EXCAVATIONS ACROSS THE SUPPOSED LINE OF 'THE STREET' ROMAN ROAD, SOUTH-EAST OF BUXTON, 1991

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INTRODUCTION

Over a total of ten weeks during September-December 1991, a 10 metre stretch of a linear earthwork was excavated at the eastern foot of Harpur Hill, to the south-east of Buxton (SK07007145: Fig. 1). The earthwork has generally been regarded as the *agger* of a Roman road, and the excavation was undertaken in the expectation that this would prove to be the case. It was necessitated by the impending construction of an access-road to a new reservoir, built by Severn Trent Water (STW) in 1992 at a location some 250 metres to the south-west, close to the summit of Harpur Hill (or Fox Low, as it is sometimes called, after the barrow which occupies the very summit). Two other archaeological trenches had been opened in May 1991, at 1400 metres and 2300 metres respectively to the south-east of that alongside Harpur Hill, at points where the supposed line of the Roman road was to be crossed by STW pipelines (as explained below). These two trenches, and some related observations made during the construction of the pipelines in 1992, are also reported briefly below.

The main pipeline is to carry water over a distance of nearly 30 kilometres from Bamford to the Harpur Hill reservoir. All archaeological work on the pipeline was funded entirely by STW and was carried out on their behalf by the Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust (T&PAT), for whom it was conceived and organised by GG and largely executed in the field by KC with a team of excavators averaging five in number. Construction of the pipeline and two associated new reservoirs (on Harpur Hill and Bradwell Moor) began in February 1992. The total length of the pipeline, including four intended branch-pipes and two washout-pipes, is to be 36.5 kilometres, and archaeological fieldwork was conducted at those locations along the route for which some particular archaeological potential could be identified in advance of its construction. In addition to those mentioned above, these included excavations and surveys of varying extent close to Brough-on-Noe (centred around SK180821 and 184824), on Grey Ditch (171817), above Smalldale (162812 and 164812), on Bradwell Moor (140796 and 141795), in Peter Dale (130753), in Miller's Dale (136732), and on Harpur Hill (069713). With the exception of Grey Ditch (which was excavated by Christopher Taylor) and the site on top of Harpur Hill (excavated by Daryl Garton), the archive relating to most of this fieldwork has been compiled by KC. Copies of the archive have been lodged in the Sites & Monuments Records held by Derbyshire County Council and/or the Peak National Park, depending upon the location of each site. The present report is concerned solely with the excavations and observations made in search of the Roman road to the south-east of Buxton and is the joint responsibility of GG and KC. Separate reports in respect of Batham Gate Roman road on its approach to Navio, the Grey Ditch excavation, and the prehistoric site on Harpur Hill will be published in due course.

As noted above, the earthwork running south-east from Buxton has frequently been

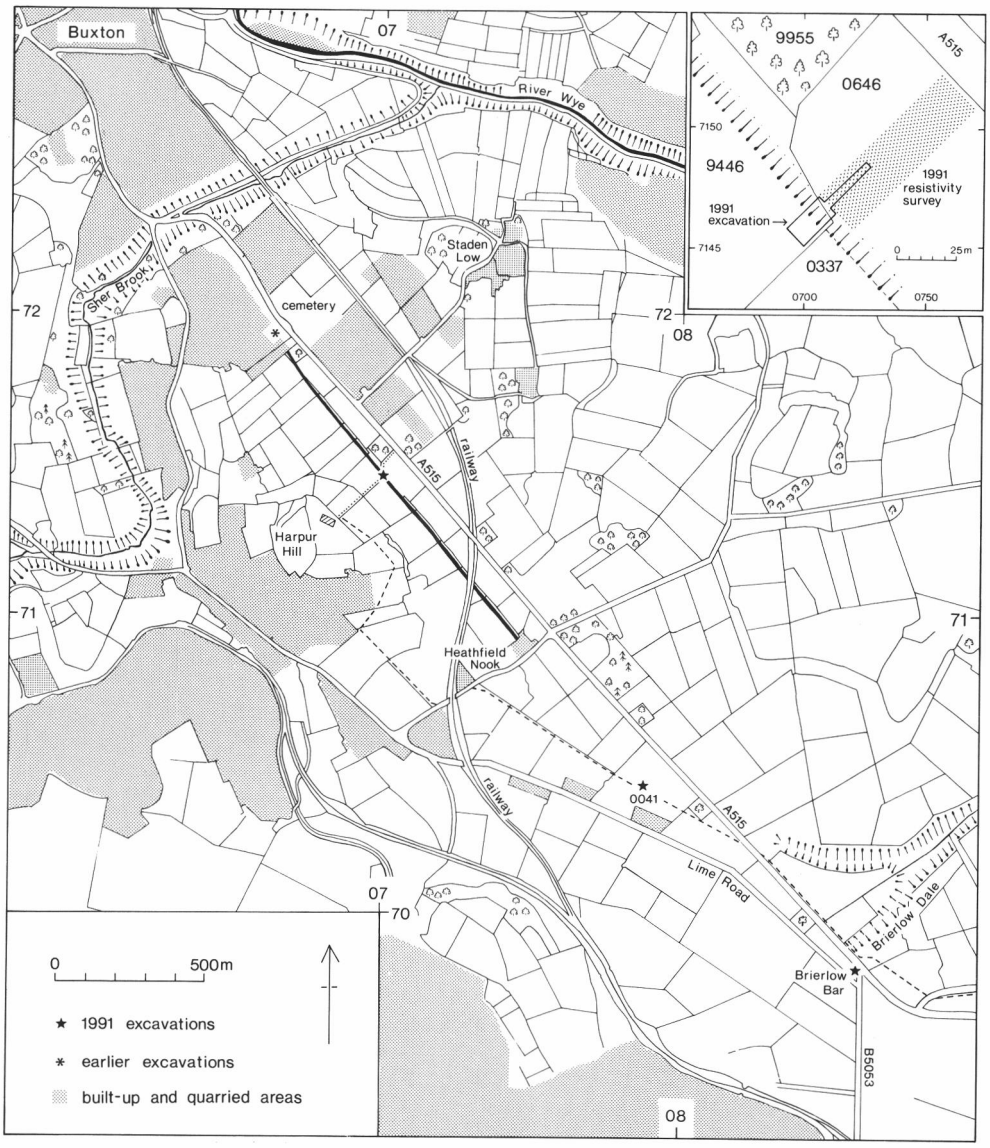

Fig. 1 'The Street': extant stretch of the earthwork (bold line) in relation to present field-walls, roads, and railways, showing the positions of the 1991 and previous excavations, the Harpur Hill reservoir (hatched), access-road (dotted), and pipeline (broken line); scale 1:25000. The plan inset at top right outlines the main 1991 excavation in relation to the earthwork (hachured), field-walls and field-numbers, and the area of the resistivity-survey (stippled); scale 1:3125. Both plans show the National Grid around their borders.

