



Traditional Direction Signs

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide advice on the use of traditional direction signs, on the repair and conservation of existing examples, and guidance on their reintroduction in appropriate locations.



INTRODUCTION

Traditional direction signs make a very important contribution to the local character and identity of suburbs, villages and rural areas across the country. Sometimes called fingerposts, they are a cherished part of the traditional image of the English countryside and suburban fringe. They have become icons that are important to national as well as to rural identity.

The wide variety of surviving regional and local designs helps to reinforce local distinctiveness, maintaining a sense of continuity in a rapidly changing environment. They are attractive items of street furniture that should be retained, repaired, and reintroduced where appropriate.

The Rural White Paper stated that “we want local authorities to seek ways to enrich the countryside as a whole, not just protected areas, and maintain its distinctive local features”.

A key component of a rural transport planning strategy should be to ensure that street furniture is both unobtrusive and compatible with local character. Various consultations have highlighted the importance which communities attach to this. Traditional direction signs can play an important role in meeting these objectives. The Department’s guidance on Local Transport Plans emphasises the particular importance of high quality design and maintenance of transport

infrastructure in historic urban and village environments, and in rural areas of high landscape value. The inclusion of local policies for traditional direction signs could therefore help an area to demonstrate the quality of its Local Transport Plan.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

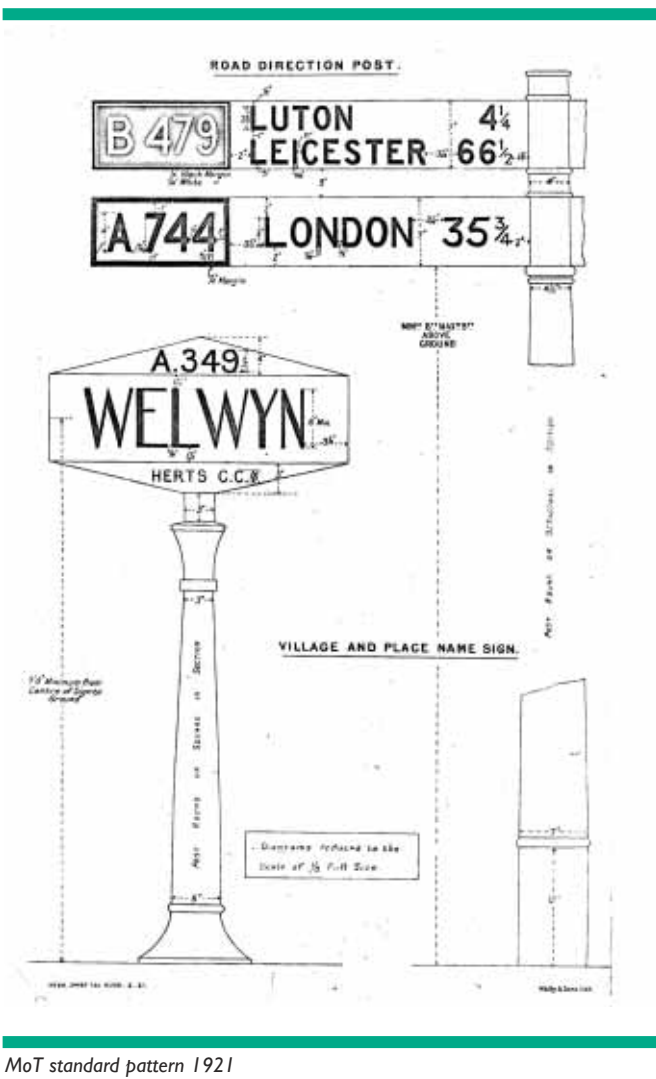
Milestones of all periods can still be found in a wide variety of forms and designs, including rare survivals from the Roman occupation. Traditional fingerposts have been part of the English country scene for centuries, which is why they are so important to rural identity. Timber waymarks with local directions painted on them were frequently installed by local parishes or people for local purposes. Medieval crosses in areas such as Dartmoor and the North Yorkshire Moors were intended to help travellers find their way, whilst the 'guide stoops' of Derbyshire and the Pennines often reflect pre-Turnpike packhorse routes.

In 1697 an Act was passed enabling local magistrates to erect direction signs at crossroads. The earliest known example of a fingerpost is Joseph Izod's post of

1699 in the Cotswolds. By the 1740s turnpike trusts were encouraged to mark every mile, and in 1766 this became compulsory to help stagecoach and mail services maintain schedules and timetables.

In 1773 the General Turnpike Act required trustees to erect signs informing travellers of the distance to the nearest town, and often to London. In the 20th century the earliest signs were erected initially by cycle clubs followed by the Automobile Association (AA) and the Royal Automobile Club (RAC), but with the Motor Car Act 1903 the Government passed responsibility for the provision of all traffic signs to local authorities. In 1921 the Ministry of Transport provided a model for direction signs, which recommended standard 2½ or 3-inch black upper case lettering on a white background, and specified that the name of the authority responsible for maintenance should be included in the design. The supporting posts were to be white. This requirement was set down in regulations in 1933 with a slightly modified font. The posts were now specified to be black and white.

