

**THE WINCHESTER - SILCHESTER ROMAN ROAD.**

A FURTHER NOTE BY S. E. AND V. E. WINBOLT.

**A. New Evidence N. of Latchmore Green.**

THIS note is additional to one in the *Proceedings*, Vol. XIV, Part 2, pp. 241-2, in the last sentence of which are the words, "After traversing two more fields (not examined by me)." In the first of these two fields, *i.e.*, the second to the N. from Frog Lane at Latchmore Green, a convincing quantity of Roman coins, pottery and roof tiles was found in September 1941. (Map, Hampshire 6in., sheet X, N.E.) The site, on Halls-in-the-Hole Farm, is a little N. of the top of the hill, 125 yards along the modern road N. of Hains Farm, and on the W. side of the road. At this point the O.S. line (middle) of the Roman road is 83 yards W. of the road hedge. The digging of two pits by the hedge at the top of the field had revealed—and here we are not eye-witnesses, but reporters of what was told us by men who saw or helped in the digging—several Roman coins and shards of Roman pottery. Unfortunately the coins had been taken away and we failed to trace them, so missing some possible dating. But in ground dug immediately W. of the road hedge we had the first picking, and on three occasions, on one of which Mr. G. W. Willis, of Basingstoke, was present, my daughter, son and I had no difficulty in finding pieces of Roman grey, black-glazed and Castor pottery and roof tiles mixed with black stuff from fires. These represent a rubbish tip of a Roman house situated close E. of the Roman road: the discovery suggests that the line of the Roman road here, probably laid down by ruler from Latchmore Green to align with Church Lane, Silchester, is substantially correct, as indications of Roman houses have now been located close to the line both S. and N. of Frog Lane, and a section of the road was laid bare S. of the lane in 1905. Our discovery is the more important as the O.S. line Latchmore Green—Church Lane turns a very small angle E. in order to bring the slightly sinuous Church Lane into the new alignment. The new evidence helps to justify this angle. In spite of its slight sinuosities, we believe that Church Lane for  $\frac{1}{2}$  m. N. of Silchester Brook represents the Roman road: a straight line ruled along it on the 6in. map reveals only such trifling divergences as often occur on Roman stretches left derelict for centuries in the Middle Ages and then reconstituted: *cf.* the Worting section of this road. In a manner common with Roman roads approaching a town, this takes a turn in order to approach the wall at right

angles to almost due N. at  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a mile S. of Silchester's south gate, at a point a few yards S. of the bench mark 276.1, and opposite the N.E. corner of Church Lane Copse. The alignment from Latchmore Green continued would have missed the south gate by 75 yards, but still would have come well within the south stretch of wall, which is some 240 yards long.

### B. A Review of the route Winchester to Silchester.

An intimate knowledge of the line N. of Kempshott gives us complete confidence in the O.S. plotting in of the road over the whole distance from Winchester to Silchester. Hence the following statement of facts and explanations offered for them, result of a study of the 6in. sheets collated with personal investigations over nearly the whole of the ground. The distance is slightly over 23 miles, and beginning with that at King's Worthy there are eight changes of direction. Similarly there are eight limbs in Stane Street, Chichester—London, slightly over 58 miles, two being long curves. The distances, angles and altitudes given are approximate.

1. (Ref. 1in. O.S. sheet 123.) The medieval wall of Winchester *via* King's Worthy to cross roads on Winchester—Basingstoke Road, W. of Woodmancott, N. of Bradley Farm and S. of Manor Farm. Starting from the N. gate of Roman Winchester the road had to keep clear (W.) of the River Itchen. In the grounds of Abbot's Barton, according to Codrington, "some remains of the ridge can still be traced." The line of the present road takes it to Headbourne Worthy, and at King's Worthy begins the long straight a little more W., on the bearing c.  $27\frac{3}{4}^{\circ}$  E. of true north; distance c.  $9\frac{1}{2}$  m. With one exception the Roman and modern roads coincide over the whole section. This is where the modern diverges slightly (max. c. 110 yds.) W. of the Roman road, the course of which was for nearly  $1\frac{1}{2}$  m. through the grounds of Stratton House. Stratton (settlement on the street) was probably settled by the Saxons at the E. side of the Roman road, and when it became derelict it was appropriated into the adjoining grounds and the westerly route of the modern road substituted. When this change was made is not clear, but perhaps it was in medieval times, as W. of Beaufort in the early fifteenth century.

