

The City of London Coal Duties

and their boundary marks

By MAURICE BAWTREE

WHEN the Corporation of London took stock of its affairs after the Great Fire of 1666, it found itself in debt to the extent of about £240,000. It accordingly appealed to Parliament for help, with the result that it was authorised to collect duties on all coals brought into the Port of London and certain areas around London. By the First Rebuilding Act of 1667, (19 Charles II, Cap. 3) Parliament authorised a duty of one shilling per chaldron, a measure of about 25 hundredweight, for ten years on all coals brought into the Port of London between Yantlet Creek in Kent and Staines in Middlesex. The duties were to be used for widening and rebuilding streets, rebuilding wharves, prisons, etc. Section 29 enacted that a column was to be erected as a "Remembrance" of the Fire, our present-day "Monument."

The duties yielded about £10,000 a year, which was not nearly enough for the City's needs. A Second Rebuilding Act of 1670 (22 Charles II, Cap. 11) increased the duties to three shillings and extended the period. This Act provided funds for rebuilding Saint Paul's Cathedral and 51 of the 86 churches destroyed in the Fire, as well as for some City properties, including Guildhall, the City's markets and Newgate Prison. Only the actual church buildings were paid for out of the duties, the internal fittings being provided by the vestries and private benefactors. It took eight years to demolish Old Saint Paul's, while the rebuilding lasted from 1675 to 1710 and cost about £747,000. The Cathedral authorities and private donors spent about £100,000 on the internal fittings and decorations. The cost of rebuilding the 51 churches was about £265,000, the most expensive being Saint Mary-le-Bow, at £15,421.

The "Stop of the Exchequer" by Charles II on 2 January 1672 brought more financial trouble to the City and bankruptcy to many leading bankers, from whom the King had borrowed about



The author and a companion during a field survey of coal duty boundary marks in Middlesex.

(Photo: Paul Carter)

£1,300,000. This amount included trust funds held by the Corporation of London on behalf of the orphans of City Freemen. To help the Corporation to meet its debts Parliament passed an Act for the Relief of the Orphans and other Creditors of the City of London (5 and 6 William and Mary, Cap. 10) in 1694, authorising a duty of 4s. per tun on wines brought into the Port of London and certain extra metage fees and duties on coals. Further Acts of Parliament enabled the City to be free from debt by 1834. From 1767 onwards the duties were used for making many improvements in and around London, including building Blackfriars Bridge, making road improvements at Temple Bar and Snow Hill, including Holborn Viaduct, and building the new Coal Exchange, which was opened in 1849 and demolished in 1963 for road-widening.

In 1862 the duties, except for a metage fee of fourpence, were transferred to the Metropolitan

Board of Works and were used to build the Victoria, Albert and Chelsea Embankments, Northumberland Avenue, Hyde Park Corner, and many other improvements, including the northern and southern outfall sewers, which were largely responsible for wiping out cholera in London.

Originally all coal was brought to London by sea and was known as seacoal, a name which is commemorated by Seacoal Lane at the bottom of Ludgate Hill and by Old Seacoal Lane between Farringdon Street and Fleet Lane. Arrangements for payment of the duties on seacoal were made before the ships were unloaded.

The Grand Junction Canal was incorporated by Act of Parliament (33 George III, Cap. 80) dated 30 April 1793. Owing to opposition by the east coast shipping companies, the canal company was forbidden by Section 119 of the Canal Act to bring coal any nearer to London than Langleybury in Hertfordshire. Subsequently permission was given, by Act of Parliament (45 George III, Cap. 128) dated 12 July 1805, and several later Acts for 50,000 tons of coal, culm or cinders per annum to be brought past the limit mentioned in the Canal Act of 1793, subject to payment of the coal duties. A boundary mark was to be erected by the towing path near the northeast point of Grove Park, Watford, and officials stationed there to collect the coal duties and to keep a record of the tonnage brought past the mark.

The Browton family of Watford were very much connected with the coal duties in and around that area. William Browton was Collector of the City's Toll from some time before 1845 until about 1860, when he was succeeded by Charles Browton, a coal merchant at Lady Capell's Wharf. When the area for the coal duties was altered in 1861 to coincide with the Metropolitan Police District, Charles Browton was transferred to Stocker's Lock, near Rickmansworth, a few hundred yards outside the boundary. A house for the 'Collector of the City's Dues' was built for the Corporation near the lock by James Browton, Builder and General Contractor, of Grove Wharf, Watford, to plans drawn by the City Architect's Department. In 1869, because of the small amounts of coal carried owing to railway competition, the house, known as Stocker's House, was sold and arrangements made with the canal company for the latter to collect the coal duties. Charles Browton was transferred to Bushey as Inspector of the Coal Traffic there.

