

ART. IV.—*Recent work at Kirkby Thore.* By DOROTHY CHARLESWORTH, F.S.A.

Read at Kendal, April 1964.

IN 1961 an excavation was arranged by the Ministry of Public Building and Works at two places in Kirkby Thore (Fig. 1) where new buildings were about to be put up on the known area of the Roman site, *Braboniacum*, a fort with an extensive civil settlement on its north-west and west sides, covering an area of about 30 acres.

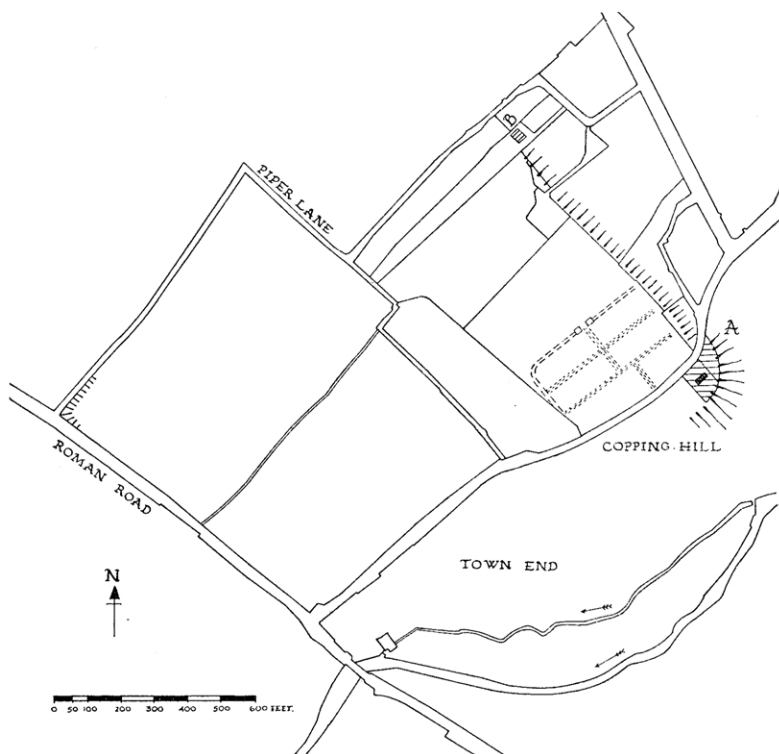


FIG. 1.

The site lies on the east side of the Roman road from York over Stainmore to Carlisle at the point where the Maiden Way leaves it to give access to the lead mining region around Alston, controlled on its northern edge by the fort at Whitley Castle. The road continues northwards to Carvoran on Hadrian's Wall, but as Collingwood¹ pointed out, it is neither necessary nor particularly convenient for military traffic. All the lead on its way south must have passed through Kirkby Thore which may have been used as a checkpoint and *depôt* for the loads from the various small mines in the hills.²

The evidence of the Roman occupation has been conveniently summarised in the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments' volume on Westmorland (1936) pp. 144-146. More recently Dr St Joseph's air photograph (Plate I) has added greatly to our knowledge of the site by showing clearly the lay-out of northern part of the fort in Burwen's field. Here can be seen the rounded western angle, the north-west wall with its central gateway, the road running south-east towards the headquarters building. The internal buildings themselves do not show and may have been heavily robbed for their dressed stone, but the roads, the *via principalis*, running across the fort in front of the headquarters, and the minor road which probably ran between that building and the granary, are plain.

Site A (Fig. 2).

About one-third of this fort must lie under the road and to the south of it. An excavation was therefore undertaken on the only free plots in that area as soon as the Ministry knew that they were to be developed. Unfortunately before we were able to start the excavation the contractors moved in on one plot, put in drains, the water supply, the foundations of the bungalow and its entrance drive

¹ CW2 xxx 116-117.

² I. A. Richmond, *Roman leaden sealings from Brough-under-Stainmore* (CW2 xxxvi 104), shows that this site served as a *depôt*.



Photo: Dr J. K. St Joseph.

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PLATE I.—The fort in Burwens field.

and started to level up the area to the south-east for the garden. This is the reason for the strange looking plan of the excavation, which leaves unexamined the main part of the site and concentrates on the fringes.

