

Roman Milestones in North-West England

B. J. N. EDWARDS, B.A., F.S.A.

ROMAN milestones are familiar objects, and there is a tendency to think of them as readily explicable. The standard text is by Mommsen (1881), and this text, in Latin, has stood for one and a quarter centuries, and is much quoted. But our well-entrenched ideas about Roman milestones are frequently derived from our none-too-precise memories of what we know of turnpike and other recent milestones. We remember that milestones were placed alongside Roman roads; that they carried the name and some of the titles of the Emperor, and a mileage measured from a place, sometimes stated, sometimes not. We tend to think of them, therefore, as useful objects which would tell Roman travellers how far they had to go. But is this the case? Were there enough of them for this? In fact, they were not apparently a very common phenomenon. Of 2,314 inscriptions on stone recorded in *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain* (Collingwood and Wright 1965, hereafter *RIB* throughout) only 95 (about 4%) are milestones. Of these 95, only eleven carry a surviving mileage figure. Twelve more milestones will appear in the yet-to-be-published volume III of *RIB* (R.M. Tomlin, *pers comm.*), but only one of these – the example from Langwathby, Cumbria (see below) – carries a mileage figure.

It is also interesting to note the numbers of miles recorded on those eleven milestones. They are as follows: 1, 2, 4, 8, 11, 14 (two examples), 18, 22, 51 and 53. These seem an unlikely survival from a random set of mileages. Over 30 years ago Rodwell attempted to deduce certain facts about exactly where the figures on Roman milestones were measured from (Rodwell, 1975). It is probable not only that the available sample is too small to be reliably indicative, but also that attempts to decide whether a milestone's distance is measured from, say, the centre of the place concerned, the edge of its *territorium*, or elsewhere, assume too great a precision on the part of those who decided the text and erected the stone. We have all met relatively recent milestones or mileposts where the distance between two successive examples was less, or more, than the miles they specified – and no Roman milestone in Britain displays a distance measured to a fraction of a mile.

Strangely, the best-known milestone from Roman Britain is uninscribed – that on the Stanegate near Chesterholm/*Vindolanda*. This was illustrated in most of the early works on Hadrian's Wall. It was painted by H. B. Richardson and lithographed by John Storey, for John Collingwood Bruce's book, *The Roman Wall*, of 1851 (Bruce 1851, ill. 88, facing 239). It was again painted by Maria Hoyer in 1925 (Hoyer 1925, 105); and appears on postcards produced by W. P. Collier of Bellingham in about the same period. It also appears in Ronald Embleton's evocative illustration of Roman troops approaching *Vindolanda* in winter (Embleton and Graham, 1984, 214).

