

ART. III.—*Ullswater Notes*. By THOMAS HAY.

Read at Stranraer, July 1st, 1937.

THE publication last year of the book on Westmorland by the Royal Commissioners for Historical Monuments directed attention once more to the many relics of antiquity that abound in this neighbourhood. The very first volume of our *Transactions*, o.s. contains an article on a kindred subject, viz., "Vestiges of Celtic Occupation near Ullswater," by Dr. M. H. Taylor. The author of that article was a man of such wide interests and many-sided activities that it is interesting to see how far some of his statements stand the test of a later review, including, of course, a comparison with the ideas of the Royal Commission mentioned above.

One of the most intriguing sights noticed by Dr. Taylor is Hodgson Hill on the east shore of Ullswater, $\frac{3}{4}$ m. S.S.W. of Pooley Bridge and referred to as a crannog by the Ordnance Survey 6 inch map (West. VII, S.W.). Taylor's article appeared in 1868 and he quotes the remarks of the Rev. Mr. Machell written with regard to the same spot 230 years earlier. Machell's account can be found in the bound volumes of his MSS. in the Dean and Chapter Library at Carlisle. He describes the place as the ancient and noble fortification called Trostermont or Tristermont and says it was the abode of Sir Tristram one of the knights of King Arthur's Round Table. The first reason that he gives for the identification is "Because there no other mount to be found hereabout nor near to the tenement called by that name excepting this onely." The other reasons when one has deciphered them from a crabbed manuscript are equally unconvincing. He drew a plan



To face p. 42.

Roman Road on High Street.
tewaas_002_1938_vol38_0005

of the hill and added to the lake side of it a triangular portion for which there is no justification whatever. In Vol. xii, N.S. of our *Transactions*, the same site was described shortly by Mr. John F. Curwen, when the Society visited Ullswater. Naturally he was much more restrained in his explanation of this ancient puzzle and he suggests that it was, in the medieval age, entrenched as a moated grange. He also thinks that the excavated earth from the ditch may have been taken to form the mound which stands 26 feet above the water level.

There is not a scrap of walling or even suspicious mounding to be seen anywhere. The one and only definite feature that can be fixed upon is the well-cut ditch on the east side which was probably continued on the south side near the spot where the steamboats are laid up for winter. This ditch and the position of the hill in such an unexpected situation make up the claim to the spectator's interest in this site.

I think Taylor was responsible for the crannog idea and apparently it was swallowed whole by the Ordnance Surveyors. Curwen's suggestion that the material out of the ditch formed the mound has this objection that as far as one can tell without careful calculations that material would not bulk as large as the hill.

Probably the hill is a perfectly natural phenomenon being formed of gravelly materials thrown down by a stream of water making its way through the ice that still choked the lower reach of Ullswater at the end of the glacial period. If this is so, it is not the first time and it will not be the last in which late glacial phenomena have led the antiquary astray. Doubtless Curwen and the Royal Commissioners are right in thinking it a work of the homestead-moat type but long before the medieval period it must have been a very valuable position in those uncertain days.

The Roman Road on High Street, according to the

Ordnance map already quoted, crosses Elder Beck just west of the Cockpit. In order to do this a noticeable deviation towards the east has to be made from the general direction of the track. But if the course of Elder Beck lower down be examined an older crossing will be found 110 yards nearer to Pooley Bridge. Whenever crossings have been much used in drift-filled valleys like those of Aik and Elder Becks, there has arisen a series of sunken tracks meeting at the ford or bridge in question. One track was used until traffic and rainwash together dug it in too deep to be serviceable and then another track was substituted. In this way sometimes four or five sunken paths are found meeting at the crossing place. If from this lower crossing one ascends the left bank of the beck in the S.W. direction of the Roman Road one finds oneself in the middle of an area where there are many surface indications of old road-foundations and the irregularities of old buildings or enclosures. It was at this lower crossing that the old track came over Elder Beck and the crossing as shown on West VII S.W. is quite wrong. Streams like Aik and Elder Becks deepen their course in the process of time and this deepening works upwards towards the source of the water. This has happened at the old crossing, and possibly long after the period when the old set of sunken tracks arose at the lower crossing it became necessary to move up-stream before a similar easy passage could be found.

This recalls attention to the oft-discussed question whether there is any real good foundation work for this track. There is none whatever to be found in connection with the new crossing of the beck but it is to be found S.W. of the old crossing when once the south bank has been ascended.

