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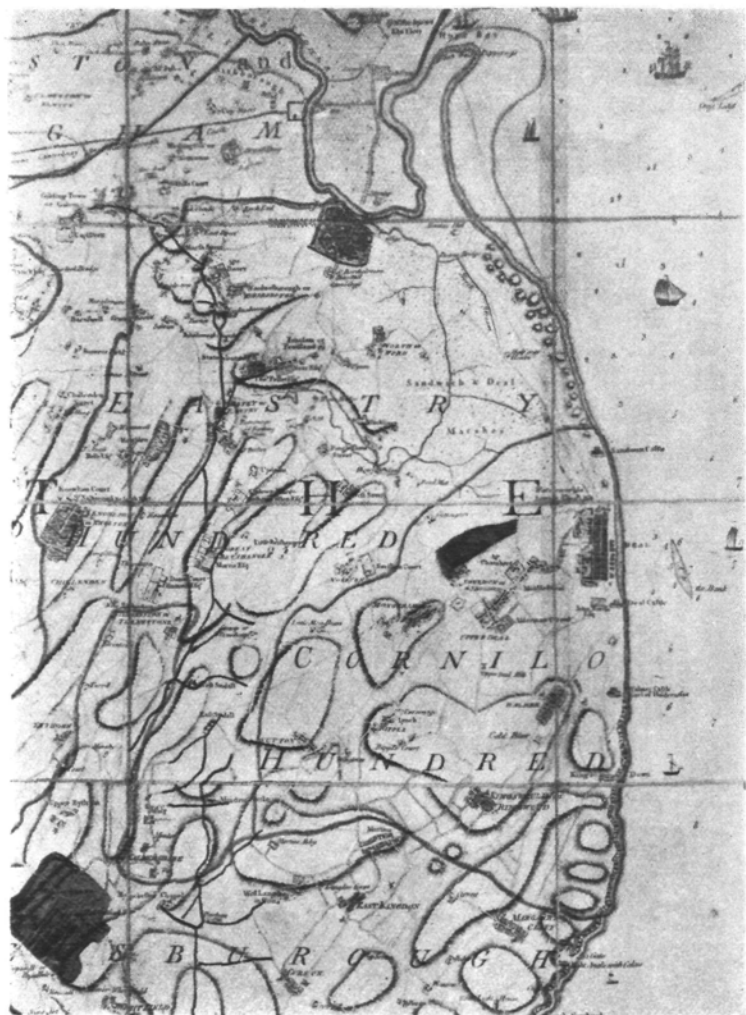


FIG. 1.

ST. MARGARET'S BAY, AND THE ROMAN ROADS FROM RICHBOROUGH TO DOVER AND CANTERBURY.

BY CECIL KNOX.

IN 1769 Andrews, Dury and Herbert published their map of Kent—on a scale of 2 in.=1 mile. A photograph of a part of this map is given in Fig. 1. There are at least three matters on this map which, I think, call for comment.

I. ST. MARGARET'S BAY.

An aerial photograph of the bay is shown in Fig. 2. As Fig. 1 is on such a small scale, Fig. 3 is given on the same scale as Andrews' map. It shows a delightful little harbour at high tide similar to Lulworth Cove. Local tradition knows nothing of this harbour. But it seems incredible that Andrews invented it. The map was produced under the patronage of the Lord Warden (Earl of Holderness) and other local notables. It is absurd to suppose that this harbour, with its pier, landing-stage and "Sea Gate, Right Angles with Calais", could have been placed on the map if it had no existence.

It seems, however, that within thirty years of the production of this map the harbour had disappeared. Fig. 4 is taken from the Admiralty Chart No. 738, "Deal to South Foreland", by Graeme Spence, 1795. We may take it for granted that on such a chart the rocks shown at low water are correctly marked. When the chalk cliffs rose from these rocks there must have been some such harbour as that shown on Andrews' map. From the look of the grass-grown cliffs it is probable that the landward side of the bay is very much the same now as it was 150 years ago. This enables us to compare Andrews' map with the present Ordnance Survey, so as to give us some idea of the rate of coast erosion at this point. It is obvious that such chalk

