# THE FOUR ROMAN WAYS

FOS.
WÆTLINGA STRÆT.
ICENHILDE STRÆT.
EARMINGA STRÆT.


Kell, Bro. Lith.rs Castle St. Holborn.

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# THE FOUR ROMAN WAYS.

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In the fifth year after the Conquest, inquisition was made throughout the kingdom into the ancient laws and customs of England. The results of the enquiry are commonly known as the Laws of the Confessor, though we are told that the laws were really made by Edgar, and merely revived by the Confessor after the interregnum of the Danes. From this source we learn, that there were at that time in England four great roads protected by the King's Peace, of which two ran lengthways through the island, and two crossed it, and that the names of the four were respectively, Watlinge-strete, Fosse, Hikenilde-strete, and Erming-strete. These are the roads which are popularly but incorrectly known as "the four Roman ways," and whose course it is proposed to investigate in the present paper.

The King's Peace was a high privilege. Any offence committed on these highways was tried, not in the local court where local influence might interfere with the administration of justice, but before the king's own officers; and we may therefore feel surprise when we find that the identity of two of the roads thus privileged, viz., the Icknield Street and the Erming Street, was the subject of differences of opinion, or at least of statement, within some seventy or eighty years after the Conquest. But though the privileges of the Four Roads were confirmed by William, and continued by his successor, yet as we have reason to believe, that n the first half of the XIIth century, the King's Peace was

extended to *all* the highways [1] in the kingdom, the question which were the lines of traffic that once exclusively enjoyed this protection, became one of merely antiquarian interest, and therefore the less likely to attract attention. The inquiry, however, is of considerable historical importance, and the conflicting opinions which have been lately published on the subject show, that modern criticism has not yet led to any satisfactory settlement of its difficulties.

There are antiquaries who tell us, that the Erming Street was the Roman road that led from St. David's (Menevia) through Gloucester to Winchester and Southampton, and the Icknield Street, the ancient road that led from Derbyshire southward by the West of Arden. There are others who tell us, that the Icknield Street was the trackway which ran along the chalk downs from Norfolk and Suffolk eastward, and the Erming Street the highway which went northward from London in a line nearly coincident with that of the present North Road.

The first of these two parties ground their opinions on the authority of Higden, the monk of Chester, who wrote about the middle of the XIVth century; but they carefully avoid all mention of Jeffrey of Monmouth, whose story that writer at least partially followed. According to Jeffrey, King Belinus son of King Molmutius constructed the Four Roads some four centuries before Christ. One of them "he ordered to be made of stone and mortar, the length of the island, from the sea of Cornwall to the shore of Caithness, so as to lead in a straight course to the intermediate cities. Another road he ordered to be made the breadth of the island, from the city of Menevia on the Sea of Demetia to the port of Hamton (Southampton), in order to afford access to the cities between these places. Two others he also made which crossed the island obliquely," &c.[2]

It will be seen that Jeffrey does not give any names to his Four Roads, and except in the case of his second road does not mention any locality which fixes their identity beyond dispute. His first road, in all probability, was intended to represent the Foss: the second, there can be no doubt, was meant for the Roman road which passed from South Wales through Monmouthshire to Gloucester, and thence to Winchester and Southampton. I cannot find the

[1] In the Laws ascribed to Henry the First, I find the statement "omnes herestrete omnino regis sunt."

[2] Galf. Mon., 3, 5.

slightest corroborative evidence to show that this was one of the four great Roads, and I believe it was selected by this unscrupulous writer, merely because it was an ancient highway, and passed through his native county.

Higden repeats the story of King Molmutius and his son Belinus. The latter he tells us, "caused four royal roads to be made through the island, and protected them with extraordinary privileges. Of these the first and greatest is called Fosse, and stretches from south to north, from its commencement in Cornwall at Totenesse, to the extreme point of Scotland at Catenesse. To speak more accurately, however, according to others it begins in Cornwall and stretching through Devon and Somerset runs by Tetbury on Cotswold, and by Coventry to Leicester, and thence over the open wolds, ending at Lincoln. The second highway is called Watling Strete, stretching across the former road, viz., from south-west to north-east, for it begins at Dover, and passes through the midst of Kent, and over the Thames nigh London, and west of Westminster. Thence it passes near to, and to the west of St. Alban's, through Dunstaple, Stratford, Towcester, Weedon, south of Lilbourn, through Atherston (per Atherscotiam) to Gilbert's Mount, which is now called the Wrekine. Thence it passes the Severn by Wrokcester, and running to Stretton and through the midst of Wales to Cardigan, is terminated on the Irish Sea. The third highway is called Erninge Strete, and stretches from west to east. It begins at Mavonia (Menevia ?), in West-Wales, and goes to Hamo's Port,[3] which is now called Southampton. The fourth highway is called Rykeneld Strete, and stretches from the south to the north-east, beginning at Mavonia aforesaid, and running through Worcester, through Wich, through Birmingham, Lechefeld, Derby, Chesterfield, York, to the mouth of the River Tine which is called Tinemouth." [4]

Higden's account of the course of the two roads, the Watling Street and the Foss, is, with the exceptions hereafter to be noticed, accurate and important. He is said to have been a great traveller, and probably spoke from his own observation. At any rate, these two great thoroughfares were so much frequented, that they must have been

[3] Jeffrey fables, that Southampton took its name from Hamo, a Roman who was slain there.

