

## Roman Roads South and East of Dorchester-on-Thames

By F.J. MALPAS

### SUMMARY

*Four Roman roads can be shown to enter Dorchester-on-Thames apart from the well-known road coming in from Alchester on the N. These roads come from Streatley on the S. (and ultimately from Silchester), from Henley on the SE. (and ultimately from the main London-Silchester road), and from Aston Clinton and Fleet Marston, both on the NE. and on Akeman Street. There is also good evidence for two local roads E. of the Thames at Dorchester.*

The introduction to the Ordnance Survey Map of Roman Britain (4th ed., 1978) states that 'only well authenticated stretches of road are shown on the map as certain'. For the area under review the map shows only the road coming in from Alchester to Dorchester and its continuation southwards between Brightwell and Sotwell as far as Mackney; the map also shows the prehistoric Icknield Way/Ridgeway. A number of Roman roads S. and E. of Dorchester, for which the writer suggests there is good evidence, are shown on Fig. 1. The purpose of this article is to review this evidence.

The article has gained considerably from discussion with Richard Chambers and David Miles of the Oxford Archaeological Unit, but they are in no way responsible for its shortcomings. Thanks are also tendered to the various landowners who have kindly allowed access to their property. The article would not have been possible without the active co-operation of the writer's wife.

### A: SILCHESTER - DORCHESTER

This road enters the area through the Goring Gap at Streatley. A Roman settlement here is indicated by finds of foundations and coins,<sup>1</sup> the latter being frequent, and by the place-name. The actual way through the gap S. of Streatley must have been approximately along the terrace on which the modern road runs.

From a point on the A329 some 600m. north of Streatley crossroads, the modern road runs due N. and straight for 600m. till it meets Streatley Farm. This can be taken as the line of the Roman road: if extended southwards, it crosses Streatley High Street as a terrace in front of the Manor House and meets the A329 again S. of the village: if extended northwards, it is accompanied by the modern road swinging a few metres to either side of it till the present county boundary is crossed after another 800m.

At Streatley Farm itself the modern road swings W. to avoid the farm buildings; but

<sup>1</sup> *V.C.H. Berks.* i, 214.

