

North–South Routes through Western Leicestershire

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Documentary evidence and local legends support the dominance of north–south traffic over east–west traffic through western Leicestershire since Norman times. Little has been published on the Derby–Coventry routes, apart from a nineteenth century source which used John Nichols’ work to attempt a reconstruction. (1) This article attempts to reconstruct John Ogilvy’s 1675 route between Derby and Atherstone, and the Redway between Derby and Caldecote. The main differences from the Redway reconstructed here are that Nichols’ and Glover’s route ran through Shackerstone and Congerstone, east of the north–south line described here, and that their route crossed the Trent by the Swarkestone Bridge.

The Redway, (or Radway) is a prehistoric route that runs almost due north–south, from Derby through Leicestershire to Coventry, and on to Edge Hill in south Warwickshire. There are hints that the route may be contemporary with Stonehenge in origin, certainly Iron Age. In common with four other undated, but probably Iron Age routes, it crosses the River Sence watershed in west Leicestershire. (2) The Anglo-Saxons called it the Redway or Radway. The earliest cartographic evidence is the strip maps in John Ogilvy’s *Britannia*, the first comprehensive Road Book in the UK (3). These show a route which followed parts of the Redway from Derby to the Leicestershire county boundary, although by Ogilvy’s time, it had been diverted west of the older route south, largely as a result of blocking by major landowners.

The main evidence and sources used to trace the Redway and Ogilvy’s route here include:

1) Topographical evidence from Google Earth, along with



Ogilvy's 1675 map of the area around Pinwall and Atherstone on the Leicestershire – Warwickshire border

the detailed computerised maps of Bing–Multimap, cycling and walking.

2) Documented history, in particular the Domesday census, and John Nichols *Leicestershire*, 1818. (4)

3) Old county maps, on which roads first appear in the eighteenth century, and the Ordnance Survey maps of 1835 and 1887.

4) Topographical names around the north–south line of the route.

5) Route Map 82 ‘Oxford to Derby’ in Ogilvy’s *Britannia*. (5)

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The northern starting point of the Redway seems to have been much further north at Ripon in Yorkshire, with part of it being superseded by the Roman Ryknild Way, whilst its southern finish is at Edge Hill where it connects to a ridgeway running to Salisbury Plain. The line of the Redway through Leicestershire appears to have been consistently due south over a distance of 19 kilometres. Over its wider compass from north of Derby at Little Chester through south Derbyshire and Leicestershire to Coventry, the deviation is 2–3 kilometres from north–south, in a distance of 36 kilometres.

Traditions

A brief look at some of the legends and traditions associated with western Leicestershire provides support for the dominance of north-south routes in the area and gives some clues about the route of the Redway and other tracks.

There is a legend associated with Packington that speaks of the village being on a route from Derby to Coventry. The legend is supported by the Domesday data, in which the village is held by St Mary's Abbey in Coventry, and by the coincidence of the name Bablake (Babelake), which is both a district of Coventry and the name of a cul de sac southwards from Packington. Whilst the present road pattern did not support that of the old routes, the village does however have two lanes leading south to various farms, which merited investigation as part of a direct road from Packington to Coventry.

Further south at Newton Burgoland, a bridleway – Francis Lane – runs south towards Derby Lane, which according to tradition was formerly used by the hat makers from Atherstone to reach Ashby de la Zouch (6), where they would sell their wares from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. The hatters would have come from Atherstone through Pinwall to Main Road, Sheepy Magna, thence via a lost road to Lovett Bridge and along Watery Lane and Gallows Lane into the Redway at Temple south of Bilstone.

