

# Coal posts in south Hertfordshire

## Potters Bar

There are three coal posts in Potters Bar, at the junction of North Road and the A1000 (TL 260 021), near the corner of Church Street, (TL 260 021) and on the north side of Barnards Road (TL 257 025). the south of the county, some at road junctions, others buried away in woodland and hedgerows. All are more than 130 years old. A [feature](#) on this site explains the history of the posts.

All the grid references given below the pictures relate to the [Ordnance Survey](#) Landranger Series 1:50,000 scale map for Luton and Hertford (sheet 166).

[Click here](#) for the location details of all the coal posts in Hertfordshire.

If you want to see the exact location of the posts on an Ordnance Survey map, [click here](#) and enter the exact grid reference (e.g. TL 271 035) in the search field and the map will be downloaded for you.



A1000 junction with Church Road  
OS ref: TL 262 022



Church Road junction with A1000  
OS ref: TL 260 022





**Little Heath detail**  
**OS ref: TL 257 025**

**Little Heath near Bricklayers pub**  
**OS ref: TL 257 025**

These square cast iron column with bevelled corners are the most common. They are set on a base with a cap and a small collar just below. Out of the ground they are about 4' high. When in position, and part buried, they are 3' to less than 2' depending on how deep they are set in the ground.

Between the cap and collar there is the arms of the City of London. Below the collar many have the details of the Act under which the posts were erected. On the base of the marker are the details of the casting company - Henry Grissell, Regents Canal Ironworks, London.

These inscriptions are usually dated. The columns erected under the 1851 Act have the inscription recording the 1861 Act screwed over the original (in some cases the plates have been lost). There are other minor variations.

The body in the post, including the cap, is white. The coat of arms depicted is that of the City of London, with the shield bearing the Cross of St. George and the Sword of St. Paul, painted red on a white background.

Beneath the coat of arms is to be found the letters "24 & 25 VICT. CAP 42". This refers to the Act of Parliament which led to the setting up of the posts and signifies the 24th and 25th year of the reign of Queen Victoria (1861) and the 42nd chapter of that act.

If you know of any coal posts in Hertfordshire that are not included in the [list](#) please e-mail [history@brookmans.com](mailto:history@brookmans.com) with the details. An ordnance survey map reference (see above) would be a great help.

## Hertfordshire's coal posts

You may have passed them in the car, by train or on foot and you probably won't have given them a second glance.

But if you had travelled the same way 130 years earlier you might have found queues of people, many with cart loads of coal, wine, clothing and food, haggling with the taxman.

They are the coal tax posts, many of which were erected following the Coal Duties Act of 1851, and thanks to them, many of the bridges across the Thames were paid for.

Some are at busy road junctions, others are buried away in woodland and hidden in hedgerows.

There are estimated to be 250 coal posts in the countryside surrounding London and more than 40 of those are in south Hertfordshire, although the exact number is not known.

Records vary, but a survey, carried out in 1961 and filed at Hertfordshire



Corner of Well Lane and  
the Ridgeway OS ref: TL  
272 035

County Council, puts the number at 43, although there is at least one coal post, featured on this site, which isn't included in that list. [Click here](#) to view that list.

Many mark the old boundaries for the collection of duties at points, roughly 20 miles from the General Post Office in the City of London.

(The area was later reduced by the London Coal and Wine Duties Continuance Act of 1861 to include only those places lying within the Metropolitan Police District and that explains why, when you plot the positions of the coal posts on a map, it does not form a neat circle round the capital but is more a scattering of markers.)

Some coal posts were moved when the new Act became law, others were left where they were originally placed ten years earlier. Most of the coal posts existing today are at the spot where a public road or path, railway or canal entered the Metropolitan District.

The posts to the south of Brookmans Park followed the former boundary between Hertfordshire and Middlesex, and they still follow the boundary between the present day Hertsmere and Welwyn Hatfield districts.

