



## West Dart Research Papers – No 1

### A Rare and Historic Stone Re-discovered at Bow

Graham Hawkins

After the dissolution of the monasteries, Henry VIII realised that he had lost the bodies who administered the maintenance of country's roads and bridges. In order to provide for this, he introduced the *Bridges Act* (also referred to as the *Statute of Bridges*) in 1530 which laid down the basis for the finance and upkeep of bridges and associated roads.

The aim of the act, enacted in 1531, was to ensure that bridges should not fall into disrepair purely because nobody was accountable for their maintenance thus causing them to, *lie long without amendment to the great annoyance of the King's subjects*. The act stated that the bridges were to be maintained by the counties unless it could be proven that another body or individual was responsible. In Devonshire, responsibility was assumed by the magistrates of the Quarter Sessions, an arrangement that remained in place until the County Councils were established in 1880.



Tuckenhay Bridge County Stone (N)

In order that the act was funded and complied with, the county levied a rate on all the inhabitants of the administrative area, appointing two collectors to gather the rates and two surveyors to oversee that any bridge repairs were carried out. As well as maintenance of a bridge, the statute required that the road over it, and for 300ft on either approach, should be properly maintained. The levy provided a model for the poor rate introduced in 1601 and subsequent local rates raised for a variety of purposes including road upkeep.

In 1841 the Devon magistrates decided that the limits of their responsibility were to be marked by bound stones. These were about 3 feet high with incised Cs on the sides facing the road. One was to be placed either side of a bridge at the required distance. The cost of the installation of each stone was approximately 7/6d.

The stones came to be known as *County Stones* or '*C*' *Stones*. Many of those still identifiable are located on Dartmoor including those listed below.

Location	OS GR		
Bellever Bridge (2)	658774	Holne Bridge (2)	730706
Brent Bridge (1)	697595	Horrabridge (2)	514699
Cadover Bridge (1)	555647	Huccaby Bridge (2)	659729
Cockingford Bridge (1)	717751	Huckworthy (2)	531705
Dart Bridge (1)	745667	Ivybridge (2)	636564
Gulwell Bridge (1)	753693	Langham Bridge (2)	608592
Harbournford Bridge (1)	717623	Lydford Bridge (1)	509845
Hill Bridge (2)	532803	Merrivale Bridge (1)	550751
		Norsworthy Bridge (1)	568694

Ockery Bridge (1)	595751	Steps Bridge (1)	804883
Piall Bridge (2)	596604	Two Bridges (1)	607749
Ponsworthy Bridge (2)	702604	Ward Bridge (2)	543720
Shipleigh Bridge (2)	681628	Wisdom Bridge (2)	614603

But we are not without our own County Stones in the West Dart. One has long been known in the retaining wall below Tuckenhay House on the right just before the old Corn Mill. This is the north stone of the pair that marked Tuckenhay Bridge which originally was took the original road from Ashprington over the River Wash and via Corkscrew Hill to Cornworthy.

But now this is not alone. In 2013 a WDHG publication *More Memories* featured the reminiscences of several senior villagers in the area including Heather Simpson who lived at Chapelle Cottage near Bow Bridge. A couple of years ago I received a box of local archives from the executors



Bow Bridge County Stone (E) in the garden of Chapelle Cottage, Bow 2013



Bow Bridge County Stone (E) installed outside Chapelle Cottage, Bow 2024

of the late Sheila Johnson who was a keen local historian and had edited the *More Memories*' book. In the box were all the original photographs taken for the book including one of Heather's garden. To one side was a garden path of large stones, one of which was engraved with a large letter 'C'.

(The long stone on the right near the lower edge of the photograph). I guessed this was a County Stone.

I approached the present owners of Chappelle Cottage, Joe and Nina Todd, and very kindly they agreed to lift the stone from their path and install it on the roadside of their garden wall to be enjoyed by all who pass.

When walking the lanes of the South Hams keep a sharp look out for any other lost examples of these splendid stones.