

ART. XXX.—*A Contribution to the Map of Roman Cumberland.* By JOHN DIXON, ESQ., Whitehaven.

Read at that place, December 11th, 1877.

THE Roman occupation of West Cumberland appears to have been maintained by the principal stations of Old Carlisle, Papcastle, Ellenborough, Moresby, and Hardknot, aided by several smaller camps, as Malbray, one on the right or northern bank of the Derwent, near Burrow Walls, Egremont, Muncaster, Cold Fell, Ponsonby Fell, Maiden Castle, and others. Some of these have had but little notice. The finding of a large fragment of an altar near Burrow Walls* reasonably leads to the conclusion that an important creek, such as the Derwent was in those days, would not be left unguarded by a military people like the Romans. The same consideration applies to the passage of the Ehen, at Egremont, on the main road leading north and south.

The existence of these numerous fortified places, indicating a troubled frontier and a hostile population, leads to a consideration of the roads, wisely designed and skilfully made, by which they were kept in communication, many remains of which still exist. "The Roman armies, in their advance into a barbarous country, were accustomed to raise earthen ramparts round their camps in which they rested between successive day's marches. If they intended, as was generally the case, to return for a second or third campaign, they opened pathways through the woods or across the morasses, marked out by two parallel trenches, and to these they gave the name of *limities*. If they contemplated a more permanent occupation, they proceeded

* Engraved in the Lapidarium Septentrionale, No. 905.

to build a road in place of the *limes*, excavating the loose soil between the trenches, and filling in the space with successive layers of concrete and squared stones, raised often to a considerable height above the surrounding country." And, although centuries of change, the effect of floods in some places, of cultivation in others, and the growth and accumulation of soil everywhere, have so altered the face of the country that we may now be unable to draw a perfect map of Roman Cumberland, yet the portions of roads still existing are so numerous that a careful examination of the district, aided by reliable tradition, will, I am persuaded, enable us with certainty to fix upon many more, and also to identify as of Roman origin numerous roads now in common use.

On the south-east of the country, on or near the old pack-horse road from Whitehaven to Kendal, the Roman road is found to the north of the "Shire Stones." It follows the right bank of the Duddon by Gaitscale to Black Hall, from where it makes to the Hardknott Pass, on the south side of which it is found well paved a hundred and fifty yards in length and two-and-a-half yards wide. A little way down the western side, the same length of road is found four yards wide, leading in a direct line to the south side of the camp. From Hardknott northwards, there is not for many miles any certain trace of the road, but the presumption is that the present road to Whitehaven is on or near it. Approaching Egremont, at two places where the turnpike road has been opened, traces of a well-paved former road were found near to "Street Bridge," not far from which is "Causeway," corrupted to "Keesay" Bridge. Most worthy of note is that paved road recently found at St Thomas' Cross, where, for a hundred and forty yards, or as far as the cutting extended, there was discovered at a varying depth below the existing surface, a compact pavement resembling undoubted Roman work as seen in East Cumberland. This more ancient road dipped to a little ravine on the
south,

south, which is evidently crossed at an open wath, the passage of which would be always easy; it was composed of the boulders of the neighbourhood, roughly paved in, and pointed in the direction of Egremont.

At Egremont the road would cross the Ehen by an easy ford where the old bridge stood; both banks of the river are low, and the stream shallow. The position of this ford has evidently given name* to the place. There is every reason to suppose that this ford would be carefully held by the Romans, as it long continued to be by invaders who came after them. The general opinion of those who have examined the place is that a station occupied the ground whereon the castle stands.

North of Egremont the road was in the early part of this century dug up and removed from farm lands: it would lead to near Croft End, and there turning, pass through a field south of Cleator Hall, and thence along the present main street of Cleator village, a few fields to the north of which we again come with certainty upon it in a field called "London Street," at about a hundred and thirty yards from Wath Brow. The road here was, within living memory, used by carts on their way from the Moor to Cleator, with the street of which it is in a direct line. When land here is turned over by the plough, the site of the road may be known by the difference in colour of the soil and the abundance of boulder stones, used in constructing the road. Producing the line of this road northward, there are evident traces of it proceeding through fields to the Mere Stone, north of which it would for some distance be identical with the existing highway. Again the road is found in Frizington Park, a compact well-made road about twenty feet broad and eighteen inches below the

* Still preserved in the peasant speech of the district, Anglo-Saxon *Egor-muth*, or with its Danish termination *Egor-mond*; the Wath or Ford on the main-road north and south being directly from the mouth of a rivulet. The Norman termination, *mout*, was given by Le Meschin, who built his castle on the supposed site.

present

present surface ; and here also, as in Cleator, the road can be readily found when the soil has been ploughed. Near to the road in Frizington Park extensive foundations were a few years ago dug out. This portion has happily been laid down on the Ordnance Map, and if its line be extended in a south-west direction it will coincide with the road near Wath Brow and the main street of Cleator. North of Frizington Park the road must, on account of the nature of the ground, have diverged to the right or left to join that in Lamplugh. Most likely it would take to the right hand, by Pasture Gate, where the road northward is in good line with that in Lamplugh. The Roman engineers no doubt preferred a straight line of road, as do our railway engineers, and like them, if circumstances or the nature of the ground required, would diverge to the right or left. It is to be remarked that the road in Lamplugh is in direct line with that from Ennerdale to Calderbridge, and this may help to account for the camp on Cold Fell, and for the presence of an inscribed Roman stone formerly in a fence near Hale. Paved roads are said to exist near the camp on Ponsonby Fell. On the slope of Lowca Brow, north of Moresby, is found the same indication of an old road that led me to fix upon the one in Cleator. North of Ellenborough the same stony appearances may be found. It is more than probable the present road from Moresby to Cockermouth is in many places on a still older road of the Romans. By the side of it flourishes one of the most local of British plants, *senecio saracenicus*, a medicinal plant said to be most frequently found near Roman sites, and from its specific name may have been introduced by the Moors, who garrisoned some of the Roman stations.

In offering a contribution to the map of Roman Cumberland, I notice the number and position of the Roman camps, indicating a strong military occupation, that the necessity of rapid communication between these camps would demand a system of good roads, and that in some remarkable

markable instances we find these roads still existing, and evident portions of them in actual use. I incline to think that others may yet be found, and suggest that good search be made in spring and autumn when fields are ploughed, and, where it can be done, a trench one or two feet deep dug across where the road is looked for. The aid of etymology is doubtful, but it is a help not to be altogether despised. When we find the same name occurring near undoubted Roman sites, and again find it but little changed where such occupations may be looked for, we may pause and consider both the name and situation.
