

ART. V.—*Cote How Tower (16a), on the Cumberland coast.* By I. A. RICHMOND, F.B.A.

Read at Penrith, July 3rd, 1956.

THE Roman tower in Cote How sandpit, south of Mawbray Beck, has recently been classified by Mr R. L. Bellhouse (CW2 liv 32 and map) as Tower 16a in the coastal series which continued the frontier barrier of Hadrian's Wall. Following the notice of Roman foundations here by the late Mr H. Valentine in 1934, recorded in *Transactions* (CW2 xxxv 282), the site was inspected by the writer in company with the late Mr F. G. Simpson in September 1937, during a brief reconnaissance of the Cumberland coast, as a result of our re-discovery of Chancellor Ferguson's map marking the positions of Towers 3a and 3b, and the consequent detection of the regular spacing of the series (cf. CW2 xlvi 80). The total removal of the Cote How structure was plainly imminent, and arrangements were therefore made to undertake the excavation of what was left; this work was carried out under the writer's supervision on 21 and 22 October 1937.

Neither Mr Simpson nor the writer was then aware that an account of the visible remains had been read at the Society's meeting on 8 September 1937, by Mr Harold Duff,¹ or that finds had been made on the spot; though one of the two spearheads discovered by Mr Duff was shown to the writer at Mawbray by its owner, while the excavation was in progress. The remains were recorded by Mr Duff as a clay and cobble foundation, 3 ft. wide and 4 ft. deep, running east and west, while he noted that

¹ Cf. "Roman remains near Mawbray", CW2 xxxviii 157-159. A brief notice of our excavation, drawing attention to its significance, was contributed to the *Journal of Roman Studies* (xxviii 177): it was done for the Cumberland Excavation Committee.

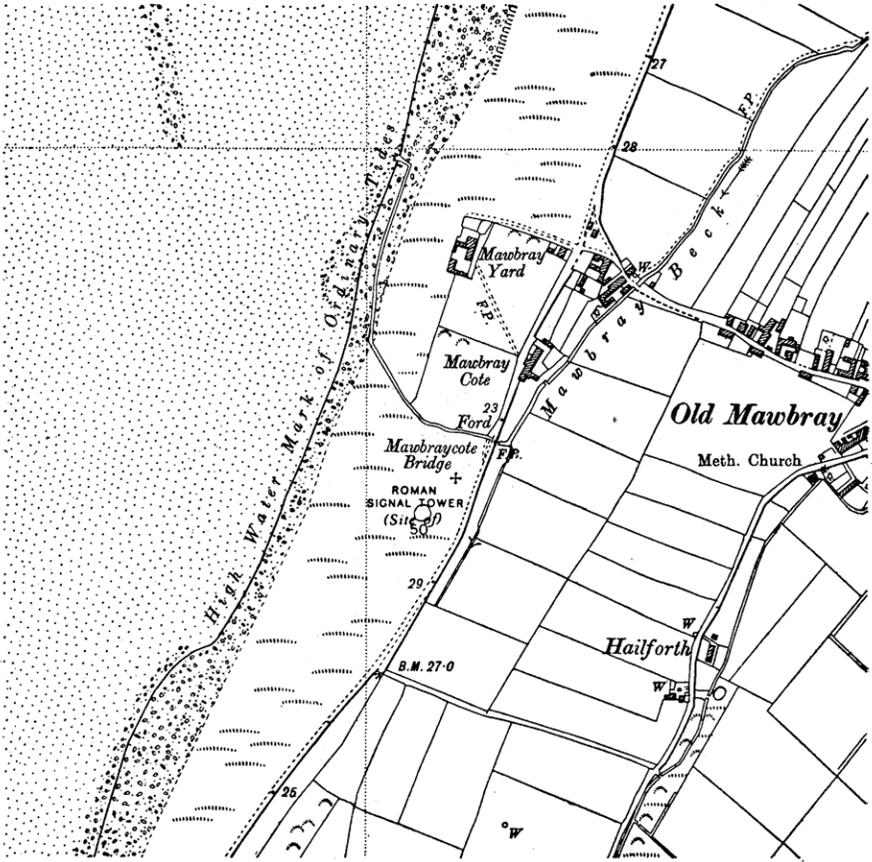


FIG. 1.—Site of Cote How Tower (16a), now destroyed.

the sand-diggers had thrown out cobbles and other occupation-material westwards, among which two spear-heads were found—one of them much broken, the other worth illustration (CW2 xxxviii, pl. facing p. 158); no other relics were noted.

The site, the position of which is marked on the accompanying map (fig. 1), occupied the crest of a small dune, then dwarfed by the larger mass of Cote How to south of it. No masonry was left in position, but fourteen blocks of dressed red sandstone, tooled in Roman fashion, had been tossed aside by the sand-diggers and were gathered together for a photograph (pl., fig. 1).

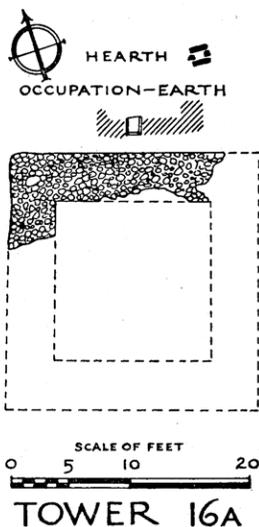


FIG. 2.