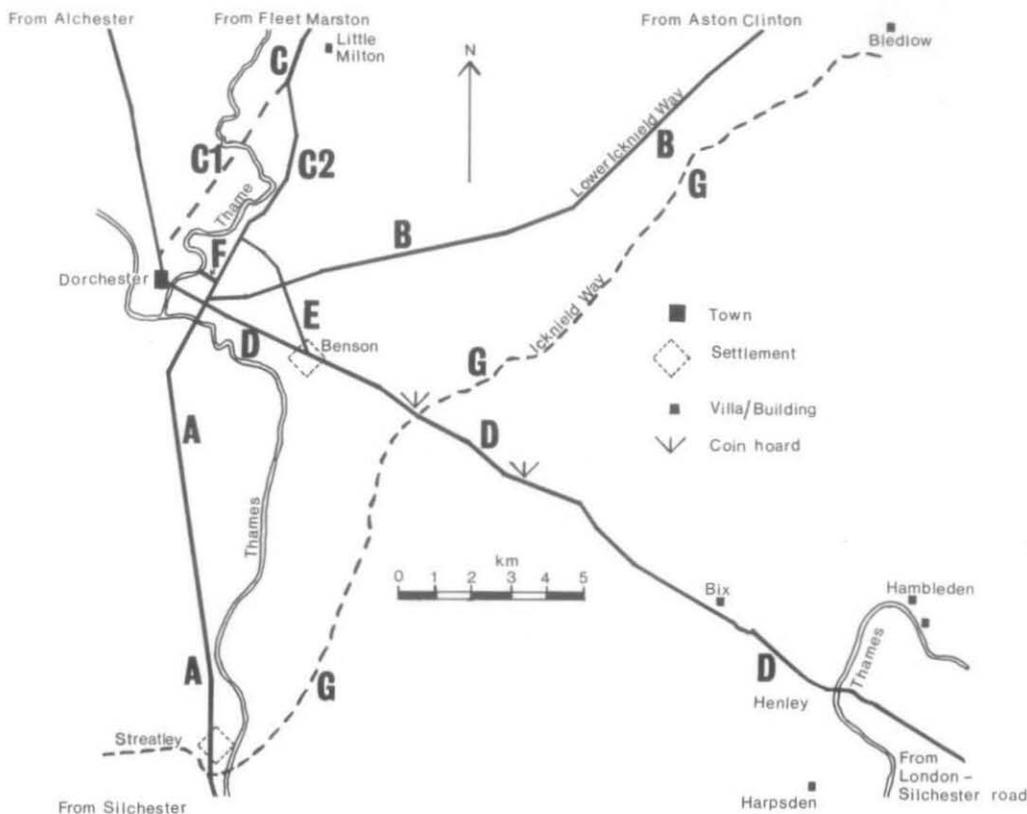


Fig. 1. Outline map of the area, showing roads A-G. *Crown copyright reserved.*

the suggested Roman line goes straight through them. Indeed, the entrance to the old barn on the N. side is firm, well drained and on the line, as is the former rick yard opposite.<sup>2</sup> At the county boundary the modern road swings a few degrees W., but the suggested Roman line heads straight for the high ground at Sowberry Court S. of Moulsoford. From here visibility back to the A329 south of Streatley is excellent, and the Roman alignment swings a few degrees W. to point at the saddle north of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, some 8.5km. away.

In Ferry Lane, Moulsoford, a timber-framed cottage takes advantage of the firm foundation offered by the Roman road, as does Moulsoford church; this was rebuilt in 1846, but on the old foundations.<sup>3</sup> The church stands on a clear terrace, as do various other buildings in Moulsoford; this is best seen from the other side of the river. During the 19th century Roman coins were found in Moulsoford, but it is not clear where.<sup>4</sup>

Just N. of Moulsoford the Roman line crosses the A329. A British Gas pipeline was laid

<sup>2</sup> Ex inf. Mrs. R.W. Bishop, Streatley Farm.

<sup>3</sup> *V.C.H. Berks.* iii, 507.

<sup>4</sup> J.K. Hedges, *History of Wallingford* (1881), i, 142.

under the road at this point in 1976, but the modern road had apparently obscured any possible remains of the Roman road. The pipeline did reveal two parallel ditches some 4.5m. apart (centre to centre) 250m. to the E., but it is difficult to see any connection between these ditches and the Roman road.<sup>5</sup>

To the N. of this point the agger causes a distinct hump across Halfpenny Lane, just to the west of a petrol station on the main road; S. of the lane a concentration of flints is clearly visible after ploughing. North of the lane a track used to run along the Roman line, at least until the late 19th century, and fifty years ago its ridge was still visible across the field, as was a layer of gravel in the side of the railway cutting.<sup>6</sup> The track still exists north of the railway, and continues through Cholsey as Honey Lane. The swelling of the agger causes a hump across the Wallingford Road outside the vicarage, and when the vicarage was rebuilt in 1931 traces of an old road were seen in its grounds.<sup>7</sup> There were 19th-century finds of Roman coins in Cholsey, but no locations were recorded.<sup>8</sup>

In Church Road, on the N. edge of the village, there is an old house called Causeway Farm, and although it lies W. of the Roman line its land may well once have included a visible agger. Further N., Roman pottery has been found on Hillgreen Farm,<sup>6</sup> but nothing is to be seen on the ground for 2km. N. of the village. Rocque<sup>9</sup> shows a straight field-boundary for some of the way, but there is no other evidence for this and, like many of his field-boundaries, it is probably conventional only.

Where the Roman line crosses Mill Brook W. of Hithercroft Farm there is a hard bottom.<sup>6</sup> A slight swelling is visible across the meadow between the brook and the road to the S. of it; in the hedge-line on the N. side of the road when seen from the meadow; in the headland immediately S. of the road; and in the hedge-line 300m. N. of the brook.

At Mackney the Ordnance Survey line starts and goes along Mackney Lane. It continues as the parish boundary between Brightwell and Sotwell, called 'the old street' in the mid 10th century,<sup>10</sup> as far as the Thames. It goes between the twin villages as a footpath, then between modern houses, crosses the by-pass (A4130) and climbs the hill as an overgrown bridle-way. At the saddle the alignment swings about 30° E. to point at the western flank of Town Hill above Warborough and is marked downhill by the bridle-way and finally by a drainage ditch. The crossing of the Thames was identified by G.B. Grundy as Old Street Ford,<sup>11</sup> and is marked on the N. bank by a low causeway.<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 2. Road A, Streatley to Brightwell-cum-Sotwell. Crown copyright reserved.

<sup>5</sup> P.D. Catherall, M. Barnett & H. McClean (eds.), *The Southern Feeder, The Archaeology of a Gas Pipeline* (1984), 47.

<sup>6</sup> H.J. Peake, *Archaeology of Berkshire* (1931), 93.

<sup>7</sup> I.D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain* (rev. edn. 1967), 166.

<sup>8</sup> Hedges, *op.cit.* note 4, 142-3.

<sup>9</sup> J. Rocque, *A Topographical Survey of the County of Berks.* (1761).

<sup>10</sup> *E.P.N.S. Berks.* 809.

<sup>11</sup> *Archaeol. Jnl.* lxxv (1918), 133; *Berks. Bucks. & Oxon. Archaeol. Jnl.*, xxvii (1922-3), 218.

