ART. III – The “Streetgate” at Conishead, the “Castellum” at Dalton, and Roman Furness

BY DANIEL W. ELSWORTH

From the late 18th century and until the end of the 19th a Roman military presence in Furness (specifically Low Furness) was taken to be a historical fact based on observed archaeological features. Although these remains were few in number they were considered to include a road across the peninsula and a fort at Dalton. During the 20th century, however, there was a complete reversal of opinion; the earlier evidence was ignored or rebuffed and the results of new fieldwork were taken to show that the opposite was in fact the case. A re-examination of the documentary sources, combined with evidence from aerial photographs and more recent discoveries, shows that the original claims still have considerable validity and that they actually indicate a greater degree of Roman activity in the area than previously thought.

Early evidence

In order to re-consider the original claims of Roman activity in Furness it is necessary to give a brief history of the study of the subject, which will be presented in chronological order. Important unpublished information is also included within this account, which greatly alters the perceived understanding of the period.

It was, perhaps inevitably, Father Thomas West who first recorded physical remains considered to belong to the Roman period in Furness. He suggested that, “The Romans had entered Furness at Conishead Bank: in the perambulation-roll of the parish of Ulverston . . . it is called the Spina Alba, the White-thorn . . . where the road they made use of quits the sands, and is in the same roll called the Street” (West, 1774, viii). This road, known as Red Lane, he considered continued westwards, before turning towards Dalton, after which it passed over “God-mire” (Goldmire) and on to the Duddon sands (op. cit., vii-x). In places it had been exposed by the construction of field boundaries, and in 1774 a large section, approximately “eight roods”, was destroyed close to a field boundary opposite Mountbarrow house (now called The Grange), during the construction of what West calls the “new turnpike” (op. cit., ix). Another section was apparently also revealed beneath Bardsea Park wall (ibid.), although the exact location is not clear. In addition, earthworks in Dalton, particularly “the remains of a ditch and rampart on the eastern side of the churchyard”, were thought to be all that survived of a fort or Castellum attributed to Agricola (op. cit., x). While this evidence is intriguing, to modern readers it perhaps sounds a little too good to be true and a case of an over-enthusiastic willingness to mark everything with an imperial stamp, particularly that of Agricola. Indeed, West was accused by one contemporary of taking too much of a “Romanist standpoint” in his history of the area (LRO RCHY 3/7/55 1775-6).

Nevertheless, West did identify additional evidence at Dalton that gives credence
to his claims, although this came too late to be included in the *Antiquities of Furness*, and was presumably lost or forgotten prior to the completion of subsequent editions. Unpublished draft notes (now held as part of the Hornby Presbytery collection in the Lancashire Record Office in Preston), probably the contents of a letter to John Whitaker of Manchester, reveal the extent of these discoveries:

it was improvement of a part of the Roman Castellum at Dalton into a garden that led to a full discovery of what was only before suggested, that the Romans had been there. This was evident by some fragments of Roman earthenware and Roman cement, but what made it above all doubt was the remains of a hypocaust, a Roman furnace for smelting copper with part of the copper slag, and a fragment of the worked metal, a small piece of the cornish [cornice?] of an altar of polished limestone, marked with part of two Roman letters elegantly cut – a further search may lead to valuable remains (LRO RCHY 3/7/50, 1775).

Remarkably a second draft of the same letter exists, in the collection of St Joseph’s Roman Catholic Church, Lancaster, also held at the Lancashire Record Office. While many of the details are essentially the same there are a number of more specific points made regarding some of the features that he identified:

on the spot where I marked Agricola’s Castellum in Dalton church-yard has been dug up fragments of Roman earthenware, cemented walls &c, the foundation of a Hypocaust part of a building of pebble stones set in lime in shape of a hollow con [cone?] or modern limekiln, the aperture at the bottom being very narrow and rested on a free stone with a semi circular aperture of 7 inches by 13 in form which rested on 2 square stones or pedals. The funnel [funnel?] shap’d building had a narrow slit from top to bottom. Some charcole and copper Scories [scoriae] were found near it with a fragment of an unpolyshed copper cornish from these accompaniments. I fancied it to be some part of a furnace for smelting copper . . . but by whom British or Roman though familiar to the work of the latter I shall be glad of your opinion (LRO RCLJ 1/2/10, n.d.).

