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# THE CANTERBURY-RICHBOROUGH ROMAN ROAD: A REVIEW

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## INTRODUCTION

Margary's account in 1967<sup>1</sup> of the Roman Road to Richborough from Canterbury begins 'This road leads east from Canterbury (Durovernum) and must have been one of the most important in Britain, for the port of Rutupiae was one of the principal points of entry from Gaul, and perhaps the most used of all at that time'. Nevertheless, despite its paramount importance, the exact line of the road has yet to be established beyond reasonable doubt. This present paper reviews efforts made over the years to point to a solution to the problem, and attempts to summarise conclusions which may be drawn from the present state of knowledge.

A basic problem is that the geography of the Wantsum area has changed radically since Roman times; the Wantsum has disappeared and Rutupiae is no longer an island. Dowker in 1872<sup>2</sup> published a Map of the Coast round Richborough in Roman times (see Fig. 1) and there have been a number of variations of such a map published subsequently. Perhaps the most authoritative is that of J.D. Ogilvie<sup>3</sup> in 1977 (see Fig. 2). From these conjectural maps it may be seen that, however excellent an harbour and anchorage Rutupiae may have provided, the establishment of a direct road to Canterbury from the island through tidal marsh land with deep and changing inlets, must have presented severe problems to Roman engineers.

<sup>1</sup> Ivan D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, Rev. Ed. London, 1967, 36.

<sup>2</sup> G. Dowker, 'Account of the Society's Researches on the Roman Castrum at Richborough', *Arch. Cant.*, viii (1872), 1-17.

<sup>3</sup> J.D. Ogilvie, 'The Stourmouth - Adisham Water Main Trench', *Arch. Cant.*, xciii (1977), 91-124.

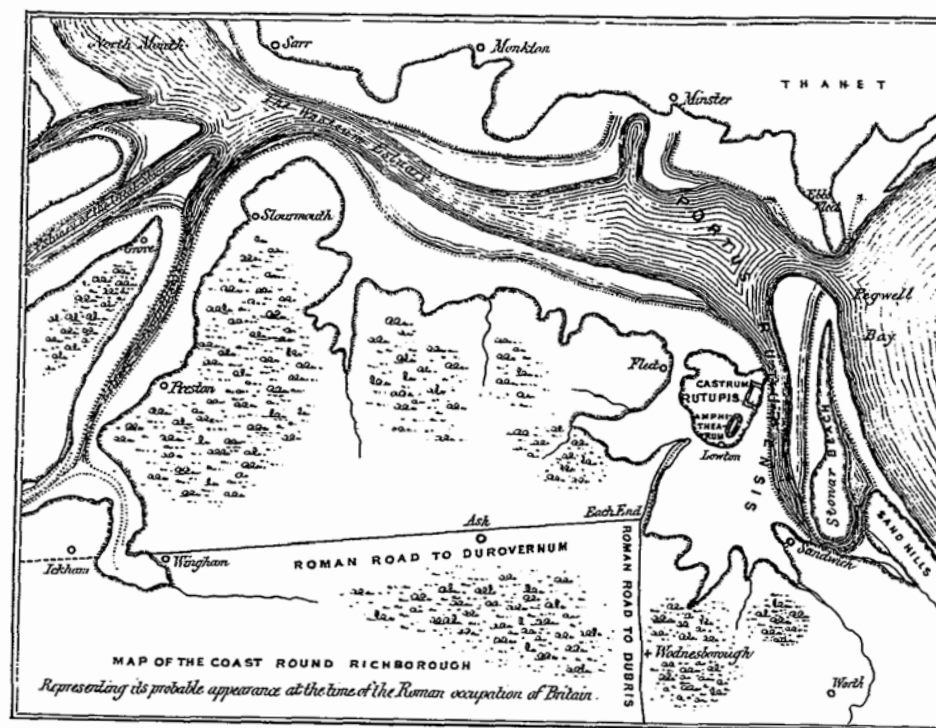


Fig. 1. Map of the coast round Richborough in Roman times (Source: Dowker, 1872).

