

ART. IV.—*The Roman road from Old Penrith to Keswick, and beyond.* By R. L. BELLHOUSE, B.Sc.

Read at Penrith, September 14th, 1954.

WHEN setting out to trace Roman roads little equipment is required, at first, beyond a lively imagination. My rediscovery of the road running south-west from the Roman fort at Old Penrith, towards Keswick, began at home in the spring of 1952 as an idea. I felt that there must have been a road through such an obvious gap in the mountains, so I turned to the 1-in. Ordnance map and almost immediately spotted a most interesting line. Taking pencil and ruler, I joined up several lengths of modern road near Greystoke and found that the resulting line, when continued to the north-east, made for Old Penrith. I also extended the line to the south-west, and found further significant signs: for example, west of Greystoke the line coincided with a cart-track along the edge of a strip-plantation, and there seemed to be a change of direction on a nearby hill-top; furthermore, I found a farm called *Low Street* close to the line, and noticed too that the line appeared to be sighted on Great Mell Fell.

Here, then, was something to be tested on the ground at the first opportunity. This came in the following August when I happened to be at Berrier, a hamlet close to my hypothetical road. My business finished, I took the road which runs just west of Whitbarrow to meet the main Penrith to Keswick road. I stopped when I thought that I should be somewhere near the line and there, to the west of the road, were clear signs that I was at least athwart a pack-horse track; and on the east side I could

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see an old track curving up the side of a bank, towards Whitbarrow. This was encouraging, but not particularly significant, so I returned towards Berrier and took the road leading to Greystoke; this road also crossed my line where the strip-plantation, mentioned above, came to an end. I reasoned that if an old road did in fact run along the edge of the plantation, and if it were Roman, there would be a very good chance of finding it well preserved on the unenclosed moorland beyond.

I stopped my car on the roadside, by the end of the plantation, and found a gate on the east side of the road; and beyond the gate there was a grass-grown metalled track. (This was something which I had hardly hoped to see, but I now know that several long lengths of this road are shown on the 6-in. Ordnance maps.) I went through the gate and measured the road: it was eighteen feet wide, well cambered and kerbed with large stones. This certainly looked like the real thing, and in a few more moments I should be putting my idea to the test. All this was most exciting: to the east a metalled road on enclosed land, to the west rough moorland with no signs of a road across it.

I crossed the road, probe in hand, to investigate; and it was with great satisfaction that I felt the familiar solid resistance of the metalling, under the springy turf. I prodded my way towards Whitbarrow, noticing at the same time that this section was aligned on the little hill where Whitbarrow stands. Near by were some small gravel-pits, quite possibly first opened by the Romans for road material. By now I was certain that I had discovered another Roman road, and I was able to follow it, without difficulty, first eastwards for nearly two miles towards Greystoke castle, and then about three miles westward to a point where it crossed the modern road near Troutbeck station. The greater part appeared as a well-defined green mound, easy to follow, and mostly undisturbed by the plough.

I had no time left for further field-work that day, but I was content to note that I had plotted some four miles of good road, two changes of direction on hills, and some possible quarry-pits. I also marked on my plan a curious ridge in the fields just east of the farm called Lanehead; there is a distinct bump in the modern road where it crosses this ridge. I now know that I had walked two sides of a large marching-camp, about 10 acres in size, without spotting it.

So far, this had been a triumph for method, but I had no idea that an 18th century antiquary, West, had been over the same ground very thoroughly, and had placed on record a most accurate description of the road's course; it is so unusual to find such excellent reporting that I do not hesitate to quote his account in full:¹

“Upon HUTTON-MOOR, and on the north side of the great road, may be traced the path of the Roman road, that leads from old PENRITH, or PLUMPTON-WALL, in a line almost due west, to KESWICK. Upon the moor are traces of a large encampment that the road traverses. And a little beyond the eighth mile-post, on the left, at WHITBARROW, are strong vestiges of a square encampment. The Roman road beyond that, is met with in the inclosed fields of WHITBARROW, and is known by the farmers, from the opposition they meet with in plowing across it. After that it is found entire on the common called GRAYSTOCK-LOW-MOOR; and last summer they have formed a new road on the agger of it. It proceeds in a right line to GRAYSTOCK town; where it makes a flexure to the left, and so continues in a line to BLENCOW, and is found in a plowed field, about 200 yards to the north of LITTLE-BLENCOW, pointing at COACH-GATE, and from thence it passes on the north side of KELLBARROW, and through COW-CLOSE, and was discovered in making the new turnpike-road from PENRITH to COCKERMOUTH, which it crossed near the toll-gate; from thence it stretches over WHITRIGG in a right line, and is visible on the edge of the wood at FAIRBANK, and in the lane called LOW-STREET, from thence it points through enclosed land, to the south end of the station, called PLUMPTON-WALL, and old PENRITH. It crossed the brook PETTERAL, at TOPIN-HOLME.”

