On the Name of Silver Street,

WITH A NOTICE OF SOME TRACES OF THE ROMANS IN AND ABOUT TAUNTON.

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AS the interest which attaches to the name of Silver-street may not be very generally known, it is hoped that the following remarks in reference to it may prove acceptable on the present occasion.[1] In taking a survey of Silver-street, in this town, at the present time, there is certainly nothing in its appearance to betoken that at the earliest known period—at least, so long ago as the time of the Romans—it formed the principal approach to Taunton (or rather to the locality known to us as Taunton), yet I trust to be able to show that this was actually the case. It is well-known that the name *street*, the Latin *stratum*, or *via strata*, was adopted by the Saxons as the characteristic appellation of a Roman road, and, where it has existed from ancient times, it may always be taken as representing a Roman way. In a very marked and special manner also does it appear that the term "*Silver-street* is always suggestive of the foot-prints of the *Romans*," though some diversity of opinion seems to prevail as to the mode in which the Roman significance which thus attaches to the word *silver* is to be accounted for. The most usual, and, I believe, the most correct, etymological explanation seems to be that silver is a corruption of silva,[2] a wood, a sense in which it is not unreasonable to suppose the name would be frequently applicable at the early period here referred to, when woods and forests abounded over the face of the country. In accepting, then, this explanation of

(1). This paper was read at a Conversazione Meeting of the Society, held in Taunton Castle on April 29th, 1878.

(2). *Book of the Axe*, by G. P. R. Pulman, 1875, p. 590.

the term, it will be found to receive marked confirmation from the employment of the name as applied to Silver-street in Taunton, which formed the direct approach from the town to a Roman station, situated in an extensive forest, very probably designated as such by the Romans. I refer to the Alauna *Sylva*,[3] of Ravennas, an appellation, however, which, for reasons which will immediately appear, I would venture to propose should be read *Alaena* instead of *Alauna*. It is admitted by the best authorities on the subject that the important British hill-fortress of Castle Neroche was adopted and used by the Romans in accordance with their prevailing custom in such cases. "The Romans after the invasion of Britain," says the Rev. F. Warre, "occupied many of these hill-forts, such as Hamdon hill, *Neroche*, Cadbury, and others." And in describing Castle Neroche more particularly, he observes, "round the summit of the beacon itself traces remain of a massive wall of strongly cemented masonry, which has been pronounced by a high authority to be of Roman construction." Many other writers concur in the same view. Mr. Pulman, speaking of Neroche as an important British hill-fortress, goes on to state that it was appropriated by the Romans, and adapted to their peculiar plan of castrametation. The late Mr. Davidson, of Sector, near Axminster, referring to Castle Neroche, remarks:—"This noble entrenchment, though of British construction, was in all probability occupied by the Romans, and was, perhaps, the *Alauna Silva* of Ravennas, which is mentioned next in course to Isca Damnoniorum and Moridunum." The opinion thus expressed by so able a local antiquary as Mr. Davidson, whose writings have contributed largely to illustrate this part of the country, entitles his suggestion to the highest respect, whilst the variety of sites to which

(3). As the comparatively modern use of spelling *Sylva* with a *y* seems to have created a difficulty with some in accepting the derivation of *Silver* Street from *Sylva*, I have thought it best throughout the rest of this paper to retain the ancient mode of spelling with an *i*, *Silva*. In Ainsworth's large Latin Dictionary we find "Sylva, vid. Silva; sic enim omnia antiquitus scripsisse videtur."

the Alauna Silva has been assigned by different authors, tends only to exhibit the uncertainty which besets this question. Looking at the combination presented by Neroche, of a noble camp, situated in an extensive forest, and also to the itineral course in which it comes, as pointed out by Mr. Davidson, I would submit that it was in all probability the real object intended to be specified, and that the difficulty which has arisen on the question of the location of the Alauna Silva (recently referred to as "a great riddle to the interpreters of ancient topography,") is to be ascribed to the characteristic carelessness of Ravennas, as exemplified in this instance, by his having written Alauna, instead of Alaena Silva. On referring to the map of Britannia Romana in Camden, which is taken from Ptolemy, Antonine's Itinerary, &c., we find Alauna and the *Alaunus fluvius* occurring in the North, and still recognisable as Alne and Alnewick in Northumberland. On referring, however, in the same map to the south coast of Devon, where the Axe falls into the English channel, we find in place of Alaunus the name *Alaenus fluvius* is given, and in Ptolemy's description of the British island, Albion, the Axe, according to Horsley, is called Alaenus fluvius, whilst the estuary of the Axe is commonly referred to as the Alaeni Ostia. When we consider the remote distance at which any other place named Alauna is situated, and that here in this immediate vicinity we have undoubtedly the Alaenus fluvius, we arrive at once at the conclusion that if the Axe could be shown to take its rise in, or be in any way connected with, Castle Neroche, the fact might be regarded as affording confirmatory evidence that the mistake of name has arisen, as suggested, from a slight clerical error (so common an occurrence with Ravennas)[4], the substitution in this case merely of a *u* for an *e*, and that Alaena Silva would thus, in the time of the Romans, be a perfectly legitimate and appropriate name for the Forest of Neroche.

(4). "It will be always useful in consulting Ravennas to remember that, if not a Greek himself, he composed his work from a Greek map, and that the later Greeks always disfigured names and places of foreigners with the arrogant carelessness of the modern French."—*Lyson's Magna Britannia*, vol. vj., p. cccxxi.)

