

# ROMAN ROADS IN THE PEAK DISTRICT

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## INTRODUCTION

The Roman roads of the Peak District have always been a challenge to a student of the subject. Only two of them, 'Batham Gate' (Buxton to Brough-on-Noe), and 'The Street' (Buxton to Little Chester), showed evidence of engineering in the form of a raised *agger* or embankment and rigidly straight alignments. The road between Brough-on-Noe (henceforward Brough) and Melandra Castle (henceforward Melandra), although generally accepted as 'course certain' (Margary, 1973), had only the characteristics of any unmetalled trackway, i.e. ruts and hollow-ways of varying widths and gradients. One other road, that from Brough to Templeborough, had been identified on the outskirts of Sheffield (Preston, 1969). However, the part between Brough and Stanage Edge, which lies just within the area covered by this report, remained undiscovered. Little was known about the rest of the roads published here other than that they were reputed to be of Roman origin.

In the years between 1960 and 1970 the author and P. Mellor shared an interest in the old roads and trackways of northwest Derbyshire; some fieldwork was done, but not really on a systematic basis. However during 1970 an attempt was made to extend the line of a Roman road known to exist to the north of Buxton (Turner, 1903). This venture proved successful and the road traced to within three miles of Melandra, the Roman fort near Glossop; eight sections were cut (Wroe and Mellor, 1971). By using the experience gained, attention was then directed towards other Roman roads in the area, starting with the road between Brough and Melandra. This was found and recorded between 1972 and 1973 and thirty full and several partial sections cut (Wilson, 1973, 1974). During 1974 fieldwork around Brough revealed a road heading south for three miles and six sections were cut (Wilson, 1975). Finally a road was traced leaving Buxton for the southwest and fourteen sections were cut (Goodburn, 1976). In early 1976 the Wroe and Mellor partnership ceased owing to P. Mellor having other commitments. By this time the North Derbyshire Archaeological Committee (later N.D.A.T.) was taking an interest in the work; C. R. Hart, then Assistant Director, advised regarding the most outstanding problems and fieldwork continued on that basis.

One of these problems was at the southern end of the Buxton to Little Chester road. The road had not previously been traced past Minning Low, 209 573 (Margary, 1973), and owing to the discovery of a Roman settlement at Carsington, 252 524, seventeen miles from Buxton (Ling and Courtney, 1981), its direction and destination now assumed new importance. Although in no doubt, the route was not accurately known, so the road was walked and recorded by the author but success at the southern end was limited, only two and a half miles of new road being traced (Goodburn, 1978). Two sections were cut: one near Buxton in 1974, when a length of road was destroyed by housing development (Wilson, 1975), a second in 1977 which was found to be uninformative. During 1978 the first mile of the Brough to Templeborough road was traced as a direct result of unpublished notes by J. P. Heathcote and R. W. P. Cockerton concerning the road layout close to the fort, and made available by the efforts of C. R. Hart. (Fieldwork by Wroe and Hart; four sections by Wroe — Goodburn, 1979.) Further fieldwork by Wroe and Hart to identify the road over Stanage Edge was unsuccessful. The publication of the *North Derbyshire Archaeological Survey* (Hart, 1981) included a brief summary of past and current Roman road research. Since then a limited amount of fieldwork and excavation has been continued by the author, mainly concerned with the more elusive roads.

## GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

One of the more puzzling aspects of the Roman communications network is the way in which some roads survived and others vanished from view. The two main survivors, 'Batham Gate' and 'The Street', were laid out over relatively easy ground where there was little need of sophisticated engineering work which could cause trouble. In addition, they both connected long-lived sites, thus ensuring continued use. In contrast, the roads passing over broken country, or connecting short-lived sites, fared rather worse. The very engineering skills that enabled the Romans to overcome the more difficult obstacles led to rapid decay from erosion once maintenance ceased. Culverted causeways over gullies and terraces along hillsides were especially vulnerable, being liable to slip in bad weather. Once vital crossing points were lost, following traffic was forced to seek alternative routes. The evidence for this traffic is shown by the frequency with which the better known roads have become named routes in later times. Some are renowned and appear on Ordnance Survey maps: 'Doctor's Gate', 'Batham Gate', 'Monks Road', 'The Street', 'The Long Causeway'. Others like 'Castle Gate' and 'Hereward Street', which were researched by Cockerton (1932, 1960), give clues to roads which either are now partly known or await discovery. In many cases hollow-ways can be seen following and sometimes using a damaged Roman terraceway. It is impossible to state categorically when this wear occurred but the most likely time is during the packhorse era in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As the years passed these packhorse ways which used the Roman roads in parts became accepted as the earliest and oldest road, and as such appealed to antiquaries as most likely to represent the Roman line in its entirety.

In the meantime isolated and abandoned lengths of Roman road became quickly covered by scrub and woodland below the treeline and buried by the accumulating topsoil. Where exposed to the elements on the high moors and so lacking the protection of forest cover, the clay or earthen body of the road could slowly erode away, leaving only an anonymous scatter of broken stone. Under certain circumstances the road could be deeply buried beneath a growing blanket of peat. It is probable that some lengths of Roman road were lost and overgrown before the end of the Roman period. Some forts were abandoned c. A.D. 140 (Webster, 1969) and no doubt after that there would be no compelling reason for regular maintenance even if there still was some reduced military activity in the area.

All these reasons explain why Roman roads can be very hard, and sometimes impossible, to find in certain areas, and how they can also survive in mint condition even though completely invisible on the ground surface. The fact that they are lost for ever to the casual observer means that excavation is essential. A drawn section of a road in association with an accurate map provides valuable evidence that can be assessed by later workers.

The area covered by Figure 1 totals 1120 square miles, yet includes only part of one major city, Sheffield. All the rest, apart from industrial and urban development in the northwestern corner, is either farmland or moorland with some smaller towns and many villages. Centrally within the northern half of the map is the main upland mass of the High Peak. The map allows comparison with direct lines between sites and actual courses of Roman roads. The 1000' contour shows how the Romans made use of valley sides and passes. Absolute directness was sacrificed to gain acceptable gradients and avoid crossing difficult valleys wherever possible. This reflects the requirements of carts and wagons, essential for the movement of heavy stores and equipment. It is probable that the road network as shown on Figure 1 was basically military in character and was laid out to link forts at strategic points. Forts on the eastern and southern fringes of the hills were established between A.D. 54 and A.D. 68. These include Templeborough (May, 1922; Simpson, 1964) Chesterfield (Courtney and Long, forthcoming), Strutt's Park (Brassington, 1970; Forrest, 1967), and Trent Vale near Stoke-on-Trent (Wilson, 1971). In addition, Chesterton was established by A.D. 69-70. The central zone forts, Melandra and Brough, date from c. A.D. 75-78 (Hart, 1981; Jones, 1974) and Buxton, a probable fort, is contemporary (Simpson, 1964). It may be that there was a fort of the

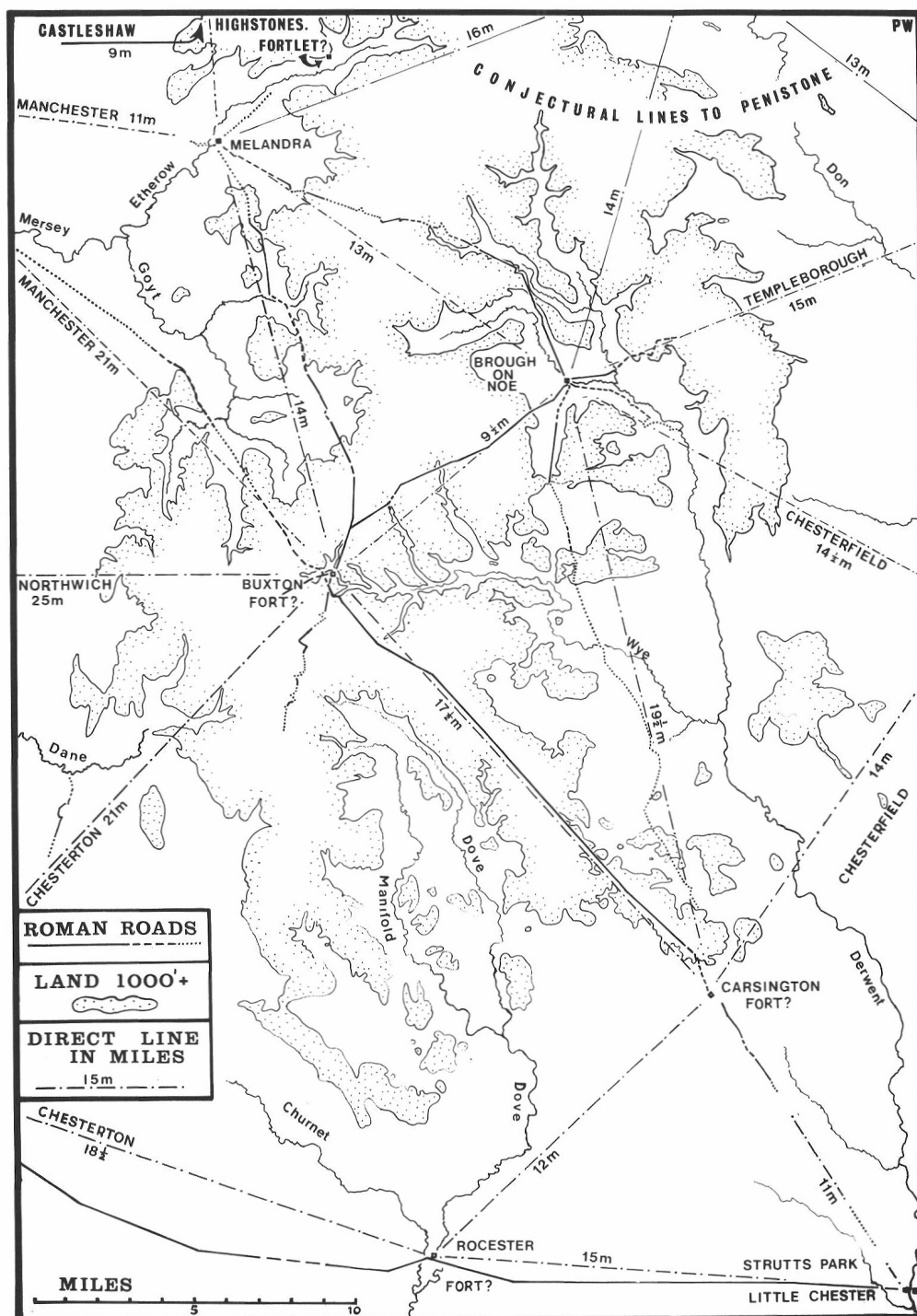


Fig. 1 The Roman road network in the Peak District. Solid square — known fort; open square — possible fort.

same period at Carsington. The similar dating of the central zone forts could thus indicate an overall plan to seize control of the Peak.

