

V.

NOTES ON THE “ROMAN ROADS” OF THE ONE-INCH ORDNANCE MAP OF SCOTLAND. BY JAMES MACDONALD, LL.D., VICE-PRESIDENT.

4. THE ROXBURGHSHIRE ROADS.

From the English Border two old roads enter Roxburghshire, named on the map Watling Street and the Wheel Causeway. The former is regarded by writers on the antiquities of the district as a continuation of the Northumberland road of the same name; the latter, of the Cumberland Maiden Way. Both are popularly believed to be Roman.

1. *Watling Street*.—About a mile after crossing the sources of the Coquet at Chew Green, this old road leaves English soil and proceeds in a north-westerly direction across the Cheviot Hills. In penetrating this range its course winds considerably, as it has to accommodate itself to the nature of the ground. Its breadth varies from 6 to 10 or more feet. Its track, which has been skilfully chosen, is level and covered with grass, having sometimes low mounds bounding it on either side.

A mile or two further on, and at some distance from the road on the right, is the remarkable Mote or Fort of Buchtrig. On the left, a little in advance, is Woden Law (1398 feet), crowned by two closely adjoining rectilinear forts, which are defended on three sides by triple ramparts, but are open on the west—the side most distant from the hollow in which the road runs. The traveller has now reached a pass in the last of the Cheviot heights. Suddenly the southern Scottish uplands burst on his view. To the north-west the three conical summits of the Eildon Hills are seen rising abruptly from the plain. Further west, and more distant, are the peaks of the Ettrick Hills; north of the Eildons, but still farther away, are the Lammermoors; while the picture is filled up by that succession of low, rounded hills and fertile vales, varied by the presence of intrusive masses of trap, such as the Dunion, near Jedburgh, that give to these uplands a character of their own.

At the end of the pass, on the right, is the “Streethouse” of the Ordnance Map, once a shepherd’s dwelling, but now bare, roofless walls.

Thence there is a rapid descent towards the Kale Water, which is crossed just below Towford schoolhouse.¹ Here the ground begins again to rise. The road then bends somewhat to the north. Soon it passes, on the left, a large rectilinear enclosure, within which is a smaller one, both having traverses "in front of the openings or gates." Near them stood the "Streethouse" of Roy's plate,² but it has long since disappeared. The larger camp is of the same type as that on Torwood Moor, Dumfriesshire.³ Following the road, which here separates the parishes of Oxnam and Hownam and is still in use, though kept in bad repair, we gradually ascend to Pennymuir, where large sheep-fairs were formerly held. So far, there has been nothing to distinguish our road from old or partially used roads in other parts of the country. Whether the Romans had any share in its construction must depend on considerations apart from the appearance it now presents.

From Pennymuir to Cunzierton Hill and onwards to the Oxnam and Hownam road—a distance of about 3 miles—the traveller continues to ascend in the same direction as before. Here the road, now all but disused, is of greater breadth than at Towford. Though its course is not that of a straight line, the windings are not very marked. The roadway is much cut up and in wet seasons parts of it are swampy, especially just above Pennymuir. On the left it is fenced by a stone dyke, while the right is unprotected at first, except by a slight mound here and there. The whole ridge along which it runs is uncultivated, and pastured by sheep. Rather more than half-way between Pennymuir and Cunzierton Hill, on the top of which is a British fort, we pass a so-called Druidical circle on the right, and further on a smaller one on the left. North of Cunzierton Hill the character of the road continues the same. A wire fence runs on the right for some distance, replaced, where the footpath to Chatto branches off, by a stone dyke. At intervals here and there it is raised in the centre by what seems to be a line of large stones. In one or

¹ To Mr J. W. Thomson, lately schoolmaster there, I am indebted for much information regarding the antiquities and place-names of Roxburghshire.

² *Military Antiquities of the Romans in North Britain*, plate xxii.

³ *Proceedings of the Soc. of Antiq. of Scotland*, vol. xxviii. p. 308.

two places they have the appearance of having been fitted into each other artificially. By-and-by it may be observed that there are similar ridges or layers of the same kind elsewhere than in the centre, and even beyond the line of road altogether, as if the stones are either natural to the soil, or else decayed portions of the uptilted rock still *in situ*. Along the sides of the roadway small pits are to be seen, from which material had no doubt been taken to repair it at the time it was in use; but most of this has since been washed out of the hollows that now render its surface uneven. Shortly before reaching the Hownam road, its contour becomes more distinctly and somewhat regularly rounded. But, as in the case of the ridge of stones already noticed, the curve is now in the centre, now towards one side, now towards another,—evidence, apparently, that the roundness of surface is due to the operation of some natural causes, and not to the hand of man. At one spot, indeed, the raised centre has been exposed, to some depth, by the unceasing action of a tiny rill, and shown to be solid rock. It would thus seem as if the present hollows had been softer parts of out-cropping strata on which the road had been laid down, which, worn away by the rains and frosts of winter, were left unfilled after the road ceased to be used for traffic; while the higher portions, whether occurring in the centre or at either side, are of a texture hard enough to withstand better and longer these destructive agencies. For some time the roadway has been from 20 to 24 feet wide.