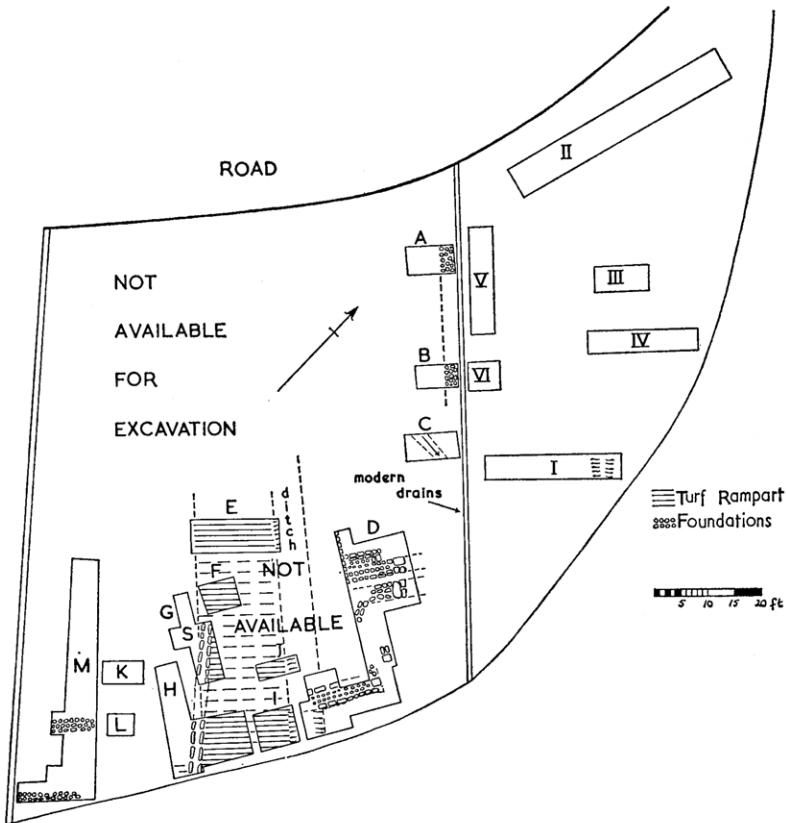


FIG. 2.

The results of the excavation were both disappointing and puzzling. Heavy stone robbing was to be expected as the village has grown up on the edge of the Roman site, but observation on the ground suggested that the east

corner of the fort known from the air photograph, together with part of the defences on the north-east and south-east would lie within the area available. Outside the presumed line of the fort the hill slopes steeply to the south-east and more gradually to the north-east. However, there must have been considerable erosion since Roman times, for on the south-east such remains as were found showed that we were still inside the fort and on the north-east virtually all trace of the defences had vanished. There broad medieval cultivation terraces associated with Kirkby Thore Hall, some 200 yards to the east, which probably dates from the 14th century, are clearly visible when the sun is low and it may be this which is responsible for the disappearance of the Roman work. All that was traced of the expected defences was a ditch section in trench 1 (Fig. 3) from which came

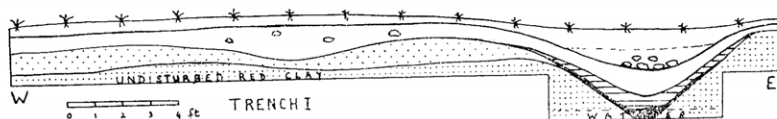


FIG. 3.

two pieces of late 2nd century pottery (p. 69, 1 and 2) and, in the position where the stone fort wall was expected, part of a clay and cobble foundation, resting on disturbed clay. Trenches A and B in which this was found became waterlogged and a complete section could not be obtained. There were no associated finds.