In fact, then, despite our complacency, the whole subject bristles with problems

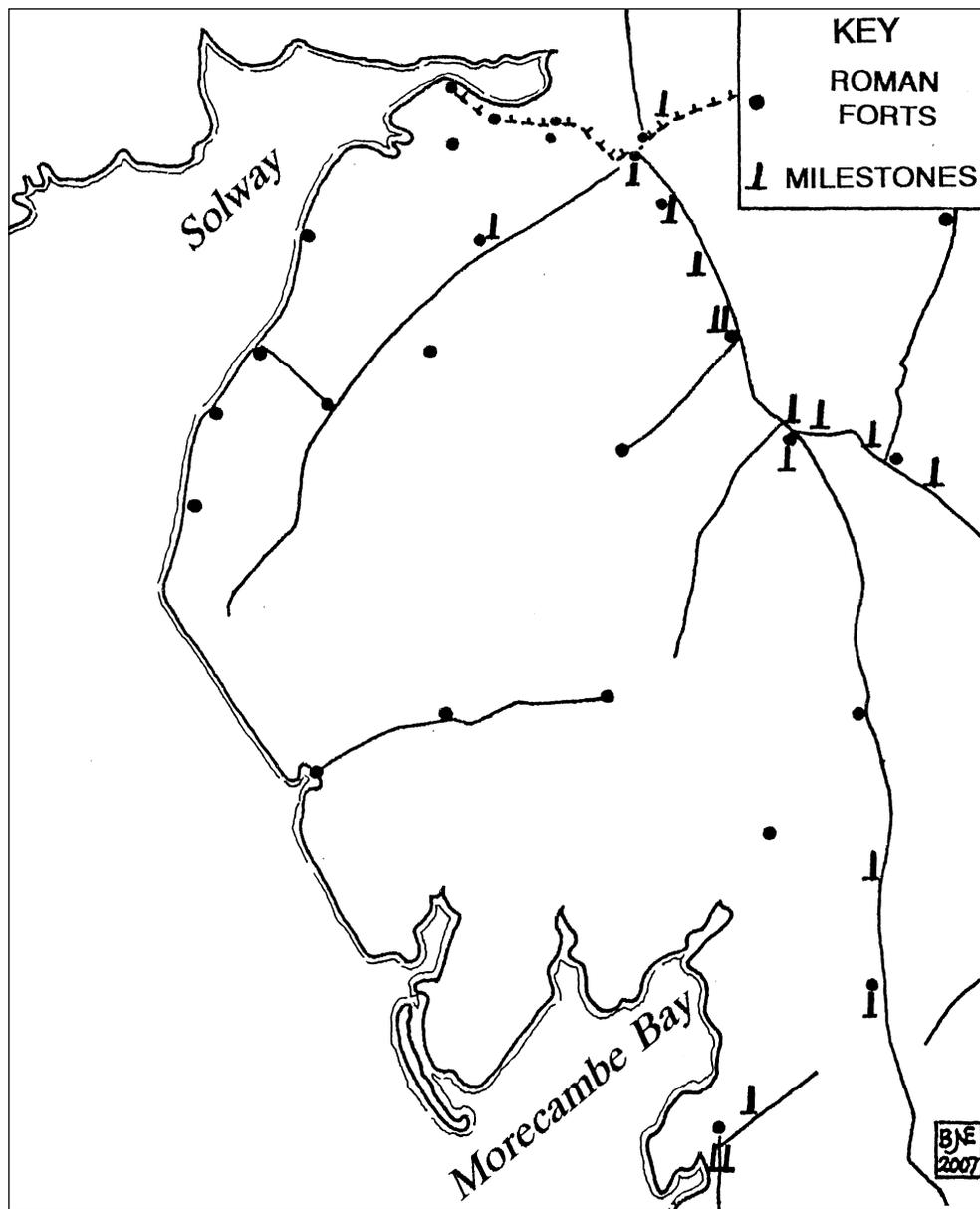


FIG. 1. Map of north-west England showing Roman roads, forts and milestones.

and contradictions. Why, for example, are there no known milestones from Roman England and Wales earlier than the time of Septimius Severus, apart from three well-known Hadrianic examples, one of them in Lancaster City Museum? The other two are from two miles from Leicester and from eight miles from Caerhun towards Caernarvon (*RIB* 2272, 2244 and 2265 respectively). Again, why are there only two milestones recorded from Roman Scotland (*RIB* 2312 and 2313), these being the only British examples from the reign of Antoninus Pius, so filling the gap between Hadrian and Septimius Severus? It is certainly not a matter of differential survival in areas of readily-available stone as against areas where such material is scarce and likely to be re-used. Why, in contrast, are there no fewer than five milestones known in Cornwall, when the *O.S. Map of Roman Britain* marks not a single mile of Roman road west of the Tamar? It must, of course, be said that recent discoveries of Roman forts in Cornwall may go some way to explaining this. Further, are some of the inscriptions recording only the Emperor's name and titles really milestones in any sense in which we ourselves would understand the word? These are all questions which demand answers, though it is by no means easy to find those answers.

Before dealing with the milestones from the north-west of England, it is worth considering one of the milestones from Scotland (*RIB* 2313) – not so much because of its intrinsic interest (which is considerable) – but because of the way in which it has been displayed. It is an object lesson in how much the student of Roman Britain is in the hands of those who, in various ways, publish inscribed stones, the word 'publish' including, for this purpose, 'prepare for museum display'. In this case, two portions of the milestone concerned were found in the late 17th century and were given to Edinburgh University, and then subsequently passed to the National Museum. There, the inscribed portion became separated from the decorated portion. The inscription appeared in *RIB* (2313), and the stone was generally ascribed to Septimius Severus, the erasure being presumed to be of the names of Geta, his son, liquidated by his brother, Caracalla. We may note, in passing, that the *RIB* drawing does not distinguish at all clearly between deliberate erasure and accidental damage. By 1971, however, the decorated portion was rediscovered in a museum store and reunited with the inscription. It was then clear that the erasure was not in the correct position in the inscription to have been of the names of Geta, and that the Imperial name was almost certainly that of Antoninus Pius. The erasure was then considered to have been of the names of a hitherto-unknown governor of the province who succeeded Lollius Urbicus, and for whose identity a suggestion could be made (Cornelius Priscianus – Maxwell, 1983). The milestone was then reconstructed with a height of about 160cm or 5 feet 3 inches (it is illustrated thus in Breeze, 2006 as Fig. 4.8.). It was later reconstructed reduced to about 112cm or 3 feet 8 inches, with a considerable amount of the inscription restored in the material of the modern make-up. The intention in mentioning these changes is not in any way to denigrate the National Museum of Scotland, but to demonstrate how both the meaning of the inscription and the general appearance of the stone can be affected by techniques of publication and display.

