

THE PILGRIMS' WAY
AND ITS SUPPOSED PILGRIM USE.

BY

WILFRID HOOPER, LL.D.

THE popular belief that the old road along the North Downs in Surrey and Kent, known as the Pilgrims' Way, was adopted in the Middle Ages as one of the principal pilgrim routes to Canterbury obviously assumes that the road at that period formed a continuous thoroughfare as distinct from a series of disjointed links. The case for the original continuity of the road east of Guildford has been presented with great force by Mr. Hart in a recent volume of the *Collections*.¹ Yet it is possible to assent to this conclusion without subscribing to the belief of a later pilgrim use, and though he professes himself satisfied with the evidence on which that belief rests, it is clearly not an essential part of his main thesis. Generally, however, the two beliefs are held in common since the popular literature on the subject is mainly concerned with the pilgrim aspect of the Way and takes its continuity for granted. Most people accept the pilgrim theory without discussion as an article of everyday belief and would be surprised to hear that it has ever been seriously challenged. Indeed it would be hard to find any other historical theory that has received less critical examination.

The sceptics, assuming a somewhat superior air, have, until lately, kept their doubts to themselves as if the theory were unworthy of serious notice. This contemptuous silence has now been broken by two well-known Kentish Archæologists, Captain W. H. Knocker and Mr. F. C. Elliston-Erwood, who in recent years have openly assailed the theory chiefly on evidence drawn from their own county. Mr. Erwood, who

¹ Vol. XLI, *S.A.C.*, p. 1, etc.

was formerly a disciple of Mr. Hilaire Belloc in his advocacy of the orthodox faith, has since been converted into one of its stoutest opponents, though his popular guide to the Way still shows evident traces of his former belief.¹ Yet the issue so far from being settled, can hardly be said to have been fully joined. If a poll were to be taken of archæologists of repute who have formed any settled convictions on the subject, there can be little doubt that supporters of the pilgrim theory would greatly outnumber the "non-contents."

In consequence of the changes of archæological terminology recently adopted by the Ordnance Survey, "Probable course of" will take the place of "Supposed course of" "Pilgrims' Way" in future editions of their larger-scale maps. This will doubtless tend if anything to fortify the popular belief, though considering the improbabilities connected with the route as laid down in some sections of the Maps, and the obvious need for correction in other sections, the change of adjective seems singularly inopportune, quite apart from any question of the historicity of the Way. On the one-inch maps, which are those in popular use, the Way continues to be labelled "Pilgrims' Way" simply.

Before a satisfactory conclusion can be looked for, a fresh examination of the evidence is necessary, detached from the usual preconceptions, and confined not to a single county or district, but covering the whole of the data worthy of serious notice without regard to geographical divisions.

I propose in the present article first to examine the evidence bearing on the Way as a pilgrims' route, and next to inquire whether and how far pilgrim and kindred names in other counties have been influenced by or have themselves influenced modern pilgrimist ideas. An inquiry on this extended scale has not previously been undertaken, and in the course of it, opportunity will be taken to deal with some fresh material that has recently been brought to light.

To avoid circumlocution, I have coined the word "pilgrimist" to denote one who associates pilgrim and kindred place-names with medieval pilgrims and pilgrimages of a religious character, and in particular one of that large and respectable band who hold the belief that the old road through

¹ *The Pilgrims' Road*, 2nd ed., 1922.

Kent and Surrey with an extension to Winchester, which is known as the Pilgrims' Way, became after the canonization of Thomas Becket in 1173 one of the chief and most popular routes followed by pilgrims journeying to his shrine. This neologism can equally well serve as an adjective, and is frequently so applied in the following pages.

I. THE NAME IN SURREY, KENT AND HAMPSHIRE.

The first published appearance of the name Pilgrims' Road, a name which goes back at least a century earlier than its variant, Pilgrims' Way, occurs in Andrew, Dury, and Herbert's Map of Kent, 1769, where it is applied to a portion of the Old Road above Kemsing which is styled "The Upper or Pilgrim Road." The name is repeated in the same place on the map of Codsheath Hundred in Hasted's *History of Kent* which appeared ten years later, while on the map of the Hundreds of Toltingtrough and Shamel in the same work the road leading towards Rochester along the left bank of the Medway is designated "Pilgrims Road." Captain Knocker's wide researches in Kentish Manorial archives led him to state that he had not "seen any evidence that the name of Pilgrims' Road is of earlier origin than say the reign of Queen Anne," but later he reached the conclusion "that this was a generous estimate."¹ Documentary evidence prior to the eighteenth century both for Surrey and Kent gives no colour to the name. The Old Road above Westerham was in 1571 called simply "the underhill road," a description that was still applied in Chevening and Otford two centuries later.² At Titsey in 1667 the Way bore the jejune title Eastfield Lane, while in Reigate at an earlier period it was termed Kingswood Lane.³ In some parts of Kent a common medieval appellation for the Way was Dun Street. Dr. F. W. Hardman has traced instances of this in the parishes of Otford, Boxley, Lenham, Westwell, and Brabourne, and thence infers that the street so called was probably an old British road which ran continuously through the County, and, from the occurrence of the name in Brabourne, did not turn off to Canterbury but

¹ Vol. XXXI, *Arch. Cant.*, p. 159; Vol. 37, *ib.*, p. 11.

² Vol. XLIII, *Arch. Cant.*, p. 90.

³ Vol. VI, *S.A.C.*, p. 190; *M. & B.*, Vol. I, p. 288 n.

continued under the Downs beyond Wye.¹ The Way above Westwell still bears this ancient name. It is to be noted, however, that several parishes under the Downs are unrepresented in the list, and further, that in Boxley the name was not used of the Way but of a hamlet on the road, which no doubt originally bore that name, leading northward over the Downs. This at least is to be inferred from the maps, and agrees with "Dunstreet upon the hill," an example quoted by Dr. Hardman for 1540. A small hamlet of the same name still exists some $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of Boxley village. It appears therefore that the name was not confined exclusively to the Way, nor to an east and west road. Dun, which signifies "down," is a common element in place-names on the North Downs in Kent and Surrey that are often remote from the Way.²

Mr. Hart lays great stress on the West Kent Tithe case, which was tried at Croydon in 1815, and refers to the Plaintiffs' witnesses as speaking to the "immemorial antiquity" of the name Pilgrims' Road.³ But their evidence, even if accepted in full and put at its highest, does not carry the name back earlier than the eighteenth century, and, further, was, it is important to note, entirely confined to parishes west of Aylesford.

The first mention of the Pilgrims' Road in Surrey appears under Titsey and Tatsfield in the second volume of Manning and Bray's *History*, published in 1809.⁴ The name had by that date apparently filtered through to these border parishes for the reason no doubt that in addition to their position, the Old Road there followed a well-defined route in contemporary use that invited comparison with neighbouring sections in Kent. The line through Titsey Park had been stopped up under the powers contained in the local Turnpike Act of 1770,⁵ in which it is described anonymously as "a certain Lane and Footway leading from the Bottom of Botley Hill to Titsey Place." This may be compared with the anonymous description of the Way through the upper end of Gatton

¹ I am indebted to Dr. Hardman for permission to use his note which was kindly lent me by Mr. Hart.

² For Surrey instances see *Place Names of Surrey*, p. 342.

³ Vol. XLI, *S.A.C.*, pp. 7 and 10.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 408.

⁵ Act 10, Geo. III, c. 62.

Park which was diverted by the Order of 1756 set out in full by Mr. Hart. East of Titsey Park, however, the road ran, as it still runs, without a break to the County boundary and on through Westerham and Brasted parishes to the confines of Chevening Park where its course was again blocked by a recent diversion which had been carried out under an order of the justices in 1781.¹ A farm-house which adjoins the Way at Titsey, and has become known in modern times as Pilgrims' Lodge, is confidently pointed to by the pilgrimists as a genuine survival of the name.² But this seems to be merely another instance of importation, for on the early ordnance sheet it appears as Titsey Court.³ It is not mentioned by Manning and Bray, and is almost certainly a re-christening suggested by the re-naming of the Way, and typifying the process which had then set in and was soon to carry pilgrim names to the further end of Surrey, just as the names of Romano-British and other ancient roads like Watling Street, Ermine Street and the Icknield Way were extended by antiquarian fancy to roads which had no title to them. There are fashions in place-names as in Christian names, and a name once popularized may rapidly be transplanted. Instances are numerous of the widespread transference of names to fresh localities where they have no significance and are purely exotic.⁴

In the same volume occurs the well-known passage describing a lane in Merstham which "retains the name of Pilgrims' Lane . . . and was the course taken by Pilgrims from the West, who resorted (as indeed from all parts) to *Canterbury* to pay their devotions at the shrine of *St. Thomas à Becket*."⁵ The source of this information is not given but it not improbably emanated from the Rector of that day, the Rev. Martin Benson, for almost immediately afterwards he is quoted in regard to the state of the parish poor. The living was a

¹ See article on Star Hill by Earl Stanhope in *Sevenoaks Chronicle* of 4th January 1935. The order is dated 21st November 1781.

