

ART. V. – *The Roman Road between the Forts at Ambleside and Kendal*  
By ARTHUR THORNTON

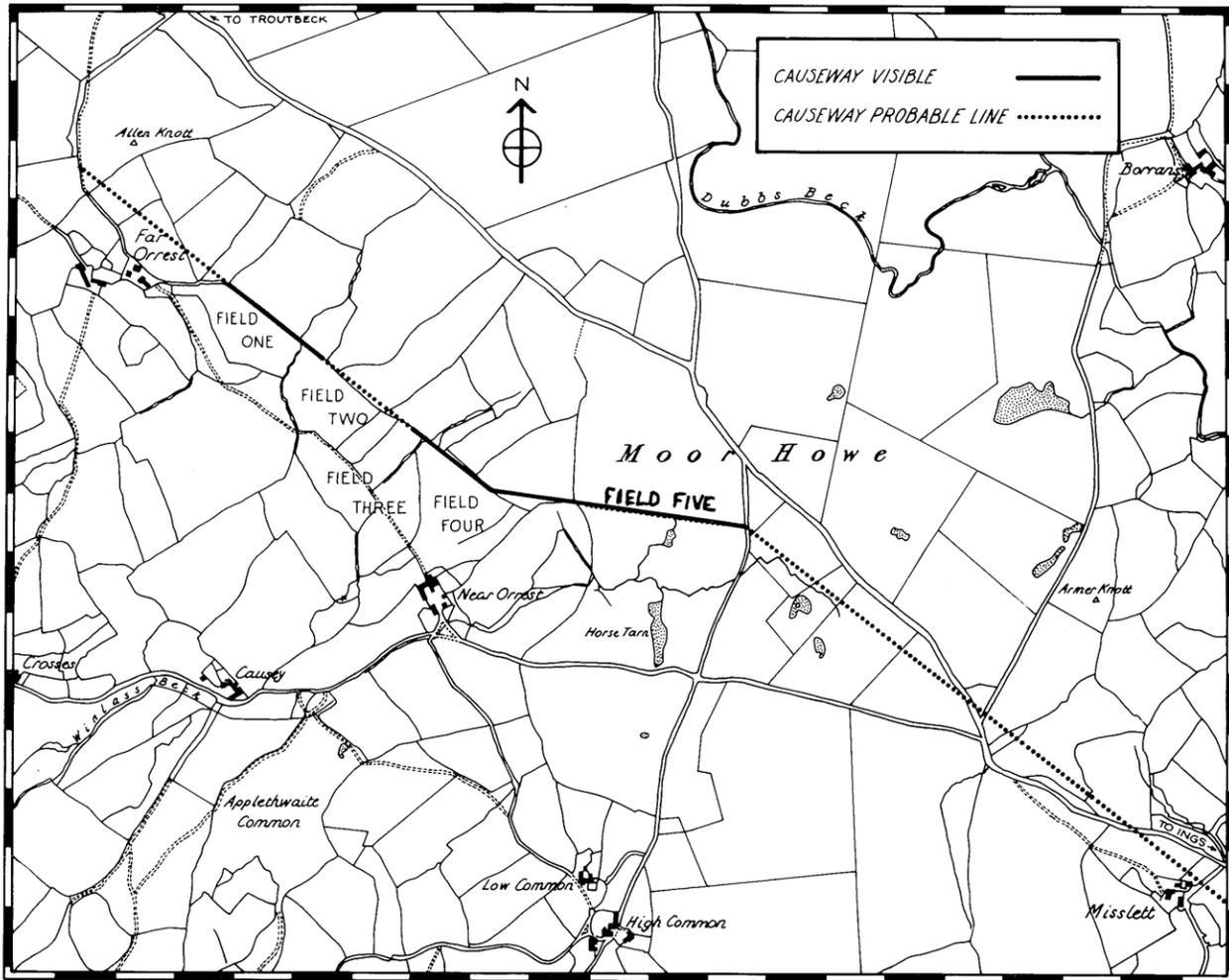
THE course of this road has been sought for many years; it is known that it was part of an important through route because of its inclusion in the Tenth Iter of the Antonine Itinerary in which the distance between the forts is given as twelve Roman miles, very close to the actual distance of some thirteen statute miles, and yet nothing of this road has, until now, been traced in the landscape. Indeed in 1937, R. G. Collingwood, referred to it as ‘that elusive road’.<sup>1</sup> It must have been an important link in the Roman communication system forming part of the southernmost route across the Lakeland hills to Ravenglass. Its uses were no doubt both military and for the movement of goods and produce.

In order to find the alignment chosen by the Roman surveyors, it is important to try to imagine the landscape as it was 2000 years ago and the burden of traffic which the road had to carry. Most of the ground is rough and stony and also included tarns and wet areas of bog not visible today because of drainage resulting from farming activity, the construction of new roads, and the clearing of woodland. No doubt the Romans had difficulty in maintaining the sort of direct route which they generally preferred. Drawing a line between the two forts on the modern map reveals nothing on the ground, but there is a minor road roughly parallel to the direct line, from Allen Knott (NY 416011) to Hill Farm, Ings (SD 442988), which is about a mile to the north-east of that line. Writing as long ago as 1912 on the same subject, R. G. Collingwood’s view was:–

... ‘it seems in every way more probable that (the Roman road) ran north-westerly through Ings, on which line the names Broadgate and Causey suggest its presence’.<sup>2</sup>

B. P. Hindle in his book *Roads and Trackways of the Lake District* also indicated the need to search this line (pages 19–21).

