

The Four Shire Stone

As part of our Cotswold sightseeing, Secret Cottage tour stopped at The Four Shire Stone near Moreton-in-Marsh today. This is a nine foot high Cotswold Stone monument, used as a boundary marker, that defines the place where the four counties of Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire once met. Each face of the stone has the name of one of the counties on it.

The original stone is believed to have been put up in the late 16th century and there may even have been individual stones for each county prior to this; although the real history is still hazy and wrapped in mystery.

According to the book "Four Shire memories : history and reminiscences of villages round the Four Shire Stone, Gloucestershire"; legend has it that ancient battles took place near the site. In more recent times the site was reportedly treated as a meeting point for councils and later for 'vagabonds, prize fighting and other illegal sports' – it being easy to move into the adjoining shire if the constables of one county turned up!

The boundaries have changed over the years, but tourists on our tour are fascinated by the historical importance of this stone; which is listed as a historic monument.

Although there are several stones like this across the UK, the Four Shire Stone is special because it marks the ONLY point in Britain where four counties once met. During the 1930s the boundaries of these counties was reorganised and today, only three counties meet at the stone. It is believed the monument you see today was built in the 18th century and it is a grade II listed building.

This stone was believed to be the inspiration for Tolkien's Three-Farthing Stone; which appeared in The Hobbit and The

Lord of the Rings. The Three-Farthing Stone was a central point in the Shire where three Farthings met.