promontories as those forming the Sea Gate could not survive many winter storms, but there seems to have been unusually rapid erosion at that time. Having enlarged Andrews' harbour to a 6-in. scale, and compared it with the 6-in. O.S. (1906) (Fig. 5), it is found that for a length of one mile, during the period 1769-1906, the cliff edge receded, on an average, about 300 feet, say two feet per annum. This is on the supposition that Andrews' map is reasonably correct. The rate of erosion is, of course, nothing like that now, but then the coast-line has become smoothed and straightened out, whereas in 1769 it appears to have been indented with bays and headlands. What the rate of erosion was before that date we do not know, but 1,800 years earlier St. Margaret's Bay must have been a very useful harbour.

This harbour was formed by the submersion of the valley which we see descending from the lighthouse in Fig. 2, in a north-easterly direction. As it nears the shore it becomes steeper and narrower, being flanked by considerable cliffs where it enters the sea. It seems, then, probable that in Roman times the harbour was narrow, and enclosed by cliffs.

On August 26th, 55 B.C., Caesar, waiting for his transports to come up, anchored—according to Rice Holmes—off the South Foreland. "The formation of the ground", Caesar tells us, "was peculiar, the sea being so closely walled in by narrowing cliffs (*montibus angustis*) that it was possible to throw a missile from the ground above on to the shore." This seems to be entirely in keeping with the suggested harbour.

It is interesting to note that the local branch of the Pilgrims' Way continues through Canterbury as far as Studall, in a direction making straight for this harbour.

II. THE ROMAN ROAD TO DOVER.

Next, returning to Andrews' map, let us see what he makes of the Roman road from Wodensborough to Dover. We find that nearly all the road is marked on the map, but so faintly that they have been inked in on the photograph

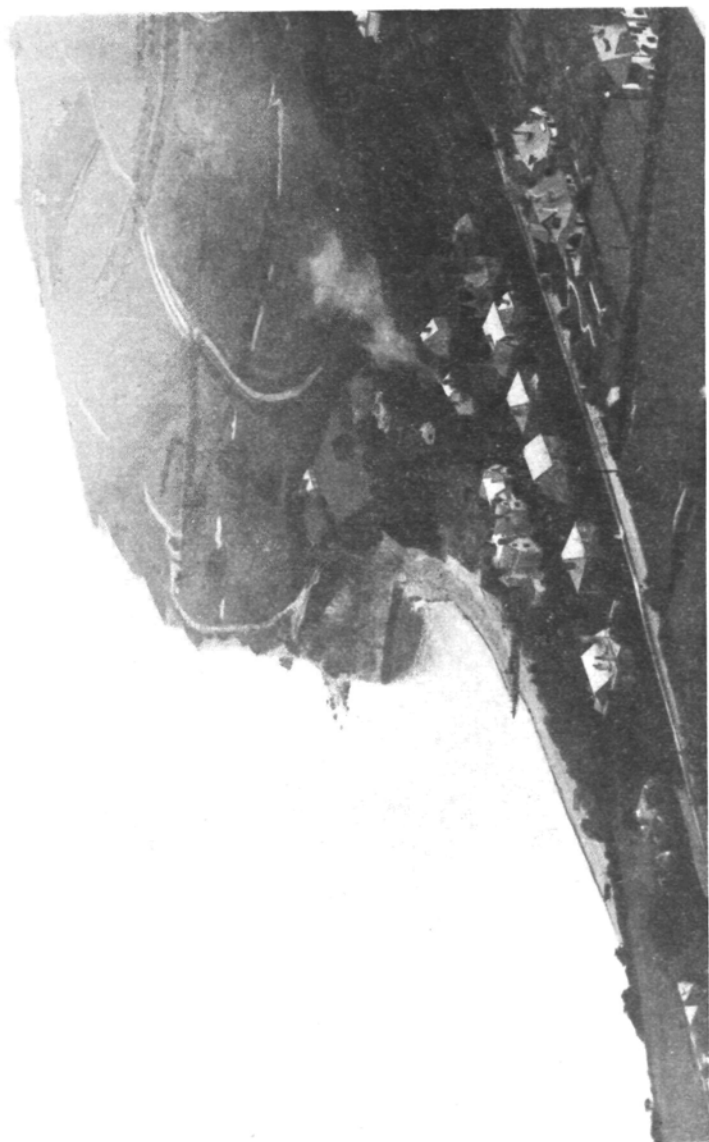


FIG. 2.



