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ON THE PRE-ROMAN ROADS OF NORTHERN AND EASTERN YORKSHIRE,¹

By Professor W. BOYD DAWKINS, M.A., D.Sc., F.R.S.

I.—INTRODUCTORY.

The network of roads in the British Isles, as elsewhere, has gradually come to be what it is by a process of evolution from the earliest prehistoric times to the present day. They began with the earliest tracks of the nomad hunter, and were the lines of communication between the fixed centres of habitation when civilization had arrived at the farming stage. From that they have passed into the pack-horse tracks and the roads for wheeled vehicles, in all cases taking the easiest routes, or the lines of least resistance. With the arrival of the Romans the straight point-to-point roads come in, and mark that phase of road-making of which our railways are the last outcome. In the following pages an attempt is made to deal with the earliest roads in the district under consideration. It is necessarily, from the very imperfect evidence, only a sketch, founded on principles which I have found of great service in dealing with the prehistoric roads of Hampshire and Somerset for the *Victorian History* of those counties, as well as with the Pilgrim's Way, in a paper communicated to the Archaeological Institute in 1902.²

II.—THE PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE DISTRICT.

The north-eastern district of Yorkshire, bounded on the south by the estuary of the Humber, and on the north by the Tees, and including the area to the east of a line drawn between York and Darlington and the sea, presents a geography that has left its mark on the distribution of the population in ancient times. In the district to the north of the Humber the bare chalk wolds

¹ Read at the Meeting of the Institute, on 4th May, 1904.

² "On Bigbury Camp and the Pilgrim's Way," *Arch. Jour.*, LIX, 211-218.

overlook on the east the low-lying districts from Hull to Bridlington, on the west the great plain of York and the lower marshes of the Derwent, and on the north the broad marshy Vale of Pickering—the site of an ancient lake which extended eastwards to within about a mile of the sea-cliffs near Filey. It consists of dry rounded hills, rising on the west to 700 feet, and surrounded on every side by land lying below the 100-foot contour, excepting at the north-east, where it is joined to the north-eastern moors by the low jurassic hills which form the cliffs from Filey to Scarborough.

A second district is constituted by the well-wooded triassic and jurassic hills, rising to a height of 565 feet, at Yearsley, and ranging west of the Derwent as far as Easingwold, and passing at Coxwold into the Hambleton Hills.

The Vale of Pickering shuts off these two districts from the high moors overlooking it to the north, and forms the third well-defined area from all the rest, being mostly a flat tract of marshlands.

The fourth consists of the north-eastern moors, 1,400 feet above the sea, mostly heather covered, and cut into deep-wooded ravines, one series opening on the south on the Vale of Pickering, and on the north into Eskdale, the deep gorge cut by the river eastwards from the Cleveland Hills to Whitby. To the north of the Esk, high moors, including those of Danby and Egton, form the divide, delivering the drainage of its northern slopes into the estuary of the Tees and into the sea. It is bounded on the east by the line of cliffs from Whitby to Scarborough, and on the west by the Cleveland Hills overlooking the basin of the Tees, and by the Hambleton Hills overlooking the lower basin of the Swale to the south of North Allerton.

III.—THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION IN PREHISTORIC TIMES.

These four districts have been utilised by man in ancient times according to their physical differences. The uplands have attracted the farmer and herdsman of the Neolithic, Bronze, and Prehistoric Iron Ages, because

they were dry and more or less treeless, while the lower grounds, densely covered with forest and morass, were left to be the lairs of the wild beasts until the time of the Roman conquest. On the higher grounds the traces of prehistoric habitations, camps, dykes, enclosures of fields, and more especially the burial places of the dead, abound. In the lower they are for the most part conspicuous by their absence. For the purposes of this communication I shall take the burial places as shown by the tumuli, marked in the one-inch and six-inch Ordnance maps in the area under consideration, as an index of the distribution of the prehistoric population. It must, however, be remarked that the numbers are not absolutely accurate, because in many cases it has been found impossible to mark each separate tumulus in the map. They represent a minimum, which in many cases can be largely increased by the examination of the ground. They are as follows:—

