

A Roman Colony near Brancaster.

COMMUNICATED BY

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INTRODUCTION.

It is the object of this essay to introduce to the student of Roman Britain a line of research hitherto neglected. In brief, the suggestion is this—that the sites, the boundaries and the divisions of certain Roman soldier settlements in Britain can still be identified. It is further suggested that one such site extended from Holme-next-the-Sea towards Brancaster, and that many of its old divisions have persisted as roads and field boundaries. There can be no doubt that the lay-out of the roads (herein called the “road-pattern”) in this corner of Norfolk is quite unlike that of the rest of the county, and is well worth investigating for that reason alone. Similar restricted areas occur in other counties. What they mean and who made them cannot well be decided on the evidence of any single area. That is why this paper is no more than an introduction to a particular line of study, a line especially commended to the student of Roman Britain.

NORMAL ROAD PATTERNS AND VARIANTS.

The normal road pattern of the east and south-east of Britain is of the “wheel-spoke” variety shown in Figure 1.

Where there are no particular natural obstacles the inhabitants of each village have developed a series of radiating roads to connect them with their nearest neighbours. Any marked variation from this pattern calls for examination and, if possible, explanation. Certain variations are of obvious significance; for example, turnpike and arterial roads and the long straight roads which were made pursuant to Enclosure Acts. To these must be added the great Roman roads such as Peddar's Way, but with none of these are we really concerned in the area to be studied. Peddar's Way just avoids the area, the Enclosure Acts hardly affected it, and the same is true of more modern activities in the making of roads. Of the other factors which tend to disturb the typical wheel-spoke pattern there are two of chief importance, the draining and reclamation of marshes and the influence of hill country. The reclaiming of marshes by means of sea walls was commonly followed by the use of these walls as highways, and such highways make a pattern all their own. It is not difficult to recognise on the map, since the walls themselves are usually shown. There are a few such roads on the north of the Holme-Brancaaster area, but they do not affect the road patterns with which this essay deals. The drainage of marshes has also a tendency to produce a rectangular map pattern, composed mostly of water channels, but usually assisted by field divisions and roads whose site and direction has been determined by the water channels. The patterns which develop in marsh areas do not really concern the thesis with which this paper deals, but they are of subsidiary importance because those who do not know the area, and depend only on a map, might well suppose that the marshes bordering the area on the north cover a larger area than is actually the case. The influence of hill country on the normal road pattern has only one point of interest at the moment. When a series of villages lies at the foot of a

range of hills, and those hills (as is commonly the case) have a series of parallel valleys, each having a village at its foot, then we may also expect to find parallel roads, one in each valley, rising to the top of the hills by the shortest route. Thus we may encounter on the map a series of parallel roads not at all unlike the Holme-Brancaſter roads, and these may, at firſt glance, prove confusing. The hills ſouth of the Holme-Brancaſter area are not ſufficiently high, nor ſo broken with valleys, as to cauſe confusion in this particular inſtance. Nor do the roads follow ſuch depressions as there are. An example of this tendency to parallel hill roads may be ſeen on the map of Norfolk to the eaſt of the line East Walton-Gayton-Grimſton-Hillington.

THE HOLME-BRANCASTER ROAD PATTERN.

Although none of the diſturbſng factors juſt mentioned can be held reſponſible, the road pattern in this area departs very widely from the wheel-ſpoke normal variety. It is baſed on two main roads, each approximately four miles in length. The more northern of theſe paſſes from Holme through Thornham and Titchwell to Brancaſter and ſomewhat beyond. Two miles to the ſouth of this is a parallel road ſtarting at Ringſtead and running in the direction of Burnham Market. It paſſes through only one village, that of Choleſey, which is now (and in all likelihood has always been) of no more ſocial complexity than could be occaſioned by the internal organiſation of a ſingle eſtate. Theſe two roads are ſhown in Figure 2b, which is traced from the one-inch map. It will be noted that they are joined together from north to ſouth by a number of roads (which are of courſe much better ſeen on larger, and on older maps) which have the following characteristics:—(a) they lead from points apparently choſen haphazard on the northern road to points of a like unimportance on the ſouthern; (b) they meet the greater

roads always at right angles; and (c) they are parallel to each other. It is quite true that some of these roads do not stay the whole course, starting due south from a spot on the northern road they keep for some way parallel to their neighbours. Then the influence of Choseley or Docking begins to be felt and the road bends in the direction of one or other village. These curious straight starts and sudden bends are in themselves sufficient to suggest that the straight roads may originally have had some other purpose than their use for traffic. It will presently be suggested that they were laid down to demarcate what we should call small holdings, and that their usefulness for traffic was merely incidental.

We have thus, even on the one-inch map, the main outline of the Holme-Brancaſter road pattern—two main roads running east and west, joined by a number of parallel roads which tend to divide the area into rectangular blocks. For the detail one must go to other maps on a larger ſcale.

THE SIX-INCH MAPS.

The parishes in the area to be dealt with will be conſidered in order, preſently, with ſome reference to the ſix-inch maps, on which the accompanying figures are based. But it is to be remembered that the land diviſions with which this paper deals may (as the writer thinks) have been firſt ſet out more than 1500 years ago. It is not to be expected that they will have ſurvived unchanged. The mere fact that they often coincide with pariſh boundaries is a further indication of great age and of middle Saxon origin at the lateſt. It is therefore no cauſe for ſurpriſe that the modern ſix-inch maps are ſuggeſtive but not of any deciſive value, and with the aid of theſe alone it might have been impoſſible to hazard the theory with which this paper deals. Nor is it now poſſible to diſcuſs the whole area in any detail.

In particular, the six-inch map of Brancaster must be left to speak for itself. But the neighbourhood of Holme, owing to the kindness of Mr. Thomas Nelson, can be studied in the light of much more detailed information, including that afforded by a map of the whole parish in 1609, the Enclosure Map and the Tithe Map, and a Holme Field Book of 1630. The first of these is by far the most important. It is to the roads and field boundaries of Holme as it was in 1609 that one looks for the most convincing demonstration of the original lay-out of the whole Holme-Brancaster area.

HOLME-NEXT-THE-SEA IN 1609.

