

## XII

### THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MILITARY ROAD IN NORTHUMBERLAND 1751-1757

*William Lawson*

#### INTRODUCTION

EARLIER research on the origin of the road (*A.A.* 4/XLIV, 1966) established that an entry in the Minutes of the Surveyor General, dated 4th April, 1749, ordered that a petition from the Nobility and Gentry desiring a road to be made from Newcastle to Carlisle should be referred to the Surveyor General (Thomas Lascelles) himself. The petition has not survived, though its form is clear from page 87, vol. 26, *Journals* of the House of Commons. It stated that much of the country between the two towns was uncultivated, thinly inhabited and frequently impassable. Lack of communication had greatly endangered the kingdom during the recent rebellion but that the required road could not be laid out "or the expence thereof defrayed, but by a National assistance...".

In response to an order from the Surveyor General dated 7th May, 1749, Dugal Campbell, Sub-Director of Engineers, (assisted by Hugh Debbeig), produced a survey of roads currently in use between the two towns, and suggested a course for the new intended road whose cost he estimated at £22,450. Campbell's report has been lost but two copies of the survey exist, one the property of the Allgood family at Nunwick and the other in the possession of this Society since at least 1839. Lancelot Allgood, who was Sheriff of Northumberland in 1745, and became a Member of Parliament in 1749, may have had some association with the project.

The petition came before the House on 4th March 1750/51 and was referred for examination and report to a Committee of over fifty members. Witnesses summoned included three officers who had accompanied Wade on the ill-fated Hexham march and all agreed on the importance of open communications between Newcastle and Carlisle "for the commodious passage of troops on any future occasion". The Committee concluded that the road could neither be repaired by the ordinary course of law nor by erecting turnpikes which could easily be avoided because of the open nature of most of the country, and after £3,000 had been allocated towards construction by a Committee of Supply, the House instructed eight of its members, including Allgood and Sir Wm. Middleton, to prepare and introduce the necessary Bill, which, after an uneventful passage, became "An Act for Laying Out, Making,

and Keeping in Repair, a Road proper for the Passage of Troops and Carriages from the City of Carlisle to the Town of Newcastle upon Tyne”.

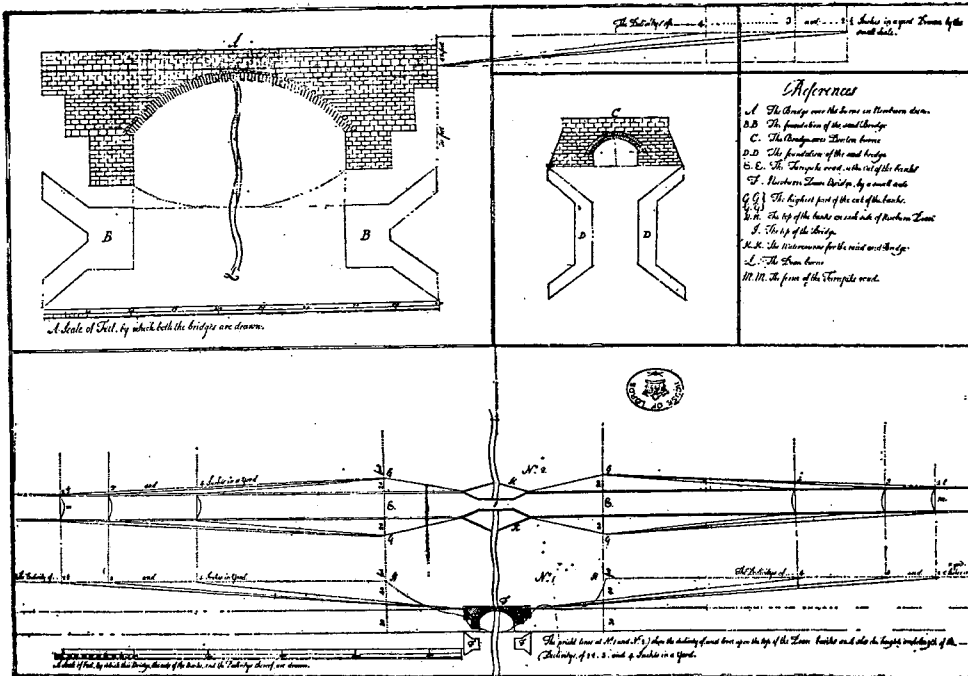
Pursuant to an agreement with the Commissioners, Christopher Lightfoot and his partners Thomas Lightfoot, James Paul (all from Yorks.) and Robert Rowntree (from Co. Durham) undertook to make the road within Northumberland for the sum of eight shillings per rood, distance between ditches to be 27 feet, width of stonework 16 feet and 15 inches thick on crown, declining to five inches at each side. The Act, doubtless based on Campbell's report, lays down the route as from the West Gate by way of East Denton, Chapel Houses, Heddon on the Wall, Harlow Hill, Portgate, Chollerford Bridge, Walwick, Carrawburgh etc. to Carlisle but the commissioners had power to decide the exact course between the points specified and usually had no hesitation in following that indicated by the dotted line on the survey. This in turn coincided with the path of “Severus Wall” for most of its journey between Newcastle and the central heights. John Tweddell was appointed clerk and treasurer to the commissioners and John Brown of Kirk Harle (brother of “Capability”) surveyor.

