ART. VIII. – *Medieval Roads in the Diocese of Carlisle.* By BRIAN PAUL HINDLE, B.A., M.Sc., Ph.D., F.R.G.S.

Read at Temple Sowerby, July 8th, 1977.

THE area chosen for study in this paper is that of the medieval diocese of Carlisle, comprising roughly north and central Cumberland and north Westmorland. Despite the comparative remoteness of the area, a substantial amount of information survives about its early roads. Most of this is summarized in W. G. Collingwood's inventories of ancient monuments, where each entry is accompanied by a brief but sufficient reference, except for roads in Westmorland where he made use of MS. material later published by J. F. Curwen.[1] While the material is comparatively abundant, it has not been much studied from the standpoint of its topographical implications; only the Roman road system has attracted, and is still attracting, the attention of workers in this field.

In this paper the objective is a study of the medieval road system, the roads which in C. T. Flower's memorable phrase, "made and maintained themselves".[2] The sources will include some of those already noted, but also the itineraries of two medieval kings and a bishop, a mid-14th century map, and several post-medieval maps and road books, sources that have been but little used hitherto to throw light on medieval lines of communication in the area. Many of these medieval roads, not having the systematic construction of the Roman roads, are now difficult to trace, either because they have gone out of use and are no longer visible in the landscape or because their continued use makes them difficult to date. Archaeological evidence which is unconfirmed by other sources is thus very difficult to use either because it is uncertain when a particular road came into use, or because of the poor distribution of the evidence which cannot be used to reconstruct the whole of the route network. This article will suggest that a geographical approach to this problem is a useful and indeed necessary preliminary to archaeological work. It is convenient to start from the Roman road network because of its continued use in whole or in part in medieval times.

Roman Roads

The area which was later to become the diocese of Carlisle formed one of the northern borders of the Roman Empire, and the most obvious feature was the wall built by Hadrian; this was well served by roads both parallel to it and connecting it with the rest of the province. The road behind the wall east of Carlisle is called Stanegate, this name being a mixture of Old English and Norse meaning "stony road", which attests to its continued use during the periods of the Anglian and Norse colonisations. The main route to the south seems to have been *via* Brougham and Low Borrow Bridge to Kendal though there was also a road from Low Borrow Bridge to Kirkby Lonsdale, whilst another road led to Brough and across Stainmore into Yorkshire. Also leading from Brougham is the famous High Street which reaches about 2,700 feet above sea-level; probably never intended as a vehicular route it still seems to have carried foot and animal traffic during

the Middle Ages when it was known somewhat inaccurately as "Brettestreete" (the Britons' road).[3] A detailed survey of this route has yet to be carried out.

There are two other main roads, the so-called Maiden Way from Kirkby Thore to Bewcastle and the road from Carlisle to Papcastle. The Roman wall proper ended at Bowness, but it was continued south by a line of mile fortlets which are still being investigated, and these were probably served by several roads. Thomas West, an early visitor to the Lakes, noted another road leading from Old Penrith towards Keswick,[4] and this has been tentatively linked through to Papcastle and perhaps even to Caermote.[5] The map depicting the Roman roads of this area (Fig. 1) is derived from the Ordnance Survey map,[6] the work of I. D. Margary,[7] and recent local work.[8] Detailed archaeological work is still proceeding and the network is still far from complete, though no fort or settlement is far from a known or presumed road.
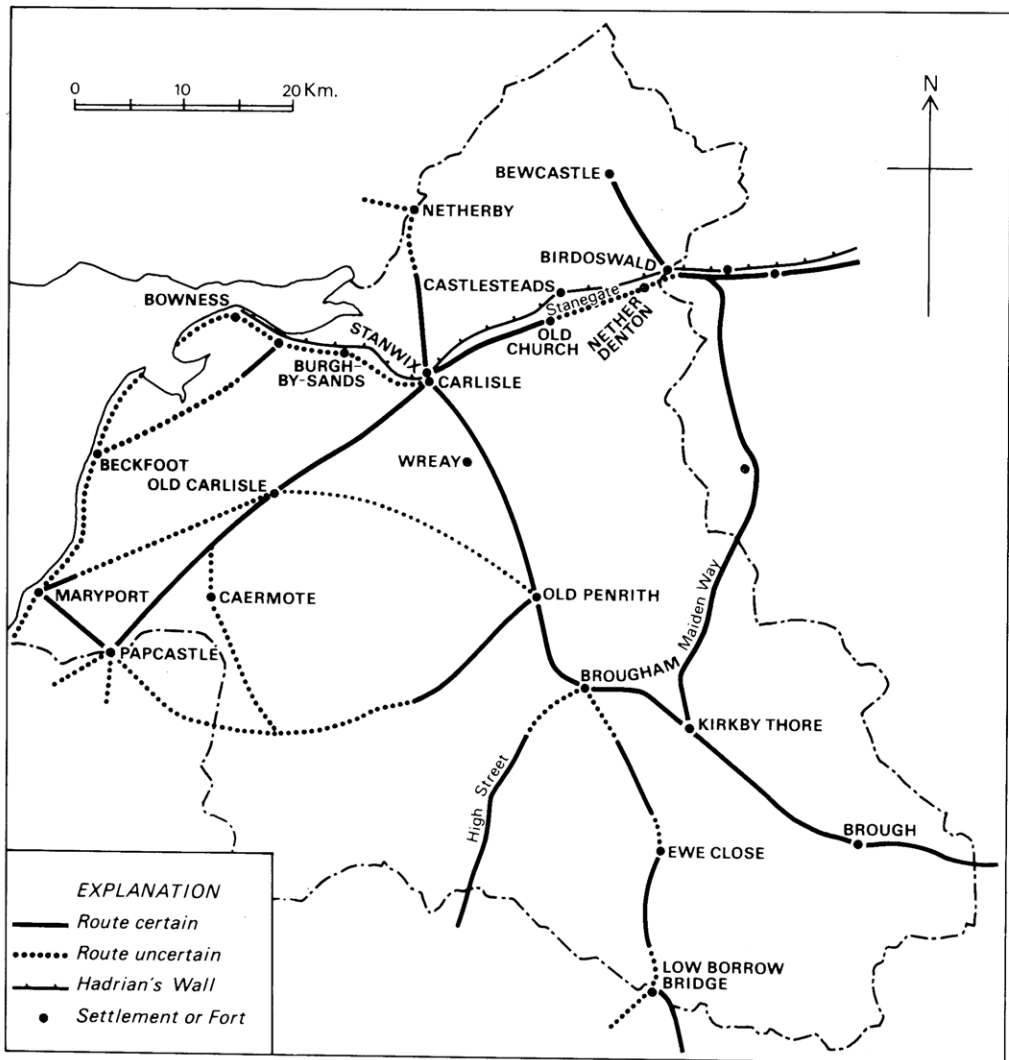