FIG. 3.

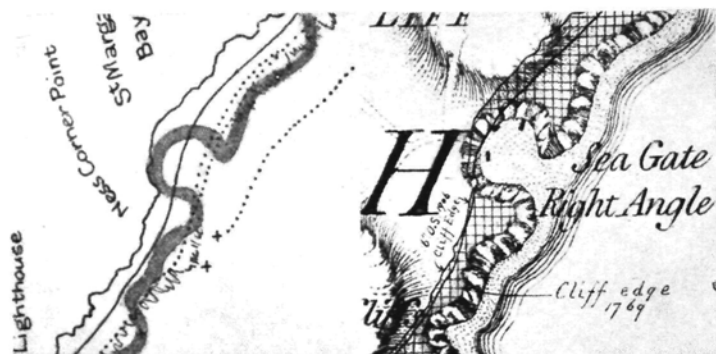


FIG. 4.

FIG. 5.

Fig. 3. St. Margaret's Bay 1769, same size as Andrew's map.

Fig. 4. St. Margaret's Bay 1795, with 3 superimposed.

Fig. 5. St. Margaret's Bay 1906, with 3 superimposed and the eroded portion marked in 100 ft. squares.

(Fig. 1). It is evident that Andrews had not the least idea that he was dealing with a single, through and perfectly straight road.

It was not till 1799, when the first O.S. Map of East Kent was surveyed, on the scale of 3 in.=1 mile, that this road was shown as a continuous thoroughfare. The name "Roman Road" first appeared on the 25-in. O.S. (1858-73).

Now, it is generally taken for granted that this road was intended to connect up Richborough with Dover, the part from Wodensborough northwards being entirely lost. On the other hand there are certain considerations connected with this road which suggest that possibly it was intended for another purpose.

We know that in Roman times the Count of the Saxon Shore was appointed to protect the country from the marauding Saxons. We may take it for granted that he took all proper military precautions to attain this end; amongst other things setting up observation posts at the proper places. The most important of these was on the hill at Wodensborough, for this is the only hill which commands an uninterrupted view of the whole coast from Ramsgate to Walmer, and the whole harbour to Reculver. At present trees block this view, but a visit to the church tower close by will confirm this statement. The bench-mark on the church, at a slightly lower level than the hill-top, is 109·4 feet. Also, on the hill-top is a mound, marked "tumulus" on the 6-in. O.S., and an antiquity cross. This hill must have been the nerve-centre of the defence of this part of the coast. Now, every observation post must be provided with means for the rapid despatch of information to those concerned. To-day it is telephones. In Roman times it was paths for runners and despatch riders. When the enemy is sighted off the North Foreland, or the danger signal seen at Reculver, word must be quickly sent to Dover. Hence the straight road from Wodensborough to Dover. It is noteworthy that the line of the road on the 6-in. O.S. runs exactly through the centre of the tumulus. Had the road ever continued farther north this tumulus would have been swept away.

III. THE ROMAN ROAD TO CANTERBURY.

Lastly, in Fig. 1, look at the imaginary road marked "from Canterbury to Richborough Castle". The former existence of this road is generally taken for granted, though there is nothing now to show for it. Even the Official Guide to Richborough says, "The line of the Roman road from here onwards to Canterbury cannot now be traced, but it may be assumed that it ran across country in a practically straight line, in accordance with the usual Roman practice."

Now, if there is any vestige of this road left it ought to appear on the 6-in. O.S. map. When this is examined, not a trace of the road is to be found. On the contrary, there is evidence there that it never existed. For this map gives the parish boundaries. Fig. 6 shows a number of these boundaries crossed by Andrews' road. It is uncertain when they were laid down, but it is safe to say that most of them were there before the Norman Conquest. It is very unlikely that Andrews' road, had it existed, would have completely disappeared at that time. All the other Roman roads in the district have been used to some extent in the demarcation of the parishes through which they pass. It is incredible that all the boundaries shown in Fig. 6 should completely ignore the road—as they do—had it been there. This is not, of course, conclusive evidence, but it is very strong evidence that there never was an Andrews' road.