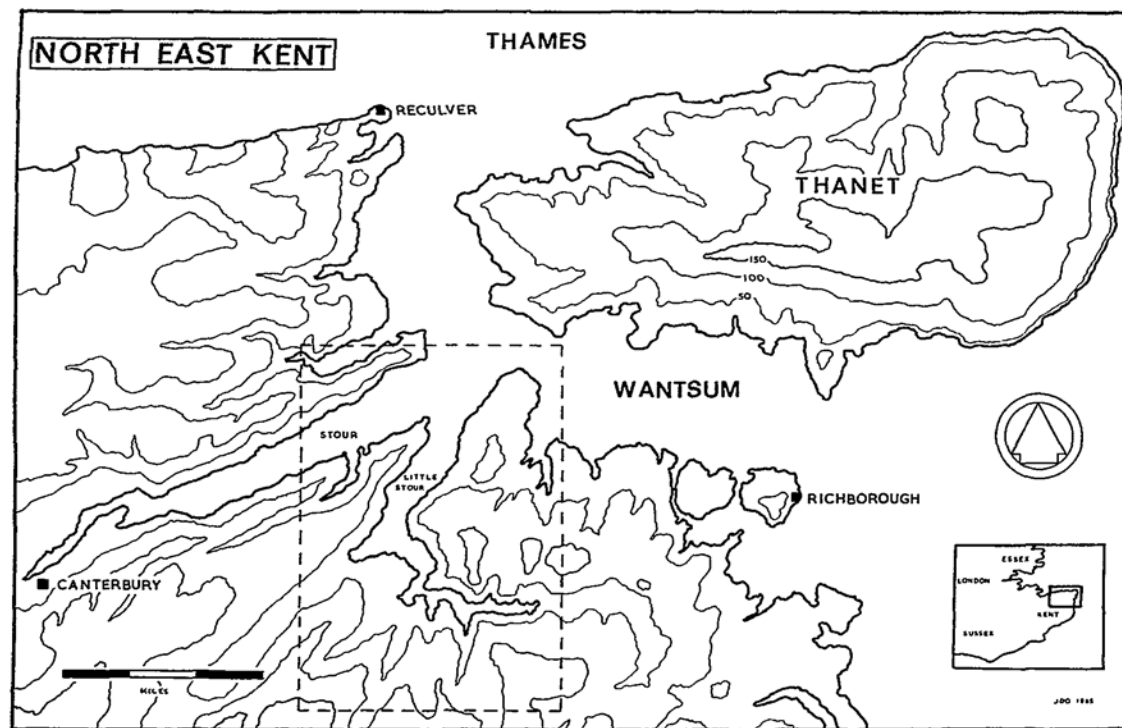


Fig. 2. North-east Kent in pre-Roman times (Source: Ogilvie, 1977).

## EARLY VIEWS

Codrington<sup>4</sup> found it curious that there were 'very few traces of the Roman Road from Portus Rutupiae, the usual port of entry into Britain, to Canterbury'. He noted that those recorded by Harris, as observed by Dr Plot and Harris in 1719, were but vague, and that between Shatterling and Richborough they could find no traces. Staveley, a little later, equally found no trace. Codrington's conclusion, mainly derived from the Tabula Peutingeriana, was that the road from Dover via Woodnesbury, and that from Canterbury, joined and followed a common causeway across tidal land to Richborough.

Walker in 1926<sup>5</sup> gave a diagram which followed Codrington's conclusion, and from an examination of the topography of the ground, suggested a route from Canterbury by Ash, Brookehouse, and Cooper Street, with the route from Dover passing Each End and joining the Canterbury Road between Brookehouse and Cooper Street to form a common causeway to Richborough (see Fig. 3). About the same time, Winbolt<sup>6</sup> published a similar but perhaps more detailed map of the confluence of the two roads and their common entry onto Richborough Island (see Fig. 4).

## THE 'MARGARY LINE'

Margary<sup>7</sup> in 1948 gave details of a route through Littlebourne, Wingham, Neavy Downs, Barham Downs Ridgway and onto the road to Ash, together with suggestions for the road to Richborough in the Ash/Each End area (see Fig. 5). Margary's observations from field walking and topographical features are drawn on in his subsequent book.<sup>8</sup> Margary's suggested route for the final stretch, broadly followed that of Winbolt, and suggested that the road from Woodnesbury joined the Canterbury road on the eastern outskirts of Ash, proceeding on a common line via Cooper Street and Fleet Farm. However, it was not until 1957 that the line of the agger in the immediate vicinity of Richborough fort, identified by Winbolt and by Margary from visual observations, was investigated by excavation by the Ash Local History Group, led by J.D. Ogilvie.<sup>9</sup> They found no

<sup>4</sup> T. Codrington, *Roman Roads in Britain*, 3rd Ed. (Revised), 1919 SPCK, 40-41.

<sup>5</sup> G.P. Walker, 'Old Roads in E. Kent and Thanet', *Arch. Cant.*, xxviii (1926), 18.

<sup>6</sup> S.E. Winbolt, 'Roman Folkestone', London, 1925, 156.

<sup>7</sup> I.D. Margary, 'Notes on Roman Roads in E. Kent', *Arch. Cant.* lxi (1945), p 126-34.

<sup>8</sup> Ivan D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, Rev. Ed. London, 1967, 36.

<sup>9</sup> J.D. Ogilvie, 'The Fleet Causeway' in (Ed.) B.W. Cunliffe, *Fifth Report on the Excavations of the Roman Fort at Richborough, Kent*, Society of Antiquaries of London Research Report no. xxiii, 1969, 37-40.