It is at present hard to understand when this necessary and extensive road building programme was carried out. Perhaps the most likely time is between A.D. 71 and 78, depending on the number of legions on active service, at first in the north and then in Wales. Detachments from stand-by legions in other areas could have organised the work with the help of slave labour. After 78, when three legions were in the north with Agricola (Frere, 1967), there would presumably have not been sufficient men to spare. For the system to be operative by 78, both forts and roads should have been completed — one without the other was surely useless.

To leave the southern Pennines insecure in 78 would have been to court disaster and this should imply the completion of the network. However, it would seem from the system known at present that it is badly deficient in one respect. The western side is unprotected, thus exposing the Cheshire plain to attack. A north-south road with a fort half way along seems necessary to complete an encircling road from Manchester via Chesterton via Strutt's Park or Little Chester and north to Templeborough (Fig. 2). Such a ring of roads and forts would be vital for restraining tribesmen who might threaten vulnerable Roman supply lines and bases in the early stages of the advance

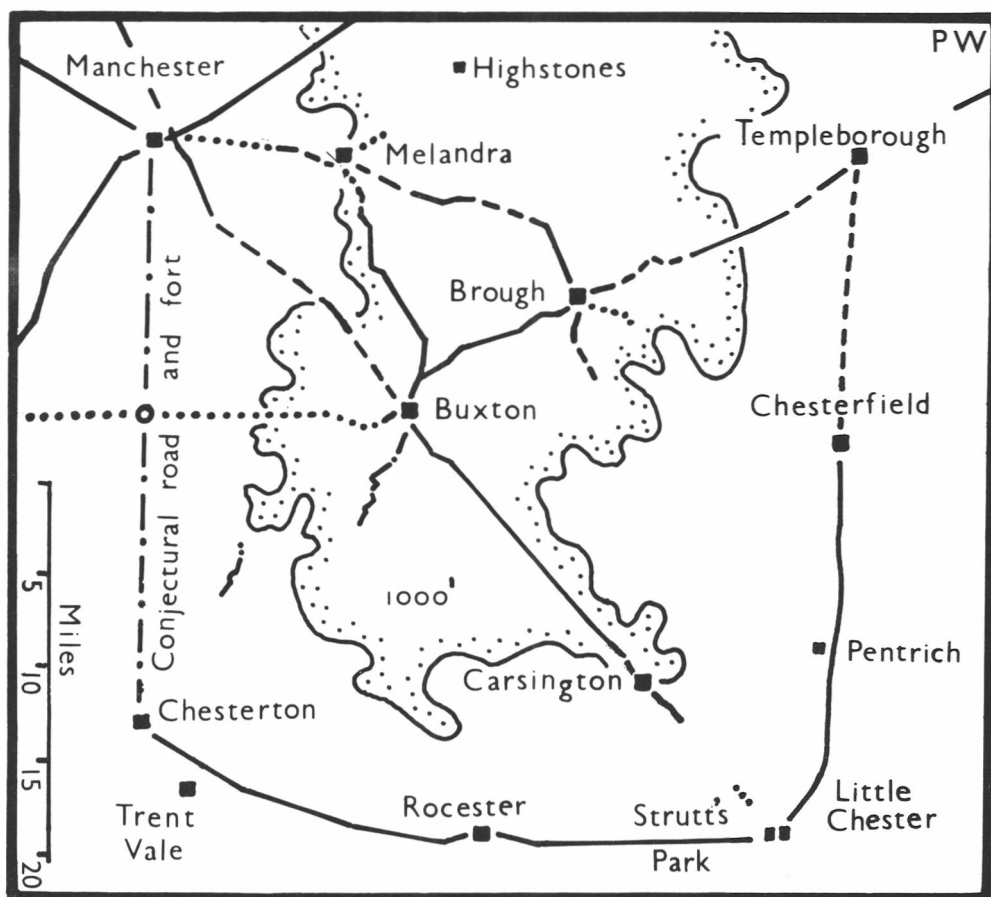


Fig. 2 The encirclement of the southern Pennines by Roman roads.



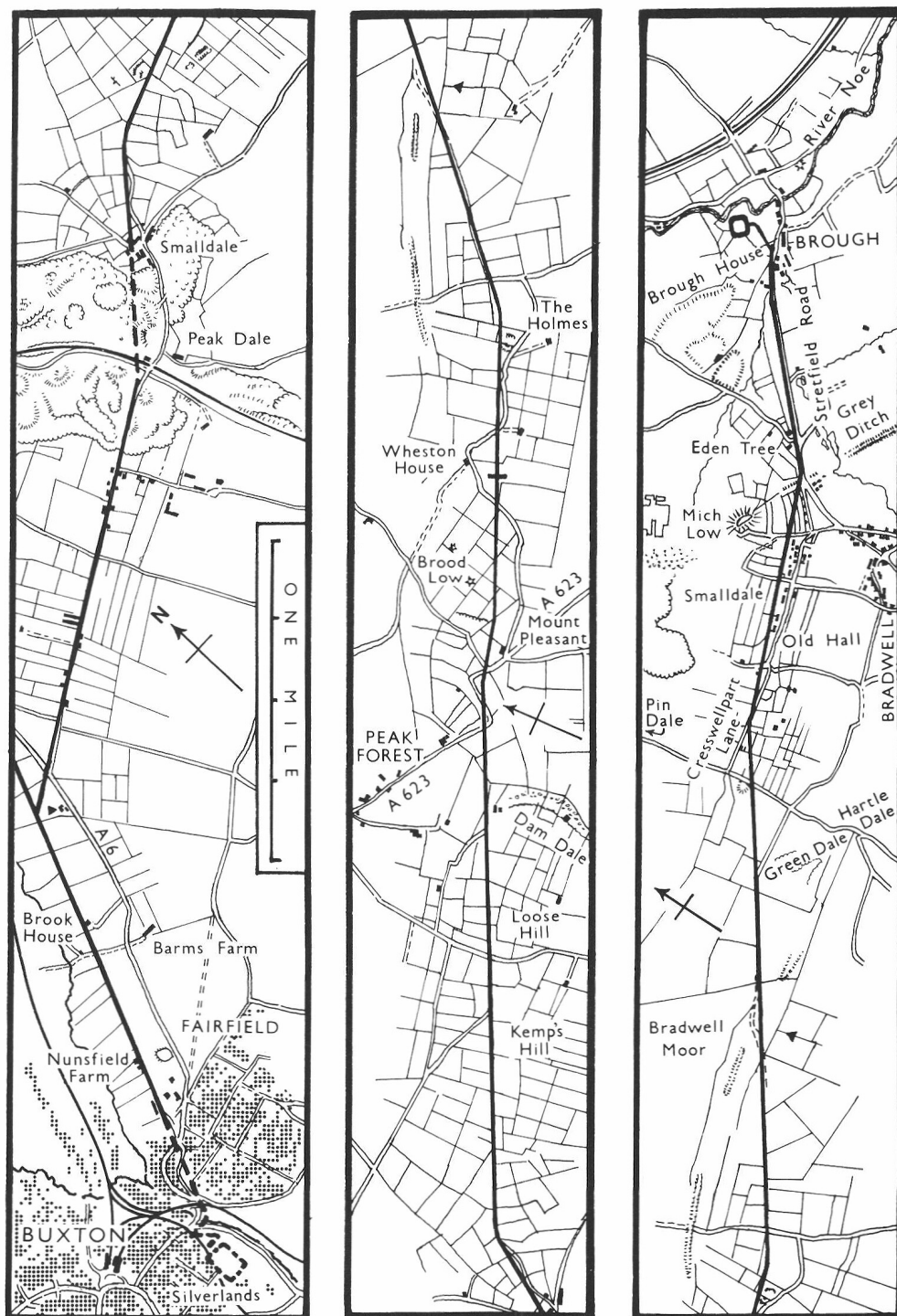


Fig. 3 The Roman road from Buxton to Brough.

northwards into Brigantia in 78. A road from Manchester to Chesterton has been suggested in the past (Thompson Watkin, 1886). The fact that all the forts listed above from the periphery are pre-Flavian or early Flavian, except Manchester, gives cause to wonder if perhaps an earlier fort exists there also.

### THE ROMAN ROAD SYSTEM: MAJOR PROVEN ROUTES

In the following discussion, the Ordnance Survey map references are assumed to have the prefix SK unless otherwise annotated. The courses of the roads in Figs. 3 to 9 are marked as either unbroken, broken or dotted lines. The continuous line is used for a certain course, between proven sections or where convincing surface evidence can be seen on one alignment. Where the line is broken the course is estimated but still probable, often where there seems no good reason for a change in direction. Where only dots are used the course is unknown and the line simply marks the most reasonable route of the many investigated in the field. It must be emphasised, however, that such assumed routes have to be treated very cautiously: minor deviations from the straight can occur, especially where there are two or more periods crossing apparently easy gullies, or where perhaps in Roman times the ground was unstable.

#### **Buxton to Brough ('Batham Gate') Figs. 3 and 10 (Margary 710a)**

The Roman fort probably lay at Silverlands, and from the northeast corner of the hill top a terraceway descends towards the northwest, to be lost on reaching lower ground. More certain evidence is visible half a mile northwards just to the south of Nunsfield farm, where a substantial agger or embankment crosses a small paddock. 'Batham Gate' shares the first one and a half miles with the road to Melandra and the last mile of this length from Nunsfield farm up to the parting of the road at 072 756 is clearly visible, both on the ground and on aerial photographs. (CPE/UK 2598, 3053-4 and 4115-6.)

For the next three miles, enough survives for the course to be traced. Near Peak Forest the road passes into open fields, 111 783, but traces there are slight. Beyond the crossing of the Chapel-en-le-Frith to Tideswell road, 122 788, the remains become impressive for about a mile, then fade out again, to be once more overlain by existing roads, 142 795.

