

## IX.—THE STANEGATE AT CORBRIDGE.

BY R. P. WRIGHT.

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The following abbreviations are used :

<i>AA</i>	<i>Archæologia Aeliana.</i>
<i>CW</i>	<i>Cumberland and Westmorland Transactions.</i>
<i>NCH</i>	<i>Northumberland County History.</i>
<i>OS</i>	Ordnance Survey.

This report describes the excavation of the roads from the Roman site at Corbridge and from the Roman bridge-head on Tyne to the Stanegate, or main westward road towards Carlisle. They join at the east end of Shordon Brae wood beside the Cor Burn, just opposite Corbridge Mill and about 350 yds. south-west of the granaries on the Roman site.<sup>1</sup> The work was done in July 1938 and 1939 with labour provided by the Durham University Excavation Committee.

In the excavations of 1907<sup>2</sup> and 1911<sup>3</sup> the approach to the north abutment of the Roman bridge over Tyne was examined, and the main road, Dere Street, was traced northward for 175 yds. till it reached the main east-west road through Roman Corbridge. This junction lies 100 yds. west of the west granary. The road continuing westward from this junction was followed for only a few yards.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One-inch OS map 6, G 14.

<sup>2</sup> *AA*<sup>3</sup> IV, 208 = 1907 *Report*, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *AA*<sup>3</sup> VIII, 139 = 1911 *Report*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> The 1922 OS map lays down the course of the roads near the junction rather schematically; the lines here adopted are derived from the excavation-reports.

In 1938 we cut section I about 3 yds. west of the junction, at the point where the former excavators had left off. This was indicated not only by the displacement of the upper gutter-stones but also by the concealment within the gutter of a modern bottle. The road was 22 ft. wide, including its covered stone gutters. The cambered surfacing, covered at the middle by only 10 in. of topsoil, was built of gravel laid upon a bottoming of 6-in. grade cobbles. The purpose of most of the sections within the west field, no. 121, was merely to trace the course of this road; and in fig. 1 arrows are used to indicate the sections where work was confined to locating the edge of the road, or preferably the accompanying gutter. Even where full cross-sections were cut, no attempt was here made to reach subsoil or to see whether the three periods found on Dere Street by the 1911 excavators were repeated. The edge of an earlier road-surface was, indeed, found in section III, and on it a coin of Faustina II (A.D. 145-161: see coin-list, no. 1).

In sections II, III, and V the covered north gutter was found, in section IV only the edge of the gravel surfacing. In section VI, a full cross-section, the road was 25 ft. wide; the south gutter was missing, but on the north there were two open channel-stones, the upper one set in the gravel surfacing, the lower one retaining the bottoming. While the gravel at the side of the road was 6 in. thick, in the middle it had been worn away, thus removing the usual camber. The bottoming was in two layers composed mostly of sandstone blocks of 6-in. or larger grade, but partly of water-worn cobbles; both layers belonged to the same period of construction. The gravel surfacing of an earlier road lay immediately below this bottoming, but was not explored further.

In the next ten sections the north edge of the road maintained its general direction unchanged, although there were minor variations even where the limit was clearly defined by the side channel-stones, as in sections VII, XI, XII, XIII, XV, XVI. In the others, VIII, IX, X, and XIV, the edge of the

cambered gravel surface had to suffice. The channel-stones averaged 18 in. in width and the hollowed channel 5 in. in depth.

A full cross-section was made at xvii (see diagram, p. 199) where the road measured 21 ft. across the actual metalling and 25 ft. including the gutters, which at this point had their sides built up to a height of 1 ft. 8 in. above the channel itself. As before, the top of the road was formed of gravel to an average depth of 10 in.; for the bottoming on the south half of the road there were 6-in. grade cobbles, but these did not appear at the same level on the north, where the gravel went much deeper, and exceeded 20 in. in depth at one point. The search was not continued below this for any earlier road. A new feature was a covered drain which was embedded in the metalling towards the middle of the road; it ran obliquely from north-east to south-west, and made an angle of about  $25^{\circ}$  with the axis of the road. The upper and lower stones composing it were each about 3 ft. long.

The eastern third of the west field (no. 121) is part of the plateau on which the Roman settlement is built, but as the road proceeds westward the ground falls away to reach the level of the Cor Burn. Ploughing in mediaeval and modern times has accumulated as much as five feet of earth above the Roman features at the west end and made the last fifteen yards of the field practically level. The Roman road, however, maintains a steady fall, and here begins to swing off a few degrees southwards. The edge of the metalling and north gutter were found in sections xviii, xix, and xx, and a coin of Valentinian I (or his family) was found on the road-surface of section xx (see the coin-list, no. 2); it denotes use of the road in Theodosian times.

