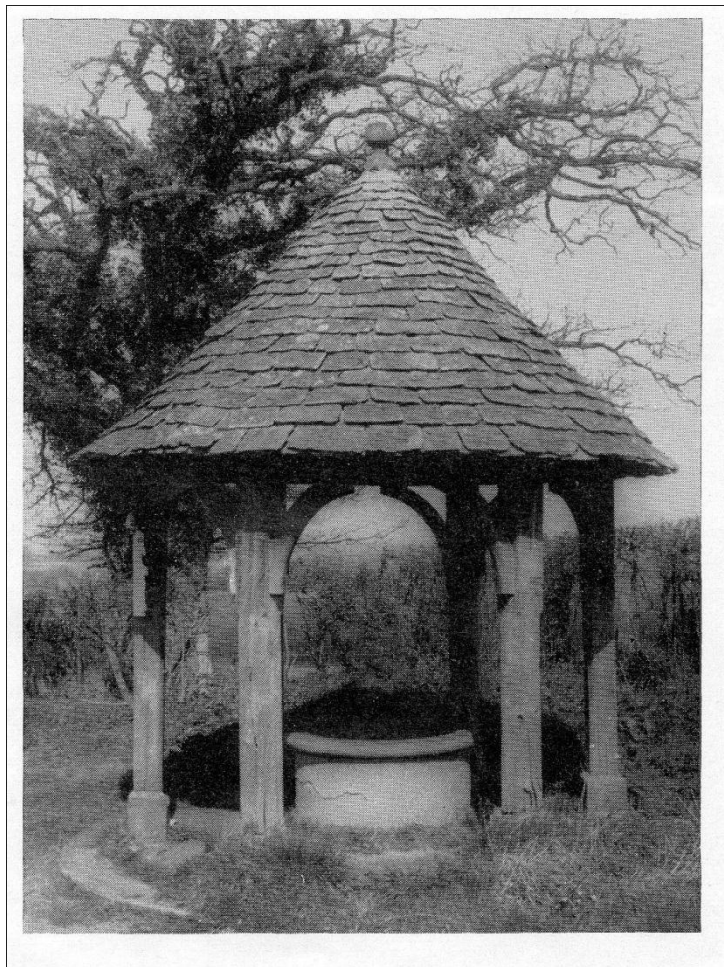


Wayside Curiosities In Wiltshire

By Cyril May

(Originally Published in Wiltshire Life Magazine 1967)