<sup>12</sup> Oxfordshire County Museum Sites and Monuments Record P.R.N. 5051.

To the N. of the river the alignment swings a few degrees further E. to point directly at the top of Town Hill. It is picked up by the parish boundary between Dorchester and Warborough and soon meets the road coming in from Henley, which it joins to Dorchester (see D below).

#### B: ASTON CLINTON – DORCHESTER (LOWER ICKNIELD WAY)

This road leaves Akeman Street west of Tring and runs roughly parallel to the prehistoric Icknield Way, but along the foot of the Chiltern escarpment; it has obviously got its name from this parallel path. Near Shirburn it swings away from the hills and heads for Dorchester via Cuxham, Brightwell Baldwin, Berrick and Warborough.

The N. part of the road has been worked out in detail by R.W. Bagshawe and R.H. Reid,<sup>13</sup> and the S. part in similar detail by C. Morris, G.H. Hargreaves and R.P.F. Parker.<sup>14</sup> Both accounts have accompanying maps, and it seems unnecessary to repeat these details here.

The line near Brightwell Baldwin was confirmed in 1976, when British Gas pipeline construction sectioned the road 600m. WSW. of Brightwell church. The road showed as a cambered layer of packed flint and pebble gravel, usually some 8cm. in thickness. The overall width was some 10m., with the edges marked by very ill-defined ditches. The road appeared to have been widened by some 2m. from an original width of some 8m.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting that, of the 21 known or suspected Roman roads crossed by the 355km. of the Southern Feeder pipeline, this was the only one which could be seen in the pipe trench section,<sup>16</sup> a point which stresses the difficulty of determining the course of these roads. Also, the road as found lies S. of the direct alignment from Brightwell to Berrick and some 15–20m. N. of a bridle-way; this demonstrates how these minor roads tend to deviate from the direct alignment but to be built in short straight stretches which are often preserved by ancient bridle-ways and footpaths.

A few points can be added to the original accounts. Between Berrick Salome and Berrick Prior the agger is clearly visible where it crosses the modern road. The alignment from Berrick is probably better regarded as pointing straight at Castle Hill, Wittenham Clumps, which provides a clear sighting point, rather than at the Thames crossing, to which the road does not, after all, go. The agger is also clearly visible where it crosses Green Lane W. of Warborough. The line from Warborough to Green Lane is preserved by a footpath; beyond Green Lane it presumably continues the short distance till it meets road C(2) (see below).

#### C: FLEET MARSTON – DORCHESTER

Fleet Marston is a Romano-British settlement on Akeman Street to the W. of Aylesbury. The course of the road from there to Dorchester, running through Long Crendon, Great Milton and Little Milton, has been worked out in detail by R.W. Bagshawe.<sup>17</sup> From a point N. of Stadhampton, Bagshawe puts forward a line shown as C(1) on Fig.1; the

<sup>13</sup> The Viatores, *Roman Roads in the South-East Midlands* (1964), 55–6.

<sup>14</sup> *Oxoniensia*, xxxiii (1968), 14–21.

<sup>15</sup> Catherall *et al.*, *op. cit.* note 5, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Ex inf. P.D. Catherall, British Gas Corporation.

<sup>17</sup> The Viatores, *op.cit.* note 13, 274–8.