It is clear from these documents that there was, as far as West was concerned, compelling evidence for a Roman site being present at Dalton, although we again cannot be certain of the accuracy of his interpretation. He clearly made great use of the “Republic of Letters” that existed between antiquarians at the time (Sweet, 2004, 61). This has fortunately preserved these additional unpublished observations, the detailed nature of which has already proved of great value to more recent archaeological research (Edwards, 1971, 23-27). The 19th century antiquarian W. Thompson Watkin was evidently familiar with some of the correspondence that passed between West and Whitaker, and he reproduced what was clearly Whitaker’s response, dated 16 October 1775, in his *Roman Lancashire*:

The recent discoveries in Dalton Churchyard strikingly confirm your printed account. A Roman station was certainly there, the pointing of the road and the cement of the walls decisively shew it. But cannot you trace the walls or the ditch? And if you can, at what dimensions is the area? The foundations of the hypocaust I shall be glad to hear more of. This is too curious and too rare a part of Roman British antiquities to be past [sic] over slightly. As to the conical building, I have no doubt it was a furnace, as you suppose, though I have never met with anything of the kind before, and the position of it must give it to the Romans I think, unless it was within the area of the station, and in that case it must be later, I apprehend (Watkin, 1883, 216).

West evidently took Whitaker’s suggestion to heart, as a subsequent draft letter, dated 13 January 1776, seems to contain his reply:

There is only one dimension of the Castellum at Dalton that can now be ascertained and that is from the declivity on the western side of the remains of the foss on the eastern side, about 80 paces, the rest of the foss and rampart has been cleared away to make place for the town, yet it
may be presumed that the north extremity of the Castellum would not exceed the bend of the road from the Thorn, which entered the station on the eastern side and would issue from the station on the northern side at the foot of Scalegate, which is about 160 paces from the precipis on the southern side. The remaining Crest of the rampart has been a garden for ages past, and is of a considerable breadth, and the foss on the inside is very visible – I intend a further tryal into the ruins and if anything be discovered worthy of note you shall hear of it (RCHY 3/7/55, 1775-1776).

Clearly West was not adverse to a little investigation in the field if necessary, although quite what form his “tryal” took, if it ever occurred, is unknown; the expression might be taken to suggest excavation. The content of these letters would seem to indicate that at this time there was no debate over West’s claims, but it is evident that there was. Lord George Cavendish, writing to West in 1776, and based on the evidence of the “Roman” bronze axe from Gleaston Castle (which is actually Bronze Age (Gaythorpe 1899, 161-164)), suggested that it “will be a proof . . . of what has been doubted but which, you, had pretty well ascertained before, that the Romans had stations in Furness, which I believe had been generally denied” (RCHY 3/7/59, 1776). West obviously had some powerful friends, some of whom were happy to lend their support to his suggestions, and this, presumably, considerably enhanced the strength of his claims.

The second edition of the Antiquities (and all subsequent versions) repeated West’s published claims regarding the evidence for Roman occupation in Furness (West, 1805, 8-9). Additional evidence was also identified at this time, including a coin of Augustus found near Conishead Priory in 1800 (reported in detail by Evans (1842, 119)). William Close, who edited and enlarged the later versions of the Antiquities, also examined the earthwork at Dalton, describing it as “a long hollow which has the appearance of a defensive ditch, backed by a mound of earth resembling the remains of a rampart” (Close’s additions in West, 1805, 343). Like West, he too was not afraid to investigate further, and excavated three areas of the vicarage garden (where the “rampart” at this date stood), the results of which he described thus:

1. On the east side of the ditch in the church yard, an irregular foundation of a wall three feet in thickness, consisting of stones without mortar, was found under a quantity of superficial materials.
2. In the garden near the south-end of the rampart, at five or six feet below the surface, immediately under a bed of small loose pebbles, there was a stratum of dark earth mixed with marine shells. And 3. In part of the garden opposite the east end of the church, at the depth of six feet below the surface, the soil was mixed with the shells of periwinkles. From the different circumstances observed in making these perforations, it appeared evident that this mound of earth had been amassed in a great measure by human industry; but for what purpose it was not possible to discover (op. cit., 344).