This was not the first fort on the site. Within the area of the stone fort, in trench E, a turf rampart and ditch were found (Plate II, a). The turf lay on clean red sand, apparently a natural capping of the clay, without either timber strapping or a foundation of stone. Its eastern angle must have been near the edge of the excavation for the remains of it in trench H (Fig. 4) were very

irregular. Its width at the base was 18 ft. Outside it was a small ditch dug into the heavy clay, which became waterlogged, and could not be cleared to the bottom. Its width was only 8 ft. and there was no berm separating it from the rampart. This is very similar to the defences of the Flavian temporary camp at Oakwood,³ a clay rampart 15 ft. wide and a ditch 6 ft. wide without any intervening berm. The fort which succeeded it had a

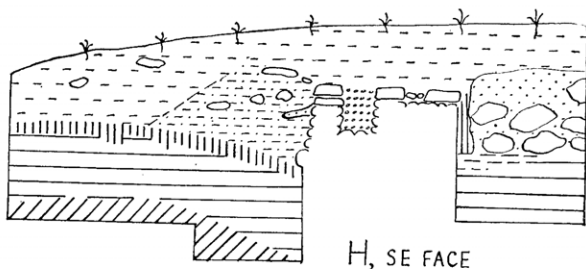


FIG. 4.

23 ft. clay and turf rampart, 2-4 ft. berm and a ditch 13 ft. 3 in. wide. At Easter Happraw the fort, again Flavian, had similar defences rampart 25 ft. 6 in., no berm and a ditch 12 ft. wide.⁴ Both fort defences are far more substantial than those at Kirkby Thore seem to have been, but it seems most unlikely that there was a temporary camp here, on the same site as the later fort and although no internal buildings of 1st century date could be identified, the pottery (3-9) which came from the early level all lies within the period 80-120 and does not suggest a brief occupation within that period. The pottery (10-12) from the overlying black layer, which must represent the destruction of timber buildings, suggests that the early fort came to an end *c.* 120-125. With such a small sample of pottery and no coins any conclusion must be very tentative, but the evidence suggests a prolonged occupation.

³ K. A. Steer and R. W. Feacham, *Roman fort and temporary camp at Oakwood, Selkirk*, in PSAScot. lxxxvi (1951-2).

⁴ K. A. Steer, *The Roman fort at Easter Happraw* 97, fig. 4, in PSAScot. xc (1956-7).

Overlying this burnt layer in trenches G and H was a thick layer of clay and cobble, in which were parts of three querns, one of the beehive shape which is associated with the pre-Roman Iron Age. It may have been a road surface or merely packed in to level up the ground at a very wet place where the remains of the rampart were holding the water. Its S.W. limit was not found but it seems unlikely that it extended as far as trenches K and L, which contained nothing but disturbed soil. Amongst the clay and cobble at the point marked S on the plan (Fig. 2) was an incomplete skeleton of a man (see p. 74). The few pieces of pottery (13-18) associated with the skeleton among the clay and cobble suggest that it was buried not long after the destruction of the first fort, perhaps at the time the clay and cobble was laid down. This may well be a re-burial of the bones, for they lay all bunched together and many are missing.

Part of a building was uncovered in the east corner of the main site, where the contractor's spoil heaps had been piled up to level up the slope and made extensive digging impossible. The bottom course of a substantial wall was found at the south end of this area, large masonry on a clay and cobble foundation which lay on made-up ground and extended over the early ditch (Plate II, b). Its east face was robbed at the south end and was not picked up again in trench I. This must have linked up with the walling in the north of this area (Plate III, a and b). The scattered rubble on the edge of the connecting trench implied a robbed-out wall. Neither the plan nor the date of the building were determined. No finds were associated with it.

In trench M two parallel foundations, which are more or less at right angles with the foundation in trenches A and B, and therefore probably of the same period of building, were the only other identifiable features in the excavation. Two pieces of pottery, one of which (17) cannot date earlier than 170, indicate a late 2nd century

building period. The drain may have been filled in at this time. The two pieces of pottery (19 and 20) found in it also date to this period.

The unstratified pottery ranges in date from *c.* 80 to the late 4th century.

Site B (Fig. 1 and Plate IV, a).

Here only a single trench, so as not to interfere with the building site, was dug across the line of a bank running N.E.-S.E. through the village and, as was expected, the foundation, 6 ft. wide, of a substantial wall which must have surrounded the civil settlement, was found. Surface observation had determined the area of the settlement and suggested that it was defended. The W. angle seems to lie in the field at the junction of the A66 and Piper Lane. Further work will have to be done to determine the character of the defences and to get some dating evidence. The existence of a small walled town here, as at Carlisle, is interesting for the light it throws on the development of civil institutions in the north. Professor Birley⁵ has compared the growth of this site with that of Gemellae and Heddernheim. He kindly tells me that "on the analogies in Numidia and in Upper Germany, one will be justified in supposing that it became a chartered town in the course of the 3rd century or even early in the 4th."