Just west of field no. 121 the ground falls sharply and the bank is traversed from north to south by the mediaeval water-leet for Corbridge Mill and then by the present farm-road. Despite these later insertions, the north edge of the Roman road was traceable by one of its large channel-stones

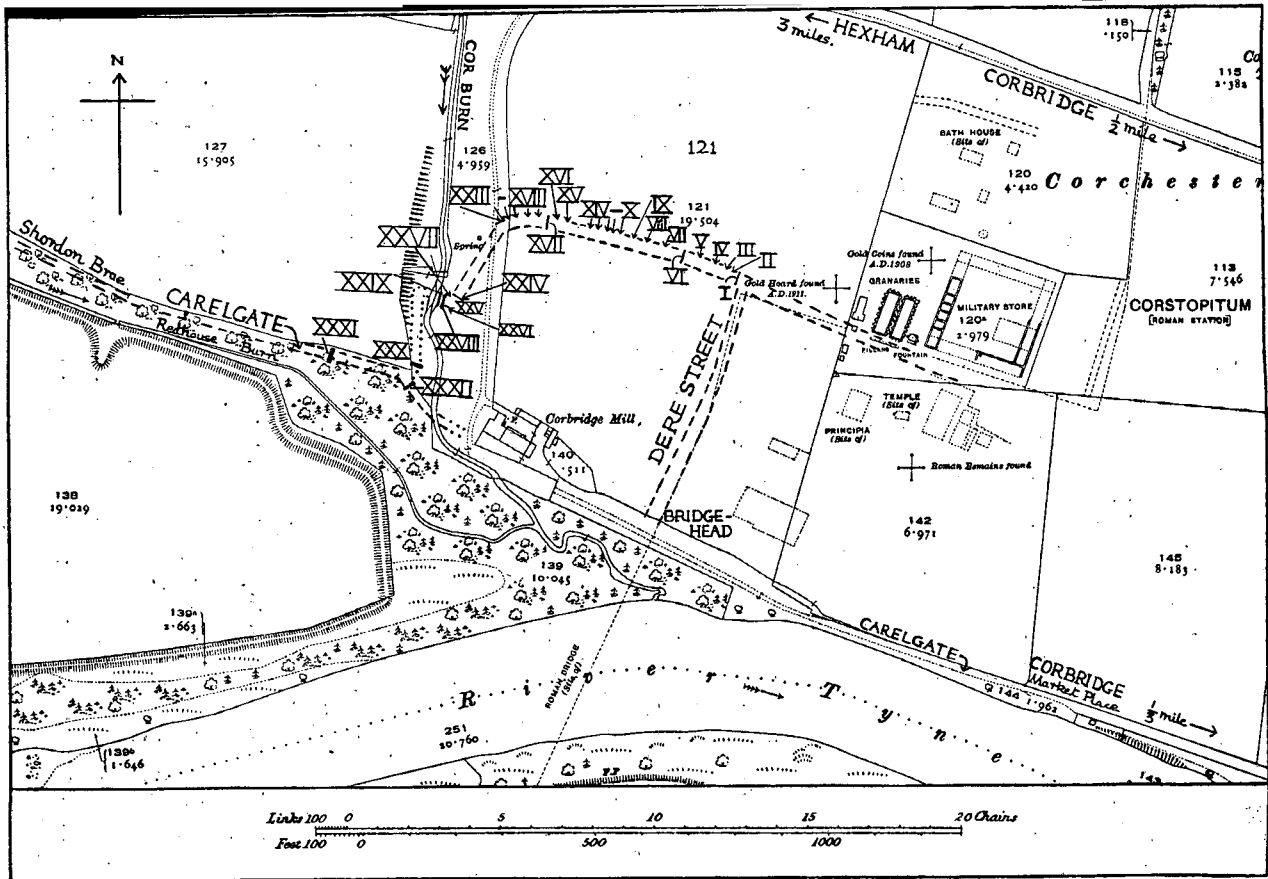


FIG. I. THE STANEGATE AT CORBRIDGE.

Reduced to  $\frac{1}{2}$  scale from the 25-inch OS map of Northumberland N XCII 9 (ed. 1922); reproduced with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office

still *in situ* with built masonry to heighten its side-walls (section XXI) and by the steeply cambered termination of the gravel surface (sections XXII and XXIII). At the bottom of the hollow beside the road in section XXII a group of pottery fragments lay embedded in silt washed off the gravel. They formed a homogeneous group of the Antonine period, and included (1) a Samian sherd, *Drag.* 37, with ovolo, wavy line, and astragalus, (2) a small sherd of undecorated Samian, *Drag.* 31, (3) part of a pink flagon, (4) two rim-fragments of black carinated bowls, (5) four rim-fragments of second-century grey ware, and (6) one fragment of glass. Presumably they were washed down the slope from some occupation-site lying a little to the east, but they do not date the road itself, for they may have been dislodged from their original site at any period.