Close did not apparently recover any finds of Roman date during his excavation and did not consider there to be any conclusive proof of a Roman fortification near the church (MCL BR 942.72 F4 c.1810), although an object described as “a small coin, or piece of lead, inscribed on both sides with the word SOL in Roman letters” was discovered in a garden on Scalegate in Dalton, a short distance to the north of the “rampart”, in 1804 (Close’s additions in West, 1805, 344-5; Plate 1). Unfortunately, the earthworks that formed the “rampart” were completely removed when the churchyard was enlarged in the early 19th century, perhaps only shortly after Close’s investigation (Fell, 1885, 124).

Subsequent authors tended to agree unquestioningly with West, however. In
addition, Baines suggested that a road ran towards the fort at Ambleside from a branch that had its origins in Low Furness and that remains of it had been identified “on the eastern borders of Satterthwaite” (Baines, 1836, 704). West had, however, already expressed the view that Ambleside was “placed near the meetings of all the roads from Penrith, Keswick, Ravenglass, Furness, and Kendal, which it commanded” (West, 1789, 75). Evidence for Roman roads connecting Furness to the north and south was also presented during the 19th century: a road heading north from Lancaster towards Morecambe Bay was identified at an early date (Whitaker, 1823, 213), and a road described as the High Street, running northwards from the north side of the Duddon Estuary, was described as early as 1794 (Hutchinson, 1794, 556) and repeated by subsequent authors who connected it directly to Furness (Ferguson, 1890, 38; Barber, 1894, 342).

Throughout the 19th century West’s interpretation remained virtually unchallenged, although Watkin considered the existence of a road across Morecambe Bay to be “undecided” (Watkin, 1883, 85) and reservedly suggested that at Dalton “there appears to have been a small Roman post” (Watkin, 1880, 79). Other authors were less hesitant in their support of West; Jopling wrote of Conishead, “An avenue of sycamores on the southern boundary of the pleasure grounds, is interesting . . . to the antiquary, from the circumstance of its marking the site of a portion of the old Roman (or Thorn) road across Furness, which commenced from the Sands near this point” (Jopling, 1843, 159), a statement repeated by Philp (1880, 16). Jackson reasserted the use of the cross-sands route by Agricola, with particular reference to Tacitus’ account of crossing wooded estuaries (Jackson, 1878, 12), more accurately translated as woodland and estuaries, not necessarily at the same location (Shotter, pers. comm.).
Fell categorically asserted that, “It is quite clear that the Romans had a road across the Cartmel promontory . . . This road extended on the Furness side of the Conishead Bank, by what is familiarly known as the Red-lane, and through Dalton to the estuary of the Duddon. Both the road across the Cartmel promontory and that from the White-Thorn on Conishead bank imply the use of the sands by the Romans practically in the same line as was adhered to till the construction of the Ulverston and Lancaster Railway in 1857” (Fell, 1884, 7). However, Beck, presumably writing some time earlier, considered that the cross-sands route to Conishead had “long been discontinued in consequence of changes in the channels of the rivers flowing through the sands in their passage to the ocean, but chiefly from the nearer transit to the town of Ulverston occurring higher up the bay” (CRO(B) Z327, n.d.). Two regional surveys of archaeological monuments carried out at this time mark the majority of the road across Furness as known and additionally show a route from Dalton to Ambleside as “probable” (Ferguson and Cowper, 1893; Harrison, 1896). However, no additional investigation in the field appears to have been carried out during the 19th century following Close’s excavation at Dalton.

**Twentieth Century doubts**

By 1924 W. G. Collingwood was confident that there were “no forts or roads of Roman construction in Furness and Cartmel”, although he conceded that there were “many Roman coins and other relics from different sites, especially from the neighbourhood of the ‘British Settlements’” (Collingwood, 1924, 291). What was it that had brought about such a radical reversal of opinion within less than 30 years? While it is not possible to identify a single incident that first led to this change, the earliest direct attacks on West’s ideas appear to have occurred in 1902. Collingwood, in the first edition of *The Lake Counties*, when describing Dalton church, indicated that, “earthworks formerly existed, considered by the older antiquaries to be Roman; but they were the rampart of the Daltune of Domesday Book” (Collingwood, 1902, 66). On what basis he made this claim is not certain, but the lack of any fieldwork for almost 100 years makes this position equally difficult to substantiate.

