ART. VI – *Unpublished Excavations on and off the line of Roman roads in Cumberland by the late George Richardson.*

By Ian CARUANA.

FOR reasons largely beyond his control, a number of excavations to locate the position of certain Roman roads remained unpublished at the time of George Richardson's death in 1982. This collection of reports clears up the backlog of unpublished reports and chance observations. The excavations were undertaken following fieldwork by Dr Martin Allan and were designed to test hypothetical road alignments arising from that fieldwork. I have not been involved with any of the excavations and have not observed any of the trenches at first hand, nor, in fact, even visited the sites. The conclusions are, therefore, in a sense, objective in that it is only possible to describe what is recorded. However, it is clear that such objectivity is paid for in lack of familiarity with the excavated trenches. To some extent this has been offset by the help I have received from Martin Allan who has answered my questions on matters not sufficiently clear in the surviving records.

The immediate impetus for doing this work is to present the excavation evidence for Dr Allan's wider study of these Roman roads. It has not, therefore, been necessary to present the excavation results within a context of either past work or current thinking, nor to enter debates about the status of certain roads. All such matters must await Dr Allan's papers which also include many field observations not augmented by excavation. The order of presentation of the sites in this paper has been made to conform with that in Dr Allan's papers although it reverses the chronological sequence of the excavations.

Certain excavations were actually written up by George Richardson and were ready for publication. Others were described in interim form in the CBA3 Newsbulletin. Where possible I have used these texts and drawings direct. Such sections appear in quotations. Unfortunately many explorations, and probably those which were most problematical, have no conclusions attached to them. They are published as best they can be. The appearance of an excavation report here should not be held to guarantee that either a road is present in the excavation trench concerned or that the road is of Roman origin. Had he lived, George Richardson would certainly have cautiously sorted the good evidence from the dubious and continued to test his conclusions about the line of these roads. All I can do is present the whole evidence as fairly as possible to allow others to judge its value and, in the case of negative findings, to guide other researchers away from unprofitable lines of search.

TROUTBECK-KESWICK

Troutbeck Fort (NY 38172726) Fig. 1 and 3

October 1979

"Drainage-trenching in October 1979 having exposed a good cross-section of road in the suggested line, 37 m north of the northern edge of the A66, level with a point where

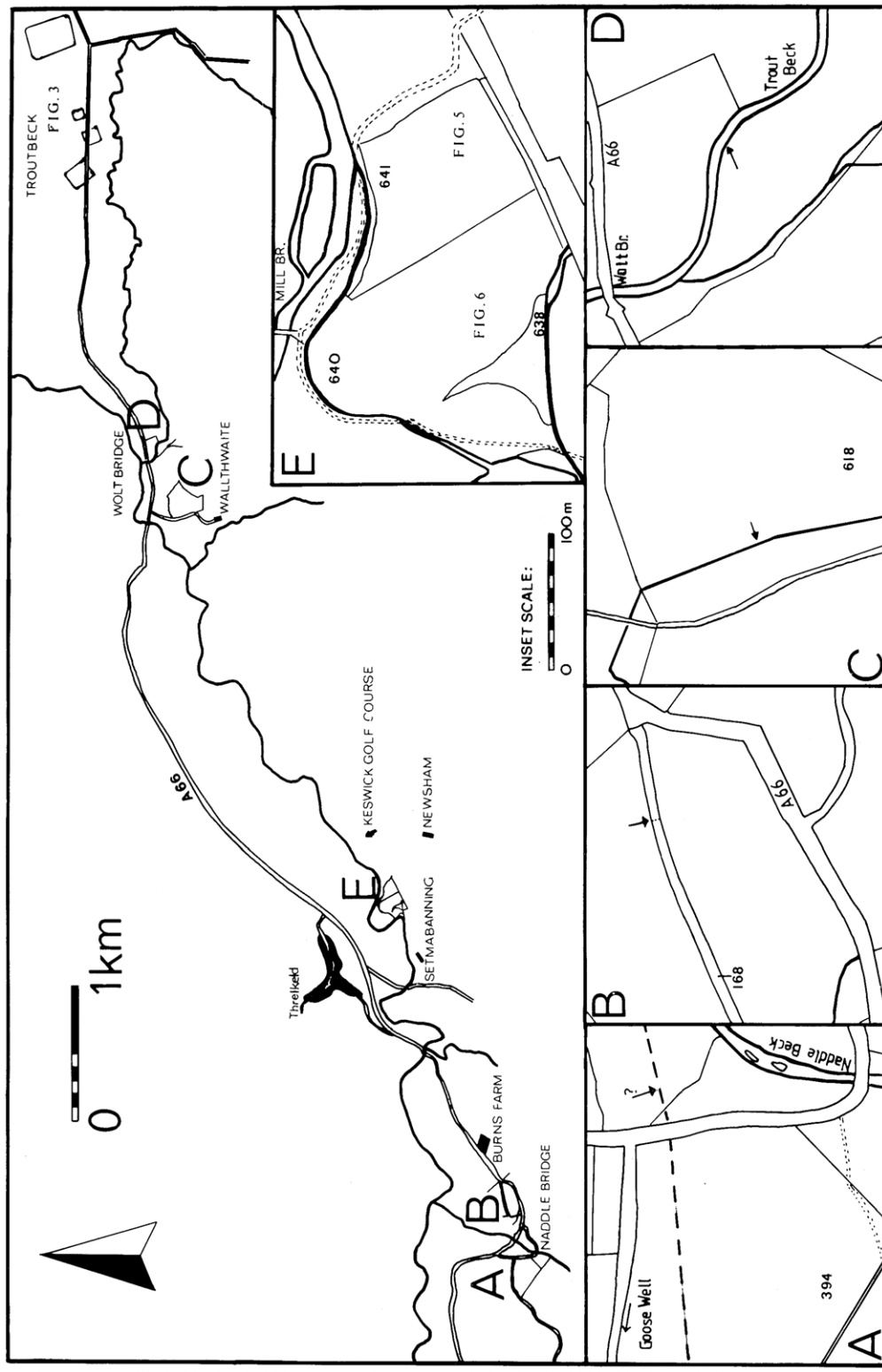

FIG. 1. – Plan of Glenderamackin Valley from Troutbeck-Naddle Bridge.

a Roads Department storage lay-by occupies the north-west corner of the fort. Cleaning of the sides of a trench at this point – a point close to the eastern boundary of an uncultivated field – displayed a 4.5 m wide band of large stones, together with in-filling and a surface layer of small stones and pebbles to a maximum depth of 0.25 m, the surface being cambered *c.* 1:33. There was no trace of a ditch on the south side of the section, but on the north (i.e. lower) side there was a silted ditch, 0.20 m deep, revetted with stones on both sides, this last being a feature found (bilaterally) also at Wallthwaite. Similar though less compact metalling was visible in the next three trenches south-westwards, on an alignment 262 degrees magnetic, the line being thereby carried to almost the east corner of the west (10 acre) camp, at which point there is a break of about 8 paces in the visible trace of the rampart." (Newsbulletin, 2, No. 11, Sept. 1980).

