

III.

ROMAN COMMUNICATIONS IN THE TWEED VALLEY.

BY A. GRAHAM, F.S.A., F.S.A.SCOT., AND I. A. RICHMOND,
LL.D., F.B.A., F.S.A., F.S.A.SCOT.

It has long been assumed that Trimontium and Dere Street must have been linked, by a lateral road, with the communications in the Clyde valley, but the paucity of material remains of any such road, especially between Trimontium and Peebles, has remained a serious puzzle. Within the last few years, however, some fresh discoveries have been made near Peebles,¹ at Innerleithen,² and in the area west of Kirkurd,³ and more recently still the Ancient Monuments Commissioners have come across some further facts in the course of their surveys in Peeblesshire and Selkirkshire. The Commissioners welcome the opportunity for reviewing the whole of the evidence, published and unpublished alike, in advance of their regular *Inventories* of the counties in question; and the present paper, which includes the results of field-work⁴ done between 1945 and 1954, has accordingly been prepared with their concurrence.

In dealing with the section between Newstead and Innerleithen, at which latter place the position of the marching-camp on the left bank of the Tweed suggests that the road was also on the left bank, the scarcity of material evidence makes it necessary to discuss probable courses rather than to describe remains. The primary question is consequently one of topography, and as soon as the configuration of the Tweed valley is examined, the difficulties of a direct course along the left bank of the river, following a crossing made perhaps somewhere near Abbotsford, immediately leap to the eye. The northern slopes, for example, fall abruptly to the river below Fairniee Hill, Neidpath Hill,⁵ Laidlawstiel Hill, Thornylee Craigs and Pyat Hill, with the result that side-cutting and terracing on a vast scale would have been needed over great parts of these sections, while to the Romans the tactical disadvantages of a course of this kind would also no doubt have seemed serious. Nor would it have been possible to improve matters by taking a

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, LXXIX (1944-5), pp. 170 f.

² *J.R.S.*, XLI (1951), p. 57.

³ *The Roman Occupation of South-western Scotland*, pp. 58 f.

⁴ Localities are described in terms of the 6-inch O.S. map of Peeblesshire, 2nd ed., 1900, references to sheets concerned being given as necessary in footnotes. National Grid references are all to 100-kilometre square 36 (N in forthcoming editions), as shown on sheet 80 of the 1-inch O.S. map of Scotland, Popular Edition.

⁵ Not to be confused with the Neidpath Gorge, a mile west of Peebles, on which see p. 67.

right-bank course and crossing to the left bank at Innerleithen, as some equally awkward slopes occur on the south side of the river—for example overlooking Yair Bridge, and below Caddon Shank, Scrogbank Rig and Cadon Bank. And it is quite out of accordance with Roman practice that a road should have made frequent crossings over so formidable a river, to look for easy ground first on one bank and then on the other.

An alternative course for a road which readily suggests itself is one which keeps south of the Tweed to above the inflow of the Ettrick, crosses the Ettrick at Ettrickbank, and then follows the "ridgeway" over Peat Law and Minch Moor, ultimately descending to the right bank of the Tweed at Traquair and there crossing to Innerleithen. This route was certainly in use in the Middle Ages and later, but careful examination of its whole extent has failed to reveal the least trace of Roman work, and the same may be said of the "Minchmoor Road" proper—a route which rises from the Yarrow at Yarrow Ford and coalesces with the ridgeway just west of Wallace's Trench. This negative evidence, on ground so free from interference, is sufficient to rule out the ridgeway completely as an alternative route. There remains the possibility that the road ran westwards from Newstead through Darnick, crossed the Tweed at some convenient point near Abbotsford, continued through Galashiels to somewhere near Torwoodlee,¹ turned south-westwards through the dry valley between Mains and Meigle Hills, crossed the Caddon Water near Clovenfords and passed up the south-western side of its valley, and regained the Tweed Valley proper by the saddle at Laidlawstiel (421369). It could thus have avoided the gorge below Caddonfoot and the steep south-western slope of Laidlawstiel Hill, in much the same way as it avoids the Neidpath Gorge by the detour described below (p. 67). Difficult places would still have had to be passed below Thornylee Craigs (c. 397372), below Pyat Hill (380378) and at Walkerburn; but as to the first of these something will be said shortly, and for the rest it must be remembered that the Tweed may well have changed its course locally since Roman times, with the result that where it now runs close to the foot of a slope there may once have been an area of haughland giving easy passage for a road.

