

THE MEAD WAY, THE STREET AND DODDINGHYRNAN IN ROCHESTER REVISITED

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In *Archaeologia Cantiana*, LXII, Gordon Ward (no relation) wrote an article entitled 'A note on the Mead Way, The Street and Doddinghyrn in Rochester' (Ward 1949, 37-44). As part of the celebrations for the 1400th year anniversary of the founding of Rochester Cathedral the *Textus Roffensis* (hereafter *TR*) along with other items and information panels was displayed at Rochester Guildhall Museum. Part of that display included information from Dr Ward's interpretation of the four Anglo-Saxon documents he used to provide a topographic analysis of Rochester from the seventh to the ninth centuries. For many years the writer had been intending to show that a different interpretation of the information within these documents is possible.¹ The recent display, seen by many interested in the history of Rochester, suggests this is a good time to put forward an alternative interpretation.

The documents

Four documents are used to show how the Church acquired the whole of the area within the old Roman town walls:

1. This is not a formal Charter but rather a statement, and hence not indexed by Campbell (1973) or Sawyer (1968). This note of a grant was recorded when the *TR* was written (c. 1122-24) from the 'collective memory'; there was no actual charter (Guildhall Museum *TR* display; hereafter GM *TR*). However, there is no reason to doubt the basis of the text, for we know it was true from other sources. Within the *TR* this information is incorrectly dated to 600, all specialists agree the date should be 604.

All the land which is on the southern side from the Mead Way as far as the east gate of the City.

Two of the GM *TR* panels quoted the above but one continued:

...and other land without the wall of the city on the north.

The two panels managed to contradict one another. One followed Gordon Ward's reasoning that the 'Med Weay' (letters misplaced?) was a road. The other stated, that the 'Mead Way' was the river and that Gordon Ward was wrong: 'the Latin *medu waie* in the original document is certainly the River Medway not an earlier name for Northgate formerly Pump Lane as suggested by Ward'.

2. Charter indexed as B.C.S. 3 (i.e. Birch's *Cartularium Saxonicum* (1885-93); indexed by Campbell as 1 and Sawyer as 1). Dated to 609 by Gordon Ward, but 604 by Campbell, Sawyer and GM *TR*. The latter stated the date of 609 was incorrect. Although written in Old English it is implied by Campbell that the charter as it survives is of post-Conquest date (Campbell 1973, xxii).

From the South Gate westward along the walls to the north lane, to the street, and so eastward from the street as far as Doddinghyrnan over against the broad gate.

Domesday Book (1086) tells us that much of this area was given back to the king between 1066 and 1086 in exchange for land at Aylesford, so that the first castle could be constructed (Morgan 1983, 1.2). The usual map portrayal of the first castle showing it situated outside the town wall is totally incorrect (see Flight and Harrison 1978 for the archaeological evidence confirming its correct position).

3. Charter indexed as B.C.S. 242 (indexed by Campbell as 11 and Sawyer as 266). Dated to 781 but probably ninth-century (Campbell 1973, xxiii). Most of this area eventually passed out of church control. Confusingly written in a mix of Old English and Latin.

Within the walls of the said city in the north part, that is, from Doddinghyrnan to the broad gate, east by the wall, and so then south to the east gate, and so west by the street to Doddinghyrnan.

4. Charter indexed as B.C.S. 518 (indexed by Campbell as 26 and Sawyer as 339) and dated to 868, written in Old English. Most of this area eventually passed out of church control.

Here are the boundaries as far as the Mead Way: from Doddinghyrnan west along the street out to the wall, and so by the northern way out to Liaba's house, and so by Liaba's house to where the wall turns east, and so east within the wall to the great gate, over against Doddingherne, then straight south from the gate, along the way, to the east of this land, to Doddingherne.

THE TOPOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

So what do we have? We can see three place or personal names, Liaba's house (in document 4), Mead Way (1, 4) and most notably *Doddinghyrn* or *Doddingherne* (2-4). Also an east gate (1, 3) south gate (2), a north lane (2) and northern way (4), the street (2-4), a broad gate (2, 3), a great gate (4), the way (4). We have to be careful with the words within the documents. The most obvious example is where the word *gaet* was being used; we have to look at the context to try to understand whether it was a gate, in our sense being referred to or, as often, in an Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian context, a street (Tatton-Brown 1984, 16). Even more confusingly it is possible the same word might be used with a different meaning in a different, or indeed the same, charter.

