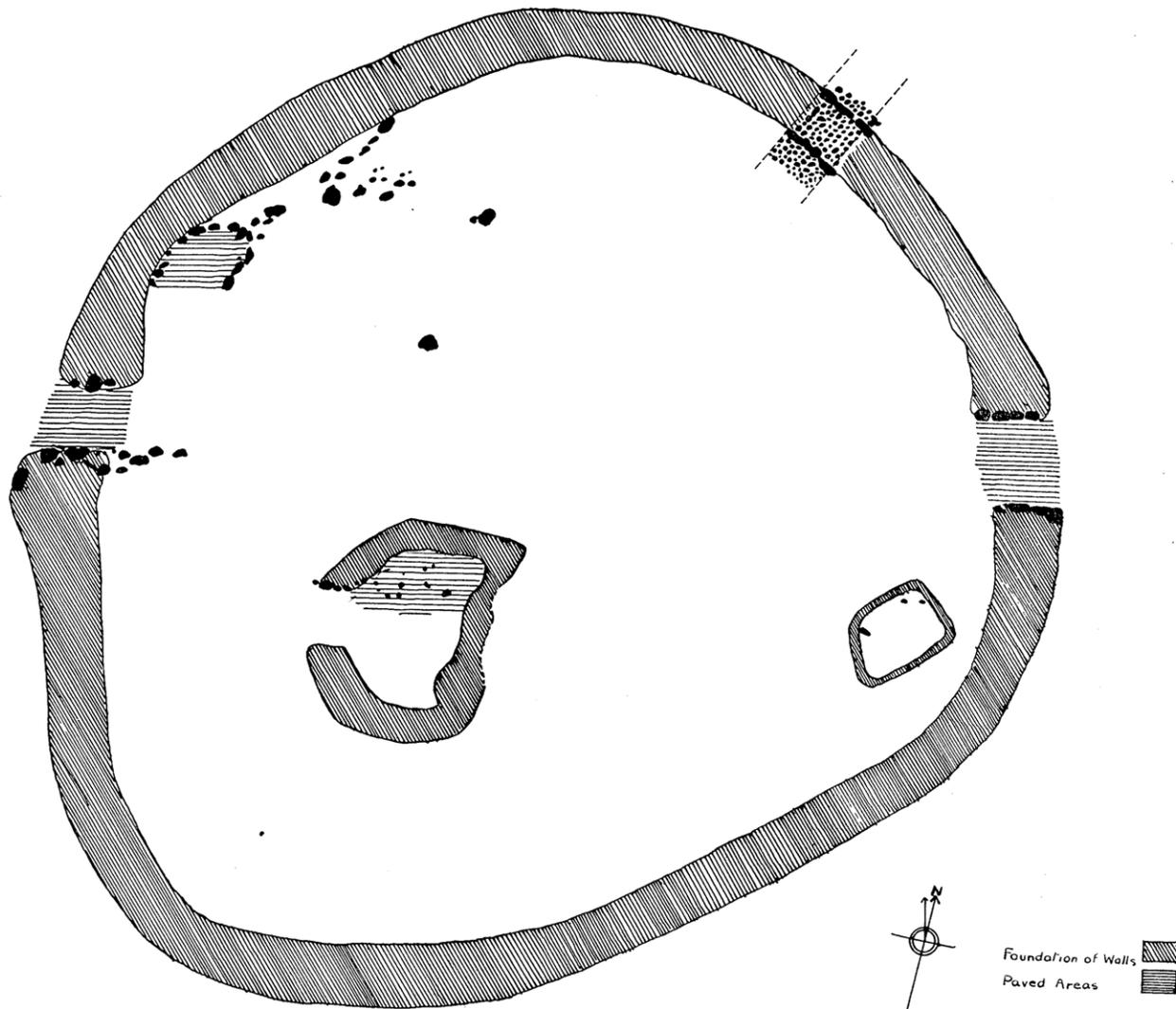


BOLTON WOOD ENCLOSURE.
GOSFORTH PARISH



0 5 10 20 30 40 50 60
Scale of Feet

JES
1936

To face p. 43.

ART. VI.—*Bolton Wood Enclosure*. By J. E. SPENCE,
M.B. D.P.H.

Read at Penrith, July 7th, 1936.

