

The Roman road of the Portslade/Aldrington area in relation to a possible Roman port at Copperas Gap: Additional Information

By Glen Shields

1 The Brighton Valley Route

On the basis of some minor item finds made along the line of the A23 within Brighton, and presence of a villa near Preston, H.S. Toms believed there must have been a road from the coast to Preston, and that it would have continued northward along the Brighton valley to connect with the London road.¹ But if it existed this would probably only have been a minor route, and, like all the other minor Roman routes of the region, have followed a ridgeway path rather than the valley bottom. The ridge that forms the east side of the Brighton valley extends to within 2.5km of the Preston villa, and it could have taken the route on to the Clayton area, for a link with the London road at about Coldharbour Farm. The Yeakell and Gardner map shows that there was a road on this ridge, of which little sign now remains, and the way in which old Patcham lies on the ridge's tail end suggests that it could have been an ancient one. Alternatively, the route could have followed the Brighton valley's west side ridge, using the West Hill ridgeway track that is partly taken by the Pyecombe to Portslade road, and joining the latter at the point where it turns down into the Saddlescombe valley. A finding of two Roman coins on Sweet Hill, down which the ridgeway track passes to Patcham, gives some support to this possibility.²

2 The Alleroft Route

At nearly 300m along, the combe path broadens into a cut terrace about three metres wide, and it is at this point that the parish boundary path of the Curwens' road joins the route. The parish boundary itself turns to run parallel to and about 45m above the terrace, and it was marked by a furrow, as the six-inch OS map of 1873-5 shows. A furrow along the inner edge of the terrace looks like an earlier boundary marker, and the terrace might have been cut to enable it to be made.

The way at Poynings Place would probably have gone out of use when the Place was built, in the medieval or Tudor period, and been restored as the present-day lane when the Saddlescombe-Brighton road was converted into a turnpike road in 1770.

The stretch between Star Cottage and New Way Lane may have been closed when the Great Park of Danny,

extending up onto the Downs, was created in medieval times.³ Here a shelf of lane below the bridleway, overgrown with trees, and containing some probable early marlpits at its start, shows signs of having been a road.

3 The Foredown Road

Sturt himself found a Roman coin on Fulking Hill, and another on Mount Zion.⁴ He also discovered the sites of two Romano-British villages (or agricultural settlements) on either side of the track, near its northern end, at which he picked up pottery, iron implements, and wattle-and-daub from hut walls. One of these sites would probably be at TQ252095, where the 1873-5 map marks a specific find spot for fragments of British and Roman pottery; the other might be at TQ247095, where Roman roof and flue tiles, many fragments of Roman and Romano-British pottery, oyster shells, and an Iron Age brooch were found in the 1930s.⁵ Alternatively, Sturt's second site might be a settlement on Tenant Hill, at 900m to west of the track (TQ240093), on which he found a Roman coin, and where several urns, possibly Roman, and perhaps representing a burial place, were dug up in around 1805.⁶ There was also a Romano-British settlement at Devil's Dyke (TQ2571 08), so that at least five such settlements existed about the northern end of the Foredown track.⁷

4 The Kingston Road

At Kingston the road begins opposite the present-day mouth of the River Adur, passes northward as Kingston Lane, and crosses the A27 to continue as Upper Kingston Lane. It goes on as a trackway that soon turns north-eastward to climb the ridge of Southwick Hill. On the ridge top the trackway meets the Thundersbarrow road (another possible Roman route), and veers north-westward with it. But the Kingston road crossed over the Thundersbarrow road, to slant down the ridge's far side as a terrace-way that has many variant courses on either side, indicating much use of the road in the past. It becomes a deep hollow-way lower down, which turns northward to reach the floor of the Mile Oak valley at Whitelot Bottom, near Mile Oak Farm.