Long-distance north-south travel clearly went through Sibson, where according to tradition the highwayman Dick Turpin (1705–1739) was a regular user of the Cock Inn, where he hid to avoid capture. Further undated stories of Sibson indicate long-distance travellers along the south–north route and the poor quality of the Redway in this area. Arthur Mee records: 'Not far off is the Eightlands Field [south of the old muddy ford over the Saint] which pays for the ringing of curfew from October to March. It was given long ago by a benighted traveller who, having lost his way, found it again by the sound of the curfew ringing from Sibson's church.' (7) A suspiciously similar story explains Sheepy church's Bell Rope Cottage on Frog Moor east of Crow Lane, which was also the route taken by Ogilvy in 1675. A traveller lost in a fog on Frog Moor is said to have

heard the curfew bell from the church about 1 kilometre to the east and found his way there. Both stories indicate the uncertain tracks that travellers encountered before the land was enclosed, whilst the addition of hedgerows would have helped guide traffic.

References to the Redway can also be found in connection with the Battle of Bosworth, and it is probable from documented history that the route in this area ran around Upton or Fenny Drayton. Whilst the battle's site is disputed, early accounts tell that the battle was fought on Redmoor, ('road moor'), which must have adjoined either Fenn Lane or the Redway. Nichols stated that Henry Tudor reached the battlefield along the Radway. Austin recently suggested, incorrectly in the view of the writer of this article, that this 'Radway' ran from Tamworth through Polesworth, and crossed the River Sence at Lovett Bridge. (8)

Place names and features with the name Derby in them, as alongside the former road north from Drayton church towards the centre of Atterton, and west of the present A444, may have been named after a Derby–Coventry route, rather than after Lord Derby. (9)

Routes over the Trent to Ashby – The Redway and Ogilvy's Route

This reconstruction of the Redway and Ogilvy's routes starts at Derby in the north and ends at Atherstone and Caldecote further south. Early constraints to both routes in the Derby area would have included the River Trent, nearby fens and marshy ground. The Redway crossed the Trent from Barrow upon Trent to Ingleby (10), whilst Ogilvy's route which followed the prehistoric route through Normanton in Derby, west of Sinfen Marsh to Barrow, diverged east along a dike dating from before Norman times, and then south to the fourteenth century bridge over the Trent from Swarkestone to Stanton by Bridge. There is no evidence of earlier bridges before Swarkestone Bridge in the stretch of the Trent between Burton and Hemington. Several ferries are well-documented and there must have been one from Barrow to Ingleby. Before the Trent was dredged in the eighteenth century, some parts were fordable in good weather.

From Ingleby, parts of a present day footpath represent the Redway and lead due south towards Ticknall church. South of the church, at the crossing of Main Street, Ogilvy's route coincided with the Redway for 2.4 kilometres. His route ran east of the turnpike (now the B5006), skirting Calke Park, along the middle section of a dog's leg in Staunton Lane and along a line, now a footpath, and past Heath Farm at the foot of Pistern Hill. There Ogilvy turned sharply south-west, going up Pistern Hill along the eastern section of Heath Lane as far as the later turnpike, and then continuing south-west to Smisby church. Before the Norman Conquest, the Redway must have continued through the lost village of Trangesby

on the eastern edge of Pistern Hill to St Helen's Church, Ashby de la Zouch. The last 2 kilometers of the Redway, from the Leicestershire county boundary to Upper Church Street in Ashby, is almost obliterated. After skirting the eastern scarp of Pistern Hill, it ran past Old Parks House, then east of Cliftonthorpe and east of Monkshill Farm, where a hedge line indicates its course.

From Smisby church, Ogilvy's route turned into Smisby Main Street, then south into the Smisby-Ashby Road, which then existed as part of a route to Repton before the Derby turnpike. In Ashby, the line of Smisby Road must have crossed the Gilwiskaw Brook through what is now Hood Park and Mill Lane Mews, to Market Street. Ogilvy however took the Cales, now Callis, and Brook Street to Kilwardby, turning west onto 'Stone bridge 3 arches' over the Gilwiskaw into Market Street, and almost immediately south at the Lamb Inn through what is now an archway into Prior Park. (11)