In the same year Harper Gaythorpe, President of the Barrow Naturalists’ Field Club, also attacked the assumptions of earlier antiquarians, with some of West’s opinions being particularly strongly criticised:

> West . . . persuaded himself that he had discovered the vestiges of a Roman encampment at Dalton, supposed to be the ancient castellum erected by Agricola. There is not the slightest evidence to support this theory. No Roman altar has ever been found at Dalton, and the stones of which the Roman castellum was built, if such ever existed, must have been carried away. The few Roman coins which have been found in Furness have probably been lost in more modern times and re-found. The so-called Roman road which enters Furness at White Thorn, at Conishead, is most likely a road made by the monks’ (Gaythorpe, 1909, 145).

Whether or not it was Gaythorpe’s robust comments in particular that caused the collapse of faith in West’s interpretation is not certain, although he clearly believed that absence of evidence amounted to evidence of absence, and took the work of William Close far more seriously. Nevertheless, the strength of this counter-argument was enough to mean that when the *Victoria History of the County of
Lancashire was compiled a few years later all of the possible Roman remains in Furness are described as only “doubtful” (Ferrers and Brownbill, 1914, 286). Both Gaythorpe and Collingwood corresponded with John Brownbill during the compilation of the *VCH* (MCL L1/58/1/281-296, 1909), so it is perhaps not surprising that this line was taken. Indeed, Gaythorpe went to some lengths to point out earlier accusations that West’s *Antiquities of Furness* was biased because it specifically left out all references to the Quakers at Swarthmoor Hall (ibid; citing Webb, 1895, 425), which would undoubtedly have cast him in a poor light. However, subsequent comments indicate that he may have been more sympathetic than these letters suggest (Gaythorpe, 1910, 335), and Brownbill was certainly not persuaded by the claims of bias (Brownbill, 1910, 331).

In the following years attacks on the notion of Roman occupation in Furness continued. Between 1925 and 1928 Dr Wishart, one of the then owners of Conishead Priory and part of a company that wished to turn it into a holiday resort (*Anon.*, c.1930, 17), excavated part of the grounds of the priory, including sections of the “Roman” road (Kelly, 1930, 163-168). Although it was subsequently stated that Dr Wishart “does not endorse the theory that the road is of Roman origin”, the assumption being that it probably related to the priory (*Anon.*, 1931, 8), at the time he seemed to be less certain and presumed that, “The direction of the ancient Road is past the Priory &c, so far as I cd make out, not leading to it or sending a branch to it” (CRO(B) Z639/1, 1929).

The priory was sold in the same year, subsequently becoming a convalescent home for Durham miners (Ashburner, 1988, 8), and Paul Kelly published the results of the excavation. He certainly took the view that the road was not Roman, despite the fact that it comprised an upper surface of loose small stones, two feet above a 25ft wide road made of cobbles and large stones, flanked by ditches (Kelly, 1930, 165). His somewhat circular argument concluded, “there is no reason . . . to suppose the Romans ever occupied the Furness district, and such being the case there was little need for a Roman road” (*op. cit.*, 167). A contemporary commentator also took the same view, stating, “there was nothing found to enable a date to be assigned for the construction of this road, and nothing to support the persistent local tradition of a Roman origin” (Stables, 1929, 15).

It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that throughout the rest of the 20th century support for the notion of Roman occupation in Furness gradually declined. Later excavations of sections of the road at Goldmire in 1949 and 1966 were not able to provide any conclusive evidence, although they discovered a metalled surface with kerbs laid on logs and brushwood (Brady, 1971). Unfortunately, the photographic record was accidentally destroyed or lost, although the report contains drawings of the road and a horseshoe of early-medieval form (Sparkes, 1979, 9-10; Brady, 1971, 32). This is possibly the fourth horseshoe of this type to be discovered at this location, as two or three more were found on the surface of the same road in 1803 (Close in West, 1805, 360, figure 5, plate 5). Throughout the rest of the 20th century the idea of Roman settlement in Furness was almost universally dismissed by local historians: “Evidences of Roman occupation in Furness are entirely wanting, and there is nothing to indicate that they ever occupied a military post here” (Barnes, 1968, 12), “it is generally believed today that the Romans never occupied Furness, and that this site [the ‘fort’ at Dalton] was an Iron Age
settlement” (Walton, 1984, 5), and “There is no evidence that the Romans paid more than a passing visit to Furness” (Trescatheric, 1993, 23). Only Birkett showed any sympathy for West’s view (1949, 10), while the possibility of a road existing did not even merit a mention by Margary (1957). More recently it has been suggested that earthworks within Dalton churchyard, traditionally thought to mark the site of a plague pit (Walton, 1984, 43), were the same as those forming “ramparts” (C.C.C. and E.H., 2002, 9), although no documented source is given to support this notion.

