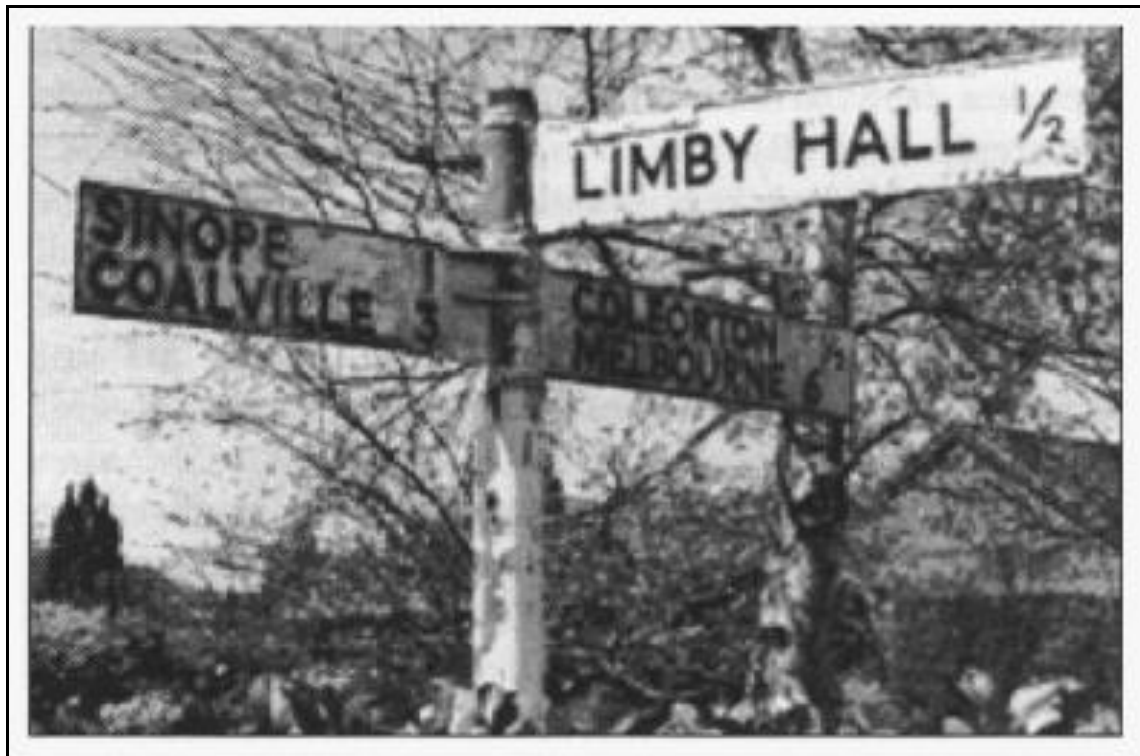


**A 'RARE' OLD LEICESTERSHIRE METAL
FINGER POST ON COLEORTON MOOR AT THE
JUNCTION OF 'THE MOOR' AND 'MOOR LANE'**



UNDATED PHOTOGRAPH BUT WOULD HAVE BEEN TAKEN POST 1960

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - JUNE 2023

FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPH

Taken from the Leicestershire Historian 37 (2001) for which they own the copyright.

PREFACE

The front cover photograph features the original main post, on which the finger post assembly is mounted. The former has been replaced at some point by a cast iron round tube. All other parts have survived and some repairs have been carried out. The author believes that this finger post dates back to the later Victorian period, and is quite possibly the only one of its design surviving now. Apparently, there was another one at Appleby Magna but the author cannot find any evidence of this being there now.

Traditional direction signs have made 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.

Historically, there were many, many more fingerposts across the country than we see today, as apparently in World War 2 many were removed, supposedly to disorientate the Germans should an invasion occur. Whilst the majority were stored and re-erected after the war, there were rumours that some counties sold them as metal for the war effort.

