

THE
DANE'S PAD
A
ROMAN ROAD TO NOWHERE?

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Introduction.

The Ordnance Survey's map of Roman Britain uses double unbroken lines to denote accepted courses of roads, whereas double dotted lines indicate uncertain routes. Among the latter in the North West are roads linking well-established forts or settlements at Lancaster, Walton-le-Dale, Ribchester, Wigan and Manchester.

In such a context, it may seem a little surprising that a road is shown on the map in unbroken lines running west through the Fylde from the fort at Kirkham, then curving north-westerly before ending without reaching, or appearing to be heading towards, an obvious destination. This becomes more remarkable when it is learnt that the very existence of this road, generally known as the Danes' Pad, has been the subject of debate amongst local historians for more than 60 years.

It is well over a century since W. Thompson Watkin, in his book, *Roman Lancashire*, recounted the evidence for the Danes' Pad given by antiquarians during the previous hundred years. As the subject continues to give rise to interest, opinions and conjecture, a modern detailed treatment is overdue.

This book will hopefully arm those interested in the subject with the information necessary for them to investigate it further without having to search through obscure volumes. Wherever possible the early sources have been quoted at length, in order to maintain their context and avoid misunderstandings. Although this may have led to some pedantry, it has been thought necessary as understanding of the subject depends very much on the interpretation of what was actually said to have been observed.

Ted Lightbown,
August 1996.

The Historical Background.

Antiquarian Antics.

Antiquarian speculation about Roman roads in the western Fylde had its dubious origins in the publication by Bertram and Stukeley of the *Itinerary of Richard of Cirencester* in 1755.

William Stukeley (1687-1765) was a well known antiquary whose enthusiasm for ancient Britain had earned him the nickname “the Arch-druid”; he even had a replica henge in his grounds. It is still “discovered” from time to time. One of his stranger notions was that the Romans had been divinely inspired to build their roads “for the naked feet of the apostles”!

Charles Bertram, a professor of English in Copenhagen, had persuaded Stukeley that the itinerary in his possession had been copied by Richard, a 14th century monk, from original Roman documents. To quote from Stukeley's book *A Medallic History of Carausius* of 1757:

—
“Our writers scarce knew, that the Romans had conquered this country, till Richard de Cirencester's manuscript was brought to light. I have induced my friend, the owner of it, at Copenhagen, to print it. It gives more light into Roman Britain than any thing we have yet seen.”

Among the routes described in the itinerary was one crossing the country west to east, from “the port of the Sistuntians to Eboracum [York]”. From then on, practically every history of Lancashire, or a part of it, included a discourse on some aspect of the itinerary, the most popular being the location of the port at the western end of the route.

A hundred years was to pass before Richard's work was generally acknowledged to have been a forgery based upon Ptolemy's Geography and other itineraries. During that time it had caused a great deal of damage and confusion.

In 1837, Rev. William Thornber (1803-85) in his *History of Blackpool and its Neighbourhood* argued that there was no evidence to support the conclusion of Rev. John Whitaker (*History of Manchester*, 1775) and of his son Dr. T. D. Whitaker (*History of Richmondshire*, 1823) that the Portus Setantiorum had been on the Ribble at Freckleton Naze. Instead, he suggested that it had stood on the Wyre and maintained that:—

‘The vestiges of an agger, immemorially called the “Danes' Pad”, from the tradition that along it those plunderers penetrated into these parts is yet so distinctly discernable on the Warren near the mouth of the Wyre, at Staining and the low moss lands near Mythorp, that Dr. Whitaker is constrained to admit there was a branch from the great Roman road to this port.’

For the record, Thornber's had not been the first written mention of ‘Danes' Pad’; Edward Baines had used the term on page 377 of his *History of Lancashire*, published just one year earlier.

Victorian Rationalism.

In the early 1840s, William Thornber convinced John Just, a Bury schoolmaster with a great

interest in Roman roads, and the officers of the Ordnance Survey, then preparing the first six inch to the mile map of the area, that there were traces of the road to be seen in several places. These were duly represented on the map, being indicated by double lines. Elsewhere, the assumed course of the road was shown by a single dotted line.

The founding of the Historic Society for Lancashire and Cheshire in 1848 appears to have stimulated antiquarian research in the area, for in 1851 papers by Thornber, Just and Langton Birley, describing the Danes' Pad, were read and published. Ironically, John Just's paper is followed in the transactions by a letter from J. Robson expressing doubt about the authenticity of Richard's itinerary.

A Storm in Any Port.

The itinerary was finally shown to have been forged by Bertram in an article by B. B. Woodward for the *Gentlemen's Magazine* of 1866-7. By that time, the realisation that it was a fake had little effect on the case for the road through the Fylde for, after all, traces of it had been found. In any case, Portus Setantiorum, the Danes Pad's assumed *raison d'être*, was still mentioned in Ptolemy's list of co-ordinates, which, however inaccurate, placed it somewhere on the north west coast of Britain — and the Wyre was as good a place as any.

Several attempts were made to compensate for the distortions and errors in Ptolemy's coordinates, and thereby determine the true location of the Portus, using quite elaborate techniques. Somehow, these usually managed fortuitously to place the harbour where each antiquary-cum-mathematician had thought it had been in the first place, which also tended to be near each one's particular area of interest. A full account of the arguments for the positioning of the Portus may be found in the first chapter of Hardwick's *History of Preston*, 1857, and a good example of the application of mathematics to the problem is in Stan Jones' *Was Lancaster Camelot?*, 1992.

Thornber thought that the Roman harbour had been on the Wyre in the area of Stanah or Skippool. John Porter, however, in his *History of the Fylde* of 1876, used Thornber's evidence, the interpretation of Ptolemy's co-ordinates and assumptions about the coastline in Roman times to advance a theory that placed the harbour out beyond North Wharf sand bank, north of Fleetwood.

Despite being highly speculative, Porter's theory has held sway in the popular mind ever since, being helped, no doubt, by his book's popularity and accessibility. And, once the Portus is accepted as having been at the mouth of the Wyre, it follows that the Danes' Pad must have existed in order to reach it. But many supporters of Porter's theory will readily turn this argument around and assert that the Portus must have been at Fleetwood, because that is where the Danes' Pad leads.

A similar circular argument says that Portus Setantiorum must have been in the Fylde, because the Setantii are known to have inhabited the region. Yet, despite all that has been written about the Setantii and their way of life (usually based upon etymology and the attributes of the Brigantes), the only mention of such a tribe to come down from antiquity is in the single co-ordinate given by Ptolemy.

Modern Scepticism.

Antiquarianism in the Fylde was given its own monument in 1937 with the publication of *Amounderness* — the report of the Fylde Region Joint Town Planning Advisory Committee. This lavish and pretentious book, published by Batsford for the consultants Thomas Mawson and Son, might be imagined to have concerned itself just with the present and future of the Fylde. Instead, it happily and uncritically recounted Porter's theory, John Just's description of the Danes' Pad and much local history, some little more than folk-lore.