#### CONSTRUCTION OF THE ROAD

A note in the *Newcastle Journal* of 13th July, 1751, stated simply, “On Monday last the Carlisle Turnpike Road was begun near the Westgate of this town”. How work progressed in those early days can be judged to some extent from entries in the Commissioners' accounts, the first of which covers the period 9th August-2nd Nov. 1751, during which sums totalling £790. 18s. were drawn from their London banker, Gislingham Cooper. Of this amount Edward Bigge, their Solicitor, received £190. 18s. 0d. as two-thirds<sup>1</sup> of his bill “for fees and disbursements” in getting the Act passed. Ralph Callender received 13s. 4d. (29th Aug.) for building an abutment wall to support Quarry House which stood at the junction of the present Westgate Road and Corporation Street, and which had been endangered by the operations of the roadmakers. On 8th Oct. Thos. Layburn received £2 for excavating for foundations for the bridge over Newburn Dene. He was a mason from Wolsingham and with Wm. Wheatley of Lanchester had contracted to build bridges at Newburn and Denton Denes in accordance with the plans shown opposite. The agreement with the Commissioners was not signed until 2nd Nov. and states

<sup>1</sup> The remaining one-third, £95. 9s., appears in favour of Bigge under an entry of 25th Nov. in the Cumberland accounts. Annual Treasury grants were usually made in the proportion of two-thirds to N'land and one-third to Cumberland. No other details of Bigge's account are available but an itemised “Bill of Charges for Passing the Road Bill from the West Cow Gate to Wansbeck” exists amongst the Allgood Estate

Papers (C.R.O. Zal. 98/4). Date of this Act was 1749. Bigge was probably the solicitor in question and some of the items on the bill are recorded on page 189 *A.A.* 4/XLIX, 1971. He regularly delivered the accounts and reports of both the N'land and Cumberland Commissioners to Parliament up to 1758 and probably presented the annual petitions for further grants.



Details of bridges at Newburn Dene and Denton Burn

that the distance between the breast walls of the Newburn Bridge must be 31 feet but in the case of the Denton Bridge only 8 feet. Both bridges are to be 14 feet wide across the battlements and all work must be finished by Midsummer day 1752 and maintained for 7 years. The price is to be £160. The agreement with the bridge builders like that with the roadmakers, had evidently been verbal in the first instance since, on the same day (2nd Nov.) Layburn received £30 on account for work already done. Also on the same day Christopher Lightfoot received £300 for road work and £7. 3s. 6d. for making conduits on each side of the road from the Westgate to Benwell Quarry Gate,<sup>3</sup> a distance just short of 2½ miles. Whether the larger sum included any payment for work done on Benwell Hill is not specified, since for adjustment to the gradient at the top of the hill Lightfoot's agreement permitted an additional payment of £52. 10s. Sectional drawings extant indicate that the sector involved extended from within 30 yards of Benwell Windmill (which the Official Survey of 1749<sup>3</sup> shows to have been approximately 100 yards east of Condercum fort) to a point almost 400 yards west marked by a thorn tree. Probably little damage accrued to the fort since the section

<sup>2</sup> Approx. where the Lodge of St. Cuthbert's School now stands.

<sup>3</sup> Only this Society's copy, but not Allgood's, perhaps indicating that the former was used

by officials and contractors and that the position of this Windmill was a late addition with special reference to the work on Benwell Hill.

shows that the intention thereabouts was to in-fill a slight hollow approaching the hill summit from the east, rather than to excavate. The major portion of the work involved the removal of a few feet from the summit itself and did not affect the long descent from just beyond the position of the thorn tree to Denton Burn. Not far from the Windmill "Mr. Shaftoe's farmhouse" is indicated and it is to this year or 1752 that his Plan of Condercum<sup>4</sup> is dated. His discovery of Turret 6B may indicate that the roadmakers were plundering the Wall for stones, though Wall and road do not coincide here.

For 1752 no accounts have been found to cover the period between 2nd Nov. 1751 and 20th Jan. 1753 in Northumberland but from the *Journals* of the House of Commons we know that petitions on behalf of Northumberland and Cumberland Commissioners were submitted annually (except 1756) in January or February, to the effect that though the Commissioners, by virtue of the Act passed in the previous session, have caused part of the road to be amended and made passable, they cannot finish it unless the House shall be pleased to grant them such further sum as it may deem fit.<sup>5</sup> In 1752 this resulted in a further grant of £3,000 of which Cumberland received £1,000; Treasury deductions amounted to approx. five and a half per cent.

The press has little to relate in 1752 but three Denton Estate letters<sup>6</sup> are particularly valuable. The first of these dated 27th May, 1752, is from John Airey<sup>7</sup> to a Mr. Carter through whom he wishes to communicate with Edward Montague<sup>8</sup> and begins "Wee are proceeding fast on the Military Road which is east as far as Heddon on the Wall: and will soon reach Rutchester (thus). It is proposed to keep upon the Roman Wall as much as possible ..." and goes on to say that the Commissioners have desired Airey to inform Montague that he will take nothing for the ground that he will lose to the road in its passage through Whitcheater, provided that his neighbours will do the same; other landowners such as Lord Northumberland and the Trustees of Greenwich Hospital<sup>9</sup> have signified their intention of taking this course and merely desire to have their grounds fenced off from the road at the Commissioners' expense; he is further to seek Montague's permission to carry on the road through his property at Rudchester. In light of a remark in the second letter, some two

<sup>4</sup> Vol. I, Brand's *Hist. of Newcastle*.

<sup>5</sup> For details see *Journals* of House of Commons, vol. 26, 1750-54, and vol. 27, 1754-57, under headings of "Carlisle Road" and "Supply".

<sup>6</sup> C.R.O., Ref. M17/60B.

<sup>7</sup> A family of Airey's were "coal-fitters" (i.e. supplied coal as freight to ships) in Newcastle. The name of John Airey appears among those of the Commissioners and he is probably the writer of the letter. He had an office in town and had property at Whitcheater through which the road was to pass. *Newcastle Journal* reported on 16th Oct. 1756 the death of Thos. Airey, heir of the late John, in Westgate who had died the previous month. Thos. died at Crow Hall, his country seat near town.

<sup>8</sup> Grandson of the first Earl of Sandwich, sat as Member for Huntingdon from 1734 to 1768. Possessed estates in Yorkshire and Berkshire and coal mines in the Denton area; also owned Rudchester at this time and later lived at Denton Hall. His wife achieved distinction mainly through her ability as a letter-writer (*N.C.H.* vol. XIII).