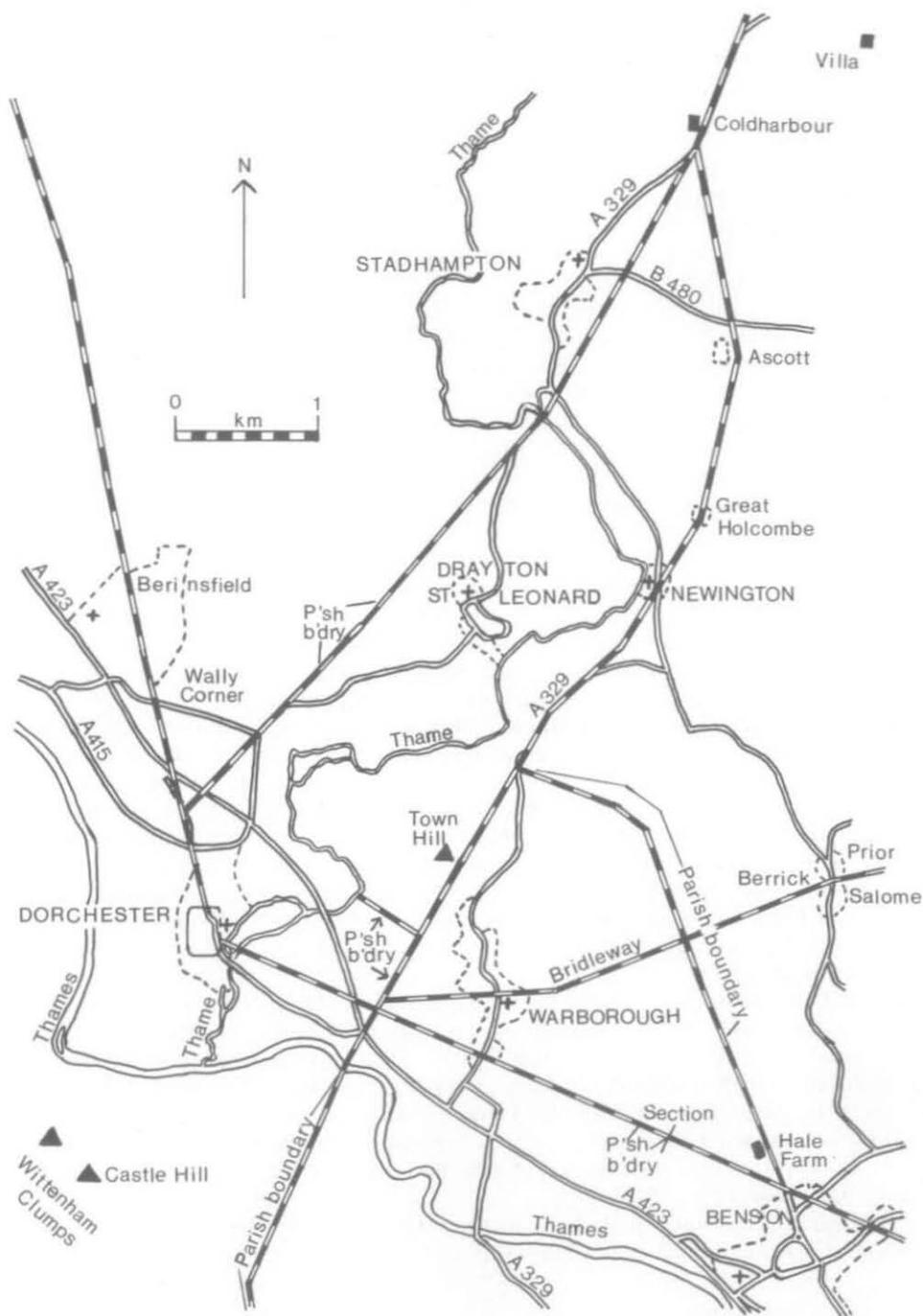


Fig. 3. The area around Dorchester. Crown copyright reserved.

present writer suggests instead the line shown as C(2). The line C(1) leaves the modern road S. of Coldharbour Farm and goes by an ill-defined route through Stadhampton to Hayward Bridge, where the Thames is fordable. The line follows the modern road SW. for 300m., and then goes cross-country till it is picked up by the parish boundary W. of Drayton St. Leonard. For 1250m. the line is shown, with slight changes of alignment, by the parish boundary, the line of a former track and the modern road to Wally Corner. Here Bagshawe found 'several large pieces of limestone'; J. Sutton investigated a late Romano-British site here, which he concluded to have been in limited use over a limited time.<sup>18</sup> Bagshawe's line then meets the Alchester road N. of Dorchester, where the latter meets the pre-bypass modern Oxford road.

The line C(2) also leaves the modern road S. of Coldharbour Farm; at this point the modern road and the Roman line have been aligned for 900m. from just S. of Little Milton onto the saddle above Brightwell-cum-Sotwell. C(2) heads a little E. of S. for a small patch of high ground by Ascott. For 500m. the line is marked by a hedge and ditch; the old house at Belcher's Farm stands on it, as does the modern barn by the B480 at Ascott. Here there is also a swelling in the road, apparent when vehicles drive fast over it, and from the S. the swelling is visible in the hedge-line; at a fence 100m. to the south a swelling is again visible.

At this point there is a change of alignment; visibility is excellent to both N. and S. The new line heads a little W. of S. towards a rise near Great Holcombe; it goes first down into the valley S. of Ascott, where it is marked for 100m. by a boundary brook, formerly part of a mill-race. It then goes over the gentle slope of Newbury Hill, and crosses a stream where a farm track does (by a bridge nowadays). On the line, just N. of the hedgerow by the bridge and therefore just E. of the farm track, the Newington Tithe Map of 1840 (Hamlet of Holcombe)<sup>19</sup> shows an unnamed building, now gone and presumably a barn of some sort, which presumably stood on the remains of Roman metalling.