[4] Polychronicon, lib. i.

familiarly known to most of the strangers who visited his monastery, and the minute details into which he has entered, more particularly with respect to the Watling Street, are extremely valuable.

His account of Erming Street Higden evidently took from Jeffrey, and he seems to have thought that as this highway and the Watling Street crossed the island, and the Foss was the only road that ran lengthways through it, the remaining highway must also run in that direction. Now in travelling along the Watling Street from Chester to London, the first road which Higden came to that fulfilled this condition was the Rykeneld Street, and as its name bore some resemblance to Icknield Street he seems to have been led by a false critical inference to adopt it as one of the four great roads. The popularity of Higden's work gave currency to the notion, and the Rykeneld Street seems gradually to have attached to itself the name of Icknield Street. It must have borne this name early in the XVIIth century, for Dugdale, in his History of Warwickshire, tells us that through a great part of its course it was called "Ickle Street," which is merely a corruption of Icknield Street; and at the present day the many "Icknield Houses" and "Icknield Terraces" which are met with along this road, more particularly where it skirts the great iron district of Staffordshire, is evidence that no doubt is entertained in that neighbourhood of its identity with the more ancient and more celebrated thoroughfare.

The Editor of "The Ancient Laws and Institutes of England" adopts the whole of Higden's views with respect to the Four Roads, and suggests that his Rykeneld Street may be merely a clerical blunder for Hikenilde Strete. But Mr. Thorpe forgot that Hikenilde Strete itself is obviously an instance of that blundering spelling which so often disfigures our names of places in writings posterior to the Conquest, and that the more correct Anglo-Saxon orthography Icenhilde stræt, of which we shall speak shortly, lends but little countenance to his hypothesis. He forgot also that Selden considered the name of Rykeneld Street "justifiable by a very ancient deed of lands bounded near Birmingham in Warwickshire by Recneld;"[5] that the Eulogium,[6] which as regards this matter seems to be some-

[5] Notes on the Polyolbion, Song 16. [6] Cotton MSS., Gall. E. 7.

thing more than a mere copy of Higden's work, has the name of Rykneld; and that Pegge found "in an old survey or map of the country about Tupton Moor (in Derbyshire), where this road goes, &c., which was made in the beginning of the last century (i. e. soon after the year 1600), it was called Rignall Street."[7] It would seem then that the name of Rykeneld Street does not depend solely on the integrity of Higden's text, but has independent grounds[8] to rest upon, and consequently that the difficulty which arises from the discrepancy of the name remains in its full force. It is matter of regret that in a work published under official sanction opinions open to such grave objections should have been adopted so lightly.

We have now to examine the views of those antiquaries who transfer the Icknield and the Erming Streets to the eastern parts of the island—that district, where traces of an early civilisation are most obvious, and whose relative importance becomes the more striking the deeper we penetrate into the antiquities of British History.

Henry of Huntingdon flourished in the first half of the XIIth century, and consequently was a contemporary of Jeffrey of Monmouth. In his History we read, "In such estimation was Britain held by its inhabitants that they made in it four roads from end to end, which were placed under the King's protection, to the intent that no one should dare to make an attack upon his enemy on these roads. The first passes from East to West and is called Ichenild (in some MSS. *Ikenild*), the second runs from South to North and is called Erninge Strete, the third crosswise from Dover

[7] Bibliotheca topographica, Vol. 4.

[8] *One* of the authorities, which Gale quotes in support of his conclusion, that the road in question was called Rykneld Street, must be given up. He tells us that the name of Rykneld Street may be found in a charter (t. H. 3), granting lands to Hilton Abbey, in Staffordshire. The name, as I find it written in the Monasticon, is Richmilde Streete. The difference in the orthography might not, perhaps, be decisive against his inference; but I have discovered the locality of the estate granted by the charter, and I find it lying in the heart of the Potteries. The road referred to in the charter as Richmilde Street, must have been more than twenty miles distant from any portion of the Rykneld Street.

There is an ancient highway, leading to South Shields, at the mouth of the Tyne, which is known as the *Wraken-dyke*. It was called by this name in a charter of the XIIIth century (Vid. Arch. Æliana, 2, 129), and in a charter of the XIIth century, a place in its immediate neighbourhood was named *Wrachennd-berge*, (ib.) This highway was certainly considered by Higden to be a portion of the *Rickneld Street*, and possibly the two names may be connected in their etymology. A writer in the Gent. Mag. (April, 1836) suggests that Rickenhall, in the parish of Aycliffe, Durham, may be a connected word, but I am not aware that any traces either of the Rykeneld Street or of the Wrakin-dyke have been found in its neighbourhood.