Gordon Ward believed that the Mead Way represented a road running south from the North Gate or, as he would have it, the Broad Gate. He rejects what is obviously the simplest explanation to regard the Mead Way as the river (Ward 1949, 39-40) even though this had been previously suggested (admittedly without discussion) by R.C. Fowler in the pages of the V.C.H. (1926, 121). The reader is directed to Dr Ward's article for a detailed description of his interpretation. Here only a basic summary is provided along with a redrawn copy of his map to show his topographic findings (Fig. 1). Outwardly Dr Ward's interpretations all seem perfectly reasonable and indeed there is (as should be hoped) a large measure of agreement between his and this revised interpretation. However, not everything is as it seems. With a change in emphasis on certain phrases a different series of 'facts' emerge, with the advantage that there is no need to *invent* a further name for the modern Northgate, formerly Pump Lane, Bounds Lane and, in the eleventh century, Cheldergate or Childergate ('the road by the spring'). This revised interpretation is depicted in Fig. 2.

It is obvious that to a very great extent the figures agree, but the basic analytical fact that the Mead Way is a road is rejected in the latest interpretation. It is now argued that the Mead Way is still with us in the form of the River Medway and that it was so called from at least the early seventh century. All the other relevant topographical factors can then be fitted into this interpretation. Gordon Ward's failure to think logically about how the wording of each document could be fitted into an interpretation based upon the river led to unnecessary complications. This failure has been followed by all and sundry down to the present day and is a classic case of historians' 'tunnel vision' (a fault to which archaeologists are even more prone!).

DISCUSSION

Grant 1 Dr Ward stated that the Mead Way is the modern Northgate, and the 'charter' implied it also extended south of the High Street into

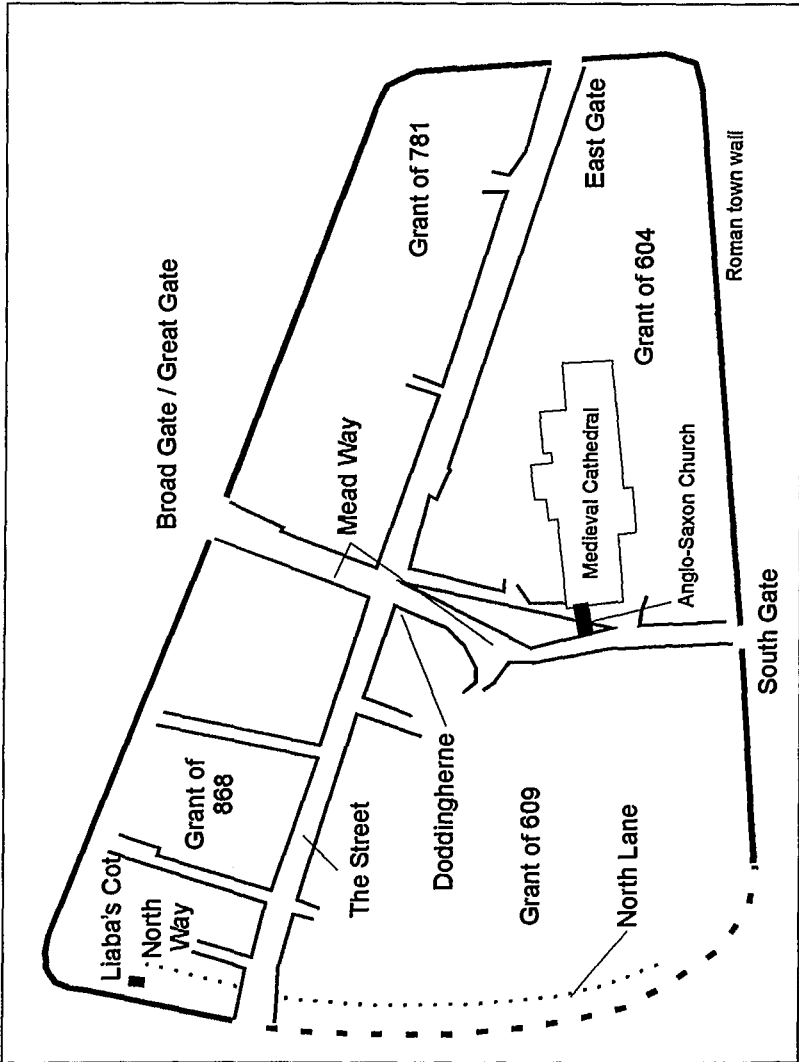


Fig. 1 Map of Rochester based on details of early land grants to the Cathedral from the *Textus Roffensis* — as proposed by Dr Gordon Ward (1949).

