

EXCAVATIONS AT CHESTERS. 1903.

Trenches ———
 Ditch found - - -

Scale of feet
 0 10 20 30 40 50 60

ART. XIX.—*Report of the Cumberland Excavation Committee for 1903.* By F. HAVERFIELD, M.A., F.S.A., Hon. F.S.A., Scot.

THE tenth Report of the Cumberland Excavation Committee will be briefer than usual. Rain and other difficulties prevented any attempt at extensive operations—and in respect of the rain we may observe that we were hindered, not only by the actual showers and storms, but by the wetness of the ground, which caused deep trenches to fill speedily with water. We were able, however, to make an excursion into Northumberland—not as a committee, but in connection therewith—in search of the Vallum at Chesters. Here we found reason to think that the maps are correct, and the line of the Vallum coincides with the line of the southern rampart of the fort: we were also able to correct a few details, provisionally, in the planning of the buildings.* In Cumberland itself a trench across the Vallum at Hare Hill illustrated the construction of the Vallum mounds; some trenches at Newtown of Irthington filled up a tiny gap left in 1902; some observations of drainage work at Burgh by Sands gave negative evidence as to the site of the fort at that village.

We have to thank Mrs. Clayton for kindly allowing us to work in her park at Chesters. We have also to thank the Earl of Carlisle and Mr. F. P. Johnson, and their tenants Mr. Gibson of Lanercost and Mr. Gillespie of Newtown, for leave to dig in Cumberland. Mr. and Mrs. Hodgson have, as before, undertaken the toilsome, but most necessary, task of laying down the trenches and preparing plans.

* I described this to the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries on Aug. 26th, 1903.

I.—THE VALLUM AT CHESTERS.

As is well known, the line of the Vallum has almost everywhere vanished from the surface in the immediate neighbourhood of a fort, and this is the case at Chesters. Its line is visible, however, a little distance to the west, and this line, if produced nearly straight, would coincide almost exactly with the south rampart of the fort. It is, indeed, so laid down on the maps of MacLauchlan and the Ordnance Survey, and MacLauchlan adds (p. 32) that it here made a slight bend, diverging a little from the Wall on each side of the fort in order to reach the two ends of the southern rampart. Had it run strictly parallel with the Wall it would, according to his account, have fallen on to the east and west ramparts a few yards north of the corners of the fort. (Fig. I.) We desired to test

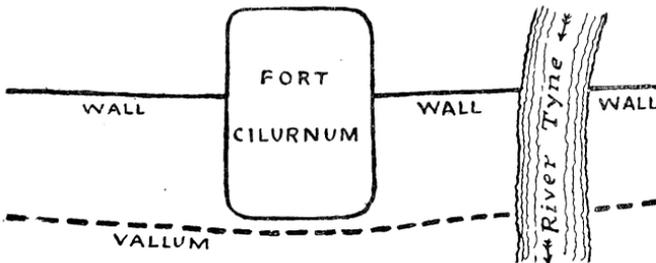


FIG. I. LINES AT CHESTERS, FROM MACLAUCLAN.

with the spade this judgment formed on the surface. The work was difficult. The subsoil is naturally wet here: the ground has been much disturbed and is full of huge stones; the site is a private park and not an open fell side where appearances do not matter, and our time was limited. We obtained, however, reasonable evidence, first, that a ditch ran round the fort with a broad berm of 15 or 20 feet between itself and the ramparts. This had been usually assumed; we strengthened the assumption by finding the ditch on the east and south sides.^o Secondly,

that the ditch of the Vallum, pursuing a slightly bending course, runs into this fort ditch at each of the southern corners, and coincides with it along the south face of the fort. We were able to decide that the Vallum makes the slight bend asserted by MacLauchlan, at any rate on the east side of the fort. But an attempt to trace the Vallum on the east bank of the Tyne was only doubtfully successful. The following are the details of the trenches which we dug:—

- I.—Trench 13 feet long, outside the east wall of the fort. This revealed the inner lip of the fort ditch, 8 feet from its west end and about 20 feet from the face of the Wall (berm). The dip of yellow gravel against black mixed earth was very clean.
- II.—Trench 31 feet long, across the presumed line of the Vallum near the slope of the ground to the Tyne. This was too difficult to dig wholly, but unquestionable traces of a flat-bottomed ditch,—the bottom $9\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep at $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet from the north end of the trench and $9\frac{3}{8}$ feet at 16 feet. Near the bottom, at 8 feet deep and below, were found pieces of leather, traces of ferns, heather, and the like and a stratum of greyish clay.
- III.—Trench 60 feet long, parallel to II. but further west. Here also the heaviness of the ground forbade complete excavation. The north end of the trench shewed a stratum of grey clay like that of trench II., but it contained no foreign matter such as leather or vegetation. This was the least satisfactory of our trenches, but the grey clay may reasonably be taken to represent the ditch of the Vallum.
- IV.—Trench 35 feet long, nearly perpendicular to III. and west of it. A ditch was found running right along the trench east and west, and at 10 feet from its east end the eastern edge of another ditch running in from the north at an angle (point A on plan). The undisturbed soil between the mixed soils of the two converging ditches was very plain. It is no great assumption to call the ditch running east and west the Vallum ditch and the ditch which meets it the ditch of the fort.
- V.—Trench 30 feet long, west of IV. and perpendicular to the south wall of the fort. This filled rapidly with water and could