Figure 3 shows the greater part of Holme parish, the marsh area to the north being alone omitted. There were in 1609 more roads than there are to-day, and those which have now vanished are marked in solid black. No field divisions are marked, and the names given to the roads are those of 1609. The north-west corner of the parish is that in which the road system is most complex, and this is shown in more detail in Figure 4. Even if the development of the road pattern of 4 (*b*) into that of 4 (*a*) be not admitted, we are faced with a road system which cannot possibly be explained except on the hypothesis that it was deliberately laid out for some particular purpose. It was not formed by such natural processes as developed the normal wheel-spoke pattern, nor does it represent that pattern as modified by any of the influences already mentioned. It is not in marshy country, nor hilly. It calls to mind the deliberate planning of new cities in all ages, from Babylon to North America. It is hardly necessary to argue the point since the map speaks for itself. It is sufficient to note that in the area for which we have the earliest information we have also clear evidence of (*a*) an intention to produce a rectangular road pattern, (*b*) an actual road pattern enclosing oblongs

each from 25-30 acres in area. These are not the only fields of this size in the parish, but they are almost the only ones which still had roads *on all four sides* in 1609. It is known (as will be seen later) that the Romans were accustomed to make roads for use as boundaries. It is not known that any later lords of this country were accustomed to do the same, except only in case of city planning (*e.g.*, New Winchelsea by Edward I.), and no question arises of any intended city at Holme.

THORNHAM PARISH.

For this we have no such early map as is available for Holme, but by the kindness of Major Victor Ames it is possible to show the northern part of the parish (Figure 5) as it was in 1787. Since that time several roads have vanished, and these are marked in solid line. The evidence of rectangular planning is not so clear as at Holme, but it is still very clear indeed. It would be difficult to match this road plan in any other part of Norfolk.

TITCHWELL PARISH.

Mr. Bradfer-Lawrence kindly allows me to reproduce a map of Titchwell in 1813 (Figure 6). Only the northern section is shown. Certain field divisions are added in this map since the roads, although rectangular enough, are few in number. The Enclosure Award for Titchwell was made in 1786, and these fields are therefore shown as they existed twenty-seven years after the enclosure. There can be little doubt that they also existed in this form before 1786, since this part of Titchwell was certainly not unenclosed land in 1786, and the names of the fields are not such as one would expect to find associated with new enclosures. These fields (those named in Figure 6) average about 32 acres, which is slightly larger than

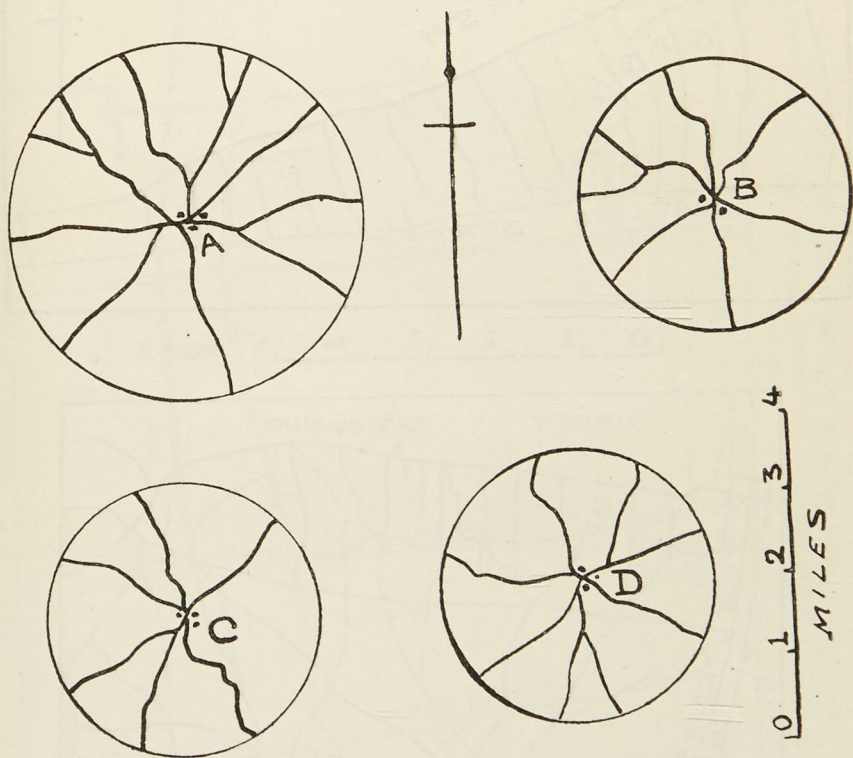
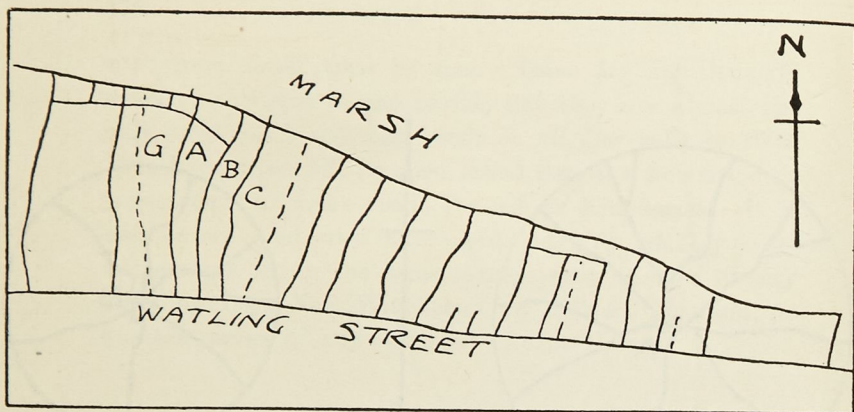


Figure 1. Typical wheel-spoke road patterns based on Norfolk centres (A) Docking, (B) Binham, (C) Saxthorpe, and (D) Holt.



0 1 2 3 4 5 MILES

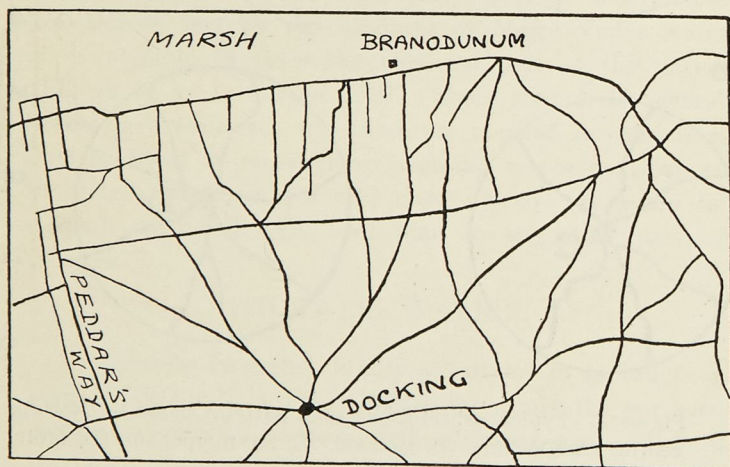


Figure 2A. Above, the general road pattern of the Gillingham Colonia. The strip marked G formed an independent pre-Conquest parish. The strips marked A, B, and C are shown enlarged in Figure 10.