While the case just put seems attractive on a basis of topography alone, it is also possible to support it with some fairly definite evidence. In the first place, notice should be taken of a road marked as running "from Peebles to Lauder" on Roy's map of 1747-55. This road, to trace it backwards, crosses the Gala Water near Torwoodlee, passes through the Clovenfords gap, and crosses the Laidlawstiel saddle, all very much on the line just suggested; thereafter it crosses the southern slopes of Cauld Face, and

¹ As the Tweed was bridged by the Romans at Newstead, for Dere Street (R.C.A.M., *Inventory of Roxburghshire*, p. 469), Torwoodlee might equally well have been reached by the left bank of the Tweed and of the Gala Water. Choice of this route would have avoided the necessity of bridging the Tweed again as suggested above, but the Allan and Gala Waters would have had to be bridged instead and the terrain is in general less easy.

descends to the line of the Peebles highway (A72) at the shoulder below Thornylee Craigs.¹ As this route was evidently in use in the middle of the 18th century, before the opening of the campaign for road improvement in general, it is quite possible that traffic was here still following a traditional line once indicated by the wreck of a Roman road.

That something of this kind has happened is strongly suggested by traces still remaining on the ground. A section of Roy's road can be recognised in a farm track which branches off the by-road from Thornylee to the Caddon Water at 42343715, near the N. corner of the Laidlawstiel policies; and in the field immediately below this point deep ploughing disclosed a strip of massive stones,² which ran obliquely across the field at a rather lower level than Roy's road. This strip strongly suggests a Roman road-foundation, and its alignment would agree very well with a course along the side of the valley towards Clovenfords. Again, on the other side of the Laidlawstiel ridge, the Thornylee section of Roy's road can be seen diverging from the NW. side of the Caddon Water by-road beside a small swamp (41753665), about 40 yds. below B.M. 660·3 or 90 yds. above the end of a farm road from the fields above Thornylee. After being obliterated by a quarry, it joins the farm road 75 yds. west of the end of the latter, the indications being that the farm road is of recent construction and runs along an older terrace which seems unnecessarily wide for it. Farm tracks of this character are commonly from 8 to 10 ft. wide, but this terrace is up to 18 ft. or even 20 ft. wide; it is also very solidly constructed, with plenty of heavy stonework showing along its lower margin, and there are also a number of very old quarry-pits to be seen either at its upper margin or on the hillside at short distances above it. A typical example occurs just where Roy's roadway joins the terrace, and it is noteworthy that two of the other pits coalesce in a way which is often seen in Roman work. The combination of all these facts tempts us strongly to attribute a Roman origin to the terrace.

On reaching the first of the Thornylee fields, which it enters by a gate 50 yds. below the north-eastern corner, the terrace immediately disappears, having been destroyed by the plough; but its further course is indicated by a mound below the next field-wall to the west and also, most probably, by a gate in the wall beyond (41053640). In the partially felled strip known as Toll Wood the traces are somewhat obscure, but Roy's road appears clearly emerging on the western side about 300 yds. north of the Peebles highway (A72) and can be followed on an oblique downward course across the hillside, which is here fairly steep. After passing below a small felled plantation enclosed by dry-stone walls (402367), it becomes deeply hollowed and joins up with an earlier version of the highway, the joint route being then destroyed, on the steep transverse shoulder that descends from Thorny-

¹ Refer to 6-inch O.S. sheets XIV SE., XIVA SW. and XVIII A NW.

