



# PLOTTING PLYMOUTH'S PAST



## Plymouth Corporation Water Works: [See PPP series PCWW and PCWW MP](#)

The markers in series **PCWW** mostly comprise tall, granite boundary posts, dated 1917, 1919 and 1932. These are located along the thirteen mile boundary of the water catchment area for Burrator Reservoir, on the edge of Dartmoor. The series **PCWW MP** are smaller cast iron marker posts in the vicinity of the Reservoir. These are undated and their purpose is unclear. The granite posts are all incised "PCWW", with date. The metal posts have the same initials in raised lettering. P.C.W.W. denotes Plymouth Corporation Water Works.

The Plymouth Corporation Water Act 1893 gave the Corporation the right to impound the water of the River Meavy and its tributaries. Burrator Reservoir was constructed by the Borough of Plymouth and completed in 1898 to replace the inadequate and vulnerable water supply in "Drake's Leat", dating from 1591. The Meavy had also supplied the open leat that served the town for 300 years. The Burrator Reservoir site, plus the immediate surrounding land together totalled some 350 acres.



The Reservoir catchment area was some 5300 acres and the majority of that land was originally in the ownership of the Lopes family of Maristow. In 1916, Sir Henry Lopes agreed to sell his holding within the catchment area, comprising 4891 acres, to the Corporation. This land was conveyed the following year and the associated newly erected boundary marker posts were inscribed "PCWW 1917". It is not known how many were erected, and it is likely that some on the western boundary have been lost over the years.

### **Left: P.C.W.W. Proposed Purchase of Meavy Watershed from Sir H. Lopes, Bart., 1916**

Area of Reservoir and original land purchase shown bottom left. The dotted line shows the full extent of the water catchment area. The hatched area shows the area of land purchased from Lopes in 1917.

(PWDRO Ref. 1572/20 - from the 1914-19 Minute Book)

Two further groups of stone markers were added. First, in 1919, when land around Sheepstor was acquired from the Bayly family. The final stones are dated 1932, when a small marshy area of the Meavy headwaters was acquired, presumably from the Duchy of Cornwall. The additional stones are of the same design, all inscribed with the PCWW initials and the year in which the associated land was purchased.

## PCWW Stones

Starting from **PCWW 1** (located at SX 5507 6746 on the River Meavy below the Burrator dam) the series of stones is recorded clockwise up onto Yennadon Down (see **PCWW 3** right) and north over Walkhampton Common to North Hessary Tor. There, **PCWW 18**, the most northerly marker, is unusual as the inscription is incised into the rockface of the Tor. From this point, the boundary follows the ancient Forest boundary to South Hessary Tor and includes three “1932” stones close to the site of the old Princetown railway station (taken in sequence



as **PCWW 21**, pictured left, and **PCWW 22** and **23**). From South Hessary Tor, the line to Nun’s Cross has nine stones (**PCWW 30** to **39**) and from there to Eylesbarrow there are seven more (**PCWW 40** to **46**).

From this point the catchment boundary leaves the Forest boundary and swings round in an arc enclosing the Deancombe valley until, at SX 5787 6775, stone **PCWW 58** is beside the Longstone or Sheepstor Leat (shown on OS maps, but not named). The boundary now follows the Leat west to

Yellowmead Down and then heads to the Sheepstor summit; this line comprising nine of the ten “1919” stones (**PCWW 59** to **67**; with **PCWW 64** pictured right). The final “1919” stone is below the summit on the western side, recorded as **PCWW 69**.



The “1919” sequence is interrupted by one “1917” stone **PCWW 68** (see left). The remaining three “1917” stones (**PCWW 70** to **72**) are located between **PCWW 68** and the Reservoir. The final one (**PCWW 72**) was recumbent near the Sheepstor Dam and had been used as a stile before that. It has now been removed for safe keeping and formal display at the Burrator Discovery Centre.\*

## PCWW MP Markers

The eight cast iron marker posts recorded are all undated and of three different patterns. One distinct group of four (**PCWW MP 10**, **MP 11**, **MP 12** and **MP 13**) have the letters P.C.W.W. generously spaced out with the name Ellacott & Son, Plymouth Foundry cast on the reverse (see **PCWW MP 10** right). Ellacott & Son were in business under that name until 1921. **PCWW MP 11** has now been removed and restored and can be seen on display at the Burrator Discovery Centre\*.



The purpose of the cast iron markers remains a mystery, although a second group of three (**PCWW MP 2**, **PCWW MP 5**, pictured below left, and **PCWW MP 6**) all feature

a downward arrow which could indicate they are positioned above buried pipe work. **PCWW MP 1** (below right) is the odd one out; similar in style to the last three but with no downward arrow.



## Postscript

After the 'Three Towns' were amalgamated in 1914, steps were taken to rationalize the water supply and one result of that was the diversion of the Devonport Leat into Burrator Reservoir. Shortly afterwards came the outright purchase of the Burrator catchment areas, as summarised above. Thereafter, the tenant farmers in the catchment area were prohibited from keeping livestock. Over the next decade most left and their farm buildings were abandoned.

The main Burrator Dam and the smaller Sheepstor Dam were raised by ten feet in a four year project beginning in December 1923. This increased the Reservoir capacity from 668 to 1026 million gallons (see *Burrator A Pictorial History* by Peter Walsh & Brian Byng; 1985).

The Reservoir remained with Plymouth until the formation of the South West Water Authority (SWWA) in 1974; SWWA was an amalgamation of several regional water boards including the Plymouth Municipal Waterworks, as it had become known by then. Burrator is now managed by South West Lakes Trust, a charity established in April 2000 to promote public access, recreation and conservation on and around the South West's inland waters.

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In 2012 the Dartmoor Society initiated a project with SWWA, the Maristow Estate and others to ensure that PCWW boundary stones between South Hessary Tor and Drizzlecombe are in good condition for 2017, the centenary of their erection. Some stones have been righted, but the work has mainly involved filling hollows to avoid ponding around the stones. (See **PCWW 13** pictured right - before this work). The stones being worked on are on the boundary of the Cramber Tor Training Area, used by the military. For further information on the work see news items at [www.dartmoorsociety.com](http://www.dartmoorsociety.com) .



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\* The Burrator Discovery Centre (SX 5520 6853) is located north of Burrator Dam, just beyond Burrator Lodge on the Reservoir side of the road. The two PCWW markers that are on display there are visible from the public area around the Centre and can be seen close-up when the Centre is open: [www.swlakestrust.org.uk/lakes-and-facilities/the-lakes/burrator](http://www.swlakestrust.org.uk/lakes-and-facilities/the-lakes/burrator)