interpreted as a stretch of the agger of a Roman road. This road is believed to have crossed the White Peak from Buxton (Roman *Aquae Arnemetiae*, where there is supposed to have been a fort, as yet unlocated, in addition to a spa) to Carsington (where it is reasonable to expect that

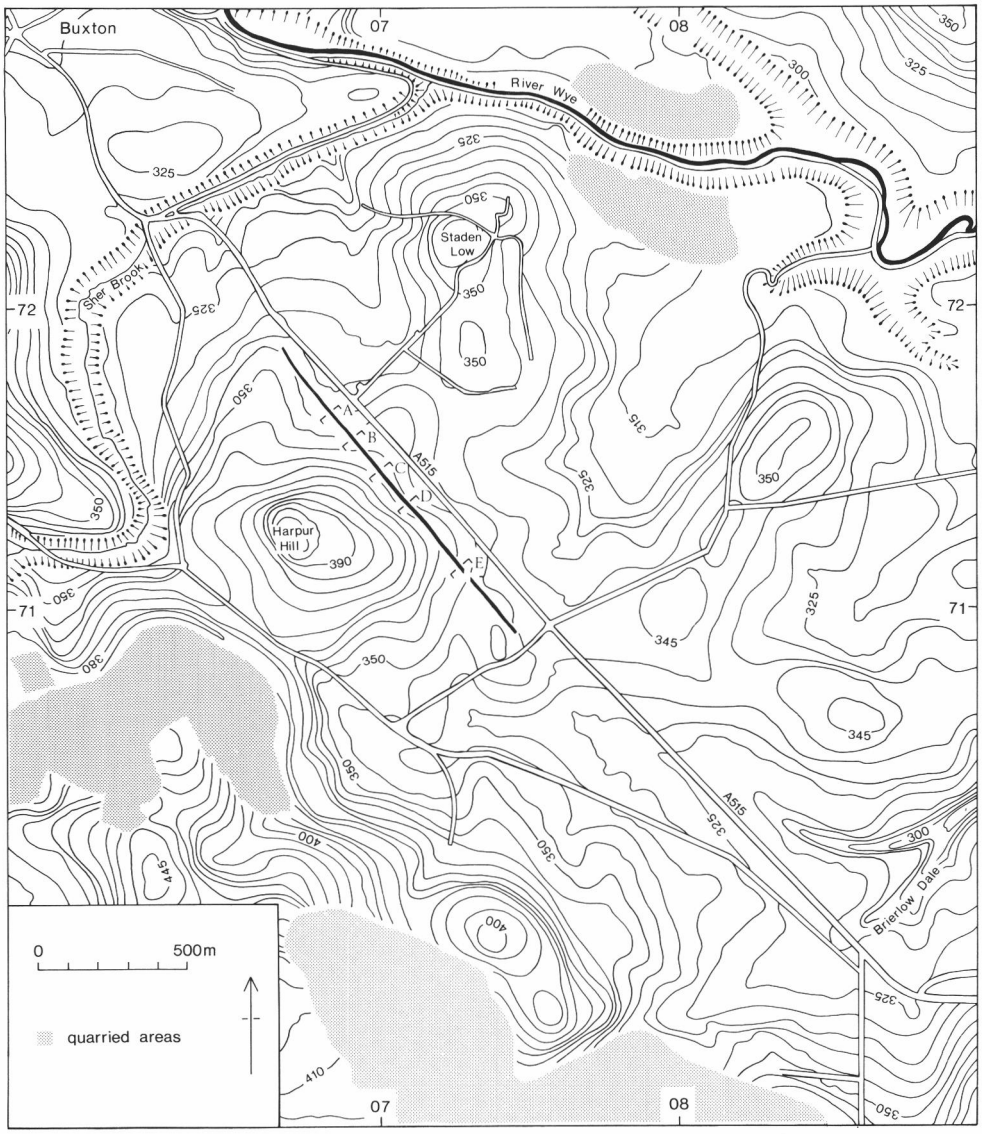

Fig. 2 'The Street': extant stretch of the earthwork (bold line) in relation to contours at 5 metres vertical interval and roads, showing the positions of earthwork- profiles A-E (as illustrated in Fig. 3); scale 1:25000.

there would have been a Roman fort close to the southern limestone scarp of the Peak District, although again this has yet to be discovered) and thence across lower-lying land to Little Chester, Derby (the Roman fort of *Derventio*). It is generally known as 'The Street', and its existence was established as early as the tenth century, when it was called *cyngstræt*, 'King Street', in a document relating to an estate situated close to the southern edge of the White Peak (Brooks, Gelling and Johnson, 1984: 153). Any Roman road leaving Buxton in a south-easterly direction

may be assumed to have exploited the flattish ground between Harpur Hill and Staden Low, having negotiated the difficulties of the Sher Brook dale (Fig. 2). This would accord with the explanation of the linear earthwork as a Roman agger. However, the excavation alongside Harpur Hill has revealed no trace of metalling of any date, and the earthwork now seems more likely to be a major land-boundary, built before the seventeenth century, and used for long enough for its ditch to fill and be recut. This result is both surprising, in that it discredits the received doctrine of the Roman road, and intriguing, in that it identifies a separate monument which surely must relate in some fashion to the supposed Roman road, if only in respecting its alignment for a considerable distance — probably, as we shall see, offset to the south-west of it.

THE EARTHWORK

The earthwork runs north-west/south-east, roughly parallel to, and up to 90 metres to the south-west of, a straight stretch of the A515 Buxton/Ashbourne road, which has occupied its present line since at least 1749, when the Buxton/Hurdlow stretch of the Manchester/Derby turnpike was constructed (Radley and Penny, 1972: 95; Figs 1, 2). Today, the earthwork is visible for a distance of about 1.2 kilometres, running virtually straight from the west corner of a small square plantation opposite Buxton Cemetery (SK06677185) to the east corner of the field that lies immediately north-west of the farm at Heathfield Nook (07457093). Between these two points, it crosses a series of pasture-fields (Fig. 1).

For most of this distance, the line of the earthwork is reflected in the present field-pattern, with an essentially continuous stretch of drystone wall running more or less parallel to it, generally lying a short distance to its north-east but directly overlying it in two short lengths. This wall-line clearly forms a dominant element in the layout of fields round about, with other drystone walls set out from it on either side (Fig. 1). Many of these probably originated in the early-nineteenth century, when the Enclosure Award for Hartington, dated 1804, recorded much the same pattern of walls as is seen on modern Ordnance Survey maps. The long wall-line extends the alignment of the earthwork to the south-east by 370 metres beyond Heathfield Nook Road, separating fields that are pock-marked by quarrying but which bear no certain signs of the earthwork. Even so, there is an obvious possibility that the earthwork formerly existed here, not least because the fields lying to the north-east of this extended wall-line are termed 'Ancient Inclosure' on the 1804 map, implying perhaps that they were enclosed before the wall was built.

