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Communications

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Mr W. H. BULLOCK-HALL made the following communication :

ON THE ICKNIELD WAY.

THE Icknield Way, which is probably the oldest thoroughfare in Britain, being a kind of natural high and dry chalk bridge, crossing England diagonally from Norfolk to Dorset, is that by which successive waves of early invaders passed from East to West. It was never paved or gravelled like a Roman *via*, and seems to have been carried in a course apart from Roman lines of communication.

Seeing that the Icknield Way passes my front gate and runs through, or along, my property for about three miles of its course between Newmarket and Royston, I cannot be charged with going out of my way in selecting the subject of my paper. Having been familiar with a portion of this road for more than half a century, I have in the last two or three months, for the first time, endeavoured to trace its course in both a south-westerly and north-easterly direction beyond the limits of our own county.

The labours of the late Dr Guest, Professor Babington and others having dealt in considerable detail with the subject of the Icknield Way in Cambridgeshire, I think that the most useful contribution in my paper will be the light I may throw on the Icknield Way as a whole. I will at the outset state that I was quite unprepared to find that its features would prove, as they do, far more distinct and interesting as one proceeds westwards, through Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

But before I attempt to lay before you the result of my explorations of the Way itself, I will sketch briefly the early history of the British tribe, with whose name it is connected.

I will next proceed to glance at the written evidence throwing light upon the course of the Icknield Way.

That the first syllable of the word "Icknield" is derived from the root 'Ic' in the name of the British tribe "Iceni,"

who occupied the greater portion of the East Anglian peninsula at the date of the Roman Conquest, there is a practical consensus of opinion. As to the second syllable, Dr Guest¹ suggests that it is the Saxon word 'hild' meaning war, making the whole name read 'Icen-hild-weg,' or war path of the Iceni. Horsley, however, connects the second syllable with the Saxon word 'elde' (old). Nearly all the authorities, including Dr Guest, hold that the Icknield Way was originally an ancient British track. I am inclined to go even farther than this in doubting whether it ever became a Roman road. It does not fit in with any Iter mentioned in the Antonine or any other ancient Itinerary. Although the Romans planted garrisons at some few points on the Icknield Way, most of the vestiges of them which have been discovered in its vicinity, must be rather attributed to the Roman road, of which several sections still exist, parallel to, and at no great distance from, the Icknield Way.

Almost all we know about the Iceni is derived from the *Annals* of Tacitus, the son-in-law of Agricola and contemporary with the incidents I am about to touch upon. Referred to incidentally in Book v. c. 21 of Caesar's commentaries under the name of "Cenimagni" as joining their neighbours the Trinobantes in making terms with the Romans, without taking up arms, the Iceni are first mentioned under their proper name by Tacitus.

Taking advantage of the facilities for breeding and rearing horses afforded by the plains they inhabited, the Iceni became famous amongst the British tribes for their war chariots—a taste probably brought with them from Belgium. The Iceni were thus the fitting progenitors of the horse-loving inhabitants of Newmarket.

That the Iceni were a Celtic tribe may be inferred from the names of their King Prasutagus and his Queen Boadicea, both of which are held to be Celtic. From the position we find them occupying in East Anglia, it is probable that they entered Britain by the mouth of the Yare, up the estuary of which they sailed to Norwich, which became their central stronghold, and

¹ Guest, "The Four Roman Roads," *Archaeological Journ.* pt. 54.

was called by the Romans "Venta Icenorum." Had the Iceni come up the Thames valley they would hardly have found their way into Norfolk.

Remaining true to the cause of Rome during the period of the invasion conducted in person by Claudius, the Iceni revolted a few years later against his lieutenant Ostorius Scapula.

As soon as this rising in East Anglia was put down, the Romans saw the necessity of planting a colony at Camalodunum (Colchester) to hold the Iceni and the Trinobantes, their allies, in check for the future.

A few years later the Iceni, taking advantage of the absence of the bulk of the Roman forces on the western side of the island, made another effort to throw off the Roman yoke. For the exactions of the procurator Catus and the excesses of the colonists of Camalodunum had become quite intolerable. That this revolt was fully justified is clearly shown by the statement of Tacitus¹.