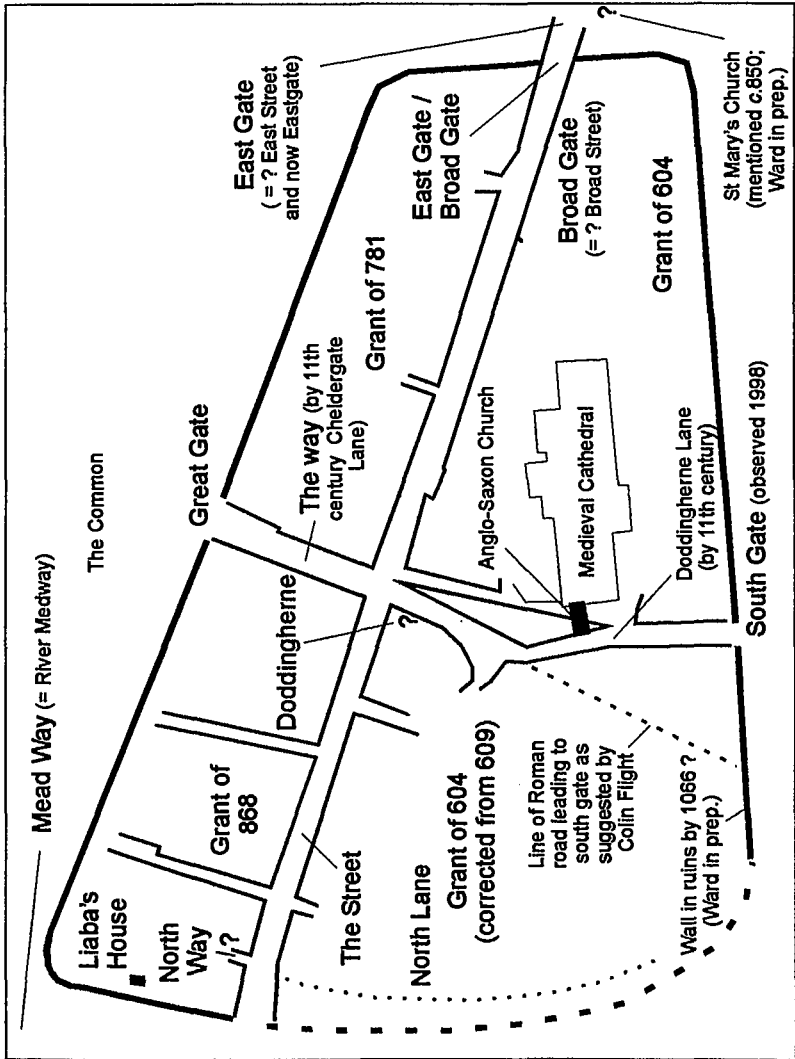


Fig. 2 Topographical information for the mid/late Anglo-Saxon periods – as proposed by Alan Ward (2004).

what is known today (incorrectly) as Boley Hill (formerly Kings Head Lane, Deadmans Lane or, correctly, Doddingherne Lane). However, the 'charter' can be read another, far more literal, way. The grant of land is referring to *all* of the land south of the High Street *from* the river as far as the East Gate (here a gate, not a street), not just some of the land from an *invented* street name eastwards.

This early mention of the River Medway perhaps hints that here we have a place-name survival from the Roman period. The information mentioned in one of the GM *TR* exhibition panels, for the land to the north of the city, would also imply that part of The Common was dry-land rather than tidal marsh in the seventh century despite the fifth-century rise in sea-level.

Charter 2 If the revised interpretation of 1 is accepted then there is an obvious potential problem with this charter in that it is covering part of the same ground. However, first we have to remember that 1 is not a charter, it is merely recording the commonly held early twelfth-century belief that this was the first land grant to the Church at Rochester. Even if that were not the case, the repetition could easily be explained by pointing out that this document is going into more detail. A problem may have arisen and clarification was being sought. That problem may have been that, as the cathedral was constructed on land to the east of what became Doddingherne Lane and had hence obviously been given to the Church, it was necessary to confirm that the land to the west had also been given.

