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THE LONDON STONES: MARKING THE CITY OF LONDON'S JURISDICTION OVER THE THAMES AND MEDWAY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT

Edward Carpenter

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THE LONDON STONES
MARKING THE CITY OF LONDON'S JURISDICTION OVER THE THAMES AND MEDWAY

Edward Carpenter

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SUMMARY

The City of London held jurisdiction over part of the River Thames and part of the River Medway from the 12th century until the mid-19th century. The boundaries of this jurisdiction were largely determined by natural features, but from at least the post-medieval period they were also partly marked by boundary stones and these stones were identified for further work during English Heritage's Hoo Peninsula Historic Landscape Project (Carpenter et al 2013). The three earliest surviving stones are thought to date to the 18th century and were originally at Staines, Southend-on-Sea and at Upnor. Of these three only the Upnor stone remains in-situ. The City's jurisdiction was frequently challenged and the boundaries were periodically visited by the Lord Mayor of London and other officials. These river trips, sometimes referred to as 'views', would last about three days. They included ceremonies undertaken at the stones in an assertion of the City's rights in which wine, beer and coins were distributed to the attendant crowd. These visits also became social events with dinners and balls held in either Rochester or Southend-on Sea. In the early 19th century two new obelisks were erected alongside the existing stones at Upnor and Southend-on-Sea, perhaps in a reassertion of rights in the face of criticism from a parliamentary select committee. The final stone was erected at Yantlet Creek, Kent in 1856 and the following year the City lost control of these rivers. The three obelisks remain in situ.

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CAPTIONS

INTRODUCTION

The author Peter Ackroyd's journey along the Thames (Ackroyd 2007) followed the river from its source and ended in Kent. The point where the river becomes the sea is marked by a 19th century obelisk called the London Stone on the foreshore near Yantlet Creek. If Ackroyd had instead been travelling along the Essex coast, his journey would have ended by a similar obelisk called the Crow Stone situated on the Chalkwell Oaze mudflats. Though these two stones and the imaginary line drawn between them mark the end of the Thames, they were not erected as river-end equivalents to the stone later put up at the source of the river at Thames Head in Gloucestershire. Instead, these stones, which were identified for further work during English Heritage's Hoo Peninsula Historic Landscape Project (Carpenter et al 2013), were put in place to mark the eastern limit of the City of London's jurisdiction over the river (Fig 1). The City exercised this jurisdiction from the 12th century until the mid-19th century and it was originally purchased by the City from Richard I in 1197. It was concerned with control of fisheries and also the charging of tolls, but the legal position on the capital's control and ownership was never clear and it was frequently disputed (Weinreb & Hibbert 1995, 883).

