

V.—THE DEVIL'S CAUSEWAY FROM RIMSIDE MOOR (LONGFRAMLINGTON) TO BRIDGE OF ALN.

BY R. P. WRIGHT.

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The following abbreviations are used :

AA *Archæologia Aeliana.*

OS Ordnance Survey.

PSAN *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne.*

This article discusses the course of the Roman road called the Devil's Causeway for five miles south of its crossing of the Aln, and gives details of its structure near Edlingham.¹ An attempt to fix its junction with the road from the west from High Rochester and Holystone proved unsuccessful.

The work began in May 1937 as a search for the Devil's Causeway near the Edlingham burn by Messrs. W. de L. Aitchison and F. E. Lupton, and the latter followed up the initial success by making a substantial correction to the line laid down by MacLauchlan² near the burn crossing. Later in the season the results were generously placed at the disposal of the present writer, who in September 1937 and July 1938 had the valued collaboration of Mr. Lupton in recording and extending the work.

The road was identified partly from visible traces, partly by kerb-sections, and partly by full cross-sections. The sections are here arranged in a single series from south to north (see fig. 1, p. 66) and kerb-sections have an arrow

¹ One-inch OS map 4, C7, B7.

² *Memoir written during a survey of the eastern branch of the Wailing Street* (1864) 19, and *Map*, sheet 11.

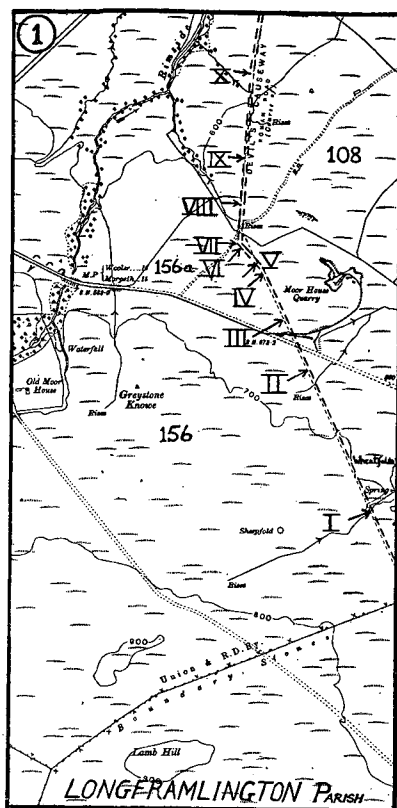
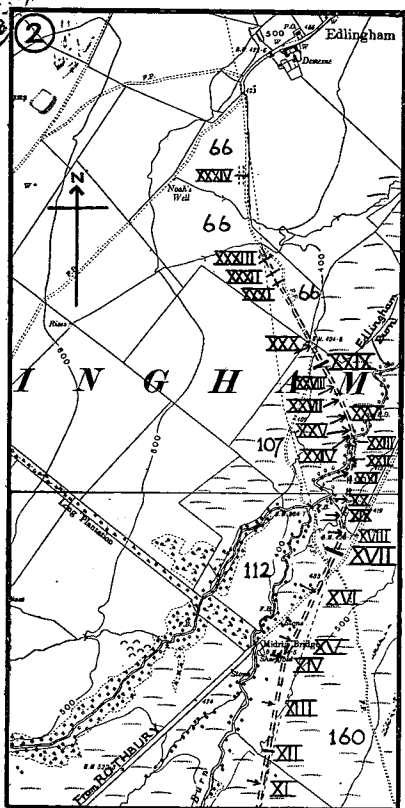


FIG. 1. THE DEVIL'S CAUSEWAY NEAR EDLINGHAM.