On reaching the spot where the road to Hownam, already mentioned, branches off to the right, we turn somewhat sharply to the left and find that this road—that leading from Jedburgh through Oxnam to Hownam—occupies for about 2 miles a portion of the track of “Watling Street.” At first the latter bends slightly to the left, running thereafter due W.N.W. to Jedfoot Bridge, a distance of 7 or 8 miles. Its surface, now grassy and almost level, is separated on both sides from well-cultivated fields by mounds, ditches and sometimes rows of trees. This marked change of scene is easily accounted for. “Watling Street,” not far from its first contact with the Hownam road, leaves the comparatively barren Greywake of the Cheviot range and enters a fertile tract of country, the under-

lying rock of which is the more kindly Old Red Sandstone. Smiling fields accordingly succeed the less luxurious herbage of the hilly uplands. Here portions of the road are still made use of by the farmers through whose land it runs, and at whose hands it receives occasional repairs. In constructing it, the ground had, where necessary, been levelled, and a shallow trench sunk in it to receive stones or gravel. In the middle, extending to a breadth of 18 feet or so, is a track for horses and cattle, lined with a broad margin of grass on either side. To keep the whole level seems to have been the chief object of those who last used it. There are no kerbstones, no pavement of flat stones, no raised line of stones set edgeways in the centre. It has been said, indeed, that the roadway was once paved, but that the stones were long since removed and used for building. Of this, however, there is not a shadow of proof. That, in a district abounding in stone, it should have been everywhere completely denuded in this way of a stony covering, may be conceivable, but seems highly improbable. On the portions of it still in use for farm purposes a flattish stone may occasionally be seen filling some hole made in the track, though unbroken stones or metal is oftener now used in doing so. Its great breadth, and the care with which its sides had at one time been fenced, deserve attention. In addition to a normal breadth of 24 feet, often exceeded, there is sometimes a ditch 6 feet wide on one side of the road and a mound 12 feet broad at the base on the other,—making, in all, a breadth of 42 feet. In some places there is a ditch inside this mound, and a mound outside the opposite ditch, so that the roadway has a ditch and mound on either side. This may be seen at the top of the ridge near Renniston, where the descent to Oxnam Water begins; and such was probably at one time its form wherever it passed through highly cultivated soil. Its almost perfect straightness and its borders of trees render the “Roman” road from Shibden Hill to Jedfoot a very prominent feature in the landscape of that part of Roxburghshire.

Just before the Oxnam is crossed, there is a bluff of some extent, formed by the junction of a small rivulet with that stream. It is steep on the side next the latter, but less so where it abuts on the “Roman”

road. On one of the remaining sides is a field, of which it was till lately a part. Here is a slight depression which may mark what was once a ditch. Along the fourth side runs the Cappuck road. The bluff is on the farm of Cape Hope or Cappuck, belonging to the Marquis of Lothian. When it was being ploughed, eight years ago, foundations of buildings were discovered. Excavations, then ordered by Lord Lothian, were carried out under the supervision of Mr Walter Laidlaw, Jedburgh Abbey, of which an account, with plan, has been published.¹ The lower courses of walls, supported by buttresses, were revealed; a portion of a Roman inscribed stone was found, together with some articles of Roman manufacture, chiefly pottery. These, with other indications, place it beyond doubt that Cappuck had been the site of a Roman or a Romano-British settlement, for a longer or shorter period. No trace of a surrounding rampart or wall seems to have been got, but the excavations were only partial, a great part of the station still remaining unexplored.

