

Guardbridge to Craigtoun and St Andrews

This walk took in five of the six milestones on the road between Guardbridge and Peat Inn, and three of the four between Pitscottie and St Andrews. These are 'C' roads, which the OS shows in yellow, unnumbered, and in two different thicknesses, indicating different widths, either more or less than four metres. The two roads with the milestones are more than four metres. Although the milestones are not marked on the map, they are listed in *The Milestones of Fife*.¹

I got off the bus in Guardbridge and walked back to the turning to Strathkinness. There's a small wayside café on the corner, which used to be called The Hungry Horse, but is now Fresh 'n' Fast. In the days of The Hungry Horse, almost thirty years ago now, Mary Collier used to shop there for interesting groceries on her way home from work in Dundee.

The day was fine, despite forecasts of rain. It was just after 10.30. There were dark clouds to the north and misty clouds to the south, with no warmth in the milky sunlight. Days of unremitting rain had left puddles everywhere. The air felt damp, the grass was wet and the trees and hedges dripping. At the turning to Strathkinness was a road drain to catch water running down the hill, but from then until coming in to St Andrews from Craigtoun there were only drainage channels into the ditch, some of them badly clogged.

The first milestone comes almost immediately after the turning, half a mile from Guardbridge. The route runs from Newport on the Tay to Elie on the Forth. The stone gives the distances from Leuchars and Newport in one direction, and Colinsburgh, Kilconquhar and Elie (thirteen miles and five-eighths) in the other. Colinsburgh is the nearest in the Elie direction – it's eleven miles, which is a longish stretch without a named place. I might have expected Peat Inn to be marked.

Just before the turning off to Kincapple is a building with a piece of coloured decorative stonework in the wall, celebrating the coronation. 'Kincapple, ER 1953,' it reads, with a crown, but significantly not the number II. I'm not sure what the building was originally. It looks as though it has two low storeys or a ground-floor and a loft, with the only window on the road side just below roof-level. There are two rectangular openings in the wall, a couple of feet high and a foot or so above the ground.

The hill is quite steep in places. Oncoming traffic forced me onto the verge, which was soft, but not particularly muddy. My well greased shoes kept out the damp. The hawthorn hedge was bare of haws and leaves, and I could see through it down into the field some way below the level of the road. Water was flowing fast in the ditch. Further up, where the road was below the level of the field, water was draining off the land onto the roadside, somehow missing the ditch. A stream ran downhill until a bend where a huge puddle had collected around a channel that was taking it slowly off into the ditch.

Just before Monksholm is a field-gate which now has a wooden post, but there's also what I assume must have been the old stone gate-post. It consists of a drum-like base of stone and mortar, with a single rough-hewn stone placed on top, giving the impression of a squat snowman, the lichen even sketching in what could be eyes and nose.

As I climbed towards the second milestone, 1½ miles from Guardbridge and ten from Colinsburgh, the roadside was clear of water, the run-off having left behind a sandy deposit. The ditch, where it was visible, was full and sluggish. Over the fields of young corn to the left there was a view across to St Andrews, with its modest towers looking more modest than ever in the distance, and the huge crane which we have grown accustomed to seeing around the town.

On the steep approach to Strathkinness the verge had been strengthened with small boulders set into it at irregular intervals, something which is probably standard practice but which I'd never noticed before. Perhaps more of them than usual were uncovered because of the rain, enough to make it clear that they were unlikely to be there just by chance. From the crossroads I looked down

¹ C roads have a number but it is only used by the local authority for its own administrative purposes. *The Milestones of Fife* calls the Guardbridge to Peat Inn road the C4, and the St Andrews, Craigtoun and Pitscottie road the C65.

the village street and up the hill beyond the Low Road; the long ribbon of wet tarmac glistened in the sun.

I don't think I've been through Strathkinness since the new houses were finished. This is the development that has been sign-posted for a year or more now, called The Green. It won a 'Houses for Scotland' award in 2013, and with its little patch of grass in front it certainly looks attractive. 'Attractive' is almost a technical term here, for the particular kind of neatness, cleanliness and newness which adds up to not very much either positive or negative. I don't know what these little houses would be like to live in, nor how they are viewed by the old inhabitants of Strathkinness. But what I feel is beside the point, and even what the old inhabitants of Strathkinness feel is of minor importance, in the face of the chronic need for homes. If we wait for the perfect design and the perfect location we'll never get anything built. The blandness of the development provides the owners of the houses with a blank sheet on which to write their own lives, private and communal.