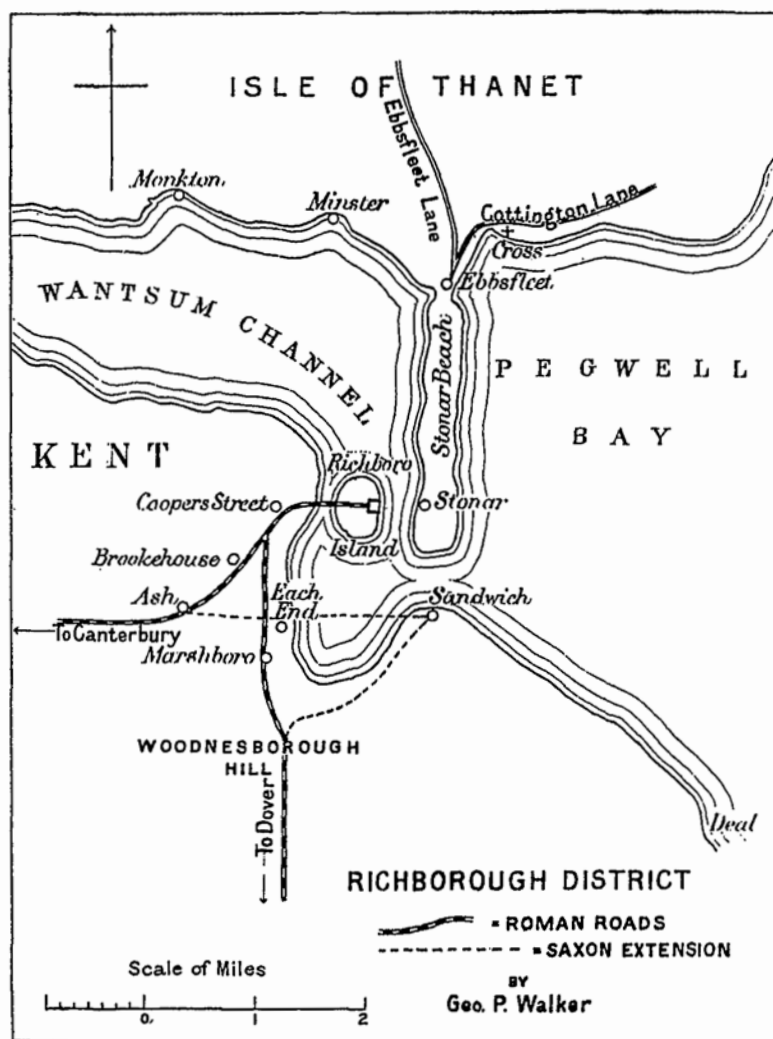


Fig. 3. Roman and Saxon roads, Richborough district (Source: Walker, 1926).

evidence of Roman road along the line of Winbolt's agger, but they did find it about 20 ft. south of that line, at a point close to the N-S Cooper Street - Richborough modern road. It was about 23 ft. wide, and no more than 14 in. below the surface. Ogilvie did not find it possible to trace that road (by probing and augering) eastward to the Fleet Channel crossing, but, in 1958, the Richborough island end of the crossing was