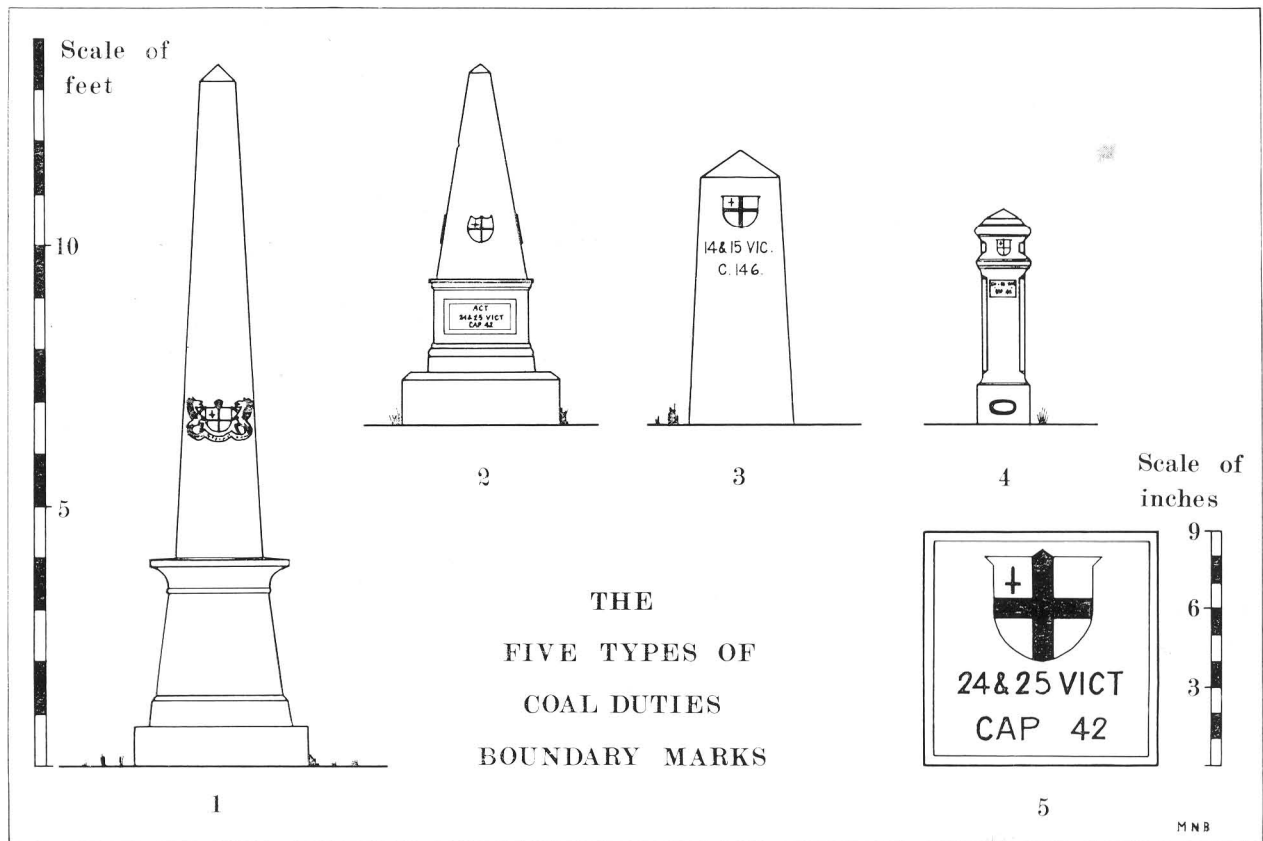
In 1831 the duties were fixed at one shilling and one penny per ton by an Act of Parliament (1 and 2 William IV, Cap. 76) for regulating the vend and delivery of coal in the Cities of London and Westminster and within 25 miles from London. Coals were in future to be sold by weight and not by measure. The duties on seacoal were to be paid

to the Clerk of the Coal Market before the ships were unloaded. The duties on coal brought past the mark on the Grand Junction Canal at Grove Park and past the City's Mark (London Stone) west of Staines Bridge on the Thames were to be paid to the City's officials stationed near these points.