Figure 2B. The general road pattern near Brancaster, from 1-inch O.S. To the south is the contrasting wheel-spoke pattern about Docking.

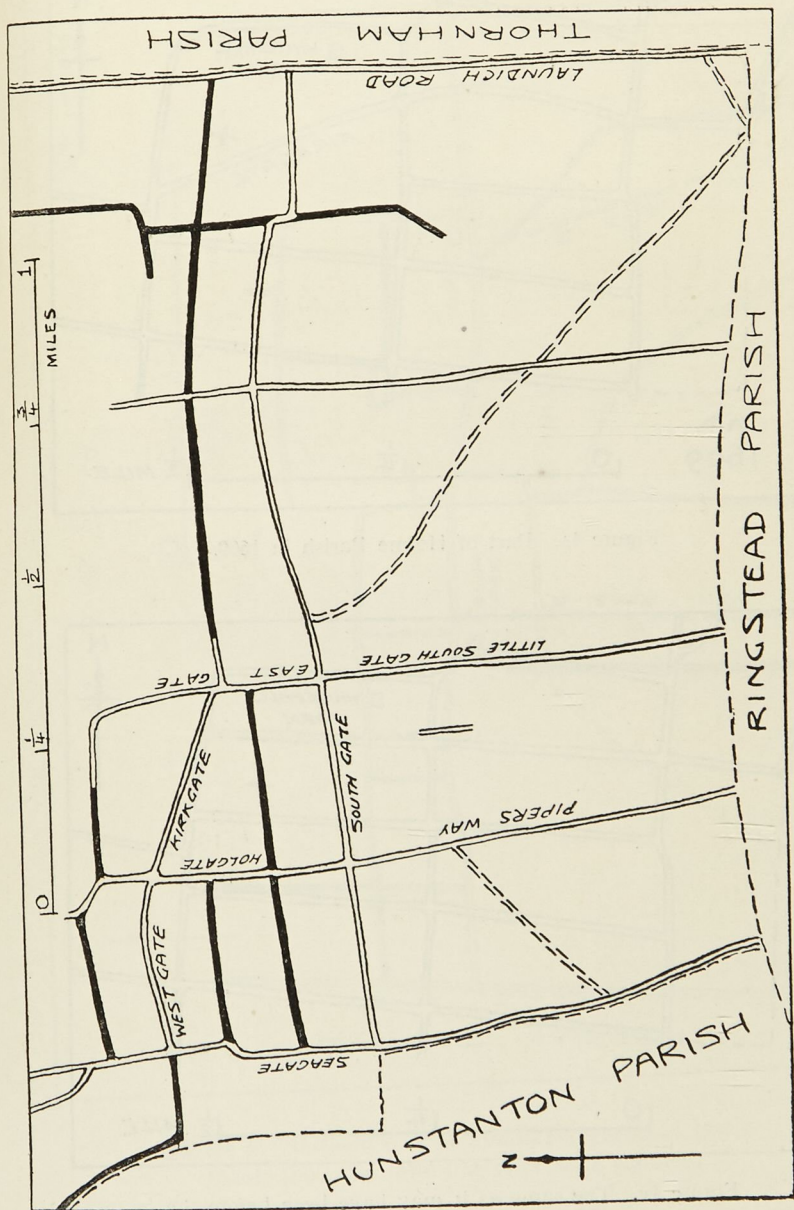


Figure 3. The parish of Holme-next-the-Sea, from Mr. Thomas Nelson's map of 1609, showing the rectangular road pattern. Roads shown in solid line have since disappeared.

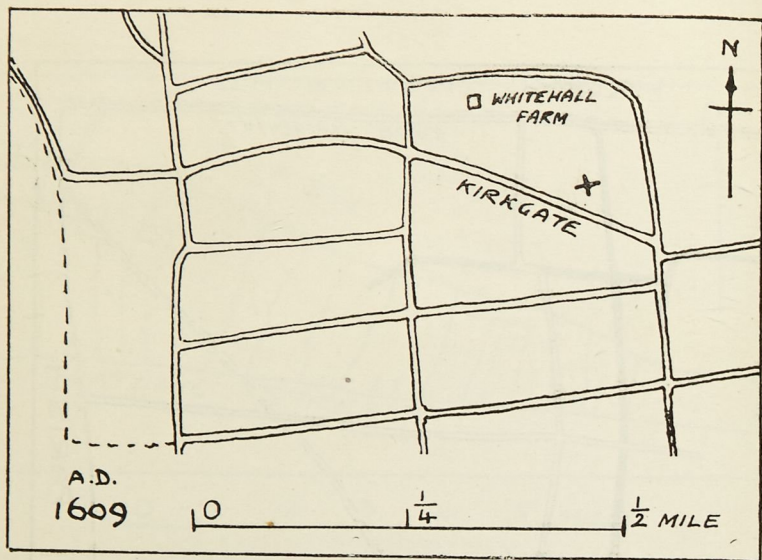


Figure 4A. Part of Holme Parish in 1609.

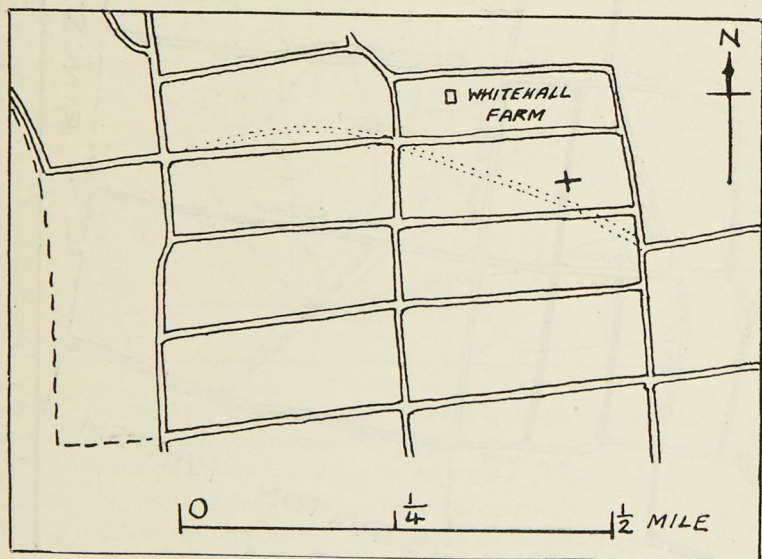


Figure 4B. The same as it may have been before the church was built, and Kirkgate developed.

