

## VIII.—EXCAVATION AT LONGBYRE (HALTWHISTLE PARISH).

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In May 1957 Mr. J. P. Gillam reported to the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments that the Northumberland County Council intended to straighten and widen the road from Greenhead to Gilsland at the point where it crosses Hadrian's Wall (NY 656661). Land containing a length of about 50 feet of the Wall had been acquired for this purpose.

An emergency excavation was arranged by the Inspectorate and carried out under my supervision in July 1957. Work was confined to the area west of the existing road, where the Wall climbs a steep slope towards the west. Surface indications here were faint both on the ground and from the air. However, on the opposite side of the road the line of the Wall and ditch was particularly clear.

The remains of the Wall were uncovered for a distance of 43 feet (fig. 1). The central section, of 22 feet, was in good condition, the rest fragmentary as the result of extensive stone-robbing. Sufficient remained to establish the precise position and width of the Wall at this point. The Wall was here provided with a bottom course of rubble faced on each side with flags roughly tapered inwards into the core. The width of this course varied from 11 feet 3 inches to 11 feet 9 inches. On the south side of the structure three courses of long, thin facing stones survived above the bottom course from which they were set back 9 inches. Slight traces of mortar pointing were noticed in these upper courses.

The core consisted of small cobbles placed in layers. Although these layers ran parallel to the slope of the ground,

the stones themselves were largely set at an angle to the slope as if to counteract slip. There was no sign of any bonding material. The stones themselves were smaller than has usually been observed elsewhere on the Wall. Many were water-worn and doubtless came from the nearby Tipalt Burn.

A continuous section was cut across the Wall and Wall ditch (fig. 2). The south lip of the latter had been heavily eroded and exact dimensions were consequently difficult to establish. The berm was approximately 22 feet wide, the ditch about 33 feet. The bottom of the ditch was 12 feet below the footings of the Wall, but the considerable slope of the ground from south to north (in addition to that from west to east) reduced this depth to about 6 feet from bottom to existing lip. The inner slope of the ditch was gentle and the bottom apparently flat and 9 feet wide. At the north end of the section it rose at an angle of nearly 45 degrees. No upcast was observed beyond the ditch, but the surface has clearly been disturbed since the Roman period.

The surviving structure of the Wall at Longbyre is certainly the Broad foundation, standing several courses high above the footings (as in the Willowford and Gilsland Old Vicarage sections). There is no trace of the superstructure (presumably Narrow) *in situ*, though two of the characteristic facing stones were found in the bottom of the ditch. The remains are close to the surface for much of the length and there was ample evidence of stone-robbing. Recent interference was also noted in the ditch which was found to have been filled in the nineteenth century. No true silting had occurred, due to the steep west to east slope. The profile is quite unlike that of the normal military ditch and is perhaps the result of recutting. A similar profile seems to have been observed at Rudchester and elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> However the shape at Longbyre may originally have been considerably sharper, since not only is the hillside sandy and liable to erosion but also the ditch itself remained open to a considerable depth

<sup>1</sup> *CW*<sup>2</sup> ii, 391; cf. *AA*<sup>4</sup> xxxvi, 55, n. 1.

until the last century.<sup>2</sup> It is, indeed, remarkable that any traces of the structures survive in this place so apt for their destruction.

On completion of the excavation, the larger part of the Wall structure itself was consolidated by the Ministry of Works. This section will be permanently preserved in the bank at the side of the road.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *AA*<sup>4</sup> xxxvi, 55ff., for the ditch at Bays Leap and a suggestion by Mr. Jobey that such a flat bottom may be due to the work being unfinished.