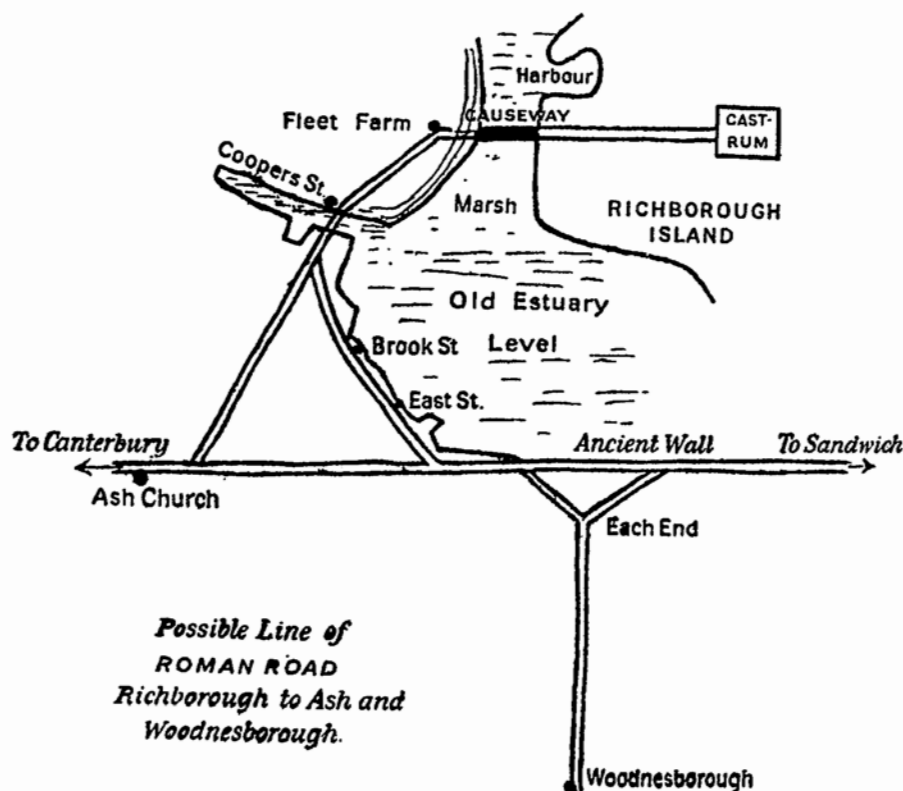


Fig. 4. Roman road, Richborough to Ash and Woodnesborough (Source: Winbolt, 1925).

found by auger, – again, further south than indicated by previous authors. Attempts to trace the roadway from the marsh were unsuccessful. Beyond the N–S modern road, the existence of an orchard prevented further investigation.

#### THE 'ANDREWS LINE'

Other routes for the road have been suggested. The Andrews Dury and Herbert map of Kent in 1769 (scale 2 in. to the mile) showed a Roman road in a direct line from Canterbury to Richborough, with no deviations. Knox,<sup>10</sup> in a critical appraisal of features in the 1769 map,

<sup>10</sup> C. Knox, 'St. Margaret's Bay and the Roman Roads from Richborough to Dover and Canterbury', *Arch. Cant.*, liv (1941), 35–40.

referred to it as an 'imaginary' road. He pointed out that if it had existed, vestiges of it might have been expected in the first O.S. maps. He also pointed out that the parish boundaries (which might have been expected to follow the line of a Roman road to some extent as a line of demarcation between parishes) completely ignore or run counter to the line of the road in the 1769 map.

#### THE 'KNOX LINE'

As another alternative Knox proposed that the road had proceeded from Richborough in a more or less straight line by the way of Westmarsh and Grove Ferry to Upstreet joining the road to Canterbury from there (see Fig. 6). Knox's evidence was largely drawn from features on the 6 inch O.S. map of the area, based on the coincidence of an alignment of a short piece of road at Grove Farm, a straight half mile length of watercourse at Westmarsh, a quarter mile length of lane NW of Fleet Farm, and the proven causeway over to Richborough Island. Margary dismissed this suggestion as at least improbable, since from Westmarsh (1½ miles) and from West Stourmouth (1 mile), the line crosses alluvial marshland which would have been almost certainly part of the estuarine area in Roman times. Moreover, Margary noted that there seemed to be no sign of agger or metalling along the line. He concluded that it seemed certain that no Roman engineer would have chosen it.

#### OGILVIE'S WORK

In his paper of 1969 Ogilvie<sup>11</sup> reported on efforts he had made to look for evidence for the 'Andrews Line' and the Knox route. On the former he commented that some evidence existed, including cremation burials at Overland and Ware, and roads and buildings at Great Wenderton. However, the line would have necessitated the crossing of a narrow strip of marsh and sandhills. Augering and observations of periodic dredging of dykes there had produced no evidence. This suggested that the crossing there, if it had existed, must lie under the present road. On the 'Knox line' Ogilvie commented that it partly depends on the existence of an agger across the Westmarsh marshes. This, in its construction, resembled the false agger at Fleet, and it was obvious to Ogilvie that, at some medieval date, the many streams flowing northwards towards the shrinking channel had their waters diverted by the digging of the Richborough stream, with

<sup>11</sup> J.D. Ogilvie, 1969, *loc. cit.* in n. 3.