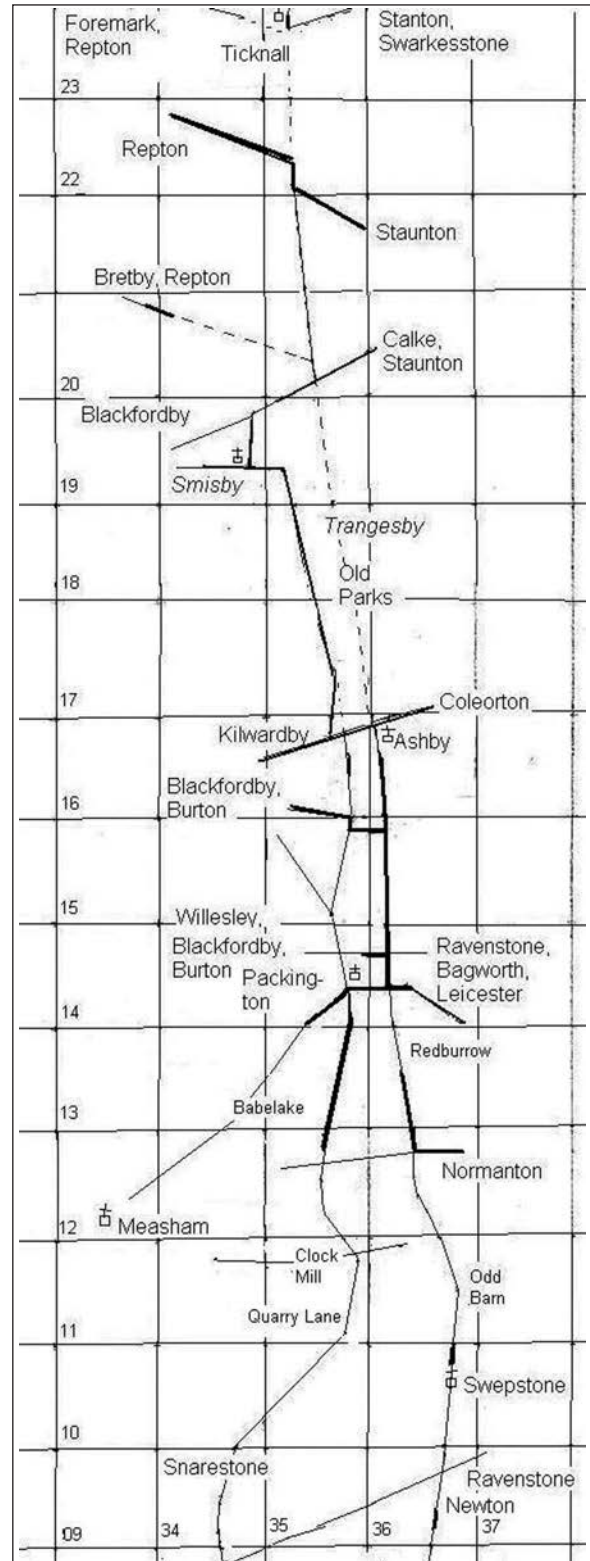
Alternative routes and diversions around Ticknall and Smisby

The section of the Redway from Ticknall to Ashby has two alternative routes and diversions. The older would have been to Repton, which lies north west of Ticknall, and was a royal city of Mercia c600-673. It would have seen most of the north-going traffic diverted westwards in its direction. Three road lines, now mostly green lanes and footpaths, run north-west from the Redway at the county boundary near Old Parks, at Calke Park and at Ticknall. Although a valley route to Ashby through Hartshorne in Derbyshire might have been easier, the old road-lines indicate that the Redway across Old Parks remained popular until the Norman Conquest. Ogilvy used a section of the Redway, but then headed south-west away from Old Parks on a more recent diversion.

The second diversion was at Trangesby, mentioned above, which seems to have been between Ticknall and Ashby, probably in the area of Old Parks House. Laid 'waste' after the Midland rebellion against William the Conqueror, travellers could still have passed through here until c1474 when it became depopulated and travellers were excluded from a new game park. This was established by William Lord Hastings who had been awarded a licence from Edward IV to 'empark' 3000 acres of land 'surrounding' his castle, an area equal to that of the land between Smisby Road, Lount north of Ashby, and as far as the county boundary (12).