Beyond the north-west end of the extant earthwork, there is nothing to be discerned of its line in the present landscape, for an extensive area has become engulfed by a modern housing-estate. However, early Ordnance Survey maps can furnish a few clues. At one stage, beyond the most northerly point shown on Fig. 1, the earthwork was mapped as curving a little towards the north, stopping short of the A515, while the parish-boundary formerly followed a similar curving course to meet the A515 at SK06647196 and thence to run along the modern road into Higher Buxton, where it is commonly contended that the Roman fort was situated (Watson, 1775: 237; Tristram, 1916; Hart, 1981: 87, fig. 8.5; Wroe, 1982: 54, figs 4, 18; Barnatt, 1987). It is noticeable on the ground and on maps that the A515 makes a slight change of alignment at exactly this point, where it meets the crest of the slope down towards the dale of the Sher Brook. It could be that the modern road matches the line of the earthwork from here north-westwards for the 450 metres or so down to the brook; and, indeed, the first-edition 1" Ordnance Survey map of 1842 appears to show the earthwork running alongside (i.e. to south-west of) the road towards the brook.

The central stretch of the extant earthwork is visible as a terrace running along the slope. Thus, seen in profile, it has a distinguishable scarp along the downslope (i.e. north-east) side, while it

merges gently into the steepening slope of Harpur Hill on the uphill side (Fig. 3: C, D — C being along the south-east limit of the 1991 excavation outlined in the inset plan in Fig. 1; cf. the surface-profile in Fig. 6, 10 metres to the north-west). At some points, the field-wall which runs close to its downslope scarp appears to sit in the top of a slight hollow, possibly the last trace of a largely-filled ditch, but perhaps in part due to localised quarrying related to the construction of the drystone walls. Before excavation, it was supposed either that the Roman road had been

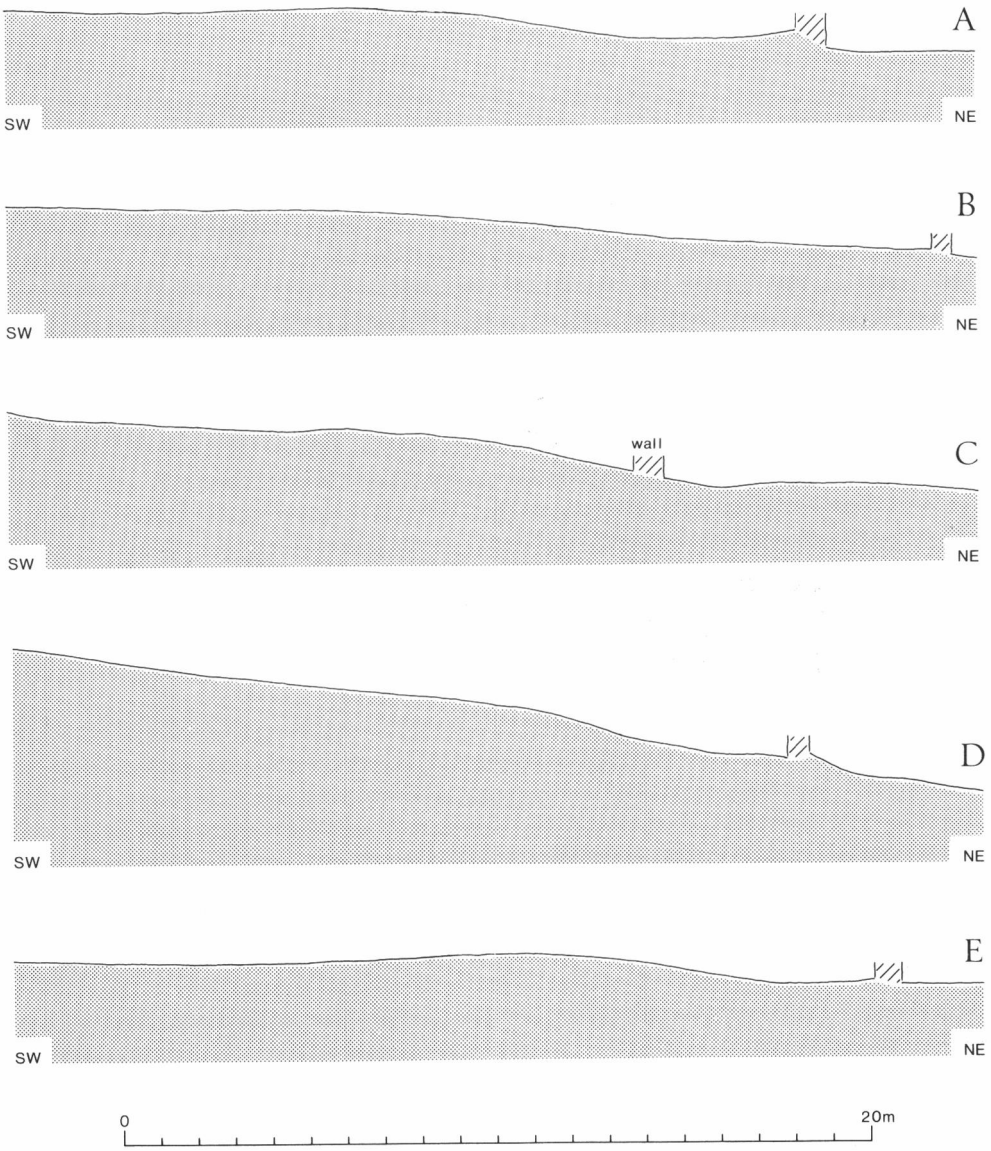

Fig. 3 'The Street': surface-profiles across the earthwork, recorded at positions marked A-E in Fig. 2. Scale 1:200.

constructed here with an agger of asymmetrical section to create a reasonably level surface for wheeled vehicles, or that its uphill scarp, together with any drainage-ditch along that side, had become buried by hill-wash and/or ploughsoil. Towards either end, and particularly south from about SK07247116, as the earthwork leaves Harpur Hill behind and begins to run down (instead of along) a gentle gradient (Fig. 2), it assumes a slightly different profile which appears to owe nothing to any build-up of colluvium or formation of lynchet. Where best preserved, in the field bisected by a nineteenth-century railway-cutting (i.e. at SK073711), it comprises a low bank of consistent profile standing a little proud of the ground to either side, with continuing indications of a ditch under the later field-wall along its north-east side (Fig. 3:E, cf. A). Superficially, it makes a perfectly acceptable cambered agger for a road here; but, again, the excavation-results described below cast serious doubt upon this interpretation since there is no apparent cause to suppose that this is not the same earthwork as that excavated 400-500 metres further north-west.