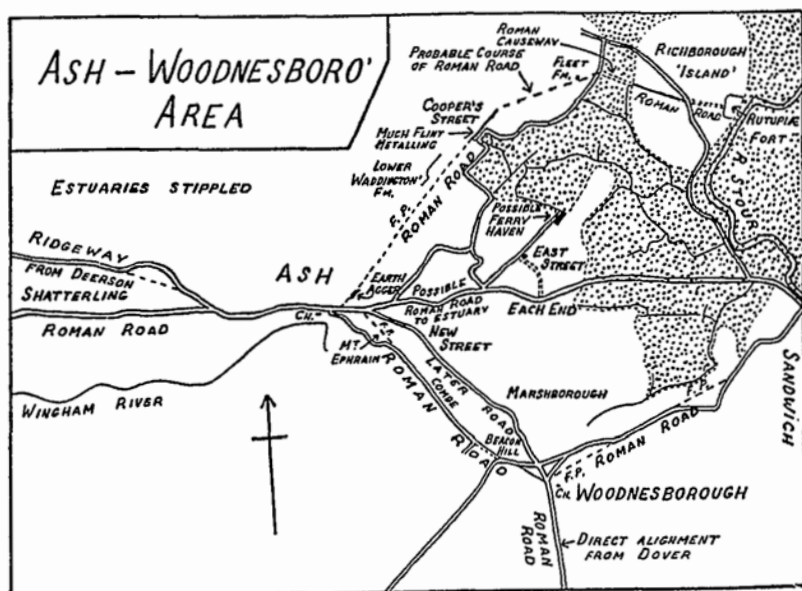
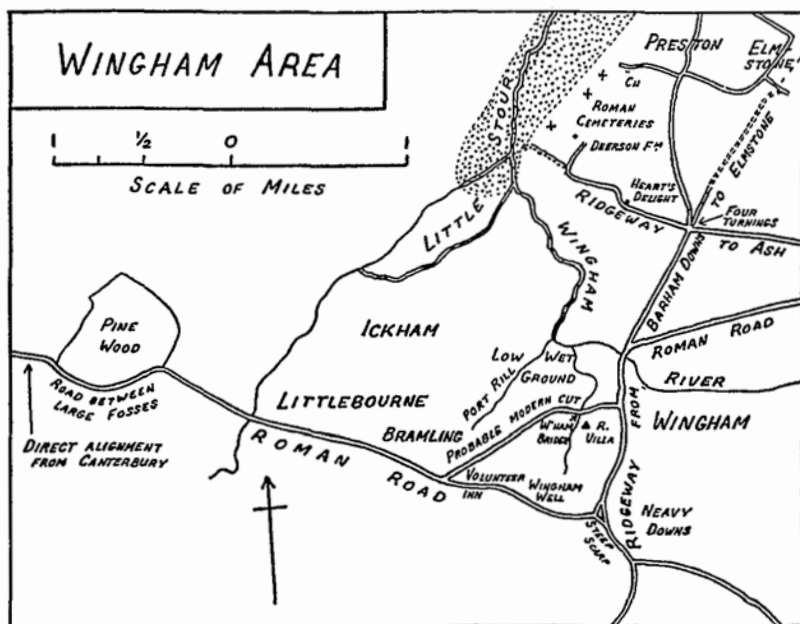


Fig. 5. Roman roads in east Kent (Source: Margary, 1948).

