

REPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS.

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REPORT

PRESENTED TO THE

**Cambridge Antiquarian Society,**

AT ITS FORTY-FIFTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,

MAY 18, 1885,

WITH AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY,  
1884—1885.

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ALSO

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III. ON THE SUPPOSED ROMAN CAMP AT WHITLEY NEAR  
ALSTON, AND ON THE MAIDEN WAY AS A ROMAN  
ROAD. Communicated by Professor HUGHES.

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[November 10, 1884.]

IN a paper read on May 26 of the present year I asked the Society to reconsider the evidence upon which certain roads and earthworks in this neighbourhood had been assigned to the Romans. Following up this line of enquiry I have been examining some earthworks and a road at the northern end of the Pennine range, which have been hitherto called Roman.

Whitley camp is situated on a small spur running out towards the valley about two miles N.N.W. of Alston, at an elevation of something over 1000 feet above the sea. It will be found marked "Roman Station" and drawn as an almost rectangular enclosure with a single rampart in the extreme S.W. corner of the Ordnance map quarter sheet 106 S.E. It is more accurately drawn on the maps of larger scale. Roman altars have been found close to it and Roman pottery is not uncommon in the surface soil about it. A supposed Roman road runs into the district which it commands. So it has been called Roman<sup>1</sup>. But the characters of a Roman camp are well

<sup>1</sup> See Maughan, *Arch. Journ.* Vol. xi. p. 1.

known and, although differences might be expected in the mode of entrenchment adopted by troops of such different races as were pressed into the service of the Romans, there is a remarkable uniformity of plan in all proved Roman camps. They are the camps of an aggressive people holding their own in the enemy's territory. Theirs was a system which could be readily carried out by advancing forces, quite irrespective of the natural features of the ground.

All known British camps also have their own method of construction, a selection of strong positions and an arrangement of the entrenchments so as to take advantage of the natural features. They are essentially the camps of native tribes well acquainted with the strong places and acting on the defensive.

So we always find them occupying the ends of spurs or the tops of hills. Where there was no probability of attack, as along the top of a precipice or very steep slope, there they made no raised entrenchment or only a slight bank as sufficient to form a cover for the defenders.

I had no opportunity of digging into the fosse at Whitley camp, but the form was enough to prove that it was a British camp. It is true that it approaches a rectangular form, but this is due to the geological features of the ground. A terrace of Carboniferous sandstone gives a nearly even front on the S.E. On the S.W. and N.E. denudation by torrents from the mountain behind has cut down the two sides. Behind it is accessible. The ground slopes down to it and, though swampy, does not present an easily defended line; so we find here seven irregular earthworks just such as would make it difficult to take the place by a rush. Following these round to the W. and N. we find them reduced to four, while the steeper face next the valley was considered sufficiently strengthened by two.

As in New Zealand or Africa our troops have frequently to storm and temporarily occupy such places, so the Romans are

known to have taken British strongholds. The camp of Parcymeirch near Abergele in N. Wales is very similar to that of Whitley near Alston. I excavated in the Welsh camp and in a few hours found that the Romans had been there;—a piece of a mortarium and other common Roman pottery occurred in the top layer. In the lower layers in the bottom of the first fosse were the rude British implements, picks formed of red deer antler which perhaps they had used in making the camp.

So we have to choose between two explanations:

(1) That this is a Roman camp of a form of which we have no other authentic example, or,

(2) That it is a British camp occupied by the Romans—a combination of circumstances of which we have proof elsewhere.

Having then found reason for thinking that the supposed Roman camp might be British, it was with some distrust that we enquired into the evidence on which it had been considered that the old track known as the Maiden Way near Alston was constructed by the Romans. That the Romans marched into that country is clear, but I do not think we can call a road *Roman* simply because they may have walked along it, unless they paved it or raised it or drained it or did something to it. They must have often marched along preexisting roads or open downs. Now this supposed Roman road is drawn crossing the splendid highway constructed by Macadam from Alston to Kendal; so we can fix our position exactly. Several tracks of exactly the same general character are here visible—mere trampled out cattle tracks; one of these is supposed to coincide in direction with the Maiden Way. This I examined, following it by the aid of the six inch ordnance map. After crossing Macadam's road it is supposed to run over the peaty ground on the West. But there had been much digging and quarrying along this line, and a torrent had torn away all the soil along the broken ground immediately adjoining the high road and

had exposed a section, through the peat and surface wash, down to the undisturbed drift or rock. Had there been any road-making there we must have seen traces of it. We cannot safely infer because we see no mark over a peaty surface that there was never any road that way, for peat forms rapidly in such a climate over any road. But here was a clear section through the peat across this very line of road and no trace of paving or metalling or raising a road or of digging trenches along it.

So I would ask what evidence is there that a Roman road ran that way at all. The track now seen is only like any modern driftway, and if that is not the mediæval and modern driftway—where is it? There must have been a route for cattle and pack horses somewhere along there—where was it?

I have already called attention to the ancient driftway along Mynydd Epynt in Carmarthenshire, for which there were special regulations founded on ancient custom, so that within the memory of man, cattle used to be taken that way in preference to the great turnpike roads. Some of these driftways may date back to British times, and if this part of the Maiden Way was a British track perhaps the Romans followed them along it; but there does not seem to be sufficient evidence as yet to show that they made a road of their own across that part of the range.

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