

SADDLEWORTH SEVEN ONE TWO



A SURVEY OF ROMAN ROAD MARGARY 712 THROUGH THE OLDHAM AREA
UNDERTAKEN BY BRADFORD GRAMMAR SCHOOL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
AND THE SADDLEWORTH W.E.A. ARCHAEOLOGY CLASS

EDITOR: DONALD HAIGH

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Preface:

This pamphlet of Roman road Margary 712 through the Oldham area is, in part, a "spin-off" from a fuller treatment in preparation of the same road from Manchester to Tadcaster. The 712 Group takes its name from the road numbering system used by I D Margary in *Roman Roads in Britain*. The two parts of the group, Bradford Grammar School Archaeological Society and the Saddleworth W.E.A. Archaeology Class were largely responsible for the fieldwork and survey within their own geographical areas, but in many of the excavations both teams worked together. In somewhat similar fashion, the written work has been shared.

Our thanks are due to the Workers' Educational Association for providing the Saddleworth Archaeology Class, and to many Saddleworth farmers for allowing us to investigate their fields.

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D.H. 1982

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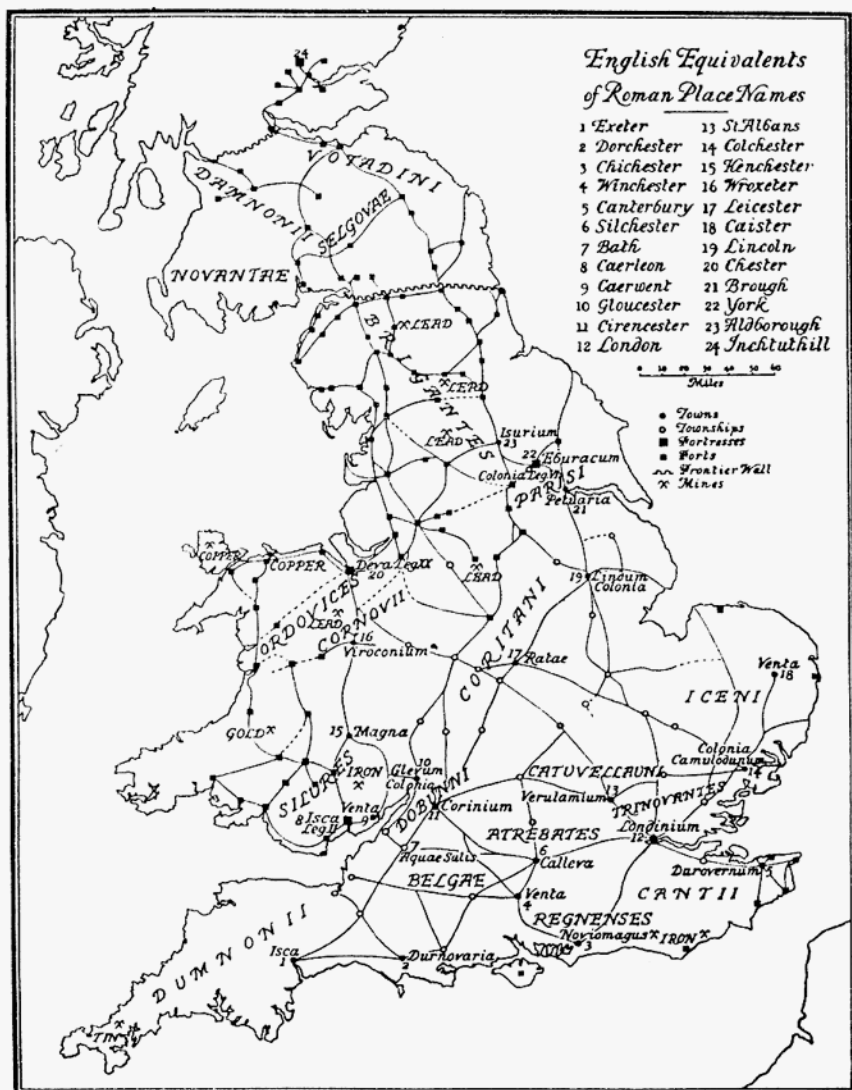
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1a. Map of Roman Britain.

1. THE ROMANS COME TO BRITAIN.

Rome first appears in history in the eighth century BC, as a little trading city at a ford on the River Tiber. A latin-speaking people, ruled by Etruscan kings expelled about 510 BC, Rome then became an aristocratic republic of patricians or nobles ruling the plebeians or common people, similar to a Greek republic. At this time Britain was a mysterious island, visited only by Phoenician traders, seeking the tin, lead, silver, copper and iron mined by the native Celts, while for 300 years the internal history of Rome was a long and obstinate struggle for freedom and a share in the government, by the plebeians, who eventually gained a working equality which gradually made possible the overthrow of the Etruscans, the repulse of the Gaulish raiders and the growth of Roman power in Italy. By the second and first centuries BC Roman power dominated the Mediterranean and much of Western Europe.

The Roman Link

The first linking of Rome to Britain came with the invasion by Julius Caesar in 55 and 54 BC. During the five years before the invasion, the Roman frontier had been extended from the Alps to the English Channel, and Roman merchants in Gaul were considering the possibilities of trade across the latter. To the Roman public, Britain was a legendary island of unknown size, isolated and uncharted, but a source of untold mineral wealth. From Caesar's brief foothold in South-East Britain, Roman merchants extended their markets, their products reaching the Humber, Severn and Trent; and tribes in the South East, or at least their ruling groups, were absorbing the material benefits of Roman civilisation. Meanwhile the Belgae tribe, only recently established in Britain in Caesar's day, extended their power enormously, especially under one vigorous ruler, Cunobelin (Shakespeare's Cymbeline). He was allied with Rome; but his relentless expansion was made at the expense of other British tribes also allied to Rome and whose security Rome was supposed to guarantee, and complaints and refugees began to arrive at the emperor's court. At first Rome regarded these events as a purely internal dispute and no concern of hers, but it became obvious that the whole balance of power in Britain was being destroyed. Affairs grew even stormier; Cunobelin's two sons were carrying on their late father's aggressive policies. Another British prince, allied to Rome, was forced to flee and took refuge there; when a demand for his extradition was refused, trouble broke out in Britain which threatened the lives and property of Roman merchants and may have taken the form of raids on the coast of Gaul. The prestige of Rome, after a long spell of non-interference in Britain and the collapse of Gaius's invading expedition, was very low. It also began to look as if the profitable British trade might be in danger.

Invasion

At first sight Claudius seems an unlikely seeker of the glory of military conquest. He was 51 years old when he became Emperor, handicapped by partial paralysis, in poor general health and despised by his relatives. He was however a considerable scholar, and had much common sense. Claudius was desperately anxious for military success to maintain his position and the tradition of his family; and what greater glory could he gain than to conquer the land where Julius Caesar had only limited and short lived success?

By the spring of AD 43 preparations were made; an army of four legions with auxiliary troops, about 40,000 men, assembled at Boulogne, set sail for Britain and landed unopposed. The conquest of Britain, a slow process which was never complete, had begun and Claudius was able to enter the British capital of Camulodunum (Colchester) as a conqueror. He had not taken part in the earlier decisive battle at

the Medway, but was summoned, according to his own instructions, to lead his army into the enemy's captured stronghold.

Conquest

Then the 2nd Legion under Vespasian (a future emperor) pushed westwards, whilst the 14th in the centre, penetrated the Midlands and the 9th on the right pushed towards Lincoln (Lindum).

By AD 49–50 Claudius had made a provincial capital at Camulodunum and settled there a large number of army veterans as a core of loyal citizens. In AD 60–61 occurred the revolt of Queen Boudicca of the Iceni tribe in Norfolk. Meanwhile there was a consolidation of occupied territory and a gradual pushing forward of frontiers. In 68–69 came the revolt of the Brigantes, the large tribe who occupied the Pennines and adjacent territory. In 71–74 they were finally defeated by Petillius Cerealis, the founder of the fortress at York (Eboracum), and policed later by Agricola. The Brigantian revolt delayed the campaigning in Wales and it fell to the governors Julius Frontinus who conquered South and Central Wales, and Julius Agricola (father-in-law of the famous historian Tacitus) who vanquished the northern tribes and seized Anglesey.

In AD 79–84 Agricola campaigned in Northern England and Scotland. The first stage reached the Tay, and a line of temporary forts guarded the Forth-Clyde line. The second stage took Strathmore, and after the battle of Mons Graupius, left the Romans with all lowland Scotland and highland resistance broken. Agricola's mark on Northern Britain is shown by the building of over 60 forts (including Manchester, Castleshaw and Slack) and the 1300 miles of road to supply them.

Stability and Revolts

Then there was a lull in campaigning, and an evacuation of troops from Britain following trouble in the Danube area, so that the 20th Legion was moved from Scotland to Chester, and in Scotland all forts north of the Cheviots and perhaps north of the Tyne-Solway line were evacuated. The 9th Legion at York was replaced by the 6th and work began in AD 122 on the construction of Hadrian's Wall, which was largely complete by about AD 130. Lowland Scotland was re-occupied under Antoninus Pius, Hadrian's Wall abandoned, and a new turf wall, the Antonine Wall, built across the Forth-Clyde isthmus after 142.

AD155–59 again saw the Brigantes and their neighbours in revolt, and reinforcements for the three legions involved in the counter attack were landed in the Tyne, direct from the German provinces. From 193–97 Albinus was Governor of Britain, and in AD 196 he withdrew his troops to Gaul in a revolt against Severus by whom he was defeated. Thereupon the Picts revolted and overran the north, severely damaging Hadrian's Wall and many other forts. It took 10 years to re-establish order and repair the damage under the Emperor Severus who came to Britain in AD 208 and set up his court at York where he died in 211.

Britain was largely peaceful until 296 when a new kind of trouble began with the sea raids of Picts and Saxons. To counter these, Carausius and Allectus began the system of coastal defences later known as the Saxon Shore, which included sea patrols. However the raids gradually increased and in 367 the Saxons, Picts and Scots made a concerted attack killing the Count of the Saxon Shore, and doing great damage. Peace was restored after 369 with the arrival in Britain of Count Theodosius.

The End of Roman Britain

The 4th century AD saw great changes in the Roman Empire: troubles within, and pressures from without from the various tribal groups beyond the frontiers,

each ready to profit from the weakening of Imperial power. A gradual withdrawal of troops from Britain, a lessening of quality in those remaining, and a re-organisation and rethinking in methods of defence followed. The Wall and the forts had been garrisoned by troops organised in regular regiments and these forts had attracted large civil settlements. But having been destroyed, these settlements were never renewed and life retreated into the garrisons themselves which then performed a joint civic and military purpose. Troops were withdrawn continually, and in 410 the Emperor Honorius instructed British towns to form their own defences, which meant the final end of Roman control.

The Final Verdict

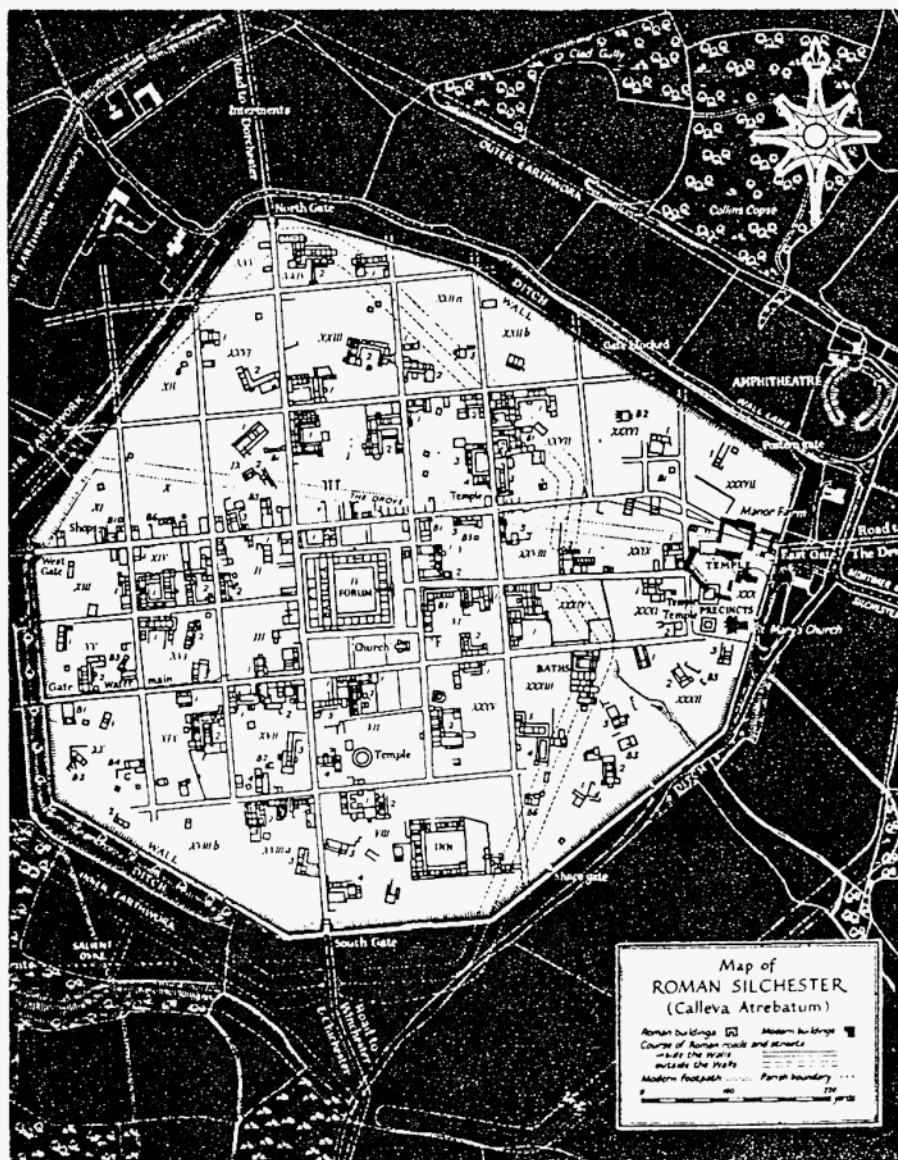
As a Roman province, Britain was no liability: grain from the fertile areas, collected as taxes, fed the army; hides from the cattle-rearing hill country, collected as taxes, supplied leather for boots, uniforms and tents. By Roman law all metals dug out of the ground belonged to the state, and Britain was rich in metals. The Britons themselves were the labour force to build roads and drain marshes, and later supplied recruits for the army. The new towns and villas proved a valuable market for imported goods. Britain was worth keeping.

