

ART. VII. – *An Old Road in the Eden Valley.*

By A. RICHARDSON, B.Vet.Med., Ph.D., M.R.C.V.S.

A GLANCE at the map of the Eden valley reveals a noticeable series of lanes and roads running in a straight line for several miles parallel to the eastern fells, on the east side of the river. The villages of Long Marton and Milburn are connected by a road whose mean directional line, when prolonged northwards, impinges almost directly on the main street of Renwick as well as on to the road leaving Brampton for Longtown. The same line projected southwards cuts the Stainmore to Penrith Roman road near the Roman signal station of Castrigg. Between Renwick and that point, there are three sections of lane with “street” names co-incident with the line and there are medieval literary references to a road from Renwick to Appleby. This suggests there was once a very straight road running along the line indicated.

Placename and Literary Evidence

A two-and-a-half mile section of the modern road between Long Marton and Milburn forms a parish boundary and is known as “High Street”.¹ In Milburn village, its continuation is known as “Low Street”² and further north-west, there is a lane known as “High Street” running about half a mile to the east of Gamblesby village. These three sections of highway are directly aligned with each other and may be connected by a straight line inclined 20 degrees to the west of Grid North. This line is co-incident with other lanes and roads and cuts the Penrith to Stainmore Roman road at OS 680217, just west of the lane to Hangingshaw. When projected north-west, it passes through the summit of Cumrew Fell at OS 565521, just above Cardunneth Pike, and then goes on to the centre of the Roman fort of Castlesteads on Hadrian’s Wall. Closer inspection of the 1:25000 map reveals that the main street of Renwick is inclined a further 5 degrees to the west but when this alignment is projected south-east, it bears directly on to the northern end of High Street, Gamblesby. The main road north of Renwick runs via Croglin, Newbiggin and Cumrew and its mean course is aligned 33 degrees to the west of Grid North for about eight miles from a point on the Raven Beck just below Raven Bridge Mill to Saughtreegate. North of that place, the road turns on to an alignment which is more or less due Grid North, via Castle Carrock towards Brampton. The general scheme of the alignments is shown in Figure 1 and a more detailed plan is given in Figure 2 which indicates that the main alignment is co-incident with the road leaving Brampton for Longtown.

There is little doubt that the road through Renwick is of great age. In Edward III’s reign when the parish passed into the hands of Queen’s College, Oxford, the title deeds mentioned “Appleby Street”³ a name still in use in 1681.⁴ In the Register of the Priory of Wetheral there are two references to the “King’s Road” in the village and a twelfth century record in the Lanercost Cartulary mentions a road to Appleby crossing the Raven Beck.⁵ There are a number of “street” place names and references to old roads and streets north of Renwick, but they are distributed in a most confusing manner. They

include "Streetfield" at Saughtreegate⁶ and Castle Carrock,⁷ the "street" on Castle Carrock Common,⁸ "Thief Street", "Street House" and "How Street" in Hayton⁹ and west of the Eden, the "Hie Street" shown on John Bowey's map¹⁰ and probably sectioned by Mr George Richardson at OS 485476.¹¹ It is unlikely that all are related to a possible main route along the fellside but the "street" placenames at Saughtreegate and Castle Carrock suggest that the section of road which connects them may once have been known as the "Street".