² For this information the authors are indebted to Mr G. Wright, Synton Parkhead.

lee Craigs, by the cutting-back of the ground on the highway's upper margin. In this section west of Toll Wood some evidence of the earlier roadway is likewise to be seen. This takes the form of a terrace which, though wide and rough, does not bear a wholly natural appearance; it might well have been artificially modified, and represent a continuation of the terraced road seen east of the Thornylee fields. Roy's road comes down to it about 150 yds. west of Toll Wood, runs along it for some distance, and diverges downhill from it about half-way to the plantation enclosure; west of this point the terrace loses some of its suggested artificial appearance and widens out to form a small shelf, but slight traces again appear just below the lower edge of the enclosure, and farther on the ruins of a small croft suggest that old cultivation may have helped to destroy the remains. These fragmentary indications die out altogether before reaching the turn of the shoulder below Thornylee Craigs. Here the hillside becomes so steep as to call for heavy engineering work if a road were continued at the level of the terrace, and a descent towards the modern highway seems to be demanded. No structural evidence, however, remains to indicate whether or how such a descent was achieved. Some 60 ft. above the highway, at a point about 60 yds. NW. of the eleventh milestone from Peebles, a depression in the hillside suggests a large and ancient quarry, but of a road there is no further trace. Between the depression and the highway the hillside has been greatly disturbed by indubitable quarrying of later date, and by traffic-tracks.

For nearly twelve miles westwards from Thornylee Craigs¹ no traces of Roman road-work have been found. Some lengths of terraced roadway certainly appear above A72 just south of the right-angled turn at Nether Horsburgh Cottage, but these are probably remains of the road of Roy's period, and elsewhere all earlier works seem to have been obliterated either in the construction of the highway or as a result of the cultivation of the adjoining ground. And as before, the possibility remains of a road having run in the haughlands and having been washed out at some time when the river altered its course. But it seems safe to assume that the Roman road kept to the left bank of the Tweed throughout this section. In the first place, as has been said, the marching-camp ties it to the left bank at Innerleithen; in the second place, the difficulties of terrain met with below Pyat Hill (380378), at Caerlee (323364), between Woodend and Nether Horsburgh Cottage (309380-307394) or below Janet's Brae, would have been balanced on the right bank by similar difficulties below Cadon Bank (338360) or between Old Howford and Cardrona (312371-306375); while in the third place, Roy's road, in so far as this can be regarded as an indicator of an earlier route, is marked as running on the left bank all the way to Peebles.

In contrast to the uncertainties so far discussed, the beginning of an

¹ Refer to 6-inch O.S. sheets XIII NW., XIII NE., XIII SE., XIV SW., XIV SE.

important stretch of Roman work¹ becomes visible on the NW. side of Jedderfield Plantation, some 600 yds. NW. of Jedderfield farm and 100 yds. N. of the point where the track leading up from the highway (A72) debouches from the plantation (231413). The course by which this road has risen from the Tweed valley cannot be judged from its alignment at the point of its first appearance. In historical times, of course, traffic has crossed the Eddleston Water at its mouth, in the town of Peebles, but the end of the Roman road seems to be aligned somewhat N. of Peebles and the local topography would favour its descent to some crossing above the town. No remains have been found to support either alternative, as the ground has all been cultivated, but it is to be noted that at Chapelhill, a mile upstream from Peebles, the breadth of the haughland is conveniently reduced by a projection of higher-lying ground. However this may be, the road can still be traced for more than a mile on a course designed to turn the obstacle presented by the Neidpath Gorge, between Peebles and Lyne. The sides of this gorge are precipitous, and the amount of rock-cutting required would have precluded the Romans from following a course through it on the line of the modern highway. The detour by Jedderfield successfully overcomes this difficulty, as the suggested detour by Laidlawstiel would have overcome the similar one presented by the gorge between Fairniee and Caddonfoot (*supra*).