The Romans did not come to Britain in any missionary spirit to spread the light of civilisation for the benefit of the natives. But, in effect, they transformed a turbulent land of warring barbarian tribes into an ordered, prosperous society; collections of huts were replaced by towns with fine public buildings, country houses were built, schools set up, literacy became general though not universal, and central government was, on the whole, just. Finally, the roads the Romans left still form the essence of the major road network in Britain, excluding motorways, for communications formed the basis of the Roman Empire.

A.O.M.C.
T.C.



1b. Coarse pottery. Castor ware beaker showing chariot racing.



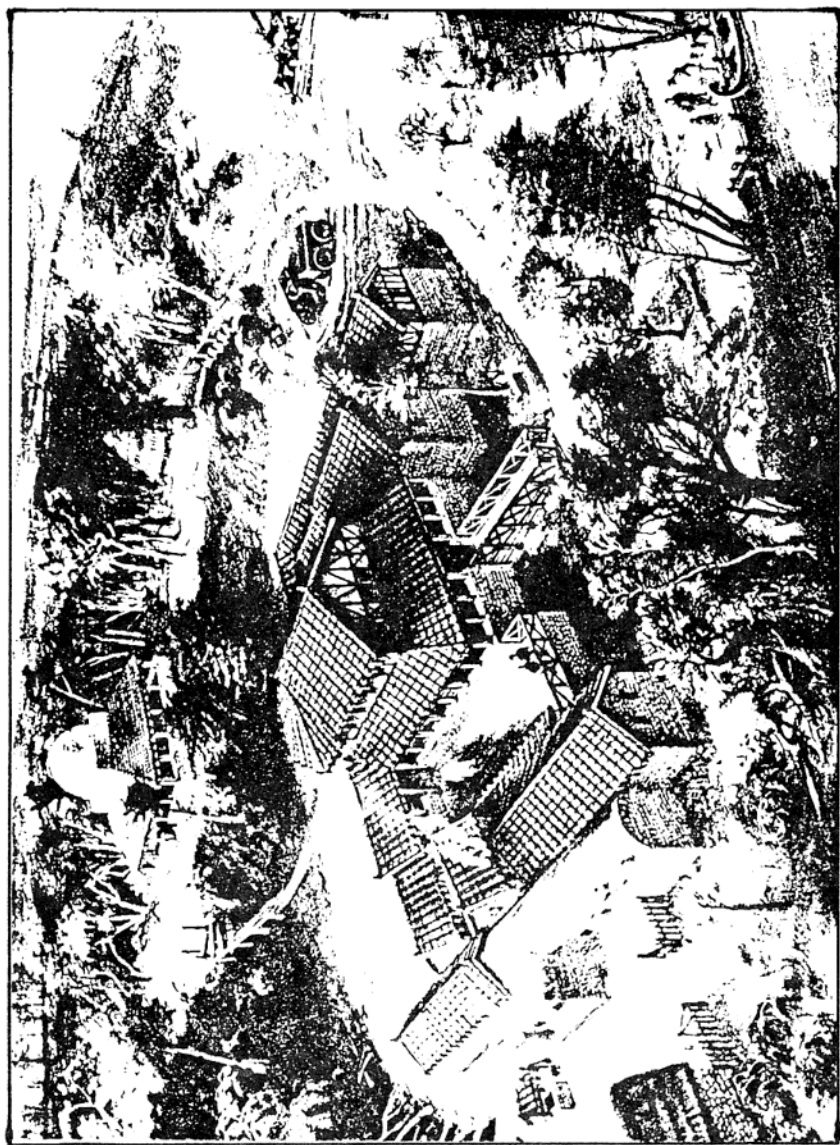
1c. Map of Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum).



1d. The great silver dish from the Mildenhall Treasure, probably buried to save it from Saxon raiders, and ploughed up in Suffolk during the Second World War.



1e. Lead pig. The inscription describes it as British lead from the Lutudarum mines (near Matlock?) with the silver removed.



1f. Lullingstone Roman villa, Kent, as it may have looked in the fourth century A.D. Dining room centre rear; baths left; temple and family burial vault in background.

1g.

1g. A tile from a roof eave, known as an antefix, showing the wild boar emblem of the XX Legion, based at Chester (Deva).

1h. Bronze head of the emperor Claudius.

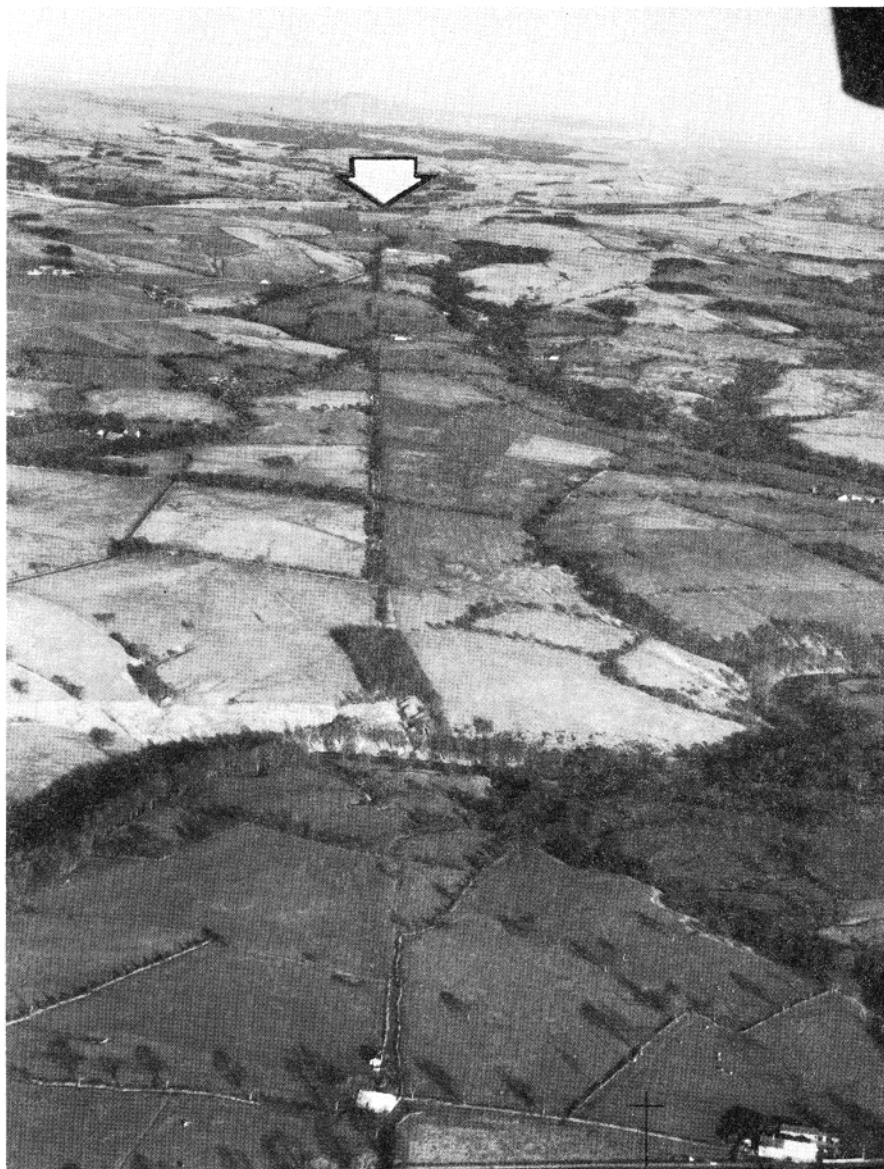
1i. An impression of Lucius Duccius Rufinus, standard bearer of the IX Legion based at York (Eboracum) before 120 A.D.



1h.



1i.



2a. 'The stony ribbon unrenewed, But now revealed by altitude . . .' Part of an alignment of Roman road Margary 7c (Ribchester to Tebay) seen north of Longridge Fell, Bowland Forest, Lancashire.

2. ROADS, TRAVELLERS, THE IMPERIAL POST, AGRICOLA IN THE NORTH OF ENGLAND.

Roads

What were the major Roman roads which formed the basis of the empire like? These were arterial roads, frequently military roads, linking important centres with directness as their main aim. So we may say, with every schoolboy, that Roman roads were straight. More accurately, Roman roads were made up of a number of straight lengths or *alignments*, with a change of direction taking place usually at a precise alignment angle, often upon high ground. Such roads were planned by competent surveyors, well briefed about the landscape with its advantages and obstacles. These obstacles were met by short straight lengths of road, terraces or zigzags, and the original line returned to as soon as possible. Very often the roads were raised on embankments, called *aggers*, to give a properly drained base. Frequently, aggers were only a gentle ridge, but on important or difficult routes they might be 4 or 5 feet high (c.1.4 metres) and 40 to 50 feet wide (c.14 metres). An agger was usually wider than the frequently cambered roadway which was of a uniform structure and of varying thickness with 1 to 2 feet (c.0.5m) at its centre, and 2 or 3 inches (c.100mm) at its sides.

This structure had 1. a base layer or foundation of piles, stakes, timber corduroy or large stones. 2. an elastic core, eg. sand. 3. a surface — gravel, small stones, flints. 4. drainage ditches. 5. boundary ditches about 60 or 80 feet apart (c.18 or 24 metres) marking areas to be kept clear, or sandy tracks for horses, grass walks for flocks or a restricted or banned area. Roads varied in width in Britain from 10 to 30 feet (c.3 to 9 metres). Materials used in their construction were always found locally. A wide variety of roads existed in the Empire; like the via Mansuerisca in Belgium, made of a log base or corduroy with piles below and a built up causeway above; the now submerged Iron Gates road on the Danube, carved out of the rock of the gorge and widened by planking jutting out on supports over the great river; roads in North Africa surfaced with small rubble; the iron slag metallurgy at Holtye in Sussex; the Craik Moor road in Southern Scotland, on living rock and cut through peat; and the lightly gravelled branch roads in some parts of the South East Midlands of England.

Travellers

All kinds of travellers used the roads of the Empire; army chiefs with their troops, emperors and their retinue, imperial officials and their escorts, ambassadors foreign and provincial, imperial post messengers, businessmen, merchants, masons, sculptors, mosaicists, seasonal farm workers, teachers, entertainers, exiles, invalids in search of a cure, persons going to consult oracles, priests, scholars, poets, tourists, people going to the games or to the theatre, marriage and funeral processions. There were vehicles carrying food, military supplies, raw materials or finished products. People travelled on foot, on horseback, in litters, in carriages of various kinds such as the benna, a light covered cart taking several passengers; a rheda, a four wheeled wagon used on the post; a cisium, a fast post chaise; a clabula, a heavy ox-drawn cart or an angaria, a fast post vehicle. Riding animals were the horse, mule, donkey and pony for which there were sandy tracks alongside the roads.

The Imperial Post

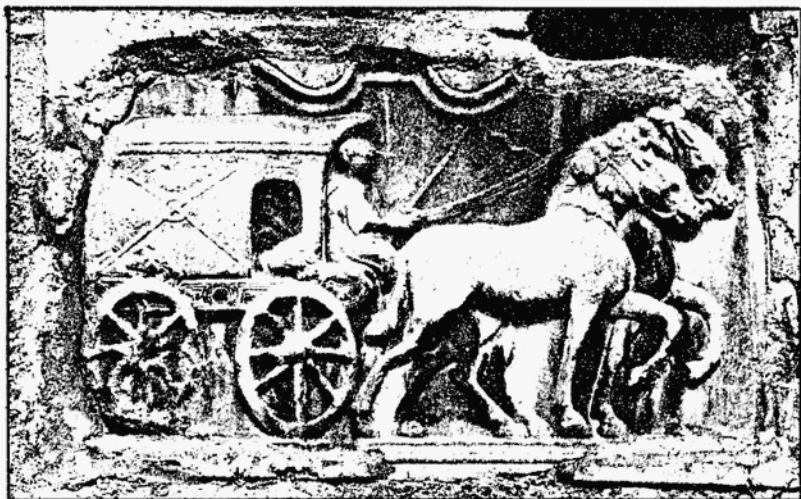
On trunk roads imperial messengers and government officials could use the *cursus publicus* or imperial post founded by Augustus. Relays of horses drew post-

ing cars between post houses. A day's journey normally might be 50 miles (80 km) but in emergency much greater distances were covered, like the 108 miles (172 km) in 12 hours by a standard bearer between Mainz and Cologne. Provision of animals for the service and posting station maintenance fell on the communities through which the road passed. The government was responsible for military roads and used local forced labour if needed. In lowland Britain posting stations (with inns, baths, stables, 'police stations', shops) developed into small settlements which are rare in the north, and seem only to be found outside important forts, but most roads in the north were kept in good repair from military necessity.