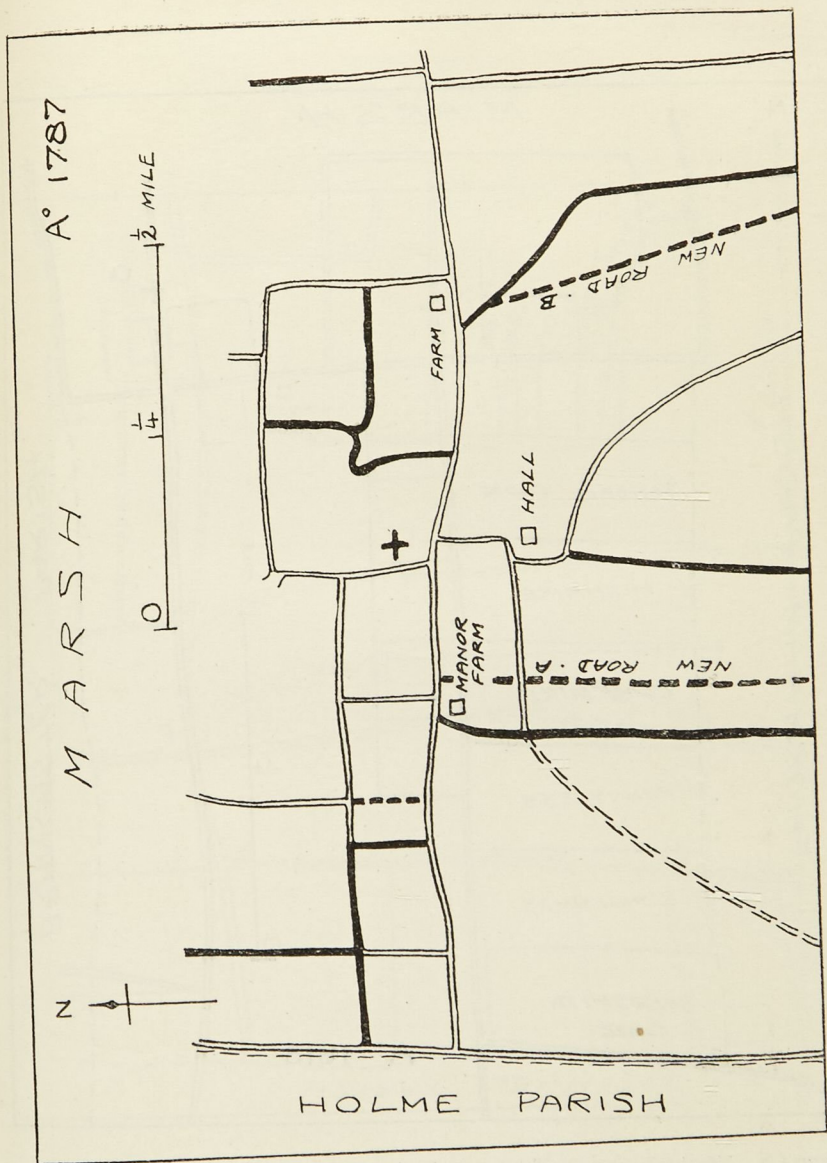


Figure 5. Northern part of Thornham Parish in 1787.
 Roads shown in solid line have since vanished.

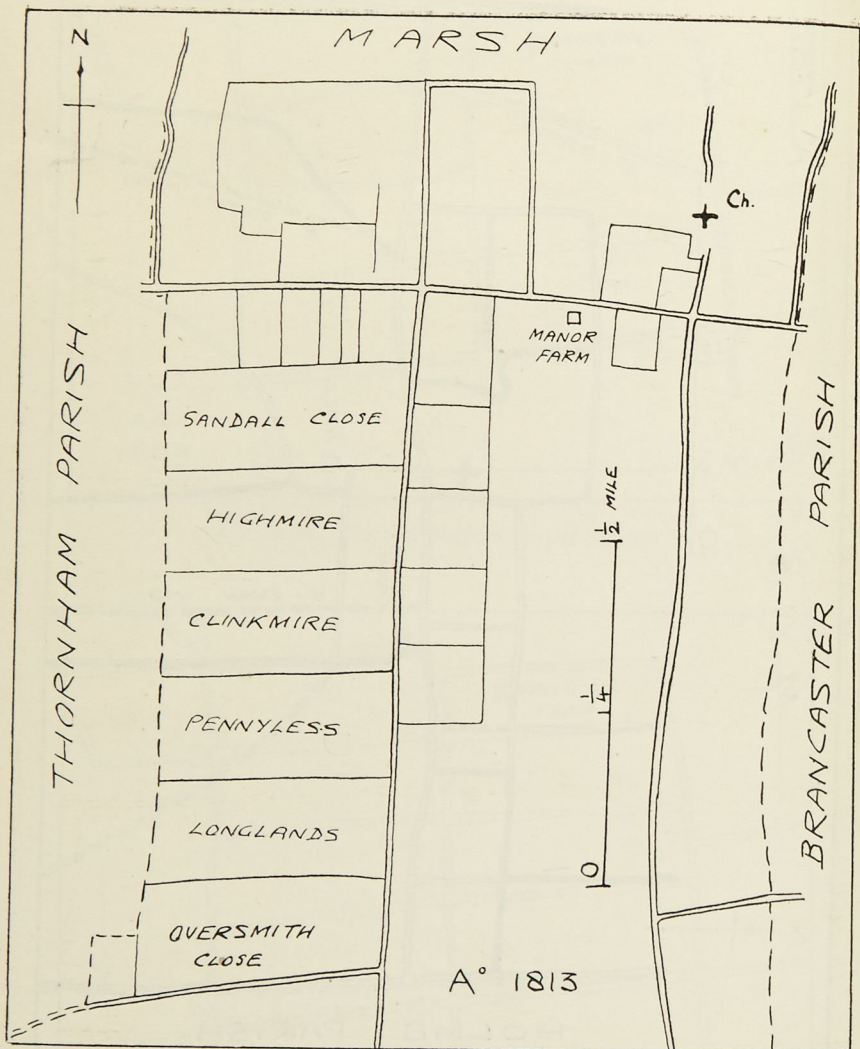


Figure 6. Northern part of Titchwell Parish showing the fields of Titchwell Farm as they are shown on Mr. Bradfer-Lawrence's map of 1813.