FIG. 1. – Roman roads in the Diocese of Carlisle.

Medieval Roads

After the Norman invasion this border area was continually in dispute between England and Scotland and consequently the roads must have been of great importance. During the twelfth century several great abbeys were established, including Carlisle, Holm Cultram and Shap, which had aims other than their principal religious ones; for instance they helped reinforce the Kings' influence in the north and encouraged new settlements and agriculture. This expansion of the church was mainly in the lowland areas; no abbeys and relatively few churches were established in the dales, and consequently "corpse roads" became a feature of the landscape, being used to convey the dead from isolated villages to the nearest church. There are several of these tracks in the diocese – for example from Mardale to Shap – but the problem is that the existence of such roads at any given time is difficult to determine, and we can have no clear idea of their total extent or usage.

The same problem also applies to many of the passes in the northern Lake District, for example the Gatescarth and Nan Bield routes out of the head of Mardale, both of which are well designed with zig-zags to ease the gradient. Other upland tracks include that from Threlkeld to Bassenthwaite *via* Whitewater Dash and from Thirlmere to Borrowdale *via* Watendlath Fell. The most famous today is Sty Head pass; it seems certain however that even this route was not causeyed until the sixteenth century.[9] The date of construction of these tracks cannot be ascertained, nor can the amount of use made of them in medieval times. The most detailed examination of such routes concludes that they "must have been in use since men first began to frequent the high country . . . many are in certain parts causeyed and metalled . . . such road construction is unlikely to date before the mid, or late, seventeenth century".[10]

There are, however, several specific references to roads in medieval documents; Holm Cultram abbey had a right of way "by the ordinary road through Bassenthwaite" from 1290 to 1327, and Furness abbey had a similar privilege on the road from Castlerigg (Keswick) towards Windermere.[11] These are examples of roads which had come into use during the Middle Ages, but there are many instances of the Roman roads then still being in use; for example, references to Kirkby Thore at the end of the twelfth century mention the fact that "The King's Highway from Carlisle comes from Sowerby towards Appleby".[12] Other examples are given by C. M. L. Bouch and G. P. Jones,[13] including references to the *magna strata* from Kendal to Shap which was later referred to as the *magna via* called Stayngate at Shap.[14] The methods employed by the church in the upkeep of roads seem to have included the granting of indulgences; forty days of remitted penance were promised by Bishop Welton for anyone working on a boggy stretch at Wragmyre between Carlisle and Penrith in 1354.[15]

Documentary evidence exists in much greater profusion for bridges; J. F. Curwen, for example, lists twelve bridges known to have existed in the fourteenth century.[16] There is also an article about bridges across the Eden at Stanwix which makes reference to post-Roman roads in the immediate vicinity.[17] In general, however, the location of bridges does not help in tracing the line of major roads, though it does pinpoint certain well-used river crossings which were replaced by bridges.