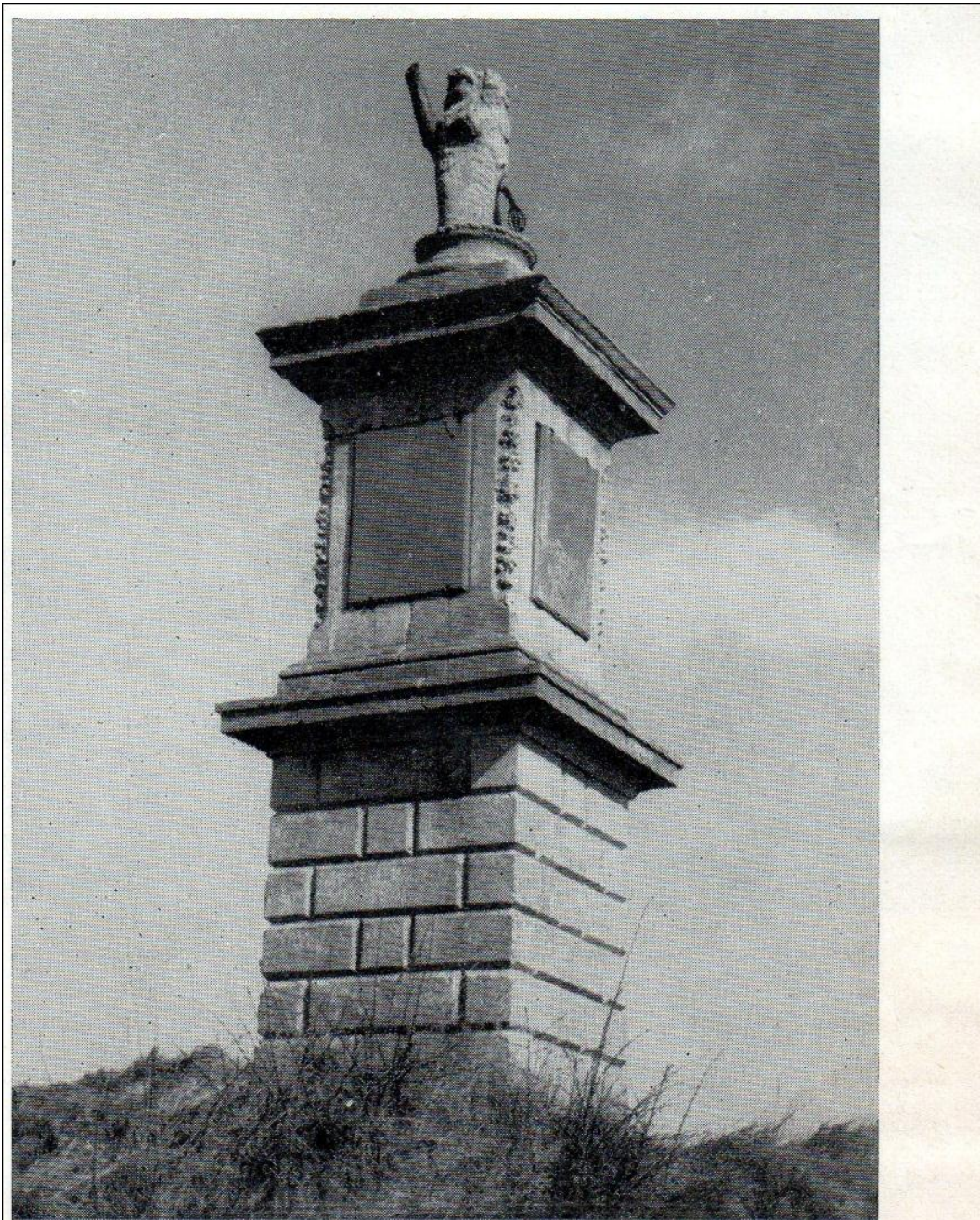
The Old Well at Derry Hill

THE roadsides of Wiltshire contain many objects of human interest which add to the pleasure of the open road. Some are queer reminders of old legends or traditions; a few are quaint with romance and folklore; others are picturesque and hoary—ancient landmarks of grand deeds and great events—whilst not a few are very curious.

Two miles from Devizes on the Upavon road standing high on a hill is a monument surmounted by a lion. Perched upon a twenty feet high pedestal his outstretched paws held high in the air are fast decaying, poor thing. Only a stump of one remains and the tips of the other have fallen off, and no one wants to own him! No one, not even the Rural District Council will do the necessary repairs.

This monument was erected in 1771 to the memory of James Long, who promoted a new road to nearby Etchilhampton village in 1768 by which a former and tedious way over the adjacent hill was avoided, to the great pleasure and convenience of travellers.

At Wylye, by the old mill, is a handsome stone figure blowing a horn in the middle of the river. This is called the "Memorial Statue" which commemorates the driver of a stage coach who was drowned when his coach overturned in fording the river.



The Lion Monument, Upavon Road, Devizes

Great Wishford lies also in the Wylve valley, and set in a wall of its Church several inscribed stones will tell you the cost of a drink of bread at various critical times during the past 160 years. The price is marked per gallon as this was, at one time, the usual way of measuring bread.

A mass of gigantic stones near Amesbury are so ancient that no record exists of how and why they were set up. This is of course the famous Stonehenge Circle, reputed to have been built about 1,700 B.C.