To turn now to the milestones in north-west England: the distribution map (Figure 1)

RIB 2272

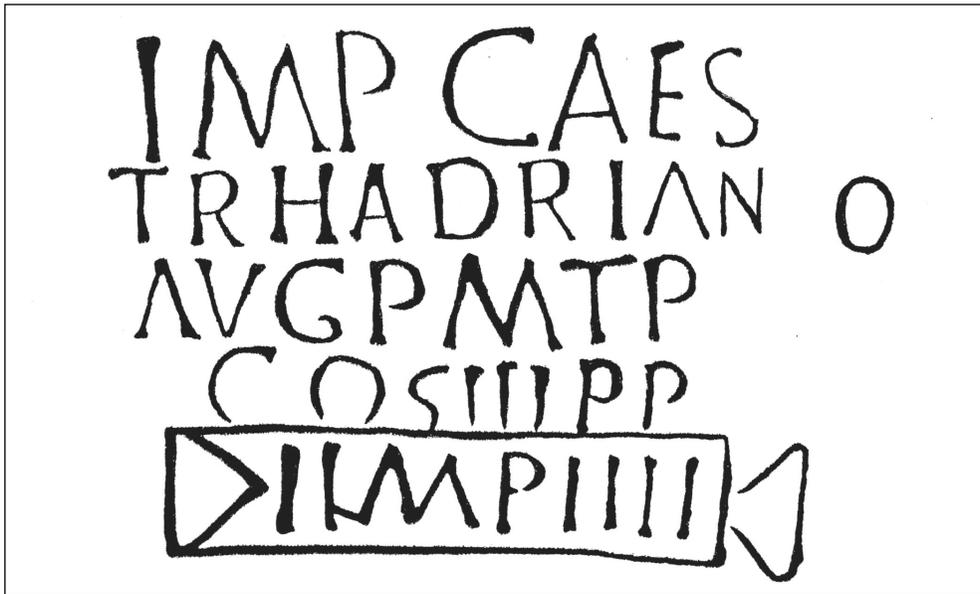


FIG. 2. The inscription on the Hadrianic milestone from Caton, as shown in RIB.
(Reproduced by permission of the Administrators of the Haverfield Bequest).

RIB 2272

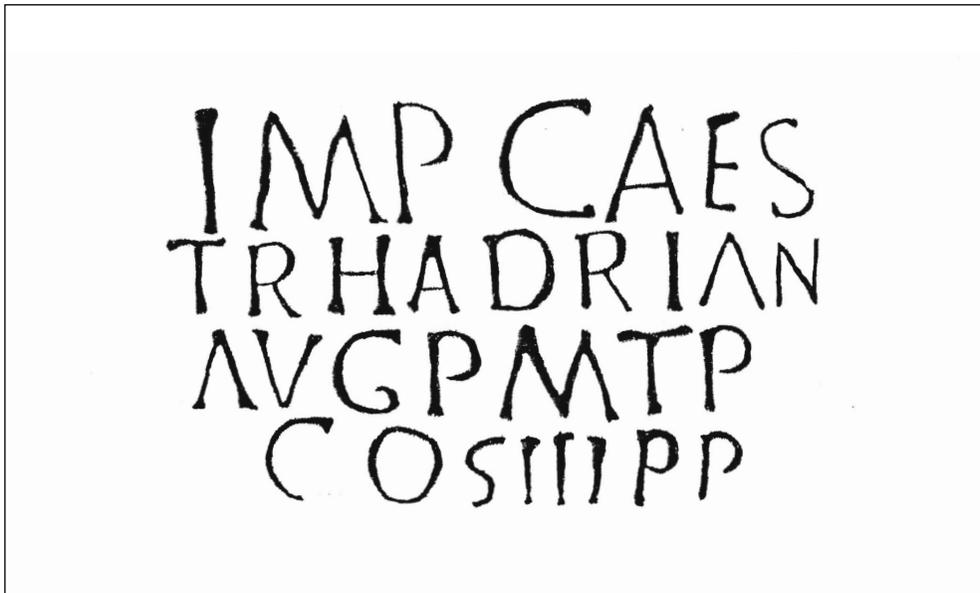


FIG. 3. Possible reconstruction of the original appearance of the inscription in Fig. 2.

shows the milestones which Sedgley recorded (1975, Fig. 1) together with those which have been discovered since 1975. Sedgley's map (of the whole of Roman Britain) illustrated the presence of something of a concentration in north-west England.

The uninscribed milestone at *Vindolanda* was referred to earlier, and there is a similar example in our area. This is positioned alongside the former line of the A66 at Temple Sowerby, now by-passed, which followed the line of the Roman road over Stainmore towards Penrith. (It was enclosed by iron railings many years ago but, unfortunately, it came to share its enclosure with a vigorous elder bush. Representations to English Heritage resulted in considerable improvement to the milestone's appearance.)

