

ART. I. – *Two Enclosures at Dobcross Hall, Dalston.* By N. J. HIGHAM, B.A., PH.D.

TWO enclosures of unusual size lie on a bluff above the Roe Beck at 110m above O.D. at Stockdalewath on land farmed from Dobcross Hall (Fig. 1). In 1789 the western (NY 392451) site was recorded by H. Rooke in *Archaeologia* vol. ix, 223, and described as an upstanding earthwork named Castlesteads, comprising two near square, ditched enclosures one inside the other. The total area is c. 3ha with an internal enclosure of approximately 0.7ha. Inside the smaller enclosure rectilinear building (0.7ha) foundations were sketched in on Rooke's plan. The ditches were later filled in with clay soil, most probably soon after enclosure of the area in the 1820s (Inglewood Forest Award 1819. Map Ref Q/RE/1/135/2). The site was brought to the attention of Prof G. D. B. Jones and myself by Mr Holliday of Dobcross Hall in the summer of 1976, and it has since been annually observed from the air in a variety of crop conditions, with the best results obtained when a ripening barley crop overlay the majority of the site. In 1977 a less regular, single ditched enclosure of comparable size (Fig. 1) was located $\frac{1}{2}$ km to the east (NY 398449).

In that summer trial excavations were carried out on the eastern site, and a single trench opened inside the internal enclosure of the western site.

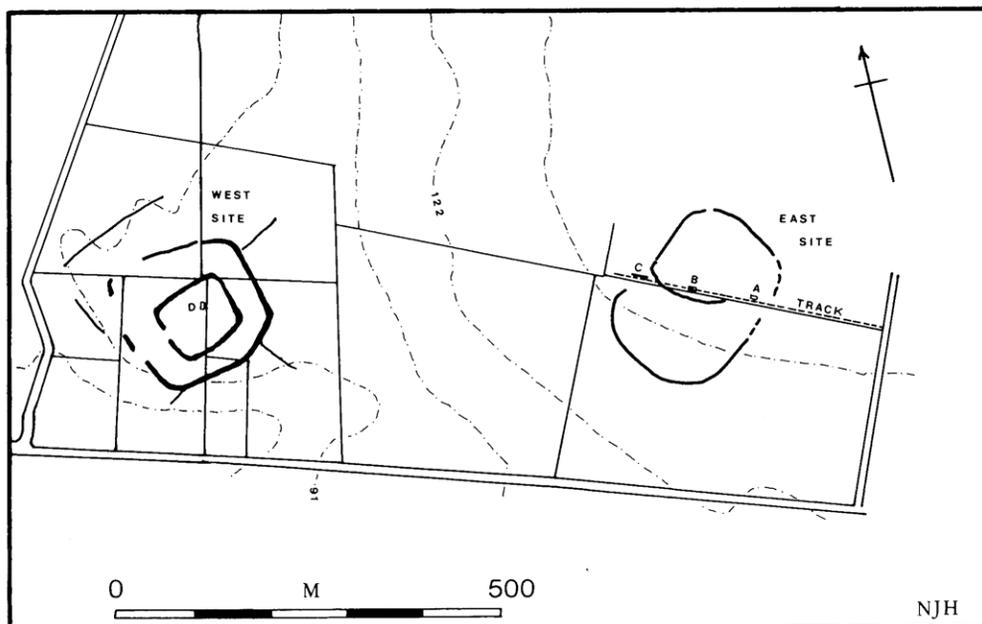


FIG. 1. – The location of the enclosures on Dobcross Hall farm. A, B, C and D, denote trial trenches excavated in 1977.

The Eastern Enclosure

Excavations here indicated that in the cropped and ploughed area agricultural activity operating over a shallow top soil (18-24 cm) had removed any archaeological surfaces that might have been present. Mould-board ploughing was eroding the clay subsoil, in which chisel ploughing had produced grooves 20-25 cm wide and 1.90m apart, with an operating depth of up to 90-95 cm. Where a nineteenth-century trackway had protected archaeological surfaces, a series of stake-holes were found in association with areas of burnt clay that may have been hearths. This suggested that the archaeological levels inside the enclosure had been destroyed by ploughing. No dating evidence was discovered and an attempt to section the outer ditch by machine located only what appeared to be a turf revetted outer bank and shallow outer ditch. Aerial photography later revealed that the ditch line had not been sectioned.

