

X.—THE STANEGATE AT NORTH TYNE.

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I. EARLY WRITERS.

In any consideration of the Stanegate, the first problem that presents itself is the eastern terminus of the road. The earlier writers trace it to Newbrough, and then take it in a curve north-east to Chesters. Horsley¹ (1732) says it was very visible as far as Newbrough, after which it pointed towards Chesters, where there was a Roman bridge; he also thought he saw remains of it near Walwick Grange. Warburton² (1753) marks it as a straight road from Newbrough to Walwick Grange; but Armstrong³ (1769) adds one north of this, running straight to Chesters. The latter road is repeated on later maps, such as that in Gough's *Camden* (1805).

Hodgson⁴ (1840) agrees that it ran through Newbrough and Fourstones to Chesters, but also conjectures⁵ that it divided somewhere near Fourstones, so that one branch would go south of Warden Law, cross North Tyne at Howford, and proceed by Acomb and Anick to Corbridge.

¹ *Brit. Rom.* 144; 158, no. 6.

² *Vallum Romanum*, 51.

³ *Map of Northumberland*.

⁴ *Hist. North.* II, III, 275.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 411.

MacLauchlan⁶ traces the course of the Stanegate through Newbrough and keeps it on the line taken by the modern road till, at the side road running to Frankham, he makes it veer north-east, to pass north of the hamlet of Fourstones. Then it skirts the north slopes of Warden Law, crosses the fields of Walwick Grange, and comes out into Homer's Lane about 60 yds. south of the ruined cross by the roadside. Over the Walwick Grange estate he was guided by the drainer belonging to the farm, who showed him where he had taken up the road, and where some few stones were yet to be seen.

Here MacLauchlan's definite evidence ceases, and he conjectures that, while some branch-road ran northward to Chesters, perhaps along the line of Homer's Lane, yet the main course of the Stanegate ran southward down the lane till it reached Howford, just above the junction of the two Tynes. From there it would follow the route to Corbridge already suggested by Hodgson.

The existence of some such branch-road to Chesters was later proved by John Clayton,⁷ who cut a trench about a hundred yards south of the south gate of the fort, and found the road less than 3 ft. below the surface. Among the milestones found beside the Stanegate at Crindledykes in 1884 is one which gives a reading *MP XIII*, which supports the view that Corstopitum was the terminus⁸ of the road. In the pre-war excavations at Corstopitum a road leading west from *Dere Street* was traced for only a few feet. Apart from this, there is no evidence for a Roman road connecting Walwick Grange with Corstopitum.⁹

⁶ *Memoir written during a survey of the Roman Wall*, 1858, pp. 30, 31; *Survey . . . of the Roman Wall*, 1857, pl. II.

⁷ *AA*² IX, 217; XI, 131.

⁸ *Cumb. & West. Trans.*² XIII, 389.

⁹ *Northumberland County History*, x, 461.

II. FOURSTONES.

In May 1932 an opportunity came of testing MacLauchlan's line (as reproduced on the O.S. map) between Frankham and Fourstones. It was where his route, on leaving the modern road, runs north-east diagonally across a field, till it crosses the road from Fourstones station to Walwick Grange.

On the O.S. line Mr. Eric Birley cut section I 20 yds. west of the wagonway fence, and section II 10 yds. west of the field-wall that bounds the road to Walwick Grange. He found traces of road-metalling, mainly waterworn cobbles, spread over a width of 19 ft. The rest of the road had been ploughed out. It was clear that there had been a road on this line, but the remains were insufficient to prove it either Roman or modern. Greenwood's map (1828), on the scale of one inch to the mile, shows a road running to Walwick Grange on this part of MacLauchlan's line, although the 1805 estate map of the farms belonging to Greenwich Hospital does not show it.

III. WALWICK GRANGE.

In September 1935, on behalf of the Durham University Excavation Committee, the writer set out to verify by excavation on the Walwick Grange estate the end of MacLauchlan's line for the Stanegate and, if possible, to trace it further east. The work lasted a week and took two labourers. Nine sections were cut as follows (see map, p. 203):

1. The first trench, cut in field 199, gave nothing on the line laid down on the O.S. map, but, when continued northward, yielded clear remains of large road-bottoming, composed of freestone packed with gravel. No definite kerbs were found, but the approximate width was 17 ft.,

and the depth below the surface of the arable field varied from 4 to 8 ins.

II. A trench cut a few yards to the east yielded nothing. But section II, cut 75 ft. to the west of section I, produced bottoming of freestone and whin-boulders. The edge was opened up on the north and south: one well-dressed kerb was found on the north in line with the general edge. The approximate width of road was $19\frac{1}{4}$ ft., and the depth of soil 6 ins.

III. This was 120 yds. east of section I. No ordinary bottoming was found, but the last 3 ft. of the road on either side were formed of a deep block of compacted freestone chips, which on the south had a depth of 22 ins. The central $10\frac{1}{2}$ ft. were composed of clay, overlaid on the south by a thin band of freestone chips set on edge. The rest of the metalling in the centre had been removed by the plough or by the drainer whom MacLauchlan mentions; for the depth of soil was only 8 ins. and a whinstone kerb on the north was scored by the plough. The road was $16\frac{1}{2}$ ft. wide.

