

ART. VI – *Watching Brief at Borrans Road, Ambleside, 1991*

By JOHN GODBERT

THE North-West Water Board laid a water-main north–south along a section of the east side of Borrans Road, crossing the road at Galava Gate NY [33732 50361] and then north–south through the two fields (OS 4369 and 3877) adjacent and to the east of Borrans Road (Fig. 1).

In 1982, during the widening of the original Borrans Road north of Galava Gate and the construction of the new road running directly north of the north–south section of Borrans Road [between Rothay Road and Barrows Road], a watching brief was undertaken. The machine excavations revealed timber buildings, hearths and floors of the Roman extra-mural settlement of the fort. Also observed was the northern edge of the settlement, apparently defined by a ditch *c.* 7 m wide (*c.* NY 33734 50381). North of this ditch, where the new road was being constructed, there was little Roman pottery and no features or layers of Roman date were recorded. The archaeology showed the extent of a thriving Roman extra-mural settlement deliberately sited north of the Roman fort and contained by a large military style ditch (R.H. Leech these *Transactions*).

The extent of surviving Roman archaeological stratigraphy in the area made it imperative that a watching brief be undertaken during the excavation of the pipe-trenches. The Lancaster University Archaeological Unit was commissioned to carry out the watching brief by the North West Water Authority. The Unit gratefully acknowledges the help of Chris Wood in co-ordinating the project.

The trench along Borrans Road, south of Galava Gate, revealed very little undisturbed Roman stratigraphy until it turned east across Borrans Road at Galava Gate and entered the southern field (OS 4369). At this point there was evidence for some Roman industrial activity. However, the main feature was a north–south Roman road running below the eastern edge of Borrans Road. The Roman road was up to 0.8 m in depth and consisted of successive layers of densely packed and concreted small rounded stones. The eastern edge of this road was bounded by a drainage ditch, and east of this was evidence of industrial activity. This complements the evidence from the 1982 work (*op. cit.*).

The 1991 pipe-trench then continued north and a well laid flagged floor, consisting of large slate slabs, and probably Roman in date, was observed. Further to the north, the Roman road was again recorded. This well laid Roman road had been supported by a series of large timber piles driven into waterlogged deposits. It continued for about 40 m as far as the northern field boundary of Field OS 4369. Bordering the east edge of the road was a small ditch, and extensive evidence of industrial activity, including possible remains of wattle and daub structures and a linear stone structure, which may have been a wall footing. Finds included pottery, charcoal and metal-working residues.

Also observed at regular intervals within this area, were lenses of burnt bone bordering the Roman road. These may represent the remains of a later cemetery, or it could be that bone ash was collected and used for glass-making. These

