MARRIOTT’S WAY MILEMARKERS AND SCULPTURE

Zipper mile-marker, Nigel Barnett

The second set of twenty six mile markers by John Behm with Nigel Barnett was commissioned by Norfolk CC in 2009. Beginning at Norwich the series of mile- posts and plaques are placed at mile intervals, marking the 26 miles to Aylsham, as were the railways measured by mile markers. Nigel Barnett’s series of benches are made out of re-used rusted iron, rails and flywheels, picturesquely welded with one taller element besides the bench shape, decorated with John Behm’s plaques. Most are informed by the theme of “Movements”: railways are about movement, but along the route of Marriott’s Way, the walker, cyclist or rider will pass by places associated with widely varying forms of communication, transport, or migration, from the River Wensum to a Roman road, to airfields, and much in between. Each of these was intended to be rubbed, and these notes based on those by John Behm provide background information. They are accompanied by the drawings used to produce the plaques, although some of these may not yet be in place.

Mile zero: The first plaque shows the route of Marriott’s Way, together with a Roman road and the pilgrim route to Walsingham, superimposed with an image of the Midland and Great Northern’s City Station, which stood in Barn Road, alongside the Wensum. City Station’s Italianate building was destroyed in a bombing raid during the Second World War, the site was later redeveloped, the road widened, the roundabout installed. Where once the rather grand, if diminutive, station stood, is now dual carriageway.

Mile One: This plaque commemorates the Shutter Telegraph, Britain’s first rapid long-distance system of detailed communication. Originally invented for France by Claude Chappe, who coined the word “te’le’graph”, it was ‘re-invented’ by the Revd Lord George Murray and the Admiralty commissioned chains of stations from Whitehall, including one to Great Yarmouth early in the nineteenth century. One of its two routes passed south of Lenwade, intersecting Marriott’s Way at three points - one very near the site of this sculpture. This plaque shows a cabin with the great frame of the shutter mechanism above, hung with pivoted panels manipulated by ropes inside the station. The system used a code based on 63 combinations of the open and shut shutters, to signal 23 letters. Around the image of the station, the plaque shows combinations forming some of the alphabet.
Mile Two: A Norfolk wherry, the broad-beamed shallow-draught barges which plied the Wensum and other rivers, until superseded by the internal-combustion engine. It was easier to move heavy material (or livestock, or people) by water than it was by land. Imagine the effort needed to shift a ton of stone in a wagon over any kind of ground, compared with moving the same load in a boat with a pole, a paddle, or better yet a sail.

Mile Three: *Up and Down Trains*. One steam engine is seen from the footplate of another. There were very few stretches where trains could pass each other at speed, since it was usual to have single lines, with dual tracks normally only at stations. The M&GN pioneered a system of keys which locked sections of single line against other, oncoming traffic, to prevent head-on collisions.

Mile Four: This image shows the decorated hilt of an Anglo-Saxon sword, found at Costessey, as a reminder of the coming of the Angles and Saxons from North Germany, and of the violence that marked their conquest of the Romanized British peoples, descendants of Boudicca and her tribe, who lived here at the time.

Mile Five: One of two pilgrims, shown in the style of an early woodcut, uses his staff as he walks while his companion carries a parcel on his. They are debating, either fine points of belief, or where they'll spend the night. Pilgrimage, the long walk to a holy place is an important part of many religions. Walsingham was an important shrine, famed for its Holy House. It was also part of “The Milky Way”, a medieval route visiting holy houses dedicated to the Madonna. The stretch of the Marriott’s Way at which this sculpture is found parallels, and intersects, the pilgrim route from Norwich to Walsingham.