This section of the road begins as a well-marked mound. It descends into the head of the side-valley that runs N. from Edston farm, and is shortly joined by the track that has already been mentioned. Some 80 yds. SE. of the corner of the Upper Kidston enclosures, a small watercourse has removed the road-surface and revealed much of a solid, kerbed bottoming of large and carefully laid stones. At the head of the valley it coincides with the wall of the Upper Kidston enclosures, and then swings round the north-western bay of the valley on to a south-south-westerly course. The road-mound is here somewhat indistinct, as a result of past cultivation, but about 500 yds. beyond the turn a much better preserved stretch begins, 250 yds. in length and evidently once provided with a drainage ditch on its upper side. This stretch is also accompanied by a row of quarry-pits for the supply of road metal; more than twenty pits are visible, some separate but many coalescing. Then follows a further length of 100 yds. where the mound is considerably flattened and spread by old cultivation; it has, however, been boldly cambered and was at least 20 ft. broad. It disappears in the cultivated fields at about 219406, and is not seen again in the lower part of the valley. This section of the road is well engineered and graded throughout its length.

The next potentially significant remains² are to be seen on the Meldon

¹ Described in detail and discussed in *P.S.A.S.*, LXXIX (1944-5), 170 ff. Refer to 6-inch O.S. sheet XIII NW.

² Refer to 6-inch O.S. sheet XII NE.

Burn, just below Beggar Path Bridge (208403). The left bank is here formed by a low cliff of gravel and clay, the base of which is separated from the water by a strip of haugh about 40 yds. wide. Some 35 yds. back from the lip of this cliff the slight hollow of an old track begins to widen and deepen until, when it reaches and is cut off by the eroded face of the cliff, it is 9 ft. deep and 15 ft. wide across the bottom. The remains of a small quarry can be seen about half-way along the N. side of the descending hollow. At the lip of the cliff the bottom of the hollow is still 9 ft. above the haugh, and its original lower end must evidently have been washed away. It has clearly had no connection with the cart track that now crosses the burn at this point. The hollow roadway must thus be older than both the cart track in the haugh and some old rig-cultivation in the field above the cliffs, which overrides it; but its comparatively narrow breadth, and the fact that no road metal appears in the section on the cliff-face, make it unlikely that it is a Roman road-cutting, at least in its present form. It is not impossible, however, that the Roman road crossed the Meldon Burn at this point, and that an original Roman cutting, shallower and consequently wider, was deepened by subsequent traffic to such an extent that all remains of metalling were worn away and washed out. The place-name "Beggar Path" on the O.S. map suggests the existence here of a track used by vagrants, no doubt in the fairly recent past, but perhaps representing a route of very much longer standing.¹

Clear evidence for the Roman road at and near Lyne fort ² is given in the report of the first excavation of that site,³ which supersedes the observations recorded in the earlier sources.⁴ The excavators found two disconnected lengths of a road which ran NE. from the E. gate of the fort and, at a distance of 400 yds., *i.e.* approximately the point where "Remains of causeway (supposed Roman)" appears on the O.S. map, joined another road which approached from the south-east. They traced this road "for a considerable distance southward," no doubt in the general direction of Beggar Path Bridge and past the S. side of a temporary camp which has recently been discovered here on an air-photograph. They noted that it was not paved but made of "hard compacted gravel," a method of construction already observed on Dere Street.⁵

Upstream from Lyne fort ⁶ no trace of the Roman road has been found for nearly two miles. The excavators noted that the portion found by them

¹ For a "Cadgers' Road" perpetuating a Roman road-line, see R.C.A.M., *Inventory of Roxburghshire*, No. 889, n.

² Refer to 6-inch O.S. sheet XII NE.

³ *P.S.A.S.*, xxxv (1900-1), 182-3, and fig. 7.

⁴ Horsley, *Britannia Romana* (1732), 367; Roy, *Military Antiquities*, pl. xxviii; Armstrong, *Companion to the Map of Peeblesshire*, p. 64; *Stat. Acc.*, XII (1794), 564; Stuart, *Caledonia Romana*, p. 154.

