

IV.—STOTT'S HOUSE "TUMULUS" AND THE MILITARY WAY, WALKER

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Introduction (fig. 1).

The large, grass-grown mound at the junction of Tumulus Place with Tumulus Avenue, Walker, had the singular distinction of being the only tumulus to appear on the schedule of ancient monuments in the City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne (NZ:294657). Horsley appears to have been the first to note it, as one of "two distinct tumuli remaining near the Beehouses".¹ Almost a century and a quarter later MacLauchlan plotted the position of a pair of tumuli, one lying on either side of the head of the valley descending to the Tyne and situated about sixty yards to the south of "Stote's Houses, the Bee Houses of Horsley".² The landscape has changed considerably in the intervening period. In brief, the small, almost insignificant valley which carried a minor tributary into Stote's Powe, now the considerable Dene lying to the south of the Fossway, has been filled with refuse, levelled at a later date for the construction of prefabricated houses, and is now occupied by more permanent houses in the course of erection. The site of Stote's Houses, later Stott's House Farm, immediately to the north of which lay Hadrian's Wall,³ is covered by one of three, towering blocks of flats. The proposed site of Milecastle 1,⁴

¹ *Britannia Romana* (1732) p. 136.

² *Memoir Written During a Survey of the Roman Wall 1852-4* (1858), p. 7.

³ See e.g. *History of Northumberland*, XIII, p. 492, plate III, and Bruce, *Roman Wall* (3rd ed.), p. 41.

⁴ For discussion and earlier references see E. Birley in *A.A.*⁴, XXXVIII (1960), p. 39 ff.