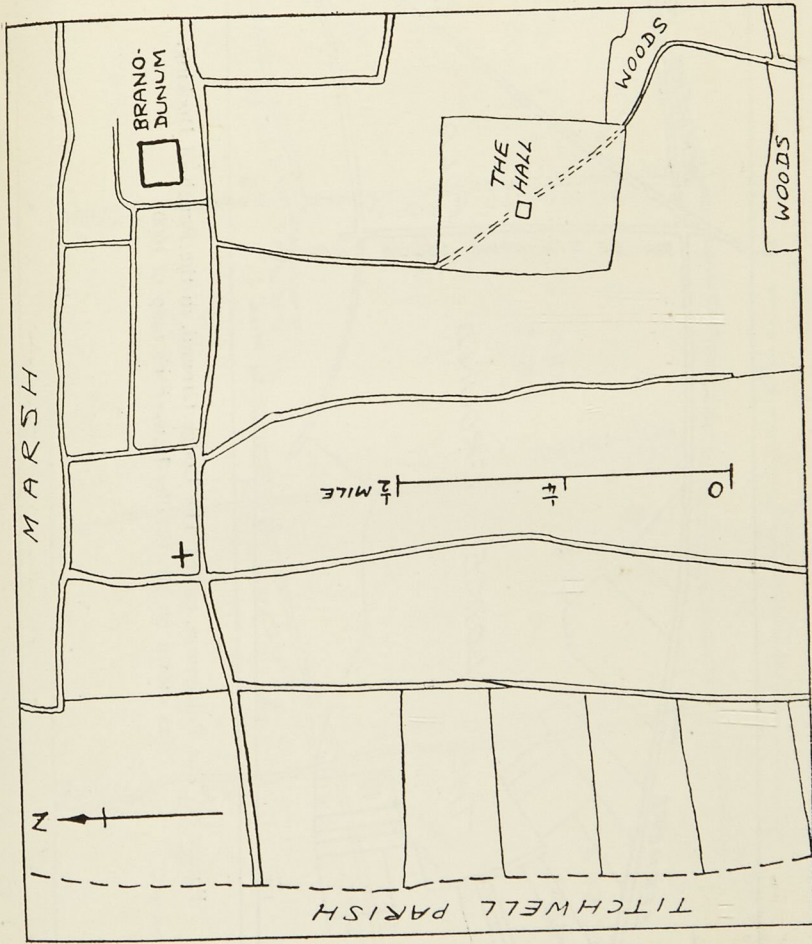


Figure 7. The northern part of Brancaster Parish from modern Ordnance map, showing rectangular lay-out of roads still persisting.

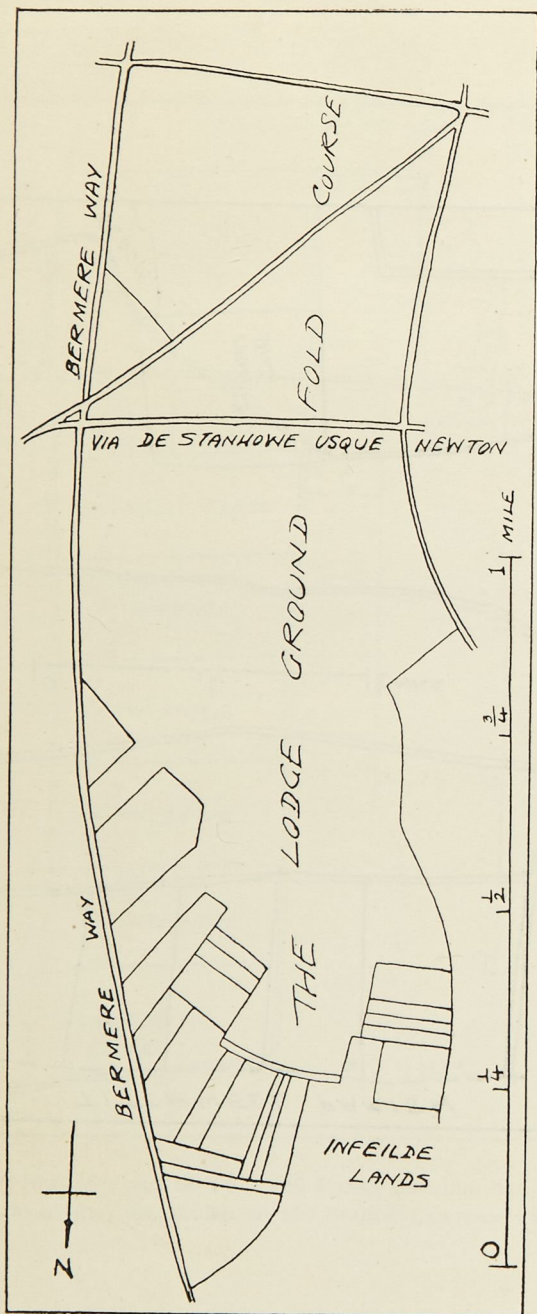


Figure 8. The Foldcourse, called The Lodge Ground, in the Parish of Docking, as shown on Mr. Bradfer-Lawrence's map of 1600.