² Cf. *V.C.H. Surrey*, IV, p. 330: "The name seems here to be old; a farm called Pilgrims' Lodge is close to the road." Mr. Way calls it Pilgrims' Way Farm.

³ 1-in. O.S. Map of W. Kent and E. Surrey, pbd. 1st January 1819.

⁴ Cf. *Place Names of Surrey*, pp. 407-8, where several instances of this tendency are given by Mr. Bonner.

⁵ M. and B., *op. cit.*, II, p. 253.

peculiar of the Archbishop of Canterbury and many of its incumbents had Kentish associations. Mr. Benson himself was the son of a Canon of Canterbury and Vicar of Boxley, a connection which would have made him familiar with the pilgrim names of the adjoining county.¹ The name is otherwise undocumented, though over fifty years later it appeared on the Ordnance map in the adjoining parish of Chaldon.

The only remaining original reference to the name in Surrey prior to the later Ordnance Survey, occurs in the last volume of Brayley's *History*, which appeared in 1848. In his account of Albury that writer says: "The ancient path called the Pilgrims' Way which led from the city of Winchester to Canterbury, crosses this parish, and is said to have been much used in former times."² It is uncertain which is the path referred to, though supposed to be that skirting Weston Wood and crossing Albury Park, marked Pilgrims' Way on the modern Ordnance map. It is significant that William Bray,³ who lived in the adjoining parish of Shere and possessed an unrivalled and lifelong knowledge of the neighbourhood, does not mention the path, nor connect St. Martha's with the Canterbury pilgrims, a silence which in view of his strongly marked pilgrimist leanings must be regarded as almost conclusive against the existence of the name in his day. The chief interest of the statement lies in its use for the first time of the term "way" for "road" and the allusion to Winchester as the western terminus, both of them prominent points in the later development of the theory.

The year 1855 saw the publication of Dean Stanley's *Historical Memorials of Canterbury*, which has since passed through many editions and taken rank as a popular classic. In an appendix to that work, Mr. Albert Way, well known in his time as an antiquary of repute, contributed a note entitled "The Pilgrims' Way or Path towards the Shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury," in which he brought together "the evidence of local tradition," consisting of all the references he could find to pilgrim and similarly suggestive place-names along the line of the Way. Profiting by the theory first advanced

¹ Vol. XVII, *S.A.C.*, p. 23. ² Vol. V, *History of Surrey*, p. 168.

³ Editor of Manning and Bray's *History of Surrey*. He died 1832 at the age of 96.

by Salmon and later adopted by Manning and Bray, he ingeniously suggests that the elements ridge- and -gate of which the name Reigate was supposed to be compounded, referred not to the hypothetical Roman road from the south-west favoured by those writers but to the Old Road itself along the crest of the Downs. Mr. Way was living near Reigate when this was written, and his suggestion held the field till the other day when Professor Ekwall offered another interpretation of the first element.¹

Mr. Way could find little support for his theory in Hampshire where the name was entirely unknown. The Old Road beyond Farnham continued as the Harrow Way over the Downs of North Hampshire and supplied no direct link with Winchester and Southampton. He touches on several possible routes between Southampton and Farnham and leans to the one—a solitary instance—that could boast a pilgrim name on its course. He favours the Dean's suggestion that Henry II chose the Way for his journey to Canterbury in 1174, a hypothesis which has since been widely accepted and serves as a basis for the assumption that Henry's example set the fashion which quickly established the Way as the popular route. The idea is a plausible one but calls for further examination. It is quite possible that Henry followed the route to Farnham and thence by the Hog's Back to Guildford. It is here that the real difficulty begins. The Dean speaks of him "avoiding towns as much as possible." The words of the Chronicle are "*occultum iter Cantuariam peregrinationis arripuit*,"² which may only mean that he travelled incognito disguised as a pilgrim. The Chronicler's next remark, that as he went on his way by chapels and hospitals he confessed his sins and distributed offerings, is more in keeping with a route passing through towns than one which by largely avoiding them would have necessitated frequent digressions to compass these pious designs. The pace at which the King travelled allowed no time for such digressions. Leaving Southampton on the 8th July he reached Canterbury on the 12th. Further, the Pipe Roll contains an entry of the charge incurred for hiring horses for the use of the sailors in following the King to

¹ *The Place Names of Surrey*, pp. 304-5.

² *Chron. and Mem.*, Vol. LXVII, I, pp. 487-8.

London.¹ It may be argued of course that his servants could by a stretch of language be said to have followed him to London, though he travelled there by way of Canterbury and they went direct, but such is not the obvious meaning of the entry. There would be little saving in distance by avoiding London, and the road between London and Guildford with its royal manor and castle must have already been well known to him.

It is sometimes declared by the sceptics that the Pilgrims' Way is the invention of the Ordnance Survey, but this is bestowing praise too generously. Though that department watered the young idea and that without stint, it was Mr. Way who planted, and the increase which he lived to see must have flattered and surprised him. The event showed that the Englishman loves a pilgrim—of the medieval sort—as much as he is proverbially supposed to love a lord. That remarkable outburst of antiquarian zeal, which marked the earlier half of the Victorian era, and gave birth to the British Archaeological Association and its offshoot, the Archaeological Institute, in addition to many of the county societies, provided ideal soil for the theory propounded by Mr. Way. It met with a ready response from the followers of this new renaissance, especially those who indulged a craving for the romantic and picturesque, sentiments which it was admirably calculated to satisfy. Yet it may be doubted whether the theory would have attained wide popularity outside these circles but for its adoption by the Ordnance Survey in their large-scale maps of Surrey, which were in course of preparation between the years 1861 and 1871, and Kent. The officer in charge of the survey in south-west Surrey was Captain E. R. James who, to his technical qualifications, added a taste for archæology and a whole-hearted enthusiasm for the pilgrim theory.²

¹ R. W. Eyton, *Itinerary of Henry II*, pp. 179–80.

² Edward Renouard James, (1833–1909) Captain, and afterwards Major-General, R.E., retired from the service in 1882 and resided at Merrow. He was elected to the Council of the Society in 1888 and was local secretary for Guildford and Merrow. A plan of Anstiebury Camp drawn by him in 1869 appears in Vol. V, *S.A.C.*, p. 21. He is often confused with his chief at the Ordnance Survey, Sir Henry James, director from 1854 to 1875, though they appear to have been unrelated.

His views were expounded in a pamphlet issued in 1871 and re-published thirty years later.¹ It opens with the damaging confession that the subject of the Pilgrims' Way had been little studied in west Surrey and that "very many persons" in that neighbourhood "were in ignorance of the very name." He propounds the theory, which has since been applied to ancient tracks in other counties,² of a winter way and summer way, which he illustrates by taking the Hog's Back as the upper way, carrying the winter stream of pilgrims, and the parallel track along the valley to the south as the lower way favoured by the summer stream. He places great stress on the local fairs and the dates on which they were held, professing to see in these strong corroborative evidence of pilgrim patronage. He refers particularly to the annual fairs of Wanborough, Puttenham, St. Catherine's, Shalford, and Guildford. Wanborough fair may at once be dismissed since it was not instituted until the eve of the dissolution.³ Puttenham fair, which had died out before 1871, fell on the 27th of June, the third day after the feast of St. John Baptist. Guildford fair took place at Whitsuntide, to which date it was shifted from Trinity shortly after its institution, on account of the number of neighbouring fairs held at the same season. Shalford fair was held on 14th to 16th August, that of St. Catherine's on 21st September. To fit in these dates with the movements of pilgrims to and from Canterbury requires no little ingenuity, but Captain James assumes without condescending to proof that they were persons of unlimited leisure who spent months on the journey. The feast of Becket's translation, which attracted the chief concourse of the year, fell on 7th July, so that the pilgrims attending it were free to return from Canterbury a month or more before Shalford fair, and over two months before St. Catherine's. Yet his readers are seriously asked to believe that the ordinary pilgrim took upwards of a month to perform a journey of 80 miles, a progress of less than 3 miles a day. If this can be credited then clearly the dates of the fairs were of little importance

¹ In *Three Surrey Churches*; n.d., but published about 1900.

² Notably by Dr. G. B. Grundy.

³ *V.C.H. Surrey*, III, p. 374. Capt. James speaks of three fairs at Guildford held 4th May, 24th September, and 22nd November.

and the evidence based on them is worthless, for whatever the dates fixed there would have been on this hypothesis pilgrims constantly on the road coming or returning in connection with the summer or winter festival. The village pesthouse at Shalford strikes his fertile imagination, for reasons far from convincing, as only less suggestive than the village fair, and he finds Whitewaysend and White Lane equally significant though names compounded of "white" are among the commonest found in the North Downs. His boldest flight of fancy is to suggest that the River Wey was so called by the pilgrims in substitution for the supposed more ancient Wye. He concludes with the surmise, to which I shall recur later, that Bunyan borrowed the earthly setting of his *Pilgrim's Progress* from the Pilgrims' Way in Surrey.