Two miles from Brough intermittent traces can be seen on the same alignment over open fields for just under half a mile, 156 807 to 1617 8118, where the line is cut by Cresswellpart Lane which leads down through Smalldale. From here the road changed direction, aiming now just to the south of the Eden Tree knoll, 174 818. For 500 yards (455 metres) the line is obscured by mining or quarrying, then a low agger can be seen to the north of Old Hall, and this can be traced downhill either as a swelling in the ground or as bumps in the transverse walls. The line is finally cut by Michlow Lane, which itself rises up over the agger. All traces then cease. Fortunately earlier accounts describe the track of the road from the southeast gate of the fort and along Stretfield Road, and this fits well with the known facts (Thompson Watkin, 1886). Probing near the fort showed that the road passed beneath the western end of Brough House.

One section was dug near Wheston House farm, Peak Forest (Frere, 1977): Figure 10. (Fieldwork and section by Wroe.)

#### **Buxton to Carsington ('The Street') Figs. 4 and 11 (Margary 71a)**

This is one road about which there has never been any doubt, due to the fact that the long straight alignments are clearly shown by fourteen miles of field boundaries following the course as far as Gallowlow Lane, 2175 5665, half a mile south of Minning Low, 209 573. It is now known that three miles ahead there was a Roman settlement near Carsington (Ling and Courtney, 1981). Up to 1978 the road had not been traced past Minning Low. Fieldwork has located another two and a half miles of road as far as 237 547, just short of Carsington Pastures, the road having made a slight easterly turn from the shoulder of Minning Low (Goodburn, 1978). During 1982 the road was provisionally identified on the approach to the Roman settlement by Ash Plantation at

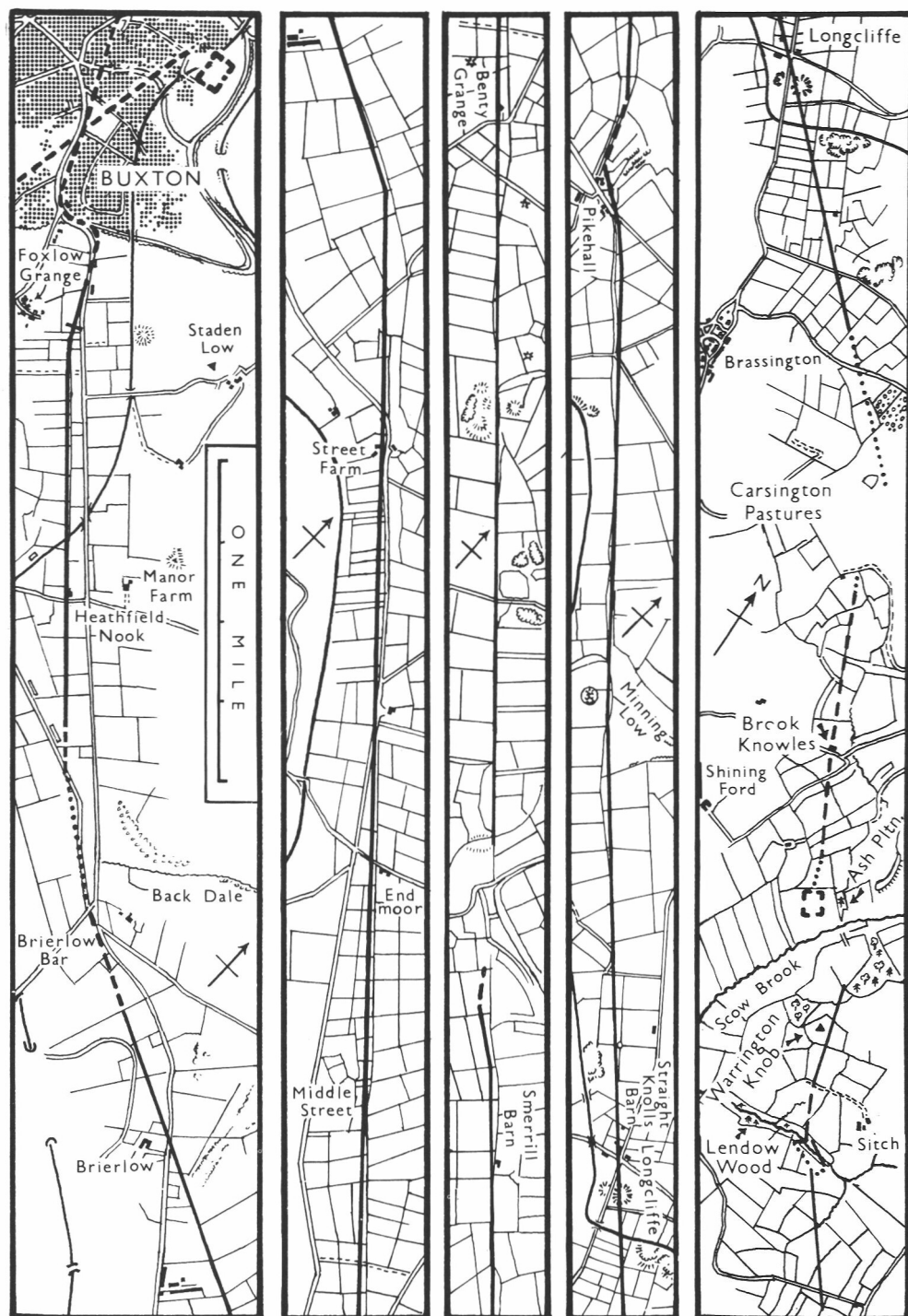


Fig. 4 The Roman road from Buxton to Carsington.

Carsington, although like the site itself, deep ploughing has destroyed almost everything.

Fair traces survive from a point about one mile out of Buxton towards Brierlow Bar. After that little can be seen until 111 683. From there through Street Farm and on towards Benty Grange, remains are almost continuous and at times substantial. Beyond, traces again fade until past Pike Hall, where there is a low agger for a short distance. Again signs fade until from 229 555; thereafter, faint but unmistakable indications can be seen up to 237 548, where all traces cease owing to quarrying or mining disturbances.

Fieldwork showed that the true line over part of the route had become obscure. This is probably due to too much faith being placed in the attendant field walls. Two sections were cut, one at Longcliffe, 2302 5544, and one near Buxton (Wilson, 1975). (Fieldwork by Wroe; sections by Wroe and Mellor.)

### **Brough to Melandra ('Doctor's Gate') Figs. 5, 12 and 17 (Margary 711)**

A large proportion of this road is lost, either by erosion or burial under peat. A direct line between the forts is blocked by Kinder Scout, at 2003 feet (631 metres) the most formidable barrier in the Peak.

The Roman surveyors solved the problem by using the Noe and Woodlands valleys to outflank the high ground, crossing the main hill mass to the north of Kinder where the terrain was smoother and lower. It was laid out in four main alignments, each with slight course corrections to cope with obstacles encountered.

The first aims northwestwards from Brough up the eastern side of the Noe valley towards the shoulder of Crookstone Hill. From there a good view is obtained for the second, which is more easterly and aiming across the Woodlands valley towards Oyster Clough, although the length to the north of the River Ashop has yet to be proved by excavation. Once the clough is passed the third is laid out up the north bank of Ashop Clough and then over the moors to near Moss Castle. The fourth and last alignment heads for Melandra which is now visible. The line of the road was certainly known in post-Roman times, for pack animals used the graded terraceways until such time as erosion and wear made some lengths impassable. Diversions were inevitable and the most striking of these is where, from a point near Oyster Clough, the later tracks veered northwards, ending up one and a half miles away from the Roman line.

The first surface features occur at Harrop, one and three quarters of a mile from Brough, and from there remains alternate between agger and terraceway until gaining high ground east of Upper Fulwood. Little can then be seen apart from on the descent towards Alport Ford, and there the line is cut by later tracks destroying the continuity. Beyond the River Ashop and The Knots, a difficult rocky area, a good but short length of possible agger survives along the higher ground. After that there is nothing until on the hill shoulder beyond Oyster Clough where another short length of agger runs through a forestry plantation. This is cut short by a sheer drop, possibly caused by landslip. Along the banks of Ashop Clough the only clear trace is the traverse beyond Nethergate Clough (see later comments on constructional features) and two embankments crossing a crescent-shaped landslip gully. On the approach to Melandra a faint terrace climbs the eastern slope of Brownhill and once through the saddle and over the top this becomes a low agger. This alignment is aiming for the fort but few signs exist in between, apart from a possible agger east of Adderley Place.

Over the moor between Ashop Clough and Wood's Cabin, 052 922, the road lies beneath 8 feet (2.4 metres) of peat. In the time elapsed between the abandonment of Melandra in A.D. 140 (Webster, 1969) and 1982, the peat would attain that depth assuming an average growth rate of  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch (1cm.) per  $7\frac{1}{2}$  years.

Thirty full and several partial sections were cut and these show two main periods. The road was completely rebuilt once and, judging from some of the sections along Ashop Clough (Fig. 17), the first road was overgrown and therefore disused. This could perhaps imply a re-occupation of one or both of the forts. There is also a third period when the second road was in commission but suffering from wear and tear. Several of

