

New Inn Roundabout to Cupar

24 April 2016

I took the Glenrothes bus to Muirhead, a few minutes beyond Kettlebridge. It was just after nine o'clock when I got there; it was sunny, but cold and windy. The New Inn roundabout is just a little way further on. Looking at it, I wondered where the famous Inn had stood, and thought yet again that I must get hold of Owen Silver's book on the roads of Fife. The four roads that meet at the roundabout go to Dundee and Kirkcaldy (A92), to Perth (A912) and to Cupar and Newport (A914), which is the road I planned to walk. It's a section of the route between the ferries on the Forth and Tay, Pettycur and Newport; I've already walked other sections: between Cupar and Dairsie, and between Dairsie and Forgan, just before Newport. The A914 re-joins the A92 at Forgan.

Having photographed the roundabout, I went back, over the railway and over what I guess must be the Freuchie Burn or one of its tributaries, and through Muirhead village. The footpath soon gave out, but there was a good verge, albeit with brambles catching at my legs. The brambles, like the hawthorns, were just coming into leaf. The traffic was light enough to allow short stretches of easier walking on the road. As a main road it is well provided with drains every dozen or so yards, some at the side of the road, others in bays cut into the verge. Ahead and a little to the left was the Hopetoun monument on Lindifferon Hill,¹ while behind me were the Lomonds. Throughout the walk I kept an eye on these two landmarks.

Before reaching the first milestone the road crosses a narrow but well filled watercourse, which appears to come down from the hills on the right, turn a right-angled corner to run along beside the road, and then turn again to pass under the road. It is not marked on the map, so perhaps it's the product of recent drainage work.

The first milestone is just before the crossroads where the roads to Freuchie and Star meet the main road. The Gazetteer in *The Milestones of Fife* names the location as Welltree, which appears on the OS map, although I found no sign with that name. The stone gives the following distances: Pettycur – 14 miles, New Inn – 1 mile, Cupar – 8 miles and Newport – 19 miles. The stone is the oldest type identified in *The Milestones of Fife*, the type used all along the Great road from Pettycur to Newport. It consists of a plinth, usually of rubble, with a cast iron plate on the front. The plate bears the date 1824, and the name of the manufacturer, Alexander Russell, of Kirkcaldy.² This type of stone does not present the same instantly recognisable profile as the other main type, which has a white stone with a sloping top and a cast iron cap. The Ordnance Survey describes some of them as mile-posts rather than milestones. The map also shows some of the stones on the north side of the road, but in fact they are all on the south side, on my right as I walked towards Cupar.

I found several things to photograph between the first and second stone, including a fine manhole cover made by the Bo'ness Iron Co Ltd, and the farm entrance at Forthar. Opposite the entrance there's a large farm building with a great array of solar panels. In a lay-by there was an abandoned AA telephone, presumably no longer required in the age of mobile phones. At the top of a rise there's a footpath going off to Rameldry Mill Bank. The verge was narrow here. I stopped to look back to the Lomonds, and forward along the straight road down to Kettlebridge.

The second milestone is just at the entrance to Kettlebridge. A little beyond the milestone, the Rameldry Burn passes under the road, and then goes round the back of a row of houses. It's not a particularly impressive bridge, but it's evidently what gives the place its name. According to *The Place-Names of Fife* (volume 2), the *Kettle* part, attested as far back as the twelfth century, probably means 'Cat-place'. Referred to as *Bridge of Kettle* on William Roy's map (1753), the place is first called *Kettlebridge* on the 1856 OS map. It's basically a Victorian settlement, with a VR post-box (in the wall of what is now the Fresh 'n' Fast Sandwich Shop).

Another manhole cover caught my eye. It had the name Glenfield & Kennedy, Kilmarnock, and also the letters FP. This probably stands for *Flow Probe* because Glenfield & Kennedy have been world leaders in manufacturing instruments for measuring water flow rates since the mid nineteenth century.

1 Or is it on Mount Hill?

2 According to *The Milestones of Fife*, another surviving stone on this road, located at Dysart Muir, is dated 1844, by which time Burntisland had replaced Pettycur as the main Fife ferry port on the Forth.

