

A ROMAN ROAD AT OTLEY

By ELIZABETH J. OWLES, B.A., F.S.A.

Mr. Ivan Margary, the great authority on Roman roads, has commented on the apparent poverty of their construction in East Anglia which makes the task of the investigator difficult since, when the road has gone derelict, all traces of it seem to vanish entirely.¹ Accordingly, when Mr. Paul Bye of Catshill Farm, Clopton, remarked that he thought a Roman road ran across his father's land, and that he would be glad to have its presence confirmed by excavation, the writer decided to seize the opportunity.

The modern B.1078 is unusually straight for most of its course from Barham Green to Dallinghoo, a fact that led Margary to assume, without definite proof, that it was of Roman origin. At Otley Bottom however, it makes a right angle bend to the right, twists along beside the stream for two thirds of a mile, and takes a sharp turn to the left just before the Crown Inn and thereafter resumes its former alignment (Fig. 29). Much of the land between the two straight stretches of road is owned by Mr. George Bye. One of his sons, Paul, mentioned to the writer that the cart-track, which ran westwards from Catshill Farm, seemed to be on the line of the Roman road and that the continuation of the track showed up as a stony streak after ploughing. He added that this was less obvious every year as he ploughed to the depth of a foot using heavy machinery which turned three furrows at a time.

In September 1967 it was decided to see whether this stony streak was indeed a Roman road and if so to examine its construction. A trench four feet wide seven yards from the west end of the track revealed the road and its flanking ditches (TM/21085433). The ditches were four feet wide and two feet deep from the present ground surface; the distance between them was twenty-five feet (Fig. 30). The road was made up of rammed gravel eight inches thick in the centre; it was not possible to estimate the original thickness because evidently considerable damage had been caused by the plough. The gravel was thinner and less dense near the north ditch. The southern edge of the road had been destroyed when a hedge, which followed its course, was grubbed up a few years ago. The soil here is heavy clay, but a fifth of a mile away, opposite the Crown Inn, is a gravel pit which may have been worked since Roman times. The only finds made were two minute fragments of Roman pottery from the north ditch.

¹ Ivan Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain* (1967), p. 245.

An attempt to trace the course of the road with the aid of a megger, loaned by Ipswich School through the good offices of Mr. James Young, proved unsuccessful. However, Mr. Bye kindly notified the writer when he was about to plough the field to the east of the farmhouse, and although the Roman road had been almost entirely destroyed, a short stretch could be glimpsed in the bottom of the furrow (Fig. 29). The field to the west was owned by Mr. D. Ball; he co-operated in a similar manner and another small portion was located.

The road whose Roman origin has now been established, was given by Margary the number 340 and was considered by him to run from Baylham to Wickham Market (Fig. 31). Since he wrote, a settlement has been discovered at Lower Hacheston (TM/312569) a mile to the north-west of Wickham Market. Trial excavations carried out by the writer in 1965 and 1966 showed that the settlement covered an area of several acres and that occupation lasted from Claudian times at least until the fourth century. Iron and bronze working and pottery making were carried out on the site. The 340 was therefore presumably making for Hacheston rather than Wickham Market.² Westward from Otley the road underlies its modern successor for ten miles; after this its course is not clear though it probably went to the settlement on the east bank of the Gipping which is actually in Coddendam parish, not Baylham.³ Here Margary's road 34 which ran from Wixoe on the north bank of the Stour, through Long Melford to Peasenhall⁴ and probably on to Dunwich, crossed his road 3, the modern A.140, from London through Colchester to Caister-by-Norwich.

² In 1967 Mr. H. Lucock, the Supervisor Foreman for the Department of Roads and Bridges, reported that during the construction of a Bailey bridge to carry the A.12 across the River Deben, he observed a layer of gravel 4 ft. thick and 7 ft. below the present road surface which he thought was unlikely to be a natural deposit. It extended over an area of 25 ft. by 12 ft. and appeared on both banks of the river. If this was a Roman road it was considerably more substantial than the main London to Caister-by-Norwich road which, as reported by Mr. Stanley West in *Ant. J.*, xxxvi (1956), p. 73, was only 1 ft. 6 ins. thick.

³ In 1949 Mr. Basil Brown cut a section across what appeared to be a Roman road north-west of Barham Church (TM/136510). It was running east and was 24 ft. wide and from the ditches came a denarius of Domitian and Roman pottery. If this also is the 340 it must have crossed the Gipping at a point further south than Coddendam. The London to Caister-by-Norwich road crossed the Gipping at Sharmford (TM/117523) according to the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1824, and joined the modern A.140 just beyond the seventh milestone (TM/111538).