From Oxnam ford the road again rises till it reaches the watershed between that river and the Jed. During the first part of its descent hence it is little used, even by the neighbouring farmers, and is consequently so much cut by the rains that in wet weather it is hardly passable even on foot. As it approaches Jedfoot railway station, however, it passes into a road in daily use.² After this, “Watling Street” is lost for a time; but it is evident that it had passed through the grounds of Mount Teviot, one of the seats of the Marquis of Lothian, for two miles further on it reappears a little to the north-west of Ancrum House, running in exactly the same direction as it did from Shibden Hill to Jedfoot. Planted over with trees the road is again a conspicuous object. “For three miles and a half of this part of its course it forms the boundary between the parishes of Ancrum and Maxton,”³ disappearing in the present Ancrum and St Boswell’s road, which keeps for a mile or two the same straight course. Beyond this, no traces of it are now visible

¹ *Proceedings of the Berwickshire Naturalists’ Club for 1893*, pp. 382-9.

² In traversing the road last summer, I was favoured with the use of a MS. “Journal of a walking tour over the line of the Roxburghshire Watling Street,” by Mr Francis Lynn, F.S.A. Scot., Galashiels, which I found of great service.

³ Jeffrey’s *History and Antiquities of Roxburghshire*, vol. i. p. 231.

in Roxburghshire; but it must have passed northwards between the Eildon Hills and the Tweed, crossing the latter into Berwickshire at Newstead, or, according to others, at Gattonside. Near Newstead, numerous Roman remains have been found on what there are good grounds for believing was the site of a Roman station.¹

As regards the history of the road, nothing can be founded on the name "Watling Street," applied to it by Horsley and others, as well as on the Ordnance Map. This epithet is, I believe, an importation from the other side of the Border, which, except from books, is quite unknown in Roxburghshire. Even in England, Watling Street is by no means synonymous with Roman road. It is a term of Anglo-Saxon origin, and of somewhat uncertain meaning; but the breadth of its application may be gathered from the fact of its being used by Chaucer of the Milky Way.

There are, however, circumstances which indicate that the route our road takes was that by which the Romans generally entered Scotland, and that part at least of its course, if not the whole, may have been laid down by them.

(1) On the Northumberland Watling Street, leading from the Southern Wall towards the Cheviots, are two Roman stations—Habitancum and Bremenium. Their position seems to show that they were intended to guard the great Southern Wall, as well as to protect the road traversed by the legionaries when they marched northwards beyond the Cheviots. At York, as the military capital of the whole province, such expeditions would be usually organised; and communication with the seat of government in that city, would be kept up by the most direct route. There is thus every reason to believe that when the Romans invaded North Britain, they, for the most part, entered it by the east, and not the west side of the island. Although the road from Chew Green—the terminus of the Northumberland Watling Street—to Shibden Hill affords no evidence by its construction that it is a Roman work, and although no Roman antiquities have been found along it, yet we are not entitled, for

¹ For notices of the Roman antiquities discovered here, see various papers by the late Dr John Alex. Smith in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol. i. pp. 28-38, 213-7; vol. v. pp. 107-8, 360-2; vol. ix. pp. 588-9, &c.

such reasons, to deny that the Romans used it, or even made it, if other facts seem to point to a different conclusion.

(2) From Shibden Hill to Melrose, the case for its having not only been used but even laid down by the Romans is much stronger. The markedly direct line in which it runs for a long distance differentiates it from all other old roads in Scotland; and the Roman stations of Cappuck on the Oxnam, and Newstead or Red Abbey near Melrose, appear to be satisfactory proof that this portion of the road had been planned by Roman engineers at a time when the Romans were masters of the country. For we can scarcely conceive of their having a line of stations that were not connected by a road with one another, and with some base of operations whence reinforcements could be drawn.

At the same time, it is equally true that the name "Drove Road," which was universally applied to it before the days of Horsley, and is still the only one known to the unsophisticated shepherds of the Cheviots, denotes the purpose which it chiefly served during the sixteenth, the seventeenth, and the first half of the eighteenth century, and may account for some of the peculiarities of construction to which attention has been drawn. The original road was perhaps the track (18 feet wide) to which reference is made above, while the additional and abnormal extension at each side, covered with grass, was intended to afford the means of sustenance to cattle and sheep without their having to stray into the adjoining fields, from which the mounds and ditches were meant to exclude them. From Shibden Hill southwards, where the land was moor or natural pasture of no great value, such precautions were not required.