In accordance with Section 230 of the London and Birmingham Railway Act (3 William IV Cap. 36) a stone obelisk bearing the City's coat of arms in cast-iron was set up at the southern entrance to Cashio Tunnel north of Watford Junction Station. A similar obelisk was set up on the east bank of the River Colne by the Great Western Railway near West Drayton Station. Similar obelisks were set up by other railways built before 1851 at points indicated in their Acts of Incorporation. The railway companies were made responsible for collecting the duties on all coal brought by them past these boundary marks and paying them to the Clerk of the Coal Market. Each company was allowed 500 tons free of duty per annum for the use of its locomotives in the London area.

Under the Coal Duties Act of 1845 (8 and 9 Victoria, Cap. 101) the boundary for the coal duties was to be a circle with a radius of 20 miles from the General Post Office in London. One result of this was that the obelisk near West Drayton was moved to a new position at Langley Grove, east of Slough Station, where it was viewed by the District Visiting Committee on Friday, 24 September 1858, in the course of one of their tours of inspection of the boundary marks and of the books of the coal duties' collectors and other officials. The Stationmaster at Slough had been made responsible for collecting the coal duties there (Minutes of Court of Common Council 26 July 1849). The obelisk was brought back to West Drayton in 1861.

Many changes were made by the Coal Duties Act of 1851 (14 and 15 Victoria, Cap. 146). Railway companies were to pay over the duties weekly, while canal companies were to make monthly returns. Certain lockkeepers were appointed to make returns of the barges passing through their locks and the Corporation was authorised to appoint Inspectors of the Coal Traffic on Canals, Railways, etc. Under Sections 16 to 18 the Corporation was authorised to erect "Boxes or Station Places" for their Inspectors by any canal, inland navigation or railway at a distance of 20 miles from the General Post Office and to set up boundary marks where any canal, inland navigation, railway, turnpike road or public highway crossed this limit. Sections 30 to 40 give details of a drawback on the duties allowable on coal taken outside this limit, provided that the quantity exceeded 20 tons. It was therefore convenient to have all points on the boundary clearly marked.

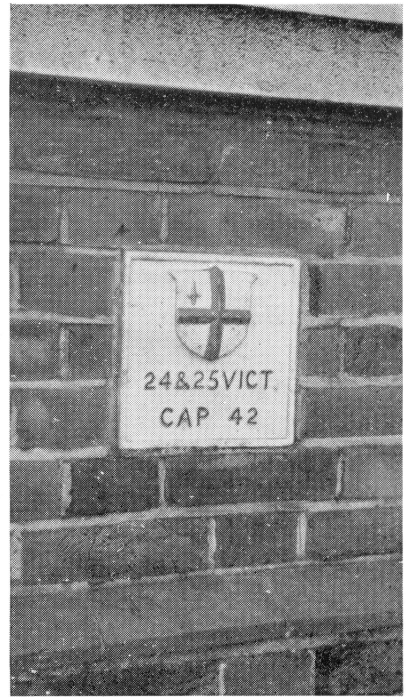
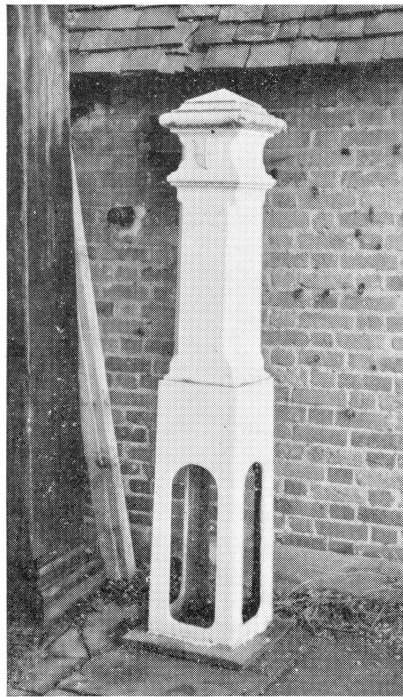


The tall obelisks (Type 1) put up by railways under this Act had the City's shield on the upper part, and were inscribed 14 & 15 VICT. CAP. 146, on the base. Some were stone and some cast-iron. The latter had the maker's name, Falkirk Ironworks Co. on the base. Thick granite obelisks (Type 3) were set up by canals and other navigable waterways. They vary in height from about three to six feet and have the City's shield and the inscription 14 & 15 VIC. C.146. Some squarish cast-iron posts (Type 4) made by Henry Grissell, Regents Canal Iron Works, London, were set up by turnpike roads and other public highways, as well as bridle paths and farm tracks, some of which have disappeared owing to disuse, so that the positions of some posts seem pointless today. When the boundary marks were moved to new positions under the Act of 1861, the inscriptions on these posts, 14 & 15 VICT. CAP. 146, were cut off to allow flat-backed plates inscribed 24 & 25 VICT. CAP. 42 to lie flat on the posts. Some posts are undated and have the maker's name and address in four lines on the base, while others have the date 1859 and the maker's mark in a double oval framework.

