

History of Village Green Sign (Ornamental Sign)

The Parish Magazine of August 1973 first published the idea of the village having what was then called an ornamental sign. The idea quickly gained in popularity and in November of the same year a letter from Mr F W May of Pine Close requesting a sign was first discussed by the Parish Council. Even at that early stage a design was suggested by Councillor Cooke and in May 1974 it was also decided to request a design from the Art Teacher at the Secondary Modern School and her pupils. It must have been a popular topic because in July 1974 a Mr Bernard Bould put forward another design which the Council deferred whilst waiting to hear from the Art Mistress.



It was not until 26th November 1974 that a design from Mr T W Fanthorpe was accepted. He had prepared this based on ideas from a field study his sister, Miss J Fanthorpe, had researched as part of a college course but the final version incorporated features suggested by various local residents. A quote of £125.00 to make the sign was accepted from Mr Harry R Carter of Swaffham. Harry Carter was a nephew of the renowned Egyptologist Howard Carter. A Londoner, he trained at the Slade College of Art and became the arts and crafts master at Hammonds Grammar School in Swaffham. By the time of his death in 1983 he had carved over 200 town and village signs.

The magnificent 15th century church of St Mary the Virgin, which is also known as the 'Cathedral of the Fleggs', provides a background on one side of the sign showing a gallant knight defending the honour of a fair maiden from a marauding Viking raider who has probably arrived in the galley ship shown just behind. The Vikings played a large part in the history of the surrounding area. The other side displays a more modern theme of a wherry, a trading ship of the Broads at the turn of the 19th century, which was no doubt a nodding reference to the three staithes associated with the village. There is a wind pump behind the wherry and Martham has two wind pumps which were used to drain the marshes to allow livestock to graze.

At the end of September 1975 the sign had been completed and arrangements were set in motion for it to be erected on The Green at a grand opening ceremony. At 2.15pm on 26th October 1975 Borough Councillor and former Mayor, Councillor W Davey performed the unveiling attended by representatives from all the religious denominations in the village. Mr A W Harris was thanked for erecting the sign on a concrete and flint base which he had done free of charge.



In July 1977 the sign was touched up by Mr D Finch of Willow Way and he again carried out repairs costing £17.50 in June 1980. The double sided sign is carved out of wood and being open to all weathers had suffered the ravages of time by 2010 when it was removed from its post and given a

thorough and complete overhaul and re-painting by the then Chairman of the Council Mike Huke on a voluntary basis. Thus it remains an often photographed centre of attention at a key junction and focal point of the village. Interesting how the sign seems to have changed the way in faces since 1975.



Unveiling ceremony 1975.
George Cook on the left and
Councillor W Davey