

PROBLEMS OF THE ROMAN ROAD BETWEEN BUXTON AND LITTLE CHESTER.

By JOHN LOMAS.

INSPECTION of the Hartington Enclosure Award, which is dated 1799, shows that before it was possible to proceed with the allotment of the common land it was found necessary to fix the parish boundary, which was in dispute in three places: on the western border with Alstonfield, to the south-east with Parwich, and along a large part of the eastern border with Chelmorton and Flagg. Arbitrators were appointed and made their award after perambulating the boundary on a day previously advertised in "the Derby paper" and also by notice fixed to the church door.

It is proposed to deal only with the dispute between Hartington and the townships of Chelmorton and Flagg, because the line of this parish boundary is of greater archaeological importance since it is frequently quoted as evidence in support of theories concerning the course of a Roman road. The rival claims are shown on the plan (Fig. 13) which was traced from one bound with the enclosure award. In their award, the arbitrators aligned the boundary on the turnpike road for most of the distance; or at any rate this line was used wherever it could be considered to be a reasonable compromise. They set it out as follows:

Beginning opposite the south corner of a certain antient enclosure in the township of Staden called King's Piece and extending in a southeastwardly direction along the southwest side of the present Turn Pike road from Buxton to Ashbourn and at a distance of thirty feet from the centre thereof to the southeast side of Horse Shoe Dale. Thence northeastwardly to the westwardly corner of a parcel of inclosed land called Blindale. Thence southeastwardly by the south west side of the said parcel of land called Blindale to within thirty-six yards of a gate set across the road leading from Hartington to Taddington and then going southeastwardly until the same (comes) to a direct line with the wall of a certain antient inclosure which the said last-mentioned road passes and then

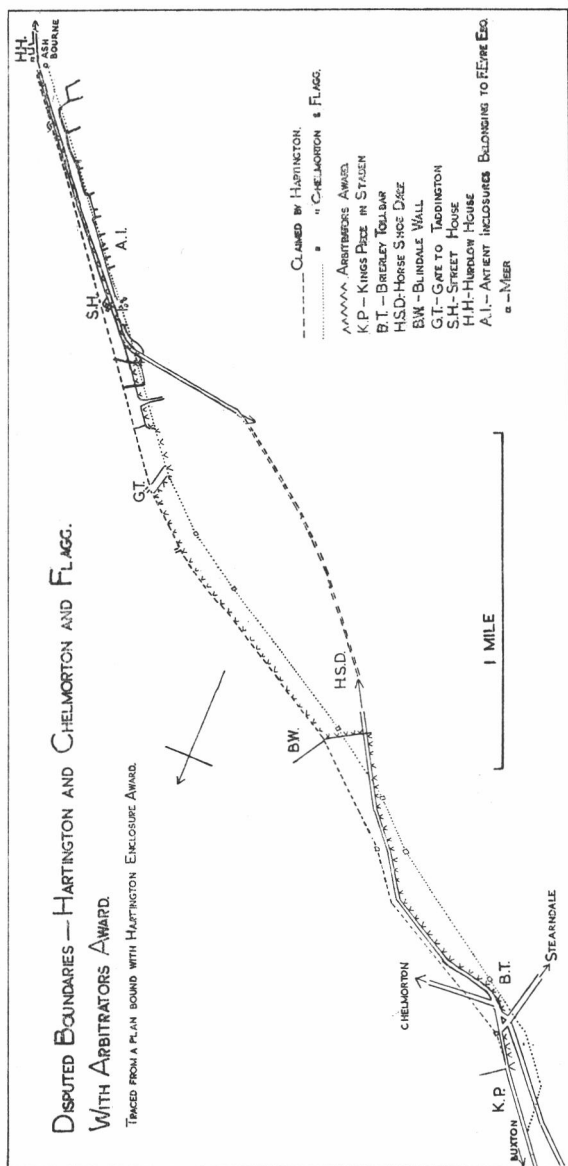


FIG. 13. The Hartington Boundary with Chelmorton and Flagg.

southeastwardly to the fence of an inclosure in the parish of Hartington and turning in an eastwardly direction round the fence on the northeast side of the said inclosure to and by the north end of a new inclosure into the said Turn Pike road from Buxton to Ashbourn opposite the north corner of an antient inclosure belonging to Francis Eyre Esq. now in the occupation of John Wilson and then southeastwardly along the northeast side of the said road and at a distance of thirty feet from the centre thereof to Hurdlow House.

