

Signs of ancient times at our feet

Watch out, says **Andrew Ginner**, liaison officer at Kenwood estate, for hidden among the foliage are stones and plates that provide fascinating clues to the area's geographical and social history

FREQUENT walkers and users of the Heath probably remember familiar routes using natural "signposts" - the sandy ditch you step across or the sweet chestnut with the hollow big enough to swallow five small children that you turn left at.

At weekends, when Kenwood attracts more visitors from further afield, I often find myself describing the route from Kenwood to Hamptonstead Village in verbiage detail using such natural signposts.

I often add a note of caution though: Ask for directions again further across the Heath - it's easy to get lost.

All but the most intrepid end up heading off for 210 bus which drops them at Jack Straw's Castle where they can walk down into Hamptonstead Village with little fear of getting lost.

Apart from gnarled oak trees, other landscape signposts like old boundary stones and iron plates can provide interesting navigational guides.

An article in the Ham&High (October 5) detailed English Heritage's replacement of a lost boundary plate with a picture of Highgate historian Malcolm Stokes.

Mr Stokes is a familiar face around the estate because he not only leads walks showing the ancient boundaries of Kenwood but is also often seen out on what might be an informal "perambulation" or walking boundary survey.

He knows the ancient stones and plates intimately and delights in pointing out 900 boundary stones poking up beneath a dog bin close to the gazebos or lifting rhododendron foliage to reveal the Harney Parish Macler by the site of Dr Johnson's summer house.

When landowners like Lord Mansfield started "improving" their estates in the 18th century, sometimes old manorial boundary markers like streams, rein ridges or man-made hedges were lost.

It became necessary for parkiers to place landscape furniture such as stones and plates to maintain boundaries and determine, for example, which of the neighbouring

parishes could claim tithes.

Across Kenwood the observant visitor will find stones and iron plates protruding from the ground, marking ancient boundary lines.

On the plates, initials of the parish church can be read: St F x P (St Pancras), St MH (St Mary Harney) and St JH (St John Hamptonstead).

In 1994 the boundary of Cauden with Harney and Barnet was redrawn to follow Hamptonstead Lane and the old boundaries across Kenwood ceased to have administrative purpose.

However, it is still important to conserve the boundary markers at Kenwood as landscape indicators.

Malcolm Stokes writes in his



Mr Stokes delights in pointing out two boundary stones poking up from beneath a dog bin

guide, *A Walk Along Ancient Boundaries in Kenwood*, that the stones and plates are of great historical significance and much "half forgotten features, banks and ditches... created in this landscape [Kenwood] perhaps a thousand years ago but almost lost in the late eighteenth century".

The markers are important for their geographic and archaeological significance and they also tell social history sto-



Historian Malcolm Stokes with the boundary plate that English Heritage made to replace the lost original. *Richard Hylton*

ries and keep alive old manufacturing processes.

English Heritage's replacement of the lost St Pancras Plate no. 213 at Kenwood highlighted the skills of Tony Bernasconi from Cambridgeshire, the cast iron pattern manufacturer responsible for making the new boundary plate.

An original St Pancras Plate in The Grove, Highgate, was used as a mould for the replacement plate. The process involved in manufacturing a new marker identical to those cast in 1791 went something like this:

1. The existing marker on the wall in The Grove was cleaned and coated with beeswax (the beeswax acting as a release agent).
2. It was then given a gel coat of polyester resin.
3. Once dry it was covered with chopped strands of fibre and resin to form a mould and left to cure.
4. This female mould was then removed and back in Cambridge another male resin mould was made from the female pattern.
5. The plate was then moulded in green sand and a cupola coke fired furnace was used to melt grey iron for the final cast.

This is a simplification of the process but it was described in great detail in correspondence now filed and stored in the Kenwood Archive along with the male resin mould.

At Kenwood, English Heritage is able to conserve landscape signposts like stone and iron plate boundary markers so that interested walkers and visitors hoping to find their way from Kenwood to Flask Walk for the first time can continue to follow the footsteps of ancient perambulators.

*Q*A *Walk Along Ancient Boundaries in Kenwood* by Malcolm Stokes can be obtained from the Kenwood House shop, priced £2.

WIN TICKETS TO SEE RUDOLPH, BLOOD BROTHERS AND CAUGHT IN THE NET

A feast of fun in the run-up to Christmas

HAM&HIGH readers have the chance to win tickets to two West End shows and a special screening of the children's adventure film, *Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer And The Island Of Misfit Toys*.

Thanks to Gadabouts Theatre and Travel Club, we have three pairs of tickets for *Blood Brothers*, Willy Russell's classic tale of a working class mum from Liverpool and her twin sons separated at birth, and *Caught In The Net*, Ray Cooney's sequel to the hilarious comedy, *Run For Your Wife*.

Blood Brothers, now in its 13th year, is playing at the Phoenix Theatre.

Caught In The Net, which is showing at Vaudeville Theatre, stars Eric Sykes and Russ Abbott and tells the story of a bigamist taxi driver whose life threatens to collapse when his son by one wife meets his daughter by another in an Internet chat room.

To enter the draw for either West End show, simply write down the name of the the-



atre at which your preferred play is showing, add your name, address and daytime phone number, and send it to: Blood Brothers/Caught In The Net competition, Ham&High, 100a Avenue Road, NW1 8JF to arrive by November 26.

Alternatively send an e-mail to: editorial@hamhigh.co.uk. Usual rules apply and the editor's decision is final. Prize tickets are not available for Saturday nights.

The Ham&High also has 50 tickets to give away to a special screening of *Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer And The Island Of Misfit Toys* at the Trieyric cinema in Kilburn High Road at 11.00am on Sunday, December 2.

The film is being shown to celebrate its release on video (£13.99) and DVD (£15.99), and features the voices of Julie Lee Curtis, Richard Dreyfuss and Rick Moranis. To enter the draw for tickets (up to four per entry are available), send your details to the address above, marked "Rudolph competition".



Q For free membership of Gadabouts, call 020-8445 5450 or e-mail: events@gadabouts.funet.nk.uk.