

The Ancient Roads connected with Melandra and the Site.

IN the following imperfect sketch I propose to deal with Melandra from the point of view offered by the study of the Roman and pre-Roman roads in the district. Melandra was obviously placed where it is to command the western portion of one of the cross ways linking the great Roman roads on the west with those of the east of the Pennine Chain.¹ It dominated the western, just as the answering fort of Brough commanded the eastern portion of the same road near Hope at its junction with the road from Buxton through Bamford to Sheffield. Some ten miles to the north of Melandra the fort of Castleshaw kept watch and ward over a similar crossway, passing over the Pennine moors to the north-east, by way of Slack to join at Castleford the Roman road from the south to York. Before, however, we can discuss these roads it is necessary to distinguish clearly the roads used by the inhabitants long before the Romans set foot in Britain, from those which were made by the Roman engineers.

The earliest roads in Britain, with which I am acquainted, go back into the Prehistoric period as far as the Bronze Age. They undoubtedly had their origin in foot-paths, some of Neolithic age, taking the easiest course between one village and another, or one stronghold and another. They are dated—as for example, on the moors and wolds of north eastern Yorkshire—by the burial

1. For details of these roads see Codrington "Roman Roads in Britain," 1903.

places which cluster round them as well as by the habitations. In Derbyshire the road passing along the ridge from Hope past Mam Tor, along Rushup Edge and on to the west, is dated by the stronghold of Mam Tor and by tumuli of the Bronze Age. These roads occur, as might naturally be expected, where the natural conditions were easiest. They are represented by many of the existing "ridgeways" which follow the higher ground. At the time they were made, the whole of Britain, with the exception of a few isolated clearings in the uplands, was covered with forest, the remains of which are to be seen in the stumps of trees lying in the peat on the top of Kinder Scout, and in the large trunks of oak found in the peat between eleven and twelve hundred feet above the sea, by Mr. Watts in making the Upper Swineshaw reservoirs for the supply of Oldham.² The bottoms of the valleys were for the most part marshes, and the low-lying region of the Lancashire and the Cheshire plain was covered with forest and marshes, so impenetrable that even as late as the Bronze Age it was rarely traversed. This is proved by the rarity of the remains of this age in the Lancashire and Cheshire plain, as well as in the great low-lying tracts of clay land on the east of the Pennines ranging from London as far as York and Newcastle. The roads therefore in the Bronze Age followed the irregular direction of the ridges, winding along the water partings, and avoiding the valleys as far as possible.³ They were probably used by pack-horses.

2. ["In an old document it is said that the bailiff of the Lord of Stockport has for his perquisite all the trees washed down by the Mersey from the hills of Longden." *Langdendale*, by Ralph Bernard Robinson (Glossop, 1863), p. 10n. Ed.]

3. These generalisations are based on the study of the roads of the south of England from Devonshire to Kent, as well as of those ranging from London through the eastern counties as far as the Tyne, and in part also of those of Derbyshire and of Wales.

In the Prehistoric Iron Age, or that period which immediately preceded the Roman conquest, these roads were improved and developed so that they could be used by wheeled vehicles. Sometimes, as in the case of the Pilgrim's Way from Dover through Canterbury, stretching away westwards on the chalk downs to Berkshire, the slope was chosen for the road rather than the summit of the hills. This also is to be observed in tracing the Icknield Way in some parts of its course from near Bury St. Edmunds to the Thames at Streatley, and southwards, until it climbs the Berkshire downs and is lost in the network of Prehistoric roads in that county. They also were extended into the low forest-clad and marshy districts so as to link together such centres as Manchester and York with the surrounding higher and dryer regions. In the Prehistoric Iron Age the forests of the lower lands were disappearing before the axe of the farmers and herdsmen, and there were probably large clearings in the neighbourhood of the fortified towns in the lower grounds. In these lower grounds it is impossible, according to my experience, to distinguish them from later roads, but when we examine the uplands they are plainly marked by their irregular and winding course, along the ridges, avoiding, as far as may be, the marshy bottoms of the valleys. There is no evidence that they were more than old lines of communication worn by long travel, which may or may not have been mended from time to time. These roads were used also during the Roman occupation, and many of them are still in use.

The Roman roads were made on a totally different principle. They were not only carefully constructed, but they were run from one point of observation to another in a straight line, and as far as the ground would allow, regardless of obstacles, such as hills and the marshy

bottoms of the valleys.⁴ Like railways they were from point to point. They did not avoid the lower grounds. In some cases the Roman engineers improved the older roads, and made short cuts, as in instances which I have met with in the road between Canterbury and London, and in some of the roads in the moors of north-eastern Yorkshire. In this respect, therefore, we have a means of distinguishing between the Prehistoric roads which have been used during the Roman occupation and afterwards, and those first constructed by the Roman engineers.