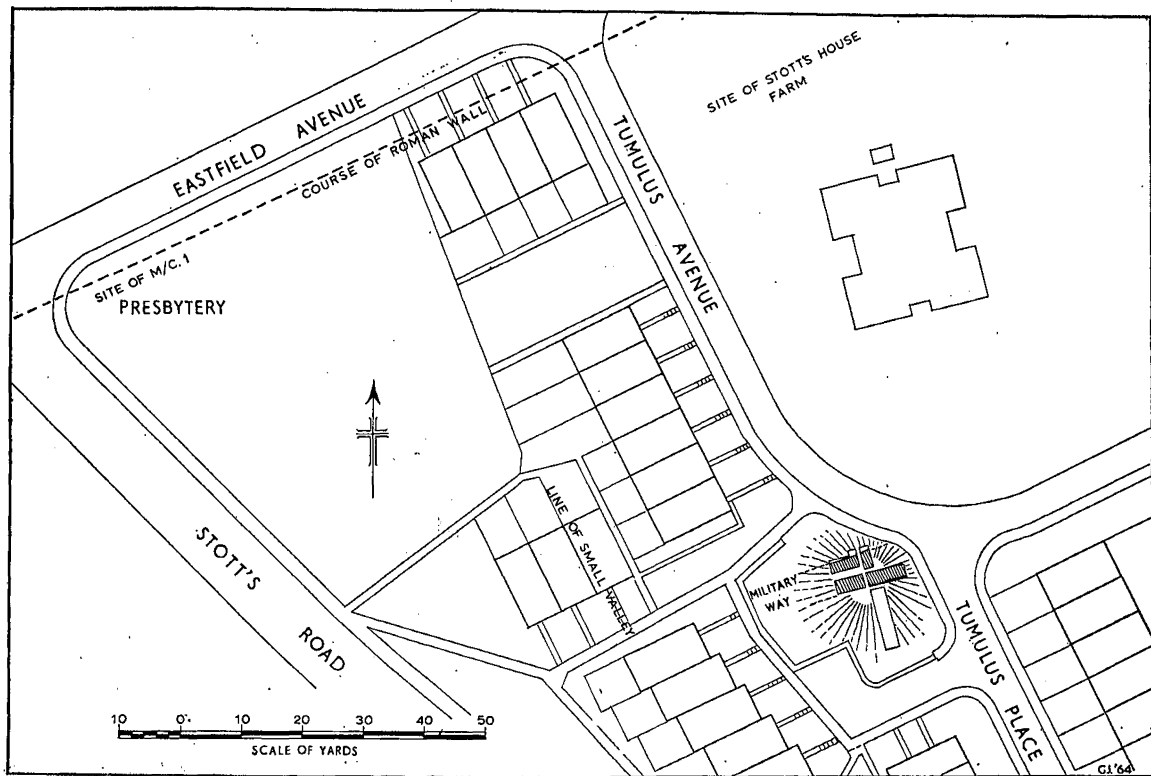


FIG. 1

formerly "The Grange", now "The Presbytery" of the Church of St. Francis, lies immediately on the west side of what has been the head of the small valley. The second "tumulus", shown by MacLauchlan as being some fifty yards distant to the west of the surviving mound, had apparently disappeared by 1897⁵ but clearly lay on the west bank of the valley, probably beneath the line of the present Stotts Road.

In 1929, Mr. Thomas Wake sank a short trench into the "centre" of the mound. Although the results of his limited investigations were not conclusive, the discovery of a platform of stones at the bottom of the trench, together with the presence of some charcoal, was taken to give sufficient indication that it covered an interment.⁶ The mound was described as bowl-shaped, seventy-two feet in diameter, and six and a half feet high at the centre. Since then, the extent of the mound has been reduced on the north and east sides by the encroachment of a road and pavement and the surface despoiled by delving and deposits of rubbish, such as an urban, vacant lot inevitably invites. It appeared before the present excavation to have a rather flat top and it was only from the natural slope to the south and south-west that the centre achieved the height previously given.

In the general development of the area, the site is to be levelled and grassed over. Excavation, sponsored by the Ministry of Public Building and Works, was undertaken with the aid of two workmen during the last two weeks of October 1964.

Excavations

The overlying rubbish, grass and top soil, to a depth of one foot, were removed by mechanical means and the approximate position of the 1929 trench established on the surface. Cuttings were excavated in the order as numbered

⁵ The eastern but not the western mound is shown on the O.S. Maps (1897) 6" and 25". Neither appear before this.

⁶ *P.S.A.N.*⁴, IV (1929), p. 125.

on the plan (fig. 2), all except number 3 being six feet wide. A watch was maintained later when the area was graded by machine. The features described below are given in established chronological order.

(a) *Early Plough Marks* (fig. 2 and plate V.1)

The original soil of the old land surface, some five inches thick and overlying yellow boulder clay, was located at the north end of cutting 1 at a depth of four feet six inches. On its removal, a pattern of dark criss-cross marks showed on the otherwise undisturbed yellow clay. These marks were no more than half an inch deep and, though intermittent, occurred at intervals of twelve inches apart. They almost certainly resulted from ploughing. Similar marks were found beneath the roadway and underlying soil in cuttings 2 and 5, where time permitted investigation.

(b) *Roadway* (figs. 2 and 3, and plate V.2)

The true nature of Mr. Wake's "platform of stones" was revealed in trench 2, where a roadway consisting of two layers of mixed sandstones and river cobbles, with some decayed metalling in the interstices, was found to rest on the original soil level. This ran from east to west along the length of the trench and had a clear but slightly ragged edge on the south side. At the west end it had been cut away by a later, shallow ditch. Cutting 3 established the width of the road as being some seventeen feet, with a slight camber, but without any noticeable curbs. Its course continued to the west in cutting 4, except where it had been interrupted by the later ditch and removed by the 1929 trench. On the assumption that this roadway was in fact the Roman Military Way, and in view of the proposed position for Milecastle 1, an additional cutting, number 5, was made in order to determine if any service road branched northwards at this point—the last convenient place of departure on the east side of the valley. The north edge of the road continued with no such junction showing. A lack of surface metalling on the road