Wolt Bridge (NY 359267) Fig. 1
18 June 1978

The O.S. give the name of the bridge as Watt Bridge but the true spelling is inscribed on the bridge itself.

A stone abutment was observed 158 m along the river bank south from Wolt Bridge on the west bank of Trout Beck. Fig. 1 shows the position of the observation. A sketch section exists but is too rough to be published. There were five courses of large stone giving a height of 900 mm, with smaller stones behind. The width is not recorded but assuming the sketch is at a scale of roughly 1:50, it would be about 6.00-6.50 m. The east bank was continuous and revealed no stonework. The bearing to Lanehead was 73 degrees (presumably magnetic).

Wallthwaite (NY 354265) Fig. 1 and 2B
16 July 1978

An exposure of stonework in a drainage channel at Bent How, Wallthwaite is sketchily recorded. The cross-section is shown on Fig. 2B. Stone extends over 5.25 m (17 ft) (CBA3 Newsbulletin 2, No. 11 Sept. 1980) and is 13-14 inches thick. Two large stones 14 inches across appear to form kerbs. The only other record is a cryptic note "To wood below barn 80 degrees mag." (The published width differs from that in the field notes of 16 ft (4.9 m) width but is confirmed by Dr Allan).

The notes on this observation are attached to another sheet recording a "15 foot possible exposure" and massive revetments of the west side of Mosedale Beck and a sketch of an abutment 3.05 m wide, partially of dressed stone, on the east bank of St. John's Beck. There is insufficient data to do more than note them.

Dr Allan (*in litt.* 1 March 1988) suggests that Mosedale is an error for St. John's Beck. He also questions the location of all the observations in stream banks described here. Since this involves the assumption that every one of the relevant field notes contained errors in orientation or in the identification of streams and throws doubt on the whole of this part of the field record I find it hard to accept. I have preferred to accept the field notes at face value, to record the existence of doubts, and leave the resolution to further fieldwork.

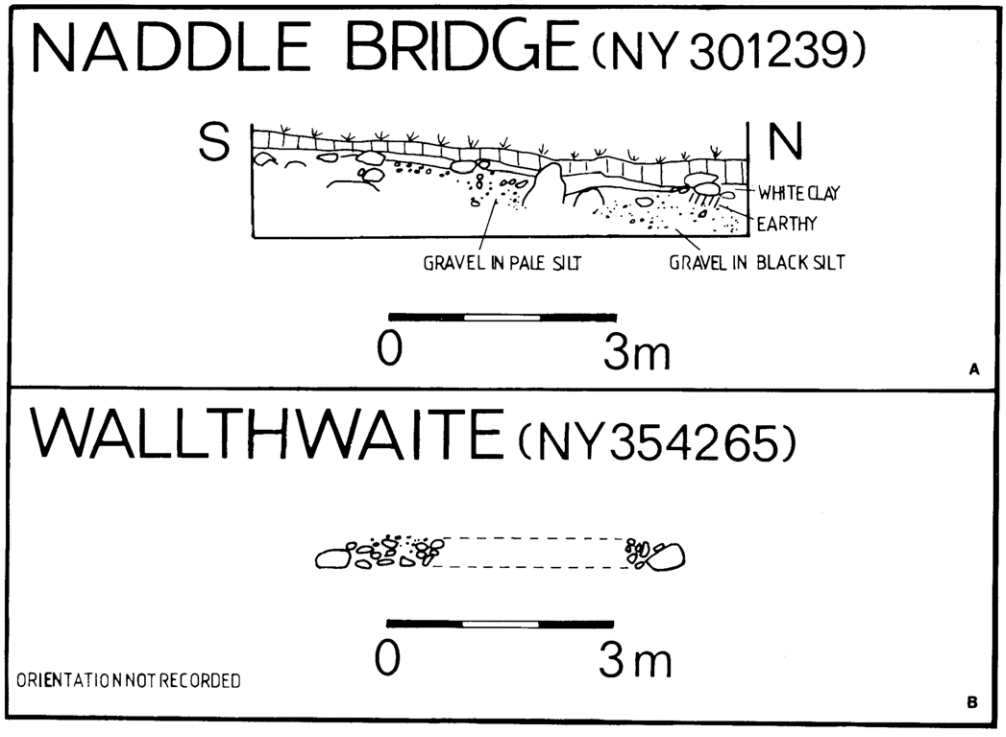

FIG. 2. – Sections at: A. Naddle Bridge B. Wallthwaite.

Keswick Golf Course (NY 33092507) Fig. 1 and 4
30 July 1978
By G. G. S. Richardson

An *agger* was observed in the narrow field between the dismantled Penrith-Keswick railway and the 8th fairway of the Golf Course. A section was cut across the *agger*. The following text is extracted from an interim report which was circulated in typescript:

"The 'dig' revealed a substantially built road about 20 ft wide based on a layer of smooth grey clay 6-8 ins deep. Above the clay, and bedded into what appeared to be decayed turf, there was an irregular spread of large stones up to 18 ins across, which were more solidly packed towards the centre of the road. Between and above these stones there was spread of smaller stones and pebbles, with traces of a surfacing of fine gravel. Most of the gravel had worn or washed down off the cambered surface, and the small stones too had spread sideways so that the road looked wider than it probably was originally.

The construction revealed in the Golf Course section is comparable with other known secondary Roman roads elsewhere, and we have found evidence of the same construction in drainage channels which cross the line of our road near Wallthwaite, 1.5 miles east, and at Setmabanning, a mile to the west. The earliest maps of the Threlkeld area, going back to the mid-18th century, show no road on this line, and it is very unlikely that anyone from then back to Roman times would have built such a solid and carefully engineered road . . . ."