Topographically, this charter is of considerable interest, for it tells us there was a road (*the north lane*) on what is now the site of the castle, presumably immediately behind the old Roman town wall. The title *the street* is emphasising the main road through the settlement (not a town at that date), and is today the High Street.

Doddinghyrnan over against the broad gate. This phrase is crucial to any topographic interpretation. Gordon Ward would have the Broad Gate as being the North Gate (whether it be gate or street). He tells us the modern Northgate '... is short and broad ...'. It has of course always been short, but *c.*1900 it was widened. From a photograph of 1896 (Guildhall Museum) it can be seen to be only slightly wider than the arch of Chertsey's Gate, certainly no more than 4m, half its present width. There is no reason to believe that it was wider in the medieval or Anglo-Saxon periods; indeed as there was a tendency for property boundaries to remain static there is every reason to believe it was the same width. The width of the road would imply the width of the gate was the same, there was no point in having a gate wider. The South Gate certainly, was little more than 4m wide in both the Roman and Norman periods (Ward 1998 plan, and in prep. a-c). This is hardly what this writer would call broad. However, if this was not the Broad Gate then where was it? We are surely

looking at the *East Gate*. The charter does not say *Doddinghyrnan* was close to the Broad Gate or that the latter was to the north. It is stating quite plainly, in the view of this writer, that to get to *Doddinghyrnan* you went east along the High Street *over against* (i.e. towards) a gate (whether it be gate in our sense of the word or a street; see below). There is perhaps the implication here that the gate had a double rather than single arch and hence was broader than, for example, the South Gate.²

Down to at least the early eighteenth century a pump existed more or less in the centre of the High Street, near the Watts Charity (Bridge Wardens map 1717) and the old Corn Exchange also stood in the middle of the street just inside the East Gate (Duke of Northumberland's map 1633; before being moved onto The Common c.1700). These two facts alone are stating quite categorically that the eastern part of the High Street was broad. Even today the post-medieval (and by implication the medieval) street frontage, from the war memorial eastwards, can be seen to gradually widen. Also the 1633 map (on display in the Guildhall Museum) shows no buildings on the south side of the High Street inside the East Gate almost as far west as the war memorial. This implies the need to keep this area, perhaps up to the cathedral precinct wall, clear. Although the writer knows of no evidence for the point, the most obvious reason would be the need of space for market-stalls. In 1969 excavations on the south side of the High Street some 20m inside the gate also provided no evidence for Roman buildings (Harrison 1972, 121-2 and fig. 1). There are references, albeit quite recent, to the area being called '... Broadgate afterwards Eastgate' (Denne 1772, 4; Caddel and son c.1851, 7). But above all else there are a series of Quit Rent Rolls dating from at least the early sixteenth century which tells us categorically that the Broad Gate and the East Gate were one and the same (Moad pers. comm.).

Charter 3 Gordon Ward would have this charter, again, give reference to the North Gate. Outwardly this might appear the more reasonable interpretation but let us look at the phraseology in detail, splitting the description into its separate components:

a. *Within the walls of the said city in the north part....* No problem so far, we are looking at an area north of the High Street.

b. *...that is, from Doddinghyrnan to the broad gate.* This, of course, is the tricky part. But what is it actually saying? Note the comma (which admittedly may be due to modern translation), the word *to* and the phrase *in the north part* and ask yourself how best do these elements fit together? To this writer the phraseology is stating that the land north of the High Street stretching from *Doddinghyrnan to the broad gate* (as a gate, and hence implying the same is true of charter 2) was given to the Church.

Used in conjunction with *in the north part* it is saying the alignment was from *Doddinghyrnan* eastward, not northward as Gordon Ward suggested. Therefore, the interpretation here put forward that the Broad Gate is in fact the East Gate becomes even more valid.

c. ...*east by the wall, and so then south to the east gate.* We are travelling eastward on the inside of the old Roman wall to the East Gate. This movement is from a position on the inside of the wall (*in the north part*) opposite *Doddinghyrnan* (the position of which can be worked out from charter 4), not from a named (*the broad gate*) position. Admittedly this writer is at a loss to see why the charter refers to the Broad Gate and the East Gate if, as is argued here, they were one and the same. This has been the one problem which from a process based purely on logic the writer has found insurmountable, but as such it does not negate the points being made. Although this may be a weak point in this revised interpretation the same alternative name problem also arises if the Broad Gate and the Great Gate of charter 4 are both regarded as being the same, and a point which Dr Ward either chose to ignore or didn't recognise, thereby weakening his own interpretation.