Prasutagus, King of the Iceni (famed for his long and prosperous reign), in hopes of securing after his death a portion to his widow Boadicea and his daughters, had by his will made the Emperor Nero co-heir with them of his fortune. But this precaution proved of less than no avail. For it drew attention to the wealth he had amassed, and exposed his family to every form of insult and pillage.

Nor were the Roman depredations confined to the family of the late King. For Tacitus adds that all the chief men of the Iceni were stripped of their ancestral possessions, as if Rome had received the whole country as a gift. With Boadicea and her daughters at their head, the Iceni, their ranks swollen by contingents of the Trinobantes and other neighbouring tribes, swept down in irresistible numbers on the devoted colony of Camalodunum; not yet defended by those walls, which have defied the ravages of time down to our own day.

How Colchester fell, and then London—not yet dignified by the title of colony—and then St Albans, and how in all three hardly a Roman life was spared, is circumstantially related in the fourteenth book of the *Annals* of Tacitus. This

¹ *Annals*, Book xiv. 31.

rising was in some respects a counterpart of the Indian Mutiny in our day, as the Romans were thereby all but swept out of Britain.

But the triumph of Boadicea and the Iceni was short-lived. For, hurrying across the island from Chester by a line of march, which subsequently became the Via Devana, Suetonius Paulinus lost no time in hurling his legions upon the entrenchments, behind which the revolted Iceni were drawn up. That the decisive battle, which finally imposed the Roman yoke on our Iceni ancestors, took place on the slopes of one or other of the Dykes, drawn across the invadable chalk bridge into Icenia, has been shown by my friend Professor Ridgeway to be highly probable.

As the colony of Camalodunum (Colchester) had proved too distant to hold the Iceni effectually in check, the Romans planted an entrenched camp at Caistor, four miles south of Norwich, on the river Taes, over against the native stronghold "Venta Icenorum."

The vallum of this camp still exists on all four sides, of which the longer measures about 430 yards and the shorter 360. It was composed of square-faced flints, bonded with courses of Roman bricks, still existing intermittently along the northern side. The vallum is not less than 20 feet high. A portion of the masonry of what is believed to have been the Porta Decumana may still be seen near the centre of the western side which rests on the river Taes. The Camp at Caistor is the best specimen of a Roman camp I have ever seen, in Britain or elsewhere, and should be acquired as a national monument.

Of the numerous writers—mediaeval and modern—who have treated of the Icknield Way, not one, as far as I know, has devoted a separate treatise to it. Almost all refer to it as one of a group of four ancient roads, mentioned in the Laws of Edward the Confessor as enjoying the high privilege of the King's Peace, and as exempt from the jurisdiction of the local courts. Henry of Huntingdon, who composed his *Historiae Anglorum* in the first half of the twelfth century, places the Icknield Way at the head of his list. On page 12 of the

Rolls Edition we read (I quote from Dr Guest's translation, which I have compared with the original Latin):—

“In such estimation was Britain held by its inhabitants that they made in it four roads from end to end, which were placed under the King's protection, to the intent that no one should dare to make an attack on his enemy on these roads.

“The *first* passes from East to West and is called Ichenild, the *second* runs from South to North and is called Erminge Strete, the *third* crosswise from Dover to Chester, i.e. from South East to North West, and is called Watlinge Strete; the *fourth*, the greatest of all, begins at Toteness and ends in ‘Catnes’ (Caithness). It is called ‘Fossa’ and passes through Lincoln.”

I have selected this extract from Henry of Huntingdon—himself an Icenian—as constituting the clearest and most authoritative statement of the case for the four great roads of Britain.