On referring then to the admirable map of the "Rise and Course of the river Axe and its Tributaries," prefixed to Mr. Pulman's very interesting *Book of the Axe*, it was with a feeling of disappointment that in tracing the Axe (as it is now known) to its source, I found it to take its rise at Cheddington in Dorsetshire, thus appearing to have no connexion with Castle Neroche. It then, however, occurred to me that possibly some branch or tributary of the Axe may nevertheless take its rise at Neroche, and on tracing out the Yarty, I found that the portion of the stream bearing this name does so, and that it thus in fact fulfils every requirement that is necessary to confer on Neroche forest the title of Alaena Silva. It is not to be supposed that the trivial and arbitrary distinctions of the river into Yarty, Axe, Coly, &c., were known to, or, at all events, were recognised by the Romans,[5] who, viewing the stream as a whole, would rather bestow their chief regard on that branch of it with which, from the fact of its leading to a camp in their own occupation, they would be likely to be best acquainted. It is admitted, in fact, by Horsley and others, that the Alaenus fluvius was the name by which the Axe was known to the Romans, and no one, I think, can look at Mr. Pulman's map and see the fine branch, called the Yarty, descending from its source at the foot of the important Roman camp and forest of Neroche, and thence from north to south, maintaining almost a *straight* course (a feature highly prized by the Romans) till it reaches the sea, without recognising that this must in Roman times, have formed part of the true Alaenus fluvius,[6] which we thus see taking its rise in

(5). Referring to the adoption by the Romans of British names, Whitaker says, "Acting upon a very different plan, and informed with the natural spirit of conquerors, they affected to bury British under Roman denominations." The Tone affords us an instance of the original British name, which, according to Polwhele, was "*Taïs*," having thus been greatly transformed.

(6). Camden, Stukley and others held the view that the ancient name of a river may have been common to all its tributaries, and Mr. Kerslake, of Bristol, remarks that "Like a tree, a river with all its branches was only one object, with only one name common to its embouchment or trunk, and to all its ramifications up to their various sources."—(*A Primæval British Metropolis, &c.*, Bristol, 1877, p. 89.)

what I venture to regard as the Alaena Silva of Ravennas, joined by the branch now called the Axe, merely as a portion of the same stream, and emptying itself into the sea beyond Axmouth at its estuary, the Alaeni Ostia of Ptolemy. Having thus, I trust, shown the probability there is that the forest of Neroche, at the time its hill-fort was occupied by the Romans, was well entitled to the appellation Alaena Silva, the explanation of the name of Silver-street, as the street or way leading to the wood, will appear in the case of Silver-street, in this town, to be strictly appropriate. A further explanation, however, of the name of Silver-street has been offered in the suggestion that it may be held to mean "*via ad Silures.*" This explanation of it in connexion with a street in Lyme Regis bearing the name of Silver-street has been commented on by Mr. Davidson, who, whilst adding his testimony to the fact that the name of Silver-street is "often found in the vicinity of Roman roads and stations," throws out the objection that in this instance the meaning "via ad Silures" seems scarcely admissible, because "as that nation inhabited South Wales the application of the term to a road at so great a distance is unlikely." Altogether apart, however, from this question of distance, it appears to me to be an insuperable objection to the explanation, "via ad Silures," that the name of Silver-street is to be found in so many localities in England, where the towns in which it occurs cannot possibly be regarded as in any way leading "ad Silures," the Roman parts even of London itself furnishing us with more than one instance of this name. For this reason, then, I apprehend that the proposed explanation of "via ad Silures" must be dismissed as untenable, whilst the derivation from a corruption of silva, or rather silvæ strata, the actual term probably in use with the Roman or Romano-British population, is at once easy and natural, and may at the same time be held to be applicable to almost every locality. In commenting on such names as *Silverton*, Little *Silver*, *Silver* Hill, &c., occurring in Devonshire, their derivation has been referred to *Sel*, which it stated,

"according to Kemble, indicates *a wood* or *covert*, and is one of the roots common to the Celt and Saxon."—If this be the case, a term so nearly assimilating in signification and sound with *Silva*, would, at least, tend to render the transition from the former to the latter name of easy adoption by the Saxons. The question, however, may perhaps be here proposed: If woods in those days were so common, how comes it that they should have been held in such high estimation as to have given rise to this name in so many English towns? In answer to this enquiry, I would observe that whilst it is an admitted fact that the name is of Roman origin,[7] there is good reason for believing that it was of very ancient use even with the Romans themselves, having probably been employed by them from the earliest period of their occupation of Britain, and having been retained by them until it became adopted by the Saxons under the corrupted form in which it has been handed down to, and still exists with us. Assuming that the name was thus in use soon after the Roman conquest, it is certainly a matter of less surprise that it should have existed from that time through the comparatively short period of the 400 years of the Roman occupation, than that it should have endured as it has done from the time of the evacuation of Britain by the Romans down to the present time. Whether, then, as a concession and measure of policy on the part of the Romans, or as a result of that tolerance which characterised the Roman mythology, it is certain that the Druidical rites and mysteries continued to be celebrated in the woods and forests of Britain long after the Roman invasion. In the full and interesting details of these rites, which have been so minutely described by Cæsar, he expressly tells us that the Druidical gatherings were not wholly of a religious character,

(7). It would appear that this *Roman* significance of the term "silver" is to be found recognised from one end of Britain to the other. In the north, as we learn from Horsley, p. 66, "at a place called *Silver Bourne*, near Aberdeen, a great number of *Roman* (not Saxon) coins have been found;" while in Cornwall, speaking of his family estate of Polwhele Castle, Polwhele tells us that "near what is a *via strata*, the *Silver Close* is *Roman*," as if the latter were an established fact that required only to be stated.

but that they formed also, as it were, the courts of law, in which crimes were adjudicated on and disputes and controversies settled; and, he adds, that the Druidic system is thought to have had its origin in Britain, from whence it was introduced into Gaul; and it is still customary for those who wish to study it more thoroughly to pass over into Britain for that purpose—"et *nunc* qui diligentius eam rem cognoscere volunt, plerumque illò discendi causâ proficiscuntur" (*De Bell. Gall.*, Lib. vi., xiii.) Thus then we have it clearly admitted by Cæsar himself, under his own hand, that these rights were recognised and tolerated in his time, and under his rule, whilst we learn from Tacitus that they were actually in use here in Britain for nearly 100 years afterwards, viz., until the reign of Nero. It is indeed notorious that woods and forests were in many instances held sacred by the Romans, no less than by the Britons, in proof of which it will be sufficient here to cite the names of the groves of Vulcan, Mars, Venus, Bacchus, Sylvanus, &c., whilst in the Aricinian forest in Italy, the *nemoralis silva*, as it is sometimes called, we are furnished with an instance of a grove, a temple, and a sanctuary, all united in one. This dedication of woods to religious uses by the Romans would doubtless tend to reconcile them to their like employment in the rites practised by the Britons. And in this way it may be supposed that by mutual consent, as it were, of the victors and the vanquished, certain sacred or otherwise noted groves were for a long time permitted to remain in various parts of the country, and it is as leading to some such groves as these that I would venture to suggest the name of Silver-street was most frequently and specially applied, as meaning the street or road leading to *the* wood, thereby implying the wood or grove expressly dedicated to religious, judicial, scholastic, or other peculiar purposes. In the particular instance here in Taunton, if we regard the forest of Neroche, the Alaena Silva, as such a wood, it will be at once apparent how appropriate the name of Silver-street would be; whilst the description left us by the poet Lucan, in the following lines from Rowes' elegant

translation, serves very perfectly to portray such a wood. The first two lines are to be regarded as referring to it in the British period—

