Parish boundary markers and perambulations in London

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Parish boundary markers—and also boundary markers placed by, for example, manors, railway companies, water concerns, prisons or county councils—are found all over England but are probably better known as a phenomenon of the countryside than of urban areas.[1] Rural parish boundary markers are more widespread and represent an otherwise exceptional intrusion by officialdom into woodlands and hedgerows; urban parish boundary markers, representing just one more man-made element in a man-made environment, are completely non-existent in many towns and seem to be numerous only in London, Bristol and Norwich. However, their restricted location enables urban parish boundary markers to be studied more exhaustively as historic artefacts. In suburban London, where they are considerably more numerous than in Bristol and Norwich and mostly of a later date, they are also a significant source for the history of local government.

A key feature of the growth of London in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the rapid increase of population in those parishes of Middlesex and Surrey in the immediate vicinity of the City of London. Despite subsequent sub-division for ecclesiastical purposes, these parishes became major administrative units, with large staffs and budgets. By 1900, when they were elevated to the status of metropolitan boroughs, the parish of St Mary's Islington had over 330,000 inhabitants and St Pancras 235,000.[2] Bristol's population was slightly smaller than that of Islington, which was the seventh largest municipality in Britain; Norwich had less than half the population of St Pancras. Unlike Bristol or Norwich, however, parishes such as St Mary's Islington and St Pancras had no mayor or corporation. The officials they employed were responsible to a parish vestry, consisting of vestrymen (who from 1855 onwards were elected at an informal annual meeting) and headed either by the incumbent of the parish acting *ex officio* or by a chairman chosen by a show of hands each time they assembled. The most important civic ceremony available in such communities was in the perambulation of the parish boundaries. In Bristol and Norwich, where local government was transformed by the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, such interest as there had been in the boundaries of the medieval city parishes seems to have become almost completely overshadowed by new preoccupations; in Norwich, of more than eighty surviving parish boundary markers in the city, only two date from after 1835.[3] The parishes around the City of London were (like the City of London itself) not affected by the Municipal Corporations Act, and they continued to place iron posts, stone plaques or iron plates affixed to buildings to mark their boundaries during the following decades.

Today these markers are not the most striking manifestation of past bureaucracy in the streets of the capital: in St Pancras, now part of the London Borough of Camden, boundary markers are less numerous as well as less eye-catching than municipal

bollards.[4] There are also a number of St Pancras vestry manhole covers in the borough, dating from the days when the vestry was responsible for electric street lighting: there is an example at the junction of Maitland Park Road and Haverstock Hill, London NW3. Manhole covers for the vestry of St Mary Islington are even more common, but other parishes in nineteenth-century London either did not mark their manhole covers or else contracted out the street lighting to commercial businesses. In Edwardes Square, Kensington, there is a set of original lamp posts, now long since converted from gas to electricity, marked KV for Kensington Vestry. The monogramming of lamp posts dates from the very earliest lamp posts, examples of which, marked GIII R may still be seen outside St James's Palace. There are others almost as old in the Outer Circle, Regents Park. The very first gas-light appliances, installed only a few years earlier, seem to have been affixed to brackets screwed to the front of buildings. The lamp posts in Edwardes Square, dating from 1835 are probably the oldest surviving set of municipal lamp posts in the world; the lamp post in Kingstown Street, London NW1 marked STPPM evidently dates from after 1841.[5] Taking the metropolitan area as a whole, however, it is the boundary markers—usually small and often decayed into illegibility—which constitute the most evenly distributed category of municipal street furniture.

It is not known when the English first concerned themselves with communal boundaries or (not necessarily the same thing) adopted communal practices to preserve the memory of such boundaries. We may discount seventeenth-century speculations that it derived from Roman practice and was 'an imitation of the feast called Verminalia, which was dedicated to the god Verminus, whom they consider as the guardian of fields and landmarks, and the keeper of friendship and peace among men'.[6] It seems that Rogation Day processions became associated with checking parish boundaries in the thirteenth century, and continued during the early days of the Reformation, but were suppressed in the late 1540s.[7] They were revived under Queen Mary and put on a new official basis by an Injunction of 1559 which excepted the annual check on boundaries from a general prohibition of religious and other processions: 'But yet for the reteyning of the perambulations of the Circuites of parishes, thei shal once in the yere at the time accustomed, with the curate and the substanciall men of the paryshe, walke about theyr parishes as they were accustomed'.[8] This is the first official reference to parish perambulations, and though the practice was referred to as 'accustomed' it is by no means certain that it had been a universal practice all over the country, especially bearing in mind the sheer extent of many rural parishes. That it was regarded as a well-established practice in southern England is confirmed by the mainly London-based poet George Wither in 1635:

> That, ev'ry man might keep his owne *Possessions,*
> Our Fathers, us'd in reverent *Processions*
> (With zealous prayers, and with praisefull cheere)
> To walke their *Parish-limits,* once a yeare:
> And, well knowne *Markes* (which sacrilegious Hands
> Now cut or breake) so bord'red out their Lands,
> That, ev'ry one distinctly knew his owne;
> And, many brawles, now rife, were then unknowne.[9]

One notes, however, that he regards the tradition as one that his contemporaries neglected. In verses 'To Anthea', written in the 1620s or 1630s, Robert Herrick referred to the custom of marking certain points of the boundary with trees, known as Gospel Trees, under which the officiating clergymen read aloud from the Bible when the procession reached that point:

> Dearest, bury me
> Under that *Holy-oke*, or *Gospel-Tree*,
> Where (though thou see'st not) thou may think upon
> Me, when thou yearly go'st Procession[10]

Such a tree, standing in what is now Southampton Road on the boundary between the parishes of Hampstead and St Pancras, gave its name to the Gospel Oak district of north London: a similar tree further south on the same boundary, at the foot of Haverstock Hill, survived into the nineteenth century.[11]