Mill Bridge (Newsham) (NY 327249) Fig. 1 and 5
6 May 1978

A plan, a section and photographs exist for these trenches but no text or notes have

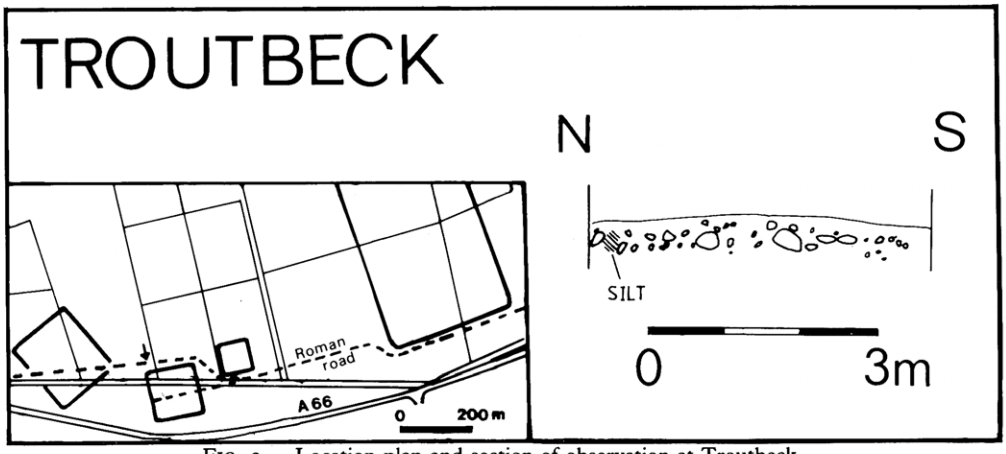

FIG. 3. – Location plan and section of observation at Troutbeck.

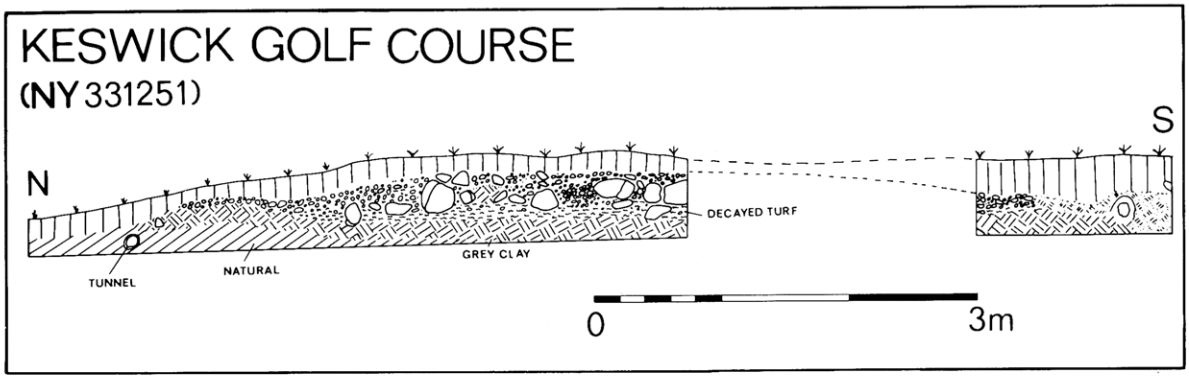

FIG. 4. – Section at Keswick Golf Course.

been found. The excavation was in Field 641 just to the east of the Setmabanning excavation. An *agger* was apparent in the field and one trench 7.50 m long was cut across it. A second sondage was cut 10 m to the west at the point where the *agger* seemed to terminate. In the main trench excavation was taken to the top of the stone spread and the east half of the trench was then excavated to natural. (N.B. the main section on Fig. 5 seems to be taken along the middle of the trench with the turf line projected from the west edge).

The south end of the trench, off the line of the *agger*, produced a profile with 90 mm top soil over 110 mm of buff sand over 100 mm of yellow sand and stones. The main trench revealed a light scatter of cobble and stone over a width of about 5 metres. Some larger stones occured at the north edge. There was some variation in the texture of the stone across the *agger*. At one point the cobble may have exhibited signs of wear but elsewhere the stone was quite roughly deposited. The section shows that, at least to the north, the *agger* is following the contours of the underlying natural.

The sondage to the west appears to show stone giving out west of the scarp marking the surface traces of the *agger*.

Dr Allan reports the conclusion that the *agger* very probably consisted of rubbish from the digging of the adjacent railway cutting.

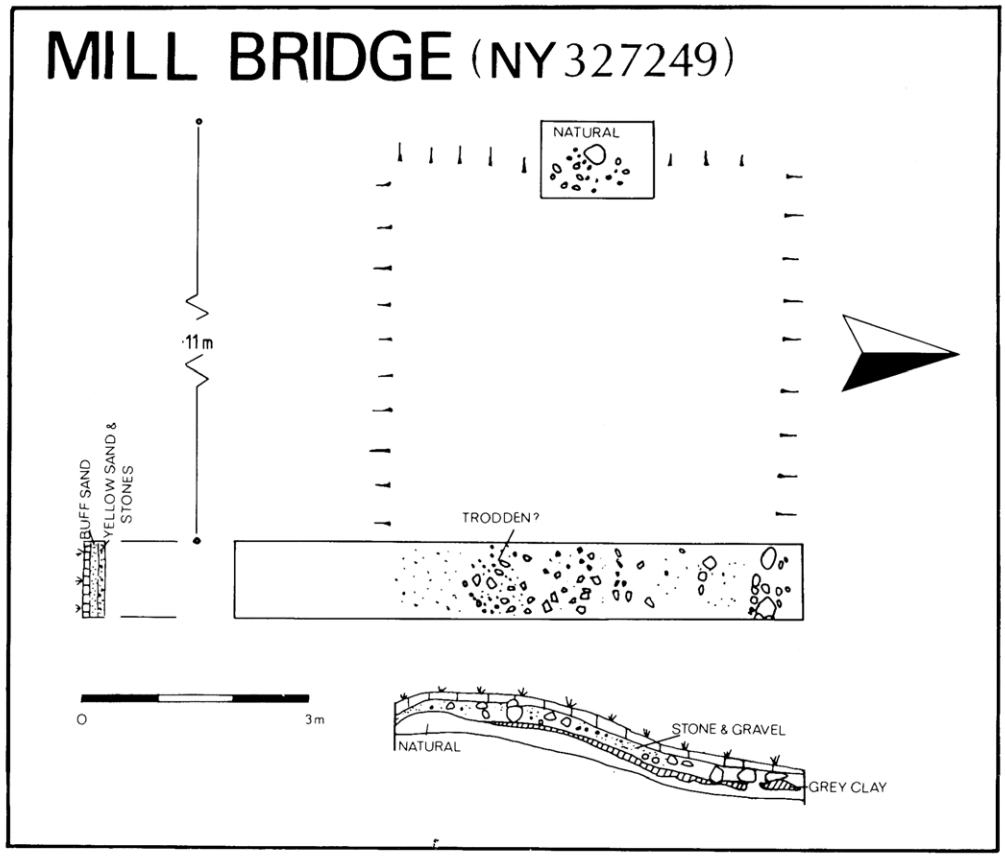

FIG. 5. – Plan and section of excavation at Mill Bridge (Newsham).