There is another change of alignment by Great Holcombe, which turns the line further W. and points to the saddle above Brightwell-cum-Sotwell. The road-line is preserved by footpaths for most of the next 1100 m., but it passes immediately in front of Newington House and the footpath is diverted on to the modern road there. In the dip SW. of Newington the line swings a little to the W., as the saddle above Brightwell-cum-Sotwell is temporarily out of sight, and points at the westernmost of the Wittenham Clumps. For 200m. the line is preserved by a footpath, marked as a hedge on the Drayton St. Leonard tithe Map of 1841;<sup>19</sup> it is then joined by the modern road. Once on the top of the Primrose Hill slope the road-line, Roman and modern, swings slightly E. to point straight at Town Hill above Warborough.

Roman and modern road-lines part company at the lay-by near Lower Grange, and there is nothing visible of the Roman line over Town Hill. At the top of the hill is a change of alignment of a degree or so, to head for the Thames crossing. For 900m. the line is marked by the parish boundary between Dorchester and Warborough; this is crossed by the Lower Icknield Way (B) and the Henley - Dorchester road (D).

Just S. of Town Hill a straight track and parish boundary heads off NW. to the Thames. This line (F) may well be that of a Roman road leading to the cemetery at Church Piece by the Thames.<sup>20</sup>

The line C(2) is suggested, first because there are more indications of the former existence of a Roman road here than along C(1), and secondly because it makes better

<sup>18</sup> *Oxoniensia*, xxvi-vii (1961-2), 7-18.

<sup>19</sup> Tithe maps at Oxon. C.R.O. The tithe maps for this area are usually the oldest detailed maps, as parliamentary enclosure was later.

<sup>20</sup> M. Harman, G. Lambrick, D. Miles & T. Rowley, *Oxoniensia*, xliii (1978), 6-16.

sense. It heads directly for the Thames crossing and thus avoids the two crossings of the Thame which a traveller from the north on C(1) would have to make. If the road network is regarded from the S., a road comes from Silchester to the Thames crossing and here splits; one branch goes through Dorchester to Alchester on Akeman Street and on to Towcester (Lactodorum) on Watling Street and so to the NW., while the more easterly branch crosses Akeman Street at Fleet Marston, Watling Street at Dropshort (Magiovinium) and on to Ermine Street for the N.E.

If the line past Ascott and Newington seems somewhat roundabout, a careful look at the O.S. map<sup>21</sup> or, better, a walk along the route will soon show the skill with which the Roman surveyor chose the best possible line. To have gone W. of Ascott would have meant crossing the valley at a very marshy point; to have gone further E. would have meant going through very wet land east of Belcher's Farm. The small valley between Holcombe and Newington is very steep-sided W. of the Roman line. The geological map<sup>22</sup> shows that the (geologically speaking) recently-formed alluvial valley of the Thame is on the average broader than that of the Thames, and the Thame meanders a lot; in Roman times there must have been frequent flooding of the Thame and its tributary brooks.

#### D: HENLEY - DORCHESTER

Margary accepts the line from Henley to Dorchester as a Roman road the course of which is certain,<sup>23</sup> and marks it as such on his maps. His description of it is, however, only general between Henley and Nettlebed, and between Nettlebed and Dorchester it is wrong.

The ford over the Thames at Henley, probably prehistoric in origin, remained in use for centuries as the E. end of the royal manor of Benson, until it was superseded by the bridge built when the new town of Henley was laid out towards the end of the 12th century. The Oxfordshire end of the ford would have been in the grounds of Phyllis Court. Margary reports that traces of a buried road have been observed under the centre of the lawns here, leading to the river at a point where old piles have been seen in the river-bed. These piles need not presume the existence of a bridge; if relevant at all, it is more likely that they would mark the course of the ford for a stranger coming this way. On the Berkshire bank, a terrace way comes gently down the hillside in Remenham Wood as a property boundary and points to the ford. The road south-eastwards from the ford, which leads to the London-Silchester road, does not concern us here.<sup>24</sup>

From Phyllis Court the line of the road is marked by a property boundary heading WNW., clearly visible on the O.S. map and marked on crossing the Marlow road by two 18th-century lodges, where there is also a clear swelling across the road. After three slight changes of direction the line is shown by the wall of Henley Park running NW. beside the Fair Mile for 1.5km. This line from the river is the N. boundary of that part of the manor of Benson which is now in Henley.

The line of the park wall is continued into Lower Assendon by the narrow road bearing to the left off the B480 at Flint Cottage. This road from here to Bix was part of the normal route from Henley to Dorchester until the turnpike trust built a new road in 1798-9 on the line of the present dual carriageway.<sup>25</sup> On the map the old road seems to wriggle

<sup>21</sup> The Ordnance Survey 1 : 25,000 2nd or Pathfinder Series has been used throughout this investigation.

<sup>22</sup> Institute of Geological Sciences, 1 : 50,000 Series Geological Map, Sheet 254 Solid and Drift Edition.

<sup>23</sup> Margary, *op.cit.* note 7, 166-7.