The book's official appearance gave credence and authority to much of its content. It now commands high prices and no doubt has many of its purchasers hanging on its words (excluding, perhaps, its recommendations for sea-plane bases). To give an objective assessment of *Amounderness*, it is necessary only to quote the late well-respected local historian, Hugh Sherdley of Pilling, who, when asked his opinion of it during a night-school class he was conducting, replied "It's a load of rubbish".

In fairness, Mawson did publish an alternative view of the Danes' Pad, in the form of a letter written to him in January 1934 by J. Burrows of Poulton, the Local Representative of the

(Opposite page) A map of the British Isles constructed from co-ordinates given by the Alexandrian geographer, Claudius Ptolemy (c. 90-168 A. D.). The proximity of 'Harbour of the Setantii' to 'Moricambe Estuary' offers no real clue to the location of the former, for the modern Morecambe Bay is thought to have been named after Ptolemy's place-name by the topographer, William Camden (1551-1623). A bay on the Solway Firth was similarly named in post-medieval times.



Ancient Monuments Board. It states:—

“With regard to the Dane's Pad, the only evidence that exists, relates to a raised path, probably of neolithic age, which stretched in Porter's days from near Weeton Railway Bridge across the valley of the Main Dyke to Mythop. It has long since vanished. . . .

“All the rest of the ‘Roman Road’ from Ribchester to Poulton rests on the imaginative accounts of Just and Thornber, both of whom were without any status as observers. The rest of the ‘authorities’ are mere quoters from Thornber.

“The late Mr. Clemesha and I actually walked over the whole of the alleged route, armed with the six inch Ordnance Survey Map, and nowhere found the slightest resemblance on or under the ground of a paved road. My finds at Kirkham have no relevance.”

Burrows and Clemesha had examined the route prior to 1924 and had come “to the definite conclusion that such a road never existed”. They had apparently then persuaded the Ordnance Survey to give “an intimation that the road will not appear on future maps”.

Ironically, after many years absence from one inch O.S. Maps, the Danes' Pad has found its way back on to the latest metric equivalent map.

In February 1937 a letter by Reginald Sharpe France, the Records Secretary and founder of the (Blackpool &) Fylde Historical Society and later Lancashire's first County Archivist, appeared in the *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*. It was mainly concerned with the supposed lost coastal village of Singleton Thorp, but included the following paragraph:—

“It is obvious, to take the most charitable view, that the Rev. William Thornber, B. A. was an incurable romantic (the Danes' Pad is also to be debited to him), and that he has misled many thousands of people, either directly or indirectly, through his fairy tales having been copied into other books.”

To take the most charitable view of Sharpe France's letter, its arrogant tone aside, the criticism of Thornber is almost entirely unjustified. Earlier sources can be found for practically everything for which Thornber has been pilloried by subsequent writers. In the case of Singleton Thorp and Waddum Thorp, he had apparently relied upon Peter Whittle (*Marina*, 1831) for his basic information. Contrary to what might be expected from an “incurable romantic”, examples of caution and candour will be found among Thornber's writings in this book.

Clearly, to be able to assess the subject objectively, it will be necessary to examine the evidence in detail. To do this, it is proposed to trace the course of the Danes' Pad westwards from Kirkham.

The Route, Part 1.

Base Camp.

In the late 1950s and early 60s, excavations were carried out at Carr Hill, Kirkham. They confirmed what had long been suspected from various finds over the years, that there had been a Roman fort there. It was only in 1980 that some of the results of the digs were published, in the late F. J. Singleton's short history of Kirkham. In 1994 an excavation conducted by Lancaster University revealed the ramparts of the fort.

The Romans' need for this fort can only be guessed at. However, as Frank Singleton pointed out, it would have had a commanding view of the Ribble. If Freckleton Marsh had then been covered by the river, its bank would have been much closer to the fort, making it another possible choice for *Portus Setantiorum*.

In Roman times, the fort at Kirkham would have been reached by the well attested road from Ribchester via Fulwood, Lea and Lund, referred to in medieval documents as “*magnam stratam*” and “*Wattelingestrete*”. There is, then, every reason to believe that a road existed as far west as the fort and no reason to dwell on it further.

Getting to the route of the problem.

During the excavations in 1963, a narrow cobbled road was uncovered at a depth of two feet, leading from the presumed position of the west gate of the fort. It had been detected by the late Alan McLerie of Poulton, using a probe. It was photographed by the County Archaeologist, Ben Edwards, but its course was not followed for any great distance.

To proceed further west, we must turn to Thornber's paper to the Historic Society in 1851:—

“I had many a weary travel to find traces of the agger near the town. It is astonishing what pavements are discovered branching towards the north west, some of them sunk very deep in the ground.”

He ascertained that the “causeway” ran from the fort “nearly down the present street, crossing, rather nearer the church, a stream at that time, now a deep channel called the Skipbourne”. John Just, about the same time, remarked that “nearly the whole length of the long street of Kirkham is upon the Roman Road or in near proximity to it”.

According to Thornber, the road then continued “to the site on which stands the present Poorhouse, where you know it was discovered”. He was referring to the second workhouse in Kirkham, on the site of the present Health Centre, Moor Street. This is supported by R. Cunliffe Shaw, who stated in his book *Kirkham in Amounderness*, 1949, that his father had told him “many years ago that he had seen this portion of the Roman road exposed during the trenching in the old Workhouse grounds”. He had said that it had “a hard gravel surface about 25 feet wide and was kerbed with cobblestones; a horse-shoe was found in the gravel . . . similar to the Roman type”.

Cunliffe Shaw went on to mention that the farmer of Avenham Hall, Singleton, had claimed to have often cut through the hard surface of the road during draining operations and that it headed in the direction of the Wyre near Mains Hall, being well recognised by the farmers as the “Danes Pad”. Cunliffe Shaw admitted that this was well off the line traced by the

Ordnance Survey and antiquarians.

The remains, if they existed, were presumably those of a different road. If only to avoid confusion, the term Danes' Pad should be taken to apply only to the feature described by Just and Thornber across Weeton Moss near Mythop, or to a projection of it. Thornber, himself, did not help matters by suggesting that a wooden "trackway" north of the Wyre, which he had earlier called Kate's Pad, should also be called Danes' Pad. It was then thought to be Roman, but radio-carbon dating has since shown it to be Bronze Age.

Returning again to Kirkham and Thornber, he next writes "Before I was aware of its being here, the name of Wrangway - bridge, which is thrown over the Dow in its vicinity, had led me to expect to find the agger near it". It is not clear why this should have been expected, either from the bridge's name, which derives from the Old Norse for "crooked", or from its location, which seems too far to the north.

He continues: "A little farther a section of it is to be seen in the stunted oak field, the property of a Mrs. Moon: the tree grows upon it. I cannot tell how we missed the spot when I pointed out the line of the road to Mr. Just and the officers of the Survey". The present writer has failed to locate this field using the 1851 Census Returns for Kirkham and the Tithe Schedules of 1837.

