The Chichester - Silchester Roman Road

by A. Clarke

INTRODUCTION

THIS road was first discovered in 1949 in the course of routine examination of air-photographs at the Archaeology Division of the Ordnance Survey. The air-photo evidence, supplemented by fieldwork, enabled it to be traced from Milland to Chichester—a distance of 14 miles.[1] The general direction suggested that its northern objective could be either Silchester, or the Alice Holt/Farnham area, or both, but it was lost at the Milland escarpment, near the Hampshire border.

In 1956, the remainder of the route was identified by the Ordnance Survey,[2] and it proved to be a road connecting the cantonal capitals of Chichester (Noviomagus Regnensium) and Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum). Where best preserved it is accompanied by small side ditches with an overall width of approximately 62 feet, a distinctive characteristic of second-class Roman roads.

There are no references to this road in the Antonine Itinerary or the Peutinger Table. Very little local tradition of it survives and, so far as can be ascertained, there are no references by early antiquaries.

THE ALIGNMENTS

Now that the whole route has been discovered it is possible to describe the alignments and give reasons for their choice (Fig. 1).

Initially, an alignment was laid down direct from Chichester to Silchester and the first two miles of the road north from Chichester fall exactly upon this line.[3] The engineers were then confronted with a series of natural obstacles: the precipitous South Downs escarpment, near Harting Beacon (2 miles W. of Linch Down); the River Rother and its many tributaries; and the very difficult country in the Selborne area. These could not be avoided by minor modifications of the direct line so the following alternative alignments were adopted:

1. Lavant House—Dunner Hill (modified over Linch Down).
2. Dunner Hill—Weavers Down (a short connecting alignment joining (1) and (3)).
3. Weavers Down—Halls-in-the-Hole (modified at Woolmer Pond, Holybourne Down and the River Loddon).

1. The results were confirmed and published by Mr I. D. Margary, see *Sussex Arch. Coll.* XCI (1953), 1-12.

2. I am indebted to my colleagues, Mr V. J. Burton and Mr W. C. Woodhouse, who also took part in the investigation of the road; to Dr G. R. Rolston of Haslemere for help and suggestions, especially regarding documentary evidence; and to the Director General of the Ordnance Survey for permission to publish this account.

3. This remarkable feature occurs on other Roman roads (e.g. Stane Street). The method by which such accuracy was achieved—considering the instruments available—is not known.

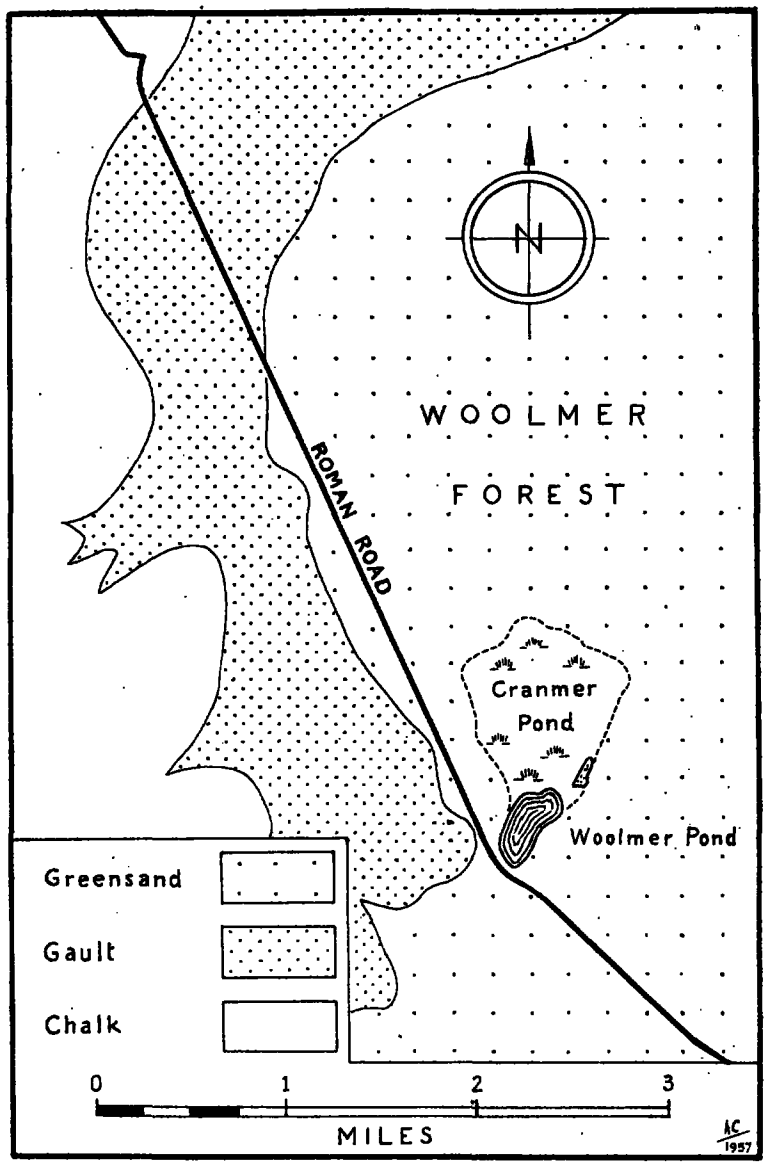

N
WOOLMER
FOREST
ROMAN ROAD
Cranmer
Pond
Woolmer Pond
Greensand
Gault
Chalk
0
1
2
3
MILES
AC
1957

Fig. 2

The Lavant House—Dunner Hill alignment was designed to negotiate the South Downs escarpment by means of a convenient spur on the northern slopes of Linch Down, and to avoid some of the many tributaries of the River Rother in the Iping area. It was not achieved, however, without a further modification on the southern slopes of the Downs which enabled the road to utilize the convenient route provided by Heathbarn Down. The ends of this alignment are not intervisible but Linch Down (818′ O.D.) was no doubt used as a subsidiary sighting-point, and also dictated the position of the Lavant House alignment angle.

The Dunner Hill—Weavers Down alignment traversed probably the most difficult terrain of the whole route: Dunner Hill and Iping Marsh; the Milland escarpment; and the steep climb to the top of Weavers Down. It was clearly a short connecting alignment broken down into two legs of which the southern was the more important. This leg was designed to cross Iping Marsh by the best route and at the same time to arrive at a convenient point to negotiate the Milland escarpment. This was west of Milland Place where a re-entrant provided a suitable point for a terrace-way or 'zig-zag'. At the top of the escarpment the northern leg bears slightly west and makes straight for the Weavers Down angle. At first this angle does not seem to be in the best position available: it is well below the highest point of Weavers Down and is not visible from Dunner Hill. The choice is explained by the first leg of the Woolmer Pond modification of the main (Weavers Down—Halls-in-the-Hole) alignment which is a direct continuation of the Weavers Down—Dunner Hill line (Fig. 1). The Weavers Down alignment angle was sited with this consideration in mind.

The main alignment was apparently sighted from Weavers Down to Halls-in-the-Hole with Holybourne Down (740 feet O.D.) and East Worldham Hill providing convenient intermediary sighting-points. This line was then considerably modified, but despite this the alignment was rigidly followed for nearly half of its total length of 21½ miles. The first modification occurred immediately and was designed to avoid, as far as possible, the marshy ground in the Woolmer Pond area. The alignment was regained at the top of East Worldham Hill and then rigidly followed for a distance of about 9 miles, with the exception of a minor deviation at Holybourne Down. At Nunnery Hill, Mapledurwell, and on the high ground east of Razor's Farm, Basing, further slight modifications were made in order to avoid double crossings of the River Loddon and its tributaries at Basing and Beaurepaire Mill respectively. The alignment finally joined the Silchester—Winchester road at Halls-in-the-Hole, one mile south of Silchester, and thereby saved two crossings of the Silchester Brook.