From this we turn to a milestone which is definitely inscribed, but concerning the meaning of its inscription there has been much debate. This is the Caton stone (*RIB* 2272); its inscription as seen in Lancaster Museum is shown in Fig. 2. The doubt, of course, lies in the interpretation of what is inside the frame. It is often assumed that it records a distance of 4 miles from Lancaster, the Roman name of which must therefore have begun with 'L'. Rodwell, indeed, in the paper already mentioned (1975, 94), uses it to show that because its find-spot is 4½ miles from Lancaster, the point from which that was measured must have been at the edge of the *vicus*. But (a) we do not know its precise find-spot – it was found in the Artle Beck at Caton (and wherever it was first erected, it was not **in** the Beck!); and (b) surely there is a case for suggesting that the frame and its contents are an addition to the original inscription, and that it once looked as in Fig. 3. At least we know that the addition, if that is what it is, was there by the middle of the 19th century, when John Weld of Leagram Hall, Chipping, painted a watercolour of the stone (L[ancashire] R[ecord] O[ffice] DP 386/10).

Proceeding now roughly from north to south, we turn to two milestones from the line of Hadrian's Wall, both in Tullie House Museum, Carlisle. The first is from Old Wall (*RIB* 2311) and carries fairly clearly the name of Diocletian, who is described as Senior Augustus, thus limiting its date to about 14 months in 305 or 306. It has had a somewhat chequered life since its discovery in 1816, having been reduced from a height of 52 inches to 28 inches and having spent 40 odd years at Falkland, Fife, until it returned to Carlisle in 1923. The second (Sedgley, 1975, No. 110 – not in *RIB*), from Hadrian's Camp (a modern military name, not referring, except in general terms, to Roman dispositions), has also had a tough life, being, as it survives, a quadrant cut from a cylindrical milestone and now consisting of two pieces cemented together. It once had a distance cut on it, but only MP for *Milia Passuum* survives.

Completeness now requires us to look briefly at the milestone from Langwathby, which was dealt with in full in these *Transactions* (Edwards and Shotter, 2005; Edwards and Shotter, 2006). Its inscription as first reported seemed so much everything one could wish for on a milestone that there were inevitably suspicions of modern forgery. Actual acquaintance with the stone soon showed otherwise; but to have the names and titles of the emperor so complete, including a record of the Emperor's tribunician power allowing precision to a single twelvemonth; the name of the erecting authority; the place from which the distance was measured; and the distance itself: all this seemed

almost too good to be true. A couple of points which were not in the published paper seem worth making. First, while this stone gives the *civitas Carvetiorum* as the authority erecting the milestone, the two other milestones of this emperor in Britain (*RIB* 2299, 2306), both from Hadrian's Wall, name the Governor, Claudius Xenophon, or Xenophon, which the Langwathby stone does not. This is some support for Rodwell's assertion (1975, 97) that only on Hadrian's Wall can we be sure that milestones, and presumably the roads which go with them, were a military responsibility, or at least that of a different authority from that which controlled and oversaw those away from the Wall. The second interesting point is that on some of the inscriptions of Severus Alexander, the name of the Emperor has been erased – but again this is not the case on the Langwathby stone.

Consideration of the Langwathby stone leads, of course, to the Frenchfield stone. This was found in 1956 on Frenchfield Farm, to the north of the River Eamont, and is now in Brougham Castle. It was surprising to find that, although the text of this stone was published promptly after its discovery (*JRS*, 55 (1965), 224), no illustration was then published, which is why both a photograph and a drawing were included with the discussion of the milestone in relation to that from Langwathby (Edwards and Shotter, 2005, 71, Fig. 2). The drawing will also appear in the supplementary volume of *RIB* when it is published. Again, there are two points of interest about this stone. First, it carries only the names and titles of the Emperor, and these are error-strewn – was it really erected officially and is it really a milestone? There is no precise definition of such stones, and any stone bearing only the names and titles of the Emperor is usually so regarded. Secondly, its find-spot is often referred to as 'Brougham', an area which does not extend north of the Eamont. It may seem of slight importance, but it is worth being aware that it was not found at the fort of Brougham, as that find-spot would suggest, but some 375 metres (420 yds.) across the Eamont from it.

There is, in fact, a milestone with the find-spot 'Brougham', which was first recorded by Reginald Bainbrigg, who sent a drawing to Camden. His drawing was slightly inaccurate, having a redundant letter, but Camden saw the error. R.G. Collingwood was able to draw the stone at Brougham Castle for *RIB* (2285), but it is now in the English Heritage stone store at Helmsley in North Yorkshire. It is particularly interesting because the copy of it among Bainbrigg's copies of Roman inscriptions built into the Broadclose wall at Appleby (Edwards, 2001, No. 14) is probably the most clearly recognisable of all of them.