We could perhaps here visualise the *broad gate* as being a gate in our sense of the word and the *east gate* as the adjacent street. Even as late as the seventeenth century the road to the east of the East Gate was indeed called The Easte Street (i.e. the road leading towards the east; Duke of Northumberland's map) and in the nineteenth the relationship of St Augustine's pump to Eastgate shows that a road was meant (the pump in question being outside the town wall; Barnaby 1899, 7), and the road is still so titled down to the present day.

d. ...*and so west by the street to Doddinghyrnan.* The street in question being the High Street, and here both Dr Ward and the writer agree; this firmly places *Doddinghyrnan* somewhere in the centre of the town (see below).

Charter 4 The Mead Way referred to here can easily be the river. It does not need to be an invented road. The charter is telling us the land bordered by the river both on west and north was given to the Church. The *northern way* is possibly a continuation of the *north lane* referred to in charter 2. Liaba was presumably important enough for everyone to know where his house was situated. The problematical bit of this charter is the Great Gate. If, as Dr Ward would argue, it was the same as the Broad Gate why change the name? The writer proposes it was called by a different name because it was a different gate. This was the North Gate. Whether it was *great* because it formed an impressive entrance into the settlement (still probably not quite a town), or whether it was called *great* simply because there were other lesser openings in the wall, giving access to properties,

we have no way of knowing. Whilst Arthur Harrison thought that a tower may have existed at this position in the medieval period, the Roman gate he regarded merely as an arched opening (Harrison and Flight 1968, 70-3 and Harrison pers. comm.), an interpretation with which neither Michael Moad (pers. comm.) nor the writer would disagree. This gate was *over* (i.e. eastward) towards *Doddingherne*, which is then again firmly placed in the centre of the town, for the traveller then continues south *along the way* to get to *Doddingherne* itself. The *way* is not called the Mead Way, it is merely a road situated *to the east of this land* to bring us to our destination. It is a general, not a specific description, of an access road.

The charters are in fact telling us, perhaps significantly, that none of the roads had actual names at the dates the documents were first written. The *northern way* may eventually have become St Clement's or Horsewash Lane and, together with the *north lane* of charter 2, implies the presence of an intra-mural road immediately behind the Roman town wall. Whether it followed the route of an actual Roman road is impossible to say but there is a good chance of survival within the castle grounds (Ward in prep. b and c). The *east gaet* became East Street (but now again called Eastgate) and the *braden gaten* is still reflected in the wider eastern portion of the High Street.

If, as Dr Ward states, the element *hyrne* of *Doddinghyrn* means 'horn' and in this instance portrays a projection of land into an open space perhaps we could hazard the conjecture that this represented a ruined Roman building projecting into the High Street. Ward states that the *King's Head* inn 'projected between the main road and the Epple Market'. Whilst the *King's Head* stands between the two it doesn't actually 'project' between them. We can however, deduce from the observations of George Payne in 1905 and the 1966 excavation on the site of what is now the *King's Head* municipal car park that a Roman building did project out into the line of the High Street (Payne 1909; Harrison 1990). If the meaning is correct, it may be to this projection that the name appends, the land in question presumably belonging to an individual called Dodda at the time of the writing of the charter.

Gordon Ward suggested that the *King's Head* was also on or near the site of the Roman forum, an idea perpetuated by a map in the Guildhall Museum and also by the mention of a market in the area of the castle ditch (Flight and Harrison 1978, 37). The writer does not believe that a forum in the classical sense existed within this small town, although no doubt some form of market (a *macellum*) did. The large number of coins found in the castle ditch excavation trench of 1976 (Flight and Harrison 1978, 36, 44-54), used to support the nearby presence of a market, were more probably washed down from the top of the ridge on which the castle now stands (Ward, in prep. b).