Commercial life in this area was later to develop than in the rest of England, although Carlisle, Cockermouth and Appleby all returned members to Parliament before 1300,[18] and markets were also held at Keswick and Penrith by that date. Carlisle's population in

1348 is estimated by J. C. Russell to have been 1,700, and the only towns within a hundred miles were Newcastle (6,600), Durham (2,000) and York (18,000); the only other centre likely to have affected the direction of commerce was London with its population of 60,000.[19] The fact that there was no large town to the south of the diocese explains the relative inferiority of roads in that direction. The nearest large towns were Newcastle and York, and accordingly access to them from Carlisle was well provided for, and presumably well-maintained. The traffic to London was probably largely channelled through York, although some may have gone down the old Roman road through Lancashire, shown on the Gough map (see below).

Medieval Itineraries

The evidence of medieval itineraries is uniquely valuable in that we know that the subject of the intinerary actually travelled between the various places mentioned, and in the case of the king probably had a large baggage train as well which would require a reasonable surface on which to travel. There are many problems involved in using such itineraries; in particular, in local studies the main problem is that we do not know the exact route taken.[20] As far as royal itineraries are concerned, this was generally an area where kings seldom came. John visited Carlisle three times using only three routes (twice each); from Carlisle to Hexham, Brough and Kendal. He presumably travelled on (or parallel to) Roman roads from Carlisle to Penrith, and again from Kirkby Thore into Yorkshire as well as along Stanegate (Fig. 2).

Itinerary of King John in the Diocese of Carlisle[21]

1201	February	16-19	Hexham
		20	Irthington
		21-23	Carlisle
		25	Kirkoswald
		26-27	Ravensworth (Yorkshire)
1206	February	14-15	Richmond
		18-20	Carlisle
	March	1	Chester
1208	August	14	Hexham
		17	Carlisle
		19	Whinfell (near Brougham)
		20-21	Kirkby Kendal

Edward I visited this area a good deal in connection with his Scottish campaigns, and indeed he died at Burgh-by-Sands. He also seems to have used Stanegate and the whole of the Roman road from Carlisle into Yorkshire, though his precise routes into Scotland are less easy to ascertain; in August 1300 he certainly arrived in the diocese after crossing the Solway at Drumburgh.

In Figure 2, which shows the plotted itineraries of both John and Edward, the road east from Carlisle seems to have been Stanegate, for John stopped at Irthington and Edward at Linstock and Lanercost.
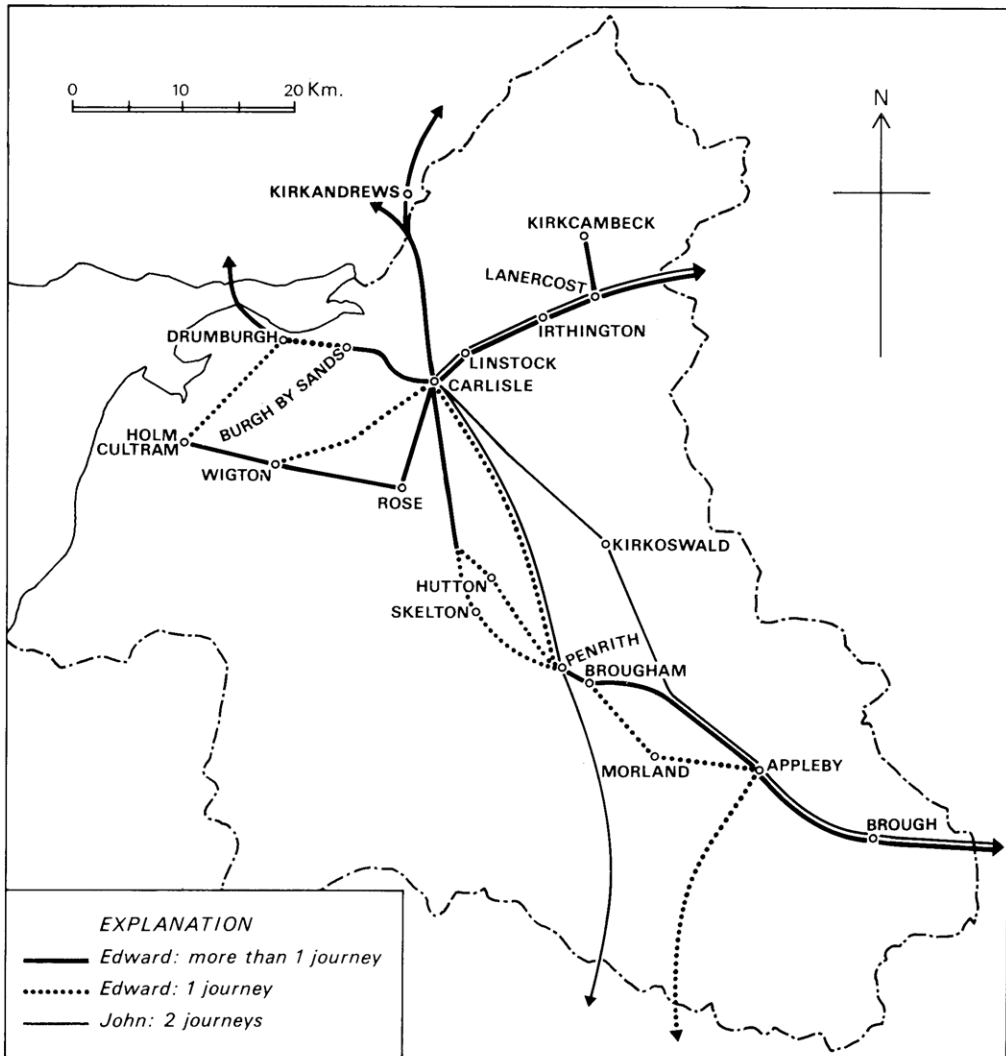
FIG. 2. – The Itineraries of King John and Edward I.

