

Plan
OF A PORTION OF
THE ROMAN ROAD
from
SILCHESTER TO STAINES,
PASSING THROUGH SURREY.

Illustrating the Paper on that subject by
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V.

THE ROMAN ROAD BETWEEN SILCHESTER
AND STAINES.

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INTRODUCTORY TO CERTAIN NOTES UPON THE SUBJECT, READ AT THE
INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY, MAY 10, 1854.

THE general subject of "Roads" is one well worthy the attentive study of all those inquiring minds which seek to trace back effects to their causes, they being among the most important means by which the civilization of mankind has been effected.

At the present moment, when the nations of the earth are either armed or arming for battle, it is interesting to consider, that not only have roads been the great engine of civilization, through the medium of peaceful communication and by the arts of peace; but they have been so to a very great degree by facilitating conquest, and imbuing either the conquerors or the conquered with the superior civilization and refinement of those nations with which they have thereby been respectively brought in contact.

Thus Greece, conquered by the arms of Rome, imposed the yoke of her arts and literature on her subduers. And Rome, in conquering other countries, conferred upon them the advantages of her own civilization.

Rome, the iron kingdom of prophecy, was the greatest military nation the world has ever seen: conquest was the breath of its nostrils. While the subject of military organization occupies almost exclusively the public atten-

tion, and while, as a part of it, the question of a short seven miles of road in a remote classical country excites so much discussion—the want of which has caused the voice of mourning to be heard in many an English home—it is interesting, and may be useful, to observe how perfect with respect to roads was the military organization of that great people whose foot-prints we are now tracing, and who left their mark so deeply on nearly all the countries of Europe as after the lapse of so many centuries to be still clearly discernible.

The principle of Roman power was centralization. Sure and rapid communication from the centre to all the extremities of the empire, the means by which it acted. No sooner was a lodgment made in any country than it was joined to the great heart of the empire by highways; along which, by means of military posts established at intervals, a safe and easy passage for the legions to or from the new conquest was secured.

Whenever the grasp of those mighty warriors was laid on a country, that grasp was of iron. It was made effectual and permanent, and indeed could only have been so, by establishing within the conquered country a system of communication by roads branching from the centre of power to the limits of the conquest, provided with military camps and posts at intervals, and with cross-roads of communication between the main routes. It is to this policy that we owe the existence of the road (with many others in Britain) forming the subject of the notes which will be found further on.

The ancient Romans are supposed to have made 14,000 miles of road in Italy alone.

Napoleon, the greatest military organizer of modern days, was not behind the Romans in this respect; and, in proportion to the duration of his empire, he

accomplished more than all the Appii and Flamini of antiquity.

In the New World, the system of roads which Pizarro found existing in Peru at the time of the conquest is very remarkable. Their number and excellence, as well as the elaborate arrangement of stages and post-houses, are described by Prescott the historian.

The following notes were appended by Lieutenant Grey,¹ of the 83rd Regiment, and Lieutenant Lushington, of the 9th Regiment, to the plan of a survey made by those officers of the Roman road between Silchester and Staines. The accompanying plan is reduced from their plan.

It may be premised that the absence of inscriptions which might have revealed the appellations bestowed by the Romans on the spots where their early residence in numbers is clearly indicated by relics, invests the particular localities of those towns or stations which are enumerated in the Itineraries with uncertainty.

For instance, Silchester has been supposed by some to be the site of the ancient Vindonum; by others, of Calleva; while arguments have been adduced by others to show that Henley and Reading are respectively on the site of Calleva.

The evidence furnished by the Iter Antonini is unsatisfactory and conflicting; but the 12th and 15th Itinera strongly indicate Farnham as Vindonum; and the 7th Iter, with equal apparent probability, points out Silchester as Calleva. It may be, perhaps, that the future discovery of other Roman roads may reconcile the discrepancies which appear to exist as to distance, in comparing the present known routes with the Itineraries.

R. M. College, March, 1855.

¹ Now Sir C. G. Grey, K.C.B., Governor of the Cape.

NOTES.

