

## Some comments on the 'Centre of England'

It seems that the origin of Meriden's tradition is lost in the passage of time and this first (as yet) known written comment does not indicate the Cross had been moved from elsewhere in the village. Perhaps this was because the writer was a stranger to the village. W.G. Fretton the Coventry historian who grew up in Meriden wrote in 1879 it had been moved within living memory. Rev F.G. Burr talking to old villagers about 1898 also heard people speaking as though the Cross had been moved perhaps when they were young with a suggestion about its previous position. Mrs Barton told me a similar story gleaned from her grandfather.

When the main road declined with the opening of the London and Birmingham Railway (1838) written comments about Meriden as 'the centre of England' is seldom found. It was not until the advent of the bicycle that an interest in the topic revived. Cyclists from nearby towns frequently Coventry joined cycling clubs and began visiting the village. In the Edwardian era a debate about which village had the accolade grew while newly popular post cards told recipients that Meriden Cross was the actual centre of England. (One in my possession said you could make a wish on the Cross). Meriden's claim did not go unchallenged especially as a spirit of scientific inquiry developed by 1920s. The tradition has therefore needed defending against the scientists who came from a different perspective and still do.

**1829** Graphic Illustrations of Warwickshire. Upon Meriden Green at a short distance from the village are the remains of a Cross, most probably erected on this spot as being upon a public and much frequented road; though there is a tradition that it was set up to mark the centre of the kingdom.....'

**1875.** Staffordshire and Warwickshire, past and present. Vol 2 part i. John Alfred Langford. On the green there are the remains of an ancient cross which was at one time regarded as marking the centre of England..

**1883** Bham Daily Post 21 November . Meriden near Coventry is believed to be about the centre of England.

**1890.** Bham Daily Post 24 September. Meriden is sometimes said to be the central spot in England...'

**1899.** Chambers Journal.

Passing the hamlet of Stonebridge we reach the picturesque village of Meriden said to be the very centre of England, an old weather-worn cross marking the spot.

**1920.** Western Daily Press. 17 April

Meriden was chosen for the new Monument ( the Cyclists' Memorial) as the most central part of England.

**1936.** 18 May Meriden, reputed Centre of England, is the Mecca for the annual pilgrimage of cyclists

**1938.** The English Countryside- a short survey. Charles Bradley Ford.

'At Meriden, sleepy little place it is , you have the privilege of knowing you are in the exact centre of England. At least this is the boast of the local people...'

**1942.**Western Daily Press. 18 August. Meriden Cross appears to have the best claim (to be the centre of England).