

X.—REPORT FOR 1933 OF THE NORTH OF ENGLAND EXCAVATION COMMITTEE.

BY ERIC BIRLEY, PARKER BREWIS, AND JOHN CHARLTON.

[Read on 28th March, 1934.]

As a result of the discovery of an original stone-revetted causeway across the ditch of the Vallum at Birdoswald in the summer of 1932,¹ the North of England Excavation Committee in the autumn of the same year searched for and found a similar causeway south of the fort at Benwell; a brief note of the discovery was appended to our last report.² In June 1933, thanks to the kindness of our members, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Macarthy and Miss Dorothy Macarthy, the committee was able to examine the Benwell causeway in detail, and the object of the present report is to describe the results obtained on that occasion. The work was under Mr. Charlton's direction, whilst messrs. Birley and Brewis paid frequent visits to the site, and Mr. Brewis was responsible for the planning of the structural remains. The publication of the pottery is deferred until a later volume of *Archæologia Aeliana*; the objects of bronze are described by Mr. Charlton elsewhere in the present volume.³

It will be convenient to describe the remains in the order not of their discovery, but of their construction. In the first place, when the Vallum ditch was dug, it was interrupted to leave a causeway 21 feet wide across it; the straight sides of the causeway were revetted with small-scale ashlar, much better dressed than in the wing-walls

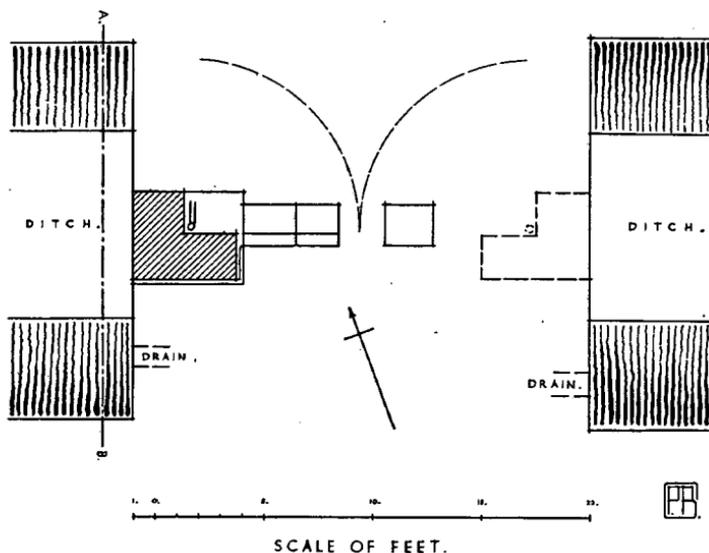
¹ CW² XXXIII, pp. 247-52.

² AA⁴ X, p. 101.

³ Cf. pp. 201, 205 below.

of the Birdoswald structure, but without the central panel of heavy masonry. As at Birdoswald, the core of the masonry was undisturbed boulder-clay. Resting on the west revetment, exactly over the centre-line of the ditch, was the massive masonry of a gateway; on the east side the corresponding masonry had all been taken away, but a gap in the metalling of the road showed whence it had

GATEWAY AT CROSSING OF VALLUM AT BENWELL (CONDERCUM).



SCALE OF FEET.

FIG. I.

been removed. The gate-passage had been 12 feet wide, closed by a pair of gates held in pivot-holes of normal type; and opening to the north; in the latest surviving level, a central gate-stop was provided, and no doubt a similar provision had been made from the first. There was no evidence for a crowning mould on the sides of the revetment such as that noted at Birdoswald, but in this case also there had been no parapet. It will be seen that both in plan and in the structural details of the gateway Benwell is rather simpler than Birdoswald; both crossings contrast markedly with that subsequently discovered at

Housesteads.⁴ The photographs, plans and section here reproduced make a detailed description of the causeway unnecessary, but the following measurements may be recorded: length 17 feet 6 inches; breadth 21 feet; depth at centre 10 feet. Two special features remain to be noticed; in the first place, at this point the north lip of the Vallum ditch is considerably higher than the south, since the earth-

GATEWAY AT CROSSING OF VALLUM AT BENWELL (CONDERCUM).

