

◆ The Roman roads of the Portslade/Aldrington area in relation to a possible Roman port at Copperas Gap

by Glen Shields

From a re-examination of the possible courses of the London to Brighton Roman road through the South Downs it is concluded that it passed to Copperas Gap, on the Portslade/Aldrington coast. Other proposed Roman roads of the Portslade/Aldrington area are also found to have probably ended there. The existence of a Roman port at Copperas Gap is therefore suggested, and some evidence in support of this is presented, from the pattern of Roman remains about the Gap, and the apparent significance of the locality in Saxon times. The region's Roman roads generally are discussed in the light of the port's existence. The question of whether the area might be important for the Saxon conquest of Sussex is raised. Copperas Gap was also found to be the probable site of the recent lost maritime centre of West Aldrington, and a brief account of this is given, including the observation that it could be the place from which Charles II sailed in his escape to France in 1651.

INTRODUCTION

The idea that there was a Roman establishment of some sort on the coast in the Portslade/Aldrington area of Sussex dates back to as long ago as 1586, when William Camden, in his *Britannia*, proposed on the basis of those two place-names that the lost Roman fort of Portus Adurni was situated at Aldrington.¹ In 1781 Stephen Vine reported that a Roman road coming from the direction of London and pointing to near the mouth of the River Adur, close to Aldrington, had been found at Burgess Hill; in 1818 James Douglas noted the discovery at West Blatchington of a Roman villa overlooking the old mouth of the Adur at Aldrington; in 1835 T. W. Horsfield remarked that numerous Roman remains had been found on the Downs, in the villages about Aldrington and by brick-makers there; and in 1875 E. H. Willett excavated a Roman cemetery at a Portslade brickfield.² All of these findings were held to confirm the existence of Portus Adurni at Aldrington; but in 1892 F. W. Haverfield showed that Camden's derivation of the name Aldrington from Portus Adurni was mistaken, and that the Adur got its name from Camden's proposal, and he dismissed the Roman finds at Aldrington and Portslade as unimportant dwellings and interments.³ The Portus Adurni theory persisted

to some extent, but ever since has not received serious consideration.

Stephen Vine was not able to trace the London road much south of Burgess Hill, and in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries various suggestions as to its course through the South Downs to the coast were made.⁴ A Major James Dunning developed a keen interest in the road, and became convinced that it must have served an important existing or planned port near Portslade. He published a book on the subject in 1924, which helped to define the route from London to Burgess Hill, but did not much clarify the further way to the coast, or substantiate the presence of a port there.⁵ Soon afterwards S. E. Winbolt discovered a Roman villa at Southwick, a short distance to the west of Aldrington, with a length of possible Roman road alongside it; and from the latter, E. and E. C. Curwen traced what they thought was a branch of the London road in the Downs.⁶ They believed that the London road was not designed to reach any particular place, but to gain the region as a whole, though that their branch was perhaps a main route leading to a port in the mouth of the Adur at Southwick. Winbolt's later excavations revealed that the Southwick villa was an important one, and he held more firmly that there was a port in the vicinity.⁷

Dunning's book stirred I. D. Margary to a study

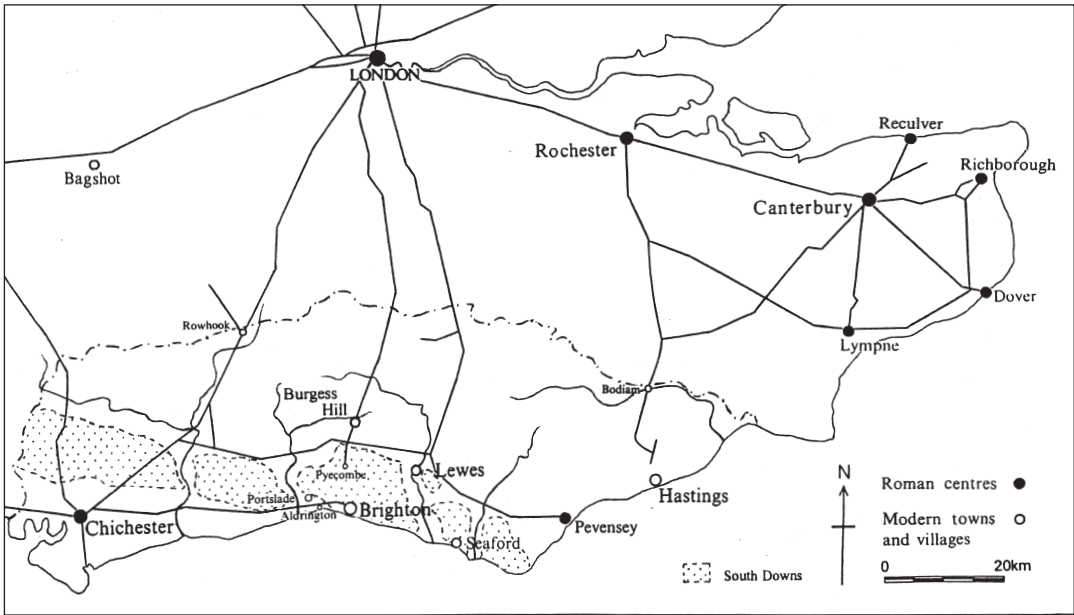


Fig. 1. The main Roman roads of south-east England.

of the London road, at the start of the work that made him the authority on the Roman roads of Sussex. He published his results in 1936, having solidly established the road's course from London to Burgess Hill and found a possible route from there to Pyecombe, within the Downs (Fig. 1).⁸ He also discovered an old way running from Pyecombe to Portslade that he thought must be the road if Portslade was the destination. However, he accepted the Curwens' belief that the London road simply connected with several roads in the Downs, though felt that its main continuation passed to Brighton from Pyecombe, and that while a route might then have gone on along the coast to the Portslade area, any port was more likely to have been at Brighton.

Little further work on the London road has been done since Margary's study; but in 1999, in a report by the present author proposing a modification to Margary's course for the road south of Burgess Hill, Margary's belief that it went to Pyecombe was reinforced, and the idea that its further path was by the old way from there to Portslade was supported.⁹ A thorough re-examination of all the road's possible routes through the Downs was therefore undertaken, and this appeared to confirm the latter suggestion. In addition, when other proposed Roman roads of the Portslade area

were looked at, the overall pattern clearly suggested the presence of a centre, presumably a port, at the Pyecombe to Portslade road's termination on the coast at Copperas Gap. It also allowed a plausible explanation for the full scheme of Roman roads of the region.