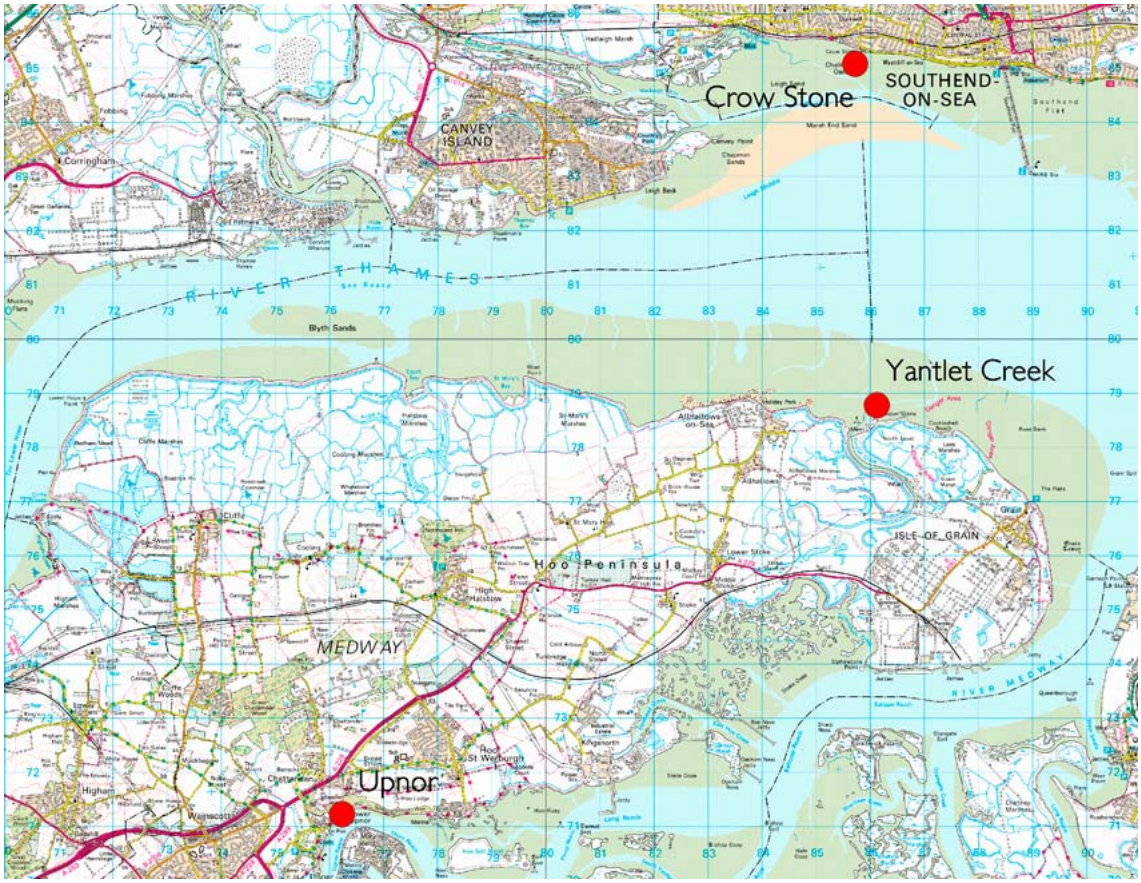

Figure 1 Location of boundary markers that marked the City of London's Jurisdiction over the Thames and Medway east of London. Background mapping © Crown copyright and database right 2014, all rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900

From these two stones the City of London claimed jurisdiction over the river westwards as far as Staines and also over part of the River Medway, from close to its confluence with the Thames upriver to Lower Upnor, near Rochester. The exact points that marked this jurisdiction were primarily determined by the junction of minor watercourses with the main rivers. At Staines this was Colne Ditch (Allen 1839, 452) a watercourse now known as the County Ditch that in the 19th century also marked part of the county boundary between Berkshire and Surrey. The eastern limit was originally determined not by a stone but by the eastern bank of the mouth of Yantlet Creek. This creek once cut across the Hoo Peninsula and the eastern limit of the City's control over the Medway was determined by the point where it joined that river. From this point the City's jurisdiction extended upriver to a point that was not marked by a natural feature but by the boundary between the parishes of Frindsbury and Hoo St. Werburgh.

