

ON THE
Roman Roads and Occupation
IN
NORTH CHESHIRE.*

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IT will hardly be necessary for me to make any excuse or apology to a Chester audience for offering to their notice some remarks upon matters intimately connected with the early history of Cheshire, and I shall at once proceed to the subject for our evening's consideration.

In a military occupation extending over more than four centuries, the Romans had diffused over the length and breadth of the land the benefits of civilization, and the people seem to have adopted the arts of their conquerors, and in a certain way to have naturalised them. Many of our most important cities—such as London, York, Lincoln, and Chester—have kept even to recent time the traditions of those early days, and are still prosperous towns. Others, as Wroxeter and Silchester, are utterly ruined, buried under the green sod, but marked by immense substructures which show what has been; while in other places again we have hardly a remnant of building, but an abundance of broken pottery and relics, which show that peaceful homesteads had existed there for successive generations. These villages, as they may be called, have been discovered in late years near Middlewich, Wilderspool, Wigan, and Walton-le Dale, and contrast strongly with the more important places before named,—and it is with them that we are at present concerned.

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The Roman geography of this island, while it has always been an important object with archæologists, is, nevertheless, attended with peculiar difficulties. The original authorities are few, and in fact, consist of little more than lists of names. The earliest of these is the geographer Ptolemy of Alexandria, who flourished about A.D. 120. His work consists of geographical tables, in which the latitudes and longitudes are given in a rather indefinite form. We shall merely consider his account of this neighbourhood. He first gives a sketch of the coast line. We may suppose him sailing round the island on the west side, and taking the position of the rivers, havens, and headlands as they occurred from north to south, giving the latitude and longitude of each. This, however, has been done to so little purpose that not one of them has been identified, and the havens of the *Setantii*, the *Belisama* estuary and the *Seteia* estuary, have been assigned to all the different rivers from the Wyre to the Dee, according to the notions of various writers.

In his remarks upon the interior of the country, after describing various tribes in Scotland, Ptolemy says:—"Reaching to both seas dwell the *Brigantes*;" and he names nine towns belonging to them, including York and Rhigodunum. The last was at a very early period assigned to Warrington, simply on account of a supposed similarity of name. "South of the *Brigantes*, to the extreme west, dwell the *Ordovices*, and their towns are *Mediolanum* and *Brannogenium*." These have always been supposed to be in North Wales. "More eastern than these are the *Cornavii*, whose towns are *Deva*, the head quarters of the Twentieth Legion, surnamed the Victorious, and *Viroconium* *" "Next after these are the *Coritavi*, whose towns are *Lindum* and *Rhage*," which have been assigned to Lincoln and Chester.

Now from these quotations it will be remarked that no boundaries of any sort are given, and that each writer has fixed his own boundary according to his own theories. Thus, some have made the Mersey the boundary between the *Brigantes* and the *Cornavii*, others have assigned the Ribble, and the *Setantii* are not named elsewhere except in connection with their haven. Some have placed them in Cumberland. Ptolemy lived at Alexandria, and while his geography is a wonderful work for the period, the rudeness of his instruments, and the insufficiency of his observations, prevent anything like the necessary precision which would be required in the present day.

Another document, equally important in connection with this subject, but in some respects still more imperfect, is the *Itinerarium*

* Otherwise *Uriconium* (Wroxeter), five miles east of Shrewsbury.

of Antoninus. The object of this work has not hitherto been elucidated, and doubts have been expressed as to the period in which it was composed. I have no hesitation in expressing my belief that it is neither more nor less than a book of the post-roads, formed and managed for and by the Imperial Government, most likely by one of the Antonines. But it will not be necessary to take up our time by entering further into this question at present.

A portion of the second of these post-routes runs from York to Chester and is thus described:—

Eburacum		York.
Calcaria	M.P. ix	Tadcaster.
Camboduno	„ xx	
Mamucio	„ xviii	Manchester.
Condate	„ xviii	
Deva Leg xx victrix	„ xx	Chester.

It is evident that one or more post-stations have been omitted here, as the actual distance between York and Chester is 106 miles against the 85 miles of the *Itinerary*. As there has never been any dispute about Tadcaster, the first stage from York, and *Mamucium* or Manchester, the second from Chester, the difficulty is in the stages between Manchester and Tadcaster, *Cambodunum* being the only station named. Whitaker, in his usual positive manner, places it at Slack, near Halifax, simply on the ground that it was 22 miles from Manchester; other writers place it at Almondbury, near Huddersfield, others near Gritland. But as it was 20 miles from *Calcaria* or Tadcaster, and Tadcaster being 58 miles from Manchester (*Mamucium*), it is evident that one or two stations must have been omitted. *Cambodunum* would be not far from Leeds if that was the route, and we might expect to find a station on the eastern side of the Yorkshire hills, and another on the western side. This must always have been a very difficult country to travel over; indeed, all the passes into Yorkshire are proverbially bad—the best being the one over Blackstonedg, which we suppose to have been the Roman post-route.