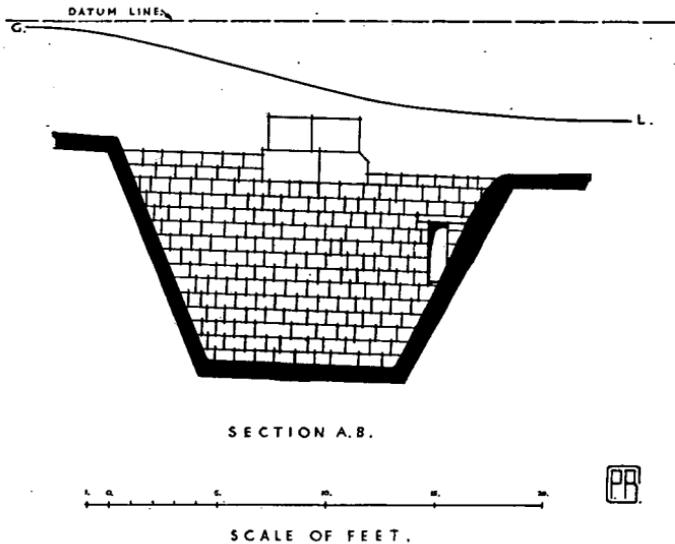


FIG. 2:

work is travelling along a southward slope; in consequence the causeway is rising from south to north, and there is an extra course of masonry at the north end. Since the Vallum ditch is dug in boulder-clay, its bottom is level; the sides are very steep, and our experience is that, in default of a ladder, assistance is needed to enable one to get out of the ditch again, once one has fallen in. The other point is also concerned with the contours of the ground; there is a drain through the causeway at the south end, 4 feet up from ditch bottom; the drain is 36 inches

⁴ Cf. pp. 186-190 below.

high and 10 wide. Its purpose is clearly to prevent an excessive accumulation of water on the west side of the causeway; for some hundred yards the line of the Vallum has been falling slightly but steadily from the west, and but for the provision of such a drain an excessive accumulation of stagnant water might have formed on the west side. Why the drain was not carried through at ditch-bottom is not immediately apparent; it is conceivable that its insertion is an afterthought, in the light of experience gained during the formation of the Vallum, when the causeway had been begun but not finished, and it was impracticable to put the drain in lower.

At first the roadway was very lightly metalled, but when fresh surfaces were laid (for unlike the Birdoswald causeway this continued to carry a road for a lengthy period) the thickness of metalling was considerable. The pivot-stone of the original level remained *in situ*, with a groove of the normal type for inserting or removing the gate (cf. plate XXIV, fig. 1); at the second level, 8 inches higher, there was no pivot-stone in position, apparently because at the second making-up that stone was raised and re-used; the third level was 10 inches higher again. The pivot-stone used in this period can best be seen in plate XXII; the stone is carefully dressed, and the mouldings on it show that it has come from a building of considerable pretensions.

It will be seen that the gateway continued in use for at least two structural periods after its original construction; the stratified coins, described below, suggest that the latest surviving level should be associated with the Constantian restoration of the Wall, so that the previous raising of the roadway will fall to Severus.

The ditch of the Vallum had been filled in comparatively soon; for on the east side there was an occupation-layer that had subsided very considerably with the filling (and so presumably the occupation had begun very soon after the ditch was obliterated); this layer contained a fair amount of pottery, of which some appeared to be earlier

than the middle of the second century. Subsequently a building was erected, fronting on the northern part of the causeway, and overlying the occupation layer; what remained of its walls ("A" on plan, fig. 3) consisted of thin flags, each course lightly narrower than that below it; it is not clear whether the surviving remains should be interpreted as more than the sleeper wall of a wattle and

