

SURVEYS

Milestones in County Limerick

In 1731 an Act of Parliament was passed dealing with the repairs needed on the road which ran from Newcastle¹ through Rathkeale and Adare to Limerick city. From Limerick the road to Cork city went through Bruff, Kilmallock, Ballyhawra, Mallow, and White-Church.² The Act was deemed to be necessary because the existing laws in operation at the time were not effective in keeping the road in good repair. It is probable that the methods used up to 1731 were those prescribed in Acts passed in the reign of James I in the early-seventeenth century. These obliged every day-labourer to work for six days in each year, at the highways in their parishes.³ This work was unpaid and therefore unpopular and, not surprisingly, it proved unsatisfactory for the maintenance of roads. This allowed a situation to develop whereby in winter, the road from Newcastle was almost impassable for wagons, carts and carriages.

Under the Act of 1731 the landowners through whose lands the roads between Newcastle and Limerick and from Limerick to Cork city ran, were appointed trustees for the proposed work. These included some of the most important landlords in Ireland, such as the Earl of Cork and Burlington, the Earl of Barrymore, the Earl of Inchiquin, the Earl of Orrery, Viscount Shannon, the Anglican bishops of Cork and Limerick, Baron Southwell and Sir Standish Hartstonge. There were many other trustees, too numerous to mention, who were not so rich or important. Any five of these men had the authority to erect turnpikes upon or across any part of the highway and have tollhouses put in place for the collection of tolls.

Coaches pulled by more than two but fewer than six horses could be charged six pence while those pulled by one or two horses could be charged three pence. It was proposed that wagons, wains⁴ or carts with four wheels should pay one shilling and those with two wheels and more than one horse should pay three pence. Cattle were charged at the rate of ten pence per score but calves, pigs, sheep or lambs cost five pence per score. Anyone who refused to pay the required toll could have their goods seized. If within five days they did not pay the cost of the toll the goods or animals could be sold, the cost of maintenance deducted and the balance returned to the owner. The first profits derived from the tolls were to discharge the expense of procuring the 1731 Act of Parliament. It would seem that the landlords along the route of the road, and merchants, who were interested in the transportation of goods, had incurred costs in lobbying for the passing of the Act. After that profits were to be spent on the upkeep of the road and on the salaries of those employed by the turnpike.⁵

¹ The earliest use of the designation West so far identified is in 1865, see Patrick O'Connor, *Exploring Limerick's Past* (Newcastle West, 1987) p. 178, note 18.

² *Statutes at Large*, 5 George II, c. 22.

³ *Ibid.*, 33 George II, c.7-8.

⁴ Archaic word for a wagon.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5 George II, c.22.

Seven milestones survive on the road from Newcastle West to Limerick city (N21), while two are found on the R512 between Limerick city and Kilmallock.⁶ The first milestone discussed (Fig. 1) is situated in the townland of Killeheen. It is set into a stone wall, on what is a newly-widened stretch of roadway: therefore, it is difficult to know if it always occupied this position. It is made of limestone and is 30 inches (76 millimetres) in height. There is a triangular shape at the top of the stone which carries the information that the distance to Newcastle is 5 [miles]. As one faces the stone it carries, on its right side the information, that Killarney is 46, while on the left side Limerick 21, is inscribed. It does not have the word 'miles' on the stone, merely the number. It is unlikely that it was set up under the 1731 Turnpike Act which stated that the journey was to be from Newcastle to Limerick and Cork and not Limerick city to Kerry. It is probable that the stone belongs to the nineteenth century when there was a substantial increase in tourist traffic to Killarney. For example, Bianconi ran a Limerick-Killarney car from 1839 to 1853. This car left Limerick for Tralee and at Rathkeale connected with the Tarbert car. It also had a connection at Castleisland with the Castleisland-Killarney branch car.⁷ This milestone is not marked on Sheet 36 of the Sites and Monuments Record Constraint Maps, which covers historical and archaeological remains in the vicinity of Newcastle West.