The Langwathby and Frenchfield milestones, both naming the *civitas Carvetiorum*, take us, of course, to the milestone at Middleton, in Lunesdale (*RIB* 2283). This was discovered in 1836 by one William Moore. He clearly felt that its simple Roman inscription – the numeral *LIII* – was insufficient, and, having re-erected the stone about 200 yards from where it was found, where it still is, added a text of his own to the effect that he had restored the stone, which had clearly suffered plough-damage. There has always been some doubt about the location from which the 53 miles indicated were measured. Birley (1953) wrote that the place was Carlisle, as has been generally accepted; his case for this, and that for Carlisle as the capital of the Carvetii, has been greatly strengthened by the two milestones found at Frenchfield and Langwathby

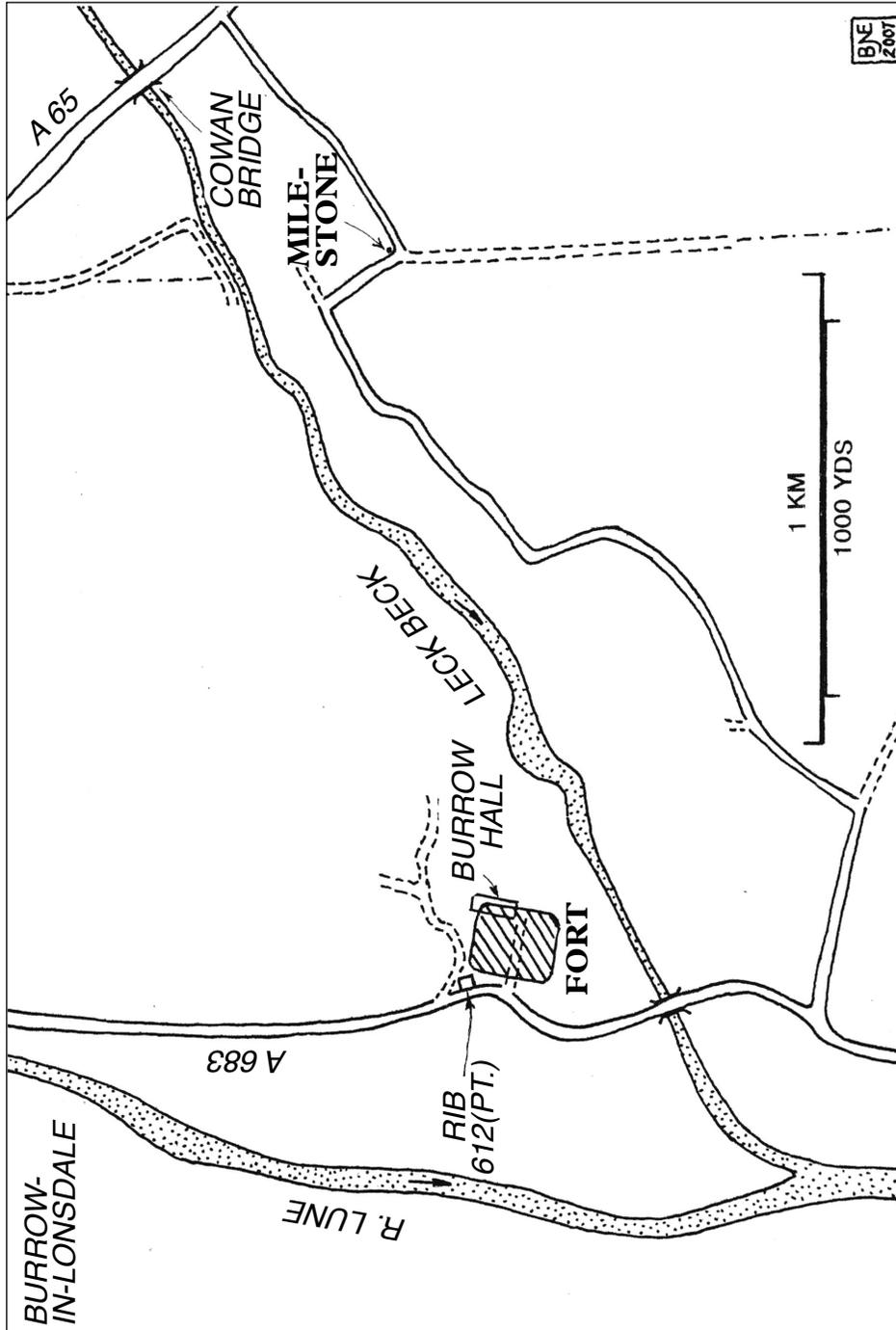


FIG. 4. Map showing the location of the fort at Burrow-in-Lonsdale, Roman roads and a milestone.

in 1956 and 2005. It seems to the writer that the location of this milestone and its anomalous inscription may suggest that it marked the southern boundary of the *civitas Carvetiorum*. (The inscription is described as ‘anomalous’ because it denotes only a mileage, and that mileage is so much greater than that on any other Roman milestone in Britain except *RIB* 2305, which carries apparently only the number 51. This stone, one of a group found in 1885 on the Stanegate at Crindledykes Farm a mile or so east of *Vindolanda*, is by no means certainly a milestone).