The majority are iron pillars about four foot high, others, particularly those by canals or railways, are either small plaques set in the wall or large obelisks made of cast iron or granite such as the Duty Stone on the east side of the east coast main line just north of Potters Bar and south of Brookmans Park.



The Ordnance Survey map of 1898 shows 'Hawkshead Siding' to the north of the Duty Stone. There is no such thing as Hawkshead Sidings today. Could it be that it was worthwhile building railway sidings there in order to offload goods just before duty became payable?

Most posts are brightly painted, some white, some black and all have ornate designs containing historic information, although some of the writing has been worn away by the elements over time.

Until the 19th Century, the transport of coal and other goods into London had been by sea. But the growth of the canal and railway systems meant that collecting points for taxes had to be set up beyond the boundary of the City.

A1000 corner of Church Road, Potters Bar OS ref: TL 262 022

Originally an official was stationed by the posts, at the side of a road or on the bank of the canal, to record the tonnage and collect the duty.

But as canal trade dwindled with the arrival of the railways, it became uneconomic to employ collectors and it eventually became the responsibility of the operating company to collect and pay the taxes to the Clerk of the Coal Market.

Many coal posts are in areas where it is easy to imagine horse-drawn carts full of coal and wine being driven to the City.

Others, like the coal post in [Wormley Wood](#) (OS ref: TL 316 057), are at points where small footpaths cross deep in woodland and far from the beaten track.

Some industrial archaeologists say the reason why a few coal posts are found in unusual locations such as by streams, footpaths and cart tracks is because there was no clear ruling in the London Coal and Wine Duties Continuance Act as to where they should be placed.

However, regarding the Wormley Wood coal post, on closer inspection of the Ordnance Survey sheet 166 Luton Hertford map it is easy to see how those small footpaths in Wormley Wood could have provided a route for a trader, who wanted to avoid paying tax, to dodge the collectors.

Either side of Wormley Wood, at [Wormley End](#) and at [Newgate Street](#) there are coal posts situated at the side of country lanes where it is much easier to image trade routes existing more than 100 years ago.

Could the coal post in Wormley Wood have been set up by the taxman after he got wise to people trying to avoid payment by taking a short cut through the footpaths?

Although the posts date back only 130 years, the history surrounding them goes back much further. The City of London has collected dues on coal and other goods entering London since medieval times.

The Plague and Great Fire of London

The [Plague](#) of 1665 and the [Great Fire of London](#) a year later used up many of the City's funds for rebuilding works.

An Act of Parliament was passed which increased the duty payable on coal entering the Port of London.

Money was needed for rebuilding and renovation work and in 1667 the First Rebuilding Act was passed, authorising an increase in the duty payable on coal entering the Port of London, partly for this purpose.

The funds collected from these taxes, together with the "Orphans Fund", were used for the rebuilding of St. Paul's Cathedral and numerous other City churches, Guildhall, the City's markets and Newgate Prison.

But the City remained in debt and in 1694 an Act "for the Relief of the Orphans and Other Creditors of the City of London" was passed.

This Act gave the City the power to impose a duty on each tun (a large cask) of wine entering the Port of London and increase the duty payable on coal.

This is thought to be the forerunner of the Act of 1861 that led to the setting up of the Coal and Wine Tax Posts.

Once all debts had been repaid, surplus funds were used to finance the building of a number of bridges over the Thames, street paving and new roads into London.

Several further Acts for raising building funds were passed during the 17th and 18th centuries.

The money raised was used for improvement schemes including the building of the Thames Embankment and the erection of the Holborn Viaduct. It was also used for the purchase of the River Thames bridges, including Kingston upon Thames, Hampton Court and Walton on Thames, to free them from tolls.

The tax was finally ended by an Act of Parliament passed in July 1889. But although the law had gone, the tax posts remained and many have survived.

Many of these symbols of our commercial past have been made Grade II structures listed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with their maintenance falling to the local authorities. If you see any in need of attention please contact the relevant local council.

According to locals of Brookmans Park, there was a post at the side of Warrengate Road, where it meets Hawkshead Lane (OS ref: TL 230 031), until the mid 1980s. It had lain knocked down for many months before it was removed. Mystery surrounds where it went.

