

ART. IV.—*Hadrian's Wall, turret 51A (Piper Sike).*

By DOROTHY CHARLESWORTH, F.S.A.

Read at Carlisle, March 31st, 1973.

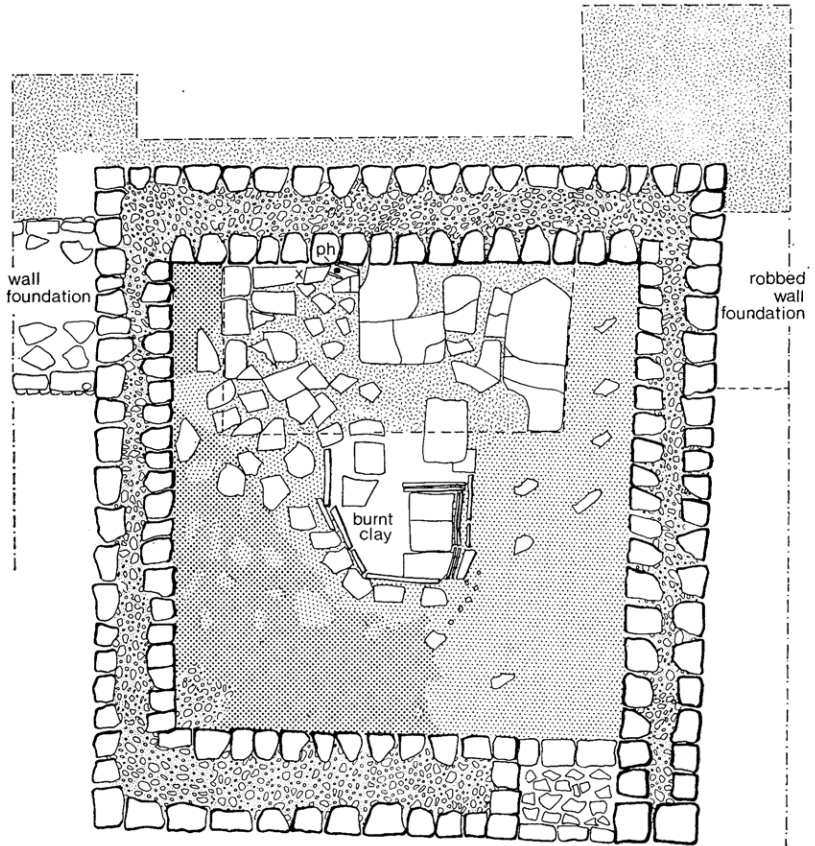
THE turret was excavated, with the help of several members of our Society, in April and May 1970 in exceptionally cold Spring weather, so that it could be consolidated by the Department of the Environment for permanent display.

It stands on the north verge of the minor road from Birdoswald to Lanercost, along which four turrets, 49B, 51A, 51B and 52B, can be seen.

51A is the normal type of turret, measuring externally 6m north-south and 5.80 east-west, associated with the Turf Wall, a free-standing building with its north and south walls thicker than its east and west, .95m compared with .75m, to take a plinth to keep the turret face in step with the batter of the faces of the Turf Wall. The north wall of the turret stands 5 courses, but the south wall has been more heavily robbed and much of it is only 3 courses high. There is no plinth course *in situ* as there is on turret 52A (Banks East) above the seventh course.¹ The door is on the east side, with all its fittings robbed. The walls are of rather small stones, generally without the tapering "tail" of the facing stones of the turrets and curtain wall east of the Irthing, which bonds them firmly with the core. The core is of small rubble and mortar. There is a single layer of rubble foundation on the natural clay. On the west side of the turret some remains of the Turf Wall can be seen (Plate I) up to the level of the top of the first course, and there was a considerable scatter of

¹ CW2 xxviii (1928). F. G. Simpson, *Excavations on Hadrian's Wall*, fig. 2, and CW2 xxxiv (1934) 148 f.