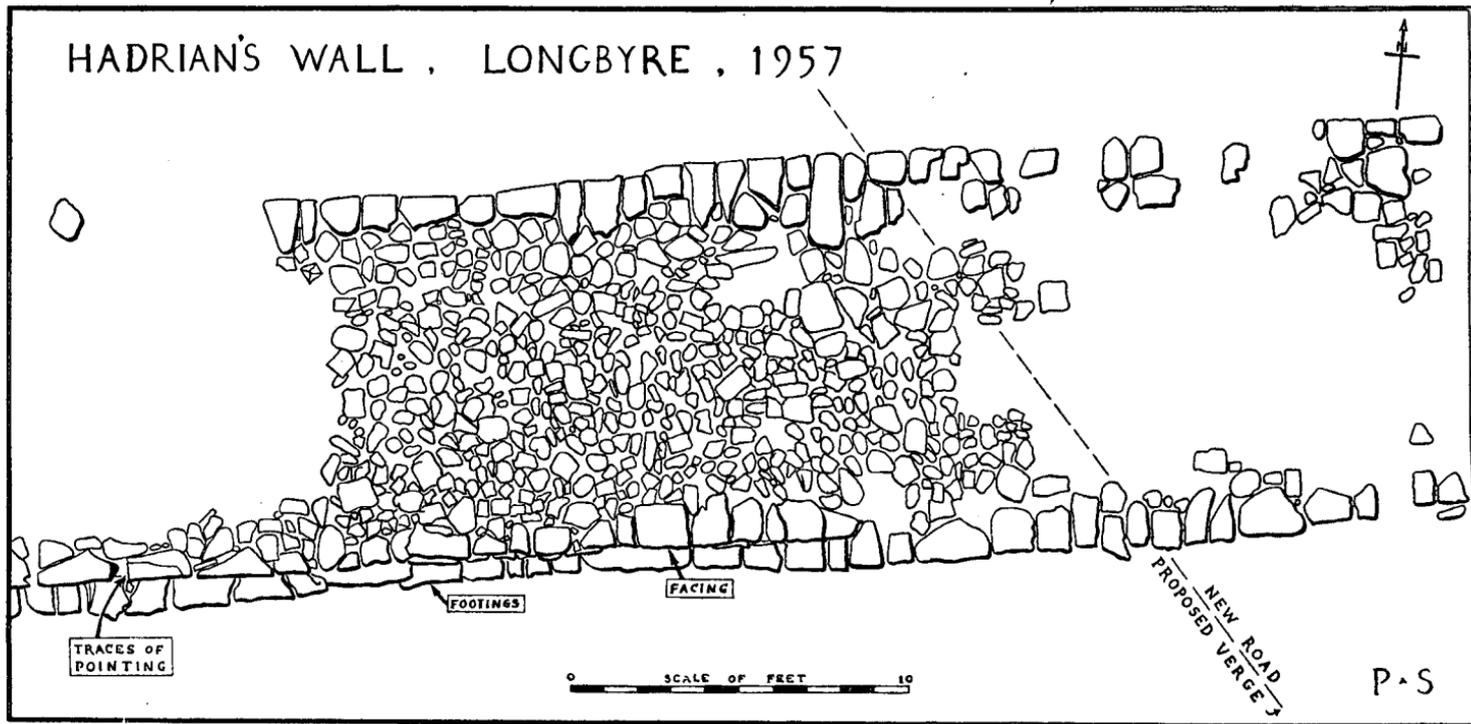


FIG. 1.

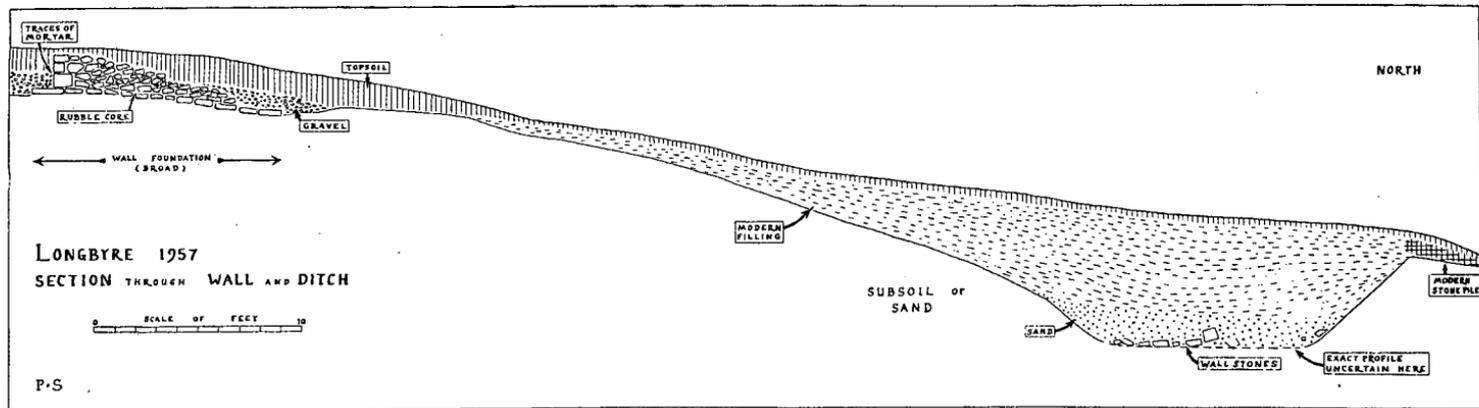


FIG. 2.

