

The Roman Military Occupation of Northern England

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A review of the evidence for military deployment in northern England and for defended civil settlements rejects the suggestion that the area had serious internal security problems and emphasises the necessity for a strong military presence to defend the empire from attack. The evidence for the proposed abandonment of some forts in the later third century is reconsidered, a review of the problems of the dating evidence for the occupation of forts in the third century is offered, and a range of possibilities suggested for the presence of defences round civil settlements.

ANY map of northern England during the Roman period offers a distribution pattern of forts, the bases of the Roman army. The ebb and flow of military deployment can be traced through successive maps but the function of the soldiers based in these forts is still a matter of discussion.¹ There are several possible reasons why so many units would have been retained in northern Britain over several centuries:

- to protect the province from possible invasion
 - to control the local people
 - to supervise imperial activities such as mining
 - to reinforce the army of Britain which was a difficult undertaking
 - to use the army of Britain as a reserve for the empire
- inertia.

Before examining each of these proposals, it is worth reviewing the ebb and flow of military deployment in northern England which here is defined as Hadrian's Wall, its advance forts and its hinterland forts as far south as Derbyshire.²

The changing pattern is usually linked to wider aspects of frontier policy such as the successive occupations and abandonment of the land north of Hadrian's Wall or the interest of particular emperors. This approach can be misleading and can lead to unwarranted assumptions since the archaeological evidence is not always so precise as to allow such accurate dating. Yet the frontier movements during the hundred years which commenced with the invasion of the Brigantes by Petillius Cerialis in about 70 do allow reasons to be offered for the changing patterns of military deployment in northern England. (All dates are AD)

The abandonment of the more northerly conquests of the Flavian emperors of the late first century, Vespasian and Domitian, led, shortly after the beginning of the second century, to the most northerly Roman forts lying on the Tyne-Solway isthmus.³ Forts were spread across the landscape to the south of the isthmus. The construction of Hadrian's Wall, and more particularly the addition of forts to the Wall line, resulted in regiments being brought to the Wall zone from Derbyshire, southern Lancashire,

southern Yorkshire and Wales. Wales was largely abandoned, the remaining troops probably staying to control the mines.⁴ The forts in the Vale of York were abandoned, with the exception of the legionary base at York. Twenty years later, the re-occupation of southern Scotland in the 140s led to the large-scale abandonment of forts in northern England, with only a handful remaining in occupation. These appear to have included Ribchester, Bowes, Maryport, a newly constructed fort at Lanchester to replace Ebchester and Binchester, and, in some form, several forts on Hadrian's Wall and the Stanegate. It may be noted that, south of the Wall corridor, the forts are widely dispersed.

The withdrawal from southern Scotland, which may have started as early as 158, resulted in the re-occupation of most forts abandoned 20 or so years before, the re-occupation of some abandoned early in the reign of Hadrian, and the building of new forts. The latter appear to have included a small fort at Newcastle on Hadrian's Wall, together with Chester-le-Street to the south. The forts in the Vale of York do not appear to have been re-occupied, though Malton, to the north-east of the legionary base at York, was rebuilt. There was a strong force to the west of the Pennines, focussed on the road from Manchester to Carlisle, but the main change was the singular concentration of forts in County Durham with not just Ebchester and Binchester re-occupied, but Lanchester continuing in use and the new fort at Chester-le-Street. Furthermore, two units are attested at Lanchester in the early third century, reflecting the pattern at some of the Wall forts and the advance forts where two or even three units are attested at that time.⁵

This pattern appears to continue. A map of military deployment in 220 is very little different from that 50 years earlier, though this may partly reflect our ignorance; indeed Bidwell and Hodgson do not differentiate within the period from 197 to 367.⁶ The next significant change can only be recognised towards the end of Roman Britain, though it may have implications for military deployment in the third century.

The *Notitia Dignitatum* is one of the sparse number of documents relating to the Roman army in Britain. In the late first, second and early third centuries, diplomas – certificates of the privileges granted to soldiers on their retirement – provide the names of as many as 58 auxiliary units in Britain in the 120s, but not where they were stationed.⁷ The evidence of the diplomas is supplemented by the Vindolanda and Carlisle writing tablets, though these provide only localised information, and the names and location of units recorded on inscriptions. The *Notitia Dignitatum* is altogether of a different character. It is a list of all officers in the Roman Empire about the year 400. The British section includes the officers in each of the various military commands, and the units they led. These units essentially fall into two classes. There are the regiments of the early empire, such as the First Cohort of Tungrians, still stationed at Housesteads, and units raised in the late empire, like the Unit of *Defensores* posted to Kirkby Thore. There are as many as 12 of these later units listed in northern Britain together with several more in the command of the Count of the Saxon Shore. It is difficult to date their arrival in Britain. Mann suggested that the title of one unit, the *equites Crispiani* was derived from Crispus, son of Constantine I and executed by his father in 326. Thus, argued Mann, the unit was raised and sent