<sup>24</sup> This road through Berkshire is currently under investigation by the writer.

<sup>25</sup> Ex inf. J. Crocker, Henley Archaeological and Historical Group.

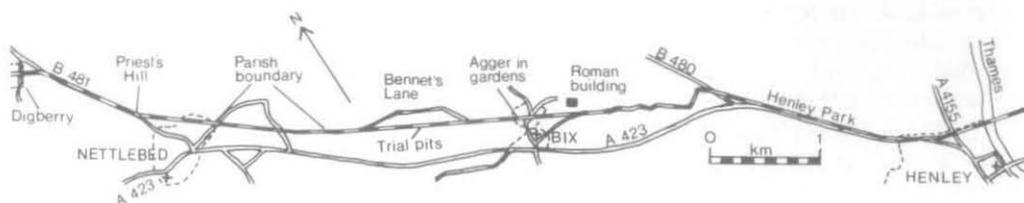


Fig. 4. Road D, Henley to Digberry. *Crown copyright reserved.*

about haphazardly; a closer study of the map or, much better, walking along the road shows that it goes, in typically Roman fashion, in a number of short, straight stretches which tackle the hill in the best possible way. Over many centuries of use the road has become worn down to, in places, a depth of several metres; it is impossible to say whether any of this was the result of deliberate cutting, and just as impossible to say whether any such cutting could have been Roman. There has been chalk quarrying on the NE. side near the bottom. It is reasonable to assume that the line of the present road is Roman.

Once the road levels out, it runs straight for 450m.; the present road then turns W. along the edge of Bix Common to the village. Just before the bend, the site of a Roman building lies 100m. N. of the road; it was excavated in 1955 but no report has been published.<sup>26</sup>

The line of the Roman road continues straight ahead from the bend, gently rising for another 2.5km. Nothing of it is visible at first, but then the agger stands out clearly in the front gardens of 19–22 Bix Common. The agger remains visible, though as a more gentle swelling, until it reaches the edge of Bix Underwood; the present track (Bennet's Lane) bears off to the N. just before the edge of the wood.

The agger was just visible in the wood until tree-felling in 1984. Near the house in Bix Underwood there is a definite swelling where a N.–S. track crosses the Roman line, which is then marked for about 200m. by a rather indistinct boundary bank and ditch about 50m. S. of the right-of-way marked on the O.S. map.

Trial pits were dug in 1984 by the writer and boys of Reading School at SU71988588, between this boundary ditch and a vestigial ditch to the N. of it, the centres of the ditches being some 13m. apart. A pit dug centrally between the ditches showed, below 5cm. of topsoil, a 20-cm. layer of small flints over a 25-cm. layer of medium flints, which rested on the undisturbed subsoil of clay-with-flints. Two pits 3m. out from this central pit each showed a similar section, except that the layer of small flints was only 15cm. thick. The top of the layer of small flints defined the camber, which was 20cm. higher in the central pit than in the side ones. The chalk bedrock is not far below the surface at this point, and it can never have been worth ploughing here; this may explain the preservation of the road.

The 1st edition of the O.S. 25" map shows the boundary bank and ditch running to the parish boundary with Nettlebed, but nothing can be seen of it now for the last 200m. The line of the road continues through the wood and across a field to join the present track 300m. E. of the entrance to the house called Halfridge; at the entrance, track and line swing a few degrees to the north to stay roughly level along the side of the valley to their N.

After crossing the side road to Crocker End, the track and line continue together for some 50m. The track then bears left along a modern line, but the Roman line continues as a property boundary and a clear terrace along the side of the valley. The former hundred and

<sup>26</sup> County Museum, P.R.N. 2867.

parish boundary between Bix and Nettlebed ran along the Roman line for 900m. from just E. of Halfridge to where it meets a minor road crossing the head of the valley.

The early county maps<sup>27</sup> show a straight road running from Bix Common to Crocker End and Nettlebed, but it is impossible to say whether this was on the Roman line. The Bix Tithe Map of 1842<sup>19</sup> shows only Bennet's Lane as the E. part, which curves round more to the N. The present main road from Bix to Nettlebed dates only from 1825,<sup>28</sup> its predecessor being the road going off to the SW. opposite the 'Fox' at Bix, which now degenerates into a track which joins the B481 just south of Nettlebed.

The Roman line from Halfridge continues straight over what was Nettlebed Common and heads for Priest's Hill, where it meets the B481. Because of old clay workings and modern buildings it is impossible to find anything of the road over these last 750m., but it is shown clearly on Pride's 1790 map.<sup>29</sup> Nettlebed lies on the flat crest of the Chilterns with steep-sided valleys to W. and E. The Roman road stays on this flat crest as long as possible, descending gradually from near Ewelme Park and then heading just N. of Benson to Dorchester. Margary, however, saw the line as that of the medieval road from Nettlebed church and manor-house through Benson to Dorchester (i.e. the A423 before the extension of Benson aerodrome in 1942, except that the section of road from Gangsdown Hill to Gould's Heath is an 1827 turnpike road,<sup>28</sup> the older road running N. of Ambrose Farm). The two objections to Margary's line are that it does not follow on from the road coming up from Henley to Priest's Hill at Nettlebed, and that a more northerly line can be shown to exist.