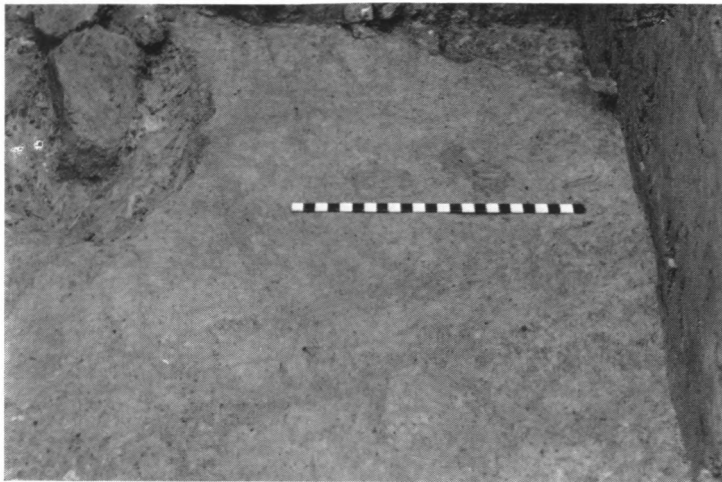


Fig. 1. Plough marks, cutting 1

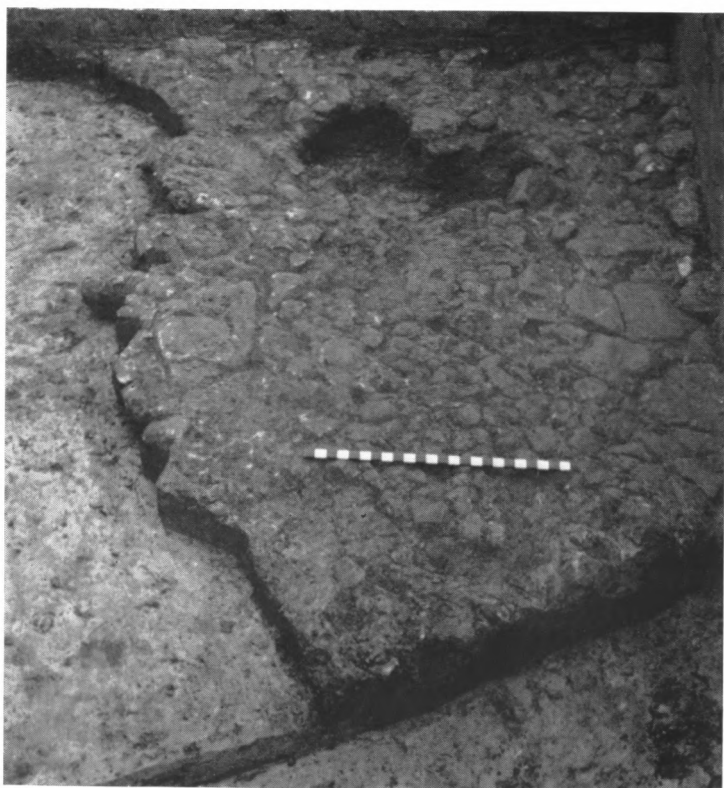


Fig. 2. Military Way, cutting 5

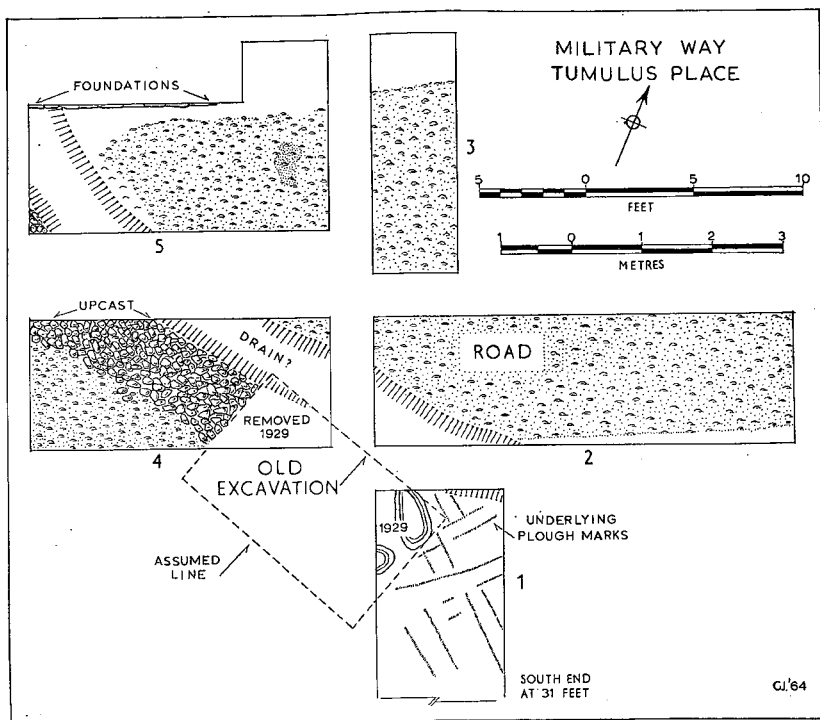


FIG. 2

may be accounted for by later ploughing, as would the rather ragged edges.