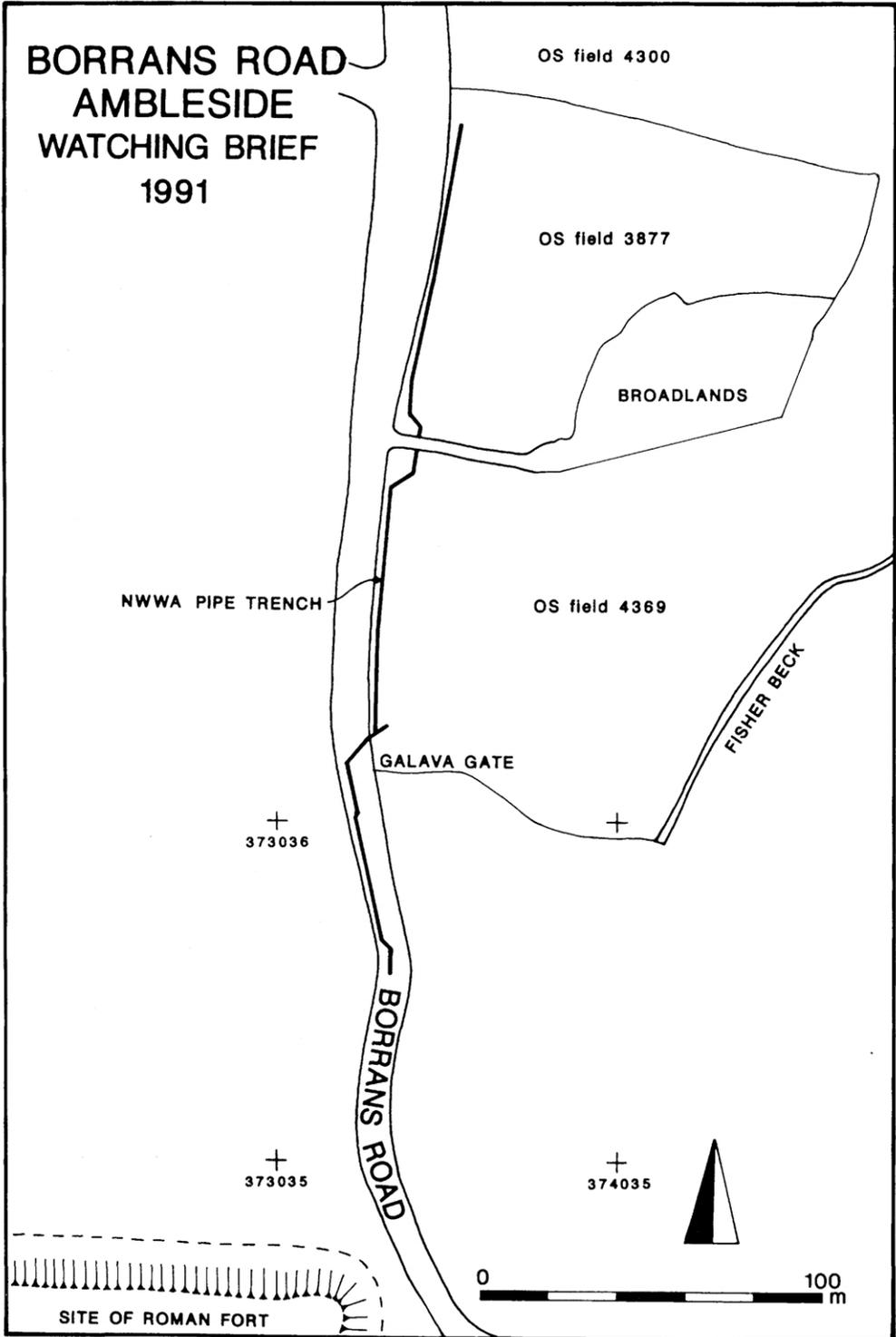


FIG. 1.

lenses were sampled and analysis will reveal whether the bone is animal or human.

At the northern boundary of Field OS 4369 the trench deviated slightly to the east to avoid damaging some trees and then crossed the field boundaries with a slight dog-leg, returning to the same alignment. Here, the pipe-trench disturbed an area of intense Roman industrial activity with finds of large quantities of pottery, metal working residues, and again, lenses of burnt bone.

In the northern part of the north Field OS 3877 the trench showed that the substantial industrial layers were replaced by a less complex stratigraphy, consisting of Roman occupation surfaces, alternating with burnt layers. A flagged floor of large, horizontally laid slate flags was observed, laid on a possible cobbled surface, which, in turn seemed to be supported by timbers. This may correspond to the flagged floor [C89] recorded in the 1982 watching brief (*op.cit.*). Further north was an area of large rounded cobbles resembling a crude surface or even a poorly constructed east-west road. This corresponds to a similar layer of stone rubble [C88 and C90] seen in 1982 sealing the large east-west ditch (*op.cit.*). However, the 1991 watching brief demonstrated that the northern edge of the stone spread was well south of the edge of this same ditch. The ditch was up to 4.50 m wide and *c.* 0.70 m deep, and probably a continuation of the ditch recorded in 1982. It is presumed to be the northern boundary of the Roman extra-mural settlement attached to the fort.

The little Roman activity north of this ditch was represented by a thin layer of grey clay containing charcoal and some Roman pottery.

The watching brief in 1991 was able to demonstrate that during the Roman period the road north of the fort was bounded on either side by houses and industrial structures, and contained on its northern boundary by an east-west ditch. There was no evidence for such settlement north of the ditch.

The Finds

Two boxes of stratified Roman pottery were retained and will be sent to pottery experts for dating and analysis. Twenty-nine soil samples were collected from industrial deposits, from pits containing burnt bone and from the organic layers. A selection will be sent for analysis.

References

Leech, R.H., "The Roman Fort and Vicus at Ambleside: Archaeological Research in 1982", *These Transactions*, 51-74