The Western Enclosure

The 4m + 3m trench excavated inside the western enclosure produced comparable evidence of mould-board plough erosion of the subsoil, and a suggestion that the thin layer of topsoil is being moved down hill by ploughing, thereby tending to increase plough penetration on the hill-top, which was assumed to be that area most sensitive archaeologically.

Under the threat of chisel ploughing of the major areas of the Castlesteads site, and in cooperation with the demonstration farm project launched by the Countryside Commission, a second season of excavation and survey was undertaken in summer 1979 by a team from Manchester University assisted by a subvention from the Countryside Commission (see Fig. 2 for location of trenches). The work comprised a machine cut trench across the outer and inner ditches, a 20m + 10m trench in the eastern half of the inner enclosure and a contour survey of all parts of the site available (i.e. without standing crops).

The Ditches

The outer ditch where sectioned ran along the interface between boulder clay and the sand/gravel strata it capped. This may have been either accidental or by design; certainly at least it added to the difficulties of crossing the ditch, since the inner face could be cut almost vertical, while the outer face was far more gentle (Fig. 3.). The ditch was slightly under 3m deep and 4.2m in width. No trace of a bank was found on the inner side. On the outer side an additional defence was provided by a slot probably intended for a wooden palisade and revetted with clay, presumably removed from the ditch, to prevent swift silting. This clay had also been seriously affected by ploughing which had apparently dragged material down the slope, but the quantity implied a considerable external bank. This section quickly collapsed, on account of a clay pipe field drain but it was possible to record that the ditch had no signs of differential fill or recuts, and the fill was almost featureless except for a clay filled sump.

The inner ditch was sectioned on more level ground and was wholly excavated into a clay subsoil (Fig. 3). It was 2.8m deep and 5.6m wide, but in this case anaerobic conditions had preserved vegetable matter in the ditch fill, with the exception of the top 90-100 cms which comprised clay soil, presumably dating from nineteenth century back filling of the ditches.

