

ART. II.—*Roman sites on the Cumberland coast,*  
1962-1963. By R. L. BELLHOUSE, B.Sc.

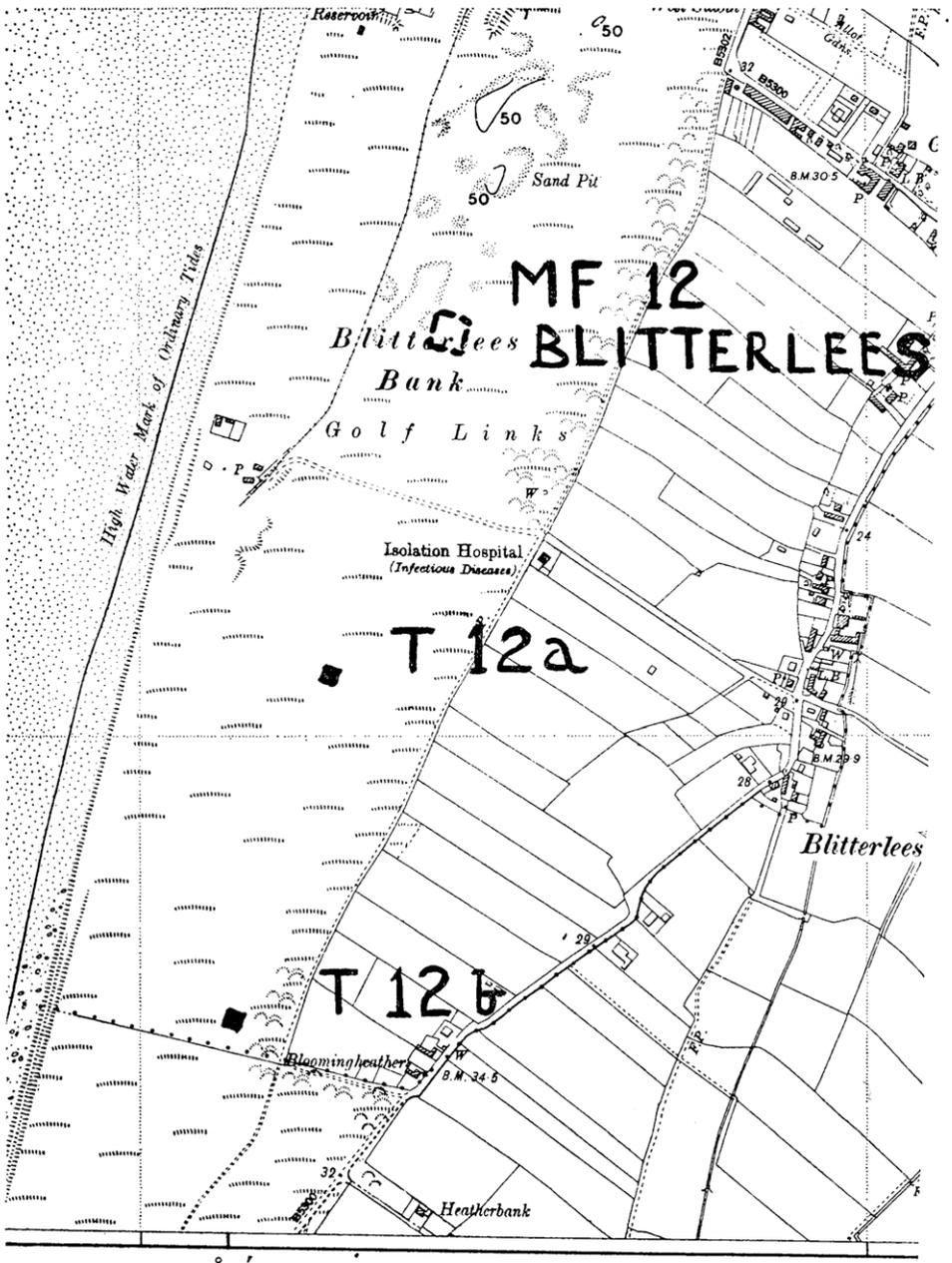
*Read at Carlisle, April 3rd, 1966.*

MY report on the new finds on the coast during 1962 was necessarily incomplete because, in order to find a place in *Transactions*, it had to be written and in the editor's hands some weeks before we were able to return to the site of tower 21b and carry out the excavation which a standing crop of corn had made impossible during our first expedition early in September. (CW2 lxiii 140 f.) It was not until November that I was able to gather my friends together and examine the remains of this tower; I was not very hopeful of finding much more than what we found of tower 20b because this, too, was on much ploughed sloping ground, but in the event, more of the structure survived than we expected. The site of the tower was quickly found in the stubble, a few trial pits confirmed the presence of walling, and then we began to uncover the remains. It was soon clear that ploughing and soil creep had taken away all the floor of the tower leaving two courses of stonework above the foundations on the east (uphill) side, chamfering off the north and south walls to the west and leaving only disturbed clay and cobble foundations on the west side. The working surface at the time of building was identified by red stone dust and chippings at the level of the top of the first footing course above the foundations; from evidence from other towers we could estimate the relative position of the missing floor and gain some idea of the extent of the damage by only a few generations of ploughmen. No trace of the entrance could be seen in the two courses of the east wall as one might have expected by comparison with tower 15a (CW2 lvii, 1, 23), but this might show that a different building party