It is interesting to observe that Henry of Huntingdon and successive chroniclers ignore completely any connection of these British roads with the Romans. According to an authority of no great weight, Geoffrey of Monmouth, King Belinus, son of King Molmutius, constructed these roads some four centuries before Christ. Elton (p. 326 of his *Origins of English History*) thinks that each of them represents a combination of portions of Roman roads. With this opinion, as far as the other three roads are concerned, I am much inclined to agree. But I do not think it holds good of the Icknield Way, or at all events not of its eastern half, with which we are mainly concerned this afternoon.

As my purpose is to be above all things clear, rather than exhaustive, I will not introduce an element of confusion by laying before you all the variations of the names of these roads. I shall limit myself to the single prose extract from the early chroniclers which I have just quoted, and to one in a kind of verse from Song XVI. of Michael Drayton's *Polyolbion* (composed in the reign of Elizabeth), which corroborates the enumeration of roads by Henry of Huntingdon. I should

premise that in Drayton's poem, the Watling Street is the imaginary spokesman:

“My song is of myself and of my sister streets,
 Which way each of us ranne, where each her fellow meets.
 From the South into the North taketh the Erning Street;
 From the Est into the West goeth Ickenelde Street.
 From South Est to North West, that is somdel grete
 From Dover unto Chester goeth Watlyng street.
 From the South-West to North-Est into England's End
 'Fosse' man calleth thilke way, that by many town doth wend.
 As Icing that set out from Yarmouth in the East,
 By the Iceni then being generally possesst,
 Was of that people first termed Icing in her race.”

I shall content myself here with the bare mention of such authorities as Higden of Chester, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Robert of Gloucester, Leland, Stukeley, Spellman, Camden, Horsley and Lysons, all of whom I have consulted.

While all these writers indicate the general course of the Icknield Way and its relation to the other great British and Roman roads, none of them affords much assistance to the identification of its course between the German Ocean and the Thames.

For this purpose, as far as Cambridgeshire is concerned, Babington's *Ancient Cambridgeshire*, and Guest's *Essay on the Four Roman Ways*, are much more helpful. But I have depended mainly on my own observation and on the sheets of the Ordnance Survey, where all the generally accepted sections of the Icknield Way are clearly laid down.

Although there can be no doubt that the Icknield Way started from the banks of the Yare, on which the chief stronghold of the Iceni—Venta Icenorum—rested, no distinct trace of its course through Norfolk can be discovered. Only so much can be made out of its general direction that it followed a south-westerly course towards Thetford, where it crossed into Suffolk by a ford over the Little Ouse just below its junction with the Thet. It is proved by an ancient deed (quoted at p. 55 of Babington's *Ancient Cambridgeshire*) apparently dated in the reign of Henry III. that the Icknield Way passed

through Newmarket. To reach Newmarket, it could not have diverged materially from the course indicated above.

While the Icknield Way started from Venta Icenorum on the south-westerly course, which it maintained right across the breadth of England, the later Roman road—No. IX. of the Antonine Itinerary—was carried due south up the valley of the Taes through Caistor to Colchester and London. As I have already observed, the Icknield Way never served to connect any of the important Roman stations, and if the Romans used parts of it, they never adopted it as a whole.

Between the Yare and the Thames, no Roman post-stations, mile-stones, temples, nor wayside tombs, nor other distinctive features of Roman roads are to be found along its course. The only conspicuous tomb of any kind as far as I could ascertain, is that of the British King Cunobolinus (Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*) in the village of Kimble (in Buckinghamshire) said to be called after him.

That the Romans occupied settlements on various points of the Icknield Way is proved by the remains of villas, forts, cemeteries and coins found near or upon it, as at Thetford, Icklingham, Mutlock Hill (part of the Balsham Dyke) and other places.

Parallel to the Icknield Way and on a lower level, at an average distance of about a mile and a half from it, another grass road, believed to be Roman, runs on the right hand of the traveller from east to west, appearing intermittently in the plain below.

This road is called variously the Street or Peddar Way by Professor Babington, who brings it into the Icknield Way (I believe erroneously), at Worsted Lodge. For it is of the essence of the Street Way—its proper appellation—to run parallel with the Icknield Way—a fact proved by the direction of its sections still existing, which I have lately explored.

