

## Report on Field Studies

The search for evidence of Roman penetration into Ayrshire continues. We print interim reports of work in two places in the County. The first, by MR. JOHN CLARKE, tells of the attempt made by him and MR. ALLAN WILSON to extend the Nithsdale route into Ayrshire.

### THE NITHSDALE ROAD

Under the auspices of Glasgow University and with financial support from the University and from the Mouswald Trust, a limited amount of field work has been done during the last two seasons (1959, 1960) on the possibility of a Roman penetration of Ayrshire by way of Nithsdale. No clue existed in tradition or obvious surface remains, unless indeed the suspiciously long straight stretches of modern road, in the main conforming with earlier roads of the eighteenth century, provided such a clue, as Dr. R. C. Reid had suggested. It was from that suggestion that the present work began. Opportunity is taken to express appreciation of the interest and help of officials and members of the Ayrshire Society in that part of the work which lay within their territory.

Very briefly the results so far are as follows. Evidence was found of an ancient road, in places with the substantial bottoming of a Roman road, linking the crossing of the river Ayr at the old ford a quarter of a mile east of the Haugh, Mauchline (NS 504254), and a similar ford over the Cessnock, immediately west of the bridge by which the modern road crosses the river north of Bargower (NS 477329). This road was quite distinct at critical points from any recorded road. Though it was clearly ancient, no conclusive proof was obtained of its Roman origin, nor can any conclusive proof be forthcoming except by the discovery of demonstrably Roman structures associated with its line. Hope that such proof might be obtained on a site immediately south of the Ayr ford was dashed this summer. Though air photography vaguely suggested a structure of the Roman fortlet type, and though there appeared surface indications of an associated road, both the suggestion and the appearance proved false. This negative evidence does not, however, impugn the general possibility. It refers only to this suspected site.

The other main focus of exploration lay at Bankhead, Kirkconnel, where Dr. St. Joseph had some years ago obtained a glimpse of a possible fortlet from the air. This site was identified by excavation and found to be a structure of the fortlet type, closely similar in size and form of defences to the known fortlets of the Antonine period at Durisdeer and at Milton in Annandale. It was connected to a road which ran past its gate. Strangely, however, though the fortlet bears every mark of Roman origin in its form and size, no relics of occupation whatever have been found despite fairly extensive search.

Thus a curious situation exists which further work alone can clarify. The Bankhead fortlet and the road which it served seem to speak of an extension of the Roman road system from the Durisdeer-Carronbridge area up Nithsdale. The goal of that extension could only be a point in Ayrshire. We have, between the Ayr and the Cessnock, an ancient road which would fit with Nithsdale and imply a junction with a road westwards from Loudoun Hill, somewhere near Hurlford. If such a line was in use, the existence of at least one and possibly two larger forts would be necessary along it. We have no clue either to the position of these, nor any clear knowledge of the line between Kirkconnel and the Ayr. But we cannot be sure, in the absence of evidence of occupation at Bankhead, that this line ever was in use; it may only have been projected. More than that one cannot at the moment say. Though a certain amount of survey has been done between the Cumnocks and Kirkconnel, there is as yet no definite evidence.

A fuller report is contained in the *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, 1958-59.

### AN OLD ROAD IN LOUDOUN PARISH

In 1960 MR. THOMAS A. HENDRY and DR. JOHN STRAWHORN began a new search for a Roman road leading westwards from the Loudounhill Fort, in the course of which a length of old road of uncertain origin was discovered. They report:—

The possibility of a Roman road extending westwards from the Roman fort near Loudounhill towards the Firth of Clyde was suggested two centuries ago by General Roy, who considered Ayr a likely terminus. More recently Dr. St. Joseph, after his



excavations at Loudoun Hill, confirmed the likelihood of such a road, possibly leading down the Valley towards Irvine. But no trace of such a road was found by local investigators; nor of the "Makyrnokis Way," mentioned in Dunbar's *The Bruce*, a mediaeval routeway westward from the Loudoun Hill area. See Ayrshire Notes in the *Kilmarnock Standard*, 1944.

It seemed to us unlikely that the road had followed the difficult and dangerous route down the Valley bottom. Of the sides of the Valley the north seemed more promising from the topographical point of view, and this choice was strengthened by the Galston minister who noted in the *New Statistical Account* (1837) "a Roman military way which may still be traced on the opposite side of the Irvine."

A second assumption was made that a route following the north side of the Valley would presumably pass north of Newmilns somewhere on the two-field-broad shelf halfway up the Valley side.

An intensive search was commenced in the area lying between Clearmount and Dalwhatswood farms, and here, after some excavation, was found a stretch of old roadway whose existence was unknown even to the local farmers. Attempts were made to trace possible extensions west beyond Loudoun Castle and east towards the Glen Water and Loudoun Hill, but results were inconclusive. Attention was then focussed on a closer examination of the road which had been found.