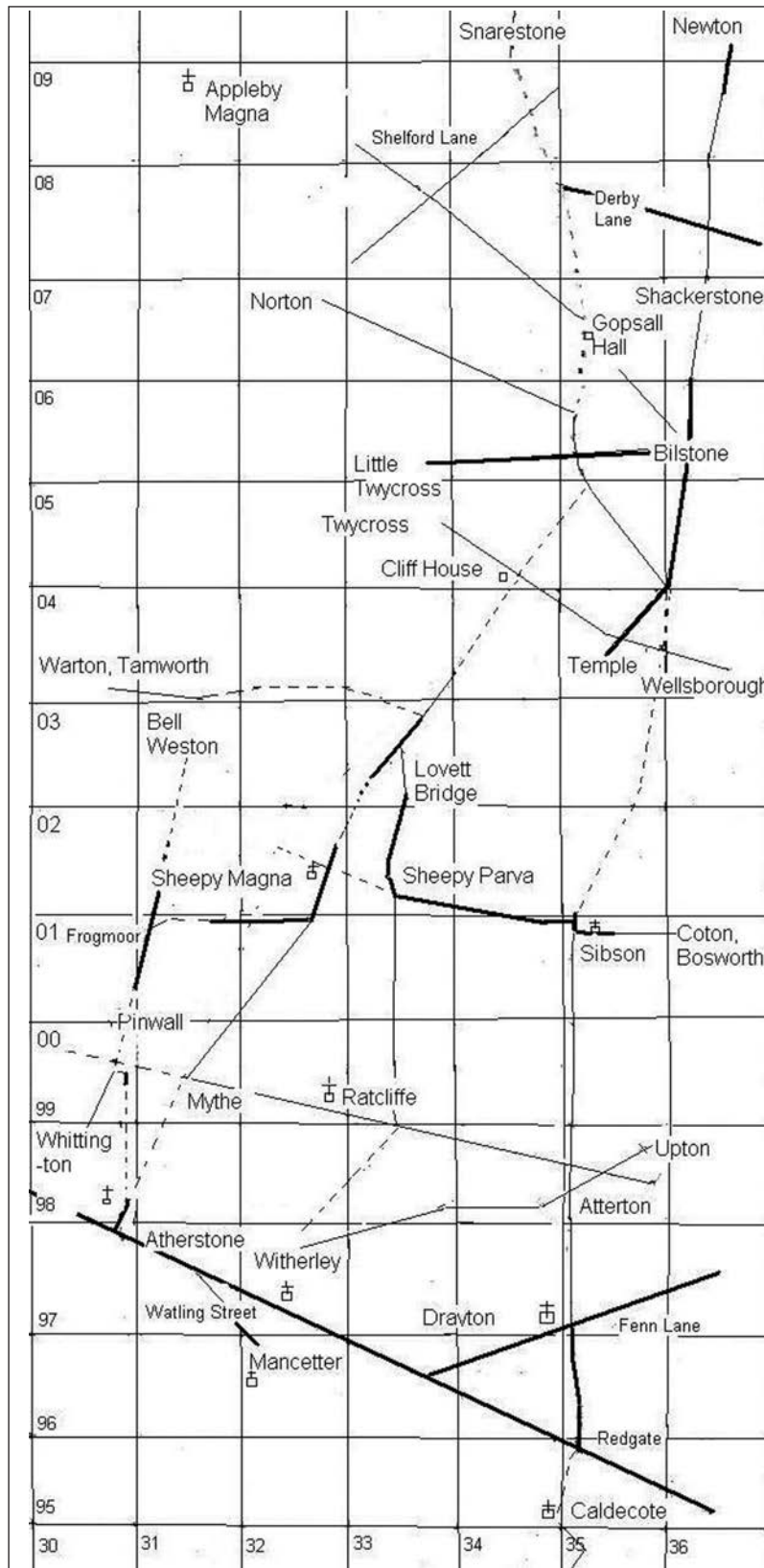
South from Ashby - The Redway: Ashby to Caldecote

From Ticknall to Ashby, and then south of Ashby, the Redway is aligned on the churches of Ticknall, Ashby (St Helen's), Swebstone, Sibson, Drayton and Caldecote (Warwickshire). From St Helen's in Ashby, the Redway ran



North-South Routes through Western Leicestershire – Map of the Northern Section.