The Icknield Way gave Cambridge and London the go-by altogether, keeping to the northern slope of the Chiltern Hills, which it struck first at Dunstable, after crossing the river Lea, near its source. It crossed the chief Roman roads at more or

less of a right angle, just as it does now all the main railway lines, leading northwards from London.

For the reason that it avoided London and all other busy haunts of men, the Icknield Way has remained an almost untrodden and ignored road. It is a paradise of drovers, rovers and all lovers of solitude, fine air and short-cropped turf. Speaking broadly, its habit is to leave all villages and the places through which it might be expected to pass, at least 1000 yards away. This is what it does, for instance, with Chesterford—the chief Roman centre in our neighbourhood—with Tring, Bledlow, Watlington and Ewelme, in its course through Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

The Icknield Way, as I have already observed, hugs the chalk range, keeping much nearer the base than the ridge, but is always sufficiently elevated to be high and dry, and to command a view over some twenty or thirty miles of the blue plain stretched out like the sea at its feet.

The Icknield Way seems to have dispensed altogether with the use of bridges, invariably crossing the few streams it encounters, in its passage along the chalk, by means of fords. It even makes no exception to this rule in the case of the Thames between Goring and Streatley, at which point I am informed that waggons occasionally still cross the river in very dry seasons by the ford.

The Icknield Way, which probably began as a mere track along the chalk downs, developed later into a green road from 30 to 40 ft. broad. Where it has not been converted into a modern stoned road, that is to say, for about one-sixth of its course between the sea and the Thames, it presents the attractive feature of a broad gently curving green band, bordered by high hedgerows—sometimes overshadowed by trees, giving it the appearance of a grassy avenue.

The hedges and trees are most conspicuous, where the Way is carried through the property of some great landowner, as for instance near Watlington in Oxfordshire. It would be difficult to find in any part of Great Britain, a more charming ride or walk of eight or ten miles than that section of the Icknield Way which runs along the northern face of the Chilterns,

commanding the branch line of railway from Princes Risborough to Watlington.

It is at a point about half a mile to the north of the village of Icklingham in Suffolk that the first trace of the Icknield Way as a broad grass thoroughfare presents itself to the explorer proceeding from east to west. In spite of the statement in Babington's *Ancient Cambridgeshire*, that the Icknield Way can be easily traced between Thetford and Icklingham, I found it quite impossible to detect it anywhere nearer Thetford. It may be that the blowing sands of Icklingham Heath have quite obliterated it at the present day. At the point where it emerges from the sandy desert on to the arable zone, within the fertilizing influence of the river Lark along the north bank of which the village of Icklingham straggles, the Icknield Way presents the familiar features described above as characterizing its course onwards intermittently to the Thames.

Were the Icknield Way traceable near Thetford either to the north or south of the Little Ouse, which divides Norfolk from Suffolk at that point, Mr Russel, the active Board Schoolmaster, who with his sons scours the neighbourhood in search of objects of interest connected with the ancient history of the place, must have discovered some trace of it. When I called upon him recently, Mr Russel informed me that not even the tradition of the passage of the Icknield Way is kept alive at Thetford.

The total absence of any earlier trace of the Way between the German Ocean and Icklingham is probably the reason why the late Dr Guest adopted Icklingham as its starting point. Dr Guest considers Icklingham to have been the principal home of the Iceni, to the prejudice of their more generally recognized centre "Venta Icenorum" or Norwich.

Icklingham, which can still boast of its two parish churches, has doubtless been an important centre from the earliest times. It has even been preferred by so considerable an authority as Horsley to Cambridge, as the site of the ancient Camboritum.

Its name plainly connects Icklingham with the history of the Iceni, and Roman remains of all kinds, including hundreds of Roman coins, abundantly prove its subsequent occupation by

the Romans. Two very ancient stone coffins, with lids in perfect preservation, now exposed in the grounds of the Rectory, are of great antiquarian interest.

