



## Romano-British Berkshire.

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It was unfortunate that Mr. Haverfield was unable at the last moment to undertake the part of this volume allotted to this period, for from his unequalled knowledge of Roman remains we might have expected an article as nearly perfect as the present state of knowledge could permit. As it was, the general editor, Mr. Page, came to the rescue at the last moment, and though his work is scholarly and careful, it shows in several places indications that the subject has been "got up" for the occasion, and that the writer was not intimately acquainted with the area with which he was dealing. Nowhere is this more obvious than in those paragraphs dealing with roads, one of the most difficult but most important parts of the subject. Still the work is careful and critical, and errs rather on the side of omissions than from the hasty adoption of unsubstantiated theories.

I propose in these pages to examine some of the roads in detail. Of the route from Cirencester to Silchester, the course described by Mr. Page is that of the present road from Speen to Baydon, and as such it is shown on his map. But a careful examination of the route shows that while the Roman road coincides for the most part with the present highway as far as Wickham,—occasionally, however, running by the side as is shown on the Ordnance maps,—from this point to Speen the course seems to be in some respects different. At the gate of Oakhanger drive the present road deviates slightly to the south, while the track of the Roman way keeps quite straight on. It crosses the modern road before the latter reaches the "Five Bells" Inn, and seems to continue in a straight line to the road by Wickham Church. Here there appear to be faint indications of it below the stables of Wickham House, and if the same line be further produced it crosses the Park,—keeping on the high ground,—and the field beyond, passes over the drive to Wormstall, and enters the present high-road a few yards further to the south-east where the road makes a slight angle. It seems probable that the Roman road made a turn here too, as otherwise it would have descended the hill and left the ridge, a course which seems unlikely. I imagine that

here the present road for awhile coincides with the old way which seems after a time to pass through the wood to the south of the road, crossing the Boxford and Hoe Benham road near the cottage and making for the wood beyond. Here again I can find no clear signs, but it formed, I fancy, the boundary of Boxford Parish from here for some way on, if one may trust the evidence of a Charter given in the Abingdon Chronicle. If this were so it passes the Chapel on Wickham Heath and follows the lane from there till it joins the high-road again, and so along the road till it reaches Stockcross, though it may keep a little to the south of this line. It seems unlikely that from this point to Speen it coincided with the present road, which neither runs straight nor follows the ridge of the hill; rather would it appear to have passed straight through the village to the south end of the little plantation, and from there to have gone straight to Spinoe. The route from Wickham, as I have sketched it is by no means a straight line, but it seems likely that this section followed, approximately at least, an earlier ridgeway road from Speen to Membury Fort.

In dealing with the route from Marlborough to Speen, Mr. Page refers to a survey made by the Sandhurst cadets in 1836, but does not commit himself to accepting the results of their investigations. The survey in question traced the road from near Littlecote to Oaken copse at Denford, and thence by Stibbs copse to Radley Farm and so by Winding Wood and Benham Burslot till it reached the road last described not far from the cross roads above Hoe Benham.

Curiously enough the late Rev. W. H. Summers of Hungerford, who like myself was unaware of this survey, wrote to me on the 26th April 1905: "You will remember noticing that the boundary of certain fields and woods at Denford ran in a straight but interrupted line, and your surmising that this indicated the course of an ancient road. I have since come upon some very interesting facts in this connection.

- "1. If this line be followed in a westerly direction, it will be found that it leads straight to Rudge, where Roman remains have been found, then about two miles south of Mildenhall (would this be the position of Folly Farm, the site of Cunetio?) and then follows the line of the existing Roman road traceable from Marlborough to Bath, making allowance for the slight deviations which often occur in a long Roman road over broken country.

"2. But if the line be continued eastward it does not point to Speen, but to a place on the Ermin street about 3 or 4 miles N.W. (near Benham Burslot). I am told that an old man now dead, named Allen, used to talk about the traces of a very straight road, upon which he had come when ploughing the fields near Radley Bottom."

The following day he sent me a postcard saying "Since writing yesterday I have seen a large map of Wiltshire, and find that the position of Folly Farm at Mildenhall exactly suits my theory."

On May 17th he wrote: "I keep getting fresh links of evidence about the Roman Road; one very important one is that a piece of old road was come upon some years ago in ploughing just N. of Oaken copse."

I have thought it well to give these extracts in full, though at the time I was unable to find any evidence of the road near Benham Burslot, and contented myself with informing Mr. Page that Mr. Summers had a theory on the subject. Since reading the account of the survey in 1836 I have been over the ground carefully, and have found fresh evidence which I think has not been noticed before, and which I will give in detail.