The next milestone (Fig. 2) is at Castlematrix near Rathkeale. On the Sites and Monuments map, Sheet 29, a milestone is shown at approximately where this one now stands. However, on the map the milestone is 15 [miles] to Limerick and 5 [miles] to Newcastle West. The stone found at Castlematrix contains different information. There is a triangular section cut at the top of the stone and on this it states that Newcastle West is 7 [miles distant]. On the right face Killarney is shown to be 48 while on the left face Limerick is 19. The word 'miles' does not appear on the stone. The 'Kil' from Killarney is missing and is merely painted on while the rest of the name is incised. The 'L' of Limerick is also painted on and the rest of the name is incised. The limestone block is 27 inches in height (68 mm).

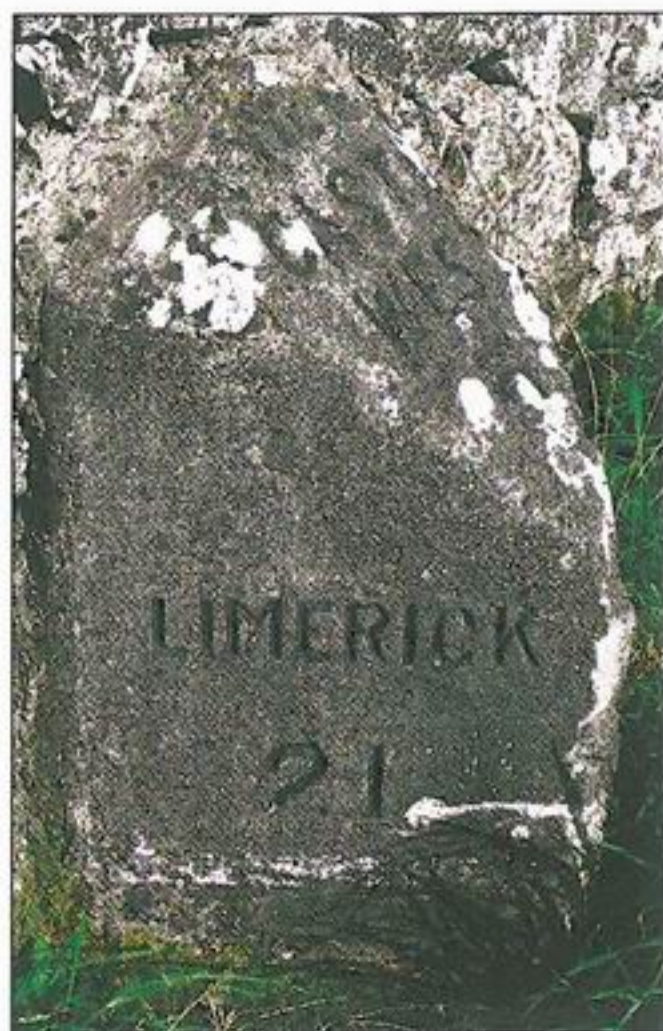


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

⁶ Research conducted during the winter of 2007-08. I wish to thank Mrs Elsie O'Connell for bringing some of the milestones to my attention.

⁷ Patrick F. Wallace, 'The Organisation of Pre-Railway Transport in Counties Limerick and Clare' *NMAJ*, 15 (1972) p. 48.