Despite the attendance of the parish clergy, perambulations after 1600 increasingly took on the character of a secular bean-feast. In the parish of Bermondsey the first perambulation recorded was in 1601 and involved the expenditure of 3s 2d. Thereafter, till the accounts lapse in 1622, perambulations were virtually annual, with the expense increasing yearly till it reached £3 19s 7d in 1612. Thereafter it hovered around £1 16s a year till 1622, when the bill was only 10s.[12] The account for 1611 mentions the provision of 'bread and drink in the vestry for the children' on the day of the perambulation, and the attendance of children—or at least *boys*—was a particular feature at such events. It was later supposed that the presence of children was required so that they would be able to testify to the boundaries when, much later in life, they acquired the status of elders in the community: in 1635 one Robert Fidler of Ormskirk in Lancashire claimed that he was certain of the location of a boundary stone on Ormskirk Moor because around 1600 he had his head knocked against it painfully to make him remember it.[13] This practice of 'bumping' came to be regarded as traditional in some areas, as did having boys or young men stand on their heads on the boundary to help them memorise it—though this is only recorded later.[14] In the seventeenth century it was also customary to beat some of the attendant boys at appropriate points on the boundary. The actual beating of the bounds—that is, the striking of boundary markers—was also carried out by the boys, who were issued with wands, or even broom staffs, for the purpose.[15] The purchase of wands and temporary markers was one item of expenditure, and the boys who were beaten were paid (at least in some places) but the main expense was the cost of entertaining the adults. At Chelsea in 1670 'the boys who were whipt' received 4s and 'the Perambulation Dinner' cost £3 10s.[16] At Fulham in 1711 £4 3s 9d was spent on 'Bread Chees and Bear for the boys', £2 3s on rods, £2 17s on '8 grosse of Points and 550 wands', and 16s on a lamb: but it is not evident what the lamb was for, as the bill for dinner was £4 12s plus 12s for beer, tobacco and brandy, plus £1 10s for refreshment at the *Robin Hood* public house and other places en route.[17] During the course of the eighteenth century the cost of refreshing the procession at public houses en route seems to have become more of a feature. The vestry of St Pancras ordered in July 1718 that no more than £5 was to be spent 'for the Dinner and other Expenses at the next perambulation', and in rural Kent the vestry of West Malling attempted to fix a limit of £1 for total expenditure in 1721.[18] In many places the custom of perambulation was simply discontinued, and the cost—and related rowdiness—may have been partly the reason for this.

The oldest parish boundary maker in England is probably the Longstone, a Bronze Age menhir on Shovel Down, Dartmoor, which is marked on one side DC, for Duchy of Cornwall, and on the other side C, for the parish of Chagford: but these inscriptions evidently date from the nineteenth century, more than two millennia subsequent to the placing of the menhir.[19] The placing of stones specifically for the purpose of marking boundaries (though not necessarily parish boundaries) undoubtedly occurred in the Middle Ages, and three stone markers of the 1550s survive in Hellesdon, Norwich, about a mile from the city centre: these mark the *city* boundary.[20] An inscribed (and now

painted) stone dated 1710, marking the boundary the parishes of St Peter Mancroft and St Giles, is to be found built into the wall of the *Coach and Horses* public house, Bethel Street, Norwich.[21] In London there is a wall plaque in New Square, Lincoln's Inn marked

<div align="center">

D
SC
1693

</div>

indicating the boundary of the parish of St Clement Danes, but this may be a later recarving, and it is usually claimed that the oldest surviving parish boundary marker is a stone in Carey Street, marked on one side with an anchor for St Clement Danes and on another side SDW for St Dunstan in the West: it is certainly very worn but it is, or ought to be, a rule in local historical studies that one should not attempt to date objects simply by the extent of their decay.[22] This stone may not in fact be as old as the one on the boundary of the parish of Hornsey, which is not in its original position,[23] marked

<div align="center">

HP
1738

</div>

There are also two markers dating from 1741 on the Islington parish boundary, on Dartmouth Park Hill and Crouch Hill. Nevertheless specially-made permanent markers still seem to have been a rarity at this period: in most cases the boundary was identified by field margins, trees, roads, ditches and other features that had some other function, purpose or significance beyond the mere indication of parish territory. At the perambulation at Weston in Norfolk in 1780 five shillings was paid by the squire (possibly out of his own pocket) to a man 'who carried a Hook and marked the Trees' and a like amount to a man 'who carried a Spade' because, 'Where there were no Trees to mark, Holes were made and Stones cast in'.[24] The two marker stones on the Islington boundary dating from 1741 were probably the only formal permanent markers on a boundary otherwise identified by topographical features: the stone of Dartmouth Park Hill was on the Islington / St Pancras boundary and is depicted in an illustrated check list of St Pancras boundary markers drawn up in 1866, but it is the only one noted in a length of common boundary requiring twenty St Pancras markers, and there is no reason to suppose that there had been other stones on this stretch of boundary that had disappeared between 1741 and 1866. On the other hand, the minutes of the vestry of St Mary's Islington for 1 April 1834 record that at the perambulation in 1833 'The Boundary stones were found to be in a very dilapidated state and at many important angles the marks were either obliterated or the stones altogether destroyed ... all the old stones have been recut and the original dates restored', which suggests many more than two stones.[25]

