

ART. III – *An excavation at Brougham Castle*

By JOHN M. ZANT

IN August 1997, a proposal was put forward by English Heritage to convert the former custodian's cottage at Brougham Castle, near Penrith (NY 537290), into an on-site museum. The proposed works included the construction of a short ramp in the existing cottage garden to allow disabled access into the museum from the road to the east, and a longer ramped path in the field west of the cottage, leading from the museum to the level terrace that approaches the castle's outer gatehouse from the east.

The cottage is situated on the west side of the road between Brougham Mill and Brougham Castle Farm, some 65 m east of the castle moat and close to the north-east corner of the Roman fort of *Brocavum*, whose earthwork remains lie south and east of the medieval castle (Fig. 1). In view of the archaeological sensitivity of this area, and its status as a scheduled ancient monument, it was agreed that archaeological personnel should undertake the ground works required for the construction of the ramps. Carlisle Archaeological Unit was commissioned to undertake the work, which was carried out under the direction of the present writer over a period of eight days in December 1997.

Methodology

Two shallow trenches were excavated along the proposed line of the ramps. The trench in the cottage garden was designated Trench 1, that in the field to the west being Trench 2 (Fig. 1). In both areas, the turf and modern topsoil were removed by hand to reveal the top of the underlying deposits, which were then cleaned and recorded. Since the archaeological brief required that excavation be limited to the disturbance necessary for construction purposes, archaeological features below the topsoil were generally left intact, although limited excavation of earlier deposits was required in certain areas.

Results

The base of Trench 1 was sloped slightly from west to east, in order to conform to the gradient required for the ramp. At the extreme eastern end of the trench, adjacent to the modern road, all archaeological deposits had been removed to a depth of at least a metre below the level of the cottage garden as a result of terracing associated with the construction of a late post-medieval building (represented by levelled walls 13 and 14 in Fig. 2). West of this disturbance, the top of a reddish-orange sandy gravel (12) was recorded 0.4–0.6 m below the surface. Although this layer had the appearance of a natural deposit, it could conceivably have been a man-made external surface composed of clean redeposited gravel.

Whatever the significance of the gravel may have been, it was cut by four sub-circular postholes (5, 7, 9, 11), each 0.4–0.5 m in diameter and filled with dark

