

ART. XVI.—*The Roman Station at Watercrock.* By
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Read at Kendal, February 10th, 1932.

UP to the time I started my excavations, all that was known about this site is well summed up in the articles by W. G. Collingwood in Vol. viii of our *Transactions* in 1908 and R. G. Collingwood in Vol. xxx, 1930. I need not print these accounts, as they will be found in the *Transactions*.

Mr. R. G. Collingwood says, "Apart from the above material (referring to Machell's and Horsley's accounts) the plan of sun burnt strips made by Mr. Arthur Hoggarth in 1887 is our only indication of the plan of the fort, and the only inscription which has any historical value is the tombstone of P. Aelius Bassus, which makes it clear that the fort was inhabited at least as late as the end of the 3rd century.

A piece of Samian with the stamp Albinus M. is the only recorded piece of pottery which is of use as evidence. Albinus was a S. Gaulish potter of the reign of Nero and Vespasian (56-79), but one piece of pottery does not make a date."

Four coins only are recorded, two of Augustus and Vespasian, one of Lucilla and one of Faustina.

When I started work, I went on the plans of W. G. and R. G. Collingwood and the survey of Hoggarth, and my first attempt was to find the N.W. gate. I was only about five yards out in my calculations, which speaks well for the accuracy of R. G. Collingwood's plan. The Via Principalis, as shown, ran right through the gate, but the actual gateway was further away from the existing stone wall than is shown on Hoggarth's plan.



FIG. 1.—WATERCROOK—N.W. CORNER OF NORTH GUARDROOM,
Showing back of well here.

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FIG. 3.—WATERCROOK—N.W. CORNER OF NORTH GUARDROOM,
Showing floor 3 and part of floor 2.

I first of all came across a very rough wall which was undoubtedly the back of the fort wall. Up to that time it was not known for certain if there had been a wall or only an earth rampart (*see fig. 1*).

I followed the wall which stood nearly four feet high for 21 feet in a northerly direction, and the section at the end of my trench proved interesting.

It showed 16 inches of humus, then four inches of whitish clay and then a dark band of about four inches, stopping abruptly about eight inches from the back of the wall.

This black line indicated the top of the original earthen rampart of the early (1st century) fort.

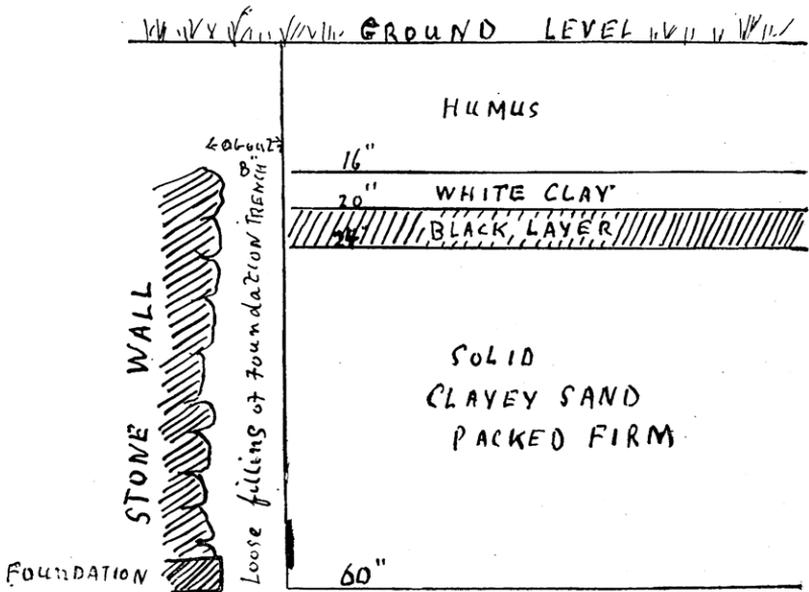
Later on, probably in the reign of Hadrian, when many of the defences in the N. of England were improved and consolidated, the face of the rampart was squared off and a stone wall built, the back of the lower part of which would rest against the bank and so show the rough appearance which I found (*fig. 2*).

Curiously enough, there was one row of dressed and well built stones along the bottom of the wall, which was five feet below the present level.

I searched for the outer face of the wall, but it has been robbed of all its facing stones, showing, however, three layers of mortar from the place where they had been taken, and, allowing for the robbed stones, the width of the wall would be about five feet.

On the south side of the trench I found another rough wall going back at right angles to the main wall, and found this was the back of the guard chamber of the gateway. The guard chamber had been much robbed for stone, but the N.W. corner was well preserved and ran to 2 courses above the footings, which projected two or three inches (*fig. 3*). The S.E. corner had been demolished, and I could not find the southern wall, but I have since located its foundations. There were no remains of the

actual gateway or the spina between the two roads. It was all a confused mass of rubble, mortar and stones. I found the S. guard chamber with the S. wall complete in length, the S.E. corner in good condition, and the E. wall as far as the doorway (fig. 4). From these remains I was able to get an accurate reconstruction of the gateway (see plan, fig. 5).