Thornber next states: "From this field stretching up Ribby Brow, anciently written Rigeby, the town on the ridge, I discovered it from the circumstance of a farmer carting away a coarse red sand opposite Tarn-brick-farm-yard gate. On enquiry, I found that he had been in the habit of taking away its materials for years, as it formed a *ridge* on one side, the left, of the highway." None of this seems significant as red sand is apparently quite common in the Kirkham area. However, the linking of the name "Ribby" with the word "ridge" is supported by the etymologist, Ekwall.

From this point to near Westby Mill, John Just thought that the Roman road coincided with the line of the main Preston to Blackpool highway. He stated that numerous Roman remains could be detected all along the side of the modern road. It is here that its supposed line commences on the first six inch O.S. map.

The highway to Blackpool has undergone many changes since then. In 1913 it had to be diverted at Westby to allow for the construction of the reservoir, and a roadside inn, the Clifton Arms, had to be demolished. Part of the old route can be seen beyond Whinbrick cottages, where it survives as a track to the reservoir. It re-emerges on the west near Westby Catholic Church.

Two windmills once stood on the site of the reservoir, one surviving into the 1870s. On the first six inch O.S. map, before the latter is reached the old highway turns a little to the south, whereas the supposed line of the Danes' Pad is made to carry on to the windmill where it veers to the north-west. John Just thought that he could see traces of the Roman road at Westby Mill Hill, but neither Mr. Hall of the Ordnance Survey nor Thornber would vouch for these "as the nature of the ground is gravelly and the signs of an agger doubtful". Nevertheless, Thornber was convinced that the road ran there and added that an old man named Segar had claimed to have "ploughed through it many times and off".

The 19th century antiquaries had little to say about the section between Westby and Weeton. Margary's book *Roman Roads in Britain*, of 1955, mentions it "just east of Great Plumpton, where the agger, 1 to 2 feet high, is clearly seen crossing a meadow towards the railway". No grid reference is given and, as far as can be determined, no writer has previously mentioned this feature, which seems strange. Philip Graystone in his book *Walking Roman Roads in the Fylde and the Ribble Valley*, published in 1996, associates the feature with a ridge visible in a field north of "Oakfield Farm", heading north-west towards the site of the former excursion railway line from Kirkham to Blackpool Central. Graystone's vague description appears to relate to one of several hummocky fields to the north of Great Plumpton. The fields to the east of the village have reportedly been re-levelled in recent years.

Thornber (1851) does mention traces of the road in Weeton, and his words are recorded here to assist in locating the spot:-

"If we meet with the road before we arrive at Thomas Jolly's, Weeton . . . it is in a cop in the hollow before you rise the hill to his house, but I insist not on it . . ."

Thornber may not have been a complete romantic, but he could certainly be vague and obscure. Once again, it has not been possible to identify the spot to which he was referring.

In for a dig.

Moving beyond Weeton, at last a stretch is reached that has been the subject of modern professional archaeology. In the early 1970s, before work was due to begin on the M55 motorway, a team from Manchester University's Department of Archaeology cut a section across the assumed line of the Danes' Pad where the line of the motorway was to cross it.

According to a report typed by the late Alan McLerie of the (Blackpool &) Fylde Historical Society, presumably based upon information obtained from Prof. G. B. D. Jones of the University, two trenches were cut across the road alignment at grid reference SD377342. They showed that the line of the road lay some 30 metres to the west of that suggested on the six inch O.S. maps. In both sections the actual road surface had been heavily damaged by modern ploughing, as the core of the road lay only 25cms below the topsoil. However, the existence of the road was shown by the presence of a clay platform some 5.2 metres wide by 25-30cms thick, resting on the natural dark-brown clay. The clay spread of the road platform was, by contrast, yellow-brown and terminated in two side ditches, which in the best preserved section (trench 2.) were nearly one metre across. In both side ditches, and particularly on the western (lower) side, the ditch sump was filled with silted gravel washed down from the original road surface. The same features were found in trench 1., where the clay platform for the road had suffered considerable damage from ploughing. The method of construction was taken to show the way in which Roman road engineers adopted local clays as a substitute for stone foundations in an area with no surface stone readily available.

If the grid reference quoted by McLerie is correct, the trenches were in fact positioned about 100 metres west of the assumed line and some 200 metres north of the line of the M55. More worrying, though, the site is uncomfortably close to that of a short farm track shown on the first six inch O.S. map of the area. Is it possible that the archaeologists were attracted to visible remains of this track?

Crossing Weeton Moss.

Any road into the western Fylde must at some stage cross a long peat-laden valley. Following what is prosaically called the Main Dyke upstream, it winds south from the Wyre at Skippool before opening out in the Ballam and Marton Moss area. It is thought to have been a melt-water drainage channel at the end of the last ice age and the peat along its length formed within the last 7,000 years.

Across the part of the valley known as Weeton Moss, an embankment of gravel was visible at least until the end of the 19th century. It was generally taken to have been a Roman road.

Thornber was by no means the first person to write about this feature, for as early as 1823, Dr. T. D. Whitaker in his *History of Richmondshire* stated:—

“About three miles south of the town of Poulton, the agger of a Roman Road was distinctly visible till within the last ten or twelve years, since which time immense quantities of gravel have been conveyed away for repairs of the roads and garden walks.”

This ties in well with Thornber's assertion in 1851 that he remembered, when a boy, how it was impressed upon Whitaker by Mr. Wilson of Poulton that tradition had handed it down that an agger ran from Ribchester to the Wyre. About “ten years or twelve years” before 1823, Thornber would still have been a pupil at the school of which Mr. Wilson was the master. It would seem that Whitaker had based his account upon information supplied to him by Mr. Wilson.

In 1851, Thornber described the Weeton Moss section as follows:—

“... we here crossing the highway to Mythorp and a valley, have a sight of the highest ridge on the whole line, indeed so large and bulky as well worthy of the skill of a railway contractor; there it is, though diminishing yearly to supply gravel for the township highways to the neglect of the open pits out of which it was constructed. It is called the Danes'-pad, and its hardness has given rise to the proverb, as hard as the Danes'-pad. These pirates, no doubt from Wyre, made their inroads along its path, and their cruelty and sojourn is so well remembered by tradition in the Fylde, that every remain of antiquity is pronounced Danish.”

Being so clearly visible, this stretch of the Danes' Pad is the first to be “double-lined” on the first six inch O.S. map. John Just noted that the gravel here seemed to have been brought from the debris of some river. However, it should be mentioned that there are several natural outcrops of gravel in the higher ground surrounding Weeton Moss, as evidenced by field names like Gravel Hill.

Writing about the feature in 1837, Thornber did not remark on its size, merely stating that from “Green-lane-end” it ran across the Water Course and the “Cowland” before passing over “Fluthorns” and “Six-acres”. Oddly, the fields to which these names are thought to relate all bear other names in the Weeton-with-Preese Tithe Award of 1840 (Carr, Hawthorne and Marled Field). He then went on to say that “its line in these fields and meadows was easily traced not many years ago”, which seems at odds with his remarks in 1851, above.