It is not actually clear why so much attention was given to these boundaries. The great Elizabethan Poor Law legislation of 1597 and 1601, by making the parish responsible for assistance to the poor belonging to the parish, might well be supposed to have conferred a new importance on boundaries because paupers whose normal residence, perhaps even place of birth, lay outside the parish were not the parish's responsibility, and equally, those living beyond the parish boundary were not liable to pay rates for the upkeep either of the church or the poor. Examination of urban parishes however suggests that the question of rates and poor relief was not the principal reason for the increased attention given to parish boundaries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The parishes in the metropolitan area outside the City of London were originally rural and only later became urbanised and part of a vast conurbation. At a much earlier stage

however parishes had formed within the walls of the medieval City of London and other towns by a process of sub-division.[26] Just as the number, location, and separation of parishes generally had never been formally organised or authorised, so the formation of parishes, often very small, in city centres was not something systematically planned or managed. The fact that there were over one hundred parishes within the City of London and 36 in Norwich, no doubt reflected the relative wealth and importance of these cities, but it is not clear why Bristol should have 21 parishes and Exeter, always a smaller city, 25, or why Nottingham should have only three parishes but Stamford five. The image of a medieval city dominated by the soaring tower of the cathedral, with the steeples of the parish churches clustering around it like piglets round a sow, is indeed justified by the importance of medieval cities as ecclesiastical centres and by the tendency of larger ecclesiastical institutions to attract smaller ones: but Colchester and Ipswich, with no cathedral, had twelve and thirteen parishes respectively, as compared with twelve in Gloucester and fourteen in Worcester, but only four in Salisbury.[27] Except in the City of London, where the Great Fire of 1666 provided the opportunity to reduce the number of parishes, these urban parishes survived into the nineteenth century, but most of the sixteen towns and cities with ten or more medieval parishes have no surviving boundary markers. Colchester has one, a stone marking the boundary between the parishes of St Giles and Holy Trinity in St John's Street, dating from 1849.[28] In Oxford there are a dozen or so city boundary markers dating from the nineteenth century in the outskirts of the city but only one inscription that is definitely a nineteenth-century parish boundary marker, a stone inscribed CSJD 1858 (Cowley St John District) on the wall behind a lamp post at 78 St. Clements Street. Somewhat oddly—or perhaps characteristically, this being Oxford—there are six twentieth-century parish boundary markers, one of them (actually a cross on the floor and an inscribed stone protected by glass on the wall) inside Marks and Spencer's in Queen Street dating from 1952, though moved from its original position in 1976, and another a brass plate at 9 Cornmarket dating from 1985, indicating the junction of the boundaries of three parishes (St Martin, All Saints and St Michael at the Northgate) none of which was actually functioning as a separate parish by 1985.[29] In Norwich on the other hand there are more than eighty surviving parish boundary markers, including eight from the eighteenth century, and such markers are also numerous in Bristol, which has the earliest known metal markers, iron plates attached to walls and dating from 1747.[30]
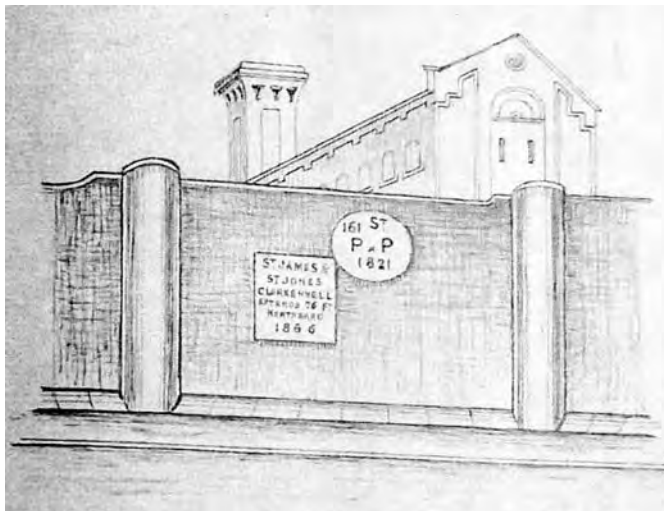

1. **Drawing (out of scale and with misspelling) of St Pancras and Clerkenwell boundary markers on the back wall of Middlesex House of Correction, Cold Bath Fields (1866).** The site is now occupied by Mount Pleasant Sorting Office. This part of the boundary (now between the London Boroughs of Islington and Camden) is no longer marked (*Camden Local History Library*)

Urban parishes often accumulated considerable bequests that enabled them to maintain almshouses and charity schools, to pay premiums for the apprenticing of children from poor families and to provide periodic gifts of clothing or dinners for the poor; and because such endowments accumulated over the years it obviously became a matter of concern to establish who was or was not entitled to parish charity. One notes, too, that richer parishes with fewer paupers had considerably lower poor rates than poorer parishes. Yet it can hardly be the case that parish activity in erecting boundary markers related to parish activity in relieving the poor. In Bristol, from the 1690s onwards, poor relief was managed not by the individual parishes but by a Corporation of the Poor established by a private Act of Parliament. In Colchester a town poorhouse had been established as early as 1565, and Bristol's example was later followed and a private Act of Parliament established a Corporation of the Poor, but several parishes were still operating their own poorhouses in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet in Colchester there is only one surviving parish boundary marker (dating from *after* the Act of Parliament which ended the parish's role as the basic unit of poor relief management) while in Bristol there are more than eighty pre-Poor Law Amendment Act markers.[31]

There seems to be no record *anywhere* of any parish dignitary in any parish, rural or urban, stating specifically why it was necessary or desirable to ascertain and mark parish boundaries, and the implication is that it was more a matter of community identity than of administrative utility. *The Norwich Directory, or Gentlemen and Tradesmen's Assistant* for 1783 drew attention to 'The vague and general name of the parish being the only direction to persons of every denomination', because of the lack of signs giving street names, noting too that 'To remedy this, in some degree, the names of the streets have been put up in a few of the parishes'. In other words, the parishes and their general topographical extent were familiar as a concept to the inhabitants of Norwich, and there were detectable differences in the administration of the parishes. But the directory, while giving an account of the aldermen of the city, the common council, guardians of the poor, and corporation committees, says nothing about parishes as administrative units, or their boundaries.[32] Similarly *The Bristol Index, or Evan's Directory* for 1818 does not mention parishes as such except to list their clergy, and, in the alphabetical index of professions, their parish clerks and sextons. *Matthew's Annual Bristol Directory and Commercial List* for 1825 gives the times of church services as well as the names of the clergy, but says nothing at all about the parishes or their clerks.[33]