The complete investigation is therefore presented here; the London road findings are set out first, then the findings for the other proposed Roman roads, and finally further evidence for existence of the port. An additional discovery was that Copperas Gap was also the probable site of the lost maritime centre of West Aldrington, but the details of this are only briefly mentioned, within the main section and in the Discussion.

THE LONDON ROAD

THE PYECOMBE TO PORTSLADE ROUTE

In my 1999 report the London road was traced from New Close Farm in Burgess Hill to Ham Farm in Hassocks, and then southward by Coldharbour Farm and through the Clayton Gap of the Downs to the Plough Inn at Pyecombe (Fig. 2).

The Plough Inn is situated on the modern London to Brighton road (A23), close to its crossing with the South Downs Way. The latter route, passing from east to west along the scarp edge of the

Downs, was an important one before the turnpike roads were created in the eighteenth century, and is generally believed to be ancient. From the Plough Inn it heads south-westward, climbing over a ridge called West Hill, and descending through the hamlet of Saddlescombe, to pass along the southern edge of the deep combe called the Devil's Dyke before resuming its westward course.

The old Pyecombe to Portslade road (Fig. 2, road I) follows the South Downs Way to begin with, but at about 1 km further on it branches off to the left, continuing in a south-westerly direction and reaching the top of the ridge somewhat to the south of the South Downs Way. On the ridge top it turns southward along a substantial ridgeway track for 500 m, but then returns to its south-westward bearing and runs fairly directly over two further ridges and their separating valleys to the top of Benfield Hill. Here it turns slightly southward to pass over a third valley and slant up a final ridge to a postulated Roman road on its top, the Foredown road.

Margary evidently thought that the road turned along the Foredown road, which runs slightly south-eastward on the ridge, to gain the Curwens' proposed road at about 750 m further on, and swing sharply westward with it through Portslade village to Southwick. But the Yeakell and Gardner map of Sussex of 1780 shows that, in fact, the road crossed the Foredown road, and continued along the ridge's far side on a now nearly due-south heading, to reach Portslade village directly. There it crossed the Curwens' road, and went on by what is now a succession of modernised roads (Manor Road, Locks Hill, Trafalgar Road and Church Road) to Copperas Gap. Trafalgar Road and Church Road veer slightly to the east, and come to lie in a hollow where a stream probably once ran, and the original route would probably have lain about 150 m west of this, where the long-established East Sussex/West Sussex county boundary could mark its true final course.

The Yeakell and Gardner map shows that the whole route existed before 1780. It might partly be the 'Highe Waye leadeinge from Poonings [Poynings] Gate towards Hill Foote' mentioned in the will of Edward Blaker of Portslade in 1571. Blaker owned a house, and probably land too, close to where the route crosses the Curwens' road, at the eastern end of the village, which is where Poynings Gate would have been, and Hill Foot would be the

scarp foot of the Downs (formerly known locally as the Hill).¹⁰ The scarp foot is best approached from Portslade village by following the Pyecombe road to the Foredown road, and then using the latter to reach the scarp top and the ways there that lead down to Fulking and Poynings (Fig. 2).

Manor Road, linking Portslade's Manor House and church, which both go back to at least the twelfth century, is presumably of even earlier date. But how old the whole route might really be is not clear. However, it has lengths of seemingly cut terrace-way in places, Margary notes traces of metalled agger at some points, and there is a straight stretch about 2.5 km long from the West Hill ridge to Benfield Hill which is quite suggestive of a Roman road. Where the straight stretch crosses the Saddlescombe to Brighton road it has a slight kink, which keeps the route to the highest ground but could well be a deviation from the original course. The route thus appears to have been planned and constructed: it runs over the grain of the land in about as direct a way as the steep-sided ridges traversed will allow for wheeled traffic, and it continues the overall south-westerly heading of the London road fairly closely. It thus seems a strong candidate for being the continuation of that road.

THE BRIGHTON VALLEY ROUTE

Although Margary noted the possibility that the London road followed the Pyecombe to Portslade path, he actually believed that it went along the line of the modern London to Brighton road (A23). This passes southward from Pyecombe, down the long valley that runs by way of Pangdean, Patcham and Preston to the coast at Brighton. From Brighton the road would have turned westward along the coastal plan to reach the Portslade area (Fig. 2).

James Dunning proposed this route in 1924, on the ground that it was the easiest course topographically.¹¹ In 1947 Margary suggested that the A27 (Old Shoreham Road) was a Roman road, and that it could have been the way westward to the Portslade area from Brighton.¹² But Margary would have noticed that the route entails a large deviation from the direct line to Portslade, and it was probably this that led him to propose that Brighton rather than Portslade was the main destination. As will become apparent, the evidence strongly favours Portslade as the area aimed for, so the deviation remains a serious objection to the Brighton valley route.