This sketch map and the following map are a reconstruction of part of the Redway and of the route taken by Ogilvy. Thick lines are sections of existing metalled roads, thin lines are farm tracks, footpaths or clear hedge lines. Reconstructions are marked with a broken line. Larger print is used for settlements; smaller print for some significant land marks. The grid represents kilometre squares with Ordnance Survey grid references. Only presumed ancient roads from before the turnpike era are marked.



North-South Routes through Western Leicestershire – Map of the Southern Section.

along what is now Castle Walk, Upper Packington Road, the Ashby Road, and High Street Packington to a skewed T-junction. In High Street, it crosses an ancient road line marked by Ogilvy and running east to Ravenstone, Bagworth and Leicester, and west to Blackfordby and Burton.

To the right of the T-junction in Packington is Bridge Street, and until the nineteenth century, a ford over the Gilwiskaw Brook, into Measham Road (which Ogilvy crossed 240 metres west). New housing on Bridge Street obscures a footpath that runs south past the Iron Age site of Redburrow. This is one of the two paths noted earlier leading out of Packington, and is the line of the Redway south from the village. After 1 kilometre, the footpath merges into the more easterly Redburrow Lane, heading in the southerly direction of Swebstone. South-east of Packington, Normanton Road, which runs east of the Redway, was probably once a branch of the Salt Road from Measham. The final 1.5 kilometres of the Redway into the Ashby Lane at Swebstone is now reduced to a footpath, but was used by a milk lorry taking churns from Swebstone farms to Ashby in the early twentieth century. (13) From Swebstone church, the Redway ran parallel to Church Street, and then along the Newton Road to Nethercote, just west of Newton Burgoland. From Nethercote, there is first a well-preserved section of cobbled lane and then a footpath leading to Hill's Bridge over the Ashby Canal. By contrast, the section across the eastern edge of Gopsall Estate to Castle Farm is a poorly kept footpath, with deep mud where it crosses Gopsall Hall's eastern avenue of beeches and chestnuts.



Ashby Lane, Swebstone, part of the Redway, looking north.

From Castle Farm to Bilstone, the Redway then follows the Main Road at Bilstone, into the first part of Gibbet Lane, to a bend near the gibbet post marks where the ancient road headed SSW to a ford over the River Sence past Temple Hall, now Temple Farm. Since mediaeval times, travellers have crossed the Sence further south to Temple Mill. After 400 metres, a hedge line south indicates the resumed line of the Redway to the junction of the B585 Wellsborough Road with the A444 Burton Road. It must originally have run just

west of the A444 to Sibson at a dog's leg in Sheepy Road 300 metres west of the Cock Inn. The diversion to the line past the Cock Inn at the junction of the A444 with Sheepy Road seems early mediaeval. From here, the route ran east of the present footpath, past earthworks and over a muddy ford, past Eightlands Farm, parallel to the A444. For the last few miles of this section, the Redway passed through the centre of Atterton, then past Fenny Drayton church, and across Fenn Lane by a dog's leg to Redgate, 'road way', where it crosses the Watling Street, and then, by another dog's leg, onto Caldecote (Warwickshire). The last two dog's legs must date from Roman times.

South from Ashby - Ogilvy's route: Ashby to Atherstone

Note: Numbers in parenthesis [] are the distances in miles from Oxford given by Ogilvy's route maps.