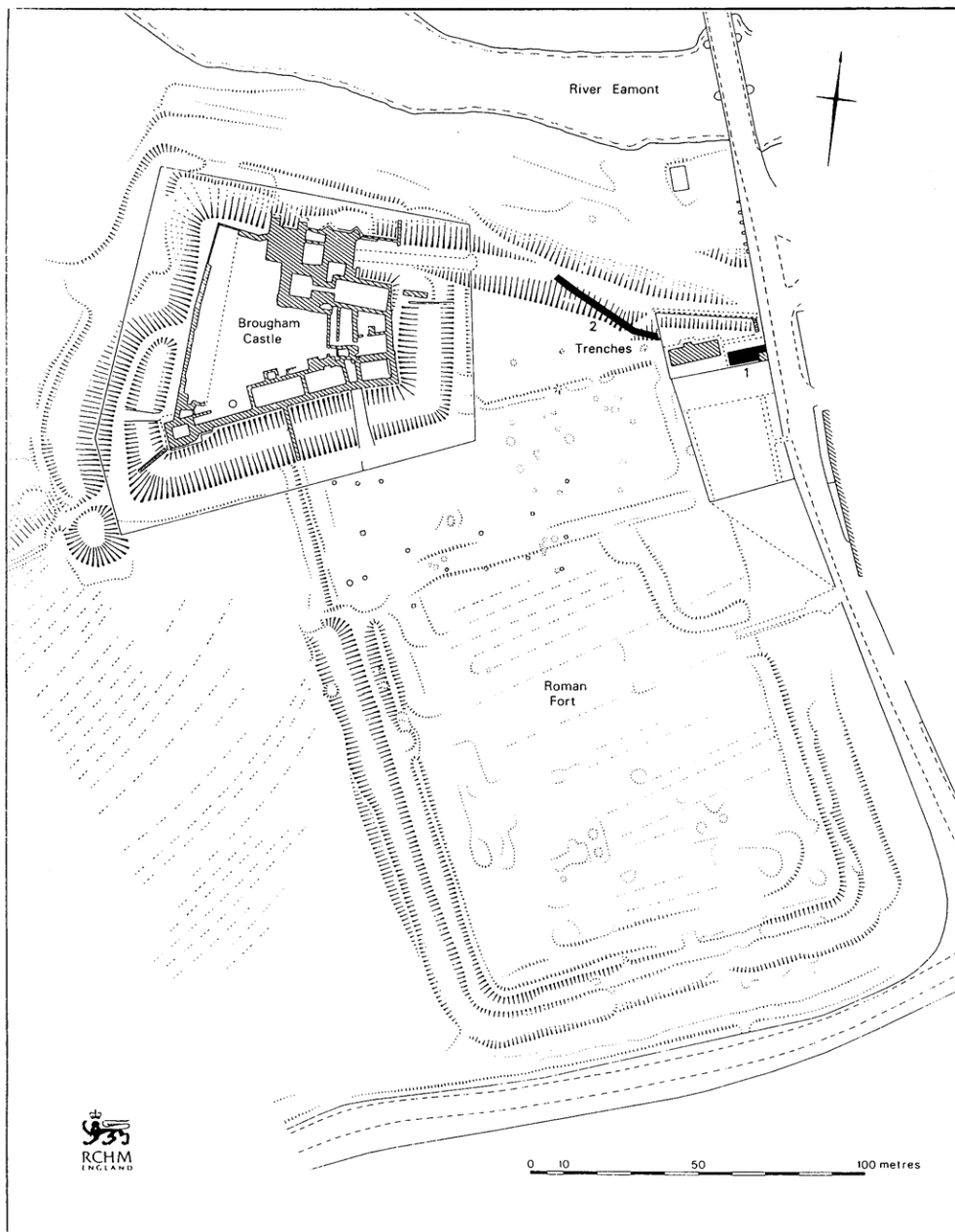


FIG. 1. Brougham Castle: plan showing position of Trenches 1 and 2 (after Summerson *et al.* 1998, Fig. 23; Crown copyright: RCHME) (scale 1:2,000).

brown sandy loam. These unexcavated and undated features presumably represent the remains of a timber structure of indeterminate character and date, the greater part of which lay beyond the limits of the excavation.

Sealing the postholes was a layer of mixed brown silty loam 0.2 m thick (2), which covered the whole of Trench 1 (except for the disturbed eastern end), although it was not removed completely over the greater part of the trench. This deposit, which is interpreted as a late medieval garden/cultivated soil, produced 46 sherds of medieval pottery, the latest being of fourteenth/fifteenth century date, and a gold quarter-noble of Edward III's Fourth Coinage, minted at London during the period 1363-69.¹ The coin exhibits little wear, and was probably lost between c.1370-80, when the lordship of Brougham was held by Roger Clifford (1354-89).

Cutting layer 2, and running roughly north-south across the trench, was a possible linear feature, c.0.65 m wide and filled with stony dark loam (3), which remained unexcavated. This feature, and all other archaeological deposits within Trench 1, was sealed by 0.2-0.4 m of modern garden soil. In addition to the medieval material, Trench 1 produced 16 Roman potsherds and two copper alloy coins, all of which were residual within layer 2 or the topsoil. Most of the ceramic material is of second- to early third-century date, though two sherds of fourth-century Huntcliffe-type ware were also recovered. The coins are issues of Crispus Caesar (A.D. 323-4) and Constantius II (A.D. 337-41).

In Trench 2, which cut diagonally across the steep and frequently uneven north-south slope forming the northern edge of the river terrace, the earliest archaeological remains were exposed at the extreme western end, where the trench extended onto the level east-west terrace forming the main approach to the castle from the modern road. Here a cobbled surface (29, Fig. 3), recorded 0.15-0.25 m below the turf, may represent the remains of a medieval road or track approaching the castle from the east. Bordering the south edge of the cobbling was a deposit of dark brown silty loam containing many white mortar fragments (31). The significance of this layer could not be determined without further excavation, although it may possibly have been the fill of a robber trench for a wall bounding the edge of the road/track. Both the cobbled surface and deposit 31 were sealed by a mid-brown silty clay up to 0.2 m thick (22), which produced three residual Roman potsherds and three sherds of thirteenth/fourteenth-century date.