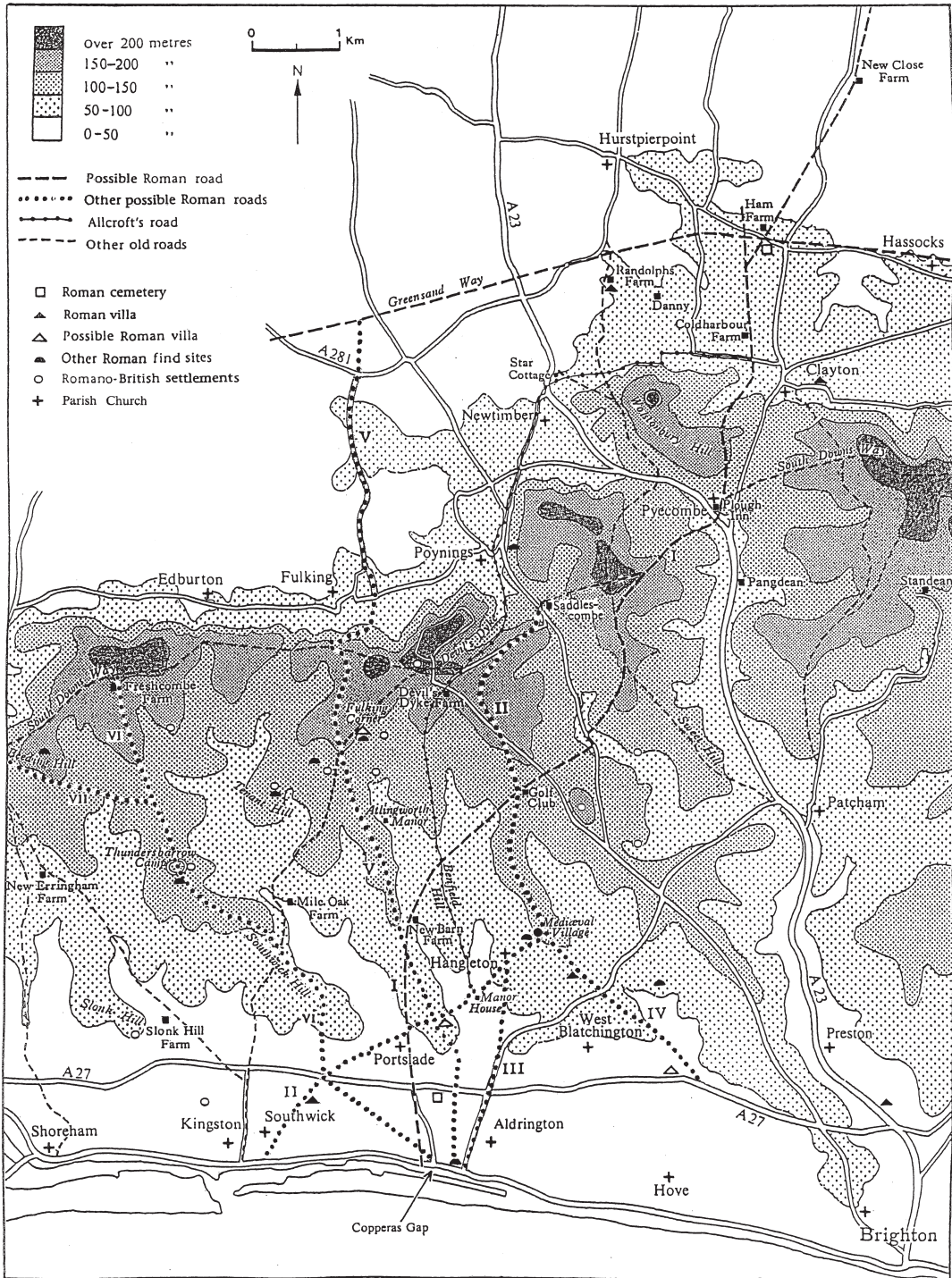


Fig. 2. The Roman roads of the Portslade/Aldington area. (© Crown copyright, Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved.)

There is actually very little evidence that a Roman road existed in the Brighton valley. One could have been lost under the modern road, but it lies in the valley bottom, which was liable to flooding from a bourne (intermittent stream) from Pangdean southward, and in the North Downs the Romans avoided such situations for their roads. The London road itself encountered just such a valley and bourne between Caterham and Croydon, and there it kept to the high ground on the east side of the valley.¹³

Between Pyecombe and Patcham there are some minor tracks on either side of the Brighton valley bottom, but they are all probably recent farm ways. From Patcham to the coast modern development makes it difficult to determine the course of any possible Roman road.

THE CURWENS' ROUTE

The length of possible Roman road found by S. E. Winbolt in Southwick lay beneath Southwick Street, on the west side of the villa there. The traced portion started opposite Roman Crescent (TQ244057), followed Southwick Street in a north-easterly direction, and crossed the A27 to continue for about 100 m up Mile Oak Road. Winbolt speculated that it would have begun at a sea creek at the foot of Southwick Green (TQ240050).

The Curwens proposed that the road carried on in a north-eastward direction along Mile Oak Road, passed through Portslade village, crossed the Foredown road at Hangleton Lane, and continued past Hangleton Manor House and Hangleton church to the site of the medieval village of Hangleton (TQ270076). They thought it then swung northward along a major ridgeway track that runs up from there to the Devil's Dyke (Fig. 2, road II).

The route appears on the Yeakell and Gardner map. Excavations at the medieval village in the 1950s indicate that there it was in use in medieval times; and a section cut across it at just north of Hangleton church showed that at this point it had a bank and ditch on either side, was about 8 m wide from bank top to bank top, and was metalled with flints.¹⁴ The excavations also showed that it met the Hangleton ridgeway track at just beyond present-day Stonecroft Close (TQ272076), only 500 m north-west of the Roman villa at West Blatchington. There was another way, terraced and flint-metalled, that branched off northward

from the main one shortly before Stonecroft Close, to gain the ridgeway track more directly; but it was thought to have been made in the medieval period.

The Hangleton ridgeway track, which passes northward at just below the summit of the ridge, proceeds initially as a well-marked terrace-way. This was found by the Curwens to be of double-lynchet form, and from its relation to the Celtic fields involved, use of it appeared to have begun in the Early Iron Age and continued into the Roman period. A recent re-examination confirmed that the fields dated to at least Roman times.¹⁵ The Curwens found some Romano-British potsherds in the soil of a barrow beside the terrace-way at about halfway along it (TQ268084); but a section they dug across the terrace-way here seemingly revealed no cut platform such as a constructed Roman road might show, merely a slightly sloping surface, up to 9.75 m wide, with a layer of flints 130 mm thick.

The terrace-way ended at about 1 km north of the medieval village, and beyond that point the road was indicated by a bridgeway, a short length of the Dyke road, and a path over the Dyke Golf Course that initially showed traces of having been an embanked roadway. These stretches followed a parish boundary that went on to the edge of the Devil's Dyke.

The Curwens believed the road was conterminous with the parish boundary all the way to the Dyke's edge, and there dropped down into the Dyke to join a route that had been proposed by A.H. Allcroft in 1915. But Allcroft's route, which is considered later, is highly doubtful; and the Yeakell and Gardner map shows that, in fact, the road curved north-eastward away from the parish boundary soon after leaving the Dyke road, and joined the South Downs Way. It went on with the latter to Saddlescombe, and could have continued with it over the West Hill ridge to Pyecombe.

As above amended, the Curwens' route passes between Pyecombe and the coast almost as directly as the Pyecombe to Portslade route, and its association with the possible Roman road at Southwick, and the other indications of its antiquity, make it seem another good candidate for being the continuation of the London road. However, overall it is not as direct or planned-looking as the Pyecombe to Portslade route, and the apparently unconstructed form of its ridgeway portion renders it less likely than the latter to be the London road.