Please e-mail [history@brookmans.com](mailto:history@brookmans.com) if you have any information about the missing coal post.

You can also e-mail this address if you know of any coal post in Hertfordshire not included in the photographs on these pages or mentioned in the [list](#) of known coal posts in the south of the county. An Ordnance Survey map reference would be a great help.

## References

The inspiration for this feature, and some of the information in it, came from an article written by Brian Powell, called, 'These most useful relics', published in the December 1999 issue of the North Mymms Local History Society Newsletter.

In that work, Brian Powell lists, as his references, an article entitled, 'The City of London Coal Duties', by M Bawtree 1969, printed in the London Archaeologist, spring edition 1969, and 'The Industrial Archaeology of Hertfordshire', by W.B Johnson, 1970.



A maker's plate 1861 - Henry Grissell, Regents Canal Ironworks London OS ref: TL 271 035

Thanks also to members of the Gobions Woodland Trust in Brookmans Park [gobions@brookmans.com](mailto:gobions@brookmans.com) and the North Mymms Local History Society [history@brookmans.com](mailto:history@brookmans.com) who have also helped research this feature.

Information was also taken from the [Elmbridge Borough Council](#) website and its tourism [history](#) pages and by seeking information via internet archaeology newsgroups.

## How to find Hertfordshire's coal posts

There are four main types of coal posts found in Hertfordshire. Below are the descriptions of the different types along with Ordnance Survey map references for locating them.

**Type A:** Four sided stone obelisk on square base.

**Type B:** Large cast iron pyramids set on a square base

**Type C:** Slightly tapered stone obelisks

**Type D:** Square cast iron column with bevelled corners

To read the feature on coal posts on this site [click here](#).

The following is based on an original list from Hertfordshire County Council's Archives, prepared in 1961. Since then some coal posts have gone missing and many details have changed. Some were missed off the list.

Updated notes from 2000 have been added after the posts have been checked and where changes to the records are needed. There will also be links to pages showing photographs of the listed coal posts where images are available.

To see the exact location of the posts on a map, copy the references, go to the [Ordnance Survey](#) site, enter the grid reference in the search field and you will see a map showing the exact spot where the post can be found.

All the grid references relate to the Ordnance Survey Landranger Series 1:50,000 scale map for Luton and Hertford (sheet 166).

### Coal Post Type A

These are four sided stone obelisk set on a square base. They are 12' to 14' high with, on one side, the arms of the City of London and details of the Act under which it was erected.

TL 368 052, Wormley. Alongside the railway line, lying in several pieces on the ground. The inscription not identifiable.

TL 243 028, [Hawkshead](#). Between Brookmans Park and Potters Bar. Appears on the two and a half inch Ordnance Survey Map 1898 as the Duty Stone.

TL 117 967, Watford. Below railway bridge over Colne. In several pieces on the ground, inscription not identifiable.

### Coal Post Type B

These posts are large cast iron pyramids set on a square base. They are about 5' to 5' 6" high with, on one side, the arms of the City of London and details of the Act under which they were erected. Many bear the inscription "ACT 24 & 25 VICT. CAP 42" on a metal plate which is fixed to each face.

The ACT 24 & 25 means the posts were set up following the Act of Parliament in the 24th and 25th year of the reign of Queen Victoria and the Cap 42 refers to chapter 42 of that Act.

TL 159 008, Radlett. Near two cottages at the end of The Avenue, half way down an embankment, rusty and overgrown.

TL 114 919, Oxhey. Down footpath from the school in Little Oxhey Lane. Not on or near a railway.

TL 091 921, Northwood. (Middlesex). On railway embankment. Arms and inscription on all four sides.

### Coal Post Type C

These are slightly tapered stone obelisks, about 3' square at their base and 4' in height. They have a shield depicting the arms of the City of London embossed on one face and have the details of the Act under which they were erected, "14 & 15 VIC. C.146" (details of the inscriptions explained above).

