

THE GREAT FORD ACROSS THE LOWER THAMES.

(A.) THE EXTENSIVE LINE OF BRITISH STAKES PROTECTING THE FORD ACROSS THE THAMES AT BRENTFORD.

(B.) DID CAESAR CROSS HERE?

(C.) WERE THE COWAY STAKES IN EXISTENCE B.C. ?¹

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The plates illustrating this paper are from the author's *Antiquities of Middlesex*.

PREFACE.

In early times we know that the south-eastern district of Britain was cut off from the interior by the Thames and its marshes, and that the first practical means of crossing this barrier was by the ford at Brentford, the next being 50 miles up stream at Wallingford.

This Middlesex ford would therefore be a place of the first importance, and also of general resort, since upon it converged the principal chariot or trackways for miles around, on each side of the river.

In times of war this portal between two extensive areas would be jealously guarded and strongly protected, and this is proved by the numerous remains of pile fortifications which have now come to light, extending for a couple of miles along the Middlesex shore of the river, from Kew Bridge to Isleworth Ferry. The troops regularly guarding this position appear to have had a circular camp near by, higher up on the level ground, in a clearing midst the surrounding trees, situated on the tongue of land between the Brent and the adjoining brook, which commanded the fordway below. The next tribal line of defence was upon the wooded uplands of Middlesex, along which ran Grimms Dyke. At either end stood camps, at Hillingdon and Bush Hill, protecting the fords of the rivers Colne (Ux) and Lea.

¹ Read before the meeting of the Institute on the 4th April, 1906.

Midway lay encampments at Horsadun and Harrow, and perhaps another at London, guarding the Old Ford across the Lea, as well as the passage-way up the Thames.

The tribe in possession of this Thames crossing would necessarily exercise a predominating influence not only throughout the Middlesex district, but over an extensive area to the north of it, and in this may be found the source of power or pre-eminence possessed by the Catuvellauni, whose territories extended over Herts and down to the Thames.

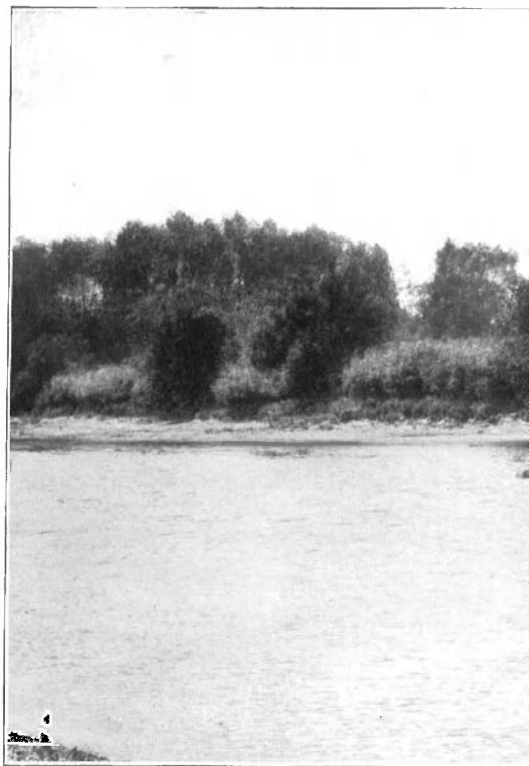
But the great Thames ford, from which radiated three principal British trackways, fell into considerable disuse when Watling Street was constructed by the Romans, and the line of route transferred, first, perhaps, to the Thornea Ford, Westminster, and then to London Bridge. As regards the ford at Westminster, I may mention, that before the Roman causeway to it was built, the crossing was both difficult and dangerous, for two miles of bog on the Surrey side had first to be traversed, and again more swamps on the Middlesex side before firm land was reached where Buckingham Palace now stands.

It may, perhaps, here be stated with reference to any crossing place by the Coway Stakes, that in British days the site where the stakes have been found was apparently not then part of the bed of the Thames. But to this subject I will return later on.

THE FORD AT "OLD ENGLAND," BRENTFORD.

Bishop Gibson, writing in 1695, says that the Thames was in ancient times easily forded at Brentford, and is so still, there being now at low ebb not above 3 feet of water. There is confirmation of this in the *Saxon Chronicle*, which states that Ædmond the Ironsides crossed here with an army twice in 1016. William of Malmesbury (1095-1143) on each occasion refers to the place as the Brentford vadum. Even at the present day, during a low spring tide, children in the warm weather may be seen wading well out into the river.

There was but little tidal scour in those days, for irregular banks, shoals, weeds, reeds and fallen trees,



THE RIVER BANK AT "OLD ENGLAND."

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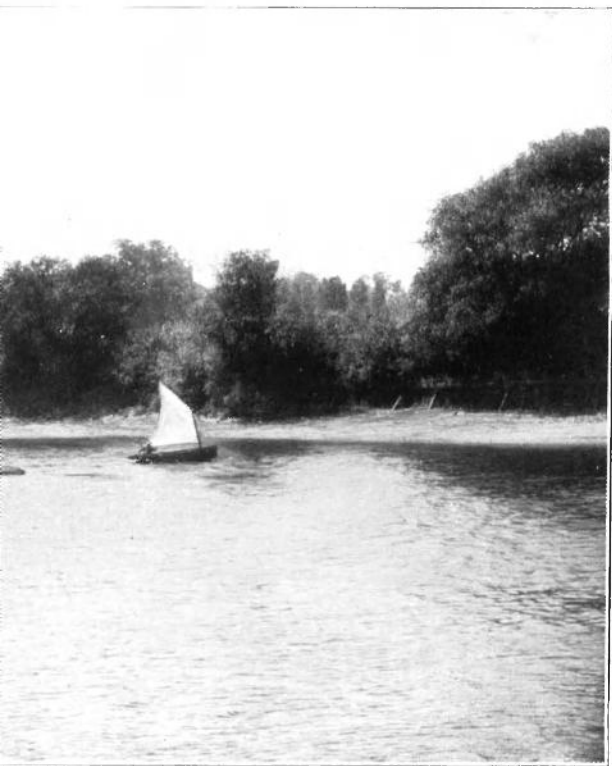


PLATE II.