Itinerary of Edward I in the Diocese of Carlisle[22]

1280	August	29	Bowes
		30	Appleby
	September	3-4	Skelton
		7-11	Carlisle
		14	Newcastle

1292	October	2	Casterton (Kirkby Lonsdale)
		3	Appleby
		4	Morland
		5	Brougham
		7	Hutton in the Forest
		8	Carlisle
		13	Berwick

1298	September	5	Lochmaben (Dumfries)
		6	"Lambruscayt"
		8-26	Carlisle and Stanwix
		26-27	Kirk Andrews (Esk)
		28	Castleton (Roxburgh)

1300	June	21	Bowes
		22	Brough under Stainmore
		23	Brougham
		24	Skelton
	July	25-4	Carlisle
		4	"Rocheland" (Rockcliffe?)
		5	Ecclefechan (Dumfries)

1300	August	30	Dornoch (Dumfries)
		31	Drumburgh
	September	2-16	Holm Cultram
		16-27	La Rose and Ravenhead (Raughtonhead)
		27	Wigton
	October	28-11	Holm Cultram
		11	Wigton
		12-16	Carlisle
		16	Burgh (by Sands)
		17	Annan (Dumfries)

1300	November	2	Dumfries
		3-15	Carlisle
		15	La Rose
		16	Carlisle
		16-17	Appleby
		18	Brough under Stainmore
		19	Bowes

1306	August	18	Newbrough (Northumberland; on Stanegate)
		20	Carlisle
		21	Newbrough
1306	September	1	Newbrough
		1-2	Carlisle
		3	Newbrough
1306	September	20-21	Thirlwall
		22	East Denton
		23	Newbrough
		24-25	West Denton
		26	Thirlwall
		26-28	West Denton
	October	1	Carlisle
		1-2	Lanercost
		3	Carlisle
		4-5	Lanercost
		6	Carlisle
		7-9	Lanercost
		10	Carlisle
1307	January	10-25	Lanercost
		25	Carlisle
	March	26-4	Lanercost
		4	Kirkcambeck (Gough gives Cambo, N'land)
		5	Carlisle
		6-10	Linstock
		10	Carlisle
		11	Rickerby
		12	Linstock
	June	12-27	Carlisle
	July	27-6	Carlisle and "Caldcotes"
		6-7	Burgh upon the Sands

This diocese is fortunate in that a medieval bishop's itinerary exists for the period 1292 to 1324. The itinerary of John de Halton is not particularly full, the best year being 1294 for which there are thirty references to the bishop's whereabouts. Nevertheless there are two hundred and four references to him being in various places in the diocese; a listing of these would be more tedious than valuable, and the reader is referred to the original itinerary.[23] If we presume that he generally stayed in one place for most of the time between the various records of his location, then at least we should be able to determine the routes he favoured most, even if the result is not particularly accurate for routes covered less often.

The pattern of his journeys, depicted in Figure 3, is a curious one; of the six major religious houses in the diocese he does not appear to have visited two at all (Shap and