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**A RECENT PHOTOGRAPH OF THE FINGER POST UPPER ASSEMBLY
TAKEN FROM THE ROAD**

The upper part of the Finger Post assembly, which can be compared with the front cover photograph, is thought to have been made in the late Victorian period and is basically still as the original one erected, although the finial is missing from the top and some repairs have been carried out to the Limby direction finger to repair a crack. A serious crack has developed over the years in the finger post carrier. This requires repairing / welding at the earliest opportunity. The major change to the original design, is that a round cast iron finger assembly support post has been fitted at some point as a replacement for the original metal one shown below which had presumably corroded. There appears to be a series of numbers around the top of the original post.





RECENT PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN FROM THE REAR SHOWING THE REPLACEMENT CAST IRON POST



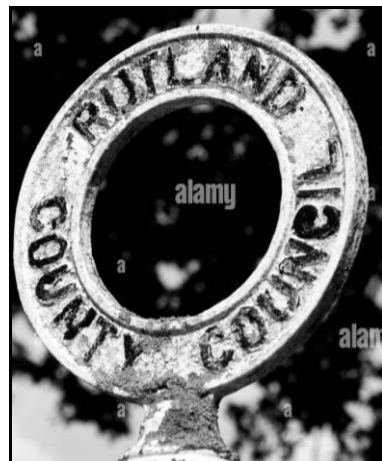
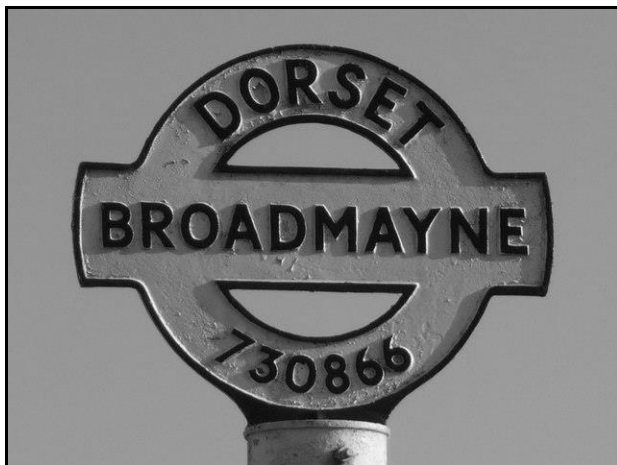
RECENT PHOTOGRAPH SHOWING THE PLATES ADDED SOME YEARS AGO EITHER SIDE OF THE LIMBY FINGER TO SUPPORT A SERIOUS CRACK WHICH HAD DEVELOPED

SPECIAL DESIGN FEATURES RELATED TO THE UPPER ASSEMBLIES, SPECIFIC TO THE COLEORTON FINGER POST

The upper assembly basically consists of four separate sections. Finger posts with integral brackets are attached to three of them. The parts have flanged male and female castellation on their end faces to facilitate the rotation of the finger posts into the required angular position. These can be seen clearly on the upper photograph on the preceding page. Later finger posts did not utilise this rather complex design, recorded as possibly being done by a Mr. Tucker of Ashby de la Zouch. The castellations on the upper section also allowed the top mounted finial to be rotated into the requisite angular position.



EXAMPLE OF CASTELLATIONS



TYPICAL OF FINIALS USED ON OLD FINGER POSTS

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FINGER POSTS

Certain information in the following narrative have been taken from an article featured in the Leicestershire Historian 37 (2001) by Joyce Lee and Jon Dean for which they own the copyright.

The front cover photograph is one of several important / old finger posts featured in the Leicestershire Historian article and described as "[A Rare Old Leicestershire Metal Finger Post on Coleorton Moor](#)".

Whilst milestones and mileposts provided distance and destination information along roads, the job of helping travellers to get on the right road in the first place was assisted by guideposts, later known as direction posts, fingerposts or signposts. In contrast to milestones and mileposts which were placed along roads and which typically stood three feet above ground level, the first guideposts were usually situated at important 'cross highways' and would have been noticeable by their height, their arms some nine feet above ground level, having been designed for the destinations to be read by travellers on horseback and coachmen without dismounting.