District 1.—The Wolds—

				Tumuli.
1-inch contour sheet,	53	...	...	0
" " "	54	...	...	51
" " "	55	...	...	7
" " "	63	...	...	30
" " "	64	...	...	78
" " "	71	...	...	0
" " "	72	...	...	110
" " "	73	...	...	0
" " "	80	...	...	0
" " "	81	...	...	0
Total				276

District 2.—Ranges west of New Malton—

				Tumuli.
1-inch contour map,	52	...	...	0
" " "	53	...	...	19
" " "	62	...	...	0
" " "	63	...	...	0
Total				19

District 3.—The Vale of Pickering—

				Tumuli.
1-inch contour map,	53	...	...	0
" " "	54	...	...	0

District 4.—The High Moors—

				Tumuli.		
1-inch contour sheet,	33	...	...	...	0
"	"	"	34	...	151	
"	"	"	35	...	0	
"	"	"	42	...	104	
"	"	"	43	...	432	
"	"	"	44	...	244	
"	"	"	52	...	26	
"	"	"	53	...	29	
"	"	"	54	...	76	
				Total	...	1,062

On testing these numbers by comparison with those in the six-inch maps, I find that in some of the larger groups of tumuli they fall in some cases—as, for example, in Map 43, south of Swinesty and on the north end of Hawthorn Hill—to less than one-half of those drawn on the larger scale map. Nevertheless, they may be taken in a general way to indicate the areas where the population was greatest. It is proved by the figures given above to have centered mainly in the northern and eastern moors represented in Maps 34, 43, and 44, especially on those bordering Eskdale. If each of the above maps be examined in detail, it will be seen that the highest and best drained land has attracted the largest population, and that the lower and more moist regions have been occupied to a less degree; while the hollows of the valleys with few exceptions, and the districts below the 100-foot contour with few exceptions, have not been occupied at all. The exceptions are two tumuli near Driffield, in Map 64, a group of four in Map 71, which stand on dry sandy gravel, and one in Map 65, on Carnaby Moor. Their presence is due to the exceptional dryness of the sites.

The archaeological date of the tumuli ranges from the Neolithic, through the ages of Bronze and Prehistoric Iron, to the Roman occupation, and the researches of Canon Greenwell and of Mr. Mortimer leave no room for doubt that all the ages are represented in the wolds and the moors. The population in both these districts was greater in the Bronze than in the Neolithic Age, and it continued to increase in the Prehistoric Iron Age, until

we find it represented at the time of the Roman conquest in the wolds by the Parisii, and in the moors by that Brythonic tribe or by the Brigantes. After the Roman conquest the centres of population ceased to be confined to the uplands, and the new roads and the drainage works opened out the lowlands for the use of the farmer and the herdsman.

IV.—THE PREHISTORIC ROADS IN THE WOLDS.

The numerous tumuli camps and other traces of early occupation marked on the maps of the wolds, characterise the prehistoric roads from all others. The prehistoric homesteads and villages were linked together by an irregular network of roads, mostly ridgeways, one series running from the breaks in the western scarp of the chalk between the Humber and Settrington, eastwards to the low-lying marshy regions as far as Beverley, Great Driffield, and Bridlington. They are crossed by a second series varying according to the shape of the ground, but mainly in a northern direction from the Humber to the heights, overlooking the Vale of Pickering, from Hillington to Hunmanby. Among the east and west roads we may quote that [63, 64, 65] running from Settrington, by Weaverthorpe, Foxholes, North Burton, to Flamborough; that running from Acklam through Sledmere, Cowlam, and Rudstone, to Bridlington, and that branching off to the south at Fridaythorpe, and passing by way of Kilham also to Bridlington. The most important north and south road is that ascending into the wolds at Welton [80] and pointing northwards by Rowley Rectory, Double Dykes, Kings Home, and Letwood Farm, passing 55 tumuli in five miles of its course to Godmanstone Lodge, and 51 in its course through Warter Wold and Huggate Dykes and Raisthorpe. It is probably continued on to Settrington. Throughout its course, as is frequently the case with these roads, it does not pass through any existing village. The rest of the north and south roads are mere fragments, marked only on the map by tracks leading nowhere, but proved to be prehistoric by the tumuli.