Setmabanning Farm (NY 325249) Fig. 1 and 6
31 July 1977
By G. G. S. Richardson

"An apparent '*agger*' extends across Field No. 640 on a bearing of 252 degrees magnetic. Part of the field has been ploughed, and showed a considerable scatter of stones, but without any significant concentration on the line of the *agger*. The farmer said the ridge had been difficult to plough, and that a similar hard ridge extended east through Field No. 641.

Two trial trenches, 2 m×0.7 m, 3 m apart were dug on the *agger*, but showed no trace of road metalling. In Field 638, 16.5m west of the trenches the line is cut by a drainage ditch. Cleaning of the east section showed a deposit of mixed stone and gravel 0.7 m deep, and 6 m wide on the presumed line. This did not reveal any clear surface or camber, and might have resulted from dumping of stones cleared from the field into the hollow where the drain had been cut; there were, however, many small stones in the deposit of a size unlikely to have been hand-picked from the field. At the bottom of the section there was a continuous layer of larger stones, closely set.

The evidence of this trial is inconclusive. Excavation farther west, in Field 638, clear

of possible clearance dumping, and also on the apparent *agger* beside the road immediately east of Field 641, might produce clearer information. The general line looks promising, and could readily link with the line of the old coach road between Burns Farm and the old bridge over Naddle Beck."

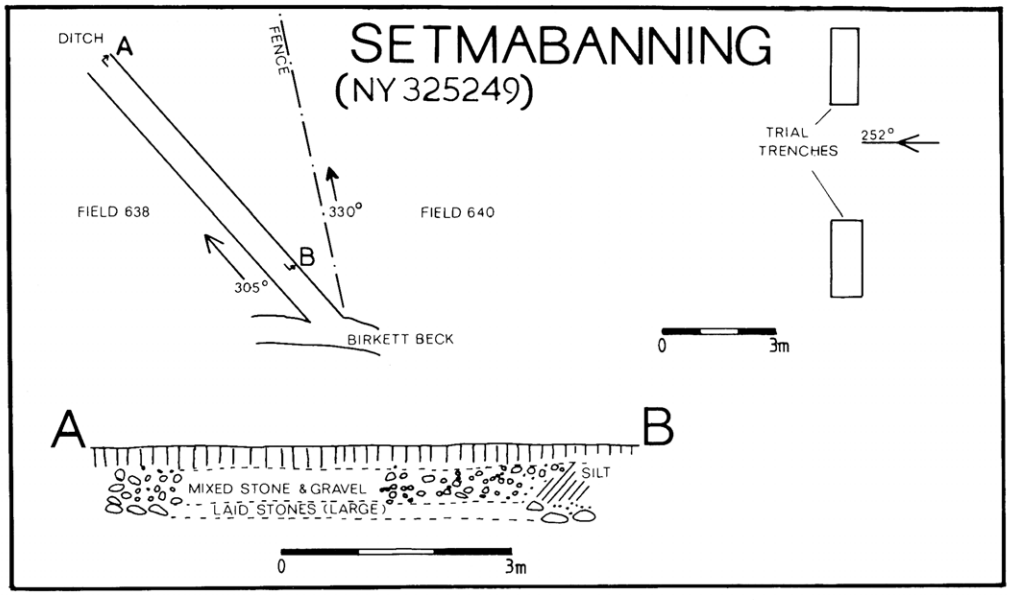

FIG. 6. – Plan and section of observations at Setmabanning.

Burns Farm (NY 304241) Fig. 1 and 7
29 July 1979

Full notes and drawings of this trench exist. George Richardson had prepared a section drawing for publication which, however, was not used and is no longer in good enough condition for printing. Fig. 7 is a tracing of this section with only trivial modifications. No descriptive text has been traced.

A trench 8 m long and 1 m wide was dug 64.1 m west from the field gate in Field No. 168 (25″ O.S. Cumb. 64.4, 1899 ed.). Below 150 mm of top soil was a layer of gravel (40 mm) on broken stone (80-120 mm) about 100 mm thick followed by a layer of laminated sand 150-200 mm thick overlying 100 mm thickness of cobbles. Under the cobbles was orange sand at the west end of the trench and grey clay at the east. A sondage traced the sand to a depth of 1 m and these two layers are presumably natural.

The lower metalled surface which was 6 metres (20 feet) wide seems to have been regarded as probably a road of early date. Despite the lack of dating and the absence of diagnostic features in the road there is no reason to challenge this conclusion.

Naddle Bridge (NY 301239) Fig. 1 and 2A
1 and 9 October 1977

Two trenches are recorded and drawings survive but no notes other than those

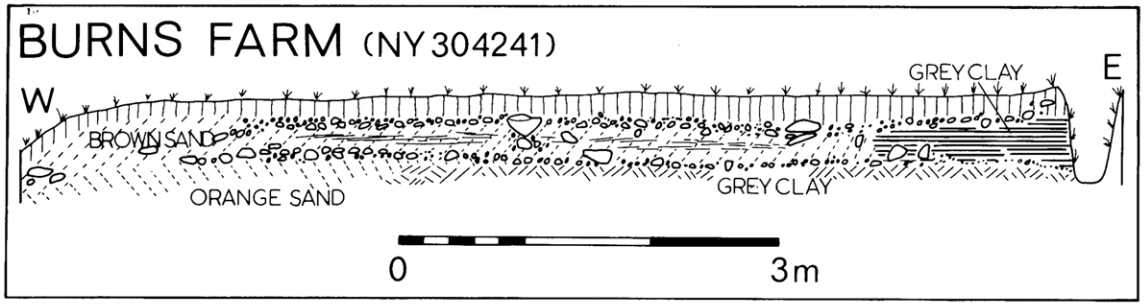

FIG. 7. – Section at Burns Farm.

amplifying the drawings and no text. There has been some difficulty in pinpointing precisely the location of the excavation trenches and the position marked in Fig. 1 remains unconfirmed.