When his pamphlet was republished thirty years later he could justly boast that the subject had emerged from the obscurity in which he found it. By that date, thanks largely to the indication of the supposed route on the Ordnance maps, the Pilgrims' Way and its pilgrims had become an article of popular belief. Miss Cartwright's well-known book¹ had appeared some years earlier setting out the pilgrimist view in a light and attractive style, to be followed later by Mr. Belloc's more imposing and comprehensive monograph.² Miss Cartwright outlines an itinerary from Winchester to Canterbury, which shows considerable vagueness, while she admits the lack of evidence in Hampshire and uncertainty as to the route at some later stages. Mr. Belloc, who follows her lead and whose book has had a marked influence on scholars as well as the general reader,³ discusses the route in much greater detail, while both writers accept the pilgrimist theory as an established historical fact. In their train have followed the host of guide-books and popular writers who have expanded and embellished *ad libitum* as fancy prompted. Some allowance must, however, be made for their excesses when it is realized to what lengths more responsible authorities can go.

¹ *The Pilgrims' Way from Winchester to Canterbury*, by Julia Cartwright, 1893. Re-published 1911.

² *The Old Road*, by H. Belloc, 1904. New edition, 1910.

³ The *Encyclopædia Britannica* introduced a section on the Pilgrims' Way under its article on Pilgrimages in 1910. Jusserand adopts the theory in the second edition of his *English Wayfaring Life*.

It has been stated for example that the pilgrims added a chapel to Reigate church which they dedicated to St. Thomas, that the former church at Gatton was of pilgrim origin, and that Merstham possesses relics of mural paintings representing that saint.¹ From another source comes the information that "the road to sites of pilgrimages was lined with chapels."² Roadside chapels were in reality very scarce in England, and exceptionally so on the Way.³ The assertions concerning Reigate and Gatton Churches are, of course, baseless. The chapel at Reigate dedicated to the saint was a chantry chapel unconnected with the church. The assertion as to the painting in Merstham Church shows the danger of pilgrimist prepossessions. The evidence that survives is far too meagre to show what these paintings were intended to depict. Palgrave, writing in 1860, when the last traces had nearly disappeared, thought that they probably represented scenes in the life of St. Catherine, the patron saint of the Church. Though a fervent pilgrimist Canterbury did not suggest the clue to him. Such a suggestion was first thrown out in 1865 and then quite tentatively. But the hint was sufficient, and before long conjecture became certainty in minds obsessed with the pilgrimist complex.⁴

More weight should attach to the views of Mr. H. E. Malden, and other contributors to the *Victoria County History of Surrey*. In his *History of Surrey* published in 1900 he takes the conventional view and also in the opening volume of the larger work which appeared in 1902.⁵ Subsequently, however, he declared that there was no historical evidence for the name Pilgrims' Way west of Reigate, the christening of the sandy track at the base of the Downs by that name being due to

¹ *Folk Memory* by W. Johnson, p. 347.

² *Social England* (1903), II, p. 374. The statement apparently rests on Jusserand's assertion "the road which led to Walsingham was called the Palmers' way and numerous chapels were built along its line" (*English Wayfaring Life*, 8th impression, p. 348), but even this is an exaggeration.

³ Webb, *Story of the King's Highway*, p. 13.

⁴ Cf. Tancred Borenius, *St. Thomas Becket in Art*, p. 54, where it is also asserted that the painted figure of a bishop faintly visible on a pillar of the nave represents St. Thomas in the act of blessing those entering the Church.

⁵ *V.C.H. Surrey*, I, pp. 355 and 366.

“modern fancy.”¹ *The Victoria History*, which was produced under his editorship, speaks of the Way in its topographical section with varying voices under different parishes but with pilgrimist views generally predominant. No fresh evidence is offered unless it can be found in the references to the Way in Chaldon. It is stated in one passage that the Old Road was known as Pilgrim Lane in that parish, though this is followed by the remark that “it is not until it reaches Chaldon that it used to be called the Pilgrims' Way.” These conflicting statements occur in the account of Merstham, a context which suggests that the writer was confusing the two parishes. Subsequently under Chaldon we read “a lane in the west part of the parish and its continuation near Willey Farm seems to have borne the name Pilgrims' Lane before the Ordnance maps were made.”² The name was apparently extant at the time of the survey of the parish in 1867 when it was placed on the maps, but in view of the silence of the earlier authorities it was probably borrowed from Merstham and not indigenous.

The paucity of pilgrim names in Hampshire has already been noticed. *The Victoria County History* quotes three which “still remain to show how largely . . . pilgrimages entered into the social life of the people of Hampshire in the Middle Ages.” These are “Pilgrims' Place, East Tisted, Pilgrims' Palace, a farm-house near Rotherfield Park, Pilgrims' Copse near Micheldever.”³ The first two appear to refer to one and the same place, a house near East Tisted on the border of Rotherfield Park, which is now and has for many years past been known as Pelham, a name which according to the ingenious derivation of one local writer comes from the French *pelerin*!⁴ Pilgrims' Copse near Micheldever is not marked on the Ordnance map and careful inquiry has failed to locate it. The reference is probably to a copse of that name situated in the parish of Ashe, though this is over four miles north of Micheldever and is marked on the early one-inch Ordnance

¹ *Memorials of Old Surrey* (1911), p. 9. He might have said “west of Gatton” for the name has no historical support in Reigate.

² *Op. cit.*, IV, pp. 188-9.

³ *V.C.H. Hants*, V, p. 418.

⁴ Curtis, *History of Alton*, p. 39, where it is said that one or two fields close by are known as “Pilgrim fields.”

sheet as "South Wood." Both these spots, however, are some miles from the so-called Pilgrims' Way, too far to be of any evidential value even if their names could be authenticated.

Tradition is lightly invoked by the pilgrimists without any true appreciation of what that much abused term implies. The only sense in which it can be legitimately employed in the present connection is that of a record of events preserved by oral transmission. Tradition therefore to be of any value must be co-eval with the events to which it relates or must at least go back to a time when men who could have remembered those events were still living. If it originated later it is obviously worthless. The so-called tradition connected with the Way is demonstrably of this latter kind and consists of beliefs, usually based on place-names, that sprang up during the nineteenth century or since. Place-names are in fact a very unsafe foundation for tradition unless their antiquity is above suspicion and consistent with that of the traditional events. Where the names cannot be traced until long after they are unworthy to rank as evidence. It may be suggested that the names arose later on the strength of the tradition. But this argument deserves no consideration unless the tradition can be authenticated by independent evidence.

Another favourite device is the application to pilgrim names of expressions such as "still surviving," "still known as," and similar tendentious phrases suggestive of an antiquity that is usually entirely fallacious. The practice goes back to Mr. Way, and has since become an inveterate habit among pilgrimist writers.

What Dr. Mortimer Wheeler calls "the co-operation between the corporal and the curate"¹ is nowhere better exemplified than on the Reigate Ordnance sheet, though it was in fact the vicar and not his subordinate who, with two other local gentlemen, co-operated in this instance. There the name, of which local records were entirely innocent before Mr. Way wrote, is attached to three distinct lines, chosen as it would seem to give effect to the summer and winter way theory of Captain James, and the claims of Reigate as a pilgrim depot.² Of the lines so dignified one follows the old track along the

¹ *The Times*, 17th October 1935, p. 15.

² O.S. 6-in. Surrey, 26 S.E.

top of the Downs, which is certainly ancient and probably part of the prehistoric road, another clings to their base, while the third descends via Nutley Lane towards the town which is entered by Slipshoe Street. Slipshoe Street, Reigate, should act as a warning to those who rely on the place-name evidence. Palgrave in his *Handbook to the neighbourhood* published in 1860 gives a wood-cut of the street under that name and this is the earliest instance which I have been able to trace. For some years prior to 1860 it was known as *The Crossways*, in the eighteenth century it appears to have been without a name, and earlier records do not bear out its present title. Furthermore, Palgrave does not mention the name in his letterpress, a significant omission, for so pronounced a pilgrimist, and going to show that it was a recent innovation. Yet much ingenuity has been expended on the etymology and old people still living in the town will explain that the street was so-called because the pilgrims would here put-off their shoes and proceed barefooted to one of the local chapels.