WATERCROOK.

FIG. 2.—Section of trench at North end of North Guardroom. Through Rampart.

It had two guard rooms 10 feet 4 inches square internally, with doorways 3 feet 8 inches leading into the camp on the side nearest the road. There were two roadways 10 feet broad with probably a spina of four feet between them.

I could not find any traces of reconstruction or any marks of former post holes in the gateway, and looking at Hoggarth's plan, one is at once struck with the curious



FIG. 4.—WATERCROOK—SOUTH GUARDROOM,
Showing plinth of outer face of wall.
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FIG. 6.—WATERCROOK—SOUTH GUARDROOM,
Showing ditch and water wall.

WATERCROOK.

PLAN SHEWING GUARD ROOMS & ROADWAY.

SCALE = 1" = 4'-0".

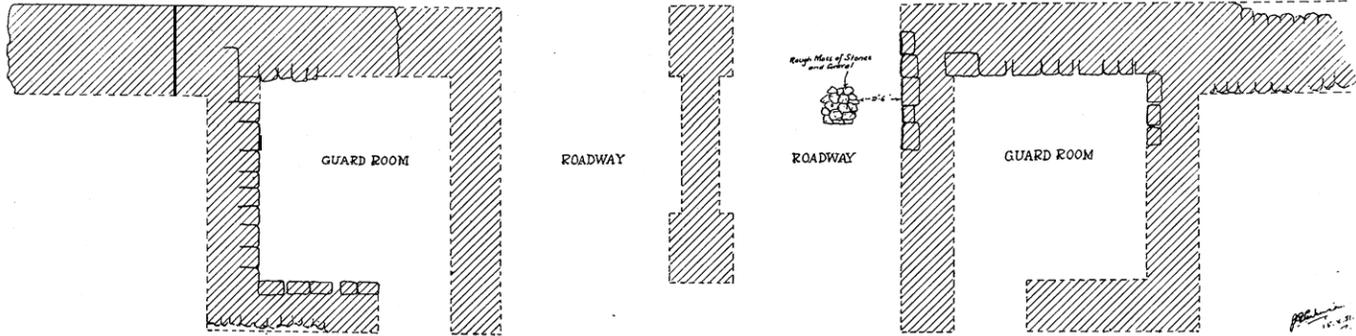
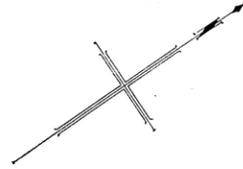
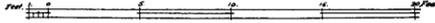


FIG. 5.

course of the road outside the gate towards the river. The road bends to the S.E. at right angles for a short distance, and then continues straight on again towards the river.

The only possible explanation which I can think of is that this detour was made to avoid an existing building in the vicus, in which case the earlier gate, if there was one, should be looked for further to the south than the present one, probably in line with the continuation of the road.

On the outer side of the S. guard chamber, I found the footings and part of the outer face of the wall. This wall was 2 feet 2 inches thick, and had a well marked rounded footing which I was able to trace for 21 feet. Outside the wall, there was a berm of 2 feet 6 inches and then a broad ditch containing a lot of building stones, animal bones and pottery. I cleared the ditch out to a depth of over six feet at 10 feet from the edge of the berm. It was a long job, as the ditch contained such quantities of building stones, and unfortunately, owing to the wet weather, it caved in and I was unable to get its accurate dimensions, but as far as I could judge, it was a single broad ditch over 13 feet wide.

I next made a trial hole (1) nearer to the N.W. corner of the fort, expecting to find the back of the wall again. As I did not find it, I made another trial hole No. 2, nearer to the corner. I did not find the wall here, as it had all been robbed, but I found a considerable amount of pottery including several pieces of Samian No. 37, one fine base with Dolphins and Tripods on it and the potter's stamp of Paternus, a very prolific Lezoux potter A.D. 140-180; one might almost call him the Woolworth of the times.

I afterwards made a trench N.W. from this hole, but found no remains of the wall, and it was only when I was finishing up that I struck the edge of the ditch which was further out than I expected.



FIG. 7.—WATERCROOK—N.W. CORNER AND REMAINS OF WALLS.



FIG. 8.—WATERCROOK—AIR PHOTOGRAPH OF SITE.