There were, as the discussion relating to the Langwathby and Frenchfield milestones showed (Edwards and Shotter, 2005, 74–75), a number of other milestones on the Stainmore road to the east of Brougham. The only one within Cumbria is that from Hangingshaw (*RIB* 2284), a site to the north-west of Appleby just where the modern A66 swings south of the Roman line for a mile or two. It is now in Tullie House Museum, Carlisle, and its text shows that it was erected in the middle of the third century under the two Philips.

If we follow the Stainmore road west, past Brougham, and turn north up the line of the A6, we come to the fort of *Voreda* (Old Penrith). From here we have two milestones, one (now lost), of Victorinus (*RIB* 2287), and another, less certainly a milestone, now in private hands (*RIB* 930). This latter had disappeared, and Birley was pleased to find a sketch, of which he published a tracing in 1958 (Birley, 1958a), evidently unaware that R. G. Collingwood had drawn it in 1927 for *RIB*. It does not seem that a photograph has ever been published. *RIB* says of the text, ‘this formula was sometimes applied to emperors in the fourth and fifth centuries’. (*RIB* 2308, from the Stanegate, carries the same inscription, though the existence of neither proves that the other was a milestone.)

Moving north, we come to Hesket, from where a Gough manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, records an inscription of Constantine the Great (*RIB* 2288). It seems probable that the frame shown in the drawing enclosing the text represents a cartouche rather than the actual shape of the stone. North again, takes us to Scalesceugh, not far south of Carlisle, where Roman tileries were active. The milestone from here (*RIB* 2289), again in Tullie House, carries an inscription of Gordian III, from the middle of the 3rd century. Further north still, and nearly into Carlisle, we reach Gallows Hill, from where comes a very splendid milestone carrying no fewer than three inscriptions (*RIB* 2290–2292), though one is almost erased. It is assumed that the central one was the first to be inscribed and was erased to allow the cutting of that rarity, an inscription of the British usurper Carausius. When his star waned, a third inscription was cut on the other end, probably in the time of Constantine the Great. Something of a parallel for this re-use of a milestone by reversing it and adding a new inscription is seen on a milestone recorded by John Horsley at Ribchester (*RIB* 2269). It does not seem probable that Horsley ever came to Ribchester, but rather that he was given a drawing of what clearly is a milestone which, like that from Gallows Hill, had been re-used. Horsley, however, seems not to have realised that, in that case, the two inscriptions would not be the same way up. *RIB* makes out a case for the names of Gordian III for one inscription, but the other seems unintelligible. This could be the inscription recorded earlier by Dodsworth, probably of Trajan Decius (*RIB* 2268).

This takes us to our last Cumbrian stone, that recorded by Horsley at Old Carlisle (*RIB* 2286) This, like the example from Hangingshaw, carries an inscription of the two Philips. This is something of an outlier, as the map (Fig. 1) shows.

All the known Roman milestones from Cumbria have now been mentioned; but the territory of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society has always extended, by courtesy, into the Lune Valley, and there are four milestones (one already referred to) from that area which are worth consideration in relation to the largely Cumbrian stones already mentioned.

The first example is a scheduled Ancient Monument. It lies at the corner of a minor road to the east of the fort of Burrow-in-Lonsdale, where that road crosses the line of the Roman road (see Fig. 4) (Edwards, 1970, 106). It has letters on it which show it has been used as a parish boundary stone, and the line of the Roman road south from its position is marked by a farm road (Edwards, 1998, 15 [photo 8]). Birley (1946, 144-146) pointed out, over sixty years ago, the apparently anomalous position of Burrow fort in the Roman road system.

Further down the valley, the Hadrianic milestone from east of Lancaster has already been mentioned, and there is a possible milestone on the southward road at Forton (Margary, 1957, 70d). There are, however, two other stones on that road, but they are closer to Lancaster. These are the two from Burrow Heights in Scotforth. One is of the period of the two Philips (*RIB* 2270), and it, like the Hadrianic stone, was painted by John Weld (LRO DP 386/10). It is interesting to imagine our knowledge of the stone if we had only that painting as evidence, rather than the stone itself, which is in Lancaster City Museum. For Weld, as in the case of his painting of the Caton stone, the precise shape was not important. He did his best, though, to record the inscription accurately and produced a competent record. The other stone from Burrow Heights is from the reign of Trajan Decius (*RIB* 2271), the immediate successor of the two Philips. Given what we have seen elsewhere, one might legitimately wonder why Philip's stone was not simply reversed and re-inscribed. Again, Weld's painting (LRO DP 386/10) would be a very useful record if we did not have the stone itself. If we look at the *RIB* record of the two stones from Scotforth, attention should be paid particularly to the inscription of Trajan Decius. The letters MES (for Messius) at the end of the second line and their relationship to DECIO in the third recall very closely those on the fragment of an inscription from Ribchester (*RIB* 598). This was found in the guard chamber of the West Gate in 1898, and is not regarded by *RIB* as a milestone, though it surely must be so, despite its odd find-spot.