(c) *Ditch* (figs. 2 and 3)

When emptied of its clayey silt, compacted by the overburden, the ditch proved to be from four to five feet wide, but no more than one and a half feet deep from the road surface. There were a few stones resting in the bottom throughout the whole length. Clearly later than the road, it ran roughly from S.E. to N.W. in the area excavated and had probably been dug in this direction, on the assumption that the upcast of clay and stone from the roadway, which lay on

its S.W. side, resulted from normal right-hand working. In cutting 1 the upcast lay directly upon the bottom soil (fig. 3, level B) and in trench 3 there was no more than an inch or so of accumulation between a thin band of road metalling, which survived at this point, and the upcast which preserved it.

No certain purpose can be attributed to this ditch but in general appearance it resembled an open drain or an agricultural "marking-out" ditch, constructed after the abandonment of the road.

(d) *Later Ploughing and Mound* (fig. 3)

The first layer, overlying both the roadway and ditch and upcast, was composed of a compact clayey soil containing a few stones. It maintained a fairly constant thickness of some nine inches over the whole of the area, except on the south side in cutting 1, where, after piling up into a low mound, it rapidly decreased on the natural slope (fig. 3, level C). An upper limit to this layer was marked by an old surface line. The whole had the appearance of ploughing with a later return to grass, whilst the slight mound to the south could have been the remains of the headland of a field. Two slots, showing in section on the east face of cutting 1, were explored, but proved to be small in extent with shelving sides. They had not served any structural function.

Subsequent to this ploughing, the core of the mound had been tipped. This consisted of mixed clay containing small pieces of burnt wood, patches of burnt earth or turf, and fragments of fired clay (fig. 3, level D). For a short, undetermined sector in the S.W., a long wedge-shaped layer of darker earth was interposed. The upper limit of this tipped material was demarcated by a thin but also consistent band of burnt wood, earth and pieces of fired clay. This was in turn everywhere overlaid by a thick band of clay containing some small sandstone fragments akin to masons' chippings. From the sections, it was apparent that the centre of the core of the mound lay towards the south edge of the road,

