

EASTRY PARISH COUNCIL

BEATING THE BOUNDS

Sunday 10th October 2010



EASTRY 2

SANDWICH 5



Boundary Beaters in 2002



Statenborough Farm,
Sandwich Road,
Eastry, KENT
CT13 0DH

10th October 2010

Dear Parishioner,

Thank you for joining us in this perambulation of our Parish Boundary. It has been 8 years since we last ventured forth on this 14 mile stroll and I am honoured to be leading the walk on this occasion.

It will take approximately 5 hours to walk the full 14 miles but you are welcome to walk only part of the way if you wish. Lifts can be arranged for those wishing to return to the village. The boundary crosses roads at various locations and cars can be dispatched to pick you up if required. Details of phone numbers to ring are available from the registration table.

I would like to thank Mary for allowing us to meet at the Five Bells and for providing refreshments this is very much appreciated by myself and the other members of the Parish Council.

Thank you again for joining us and I hope you all enjoy the day,

Yours truly,

Nick Kenton

Nick Kenton
Chairman of the Parish Council

ORIGINS OF BEATING THE BOUNDS

In the beginning

In the mists of time, family groups would have spread out from their initial settlement, clearing the wild wood as they went with fire and flint axe, and cultivating the virgin soil. Eventually they would have run up against the neighbouring community, coming the other way. The need for a recognised territorial boundary was thus born.

Natural features such as rock outcrops, streams and solitary trees (in later times some were 'Gospel Oaks') were often used as boundary markers. To avoid boundary disputes, it was important that the location of the boundary line was understood. Before the coming of the Ordnance Survey, with its precise maps in the nineteenth century, the position of town and parish boundaries were passed on by word of mouth. Often this was not enough, and recourse was had to the process of the 'Beating of the Bounds'.

Perambulation

The Beating of the Bounds is an age-old ritual, possibly having its roots in a fertility rite, traditionally carried out in Rogation Week, between the fifth Sunday after Easter and Ascension Day. In the case of a rural parish, the parson, accompanied by village worthies and a throng of inhabitants, young and old, walked around ('perambulated') the parish boundary. He would preach and give blessing at the various markers around the route. In some communities sprigs of tree foliage (oak) were carried, in others elm or willow wands were used to do the 'beating' of the boundary markers. This communal occasion was lubricated by liberal quantities of food and drink. But there was a serious purpose: to keep fresh in the local collective memory the exact location of a boundary that may never have been written on any kind of map.

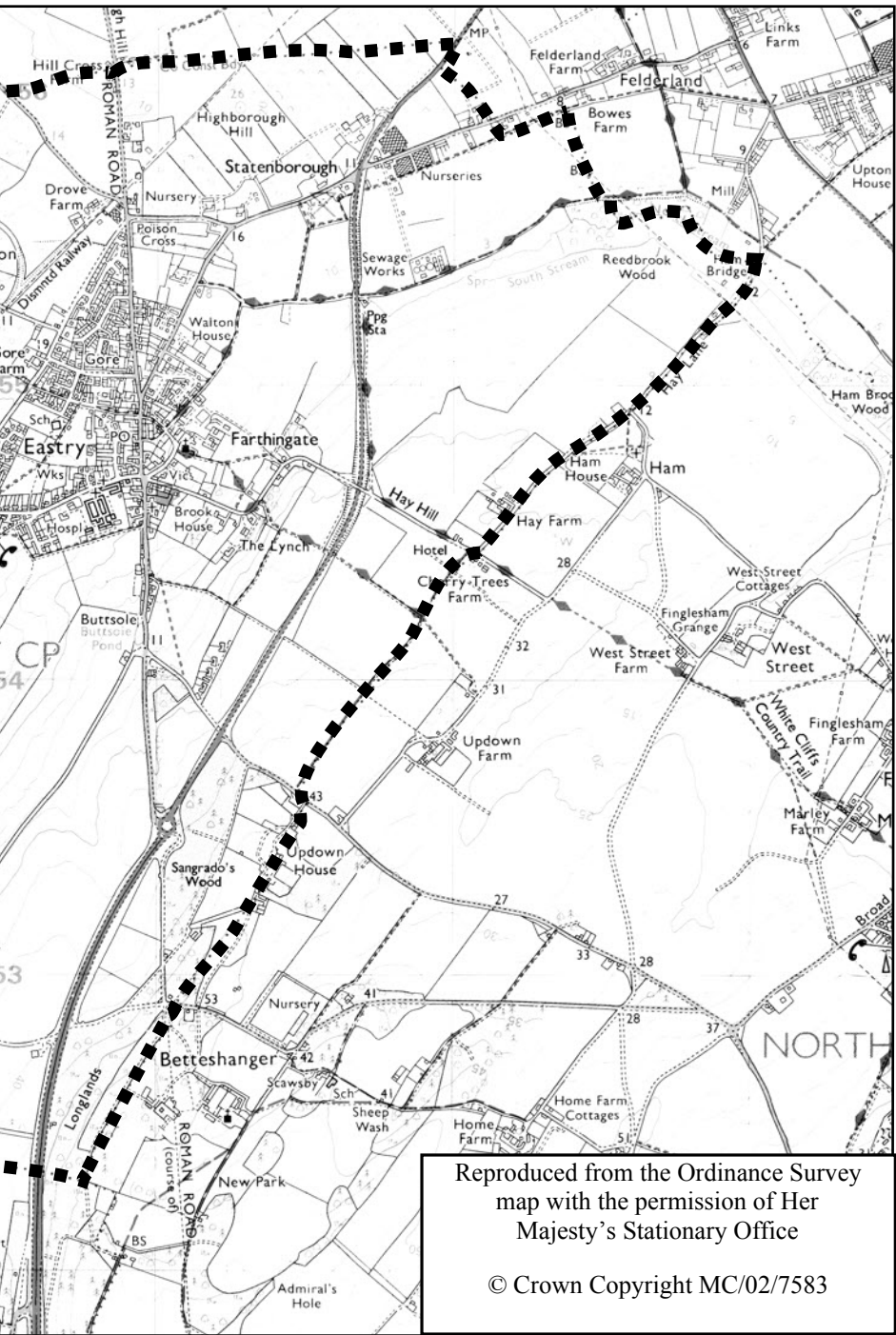
To reinforce the message, young lads in the procession (the elders of the future) would often be given a 'memorable' experience at particular points on the circuit. For instance a boy might be told to 'feel the heat' of a certain boundary stone. As soon as he had touched the stone, he would be grabbed and his finger given a mighty wrench - as a reminder of the stone and its importance. In another recorded instance a boy had his ears pulled and was 'set on his head' upon a marker-stone.