From *Mamucium* (Manchester) to *Deva* (Chester) there have been two routes from time immemorial—the one going by Stretford, Northwich, and Delamere Forest; the other by Stretford, Lymm, Wilderspool, and Frodsham; and upon one of these lines was the post station *Condate*. This has also been the subject of much dispute—Camden, Gale, and other early Archaeologists, placed it at Congleton, from a supposed similarity of name. Horsley and Stukeley placed it at Northwich, Whitaker and late Cheshire writers at Kielderton.

The first and most important point in fixing the position is the distance between Chester on the one side and Manchester on the other, as given in the *Itinerary*, viz., xviii miles from Manchester and xx from Chester. Now the actual distance from Manchester to Northwich is xx miles, and from Northwich to Chester xviii miles, while the distances on the other route are, xviii from Manchester to Wilderspool, and xx from Wilderspool to Chester; in exact accordance with the *Itinerary*.

But with respect to Kinderton, besides the distances not at all agreeing with those of the *Itinerary*, there is no direct road from either Chester or Manchester to that place; and the course which Whitaker took from Manchester would be eight or nine miles out of the way, and as King-street is the only way back again, it would be much the same in getting to Chester. The Ordnance map shows this very plainly, and has rendered these enquiries much easier than at any former period.*

By Dr. Kendrick's kindness I am enabled to show the course of all the roads connected with Chester, Middlewich, Manchester, and Wilderspool, which are named Roman road or street, as given in the Ordnance Survey. These lines of road, for the purpose of being visible to persons at a glance, are strongly marked, but we may fancy a slender line running along the centre of each to be the precise line of the Roman roads. Commencing at Stretford, one line runs through part of Dunham Park, by Bucklow Hill, along Holford-street, to Northwich, and then over Delamere Forest, at the foot of Eddisbury Hill, by Kelsall, to Chester. This course is as direct as it can be, and the breaks, which are of later date, are very few, and of no importance.

Whitaker's description of it is very misleading. He says, "From Buckley Hill it passed to Mere Town, going in the same line and retaining the same name. And about two miles beyond the latter, passing the hollow channel of a brook, it assumes the name of Holford street, and preserves it for half a mile together. A little beyond the conclusion of this, the present road beginning to tend too much towards Northwich, the Roman insensibly steals away to the left, but about a mile beyond the point, and in the direction of the course, we recover it again. And this new part of it is a well gravelled lane, denominated street, and extending in a right line for four or five miles together." (*Hist. of Manchester*,) v. I, p. 142.) When we examine the map accompanying this Paper, we see at once that the road we have been

* See Map accompanying this Paper.

fracing could not by any chance have been intended for Middlewich or Kinderton. It has pointed all along to Northwich, and leaves Middlewich five miles to the south. So far from the Roman road "stealing insensibly," it actually forms an acute angle with King-street, and yet strange enough, Whitaker's assertion has been adopted by all who have written upon the subject, and it may be particularly noticed that King-street is two miles to the east of Northwich, and that its continuation northwards is in the direction of Wilderspool.

There are two other early roads running southwards from Middlewich, one going to Nantwich and the other towards Sandbach. These are all the roads marked as Roman that centre in Middlewich, and while there is no road leading direct from Middlewich to Chester, neither is there any road leading from Chester to Middlewich. The actual line of road of the *Itinerarium* left the first described road in Dunham Park, and, going along Warrington-lane and Pepper-street, in Lymm, got to Wilderspool by Stoney-street. It then went along the present highway, and, passing by Frodsham, fell into a road named Street, at Bridge Trafford, and so proceeded to Chester.

The late Ven. Archdeacon Wood was the first to bring before the public the proofs of Roman occupation near Middlewich. The Archdeacon unfortunately laboured under some disadvantages. He adopted Whitaker's fancies as given in the "History of Manchester," and of course was not aware that *Mamucium* and *Mancunium* were different places, and he seems to have had no particular acquaintance with Roman sites generally. Till the Archdeacon found the Roman remains in the Harboro' Field, there really was no evidence that the Romans had occupied the spot at all. In a paper contributed by him to the first volume of this Society he brings the following evidence that Kinderton was the *Condate* of the Roman *Itinerarium* :—

I In the name Kinderton we have a corruption of "Condate," or as Whitaker remarks, "*Condate* is well echoed in Kinderton."—

II. We find at this place a Roman camp at the confluence of two rivers.—

III. The distances from Kinderton to Manchester, by Stretford, and from Kinderton to Chester, agree with the distances given in the *Itinerarium* between *Condate* and these places.—

IV. We have a Roman road called Kind street, terminating at Kinderton.—

V. We find at the Broadway, in Kinderton, the junction of six Roman roads, which must have rendered it a place of note, and a station of importance."