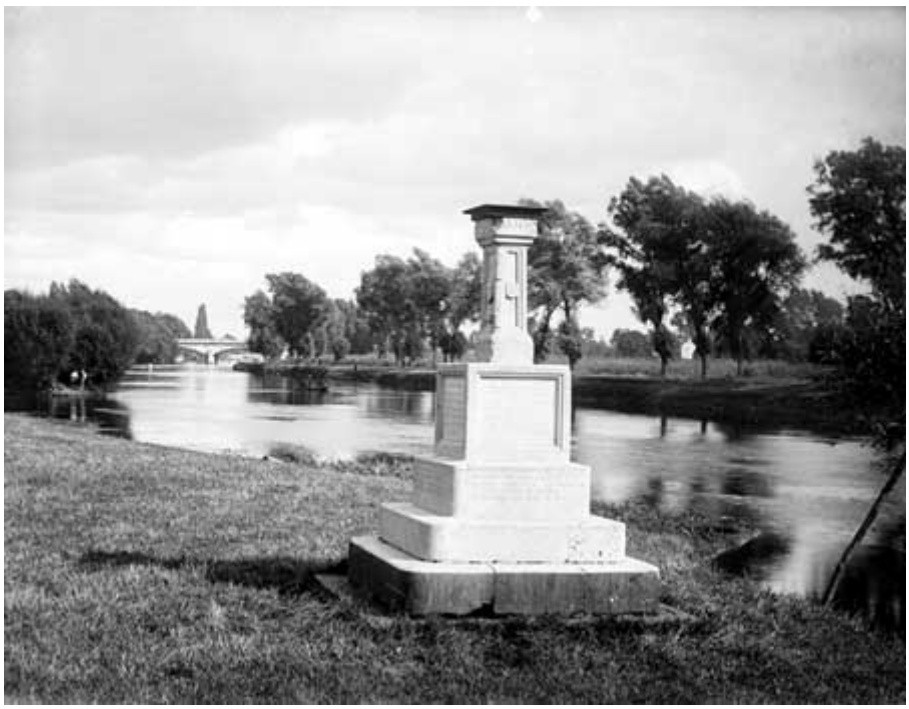

Figure 2 London Stone, Staines photographed in 1883 by Henry W Taunt. CC57/00268 Reproduced by permission of English Heritage

BOUNDARY MARKERS TO THE LATE 18TH CENTURY

Despite the medieval origin of the City's jurisdiction it is not clear when the limit of the conservancy was first marked with stones. The earliest reference to a stone is from 1676 when John Speed noted that there had *once* been a stone at Staines (Reynolds 1962, 15). A new stone at Staines was in place by 1687 and is referred to in a fisherman's charter of that year in which it was called the City of London Mark-Stone (Griffiths & Binnell 1758, 139). This may be the surviving stone at Staines (list entry 1187015) though this was modified and placed upon a new pedestal in 1781 (Allen 1839, 452) (Fig 2). It is now in a

Spelthorne Museum, Staines and a replica occupies the original location (Ackroyd 2007, 85).

No other stones seem to have been in place in 1687 and the eastern limits were described as 'Yendall, alias Yenlet, and the waters of the Medway…till they meet with the Liberties of Rochester' (1687 charter reproduced in Griffiths & Binnell 1758, 139).

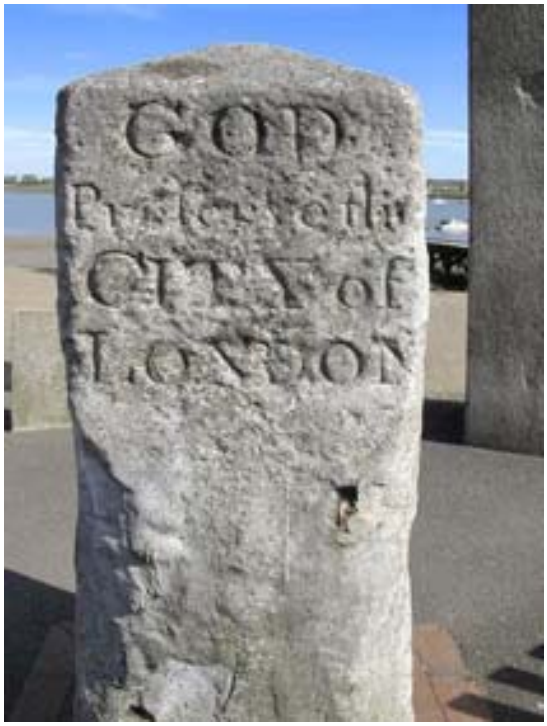

Figure 3 Older London Stone, Upnor. DP113995 © English Heritage

The earliest reference to a stone having been used to mark the eastern limit of the City's jurisdiction was, as at Staines, also a reference to a missing stone. A 1746 description of the Conservancy of the Thames published in 1758 (Griffiths & Binnell 1758, 51) states that at Leigh-on-Sea, Essex (opposite Yantlet Creek) there *had* been a stone but 'by some accident it has been lost these several years past' (ibid). This location presumably remained without a stone until a new one was erected in 1755. This area is now part of Southend-on-Sea and the 18th century stone was relocated to Priory Park, Southend-on-Sea in 1950 (list entry 1168708) (Fig 4). The third stone thought to have been put in place during the 18th century was at Upnor (list entry 1085744) though it is not known if this replaced an earlier stone (Fig 3).