At various stages in the past, the line of this earthwork and/or the stone wall which accompanies it across the landscape has marked an administrative or tenurial boundary. The first positive record which we have been able to locate is embodied in William Heyward's 'Map of Hartington Manor' of 1614 (Devonshire Collections, Chatsworth, no. 2063), a part of which is reproduced here as Fig. 4. The enclosure labelled 'St JOHNS HOLD called also BOOTH-LOWE' has a straight north-east side marked as 'the outer bounds', and the *prima facie* identification of this as our earthwork/wall is confirmed by a detailed comparison with the present arrangement of field-boundaries, as depicted in Fig. 1. Thus, for example, the pronounced indentation in the south-western perimeter of St Johns Hold, labelled 'FOXLOWE' in Fig. 4, clearly circumscribes the summit of Harpur Hill and is matched by the field-boundary lying immediately west of the new reservoir in Fig. 1. Since the south-eastern corner of St Johns Hold falls short of the southern end of the surviving earthwork, it seems improbable that the latter was constructed for the purpose of defining the former, and more likely that this was an established boundary which continued in, or returned to, use at that time. The most north-easterly line on the 1614 map is the forerunner of the turnpiked Buxton/Ashbourne road. Sandwiched between this and the line of the earthwork is a small enclosure labelled 'a little close in Bakewell Parish', which we shall have cause to mention again in discussing the line of the Roman road (see p. 58).

More recently, some part or all of the line of the long wall has served as a boundary between parishes. These have changed names repeatedly, but the details need not detain us here. At present, the coincidence with the parish-boundary is restricted to that portion of the wall which runs with the southernmost 220 metres of the extant earthwork together with its south-easterly extension beyond the earthwork (as explained above). Formerly, it was more extensive, including the entire 1.2 kilometres of the earthwork traceable on the ground today. Moreover, even today the parish-boundary extends the projected line of the earthwork south-eastwards by 100 metres beyond the field-wall noted above, before turning north-east.

It may well be that a more exhaustive search of documentary sources would have a good deal more to tell about this earthwork. Here, however, our principal purpose is simply to report upon the fieldwork conducted in 1991 and 1992, and we can only express our hope that others will undertake such research in the future.

EXCAVATIONS ACROSS THE EARTHWORK

Excavations across this earthwork, in the belief that it was the Roman road, were made early in this century and again in 1974, both in the stretch opposite Buxton Cemetery (and both probably

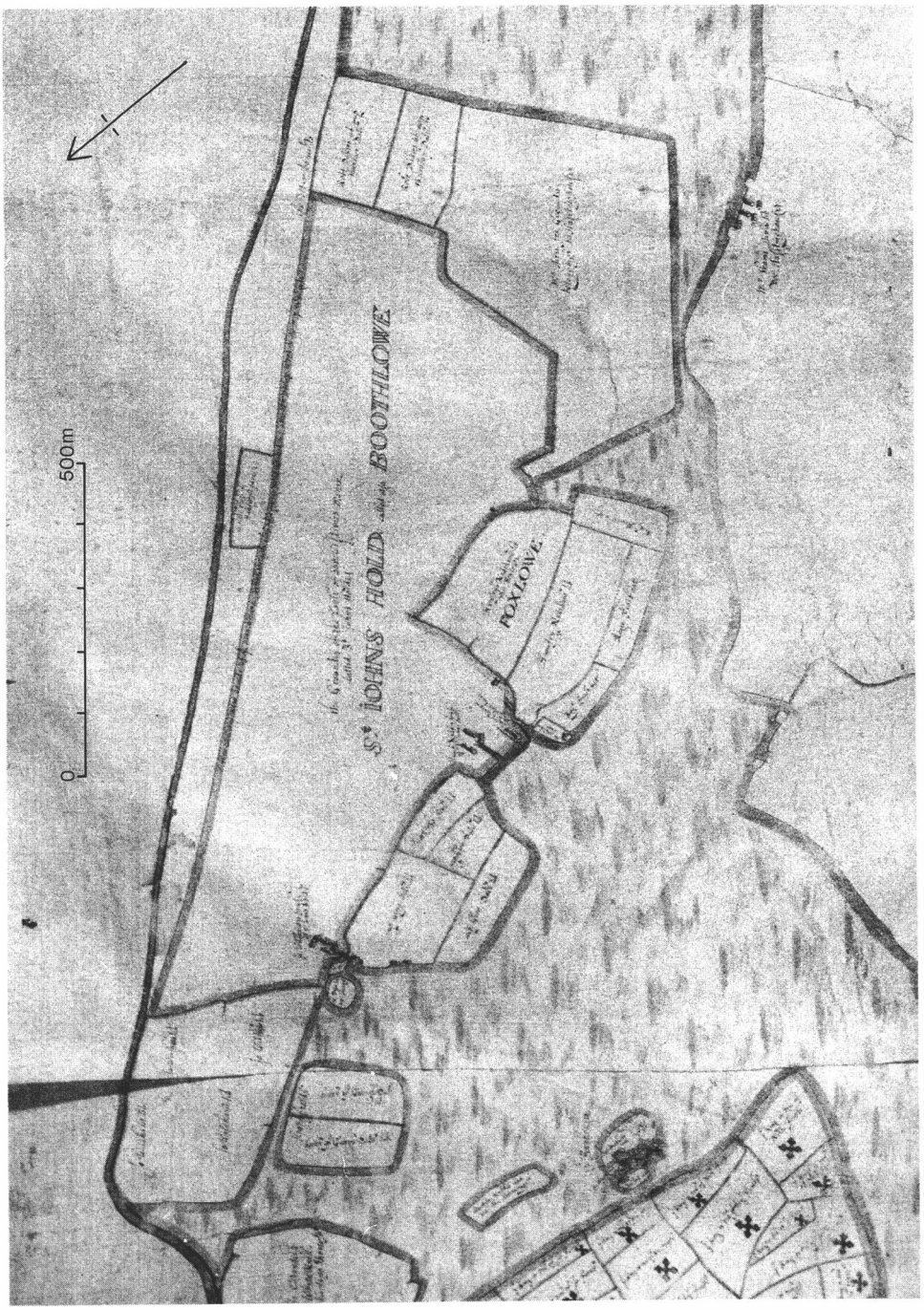

Fig. 4 'The Street': part of William Heyward's Map of Hartington Manor, 1614. Scale and north arrow added approximately. *(Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the Chatsworth Settlement.)*

at SK066719), in an area now landscaped to accommodate a housing-estate (Fig. 1). The published drawing of the 1974 cutting shows a symmetrical surface-profile like that described above for the adjacent portion of the extant earthwork (Fig. 3:A), but the soil-section beneath it appears to display no features which demand interpretation as a road-agger (Wroe, 1982: 67-8, fig. 11; Wilson, 1975: 242). Although the earlier cutting is said to have revealed surface-metalling (Tristram, 1916: 99), little reliance can be placed upon such a scanty account.