While I reconciled myself quite easily to this transformation at the centre of Strathkinness, I fretted over a much smaller change, which on rational consideration is less than insignificant. This is the conversion, overnight it seems, of all the Murray Donald estate agents' signs to Thorntons, as a result of the merger of the two, which is evidently more of a takeover by the larger firm. I probably noticed it only because of my extensive dealings with Murray Donald over the last few years. Murray Donald themselves gobbled up several smaller local firms, and changed their own name from Murray Donald Drummond Cook not long ago as part of a re-branding exercise. I have no sentimental attachment, but changes like this make me think of how the world looks to a young child. A two or three year old beginning to notice the world round about her will have got used to seeing and recognising the blue and white Murray Donald boards, and now suddenly they are gone, and there are the bright red Thorntons boards in their place. What's happened? The boards belong to the firm and they can do what they like with them, but since they oblige us to look at their advertisements we cannot help admitting them, to a tiny extent, into our lives. Unlike the intrusive houses, the change has no reason except the owners' whim and commercial convenience. It is a flaunting of their power to alter the way our world looks.

Between the bridge over the Kinness Burn and the Strathkinness Low Road comes the next milestone, 2½ miles from Guardbridge. Like most of the stones on this walk it is in need of painting. On the Strathkinness Low Road, just east of the cross-roads, there's the stone marking three miles to St Andrews and 4¾ to Ceres. It's hard to believe that it's more than three years since I walked that route, as I was just setting out on my self-imposed task.

After the cross-roads was a battered placard tied to a post saying, 'Caution, Triathlon in Progress'. There was no date, so there was no telling how long it had been hanging there misleading anyone who happened to notice it as they drove past. There was also a solitary bollard set well back on the verge. Its purpose was obscure until I noticed the tiny yellow electricity sign just above ground level, so presumably it marks where an electric cable passes under the road. The verge is narrow so that the road-sign announcing the approach to the crossroads has to span the ditch, which is filled in to provide a solid base, with the water passing through a short culvert.

The road climbs steeply towards Magus Muir. One of the fields had a large patch of rough uncultivated ground running along the edge.

I made a detour to see the monuments at Magus Muir, following the circular walk through the birch woods. There were a couple of dog-walkers, including one I passed three times; he grumbled that the path wasn't longer so that he was having to go round again. The monuments in this bleak spot are always impressive, Sharp's pyramid amongst the trees, and the enclosure at the edge of the field with the simple stone commemorating those hanged in revenge for his murder – the Archbishop sheltered, the Covenanters exposed to the elements. Both monuments were erected in 1877 by John Whyte-Melville.² The inscription on the Sharp pyramid conveys the savagery of the murder 'a salvis inimicis, adstante filia sua deprecante'. At the same time the five Covenanters are described as having suffered martyrdom for their faith, with no suggestion that their death was a punishment for the murder, in which they were not implicated. Erected to remind local people and

² Major John Whyte-Melville (1796/7-1883), convenor for the County of Fife. He was the father of the novelist and fox-hunter G J Whyte-Melville (1821-1878).

visitors alike of these dreadful events, and piously recording the names of the victims, the memorials are now themselves memorialised, both by the sign-posts of the Scottish Rights of Way Society and the more recent, and less well preserved, interpretation boards put up by the Council and the Forestry Commission.

The even-handed Whyte-Melville wanted to commemorate the events and the sufferings of those involved, but without perpetuating the conflict. And sure enough the conflict has largely been consigned to the past, with the events of 1679 blandly described on the interpretation boards. But it turns out that we are not done with religious extremism, whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim, and words like *martyr* are suddenly in the air once more, posing us difficult questions. According to the story on the interpretation board, the murderers had been planning an attack on the government's local representative, the Sheriff, who had been persecuting them, but were diverted by the accidental encounter on Magus Muir. An attack on the armed force of the state might be seen as an act of civil war, something rational and strategic; to kill an elderly churchman, however politically engaged and devious he might be, in the presence of his daughter is more nakedly sectarian and extremist. There is a distinction to be made, then as now, but I'm not sure where the line should be drawn.

I spent about half an hour visiting the monuments and then went on my way once more. The road soon crosses a burn which (I see from the map) rises on the north slopes of Drumcarrow Craig or Ladeddie Hill, and goes on to join the Kinnessburn outside St Andrews. Just before the Craigtoun to Pitscottie road there were a couple of houses with gardens draining into the ditch, which was full and flowing easily and noisily. I had been walking for almost two hours and had covered not much more than three miles, plus the walk at Magus Muir which must have been almost a mile. Progress was slow because oncoming traffic forced me up onto the verge.