An *agger* is recorded on a bearing of 60 degrees magnetic. A sketch shows it 25 yards south of the lane to Goosewell in Field No. 394 (25″ O.S. Cumberland 64.3, 1899 ed.). Trench 1 was cut 90 metres from the bridge abutment on a bearing of 37 deg. magnetic. At least three layers of stones were uncovered in the 2 m long trench but the trench or the remains seem to have got caught up in what was probably a field wall. The significance of this trench is unclear. A cross-section was not drawn and the plan is uninformative and not reproduced here.

Trench 2 was dug 11 metres to the west (?) of Trench 1. The results are shown in Fig. 2A. There is nothing to add to the data on the section beyond saying that the slope was calculated as 6.25%. Richardson also observed: "Section in river bank corresponds, but numerous large stones – 0.25 m? – partly underlying top layer of small stones."

The results of these explorations seem to be inconclusive neither definitely confirming nor disallowing the existence of a road.

PAPCASTLE-MORESBY ROAD

Wythemoor Sough Farm, Distington (NY 045245) Fig. 8 and 9

By G. G. S. Richardson

"At the request of Dr Martin Allan, in pursuance of his examination of a possible line for the Roman road from Papcastle to Moresby, a section was cut across a stony *agger* at (NY 045245) on 19th June 1977, by a team from the Carlisle Regional Group. Thanks are due to Mr Paterson, owner of Wythemoor Sough Farm for permission to excavate.

The *agger* is clearly visible for a distance of about 800 m running parallel to the south-east boundary of the farm, on a bearing of 235 degrees; the ring fence marking the boundary consists of a clay bank surmounted by a well-established thorn hedge. The section was cut at a point 60 m south-west of the field gate on the unclassified road which runs by Branthwaite Row Farm and Dean Cross. A trench 6.5 m by 0.7 m was excavated, which exposed a road surface 3.25 m wide below a layer of turf and humus 10 cm deep. The upper surface of the road was a layer of gravel and loam 3 cm deep, which overlaid a very firmly compacted surface of broken yellow sandstone in sand; the stones were mostly small, but there were a few larger ones up to 10 cm across interspersed. This road bed was 25 cm deep; there were some large stones in the bottom

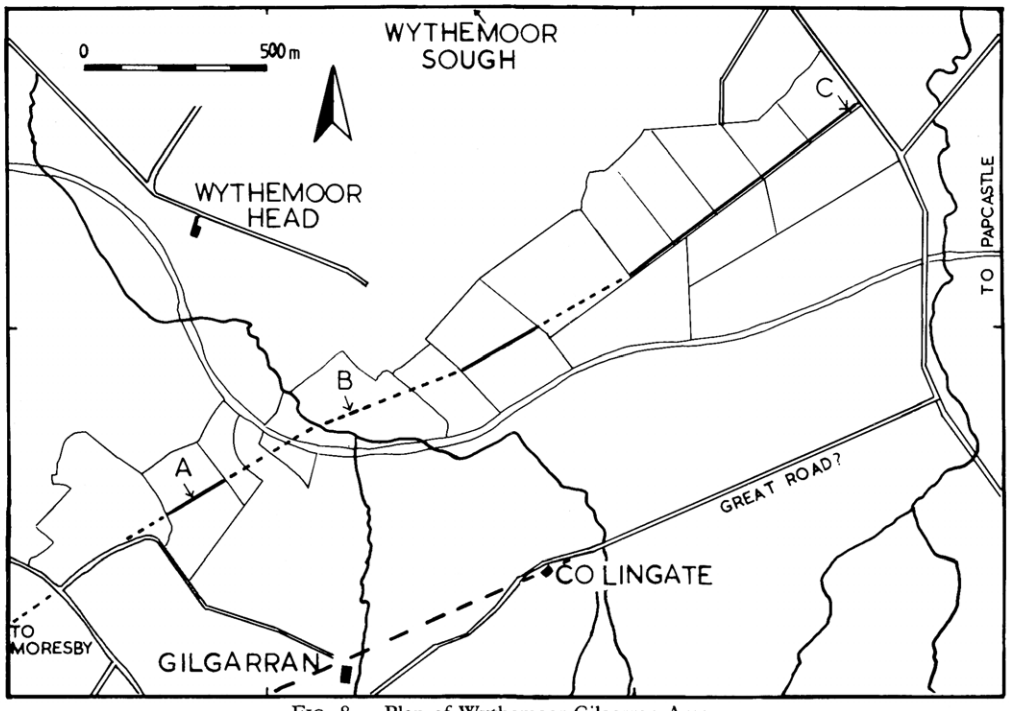

FIG. 8. – Plan of Wythemoor-Gilgarran Area.

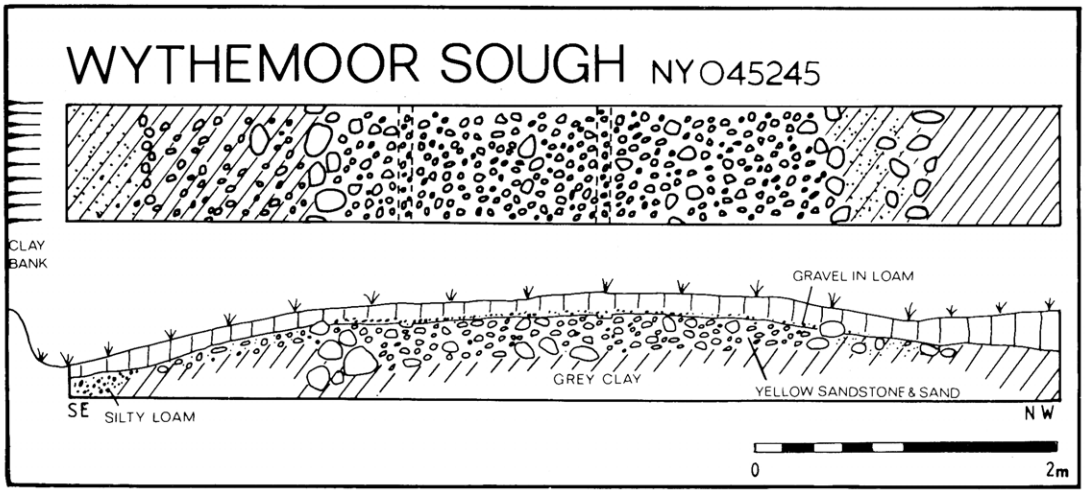

FIG. 9. – Plan and section of excavation at Wythemoor Sough.

layer but no continuous foundation, the compacted sandstone lying directly on the natural grey clay of the coal measures. The surface had a camber of 1 in 16. There were two shallow ruts 9 cm wide and 1.40 m apart in the broken sandstone surface.

