

PLATE I



Kirby Muxloe Golf Course

*Ministry of Defence (Air Force Department) Photograph. Crown copyright reserved.*

# THE ROMAN ROAD FROM LEICESTER TO MANCETTER

by

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The line of the Roman road from Leicester to Mancetter is fairly clear from Mancetter<sup>1</sup> to Peckleton, and has been fully discussed by I. D. Margary in his work on Roman Roads,<sup>2</sup> but its continuation to Leicester is open to question. Margary suggests that "its course out of the city is not clear, but from Dane Hills through Leicester Forest East the present main road (A 47) may represent it, and from this place to King's Stand, near Desford, the road is raised 1-2 feet and runs in straight lengths. After this a straight alignment seems to have been closely followed for the rest of the way, though most of the route runs like a ridgeway on high ground with wide views. Past Desford Hall towards Peckleton it is now lost, save for some hedgerow lines, but then the road to Kirkby Mallory, now narrow and rather sunken, follows it."<sup>3</sup> Further west, the road seems certainly to be heading towards Watling Street and joining it about half a mile south-east of the Roman town of *Manduessedum*.

Recent work by members of Leicester Museum staff, in particular M. G. Hebditch<sup>4</sup> and G. A. Chinnery, has shown that the road does, in fact, take a more northerly course from Peckleton to Leicester than suggested by Margary. My thanks must go to them for allowing me to publish the results of their work in a paper that makes no claim to originality. It is hoped that by presenting the evidence as it now stands future research workers will be spurred on to do more field work and to complete what has been so far done.

The evidence comes from Royal Air Force aerial photographs taken as long ago as 1948. The features now to be described have, therefore, been overlooked for nearly twenty years, and, in some cases, the land has since been developed. The photographs were taken vertically from a height of 16,600 feet with a camera of 20-inches focal length, giving a nominal scale of 1/10,000, not the best for archaeological purposes, but even so the photographs provide sufficient evidence to make a re-appraisal of this stretch of road necessary.

The relevant photographs, kept at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, are:

R.P.	541/RAF/2128DEC48	3016,3017.
R.S.	541/RAF/2128DEC48	4011,4013,4015.
R.P.	541/RAF/2128DEC48	3056,3058,3060.

The area in question is shown on the plans (Figures 1 a and b), which have been traced from the six-inch Ordnance Survey maps. Details have been omitted and only main roads and field boundaries are shown. The evidence for the line of the Roman road is as follows:

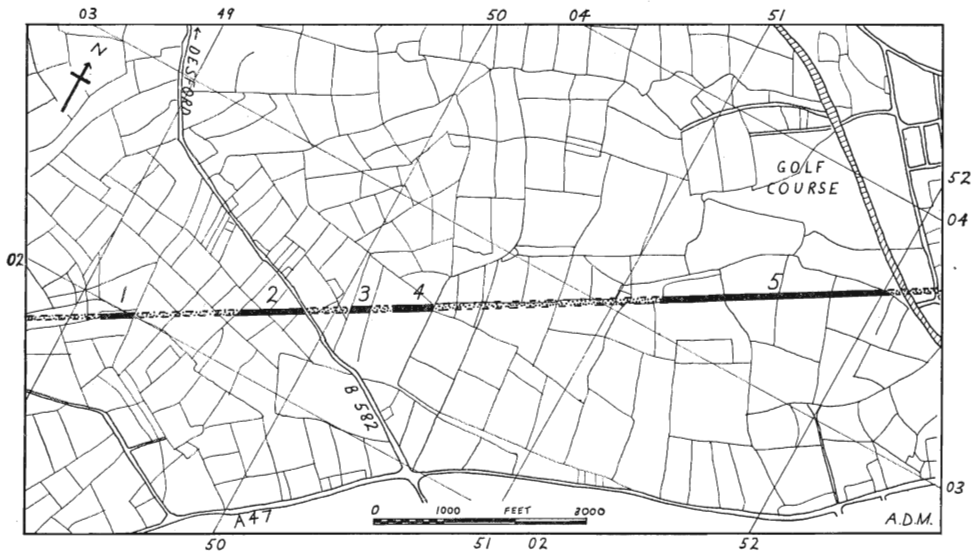


Fig. 1a. Based upon Ordnance-Survey Map. Crown copyright reserved.

Reference number on plan (Figure 1)	Photograph number	Comments
1	3016/17	Dark crop marks showing for approximately 150 yards.
2	3016/17	Light crop mark and surface features, 150 yards in length.
3	3016/17,4015	Surface features parallel to hedge, 100 yards in length.
4	3016/17,4015	Two parallel surface features, 200 yards in length.
5	4013/15	$\frac{3}{4}$ mile of surface features (Plate I) (Kirby Muxloe golf course).
6	3060/4011	Dark crop mark 200 yards in length.
7	3060	Faint light crop mark.
8	3058	Dark crop mark, 100 yards long.