The pottery.

From the ditch section.

1. Fragment from cross hatched dish. 150-200. Fig. 7, 8.
2. Rim of samian mortarium Dr. 45. Fig. 7, 9.

From first fort.

3. Fragment of mortarium rim. Katherine Hartley kindly reports: The broken, retrograde stamp beginning with P, is otherwise unknown. The second letter is doubtful but may be an O. Horizontal grain-marking in the stamp suggests the use of a wooden die. There is nothing to

⁵ E. Birley, *The Hinterland of Hadrian's Wall*, in *D. & N. Trans.* xi 54.

indicate date of manufacture with any certainty though the rim is reminiscent of the Flavian—Trajanic period. The presence of iron pyrites among the grit is notable. No Romano-British potters are known to have used it and a Gaulish origin would be possible. Fig. 5, 1.

4. Mortarium rim. Katherine Hartley reports: This mortarium has two adjacent, retrograde stamps, both incomplete, from a single die used by ERVCANVS. Other stamps of his have been noted from Bainbridge, Leicester (5), Melandra Castle, Ribchester (2), Templeborough, Wilderspool (2?) and Wroxeter. This distribution in the Pennine forts and the Midlands can be matched by that of several Midland potters working before A.D. 140. The fabric is consistent with a Midland origin. A source such as the kilns at Hartshill, where ERVCANVS' rim profiles may be closely paralleled, would fit very well, though no stamps have been found there.

The Bainbridge stamp is from a securely dated Flavian—Trajanic deposit, and the relevant deposit at Wroxeter was dated A.D. 90-120 by Bushe-Fox. All the existing evidence for the Midland potteries suggests that production began in the earliest years of the 2nd century. A primarily Trajanic date for ERVCANVS would fit all the factors very well. Fig. 5, 2.

5. Reeded rim bowl, pink fabric. 80-120. Fig. 5, 3.
6. Reeded rim bowl, fabric similar to 5, broader rim. 80-120. Gillam type 215.⁶ Fig. 5, 5.
7. Reeded rim bowl, dark grey. 80-120. Fig. 5, 7.
8. Part of neck and base of handle of flagon, pink ware. 70-130. Fig. 5, 4.
9. Rim and shoulder of carinated bowl, groove immediately below shoulder. Fig. 5, 8.

From destruction level.

10. Mortarium, white ware, broad rim, small bead. 70-110. Fig. 5, 10.
11. Segmental bowl, pink ware, rim blackened with soot. 120-150. Gillam type 294. Fig. 6, 1.
12. Bowl with flat rim, probably similar in shape to the reeded rim bowl, grey ware. 110-130. Gillam type 217. Fig. 6, 3.

Associated with skeleton.

13. Reeded rim bowl, grey ware, similar to 7. 80-120. Fig. 6, 5.

⁶ J. P. Gillam, *Types of Roman coarse pottery vessels in Northern Britain*, *Arch. Ael.*⁴ xxxv (1957).