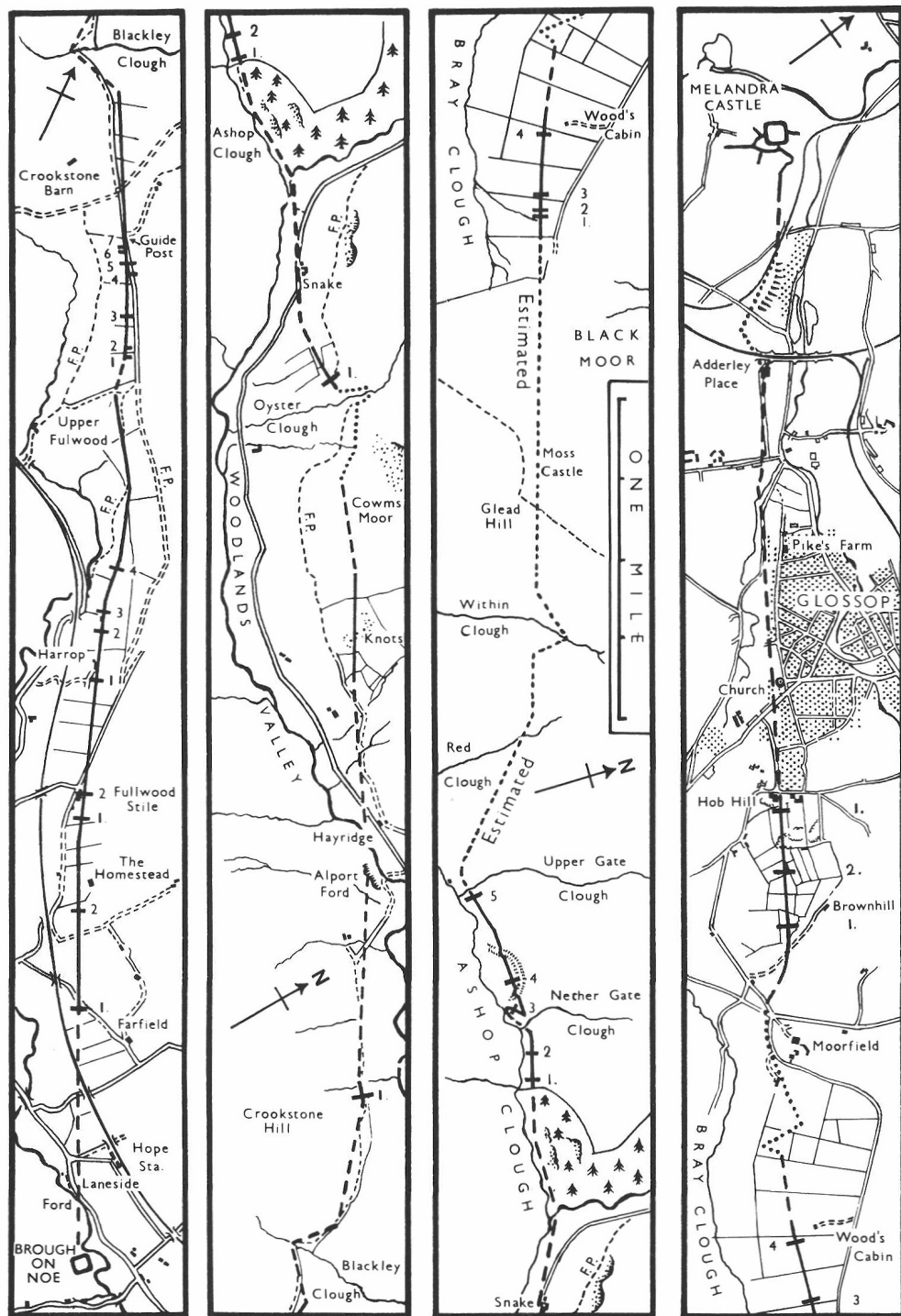


Fig. 5 The Roman road from Brough to Melandra.



the sections show that a shallow top dressing was the last work carried out (Wilson, 1973, 74). (Fieldwork and sections by Wroe and Mellor.)

**Buxton to Melandra** Figs. 6 and 13 (Margary 714)

This road shares the first alignment from Buxton with the road to Brough. One and a half miles from Buxton the roads divide, 'Batham Gate' branching off towards the northeast. For three quarters of a mile onwards from the junction, an impressive agger is visible before being overlaid by the landscaped remains of a lime ash heap. This length, which includes a sharp angled change of direction northwards, was noted in the past, but not traced beyond the ash heap (Turner, 1903). Perhaps further search for the road was frustrated by the misleading direction taken from Buxton, which would appear to indicate a destination to the north. The reason for this detour was to avoid having to climb over Combs Moss, which blocks a direct line between Buxton and Melandra. Once having skirted this obstacle the road turns onto a new alignment near Martin Side Cross, and heads for the pass at Chinley Head.

The agger is not well preserved but it can still be followed through Chapel-en-le-Frith and on to the southern shoulder of Bole Hill, where it is apparently overlaid by the present main road, A 624. Beyond the pass the line is probably represented by the Highgate road into Hayfield, although on the final descent to the river, an earlier hollow-way is more direct, 041 867. After swinging westwards through Hayfield, the next certain alignment, in three short lengths, is laid out up the valley as far as Hollinworth Head. Here is a new turning point, marked now by the base of a Saxon cross, known as 'Abbot's Chair', 029 903.

The new turn is made to avoid a valley lying across a direct line northwards. After half a mile of terraceway, a low agger swings northwards, 024 908, and merges with the 'Monks Road'. Fieldwork during 1982 revealed that a more direct route than that postulated previously (Wroe and Mellor, 1971) is possible. The Roman road continues with the 'Monks Road' for another half mile, before turning downhill towards the fort.

The road had a usable width of between 17 feet (5.2 metres) and 22 feet (6.7 metres) and was surfaced with river gravel over a sand foundation (Fig. 13). This reflects the proximity of the river to seven out of eight of the sections (Wilson, 1972; Wroe and Mellor, 1971).

**Brough to the south** Figs. 7 and 14

This road, aiming initially southwestwards from Brough, is possibly heading for Carsington, a Roman settlement now known to have existed three miles southwest of Wirksworth, 287 540 (Ling and Courtney, 1981). Compared with other Derbyshire roads it is of above average width, an indication of a road of some importance. This status in Roman times did not ensure its survival as a known Roman road, although there is evidence that as a through route it was well known in medieval times (Cockerton, 1932).

It left the fort from the southeast gate as a double carriageway shared with 'Batham Gate' (Cockerton and Heathcote, unpublished notes). After 100 yards (90 metres) it separated and turned southeastwards to cross the Bradwell Brook (confirmed by probe). Once over the brook it changed direction to the southwest. The first three miles lie along the eastern flanks of Bradwell Dale, laid out so as to cross the lowest point of the pass at the end of the valley, Windmill. It achieves this with one course correction to round the hill shoulder which blocks a clear line of sight from fort to pass.

It has suffered badly because of several erosion gullies in the soft and unstable overburden along the valley sides, no doubt one reason for the abandonment of the line by later traffic. Up to now it has not been proved beyond Windmill. It is thought likely that it would change direction there, aim towards the pass at Wardlow, 181 748, and then continue to the southeast towards Ashford. However, such a route remains conjectural (Wilson, 1975).

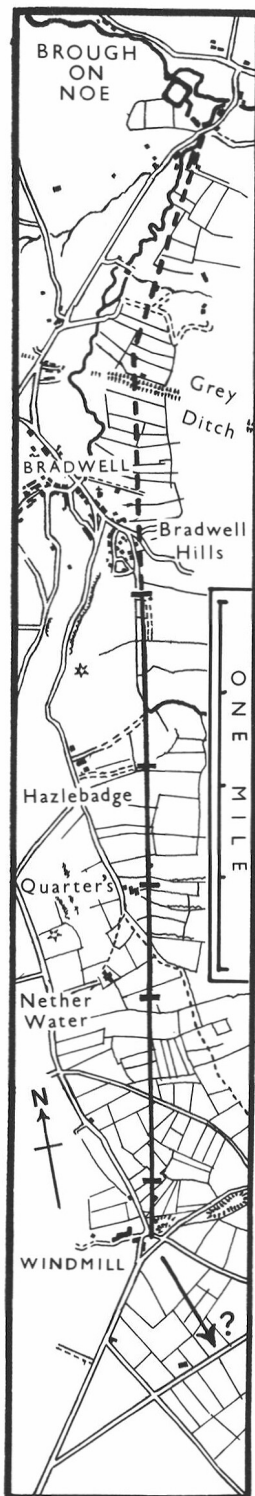
**Brough to Templeborough** Figs. 8 and 15 (Margary 710b)

Recent information (see Introduction) described a road emerging from the northeast

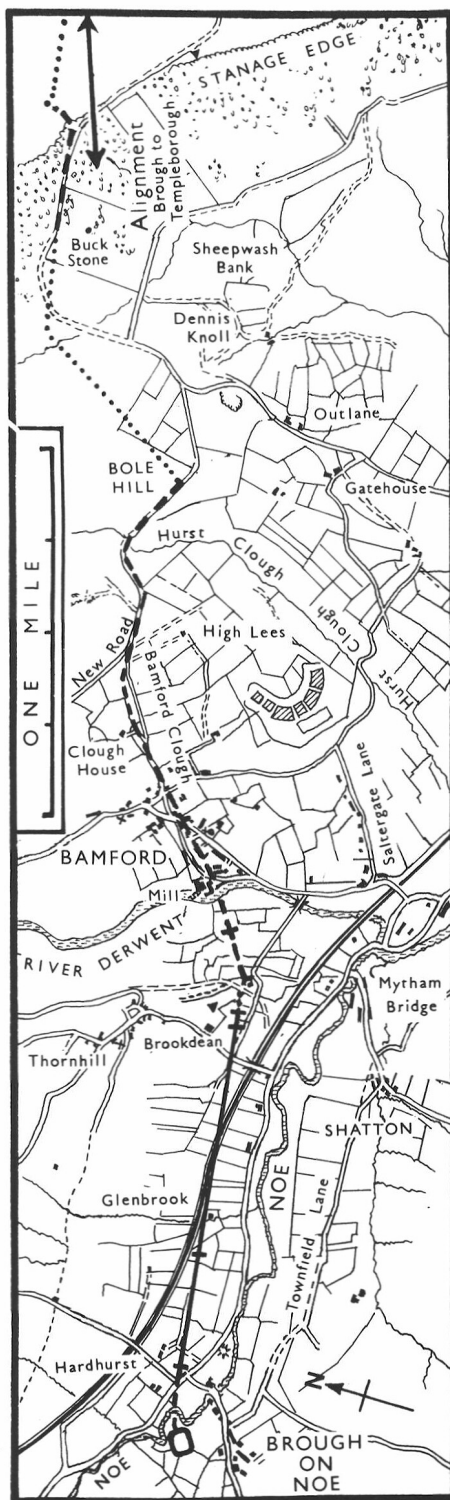




Fig. 6 The Roman road from Buxton to Melandra.



◀ Fig. 7 The Roman road from Brough to the south.



▶ Fig. 8 The Roman road from Brough to Templeborough.

gate at Brough as if to cross the river at about 183 828. An alignment, laid out from that point so as to cross the lower end of the escarpment, flanking the River Derwent by Bamford, has now been proved. Beyond, between the escarpment and Bamford Mill, a 100 yard (90 metres) length of buried road has been traced by probing and the cutting of one section.