To avoid a crossing of the Cor Burn where there is both a wide stretch of low ground and a very steep west bank, the road at section XXIII makes a sharp southward turn of 70°. It then follows the higher ground on the east bank which has been reinforced with stones at certain points as a protection against floods. In this way it reaches the narrowest part of the low ground and accordingly turns sharply westward to cross the burn at right-angles.

Section XXIV was cut just before the road turns for the crossing. Here the south-east kerb proved to be a massive structure meriting detailed examination. It was therefore opened up for a length of 11 ft. along the road (see pl. XIV, fig. 1); for 8 ft. the stones were still in position, laid in four courses. The lowest was formed by one, the next by four sandstone blocks measuring 18 by 15 by 10 in.; the next by five stones of 9-in. grade, and the top, which was missing in parts, by three stones of similar size. Above these regular lines of kerbstones came more sandstone blocks which served to retain the gravel surfacing of the road. At the level of the lowest course but one the ditch was sealed by a band of yellow gravel washed off the road. Below this was found a Samian rim-fragment, either *Drag.* 37 or pos-

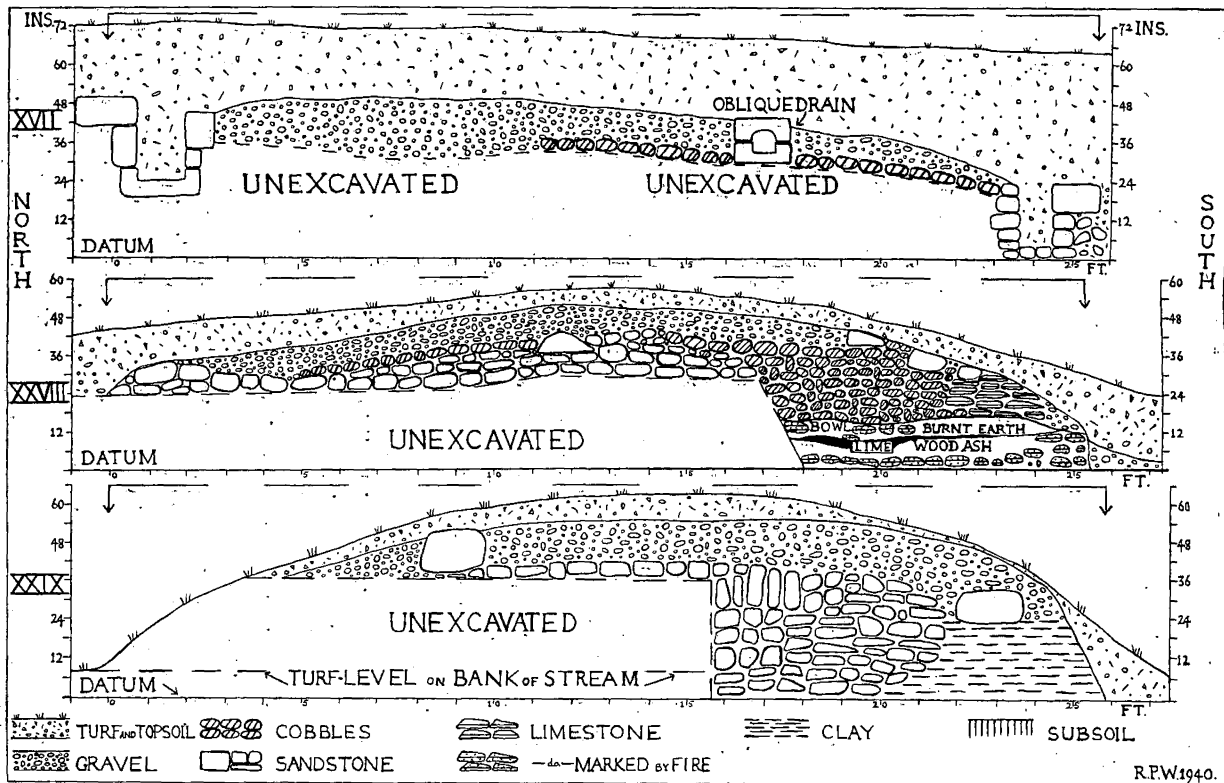


FIG. 2. CROSS-SECTIONS OF THE STANEGATE AT CORBRIDGE.

sibly *Drag.* 31; in either case the type is Antonine.