2. (6in. Hants XXVI S.W. and XXVI N.W.) From cross roads N. of Bradley Farm to *Sun Inn* on Winchester—Basingstoke Road, N.W. of Dummer. Turn to E. by  $11\frac{3}{4}^{\circ}$ ; distance  $2\frac{7}{8}$  m. The line of the road runs for  $1\frac{9}{10}$  m. E. of the curving modern road, joining it again a little N. of the *Wheatshaf Hotel*. The two then tally as far as the *Sun Inn*.

3. (6in. Hants, XXVI N.W. and XVIII S.W.) *Sun Inn* to a nameless copse running E.-W., c.  $\frac{1}{2}$  m. N.W. of Kempshott

House. Turn c.  $2\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  : distance  $1\frac{3}{8}$  m. Both roads are here running up a shallow valley to get on to the 500ft. contour, and for nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  m. they coincide. Where the modern road turns right (N.E.), the Roman road keeps straight on into a shaw, and behind a cottage. At this point there are on the left (W.) of the modern road two telegraph poles marked with black and white bands ; the tree which stands just S. of the southern pole marks the point where the centre of the Roman road enters the shaw. Past the cottage the line continues by a hedgerow up to a small farm building and the copse above mentioned, and by a narrow shaw parallel with the line. At the end of this shaw begins the new alignment.

4. (6in. Hants, XVIII S.W.) Nameless copse near Kempshott to the brook at Peat Gully Copse, W. of Beaurepaire Park. Turn to W. c.  $6\frac{3}{8}^{\circ}$  : distance  $7\frac{3}{8}$  m. The Roman road now proceeds through fields, not rejoining the modern road at Kite Hill at altitude c. 350 ft. for nearly 2 m. From the copse, the highest point on the whole route, with long views E. and W., the road descends gradually, though still on the 500 ft. contour. It is now represented for c. 550yds. by a hollow road between hedgerows and tall trees, and in another 250yds. reaches the 400ft. contour. From the copse altitude Roman Winchester could not have been visible to the road engineers, but the line northwards would have been sighted to the top of the hill at Park Prewett : thence the sighting on Silchester would be comparatively easy. The copse is a few yards away from the boundary of the Thames water catchment area. The long line of hedgerow to Kite Hill is best seen from Lone Farm, reached by a lane past Battle Down Farm from Pack Lane : for most of the way the line of the Roman road here serves as a borough boundary. From Worting to Park Prewett (c. 450ft.) the lane is sinuous, as many a lane is which represents a Roman straight. At Park Prewett a section was shown, which had virtually no top-dressing, but simply a cambered chalk surface between ditches. (Inf. G. W. Willis.) Light construction of the camber is not uncommon in chalk or sandy country. The half-mile of modern road down to Dixon's Corner at Sherborne St. John is nearly (a trifle E. of) the Roman line, which thereafter to Silchester is all through fields, except the short stretch of Church Lane, Silchester.

5. (6in. Hants, X N.E.) Gully Copse to a few yards S. of Frog Lane, Latchmore Green. Turn to W. c.  $1\frac{1}{4}^{\circ}$  ; distance  $1\frac{1}{4}$  m. This very slight diversion appears to be due to the purpose of keeping just clear (W.) of an oval-shaped hill (250ft.) W. of Bramley Corner.

• Codrington says that the eastward edge of the Roman road was 88 $\frac{1}{2}$ ft. from the centre of the modern road. It was found at the

exceptional depth of 5-6ft., explained by a hill to the S. and the name Frog Lane, 20ft. wide, "of flints in a bed of blue clay, one foot deep, resting on gravel." This is quite a solid construction. Roman pottery was found E. of the line at Latchmore Green.

6. (6in. Hants, X N.E. and IV S.E.) Latchmore Green to Three Ashes cross road. Turn to E., c.  $2\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  : distance a little less than  $\frac{3}{4}$  m. This stretch was set out, like 5, to avoid a similar 250ft. hill to the W. Roman pottery, etc., was found nearly opposite Hains Farm in September 1941, as above.

7. (6in. Hants, IV S.E.) Three Ashes to a point in Church Lane a few yards S. of bench mark 276.1, opposite the N.E. corner of Church Lane Copse. Turn to W., c.  $8^{\circ}$  ; distance  $\frac{3}{4}$  m. Why was the course from Three Ashes not direct to the S. gate of Silchester? Probably it was thought well to avoid cutting through the entrenchment to the W. in Church Lane Copse, when it could be rounded a few yards E. It is highly probable that this part of the road (as also 6 and 5) was made from the Silchester end. A way out of the S. gate of the Belgic town was made according to local conditions and convenience before the Roman road to Winchester was planned.