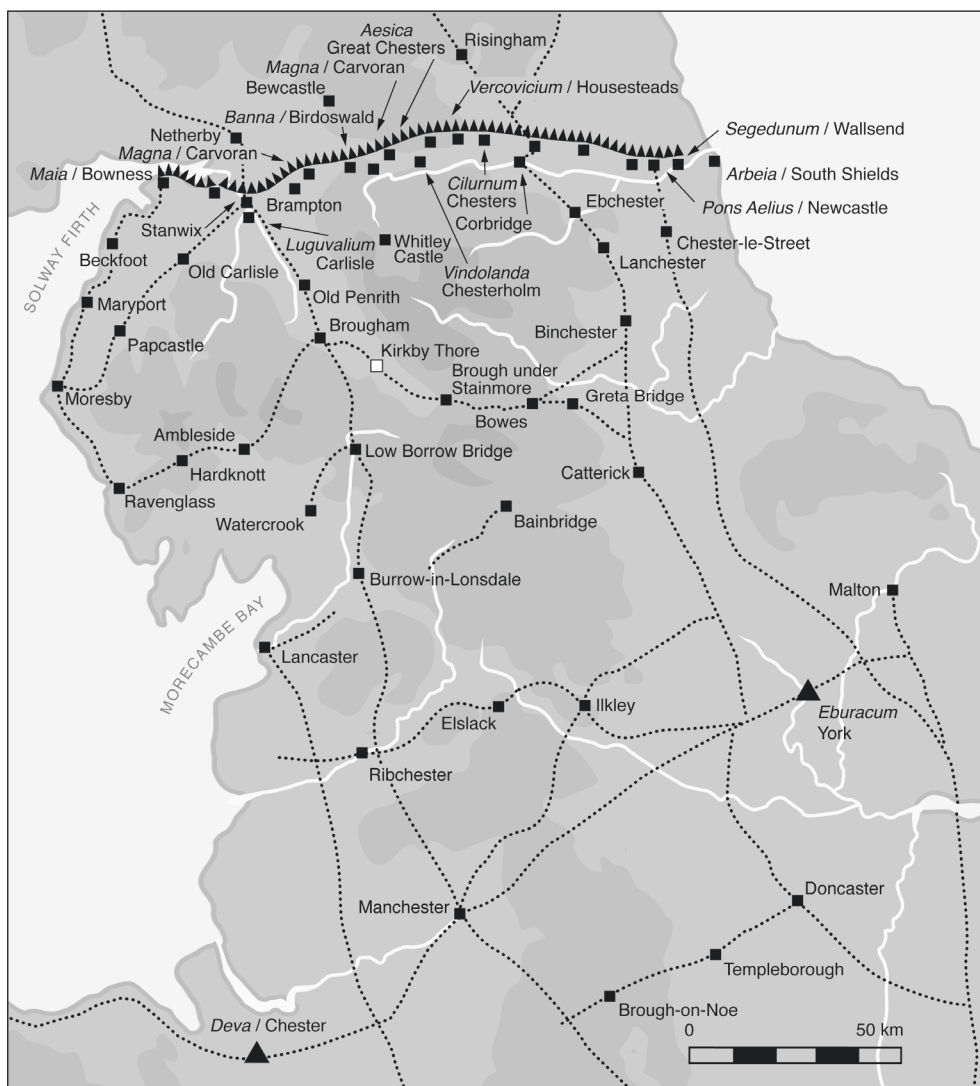


FIG. 1. Military deployment in northern Britain in the late second and early third centuries.

to Britain before that date.⁸ Roger Tomlin has offered an alternative derivation for the name, suggesting that 'as with many units listed in the *Notitia* the title may derive from a place of garrison: in this case from *Crispiana* in Pannonia (*It. Ant.* 267.9)'.⁹ This removes our sole piece of dating evidence for the arrival of these new units in Britain which therefore cannot be determined. Nor did they necessarily all arrive at the same time. Some may have come following the re-assertion of central authority in 274 and again in 296, others possibly after the Barbarian Conspiracy of 367.¹⁰ It must be emphasised, however, that the dispatch of new units to Britain may have occurred at any date and not only on those occasions for which we have some evidence of historical events.

The *Notitia* list for Hadrian's Wall and the Cumbria Coast is almost completely a replication of the early third century situation. In its hinterland, similar examples are rare. They include Ribchester and Bainbridge.¹¹ Elsewhere, forts were occupied by the new-style units. John Mann proposed that as these regiments are the only units attested at the forts in northern England where they are recorded, their predecessors had been disbanded or transferred elsewhere owing to the peaceful nature of the northern frontier in the third century. It was the rise of the Picts in the fourth century which, Mann suggested, led to the strengthening of the army of Britain.¹²

TABLE 1. Forts with different units in the early third century and in the *Notitia Dignitatum*.