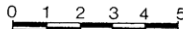
TURRET 51A



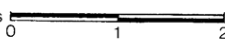
modern road









scale in feet



scale in metres



-  clay
-  rubble and mortar
-  clay and turf
-  mortar
-  x cooking fire and pot base
-  ph post hole

turf on the berm north of the turret and trampled inside it. This scatter dates from the replacement of the Turf Wall in stone, known to have taken place in Hadrian's reign, in this sector.² But before this the north-east corner had been repaired (Plate II) and on its east side, where it would be hidden by the turf-work, rubble had been put into the face up to the second course. The building of the Stone Wall, slightly further back, exposed this. A wide crack in the east wall, right down to foundation level (Plate III) and the use of a long, narrow stone in place of a proper quoin on the north-west corner (Plate IV), both indicate the lack of skill of the masons. The facing stones of the curtain wall with their well-fitting joints and larger size (seen on the right of Plate IV) point the contrast with the walling of the turret and strengthen the possibility that it was lack of skilled masons that caused the curtain wall west of the Irthing to be built in turf instead of stone. In this sector there is no lack of suitable building stone, limestone, which was also required for making mortar. There is a quarry, with Roman inscriptions³ on its face, about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from 51A.

It was intended to dig the turret in two parts with a central baulk as a check on the levels, but when the main level of occupation was reached the baulk had greatly increased in width by the necessity of leaving projecting pieces of rubble and flagstones (Plate V) and it had to be removed before the lower levels and the sunk hearth could be cleared. It served, however, to illustrate the thick layer of debris which separated the two main layers of occupation.

The later floor level over the debris extended over the northern two-thirds of the turret, but had largely been removed by the robbing of the south wall at that

² CW2 xiii (1913) 297 f. F. G. Simpson, *Excavations on the line of the Roman Wall 1909-12*.

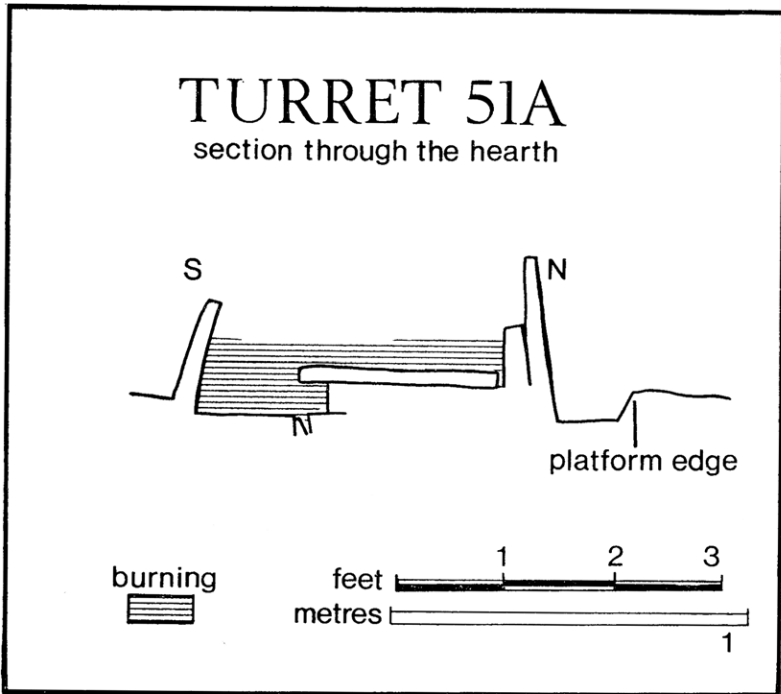
³ R. G. Collingwood and R. P. Wright, *Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, vol. i (1965), nos. 1946-52.

end and in the doorway, where there was considerable disturbance to a low level. There was little trace of occupation on it, and what there was could be dated to the second century. The main features were a central hearth with a scatter of burning to the north-west of it and another hearth near the north-west corner. The floor was mainly clay, with pieces of rubble sticking up through it in places. On it was a much-repaired mortarium (Plate VI) of 2nd-century type, some hob-nails from a sole of a shoe, parts of the grey-ware jar (p. 75, 4), other fragments of which were found in the lower debris and pieces of a rough-cast beaker, found also in the lower occupation layer (p. 74, 1) sherds of cooking-pot and of amphora. This was in marked contrast with the quantity of material from the lower occupation.

Below this uneven floor was a layer of debris, including a plinth-stone and some large flags, but mainly composed of rubble with patches of clay, mortar, turf and burnt material amongst it, particularly low down in it. This material must derive from a partial collapse of the turret, possibly when the Turf Wall was dismantled and replaced in stone. The weakness of the north corners and the east wall has already been demonstrated and the removal of lateral pressure on the east and west walls could cause the trouble. Or it could possibly date from the first period of the occupation of the Antonine Wall, *c.* 139-158, when the turret must have been unoccupied, but there is no cogent reason why it should. The presence of turf in the debris is an argument in favour of an earlier collapse. The pottery in and on the floor over the debris is too small in quantity and too fragmentary to provide any dating.