With these facts before us we are in a position to consider the relations of Melandra to the roads in the district. It not only commands the continuation of the "Doctor's Gate" through Glossop, but it is also within striking distance of the western road to Stockport, and of the northern road to Castleshaw, at their junction at Mottram a little over a mile off. The "Doctor's Gate" (one inch contour map sheet 86) starts from the Batham Gate near Hope, a Roman road, mostly straight, running from Buxton to Brough over the plateau of carboniferous limestone, and sweeps northwards along the ridge dividing the valley of the Noe from the Ashop. It follows the westward trend of the latter valley, crossing the stream at a place marked Ford on the map, and winding along the irregular slopes of the ground above Woodlands until it joins the main Sheffield road, which it leaves within a short distance of the water parting. Thence it passes to the north of Cold Harbour Moor, and follows the north side of the valley of

4. The Roman roads were the principal means of communication in Britain down to the beginning of the 19th century, and during all those centuries they apparently grew worse and worse, as is amply proved by the incidental notices of the difficulty of travelling. The duty of repairing them fell mainly on the parish, or on the manor, and it was counted for merit in the church to repair a length of road or to rebuild a bridge. Road-making as a system, could scarcely be said to have existed in Britain from the days of the Romans down to the time of Telford and Macadam.

the Shelf brook into Glossop (sheet 86). Throughout this portion of its course it has all the characters of a road of the Prehistoric Iron Age. It was continued through Glossop, where several fragments of Roman road are preserved, and through Dinting in the valley of the Glossop brook close under Melandra. It crosses the Etherow at Woolley Bridge, and joins the Roman road to Stockport at Mottram. In this section of its course it has undoubtedly been reconstructed and carried along the bottom of the valley by the Roman engineers.

The road to Stockport is a point to point road, and therefore Roman. It passes from Mottram to the south and west, following the line of the high road through Gee Cross and Woodley to Stockport (sheet 98). After crossing the Great Central Railway, an old winding ridge way, named Apple Street, ascends to the height of over 900 ft. by Windy Harbour, over Werneth Low, rejoining the main road at Woodley. In my opinion this is a portion of the original line of the Prehistoric cross way, superseded by the later work of the Roman engineer, carried along an easier gradient. It is obvious that this was a line of communication between Stockport and Brough. From Mottram (sheet 86) there was another line of communication probably of prehistoric age, but marked by fragments of a Roman road, passing northwards through Roe Cross,⁵ and following the contours of the east side of the Tame near Bucton Castle⁶ in the direction of the Roman fort at Castleshaw. Here it joined the road from Manchester through Oldham and Delph, which from its structure and straightness is undoubtedly Roman.

5. S. Andrew *Trans. Lanc. and Chesh. Antiq. Soc.*, x., p. 48.

6. There is no evidence that this is Roman. It probably belongs to the Prehistoric Iron Age.

The direction of the "Doctor's Gate" through Glossop during the Roman occupation is marked by the fragments of Roman road in the lower town. It is, however, likely that in the prehistoric Iron Age it traversed Old Glossop, ascending the hill by the church, and making for Mouse-low Castle, to the north of which a deeply-worn, winding road, Shaw Lane, between Banks Wood and Castlewood, descends into the valley at Brookfield, close under Melandra. Mouselow Castle occupies a commanding position. It consists of a fosse circumscribing the irregular summit of a hill, and clearly defined, excepting on the southern side, where it has been destroyed by a quarry. Within it is a large mound on the northern side, which may have been the site of the keep of an early Norman Castle, and on the south two mounds, probably formed by the debris from the quarry and of no archæological significance. It may have been a stronghold of the Prehistoric Iron Age—or one dating back to the Norman times,—or again it may be both Prehistoric and Norman.⁷

We may now consider the site of Melandra. The fortress stands on a promontory of glacial sand and clay overlooking the valleys of the Glossop brook and the Etherow, at the junction of the two streams. It is⁸ of the usual rectangular form, with the sides facing to the north-east, and the corresponding quarters. Each side has a central gate. The main entrance, with a double gateway, is on the north-east. From this the road led into the valley of the Glossop brook, down a steep descent, along

7. All irregular fortified enclosures consisting of fosse and ramp, with one large mound cut off from the rest, which were formerly considered by Mr. Clarke and others to be of Saxon origin, have recently been proved, by Messrs. Round and St. John Hope, to be of early Norman age; the mound represents the keep, and the lower area within the fosse being the bailey. Both mound and fosse were defended by palisades, and at a later time by walls.

8. [Approximately, see p. 67. Ed.]