Another mare's nest which has had a longer vogue calls for special notice on account of the prominence given to it by pilgrimist writers, including several archæologists of standing. The so-called Pilgrims' Chapel at Maidstone, which was restored and enlarged in 1836 to form the Parish Church of St. Peter, served originally as the chapel of the Hospital of St. Peter and St. Paul, the Newark, founded by Archbishop Boniface in 1260 for the support of ten poor persons. At the end of the fourteenth century this charity was annexed to the College newly established by Archbishop Courtenay on the opposite bank of the Medway, following which the buildings seem to have been discarded for their original purpose and allowed to fall into decay. By Dugdale and Tanner, and two early Kentish topographers, Harris and Kilburne, it is described simply as a hospital, though Lambarde and Kilburne add St. Thomas the Martyr as the third of its dedicatory saints.¹ The suggestion of a pilgrim connection originated in the eighteenth century with a local writer, the Rev. William Newton, who in a *History of Maidstone* published in 1741,

¹ R. Kilburne, *A Topographie or Survey of the County of Kent* (1659), p. 178.

speaks of it as "The Hospital for Pilgrims or Travellers dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul and Thomas Becket."¹ He refers in a footnote to a passage in Du Cange's *Dictionary* under the heading of hospital as if in support of his statement, but having in fact no bearing whatever on it. Hasted in 1799 states even more explicitly "Archbishop Boniface about the year A.D. 1260 built a *college* or *hospital* for poor travellers in the West Borough."² With this respectable backing the story gained a firm foothold, and on the rise of the pilgrimist theory the pilgrims and poor travellers passed by easy transition into Canterbury pilgrims, the hospital became one of their most important hostelries, despite the fact that to reach it and return to the Way involved a detour of about six miles, while the Chapel was dubbed the Pilgrim Chapel. The story has been widely approved by modern archæologists³ and shows how a specious legend can spring up and flourish unchallenged when no one will trouble to scrutinize its credentials.

The silence of the early maps and still more of the early topographies raises a problem which is consistently ignored by pilgrimist writers though it is evidently of fundamental importance in the inquiry into the historicity of their claims. If the tradition appealed to is valid, how comes it, we may pertinently ask, that authorities like Lambarde, Camden, Aubrey, Salmon and Hasted all with one consent ignore it in describing the numerous parishes through which the Way passes? Camden and his school had a ready ear for the legendary and frequently retailed local traditions though at times with evident incredulity. If any had been current concerning the Way when they wrote they would surely have picked them up in one or other of the parishes along its course. Salmon, for example, who plumed himself on his knowledge of ancient roads, could hardly have failed to enlarge on the implications of pilgrim names had he met with them in Surrey. We have seen how he invented a Roman road through Reigate and we shall see later how he found or invented a pilgrim legend to explain an Essex place-name, and it was he who rescued the

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 30.

² *History of Kent*, IV, p. 307.

³ e.g., the late Canon W. A. Scott Robertson. On the other hand it receives no support in the account in the *Victoria County History of Kent*, II, p. 232.

myth of the Barons' Cave at Reigate which still shows signs of vitality. Even more inexplicable is the silence of Cobbett. Born and bred at Farnham which lies directly on the supposed course, spending near there the closing years of his stormy life, and traversing Surrey and Kent repeatedly in the course of his rides, he, one might confidently assume, must have been conversant with the tradition from his youth. In that violent polemic *The History of the Protestant Reformation*,¹ if not in his other writings, he would not have missed so plausible an illustration from his native county to enforce his pet idea of pre-Reformation prosperity. He alludes in that work to pilgrimages to Canterbury and extols the hospitality of the religious houses, expressly enumerating those in Surrey. Here was a tempting opportunity for making one of those shrewd appeals to local sentiment in which he delighted, and the fact that it is not made, can lead to only one conclusion. Miss Cartwright is very fond of quoting this writer, oblivious apparently of the fact that he never alludes to the Way nor its pilgrim associations. John Wesley, another celebrated man who travelled extensively in the three counties, observes a similar reticence in his *Journal* and other writings.

The recent volume on *The Place Names of Surrey* deals kindly with the Pilgrims' Way with the desire possibly of making some amends for robbing Ockley of its claim to the battle and upsetting other cherished beliefs. The lack of any medieval evidence for the name is admitted, yet we are informed "there is *no doubt*² that it was from an early date used by pilgrims to the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury." In support of this pronouncement we are referred to the note on St. Martha's (near Guildford) in which it is surmised that the dedication of Newark Priory, the patron house to St. Thomas the Martyr "may have led to confusion in some of the later forms, helped by the resemblance of *Martha* and *martyr*." But this conjecture, even if it were well founded, no more establishes that pilgrims to Canterbury resorted to the hill than the dedication of the Priory establishes that they resorted there. The further surmise that "the *hill* was *always*² known as Martyr Hill, and the church and parish

¹ Published 1824-25.

² Italics mine.

as (St.) Martha's''¹ must obviously exclude the twelfth century Becket as the martyr commemorated. Moreover, it appears, from the examples of the name collected by Miss Heath, that the form Martyr Hill was exceptional before the sixteenth century.² Further, it was, as she points out,³ applied to the church and parish equally with the hill. The name is more probably to be explained as a popular corruption of Martha that arose from a misspelling even as St. Catherine's, the name of the neighbouring hill across the Wey, was corrupted by the country folk in later times to Catton Hill,⁴ though the possibility that the dedication was a joint one to "St. Martha the Virgin and all the Holy Martyrs" must in view of the explicit statement to that effect in the Indulgence of 1463 be kept in mind. Miss Heath's account, to which the authors of this volume refer, is sufficient to dispose of any pilgrimist associations connected with the Hill, and the Indulgence of 1463 which she translates at length, so far from supporting such associations, shows on the contrary that at that period the church was so decayed and neglected that special inducements were necessary to attract the faithful to the spot. The volume has done good service in disposing of some of the false etymologies that have been used to bolster up the pilgrim theory. It will no longer be excusable, for example, to resolve Shoelands (Puttenham) into an element signifying to beg, or to assimilate the Pray names in Mickleham to prayer. Its treatment of St. Martha's therefore is the more regrettable, for it is doubtful if any name on the Way illustrates more forcibly the risks of theorizing on place-name etymology. Grose, writing in 1773, mentions the supposition that the name was a corruption of "Martyr,"⁵ and this has led later writers imbued with pilgrimist ideas to assert dogmatically that the church was dedicated to St. Thomas the Martyr, either expressly or under the title of the Holy Martyr, unconscious of the fact that they are reversing the evidence, and that at no period was the building dedicated

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 8 and 244.

² *Notes on the History of St. Martha's*, p. 53. Apart from Momartre (1273) the earliest instance is in 1463.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁴ Kerry MSS.

⁵ *Antiquities of England*, V, p. 110.

to this saint.¹ It is inconceivable that a dedication to the Martyr of Canterbury would at any time during the later Middle Ages have been perverted into the name of the little known St. Martha, who apart from this instance has no English dedication to her credit.

Documentary evidence of the pilgrimist theory being lacking, attempts have been made to discover archæological evidence of a material character to fill the gap.² Small signs resembling crosses usually with pitted terminals are often to be seen cut in the stonework of old churches. A common position is the entrance doorway, but they are also found on the nave pillars and elsewhere inside and outside those buildings. It has become the fashion to describe them as pilgrim crosses, despite the fact that they frequently occur in churches far removed from the Way or any other known pilgrim routes, and that when the attention of archæologists was first directed to them they were not connected with pilgrims. In Sussex they have received the name of "crusaders' marks" on the theory that they were the work of crusaders returning from the Holy Land.³ Mr. C. C. Elam, who has made a special study of masons' marks, tells me that this form is occasionally found with many other marks of this class in Canterbury Cathedral. Mr. Kerry in his MSS. figures some incised crosses of this description which are still faintly traceable on the north doorway of Compton Church, Surrey, on which he remarks, "Some of them may be the original Banker Marks,

¹ F. Bond, *Dedications of English Churches*, p. 133. F. Arnold Forster, *Studies in Church Dedications*, I, p. 359. Mr. Malden lent his authority to this view, *History of Surrey*, p. 30.

² Nothing can be made of the dedications. Only one parish church in Surrey—East Clandon—is dedicated to St. Thomas of Canterbury, and this lies off the Way. For Kent see Elliston-Erwood's *The Pilgrims' Road* (2nd ed.), p. 32. The chapel of St. Thomas at Reigate was a chantry chapel. There was an image of the saint in Farnham Church. (E. Robo: *Medieval Farnham*, p. 262); and a picture of him survives at West Clandon church (Vol. XXI, *S.A.C.*, p. 24).

