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978-1-108-07557-2 - Ancient Cambridgeshire: Or, an Attempt to Trace Roman and Other Ancient Roads that Passed Through the County of Cambridge

Charles Cardale Babington

Excerpt

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ANCIENT CAMBRIDGESHIRE.

It cannot but afford some cause for astonishment that no separate dissertation concerning the ancient state of the county of Cambridge has been published, as it is impossible not to believe that a learned and populous University must have had very many amongst its members desirous of knowing, and at the same time well qualified to ascertain, the extent to which the county was traversed by roads and settled in the Roman and even in British times. Although no separate, or connected, treatise on this interesting subject exists, there are materials from which a considerable amount of information may be obtained.

The persons to whom we are chiefly indebted for the knowledge that they have treasured up for our use are: 1. Dr William Bennet, formerly Fellow of Emmanuel College, and afterwards Bishop of Cloyne (1790), large extracts from whose manuscript account of the Roman Roads are printed in Lyson's *Magna Britannia*. 2. Dr Charles Mason, formerly Fellow of Trinity College, and Rector of Orwell, who made a trigonometrical survey of the county, and left manuscripts which were used by Gough in his edition of Camden's *Britannia*, and by Lyson in his *Magna Britannia*. 3. We have the very curious,

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learned, but fanciful works of Stukeley, namely, the *Itinerarium Curiosum*, 1724; and *Medallic History of Carausius*, 1757—1759. 4. Much valuable matter, and many judicious remarks, are to be found in Horsley's *Britannia Romana*, 1732. 5. Dr William Warren, formerly Vice-Master of Trinity Hall, wrote a dissertation upon the subject of the site of the Grantacæster of Bede, which is said to have "demonstrated the thing as amply as a matter of that sort is capable of," that that place is now represented by the Castle End of Cambridge. Brydges informs us that it was the intention of his brother, Dr R. Warren, to publish this tract which came into his hands after the death of the Vice-Master (*Restituta*, iv. 388). It does not appear that he carried out his intention, nor have I succeeded in learning the fate of the manuscript. A note in Gough's *Camden* led me to hope that it might exist in the archives of the *Spalding Gentleman's Society*, but it does not appear that the paper was ever communicated to them, for their minutes, as I learn through the kindness of Mr Charles Green, one of the few members of that ancient and celebrated society, merely record the reading of a letter from the Rev. Mr Pegg, on Sept. 4, 1735, stating the fact of Dr Warren's demonstration, but not giving its mode of proof. As Dr Warren left some manuscripts to Trinity Hall, concerning the antiquities of that college, I had some faint hopes that the missing tract might be preserved amongst them, but the Rev. W. Marsh, now Vice-Master of that society, has had the kindness to examine the papers left by Dr Warren, and informs me that the treatise on Grantacæster is not amongst them.

Having made these preliminary remarks, we proceed to the description of the ancient roads which pass through the county; and, as it will be most convenient to take Cambridge as a starting point from whence to trace those that diverged from it, it will also be proper to occupy ourselves shortly with Cambridge itself.

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I. CAMBRIDGE.

THE Roman station of Cambridge was wholly situated to the north of the river Cam, and a considerable part of three of its sides may still be easily traced. If we commence by entering the town from Huntingdon, and immediately turn to the right, we soon find ourselves upon the top of the lofty bank of a broad and deep ditch which was apparently 10 or 12 feet deep, and perhaps nearly 40 in width. Bowtell (MS. ii. 96) says that the width of another part of the ditch was seen in 1802, when men were digging across a spot skirting the east side of the station to obtain brick-earth. The place was called Black-mow Piece, and the ditch appeared to have been 10 to 12 feet deep, and 39 broad. Returning to the bank and passing in front of the Storey's Alms-houses we arrive at the western angle of the ancient town; rounding it, a row of cottages called Mount Pleasant is found to stand upon the top of the rampart, which may be followed through nearly its whole length on that south-western side of the station. Traces of the ditch in front of this face of the fortification could recently be seen, but it is now filled up with rubbish. The lane called Northampton Street, by which an entrance is now obtained into the town from the St Neots road, seems to be carried along the bottom of the rampart, which passing to the south of St Giles's church, defended the south-eastern side in the time of the Romans. Perhaps there was no ditch on this side, and that it was sufficiently defended by the river, a branch of which ran close to it, as we learn from the foundation deeds of St Giles's church, preserved in the Cottonian Library (Gough's *Camden*, 130). The continuation of this river-face of the fortification is well seen in Magdalene College garden, where a terrace-walk is formed upon the vallum. The remaining side towards Chesterton parish is not traceable, having been destroyed in order to form the Norman