THE DOCKS AND RAILWAY ARE BEHIND THE TREES.

etc., coupled with the lateral flow over miles of swamps, would all tend to impede the flow in the river proper. Constant dredging at this day takes place upon the gravel shingle in the Syon reach of the river to deepen the Brentford channel for navigation, and from the above various causes it can be imagined that 2,000 years ago the river at this spot was much shallower than at present, and therefore easily fordable at low tide. All the accessories of a ford convenient for military purposes were to be found here. On the Surrey side a wide and level approach over a firm and low-lying bank (B.M. 13) led down to a shallow river of no width, flowing in this reach over a broad bed of gravel. Plate I.

The passage across probably lay up stream, a little above the line of route of the present ferry. The old ford was a double one, as an arm of the Brent had afterwards to be crossed before ascending the gravel ridge (B.M. 25) which lies between the bend of the Brent to the north, and the brook from Little Ealing. On the intervening triangle of land forming the delta of the Brent lay the town meadow, happily named and still known as "Old England." Its old appearance has now, alas! gone for ever, nearly all lost in docks and buried beneath railway embankments. Plate II gives some idea of the former appearance of the river banks here, and is taken from a part remaining untouched.

It is now impossible to ascertain what further relics of ancient strife remain buried beneath the soil of "Old England," but fortunately Thomas Layton, Esq., F.S.A., in the sixties, during the excavations for the docks, obtained many interesting antiquities, of which he has kindly supplied me with this list: stone celts polished, stone implements of various sizes, stone chisels mostly in flint, bronze and iron swords 2 feet, more or less, in length, iron spear-heads, and many Roman bronze coins and some silver, with numerous other antiquities of later date.

Camden, Dr. Guest, and others argue in favour of Caesar's army crossing at the Coway Stakes, but no writer on this subject, so far as I know, seems to have been aware of the remains of the extensive lines of stake defences at Brentford, for the dredging of the river to deepen the channel has only recently been undertaken;

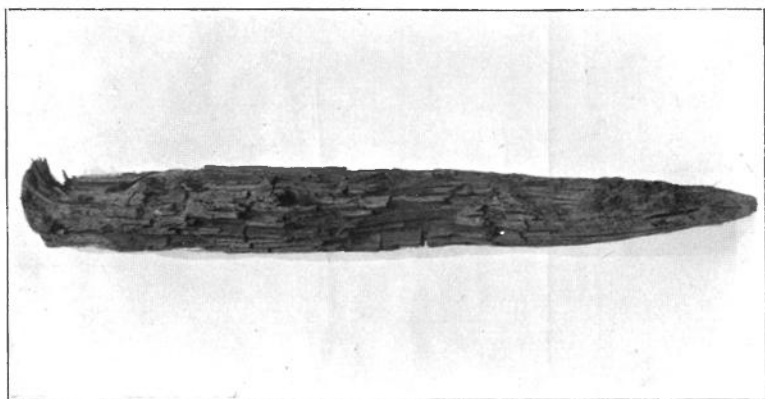
and these stakes exactly correspond, as regards their position both in the bed and on the banks of the river, with Caesar's description.

I have in my possession the remains of several of the ancient British stakes recently extracted from the bed of the river at Brentford, one of which is here shown in Plate III. It is part of an oak sapling, is 3 feet long and 15 inches in circumference, roughly pointed at the lower end, and black as ink. There is little sign of decay, though, in process of drying through exposure to the air, rifts or splits down the way of grain have appeared. The remainder of the sapling, which stood in and above the water, has of course long ago decayed or been broken off, but the stump owes its preservation to having been buried in the bed of the river. Its upper end, which projected a couple of inches above the bed, is frayed from contact with the dredger, or keels of passing vessels, and the action of river drift. The condition of some of the other stumps is not so good, it varies very much; the cores, however, are fairly sound and hard. Two specimens are now to be seen in the British Museum.

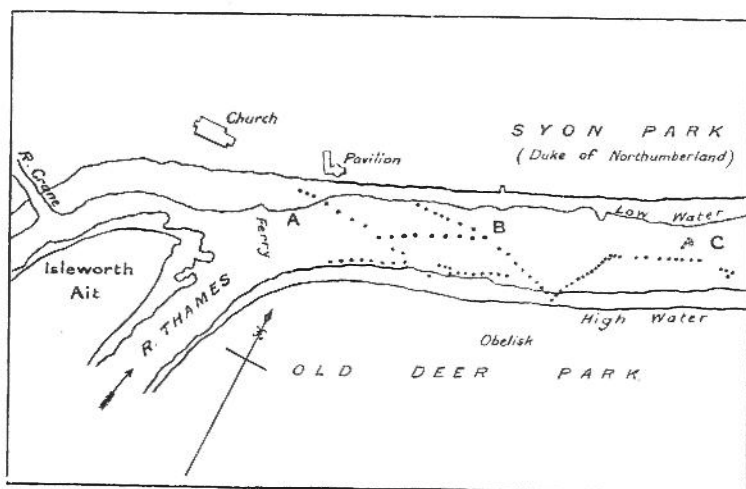
In December, 1903, Mr. Bunting, of the Thames Conservancy, in a letter to me, says that—

“The remains of the line of stake defence still exist in the bed of the river for about 400 yards below Isleworth Ferry. It runs in a diagonal direction down stream from the Middlesex to the Surrey side, and their positions, as shown at A, B, and C, on Plate IV, have been carefully ascertained. In the course of dredging, the stumps of many of the stakes have been extracted in the main channel, and those on the foreshore have been removed, as they became an obstruction or danger to navigation. The extracted stakes have from their appearance indicated that they have been tied or interlaced in some way or other.”