³ Vol. VI, *S.A.C.* (1874), pp. 20 and 275, where examples are figured from Alfold, Godalming and Newdigate. "Whether they are masons' marks or have a religious meaning there is not yet sufficient evidence to prove" (*ibid.*, p. 20). For Sussex examples see Vol. XLII, *Sussex A.C.*, p. 150 and Vol. XLVIII, p. 145. Marks of this kind in New Shoreham Church are now, I am told, attributed to pilgrims, though my informant, who is a well-known archæologist, admitted there was no evidence to support the claim.

others are probably the work of some of the youths of Compton of the olden time." This, from one who held the conventional view of the Way, goes to prove that the pilgrimist interpretation of these marks had not then come into vogue, though this Church has since been acclaimed as intimately associated with the pilgrim traffic. It is noticeable that the archiepiscopal canonicals bore the cross known in heraldry as *formee* or *patee* which differs from the usual form of the so-called pilgrim crosses. The current interpretation is the result of theorizing from a limited number of examples, and is akin to the fallacy which has been exposed by Mr. Bonner of coupling the Coldharbour sites with Roman roads because a few of them happen to be on or near those roads.¹ There is in fact not a particle of solid evidence to connect these marks with pilgrims or the Becket cult, and even if there were, it would at most merely show that the Churches bearing these marks were occasionally visited by pilgrims—a conclusion which no one is concerned to deny. The argument is really in a vicious circle—these marks are found in churches on the Way, therefore they are the work of pilgrims to Canterbury, therefore the Way was frequented by those pilgrims.

The homely *costrel* has been dubbed "Pilgrims' bottle" by modern antiquaries imbued with pilgrimist ideas. These vessels were commonly provided with ears or loops for suspension from the waist or saddle, and it is for this reason apparently, or possibly because the little *ampullas* which were sold as pilgrim signs or badges sometimes took the form of *costrels*, that the modern name has been bestowed on them, though there is no ground for supposing that their use was peculiar to pilgrims.² The name has, however, passed into current speech and is used to prove the idea which it connotes, so that the discovery of a *costrel* near the Way, as of a pilgrim's cross on a church in its vicinity, becomes evidence of the pilgrim antecedents of that track.³

¹ *Place Names of Surrey*, p. 406, etc.

² There are two pilgrim *ampullas* of this form in York Museum. One of lead bears the figure of Becket on one side, and is figured in C. Roach Smith's *Collectanea Antiqua*, Vol. 2, p. 48.

³ Similar significance is also attached to the discovery of *jetons*, or abbey tokens, on the supposition that pilgrims employed them as small coin.

In attempting to define the Old Road, the Ordnance Survey and pilgrimist writers went astray at various points owing partly to deficient knowledge and investigation but principally to the belief that it was identifiable with the supposed pilgrim route. The most serious of these aberrations occur at White-waysend and Gomshall, to which attention must be called, although it is outside the scope of this paper to describe the course in detail. Whitewaysend marks the western extremity of the Hog's Back ridge.¹ Here, where for the first time on entering Surrey the traveller from Hampshire encounters the chalk, the Old Road, if we believe Mr. Belloc and Mr. Erwood, obstinately flouts its appointed soil, and in defiance of the rules which are said to have governed its course, takes the lower road running along the northern edge of the lower greensand ridge. The claims of the Hog's Back, that long even spine of naked chalk so admirably adapted by nature for a ridge way, were too strong to be entirely ignored. It is true that the road never went to the top of the Downs when it could find a suitable line on the southern flank. Here, however, the rule yielded to the exception, for the south face of the Hog's Back is too steep and irregular to satisfy the required conditions, while the north slope which descends in easy gradients, was excluded, we must suppose, by its aspect, though otherwise suitable.² Captain James allows it to be a summer way, while in Mr. Belloc's scheme it figures as a flanking road along which an armed party could be thrown to guard the main body against the risk of surprise while proceeding in the valley below. Danger, however, was more likely to have lurked in the heaths and wastes which skirt the lower route, and it was there and not half a mile or so distant that an armed escort would have been most usefully employed.

¹ The course of the road from Farnham to Gomshall is shown on the following Ordnance Survey Maps of Surrey : 1-in., No. 124 (5th ed.) (Guildford), 6-in., Nos. 30 NW. and NE., 31 NW. and NE., and 33 NW. and NE.

² Mr. Hart has suggested the possibility that the Old Road followed the southern flank, but the course proposed by him runs at times below the spring line and over the gault clay, circumstances which seem to me fatal to its claim. It is not marked on the maps nor mentioned by Mr. Kerry.

Mr. Belloc speaks of this road as "upon the side of the hill," Mr. Erwood as taking "its characteristic level some half-way up the hill," phrases which would lead the unsuspecting to suppose that the chalk was purposely avoided because a better gradient could be found at a lower level.¹ Nothing could be more misleading. The road so far from keeping "its characteristic level" is essentially a valley route never running far above the floor of the valley and in places descending to it. A more uncharacteristic section than that between this point and the point at Gomshall, where according to these writers and the Ordnance Survey, the Way after floundering through the Tillingbourne valley at length takes to the Downs, it would be hard to conceive. Even now in bad weather the road between Seale and Puttenham, though maintained as a public highway, is in places liable to flooding. Then again it turns several sharp corners—two double ones at Shoelands—runs through villages, approaches Weston Wood by a deep-sunk miry road, strikes another wet and low lying patch just beyond that Wood, and crosses the Tillingbourne at Shere to re-cross it at some unknown point between Shere and Gomshall. Worse still it clings persistently to the shady northern edge of the greensand ridge save where it traverses the Wey valley and St. Martha's hill. Not till he reaches Weston Wood in Albury does Mr. Belloc become aware of this salient feature, though it is one that must leap to the eye of the most casual observer who takes the trouble to walk the stretch from Seale to the Chantries. His announcement of this discovery as the sole exception to the otherwise universal preference for a southern slope, shows a lack of observation which is nothing less than amazing, though some slight excuse may possibly be found in that he made the journey in the middle of winter and seems to have traversed much of the section in semi-darkness. The route by Weston Wood is in fact merely one instance in a long continued violation of the rule, a violation which if we follow the Ordnance Survey, occurs again between Shere and Gomshall, where the Way is traced as a footpath along the north bank of the Tillingbourne. An alternative track between Seale and Puttenham

¹ Belloc, *op. cit.*, p. 156; Erwood, *The Pilgrims' Road*, p. 105.

is indicated by Mr. Erwood and was favoured by Mr. Kerry.¹ This, which is now closed to the public, branched off over Seale Common to Totford Hatch behind Shoelands, and, while betraying the uncertainty of the tradition, possessed at least the merit of escaping some of the worst ground though it followed an undulating course that plunged at times between high banks.

The absence of definition at some points of this route is particularly noticeable and cannot be explained by later cultivation. In crossing Puttenham Heath and ascending to St. Martha's, for example, there are sections where it is hard to find any vestige of the wear and tear that might be expected after more than three centuries of pilgrim traffic. Indeed, the route suggests a series of local tracks, which have been subject to unequal degrees of wear, rather than a continuous entity in age-long use, while it altogether lacks that uniformity of character which is so unmistakable a feature of the Old Road along the Downs. But the central objection to this route as a through route is the passage of the Wey at St. Catherine's. Arriving there Mr. Belloc hesitates, unable to decide whether the original crossing was by the ferry or by the ford at Shalford some distance higher up the river. Had he applied his fifth rule, the problem would have been readily solved though at the cost of jettisoning the chosen route.² The only point hereabouts where firm ground on one side of the river draws close to firm ground on the other side, and the channel is confined to narrow limits is the chalk gap at Guildford some three-quarters of a mile to the north, and it was at this spot surely, and by the ford from which the town was to arise and take its name, that early man made the crossing. Surveying the scene from St. Catherine's he would, we may safely assume, have quickly decided against

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 105; *Three Surrey Churches*, p. 180, and Kerry MSS. The Rev. Charles Kerry (1833-1908) who deserves to be remembered as an accomplished and industrious antiquary, was curate of Puttenham from 1868 to 1877, and made copious notes on the history and antiquities of the neighbourhood, which are now in the Derby Public Library. While at Puttenham he also wrote a *History of Waverley Abbey*, and formed a valuable collection of flint implements which were acquired for the Charterhouse Museum, Godalming. Through the kindness of Mr. S. Alden I have also had access to some notes by Mr. Kerry in his possession.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 111.

attempting to cross at this point, not because he preferred a ford to a ferry, but because he abhorred marsh and swamp. Even now the river quickly overflows the low lying meadows along the east bank which at the best of times is bordered by marsh. In the days before it was embanked and canalized, the river for some distance above Guildford must in bad weather have resembled a lagoon.