A few feet south of this kerb the structure and width of the road were tested in section xxv. The north-west edge was difficult to determine, but the road was approximately 20 ft. wide. The north-west side was formed by a 4-in. layer of gravel for 10 ft., and the rest by a 5-in. layer of cobbles, in all a very slight structure. No bottoming could be discovered. An unstratified coin was found in the ditch on the south-east; it was a third-century radiate, probably of Tetricus or Victorinus, but too worn for certain identification (see coin-list, no. 3).

Section xxvi was cut in an attempt to define the curve, but this could be done only approximately as beyond the road to the south there was much gravel, on which a coin of Constantine I was found unstratified (see coin-list, no. 4). The north edge of the road and ten feet of the metalling were found in section xxvii. On the bottoming of 6-in. grade sandstone blocks lay a well-preserved third brass of Valentinian I, which dates between A.D. 367 and 375 (see coin-list, no. 5). It was sealed by the well-preserved and compact gravel surfacing, and may therefore be used for dating the road at this point. On another coin (no. 6), found in the gravel surfacing here, the head of the emperor is diademed and it seems to belong to the middle of the fourth century. A final coin (no. 7) was detected in the soil cast up from this trench: it was illegible, but its fabric suggested a radiate of the later third century.

In section xxviii (see diagram, p. 199; pl. XIII, fig. 1) the full width of the road was uncovered where it was narrowing to the abutment. The upper layer was once again composed of gravel, laid to an average depth of 7 in. and well cambered. The bottoming was laid in two or three courses; sandstone blocks filled the northern two-thirds, and the rest was composed of large water-worn cobbles with three sandstone blocks at the south side to retain the gravel of the top layer. Beneath these cobbles came a loose pack of more cobbles, for a depth of two feet. These had been

used to fill in a lime-kiln cut into the south side of the approach to the abutment. At the bottom of the kiln was a layer of small limestone blocks, hardly touched by fire. Above this came a 5-in. layer of black woodash which was covered by a thin stratum of the lime which had been produced. This was capped by a 5-in. band of earth which had been burnt red, and in this lay some more blocks of limestone which had been subjected to heat. The earth also contained a single sherd of Crambeck ware. It forms nearly the complete half of a yellowish-white bowl of type 9,<sup>5</sup> with upright wall, grooved on the outside, and still retaining traces of orange-red paint on the rim and inside. It is 1 $\frac{5}{8}$  in. high, and 6 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. in diameter, and is one of the types not current before the Theodosian period (A.D. 369 onwards). The burnt earth was sealed by the packing of loose cobbles mentioned above and by some layers of limestone slabs built up at the south side to retain these cobbles.

Although the section was not carried below the bottom of the kiln, it seems unlikely that there are remains of earlier work below this point, for it is on the flood-plain within 2 ft. of the normal level of the burn, and the exposed face of the abutment-mound (see the next section, xxix) showed a homogeneous structure. By a slight anticipation of results from this next section we may here consider the purpose of the kiln and dating of the abutment. The high mound, 15 ft. long and 5 ft. high, which brings the road almost to the edge of the Cor Burn, would here receive the full force of any flood; for the burn, with its rapid fall, is subject to violent floods. It is therefore likely that the remains of pre-Theodosian road-levels have been completely swept away. Accordingly for this short mound we may postulate a rebuilding from ground-level in Theodosian times. But before the core of the mound received its final surfacing of gravel, a need for lime arose, presumably to make mortar for an ashlar facing to both abutments. The easiest course was to cut a semi-circular recess about 5 ft. wide in the side

<sup>5</sup> Corder, *Antiq. Jour.* xvii, 403; Margaret Birley, *ibid.* 409.



of the half-built mound. Limestone and wood were laid in alternate levels in this cavity and then capped with earth. When the kiln had been fired most of the lime was presumably removed; and either now or at an earlier stage part of a Theodosian bowl was left behind, embedded in the burnt earth. After use this improvised kiln was filled in with cobbles till the level of the road-bottoming was reached. Then the gravel surfacing was added for the full width of the road, in a uniform layer which had not been cut through to make the kiln, but was subsequent to it. The Theodosian date of this road-making is confirmed by the coin of Valentinian I (367-375) (see list, no. 5) which was sealed between the two layers of the road a few yards to the east in section XXVII. It is, of course, possible that the coin had worked its way down from the surface, but the gravel above it was here so clean and well consolidated that it seemed to seal the deposit. It may be remembered that the uppermost level of the east-west road near the granaries was also Theodosian.<sup>6</sup>