Crossing the bottom in a rather indirect way which would probably have been straighter originally, and swinging north-eastward again, the road then ascends the valley's opposite side as Sturt's first branch road. This climbs Cockroost Hill, a projection of the Foredown Hill ridge, as a recently widened and resurfaced track that was probably largely a constructed terrace-way, and on the ridge top switches sharply eastward to join the Foredown road at two

kilometres north of the Pyecombe to Portslade road. But in 1780 the road carried on north-eastward in a now ploughed out section that reached the Foredown road at about 600m further north; and there Sturt's second branch road (now also ploughed out) took it on past Fulking Corner to Devil's Dyke.

The road seems to be old. It is shown on Richard Budgen's map of Sussex of 1724, and is the only route from the Clayton Gap to the coast given by him, so may then have been the region's most important through road. Kingston probably grew to importance as a port area in the 14th century, and the road could date back to then. But that it goes back to the Roman period appears doubtful. Some Roman material discovered at Kingston in 1927 led Winbolt to propose the presence of a villa there (TQ232055), but was later found to relate to a Romano-British corn-processing oven. This is perhaps to be associated with a Romano-British settlement just to its north-west (TQ233055).⁸ No other Roman remains have been reported at Kingston, and the Curwens' road is a more convincing Roman route from there to Devil's Dyke than the Kingston road.

5 The Thundersbarrow Road

A big point of interest of the Thundersbarrow road is the possibility that it went on from the Downs to Stane Street and beyond. Winbolt noticed that on Stane Street, the major Roman road from London to Chichester, a branch road at Rowhook going north-westward to Farley Heath and in the direction of the London-Silchester Roman road at close to Bagshot would, if projected back, reach the coast near Portslade (Fig. 1). He found the remains of a paved road on about the right line at Itchingfield, just south-east of Rowhook, where a Roman tileworks was later discovered (TQ141299),⁹ but obtained little further evidence, and concluded that the route was doubtful. W.D. Peckham suggested that the road was begun but never completed.

In the Downs it appears that such a road would have to have followed a track that branches from the Freshcombe Farm track at 800m north of Thundersbarrow Camp, and runs north-westward over Beeding Hill and down an old hollow-way (Beeding Bostal) to Upper Beeding. It might then have crossed the Adur at Kings Barn, and reached Rowhook on a line that passes close by Ashurst, Knepp Castle and Itchingfield. A mound on Beeding Hill (TQ215099) yielded a cremation urn, over 50 other Roman vessels and a Roman coin in about 1798; a Roman coin and Roman and British pottery have been found at Kings Barn (TQ190113); and Romano-British pottery at Pike

Barn near Knepp Castle (TQ164218).¹⁰ The Roman way-station at Alfoldean on Stane Street was very close to the Rowhook junction.¹¹

6 The Chichester Road

Budgen's map, which omits many routes, does not show the road east of Mile Oak Road, and it has the ferry road as turning down to Copperas Gap (then called Portslade Gap) by the possible south-eastward extension of the Thundersbarrow road that was mentioned earlier. This continues on to Brighton along the coast, and seems to be the way between Brighton and Shoreham given by John Ogilby in 1675.¹² The coast road is also mentioned in the 1609 Portslade property deed.

7 West Aldrington

Portslade became dominant by the 13th century, when its manor held about half of the Aldrington lands.¹³ Most of these held lands were at some time incorporated into Portslade parish, because from at least 1531 there are references to East Aldrington, which was today's Aldrington parish, and West Aldrington (or simply Aldrington) in the parish of Portslade.¹⁴ The Portslade Manor Court Books contain many entries for lands in West Aldrington/Aldrington, and Aldrington and Portslade, and a close study of their descent establishes that West Aldrington constituted the whole south end of Portslade parish, from the shoreline up to the A27 road at least, and on the east side of the Foredown road up to today's Mill Close (TQ260065).¹⁵ It thus included all the Copperas Gap area, with the cemetery and the Boundary Road sites, and the Cowhayes region of the Foredown road. Interestingly, much of this land descended to Edward Knight *née* Austen, brother of the author Jane Austen, as part of Red House Farm, which straddled Boundary Road.¹⁶