THE ROUTE

In order to provide a continuous record of the route it is proposed to describe the road from the last recognised point in Sussex—the foot of the Milland escarpment.

(Strip-map A–B)[4]: Here the present evidence strongly suggests that the road climbed the escarpment by means of a typical 'zig-zag' making use of a slight re-entrant west of Milland Place. Part of this 'zig-zag' is probably represented by the deeply sunken modern road, but of the remainder there is no trace.[5] At the top of the hill the road swings north-west and makes straight for the Weavers Down alignment angle. The first evidence appears on Chapel Common, immediately north of the Portsmouth Road (A.3), in the form of a deep hollow-way followed by a large causeway across a dry stream-bed. (Strip-map B–C): Apart from a short stretch of *agger* and terrace-way on the northern edge, all traces of the road

4. For key to strip-maps see appendix.

5. Alternative suggestions to this route are made by Dr G. R. Rolston, see *Proc.* Hants F.C. XIX, Pt. I (1955), 15-17.

across the Common have been destroyed by military activity during the last war. A section across the *agger* here revealed 2–3 ins. of gravel metalling, 18 feet wide, upon a substantial cambered foundation layer. Between Chapel Common and Weavers Down military operations have again done considerable damage, the only evidence being an embayed pond north of the railway and a hollow-way on the edge of Hilly Fields Copse. However, the road is clearly visible on air-photographs, the grass in the ditches contrasting strongly with the surrounding heather (Plate I). (Strip-map C–D): It next appears on the steep southern slope of Weavers Down as an eroded terrace-way passing about 25 yards W. of a prominent clump of firs on the top of the Down. North-west of the firs the *agger* is traceable intermittently to the alignment angle where the road turns 12° North. An enclosure bank is on line as far as the military railway cutting and the *agger*, extensively mutilated, is sandwiched between the bank and a track. Along this stretch are numerous traffic-ruts, no doubt the remains of the old 'Highway from Woolmer to Midhurst' which followed the line of the Roman road here.[6] North of the military railway all traces were destroyed during the construction of Longmoor Camp, but the main road through the Camp is exactly upon the line.

(Strip-map D–E): The Roman engineers were then confronted with the marshy ground of Woolmer and Cranmer Ponds, which were probably of considerable extent in Roman times and must have presented a serious obstacle. All trace of the road has been destroyed by military activity, but it seems probable that a minor deviation was made round the southern end of Woolmer Pond.[7] The line taken in this divergence is probably indicated by a track (shown on O.S. 6-inch 1910 and the Survey of Alice Holt and Woolmer Forest, 1787) which skirts the base of Woolmer Pond. Having rounded the Pond, the road swings slightly north to connect with the main alignment at East Worldham Hill. The line was remarkably well chosen as a glance at the map will show (Fig. 2). It made use of the best ground available, skirting the marshy ground along the edge of Cranmer Pond, and yet avoided the heavy clay soil which runs parallel to the line on the west for about three miles. The next evidence of the road is to be seen west of the Farnham—Liss road (A.325), near Regency House. Here, across a low, sandy ridge are a number of deep hollow-ways,[8] further relics of the old 'Highway'.

(Strip-map E–F): In the grounds of Blackmoor House traces are slight consisting of a hollow-way on the eastern side of a plantation,[9] and an old bank running parallel to the line farther north. Whilst digging the foundations of the wall surrounding the kitchen garden, a late 2nd century cremation burial was found about 20 yards east of the line of the road providing useful evidence in an otherwise poorly authenticated sector.[10] (Strip-map F–G): Between Blackmoor and the northern edge of Oakhanger Ponds no indications of the road were found. It will be noted that the line is shown crossing Oakhanger Ponds: documentary evidence would appear to indicate that these ponds are post-Roman, constructed by the

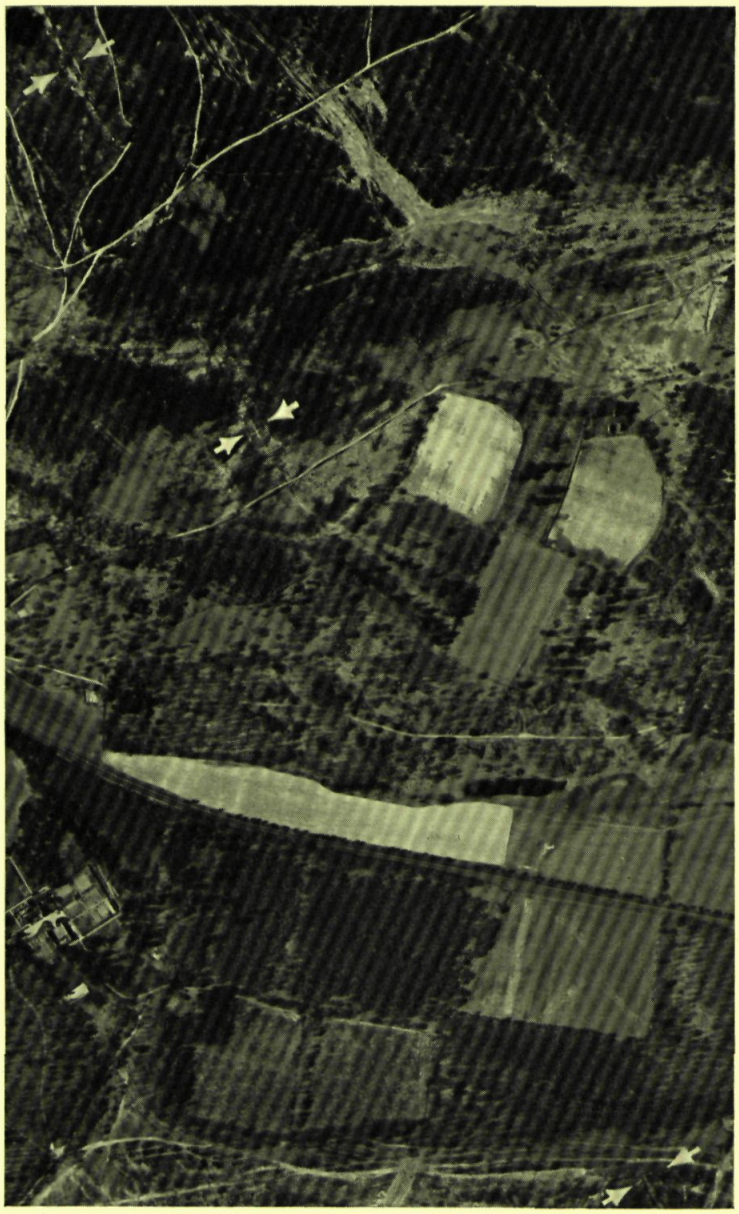
6. J. Wybord, Survey of Alice Holt and Woolmer Forest, 1787 (B.M.). (For a reproduction of this map, see Rolston, *op. cit.*, plate V.)

7. During the 18th and 19th centuries so many Roman coins were recovered from the south and west sides of Woolmer Pond in dry seasons that they were passed as local currency. For a description of these coins, which were probably deposited in hoards, see *V.C.H., Hants*, I (1900), 339-344.

8. These hollow-ways were noted by the first Lord Selborne as 'ancient parallel trenches . . . hardly . . . ancient tracks or ways. Possibly intended for military defence'. See Gilbert White, *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*, 1875, 567 (Appendix).

9. Tracks are shown running parallel to the line here on O.S. 6in. 1st Edn.

10. *V.C.H., Hants*, I (1900), 340-1; site pointed out by Lord Selborne.