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and Cromwellian fortifications of the castle. Half of the north-western side also has been levelled. There appear to have been the usual four gates through which two roads to be presently described passed. The extent was measured by Dr Stukeley, who, however, erroneously includes Pythagoras School within the walls, and found to be “2500 Roman feet from east to west, and 2000 from north to south.” Even allowing for the error of including Pythagoras School within the station, it is very difficult to conjecture by what mode Dr Stukeley obtained such a large extent for it. The Roman foot is scarcely $\frac{4}{10}$ of an inch shorter than the English foot, and the real extent of the station (taking the measurements from a recent survey) is about 1650 feet from north to south, and 1600 from east to west, measuring diagonally, as Stukeley seems to have done; or the north-east and south-west sides are each about 1320 feet long, and the north-west and south-east about 930 in length¹.

Bowtell states that some remains of the Roman wall were found in 1804, his words are: “On the interior side of this fosse stood a very ancient wall, some remains whereof were discovered in March 1804, when ‘improvements’ were making thereabouts by destroying a part of the vallum towards the north-west end, which wall abutted eastwards on the great road near to the turnpike-gate. The materials in the foundation of this wall consisted of flinty pebbles, fragments of Roman bricks, and ragstone so firmly cemented that prodigious labour with the help of pickaxes, &c. was required to separate them. A part of the wall was consequently left undisturbed, and the fosse filled up with earth” (Bowt. MS. ii. 98). He also states that men digging at about the middle of the east side of the station met with the foundations of a stone building, supposed to be part of the Decuman Gate, and that directly opposite across the station similar foundations were seen in 1810 on

¹ On the annexed plan the outline of the station is shown by the broken line.

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occasion of the erection of the Lancastrian School (ii. 99). Mr Bowtell measured one of many Roman bricks found on the edge of the fosse when the Gaol was built, and states it to have been 16 inches by 12 inches, and from $\frac{3}{8}$ to $1\frac{3}{8}$ in thickness (ii. 166). In 1804 at about 100 paces from the north-west side of the ditch, and to the west of the turnpike-road, several antiquities were found, such as a cornelian intaglio set in a finger-ring of silver, and representing Mercury with the caduceus in his left and a purse in his right hand; also a bronze figure of Mercury, two inches high, with wings on his bonnet and feet, and holding a purse (Bowt. MS. ii. 175). Many Roman coins have been found near to the castle (Gough, *Camden*, ii. 219) from an early period; and in 1802 and the seven following years, 41 of first brass, 25 of second, and 86 of third brass, also 16 of silver, besides others of which 3 were British were found there (Bowt. MS. ii. 191). A list of the Emperors, &c. is given below, derived from Vol. VIII. of Bowtell's Collections, in which the coins are all fully described¹.

A second brass coin of Otacilla was found near the castle in 1846 (*Camb. Antiq. Soc. Cat. of Coins*, 13); a second brass of Vespasian at the same place and date (l. c. 7); and in 1852 a first brass of Gordianus, and a second brass of Nero. The coins have chiefly belonged to the later Emperors. Urns,

¹ Coins of first brass of Nero, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Faustina, Commodus, Didius Julianus, Macrinus, Severus Alexander, Julia Mammæa, Gordianus, Balbinus, Quintus Herennius Hostilianus, Julius Philippus. Of second brass of Germanicus, Claudius, Vespasian, Trajan, Severus Alexander, Faustina, Probus, Antoninus Pius, Philippus, Gallienus, Carausius, Constantinus Chlorus, Valerius Severus, Decentius, Theodosius, Constans, Constantinus, Maximianus, Magnentius, Valerius Licinianus Licinius. Of third brass of Claudius, Gallienus, Tacitus, Victorinus, Claudius Gothicus, Aurelianus, Tetricus, Carausius, Allectus, Fl. Max. Theodora, Carus, Helena, Constantinus, Posthumus, Constantius, Crispus, Constantinus Junior, Constans, Magnentius, Valentinianus, Valens, Theodosius, Gratianus, Arcadius, Honorius. The silver coins were of Trajan, Hadrian, Faustina, Caracalla, Severus Alexander, Posthumus, Domitian, Gordianus, Otacilla Severa, Philippus.