It is suggested that where the arbitrators' boundary follows neither of the lines claimed but strikes out afresh it has no ancient standing; that therefore it is of little value as support for any theorising as to the course of a Roman road; and that, if this boundary was associated with the line of a Roman road, it would be most likely that such a line would coincide with one of the originally claimed boundaries, or in part with one and in part with the other.

From the plan it seems that the only part of either claim that looks at all convincing is that reaching from near the Duke of York Inn (Street House) to near Hurdlow House (now Bull-i'-th'-Thorn Hotel), where the line claimed by Flagg coincides with the fences of "antient inclosures belonging to Francis Eyre". It seems reasonably probable that these fields would have been taken as close as possible to the boundary of the parish in which they were situated. The "gate set across the road leading from Hartington to Taddington" implies the existence of a fence at this point, for otherwise no gate would have been needed.

The narrow strip of land near Street House, lying between the "antient inclosures" and the turnpike road, was divided into small plots by the enclosure award. Since that time, the field fences have been adjusted so that now only one of these small parcels of land exists separately, this plot being reserved as a stone quarry for the repair of the highway. The others have been added to the already existing fields by the removal of fences. On the line where these fences must have been a slight ridge is to be seen, much of it broader than might have been expected merely from the remains of a field wall. It is suggested that this slight ridge, on the line of a

boundary once claimed by the township of Flagg, is evidence of the line of the Roman road under discussion.

Jewitt stated that the Roman road after accompanying the turnpike road from Buxton to Ashbourn for some way (just past the Duke of York Inn) "branches off to the right, and for several miles continues within a small

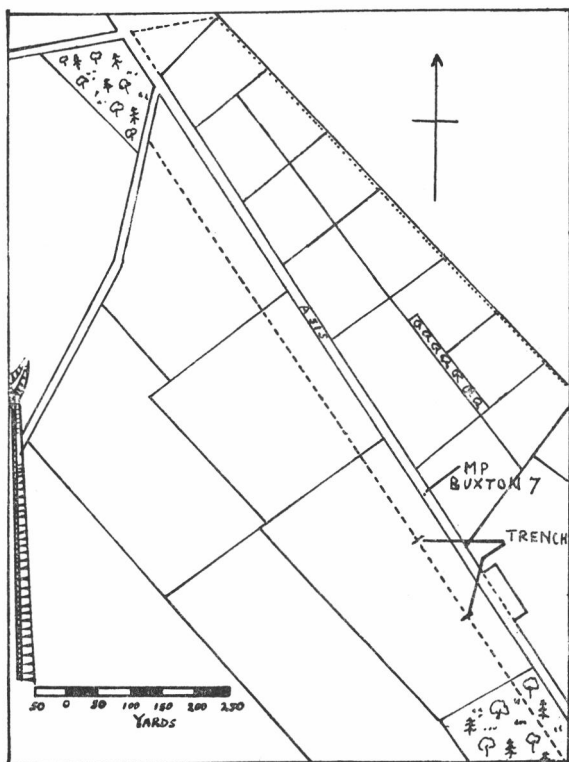
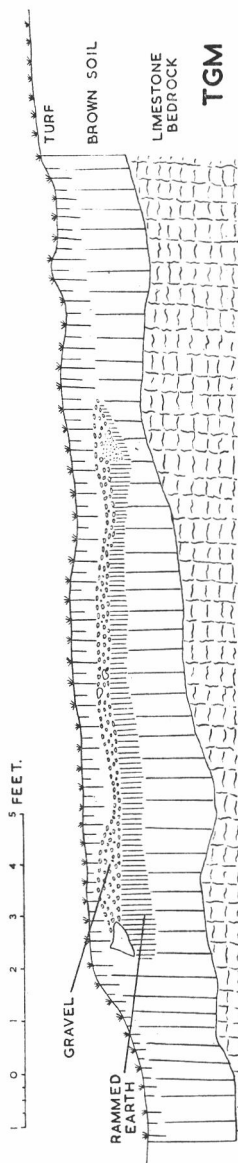


FIG. 14. Plan of Roads near Parsley Hay, Hartington.

distance of the turnpike. It is easily discernible in the enclosures by the difference in colour it exhibits".¹ Jewitt's expression "several miles" is rather vague, but it would seem reasonable to conclude that he meant at least two miles and this distance further south reaches to Grid Reference 138648. In this area, search by Miss Nellie Kirkham resulted in the discovery of a straight

¹ Jewitt, A., *History of Buxton* (1811), 197.

SECTION OF ROAD. HARTINGTON.



SECTION OF ROAD. MINNINGLOW.