V.—THE PREHISTORIC ROADS IN THE NORTH-WESTERN UPLANDS.

The second inhabited area [52, 53] is that of the uplands west of New Malton. It is traversed by a winding road making for Easthorpe and Hovingham, and over Grimstone Moor and crossing the line of the great Roman road from York to Thirsk, at one of the many Coldharbours of the district. It throws off a branch to the south from Grimstone Moor Farm through Brandsby. The population of this area in prehistoric times is proved to have been small, by the small number of tumuli.

In the third district, the Vale of Pickering, there are no roads or tracks than can be proved to be of prehistoric age. Its marshes probably formed an impenetrable barrier between the wolds and the north-eastern moors, the only means of communication being along the higher ground eastwards past Filev to Scarborough, or on the west by way of Malton. The road through the marshes north of New Malton, made by the Romans, was probably the first to cross the valley. It is, however, likely that the roads on its margins under the Wolds and the Moors are of Prehistoric Age, as they link together roads of well-ascertained Bronze Age.

VI.—THE PREHISTORIC ROADS OF THE NORTH-EASTERN MOORS.

The prehistoric roads of the moors north of the Vale of Pickering fall naturally into two main groups, one to the south of the Esk, and the other to the north. In the first of these [42, 43, 44, 52, 53, 54] their main direction is from south to north, following the ridges up into the high moors, separating the drainage area of the Derwent between Scarborough and Helmsley from that of the Esk. There is no continuous east and west track linking them together, although a length of seven miles begins at High Ridge House in Thornton Dale, and is continued on the divide. To the south of Helmsley also, a road passes in a westerly direction from Oswaldsthorpe to join at Kirkby Moor the great northern ridgeway on

the crest of the Hambleton Hills, and thus linking that district with the Cleveland Hills. To the north of the Esk [33, 34, 35] a ridgeway sweeps from Lythe, near Whitby, some eighteen miles westward over Danby Moor into the Cleveland Hills, throwing off branches north and south along the ridges between the dales. From the large number of tumuli in its course we may infer that it was one of the most important roads in the district.

These roads were a portion of the network which covered Britain before the Roman conquest, and were gradually evolved, as means of communication between the villages more or less isolated from one another, in the Neolithic Age. In the Bronze Age, when the population became larger, and the isolated units formed tribes, they were more numerous and better defined. In the Prehistoric Iron Age, when the tribes had become states, they were still further developed, and were used for wheeled vehicles such as that found in a burial mound in the wolds at Arras and in the lake village at Glastonbury. In this district, at the time of the Roman conquest, they formed a network closely linked with York, which had already grown into the position of the capital of the region, and was so well placed that it became the capital of Roman Britain.

VII.—THE ROMAN ROADS.

The Roman roads in the area under consideration have been so completely dealt with by Mr. Codrington¹ that there is little that can be added to his minute account. From York one road sweeps northwards past Easingwold and Thirsk to Thornton-en-le-Street, and on to the Tees. A second passes eastward through Stamford Bridge (Derventio²) to Bridlington. From Stamford Bridge one road goes to the north-west to Easingwold, another northwards to Pickering and over the moors towards Whitby, a third makes for New Malton, a fourth joins the great north and south road at Market Weighton. This last skirts the base of the wolds southwards to

¹ *Roman Roads in Britain*, 1903.

² The town on the Derwent.

Brough, where a Roman fort commanded the ferry over the Humber. From this it runs through the marshes to Lincoln.