Within West Aldrington there was also a community called West Aldrington, situated at Copperas Gap. It is referred to in the 1609 property deed as a hamlet, and from the deed and other Court Book entries consisted of cottages and smallholdings on the coast road and under the sea cliff.¹⁷ Quite probably this was the Aldrington village suggested by Camden in 1586 to be the site of Port us Adurni. It is also probably the settlement called East Broke [East Brook] on the Armada Survey map of 1587, situated at immediately east of the county boundary line, with Fishersgate immediately to west of it. The east brook must be the stream that was earlier mentioned to have probably run where Portslade-by-Sea's Church Road now lies, distinguished from a west brook, which would be the stream that formerly ran through Southwick Green. It

would have cut through the cliff to create the Copperas Gap, still recognisable as a dip in the coast road at the foot of Church Road. It gave its name to Eastbrook Manor in Southwick parish, is called Aldrington Brook (perhaps associated with an Aldrington Green) in a Portslade Court Book entry of 1611, and may have survived to at least 1719.¹⁸

8 Slonk Hill Road

Within the Downs the Thundersbarrow road was paralleled by a road to its west, starting from the A27 at Kingston Lane and running past Slonk Hill Farm and New Erringham Farm to the Beeding Hill hollow-way (Fig. 2). It evidently existed in the 17th century, was a main route to Brighton in the 18th century, and was turnpiked in 1807. A Romano-British settlement lay on Slonk Hill (TQ226065), but there is no suggestion that the road was British or Roman.¹⁹ It might have originated in Kingston's period of importance in the 14th century.

9 Ravenna Cosmography

A first millennium list of place names throughout the Roman Empire. Its British section has two places that were possibly on the Sussex coast: *Anderelionuba* and *Mutuantonis*. *Anderelionuba* was suggested to be a conflation of two names, *Anderida* and *Nuba*, with the former being the Saxon Shore fort at Pevensey, and the latter possibly a lost port, *Novus Portus* [New Port], which may have lain on a River and *Novia*, and so could have been at Newhaven [or Seaford], on the River Ouse. *Mutuantonis* was proposed to be near the River Cuckmere, between Seaford and Pevensey. Either place could actually be the Aldrington port.

10 Saxon Conquest

Camden, in the first edition of his *Britannia*, suggested that the Saxons initially landed at Shoreham, and others have repeated the proposal.²⁰ It rests mainly on associating some local place names with the first invaders, a now largely discredited idea.

11 West Aldrington

In late Saxon times the region's port evidently lay far up the Adur estuary, at Steyning. The Normans made their port at Shoreham and it seems to have flourished until the late 13th century, when, perhaps due to a series of great storms that hit the Sussex coast from about 1250 onward, much of its activity appears to have shifted eastward.²¹ The West Aldrington settlement probably became a chief centre again at this time, because in 1301 Aldrington was ordered to provide two ships for Edward I's Scottish campaign, while Shoreham, Brighton and Portsmouth together were only asked for one. The order was amended to

one ship from Aldrington, Shoreham, Hove and Brighton together in 1302, but obviously Aldrington was considered to be quite important.

Analysis of the Lay Subsidies for 1296, 1327 and 1332 reveals that by 1327 Aldrington had rather fewer taxpayers, and was poorer, than Southwick and Kingston, so most port activity may by then have shifted to those places. The fact that between 1291 and 1341 Aldrington and Portslade lost much land to the sea, while Southwick and Kingston did not, could explain this.²²