¹ *Guide to the Lakes*, 1st ed. (1778), 147 f.

Most of the places mentioned by West can be found on the 1-in. Ordnance map, and his account describes the road, starting at Hutton Moor (which must be somewhere just to the west of Troutbeck station), in a clear and orderly sequence across country to Old Penrith. The large encampment "that the road traverses" is obviously the ten-acre temporary camp which I failed to see on my first visit (map-reference, 383273).

The eighth mile-post cannot be identified with certainty.² The modern eighth milestone from Penrith is at 340278, and the eighth from Keswick is at 369273. If the latter is correct, the "strong vestiges of a square encampment" may now be obliterated by the buildings at Whitbarrow; but close by the ninth milestone from Penrith, on the north side of and immediately adjoining the Roman road, at 385273, there is a camp of about 1½ acres. Its rampart is still clearly visible, and there is an external *clavicula* in the western side. This land was enclosed and growing wheat in the 1850's, but before that the camp must have been quite obvious to a close observer like West, so that it is more than likely that this is the position which he meant.

I have followed up West's account and find that, in most places, there are still clear signs of the course of the road. For example, at 459335 the metalled *agger* was clearly seen just south of the modern road, in a potato field; and a little further towards Kelbarrow, at 466347, part of the causeway remains as a cart-road in the middle of a large field.

West was almost certainly right in believing that the road which he described had Keswick as its immediate terminus. Both strategy and topography suggest that the Romans should have had a fort there, though no remains of one are known. This idea is strengthened by my discovery, in the spring of 1952, of a section of Roman road on the west side of Keswick: from just north of the

² But cf. p. 23 f. below.

level-crossing at Braithwaite a 20-ft. metalled causeway is visible running across the fields, in the direction of Portinscale. It is unrelated to any of the farm tracks in the vicinity, and has the appearance of being a westward prolongation of West's road — in which case, it would proceed through the Whinlatter pass, to connect with the known fort at Papcastle.

I have spent some time in the field, in an attempt to link the point where West's road peters out, in the peaty ground by Lanehead, with Keswick; but so far without success. If the known line of the road be continued on the 6-in. map, it enters very difficult country and search of the ground has produced no telltale ramps or cuttings along this line. But one possibility remains for investigation when the chance occurs: the presence of two camps together, near Lanehead, suggests either a road-junction or a vulnerable river-crossing. Certainly there is the Trout Beck, flowing in a deep valley close by, and it may well be that the road crossed the beck here, either to gain easier ground for its continuation towards Keswick, or to join with a road coming from the fort at Brougham.³

I had hoped that my researches on West's road, and the section at Braithwaite, would have led to the discovery of the postulated fort in the Keswick district, but no further sections have come to light so far. It is worth recording, however, that if the line of the Braithwaite section be pencilled in on the 6-in. map, the course of this line near Keswick gives significance to the names Castlerigg and Castle Head.

If there was in fact a fort near Keswick, the question arises of its communications with the fort at Caermote near Bothel.⁴ A solidly made, kerbed road leaves the latter fort for the south, but only a short length of it is visible today, and I have been unable to find any trace

³ In his paper on Old Penrith, CW2 xlvii 171, Mr Birley's sketch-plan shows both West's line and also this possible branch to Brougham.

⁴ Cf. CW2 xlviii, 202 f.

of its further course beyond the point where it meets the modern road. It seems not unlikely, however, that it eventually joined West's road, and possible that it continued southward to Ambleside.

The fort at Caermote seems to have had some particular place in the Roman road-system. Not only does the road run through the earlier, larger fort, but it gives off two branches eighty yards north of the latter's north rampart—one to the north-west and the other to the north-east. During the war years these roads were ploughed up, but they are still easy to trace on the ground. The fields further north have been cultivated for many years, and in them all signs of metalling have gone. The later and smaller fort was built with its one entrance opening on to the road, here slightly diverted from its original course and obviously earlier than this fort.