The importance of community identity—orchestrated by certain more active individuals within each community—is suggested by the chronology of parish boundary markers and perambulations, and by marked differences in this regard between neighbouring districts. Norwich is remarkable not merely for its unusually large number of boundary markers fixed by city-centre parishes but also for the fact that one-third of the city-centre parishes have left no markers at all. Again, while there are plenty of instances elsewhere of boundary markers from one parish being placed directly alongside markers from another parish, only Norwich and Bristol have examples of the second parish placing a new marker above one of its own markers even though the existing marker, only a couple of decades older, must have been perfectly legible. In at least one instance the parish next door followed suit within a couple of years.[34] Of more than eighty parish markers in central Norwich, all but eight date from 1790-1834, suggesting that the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 (5 & 6 Wm.IV c.76), which established open elections to the city corporation, put an end to what might be called a renaissance of community consciousness, altering preoccupations and priorities much more, perhaps, than it did the day-to-day administration of the city. In London 1790-1834 coincides with a significant increase in the amount of municipal street furniture in St

Pancras though, as in other parishes in the metropolitan area, there was probably more investment in street bollards than boundary markers.[35] Neither the Highways Act of 1835 (5&6 Wm.IV c.50) nor the Metropolis Management Act of 1855 (18 & 19 Vict. c.120) added significantly to the functions already exercised by most of the larger London suburban parishes, but as their populations grew (that of St Pancras, already over 100,000 in 1831, almost doubled by 1861) income from rates, numbers of staff and expenditure grew too. By the mid-1850s St Pancras was beginning to outstrip neighbouring parishes in the number of bollards it erected, whereas the neighbouring parish of Hampstead seems to have given up on street furniture altogether: I know of no Hampstead bollards or boundary markers dated later than 1859. On the other hand Hampstead invested in a particularly showy Town Hall on Haverstock Hill, whereas the considerably more populous parish of St Pancras continued with a cramped vestry hall in Pancras Road, despite 'suggestions … made at various times for the removal of the Vestry Hall to a more convenient and central part of the parish [and] valid reasons for the erection of a Town Hall worthy of the great Parish of St Pancras'.[36] St Pancras was also in one respect behind the parish of Kensington, which seems to have been the first local authority to think of placing a municipal monogram on its lamp posts.[37]
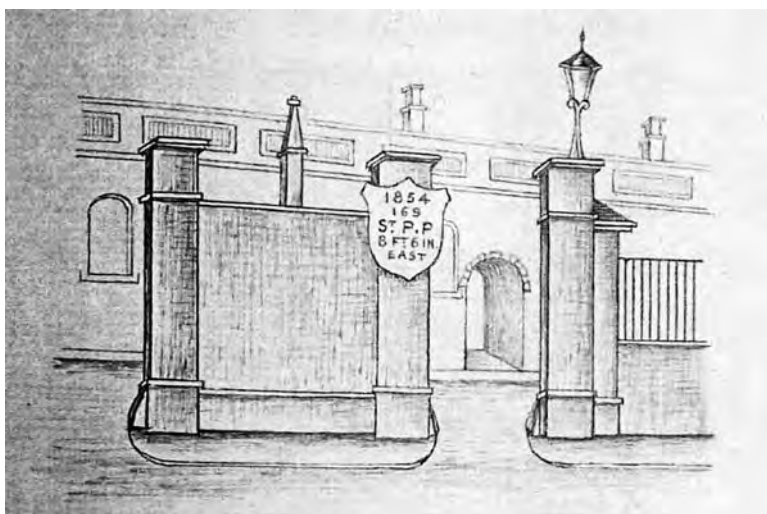

2. Drawing (out of scale) of St Pancras boundary marker (1854) in York Road (now York Way): the marker, gatepost and railway warehouses beyond are all gone (*Camden Local History Library*)

When at the very end of the nineteenth century, the parishes outside the City of London became metropolitan boroughs (or parts of boroughs) the Metropolitan Borough of Stoke Newington, from first to last a rather modest-spending body, embarked on an unusually comprehensive programme of placing shield-shaped cast-iron plates on its boundaries, and at the same time removed all but two of the boundary markers placed during the later nineteenth century by the parish of Hornsey, the southern part of the territory which had been incorporated into the new borough. All that survives of the administrative activity of the former Local Board of South Hornsey apart from two boundary markers in Clissold Park are three drain hole inspection hatches marked SHLB.[38] The new Metropolitan Borough of Paddington also placed borough boundary markers, but most other boroughs did not bother. Instead the new Metropolitan Borough of Westminster invested in obtaining a charter entitling it to be

styled the City of Westminster, and the Metropolitan Borough of Kensington applied to Buckingham Palace for permission to call itself The Royal Borough of Kensington, whereas the Metropolitan Borough of Battersea did not even apply to the College of Arms for a coat of arms until 1955.[39] Clearly different groups of community leaders—or different teams of municipal officials—had different notions of what was important.