The map shows the course of the road, crossing five fields south-east of Allen Knott; all are on private land.<sup>3</sup> In ‘Field One’ 415007, which is reached by a walled track from Far Orrest farmyard, the causeway is clearly visible and measures 5 metres 30 cms between the ditches. ‘Field Two’ is part of Causeway Farm and a watercourse enters it (see map). On the south-east bank of the watercourse is the remains of a stone parapet, possibly for a bridge. ‘Field Three’ has a gate in its north boundary wall and the causeway appears on the north side of the wall for about 60 metres. On the south side of this wall there is a large grooved stone which may have been part of the causeway surface. ‘Field Four’ belongs to Near Orrest Farm and the causeway appears on the south side of the north boundary wall and at 421003 it turns through an angle of 30° due east and shortly enters ‘Field Five’ at 422004. The angle of the turn is visible and the change of direction was no doubt in order to avoid what is still a wet area, the head of Wynlass Beck. The map which is traced from the 6" OS Map of 1860 shows a tarn named Horse tarn in the line of the causeway, had it continued in a direct line. The tarn has since been drained. ‘Field Five’ has not been ploughed and the causeway is clearly visible in winter with a



Reproduced from the 6"-1 mile (1862) Ordnance Survey map.

FIG. 1.

L.P.C. 7/1988

width of 5 metres 30 cms as before. It reaches the Moorhowe – Common Farm road at 425003, beyond which it cannot be traced.

The causeway appears again at Hill Farm, Ings, descending as a terrace from higher ground to the north-west and protected in its descent by large kerb stones. The line of stones was surveyed and an alignment of 120 metres secured. The line, proceeding north-west, crossed the Ings – Troutbeck minor road and can be traced on its south side through pasture land which has been ploughed, until reaching the boundary with Broadgate Farm at 433992. The alignment was then extended tentatively to the north-west and in fact it leads directly to the point on the Moorhowe – Common Farm road 425003 already mentioned. This was a secondary alignment made necessary by the diversion at 421003. For future reference it is suggested that the main alignment which is a kilometre in length is named 'the Causeway Farm alignment', since there is no doubt that the farm got its name in this way. It must indeed have been an impressive feature for many years. In later times it was probably used as a boundary between fields.

The *agger* was gradually eroded and the ditches filled by farming activity; and it was finally replaced by a wall built at different times by different owners or tenants. The secondary alignment can be referred to as 'the Broadgate Farm alignment'; the course of this alignment is on high ground, dry in most seasons, and suitable for its function. The land has been actively farmed for centuries but traces of the causeway have been observed and are currently the subject of a further search, mainly to the south of the Ings-Troutbeck minor road which it crosses three times.

Continuing the Causeway Farm alignment north-westward towards Ambleside, the line points to the start of the High Skelghyll track (NY 377037). This track, which provides the link between Ambleside, Troutbeck and Broadgate may well be an ancient route modified by the Roman engineers. The probable crossing of the Trout Beck is at 409020, a wide and shallow ford, reached from High Skelghyll by Robin Lane, Fell Lane and Ford Lane. The ascent from the ford going south was probably via Fusethwaite Lane to reach the Far Orrest Farm track south-west of Allen Knott 413013.

The south-eastern extension of the alignment points towards Kendal. In 1987, work began on the Staveley By-pass, and immediately attracted interest as likely to reveal the continuation of the causeway from Hill Farm, Ings. A short length of causeway was discovered south of Moss-side House, Staveley, 470976. It was of the same width as the Causeway Farm alignment and this together with other traces, encouraged the extending of the short alignment. So extended, the alignment meets the railway line at 462981, and the southern extension meets the present A591 south of its crossing of the railway, and at the beginning of a straight length 480971. The crossing point of the River Kent and the approach to the fort at Watercrock must await further research.

During the search for the causeway, an ancient walled enclosure was discovered on land farmed by Heaning Farm, but lying close to and just north of Broadgate SD 435999. This enclosure appears to pre-date other walls in the area and there are signs of fortification. Its measurements are given in feet to compare with those of the fort at Ambleside.

	<i>Broadgate</i>	<i>Ambleside</i>
North side	356'	426'
South side	400'	418'
West side	270'	307'
East side	272'	298'

There is a water supply from a spring near Borrans Lane, which is also the present supply to Broadgate Farm. A ridge of high land runs along the west side parallel with Borrans Lane and this ridge would have required fortification if the enclosure was indeed a fort. Certainly further investigation is needed here.

### Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> CW2, xxxvii, 1-12.

<sup>2</sup> CW2, xiii, 143.

<sup>3</sup> The discovery of the causeway is due in part to the help and willing cooperation of the farmers in whose land the causeway lies. The main industry is sheep rearing, and there are periods when access should not be requested. The field work carried out was entirely in the winter, when the vegetation has died down.

E. H. Buckley, Hill Farm, Ings

T. F. Clark, Far Orrest

Mrs Lister, Near Orrest

James H. Park, Causeway

James Walling, Mislet

I. Osborne, The Heights

A. Taylor, Heaning

Miss J. S. Peat, Broadgate

J. R. Nelson, New Hall

J. E. Carradus, Ashes

G. Gorst, High Reston

J. G. Redmayne, Gowan Bank

I. Sowerby (Retired), Staveley