At one time I thought that there were signs of yet another road, leaving the fort in an easterly direction; but on a recent visit I came to the conclusion that the feature which I had identified was the rampart of a temporary camp. There is obviously scope for much more field-work here too.⁵

APPENDIX: *The printed sources.*

John Horsley, Thomas West and James Clarke are the main early sources for ancient roads in Cumberland, and the accounts of later writers seldom do more than copy or paraphrase them. The following passages will be worth noting:

(a) Horsley, *Britannia Romana* (1732), 482: "I have had certain information of two military ways in *Cumberland*, which go one of them south-west from old *Penreth*, and the other south-east from *Elenborough*. And as we are sure of a military way near *Ambleside*, pointing towards *Elenborough*, so I think it cannot well be doubted, but it

⁵ Since writing the above description of the site I have looked up Haverfield's account of his excavations in CW2 iii 331 ff., and I have found unexpected confirmation of my field observations on his plan (facing p. 331): within the smaller fort it shows a shaded strip, described as "Dubious Rampart"; this is the fourth side of my temporary camp, which clearly antedates both the two known forts and the associated road complex.

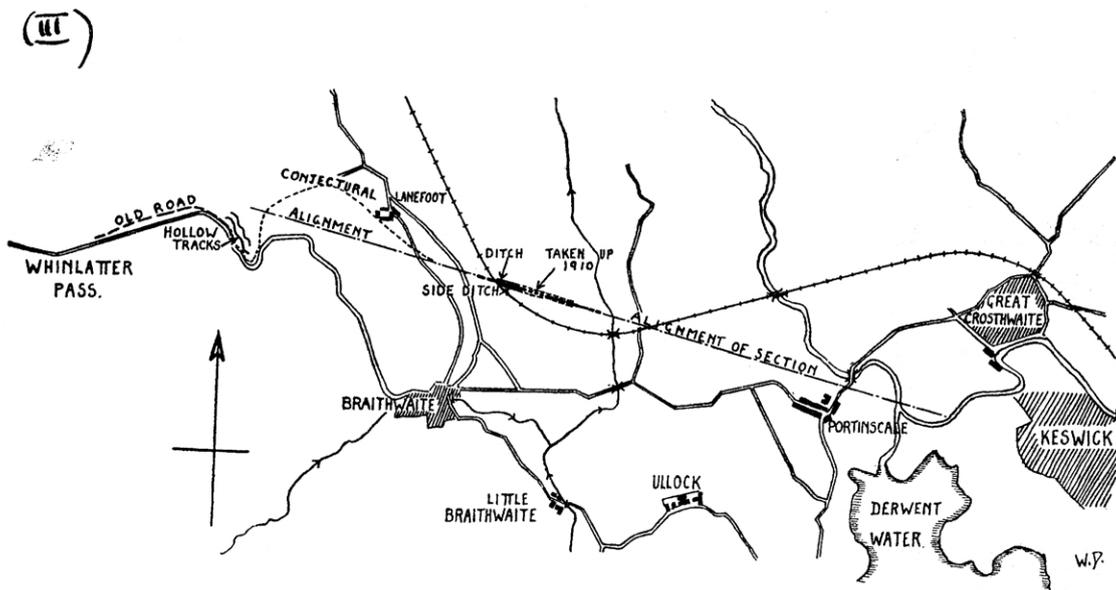


FIG. 1.—The Roman road W. of Keswick.

facing page 20

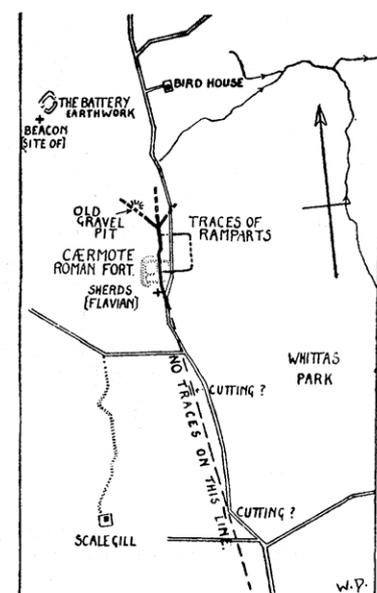


FIG. 2.—Caermote and its approaches.