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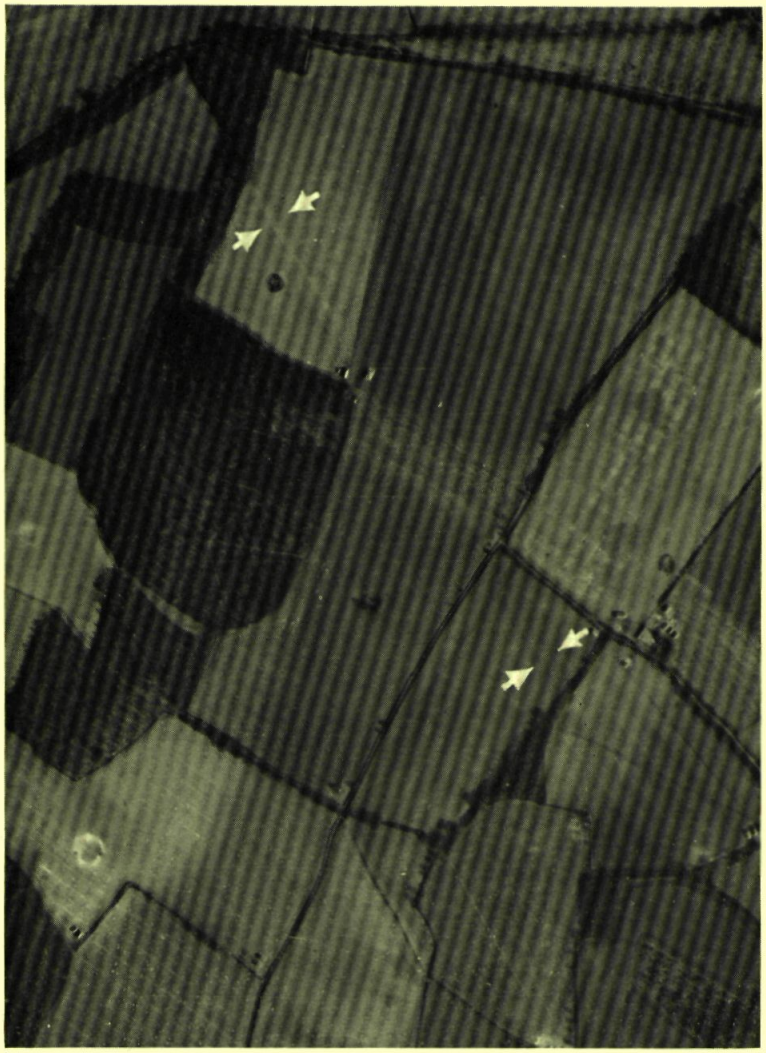
Air-photograph (R.A.F.: CPE/UK/2034/4296) of the road between Chapel Common and Weavers Down. Note the parallel ditches, now grass-grown, contrasting strongly with the surrounding heather

PLATE II



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Air-photograph (R.A.F.: CPE/UK/1973/3195) of the road between Upton Grey and the Harroway, showing the agger and side ditches

monks of Selborne Priory as fish-ponds *c.* 1324.[11] (Strip-map G–H): At Oakhanger, the modern road is on line as far as the bridge over the Oakhanger Stream, and it is along this stretch that a documentary reference to the road occurs.[12] That there was an important highway at this point is confirmed by the existence of a bridge here ' from very early times '.[13] North of the bridge to Binswood the sole evidence is a faint scatter of flint metalling in arable fields.

(Strip-map H–I): In Binswood the *agger* is especially well preserved in a clearing N.E. of Marshgreen Farm, and in a drainage ditch on the northern edge of the wood a section of the road is visible. A similar section is exposed 380 yards to the north, and in both instances the road is constructed of solid flint metalling, average width 12 ft. and 2–3 ins. thick, on a compact foundation layer. Between these sections a hedgerow, running parallel to and slighly west of the line, has been grubbed up revealing a heavy scatter of flint metalling. This portion of the road may be safely identified as the ' Stan Ridge ', a bound-mark of the Alice Holt and Woolmer Forest Perambulations which occurs between King John's Hill and Binswood.[14] East of King John's Hill a slight raised strip is to be seen across arable fields, after which there are no traces until Pookles Lane at the foot of the Worldham escarpment. (Strip-map I–J): Pookles Lane is still known as the ' old Roman road ', one of the few instances where local tradition of the road still survives; it is an eroded terrace-way climbing the escarpment by means of a ' zig-zag '. The main alignment is rejoined at this point which, it will be noted, is at the junction of the Gault and Chalk (Fig. 2). (Strip-map J–K): Beyond East Worldham Hill the course is marked by hedgerows and a scatter of flint metalling as far as the River Wey at Neatham. The Wey was probably crossed by a small bridge, no trace of which survives, but a faint terrace-way to the south and a hedgerow on the northern river-bank may indicate the course.

(Strip-maps K–M): From here the long climb to the top of the North Hampshire Downs was achieved by means of a fine terrace-way swinging east of the alignment and bending round the side of a re-entrant on the southern slopes of Holybourne Down (740 ft. O.D.). Holybourne Down is the highest point in the area and no doubt provided a convenient intermediary sighting-point from which Silchester, East Worldham Hill and Linch Down are all visible. The alignment is regained as soon as possible, and a hedgerow and parish boundary follow the line from the crest of the ridge to the modern road from Golden Pot to Sutton Common. From Holybourne Down to Upton Grey evidence for the road is slight.

(Strip-maps M–O): North of Swaineshill Farm it is clearly visible on air-photographs.[15] and traces of the *agger* are to be seen between Blounce Cottage and Dean Copse. (Strip-map P–Q): Beyond Upton Grey the *agger* is traceable intermittently across arable fields, and it is again clear on air-photographs where the side-ditches are well marked (Plate II). (Strip-maps Q–S): It then crosses the main route of the Harroway, represented hereabouts by an old green lane, after which there is little trace as far as Mapledurwell. Here, the main alignment, followed rigidly from East Worldham Hill, was modified slightly on the high ground

11. *Charters of Selborne Priory*: Hants Record Society, I (1891), 7-8, 15.

12. Gilbert White (*The Natural History of Selborne*, 1789, 416) quotes a passage from Tanner (*Notitia Monastica*, 1781, Naismith: Hants XXIX, Seleburne), ' pro secta molendini de Strete ', and goes on to say: ' but the purport of *Strete*, we must confess, we do not understand. *Strete*, in old English, signifies a road or highway, as *Watling Street* . . . therefore the prior might have had some mill on the high road '. The Priory possessed a mill at Oakhanger, and it is reasonable to assume that it was probably sited near the point where the road crossed the Oakhanger Stream.

13. Gilbert White, *ibid.*, 416.

14. Major V. Ferguson, *East Worldham* (*c.* 1955), 15-18.

15. R.A.F. A.P. Nos.: 106G/UK/1710/1017-18.

of Nunnery Hill to avoid double crossings of the River Loddon and its tributaries near Basingstoke. Little now remains of the road between Mapledurwell and the Loddon, mainly due to agricultural activities and the construction of the Basingstoke Canal, but the course is securely established by hedgerow alignments.

(Strip-map S-T): At Basing, Oliver's Battery, a motte and bailey[16] is strategically placed at the river crossing and a park pale, probably connected with it, overlies the road N.E. of Basing Lodge Farm. At the River Loddon, Lower Mill (now disused), falls exactly upon the line.[17] Immediately north of the Basingstoke—Reading road (A.33) the road appears as a faint raised strip across an arable field,[18] and farther on, Four Lanes Farm, a moated house, stands upon the line. On the high ground east of Razor's Farm, Basing, the road turns 1° North to avoid a double crossing of the Bow Brook at Beaurepaire Mill. (Strip-map U-V): A deep hollow-way in a spinney east of Razor's Farm then marks the course, followed by a mutilated stretch of *agger* south of Cufaude. Through Cufaude the modern road meanders on and off the line which passes close by a homestead moat, the site of the manor-house of the Cufaud family. (Strip-map V-W): A hedgerow and parish boundary then mark the line north of Cufaude, after which evidence becomes increasingly difficult to find. (Strip-map W-X): Apart from an embayed pond at Bramley, and possibly another example 470 yards to the north, no trace could be found to Halls-in-the-Hole, the northern terminal of the road and its junction with the Silchester—Winchester road.