One curious feature in the debris layer was a sloping post-hole (Plate VII), very sharply defined, exactly the size for a 2 x 3-in. post. It was in the west face of

the baulk near the north wall. It stopped short of the platform and did not extend up into the upper floor level. Two large flags on its north side may be fallen from the rampart walk. No other post-hole was located near it. In approximately the centre of the east face of the baulk, over the cooking-pit, was a gap in the debris (Plate V) which suggests that a post or piece of fallen beam may have lain there.



Below the debris was evidence of intense occupation. In its earliest phase, probably contemporary with the building of the turret and adjacent part of the Turf Wall, was a well-constructed hearth (Plate VIII), sunk in the floor below the level of the lowest course.⁴ This

⁴ Similar hearths in turret 7B, AA4 vii (1930) 145 f.; and 51B, AA4 xliii (1965) 170 f.

looked rather large for a mere domestic hearth and the burning on it was intense, a new hearth-stone having been inserted after some time, but there was nothing to suggest any industrial use, as has been found occasionally in turrets. The whole floor, mainly clay, sagged towards this hearth. On it had accumulated burnt material, bones and sherds, scattered about even in the doorway. It was evident that flags had been laid, or clay spread, or a patch of mortar added to this floor wherever it became too dirty, and that no complete new floor had been inserted. In its upper levels the rubble had pressed down into it and so a quantity of clay and sherds was in the lower debris rather than on the floor itself. It was an irregular build-up of occupation material, suggesting a period of concentrated, and undisciplined, use. At the north end of the turret a platform of large flags was put in (Plate VIII). It is not an original feature. The south end of it partly collapsed into the less consolidated material of the sunk hearth and under it, against the north wall, was a cooking-hearth, with a pot base in it. The platform was only some .20m above the general floor level, but it was conspicuously free from rubbish and must have formed the living area where meals could be taken. The same feature is found in the next turret, 51B and again in 52B, but in the north-west corner. It has nothing to do with a ladder-platform. The probable site for such a feature is in the south-west corner, also noticeably clean, where a pile of rubble and mortar was found (Plate IX). This could be the ladder-platform for access to the first floor. Even if there is no question now of these platforms being required in stone wall turrets because a movable ladder could not reach the full height of the room, in such conditions as most turrets exhibit at ground level, a dry and level platform for a fixed ladder would obviously be desirable. The very confined space



PLATE I.—Turret west wall and remains of Turf Wall.

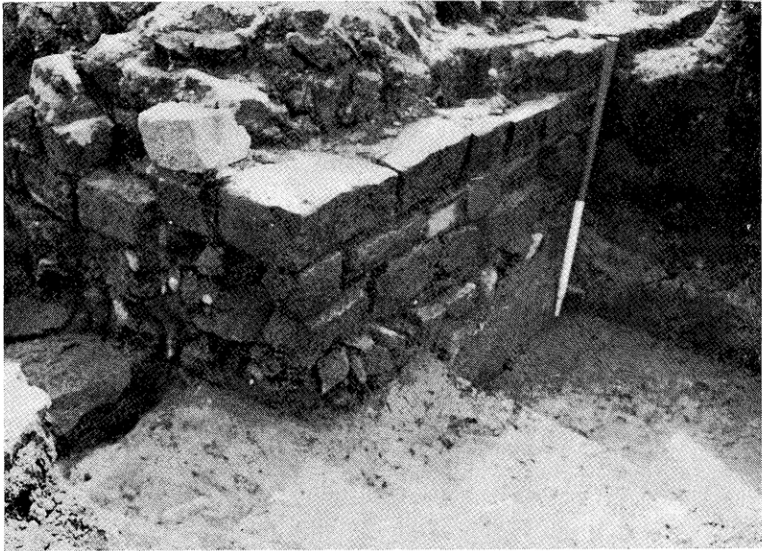


PLATE II.—NE. corner, foundation of Stone Wall on extreme left.



PLATE III.—Turret east wall, settlement crack.



PLATE IV.—NW. corner, N. face of Wall on right.



PLATE V.—E. face of central baulk, ranging pole at S. end of hearth.



PLATE VI.—Mortarium on upper occupation layer.



PLATE VII.—Post-hole in debris near north wall.



PLATE VIII.—Sunken hearth and remains of platform against north wall.



PLATE IX.—SW. corner of the turret, pile of mortar and rubble.

within the turret and the widely spread remains of hearths makes it unlikely that space would be available for a fixed sloping stair.