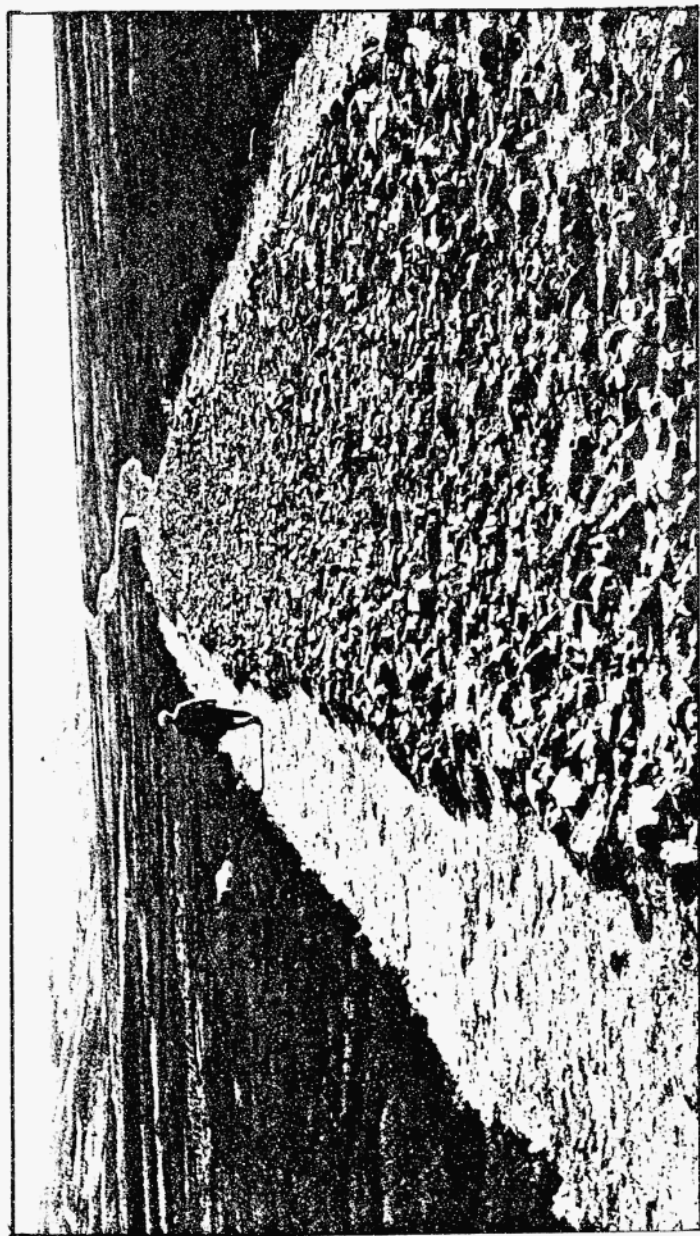
Agricola in Northern England

Military needs, in fact, are the key to the Roman road system in Northern England. Cerialis had beaten the Brigantes, but it was left to Agricola to make the final conquest and to police them. He established almost 40 forts in Northern England. To supply these required great organising ability and the survey and building of over 1300 miles of road. Within a few years, block after block of Pennine hill country was held in a tight control radiating from the legionary fortresses of Chester and York, along roads guarded by smaller auxiliary forts at intervals of a day's march. The importance of the Manchester fort lay in its position as a junction on two major arterial routes: the first, the western trunk road to Carlisle via Ribchester and the Lune Gorge; the second the road, crossing the Oldham area, to Castleshaw, Slack and York, linking together the two legionary bases at the hub of the whole system. This is the road noted as part of Iter II in a kind of Roman AA book and which Margary numbers 712.

A.O.M.C.
T.C.
D.H.



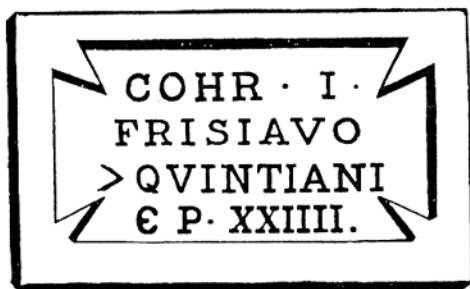
2b. A horse-drawn vehicle.



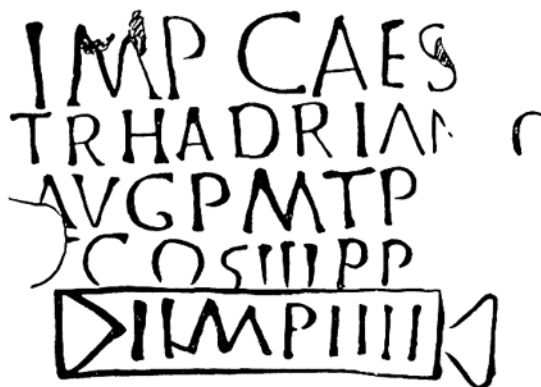
2c. Roman Road Margary 81b (Wade's Causeway) on Wheeldale Moor, near Pickering, North Yorkshire. Its foundations, clearly seen above, would have been topped with cobbles and gravel.



2d. Roman road making. A comprehensive reconstruction by the late Alan Sorrell, vividly showing surveying, forest clearance and construction work.



2e. Building stone from the Roman fort at Manchester noting that the century of Quintianus from the First Cohort of Frisiavonians (from the Low Countries) built 24 feet.



2f. Inscription on milestone from Caton, Lancashire. Erected by Hadrian, perhaps four miles from Lancaster.

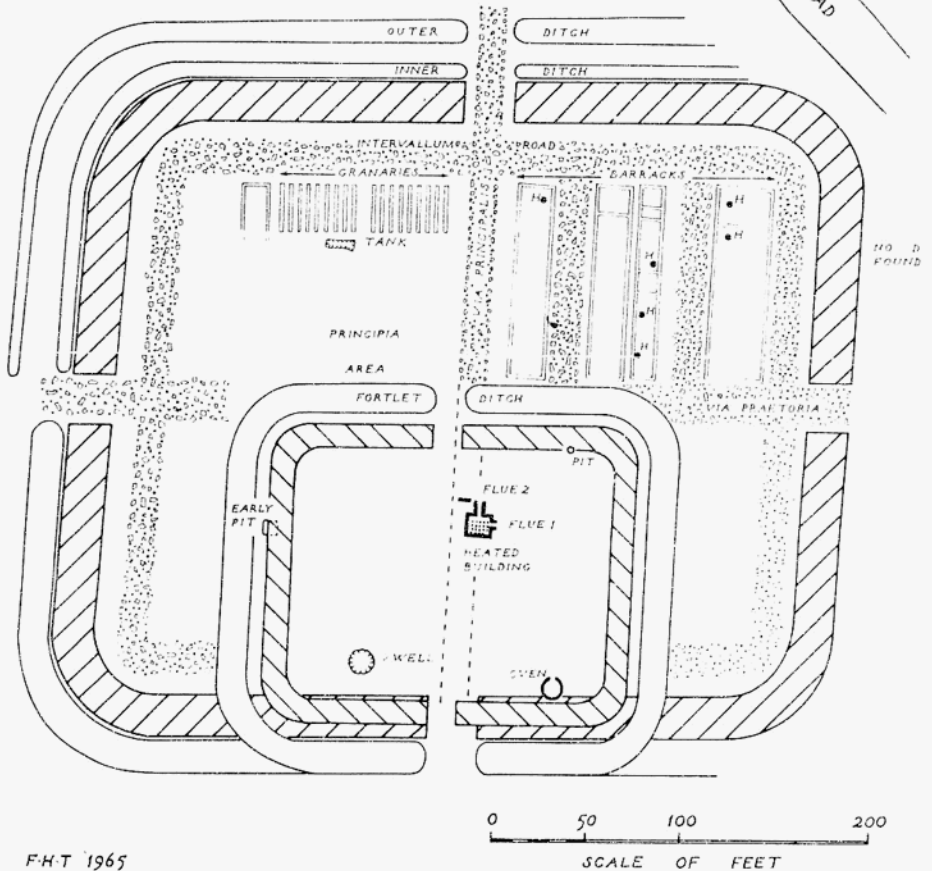


2g. Milestone erected for the Emperor Hadrian, 8 miles from Kanovium (Caerhun), near Conway, North Wales.



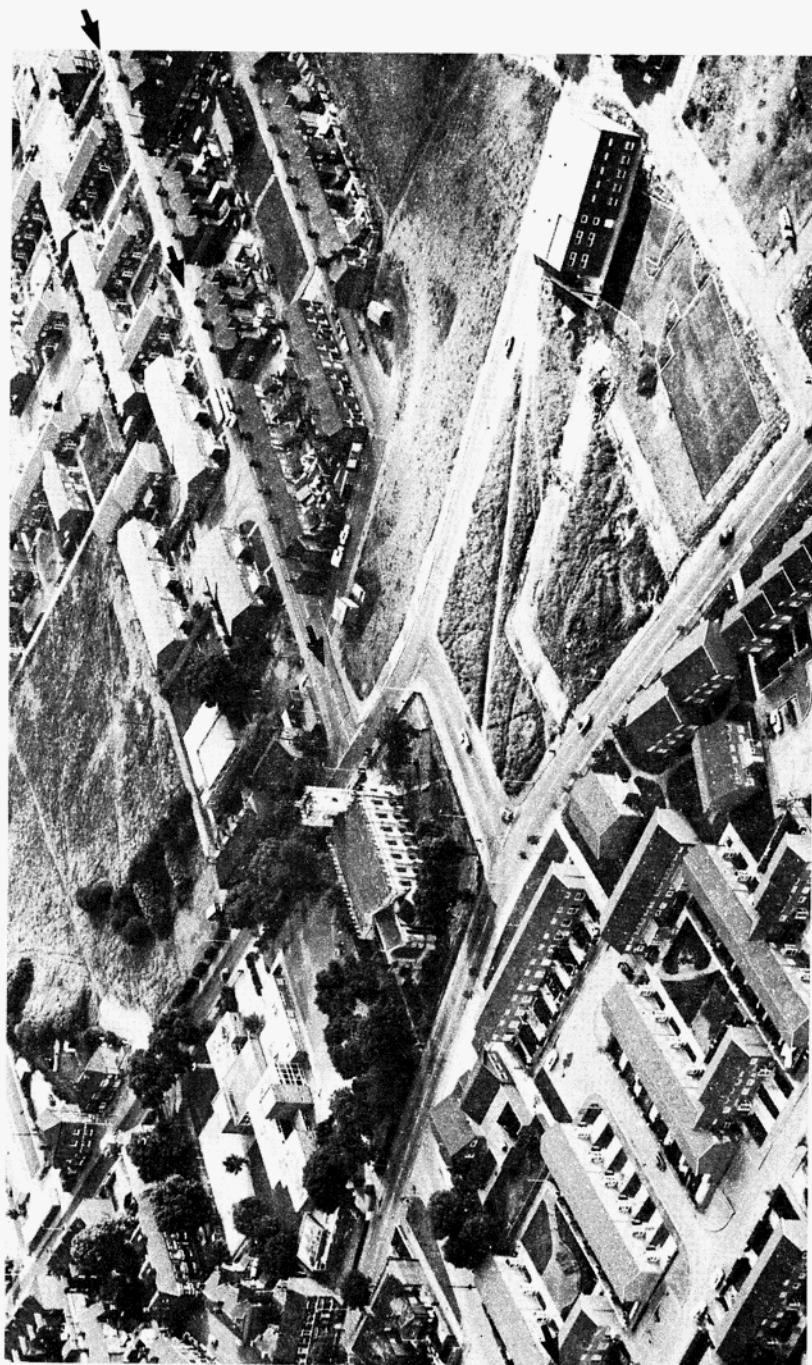
2h. An altar from the bath house at Slack fort showing that a centurion of the VI Legion at York made a vow to fortune.

CASTLESHAW



F.H.T. 1965

- 2i. Castleshaw Roman forts, Saddleworth. The larger fort built by Agricola about 80 A.D. was soon abandoned. The fortlet built about 104 A.D. was abandoned by about 125 A.D.



3a. Newton Heath Church set directly upon the line of the 712 road. Briscoe Lane which leads to it is modern road on Roman line.

3. FINDING OUT: METHODS OF DISCOVERY

'Before the Romans came to Rye, or out to Severn strode', there were no real roads, just tracks, paths, trails wandering along hilltops, a communication system of sorts. Then the Romans came to Britain and built well-planned and well-drained roads in a developed and maintained unified road network, serving military and commercial needs, linking the towns, perhaps keeping mischievous British hands busy, and providing a convenient field punishment for erring soldiers. We now want to find the locations of these roads, not just that they ran from A to B but exactly where on the ground they lay. There are still Roman roads waiting to be found. How do you start looking for them?

Existing Records

We may start with the Ordnance Survey Map of Roman Britain. It may show that a road is known to have gone through our area but its course is marked as uncertain. Our task is to find if it is there, and find it exactly. Or the map may show Roman sites on either side of our area with a possibility of a road link between them, indicated perhaps by Roman finds in our area. We must investigate such possibilities.

Buy modern Ordnance Survey maps 1 inch to 1 mile (for general work) 2½ inches or 6 inches to 1 mile¹ (for detailed study) or their metric successors, covering our area, and use them in harness with the Roman Britain map which gives the broad picture while the local maps have the detail needed for proper investigation.

Check with the local museum or library. Mark on your maps local finds, coins, tiles, pottery, inscriptions and the like. See if the local library or museum has copies of Ordnance Survey maps, tithe map copies, books of field names, or copies of articles written about the Romans locally, in the journals of the local or county historical or archaeological societies, or in local pamphlets or newspapers.

Air Photographs, Boundaries, Place Names

There is only space to comment briefly on a few of the sources just mentioned. Since the war air photography has been increasingly used in archaeology; ancient foundations below the ground surface or buried ditches may show crops as lighter or darker in colour when seen from the air. Gentle rises and falls in the ground may show as a shadow pattern from the air. Often such features are invisible on the ground. For roads across fields, buried metalling will often show as a lighter streak, while road ditches may show as dark lines.