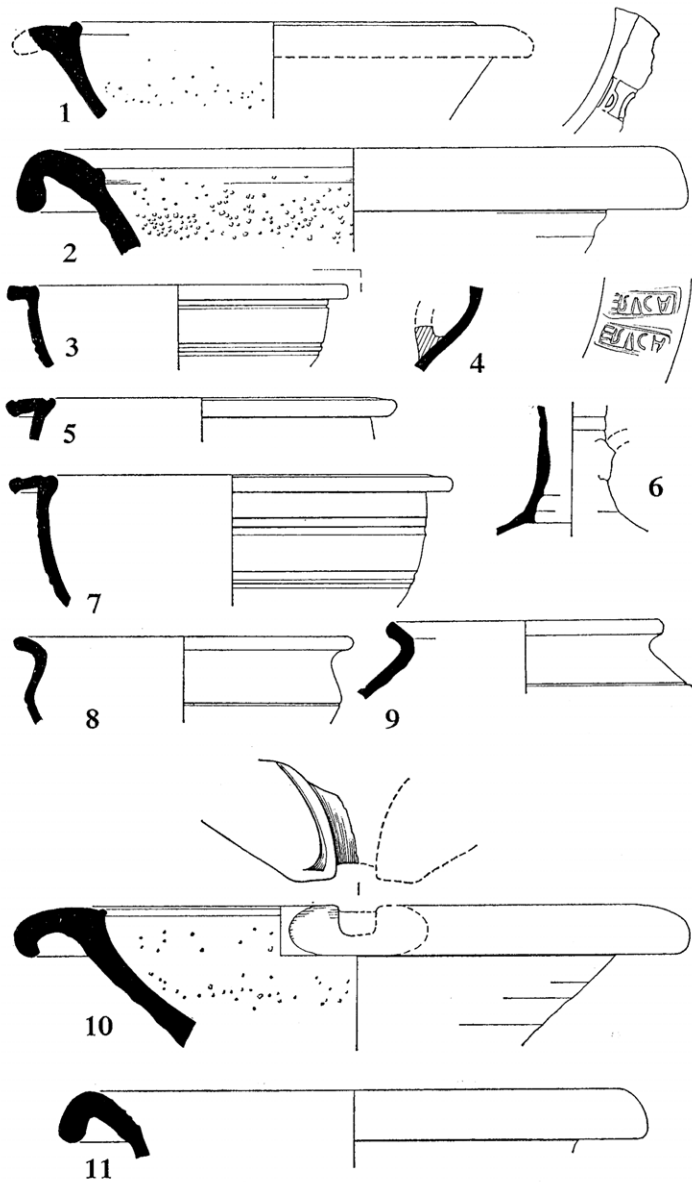


FIG. 5.

14. Cooking-pot with shoulder groove, rim blackened with soot. Trajanic? Fig. 5, 9.
15. Neck and part of handle of flagon, pink ware. 80-120. Fig. 5, 6.
16. Heavily worn rim of mortarium, white ware. 90-120. Fig. 5, 11.

In foundation.

17. Fragments of roughcast colour coated beaker, fine white ware, probably Castor. 170-230. Gillam type 86. Fig. 6, 2.
18. Grey jar with rouletting. 125-200. Fig. 6, 4.

From drain filling.

19. Fragment of base of thick, rouletted Dr. 31. 150-200. Fig. 6, 6.
20. Fragment of rim of Rhaetian mortarium, pink ware with traces of colour coating on rim. 150-200. Fig. 6, 7.

Unstratified pottery.

21. Rim of Dr. 27. Late 1st-early 2nd. Fig. 6, 8. (A few other heavily-worn fragments of samian were found unstratified.)
22. Mortarium, broad flat rim and small bead, white ware with white grit in rim as well as sides. 70-110. Gillam type 238. Fig. 6, 9.
23. Mortarium, hooked rim, pink ware with white grit, traces of white slip. 120-160. Fig. 6, 10.
24. Mortarium, white ware with red grit. 140-180. Fig. 6, 11.
25. Mortarium, pink ware, reeded rim, spout no more than a thumb mark on rim. 3rd-4th century. Fig. 6, 12.
26. Mortarium, white ware, red stripes painted on rim, probably Crambeck.⁷ Late 4th century. Fig. 6, 13.
27. Mortarium, white ware. Late 4th century. Fig. 6, 14.
28. Grey ware jar. 80-120. Gillam type 105. Fig. 6, 15.
29. Rim of narrow-mouthed jar, grey ware. Fig. 6, 16.
30. Grey ware jar. 90-130. Gillam type 109 is similar. Fig. 7, 1.
31. Small jar in fine grey fumed ware. 2nd century. Fig. 6, 17.
32. Pie dish, grey fumed ware, cross hatched. Mid 2nd century. Fig. 7, 2.
33. Base of colour coated beaker, thick white ware. 4th century. Fig. 7, 5.
34. Rim in coarse, dark grey ware. Mid 4th century. Fig. 7, 3.
35. Base in coarse, dark calcite gritted ware. Mid-late 4th century. Fig. 7, 6.

⁷ P. Corder, *The Roman pottery at Crambeck, Castle Howard* (Roman Malton and District report no. 1), 1928.



