

## Dunfermline to Hillend 5 May 2017

Anna and I spent Thursday night in Edinburgh, and were due to visit Simon and Alan in Aberdour on Friday evening, so I took the opportunity to walk the route between Dunfermline and Dalgety Bay railway station, which is at Hillend.

The bus from Edinburgh dropped me at Hospital Hill<sup>1</sup> on the Queensferry Road, the southern approach to Dunfermline. The Aberdour Road (B916) goes off to the east, and after a couple of miles crosses the motorway and the B981 before turning southwards, past Clockluine Wood to Hillend. This was the route I planned to walk. There were good footpaths for the whole of the walk, usually doubling as cycle-paths, although I saw few cyclists. There were lots of dog-walkers, however. There should be three milestones on this stretch of road, but I wasn't hopeful of finding any because the gazetteer in *The Milestones of Fife* lists one as missing and the other two as 'not seen'.

As we don't have the relevant OS Landranger map for this corner of Fife I was using our street Atlas of Edinburgh and East Central Scotland (Philips, 2010), which helpfully incorporates the OS Grid. I have since consulted the OS six-inch maps, dated 1843-82, available on the National Library of Scotland website.<sup>2</sup> The OS map shows a milestone on the main road out of Dunfermline towards North Queensferry, before Hospital Hill. Since this is not listed in the Gazetteer I didn't know about it at the time, so didn't go looking for it. I assume it is no longer visible.

After a slight detour I found my way from Queensferry Road to Aberdour Road. Looking behind me and to my left I had a view of the Abbey on one hill, while another hillside was covered by what looked like between-the-wars or just post-war council houses. They are quite forbidding – straight rows, dull greys and browns – and one can imagine that they generated as much controversy in their day as the current tide of house-building. It's hard to formulate my own thoughts on these housing developments, which is only to be expected, because the issues are complicated. Are these houses what is needed in order to give everyone a decent home? Some would say that this is not just the most important question, but the only question, but most of us would want to throw in other values, such as environment, aesthetics and community, not to mention priorities in the distribution of resources. I try to hold in check my instinctive hostility to this suburban sprawl in the hope that one day the dilemma will be approached rationally and fairly.

At first the houses lining Aberdour Road itself are solid stone bungalows, a bit older than the council houses on the hill. On the left they soon give way to newer houses, making up the Brucefield development.

On the right is the Pitbauchlie House Hotel.<sup>3</sup> *The Place-Names of Fife* points out that there are more *pett* names in the Parish of Dunfermline than in any other parish except Abernethy, suggesting that this is possible evidence of an early religious foundation.<sup>4</sup> Pitbauchlie means '(place of the) estate of the crozier' from the Gaelic *bachall*, a crozier. There is a long discussion in *PNF* about the precise significance of the name.

The grid reference in the Gazetteer places the first milestone (2 miles from Dunfermline) just opposite Tweeddale Drive. The Gazetteer gives its location as Brucefield, but the map shows it further on, just beside Easter Pitcorthie. It may be that the development north of the road, which includes Tweeddale Drive, was regarded as an extension of Brucefield, but still it seems odd not to give the milestone's location as Pitcorthie. Needless to say I found no trace of it anywhere in the vicinity. Nor did I see the standing stone recorded in the name Pitcorthie (Gaelic *coirthie*, a pillar or standing stone), although it is still extant.

The development on the sites of Easter and Wester Pitcorthie took place in the 1960s with a large estate of Wimpey houses. A newspaper article marking the fiftieth anniversary notes that in those days the Council made fewer stipulations when granting planning permission, so the houses were

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1 The Hospital referred to is the thirteenth century hospital of St Leonard; *Spittell hill* occurs on Blaeu's 1654 map. (*PNF* volume 1 p 324)

2 Simon drew my attention to this excellent facility. See <http://maps.nls.uk/os/6inch/index.html>

3 *PNF* volume 1 p 349 refers to the Pitbauchlie Bank Hotel. I can find no mention of this on-line, so I guess there is just the one hotel, which has changed its name. There is a street called Pitbauchlie Bank.

4 See volume 1 pp 286f. Volume 5 of *PNF* contains an extended discussion of the significance of *pett* names, and the difference between *pett* and *baile*.

built without services such as shops.<sup>5</sup> The article estimates that there were about 1000 families on the estate, but doesn't say whether all the houses were private. Former residents interviewed by the newspaper recalled economising on food in order to meet the cost of their mortgage. Simon remembers from his childhood that Pitcorthie had a reputation as a 'problem' estate, and there are indications that efforts have been made to improve things. There is now a middle-sized Tesco, and a small row of four highstreet-type shops – a fish and chip bar, a betting shop and a double-fronted Barnardo's charity shop. At the two entrances to the estate from Aberdour Road there are attractive signs on plinths constructed from rough cut red sandstone.