On the south-east side there was a revetment of large water-worn stones up to 25 cm in diameter, 0.5 m deep and 0.45 m thick, beyond which a bed of small stones and clay sloped downwards at about 1 in 4, and was cut into after 1 m by a more recent ditch fill, probably associated with the boundary bank. On the north-west side there were two lines of large stones

0.5 m apart; the space between them suggested a ditch 15 cm deep filled with soft clay and stones.

A few fragments of Victorian pottery and part of a clay pipe bowl were found in the ditches, but there were no securely sealed artefacts.

On the evidence of the south-east ditch section the road would appear to pre-date the boundary bank and hedge. It seems too substantially and carefully constructed to be merely a field access road. In the absence of any obvious later function for a well-engineered road on this line a Roman origin is not impossible."

Gilgarran (NY 028234) Fig. 8 and 10
16 October 1976

Trench 1

1 m east-west by 1.8 m north-south at a distance of 7.75 m from east field boundary. The trench was sited along the edge of the stoney area established by probing. The plan and section show a very light scatter of stone below the top soil at a depth of just over 350 mm.

Trench 2

2 m north-south by 0.8 m east-west at a distance of 4.5 m north of Trench 1. Not illustrated. "Natural yellow clay at 40 cm." There were some large boulders on the surface about 700 mm from the south-east corner of this trench.

Trench 3

2 m north-south by 0.8 m east-west. 41.1 m from the base line forming the east side of Trenches 1 and 2. A stone lined V-drain with a slab cover was found at the north end of the trench. Some stone was found in the centre of the trench. A layer of mixed yellow clay seems to be associated with the V-drain which, stratigraphically, look relatively modern.

Trench 4

2 m by 0.8 m (orientation not recorded but possibly long axis north-south). One metre south of Trench 3. "Sterile to yellow clay at 0.5 m".

Wythemoor Head (NY 033238)
18 June 1977

The site of this trench is marked on Fig. 8 at point B but no records or details of this excavation have been found. Dr Allan reports that the so-called *agger* was just a pile of stones.

The relevance of the road in these sections to the Roman road system has been questioned by R. L. Bellhouse. Fig. 8 shows Bellhouse's preferred line going through Colingate (CW2, lvi, 37). Discussion on this matter appeared in the CBA3 Newsbulletins from December 1977 and into 1978. Dr Allan has accepted since 1979 Bellhouse's

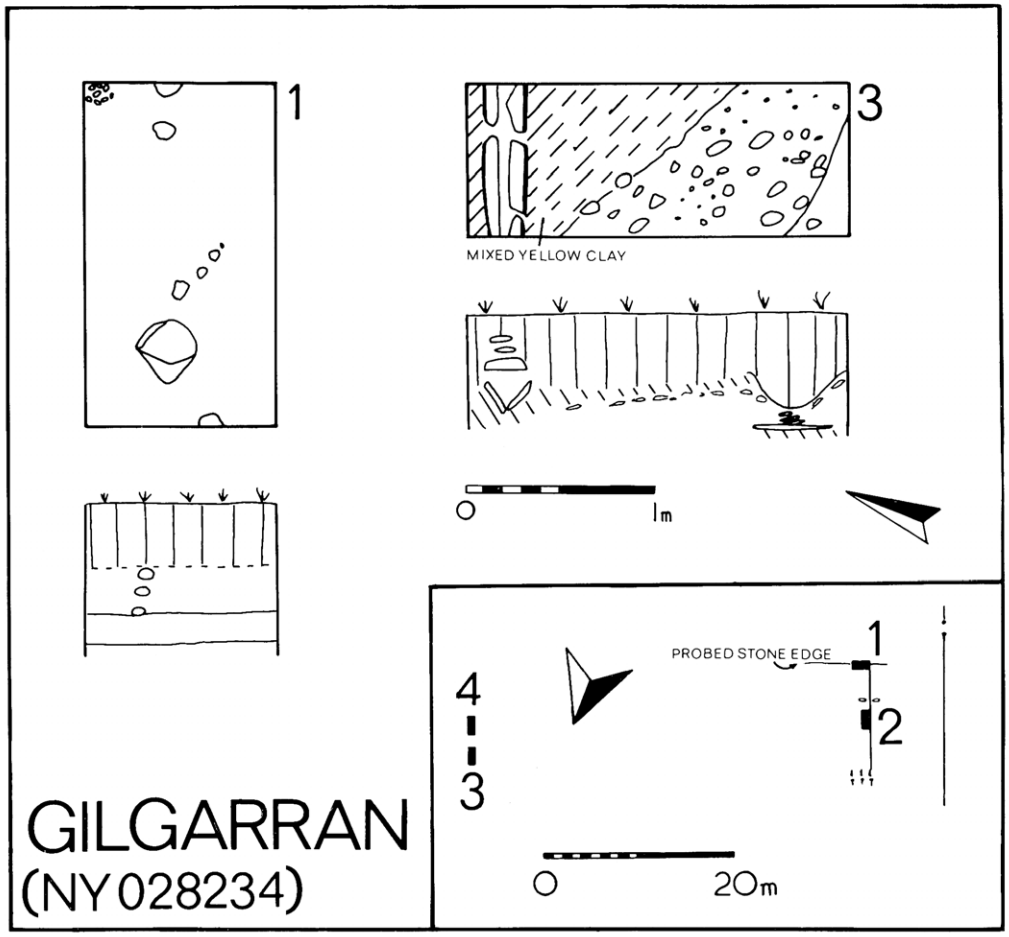

FIG. 10. – Plans and sections of excavation at Gilgarran.

interpretation of the charter evidence that "the great road towards Dene" is the Colingate though, of course, that does not *necessarily* imply that it is also a Roman road. The excavated road may well have served the disused coal mine at NY 033236. The excavations published here are, at best, inconclusive.

