

Cupar to Ceres *via* Craigrothie 30 June 2012

I got off the bus outside Cupar station just after twelve, planning to walk to Ceres *via* Craigrothie. It is about four miles and I reckoned I should reach Ceres by 1.30. It was the day of the Highland Games, and we were to have lunch with the Jarvises.

The way out of Cupar was along South Road, over the railway, past the Crichton statue and Tesco.

David Maitland Makgill Crichton (1801-1851) was a landowner,. He was a grandson of Admiral Frederick Maitland (a younger son of the Earl of Lauderdale) and through his grandmother was connected with the Crichton and Makgill families. He inherited the estate of Nether Rankeillour from his father, Charles Maitland. An influential supporter of the Disruption and a leading lay-member of the Free Church, he was photographed by Hill and Adamson. I have passed his statue scores of times and never given much thought to who he was. The plinth doesn't seek to engage one's interest, giving only the most basic information, initials, surname and dates. It may be that the subscribers who erected the statue disagreed about which aspects of his life they wished to celebrate.

South Road climbs out of the town, heading towards a grassy slope, with sheep. Most of the houses and cottages on either side are probably about a hundred years old. I couldn't help noticing that most of them had modern windows. This is not something that usually bothers me but this time it did strike me that there was something incongruous about them. One south-east facing roof had sixteen solar panels, which didn't seem incongruous at all to me. When the houses end there are fields, and I caught a glimpse of some cows to justify the name Cow Brae.

The first milestone is in the 1824 style, marking the road from Newport to Pettycur. It is shortly before the signpost to Leven, fixed against a brick garden-wall with great swags of cement.

As the road climbs, the view over the meadows on the right is of the new houses and the hills beyond, including Mount Hill, with the Hopetoun monument, erected in memory of Sir John Hope, a hero of Corunna and later fourth Earl of Hopetoun. The Lomonds were visible ahead. A notice offered the 3.57 acres for sale as a 'potential development opportunity'.

On the edge of the town I took the left fork onto the A914 towards Leven. From now on there was to be no footpath and only narrow verges. The road climbs, leaving the Kirkcaldy road down to the right in the valley, with the railway beyond. Going uphill was warm work in the sun. The barley, still green, was blowing in the wind like a sheet of silk or an expanse of rippling water. The wheat seems stiffer and more sedate. Soon the sun went behind the great black clouds. The Lomonds ahead were disappearing in the mist. The elder was in flower. I heard yellowhammers and saw goldfinches working the hedges.

After climbing for some ten minutes, at about 12.50, I passed the place where the next milestone should be, but I didn't see it. It is marked on the OS map, and listed in *The Milestones of Fife* as being in good condition. It may have been overgrown, or possibly removed in the course of road widening. The bank looked as though it had been strengthened quite recently. Or it may be that I was looking the other way and missed it, since the road was busy and I had to keep a good look-out and climb up onto the verge every few minutes.

As I passed Hilltarvit Mains the sun came out, and at the same time there were definite spots of rain. Approaching the turning down to Springfield I could see Scotstarvit Tower through the trees, which made me think of General Scott and his ancestors, and then made me think about my Canning book, and whether it would ever be published.

Shortly after Hill of Tarvit on the left, and the tower-house on the right, there is a road going off down to Ceres. With all the jumping up and down onto the verges to avoid traffic, the walk was going slower than expected, so I thought of taking this more direct route, but it would have meant

missing the milestones I had come to find. I didn't think anyone would mind if I was late for lunch, as they would start without me, so I stuck to my plan.

At Barbarafield just before Craigrothie there is the milestone marking three miles from Cupar. It gives the distance to Kennoway as six and two-third miles, and specifies the miles to Kirkcaldy and Burntisland as fifteen and one-seventh and twenty-one and one-seventh. I'm not sure whether such precision means that this series of stones was set up by a particularly pedantic surveyor, or whether others would have used similar fractions if the facts had demanded it. It was 1.20. There is a riding school at Barbarafield, and a little band of riders crossed the road ahead of me and was making its way along the edge of the field as I photographed the stone.

The road goes down into a dip in Craigrothie, with a picturesque view of the burn beside the Kingarroch Inn. I tried to remember where it was Mike stayed in the seventies while he and Flis were in the process of moving up to Fife. We used to visit him there, and I remember a very good apple crumble that he gave us. I tentatively identified the place on the way up through the village, at the fork in the road, but if so the garden has been built on. In the garden is a tree in memory of 'Wee Bob' from all who knew and respected him. I wondered who Wee Bob was, a man or a boy, a horse or a dog.

I took the sharp left turn towards Ceres. On the skyline to the right is a dramatic tree. The milestone on the right, just beyond the edge of the village, is damaged and pretty well hidden in the long grass. The missing face of the iron cap would have marked nine miles from St Andrews. I reached it just after 1.30.

Approaching Ceres you see the church spire rising out of trees, with the northern part of the village visible on the left. A huge dung-heap at Baltilly was partly covered with grass. Swallows flew low over the barley. There were signs of activity as I got closer to the village, with a big white charabanc and people milling about. A field was set aside for car-parking, and marshals in high-visibility jackets were waving cars and pedestrians in and out. Rival public-address systems sounded, one from the fun-fair and one from the games.

The milestone, which I reached just on two o'clock, is right before the entrance to Ceres. I photographed it and then hurried on to the other end of the village, where I found Anna and Pete sitting over their lunch while Marg and the visitors had gone to watch the proceedings on the village green. I'm not sure whether Anna and Pete had stayed to wait for me, or to avoid the crowds.