A little under 7 m to the east, two poorly preserved walls of mortared red sandstone were recorded (25 and 26, Fig. 3). Both survived to only a single course in height, and consisted of a mortared rubble core faced with dressed blocks bonded in a gritty, cream-coloured mortar. Wall 25 was 0.92 m wide, but 26, which extended north at right angles to 25, had been badly disturbed, and survived to a width of only 0.55 m. Wall 25 was partly overlain by a layer of mixed dark earth and building debris (24), which almost certainly derived from its demolition.

In spite of the limited nature of the excavation, it seems clear that these remains represent part of a stone (or stone-footed) building situated approximately 35 m east of the castle moat. It is possible that this structure fronted the south side of the cobbled road (29) which was exposed at the western end of Trench 2, although the two were not certainly contemporary. Although the date of the building is unknown, layer 24, the deposit of earth and debris associated with the demolition of wall 25, produced a clay pipe-bowl dating to c.1660-80. Taken at face value this date is of

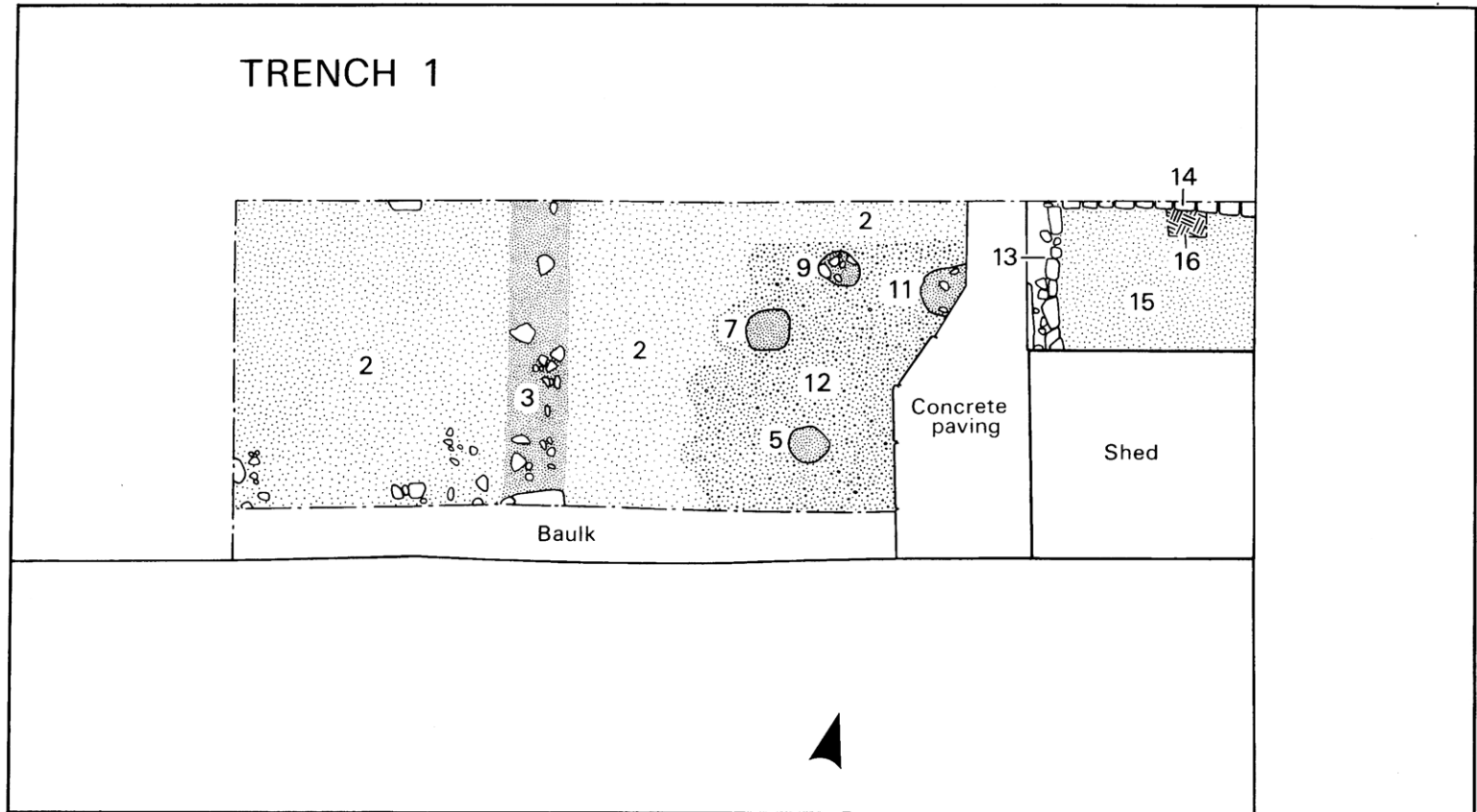


FIG. 2. Brougham Castle: plan of Trench 1 (scale 1:125).