Roman roads were often convenient landmarks and were used by later settlers to mark parish or township boundaries. Such boundaries appear on the earlier Ordnance maps. If a particularly straight boundary appears in your area it could indicate the line of a Roman road (note only *could*). The boundary between Middleton and Chadderton, where it crosses Blackley Golf Course is straight, and is on a possible alignment. (Don't go looking for it though, the green fees are high!) Field walls following parish boundaries on a straight alignment may be clues, for Roman roads were not only good landmarks, they were good foundations and good sources of ready made wall building material.

Place names, especially field names, provide useful evidence. This is why a look at the local tithe maps or books of field names is valuable. The word Street used in a particular way is a strong clue. Used in place names over 2 or 300 years old

¹ O.S. metric successors to 6 inches to 1 mile maps have become prohibitively expensive for extensive use.

Street may well indicate a Roman road — Ermine Street, Tong Street in Bradford. And what should we make of Saint Paul lodged in 'the street called Straight'. — Acts 9, 11? In Moston, near the Ben Brierley Inn was the district of Streetfold. Does this indicate the line of the Manchester-Blackstone Edge road? Street-End in Failsworth is on the Manchester-Castleshaw road. Study the Failsworth tithe map to appreciate the density of Street names in the area. Stretford, Stratford, Stretton are other ways in which the word Street indicates a Roman road with much certainty. Other names with less certainty, but still significant, are Causeway and Ridgeway. In Failsworth, the present Ridgefield Street leads to the now demolished Ridgefield House on the line of the Roman road. Ridge must surely refer to its embankment or agger.

Another word with strong Roman connections is *caester*. This usually means camp or fortification — Doncaster, Muncaster, Lancaster were Roman forts. What should we make of Kesterfield, a field name on the Chadderton tithe map and very close to the line of the Manchester-Castleshaw road? Much has been speculated about this in the past. Is it really Casterfield — the open land by the camp? In spite of all the speculations and theories, until early forms of the name are found (back into the medieval period probably) it must be regarded as not proven. Our searches so far have proved fruitless.

There are one or two other names which may have local significance in connection with a particular Roman road, which cannot be given universal validity. Some of these are mentioned in the description of the route of M712.

Weighing Evidence

Find out what local historians have said about the road in your area and mark information on your maps as 'written line' or 'literary line' of your Roman road. Remember we have very little written material about Roman roads during the time they were in use in Britain. The major evidence is on the ground. There is nothing more valuable than studying the character of Roman roads as shown by I.D. Margary or O.G.S. Crawford and then going off to trace well-proved Roman roads across country. You are then in a position to weight the evidence of previous writers about roads in your area. If a writer says he has seen Roman remains — note it, it may be useful information but needs evaluation; but if he describes in some detail what he has *seen*, this is far more valuable because he is putting you in a better position to decide what his evidence really amounts to. If he says 'it is said that,' this is hearsay, and, as Mr Pickwick said, 'it is not evidence.' You must distinguish between facts and theories. The weighing of the evidence of others who have written about Roman roads is a most important part of your task. See what local traditions there are too. Listen to them politely, but consider them very carefully before accepting them as evidence.

Alignments

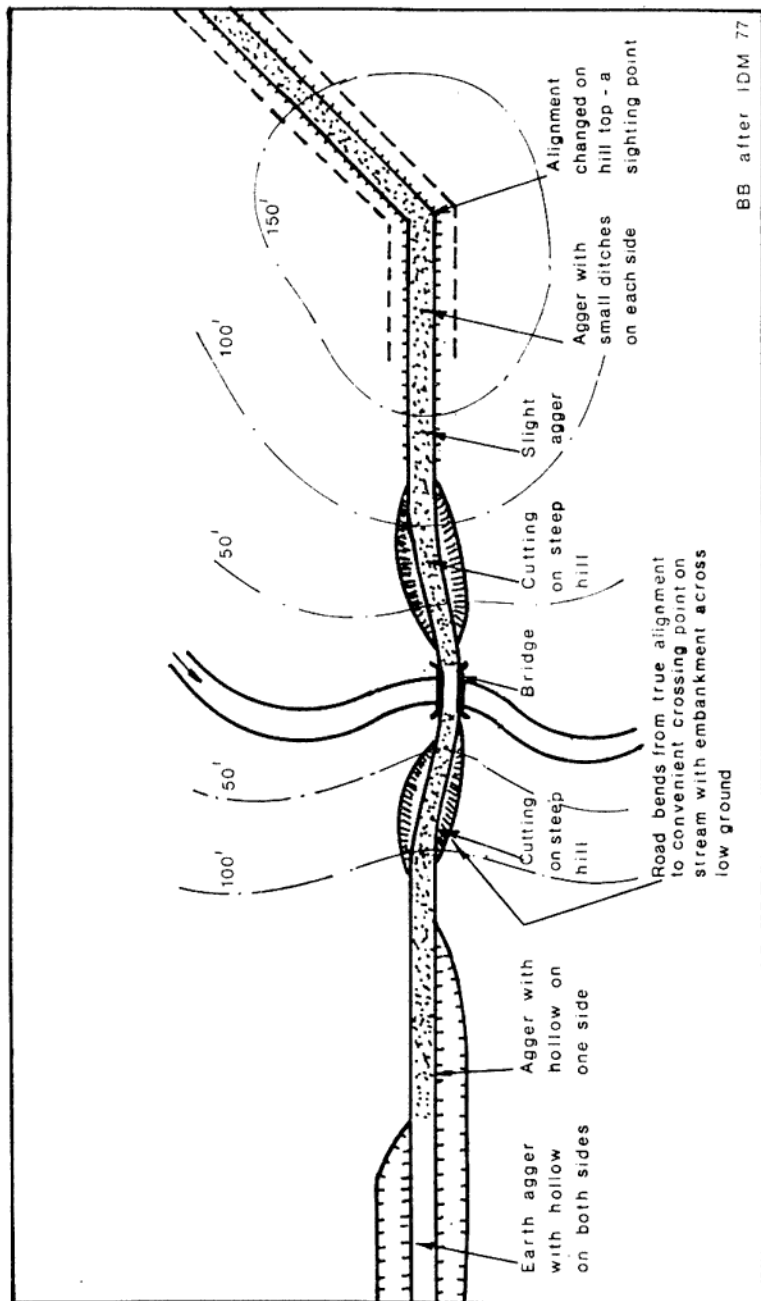
Seeking evidence of alignment — the line the course of the road is following — is probably the most important part of searching for Roman roads. It is useful to look at a piece of country and think where — if you were an engineer — you would construct a road across it, given that the valleys were heavily forested and probably marshy, and how you would tackle this obstacle or that. You should do this exercise on a map in a given area as well. Remember the Romans built roads in straight sections. A surveyor would light a bonfire on a prominent point in line with the destination and use this as a guide for one section. Now he may need to change direction and build another straight section towards his next survey point probably laid out well before. Alignments often change on hilltops where survey points might be. Alan Sorrell's drawing of Roman road building shows it all clearly. Your map,

by now, should have some indication of the line of the road gained from a variety of evidence. Draw a straight line along the indicated course and see if it joins the clues you have entered. The different kinds of evidence you might find are shown on Mr Margary's diagrams — Roman Road — As it was; but more so, on Roman Road — As it is. What you are looking for are traces of evidence, often of differing kinds, appearing along a particular line. This is what looking for a Roman road is all about.

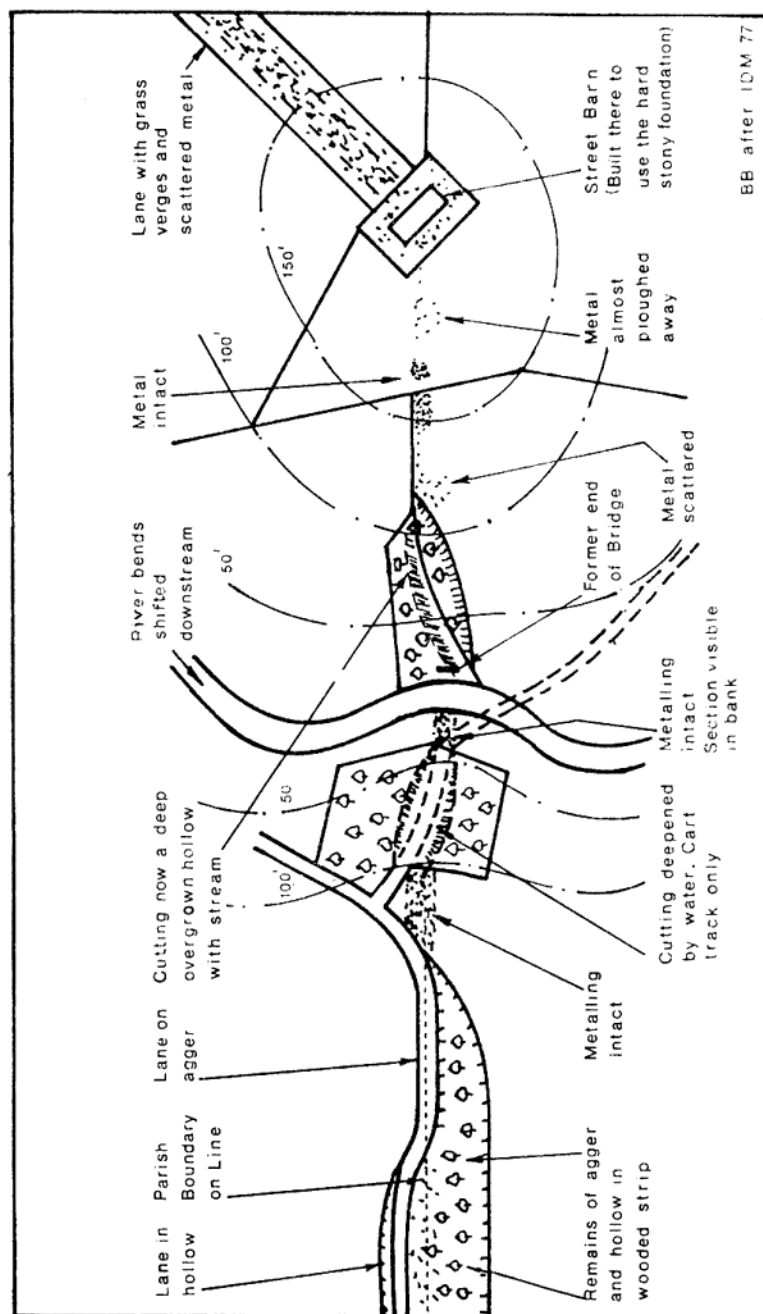
Field Work

You must now go and look at the ground, familiarise yourself with the route in detail. *To do fieldwork on public or on private land you must seek permission beforehand and you must always observe the Country code.* Don't expect to find evidence in every field, — there will be some long gaps. An ideal sign is an agger — a ridge in correct alignment across a field — as at Old Nathan's — but many are now built over, ploughed out or eroded away. Don't stop looking even in a town centre, for your road may have run through the old manor house garden, which may have survived. Look along your line for undisturbed ground where some remains may persist. Before the Industrial Revolution a Roman site may have been undisturbed for centuries, so if a site is known not to have been built on in the 19th and 20th centuries, it may be worth finding. Look also for a hint of something below the soil where a modern path crosses the Roman road — there may be a slight bump perceptible to the wheels of a car, or drying more quickly as the rain drains from it. Where the road is beneath or alongside a drystone wall the wall may be better preserved as a result of firmer foundations. Buildings were often built on a Roman road to take advantage of the foundations offered. Newton Heath Church (All Saints) sits squarely on M712 as earlier observers noted. Finally, the lining up of ranging poles from a known piece of Roman road, and marching them across country along a particular alignment, is an extremely useful way of moving from the known to the unknown and towards further discoveries.

G.B.



3b. Looking for evidence: Roman road — as it was.



3c. Looking for evidence: Roman road — as it is.

a house and a barn on the east end of the common. It then runs thro' the inclosures to Mr. Wagstaffe's house, where it enters a lane, and is visible enough. In about 400 yards more, being interrupted with a mofs, it rises with a prodigious grandeur, and is the finest remain of a Roman road in England, that I ever saw. This is at the back of Mr. Jenkinson's house in Failsworth, his land lying on both sides, and is now called Street.

3d. Literary evidence (M.712)

(above) Thomas Percival's account of the road given to the Royal Society in 1751. Extract.

