

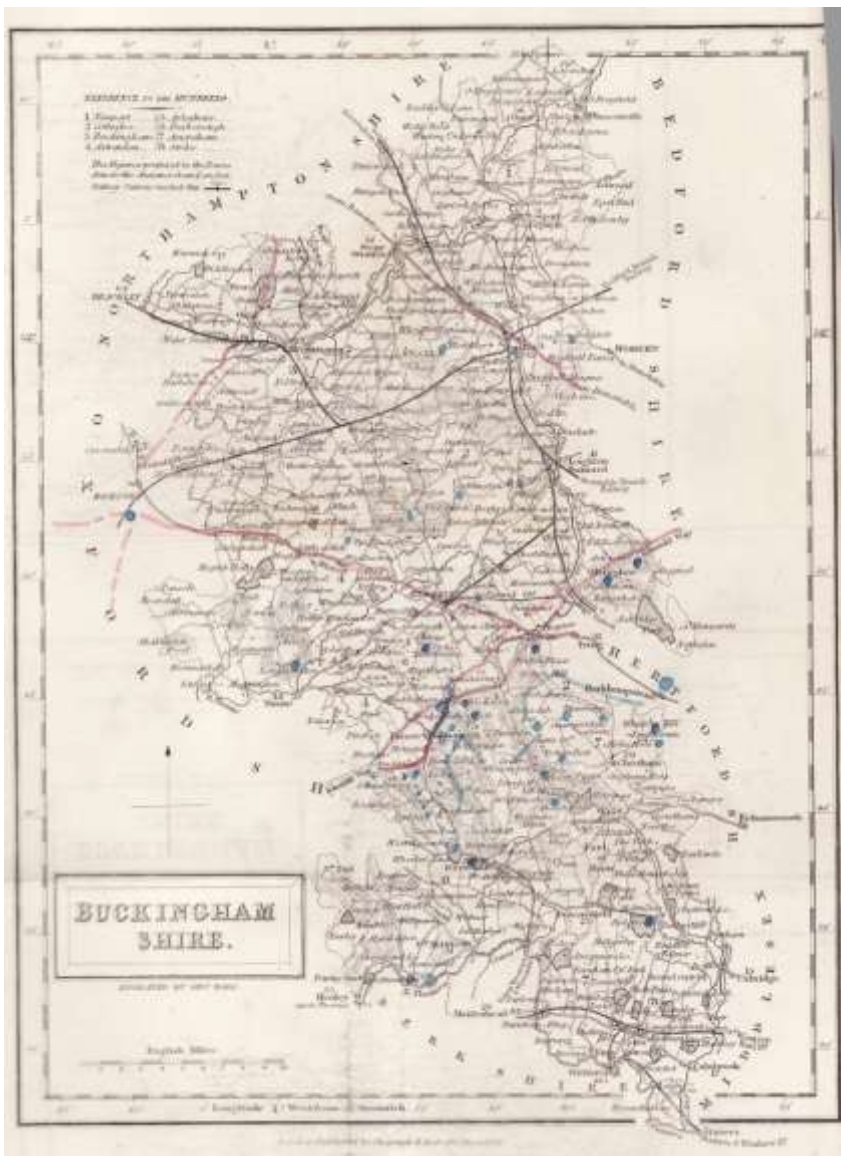
ON THE TRACES OF ANCIENT ROADS IN
THE COUNTY OF BUCKINGHAM.*

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It was remarked by a learned Member of the Archaeological Society, lately assembled at Cambridge, that evidences are continually accumulating of the wonderful unity of the Roman Empire. These evidences are commonly indirect, and therefore the more convincing, as being both undesigned and unexpected. The instance quoted at Cambridge was furnished by the recent discovery in this country of earthenware vessels of the Roman Period, on which the names of Caracalla and Geta having been originally impressed, that of Geta had been subsequently erased; upon which fact a second learned Member remarked, that vessels bearing the same names, and the same subsequent erasure, had been met with in the most opposite portions of the Roman dominion. I need scarcely add, that the name of Geta had been erased after the murder of that prince, by his brother Caracalla, A.D. 212. This rather singular discovery drew forth the observation I have above alluded to; and to those who have given any attention to this subject, many equally striking features of this unity would be familiar. In fact, there appears to have been an intensity and an individuality in the national character of the ancient Romans, that of itself both developed and sustained this unity, wherever the Roman Legion fortified its camp, or the Roman colonist erected his villa, or cultivated his farm. With the same hereditary feeling, and from the same national instincts that lead the Englishman in all possible circumstances to surround himself with English comforts and habits of life, with all the associations and familiar things that serve to bind his feelings to the Old Country, we find the Roman invaders in Britain laying out their settlements and forming their stations on the

* The Writer in drawing up the following Paper is indebted to Leland's Itinerary, Chutterbuck's History of Hertfordshire, and a volume of Bohn's Antiquarian Library, for much valuable information.

same pattern as served them in Africa or the East—or the Roman colonist building his villa with its open court, its "impluvium," its baths in the rougher clime of England as under the sky of his native Italy—his rites of sepulture, his implements and articles for domestic ornament or usefulness—all betoken the Roman individuality of his character, and his modes of life and thought. This uniformity if due in a great degree to the national character, was a part also of the able policy which enabled Rome both to extend her conquests and to tenant the conquered territory, as a subjected and settled country. So that according to the doctrine of Seneca—"where the Roman conquers he inhabits," not only did the Roman arms effectually subdue