

Roman Roads of Berkshire.

By P. WILLIAMS.

In 1923, at the suggestion of the Hon. Secretary, I gave an illustrated lecture to the Society on the remaining traces of the Roman Roads of the county; and I have been requested to commit to paper, for the aid of Field Archaeologists in the future, some of the results of such examination of the ground as I was able to make.

The military road from Staines (*ad Pontes*) to the East gate of Silchester has been well described in this journal by Colonel G. A. Kempthorne, R.A.M.C. (October, 1901), and is a sufficiently good text-book. There is also a valuable and independent investigation of this portion of the road in Lyon's *History of Finchampstead* (1895). I shall not be serving the public interest by going over that ground again fully here, especially as no field work appears to have been done recently to throw new light on the alinement; but a few notes will be added at the end.

This paper will therefore deal mainly with the remaining Berkshire roads out of Silchester. Two only are established, and I will give a section to each Road. The *Victoria County History*, Vol. I (1906), unfortunately, throws little new light on the problem. Mr. Page and his assistants seem only to have been able to collect some of the indications which the ground yields, without modifying previous traditional conclusions; and the County Map of the Roads given is misleading.

I. The Military Road, Silchester to Cirencester and South Wales, with a branch to Bath.

This was evidently the earliest of the Roads through Silchester, leading as it did direct from London, through Cirencester and Gloucester to Caerleon, the Station for some three hundred years of the great Second Augustan Legion. History records no opposition to the occupation of South-west England, but the conquest of South Wales and the reduction of the warlike Silures was part of the work of the earlier periods, and a good Road from South Wales to Rome was essential.

On a part of this Road a useful paper appeared in our Journal (October, 1907), by Mr. Harold Peake. The traditional alinement of the portion from Speen to Wickham (as given hitherto on the Ordnance Maps, and accepted by Mr. Page) is here rejected, and Mr. Peake suggests, though with some hesitation, a new alinement, somewhat to the South of the modern road which is the line given on the Maps. But since 1907 Mr. O. G. S. Crawford, in the days before the war, made a close study of the ground, marking all his finds on the six-inch maps, and recording details. All these maps and records were kindly handed over to me by him when his occupation on the Ordnance Survey removed him from the neighbourhood. My own Fieldwork confirms in every particular the observations made by him.

Beyond Mr. Peake's paper, no original constructive work on our county Roads appears to have been recorded, in our Journal or elsewhere, in recent years. His paper deals further—and I believe for the first time—with the branch Road which led to Bath. By the nature of the case this must have been of later date than the Legionary Road; it is even doubtful if the healing virtues of the Bath waters were realized by the Romans until their South Wales conquests were completed. The Antonine Itineraries name an alternative route from Silchester to Caerleon (crossing the Bristol Channel), which includes Speen and Bath as stations. We may, therefore, conclude that a non-military Road to Bath branched off somewhere West of Speen; and the details given by Mr. Peake still hold the field, and have been gratefully incorporated in the description which follows.

I will ask the reader, armed if possible with successive sheets of the six-inch Ordnance map, to start out from the West gate of Silchester. (It will be observed that the map marks by dots a straight line to the Impstone, but marks nothing beyond. This mistake is due to records of older antiquaries, whose errors need not be further pursued.) The Road takes a straight line nearly W.N.W. It can be traced by a diagonal bank and hedge, till it comes to the lane, East of Catthaw Lands Farm. There is a distinct hump in the lane bank at this point. Also a house has recently been built here, and the gardener showed me fragments of Roman tiles dug up in making the garden.

Across the lane the line shows no sign on the plough, but there is a hump in the bank of the copse then entered. On the West side of the copse the ground rises, and at this point on the steep slope there is the usual phenomenon of deep trails on each side of the Road, presumably caused by the scour of rain down the hill, which washes these trails out, leaving the Ridge intact.

