

MINUTES OF THE 105th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO ON WEDNESDAY 25th APRIL 2018

Present: - Keith McClellan – Chairman
Peter Cole – Secretary

1. Secretary's Report

Peter said that he had a very interesting visit of Catherine Laden from Dayton, Ohio, U S A on Tuesday of last week. In addition to his tour she and her husband Don had been able to visit the Quaker House in Adderbury, where her ancestor Thomas Mercer living in Adderbury in 1675 would have been present to see the leader of the Quakers George Fox open the House.

2. Keith introduced Bob Hunter to talk on **The Portway**.

Bob started by giving details of the first people known to have lived in the south of England. They certainly weren't savages, but quite civilised inhabitants of round wooden houses with conical roofs. They wore clothes rather than skins, and traded with other villages. For at least five thousand years travellers have used the Ridgeway to get about, as it was easy to walk, and was mostly above open land giving traders ample warning of potential attacks. This started at the Dorset coast and was a trading route to Norfolk and the Wash. It was known as a "corduroy trackway" as wooden planks were placed in dips where the ground was wet. It has been carbon-dated to be around 2,500 BC. A Bronze Age wheel with an axle hub was recently found near Peterborough confirming that horses and carts were used around 1,050 BC.

Locally an archaeological dig near Banbury Lane, Middleton Cheney 2 years ago revealed items of late Neolithic grooved pottery ware and Bronze Age spoons. A similar-aged Beaker pottery vase, probably used to hold salt, sealed with a layer of honey wax was found in Northamptonshire. Salt was highly esteemed and valuable in those days.

Not far from the Ridgeway ran Icknield Street, also to Norfolk.

The part of the Ridgeway from Avebury to Ivinghoe Beacon, about 87 miles, led directly to the Portway.

We now move to the Portway, or Porter's Way as it may well have been known. This was the main North/South route through central England from the south coast to York. It hardly ever varies more than two thousand yards from the Longitude 1.30° West or National Grid line 500.

The best trading ports in the south of England in pre-Roman times were Falmouth, Christchurch, Dover and Harwich. Another north/south route is thought to have existed by which the Thames was crossed near Oxford. The reasons for using the Portway are twofold. Trade was in sharp flints, bronze, iron, lead, salt, wool, leather, thatch and imports of wine, salted cheese, olive oil and pottery. The second reason was political: tribal chiefs and regional troops needed to move quickly to defend their Region. They needed to know who was entering it, i.e. whether they were enemies or honest traders. The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford has heavy examples of scrap bronze blocks, presumably collected by travelling smiths to go to smelting sites. Starting at its Southern most point (Old Botley on the Hamble River in Southampton Water) the Portway goes through or close to Winchester, Newbury, Silchester (Roman name Calleva Atrebatum), Burcot, Toot Balden ("Toot" means "Look Out Place"), Oxford, Kidlington, Kirtlington, Upper Heyford Airfield, Souldern, Aynho, Kings Sutton, Warkworth (where Roman coins were found), Chacombe, Preston Capes (where there was a Roman villa), Chipping Warden (Brinavis in Roman times), Daventry (Roman name Bennaventa), Rugby, Tripontium (a Roman town and fortress about