From the Lamb Inn in Market Street in Ashby [74], Ogilvy's route went southwards through Prior Park onto a footpath under the Leicester-Burton railway line onto a dog's leg in Lower Packington Road. His line continues as a lane to Ashby Mill, and then with a footpath from there to Nook Lane, south of Nook Farm. The last part of Nook Lane past Packington church has recently been renamed Vicarage Lane [72], which on Ogilvy's map crosses Measham Road into the Babelake, this being Ogilvy's route south out of Packington. The modern traveller has to follow a dog's leg left-right into the Bablake, which is the second ancient route south from the village. After 2 kilometres, the Babelake now declines to a footpath, though it was still used by miners cycling past Measham Hall to Measham Pit in the 1950s. Ogilvy's route took a branch crossing the Gilwiskaw at

Clock Mill, south-east of Measham Hall, to a crossroads with the present Sweptstone Road [70], where he also marks a road leading to Measham church, its track still visible in the landscape. His route then follows Quarry Lane to a T-junction with the Main Street in Snarestone [69], after which it diverges south-westwards.

Ogilvy's route from Snarestone to Sheepy Magna is harder to trace, the section across Gopsall Park being the most difficult to reconstruct. The original Derby Lane must have begun at the T-junction in Snarestone but has since been moved 800 metres east to begin now at Hill House on the Sweptstone Road. The changed route is visible in John Carey's 1792 county map. Ogilvy's route appears then to have run west of Shackerstone Fields Farm, skirting west of a Gopshill Hall (the predecessor of Charles Jennens Gopsall Hall) [68]. Ogilvy's route then curved west of Sharp's Covert [67], from where its direction can be reconstructed from field lines. It followed a short section of the Salt Way south-east. It then curved east round Cliff House, where a former road to Harris Bridge is marked, to enter Watery Lane seemingly past Overfield Farm. From where Watery Lane now curves sharply right [63], Ogilvy's route hugged the River Sence, merging onto the line of what became the turnpike (now the B4116 Twycross Road) just before Mill Lane, marked as a crossroads and labelled Shepey. The line of the former road is hardly visible in Google Earth. Where the lane is closest to the Sence west of Lovett Bridge, a causeway of Swithland slate, probably dating from prehistoric times, allowed packhorse traffic and foot travellers to use Watery Lane during floods, but was regrettably demolished during 'road improvements' around 1950.



Remains of Ogilvy's route from Prior Park, Ashby, under the Leicester-Burton railway.



Remains of Ogilvy's route from the railway to Lower Packington Road, Ashby.

Main Street, Sheepy Magna [63], originally hugged the River Sence, curving with the river to Ratcliffe Lane and Mythe Hall, now Mythe Farm, where a ford and footbridge (until the nineteenth century) crossed the River Anker leading to Friars Gate and Market Street in Atherstone. This must have been the regular route before the Friary fell into private hands at the Reformation.

Ogilvy's route, however, ran from Sheepy Magna's Main Street to Pinwall Grange and a 'stone bridge 8 arches over Ancker flu' by a lost route which even in Ogilvy's time may have been irregular and uncertain until it was superseded by the Atherstone – Burton turnpike. The bridge of the monks of Merevale Abbey was situated 300 metres downstream of the present Fielden Bridge, which was built for the turnpike was. (14) Edward III had granted Merevale Abbey the right to collect tolls on goods passing over 'Feldon' Bridge between Atherstone and Pinwall for the repair of the bridge. In one direction the bridge led past Pinwall Grange to Crow Lane, probably a nickname for the monks, but gave no easy access to Sheepy, as indicated by the legend of the traveller lost in Frog Moor, 'frog' being another nickname based on 'frock', the monks' habit. Crow Lane is ligned southwards on Mereval Hall visible on the horizon, the successor of the abbey.