⁴ The Resident Engineer for the Department of Roads and Bridges, Mr. H. Lass, reported seeing a layer of large flints 25 to 30 ft. wide and 6 to 9 ins. thick in the side of a trench at Earl Soham in 1968. He considered that it was part of the Roman road. See page 192, below.

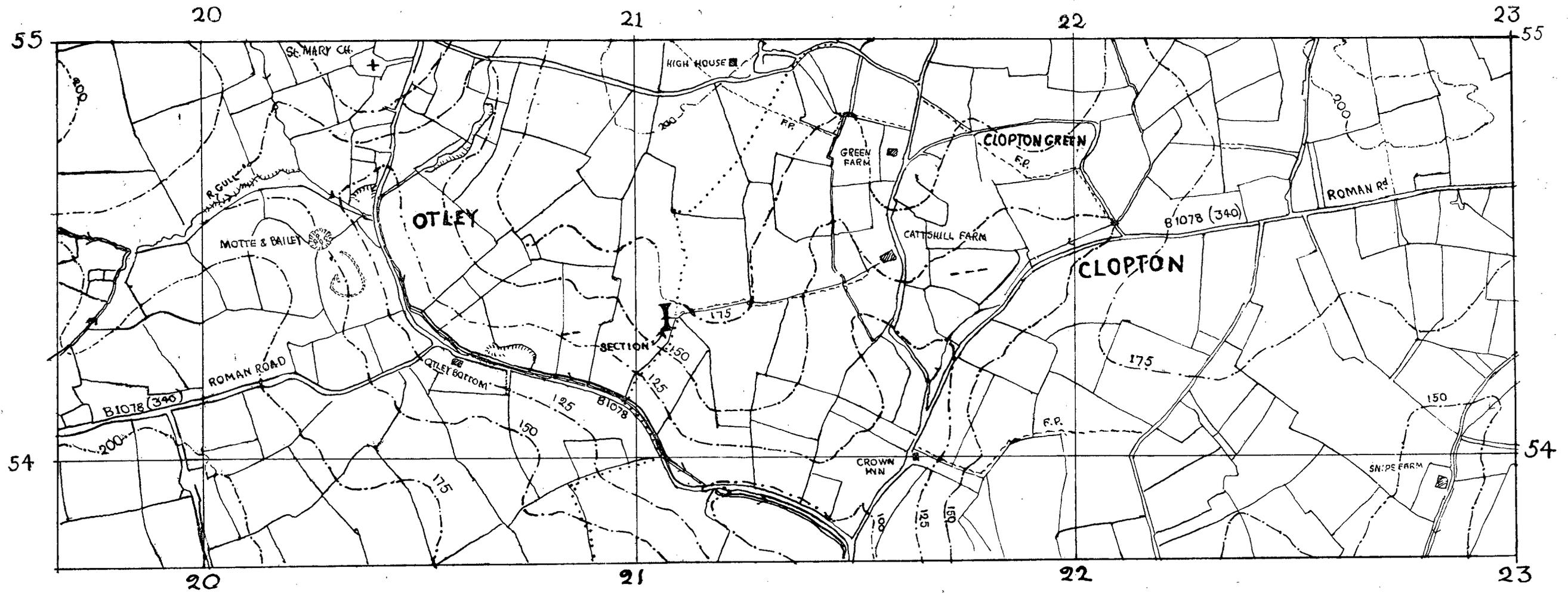


FIG. 29.—Map of Otley showing Roman road, based on O.S. Map. Scale 6 ins. to 1 ml.

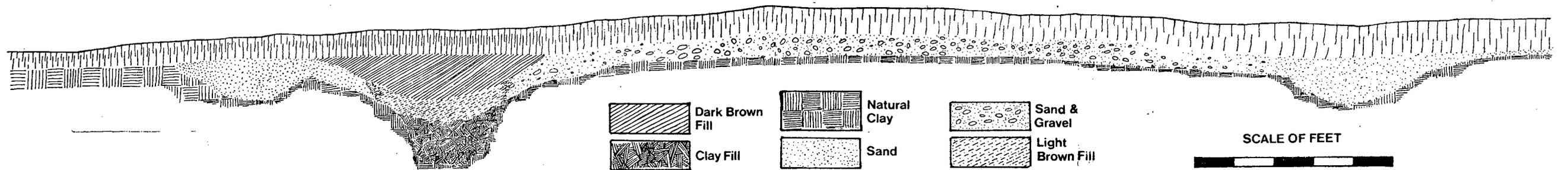


FIG. 30.—Western section through Roman road, Otley, 1967.