(Dorobernia) to Chester, *i. e.* from South-East to North-West, and is called Watlinge Strete ; the fourth, the greatest of all, begins at Totenes and ends in Catnes, in other words runs from the commencement of Cornwall to the limits of Scotland, and this road passes across the island from the South-West to the North-East. It is called Fossa, and passes through Lincoln. These are the four great Roads of England, spacious in their dimensions, and admirable for their construction, protected alike by the edicts of our Kings and the written laws of the land." [9]

The courses which Huntingdon assigns to the four Roads are wholly irreconcileable with Jeffrey's Road from St. David's to Southampton, and also with Higden's Rykeneld Street, but as regards the Foss and the Watling Street there is only a partial disagreement between his account and the accounts of these two writers. Huntingdon carries the Watling Street from Dover to Chester, while Higden carries it from Dover to Wroxeter and thence to Cardigan. As Welsh Princes were reigning over Cardigan during the Xth and XIth centuries, the King of England's peace could not have run into that district at the time when "the Confessor's Laws" were compiled, and consequently the Watling Street which those Laws refer to could not possibly have taken the course which Higden assigns to it. But as the whole line of road from Dover to Chester was under the control both of Edgar and of the Confessor, there is nothing in Huntingdon's account which is inconsistent with the known facts of our History, and thus far at least we have grounds on which to rest a presumption in its favour.

The earliest mention of the Watling Street that I have met with occurs in the treaty between Alfred and Guthrum, which was probably made in the year 879. According to this treaty, the boundary line which separated the territories of the two Kings ran up the Lea to its source, then straight to Bedford, and thence up the Ouse to Watling Street. [1] Among the charters of the Xth century are five [2] which mention Watling Street, and I believe I can point out the situation of all the estates these charters refer to. One of

[9] Hist. Angl. l.

[1] Vid. "Ælfrides and Guthrumes Frith" in "The Ancient Laws and Institutes of England."

[2] Cod. Dipl., Nos. 399, 449, 590, 1099, 1275. The last-quoted Charter may be a forgery, but if so, it must be one of great antiquity.

them was situated in the neighbourhood of Wroxeter, another in the neigbourhood of London, and the other three in the counties of Bedford, Buckingham, and Northampton. We may conclude therefore with tolerable certainty that in the Xth century the whole line of road from London to Wroxeter was known as the Watling Street, and according to the tenor of the Confessor's Laws must have enjoyed the privilege of the King's Peace. Whether the privilege extended beyond these limits may be open to dispute. The street in Canterbury through which the road from London to Dover passes has been known from an early date as the Watling Street. This, however, is by no means decisive as to the point in question. The street in London which bears the name of Watling Street could have formed no part of the highway, at least if we give any credit to Higden's statement, which makes the highway pass the river west of Westminster. The London street may have taken its name from the circumstance that travellers by the highway passed along it on entering the city; and in like manner persons travelling from the North-West to Dover may have given the name of Watling Street to the highway South of the Thames, on the supposition that it was merely a continuation of the road along which they had been travelling. The ancient road which runs from Wroxeter through South Wales probably received its name of Watling Street for a similar reason, viz., because the traveller from London to South-Wales passed first along the real Watling Street, and then along this road to his destination.

Still, however, Huntingdon may not have been mistaken in making Dover and Chester the termini of the Watling Street. It certainly was a prevalent notion in the beginning of the XIIth century that each of the Four Roads reached from sea to sea. The phrase used in the Laws of the Confessor "duo in longitudinem regni, alii vero in latitudinem distenduntur" may in some measure have countenanced the notion; but I am inclined to think that it had something better than a mere phrase of doubtful interpretation to rest upon, and that the Watling Street at the least did really fulfil this condition.

The Foss is mentioned in several of our Anglo-Saxon charters,[3] some of which date as early as the VIIIth century.

[3] Kemble, Cod. Dipl., Nos. 136, 426, 566, 620, 643, 817.

I think I may venture to say that all the estates described in these charters can still be pointed out. With one exception all the properties lay along the Foss, north of Bath and within some 50 or 60 miles of that city. The exceptional charter refers to an estate at Wellow, 3 miles south of Bath. It is no doubt a forgery, but could not have been fabricated later than the XIIth century, and, therefore, is good authority for our present purpose. To the same century belongs the charter which is quoted by Gale, and by which Henry I. granted permission to Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, to divert the "Chiminum Fosse" so as to make it pass through his town of Newark. We may then reasonably conclude, that the whole of the Roman Road between Ilchester and Lincoln was known as the Foss during the XIIth century, and probably at a much earlier period, and, therefore, that in all likelihood the whole of the road between these termini was protected by the King's Peace during the reign of the Confessor. If the King's Peace ran beyond Lincoln, it may have followed the "High Street," which stretches north from Lincoln to the Humber. South of Ilchester the Roman Road has been very imperfectly traced. It seems to point to Seaton, which is generally taken to be the Roman Maridunum, but it may have turned westward and gone to Exeter — a course which would better agree with the accounts left us by Huntingdon and Higden. We must not, however, lay too much stress on the phrase used by these writers, "from Totness to Caithness." It was merely a proverbial expression to denote the entire length of the island, and may be found even in Nennius.

The *Icenhilde weg* is mentioned in several charters[4] of the Xth century, which appear to refer to six different estates, five of which may, I think, be still pointed out very satisfactorily. They lie in Berkshire, between Blewbury and Welands Smithy; and so minute is the description of the boundaries as almost to enable us to furnish a map of the district, such as it existed at that early period. The earliest mention of the Icknield Way *north* of Thames which I have met with is furnished by "the ancient parchment" belonging to the Heralds' College, from which Dugdale took his account of the founding of Dunstable

[4] Cod. Dipl. Nos. 578, 1080, 1129, 1151, 1172. The estate referred to in No. 1053, which, by the bye, Mr. Kemble marks as subject to suspicion, I have not been able to identify.

