



The Devil's Highway between Bagshot and Silchester.

By G. A. Kempthorne.

THE road we call the Devil's Highway formed part of the Roman road connecting London with Bath and the West of England. Crossing the Thames near Staines the line of this great roadway was traced by a party of Sandhurst officers in 1835 through Virginia Water, skirting the eastern border of the county, to Duke's Hill, near Bagshot. Here it crosses into Berkshire, and suddenly changes its direction from south-west to nearly west, making straight for the Roman town at Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum), whence it is continued on to Marlborough and Bath.

After the destruction of Silchester, about the year 493, the road was allowed to fall into disuse, but up to the beginning of last century several miles of causeway could be seen on the heath between Bagshot and Finchampstead, trenched on each side and in places as much as 90 feet wide. To this the people gave the name of the Devil's Causeway or the Devil's Highway; a name which of late years has been generally applied to the whole stretch of road between Staines and Silchester.

Where the road enters the county, at the north-west corner of Bagshot Park, and just off the Bracknell and Bagshot road, is Rapley's farm. In one of the fields belonging to this farm, which is marked on the ordnance map as Roman Down, a quantity of Roman remains were found by Mr. Handasyd, of Hurst, in 1783. A full description of these will be found in *Archæologia* of that date; and the field seems to have been the site of a Roman station of some importance.

Between Windlesham and Duke's Hill the line of the road passes through woods and is hard to make out, but the south-west direction is plainly indicated by a cutting at one point. We next pick it up as a broad grass drive beyond and to the west of the lake which lies to the south of the farm, showing that somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood it must have changed its direction.

No satisfactory explanation of this turn had been given till Mr. Hughes showed the Rapley station to be really the meeting place of two roads; one from Silchester, and the other from Winchester through Farnham, and that they then ran in common as far as Staines.

The lie of the ground has been much altered of late years and where there were originally two ponds, separated by the embankment of the road, there is one large lake, while the road has disappeared.

About a mile to the N.E., on Tower Hill, is a small earthwork of irregular shape, described in Gough's Camden as a Roman Camp.

Following the grass drive westward from the edge of the lake, after about a quarter of a mile the way is blocked by a plantation. But if we continue the line through the trees we soon come upon a forest road running almost straight ahead on the line of the old one as far as Crowthorne.

There is no point of interest till we begin the ascent to Easthampstead Plain, where a cutting is marked in the side of the hill on the left showing an old track. For some distance along the plateau the road can be seen apparently much in its original condition, the ditch on the north side being very well marked.

After crossing the ride from Cæsar's Camp along the summit of the Ridge to the "Jolly Farmer" on Bagshot Hill, where a low grassy mound in the centre marks the site of an old jibbet, a deep ravine is reached. At the head of this, a little off the road is a collection of very ancient thorn bushes, known as Wickham bushes. This has long been supposed to be the site of an old village, owing to the many fragments of brick and tile found in the cartruts, or scraped up by the rabbits. The earliest account we have of it is from the pen of Mr. Handasyd, who described it in 1783, together with the Rapley village. Coins, broken pottery, tiles and iron nails are found there in considerable quantities, showing that the village must have been of some size. Mrs. Hawker of Easthampstead has some excellent specimens of Roman coins found there ranging in date from A.D. 117—383.

Less than half a mile to the north is the large irregular entrenchment called Cæsar's Camp. It crowns the summit of a branch projecting from the north side of the plateau, and is surrounded by a double rampart on all sides. From its irregular shape it is supposed to be of British origin, but was probably used afterwards by the Romans as a "Castrum Æstivum."

After passing Wickham Bushes the course is continued to a

point near the back of Broadmoor Asylum. On descending Broadmoor Hill a deep cutting can be seen on the right branching off in the direction of the Roman village, which was apparently a loop road rejoining the main one after passing through the Bushes. All the way from here into Crowthorne an old track is visible on the left, re-appearing at intervals, where it is cut out of the side of the hill, and at a somewhat higher level than the modern one.

At Brooker's Corner the forest road which we have been following ends in the Sandhurst and Bracknell one. The course of the Roman road is continued straight on into the Crowthorne School Recreation Ground, passing right through Circle Hill by a cutting about 20 feet deep. For about three-quarters of a mile the line is now marked through the heather by the remains of the Causeway, here about eight feet above the ground level. Building is at present going on fast along the Duke's Ride, and the gardens of the new houses project on to the old road. In several places already the foundations have in this way been cut into, and a quantity of grit removed, which has been found very useful for mixing mortar.

After crossing the Wokingham Road, a few yards north of the parish stone, the Ravenswood estate is entered. Here the Causeway was long ago destroyed by cultivation, but there is one point of interest. At a spot marked in the Ordnance Map, and a few yards off the supposed line of the Devil's Highway, is a very ancient stone. It is about three Roman miles from the mile stone, discovered near Finchampstead Church, and if, as has been suggested, this was of the same origin, it may easily have got shifted from its position when the land was ploughed.

Crossing the railway about 500 yards from the Wellington College Station Bridge, we come on the grassy drive leading from Mr. Walter's new lodge to Heathpool. This lake seems to have been formed by building an embankment across the course of a small stream to form a convenient watering place for travellers. The embankment, along the top of which the road runs, is situated at the north end, the edge here being quite straight, and it is so marked in the earliest maps of the country.

Proceeding up the Finchampstead Ridges we leave the modern road on the left. At this spot a deep cutting is visible. The old road takes a course which avoids part of the steepness of the ascent and makes for Roman lodge, which is built on it.

Except for a cutting, where it descends the hill by Sparvell farm, there is no trace of the road till we come to Finchampstead Church.

The church hill was the site of a rectangular camp, and, though a good deal destroyed, the remains of the vallum can still be traced. The road passed just to the north of it and a loop road ran up to the Camp rejoining the main one the other side, being cut deeply out of the side of the hill so as to enable troops to descend under cover in either direction.

Below the Camp the road is marked on the left hand side of the lane leading from "The White Horse" Inn to the Nine Mile Ride for about 120 yards, and where the lane turns off sharp to the right it enters the fields of Webb's Farm. In a dry summer its course through these fields may be seen by the growth of the crops, making for the pond at the farm, which Mr. Lyon has suggested may have been of Roman origin. In Six Acres field a Roman milestone was turned up by the plough in 1841. The exact spot was carefully marked down on the Ordnance Map, and the stone removed to Bannisters, where it now is, in Admiral Digby's garden.

West Court is built actually on the Roman road, and beyond the house is a straight drive over a quarter of a mile long, which is the road itself.

Though it cannot now be traced, we know that the road was continued straight on for a mile and a half to the junction of the Blackwater and Whitewater river at Little Ford. From here it still exists as a straight lane leading into Risely village. It passed actually a little south of the village, and can be traced across the Reading Road, when it disappears into cultivated ground. We have two names now which guide us as to the direction. In the direct line westward is Coldharbour Wood, probably the site of a Roman villa, and further on the village of Stamford End, where there was an old ford over the Loddon. In the immediate neighbourhood it may be noted Strathfield Saye, Strathfield Turgis, and Strathfield Mortimer derive their names from the Devil's Highway.

The road skirted the north of Strathfield Saye Park, but cannot actually now be traced till we reach Park Lane. This long straight lane is undoubtedly of Roman origin, and runs for three miles nearly right up to the west gate of the town of Silchester.