In the area of the wolds the Roman engineers have left their mark in the improvement of the old pre-historic lines of communication and by the construction of new point to point roads. The road from York to Bridlington, crossing the Derwent at Stamford Bridge, is a point-to-point road along the lower grounds, and on through Garrowby (Garrowby Street) and the Green Wold, where it crosses the north and south road from Brough at a height of 808 feet, and thence on to the south of Fridaythorpe. Here it branches. The southern branch traversing the lower grounds to Kilham, and under the name of the Wold Gate to Bridlington, passes a Roman-British cemetery near the point where it crosses the Malton and Driffield Railway. The northern, a ridgeway on the higher grounds, winds through Sledmere and Rudstone, also to Bridlington. The former was probably made as a shorter and easier road for the purposes of through traffic.

The Romans have also left their mark on the old ridgeway passing northwards from the Roman-British cemetery above mentioned to Wharram-le-Street, and by way of Settrington to Malton. Southwards it is traced as far as Tibthorpe by Mr. Codrington. The numerous tumuli prove it to be of Prehistoric Age, while the name Street points to its having been improved during the Roman occupation of the district. Similar evidence as to the improvement of the prehistoric roads by the Romans is also to be found in the uplands west of New Malton. The old winding prehistoric road, as we have shown, ranged along the higher ground by Hildenley Hall and Slingsby Moor, and on to the west of Hovingham, and thence westwards. The Roman engineers have cut a new point-to-point road from Malton to Hovingham by way of Appleton-le-Street, Barton-le-Street, and Slingsby. It joined the older road to the west of Hovingham. It is worthy of remark that there is a Cold Harbour near Colton on the road between Hovingham and Grimston Moor.

One of the roads in the Vale of Pickering, proved to

be undoubtedly Roman, is that passing northwards from the uplands west of Malton from Amotherby northwards to the River Rye, where there are traces of it at Newsham Bridge. Thence it passes approximately along the line of the existing road to Barugh, and northwards towards Riseborough. It is probably marked by the straight line of road from Wrelton to Cawthorne. Remains of it have been recorded from the last three places.¹ It is very distinct as it approaches Cawthorne Camps—a remarkable group of three rectangular camps, undoubtedly Roman, and one oval fortified village which is undoubtedly British, and which is proved to be pre-Roman, because its fosse and rampart have been cut into by an angle of the western of the three Roman camps. They occupy the crest of a ridge 650 feet high, overlooking a deep valley to the north. From this point it goes north by Flamborough Rigg and Stape over Pickering Moor, crossing the beck at Stape; then to the junction of Rutmoor Beck with Keys Beck, and on to the ford at the junction of Wheeldale Gill with Wheeldale Beck. From this point its course is marked by the present road over Hazel Head, through Julian Park, by Cold Harbour, to Lease Rigg. Here it joins the older road, and descends into the Valley of the Esk, crossing that river at Grosmont, and turning to the east runs by Newbiggin, over Aislaby Moor to Whitby.² This road between Cawthorne Camps and the Esk is known as Wades Causeway. It was a paved road, 17 feet wide, exclusive of the ditches on either side. It was made, as is obvious from a glance at the map, as a short cut from Cawthorne to the Esk, to take the place in through traffic of the winding ridgeway over Black Moss and Egton High Moss to the Esk. Here, too, as elsewhere, the tumuli abound on the sides of the older road, while on the newer, from Cawthorne to the junction with the older road to the north of Cold Harbour on, they are conspicuous by their absence. It would be very difficult to find a stronger contrast than this between the Roman and pre-Roman roads, or a better example of the manner

¹ Codrington, *Roman Roads in Britain*, pp. 162, 163.

² For details, see Codrington, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-167.

in which the former were dealt with by the Roman engineers.

CONCLUSION.

In this outline of a very difficult subject I have attempted to deal with the principles by which it may be possible to restore the system of prehistoric roads in Britain, and to see how far they were modified and improved by the Romans. For this to be carried out it will be necessary to make a minute topographical survey of the whole country on the six-inch Ordnance maps. This is a task far too great to be undertaken by single-handed effort. It can only be done by the workers in each centre, such, for example, as York, taking a district and combining an archaeological survey with the topography. When this is done the historians will have to revise their views as to the condition of Britain in pre-Roman times, and as to the extent to which we are indebted to the Romans for the lines of the existing roads.