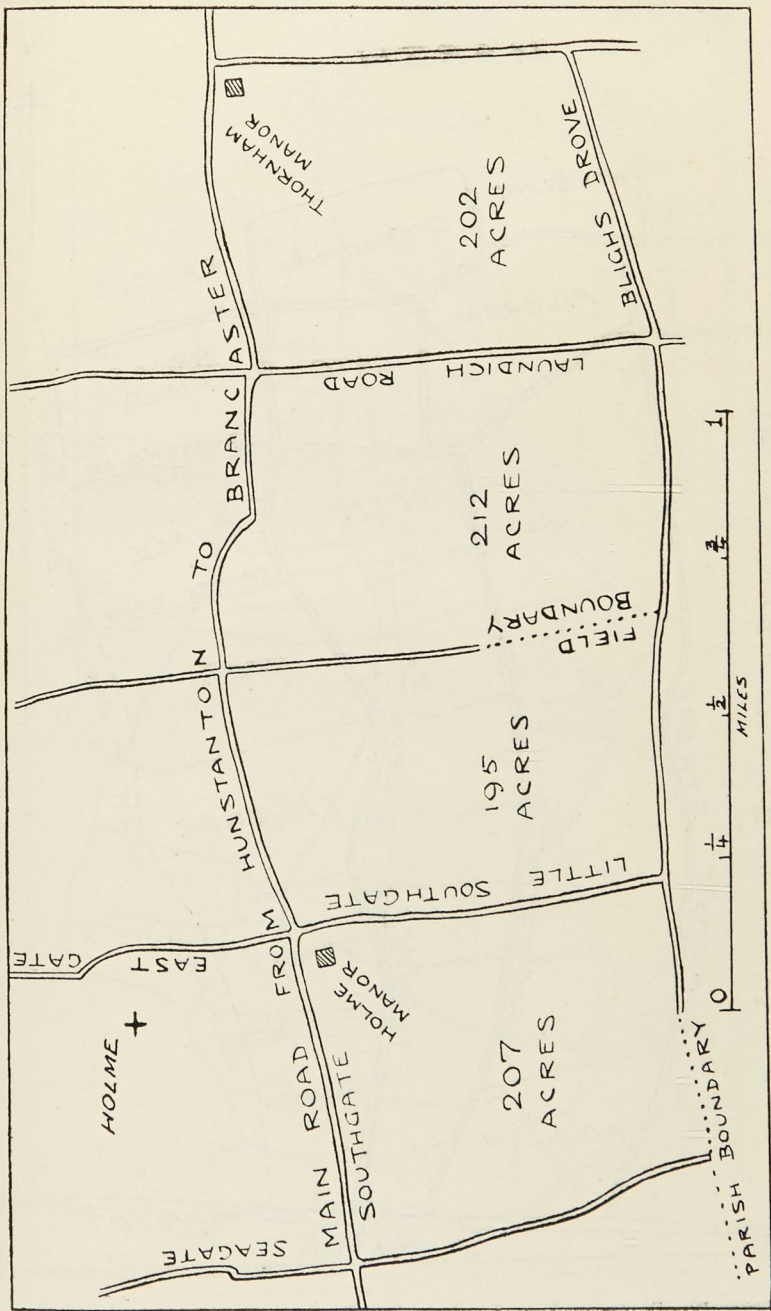


Figure 9. Showing the large units of 200 acres.

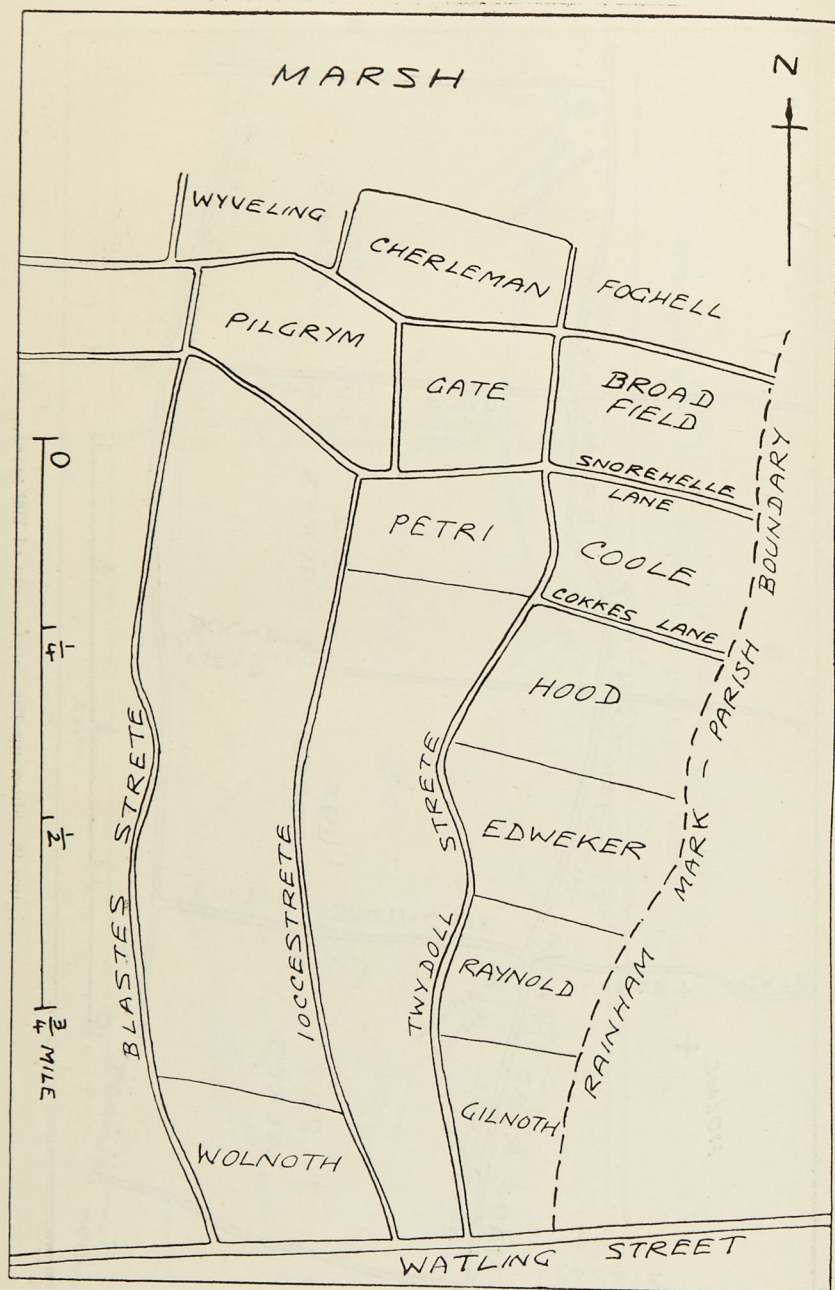


Figure 10. Some roads and yokes of Gillingham Colonia, reconstructed on the evidence of a 15th-century rental of the Manor of East Court.