The 'community jamboree' aspect of parish boundaries is evident from a study of perambulations in the nineteenth century. Following some decades in which they were of rare occurrence they seem to have become more frequent, at least in parishes neighbouring London. In 1787 a correspondent of *The Gentlemen's Magazine* remarked that 'In some parishes thirty, or even fifty, years elapse without the bounds and limits of the parish being ascertained; and frequently it happens, in cases of law-suits, that the jury are obliged to depend on the memory of some old men', but by the 1800s perambulations were taking place every seven years in Fulham, and in St Pancras in the 1820s they were every three years.[40] Furthermore, the processions became more organised. In Bermondsey in 1792 the procession began with two pioneers (workmen to clear undergrowth around markers, or refix them if loose) and continued with a bellman, constable, colours (some sort of banner), stewards, boys and master of the workhouse, followed by (among others) free school children (pupils at the parish-funded school) and their usher, the charity girls and boys and their mistress and master, parishioners' children, musicians, two beadles, two Anglican clergymen and two churchwardens, sidesmen, governors and directors (officials administering the Poor Law) and parishioners at large, as well as various other stewards, constables and colours. In 1819 the music was specified as consisting of a drum and fife band, and the vestry clerk, not mentioned in the 1792 account, was also in attendance.[41]
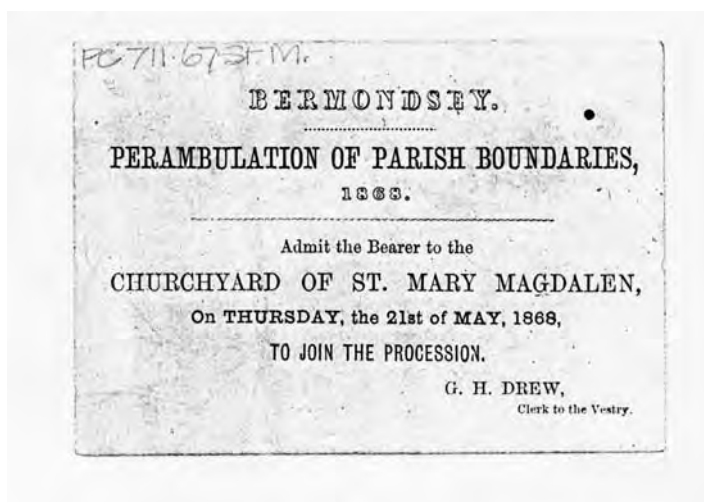
3. Admittance ticket for the Bermondsey boundary perambulation 1868
(*Southwark Local History Library*)

The cost of perambulations began once more to increase: in St Pancras the bill was £74 in 1821 and £78 in 1824, but in 1874 it was £245 19s 7d, including £74 0s 6d for 'dinners and refreshments'.[42] By 1862 the perambulation of the bounds of St Mary Newington in Southwark was being announced in advance by a printed circular, which came accompanied by an admission ticket for the dinner to be held at the end of the perambulation. On the day itself a printed programme was available: the boys from the

community schools were limited to ten from each school, and 'The Ministers of the Chapels' (the nonconformist clergy) appeared in procession, following 'The Ministers of the Churches' but before 'The Parish Churchwardens and their Sidesmen' and 'The Churchwardens of the District Churches'. In Bermondsey in 1868 admittance tickets were issued for the churchyard where the procession was to form up, suggesting either an attempt to exclude freeloaders from other parishes and local riff-raff, or else previous experience of problems with crowd control.[43] (In Shrewsbury perambulations had been discontinued in the late 1850s because of fights breaking out between the processions of neighbouring town-centre parishes, the 'rough' population of the town having joined the processions because of the prospect of 'refreshments').[44] Proceedings were reported in detail and with some jocularity in local newspapers:

> A halt was made here and there to beat a stone, and several rigid examinations of public houses along the line of route and the line of the boundary, of course, were made by the now thirsty voyagers, and these inspections became more and more frequent as the sun reached its meridian … At one place a garden wall was scaled, much to the anger of an old lady proprietress and her kitchen maid, who threatened the marauders with police and other terrors of the law, and made a stout defence of the property till overpowered by numbers.[45]

This account, from the *Islington Gazette* in 1868, also indicates that part of the perambulations that ran uphill along a main road was carried out in omnibuses and open carriages, led by the band 'snugly packed in a wagonette, banging and blowing to the limit of their hearts' desires', and that 'the old custom of "bumping"' was only resorted to, but then with hilarious and oft-repeated enthusiasm, quite late in the day, by which time, evidently, most of the procession had consumed considerable amounts of whatever it was they had found in the public houses. It would not necessarily be true to say that great fun was had by all: in 1829 a man angling in the River Lea was set upon by Walthamstow parishioners during their perambulation, perhaps to secure an independent witness, and 'bumped' against his will. He was awarded £50 damaged when he took the parishioners to court.[46]

4. (left) Stoke Newington parish boundary market 1876 (Clissold Park, N16); 5. (right) St Mary's Islington parish boundary marker 1868, with side view of diminutive Hornsey boundary marker next to it (15 Mount View Road, N4) (*both A.D. Harvey*)

It also became usual for parish officials to check the boundaries beforehand, and to draw up a list of markers to be inspected.[47] The list prepared for the 1866 perambulation in St Pancras took the form of a booklet illustrated with pen and ink drawings of each marker, shown out of scale, and the building on which, or field in which, each marker was situated.[48] In 1886 a 'List of Stones and Marks' representing the parish boundaries of St Mary Battersea was 'printed by order of the Board of Churchwardens & Overseers' and presumably distributed at the perambulation held in that year, though St Mary Battersea, like many south London parishes, was not an independent municipality but under the administrative authority of the Board of Works for the Wandsworth District.[49] It is possible that the printing of the list was related to a campaign to establish the parish as an independent municipality, for such movements occurred in other parts of the metropolitan area in this period.[50] In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries perambulations had often met up with delegations of parishioners from the other parishes, or even the entire perambulation procession of the next-door parish, to settle uncertainties about the boundaries, and old men were generally on hand to advise on where the boundary had been in their youth: thus at St Cuthbert's, Wells, Somerset in 1752, 'William Lovell aged 83 years who went the Perambulation about 60 years ago was examined Says that towards this corner the Warren has been Enlarged'.[51] As late as 1833 the perambulation of the boundary of the parish of Mitcham in Surrey included eight individuals specified as 'Aged Men'.[52] The preparation of checklists by parish officials *before* the perambulation—and also the placing of markers independent of perambulations—suggests however that by the mid-nineteenth century the establishment of the boundary as such was no longer a major reason for holding the perambulations. In Tavistock Place London WC1, in front of 36-70 Seymour House, there is a stone set into the kerb inscribed 'SPL / 1898 SGB' (SPL standing for 'St Pancras London' and SGB for 'St George Bloomsbury') and round the corner in Handel Street is a section of the actual kerb stone inscribed 'SPL / 1899 SGB' and another 'SGB 18 / 99 SPL'. These replace stones (in one instance a pair marked STP.P. 1825, 118 and STG.B. 1841) which were taken up when the street was redeveloped in the late 1890s,[53] and were evidently placed at the time of the relaying of the pavement. In October 1821, some months later in the year than the usual time of perambulation, a churchwarden and a sidesman from Streatham together with the parish constable and the vestry clerk, met up with a churchwarden, two overseers, the parish surveyor and the vestry clerk from Tooting to decide the boundary between the two parishes and agreed to set up five makers at the joint expense of the parishes.[54] There is insufficient surviving evidence to determine when such meetings first occurred, and whether they became more common in the nineteenth century, though with the growth of administrative budgets the probability is that they did.