Priory,—"locus autem ille prope Houghton, ubi Watling et Ickneld duæ stratæ regiæ conveniunt, extitit undique nemorosus et latronibus sic repletus, ut vix possit ibi legalis pertransire quin per eosdem necaretur, aut membra vel catalla perderet; dictus autem dominus rex (Hen. I.), ad hujusmodi malitiam refrænandam locum illum circumquaque jusserat assartari &c." [5] Dugdale has not given us the date of his "ancient parchment," but he would hardly have so designated it, if it had been of later date than the XIVth century, and to this century in all probability it belonged. In the year 1476 was written a certain "letter testimonial," in which the inhabitants of several Bedfordshire parishes "witnesse that ther is oon crosse standynge in the feld of Toternho, the whiche crosse standeth in Ikeneld Strete to the whiche crosse the waye ledynge from Spilmanstroste directly streacheth," &c.[6] In the XVth century, therefore, the trackway we are treating of must have been generally known as the Icknield Street by the people who lived immediately to the north of Dunstable. In the time of Charles II. the same trackway was known in Oxfordshire by the names of Icknil, Acknil, Hackney, or Hackington Way.[7] Icknil and Acknil Way are evidently corruptions of Icknield Way, and Hackney Way appears to be a mere modification of Acknil Way, arising from an attempt to give significance to a word otherwise unmeaning. The term "Hackington Way" does not admit of so easy an explanation, and the investigation of its meaning will require at our hands very careful consideration.

The name of the highway is written in our Anglo-Saxon charters, Icenhilde weg, or Icenilde weg; but the latter mode of spelling the word is found only in late or ill-written charters. The meaning of Icenhilde weg is tolerably obvious. *Hild*, war, battle, forms in its genitive case *hilde*, and this genitive case enters freely into composition; thus *rinc* is a man, *hilde-rinc*, a warrior, *leoth*, a song, *hilde-leoth*, a war-song, *bil*, a bill, *hilde-bil*, a battle-axe, &c. According to the analogy of these compounds, we obtain from *weg*, a way, *hilde-weg*, a way fitted for military expeditions—a highway; and *Icen hilde-weg* would be the Highway of the Icen, or Iceni, the people into whose country this trackway directly

[5] Monasticon, 6, 239.

[6] Chron. de Dunstaple, vol. 2, p. 702.

[7] Plott's Oxfordshire, 10, 22.

led. I have written the words *Icen hilde-weg* so as to suit the requirements of our modern orthography, but in an Anglo-Saxon manuscript I should expect to find the orthography *Icenhilde weg*, precisely as the words are written in our charters. I have elsewhere called the attention of scholars to this peculiarity in the orthography of our Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.

The Icknield Street proceeds from Icklingham, in Suffolk, to Ickleton, and then crossing "the Branditch" between Haydon and Foulmire, proceeds to Ickleford. These names, Icklingham, Ickleton, and Ickleford, are in all probability corruptions of Iceningham, Icenton, and Icenford—Icening being formed from Icen, by the addition of the gentile termination *ing*. Icenford may indicate a ford which was merely used by the Icen in their journeys westwards; but Icenton, the town or homestead of the Icen, must indicate a place where that people *dwelt*, and we may infer that it lay near the borders of some other tribe, for the name would otherwise be wanting in significance. There is good reason to believe, that the Branditch was the western *limes* of the Iceni, and Ickleton the first inhabited place within their borders, which was reached by the traveller in his progress eastward along the Icknield Street. Icening-ham, the ham or dwelling of the Icenings, was beyond any reasonable doubt the capital of that people. Traces of its importance as a British station are still sufficiently obvious.

Hence we may understand how it came to pass that the name of Icenton or Ickleton so often occurs along the course of the Icknield Street. This village was to the traveller along the Icknield Street what Berwick was to the Scotchman in his visit to England before railways were invented; and we need not feel surprise when we find the Icknield Street called the Hackington-way in Oxfordshire, the Ickleton-way, or the Ickleton-meer [8] in Berkshire, or the Aggleton Road in Dorset.[9] We must not suppose that the antiquaries who handed down to us the information, or the peasants from whom they derived it, were aware of the real meaning or origin of these terms. The names were no doubt kept afloat in local tradition ages after the obscure Cambridgeshire village, that gave rise to them, was forgotten.

[8] Wise's Ant. of Berkshire, p. 43.

[9] Gale's Essay, p. 139.

A curious, but extremely rude map, which professes to represent the courses of the Four Roads, is referred to by Gale. It is found in one of the Cotton Manuscripts[1] which my friend Mr. Watts[2] informs me is of the XIIIth century, and it carries the Icknield Street from Bury St. Edmunds to Salisbury. As Bury lies on the same river as Icklingham, and in some sense may be considered as the modern representative of the British town, there was no very great mistake in making it one of the two termini. If Salisbury, that is Old Sarum, were the other terminus, the Icknield way most probably ran into the Ridgeway before the latter reached Avebury, and then proceeded with it across the Avon-valley to its destination, in the track which has been described by Sir R. C. Hoare, in his Descr. of North Wiltshire, p. 45.