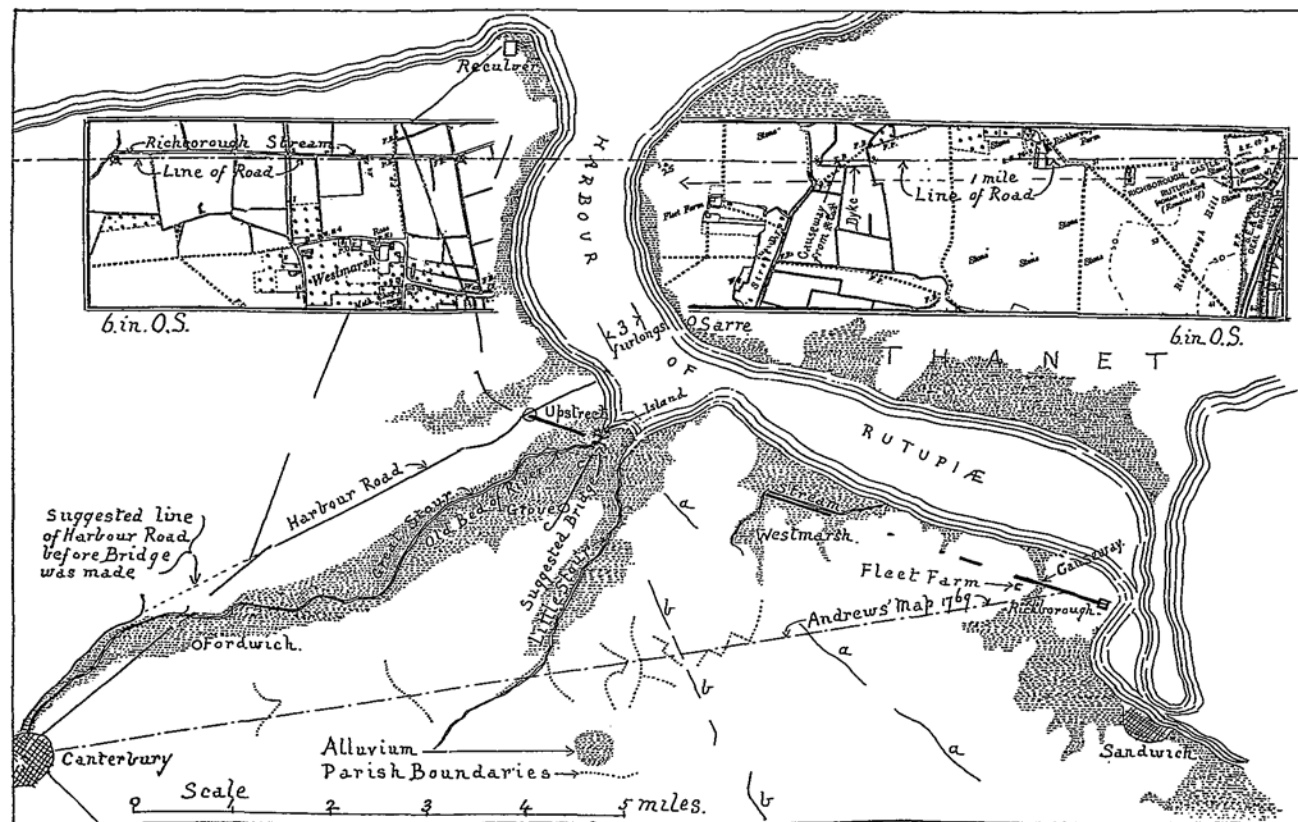


Fig. 6. Roman road from Richborough to Canterbury (Source: Knox, 1942).

the consequent production of the long straight mound, which cannot therefore be of Roman construction.

Regarding the 'Margary line' to Ash, Ogilvie noted that support would be added by finding a causeway at Cooper Street, where the route crosses a marsh similar to but narrower than the Fleet Channel. Although no structure was found, the deep dyke crossing the neck of the marsh yielded several pieces of Roman tile and flint similar to those from the Fleet Crossing.

#### STOURMOUTH – ADISHAM WATER MAIN

More recent work and discoveries in the Thanet area seem rather to have complicated than eased the problem. Ogilvie in his 1977 paper<sup>3</sup> reported on the watching brief on the excavation of a Stourmouth – Adisham Water Main Trench. (A map of the line of the Trench is given at Fig. 7). While the work yielded evidence of three new sites – Neolithic, Bronze Age and Medieval – the original objective was to look for traces of the Roman road, and although the trench was examined for all but about 200 ft. of its length, no trace of the road was found. Ogilvie noted that although the O.S. maps mark the A275 as a Roman road, the absence of deep road metalling, and the presence of medieval pottery below the road make this unlikely. Indeed, it must be that since along the length of the water main no trace of a Roman road was found, the validity of both the Margary route via Wingham, Shatterling and Ash and the 'Andrews Line' must be in some doubt.

Ogilvie also noted that the area round Preston Village must have been an important centre, continuously inhabited for a considerable period, and he concluded that 'this populous centre must have significance when considering the layout of Rutupiae and the Roman routes from Richborough to Canterbury'. In this connection, it should be noted that the water main trench stops about a mile north-east of Preston, most probably just short of the proposed 'Knox line'. The trenching, therefore, and lack of evidence from it of a road, does not affect the 'Knox line'.

#### FURTHER EVIDENCE FOR THE 'ANDREWS LINE'

In 1965, officers of the Ordnance Survey, working from Maidstone, reported on a previously recognised stretch of agger of the road in Pine Wood.<sup>12</sup> This seemed to be a continuation of the straight line of the

<sup>12</sup> Archaeological Notes from Maidstone Museum, *Arch. Cant.*, lxxx (1965), 279–80.

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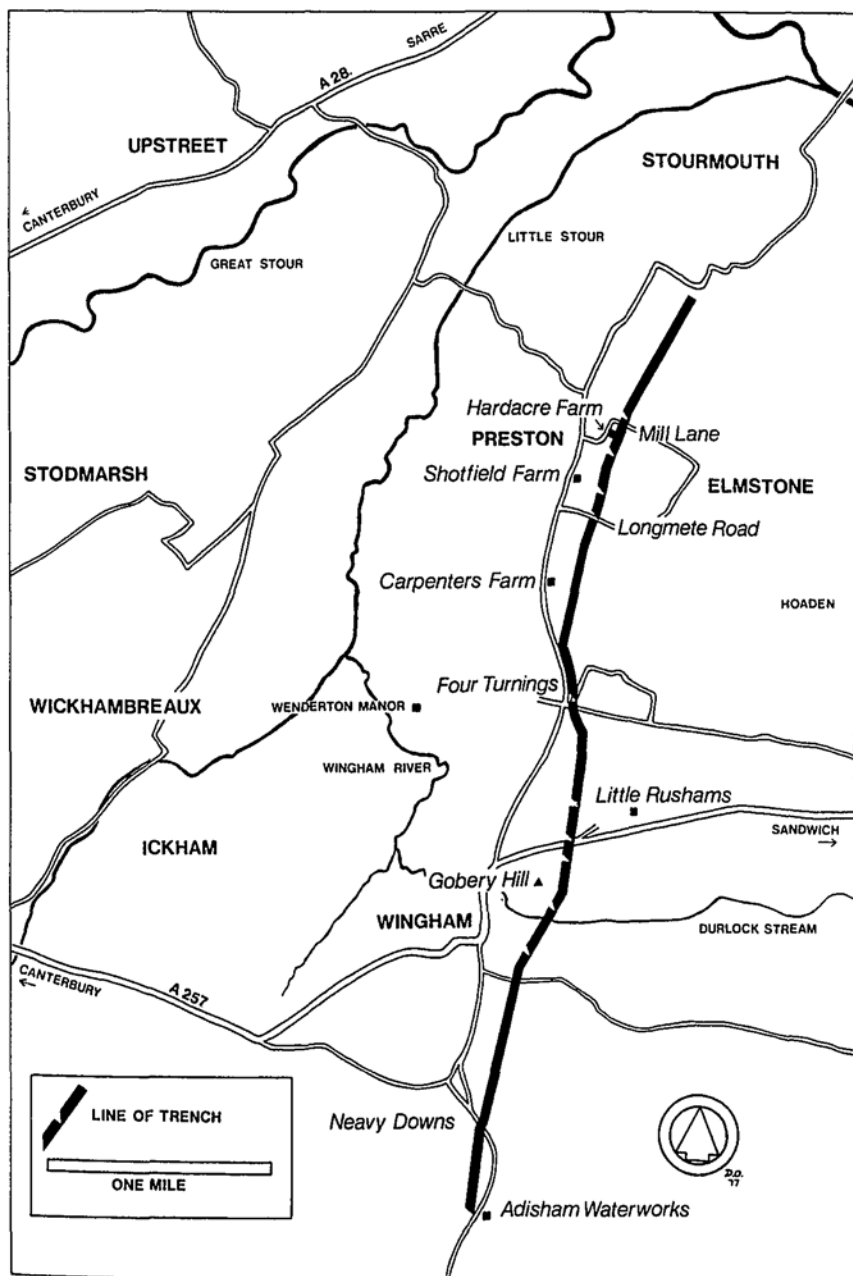