Ongoing work on the coin evidence has demonstrated a Roman presence in the area (Shotter, 1989a; 1995), but without any conclusive site of a fort it has been suggested that this may have been, at least initially, comprised of only brief military operations (Shotter, 2000; 2004, 20). The coins, however, do span the whole of the Roman period (Shotter, pers. comm.), and the presence of rich iron reserves in Furness must have been a considerable attraction (Shotter, 1995, 74). Speculation about a fort or forts in the Furness and Cartmel area filling a logical gap in the sequence of coastal defences south of Ravenglass has, however, existed for some time (Potter, 1979, 18, 139 and 358), and this has been at least partially supported by the recent discovery of a possible Roman ford crossing the River Lune at Lancaster (Pitts, 2006).

Plate 2. Part of an aerial photograph showing the two roads with ridge and furrow between, reproduced from the 1966 Ordnance Survey aerial photography with permission.
A new interpretation

The wish to reconsider the evidence of West’s claims about the Roman occupation of Furness came about after the present author observed a number of earthworks in the fields to the west of Conishead Priory. It was decided that the most efficient, and non-intrusive, way to investigate these features was through the examination of aerial photographs, so copies of these were obtained from the National Monuments Record (NMR). In all of these, the features visible on the ground could easily be made out, and in the clearest examples a number of other earthworks of interest were visible (Ordnance Survey, 1966; Plate 2; Fig. 1). Some of these earthworks are
already recorded in the Cumbria Historic Environment Record (HER, Nos. 2393, 11000, 11052, and 11158) but the oblique aerial photographs held by the HER had evidently made earlier attempts at interpretation difficult.

What is clear from the vertical aerial photographs is that these earthworks represent the remains of two roads, one running west towards Mountbarrow, and the other heading north-west towards Ulverston. Of additional interest is an area of ridge and furrow, which is visible between and respecting both of these roads. Its form suggests that much of it is medieval in date, although a small patch in the north corner is perhaps more likely to be post-medieval (Higham, 2004, 58), which would indicate that the two roads are at least as old or older.

The road to the west is visible until immediately after Priory Park Farm (SD 29392 76056), which is positioned on top of it. While it might seem tempting to suggest that the road was built for the use of the farm, this is impossible. An examination of the early Ordnance Survey maps of the area reveals two things: firstly Priory Park Farm does not appear until after 1894 (although a smaller structure is present on the site prior to this), and secondly the westward road is shown as extant and is named “Green Lane” in 1850 (Ordnance Survey, 1850; 1894; Plate 3). The name “Green Lane” is of interest because, although the present road to the south is known as “Red Lane” (historically because it was so coloured by the transportation of iron ore along it (Philp, 1880, 17)), further west it was, and still is, called Green Lane (Ordnance Survey, 1850), until it meets the present A590 near Lindal (at SD 25654 76065).

The point at which the line of the road is no longer visible in the aerial photograph also corresponds with West’s description of the eight roods that were removed in 1774 during the construction of the “turnpike”. The Ordnance Survey map of 1850 shows a field boundary running east/west across the field in front of what was then called Near Mount Barrow (now called The Grange – SD 28537 71686). This continues the route of the road to the east (Green Lane) and was probably the field boundary, mentioned by West, along which the road was uncovered. Curiously, an estate map of 1843 shows a road still in existence along this line, continuing Green Lane, although with a small dog-leg in it (CRO(B) BD/HJ/Plan 24, 1843). According to the current owners the field boundary was only removed within the last 50 years (Andrew Crayston, pers. comm.), and there is a distinct earthwork visible where it used to be, approximately 5 m-10 m wide. The route of the road to the west, if continued from this position, would probably rejoin Green Lane some point after the crossroads near Edge Hill (SD 28090 75933).