Despite the 18th century origin of these stones they are all carved with medieval dates. None of these stones record the original charter of 1197 but they presumably record dates when the City's rights were confirmed or extended. Both the stone at Staines and the older stone for Essex were marked 1285 (see list entry 1187015 for Staines and for Essex, Blundell 1965, http://www.southendtimeline.com/crowstone.htm). According to

Blundell this is the date that Edward I extended the City's administration of the river though Thacker's consideration of Staines in his 1914 work on the inland navigation of the Thames did not discover any reason why that date should have been used (Thacker 1914, 20). The Upnor stone is marked with the date 1204 which falls within the reign of King John, but is two years after a charter concerning London rights over the Thames and Medway (Allen 1839, 66).

Figure 4 Old Crow Stone, Southend-on-Sea. Images of England 122918 © Mr Ken Clark LRPS

BEATING THE BOUNDS

The Lord Mayor of London periodically held a Court of Conservancy to deal with any encroachments or offences with regard to the City's jurisdiction of the Thames. Late 18th century accounts indicate that the Court of Conservancy might also include a mayoral visit to the eastern boundaries of the jurisdiction (Anon 1771; Anon 1796). Visits to the western boundary were carried out separately and the following 18th and 19th century accounts are all concerned with the boundaries on the Thames and the Medway. Though the itineraries of each visit or 'view' as they were sometimes called did vary slightly a general pattern was followed. Usually undertaken during July, the Lord Mayor and accompanying officials would sail from London in one or more yachts flying the City's colours. The voyage would include ceremonies at the stones at Leigh-on-Sea and at Upnor as well overnight stays at Rochester and sometimes Southend before returning to the capital; the entire visit would take about three days.

There was pageantry to these visits and the Lord Major and other officials were accompanied by, among others, Watermen and the Lord Mayor's Bargemaster all in state livery, the Water-Baliff, City Marshall and Sword Barer (Anon 1849a, 37). The Sword of State and City Colours were laid on each stone and the stones circled three times. Wine and beer were made available and after drinking a toast to the City of London some of those present were 'bumped' on the stones. Money was also thrown 'amongst the poor' (Anon 1829, 3) which along with the bumping and general excess was 'for the purpose of keeping the City's Claims in recollection' (Anon 1796, 3). As reported in 1849, the scramble for this money could be a 'robustious affair' (Anon 1849a, 37), and to one presumably wealthy spectator, the distribution of fourpenny pieces presented 'an amusing scramble' and people's attempts to 'grab up more and yet retain what they had was most laughable' (Anon 1836, 6). The stones were engraved with the mayor's name and the year of the visit.

During the view the Lord Mayor would be honoured with salutes from Royal Naval vessels either at anchor at the Nore or along the Medway. In 1796, when the Lord Mayor 'came in sight of his Majesty's fleet…every ship was manned, and the yachts were saluted with three cheers as they passed' (Anon 1796, 3). Some naval vessels also gave 11 gun salutes (Anon 1823, 268).

These visits were also social occasions and the Lord Mayor would host dinners at a local inn. The two accounts from the late 18th century suggest that these were originally largely male occasions and sometimes drunken affairs. At Rochester in 1796 guest included the High Sheriff of Kent, Members of the County and City of Rochester, Vice-Admiral Buckner and the Russian Admiral Hennikoff among others. A large quantity of alcohol was drunk and 'the two municipal chiefs were so potently affected, that they found much difficulty to find words to express their regret at parting' (Anon 1796, 3). By 1816 ladies were also present and after the dinner there was a ball in which 'the dancing was kept up until six o'clock the following morning' (Anon 1816, 3). In subsequent visits both men and women, including the Lady Mayoress would accompany the Lord Mayor and attend the dinner and ball.

There are accounts of these visits in 1771, 25 years later in 1796 and 20 years after that in 1816 (Anon 1771, Anon 1796, Anon 1816). The 1823 visit was the first reference to this 'view' being a septennial custom and this seven year interval was generally adhered to until the city lost its jurisdiction over these rivers (Anon 1823a, Anon 1823b, Anon 1829, Anon 1836, Anon 1842, Anon 1849a, Anon 1849b, Anon 1856). These accounts also suggest that by 1823 the 'view' of the stones may have been carried out separately from the holding of the Court of Conservancy.