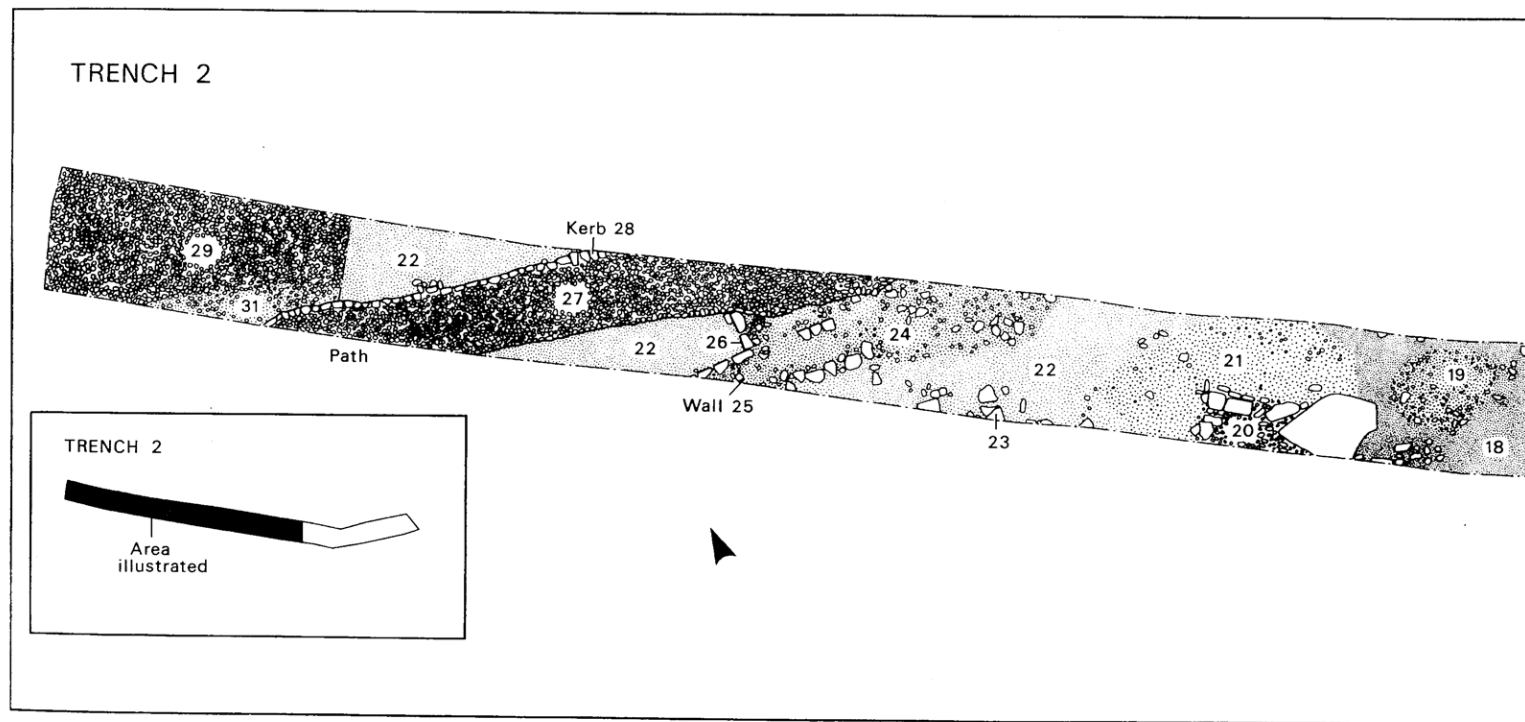


FIG. 3. Brougham Castle: plan of the western part of Trench 2 (scale 1:125).

some interest, for documentary sources attest to the construction by Lady Anne Clifford of a garden in the area south and east of the castle, probably during the 1660s.² However, tempting though it may be to associate the demolition of the building with these works, the pipe-bowl cannot provide a precise date, merely an indication of the period after which demolition must have occurred.

Some time after the building was levelled, a cobbled path 1.1 m wide (27), retained on its northern (downslope) edge by a kerb of red sandstone blocks (28), was laid out east to west across the trench. Although undated, the general character of the path was suggestive of a later post-medieval date, possibly eighteenth or even nineteenth century. Its alignment leaves little doubt that it extended towards the outer gatehouse of the castle from the modern road.

Some 5 m east of the path, and south of its projected line, a setting of unmortared red sandstone slabs and blocks (20) extended into the trench from the south. The precise character of this feature was impossible to determine; it comprised one large slab measuring 1.35 m by 0.8 m, a number of smaller slabs, and a concentration of cobbles and broken sandstone fragments, forming a possibly rectilinear setting measuring 2.8 m east-west and in excess of 1 m north-south. At the north-west corner of the feature were five smaller blocks set on edge. These appear to have been the remains of a kerb, which was perhaps intended to retain the feature and prevent it slipping down the steep south-north slope. Beneath the feature was a possibly natural deposit of fine gravel and some small pebbles in orange-brown soil (21), whilst to the east was an isolated patch of dark brown sandy loam containing numerous river cobbles (19). The date of feature 20 is unknown, and its purpose remains obscure, for it was stratigraphically isolated from all other deposits within Trench 2, excepting only layer 21 beneath, and the modern topsoil that sealed it.