From Priest's Hill the Roman line swings a few degrees N. and is followed by the modern road (with typical slight deviations) for just under 1km. It then turns WNW., at first along a parish boundary and minor road and then across country for 1200m. The buildings of Digberry Farm lie on the line, but the rectangular earthwork here has been described as definitely post-Roman by Professor S.S. Frere.<sup>30</sup>

The line from Digberry was once a bridleway leading straight to Ewelme Park. The first part of this bridleway still exists as a track and parish boundary which now swings away from the Roman line; the second part degenerated through lack of use into a very thick hedge which was grubbed out in the 1960s.<sup>31</sup> The line of this hedge was crossed by the laying of a British Gas pipeline in 1983 but, not surprisingly, no trace of the Roman road was found.<sup>32</sup>

Where the Roman line now meets a small wood at SU681887 it turns W. and heads for where a hoard of Roman coins was found S. of Ewelme Park in 1953.<sup>33</sup> The line is cut at first at an acute angle by the wood boundary, so that the flint metalling of the road is clearly visible for some 35m. in the raised edge of the wood till the agger emerges running along just inside the wood. This terrace-way is some 7m. wide and at first completely overgrown; where it comes out into the open for about 100m., the hedge on its S. side has been recently grubbed out and the metalling is again visible; for the next 150m. probing reveals a firm surface some 10cm. down. The 400m. from SU681887 are represented by an old field-boundary.<sup>34</sup> After the right-of-way turns N., the Roman road has been so disturbed by

<sup>27</sup> Jefferys (1776-7), Davis (1797), Bryant (1824).

<sup>28</sup> Records of the Henley and Dorchester Turnpike Trust at Oxon. C.R.O.

<sup>29</sup> T. Pride, *A Topographical Map of the Town of Reading, and the Country, adjacent to an Extent of Ten Miles* (1790).

<sup>30</sup> In a letter to the writer; see also County Museum, P.R.N. 2026.

<sup>31</sup> Ex inf. M. Colston, Ewelme Park.

<sup>32</sup> Ex inf. P.D. Catherall.

<sup>33</sup> *Oxoniensia*, xvii/xviii (1952/3), 234-5.

<sup>34</sup> Tithe Map of Swyncombe (1840), Oxon. C.R.O.

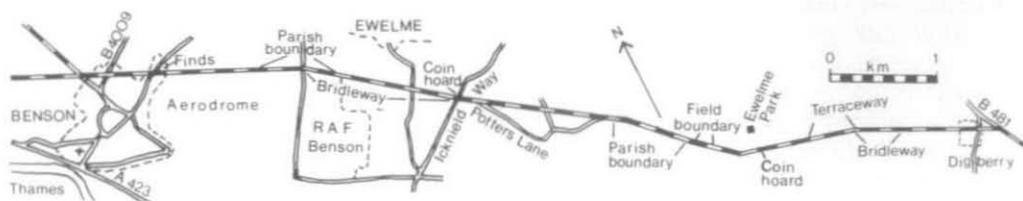


Fig. 5. Road D, Digberry to Benson. *Crown copyright reserved.*

forestry operations that there are no traces left until the swelling of the agger is visible again at the far end of the wood by the site of the hoard.

The line of the road continues straight for about another 200m., then swings about 25° to the N. and descends a gently sloping valley in the face of the scarp. The line runs as an old field boundary for 150m.;<sup>34</sup> from SU667893 it becomes the parish boundary between Ewelme and Nuffield for a further 650m. The last 350m. of this stretch are along a clear bridgeway, and it is at this point that the line put forward here joins that proposed by G.H. Hargreaves, R.P.F. Parker and A.W.F. Boarder.<sup>35</sup>

The present writer agrees almost completely with this last line, and it is now described with only minor amendments and additions. Hargreaves *et al.* start from Dorchester and head for Ewelme Park; they do not describe in detail how their road would continue towards Henley, and the writer cannot accept their suggested line up the scarp, which follows the medieval bridgeway from the manor-house at Ewelme to Ewelme Park.