AMBLESIDE-OLD PENRITH ROAD

Springbank (NY 411256) Fig. 11
12 May 1979

Records of this excavation are sparse and difficult to interpret with any certainty. The following note is a verbatim transcript of observations made on 29 September 1977:

"Double *agger* in the field south-east of the house, reminiscent of pack tracks. One continues

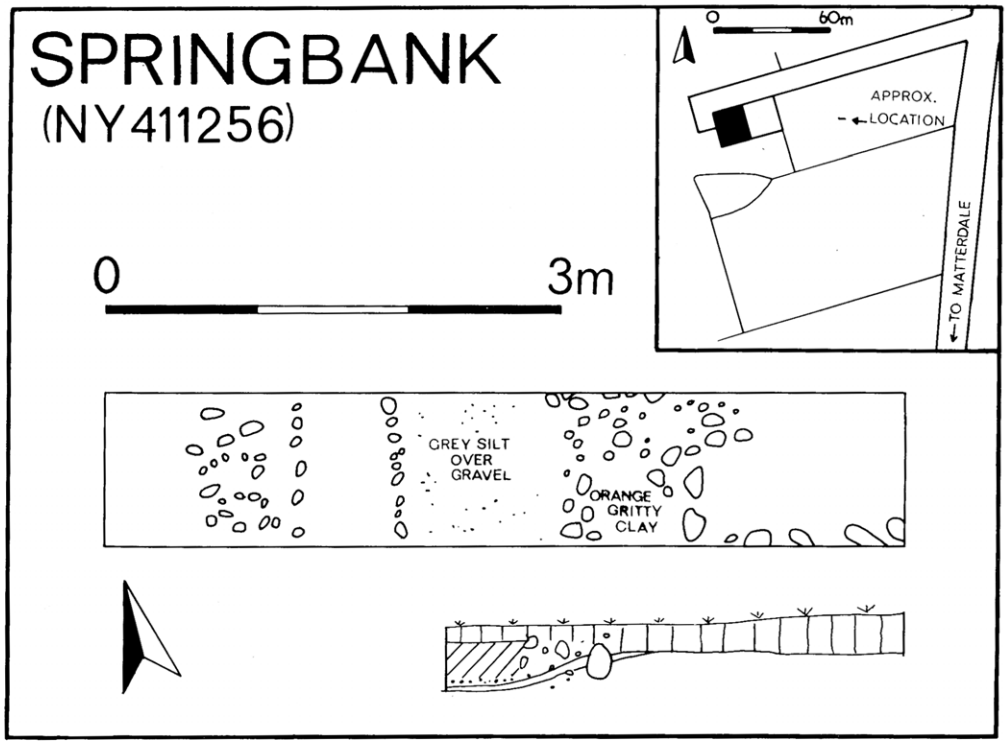

FIG. 11. – Plan and section of excavation at Springbank.

into next field south and across the farm road on west side of marshy area with stream, aligned with bend in present road.

Eastern *agger* hard over 6 m aligned from south-west corner of field, changing direction north to meet north wall of field 24.5 m from its junction with garden wall of Springbank.

Stones in sike bank north of farm road on apparent line."

The base line for the excavation (Fig. 11), on bearing of 110 degrees, starts at 35.6 m from north-west end of Springbank garden wall (at south-west gate post) and 29.2 m from south-west end of wall. The 5 m long trench began 1 m east of origin point and was dug south of the base line.

The excavated sequence was as follows:

150 mm top soil over
gravel over
larger cobbles over
natural boulder clay: pebbles in reddish clay

Two areas of cobble were found separated by a depression or ditch filled with grey silt over gravel.

While there is little doubt that road-like material was found there are serious doubts as to its relevance to the problem of the Roman road. The course of the Roman road in this area is probably that of the modern road.

Greystoke High Moor (NY 419291) Fig. 12
May 1979

Details of this excavation are sketchy. A trench was dug across the line of the Roman road marked on the O.S. maps (which is a pair of parallel slight depressions) at a point 183 paces from Bright Tarn and 212 paces from an unnamed point, assumed to be the junction with the Greystoke-Berrier road. The main trench was 5.8 by 0.7 m, with two small sondages extending the section to 9 m.

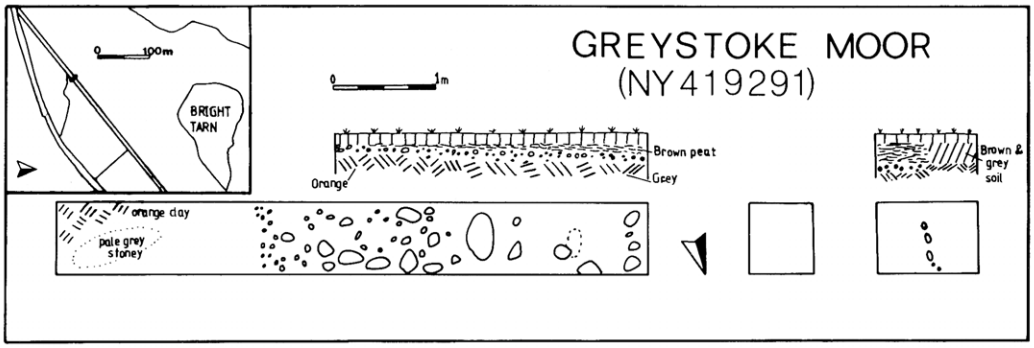

FIG. 12. – Plan and section of excavation at Greystoke Moor.

The drawings show light metalling over about 6.5 m with a thin cover of peat between the cobbles and the top soil. Martin Allan confirms "that there was very little stonework, in accordance with the general softness of the ground to the probe" (*in litt.*). Alan Richardson suggests that the absence of an *agger* is the result of stone robbing.

While it would be unreasonable to doubt the road line on the basis of the slight remains found in this excavation, it would be unwise to put much faith in the accuracy of the measured width.

OLD PENRITH-OLD CARLISLE ROAD

Calthwaite School (NY 466403) Fig. 13
March 1978
By G. G. S. Richardson

"Hutchinson (II, 408) refers to a Roman road 'not yet taken notice of' leading from Old Penrith to Maryport, passing near the 'forts' which he records at Stockdalewath (*op. cit.* 429, 431). If such a road existed it would in all probability go by Old Carlisle. An apparent road section was observed by Martin Allan in the south bank of Ravensgill Beck at a point (NY 480396) about a mile north-west of Voreda (sentence amended by T. M. Allan); it showed a bed of stones 10 metres long in the south bank of the beck, with a well-marked terrace leading to it down the south side of the valley in which the beck runs. The continuation of this line west-north-west brings it to Calthwaite, where there is a series of apparently early field boundaries on the line, notably more irregular than the enclosure patterns of the neighbouring fields. At NY 466403 there is a wide terrace immediately above the west edge of the playing field of Calthwaite school. It was obvious that this terrace, as now visible, must have carried a relatively recent road, if only for access to the adjoining fields, and Mr Walker of Orchard House Farm informed us

that a road had been in use within living memory. It was decided to excavate to find out whether there was evidence of any earlier road construction which might support the case for a Roman origin.