was at work, an idea supported to some extent by the differing shape of the stones used, and that in this case comparison should be made with 16b where two stone courses were brought up the full width of the clay and cobble foundations. In our case one course was full width with 3-in. insets each side, giving a width of 4 ft. for the second course, we must assume further courses and similar insets reducing wall width to 3 ft. We noted also a change of material: the grey clay was now pink.

When we had satisfied ourselves that undisturbed masonry survived only on the east and south sides we concentrated on these in order to display them for measuring and photography. The overall dimensions measured from the outside edge of the clay of the foundations were: east to west 20 ft. 6 in., north to south 21 ft. 0 in., the first footing-course was the full width of the clay and cobble, 4 ft. 6 in. on the east side and 4 ft. 9 in. on the other sides, and the clay and cobble proved to be 1 ft. 3 in. deep as in 21b. The surviving second course on the east side was 4 ft. wide.

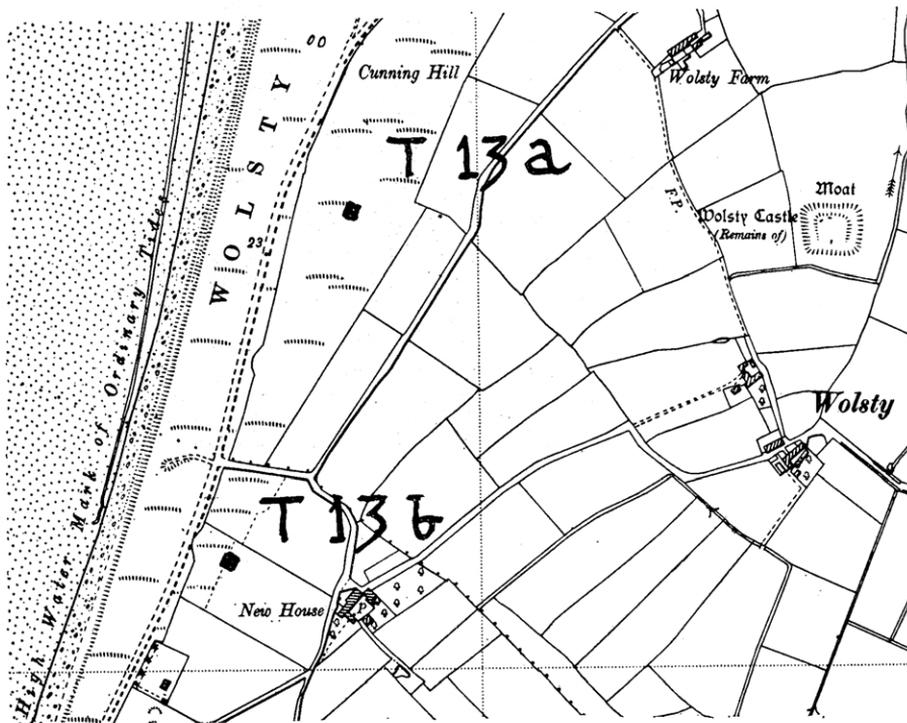
In January 1963, I spent a little time surveying Silloth golf-course, a piece of field-work I had not hitherto attempted for obvious reasons, but this time the ground was rock hard and golf was impossible, so I had the place to myself. I found tower 12a without any difficulty, its site being a hillock in the line of ancient sand-hills covered with the usual gravel and red sandstone chips. Farther north, at the predicted position of mile-fortlet 12, I found substantial remains of turfwork, but so close to the edge of old gravel workings as to make it a matter of conjecture whether more than a small part of the fortlet had survived. The turf was sandy and contained quite a lot of grey clay, particularly in the lowest levels which rested on clean sand. The top of the rampart could not be positively identified, the turf merging with the clean wind-blown sand above, but here I found a large corroded nail and a pot rim of Gillam's type 143-