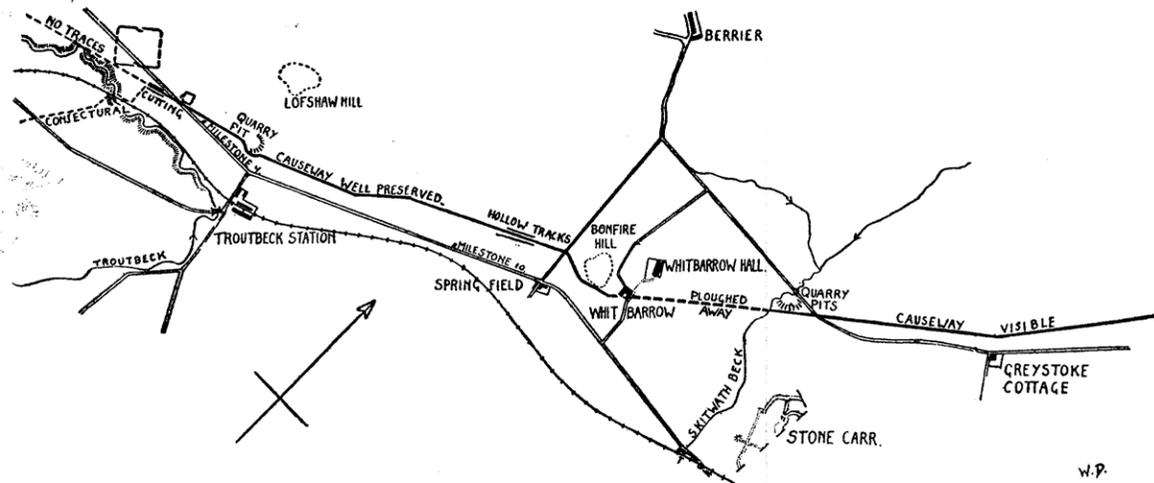


FIG. 1.—West's road, from Hutton Moor to Greystoke Cottage.

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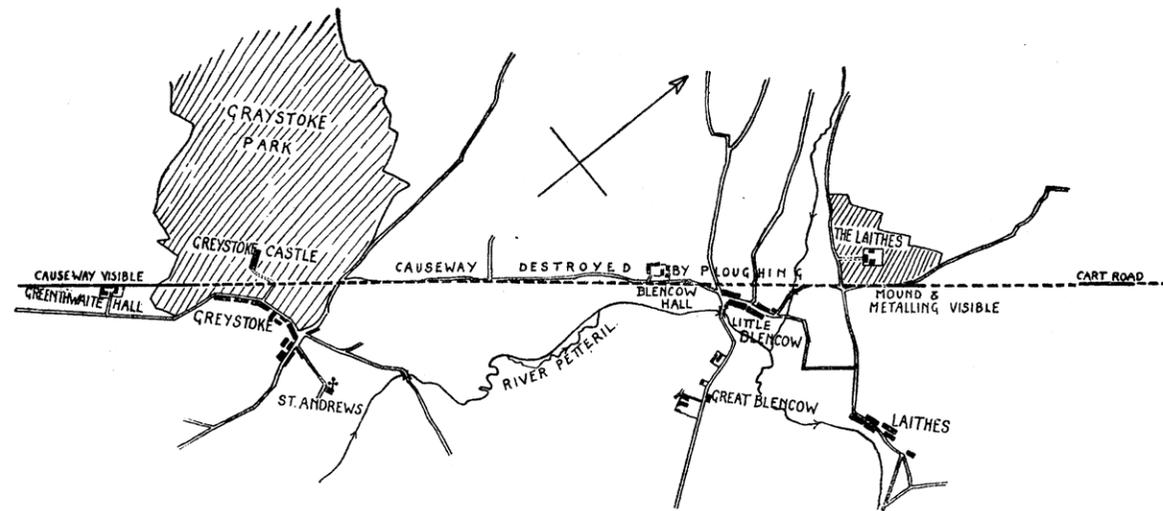


FIG. 2.—West's road, from Greenthwaite Hall eastwards.
Based, by permission, on the 6 in. O.S. Map. Scale [after further reduction by $\frac{1}{2}$ linear] $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. = 1 mile).
Drawn by W. Dodds after survey by R. L. Bellhouse.

W.P.

must have gone that way: and I believe it is no less certain, that the other way from old *Penreth* has joined this not far from *Keswick*; for this, as I am certainly informed, is the course of it."

(b) *Idem*, *ibidem*, 483 (*s.v. Ambleside*): "To this place I believe the military ways have gone, which pass by *Papcastle* and through *Graystock* park."