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not be dug out. But the north lip of a ditch—presumably the combined fort and Vallum ditches—was noted about 15-16 feet from the outer face of the fort wall. Remains somewhat resembling a wall running east and west were found at $23\frac{3}{4}$ feet from the fort wall and overlying the ditch. Similar remains were found in trench VI., and it is possible that at some period the ditch was encroached upon for building purposes. But we had not time to trace these remains out.

- VI.—Trench 52 feet long, west of V. and parallel to it. The northern lip of a ditch was found at 15 feet from the outer face of the fort wall, the southern lip at 37 feet. The filling of the ditch shewed the following layers—(a) surface soil and mixed earth containing bones, potsherds, stones, etc.; (b) layer of gravel, at first sight looking as if undisturbed; (c) grey clay; (d) peaty matter, moss, boot-leather, Samian and other potsherds at $5-6\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep. At $26\frac{1}{4}$ feet from the fort wall were traces as of a wall running east and west; compare trench V.
- VII.—Trench 135 feet long, parallel to IV., dug in order to ascertain whether by chance the supposed Vallum ditch here swerved away from the fort as at Birdoswald. Undisturbed soil was found all along it.
- VIII.—Trench 12 feet long, parallel to VII., dug for additional certainty besides trench VII. Only undisturbed soil was found.
- IX.—Trench 24 feet long, near the S.W. angle of the fort. We found mixed earth and stones to 6 feet deep; then, greyish clay, and in it boot-leather, bones, potsherds, to $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep; water hindered further search.
- X.—Trench 31 feet long, at right angles to trench IX. Here again we had to dig through 6 feet of mixed earth and stones; below was dark matter, peat, bones for $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and then the undisturbed soil forming the bottom of the original ditch. The north slope of this ditch was found close to the north end of the trench; the south slope (much damaged, apparently) was 4 feet from the south end, so that the width of the ditch may have been less than 27 feet.

Various small objects were found in these trenches, but few of special interest. The pieces of leather and potsherds are mainly little fragments, but one boot is sufficiently

perfect to deserve restoration and illustration. The Samian ware is of ordinary types: the ornamented pieces belong to the bowl-class which dates probably from the second and third centuries. A base silver ring, a hone (?), and a small coin of Gordian (found in the upper soil of trench VI.) are also noteworthy.

The excavations at Chesters were superintended by Mr. T. H. Hodgson, Mr. R. Booker, and the present writer.

II.—THE FORT AT CHESTERS.

During our excavations we were able to take a few admeasurements of the fort. We could not attempt any complete survey, but two details may be worth noting:—

(1) Mr. Hodgson's observations with a prismatic compass and my own with a plane table agreed in shewing that neither the fort nor its central buildings, called the "prætorium," is a true rectangle. The south and east walls of the fort, the only ones sufficiently uncovered for correct measurement, are not at right angles, but would, if produced, contain a slightly smaller angle. The "prætorium" also is not a true rectangle, and its south side is not truly parallel to the south wall of the fort. Small inaccuracies of this sort are, of course, common in Roman forts both in England and abroad;* this example is worth noting because the archæological plans of Cilurnum, in Dr. Bruce's works and elsewhere, shew the buildings to be regularly laid out. The Ordnance Survey Map shews the irregularity, and is, in this case, more correct than the archæologists.