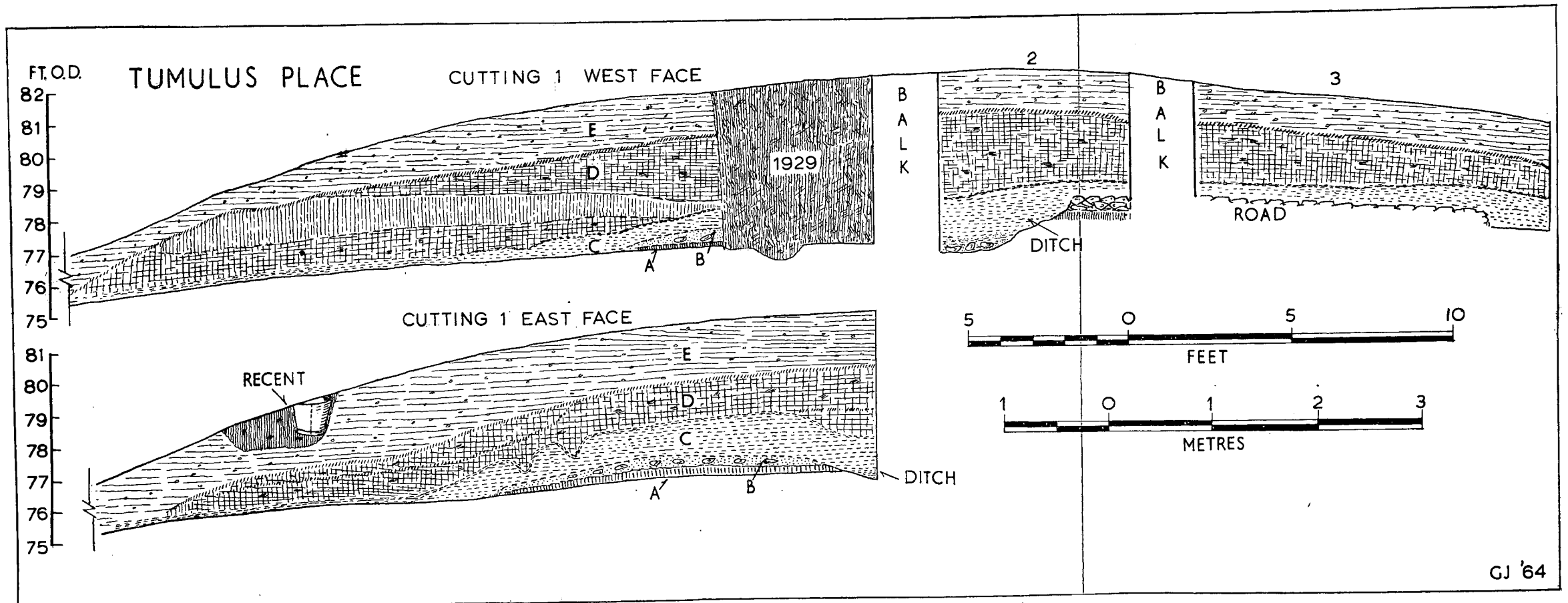


FIG. 3

although the whole area was covered without a break, except where the 1929 trench had been sunk.

No small finds were recovered, other than a clay pipe-bowl from the fill of the 1929 trench, and modern pottery from the foundations of a comparatively recent outhouse that infringed upon the north face of cutting 5.

Conclusion

The earliest feature beneath the mound was the discontinuous pattern of plough scrapes on the boulder clay. These were possibly the result of cross-ploughing such as has been found, for example, on the Bronze Age settlement at Gwithian in Cornwall, though this was a practice widespread in time and place and is not a suggestion of context in this instance.⁷ On the other hand, they could have been caused by ploughing in different directions on two separate occasions. Clearly they predated the construction of the Military Way and, in view of the proximity of the Roman Wall, might well have been earlier than the creation of the Hadrianic frontier zone.

The position and nature of the road are doubtless sufficient guide to it being the Military Way which, to the west of Newcastle, was not constructed until after the obliteration of the Vallum, the date of which event is not quite certain, but is probably best envisaged as taking place on the re-occupation of Scotland in 140 A.D. Whilst the road may have been constructed later in the second century,⁸ the earliest inscribed milestones are of 213 A.D.⁹ At this point the road lies eighty to ninety yards south of the estimated line of the Wall and is no doubt running to the region of the south gateway of the fort at Wallsend on the east. Its course between

⁷ Megaw, Thomas and Wailes, *Proc. W. Cornwall Field Club*, II no. 5 (1961), which includes a summary of the published evidence. See also H. C. Bowen, *Ancient Fields*, 7-9.

⁸ Branch tracks connect the Military Way with some turrets (e.g. Limestone Bank v. *A.A.*³, IX (1913), 63) and no pottery "certainly datable later than the end of the 2nd century" has been found from excavated turrets (E. Birley, *Research on Hadrian's Wall* (1961), 103-110).

⁹ *Handbook to the Roman Wall* (11th edition, Ed. I. A. Richmond), 32.

Wallsend and Newcastle has not been recorded with certainty but observations made by both Horsley and MacLauchlan are pertinent. MacLauchlan records that, "Immediately before we cross the little brook at Walker and between that and the smaller rill that descends from Stote's Houses, a line across the fields was pointed out to us by William Brown . . . where he constantly found obstruction to the plough, as of a paved way; these traces run parallel to the Great Wall at a distance of about ninety yards. From the distance we may assume this to have been the Military Way".¹⁰ It is also relevant that one of the earliest available maps of the area, dated 1745, gives the names of the two fields lying between the two burns mentioned by MacLauchlan and to the south of the line of the Roman Wall and Roman Wall Lane, as *East* and *West Stony Flats*.¹¹ Horsley, though somewhat more cautious than MacLauchlan, also hints at the possible line of the road further to the west: "Near the Red Barns, and upon the descent of Byker Hill to the Ewsburn (Ouseburn), I saw the track along which I believe it had gone; but the appearance is so very faint and obscure, that I lay no great stress upon my conjecture".¹² Despite his uncertainty, the basis of Horsley's acknowledged perception is once again made evident by the additional remark: "Nor should I have observed it, had I not known before that it must have been thereabouts."

