

## THE ROMAN ROAD ON THE SURREY-KENT BOUNDARY.

BY

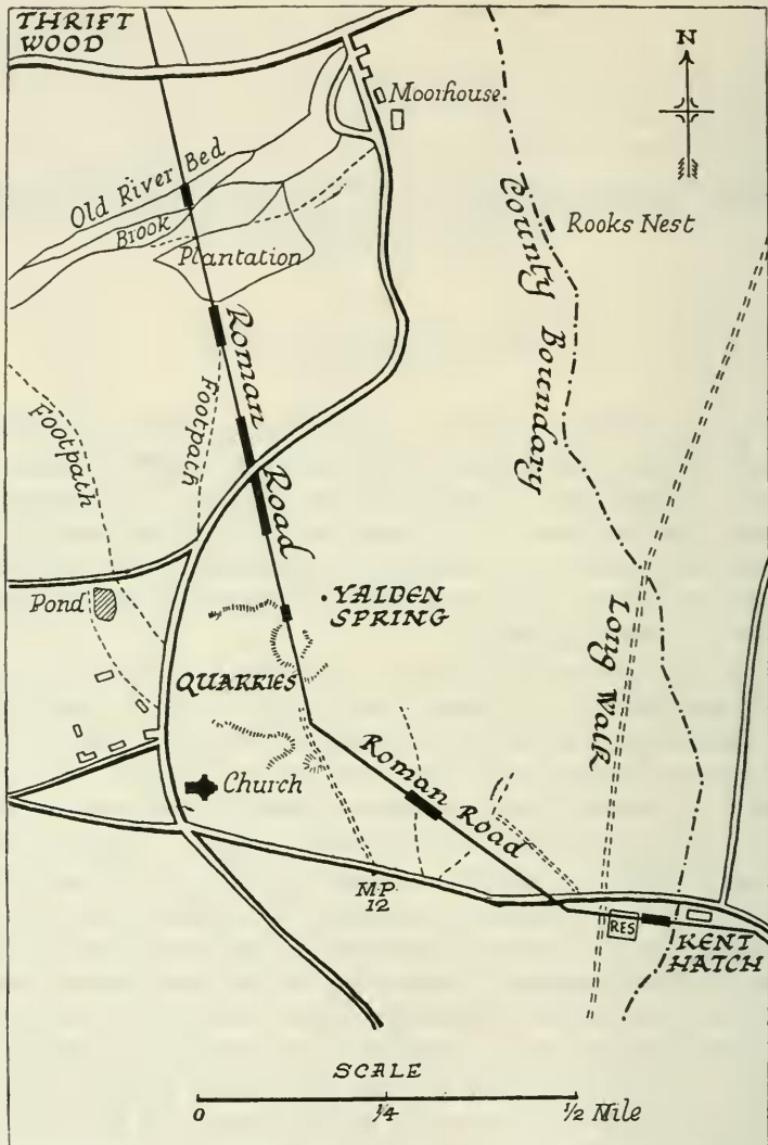
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**O**N the Ordnance Survey "Map of Roman Britain" (second edition, 1928) there is shown a short length of a Roman road, beginning at a point on the meridian of Greenwich about 9 miles south of Watling Street, and continuing in a south-south-easterly direction for a distance of about 12 miles. South of Titsey a section of about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles is shown in dotted lines ("course uncertain").

The northern section shown in firm lines ("course certain") was identified as a Roman road by Mr. O. G. S. Crawford. It begins at the north end of Rowdown Wood, one mile and a quarter east-south-east from Addington Church. At this point the county boundary, coming from the north-west, turns more to the south, and becomes quite straight. This direction is maintained for a distance of about  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles, with two small deviations, the boundary returning immediately after each deviation to the straight alignment. Over the whole of this distance the boundary follows the line of the Roman road, with the exception, apparently, of the first deviation. This is a small zigzag to the eastward, and occurs in Fairchilde Park. The road appears to have held to the straight line.

The second deviation occurs one mile south of Fairchilde, and takes the form of a much larger zigzag to the eastward. In this case the road appears to have been diverted for the purpose of crossing a deep and steep-sided valley, and the boundary has followed the road.

At the end of the  $5\frac{1}{2}$ -mile straight, at a point a quarter of a mile north of Coldharbour Beeches, the county boundary turns abruptly to the north-east, and the line of the road is



- Course of Roman Road
- Visible remains of Roman Road
- Modern Roads
- - - Tracks
- - - Footpaths

ROMAN ROAD NEAR LIMPSFIELD CHART.

taken up by the parish boundary between Tatsfield and Titsey, running in a direction about east-south-east. This change of course is evidently for the purpose of securing an oblique descent of the steep escarpment of the North Downs.

