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Akeman Street, Quenington, Gloucestershire

by H. E. O'Neil
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AKEMAN STREET, QUENINGTON, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

by HELEN E. O'NEIL, F.S.A.

TRENCHES excavated across the line of the Roman road, Akeman Street, at its crossing of the River Coln, west of Coln St. Aldwyn in August 1952, revealed some interesting features of road construction. The site of the excavation, 850 yards N.W. of the Church of Coln St. Aldwyn, lies in the Parish of Quenington and is just west of the river, which here forms the boundary of the two parishes.

The 6-inch Ordnance Survey Map (Glos. LII, N.E.) does not mark the line of the Roman road at this point, hence the value of the present excavation in verifying the position of the road crossing the Coln valley. As so many finds have been recovered in a field on the eastward slope of the valley, called 'The Chessels', and another on the westward slope, called 'Coin Slade' (or Quoin Slade), just N.E. of Coneygar Farm, a Romano-British settlement hereabouts was clearly indicated. These sites are marked on the O.S. map as 'Roman coins found'. For some years the line of the Roman road has been noticed in corn crops planted in 'The Chessels', and the recent find of the road confirmed the direction, which keeps a straight course, though running diagonally across the valley.

The actual river-bed in the valley has been altered since Roman times by the formation of a mill-race for two mills at Coln St. Aldwyn, and in more recent times 'cuts' have been made to control flood water as well as for its distribution in water-meadows. The ground between the mill-race and the river therefore has been disturbed to such an extent that no trace of Akeman Street could be located nor was there any evidence of an ancient ford.

With the permission of Earl St. Aldwyn, the owner of the land, Mr S. Jacques began an excavation of the Roman road immediately west of the river crossing in 1951, clearing an

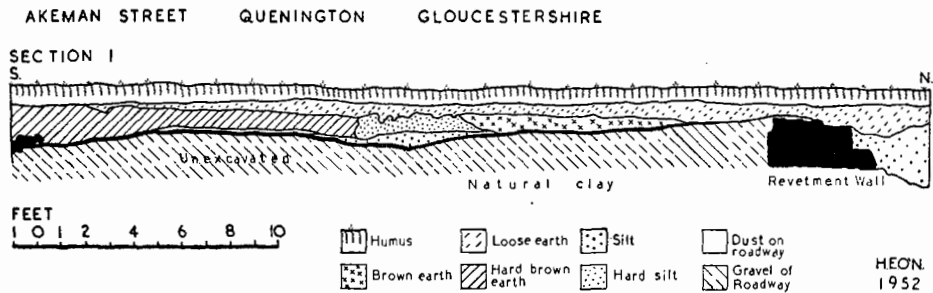


Fig. 1. Section of Akeman Street

area of about 20 feet square. The surface of part of the road was exposed and much pottery recovered as well as 27 coins. In August 1952, the excavation was left to the writer to complete.

A trench was dug down to the surface of the road across the western edge of the area already exposed by Mr Jacques and extended at either end, thus forming a section measuring 38 feet from N. to S. (FIG. 1). The northern end of the trench lay 36 feet from the river and 56 yards west of the position of a possible ford. The surface of the road lay from 18 inches to 2 feet 6 inches below present ground level. It consisted of a dual carriage way with a shallow wide gutter in between the carriage ways. The road was constructed of rammed gravel, 2 feet in depth, its surface in a remarkably good condition, hard and smooth with some wheel tracks still visible. The latter were about 3 inches wide but it was not possible to get any measurement indicating the width of wheel bases of vehicles.

A substantial stone wall bordered the north or river side of the road, forming a revetment to the road as well as protecting it from erosion by flooding, while on the south side of the road curb stones were strongly embedded at its edge. There was a slight camber to the southern carriage way with a drop to the central gutter of about 12 inches. The northern carriage way, however, had a continual rise from the gutter to the revetment wall, slightly overlapping the latter. The wall, built of large stones and with a wide offset, stood three courses high and was 4 feet 6 inches wide at its base, 2 feet high, the whole road being laid on the natural clay. The width of the two carriage ways was not equal and those parts used by traffic had a width of about 9 feet. The total width of the road including the central gutter, from the curb stones on the south to the inner side of the revetment wall on the north, was 31 feet.

River silt, a grey speckled sandy-like substance, lay in the gutter and was also present beyond the revetment wall, above this were layers of hard brown earth over the southern side of the road becoming a loose damp earth containing the fleshy roots of Burdock over the northern side.