our Island the "divisos penitus toto orbe Britannos," but the Roman colonists dwelt peaceably in Italian style throughout the greater portion of Britain, and with the evident intention of permanent occupation. Proofs of this would multiply upon us were we to search the records, though but imperfect, of a very interesting page of British History—that of the Roman Occupation—a period that has received much light from the pursuits of the Antiquarian, and, it is predicted, will fully reward his further researches. A map of our island under this period gives us a very interesting view of the Roman settlements—military or pacific—and the means by which they maintained the constant circulation of Roman life and energy, from the Head of Empire to its most distant members—I mean their admirable lines of communication—for to this practical people it was self-evident that the mode of bringing distant places into profitable connection consisted in directness and rapidity of communication; and thus by their far-extending and admirable Roads, they led the way towards the consummation almost attained by modern Science—that of uniting distant lands, and bridging over mighty waters by steam power—and thus infinitely increasing the intercourse of Earth's inhabitants, by adding to time what we apparently deduct from space. It may be interesting, therefore, to note how England's past has fashioned England's present, and how modern lines of communication have often merely followed in the tracks of Roman Roadways, and how many of the present courses of our traffic flow on in



channels opened up 1,800 years ago—some few, perhaps, at some unknown period, previous to the Christian Era. It is also an interesting topic, as connected with this subject, that if our English Itinerary be in a considerable measure the record of that of our Roman or Celtic predecessors, the Roman Itinerary has left its traces upon towns and villages in the names still inherited by them, as memorials of the passage of the Roman Road, or the presence of the Roman Station.

A few instances of these verbal traces of the Roman Via may not prove uninteresting. Such names are often merely provincial versions of the Latin Via Strata—the paved causeway so levelled or thrown up by the Roman Armies. Thus, the names of towns and villages combining this syllable "strat" or "street" for the most part sufficiently indicate their origin—as the Stratfords or Streetfords, in the northern portion of this county, on the course of the Roman Watling Street, or the village of Streetly, in Berkshire, on the line of the ancient Icknield way—or as Stratton, in Gloucestershire, on the route of the Roman Ermin Street—or Stratton in the Forsey, a few miles S. W. of Bath, situated on the Roman Road—the Foss—or still more simply as Street—a mile S. W. of Glastonbury.