> "Not far way, for ages past had stood
> An old inviolated sacred wood;"

and then, as viewed in Roman times and by the Roman soldiery,

> "This wood, near neighb'ring to th' encompassed town,
> Untouched by former wars, remained alone.
> * * * * * *
> With silent dread and reverence they surveyed
> The gloom majestic of the sacred shade;
> None dares with impious steel the bark to rend
> Lest on himself the destined stroke descend."

Thus, then, if it may be deemed permissible to regard Neroche forest, or the Alaena Silva, as such a wood as that here described, it seems by no means improbable that assimilating themselves as they did with those whom they conquered, the Romans, while occupying the camp, would look with complacency upon, and readily permit, the employment of the adjacent forest by the Britons for their own peculiar rites and ceremonies.[8] At all events, in whatever light we may be disposed to regard the suggestion thus offered, it is certain that at this period an extensive forest (Silva) existed in this locality, and from containing a camp occupied by them, was undoubtedly known to the Romans, a fact which must be held to be sufficient for my present purpose in furnishing occasion for the name of the street in question.

Having thus endeavoured, and I trust not unsuccessfully, to throw some light on the meaning of the name of Silver-street, and at the same time to show how well entitled, under the

(8). "When the Britons became Christianised, they were loath to give up their religious meetings in the woods. Perhaps it was hardly to be expected of them by those who converted them, that their prejudices might not be too suddenly shocked. Temples even continued to be called groves after they had been built of wood and stone."—*Our British Ancestors*, by the Rev. Samuel Lysons, 1865, p. 97. We also read—that "it must never be forgotten that one of the first principles impressed upon the Roman missionaries to Britain, was to *take advantage wherever they could of the religio loci.*"—*Horæ Ferales*, by John M. Kemble, p. 99, 1863.

explanation thus offered, the street known as Silver-street in this town is to the ancient appellation it has for so many ages borne, I will now proceed to point out that independently of its leading directly to the Alaena Silva, from which I would venture more especially to deduce its name, it was otherwise an important thoroughfare, forming the chief approach to the town in the time of the Romans. For though the abrupt and unqualified statement by Collinson, that "Taunton is no Roman town," may be strictly true, it is nevertheless a statement that seems to require some modification, and has, too long, it is to be feared, been permitted to exercise a prejudicial influence in its tendency to discourage any investigation of the early condition of the site now known as Taunton, previous to the time of the Saxons. That Taunton cannot prefer any claim to be regarded as a Roman town in the same strict sense in which that term is applicable to the important stations of Dorchester and Ilchester, for example, must of course at once be conceded; but, on the other hand, I would venture to submit that it is highly probable that some part of the locality now known as Taunton was the scene of habitation long previous to the time of the Saxons, and, if so, it becomes an object to endeavour to determine by whom it was then inhabited. When we regard the British camp at Norton Fitzwarren on one side and that of Castle Neroche on the other, what can be more probable than that the elevated ground forming the site of Taunton Castle, and extending for some distance around it, should have formed an intermediate point of settlement, and have been occupied previous to the time of Ine by the Romanized Britons? That the elevated rectangular platform on the south-eastern part of the Castle precincts, now used as a playground, may actually be the remains of Roman work, will perhaps be found to be a less preposterous suggestion than may at first sight appear. Mr. G. T. Clark seems to recognize the extreme antiquity of this part of the Castle grounds, as he observes that the people of Taunton "ought to value this space, because they have in it the earliest evidence of military work,"

and "they should point it out as the most extraordinary and interesting part in the history of the town;" but Mr. Clark, like others who have treated of this subject, makes no attempt to carry his researches further back than the time of Ine, assigning, I believe, the construction of this remarkable earth-work in common with the rest of the Castle, and even the town itself, to this pious Saxon king, in the year 702. Whether, however, it is not very probable that the Romans or the Romanized Britons had a footing on this very spot long previous to the time of Ine, and whether, in fact, Mr. Clark does not unconsciously bear testimony to this view of the question, I shall now proceed to examine, availing myself for this purpose of the evidence afforded by that gentleman's own words. In furnishing us with a general rule for judging of earth-works, Mr. Clark states that "when an earth-work is observed to be rectangular in its outline, the presumption is that it is Roman; but if traces of Roman occupation are found around, the presumption is turned into a certainty."[9] Now if the rectangular outline of this earthwork, which is acknowledged by all, establishes the presumption, as here affirmed, of its having been originally Roman, are we not justified in assuming that the discovery which has been made of Roman coins close to this spot "turns the presumption," to use Mr. Clark's own words, "into a certainty?" That Ine selected this site for his residence is quite probable, but, as regards this rectangular earthwork, it is no less probable that he took advantage of it to place his Castle on it, finding it already formed to his hand. The presence of Roman coins and pottery, &c., close by, must be held to afford stronger presumptive evidence that this earthwork owed its origin to the Romans than anything that can be adduced to show that it was ever actually constructed by Ine himself. At a distance of 1100 or 1200 years or more, and with no records to guide us, we must accept the view which bears on it the strongest stamp of probability, and, in this instance, the infallible rule which Mr. Clark himself has given us, receives yet

(9). *Som. Archæol. and Nat. Hist. Soc. Proc.*, vol. xviii, p. 45.

further confirmation from the verdict of a quaint old writer, who assures us that in all such cases—

"Nummus est rei certissimus testis."