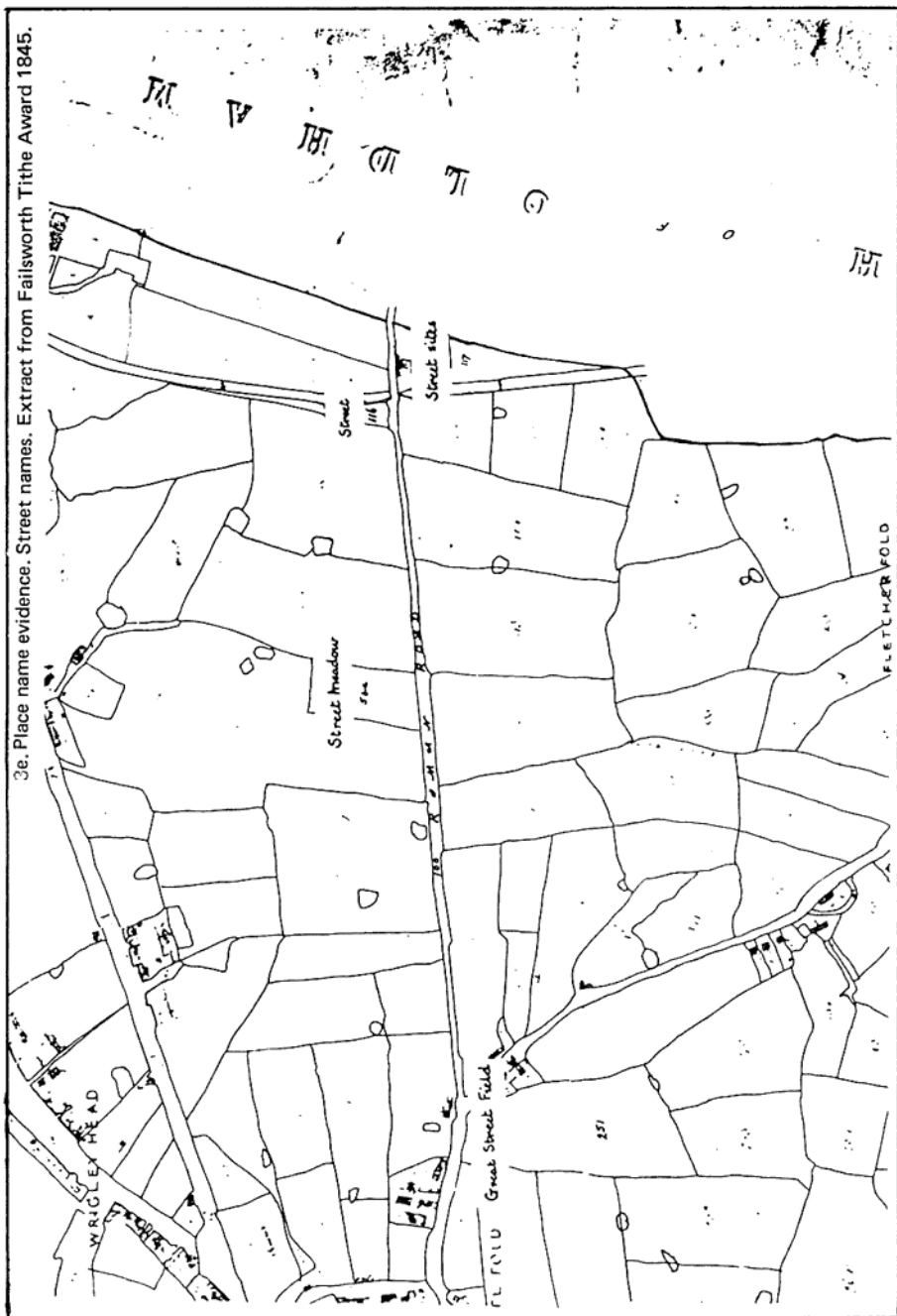
(below) John Watson's Miss recording his work on the road. Similar date. Extract.

(21)

9. Did not a Roman road run the top of West Hill?

Spaced about 200 yards to the east of the village of Waterlands. It proceeds nearly parallel with the second Red from Oldham to the downs, but on the south thereof crosses the road about 100 yards above the Deane, being the Meeting House of St. Peter, having left West Hill a little to the left. It then crosses over the Deane to the south of the Deane, where it is the supposed Roman road, and is said that from a Roman Road pieces of St. Peter's Bridge have been found here, and also an inscription on a stone which not being understood was broken up but there is only tradition (or this) then going directly to the hills, and a small winding lane, known as the Old Gate, it was certainly cut thro' the Middle 16

3e. Place name evidence. Street names. Extract from Failsworth Tithe Award 1845.





3f. 'History's aftermath'. Roman road M712 shown as a vegetation mark in the Castleshaw valley. The road is aligned on the south west corner of the larger fort. This photograph gave the first clue that the previously stated line here was incorrect.



3g. 'a Patience and an eye . . . on the ground' Agger found during field walking at New Inn Farm, Saddleworth, showing as a gentle rise and fall against the buildings, and as a lighter strip in the field.



4a. Filling in at Causeway Sett 1975. The total length of the trench 75 feet, equalled the width of the nave of Durham Cathedral.

4. MAKING A RECORD: M712: STREET END, FAILSWORTH TO CASTLESHAW FORTS: COMMENTARY

The Alignments

In their preliminary survey, the Romans considered a straight line from Chester to York and positioned their forts along it as often as possible. Manchester and Castleshaw forts are so situated. The road linking the forts was then laid out, along the shortest possible route, according to the nature of the landscape. The route into the western Pennines, and the resulting difficulties of terrain in the Saddleworth area, caused the Roman surveyors to split the Manchester—Castleshaw stretch into two alignments, with the major sighting point being High Moor, an 1150 ft hill near Scouthead, from which the Manchester fort would be visible to the south-west and the Castleshaw fort to the north-east. The first alignment was taken from a low hill about 2 miles south west of the Manchester fort (Gorse Hill, Stretford, near Old Trafford Cricket Ground) to a point on the southern side of High Moor in Saddleworth. The second alignment was made from High Moor to the south-west corner of the larger Castleshaw fort, thereby, incidentally, proving that the forts were built before the road, and that the date of the road is similar to the Agricola date for the fort.

The first alignment was closely followed for most of its 12 miles (c.20 km) as it ran through fairly easy terrain. The High Moor — Castleshaw alignment gave more problems, and was used closely only from the crossing of the River Tame (in Delph) to the Castleshaw fort. There were several difficulties: the Tame valley had to be crossed; the steep sided slopes of Knott Hill traversed, since the hill was too difficult to go over; Thurston Clough had to be crossed at a point above its steep sided lower course; the peat covered parts of High Moor had to be skirted; and a constant watch was required on the steepness of the gradients. The present surveyors are full of admiration for the skill of their Roman predecessors.

The Route; Present Survey

The start of the route, described below and indicated on the strip maps, is about halfway along the first alignment from Stretford to High Moor. Between Failsworth and Austerlands there are today no visible remains since the area is almost entirely urban and has been heavily industrialised in the past.

The evidence along Roman Road, Failsworth, apart from its name, consists of its exact following of the straight alignment — modern road on Roman line; reports from earlier observers like the Rev. Richard James in whose poem *Iter Lancastrense*, the road is described as 'high cast', or like Thomas Percival who remarked on 'its prodigious grandeur' and 'of the finest remain of a Roman road in England that I ever saw'; a battery of Street names such as Street End, Great Street Field, Street Meadow, Street Sites, Street Bridge, Street Farm, The Street; and such remains of the great agger mentioned above as were still visible to the 1848 Ordnance Surveyors.

About a third of a mile (540 m) beyond Limeside Park, the line of the road passed about 100 yards (91 m) north of the area named Kesterfield, the unproven site referred to earlier, and now totally built over. Beyond Copster Hill, an intermediate sighting point for the Roman surveyors, the straight course of Honeywell Lane runs directly along the Roman alignment. Glodwick Brook may have been crossed by a wooden bridge without a detour, or a similar bridge after such a change of direction, to ease the gradient. We cannot now tell. The road continued its straight course over the northern shoulder of Glodwick Lows and its traces, none of which now remain, were noted by earlier writers. At Salem, the Ordnance

Surveyors noted traces of the Roman road together with another short length at Wellihole. Both these fit perfectly along the alignment but nothing remains today. Some earlier writers have wondered if the meaning of the names Glodwick and Sett (near Salem) owe something to their closeness to the Roman road. Glodwick might refer to the ditch beside the road, and Sett is a word for a small paving stone. These views do not enjoy general acceptance, however.

The short straight piece of combined township, parish and county boundary alongside and beyond Dovecote Lane near Hey Church, suggests that the Roman road ran parallel to the boundary some yards to its south on the Manchester — High Moor alignment. No remains now exist, although there were traces of gritstone gravel scatter when the area was walked before the present housing estate was built a few years ago. Urban surroundings now give way to the Saddleworth countryside. Along the route being described, the first visible remains, lying exactly along the first alignment, exist as two aggers, 24 ft to 35 ft wide, (c.7 metres to c.11 metres) up to 2 ft high, (c.0.6 metres) each some scores of yards (metres) long at Lower Thorpe Farm and near Old Nathan's. Their presence disproves the views of earlier writers, including the Ordnance Survey, that Thorpe Lane was the Roman road. Across the fields between Old Nathan's and Doctor Lane Head are scattered traces of gritstone metalling in walls and on the ground along the alignment, together with a low agger south of Daisy Hollow Farm. A short distance beyond this, the long first alignment ends short of the High Moor sighting point, where, owing to extensive quarrying, possible traces of the Roman signal station which might well have been there, have been lost.

The Roman road now changes direction three times as it sweeps round the side of High Moor to cross Thurston Clough. Along the first stretch is a piece of agger just west of Doctor House, while in the field opposite Mason Row there is a good stretch of terraceway which merges into the modern Thurston Clough Road for a short distance before the Roman road appears just east of New Inn Farm, having changed its course. At New Inn Farm, in the excavated section cut in 1973, was revealed a fine agger of rammed sandstones and gravel, supported on the downward side by a buttress of stones from the whole of which a long tail of sand had been washed downhill. This agger would have had above it (originally) smaller stones and gravel for the actual road surface. It was about 20 ft wide (c.6 metres) and almost 2 ft thick (c.0.6 metres) in the centre.

Between New Inn Farm and Higher House remains of the agger are visible in the fields north of Thurston Clough road, both on the ground from the opposite hillside and on air photographs. At Set Stones (possibly a significant name) a curving agger 24 ft wide (c.7 metres) may be seen just south of the modern road as the Roman road swings round to cross Thurston Clough at a point immediately upstream of the present bridge, where, however, no traces remain. The remains from Doctor Lane thus far, are consistent with Thomas Percival's account in 1751, but not as that description has been interpreted by many subsequent writers. A short straight alignment, initially along the northern side of the modern road, brings the Roman road out of Thurston Clough to a turn in the field south east of Knarr Barn Farm, not up Knarr Barn Lane as other writers have it. Between the field where the turn is made and Knott Hill Lane are remains of a slight agger, revealed by melting snow some years ago, and a terraceway as the road approaches Slack Field. South of the curving line of Knott Hill Lane opposite Stoneswood are the remains of a massive curving agger 34 ft wide (c.10 metres) and up to 5 ft high (c.1.5 metres) with the township boundary between Friarmere and Shawmere running parallel to it a few feet away on the north side of Knott Hill Lane which has clearly developed from a medieval hollow-way alongside the Roman road. The

road now leaves Knott Hill Lane, contours round Knott Hill and runs down towards Delph village on a well marked terraceway 25 ft wide (c.7 metres) which together with the Knott Hill Lane agger is clearly shown on air photographs.

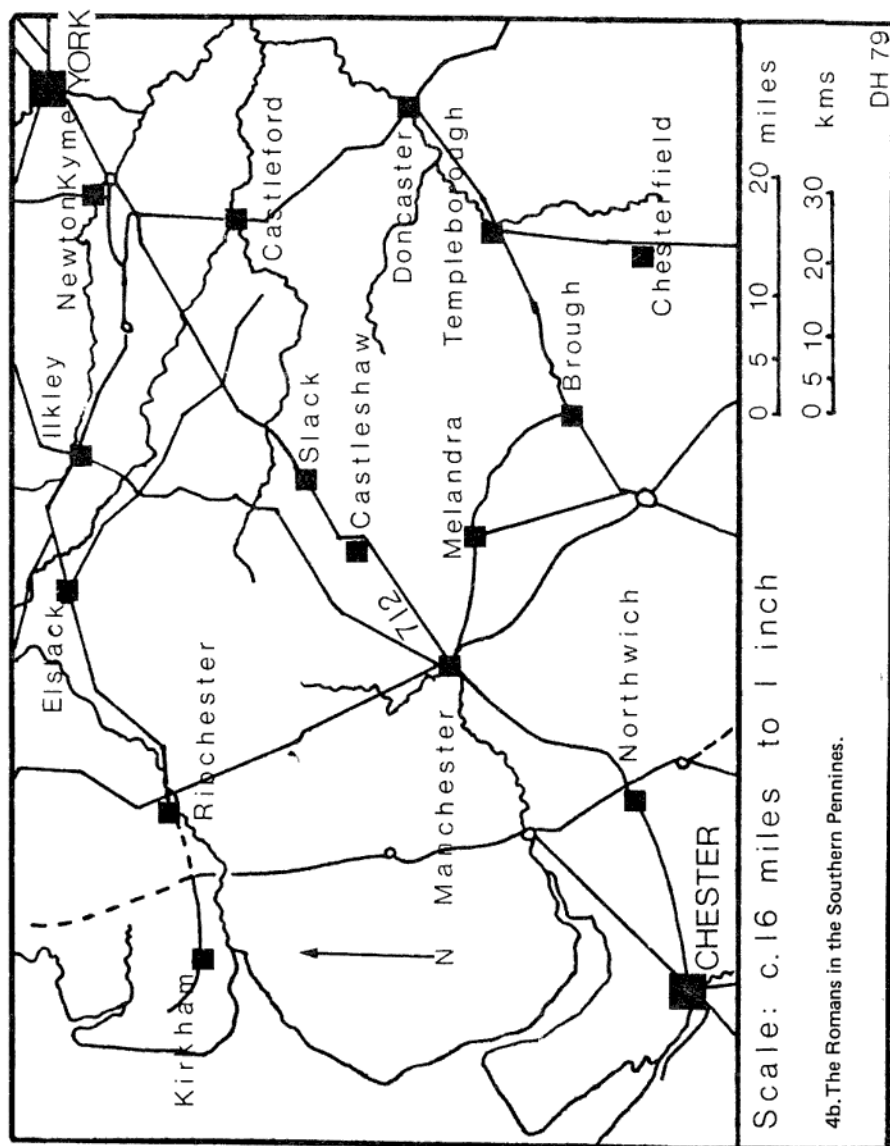
The course of the Roman road below Grains Road is uncertain, and zigzags may have been used on the steepest portions. To return to the exact line of the High Moor— Castleshaw alignment, a crossing of the River Tame was almost certainly made several yards upstream from the present Delph Bridge at a point where the Friarmere boundary crosses the stream, near a row of cottages at right angles to the River Tame. This is also probably the point where the medieval saltergate crossed the stream and the numerous medieval references to the way from Standedge to Knott Hill which 'passeth the water of Tame' also refer to this point. In 1885 workmen reported the finding of a paved road when digging a drain in the vicinity but interpreted it as a road 'up the Bottoms'. It may well have been the Roman road instead. Nearby there is a ford of some antiquity, with paving stones visible in places, although it is more probable that the Roman crossing was a wooden bridge.