Sherds were recovered from all the fillings above the road, those in the upper levels in an abraded condition while in the silt of the gutter more and larger sherds were found. Animal bones and some objects were also found in the silt. A coin of Constantius II or Constans, A.D. 340-5, was found embedded in the surface of the north carriage way, while the 27 coins found by Mr Jacques were scattered, partly in the silt of the gutter and on the adjoining slope of the north carriage way. The accumulated débris in the gutter appeared to have been washed down into it either from the slope of the hill above the roadway or deposited by floods from the river. Since so much pottery was found, habitation must have been close at hand. Roman sherds found in the wood called 'Sidelands', less than

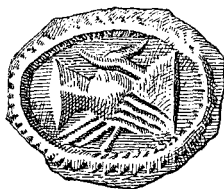


Fig. 2. Gold bezel of finger ring ($\frac{1}{2}$)

100 yards to the south indicated a possible site, but it is highly probable, in any case, that a posting house and way-side shops were situated at this crossing of the river. The site is some 7 miles distant from Corinium and would therefore make a suitable halting place.

It is clear from the coins and pottery, predominantly of 4th century date, that only the last phase of the use of the road was found in the present excavation. The remarkably good state of the surface of the road is difficult to explain, except that following the withdrawal of Roman influence the road fell quickly into disuse. No finds of a later date except quite modern sherds of china in the top soil, seem to confirm that the road was either not needed or shunned by the Saxons and later peoples, and would thus have been soon overgrown and forgotten.

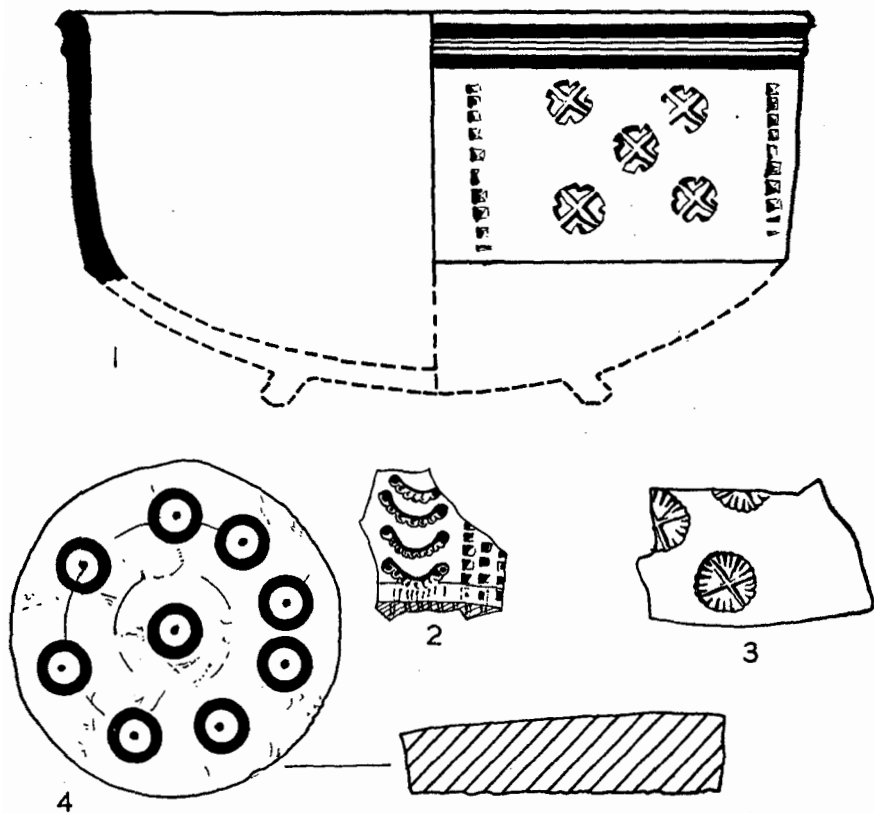


Fig. 3. Nos. 1, 2, 3 Impressed-pattern ware ($\frac{1}{2}$)
 No. 4. Bone counter ($\frac{1}{4}$)

The finds of greatest interest recovered during the excavation, were sherds of three vessels with impressed patterns (FIG. 3, nos. 1, 2, 3 and p. 43) of 4th century date, and the gold bezel of a finger ring (FIG. 2 and p. 42), with embossed emblem of clasped hands representing 'Concordia'. The latter can be paralleled with one from Richborough dated to mid 4th century A.D. A decorated bone counter (FIG. 3, no. 4 and p. 42) was amongst some of the objects found. A list of the coins found follows.