Although based on a common model, local authorities had considerable discretion over the design of the posts, arms and finials, and this led to a rich variety of local styles which reinforced local character and



MoT standard pattern 1921

Traditional cast iron fingerposts reinforce local character: Cumbria

identity. Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall boast red posts with white lettering, the origin of which is unclear, whilst others carry finials in the form of discs, rings, balls and pyramids marked with county names and sometimes map grid references.

Following criticism of the inadequacy of the 1933 traffic signs system, in 1961 a Committee was appointed under Sir Walter Worboys to review traffic signs. The result was the 1964 Traffic Signs Regulations, which specified a new standard national style based on a mixed case font. Although local authorities were encouraged to remove traditional fingerposts, there was no general requirement to do so, and existing pre-1964 signs remain lawful to this day. However, until special provision was made in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1994, it was not possible to install new signs of the fingerpost type.

CURRENT REGULATIONS

The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 permit the erection of new fingerpost signs (diagram 2141) at the junction of one minor road with another (i.e. neither road must be classified as an A or B road).

PLANNING POLICY

Policies for the protection and restoration of historic street furniture command widespread community support and should be included in local development plans or frameworks. Because of the beneficial contribution that fingerposts can make to the local character and distinctiveness of an area, policies for their repair or reinstatement should be included in Village Design Statements, Parish Plans and other relevant work, such as the Quiet Lanes initiative, as well as in Local Transport Plans.

CONSERVATION AND REPAIR

- All surviving traditional fingerpost direction signs should be retained in situ and maintained on a regular basis. They should be repainted every five years in traditional black and white livery. Other colours should be used only when these are known to have been in use before 1940.



Fingerpost signs: design prescribed in Traffic Signs Regulations 2002 (Diagram 2141)



Routine repair and regular maintenance are essential

- Local amenity societies and parish councils are well-placed to document the location and condition of surviving examples. Signs audits to remove unnecessary clutter, such as duplicate signs, and to highlight priorities for the repair of historic street furniture, can be particularly helpful. Responsibility for maintenance should be made clear between the relevant council and the highway authority.
- Where damage has occurred, care should be taken to ensure that repairs are carried out sensitively to match the original materials and details as authentically as possible. If necessary, guidance should be sought from local authority conservation staff. Repair and maintenance can provide useful employment in the rural economy and help to support local jobs and craftsmanship. Cast metal arms, raised letters and other details can be replicated by specialist manufacturers.
- Where new arms or road details need to be added to an existing fingerpost, they should match the existing materials, lettering and livery exactly. Modern signs or symbols, for instance for tourist attractions or cycle routes, must not be added to fingerpost signs, as they do not comply with the Traffic Signs Regulations and detract from their authentic appearance.

NEW SIGNS

When considering the installation of new direction signs in rural areas, highway authorities should normally follow modern practice. Modern signs are more visible and easier to read at a distance, so that drivers are less likely to miss the junction. It should also be remembered that traditional fingerpost signs are not reflectorised and will be more difficult to read at night. However, on minor roads, where traffic is light and speeds relatively low, and where there are unlikely to be any safety implications if drivers slow down or stop to read the signs, traditional fingerposts can be reintroduced to match the original style and upper case font.

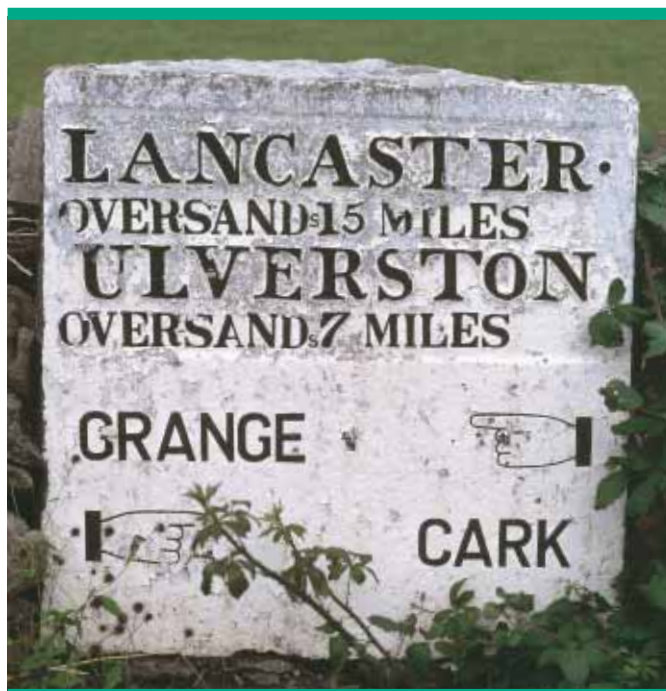
The original upper case fonts are no longer prescribed and therefore special authorisation is required. Alternatively, Transport Heavy alphabet, as shown on the Newton Longville example (diagram 2141 in the 2002 Regulations) may be used. Chapter 7 of the Traffic Signs Manual includes design guidance. Details of the fonts can be obtained from the Department for Transport. Where new fingerposts are installed, they should replace, not duplicate, existing signs.