On the other side of the river, there is evidence, albeit slight, that the road then aimed straight up the hill towards Bamford Clough. The road at first lies to the east of the present old lane from the mill. Then, to the east of Bamford Chapel, it merges with the old road up the clough as far as Clough House. Here, for a short distance, the drive to Clough House overlays the Roman line.

Soon after this the road turns eastwards following the natural line of the gully and after another 230 yards (207 metres) turns again until running due east and merging in line with the present road at the top, New Road.

Beyond the clough, the road slants up the southern slopes of Bole Hill on the line of the present road until near the crest of the ridge, where the present road turns slightly off the line. The Roman road goes straight on up to the apex of the ridge and turns sharply northeastwards at the top. This last ascending part has been cut away by the builders of the new road, but over the top of the hill a short length of terraceway can be seen before it is lost under the deep moorland vegetation.

The next length as far as Stanage Edge is still speculative yet fits well with several observed facts. The clues come first from the direction taken by the short length on Bole Hill. The second is taken from the descending traverse down Stanage Edge from the only low point along the escarpment. This feature is less than 150 feet (45 metres) from a direct line between the forts and it is probable that the Romans used this primitive pass. These two alignments are aiming to meet at the crossing of a low boggy area lying between Bole Hill and the Edge. It is clear that this is merely the usual Roman method of negotiating the banks of a river, but on a much larger scale.

The gap in the escarpment through which the road must have passed was probably enlarged by the Romans, but is now obscured by tons of fallen rock and debris. Even the approach ramp which would have been needed has vanished. However this would not be surprising, partly because of the rock falls and water erosion from the gully, but also from the fact that much of such a ramp would either have collapsed or been pulled down when the turnpike was built through and past it along the hillside.

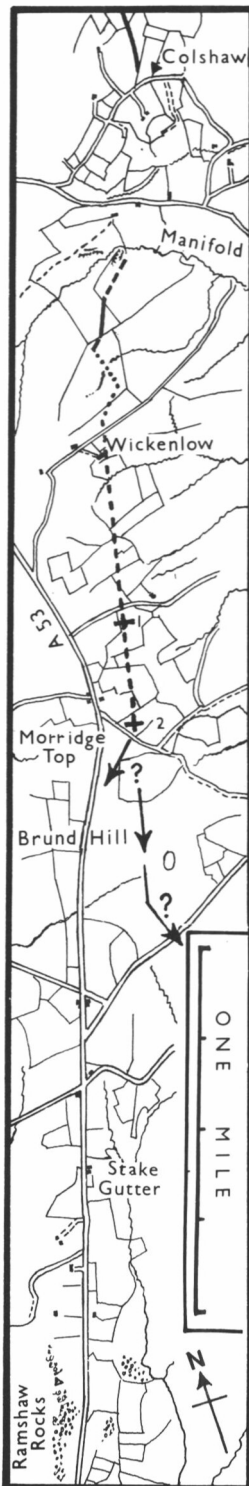
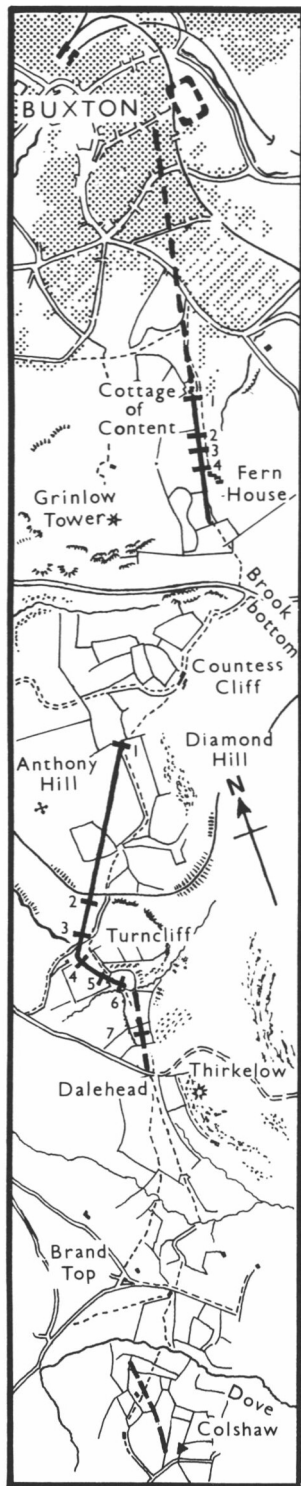
If this line is correct it should be easy to prove by the cutting of one or two sections. (Fieldwork by Wroe; work carried out in 1982.)

#### **Buxton to the southwest Figs. 9 and 16 (Margary 713)**

A road left Buxton in a southwesterly direction but to date it is possible only to speculate about its destination. Excavation has proved a southerly alignment past Cottage of Content and Fern House. This line, extended northwards, intersects Silverlands Road just west of the estimated position of the fort. It was close to here that a Roman milestone was found (Tristram, 1916). Southwards, a deep valley has to be crossed and there is no indication of how this was accomplished. The northern slopes are damaged by quarrying and the southern are prone to landslip.

The next certain alignment aims westwards from 0512 7079, west of Diamond Hill, towards 0463 7010, near Turncliff farm. The road turns southeastwards from the farm and curves round and down, heading more easterly until a shallow brook is reached. Here it turns abruptly southwestwards again towards Dalehead, where there is a convenient and easy passage through a long barrier of hills. This pass lies on a direct line extended from the end of the presumed alignment from Leek to the fort(?) at Buxton. At Buxton, Grinlow Tower overlooks the fort(?) and can be seen through this pass from the end of that alignment.

Beyond the pass lie two valleys, the headwaters of the River Dove, and it is on the south bank of the more southerly of these that some evidence survives. Here, descending northwards from the top of the hill (Colshaw) there is a wide terrace. It fades out above the stream, evidently badly eroded. More certain proof can be seen one



◀ Fig. 9 The Roman road from Buxton to the southwest.

mile further south at 037 668, on the south bank of the River Manifold. Here a short length of agger points towards Morridge Top.

Although the road has been proved to run to Morridge Top and thus to line up with the straight line of turnpike towards Leek, it is far from certain that it continued that way. The route past Ramshaw Rocks may have been too hazardous for a military road. A possible alternative is for the road to swing eastwards and follow Morridge until just southwest of the Mermaid Inn, and then to diverge more southwesterly through Whitehouse farm at 023 594, and south to Thorncliffe. There are precedents for such detours, for example the Chute Causeway between Winchester and Mildenhall (Margary, 1973).

Sections were cut along the first alignment from Buxton near Fern House, at Turncliff farm (Fig. 16), and lastly at Morridge Top. (Fieldwork and sections by Wroe and Mellor; Goodburn, 1976.)

#### THE ROMAN ROAD SYSTEM: OTHER ROUTES

It is probable that at least nine more roads await discovery. Some of them lie mostly outside the Peak District, but nevertheless have to be considered in relation to the forts and roads of the area. Most have long been regarded as Roman routes and appear in past literature on the subject (Thompson Watkin, 1886). A few are recent suggestions, stimulated either by recent discoveries, like the probable Roman fortlet in the Longdendale valley (Hart, 1981), or by investigation of existing air photographs (Longley, 1978/79). It must not be thought that even this list is complete. These examples represent only the obvious links between known or presumed settlements and forts and there must be other roads without such clear relationships to known Roman sites (Thompson Watkin, 1886).

##### **Buxton to Northwich Fig. 1**

This road has always been presumed to be mostly overlain by the first turnpike to Macclesfield. Before 1982 no convincing traces could be found. Now it is possible to say with confidence that part of the turnpike does indeed overlie the Roman road. This part runs towards Buxton from Burbage Plantation, at 035 723, which is the first shoulder of high ground to the west of the fort. It aims through Burbage, but diverges southwards from the turnpike after the crossing of the River Wye. Here the Roman road, keeping on a straight alignment, climbs higher than the turnpike, then crosses it at 049 731, passing soon after into open fields. Here there is a slight change of direction, necessary to keep between river and stream, and the road then aims for Silverlands at approximately 062 734. This is close to the presumed position of the Roman fort. The road has been traced with the probe across the open fields to the north of Macclesfield Road.

A road surface was found during pipe laying in this road in 1892 (Turner, 1903), somewhere near this line. Also found nearby, at 0535 7324, when Lismore Road was made c. 1892, was a supposed road, together with what was said to be an altar (Turner, 1903). This find spot is c. 80 feet (24 metres) from the Roman road and is perhaps more likely to represent the foundation for a funerary monument or even paving outside a building.

Beyond the hill shoulder to the west, the road may lie partly under the first turnpike and partly under c. 6 feet (1.75 metres) of peat, depending on how closely the Roman line was followed. However, it is certain that it would have to coincide with the turnpike again at the pass through the hills at Stonway Quarries, 996 727. All periods of road make use of this feature, including a packhorse road climbing northeastwards over the hills. Below the pass the Roman road probably closely followed a line of walls leading from 988 726, near Torgate farm, first northwestwards, then westwards, passing just south of Hindsclough farm. It then merged with a straight length of road which incorporates both periods of turnpike. The later packhorse road follows a similar course just to the south, passing through Brookhouse farm.

The course of the Roman road onwards towards Macclesfield can at present only be presumed to be close to the line taken by the first turnpike, past Walker Barn, 956 737,

and Windyway House, 951 734. (Fieldwork by Wroe.)

#### **Brough to Chesterfield Fig. 1**

A possible route from Brough has been noted continuing the initial line already postulated and excavated (Preston, 1969; Richardson, 1969). It avoids the difficult country of Offerton Moor by using the smoother terrain just south of the Derwent. Enough signs of old road survive, terraceways and hollow-ways, to encourage a more detailed survey. It has currently been traced provisionally to a possible crossing of the Derwent near Leadmill, 237 803, Hathersage.

Its approximate alignments are from 188 824 to 202 823, then following the line of an existing lane along the contours to 213 814, thence to 219 809 and on to 220 808, beyond which there is a deep ravine where the road is untraced. After that it can be traced from 223 806 to a point adjacent to Mount Pleasant, 226 806, and thence through Leadmill to the Derwent at 237 803. The ravine crossing is very close to the ideal alignment between the forts. (Fieldwork by Wroe.)

