Manor Courts and meerstones.

Historically the life of Embsay and Eastby was controlled in part by the annual manor court. Every tenant and landowner in the village had to attend this court. No attendance meant they were fined; 6d for a freeholder and 4d for a tenant.

In 1705 the fields next to the moor wall above Eastby were un-enclosed and formed Eastby Pasture, which was common land that all freeholders and tenants could use. A medieval measure was still in use in the eighteenth century, called the 'cattlegate'. In general, the larger your farm, the more cattle you could graze and the more cattlegates you were apportioned on the village common land.
The Manor Court held in November 1705 refers to the boundary wall between the Eastby Pasture and the moor. The wall was in need of maintenance and the village had to repair it. The way that they apportioned the cost was to allocate a length of the wall to each freeholder and tenant of Eastby. The length of wall allocated was calculated according to the number of cattlegates your farm permitted you to graze.

The manor court document states *'…pursuant to the order of May 1703 (the freeholders and tenants) measured and marked out the several and respective portions of the Outfence of the Pasture with meerstones marked with the Capital Letters of the Christian and Surnames of the respective owners of the said outfence according to the number of cattlegates in the said Pasture'*

Later documents show that the moor wall was rebuilt and individuals were regularly charged with repairs of their section.

However, once the Pasture was enclosed (by 1760 we believe), the meerstones had no use. The meerstone that one of the landowners or tenants had caused to be erected has found its way to re-use as a gate post. It can be seen if you walk up Hunters Lane in Eastby on the public footpath towards Eastby Gate (the gate in the moor wall). It is in the last gate before you get to Eastby Gate.

We cannot be certain who RB was. There was a substantial landowner called Robert Benson who lived in Halton East, but he was born in 1769 and died in 1818, far too late for this to be his meerstone. However, a Robert Benson was signatory to an Embsay-with-Eastby manor court document of 1705 when several local occupiers of the common pasture above Eastby demanded that anyone who failed to repair their length of wall should be fined. Charles Benson, probably a close relative, also signed – and we know he lived in Halton East.

The term meerstone (or merestone) is more normally used for a boundary stone. '*Maere'* is the Old English word for boundary.

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