<sup>9</sup> The Third Earl of Derwentwater had been executed for treason in 1716 and his estates seized. In 1749 an Act enabled £30,000 to be raised out of them for the benefit of various members of the family and also divested them out of the Crown and vested them in trustees for use of Greenwich Hospital for Seamen. (*N.C.H.* vol. X, page 301.)

months later, it is clear that though operations might have reached Heddon, the road was certainly not complete to that point. As already stated, the Act left the exact line of the road between specified points to the Commissioners (or any seven of them) who were authorised:

“To act, to view and survey the lands and grounds within the said Counties respectively (i.e. Northumberland and Cumberland) and to set out and appoint such part and parts thereof respectively as they think proper to be used and applied for the new intended road ...”

The second letter, dated 21st July, is from Wm. Newton (who appears to have been Montague's agent) to his employer who has apparently instructed him to contact Airey following receipt of his letter. The more relevant portions of the letter are reproduced in full as indicative of the current attitudes towards the project. The original spelling and punctuation are retained.

“Burnopf.<sup>d</sup>. July 21st 1752.

Honoured Sir,

Immediately after I received your Honours favour of the 21st June last, I waited upon Mr. Airey at his Office in Westgate Newcastle, having before Viewed the intended Military Road through Ruchester and as it was not then certainly known whether the road would be exactly upon the Old Roman Wall or not, I recomended that we might have a meeting upon the place in order to settle that point. This Mr. Airey said was very necessary and according to that gentlemans appointment Mr. Isaacson (who was so good as to give his Company) and myselfe went with him on Thursday last and Viewed it where we met with Mr. Wear and the Tenant Wilson. We all agreed that the Military road would be best upon the Old Roman Wall through that Ground; for that it is the strightest way, the easiest expense and will do the least damage to the ground, and Mr. Airey said their people<sup>10</sup> had set it out so.

There are about 20 old and young ash trees including some bad scrubby oaks growing upon the Old Roman Wall that must be taken down in order to make way for the Road, which I have not yet valued; but Wear says and I think they may be worth about Ten Pounds if cut after Michaelmas when the sap is down, there is likewise a bad Stone Wall upon it<sup>11</sup> that divides the Closes that must be taken away also; but the Stones of that and other stones that may easily be got out of the Ruin of the Old Roman Wall must be reserved to make a Stone Wall on each side of the Road and this must be done at the Commissioners expense and I think it will cost 4 Sh. a Rood on each side amounts to £88. (A hedge and Quicks will not do so well because there is nothing in the Ground to repair it with.)

<sup>10</sup> “their people”. As a Commissioner, Airey is probably referring to the commissioners' employees, i.e. Brown the surveyor, the undertakers, etc.

<sup>11</sup> So that the Roman Wall at this point was not high enough to act as a barrier to farm animals.

As the Road is to be upon the Old Roman Wall I think the Damage of Ground will not exceed Four Pounds per year Accounting the Breadth 22 yards and length 70 Chains which is 7 Acres but supposing it to be 8 acres (which is more than it will be) I think Ten Shillings an Acre a high price for that Ground as it falls to be upon the Ruins of the Old Roman Wall and I find that Wilson the Tenant will be content with Four pounds a year.

If this affair can be settled as before mentioned the Estate will be no worse for the Road but rather better in my opinion; because there will be a much better road to Newcastle Market. After the fence Walls are built on each side I would recomend planting it with Elm Trees on each side as your honour was pleased to Observe when at Newcastle. it will be Ornament, Shelter and profit.

Your honour has a power by the Act of Parliament to make a bargain with the Commissioners for Damage of Ground etc. and in case it cannot be agreed in that way, to be settled by a Jury; but I think as good terms will be got by bargaining or referring to two indifferent persons as by a Jury and at less expense and trouble.

The Military Road is already finished from Newcastle to West Denton and is formed and a great part of it made from there to Heddon on the Wall which is about three-quarters of a mile from Ruchester Grounds and Mr. Airey says the Undertaker is to make it to Sheldon Comon<sup>12</sup> this year therefore desires your honour will give leave to carry it through Ruchester. I told that Gentleman I would imediately lay the affair before your honour and he might expect an Answer in Ten Days or a fortnight.

From Newcastle to West Denton the Road keeps at or upon the present<sup>13</sup> high Street, therefore there is little or no Damage so farr and from thence upon or very near the Old Roman Wall through the following lands to Sheldon Comon (viz.) thro a small part of West Denton belonging to Mr. Blacket of Wileham.

Chappel House Ground<sup>14</sup> ... Newburn Grounds ... Throckley Ground ...  
Heddon on the Wall Grounds ... Ruchester ... Whitchester ...  
Harleyhill ... Sheldon Comon ...

Lord Northumberland, Greenwich Hospitall and Lord Carlisle<sup>15</sup> gives the property of their Ground on condition that their Tenants be paid the Damage dureing their Leases and have their Ground fenced off on both sides and these fences kept in repair for Six years at the expence of the Commissioners.

<sup>12</sup> Sheldon or Shildon Common. The area south of the Wall between Wall Houses and Halton Chesters. Lancelot Allgood presented a bill on 17th Jan. 1754 for enclosing and dividing Great Shildon Common. Vol. 26 *Journal House of Commons*, p. 904. Royal Assent received 5th March.

<sup>13</sup> Also marked as "The old Roman Wall or Street to Newcastle from Newburn" upon a

survey dated 8th Oct. 1708 of Coal pits in the Benwell area but only extending as far west as "Denton Bridge". A copy dated 11th Dec. 1785 and certified as accurate by John Newton, Surveyor, may be seen at C.R.O.

<sup>14</sup> Owners are indicated in each case in the letter.