Since this was written further dredging by the Thames Conservancy has taken place with the object of clearing the river bed. Mr. Haig has, however, carefully noted for me, on the plan shown on Plate V, the position of every stake withdrawn up to April, 1905. He has also marked some stakes at the other end of the line, across the old channel just above Kew Bridge, between the brook and the lower end of the ait at G. In spite of dredging, the depth of low water at 13 feet 6 inches below T.H.W.,



ANCIENT BRITISH STAKE EXTRACTED FROM THE BED OF THE THAMES
AT BRENTFORD.



ENLARGED SECTION SHOWING POSITION OF EXTRACTED STUMPS AT UPPER END OF THE LINE OF FORTIFICATIONS GUARDING THE FORD.

when taken with about 18 inches of flood water out, was at Kew Bridge $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet, Old England 4, the Obelisk $2\frac{1}{2}$, and Isleworth Ferry $6\frac{3}{4}$.

The Venerable Bede (A.D. 673—735), after referring to Caesar's description of the stakes in the river, says, "the remains of which stakes are to be seen there to this day." This would be from seven to eight centuries after Caesar's invasion.—Bede himself, I believe, never saw the stakes, and unfortunately did not mention the place by name where they were to be seen.—Is it not more likely that he was referring to those at Brentford, which extended for about two miles *along* the river, and were visible from the adjoining western road, than those *across* the stream at Coway, which were away from the ordinary route of travel and possibly not then even in existence? Mr. Hanson, of Southall, tells me, that in 1881, when engaged on some riverside works, at F on map on Plate V, a threefold line of stakes, with wattles and boughs interlacing them, was laid bare at a depth of ten feet or more below the level of the bank, Plate VI. They appeared to be in a semi-petrified condition and of a dull *lead*en hue in colour, from their contact with the mud by the mouth of the Brent. He regrets that no particular attention was then paid to this ancient defence work, or to the numerous stone celts, coins, and shells lying adjacent, many of which were disposed of by the workmen for pots of beer. In a subsequent letter to me he says :

"Some of the stakes were pointed, others with butts upwards as if small oak or other hard wood trees had been cut down for the purpose, and I should say the top and lop of same had been used to lay between the stakes. As I told you, most of the wood was cased with petrified sand or something of that kind."

This confirms Mr. Bunting's view as to the tying or interlacing between the stakes.

Having given the position of the lines of stakes at A, B, C, F and G, we will now consider the intermediate portions in the light of information kindly given by Inspector Rough, of the Thames Conservancy, who for upwards of forty years has been engaged upon the river, and is intimately acquainted with this part of it, besides having superintended the local dredging operations.

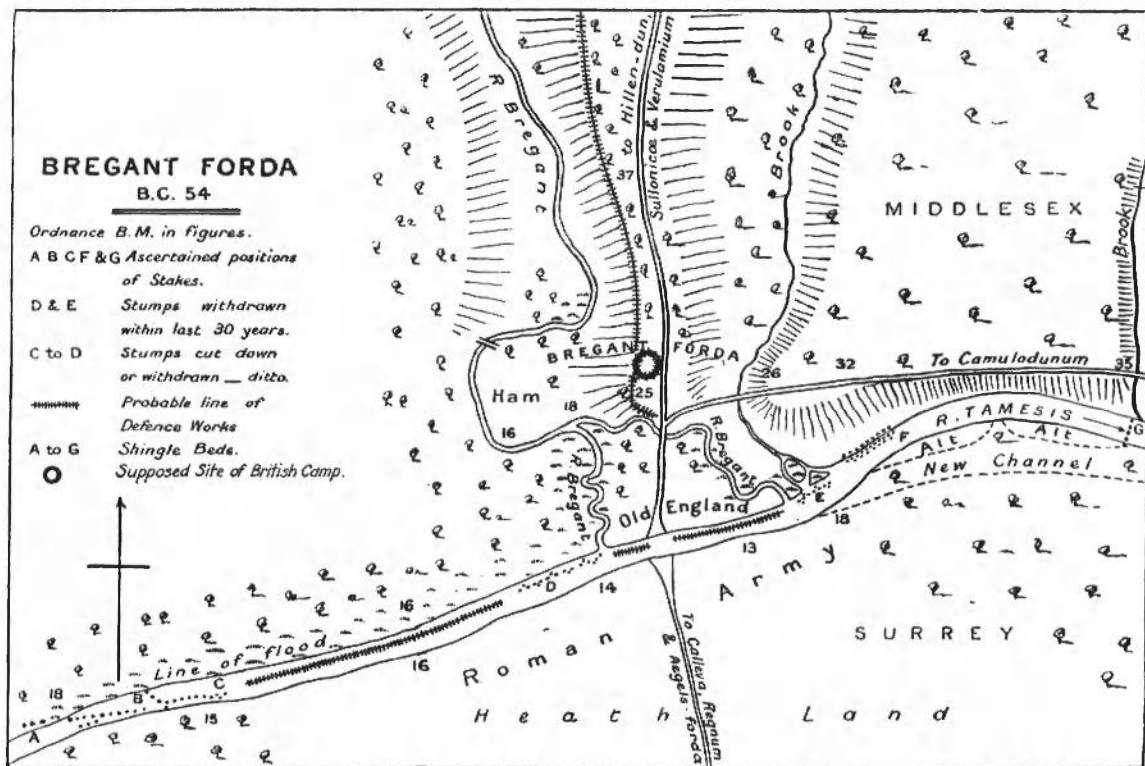
In his company I inspected the site of the ancient ford, and then interviewed the working foreman who has been employed on this section for thirty years and who has often been engaged in removing obstructive stumps.