THE valleys of the Irt, Mite, and Esk, with their common estuary at Ravenglass, have always occupied an important position in the early history of West Cumberland. The Romans left evidence of their occupation in the camps at Ravenglass and Hardknott, the Norse by their monuments at Gosforth, Irton, Muncaster and Waberthwaite. There are abundant remains of the earlier inhabitants of the district on the fells at Barnscar, Burnmoor, Irton Fell and Stockdale Moor, and in the adjacent valleys stone and bronze implements have been found. Evidence of a possibly earlier occupation has been revealed recently by the discovery of a flint industry among the sand dunes of Drigg and Eskmeals.

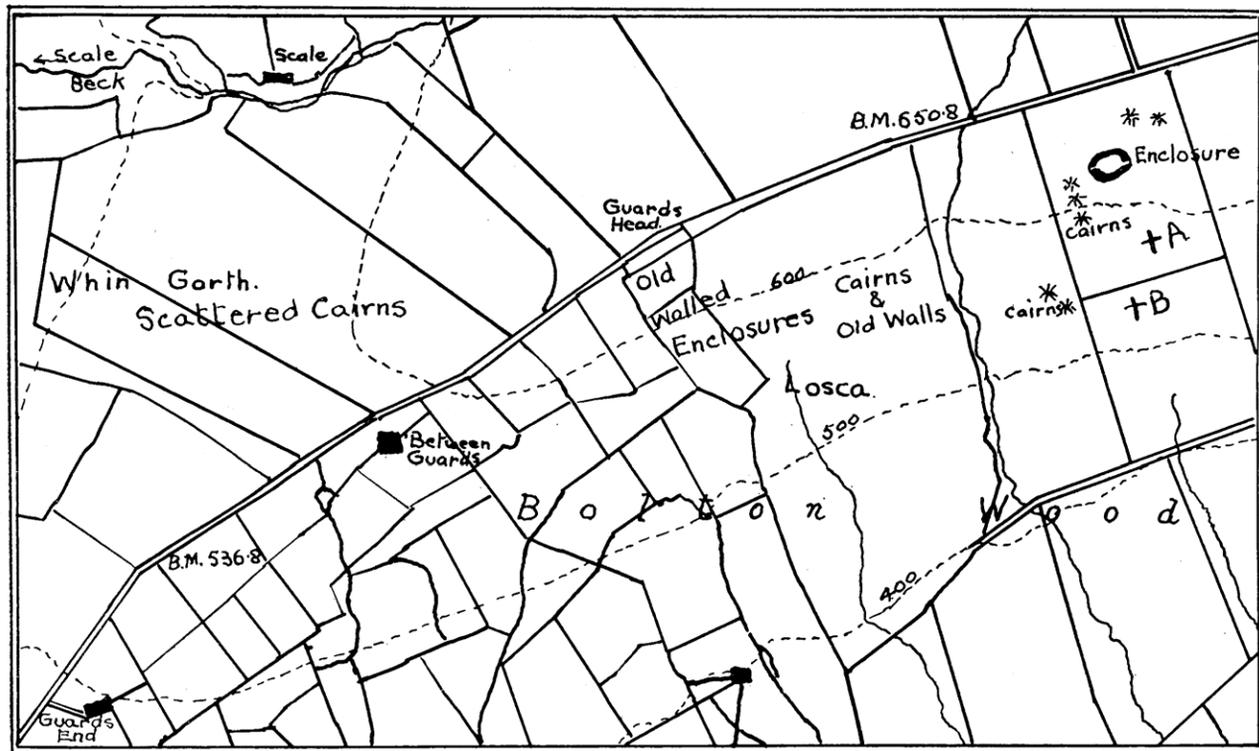
On the North side of the valley of the Irt the ground falls gently from the lower slopes of Seatallan towards the West forming a fairly level tongue of land which runs down towards the elbow formed by the river Bleng. On the southern slopes of this tongue of land about two miles West of Gosforth is an ancient enclosure which lies on gently sloping ground about 100 feet below the crest of the ridge and 300 feet above the valley.

The land on which the enclosure is situated was open fell until the second quarter of the nineteenth century. In the neighbouring parks there are scattered tumuli and foundations of early walls while in the same park as the enclosure a copper battle-axe (A on the six-inch map) was found in 1820, and in the park to the South a stone axe-hammer (B) has been found.

