

A walk round St Andrews

Friday 3 June 2011

The plan was to walk to each of the one mile milestones on the roads leading out of St Andrews and take photographs of the stones and their location. The OS map shows milestones on the Guardbridge road, Strathkinness Low Road, Hepburn Gardens, Largo Road and the Crail and Astruther road. I walked this route the previous week, but none of my photographs came out so I was having another try. The previous week had been good walking weather, but now it was too warm to be comfortable.

I went down through the car-park to Petheram Bridge and then out along the Guardbridge Road. There was not much shade on either side of the road. The cycle track and footpath are separated from the road, so I used the grass verge, which had recently been cut and was easy to walk on. The milestone is about ten minutes walk out along the road, beside an entrance to the golf course and opposite the drive leading to the new restaurant at Balgove. Lettering on this stone is in capitals, clear and sharp.

On the way back towards town there is a footpath leading off the road towards the North Haugh just before the roundabout. This took me to the right of the Gateway building towards the new construction work that is going on around the Purdie and BMS Buildings. I went up the steps beside the Purdie Building and then up the steep path to the Sports Centre. Just past the Centre is a straight path leading to David Russell Apartments, a student village, with the Strathkinness High Road beyond. There is a pool just at the entrance to the complex, stagnant and well on the way to drying up completely. Today the complex was almost deserted, but last week there were more students about, including a couple who, with a bicycle propped between them, were engaged in a lingering embrace. I noticed some of the names of the blocks of flats – Eden, Ruskin, Dover – and wondered how they had been chosen, since there had been no attempt to follow a single theme. Naming buildings and streets must be one of the most gratifying ways of exercising of power.

I walked a little way along the High Road to see if I could find a milestone there. There isn't one on the map, and the map is right, so I turned back to the point where the High Road and Low Road diverge. The milestone on the Low Road is just beyond the fork. The lettering here is upper case and quite clumsy with intrusive full-stops, and there are rust marks on the cast iron plate and staining the stone itself.

Going back towards town the Low Road becomes Buchanan Gardens, with substantial houses and well kept gardens, including one luxuriant honeysuckle. The gales at the beginning of last week brought down several trees, including one that came down across the road. The destruction was much in evidence last Friday; less so today. You soon come to Middleshade Road, which takes you across to Hepburn Gardens. Most houses in Middleshade Road have recently had their roughcast re-painted in various shades of cream and off-white. Turning right onto Hepburn Gardens, away from town, you pass houses with names like Priory Acres, Abbott's Inch and Prior's Croft, presumably named by owners of an antiquarian bent recalling the old church lands on which they were built. The milestone, just a little along the road, is in poor condition with the paint flaking off the stone and the iron plate badly rusted. The writing is in elegant flowing script.

Just beyond the milestone on the way out of town is Balnacarron, the care home where Anna's father is living. A little further again is a narrow footpath going down to the left towards the Lade Braes, beside a plantation of trees known as Boase Wood. Last week I walked along the Lade Braes towards town and just past Plash Mill went up to Maynard Road and so to Canongate and Broomfaulds Avenue, coming out onto Largo Road opposite the Aldi supermarket. Today I crossed the burn straightaway and followed the footpath round to the left of Hallow Hill, reaching the street called Hallow Hill and then coming onto Canongate or Bogward Road via Trinity Place. A little way back to the right is John Knox Road, which leads to Morrisons supermarket. Morrisons (formerly Safeway) used to be an outpost on the edge of town, but now, with the arrival of the Community Hospital, has become part of a new focus of activity. The milestone is on Largo Road just beyond the roundabout, beside the hospital. It has beautiful flowing script. I met a friend there and we discussed the weather, how hot it was today and how dull the forecast was for the next few days.

A little way down Largo Road is Scooniehill Road. Last week I was struck by the shrieking of nestlings in the hedges and trees; today the noise was less and there were large numbers of young starlings to be seen on the grass. Looking down the roads that go off to the left, such as Roundhill Road, you get good views of the town. The Kilrymont site of Madras College is as uninspiring as I remember from our children's schooldays. There should be a way to get from Scooniehill Road onto the Grange Road, but I couldn't find it. Instead last week I carried right on down Kilrymont Road to Lamond Drive. Today I turned off opposite the school into Kilrymont Place and then down a footpath which comes out onto Lamond Drive beside the little general store. This path runs quite steeply down a narrow strip of neatly trimmed grass with new trees planted in rows. You can hear but not see running water. The stream, before it runs underground, is hidden by a thicket of trees and bushes. The smooth green slope and the rough scrub in the gully make a happy contrast. A bird which I later identified as a yellowhammer was fluttering among the branches. An elderly couple were walking with an elderly dog; the man picked up some litter and laboured back up the path to put it in the bin. I sat on a warm bench and watched the gulls soaring high over the edge of town. I thought for a moment they were perhaps some more exciting birds of prey, but I think they were just big gulls. One swooped down overhead and with the sun shining through its wings the effect was almost like an x-ray picture.

There was just a short way to go to the end of Lamond Drive. I turned up the Grange Road, past the direction stone that stands at the fork with the road to Crail and Anstruther. I was wondering whether there was a milestone on the Grange Road, although none was marked on the map. A little way up the road you can get onto a path that runs beside the wheatfield on the left. I followed this for a little way, until I realised that it meant I was not carrying out my plan of searching along the roadside verge for a milestone. Having found again that the map was right, I went back up the path and found a shady place to eat my sandwiches and enjoy the view of the town. Looking across the field I could see the milestone on the Crail Road.

Walking quite slowly now, I went down to the fork and photographed the direction stone. The letters stand out in relief and are painted in black. The paint looks as though it has been recently renewed and I noticed that in *Pitmilly* the M has been painted as N. The milestone is just a short way up the hill, well before the turning off over the hill to Anstruther. The places named on the stone (Anstruther,

Kilrenny and Pittenweem) suggest that when it was erected people considered that the main road was the one over the hill rather than, as now, the one round the coast via Crail. Whereas the other stones suggest that roads end at St Andrews, this one mentions the next places, Leuchars and Newport.

Last week I walked straight back along Abbey Walk into town, but this time I thought that as St Andrews is a seaside place a journey round the edge of the town must include going beside the sea, so I cut through Albany Park to the East Sands. Passing the Gatty and the ice-cream stall I watched the people enjoying the beach in summer undress. Up from the harbour I took the path to the right of the Cathedral, looking down onto the rocks from which rose the cooing of the eider. The males were resting on land, but the females were more active, searching in the pools or swimming on the calm sea. A couple of them were accompanied by young. Beside the castle was a knot of elderly visitors. A man was lecturing his companions about something, and a woman chipped in, saying that yes, her mother had once travelled down from here by sea to London.

By rights I should have carried along the Scores at least until Granny Clark's Wynd, and then come home up by way of the North Haugh, but I decided to avoid the extra bit of uphill work, so I came home via Murray Park and Greyfriars Garden.