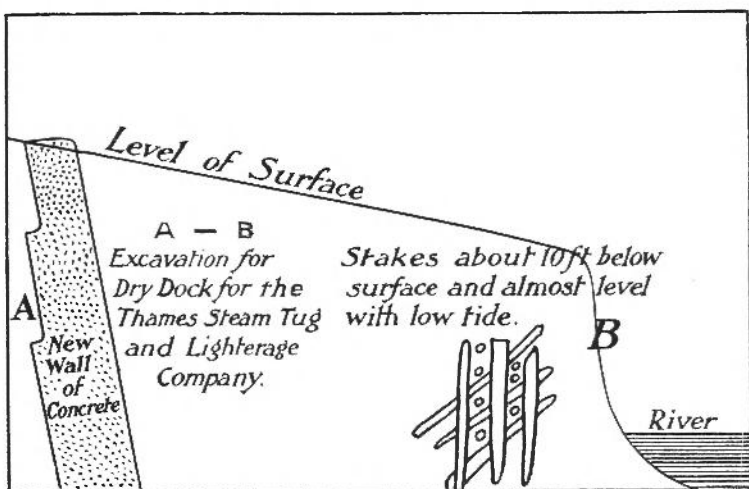
The result from the dredging has been to lower the bed of the river, which then left uncovered the stumps of the stakes and standing about 9 inches above the bottom and dangerous to navigation at low tide.

To sum up my investigations, it seems that within the last quarter of a century or so 30 stumps have been drawn at G, upwards of 36 in the vicinity of E, which appear to have been the continuation up stream of the threefold line at F.

Adjoining the bank at D, just above Old England, about 14 stumps have been extracted, and here again they were irregular, apparently the remains of several rows, as at F. Between D and A, further up river, upwards of 150 stumps have at different times been drawn or cut down as occasion required, all of which have been carefully noted on the plan.

However, it can now with confidence be asserted that these works extended for about two miles along the course of the river between the points A and G, the passage of the ford being at about the centre. The number of vertical stakes used in a single line crossing the stream diagonally at either end, and stiffened with two other lines below "Old England," would when driven in 6 feet apart have amounted to between two and three thousand. This river palisade work guarding the chief portal into Middlesex must, in those savage times, have been a fine specimen of military engineering skill. It was a strong outlying fortification, the first line of defence, situated at the termination of the land palisade which the Catuvellauni had doubtless constructed across the county, along their boundary line and trackway from their home in Herts to the ford of the lower Thames. In extent it will not be compared with the impenetrable hedge wall which the Nervii across the Channel had raised round their country, or with the 300 miles of similar fortification built by the Romans from the Danube to the Rhine, known as the Pfahlgraben.





REMAINS OF BRITISH STAKE FORTIFICATIONS DISCOVERED IN THE RIVER
BANK, BRENTFORD.

As regards the bank at A and F, it is worthy of note that we have, at this day, evidence that stakes were driven into the *foreshore* as well as the main channel; this accords with Caesar's description, when he says that the *bank* was also defended.

Caesar and Orosius (A.D. 416) both mention that sharpened stakes were concealed under water. They were thrust through, and then bound to the interlacing work between the stakes at an angle of 45 degrees, with their butts embedded in the gravel: though all trace of this work above the bed of the river has long since disappeared. But as regards the bank at F, Mr. Hanson says "some of the stakes were pointed," and from his diagram their position to the vertical piles was as that of an angle of 45 degrees.

When Caesar arrived at the ford he does not seem to have even waited for low tide before making his attack. for his soldiers in crossing were up to their necks in water. It is probable that his main advance was upon "Old England," where the ground had been cleared for the purposes of the ford, and from whence a trackway had been cut through the undergrowth. The cavalry would perhaps go forward, and from the backs of their horses scale the defensive barrier of interlaced boughs and sharpened stakes. To make the attack elsewhere would seem to be less advantageous, for above "Old England" up stream lay the uncleared woodland, unsuited to Roman tactics, but favourable to those of the British: whilst below, the higher ground at F, rising from behind the lines of stakes upon the bank, formed a strong defensive position.

I now proceed to give a translation of Caesar's account of his passage across the Thames, which, when read in the light of the above material, will, I trust, prove that this great historic event took place at Brentford.

B.C. July 54. CAESAR'S INVASION WITH 20,000 MEN.

"Caesar being aware of their plans, led his army to the Thames to the kingdom of Cassivellaunus. The river was passable on foot only at one place, and that with difficulty. When he arrived there he observed a large force of the enemy drawn up on the opposite bank.