<sup>15</sup> Referring collectively to Chapel House, Newburn, Throckley and part of Heddon.

Mr. Airey says he will ask no Damage for himselfe or Tenant, but as the Old Roman Wall is the Division Hedge between his Ground and Mr. Bells they will have little or none by the new intended Road.

I am Honoured Sir your most Obedi- Humble Serv.  
Wm. Newton.”

How matters were eventually settled at Rudchester is reported in the third letter, dated 19th Nov. 1752, and written to Montague by Newton and counter-signed by Ant. Isaacson, a cousin of Montague.

“On the 14th of October last we took a through view of the Carlisle Road from Newcastle as far west as Shildon Comon which is about four miles west from Ruchester and viewed the ground both where it is made and where it is intended, in order to enable ourselves to talk with the Commissioners relating the damage it will do in Ruchester Estate and waited upon them the 21st. After some talk with them they desired that Mr. Brown their agent and us would try to settle it which at last we did on the following terms in case (?) Your Honour and the Commissioners agree to it viz. We to have nine shillings an acre at 30 years purchase for the ground that the new Road takes up in Ruchester, to have the Old Road<sup>16</sup> and three shillings a Rood for fencing on each side of the new Road, and stones off the Old Roman Wall in making a new stone wall on one side the other side to be a hedge and Quick.

We have heard nothing from the Commissioners since but Brown the Agent tells us that they agree to it. If Your Honour have no objection we will wait upon the commissioners once more and confirm it, for we think these terms will be a full satisfaction for all—damages.”<sup>17</sup>

With one or two notable exceptions, the press is of little assistance in 1752 though the *Newcastle Journal* of 4th Nov. contained a rare item which its competitor, the *Courant*, missed.

“A few days ago the workmen employed in making the Military Road to Carlisle, found a great number of curious Roman coins and medals in the Ruins of the Old Wall near Heddon. They had been deposited in wood boxes which were almost decayed; yet several of the medals are as fresh and fair as if but newly struck. Some of them are made of silver; but the most part of copper and a mixture of coarser metal. They are thought to be as valuable a collection as has been discovered for some centuries past.”

All trace has vanished though Sykes (*Local Records*, vol. I, p. 204) says that “several of the most curious coins were purchased by the Royal Society.” Other issues appearing towards the end of the year contained notices of a proposal for a turnpike road from “that part of the road now making . . . which lies through the township of Welton<sup>18</sup> . . .” through Stannerton,<sup>19</sup> Belsay, Walton, Morpeth Low Common Gate, Stobhill, Hertford (thus) Bridge, South

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the Military Way.

<sup>17</sup> An item in the accounts dated 21st July, 1753, notes payment of £65. 2s. 0d. to Ed. Montague.

<sup>18</sup> In the area of Whittledean Waterworks.

<sup>19</sup> Stamfordham.

Blythe, (thus), Potts House, Annitsford, Longbenton, Sandifordstone Bridge to Newcastle. Yet another proposal was for a similar project from Gateshead, along Jackson's Chare, over the Windmill Hill and on via Swalwell, Winlaton, Crawcrook and Wylam again "to the road now making". Whether or when these proposals actually came to fruition has not been ascertained though no further mention of them was made during the following year; they may however give some indication of progress along the Military Road.

The final notice of the year appeared on the 23rd Dec. and invited proposals from all persons willing to make such part of the road as remained unfinished in Northumberland. The explanation lies in a payment dated 24th January of £23. 16. 6. to Christopher Lightfoot as money due to his father "the late undertaker". Subsequent payments were made to "Thomas and Christopher Lightfoot, the Undertakers" so that Thomas now appears to have become senior partner and the contract to have been secured by what was virtually the same firm. If a new agreement was signed it does not seem to have survived, but at least we may hope that before his demise Lightfoot had realised his intention of reaching Shildon Common by the end of 1752.

Throughout 1753, the press is even more silent than in 1752, the *Newcastle Journal* containing only four notices of meetings, though it is possible that only extraordinary meetings were advertised through this medium. However, notices in respect of other turnpikes indicate that there was no lack of road-making either in progress or under contemplation at this time,<sup>20</sup> so that it is all the more unfortunate that on the Military Road the otherwise laudable work of construction had to be preceded by that of destruction of the still considerable remains of the Wall in the eastern sector. According to Sir John Clerk<sup>21</sup> of Penicuik who traversed the Wall in 1724 there was little to be observed in the initial stage though he found the camp at Benwell much in evidence. A mile beyond the fort, what he terms the "praetentura", began to be more distinct especially at Denton Ludden (thus) and Chapel Hall which presumably implies that hitherto it was at best only traceable. At Walbottle he was able to see the "treu form" of the stone wall and to produce a sketch showing three courses of stone work protruding above the mass of rubbish covering the lower facings of the Wall; indeed he believed that in some places the Wall still stood nine or ten feet high and concluded that there were few places known to him on the whole course of the works where Wall and "that ditch called Hadrian's"<sup>22</sup> appeared to better advantage than between Walbottle Village and a deep gell (gill) to the west of it. At Heddon the stone wall appeared "in all the perfection it can well have" though unfortunately he

<sup>20</sup> Initial Acts (Vols. 25 & 26 of *Journals of House of Commons*) were passed as follows:  
1746/7 Cow Causey to Buckton Burn ("Great North").

1749 West Cowgate to Wansbeck (i.e. Ponteland Road); North Shields to Newcastle.  
1752 Hexham-Alnmouth; Morpeth-Elsdon;  
Longhorsley to Breamish; Berwick, Norham

and Islandshires; Hexham (i.e. Greenhead via Hexham, Corbridge to Military Road).

<sup>21</sup> See *Trans. of the Architect. and Archaeol. Soc. of Durham and N'land*, vol. XI, Pts. III and IV where Clerk's account of his visit to the North of England is edited by Prof. E. Birley.