#### **Melandra to Penistone Fig. 1**

The discovery of a probable fortlet at Highstones in the Longdendale valley (Hart, 1981) is indicative of a road from Melandra towards the east. The most likely line for such a road would be northeastwards from 012 951, just below the fort, to 021 960 on the crest of the hill shoulder and part way along Stanyforth Street, Hadfield. From there a turn is made more easterly following existing roads as far as 024 961, where a northeasterly course is resumed. The turn is made to avoid low ground ahead. Unfortunately this new alignment coincides with the railway, which itself is taking the only level and straight way through. At the end of this mile, 035 972, the course is problematic. A line from there to a point south of the fortlet(?) is possible with minor modifications to cope with bad ground and would cross the Etherow at about 056 983. The fortlet(?) lies at 064 990. It may be that the railway, which follows the same course to the Etherow, has destroyed much of the Roman road. (Fieldwork by Wroe and G. G. Taylor.)

#### **Brough to Penistone? Fig. 1**

If the assumption made above is correct, it follows that a road should exist connecting the above sites. Such a road has been suggested in the past (Thompson Watkin, 1886). The most likely route would be via the pass at Moscar, 225 886, then following the eastern side of Bradfield Moors and across another pass at Smallfield, 245 945, then due north to the Penistone area.

#### **Carsington to Strutt's Park and Little Chester Fig. 1**

This road, until recently unknown and almost unsuspected, is now fully confirmed although as yet unproven by excavation. It leaves the Carsington settlement via the Scow Brook and is first seen as a terraceway at 2552 5205, which climbs over Warrington Knob (Figs. 4 and 18). It continues over the saddle on the same line and drops downhill to 2565 5157, where there is a slight turn easterly. It soon reaches Lendow Wood and here a ramp is visible approaching the deep gully. This obstacle was probably crossed on a timber bridge. The road then climbs out towards the west to resume a similar alignment beyond. This new line runs from 2583 5125, southeastwards to a high point at 2630 5068. From here until Bullhill is reached the course is estimated only: that is, continuing to 2683 4964 and then to 2726 4916.

This last position is at Bullhill, where an alignment runs for nearly a mile to 2797 4827, the present road overlying the Roman road in parts. From there the course gets increasingly difficult to trace but may turn slightly southwards to 2812 4788, where it resumes its original direction and merges with an existing road called Bullhill Lane.

Remains along the route are very slight. Perhaps the finest, apart from the bridge crossing point, is between Bullhill and Rakestones farm, where the Roman road zig-zags very slightly to climb the southern end of Bullhill (Peter Jennings, *pers. comm.*). It is possible that, over the first length from Carsington to Lendow Wood, there are two



periods running separately. On the same alignment as that approaching from the north to the settlement by Ash Plantation, is a possible road cutting through the lower flank of Warrington Knob. Once having gained the crest of the hill shoulder, the road could have slanted down to join the other road at the crossing point. Here a second crossing has been engineered across the stream at a lower level and in a straight line, presumably joining the original road line once over the valley. This easier crossing must be later than the zig-zag one, but it is not yet clear which road is to be associated with it.

The rest of the route towards Strutt's Park remains unknown as yet, but it is possible that a minor road, which forms the eastern boundary of Kedleston Park, represents the Roman line. Where this road turns off the alignment at the northern end, a low agger continues onwards. This minor road, projected northwards, aims to within 200 yards (180 metres) of the Roman settlement by Ash Plantation. Projected southwards it is aiming through the southwestern edges of the scatter of Roman finds assumed to indicate the site of the fort at Strutt's Park. (Fieldwork by Wroe.)

#### **Carsington to Chesterfield Fig. 1**

R. W. P. Cockerton submitted some evidence for this road (Cockerton, 1960) supposedly known as 'Hereward Street'. However, Henstock (1980) has shown that the name is unlikely to apply to the above route. Evidence is therefore slight indeed. Nevertheless, it remains probable that such a road did exist.

#### **Carsington to Rocester Fig. 1**

A continuation of the above postulated road southwestwards.

#### **Buxton to Manchester Fig. 1 (Margary 71b)**

The general line of this road has been known for centuries. It was one of the earlier turnpikes, the date of 1724 being given for the Act authorising it. This inevitably means that much evidence of Roman work is overlaid or destroyed. Nevertheless, diversions over the years are unavoidable and it seems certain that a Roman surveyor would not have chosen the line taken by the turnpike through Whaley Bridge. A more direct line is to be expected, and signs of this have been found at Reddish farm, Whaley Bridge. Here, three partial sections revealed the west edge and ditch of a road. The east edge and ditch have not so far been proved but a resistivity survey gave convincing indications of a buried agger.

Near Higher Disley, three miles northwest of Whaley Bridge, a 600 yards (540 metres) length of terraceway has been noted running between SJ 988 837 and 986 838. A section showed a substantial road of at least two periods with an overall width of c. 25 feet (7½ metres) similar to that found at Reddish. (Fieldwork and sections by Wroe and Mellor.)

#### **Roman road over Biddulph Moor Fig. 1**

Destinations unknown. This road was identified from an aerial photograph running from SJ 9178 6025 to SJ 9221 6137, including two slight directional changes (Longley, 1978/79). Fieldwork has proved another two thirds of a mile over a very circuitous route avoiding bad ground, as far as SJ 9253 6228 (Wroe, 1982). At this point the road is three quarters of a mile south of the River Dane. (Fieldwork by Wroe; excavations by Wroe and Taylor.)

From its position and direction, north northeast/south southwest, the road would seem to be a link between Chesterton and Buxton. The Dane lies midway, so there is the possibility of the presence of a fort or fortlet guarding a river crossing. If a road does connect the above sites, it must mean that the existing and proven road leaving Buxton for the southwest and currently assumed to be heading for Chesterton must have some other destination.

### **ROMAN ROADS IN THE PEAK DISTRICT: CONSTRUCTIONAL FEATURES AND EXCAVATIONS**

The construction of the roads depended on the nature of the terrain, and the roadway or usable width varied according to the amount of engineering work required in any

given situation. Over flat ground there were few drainage problems and the agger would have been a simple low embankment of mixed clay and earth including variable amounts of broken stone or river stone. This agger was rarely more than 18 inches (.5 metre) high and was usually less. It was commonly 5 feet (1.5 metres) wider than the roadway, which varied between c. 10 feet (3 metres) and c. 26 feet (8 metres) between kerbs. These were either small dumps of broken stone, being on occasion carefully laid (Fig. 13), or single square stones, placed to support the edges (Figs. 13 and 16). In areas where stone was scarce, what was available was used as kerbing to hold the road together rather than for surfacing it. However, apparent lack of stone can be misleading as in some places quite large stones have disintegrated into sandy grit, leaving only an outline of their position.

Roads over severe hills were carefully constructed to cope with the different conditions encountered. A good example of this is shown by the behaviour of the road between Brough and Melandra as it negotiates a difficult gully and hillside at Nethergate Clough, along Ashop Clough (Fig. 5). The road, heading east up the clough, lies on a natural shelf below the high moor and alongside the river. Nethergate Clough, a deep gully, bars the way ahead and beyond is a sheer wall of hillside. The road crossed the clough either on a bridge or culverted causeway and then passed onto a narrow shelf cut into the south flank of the hill. Most of this has now slipped away but a few yards farther on it survives in part, although even there it has slumped badly. The road then turned back through 160° northeastwards and traversed upwards until overlooking the crossing point and 60 feet (18 metres) higher up. Another turn westwards continued the original alignment. The ascending traverse was a rock cut terrace 30 feet (9 metres) wide carrying a normal agger 13 feet (4 metres) wide.

Another variation on construction can be seen a few yards farther along this higher alignment. There, a washout has exposed the trunks of trees, seemingly placed at right angles, about a yard (1 metre) apart and at about 30 inches (.75 metres) depth. This probably represents a strapping laid down to cross a patch of unstable ground.

Also between Brough and Melandra, where the road was built along a hillside with an average slope of 1 in 5 (Fig. 12), special measures were evidently considered necessary. To counteract any tendency for the road to slip downhill, material was quarried out of the hillside and moved outwards to form a broad flat continuous platform 30 feet (9 metres) wide. A quite modest agger was then built centrally on this prepared base. When the road was widened and strengthened the same process was repeated but with more careful attention to the downhill edge which was buttressed with stone (Fig. 12). Exactly the same methods were used on 'Deere Street' in Roxburghshire where the profile survives intact (R.C.H.M., 1956). In contrast the Derbyshire road is now buried by hillwash that effectively hides its true form. The usable width varied between 8 feet (2.4 metres) and 18 feet (5.4 metres) in its first period of construction.

Silting has also affected the roads on flatter ground and in every case the ditches are choked with clay or sand. Where there are two or more periods the ditches of the early roads were already full of silt when the later ones were constructed over them. No doubt to the rebuilders the height of the agger would appear so diminished once the first ditches were filled that they would merely decide to lay down more road material.

Sources of road material are not always obvious. Small round quarry pits, now usually silted up, have been noted along 'Batham Gate', 101 778, 'The Street' 111 683 to 113 681, and also along the route from Buxton to Melandra, 072 758. It would seem that these were the most usual quarries, as the side ditches are rarely large enough to have provided sufficient material. Where there are two or more periods, each has its own characteristic makeup in the material composing the road, depending on the quarrying methods in use at the time. In the Brough to Melandra road the early period over part of the route is of grey shale, contrasting well with the brown sand and broken stone of the later period. The grey shale was subsoil obtained from ditches and side cuttings, and then when a new road was laid over the top, sandy soil and rock were quarried from nearby to strengthen and improve the construction.

The sheer scale of the task of building a Roman road is one not often considered. Sufficient sections were cut across the Brough to Melandra road to make possible a simple calculation as to the amount of material required. The road in the first period averages 18 cu. feet per running foot. This conveniently makes 2 cu. yards per running yard of road. As the road is 14 English miles long, i.e. 24,640 yards, this figure multiplied by 2 gives a total of 49,280 cu. yards. To this must be added perhaps another 2,500 cu. yards for gully filling and approach ramps, thus giving a rounded out total of 52,000 cu. yards. Experience of digging up Roman roads as opposed to laying them indicates that as a minimum figure one man could comfortably quarry and lay  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cu. yards per day. So by assuming a modest work force of 500 men, this gives the time needed as approximately 61 days. To this must also be added the time taken to clear a passage 63 feet (19 metres) wide, normal for this class of road (Margary, 1973), through scrub and forest: say another 50 days, although this must be a very arbitrary figure. In the 13th. century a field army using on average 1000 woodmen for path-cutting covered 1 mile per day through the forest (Simpson, 1964). Other delaying factors would have been bad weather, a hostile population, and those unavoidable extras in hilly country: culverts, fords, bridges and so on. The task was formidable and would be so even today; nevertheless it would seem that, given a work force of 500-1000 men, such a road could have been completed in a season.