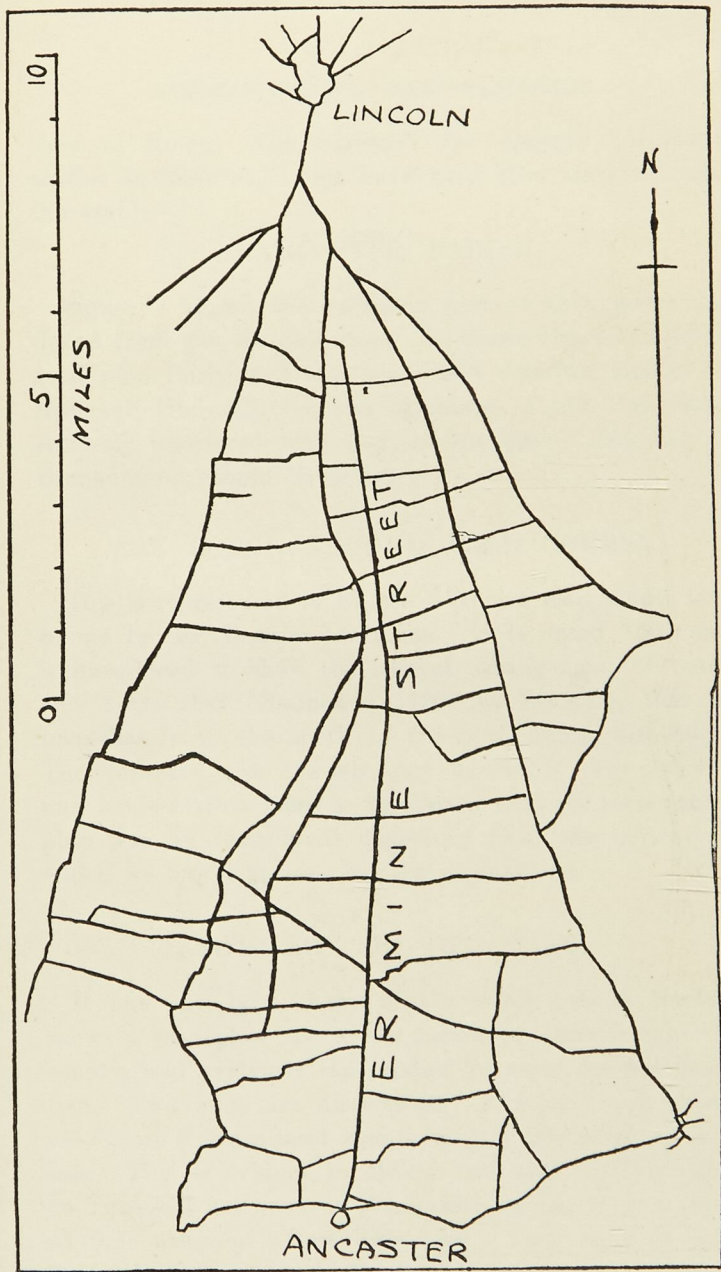


Figure 11. The road pattern to the south of Lincoln, showing presumptive evidence of the "territorium" of Lindum Colonia.

those of Holme. The increased size suggests that roads similar to those at Holme have here been absorbed into the arable.

BRANCASTER PARISH.

Figure 7 shows the northern part of this parish reduced from the six-inch map. It shows the rectangular road plan fairly well and some field divisions similar to those of Titchwell, but the demesnes of the Hall have seriously interfered with part of the plan. The site of Branodunum should be noted.

THE LODGE GROUND FOLD COURSE.

This is represented in Figure 8 from a map kindly lent to me by Mr. Bradfer-Lawrence. It is dated 1600 and is introduced to show the sort of arrangement of roads and fields that obtained in 1600 at Docking, that is, immediately to the south of the area under discussion. The contrast with the previous figures is very marked and lends further point to the theory that the rectangular plan was an intentional departure from the normal, of which we ought to seek for the explanation.

SUMMARY OF THE MAPS.

It has now been shown that a small area in Norfolk shows a road plan not to be paralleled elsewhere in the county, and evidently the product of some definite intention. Two units are discernible. Firstly, a unit shown on Figure 9: an almost square unit of 200 acres more or less. This is evident in Holme and part of Thornham. In Titchwell and part of Brancaster we can trace a series of four areas of about 240 acres. They seem to have been planned, as were those of Holme, with a 200-acre unit in mind, but they have since extended further south than those of Holme and have so become more oblong

and of greater area. Why this should have happened, or whether it was a deliberate variation of the unit from the first, I cannot pretend to say. We may say that there was certainly a large unit of about 200 acres, and possibly another of 240. It remains true that large units of some sort (which were an essential of the Roman system) are fully evidenced. The smaller units, possibly the holdings of individual Roman soldiers and their families, were best shown at Holme but are also in evidence in the other parishes. They are oblong and of 25-30 or (at times, in Titchwell) as much as 33-4 acres in area. The larger units are divided up to form a number of these smaller units. In the oldest maps both large and small units tend to be outlined by roads; in more recent maps many of these roads are seen to have disappeared.

We can now obtain some idea of what must have happened long ago. Some authority, perhaps Roman, perhaps later, desired to set out a large number of 25-30-acre plots in the district between Holme and Brancaster. There already existed a road from Holme to Brancaster, or at least a track of some sort. Based upon this the country was ruled out into approximately square areas of about 200 acres, both north and south of this road (the plan to the north of the road has important but not extensive remains, except at Holme). These large squares were then subdivided—all divisions being made by laying down roads, or setting apart strips only to be used as roads. All this happened at latest before the Norman Conquest. It can hardly have happened since or some record would remain. A thousand years of change then swept over the planned area bringing new men and new systems of agriculture. What remains is evident to-day, and, even to-day, is so unlike what we find elsewhere in Norfolk that it demands explanation. We must pass now to consider the ex-

planation, commencing with an investigation of Roman surveying, or of that part of it which is usually called "centuriation," that is, the division of large areas into plots.

ROMAN CENTURIATION.

Mr. R. G. Collingwood very kindly read a draft of this paper and provided the following very useful statement about centuriation:—

"Roman Centuriation.—Roman colonies had their land laid out in square plots divided by roads: these squares generally measured about half a mile each way, *i.e.*, each would be about 160 acres. Within these squares, lesser plots might be divided up pretty well anyhow the occupiers liked. Therefore, in looking for a Roman colony's centuriated land, what one has to look for is a network of plots having two characteristics: (*a*) they must be square—approximately, but the intention to make them so should be visible, and (*b*) they should be in units of about 150 acres—again, of course, approximately. Any conspicuous departure from either of these norms would weaken the case for Roman centuriation."