<sup>22</sup> i.e. the Vallum.



gives little description, and from "Haddon Hall" he noted that the system ran towards Rudchester where he found a large "square" fort. A sketch of a section in the area again shows three courses of facings topping the rubble round the foot of the Wall; so does a third at a point between Harlow Hill and Halton Shields where the works were very conspicuous.<sup>23</sup> A little west of Halton Shields the Wall still exhibited four or five courses of hewn stone and retained "the same noble appearance" to within a mile of the Dere Street crossing.<sup>24</sup> "The ruins of great buildings of stone . . . covered over with grass" could only be Halton Chesters. Of the section between "Portegate" and the North Tyne he believed that scarcely anything that belonged to the Wall had been carried away yet at Chesters, surprisingly, he could see nothing of any particular merit. Further west, he found the system "very entire for several miles",<sup>25</sup> defaced only by the ravages of time, but as we have reached the point at which Road and Wall diverge we need follow Sir John no further. Imperfect as his account and those of others may be, they nonetheless furnish clear evidence that in the first half of the 18th century mile upon mile of the Wall, in varying states of preservation, still remained in the eastern sector. It is only in the first few miles beyond the Westgate and at one or two other points that the roadmakers can avoid responsibility for the final desecration.

The accounts for 1753 (20th January to 10th November) throw some light upon operations. Brown had made, or caused to be made, a crossing at Walbottle while Layburn had made three arches at Rudchester Dene and two at Halton and Shildon Common as well as extending the flank walls of Newburn Bridge and building other walls at Newburn Dene and Walbottle Lane. Wm. Ramshaw received £12. 10s. 0d. for raising the Road at the gill between Rudchester and Whitcheater and for cutting down a hill at Heddon. For making two batteries to support the road there and for conduits, John Richardson received £15. 12s. 0d. while Lightfoot, in addition to his usual occupation of roadmaking, had also been engaged in levelling hills, filling hollows and "stubbing" wood. John Usher had dug a well, filled up by the roadmakers and Michael Pearson had made 40 roods of wall at East Matfen and covered them with sods, there not being enough stone to make them up to five feet high. Joseph Hedley and partners had been paid for work (not specified) on the road and for walling on the north side of Shildon Common while John Bell received sums totalling £70 for building several walls at Halton. The account for 1753 ended with a balance in hand of £184.

Most of the entries mentioned above at least indicate in which area operations were proceeding.<sup>26</sup> Exactly how far the completed road extended cannot

<sup>23</sup> Other testimony comes from Gordon, *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, page 72, who estimates the height of the Wall as about nine feet near Harlow Hill "though the square stones, or outfacings . . . are not above two courses entire". An inset on the 1749 survey shows four courses of masonry topped by a mass of bush-grown rubble "a mile west of Harlow Hill".

<sup>24</sup> which Clerk designates "the Porte Gate".

<sup>25</sup> Of the three miles after leaving Walwick, Gordon reported the remains as "in greater perfection and magnificence than anywhere else between the two seas".

<sup>26</sup> In the same year Wm. Moffitt received payment for making 294 yards of pavement in Westgate.

be determined, but if, as the Douglas Papers<sup>27</sup> indicate, the contractors were in the Portgate area in March 1753 (though operations here were not finalised before June 1754) then it seems reasonable to suppose that they had reached Shildon Common in 1752 and that by the end of 1753, preliminary work may well have been in the neighbourhood of the North Tyne.

For 1754 and 1755 we have no commissioners' accounts and the press is almost as silent as in 1753. Fortunately the Douglas Papers came to light. These were the property of the late Mr. N. W. Kelly of Tadworth, Surrey, and are contained in one of four books purchased by him at an auction sale at the premises of Messrs. Anderson & Garland of Newcastle upon Tyne about the beginning of the second World War. Previously they had belonged to Mr. Joseph Henry Straker of Howden Dene. The book in question is a large letter-book entitled "Papers relating to Hexham, Corbridge, Haltwhistle, etc." and dated "1600-1755"; the first page is endorsed "Collection towards a History of Hexhamshire, A.D. 1560-1755". The present writer was able to secure an extended loan of the same from Mr. Kelly and, while it is obvious that the entire collection requires considerable editing, has confined his attention to twenty-two papers directly concerned with the Military Road under the temporary reference<sup>28</sup> of "The Douglas Papers", since many of the documents are addressed to Joshua Douglas (see below) or appear to have emanated from his office. Of these twenty-two, eleven may be referred either definitely or with reasonable certainty to 1754, five are dated 1755, two belong to 1756, and of the remainder, some are certainly, others probably, from the period 1750-1753. Of the people mentioned, Joshua Douglas was an Attorney "at the foot of Westgate Street" Newcastle, and almost certainly a commissioner; Wm. Errington, who figures most prominently, and who is Douglas's client, lived at Sandhoe and had purchased, probably in 1750,<sup>29</sup> the rights of Dr. J. Blackburn in Portgate, an estate bounded on its north side by the Roman Wall; John Donkin was his agent, and Thos. Scott the tenant of Portgate. John Errington, described as "an infant", was William's nephew and owned Grottington, (Little ?) Whittington, Spy Hall, and Errington Hill Head to the north of the Wall; his Agent was Robt. Lorraine. Also frequently mentioned is John Brown, the surveyor, and, to a lesser degree, Lancelot Allgood. Broadly, the Papers are concerned with the acquisition of land in the Portgate area for the making of the new road and while there emerged from the negotiations numerous details concerning the price of hedging and walling, interminable wrangles over costs and damages (both real and alleged) and even highly relevant facts pertaining to the Wall itself, the most recurrent topic, and one which occupied the time of at least three Trustees'

<sup>27</sup> See below page 186.

