

## Long-term significance of King Street

The discovery that the country lane known today as 'Onley Lane' in Barby parish was formerly known as 'King Street' between at least the early 1500s and the late 1700s is of potentially great significance ...

A number of early "viae regia" or "King's streets" have been noted in other parts of the country (both within and outside Northamptonshire) by members of the Community Landscape & Archaeology Survey Project (CLASP), and these are currently the subject of some interested discussion. It is believed that they may have served as 'royal roads' between tribal areas in much earlier times - back, for example, as far as Saxon time, and perhaps even further.

The 'King Street' lane at Barby and Onley, and its continuation both to west and east of Barby parish, has some topologically interesting features associated with it ( [refer to this 1906 VCH map](#) ):

- It appears to be a straight-line route leading directly from a point near to the centre of Rugby town, up and over Barby Hill, and thence along a ridgeway route that may have originally led to the Iron Age settlement at Borough Hill Daventry. It may be significant to add that there was a former settlement of the celtic Dobunni tribe in Rugby at the western locus of this route - and also that the route heads eastward into what would probably have been Catuvellauni territory at that early period.

- The King Street route intersects what is probably another early ridgeway route just east of Barby (near to the site of Barby windmill), heading roughly from Crick to Willoughby.

- The King Street route crosses the Warwickshire/Northamptonshire border at a small stream (the Rainsbrook, which is a corruption of an earlier name 'Rangebrook' or 'boundary brook'). The Rainsbrook rises in Kilsby parish, and defines the Warwickshire/Northamptonshire borders all around Barby Hill. Streams were often regarded by the celtic tribes as boundary markers.

- The local historian Bloxam, writing in the early 1880s, records that there was an old-wives-tale associated with the bridge that carries 'King Street' over the Rainsbrook. In brief, it was said that a great battle between three kings would take place one day between the bridge and Barby Wood, and that a miller with three thumbs would hold the bridles of their horses. This tale was certainly so old by the late 1800s that it had been largely forgotten ...

- The Warwickshire/Northamptonshire border at this point is radically distorted by Barby Hill, in a way that strongly suggests that Barby Hill could have been occupied at an early date (prior to the formation of the shires) by a community that had no alliance with the settlement at Rugby.

- The local historian Ernest W. Timmins had speculated that Barby was of Saxon origin,

and that the name derived originally from "Berughburie" rather than the Danish "-by" ending. He speculated that the village may have been Saxon before being taken by the Danes, who then slightly modified the name to incorporate the Danish ending that is evident at Domesday. Some early tombstone remains in Barby church are also thought to be potentially of Saxon origin.

- Very recent archeological survey has revealed evidence of what is thought to be a ring-ditch fortification on Barby Hill very close to the line of "King Street".

These comments are collected together and summarised here in order that they may be incorporated into subsequent studies on the topology of this area and its early history.

It may be speculated that an early Catuvellauni outpost at Barby could have acted as a lookout over the neighbouring Dobunni territory on the west side of the hill, with the ability to relay news further into Catuvellauni territory (e.g. to Borough Hill at Daventry, Arbury Hill etc) via a beacon or similar means located near to the crossing point of the two ridgeways on the east side of the hill.

It is also possible that the Dobunni settlement at Rugby and the suggested Catuvellauni settlement at Barby Hill may have each been strategically located close to a possible trading site at Barby Nortoft, which lies close to what would have been the intersection of Coritani/Dobunni/Catuvellauni territories around the time of the Roman conquest.

Clearly this is no more than casual speculation (though there is mounting topological evidence to support it) ... and views are invited from others who have specialised in this period.