Section XXIX (see diagram, p. 199) was made by paring off the south part of the exposed face of the abutment-mound where it ends abruptly within 10 ft. of the present course of the burn. Just here the burn is now 10 ft. west of the position marked for it on the *O.S.* map. Though the excavation was not carried below the present level of the turf for fear of weakening the mound in the face of floods, the remains of a layer of 10-in. grade sandstone blocks was traced in the bank of the burn, thus constituting a foundation or raft for the mound. The core of the mound was made of sandstone blocks of various shapes, some being set vertically on edge and the others packed in horizontally. A bank of clay 5 ft. wide and 2 ft. high made a solid kerbing on the south side and itself carried a large kerbstone. Above the clay and core came a thick layer of gravel surfacing. All the features belong to a single period of construction. No trace was found of any dressed stones for a facing of the

<sup>6</sup> *A.A.* xv, 262.

abutment, but these may easily have been removed either by floods or mediaeval builders of the mill. The presence of the lime-kiln strongly suggests that mortared masonry was used here.

*West of the Cor Burn.*

West of the burn the corresponding abutment and about 50 yds. of road-embankment have been removed by floods, for the burn has ranged from here westwards over a width of 20 yds. as far as the foot of a steep bank 25 ft. high. Clearly the road could not proceed due west in face of such an obstacle, but after crossing the burn must have turned southward along its west bank till it reached the corner of Shordon Brae wood. The existence of this link between the abutment and wood was proved by section xxx, cut just east of the south-east corner of field no. 127 (see pl. XIII, fig. 2; diagram, p. 205). This revealed a solid road 16 ft. wide which pointed northward to the abutment and had its west kerb close to the fence of field no. 127 and its east kerb close to the burn. The structure was unusual: for 9 ft. at the centre the bottoming was built of limestone slabs to a depth of 15 in., but at the sides larger blocks of sandstone had been used. The well-defined east kerb can be seen in plate XIII, fig. 2. In the upper layer cobbles filled the central 6 ft. and 6-in. grade sandstone blocks occupied the rest. The depression in the middle of the road made it probable that the cobbles found on the upper surface here constituted a later repair. No trace was seen of any gravel surfacing. Either floods had swept this away, or the builders had been content with a rougher surface. Towards the top of both the limestone and the sandstone bottoming, and for the full width of the road, the stones had been subjected to the action of fire for a depth of 4 or 5 inches. No explanation was forthcoming for this unusual feature. It seemed as if a large fire had been lit upon the bottoming and then removed before the upper surface was added. It appeared to be unconnected with the production of lime, and could

hardly represent a beacon where the road lay so low. A possible parallel comes from Bewcastle,<sup>7</sup> where the Romans cleared and burnt the scrub before laying out the fort. Whatever the meaning of the burning, the road in which it occurs is undoubtedly Roman.

The next stage was to examine the line of road which keeps within Shordon Brae wood and skirts field no. 127. This was used from mediaeval times till the eighteenth century as the main road from Corbridge to Hexham, and was formerly named the Carelgate, or Carlisle road. From mediaeval Corbridge it held to the north bank of Tyne and, passing south of Corbridge Mill, forded the Cor Burn; then, on reaching the north-east angle of Shordon Brae wood, it turned west towards Hexham. Two sections were cut to see whether any Roman levels could be found beneath the later metalling. Section xxxi was made at a point 60 yds. west of the north-east angle of the wood. The site lies low and the field on the north stands at a higher level; so that ploughing has brought 3 or 4 ft. of earth down the slope. On the shelving bank of clean sand (see pl. xiv, fig. 2; and diagram, p. 205) a thick layer of gravel had been laid for a width of 20 feet. At the lower end it was 2 ft. thick and contained a hand-made brick (to be discussed below). It had once been well cambered but at the centre all the metalling had been worn away by heavy traffic and the resultant hollow was filled with mud.<sup>8</sup> The road had been remade by spreading 10 in. of gravel over all but the north edge, and about 6 in. of topsoil had accumulated above this.

Section xxxii (see diagram, p. 205) tested the Carelgate just west of its ford beside Corbridge Mill, where it might be independent of any Roman line. Here there were three separate periods. The lowest road was at least 18 ft. wide, but owing to the field-wall no search could be made for its east kerb. It was built in three layers, large cobbles at the

<sup>7</sup> CW<sup>2</sup> xxxviii, 235-6. Mr. Richmond suggested this parallel.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. A. Raistrick kindly analysed a sample and found that it contained many blown plant fragments, such as would accumulate in an open hollow over a long period of years.



