“Bench marks on postcards”
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In the late 1960s I encountered an album of postcards sent to great-grandparents between about 1907 and 1922. This was an introduction to the world of the Edwardian picture-postcard which, perhaps fortunately for my pocket, has not developed in the way that some of my collecting interests have done. That is to say, I am very discriminating: north-east Lincolnshire and the Lincolnshire coast, as I come from there; Spurn Head (not that I’ve actually found any); Kings Lynn, as there are family connexions; east Surrey, as it has been our family home since 1965, and Exeter, as I live there (not that I’ve found anything worthwhile there, either). The astute will notice that this covers five ‘historic’ counties, including three of the largest, and so I get to see rather more postcards in our local antiques market than my rather ‘picky’ tastes might suggest.
It is therefore due to a search for east Surrey postcards that I lighted on the example illustrated here, which may be by an east Surrey firm (the well-known one of Frith of Reigate), but is of a location at diametrically the opposite end of the county, near Haslemere. What made me shell out thirteen shillings (all right, 65p) for it was the bench-mark. I’ve never seen a bench-mark on a postcard before, and wonder how many more are to be found?

I certainly did not buy the card for the subject-matter, and its modest price suggests that not many other people are expected to, either. Murray’s handbook for Surrey of 1888 provides further details:

This sailor was murdered at Hindhead, September 24, 1786, and rolled into the hollow of the ‘Devil’s Punchbowl’. His body was found by some labouring men; and the murderers (three sailors named Longeon, Casey and Marshall, like the sufferer, on their way to Portsmouth) were taken the same day at Sheet, near Petersfield, while selling their victim’s clothes. They were hung in chains on Hindhead Heath, near the scene of the murder, where a stone with an inscription was placed to mark the spot by Jas. Stilwell, Esq., of Cosford, near Haslemere. ... The old Portsmouth road passed round the extreme edge of the hollow, and was far from safe. In 1826 the present road was carried about 60 ft. lower, and an embankment raised along the outer side. The stone meant to mark the place at which the sailor was murdered ... [was] removed to the lower road.'

The sailor was buried at Thursley, with a headstone ‘with a rude sculptre representing three ruffians killing a sailor, and a rhyming inscription below.’

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