Fig. 7. Stourmouth-Adisham water main trench (Source: Ogilvie, 1977).

road from Canterbury, where it reaches the outskirts of Littlebourne. At this point the modern road takes a wide swerve to avoid Pine Wood (N.G.R. TR 196578). The O.S. workers found that the stretch of agger 'incorporated a change of alignment which suggested that the road ran along the ridge towards Wickhambreaux, to cross the Little Stour in the vicinity of Deerson Farm, and thence direct to the Wantsum crossing immediately west to Richborough. A good route, but no confirmatory evidence was found.'

Work (so far unpublished, but in the possession of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust) in the 1960s and 1970s, centred on Ickham Gravel Quarries (N.G.R. TR 233590) has yielded evidence of Romano-British industrial sites, including water mills, and timber lined wells. Also found in the area was evidence of road alignments, including metalling and side ditches built on pegged brushwood. It would seem, however, that the road structures found may not have been substantial enough to indicate a major route. Evidence was also found of flints, perhaps of a ford or bridge, across the Wingham River, period A.D. 100–400, and of a zig-zag road up the incline on the Great Wenderton side of the Wingham River. The location of these features are more or less in alignment with the direction change of the agger reported in Pine Wood, and towards the causeway from Richborough Island; the 'Andrews line'.

#### C.A.T. WORK 1992

In 1992, work by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust at Each End near Ash revealed a stretch of Roman road with associated settlement of quite early date (N.G.R. TR 585303). The alignment was roughly NE, heading towards Richborough. The location of the site is, however, too far east along the Ash-Sandwich road for the line of the excavated road to be fitted into Margary's or Winbolt's postulated route from Ash to Richborough. The metalling may have been too light for a major road, and in any event, the line of the road would most probably have met tidal marsh land before reaching Richborough. The discovery, therefore, may not be relevant to the central question of the main Roman route out of Richborough to Canterbury.

#### FIELD WALKING 1994

On 5 January, and on 30 April, 1994, attempts were made to verify on the ground evidence of the road as noted by previous authors. The field walking party consisted of Mr J. Bradshaw (who had been largely

responsible for the Roman sites at Ickham Gravel Quarries); Mr and Mrs. A. Mauduit, local residents at Ickham; and the author of this present note.

On the 5 January reported sites at Littlebourne and Ickham were walked over, and on the 30 April, the reported routes from Ash to Richborough Fort were traversed.

Attempts to find the agger in the Pine Wood, Littlebourne (N.G.R. TR 196578), as reported,<sup>13</sup> failed. It would seem that parts of the wood have been grubbed out and put to the plough since the original observations were made in 1965, and this may account for the present lack of evidence.

On the other hand, a stretch of track was clearly to be seen in a field north of Seaton Mill, between the Wickhambreaux road and the Little Stour (N.G.R. TR 225588-227589). Further east, (N.G.R. TR 235593) evidence for a crossing of the Wingham River was still visible including some old timbers driven in the banks on both sides, which may provide evidence for a bridge. Across the Wingham River, on the Great Wenderton side, evidence of the track zig-zagging up the incline could still be seen. That there was Roman activity in this area, roughly on the 'Andrews line' is clear, but there may have been a local road only associated with industrial use in the area.