Scale: 3 inches to 1 mile. Reproduced from the 6-inch OS map of Northumberland nXLII NW, XXXIV SW (ed. 1926), with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

to indicate the side which was verified. The detailed survey began at the Longframlington-Edlingham parish boundary, three miles N.N.W. of Longframlington village and one mile S.E. of the New Moor House cross-roads. From the parish boundary on the hill-top the road was traced by its straight mound and metalling (section 1) passing one hundred yards west of the west wall of the enclosure called Wheatfolds by MacLauchlan. In this sector his line; as adopted on the

OS maps, is correct. It was verified at sections II-VI. At 230 yds. north of the Wooler-Longframlington road it makes a short westward bend, not marked by MacLauchlan, to avoid an outcrop of rock with marshy ground beyond. At section VII it turns due north, and its causeway is well defined on rising ground past sections VIII and IX. On the crest at section X it turns 6° east, and keeps straight for 640 yds., slightly west of the *OS* line; it is easily visible at section XI. A full section was bared at XII and gave a width of 18 ft. 9 in. Passing XIII, it makes at XIV a further slight eastward turn and crosses the Rothbury-Alnwick road (sections XV, XVI). Here MacLauchlan's line swings sharply north-west and roughly follows an old carriage-road, probably of the eighteenth century, towards Edlingham, but he admits that after crossing the burn he lost traces of it in the cultivated ground. In reality the road does not turn here, but keeps on the east side of Edlingham burn for 400 yds., where Mr. Lupton worked out its course in detail, despite the handicap of bracken.

Section XVII, where the work originally began, was extensively bared to reveal the direction of the road, which is well preserved at this point (see pl. VII, fig. 2). The kerbstones were remarkably fine, averaging 12 by 15 inches. It was later developed as a full cross-section. While the section shown in the plate had only one layer, some upper metalling, as given in the diagram on p. 70, was found a few feet to the south. On the sloping clay subsoil heavy bottoming of 10-in. grade sandstone blocks had been laid between large kerbs. In the middle a "central rib" of flat blocks about one foot square had been laid along the axis of the road and the ordinary bottoming had been packed in against it at right-angles. The rib was bared for 7 ft., and can be seen left undisturbed in plate VII, fig. 2. Its purpose is discussed below. A 4-in. layer of grey sand separated the bottoming from the cambered surfacing, which was 4 in. thick and was formed of 6-in. grade sandstone. The road was 20 ft. wide.

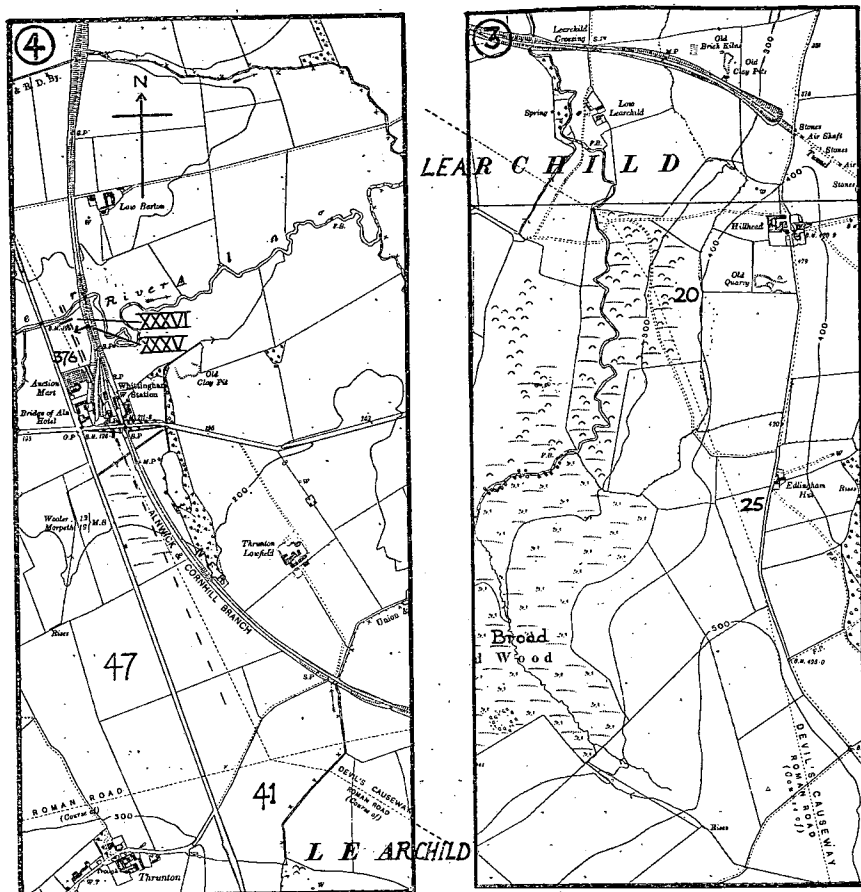


FIG. 2. THE DEVIL'S CAUSEWAY NEAR BRIDGE OF ALN.