The entrenchment which shows in the S.W. corner of Church Lane Copse and continues S.W. through fields for nearly a mile is held by Dr. Williams-Freeman (*Field Archaeology*, p. 322) to represent the Roman road, which Codrington takes down Church Lane. We cannot agree with the Doctor here, for, first, our discovery at Halls-in-the-Hole Farm tends to confirm the O.S. line. Second, the entrenchment running S.W. for nearly a mile could not be made to fit in with the line of the certain remains of the Roman road both N. and S. of Morgaston Wood without a turn of c.  $45^{\circ}$ . Third, the nature of the entrenchment does not represent the structure of a Roman road : it is quite sinuous, and the well-preserved stretch S.W., where after one field from the copse it forms a field boundary covered with trees and bushes, is an ideal defensive work, rising high from the field on the S.W.

8. (6in. Hants, IV S.E.) Church Lane Copse to S. gate of Roman Silchester. Turn W. c.  $16\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  ; distance  $\frac{5}{8}$  m.

Between the bend in Church Lane and the south gate of Silchester there is now no visible track, but there used to be a foot-path, the entrance to which has been wired up for a long time. It almost certainly represented the Roman Road.

Had the original direction from King's Worthy been maintained all through its course, the road would have come to a point a little over a mile E. of Silchester S. gate. The two main rectifying angles are at Nos. 2 and 4.

The following fact may be noted. All over the chalk, Winchester to Sherborne St. John, except in Stratton Park where we have not examined the line, the Roman line along modern roads and long hedgerows is still perfectly clear: as you go over the ground it satisfies the eye completely. But directly it negotiates the clay and the old wooded country from Sherborne St. John, the tracker's difficulties begin and the sceptic gets his chance.

The evidence here (see *Proceedings* as above) has to be searched for in fields and woods, and consists of three short stretches of *agger* (raised mound of the road), Roman pottery at two places, a half-mile of 'wobbly' lane, and the modern road N. from Latchmore Green which, being close and roughly parallel, suggests the Roman line. Apart from the difficult nature of the terrain, there is further an economic reason for the lapse of this section of the road. In Saxon and early medieval times, Silchester having ceased to exist, there was very little need of road communication from the Sherbornies northward as far as the Kennet. Moreover, this region was for some time a kind of no-man's land between the West Saxons and the Mercians.

Of the date of the original construction of the road we know of no archaeological evidence: there is only a general historical likelihood. Winchester and Silchester were occupied by the Belgae very early, c. 50 B.C.; and the Roman western road London—Silchester—Bath must have been constructed very early. It would be reasonable to suppose that the route Chichester—Winchester—Silchester—Staines—London was also made well within the first century.

The mileage given in the Antonine Itineraries VII, 22 miles Roman, or roughly 20½ English, from Winchester to Silchester is, as Antonine distances go, fairly accurate, being only 3 miles short: strict accuracy is seldom attained in Antonine distances, which were probably measured by paces, and paces of different people for different sections of the route.

The watering of men and horses was an important consideration. After leaving the Itchen at Winchester the traveller would have no plentiful natural supply till he reached the 'clear stream' which gives its name to Sherborne; thence the road crossed several brooks.

A last reflection, chronologically entitled to first place in this short review. Both Calleva Atrebatum, a typical Belgic *oppidum* and the suzerain town where King Commius struck inscribed coins, and the less important Venta Belgarum were occupied c. 51-45 B.C., long before the Roman conquest, by Belgic tribes from Gaul, invaders who had to assert themselves among the prior Hallstatt inhabitants. From the Thames in Berks to the sea in Hants these tribes, all using bead-rim bowls, "formed a single cultural group

and must have come over to Britain together." It is inconceivable that sound, practicable road communication between Calleva the capital, *via* Venta, and the sea at Southampton (where indeed they first landed) did not exist nearly a century before 43 A.D. To argue that this Roman road was a late structure is to forget that Clausentum at Southampton had long been the seaport of Silchester, which was thus probably more easily reached by ships than from the Thames. The civilisation of the forest city depended on sea-borne commerce : by this route came its pre-Conquest Arretine ware. Silchester was early a great road centre. Through it from London one went S. to Winchester, Southampton and Porchester, S.W. by the Portway to Dorchester and Exeter or to the Mendips, W. to Bath, N.W. to Cirencester, Gloucester and S. Wales, and N.E. *via* Speen to Dunstable and Watling Street. There was nothing in the terrain to prevent the roads taking a nearly direct line. This, as other pre-existing routes, the Romans improved by straightening and broadening where necessary. The position of Winklebury Camp close to the road on the E. is of no importance in relation to it. If it was occupied before the Belgae came, they would have had no difficulty in taking it over and rendering it innocuous ; if the Belgae built it, they did so probably to secure their road. But few earlier forts were taken over and few built by the Belgae, and probably Winklebury already lay deserted in Belgic times.