Just west of Tatsfield Rectory the boundary, now on an easier gradient, turns to the south. About 600 yards south of the Pilgrims' Way it again changes direction slightly to the eastward, and runs perfectly straight for nearly a mile. Over the whole of this distance, i.e. from the turn near Cold-harbour, the boundary appears to follow the line of the road, with the probable exception of a small deviation in the field to the west of Tatsfield Church, for which no reason is evident.

Just north of Thrift Wood the boundary turns to the west, but the road keeps its southerly direction, passing through the wood, and reaching the Limpsfield-Westerham road at a point about 200 feet west of the south-east corner of the wood. Here begins the  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles of "uncertain course" as shown on the "Map of Roman Britain."

Investigations made during 1930-31 by Mr. E. P. B. Pryor and myself, at first independently and later together, have produced enough evidence to fix the line of the road with a reasonable degree of certainty for a distance of more than a mile and a half, reckoning from Thrift Wood southwards.

The conclusion we have reached is that the road continues in the direction of the last "certain" alignment, i.e. that of the straight mile of parish boundary between the Pilgrims' Way and Thrift Wood, for a distance of nearly a mile. It then turns to the south-east, keeps that direction for about 800 yards, turns again slightly more to the east, and, skirting the edge of the very steep escarpment of the greensand just east of Kent Hatch, arrives at the top of Crockham Hill, where it seems to be absorbed in the modern road.

The evidence on which this conclusion is based is as follows :

Three hundred yards south of Thrift Wood there is an ancient river channel. All that is left of the river that once occupied it is a small brook running to the north-east towards Westerham. Between the brook and the north bank of the river channel there is a distinct, though low, cambered bank exactly on the line of the road, with faint traces of a ditch

on its western side. The eastern side of it has been somewhat interfered with by a cart-track, now disused. This track crosses the brook by a flat concrete bridge, built some years ago for the haulage of timber from the plantation to the south. Under this bridge, and for several yards both above and below it, the bed of the brook is occupied by a mass of large blocks of stone. I have examined the bed of the brook for a considerable distance, both up and down stream, from this point, and found no more stone. Some of the blocks have been used to support the bridge. Local evidence is to the effect that the stones have "always" been there, and that, before the bridge was made, they filled the bed of the brook to the height of the banks. The occurrence of this mass of heavy stone, at this point, suggests that the road crossed the brook by means of a stone causeway, possibly built with interstices to permit the water to flow through it. The present position of the stones is not exactly in line with the cambered bank mentioned above, but a few yards down stream. This may be accounted for by the stones having been pushed down stream little by little by repeated floods. The power exercised by running water is very considerable, and its undermining effect, on a soft muddy bottom, would also come into play. Once the causeway began to break down every heavy flood would move some of the stones. Assuming that the road and the causeway were abandoned, so far as repairs are concerned, in the fifth century, an average movement of 2 feet per century would place them in their present position.

South of the river channel a modern plantation crosses the line, and any traces of the road which may have existed here have been destroyed by the planting operations. About 180 yards south of the stile by which access to the plantation is gained the ground begins to rise fairly sharply. Here a long high ridge appears, exactly on the line of the road, extending some 60 yards before merging in the higher and flatter ground. On its western side is what seems to be a disused hollow way, and on its eastern side another hollow way now in use as a cart-track. Above the ridge this track diverges from the line of the road, in a nearly due south direction, the line itself continuing through the somewhat dense wood. Fragmentary pieces of a raised bank can be traced, in line with the

ridge, for some distance through the wood, when the under-growth is at its lowest in March and April.

About 150 yards south of the ridge a flattened boundary bank, with old beech trees along it, runs from south-west to north-east. South of this the cambered ridge of the Roman road is in good preservation, and continues right up to the Limpsfield-Moorhouse road, which has been cut through it on a lower level. As it approaches the modern road the ridge is about 2 feet high and very conspicuous. The point of intersection is 210 yards from the road-fork to the south-west, and 30 yards west of telephone pole No. 18.

South of the Moorhouse road the cambered ridge is very clear for a distance of about 40 yards. Then it suddenly moves about 30 feet to the eastwards, and continues in the original direction. There is no apparent reason for this curious "kink". It has been suggested that there may have been a guard-house or toll-post at this spot, and that the "kink" was put in for the purpose of more easily holding up traffic. This is, of course, merely a guess. Excavation might reveal the real reason.