The road to the north-west continues in an almost straight line towards Gascow farm (SD 29317 76669), which is also positioned on top of it. On the way is passes close to a large depression containing a spring, where there are apparently several other earthworks of uncertain character. This spring is the terminus of a watercourse that begins at Trinkeld and was enhanced by the canons at Conishead Priory to improve their water supply (Farrer and Brownbill, 1914, 355). Beyond Gascow Farm a large section of the road has evidently been destroyed by quarrying, but a short section is visible continuing beyond this through what is now an allotment and into the southern corner of the graveyard (SD 29192 76881), at which point it rejoins the present road (the A5087).

It seems likely that both roads were diverted from their original routes at an early
stage, leaving the extant earthworks. The westward road was moved to the south, taking it between the estates of Conishead Priory and Bardsea, perhaps following the dissolution of the priory and the passing of the Conishead estate into private hands. Alternatively it may have been diverted round the expanded holdings of Conishead Priory but still with the intention of providing a route to the coast for the iron ore traffic. The movement of land boundaries in Furness as a result of changes in ownership in the medieval period, especially in relation to monasteries, has already been described (Rollinson, 1963), and this could explain why the name “Red Lane” came to apply to one section of the road, which was constructed specifically to serve the iron ore traffic, and not the whole route. A description of the boundary of the Bardsea estate in 1282 unfortunately does not add any further evidence to support this theory, however (Anderton, 1912, 229), and it is not recorded when the name “Red Lane” was first used. The north-western road was apparently diverted to provide a grand new entrance into the priory. This was probably carried out during alteration and rebuilding at Conishead from 1821 onwards, as a new and even grander route was constructed in 1842 (Jopling, 1843, 146).

The identification of two roads in the aerial photographs also fits well with the historical account. The foundation charter of Conishead Priory, dated between 1180 and 1184, granted the existing hospital “all the lands on both sides of the road which leads from Bardsea to Ulverston, and from the great road to Trinkeld, and from thence to the sea bank” (West, 1805, 249; Farrer, 1902, 357). This certainly suggests that at least one road already existed at this date (between Bardsea and Ulverston) and that another was possibly present between Trinkeld and Conishead, which would seem to concur remarkably well with the remains that are visible in the aerial photograph. Although the date at which these roads were constructed is not known, they clearly pre-date the establishment of the priory. A Roman date is
therefore quite plausible, especially since the monasteries are not generally known for their large-scale road building (Hindle, 1984, 45), and it seems unlikely that the earlier hospital would have had the necessary resources.

Other features of interest are also visible in the aerial photographs. Immediately south of the Oxley's factory (originally Priory Park; SD 29972 75638) is a rectangular ditched enclosure, which is visible as earthworks on the ground. This is, however, probably quite modern as it is depicted on the Ordnance Survey map of 1913. A number of other areas of post-medieval ridge and furrow, former field boundaries and the like are also visible in this photograph, particularly in what is now Bardsea Golf Course but was formerly part of Bardsea Park, although these are not relevant to the subject under discussion. The preservation of the two roads and associated ridge and furrow near Conishead is also likely to be due to their being situated within park land, as demonstrated by the present place names.

The historical basis for West's claims was also re-examined, in order to establish whether his interpretation of the relevant medieval documents is accurate. It is now not possible to ascertain the whereabouts of the perambulation roll for Ulverston, which West describes as “a record of high antiquity” (West, 1774, viii), and which, crucially, names the westward road as “Street-gate” (op. cit., 46), but another early document does confirm this name. A deed dated 1446-7 for a piece of land in Pennington parish in the records of Lord Muncaster names “the king’s highway called Stretegate” as its southern boundary (Historic Manuscript Commission, 1885, 225). Even later still, a perambulation roll for Pennington dated 1793 refers to the “streat gate hedge” forming part of the parish boundary (Fell, 1929, 328). The present boundary between the parishes of Urswick and Pennington still follows the line of the road (where it is known as Green Lane) between SD 27205 75830 and SD 26380 75848.

The use of the term “king’s highway” also seems to recur in relation to the westward road and is used in the grant of land to Conishead between 1180 and 1184 (West, 1774, 186; Farrer, 1902, 358). It is also used in the description of the boundary of the Bardsea estate in 1282, which curiously describes it as following the road from the “White Cross” rather than “White Thorn” (Anderton, 1912, 229). The term has also been used in association with roads thought to be of Roman date in other areas (Bouch and Jones, 1961, 19). Subsequent maps show that the line of this road, where it passes through the gardens of Conishead Priory, forms the boundary of the Bardsea estate (CRO(B) BD/HJ/Plan 14, 1839), and it also divides the parishes of Urswick and Ulverston today. It is interesting to note that further west it is not the line of the road observed in the aerial photographs that forms this boundary, suggesting that it was only defined following the grant of 1180-84.