The adjoining and almost disused church of All Saints, with its old tower and thatched roof, overshadowed by the ancient trees which shut in the churchyard, contains features of the greatest interest, pointing to its early Saxon origin. The quaint half dislocated tiles, let into the altar steps, are well worth inspection, but cannot be attributed to the Romans.

It is probable that the Roman Icklingham like the modern village rested immediately on the river Lark, which is nowhere fordable there. The ford, by which the Icknield Way crossed the Lark, is about two miles higher up the stream at 'Lack-,' or, as it should be called, 'Lark-ford,' where I observed that its bed is gravelly. The site of the British Icklingham was probably on higher ground on the edge of the sandy plateau stretching northward to Thetford.

From Lackford onwards through Kentford to Newmarket the Icknield Way is identical with the modern road, as is clearly indicated by the Ordnance Survey. That the Way passed through Newmarket is proved by the deed of Henry III. referred to by Professor Babington, to which I have already alluded.

From Newmarket the Icknield Way proceeds across the Heath to Six-Mile Bottom, and thence in a south-westerly direction through Ickleton to Royston, leaving Chesterford to the left. During the portion of its course between Newmarket and Ickleton—a distance of 15 miles—the Icknield Way mostly presents the appearance of a wide and straight road. I believe however that this appearance is attributable not to the Romans, but to the engineering of the road in the reign of the Stuart Kings to facilitate their access to their favourite sporting headquarters at Newmarket.

The habitually winding course of the ancient British Way would have brought it alternately to the right or left of the rectified modern highway. It is probable that it did not invariably pass through the dykes by the same gaps as the modern road. For it is in this section of 15 miles that the

Icknield Way crosses the Cambridgeshire Dykes of which my friend, Professor Ridgeway, has treated so ably in a pamphlet, which ought to be known to all of you, that it seems quite unnecessary for me to touch upon them this afternoon in any detail.

I must however observe that I cannot accept the theory of my friend Professor Hughes that the line of the Via Devana is really that of a fifth dyke, and not of a Roman road. At certain points, for a short distance on either side of Worsted Lodge, where the Icknield Way cuts it at a right angle, the Via Devana might perhaps pass for a dyke. But no one who has followed it, as I have done, beyond Horseheath into the woodlands where the chalk leaves off, and where our dykes lose their *raison d'être*, can have any doubt that he is on the track of the Roman road from Colchester to Chester.

Diverging from the Newmarket-Chesterford road to the right at a point called "Stumps Cross," the Icknield Way, now a green road, crosses the Cam at the entrance of the village of Ickleton—like Icklingham, once an important centre of the Iceni.

Between Ickleton and Royston the Icknield Way pursues a course independent of any highway, maintaining for the greater part of the distance (about ten miles) the character of a grass or field road. It crosses the Brent Dyke below Heydon.

At Royston the Icknield Way crosses the Ermine Street at a right angle, the point of intersection being undermined by the famous Royston cave, which is curiously carved with quaint designs from profane and sacred history, offering an interesting puzzle to the antiquarian.

Immediately beyond Royston, the Icknield Way mounts on to the breezy common, where the dry exhilarating air of the golf links—now much frequented by Cambridge students—offers a refreshing contrast to the depressing atmosphere of the valley of the Cam.

Identical with the modern highway as far as Baldock, the Icknield Way at that point severs its connection with the modern Hitchin road, making for Ickleford, past the camp of Wilbury Hill, by a grassy track, which my friend Mr Allix,

to whom I am much indebted for assistance, followed throughout.

Crossing the insignificant streamlet the "Hiz," about two miles to the north of Hitchin, the Icknield Way makes nearly due west from Ickleford for Dunstable, by high chalk downs, the most striking of which is known as "Ravensburg Castle" (on the maps) or more generally as the "Beacon Hill." From the summit of this very striking eminence, which bears signs of having been an important British "oppidum" in pre-Roman times, the view over the Bedfordshire plains would alone amply repay the trouble of a journey from Cambridge expressly to enjoy it. It is within six miles of Hitchin by the Hexton road, which should be followed up to the point where the Icknield Way, in its full width, and showing its most attractive features, crosses the Hexton road to mount the down as a grass road. Hitchin should be regained by "Lilly Hoo," a two-mile ridge of crisp turf, the neck of which is cut by the Icknield Way at a right angle, at the point of connection of the Hoo with the headland of Ravensburg Castle. I am sure I can appeal to Professor Ridgeway, who was my companion, to endorse my recommendation of this excursion.