The real explanation of this long and curious divergence is that it leads to the twin heights of St. Catherine and St. Martha which, crowned by their medieval fanes, salute one another across the valley of the Wey. Two such prominent landmarks of unknown antiquity must needs have roused the speculation of theorists in all ages, particularly since neither has been properly explored. Mr. Way was clearly influenced by their spell. Captain James and Miss Cartwright, like later pilgrimists, find it natural to connect them with the pilgrims. Captain James adds the gratuitous assertion that a priory or nunnery was established near St. Catherine's, which may explain the fact that this much-abused name is now attached to two houses in the neighbourhood. Equally untenable though endorsed by the Ordnance map and the *Victoria History*, is his identification of Chilworth Manor with the site of a monastery or cell to Newark Priory which housed "a body of monks" for ministering to the pilgrims.¹ As soon as the attempt to divorce the Way from its true habitat is abandoned and the sand is exchanged for the chalk, the incongruities inseparable from the lower route disappear. Mr. Hart has not only demonstrated the feasibility of a line along the escarpment of the Downs between Titsey and Guildford, but has by dint of detailed survey found many traces of the course, and in places some long disused and forgotten fragments of the road itself which have escaped the notice of previous workers and the Ordnance Survey. Some stages in this section, however, raise problems for further discussion, and it is regrettable that above Shalford Mr. Hart succumbs to the pilgrim snare and deserts the Downs for the valley, to join the track leading to St. Catherine's ferry. There is no physical reason why a westbound traveller should abandon the Downs at this point, and more than one why he should

¹ *V.C.H., Surrey*, III, p. 105; *Three Surrey Churches*, pp. 188 and 200.

not. Early man would have held to the hills, till forced to descend in the Guildford gap, and would, we may be sure, have instinctively shunned a detour across the valley, which besides its other dangers, condemned him to approach the river through a wide belt of swamp or flood.

Having deserted the chalk for so long there was no particular reason save one why pilgrims or other medieval travellers between east and west should have taken to the Downs on reaching Gomshall. Indeed, some pilgrimists imagine that they continued along the valley to Dorking, keeping to the northern edge of the sand as before. By so doing they would at least have come upon two more churches, and their track though taking them over much wet and spongy ground could not have been worse than that already experienced. On the Ordnance Sheet the Way having floundered through Gomshall marsh, turns abruptly north up Beggars Lane, a name which in the past has conjured up visions of the pilgrims, though more probably used derisively in allusion to the bad state of this by-way. The Way is then carried over Ranmore Common to West Humble. And all for what? Merely to satisfy the pilgrims' urge to pay their devotions at a small and obscure wayside chapel in the heart of the Downs two miles north of the escarpment. Little is known of the building which is now an ivy-clad ruin. It was probably erected by Merton Priory for the use of the tenants of that house.¹ There is no evidence that it was provided for pilgrims or frequented by them. The idea probably emanated from Dr. J. S. Bright of Dorking, who at the time passed as an authority on the Way and supplied the Survey with information. Mr. Belloc, on the other hand, thinks the detour was occasioned by Burford Bridge; the pilgrims used it because "everybody uses a bridge once it has been built."² The Ordnance Surveyors thought otherwise; their line makes for the ford some distance to the south and there is good reason for this, apparent to anyone familiar with the ground. By crossing the bridge a west-bound traveller who wished to avoid a laborious climb over Box Hill and regain the old road along the escarpment would have found himself hemmed in between the river and the western slope of the Hill, far too steep to admit of any passage.

¹ *V.C.H. Surrey*, III, p. 303.

² *Op. cit.*, pp. 181-2.

II. PILGRIM NAMES IN OTHER COUNTIES.

A comparative study of pilgrim names in other parts of the country, even on the limited scale here attempted, will take us far afield, but the excursion will be justified if it helps to a better understanding of our own problem. The instances which follow have been taken at random regardless of any conclusions that it may be possible to draw from them. They make no claim to be exhaustive, but are I believe fairly representative of the pilgrim names that exist outside the three counties that we are immediately concerned with.

Pilgrim Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, is one of the few examples where the name is undoubtedly old. Brand, in his *History of Newcastle*, which was published in 1789, gives 1292 as the earliest known use of *Vicus Peregrinorum* in reference to the important thoroughfare in the heart of the city which still bears the name Pilgrim Street.¹ This and Pilgrim Street Gate, which formerly stood across the top of the street and was pulled down in 1802, are repeatedly mentioned in local deeds and wills during the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.² Brand relates that the street, he knows not on what authority, "is said to have had its name on account of the pilgrims who came from all parts of the kingdom to worship at our Lady's Chapel at Jesmond in the vicinity of Newcastle." It is possible this is a later accretion; the street does not lead directly to the chapel, and the name may have originally been applied in its early sense of strangers or travellers in general.³ Pilgrim Street, in the City of London, illustrates the ease with which pilgrimist tales spring up and fasten round the name. The name in this case seems to have arisen towards the end of the eighteenth century, and to have first appeared on Horwood's Map of London, 1799. The lane ran roughly east and west along the old London Wall and bore different names at different periods. At one time it was known as London Wall or simply The Wall, later as Stonecutter's Alley, and, immediately before Pilgrim Street, as Little Bridge Street.⁴ The story that it was called after the

¹ *Op. cit.*, I, p. 338, and note *d*.

² R. Welford, *History of Newcastle and Gateshead*, *passim*.

³ Cf. Hastings, *Encyclopædia of Religion*, Art. Pilgrimage (Christian).

⁴ *Ex inf.* kindly supplied by the Records Office, Guildhall.

pilgrims coming by water to Blackfriars and those who came to worship at the shrine of St. Erkenwald in St. Paul's Cathedral can, therefore, be safely dismissed as a modern conceit.¹ Brentwood, Essex, possesses the remains of a medieval chapel which was built by the Abbey of St. Osyth for the convenience of its tenants and dedicated to St. Thomas of Canterbury. The building fell into disuse in the early part of last century and is now a ruin. Two miles away to the north-west, but in the same parish, is the hamlet of Pilgrims' Hatch. The name is certainly old. The recently issued volume, *Place-Names of Essex*, gives an example in 1483 followed by instances from the Parish Registers for 1539 and 1540. On the other hand Pilgrims' Hatch Common in the same neighbourhood is clearly a modern transference; until the nineteenth century this was known as Bentley Common.² Salmon, referring to the chapel in his *History of Essex*, 1740, says, "The perquisites of the chaplain arose from Travellers upon the road, and such as came out of Devotion to *St Thomas*, whence a gate upon the military Way from *Ongar* in this Parish retains the name of *Pilgrims-Hatch*."³ The same statement is repeated almost verbatim by the later Essex historians, Morant and Wright, and is now firmly embedded in modern guide books and directories as an item of local history. Whether Salmon was repeating a local tradition picked up by himself, or taken from Thomas Jekyll, whose collections he made use of, or was merely indulging that love for the fantastic which was his besetting weakness, the germ of the story, it seems clear, is to be seen in the licence for the founding of the Chapel granted 1221 to the Abbot of St. Osyth whereby offerings by strangers and travellers (*extraneis et transeuntibus*) were assigned to the chaplain.⁴ Pilgrims as such are not referred to but the mention of travellers would have been sufficient to suggest them to the eighteenth-century antiquary who wanted an explanation of the place-name, apart from which the mere proximity of hamlet and chapel rendered it inevitable that sooner or later a

¹ Cf. J. C. Wall, *Pilgrimage*, p. 58.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 137.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 261.

⁴ The licence is given in Newcourt's *Repertorium*, II, p. 646.

connection would be suggested between the two in accordance with the normal pilgrimist tendency.

The fame of Our Lady of Walsingham has given an impetus to pilgrim names in Norfolk hardly less potent than that given in Surrey and Kent by the renown of St. Thomas of Canterbury. His own fame may also have encouraged their growth there, for it is a striking fact that the cult of that saint was more popular and widely diffused in Norfolk than in any other county.¹ In the parish of Weeting St. Mary, just within the county boundary, is a track running north known as Pilgrims' Walk, and marked on the Ordnance sheet as an antiquity by that name. In the eighteenth century this was called Walsingham Way, and is referred to by Blomefield who says: "In the fields of Weting north of the town is a greenway called *Walsingham Way* used (as it is said) by pilgrims on their way to the Lady of *Walsingham*, a *modona* of such repute that the *Galaxia* or *Milky Way* was called by people of these parts, the *Walsingham Way* as pointing to that angle."² This extract points to the origin of the present name as a pilgrimist gloss, and the same explanation may account for "Pilgrims' Path," a name which is found in the Suffolk parish of Icklingham, and appeared on the early Ordnance map of 1836. In a map attached to R. Taylor's *Index Monasticus*, 1821, the road running across Norfolk from the Suffolk border is styled "the Walsingham Green Way or Pilgrims' Way," which is interesting as an example of the two names appearing in conjunction. It is doubtful, however, whether Walsingham Way can claim to be an ancient name; the only early reference to it so far discovered being in the parish of North Elmham in 1417, which is not on the same route.³ Another and more popular name, applied to the main route through Brandon and Fakenham, is the Palmer's Way. Several authorities assure us that this road is "still called the Palmer's Way," but this is the hackneyed phraseology of pilgrimist writers and merely begs the question. So far, early instances of the name are wanting and till they are forthcoming, its antiquity remains unproved.

¹ *N. and Q.*, 12th Ser., Vol. XII, p. 223 (1923).

² *History of Norfolk*, Vol. II, p. 173 (ed. 1805).