PLATE II, a.—North end of trench G, showing remains of turf work and lip of ditch.

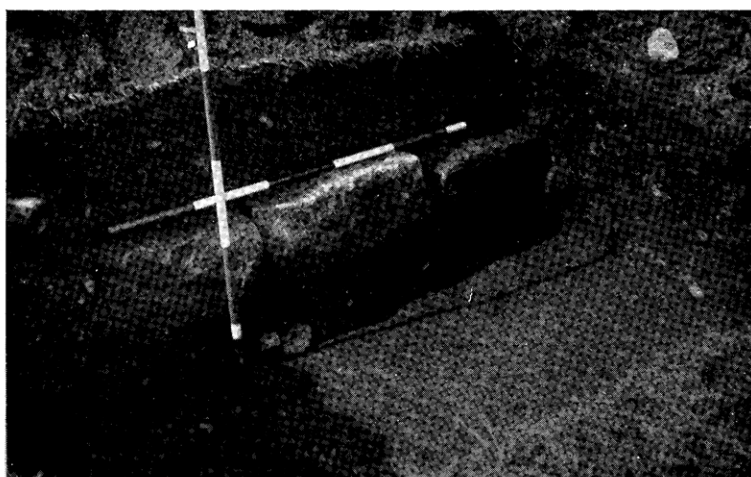


PLATE II, b.—Building in S.E. corner of site, overlying N. lip of ditch.

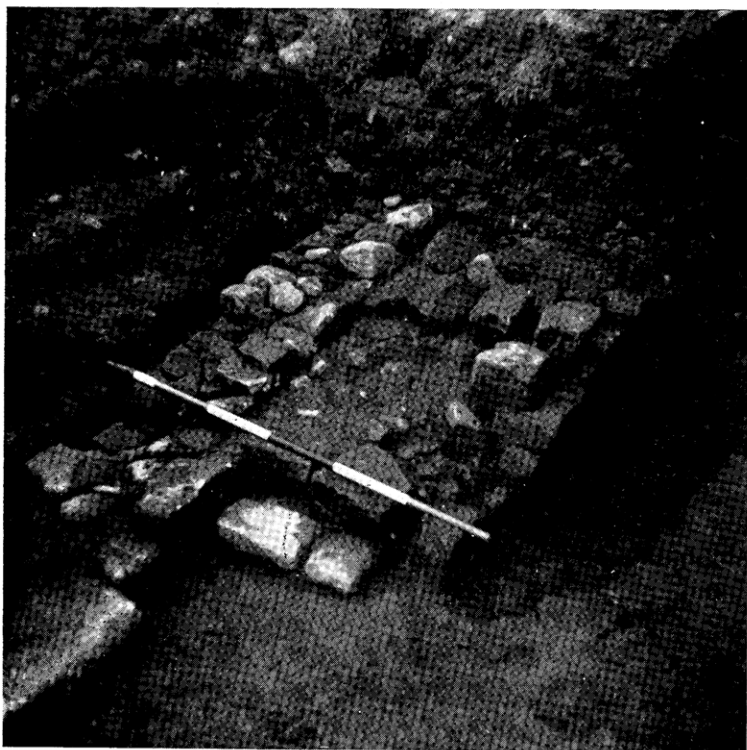


PLATE III, a and b.—Foundations of building in east corner of the site.