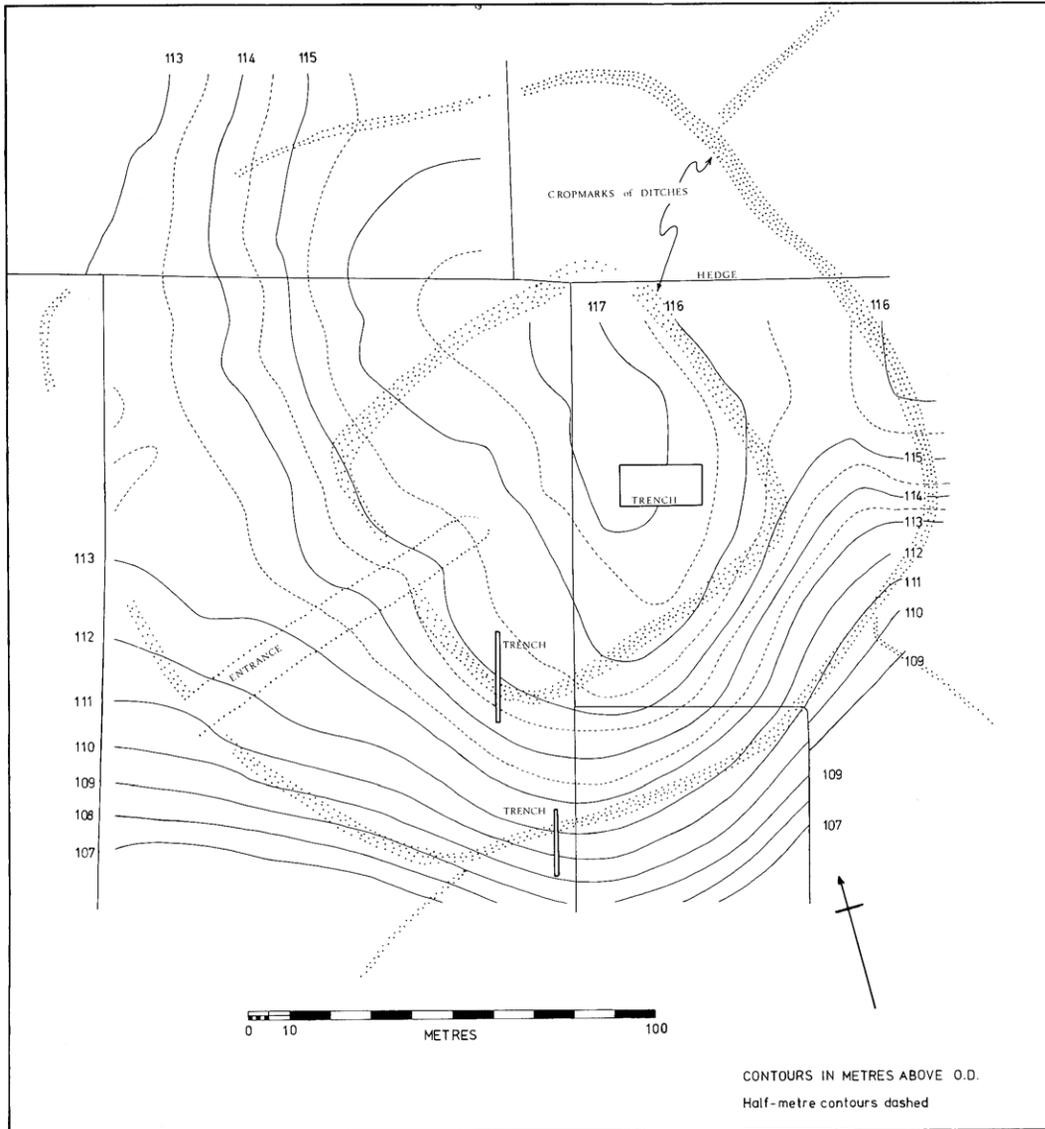


FIG. 2. – Contour survey of the western enclosure with the location of 1979 trenches. The ditches have been superimposed from aerial photographs.

The Internal Structures (Fig. 4)

At the south-eastern end of the trench, a set of three substantial stone filled post-pits, 50-100 cm in diameter, were connected by the sumps of construction trenches, distinguished by a packing of small stone. Possibly in association with these were two small stone filled pits and two small postholes. These remains implied at least two phases of timber construction, whether of buildings or of external fencing is unclear.

At the west end of the trench the earliest feature was a rectangular area of laid cobbling set into a grey silt/clay typical of a livestock standing area. Sealing the cobbling but