Between Ravensburg Castle and Dunstable the exact track of the Icknield Way is lost in the low-lying bays of clay of the Bedfordshire plain, which run up into the chalk downs. It is known to have passed through Limbury, adjoining Lea-grave, the source (I believe) of the river Lea.

At Dunstable, in the centre of the town, the Icknield Way crosses the Watling Street at a right angle, and continuing on its south-westerly course immediately outside the town, strikes the chalk downs again, never to leave them till it reaches the Thames.

It can hardly fail to interest a Cambridge audience to learn that the Icknield Way was in former days the recognised line of pilgrimages between Oxford and Cambridge. Although not the shortest, it was the surest way of getting from one University to the other, because of its distinctive merit of offering a high and dry thoroughfare, well raised above the swamps of the Ouse and its tributaries.

At a point about six miles to the east of Dunstable, the Icknield Way branches into an Upper and Lower Way. The Upper—a grassy track—scales the chalk down to the south, while the Lower is identical with the modern road to Ivingho, a place which gave its name to Scott's novel *Ivanhoe*, which was suggested by an old rhyme

Tring Wing and Ivinghoe (Ivanhoe)
 For striking of a blow,
 Hampden did forgoe
 And glad he could escape so.

The blow in question is said to have been dealt, during a game of tennis, by an ancestor of the famous Hampden to the Black Prince, whose name is associated with Princes Risborough, where he had a palace.

My friend Mr Allix and I did not hesitate a moment about giving the preference to the Upper road, which culminates in a beacon hill, overlooking the rolling plains of Buckinghamshire, the towers of Mentmore standing out in the distance.

Avoiding Tring, which it leaves a mile to the southward, the Icknield Way passes through Wendover to Princes Risborough—mostly in the guise of a modern road. It is between the two last-named places that a striking chalk mound is pointed out as the tomb of Cymbeline at the village of Kimble, as I have already mentioned.

I have already suggested to you a short excursion from Cambridge by Hitchin to Ravensburg Castle. I would now strongly recommend to your more active members a longer one, necessitating sleeping out two nights. It is that via Dunstable, Wendover, and Princes Risborough to Watlington, embracing most of the best preserved and beautiful features of the Icknield Way.

The Hare and Hounds Inn at Watlington provides excellent food and fair sleeping accommodation.

Onwards from Watlington to Goring, a distance of about fourteen miles, through Ipsden, the Icknield Way presents features for the most part much less striking. As it approaches Goring, it goes by the name of the "Hackney road," which becomes elsewhere "Hackneld Way." A roadside farm is

however marked as "Icknield Farm," and at Goring you find an "Icknield Villa."

Crossing the Thames by the ford to Streatley, the Icknield Way continued through Berkshire and Wiltshire, reaching the sea in Dorsetshire. But to-day we take leave of it at Goring, its course onward beyond the Thames presenting almost hopeless difficulties of identification.

Wednesday, November 29, 1899.

Dr GLAISHER, President, in the Chair.

The election of the following members was announced :

FRANCIS HENRY HILL GUILLEMARD, M.D., Gonville and Caius College.

WILLIAM HENRY BULLOCK-HALL, Six Mile Bottom.

J. W. CLARK, M.A., gave a lecture, illustrated by lantern slides:

- (1) ON THE VATICAN LIBRARY OF SIXTUS IV.
- (2) ON THE LIBRARY OF MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD.

Monday, February 12, 1900.

Dr GLAISHER, President, in the Chair.

The election of the following member was announced :

E. H. MINNS, B.A., Pembroke College.

Dr JAMES read a paper :

ON THE MANUSCRIPTS AT LAMBETH,
which has been published as a separate octavo publication.

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