

THE LOST SETTLEMENT OF BRIGE.

By ROSALIND HILL.

IT has been said with much justice that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread", and it may seem more than a little foolish for a medieval historian, whose only excuse for writing about Hampshire is an intimate knowledge of the countryside, to suggest a solution to a problem which has puzzled archaeologists for a great many years. Nevertheless, the study of medieval history may sometimes throw light on an earlier period, and the main features of the Hampshire landscape appeared to the Romans very much as they do to us. If I may succeed in gaining the interest of archaeologists in a new approach to the problem of Brige I shall be well contented. The suggestions which I put forward occurred first to my father, Norman Hill of Stockbridge, and I have taken care, so far as I can, to explore the ground, to check his references to earlier works and to amplify them, whenever I could, by a study of recent publications.

The Roman station of Brige is mentioned in the Antonine Itinerary, a work describing the main routes in use in the Roman province of Britain. Professor Collingwood has described the surviving document as belonging to the first half of the third century A.D.¹ although it is not unlikely that, like a modern A.A. handbook, the work existed at an earlier date and was re-written at intervals. In the Itinerary the distances between Winchester (Venta Belgarum), Brige and Old Sarum (Sorviodunum or Sorbiodunum) are twice given in the following form:—

"Venta Belgarum . . . Brige XI milia passuum
Brige . . . Sorvioduni (Sorbioduni) VIII milia passuum."²

The figures given are for Roman miles, one of which is generally taken as eleven-twelfths of an English mile. It has been assumed that Brige must lie upon the line of the original military road from Winchester to Old Sarum, a road thus described by Professor Haverfield: "This route is mentioned in the Itinerary . . . The total distance of nineteen miles is rather less than the real distance of twenty-one English miles, but this error need not disturb us. The road itself can still be traced. Leaving Winchester by the Westgate and climbing the hill it runs between Crab Wood and Pitt Down, where it is still in use. Near Farley Wood and King's Somborne its traces are less visible, but it appears to have crossed the Test at Horsebridge, and from near Broughton to Old Sarum it is still in use. The situation of the half-way station Brige is still

1. Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, p. 241.
2. Printed in T. Codrington's *Roman Roads in Britain*, pp. 22-3.

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uncertain. Camden placed it at Broughton, but he seems to have had no better reason than the similarity of the initial letter".³ Haverfield's dismissal of the difference between nineteen Roman miles (or about seventeen and a half English miles) and twenty-one English miles is a curious statement to find in the work of so great a scholar. The Itinerary does contain errors, and occasionally gives a variant reading of one Roman mile, but a discrepancy of three and a half English miles in twenty-one is unprecedented, and seems to demand an explanation.

Camden himself was not quite happy in placing Brige at Broughton. Below Wherwell, he says, "the Test runs in search of Brige or Brage, an ancient town placed by Antoninus nine miles from Sorbiodunum, at which distance, and not far from its banks, it finds a small country village called Broughton; and if Brage were not this place, I am of the opinion that it was entirely demolished when William the Conqueror converted these parts into the forest we have just mentioned".⁴ (The idea of the demolition of villages in order to provide more land for the king's hunting has, of course, been shown by J. H. Round to have no basis in fact.)⁵ Gough, in his edition of a translation of Camden's work published in 1789, saw that the identification with Broughton could not be made to square with the figures given in the Itinerary which must, he says, "be transposed to read thus—Brige VIII, Sorbiodunum XI—which suit the present distances with the utmost exactness".⁶ He adds that "Broughton is a mean town. Salmon places Brige on a hill near Broughton. Mr. Gale in a MS. note says he saw in 1719 very large banks, the remains of this town, in a wood near Broughton on the way to Salisbury".⁷ Of Stockbridge Gough says that it is "a borough town, noted only for its inns and a declining market. Near it Aubrey puts a Roman camp. Here, says he, one might guess the engagement began on the west side of the river; the great barrows show the flight was westward; the north side of this camp is 210 paces, the south side 240, the west 290, the east ploughed up. Q. if Dunbury".⁸

Both Gale and Aubrey were impressed by the sight of earthworks. Gale's description of the "very large banks" is somewhat vague, and there is no known camp near Broughton which would account for it, but since he mentions the fact that the banks were "on the way to Salisbury" he may have been describing the earthwork upon Meon Hill, two and a half miles from Broughton and

3. *V.C.H. Hants*, I, p. 322.

4. Camden, *Britannia* (edition of 1586), p. 126.

5. *V.C.H. Hants*, I, pp. 411-3.

6. Unfortunately, Gough's reading was not much more satisfactory than the original. The nearest point to Broughton on the Roman military road is eleven miles from Winchester and ten and a half from Old Sarum.

7. Camden, *Britannia* (tr. and ed. R. Gough), I, p. 135. Gale's MS. note exists in a copy of his *Antonini Itinerarium* (now in the Bodleian Library), p. 137.

8. Gough, *op. cit.* I, p. 134.

lying immediately to the south of the highway from Winchester to Salisbury as it ran in the eighteenth century. This is the camp nearest to Broughton and its ramparts, now ploughed level with the ground, may well have been standing in 1719. Aubrey's "Roman" camp was probably the same place. It cannot have been "Dunbury", for the ramparts at Danebury are still remarkably well preserved, and those on the eastern side are steep and intricate, showing no traces of erosion by the plough. Woolbury cannot be Aubrey's camp as it lies on the wrong side of the river.

Later historians, although sceptical about the identification of Brige with the actual village of Broughton, have always sought for it on the line of the military road described by Haverfield.⁹ This road was built during the campaign of Vespasian (not yet emperor) in the middle of the first century A.D. But the Itinerary reflects the conditions of the province of Britain in the third century, when the period of conquest had ended and that of peaceful settlement had long been established. In order to set the problem of Brige in its true perspective, it is necessary to consider the effects of the Roman occupation upon Western Hampshire and upon the people who lived there during the first three centuries of Roman rule.

Attempts to locate Brige on or near Vespasian's road are based upon the assumption that the road described in the Itinerary is the military road built nearly two hundred years earlier. This assumption is not necessarily true. The original roads built while the Romans were in the process of conquering Britain were naturally "planned to serve the needs of conquest and government rather than those of civil traffic".¹⁰ They provided an excellent means of keeping the legionary fortresses and tribal capitals in touch with the seat of the provincial government at London, and of ensuring that reinforcements could be sent quickly to places threatened by attack from outside the province or revolt within it. Conditions in the late second and early third century, however, were quite unlike those which had existed when the military roads were built. The country, at least in the south, was peaceful and prosperous,¹¹ and an increasingly large number of people were forsaking the walled towns in order to settle in villas, pleasant country dwellings surrounded by tracts of farm land. Although a large villa might be self-supporting in such products as wool, corn or meat, the household must have purchased other commodities—tools, wine, pottery and a good deal of their building material. Even the Romano-British villagers of Stockbridge Down, squalid though their huts were, indulged in a few luxuries such as imitation Samian bowls

9. E. G. Colt-Hoare in *Ancient Wiltshire*, pp. 58-65, and S. Winbolt in *Proceedings Hampshire Archaeological Society*, XVI, pp. 52-5. Winbolt's identification is accepted by I. D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, pp. 92-3.

10. Collingwood and Myres, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

11. Charlesworth, *Britain, The Lost Province*, p. 20.