Except, indeed, on the supposition that the Saxons found the site of Taunton already occupied, it is difficult to conceive that it could in so short a time have become a place of such "great note" as to have attracted King Ine to select it for his residence, and to found his Castle here; whilst the statement of Collinson, that a Roman road passed through Taunton, loses all significance, except on the understanding that Taunton existed, and was actually inhabited in Roman times. With perhaps fewer indications of the fact than are afforded by Taunton, Mr. Pulman has insisted, and I conceive very justly, that Chard was for a considerable period the scene of Roman occupation; and the words in which he describes what he regards to have been the condition of Chard at the early period here referred to are at once so interesting, and, as it appears to me, so applicable to Taunton also, that I feel no apology is necessary for introducing them here. Having pointed out that Chard, as is the case also with Taunton, lies in the midst of what are known to be the remains of ancient British life and occupation, he proceeds to remark, "These and other circumstances leave no doubt that Chard, or rather the locality known to us as Chard, was at a remote period the scene of ancient British life. It might have been only a few huts in the woods, the inhabitants of which either fled before the Romans, or remained as slaves after the invader had beaten in the field the heroic bands, which no doubt opposed them in the fight for home and liberty. It is certain that when the victory was complete, the conquerors began to settle down among the conquered, and in their own inimitable way to introduce the arts of peace and civilization." . . . . "They did not fail to take advantage of existing towns, or settlements, or whatever were the collected habitations of the Britons, improving, enlarging, and adapting them on their own unvarying principles. Whether Chard was originally 'adopted,'

or Romanized, or not, it is impossible to say with certainty, but that it was the scene of Roman occupation is indisputable. As at Dorchester, Bridport, and Honiton, the broad, straight streets of Chard, with their rectangular intersections, point unmistakeably to that occupation." These observations on the early condition of Chard, are, I conceive, in all respects, *mutatis mutandis*, equally applicable to Taunton, the name of which might well be substituted for that of Chard, without doing any violence to the context. There yet remain, however, one or two points as regards the evidences of Roman occupation, in which Taunton may claim to have the advantage over Chard, inasmuch as although the Roman remains, which have been found in the immediate vicinity of Chard, are sufficiently abundant to justify Mr. Pulman's views, it does not appear that any traces of the Romans have actually been discovered within the town of Chard itself, whilst evidences of the presence of the Romans have been found, not only immediately contiguous to, but in the very centre of the town of Taunton. The earliest discovery of this kind of which we have any notice was in the year 1643, when, in the course of removing "the foundations of an old house *near the Castle*," a number of Roman coins and other objects were discovered, being the instance of the occurrence of Roman remains at this spot already alluded to. The fact was communicated by Collinson to Dr. Toulmin, by whom it was first recorded in his *History of Taunton*, published in 1791, where he further mentions "a like incident having occurred within the memory of man" (probably about 1750), when, on pulling down an old house in St. James's parish, a coin of Vespasian was found, having on the reverse a female captive, her hands bound behind her to a palm tree, with the legend, "Judæa capta," &c. Although there is not the slightest reason to question the accuracy of the statements by Collinson and Toulmin, yet as the period to which they refer is somewhat remote, it is all the more satisfactory to find them receiving additional confirmation in our own day. Unfortunately I am unable to state the precise year,

but believe it was in the year 1861, that it became necessary to excavate to a considerable depth in front of the West of England and South Wales Bank in Fore-street, when some Roman or Romano-British pottery was exposed, a good specimen of which is now to be seen in our Museum, to which it was presented by our late respected secretary, Mr. W. A. Jones. It is to be regretted, however, that beyond a mere notice of the place of its discovery, the deposit of this Roman relic was unaccompanied by any date or other detail connected with its finding. It would be very interesting to know the depth at which it was discovered, as indicating the level of the town in Roman times, and suggesting the depth of excavation short of which there would be little likelihood of making any further discovery of Roman remains. From such enquiries as I have been able to make, I gather that this pottery was found at a depth of thirteen feet, which I presume may accordingly be taken to be somewhat about the amount of superincumbent soil which has been accumulated in this particular locality since the time of the Romans. The Museum also contains specimens of Romano-British pottery, dug up in the Taunton Cemetery, in 1858. In addition to the unequivocal indications which the discovery of these material objects affords of the presence of the Romans on the very site of Taunton, a further confirmation of the fact is furnished also by the language of the people, which has stamped its impress, as it were, upon this locality. Without insisting more particularly in this place on the Roman significance of the name of the street forming the more especial occasion of this paper,[10] we have, further in the name of Plaistreet, on the other side of the town, a clear proof of the existence of a Roman road at this spot, whilst Collinson himself actually assigns to Taunton the distinctly Romano-British name of "Thonodunum" that is, the hill, hillock, or eminence near the Tone. It has, I

(10). Mr. Davidson argues that Lyme was known to the *Romans*, "as the principal entrance to it *bears the name of Silver-street.*" *(British and Roman Remains*, p. 62.)

am aware, been proposed to transfer this name to the earthworks at Norton-Fitzwarren, but unfortunately for the suggestion, though Norton certainly possesses a hill, it cannot be said that the Tone flows near it. There might, indeed, have been reason for the attempt to deprive Taunton of its ancient Roman title, had it been possessed of no feature that would justify its application; but whilst the elevated ground around Taunton Castle still remains, rising as it does even now, at its highest point upwards of thirty feet above the level of the Tone, flowing at its foot, we need not look further for any other site on which to bestow the name of Thonodunum. As an additional fact, however, that cannot be questioned, we know that about two miles and a half north-west of Taunton there are the remains of a remarkable British earthwork, in the parish of Norton-Fitzwarren, which bears such unmistakable evidences of subsequent occupation and adaption by the Romans, that it has been described by the Rev. Prebendary Scarth as a Roman camp or city. It is further maintained by several writers that about a mile north of this, at a place called Conquest, part of a Roman legion was for some time stationed, and from the large quantities of Roman coins in a perfect state of preservation, which have been found near this spot, and from other indications, the Rev. F. Warre held it probable that even "a mint" had been established here. Then, again, on the opposite side, about a mile from the town on the south-east, the rounded hilly ridge lying to the west above the hamlet of Holway, towards which Silver-street directly leads, was evidently for some period occupied by the Romans, as here also a considerable number of Roman silver coins, all likewise in a high state of preservation, have at different times been found. It would be quite unreasonable to doubt but that frequent intercommunication must have taken place between the Roman soldiery stationed at Conquest and Norton and those who occupied this site at Holway, and in all such intercourse Silver-street must have formed the natural and direct line of route, and must thus frequently have borne the impress of Roman

footprints; and where now the youth of our town wend their way to the Taunton College School, to acquire, *inter alia*, a knowledge of the Latin tongue, the echoes were awakened some fifteen centuries ago to the sound of this same language as it fell from the lips of the Roman soldiery.