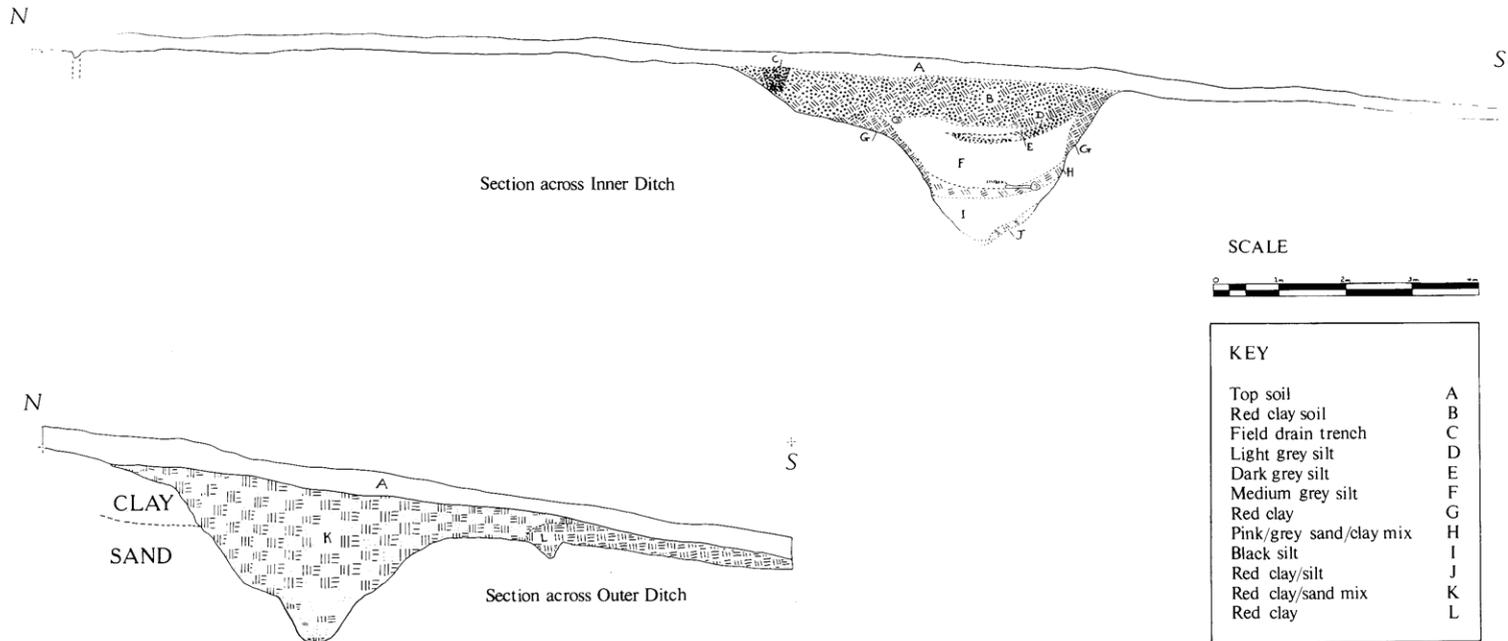


FIG. 3. — Sections across the inner and outer ditches of the western enclosure.