As remarked above, the 1991 excavation at the foot of Harpur Hill encountered nothing which can be interpreted as a road, nor provided any reason to suppose that all deposits forming a road had been eroded. This excavation crossed the earthwork in the east corner of the field numbered 9446 on the relevant sheet of the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map, where the proposed access-road for the reservoir was to result in the earthwork's being levelled (Figs 1, 5). It extended 19 metres south-westwards into the field, well upslope beyond the ridge of the earthwork, and 10 metres north-westwards to cover the full area under threat from the construction of the access-road. A narrower (3 metres) arm of the trench was excavated 24 metres north-eastwards into the neighbouring field 0646, to ensure that the full width of any ditch along the downslope side of the ridge was recorded. Excavation was preceded by a spot-height/contour survey of a 40 x 10 metres area, recording the consistency of the surface-profile of the earthwork in the threatened stretch. In field 0646, excavation was also preceded by a resistivity-survey of a 20-metre swathe extending across 71 metres of the field as far as the wall alongside the A515 (Fig. 1); this revealed bold linear resistance-anomalies which subsequent excavation allows us to infer are the result of nothing more significant than the bedding of the limestone bedrock and the clayey subsoil.

Apart from the easternmost 20 metres of the trench in field 0646, which were stripped of topsoil by machine, all parts of the excavation were conducted entirely by hand. Following the removal of topsoil, the general excavation-strategy was to strip arbitrary spits averaging 0.1 metre deep using mattocks and shovels, and to clean the surface revealed by the removal of each spit using trowels. It was hoped that this procedure would allow the detection of variations in the make-up of the earthwork which might indicate its structure or form and any sequence of deposition within it. Such soil-variations as could be seen at the base of each spit were recorded by planning and photography; these, together with similar records of the soil-sections left standing along the northern and southern limits of excavation, have allowed the succession of features and deposits comprising the earthwork to be established at least in outline. Once the subsoil/bedrock had been penetrated by the fourth-sixth such spit (the depth to this level obviously varied across the excavation in relation to the profile of the overlying earthwork), the ditches cut below that level were excavated to reveal their profile where this was clearly identifiable. Where necessary, box-sections were cut into the subsoil to ensure that the bottom and sides of the ditches had been correctly identified (hence the dot-dash line along the foot of the section-drawing in Fig. 6).

The principal features excavated, as shown in the plan and section drawings (Figs 5, 6), were two ditches, two short alignments of drystone revetment, and a build-up of fine-grained silty clay overlying the subsoil and presumed to be largely hill-wash, perhaps partly ploughsoil, and perhaps partly material cast up from the ditches. The ditches are the dominant archaeological features encountered here, and they are presumed to mark the line of a well-established land-boundary of some kind. The western ditch impinged upon, and was therefore later than, the eastern one. This stratigraphical sequence was observed quite clearly in plan across the full width of the trench, and it seemed to be reflected in the soil-section at the northern limit of the excavation by a sloping stone high over the western edge of the fill of the eastern ditch (hatched in Fig. 6).

