

## GOING THE EXTRA MILE



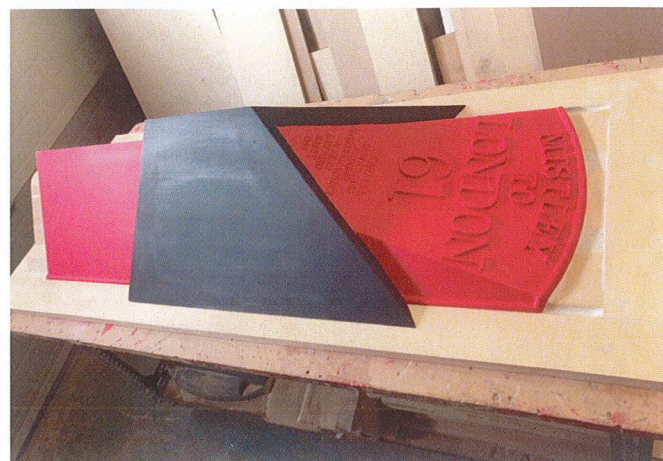
“The Swan Basin at Mistley, the old milestone newly erected on the left behind the swan and the newly-cast milepost to the right.”

The boundary of the south-eastern edge of the AONB is the old turnpike road running from London to Harwich and considered sufficiently important by the Romans for them to upgrade the ancient track to three-lane status. Whether or not they actually erected milestones along its length is a moot point or perhaps they preferred effigies of emperors and others less worthy, a few of which have been unearthed more recently. It is conceivable that crude wooden stakes would have been used in mediaeval times to mark the way on the more important roads but by the 1740s the first of the Turnpike Acts had made it obligatory for the Turnpike Trusts to erect either wooden or stone mile-markers, a law that was reinforced by further Acts of Parliament in 1766 and 1773. Square stone columns were commonly used, incised with the relevant information relating to their distance from the Capital, but in Essex a more ornate milestone appeared having a triangular

shape making it apparently easier for the traveller to read. But as anyone interested in the inscriptions on gravestones will testify, weathering, lichen and general wear and tear make incised lettering difficult to decipher and many stones became damaged or lost.

By the early nineteenth century it was realised that something had to be done as milestones were assuming greater importance to keep coaches to schedule, for example, and to calculate postal charges before the introduction of the universal postal rate in 1840. They needed to be more easily read and it was decided that stones should have a cast-iron plate fixed to them and in Essex the contract for their manufacture was awarded to Ransomes in Ipswich for the road from London through Colchester to the outskirts of Ardleigh and to Bendall's foundry in Manningtree for the final sixteen miles to Harwich. Several original Bendall mileposts have survived and one of the most prominent examples is at Manningtree Market with the date 1834 cast into it.

During the latter part of the eighteenth century a milestone had been placed halfway up the hill at Mistley on the north side of the road indicating sixty-one miles to London but at sometime during the nineteenth century it had been moved down to the quay at a time when the vast Victorian maltings were being developed. In 2018 it was unearthed when the Brooks feed-mill was demolished and it was rescued and placed in the yard of Rose Builders for safe-keeping. A Bendall plate had been placed on the opposite side of the road during the nineteenth century in a position which was unlikely to be in the way of any future building schemes and was still there as recorded in a photograph taken in 1936. But it had been cast for the side of the road where the earlier stone had stood resulting in the numbers and letters facing the wrong way. It survived beside the entrance to the EDME Company works until comparatively recently but when the factory entrance was widened the milepost disappeared.



“The wooden pattern, painted and ready for the moulding process. The black section is for a separate core which has the letters spelling Colchester and Harwich on the underside.”

Photo, Terry Phillipson

Bob Horlock, a Mistley resident all his life, decided to initiate a scheme to have the newly-found milestone permanently re-erected and a replica cast-iron Bendall post manufactured to stand near it. Two possible sites were unavailable but it was eventually decided that the Swan Basin would be the most appropriate. Mistley Parish Council, Essex County Council and Historic England all gave their permission, EDME donated £1200 to have a wooden pattern made by CP Designs at Dunmow, the casting moulded and poured by Taylor's Foundry, Haverhill and Rose Builders installed them free of charge, one each side behind the Swan Fountain. A second milepost has been manufactured, paid for by the Manningtree History Group, using the original pattern but with letters and numbers appropriate to its position one mile further towards Harwich. A third post is awaiting installation and Parish Councils along the old turnpike have been approached with the same aim in mind.

Cast iron has always been associated with the Victorians who made all manner of decorative and structural items but it's a brittle material and when applied to structures like the Tay Bridge its shortcomings became spectacularly exposed. Eventually a ductile cast iron was invented which didn't break and is commonly used nowadays for drains and drain-covers subject to heavy use by traffic.