2. *The Wheel Causeway*.—Jeffrey¹ is the authority to whom we are chiefly indebted for a notice of this road. He considers it to be a continuation of the English "Maiden Way," a view shared by archaeologists south of the Border, who describe the course of "this great military way" as running from Overborough in Lancashire to Bewcastle and thence onwards to Scotland. Jeffrey writes: "It . . . enters Scottish ground at Deadwater, when it assumes the name of

¹ *History of Roxburghshire*, vol. i. p. 247 ff.

the WHEEL CAUSEWAY. The appearance of the road between the wall and Bewcastle [*i.e.*, during part of its course through England] is described as being above 21 feet broad, and made with sandstone. The stones are laid on their edges, and generally in the centre; on the sides they are found lying flat. Where streams of water cross the path, they are carried below it by means of culverts built on the sides, and covered with large flags. It presents the same features in this district [*i.e.*, in S. Roxburghshire] where it has not been destroyed by the farmers converting the stones with which it is paved into fences for sheep walks." Then follows an account of the line taken by the road, which is said to cross the Peel Burn at a point where there is a strong fort. Turning to the right, it runs along the ridge known as the Wheel Rigg, passing close by the site of the old Wheel Church and making for the summit of Needslaw. Jeffrey is perfectly clear and consistent in what he says. He speaks only of one road—the Wheel Causeway, which he believes to be Roman, and as to the line of which, in this part of its course, he has no manner of doubt. His view is the same as that adopted in the Ordnance Map, which, indeed, furnishes the best possible illustration of his text.

In Maclauchlan's *Notes on Camps in Northumberland* (London, 1867, privately printed) we get a somewhat different account of the matter. The writer's main interest is in camps, and his reference to the road is more or less incidental. Probably this accounts for the want of clearness in what he says. On one point there can be no doubt. The road which Jeffrey calls the Wheel Causeway, Maclauchlan calls "the Drove Road." The description he gives of the line of this "Drove Road" corresponds exactly to that followed by the "Roman Road" of Jeffrey and the Ordnance Map. Our two authorities, then, are in agreement as to the course of this road, but they differ entirely as to its early history.

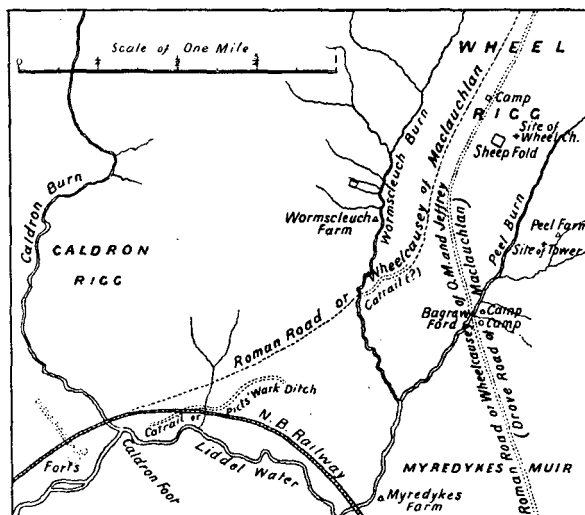
Maclauchlan, however, goes farther. At first, indeed, he is somewhat cautious about admitting the Romans to this district at all. "It is said that the Romans had a way from Jedburgh, over the Wheel Causeway, into both Northumberland and Cumberland. Part of the line over the Wheel Rigg looks like it; and there are remains of a small square camp

on the side of the way, which possibly has been used by them as a post of observation. But, Roman or not, the line of communication, up by the sources of the Jed, and down by those of the Liddel and Tyne, could not have escaped the notice of the very early inhabitants; so that, for the passage of either people or cattle, the course of the Wheel Causeway must have been very early established as a Drove Road” (p. 56). So far there is no inconsistency. The “line over the Wheel Rigg” is apparently the Wheel Causeway, a Drove road, and a possible Roman road.

In a footnote to the paragraph just quoted a new view is put forward. There we are told that the author had examined the ground in company with a friend. They considered that they “could trace the line of Roman Road, about 80 yards on the west of the present Drove Road, when it reaches the Rigg from Bagrawford. . . . It bends slightly to the westward, and appeared to us as crossing the Wormsleugh Burn. . . . We came to this conclusion from seeing some stones on each side of the brook in the line we were examining. But, beyond this, we could trace nothing satisfactorily; though, if not Roman, there is a probability that a Drove or other road passed this way to the camps at Caldron Foot.” In further references in his text, this theory of a second road is tacitly adopted. Jeffrey’s road is definitely pronounced to be “an ancient British Way,” and is called the Drove Road (p. 57). The (Maclauchlan) Roman Way is apparently identified with the Wheel Causeway, and is regarded as a separate line, also running along the Wheel Rigg (p. 58). A reference to “the oblique manner in which the Drove Road runs by the side of the Roman Way for some distance” completes the materials at our disposal for judging what Maclauchlan believed to have been the course of the roads.