All the stones we have discussed exist either as actual pieces of stone or as pictorial records. Finally, there is a ghost – a possible milestone with only verbal description. The first mention of it was in the second edition of Richard Rauthmell's *Antiquitates Bremetonacenses* (1824, 134), which, despite its title, refers to Burrow-in-Lonsdale. The mention of an inscription was noticed by W. Thompson Watkin in 1880 (Watkin, 1880) and his reference was picked up by Birley in 1958 (Birley, 1958b, 181-182). The only location given for its discovery was 'in draining a moist meadow . . . in Lowgill'. By the time of the first publication it was owned by 'Mr Court'. The

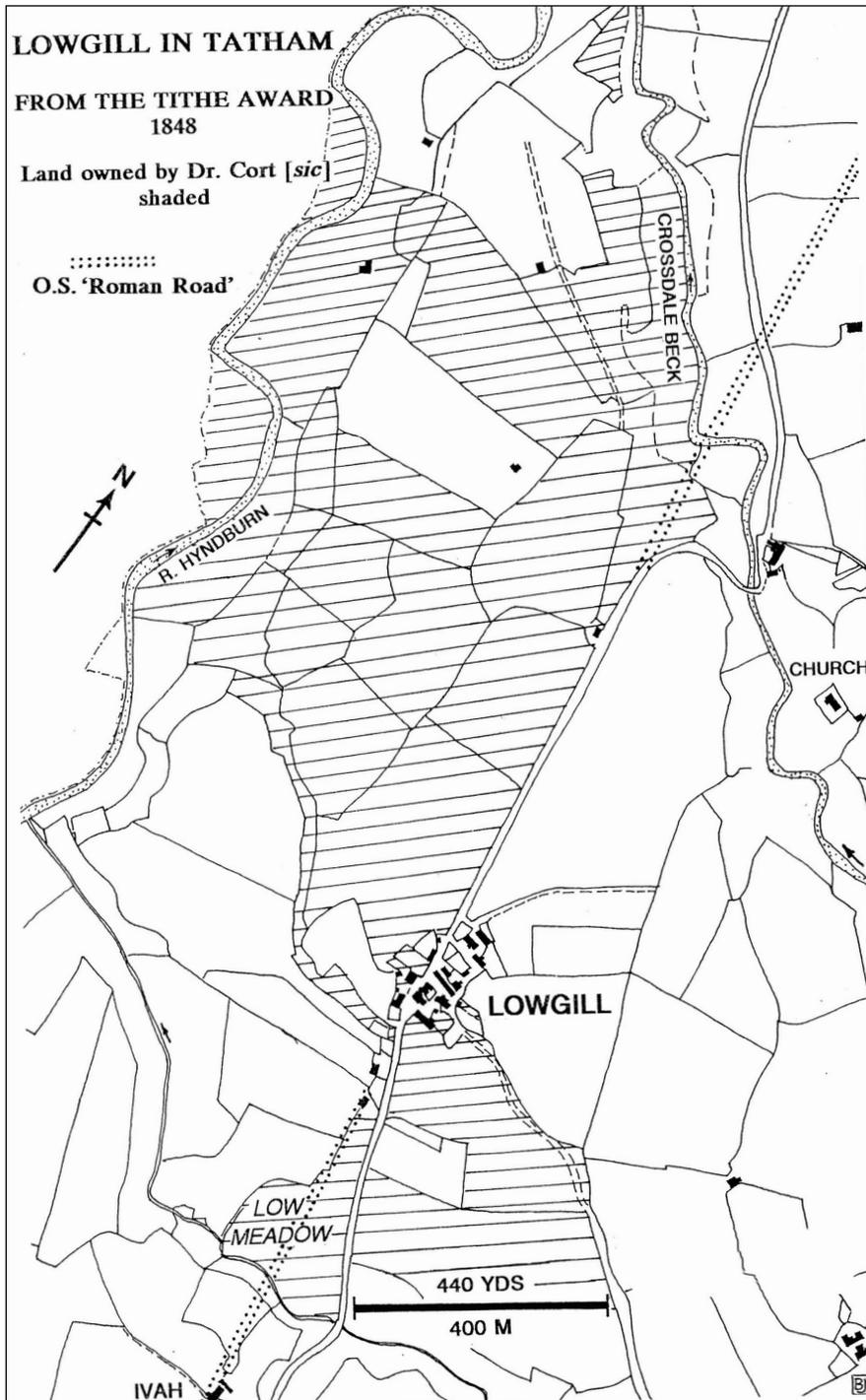


FIG. 5. Plan, redrawn from the Tithe Commutation Award, of Lowgill in Tatham, to illustrate the probable find-spot of the missing Roman milestone.