The importance of the boundary

Understanding the position of the boundary was of vital importance to an individual in his relationship to his community, his parish church and local government. It had economic significance in defining common rights (to land, or firewood collection, for instance). In mediaeval times, the church had a right to a 'tithe': a tenth of all crops and produce went to the parson as a tribute to the church. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 16th century, however, the right to a tithe could be bought and sold, leased or sub-let.

The position of a boundary would determine the value of a tithe, and be of great significance. Disputes about boundaries were common, and often heated.

Photographs in this booklet were taken by Chris Martin during the last perambulation on 6th October 2002.



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EASTRY TRADITIONS

The purpose of beating the bounds, was to impress the route upon the inhabitants, especially the young. In Eastry, this was frequently achieved by "bumping" them on the marker stones.

The Overseers and Highway Wardens had to levy rates to maintain the poor, hurry sick travellers into the next parish and ensure no stone was laid in the neighbour's road. When the boundary was in the middle of the road, Eastry and Woodnesborough had to fill one cart rut each until they hit on the revolutionary idea of each repairing the whole road for half the distance

Our first record of "Beating" dates from 1356 and is entirely concerned with tithe. Worth was then part of Eastry and the walkers had to go down to the sea and along the shore. Items like "Dinners for going the bounds" preserve dates from 1689 to 1868 and the walk was completed at least 13 times in the 20th century. The most recent occasion was on 6th October 2002.

A record of 1814 reminds us that the boundary is reputed to pass through the farmhouse at Thornton "Entering the house at an eastern angle" ----- and "through the oven". Legend has it that the smallest boy used to be popped into the oven. That record mentions few stones but refers to stumps, a mark on an Elm tree, a Maple stump and the stool of an Oak tree as markers.

The most detailed record is of 1897 when more than 60 stones were found, including the 21 all very close together at Heronden.. Some stones were missing in the 1920s and were replaced.

On Shingleton Down the boundaries of Eastry, Tilmanstone and Nonington converge at a spot once marked by an ancient Yew tree, where by custom the Old Hundredth (associated with Psalm 100) "All people that on earth do dwell", is always sung. No doubt it is a memorial of the days when neighbouring parishes sent

representatives to join the walkers. Sadly the tree was grubbed about 1956 and in 1957 we found ourselves in pouring rain, singing in the middle of a field of Kale. The first replacement tree died because the soil is very shallow over solid chalk, but in November 1979 Councillors Waring and Shevde dug a deep hole in the chalk which was filled with imported soil in which the present tree was planted, guarded from horses and sustained with drums of water during its first two summers.

In 1931 the boundary with Woodnesborough was varied. Instead of first reaching eastward along the Canterbury road to Poison Cross it now passes across the fields from Great Selson land to Foxborough Hill.

The forgoing owes much to an illuminating paper by the late Mr. R. W. Hopper (Clerk to the Parish Council 1956-83) and to the Minutes of the Council.

Jack Bones



The Old 100th Psalm

1. All people that on Earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;
Him serve with fear, His praise forth tell,
Come ye before Him, and rejoice.
2. The Lord, ye know, is God indeed,
Without our aid He did us make;
We are His folk, He doth us feed,
And for His sheep He doth us take.
3. Oh enter then His gates with praise,
Approach with joy His Courts unto;
Praise, laud and bless His name always,
For it is seemly so to do.
4. For why? The Lord our God is good,
His mercy is forever sure;
His truth at all times firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure.
5. To Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
The God whom Heaven and Earth adore;
From men and from the Angel host,
Be praise and glory evermore.





Stephen Coulson being bumped on a marker stone in 2002 by Bill Martin and his grandad Colin Coulson