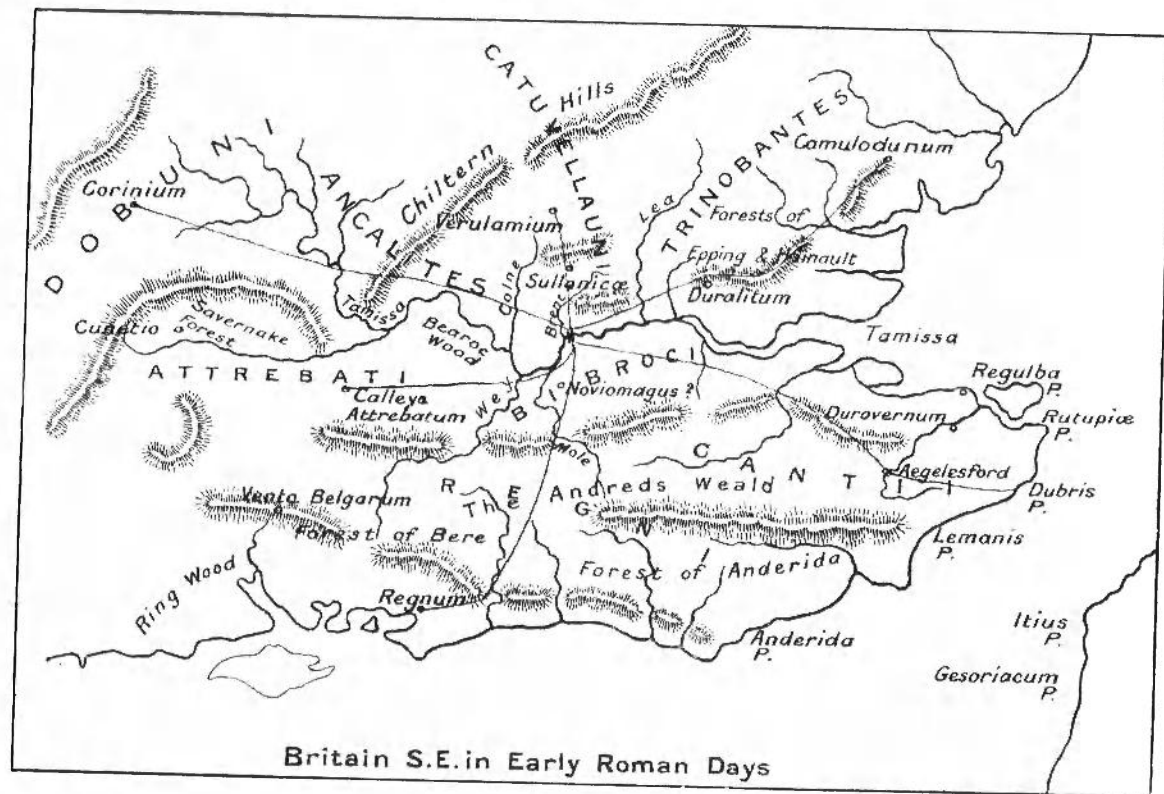
"The bank also was defended with sharpened stakes fixed outwards, and similar stakes were placed under water and concealed by the river. Having learnt these particulars from the captives and deserters, Caesar sent forward the cavalry, and immediately ordered the legions to follow. But the soldiers went at such a pace and in such a rush, though only their heads were above water, that the enemy could not withstand the charge of the legions and cavalry, and they left the bank and took to flight."

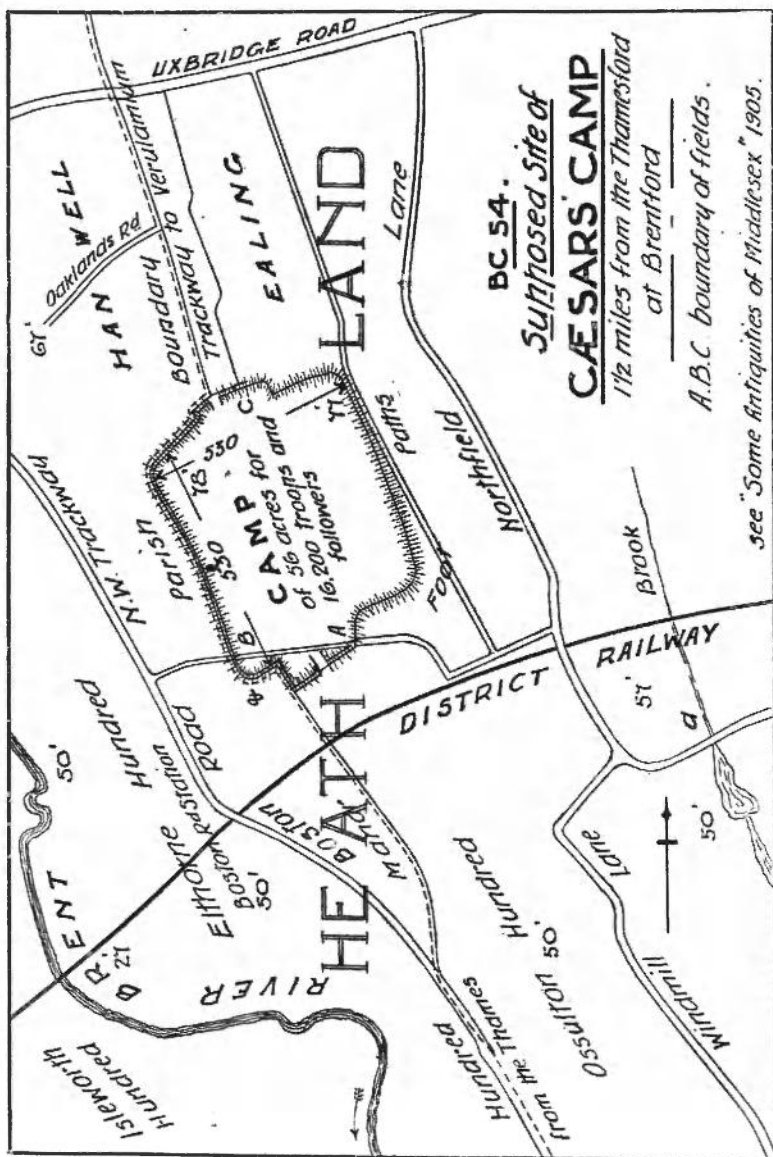
CAESAR IN MIDDLESEX. Plate VII.