Of these two roads, that from "Elenborough" (now known as *Maryport*) is certain as far as *Papcastle*, and from what has been said above it can be carried with some confidence via *Whinlatter* to the outskirts of *Keswick*; the course of the other road has been traced as far westwards as *Lanehead* farm, near *Troutbeck* station: and it may well be justifiable to accept, as a basis for further research in the field, *Horsley's* view that the two roads met near *Keswick* itself. It will be seen that *Horsley* mentions that the road from *Old Penrith* goes *through* *Greystoke* park; *West* questions this view, and *Clarke* echoes him, but we now know that *Horsley* was right. *West's* own account of the road has already been quoted, but it will be as well to give his comment on *Horsley* here:

(c) *Guide to the Lakes* (1st ed., 1778), 154: "That *HORSLEY* never visited these parts is evident, from his mistaken account of the road from *PLUMPTON-WALL* to *KESWICK*, which he says passed through *GRAYSTOCK-PARK* this, had he but seen the face of the country, he could never have imagined. His mistake, and *CAMDEN's* silence, gave occasion to a regular survey of the said road."

In passing, *West* ought to have remembered that *Horsley* specifically disclaims autopsy, relying on an informant (in whose judgement he clearly had the greatest confidence). It is clear from *West's* own account how he came to miss the correct line: "last summer they have formed a new road on the agger of it", and "it makes a flexure to the left" (at *Greystoke* village), together imply that he took the modern road from *Berrier* to *Greystoke* to follow the Roman line: it runs parallel to and south of the park wall, outside the park, and a "flexure" is needed at *Greystoke* to bring it into the correct alignment. The Roman road, by contrast, runs parallel to it but inside the park wall, on the precise alignment of the road from *Whitbarrow* as far as the hilltop at 425295, where it changes direction and continues on a new line which brings it accurately to *Old Penrith*.

The location of *West's* "eighth mile-post" is given by him in a later passage:

(d) *Guide to the Lakes*, 155: "Those who do not chuse to go as far as PENRITH, may, near the eighth mile-post turn off to the right; MELL-FELL, a round, green hill, will be on the left."

This makes it clear that the traveller is visualised as coming from Keswick, and the local landmarks indicate a point close to Troutbeck station. If West's "square encampment" at Whitbarrow was a little further on, it must surely have been on the hilltop close to Whitbarrow farm, where traces of it must be looked for. It does not seem likely that West was referring to Stone Carr, but some later writers have referred to the latter as Whitbarrow Camp, and it seems necessary to indicate what the evidence for it is:

(e) Clarke, *A Survey of the Lakes* (1787), 50: "From this place (*sc.* *Motherby*), the remains of a Roman road may easily at this day be traced to a fort upon this common, near the end of Whitbarrow Fields. It is called by Horsley *Redstone Camp*, and by Cambden *Stone-Carron*,⁶ which I think is the original name; for the ground from the school-house to this camp is called at this day Stone-Carr. I cannot, however, find in the *Notitia* such a name as either, or any certain or satisfactory account of it. But be this as it will, certainly there has been an encampment of the Romans at this place, for the military road leads exactly to and from it: within these two years also, several bones, urns, stone-coffins, &c. have been found here by people digging for stones. Some of these I am in possession of, but were generally broke, so that it was impossible to make them out. One I saw which had T.S. and I think there had been other letters . . . Horsley informs us, that the Roman road to this place leads through Greystock park: in this he is (if appearances may be trusted) so entirely wrong, that I cannot help thinking he never gave himself the trouble (p. 51) to examine it. He and some others likewise assert, that the road led from hence by Castlesteads to Amble-Side. This I must also contradict, for the road may be traced between the two hills called Eastern and Western Mell-Fells to the high end of Gowbarrow Parks, and no further. It has, however, certainly proceeded through Patterdale to Amble-

⁶ Neither Camden (or any of his later editors) nor Horsley has any reference to the site; Clarke's references were made from memory, as is noted in his Introduction, p. xlii, but I am unable to say what the real sources for these two names may have been; for Clarke's sources, see my note, later in this volume. E.B.

Side; for just at the separation of these two districts is a very large cairn called Woundale.⁷ . . ."

