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Report 19/06/2023 **Freethorpe Village Sign Restoration**



October 1977

1. Summary

The condition of Freethorpe Village Sign had deteriorated over time. Parish Council agreed to a restoration of the existing sign. Local artist Suzanne Burman, having recently carried out excellent work on the new Wickhampton Village Sign post, was engaged to advise and carry out the restoration work. New planters were also purchased and were planted up around the sign by Adrian Barber and Hannah Barber, with the plants as a gift. The paving slabs around the sign were cleaned up by David Pentney, also on a voluntary basis.

This report recalls the story of the village sign, unveiled in 1977, and the aspects of our village that are represented. It then uses photographs to show before – during - and after – the 2023 restoration of the sign.

2. The Story of the Sign

Freethorpe Village Sign was erected near the Village Hall in 1977. It was donated by Mr. Alec Alexander, designed by Mr. David Cooper and mounted on a new base by Mr. Derek London. It was unveiled on Sunday 23rd October 1977 at 4 p.m.



Alec Brock, Irving Watson, Edith Moll, Peter Upton, Rev. Peter Halls, Derek London, Elsie & Alec Alexander.



Irving Watson, Alec Brock, Edith Moll, Alec & Elsie Alexander, Derek London

“EII 1977” on the sign post is a reminder that this was the Silver Jubilee year of Queen Elizabeth II.

A simplified shield version of the **Walpole family crest** was taken from Walpole hatchments (which were found at the Manor House and ultimately returned to the Walpole family). It features the triangular line patterns along with the lion and unicorn from the Walpole coat of arms. The Walpoles were lords of the manor in Freethorpe. Richard Henry Vade Walpole was the incumbent lord who left the greatest mark on village history with the building of the Walpole almshouses and a number of houses in the village which bear the Vade Walpole lettering. This shield was originally on the sign itself. At a later date the shield was moved to its current location on the post, revealing a tree on the sign.

The sign itself features eight items which represent the history and the active life of Freethorpe as it was in 1977.

The church of All Saints with its round tower.

Freethorpe's parish church is one of Norfolk's remaining 124 round-tower churches. The Parish Church of All Saints is an ancient stone building in the Norman style, consisting of chancel, nave, north aisle, south porch and a low round tower containing 1 bell. The tower is thought to be of Norman architecture (12th century) and the remaining parts 13th century. Richard Vade Walpole paid for restoration work by Anthony Salvin to the church in 1849, and also financed the enlargement of the churchyard in 1851. In 1924 Mr W.T.Jary funded repairs and improvements to the fabric of the church. The register dates from the year 1758. The Vicar in 1977 was Rev.Peter Halls.

The windpump, known as Lockgate Mill

The windmill is thought to be Lockgate Mill, also referred to locally and historically as Freethorpe Mill, 'Banham's Black Mill' and 'Duffel's Mill'. It is a windpump on the Halvergate Marshes in the detached parish of Freethorpe near the northern edge of Breydon Water. The current mill at this location was built somewhere between 1800 and 1825 under the name 'Freethorpe Mill', it is four stories high and built of red brick tarred black. The structure stands at 35 feet to the curb and the diameter of the base is 24 feet, housing two doors and 4 windows. A farm once stood next to the mill, it was known as Lockgate Farm and was demolished in 1981. When operational, the mill was driven by four patent sails. It drained Acle marshes that lie to the north of the mill. The earliest recorded marshman of the mill was a Mr Dan Banham, followed subsequently by Mr Bob Banham. The Banham family ceased working the mill in the early 1920s and was taken over for a short period by Mr Gordon Addison, who lived in the nearby Lockgate Farm. The final marshman that worked the mill was Mr Leonard Carter, who left the mill in the mid-1940s. After Leonard Carter left the mill, it began to fall into disrepair. In 1953 the sails were blown off the mill in a gale and was left to deteriorate until a temporary aluminium cap was fitted in 1988 to protect the remains of the mill.

The Sack of corn

This represents the agricultural heritage of the village. The main farm in 1977 was the Executors of Myrus Sutton, which was primarily an arable farm but with a past history of cattle production. The sack of corn also alludes to Frank Moll & Sons Agricultural Feed and Corn Merchants, which was a small factory on the Common (present day Granary Close is built on the site).

The wagon wheel

Represents the wheelwrights. This was a family business run by the Youngs family, based on the Green next door to the current village shop. In the earlier 20th century wheels for wagons were made here. There was a wood yard and a carpenters shop. By 1977 the wheelwrights yard had become a builders yard and the business was mainly building under the auspices of Mr. Stanley Youngs.

The anvil

Represents the blacksmith's shop and is further evidence of the agricultural community. Under the ownership of the Sharman family, the blacksmith's shop was a very busy place, employing men for the shoeing of horses and repairs to farm equipment. Mechanisation brought new skills and work maintaining agricultural machinery. The work was diversifying further into general work such as plumbing by 1977. Although the site has now been used for houses, the junction of the Common and the Green is still referred to as 'Blacksmith's Shop Corner'.

The row of bricks

Almost unnoticed, below the Freethorpe name is a row of bricks. These represent the brickyard. At one time 'Freethorpe' bricks and tiles were made at the Brickyard on Reedham Road. One of Freethorpe's finest sons, Henry James Waters, was born here, and ran the brickyard before moving away to become a successful farmer, auctioneer, councillor and alderman of the County Council. A plaque in his memory is on the west internal wall of the Methodist Church. Bricks from Freethorpe were used in the building of the school and school house. They were also transported from Reedham by wherry.

The tree

A tree was uncovered or added when the Walpole plaque was moved from the sign to the post. In the 19th century Freethorpe had several wooded areas, including the Common and beyond Porters Road. The Plantation near the Brickyard remains, although technically part of Reedham parish. Freethorpe is also home to a glorious oak meadow on the Green, now known as Brock's Meadow.

Blue sky

The final feature of Freethorpe's village sign is a wide open blue sky with the hint of a few white gulls soaring above. A reminder of the wide open skies, the fresh air and proximity to the sea that we enjoy in our village.

3. Refurbishment 2023 - Before



4. Refurbishment 2023 - During



5. Refurbishment 2023 - After



6. Refurbishment 2023 – Official Re-opening

A short ceremony at the start of the Freethorpe Parish Council meeting on 19th June 2023 marked the re-opening of the refurbished village sign. Suzanne Burman was thanked for the excellent work carried out to make it look as good as new. David Pentney also attended and was thanked for his work clearing the slabs around the sign. Hannah Barber and Adrian Barber were not present but their work in putting in planters, and filling them with flowers was also noted and much appreciated.



John Fleetwood, Andrea Rowlands, David Lake, Lana Hemsall, Grant Nurden, Michael Blake, Paul Crisp, Paul Bacon, Nick Spencer, Suzanne Burman, David Pentney







District Councillor Grant Nurden, County Councillor
Lana Hempsall