It is, however, a matter of the greatest difficulty to define the portion of this old trackway which in the XIth century was protected by the King's Peace. The Roman Road running from Old Sarum to Badbury, is called Ackling Ditch, and west of the Stour are the remains of an old thoroughfare which the peasantry still point out as a continuation of the Icknield Street, and whose name of Aggleton Road occasioned Gale so much perplexity. Stukeley again describes the Icknield way as bifurcating south of Thames—one of the branches running towards Avebury, and the other in a direction towards Silchester; and I am told by my friend Mr. Gunner, that he has seen a charter (t. H. 6) which describes an estate near Andover as bounded on the north by the Icknield Way.[3] No one can suppose that in the Laws of the Confessor *two* lines of road were referred to under the name of Hikenilde Strete, and as it is certain that in the Xth and XIth centuries the name of Icenhilde Stræt was given to the road which led to Avebury, we must conclude it was applied to the road leading towards Silchester *by mistake*, when in a later age such road became the ordinary thoroughfare from the East

[1] Nero, B. 1.

[2] He also informs me that the account which Gale gives of the blunders in the manuscript has no foundation in fact. The blunders are really due to Gale himself, or the person he employed to copy, and not to the writer of the manuscript.

[3] It was probably one of the deeds referred to by Richard Willis in his very unsatisfactory paper on the Icknield Way. "In old deeds of lands in Andover bordering on this street, it is called the Hicknel or Hecknal Way." Arch. 8, p. 94.

to Salisbury. We have already noticed similar misapplications of the name of Watling Street.

Traces of an ancient causey may still be found alongside the turnpike-road which leads from London to Royston. On reaching the chalk-downs above the latter place, the traveller sees the straight white road descending into the Fens, which stretch away to the North as far as the eye can reach. Some two or three miles from the foot of the Downs the road crosses a branch of the Cam at a place called Arrington Bridge. This bridge is generally supposed to be built on the old ford, which gave name to the Hundred—Ermingford Hundred. The village lies about a mile from the bridge, and a circle round it of three or four miles radius would include some of the richest pastures in the county. In Domesday Book Arrington is written Erningtune, and Ermingford Hundred Erningford Hundred, just as we have seen that Huntingdon and Higden wrote Erning Street for Erming Street. It is obvious, that less action of the organs is required[4] in pronouncing Erning than Erming, and the greater facility of pronunciation, no doubt, gave rise to the corruption. Facility would be still further promoted by dropping the *n*, and hence at a later period Ernington was changed into Arrington. There can be little doubt that Arrington represents the Earmingtone which Bishop Theodred mentions in his will,[5] together with other estates in Cambridgeshire and the adjoining counties. Some place, also, in the neighbourhood of this village must represent the Earmingaford which Edgar gave,[6] and the Erningford which the Confessor confirmed[7] to the monks of Ely. The names of the villages which accompany the mention of these places in the two charters, such as Shelford, Triplow, Melbourne, &c., leave us little room for doubt either as to the identity of the places, or as to their locality.

In his account of Huntingdonshire, Camden tells us that the present North road near Stilton was called Erming Street in an ancient Saxon charter; and in his account of Cambridgeshire he quotes the "Hist. Eliensis" as his authority for giving that name to a part of the same road in the latter county. Other writers, and among them Bentham in his history of Ely Cathedral, quote the "Hist. Eliensis" to

[4] This is seen most clearly when the *r* is pronounced *distinctly*.
[5] C. D., No. 957. [6] C. D., No. 97. [7] C. D., No. 907.

the same effect. I have, however, glanced through this work without finding the passage referred to; and consequently the earliest authority I can cite for giving the name of Erming Street to this particular line of road is the passage from Huntingdon, which has been already quoted.[8]

The name of Earmingaford, which has come down to us in its Anglo-Saxon integrity, suggests that the earliest name of the Street was Earminga Stræt, the street of the Earmings —Earminga being the genitive case plural of Earming.[9] The question then naturally arises, who were these Earmings?

Jacob Grimm [1] has speculated on the etymology of Erming Street. He speaks doubtfully of its connexion with Arminius and the Irmen-sul, and seems to prefer the derivation *Earminga stræt*, the street of the poor men, on the perfectly gratuitous supposition, that it was much frequented by pilgrims. It cannot surely require much ingenuity to suggest a more plausible hypothesis.

Bede calls the men of Cambridgeshire the Southern Girvii.[2] Girvii is clearly connected with the Anglo-Saxon *Gyrwe*, a fen, which is represented in the Icelandic by *eörfi*, mire, fen. Haldorsen, in noticing this latter word, informs us that the Norwegians call bog-earth *eörme*, "per notissimam metathesin *m* pro *f*." Now Cambridgeshire was the very centre of the Danish settlements in this part of England during the IXth century. At the close of that century the Northmen had burghs at Cambridge, at Huntingdon, and at Bedford; and the whole of Norfolk and Suffolk was in their hands. We can understand, therefore, how the Norse phrase *eörme* came to be naturalised in Cambridgeshire, and the men of that shire to be called Earmings, *i.e.*, the men of the *Earm*, or fen-land. We find this word in other parts of the island, and sometimes in close proximity with the

[8] Salmon in his "New Survey," &c., tells us that "in the buttings and boundings of lands in Therfield (near Royston) some are said to be near the Ermine Street;" and also that "a Roman way near Stamford is in the writings of the Monks called Ermine Street," &c. I presume these "writings of the monks" are the same as "the writings of Peterborough Abbey," which, according to Horsley, "mention Hermen Street." It were to be wished these writers had been more particular in citing their authorities.