The footpath continued out of the village, and was to continue all the way to Cupar, which was a relief, because the traffic was getting heavier. The road climbs out of the village to a turning to Kingskettle and Kettle Church (where, according to a notice, a flower festival was going on) and then dips down to Balmalcolm, where the third milestone is found at the entrance to the village.

Balmalcolm, as well as being the name of the village, is the farm where Kettle Produce Ltd is based. In a field beside the road two men (or a man and a woman) seemed to be having a problem with a piece of machinery. In another field was a Vegcraft trailer with a number of wooden containers marked Fountain Plants, which probably refers to the nursery business of R Fountain & Son, Boston, Lincolnshire. Some of the fields had already been planted with rows of plants, and some were covered in polythene which was rippling like silk in the breeze. On closer inspection it does actually look more like silk than polythene; it's light and flexible, and seems to have a woven texture. There were great rolls of it waiting to be used.

I stopped at the entrance to Ramornie Mill, looking down the drive towards a substantial house. Then I looked back again at the view of the Lomonds. Not long afterwards I reached the fourth milestone at Crossgates. It's not in good condition, rusty with some of the paint is flaking off. Like several others on this stretch of road the fourth name, Newport, is partially obscured, although here it was just a matter of flattening the grass to see it clearly enough. The Gazetteer in *The Milestones of Fife* gives the location of this milestone as 'South of Pitlessie', suggesting that the name is no longer used.

Crossgates used to be a significant crossroads. The road on the left comes from Ladybank and Bow of Fife. Its continuation on the right is just a track which, according to the OS map, fizzles out on the hill before reaching Burnturk, but which Ainslie's map of 1775 shows continuing to Auchtermairnie on the outskirts of Kennoway.³ It was therefore a cross-country route linking the roads going from from Cupar to Auchtermuchty, to New Inn, and to Kennoway.

Pitlessie is a handsome village, with some fine houses and a smart village inn (called The Village Inn). Beside the inn is a field which contained some vigorous lambs. On the northern edge of the village is Priestfield Maltings, where the old buildings have been converted into accommodation. The shape of the nineteenth century maltings has (I guess) been preserved, but for some reason the overall impression is phoney, as though it's made of Lego. Perhaps it will look better once the weather has got at it for a few years, but even so I don't see the point of this kind of 'preservation'.

Beyond Pitlessie the road-side hedge was aggressively well trimmed, but not yet in leaf. It had a strange, gnarled, skeletal look. I don't know whether it was beech, which usually keeps last year's leaves until the new growth comes. Perhaps the strangeness lay in having such a long stretch of hedge consisting of just one species; usually there would be several, at different stages of growth. The road passes the track to Lower Bunzion (pronounced like Bunyan, and on the Blaeu map spelled *Bunzum*) which lies about halfway up Cults Hill.

The fifth milestone is on a straight stretch of road with Cults Hill on the right and a little wood and Cults Mill to the left. It is just beyond a bridge over a burn running off the hill to join the Eden. The plinth is painted white, which makes it more readily identifiable from a distance. It also stands taller than some of the others on this route, and unlike all except the next one is free-standing rather than fixed to a wall. In contrast with the whiteness of the stone, the iron plate is badly discoloured. Like all the stones on this road it faces north or north-west, which exposes it to the worst effects of the weather.

The signpost at the turning to Cults Mill has a picture of a charabanc above it, but it's not clear whether this means that charabancs are banned or encouraged. The ploughed fields beyond this turning had a surprising number of old roots lying around, missed by last year's harvesters. They looked like under-grown turnips, so perhaps they were actually discarded by the machine as not up to standard. I've been getting increasingly bothered about waste, thinking of all the peelings and squashy or knobbly bits of fruit and vegetables that I throw away; thinking even of the nutritional value of the bits swishing around in the washing-up water, or of what I wipe from my lips and beard with my napkin.

³ See *The Place-Names of Fife* volume 2 p 117.

After a turning to Cults Hill and Chance Inn the road climbs, with woods on the left, and open ground on the right – the south, which gave me the benefit of the sun. The sky was clear now, and there was a bit of warmth. A skylark was singing above the field. Then there was a buzzard circling; it was having to flap its wings every few seconds, as though it had not quite found the currents to sustain its usual easy, wheeling flight. A little later it wasn't there any more, but then there was a mewing, and two buzzards emerged one after the other from trees on the right.