⁵ R.C.A.M., *Inventory of Roxburghshire*, pp. 471 f.

⁶ Refer to 6-inch O.S. sheets XII NE., XII NW.

did not continue past its junction with the branch leading to the fort, and they attributed this to the harder quality of the ground, on which the Roman construction might not have survived so well.¹ This may well be a correct explanation. The topography suggests that the road may have kept to the left bank of the Lyne Water until about opposite the inflow of the Wester Happrew Burn, and may have then mounted obliquely on to the lowermost slopes of Hog Hill.² Actual remains of what appears to be a Roman road begin, moreover, to be identifiable just outside the N. boundary-fence of the Wester Happrew fields; some 20 yds. downhill from a conspicuous natural mound, this point (168426) being about 140 ft. above the Peebles-Glasgow highway and about 170 ft. above the haughs of the Lyne Water. All that appears here is a length of roadside scarp, running in a northerly direction approximately along the 800-ft. contour; this quickly fades out, but a few vague grass-marks in the heather carry its line on for some 220 yds. to where a scarped shelf, worn but distinct, begins to develop. This is quite clear as it turns the NE. shoulder of the hill, but after rounding the shoulder it again degenerates into a grass-mark—though one which is flanked by a slight scarp on its uphill side. This scarp can be followed even where it crosses pure grass, and is seen to be remarkably straight. So far everything suggests Roman work, which would fall naturally into place as part of the "Roman road from Kirkurd to Peebles" marked by Roy on his plan of Lyne fort;³ but before the vestigial terrace arrives at a point vertically above the Tarth Bridge it is joined by a large hollow track which has risen obliquely from the level of the modern highway. This is clearly not Roman, and is also of later date than the slight scarped terrace, which it overrides at their junction; it may be regarded as a predecessor of the modern highway and is perhaps of 18th-century date, though no road is marked on this line on Roy's map of 1747-55.

This slope at the base of the N. side of Hog Hill seems all to have been under the plough, but the terrace formed jointly by the older and newer road is still a conspicuous feature and was noted in 1938 by Dr O. G. S. Crawford.⁴ Though they run virtually in conjunction, the scarp can generally be distinguished, and in at least two places it maintains a significantly straight alignment where the later road swings out to turn a small transverse shoulder at a slightly lower level. The remains of at least six typical quarry-pits, two of them coalescing, can be seen short of the small cleuch that runs down some 230 yds. west of the Tarth Bridge, together with grass-marks which suggest that a further six have been filled up. Just short of the cleuch, and at some height above the road, there is an unusually

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, loc. cit.

² Roy, on his map of 1747-55, marks a road running up the left bank from Lyne to Newlands and beyond, passing the present positions of Hamildean and Stevenson.

³ *Military Antiquities*, pl. xxviii.

⁴ Quoted by Dr St Joseph in *The Roman Occupation of South-western Scotland*, p. 57.

large, but still evidently ancient, quarry, along with two smaller ones; all three are cut like niches into the steep hillside in a manner noted in at least one place on Dere Street.¹ Rock appears to have been conveniently available here, and much road metal was probably needed for the passage of the wet ground in the cleuch. Beyond the cleuch the road passes into fields which are still under cultivation, and through them it can be followed for a further 550 yds. as a scarped shelf which appears quite plainly in places with a width of up to 27 ft. These are, however, almost certainly remains of the supposed 18th-century road, and their traces, for what they are worth, disappear about 70 yds. south of the Peebles-Glasgow highway on a small tree-grown burn (157429).