Armathwaite), he is recorded as visiting Holm Cultram and Wetheral only once, and Lanercost only twice though it lay on his route out of the diocese to Newcastle. We know that all these houses were flourishing at the start of his period of office; the papal taxation for them was almost £500 in 1291 although in 1318 it amounted to only £66 because of the Scottish border raids; Armathwaite and Lanercost were then described as "Waste" and paid no tax at all. Bouch notes that Kendal escaped these raids, and suggests that this was perhaps because there was no good road to it.[24] As far as the ordinary parish churches were concerned the bishop seems to have visited only 23 of the 93 in the diocese listed by Bouch.[25] The bishop's itinerary does, however, appear to use Roman roads from Carlisle through Penrith to Brough, and much of Stanegate which passes close to Lanercost Priory. For the rest, his journeys reflect his destinations rather than the availability of roads: his most frequently travelled route was in fact from Carlisle to the manor of Rose where he built the first stone tower in 1297; Edward I stayed there in 1300.[26]
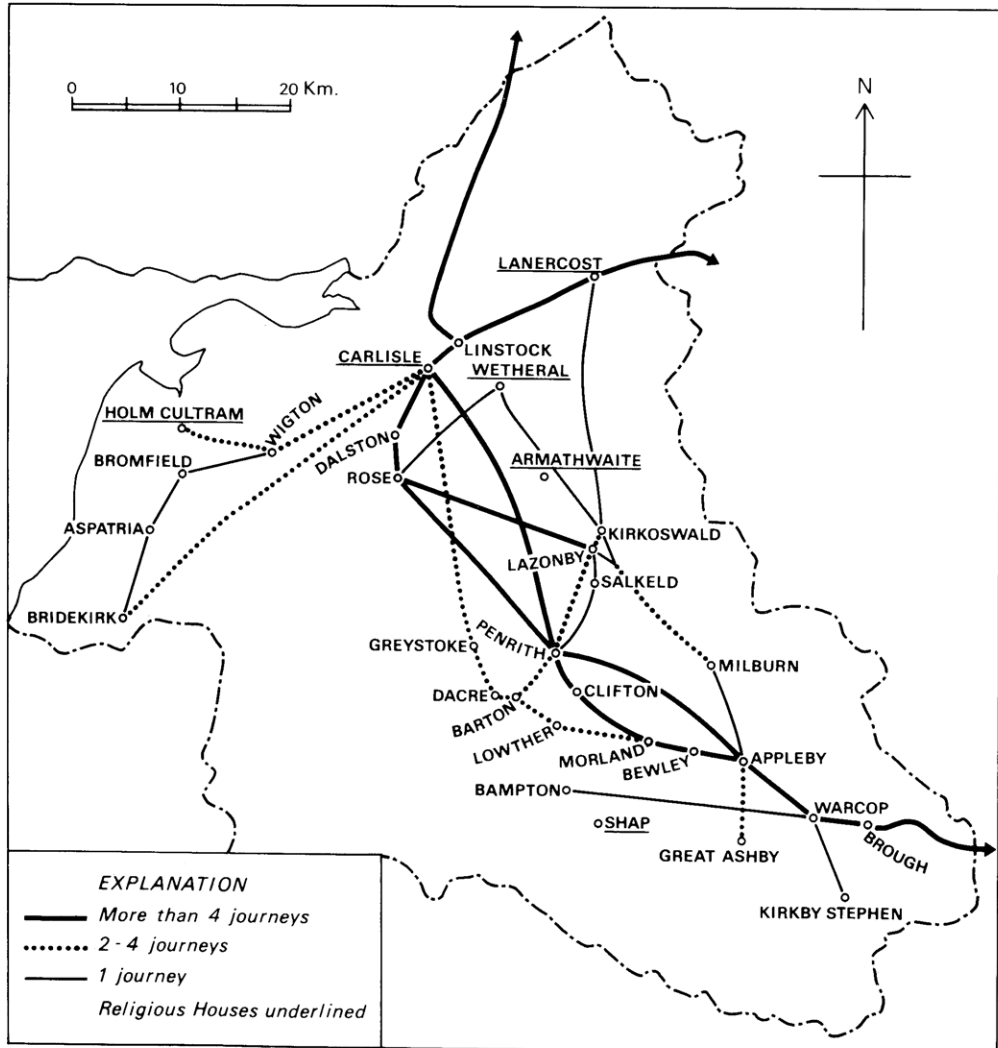

FIG. 3. – The Itinerary of John de Halton.

Cartographic Evidence

Perhaps the clearest evidence for the course of medieval roads is given on the Gough map, named after the antiquarian Richard Gough, who noted its existence in 1780.[27] It appears to have been drawn in about 1360 and it is most remarkable in that it shows a network of 2,940 miles of roads in England and Wales. About forty per cent of these roads are along the line of old Roman roads although this figure is far higher in north west England.[28] It does not necessarily follow that a Roman road was in use if it appears on this map and similarly the omission of a Roman road does not mean that it was not in use. The Roman wall is clearly shown, but there is no indication of the route from Carlisle to Newcastle. The Gough map depicts three routes from Carlisle (Fig. 4); one leads across into Yorkshire to the Great North Road, the second through Kirkby Lonsdale to Doncaster, and the third to Kendal and Lancashire. Perhaps the most important feature is that the Roman road due south of Brougham is no longer given; the route goes instead by way of Shap with a branch descending to the Lune to rejoin the Roman road to Kirkby Lonsdale. The Gough map shows a total of fifteen places in the diocese, as opposed for example to the four shown in Cheshire; this is surprising in view of the fact that the diocese was not much larger than Cheshire and was certainly less well populated. The reason for the greater detail is probably the strategic importance of this area in the mid-fourteenth century; six of the places are on the roads to Carlisle, and seven could be regarded as border towns. In addition, Penrith, Greystoke and Naworth all had licences to build pele towers before 1353;[29] Pendragon Castle was built about 1300,[30] and Burgh-by-Sands is perhaps included because Edward I died there.