CHALLENGES TO THE CITY OF LONDON

The city's jurisdiction over the Medway did not go unchallenged and on one occasion the stone at Upnor was appropriated as a marker for a rival claim. On arriving at Upnor in the summer of 1771 the Lord Mayor 'observed there some letters fresh cut on the side of the stone nearest the land, which were said to mean a claim of a lady of the manor' (Anon 1771, 376). The reference to the rival inscription being freshly cut implies that it was undertaken immediately before the septennial visit in the knowledge that it would be seen by the Lord Mayor. In this instance the challenge was quickly dealt with and the inscription was immediately chipped-out and the stone then cut with the mayor's name and the year (ibid).

Despite the Lord Mayor being received by the Major of Rochester on these septennial visits it appears that the corporation of Rochester did deny the right of the city of London to conservational jurisdiction in the Medway (Fletcher 1841, 104). It is tempting to see a connection between the political wrangling in Rochester in 1836 (the town council's inability to choose a mayor or aldermen or to officially receive the Lord Mayor of London (Anon 1836, 6)) and London's claim over the Medway. Two men of Rochester who spoke at the dinner held during that visit used phrases that hinted at dissent. Sir E Knatchbull regretted that his colleagues were not present, but noted that 'the men of Kent were determined to maintain their own rights' (Anon 1836, 6) while Mr Eassel hoped for a quick end to the town council dispute, but also stated that 'the City of Rochester had like other towns been deprived of ancient privileges' (ibid).

The City's right over part of the Medway appears, in part, to have been because Yantlet Creek once allowed navigation between the Thames and the Medway (Fletcher 1841, 104), though by the early 19th century navigation along the Yantlet had long been impossible due to the causeway that carried the road from Grain. The importance of connecting the rivers Thames and Medway via the Yantlet to enforce the City's claim can be seen in the actions of the corporation in 1823. In July the septennial visit included a journey down the Yantlet as far as this causeway, referred to as an obstruction that prevented 'the ancient and undoubted communication between the Thames and Medway' (Anon 1823, 267). In September of that year the causeway was removed but a court case in 1824 found against the corporation and the causeway and road were reinstated.

This 1823 visit was reported in both *The Times* and in *The Gentleman's Magazine* but they both give very different accounts of events. In *The Times* the article describes a visit beset with misfortune in which bad weather resulted in sea sickness and the swamping of boats. Unusually the main dinner and ball that was a feature of these visits was held at Southend-on-Sea not at Rochester. Though the following night there was a dinner at Rochester with the mayor and corporation, the decision not to host the ball there may have been an intentional slight on the city. Though *The Times* did describe the ball as 'brilliant', it also reported that a fight broke out between two drunken gentlemen and 'one

of the company actually had his eye blackened in the presence of the ladies'. Bad weather on the final day prevented a return to the capital by boat and the group eventually returned home by other means 'after having suffered "unutterable things"' (Anon 1823, 3).

This account can be contrasted by the report of the same visit in *The Gentleman's Magazine* which described a most successful few days and drew its account to a close with the opinion that it was 'scarcely necessary to add, that the various reports which have been circulated of perils and inconveniences on this voyage are almost entirely without foundation' (Anon 1823, 268). Though it is not clear which of these reports is most accurate, the Lord Mayor's trip along the Yantlet may have been particularly provocative and in this context *The Times* article could be read as an attempt to undermine the dignity of the Lord Mayor and thereby the claims of the City of London.

These tensions between London and Rochester appear to have also manifested themselves with regard to the Thames and Medway canal which was started in 1800 and after some delay was finally completed and opened in 1824. This, like Yantlet Creek joined the rivers Thames and Medway and an obelisk was erected alongside the canal at the boundary between the jurisdictions of London and Rochester (list entry 1246068). This stone was erected by Rochester in 1820 before the canal was completed and at a date by which most of the work then undertaken was under London's jurisdiction. It suggests that the City of Rochester was determined to not only have their jurisdiction marked but also to ensure that it was not marked by a City of London stone.

