

A RECENT opportunity to examine part of the Roman settlement associated with the fort at Old Carlisle, Cumbria, was provided by clearance work at Old Carlisle Farm (NY 2614 4614). In order to construct a level yard to the west of the farm, an area measuring some 18 m by 14 m was stripped of topsoil. This revealed a suite of archaeological features, which, at the behest of English Heritage, was subject to a programme of archaeological recording by Oxford Archaeology North in June 2002. The work was restricted to the manual cleaning of the exposed remains; further excavation was not undertaken in order to preserve the integrity of the archaeological features.

The site lies *c.*116 m east of the Roman fort at Old Carlisle (Fig. 1), within the area designated as a Scheduled Monument (SM CU8). Very little is known about the character and development of the Roman extramural settlement there, reflecting the limited amount of archaeological investigations undertaken; previous work includes an excavation of part of the settlement to the south of the fort (Bellhouse, 1959, 15-31), and detailed analysis of aerial photography of the site (Higham and Jones, 1975).

Archaeological remains

The exposed area was dominated by a substantial and well-preserved surface of rammed gravel (03), which had a maximum width of 5.2 m, and crossed the site from east to west. This was undoubtedly part of the Roman road leading out from the east gate of the fort, as a branch from the main Carlisle to Papcastle road, which takes a course just south of both the farm and the fort (Margary, 1973, 395-6). The branch road had been built on a low embankment, or *agger*, and incorporated a gentle camber between the edges and the crown of the surface (Fig. 2). Three large, sub-rectangular stones (11) were revealed towards the eastern end of the exposed surface. These appeared to be *in situ*, and had been carefully placed at regular intervals of *c.*0.6 m across the width of the surface, perhaps representing a junction between working parties during the road's construction. A second series of large, sub-rectangular stones (12) had been laid along the length of the road. These were situated in the approximate middle, seemingly marking its centre.

Clear evidence of structural remains was revealed at the eastern extremity of the area examined (Fig. 2). The largest structural component comprised an alignment of four sizable freestone blocks, laid parallel to the road, forming a substantial wall (13). Interestingly, one of the blocks was of a yellow sandstone that does not occur locally and was likely to have been imported to the site. Immediately adjacent to the wall was a large sandstone slab (05), which had straight sides and chamfered edges. Limited excavation revealed that a course of masonry underlay the slab, suggesting it to have been a structural component. However, its overall size and carefully worked edges suggested that it may have once been intended as a piece of monumental masonry.

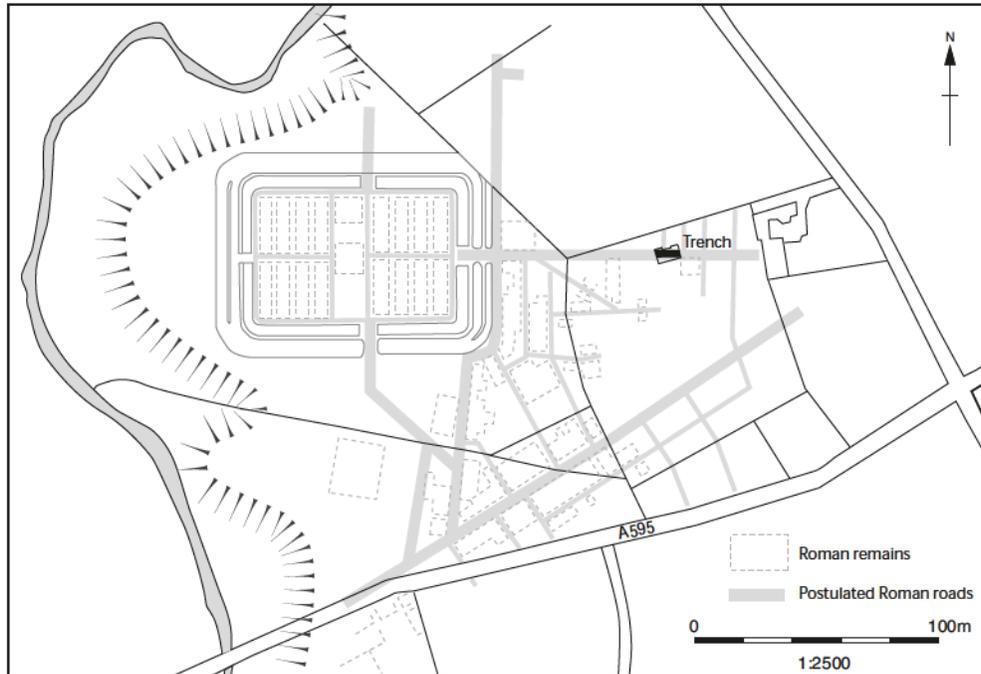


FIG. 1. Location of the study area relative to the position of the Roman fort (after Higham and Jones, 1975).