[9] The full significance of *Erminga Stræt* would no doubt be conveyed by the compound Earming-Stræt, but not with the same degree of precision; just as Aldermanbury, though synonymous with, yet expresses its meaning less clearly than, Aldermansbury. It is probable, however, that Watling Street and Erming Street are not the representatives of such Anglo-Saxon compounds, but corruptions of the Anglo-Saxon phrases Wætlinga Stræt and Earminga Stræt.

[1] Deutsche Mythologie, 213.

[2] Hist. Eccl., c. 19.

corresponding Anglo-Saxon word. Jarrow, the monastery where Bede lived, is called by Simeon of Durham "æt Gyrwum"—at the fens; and it evidently took its name from "the Slake," a low marshy tract which is overflowed by the Tyne at high-water, and on the borders of which it stands. Now, close to the southern boundary of Bede's county, in a low peninsula almost surrounded by the Tees, stands the town of Yarm, which has more than once been nearly swept away by the river during floods. There cannot be much doubt that the name of Yarm is the Norwegian term *eörme*. Such places were often selected by the Northmen for their burghs, and Yarm may probably have been the site of one of these fortresses.

The name of Earminga stræt, the street of the Earmings or fenmen, must have been first given to that portion of the road which bordered on the fens, and then gradually applied to the whole line of road which was protected by the King's Peace; we may conclude with tolerable confidence that this protection extended from London to Lincoln. If the Erming Street passed beyond Lincoln, it probably crossed the Foss[3] and ran into Yorkshire.

In noticing the Erming Street, Grimm also gives us his notions on the etymology of Watling Street. As in the XIVth and XVth centuries the Milky Way was called Watling Street,[4] he seems inclined to look upon the Wætlings as one of "the Mythical Races." He afterwards suggests *waðol* "wandering" as the root of the word, and that the Watling Street was called the Wanderer's Way, as the Erming Street the Poor man's Way, because it was much used by pilgrims. There is, however, no reason for believing that the Erming and the Watling Streets were more frequented by pilgrims than any other highway in the island—than the Foss and the Icknield way, for example.

These vague and misty speculations seem to have met with but little favour at the hands of our countrymen.[5] I believe

[3] The Ordnance Maps assign the name of Erming Street both to the road that leads from Lincoln to the Humber, and also to that which crosses the Trent; and they recognise a third Erming Street in Jeffrey's Road from Gloucester to Winchester. They have also no fewer than three Icknield Streets. Two or three Fosses, or two or three Watling Streets, might have admitted of explanation; but as Erming Street and Icknield Street are not generic, but distinctive names, these triplicities are peculiarly unfortunate.

[4] The well-frequented thoroughfare which crossed the island, would present an obvious analogy with the great arch crowded with stars that stretched across the heavens.

[5] Mr. Thorpe refers to them, but only as "conjectures," (Laws and I. of Engl.

the great body of English antiquaries still entertain the opinion of Stukeley, according to which Watling Street meant the Irishmen's road—a meaning which everyone will admit to be at least an appropriate one. Stukeley knew nothing of Anglo-Saxon, and if he had been asked to support his etymology on philological grounds, would no doubt have been at fault. But it must, in candour, be admitted that there is no real philological objection to his hypothesis. The Welsh call the Irishmen *Gwyddel*; and this term, supposing it to have been adopted by our ancestors, might well have taken the form of *wætel* in Anglo-Saxon. Adding the gentile termination *ing*, we get the derivative *wætling*, and Wætlinga Stræt, the term which is met with in our Anglo-Saxon charters, would be the street of the Wætlings or Irishmen—Wætlinga being the genitive case plural of Wætling.

But the objections to this derivation on other grounds appear to be unanswerable. There are several Watling Streets in Britain. One of them runs through Delamere Forest in Cheshire; another through the woodland districts of the West-Riding, the Elmet Forest of Bede; a third through Northumberland and Roxburghshire towards Ettrick Forest; and lastly the Erming Street in the neighbourhood of Rockingham Forest has been called Watling Street both by Leland[6] and by others.[7] No one, it is presumed, will maintain that all these roads took their name from the Irishmen that travelled along them. Again, Verulam, through which the Watling Street passes, is called by Bede,[8] and also in a certain Anglo-Saxon charter,[9] Wætlinga ceaster, the city of the Wætlings; whence it appears that the people who gave this name to the road also gave it to the Roman city, and it is equally clear this people were not Irishmen. Who then were these mysterious Wætlings?

The answer, I believe, lies on the surface. The Welsh term *Gwyddel* was applied not only to the Irish but also to

Gloss. *Erming Street*). Mr. T. Wright, however, adopts them without hesitation and without acknowledgment. "Of these four roads one only, the Wætlinga Stræt, is mentioned in purely Anglo-Saxon writings, and on the name of that there can be no doubt, or of its mythic character. The name of another is equally mythic, which is written in the printed text *Erminga Strete*, and has been corrupted in more modern times into Erming Street." Inventorium Sepulchrale, l. i. c. vii.