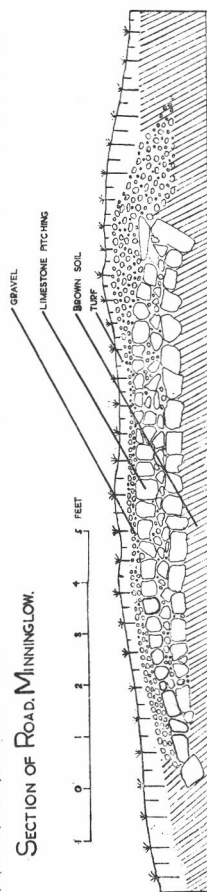


FIG. 15. Road Sections at Hartington and Minninglow.

track which runs for approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile between Grid References 138645 and 133657 (Fig. 14). No trace of it could be found in the plantation north of the road going to Pilsbury but it could be easily followed across the next three fields before finally fading out in the plantation near to Cotesfield Farm. In the grass fields the indications were a darker coloration of the grass and a very distinct terrace over 200 yds. long; in the plantation the line was plainly shown by the terrace and bank, and by the presence of many stones projecting from the turf. When seen by the writer and others early in 1957, the grass land had been ploughed, but this had made the indications plainer rather than otherwise. The line was shown continuously by some or all of the following signs: a narrow terrace, slight hump or ridge, scatter of small stones, a streak of lighter coloured soil, and patches of green where the plough had failed to penetrate owing to the presence of road metal beneath the turf, a strip 160 yds. long and up to 4 yds. wide having been left unploughed for this reason.

Later in the same year a trench was dug across the line to confirm the existence of a metalled road (Fig. 15). The turf was very strong and the soil beneath it was black. The road surface, 10 ft. 6 ins. wide, was found at depths varying from 2 to 8 ins. It had two pronounced ruts 5 ft. 6 ins. apart and was made of a mixture of gravelly material and small stones, with some larger stones about the middle. At the banked side of the terrace a row of larger stones had been placed with smaller ones in the interstices so as to prevent the smaller material trickling out. There was no kerb at the opposite side but there was a strip of greyish crumbly material, rather like decayed concrete, which extended across the trench. The gravelly material formed a layer 2 to 6 ins. in thickness. Below it was a layer of dark brown rammed earth of which the surface was fairly level, thicker at the kerb side, as though turf had been arranged to bank up the low side of the track before surfacing. Underneath was a layer of much less solid light brown soil which extended down to the much fissured and weathered limestone bed-rock. Another section was seen and recorded when a

water pipe was being laid across the same field. Here the construction was rather more substantial with the road surface beneath 4 to 6 ins. of turf and black soil; it consisted of small stones and gravel in a layer from 6 to 10 ins. thick with no sign of paving; under the metalling was a layer of black soil which was separated from the light brown sub-soil by a thin iron-pan at a depth of 15 ins., the iron-pan extending 2 ft. farther than the road surface on either side. A kerb of large stones was found at each side of the track. The pipe trench extended a considerable distance on both sides of the road, but no sign of a ditch was observed. The trench crossed at an acute angle so that the section of road exposed was 19 ft. long, the corrected width being 10 ft. It is possible that the difference in strength of construction at these two points, which are only 130 yds. apart, could be due to the activities of stone robbers. Such differences due to obscure causes are not uncommon: Smithard uncovered a section of the road on Minninglow, and found a well-paved road surface, almost flat and 12 ft. wide;² in 1957 the writer, assisted by Mr. P. Archer, investigated at a point about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile north and found a steeply cambered, well-paved road 11 ft. wide, which showed signs of having been repaired or re-surfaced.

In considering the value of parish boundaries as evidence for the course of a Roman road in this area, it is important to bear in mind that some of them may have no ancient standing, Ballidon, Brassington and Aldwark being originally parts of the parish of Bradbourne.

These rather disconnected points are offered to show that there is need to re-examine all the evidence so far published regarding the course of the Roman road from Buxton to Little Chester.

The writer wishes to acknowledge gratefully his indebtedness to His Grace the Duke of Devonshire, the owner, for permission to excavate at Cotesfield Farm, also to Mr. Brocksopp, the occupier of the land; to Mr. Sellers for permission to excavate near Minninglow; to Mr. Brindley, Parish Clerk of Hartington, for assistance with the Hartington Enclosure Award; to Mr. Manby for assistance and advice; and to Messrs. Holt and Archer.

² *D.A.J.*, XXXII (1910), 137.