

THE ROMAN NAME OF ILCHESTER

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THE wish to find Roman names for Roman sites (or sites which might be hoped to be Roman) is an old one ;¹ it reached its height a century or so ago under the malign influence of the forged itinerary of Richard of Cirencester, and is rather out of fashion in these days of scientific excavation. Nevertheless, it still gives some satisfaction to find a Roman ' name ' for a ' local habitation ' which the archaeologists are exploring for us. And if, to find the name, involves as well writing a page of history, it is more than mere satisfaction. I have hopes that my paper may be deemed to have done both for the Roman site of Ilchester.

The sixteenth century humanist, Michael Servetus, attached to Ilchester the name Iscalis, which Ptolemy's *Geography* locates within some thirty miles of it,² and his guess was accepted for centuries. But it relies merely on similarity of appearance, and we now know that the similarity is deceptive.³ To find a plausible substitute we must go far afield, to set our find in historical perspective still further.

For the name we must go to Hadrian's Wall. It is known that in Britain the unit of local government was normally the *civitas*, comprising the area more or less identical with that of a free British tribe and provided with a town of Roman layout, normally with a town-wall, on a nodal point of the Roman road system.⁴ Ptolemy's *Geography* offers us to the east of the Dumnonii of Devonshire the Durotriges with their capital of Dunium, which we must identify with Maiden Castle. Its place was taken in the first century A.D. by Durnovaria, Dorchester, which becomes the Roman centre of a *civitas*, the Durotriges.⁵ Indeed, it is from Durnovaria, not from the Durotriges, that the name of Dorset takes its origin.⁶ But

1 As old as Henry of Huntingdon (twelfth century) at least (Haverfield and Macdonald, *Roman Occupation of Britain*, 291.)

2 See Haverfield in *V.C.H. Somerset*, i, 295.

3 Ekwall, (*Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*), quotes ' Givelcestre ' from Domesday Book and explains : " Roman fort on River Yeo " (formerly *Gift*).

4 Compare Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, 166.

5 Wheeler, *Maiden Castle*, 13, 67.

6 *Collected Papers of Henry Bradley*, 92.

From Hadrian's Wall we have two inscriptions recording work of rebuilding performed corporately by the *civitas* of the 'Durotriges Lendinienses'.¹ This can only mean that at some date later than Ptolemy,² the *civitas* of the Durotriges was divided, one part still having Durnovaria as its administrative centre, but the other provided with a new one, from which the adjective 'Lendinienses' derives. It is our problem to locate it.

It cannot be to east or west of Durnovaria, for there are no towns of Roman type in the area which we may assign to the Durotriges;³ we can only look to the north. Here we must look south of Bath and the real Iscalis, wherever it was,⁴ for Ptolemy assigns them to the Belgae. The only clue to the northern boundary of the Durotriges is the distribution of coins attributed to them, and this suggests that it was the Axe or the line of the Mendips.⁵ Within this area to the north of Durnovaria we have a Roman site which will fulfil the requirements, and one alone. It is Ilchester.

And there is confirmation. Somewhere in this district the Ravenna Cosmographer places the site of Lindinis, and his most recent editors, Messrs. Richmond and Crawford,⁶ noting the common confusion of I and E in Roman written versions of Celtic names, accept the identification that I had proposed,⁷ with the 'Lendinienses' of Hadrian's Wall. On analogies such as Rutupis in the Cosmographer—Rutupiae, we can accept the name of 'Lendiniiae'. Richmond and Crawford give it a meaning—'Marsh' or 'Littlemarsh'; and the name is as appropriate for Ilchester as we could wish. One recalls Haverfield's description:⁸ 'The marsh comes up to its western edge and the neighbourhood is liable to flood.' We might dare indeed to see Lendiniiae/Ilchester created by the Romans as the successor of the hill fort of Ham Hill,⁸ much

1 *Corpus Inscr. Lat.*, vii, 695—*Ephemeris Epigraphica*, ix, 592; and vii, 1052.

2 I have argued that these inscriptions record the rebuilding of A.D.369 (*Eng. Hist. Rev.*, lvi, 359), but local experts prefer a third century date.

3 To the east the cultural frontier is the Test (Hawkes, *Proc. Hants. Field Club*, iii, 160); Collingwood (Collingwood & Myres, 168) places the frontier with the Dumnonii 'probably at the river Axe'.

4 *Geographia*, ii, 3, 13. For Iscalis I am attracted in spite of Haverfield (*V.C.H. Somerset*, i, 368) to Uphill, the 'harbour of Isca', whence the road started to the lead mines (Codrington, *Roman Roads in Britain*, 219), worked by Legion II from Caerleon (Isca).

5 *Archaeologia*, xc, 36, map VII.

6 *Archaeologia*, xciii, 37.

7 *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, lvi, 359, n. 5.

8 Ham Hill was not completely abandoned. British and Gallic analogies suggest a religious site maintained there, and Haverfield thought of a village of quarrymen (*V.C.H. Somerset*, i, 298).

in the same manner (and, indeed, at the same time)¹ as Durnovaria/Dorchester succeeded Maiden Castle.