THE DOUGLAS ROAD

When James Douglas reported the finding of the West Blatchington Roman villa in 1818, he noted the existence of a trackway to the west of it, overlooking Hangleton, that he took to belong to the London road. This trackway must have been the Curwens' road. Of its northward course he said merely that it 'proceeded considerably to left of Devil's Dyke . . . on the descent of the old road to Clayton'. Here *left* is obviously a mistake for *right*, and Douglas probably meant that the track followed the Saddlescombe route that was described above. But of the track's southward course he remarked that it went to the old mouth of the River Adur at Aldrington. This was the mouth that from at least 1724 to 1760 opened at Copperas Gap.¹⁶ The southward length of Douglas's trackway was thus not the Southwick to Hangleton portion of the Curwens' road, but a road that ran straight down from Hangleton church to Copperas Gap (Fig. 2, road III).

This road is shown on the Yeakell and Gardner map, and is mentioned in a conveyance of lands at Aldrington in 1743 as a lane leading from Hangleton to the sea.¹⁷ Today it is covered by Hangleton Way, Hangleton Road and Boundary Road. Boundary Road, lying on the parish boundary between Aldrington and Portslade, is believed to be ancient. It appears in a Portslade Manor Court Book entry of 1682 as Aldrington Droveaway, and is probably the 'le drove' referred to in a Coroner's Inquest at Aldrington in 1555.¹⁸ It may also be the road at Aldrington called 'Berghweye' in a charter of c. 1240, which name could derive from the Middle English *bergh* (mound, tumulus), and refer to the barrow beside the Hangleton ridgeway track, or perhaps from the Anglo-Saxon *burh* (earthwork or stronghold), and relate to the big Iron Age hillfort at Devil's Dyke.¹⁹

The Douglas road takes the Hangleton ridgeway track down to the coast much more directly than does the Southwick to Hangleton portion of the Curwens' road. Also, a row of four Roman cremation urns found in 1896 in a bank to the north of Hangleton church and about 30 m west of the Dyke railway and 0.804 km (half a mile) west of the West Blatchington villa (TQ269075), was suspected of being associated with it.²⁰ In addition, as will be shown later, there is a strong possibility that the Aldrington brickfield which contained the Roman remains mentioned by Horsfield in 1835 lay

at the foot of Boundary Road. Thus, the Douglas road rather than the Southwick to Hangleton route could be the main final course of the Curwens' route to the sea.

THE NORRIS-BURSTOW ROAD

When they were excavating the West Blatchington villa in 1947–9, N. Norris and G.P. Burstow found that the Hangleton ridgeway track probably extended beyond the Stonecroft Close area, and they believed that it went on in a south-eastward direction along the ridge. They thought its course was on about the line of present-day Beeding Avenue, Court Farm Road and Nevill Road to the Hove Engineerium, then by a path called the Droveaway across Hove Park (where there was a distinct double-lynchet way), and over Goldstone Crescent to the A27 at Hove Park Villas (TQ290059) (Fig. 2, road IV).²¹ Yeakell and Gardner's map shows most of this route. It passes close by the West Blatchington villa, and near an area of West Blatchington where a Roman coin hoard, a single Roman cremation burial, and Roman pottery fragments were found (TQ285071), and near a suggested Roman villa site in Hove Park (TQ287060).²² Thus, it may well have been in use in the Roman period. If projected south-eastwards, it would reach the Brighton area and the important villa at Preston (Fig. 2).

THE ALLCROFT ROUTE

A.H. Allcroft believed the destination of the London road was Portslade, but he began his route at Hangleton Manor House, on the Curwens' road. From there the route passes northward by a ridgeway track on the Benfield Hill ridge, turns north-eastward along a farm track to Devil's Dyke Farm, and crosses the Dyke road. It continues for about 300 m along the road that runs from the farm to Saddlescombe (which road lies on the South Downs Way), and then follows a path that slants down into the Dyke combe and on to a lane that climbs up from Poynings village to the Saddlescombe–Brighton road. Crossing this lane, the route proceeds by a length of old way that soon itself joins the Saddlescombe–Brighton road, and it is then continued by a minor road called Beggars Lane and Church Lane to the A23 at Newtimber. Beyond the A23 the route runs for 200 m at the foot of a big lynchet bank to the back of a house called Star Cottage, and there turns eastward to pass as a

bridleway along the base of the Downs and reach a road from the north called New Way Lane. This road switches sharply eastward here, and it takes the route on to the London road at just south of Coldharbour Farm (Fig. 2).

There are strong reasons for doubting the reality of Allcroft's road. Firstly, the ridgeway track on Benfield Hill is a minor one, and shows no sign of having been a constructed road. Also, it is unlikely that there would have been two Roman roads from Hangleton to the Devil's Dyke, and the Hangleton ridgeway track is a more convincing possibility than the Benfield Hill track.

Secondly, the Yeakell and Gardner map shows that, from Devil's Dyke Farm, the track continued with the South Downs Way road all the way to Saddlescombe, and it has no indication of a route into the Dyke combe. It is unlikely that the Romans would have made a road down the very steep side of the combe rather than along the much easier, and probably already existing South Downs Way. The combe path begins its descent as a footpath less than two metres wide, which Allcroft himself admitted could not have carried wheeled traffic. He thought that soil slippage had reduced the width here, but this does not look a probable explanation.

Thirdly, the old way beyond the Poynings village lane is almost certainly not a continuation of the path from the combe, but an early course of the village lane. At its start the way is beginning to curve down to the village, but is cut short by the levelled site of the old manor house of Poynings Place. It shows several variant courses here, indicating an amount of traffic that could only have derived from the village.

The rest of Allcroft's route follows the continuation of the village lane, which seems to be part of the road sometimes called the Underhill Way that runs the length of the Downs at the scarp foot, linking the villages that arose there in Saxon times. Beggars Lane, Church Lane, and the eastward arm of New Way Lane, which goes on to the village of Clayton, are probably surviving pieces of this road.

As a final point against Allcroft's road, it is very unlikely that the London road would have turned at right angles immediately before the Clayton Gap to go westward, especially since the Greensand Way Roman road, at just 1.3 km to the north, provides a better westward route.

OTHER PROPOSED ROMAN ROADS OF THE PORTSLADE AREA

THE FOREDOWN ROAD

The Foredown road, mentioned briefly above, was suggested to be a Roman road by H.C. Sturt in 1902.²³ He proposed it as a possible path for the London road, but its direction, and the existence of the more plausible Pyecombe to Portslade and Curwens' routes, make this very unlikely. In 1902 it was a ridgeway track that ran along the top of the Foredown Hill ridge all the way from the A27 at Portslade to the South Downs Way at Fulking Hill, above the village of Fulking (Fig. 2, road V). The six-inch O.S. map of 1873–5 shows that the track began on the A27 at 400 m west of Boundary Road. It headed slightly eastward to begin with, but soon curved to a north-westward direction, and then, at 600 m along, turned to pass at just west of north in a rather straight line for the rest of its length. Today's Benfield Way covers its first part and Mill Lane and the northward arm of modern Foredown Road lie on the following section. It was crossed by the Curwens' road at Hangleton Lane, and by the Pyecombe to Portslade road at about 750 m beyond that.