In speaking, however, of Silver-street, as having been thus traversed in the time of the Romans, it is not to be supposed that even the roadway itself then was the same as that which we see now. Strange indeed it is, in connexion with this point, that since I began to prepare this paper an interesting discovery has actually been made in Silver-street, in this town, which has had the effect of revealing traces of an ancient buried roadway underneath the present one. The street has lately been opened from one end to the other for the purpose of laying water pipes, and in some situations, at a depth of about two feet, the workmen came upon portions of an ancient *paved way*, which proved to be exceedingly hard and compact, and was formed of large flint stones. In one part the soil for a considerable distance around was perfectly black, and even the flints themselves were stained a black colour. Whether this buried road thus exposed may be held to be the road actually trodden by the Romans or not, is a question on which I venture only to observe that its character, and the depth at which it was found, do not seem inconsistent with its being so regarded. What may have been the precise character of the occupation by the Romans of the site at Holway, it is by no means easy now to determine, nor do the few notices which barely make allusion to it afford us any assistance in the enquiry. It is evident, however, from the general aspect of the locality, and from the number of Roman coins found in various parts of it, as also from the fact of interments having taken place there, that the occupation was one of some duration and covered a large area of ground. Whether or not the site deserves to be regarded as having been used by the Romans as one of their *præsidia* or outposts—one of their *stationes agrariæ*, or advanced posts, to prevent surprise and

guard the country people about in the fields,—or whether it may have been one of their *mutationes* or inns for changing horses and affording accommodation to travellers, are points that remain still open to investigation; but in reference to the last of these I may mention that Mr. Scarth has suggested, from a description which I sent him, that this site probably borders on an ancient Roman road, and he points out that the name of Holway or Holloway indicates such a road, and occurs also on the ancient line of the Foss road through Bath, where it crosses the Avon and ascends the hill, and points towards Shepton Mallet. In a part of Holway-lane, near this place, a portion of an old road, on a higher level than the modern one, still remains to be seen, and it is to be regretted that a paper "On Traces of Ancient Roads in Holway-lane," by the late Mr. Elliot, read at one of these Conversazione Meetings in 1865, has never been published, as it doubtless contained both useful and interesting information, which is now lost. And here, whilst touching on Holway in this aspect, I cannot help drawing attention in passing to the remarkable coincidence we find in the association of names occurring just in this locality and in the old part of London. In the neighbourhood of Watling-street, in London, which it is stated was "no doubt in its whole length a Roman causey," the name of Holloway-street occurs, and not far off we have examples of the name of Silver-street, and also of the name of Shoreditch, all not further apart from each other in the old Roman part of London, than Silver-street, Holway, and Shoreditch are distant from each other here in Taunton. Some significance must, I apprehend, be held to be conveyed by this association of names, an explanation of which it is hoped this notice of the fact may help to elicit.

It was in the year 1821 that a Roman urn containing a great number of Roman silver coins was ploughed up at Holway, in a field called the Ten Acres, belonging to Mr. Blake, the ploughshare striking against the urn and breaking off the top of it. Near the urn were found also the remains of two human

skeletons. The earliest of the coins found in the urn was one of the 5th year of Constans, A.D. 342, and the latest of them one of the 10th year of Honorius, bearing the mint mark of Constantinople, A.D. 405, thus fixing the period of the Roman occupation in this locality to have been between the years 342 and 405 of the Christian era. The coins were in perfect preservation, and were of the following emperors:—Constans, A.D. 337; Constantinus II, 337; Julian II, 360; Jovian, 363; Valentinian I, 364; Valens, 364; Gratian, 367; Valentinian Junior, 375; Theodosius, 379; Magnus Maximus, 383; Eugenius, 392; Arcadius, 395; and Honorius, 395. As no description of the situation, or other circumstances connected with the field in which this urn and the skeletons were found, has hitherto been given, it is possible that the few following details which I have been enabled to collect on the subject may not prove destitute of interest. The field in question lies in the flat on the eastern side, just below and immediately adjoining the hilly eminence which rises above Holway, at its further extremity from Taunton; and the skeletons and urn were found at the further or southern side of the field. From the situation in which the interment took place, I think it may fairly be inferred that these bodies were committed to the earth at a short distance outside the settlement or station, and the money found in the urn[11] placed near them was, I conceive, the customary "naulum," or fare for Charon on the passage of the soul over the waters of the Styx. It must be remembered that after the 2nd century of the Christian era, the period we are here speaking of, the practice of cremation had become unpopular, and had been to a great extent superseded by a return to the more ancient usage, adopted in the present instance, of burying the dead entire. At some distance from the site of this interment, and nearer towards the town, there not long since existed in the same field two large regularly-formed, funnel-shaped circular depressions, about ten feet in diameter and eight or ten feet deep; and a few years

(11). One of the "funeral pots or pitchers" of Camden (*Britan*, p. 105.)