<sup>28</sup> This title was suggested by Miss Barbara Harbottle, M.A., F.S.A., by whom the writer's attention was drawn to the papers. A decision upon the disposal of the entire book is awaited but copies of those documents relative to the Military Road are appended in thesis *The Con-*

*struction of the Military Road from Newcastle to Carlisle, 1751-58* (Wm. Lawson), which may be seen at the University Library, Palace Green, Durham. Numbers refer to these documents only.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas Paper 1.

meetings, was Wm. Errington's claim for a fence between his "out" (peripheral) property and the Military Road (i.e. to replace the Roman Wall which the roadmakers had demolished) and the trustees' refusal to supply one. The Wall was the boundary between Portgate and Grottington estates, according to Douglas Paper 5, and was two and a half yards high in some places though others were lower and yet others entirely level and with several stones under the ground, so that perhaps Errington had failed to maintain it as a fence. Whether the land immediately south of the Wall was common appears to be under dispute, Errington claiming that it was not. Other items that emerge are that the "old way" was entirely on the north side of the Wall and so could not have referred to the Military Way; that the current price paid by the commissioners for quickset should not exceed three shillings per rood, for walling five shillings; that for two acres and 22 perches of his "inn" and for one acre, two roods and 17 perches of his "out" grounds, Errington received £40. 17. 6. Errington's claim for a boundary fence,<sup>30</sup> or an allowance to construct one, came before a somewhat unusual meeting of commissioners on Saturday, 6th Oct. 1754.<sup>31</sup> Present were Matthew Ridley, Lancelot Allgood, Edward Blackett, Henry Ellison, Ralph Wm. Grey, Wm. Bigge, and John Williams; Wm. Gibson officiated as clerk. Upon the claim being presented, Grey, Bigge and Williams refused it, Allgood adamantly declined to vote, and the other two were not asked, presumably because, like Blackett, their sympathies were with Errington. The Chairman gave his vote "officiously", though not asked to do so! Amid the confusion, Ridley arrived and proposed £10 for the stones. Douglas re-submitted the claim at another meeting held 9th Nov.<sup>32</sup> when Grey, Bigge and Gibson were again present, also Edward Collingwood. Since three of these had already expressed disapproval, Douglas clearly had little chance of success and was informed by Bigge that a decision had already been taken and to this they adhered. On 30th Nov. a meeting<sup>33</sup> attended by Allgood, Bigge, Grey, Williams, Douglas and Gibson ordered payments totalling £154 to Lorraine, agent to the "infant", John Errington, to cover cost of a hedge, wall, gates, and damage to his ground at Whittington and Errington Hill Head. No doubt his uncle, William, felt somewhat embittered. His claim was once more submitted at a meeting held 28th June, 1755,<sup>34</sup> and again rejected on the grounds that no fence should be supplied at public expense where, in the commissioners' view, none had existed before. Errington at last capitulated.

To obtain checks upon the progress of the roadmakers we must now turn to Stukeley's Diaries and Letters,<sup>35</sup> vol. 3, where two letters to him from the

<sup>30</sup> As we have seen in the Denton Letters, many landowners gave the ground to the Commissioners, only stipulating that the road should be fenced off.

<sup>31</sup> Douglas Paper 12.

<sup>32</sup> Douglas Paper 13. If only four or five were present, the legality of the proceedings was at

least doubtful. The rule that seven or more could act for the rest does not seem to have been kept very strictly.

<sup>33</sup> Douglas Paper 15.

<sup>34</sup> Douglas Paper 19.

<sup>35</sup> Surtees Society 80.

Rev. John Walton<sup>36</sup> are of interest. The first, dated 5th Feb. 1754, mentions that little is being done at that time of year but that, though the Wall must suffer, yet "the goodness of the foundations will render it one of the finest roads in the nation", a remark hardly likely to find favour with Stukeley.<sup>37</sup> Walton does not state directly where the roadmakers are engaged but the general tenor of his letter, which refers to areas which are less inhabited and cultivated and to the fact that there would still be considerable remains where Wall and Road deviated, may well point to the area between Portgate and the North Tyne. His second letter, dated 24th Feb. 1755, mentions that he has been expecting some centurial inscriptions from Walwick and hoped that something better would turn up from west of that place, although all that has been found, apart from centurial inscriptions, was a small broken image of what he takes to be Minerva. From Carrawburgh, however, he has obtained a "Burcred".<sup>38</sup> Another clergyman with an interest in the Wall was Rev. Henry Wastell of Simonburn,<sup>39</sup> concerning whom an entry in Stukeley's diary dated 15th July 1754, mentions that Wastell has dined with him and tells him how the Wall has been entirely destroyed for miles and the stones beaten to pieces to make a foundation. His next relevant entry, dated 19th Oct., tells of a visit to Carlton House and a long conversation with the Princess of Wales throughout dinner. He had praised the Wall as the greatest of all Roman works anywhere, having travelled the length of it, and made the most of his opportunity to express to her his concern

"at the havoc now making of this most noble antiquity by the surveyors of the new road carrying on by act of Parliament, who pull the cut and squared stones of the wall down, and beat 'em in pieces with sledge hammers to lay the foundation of the road with 'em, and in a country abounding with stone, and where the Roman road<sup>40</sup> still remains, if they take the pains to seek for it, which would much shorten their labor (thus) ..."

His indignation is shown to an even higher degree a few days later in an entry of the 23rd when he records a letter (admittedly a copy of an earlier one to Dr. Hill) to the Princess. This was the occasion when he denounced so bitterly the failure of the surveyors to trace out the Military Way; they would have found it straight and well laid out in regard to the ground and a sufficient

<sup>36</sup> Succeeded his father as Vicar of Corbridge, Jan. 1741/2 till 1765. For biographical details see *N.C.H.*, vol. X, 1914, p. 201f; there are also many references in Wallis' *Northumberland*, vol. II, and in Stukeley's *Medal. Hist. of Carausius*.