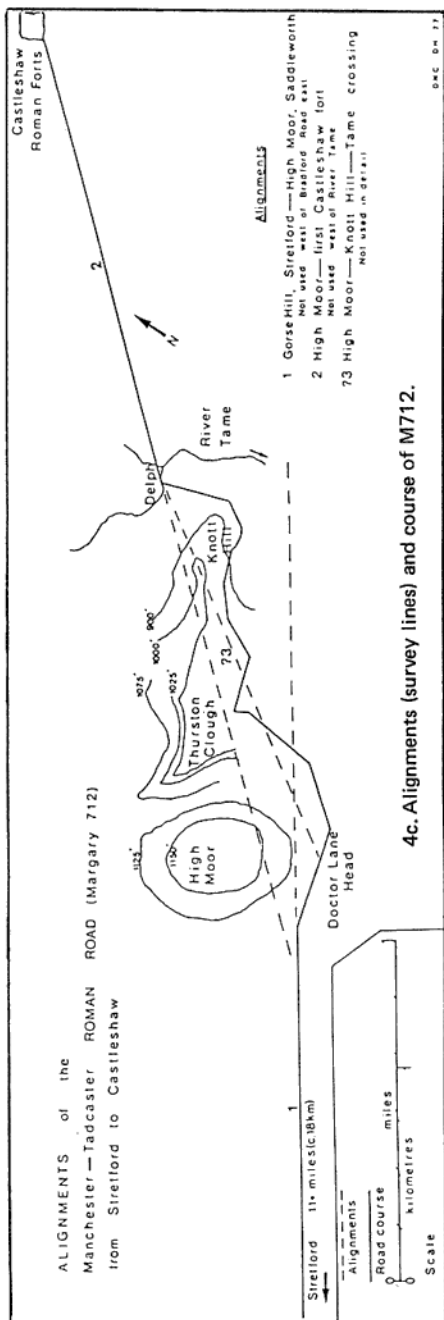
The Roman line runs up Cobblers Hill under Delph Lane for a short distance, where the boundary between Friarmere and Lordsmere follows it for about 100 yards (91 m) before the Roman road leaves Delph Lane on its right, and runs directly through the modern houses via Hull Mill Dam to the Castleshaw forts.

If the observer stands in Hull Mill Lane east of the mill dam and looks towards the Castleshaw forts he will see clearly running through the nearer fields traces of the magnificent agger up to 3 ft high (c.1 metre) and between 40 and 50 ft wide (c. 12 to 15 metres) aligned on the south-west corner of the first, larger fort. Between Hull Mill and the fort the agger is visible intermittently in the fields and shows clearly on air photographs. In 1975 near Causeway Sett, another significant name, it was excavated revealing rammed stone and gravel set on natural clay. The road foundation material was about 23 ft wide (7 metres) and up to 18 inches thick, (c.0.5 metres) and it was set centrally on an agger about 50 ft wide, (c.15 metres) doubtless so, because it was running along a valley bottom prone to swamp and abundant water. This proof is again consistent with Thomas Percival's account in 1751, but, again also, not as that description has been interpreted by subsequent writers including the Ordnance Survey and I.D. Margary. It is ironic too that Bradford Grammar School boys should have contributed to the disproving of the literary line advocated by an earlier old Bradfordian, W. B. Crump. There is no doubt that the Roman road across the fields to Castleshaw soon went out of use after Roman repair work ceased, on account of drainage problems, and by the time of the medieval monastic grange in Friarmere, it had been superseded by the so-called literary line which was, in reality, a medieval deviation from the course of the Roman road.

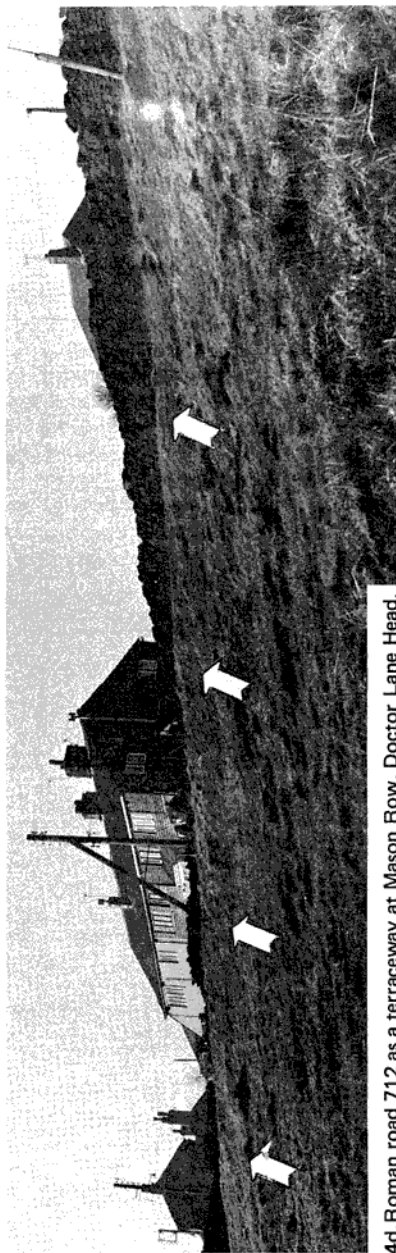
The final approach to the fort runs up south of Castle Hill Cote where there is a rather vague piece of agger. Alongside the south wall of the larger fort runs Dry Croft Lane, and south of this in the field, runs, not quite parallel to it along its eastern half, a piece of agger which indicates the start of the next alignment and helps to define the alignment angle as the south west corner of the fort. Link roads certainly led into the first fort by way of the south west and north east centre gates. A geophysical survey carried out in 1977 gave some indication of where the south western link might be. This concludes the description of M712 between Failsworth and Castleshaw.

D.C.
D.H.





4c. Alignments (survey lines) and course of M712.



4d. Roman road 712 as a terraceway at Mason Row, Doctor Lane Head.

4e. MAKING A RECORD — STRIP MAPS MARGARY 712 — STREET END FAILSWORTH TO CASTLESHAW ROMAN FORTS

ABBREVIATIONS USED ON MAPS

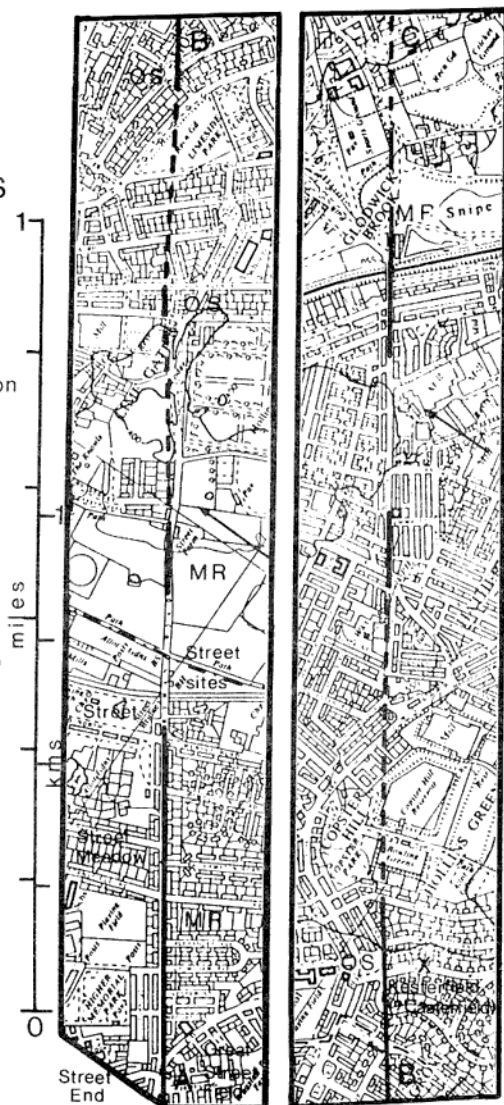
- Ag Agger
- AA Alignment Angle
- AP Air photograph
- MR Modern road on line
- OS Remains indicated as visible on
First Edition 6 inch Ordnance
Survey Map 1848
- SECT Section
- SM Scattered metalling
- TB Township (mere) boundary on
line
- TW Terraceway

- Roman Road — course certain
- - - Roman Road — course inferred

Names (strip A-B) from
Failsworth Tithe Map 1845

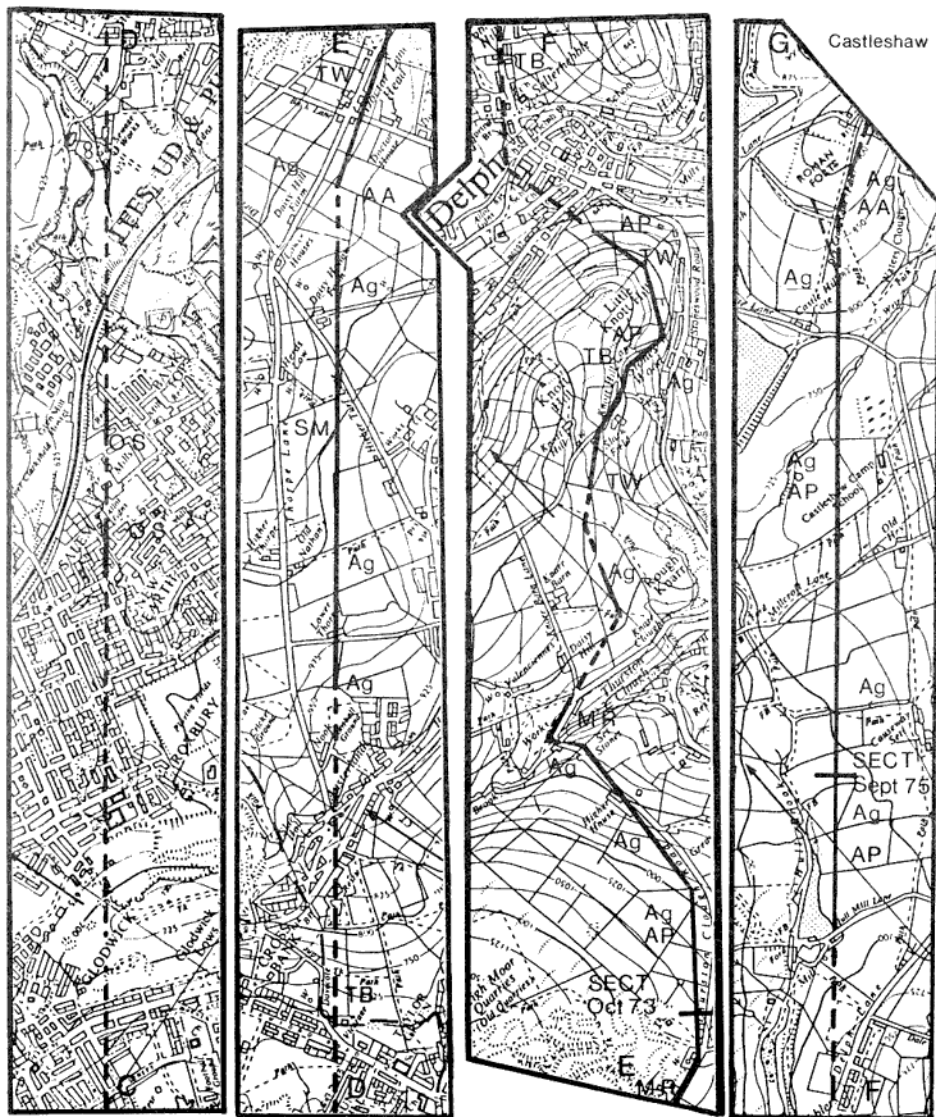
Scale: 6 inches to 1 mile

1967 Edition Six-inch
Ordnance Survey Maps reproduced
with the sanction of the Controller
of H.M. Stationery Office
Crown Copyright reserved



STRIP MAPS

The earliest writers on Roman roads bothered little about maps, but by the early years of this century maps were being used. The strip map seems to have been evolved by I. D. Margary in the 1930s and 40s. Its most complete development as a comprehensive but convenient way of recording Roman road evidence is to be found in the work of the Viatores *Roman Roads in the South East Midlands*. 1964.

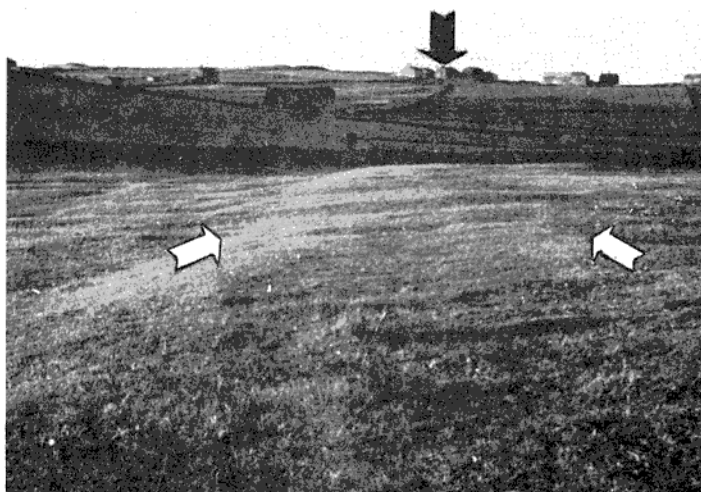


NME; PJS; DJW. 1977

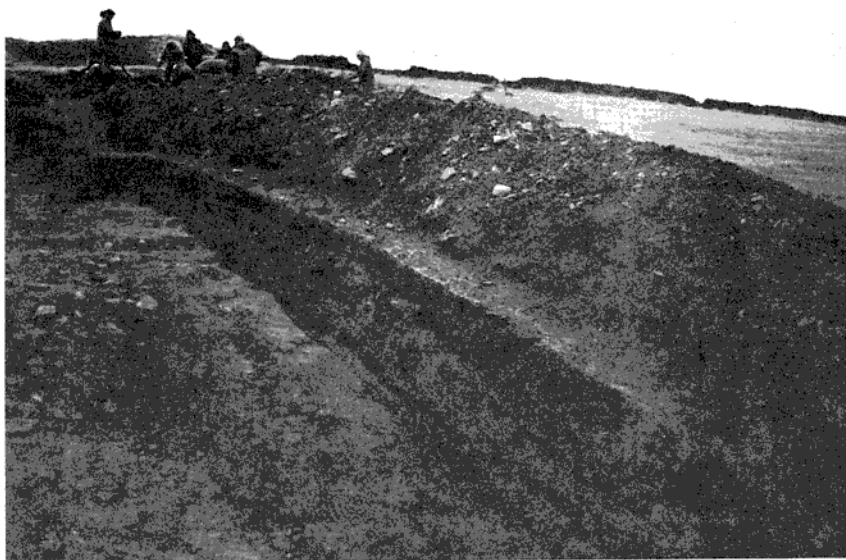


4f. Modern road on Roman line. Roman road Failsworth 1974. The site of the fields marked on the 1845 Tithe Map one hundred and thirty years later.