Watkin wrote that he “can vouch for the existence of this fragment until March, 1881, but

comparatively [a?] little reduced in size". Indeed, in February 1895 the *Blackpool*

(Opposite page) Something of the feature across Weeton Moss did survive to be photographed in 1945. On this vertical aerial view a lighter "stained" area in a field corresponds well to the "double-lined" section on the map (compare with page 21). The "stain" probably results from a preponderance of gravel in the otherwise dark peaty soil.



Gazette & News reported:—

“Thomas Miller of Singleton has given instruction that the portion of the (Roman) road through the Fylde which runs through Weeton Moss, and is one of the best specimens in the county, is to be strictly preserved and no more gravel is to be taken from it.”

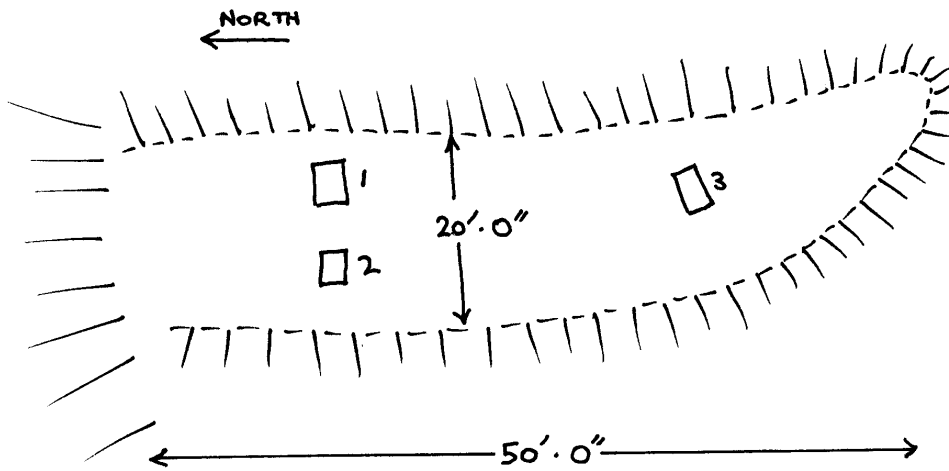
Mr. Miller's instructions were obviously ignored for, today, little or nothing is to be seen.

Getting in another dig.

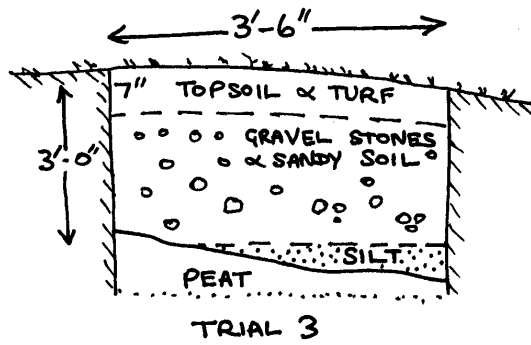
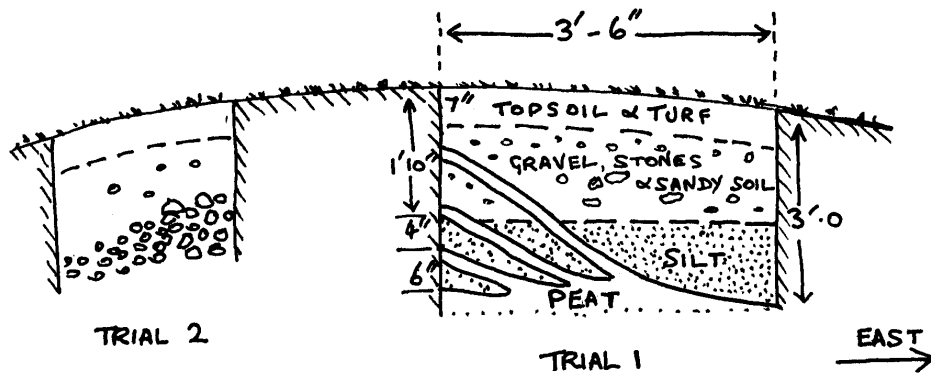
In 1984, the (Blackpool &) Fylde Historical Society had obtained permission from the farmer of Mythop Hall to examine his land. To the south-east of the farm, just north of a dyke (grid reference SD372349), a small ridge was noticed in an otherwise flat field. Along the ridge, which followed the still double line of the Danes' Pad on the map, the soil was very stony, contrasting with the soft peaty soil elsewhere in the field.

On 16th August 1984, a team comprising members of the Preston & District Archaeological Society, led by Jack Ainsworth, and members of the (Blackpool &) Fylde Historical Society, led by the late Frank Gardner, a keen amateur archaeologist, dug trial holes into the ridge to determine its composition. Despite the crude way in which the dig was carried out, it did produce some interesting results. Mr. Ainsworth described what he had seen as follows (*The sketches opposite are based upon his section drawings.*):—

“The excavations revealed that the ridge (50ft. long, 20 ft. wide and 3 to 4 ft. high) consisted of about 7 inches of topsoil and turf on a heavy concentration of gravel, stones and silt on a bed of peat at about 3 feet below the surface, with rising bands of peaty deposits containing leaves, twigs, seeds and the remains of grasses and rushes indicating that the ridge had been the edge of an ancient lagoon which had advanced three times.



NOT TO SCALE



There was no evidence of man made construction in the gravel deposits.”

What were they looking at?