The general distribution of finds belonging to the Roman period in Furness is also interesting and worth reconsideration (Fig. 2), especially as the situation has clearly vastly improved since Barnes stated that “no tiles, pottery, tools, ornaments, inscriptions or masonry” had been found on the peninsula (Barnes 1968, 12). While a great number of coins have been recorded (Shotter; 1979b; 1989a, 41-43; 1994, 293; 1997, 253; 2002, 306) the results of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) mean that several more have recently been reported (Shotter, 2005, 236-237; 2006, 230-232). In addition, other objects have been declared as part of the PAS, including a possible miscast brooch and a horse mount.
It is perhaps also worthwhile reconsidering the small lead “coin” found in Dalton (Close in West, 1805, 345; Plate 2). The description and illustration of this, combined with the fact that it is made of lead, suggest that it is more likely to be a seal, of the type recorded at forts such as Lancaster (Shotter and White, 1990, 63) and in large numbers at Brough-under-Stainmore (Richmond, 1936). These are often marked with three initials on either side, one set denoting the name of a military unit,
the other a personal name (Shotter, pers comm.), although in the case of Dalton it is
not known what “SOL” stands for or why the same initials were apparently present
on both sides. More recently two button-and-loop fasteners of late first century or
early second century A.D. date have been discovered in the Dalton area (Dot Bruns,
pers comm.), although these were originally thought to be from Pennington (Bruns,
2006), and it is noticeable that many of these items are commonly associated with
military sites, particularly the putative lead seal. Other finds also include a possible
stone gaming board discovered on the south end of Walney by J. G. Jackson in 1963
(Barnes, 1968, 12), although the dating of this is uncertain, and it has been published
as part of a list of prehistoric finds (Fell, 1971, 7).

The density of Roman artefacts from the area around Furness Abbey is of
particular interest (Fig. 2). These include at least ten coins, as well as a bronze
statue, thought to be of Hercules and imported from Gaul, held in the collection at
the Dock Museum (accession no. 04215), and a blue glass bead found somewhere
in the Bekansgill Valley with a variety of other objects (Robinson, 1986). It has been
suggested that the Roman finds from Furness Abbey represent souvenirs brought
there at a later date as antiquities by the monks (Shotter, 1995, 75), but if this is the
case how prevalent is it at other monastic sites? The potential for the site of Furness
Abbey to have been utilised prior to the construction of the monastery cannot be
overlooked (Shotter, 2004, 129).

There has also been considerably more Roman pottery discovered in Furness
than is evident in the published record. A few discoveries have, however, been
reported. In 1922, during the construction of Lightburn Park, members of the
North Lonsdale Field Club recovered a number of artefacts that they concluded
were prehistoric in date (Atkinson and Dobson, 1923). A re-examination of these
pieces by Clare Fell revealed that while most were not prehistoric (and many were
probably only 18th or 19th century in origin) there were three fragments of pottery
considered to date to between the second and fourth centuries A.D. (Fell, 1947,
237-238).

More recent discoveries include a mortarium rim from near Page Bank farm
(discovered and illustrated by Penny (1997)), a fragment of probable amphora rim
discovered at Bardsea (reported to the author by Martin Stables), and other finds,
particularly from coastal areas, recorded in the HER. Recent ploughed-field walking
by the author and Jo Dawson has recovered heavily abraded coarseware and Samian
in a number of locations around Ulverston. Two undiagnostic sherds of pottery
dated to the Romano-British or medieval period have been discovered during
excavations in Ulverston (OA North, 2004, 30; Greenlane Archaeology, 2006, 9),
and a fragment of Huntcliff ware has also recently been recovered during an
evaluation on the edge of Barrow-in-Furness (OA North, 2006, 18), perhaps the
first recorded from anything approaching a secure context.