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I next tried to find the angle turret, if it existed, and started a trench (No. 3) on the N. side, well between the existing mound at the corner, hoping to find the ditch and wall and then the tower. I did not find the ditch, which must have been further out round the corner. I found a mass of stone crossing the trench, which suggested a wall, but it had all been pulled down and robbed, and there was no part of it in position nor were there any facing stones, even loose ones. Higher up, near the highest part of the bank, I found another large mass of stones which I think must represent the remains of the main wall, but again it was too much robbed to make anything clearly out of it. Thinking I had perhaps missed the turret, I turned my trench round in an easterly direction. I could not find definite traces of the turret, but above the mass of stones I have mentioned before I was able to trace three fairly distinct floor levels. The section showed six inches humus then eight inches of gravel, the bottom of which I took for the upper floor, then nine inches of blackish rubbish with a considerable amount of pottery and a floor of rough slabs of stone. Underneath this there was 10 inches of building material and rubbish, rather lighter in colour than the layer above, and also containing pottery. Beyond the floors there was a small piece of walling which looked like a threshold. It was 13 feet 6 inches from the mass of building stones. Outside the threshold, I found two small coins, one of Claudius Gothicus, 268-270, and the other of Tetricus I, *circa*. 270-273 (half barbarous). Both coins were in a very bad condition, and it was only after a long treatment that they could be deciphered.

The only other coin we found was in the ruined gateway, and it is still being treated. I am almost certain it is a coin of Gallienus. It is curious that the only coins found were all 3rd century and of three succeeding reigns, and unfortunate that none of them were of much use for dating purposes.

I could not be certain whether there was a turret at the N.W. corner, or possibly a platform. There was certainly some erection there, but it had been completely robbed, and was very hard to make anything of (fig. 7).

I have been unable to explore the Civil Settlement as I wished to do, on account of the land, but I discovered in the banks of the river the remains of a rubbish pit, from which I got a few pieces of datable pottery, and, behind it, I found a wall standing up to three courses. The style of walling is much rougher than that of the camp, though well built, and I think it is probably the surrounding wall of the vicus, though possibly it may be the foundation of a building. This wall is about 230 feet in a N.N.E. direction from the N.W. corner of the fort.

I had some air photographs taken of the site, but they did not show up much. They do show, however, some curious earthworks across the river, cutting off the angle between the river and a small stream coming into it. It was somewhere near this that the pottery kilns, mentioned by Cornelius Nicholson, were found in 1813, but probably on the other side of the small stream. I have verified the earthwork on the ground, but could not find any traces of the pottery kilns (fig. 8).

The finds included two portions of quern stones, one from the N. guard room and one just outside it in the gateway; a small gold earring which was found in the earth thrown out of the S. guard room; an iron knife, an iron stylus, one piece of a Kimmeridge Shale bowl; a beautiful little belt ornament (?) in bronze with traces of silvering on it and an openwork pattern, on the lowest floor of N. guard room; portion of a mortarium, with a well defined maker's mark on it of late 1st century make.

A fair amount of Samian ware was found, including a complete base of form 37 with Paternus stamp on it, showing Dolphins and Tripods from Trial Hole 2, also two other fragments probably of same potter; two fragments



WATERCROOK—BUILDING STONES EXCAVATED FROM DITCH.

of form 37, probably by Albucius, Lezoux, mid 2nd century, Trial Hole 2; Ovolo, form 37, with Boxer, Antonine, Lezoux, N.W. corner; a large fragment, form 37, showing a Rheinzabern Ovolo from ditch; a fragment, form 38, 2nd half 2nd century, Trial Hole 2, potter's stamp Lupinus; a fragment with graffiti "N.D." from outside gate, six fragments showing rivet holes; a fair amount of Huntcliff ware.

There was also a large quantity of pottery upon which I have not yet been able to get a report, but with which I hope to deal more fully in a later report.

Owing to the disturbed state of the site, only a certain amount was properly stratified and available for dating purposes.

To summarise the results obtained, we have plenty of evidence of occupation from 1st to 4th century.

Also evidence of an early earth fort later turned into a stone built fort, the stones are extremely well-dressed, showing very much better work than those used at the Ambleside fort. The one gateway so far explored was a double one with two guard rooms and two 10 foot roadways.

Unfortunately I have not been able to continue my work on this most interesting site, and there are still a lot of problems waiting to be solved, but we can say that for the first time some systematic excavation has taken place here, and we know a good lot more of the Roman Station at Watercrook than we did two years ago.

I wish to thank the Society very much for their financial assistance, which enabled me to carry out the work, also our member, Mr. S. Bendle, and Miss D. Burgess for their great assistance in the excavations. Thanks are also due to the "Westmorland Gazette" for kind permission to reproduce the photographs illustrating this article, and to Mr. J. Parkinson for surveying and planning the site.