Beyond Hangleton Lane Sturt observed that, in places at least, the track had a bank and ditch on either side; and in 1922 H. S. Toms remarked that on Mount Zion, at about midway along its course, it was 7.6 m (25 ft) wide, or 15.2 m (50 ft) including the ditches.²⁴ The track ended abruptly on the Portslade parish boundary, at about 700 m short of the South Downs Way, having been ploughed out from there on. But the map shows a double embankment going on northward that probably marks its continuation. This would be the terrace-way section on the western slope of Fulking Hill noted by Toms in 1922. It might also be the pair of lynchets separated by a baulk 3.4 m (11 ft) wide seen there by E. and E. C. Curwen in 1923.²⁵

Sturt noticed that the main line of the track, if projected straight back, would reach the coast near the bottom of Boundary Road. That the road did extend southward thus is supported by the fact that the Portslade tithe map shows a piece of land called Stonery on that line. This recalls the Stonery Farm near Berwick through which the Pevensy–Lewes Roman road passed.²⁶

Sturt did not trace the track beyond its northern termination, but thought it must have descended

the scarp face of the Downs. At just 150 m to the west of the route's end on the South Downs Way there is Fulking Bostal, a prominent pass down the scarp face which seems to have once been important. The route passes north-eastward down to the east side of Fulking village and from there an old lane (Clappers Lane) continues its line northward to the Henfield–Pyecombe road (A281) at only 650 m short of the Greensand Way.

The Foredown road appears to be ancient. It is on the Yeakell and Gardner map, which also shows the continuation to Fulking village, and Clappers Lane. A Portslade property deed of 1609 refers to it as the Common Droveaway, and seems to include Aldrington Droveaway (Boundary Road) with it.²⁷ It may also be noted in a deed of 1398.²⁸ This deed concerns a piece of land in Aldrington lying between two places called 'Toweheye' and 'Taggelheye', and beside a highway leading towards 'Dychewey'. At its start the Foredown track traversed an area called 'Cowhayes', which lay in the West Aldrington region of Portslade (*see later*), and if 'Toweheye' is a mis-spelling of 'Cowhayes' the highway might be the length of the Foredown track from the A27 to Hangleton Lane. 'Dychewey' (i.e. Ditchway or Dykeway – the way to the Dyke) could be the Curwens' road or the northern length of the Foredown track, both of which go on to the Devil's Dyke area.

The Foredown track's northern length had midway along it the manor house of Atlingworth Manor, reached by a branch road from the ridgeway route, and is likely to predate that. References to the manor go back to at least *c.* 1165.²⁹ The terrace-way portion could be a double-lynchet way of Iron Age date. The Curwens thought their lynchets related to Saxon fields, but the field systems about here are now considered to be Celtic.³⁰

A notable feature of the Foredown road is the amount of Roman and Romano-British remains that seem to be associated with it. The road begins at the brickfield at the foot of Boundary Road that may be Horsfield's Aldrington brickfield with Roman finds. At 800 m further on it passes close by Willett's Roman cemetery. At 650 m further on again, near the Curwens' road crossing at Hangleton Lane, is the site of a possible Roman villa on Portslade's East Hill.³¹ Near the road's present-day termination on the Portslade parish boundary the boundary has a right-angled indentation called Fulking Corner (TQ250100)

where a Roman grave group was found, and there may have been another villa close by. In addition, near to this point the 1873–5 O.S. map shows a supposed Roman encampment where a Roman quernstone was discovered in 1925 (TQ244100).³² Many minor finds (pottery, coins, etc.), usually at Romano-British agricultural settlements sited near the road here, have also been made.³³

From all this evidence it seems very likely that the Foredown road was a Roman route, serving the agricultural area north of Copperas Gap, and linking the Gap region to the east-west trunk of the Greensand Way.

THE KINGSTON ROAD

Sturt noted the presence of two possible branch roads from the Foredown road, but investigation revealed that they belong to a road from Kingston to the Devil's Dyke unlikely to be of Roman origin.

THE THUNDERSBARROW ROAD

The Thundersbarrow road is a ridgeway route that began near the Southwick Roman villa and ran in a north-westerly direction along the ridge of Southwick and Thundersbarrow Hills. It was proposed as a Roman road by Winbolt in 1926–7, and partly described by E. C. Curwen in 1933.³⁴ The 1873–5 O.S. map shows that it began on the A27 at the Curwens' road crossing, went northward for a kilometre on about the line of present-day Downs Way, and then turned north-westward. Curwen found that it then passed for over 1.6 km as a broad double-lynchet way between Celtic fields that curved northward to the entrance to Thundersbarrow Camp. The Camp, a small Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age hillfort on the summit of Thundersbarrow Hill, had gone out of its original use by the Roman period, and the road passed through it as a slight hollow-way. No certain traces of the road survived beyond the Camp, but both Curwen and Winbolt believed that it continued straight on at just west of north, along the line of the present-day track to Freshcombe Farm (Fig. 2, road VI).

Yeakell and Gardner's map does not show the initial length of the Thundersbarrow road, but it is given by Thomas Gream and by C. and J. Greenwood in maps of 1817 and 1825 respectively, and its crossing of the Kingston road is indicated on Budgen's map of 1724. The maps of Gream

and Budgen also show that a road from the Curwens' road crossing carried on south-eastward to Copperas Gap. Whether this road was part of the Thundersbarrow road is uncertain, but in any case, the route as a whole is another one that heads for the Gap.

A mound called Thundersbarrow, which gave the hill its name, stood in the roadway before the Camp's entrance, and several urns, said to be British, Roman and Saxon, were found here before 1873. It could have been the cemetery for a Romano-British settlement that existed on the Camp's east side. Another such settlement existed near the road's end at Freshcombe Farm (TQ229100).³⁵

It is possible that the Thundersbarrow road went on from the Downs to Rowhook, on Stane Street, and beyond (Fig. 1).³⁶ If so, it would probably have followed a track that branches from the Freshcombe Farm track at 800m north of Thundersbarrow Camp, runs north-westward over Beeding Hill, and passes down an old hollow-way (Beeding Bostal) to Upper Beeding (Fig. 2, road VII). It might then have continued via Ashurst, Knepp Castle and Itchingfield to Rowhook, though evidence for this is slight. Whether it reached Rowhook or not, the Downland road is a likely Roman route, since Thundersbarrow Hill was an important agricultural area.