<sup>37</sup> Cadwallader Bates (*Hist. of N'land*, 1895, p. 265) while owning that, militarily, the road may have been well-planned and certainly attracted a considerable amount of trade and traffic to Newcastle, also declared, that for ordinary purposes, there was not a worse engineered road in the kingdom.

<sup>38</sup> or Burgred, King of Mercia. According to Humphrey's *Coin Collectors' Manual*, Vol. II, p. 413, there had been a general decline in the coins of Mercia since the reign of Offa, Burgred's being the worst of the series. Acknowledgements to Prof. E. Birley.

<sup>39</sup> See Mackenzie, *Hist. of N'land*, Vol. II, p. 238, also *N.C.H.* X, p. 101-2, for biographical details.

<sup>40</sup> i.e. The Military Way.

foundation for their new road; having ridden the length of it in the company of Roger Gale, he spoke as an eye-witness and was aggrieved to see so little taste and judgement shown by the public in an otherwise laudable undertaking...

His campaign, however, had come too late to be of any avail and whether it could have influenced events, if undertaken earlier, can only be regarded as doubtful. Nothing daunted, he returned again to the attack in his *Medallic History of Carausius*<sup>41</sup> though his climax came in a paper read to the Antiquarian Society on 3rd May, 1759, when he declared

“This grand work, the glory of the Roman Power, the glory of Britain, the greatest work the Romans ever did, this stupendous work ... is thus demolished by these senseless animals, under the sanction of government; and in a country where there can be no want of materials, being entirely stone and gravel.”

For the years 1756 and 1757 source material consists mainly of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Accounts. There is the final petition in the *Journal* of the House of Commons for supplies for 1757, as a result of which Northumberland received £2,500 and Cumberland £500; no application was made in 1756 when the commissioners for both counties obviously had sufficient cash in hand for that year. There are also a few press notices.

A significant feature of the 1756 account is that nine entries, involving a total of £2,300 out of £3,103. 3. 4½. disbursed, are simply payments to John Brown “on account” without mention of their purpose. Since the roadmakers appear to have been in the area of Carrawburgh in Feb. 1755, the probable explanation is that they were now beyond the point at which Wall and Road diverge and where the Wall’s ready supply of stone was no longer available.<sup>42</sup> Brown would therefore be at the expense of procuring alternative sources. Similarly in 1757 well over half the total payments of £2,349. 12. 3. were in favour of Brown; we can only surmise that the bulk in both years was spent on materials for the road, tollhouses, on haulage, tools, Brown’s own expenses in lodgings, horse hire and the like. The outstanding entry in the 1756 account, however, was dated 12th October to Thos. Lightfoot and was one of £193. 4. 9½. “being the balance for finishing the road from the Town of Newcastle upon Tyne to Carrier’s Gap”. For Lightfoot this was literally “the end of the road” though bridges were not yet finished nor tollhouses erected. It would be more than another twelve months before the road could be regarded as officially complete.

Worthy of note in the 1757 account (the Thirteenth) are two payments to Joseph Gibson and partners, the first of £40 (“on Account”) on 2nd July,

<sup>41</sup> Vol. I, page 9, (1757) and page 135.

<sup>42</sup> The last entry for the 1756 account was one of £1. 10. 0. to Wm. Baird “for damage done

to his ground by working stones out of his quarry for the use of the road.”

the second of £52. 18. 0. ("in full") on 3rd Sept. for building Haltwhistle Burn Bridge. Thomas Layburn, often mentioned in these accounts as a builder of bridges, is described in another entry as the "late undertaker". The final item (3rd Dec.) is one of £62. 0. 6. paid to Joshua Douglas for two acres, one rood and 37 perches of his ground at Henshaw "made part of the road" and for making 271 "Rood of Fences" in the same ground. Whether this property had been in Douglas' possession for some time past, or whether it had been more recently acquired with an eye to speculation, has not been determined.

The press of 1757 is more informative than for some time past. The issue of 12th February announced that a bridge was to be built over Haltwhistle Burn, as has already been noted above. Notices had always been headed "Carlisle Road" but on 23rd April came a dramatic change with the introduction of "Grand Road from the City of Carlisle to the town of Newcastle upon Tyne" and the announcement that a bridge was to be built over Powtross<sup>43</sup> (thus) near Temmon at the joint expense of the Northumberland and Cumberland Commissioners, undertakers to apply either to Brown at Kirkharle or to Richard Waller<sup>44</sup> at Brampton for particulars. An item in the orders of the Cumberland Commissioners of the same date instructed their clerk, John Blamire, to attend the next meeting of their Northumberland colleagues with power to agree with them "upon a plan for building a bridge over Powtross between the two counties (to be finished this summer) on such conditions as they shall think the most convenient". The matter came to a successful conclusion, for the Northumberland Account for 1757 records payments in July and September totalling £70 to John Johnson "Undertaker of Bridges" while on 22nd October Cumberland Commissioners ordered payment of £22. 10. 0. to John Johnstone<sup>45</sup> "in full for building half the bridge over Powtross at Temmon". That the Northumberland payments included work at "Powtross" seems reasonable enough though, as will presently be apparent, not all bridge building in Northumberland had been paid for.

Under the new heading, the *Journal* of 27th Aug. 1757, bore the long-awaited announcement, "As much of the said road as lies in the County of Northumberland is now completed and made passable for Troops, Horses, and Carriages". Commissioners were to meet on 3rd Sept. to consider the location of turnpikes and tollhouses and to proportion tolls, also measures for keeping the road in repair. Just over six years had passed since its commencement, making the average distance laid per annum in Northumberland a little over seven miles. The corresponding notice concerning Cumberland did not appear until 1st October when the road in that county was described as being *nearly* completed; commissioners were to meet on 22nd to consider the fixing of *nearly* gates and tollhouses. On 1st October, however, a further notice in the *Journal* (but not the *Courant*) intimated that in Northumberland the

<sup>43</sup> Poltross.