However, there would seem no doubt that the road commenced at Halls-in-the-Hole. The choice of this point is governed by two important factors, (i) two tributaries of the Silchester Brook are avoided by the adoption of the Winchester road for the first mile south of Silchester, and (ii) this is the first position along that road from which the Holybourne Down sighting-point becomes visible. In addition there is the significant siting of a Roman building—probably a wayside inn—at the junction of the two roads.[19]

Evidence of Roman occupation along the route is considerable and two sites are worthy of particular mention. At Neatham (Strip-map J-K) a large quantity of Roman material has been found on both banks of the River Wey on the line of the road: this concentration, about 14 miles from Silchester and 12 miles from Iping, suggests a likely site for the remaining posting-station.[20] The second site is at Blackmoor (Strip-map E-F) where the famous coin-hoard was discovered in 1873. It is one of the largest Romano-British coin-hoards ever recorded, comprising almost 30,000 antoniniani. Previously considered to be the military pay-chest of Allectus, buried on the eve of his battle and subsequent defeat somewhere in the area *c.* 296 A.D., it is now thought to have belonged to a local resident who concealed his savings during the period of disturbance.[21] In 1876, during the construction of Blackmoor

16. O. G. S. Crawford, *Archaeology in the Field*, 1953, 196.

17. This mill is described as Basing Mill on Isaac Taylor's Map of Hampshire, 1759, and it is probably on the site of one of the three mills mentioned at Basing in Domesday. There are numerous examples of mills on the line of Roman roads: the causeway no doubt provided a suitable foundation for the mill and a ready-made pond-bay.

18. I am indebted to Mr I. D. Margary for drawing my attention to this evidence.

19. S. E. and V. E. Winbolt, *Proc.* Hants F.C. XV, Pt. II (1943), 159, 162, 244.

20. A number of Roman sites, including an alleged building, are shown here on O.S. maps. Unfortunately the O.S. records were destroyed by enemy action during the war and the authority for these sites is not known. Further finds have been made in the area since the war, mainly during road works and drainage operations on the north bank of the river, near Cuckoo's Corner. The material includes building debris, pottery and coins of the 1st–4th centuries. Unpublished: in Alton Museum.

21. C. H. V. Sutherland, *Coinage and Currency in Roman Britain*, 1937, 68-70.

House, more Roman material was found, including (? hypocaust) tiles, much pottery and coins of the 2nd-4th centuries, and other miscellaneous items.[22]

DATE

No firm dating evidence for the construction of the road was obtained, but it is reasonably certain to have been built within a few decades of the Conquest. It was clearly contemporary with or later than the early Silchester—Winchester road which, as we have already seen, it joined near Silchester. The posting-station at Iping may provide another clue: it bears a close resemblance in plan and dimensions to other examples at Alfoldean and Hardham on the Stane Street. These posting-stations were excavated by S. E. Winbolt and Hardham, for instance, was found to have flourished between A.D. 50 and 150.[23] The singular existence of three such posting-stations so close to Chichester suggests that a parallel date for the roads is probable.

This account would be incomplete without some reference to the remarkable fact that modern roads follow the line of the Roman road for 2¾ miles only out of a total length of 39 miles. Many factors may have contributed to this, but the decline of Silchester was the most important. The geographical position of Silchester—on the site of the *oppidum* of the Atrebates—was one of political convenience: it is not to be explained on grounds of strategy or commercial expedience. At the close of the Roman period the decline appears to have been rapid, and the town was abandoned: in the absence of military needs or commercial intercourse, therefore, the road would quickly fall into disuse.

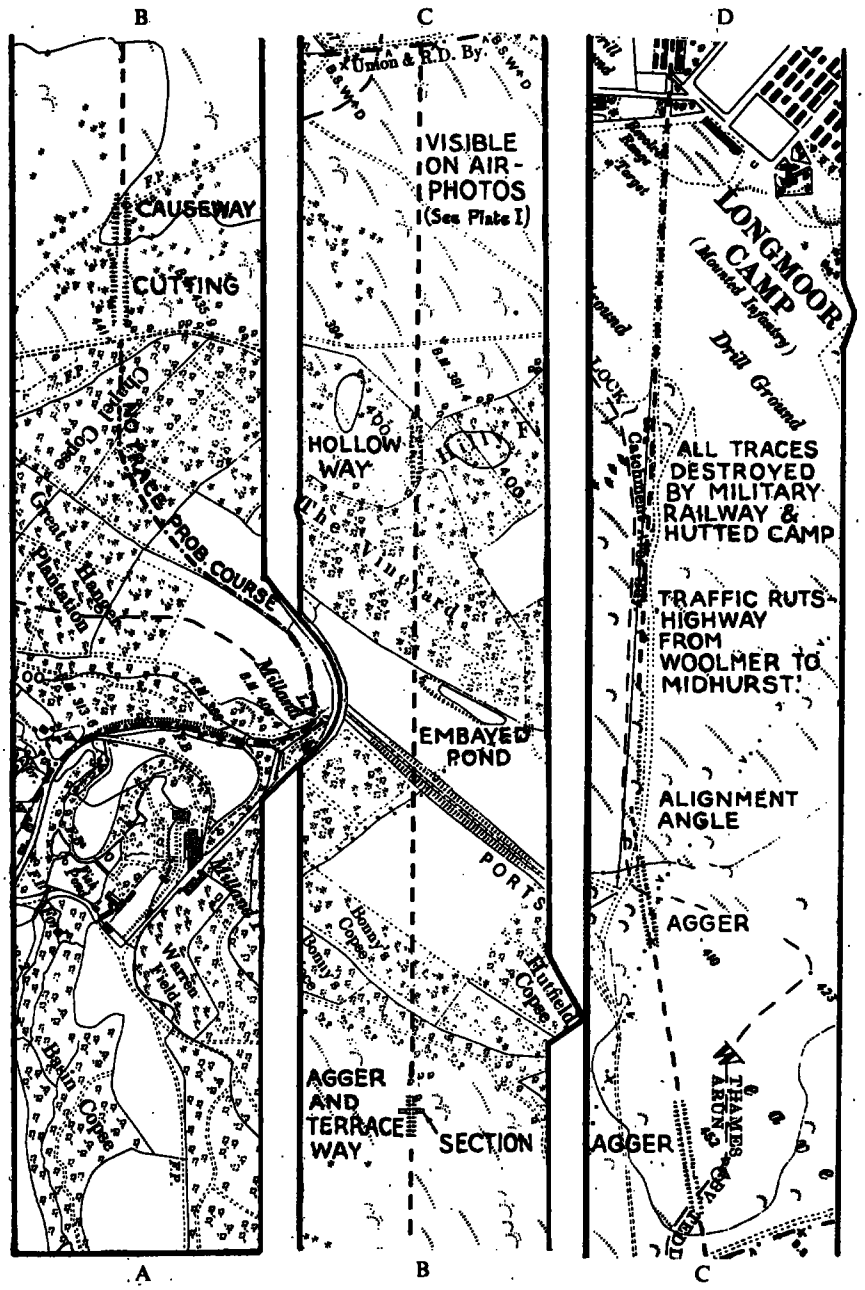
22. This material, and the coin-hoard, are at Blackmoor House, the property of Lord Selborne, to whom I am indebted for information concerning the Selborne area.