Early in the last century an Englishman, Bertram, living at Copenhagen, professed to have found an old manuscript describing Britain as it was in the time of the Romans, and including what he called *Diaphragmata*, in fact another series of *Itinera*, differing in some respects from those of Antonine. It is hardly necessary to say now that this work is acknowledged to be an unprincipled forgery, and the mischief it has done in confusing the geography of Roman Britain can scarcely be appreciated. We shall at present leave it out of sight altogether.

And now to reply to the late Archdeacon's five propositions.

I. Etymological evidence is always hazardous, as is shown in this very word *Condate*, which was at first placed at Congleton, for precisely the same reason that it has since been placed at Kinderton. Besides other etymological difficulties, I do not think that a single instance could be adduced of the termination "ton" being added to a Roman name in the form of Kinderton: it is called Cinbretone in "Domesday."

II. Though there has been a Roman town or village at or near Middlewich, there certainly has never been a camp or fortress there.

III. The distances between this place and Manchester on one side, and Chester on the other, do not at all agree with the *Itinerarium*, and it is only by altering these numbers in every particular that Whitaker arrived at his conclusions. He says (*Hist. of Manchester*, vol 1, p. 145,) "The distance of this station from *Mancunium* is fixed by the sixth Iter of Richard (Bertram's forgery) at 36 miles, but in the tenth at 23, and by the tenth and second of Antonine at only 18. And in this diversity of information we are fully at liberty to choose such of the measures as best agree with the real distance, and to reject all of them if none agree," a process which Whitaker thoroughly entered upon and carried out.

IV. King-street, under the same management, and for similar etymological reasons, was transformed by him into Kind-street, but not a shadow of proof has been given, so far as I am aware, that it ever bore that name.

V. With reference to the Broadway at Kinderton, the Archdeacon seems to have adopted Whitaker's notion that two or more Roman roads might meet immediately at the gate of the fortress, though coming in various directions. There is nothing, however, in the plans of Roman towns or fortresses to support this notion. We have in Chester a fair specimen of the arrangement of a Roman city, with its four gates, one on each side, and where a road takes a new direction, branching off from the original line, at a greater or less distance from the gate.

There is one curious circumstance mentioned by Archdeacon Wood in a note—"The farmers tell me that they find this road (from Occleston Green towards Wem, in Shropshire) very little below the grass sod, and that, like many of the Roman roads, it has, at intervals, narrow footways branching from it." It would be very desirable to know something more about these footways, as I am not aware of having heard of any other instance.

In Part VII., p. 236, of the *Journal* of the Chester Archaeological Society, there is an abstract of an article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1862, by Mr. Francis R. Carroll, which requires a short notice. He supposes that *Condate* stood on the present site of Manchester, and *Deva* at Frodsham, as he says that there is "a great similarity in the sounds of Weaver and Deva." He places *Bovium* at Chester, and then comes round to Kinderton, where he places *Mediolanum*. I think it is hardly necessary to make any observations upon this topography, but it serves to show how very uncertain the attempts to establish a correct system of Itineraries are. Mr. Carroll sees the difference between *Mamucium* and *Mancunium*, as he places the former at Castleshaw, near Rochdale, and the latter at Blackrod. Ono other Iter, named by Mr. Carroll, the eleventh, from *Segontium* to *Deva*, which has always been supposed to be from Carnarvon to Chester, he takes from Frodsham to Sedbergh in Yorkshire, observing "the name of Sedbergh is more Roman, and is more like in sound to *Segontio*, than Carnarvon." It is sufficient to say that the commencement of this Iter, is from *Caer Seiont*, which is clearly the original of *Segontium*.

I have already observed that we are indebted to the late Mr. Archdeacon Wood for the actual proofs of Roman occupation at Kinderton, but he seems to have adopted implicitly all Whitaker's notions, and consequently got into inextricable difficulties. We have, therefore, to set aside the assertions of the historian of Manchester, and shall now proceed to an examination of the termination of the eleventh Iter of Antonine.

It will not be necessary for me to go into the various hypotheses which have been started respecting this Iter, which ends at *Mediolanum*, but it is generally acknowledged that it went from north to south on the western side of the kingdom. But not one of the names in it is found elsewhere, except that of *Condate*, which appears to have been 17 miles from *Mediolanum*, and this is the only direct clue we have for tracing the road. At Wilderspool evidences of Roman occupation have been found, and at exactly 17 miles to the south we

come to Middlewich, where similar remains in still greater abundance have been discovered. These two places—Wilderspool and Middlewich—are connected by a road of Roman construction, (perhaps one of the most remarkable in the kingdom,) which is traceable northwards to Lancaster.