In local studies use can be made of evidence of routes given by later map makers and writers, because in the absence of any systematic road-building, a road in use in the sixteenth century is quite likely to have been in continuous use throughout the Middle Ages. One of the earliest writers to visit this area was John Leland whose fragmentary itinerary relates to the years around 1540; his visits coincided with the dissolution of the monasteries.[31] His route seems to have taken him from Kendal to Appleby, Brougham, Penrith, Carlisle, Bowness on Solway, Burgh-by-Sands, and finally towards Newcastle.[32] He makes only the most general comments about his route, and never complains of the difficulty of travel. Greater detail is given by William Harrison in the preface to *Holinshed's Chronicles* (1586),[33] and by William Smith in 1588,[34] though even more detail is given a century later by John Ogilby in his route book of 1675,[35] and roads are also shown on Robert Morden's county maps produced for William Camden's *Britannia* in 1695.[36]

There are several drawbacks to the use of these maps; first the number of roads they show is generally inconsistent from county to county; for example Morden's maps of the East and West Ridings of Yorkshire show no roads at all whilst his map of Shropshire must have been able to lay a claim to have shown every by-road in that county. A second point is that by the time these maps appeared the landscape of many areas had been much altered by enclosure. Third, the accuracy of depiction of Harrison's and Morden's roads is often doubtful, and sometimes there is very little information; Harrison gives only two routes in this area; the first, to the south, starting not from Carlisle but from Cockermouth, and running along the eastern shore of Bassenthwaite instead of traversing Whinlatter as the turnpike was later to do:

Cockermouth to Kiswike	6 miles	Kiswike to Grocener (Grasmere)	8 miles
	Grocener to Kendale	14 miles	

and so on to London. Carlisle is cited only as the terminus of the second route into Galloway, *via* Redkirk, on the northern shore of the Solway, 330660:[37]

Carleill over the Ferie against Redkirke 4 miles.

The missing link from Carlisle to Cockermouth is given by Smith.[38] The route from Cockermouth to Kendal is also shown in Ogilby's route book although the distances given by Ogilby are 14, 12 and 17 miles respectively (these were statute miles as opposed to the rather inaccurate computed mileages given by Harrison).[39] There are four other routes given by Ogilby (Fig. 4);[40] the first was a route from Carlisle to Penrith, Shap and Kendal, confirming the abandonment of the Roman road around Shap, and the second a route from Carlisle to Cockermouth closely following the old Roman road to Papcastle.
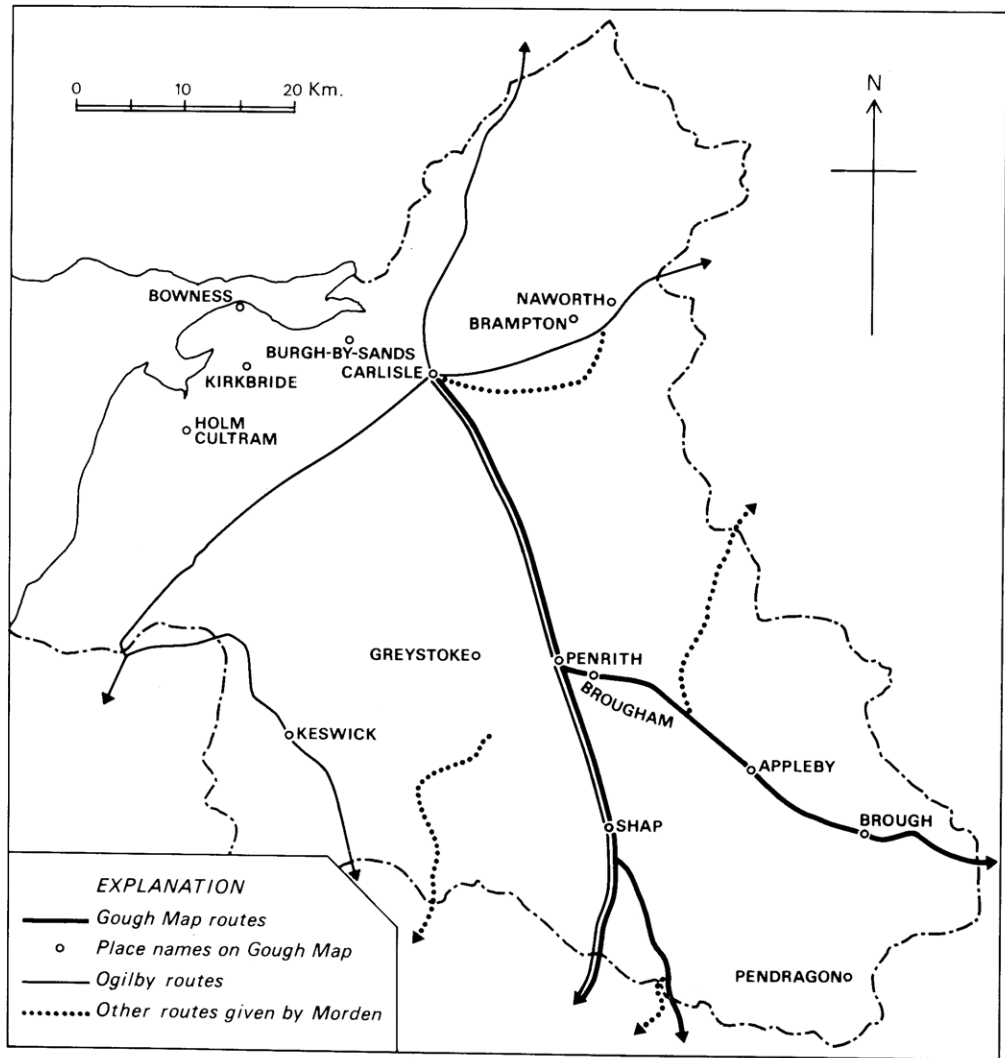