Over the eastern 12.5 m of Trench 2, removal of the turf and topsoil revealed a layer of mid-brown silty clay loam containing frequent pebbles and small cobbles (18), at depths of 0.2-0.35 m below the modern surface. This deposit was probably the same as soil layer 22 in the western part of the trench. Excavation was halted at this level and no other features or deposits were recorded on this part of the site.

Almost all the pottery recovered from Trench 2 came from the modern topsoil, which was generally 0.15-0.3 m thick. Of the 49 sherds recovered from this layer, 34 are Roman and 15 post-Roman, the latest being single sherds of sixteenth/seventeenth-century and nineteenth-century date. The Roman assemblage is predominantly second to early third century, but includes three sherds of fourth-century Huntcliffe-type ware, whilst the medieval wares span the period from the later thirteenth-fifteenth centuries.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are extended to David Sherlock of English Heritage for facilitating the work, and to David Irwin of the architects, Lowe Rae, for providing on-site advice. Thanks also to the excavation team of Aaron Johnston, Juliet Reeves, Cori Renfrew and Jo Wood, and to Mike McCarthy for commenting on this note. Information on the Roman and medieval pottery was provided by Vivien Swan and Cathy Brooks respectively, and the Roman coins were identified by Dr David Shotton. Barrie Cook of the British Museum confirmed the identification of the quarter-noble, and

provided additional information about the coin. The illustrations were prepared by Philip Cracknell. Figure 1 is published with kind permission of The Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England.

Notes and References

- ¹ J. North, *English Hammered Coinage* (London, 1959) ii, 1243.
- ² H. Summerson, M. Trueman and S. Harrison, *Brougham Castle, Cumbria. A Survey and Documentary History* (1998) (CWAAS Research Series 8), 58.

