

ART. IV.—*Roman roads in Cumberland. A note on some discoveries in 1959.* By R. L. BELLHOUSE, B.Sc.

Read at Carlisle, April 11th, 1959.

I. MARYPORT TO OLD CARLISLE.

IN the school garden at Fletchertown there stands a red sandstone pillar fashioned to look like a Roman altar. It bears two cast-iron plaques on its sides; the smaller faces to the west and reads thus: "In memory of Mr John Moore of Mealsgate. OB 1840 AE 74"; the larger faces to the south and reads as follows: "Here was the famous Roman military road that connected Ellenborough and Old Carlisle two of the fortified cities in Hadrian's Barrier from sea to sea circiter CXXI." I am most grateful to Mr John Bryson of Fletchertown for telling me of the existence of this monument; it led me urgently to review the course of the road shown on the plan facing page 52, CW2 lvi. I am equally grateful to Mr Isaac Williamson of Waverbank who told me exactly where to look for remains of the road on his land. The remains are substantial and were visible in plough as a trail of boulders across the second and third fields to west of Bellows Wood; their appearance exactly fits J. B. Bailey's description of the remains nearer Maryport (CW2 iv 250 f.).

The correct course of the road can be plotted by marking the centre of the round end of Bellows Wood and drawing a line from thence to the trigonometrical mark at Watch Hill. The road leaves the main highway about 200 yds. to east of the wood, and its alignment is clearly based on the uninterrupted view between these points. We now find that the second quotation on page 52 (*loc. cit.*) describes the road with satisfying accuracy.

II. OLD CARLISLE TO PAPCASTLE.

Extensive drainage work on the farm Threapland Leys has proved the course of the road between 169384 and 161372. Behind Wharrels Hill where the *agger* is visible a small section of road was bared and found to be a laid cobble surface. Farther east, where we had reason to think that the road had not been disturbed by the plough, pupils from the Nelson-Thomlinson school, Wigton, examined it and found the same construction. I hope their joint report will appear in *Transactions*.

III. KESWICK TO WHINLATTER.

Boys from the Brathay Hall Exploration Group under the direction of Mr McCarthy and Mr Ford sectioned the visible remains in the field adjoining Braithwaite Station. Side ditches and substantial metalling were proved. They also examined several of the puzzling terraced tracks on the Lorton side of the Pass. I look forward to the completion of their report with great interest.

IV. EGREMONT TO ST. BEES.

Certain charters in the Register of St. Bees contain references to roads; charters 171, 174 and 175 provide interesting additional evidence for the course of the main highway between Papcastle and Egremont near Rowrah and Cleator, and we can be certain in these instances that the road mentioned was the Roman one.

Charter 370, which gives the bounds of the Franchise of St. Bees, mentions two roads, and a point on one of them can be located with certainty. Now a footnote to this charter (page 367) comments on the manner in which the monks made their boundary marks by erecting rudely sculptured crosses; two of these survived into modern times to be recorded on the Ordnance Survey plans. On the 6-in. sheet LXXII NE. at the Cleator road end (989121) is marked "St. Bees Stone," by Ellergill Bridge

(988110) appears the legend "Cross (site of)." Ellergill Beck in the charter is simply Ellerbek and the significant passage is as follows: ". . . ubi Ellerbek crosse situatur juxta viam tendentem ad Egremonde . . ." The modern road at this point links St. Bees with Egremont in the direct and forthright manner we associate with Roman engineering.

Two main alignments are clear from the map; the longest from Outrigg (974116) to the hill at (994109), 364 ft. O.D., once the site of "standing stones," and from this point, turning only a few degrees north, the other is on a line leading directly to Egremont castle. To my eye the road is Roman but thorough fieldwork is needed.

Circumstantial evidence always has some value and in this connexion it is worth noting that the castle might have been sited at a road junction, certainly it watched an important line of communication, and a branch road to the north-west could have influenced the founders of the Priory in their choice of site.

V. RAVENGLASS.

A road northwards from the fort would have to cross the river Mite. If the Roman crossing point could be found it would be the best place from which to attempt to trace its course towards Egremont. With this in mind I went to the place where Miss Fair described "an ancient ford." Her paper appears in CW2 xxix 259 f. with two photographs and a sketch plan, and the place was easily found. Despite her confident description of a substantial causeway I could not find it. From the south bank two lines of *stepping stones* cross the river and converge on a point on the north bank. The lower one is that described as "West Kerb of Causeway" on the photograph facing page 262, its direction is north to south; the other a little upstream is the "East Kerb of Causeway" on the photograph facing page 259, and its direction is east to west.

There is no case for a hard ford hereabouts because, once the tidal mud on the banks has been safely negotiated, the river has a hard gravel bed, and it can be crossed without difficulty at any point for several hundred yards both up- and downstream. As to visible remains of road on the north bank when viewed from the opposite bank, I was at first deceived as Miss Fair was, page 260; but I crossed the river to examine the "line of heavy flat stones forming apparently the road bed, with another layer some 18 in. or 2 ft. (of similar stones), above." The river-bank here is subject to erosion when the river is in flood; it stands in a vertical face some 3 ft. high above a mud bank; the silt of which it is composed has a columnar structure and when pieces fall away they lie on the mud below, and from a distance look like a row of roughly squared stones.

Whether or not there was an ancient ford here is still an open question, but as a starting point for a road survey I am forced to rule it out for lack of evidence.