But, if the 6-in. O.S. map rules out this road, it shows traces of another which may be the road we are looking for. This is shown in Fig. 6 by the thick markings in a straight line between Richborough and Upstreet. Consider the first length of this road from the Castle to Fleet Farm. This passes over the causeway which (not shown on the 6-in. O.S.) lies on the north bank of the dyke shown in Fig. 6, inset. There can be no doubt about the site of the road so far, and little doubt that it continued in a straight line to the top of the hill by Fleet Farm, however it may have gone afterwards. Next is a quarter of a mile of road, shown on the 1-in. O.S. map, and then follows a very interesting five furlongs of causeway across the marsh which forms the south bank of the Richborough Stream (Fig. 6 inset).

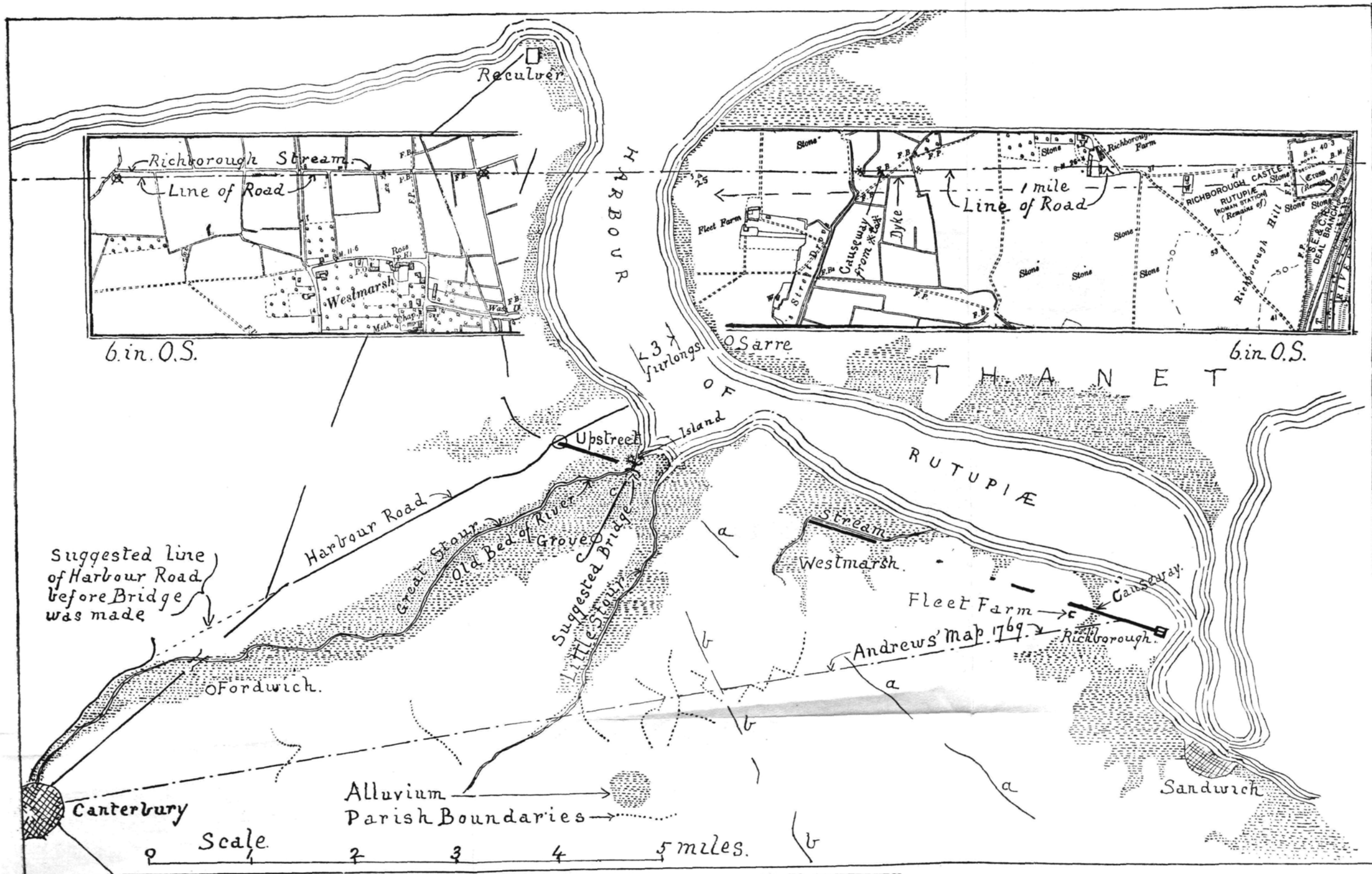


FIG. 6.

THE ROMAN ROAD FROM RICHBOROUGH TO CANTERBURY.

Lastly, we get the five furlongs of road from Upstreet across the Ferry. Anyone having the 1-in. O.S. Road Map, sheet 117, can check these lengths for himself, for it shows the Richborough Stream in blue. If he will mark in these lengths of road, laying a ruler from the Castle to Upstreet, and continuing the road from Richborough to Fleet Farm, he will get the markings shown in Fig. 6. That this represents the line of a Roman road is, I think, borne out by the considerations which follow.

Some will regard this suggested road as impossible, because they assume that the marsh-land marked "alluvium" in Fig. 6 was under the sea in Roman times. Others think that to have made a road across the estuary of the Stour would have been possible, but it "would have been an enormous task and scarcely worth the trouble". On the other hand, H. J. Osborne White in his Geological Survey of the district (1928), tells us, "the silting of the Wantsum was probably far advanced in the time of the Roman occupation". If we consider that the silting up of the Wantsum and the Stour valley began about 3000 B.C. and that by A.D. 700 the channel between Thanet and the main land was only some three furlongs wide (Fig. 6), it is at least probable that the marsh-land between Upstreet and Stourmouth was sufficiently firm in Roman times for the construction of a road for light traffic. There would be no difficulty whatever in making such a road, and there would be no difficulty whatever in bridging the Stour. Roman engineers would make light of such a job.