The ridge is traceable up the hill for a distance of another 100 yards or so, and then fades out. The line passes about 110 yards to the west of Yalden Spring (a very ancient track leads down to the pool), but nothing more is visible until the rough track now (1932) in use by the lorries carrying stone from the quarries is reached. Here a hard ridge, exactly on the Roman road alignment, runs diagonally across the track. In very wet weather, when the ruts on either side of this ridge were 8 inches deep, the heavy lorries had made no impression on the ridge itself. This is the last visible trace on this alignment, the ground to the south being completely cut to pieces by the quarries. At least one Roman interment has been found in these quarries, so they possibly supplied material for the road.

South of the quarries area, and beyond the Limpsfield-Edenbridge road, no indications could be found. It was obvious that the road must have turned to the south-east somewhere in this neighbourhood, for two reasons. Firstly, because it had to connect with the known Roman road through Edenbridge, and secondly because a continuation of

the alignment hitherto followed would have taken it directly down the almost precipitous escarpment of Scearn Bank. After considerable search a suspicious-looking ridge, traceable for about 60 yards, was found in the Chart Woods, about 150 yards north-east of the twelfth milestone (from Croydon) on the Limpsfield-Edenbridge road. This pointed in the required direction, viz. approximately east-south-east. Being on a changed alignment it was decided that a "dig" was advisable. Owing to difficulties with trees it was found impossible to cut a straight trench clean across and through the ridge, but shorter trenches on either side, and an exploration for several yards along the crown of the ridge, produced enough evidence.

The site is on the Hythe Beds of the Lower Greensand. The undisturbed ground in the immediate vicinity, as tested by digging a few holes and short trenches, showed the following conditions :—Immediately below the rough turf of the surface a loose agglomeration of pieces of stone, measuring anything up to five inches in length, with yellow soil. These conditions continued to a depth of at least three feet with little change. The stone lies in somewhat irregular layers, and between the layers isolated pieces of stone occur.

The trenches on the ridge gave the following results, from the surface downwards :

(1) Twelve inches of sandy soil, containing no stone.

(2) Eight inches of closely packed small stone, 1 inch to 2 inches cube (nothing larger). The surface of this layer is quite smooth, and shows a slight camber. The stone is packed closely enough to resist the efforts of tree roots (mostly oak) to penetrate it, except towards the sides of the ridge, where it thins off and has suffered so much damage from roots that the edges cannot be definitely located. So far as could be ascertained the width of the metalled road appeared to be about 24 feet. In one trench what seemed to be the edge of the metalled road was marked by closely packed large stones similar to those in the undisturbed ground, but these were not observed in other trenches.

(3) Below the metal was a layer of greenish grey sand, from 4 inches to 8 inches thick, conforming to the irregularities of the undisturbed ground below it. This layer contained

no stone, excepting a few very small pieces similar to the "metal" above it.

(4) At a depth of 6 inches below the top of the grey layer, and embedded in it, a small pocket of charcoal was found, the largest pieces measuring 15 millimetres by 10 millimetres. The charcoal was sent to Mr. Maby, of Oxford, who reports that it is made from the wood of a poplar.

The alignment indicated by this bank reaches the Limpsfield-Edenbridge road 150 yards west of the Long Walk. At this point the road-bank, on the north side of the road, has a broken-down appearance, and carries much less than the normal amount of vegetation. This is possibly due to the road-bank being made of material thrown up from the Roman road when it was cut through. Such material would be more stony and more friable than the normal soil.

Just east of the Waterworks Reservoir, and practically in line with the northern bank of that work, the ridge of the Roman road reappears, pointing towards the south front of Kent Hatch House. It is somewhat broken up and interrupted, the ground having undergone considerable disturbance, but, when vegetation is not too dense, it is clearly visible. The exact point where the change of direction takes place, west of the reservoir, can be ascertained by producing the alignments, but nothing definite is visible.

Beyond Kent Hatch corner the line is taken up by a narrow grassy path, much overgrown, on the south side of the modern road. East of the enclosed land, under a group of pine trees, there is a well-defined ridge, with the remains of a hollow way alongside it, which runs out into a terrace skirting the edge of the escarpment. Just before entering a dense thicket below the level of the modern road a short length of cambered bank is visible. Beyond that point, as already stated, the modern road seems to absorb the Roman road.

The actual line of descent on Crockham Hill is apparently obliterated by the modern road, farm buildings, and the houses of the village, but it seems likely that it is approximately represented by the old steep road plunging straight down the hill.