New cast iron fingerpost to traditional design: Salternshill, Hampshire



Modern signs and symbols must not be added to fingerposts



Milestones of all periods are generally listable. Particular care is needed to avoid damage during the maintenance of verges and hedgerows

LISTING

Milestones of all periods generally qualify for addition to the statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest.

Because of their relatively recent date, their removal during World War II, and the regular renewal of their component parts, under current criteria traditional direction signs will not normally qualify for listed status, unless they are particularly unusual or elaborate examples. Nonetheless they make a major contribution to the historic environment and warrant every effort being made to retain them. Where they still provide an adequate level of service and safety, local authorities are recommended to retain and maintain them as part of an integrated approach to their highways and planning functions.

FUNDING

The repair of traditional fingerposts and the provision of appropriately designed new signs can form part of the maintenance bid in the Local Transport Plan, although such bids are unlikely to have a high priority in national terms. In some circumstances funding may be available to community groups from the Local Heritage Initiative, a Heritage Lottery Fund grant scheme run by the Countryside Agency. This scheme helps groups to

investigate, explain and care for their local landscape, landmarks, traditions and culture. Details can be found on the LHI website at www.lhi.org.uk, or for an application pack call 0870 9000401.

SUMMARY

- Traditional direction signs make a major contribution to local distinctiveness and rural identity. Their repair and maintenance can be important to the local economy by supporting craftsmanship and helping to provide local jobs.
- Existing examples should be retained and regularly maintained as part of an integrated approach to local authorities' highways and planning functions.
- Wherever appropriate, traditional fingerposts can be reintroduced on rural roads other than 'A' and 'B' classified roads to reinforce local identity, for example where some fingerposts are already in use in an area and new ones can provide an adequate level of service and safety. Duplicate or unnecessary additional signs should be removed to reduce clutter.
- Where fingerposts are reintroduced, only upper case lettering should be used. Where pre-1964 fonts are to be used on replacement signs, authorisation must be sought from the Department for Transport.
- Responsibility for the maintenance and repair of fingerposts and other historic street furniture should be clarified and local authorities should maintain a register of sites.

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www.dft.gov.uk

English Heritage
23 Savile Row
London
W1S 2ET
Tel: 020 7973 3000
Email: policy@english-heritage.org.uk
www.english-heritage.org.uk

Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)
128 Southwark Street
London
SE1 0SW
Tel: 020 7981 2867
Email: info@cpre.org.uk
www.cpre.org.uk

Countryside Agency
John Dower House
Crescent Place
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire
GL50 3RA
Tel: 01242 521381
Email: transport@countryside.gov.uk
www.countryside.gov.uk

Heritage Lottery Fund
7 Holbein Place
London
SW1W 8NR
Tel: 020 7591 6000
Email: info@hlf.org.uk
www.hlf.org.uk

The Milestone Society
The Oxleys
Tenbury Road
Clows Top
Kidderminster
Worcestershire
DY14 9HE
www.milestone-society.co.uk

FURTHER READING:

Benford, Mervyn: Milestones (2002)

Campaign to Protect Rural England: The Cluttered Countryside (1996)

Cumbria County Council, Signpost Restoration Ltd: Guidelines and specifications for the repair, restoration or reinstatement of cast iron signposts (2003)
Email: www.signpost-restoration.co.uk

The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 (TSO)

Department for Transport: The History of British Traffic Signs (1999)

English Heritage: Streets for All: A Guide to the Management of London's Streets (2000)

Hands, Stuart: Road Signs (2002)

HMSO: Report of the Committee on traffic signs for all-purpose roads (The Worboys Report) (1963)

Institution of Civil Engineers, Countryside Agency: Rural Routes and Networks: creating and preserving routes that are sustainable, convenient, tranquil, attractive and safe (2002)



Details of Traffic Advisory Leaflets available on the DfT website can be accessed as follows: www.dft.gov.uk
From the DfT homepage, click on Roads and Vehicles, then Traffic and Parking Management and then Traffic Advisory Leaflets.

The Department for Transport sponsors a wide range of research into traffic management issues. The results published in this Traffic Advisory Leaflet are applicable to England and Wales. Attention is drawn to variations in statutory provisions or administrative practices between the countries.

The Traffic Advisory Unit (TAU) is a multi-disciplinary group working within the Department for Transport. The TAU seeks to promote the most effective traffic management and parking techniques for the benefit, safety and convenience of all road users.

Department for Transport

Requests for unpriced TAU publications to:
Charging and Local Transport Division,
Zone 3/19, Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DR.
Telephone 020 7944 2478
e-mail: tal@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Llywodreth Cynulliad Cymru Welsh Assembly Government

Within Wales, enquiries should be made to:
Welsh Assembly Government,
Transport Directorate, 2nd Floor, Cathays Park,
Cardiff, CF10 3NQ
Telephone 029 2082 5111
e-mail: robert.cone@wales.gsi.gov.uk



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Systems



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