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Pateræ embellished with figures, Querns, Lacrymatories, Armillæ of brass, a variety of Amphoræ and fragments of green and blue glass were found near the castle in 1802—6 (Bowt. ii. 166, 167, 168), and also more recently urns have been found. Stukeley thought that there was a ford at the Great Bridge (*Itin. Cur.* 78). Mr Essex says, that when he was superintending the excavations for the foundation of the Great Bridge in 1754, he saw those of the ancient stone-bridge over the river Graunt, built on piles. It consisted of two small round arches as he learned from finding some of the stones that formed the arch. Mr Essex does not call this bridge Roman but only “very ancient.” He says that there was probably a paved ford there in the time of the Romans, which “very plainly shewed itself in the year 1754 as a firm pavement of pebbles.” At the same time he states that several pieces of Roman antiquities were found, one of them being a weight, or perhaps the ornament of a standard, which Dr Stukeley called a representation of Carausius’s supposed Empress Oriuna (Bowt. v. 944, 945). In Lyson’s *Cambridgeshire* (44) Mr Essex is stated to have considered the bridge to be Roman, and that the ford was an idea of Stukeley’s. (See also *Reliq. Gal.* 53.)

“A Lachrymatory” was found in removing the foundations of the old Provost’s Lodge of King’s College. A small Roman vessel was found in the excavation for a sewer in Park Street in 1848. A patera of Samian ware, and a lachrymatory of white clay were found at the south-west corner of Northampton Street in 1847 (C. A. S. Museum). It is stated in Gough’s *Camden* that Roman bricks were to be seen in his time in the north-west corner of St Peter’s church-wall.

That there was a large station at Cambridge appears, then, to be certain, but the name borne by it in the times of the Romans admits of doubt, and has been discussed at great length by the antiquaries of the last century. I shall only therefore remark that probably it is the CAMBORITUM of the

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Itineraries which are peculiarly confused in their reference to this district. That name is given to this station by Gale (*Anton.* 92), where he derives it from “*Cam*, ‘fluvius,’ *rhyd*, ‘vadum.’” He is generally believed to be correct, but Stukeley (*Car.* ii. 139) places that station at Chesterford, and Horsley (*Brit. Rom.* 430) at Icklingham. In the same manner DUROLIPONS has been placed at Godmanchester, which is now generally allowed to be its true site, at Ramsey, and even at Cambridge. Cambridge is the *Caer Graunt* of Nennius (ed. *Gale* 115), for I cannot agree with those who place that “city” at Grantchester where, as I hope to shew, there was only a small fort. Stukeley (*Car.* 160, &c.) invented a city of GRANTA which is unknown to antiquaries, but which he supposed to have been founded by his favourite Emperor Carausius after the compilation of the Itineraries. The name given by Nennius is doubtless a fact in his favour. To conclude, in the words of Bishop Bennet after he had carefully examined the subject, “I feel myself incompetent to affix any certain name to the station at Cambridge, although, if I was obliged to decide, I should on the whole prefer that of CAMBORITUM.”

The position of this fortified town was well chosen, for it is situated on one of the most commanding spots to be found in the district. Its site is the projecting extremity of a low range of hills, backed by a slight depression, or broad and shallow valley. On at least two of its sides the ground fell away rather rapidly from the foot of the ramparts, and the river defended the fourth side. It fronts the only spot where the river could be easily passed by the *Via Devana*, or indeed approached without traversing extensive morasses. Grantchester possesses none of these advantages, nor is it situated upon either of the great Roman roads.

It is highly probable that the Saxon town of *Grantabrigge* stood upon the same site as the Roman CAMBORITUM, and that it was at a late period, perhaps even after the Norman conquest, that the principal part of the town became stationed

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on the south side of the river. May not the construction of the Norman castle have been a promoting cause of this removal of the population, as was the case at Lincoln? The Domesday Survey informs us that twenty-seven houses were destroyed for the purpose of building or enlarging the castle of Cambridge, and that what had constituted two of the wards of the town in the time of King Edward the Confessor was then, on account of this destruction of the houses, considered as forming only one ward (*Domesday Book*, i. 189).

Perhaps the very ancient *Caer Graunt* of the Britons is represented by the village of Grantchester, to which a British trackway will be shewn to have led, and that the Romans, finding it better situated for their purposes, founded *CAMBORITUM* at Cambridge. A similar event seems to have taken place at Norwich, where the present city represents the British town, and *Caister* the Roman fort in its neighbourhood (see Woodward's *Norwich*). This would remove much of the difficulty which attends the determination of the sites of *Caer Graunt*, *Camboritum*, *Grantacæster* and *Grantēbrigge*; indeed all, if Bede is allowed to have been as misinformed concerning the true name of the spot where St Etheldreda's coffin was found as he was of its material (*Cæli Hist. Canteb. Acad.* 8.).

