a scene set by the

stone, one of the characters, Ivor, 'sank over his knees in the mire'. The stone by Pudmore Pond is set in the bog and is the only one where this scene would be credible to anyone who knew the area.

The Cricklestone is now safe from unintentional damage and its future is as assured as that of its later neighbour — both important links to the history of Thursley Common.

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