We will now trace Caesar's march from the Kentish coast through Brentford to Verulamium.

About the 18th of July B.C. 54 Caesar reached the shores of Britain with a fleet of some 800 vessels, transporting from Gaul an army of five legions, or about 17,500 infantry with 2,000 cavalry. After the troops had disembarked, Caesar tells us that he at once marched to attack the British, who were beaten back to a stronghold in a neighbouring wood "well fortified by nature and art." At last they were driven out, and this spot in Bourne Park, near Canterbury, is still known as "Old England's Hole." It is a curious coincidence that both in Kent and Middlesex there should be two places known as "Old England" where Caesar engaged the British on his march to Verulamium. Then he returned to the coast, as a storm had arisen which had caused considerable damage to his ships, and so it was not until about August the 2nd that he was able to march on the Thames, leaving his vessels under a guard of ten cohorts, or about 3,000 men with 300 horse.

After referring to his camp and damaged fleet, he goes on to say that the territory of Cassivellaunus, the British overlord, was divided from the maritime states by the Thames, distant 80 miles. A Roman mile contained about 1,611 of our yards, and it is just 80 of such miles from the neighbourhood of Deal by the British chariot way through Agelsford to the great Thames ford. From that seaport to any place higher up or lower down on the Middlesex bank of the Thames, the mileage would be increased or diminished. Therefore, if we take Caesar to mean that from his camp by the sea to the entrance into the territory of Cassivellaunus by the great Middlesex ford was 80 miles, his mileage is correct. This is





a further proof in favour of Caesar having crossed at Brentford as against Coway, Thornea or any other place.

After his defeat, Cassivellaunus disbanded his levies, retaining 4,000 chariots, with which he watched the Romans from some distance, sheltering himself in the woods of Middlesex which lay to the north of the country.

The hills of Horsa-dun, Harrow, and the high ground at Sulloniacae would be excellent points of observation for Cassivellaunus, as the Romans marched to Verulamium, 20 miles from the Thames. See Plate I.

Meanwhile ambassadors had come in to Caesar, who would have constructed the usual *castra exploratoria* or temporary camp above the ford after the recent battle there (Plate VIII), and, allowing 3 acres per thousand of the troops, the rampart of the camp would have encircled some 50 acres.

The British trackway to Verulamium, after leaving the ford, crossed a heath, where it was to form subsequently the boundary between adjoining hundreds, manors and parishes. Owing to certain irregularities in this boundary line here, which I have fully dealt with in my *Antiquities of Middlesex*, we can perhaps still trace the outlines of Caesar's camp.

It was rectangular in form, the north-western corner being rounded off, while 250 yards to the east the line indicates a projection for a portal. Its length from north to south is about 530 yards, and if the public footpath parallel to the western boundary indicates the extent of the camp to the east, then the rampart enclosed a square, containing some 50 acres, which the force under Caesar would require.

If I am correct, then we have here the historic spot where Julius Caesar received the submission of the British tribes, who would arrive by the main trackways, centering here upon the ford below.

Dr. Stukeley, unaware of the Brentford passage and its two miles of fortifications, in his *Iter Boreale* conducts Caesar across the Thames at Coway, through Greenfield common, Staines, which was somewhat off the line of his march, then to Hounslow Heath and on to Kingsbury. At each of these places the writer had

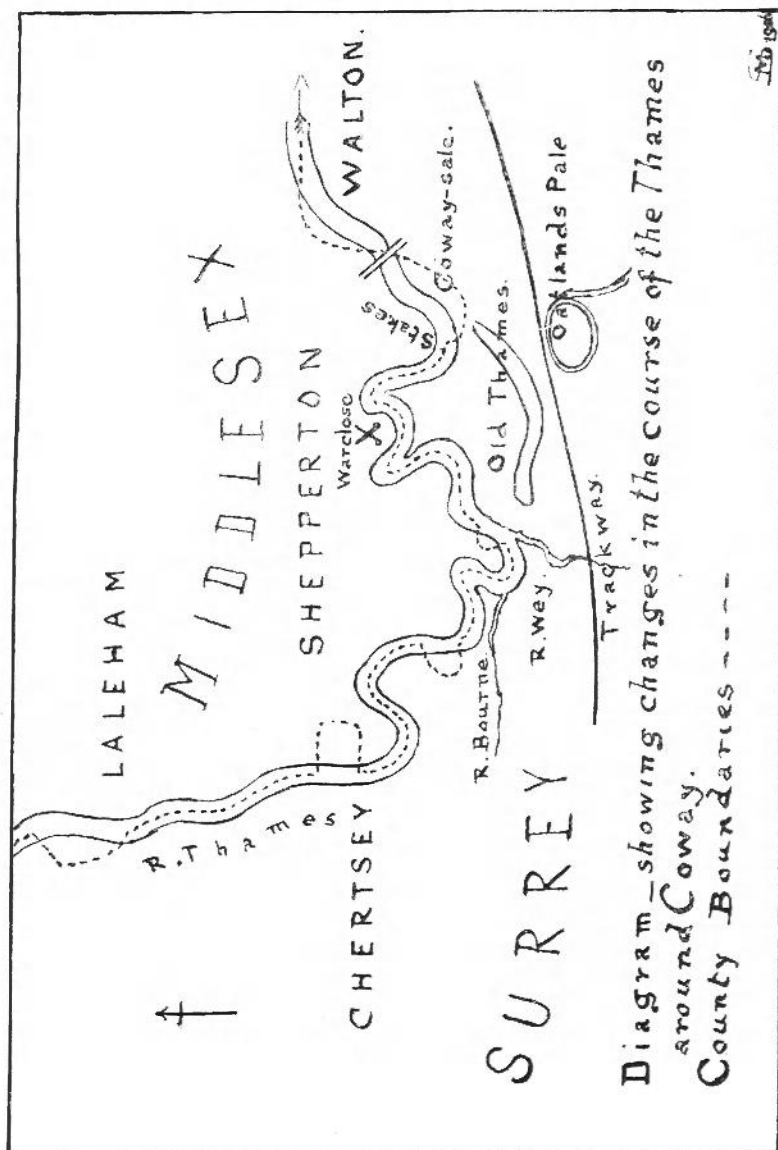
discovered vestiges of earthworks which he attributed to Caesar, though such enclosures are common over the country, and may equally belong to an earlier or to a later period. As to the camp at Kingsbury, he says it "is now the churchyard and still visible enough. Its situation is high and near the Brent, and measured 30 by 40 yards."