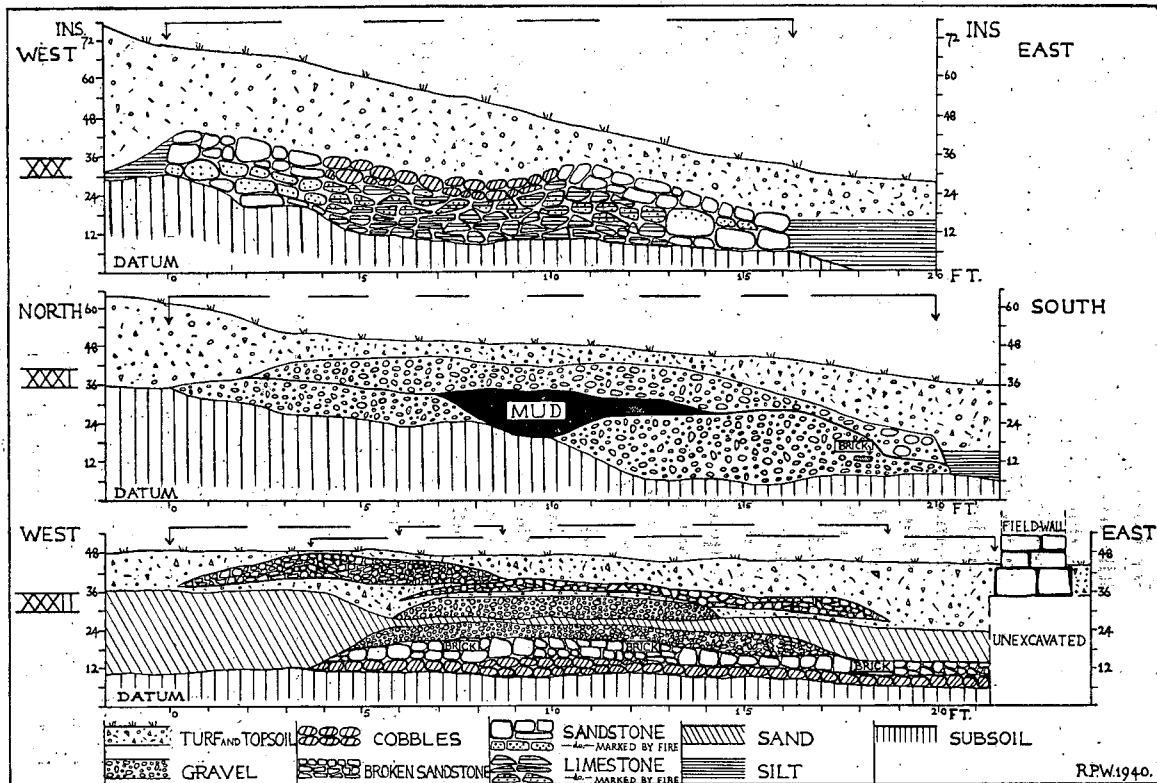


FIG. 3. CROSS-SECTIONS OF THE STANEGATE AT CORBRIDGE.

RPW.1940.



bottom, 6-in. grade sandstone in the middle, and gravel on the top, together forming a cambered and well-compacted road. The middle layer yielded three more brick fragments, one of which was the corner of a box-tile from a hypocaust with criss-cross scoring on one face. The thickness of the others, including the example from section xxxi, accorded with Roman standards, and their fabric was not inconsistent with a Roman date. In level this road was only 2 ft. lower than the east kerb of section xxx, which lay outside the corner of the wood. Above this road with its three layers came a band of clean river-sand, showing that the Cor Burn had swept over the site after the road was disused. Nowadays the burn is level with the foundation of the road, but in the course of centuries the burn has brought down a quantity of silt which, accumulating near the mill, has raised the level of the ground. There is no need to picture the road as waterlogged in Roman times.

The next road-builders laid a gravel road, 8 ft. wide, above the silt, and this was rebuilt with small blocks of sandstone roughly laid for a width of 12 ft., being separated from the lower surface by an inch or so of soil. In the third period a new road was laid rather to the west in order to ease the turn for traffic moving at speed. This was a well-cambered road, only 8½ ft. wide, built of sandstone broken up small, and covered by only 3 in. of topsoil. Probing showed that this road, and presumably its predecessors, continued to the south-east parallel with the west wall of the wood and then swung more to the east to ford the burn and pass south of Corbridge Mill.