All of these discoveries suggest a strong “background” presence in the area during
the Roman period, and, although the means by which they arrived in the region
cannot be ascertained with any certainty, they demonstrate that the peninsula was
not isolated or ignored at this time.
The implications for Roman Furness

The positive identification of the Roman road originally recorded by Thomas West would in itself be an important discovery in the history of Furness. The ability to date it by reference not only to historical sources but also by its relationship with other earthworks would be even more significant. Assuming that the roads at Conishead include the one identified by West, and are Roman in origin, this has considerably wider implications for the area. The road to the west has always been thought to lead to Dalton, where evidence for remains considered to be of Roman date were also recorded by West. Although none of these have been adequately dated, it seems rash to dismiss them on this basis alone. West’s identification of Roman roads has been seen to be extremely accurate in some cases (Bellhouse, 1954, 19), but at the same time prone to over-optimism (Pugmire, 2004, 108), although this is not a reason to dismiss the potential importance of his other discoveries at Dalton.

It would also have wider implications for the understanding of relations between native tribes, perhaps part of the Brigantes, or even the elusive Setantii (Shotter, 2004, 7), and the Romans. Furness was evidently quite densely occupied during the late prehistoric period (Shotter, 1989b, 43), and the reaction of the locals to the off-comers (to use the current expression) is not known. If the Romans came across the sands of Morecambe Bay, would this not suggest that they had at least some native supporters? The rich iron ores of Furness must also have been a considerable draw to the area, and it has been suggested, based on analysis of slag from the fort at Manchester, that the Roman military did make use of them (op. cit., 45). Recent examination of the late prehistoric site at Stone Walls near Urswick has shown that the ore was certainly being mined prior to the arrival of the Romans (Bowden, 2000, 12-14), and it seems inconceivable that they would not have done all they could to exploit it more fully.

The evidence of a road leading north-west towards Ulverston also fits the suggested line of a road from Ambleside to Furness (Baines, 1836, 704), and is perhaps significant in our understanding of the development of Ulverston, where there has been an ever-increasing number of Roman coin finds (Shotter, 2005, 238; 2006, 232), and at least one apparently unpublished earlier example (CRO(B) BDSo 4/12, c.1938). While it is not possible to be certain of the route of the north-west road after Gascow it is conceivable that it might have continued to Ulverston along Dragley Beck Road. The possible continuation of this road is also of interest as it not only continues directly into the centre of Ulverston, but it also passes close to the site of Neville Hall (now the site of the police station), the closest the town has to a medieval manor house and manorial centre (Perriam and Robinson, 1998, 387). Neville Hall, which was the capital messuage of a manor in its own right, was of medieval origin and is rumoured to have been partially fortified (ibid.). There are, of course, several examples of large houses, castles and so forth with medieval origins, which occupy Roman sites (Shotter, 2004, 169), and while this should not be taken to imply the presence of a Roman fort in Ulverston, the position of the town may have been influenced by the presence of the road. Indeed it has been said that, “Many medieval centres, several of which had no history of Roman occupation, were sited with obvious respect to the Roman routes” (Morris, 1983, 2), and this is...
certainly worth bearing in mind in the case of Ulverston. A possible continuation of the road at Ulverston might be along what is now Quebec Street, formerly Ratten Row, a street of some antiquity, which is recorded as being in existence from at least 1421 (Farrer and Brownbill, 1914, 355).

If the west and north-west roads existed at the same time, a logical short-cut, connecting any settlement at Dalton to Ambleside, might be expected to exist, the most obvious place being along what is now Dal Tongate (Fig. 1). A route certainly existed between Dalton and Ulverston from at least 1196, as it is mentioned in the agreement between Furness Abbey and the Lord of Kendal regarding the Furness Fells (Farrer, 1899, 5). In addition, a “way” between Ulverston and Dalton, presumably the same one, is recorded in a document of c.1220 (LRO DDK 1410/1, c.1220). Dal Tongate’s name suggests an early medieval origin, and it also forms a substantial part of the boundary between the parishes of Ulverston and Mansriggs, another indicator of a road of some antiquity, particularly those of Roman date (Hindle, 1984, 15).

The identification of a road across the Furness Peninsular obviously has implications for claims made of roads to the north, leading up the west coast, and south, across the Cartmel Peninsula. It is not the intention of this paper to explore these issues further, although the discovery of coin hoards from the latter (Shotter, 1995, 75), and a hoard from Millom Castle (Shotter, 1982, 198) indicate good Roman connections. The place-name “Borwick Rails”, on the coast just outside Millom, may also be of some significance, containing as it does two elements meaning burials (Lee, 1998, 11 and 68), which are often associated with Roman sites.

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