No inscribed building stone was found in the turret. The position of the door on the east indicates the 2nd or 20th Legion, but it must be remarked that the construction represents a serious falling off in either legion's usual standards, exemplified further east. Both these legions are recorded on altars found at Bankshead, milecastle 52 (RIB 1955 and 1956). The 6th Legion is recorded on two stones (RIB 1938 and 1939) at stone-wall turret 50A, but this is not proof that the legion built the original turret, for the original turret 50A was to the south of the stone-wall turret, this being the short length where the lines of the Turf Wall and Stone Wall do not coincide. There are no legionary (or indeed any other) building stones which can be connected with the stone turrets built on the Turf Wall line.

The pottery is all 2nd century in date and a sample, the more complete pieces, is illustrated. The mortarium (Plate VI) in buff ware has, unfortunately, vanished. Only one coin, found in the disturbed soil of the gateway, cannot in view of its position and the total absence of any other 3rd-century finds be taken as evidence for occupation in the 3rd century. On the other hand there is no evidence that this turret was obliterated, as was 50A.

Coin

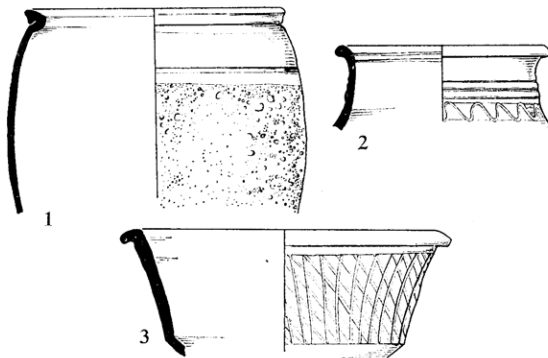
(kindly identified by Mr P. E. Curnow).

obverse [IMP (C) V]ICTORINVS [P F AVG] Bust radiate, cuirasse right.

reverse [INVICTVS] Sol left, mint mark Cologne.

The pottery.

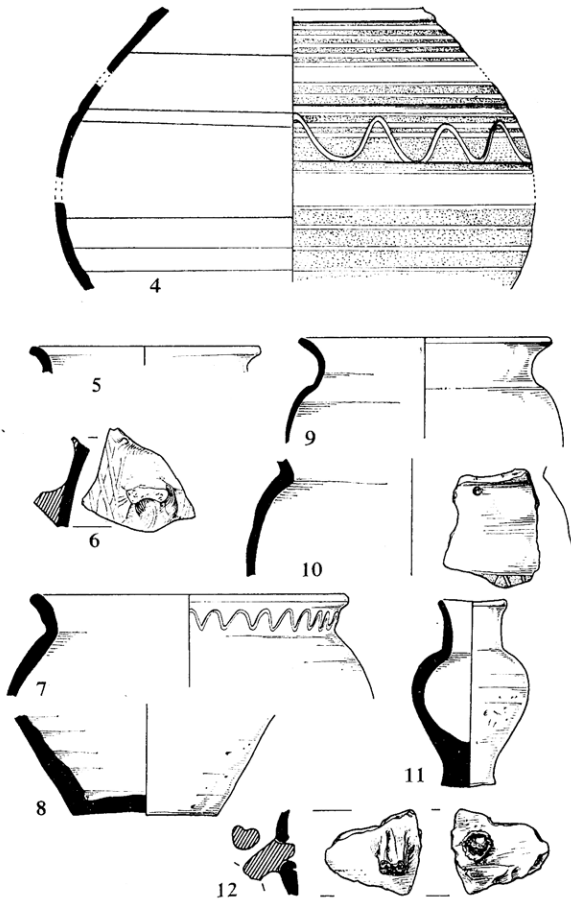
1. Red ware, rough-cast beaker, outside unevenly smoke-blackened. Gillam 72,⁵ but with the addition of a shallow groove on the shoulder. (Gillam 74 has the shoulder groove but the rim does not correspond with this example.) 21 sherds found scattered, mainly in disturbed soil of doorway and lower occupation layer, 2 rim fragments (conjoining with pieces from lower level) in upper occupation layer.
2. Rim and neck of a jar, black burnished ware. Not a Gillam type, but general resemblance to some features of Gillam 28. Lower occupation layer, SW. corner of turret.
3. Dark grey core, unevenly fired surface internally pink, externally dark to light grey, acute cross-hatching, 6 sherds. Gillam 219/220 lower occupation layer, SW. corner of turret



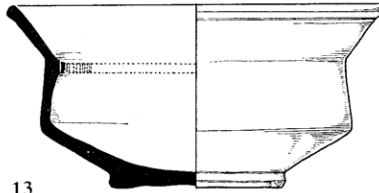
4. Hard blue-grey ware jar, decorated with burnished lines, 17 sherds found scattered outside, in upper occupation layer and in clay among lower debris. Not a Gillam type but fabric resembles Gillam 28.