By now many, if not most, of the boundaries between metropolitan parishes outside the City of London were clearly marked by stones (sometimes set into the street kerb), iron posts, or iron

6. St Pancras and St George Bloomsbury boundary marker on kerbstone 1898 (*A.D. Harvey*)

plates screwed to the frontage of buildings. In 1791 St Pancras placed a number of oval iron plates marked

S
P+P
1791

Examples survive at 69-71 Marchmont Street and 58 and 59 Goodge Street. Miniature bollards marked '1821' were erected thirty years later: examples can be found in the flower beds at Woburn Square and on Primrose Hill. As late as 1853, St Olave's Southwark was ordering, in addition to half a dozen 'New Iron Cast Boundary marks', 38 'Wood boards for the Boundary marks', though by this period the use of wooden markers was exceptional.[55] Some at least of St Olave's 'New Iron Cast Boundary marks' were intended for commercial premises through which the boundary ran: a paving stone on the floor of a counting house on a riverside wharf in Southwark had an inserted chevron-shaped metal plate marked:

No.4 St Olave Parish 1853

and though it is unclear how widespread this practice was, some of the metal plates fixed in St Pancras in 1791 were also inside business premises.[56] From the late eighteenth century the initials of the churchwardens appeared on the boundary posts in some parishes; elsewhere, as in St Pancras from 1821 onwards, markers were given a serial number.[57] A number of marker designs survive only in unique examples, such as (at the corner of Downs Park Road and Cecilia Road, E8) a box-shaped cast-iron object with attached plates on the side embossed with

HP
1825
WHH
&
[?] F.C.
CHW

i.e. Hackney Parish 1825, WHH and [?] F.C. Churchwardens, and something like a short length of H-section girder, with the sides of the H coming together to make a smooth rounded head, is to be found near the double gate of Clissold Park on Stoke Newington Church Street, London N16, back to back with a very similar parish of Hornsey marker of 1887, embossed with

1876
SN
W.Eve
G.Motion
Churchwardens

At 133 Upper Street, London N1, there is a slightly more massive example of the same design, embossed HH 1816 and evidently a marker of a long-since vanished private estate.[58] The techniques of casting iron suggest that these are sole survivals of what might once have been quite numerous batches.

In many instances the markers of adjacent parishes would be fixed next to one another. As late as 1887 the parish of Hornsey was erecting its small and elegant H-section cast-iron markers right up against Islington's much taller and uglier square-section iron marker pillars. Though the oldest surviving urban parish boundary marker in the country, that in Norwich dated 1710, was erected by two adjacent parishes working in

collaboration, and there used to be joint St Pancras and St Giles in the Fields stones of 1787 in Chenies Mews, London WC1, co-operative action of this sort seems to have become common in London only after the 1860s. An interesting example is on a terrace of working-men's cottages in Harrow Road, London NW10, dating from 1861: at no. 689 there is a stone for the parishes of Kensington and Hammersmith inscribed

<div align="center">

K.P | H.P.
1865 | 1865

</div>

and at no. 693 a stone evidently produced by a quite different workman is inscribed (for Hammersmith and Willesden)

<div align="center">

H.P. W.P.
1865

</div>

Despite the programme of the Metropolitan Borough of Stoke Newington for eradicating Hornsey markers and setting up its own, markers and perambulations seem to have gone out of fashion by the 1900s. The expense and rowdiness of processions was no doubt a factor, but it was perhaps less a question of the growth of respectability than of the growth of municipal staffs and their increasing involvement in civic life. The expenses of a boundary perambulation of Wandsworth parish in 1898, which had a numerous attendance, came to only £12 16s 8d, including just £5 2s 8d for refreshments, most of the remainder being accounted for by a payment of two guineas each to the vestry clerk and the parish surveyor 'for damage to clothing': evidently they had muddied themselves and torn their jackets fighting their way up to inaccessible markers. It is, however, slightly suspicious that the only two individuals compensated for damage to clothing were the two officials responsible for drawing up the accounts.[59] What had once been a community celebration was now becoming just another local government junket. In recent years a number of parishes up and down the country have organised perambulations but as a phenomenon of secular urban community life they seem to have been killed off by modern municipal government. While researching this paper I observed that a kerbstone in front of 67 Marchmont Street, London WC1 which had been inscribed as a parish boundary marker had been carefully defaced by London Borough of Camden contractors.[60]

Notes and references

1   See, for example, Angus Winchester, *Discovering Parish Boundaries* (Shire, 2000)

2   Figures for population are from the 1901 Census: Bristol and Norwich were by no means demographically stagnant at this period—in percentage terms they were growing more rapidly than Islington while the population of St Pancras had marginally declined.