As we reach the level there is an obvious Ridge continuing the line across the heathy land, till we cross a track running due North (and leading to a small circular Camp). Beyond this track we enter wood again. In the wood a bank and ditch carry on the line accurately till the wood ends in a grass field sloping steeply down to the bottom at Aldermaston Soke, and we run into the modern road. Across this field are evident signs of a well engineered Road sloping down the hill, a feature of Roman road construction. The modern Road at Aldermaston Soke carries on the line across the county boundary and the stream. The line then parts from the modern road, and in crossing a cart track on the edge of the wood leaves a hump on the unmetalled track. Across Decoy Plantation there is nothing visible, but when we cross the next road and enter Keyser's Plantation, the Ridge is clearly marked for a hundred yards on the heath. Through Aldermaston Park we pass to right of Pavilion, but the ground gives no sign until we reach the lower Fishpond. This is a good instance of the formation of a pond through the natural blocking of the water by the Ridge of the Road. (There is a fine instance of this at Heath Pond, near Wellington College Station, and we shall meet with another on Sole Common.)

Just beyond here the Ridge is clearly marked in the plantation, till we come out on to the Aldermaston to Basingstoke Road. Beyond this the line is carried on by a hedge, and then by the North-east fence of Bull Pate Copse, another hedge bringing us to The Hornets. The line then crosses a corner of Wasing Park, and comes out on to a road at point 209. This road carries on the line for a hundred yards, after which we enter the course of the Enborne stream and the condition of 'land liable to floods.'

The line bears on Quaking Bridge on the Kennet, but before reaching this there is a noticeable and distinct Ridge

projecting into the flood level. This Ridge is an evident relic of the Road; and it was proved in 1915 when a section was cut across it by the energy of boys of the Newbury Grammar School when the gravel bedding was disclosed.

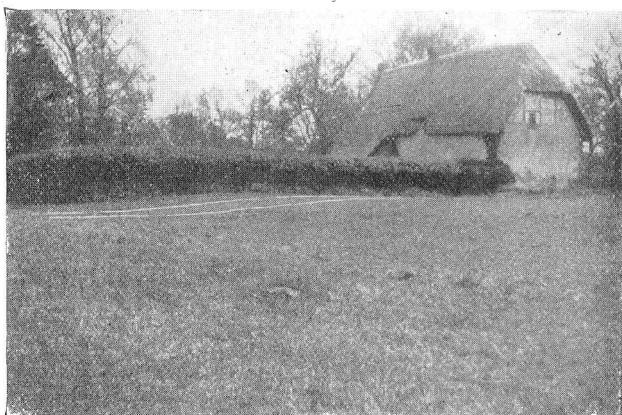
An interesting confirmation of the statement, that the Road crossed Kennet hereabout, has been given me by Mr. Crawford. He was using one of Birch's Charters (*Cartularium Saxonicum*, ii, 802) to work out the bounds of Brimpton. The boundary line comes down on to the river at a spot called in the charter *Weala Brucge*, just about where Quaking Bridge now stands. It is remarkable enough that in Saxon times there should have been a bridge of any sort here: but it is well known to students that *weala* meant to the Saxon invaders anything foreign, that is, Roman; and we seem to have here good evidence that the compilers of this Charter found at this spot the remains of a Roman bridge.

From this point all traces disappear, and there is little doubt that the river-bed has varied since Roman times. Immediately after crossing the railway, when we are again above flood level, and have passed South of Calthrop Mill, the line is carried on by a deep ditch and hedge, which bears directly on Thatcham Church, passing South of Thatcham House, but further indications are wanting.

In and round Thatcham Village a number of Roman finds have been made since this lecture was delivered, and it is hoped that the bedding of the Road on the South and West sides of the village may be found.

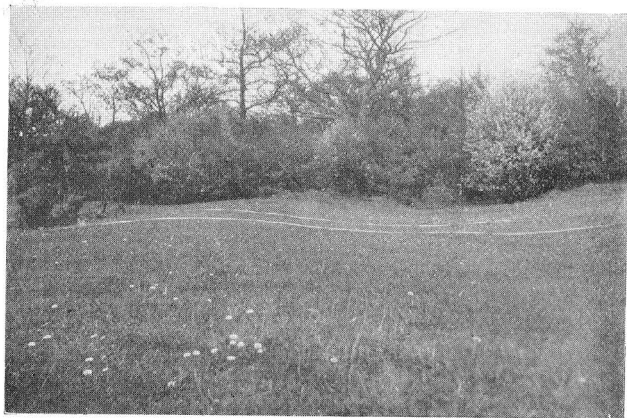
The turnpike cottage, on the Bath Road, stands at the junction of the Shaw Lane, which carries on the line exactly to Shaw Bridge, and it is tempting to believe that the Lane is the Road itself. After Shaw is passed we are again on 'Land liable to flood,' and up to the present no indications have come to light in the grounds of Donnington Grove. Beyond the Five Bells public house, I walked along the railway to Stockcross Station, and noted a distinct Ridge on the North side of the railway, where a shallow gully runs down towards the river; and just before the station is reached the Ridge reappears in the grounds of Woodspeen.

