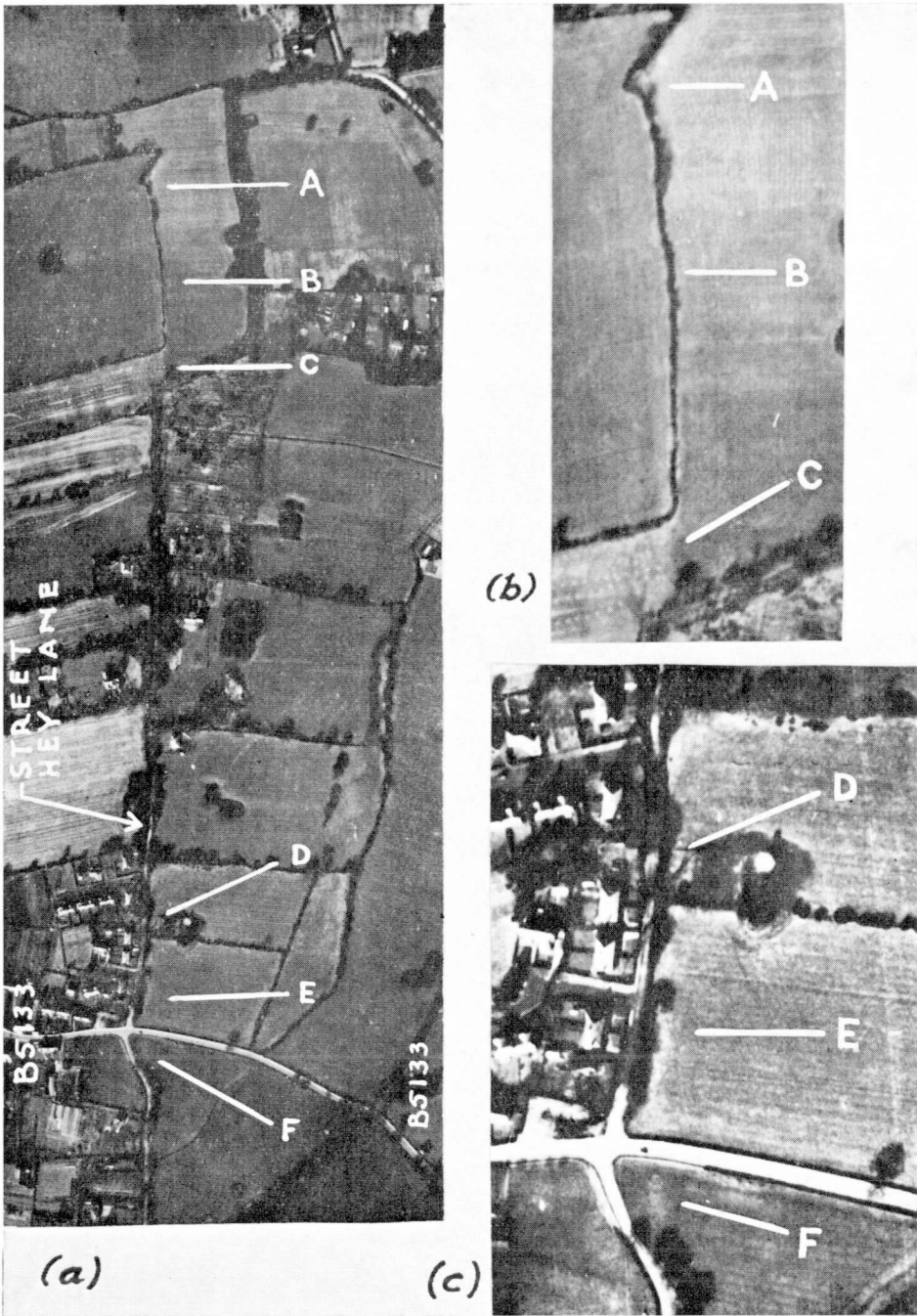


PLATE I.



(a) Air photograph of Street Hey Lane, Willaston. (b) Enlargement showing area near the northern end. (c) Enlargement showing the southern end. (Royal Air Force photograph, Crown Copyright reserved.)

The Roman Road in Wirral

Air Photography and some Further Notes

by K. E. JERMY, M.A., A.I.M., A.R.HIST.S.

THE line of the Roman road in Wirral, as determined by fieldwork and excavation in an area based on Street Hey Lane, Willaston, has been described by the present writer.¹ The notes now given deal with air photographs of the area, further fieldwork done by M. Anderson, and the name "Blake Street". In them the original account is referred to as "the 1961 paper" and the excavations as "the 1960 excavations".