(2) The south-west corner of the "prætorium," as figured on the published maps (again excepting the Ordnance Map), appears without one or two details of interest. The two western rooms contain two central "squares" of flooring, and the room marked A on the

* Mr. St. John Hope tells me, however, that he has tested minutely some of the public buildings at Silchester and finds them, as a rule, absolutely correct.

plan (Fig. 2) yielded, when excavated, some coal and other traces of firing. Similar features have been noted at Housesteads and elsewhere. Further, a room has to be added between the room containing B and the steps of

**SOUTH-WEST CORNER OF
CENTRAL BUILDING . CHESTERS**

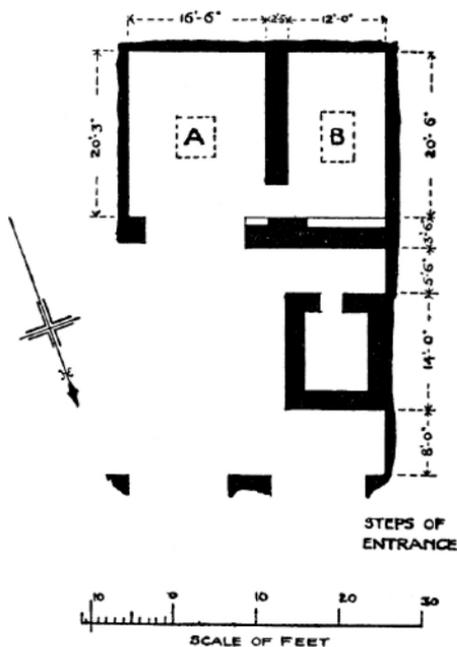


FIG. 2.

the western entrance to the "prætorium." A rather puzzling structure exists in nearly the same position at Housesteads. The Chesters room measures externally 12 by 14 feet, has a door on the south side 33 inches wide, and is surrounded by walls 27 inches thick. I am told that broken glass was found in it.*

* It may be added that the three entrances to the rooms at the south of the "prætorium" (room A and two rooms to the left of it, not shewn in Fig. 2) are not 18 feet wide, as is stated in Dr. Bruce's *Handbook* (p. 94, ed. 4), but the central one measures $13\frac{1}{2}$ feet, the left and right ones $12\frac{1}{2}$ feet each.

III.—THE VALLUM ON HARE HILL.

Just outside the north-east corner of the Abbey Park Wood, and immediately under the farm of Harehill, the Vallum survives in fair preservation.*

A trench was dug here in 1894 and an opportunity offered this year for another section, about 100 feet west of the former work. Unfortunately, the wetness of the soil prevented a complete section.

The Vallum here consists of a north mound and berm, ditch and two south mounds. It measures superficially about 125 feet from the north edge of the north mound to the south edge of the southernmost mound. The base of the north mound is about 30 feet wide. The two south mounds are distinctly smaller; the berm may be reckoned at 15 feet wide, the ditch at 26-27 feet. The subsoil of the hillside is a red sandy clay, with a very thin layer of whitish-grey clay lying above it generally. Our excavation of the north mound (Fig. 3) shewed that its top has



FIG. 3. NORTH MOUND OF VALLUM, HAREHILL (1 : 100).

been much ploughed down and soil has been piled against its north slope, either through ploughing or through the natural drainage down the hillside. The bulk of the mound is the clay of the subsoil, principally red, partly grey. The whole is obviously no chance upcast, but a definite bank. In the berm and ditch the undisturbed soil lies close below the surface, and we have here the original contour, only largely levelled down by ploughing. Of the south mounds, the southernmost is, as usual, the

* It is one of the fairly numerous places where the ground rises sharply to the north of the Vallum, shewing that, if the Vallum had a military "front" at all, that front cannot be to the north.

larger. It consists of a bank of red clay like that in the north mound, but rather smaller. The inner (marginal) mound contained no such bank, but a thin layer of mixed earth hardly more than 4 feet long. Here, as at Appletree, the north and southernmost mounds of the Vallum consist of definite banks of earth, obviously taken from the ditch, while the inner or marginal mound is a much more uncertain structure.

The work at Hare Hill was supervised by the present writer.

IV.—EXCAVATION AT NEWTOWN OF IRTHINGTON.

In 1902 we were prevented from tracing the Vallum across the field between Newtown and Headswood (plan, Vol. iii., p. 340) by the presence of a crop of turnips. In the spring of 1903, however, we had the opportunity of getting on to this field, and so completing the work. Mr. Hodgson, who supervised, sends the following account of it :—

We proceeded to dig a trench in the production of the line already found, at a distance of 380 feet from the fence on the S.W. side. We at once found the ditch, not a very well-defined section, but filled with grey silt mixed with black vegetable matter, and easily distinguishable from the red sand which here forms the subsoil. At a depth of 7 feet 4 inches we got through the silt, and the red sand of the subsoil reappeared. This trench was at nearly the lowest point, the water draining toward it from both sides; the accumulation of vegetable matter was, therefore, as might be expected, considerable. The slope of both sides of the ditch was found fairly well marked in the red sand. We then proceeded to dig a trench across the continuation of the same line, at a distance of about 900 feet from the fence before mentioned, and about 150 feet from the point at which the field falls steeply to the alluvial holms of the Cambeck. Here we again found the