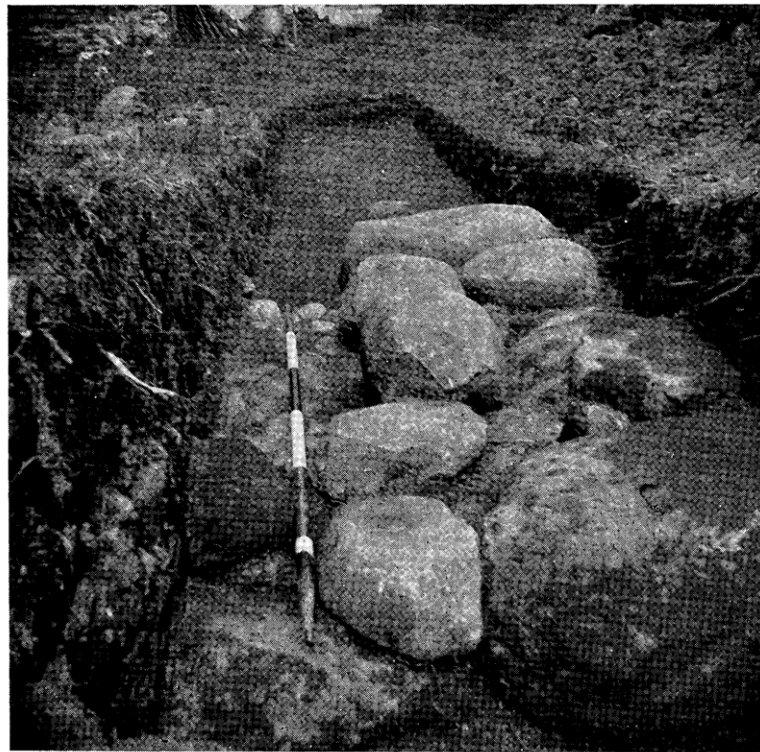


PLATE IV, a.—Foundations of wall on site B.



PLATE IV, b.—Top of colour coated flagon.

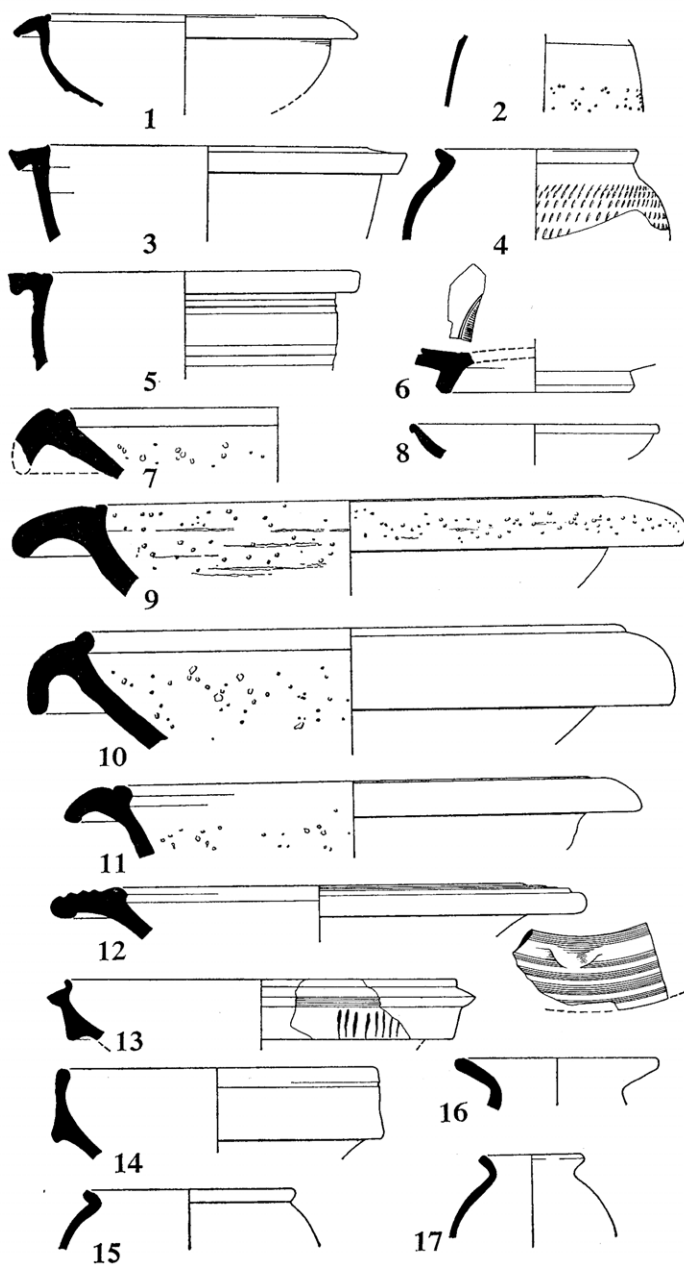


FIG. 6.