3   David A. Berwick, *Beating the Bounds in Georgian Norwich* (Dereham 2007); photographs by Leo Reynolds www.flickr.com/photos/lwr/sets/7205759405 6324887

4   See A.D. Harvey, 'Bollards in Camden', Camden *History Review* no.25 (2001) pp.10-11, and 'Early Nineteenth Century Bollards in London', *The Local Historian* vol.35 no.1 (Feb 2005) pp.2-7

5   See Peter G. Scott, *'Vestry Arc': the historic public lighting columns of St Pancras* (Greenhill, 1979) p.15

6   *A Short Account of the Parish of Bermondsey, with Notes on its Boundaries, Collected by B. & H.L.P., and Intended to Commemorate the Perambulation of the Parish on Holy Thursday 21st May, 1868* (Brixton 1868) attributes the notion that parish perambulations were derived from the Verminalia to 'Spelman' (presumably the antiquarian Sir Henry Spelman). In fact Verminius—or more properly Verminus—is recorded only in a single inscription of the second century BC: Herbert Canclik, Helmut Schneider eds. *Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike* (Stuttgart 1996 – 2003) vol.12/2 p.74

7   Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: a History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford UP, 1996) pp.277-280

8   *ibid.*, p.281; *Iniunctions Geven by the Queenes Maiestie Anno Domino 1.5.5.9. The first yere of the raigne of our soueraigne Lady Quene Elizabeth* [1559] signature Biiv18; see also W.H. Frere,

Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation (3 vols. London 1910) vol.3 p.177 fn.2, Edmund Grindal, bishop of London to archdeacon of Essex, 1560

9   George Wither, *A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne* (London 1635: facsimile edition Aldershot, 1989) p.161

10 Robert Herrick, *Poems*, ed. L.C. Martin (London 1965) p.20

11 *Notes and Queries* ser.6 vol.3 p.195 (5 Mar 1881) communication from E. Walford M.A.; see also Notes and Queries ser.6 vol.1 p.403-404

12 *A Short Account of the Parish of Bermondsey*, p.6

13 Winchester, *Parish Boundaries*, p.40

14 *Gentlemen's Magazine* 103-1 (1833) pp.116-117 mentions the practice at Scopwick, Lincolnshire, prior to 1797. Robert Fidler (see previous footnote) 'was set on his head' on a boundary stone in 1635 but this was presumably part of the process of knocking his head against it.

15 Robert Latham and William Matthew (eds), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (11 vols London, 1970–1983) vol.2 p.106 (23 May 1661) specifies 'broomstaffes'; vol.9 p.179 (30 Apr 1668) mentions 'they do whip a boy at every place they stop at in their procession'; see also vol. 8 p.218 (6 May 1667)

16 Daniel Lysons, *The Environs of London, being an historical account of the Towns, Villages, and Hamlets, within twelve miles of that capital* (4 vols. London 1792) vol.2 pp.145-146

17 Charles James Fèret, *Fulham Old and New* (3 vols. London 1900) vol. 1 p.17

18 Walter E. Brown, *From Open Vestry to Borough Council (St Pancras Vestry 1718 – 1900) A Retrospect* (London 1905) p.14; Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, West Malling Parish Records p.243/4/1

19 Dave Brewer, *A Field guide to the Boundary Markers on and around Dartmoor* (Exeter 1986) p.8

20 Information from Freda Wilkins-Jones, Senior Archivist Norfolk Record Office, 23 July 2005: I am particularly grateful to the staff of the Norfolk Record Office for their assistance in the preparation of this article.

21 See Leo Reynolds photograph on www.flickr.com/photos/lwr/sets/72057594056324887

22 Information from Ali Burdon, Westminster City Archives Centre, 21 May 2003.

23 Malcolm Stokes, *A Walk Along Ancient Boundaries in Kenwood* (London [2002]) p.13

24 James Woodforde, *The Diary of a Country Parson* ed. John Beresford (5vols. Oxford 1924-31) vol.1 p.281, 3 May 1780

25 The illustrated checklist of St Pancras markers drawn up in 1866 is in the Camden Local History Library (P/PN 2/WO/1); Malcolm Stokes, 'Discovering parish borders: the boundary between Hornsey and Islington', *Hornsey Historical Society* Bulletin no.43 pp.2-7; see, however, the 1735 map which is the frontispiece in John Nelson, *The History and Antiquities of the Parish of Islington, in the County of Middlesex* (London 1823) and shows boundaries and e.g. 'A Hedge w^h divides the Parishes'.

26 Various theories for the emergence of urban parishes before 1200 are given in Richard Morris, *Churches in the Landscape* (London 1989) pp.207-208, N.J.G. Pounds, *A History of the English Parish: the Culture of Religion from Augustine to Victoria* (Cambridge 2000) pp.119-126, and Nigel Baker and Richard Holt, *Urban Growth and the Medieval Church: Gloucester and Worcester* (Aldershot 2004) pp.239-241, and pp.256-259. Pounds suggests that in the early Middle Ages urban parishes had been even more numerous, many not surviving till the 1500s.

27 Cecil R. Humphrey-Smith (ed), *The Phillimore Atlas and Index of Parish Registers* (Phillimore, 1984)

28 Information from Richard Shackle, Colchester Library, 7 July 2005

29 Information from Michael Popkin's survey, www.oxfordinscriptions.com/boundaries.htm: there are also numerous undated and undateable markers.

30 Temple Local History Group, *A Survey of Parish Boundary Markers and Stones for Eleven of the Ancient Bristol Parishes* (Bristol 1986) pp.12, 15 and 20. There are actually two pairs, on the north side of the arcade at the rear of the Corn Exchange, one marked StW (St Werburgh) and ASP (All Saints Parish), the other StN (St Nicholas) and StW. Unlike later markers in Bristol they are of identical format, evidently from the same foundry; see also www.members.lycos.co.uk/brisray/bristol/bound1.htm.

31 Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government vol. 7: English Poor Law History: Part 1: the Old Poor Law* (London 1927) pp.118-120, *Victoria County History: Essex* vol.9 (1994) pp.280-281

32 *The Norwich Directory, or, Gentlemen and Tradesmen's Assistant* (Norwich 1783) p.iii, cf.pp.58-59, 61-62, 68-69

33 See *The Bristol Index*, or *Evans's Directory for 1818* (Bristol 1818) p.34 and p.47 for the parish clerks and the sextons (of whom ten out of twenty were women). *Matthews's New History of Bristol, or Complete Guide and Bristol Directory for the Year 1793-4 and Matthews's Complete Bristol Directory, Corrected to February, 1812* simply give the names of the clergy.

34 For example at 32 St Giles Street, Norwich, where there are two St Gregory marker plates adjacent to two St Giles marker plates, the later plates in each case placed directly above the older ones. In Bristol at the rear of the Corn Exchange the parish of St Nicholas's STN 1747 Plate is supplemented by a later cast-iron monogram.