⁵ J. P. Gillam, *Types of Roman coarse pottery vessels in Northern Britain* (1968).

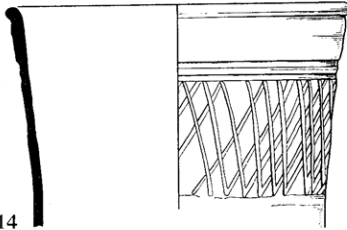
5. Rim fragment, grey ware. Upper occupation layer.
6. Part of a handle of a pink ware mug with cross-hatching (see also 14). Disturbed soil in doorway.
7. Cooking-pot rim, black burnished ware. Gillam 119. 3 fragments in disturbed soil in doorway, one in lower occupation layer.
8. String-cut base of cooking-pot, black burnished ware. Hearth 2, below the platform presumably builder's cooking-hearth.



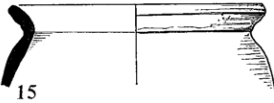
9. Thin, abraded grey-ware rim. In rubble on berm.
 10. Shoulder of cooking-pot, pierced for repair, black burnished ware. Upper occupation layer, hearth near NW. corner.
 11. Small jar, pink ware. Not a Gillam type. In clay among lower debris.
 12. Handle fragment of grey ware. Probably a mug, Gillam 64-6.



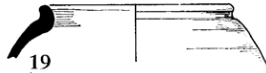
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14



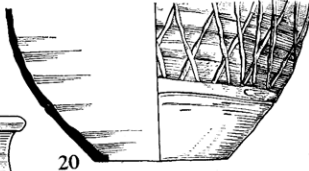
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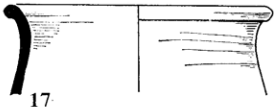
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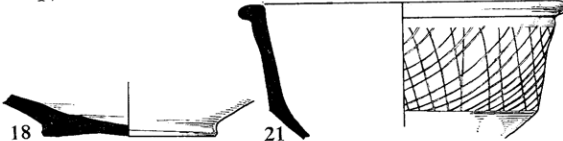
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13. Fragments of bowl with strainer, grey ware, black surface, should perhaps be restored as Gillam 349⁶ but the fragment gives only the extreme edge of the strainer so its angle is not determined. 5 fragments from lower occupation layer.
14. Pink ware, grey core, abraded, handle missing but this is a mug.⁷ Gillam 181. The handle fragment 6 is a similar but not identical fabric. 7 fragments from lower occupation layer, one in burnt material near doorway.
15. Hard grey-ware rim with crack formed during firing. 5 pieces in lower occupation layer.
16. Cooking-pot base, grey ware, in lower occupation layer.
17. Jar rim, grey ware with burnished lines, in lower occupation layer.
18. Jar base, black burnished ware, in lower occupation layer.
19. Cooking-pot rim, black burnished ware. Gillam 118. In lower occupation layer.
20. Cooking-pot, black burnished ware. 3 fragments from lower occupation layer.
21. Bowl, black burnished ware with fine cross-hatching. Gillam 119. 6 fragments in lower debris over platform in NW. quarter of turret.

All the above fragments are of 2nd century date, none necessarily late 2nd century. Unillustrated fragments are mainly from cooking-pots and none is thought to be later than 2nd century. I am indebted to both Mr R. A. H. Farrer and Mr P. Webster who looked through this pottery, each for his own reason, and agreed with the 2nd century date for the whole lot.

⁶ See also M. R. Hull, *Roman Colchester* (1958), type 387.

⁷ Same type in turret 49B, CW2 xiii (1913) 347, pl. xvi, 5.

The animal bones.

These were kindly identified by Mr R. Harcourt who reports that of the 79 identifiable bones all but 11 were of sheep or cattle. The one complete sheep bone, a metatarsal indicated a small, slender animal about 21 in. (54 cm) in height.

Other animals represented were pig, red deer, water-vole, frog or toad (the Wall ditch is extremely wet at this point) and fish.