36. Flanged dish, grey ware, probably Crambeck. Gillam type 315. Fig. 7, 7.
37. Similar to 36, broader flange. Fig. 7, 4.
38. Top of a colour coated flagon, reddish slip on pink ware, with moulded female head on it. 350-400. Plate IV, b. *Richborough IV*, 462, 463 are similar.

Tiles.

1. Part of a box flue tile with diamond hatching. From destruction layer. Fig. 7, 11.
2. Part of a flanged tile of unusual type. At the corner the flange has been cut back at an angle before the tile was fired. Fig. 7, 12.

Glass.

One fragment of window glass. 1st-2nd century.

Two dark glass (colour uncertain) gaming counters. Fig. 7, 10.

Bones.

Mr R. Powers of the British Museum (Natural History) kindly reports that the incomplete skeleton is that of a rather small adult of slender build, probably male, between the age of 30 and 40 years. The right first rib and the distal end of the clavicle and the atlas and axis were found in the skull matrix. The following bones were present: cranium and mandible, 2 fragments of clavicle, fragments of ribs, imperfect right ulna, left scapula, 2 tibiae, both imperfect, 2 fibulae, also both imperfect, right femur, right innominate, 3 lumbar vertebrae including lowest, left third metatarsal, left second metacarpal.

The animal bones were kindly examined by Mr Sheldrick, British Museum (Natural History) who identifies an antler tine fragment, cut at both ends, seven fragments of ox bones, one of sheep or goat, one of a bird.

Acknowledgements.

I wish to thank the owners of the sites, Messrs C. Bosomworth and J. Hillary, for permission to excavate.

Mrs Bagot and the late Mrs Bromley-Boorne kindly helped on the excavation. The Penrith group visited and later a few members gave some assistance.

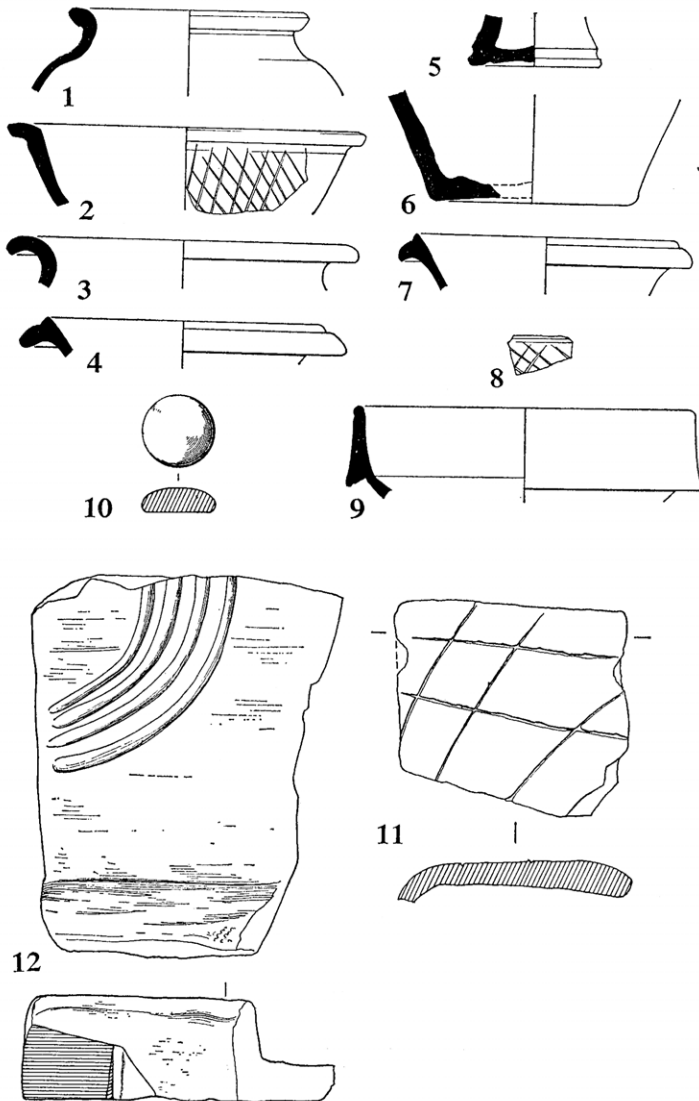


FIG. 7.