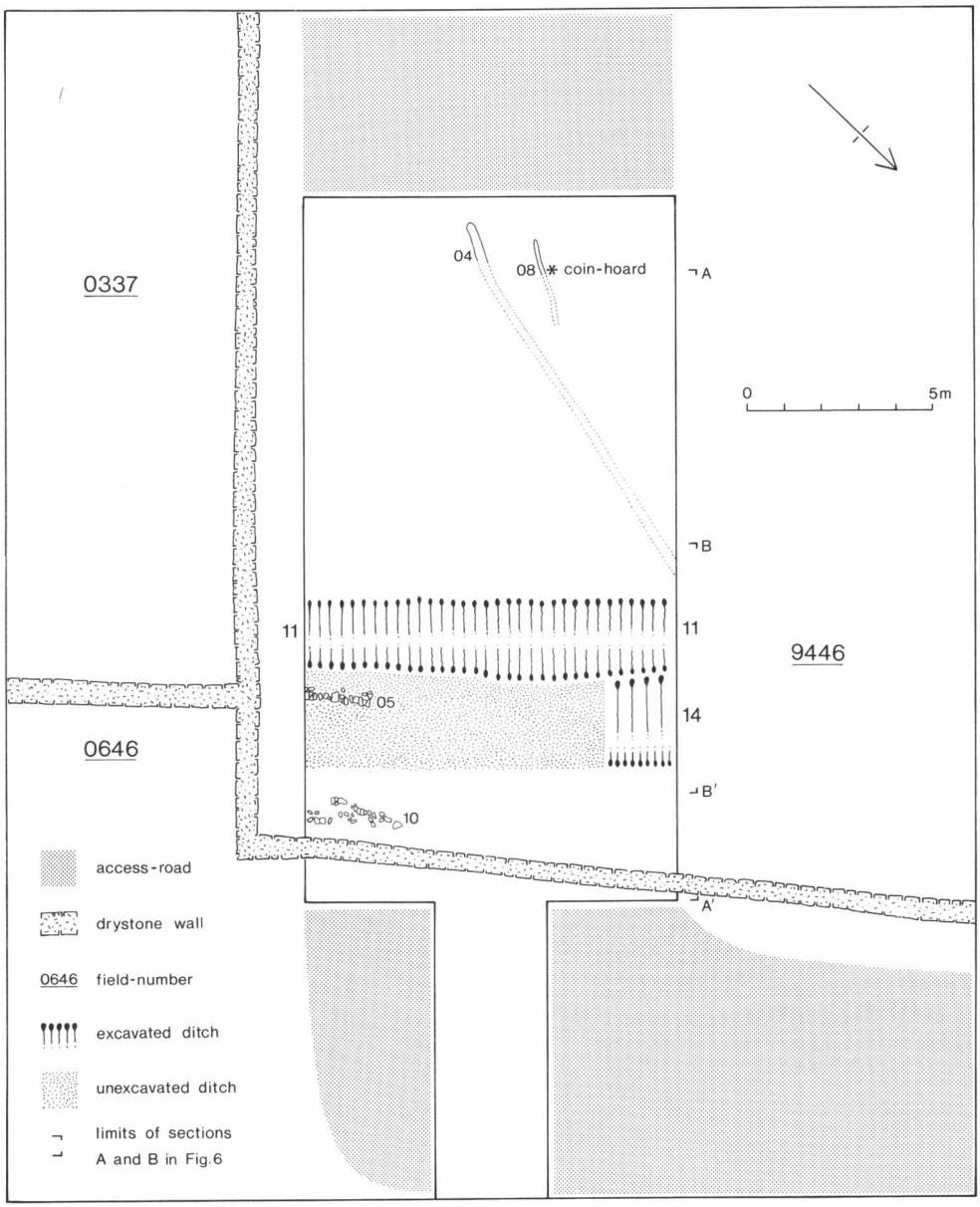

Fig. 5 'The Street': plan of archaeological features revealed by the 1991 excavation at the foot of Harpur Hill (i.e. as outlined in the inset plan in Fig. 1), showing ditches 11 and 14 at the level of the surface of subsoil (hachured where excavated, stippled where not), drystone revetments 05 and 10 at a higher level, the position of the 19th-century coin-hoard, modern field-walls across and around the excavation, and the numbers of the fields used on the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map; scale 1:200.

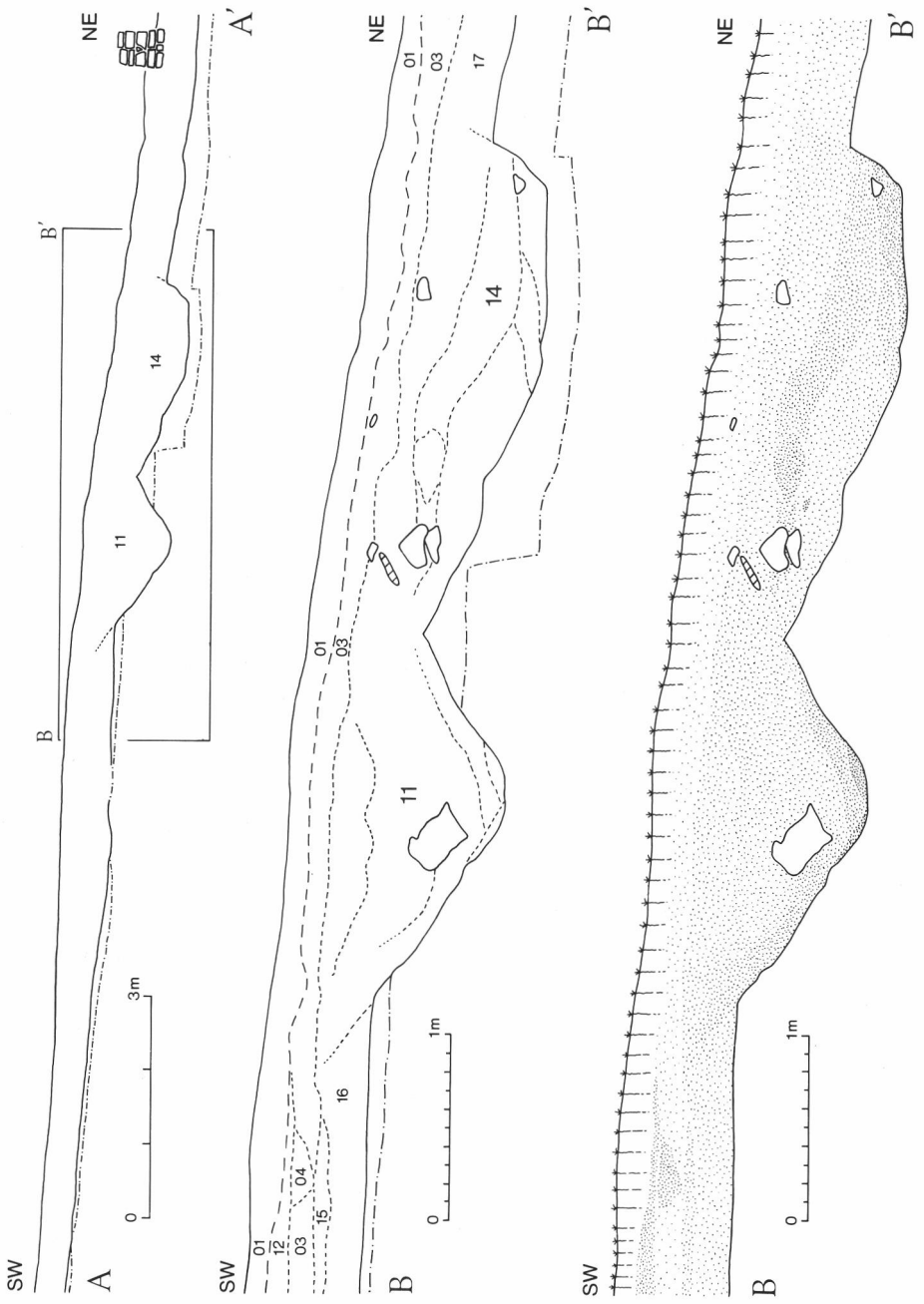

Fig. 6 'The Street': section of the earthwork recorded along the north-west side of the 1991 excavation at the foot of Harpur Hill, between points A-A' and B-B' in Fig. 5; the upper drawing is at scale 1:100, the middle and lower drawings at 1:40.

The full 10-metre stretch of the western ditch (numbered 11 in Figs 5 and 6) was excavated. It had a V-shaped profile with sides sloping evenly and gently. Only the northernmost 2 metres of the eastern ditch (14) were emptied. It was asymmetrical in profile with a steep scarp forming the eastern, or downslope, side, a flattish bottom about 1.0 metre wide, and a gently-sloping western side. Both ditches were cut into the subsoil, and it was evident that both had been cut from some way up in the 0.35-0.60 metre thickness of the silty clay, itself divisible by a slight difference of colour and texture into a lower deposit (numbered 16/17) and an upper one (03), with lenses of slightly differing material at the interface (15). Both ditches appeared to be overlain by 03, and the western ditch, if not also the eastern, may have been cut from the top of 16/17 or thereabouts. Thus the western ditch seems likely to have been at least 0.9 metre deep and up to 2.8 metres wide, while the eastern was up to 0.7 metre deep and more than 2.7 metres wide (Fig. 6). However, their recorded profiles may be a little misleading: given the soft materials through which they were dug, their sides should have flared out towards the top in a weathering-cone. From this one might infer that they were originally rather deeper and had somehow become truncated before deposition of the upper silty clay 03.