A milestone still stands on the main street in Rathkeale, approximately one hundred yards on the Newcastle West side of the bridge over the river Deel (Fig. 3). It is 34 inches in height (86 mm) and is made of limestone. It is marked on the Sites and Monuments Record map, Sheet 29. There is the triangle at the top with the distance to Newcastle shown as 8 [miles]. On the left face Limerick is 18 [miles], while on the right face Killarney is 49 [miles]. In Taylor and Skinner, *Maps of the Roads of Ireland*,⁸ this site in the town is shown as milestone 14 on the road from Limerick to Tralee. However, the milestone now standing is not that which was erected in the eighteenth century as the distance from Rathkeale to Newcastle West is given as six miles three furlongs,⁹ measured in Irish miles and the distance to Limerick as fourteen miles also using the old Irish measurements. These had 2,240 yards per mile, in contrast to the English, statute mile, which consists of 1,760 yards. The statute mile was formulated by the English Parliament in 1592, hence the word 'statute.' The present milestone was set up in the nineteenth century when the English measurement had been adopted under the influence of the Ordnance Survey. By 1846 all of the island of Ireland had been mapped on the scale of six inches to one mile thus providing a strong impetus for the general adoption of standard measurement on milestones. The two previously discussed milestones, which have the same design and are almost the same size, also show distances in English miles.

Another milestone stands on the outskirts of Adare (Fig. 4), on the Rathkeale side where the road from Ballingarry (R519) meets the N21. It is beside the wall enclosing the old deer park of the Dunraven estate. It is made of limestone and is 28 inches (71 mm) in height. It is marked on Sheet 21 of the Sites and Monuments map. Taylor and Skinner list it as milestone 9.¹⁰ It is interesting that measurements are in Irish miles: 9 Irish miles from Limerick, and 5 Irish miles from Rathkeale. It is almost flat on top and on its right side 'Rathkeale 5 miles' is not incised but seems rather to be painted on the stone. The 'L' of Limerick is missing but it states 'imerick 9 miles'. This milestone is not the same design as those already mentioned. It seems to be older and in a more distressed condition than those around Rathkeale and because it measures distances in Irish miles, it is probable that it was set up in the eighteenth century.



Fig. 3

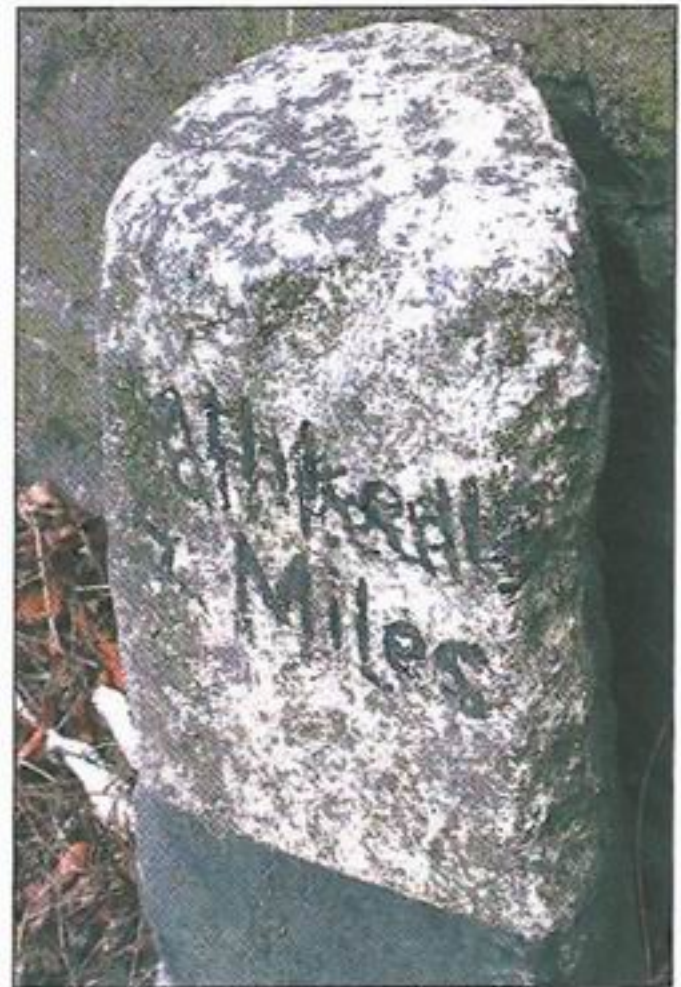


Fig. 4

⁸ George Taylor and Andrew Skinner, *Maps of the Roads of Ireland Surveyed 1777* (London and Dublin, 1778) p. 104.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