In addition to the above there are many hedgerow alignments on the course of the road. There is sufficient evidence to show the course of the road as far as Kirby Muxloe (numbers 1 to 5) with certainty, but from there to Leicester the line is not clear. The crop marks (numbers 6 and 7) are very faint, and taken alone, would not be convincing, but as they are on the projected line of the road they may be taken as definite.

If this alignment is projected towards Leicester then it would take the road to the north of the Roman town, and one might suggest that it then turned south and entered the town by the Roman north gate. It could, on the other hand, turn somewhere to the west of the town and enter by the Roman west gate. On photograph 3058 (Figure 1 b, number 8) there is a dark crop mark<sup>6</sup> which can be traced for about 100 yards, and from the

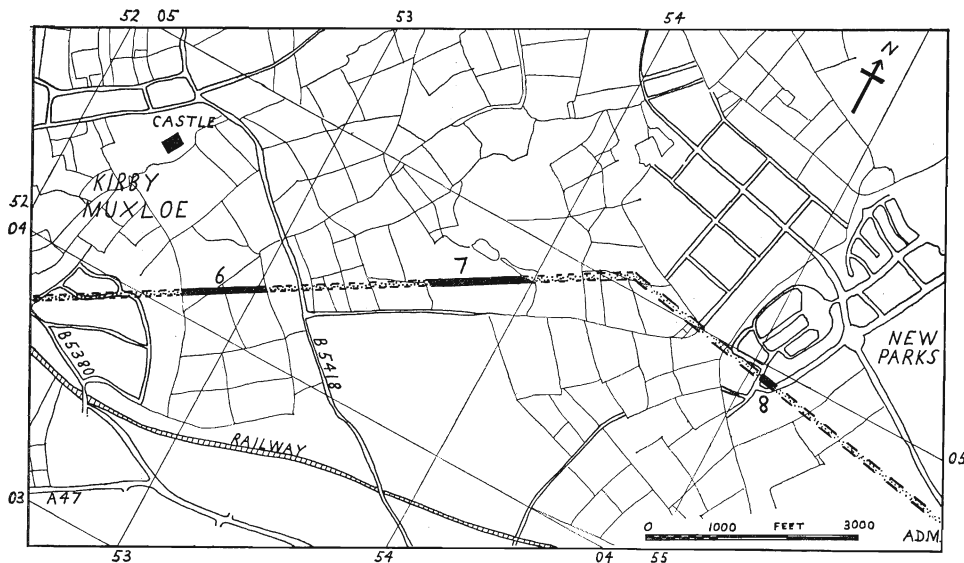


Fig. 1b. Based upon Ordnance-Survey map. Crown copyright reserved.

photograph it appears to be earlier than the ridge and furrow. If the line of this crop mark is projected to the east (*i.e.* towards Leicester) it joins up with King Richard's Road and hence to the Roman west gate.<sup>7</sup>

When King Richard III rode out of Leicester to Bosworth Field he went by way of Bow Bridge. As both Bow Bridge and Braunstone Bridge were then in existence it looks as if an established route out of Leicester in the fifteenth century was *via* Bow Bridge and King Richard's Road.<sup>8</sup> It is conceivable that this road is even older and dates from the Roman period. If this line is further projected west it would meet the Roman road to Mancetter established above (grid. ref. 544051).

The evidence for the course of the road into Leicester is very slender, and more work needs to be done. Unfortunately most of the area is now covered by houses, and it would be almost impossible to check this proposed line by excavation.<sup>9</sup> It is not unknown for Roman roads suddenly to change direction close to towns<sup>10</sup> and this often can produce problems of interpretation which it would be unwise to pursue in this case, until more work has been done on the Roman road system of Leicestershire.

The significance of the Fosse Way has long been recognised as the earliest frontier of Roman Britain.<sup>11</sup> More recently Graham Webster<sup>12</sup> has shown that it is to be attributed to Aulus Plautius (governor A.D. 43-47) rather than to Ostorius Scapula (A.D. 47-52), and that it formed, so to speak, the spine and connecting link of a wide belt of forts along the frontier zone. This broad fortified zone swept through Leicestershire and the importance of the road network and the early Roman sites in the county can be clearly seen. It may be that some of the roads are military and of the invasion period. The identification of an early fort<sup>13</sup> half a mile west of the Roman town of