A stronger threat to the City of London's control came in 1836. A government select committee reported on the state of the Thames, condemned the laxity of the City in carrying out its duties and concluded with a recommendation that London should lose its jurisdiction over the Thames and Medway (Weinreb & Hibbert 1993, 883).

The 1836 obelisks

This 1836 challenge by the select committee provides a context in which the City, in a tangible reassertion of its rights over the rivers erected new stones alongside the existing ones at Leigh and at Upnor. Both these stones are obelisks and in addition to the date that they were erected the Upnor stone has a carving of the City of London's crest while the Crow Stone has the legend 'God Preserve the City of London' (Fig 5).

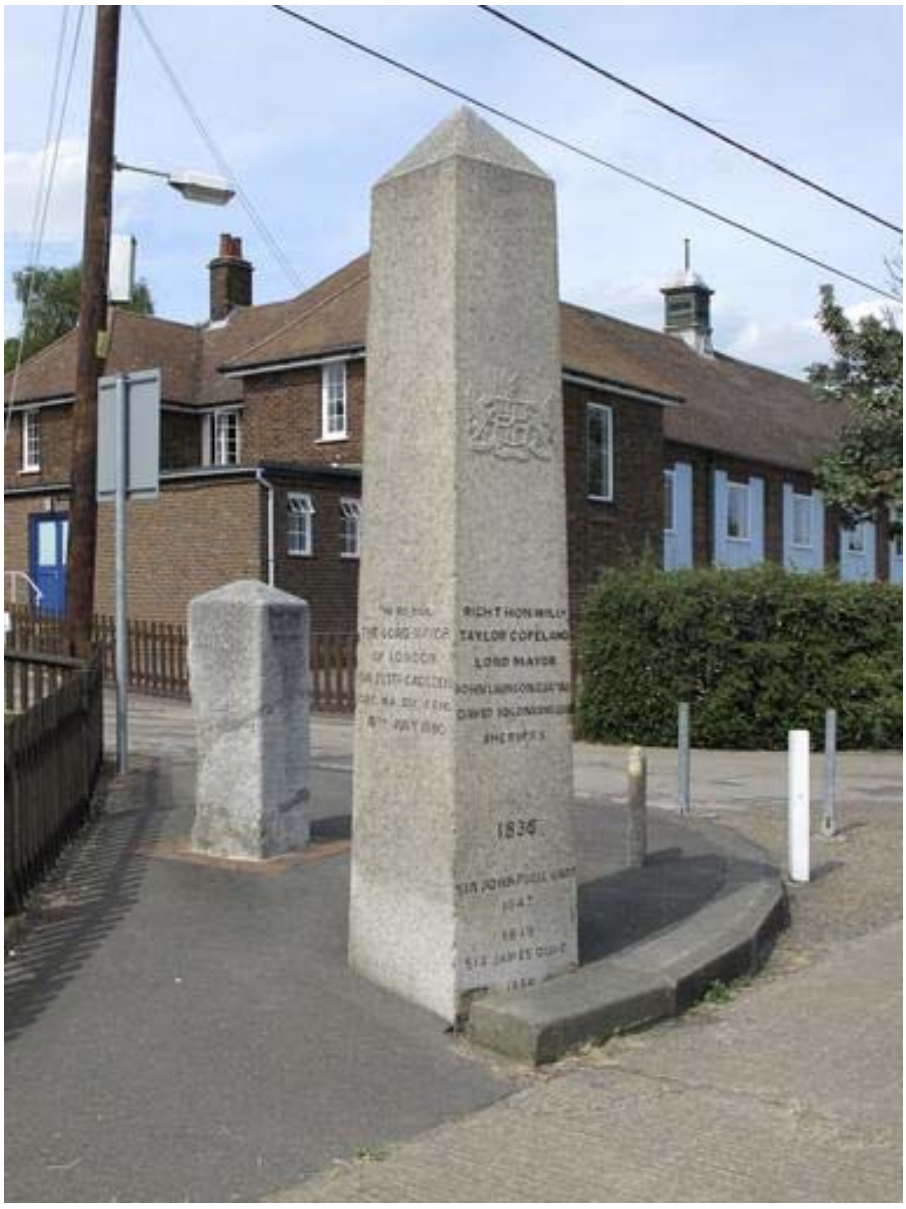

Figure 5 1836 stone at Upnor in front of the earlier marker. DP113994 © English Heritage