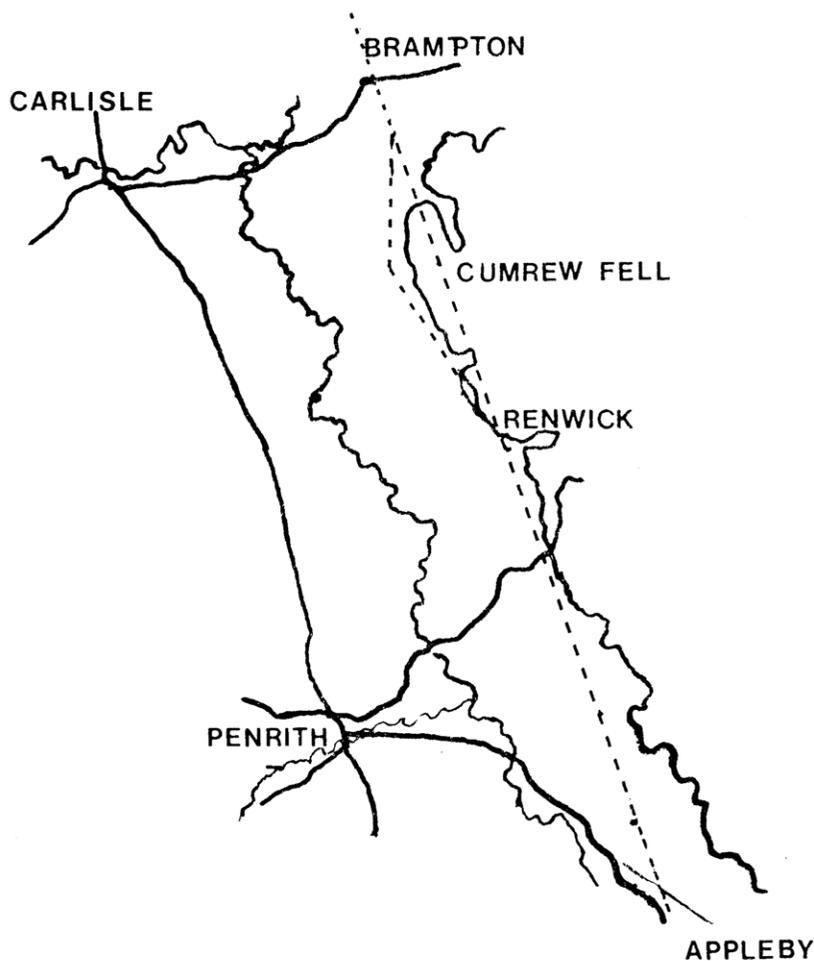


FIG. 1. - General scheme of road alignments.

Field Observations

Over a number of years, the author searched the ground along the two main lines from Hangingshaw to Renwick. North of Low Street, Milburn, the modern road wanders to the west of the line which, for a short distance, is marked by a footpath to Lounthwaite