Evidently he considers that the two roads, in passing from the head waters of the Jed towards England—for it must be borne in mind that he looks upon them as leading from Scotland into England, not *vice versa*—pursued a parallel course along the top of the ridge known as the Wheel Rigg, there being about 80 yards of an interval between them. On nearing the southern extremity of the ridge the Drove Road swerves to the left and leaves the Wheel Rigg by crossing the Peel Burn at Bagrawford. This, it may be repeated, is the course followed by the

Roman Road of Jeffrey and the Ordnance Map. Maclauchlan's Roman Road, however, which lies to the west of the Drove Road, swerves to the right at the point of divergence, and leaves the Wheel Rigg by crossing the Wormsleugh Burn. This burn, it should be explained, runs along the valley on the west side of the Rigg, while the Peel Burn runs along that on the east side. The following sketch map will make these statements clearer:—



A recent visit to the district failed to furnish any evidence that could support Maclauchlan's hypothesis of a second road.¹ Even the "Drove Road" is now barely traceable at some points of its course. Careful inquiry among the natives established the fact that no tradition of any other road exists. The track which still survives is most commonly known as "the Drove Road." Some had heard it called "the Roman Road." A few of the older people recollected its being spoken of as "the Wheel Causeway." The only person who was familiar with all these names was quite positive that they applied to one and the same

¹ "There are in the line some remains which are called a part of the Catrail or Pict's Dike; but this has no authority beyond tradition." Maclauchlan, p. 57, *note*.

line of road. Maclauchlan's own statement as to the “traces” he discovered is far from confident. Jeffrey, before him, had seen nothing of a second road, nor did the officers of the Ordnance Survey—who cannot be accused of scepticism in matters of this kind—leave any record of such a road upon their map. The balance of evidence, then, is certainly not in favour of the hypothesis of two distinct roads.

Returning now to Jeffrey's theory, we find ourselves face to face with an altogether different question. The existence of the road is undoubted. What we have to ask ourselves is: “What proof is there that it was a Roman road?” The only evidence of any value in such a case, apart from the existence of Roman stations or similar remains close by, is that which can be derived from its construction; and this, we have seen, leads Maclauchlan to pronounce unhesitatingly against its being Roman. In matters of this kind it is perhaps unsafe to be dogmatic, but it may be said at once that the present condition of the road does not justify the conclusion that it was the work of Roman engineers. Owing to the changed circumstances of the country, Jeffrey's “Wheel Causeway” is rapidly disappearing under the natural growth of moorland vegetation. For it is no longer used for communication of any kind. Where its track is still unmistakable, its most characteristic feature is a grass-grown, rounded ridge, somewhere about a yard broad, marking the centre of the road. At one point accident enables us to form a tolerably complete idea of its original structure. On either side of Bagrawford, where the Peel Burn is crossed, the line of the road is the easiest means of ascending the slopes of the valley formed by the brook. Elsewhere the banks are steep. And so the sheep, in passing from one hill to another in search of pasture, still follow the line of the old Drove Road for somewhere about 100 yards. This portion, which is bare of vegetation, exhibits no trace of anything but the most primitive engineering. Large stones of various shapes have evidently been laid down to keep the track solid in wet weather. But there is not much system in the manner they have been arranged, and certainly nothing like the elaborate and regularly constructed causeway which Jeffrey's account would lead one to expect. Yet, so far as one could gather from farmers and shepherds, this was the part of the road that was in most perfect preservation.

One other point requires notice. Jeffrey alludes (p. 248) to "a strong fort" at Bagrawford, and seemingly would have us conclude that the fort was connected with the Wheel Causeway. Maclauchlan makes Jeffrey's "strong fort" a British camp, and places a second camp directly opposite it—the Drove Road passing between them on the southern (or eastern) bank of the Peel Burn, immediately before crossing the ford (p. 58). These he supposes to have been encampments built to defend the passage. It is certainly the case that where the road descends towards the burn, there are on either side of it sundry mounds of earth, which may be artificial. But such a description of the fortifications as we have in Maclauchlan can only be arrived at on the principle of *ex pede Herculem*. So far as present appearances go, these "camps" or "forts" supply no data on which to build positive conclusions as to the history of the Wheel Causeway.

These arguments are in no way intended to call in question the opinion of English archæologists that the Cumberland Maiden Way is Roman, or that the Wheel Causeway at one time led from it into Scotland. In mediæval and later days, when the Maiden Way, like other Roman roads, was in general use, an extension of it into Scotland as a drove road became both useful and necessary; and in this sense it can be freely admitted that the one road was a continuation of the other. But the evidence before us seems to forbid any definite statement as to their having formed part of one system constructed in Roman times.