In construction it is substantial. A layer of closely-fitted undressed stones, set upon the natural clay, between kerbs of larger boulders, forms the base. A fine layer of smaller stones and gravel removes unevenness and produces a compact surface which at several points suggests a slight camber. In none of the parts exposed was any evidence of ditches traceable. The average breadth of the road is approximately twelve feet.

The road comes from the eastern end of Dalwhatswood farm land, crosses a field from which the farmer had once lifted "cartloads of stones," appears in a plantation (NS 536381), and can be traced passing along a shelterbelt over a length of 90 yards. Some 300 yards further on it reappears, with a sharp turn to the right to avoid the precipitous side of a gully and make an upstream crossing. It would seem to descend, after making the second turn of its Z-bend, to a ford-crossing of the Hougenecraig Burn (NS 532382). Beyond this a stretch of roadway comes up from the burn through a cutting.

A track from this ford towards Clearmount Farm appears on the six-inch O.S. Map, but of the entire newly-discovered stretch of road between the two points whose references are given above, nothing is shown on any modern or earlier maps, and only what may be the road corner is marked on the manuscript Loudoun Estate Plans (1806). This old road, then, whether a short stretch linking Clearmount and Dalwhatswood Farms, or part of a longer route, seems to have gone out of use before 1806. How much older it may be it is as yet impossible to state.

#### RECENT FINDS

Stone Axe Head: Symington, NS 3731. Polished stone axe head  $6\frac{1}{2}$  ins. long by  $2\frac{1}{4}$  ins. wide, with rounded butt and squared sides found in the garden of Townend, Symington.

*Discovery and Excavation*, 1959.

Stone Axe Head: Darvel, NS 568380. Axe head with smooth surface, neolithic type, found in garden at Hutcheson Drive, Darvel, 1960; now in Dick Institute, Kilmarnock.

Cinerary Urns: Girvan, NS 1997. In April, 1961, during housing developments at Claypots, Girvan, two cinerary urns were unearthed. First reports speak of these as remarkable, and it is hoped to publish full details in a future volume once these finds have been studied.

Hoard of Coins: Beith, NS 377505. A hoard of 19 Scottish coins mostly of the reign of James IV, presumed buried in the late 1570's, was unearthed by plough on 7th March, 1958, at Mains of Giffen, Beith.

*Proc. Soc. Antiquaries of Scotland*, 1957-8.

Peden's Tombstone: Cumnock, NS 569204. In October, 1960, when the plot of ground around Peden's Monument in Cumnock Old Graveyard was being tidied, under six inches of turf was discovered a hitherto-unrecorded horizontal slab inscribed:—

"Here lies Alexander Peathine, faithful minister of the Gospel, sometime of Glenluce, who departed this mortal life on 26th January, 1686, and was raised after six weeks out of the grave and buried here out of contempt. *Memento Mori.*"

A small upright tombstone, beside which the Monument was erected in 1892, has been regarded as the earliest memorial. It is surprising that the horizontal slab has never been noticed, but its considerable age is obvious from the fact that it was at one point overgrown by the thick roots of Peden's Thorn, a tree estimated at well over a century old.

According to tradition, when Peden died he was buried secretly at Auchinleck. Six weeks later the body was raised by his enemies and taken to be hanged on the Gallows Hill at Cumnock. This intention being thwarted, the body was reinterred at that spot. Beside it in the 18th century was formed a graveyard when road development put out of commission the original burying ground round the parish kirk. Theory has it that soon after Peden's reinterment, the spot was surreptitiously marked by his friends with the slab which has now come to light.

See *Cumnock Chronicle*, 14th and 28th October, 1960.

Gravestone : Whitlets, NS 358228. A solitary gravestone was found in 1960 in ground behind the row of new shops in Whitlets. On the chart of the Master of Works the building area is named "Padanaran"—which is a Biblical name. During building operations the stone was removed from a hole in which there was a large rectangular stone and also a smaller rectangular stone with a hole in the centre as if to hold an upright. The gravestone was 2 ft. 4 ins. in height, 1 ft. 10 ins. in breadth, with an arched top. It bore the following inscription (with the letters in brackets conjectured):—

"Here lays The Corps of Jenat Maskimmen Spous to  
Thomas Mcom who daied July 14 1765 as Also James and  
Hugh Me(om) Chil(dren)."

From Rev. Archibald Mackenzie.

Cheese Press : Beith, NS 3750. A cheese press, not in its original position, is set up in the garden of Mains of Giffen.

*Discovery and Excavation*, 1960.

Sundial : Beith. An old sundial from Giffen Castle, Beith, reported in Dobie's edition of Pont is now located at Craigbet, Renfrewshire.

*Discovery and Excavation*, 1959.