It is easy on paper to move large bodies of troops with their train from place to place, where a few iron-shod stakes or small earthworks have been found; but this learned writer has hardly given sufficient thought to the original condition of the country. During a stay in Britain of only two months, Caesar, with all his appliances, could hardly have cut a special route for his army through 100 miles of country in its primeval condition, and in the face, too, of a hostile population. There was no necessity for him to do this, as there was a direct trade route from the coast ports to Verulamium, which Mandubratius or other refugees could easily point out. Otherwise, unless to avoid some formidable obstacle, which would take too long to overcome, what object was there to be gained by the legions leaving the beaten track and plunging into the wild woodland, only to be harassed and sniped at by fierce back woodsmen?

From the sea camp at Deal to Verulamium and back is about 204 Roman miles, and out of the 55 days from August 2nd to September 26th, twenty would probably be occupied in actual marching. A week's stay may be allowed at the camp on the Hanwell-Ealing heath, where the tribes submitted to Caesar, and perhaps a few days at Sulloniacae on the northern boundary of the county in preparing for the assault on Verulamium. This would leave 25 days for engagements for foraging during the march, the taking of the capital, and for the embarkation of the troops.

THE COWAY STAKES.

Some learned writers contend that the Coway Stakes, one furlong west of Walton Bridge and 14 miles by river above Brentford, are those which were referred to by Caesar as having been placed by the British to oppose the crossing of his army.



Camden says—

“It is impossible I should be mistaken, because the river is scarce 6 feet deep, and to be about 80 miles distant from the east part of Kent where Caesar landed. I am the first that I know of that has mentioned and settled it in its proper place.”

Dr. Guest writes—

“I hope I have induced the reader to fix the place at the Cowey Stakes; at any rate it is certain it cannot be fixed in the neighbourhood of London.”

Geoffrey of Monmouth states—

“that the Cowey Stakes were placed to prevent the passage of Caesar’s ships; while other writers agree that they formed part of a weir or a bridge.”

The stakes were described as being as thick as a man’s thigh, black and hard and shod with iron. They stood in two lines *across* the river, 9 feet apart, the posts in each line being 4 feet from each other, while some were fixed in the bank as well. They had all disappeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

These two lines of posts have been called the *Coway* Stakes, for the southern end connected with Coway Sale, a piece of land consisting of 18 acres, part of the parish of Shepperton, Middlesex.

The land lies on the Surrey side of the Thames, and, with forty other acres in the parish, was subject to the right of cow pasture. This area was divided into 118 portions called Cowfarrens (a Wessex term for half an acre), each of which enabled the owner to keep one cow upon it. This detached part, known as the Sale, was doubtless so named from *sal*, a wooden hoop put round the neck to tether a cow, which the animal would need whilst grazing on its owner’s unfenced farren. Now at some date subsequent to the formation of parishes, which were gradually becoming defined about the tenth century—and “it seems pretty clear and certain that the boundaries of parishes were originally ascertained by those of manors”—the Thames, still in a primeval condition, appears in Saxon times to have changed its course in several places through the flat meads below Staines. (Plate IX.) For in addition to Coway Sale, 3 other acres of Shepperton, and 22 acres of Laleham parish (by Laleham Burway) lie on the Surrey or south

side of the river, while 14 acres of Chertsey and 8 acres of Walton parishes are to be found on the northern or Middlesex side. Otherwise the Thames formed the natural boundary line between the two counties and their respective parishes, along its banks from Staines to London. But as regards Coway Sale, we fortunately can glean some information regarding its severance from the rest of the manor and parish of Shepperton.

A wooden bridge between Shepperton and Walton was first built in 1770 under an Act of George II., and the approach thereto at the Surrey end crossed Coway Sale. One of the piers of this bridge seems to have been subsequently "blown up" by a heavy flood, and to guard against any recurrence of this, Manning, in his *History of Surrey*, says—

"Five arches were turned on the Surrey side, and in high floods the water now runs through them, taking that side, not the Middlesex. *Heretofore the river ran between its present course and Oatlands Pale, leaving the land now called Cowey or Cowey Sale on the Middlesex side.* There is now some water under Oatlands Pale which is called the 'Old water' or the 'Old Thames.' If so, it ran across where the five arches now are, and under Lord Tankerville's wall, which was Mr. Dicker's, the builder of the bridge."