FIG. 4. – Roads shown on early maps of the Diocese of Carlisle.

The third was a route north from Carlisle leading up the Liddel valley eventually to Berwick. The fourth route leads to Newcastle and clearly follows a post-Roman route; it starts out on the opposite side of the river to Stanegate and crosses the Eden at Warwick Bridge. It then skirts around the south of Brampton to join the course of Stanegate for four miles at Chapelburn before veering away again at Greenhead to continue parallel to, but a mile south of, Stanegate in the south Tyne valley. Morden shows several of the routes already detailed and in addition a route over the Kirkstone pass which peters out alongside Ullswater, second an alternative route between Milton and Carlisle (described by Ogilby as the "worst way" to Carlisle), and last the Maiden Way from Kirkby Thore into the upper south Tyne valley.

Perhaps another line of evidence which could be followed up is the detail given in some of the early Turnpike Acts. Most of these acts started with a preamble stating that the existing roads were "ruinous" or "impassable" and that it was intended to repair and widen them. It is clearly impossible to say how long these pre-turnpike roads had been in existence. We know for instance that both the Orton to Shap and the Tebay to Kirkby Stephen Turnpikes (1760) replaced earlier tracks, though not wholly on the same routes.[41] It may well be possible to work back from this evidence, which dates from the period after 1740, though the link with any possible medieval routes is becoming rather tenuous. Indeed it cannot be stated too strongly that the process of inferring the existence of medieval roads from later written evidence must never be used without contemporary evidence.

Conclusion

The relative sizes of the boroughs suggest that in commercial terms the strongest links during the medieval period would be to Newcastle and York; a direct route to the south (to Chester) would be commercially unimportant. Evidently, other considerations such as defence were more important in determining the demand for, and the use of, roads in this direction. The roads centre on Carlisle, radiating out to Cockermouth, to Berwick and Newcastle, and to Penrith where the road divided to lead into both Yorkshire and Lancashire. The Roman roads are well represented, from Carlisle to Papcastle (Cockermouth) and Carlisle to Brough and Yorkshire. On the other hand the Roman road from Brougham to Kendal was no longer in use, having been replaced by a route to the west through Shap, although a branch does lead from this route back to the old Roman road through Tebay and the Lune gorge. The use of Stanegate from Carlisle seems to have been on the decline; it appears to have been used by the kings and the bishop, but both Ogilby and Morden give other, longer routes further south. Certainly the section of this road between Irthington and Chapelburn is no longer evident in the landscape, having long since been superseded by the later Ogilby route and the still later military road which cuts a middle course via Ruleholm Bridge and Brampton (the present B6264).[42]

The roads available seem to have been adequate both for the passage of goods and of people: there are no records of impassable roads in the diocese dating from this period. Indeed in 1281 Archbishop Wickname travelling just to the south of our area was able to cover a good deal of ground in a few days; he covered the 45 miles from St. Bees to Burton-in-Kendal in two days, and this is not an unusual example.[43] Certainly there is no evidence to suggest that the roads of medieval Carlisle were in the ruinous state into

which they fell after the fourteenth century – a decline often blamed on the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536-39. All the evidence points to the continued use and upkeep of the Roman roads together with the establishment of new routes which, with a little ecclesiastical help, made and maintained themselves in this strategically important diocese.

This has been a geographer's approach to an historical problem, an approach which is based on the cartographic representation of roads; lines on the map rather than on the ground. Such an approach has its obvious drawbacks, the chief of which is its inaccuracy at the local level, and so we must enter a plea for further research at the parish rather than the regional level if we are to discover exactly what did happen to the roads in this area between the departure of the Romans and the coming of the turnpikes.