We cannot, indeed, define the line that divides the new *civitas* from the old with its centre continuing at Durnovaria; one thinks of the central spine of hills, the watershed of streams flowing to the Bristol and English Channels, and possibly the actual boundary of Somerset and Dorset may be in its general line older than we think. But it is possible to conjecture why the division was made. It was a principle of Roman imperial taxation that the responsibility for its collection should fall upon the local senators (*decuriones*) of the *civitas*. It was, therefore, to some extent in the emperors' interest to create new *civitates* where possible in order to spread the burden. But the locals might be interested too. A village (*vicus*) in the territory of a *civitas* might feel that it was not getting fair treatment from the authorities in a distant capital town and protest in a manner for 'no taxation without representation'. For the picture we must go to Asia Minor. Here we learn that the emperors (their names are unknown) 'who are imbued with the idea of increasing the number and glory of *civitates* throughout the Roman world' grant the request of the *vicus* of Tymandus 'to enjoy the name and dignity of a *civitas*, since its inhabitants guarantee that there will be a sufficient number of senators there for the future'. A similar request by the people of Orchestus (who had had the privilege and lost it) is made to Constantine equally with success, and here the grounds for the request are given. It is an old town, a road junction, has fine baths—and all the inhabitants are Christians. Moreover, the local authorities of Nacolea, on which it had been dependent, have been unfair to it in financial matters.²

Ilchester is a road centre like Orchestus; for fine baths and—who knows?—a Christian church, we must pin our hopes on its excavators. That Ilchester, like Tymandus, could guarantee a body of local senators, men of property, that is, from the local gentry, is more than likely. In fact it looks rather as if in the Roman period the balance of prosperity as between the northern and the southern halves of the Durotriges had shifted—to the benefit of the northern.

1 So Seaby infers (*Num. Chron.* 6s, ix, 177; *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, xcv, 156). No doubt the excavations will give a decisive answer.

2 The inscriptions usually cited from *Inscr. Lat. Select.*, 6090 and 6091 are most easily consulted by English readers (though not translated) in Abbott & Johnson, *Municipal Administration in the Roman Empire*, documents 151 and 154.

Coins of the Durotriges in circulation down to the second century A.D. are common in the south and especially in Cranborne Chase, rare in the north, where hill-forts and vestiges of the iron age are not common either. On the other hand, the Ordnance Survey map of Roman Britain shows twenty-one villas close to Ilchester, against less than half a dozen in the region of Dorchester. And if, as scholars believe,¹ Cranborne Chase became an imperial estate, that would mean that it was removed from the control of Durnovaria, which would lose, consequently, in position and prestige. Moreover it is consistent with the general picture that the Ilchester group of villas, conspicuous by mosaic pavements connoting luxury, seems to originate relatively late in the Roman period.²

The explanation of this new prosperity of the northern Durotriges, the Durotriges Lendinienses, must be speculative. Reclamation of agricultural land is a possibility, though the pollen evidence from the Shapwick region is not quite certain of interpretation, and might indeed point the other way—to an inundation of the sea.³ Conceivably private instead of state exploitation of the Mendip mines (which seemed to Sir Arthur Evans the explanation of the silver hoards of Somerset⁴) may be in question.

Whatever the explanation, the fact of the rising prosperity is certain enough, and we can imagine impatience at control from distant—and decaying⁵—Durnovaria, and such a demand for administrative independence as was made to emperors from Tymanus and Orchestus. That a new *civitas*, the 'civitas Durotrigum Lendiniensium' was created, which by recording its work on Hadrian's Wall has given us its name, and that this name, Lendiniae,

1 So Collingwood & Myres, 224, followed by Hawkes, *Arch. Journ.*, civ, 33. I hope elsewhere to give more substance to their case which is rather tenuous as it stands.

2 The final reconstruction of the Low Ham villa with its splendid mosaic dates from the fourth century (*Somerset & Dorset Notes & Queries*, xxv, 141); the site at Westland, Yeovil, where occupation commenced c. A.D. 180 had 'its most intensive occupation during this period' (*Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, lxxiv, ii, 133, 137). Other sites, not scientifically examined, hint at the same story (see *V.C.H. Somerset*, i, 320-334).

3 *Philosophical Transactions*, ser. B, No. 233, 283.

4 *Num. Chron.*, 4s., xv, 500.

5 *Excavations at Colliton Park*, 1st Report, 13.

is the Roman name of Ilchester, I trust to have demonstrated with a meed of plausibility in this paper.

[Material support is given to Mr. Stevens' paper by finds from excavations at Ilchester in recent years. Mr. J. Stevens Cox, F.S.A., has discovered not only substantial Roman building foundations but, in the lowest levels of occupation, traces of a mid to late first-century settlement of wattle-and-daub huts (*Arch. Journ.*, cvii, 94-5). Much of the pottery used by these settlers is similar to that from the Belgic War Cemetery of A.D. 44 at Maiden Castle (cf. *Report*, 232, fig. 72), while a base silver coin of Durotrigian (Hod Hill) type, as those from Ham Hill, has also come to light here (*Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, xcv, p. 156, footnote 4). These discoveries will be fully reported in the *Proceedings* at a later date —Ed.]