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Untouched piece of the Ridge, on old grass, near
Poughley House, Eastgarston Parish.

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The Ridge emerging from the West side of Stibbs Wood,
Avington Parish.

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From Stockcross Station onwards, for the next two miles, there are continual signs of the Ridge. It is faintly visible to the left across the field in which the station lies, and it forms the North-east fence of a copse which follows. Where it crosses the cart track to Woodspeen Farm it leaves a hump on the track. It is very clear again through Oldfield Wood. At Huntsgreen Farm it is visible on each side of the buildings. It is plain again through Shepherd's Border, and again in Williams' Copse. At Ownham Lower Farm the Ridge crosses the yard. Through Ownham Copse it does not show, but where it crosses the hedge beyond there is a hump in the bank. There are also traces across the plough beyond, which brings us to High Street, leading down to Boxford.

Across this lane we enter the plantation called Sole Common; here the pond is evidently formed naturally by the blocking of its North-east side by the Ridge (see Aldermaston Park ante). This is visible for two hundred yards beyond, leading to Wickham, but the growth is tangled: where it is cleared beyond, but not cultivated, two small pieces of the Ridge are faintly visible. In the Sandpits beyond the lane the Ridge is gone, but it survives in the wood above. It is lost in the grounds of Wickham Rectory, but just after the Village it coincides with the modern road and so continues till it passes into Wiltshire near Baydon, on the way to Cirencester.

At Wickham the branch Road to Bath must have diverged at about an angle of forty-five degrees, but its beginnings have not been discovered. The Ridge has been found in Orpenham Copse and at Elgar's Farm: it becomes unmistakable through Three Gate Copse, and in the next dip, across tillage, it is plain.

The Road evidently passed through Radley Farm House: it is clear through Stibb's Wood, on emerging from which, on the West side, there is a steep drop on to the lane in Radley Bottom. The Ridge is here very clear, sloping diagonally downwards on untouched grass, and where it crosses the valley there is a plain hump in the road surface. The Ridge can be seen in Heath Hanger Copse, and it continues as the North fence of Oaken Copse. Then it is carried on as the South fence of Great Hidden Farm, and by Peaked Lot, to the main road at Memorial Cross.

From this point no further traces have been found, but it re-appears again near Marlborough. It must be remembered that this branch of the Road was non-military and of presumably later date; and it is possible that the engineers of the time were contented with the Celtic road which here carries on up the Kennet Valley through Chilton.

II. The North Road from Silchester to Dorchester and beyond.

This Road is very obscure in its earlier part. It leaves Silchester by the North Gate, and passes over the site of the City Cemetery, the line given by the Ordnance map being correct. It soon crosses West End Brook: there is a pronounced Ridge projecting into the stream on the South side, and there are well-marked gullies on the North side, on each side of the Ridge, a common feature on hillsides. The line is carried on by a hedge at Lovegrove's Farm, and by the lane leading to West End Farm, as indicated on the six-inch map, the direction being nearly N.N.W.

At this point indications become scanty on the light soil: there is a fence along Child's Piece down to the stream at Pottinger's Furze, continuing up the slope on the North side, causing another deep trail, or gully, from the scour of rain on the hillside.

On the Hundred Acre Piece all traces are gone. After crossing the road, which is the county boundary, there is a hump in the bank of the ditch of Pond Slade. Park Piece, Pennsylvania Wood and Church Plantation give no traces; but across the tillage beyond there is a straight strip of bare ground from the Lane as far as the Church path; and Mr. Goddard, of Ufton Green Farm, told me that year after year crops fail on this strip. It is reasonable to believe that this is the Ridge.

Between this spot and Streatley Village, a distance of nine miles, no certain traces of the Road have been found. Much of the ground is too hilly for a direct Road—yet the old line is picked up again at Streatley, almost suddenly, and continues to the crossing of the Thames near Dorchester. I failed to find signs in the grounds of Streatley House, on the South side

of High Street : but North of the Village the line appears to be carried on by the main Wallingford Road.