The sand-diggers had already removed all but the north end of the tower; there they had left in position the right-angled NW. corner, defined by a foundation extending 17 ft. 9 in. towards the east and 8 ft. towards the south (fig. 2, and pl., fig. 2). The foundation was laid in a straight-sided trench, cut in the firm sand, and was



FIG. 1.—Cote How Tower (16a), facing stones and merlon-cap associated with remains of foundation.

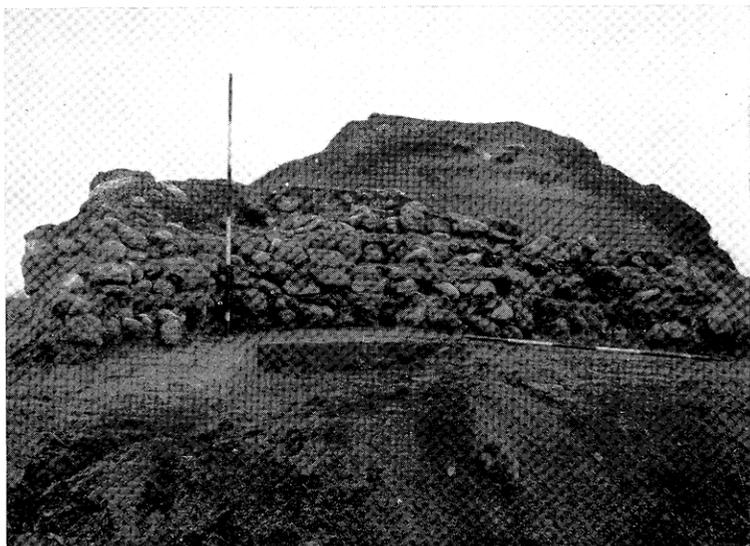


FIG. 2.—Cote How Tower (16a), foundations of north wall and north-east corner, 1937.

Photos: I. A. Richmond.

between 3 ft. 10 in. and 4 ft. wide and 3 ft. 6 in. deep. These figures do not quite correspond with Mr Duff's, which were presumably taken from a part of the building destroyed before the writer's excavation. In any case, the depth of the foundation remains impressive, and it would be interesting to know whether the foundations of these coastal towers were regularly so deep, whatever the subsoil, or whether the provision at Cote How represents a specially deep foundation in sandy soil; it may be recalled that in sand, at Tower 13*b* (Wolsty), the foundation was 3 ft. 3 in. deep (CW1 v 259, quoted also in CW2 xxix 147). The clay and cobble mass was carefully laid in eight layers, as at 13*b*, and its top lay 15 in. below Roman ground-level outside the tower, suggesting that the two courses of masonry which Mr Bellhouse observed below floor-level at Tower 16*b* had been present here too. No part of the internal floor had been left in position by the sand-diggers; but, on the north side of the tower, there lay a mass of occupation-material, including a thin slab of stone, 13 in. wide and chamfered on three sides, which may well have been one end of a merlon-cap from the superstructure of the tower.² If so, it would imply that the tower, like the turrets on the Turf Wall, had a flat roof; and this would explain why neither roofing-tiles nor stone slates have been found at any of the coastal towers so far examined.

The occupation-material formed a thin strip round the tower; it yielded two fragments of black cooking-pot, one with acute-angled cross-hatching of the Hadrianic period, the other showing the obtuse-angled cross-hatching typical of the third or fourth centuries. A little further to the NE. lay a small built fireplace or hearth (cf. fig. 2).

The structure here described was very fragmentary, but there can be no doubt that it represents the remains of a coastal tower, 20 ft. square, matching Tower 16*b*, 540 yards further south, which Mr Bellhouse excavated in

² It is now preserved at Tullie House, Carlisle.

November 1954 (CW2 liv 42). The relics discovered support a Hadrianic date for its occupation, as might be expected; and, although no evidence remained to suggest relatively early demolition by the Romans themselves, as postulated by Mr Bellhouse in the case of Towers 13*a*, 15*a* and 16*b* (CW2 liv 47), it should be emphasized that the fragment of later Roman cooking-pot found outside the tower (as mentioned above) does not necessarily mean that this tower itself was occupied when the others were not—though the fourth-century reconditioning of milefortlet 5 (Cardurnock: CW2 xlvii 124) must imply that some elements of the abandoned system were re-used at least sporadically in later Roman days.

Apart from the datable pottery, the spearheads are of some interest. When we take them in conjunction with the three examples from Tower 16*b* (CW2 liv 45) and two from milefortlet 5 (CW2 xlvii 94 and pl. ix), it becomes evident that spears were in good supply among the coastal guards, and that they were their principal weapon. It will be well to recall the illustration of the river guards of the Danube on Trajan's Column:³ these men, while equipped with swords, all carry spears and oval shields.

³Cf. C. Cichorius, *Die Reliefs der Traianssäule*, Berlin, 1895-1900, pl. i; *Papers of the British School at Rome* xiii 35, fig. 14.