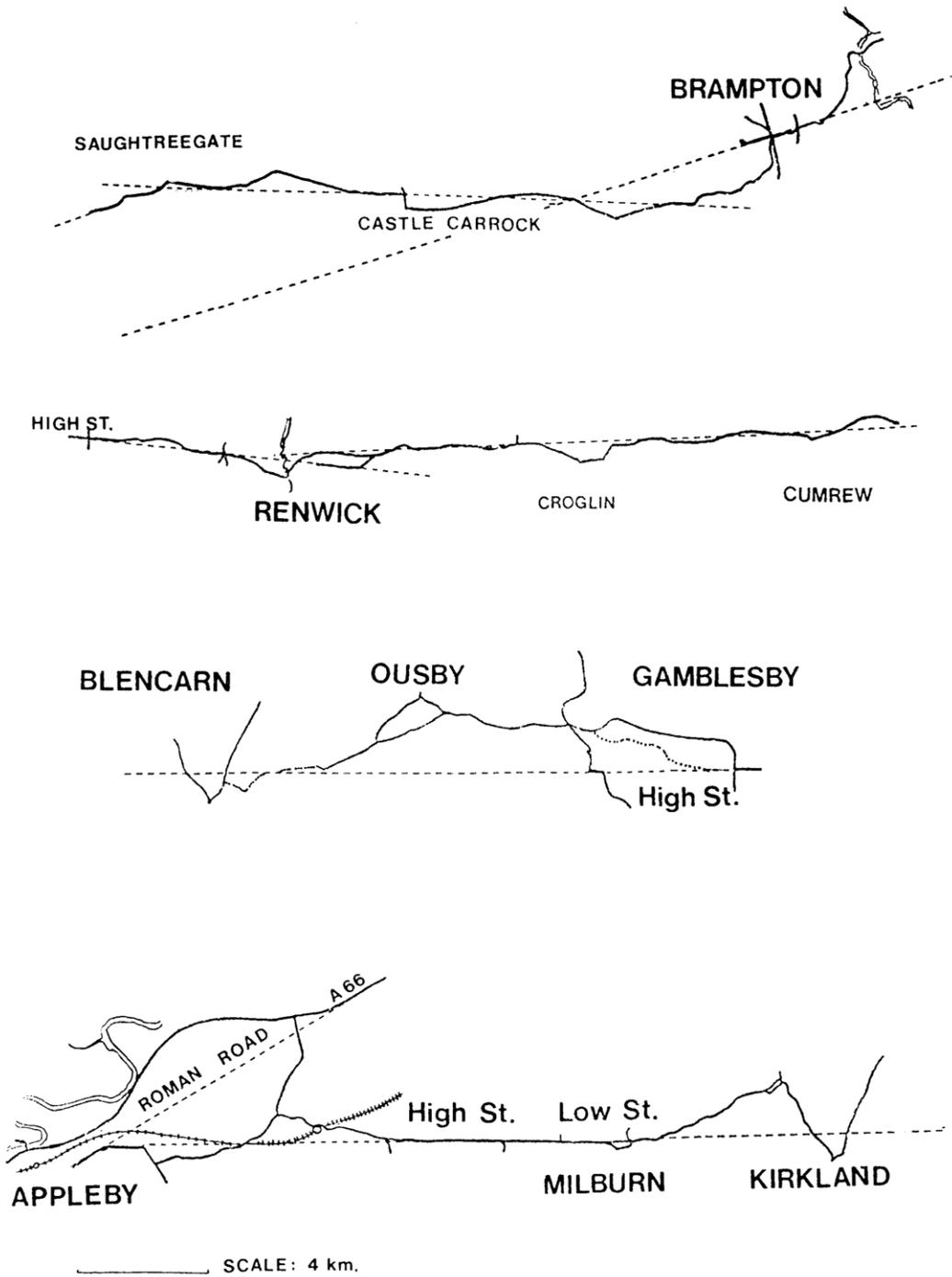


FIG. 2. - Sections of the road alignments.

farmhouse before it passes east of Blencarn village and crosses the conjectured line of the Maiden Way. From OS 639332 to 635339, it overlies a straight mile of farm lane with a curved central portion and a most substantial rock-cutting at a beck crossing. The line and gradient of this small, roughly surfaced lane which merely connects a number of fields, hint at a majestic piece of engineering.

Beyond Ousby Townhead (OS 636340), the line runs across country to High Street, Gamblesby, while the modern road goes by the villages of Ousby, Melmerby and Gamblesby, about half a mile to the west. Examination of the ground in the fields belonging to Gale Hall, whose name has been interpreted as meaning "steep path",⁷ revealed possible traces of road metalling in the form of an unploughable strip of cobbling in a field just below Round Wood at OS 631358, though this was a few hundred yards to the east of the line. However, exactly on the line, at OS 623375 on the 1:25000 map, there is a "ford" marked on a small beck in a deep, wooded gully. No road or track now crosses by this ford which is difficult to find, but there is evidence of a cutting and embankment on its southern approach.

The line then runs along a quarter mile section of the A686 Penrith to Alston road and heads for High Street, Gamblesby. North of the main road, there are several old stone pits along the course of the line and another apparent cutting through a rock outcrop on the approach to a crossing of the Gill Beck at OS 618387, east of Gamblesby village. From the northern end of High Street, Gamblesby, the modern road to Renwick follows the second line, though the slight shift in alignment is not perceptible on the ground. This road can be followed to a point (OS 604425) just south of Raven Bridge Mill. Here, the modern road sweeps east to descend to the Raven Bridge, while the line continues across the lane to Huddlesceugh Hall beyond which it is marked by what appears to be an old track now covered by the turf of the pasture. This runs straight down to the Raven Beck at a point about seventy yards below Raven Bridge Mill farmhouse and it can be seen clearly from the fellside lane to Greenriggs, above Renwick village. At this point on the beck (OS 601429), there are two rows of large, well-dressed stone blocks set into the northern bank and bearing all the appearance of the remains of a bridge abutment twenty-one feet wide, and now overgrown with tree roots as thick as a man's body.

