

On an Ancient Roman "Botontinus" or Landmark on Banwell Hill.

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ON the north side of the Roman road along the Mendip Hills, and west of the Camp at Banwell, is an ancient Roman landmark.

When Sir R. C. Hoare caused a survey to be made of the line of Roman road extending between Uphill and Old Sarum, the surveyor, Mr. Crocker, noted an earth-work, with a slight bank and ditch, having a cross in the centre, and entered it on his plan. Sir Richard gives a large drawing of it in his *Ancient Wilts* when treating of the Roman period, but does not enter into any explanation of it. Subsequent enquiry and examination has led to a better understanding of this ancient mark of Roman dominion, and has cleared up the doubt and difficulty that once surrounded it.

Mr. Coote, in his work on *The Romans in Britain*, when treating of the interesting subject of the Roman colonization of this island, and explaining the method of apportioning the conquered territory, in speaking of the work of the *agrimensores*, or Roman land surveyors, observes, "In Somersetshire, at a place called Banwell Camp, is an earth-work, consisting of an oblong enclosure, with the angles rounded off. This earth-work is 55 yards in length and 45 in breadth, having a slight agger and fosse. In the centre is a ridge of earth, forming a Greek cross, raised about two feet above the rest of the enclosure, and four feet broad." This earth-work is also noted by Mr. Phelps, in his *History of Somerset*, who copies from Sir R. C. Hoare.

These ancient "botontini" are not unknown in other parts

of England, but have been noted in many places. A cross in masonry within the Castellum or fort, at Richborough in Kent, has much exercised the minds of antiquaries, but is supposed by Mr. Coote to be only a "botontinus" of earlier date, which had been enclosed within the fort of later construction, when that part of the coast was fortified against the attacks of pirates from the northern shores of Europe—the fort at Richborough being only one of a chain constructed in the 3rd and 4th centuries, to protect the British coast.

These crosses were sometimes covered with a mound. This was found to have been the case at Helperthorpe, in the Wolds of Yorkshire. The mound on being opened there was found to contain pieces of pottery, an iron horse-shoe, fragments of red tile, and lumps of burnt sandstone. Under the mound was a cruciform platform, protected by walls built of native chalk. The cross was of Greek form, like the buried cross at Banwell, and, like it, raised in relief upon the natural ground.¹

Let us consider, then, what is meant by this cruciform figure.

The subject of *termini* or boundary marks is of much interest, but much has been done to destroy them in this country, through ignorance of their meaning and their original purpose for marking out estates. "Removing the ancient landmark" was not only a sin under the Jewish law, but wherever property came to be held as a possession, it was a crime.

Boundary marks in ancient, as well as in modern, times, were very varied; sometimes trees, sometimes stones, marked or unmarked; sometimes mounds or barrows of earth, under which were placed certain "indicia" or tokens, by which they could be recognised as boundary marks. It is not needful to go into the Roman law, under which the divisions of a conquered territory were apportioned to colonists. There are those more competent than myself to go into the particulars of this

(1). See *Buried Cruciform Platforms in Yorkshire*, by Chas. Monkman; *Yorkshire Archæological and Topographical Journal*, vol. xi. pp. 69—75; also, *Coote's Romans of Britain*, p. 101.

subject. I will only refer to some authorities for the "Lex Colonica" to which reference may be made, such as the Theodocian Code, and the work of Hygynus to which Mr. Coote in his very useful volume makes frequent reference. Whatever was done in Roman times was done under authority, and rested upon the firm basis of *law*. The "Lex Colonica" was carried out by a Commission, and this consisted of a military corps, with augurs, land surveyors, and architects; but the measurements of the land rested with the *agrimensor*, or surveyor, and he went upon a system, as all surveyors must.

Mr. Coote observes that we have evidence that the artificial boundaries of a city's territory consisted of roads, stone altars, and *termini* of a particular kind. The territory having been assigned, was marked out by *centuriation*, and in this manner the surveyor proceeded. He divided the territory by a line drawn from east to west into two parts—called right and left; the right being on the north of the surveyor as he looked west; the south being on his left. Another intersecting line was taken from south to north, and this divided the land into two more portions; that which faced the surveyor being called *ultra*, or beyond; that behind him *citra*, or the opposite direction; these divisions were called *regiones*, the intersection of the lines being called the *umbelicus*, or central point.

The line drawn from east to west was called the *decumanus maximus*; that from south to north, the *cardo maximus*. The two lines, when noted on a plan, or on the surface of the ground, formed a cross. This cross, then, at Banwell, on the hill, marks the intersection of these two lines, and indicates that a "*territorium*" had been marked out at this point. How far it may have extended we know not, but we have most certain proof of Roman occupation, and it is an interesting relic of the former subject condition of this portion of our island.

That this district was an important possession in Roman

times there can be no doubt. Let us suppose ourselves stand in the centre of this "botontinus," and looking westward, with the Roman *agrimensor*. The Roman road (according to Sir R. C. Hoare's survey, which seems to have been done with care and accuracy) passes close to the south side of the earth-work containing the cross. From the centre of the cross we look westward on Brean Down, and the mouth of the river Axe. On that down are unmistakeable marks of Roman occupation, and Roman remains have been found there. Uphill Bay formed a safe anchorage for Roman galleys, while all the surface of Brean Down is marked with traces of Roman habitation.

On the south side of Bleadon Hill, before cultivation had extended itself up the slope, there were very distinct marks of an aboriginal settlement. These were noted especially by the surveyors of Sir R. Hoare, and the remains are marked on his plan. I can remember observing them myself thirty-five years ago. If the Roman *agrimensor* turned to the east, he looked upon the rich mineral district of the Mendip Hills, abundant in lead—a mineral of which the Romans well knew the value, and which for three hundred years was worked by them, and so well worked that all the virgin ore has been appropriated!

If we turn with the Roman *agrimensor* and look north,—towards Weston and Clevedon, to the mouth of the Yeo, at Kingston Seymour,—we there find the remains of villas and deposits of Roman money, the date of which carries us on to the commencement of the 4th century, if not later; and during a period of 300 years we find the Roman reclaiming the waste land from the sea, and draining the marsh and tilling the land, as well as working out the mineral, and teaching the natives of Britain that which they had never learned before.

These ancient boundary marks are matters of great interest in other countries. Since the above paper was written I have received a quarto pamphlet, published in Naples (1877), on an

ancient terminal stone found on the estate of Signor Augusto Monaco, in 1874, in the province of "Terra di Lavoro," and preserved in his villa at Portici. It has been recorded by Professor Mommsen, in the 10th volume of the *Corp. Inscrip. Latin.*, and is exceedingly curious from the antique form of the letters with which the stone was inscribed. It gives the names of three commissioners who were sent to define the boundary of a disputed territory

Such examples of early arbitrations are not unknown, and one is given in Rich's *Companion to the Greek Lexicon and Latin Dictionary*, p. 162, under the word *Cippus*. The stone there represented is preserved in the Museum at Verona, and is said to be one of the oldest authentic Roman inscriptions extant, but the stone recently found in the territory of *Francolise* appears from the form of the lettering to be much more ancient.¹ It is not improbable such records may still be found within the limits of our own island.

(1). See *Lapide Terminale Arcaica dell' agro Falerno Illustrati dal Dottore Carmelo Mancini. Napoli, 1877.*