The enclosure has been known for some time to our member, Miss M. C. Fair, and it is due to her interest in the site and the interest of Mr. J. B. Wrigley, of Steelfield Hall, Gosforth, the owner of the ground, that I am enabled to explore the site. I desire to express my thanks to Mr. Wrigley for his assistance in the excavation of the site and the provision of the necessary labour, and to acknowledge the assistance of Miss K. S. Hodgson and Dr. Pringle in the work.

The enclosure is situated on the fell side, 625 feet above ordnance datum, on ground which slopes gently to the South; its South wall being eight feet below the level of the North wall. It is approximately circular: its diameter from East to West is 151 feet, while from North to South it measures 157 feet. It has two entrances, that on the East is eleven feet six inches wide and that on the West eight feet wide. In the interior are three enclosures, one a little to the South of its centre, one South of the East gate and one North of the West gate.

The foundations of the enclosure wall are quite distinct around the entire circumference, but on the South side where the ground falls rather more steeply the foundations have been disturbed and have spread somewhat. A section of the wall in the North-East quadrant was selected for examination and the turf removed. The wall was found to consist of an outer and an inner line of orthostats, its overall width being eight feet six inches. Between the orthostats the foundation consisted of boulders carefully pitched in regular courses across the width of the wall. On the outer side was a slight revetment of small stone, while on the inner side, owing to the greater fall of the ground, the revetment was more extensive, being about four feet in width. There was no ditch on the outer side of the enclosure wall. As the wall approaches the entrances it gradually becomes wider and terminates in a line of larger orthostats on either side of them. Of the walls, only the foundation courses



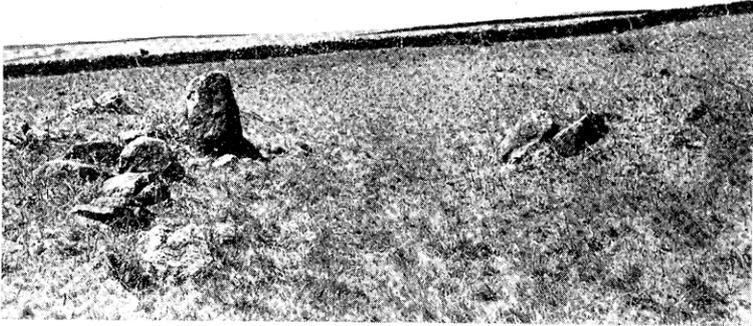
BOLTON WOOD, GOSFORTH. Scale 6 inches to 1 mile.

remain throughout the whole circumference, the upper courses having doubtless been used as a convenient quarry for stones in the early part of the last century when the common was enclosed

The Eastern entrance is eleven feet six inches wide; the wall on its North side being ten feet three inches thick and on the South side eleven feet thick. The orthostats forming the abutment of the wall on the North side stand two feet six inches above ground, while two of those on the South are four feet in length but not so high. The entrance is paved with a rough layer of stones between which indications of dirt were found, but the soil below the stones is clean and undisturbed. The pavement terminates in a straight line on a level with the outer and inner faces of the wall.

The West entrance is not so well preserved; most of the orthostats forming the abutment of the wall on the North side have been removed, but on the South side one large orthostat three feet in height and several smaller ones remain. The Southern abutment appears to have been continued into the enclosure as a wall for a distance of ten feet, its foundation being indicated by a line of stones running Eastwards. This entrance was paved similarly to the East entrance, the pavement terminating at the inner and outer faces of the wall which, on the South side of the entrance, is wider than at any other part of the circumference.

In the interior are three enclosures. The central enclosure is irregular in shape, its North and East sides are almost straight forming a right angle, while the remaining walls are approximately circular. The foundations of the walls are about five feet in thickness, but the outer face of the East wall is irregular owing to the removal of some of the stones. The remains of the walls consist of a single layer of stones, but there are no orthostats as in the wall of the main enclosure. The entrance, which is seven feet wide, is on the West side.



View from inside before excavation.



View from outside showing pavement.

BOLTON WOOD ENCLOSURE.

West Entrance.

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Photo. by J. E. Spence.