TL 372 050, Wormley. Alongside Lea Navigation. Bench Mark.  
TL 046 932, Rickmansworth. Alongside the Grand Union Canal. Bench Mark.

## Coal Post Type D

These square cast iron column with bevelled corners are the most common. They are set on a base with a cap and a small collar just below. Out of the ground they are about 4' high. When in position, and part buried, they are 3' to less than 2' depending on how deep they are set in the ground.

Between the cap and collar there is the arms of the City of London. Below the collar many have the details of the Act under which the posts were erected. On the base of the marker are the details of the casting company - Henry Grissell, Regents Canal Ironworks, London.

These inscriptions are usually dated. The columns erected under the 1851 Act have the inscription recording the 1861 Act screwed over the original (in some cases the plates have been lost). There are other minor variations.

The body in the post, including the cap, is white. The coat of arms depicted is that of the City of London, with the shield bearing the Cross of St. George and the Sword of St. Paul, painted red on a white background.

Beneath the coat of arms is to be found the letters "24 & 25 VICT. CAP 42" (details of the inscriptions explained above).

TL 364 056, Wormley. On the east side of the A10 behind a brick pillar box.  
TL 322 054, [Wormley wood](#). Deep in the woods just north of the lake.  
TL 343 058, Wormley/Cheshunt boundary. About half a mile north of Paradise Hill.  
TL 304 042, Hatfield. Half a mile south east of Newgate Street at the railway bridge over the road.  
TL 300 042, Hatfield. Half a mile south of Newgate Street and North of Carbone Hill.  
TL 272 035, [Northaw](#). West end of the Ridgeway.  
TL 270 032, [Northaw](#). At entrance to Queenswood School drive.  
TL 260 021, [Potters Bar](#). North Road A1000.  
TL 260 021, [Potters Bar](#). Church Street. These two markers are within a yards of each other.  
TL 257 025, [Potters Bar](#). Turn left from north end of Barnards Road, outside house called Lanresse.  
TL 230 031, North Mymms. South end of Water Lane.  
TL 205 058, [Colney Heath](#). Road junction.  
TL 205 059, [Colney Heath](#). Opposite the Cock public house.  
TL 205 050, [Colney Heath](#). Near Coursers Farm. Bench mark.  
TL 199 059, [Colney Heath](#). On the heath north east of the river Colney.  
TL 182 037, London Colney. Alongside bridge carrying the A6.  
TL 176 032, London Colney. Broad Colney bridge.  
TL 172 023, Shenley. Near Colneyhouse Farm.  
TL 171 020, Shenley. Near Harperbury Hospital.  
TL 170 011, Shenley. In hedge on Wild Farm.  
TL 163 995, Radlett. High Street, alongside Messrs Wright and Mills.  
TL 161 007, Radlett. On the east side of the A5, south of the bridge over the stream and half a mile north of the station.  
TL 151 939, Watford, Bushey Heath. On the A4140.  
TL 131 926, Oxhey. On the A4008 at Burntoak Farm, gatepost to No.1, The Hollies.  
TL 120 952, Bushey. Capell Road near Bushey Station - rusty.  
TL 118 955, Bushey. North-east corner of Bushey Arches - rusty.  
TL 116 963, Watford. Water Lane. Rusty and deeply buried. Likely to be affected by road reconstruction. (Removed April 1966 and relocated at the College of Further Education).  
TL 106 916, Oxhey. On the B468 at Potters Street Hill, near junction with Oxhey Drive.  
TL 087 923, Rickmansworth. In playing fields of St Martins School, south of Batchworth Lane.  
TL 078 924, Rickmansworth. Batchworth Heath, just south of the Prince of Wales public house.  
TL 070 915, Rickmansworth. At the junction of White Hill and Jackets Lane.  
TL 069 915, Rickmansworth. Battlewells Farm.  
TL 065 917, Rickmansworth. 300 yards west of Battlewells Farm and north of the old reservoir.  
TL 058 922, Rickmansworth. On the road from Woodcock Hill to Harefield.  
TL 041 935, Rickmansworth. At the bridge over Colne near Drayton Ford.