#### The road sections Figs. 10-17

A total of seventy sections have been cut to date. One from each of the proven major roads has been illustrated, with one extra of the Brough to Melandra road, the sections from which were particularly interesting. All the sections cut by Wroe and Mellor were completed and backfilled in one day even if not fully recorded. This occasionally meant going back several times where the section was felt to be unusual or where some feature was not understood. One disadvantage of one day excavations is that the lower levels are rarely investigated thoroughly and useful information about the original ground surface missed. However, the system worked well at least for gaining adequate proof that the course of the road was authentic. Small holes were dug through to the subsoil to try to make sure earlier roads were not missed.

#### Fig. 10. Wheston House, Peak Forest (Buxton to Brough)

Two periods only are without doubt: those within 18 inches (.5 metre) of the ground surface. Below is a laid dump of sand and below that again an apparently natural layer of sandy hillwash, implying a period of disuse. More sections are needed to verify this feature. The rock-cut ditch probably represents the first road (Frere, 1977).

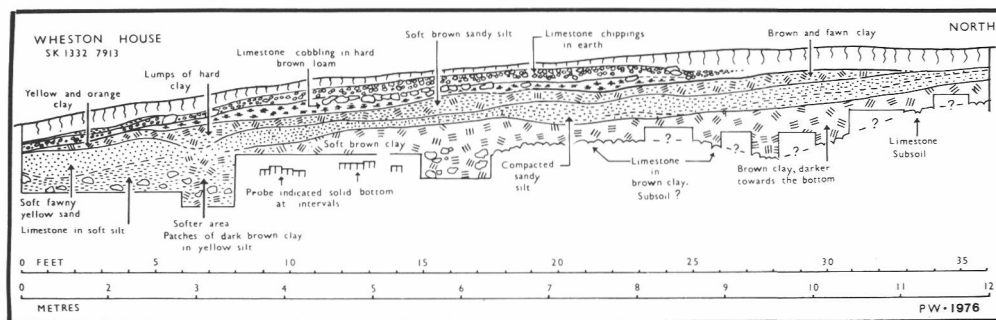


Fig. 10 Road section, Wheston House.

#### Fig. 11. Foxlow Grange, Buxton (Buxton to Carsington and Little Chester)

Excavated in advance of housing development one mile from the centre of Buxton. It is of two periods, both of sandy clay. In the later period the east edge was supported by a

kerb of massive limestone blocks (Wilson, 1974). Surface stone had not survived but was reported by a previous excavator when three sections were dug in the same area (Tristram, 1916).

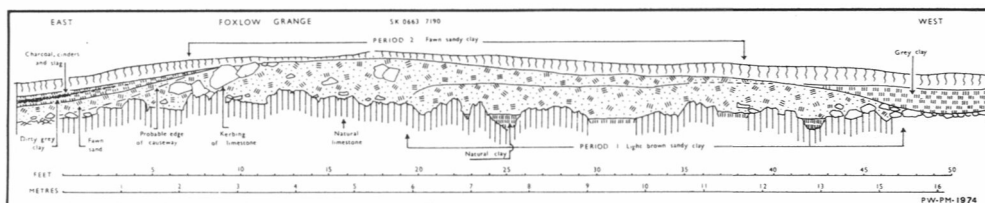


Fig. 11 Road section, Foxlow Grange.

Fig. 12. Fullwood Stile, Hope (Brough to Melandra)  
Described above; see also Wilson, 1973.

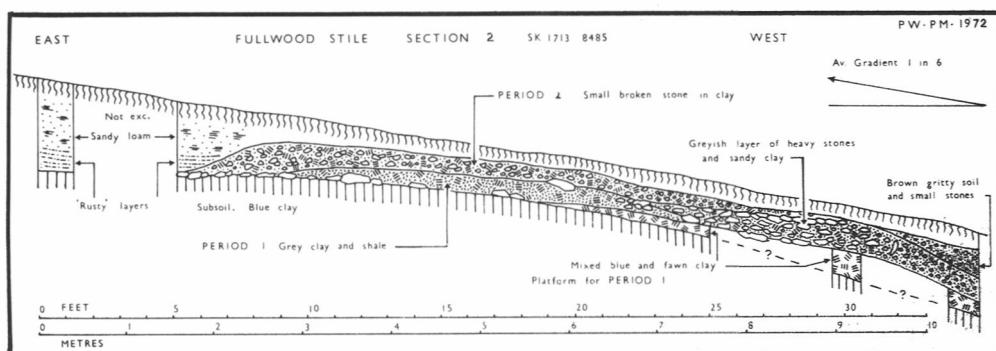


Fig. 12 Road section, Fullwood Stile.

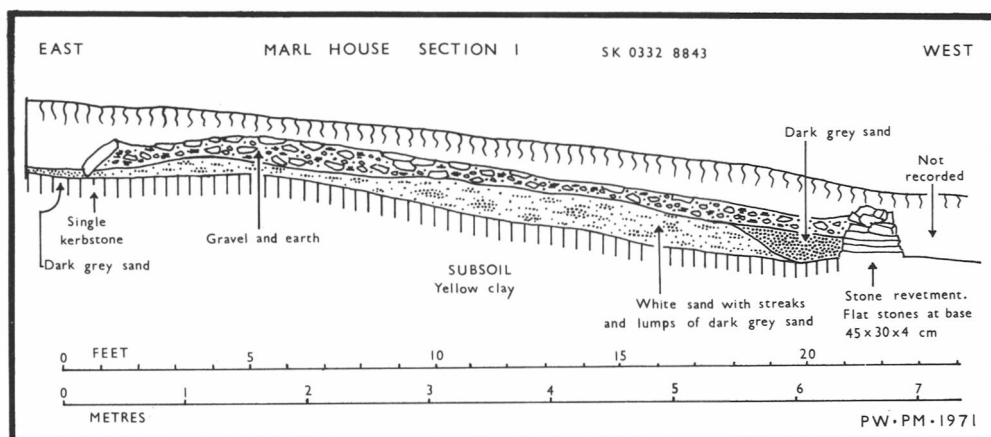


Fig. 13 Road section, Marl House.

*Fig. 13. Marl House, Little Hayfield (Buxton to Melandra)*

Cut at a point 100 yards (90 metres) from a difficult stream crossing where an approach ramp would be needed. This perhaps explains the carefully laid walling on the west side. On the east side is typical square kerb stone. See Wroe and Mellor (1971) for another section cut across the end of the approach ramp.

*Fig. 14. Nether Water, Great Hucklow (Brough to the south)*

One of five sections cut along the main alignment, it shows at least three periods and possibly four. It is wider than the other roads although the roadway was still probably only 20 feet (6 metres) wide. Only the last two periods are definitely wide; in the earlier, judging by the other sections as well, the road was only c. 15 feet (4.5 metres) wide. Construction was typical, being of sandy clay and broken stone, some of which was decayed (Wilson, 1975).

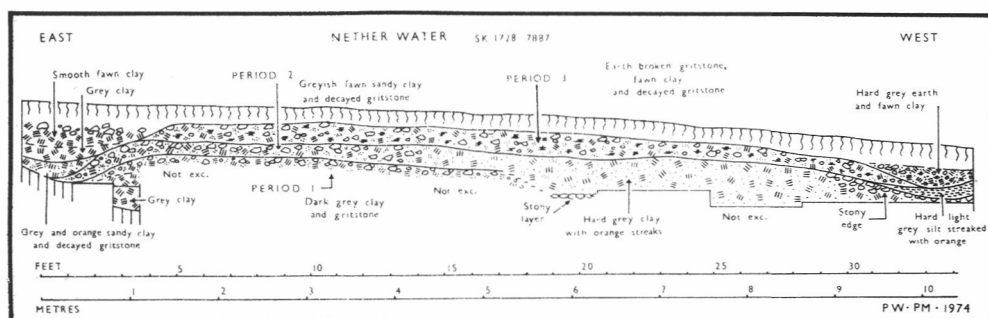


Fig. 14 Road section, Nether Water.

*Fig. 15. Hardhurst, Brough (Brough to Templeborough)*

Two periods: the earlier road was of broken stone set in sand or shale, the later of river stones set in clay. A section cut across a hillside slope of 1 in 5 showed a remarkable lack of terracing, although there was a buttress of dumped material to support the lower edge (Goodburn, 1978).

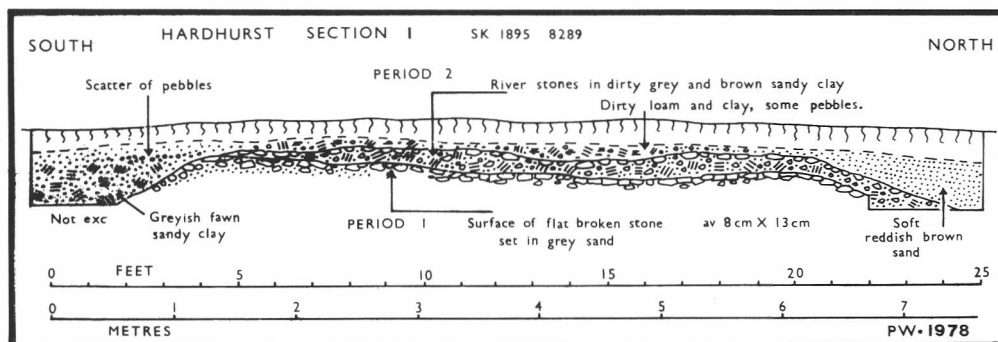
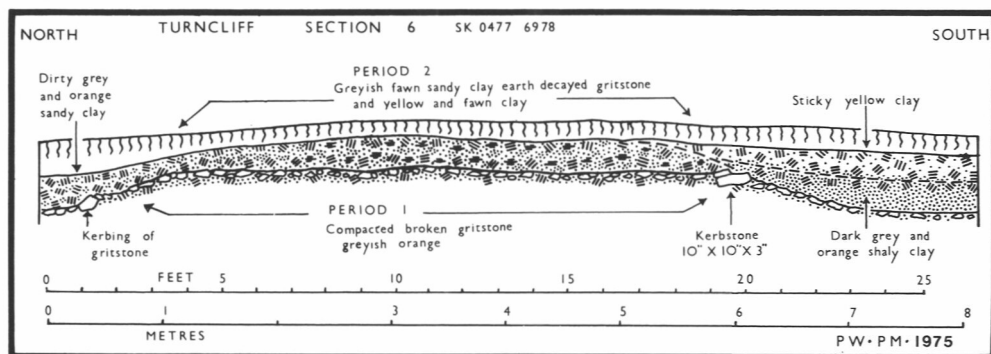


Fig. 15 Road section, Hardhurst.