Notes and References

[1] W. G. Collingwood, "An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments of Cumberland", CW2 xxiii 206 ff; "An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments of Westmorland and Lancashire – North-of-the-Sands", CW2 xxvi 1 ff; J. F. Curwen, "The Later Records relating to North Westmorland", *C.W. Record Ser.* viii (Kendal, 1932), 9-10.

[2] C. T. Flower, "Public Works in Medieval Law", vol. ii, *Seldon Soc.* 40 (1923) xvi.

[3] A. H. Smith, *The Place Names of Westmorland*, Part 1 EPNS XLII (1967) 21.

[4] T. West, *Guide to the Lakes* (1778), 147 ff.

[5] R. L. Bellhouse, "The Roman Road from Old Penrith to Keswick, and beyond", CW2 liv (1955) 17-27.

[5] Ordnance Survey, *Map of Roman Britain* (1956).

[7] I. D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain* (1967) 385-399.

[8] R. L. Bellhouse, "Roman Roads in Cumberland", CW2 lx (1960) 24-27. W. H. Pearsall and W. Pennington, *The Lake District: A Landscape History* (1973) 213-215.

[9] M. Lefebure, *Cumberland Heritage* (1970) 38-46

[10] *Ibid.*, 39.

[11] W. Rollinson, *A History of Man in the Lake District* (1967) 86.

[12] F. Grainger and W. G. Collingwood, *Register and Records of Holm Cultram* (Kendal, 1929) 61-66.

[13] C. M. L. Bouch and G. P. Jones, *The Lake Counties, 1500-1830* (Manchester, 1961) 18-21.

[14] F. W. Ragg, "Shap and Rosgill and some of the early owners" *CW2*, xiv (1914) 29 F. W. Ragg, "Two Documents relating to Shap Abbey", CW2 ix (1909) 271.

[15] C. M. L. Bouch, *Prelates and People of the Lake Counties* (Kendal, 1948) 87-88.

[16] J. F. Curwen, *op. cit.*

[17] R. Hogg, "The Historic Crossings of the River Eden at Stanwix and their associated road-systems", CW2 lii (1953) 131-158.

[18] *Return of the Names of Members of Parliament, 1213-1702* (1879).

[19] B. P. Hindle, *A Geographical Synthesis of the Road Network of Medieval England and Wales*, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Salford, 1973), 121-126. These figures are derived from J. C. Russell, *British Medieval Population* (Albuquerque, 1948).

[20] Hindle, *op. cit.*, 59-71.

[21] T. D. Hardy, "Itinerarium Johannis Regis Angliae", *Archaeologia*, xxii (1829), 124-160.

[22] H. Gough, *The Itinerary of King Edward the First* (Paisley, 1900), 2 vols.

[23] "The Register of John de Halton, Bishop of Carlisle, 1292-1324", *Canterbury and York Soc.* xii (1913) 238-242.

[24] C. M. L. Bouch, *op. cit.*, 68-69.

[25] *Ibid., 15.*

[26] J. F. Curwen, "The Castles and Fortified Towers of Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands", *C.W. Extra Ser.* viii (1913) 227-228.

[27] R. Gough, *British Topography* (1780) i 84.
A modern facsimile is given by E. J. S. Parsons, *The Map of Great Britain, c. 1360, known as the Gough Map,* memoir with amended reprint of part of a paper by F. M. Stenton on the road system of medieval England. (Oxford, Bodleian Library, 1958).

[28] B. P. Hindle, *The Roads of the Gough Map,* (Paper presented to the 5th International Conference on the History of Cartography, Warsaw, 1973), 4-5.

[29] J. F. Curwen, "The Castles . . ." *op. cit.,* 188-190.

[30] *Ibid.,* 121-122.

[31] J. Leland, *Itinerary, 1535-43,* (ed. L. T. Smith) 5 vols. (1906-1910).

[32] *Ibid,* Part IX, fols. 62-70.

[33] W. Harrison, "Description of Britain", in *Holinshed's Chronicles* (1586) i 414-421.

[34] W. Smith, *The Particular Description of England* (1588).

[35] J. Ogilby, *Britannia* (1675).

[36] R. Morden, *The County Maps of William Camden's Britannia, 1695* (Newton Abbot, 1972).

[37] W. Harrison, *op. cit.,* i 416, 418.

[38] W. Smith, *op. cit.*.

[39] J. Ogilby, *op. cit.,* i 96.

[40] *Ibid.,* i 38, 62, 86.

[41] J. F. Curwen, "The Later Records . . .", *op. cit.,* 5-6.

[42] T. H. Hodgson, "The Military Road in Cumberland", CW2 ii (1902) 274-281.

[43] C. M. L. Bouch, *op. cit.,* 140.

Since this paper was written, some of the problems of medieval roads have been discussed by the author in "The Road Network of Medieval England and Wales", *Journal of Historical Geography* 2, pt. 3 (1976), 207-221 and in *Lakeland Roads* (Clapham, 1977).

The maps used to illustrate this article have been drawn by Mr R. Oliver, of the Department of Geography, University of Salford.