One-and-a-half miles west at the cross roads of A360 and B3086 is "Airman's Corner" where stands an ornamental stone cross erected by the comrades of two airmen, who whilst on flying duty met with a fatal accident near the spot on July 5th, 1912.

Shrewton is not far away and its 300 year-old Lock-up has a prominent position by the bridge over the River Till. The old village Lock-up or "Blind Houses" as they are sometimes called were once used for the temporary confinement of persons found guilty of theft and other offences before they were taken to a nearby place called the Gibbet for execution. With walls of one-and-a-half feet thick and great doors of solid oak they are also found at Steeple Ashton, Hilperton, Trowbridge, Bradford-on-Avon and Lacock. The one at Bradford is unique in the fact that it is built into the old bridge over the River Avon, and has been used as a chapel and a toll-house. William Hitchens, one of Wesley's preachers, was locked up in it for a night in January, 1757.

Just by Frith Wood, near Wilcot, is Cocklebury Bridge or more appropriately called "Lady Bridge" which is a very decorative structure spanning the Kennet and Avon Canal. This is the only ornamental bridge throughout the canal's whole length, and it bears the date of 1808 on both sides.

Jack Spratt's curious clock on St. Andrew's Church at Wootton Rivers is interesting. It was originally made by the village postman, mainly of old cycle parts and it has six chimes. In place of the numerals, on its face it has twelve letters, "Glory be to God."

At Potterne, two miles from Devizes, and right on the side of the road stands a beautiful 500 year-old half-timbered building called the "Portch House" which in turn has been a Bishops' residence, a pack-horse inn, bakehouse, brewery, and even a barracks.

In the centre of Devizes is the "Liar's Cross" a memorial in Gothic style to an "act of God" by which Ruth Pierce, a market woman, on January 25th, 1753, suddenly fell dead after calling God to witness that she had paid the amount of her share for a sack of wheat. The money was found concealed in her hand.

The Robber's Stone" so very easily missed, is situated in an avenue of trees at Gore Cross, near

West Lavington. It commemorates the evening of October 21st, 1839, when a resident of the nearby village of Imber was attacked and robbed by four highwaymen. After a spirited pursuit lasting three hours one of the felons fell dead on Chitterne Down. The three others were eventually captured and convicted and transported for the term of 15 years.

Just over two miles from Box, near the village of Ditteridge on the Roman Fosseway, hard by the side of the road, is a group of huge boulders, very similar to an ancient cromlech, but this curiosity only dates back to 1858. It is called the Horel Shire Stone, or the "Three Shires Stone" making the spot where the counties of Wiltshire, Somerset and Gloucestershire meet.

Lacock near Chippenham is one of Wiltshire's loveliest villages, and the worn out steps of its ancient Cross gives a clue to its age—well over 700 years.

Derry Hill not far away, possesses a pretty well, which although now dry, testifies the time when it originally supplied the whole village with water. Inside its circular old stone roof, in old English script are the words :—

*"Here quench your thirst and mark in me
an emblem of true charity,
Who why my bounty I bestow
Am neither heard nor seen to flow,
Repaid by fresh supplies from Heaven
For every cup of water given."*

At the top of Derry Hill itself is another old well of semi-circular design which is still kept full by a running spring. It certainly recalls the slower era of the horse traffic, carriers, brakes and coaches. An inscription for ever true, and now almost covered with overhanging ivy reads :—

*“Drink Traveller Drink, and more than worldly
wealth,
Enjoy God’s Greatest earthly blessing Health.”*

And so for the time being we must leave some of the roadside oddities of Wiltshire with its Lock-ups and Robber’s Stone. Fortunately we now live in a kindlier age. No one is attacked by Highwaymen who prowled the lonely roads and the Lock-ups are unused . . . remaining only as curiosities to be inspected by the traveller as he passes through the village streets.



The 13th Century Cross at Lacock