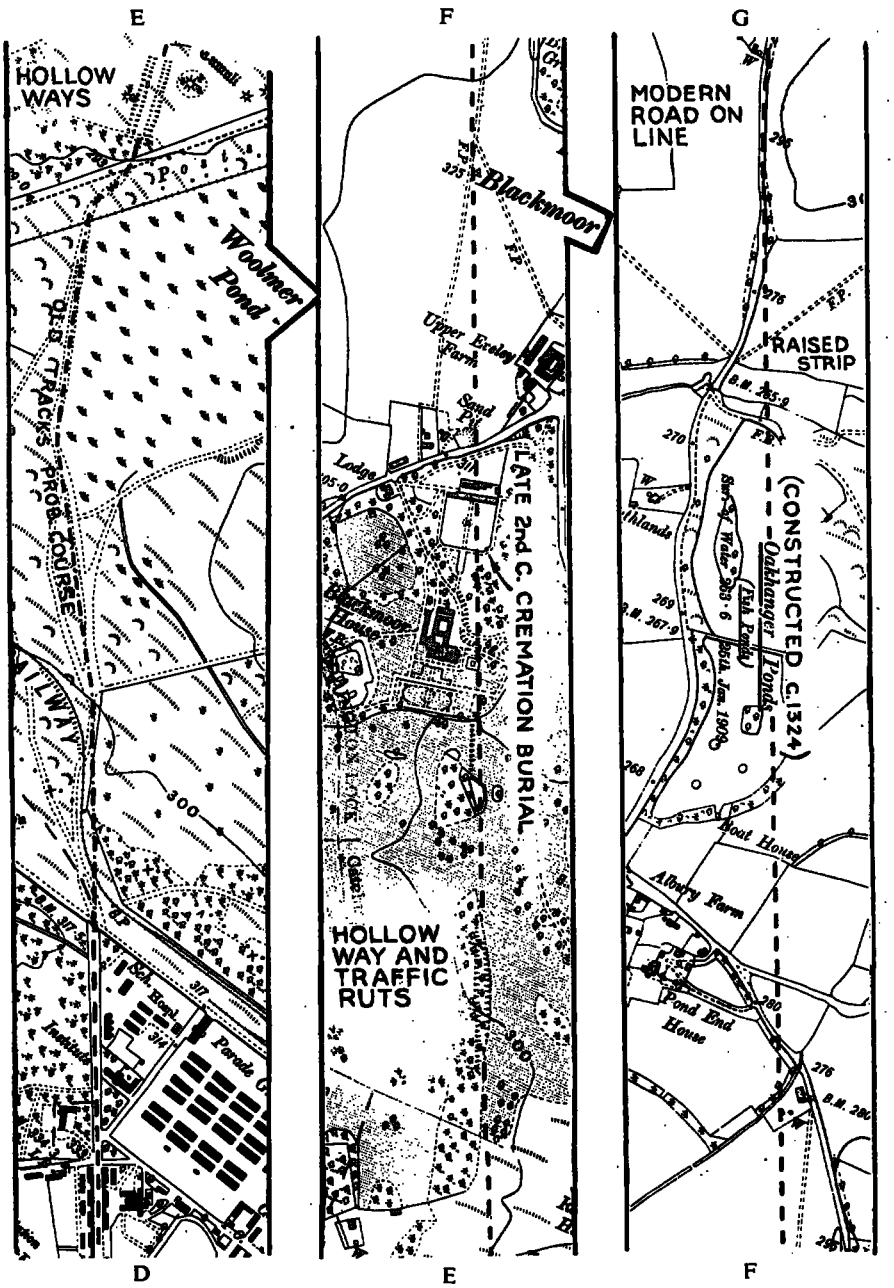
23. Alfoldean: *Sussex Arch. Coll.* LXIV (1923), 81-104; LXV (1924), 112-57. Hardham: *Ibid.*, LXVIII (1927), 89-132.