With the increased amount of evidence collected since Dr Ward wrote it seems improbable that much of the Roman town can be seen in the modern topography (Ward 1949, 43; Ward in prep. b and c). Indeed, if so it would be a unique case amongst our historic towns. The High Street remains (more or less) on the line of the Roman main street as does North Lane, but there is no indication that any of the minor roads, now alleys, are any older than the late Anglo-Saxon period when the town was refounded. Boley Hill (more correctly Doddingherne Lane) to the south of the High Street is of course of considerable interest, for it is angled around the cathedral cemetery. Recently Colin Flight has suggested that only the northern part of this road was Roman in origin and continued in a straight line southwards into the area now occupied by the castle to pass out of a south gate situated in the area of the castle keep (Flight 1997, 174 note 10 and fig. 19). In 1998 the writer uncovered part of the remains of the Roman and Norman South Gate adjacent to South Gate House (Ward 1998 and in prep. a-c). First noted, but not seen, by George Payne (Payne 1895, 6) two fragments of salmon pink concrete walling were observed at right angles to the third-century Roman town wall. These two walls are regarded as belonging to the Phase 1 earthen rampart defences dating to the late second century. A wall was added to the front cutting away part of these walls sometime in the third century and a blocking wall, considered to be late Roman, was also observed. This blocking was presumably removed sometime in the Anglo-Saxon period, perhaps in 604 for charter 2 implies the gate was in use at that date. Probably in the early Norman period the town wall was rebuilt. That the whole sequence represents part of the defences there can be no doubt. However, this does not explain the bent nature of the road itself further to the north. Whilst Flight's interpretation of a south gate in the castle grounds can be safely rejected, the idea itself can be developed. If we assume that place-name specialists are correct, and that *Durobrivae* does mean the 'fort by the bridges', the alignment pointed out by Colin Flight may indicate the route to a fort or, more likely, fortlet of the invasion period (c.43-c.60) situated either on the site of the Norman keep or on Boley Hill proper. A different route would be needed for traffic from and into the civilian settlement, and when the army moved north this route was the one retained, eventually to have the second-century gate constructed on its line. The possible route to the suggested fort would presumably be abandoned and built over.

Both the writer and Dr Ward agree the position of *Doddinghyrnan* has to be a central point but as shown above there is another way to fit boundaries into this undoubted fact. Overall the topography as set out by Dr Ward is not much altered, but the writer would argue the suggested changes put forward here are far more reasonable, for they do not necessitate the invention of a road name based on (at best) flimsy

evidence. All of the topographic features that are mentioned can be fitted together in their entirety one with another without the need of such an invention and the Mead Way can then be regarded as the river.

The final paragraph of the discussion will have made the reader aware that our understanding of the topography of Rochester for both the Roman and later periods can be developed further. The present writer is attempting an up to date analysis of the topography of the settlement (Ward, in prep. b and c) based on the many small trenches observed over the last century as well as the documentary evidence put forward by Gordon Ward and others. Of Dr Ward's suggestions it is only now, over fifty years later, that we are in a position to revise his findings. His interpretations have lasted longer than most.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ENDNOTES

¹ Unlike Dr Ward, who understood Latin and Anglo-Saxon, the writer has to rely entirely on the modern English translations supplied.

² By tradition the city is aligned east to west when in fact its true compass points are south-east to north-west; the gates have been called East, South, etc., since the mid Anglo-Saxon period. The writer does not wish to argue with tradition and believes that those who use the true compass points in their descriptions risk making a confused situation even worse.

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Rochester is the third-largest city in New York state of the US. This online map shows the detailed scheme of Rochester streets, including major sites and natural objects. Zoom in or out using the plus/minus panel. Move the center of this map by dragging it. Also check out the satellite map and open street map of Rochester. Stay home and share the link with friends The Way Rochester, Henrietta, New York. 468 likes. The official Bibleway Facebook page connects you to a variety of resources that will help you stay... See more of The Way Rochester on Facebook. Log In. or. Create New Account. See more of The Way Rochester on Facebook. Log In. Forgot account? THE PEDESTRIAN On misty November evenings Leonard Mead would leave his house for lonely walks through the silent city. With his hands in the pockets, he made his way very carefully trying not to step over a blade of grass. He would stand upon a street corner and look down long moonlit roads, deciding which way to go. But it really made no difference. He seemed to be alone in this world of 2053 A.D. Sometimes Leonard would walk for hours and miles and return only at midnight. And on his way he would see the houses with their dark windows, and he seemed to be walking through a graveyard. Sudden