Here at this point just slightly over 1000 feet O.D. the ancient way has been subjected to the ordinary processes of sub-aerial weathering and to the growth of a thick mat

of vegetation. But higher up near the summit of High Street proper, on the part called Race-course hill, the attack of time has taken a more violent form. If one looks from the Straits of Riggindale, south along the track as it ascends the rise in question one sees at first one well-marked way which presently breaks into two. The upper pursues a hesitating and broken course while the lower goes direct as far as the eye can trace it. The lower one is the real old track but the upper one is the one in use now. The reason is that, at two places in the lower one, erosion on the steep slope above Hayes Water has breached the track and removed two lengths of about 40 yards each. The Ordnance Map XX N.W. shows the erosion in the shape of the cliff edge touching the road in one place and having actually eaten through it in the other. But it has really worked beyond it or at least into it in both cases.

It is interesting to notice that Professor Marr has called attention to the larger of these gashes in a paper called "The Waterways of English Lakeland," published in the *Geographical Journal* of June, 1896. He says "An interesting gully is seen north of the top of High Street, as seen on the 6 inch Ordnance Map, the Roman Road is partially destroyed by a ravine which has cut through it. The head of the ravine is a few yards above the road, and where it cuts the road it is about 18 feet deep and 103 feet across the top. It is excavated partly in loose rubble but largely through rock *in situ*, though much affected by weathering. Some of the material may have been removed by landslip, but the greater part was probably disintegrated by running water which has also removed it."

The gully can only have running water in it very occasionally and the destruction is largely due to the backward and upward working of the sub-aerial weathering along the steep slope in a very loose rubbly rock. The second bite of destruction can never have running water in it and yet the effect is nearly the same although it does not lie at the head of a well marked gully.

Where ready-made sections like these gashes have been made by the hand of nature in the old roadway, one instinctively looks to see if any foundation stonework exists under the track. Not a trace of any can be found in either of these places and yet it would have been bound to be seen if it had existed. It will be remembered that several writers have testified to the existence in different places of such a substratum. The Royal Commission "Westmorland" enumerates Cornelius Nicholson, Professor Collingwood, Dr. G. B. Grundy, Mr. W. H. Parkin and Professor Haverfield as amongst these observers. The present article has given another place where it is found and more could be mentioned. But what is far more noticeable than the presence of this metalling in certain places is its total absence in many others. This has led many people to declare that it does not exist and to doubt the claim of the track.

Probably it is a pre-Roman track which was patched up by the Romans where it was specially subject to destructive forces although it was never metalled throughout. It passes within 150 yards of a stone circle near the source of Swarth Beck. This is marked as Standing Stones on sheet 13 N.W. of the Ordnance Survey although actually there is only one stone left standing. This shows that the track is associated with earlier phases of life than that of Roman times.

At 2700 feet above the sea, the track on Racecourse Hill is subject to another destructive force which may have puzzled many observers. At such heights a form of solifluction or soil-flow takes place when the warmer temperature of a thaw has softened the surface without penetrating to the lower parts of the frozen ground underneath. Little flows of mushy earth and boulders simulate tiny landslips and in several places the Roman Road is completely obliterated and covered by such spreads of material. In others large boulders have moved

down the slope above the road on the east and now actually repose right on the track.

Just above, it was mentioned that there are two tracks on Racecourse Hill, the upper and the lower. It is stated that in Hodgson's time the straight stretch on High Street was used annually on July 10th for horse races. Now it is remarkable that one part of the upper track has been very carefully prepared although as we have seen it is not the Roman Road itself. It must have been on this good part of the upper track that the races were held. Otherwise the real Roman Road along the lower track would have provided too much excitement with its sudden descents towards the Hayeswater slope.

This short article may end, where it began, with Dr. Taylor's enumerations of local antiquities. He placed a camp like that on Soulby Fell on the top of Little Mell Fell where there is nothing but a respectable tumulus and he claimed to have found in a field called Yamonside below Pooley Bridge, an ancient monument composed of four concentric rings of stones. Absolutely nothing is to be found there now and judging by the nature of the ground it seems very unlikely that such a feature can ever have existed there. Probably it was another case of the misinterpretation of natural features, in this instance also connected with glacial boulders.

But these are trivial matters, merely the exuberances of Science in its youthful phase and they do not diminish our sense of gratitude for all that Dr. Taylor accomplished. He lived in those spacious days when a man could be an authority on many subjects. He was a source of enquiry and enthusiasm in ways that even now continue to benefit out Society in general and his own town of Penrith in particular.