Discussion

The available evidence suggests that at least as early as the twelfth century, a road ran from Renwick to Appleby, crossing the Raven Beck near Raven Bridge Mill. Two miles and eight miles to the south-east of this place, there are three lengths of modern road and lane with "street" names, all aligned with each other. There is evidence of a bridge having spanned the Raven Beck at a point where two road alignments meet and it is therefore a reasonable conclusion that a road based on a careful survey was laid down along these lines before the twelfth century.

Nor is it unreasonable to suggest, at least tentatively, that Appleby Street ran north towards Brampton, via Saughtreegate, thus giving four alignments, one inclined 20 degrees to the west of Grid North, a second inclined a further 5 degrees to the west, a third inclined at 33 degrees and a fourth going due Grid North for a short distance before the original line is regained. The first alignment is thus the main one, passing through

the summit of Cumrew Fell and thence to Castlesteads. This arrangement bears a striking similarity to the lay-out of the Carlisle to Low Borrowbridge Roman road described by Ross¹² who showed that its main alignment between High Hesket and the "Street" south of Brougham was inclined 25 degrees to the west of Grid North, but with secondary alignments taking the road itself westwards past the forts of Old Penrith and Brougham. The secondary alignments of the Eden valley fellside road avoid the great mass of Cumrew Fell. A point on the hilltop, east of Penrith Beacon seems to be analogous with Cumrew Fell summit as a probable surveying point.

There is therefore, the possibility that the Romans also made the road east of the Eden, though none of the evidence is conclusive. After much effort, the author could not find remains of possible aggers south of Renwick other than the traces of metalling near Round Wood, though this does not mean that they do not exist. A crucial question is whether roads known to have existed in the early Middle Ages are bound to be Roman. Little is known about road making between the Roman period and modern times, though it is likely that the great monastic houses were capable of undertaking such tasks. At Glossop in Derbyshire, there is a road reputed to have been made by monks and certainly there were enough monastic houses in the region of the Eden valley to have mounted the necessary effort. Yet, had they done so, they would probably have mentioned it in their records.

Furthermore, to ascribe a monastic origin to a road requires as many, if not more, assumptions than it does to accept a Roman origin. At first sight, a Roman road in the north Eden valley would seem to duplicate unnecessarily the Penrith to Carlisle road which according to the evidence of the Scalesceugh tilery¹³ was in use during the Flavian period. But is it necessary to insist that the Romans would have been content with just one main road to the Wall, west of the Pennine scarp, and would not the strategic importance of the eastern side of the valley have justified a road for rapid access?

Acknowledgements

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References

- ¹ CW1, vi, 481. J. G. Goodchild, 'Notes on the Archaeology of Milburn and its Neighbourhood and Ordnance Survey six inch map, Westmorland'.
- ² OS map, Westmorland.
- ³ Nicolson and Burn, II, 426.
- ⁴ R. S. Ferguson and *Bishop Nicolson's visitation and Survey of the diocese of Carlisle in 1703-4*, CW Extra Series, I.
- ⁵ J. E. Prescott (ed.), *The Register of Wetheral Priory*, CW Record Series, I (1897), No. 175 and N. & B. II, 426.
- ⁶ Personal communication, Mr Maugham, farmer at Saughtreegate.
- ⁷ *Place-Names of Cumberland*, Part I. English Place-Name Society, XX.
- ⁸ An Undated Map of Roads Crossing Castle Carrock Common, Cumbria Record Office (Carlisle) D/Mh, vol. 3, p. 197.
- ⁹ CW2, vii, 42. T. H. B. Graham, 'An Old Map of Hayton Manor'.
- ¹⁰ CRO (Carlisle) DX 128/7/21. Map of Part of the Forest of Inglewood, by Thomas Bowey, 1715.
- ¹¹ Personal communication, Mr George Richardson. See also CAB Bulletin, Series 2, No. 1 (April 1977), 11.
- ¹² CW2, xx, 1. Percival Ross, 'The Roman Road North of Low Borrow Bridge to Brougham Castle, Westmorland'.
- ¹³ CW2, lxxiii, 79. G. G. S. Richardson, 'The Roman Tilery, Scalesceugh, 1970-1971'.