A second stone wall (14), aligned north to south, was exposed 2.7 m to the west (Plate 1). The wall faces incorporated freestone blocks, which enclosed a central core of rubble. Traces of clay within the rubble core may have represented the vestiges of a bonding material, although this could not be confirmed without further excavation. It seems likely that the two walls were associated, and represented a substantial structure (04).

Further structural evidence was provided by a 1.05 m wide linear spread of closely-packed stones (08), set in a matrix of compacted orange sandy-clay. This lay 0.88 m to the west of building 04, and was similarly aligned parallel to the road. The stone spread appeared to represent the clay and cobble foundations of a small building, whilst a series of regularly-spaced iron nails discovered along the upper surface suggested that it may have supported a timber superstructure. The foundation was traced for a distance of 4.4 m, and north/south aligned returns at each end were noted, which continued beyond the southern edge of the exposed area (Fig. 2). It is suggested that these foundations represented a second building, as there was no direct link with the stone structure to the east, and different construction techniques had been used. It is nevertheless possible that these two structural components were part of the same building, the bulk of which lies beyond the recorded area to the south.

The foundations enclosed a spread of closely-packed, rounded stones to the south that formed a cobbled surface (10), possibly a floor internal to the structure. The

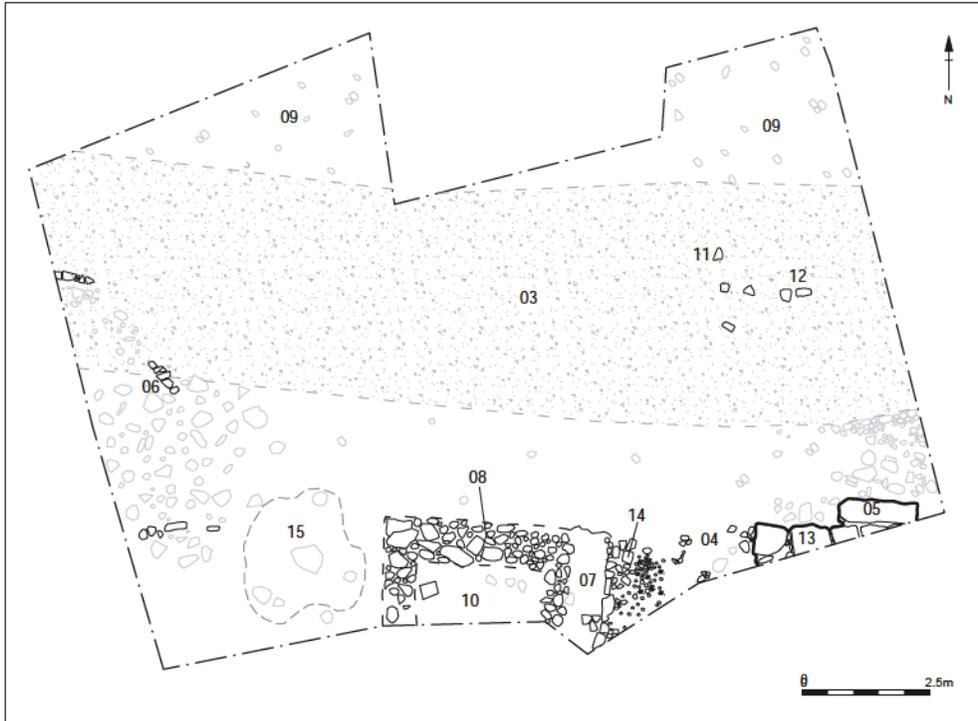


FIG. 2. Plan of the trench.

surface was overlain by tumbled building material that included fragments of Borrowdale slate, some of which contained peg holes, and *tegulae*.

A 2.7 m wide gap (07) between building 04 and wall 08 contained displaced masonry, fragments of slate roof material, and traces of a fine metallurgy. This latter may suggest that it was an entrance to one of the buildings, or an alley between the two structures.