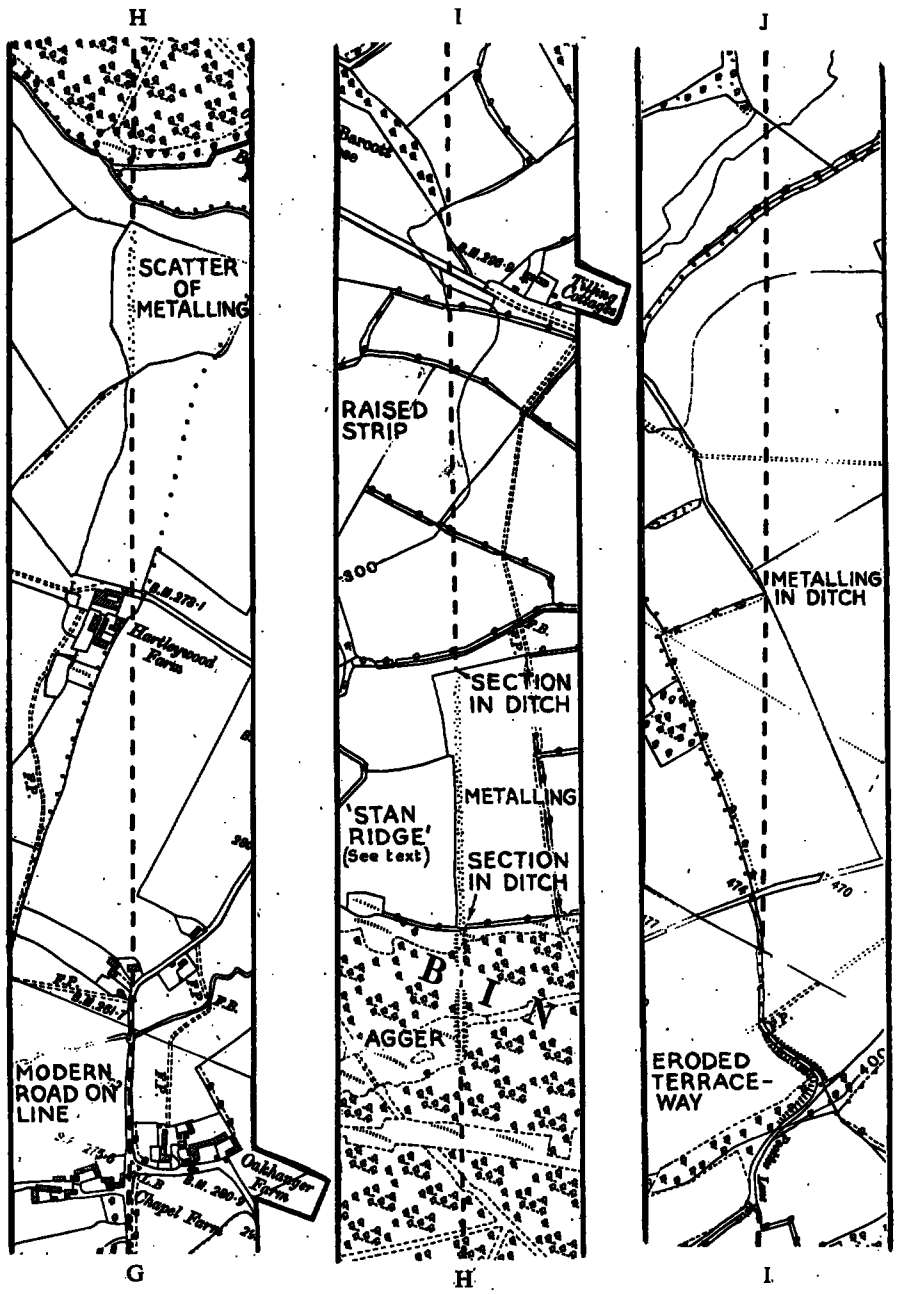
APPENDIX

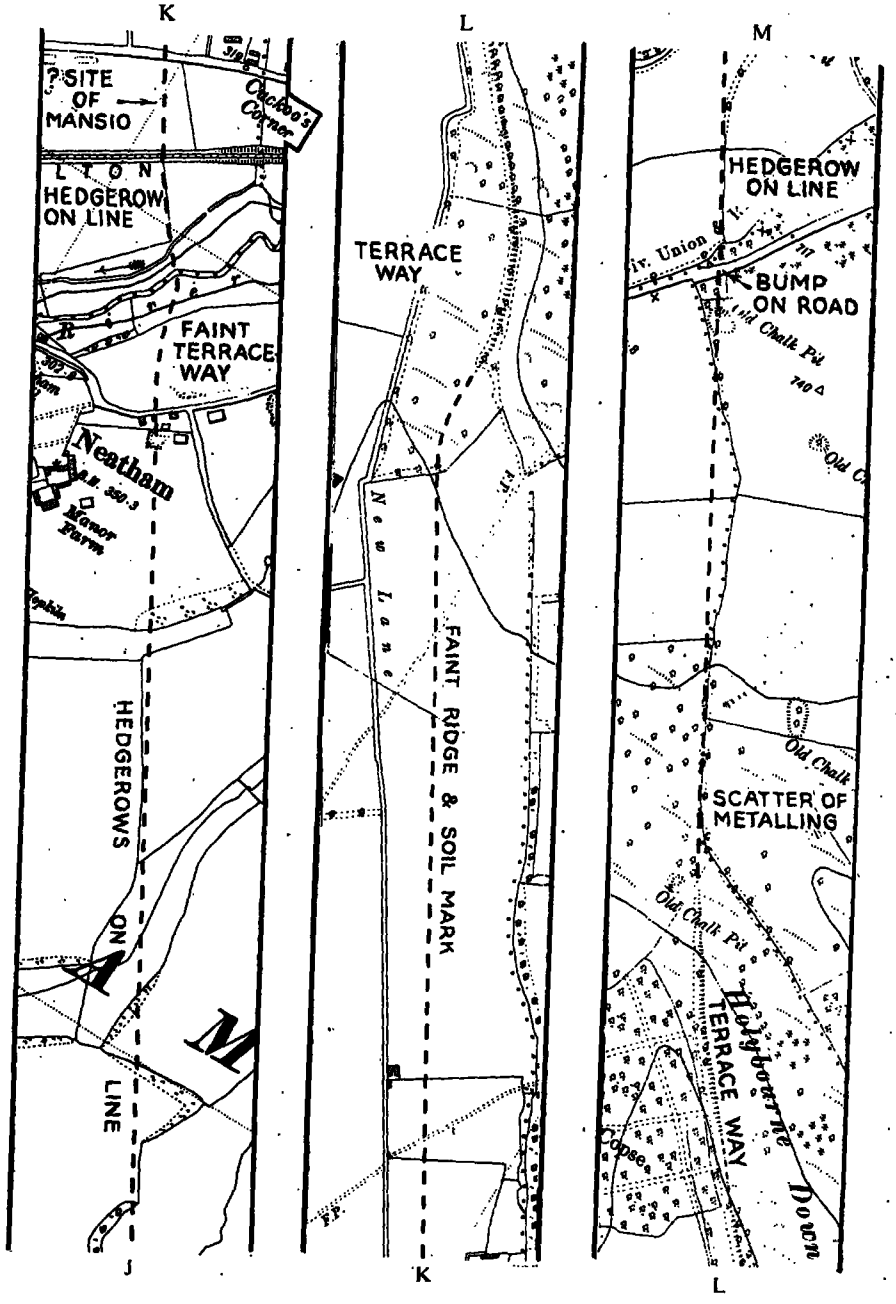
KEY TO STRIP-MAPS

Map	O.S. 6in. Sheet(s)
A – B	Sussex: 10SW
B – C	,, 10SW
C – D	Hants: 44SW, SE
D – E	,, 44SW
E – F	,, 44NW, SW
F – G	,, 44NW
G – H	,, 36SW, 44NW
H – I	,, 36SW
I – J	,, 36NW, SW; 35NE, SE
J – K	,, 35NE
K – L	,, 27SE; 35NE
L – M	,, 27SE
M – N	,, 27NE, SE
N – O	,, 27NW, NE
O – P	,, 19SW; 27NW
P – Q	,, 19SW
Q – R	,, 19NW, SW
R – S	,, 19NW
S – T	,, 11SW; 19NW
T – U	,, 10SE; 11SW
U – V	,, 10SE; 11SW
V – W	,, 10NE, SE
W – X	,, 10NE

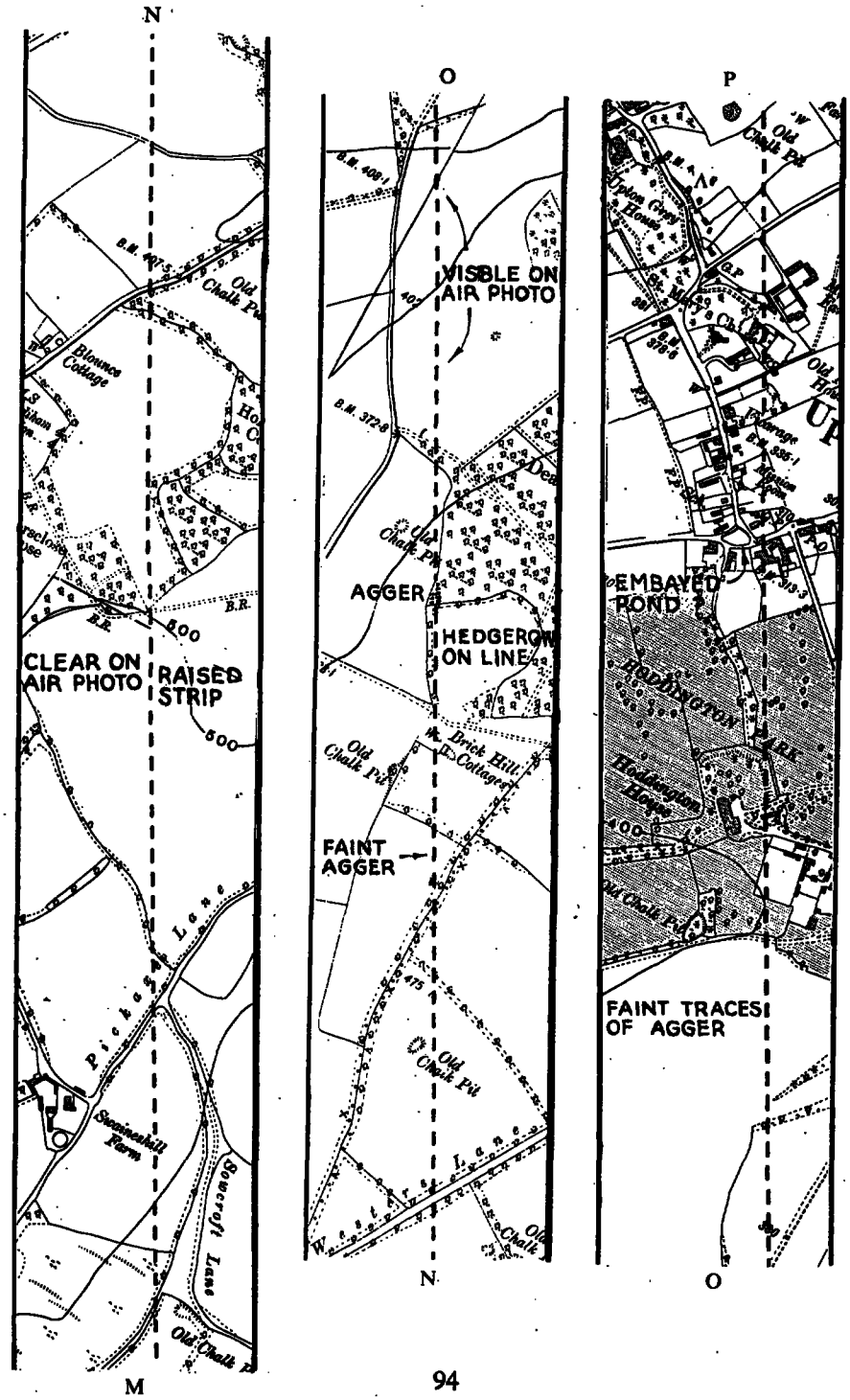

B
C
D
CAUSEWAY
CUTTING
NO TRACE
PROB. COURSE
Great Plantation
Hanger
Milland
Warren Field
Bean Copse
Union & R.D. By.
VISIBLE ON AIR-PHOTOS (See Plate I)
HOLLOW WAY
The Vineyard
EMBAYED POND
PORTS
Bonny Copse
Huffield Copse
AGGER AND TERRACE WAY
SECTION
LONGMOOR CAMP
(Mounted Infantry)
Drill Ground
ALL TRACES DESTROYED BY MILITARY RAILWAY & HUTTED CAMP
TRAFFIC RUTS-HIGHWAY FROM WOOLMER TO MIDHURST
ALIGNMENT ANGLE
AGGER
AGGER
THAMES AROUND
A
B
C