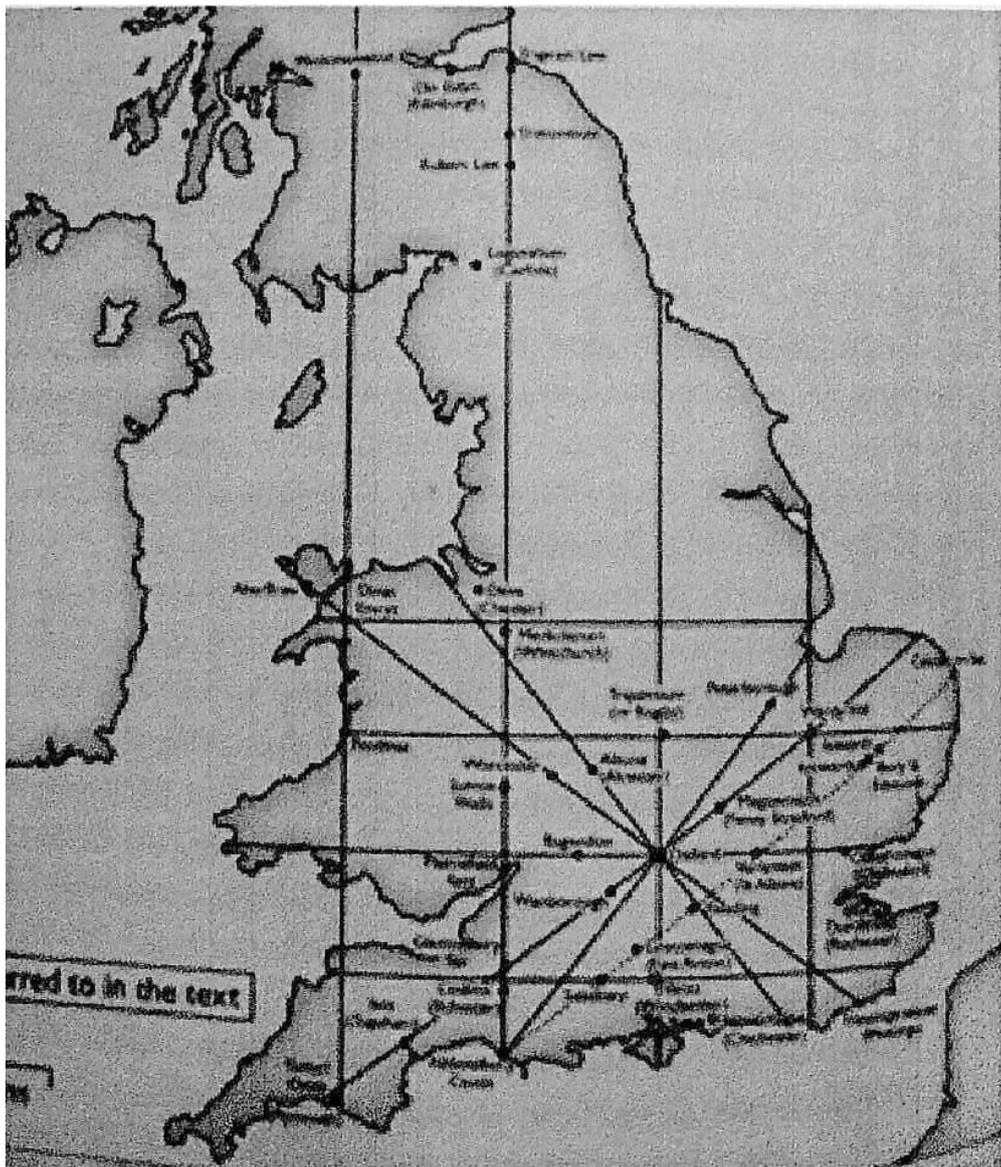


The North/South Trackway Route

3 miles north-east of Rugby) and High Cross (crossing Fosse Way & Watling Street.)

A book "The Ancient Paths of Celtic Britain" by Graham Robb has a map which shows the Portway together with Druid, Celtic and Gaulic Grid systems. These are lines going to most compass points, but all intersecting with the Portway at Oxford on the 1.30° West Nat. Grid line 500 and the East/West Latitude line. Many finds have been made at Tripontium: a Roman sandal, pottery, a very heavy lead ingot from Derbyshire, which had been dropped and was too heavy to be retrieved, a horse shoe and a 306 AD Watling Street roadside stone commemorating Roman Caesars.

Going northwards the road would have gone close to Nottingham, then not far from Doncaster on its way to York and possibly the coast at Hartlepool.



Graham Robb's Grid Systems Map .

Bob Hunter has examined carefully the details of early activity along this South/North route. He has found that watering places, springs and ponds are much in evidence along the route, often not being more than one mile apart. The route also allows only gentle gradients. He also presented evidence from the OS maps showing Celtic Fields, Tumuli, and Forts belonging to the Pre-Roman period, which lie alongside this Portway South/North route.

3. Forthcoming Meetings: –

Wednesday 30th May – **Waddesdon Manor** – Home of the Rothschilds – by Maureen Paterson

Wednesday 27th June – **James Secull – A story of a family from Aynho to Melbourne, Australia** – Doctor Simon Smith, a Professor from Victoria University, who is a direct descendant of James Secull has written a book about him. He is coming over to England to launch his book and speak at our meeting. He will be inviting any member of the Secull family living in England to come to the meeting.