[6] "Ancaster standeth in Wateling Street," &c. Lel. i. 30. Elsewhere he calls this road Hermen Street. Lel. Itin. i. 82.

[7] "The continuation of the street from Stilton is there named Forty-foot Road, from its breadth, and in some maps Watling Street, which must be a great error," &c. Gale's Essay, p. 124.

[8] Hist. Eccl. c. vii.

[9] Cod. Dipl. No. 696.

the wild men who lived in the Weald, as contradistinguished from the husbandmen who cultivated the plain.[1] Now the woodlands through which the Watling Street ran for some 30 or 40 miles after leaving London were during the middle ages notorious for the banditti that infested them. Mathew Paris tells us that Leofstan Abbot of St. Albans in the XIth century cut down all the trees within a certain distance of the highway to enable the traveller the better to provide against the robbers that lay in wait for him; and we have seen that Henry the First founded the town and priory of Dunstable as a further protection against their outrages. These broken and desperate men must have been the Watlings that gave their name to the Watling Street; and it was no doubt to their harbouring themselves in the vaults and amid the ruins of the old Roman town[2] that the latter obtained its name of Watling-chester. It is well known that many other forest-tracts were infested with bands of outlaws, and we need feel little surprise when we find Watling Streets in the neighbourhood of the several forests of Delamere, Elmet, Ettrick, and Rockingham. Gale charged those, who converted a portion of the Erming Street into a Watling Street,[3] with committing "a great error;" but the error really lay at the door of the critic, and not of the topographer.

The name of *Foss* has given rise to some very strange hypotheses. It has been supposed that the road was so called, because it was one of the hollow ways which marked out the lines of ancient British traffic; but, in truth, the Roman character of the Foss is perhaps more decided than that of any other highway in the island. It has been conjectured by others, that the road was left incomplete by the Romans, and certain portions of it in the north of Warwickshire have been pointed out as exhibiting a *fossa* merely, without any *dorsum* or ridge. But every one who has travelled along a Roman road knows that it often exhibits the appearance of a ditch—and sometimes for very long distances—owing to the abstraction of the gravel, &c., for the purposes of the neighhourhood. I suspect the origin of the name does not lie quite so near the surface as these antiquaries have imagined.

[1] Owen Pugh's Dict. *Gwyddel.*

[2] In like manner, during the XIVth and XVth centuries, the deserted stations along the Wall afforded harbourage to the border-thieves of Northumberland.

[3] Vid. p. 113, n. 7.

Roman writers upon agriculture give the name of *fossa* not merely to the open, but also to the covered drain. One was called the *fossa cæca*, and the other the *fossa patens*. Now in making a causey, the first thing the Romans did was to remove the surface soil, or, in other words, to make a *fossa* to receive the gravel, and other hard materials—

alto
Egestu penitus cavare terras
Mox haustas aliter replere fossas.

As the *fossa*, which served for a covered drain, retained the name when filled with stones and brushwood and covered in with soil, so I believe the road-maker's *fossa* kept its name, even when it appeared as a finished causey. I cannot quote any ancient authority which distinctly favours this conclusion; but *fossatum*, which by the later Latinists was used as a synonym of *fossa*, was commonly employed in our charters to denote a causey, from the XIth to the XVth century. The great Roman road which we call the Foss, appears to have been termed the *fossa* κατ' ἐξοχήν—*the* Causey.

It may be said, that if the British provincials used the term *fossa* as a general name for a causey, we might expect to find more than one instance of the word in our English topography. In fact, the county of Dorset does furnish us with a second instance of its use. We read in Gale's Essay, "Speed places Dorchester on the Fosse, and upon inquiry, I find that there is a large raised causeway which runs directly from that town, ten miles together, to a place called Egerton Hill, where the remains of a Roman camp are to be seen, called by that name." The accuracy of Gale's information on this subject has been sometimes questioned, but it has been confirmed from other sources, and is sufficient warrant for our giving the name of foss to the road in question. The scepticism, however, of those who doubted on this matter, was not altogether unreasonable. The Dorsetshire foss was most certainly no part of the highway, to which we have hitherto given the name, and of which certain antiquaries considered it to be the continuation.

Before I conclude this paper, I would add a few words with respect to the time when, and the circumstances under

which the Four Roads were constructed. The Watling Street and the Foss were no doubt throughout their whole course Roman causeys, and there can be little doubt that in the XIIth century these magnificent works existed in nearly their original state. I know not from whence Huntingdon and Jeffrey could have taken their description of these roads, unless it was from personal observation. They have now almost disappeared from the surface of the island. The work of destruction has no doubt been going on for centuries, but it is the road-contractors of the last century to whom the state of dilapidation, in which we now find these monuments, is chiefly owing.