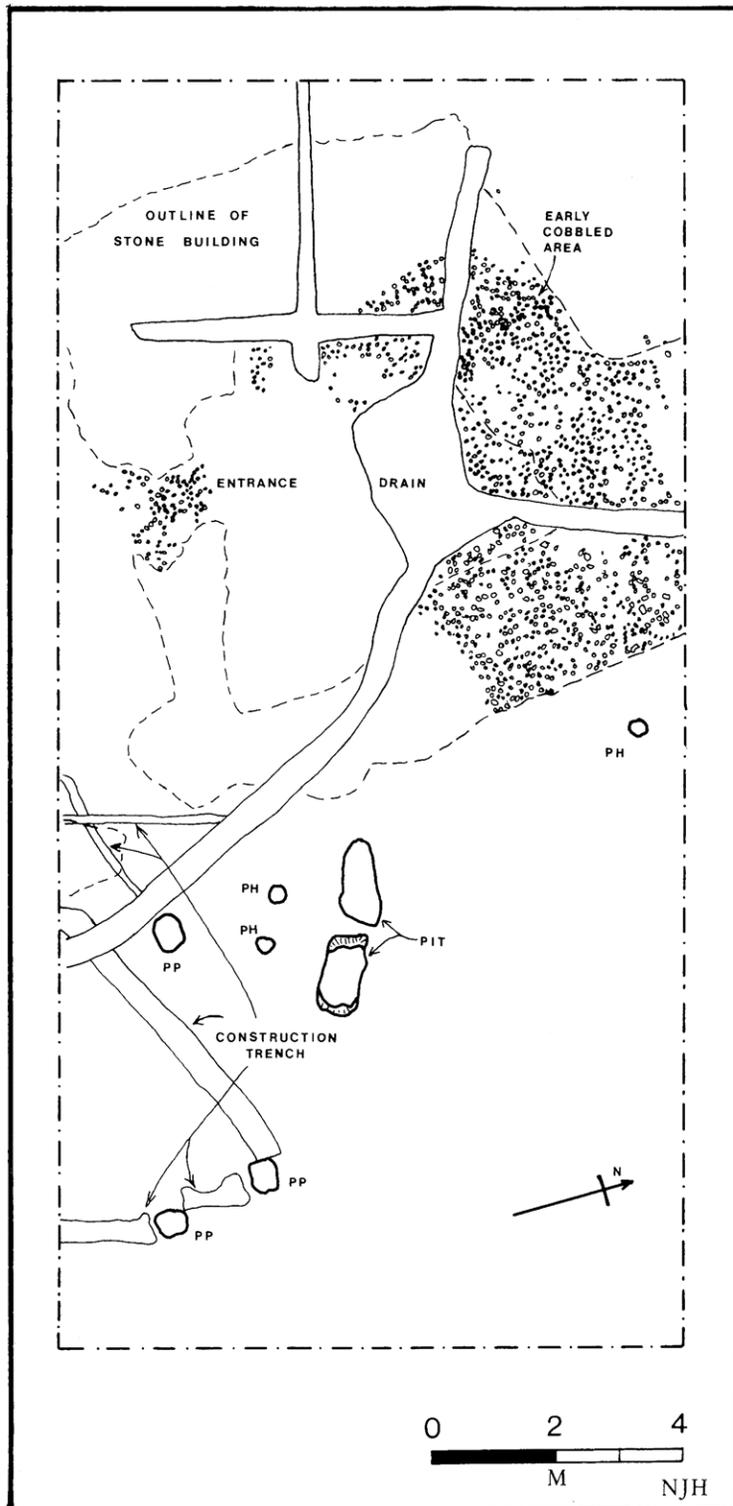


FIG. 4. - Plan of the area excavated inside the inner ditch of the western enclosure.

extending further to the south was a rectangular pattern of heavy stone, externally *c.* 9m × 7m (Fig. 4), with a small cobble threshold in the middle of the southern side. This scatter was on an alignment identical to (but far smaller than) one of the internal rectangular structures incorporated by Rooke on his sketch plan in 1789. Ploughing and a system of "French" style drains, cut radially from a soakaway in the western end, had caused significant destruction, but the remains implied a stone-built rectangular structure or house, with a single entrance *c.* 1.5m wide and walls running off the south-east and north-east corners.

The Pottery

- Few sherds were found, all of them abraded by agricultural activity. They included:
- 1 base and side wall sherd of a blue/black slip coated, orange ware, probably a small jar or beaker, probably Nene Valley, Antonine (base diameter 44mm).
 - 1 body sherd of Samian ware (badly abraded).
 - 1 rim possibly Samian ware (badly abraded).
 - 1 body sherd of an orange, coarse ware bowl with massive and prominent inclusions. Probably a local product.
 - 1 tile fragment.

The Chronology of Occupation

On the basis of the excavations so far carried out, only a hypothetical outline of chronology can be offered. The size of the enclosure outlined by the outer ditch, its defensive location, profile and outer palisade and bank are not compatible with civilian occupation in the Roman period. Survey work suggested the entrance trackway of the inner enclosure from the south-west slighted the outer defences. The implication is that the outer enclosure is of pre-Roman date but that the inner enclosure and structural features are compatible with occupation in the Roman period as a farmstead. The pottery suggests occupation in the second century A.D., but this should not be seen as an exclusive period of occupation, since insufficient dating evidence was available and it was clear that at least two phases of building had occurred. There is, therefore, evidence of two different types of site, occupied at two different periods, and further work here might provide useful insights into the problems of continuity or discontinuity between the Iron Age and Roman Periods.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mr R. Holliday and his family of Dobcross Hall for all their encouragement and many kindnesses during these excavations, and for permission to excavate. Permission was also granted by the Church Commissioners as landowners. The 1977 excavations would have been impossible without Mr J. Williams. The 1979 season was undertaken by a group largely from Manchester, centring upon Mr F. Taylor, Mr D. Brody and Jenny Bowring with able assistance from many others. Mr E. Foster carried out the contour survey, and Mr Brody was responsible for FIG. 3. The Countryside Commission funded the project, and Professor Barri Jones took the majority of the aerial photographs.

Reference

CW2 xxiii, 239.