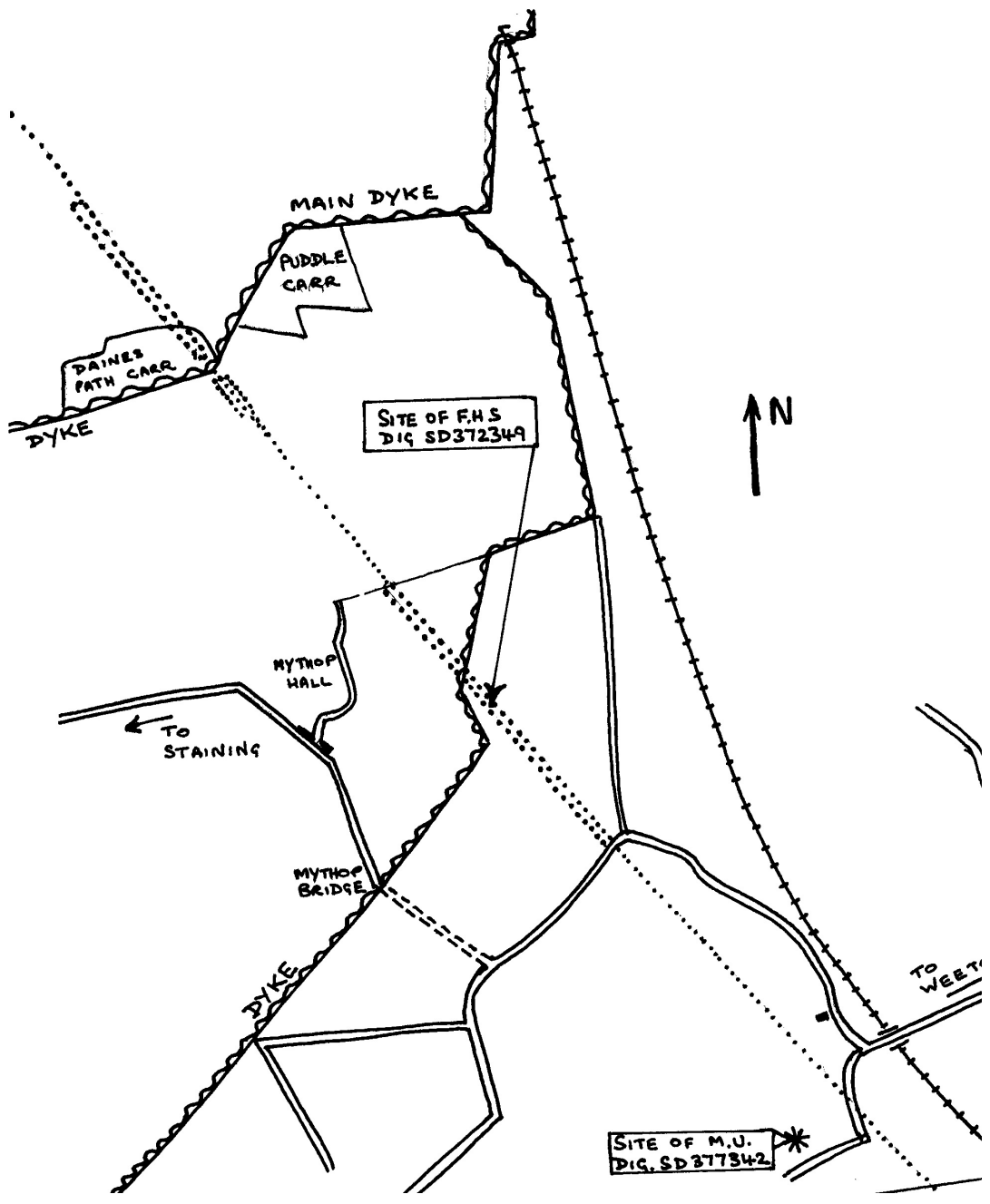
This interpretation of the findings does not preclude the possibility that a road across Weeton Moss created an artificial bank for a lake formed there at some subsequent period. Alternatively, a road may have avoided an existing mere by skirting its shore or may have used the remaining hard pebbled shore of a former lake or river as its foundation at this point.

Interestingly, on Yates's map of 1786 the northern edge of Weeton Moss is shown in this vicinity, suggesting that the feature then formed a boundary. The O.S. map of 1845 shows that the Moss had by then receded much further south, although the highway from Weeton to Mythop was still shown by dotted lines across the low ground, where today it is on an embankment.

In 1731 and 1741 the size of Marton Mere, to the west, was drastically reduced by the cutting or enlargement of the Main Dyke north of Mythop and, to judge from the depth of the cutting in parts, it must have been a major undertaking. It was effected by Edward Jolly of Mythop and later by William Jolly, as detailed by R. Sharpe France in the first transactions of the Fylde Historical Society in 1940. As the Main Dyke goes on to flow through the valley of Weeton Moss, it is likely that the drainage of the Moss north of the Danes' Pad also dates from this time.

Is it possible that the Danes' Pad was constructed by the Jolly's to facilitate access to the dyke while the work was proceeding? Alternatively, it could have been built about this time to link Weeton and Staining, thus avoiding Chain Lane, shown as a private road on the 1845 map, with “Mythorp Toll Gate” just north of Thatchplatt Bridge over the Main Dyke. Later ownership of the land may have precluded its use as a road.

(Opposite page) The line of the Danes' Pad shown against the lanes, tracks and watercourses of Weeton Moss in the mid-19th century.



Interestingly, early in 1996 two Roman coins were found by metal detector in the field immediately to the north-west of the above mentioned bridge. This is well to the west of the line of the Danes' Pad and the field would have once formed the bed of Marton Mere. The coins had probably been thrown in.

Accepting that the Danes' Pad once formed a sizeable embankment over Weeton Moss, it is strange that field boundaries take no account of it. This could be taken as meaning that the road was constructed after the fields had been marked out following the draining of the moss. However, there is still the possibility that, after the field boundaries had been drawn up, drainage caused the land to shrink, revealing a much older feature. Peat-cutting might have produced a similar result.

The Route, Part 2.

Down in the Valley.

Following the Danes' Pad further on the six inch O.S. map of 1845, it passes to the east of Mythop Hall, where its line becomes single once more as it reaches the high ground. Members of the (Blackpool &) Fylde Historical Society dug trial holes in this area in 1984, but found nothing. As the line continues into the next valley, it again becomes double before terminating abruptly just south of the Main Dyke. However, it re-emerges north of the dyke, double-lined and still on the same north-westerly alignment as the Weeton Moss section. Here it clips the eastern corner of a field called "Daines Path Carr" in the Hardhorn-with-Newton Tithe Award of 1838.

It would be nice to be able to regard this as solid folk-lore evidence for the Roman road. But it does seem strange that Thornber, who seems to have been fond of quoting field names, should not have mentioned this one, out of all of them! By 1838, the farmer is likely to have known about Thornber's explanation of the feature in the field, either directly or through his *History of Blackpool*. Unfortunately, publication contaminates tradition and there now seems no means of proving that the field was not given its name at this time.

Thornber had written in 1837 that, going south, the road "crosses the 'Main Dyke', in the cutting of which its materials were particularly observable; thence it stretches across 'Puddle-carr', where it lies on the moss to the depth of two yards in gravel". Although the Tithe map shows Puddle Carr to be south of the dyke, it lies about 250 metres to the north-east of where the Danes' Pad crosses the dyke on the O.S. map. Once again Thornber's description can be seen to be misleading or confused. It may be significant that he had a drink-problem, through which he was forced to resign his living a few years later.

Fortunately, his account of 1851 is more coherent:—

"After passing over the next hill from Weeton, we behold the agger crossing another valley, through which a 'main dyke' has been cut, bisecting the road. We are now near Benson's Farm, Staining, in the Parish of Poulton, and not far from its Mere, generally known by the name of Marton Mere, where on the cutting of the above mentioned dyke, the waters left bare a brass celt, two skin boats, and a skin cap without a seam. These the Rev. Mr. Buck inspected in Poulton. Many shoes and pieces of iron have been taken yearly out of the causeway here, as its materials, land gravel, are carted away for the repair of the highways. I have measured it and found its breadth at the crown about twelve yards and its base twenty, whereas on the sound land it is not more than eight or ten yards. There are no signs of ruts — and I doubt whether any wheeled carriage was used thereon — whilst I can prove that sledges were; for as we walk up to the farm-house and look at the oak-posts at the first gate, we may see the sides of a sledge which were dug out of the agger."