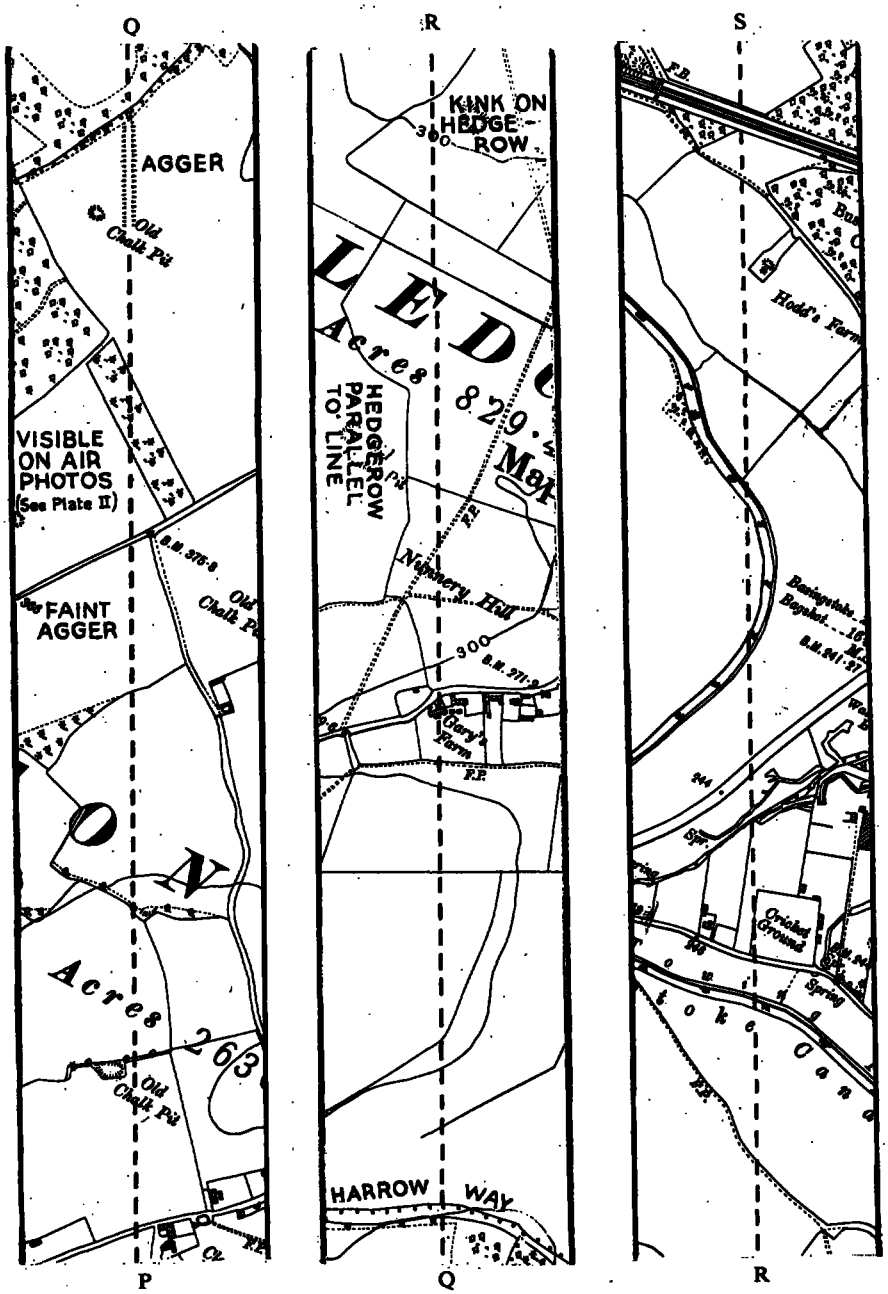

E
F
G
HOLLOW WAYS
Woolmer Pond
OLD TRACKS PROB. COURSE
Blackmoor
Upper Ecclesfield Farm
Sand Pit
Lodge
Blackmoor House
LATE 2nd C. CREMATION BURIAL
HOLLOW WAY AND TRAFFIC RUTS
MODERN ROAD ON LINE
RAISED STRIP
(CONSTRUCTED C.1324)
Oakhanger Ponds
(Fish Ponds)
Root House
Allery Farm
Pond End House
D
E
F