³ Reference kindly supplied by Professor O. K. Schram, who is working on Norfolk place-names.

The little fourteenth-century chapel at Houghton-in-the-Dale, which lies on a side road some two miles south of Walsingham, has acquired the name of Slipper Chapel or Shoe House. The explanation runs that pilgrims on reaching this spot put off their shoes and completed the journey with bare feet. This legend, which like the name appears to be of modern origin,¹ is probably a generalization of the story told by Sir Henry Spelman of Henry VIII. He relates how that monarch in one of his fits of youthful piety, walked from Barsham to Walsingham barefooted and presented costly offerings at the shrine.² He is alleged to have set out on this pilgrimage from East Barsham Manor, and if so, he would by following the nearest route have passed the chapel on his way.

Wales teemed with saints whose names are often preserved in those of the parishes, while their exploits form part of Celtic hagiology. As pilgrimages overseas declined, visits to the shrines of these domestic saints rapidly increased. Many were of only local repute, some had a wider renown, chief among them St. David, whose shrine attracted pilgrims from far beyond the limits of the country which revered him as its patron saint. The road to the shrine was, according to Dr. Hartwell Jones (who adds that "small stretches of road near the Cathedral bear to this day the name Pilgrims' Road"), known as the Meidr Sant or Holy Way.³ The ancient trackway along the Prescelly Mountains in Pembroke is variously known as *Via Julia*, *Via Flandrica*, and the Pilgrims' Way, of which the first is a spurious modernism and the second a latinized form of Ffordd Fleming.⁴ Fenton when describing this track in his *Tour through Pembrokeshire* (1811) fails to mention these names, though in alluding to the main

¹ The first instance which I have traced is in *Norfolk Churches in Hundred of North Greenhoe*, by T. H. Bryant (1898), p. 48. The name does not appear on Faden's Map of Norfolk, 1797, where the building is marked "Chapel in Ruins." Bryant and earlier writers suppose that it was attached to Walsingham Priory, and this belief though ill-founded may have encouraged the legend.

² *The English Works of Sir H. Spelman*, ed. Gibson, 1728, pp. 149-50.

³ G. H. Jones, *Celtic Britain and the Pilgrim Movement*, p. 371.

⁴ *Historical Monuments Commission, Wales and Monmouth*, Vol. VII, p. 226. Cf. *Antiquity*, Vol. VII, p. 57, and Codrington, *Roman Roads in Britain*, 3rd ed., p. 299.

road leading from Fishguard to St. David's, he speaks of a stone at Mesur y Dorth as "one of the many that at intervals are remembered, marking the different roads leading to St. Davids, the encouraging directory of the pilgrims frequenting it." ¹

By one of the many routes leading to St. David's from the east lies the ruined church of St. Michael in the Parish of Llanfihangel Abercywyn on the south coast of Caermarthen-shire. The Church is popularly known as the Pilgrims' Church from the supposition that six gravestones in the churchyard mark the interment of pilgrims who died on the road and were buried there. The result of recent research is to discredit this story. It is not mentioned by the earlier travellers and topographers and is to be ascribed probably "to the revival of interest in Welsh antiquities and the publication of guide books to Welsh districts." "There is no reason to suppose that the church stands on a route frequented by pilgrims." ² A similar legend is related of two head-stones in the churchyard of Llandowror, which is situated in the same neighbourhood. At Nevern in Pembrokeshire, pilgrims who expired on their way to the shrine are supposed to have been buried in the churchyard. It is interesting to note that in Mr. Kerry's time a similar story prevailed at Puttenham where certain graves were attributed to pilgrims, and it was even related that some years earlier a German had visited the Church to view the burial spot of a pilgrim ancestor.³ Tales of this kind would easily spread, and careful inquiry would no doubt disclose further instances.

Bardsey Island, the reputed resting-place of twenty thousand saints, bore a character for sanctity from early times, which attracted pilgrims from all parts of Britain despite the difficulties and perils of its approach.⁴ The road thither, which followed down the Lleyn promontory, still exists and part of its course is styled on the Ordnance map "The Saints Road to Bardsey." But this description, though reminiscent of its ancient use, appears to be of modern date. The name

¹ Fenton, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

² See Art. in *Trans. Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society*, II, p. 162, by David C. Evans.

³ Kerry MSS.

⁴ G. H. Jones, *op. cit.*, II, p. 354, etc.

is unnoticed by that careful observer, Thomas Pennant, who traversed the promontory in 1776 and left a full description of it.¹

The little Isle of May in the Firth of Forth possesses a landing place known as Pilgrims' Haven, and a well called the Pilgrims' Well, a draught from which was at one time reputed to restore fecundity to women struck with barrenness. St. Adrian, a popular Scottish saint, is said to have settled in the Island and to have been martyred by the Danes in the ninth century. A Priory was afterwards erected, the Church of which was dedicated to him. The Island became a popular pilgrim resort in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and was frequently visited by James IV till shortly before his death at Flodden in 1513. Modern writers seize on these names as though ancient in typical pilgrimist fashion, but omit to furnish evidence. The published Records of the Priory do not mention the names, and references to the King's visits, which are contained in the contemporary accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland, are similarly silent.² On the other hand Sir Robert Sibbald in his *History of Fife and Kinross* published in 1710 enumerates "Pilgrims' haven" among the four places where boats arrived in ancient times, which suggests that the name goes back at least to the later part of the seventeenth century.

The lesson to be drawn from these examples seems to be that the names in cases where not obviously modern are often of doubtful antiquity, and that whatever their origin they have invariably become invested with pilgrimist associations, which in some instances are the product of modern imagination, and in others are seldom supported by any contemporary evidence.

III. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS.

Probably the Way owes more to Bunyan than he ever owed to the Way. Captain James' suggestion of his indebtedness may be an unconscious inversion of the truth, and it may

¹ *Tours in Wales*, ed. 1883, Vol. II.

² *Records of the Priory of the Isle of May*, edited by John Stuart, LL.D. (1868); *Emeralds Chased in Gold*, by J. Dickson, pp. 272-4, 294. "Pilgrims' Haven" is marked on the O.S. map of Fifeshire, 1855, but not on the earlier maps of J. Gordon, 1645, and J. Ainslie, 1775.

well be that the source of the Pilgrims' Road is to be found in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. That work appeared in 1678 and attained immediate and lasting popularity, especially among the working-classes and country folk with whom it ranked only second to the Bible, and formed one of the chief items in their scanty libraries. Mrs. Elizabeth Montague, "the Queen of the Blue Stockings," writing to a friend in 1741, remarked how the Kentish squires turned to that book as one of their sources of entertainment.¹ What is more likely than that they found in stretches of the Old Road a fancied resemblance to the strait and narrow way of the famous allegory, even as the peasants of Surrey strove like Captain James to identify the Leith Hill range with the Delectable Mountains? ² In the dialogue between "Good-will and Christian" the narrow way is pointed out and declared to be "as straight as a rule can make it," and to Christian's inquiry whether there are "no turnings nor windings by which a stranger may lose his way" comes the reply: "Yes, there are many ways butt down upon this, and they are crooked and wide"—a not inapt description of long sections of the Way in Kent which, though not attaining the rectitude of a Roman road or modern turnpike, have a directness seldom matched by the ways that "butt down" on them, and even more appropriate in the eighteenth century when the average country lane, which could boast no permanent track, and wandered vaguely from side to side, was both "crooked and wide." For pilgrimists, however, who following Captain James, seek to "Bunyanize" the Way, no clue is too fanciful, so that they profess to find corroboration even in the name Dowding Castle applied in modern times to a homestead in the middle of Walton Heath, which as late as 1841 was known as Rapley's Home.³

The pilgrim theory was the concept of antiquarians of a later age. Deduced from the name after the origin had been lost sight of, it has been gradually elaborated within the last 100 years. The name was, as we have seen, at first purely local, confined to a few parishes in Kent and spreading with the growth of the theory.

¹ *John Bunyan*, by John Brown (ed. 1928), p. 462.

² *Ibid.*, p. 269.

³ Banstead Tithe Apportionment.