I could find no traces of the Roman road from the county boundary till I reached the junction of the Hungerford and Wantage Road with the Leverton and Denford Lane; but from here for about 50 yards it seems to have coincided approximately with the present lane to the east. The lane deviates to the south at a little triangular wood by Peaked Lot, and in a gravel pit by the side of this I noticed that there were a number of large flints on the surface, some of which had fallen into the pit. Near by a small hole had been dug, just inside the wood, and here many large flints had been thrown out, and I could see a few still *in situ* about a foot beneath the surface, embedded in a fine white gravel.

A fence to the south of Great Hidden farm seems to indicate the course of the road, but the land has been ploughed and no evidences remain. Over the next field there are no signs, and then we come to Oaken copse, the north fence of which is in the same straight line. The coincidence is in this case the more strange, as these two fences are in different parishes and manors. Through Oaken copse I could find nothing decided, though Lieut. Ready in 1836 found 700 yards "the substratum of which is nearly entire." He does not describe the direction, but the north side of the wood is nearly 700 yards long, and it was near this that the piece of old

road was met with according to Mr. Summers. The line then passes through Heath-hanger copse, where no traces of the road were found in 1836, but I noticed two parallel ditches, about 12 yards apart, very indistinct in places, which I found to be in the same line, and between them at one spot a number of large flints. This brings us down to Radley bottom, and the land west of the lane there has been under plough. Across the road, however, the surface seems undisturbed, and the slope very steep ; and here I noticed a shelf, running obliquely up the bank, starting from the line already traced but running to the North-east at an angle to the original line, so as better to negotiate the steep incline. At the top of the hill I found two deep trenches, which continued through Stibbs wood, in a direction almost parallel to the former course, and pointing direct to Radley Farm. Between here and Three Gate copse the land has been ploughed, and the Road must have deviated for a few yards from the straight, as the parallel trenches appeared again in this wood, but a little to the north of the line in Stibbs wood.

Here all signs ceased, as all the land has been ploughed ; but if the road continued in the same line it would pass in front of Winding-wood House and Elgar's farm, through Orpenham farm and the cottages close by, across the south corner of Wormstall park, reaching the Elcot lane where the Kintbury and Welford parish boundary crosses it. At this point, I imagine, the road must have turned, as if it continued straight on it would have been compelled to have ascended a very steep bank, where there appear no traces of it. If on the contrary it negotiated the bank obliquely, as in the case of Radley Bottom, it would have followed a similar shelf, still faintly to be seen, crossing the footpath to Benham Burslot just at the top of the gardens, and the other road to the Burslot close to the high-road, where it would have met the Cirencester road before described. Of course none of these pieces of evidence are in themselves certain, but taken together they have, I venture to think, some value ; the matter, however, could be easily decided by a little excavation in these woods, if the necessary funds and permission were available.

So much for the road from Marlborough ; its continuation to Silchester is not so clear. It seems probable that it crossed the Kennet near the present Newbury Bridge, reaching it by Northbrook Street, which is built on a causeway of gravel either natural or artificial. Its further course is unknown, but I understand that a bed of concrete, the remains it was thought of a Roman road, was discovered about twenty years ago at a spot now occupied by the

Paddock of the Newbury Racecourse. This is almost if not exactly in a straight line between the bridge and the Brimpton barrows, from which point the road to Silchester is fairly clear.

The early roads, that is those existing before Roman times, are only just alluded to, and perhaps scarcely belong to this subject ; but it seems a pity that Mr. Page has not given us further details, with references, of the various theories as to other roads, which have been made from time to time by different writers. Some of these no doubt are fanciful, but may contain a germ of truth ; some of the roads are doubtless pre-Roman, but others, such as that from Bray to Reading and perhaps to Speen, which would bring into line the fragment found at Shaw Crescent, rest on evidence too great to be ignored. The very distribution of the Roman remains indicates the existence of other roads, not perhaps of Roman origin ; one must clearly have run from near Brimpton towards Wallingford or Dorchester, while another, one would suspect, ran from Speen by Wyfield, Fawley, Wantage, Garford and so on northwards.

There is still much to be done before the geography of Roman times can be restored, and to do this all possible fragments of evidence require collecting as well as sifting ; but first we must distinguish between roads that are Roman and those which are earlier, and remember that both classes were probably in use during the Roman period.

A few minor inaccuracies may be noted in the Topographical list.

Bussock camp should be given under Winterbourne.

The hoard of coins mentioned under Chaddleworth is given again correctly under Welford, in which parish it was found.

Stanmore farm is not in East Illesley but in Beedon.

Under Uffington, p. 215, a reference is given to Blackwood. Sept. 1882, p. 319, "The Berkshire Ridgeway." This date is evidently wrong, as nothing on the subject appears in the volumes for 1882.

Wickham is in the parish of Welford.

HAROLD PEAKE.