Mile Six: William Marriott was the supervising engineer of the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway for about 40 years, operating from headquarters at Melton Constable. A man of tremendous energy, enthusiasm and application, he designed everything. Bridges, the single-line key system, mail-bag collection gadgets and locomotives. This plaque illustrates a typical M&GN 4-4-0, steam loco, named after the layout of the wheels. The M&GN locos were numbered between 1 and 99, rather than named. Here number 45 steams up the line toward Melton Constable.
Mile Seven: During World War Two, both the RAF and the US Army Air Force built airfields throughout Norfolk, and the route of Marriott’s Way is near four airfields: Horsham St. Faith’s, Attlebridge, Oulton and Swannington, close enough to the line for coal trains to deliver to the airfield. Swannington was home to Mosquito Fighter-Bombers, and one can be seen between two crossing searchlights, making the pattern of the ‘stave and crotchet’ used in the design of the runways to allow take off and landing regardless of the direction of the wind.

Granite slab on bank on right from Norwich, Les Bicknell and Keith Rackham, inscribed KAAH-KAAH, perhaps referring to a rook’s call

Mile Eight: The Wensum River valley has been the site of many archaeological finds, more especially of Bronze age axe-heads. Some were a ritual offering to the gods, while others were deposited by the maker or trader in bronze tools, secreting his stock against uncertain times. As there was no source in East Anglia of the raw ore to produce bronze, metal goods had to be imported, by foot, in bulk: this image suggests the flow of bronze tools into Norfolk over the course of the Bronze Age.

Mile Nine: The North German invaders of the early medieval period, the Anglo-Saxons and the Danish Vikings, brought with them unfamiliar forms of worship, including devotion to Thor. His followers wore a pendant depicting the “Thor Hammer”. The finely-wrought example with inlaid silver decoration from which this image is drawn is now in the Norwich Castle Museum, but it was found near here, at Great Witchingham.
**Mile Ten:** Here near Lenwade, Marriott’s Way passes both a round barrow cemetery group and the Foxford Henge monument, part of the ‘ritual landscape’ of the Wensum valley uncovered by recent research. These barrows and Henges played a significant part in the devotion to the gods demonstrated by the scattered populations of the Neolithic and Bronze Ages in the valley of the Wensum.

**Green granite Monolith,** Les Bicknell and Keith Rackham near Lenwade bridge inscribed with early versions of the river Wensum’s name: Wensum/ Wenson/ Weneson/ Weysum/ Wantsume/ Winsder/ Wentsat.
**Mile Eleven:** In this plaque we see the old bridge over the Wensum at Lenwade, an important aid to travel along this route, reflected in the fact that there have been three successive bridges at this point in recorded history, with more before that, emphasizing the importance of the Wensum valley as a conduit of exchange and communication.

**Mile Twelve:** An owl’s eye view over the intimate local landscape, made up of small holdings and farms which still provide a diversity of habitat supportive of wildlife. Marriott’s Way provides a succession of ideal vantage points from which to enjoy our fragile natural heritage.

**Memorial** Carrara marble, near Whitwell station Les Bicknell and Keith Rackham inscribed down the column with battlefields in the Somme, as Marriott’s Way was used for the mobilisation of Norfolk troops.

**Mile Thirteen:** One of East Anglia’s largest tanneries for curing leather had been established at Whitwell Hall. The station at Whitwell-and-Reepham was sited to carry the output of the tannery, much of whose leather went to Norwich to supply the cordwainers, cobblers and, later, the shoe factories of the city. The tannery closed in the early 20th Century.

**Mile Fourteen:** Near this point Marriott’s Way crosses the Roman road, which passed west to east, to their establishments in north Norfolk and on the north of the “Great Estuary” of the “Saxon Shore.” Roman roads had substantial foundations, were well made and lasted long. There were two clear lanes, and as Roman chariots and wagons shared a common gauge, or width of wheel spacing, deep parallel grooves were cut into the surface by the passing of traffic.
**Mile Fifteen:** The M&GN brought the concept of Norfolk as a holiday destination to England at large, and more particularly the Midlands, and each summer their trains brought thousands of holidaymakers to the coast. But year round, the great bulk of the M&GN’s movements were of freight: fish to and from the ports and farm machinery and agricultural produce to and from the farms. This design is shows sugar beets and swedes, composed in a stylized view, as if looking down into an open wagon full of root crops.