A trench one metre wide was dug at each side of the terrace. At 20 cm below the present surface there was a layer of road metalling 4.1 m wide, consisting of rounded cobbles 8-15 cm in diameter; the cobbles towards the west end were small and barely more than a single layer, but towards the east end there were two layers of larger cobbles. There was no foundation to the metalling; the cobbles rested on a thin layer of orange clay flecked with organic material, below which there was, in the west trench, a bed of mixed red and orange clay 15-20 cm deep but in the east trench this layer was softer and much more earthy. The mixed clay merged into a bed of gritty red clay, with large stones and some smaller ones embedded in it, which rested on the natural orange and red boulder clay. The red clay re-appeared in the east trench where it terminated sharply in an almost vertical face (see Fig. 13), defining a width of about 4 m. Towards the western end of the excavation the natural clay rose steeply through some 80 cm. A field drain of horseshoe tiles, in a trench with sloping sides, cut through all the levels at 1.5 m from the west end of the trench. The drain trench contained many sherds of broken horseshoe tiles; similar sherds appeared in the base of the cobbled road.

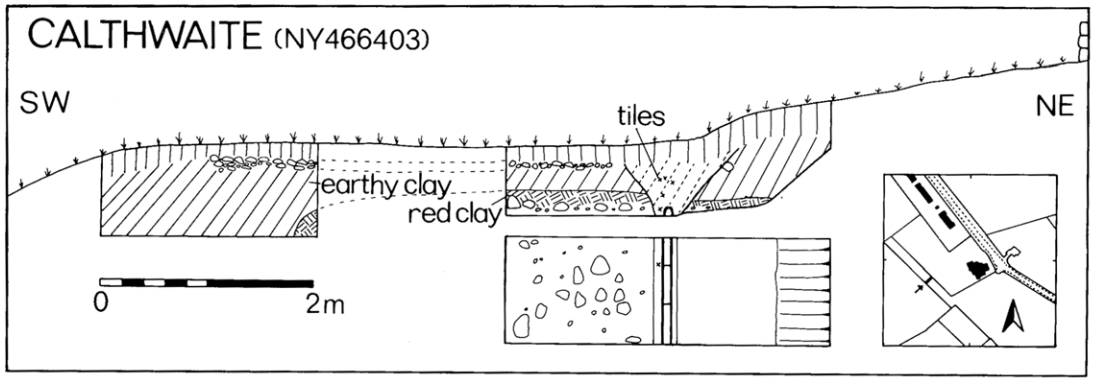

FIG. 13. – Plan and section of excavation at Calthwaite.

The Inglewood Forest Enclosure Award of 1819 shows that the field wall above the west side of the terrace was an existing boundary at that date, but makes no reference to any road along the terrace. It would seem, therefore, that the cobble road must have been constructed later in the nineteenth century, along with the associated drain. If the hypothesis that the Roman road took the same line was to be supported, evidence of an earlier phase of road building was necessary. The red clay layer, and possibly the mixed clay layer above it, clearly showed a deliberate cutting back into the sloping ground, the excavated clay being spread to form a more or less level terrace. This terrace was evidently not constructed to carry the nineteenth century road, which was off-set 1 m eastwards from it, and which, at its east side rested on a different fill, probably resulting from a later rebuilding of the edge of the earlier terrace. It can only be tentatively inferred that the early terrace carried a road which was completely worn and eroded away, along with the east edge of the terrace itself, but sufficient of the terrace survived to make it a convenient basis for a reconstruction to carry the nineteenth century road. Further field investigation will be needed, along the projected line, to support the hypothesis that the early terrace was of Roman construction."

Roads at Old Carlisle

Some corrections need to be made to George Richardson's note "Roman Road near

Old Carlisle" in CW2, lxxii. These difficulties in the published account were identified by R. A. H. Farrar of the R. C. H. M. (E) and amended by the author in a letter of June 1977.

1. The grid reference for the Old Carlisle-Carlisle road should be NY 268467.
2. The grid reference for the Drumburgh road should be NY 261470 rather than NY 264470.
3. For *Tiffenthwaite* farm read *Greengarth*.

BIRDOSWALD-BEWCASTLE

Kiln Hill (NY 613669) (Fig. 14)
1 June 1975

An apparent *agger* is visible running east-west across a small plantation just west of Kiln Hill. A trench apparently 8 m long by 1 m wide was dug. From north to south the section showed a shallow ditch 1.8 m wide with stone bottoming. Then was a bank of mixed earth, clay and stones 2.6 m wide, surviving to 0.4 m high. Larger stones (0.16 m)

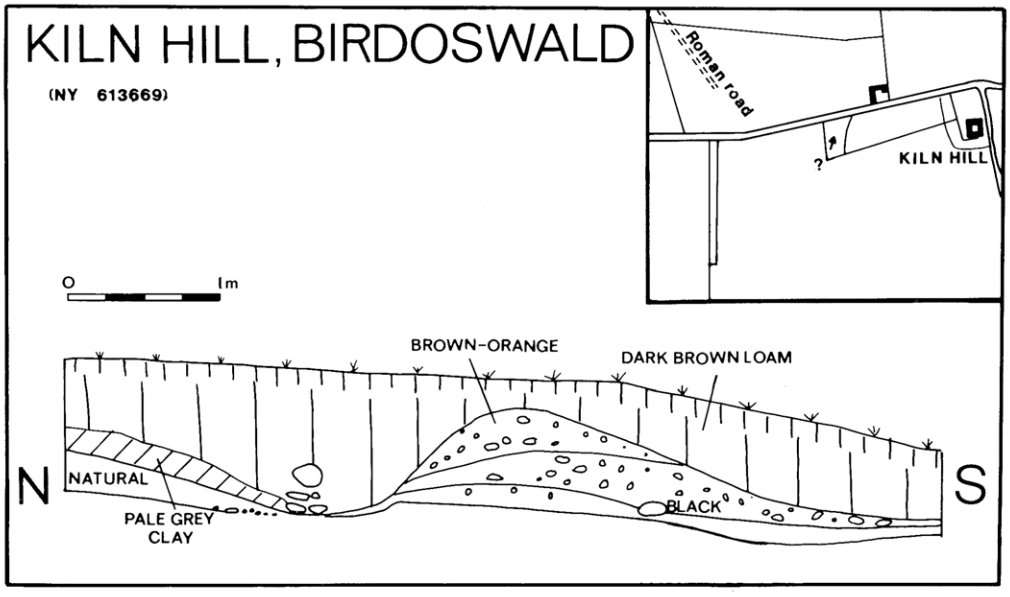

FIG. 14. – Plan and section of excavation at Birdoswald.

occurred at each toe of the bank. There was some tumble of stones to the south of the bank.

The bank was presumably an ancient boundary but there was no dating evidence. This excavation was undertaken jointly with T. Patten.

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