In 1861 the area was altered to coincide with

the Metropolitan Police District by the London Coal and Wine Duties Continuance Act (24 and 25 Vict. Cap. 42) and the existing marks moved to new positions on this boundary. While the Act was still in its Bill stage, the City Architect was instructed to obtain fifty new posts for erection as soon as the Bill became an Act. As the Act's numbering was not yet known, the posts were inscribed 24 VICT. only and are dated 1861 in the maker's mark on the base. After the passing of the Act, many Type 4 posts were cast with the inscription 24 & 25 VICT. CAP. 42 in 1861, 1862 and 1864. When hollow-backed plates were fixed to most of the posts in 1866, the '2' or '24' was cut away to allow these plates to lie flat on the post, as the recesses at the back of the plates were not quite large enough to contain the whole inscription. The new plates were inscribed ACT. 24 & 25 VICT. CAP. 42 in three lines. Many of them are now missing. Some square cast-iron plates (Type 5) were put in the parapets of bridges, especially those over rivers on county boundaries. Cast-iron obelisks (Type 2) were erected by the side of railways built after 1861 but most have since lost the inscription plates from their bases and some of the City's shields from their upper parts.

Two further Acts of 1863 and 1868 continued



Coal duties boundary marks types 2, 4 and 5, from surviving Middlesex examples.

the coal duties to 1889. They were to be used to liquidate any debts outstanding, including those on the Holborn Valley Improvements Scheme. Under the Kew and other Bridges Acts of 1869 and 1874 many bridges in the London area were repaired or rebuilt and those as far as Staines freed from tolls. The London Coal Duties Abolition Act of the 9 July 1889 (52 and 53 Victoria, Cap 17) brought the duties to an end on 5 July 1889, except for a metage fee of fourpence, which was continued for one year to 5 July 1890 to liquidate any outstanding debts.

James Browton had annual contracts for repairing and repainting all the boundary marks from 1863 until his death in 1870, when the contracts were given to Dudley Browton. Judging from a tender for £185 in 1887 from James Dudley Browton to clean, repair and paint once in oil paint and number consecutively 257 boundary marks and to keep them in repair for the year ending March 19 1888, it seems that at least three Browtons carried out these duties.

By 1890 there were probably about 265 boundary marks, of which about 216 have been traced during surveys carried out in Kent and Surrey by Mr. Martin Nail of Epsom, in Hertfordshire by Mr. C. W. Meredith of Northwood, in Essex by Mr. Kenneth Neale of Chingford and by me in Middlesex. Mr. Nail, Mr. Meredith and I have overlapped with one another and also explored parts of Essex.

In March 1961 the Corporation of London wrote to all the local authorities concerned, asking how many boundary marks remained in their areas and whether they were willing to maintain these marks for the Corporation, with the result that many have been repainted and otherwise cared for.

This article is based on surveys carried out on my own or with Mr. Nail or Mr. Meredith. I have made use of the Acts of Parliament mentioned herein, the Minutes of the Court of Common Council and of the Corn and Coal and Finance Committee and relative correspondence files in the City Record Office and the maps of the Coal Dues Area in the Guildhall Library. Some details have been taken from Mr. Raymond Smith's book *Sea Coal for London*, Mr. Gerald Cobb's *London City Churches*, the *History of the Monument* and the City's Official Guidebook. Two other very useful and interesting articles are "City Posts" by Mr. Martin Nail in the April 1964 *Bulletin of the Nonsuch and Ewell Antiquarian Society* and *A Most Dreadfull Fire* by Mr. Kenneth Neale in the *Essex Journal* for June 1968. I acknowledge with thanks all the help which I have received from the above-mentioned sources and from members of the staff at the Record Office and the Library. I am particularly indebted to Mr. C. W. Meredith for having proved to me, by careful measurement, why the 2 of 24 on some of the posts had to be cut away and thus explaining why it is missing from so many posts.