I am much indebted to Earl St. Aldwyn for permission to excavate; to Mrs E. D. Atkinson of Coln St. Aldwyn for her hospitality; Miss M. V. Taylor, for advice; Miss E. M. Collinson, Mr G. C. Dunning and Mr G. Boon for help with the pottery, and Mr L. Monroe for the drawing of the gold bezel. The identification of the coins was the work of my husband.

COINS

The number of coins found on this site numbered twenty-eight, twenty-six of which are of the 4th century. One, Constantius II or Constans was found embedded in the surface of the road (N. carriage way) in a worn condition. Nineteen of the coins were of Constantius-Constans type (A.D. 307-50), two of Valentinian I and four of Valens (A.D. 364-78). There was also one of Crispus (A.D. 317-26). The remaining two were of the 3rd century, one of Gallienus (A.D. 260-8) and one Radiate Head (A.D. 270 or later).

Gallienus (Sole Reign, A.D. 260-8)

- 1 *Obv.* GALLIENUS AVG. Head rad. r.
Rev. SOLI CONS AVG. Pegasus r., springing heavenward.
Mint $\overline{\text{N}}$ (Rome) Antoninianus. M. and S. 283.

Radiate Head

- 2 *Obv.* Illegible, but Tetricus type.
Rev. PAX AVG type. Small and worn. A.D. 270 or later.

Constantine I (A.D. 306-37)

- 3-6 *Obv.* CONSTANTINOPOLIS. Bust of C. helmeted l.
Rev. Victory l.
Mint Illegible (4).

- 7 *Obv.* IMP CONSTANTINUS AVG. Bust laur. dr. r.
Rev. SOLI INVECTO CONITI. Sol. radiate l.
Mint $\frac{TR}{R}$ (Trier) Follis. A.D. 313-17.

Crispus (Caesar A.D. 317-26)

- 8 *Obv.* . . . CRISPVS NOBIL CAES. Bust laur. dr. r.
Rev. [VICTORIAE LAETAE PRINC PERP]. Two victories sitting
 on an altar a shield inscribed $\frac{VOT}{PR}$.
Mint Illegible. 3 Æ.

Constantine II (as Caesar)

- 9-10 *Obv.* CONSTANTINVS IVN NOBC. Bust laur. cuir. r.
Rev. GLORIA EXERCTTVS. Two soldiers and two standards.
Mint $\overline{TR}S\ddagger$, $\overline{TR}///$ (Trier). 3 Æ. A.D. 330-5.

Constantine II (A.D. 337-61)

- 11 *Obv.* D N CONSTAN|TINVS P F AVG. Bust diad., cuir. r.
Rev. FEL TEMP REPARTIO. Legionary spearing fallen horseman
Mint \overline{PLG} (Lyons). 3 Æ. c. A.D. 350.

Constans (A.D. 337-50)

- 12-14 *Obv.* CONSTAN|S P F AVG. Bust diad., cuir. r.
Rev. VICTORIAE DD AVGG. Q N N. Two victories facing, each
 holding wreath.
Mint $\frac{S}{///}$ + 2 illegible.

Constantius II or Constans

- 15-16 *Obv.* . . . CONST . . . Bust diad., cuir. r.
Rev. [FEL TEMP REPARATIO]. Legionary spearing fallen horse-
 man.
Mint Illegible. 3 Æ. c. A.D. 350. (One is barbarous).
 17-18 *Obv.* . . . CONSTAN| . . . Bust diad., dr. r.
Rev. VICTOR[IAE DD AVGG Q N N]. Two victories facing.
Mint $\overline{TR}///$ (Trier) and one illegible. 3 Æ. A.D. 341-5.

House of Constantine

- 19-21 *Obv.* Illegible. Bust diad., dr. r.
Rev. [GLORIA EXERCITVS]. Two soldiers and two standards.
Mint Illegible (3). 3 Æ. A.D. 330-5.
 22 As above but one standard. A.D. 337-42.

Valentinian I (A.D. 364-75)

- 23-24 *Obv.* D N VALENTINI|ANVS P F AVG. Bust diad., dr. r.
Rev. GLORIA RO|MANORVM. Emperor r. with labarum, dragging captive.
Mint $\overline{\text{SCON}}$ (Arles) and one illegible. 3 Æ.