It must however be added that the Castle Hill at Cambridge, which is situated within the walls of *CAMBORITUM*, is manifestly one of the ancient British tumuli, so often found to occupy commanding posts and to have been fortified in after times. The lower part of the hill is natural, but the upper half in all probability artificial. The existence of this tumulus and the want of any ascertained British remains at Grantchester throw doubt upon the above suggestion.

It may be allowable to remark here that the difficulties attending some of the itineraries of Antoninus are very great, owing probably in part to the corruption of the text, but also from the circuitous course taken by them. In that route with which we are interested, viz. the *Iter v.*, it certainly does seem very remarkable that the traveller should be led from London

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to Colchester on his way to Lincoln; more especially as we find the *Ermīng Street* forming an almost direct communication between the two places. On examining the *Iter vi.* we find another route connecting the same stations of *LONDINUM* and *LINDUM*, but deviating from the direct course to about as great a distance to the west (to Daventry) as the *Iter v.* does to the east. This may perhaps be explained by supposing that these itineraries were not meant to give a list of the stopping places upon the great roads of Britain, but are derived from the note-book of some person visiting officially the different stations, and taking such a course as would most conveniently admit of his doing so. Indeed there is only one place of any apparent importance which is situated upon the southern part of the *Ermīng Street*, and not visited in one or the other of these journeys, viz. *AD FINES*, which is placed at Braughing in Hertfordshire. An anonymous writer, who has published *The Roman Roads in England*, under the signature "A. H.," suggests with much probability that in *Iter v.* *VILLA FAUSTINA* was at Woodbridge and *ICIANI* at Dunwich, the travellers returning from this latter place to Colchester and proceeding along the *Via Devana* to Cambridge, which he names *CAMBORITUM*. By this scheme the number of miles between the stations accords reasonably well with those stated in the Itineraries, and if the object of the journey was such as I have above supposed to be probable, this deviation will not be looked upon as unlikely to have taken place. Mr Neville considers *ICIANI* to have been at Chesterford, but does not, as far as I am informed, explain how he makes that idea accord with the Itineraries (*Journ. Archæol. Assoc.* iii. 208).

It is worthy of remark that if the usual idea of the Itineraries forming a kind of road-book, is adopted, we find many undoubtedly Roman roads unnoticed in them. For instance, the *Akeman Street* which passes through Cambridge is omitted, and also that part of the *Via Devana* which lies to the north-west of this town.

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II. ANCIENT ROADS THROUGH CAMBRIDGE.

Two great lines of road passed through CAMBORITUM, crossing each other nearly at right angles in the center of the station; namely, (1) The *Akeman Street*, which starting from the north coast of Norfolk terminated by a junction with the *Foss Way* at Cirencester (CORINIUM); and (2) the so-called *Via Devana* leading from Colchester (COLONIA or CAMELODUNUM) to Chester (DEVA); (3) Some fancied roads from Cambridge are noticed after the description of these.

The other roads that passed through any part of the county were (4) the *Erming Street*, (5) the *Ickniold Way*, (6) the *Ashwell Street*, (7) the *Peddar Way*, (8) the *Fen Road*, (9) the *Ely and Spalding Way*, (10) the *Suffolk and Sawtry Way*, (11) the *Aldreth Causeway*, (12) the *Bury, Wisbeach, and Spalding Way*, (13) the *Bullock Way*, (14) *Cnut's Dyke*.

1. THE AKEMAN STREET.—(1) *Cambridge to Brancaster*. It left the north-eastern side of the station at CAMBORITUM, not far from the site of the castle, and could be traced over the open fields to King's Hedges as a track for carts, but has recently been obliterated on the inclosure of the parish of Chesterton¹. I have often walked along it to King's Hedges, where there is a large oblong camp on its southern side, which may be of Roman origin, as Roman coins (particularly one of silver with the head of Roma on one side and Castor and Pollux on horseback on the reverse) have been found there (Gale, *Anton.* 92; Gough's *Camden*, ii. 226, from the Aubrey MS.); or may have derived its formation from William I., who is believed to have occupied it during his war with the Saxons of the Isle of Ely. Also at a short distance from it on the other side there is a semicircular camp called Arbury, which may have been used by the Romans, as seems to be generally supposed, but from its shape is most probably

¹ Roman vessels have occasionally been found in this parish.