

OLD TRACK FROM WALBURY CAMP TO TIDBURY RING.

BY CHRISTOPHER BURNE.

I was first led to investigate this Way by wondering as to the meaning of a footpath, on the high ground, to the west of St. Mary Bourne village. It seemed to lead from nowhere to nowhere, but on studying the one-inch Ordnance map it looked as if it might possibly form a link in an old trackway from Walbury Camp to Tidbury Ring, and with the aid of Dr. Williams-Freeman and of my nephew, Mr. Arthur Burne, who is an authority on the old roads of North Staffordshire, I think I have ascertained that it does so.

Leaving Walbury Camp by the eastern exit one finds a grass road running east along the ridge, which presently joins a roughly metalled road running due south along the ridge to Faccombe village. It continues due south from the village as far as Kimmer farm along the existing metalled road, which at this point bends to the right down-hill to join the Netherton and Hurstbourne Tarrant road. But if we keep straight forward through a gateway and along a break in the cultivation of a large arable field, we shall find ourselves opposite the end of a ride in Doiley Wood. This ride bends a good deal, but it emerges from the south of the Wood exactly on the top of the ridge. From this point as far as the Hurstbourne Tarrant and Newbury road there are no signs of the road, nor would one expect to find them as this tract was formerly woodland which was grubbed within living memory.

On the other side of the Newbury road there used also to be woodland, but an old man who helped to grub it told me that there used to be two rides which crossed each other at right

angles at the top of the hill at Doiley Barn, marked 500 feet on Ordnance map. One of these rides came from the direction of the Newbury road, and had its southern end at an old gate-way at a spot where one would naturally have expected the trackway to emerge so as to join up with the existing road. From this point until within one field of Tidbury Ring the Way is clear. It is a metalled road from the old gate-way last mentioned till the Stoke and Binley road is crossed, then a narrow and grassy lane curves down to Gangbridge where the Bourne is crossed. It follows the main road down the valley towards St. Mary Bourne village for 400 yards and then starts up the other (western) side of the Bourne valley along a very old lane, wide and deeply sunken in places, to the Five Lanes end above St. Mary Bourne village. The fifth lane, a mere cart road, ends in 200 yards, and my footpath begins and continues in an almost straight line across open fields until the L. & S.W. R. main line is crossed by a farm bridge opposite the lane to Apsley.

Our route continues along the Apsley lane till Hurstbourne Common is reached. Here it crosses the principal road at right angles and is continued as a rather sunken and very rough cart road until the Whitchurch and Andover road is crossed at the top of Hurstbourne Hill. Our cart road soon after crossing the high road turns to the right, but we continue straight forward down a footpath by the side of a hedge, which soon ceases, and a narrow green footpath between two arable fields forms the boundary between the parishes of Hurstbourne, Priors and Longparish. This footpath strikes the road from Hurstbourne to Longparish just north of the first cottage in the latter, crosses the road and enters the water meadows by a path which at some time or other has been gravelled. There is a footbridge by which to cross the Test, and immediately above it is a fordable passage. In old days the water was doubtless lower, as it is now held up by the Mill which is only two or three hundred yards below.

When once across the river, the footpath joins a road which has crossed the river by a bridge just below the Mill. The road then goes by Larkwhistle Farm and under the Didcot, Newbury

and Southampton Railway, and points direct to Tidbury Ring until the cross-road from Fargo to Lodge Farms is reached. Here all traces of our track vanish as far as I have been able to see, but we are now within half-a-mile of the Ring. There is a footpath which forms a continuation of our route but it bears to the right and leads to Tidbury Farm. The lane from Larkwhistle Farm is evidently a very old one and is bordered by yews.

It may be objected that pre-historic man would not cross water twice when he could have kept to the east of the Bourne valley and crossed the Test by Hurstbourne Park. To this the answer probably is that there was no convenient crossing by the Park, while there was one at Larkwhistle. The Bourne is dry at Gangbridge for a good many months in the year now, and it may have been so then.

The land on the west of the Valley forms more level going than that on the east. Moreover a road through Doles Wood, joining Fosbury and Tidbury may have existed prior to the Walbury—Tidbury track, and the latter would naturally branch off from the former somewhere about the Five Lanes above St. Mary Bourne.