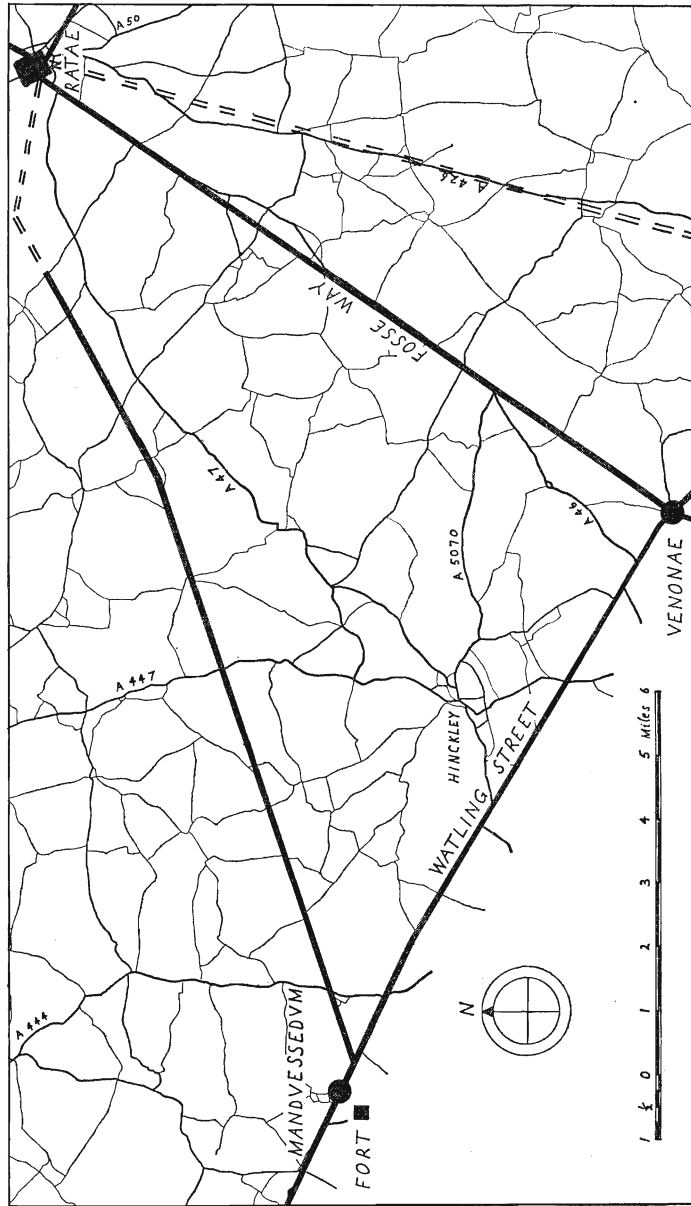


Fig. 2. Based upon Ordnance-Survey map. Crown copyright reserved.

*Manduessedum* at the village of Mancetter might suggest that the road between *Manduessedum* and *Ratae* was laid out in this period to connect the forts situated on these sites. This might account for the fact that the road aims at a point three-quarters of a mile south-east of the Roman town on Watling Street. It must surely be aiming for the military settlement (*vid.* Fig. 2).

Of the other roads in the south-west of the county, little fresh can be said. The line of the Fosse Way from High Cross (*Venonae*) to Leicester is fairly certain, although trenching in Green Lane, Enderby,<sup>14</sup> prior to the construction of the M 1 failed to locate it. This may have been due to the fact either that the trenches were not on the line of the road, or that all the road material has been worn or quarried away. Even so one would have expected that the roadside ditches would have been found. Its continuation into Leicester is assumed to follow the Narborough Road and eventually to arrive at the west gate of the Roman town. In view of the historical importance of the Fosse Way it is unfortunate that very few complete sections have been dug across it to establish its original date and chronological development.

Margary feels fairly confident about the Roman origin for the Leicester to Lutterworth road,<sup>15</sup> and suggests it follows the modern main road (A 426) heading for the Roman settlement of *Tripontium*, near Caves Inn Farm, Shawell. This may be so; yet in view of the lack of certain evidence a more detailed study of this area must be awaited.

A great deal of work needs to be done to improve our knowledge of the Roman road system of the county, to establish dates, lines of construction and alterations. Study of other aerial photographs might prove most rewarding and help to throw fresh light upon the history of Roman Britain as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

## NOTES

1. There are at least two Roman sites in the area: the civil one (*Manduessedum*) lies astride Watling Street and is in the parish of Witherley; the military site is in the village of Mancetter, half a mile west of the Roman town. Mancetter is used in this paper to describe the Roman town of *Manduessedum*.
2. I. D. Margary *Roman Roads in Britain* (1953), vol. II, 24.
3. *ibid.*, 24.
4. Mr. Hebditch has since taken up a post at Bristol Museum.
5. Dark crop marks suggest robbing of the metalling as at Thorpe, Nottinghamshire. *Journ. Rom. Studies* xlviii (1958), pl xv; and lvi (1966), fig. 10.
6. This lies between New Parks Boulevard and Frolesworth Rd.
7. Assuming the gate to be situated close to West Bridge.
8. I owe this suggestion to G. A. Chinnery.
9. Although it would be possible to excavate in Western Park.
10. For examples *vid.* the two volumes of Margary's book mentioned above, and also K. M. Kenyon, *Excavations at the Jewry Wall Site, Leicester* (1948), plate xxx. For a recent review of the road system at Cirencester *vid. Antiq. Journ.* xlv (1965), 100.
11. R. G. Collingwood, *Journ. Rom. Studies* xiv (1924), 252-6.
12. *Arch. Journ.* cxv (1958), 49.
13. *ibid.*, 55.
14. Carried out by M. G. Hebditch and report as yet unpublished.
15. Margary *op. cit.* I (1955), 190.
16. I am most grateful to Professor S. S. Frere and J. S. Wachter for reading this paper through and making comments, most of which have been incorporated.