The line of the road towards Wallsend on the east is doubtless marked by the series of Roman inscribed and sculptured stones, found to the west of Philiphaugh, some seven hundred yards from the fort at Wallsend, when the land was developed for allotment gardens in 1892.¹³ This is the area immediately to the east and south of the present excavations, on which American type prefabricated houses

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 9 note 3.

¹¹ *Map of Walker* (1745), fields 34 and 35: City Archives, Newcastle upon Tyne.

¹² *Op. cit.*, 137.

¹³ List in *History of Northumberland*, XIII, 193. Also O.S. *Map of Hadrian's Wall* (1964).

were formerly erected (the surviving street names Maryland and Arizona bear witness). The provenance of the stones at the "south end of the gardens" suggests the presence of some ribbon building or a possible temple area situated in a position of some aspect and former beauty, immediately south of the assumed line of the road and overlooking the deep dene (Stote's Powe) that leads down to the Tyne.

Elsewhere, branch roads or tracks have been found at times to serve the Milecastles, even where the Military Way approaches closely to the Milecastle positions.¹⁴ A short branch road in this instance would be necessary to serve Milecastle 1 at its proposed position now occupied by "The Presbytery". This being so, the easiest line of approach would have lain in a perpendicular road on the west side of the small valley.

These limited excavations yielded no indication of an earlier track or "Lesser Military Way".¹⁵ MacLauchlan's record at second hand of the remains of two roads,¹⁶ "not very continuous but nearly parallel", the smaller of gravel and the larger paved, that were seen at one time leading down to the mouth of the valley just to the west of the fort at Wallsend, were at best probably no more than roads within the civil settlement. On the other hand, it seems reasonable to assume that there was an approach down to the Tyne itself from the fort and Military Way.

The precise *function* of the overlying mound is problematical. Later than the disuse of the Military Way and subsequent ploughing, but presumably already looking venerable enough by the third decade of the eighteenth century to merit Horsley's simple description "tumulus", it produced no evidence of having been a burial mound. The former presence of a similar, though less distinct mound,¹⁷ a short distance to the west, suggested that the two could

¹⁴ E. Birley, *op. cit.*, 111-114 for summary of evidence.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 114-116

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, 7 note 1.

¹⁷ Bruce, *Roman Wall* (3rd ed.), 41.

have been used in conjunction on either side of the burn, but no structural features showed on the surface of the mound or in section. The question must arise then as to whether the mound could have been connected with some early, local industry. Until recently, the boulder clay area bordering on the Tyne supported a number of brick-yards and was at one time scarred with the clay pits indicative of this industry.¹⁸ It was common practice, at times in the past legally enacted, to leave dumps of newly excavated clay to be subject to a winter's weathering before use.¹⁹ However, the mixed nature of the clay in this mound would militate against such a purpose in this instance. Added to which, at the moment there are no records of brick-yards or tileries of sufficient age to qualify for consideration in this area.

On the other hand, there are some clues as to the *nature* of the material in the core of the mound. The burnt wood, and burnt earth or turf, together with the fragments of fired clay possessing buff/red surfaces and dark grey cores, point to the dumping of waste material from some form of early kiln, using wood and possibly turf as a fuel. Again there is no record of such in the area in a sufficiently early context, but there does remain the unusually named *Beehouses* of Horsley as a possible tradition. To go further on the present evidence would be to chase too many shadows.

Acknowledgements

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The City Architect's Department has kindly undertaken to mark the line of the road in some suitable manner when the area is grassed.

¹⁸ See e.g. Oliver's *Map of Newcastle* (1830).

¹⁹ F. W. Brooks, *A Medieval Brick-Yard at Hull* in *Journ. Br. Arch. Assoc.* 2, IV (1939), 151-174.