(f) Idem, *ibidem*, 107: "Mr West's conjecture . . . is ingenious enough: I cannot, however, trace the Roman road, in the manner he mentions, from Whitbarrow. Whilst I was collecting materials for this work, I examined this causeway in the most attentive manner; but the road, instead of going through Keswick, leads past a place near *Shoulthwaite*, called *Buck Castle*; it then disappears, but may again be perceived at Wythburn; if then we examine the direction of this road, we shall find it could not by any means touch at Keswick."

There is some new material in this, but first let us dispose of Stone Carr. Thomas Hay's study of that puzzling collection of mounds and hollows (CW₂ xlv 126-33) shows that it can hardly be Roman. The Roman road which has been studied above runs past half a mile to the north of it, and there is hardly likely to have been a second Roman road so close — unless, indeed, a branch road from Brougham passed through the site? There is clearly need for further field-work here. The road running southwards between the two Mell Fells is marked as Roman on the O.S. map (6 in., Cumberland LVII N.E. and S.E.), but its character and its further course still await investigation. What the true source of Clarke's reference to "Castlesteads" may be, does not appear, nor can the site be identified; but West's road, where it peters out near Lanehead, is pointing westwards, and I feel bound to accept Horsley's report that it joined the road from Papcastle near Keswick. Indeed Clarke seems to be contradicting himself here, for his road past Shoulthwaite and Wythburn should surely be the Keswick-Ambleside portion of Horsley's line. One wonders whether "Castlesteads" is not really a slip of the pen for Castlerigg, on the south-east side of Keswick.

Of the later writers, it may be noted that Bennet, bishop of Cloyne, in his contribution to the Lysons' *Cumberland* (= *Magna Britannia* iv, 1816), p. cxxxvi, contents himself with paraphrasing West's account and part of Clarke's, adding one noteworthy new point:

(g) "Another road, which is certainly Roman, came from the station at Brougham, through Stainton to Whitbarrow, which was therefore a post of some consequence."

⁷ Cf. CW₂ xlvi 221 f. and xlix 10-14.

The confusion between Stone Carr and Whitbarrow, for which Chancellor Ferguson was mainly responsible,⁸ must be cleared up as soon as possible by further field-work; and the road from Brougham surely cries aloud for attention: if it exists, its line from Stainton to Whitbarrow runs, according to the map, through Motherby and across Stone Carr, thus incidentally fitting Clarke's account; but we cannot exclude the possibility that the bishop of Cloyne was in this case drawing an inference from Clarke's book (he does not mention it or West's account, but on internal evidence he has drawn upon both).

It may be added that Dr St. Joseph has flown over the Whitbarrow area, in order to photograph any Roman remains that might be visible there. He found three camps, but nothing at Whitbarrow itself. Two of the camps are those shown on my survey (pl. I, fig. 1); the third is a large temporary camp, of about 40 acres, adjoining the Roman road immediately north of the turning to Matterdale.

Finally, a further reference may be given in connection with the Roman routes west of Keswick (I owe it to Mr Eric Birley):

(h) CW2 xxi 152 (in W. P. Haskett-Smith's paper on "Fountains Abbey and Cumberland"): Bassenthwaite and Derwentwater "were no doubt originally one, until severed by the vast deposits made by the rivers draining the west side of Helvellyn and the south side of Saddleback and the severance had already been effected before the arrival of Romans; but then and long after the land formed between was much narrower and much less solid, so that water and marsh occupied most of the space, (p. 153) leaving a mere strip of firm ground along the north shore of Derwentwater. We may fairly assume that when these charters describe an *altum chimum* and a *magnum chimum* proceeding from Crosthwaite, one along the slopes of Skiddaw to the east of Bassenthwaite lake and one along the foot of Derwentwater over a *pons petrae* to the foot of Whinlatter, we have traces of Roman work. Moreover they show that the latter road was carried on an embankment . . ."

This latter road is clearly the one of which I found a section near Braithwaite in 1952 (p. 20 f. above), and the *pons petrae* must have been at the one big river crossing on that line, just above the confluence of the Derwent and the Greta. As for the road along the east side of Bassenthwaite lake, that would accord well with the link which we are bound to postulate with the fort at Caermote. It may be noted that on this line there

⁸ Cf. CW1 iv 320-323 and plan facing p. 318.

is a small hill, close to the Derwent, known as Castrigg; its name becomes doubly significant when one recalls that Dr St. Joseph's air photography has identified a Roman signal-station on another Castrigg, close to the known Roman road near Kirkby Thore (J.R.S. xli 54).

I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr Eric Birley for his kindness in sending me abstracts from the writers cited above.