Watkin wrote that the gravel here was two yards in thickness as late as 1880. Yet, on the first 25 inch map, produced 12 years later, the road here was represented by just a single dotted line.

John Just, tracing the route south from Poulton in 1851, wrote:—

“But having got over the higher ground and come to a part of the flats of the Fylde district, we meet with striking remains of the road on the turfy grounds where it has been piled up in an immense bank or agger; and serves as it has done for years past, as a gravel bank for getting materials to mend and keep in repair the common roads of the country. Across this mossy flat the line is very distinct, and as therein ditches separate the fields in lieu of fences, frequent sections of the road are made particularly by the water-cuts made for the drainage of the district, some years ago. On the higher grounds the whole line has long been obliterated, and we are not favoured with any other evidences of the course it has taken, until we again detect it in a low hollow, towards Weeton Moss, which has not come within the general influence of the drainage just mentioned. Here is an immense embankment of several yards in height, its base standing in the water which cannot get off, from the isolation of its situation”.

From its position within Just's text, the “immense embankment” appears to be describing the Main Dyke section, but it is strange that it should have been “standing in water which cannot get off” because the dyke ought to have provided adequate drainage. It is conceivable that he was referring to some hollow in the higher ground north-west of the dyke in the vicinity of Hall's House Farm. The Main Dyke section on the first six inch map is “double-lined” as far north as a little east of the farm (grid reference SD364358). Not only do later O.S. maps show just the Danes Pads' assumed line in this area, but, quite irrationally, they show it to veer from the double line of the first map, as if “pulled” by the Puddle House Farm section a mile further north.

It is one thing to imagine a Roman road from a scattering of stones, but, here, independent observers were clearly describing a substantial feature. If anything, it is too large. So perhaps alternative explanations for such an embankment should be sought. Could it possibly have been a temporary dam constructed in the 18th century to facilitate enlargement of the Main Dyke downstream of it? Similarly, perhaps it could have been a medieval dam associated with a water mill at Staining mentioned in monastic charters, or even that at Great Marton. If this were so, it might at the same time explain why, up to the 18th. century, Marton Mere drained to the west, whereas a glance at a geological map suggests that it should naturally drain to the east. Of course, a substantial Roman road at this point could have had the same effect. There is otherwise the difficulty of explaining why a dam should be perfectly aligned with the Weeton Moss section of the Danes' Pad, unless the officers of the first survey had not been completely objective and the alignment was imagined.

In August 1958, members of the (Blackpool &) Fylde Historical Society, led by Mrs. Gorrie, dug in “Daines Path Carr”. Unfortunately they had chosen a spot 70 yards to the west of the line on the maps, having been attracted to a ridge across the field. This was found to have been a filled-in trench for an old drain! In 1983, members of the same society dug several trial holes in the east corner of the field, but nothing other than peat was found.

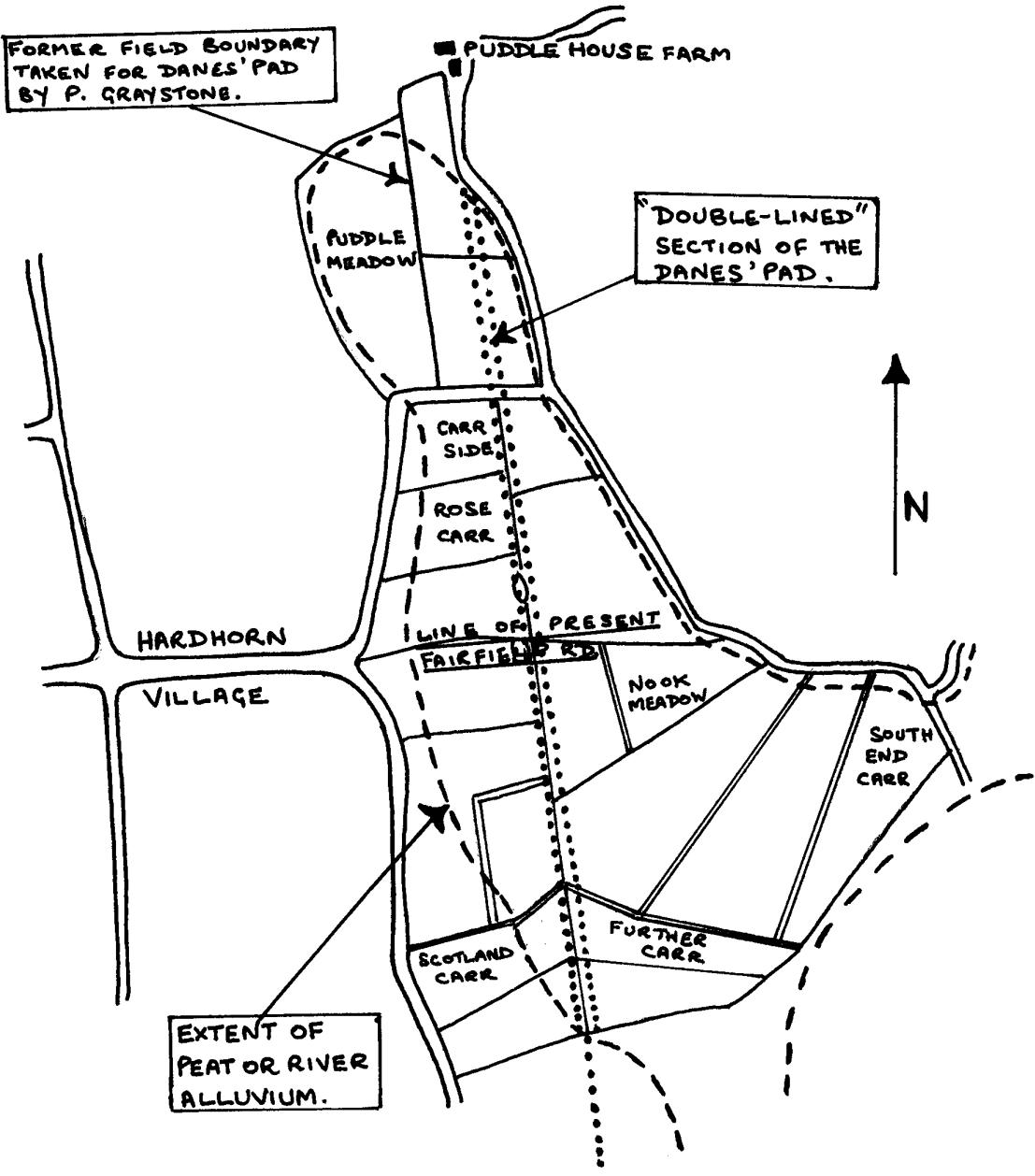
In the mire.