From the point on the bridgeway where a layer of packed flint-and-pebble was found on the chalk beneath 90cm. of loam,<sup>36</sup> to where the alignment crosses the Icknield Way at SU649906, the course of the road may have been either direct or along the line of the present bridgeway and Potters Lane. Near the junction with the Icknield Way, a hoard of coins was found in 1720.<sup>37</sup> From this point the Roman line is preserved for nearly 1500m. by a bridgeway which swings from it no more than about 50m.; the last 300m. of this are also the parish boundary of Benson and Ewelme. Beyond this point the parish boundary follows the line for another 400m. across what is now Benson aerodrome, and was accompanied by a bridgeway until the aerodrome was built.

A straight alignment from here across the flat ground to Dorchester cuts through the NE. tip of Benson village. Evidence for a Roman settlement here includes finds of coins and pottery,<sup>38</sup> a possible cemetery,<sup>39</sup> and the suggestive fieldname Blacklands. About 1500m. further W. along the alignment are a burial long suspected to be Roman<sup>40</sup> and a pottery find,<sup>41</sup> both to the W. of Hale Farm. Also near this point, Hargreaves *et al.* report a clear section of the Roman road cut by a drainage ditch at Gallows Lease, SU60989265: 45cm. below the modern surface they found a 15cm. thick layer of flat limestone pieces, 9m. wide, surfaced with sandy gravel and on a thin foundation layer of debris laid directly on loam.

West of this section come 200m. of straight parish boundary (Benson-Warborough) nearly on the Roman line, then 550m. of straight drainage ditch; this ditch preserves an old

<sup>35</sup> *C.B.A. Group 9 Newsletter 8* (1978), 5-7.

<sup>36</sup> At SU66228974; mentioned by Hargreaves *et al.* (op.cit. note 35), but not mentioned by Catherall *et al.*, op.cit. note 5.

<sup>37</sup> County Museum, P.R.N. 2129.

<sup>38</sup> Coins marked on older O.S. maps; pottery, County Museum, P.R.N. 8039, 8041.

<sup>39</sup> County Museum, P.R.N. 11980.

<sup>40</sup> Marked on older O.S. maps.

<sup>41</sup> County Museum, P.R.N. 4466.

field-boundary which continued along the Roman line for a further 250m.<sup>42</sup> The line crosses the A329 by Oatlands at the S. tip of Warborough village, where it is marked for 250m. by property boundaries on both sides of the road. At a point 600m. beyond the end of the modern road, a broad raised line starts and runs for nearly 800m., clearly visible where it is cut by the Dorchester bypass. It has been interpreted as a headland,<sup>43</sup> and most of it is shown as field boundaries on the Dorchester (Hamlet of Overy) and Warborough tithe maps, so it presumably cannot be taken as an agger, but it does preserve the Roman road-line; Roman burials were found to its S. in the 19th century.<sup>44</sup>

This line crosses the Thames between the present (1813–15) bridge and the abbey church, and could have entered the Roman town of Dorchester or a predecessor fort by a gate roughly in the centre of an E. wall. There is no evidence for any Roman crossing of the Thames either at the site of the present bridge or at the site of its medieval predecessor at Bridge End Green, and access from both these sites to the fort or town would have been extremely awkward.

#### E: FROM BENSON NORTH-NORTH-WESTWARDS

This road, a kind of short cut, made it possible for a traveller on one of the roads D, B or C(2) to join the other two roads without having to go nearly to the Thames crossing and back again. It is shown as a road the whole way by both Jefferys (1776–7) and Davis (1797), but Bryant (1824) and the first edition of the Ordnance Survey 1-in. map (1830) show it as such only in portions.

It leaves Benson now as Hale Road, an ordinary asphalted road as far as Hale Farm. North of the farm buildings it becomes a raised causeway some 8m. wide, probably dating in its present form from the 1850s, when the farm was laid out, as the causeway stops when it meets a drainage ditch. The Roman road continues as a slightly raised track, and this contrasts well with the bridleway from Roke to Warborough which it crosses after another 100m.; the latter, probably equally old as a bridleway, is not raised at all. The Roman road is gradually ploughed out in the field N. of the E–W. bridleway, but its swelling can be clearly seen from the N. It is soon picked up by the parish boundary of Warborough, which it follows to the end. After it crosses the Lower Icknield Way it becomes a bridleway again; accompanied by a deep ditch, it goes with two changes of alignment to its junction with road C(2).

F: see above, p. 28.

#### G: THE PREHISTORIC ICKNIELD WAY / RIDGEWAY

It is generally agreed that this prehistoric long-distance route remained in use in Roman times, as is shown by numerous finds along its path. It is also quite likely that sections of it would have been improved from time to time to Roman standards. Any discussion of this route is, however, outside the scope of this article; Fig. 1 shows it merely for the sake of completeness.

<sup>42</sup> Tithe Map of Warborough (1846), Oxon. C.R.O.

<sup>43</sup> Ex inf. R.A. Chambers, Oxford Archaeological Unit.

<sup>44</sup> See note 20 above.