To take another form of this local tradition, how numerous are the Stantons, Stauntons, and Stansteads—names of places which still give the echo of the Stony Street or paved causeway of the Roman Road-makers. Another reminiscence of the Ancient Via is found in the Saxon syllable Old or Auld, used as a prefix as Old Street or Auld Street, and Old-ford; and yet another, less obvious at first sight, is found in a purely British version of the Roman Stratum, indicated in the names of places through which it passed. This is the British term "Sarn," with its compounds. Thus, on the track of the Roman Via called the Fossway we find Sharncoote, and South Sharney between Cricklade and Cirencester, North Survey two miles distant from the latter place, and Sharnton three miles from Gloucester. There is also (says Camden) a Sarn Helen to this day. But we need not even travel beyond this county for our instance, since on the track of the Watling Street, in Northern Bucks, we find a village named "Shenley," anciently "Sham-

ley." Occasionally, also, the villages, towns, or stations were called after' the particular, and not the generic name of the Roman Road on which they were situated. Thus, one important Roman Road, as is well known, was called Fossata—now Fossway—from the deep trench and embankment marking its line; and still along its ancient line are met corresponding names of places. Thus, in Somersetshire, Stretton-in-the-Vorseway, near to Bath, with Fosscott midway between them, and Stretton-super Fosse, where that ancient way enters into Warwickshire; and other instances might easily be brought forward if these did not suffice as illustrations of the case before us.

It will be necessary before particularizing the ancient Roads that are traceable in this county to detail in mere outline the names and general bearings of those that have been best ascertained by historical enquiries. These were—1. The Watling Street (Saxon Guethelinga) in two branches, northern and southern, leading from the Straits of Dover to the Irish Channel. 2. The Ermyrn Street, leading from the Coast of Sussex, near Eastbourne or Percusey, to the S. E. part of Scotland. 3. The Ick-nield Street, which never lost its original character of a British Trackway, leading from the country of the Icenii, on the East Coast, to the S. W. extremity of England. 4. The Rycknield Street, leading through the country of the Upper Icenii. 5. The Upper Saltway, leading from the Salt Mines at Droitwich to the Coast of Lincolnshire. 5. The Lower Saltway, leading from the same Mines to the S. E. Coast.

Of the Roman Roads in Britain the most conspicuous was the Watling Street, or Irish Road, leading from Richborough (Rutupioe), in Kent, to Chester (Deva), and thence into Wales, terminating at Holyhead, in an ancient town, of which the name is lost. This Way was formed upon the track of a British Road, and bears a modern form of the Saxon name, Guethelinga. It passes in its course from the S. E. Coast, Canterbury (Durovernum), Rochester (Durobrivoe), London (Trinobantum), where Watling Street is still a familiar sound, St Alban's or Verulam (Verolamium), a spot distinguished by Roman Fortifications, and abounding in interesting remains, Dunstable (Durocobrivoe), in the vicinity of which are both a Roman Camp and a British

stronghold, now called Maidenbower. From Dunstable, where the Watling Street crosses the Icknield Way, it is identical" with the great North Western Road through Bucks, and passes through Little Brickhill, Fenny Stratford, Shenley, Stony Stratford, and leaves the county at Old Stratford, a quarter of a mile N. W. of Stony Stratford. Is it necessary to point out the significance of the first mentioned name? The Stony Street of the Romans there crossing by a ford the River Ouse. Thence the Watling Street pursues its route to Towcester (Lactodorum), and by Burnt Walls (Isanta Varia), near Daventry, close to which is Borough Hill, a British Station, anciently Bennavennae, to Wroxeter, as so onward to Chester. We may notice as a Buckinghamshire relic that near this Roman Way at Fenny Stratford lay the Roman Station Magiovinium, still called Old-fields, where many Roman Antiquities have been brought to light. Of the Watling Street, in Buckinghamshire, no traces peculiarly Roman remain, if we except the undeviating straightness of its course, and the record of its once paved causeway preserved in the names of the towns through which it passes.