Now the Stakes which lay across the new channel terminated at the north-western end of Coway Sale, about a quarter of a mile distant from and to the north of the old Thames channel; consequently, prior to the river altering its course here, and to the formation of Saxon Manors and their boundaries, the site of the Stakes did not then form part of the bed of the river, and *a fortiori* in British days when Caesar forced the passage of the Thames. Further, the line of the stakes lay not only at right angles to, but at some distance from the old river, and even if then existing, could not have been those referred to by Caesar when he says, "the bank was also defended by sharpened stakes fixed outwards," for this necessarily implies that they were driven in not at right angles, but parallel to the course of the stream; and, lastly, we have no evidence that the old Thames channel was ever fordable here.

We may therefore thus sum up the situation :—

- (a) In British days the course of the Thames from below the mouths of the rivers Bourne and

Wey, lay past the pale of the Oatlands Camp and the southern approach to Walton Bridge.

- (b) By the tenth century the Thames had cut through the marshland a new channel, about a quarter of a mile to the north, which was adopted as a division between the two counties.
- (c) At a subsequent date there was a further change in the course of the Thames, and four small portions of the two already defined counties became severed, and to this day remain detached on the opposite bank.

For what purpose, then, and when, did the Saxons drive these piles across the new channel of the Thames?

The simple explanation seems to be that these two rows of iron-shod posts of Durmast oak were constructed either (1) to form a passageway 9 feet wide, within which cattle could, by half swimming and wading through water "scarce 6 feet deep," cross the river in safety, for otherwise they would be liable to be carried down stream and be either lost or drowned; or (2) for a bridge.

When the invading East Saxons overran the Middlesex area (A.D. 550—600), and destroyed the Roman-British civilization, they would naturally pull down the bridges across the Colne and Thames at Staines (Pontes), so as to hinder any attack upon them from the south-west. But in the course of time, as the "hams" and "tons" of these new settlers gradually spread westwards through the Spelethorne Hundred, some means of ready passage across the river became more and more necessary, and especially so in times of peace between Mercia and Wessex. Now the old trackway of the Attrebates, from the Kentish ports to Calleva and the West, we know passed close by on the Surrey side of the river, and here its new channel was scarce six feet deep. Such a spot probably then presented a more suitable site for the construction of a crossing place than the old one at Staines, where the deserted Roman road had been lost in the surrounding marshes. By the end of the eighth century, the monks at Westminster had become considerable landowners in this part of the Hundred. Ashford, Halliford (Halgeford, the holy ford over the Exe),

Laleham, Staines and Teddington were amongst their earliest possessions, the supposed gifts of King Offa (757—96), and later on they acquired Hanworth, Littleton, Shepperton and Sunbury (in all about 12,400 acres). Therefore, taking these things into consideration, it seems most probable that the stumps, which have been extracted from the bed of the river to the north of Coway Sale, were the remains of a cattle way, or of a wooden bridge constructed by an early Abbot of Westminster, to meet the increasing needs of the villani on his manors for an outlet beyond their western and southern boundaries.

The structure of this "way" across the river was probably destroyed during the warfare with the Danes, perhaps in A.D. 999, when Olaf, King of Norway, came up to Staines with 93 ships and laid waste the country about it. He moored his vessels to the bank at a spot still known as the Hythe (a landing place), and perhaps then proceeded to entrench his men within the dyke, which, according to Dr. Stukeley, formerly enclosed Staines, in order to provide a safe retreat before ravaging through Western Middlesex.

The battle which took place close to Coway Sale, in the field now known as "War Close" within the grounds of Shepperton Manor House, may have occurred during this incursion, when the stakeway was being destroyed to permit the passage of the vessels higher up the river to Staines. The remains of some of its stakes, which were still standing in 1807, have been known as the Coway Stakes, and for the last three centuries have given rise to endless speculation and controversy.

In the discussion which followed the reading of the paper, Mr. REGINALD SMITH, F.S.A., pointed out that a minute knowledge of the area under discussion was essential to a full criticism of the paper, but one or two side-issues might be noticed. The Brentford stakes were much larger than the Coway specimen in the British Museum, but none seem to have been shod with iron. The fact that Edmund Ironside crossed the Thames at Brentford in 1016 disposed of Dr. Guest's objections, and the disposition of the stakes there answered much better to Caesar's description. Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History* (I, 2), said the piles were coated with lead, a most improbable statement that did not seem to be confirmed by discovery. Mr. Sharpe was to be congratulated on the excellent case he had made out for Caesar's crossing at Brentford.

Mr. MONTAGU SHARPE, in replying, said that he had considered the question of the presence of lead in his *Antiquities*,¹ and did not attach any importance to it. Bede did not state as a fact that the stakes were covered with lead; he was writing 700 years after Caesar's invasion and from hearsay, and what he did say was: "*it appears to the observer as though the several stakes . . . and cased with lead were fixed immoveably in the bed of the river.*"

Bede's informant when crossing the ford probably saw some of the old piles in the near distance, and fairly described the dull grey mud and river deposit with which they were incrustated, as a casing of lead. If that metal had been used it would long since have been stripped off and stolen.

It was a curious coincidence that Mr. Hanson, in describing the stakes in position which he unearthed upon the bank, says: "They appeared to be in a semi-petrified condition and of a dull *leaden hue* in colour from the contact with the mud by the mouth of the Brent."

¹ *Antiquities of Middlesex*, Brentford, W., The Brentford Printing and Publishing Company, Limited.