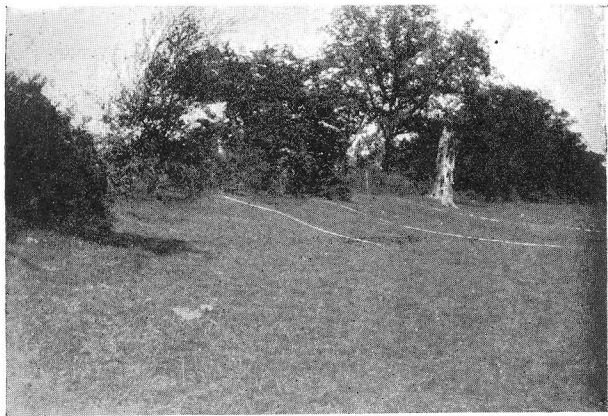
On approaching Moulsoford, there is a lane leading down to the Beetle and Wedge on the river bank, and just where the Road would cross it there is a hump in the roadway of the lane. The Manor House and the Church of Moulsoford appear to be built on the Road. On the North side of the Village, at benchmark 185, the Ridge leaves the modern road, and is plainly visible across the plough, carrying on the line across a lane and up the hill nearly to the deep cutting of the Great Western Railway, which is here crossed by an occupation bridge. The cutting appears to show a layer of gravel at this point : the cart track onwards from the bridge seems to be the line.

After crossing Papists' Way, the line is carried along Honey Lane to Cholsey Village : I noted a hump in the road immediately in front of the Vicarage gate. Just beyond this is Causeway Farm, but I could find no Causeway, and the ensuing tract of low ground on both sides of the Mill Brook has left no traces until the hamlet of Mackney is reached. Here Mackney takes up the line exactly.

After crossing the Wittenham and Wallingford Road, we find the ground rises, and follow the parish boundary. This begins in a sunk lane and develops into a wide turf balk of evident antiquity. When it crosses the 300-foot contour line the boundary changes direction suddenly ; the line no longer bears direct on Dorchester, but turns to right through thirty degrees and becomes a broad balk leading down to the river bank by a boundary hedge.

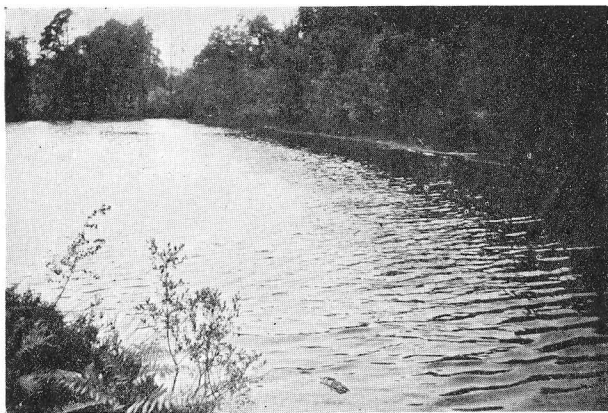
It is impossible to resist the conclusion that the Roman Crossing was here, and that a road on the Oxfordshire side led into Dorchester, whence the line is clearly carried on through the Baldons to Alchester. Useful evidence on this point is given by a Survey attached to Charter 810 in Birch's *Cartularium Saxonicum*, of which Dr. Grundy gives a translation in Vol. xxvi, No. 3, of our *Archaeological Journal*. The bounds of Brightwell are here carried down to the bank of the Thames at a spot called *tha Ealdan Stret Ford*, 'the old road ford,' which indicates that the Roman crossing was at the parish

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Old diagonal hedge, showing Ridge, near Sunningdale Station.

(p. 235.)



Heath Pond, Finchampstead. The pond was formed accidentally by the Ridge.

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boundary of Brightwell and Sotwell, and not immediately south of Dorchester.

III. The Road (in Berkshire) East of Silchester.

The Road enters Berkshire in Sunningdale Parish, from Staines. In the *United Service Journal* for January, 1836, it is stated that a 'good bit' of the Road is visible close to the Belvedere Tower (just outside the county boundary); all that ground is, however, thickly wooded, and further research is needed.