Mr. Collingwood's norms are applicable to Italy and to the particular allotments considered adequate for discharged soldiers: in fact, to the typical Roman "colonia." His is an important and valuable opinion as reflecting the ideal which the Roman had in mind, the sort of thing which was likely to be done at that period. But it is certain that the area determined by custom or political conditions in Italy at one time would not necessarily be that used in Norfolk at, possibly, quite a different time. It is also certain that land division was practiced for the benefit of persons who were not soldiers. Here is a description

of the formation of a colony for serfs (Arnold, *Roman Provincial Administration*, p. 240):—

“The ceremonies usual at the foundation of a colony remained on the whole unchanged in all periods. The land was parcelled out into centuriæ or squares of 200 acres each; and these again divided into allotments, sortes, the size of which differed in different colonies. In military colonies a man received a larger or a smaller share according to his rank.”

The writer is in no way competent to discuss the exact social or military class which was settled on a colonia, and there would seem to be still some doubt about various points. But the two descriptions quoted do not really vary in general effect. Both retain the square as the essential unit, although the size of this square varies from 160-200 acres (and Seebohm, *English Village Community*, p. 273, makes it as much as 240). Mr. Collingwood says that the further divisions of this square do not seem to have followed a regular plan, while Arnold implies that a smaller unit resulted, which he elsewhere states to have been from 25-50 acres.

Now, Figure 9 shows squares of 200 acres, while other figures show the small unit of 25-30 acres; and these units are demarcated by roads. This is not evidence that the Romans laid out the Holme-Brancaster area, but it is evidence that what happened there was within the ambit of what one might reasonably expect from the Roman surveyor. I think it is convenient to call this area a colony, and, if further argument prove acceptable, a Roman colony; not using the word “colonia” because it may appear to have some more limited and technical significance than the facts would justify.

We have now to consider what race or period could have produced the road pattern and the other evidence of this Brancaster colony.

EVIDENCE FOR ROMAN ORIGIN.

The strongest evidence is to be found in the distribution throughout the country of like colonies, that is, of places at which one may find the same road pattern, contrasting in the same way with the normal road pattern of the district, and having in keeping with its rectangular plan the field divisions and parish boundaries within its area. Such places are widely distributed and lead one to suppose that the people who planned them must have had an equally wide authority.

It was not the Brancaster area to which the writer's attention was first called in this connection; indeed, Brancaster was visited because of the road pattern on the one-inch map and without any other knowledge of the locality. This road pattern was seen to bear a close resemblance to an area already investigated in Kent, just to the east of Rochester in the parish of Gillingham and adjacent parishes. Here there were a number of parallel roads of the type already discussed, joined north and south (as at Brancaster) by two main roads parallel to the coast. Figure 2a shows some of these roads. No old map was available for this area, but there was a valuable manor rental of 1447-8 which showed that they existed at that date and that the strips formed by these roads were divided into areas called "juga," similar to the smaller land units at Brancaster. Some of these divisions are shown in Figure 10. The picture shows curious distortions of a wavy character, which tend to obscure the fundamentally rectangular lay-out. A similar distortion is obvious in Thornham Parish, and its cause is unknown. The writer is inclined to suppose that the lay-out at Gillingham was careless from the commencement. The whole plan at Gillingham is based on the Watling Street, and it almost certainly extended much further than the area at present investigated. No other area of the sort was noted in Kent, although Roman roads are frequent.

Figure 11 shows the area between Lincoln and Ancaster as it appears on the one-inch map. The road pattern is suspiciously rectangular, and a similar pattern can be seen north of Lincoln. It will be remembered that Lincoln is a known Roman colony, and its inhabitants must have had a "territorium coloniæ," which would naturally be in the immediate neighbourhood. It is therefore likely that this rectangular road plan is really that of the original Roman "territorium." Examination of the six-inch maps and of any old maps available would almost certainly show that field divisions and parish boundaries tended to conform to the rectangular plan, but the writer has been unable to consult these. Mr. R. G. Collingwood suggests other areas (for which the writer has no maps), namely, St. Albans-Dunstable, Cambridge-Huntingdon, the Fosse south-west of Newark, and the Aldborough-York road at its north-west end. He adds: "I am sure that there is a phenomenon here which deserves careful study."

This paper is avowedly an introduction only. The problem can only be worked out by those who have the requisite local knowledge and material for each locality. But it is very clear that if (a) these various places show the same sort of plan, and (b) that plan is reproduced on the site of the territory of the Lindum colonia, we have strong *prima facie* evidence for a very considerable improvement of the maps of Roman Britain. It might be added "and of Roman Gaul," for a reference to certain war maps which guided the writer twenty years ago shows that the roads of France promise to repay study even better than those of Britain.

SOME OBJECTIONS.

It might well prove fatal to the hypothesis here set forth if similar road plans could be found outside the limits of the Roman Empire. Mr. Collingwood has called attention to rectangular planning in Holland and Frisia,

but, in both cases, in marsh areas. These parallels are therefore deprived of much of their force. One may find such plans in the Cambridge fens also. So far as one can gather, the typical colony was sited on gently rising ground up to 100 feet or so above sea level, where this could be found, and here the roads were laid out well above the reach of floods. The conditions in marshland are quite different. Drainage channels are the first consideration, and it does not pay to dig these otherwise than straight. Roads must conform to a plan enforced, and often to the safer ground of banks made by the digging and scouring of the drainage channels. They therefore follow a rectangular plan, which may easily have some superficial resemblance to that of the colonies.

It is a further objection that the road plan produced in known Roman *colonia* in Italy is much more regularly rectangular than any of those mentioned in Britain, and that the major squares are little in evidence in Britain. This objection has obvious force only if one is content to believe that only one form of colony was known in Roman times. But we cannot be sure that this was the case. Nor does it really matter. If the Brancaster road pattern is not of Roman origin, it is nevertheless an extremely interesting departure from the normal. It calls for explanation. Only when much comparative work has been done, and when the minds of those best able to deal with such problems have been directed to this, can we hope for some finality of opinion.

N.B.—For the purpose of the above essay certain maps have been reduced, or raised, to the six-inch scale and copied on six-inch Ordnance maps. These six-inch maps have now been deposited at Norwich in the Castle Museum, together with some extracts from field books and other Norfolk material.