

ART. XI.—*The End of the Maiden Way.* By W. G. COLLINGWOOD, M.A., F.S.A.

Read at Penrith, July 5th, 1923.

UNTIL recently the Roman road from Birdoswald to Bewcastle was known as far as High House, a mile and a quarter S.S.E. of Bewcastle fort; but further north it was not clearly followed. A theory, which has become the tradition of the neighbourhood, made it run into the line of an old track going northwards, east of the fort and of Borderrigg, to Hill, Crew Castle, the Cross and Kershope Burn; in fact, the "Maiden Way" which Sir Walter Scott rather loosely described in *Guy Mannering*, chapter XXIII. This theory, however, is not now accepted by antiquaries and the road was omitted in the Ordnance survey of 1900. Indeed, the line is so irregular that it does not look, on the map,* like a Roman road; it does not run to the fort, but evades it by half a mile; and it does not aim for any Roman site in the north (these *Transactions*, N.S. xxii, 180-182).

But it is a "made" road and an ancient one. After Bush, it strikes a trifle E. of N. past the ruins of a cottage called Dollar Line; crosses the Kirk Beck at a rocky place where a wooden bridge could easily be made; and then runs north. In the lower meadow of Borderrigg, the road, hardly visible but known to residents, was pointed out to us by Mr. Charlton Noble, junior, of Borderrigg; and on June 21st, 1923, our party—Lady Dorothy Henley, the Hon. F. R. Henley and the writer—made a section of it. We found a roadway, 10½ feet wide, with kerbs of walling-stones but no solid filling nor metalling such as the

* It is hardly necessary for the purpose of this article to reproduce the Ordnance Map. The description can be followed on any one-inch or larger map of the district.

normal Roman road shows. There were stones in the middle of the path, but not solidly compacted; and though there was the track of a ditch on the W. side there was no traceable ditch on the other. A single section may not be conclusive, but this section did not show Roman construction.

It is not popularly known that mediæval roads exist, except on the line of Roman roads, but there are several in our district. The High Street round the Furness and South Cumberland coast has been found as a paved way, both at Mountbarrow and Goldmire in Furness (West, edition of 1822, p. 9) and near Millom at Holborn Hill (information from the Rev. W. S. Sykes). A little farther W. it must be the road mentioned in a charter of 1309 (these *Transactions*, N.S. xviii, 253). But its plan on the map, and the absence of Roman stations along its line—for the old idea that Dalton was Roman cannot be held, and a few relics such as coins must have been dropped by Romano-British inhabitants—disprove the suggestion often made that it was of Roman construction.

Again, the "Friars' Walk," S.W. of Papcastle, and its continuation by Eaglesfield, Dean, Ullock, Streetgate, Gatra, Arlecdon and Egremont, is known to have been in parts a paved way; but its Roman character is at least doubtful. The name of "Friars' Walk" like "Friars' Waingate" between the Wall and the river Line, is suggestive; and Miss Rotha Clay has noticed that the hermit John of Corbridge was occupied in mending the highway at Wragmire and that roads and bridges were often under the care of religious houses (*Hermits and Anchorites*, pp. 58, 60). The "street" from Appleby to Tebay mentioned in Ivo de Veteripont's grant to St. Peter's, York (N.S. xi, 319), the ancient "Brampton Streitte" (N.S. xx, 25) running to Appleby and mentioned in the Register of Lanercost (N.S. xxi, 48), and a number of minor roads, paved in parts (e.g. near Broadgate, N.S.

ii, 75) show that paved roads were made at various times later than the Romans; and the naming of some of these in 12th century documents proves that they were made by that time. It is highly unlikely that such work was undertaken before the foundation of the 12th century abbeys; but when the abbeys were in being, communications must have been required, and there were resources equal to the task of creating them. And when the abbeys were dissolved, the roads fell into the state so often described by travellers of the 17th century.

Now this track from Bush and Borderrigg northwards is remarkable for the fact that it avoids Bewcastle (Shopford) and runs half a mile to the east. It must have been laid out at a time when the Roman fort was not used, and when the 13th century church was not standing. Late in the 11th century, Bueth probably had a castle (a motte?) there, but his son Gillēs was the *eponymus* of Gilsland and perhaps did not live at the old site. There is no history of the place during the whole of the 12th century. But Wetheral and Carlisle priories were in existence, and in Scotland there were ecclesiastical sites to which access was required. A piece of road, not Roman, but made with walling-stones from the Roman buildings and imitating the Roman method in much except its thoroughness, must be a work of the 12th century.

As to the true Roman road or Maiden Way, our problem was to examine the line as marked on the 25 inch map of 1860 between High House and the site where a Roman altar was found, half a mile S.S.E. of Bewcastle fort. We had to see whether there were any traces of the real road on the line so boldly mapped by the earlier Ordnance surveyors and omitted by the later; and to look for the continuation to north from the altar-site, using the spade and not trusting to surface-indications.

This was done on June 19th and 20th, 1923, by the same digging party with Captain Edmond L. Warre and Mr.