On 30 April, 1994, an attempt to trace Margary's suggested route from the Ash Road to Richborough via Cooper Street and Fleet Farm was made. No definite identification was made of features mentioned by Margary, though it has to be noted that parts of the area have been much changed by the new Sandwich by-pass road. It was, however, possible to identify the location of the line of the Fleet Causeway as given by Ogilvie.

In summary, evidence for Roman activity on the Andrews line in the Ickham area was confirmed, but roads may have been local only, associated with industrial activity in the area. The forays threw no new light on the Margary line, apart from locating the line of the Fleet Causeway as evidenced by Ogilvie.

## DISCUSSION

During its four centuries of Roman occupation the Rutupiae site was put to various uses, and it cannot be excluded that at different times in its history different routes may have been found suitable and appropriate.

<sup>13</sup> cf. n.8.

In the first century or so of Roman occupation, the Wantsum channel, guarded at the ends by Reculver and Richborough forts, was the route into Britain from the Continent, and Richborough itself was the chief port of entry. Among the remains of the Roman encampment of first and second centuries A.D., is a massive concrete platform, some 100 x 80 ft. in dimension, on which is based a large cruciform foundation.<sup>14</sup> Various theories have been advanced to account for these massive foundations; a Pharos or watch-tower of unusual height, or a triumphal arch of some description. An imaginative suggestion by Knox<sup>15</sup> fits the plans for a praetorium at Lambèse (Algeria) onto the platform at Richborough, with the cruciform structure, raised a few feet above the platform, fitting neatly inside the postulated praetorium. The whole would have provided a triumphal ceremonial entry into the province of Britain, with the cruciform space providing a platform on which dignitaries could stand to receive visitors in a ceremonial fashion.

Whatever were the structures on the concrete and cruciform bases, it can hardly be doubted that the existence of these massive bases implies buildings of importance matching the role of Rutupiae as chief port of entry in the Province. We must query whether, given such an impressive entrance, it is likely that the road from the island would take such a devious and anticlimatic line as to Each End and Ash as proposed by Winbolt, Margary and others. Is it not likely that a straight, impressive route would be preferred, even though that would present problems (though not perhaps insuperable ones) to Roman engineers in negotiating the marshy areas through which it would have to pass?

In the late third century, after a period of decay and obvious decline in importance, Richborough entered a period of use as a fort of the Saxon Shore, part of the defence of the civil zone of the province against raiders from the sea. In this period, the emphasis would be more on enabling the Saxon Shore fort to draw on the resources of and provide protection for the local populace rather than acting as a triumphal port of entry. The need for a correspondingly impressive route out of the island may therefore have diminished, and the original straight road (if it had existed) may indeed have fallen into disrepair or have been overwhelmed in part by tidal waters. An easier but less direct route might then be preferred. In the period of decay and abandonment in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, upkeep of difficult routes could scarcely be expected.

<sup>14</sup> See Dowker, *op. cit.*, and G. Dowker, 'On the Cross and Platform at Richborough', *Arch. Cant.*, xxiv (1900), 201.

<sup>15</sup> C. Knox, 'Richborough - Lambèse', *Arch. Cant.*, xlv (1932), 165.

What all this may imply is that different routes at different times may have been constructed, according to the use and importance of the site, and that, at times, more than one route may have existed. On these grounds, none of the three main routes proposed – the Andrews line, the Knox line and the Margary line – can be ruled out as improbable.

However, evidence for Knox's route to Upstreet is slight and disputed, and would have presented difficult engineering problems. For Andrews' direct route equally, engineering problems would have been difficult. This route, skirting Littlebourne and going through Ickham and Wickhambreaux, has some evidence of aggers and Roman sites along the line, but lacks support of other features, such as parish boundaries, footpaths, etc. However, it may be that this route, if it existed, had effectively disappeared before parish boundaries began to be defined in Saxon times. Margary's route, following in the main existing routes to Ash and Each End, and thereafter relying on evidence of aggers and embankments is perhaps better attested. Note must be taken, however, of the monitoring of the water main trench from Adisham to Preston, which found no evidence of a Roman road crossing the line of the trench, and therefore casts doubt on both the Margary and the Andrews line, but no evidence against the Knox line.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In sum, while Margary's proposed route remains the most plausible, it does not seem possible to dismiss the Andrews direct line entirely. This may have been the first route used when Rutupiae was the first port of triumphal entry to the province, subsequently falling into disuse and disrepair when the importance of Rutupiae declined before rising again as a Saxon Shore fort. Support for either of these routes is diminished by the negative findings from the Adisham — Preston water main. The Knox line is not affected by the water main evidence, but it remains comparatively theoretical and speculative.

The problem is unsolved and is likely to remain so, in default of hard and significant evidence.