Other interesting features marked on Ogilvy's map as the route leaves Sheepy Main Road include a road to the left to the Mythe, south of and parallel to the present Ratcliffe Lane and to the right a green lane, known as Emery's Lane or New Hall Lane. The next road right [64] is a long-lost junction with Crow Lane. A crossroads is marked near

Pinwall Grange which leads towards the right to Highfield. This represents part of the Danelaw frontier road through Orton and Little Orton. To the left, marked Ratcliff, the road led along the south side of Anker Hill to Mythe Hall, where it crossed the Sence 100 metres upstream of its confluence with the Anker. The road then ran along the south side of Ratcliffe church and the former Ratcliffe Castle, crossing the Redway 400 metres north of Atterton towards Upton Park. The evidence of Jones and Austin suggests that Richard III used this route. (15)

Ogilvy's route continued from the old Feldon bridge into Old Holly Lane, Whittington, now part of Atherstone. Here, it turned south-west towards Alder Mill, then south along the track from Alder Mill through the former

Priory grounds, and into Friars Gate–Market Street, Atherstone.

Topographical names

Whilst carrying out this research, it became noticeable the number of place names and with either 'red' or 'rad' in their names, further supporting evidence for the route of the Redway or Radway.

Examples in the Midlands suggest that *red*, *rad* and *rat* in place-names usually mean 'road' and not 'red'. It derives from Germanic *rad*, meaning 'wheel' and indicates an ancient road suitable for wheeled traffic, not just pack-horse traffic. It occurs in a number of Leicestershire place-names, including Ratby, Redburrow Iron Age Fort at Packington, Ratcliffe, where the border road of Danelaw, the Mythe–Hinckley road, is 'cleaved' by a river, Redgate, where the Redway leaves Leicestershire between Fenny Drayton and Caldecote, Redhill Farm on the old Appleby Magna–Norton juxta Twycross road, part of an early road to Burton on Trent, and Redmile on a Roman road to Nottingham. Along the Warwickshire section of the Redway, it occurs in Radford Semele, where the road crossed the River Leam, Radway at the foot of Edge Hill (which clinches the identity of the Radway in Henry Tudor's route in 1485), and Ratley near the summit of Edge Hill, a focus of ancient roads, including Ditch hedge Lane running south-west towards Salisbury Plain and the Jurassic Way running north-east. Contrary to suggestions elsewhere, none of these examples can be explained from a red feature or a personal name. (16)

Choice of Routes and Causes of Diversions

On the two routes discussed here, there has been little influence on their direct lines from the three large lakes of the Glacial Era, which turned into mediaeval marshes running north-east from the River Anker. Perhaps by chance rather than design, the oldest route, the Redway, skirted east of all three, as well as the 'South Fen' (Sinfin Marsh) between the Trent and the Derwent. In time, the building of the mediaeval bridge at Swarkestone diverted travellers from the prehistoric route south to this crossing, along the southern dike of Sinfin Marsh, as mapped in Ogilvy's road book. Surprisingly the early route shows that travellers did not avoid the steep slopes between the River Trent and Ashby de la Zouch, nor the Nuneaton Ridge south of Caldecote, nor up the steep slopes of Edge Hill.

Later, the original line of the Redway was altered into several minor dog's legs at river crossings, an indication that the original road preceded the building of water mills on the Sence and the Anker. The dog's legs at Fenn Lane, the Watling Street and Foss Way suggest that the Redway also preceded the Romans.

The source of major diversions for both routes was large landowners. The Huntingdons, or perhaps the Normans, barred traffic through Old Parks for the benefit of their hunting, whilst Charles Jennens, who rebuilt Gopsall Hall c1750, was responsible for the first diversions from Ogilvy's route onto the realigned Derby Lane, and from the Redway to Bilstone. The Howes would have been responsible for the large curve west of the turnpike between Snarestone and Twycross. A further major diversion of Ogilvy's route was where it left Leicestershire, this being the result of an initiative of the Bracebridges of Atherstone Hall for their 'peace and quiet'.

Subsequent changes to the road patterns mean that today large sections of the two principal roads described here can be followed in peace and quiet by the twenty-first century rambler or cyclist.

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