Doctor Lane Head



4g. Widely spread agger at Old Nathan's. Discovered 1972 and disproving Thorpe Lane as the Roman road.

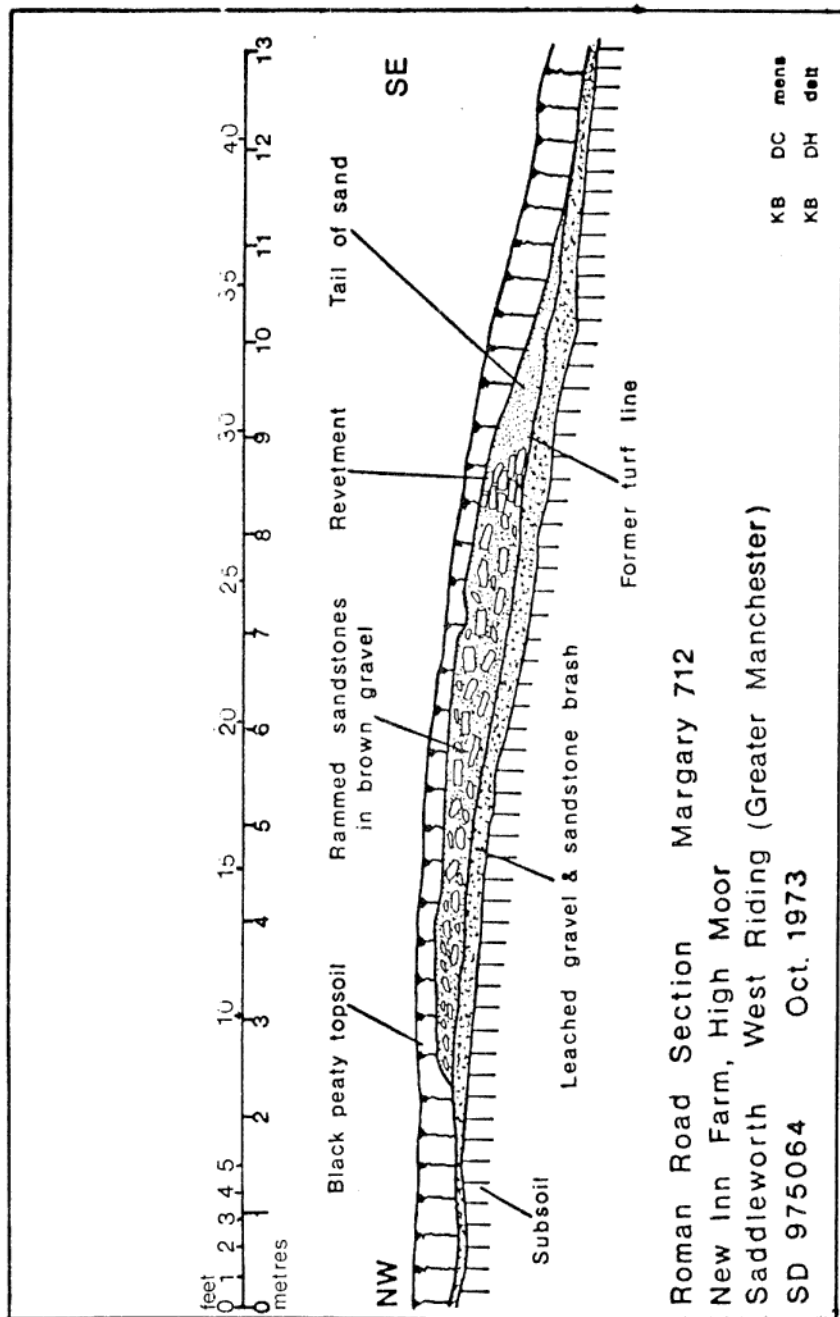


4h. Section, New Inn Farm 1973. The trench is always cut *across* the line of the road. The section is cleared up, measured, photographed and drawn. For a brief description of what was found, see "Making a Record".

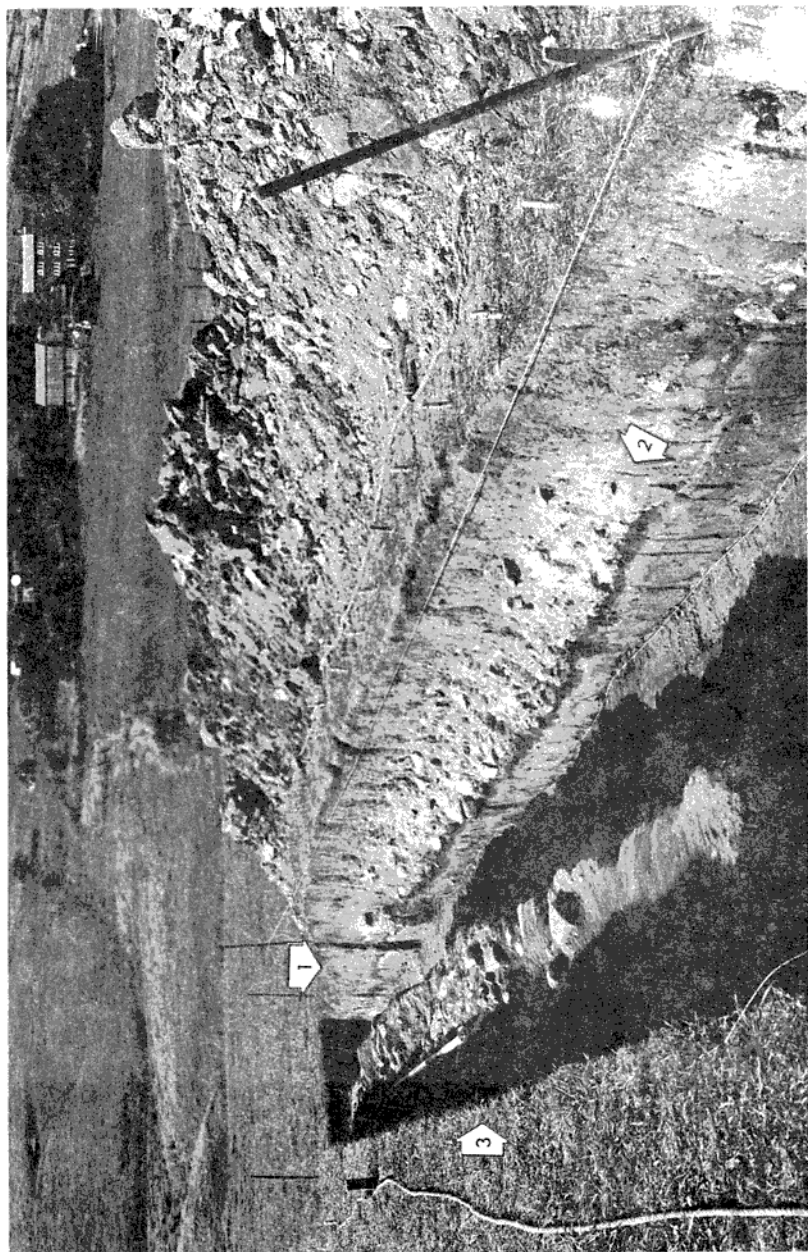
Castleshaw Forts



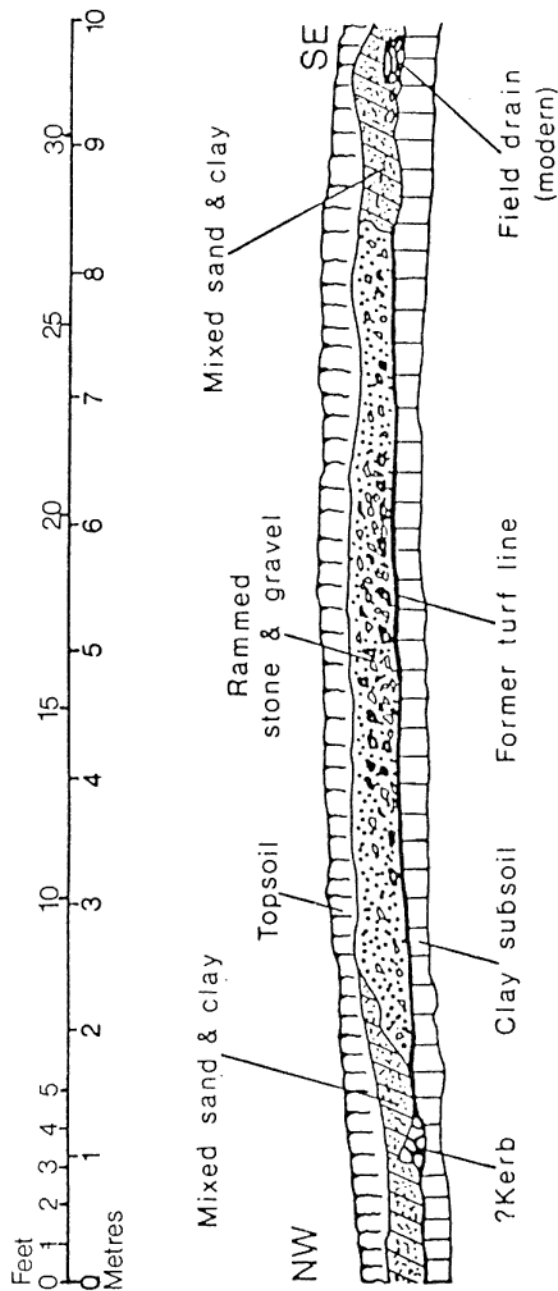
4i. The agger, discovered on the Meridian air map, seen at ground level, was wider than is usual — and higher — because of the low-lying ground over which it passed in the Castleshaw valley.



4j. New Inn Farm section: completed drawing.



4k. The magnificent remains at Causeway Sett photographed on a glorious summer evening in 1975. Notice (i) the width and height of the agger, (ii) the road material set centrally within it, (iii) the direction of the road.



Roman Road Section, Margary 712

Causeway Sett, Saddleworth

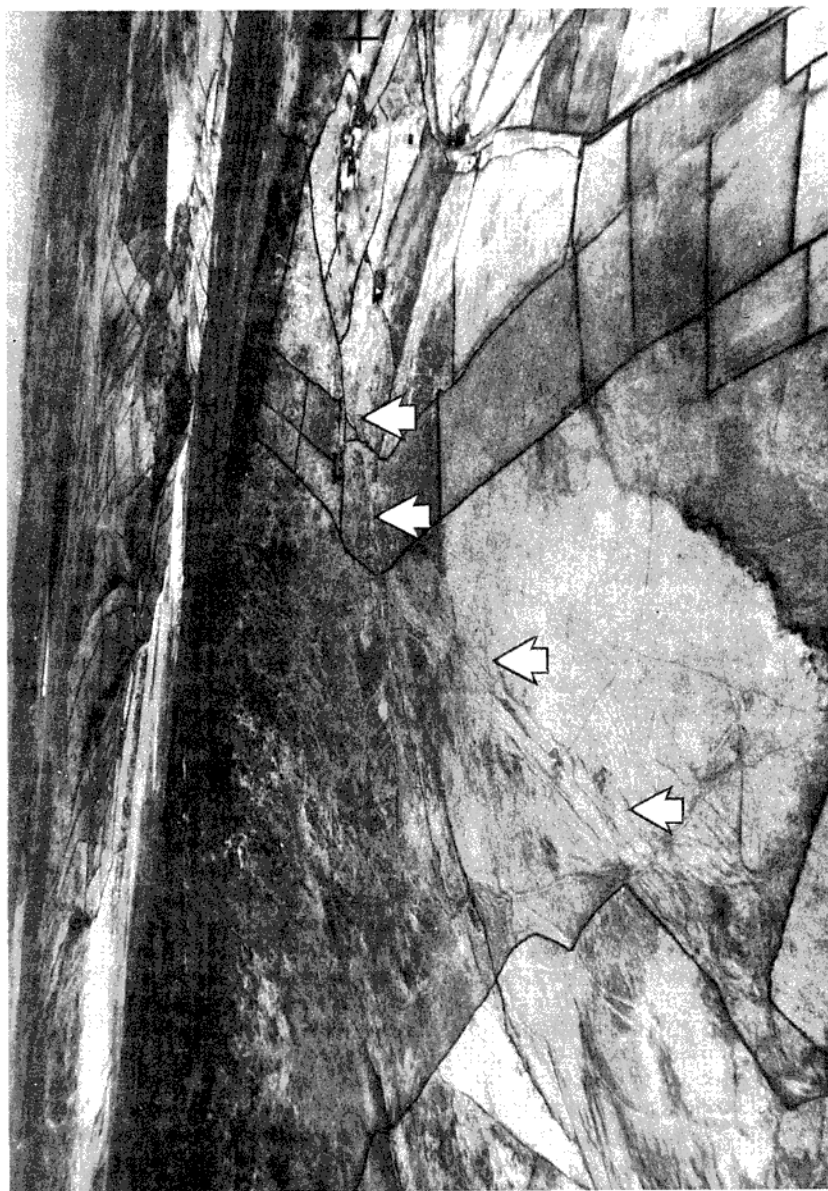
The West Riding (Greater Manchester)

SD 991087 Sept. 1975

IRJ MGK BS PNS GT mens

DH SRH RH CCW delt

41. Causeway Sett section: completed drawing.



4m. Pennine Panorama. Roman road 712 climbing the ridge from Castleshaw to the rim of Standedge on its way to Slack.