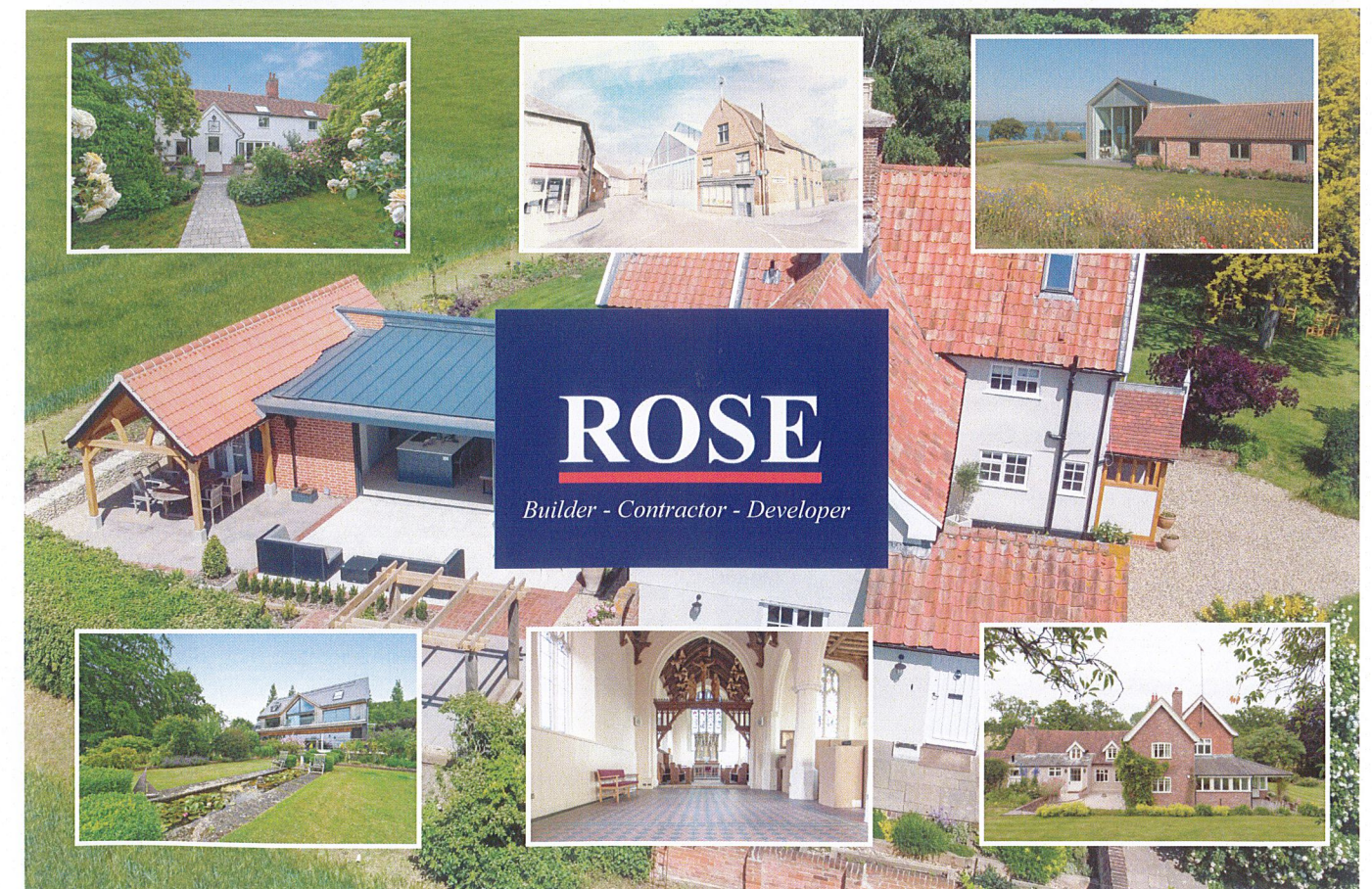
The milestone project is a credit to all involved but especially to Bob Horlock whose initiative and persistence have resulted in such a magnificent outcome.

Acknowledgements: Bob Horlock, Philip Cunningham (Manningtree Museum and Local History Group) and Rose Builders. EDME is the *English Diastatic Malt Extract Company* founded in 1881, its original name being *The Condensed Wort and Brewer's Meal Company* but this was considered too much of a mouthful and was changed in 1884.

Paul Gallifant.



“The original milestone at mile 61 from London, unearthed when the old Brooks feed-mill at the quay was demolished in 2018.”



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