The upper levels of the Carelgate may be assigned to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. From the Quarter Sessions Order Book of 1701 we learn that "John Coatsworth, esq., presents the highway in the Thorns loaning att a place called Shordon Sike to be foundrous and ought to be repaired," and there are other such references<sup>9</sup> later in that decade. We know that in 1745-6 General Wade's

<sup>9</sup> NCH x, 231.

force was unable to get beyond Hexham on its march towards Carlisle owing to the bad roads, and this was remedied in 1751-2 by the construction of the Military Road between Newcastle and Carlisle. It passed three miles north of Corbridge, and so, to help local traffic between that town and Hexham, a new road was built in 1752 on the south bank of the river. The need for this was shown in the preamble of the Act of Parliament, which stated that the old road past Corbridge Mill had "become so ruinous that it was almost impassable for coaches, waggons, and other carriages, and dangerous for persons travelling on horseback." Nevertheless the road through Shordon Brae wood was still marked as open on the 1868 *OS* map, and was only closed later in the century.

If, however, the upper levels represent eighteenth-century repairs, it is difficult to account for the lowest road in section xxxii except as a Roman structure, and this dating seems to be borne out by the presence of Roman brick fragments. Similarly the earlier level in section xxxi produced a hand-made brick and was systematically built and had sustained prolonged wear before it was remade. Granted the Roman date of section xxxii, we can safely assign the earlier level of xxxi to the same period and confirm this by its context. For once the Roman road which traverses the west field and Cor Burn bridge reached the north-east corner of Shordon Brae wood, there was no other feasible line for its continuation except that which was later adopted by the Carrelgate in this sector.

Consideration, however, of the structure and course of the road within the wood suggests that sections xxxi and xxxii indicate an integral, primary road which crossed the Cor Burn by a ford or culvert and aimed for the main Roman bridge-head on the Tyne. The rest of the complex is then explicable as a branch-road placed as an addition to the scheme, and at an awkward angle, which struck off from the corner of the wood to run north-east to the best point for bridging the Cor Burn and so to reach the west end of



Roman Corbridge. At the Cor Burn bridge the remains are Theodosian, but reasons have been given to explain the absence of earlier levels. In the west field at least two levels were found and it is very likely that, when a complete section is made near the east end of this field, the road will reveal at least the three periods which were found in 1911 on Dere Street.<sup>10</sup> It seems clear that the route to the Tyne bridge-head is primary, and may now without hesitation be called the Stanegate. Its successor, the Carelgate, runs westward for  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles to Anick Bank Foot, where it reaches the modern road from Corbridge to Hexham. It is probable that for at least part of this distance the Stanegate underlies it. From Anick Bank Foot to Walwick Grange, four miles away to the north-west and across the North Tyne, search has been made for its traces without success; but where last found at Walwick Grange<sup>11</sup> it had just made a turn of  $35^\circ$  to head in the direction of Corbridge. In general, therefore, this study has succeeded in tracing the east end of the Stanegate as far as Corbridge, where the main objective was the bridge-head.

This accords well with the method of the Roman advance. As soon as the primary roads had been driven northward, from Overborough and Low Borrow Bridge to Brougham and Carlisle on the west and from York and Catterick to Corbridge on the east of the Pennines, there arose an urgent need for a lateral connection. So the Bowes to Brougham road was built across Stainmore to link York with Carlisle, and further south Bainbridge became and remained an important road-junction with a history which ran from Flavian to Theodosian times. As soon as Corbridge was occupied as an important base for Agricola's advance into Scotland, it was essential to link it with Carlisle across the Tyne-Solway gap. The new cross-road, the Stanegate, struck off westward as soon as Dere Street reached its bridge-head on the Tyne. The roads which met

<sup>10</sup> *AA*<sup>3</sup> VIII, 142 = 1911 *Report*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> *AA*<sup>3</sup> XVI, 143.



FIG. 1. STANEGATE AT COR BURN, SECTION XXVIII, LOOKING NORTH.