I consider it quite certain that the Romans were acquainted with the salt-springs in the vale of the Weaver, and in all probability Middlewich was a central and important point. With respect to Northwich, which the road leaves two miles to the west, one may reasonably doubt, notwithstanding the name of Castle has been given to part of it, whether it was ever fortified; certainly not by the Romans. The Castle-hill, as I remember it (for it is now much altered), consisted of two peaks, as one may call them, one of them rather higher than the other, but not capable of holding more than a dozen or 15 men, and affording no shelter from the ground (nearly as high) just behind. I should be more inclined to consider them as beacons, but will not be very positive any way.

The road which has just been described has been found in remarkable preservation for two or three miles southwards from Wilderspool, running through Stretton, seven yards wide, and formed of large pieces of broken sandstone covered with a thick coating of gravel, much upon the plan of our best road makers of the present day. The same construction was found at Haydock, in Lancashire, eight miles to the north of Wilderspool; and it would be very desirable, if possible, to ascertain whether King-street to the south is formed in the same way.

Any member of this Society wishing to follow up the subject more fully is referred to the early volumes of the *Transactions* of the "Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire."

In conclusion, I beg to draw attention to what I believe to be the very earliest event connected with Chester. It is told by Tacitus, in his *Life of Agricola*, and, though no locality is mentioned, it could at that time have happened only on the west coast, and I believe that the Romans had no other possible station for such an occurrence. The story is as follows:—The Roman General Ostorius, in the year 50, advanced against a tribe called by Tacitus the *Cangi*, "whose territory extends to the Irish Sea,*" but he was called back by some

* Ptolemy names the promontory of the *Cangani*, which is generally considered to be the great Ormeshead; and we have also pigs of lead from the same neighbourhood with the name *Ceangis*, A.D. 60.

disturbances among the *Brigantes*. One of his successors, Suetonius Paulinus, in 61, had reached the Menai Straits, when the insurrection of Boadicea broke out; and amongst the troops with which he marched from North Wales towards London, Tacitus tells us, were the Vexillarii of the Twentieth Legion, evidently showing that the Legion itself was left behind. In the time of Ptolemy it was fixed at Chester, but there can be little doubt that Chester was already a Roman settlement; and that Paulinus, leaving the main body there, and so disposed as to keep up his communications, took with him that portion called the Vexillarii, who, having been a certain period in the service, were favoured troops, still attached to the *Vexillum*, or standard, but called into the field only under especial circumstances.

Twenty-one years after this, namely, A.D. 83, Vespasian had become Emperor, and Agricola, the governor of Britain, was engaged in the Highlands of Scotland. During the summer a cohort of *Usipians*, who had been enrolled in Germany, were sent over into Britain, for the purpose of being trained, and attached as auxiliaries to one of the legions. A few Roman soldiers were placed in each company to act as models and teachers, and the whole was under the command of a centurion. These men, probably not liking the drill, killed the soldiers and their commanders, seized three galleys, and before anything was known, in a wonderful manner got out to sea. One of the pilots made his escape, and fearing that the two others would betray them, they put them to death. The beginning of the voyage was fortunate, but afterwards they were at the mercy of the wind and tides; and, when in want of provisions, were forced to make attacks upon the country people, being generally successful, but sometimes defeated. At length, suffering the extremity of hunger, they devoured the weaker among themselves, and then cast lots who should die next. They then sailed northward round the island; and having from ignorance of navigation, lost their vessels, they were taken as pirates, first by the Suevians and then by the Frisians, and sold as slaves: and some were finally brought as such for sale on the left or Roman bank of the Rhine, where they related the wonderful adventures they had passed through.

There can be no doubt that Chester was already, not merely a Roman garrison, but the head-quarters of the 20th Legion; so that there would be nothing unlikely in the foreign auxiliaries which were to join it being sent there to go through their training. But if at this period the Romans did not occupy Chester, they would have had no post at all on the western coast; and it is impossible to conceive these

men leaving Richborough or Porchester, and sailing round the island, to reach Sweden or Holland. We know, too, that, the year before this, Agricola had ships in the Irish Channel, though his great fleet was on the eastern coast, from which side he is said to have circumnavigated the island the following year. When the men, however, got out to sea, supposing they sailed from the Dee, they must have been well aware that their best chance of escape was to keep to the north; but, their vessels not being provisioned for such a voyage, they were under the necessity of landing and getting supplies as they could, till they were driven to the coasts of Sweden and Holland. We may remark, also, that amongst the numerous foreign troops that are named as being stationed in England, we never meet with any *Usipians*.