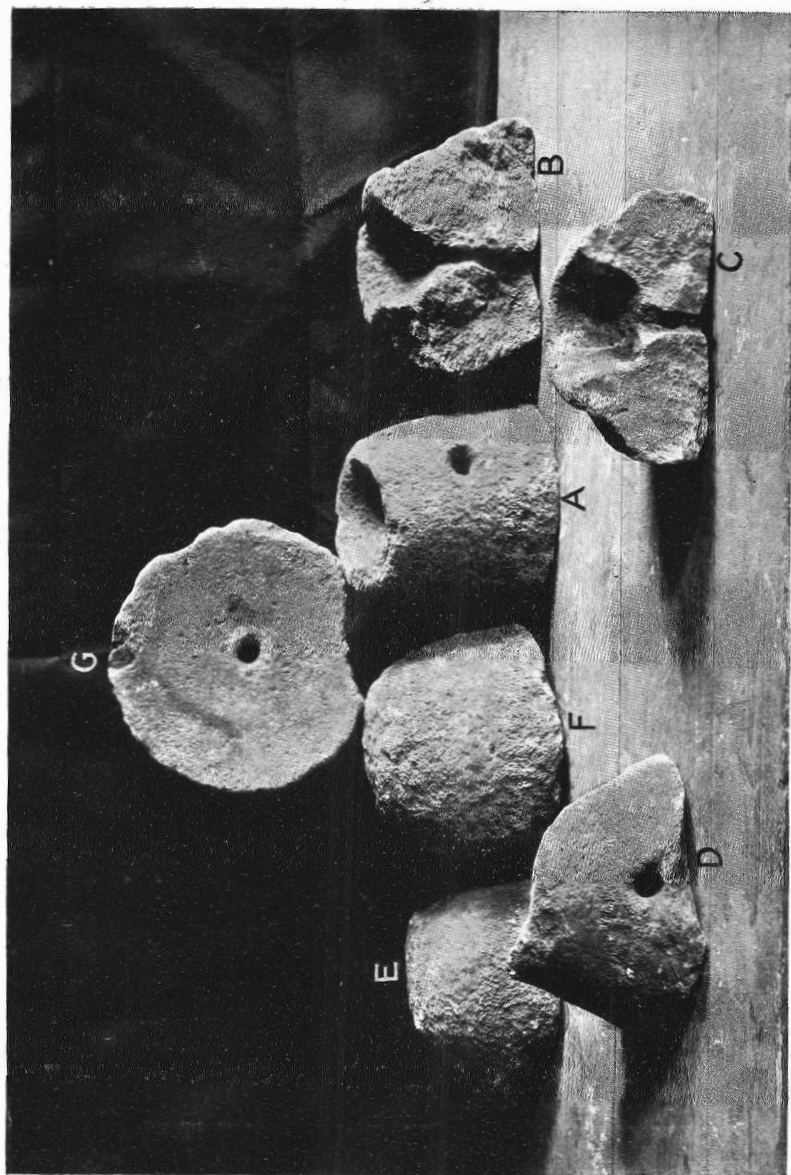


Fig. 1. Pre-Roman Querns.

which its course has been obliterated by slips. In the south-west gateway a road, now represented by a ridge in the first and third fields to the south, curved round to the east opposite Lower Gamesley Farm. From the small size of the gateway it may be inferred that this was an approach of little importance. It must, however, be observed that the small gateway may stand in relation to the fact that this was the weakest side of the fortress. On the other three sides it was amply protected by the lie of the ground. On the north-west it was not only protected by the steepness of the scarp but by the morass (now represented by alluvium) at its base, traversed by the Etherow; on the north-east by the scarp overlooking the marshy valley of the Glossop brook; and on the south-east by a ravine which formed a tête-du-pont, covering the access to the gate at a distance of about 60 yards. Neither here nor on the opposite side are there traces of roads.

The walls of Melandra are made from the sandstones of the Millstone Grit in the neighbourhood. They, as well as the discoveries which have been made inside, will be described by the members of the Classical Association who carried on the work. I will content myself with calling attention to evidence which seems to me to point to the fact that the site was occupied in Prehistoric times.

A considerable number of flint splinters, knocked off in the manufacture of implements, have been discovered, which show that the site was occupied, like many others near Rochdale and elsewhere in the Pennine Chain, in the Neolithic, or, as is more probable, in the Bronze Age. The evidence that it was occupied in the age of Prehistoric Iron is afforded by portions of seven querns, of bee-hive shape, which characterise that age, four (fig. 1, A. B. C. D.) being upper, and three (E. F. G.) the lower stones. They are all made of millstone grit.

They are identical with the querns found in Danebury, near Northampton, and in the Lake Village of Glastonbury, both of which belong to the Prehistoric Iron Age. They differ from those introduced by the Romans in the fact that the latter are thinner and wider, and disc-shaped, with grinding surfaces frequently grooved, as may be seen from the group (Fig. 2) of seven portions of Roman querns from the mill-house in Melandra. These are, with one exception, of Millstone Grit, and were probably made in the district. The exception (the lowest in the figure) is of volcanic rock, and came from the Roman quern factory of Andernach, near Coblenz, from which querns were sent almost over the whole of Roman Europe.⁹ A fragment of another quern of the same material has also been found. The bee-hive querns are frequently met with on the moors of Yorkshire, and, so far as my experience goes, are not found in association with Roman remains. Whether or no they were used in Roman times is an open question. If they were used they are merely a survival from the Prehistoric Iron Age—like the greater portion of the roads guarded by Melandra.

In conclusion, we may very well ask why should the roads from Melandra westwards point towards Stockport and Manchester. The answer is to be found in the fact that both these places, as pointed out by Mr. Henry Taylor and Mr. Roeder, were inhabited centres in pre-Roman as well as in later times. Both grew round the fortified rocks which commanded, the one the marshes of the Mersey, and the other the junction of the Irk with the Irwell.

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9. I have identified these querns in Hod Camp, near Blandford, in Roman Chester, and in Caerwent.