

THREE INTERESTING GLOUCESTERSHIRE SIGNPOSTS

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Teddington Hands

Teddington Hands is a stone column with metal arms to the south of the roundabout where the A46 Tewkesbury to Evesham road is met by the A435 from Cheltenham and the B4077 from Stow-on-the-Wold (SO 964 339). A minor road from Overbury also joins the roundabout, and the junction once included a way to Teddington and Winchcombe, but this is now only a footpath. The stone column stands near the original junction of these six routes, and it still has six arms each with a symbolic hand on the end.

The column also carries two inscriptions recording that the signpost was erected by Edmund Attwood. Both inscriptions start with the same four lines:

Edmund Attwood of the Vine Tree
At the first time erected me
And freely he did this bestow
Strange travellers the way to show.

One inscription on a brass plate continues:

Six generations past and gone
Repaired by Charles Attwood of Teddington.

Drinkwater(1) records that in 1868, words painted on the stone continued:

Eight generations past and gone
Repaired by Edmund Attwood of Teddington.

The inscription now chiselled on the stone column has these two final lines:

Ten generations past and gone
Repaired by Alice Attwood of Teddington August 10 1876.

Drinkwater(2) has traced the Attwood family back through the names given and found that the original Edmund Attwood lived between 1562 and 1643. So it is reasonable to say that the signpost dates from early seventeenth century, although the metal arms are presumably more recent. One final point of interest relates to the reference to Edmund Attwood being "of the Vine Tree". There still is a Vine Tree Farm in Teddington, and growing up the wall is a fine old vine that could date from Edmund's time.

Cross Hands, Chipping Campden

The sign post known as the Cross Hands is two miles south-west of Chipping Campden where the A44 is joined by the B4081 and a minor road from Snowhill (SP 131 359). It is a tall

white post with four metal arms, each having a hand on the end with a finger pointing. In fact what is there now is a replica, and the original is kept in Chipping Campden, but the replica is a very good likeness.

The inscriptions on the four arms say:

The Way to Oxford 24 miles 1669
The Way to Warwick 15 miles 1669
The Way to Woster 16 miles NI
The Way to Gloucester 18 miles NI

The initials NI must stand for Nathan or Nicholas Izod of nearby Westington and Broad Campden, who were both alive in 1669 when the signpost was evidently erected(3). The pointer to Gloucester seems surprising today as the road is mainly narrow and winding, but in the seventeenth century it was a main route over the Cotswolds via Snowhill, Stanway and Winchcombe(4). Another surprise is that the mileages quoted are about 70% of what would be considered correct today. Evidently the Izods must still have been using the old British mile of 2428 yards, which perhaps explains why travellers like Celia Fiennes commented upon the long miles they found in Gloucestershire(5).

In times past it was quite common for signposts to have arms with pointing hands, and it is from these that pubs at cross-roads have taken the name Cross Hands. This origin is often forgotten by modern sign painters who prefer the image of a highwayman with pistols in his hands crossed in front of his chest. In Gloucestershire, only the Cross Hands pub in Summer Street, Stroud, now has a signpost on its sign.

Tom Long's Post, Minchinhampton Common

Tom Long's Post is a modern signpost where a number of minor roads meet in the middle of Minchinhampton Common (SO 859 012). Although the present signpost is modern, the interest here is how the name Tom Long became associated with it. Several books suggest that Tom Long was a highwayman who was executed where he had committed his crimes. In fact most hangings took place at the gallows at Over or at the County Gaol in Gloucester, so if Tom Long was a highwayman, it is more likely that the post was where his body was hung in chains after execution as a deterrent to others. Another story is that Tom Long was a suicide who was buried at the cross-roads because he could not be buried in consecrated ground.

There is some evidence that the name Tom Long's Post came into common usage in the first half of the nineteenth century. An un-named direction post or crosspost is recorded at the cross-roads in the maps associated with turnpike road Acts of 1818 and 1821, but not in earlier Acts(6), whereas by 1841 the post was named in the definitions of the census enumerator's districts. While a highwayman could have been active or remembered during this period, there is no record of Tom Long as a highwayman in the Gaol Calendars which date from 1728 or in the list of hangings from 1786(7). Unfortunately, he is also not mentioned as a suicide in the surviving coroner's records(8), although these are so patchy that this possibility cannot be ruled out. In fact support for this possibility comes from an account of a lecture by Charles Playne in 1874 when he said "at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Tom Long hung himself in a cottage near Rodborough manor house and was buried

at the cross-roads”(9). This does sound plausible as the date is consistent with that deduced above, and the statement was made just about within living memory of the event.

However, Colonel Yarnold of Minchinhampton has put forward a totally different theory. He has pointed out that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Tom Long was the nickname for a carrier - like Tommy Atkins for a soldier or Jack Tar for a sailor(10). He suggests, therefore, that Tom Long’s Post was a setting-down and picking-up point for the carriers operating on the old road from Stroud to London which crossed the common. Any further contributions, supporting or contradicting any of these theories, would be most welcome.

Notes

- 1 Drinkwater, P. - *Ways and Waymarks in the Four Shires*.
- 2 Drinkwater, P. - *op cit*.
- 3 Drinkwater, P. - *op cit*.
- 4 Ogilby, John - *Britannia*.
- 5 Morris, C. (Ed) - *Journeys of Celia Fiennes*.
- 6 Glos. R. O. Q/RUM 64 & 72; 31 Geo II c65; 54 Geo III c53.
- 7 Glos. R. O. Q/SG index; Glos. Coll. JR 9.62.
- 8 Glos. R. O. D260, D1406.
- 9 Glos. Coll. R 205.5.
- 10 Lt. Col. Tony Yarnold - private communication.