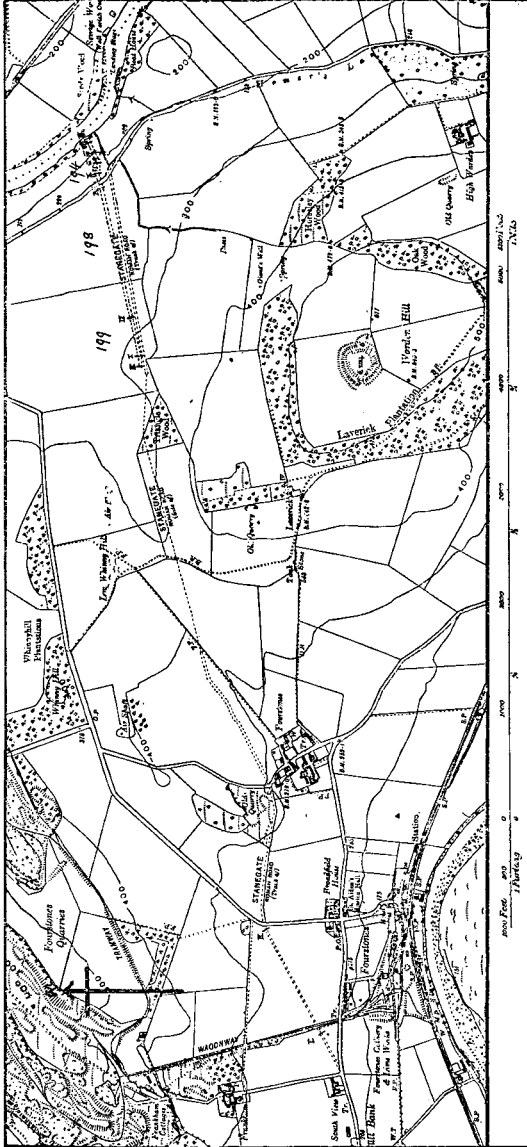
IV. This was cut in the head-rigg of field 198, just west of Homer's Lane. At a depth of 2 ft. a compact surface of freestone chips was found. The approximate width was $16\frac{1}{2}$ ft., the kerb on the south being well defined by a large whinstone.

V. Then a series of trenches was cut in the meadow (field 194) east of the lane. Section V produced a layer of well-laid whin-boulders about 12 ins. below the surface. The width was only $14\frac{1}{2}$ ft., but draining operations may have disturbed one edge.

VI. This was 110 ft. further east. At a depth of 18 ins. there was a fairly regular surface of freestone and small whin-boulders, with the remains of some blue limestone chips at the edges. The north kerb was definite, but on the south the last 2 ft. may have been packing: the width was therefore either 18 or 20 ft.

VII. This was on the edge of a steep gradient. At a

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Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Map, with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office. Reduced to half-scale from the six-inch Map of Northumberland [New Series] Sheet N XCI. N.W. (ed. 1924).

depth of 12 ins. a layer of limestone chips covered the bottoming of larger limestone blocks. No attempt was made to find kerbs. Twenty feet further east the ground falls away sharply and attains a gradient of 1 in $3\frac{1}{2}$.

VIII. One hundred feet further east, near the bottom of the slope, was found a fine example of the road-bottoming. Large limestone blocks bounded it on the north and south, and the rest was a mixture of limestone, whinstone, and freestone. Traces of limestone chips were found on the south kerb, as well as part of the clay packing. The surface of the bottoming was less regular than in section v, but it may have been disturbed by the plough. In any case the mixture of three sorts of stone cannot be regarded as natural outcrop, nor can the presence of the stones be explained unless they form part of a road.

IX. On the lip of the river bank, 37 ft. east of section VIII, a short trench only 3 ft. deep yielded nothing. This was not surprising, as the road-remains would be well covered at the bottom of a steep slope. There was no time to deepen the trench.

Across the fields 199 and 198 the course of the road is straight. It is 25 ft. north of the O.S. line at section i and 125 ft. north at section iv. It passes only 15 ft., and not MacLauchlan's "about sixty yards," south of the cross beside the lane. Beyond the lane it veers slightly south (see sections v and vi), and then, on the edge of the steep slope, bends back a little to the north, presumably to cross the river at right-angles.

Practically all the sections showed excellent bottoming for a well-built road. Of the upper layers that must have covered this scarcely a trace remained, for all the land has at some time been under the plough, which would easily distribute the smaller metalling, particularly if cambered. The width of the road was usually $16\frac{1}{2}$ ft., though widening to about 18 ft. on the steep slope. In some sections definite kerbs were found. The road is laid out in straight stretches and makes only two slight changes in direction.

It is obviously a well-engineered road, and its features are Roman; its usual width, indeed, agrees with that of the Stanegate at Haltwhistle Burn fort.¹⁰

The excavation has not only proved MacLauchlan's account, but has also taken the road for a further 400 ft. and brought it to within 40 ft. of the right (i.e. west) bank of North Tyne. We may therefore postulate some form of river-crossing at this point, which is one mile south of the known Roman bridge at Chesters and equidistant from the railway-station and village of Wall. We may go further and conjecture that it was a bridge, for nowadays the river is not easily fordable here even at midsummer in a dry year, and is quite impassable after a few days' rain. It is not possible to know the exact course of the river in Roman times, and the right bank is being eroded; but, making allowance for this, it is hard to see how a ford could have been feasible, considering that there is a difference in level of about 20 ft. between the river-bed and the lowest part of the meadow, where section IX was cut. Nor is there any indication of a cutting in the river-bank, which is formed of limestone, to suggest a ford.

IV. THE HERMITAGE, NEAR HEXHAM.

In the Front Park of the Hermitage, just north of the New Bridge end, a broad mound runs east and west about 100 yds. south of the road and 200 yds. north of Tyne. The mound is about 20 ft. wide and appears to curve round past the south front of the Hermitage, then cross the road to the Old Pasture, and so head for the straight stretch of road, called Cross Bank, north of Acomb. Trenches cut to test this line proved the mounds, in both Front Park and Old Pasture, to be natural formations of river-sand and gravel.

¹⁰ AA³ v, 257.

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