[Click here](#) to see a page of photographs of local coal posts along with Ordnance Survey map references for locating them

**References**

From the records at Hertfordshire County Council Archives department.

Guildhall Library, London.

Middlesex Council Bulletin, November 1961.

Hertfordshire Countryside, Spring 1963.

W.Branch, Johnson, Bangor House, Welwyn, Herts.

If you have any information as to its whereabouts please e-mail [history@brookmans.com](mailto:history@brookmans.com) with the details.

## What is a Coal and Wine Tax Post?

It is a means of marking the point at which duty became payable on coal and wine being transported into the City of London. There are over 200 located around London, 23 of which are known to have survived within Elmbridge Borough. These are to be found in various locations in Walton on Thames, Molesey, Esher, Claygate and Oxshott (see map). They were set up under the Local Coal and Wine Duties Continuance Act 1861 at points where any canal, inland navigation, railway or public road first entered the Metropolitan Police District.

### HISTORY

Although the Coal and Wine Tax Posts have been in existence for over 130 years, the history associated with them goes back centuries earlier. Since mediaeval times, the Corporation of the City of London exercised the right of "metage" - the collection of dues - on coal or other goods entering London. The majority of coal was brought by sea from Newcastle, and the collection of the fees was relatively uncomplicated. As the coal was unloaded and weighed, the appropriate fee was paid to a Corporation official known as "The Measurer of Coals".

A further important aspect in the history of the Coal and Wine Tax Posts is the link between these and the existence in the 14th Century of the "Orphans Fund", which was administered by the Court of Record, acting on behalf of the Mayor and Corporation of the City. All citizens were obliged, as a condition of accepting the Freedom of the City, to execute a will nominating the Corporation as administrators of their estate. In the event of their death, any of their under-age children would come under the custody of the Court. The proceeds of the sale of property were invested by the Court, and returned to the children either on their marriage or coming of age.

In the 17th Century, the City suffered two major disasters, the Plague in 1665, and the Great Fire of London in 1666. Funds were needed to enable rebuilding and renovation works to be carried out and in 1667 the First Rebuilding Act was passed, authorising an increase in the duty payable on coal entering the Port of London. The funds collected from these taxes, together with the "Orphans Fund", were used for the rebuilding of St. Paul's Cathedral and numerous other City churches, the Guildhall, the City's markets and Newgate Prison.

But the City remained in considerable debt and an Act of 1694 "for the Relief of the Orphans and Other Creditors of the City of London" was passed. This act bestowed upon the City, amongst other things, the power to impose a duty on each tun (a large cask) of wine entering the Port of London and increase the duty payable on coal. It is acknowledged as the ancestor of the Act of 1861 that set up the Coal and Wine Tax Post which are still in existence today. Once all debts had been repaid, surplus funds were used to finance public works including the building of bridges over the River Thames, street paving and new access roads into London. Several further Acts passed during the 17th and 18th Centuries continued the provision of funds to be used for public works.

Until the 19th Century, the transport of coal and other goods into London had been by sea. But the growth of the canal and railway systems meant that collecting points for taxes had to be set up beyond the boundary of the City. Originally an official was stationed on the bank of the canal to record the tonnage and collect the duty; but as canal trade dwindled with the advent of the railways, it became uneconomic to employ collectors, and it eventually became the responsibility of the operating company to collect and pay the taxes to the Clerk of the Coal Market. The Coal Duties (London, Westminster and adjacent counties) Act 1851 set the boundaries for collection of duties at 20 miles from the General Post Office in the City. The area was subsequently reduced by the London Coal and Wine Duties Continuance Act of 1861 to include only those places lying within the Metropolitan Police District.

As a result of the liberal interpretation of this Act, many posts were erected at places that were little more than streams, cart tracks and footpaths - very little trade could have passed by these! The revenue raised was used for metropolitan improvement schemes including the building of the

Thames Embankment, the erection of the Holborn Viaduct and the purchase of the River Thames bridges, including Kingston upon Thames, Hampton Court and Walton on Thames, to free them from tolls.