The first indication is about 500 yards south-west of Sunningdale Church: at the point on Station Road outside the gate of Wardour Lodge an old field-bank and ditch point direct on the Belvedere, and continue for 300 yards towards it, disappearing in the low ground. Proceeding westwards and crossing the railway, we find the line clearly marked in a field-bank beyond the grounds of St. Bruno Lodge, and then by other boundaries which bring us to the pond and boathouse of Broadlands. From here onwards, for more than $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles, the Road coincides with the county boundary; this brings us to Duke's Hill, where Colonel Kempthorne's account begins. He accounts for the sudden change of 25° in the direction of the Road at this point, though the county boundary carries on the old line.

Over Easthampstead Plain the Road is very clearly defined, being in use as a forest track, quite straight, showing some of the old ditches, passing North of Broadmoor, and bringing us to Circle Hill, Crowthorne. From here onwards traces of the Road have been destroyed by new houses and gardens; but a diligent search along the line of the Devil's Highway, as recorded on the Ordnance Map, will reveal scraps of it still; especially at the gateway of the new Golf Course, where the Ridge can be seen on the grass and is carried down to and across the railway.

Finchampstead Ridges are entered at Roman Road Lodge, on the Bearwood estate, and a beautiful grass ride carries us past Heath Pond, previously referred to: the shape of the pond cannot be accounted for except as the result of the blocking of the shallow depression by the Road.

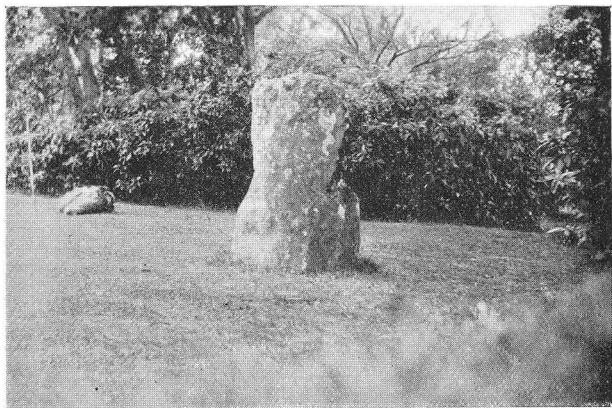
On the north side of Finchampstead Church, a portion of Commonfield Lane (300 yards) coincides with the Road, and the

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The Road on Easthampstead Plain, in use as a sandy track.

(p. 235.)



Roman mile stone, dug up on Webb's Farm, Finchampstead, on the line of the Road. Now in the garden of Banisters.

No inscription has been detected.

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small pond at its east end is probably formed by the blocking of the water. Beyond this, on Wheatlands Manor Farm (Webb's Farm), we come to the spot where the so-called Milestone was dug up. This stone has a square base, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet, the upper part being a rounded column; the height is about 4 feet. No inscription can be found.

Further West, at the present junction of the Blackwater and the Whitewater, the Road again coincides with the county boundary. This continues up to the East gate of Silchester, with a break on the northern bounds of Stratfield Saye; the Park was enlarged in 1845, which presumably involved a modification of the county boundary, and consequent destruction of the Ridge of the Road.

Notes.

SOME BERKSHIRE CHARTERS.

Though the following charters are of no great value or interest except to an antiquary working on the particular district, they happen to be hidden away in records, not only unprinted, unindexed and uncalendared, but also unlikely to be searched for traces of Windsor folk.

The Lansdowne MS. No. 434 contains the manor court rolls of the Monastery of Chertsey, from 1327 to 1346. At the end are transcripts of fourteenth century charters, probably produced before the court to substantiate a claim to a villein holding.

- I. Grant by Nicholas atte Leye of Old Windsor to John Morkoc of Eggham for 10s-6d, of various parcels of land in the parish of Eggham, in a place called Eremershs, lying scattered among the lands of Robert Wythemay, William de Toune, William atte Felde, Agnes de Fonte, William de Bakeham and Walter le Honte.

Witnesses : Robert de Imeworth, Thomas de Sodington, Adam atte Burgh, Andomer de Hamme, Thomas atte Hamme, Robert Outred, William Clerk and others. Dated at Eggham on Sunday before St. Matthias, 10 Edward II. (1316-17).