plan (Fig. 5) shows land owned by 'Dr. Cort' [*sic*] at the time of the Tithe Commutation Award (LRO DRB 1/183) 20 odd years later. The only 'moist meadow' which was owned by Dr. Cort and which also lay on the line of the Roman road was that named 'Low Meadow' on the map. It is worth noting that Foster, in Rauthmell, 1824, stated that Mr. Court 'uncovered a considerable extent of [the Roman road]'. He went on to mention the 'pavement', and, later, to refer to the stone with which we are concerned. This, he said, was found 'below the surface'. Watkin took this to mean that the stone came from 'under the pavement of the road', which seems improbable. Foster added that the stone had 'some illigible [*sic*] lines inscribed on it'. Perhaps a fragment of a Roman milestone is still lurking somewhere in the area, waiting to be brought to light again!

To sum up: in this paper something has been mentioned of every Roman milestone, and possible contender for that title, known from the old counties of Cumberland and Westmorland, with a little slippage over the border into Lancashire. Attention has been drawn to a number of anomalies and puzzles. Among these, perhaps the most important is the question of the very purpose of Roman 'milestones'. This is so easy to pass over because milestones whose purpose was clear were part of everyday life until quite recently, and to a lesser extent still are so. There is certainly a case for making two suggestions: first, that not all the Roman stones which we classify as 'milestones' necessarily had the same function; and, second, that some at least – particularly those bearing only the names and titles of an Emperor – may have had more to do with Imperial propoganda than with facilitating travel. These monuments certainly merit further consideration.

Bibliography

- Birley, E. B., 1946, 'The Roman Site at Burrow-in-Lonsdale', *CW2*, xlvi, 126-156.
Ibid., 1953, 'The Roman Milestone at Middleton in Langdale', *CW2*, liii, 52-62.
Ibid., 1958a, 'A 4th-century Milestone from Old Penrith', *CW2*, lviii, 88-93.
Ibid., 1958b, 'Two Lost Roman Inscriptions', *CW2*, lviii, 181-182.
 Breeze, D. J., *The Antonine Wall* (Edinburgh, 2006).
 Bruce, J. Collingwood, *The Roman Wall*, (London and Newcastle upon Tyne, 1851).
 Collingwood, R. G. and Wright, R. P., *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain, vol. I, Inscriptions on Stone* (Oxford, 1965).
 Crosby, A. G. (ed.), *Leading the Way: a History of Lancashire's Roads* (Preston, 1998).
 Edwards, B. J. N., 1970, 'Lancashire Archaeological Notes, Prehistoric and Roman', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 121, 99-108.
Ibid., 'The Romans and Before', in Crosby, A. (ed.) 1998, 1-28.
Ibid., 'Reginald Bainbrigg, *scholemaister*, and his Stones' in Higham, N. J. (ed.) 2001, 25-33.
Ibid. and Shotter, D. C. A., 2005, 'Two Roman Milestones from the Penrith Area', *CW3*, v, 65-77.
Ibid., 'The Langwathby Roman Milestone – a postscript', *CW3*, vi, 235-237.
 Embleton, R. and Graham, F., *Hadrian's Wall in the Days of the Romans* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1984).
 Higham, N. J. (ed.), *Archaeology of the Roman Empire: A tribute to the life and works of Professor Barri Jones*, (*BAR Int. Ser.*, Vol. 940, 2001).
 Hoyer, M., *By the Roman Wall: Notes on a Summer Holiday* (1925).
 Margary, I. D., 1957, *Roman Roads in Britain*.
 Maxwell, G. S., 1983, 'Two Inscribed Roman Stones and Architectural Fragments from Scotland', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 113, 379-390.
 Mommsen, T., 'Viae Publicae Provinciarum Africanarum' 859-860 in *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 8 (Berlin, 1881).

- Rauthmell, R., *Antiquitates Bremetonacenses: or, The Roman Antiquities of Overborough* (2nd edn. Foster, A., Kirkby Lonsdale, 1824).
- Rodwell, W., 1975, 'Milestones, Civic Territories and the Antonine Itinerary', *Britannia*, **6**, 76-101.
- Sedgley, J. P., *The Roman Milestones of Britain*, (*BAR* **18**, 1975).
- Watkin, W. T., 1880, 'Roman Inscriptions Discovered in Britain in 1879', *Archaeological Journal* **37**, 136-154.

Abbreviations

- BAR* = *British Archaeological Reports*.
- JRS* = *Journal of Roman Studies*.
- LRO = Lancashire Record Office.
- RIB* = Collingwood and Wright 1965.