Scale: 3 inches to 1 mile. Reproduced from the 6-inch OS map of Northumberland XXXIV SW, NW (ed. 1926), with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

Kerb-sections XVIII-XXIII showed how the Roman engineers had built the road in straight stretches despite frequent changes of direction over difficult ground. First the road followed the south bank of a gully 12 ft. deep and 50 ft. across, then turned across it at right-angles, presum-

ably by a wooden bridge, and proceeded down an easy slope to cross the Edlingham burn near section XXIII. The ground on the east bank is low-lying and within reach of floods. The west bank at this point rises twelve feet above the burn nearly vertically, and the metalling of the road, 20 ft. wide, can be seen high up in the bank within 1 ft. 6 in. of the upper ground-level. Some yards to the north the west bank has been cut away to make the burn fordable. If the burn was approximately on its present course in Roman times, there must have been a bridge for crossing it, with perhaps the addition of a ford downstream. The burn has, however, at some time cut another channel, now dry, further to the east, and the portion of road near section XXIII is now isolated between the two channels. It is therefore possible that the burn was in the eastern channel in Roman times and later changed its course and cut through the road which by a steep gradient will have linked sections XXIII and XXIV.

Once over the Edlingham burn the road swings west through 40° and can be seen as a broad mound across field 107;³ half-way up the field it swings slightly further west and keeps this course across field 66. The kerb was easily located at sections XXIV-XXX. Section XXIX was developed as a full cross-section (see pl. VIII, fig. 1, and diagram, p. 70). Large sandstone blocks of 10-in. grade had been laid upon subsoil clay for a width of 21 ft. 9 in., though this figure should be slightly reduced because the stones at the west edge had slipped outwards and left a small gap. The stones for one foot near the centre had been removed by ploughing, as was clear from the furrows running obliquely across the road and from the plough-marks on the adjacent stones. There had been an upper layer of small sandstone, but traces of this remained only where it was filling the crevices between the large blocks: presumably the plough and weathering had removed the rest. Once more a central rib was found, this time projecting 6 in.

³ Field-numbers are taken from the 25-in. OS maps.