The third and last “double-lined” section on the six inch O.S. map only appears a mile further on, but this time on a more northerly heading. Thornber described it in 1851 as follows:—

“ . . . we meet with the road again beneath the village of Hardhorn, near Paddle House. It is plain enough, though the gravel has been removed, and it is making direct to Poulton, which is not far off. Here ends every trace which I dare to vouch for;”

The double-lining continues until the road merges with the farm lane, a few yards short of Puddle House itself. It is not clear why Thornber should refer to it as “Paddle House”. Philip Graystone (*Walking Roman Roads*, 1996) maintains that earlier documents give it this name and he suggests that it might derive from the name “Danes' Pad”. However, entries in the Poulton Parish Registers as early as the mid-17th century still show it as “Puddle” or “Pudle”, a name generally associated with marshland. In his book, Graystone identifies a ridge passing to the west of the farm as the Roman road, and even shows a photograph of it. Unfortunately this is just a former field boundary, which can be seen on the first six inch O.S. map running parallel to, but west of, the double-lined section of the Danes' Pad.

(Opposite page) A sketch of the Puddle House Farm area in the mid-19th century showing lanes, some fields and the “double-lined” section of the Danes' Pad.



Elsewhere on its route from Kirkham the Danes' Pad has kept to the high ground or has taken the shortest way across any valleys. Its route has always been a plausible one. It seems inconceivable that the practical Romans would have crossed what was then probably a peat bog to Puddle House Farm, when a little to the west was the hill at Hardhorn and to the east more high ground.

Significantly, this is the only section where the road follows field boundaries, most of which are adjacent to a ditch. It is more likely that Thornber and the Ordnance Survey mistook material taken from the ditch and an old farm track for the Roman road.

It should be borne in mind that, if the evidence for this stretch of the Danes' Pad is rejected, there is less reason to look for or expect signs of the road further along the same alignment. What remains is some evidence for a Roman Road heading towards Bispham!

An alternative theory.

Porter's placing of Portus Setantiorum at the mouth of the Wyre has so coloured thinking on the Danes' Pad that it may serve a useful purpose to provide a different postulate, if only to free-up a few minds.

What if the Danes' Pad had, in fact, continued in the direction of Bispham? In Roman times it would have reached a coast at least a mile further to the west than the present one. More significantly, most of the land near the coast would have then been well over 100 feet above sea level, for contour maps suggest that the Bispham's cliffs and Warbreck Hill are all that remains of a moraine once as large as that of Kirkham. Such a location would have been ideal for a coastal lookout fort protecting Morecambe Bay and the Fylde from seaborne attack. Such forts are known to have existed along the Cumbrian coast to prevent Hadrian's Wall from being outflanked. What better place would there have been for one on the Lancashire coast?

Such a postulate seems just as plausible as Porter's theory and, like all enduring legends and religions, it is placed all too conveniently just beyond proof or disproof. However, as nothing has ever been found in the direction of Bispham, a more northerly path must be followed.

Poulton and beyond.

Thornber's paper of 1851 goes on to state:—

“yet it is said that the causeway gained the top of Poulton-hill, by the Church Sunday School. I affirm it not: neither do I say there are some marks of a square fosse around the Church-yard. Certainly there was a peculiar ditch and a high bank that surrounded it, with the exception of a portion on the south near and at the great church gates. This I do know, that I saw two copper coins of Adrian in the possession of Mr. H. Wilson which had been found near the church, and I am assured that Mr. Crossfield, of Kirkham, has a pretty large medal of Germanicus, which was taken by Miss Threlfalls from a garden behind the market-place. Mr. Just fancied that Poulton might have been the Portus, and the pool of the Wyre and the Skippon, half a mile distant, the rode or statio navium. I rather fancy that the agger ran past Poulton on to the Town-fields near Little Poulton Hall, having only a branch to Poulton Hill. On the high ground of the Town-fields there is a track of an ancient road which evidently was gravelled over the low lands, and this road leads by a curious cut through the banks of the

Wyre to the Shard, or as anciently written, Aldwath, or the old Ford, so denominated before 1300.

“The agger could not go to the mouth of the Wyre over Thornton Marsh for obvious reasons. But the Bergerode of Wyre, so called in old maps, was between the hill of Bourne Hall and that of Stana, and in my opinion was approached from Skippool. It is singular I have paid little or no attention to Stana, although it has been in my mother's family for a century, and I fancy something has been said of ruins there — and an agger *could* approach *it* from Poulton. At Bourne, which is marked in the Domesday survey by mistake of Baines, as Bryning near Lytham — there are certain rough grounds named Danes' Pad by the country people. Rawcliffe, anciently in Domesday written *Rodecliffe*, and the commencement of *Kates' Pad*, lie across the water nearly opposite, and Wardless, where till Fleetwood was founded, was the rode of shipping for time immemorial; and these places might have been gained from an agger to Stana by the old ford of Bulk across the Wyre. Of Fleetwood I must say little; but that in 1840, between Rossal Point and Fenny, some brickmakers discovered a treasure of some 400 silver denarii, consisting of the coins of Trajan, Adrian, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, Antoninus, Severus, Caracalla, Sabina, Faustina, &c. I possess 40 of them, and myself and brother here saw destroyed, for the sake of its materials, a large paved platform, which I had often fancied had been used as a landing-place. At this spot I have heard old people speak of the ruins of a rude, thick-walled, circular building, round which it was uncanny to sport.”

The founding of Ben and Margaret Edwards' *Lancashire Archaeological Bulletin* in 1975 precipitated a flurry of articles on the Danes' Pad, just as that of the Historic Society of Lancashire & Cheshire had 125 years earlier. Julia Beeden of the Pilling Historical Society wrote in the third issue that in 1968 she had realised that any Roman road going north from Poulton would probably be intersected by Amounderness Way, then under construction. The foreman on the site confirmed that a cobbled road had been broken through, which she was then able to trace from Poulton to School Road, Thornton.

The following issue of the bulletin contained an article by Alan McLerie, confirming the existence of the cobbled track and tracing its course south from Ardelles House (grid reference SD349411) across golf links, where its line was revealed by discoloured grass, towards the grounds of Poulton College, now Wyre Civic Centre. He noted that:—

“Almost immediately after crossing the Breck Road at the College, and entering the line of Station Road, it comes onto the northern end of a remarkable boundary hedge, appearing on the older O/S maps, but now almost entirely obliterated by modern development, which runs almost due south, without break for 2.25 kilometres. At one stage it forms the western boundary of the field called ‘Purgatory’, and extends as far as ‘Puddle House Wood’.”

McLerie also noted that on the 1845 six inch O.S. Map the track turns 45° to the north-east where Ardelles House later stood and that, continuing in this direction, it appeared to making “for that conspicuously elevated point on the western bank of the River Wyre opposite Wardleys”.

He needed some prodding.

In the fifth issue of the bulletin, there appeared an article by J. C. Plummer supporting Porter's

placing of the Portus Setantiorum off the coast at Fleetwood. He too had traced the road across the golf course and, using a probe, had located it in the grounds of the College, south of the railway line. However, he ventured that the latter was part of a Roman road branching off the first road in a north-westerly direction towards Thornton and perhaps Fleetwood. Mr. Plummer, incidentally, claims to have located several other Roman roads in the Kirkham and Freckleton areas, using a probe and by dowsing. Both methods may be regarded as being highly subjective.

