

ART. V.—*A cross-section of the Roman road in Casterton, Westmorland.* By JANE M. EWBANK.

Partly read at the site, September 12th, 1958.

DURING the Autumn Meeting of 1958 the Society paid a short visit to the small-scale excavations I had made across the Roman road in Casterton parish: a section was cut across the road at a point, O.S. 626805, where it crosses the pasture field no. 99 as a low causeway (see Diagram, Fig. 1). It is the trunk road from Chester to Carlisle, believed to be the first Roman road to Carlisle¹ and to have been constructed under Agricola about A.D. 79; it is section 7c according to Mr Ivan Margary's numbering.² Owing to the difficult, hilly route it takes through North Lancashire and Westmorland its importance declined after the construction of a road linking Carlisle with York and the South via the easier gradients of the Stainmore Gap.

A trench, 2 ft. wide and 36 ft. long, was cut through the causeway, and it was not long before we discovered that the excavations would be hampered by the unexpectedly high water-table in the field — some 3 ft. below the datum line and in places under a foot below the surface. Despite this, we were able to get a complete section of the road, revealing its construction.

The road was built on a layer of brushwood which, owing to the high water-table, was in a good state of preservation. It contained the remains of beetles (kindly identified by Mr F. H. Day as a ground-beetle, a ladybird and a weevil), hazelnuts and twigs (kindly identified by Mr Ernest Blezard), and some quite large branches. This could possibly be part of a corduroy construction, to prevent the road from sinking into what appears to have

¹ Cf. Percival Ross's study, CW2 xx 1-15.

² *Roman Roads in Britain* ii, 109 ff.

been a marsh: compare the corduroy road found at waterhead, Ambleside, recorded by H. S. Cowper (CW2 ii 31-37). The presence of a scattering of charcoal in the clay subsoil under the centre of the road supports this theory.

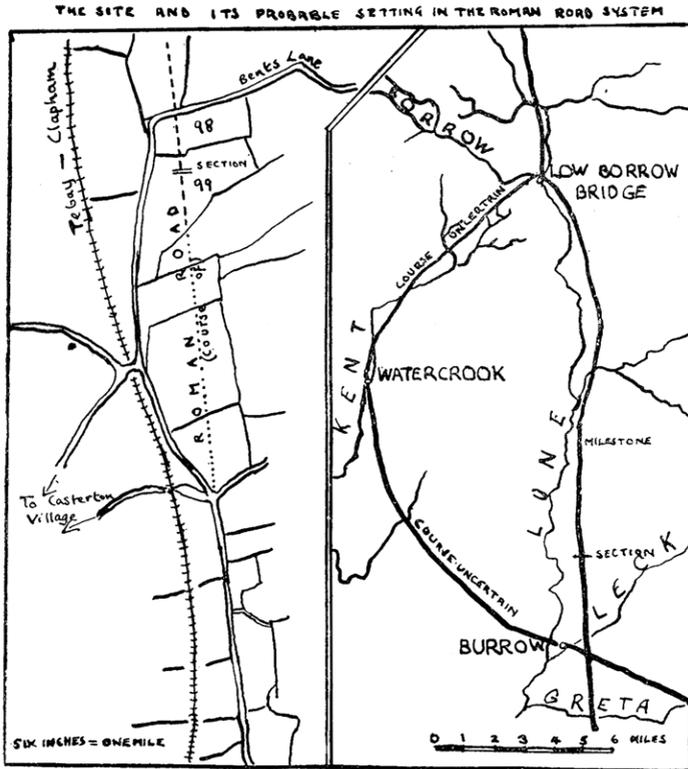
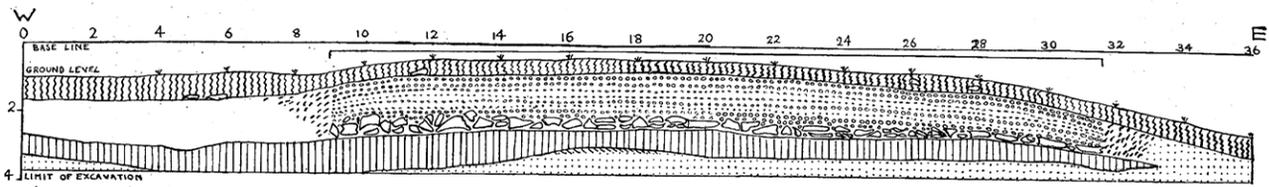


FIG. 1.

The road itself was constructed with a foundation layer of large river cobbles, measuring 22 ft. 9 in. across. There were no large kerbstones at the sides of it. The metalling consisted of a layer of tightly packed small stones and gravel, about 1 ft. thick. The surface showed no signs of having been paved, but it had a definite camber: see



A CROSS-SECTION OF THE ROMAN ROAD AT CASTERTON EXCAVATED IN SEPT. 1958



FIG. 2.

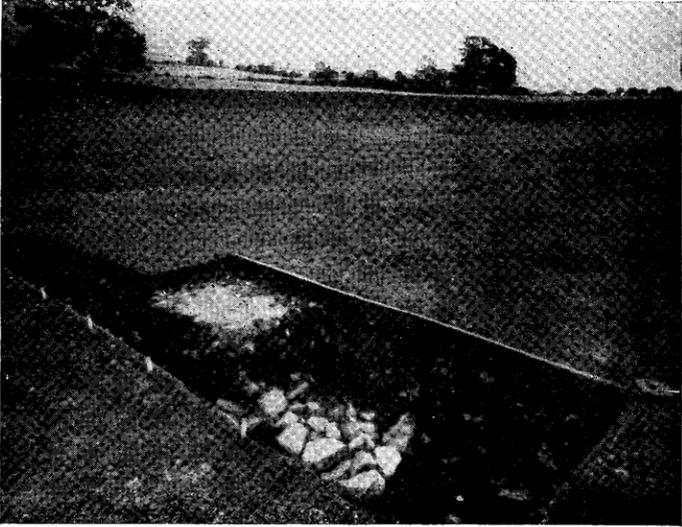


Photo: Miss K. S. Hodgson.

PL. I, 1.—The widened trench, demonstrating the three chief layers of construction.



Photo: Mrs. E. M. Maples.

PL. I, 2.—General view of the section looking east.

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the section, Fig. 2. The trench was widened 2 ft. for a length of 9 ft. so as to demonstrate these layers more clearly: see the photograph, reproduced as Plate I, 1.

The surface of the road lay some 6 in. below the turf of the field, and showed no signs of having been disturbed by ploughing. It was gently cambered, and fell away more steeply to the east than to the west. On the western side the brushwood layer was separated from the humus by a layer of leached, post-Roman silt accumulation. To the east, the brushwood layer petered out, leaving the natural humus and clay subsoil.

The western end of the trench was extended some 10 ft. in the hopes of finding a ditch, but without success; and the natural layers were exactly the same in another trial-hole 10 ft. further west.

I must thank Mr J. Martindale for permission to dig in his pasture. Miss Sylvie Nicholle and Mr R. A. C. Lowndes gave me valuable help in excavating, and the boys of Cressbrook School filled in the excavation afterwards. Miss K. S. Hodgson and Mrs E. M. Maples gave me permission to reproduce their photographs (Plate I, 1 and Plate I, 2), and Professor Birley has given me much help and encouragement.