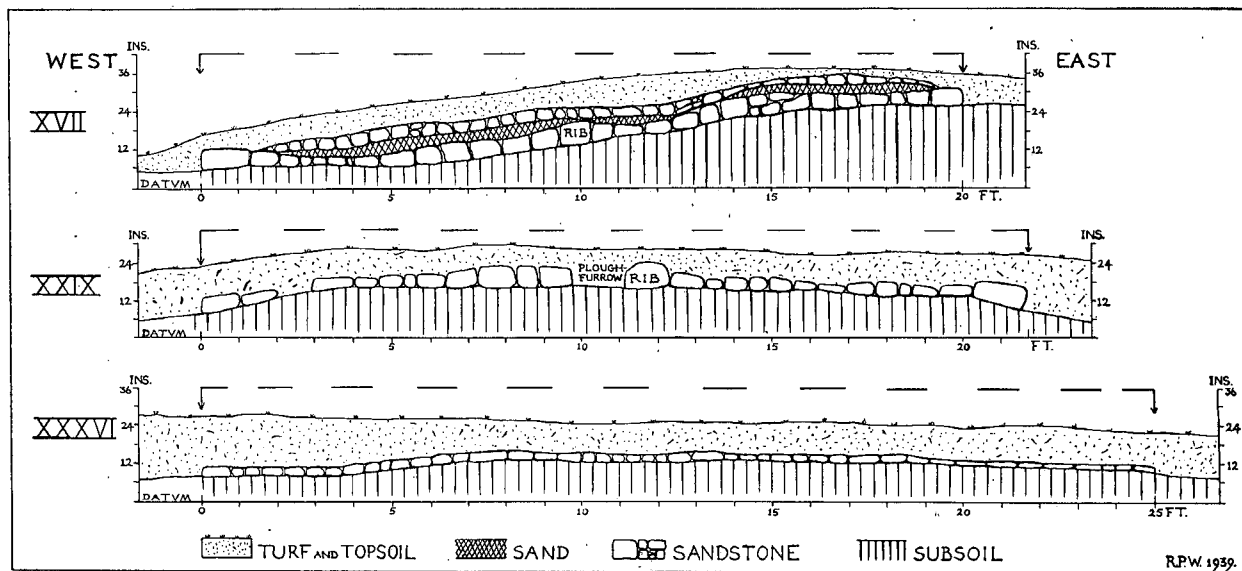


FIG. 3. CROSS-SECTIONS OF THE DEVIL'S CAUSEWAY NEAR EDLINGHAM AND BRIDGE OF ALN.

above the rest of the bottoming, exactly as on the branch-road⁴ from High Rochester to Bridge of Aln. In section xxix it may have served as a gauge for the minimum height of the camber, but in section xvii it did not rise above the level of the other stones and may perhaps have served as an additional setting-out line from which the stones were laid outwards to either kerb. Search was made for ditches where the sides were least disturbed 60 yds. south of section xxix. No trace was found within 15 ft. on either side.

In the next field, no. 66, an attempt was made to fix the site of the road and see whether it turned some degrees eastward after passing near the head of the small burn which flows from Noah's Well, as MacLauchlan suggested. The eighteenth-century road takes a winding course somewhat east of the presumed Roman line, which is marked by a ditch and bank of earth, as if the east margin of the road had once formed a boundary and been demarcated by throwing up earth from the east ditch. It proved necessary to cut three trenches (xxxi-xxxiii) to get conclusive evidence. Sections xxxi and xxxiii revealed an east kerb of 18-in. grade backed by 5 ft. of large bottoming. Next came about 15 ft. of 6-in. grade sandstone, mainly packed in; but, although the trenches were continued for 10 ft. further west, no defined edge or kerb could be found, and the intermittent stones seemed to be part of the natural subsoil. Section xxxii, cut between the first two, provided a well-defined west edge formed by a pack of 6-in. grade sandstone, which was uncovered for 5 ft. The centre and east margin of the road were made of 8-in. to 10-in. grade blocks. The bottoming was a homogeneous structure 21 ft. wide, ending abruptly on east and west. On this evidence it proved possible to accept the other two sections and show that the road keeps a straight course between the six sections xxviii to xxxiii. North of the small burn (from Noah's Well) probings were made in a part of the field where the plough-riggs are regular, to see whether the road continued straight on over

⁴ PSAN⁴ viii, 51-2. See also AA⁴ xv, 364-6.

the hill and down to Broad Wood and the Coe burn; the results were negative.

Attention was then paid to the more likely course near the old carriage-road and MacLauchlan's suggested line. It would be reasonable for the road to swing about 20° east once it had crossed the burn above the point where it opens out into a wide gully. The road could then keep along the ridge of the hill and make the easiest crossing into the valley of the Coe burn. North of the Noah's Well burn the east margin of field 66 has been extensively disturbed by deeply hollowed tracks. Section xxxiv was cut to test the most promising site for the road. Between two of these tracks, here 3 ft. deep and 6 ft. wide, a section was cut for 40 ft.; beneath the turf lay a pack of 4-in. grade broken sandstone, with random larger blocks. Below this was natural boulder-clay. It would appear that this was an artificial layer forming a track of some kind, but, with no defined edge or bottoming, the evidence is quite insufficient to prove a Roman road. Even extensive trenching, for which there was no opportunity in 1938, might fail to produce positive evidence.

Edlingham Demesne to Thrunton.

Continuing the search northward, MacLauchlan⁵ lost all traces of the road past the Demesne Farm, Edlingham, and over the Glebe lands, but claims to have seen traces in descending Whinney hill (field no. 20) and a "very small part of the foundation" at its crossing of the Coe burn. In 1937-8 Mr. Lupton made a close survey of this line and all adjacent fields. Trenching in field 25 just north of the point where the modern road swings east of the alleged line, and secondly in Whinney hill field (no. 20) at two sites on the OS line proved negative. A further search by the present writer also produced no positive result.

Thrunton and the Bridge of Aln.