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The Northern portion has been paved, and, in the paving two circular depressions were noted which were suggestive of hearths, but there was no evidence of fire on the stones. The floor over the remainder of the enclosure is of earth with a few scattered stones. About one quarter of an inch of the earth showed evidence of dirt, but below this level the soil is clean and undisturbed.

Abutting on the main wall, fifteen feet North of the Western entrance, is a horse shoe-shaped enclosure, ten feet in width, with a roughly paved floor. Its walls are formed of large boulders about the same size as the orthostats of the main enclosure wall. The pavement, which is very uneven, terminates towards the South in a straight line.

To the South-West of the East entrance is a rectangular enclosure thirteen feet long and nine feet wide. The foundations of the walls are thin and consist of a single course of stones.

The remainder of the enclosure showed no evidence, on the surface, of other buildings and was not explored.

A small tumulus, twelve feet in diameter, lying 50 yards to the West of the enclosure was also opened. It consisted of a rough mound of boulders and, at a depth of eighteen inches, fragments of charcoal were encountered. Below a large boulder at a depth of three feet a mass of black unctuous earth about a foot thick was found containing a large amount of fine charcoal, some small fragments of bone and part of a charred hazel nut. The fragments of bone were few in number and small in size. Nothing was found which would assist in dating the cremation, but the tumulus was similar in all respects to one opened on Moor Divock in 1934 and reported in *Transactions*, N.S. xxxv.

During the examination of the site no objects were found which might in any way assist in dating the enclosure. The structure of the wall foundations is similar to that of the walls of other early enclosures, such

as the one explored at Millrigg last year, which have been provisionally assigned to the Romano-British period. The absence of hut circles or any evidence of habitation excludes the possibility of it being a settlement site. It is situated on a gently sloping upland moor which would form a good summer grazing ground for cattle and, in the absence of evidence of habitation, it appears to be a reasonable presumption that the enclosure was a summer sheeling for the protection of the herd against wild animals at night, while the central enclosure has been a smaller fold for cattle. Some shelter for the herdsman would be necessary, and it is probable that the enclosure to the North of the West entrance might have provided protection for him during inclement weather. The rectangular enclosure South of the East entrance is similar to many which may be found scattered about the fells in the two counties, and is probably a peat-house of much later date. It is probable that the tumuli in the neighbourhood may have no connection with the enclosure and may be earlier in date.

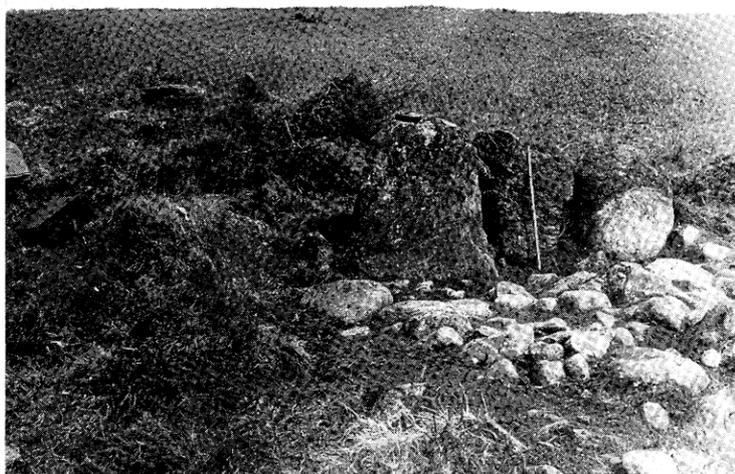
The place-names in the vicinity—Losca, Guards Head, Between Guards, and Scale—are interesting reminders of the Norse occupation of the district. At Guards Head are the remains of a farmstead of early date which may possibly be Norse.

The only positive inference which can be made from the exploration of the enclosure is that it was not a permanent settlement but merely a summer sheeling. Its date is undetermined, but, from the structure of the enclosing walls, it may be assigned to the Romano-British period.

About a mile to the West of the enclosure, in the parks to the North of Between Guards farm, there are a large number of cairns which resemble tumuli. Permission was obtained to explore a representative sample of them, but on excavation they proved to be heaps of stone gathered from the ground when it was under cultivation.



North abutment of wall. South abutment of wall.
View from West after clearing.



North abutment of enclosure wall on East Gate.

BOLTON WOOD ENCLOSURE.

Photo. by J. E. Spence.

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