**Mile Sixteen:** Since the establishment of Marriott’s Way, what was once a plant-free rail bed has become semi-wild and lush, with undergrowth and young hardwood trees, a rich diversity of flora and fauna. Among the migratory birds drawn to this “linear nature reserve” are greylag geese making their seasonal retreats to this region’s mild winters.

**Mile Seventeen:** This sculpture is near the village of Themelthorpe, which gave it's name to the “Themelthorpe Loop”, a near doubling-back upon itself of the lines, where two competing rail lines, the M&GN and GER, were joined to reduce rail mileage for freight services to the north of Norwich. Themelthorpe is an Old Scandinavian name meaning “the outlying farmstead of the man Thymill”, and was brought to Norfolk by Danish Vikings. This plaque shows how the voyage ahead would have seemed to the Vikings, from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, as they stood on their home shores looking across the ‘German (or North) Sea’, thinking about the sea routes that would carry them to England, Scotland, Normandy and Ireland.

**Mile Eighteen:** The chiff-chaff is a small member of the Warbler family, a migratory visitor to the British Isles, and here along Marriott’s Way these tiny birds begin arriving in March for the summer nesting and breeding season, from their over-wintering grounds far to the south.

**Mile Nineteen:** In the early days of the railways many small companies merged and merged again, including the Eastern Union Railway, one of the earliest to come to Norfolk. It became part of the Great Eastern Railway (GER), which was the great rival of the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway Company. In the early part of the 20th century, these two companies formed part of the London and North Eastern Railway, which in the 1940s became part of British Rail.
**Mile Twenty:** In the first days of the railways, before the development of mechanical signals, railway policemen had among their duties signalling by a limited semaphore of arm gestures. This panel shows those for CAUTION', 'DANGER!', and 'ALL RIGHT'.

**Miles Twenty-one and Twenty-two:**
The tower of St. Agnes Cawston is a prominent landmark. These two plaques show the decoration of the west doorway, where a hairy wildman, known in Norfolk as a ‘wodewose’ fights off a fierce dragon, shown with the attributes of the devil - cloven hooves, a sexually suggestive tail, and horns. The church was built in the early 15th century by the wool baron Myghell de la Pole, 2nd Earl of Suffolk, who used the wodewose as a family symbol.

**Mile Twenty-three:** A wheelwright drives spokes into the mortices of a wheel hub. Before the spread of the internal-combustion engine there was always someone locally to build what you needed, be it a boat, a bicycle, or a wagon. Wainwrights - wagonwrights - had the all the skills and materials needed to produce a finished vehicle: joinery, blacksmithing, and wheelwrighting. When the internal-combustion engine finally arrived, the first automobiles and motorcycles were still built by a local wainwright.

**Mile Twenty-four:** Near this spot was once a medieval rabbit warren, a kind of free-range rabbit farm, a very valuable and closely-guarded source of meat and skins. The plaque shows an ancient Himalayan design of three circling hares. They are symbols of, and attendants upon, the goddess of regeneration and fertility, known in Northern Europe as Eostre, the source of the Christian feast of Easter and the word oestrogen, the hormone necessary to human fertility. While each hare has two ears they share the three ears. This is a hint that the next stage in any cycle grows from the previous stage, and passes something on to the next step, the next incarnation. Little of the living world is solely ours in this moment.
Mile Twenty-five: On this panel, you are looking into the engine of a steam engine, the linkages and rods, which convert the back-and-forth action of the pistons into the rotary motion of the wheels.

Mile Twenty-six: Aylsham is an Anglo-Saxon place-name. As the power of the Roman Empire weakened, the Angles, Jutes, Frisians and Saxons invaded eastern Britain, following the searoutes shown on this plaque. Having killed or driven away the 'Wales', the 'foreigners' or Britons who had always been here, they renamed their new territory. Here at Aylsham, Aegel obtained much valuable farmland, and so it was named Aegel's Ham, the homestead of the man named Aegel.