5. TAKING IT FURTHER: OTHER LOCAL ROMAN ROADS. PRESENT PROBLEMS

It must not be thought that Roman roads as a subject for investigation are worked out. A brief study of the maps in Mr Margary's book or the Ordnance Survey Map of Roman Britain will show that there are still gaps to be filled. The filling of these is bound to be undertaken piecemeal since it depends on suitable observers, working according to the principles of Roman road study as developed by Crawford and Margary, and able to carry on work in a particular area. We are talking, of course, of military roads linking forts, or major roads linking considerable settlements, rather than the minor roads of the Roman period which had a commercial or economic rather than a military function, and which, in any case, might be extremely difficult to prove as being Roman. Around Oldham there remain two areas¹ of investigation of military roads; one of some and one of minor importance. These are the course of road M 720a (Manchester to Ilkley) from Manchester to Blackstone Edge,² and whether Castleshaw was linked by road to the fort at Melandra near Glossop or to the supposed Littleborough fort.

The major difficulty in tracing the Manchester—Ilkley road into the western Pennines is the absence of any fort there to which the road may be aligned. The site of the supposed fort at Littleborough is entirely unknown, although there is a local tradition that a large Tudor house known as Windy Bank on the way to Blackstone Edge is built on the site of a Roman fort or fortlet. This lack of evidence contrasts with the discoveries in central Manchester in recent years where the course of the road from the fort to the site of the Cathedral overlooking the Irk river crossing has been confirmed on a number of occasions. It is the alignment and detailed course from the latter point to the Littleborough area which is needed. For reasons of space one cannot set out all the possible evidence, even though it is clear that a major alignment has to be studied from one Roman site to another irrespective of any modern boundaries. One can indicate the possible evidence in the Oldham area however. This is of two kinds: a suggestive parish boundary and two street names.

Between Middleton and Chadderton, there is a straight parish boundary, partly on present day roads and paths as well as across Blackley Golf Course which looks promising. In one direction, it points just east of the Manchester fort, in the other to Littleborough. Unfortunately two street names, Street Bridge in Chadderton and Street Gate in Royton do not lie on this line but point towards Shaw in one direction and Prestwich in the other. Apart from the difficulties in deciding what weight to give to pieces of evidence seemingly at odds with one another, from Manchester to Royton the ground is so built up that the road is only likely to be found by accident in digging foundations or drains. In recent years nevertheless much useful work on the possible route of this road has been done by the Rochdale W E A class on the Archaeology of Roman Britain led by Colin Harding whose interim reports have appeared in C B A Group 5 Archaeological Newsletters³, which should be referred to for fuller information.

¹Since this was written, there has been the discovery of a Roman fortlet in Longdendale, some four miles north east of Melandra. Its meaning within the Roman network of forts and linking roads in the Southern Pennines is, as yet, unclear.

²Mentioning Blackstone Edge does not necessarily mean acceptance of the view that the *extant* remains are Roman.

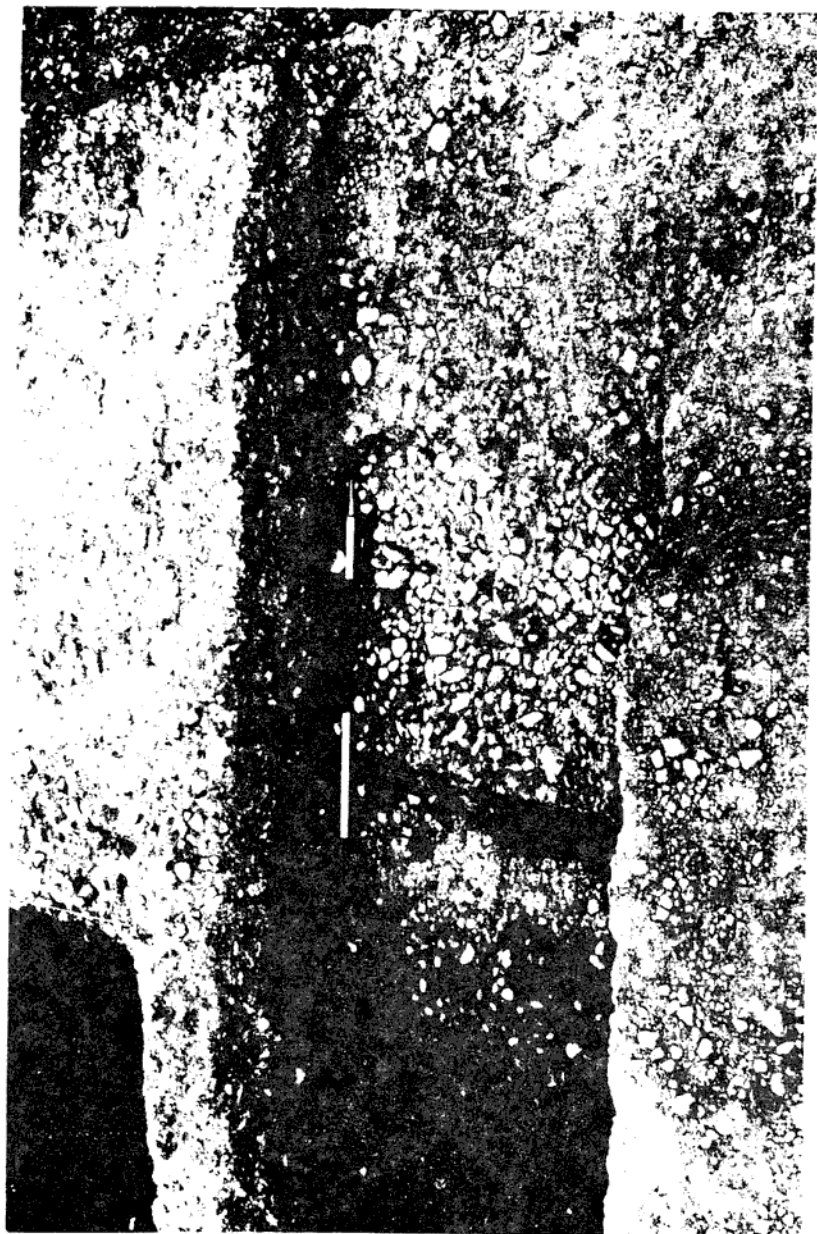
³Council for British Archaeology whose H.Q. is at 112 Kennington Road, London SE11 6RE.

Some ten miles south of the Castleshaw fort is that of Melandra near Glossop. It is possible that these two sites were linked by road but finding it has not proved easy. This is in part due to the broken nature of the ground between, over which even a Roman surveyor would have had difficulty in laying out a well aligned road. According to local tradition, there are in fact two Roman roads in the area. These were marked as such on old maps but have been removed from current ones on the grounds that they have not been proved Roman. One route enters the Saddleworth area below Noonsun Hill heading for Greenfield. Beyond the valley, according to tradition, Kinders Lane and Gellfield Lane leading to Saddleworth Church are on a Roman line. The road is then supposed to have passed between two large cinder heaps in Diggle, and then towards Standedge. Such a road is clearly not heading for Castleshaw, but presumably Slack via the Colne Valley. Since however, it passes within a mile of Castleshaw, a connecting road might be expected. It must be said at once there is nothing recognizably Roman about the road in its present state. Parts of it have been eroded into deep hollow-ways. Elsewhere it is a well-made terrace, but no where, so far, has a visible agger been found. Although parts of it might be described as aligned, there are deviations round cloughs which seem greater than a Roman surveyor would have laid out.

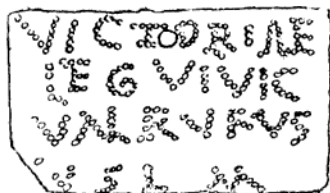
The second route from Melandra via Stalybridge enters Saddleworth from Quick Edge, traditionally Roman. It would seem to be heading for Doctor Lane Head, though probably by a straighter line than the present road. At Doctor Lane Head it would cross the Manchester—Castleshaw road almost at right angles. It has been thought that this is, in fact, a T-junction without a continuation northward thus providing an indirect route from Melandra to Castleshaw. This does not seem very probable. It is more likely that it continued to the watershed at Grains Bar and thence to the presumed fort at Littleborough. Nothing has so far been found of such a road and the terrain from Grains Bar to Littleborough is so broken that its discovery would be very difficult. Are there however perhaps two slender threads of evidence in the name of the small hamlet of Street near Grains Bar, and, further on, the findspot of the Roman silver arm at Tunshill, a short distance from Hollingworth Lake?

Little work has been done on the possible link between Melandra and Castleshaw and Littleborough. The evidence is largely traditional. To investigate, it would be necessary to go back to first principles and to consider — at the very outset — the likelihood of a Castleshaw—Melandra or Littleborough link across the basic grain of the Pennine landscape as it were; the behaviour of Roman roads in such country, by searching for possible comparisons elsewhere in Roman Britain; and the nature of the Roman road network in the Southern Pennines. Finding a fort at Littleborough would be a useful start.

G.G.T.



5a. The earliest surface, complete with traffic rut, of the northern exit road from the fort at Manchester. The Manchester-Ikley Roman road (M720a) followed this route as far as the main Roman road junction near the present Cathedral.



5b. The silver plate from the Tunstall Arm recording a vow to the victory of the VI Legion (based at York).

from

ITER LANCASTRENSE

Rev. R. James 1636

. summe miles beyond thy home
 Mounted vppon thy horses we did rome,
 Vnder thy guidance, to a Roman waye
 High cast yet standing, as perchance it laye
 From Yorck to Chester
 Our wayes are gulphs of durte and mire, which none
 Scarce ever passe in summer without moane;
 Whilst theirs through all y^e world were no lesse free
 Of passadge then y^e race of Wallisee,
 Ore broken moores, deepe mosses, lake and fenne,
 Now worcks of Giants deemd, not arte of men.
 On theis their stages stood their forts and tombes;
 They were not onely streets but halydoms:
 So did their businesse speede, and armyes flye
 From East to West like lightning in the skye

5c & 5d (overleaf). Two poems, by two Oxford men, separated by over three hundred years and inspired by this Roman road, present interesting contrasts.

5d. **A YORKSHIRE ROAD**

R. Shaw-Smith 1974

To find the Roman highway's track
That leads from Castleshaw to Slack
Over the bony Pennine Chain
Beneath the ages' sun and rain
Requires a patience and an eye
Both on the ground and in the sky.
You tramp the moor and cross the peat
And try to line the marching feet
Of legionaries come from Spain
And wishing to be back again;
You look for history's aftermath
Upon an aerial photograph,
And scan the likely path of green
Which is to earthbound eyes unseen,
The stony ribbon, unrenewed,
But now revealed by altitude.
You find it here, directing straight
Towards the fort's sinister gate,
But there beyond the Standedge rim
The causeway and the ditch are dim,
And now surveyors make a stay
Before they think they see the way
That Romans, Celts and Saxons trod
Across the heath and acid sod.
They built it true and built to last,
But in the time-eroded past,
And so the road is hard to draw
That leads from Slack to Castleshaw.

FURTHER READING

1. For Younger Readers

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A R Birley — Life in Roman Britain Batsford 1964
T Cairns — The Romans and their Empire Cambridge 1970
B Cunliffe — Fishbourne: A Roman Palace and its Gardens. Thames and Hudson 1971
G Cyrille — Roman Roads Hart Davis 1974
A Fox and A Sorrell — Roman Britain Lutterworth 1961
M Hassall — The Romans Hart Davis 1971
Jackdaws of : Hadrian's Wall Cape 1968
: The Villas of Roman Britain Cape 1972
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D Macaulay — City Collins 1974
J Wilkes — The Roman Army Cambridge 1972

2. Adult Material

General

- K Branigan — Roman Britain Readers' Digest 1980
R G Collingwood and I A Richmond — The Archaeology of Roman Britain London 1969
S S Frere — Britannia — A History of Roman Britain London 1978
A L F Rivet and Colin Smith — The Place Names of Roman Britain London 1979
R J A Wilson — Roman Remains in Britain London 1980
Ordnance Survey Map of Roman Britain. Fourth Edition 1978.

Regional

- K Branigan (ed) — Rome and the Brigantes Sheffield 1980
R M Butler (ed) — Soldier and Civilian in Roman Yorkshire Leicester 1971
E Ekwall — The Place Names of Lancashire Manchester 1921
M L Faull, S A Moorhouse (eds) — West Yorkshire: An Archaeological Survey to AD 1500 Wakefield 1981
G D B Jones — Roman Manchester Manchester 1974
A H Smith — The Place Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire Cambridge 1961–63

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- B Barnes — Passage Through Time. Saddleworth Roads and Trackways Saddleworth 1981
W B Crump — Huddersfield Highways Huddersfield 1949
D Haigh — Roman Road 712 from Manchester to Standedge — forthcoming
I A Richmond — Huddersfield in Roman Times Huddersfield 1925
A Wrigley — Songs of a Moorland Parish Saddleworth 1912

Roman Roads

- R W Bagshawe — Roman Roads Shire Publications 1979
R Chevallier — Roman Roads London 1976
O G S Crawford — Archaeology in the Field London 1960
D E Johnston — An Illustrated History of Roman Roads in Britain Spurbooks 1979
I D Margary — Roman Roads in Britain London 1973
The classic work on the subject.

DCCXII

