# Cheltenham crosses and crossroads

Older records refer to several different crosses in Cheltenham, all now lost, so their nature and location can be hard to pinpoint. Were they substantial structures, were they sign-posts (like that still commemorated by the Cross Hands Inn on the Tewkesbury Road) – or were they no more than notable road junctions? (In Tudor times, it's just possible that some crosses had previously been the site of wayside shrines, but none of those below really fits that explanation.)

Here's a list of the ones I know of, and my comment about each one.

The **High Cross**: from Tudor times if not earlier, this stood in the main street near the booth hall (market house), roughly at the junction with the road heading north to Prestbury (today Winchcombe Street). This has always been a T-junction and not a cross-roads, so the reference is certainly to a market cross - a secular structure, even if surmounted by a cross. It might well be what was later referred to as the *Butter Cross* - an 'old coarse building supported on stone pillars', as it was dismissively described in a 1781 guidebook, destined to be swept away when the High Street was cleared of out-dated obstructions a few years later.



*The market cross at Malmesbury suggests what Cheltenham's High Cross might have looked like.*

This High Cross was alternatively known as the **Upper cross**, as shown in a deed of 1576, which refers to 'the highway leading from the said Upper cross towards Prestbury'. It also appears sometimes as the '**Over cross**' (1656).

The terms Upper and Over rather imply there was also another cross, lower down the High Street, and here we run into what initially looks like a puzzle. There was indeed another cross, where a certain 'Mill Lane' joined the High Street. All the evidence points to this lane being what is now New Street, which in pre-Waitrose days ran down to the site of Cheltenham's lower mill (aka Alstone Mill).

The lane was the centre of a long-running dispute in the late 1550s-1560s with the then miller, who insisted on blocking it off with a gate, barring the way to people and horses, while the authorities stoutly maintained it was a public highway, repeatedly fining the miller. Reports of the dispute routinely locate the affair at 'the common highway in Mill Lane next to the **High Cross** there', so it's certain there was second high cross in existence as the same time as the upper one. And one reference gives us the clue we need: *[the miller] unlawfully blocked three times a certain common lane with a gate, which lane lies next to the High Cross* <u>*and the town's market place,*</u> *against many previous orders.*

So the 'other' High Cross probably also had a market function. If the 'upper' market was mainly for butter and other wares, we might guess that the 'lower' one was mainly for livestock. Later on, nearby Well Lane (now Henrietta Street) was certainly where sheep were penned before market (hence the Fleece inn), so it's a plausible suggestion. The same 1781 guidebook mentions a nameless old structure lower down the High Street than the Butter Cross – could this be our other High Cross?

Outside the town centre, but still in Tudor times, we find numerous crosses of a different sort. In Alstone we have a **Whytecrosse** in Itchling furlong in Sandfield. There was also a **Whytecrosse** furlong in Sandford – this name survives in *Whitecross Square*, a residential cul-de-sac off Naunton Lane. And also out in the fields, we have yet another **Whytecrosse** in Whaddon field. My surmise is that these were simply white-painted fingerposts, indicating local paths or perhaps routes for plough-teams (or *yoke ways*, as these were known).   As a minor placename, Whitecross occurs several times around the British Isles, but these other examples don't appear to shed any light on the Cheltenham instances.



*Whitecross Square, from Google Streetview*

In 1564, there are two references to a **Wullosse Crosse**, in Arle. The internet tells me that 'wulloss' is a Barbadian exclamation expressing disappointment, but I don't feel this brings us any closer to an explanation of what is a very odd name. It doesn't resemble any other place- or personal name I know of.

On the west side of town, there was also **Heydons** or **Heydons Hill cross** (1560s-70s), and **Shortcrosse** in Alstone Sandfield (1574), while on the east side, in Charlton Kings we find **Brode** (broad) **Cross** (1572) – location uncertain – and 'the **Forden crosse**' (1573), very probably near Forden House (Charlton Park). All of these could have been names for cross-roads, which may or may not have had signposts too.

And to end with, we have **Feyrcrosse** or **Feyre Crosse**, where road repairs were often needed in the 1560s. From several occurrences, we can be quite sure this refers to where the London Road meets Hales Road and Old Bath Road – right on Cheltenham's boundary with Charlton Kings.

The old-fashioned spelling with an **e** suggests that the first part is likely to mean fair as in 'fine', rather than fair as in 'funfair' (and we can safely disregard the recent use of nearby Cox's Meadow for funfairs), so how do we explain the name at this spot, right at the entrance to the town?  I'm tempted to link it with the fact that this was where the gallows stood, so 'fair' would be a euphemism for the discouraging sight that might greet travellers after the gallows had been put to use.  If that sounds too fanciful, Feyrcross was definitely a major crossroads, the junction of two recognised royal highways, and we can be pretty sure there was a decent signpost there.



Other ideas and additions welcome - I promise I won't get cross!

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27 April 2020

*An alternative style of market cross, from Stow-on-the-Wold*