since the bottom of one of them fell in for a depth of several feet into a chamber or cavity beneath, in consequence of which they were ordered to be filled up, and one of the workmen engaged in the work informed me that it took upwards of ten large loads of earth to fill up each of them. These conical circular depressions correspond so exactly with some just similar to them which have been found at Castle Neroche, and which have been described in the 5th vol. of our *Proceedings* by the Rev. F. Warre, that there can be little doubt but that the purpose for which they were in each case constructed must have been identical, so that in reference to these at Holway I cannot do better than employ the words which Mr. Warre applies to those at Neroche, when he says, "I offer no suggestion as to their use unless they may be supposed to have been *silos* or subterranean graneries"—a suggestion which, from the description I have received of them, seems to apply with almost conclusive force to those at Holway. Slight depressions in the soil still mark the site where these deeper circular hollows existed; and I have lately been informed of the presence of several others at no great distance from this field, and one of which has only quite recently been filled up, the process of subsidence having as yet scarcely ceased. It may here be observed that from nearly the whole of the crest of the hilly eminence which rises above the field, where the urn and skeletons were found, a clear view is obtained of Castle Neroche on one side, and of Cothelstone and Norton on the other, thus proving the importance of this site at Holway as a point of intermediate communication between these distant hill forts, which might thus on either side be easily communicated with at night by beacon fires. Over great part of the surface of the fields on this elevated ground isolated Roman coins have at times been found, but more particularly at the northern extremity or at the end nearest the town. Here also are evidences of artificial disturbances of the soil, exhibiting now little else than slight undulations of the ground, yet wearing the appearance of a rectangular form, whilst in close approximation

we find a considerable hollow or pit, somewhat similar to the one which has been noticed just outside the camp at Norton. It is true that these traces of disturbance are very slight, and of a character that may be deemed insufficient to warrant the conclusion of their having been in any way connected with the occupation of this locality by the Romans, and, but for the fact of the frequent occurrence of Roman coins here, the suggestion would scarcely have presented itself. It is deemed well, however, just to bestow this notice on these evident disturbances of the soil, as it is in close proximity to the spot where they are most apparent that numerous Roman coins have been, and still continue occasionally to be found; and when viewing the traces of disturbance by the light which this circumstance sheds upon them, we must not fail at the same time to bear in mind that they have for ages past been exposed to the effects of the atmosphere, and to the still more destructive operations of the husbandman. So abundant have been the coins which have been found at this situation, that it is no unusual thing to observe many of the labourers at Holway wearing a bunch of them, often containing several Roman ones amongst them, attached to their watch chains: a source, in fact, from which I have recently obtained a very perfect Valens and a Eugenius, indicating the respective dates of A.D. 378 and 392. In the same way I obtained a second brass coin of Antoninus Pius, with a figure of Britannia on the reverse, which had been found near the same spot as the more recent ones, and which possesses additional interest on account of its earlier date. I have also in my possession a perfect Valentinianus, junr., which was brought to me some time since by a labouring man in my own employ, who told me that many others had been found near the same spot where he came upon this one. The evidence thus afforded by coins spread over so great an extent of land, together with the urn and skeletons, and subterranean graneries, must, I conceive, be held conclusively to establish the fact that for some time this site at Holway must have been in the occupation of the Romans, and here, before

taking leave of this part of the subject, I would just draw attention to the circumstance that two or three of the fields forming the extreme point of this hilly eminence in the direction *leading to Neroche*, bear the suggestive name of *highways*, a fact which is the more deserving of remark, as it tends to illustrate the valuable observations of Dr. Prior, in the 18th vol. of our *Proceedings*, on the importance attaching to the early names of our fields.[11]

It is not, however, merely from its leading direct to Holway and Neroche that Silver-street derives its claim to be regarded as having formed the chief approach to the town at the early period under consideration. If we look abroad over the district lying beyond Taunton on either side, but more especially on the south or Silver-street side, we shall find, extending in all directions, numerous evidences—in camps, in roads, and in other objects—of what have been termed "the relics of Romanity." On the northern side, in addition to the camp at Norton, with Roman pottery in the railway cutting close by, the remains of another Roman camp further on, at a distance of about two miles from Cothelstone tower, have been noticed by the late Mr. Jones; whilst, in the year 1711, an urn full of Roman coins, 1,600 in number, was found at Wiveliscombe, and numerous other objects of the like kind in the surrounding neighbourhood are noticed by Collinson. It is, however, as already observed, on the southern side of Taunton, to which Silver-street formed the approach, that we find the most abundant traces of the Romans. Passing by Holway, and proceeding through Haydon, Henlade, and Ash Cross, for a

(11). As a case in point, showing at once the importance of these observations, we learn from Sir Thomas Browne that it was "agreeable unto *Roman* practice to bury by highways, whereby their monuments were under eye."—*Hydriotaphia*, p. 12, 1686. And again, "that it was a custom of the Romans to bury their dead by the sides of their highways is a fact known to every one who is in the least conversant with their antiquities."—*Archæologia*, vol. i, pp. 61, 62. Now, as a very interesting fact, supplying its own comment, the field in which the skeletons and accompanying funereal urn were found at Holway, *is immediately outside and adjoining* the fields which still bear the significant name of *Highways*.

distance of about four miles to the south-east we reach Lillesdon, in the parish of North Curry, where, in the year 1748, a large number of Roman coins were found, of which the following description was given in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for September of that year :—"At North Curry, near Taunton, Somersetshire, July 12th, 1748, there was ploughed up in a field where a hedge stood, an urn, in which were contained several Roman coins, viz., Gratianus, Valentinianus, Valens, Theodosius, Honorius, Arcadius, Constantinus, Constans, Julianus, Magnus Maximus, and many others. They are all of the same size, excepting one of Gratianus, with the inscription, "D: N: Gratianus, P.F., Aug.," and on the reverse a sort of angel, standing with one of his feet on a globe, with a shield in his hands, in which are the words, "Vot: V. Mul: X.," and in the round, "Victoria Augustorum," and in the bottom, "S:M:T:R:" This piece is three times as large as the others, and weighs very nearly a shilling. There have been found about 150 of the smaller pieces, and the greater part of them are now in the possession of the Rev. Mr. Woodforde, Vicar of North Curry, above mentioned. They have been viewed by several learned gentlemen, and are reckoned to be some of the greatest curiosities of that kind hitherto found. They are as perfect and free from decay as if they were but lately coined, notwithstanding the latest of them is above 1350 years old." As exact particulars are often of importance, and as it is now so long since it originally appeared, I have deemed it well to reproduce the above brief description in full, just as it was given at the time. It will be observed that the coins were precisely of the same period as those found at Holway, and were in an equally perfect state of preservation. The coincidence is also deserving of note, that the coins at Lillesdon were ploughed up "*where a hedge had stood,*" and the greater number of loose coins which have been found of late years at Holway have also been *in a hedge*, or in a bank forming the side of a hedge, thus showing the marked changes which the original face of the sites in which these coins were deposited must have since undergone