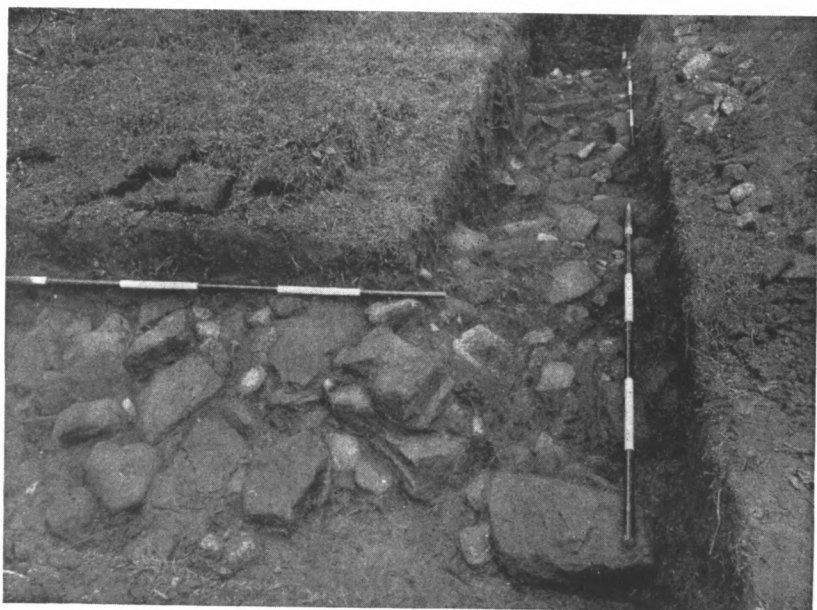


FIG. 2. STANEGATE WEST OF COR BURN, SECTION XXX, LOOKING WEST.





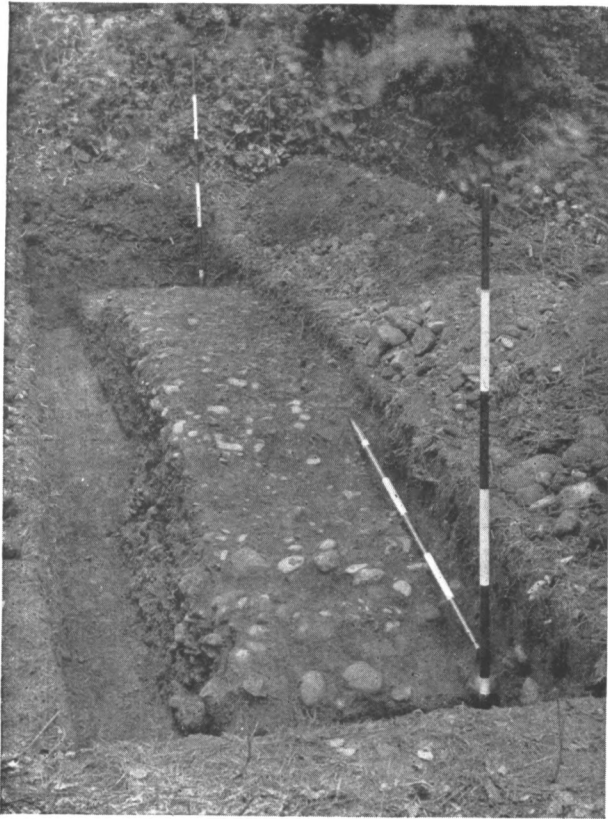


FIG. 2. CARELGATE IN SHORDON BRAE WOOD, SECTION XXXI,  
LOOKING NORTH.



FIG. 1. SOUTH-EAST KERB OF STANEGATE, SECTION XXIV,  
LOOKING SOUTH-WEST.



at Corbridge brought that site into prominence whenever campaigns were planned against Caledonia, whether under Domitian, Antoninus Pius, or Septimius Severus.

The writer wishes to thank Mr. David Cuthbert for granting permission to excavate, and Mr. W. Coulson, of Corbridge Town Farm, and Messrs. J. Lowes and W. Patterson, successive tenants at Corbridge Mill, for full facilities. He also makes grateful acknowledgement of valuable help of various kinds from Dr. A. Raistrick, the Rev. T. Romans, Messrs. W. P. Hedley, I. A. Richmond, and M. Rowlands.

## COIN-LIST.

Mr. Hedley has given expert help with the identification of these coins.

1. (Section III) Faustina II (A.D. 145-161): *as* in good condition. *Obv.* FAVSTINA A | VG PII AVG FIL. *Rev.* FELIC | [I]TAS S | C (Mattingly and Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, III, p. 193, no. 1395).
2. (Section XX) Third brass of family of Valentinian I (A.D. 364-378).
3. (Section XXV) Illegible *antoninianus*: ? Tetricus or Victorinus. Radiate.
4. (Section XXVI) Third brass of Constantine I, facing r., diademed (*circa* A.D. 337-340). *Obv.* CONSTANTII | [N]V S P F AVG. *Rev.* GLORIA [EXER]CITV[S]; in exergue TRP, crescent. A standard between two soldiers.
5. (Section XXVII) Third brass of Valentinian I (A.D. 367-375). *Obv.* D N VALENTINI | ANVS P F AVG. *Rev.* SECVRI[TAS] | REIPVBLICAE; in exergue P CON.
6. (Section XXVII) Illegible third brass; diademed head, probably mid-fourth century.
7. (Section XXVII) Illegible third brass; fabric suggests a radiate of the later third century.