Leif Jones. We began with the known road, and thanks to Mr. Dodd of High House easily found and cleared a section at a dyke 250 yards N.N.W. of Robin Hood's Butt. The road there was 12 feet wide, formed of two courses of stones laid flat on the peat, over which was a layer of small road-metal, the whole well cambered and having large stones for kerbs, and on each side a ditch about $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide. This we traced northwards over moorland ground, much broken, until the line ran into and coincided with an old dyke—formerly the fence of the intake, but now replaced by a stone wall—about 500 yards S.S.E. of High House. Thence to the brow of the hill the road may be inferred, but is not easy to see or search for with the spade.

We were then taken by Mr. Dodd to the place in his lower meadow (field 164 of the 1860 map, 437 of the map of 1900) south of Herd Hill, where the Roman road is seen again and marked in the earlier 25 inch survey. The field is very swampy; the causey is not very visible, but easily recognised in walking over the grass. Digging there we found the same features—two courses of stone and well marked kerbs; but the metalling was absent and the ditches hardly traceable, as must be the case in wet ground. The road was 15 feet wide, as against 12 feet on the moor.

Retracing the line southwards from this point, we found a zigzag going up the steep bank through which the 700 ft. contour runs; the ancient route well marked as a slack diagonally across the sharpest descent of the brow. The old map makes the Roman road run up the brow by a dyke, a little E. of this point; but this would turn the direction of the line out of the straight without gaining the advantage of an easier gradient; and we suggest that here the Roman engineer used the zigzag. From the top of this, regaining the straight line, the road ought to aim at the southernmost corner of field 276/422, in the slack between

High House and Collin Bank. This would take it through the eastern edge of field 173/423; above which, rather over 20 yards W. of the S.E. corner of that field, something like the normal causey appears again, though we did not get a quite convincing section, and thought that the ground must have been disturbed by cutting the dyke. This seems to link up the line, making it quite straight—barring the zigzag—from a point on the brow about 70 yards E. of High House to the site where the Roman altar was found; but not quite in line with the long stretch of road S. of High House. It seems as though the engineer, on reaching the High House brow, started a new piece of road. He sighted afresh towards Bewcastle; but now no longer accurately towards Bewcastle, and shifting the direction a trifle towards the east. The reason for this becomes obvious when the ground is examined more closely. If he had gone straight on, he would have crossed the White Beck in its most ravine-like part. By deflecting the line a trifle to the E. he got an easier route and a better crossing, though he had to turn a little westwards again, after crossing, to enter Bewcastle.

Starting afresh from our digging in the low meadow, we followed the road over Herd Hill, seeing two or three sections and frequent outcrops of kerbs up to the next fence, between fields 160/443 and 161/442. There the present track from Collin Bank to Oakstock begins to leave the Roman line, which runs straight on to the Limekiln in field 123/495; the Limekiln has partly obliterated the road, which, however, can be seen at a broken brow to N. down the same field, and this leads us straight down to the White Beck. On the N. bank of the beck, in the direct line, as marked on the old map, there is a mass of stones (with a drain running down beside it on the E.), much dislocated but containing several squared walling-stones, apparently Roman. This looks like the remnant of the pier of a wooden bridge, to carry the road

over a stream which, though small, is rather deep and rough for crossing with ease.

Thence up the brow to the site of the Roman altar the road is boldly marked in the old map. We did not see it, but the distance is only a few yards. That altar stood on the top of a low ridge from which the traveller would get his first near view of Bewcastle in arriving; and in leaving, it would be the place to bid the fort farewell. Here the engineer would take fresh sight of the place he was aiming at, and he deflected the road accordingly.

We picked up the traces about 200 yards to the N.W., across the High Grains road, after passing through the gate into field 106/497, and followed the road down the W. side of a dyke. Messrs. Ewart of Bush have been ploughing this field lately, and they have turned out great quantities of stone—mostly the kind of slabs which are natural to the soil hereabouts, but also some squared walling-stone from the Roman road. Its track is visible, cutting N.W. across the northern side of the field, and they reckoned it to be rather more than five yards wide as they found it with the plough. So we heard later; for on the bank of the Kirk Beck, 50 yards E. of Byer Cottage, we halted at a mass of stones terminating a causey-like ridge in line with the road we had followed, and Mr. Ewart came up. "We are looking," we said, "for the Roman road." "Why," said he, "you're standing on it." And he was right.*

The river, which is liable to spates and has wandered considerably in a broad bed, has no doubt destroyed the original pier of the Roman bridge here; but many squared walling-stones and some stones of great size in the stream suggest that hereabouts such a pier must have existed. The material remains, though the form is gone.

* This is no doubt the "small embankment or raised road leading from the Eastern gate of the station" mentioned, but not connected with the Maiden Way, by the Rev. J. Maughan in his *Memoir* (1857) p. 4

On the opposite side where the grass-bank begins to go up under the ramparts of Bewcastle, the road seems to be traceable at first. Whether it continued up one of the slacks which merge into the fosses of the unexplored ramparts, or entered the place otherwise, would need a considerable excavation to decide. But it is clear that the Roman road entered the eastern gate of the fort at Bewcastle, and that this was the end of the Maiden Way.