The complicated relationship between Portslade and Aldrington makes the later status of West Aldrington difficult to determine. Probably it remained significant, since Camden remarks that attack by French raiders of the early 16th century was awaited here. [East] Aldrington's population was very small at the century's end, and stayed so until the 19th century; but references to West Aldrington seem to increase from around 1600, including mentions concealed under the names Aldrington and Portslade.²³ It appears to have remained mostly as a hamlet, though Mark Lower, in his *History of Sussex* (1870), says, on unstated grounds, that towards 1700 it had a population of about 200. The mouth of the Adur moved back and forth between Shoreham and Hove a number of times from about 1586 to 1821, when modern construction work finally stabilised it at its present position, and it appears that West Aldrington once again flourished within this period.²⁴

Brighton became part of the Shoreham Port complex from about 1661, and some of its merchant mariners had an interest in West Aldrington from at least 1683-4.²⁵ Thus, to at least some extent, West Aldrington probably functioned as a port for Brighton. The Brighton merchant fleet became the largest in Sussex by 1701, with particular importance in the coal trade. This raises the very interesting possibility that West Aldrington was the place where Charles II embarked in his escape from England in 1651. Charles sailed from a break in the coast near Brighton, on a coal-brig owned by Nicholas Tattersell of Brighton, who was said earlier to have 'touched at Shoreham, four miles from Brighton'. All of this fits well with West Aldrington's position.

West Aldrington was largely destroyed by another series of great storms at around 1700, but appears to have recovered to some extent. One of its Brighton mariners, Richard Masters, had property here, and it was probably from him that Copperas Gap acquired its name. Export of copperas (iron sulphate) from the

Sussex coast to London was occurring by 1695-1714; Copperas Gap, with a warehouse, is referred to in a Portslade Manor Court Book entry of 1739; and the 1750 will of Richard Masters, son of the first Richard, mentions his Copperas Gap property, and that he had a property in Brighton called Copperas Green.²⁶ The later history of West Aldrington has not been gone into, but attempts from 1760 to fix the Adur entrance at Kingston must have affected it, and the Portslade tithe map of 1841 shows it then as merely a hamlet.

12 Sussex's Roman Roads

It is over thirty years since Ivan Margary last spoke about the Roman roads of Sussex, and little work has been done on them since. It is unlikely that he discovered all of the existing roads, or that he was always correct in his account of the ones he dealt with. The present paper and that by the author in 1999 point to the possibility of a road from Portslade to Rowhook and one from Ham Farm towards Crawley, and of the need for closer study of the Chichester to Brighton road. Reported lengths of possible Roman road to the south of Lewes and at Henley, near Midhurst, might also merit further attention.²⁷ Roads can reveal much about settlement patterns generally, and a renewed hunt for the Roman roads of Sussex using modern search methods could be rewarding.

NOTES

- 1 H.S. Toms, *BH*, 6 October 1917.
- 2 *BHA* **1**(1914), 83-88.
- 3 *Victoria County History of Sussex* (hereafter *VCH Suss.*), **7** (1940), 176.
- 4 *BHA* **1**(1914), 83-88.
- 5 C.R. Ward, 'A La Téne III type brooch from Old Portslade', *SAC* **73** (1932), 203; *VCH Suss.* **3** (1935), 54.
- 6 *BHA* **1**(1914), 83-88; J. Dallaway & E. Cartwright, *History of West Sussex* (London: J.B. Nichols and Son, 1830), II(2), 240.
- 7 G.P. Burstow & A.E. Wilson, 'Excavation of a Celtic village at the Ladies Golf Course, Devil's Dyke', *SAC* **77** (1936), 195-201.
- 8 N.S. Norris, 'The Romano-British site at Kingston Buci', *SAC* **94** (1956), 1-12; E. Curwen, 'Prehistoric remains from Kingston Buci', *SAC* **72** (1931), 185-217.
- 9 T.K. Green, 'Roman tileworks at Itchingfield', *SAC* **108** (1970), 23-38.
- 10 T.W. Horsfield, *History and Antiquities of Lewes* (Lewes: J. Baxter, 1824), I, 38-50; *VCH Suss.* **3** (1935), 49; K. Jane Evans, 'Worthing Museum Archaeological Notes for 1964', *SAC* **104** (1966), 103.
- 11 M. Luke & J. Wells, 'New evidence for the origins, development and internal morphology of the