Then the road went down between woods on both sides. The sixth milestone is another free-standing stone. It's plate is badly discoloured, but it has the date 1824 picked out very clearly in black. It comes just before a crossroads. On the left is the road through Springfield to the Auchtermuchty road, while on the right the road goes up past Scotstarvit to join the main Cupar, Criagrothie and Kennoway road. I could see traffic on the Kennoway road on a hillside ahead of me, to the right, running along below a line of trees. The left turn also leads to Stratheden Hospital, Cuparmuir and Elmwood Golf Course. There are also two of the ubiquitous yellow signs pointing to new housing developments. For such a little road it merits a surprising number of signs of different colours.

The Gazetteer says this milestone is at Clushford Toll, although I found no evidence of the name on the ground or the map, and no sign of the toll-house at the crossroads. *The Place-Names of Fife* says the toll was named after a settlement a little distance away on the north side of the Eden.

As the road reaches the end of the woods it passes the entrance to Edenwood, which is a substantial house, with warnings about 24 hour CCTV. A field at Edenwood Farm was being sown with young plants (again from Fountain Plants), and I was able to observe something of how it was done. A tractor was moving slowly across the field with two people sitting at the back minding the machine which, somehow, was putting the plants into the ground. I could see various wheels, and hoppers containing the green seedlings, but not exactly how it all worked, or what the people had to do. They seemed to be chatting in a fairly relaxed way. It was quite surprising to see the rows of green shoots springing up in the tractor's wake. Two men were following on foot, and they seemed to be checking that the plants had gone in correctly. Every so often they would bend down to put something right. Looking back I could see four or five mobile homes beside the farmhouse (not the big house), presumably for the seasonal workers.

I was now more or less level with the Hopetoun monument on my left, and soon Cupar was in sight. The Gazetteer says the seventh milestone is at Tarvit Mill, but it is closer to the newly built entrance to Damside Mill. There are a lot of mills along the Eden. Tarvit Mill, owned by Fife Council, provides emergency accommodation for homeless people, and is also the largest of the Council's three designated Travellers' sites, with twenty pitches. The milestone itself is easily missed, being set well into the verge and partially obscured by overhanging weeds from above, and grass growing up around the base.

Damside Mill is owned by the pig and poultry feed manufacturer ABN, which in turn is part of AB-Agri (Associated British Agriculture). With my new interest in animal husbandry I have looked at the ABN website. Here's an example of their spiel, referring to one of their pig products, ABN Delta Renovo:

Renovo, meaning - restore; renew; and repeat, is designed to do exactly that: Restore sow body condition; Renew reproductive tissue; and Repeat strong piglet development, bringing you a lifetime of performance. The Delta Renovo range has been developed on the back of extensive and innovative research aimed at optimising the efficiency of reproduction of the prolific sow.

It's hard to get an idea of what their products actually contain, in particular how much imported soya they use.

Soon I was coming down into Cupar, past the usual array of signs and warnings. The road joins the A916 from Kennoway and Windygates. On the brown signs at the junction both modern spellings of the place that Blaeu calls *Kengurrick* appear – Kingarroch Inn in Craigrothie, and the Kingarroch 'Hickory' Golf Course south of Hill of Tarvit.⁴ The 'potential development' land that I remarked on

4 The form ending in *k* is more frequent in the historical documents cited in *The Place-Names of Fife*, but the form in *h* is given as the one in general use now. Perhaps the golfers stick to their form because it echoes the *k* in *hickory*.

when I walked from Cupar to Craigrothie and Ceres in June 2012 is still being offered for sale, the hoarding more weather-beaten than four years ago, and even less convincing.

A new traffic calming system is being introduced on the way into the town. As I watched, substantial tailbacks of traffic suddenly built up, in both directions. At first I blamed the traffic calming, but it turned out to be caused by roadworks further down. While I was waiting for the traffic to clear so that I could photograph the eighth milestone on the other side of the road, an old man asked me what I was doing, and enlightened me on the origin of the traffic jam. They were poking in the drains outside Tesco again, he said.

Having taken my last photograph I walked across Cupar to Claire's house in Well Street. I got there at about one o'clock, four hours after setting out from New Inn. It seemed much chillier than when I started off.