<sup>44</sup> Surveyor to Cumberland Commissioners.

<sup>45</sup> Doubtless the same man, and yet another instance of the eternal confusion between "Johnson" and "Johnstone", etc.

gates and turnpikes were set up and that at a meeting to be held 12th Nov. the proportion of the tolls to be taken at the several gates and turnpikes would be considered and gatekeepers appointed. No record of the appointments appears to exist but two further notices seek proposals from persons willing to keep the road in repair, the second specifically mentioning the sector between Harlow Hill Bar-gate and Newcastle. The 1757 Account ended with a balance of £134. 11. 4. but there is a separate record of debts still to be met, totalling £359. 6. 9. The two principal items are each of £150, the one due to the undertaker (unnamed) of turnpike houses,<sup>46</sup> the other relating to bridge work, damage to private ground, and repairs to the road.

During 1758 press notices of a routine nature continued to appear. Thus we learn that at a meeting to be held on 14th October, a surveyor, obviously in succession to Brown, was to be appointed.<sup>47</sup> He had seen the project through from beginning to end and further entries on 9th September and 11th November show that he had likewise resigned his appointments with the Alnmouth and Ponteland Turnpikes.

#### THE COST OF THE MILITARY ROAD

By a combination of relevant details under the headings of "Carlisle Road" and "Supply" in *Journals* of the House of Commons between 1750/1 and 1757 (incl.) with the accounts of the commissioners for Northumberland and Cumberland the cost of the road to the Treasury may be represented thus:

	<i>Northumberland</i>	<i>Cumberland</i>
	£	£
1751	2000	1000
1752	2000	1000
1753	2000	1000
1754	4000	2000
1755	4000	2000
1756	0	0
1757	2500	500
	£16500	£7500

Total £24,000, from which Treasury fees of approximately 5½% or £1,320 should be deducted, leaving £22,680 as the cost to the commissioners of both counties. This included settlements for ground, walling, etc. Cumberland still had a small balance in hand at the end of 1758, but Northumberland had debts of over £200 to meet in the same year.

<sup>46</sup> There is no further information about these but Cumberland accounts show that two houses and gates cost £111. 5. 0. in that county.

<sup>47</sup> Inadvertently reported as 1757 in footnote 35, page 206, *A.A.*: 4/XLIV, 1966.

## TOLLHOUSES

As marked on the 1865 Ordnance Survey, these ultimately numbered up to fourteen. From east to west they ran in the order shown though only two, Brunton and Low Crosby, remain. O/S designations are used:

(1) Benwell T.P. Said by Wallis (*Antiquities of N'land*, vol. II, p. 177) to have been near the first milestone, where "a handsome road branched off ... to Elswick." If the road can be identified with Bentinck Road, then the milestone was within 150 yards of it, but the T.P. was nearly half a mile to the west.

(2) Throckley T.P. At the top of Condercum Road. This existed within living memory and apparently marked a tram terminus in its latter days.

(3) Denton T.P. At Denton Square crossroads, close to Denton Hall.

(4) Throckley T.P. At Throckley crossroads (now roundabout). Why there should be two of this name is not clear, unless they were originally "East" and "West". Cf. Harlow Hill.

(5) Harlow Hill East T.P. The formerly well-known white cottage at Rudchester. Removed April, 1968.

(6) Harlow Hill West T.P. This was the first building at the east end of the village and stood near the site now occupied by the petrol pumps. Strong local tradition asserts that the last tollkeeper was a cobbler and that the "bar" was a chain across the road.

(7) Branch End T.P. This stood approximately opposite Wall Houses and was removed in 1958. The field rails still skirt the site.

(8) Stagshaw Bank T.P. On the north side of the road opposite the Errington Arms Public House, before construction of the present roundabout. Removed 1960.

(9) Brunton T.P. Still occupied and known as Brunton Gate, this is the first house downhill after the Heavenfield Cross. There is a window in each gable and, originally, an aperture in line with these existed in the internal dividing wall of the cottage. The road could thus be kept under surveillance from either room.

(10) Chollerton T.P. This stood midway between Chollerton crossroads and the former railway station entrance (roughly opposite to the present filling station). The late Mr. Thompson, formerly blacksmith at Humshaugh, could remember his parents referring to "the pay gate" and the wiles of the cattle drovers to avoid it.

(11) Bradley Gate T.P. Nearly a mile west of Housesteads, a solitary cottage close to the 30th milestone from Newcastle. This stood at right angles to the north side of the road and was removed in 1971.

(12) Reaygarth T.P. About quarter of a mile west of Reaygarth which is at the 40th milestone. It stood at the north side of the road and was removed either in 1939 or 1940.



(13) Low Row T.P. (Cumberland). Stood near the junction of the Military Road with that passing through Low Row. It is significant that the address on the postbox near the junction is "Toll Bar".

(14) Low Crosby T.P. (Cumberland). Now known as East Lodge, Eden Grove, Crosby on Eden. It stands just west of the 52nd milestone from Newcastle (4th from Carlisle) on the south side of the road and was certainly occupied within recent times.

#### SOURCE MATERIAL

The following documents are filed in the Record Office of the House of Lords but copies are held at Department of Archaeology, University of Durham:

(1) Accounts of the Northumberland Commissioners pertaining to 1751, 1753, 1756 and 1757.

(2) Agreement with Christopher Lightfoot and partners and sectional drawings in respect of alterations to Benwell Hill.

(3) Agreement with Thos. Layburn and Wm. Wheatley in respect of bridges at Newburn and Denton Denes; also plans and elevations.

(4) Most of the orders of the Cumberland commissioners from June 1751-1759 with records of progress. (Originals as far as 1791 and from 1855-'77 are also filed at Cumberland Record Office.)

(5) Other agreements in respect of road and bridge work in Cumberland.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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