at the hand of the agriculturalist. At no great distance from this site at Lillesdon, in the adjoining village of Curry Mallet, is a somewhat isolated group of houses, mostly of antiquated character, bearing the characteristic appellation of *High-street*, a name which, occurring in such a situation, would seem to claim a Roman significance. Mr. Wright, in his book, *The Celt, the Roman, and the Saxon*, tells us that a Roman road runs over the top of one of the mountains of Westmoreland, almost 2,000 feet above the level of the sea, which is named from it *High-street;* and Dr. Guest, in his able article in the *Archæological Journal*, on "The four Roman ways," shows us that the great Roman Foss was continued from Lincoln to the Humber under this name of *High-street*. Proceeding beyond this, at Welltown, at Stanchester, at Pitney, and at Langport, numerous and important Roman remains have been found, thus tending to illustrate the observation of Mr. Munckton, in the 11th volume of our *Proceedings*, that the surrounding neighbourhood is full of such objects.

Taking leave, then, of this locality, and again quitting Taunton by Silver-street, and continuing almost directly south, we come to Castle Neroche, passing in our way over Staple-hill, with its strange, and to me enigmatical array of boulder stones, extending from this, the Taunton side of Staple-hill, to above the camp at Neroche. Whether the present road, where this line of boulder stones occurs, may have formed part of, or may have been constructed upon an earlier trackway, I am unable to state, but the theory which would account for these boulders from a geological point of view, and would regard them as having been deposited *in situ* where they now lie by the agency of those natural causes to the operation of which the presence of erratic blocks is commonly ascribed, cannot, I apprehend, be regarded as free from difficulties. At all events, even assuming their presence here to to be due, as now maintained, to the agency of the vast ice-floats, it would still seem not unreasonable to suppose that their original disposition may have become subsequently modified by human agency, in connexion with the employment of the forest of

Neroche by its first occupants, the Britons. Regarding them in this later aspect, indeed, it is somewhat remarkable that the only other instance I have met with of any similar distribution of boulder stones over a road of this kind occurs in close proximity to the noted Druidical site of Avebury, in Wiltshire. In the 14th volume of the *Archæological Journal*, Mr. J. M. Kemble describes an interesting "boundary line" in this locality, extending from the river Kennet, at East Kennet, to the Wansdike, and states that it re-ascends on the east by "a road still very remarkable for the great stone blocks which lie about it,[12] till crossing the river and running northward, it then runs westward and southward in the direction of Avebury" (p. 134). The description thus given of this road near Avebury, as "a road still very remarkable for the great stone blocks which lie about it," is a description which even at the present day is perfectly applicable to the road over Staple-hill leading to Neroche, though it is a matter of regret that of late years the number of boulders in this latter road has undergone evident diminution. One of them, as we are all aware, has recently been transferred to these grounds, having received the honourable distinction of serving as a memorial to our highly valued secretary, the late Mr. W. A. Jones; but the greater number of them have, unfortunately, been put to baser uses, some having been broken up for repairing the roads, whilst others have been removed from their original situation and placed at the angles of cross roads, or at the sides of the entrance gates to fields, to serve as guards to prevent wheels from touching. At one time I was under the impression that these boulders were ranged chiefly on the *left* hand side of the road leading from Taunton, that is, on the same side as the camp, but this arrangement, owing, perhaps, to the removals just referred to, appears to me to be less conspicuous than formerly,

(12). In the actual description given in the extract from the Codex Diplomaticus Œvi Saxonici, beginning, "These are the bounds of Overton," we read that the boundary line ran "eastward by south round about Ædelferd's dwelling on the *Stony Road*" (p. 133).

though amongst those still remaining, one, of much larger dimensions than the rest, and the weight of which seems hitherto to have protected it, is still to be seen about half-way up the hill on the left hand side. This block is pierced at nearly opposite points on either side by a hole, rather wide at its orifice, and tapering down to a point, about 8 or 10 inches in depth; but whether these rude perforations are to be referred to natural or to artificial agency it is, as occasionally in the more marked instances of rock-basons, not easy to decide. They wear rather the appearance of having resulted from the effects of drip, though in the present situation of the block there appears to be no source from which it could have been specially exposed to any such agency, at these two particular points.[13] Without, therefore, hazarding any hypothesis on the subject, I have thought it well to offer these remarks in passing in reference to these boulders, in the hope that what has now been said may have the effect of attracting to them the attention they merit, both in an antiquarian and in a geological point of view, and may at the same time help to protect those that remain from further spoliation, and thus assist in preserving a feature which may, perhaps, deserve to be regarded as a curious and interesting appendage to those truly noble British earthworks to which this

(13). I have lately made a more accurate measurement of this block, with its perforations, which I find to be as follows: Length of block, 6 ft. 6 in.; depth, 3 ft. 3 in.; width, 5 ft. 6 in. Of the perforations, the one facing the road is about 4in. deep, and from 3 in. to 4 in. wide, and it holds about half a pint of water, its capacity having apparently become diminished from some of its outer edge having been broken away. The inner one, towards the hedge, being less exposed, is more perfect. Its width is 6 in., length 8 in., and depth 10 in., and it will contain more than a quart of water. Assuming this block to have been in or near its present situation in the time of the Britons, the suggestion has been made that it might have been employed by them for sacrificial purposes, and that the cavities might have been used to catch some of the blood of the victim. Availing myself of the like assumption, a more pleasing theory of their use seems to suggest itself in the notion that, as in the case of the larger "rock basons," they may have served as receptacles of water for the rites of water lustration, &c. "From such basons," says Polwhele, "the officiating Druid might sanctify the congregation with a more sacred lustration than usual. In this water he might mix his mistletoe, and infuse his oak leaves, for a medicinal or incantorial potion." p. 59, *Historical Views.*