Beyond Edenbridge the Roman road has been traced by

Mr. I. D. Margary nearly to Camp Hill on Ashdown Forest. Its ultimate objective is at present unknown.

The bearings (true) of the several alignments are as follows :

(1)	Rowdown Wood to turn near Coldharbour . . . . .	$347^{\circ}$
(2)	Turn near Coldharbour to near Tatsfield Rectory . . . . .	$286^{\circ}$
(3)	Clacket Wood (south of Pilgrims' Way) to Limpsfield Chart Quarries . . . . .	$347^{\circ}$
(4)	Quarries to Reservoir . . . . .	$306\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$
(5)	Ridge E. of Reservoir . . . . .	$278^{\circ}$
(6)	Kent Hatch towards Crockham Hill . . . . .	$305^{\circ}$
(7)	Road through Edenbridge . . . . .	$350^{\circ}$

The close approximation of the main alignments, viz. Nos. 1, 3, and 7, is noteworthy. Nos. 1 and 3, indeed, are exactly parallel, though the road shifts nearly 1,200 yards to the eastward in descending the chalk escarpment, and No. 3 is so nearly in alignment with the Edenbridge river crossing that, if produced, it points not more than 50 yards to the east of the existing bridge. It almost looks as if it had been intended to run the No. 3 alignment straight down to Edenbridge, in which case the diversion via Crockham Hill was an after-thought, adopted to ease the gradient.

As previously stated, the ultimate objective of this road is unknown. The route by which it reached London also remains to be discovered. As a tentative and provisional theory to account for its existence I venture to suggest that it was intended to connect the fortress of Anderida (Pevensey) with London.

That it was a road of considerable importance is evident from its size, and its skilful engineering. On Ashdown Forest it is "60 feet between the outer ditches, and where the track is best preserved the central 24 feet is raised about 18 inches, leaving two lower side spaces about 18 feet wide" (I. D. Margary, in *Sussex Notes and Queries*, Vol. III, No. 1, February 1930). There is some evidence that in Fairchilde's Park, Chelsham, the width between ditches was also 60 feet. As to engineering, the descents of the chalk and greensand escarpments are designed to secure comparatively easy and regular

gradients with the minimum increase of distance, and show great engineering skill. The same remark applies to the valley crossing one mile south of Fairchildes.

The steady persistence of the main alignment, with a variation of only three degrees over the known distance of 22 miles, indicates a military objective. (The direction of the Edenbridge alignment, 350 degrees, is maintained almost to King's Standing, on Ashdown Forest.)

If this alignment is produced, it reaches the coast at Beachy Head, passing slightly to the west of Polegate. Assuming Pevensey, easily the most important Roman site in the neighbourhood, as the objective, this is approximately the direction a road from the north would take, in order to avoid the marshes north of Pevensey. The final approach to the fortress would then be from the direction of Polegate, i.e. from the west. It is possible, however, that the alignment, after clearing Ashdown Forest, where, as Mr. Margary has shown, a sharp turn to the south-west occurs, turned rather more to the east. If so, the line may have been approximately via Coldharbour (just south of Crowborough), Stone Cross, Hadlow Down, Roser's Cross, Lion's Green, North Street, Hellingly, Hailsham, and so to a second Stone Cross just 2 miles west of Pevensey Castle. This line just skirts the edge of the marshes, thus saving as much distance as possible, and the names along it are suggestive.

Dr. Curwen says that the Romans "were content to allow their later towns, as Anderida (Pevensey), to depend upon improved native trails for their communications" (*Prehistoric Sussex*, Second Edition, 1930, p. 100). This fact may indicate the answer to the riddle of this road. North of Addington, in the Thames Valley area, there would almost certainly have been a pre-existing track, or tracks, before the necessity for a military road to Anderida arose. And south of Ashdown Forest the line runs right through the iron-mining district of the Sussex Weald. Here again there would be pre-existing tracks. It must have been important, from a military point of view, to get a through road from London Bridge to Anderida completed in the shortest possible time, once the decision to construct it had been taken. The natural, quickest, and most economical course would be to improve already existing tracks,

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when they ran approximately in the required direction, and to fill in any gap, or gaps, with a specially constructed road. If this is what actually occurred, the county boundary passing west of West Wickham and turning away to the north-west possibly represents the northern connection towards London. In several places it has the appearance of an ancient road, but it lacks the characteristic straightness of a Roman road of the military or "engineered" type.