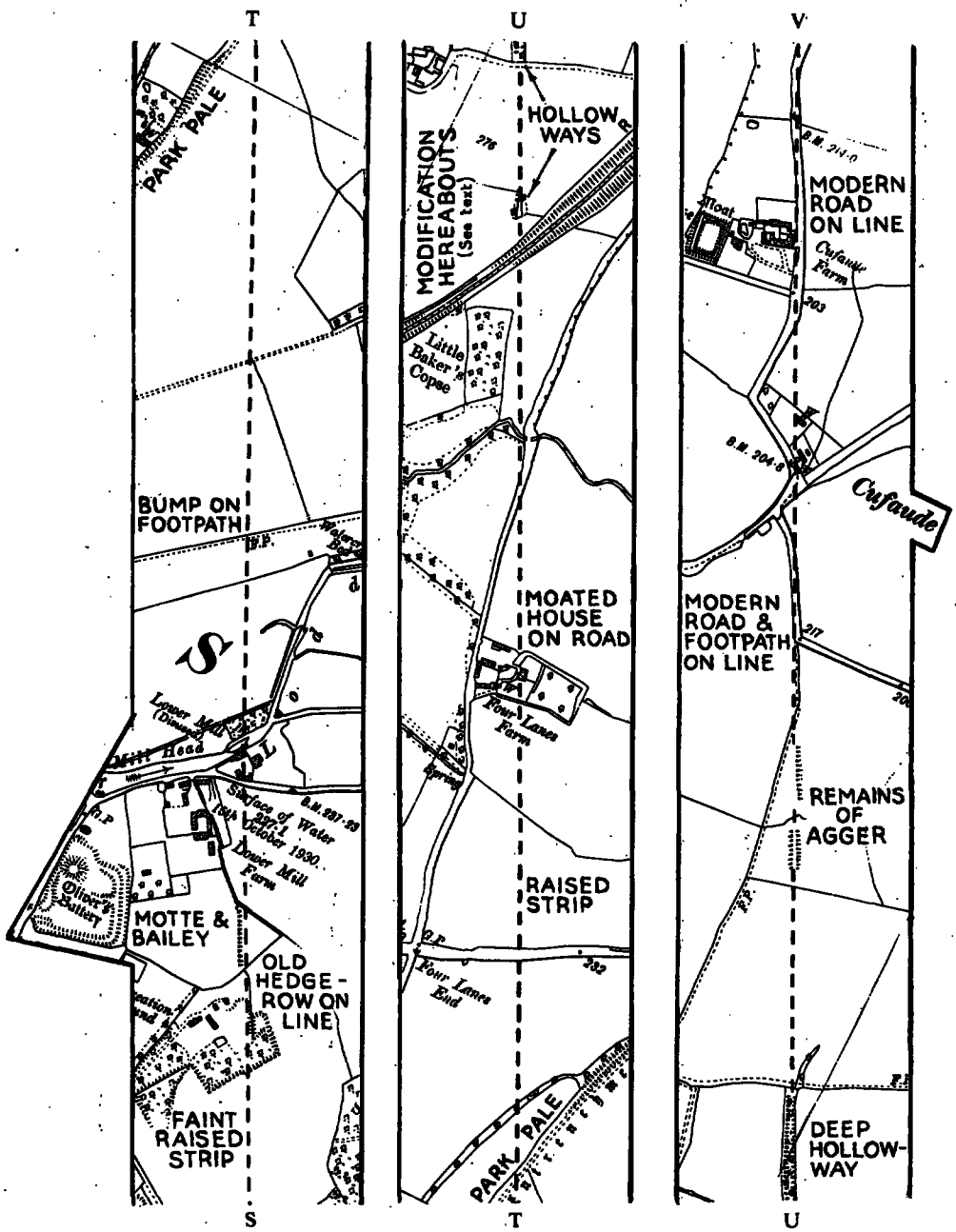

H
I
J
SCATTER OF METALLING
Hartlingwood Farm
MODERN ROAD ON LINE
Oakhanger Farm
Chapel Farm
G
RAISED STRIP
300
SECTION IN DITCH
METALLING
'STAN RIDGE' (See text)
SECTION IN DITCH
B I N
AGGER
H
METALLING IN DITCH
470
ERODED TERRACE-WAY
I

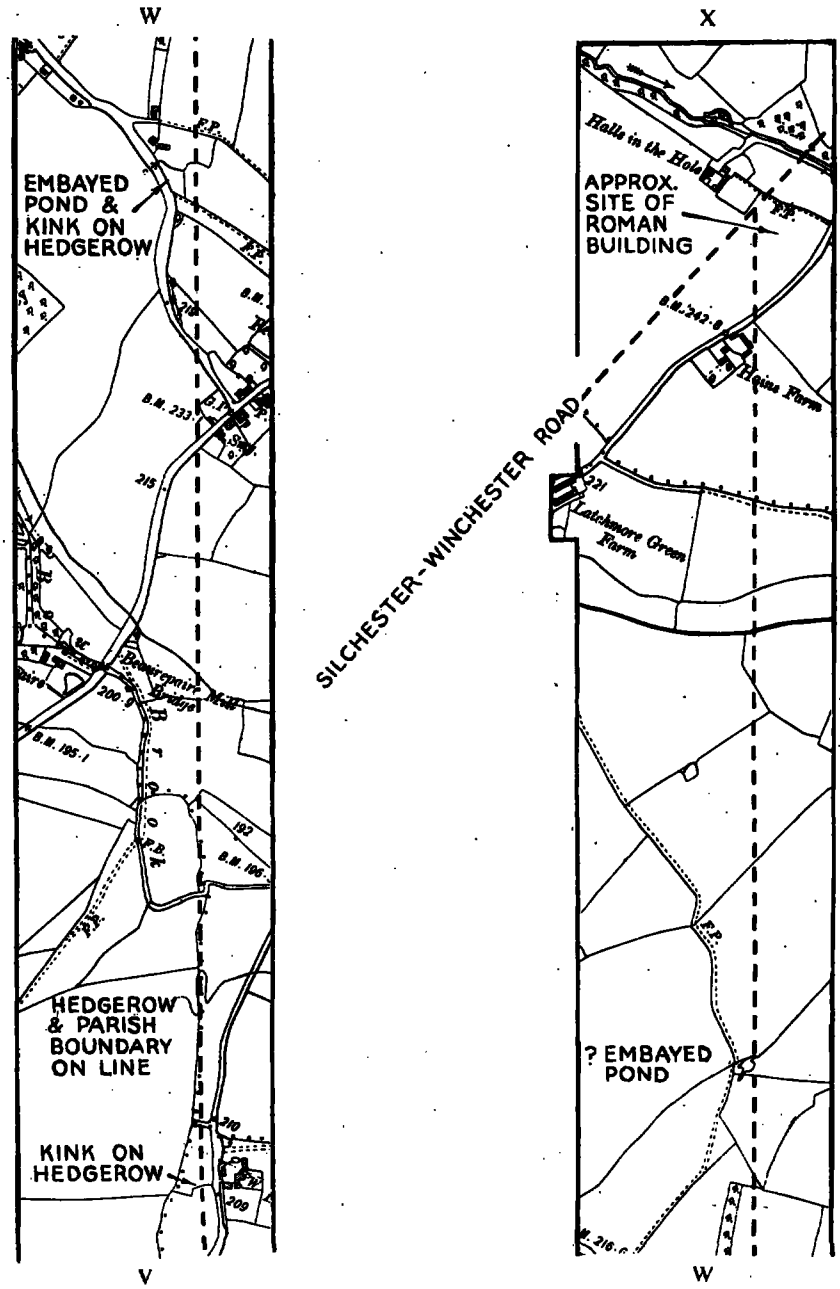

K
L
M
?SITE OF MANSIO
Cuckoo's Corner
HEDGEROW ON LINE
FAINT TERRACE WAY
Neatham
Manor Farm
HEDGEROWS ON LINE
TERRACE WAY
New Lane
FAINT RIDGE & SOIL MARK
HEDGEROW ON LINE
BUMP ON ROAD
Old Chalk Pit
SCATTER OF METALLING
Holybourne Down
TERRACE WAY
Copse
J
K
L

G


N
M
CLEAR ON AIR PHOTO
RAISED STRIP
Old Chalk Pit
Blounce Cottage
Picket Lane
Swanthill Farm
Boarstall Lane
O
N
VISIBLE ON AIR PHOTO
AGGER
HEDGEROW ON LINE
Brick Hill
FAINT AGGER
Old Chalk Pit
P
O
EMBAYED POND
RODDINGTON PARK
Hoddington House
FAINT TRACES OF AGGER


Q
R
S
AGGER
Old Chalk Pit
VISIBLE ON AIR PHOTOS (See Plate II)
See FAINT AGGER
Old Chalk Pit
Acres 263
Old Chalk Pit
P
KINK ON HEDGE-ROW
300
Acres 829
HEDGEROW PARALLEL TO LINE
Nightery Hill
300
Glory's Farm
F.P.
HARROW WAY
Q
Hodd's Farm
Basingstoke
Bagshot
Orchard Grounds
Spring
R


T
U
V
PARK PALE
HOLLOW WAYS
MODIFICATION HEREABOUTS (See text)
276
Little Baker's Copse
MODERN ROAD ON LINE
Moat
Cufaude Farm
203
B.M. 214·0
B.M. 204·8
Cufaude
BUMP ON FOOTPATH
Mill Head
Lower Mill (Disused)
Surface of Water 1st October 1930
B.M. 237·33
Lower Mill Farm
Oliver's Battery
MOTTE & BAILEY
OLD HEDGE-ROW ON LINE
FAINT RAISED STRIP
S
MOATED HOUSE ON ROAD
Four Lanes Farm
Spring
RAISED STRIP
Four Lanes End
232
PARK PALE
MODERN ROAD & FOOTPATH ON LINE
217
REMAINS OF AGGER
DEEP HOLLOW-WAY


W
X
EMBAYED POND & KINK ON HEDGEROW
HEDGEROW & PARISH BOUNDARY ON LINE
KINK ON HEDGEROW
V
SILCHESTER-WINCHESTER ROAD
APPROX. SITE OF ROMAN BUILDING
? EMBAYED POND
W