Although the later Crow Stone (Fig 6) has been dated to 1836 by a number of sources (Smith, 1945 386; Addison 1954, 122; Pevsner 1965, 354) a copper plaque attached to the stone in 1950 by the Port of London authority gave the date as 1837 and this is the date used in the latest edition of the Essex volume of the *Buildings of England* (Bettley & Pevsner 2007, 717).

The retention of the earlier marker stones with their inscriptions of medieval charter dates and names of previous mayors was perhaps intended to lend more weight to the City's claim. It is also stands in complete contrast to the occasions where the loss of earlier stones had left boundaries unmarked. There may also be an argument that the retention of the older stone may have served a more practical function. The new obelisks

were too tall for people to be 'bumped' upon or for anyone to stand on. Both events are illustrated in the account of the 1849 ceremonies (Anon 1849a). At Leigh and Upnor water boatmen with the City colours are shown stood on the lower, older stones and one illustration depicts someone being bumped on the older stone at Upnor.

Figure 6 The new Crow Stone, Essex © William and licensed for reuse under the **Creative Commons Licence** http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/

An Obelisk is an Ancient Egyptian form, originally erected in pairs and often flanking an entrance. They were introduced to Europe by the Romans who erected them singly, and these were later re-erected in Renaissance Rome and subsequently widely copied across Europe (Curl 2006, 533). Obelisks were familiar in England from Elizabethan times (Curl 2013, 151). They were also a fashionable form associated with Neo-Classicism and were often adopted to be seen from afar (Humbert & Price 2003, 4) or to function as eye-catchers over shorted distances (Curl 2013, 185). Although the City of London obelisks are not massive structures they are taller than the earlier stones and presumably more noticeable, especially in the flat and open landscape of the Thames estuary. By erecting obelisks the City of London was also following the lead of the City of Rochester who had chosen that form as a boundary marker on the Thames and Medway canal 16 years earlier. Regardless of the intended purpose of erecting an obelisk it did not 'exclude perceptions of charm or a certain esotericism' (Humber & Price 2003, 3). Certainly there may also have been a symbolic significance in the choice of an obelisk as a marker and they had symbolic associations with a number of ideas or beliefs including 'justice and truth' and 'eternity' (Humbert & Price 2003, 4; Curl 2013, 133). In those terms the 1836 obelisks provided a layer of meaning that added legality and permanence to the City's claims of jurisdiction.

THE YANTLET STONE AND THE CITY'S LOSS OF RIGHTS

Some of the problems highlighted by the 1836 select committee with respect to the City's management of the Thames continued in subsequent decades. In particular the City's unwillingness to pay for work needed to maintain navigation on the river. This in part may have been due to the dramatic fall in revenue from the river as a result of competition from the railways (Thacker 1914, 188-9). Income from tolls was almost halved from c. £16,000 to c. £8,000 in the years 1839-1849 (ibid, 250). Damage to the banks of the Medway and the potential problems to navigation were highlighted to the Lord Mayor during his 1856 septennial visit (Anon 1856, 11). It was in that the year that the final obelisk to be erected was placed on the Thames foreshore at the mouth of Yantlet Creek (Fig 7). This date is all that is carved on this obelisk and is difficult to read (KCC HER TQ 87 NE 1014) but if correct must have been put in place by the City of London as in 1857 the Crown reclaimed its rights over the river. The Thames Conservancy Act 1857 transferred the jurisdiction of the Thames from Staines to the Sea to a body known as the Thames Conservators. It is perhaps fitting that the Lord Mayor's final septennial visit took place in the last year of the City of London's jurisdiction over the Thames and it is certainly symbolic that at the end of this visit the Mayor and officials returned to London not by yacht, but by a special train on the North Kent Railway (Anon 1856, 11).