**Fig. 16. Turncliff, Turncliff Common (Buxton to the southwest)**

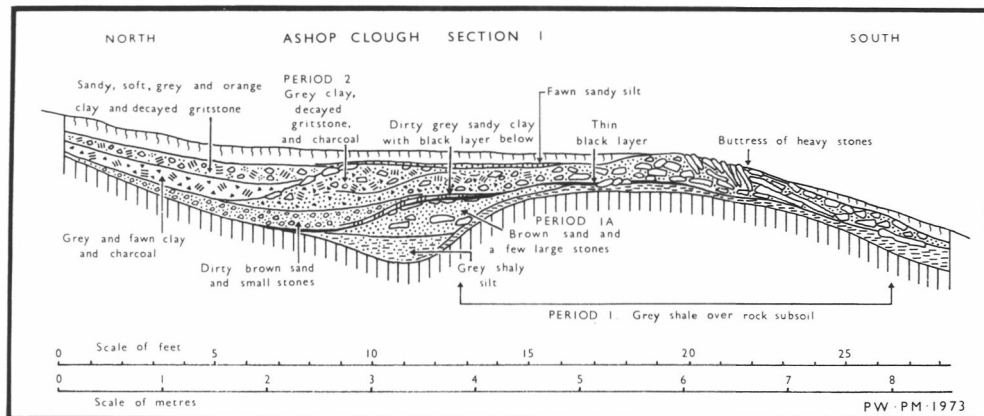
A road of two periods, the first of good quality, the second of indifferent construction, being merely a sandy clay bank. It may be that erosion has removed the surface metalling (Goodburn, 1976).



**Fig. 16 Road section, Turncliff.**

**Fig. 17. Ashop Clough, Hope Forest (Brough to Melandra)**

The road here is on a natural shelf high above the river and evidently suffered throughout its working life from erosion on the downhill edge. The earliest road had a high camber which would have been very hazardous for wheeled vehicles and surely must have lost much of its banked-up lower edge. It was widened uphill by dumping brown sand and stones over the silted ditch of the first road. Once again wear and erosion took its toll and the surface first became uneven and was then covered with a layer of muddy earth. This shows a long period of disuse and during this period sand and stones washed off the hillside, filling the north ditch. Eventually the road was rebuilt and was moved yet again from the slippery edge. This time a heavy buttress of stones was carefully laid to support that side and loose rocks were tipped down the slope (not on illustrated section) to stabilize it. Evidently scrub had spread over the earlier road and a lot of clearing and burning was required to open up the necessary road zone. Some traces of this burning were mixed in with the new agger and in the ditch a 9 inch (230mm.) layer of rapid silt collected, which contained charcoal and grey and fawn clay. This would have come from the softened and churned up ground uphill, caused by the clearing and quarrying for new road material.



**Fig. 17 Road section, Ashop Clough.**



## ROAD LAYOUT AROUND FORTS

Figure 18 is an attempt to detail the pattern of major roads close to two known forts and to two suspected forts. The positions of the conjectured forts at Buxton and Carsington are based partly on the topography and partly on the road pattern. It should be stressed that to date no evidence exists to confirm either site or even the certain presence of forts, although a possible rampart has been detected at Buxton slightly south of the position shown (Hart, 1981).

Around Brough (Fig. 18: 2) the roads are virtually confirmed but may still be incomplete. Melandra (Fig. 18: 1) has a complicated road system which still presents problems. The road passing through the defensive ditch south of the fort proceeds some way southwestwards before turning southeastwards towards Buxton. This might be explained by the Buxton road by-passing the fort and joining the Manchester road by the river. The road out of the fort would then serve merely as a link road. The road heading northeast out of the north gate appears to be aiming as if to round the bend of the river towards Woolley Bridge, where there was an old ford. If this was done and a turn then made northwestwards, it could represent a road to Castleshaw. The ground northwest of the fort is flat and marked by many old river channels, so it is likely that this would prove an obstacle to a road on a more direct line. Some slight confirmation of the presence of a road may perhaps be seen in the discovery of an urn or vase of Samian pottery near Woolley Bridge in the early nineteenth century (Thompson Watkin, 1886).

The roads at Buxton (Fig. 18: 3) are conjectural in that the layout is based only on alignments approaching or passing the fort(?) and settlement. Nevertheless, the distribution of sporadic finds tends to support the road system shown.

Carsington (Fig. 18: 4) is still much less researched than we would like. The area west of Ash Plantation shows a flat platform, surrounded by falling ground except for a narrow strip to the north, across which the road approaches. Around this 400 feet (360 metres) square there are faint signs of wide low banks; on the southwest there appear to be two phases. The road from Buxton is now almost certain and the route onwards to Strutts Park is known for three miles. It should be possible now to trace other roads out and in fact two possible roads have been noted on the south bank of the Scow Brook.

## CONCLUSION

The roads published here are in varying stages of investigation. Some are now well known but others still remain rather elusive, and in today's fast changing landscape each year that passes makes their survival more precarious and their investigation more difficult. Of course substantial progress has been made in the past twelve years, but there can be no cause for complacency: of the sixteen roads discussed here, only four are adequately understood and recorded, six more are just beginning to be recognised properly, and the remaining six are still little more than conjectured routes. It is not known whether the roads mapped here differed in importance in their role in the Roman communication system, although if judged by width and periods of use, the road from Brough to the south seems to have been a key route. Even this well used road, however, became completely lost and forgotten after the Roman period, and has vanished as the prominent feature of the landscape it must once have been. Yet it is right to end this study on an optimistic note: despite all the destructive agencies of the last two thousand years, both natural and man-made, it is remarkable how much of the Roman communication system in the Peak District can still be pieced together even though so many of the roads are lost from popular memory, buried and virtually invisible.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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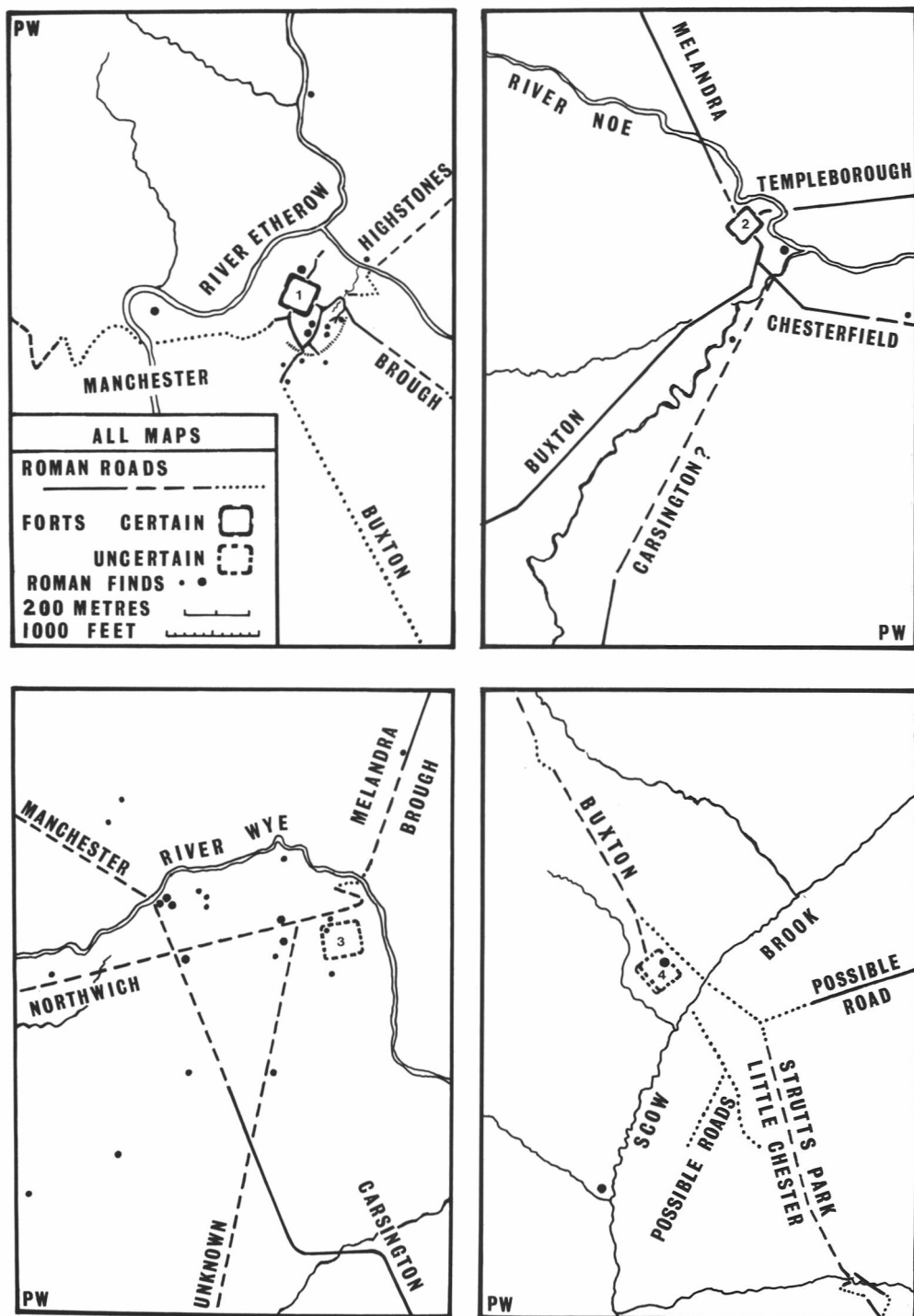


Fig. 18 Road layout around Roman forts in the Peak District. 1. Melandra Castle; 2. Brough-on-Noe; 3. Buxton; 4. Carsington.

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