road directly leads. Not far distant from the camp of Neroche there appears to have been a Roman smithy, or what has been described by the Rev. F. Warre as a Roman cavalry station, at which was discovered an immense heap of cinders and scoriæ, such as might be expected near a very large forge, and among them was a considerable number of horse shoes, evidently of very ancient date. It is not surprising that a place of such importance as Neroche, when occupied by a Roman camp, should have been provided with ample means of approach, and we accordingly find that several roads have been described as leading to and from it. Mr. Warre describes a branch of the great Roman Foss way, which led off from Neroche, through Broadway, Atherton, Hurcott, and Water-gore to Hamden-hill, most, if not all, of which places bear evidence also in themselves to the presence of the Romans. Mr. Pulman states that there is little doubt that a Roman vicinal road, constructed upon an earlier British trackway, passed from Neroche and beyond it through Chard; and in the immediate vicinity are the remains of the Roman villa at Wadeford, in the parish of Combe St. Nicholas, which have already been fully described in our *Proceedings*, and which on the occasion of the meeting of the Society at this spot in August, 1866, gave rise to the observations of Mr. Jones, to the effect that the presence of these villas in such situations afforded evidence that the Romans held a quiet and peaceful possession of these districts, and had no fear of being disturbed. Mr. Davidson describes a road passing from Seaton to Taunton, or if it may be permitted to use the Roman names, from Moridunum to Thonodunum, of which road the celebrated Morwood's causeway (since destroyed) formed a part. This road, it appears, branched off to Seaton on the one hand, and to Hembury Fort on the other, its principal line being undoubtedly to the latter place. According to the same author, another road was without a doubt a vicinal way of the Romans, although originally of British formation. "It leaves Castle Neroche on the Black down, and passes over Buckland hill to Whitestanton,

and Baalay down, where it divides—one branch leading to Membury Fort and Axminster, while the other, passing over Smalridge hill, joins the Foss at Streteford." Indeed, it would be impossible, within the limits of this paper, to trace the Roman roads, the evidences of which, as has been observed, are scattered broadcast over this part of the country. Mr. Pulman states that Chard was certainly occupied by the Romans, and Mr. Davidson insists that the town of Axminster was one of their minor stations. He has shown that the two great Roman roads, the Foss way and the Ikeneld, bend out of their course in order to reach Axminster, and observes in summing up, "The numerous Roman roads which are thus formed to intersect this part of the country in almost every direction, are proofs, if any others were wanting, of the long and peaceful possession of the district by that people."

To the whole of the country, then, which has now been thus rapidly glanced at, it is manifest that *Silver-street* would form the direct channel of communication for Taunton and the surrounding neighbourhood to the north.

And now, in bringing these observations to a close, whilst it has been my endeavour that they should rest on as firm a basis of probability as is attainable in enquiries of such a remote character, I would still desire it to be understood that I propose them only as conjectural or suggestive, and trust they will thus prove the means of inducing other members of the Society, more competent than myself, to enter on the further investigation of the topics to which they relate.

In the meantime, if I have succeeded in imparting some additional interest to a locality so near to us as Holway—in making more conspicuous the evidences of Roman remains existing in our very midst,—and in rendering it probable that, as has been now suggested, the Devonshire Axe, the Alaenus fluvius, was held in Roman times to take its rise at the foot of Neroche, thereby conferring on this ancient forest the claim to be considered as the Alaena Silva, and thus showing, as it were, the actual

continuity of the three objects represented by the consecutive Roman terms, Alaena Silva, Alaenus fluvius, and Alaeni Ostia, I trust that this attempt to elucidate the name of Silver-street[14] in Taunton, may not be regarded as having been altogether made in vain.

The subjoined list exhibits some instances of the name of "*Silver-street*" occurring not only in towns, but also in country districts, remote from any town. In every case there are sufficient traces of the presence of the Romans near to justify the observation that the name of "*Silver-street is always suggestive of the footprints of the Romans.*"

Axminster, Bridgwater, Bristol, Buckland St. Mary, Cambridge (*Camboritum*), Chard, Cheddar, Colyton, Congresbury, Curry Mallet, Honiton, Ilminster, Lincoln (*Lindum*), Lyme, Salisbury (which, though not Roman, is close to *Sorbiodunum*), Taunton, Tiverton, Warminster (where a street bearing the name of *Port-way* runs into it at one end, whilst at the other it leads to a street bearing the same name of *Port-way* in Frome), Wells, Wiveliscombe, and Yeovil. To these no doubt many others might easily be added. In three of these, viz.,

(14). Since this lecture was delivered, I have learned that on the other side of Neroche, about a mile and a half from the camp, this name of "Silver-street" occurs, and I find that it is applied to a scattered range of houses extending along the roadside, about midway between Broadway and Neroche. From its character and situation it appears that Silver-street in this instance actually lies on the line of what we have seen Mr. Warre describe as "a branch of the great Roman Fosa way leading from Hambdon hill, through Watergore, Hurcott, Atherton, and Broadway, to Neroche;" thus, on the other side, carrying the name close up, and as it were almost affixing it to the very object, which as the Alaena Silva of the Romans, I hold to have given occasion to the name of Silver-street, as it occurs in Taunton. I may further mention that close to "*High-street*" at Curry Mallet, which has been shown to have a Roman significance, we find also the name of "*Silver-street*," pointing in a marked manner directly towards Neroche, which lies most conspicuously in a straight line with it. The occurrence of the name in this latter instance, and yet more especially in that close to Neroche, lends strong confirmation to the view that the name of *Silver-street* is derived from a corruption of Silva, a wood.

those occurring in the rural districts of Curry Mallet, Buckland St. Mary, and West Buckland, "*Silver-street*" is quite remote from any town, and the term "*street*" is not otherwise present. Similar instances are also presented to us by a "Silver-street" remote from any town in the Hoo district in Kent, north of Rochester, by one near Culmstock, and by another near the Tiverton Junction Railway Station, in Devonshire. In the last instance it is found close to a "*Cold Harbour*," itself held to indicate the presence of the Romans. The occurrence of the name in towns may, perhaps, in some cases (possibly in Salisbury), be held to be of like kind as in these to which I have referred; for though originally in the country, they may have become included within some town of more modern date.

In an able work with which I have only lately had an opportunity of becoming acquainted, an instance is given of a "*Silver Street*," north of Stow Market, in Suffolk, in connection with which we find the following suggestive question:—"Does not this come from the Latin *Sylva*, just as we say *Wood Street* at the present day?" (Hartshorne's *Salopia Antiqua*, Parker, 1841, p. 280.)