The drystone wall separating fields 9446 and 0646 could be seen before excavation to sit in a slight linear hollow (as noted above). A box-section was excavated through the subsoil here in the expectation that a third ditch might lie beneath the hollow, but no evidence for such a feature could be found. At this point, the hollow had been scraped out of the silty clay 03, and seems to have been related to the construction of the wall. It appears to have turfed over quickly, and the ground upslope seems no longer to have been eroding at that time. Layer 03 extended a short distance east beyond the hollow into field 0646, whereafter ploughsoil lay directly over the subsoil/bedrock.

Both ditches were largely filled with material that differed little from the general accumulation of silty clay, and it was only through minor variations in texture and, more particularly, colour (shades of orange/brown/grey) that the ditches could be distinguished from the silty clay to either side or from each other. Likewise, any layering within the fills of the individual ditches could be recognised only with difficulty.

One curiosity of the ditch-fills that remains difficult to interpret came in the shape of weathered limestone blocks, some as much as 0.60 metre across, arranged in rough lines along the length of both, but more especially in the eastern one. Many of these stones lay at an angle, projecting up towards the east, as though resting on successive sloping surfaces along the eastern side of each ditch. These stones could have been dumped here when stone was cleared from the land to the east, though this explanation might seem more acceptable had the stones lain in heaps rather than being spread thinly along the ditches. Alternatively, they could have reached their positions accidentally, perhaps by falling from a bank or drystone wall along the eastern lip of each ditch, though other evidence for this had not survived in the excavated area (see below).

This ditched boundary seems to have been rapidly eroded and overridden with soil transported down the slope, perhaps in part through natural processes but perhaps in part induced by ploughing, creating a lynchet which replaced the deliberately-constructed boundary. The stratigraphical relation of the ditches to the accumulation of silty clay, as noted above, suggests that the lynchet was already forming before either of the ditches was created. As the boundary became buried, it was renewed by re-digging the ditch, only to be overcome again. An attempt was made at least twice to arrest the downslope movement of the soil by constructing short lengths of drystone revetment, once (05) executed neatly over the fill of the eastern ditch, and once (10) more roughly to the east of it. But these too became enveloped by soil-creep and, by

the time the present field-walls were built, the earthwork had stabilised at its present profile. Consequently, it seems likely that there has been little ploughing of field 9446 since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century because there has been no lynchet-formation against the downslope boundary-wall of that field.

When originally dug, each ditch would have produced a considerable bank of upcast which, though not clearly identifiable in the essentially homogeneous soils of the excavated area, is most likely to have been dumped on the downslope (i.e. north-eastern) side. This conclusion arises partly from the observation that this would have been the easier option for the ditch-diggers and partly from the evidence of the angled stones lying within the ditch-fills. As described above, these stones probably reached their resting-places by entering the ditches from the east and may therefore have tumbled from a bank, perhaps even a stone-revetted bank, positioned along that ditch-lip. Even so, the possibility of a bank on the upslope side at one or more stages cannot be ruled out, not only because the bulk of the bank-material could then have returned by soil-creep to re-fill the ditches, but also because this fits most obviously the superficial profile noted in other parts of the earthwork. Moreover, some remnant of a bank might be expected to have survived along the downslope side, whence it is less likely to have all crept back into the ditches, even if the amount of faunal disturbance observable through the full depth of the soil-sections might account for the difficulty experienced in distinguishing different deposits (Matthew Canti, Ancient Monuments Laboratory, Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, during autopsy of the site).

There was no sign of any fossil-soil horizon buried under the build-up of soil upslope of the ditches, where the silty clay merged downwards into the more clayey subsoil without a well-marked interface. The subsoil in turn smothered the bedrock, which was exposed in places but nowhere penetrated by the base of either ditch, at least within the excavated area.

Apart from the ditches, the only archaeological features recorded by this excavation were two shallow gullies (Fig. 5: 04, 08) cut from a high level in the silty clay. A 1-metre length at the western butt of each was excavated. Gully 04 yielded a single post-medieval potsherd, but the cause or purpose of both is obscure.

This excavation yielded little in the way of useful dating evidence. Sixty-seven pieces of worked flint and chert were scattered through the fills of the ditches (16 from the western, 12 from the eastern) as well as the silty clay and topsoil. In addition to various flakes and blades, these include a leaf-shaped arrowhead, a knife, a fabricator, a polished fragment and a core. Together with those recovered from the more prolific site near the summit of Harpur Hill, also excavated by T&PAT in 1991, in advance of the construction of the reservoir, these artefacts will be the subject of a report by Daryl Garton. It is likely that they came from areas of prehistoric settlement located farther up the hill, in which case they can help little with the dating of the ditches. Similarly, sherds of late-medieval and post-medieval pottery scattered through the upper part of the silty clay could easily include a high proportion of residual material.

There is, however, one piece of evidence that helps to establish at least a *terminus ante quem* for the development of the earthwork: six George III copper pennies (the latest of which can be dated to 1807 — full details in archive) and two demonetised silver coins (which had been hammered flat and subsequently used by a silver-smith or die-sinker to test his punches), all probably deposited in a cloth bag (of which a small fragment survived). The coins were found at a depth of only 0.2 metre below the modern ground-surface, high in the build-up of silts towards the western end of the excavation (Fig. 5). They lay evidently undisturbed since they were lost or hidden, and their presence confirms the deduction, made above, that this field can have been ploughed infrequently, if at all, since early in the nineteenth century.

OTHER EXCAVATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS IN SEARCH OF THE ROMAN ROAD

In May 1991, a trench was excavated across a south-easterly projection of the line of the earthwork, at some 650 metres south-east of where it is last visible (i.e. at SK078704, in the middle of the field numbered 0041 on the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map and in Fig. 1). This trench, measuring 24 x 4 metres, was stripped of ploughsoil by hand to reveal a featureless and virtually stone-free, orangey-brown, silty-clay subsoil. The ploughsoil yielded a single microlith and a small collection of post-medieval potsherds. At the time, the complete lack of evidence for the earthwork was puzzling because it was still then believed to be the agger of the Roman road and there was no apparent reason why it should have diverged from a straight course at this point. In the light of the more recent excavation adjacent to Harpur Hill and the discrediting of the Roman road interpretation for the earthwork, it is now easier to accept that it might have changed course, either by curving progressively to one side or other of the projected straight line or by a more radical re-alignment.

