

“VIARUM ROMANARUM IN AGRO BUCKING- HAMIÆ VESTIGIA.”

An Address delivered in substance at Fenny Stratford (Magioventum)
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TRACES OF ROMAN ROADS IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

THERE are three or four Roman roads which are indicated to us with tolerable clearness; but with regard to the cross-roads or bye-ways which intersected the island very little is certainly known. The two which can be best traced in this county are the WATLING STREET and the ICKNIELD WAY. The Saxon form of the word Watling

is "Guethelinga." It is supposed to derive its name from the "Guethelinga" or Wætlinga, the sons of Wætla, a Saxon chief. It is well known that the Anglo-Saxons, after their occupation of the island, adopted the Roman roads and bridges in every part, and delighted to give to them the names of their own chieftains or deities. Florence of Worcester, in his Chronicle (A.D. 1013), says of the Watling Street—"Omnis populus qui habitabat in septentrionali plagâ Weatlingastreatæ, id est strata quam filii Weatlæ regis ab orientali mare usque ad occidentale per Angliam straverunt." This road evidently had a great fame. Chaucer mentions it as being employed in his time as one of the names of the Milky Way in the heavens—

"Lo there," quod he, "cast up thyne eye,
Se yondir, lo, the galaxie,
The wiche men clepe the milky way,
For it is white; and some *par fay*,
Y-callin it han Watlinge-Streete."

House of Fame, Book II.

Watlington, Wallingford, Wellingborough, Wellington, and other places, derive their names from hence. This great and famous road runs from the south-east coast of England, from Richborough (Dover) in Kent to London; and from thence, right across the island to Deva (Chester), and so on to Segontium (Caer Seiont), near Carnarvon (one of the most important Roman towns in Wales), and thence into Anglesea, perhaps to Holyhead, following for all practical purposes, the course of the London and North-Western Railway. It enters Buckinghamshire between Fenny Stratford and Dunstable, not far from Leighton Buzzard, and leaves it a little north-west of Stony Stratford, where it crosses the Ouse. The places Fenny Stratford and Stony Stratford, take their names from the road on which they stand, the "strat," "streat," or "street," being derived from the Latin "strata via;" that is, a "spread" or "paved way;" and the word "ford" indicating that the road there crosses a stream, as the Ousel at Fenny Stratford, and the Ouse at Stony Stratford. The Romans took great pains in the construction of their roads. They began with making a deep excavation, the material thrown out forming a mound on either side, on which they erected a

parapet. The excavation was then filled up with layers of different materials, of which concrete was one. Above these layers they placed the hardest stones that they could procure, and these were laid in cement. The elevated parapet was useful for those who travelled on foot. Temples and monuments adorned these ways; and the distances were marked on columns of stone. Sometimes the Romans formed double roads, like our double lines of railway, one for those going one way, and one for those going the other. In these cases, the two roads were separated by a parapet paved with bricks, for the convenience of foot passengers. The road from Rome to Ostia, called "Via Portuensis," was so formed. But to return to our Watling Street. In the Roman Itinerary of Antoninus is marked a place or station called "Magio-ventum" or "Magiovenium," which can be shown by the distances to have been close to Fenny Stratford, a little south of it, at a place now called "Old Fields." Many Roman and other coins have been found at this spot on either side of the road; and this confirms the general tradition and belief that there was here at one time an important Roman station. This road will at once arrest the attention of the traveller by its straightness.

The other road to which I have referred, the "Icknield Way," was originally a British road. It derives its name from the Iceni, a Celtic tribe, who inhabited the eastern parts of the island, which now comprehend Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, and portions of other counties. This Icknield Way, corrupted in Buckinghamshire into the "Hacknell" or "Acknell" Way, was really the way of the Iceni, and was afterwards utilized by the Romans, and converted by them into one of their highways. For this reason it lacks the characteristic straightness of an original Roman road. It does not run in a straight line like the Watling Street, but winds about, so as to keep, wherever possible, upon the higher ground, as may be seen in Buckinghamshire, where it runs along upon the shoulders of the Chiltern Hills by Ivinghoe (near which it enters the county), Pitstone, Wendover, Ellesborough, Little and Great Kimble, the Risboroughs, and Bledlow. It finally leaves the county near Chinnor. In its course from the east it strikes the Watling Street at Dunstable (Durocibrivæ), near which are the remains of both a

Roman camp and a British stronghold. We thus see the courses of the Watling Street and the Icknield Way. As the Watling Street seems to have been the great highway of communication across the island from the south-east to Deva (Chester), and so on westward into Anglesea; so the Icknield Way seems to have been intended to connect the corn fields and grazing lands of the east, with the mining districts of the south-west. It runs from the east coast right across the country south-west, until it touches the mines in the far west of England. And so it seems to have been the means of communication between the corn and cattle of the east, and the mineral wealth of the south-west. It is to be noticed that at Streatley, in Berkshire, it divides into two branches, both of which, however, appear to lead ultimately into Devonshire and Cornwall. Beyond these two great trackways, which cross one another near Dunstable, not long before they enter this county, our knowledge of the ancient Roman roads is limited and uncertain. The "AKEMAN STREET" is supposed to have entered the county near Tring, in Hertfordshire, and so to have passed through Aston Clinton and Aylesbury to Bicester. But about the course of this road authorities differ. It was, perhaps, a more northerly branch of the Icknield Way. It is said to have derived its name from its being the road along which Akemen (aching men) passed, for the benefit of the waters of Bath (Aquæ Solis). At all events, one of the Saxon names of Bath was Akemannes-ceaster, or the city of invalids. Another road, which has some claim to notice, is called the Foss-way (via fossata), so called apparently because it was never completed; that is to say, the excavation was made, but the road was not finished. This road is believed to have run northwards to Lincoln from Cornwall. In mentioning this road, I may say that there is some reason for supposing that there was a cross or branch road from Stony Stratford to Water Stratford, both in this county. A line drawn between these two places would pass through Foscote, the "cot" or village of the "via fossata;" perhaps an unfinished cross-road. The ERMYN STREET, a corruption of "Eormen," one of the chief Anglo-Saxon divinities, was supposed to run from St. David's to Southampton. Some good authorities, however, are of

opinion that this road ran northwards from Pevensey through London and the great Yorkshire towns to the south-east of Scotland. In this brief notice of the Roman roads, I ought not to omit to notice the true position of the Roman station called Lactorodum or Lactodorum. Camden takes some pains to show that its site is Stony Stratford; "lacto," according to him being the Latinized form of "leach," an old British word signifying a heap of stones; and "rodum," being also the Latin form of "ryd," a ford. But unfortunately for him, the word as given in the old Itineraries, which apparently he had not consulted, is not Lactorodum, but Lactodorum, which at once disposes of his ingenious but somewhat fanciful theory. I believe that the more trustworthy evidence of the distances would remove the site of Lactodorum into Northamptonshire, probably near to Towcester. I will only repeat that considerable doubt rests upon the courses and the termini of other Roman roads, such as the Ryknield Street, the Portman Way, etc.; and I will not, therefore, hazard any conjectures concerning them. It is enough for us that two well recognized Roman highways pass through our county, the one of interest as an original Roman road, and the other no less interesting as an adopted British highway—the origin of which reaches far back into the remotest history of the island.