GATEWAY AT CROSSING OF VALLUM AT BENWELL (CONDERCUM).
PLAN OF LATER BUILDINGS

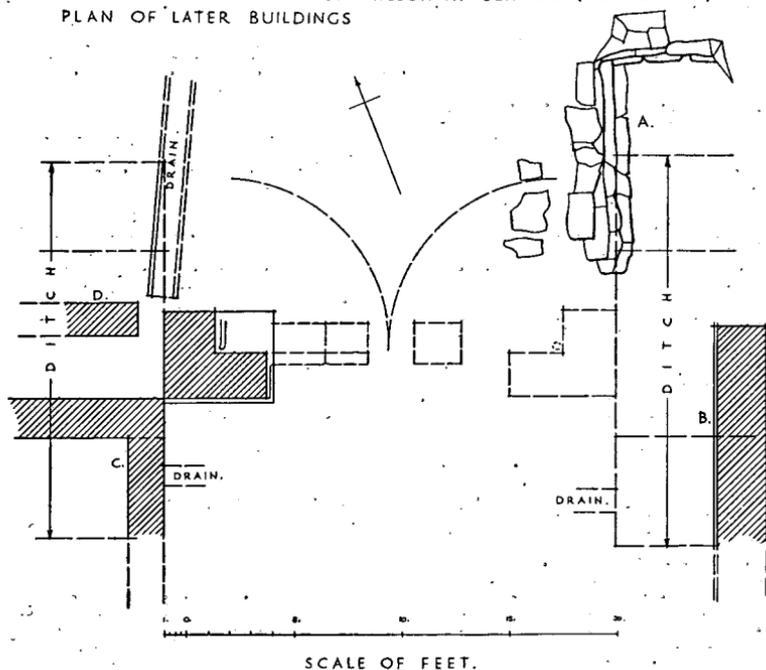


FIG. 3.

daub erection (cf. plate XXIII, fig. 1). The walls of "A" were contemporary with the second road-level (cf. plate XXIII, fig. 1); its floor was flagged, and over the flagging was a considerable occupation layer, which produced a fair amount of pottery.

After the southern part of this building had settled with the filling of the ditch to such an extent that its floor was too steep for one to walk unaided from one side to the other, another building, "B," was erected, overlapping the

southern part of "A." "B" was built of large and somewhat irregular blocks of stone, only roughly coursed and rarely dressed; its foundation was of smaller stones, arranged in approximately herringbone fashion; while the depth of the foundations showed that subsidence was feared, none had taken place, so that we may presume that a considerable period had elapsed before "B" was erected.

On the west side of the crossing there had been two buildings. "C," opposite the southern half, at its north-east angle almost touched the south-west corner of the gateway. The east wall of this building was parallel to the side of the causeway, the highest course of which was lower than the footings of the building; unfortunately, it was impossible to establish a connection between the building and one or other of the later road-levels. "C" was roughly built, of large, poorly dressed stones and thick flags set in clay; its floor was of large heavy flags. To the north of it was the fragmentary wall of another building, "D," coming to an end 15 inches from the west face of the causeway, and separated from the north wall of "C" by a passage 3 feet wide. Of this wall all that survived were three courses of flags, 3 inches thick, and set as "throughs"; they were laid in heavy clay.

Partly over the northern end of the west side of the causeway was a drain, square in section, formed of flags some 3 inches thick; its internal dimensions were 1 foot wide by 10 inches high, and its bottom was from 3 to 6 inches above the original roadway; it had formed one side of the second road-level. On approaching the gateway it had partly collapsed through the subsidence of the ditch-filling, and it is not clear in what direction it went beyond the point to which it was traced; it is conceivable that the water which it carried would be diverted westwards along the alley between the two buildings on this side; at least there was no apparent way provided for it to continue southwards.

These buildings all appear to have fronted on the road, but in no case was more than a comparatively small part

of the building examined, since the committee was concerned mainly with the crossing itself; so that it would be unwise to attempt a close dating of "B," "C," or "D": "A," as has been seen, appears to be contemporary with the road-level that can most simply be assigned to Severus, but there was a structure of some sort (proved by the lower occupation-layer) fronting on the east side of the causeway before it. It is worth emphasizing that there were buildings both north and south of the gateway on either side, so that the reason for its maintenance becomes something of a problem. Indeed the mere fact of the gateway having continued in use, as the raising of the pivot-stone and the provision of a gate-stop at the highest surviving level show it to have done, creates difficulties of interpretation. In the first place, when the Vallum formed the frontier, since the gateway opened from the north side, it is clear that it was maintained by the garrison of the Vallum fort, which on occasions might wish to bar traffic northwards; and it is reasonable to suggest that while the ditch marked the customs line, during hours when traffic across the line was not permitted (for example after dark) the gateway would be kept shut. In some ways it would be an advantage if we could suppose that after the building of the Wall, although the Vallum ditch was filled in in the neighbourhood of the forts, its line continued to be observed as the customs frontier; that at least would explain the continuation in use of the gateway at Benwell; but the certain neglect of the corresponding causeway at Housesteads,⁵ and the complete demolition of the gateway at Birdoswald,⁶ do not favour this view.

Again, the fact that there were buildings both north and south of the gateway makes it difficult to suppose that it was retained to mark either the northern or the southern limit of occupation in the settlement. But it is clear that the road itself formed the main line of communication southwards, and the very fact of buildings fronting on it

⁵ Cf. p. 188 below.

