

The Farleighs, Boughton Monchelsea, The Loose Valley and the Roman  
Occupation.

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During the period when Britain was occupied by the Romans (AD43 through to the early 5<sup>th</sup> Century) both West Farleigh and East Farleigh played an important role as part of a dynamic industrial landscape in the Upper Medway Valley North-Western Kent.

From the around AD50 the Medway Valley began to supply ragstone to enable the urbanization of the South East of the Province (later *diocese*) of *Britannia*, for example such building stone being used as part of the first *forum* in London (*londinium*) which began construction at this time. I believe that the ragstone was quarried from at least four sites along the River Medway. The furthest downriver was at Allington at around, or just above, the tidal reach on the River Medway. Upriver of Allington were three additional quarries, these being at Boughton Monchelsea on Medway tributary the Loose Stream, alongside Dean Street (a huge quarry) and at Teston. From wharfing on the river associated with these quarries sailing vessels would have carried loads of up to 50 tonnes of ragstone through to the Thames Estuary and then either west to London, north to Essex (where such ragstone has been found at Roman Colchester - *camulodunum*) or east to be used in Canterbury (*durovernum cantiacorum*), Richborough (*rutupiae*) and Dover (*portus dubris*).

Each of these quarries is associated with villas where the elites tasked with managing the quarries would have lived, together with other settlement infrastructure. The well known site at East Farleigh featuring a villa with a temple was linked to the Dean Street quarry, while that around the river at Teston was linked with the Teston quarry. To make these quarries, villas and settlements accessible above the tidal reach of the Medway at Allington, I believe that the Romans would have built a series of locks and weirs which would have been similar (if more primitive) than those in use today. These were later removed in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century by the Medway Commissioners of Sewers and in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century by the Medway Navigation Company.

Chronologically, this quarrying activity took place in two specific phases. The first was through to the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century and was a massive, State-run enterprise under the control of the *classis britannica* (the British fleet) on behalf of the Procurator of *Britannia* who would have been tasked with making the maximum profit out of the Province/ *diocese* on behalf of the Emperor. In this phase the cities and towns of South-Eastern Britain were built, and into the third century, sophisticated fortifications in the form of walls with towers and bastions added. After the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, when the *classis britannica* disappears from our records, I believe that the quarrying continued, but on a more localized scale as agriculture (present until then but secondary to the quarrying) became more important. This was particularly that case into the 4<sup>th</sup> Century as Britain became the bread-basket of the Western Roman Empire at a time when Gaul and Germany were aflame from barbarian incursions and civil war.

Throughout the occupation industry and settlement in the Medway Valley seems to have been in the economic sphere of influence of London (along with the Darent Valley). It thus had a separate identity to a similar sphere of economic activity to the east around Canterbury and Richborough in the North East of the modern County, and another to the south in the Weald (where famously the *classis britannica* ran a thriving iron manufacturing industrial enterprise until the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century).

Activity throughout the Medway Valley seems to have come to an end towards the close of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century as, progressively, the villa sites were abandoned. The latest coins found are of the Western Emperor Honorius (from the villa sites at East Farleigh and Teston) who was in power from AD395 – AD423, after which many such sites seem to have fallen out of local memory. It seems likely indeed that the Medway Valley upriver of the tidal reach fell out of use totally until the arrival of Anglo-Saxons following the landing of Augustine at Ebbsfleet in Thanet in AD597. Anecdotally, this is backed up by the re-use of building materials from Roman villa sites (such as that at East Farleigh) in the earliest Saxon phases of nearby churches, for example St Mary's at East Farleigh and All Saints at West Farleigh.

By their very nature it is difficult to find hard archaeological evidence for the provenance of a given quarry as being Roman (the stone being quarried away into the modern era in many cases), and we therefore have to deploy the tools left to an

archaeologist in these circumstances – associated archaeology, the written record, analogy and anecdote. Good local examples include the Roman Road I have identified as running from the Dean Street Quarry down a gentle gradient in the valley down to the East Farleigh villa and Barming crossing (a ford during the Roman occupation). Along this road has been identified a potential milestone and, recently, a possible burial has also been found to add to those found along its length in the 19th Century.

It is clear to me that during the Roman occupation the whole region around West and East Farleigh would have been markedly different from today, it being at the centre of an intense industrialised landscape. Looking north towards the river from Farleigh Green one would have been able to see quarrying and associated quarrying infrastructure being carried out on a monumental scale. Meanwhile, just a short walk up to Heath Road, one could look south into the Weald where the *Classis Britannica's* iron and tile industry activities would have been evident.

One thought to bear in mind however is that while we have a clear idea of where the elites who ran these industries lived, and are aware of aspects of the luxurious lifestyles they enjoyed in their villas on the river, we have no insight at all into the rather grim existences of those who actually carried out the laborious, dangerous quarrying activity. It is perhaps fitting to end this article thinking of these slaves or indentured workers of whom we know so little, and who have left so little an impression on the region in which they lived out their unfortunate existences.

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