If we pass from the northern to the midland portion of this county, another ancient Road is distinguishable, commonly named in maps, and by tradition, the Akeman Way. This Road enters Bucks from Hertfordshire, a little westward of Tring, and pursues a direct course by Aston Clinton towards and through the town of Aylesbury, on leaving which place it passes in a generally straight direction by Waddesdon to Bicester, in Oxfordshire, a little southward of which was the Roman Station of Alchester (Aelia Castra). Here it is met by a Roman Road coming through Oxfordshire, from the south, and passing N. E. to join the Watling Street. Thus, this so-called Akeman Street follows the direction from the east usually assigned it by historians, and probably in its Buckinghamshire Section formed a connection between Verulam on the east and Alchester on the west: but, in the face of the authorities who place the course of the true Akeman Street higher in the county, and give its course as from Bedford, by Newport Pagnell, Stony Stratford, and Buckingham, to Alchester, I shall merely suggest that some weight at least is due to the traditional

name of the Aylesbury Akeman Street, that it certainly bears the test of Roman directness, that it connects Roman Stations, and that it completely answers the received idea of the Akeman Street as a deviation from the Icknield in a more northerly track, and that on these grounds it has some considerable claims to the name it now bears.

It is well worthy of notice also, that the N. W. boundary of a portion of this county is for some distance formed by the track of a Roman Road, as is also the N. E. limit of a detached section of the county which lies in Oxfordshire, a little to the west of Stratton Audley. This ancient Way and its neighbourhood are of a very interesting character. It may be traced from Alchester in a N. E. course, and passes near Fringford and through Newton Purcell, in Oxon, until it reaches the main body of this county at Water Stratford, and so continues through Stowe Park, to a junction with the Watling Street, on its entrance into Northamptonshire. I should describe this way, as a portion of the Akeman Street, when understood as passing by Newport Pagnell and Buckingham to Alchester, and it is clearly connected at the latter place with a Roman Way, the traces of which run southward from that station towards Headington, near Oxford, over Ottmoor, which Road appears to have been a connecting link between the Watling Street and Alchester, and the famous Roman Station on the Thames, at Dorchester, Dorocina, from which again a southward branch passed on to Silchester.

It is necessary also in making this Record, to allude to traces of a Roman Road, which, under the usual name of the Portway, are visible in the vicinity of Stone and Hartwell; and if we connect this with the fact that many Roman relics have been found in that neighbourhood, that the western side of the county, as at Long Crendon, presents many remains of Roman occupation and sepulture, that a Roman Way seemed to connect these posts from east to west and from north to south, there seems little room to doubt that Aylesbury itself stands on a Roman Road of a very distinct character. But this Paper would be very incomplete if I were not to give due commemoration to a Trackway of ancient renown, and still in excellent preservation, a portion of which lies through the county of Bucks — the Icknield Street or Way. This

Way may be termed the Road of the Iceni, from which ancient Celtic tribe it derived both its name and origin, for under its various provincial designations of Ackneld, Hackney, or Ikenild Way, the true name of the ancient inhabitants of the East Coast of Britain is, I think, sufficiently apparent. The Icknield Way still preserves its original features as a British Trackway, as distinguished from the Roman Road; and as a proof that it does so, I may cite from a good authority the characteristics which distinguish the Roman from the British Way. The British Ways are not paved nor raised, nor always straight, but often wind along the tops or sides of the chains of hills which lie in their course. They do not lead to Roman towns or notice such towns, except when placed on the sites of British fortresses. They are attended by "tumuli," like those of the Romans, but usually throw out branches, which, after running parallel for some miles, are re-united to the original stem. Now in all and each of these particular features, the Icknield Way is conspicuously British. Thus, the Road of the Iceni, still bearing with the name its ancient British peculiarities, appears to have been made originally for commercial purposes, and led through districts probably then, as now, thickly populated. It commences on the East Coast of Britain, near Yarmouth, and first points for Taesborough, "ad Taum," the chief town of the Iceni. For some part of its course it forms the boundary between Essex and Cambridge. It then runs by Ickleton and Ickleford, to which it has given their names, to Royston in Hertfordshire. From Royston, crossing the Ermin Street, it passes through Baldock, also in Herts, and runs under Welbury Hill, where are remains of a camp supposed by Stukeley to be a British town, thence to a village in Herts, also called Ickleford, and so passing under the Warden Hills, and crossing the Road from Luton to Bedford, sends a principal branch to the British Post at Maiden-bower, near Totternhoe, and another to Dunstable, whence it passes through a small part of Beds and Bucks, leaving Totternhoe and Ivinghoe both on its right. Thence it re-enters Herts, near Bulbourne Head, leaving Tring on its right, and so finally quits Herts. After this re-entering Buckinghamshire, it still keeps the edge of the