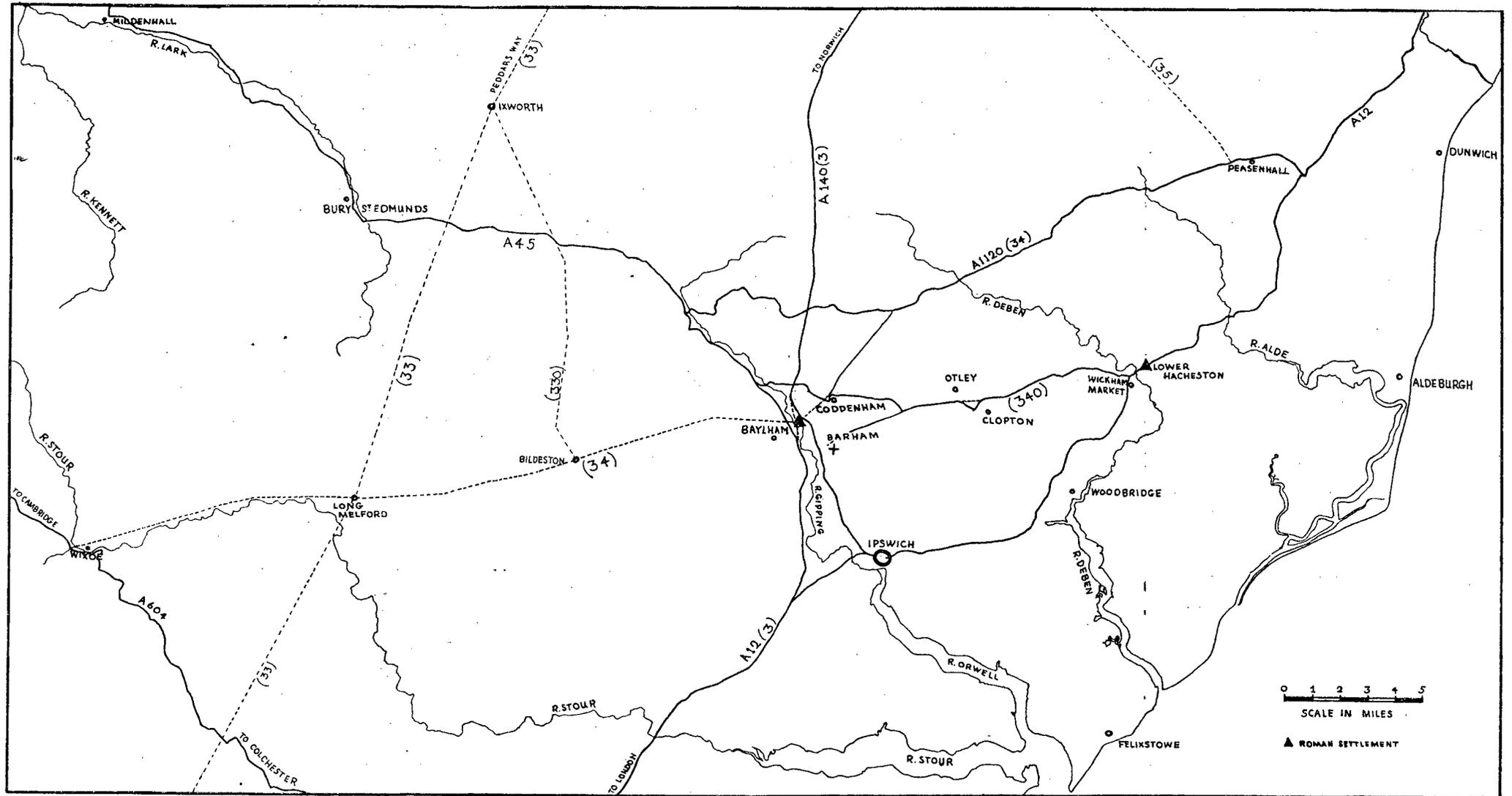


FIG. 31.—Roman roads in Suffolk.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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