The military road between Staines and Silchester is one of the most remarkable memorials of the Roman power in Britain ; it extended from London to Bath, and coincided with a portion of the Port-way from Norwich to Exeter. From Silchester, the ancient "*Calleva Attrebatum*," situated at the intersection of several great roads, which have been frequently traversed by the Roman armies during their occupation of this country, the line now surveyed proceeds eastward through Strathfieldsaye (the seat of the Duke of Wellington) in a right line along what is called the Park Lane, which is scarcely passable in the winter season. The precise spot at which it crossed the Blackwater river is uncertain, the line being interrupted by cultivated ground as far as Westcourt House (the residence of Mr. St. John), built, according to tradition, upon the road itself, whose direction is here marked by the avenue to the mansion. Some faint traces of the road again exist on the ground northward of Finchampstead church ; but on the eastern side of the heights its course is discovered extending in an unbroken line along a level country from thence to Easthampstead Plain, and bearing the fanciful name of the "*Devil's Highway*." The ascent of the road to this commanding plateau can be distinctly observed by a deep fosse on one side ; but the rectilinear direction, which had been hitherto preserved, appears now to have been changed, in order to avoid a deep and marshy ravine, and the road bends northward, so as to pass by the head of the ravine, and afterwards regains its former direction, and thus crosses the plain. This part of the road runs through Wickham Bushes, which have long been remarkable for the quantity of antique pottery from time to time discovered there ; it is also in the immediate vicinity of the strong intrenchment usually called "*Cæsar's Camp*," which crowns the summit of a height projecting from the plateau, and is strengthened on the side of the latter by a double parapet and ditch.

The road descends from the plain on the eastern side, and proceeds towards Bagshot. At Duke's Hill, near this town, it forms an angle of about 25 degrees with the produced line of its original direction, passes through a plantation, in which it can with difficulty be traced ; its existence here is, however, well known to the people of the country. At about a mile from Duke's Hill the road crosses a marsh, where, having been raised to a considerable height, it is in some parts very distinct. From this marsh it runs through a garden in the occupation of Mr. Hammond, and the substratum, which consists of excellent gravel, having been removed for the purpose of repairing the modern roads in the neighbourhood, the outline presents a remarkable appearance : from

hence the road again enters some thick plantations, and for about half a mile can with difficulty be traced ; it afterwards runs over cultivated ground, and from thence to the Sunning Hill road is very conspicuous. In the immediate vicinity of the road at this spot there exist great quantities of Roman tiles, bricks, &c., which, from the land having, till within the last three years, been left in an uncultivated state, appear to have escaped observation. This part of the road is therefore deserving of minute inspection. From the Sunning Hill road it crosses some low meadow land, where it can only be discovered with great difficulty ; and about a mile further, at its entrance into Windsor Park, it is for some distance totally lost. There is, however, a portion left in excellent condition between that place of entrance and the point where its line of direction cuts Virginia Water ; it can also be distinguished in a spot between that portion and the water, where one of the Park rides runs for about 300 yards along it. The old labourers in the Park state, that this part of the ride having never required any repair, they had been led to conclude that it was formed on the surface of some old road. It must be observed that the part of the Virginia Water which is crossed by the direction of the Roman road is artificial, and has been excavated only within the last forty years. From this spot the direction passes through the inn-yard at Virginia Water, and it is said that a foundation of gravel was formerly discovered there. On the brow of the hill above Egham, and in the direction of the road, within the last few months, part of its substratum, the foundations of some buildings, together with a variety of Roman coins and other remains, have been discovered.

The commanding nature of the ground about Egham, joined to the discovery of the remains, and the agreement of the distance from London with that which is stated in the *Itinera*, seem to point out this place as the site of the ancient Bibracte ; while the neighbouring part of the Thames may with equal probability be considered as the place of the station Ad Pontes. A chain of forts appears to have commanded the river between Staines and Chertsey. Three of these, of a square form, still exist near Penton Hook.

Nearly in the continuation of the line from Duke's Hill to Egham lie the remains of the Roman road from London to Staines, which are mentioned by Dr. Stukeley ; a portion of it near Ashford, on the Middlesex side of the river, was a few years since distinctly visible, but it is now wholly obliterated.