

## A Survey of Milestones on Limerick's N69 coast road

GERARD CURTIN

A study of milestones on this stretch of road in West Limerick, using maps, fieldwork and local knowledge, revealed a very large rate of loss since the early 1920s in contrast to a high survival rate in the nineteenth century. Road improvements schemes, which took little or no account of these historic markers, were the main agents of destruction.

The N69 national secondary road takes a route by the Shannon Estuary between Limerick city and the county boundary near Tarbert, county Kerry. Formerly known as the Mail Road, it was laid down in three phases from the eighteenth century to 1830. The sections from the Kerry county boundary to Glin village, skirting by the shore to the north of Glin Demesne, and that east from Askeaton to Ballyengland are shown in Pelham's 1797 map of County Clare. The section from the Glencorbry River at Glin to the Creeves junction, west of Robertstown church, was laid down between 1811 and 1815, while the other sections, from Robertstown to Askeaton, and Ballyengland to the Ferry Bridge were constructed in a public works scheme between 1824 and 1827. These new roads brought major changes to the lives of the people. Prior to this the road between Glin and Shanagolden ran a mile or so further inland and passed to the south of Cappa House, later known as Mount Trenchard House. The front of the house faced southwards towards this road, which explains why the rear of the house now faces the coast road. Further east at Kilcornan, the fairground was moved in the late 1820s from Stonehall village, on the old road, to a site situated a mile or so to the north at the junction of the Adare road with the new mail road. A few years later in 1831-2, the site chosen for the new Kilcornan Catholic Church was prominently on the new road. Further improvements also took place on this stretch of road east of Askeaton as part of public works schemes during the famine years of 1846-48.<sup>1</sup>

Thirty-one milestones are recorded on the 1923 Ordnance Survey maps on this road starting from Mungret on the outskirts of Limerick City to the Kerry county boundary. Only one milestone is not recorded, that at Carrowbane More, Loughill. Charlotte Murphy has suggested that these milestones were likely laid down in the mid-nineteenth century following the completion of the mapping of the country in 1846 by the first Ordnance Survey.<sup>2</sup> It would seem therefore that only one milestone did not survive the following seventy years, a very low rate of loss. In September 2014, when this survey was undertaken, only nine examples were found. While much change and modernisation has taken

<sup>1</sup> Grand Jury Maps of County Clare, 1787, Clare County Library; Pelham's Map of County Clare, 1797, Clare County Library; British Parliamentary Papers, *Minutes of Evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Commons appointed to inquire into the Disturbances in Ireland, 1824*, vol. vii, 1825, p. 227; Ms 568-72, National Library of Ireland; Samuel Lewis, *A History and Topography of Limerick City and County*, (Dublin, 1980 edn.), p. 81; *Limerick Chronicle*, 2 October, 1830; Gerard Curtin, *Recollections of Our Native Valley, a history of Loughill-Ballynahill and the Owvaun valley*, (Ballynahill, 1996), p. 299-300; James Killeen, 'Communications', in F.H.A., Aalen, Kevin Whelan, Matthew Stout, (eds), *Atlas of the Irish Landscape*, (Cork, 1997), p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Murphy, 'Milestones in County Limerick', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, vol. 49 (2009) pp 125-9:127.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

place on this road in the last fifty years, a number of bends have been by-passed, stretches of road have been straightened and many new houses have also been built, it is still an enormous rate of destruction.

All the surviving milestones are situated on the northern side of the road. Each has a triangular shape on top and two rectangular sections on the left and right hand sides, with the numbers and letters engraved. None of the milestones contain the word 'miles', numbers are solely used to depict the distance to the next village or town.<sup>3</sup> Travelling eastward from Tarbert towards Limerick City, the first milestone (Fig. 1) is situated in the townland of Glin Demesne on a pedestrian footpath, a short distance to the west of Glin village. It is positioned a little out from the sea wall suggesting that the milestone was laid down after the original sea wall was built. It is 490mm in width and 950mm in height. At the top of the stone the distance to Limerick of 32 miles is given. The word 'Limerick' is poorly etched into the stone and is sloping to the left and there is a large gap between the letters 'c' and 'k'. The left face of the stone gives the distance to Glin of one mile and the right face the distance to Tarbert of three miles. These distances are not correct, the distance to Glin is less than two hundred metres and the distance to Tarbert is over four miles from this milestone. Indeed incorrect distances are a feature of many of these stones.

The next milestone (Fig. 2) is one mile further east at Caheragh, Glin situated on a lay-by, near the river Shannon. The road here was straightened some forty years ago resulting in the milestone being no longer on the side of the road. It is 490mm wide and 950mm high and shows the distances to Limerick 31 miles, Loughill 4 miles and Tarbert 4 miles.<sup>4</sup> As it is no longer situated on the roadside much of the base of the stone has become exposed resulting in the height of the stone being almost one metre. The top triangular section giving the distance to Limerick is not centrally placed suggesting this was a later addition to the milestone. This milestone is the most roughly finished of all those surveyed. The next example is that at Mount Trenchard, Loughill (Fig. 3). Situated a short distance west of the western entrance to Mount Trenchard House, the top has suffered some damage and there is a later stone wall built into the rear of the milestone. It is 490mm wide and 740mm high and gives the distances to Limerick 25 miles, Foyne 3 miles and Loughill 2 miles.