THE CHICHESTER ROAD

Margary proposed the A27 as a Roman road as part of an east-west route along the coastal plain from Brighton to the Romans' capital town at Chichester. Such a route seems required by the extent of Roman settlement on the plain. The A27 passes rather directly all the way to Chichester, keeps to good high ground, and crosses the rivers Adur and Arun at points suitable for ferry passages. These geographical considerations rather than much archaeological evidence were what persuaded Margary.

The Brighton end of the road appeared to him particularly convincing. It runs fairly straight and level, at well up from the coast but below the steeper hill region of the Downs (Fig. 2, where the A27 is not marked as a possible Roman road to reduce complication). At a kilometre beyond the Kingston road a brief south-westward turn occurred, but Margary found that the original route carried straight on here, to reach the Adur at an old ferry crossing just above the bridge that took the

later road. The crossing was at the Saxon village of Old Shoreham, suggesting its ancientness; and the road overall did not seem made to serve the other Saxon settlements between there and Brighton, which Margary took to support his theory that it was Roman.

Hard evidence for the road's age is scarce. A slight change of alignment where the Norris-Burstow road joins it suggests that the length from there to Brighton is a continuation of the latter route. The Portslade stretch of the road is mentioned in the property deed of 1609.³⁷ At Old Shoreham the ferry existed before 1612, and a way near it in 1229 called 'Asseweie' could be that end of the road. Also, references in 1622 and after to a 'Lancegate' at the west end of Portslade village might indicate that Mile Oak Road had long continued by the ferry route to Lancing, at 2 km beyond the ferry.³⁸

It appears that the Brighton to Shoreham portion of the Chichester road is old, but whether it was a Roman road remains uncertain. It does not fit very comfortably with the other possible Roman roads of the area, nor with the port at Copperas Gap that is argued for below. The Chichester road as a whole has only very weak Roman associations, and a small excavation at just west of the Adur ferry site in 1959 failed to find a Roman road there.³⁹ While a Roman route from the Brighton area to Chichester is likely, a course along the coast to Shoreham using a ferry crossing that in medieval times lay south of the one at Old Shoreham may be a better proposition than the A27 route.⁴⁰

EVIDENCE FOR A ROMAN PORT AT COPPERAS GAP

The name 'Portslade', from the Anglo-Saxon, apparently means either 'the causeway at or to the port', or 'the crossing place of the harbour'.⁴¹ It could derive either from the Curwens' road, or the Pyecombe to Portslade road, or from the crossing of those two routes. If, as seems possible, the Pyecombe to Portslade road is the London road, it would be the main route concerned, and to conclude this points to the presence of a port at Copperas Gap. The fact that at least three other of the roads described above: the Douglas, the Foredown, and the Thundersbarrow — all with a good possibility of being Roman routes — converge on the Gap, adds strongly to this suggestion.

There are other findings that support the indication. An important element in the early belief for a Roman settlement at Portslade was Horsfield's remark in 1835 that Roman remains had frequently been dug up by brickmakers at Aldrington. The Portslade and Aldrington tithe maps, dated 1840 and 1845, show brickfields at TQ262050, TQ276045 and TQ279048. They were in existence by 1830, 1828, and 1840s respectively.⁴² The TQ262050 field had a brick-kiln and was on the Portslade/Aldrington parish boundary (in the south-west angle of Boundary Road and the coast road), close to Copperas Gap; the TQ276045 and TQ279048 fields seem to have been more temporary, and were in the south-east corner of Aldrington parish, 2 km distant from the Gap. There is thus a good likelihood that the Horsfield finds relate to the TQ262050 field. In support of this, a Roman coin was later found within that field's area, at Franklin Road (TQ263053).⁴³ The field lay in the West Aldrington portion of Portslade parish, as explained below, which accounts for Horsfield's Aldrington location for it.

A second major element in the settlement theory was the presence of the Roman cemetery at just north of Copperas Gap. In 1875 Willett reported that it had over five burials and was near to a possible course for the London–Portslade Roman road. A newspaper account states that the site was about 275 m (300 yds) north-west of Portslade railway station.⁴⁴ The station then lay on the west side of Boundary Road, placing the site at about TQ262057 – close alongside the southward extension of the Foredown road. This suggests that Willett anticipated Sturt in identifying the Foredown road as a Roman route; and it also strengthens that identification and adds much to the likelihood of a settlement at Copperas Gap, since Roman cemeteries were generally placed beside roads leading from their settlements.

Winbolt, in 1935, places the cemetery at about 600 m west of the railway station (TQ259057), and says that 20 or more burials were found.⁴⁵ It thus appears that excavation continued after 1875, and extended the site westward. The recent discovery of a burial at TQ259056 favours Winbolt's location.⁴⁶ His location puts the cemetery equidistant between the Foredown road and the Pyecombe to Portslade road, and so could relate it to the latter rather than to the former; but this still places it on a road from Copperas Gap.

Winbolt also mentions a Brighton Museum holding of Roman pottery from Aldrington in 1879; and O. J. Gilkes speculated that it might have come from the cemetery.⁴⁷ However, the TQ262050 (Boundary Road) brickfield, which by 1879 had moved on to about TQ262052, almost midway between its original position and the cemetery, is an equally likely source. That location would further strengthen the credibility of both the Foredown road, and the existence of a settlement at the Gap.

Presence of a Roman settlement at Copperas Gap could explain an apparent importance of Aldrington in Saxon times. From the Domesday Survey of 1086, the regional Hundred, containing Kingston, Portslade, Hangleton and Aldrington, was originally called Aldrington, indicating a chief significance for the latter when the Hundred was made.⁴⁸ By 1086 the Normans, in creating the rapes of Bramber and Lewes, had divided the Hundred along the East Sussex/West Sussex boundary line into two Half-Hundreds, one containing Kingston, and the other Portslade, Hangleton and Aldrington. But Aldrington's importance was still recognised, since it was rated as having over 16 hides of land and 73 persons, while Portslade had only 1 hide and 2 persons.

During the present investigation it was discovered that the south end of Portslade parish was, until recently, called West Aldrington. The area involved extended from the shoreline up to at least the A27 road, and on the east side of the Foredown road up to today's Mill Close (TQ260065). It thus included the Boundary Road brickfield and the Cowhayes region of the Foredown road. It appears that it contained a community, also called West Aldrington, situated at Copperas Gap.⁴⁹ Lying on the coast where several old roads meet, this is likely to be the maritime centre that has long been thought to have existed in Aldrington parish. That centre seemingly flourished in the medieval period and was destroyed by the sea at around 1700.⁵⁰ Its presence indicates that Copperas Gap was a place where a port could be established.