The link between Farnham and Winchester has always been one of the weakest in the chain. To establish this, and the choice of Winchester as the point of departure, various assumptions are made by pilgrimists of the modern school which are none the less conjectural and undocumented though usually expressed in categorical form. Mr. Belloc supposes that the earliest of the routes, by which prehistoric man set out on from Winchester to Dover, was by a path running directly north to join the Harrow Way, his "first effort being to find the established road, the 'guide,' as soon as possible."¹ Next a short cut was possibly attempted to the north east, and finally the shortest cut was taken along the valleys of the Itchen and Wey, this being "the universal method of communication between neighbouring centres on either side of a watershed." Why, one may ask, if this is the universal method, did primitive man so long neglect it in this instance and go to the labour of following two sides of a triangle instead of its base. Moreover, he and Mr. Erwood are mistaken in asserting that the Harrow Way fell into disuse and is now hardly recognizable.² It is on the contrary far better defined in the main than the Pilgrims' Way through Surrey, and can be followed with little difficulty from Farnham to Weyhill, as it was recently by a party from our Society. The Harrow Way was *ex hypothesi* the original continuation of the Old Road from Farnham westward, and arguments based on sounder premises than *à priori* conjecture are needed to account for its supersession by the Winchester tributary. Mr. Belloc maintains, however, that his tributary road grew in importance with the rise of Winchester, till at last all the main traffic from the west was "canalized through Winchester," and the Way became "the main artery" between that region and the Straits of Dover. Decline set in as Winchester decayed and yielded its supremacy to London. Then when the road was stagnating and near to extinction, it was salved by the accident of Becket's murder. "The pilgrimage saved the road." Winchester once again became the gathering point and focus of the western traffic, but with this difference. The streams which now converged on it were composed not of secular travellers bound for the Straits, but

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

² *Ibid.*, p. 62.

of pilgrims voyaging to Canterbury for the good of their souls. In the absence of evidence of this great revival, the problem arises why this wide-drawn traffic should concentrate on Winchester at a time when that city was decaying and the Way obsolescent, and further, why the pilgrims should choose a distinctive route for their departure. Notwithstanding Mr. Belloc's "certitude" that the Way started from the north gate of the city,¹ the probability is that the road to Alresford and Farnham left by the east gate and passed through Winnall and Easton, keeping to the south side of the Itchen. An alternative course was by the road over Magdalen Hill. Recent excavation at Winnall has revealed the Roman road passing the church in the direction of Easton, and among its other merits this route, which still exists, cut the bend of the Itchen and avoided the low-lying ground on Mr. Belloc's route and the ford at Itchen Stoke. The lane leading from Winchester towards Winnall has for centuries past been known as Beggars' Lane, a name which should commend it to pilgrimists, while pilgrims' badges have been found in this lane and by Winnall Church.² The truth is that this picture of alternating periods of activity and stagnation exhibits the Way in false perspective and fails to take account of the change in its character after entering Surrey.

In the matter of distance alone, pilgrims from South Wales and intervening counties, would by striking down to Winchester have sacrificed more than they saved by following the Way from that City. For them London was the more convenient gathering point as it was for Chaucer's Wife of Bath, and for his Shipman though "woning fer by west" at Dartmouth. If the Way was adopted by the first rush of pilgrims with the spontaneity and suddenness alleged, this could only have happened because it had survived in common use and was not the moribund track which they resuscitated. The villages dotted along the course in Hampshire would have kept communication alive, irrespective of the fortunes of Winchester and the falling away of through traffic. Inter-course between the episcopal manors, which were acquired long

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 118.

² I am indebted to Mr. S. Ward-Evans of Winchester for information on the medieval roads from that city and these discoveries.

before the pilgrim era, and Winchester, their administrative head, would also have made for preservation of the road in that county. At the two extremities were Wolvesey and Farnham, both important seats of the bishop, while between lay Alresford, Bishops Sutton, where he had a palace and kennels, and Bentley. In the thirteenth century this road underwent important developments with the growth of Alresford and the construction of a royal highway between that town and Alton, while the pass of Alton grew notorious as the haunt of brigands and outlaws.¹

The improbabilities of the theory are greatly accentuated after Surrey is reached. It is hard to believe that masses of pilgrims, who numbered according to the favourite estimate 100,000 a year, would deliberately select a course which, east of Guildford at any rate, becomes a hillside track and steadily shuns all towns and most of the villages and crosses the rivers by a ford or ferry. The attractions of such a route might appeal to a few of the hardier or more contemplative spirits who welcomed a cross-country saunter and were prepared to face its perils and hardships, but they must have had little fascination for a mixed company such as Chaucer portrays, and all who preferred the ordinary security and conveniences of travel.

The difficulty of subsisting the pilgrim hordes on this route has been pointed out by Mr. Erwood.² To suggest that they resorted to towns like Dorking, Reigate, and Maidstone is not a satisfactory answer. Reigate and Dorking were not in the Middle Ages large enough to accommodate the numbers involved, while Maidstone lies over two miles back from the Way. The fact that these places lay out of the direct course would add considerably to the inconvenience and length of the journey, and the digressions thus necessitated would have robbed the Way of the advantage of that directness which is claimed as one of the chief causes of its popularity.

Again, if the theory be true, the towns and villages served by the Way must have escaped the isolation that usually overtook a country community during the winter months owing to the foulness of its communications. The idea of a

¹ *V.C.H. Hampshire*, II, p. 473; III, p. 348, etc.

² *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. XXXVII, pp. 12 and 13.

close season is ruled out in places which day by day witnessed the invasion of bands of pilgrims passing through or dropping in for rest and refreshment, and this contact would have left its mark on their history and development.

Further, if the name is rightly associable with medieval pilgrims, it may plausibly be argued that their goal was Rochester rather than Canterbury. We have seen that the name appears first in west Kent, and that the branch road towards Rochester on the left bank of the Medway is also labelled "Pilgrims' Road" in Hasteds' map of 1778, the name still applied to it on the Ordnance map. St. William, the baker of Perth, pales before St. Thomas, but he was sufficiently popular to draw throngs of pilgrims to his shrine and their lavish offerings furnished the means of enlarging and enriching Rochester Cathedral.

Note on the Relation of Churches to the Way.

Exception must be taken to Mr. Belloc's fourth characteristic, habit or rule, of the Old Road which he states thus: "Wherever the road goes right up to the site of a church, it passes upon the southern side of that site."¹ He offers no reason for this habit but assumes that many, if not all, of these sites are of pre-Christian origin, and this is to be inferred from the rule which implies that they existed prior to the road and determined its course. To this there are two answers: first, even assuming that the churches occupy pre-historic sites, those sites must have been preceded by tracks of some description leading to them. Mr. Belloc admits as much in his introductory chapter where The Road is classed "among primal things" and as "the most imperative and first of our necessities . . . older than buildings and than wells."² Secondly, the course of the road as the other characteristics show, was determined purely by natural conditions and not by artificial features that now happen to be in its path. Many old churches besides those on the Way lie immediately north of a passing road, for the simple reason that the principal entrance to a church is normally on the south side, following the tendency to "a sunward disposition" which

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 108-9.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

goes back to the primitive dwelling, or as Mr. Belloc puts it, "a custom presumably much older than our religion gave approach to sacred places from the side of the sun."¹ The rule did not always apply in the manner that Mr. Belloc supposes, and his treatment of the passage of the road past Puttenham and St. Martha's Churches is unsatisfactory. While it is true that at Puttenham the road formerly passed by the south of the church, he is wrong in asserting that it continued straight on "past the inn miscalled 'The Jolly Farmer.'"² The road was diverted by the justices in 1824, and the map attached to the Order of Quarter Sessions shows that the old course was that now followed by the drive of the house called "Puttenham Priory" which emerges on to the road running up to the Hog's Back at a point some 150 yards north of the inn. The reason for this is apparent on examination of the ground. Exit farther south is blocked by a conical mound called Bury Hill inside the Priory grounds which was apparently unknown to Mr. Belloc and is not shown in his diagram.³ As regards St. Martha's Church, he states in one place that it "is passed on both sides by a reduplication of the track," though subsequently on examining the hill he confesses his inability to reach a decision. In Rocque's Map of Surrey, 1768, and the early Ordnance sheet of 1816, the road is shown to pass along the north side, and whereas the ground on this side is flat, on the south it shelves away sharply. To pass round the south side necessitates a detour from the line of the tracks which ascend the hill east and west of the church, and the surface indications and gradients are against the view that the road ever made such a sweep. The rule, therefore, by reversing the true historical sequence, puts the cart before the horse. If the rule is turned round and priority given to the road, it merely expresses the truism that church

¹ Cf. *Antiquity*, Vol. IV, p. 345 and n. 3. Belloc, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

² *Op. cit.*, pp. 159-61.

³ "The high conical mound near the Priory, now mostly called 'The Mount,' was until lately termed the 'Bury' . . . but whether this was the site of a British or Saxon camp, I am unable to say, since no remains to my knowledge have ever been found there. . . . About four generations ago, say 1740, Bury Hill was covered with greensward with a furze bush here and there. It was then common land and was a favourite resort for the villagers on Sunday afternoons" (Kerry MSS.).

sites directly on the road usually lie on the north side. But this habit is not invariable and is displaced occasionally by local conditions. St. Martha's is an exception, and another occurs at Seale (nr. Farnham) where the road on nearing the church turns abruptly away without passing owing to a sharp fall in the ground beyond.

Since the above article was written, an interesting article on the Pilgrims' Way has appeared in the quarterly issue of *History* for June, 1936. This contains a trenchant criticism of the pilgrim theory by the late Mr. C. G. Crump.