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The Lighthorne Village Sign

by Peter Amis (2001)

The Background

The idea for a village sign in Lighthorne arose when the committee that was formed to organise the Lighthorne Millennium year, first met and discussed possible events to take place during the year. The suggestion was that something more permanent than sports days and street parties was desirable - but what sort of a memorial?

The tradition of village signs started in Norfolk at the beginning of the 20th century when King Edward VII suggested having signs to focus the individual identity of villages in the Sandringham area, and the idea was slowly taken up by other villages in the region.

In the 1930s Harry Carter, an art and woodwork master at Hammonds Grammar School in Swaffham, carved a sign for his home town. Little did he know that it was the start of a lifetime hobby. When he died in 1983 there

were over 200 village and town signs in the region. There are now nearly 400 village signs in Norfolk alone, and the concept has been taken up in other areas of the country. There was a large increase in the number of signs at the time of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and since then other national and local occasions have been marked by the erection of signs. Many new ones have appeared to mark the Millennium - we believe that ours was the first in Warwickshire! Today, besides the traditional wooden carved signs, there are more painted cast metal signs and even more modern materials appearing. These new signs have finer detail and hopefully a longer lifespan than their timber predecessors, whilst still carrying on a tradition that has become almost an art form.



Photo Colin Such

The Project

I originate from Norfolk and another resident of the village Sue Meehan has ties with Norfolk, both having seen such signs, so as members of the committee we were charged with the task of organising the project. We were joined on a subcommittee by Martin Thornton and Tony Hunter (a Rover designer), who had volunteered to submit some designs. Seventeen designs were produced and the subcommittee chose a combination of two. Our proposal was then submitted to a public meeting and to the Parish Council. Following the approval of the proposal, the first step was to obtain planning permission. This proved to be a bit more tricky than one would expect, as it turned out that the piece of land on which the sign is now sited is not, as was expected, village green but belongs to the Warwickshire County Highways Department. The Highways Department were, however, very co-operative and gave permission for the sign to be placed there. Quotes for the work were obtained and an application was then made to Stratford on Avon District Council for planning permission and for a grant from their Awards For All scheme, specifically designed for community projects of this nature. The Parish Council and the three District Councillors for the Harbury Ward gave their support for the project, with the Parish Council voting a grant of £500 toward the cost. Another £500 was donated from the Village Hall committee, and a further grant of £2000 was ultimately approved by the Dasset Area committee of the District Council. Thus we had raised £3000 toward cost, a number of other donations were made and offers of help other than financial were forthcoming.

I approached Land Rover for help, and they agreed to manufacture the timber section of the sign in their model department, using timber that would be bought by the Millennium Committee. The stainless steel in the top section of the sign was donated and manufactured by a relative of Tony Hunter in Falkirk in Scotland.

Having acquired all necessary permission and a number of donations, it appeared that we had a viable proposition. A builder was appointed as the lowest of three quotations received, also coming with impeccable testimonials and qualifications. However he proved to be totally unreliable and the project was delayed by two months because of his inability to deliver what he promised. It was decided to dispense with his services and somebody that most of you know, Alwyn Knapton, was asked to complete the job.

Peter Hinman was charged with the task of gathering together items to put in a time capsule. The capsule is now buried in the base of the village sign and contains a number of items which will give the impression of life in Lighthorne today. Photographs of the Millennium year celebrations in the village, recordings of things which have taken place during the year, pieces written by villagers who responded to the appeal for items to be included, newspaper extracts and some coins, are all in the capsule.

The shape of the sign is intended to depict the village sitting in the valley. The two curved pieces of English oak symbolise the hills on either side of the village, with the stainless steel silhouette of the village and the name Lighthorne joining the two hills. The stone base has been reclaimed from an old building on the Bank, thanks to Paul and Sue Simmons who donated it. The combination of the traditional stone and oak with the modern steel and

technology is deliberate, and is intended to symbolise the past and future linking the old and new Millennia.

Stainless steel plates on the base (yet to be mounted) show on the one side a short description of the project together with an engraved line drawing map of the village as it was at the turn of the century. On the other side will be a reproduction of the electoral register for the village for the year 2000.

Why is it facing the way it is? This was the subject of considerable discussion in the committee. The ultimate decision was decided by geometrically bisecting the angle at the top of the grass triangle and placing the sign on the line thus drawn. However, it would appear that by coincidence this was the right decision, as you can read it coming down and going out of the village until you are past it.

Why is it where it is? It has been said that a village sign should be at the entrance to the village, however, the intention of this type of sign is as a memorial and not a sign that you are about to enter or leave the village.



Photo Colin Such