Although the tax was finally extinguished by an Act of Parliament passed in July 1889, many Posts remain as fine examples of industrial archaeology in Elmbridge, the majority of which are Grade II structures listed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

## TYPES OF COAL AND WINE TAX POST

There are examples of four different types of Coal and Wine Tax Post within the Borough. The variations in style reflect both their age and location, i.e. roadside (type 1), railway embankment (types 2 and 3) and river towpath (type 4).

**Type 1** (pictured right): these are the most commonly see Coal and Wine Tax Posts and form the great majority of the surviving boundary marks in Elmbridge. They are found beside roadways, bridleways and footpaths. They are made of cast iron, and were cast by Henry Grissell at the Regents Canal Ironworks, London. A maker's plate is often still to be found either on the front or the rear of the plinth, indicating the year in which the post was cast.



The posts are 1.8 metres (6ft.) high in total, of which approximately 1 metre (3ft.) is usually above ground, although some are now buried much more deeply. A fine example of an entire post can be viewed from the Hurst Road entrance of the Walton Advanced Water Treatment Works, West Molesey. The body in the post, including the cap, is white. The coat of arms depicted is that of the City of London, with the shield bearing the Cross of St. George and the Sword of St. Paul, painted red on a white background. Beneath the coat of arms is to be found the letters

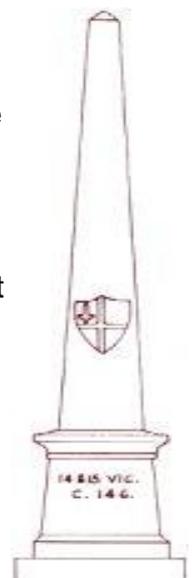
"24 & 25 VICT. CAP 42"

This is the reference to the Act of Parliament under which statute they were erected - in this instance the London Coal and Wine Duties Continuance Act 1861. On many of the posts this lettering is somewhat illegible, and in almost all cases the "2" of "24" and the "T" of "VICT" is missing. This is attributed to the fact that the production of some posts was put in hand prior to the Act being passed by Parliament. These posts did not carry a full inscription and so it was necessary to fix a correction plate bearing the words.

"ACT 24 & 25 VICT. CAP 42"

over the original inscription. To ensure uniformity, these correction plates were fitted on all posts cast, and to enable a good fit, it was necessary to grind away the "2" and "T". There are only four posts in the Borough where these correction plates remain intact.

**Type 2:** (pictured right) These are tall obelisks, approximately 4.2 metres (14ft) high, and made of stone or cast-iron, which were erected along railway lines before 1861. There is one example of this style of post in Elmbridge, on the railway embankment at Douglas Road, Esher. This granite obelisk was originally erected on the main railway line at Weybridge under the powers of the Coal Duties (London & Westminster and adjacent counties) Act 1851. It was moved to Douglas Road, Esher following the passing of the 1861 Act, which revised the boundary of the area within which duties became payable.



**Type 3:** (pictured left) These are cast-iron obelisks approximately 1.5 metres (5ft) high with metal shields depicting the coat of arms of the City of London attached to each of the four faces of the obelisk, and with a plate bearing the inscription

"ACT 24 & 25 VICT. CAP 42"



fixed to each face of the plinth. They were erected along railways after 1861. The sole example of this style in the Borough is on the railway embankment at Stokesheath Road, Oxshott.

**Type 4:** (pictured right) These are granite obelisks approximately 1.2 metres (4ft) high, without a plinth, and with the shield depicting the coat of arms of the City of London embossed on one face and beneath it the inscription

"14 & 15 VIC. C.146"

is engraved. Again there is only a single example of this type of post in the Borough, located on the towpath of the River Thames, Walton on Thames. It is believed that this granite obelisk was originally erected at New Haw Lock under the powers of the 1851 Act and relocated at Walton on Thames with the passing of the 1861 Act.