

# BRADFORD ABBAS FINGERPOST REFURBISHMENT

## Background

This note describes the pilot project to investigate whether the Parish Council could reasonably undertake refurbishment of fingerposts in the village. Dorset County Council has declared that they will no longer be doing this and are content to see them rot. Currently all posts in the village use painted plywood arms rather than the traditional hardwood that was used decades ago. They also use plastic lettering rather than the original cast metal lettering. Plywood is particularly unsuited to the environment and rots in a few years. Whilst some parishes with iconic fingerposts have used more traditional materials such as oak for the arms and remove the entire post for refurbishment, this has resulted in a refurbish cost in excess of £1000 for a typical post. Our approach was to assess use of uPVC for the arms as this does not require painting, does not rot and is potentially cheaper to replace in future if arms are broken by hedge cutting contractors.

An estimate obtained for making arms in a cheap hardwood suggested a cost of £130 for a finished painted arm (without lettering).

## The Pilot Project

The fingerpost selected was the one at the Back Lane/Underdown/Old Compton Lane junction since it was very accessible. Unfortunately it was a very old design with lots of components and in very poor condition.



**Figure 1 The Post in Original State**

The original intention to just replace the arms was abandoned given the poor state of the metalwork and the post was dismantled, albeit with some difficulty as all bolts and fixings were badly corroded. Each finger is attached to top and bottom bracket arms with six bolts, nuts and washers. Each bracket arm is bolted to a heavy cast flange collar which has a series of radial holes allowing the bracket arms to be mounted pointing in the desired direction. So there are four collars in all, each of which is held to the post by three bolts. All sixteen arm fixing bolts were so corroded that they had

to be sawn and chiselled off. All twelve collar fixing bolts had to be treated with a blowtorch to loosen them sufficiently for removal and three finally had to be drilled out because the bolt heads were so badly corroded they snapped off.



**Figure 2 Removed Collars**

There were two non-standard bracket arms which were in such a bad state that I had to remake them. Material source was a 1920s bed frame. Never throw anything away!



**Figure 3 Non-Standard Arm Brackets**

The post was cleaned with an aggressive power wire brush to remove all loose paint and corrosion and sanded smooth. It was then painted with three coats of Hammerite paint including a section below ground.



**Figure 4 Cleaned and Painted Post**

The collars and bracket arms were thoroughly cleaned to remove rust and then repainted with four coats of Hammerite paint.



**Figure 5 Collar Before and After Cleaning**



**Figure 6 Renovated Collars and Bracket Arms**

The four finger arms were then remade. It was possible to rescue some lettering from the one remaining finger (Bradford Abbas) but all remaining lettering had to be purchased. This entailed a bit of guesswork. Firstly what was written on the arms? A thorough search of the undergrowth and adjoining Haines property revealed no sign of them, but Google Street View (2011) gave the answer to this and also showed what a good state all the hedges and posts were in in 2011! Secondly, what was the letter form? A session on Microsoft Word suggested that it was Arial Bold so I risked it and from the firm I had previously found ordered 68 letters 64mm high by 3mm thick in Arial Bold, high gloss, black. Thankfully they were an exact match. The only alteration that I made was to change the Sherborne/Thornford finger arm to Sherborne/Yetminster as the post at the next junction has Yetminster on it but not Thornford. The next one down at Grants Hill/|Old Rectory junction has (had) both Thornford and Yetminster, so this seemed more logical and helpful.



**Figure 7 What Happens to DCC Highways Plywood Arm Fingers**



**Figure 8 New 18mm Thick uPVC Arm Fingers**

The lettering was glued to the arms. Two types of glue were evaluated by sticking letters to a uPVC offcut and assessing how difficult it was to remove them 48 hours later. The winner was glue formulated for hard plastic which is specified down to -30C and can also be used on outside plastic building materials such as plastic guttering. So it should be OK with the summer and winter temperature differential between the white uPVC board and the black acrylic lettering.

The finished metalwork and new arms were then rebuilt onto the refurbished pole.



**Figure 9 Reassembled Components on Pole**

The old finial on top of the pole had fallen apart. It was as simple metal cap held on with three screws and not the shaped one on some other fingerposts in the village or the traditional Dorset

circular ones (often with the grid reference on them) that we have on two of our other posts. The DCC Sign shop had no finials so the only solution I could come up with was a 110mm 'stop end' used in plastic underground foul water drainage to block off unused branches. £3.99 in Wickes, or £12 in Jewsons or other builder/plumbing merchants - so we have the Wickes one painted with black gloss paint.



**Figure 10 Completed Job**

### **Conclusion**

Refurbishment of the fingerposts would be possible. At least some of the remaining posts could probably be completely cleaned and painted in situ without removing components other than the remaining finger woodwork; but traffic management would need to be in place for this.

The cost of each arm on the refurbished post without lettering was around £5.50 compared to the quote of £130 for a painted arm made in cheap hardwood. Total refurbishment material cost for this fingerpost was £190. Some posts only have lettering on one side and would be much cheaper. Lettering costs for this post would be around £100 (was £81 using salvaged lettering), so saving lettering from old arms is an important financial factor.

Tricia has a detailed invoice showing all material costs and sources. I have now managed to obtain sufficient letters for the other posts from the Sign Workshop at the DCC Highways depot at Charminster.

**D M Hayward 15<sup>th</sup> July 2015**