While no certain remains of the Roman road are found between this burn and the county boundary, some $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles westwards, it is likely enough, for reasons which will appear, that its course westwards and north-westwards from the point last mentioned was probably much the same as that of the modern highway.² At Hopes Burn, for example, its crossing-place can hardly have been higher than the existing bridge (Grantshall), as the burn here comes out of a steep ravine; nor can it well have been lower, as the burn below the bridge has evidently been artificially canalised through what must have been a swampy haugh. The notch between Castle Hill and Law Hill, again, provides a natural pass through which roads would have been almost bound to run at all periods, and it is consequently not surprising if the modern highway has entirely obliterated its predecessors. Something of great interest, however, appears at the northernmost extremity of Gallowberry Wood, where a length of old road can be followed south-westwards for a quarter of a mile from the edge of some broken ground immediately east of the mill pond (131446) to a point near Kirkurd School, 50 yds. short of the end of a private road leading to Castlecraig House (129443). At its NE. end this road consists of a well-marked mound, 27 ft. wide and flanked by a scarp up to 2 ft. high along its SE. side; it here strongly resembles the road-mound identified as Roman by Dr St Joseph some $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles farther on, between Corsincon and Melbourne.³ This first section runs for 53 yds. through the wood—where the ring-count of a felled tree indicates that it must have gone out of use before 1814—and then passes into the field in which the mill-pond lies. Here the mound has been ploughed down, though the upper edge of the field maintains its line; but towards the further corner of the field it has evidently made ploughing difficult and begins to appear as a shelf. On re-entering the wood it becomes very clear as a low mound with a later bank built on its southern margin and a slight hollow along its northern one. It is fully 20 ft. in width. Not only does it strongly resemble a

¹ R.C.A.M., *Inventory of Roxburghshire*, p. 464.

² Refer to 6-inch O.S. sheet VIII SW.

³ *The Roman Occupation of South-western Scotland*, p. 58.

Roman road—a resemblance backed up by its position between sections of road whose Roman origin is certain—but, if it is not in fact Roman, it is unlikely to be older than about 1750, with the result that its construction, its disuse, and the planting of the oldest trees in the wood would all have had to be packed into a period of some sixty years. This is not of course impossible, but it is at least somewhat unlikely. The road disappears in a patch of ground which has been heavily cut up by drains.

From the corner at Kirkurd School, which it has reached by a detour passing West Mains farm, the modern highway runs W. to the county boundary by way of Harestanes and along the S. edge of the Netherurd policies.¹ Dr St Joseph has noted the characteristic straightness of this stretch,² from which it is tempting to infer that it is following a Roman line though no remains of ancient construction can now be seen. The slight notch, too, in the spine of the ridge in the felled wood of Corsincon (100445), through which the highway passes into Lanarkshire, would have provided the Roman surveyors with a useful aiming-mark. In crossing the spine of the ridge the highway describes two curves, forming a flattened S some 600 yds. in length, and the easternmost of these is flanked on its inner, or uphill, side by a conspicuous terrace as noted by Dr St Joseph and marked on his map.³ The terrace is slightly mounded, measures over 20 ft. in width where best preserved, and has on its N. side a scarp perhaps measuring up to 4 ft. 6 ins. in height when a slight plantation-bank on its lip is discounted. It begins by continuing the original alignment of the highway from the point where the latter diverges on the first of its curves (B.M. 917.6); later it curves slightly itself, and is shortly cut off by the highway where this curves back and enters the wood⁴ just short of the county boundary. Its total length is thus about 230 yds. A linear hollow, presumably a deeply-worn track, runs through the felled plantation for 170 yds. just inside, *i.e.* south of, the highway's second curve, and the Roman road-mound that Dr St Joseph recorded, though very greatly reduced, can just be made out flanking its northern lip.⁵ The further remains that he noted, and marked on his map as descending the slope towards Melbourne, are reasonably well preserved and can be readily identified.

The Commission's survey has not extended through Lanarkshire, but the further course of the road towards the Clyde valley has been dealt with by Dr St Joseph.⁶

¹ Refer to 6-inch O.S. sheets VIII SW., VII SE.

² *Loc. cit.*

³ *Loc. cit.* and pl. xxiiiA.

⁴ The woods on both sides of the highway had been felled when the site was visited.

⁵ His account places the mound south of the hollow track, apparently as the result of a misprint (*op. cit.*, 58).

⁶ *Op. cit.*, 59.