On the grass margin close to the entrance to the Augustinian friary at Adare (Fig. 5), there is a milestone of similar construction to the previous one. The top is almost flat, but the finish is rough. On its left side it states that Limerick is 8 miles distant and on the right side that Rathkeale is 7 miles away. Taylor and Skinner state that there are 8 Irish miles from Limerick to Adare. However, the same page indicates that there are 6 Irish miles from the eighth milestone at Adare to the fourteenth at Rathkeale.¹¹ Could it be possible that this stone dates from the 1730s and is not therefore as accurate as those produced in the late-eighteenth century? It is also clear from the map on page 103 of Taylor and Skinner that the eighth milestone is situated on the Limerick side of the river Maigue and not in its present position. The 22 inch (56 mm) milestone is constructed from limestone. The stone, in its present position, is marked on Sites and Monuments map, Sheet 21.

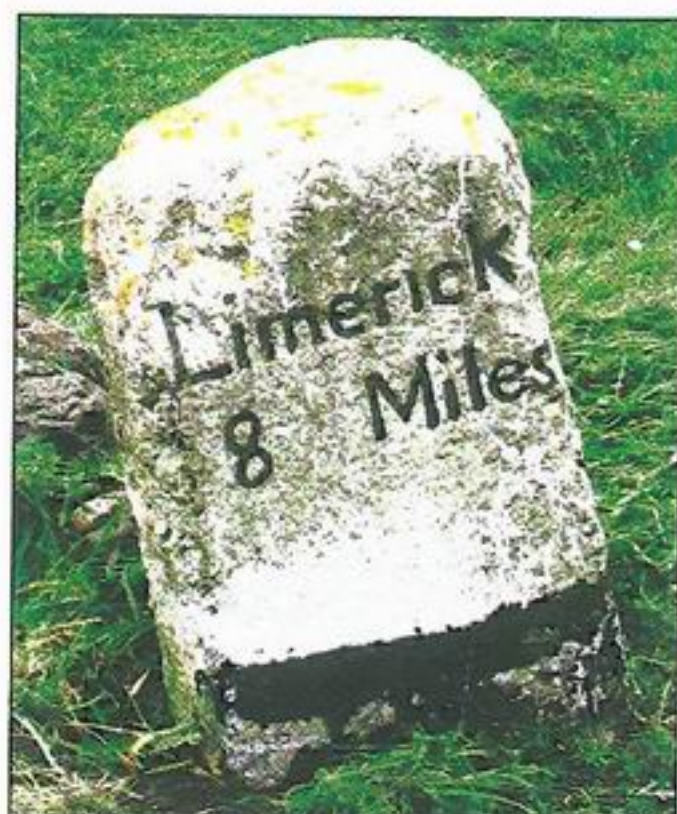


Fig. 5

A few years ago a milestone, situated between Adare and Patrickwell, was rescued by the Lynch family (Fig. 6). It was about to be smashed by a mechanical digger but a timely intervention ensured that it is once more erected in its original position for all to see. It is situated near the site of the old Newborough House in the townland of Ballyloughnaa, on the old Adare to Limerick road.¹² This stone is 29 inches (74 mm) in height and made from limestone. The height of this stone, compared to other ones found on this road, can be accounted for by the fact that it is now propped up against a concrete support; it is not partially buried in the ground which is the usual method of holding milestones in place. It is also marked on Sites and Monument map, sheet 21. It shows that Limerick is 6 miles distant while Rathkeale is 8 miles away. The 'e' of Rathkeale is missing. Taylor and Skinner's map on page 103 shows the sixth milestone from Limerick, 6 Irish miles from the city and 8 Irish miles from the fourteenth milestone at Rathkeale.