- Roman roadside settlement at Alfoldean', *SAC* **138** (2000), 75- 101.
- 12 Rev. Edward Turner, 'High roads in Sussex', *SAC* **19** (1867), 153-69.
- 13 *VCH Suss.* **7** (1940), 275.
- 14 E.H.W. Dunkin (ed.) *Sussex Manors*, *SRS* **19** (1914), 200; Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) PROB 11/36, P.C.C. Tashe.f.4, Will of Richard Bellingharn; Col. F.W.T. Attree (ed.) *Post Mortem Inquisitions*, 1485-1649, *SRS* **14** (1912), 157; B.C. Redwood (ed.), *Quarter Sessions Order Book*, 1642-1649, *SRS* **54** (1954), 40-41.
- 15 The proof involves matching the Court Book lands with lands on the Portslade and Aldrington tithe maps. Many other documents in the ESRO and PRO, too numerous to detail, were helpful.
- 16 ESRO ACC 6779/4, 175-76; PRO C16 428 I/J 129.
- 17 ESRO AMS 5600,50-55; ESRO Add MS 653, 3, 10; W.H. Godfrey (ed.), *The Book of John Rowe*, *SRS* **34** (1928), 146-48 & 205-15.
- 18 M.A. Lower (ed.), *A Survey of the Coast of Sussex made in 1587*, (Lewes: W.E. Baxter, 1870); *VCH Suss.* **6** (Pt. 1) (1980), 173-83; ESRO Add MS 653, 14; ESRO AMS 5600, 86.
- 19 *VCH Suss.* **6** (Pt. 1) (1980), 140-41; R. Hartridge, 'Excavations at the Prehistoric and Romano- British site on Slonk Hill' , *SA C* **116** (1978), 69-141.
- 20 William Camden, *Britannia* (London: Ralph Newbery, 1586), 157-58; H.F. Napper, 'Ella's landing place', *SAC* **40** (1896), 272; H. Cheal, *The Story of Shore ham* (Hove: Combridges, 1921), 7.
- 21 *VCH Suss.* **6** (Pt. 1) (1980), 142-43; Woodcock, 2003.
- 22 Rev. W. Hudson (ed.), *Sussex Subsidies*, 1296, 1327, 1332, *SRS* **10** (1910), 49, 174, 288; A.R.H. Baker, 'Some evidence of a reduction in the acreage of cultivated lands in Sussex during the early fourteenth century', *SAC* **104** (1966), 1-5.
- 23 Barr-Hamilton, *SCM* **26** (1952), 170; *VCH Suss.* **7** (1940), 275. Mentions of West Aldrington include, for example, I.S. Cockburn (ed.), *Calendar of Assize Records, Sussex Indictments, Elizabeth I*, (London: HMSO, 1975), 86; E.H.W. Dunkin (ed.), *Sussex Marriage Licences*, *SRS* **1** (1901), 136; West Sussex Record Office EpII/5/13, f. 38, 5/14, f. 123, 5/15, f.50, 6/16, f. 15-17 & 23-24; C.E. Clayton, 'Hangleton and its history', *SAC* **34** (1886), 181.
- 24 *VCH Suss.* **6** (Pt. 1) (1980), 140.
- 25 ESRO AMS 5600,39,41,48.
- 26 ESRO SAS HA 252.
- 27 J. Cooper, 'The Hundred of Swanborough' ,*SAC* **29** (1879), 126; Rev. E. Tatham, 'A paved road in West Sussex', *SCM* **4** (1930), 153-55 & 323; I.D. Margary, 'The old paved road at Henley Hill, Fernhurst', *SNQ* **12** (1946-49), 169-70.

Additional information for: Shields, G, 2005 The Roman roads of the Portslade/Aldrington area in relation to a possible Roman port at Copperas Gap, *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, **143** , 135-49.