⁶ CW² XXXIII, p. 250.

would mean that once the gateway was closed, wheeled traffic would be held up; it may be that the buildings themselves to some extent took the place of the ditch as a bar to unauthorized traffic.⁷

It is noteworthy that the extensive building discovered at the southern edge of Benwell Park, in the course of the committee's previous excavations in 1927,⁸ fronts on the east side of this same road. How much farther south the road went it is not known, but from the information collected in the *County History*,⁹ it appears that the settlement extended for a considerable distance down the hill from the fort; when the Vallum formed the frontier, it may be presumed that the main line of communication southwards and perhaps westwards also passed along this road.

THE COINS.

The following coins were found in the course of the excavation of 1933; we are obliged to Mr. Percy Hedley for their identification:

- (a) *On the surface of the original road*—
 1. *Denarius* of the younger Faustina (C.¹⁰ 141).
- (b) *Below the highest metalling*¹¹—
 2. *Denarius*, DIVO PIO (C. 357).
 3. *Denarius* of M. Aurelius (C. 297; A.D. 172-3).
 4. *Denarius* of Elagabalus.
 5. *Antoninianus*, obverse with radiate bust r. (late third century).
- (c) *In the floor of "A"*—
 6. *Denarius* of Severus.
- (d) *Unstratified*—
 7. *Dupondius* of Trajan (C. 356; A.D. 114-7. This coin was found in laying a cable south of Benwell Park, and presented to the committee by the finder).
 8. *As* of Pius, COS IIII (A.D. 147-51).
 9. *Denarius* of Severus (A.D. 197).

⁷ We are indebted to Mr. Richmond for this observation.

⁸ AA⁴ V, p. 52 f.

⁹ XIII, pp. 526-7.

¹⁰ Cohen's reference.

¹¹ In no case was it possible to distinguish whether the coin came from below the second level.

THE COURSE OF THE VALLUM.

In 1929 the committee was able to trace the course of the Vallum from the east to the south side of the fort, and the plan in the *County History* shows its line as far as it was traced on that occasion. The causeway (taking its centre as a measuring point) is 90 feet further west, in a straight line with the most westerly length found in 1929. In 1933 it was not possible to follow its course still further west, but there is a piece of evidence in existence, the significance of which has not been noted hitherto. Reference is made in the *County History*¹² to a cutting in the rock 14 feet wide at the surface, 11 feet deep, and 9 feet wide at the bottom, running north and south, found when Pendower house was building in 1864.

The plan of this cutting, which is unsigned, is preserved in the library at the Black Gate; it is carefully drawn to scale, and gives a section; and it clearly represents the ditch of the Vallum—narrower than usual, because it is cut in the rock—bearing northwards again after passing the fort-site. On plate xxv, this short length is shown in black, and the course of the Vallum is extended from the causeway to join it, making a convincing, though not quite symmetrical, line in relation to the present fort.

¹² *Loc. cit.*



BENWELL CAUSEWAY, WEST SIDE. FROM NORTH.



Fig. 1. BENWELL CAUSEWAY, EAST SIDE, FROM NORTH.



Fig. 2. BENWELL CAUSEWAY, EAST SIDE, FROM SOUTH.

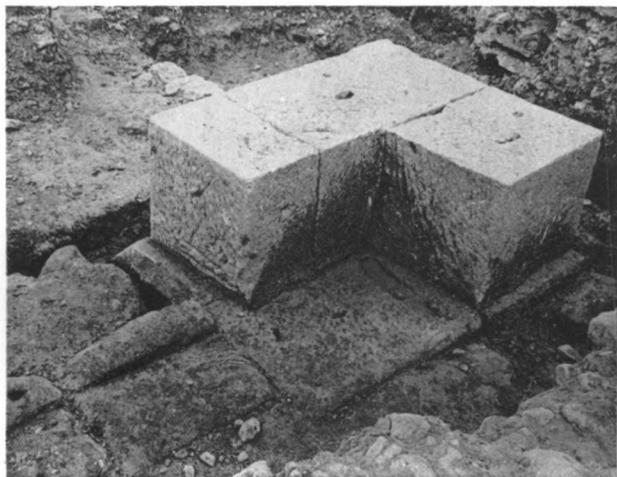


Fig. 1. WEST SIDE OF GATEWAY AND ORIGINAL PIVOT-HOLE.



Fig. 2. BENWELL CAUSEWAY, WEST SIDE. FROM SOUTH.