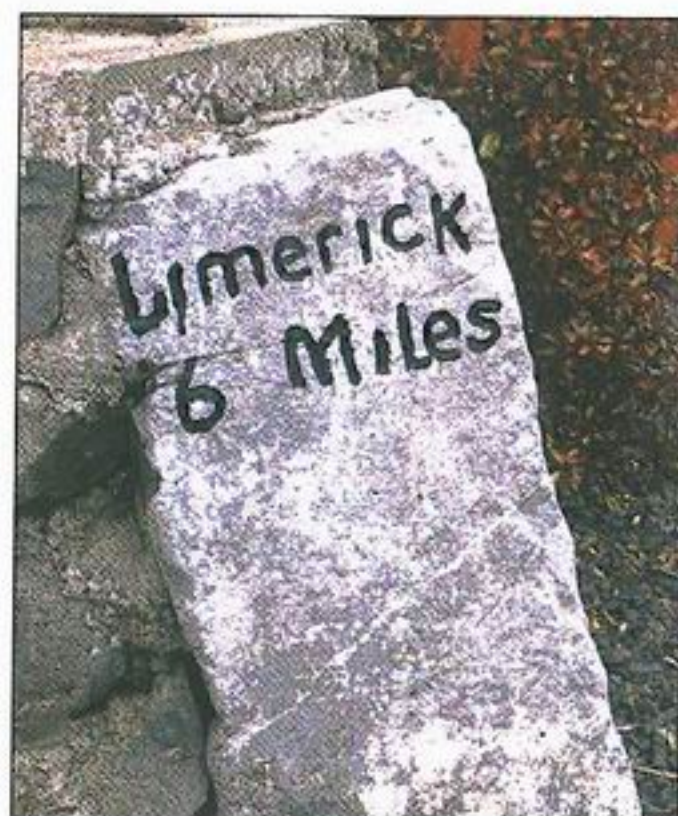


Fig. 6

On the old approach to the village of Patrickswell from Adare, in the townland of Ballyanrahan, there is another milestone (Fig. 7). It is 23 inches (59 mm) in height but it is so worn that it was not possible to make out anything inscribed on its surface. Its general design is similar to the three previous stones.



Fig. 7

¹¹ Ibid., p. 103.

¹² Information from Mary Lynch, Ballyloughnaa, 15 February 2008.

Its top is rough and it is presumed that the towns and distances were inscribed on both of its sides. This stone is also shown on Sites and Monument map, Sheet 12.

Two milestones were found on the road between Limerick city and Kilmallock. The first one is in the townland of Grange. If one is travelling from Limerick it is situated a short distance before one reaches the estate wall of the old Grange demesne. The stone (Fig. 8) is different to any of those already discussed. It contains only the number 9 cut into a square. There is no mention of any towns or villages. The stone is dressed, with careful and exact margins at the angles and around the end where it enters the ground. It appears to be milestone 41 of Taylor and Skinner.¹³ This would make it the ninth stone from Limerick on the journey from Cork to Limerick. Therefore, it was not put in place to guide travellers from Limerick to Cork but was erected to guide people into Limerick from Cork city. Another milestone, of almost identical design, was found just outside Kilmallock (Fig. 9). However, it is now painted white to celebrate the fact that it was rescued from a ditch.¹⁴ The number carved is 19. Again there is no town or village inscribed on the stone. It is in the townland of Mount Fox and is probably milestone 34 of Taylor and Skinner.¹⁵ Both milestones are marked on the Sites and Monuments map; the one at Grange on Sheet 23 while the stone at Mount Fox is on Sheet 39. At approximately the top of both of these milestones a chevron has been carved, making the shape of an arrow. The arrow is considered to be one of the oldest marks indicating ownership by the British government. It is not clear if these stones, with their unusual design, were put in place by the army or by the Ordnance Survey.

Charlotte Murphy



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

¹³ Taylor and Skinner, *Maps of the Roads of Ireland*, p. 184.

¹⁴ Information obtained locally on 12 October 2008.

¹⁵ Taylor and Skinner, *Maps of the Roads of Ireland*, p. 184.