Map references are understood to be prefixed by SJ(33).

I. AIR PHOTOGRAPHS

Recently it was asserted that no major archaeological sites have been discovered by air photography in Cheshire. Nevertheless, examination of an air photograph after the 1960 excavations and fieldwork had been completed gave striking confirmation of the line of the road.

The road can be seen as a light-coloured line on print F21/0024 of sortie 58/RAF/1682 (14 March 1955). For better reproduction, a high-contrast print was prepared from the original photograph, and Plate I(a) is a portion of this print, corresponding approximately with the left-hand of the two map strips of Fig. 2 of the 1961 paper.

The road is seen as a light line at points B, where a ridge near the hedge exists on the ground, and C. Just east of Street Hey Lane it is seen near D, corresponding with the cobbles found in the front garden of the house "Girston", and at E, which is the ridge at the edge of the field that was cut at two points during the 1960 excavations (map ref. 340782, roughly). The continuation of this line south of the B.5133 road, at F, was also noted on the ground and is seen on Plate I(a).

Enlargements of the areas at the northern and southern ends of Street Hey Lane are given as (b) and (c) respectively.

No trace of the road, however, can be seen on print RP 3191 of sortie 58/RAF/709 (31 June 1951). This is an instance of the variations of crop-marks in vertical air photographs with the time of year and type of crop (pasture in (a)).

This evidence shows that valuable confirmation of fieldwork can be obtained by examining air photographs, at least on Wirral. Moreover, an initial negative result need not be conclusive!

¹*The Roman Road in Wirral*, J.C. & N.W.A.S. (1961), vol. 48, pp. 1-13.

II. LATER WORK ON THE ALIGNMENT

During 1962 fieldwork and excavations by M. Anderson^{2,3} confirmed the line of the road near Street Hey Lane and extended it for roughly one mile in a NNW direction on to Hargrave Heath. Brief details of the excavations follow.

One was made at point F on Plate I(a) (and also on Fig. 2 of the 1961 paper), in the field bounded on the north by the B.5133 road and on the west by Heath Lane. The road was found to be a continuous layer of cobbles, of diameter $3\frac{1}{2}$ — $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. (as in the 1960 excavations), but with the added feature of a layer of gravel of diameter $\frac{1}{2}$ — $\frac{3}{4}$ in. This was at a depth of 16in., placed on top of the cobbles.

Immediately to the east of Hargrave Lane, at 33167960, the construction was found to be similar, the gravel metalling being at a depth of 17in. In addition there was a line of kerbstones, about 12 x 7 x 8in. in size, similar to those found on Watling Street near Aldford.⁴ The width of the Wirral road here was over 12ft.

The line of kerbstones was found again at 33087980, approximately 250 yd. NNW from the last section, and some 65 yd. east of Hargrave Lane.

III. THE NAME "BLAKE STREET"

The line of the Roman road in Wirral has been identified with that of the mediaeval road to Birkenhead called the Blake Street;¹ this name is also attached to a road on the boundary of Saighton, SE of Chester, which shows some Roman characteristics.^{5,6} W. J. Williams⁷ suggests that the name is derived from iron slag used in the construction of the road, as in the London—Lewes road.⁸ This suggestion must await confirmation by the establishment of the existence of Roman iron-smelting furnaces near Chester, and of slag in a section of the road. Moreover, the meaning of "blake" here is not definitely established—D. Sylvester⁹ points out that O.E. *blac* means black, O.E. *blac* means white.

IV. CORRIGENDUM

On p. 12 of the 1961 paper,¹ the map reference for the garden in Prenton Dell Road where a layer of cobbles was found (reference 43) should read 294863.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mr. J. Rigg, of the Archaeology Division of the Ordnance Survey, helped considerably with identifying and procuring the air photograph showing the road. Plate I was prepared by Mr. R. S. Oldacre from the air photograph.

²"New Evidence of Roman Road", *Birkenhead News and Advertiser*, 13 June, 1962, p. 6.

³Private communication, 3 December, 1962.

⁴M. St. J. Way, *J.C. & N.W.A.S.* (1961), vol. 48, pp. 15-23.

⁵K. E. Jermy and D. M. Evans, jun., *Cheshire Sheaf* (1960) 3rd series, vol. 54, pp. 25-26.

⁶K. E. Jermy, *Ibid.* (1962), vol. 55, pp. 90-91.

⁷"Salt at Saltney", *Chester Chronicle*, 19 November, 1960, p. 11.

⁸I. D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, vol. 1, p. 55 (London: Phoenix, 1955).

⁹"Cheshire in the Dark Ages", to be published in *T. H. Soc. Lancs. and Ches.*