Mr. McLerie's hedge, however, has more recently been pointed out by the historian, Dr. Alan Crosby, as a significant old boundary which separated the Poulton town fields from its moorland. But a simple mundane explanation for the track across the golf-links is apparent from a study of the first one inch O.S. map (David & Charles reprint, sheet 15). On it, what is now called Little Thornton can be seen to have been the original nucleated settlement of Thornton, from which lanes spread out in all directions. The imagined Roman road can now be seen to be just one of them. This lane, which is not particularly straight even at this small scale, would have linked Thornton with the Breck and Poulton, before being cut in two by the Preston & Wyre Railway of 1840.

Town End Farm, Thornton.

A brief newspaper report of 1935 mentions that Richard Ainsworth, a Cleveleys historian, took members of the newly formed Fylde Historical and Antiquarian Society to Town End Farm, Thornton (grid reference SD332434), where he was able to show them traces of a Roman road. The society's secretary, R. Sharpe France, does not appear to have been impressed, as there is no mention of the visit in his minutes. However, a letter, dated 15th. July 1935, to Sharpe France from another of the society's founder members, Eric Porter, survives and the following are extracts:—

“ . . . It seems that Mr. Cowell, the present farmer, was told by Mr. Walsh, the previous tenant, of finding large stones etc. which were believed to be part of the Danes Pad. This was around a place which was indicated to me by Mr. Ainsworth.

“ . . . In or off West Drive in Thornton, Mr. Ainsworth indicated the remains traditionally known as the Danes Pad. This is on land which is farmed by Mr. Bradshaw. The land is being rapidly built over but this depression, roughly 10 ft. wide and 1 ft. deep, is very clearly defined.

“ . . . Mr. Bradshaw is willing for us to do whatever excavation we might wish to, and I suggest to you that we might take full advantage of this offer. We might have a word with the builder whose new houses run across it, or with the new householder whose potatoes seem to be doing particularly well on the Pad.”

In October 1935, Porter interviewed Mr. Walsh, then in his late nineties. In the orchard at Bourne Hall (grid reference SD333443), Walsh claimed to have uncovered what was taken to be a Roman road. It comprised large cobbles or setts “such as were usually used in the construction of roads at the time”. Only a small area was uncovered and the direction of the road appeared to be northwards. In fact Thornber had written in 1837 that the course of the Danes' Pad could be traced “along the Naze, by Burn Hall, in the direction of Poulton”.

Beside the Seaside.

Right on to the End of the Road.

For want of further evidence, it is necessary to move on to journey's end, Fleetwood. Here in 1837 Thornber had said that an agger was visible on the Warren, near the spot called the "Abbot's walk". This name, incidentally, had been mentioned by T. D. Whitaker as early as 1823, well before the town of Fleetwood and its similarly named street had existed. John Porter, wrote in 1876 that, soon after Thornber's book had been published, workmen engaged in excavating for a sea wall foundation came upon the road in the sand on the margin of the Warren. Porter, who died a young man, gives no authority for this discovery, which must have occurred before his birth.

In more recent times, during low tides, long straight ridges of pebbles have been noticed across the bank north of Fleetwood. J. C. Plummer has photographed parallel ridges which seem to him to form a harbour. There have also been reports of masonry on the North Wharf near the Wyre Light. In 1948 the site was visited by a party which included Fleetwood's Borough Surveyor, W. Melville. He reported that they found what may have been a harbour for shallow draughted boats, silted up, and a clay and boulder embankment about half a mile long.

In 1977 members of the Fleetwood Aqua Club reported finding there a 15 ft. high retaining wall, apparently constructed of stone blocks, just two feet below the water. They had visited the spot by boat in response to stories of fishermen snagging their nets on the wall. To assess these accounts, it is necessary to consider how the coastline here is likely to have changed since Roman times.

Getting the Drift.

According to geologists, the north of Britain has been gradually rising since the release of the weight of ice on it following the last ice-age, over 10,000 years ago. Meanwhile, the sea level has also been rising as ice melted, but, south of a line from Barrow to Edinburgh, the land has risen less than the sea. Fleetwood being quite close to this line, the sea level there has probably changed little during the last 2,000 years.

There is, however, another factor to consider. It is well known that there was a great deal of erosion along the Fylde Coast between North Shore, Blackpool, and Rossall Point before sea walls were built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One of the main agents was longshore drift, which would have then deposited the material eroded from the cliffs further round the coast near Fleetwood. Therefore, it would seem that on the Fylde's northern coast a great deal of accretion, rather than erosion has taken place. On this basis alone, the North Wharf would have been an unlikely place for a harbour.

One interesting effect of longshore drift is the formation of shingle spits running in the direction of the drift. These can be so long and straight as to give the appearance of being man-made. This phenomenon adequately explains the ridges seen on the North Wharf. Similarly, the "road" on the Warren seen by Thornber and that discovered by workmen are likely to have been older spits, later covered by sand. It is significant that Thornber, a keen amateur geologist, did not mention a road on the Warren in his later writings.

As for stone walls on the North Wharf, Captain Denham's plan of the Wyre Navigation, of

1840, shows some sort of wall stopping up a minor channel at the northern end of Black Scar, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile out. Irrespective of whether or not this was actually put in place, is it possible that other walls were built further out at this period? Stones, the ballast of wrecked ships, are to be seen on the North Wharf during low tides.

Really Roman.

After so much uncertainty, there is the hard evidence of the Rossall and Hackinsall coin hoards to consider, and it is nice to end the journey with something both Roman and real. They, of course, cannot be explained away and do show that the Romans were not unfamiliar with this peninsula. But, people have traditionally buried their treasure in remote desolate spots. Would locations near the Roman equivalent of a seaport at the end of a motorway have been sufficiently isolated?

Winding up.

Where does it leave us?

The conclusions that readers of this book will reach about the Danes' Pad will, perhaps, depend on the comparative weight they give to the various strands of evidence presented here. In the writer's view the whole subject revolves around the Weeton Moss and Main Dyke "double-lined" sections; the rest could be regarded as random noise. There was definitely a feature to be seen in the 19th. century across Weeton Moss, but there is no strong reason to conclude that it was a Roman road. Its physical links with any road emerging from the fort at Kirkham are too tenuous for that, and the evidence for a destination of such a road is even more unsatisfactory

What's in a name?

Little attention has been given until now to the name "Danes' Pad" itself. "Pad", of course, is merely an old word for a track or path, but it has been pointed out that the Scandinavians who settled in the North West were not Danes but Norsemen, the former having concentrated their efforts on the eastern side of the country.

However, included in a list of land-holders in Staining at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries (*Coucher Book of Whalley*) is "the wife of Richard Dane". In addition, the *Poulton Parish Registers* show a Jane Dane to be living in Staining in the late 17th century.

Even without knowing whereabouts in Staining the Dane family farmed, it seems more reasonable to assume that the Pad's name relates to them rather than to a horde of Viking invaders some 800 years earlier. Could it even be that the Pad was a track made across Weeton Moss in the 17th century by a Mr. Dane?

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T. L.