Valens (A.D. 364-78)

- 25-28 *Obv.* D N VALEN|S P F AVG. Bust diad., dr. r.
Rev. SECVRITAS|REIPVBLICAE. Victory l.
Mint $\overline{\text{PCON}}^{\text{OF III}}$ $\overline{\text{CON}}^{\text{IV}}$ (Arles), $\overline{\text{RSECVDA}}$ (Rome) and one illegible.

Other coins

The adjoining sites of Chessels and Coin Slade have produced a total of 63 coins; 55 from Chessels, 44 of which are of 4th-century date and the rest of the 3rd; while only eight coins have been recovered from Coin Slade, three of which are of the 4th century and the remainder of 3rd-century A.D. date.

Objects

Bezel from finger ring. (FIG. 2)

The bezel is of thin sheet gold, oval in shape and embossed with the emblem of clasped hands, representing 'Concordia'. (FIG. 2). It is $\frac{9}{16}$ inch in length and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in width. The edges are roughly cut but these would not have been seen when set in the ring. The emblem of the clasped hands is enclosed within an oval frame.

An exact parallel comes from Richborough (*Richborough*, IV, p. 126, pl. xxxv, no. 93), where it is dated to mid 4th century A.D. From unstratified level but above road surface.

Decorated bone counter. (FIG. 3, no. 4)

Bone counter decorated with ring and dot pattern, the pattern inlaid with a dark pigment. It is circular, with a diameter of $1\frac{1}{8}$ inches and $\frac{3}{8}$ inch in height, but the latter is uneven. It is polished on top and upper parts of sides, the bottom being left rough. From unstratified level but above road surface.

POTTERY (FIG. 3)

The pottery was predominantly of 4th-century types, found in small abraded sherds in the upper levels but larger pieces and in better condition from the silt of the central gutter. The pottery found by Mr Jacques was unstratified but all came from levels above the N. carriage way and from the silt of the gutter.

- No. 1. Three sherds of a highly burnished bowl in orange-red ware, well fired and hard in texture. In section an even red almost similar to Samian. Lower portions of bowl missing but the form probably similar to New Forest type, see Sumner's *New Forest Potteries*, p. 27, pl. IV, 2. Decorated with a stamped pattern of a cross in relief within a circle, the latter having pointed projections between the arms of the cross. The pattern is arranged in four panels of groups of five stamps in each panel divided by a vertical line of square-cut impressions. The stamp is of a type discussed by Mr G. C. Dunning in *Bristol and Glos. Arch. Soc. Trans.*, vol. 56, pp. 113-15, when describing a sherd with a somewhat similar pattern found at the Leadenwell Villa at Bourton-on-the-Water, Glos. Stamps of this type have occurred on a sherd from Silchester (May, *Silchester Pottery*, pl. LXXXII B) and from Park Street Villa (*Arch. Journal*, CII, pp. 91 and 96) and are dated to the 4th century and later. The Akeman Street sherds however differ from those mentioned in being of an orange-red ware while the Bourton-on-the-Water and Park Street specimens are in a grey ware and the Silchester sherd in a red-coated ware. The type of the Akeman Street sherds can be almost matched with sherds of orange-red ware in the Corinium Museum but these are not stamped with a pattern. Lady Fox considers the Corinium material to be late in date and perhaps coming from a local kiln. Miss E. M. Collinson who has studied New Forest wares states that the Akeman Street sherds are definitely not New Forest ware, being of a much harder texture than any ware from the New Forest kilns.
2. Sherd of a brown coated ware, burnished, even firing in section, decorated with impressed half circles, arranged one above the other and divided by vertical lines of square dots.
 3. Sherd of a brown coated ware, in section evenly fired red. Decorated with impressed circles in petal-like pattern, an ill-defined cross in slight relief incorporated in it.

Very little Samian was found, one sherd of Form 29, showing a pattern of part of a leaf scroll and a hoof of an animal. Amongst the other sherds were fragments of large and small storage jars, fumed grey and black cooking pots, black flanged bowls, mortaria in red-coated ware and other forms in this ware. Sherds of three colanders, two in red and one in black ware, Castor ware, one sherd with raised scale pattern, five specimens of folded beakers, one in red with raised-leaf pattern arranged vertically, grey ware with wavy scored pattern were also found as well as sherds of a flanged bowl of calcite gritted ware.