Downs, and skirts the Chilterns through Aston, Halton, and Wendover, and runs through Ellesborough and the Kimbles to the foot of Whiteleaf Hill, in Monks Risborough, whence it bends southward of Princes Risborough, for the sake of keeping the higher ground. Thence leaving Bucks at the parish of Bledlow, it enters Oxfordshire, near Chinnor, and still keeping the declivity of the hills as it traverses Shirburne, Watlington, and other Oxfordshire villages, it crosses the Thames at Goring to Streatley, in Berkshire. Here it divides into two branches. One called the Ridgway ran along the Berkshire Downs, by Cuckhamsley Hill, White Horse Hill, and Ashbury, towards the British Sanctuary at Abury, in Wiltshire, from whence its course is not positively known, though probably it proceeds towards Glastonbury, and thence into Devonshire and Cornwall. Another branch from Streatley passed by Aldworth and Newbury Street to Old Sarum, "Sorbiodunum," thence by the two Stratfords, Maiden Castle, Durinum in Dorset, Bridport, Honiton, Exeter, "Esca," to Redruth, and the Land's End.

Considered in its Bucks Section, this ancient Way is full of Antiquarian interest. It was anciently designed for the exchange of the corn and cattle of the East with the mineral riches of the West of England, and still serves for the passage of flocks of sheep from Wiltshire to Oxfordshire, Bucks, and Herts, forming for the traveller an agreeable route from South Oxon to Cambridgeshire. It is attended in this neighbourhood by a branch or parallel road called the Lower Icknield. It passes near to many British works with which it communicates, as Maiden-bower, Cholesbury Camp, Ivinghoe Beacon, Aston Hill, Long Down Camp, Kimble Castle, or the Castle of Cymbeline, White-leaf Cross, Princes Risborough Castle, Grims Dyke, at most of which sepulchral and other remains have been found. It is attended by many "tumuli," some of conspicuous size, as on White-leaf Hill. It has either attracted population to its line of transit, or has been the means of retaining it in situ, its course being studded with picturesque churches and villages, in the proportion of a parish church to every successive mile. Some of these churches occupy most picturesque and commanding sites,

as *e. g.* Eddlesborough and Ellesborough—the former on the Bedfordshire side, the latter in the centre of the county, and adjoining the beautiful grounds of Chequers. At Ivinghoe the Church is a fine structure. At Chinnor are many beautiful brasses. In the Bucks and Oxon section of the Icknield the scenery on either side is varied and beautiful, so that in an Archaeological, Architectural, or Natural point of view, a tour of inspection along the Icknield would furnish the lover of such objects of pursuit with many a scene to please his eye, gratify his taste, or bring before his imagination visions of ancient tribes and long-past histories.

Touched by these sources of inspiration, the mind of Drayton found in the Icknield a Poetic theme, though his verse is homely, and his muse evidently travels the Icknield on foot:—

" But, oh! unhappy chance, through Time's disastrous lot,
 " Our other fellow Streets lie utterly forgot,
 " As Icening that set out from Yarmouth in the East,
 " By the Iceni then being generally possest,
 " Was of that people first termed Icening in her race,
 " Upon the Chiltern here that did my course embrace,
 " Into the dropping South, and bearing then outright,
 " Upon the Solent Sea, stopped on the Isle of Wight,"

—*Drayton's Polyolbion*, vol. I., p. 247.

*** In the map of Buckinghamshire, which accompanies this Volume, the ancient Roads are coloured pink ; other Earthworks blue.