Figure 7 London Stone, Yantlet Creek AA94/02210 © Crown copyright. English Heritage

DESCRIPTION OF THE STONES

This section provides a brief description of the boundary stones that marked the eastern limits of the City of London Thames Conservancy. The obelisks were not visited during the preparation of this report and information of stone type, monument dimensions and details of inscriptions are not known. In addition to more detail recording of the physical attributes of these obelisks there is also potential for more detailed documentary work to further explain the story of London's jurisdiction over these rivers. The river/estuarine location of these stones means that a better understanding of these stones would

contribute to both NHPP Measure 3A1 Unknown Marine Assets and Measure 4B3 Transport and Communications.

The Crow Stones, Southend-on-Sea

Crow Stone is the name given to the stones erected near the north bank of the Thames at Southend-on-Sea and two stones with this name survive. The newer 'Crow Stone' is still situated on the foreshore and the 'Old Crow Stone' which has been repositioned from this location to Priory Park in the town.

Old Crow Stone

The Old Crow Stone is listed. It is a granite obelisk about 2m high was originally erected on the Chalkwell foreshore in 1755. It was replaced and re-erected on its present site in Priory Park west of Prittlewell Priory (NGR: TQ8741 8728), Southern-on-Sea in 1950.

List Entry Number 1168708 Grade II. First listed 23-Aug-1974

Crow Stone

This obelisk is dated 1836 or 1837 and is positioned on Chalkwell foreshore, originally next to Old Crow Stone (NGR: TQ 8579 8528). Set on a base, the obelisk is made of a single piece of stone. This occupies a relatively exposed location and is washed by the tide.

The London Stones, Upnor

Both these stones are located close to each other on dry land at Lower Upnor.

Old London Stone

The older of the two boundary stones at Upnor (NGR: TQ7619 7122) is listed. Probably 18th century it is 1.2m high, square, with pyramidal top. It is inscribed with the date 1204 and 'God preserve the City of London'.

List Entry Number: 1085744. First listed 14-Nov-1986

New London Stone

This is an obelisk dated 1836. Positioned next to older boundary stone (NGR: TQ 7619 7122) it is made from a single piece of stone, though the lower part is partially subsumed

in the tarmac of the pavement and hidden behind a kerb stone. It is carved with the arms of the City of London and the names and dates of Mayoral visits.

London Stone, Yantlet Creek

This obelisk is situated on the foreshore of the Isle of Grain, near the south bank of the Thames and close to Yantlet Creek (NGR: TQ 8609 7856). The obelisk is raised on plinth and in addition to the base consists of three pieces of stone. This stone is in a relatively exposed location and is washed by the tide. It has an eroded inscription thought to read 1856 and its weathered nature indicates a degree of erosion.

SIGNIFICANCE OF LONDON STONES

These stones are important indicators of City of London's jurisdiction over the River Thames, a control that was exercised far beyond the bounds of the city itself. As such they also act as reminders of the importance of river navigation in a pre-railway age. The use of artificial markers at locations long established by natural features may in part reflect a desire to clearly establish bounds in a period before maps were widely used, but they also served to explicitly assert the City of London's control. This requirement to assert control hints at some of the controversies surrounding the City's jurisdiction, particularly over the Medway.

Unlike many other examples of obelisks in England that were erected to commemorate individuals or past events, the 1836 and 1856 obelisks on the Thames and Medway had a more contemporary relevance in the landscape and seascape. As such they have something in common with the Coal Duty markers erected around London, e.g. the obelisks on Thames Street, Staines and at Broxbourne, Hertfordshire (list entry 1205078; 1296383) though their inclusion in septennial ceremonies meant that they played a more active role.

Since the City lost control, these stones have unofficially taken on the role of memorials both to the extended reach of London's control along the Thames and Medway but more specifically to the points in the landscape where the boundaries were and where the pomp, ceremony and excitement of the septennial customs was experienced. As such it can be argued that the significance of these stones is diluted when they are removed from their original location. For those stones that remain their significance is not only enhanced by their location but also by the group value of their relationship to the other in-situ stones.

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