Soon after Pitcorthie comes the Masterton Road roundabout, and from now on we are into extensive new developments. There is a large, spick and span barrack-like building beside the roundabout. A signpost to the left points to the Superstore, the Leisure Centre and a place ominously known as Bluebell Meadows, a sure indication that greenfield development has taken place. It's uphill now towards Masterton and another roundabout as the road crosses Lapwing Drive and Sandpiper Drive, more reminders of the exchange we make in order to provide ever more houses. There are more and more plots being sold for development, all the way from here to the motorway. On the OS maps the hill is called Dover Heights, a survival of the name Dover Hall which appears on the 17th century maps.

Just beyond Sandpiper Drive to the north of the road is a pond, not marked on any of the OS maps up to 1961. It may have been created as part of the drainage of the land prior to building the houses. It is surrounded by reeds and has a slightly sinister appearance, encouraged by the numerous warning signs – no swimming, beware of thin ice and so on. The area is not marked as marshy ground, but there are several ponds roundabout, and the Pinkerton Burn flows down from the interestingly named Calais Muir Wood.<sup>6</sup> In the vicinity of the pond the volume and variety of birdsong was higher than it had been as I walked along the road.

All along the route I noticed bits of street furniture with stickers on them saying 'JDB Decorating and Property Services'. I assumed that this was because the firm had the contract for painting the lamp-posts and electricity cabinets and so on, but looking at their website I'm not so sure. It may be that they have just been fly-posting, but if so it's odd that their stickers do not include any sort of contact number, address or website. Perhaps they rely on people finding them through a Google search, as I did.

The second stone (3 miles from Dunfermline) should have been where Middlebank Drive meets the road, a bit beyond the Dunfermline welcome sign, but it was nowhere to be seen. The Gazetteer describes it as being at Duloch, and the old maps show it just before Mid Duloch. There are new houses right up to Mid Duloch Farm, but beyond the farmhouse there's a ploughed field, complete with fly-tipping, on the north side of the road. Building continues to the south. The motorway was audible now, and so was a skylark, and on the other side of the field the top of the Amazon warehouse was just visible over the brow of the hill.

From the bridge over the M90 motorway it's possible to see the huge extent of the building site to the south. There's also a good view of the new road bridge over the Forth. The three towers of the bridge with their fans of cables looked insubstantial in the bright, hazy light. It was now that I saw an orange tipped butterfly.

Just after the motorway the road reaches the old A90, now the B981, which was the Great North Road from North Queensferry to Kinross and Perth. The older OS maps show a milestone just north of the junction (4 miles from North Queensferry, 12 to Kinross), which is not listed in the Gazetteer; I found no trace of it. After a few yards going south on the Great North Road, the B916 (now called Clockluine Road) turns off and goes downhill past Clockluine Wood. *PNF* tentatively explains this name as deriving from Gaelic *clach*, a stone, and *clao*, a slope or brae.<sup>7</sup>

The third milestone on the B916 (4 miles from Dunfermline) is marked just about where the wood now ends – although the wood extended further at the time when the milestone still existed. The foot and cycle path is at some stages separated from the road by a hedge, so I wasn't sure whether I

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5 *Dunfermline Press*, 13 April 2016, [http://www.dunfermlinepress.com/news/14424373.Pitcorthie\\_celebrates\\_50\\_years/](http://www.dunfermlinepress.com/news/14424373.Pitcorthie_celebrates_50_years/)

6 *PNF* volume 1 p 300 suggests that Dover, as in Dover Heights, which is first shown on the Blaeu map in 1654, may have been named in allusion to Calais (13th century form: *kellohouis* from the Gaelic *coille*, a wood, woodland). Alternatively the spelling Calais may have been adopted in allusion to Dover.

7 volume 1 p 376 and volume 5 p 330.

might miss the milestone, but I don't think I did, I don't think it is still there to be seen. It was pleasant in the sunshine and I was enjoying the walk so much that I forgot to take many photographs and even forgot about the missing milestone and failed to take note of its supposed location.<sup>8</sup>

The road continues downhill until the cemetery after which it climbs again, crosses the Keithing Burn at Pargillis Bridge, and then goes on up to Hillend. On reaching the top I didn't turn right onto Hillend Main Street, but went left to Dalgety Bay railway station. There is a big roundabout where the B916 meets the A981, the road from Inverkeithing to Aberdour and Kirkcaldy, along which I had no wish to walk. The two milestones marked on the old OS maps between Hillend and Aberdour are no longer extant, not even listed in the Gazetteer. So I found a pub to have a cup of coffee before walking the Coastal Path to Aberdour. After sitting and reading for a bit, I decided to stay put, have some soup and then take the train.

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8 Comparing the 1843-82 OS map with the modern map, I thought the course of the road had changed, so I wondered whether the milestone might be somewhere in Clockluine Wood or among the new houses, but it looks as though there is a general discrepancy between this map and the overlay provided on the NLS website, so that everything appears to have been shifted slightly eastwards.