Finally, there is the statement by Joseph Stevens in 1872 that, from the Down behind Portslade, when the tide was very low and the sea very calm, long black lines like the ground plan of a town could be seen close along the Portslade shore. James Dunning mentions a similar report in a Brighton newspaper of 1863, but this could

not be traced.⁵¹ Stevens noted that the spot was marked rocky on the map, although there were no other rocks anywhere nearby. In fact, a fan ofcombe rock (essentially erosion detritus) from the large valley behind Portslade does enter the sea at this point, and could perhaps account for the phenomenon.⁵² However, the observation seems never to have been investigated, and the possibility of a submerged settlement, perhaps briefly exposed and then reburied under sand and shingle, cannot be ruled out.

DISCUSSION

James Dunning thought it was not believable that, having constructed a road for almost 50 miles from London, the Romans did not continue it for the few extra miles to the Sussex coast. The findings of the present study appear to support his view. While there is no certain proof that the Pyecombe to Portslade route is the continuation of the London road, the mainly direct way in which it passes over four ridges and valleys to end in a region with the greatest concentration of Roman remains for this area of the coast is quite striking, and it is difficult to think who other than the Romans could have made a road like this. The lack of Roman finds near to it for most of its length is a weakness, but a Roman coin found in 1857 by a mound which contained seven skeletons, at just west of where the route crosses the ridgeway portion of the Curwens' road (TQ266089), might be one such find.⁵³

Of the other routes that have been proposed as candidates for the London road, only the Curwens' road seems a credible alternative. It has quite strong claims, including the possibility that its first portion connects three Roman villas (Southwick, Easthill, and West Blatchington); but it appears basically to be a British ridgeway track that was linked by the Romans to occupation places along the coast. When the Romans arrived in the area they are initially likely to have used the existing British ways, of which the ridgeway track was perhaps a chief one. The Douglas road could be a route to it from a settlement at Copperas Gap, the Southwick to Hangleton road a link from the Southwick villa region, and the Norris-Burstow road a link from the Preston villa and Brighton region.

The ridgeway track went to the South Downs Way (its main goal may have been the Devil's Dyke hillfort), and that is likely to have remained

an important east-west route for the Romans until the Greensand Way was made. It could also have carried on through the Poynings Gap into the Weald, and this appears an easier and more direct course for a Roman route to the Greensand Way than a path via the Clayton Gap. A series of old ways lies on either side of the present-day road through the Poynings Gap. Its explanation is complicated, but a detailed study indicated that, essentially, a road passing high on the Gap's east side was, over recent centuries, progressively lowered to the position of the present road.⁵⁴ The top road, which would be the British and Roman way if one existed, passes from Saddlescombe to Beggars Lane, on the Allcroft route. Its line is then continued by the Allcroft route to Star Cottage at Newtimber, where, rather than turning east to Coldharbour Farm, it could have carried straight on to the Greensand Way at the Randolphins Farm Roman villa (Fig. 2).⁵⁵

A cache of three Roman-style pottery items and pieces of coarse pottery and Roman flue-tile were found beside the top road at 800 m north of Saddlescombe (TQ268121),⁵⁶ indicating its possible ancientness, and at Randolphins Farm there is a north-south way that lies almost on the route's line. But the top road is rather slight, and there is no certain continuation from Star Cottage to Randolphins Farm. Thus, rather than being a full Roman road, the Poynings Gap road might be a British way that was used by the Romans. Whatever the position, the Curwens' road would presumably have been largely replaced by the London road as the chief route of the area after the Romans had become more fully established. The Preston villa could have connected with the London road via the latter's West Hill ridgeway track, which continues south-eastward to Patcham down Sweet Hill, on which two Roman coins were found before 1914 (Fig. 2).⁵⁷

The Foredown road seems a likelier first Roman road from the coast to the Greensand Way than the Curwens' road. It is more direct, and more completely associated with Roman remains. Its path to the Weald is more difficult than a course through the Poynings Gap or the Clayton Gap, since it involves a descent of the very steep scarp front at Fulking Hill. This necessitated substantial engineering work, like that where Stane Street descends the scarp near Bignor, and which is perhaps more likely to have been done by the Romans than by later residents.

For the other proposed Roman roads not much can be added to what has already been said. With the Chichester road, modern urban development has probably ended any hope of determining whether the Brighton to Shoreham portion of the A27 was Roman. Development, or coastal erosion, has also reduced the chances of finding an alternative road beside the sea. Further study of the route west of Shoreham might possibly settle the matter: the evidence for a continuation on the A27 path to Chichester is very thin, and the argument for a more southerly course, as, for example, one proposed by Winbolt in 1926–7, seems never to have been properly investigated.⁵⁸

An eastward continuation from Portslade to Brighton of the Chichester road could also have followed a coastal rather than the A27 path, and been lost to the sea. At Brighton it might have gone on with a Roman road proposed by Allcroft from there to Lewes, to link with the London to Lewes and the Lewes to Pevensey roads (Fig. 1). The Brighton to Lewes road follows an old ridgeway route called Juggs Road, near to which was found some Roman urns on Brighton's Race Hill (TQ331050), a small hoard of Roman coins on Newmarket Hill (TQ363070), and an early Saxon cemetery at Lewes (TQ407095). Finds of Roman items have also been made close to Allcroft's suggested line for the road within Brighton.⁵⁹

A coast road on from Brighton towards Seaford, following today's coast road (A259), has also been proposed. But while various Roman finds have been made along its line – at East Brighton, Rottingdean, Newhaven and Seaford (where there was probably a small Roman settlement), and, indeed, on to Pevensey and the Roman fort of Anderida – no real evidence for a road exists. Again, one could have been lost to coastal erosion.⁶⁰ Possibly transportation along the coast was mainly by sea, and any roads there only minor.

A big weakness for all of the proposed Roman roads of the Portslade/Aldington area is the lack of hard evidence for Roman work on them. Although such evidence may not now be obtainable for the roads in the built-over coastal region, investigation further northward might still produce results. Excavations on the Pyecombe to Portslade and the Foredown roads in particular could be worthwhile, especially on the conjectured portions in the Saddlescombe valley and to the north of the A281 road, and also a search for a road between Star

Cottage and Randolphins Farm. Possibly Roman engineering work could be identified elsewhere, but there may be little of it on the ridgeway lengths of the Thundersbarrow, the Curwens', and the Foredown roads.