Plan showing the positions of towers 12a and 12b and mile-fortlet 12, Blitterlees.

147, probably 145, A.D. 270-340. I estimate the present height of the rampart to be at least 6 ft., and it remains to be seen exactly how much of the fortlet survives and what datable material, if any, a future excavation will produce; in the meantime the pottery gives us a hint of occupation in the 4th century and helps to explain the rough undated rebuild of the nearby tower 12b.

The opportunity was taken later in the year to check the true position of tower 13b (Wolsty South), as the  $2\frac{1}{2}$  in. to the mile Ordnance Map showed it in the wrong place. The field in which it lies having been ploughed as far as the crest of the ancient dune ridge, I had no difficulty in finding the familiar gravel and sandstone



Plan showing the position of the remains of Wolsty tower T 13b.



*Photo Anthony Whitehead*

Tower 21b. East wall and south-east corner.



*Photo Anthony Whitehead*

Tower 21b, Brownrigg.

Two courses of the east wall survive above the clay and cobble foundations.

at the edge of the ploughed land and a satisfying amount of the typical Hadrian-Antonine cooking-pot rims. The corrected position on the map fits comfortably into the schedule of coast sites.

In conclusion, these new discoveries indicate that we have seriously to consider the long-term effects of wind erosion in past ages on tower and mile-fortlets sited along the ancient dune ridge. On a tower site wind takes away the loose sand and the heavy *débris* remains to settle as a protective cap, but a fortlet with a poor turf rampart, wooden buildings and gravelled floors cannot be protected in the same way and would disappear. This seems to be the most likely explanation of our failure to find mile-fortlet 13 in 1956.

I have another failure to report, just before concentrating on tower 21b, Mr Whitehead and I searched the measured position of mile-fortlet 23, Bank End, our trial holes were quite inconclusive. The sea cliffs hereabouts are high and show signs of many ancient slips; where the mile-fortlet should have been there is a deep indentation in the coastline as if caused by a considerable cliff fall in fairly recent times, perhaps it has been lost at sea like mile-fortlet 15. There may be another explanation; the fort at Maryport only about 500 yds. on was established and occupied long before the coastal system was planned, so we must consider what might have happened when the new met the old. All the evidence we have shows that the system was rigid at least as far south from Bowness as mile-fortlet 22, Brownrigg, the question to be answered is: was the system equally rigidly extended up to and beyond the already existing fort at Maryport? Surely some of the units, even if planned, could have been left unbuilt, so that the line ended reasonably close to the fort on one side for signalling and patrolling purposes and recommenced a reasonable distance away on the other, in which case the nearest mile-fortlets, 23 Bank End and 24 Maryport, need never have been built.