That portion of the Erming Street which lies between London and Huntingdon was not, I believe, of Roman construction. A great Roman road leaves unmistakeable evidence behind it that it once existed, in the remains of Roman stations, of Roman villas, and of Roman burial-grounds; and none of these remains have yet been found along that portion of the Erming Street which lies south of the Fens. But a still stronger argument against the Roman origin of the Erming Street south of Huntingdon, is furnished by the Iters of Antoninus. Three of the Iters pass from London to Lincoln; and of these, two run down the Watling Street to the Foss, and then up the Foss to Lincoln, while the third Iter proceeds to Colchester and then to Lincoln by way of Cambridge and Huntingdon. I cannot believe we should have had any one of these three iters, if a paved road had then existed leading directly from London to Lincoln.

The Erming Street, however, must certainly date from a very remote antiquity. It must have existed in the days of Edgar, and perhaps as early as the times of Offa. We have ample proof that, in the Anglo-Saxon period, Hertfordshire was a well-peopled district, and consequently that its woodlands, which appear to have been the great impediment to Roman road-making, must in great measure have disappeared before the labours of the husbandman.

The Icknield Street has been generally, and I believe rightly, considered as a mere British trackway. I have looked for traces of an artificial road along its course, but have not found them. The word *street* must not mislead us, for it was certainly used, at least in the south of England,

with great laxity of meaning. In our charters the road is generally styled a way—*Icenhilde weg*, — though in one charter it is called a street.[4] It may possibly have been gravelled and paved for short distances, to meet the requirements of particular localities.

The Bishop of Cloyne's description of the Icknield Street some fifty years ago, will give the reader on the whole a not unfair notion of its general appearance even at the present day. He tells us it enters Cambridgeshire "near Newmarket, and keeping by the hilly grounds to the east of the present turnpike-road, bears directly for Ickleton, &c. It goes through Ickleton and by Ickleton Grange over Fulmere field to Royston, where it crosses the Ermine Street, and keeps straight by the chalky hills to Baldock and Dunstaple. In some parts of the line here described, especially over Fulmere field, from frequent ploughings and the confusion occasioned by numerous field roads it is not easy to follow it, but in much of its way over the heath near Newmarket, on the hill south-west of Ickleton and on the downs to the east and west of Royston, the marks of its course are so evident as to leave no doubt that a road of considerable antiquity and importance must have proceeded in that direction." [5]

I know no part of England—and I am well-acquainted with its bye-ways—where so much of genuine legend still lingers among the peasantry as along the course of the Icknield Street. Plott represents the road as almost deserted even in his day, yet your guide will talk of the long-lines of pack-horses that once frequented the "Ickley way," as if they were things of yesterday; and a farmer in the Vale of

[4] C. D., No. 1129.

[5] Lyson's Cambridgeshire, p. 44. I quote Bishop Bennett's testimony to the course of the Icknield Street in this particular district, as an answer to some novel views which have been lately published on the subject, though I believe no difference of opinion exists, or ever did exist, among well-informed antiquaries as to the matter in question.

In his recent work, entitled the Inventorium Sepulchrale, Mr. Roach Smith has inserted an essay written by his friend Mr. Thomas Wright, which treats *inter alia* of the Four Roads. In the map prefixed to the Essay, Mr. Wright carries the Icknield Street to Cambridge. Not a single argument is adduced to justify this departure from received opinion; and when we find Mr. Wright carrying the Erming Street also to Cambridge, and the Watling Street to Shrewsbury; when we find him asserting that this name of *Watling Street* was the only one of the four known to the Anglo-Saxon, and that the term *Fosse* is "undoubtedly" of Anglo-Norman origin, the reader will probably agree with me in the conclusion, that any further notice of Mr. Wright's speculations on these subjects is uncalled for.

Aylesbury told me, as he was pointing out the course of the Icknield Street along the sides of the Chiltern, that in the popish times they used to go on pilgrimage along it from Oxford to Cambridge. The story admits of an easy explanation. The Icknield way was no doubt the great road for pilgrimages from the west of England to the "Martyr's shrine" at Bury, and as it passed some ten miles south of Oxford, and about the same distance south of Cambridge, these familiar names were seized upon in order to give shape and locality to the story.

There is something in the deserted aspect of this old trackway which is very fascinating to the antiquary; while the boundless views which, throughout its whole course, open to the west and north, and its long stretches of springy turf-land, which even the agricultural changes of the last ten years have not wholly obliterated, are accompaniments that will no doubt be more generally appreciated. The absence of ancient towns along its course has been often noticed. At three points, indeed, where it is crossed by ancient roads, we find Royston, Baldock, and Dunstaple, but of these the first and last date only from the twelfth century. The want of Roman remains, however, is amply compensated for by the many objects, mostly of British antiquity, which crowd upon us as we journey westward—by the tumuli and the "camps," which show themselves on our right hand and on our left—by the six gigantic earthworks which, in the interval of eighty miles, between the borders of Suffolk and the Thames, were raised at widely distant periods to bar progress along this now deserted thoroughfare—by the White Cross which rises over the Vale of Aylesbury, and the still more ancient White Horse that looks down upon the Vale of Wantage. When it is remembered that in its probable course westward, the Icknield Street passes by "Wayland's Smithy," and the mysterious Avebury, and that it crosses the Wansdyke in its progress towards Stonehenge and Old Sarum, it will be conceded, that no line of country of the same extent in Britain, can show objects of greater interest to the antiquary and—why may we not add the more dignified name?—to the historian.