One of the oldest recorded guideposts in Leicestershire apparently stood close to the meeting place of Watling Street and the Fosse Way. The site was originally marked by a cross from which High Cross apparently takes its name. This was succeeded by a higher post, probably the same tall thin pointed wooden post illustrated in Nichols and which was described by a Mr. Ashmole in a letter to Sir William Dugdale in 1657 as a 'long pole ... with four arms directing the way from London to West-chester, and from York to Bristol'.

How useful many of these early guideposts were in reality is a matter for conjecture. According to one writer in 1635, it was usual '*where wayes be doubtfull, for a traveller to find a standing post with a hand to direct men the ready way... [but] Those hands tell thee not how many miles, nor the distance from place to place*'.

The growth in road traffic and the lack of improvements to road signing no doubt contributed to the legislation of 1698 which made it a duty of the local Justices to set up direction posts at crossroads. However, contemporary sources during the next half century suggest that in most parts of the country these obligations were being ignored, with accounts of coaches reaching crossroads with no signing, and servants being sent off in each direction to ascertain the correct route.

In common with elsewhere, it was the turnpike trusts which were the chief initiators of erecting guideposts, the General Turnpike Act of 1773 having made the trusts responsible for setting up and maintaining guideposts on their roads.

The fingerpost — first made of wood, then cast iron — started to be used extensively during this period by trusts, as did milestones. In 1766, the placing

of the latter along routes became compulsory as a means of measurement. By recording the time taken to travel between them, speed could be calculated as the stagecoach raced through the countryside. When fingerposts were installed, they were usually set at a height to be read from horseback or a horse-drawn carriage.

Few attempts were made to sign lesser routes until much later. Individual Acts provided legal protection for guideposts from a wide variety of damage and mischief.

The turnpike system only accounted for part of the public highway network, with many more miles of roads, lanes and byways under parochial and town administration, supplemented from 1835 by groups of parishes acting as highway boards, and with local surveyors authorized to maintain direction posts on non-turnpike roads. The extent of guideposts on both turnpike and non-turnpike roads in and around Leicester by the 1880s can be gleaned from the early large-scale Ordnance Survey maps. Major changes occurred from 1888 when the newly-formed County Councils took over the main county and turnpike roads, whilst in 1894 responsibility for the parochial roads passed to the new rural and urban district councils, transferring the duty of road signing to the appropriate authority. **Leicestershire County Council's early attempts to improve the signing of the county roads included the purchase in 1895 of 40 new posts from Richards & Son, iron founders of Leicester, to a specification by a Mr. Tucker, based on designs which he had originally carried out for the Ashby district.**

Today, the oldest surviving finger posts which can still be seen on the roads of Leicestershire and Rutland, are believed to be those of cast iron which belong to the early part of the twentieth century or possibly at the end of the nineteenth. Such posts are few however, with eight identified to date in Rutland, four of which are in the village of Braunston-in-Rutland, one at Barrowden, one at Pickworth, one near Teigh, and one at Lyndon. Of these, five bear the same maker's name, Gibson of Stamford, and most retain at least two of their original cast iron arms. Exceptionally, the Lyndon post is crowned by a hoop finial, bearing the name 'Rutland County Council'. There is another finial of this type preserved at Dingles steam village in Devon. **In contrast, only two definite older type metal posts have been found in Leicestershire so far, one at Appleby Magna, the other at Coleorton Moor.** In many cases, precise dating of posts is difficult, not only because of the frequent absence of maker's marks, but also because their various components can be renewed at different times.

In 1921, the design and construction of signposts had become the subject of a Circular from the Ministry of Transport which recommended block capitals 3" high in black on a white background, with an indication of which authority was responsible for the signpost's maintenance. Although aimed at standardizing signing, the guidelines were not only non-statutory but also left the design of arms and finial to each individual authority, the effect of this across the country being the development of many distinctive local styles.

Leicestershire's response was to replace any posts which were beyond repair and to repaint the remainder for further service, recommending that any new posts erected be of reinforced concrete with raised malleable iron letters on wooden arms bolted to the post.