With regard to the suggested port at Copperas Gap, again James Dunning held that the Romans would not have built a road from London to the coast without having a substantial establishment at its termination. He believed that *Portus Adurni* lay there, but that a commercial port also existed, or was intended, with it. *Portus Adurni* is now thought to lie at Portchester, in Hampshire, or Walton Castle, in Suffolk, but the idea of a port remains valid.⁶¹

As Figure 1 shows, a port near Aldrington would have been a useful midway refuge for sea traffic between Pevensey and Chichester. It would also have been ideally situated for handling the export of such commodities as grain from the Romans' corn production on the South Downs and iron from their iron-making industry in the Weald. The area about Aldrington was, to judge from the field systems and many corn-processing ovens that have been found there, an important one in the production of grain, and large iron-making sites existed close to the London road in the Weald.⁶²

Dunning argued that the port was a major one; and while his claim appears exaggerated, the possibility of a fair-sized facility remains. The cemetery appears small, reflecting a small population, but Horsfield's description of the Roman relics found by the Aldrington brickmakers (urns, skeletons, fibulae, etc.) suggests funerary items, so burials might have extended alongside the Foredown or the London road almost to Copperas Gap. That would imply either a large settlement, or one that was long-lived. A significant settlement at Aldrington would help to reduce an anomaly noted by C. Green in 1980: that the pattern of Roman towns in Britain being spaced at intervals of about 30 miles breaks down for East Sussex and the Weald.⁶³

Winbolt found that the Southwick villa was probably inhabited from late in the 1st century to about AD 350. The Romans must thus have had control of the Portslade area from soon after the invasion of AD 43, and could have established a port there at any time in their occupation. The villa was unusually large and rich, and of Mediterranean style, prompting the thought that it might have

belonged to an official in charge of the port rather than to a local Romanised Briton.⁶⁴ However, the burials in the cemetery date to the late 2nd or the 3rd century, as does the use of the West Blatchington villa, and that might have been the port's main period of importance.⁶⁵ The Roman cemetery at Hassocks (Ham Farm), where the London road crosses the Greensand Way, probably existed from AD 70–250, with the greatest usage being from about the mid-2nd to the early 3rd century; and Roman operation of the iron-making sites near the London road was seemingly mostly in the late 1st and the 2nd centuries.⁶⁶

That there was a significant Roman port somewhere along the Sussex coast may be indicated by the Ravenna Cosmography, but its information is too vague to be very helpful.⁶⁷

As with the roads, a big weakness of the theory of a port on the Portslade coast is the lack of direct evidence for one. This is explainable as due to coastal erosion, which may have reduced the land here considerably since Roman times. Whether there are remains beneath the sea or shore that could be detected by modern survey methods is an open question.

What the coast was like in Roman times is a complicated and uncertain matter. In recent centuries at least, it seems that a shingle bar was continuously being driven across the mouth of the River Adur, diverting it eastward almost to Hove on occasion, until a severe storm would break through the bar and return the entrance towards Shoreham.⁶⁸ If this process operated in the Roman period, there could have been a harbour anywhere between Shoreham and Hove. But the suggested stream at Copperas Gap would have provided fresh water for a settlement there, and perhaps have helped to maintain a channel through the bar (as also would the stream that existed at Southwick).⁶⁹

There was a Saxon cemetery at Copperas Gap (TQ259052), close to the proposed Horsfield brickfield site, with its possible Roman burials. This might strengthen the suggestion that the Portslade cemetery extended towards the Gap, since Saxon cemeteries were often placed with Roman ones. The orientation of the graves suggested Christian burial, and hence they were dated to the late 7th century or after. But for the Saxon cemetery at Highdown, about 12 km west of Shoreham, M. Welch found that such burials occurred from as early as AD

450–500, so the Copperas Gap graves could be older than was thought. A Saxon burial 2 km north of them, (TQ262073), perhaps representing another cemetery, was certainly pagan.⁷⁰

The question thus arises as to whether the proposed Roman port could have significance for the Saxon conquest of Sussex? This is too big a subject to explore deeply here, but the port's central location and road system would have made it a perfect base for an invasion of Sussex. There are Saxon cemeteries all about the region, some of them (at Brighton, Hassocks, and Saddlescombe) perhaps very early, and others (at the Wolstonbury and Thundersbarrow hillforts, and maybe at Mill Hill, just to west of Slonk Hill) that could well be so;⁷¹ and from their community at Highdown (believed by Welch to be an encampment where military mercenaries were allowed to settle in the mid-5th century) the Saxons would have been very familiar with the port area and its rich cornlands.

No other evidence for a Saxon settlement at Copperas Gap is known, but it would presumably have been lost to the sea with the Roman port. In late Saxon times the place was apparently of little importance. Soon after the Conquest, the Normans changed the Aldrington Hundred name to 'Fishersgate', after a settlement immediately to west of Copperas Gap. 'Fishersgate' could originally have been the west end of the West Aldrington settlement, as 'Poynings Gate' and 'Lancegate' were the east and west ends of Portslade village. That would explain an oddity of land ownership there: that although it lay in Bramber Rape, the Fishersgate area was held by the lord of Lewes Rape.⁷²

West Aldrington probably flourished as a medieval port at around 1300, when it was ordered to provide ships for Edward I's Scottish campaign.⁷³ It is likely to be Camden's Aldrington village for the site of Portus Adurni, and also the settlement called 'East Broke' [East Brook] on the Armada Survey map of 1587. It may have revived again in the 17th century, possibly in association with the development of Brighton's maritime trade; and it could well be the place that Charles II sailed from in 1651 in his escape to France on a Brighton coal boat.⁷⁴ Following its destruction in about 1700, it may have recovered slightly for a while: the name Copperas Gap (from the iron sulphate which was being exported from the Sussex coast to London by 1695–1714) appears there by 1739.⁷⁵

Until firmer evidence for the reality of the Roman roads and port described in this article is obtained, acceptance of their existence needs caution. It remains possible that the extension of the London road from Hassocks southward was a minor route, serving the coastal region and its villas

only generally. Carriage of iron from the Weald and corn from the Downs could have been by way of the Greensand Way to the River Ouse at Barcombe, near Lewes, and then by boat to a port at Seaford (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, the argument for a port at Copperas Gap does appear to be quite strong.

Author: Glen Shields, 31 Lansdowne Street, Hove, East Sussex, BN3 1FS

NOTES

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