At the crossroads I turned right towards Pitscottie past Claremont farm, where the house has a ridiculous number of crow-steps, on every gable. By now the sky was beginning to clear, but the wind was rising and there was no heat in the sun. After less than a mile with Drumcarrow Craig on my left I reached the entrance to Denork House where there is a milestone marking three miles from St Andrews, and $4\frac{3}{4}$ to Ceres. *The Milestones of Fife* says the cap is missing. It has since been restored, the mileages corresponding with what the book says they should be. The book lists only one more stone between Denork and the junction with the St Andrews to Ceres road (B939) just before Pitscottie, a missing stone that should be at Newbigging of Blebo. The stone at the Pitscottie junction gives the distance to Ceres as $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles, which indicates that there is something not quite right about the mileages on the Denork stone. I didn't go on to Newbigging of Blebo to see whether the stone has been restored – a return trip will be necessary, perhaps bringing Swithun's GPS gadget to check the distances.

Instead I went back to the cross-roads where I turned right, re-joining the road to Peat Inn. After a short, steep climb, just before the brow of a hill, I came to the milestone marking $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Guardbridge and eight from Colinsburgh (ten and five-eighths from Elie). Drumcarrow, with its radio masts, was now on the right, while behind me there was a fine view of the Eden estuary. The clouds were thickening once more. Having not seen many birds I was pleased to see a robin perched among a few stubbornly surviving haws.

Approaching Denhead I passed various buildings with the name Elderburn, including Elderburn Luxury Lodges and Elderburn North, a new building with a surprising notice on the gate: Danger Deep Water. I could see no water, deep or shallow, but there was some tall vegetation in the middle of the lawn which may have concealed a pond. At Denhead there is an old school and school-house. This was one of three schools in the parish of Cameron during the nineteenth century – not the parochial school and so dependent on school fees.³

Although it was not yet two o'clock the afternoon was already beginning to darken. Starlings were gathering to roost. On the left was a flooded field, while on the right were the extensive buildings of Drumcarrow Equestrian, a huge operation where they breed and sell horses and provide livery services. A large horse-box was parked in the yard, more like a horse-charabanc. The notice says

3 John M Leighton, *History of the County of Fife*, 1840, vol 3 p 80.

'Lohoar Sport Horses', and I assumed Lohoar was the name of a particular breed, but it turns out to be the name of the owner of the business. I could detect no horsey, manurey, smell but there was a non-stop clip-clop, clip-clop. I couldn't decide whether this was of horses shuffling their feet in their stalls or walking around the covered yard, acquiring the dressage skills which, the firm's website insists, are essential for all horses.

I stopped at the top of the hill and looked over to the south-west, where the sky was a pinkish yellow, and the west, where a line of green showed between the dark Lomonds and the dark bank of cloud. A drone flew overhead, the first I've seen. I don't know how drones are constructed, but this had what I took to be its fuselage, with a big sack slung underneath.

Going down from Drumcarrow, and passing the farm track to Cassindonald, I came to the milestone marking 4½ miles from Guardbridge and seven to Colinsburgh. The book says the cap is missing but it has been restored, presumably with an older one salvaged from the Council's store – a different style of cap from the others on the Guardbridge to Peat Inn road. The others use the cursive lettering while this is in block capitals. On some caps the side facing the walker gives the places he or she has come from, but more commonly the places she or he is going towards.⁴ On this particular cap the names have been mixed up, so that on the side facing the walker from Guardbridge it shows Guardbridge, Colinsburgh and Leuchars, while on the side facing the walker from Kilcoquhar or Colinsburgh it shows Kilconquhar, Newport and Elie.

I then turned back up the hill to Drumcarrow and walked to Denhead, with a view of the Estuary ahead of me. Instead of going all the way back to the crossroads I cut off a corner by taking the narrow road (less than four metres according to the map) down past the cottages of Denhead (including the house called Micklefolly that was once occupied by the Woodwards). It's a smart little settlement, all the houses having tall, well-trimmed hedges of beech or leylandii.

Back on the road to Craigtoun and St Andrews I soon began to wonder whether by cutting off the corner I had missed the Craigtoun milestone. Or had I missed it because my attention was diverted by two resolutely surviving pink champions in the ditch? I passed one track to the Country Park, and then walked on for another ten minutes before reaching a second. Just before the turning, there at last was the milestone. Again a missing cap has been replaced, with the distances correct according to the gazetteer in the book: 2 miles from St Andrews, 5¾ from Ceres. The side facing me as I approached gave the names of the places I was coming away from.

From there it was easy going, downhill and with a footpath for the first time since I left Guardbridge. There were drain grilles made of ductile iron set at irregular intervals in the side of the curb. As I was approaching the newish roundabout at the junction with Bogward Road⁵ someone was coming towards me reading a book and leading a dog; it turned out to be my former colleague Phil Robertson, so we had a chat before I continued on towards the milestone on Hepburn Gardens. I rounded off the day by calling on our friends the Tavakolis in their new house.

4 The reason for the difference could be not that the design of the caps changed, but that the stones were moved from one side of the road to the other.

5 The street leading to the new houses to the west is called Melville Road. I don't know whether this is in honour of Andrew Melville or of the Whyte-Melville.