Across the western part of the exposed area was a wide spread of closely-packed stones (06), which comprised stones of all sizes and configurations, including fragments of sandstone ashlar (Fig. 2). The majority of these stones appeared to have been deposited randomly, and potentially originated from the discarding of material during stone-robbing. Two small groups did, however, give some impression of having been deliberately laid, suggesting that they may be *in situ* structural remains. The greatest concentration within this spread occurred across its western part; the density of stones decreased towards the south-west corner of the site, with a corresponding increase in the proportion of the coarse sandy-clay soil matrix. In places, this deposit was of a loose consistency, forming "soft spots" (15), which occurred in conjunction with a concentration of flat slabs of sandstone, many of which displayed indications of burning on one side, and slate roof tiles, one of which retained a peg hole. This deposit was impossible to characterise without further excavation, although it is tempting to draw comparisons with the hypocaust discovered at Old Penrith (Austen, 1991, 86-9).



PLATE 1. The western wall of stone building 04, looking east.

A rubble spread (09) along the northern edge of the road similarly contained fragments of worked stone, suggesting that they were ashlar masonry from a demolished structure. However, there was no surviving evidence of any such building at the depth excavated.

The Finds

By Sean McPhillips

A moderate assemblage (192 fragments) of artefacts of Roman date was recovered during the fieldwork. In general the material was in poor condition, with many fragments clearly abraded. The assemblage comprised a range of material categories, including fragments of pottery and glass vessels, ceramic building material, and metal objects, suggesting a level of wealth on the site. However, all artefacts were recovered from essentially disturbed deposits, and therefore cannot provide any close dating for individual elements of the site.

The pottery assemblage consisted of 121 sherds, and included fragments of fineware and coarseware vessels comprising Samian, amphorae, Black Burnished Ware, and locally-made products. The date and range of pottery fabrics and vessel forms amongst the assemblage suggests the site was able to access the military

supply network, at least during the second century, and probably into the third.

The metal objects were largely represented by nails that derived from structure 08, but also included a masonry spike and a wedge from the same building, and an iron “D”-shaped buckle from structure 04. Other metal objects included a badly corroded silver coin, probably a second-century denarius, and a copper alloy ring, from floor 10, that was seemingly part of a horse harness.

Seven fragments of glass, retrieved from the clearance layer, represented two blue/green thin walled vessels. One storage vessel evidently incorporated a small hexagonal base with a concentric ring decoration, of a type that dates from the late-second century (Price and Cottam, 1998), and the second vessel appeared to be part of a small flask.

Conclusion

The programme of archaeological recording at Old Carlisle has confirmed an *in situ* presence of Roman structures beyond the east gate of the fort, and has expanded upon the results of aerial photographic analysis of the area (Higham and Jones, 1975). The position of the substantial stone wall corresponds to the northern wall of a structure, measuring some 12 m square, identified from aerial photography.

This building is particularly interesting, as only a limited number of comparable buildings have yet been identified from other extramural settlements in the North West. Perhaps the best parallels may be drawn from the extramural settlements at Old Penrith, Papcastle and, most recently, Maryport. Excavations at Old Penrith exposed several buildings of massive sandstone block construction that lined the main road to the fort. Their function was not firmly established, although it was suggested that they represented official buildings under military control (Austen, 1991). Similarly, the foundations of a large stone public building, thought to have been a *mansio* or a temple, were revealed at Papcastle (Olivier *et al.*, 1990). An extensive programme of geophysical survey at Maryport identified numerous buildings of various sizes, which included a significant proportion with dimensions broadly comparable to that at Old Carlisle. Whilst these buildings have not been excavated, it was suggested that the larger structures had been used as either workshops or for storage (Biggins and Taylor, 2004). It was also noted that smaller structures had been built to the rear of those buildings fronting the road. On the present evidence, however, it is not possible to conjecture as to the function of the building at Old Carlisle, although the apparent use of slate, rather than thatch, as a roofing material suggests an element of wealth, particularly as the Borrowdale volcanic rock implies a central Lakeland origin, and will thus have been brought from some distance.

The nature and function of Roman extramural settlements in the north of England have recently been a topic of much debate (Philpott forthcoming), and the remains exposed at Old Carlisle Farm have the potential to inform further discussions. Recent excavations at Burgh-by-Sands (Miller forthcoming), for instance, have raised the possibility of an “industrial zone” stretching along the road from the east gate of Burgh II (the fort on Hadrian’s Wall). Similar results have been obtained from excavations along Botchergate, Carlisle (Oxford Archaeology North, 2001), whilst excavations outside the north gate of the Roman fort at Manchester

produced evidence for a dense concentration of industrial activity (Jones and Grealey, 1974). There is, as yet, insufficient information to propose a similar scenario at Old Carlisle, but the complete absence of “burnt clay nodules” and “abundant charcoal” within the present study area contrasts with the results of excavations to the south of the fort (Bellhouse, 1959), and may tentatively suggest that the two areas had different functions.

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