In May 1992, the 10 metre-wide easement for the 1.6-kilometres stretch of the STW pipeline between Brierlow Bar (SK08656987) and Heathfield Nook Road (07307075) was stripped of ploughsoil by the contractor's machinery (dashed line in Fig. 1). Inspection (by GG) of the surface thus exposed found neither the earthwork nor the Roman road at any point. This inspection covered approximately 0.5 kilometre adjacent to the east side of the A515 and 1.0 kilometre across fields to the west of it. For much of this length, including the full width of field 0041, the surface of the easement comprised silty clay similar to that seen in the trench excavated one year earlier. Even in the relatively crude working-conditions of such a watching-brief, a homogeneous subsoil of this nature should provide a reasonable background against which to identify either linear bands of contrasting soil, such as might indicate the presence of a buried ditch, or stony concentrations, which might signify road-metalling, but nothing of the sort could be seen. It may therefore be concluded that the earthwork did not continue this far south of Heathfield Nook, and perhaps also that the Roman road did not cross the ground laid bare by the easement. Unless all traces of its metalling have been removed by robbing and/or agriculture hereabouts (and even ploughed-out metalling might be expected to manifest itself by some variation in the composition of the ploughsoil), it can only be presumed that the Roman road ran along the same line as the modern A515 in this stretch. It surely cannot lie to the east of the pipeline-easement, for this passed tight against the head of Brierlow Dale, which will have been avoided by the Roman surveyors. Indeed, it is evident on the ground that the A515 is built upon a causeway for a length of about 160 metres to the north of Brierlow Bar (from SK08606986 to 08486998), doubtless necessitated by the need to avoid too sharp a bend in negotiating the head of the dale, the slope into which steepens sharply immediately to the east. If the Roman road is under the A515, it may seem likely that this causeway was first constructed at that time and that subsequent re-surfacing of the road has buried the Roman metalling. Any opportunity to inspect the composition of this causeway in future cuttings across the A515 should be grasped.

It should be noted that in May 1991, another trench had been excavated by machine at Brierlow Bar, measuring 2 metres wide and extending 40 metres across the road-side verge between the A515 and an unnumbered road heading north-west towards Harpur Hill (called 'Lime Road' at the beginning of the nineteenth century and in Fig. 1). This trench was opened in anticipation of a subsidiary pipeline which was constructed in 1992, branching off the main line at SK08626986 and running due south along the B5053 road to the Hindlow reservoir. As noted above, the Roman road is believed to have skirted Brierlow Dale, but in May 1991 there

was no archaeological evidence to demonstrate its presence west of the A515 at Brierlow Bar. It may simply be reported that this trench uncovered subsoil close to the surface and that no artefact nor any evidence for the Roman road was recovered.

In June and December 1992, there were two chances to test the theory that the Roman road lies below the A515 when the main and branch pipe-trenches were opened by machine across it at SK08287020 and 08616985, unfortunately to the north and the south of the causeway noted above. These trench ran obliquely to the line of the road and, being over 2.0 metres deep but less than 1.0 metre wide, were less than ideal for recognising archaeological detail. Observation during machining (by S. Malone in respect of the northern trench, by GG of the southern one) revealed limestone rubble up to 0.5 metre thick underlying the modern tarmac and sitting upon subsoil or limestone bedrock, with possible traces of a fossil soil between the rubble and the subsoil in the northern trench. However, it was impossible to date any of this material to the Roman period, and there was no indication of road-side ditches in either trenche.

DISCUSSION

The earthwork alongside Harpur Hill has long been equated with 'The Street' Roman road, and has been regarded as one of the best-preserved aggers in the Peak District. As far as we are aware, the earthwork was first depicted on the 1842 Ordnance Survey 1" map. Watkin (1886: 210) seems to have been the first to explain it as the Roman road, followed by Turner (1903: 160), Codrington (1905: 283, seeming to refer to this earthwork as an 'irregular hollow'), Haverfield (1905: 248), Tristram (1916: 100), Cockerton (1937: 42), Margary (1967: 312 — changing his position from 1957: 44), Dodd and Dodd (1974: 37), and Wroe (1982: 56, fig. 4). In the light of the 1991 excavations and the 1992 observations, however, this interpretation can no longer be sustained, and the most acceptable course for the Roman road south-eastwards from SK06647196, where it is assumed to have crested the upper slope of the Sher Brook dale, must now be directly beneath the modern A515, i.e. the 1749 turnpike, for the straight 3 kilometres to Brierlow Dale. Thence, the Roman road is generally assumed to have changed course slightly before mounting the hillside to Brierlow Grange on a straighter course than the modern road and a little to the south-west of it (i.e. as shown on current Ordnance Survey maps and by Wroe, 1982: fig. 4; but contrast Margary, 1967: 312).

In suggesting this line, we revert to the early-nineteenth century view that 'the Roman road leaves Buxton in the track of the present Ashborne road' (William Bennet, bishop of Cloyne, in Lysons and Lysons, 1817: 213; closely followed by both Glover, 1829: 291 and Bateman, 1848: 143; though Jewitt, 1811: 87 had proposed a curious alternative line past Chelmorton to Staden Low). The one snippet of evidence which appears to conflict with this proposition comes in the shape of an annotation on the 1614 Map of Hartington Manor (see above, p. 50). In this map, the apparent line of our earthwork is labelled 'this wall is ye bounds of ye manor and before this little close adjoining was walled in the streteway went close to ye wallside'. Presuming that a stone wall already followed the earthwork by then, and presuming that the term 'streteway' should be taken to imply a road on precisely the course of the Roman road, then it would have to be supposed that the latter did formerly pass where the 1991 excavation and geophysical survey failed to reveal it. However, these presumptions, particularly the second, are themselves somewhat dubious, and, negative though it is, it is more prudent for the moment to trust such archaeological evidence as we possess.

The most recent general survey of Roman roads in this region states boldly of The Street that '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 ... field boundaries' (Wroe, 1982: 54 — though, in fairness, it should be added that Wroe did express reservations at 'too much faith being placed in the attendant field walls' when mapping its line in detail — *ibid.*: 56). Moreover, the standard text on Roman roads in Britain tells us that from Brierlow Bar 'the straight road on to Buxton is *not* the Roman route which is now known to be marked ... by a line of field walls with remains of the agger right on to the houses of Buxton' (Margary, 1967: 312). Here, then, is an example of the power of detailed excavation to challenge even the most trusted axioms of archaeology in Derbyshire, as also elsewhere.

The 1991 excavation at the foot of Harpur Hill has left considerable uncertainty over the precise function, date and context of this earthwork. Given the evidence of the 1614 map, we can do no better at present than reiterate that the earthwork probably served as some kind of administrative and/or tenurial and/or land-use boundary at some time in the medieval period, probably before the seventeenth century, perhaps akin to others in the White Peak (Hart, 1981: 129-62). However that may be, this excavation has swept aside a misconception, inviting a fresh look at the evidence for 'The Street'. Indeed, a critical review of that evidence, in which field-walls and parish-boundaries are given rather less weight than is sometimes the case but with an eye to details of topography, may be thought overdue in respect of this and other Roman roads in the Peak District (cf. Lomas, 1958 for The Street).

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