East of Thrunton farm, in field 41, MacLauchlan con-

⁵ *Op. cit.*, 19, 20.

sidered that the Devil's Causeway made its junction with the branch-road⁶ which came from High Rochester (on Dere Street) by Holystone and Callaly. He laid down his line from information received from the farm-tenants concerning remains found in draining and ploughing. His informants maintained⁷ that the cross-road continued even east of the Devil's Causeway, but he himself was inclined to doubt this. Enquiries in 1938 from Mr. Bainbridge, of Thrunton Low Field, and a survey with probing of the OS routes both to west and north failed to produce any tangible evidence for either road within three-quarters of a mile of the junction. In these much-ploughed fields, long since laid to grass, even large-scale excavation might well prove negative. Unless draining operations chance to produce some clue in the future, it does not seem feasible to confirm MacLauchlan's site for the junction by excavation.⁸ Though no clue could be found between MacLauchlan's junction and Whittingham railway-station, probing revealed a section of the road on the south bank of the Aln, approximately where MacLauchlan recorded traces. The banks are 8 ft. above the river, but have no remains of the road showing in the side. Section XXXVI was cut 210 ft. east of the south-east corner of the Bridge of Aln. In the first trench the centre of the road had been destroyed, leaving a portion of the road 2 ft. wide on the west, and 6 ft. wide on the east, giving an overall width of 22 ft. In the second trench (shown in diagram on p. 70), cut 10 ft. nearer the river, the road was found in excellent preservation (see pl. VIII, fig. 2). On the clean clay a compact layer of sandstone slabs had been laid, ranging in depth from 4 in. on the west to 2 in. on the east. There was a 9-in.

⁶ For a recent survey see *PSAN*⁴ VIII, 51.

⁷ MacLauchlan, *op. cit.* 55.

⁸ Steam-ploughing in May 1938 unearthed a mass of sandstone blocks in a band across the south end of field 47. A long trench (starting 100 ft. north of the south boundary of the field and running alongside its west fence for 75 ft.) showed that the stones had been broken off from the natural rock-face which at one point comes within six inches of the surface.

grade kerbstone on the west, and an abrupt finish of the slabs on the east, making the road 25 ft. wide. Gravel firmly bedded in the crevices of the bottoming showed that there had once been an upper surface, though only an inch in thickness now remained. No full section of the road could be found further south in the field, but the east edge was uncovered at section xxxv. The line of the east kerb at sections xxxvi and xxxv, when produced southward, falls 180 ft. west of the junction-point with the road to High Rochester as marked on the OS map from MacLauchlan's survey. But on so short a base-line a point so far away cannot be fixed with exactitude, and we may therefore note that it would roughly correspond with MacLauchlan's junction-point.

The work here recorded has served to confirm and in some cases to correct the traditional line of the Devil's Causeway in the Edlingham sector. It failed to shed light on the course between Edlingham and Thrunton or to reveal the junction with the road to High Rochester, but it did establish the point at which the AIn was crossed, some seventy yards downstream from the modern bridge. Furthermore it demonstrated the ways in which the road-builders adapted themselves to difficult ground; and it provided two more instances of the central rib as part of the road-structure.

The writer wishes to thank Sir Stephen Aitchison, Bart., for providing labour for much of the work; Mr. J. H. Grey for permission to excavate on the Demesne farm, Edlingham; the Alnwick Auction Mart Company for similar permission at Bridge of Aln; and Mr. D. Curry at Thrunton farm. He is also grateful to Mr. W. de L. Aitchison and Mr. A. H. A. Hogg for valuable help. In particular he makes acknowledgement of the generous co-operation of Mr. F. E. Lupton, of Lemington, who did the pioneer work with great success, helped with the arduous surveying and the cross-sections, and has allowed results which largely derive from his work to be published in this form.



Fig. 1. ROMAN ROAD, CHAMBERS CRESCENT, LOOKING WEST.



Fig. 2. DEVIL'S CAUSEWAY, EDLINGHAM, SECTION XVII, LOOKING NORTH.



Fig. 1. DEVIL'S CAUSEWAY, EDLINGHAM, SECTION XXIX.,
LOOKING WEST.



Fig. 2. DEVIL'S CAUSEWAY, BRIDGE OF ALN, SECTION XXXVI.,
LOOKING WEST.