<sup>3</sup> Ordnance Survey 6 inch map nos., 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, (1923).

<sup>4</sup> Loughill is spelt this way by the Ordnance Survey, however on road signs and milestones it is spelt Loughill and this is the spelling used by most local people.



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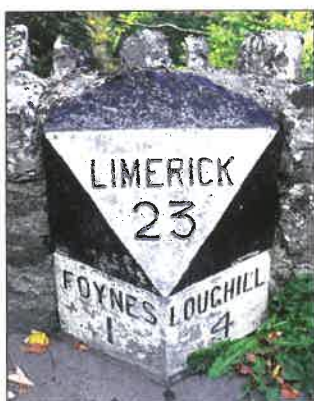


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

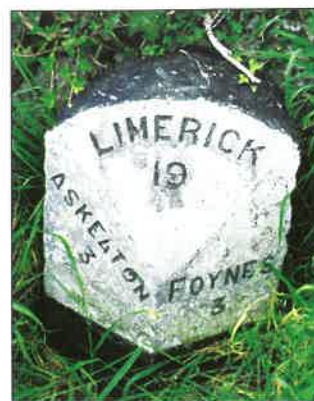


Fig. 6

The stone at Foynes Wood, Leahys, Foynes (Fig. 4), a little west of Ardanoir House, shows the distances to Limerick 23 miles, Loughill 4 miles and Foynes 1 mile. Set into a wall and with a footpath built around it, this milestone is 490mm in width and 520mm high. Proportionally this is the most uniform stone and it is also the best preserved. At Ardaneer, Foynes, about a hundred metres north of the Stonecutters' road junction another milestone (Fig. 5) survives. Set near a stone wall and much overgrown with ivy this is 490mm wide and 590mm high, its top is damaged and gives the distances to Limerick 21 miles, Askeaton 5 miles and Foynes 1 mile.

The next survival (Fig. 6) is at Barrigone, Craggs, Foynes, near the former Fennessey's pub situated on a sharp bend. It is 490mm high and 690mm wide and shows the distances to Limerick 19 miles, Askeaton 3 miles and Foynes 3 miles. At Tomdeely North, Askeaton, a few metres west of *Reilig Mhuire* cemetery, set near the front boundary wall of a house and partially covered by bushes, a milestone (Fig. 7) gives the distances to Limerick 17 miles, Askeaton 1 mile and Foynes 5 miles and is 390mm wide and 650mm high. At Church Street, Askeaton, almost directly opposite the entrance to the GAA field there is another milestone (Fig. 8), fixed against the wall of a house, which is 470mm wide, 1120mm high and shows the distance to Limerick 16 miles, Kildimo 7 miles and Foynes 7 miles. At Ballyengland North, Askeaton (Fig. 9), and a little east of Wallace's road junction, a stone placed against the boundary wall of a recently built house, measures



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

520mm wide and 490mm high and gives the distances to Limerick 13 miles, Kildimo 3 miles and Askeaton 2 miles. It is possible, though unlikely, that another milestone might still survive at Skow Bridge, Glenbane East, Foynes, as was shown in the 1923 Ordnance Survey map. This bridge was by-passed in the early 1980s, when a new bridge was constructed. It has since become totally overgrown with bushes and brambles and as a result access to the derelict bridge was not possible.

An interesting aspect of these milestones is that on the 1923 Ordnance Survey maps the distances to Limerick city and Tarbert are only depicted for each milestone. Yet each milestone has three faces. The only surviving milestones to have distances to Limerick city and Tarbert are those at Caheragh and Glin Demesne, and mileage depicted is the same as on the 1923 Ordnance Survey maps. This could be interpreted that these two milestones are the original ones from pre-1923 and all other milestones are replacements or perhaps the faces were later cut to accommodate the mileage to other villages. Adding further support to this theory is that on the 1923 Ordnance Survey maps the milestones at Leahys, Ardaneer, Craggs, Tomdeely North and Ballyengland North show the distance to Limerick city of 24, 22, 20, 18 and 14 miles respectively, while the distances depicted on each milestone are one mile less.

This survey found that twenty-one milestones did not survive on this section of the N69 road between 1923 and 2014. This is a high rate of loss and is as a result of the major alternations to the alignment, width and boundaries of this roadway in the last ninety years. Most of the milestones were in rural areas and therefore these areas suffered a greater loss. There were only three milestones situated in or on the edge of urban settlements at Foynes, Askeaton and Clarina. With the expansion of these urban settlements and building of new houses and footpaths at Foynes and Clarina in the last fifty years these milestones did not survive, while that at Askeaton was saved because it was set against a wall of house that has existed from before 1923. Interestingly many of the surviving milestones are situated adjacent to the Shannon estuary. As no development or road widening took place to the north of where these milestones are situated at Glin Demesne, Caheragh, Mount Trenchard and Leahys, there was a greater likelihood of these milestones surviving.