35 cf. Harvey, 'Early Nineteenth Century Bollards in London'

36 Frederick Miller, *Saint Pancras Past and Present: being Historical, Traditional and General Notes Of the Parish, including Biographical Notices of Inhabitants Associated With Its Topographical and General History* (London 1874) p.350

37 Scott, '*Vestry Arc*'

38 These are at the junction of Gunston Road and Walford Road, London N16 and at Wilberforce Road, just north of Mountgrove Road, and Finsbury Park Road, just north of Brownswood Road, London N4. An alleyway

named Town Hall Approach between Albion Road and Milton Grove, N16 commemorates South Hornsey Town Hall, which formerly stood in Milton Grove. In 1891 South Hornsey (established as an Urban Sanitary Authority in 1865) had an area of 230 acres and a population of 16,892. In 1894 it became an Urban District Council. *The Report of the South Hornsey Urban District Council … for the Year 1899-1900* p.5 denounced the 1899 Act of Parliament establishing the Metropolitan Borough as 'a very serious attack upon its independence as a separate self-governing area'. See also Hackney Archives Department, HOR/E/1, 'Parish of Hornsey/Middlesex /A List of the Several Posts and Plates Marking and Defining the Boundary of the Parish of Hornsey … 1887 and 1888'

39 See A.D. Harvey, 'London Boroughs', *History Today* vol.49 no.7 pp.15-17 (July 1999) p.17

40 *Gentlemen's Magazine* vol.57 (1787) p.5; cf. Thomas Faulkner, *An Historical Account of Fulham* (London 1813) p.35 and Hamilton, *Select Vestry of the Parish of St Pancras*, p.21 appx.6

41 *A Short Account of the Parish of Bermondsey*, pp.6-7

42 Hamilton, *Select Vestry of the Parish of St Pancras*, p.21 appx.6; Brown, *Select Vestry to Borough Council*, p.14

43 Item in London Borough of Southwark Local History Library

44 Charlotte Sophia Burne, *Shropshire Folk-Lore: a Sheaf of Gleanings* (London 1883) p.345.

45 *Islington Gazette*, quoted in Stokes, 'Discovering Parish Borders', pp.2-3; an account by the parish surveyor of the perambulation in 1857 made no mention of any jollification: see Thomas Edlyne Tomlins, *Yseldon: a Perambulation of Islington* (London 1858) pp.176-178

46 *The Observer* 10 Jan 1830, quoted in John Brand, *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain: chiefly illustrating The Origin of our Vulgar and Provincial Customs, Ceremonies and Superstitions* (3 vols. London 1853-5) vol. 1 p.206

47 See Camden Local History Library [CLHL] P/HA1/2/4 'Saint John Hampstead Particulars of the Boundary Stones taken April 1854' and City of Westminster Archives Centre E2871 list of markers for the parish of St Margaret and St John, prepared in 1856: I do not know of any earlier examples.

48 CLHL P/PN 2/WO/1

49 The copy in Wandsworth's Local History Collection, Battersea Library, has a date stamp, 'The Board of Works For The Wandsworth District, Battersea Parish 6-JUL-86'.

50 The parish of Stoke Newington, for example, secured its independence from the Hackney Board of Works in 1894.

51 *Notes and Queries for Somerset and Dorset* vol.7 p.297. At Edenbridge in Kent in 1758 John Humphret was paid two shillings 'for goeing with us 2 Days to shew us the Bounds'; presumably he too was an old man: Granville Leveson-Gower (ed), 'Churchwardens' Accounts, Edenbridge', *Archaeologia Cantiana* vol.21 (1895) pp.118-125 (p.122). H.J. Wilkins (ed), *The Perambulation of the Boundaries of the Ancient Parish of Westbury-on-Trim in May 1803* (Bristol 1920) p.12 gives an instance of two processions meeting up and conferring.

52 Edwin Chart, *Beating the Bounds: Perambulation of the Boundary Line of the Parish of Mitcham, County of Surrey, on Thursday 16th May 1833* (ed. E.N. Montague: Merton Historical Society Local History Notes no.26, 2005) p.7

53 See earlier illustrations in Camden Local History Library P/PN 2/WO/1

54 W.E. Morden, *The History of Tooting-Graveney Survey: Compiled from Original Documents* (London, 1897) pp.102-103 vestry minutes 19 Oct 1821

55 Southwark Local History Library, Archives 5935.

56 *ibid*.; 'Account of the Perambulation of Saint Olave Southwark as it took place in the Year 1846, And again in the Year 1853'; Camden Local History Library P/PN 2/WO/1 nos. 83 and 137 (both dated 1791) and 153 (dated 1842)

57 *Wandsworth Notes & Queries* Pt.1 (1898) no.4 p.13 records a boundary post marked on its east side 'Battersea parish ends here, 1783' and on its south side 'Wandsworth parish ends here erected I.C.J.S. Esq. church warden 1783.' Later, though rarely, the full names of the churchwardens were given.

58 Presumably the 74-acre Highbury House estate, owned in 1816 by Robert Felton, but later built over (*Victoria County History: Middlesex* vol.8 pp. 68-69): this bollard seems however to have been moved from its original location, though this is not unusual. Other street bollards marking, or formerly marking, the boundaries of private property are to be found in Guilford Street, London WC1 (Foundling Hospital) and Ensign Street, London E1 (Royal Brunswick Theatre).

59 *Wandsworth Notes & Queries* pt.1 (1898) no.7 p.23

60 The kerbstone, inscribed STG.B. 182[illegible] and placed upside down, was in any case not in its original position. Marchmont Street, formerly on the border of the parishes of St Pancras and St George Bloomsbury (which in 1900 became part of the Metropolitan Borough of Holborn) ceased to be on a municipal boundary with the amalgamation of St Pancras, Holborn and Hampstead to form the London Borough of Camden in the early 1960s.

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