

## St Michaels to Guardbridge 20 September 2012

I had to go to Ninewells to deliver Anna's heart-monitor, and decided to go by bus. The ride from the Nethergate to the hospital and back again took me on a tour of unfamiliar parts of suburban Dundee: Perth Road, Blackness Road, Balgay cemetery, Dickson Avenue, the end of Hawkhill. Everywhere there were glimpses, or vistas, of the Tay and of Fife. The Dundee buses that I travelled on (numbers 73A and 73) had conductors, young men equipped with electronic ticket machines. The new version of "Any more fares, please?" seems to be "And for yourself, sir?" I don't know whether conductors are now on all the Dundee routes. On the whole I approve. The number of passengers today didn't keep the conductors busy, but if we are to have people on hand to supervise, reassure and assist the public, we have to allow for slack time. However, the way one of the conductors today spent the whole time chatting and laughing with the driver was a bit alarming; I had the feeling the driver's concentration was affected. On the way back to St Andrews I was on the number 96, which goes through Tayport. The detour was not as long as it sometimes is, and the back road from Tayport to St Michaels was pretty in the autumn rain.

I got out at St Michaels and walked to Guardbridge. The map marks a milestone just the St Michaels side of Leuchars, but I had never seen it until Anna spotted it on a recent car journey. The iron cap is rusted, so it doesn't show up well. *The Milestones of Fife* lists an uncapped stone beside the RAF base and a missing stone in Guardbridge.

The road out of St Michaels (A919) runs beside the railway, although you might not realise it until a train goes past. The strip between the road and the track was overgrown with willow herb, rose hips, and a tangle of grasses, weeds and bushes. The big potato field outside the village looked pretty well ready to harvest. There is a footpath all the way to Leuchars, first on one side of the road, then on the other.

The milestone (Newport 5 miles, St Andrews 6) is just beyond the track to Leuchars Castle Farm. It is almost overgrown and the rusty cap camouflages it well. It has the cursive lettering that is found on the road out of St Andrews to Guardbridge and Dairsie (apart from the first stone, and the spurious fifth stone).

I carried on through Leuchars. The uncapped stone was described as being on the A919, so I was surprised to find that first right turn out of the village towards the station is the A919. I knew the stone wasn't on that stretch of road so I ignored the turning and carried on through the village and found that at the roundabout beside the church the right turn is also called the A919. This leads past the air base. As I was walking along beside the wire fence Jessy and Mo phoned me, so I was trying to talk to them as jets went noisily overhead.

I began to think the stone had been removed, perhaps at the time when the newish markers for a gas pipeline were put up—I should have photographed them, but I suspected that the RAF might be sensitive about cameras. Just as I was giving up hope, I saw the stone ahead. It now has a cap, obviously quite recently cemented in place, so the book was undoubtedly correct when it was published. I took pictures of the two faces of the stone, hoping that no-one would shout at me; no-one did.

There was a large transport plane loading up in the background, and it had attracted a handful of spotters with binoculars and cameras—so perhaps the base is used to being photographed. Who was I to laugh at this obsession with aircraft when there I was trudging through the rain to get pictures of milestones?

I carried on into Guardbridge in the hope that the missing stone might have reappeared. I was pleased to get a good look at the old paper-mill, now the property of the University. The buildings have an elegance about them. I got to the last bus-stop in Guardbridge, just before the Cupar road, without seeing the missing stone, so I stopped and waited for the bus to St Andrews, arriving a little late for our lunch date with Chris and Ann Carter.