grey silt, as well as the slope of both sides, and, at the depth of 7 feet 4 inches, as before, found that the red sand reappeared, showing that we had reached the bottom of the ditch. This trench being on higher ground, the water had drained away from it, and the black vegetable matter was much less in quantity, but at a depth of 7 feet we found leaf mould, among which were the remains of a leaf, probably an oak leaf, still retaining its texture when examined under the microscope. The crop being off, a well-defined "slack" was plainly visible for at least two-thirds of the length of the field, exactly in the line of the Vallum ditch, which it probably represents. We were thus satisfied that we had traced the Vallum to the cliff overhanging the valley of the Cambeck. There seems no prospect of our being able to trace it across the valley. The steep banks have been evidently subject to much erosion, and the low-lying holms are liable to such frequent and heavy floods that all traces must have been long since washed away. But the line now found would probably continue till it intersected the line produced from the point marked "cliff" on the map. This would be a little north-east of the small stream coming down from near the house at Beck, where the course of the Cambeck, which has evidently changed often, may well have been at the time of the Roman occupation.

V.—THE ROMAN STATION AT BURGH-BY-SANDS.

In September, 1903, the Carlisle Rural District Council laid a sewer at Burgh-by-Sands, along the road to the north of the churchyard for a distance of about 550 feet, passing directly across the area of the Roman Station as laid down on MacLauchlan's Survey, and crossing the supposed site of both east and west walls of the Station. No trace of walls or foundations of any kind were seen, nor were any relics, not even a fragment of pottery or hewn stone, discovered, though a careful watch was kept.

The cutting was made to a depth of 8 to 10 feet, through red sand with water-worn pebbles of various stone, and no trace of disturbed or mixed soil was seen, though the sub-soil is such as would at once betray any disturbance.

MacLauchlan (p. 81) does not speak confidently of the site assigned by him to the Station. He appears to base it chiefly on uncertain analogies. It now seems certain that it is incorrect.

Earlier notices of the Station are slight. Camden says, "There was also another Roman Station, which by a change of the name is at present called Burgh-upon-Sands." But he makes no suggestion as to its situation. Gordon, in 1724, mentions Burgh, but he does not even suggest that there was a Roman Station there. Horsley, in 1732, is more explicit. He says, "The name of Burgh leads one to think of a Station there. And when I was upon the spot I saw and heard of such other evidences as lead no room for doubt. The Station has been a little to the east of the church, near what they called the Old Castle" (of the de Morvilles) "where there are the manifest remains of its ramparts. On the west side the remains are most distinct, being about six chains in length." Hutton, in 1801, says, "Severus was obliged to choose (for the site of the Station) a low meadow, about 200 yards east of the church, called the Old Castle, the foundations of which are still visible." Bruce is doubtful. He quotes Horsley, and seems to accept his view. But he thought that the church and churchyard were within the Station.

On the whole, Horsley is probably nearer the mark than anyone else. The field in which the Old Castle traditionally stood is to the east of the village and to the north of the road leading to Carlisle, opposite the present vicarage. A man who was employed in draining it told us that it is full of made earth and fragments of stone, though he had seen no trace of foundations. The Roman remains found at Burgh, so far as their site have been minutely

recorded, seem to come from the eastern side of the village. Potsherds have been found in the churchyard, and a few other things at the vicarage and near it.

There is no building stone in the neighbourhood, and Wall and Station would be early spoiled to their foundations, perhaps for the De Morvilles' castle, which itself has in turn been destroyed for similar purposes.

The work at Burgh was watched by Mr. Hodgson, to whom the preceding paragraphs are due. The vicar of Burgh, the Rev. J. Baker, also rendered kindly aid.

EXPENDITURE.

The whole expenditure in 1903 was defrayed by private subscriptions, and the balance of the £25 voted by the Society for our work, now £15, is intact for use next year. We have to thank the Yorkshire Archæological Society for a contribution of three guineas towards our work on the Roman Wall.

NOTE.

We desire in these Reports to avoid controversy, except such as arises directly from our work. We do not, therefore, propose to discuss here the paper by Dr. Emil Krüger on "Die Limesanlagen im nördlichen England," contributed to the "Bonner Jahrbücher." Nor do we, on the other hand, wish silence to be interpreted as agreement with Dr. Krüger's views. We should like, therefore, to say briefly that we cannot regard his article as contributing any real advance towards the solution of the Mural problems. Dr. Krüger treats his evidence, both ancient and modern, with much arbitrariness, and he commits serious errors in points of fact, which vitiate his criticisms and his theories alike. These defects neutralise the useful material which is also contained in his pages, and the net result is not to bring us nearer, but to take us further away, from a correct appreciation of the facts of the English "Limes."