And there is a reason why, had it been possible, some such road must have been made. Consider the harbour as a whole (Fig. 6). It was guarded at each end by a fort. The harbour, at all costs, must be defended, and so it was, from the very beginning, a military necessity that there should be the means for rapid communication between these forts, and between each of them and Canterbury and Dover. A coastal road between the forts would be nine miles long. The next shortest road—that by Fordwich and Sturry—eighteen miles. This extra nine miles might, in an emergency, make all the difference between saving the

harbour and losing it, between victory and defeat. We may say, then, with considerable certainty, that there was a coastal road from Richborough to Reculver. But we are looking for a road to Canterbury.

Now, as all traffic, apart from local garrisons, wanted to go to Canterbury, it is obvious that the first road to be made was the Harbour Road to Upstreet. Here was a good "hard" on which to land, only six miles from Canterbury. This road being made, and the coastal road connecting with it at Upstreet, there was no need to make Andrews' road, which would have been only one mile shorter. These were necessary military roads. Andrews' road would have been a luxury.

Let us suppose, then, that there was a direct road from Richborough to Upstreet. This crossed the Stour somewhere between Stourmouth and Upstreet. Both the 6-in. O.S. and the 1-in. show an old bed of the river about half-way across (Fig. 6). We do not know when the Stour used this bed, but if the suggested road was in existence at the same time it must have crossed the river at the point where the bridge is marked. If we look at the road from Grove to Upstreet (c c) we see that it runs straight to the site of this bridge, and then returns at an acute angle to the Ferry. Also, as we have seen, military necessity demanded rapid communication between Reculver and both Wodensborough and Dover. Both the 6-in. and 1-in. O.S. maps show the footpaths a a a and b b b (Fig. 6) radiating from this bridge. It seems, then, quite likely that this old bed of the river was the one in use in Roman times.

There is one last point in connection with this bridge, which is, I think, important, and may have determined the choice of this exact spot for its building. Alongside the bridge is an island of brick-earth about six feet high and two hundred feet across, roughly round, shown on the 6-in. O.S. This island must have been of immense importance in the defence of the bridge. Perhaps, some day, the spade may reveal some traces of this use.