Fort	Unit in the late second/early third century	Unit in the <i>Notitia Dignitatum</i>
South Shields	Fifth Cohort of Gauls	Unit of Tigris Boatmen
Chester-le-Street	A cavalry regiment	Unit of Vigilant Soldiers
Bowes	First Cohort of Thracian	Unit of Scouts
Brough under Stainmore	Seventh Cohort of Thracians ¹³	Unit of Directores
Kirkby Thore	A cavalry regiment	Unit of Defensores
Lanchester	(First Cohort of Lingones) Detachment of Suebians	Unit of Lanchester

Our final references to the army of Britain date to the last years of Roman Britain. In 360 and 367, when under attack, the army of Britain was supported by regiments sent across from the continent. In 372, a substantial force of Alamanni was sent to Britain. About the end of the same century, a small field army was permanently based in the island, and recorded in the *Notitia Dignitatum*; its location is unknown.¹⁴

The number of regiments based in Britain at any time is one aspect, the size of each unit is another. It is clear that the units of the late Roman army were much smaller than their predecessors. The legions were down from about 5,000 to 1,000 to 2,000 men, while auxiliary units were perhaps a quarter of their previous size. I have suggested that the strength of the army of Britain under Hadrian may have been a little over 50,000, falling to about 25,000 towards the end of the third century if John Mann's argument is accepted, and rising to about 33,000 by about 400.¹⁵ The size of the late fourth century army in Britain, however, has been put as low as 18,500 and this seems more likely than my larger figure.¹⁶ It should be emphasised that these are theoretical strengths and several fragments of evidence suggest that units were frequently – perhaps normally – below strength, in one case by nearly 25 per cent.¹⁷ One suspects that in peacetime there is a greater likelihood of units being below strength. In Britain, the smaller size of the regiments of the late empire was not compensated by increasing the number of the units in the island. One way of interpreting this is to assume that the enemy of the fourth century was not so strong nor so troublesome as that of the early empire. In relation to this, we should note that none of the forts on the line of Hadrian's Wall were rebuilt or modified to create the characteristic defensive structures which are still visible on the Saxon Shore and are also known on the west coast of Britain. One conclusion must be that

the enemy beyond the northern frontier was not as troublesome as the Irish and the Germans.

Let us turn now to the various reasons offered for the density of military deployment in northern Britain.

The role of the army of Britain was to protect the province from attack

There are many references to warfare on the northern frontier of Britain from the earliest years of the province through to the early third century. At first the Romans had to deal with the internal dissensions within the kingdom of the Brigantes. Then, after the absorption of the Brigantes into the province in the early 70s, the warfare of the following decade was largely the result of Rome's intention to continue with the conquest of the island leading to the Roman victory at Mons Graupius in 83. While the years from 83 into the second century suffer from a paucity of sources, there are hints at warfare in Britain under Trajan (98-117). During his reign an officer was decorated in Britain, a unit was awarded military honours probably in Britain, while about the same time a centurion who died in a war was buried at Vindolanda, and at the beginning of Hadrian's reign there was trouble in the island. Under Hadrian, perhaps in the 120s, a large number of soldiers were killed in Britain. In the early 160s there was again trouble, while in 180 or thereabouts the northern tribes crossed the Wall and defeated a general and his army. In 197, the governor was not strong enough to take the field against the Caledonians and the Maeatae and purchased peace. Dio records that the governor of Britain was winning wars in 207 but in the following year, the Emperor Septimius Severus came to Britain to campaign and secured victory over Rome's enemies only to find that they rose in rebellion the following year. For the whole of the next century, practically nothing is recorded on the frontier, though the fact that some emperors – Aurelian, Numerian, Carinus and Diocletian – took the title *Britannicus* between 273 and 285 may indicate fighting in Britain, though other reasons are possible, such as the successful re-absorption by Rome of the breakaway Gallic Empire in 273. The end of the third century, however, saw the rise of a new enemy in the north, the Picts. We first hear of them in 297. In 305, the Emperor Constantius I and his son Constantine campaigned against the Picts. In the winter of 342/3, the Emperor Constans, son of Constantine, came to Britain, apparently to deal with problems on the northern frontier. In 360, the province came under attack, and more seriously in 367, while Magnus Maximus campaigned against the Picts in 382 and further activity occurred in the late 390s and later, during the reign of Honorius.¹⁸

Some analysis of this catalogue is worthwhile. Firstly, it should be acknowledged that there is no evidence for warfare south of the Humber from the early 70s until the maritime disturbances which started in the late third century; nor is there in the territory of the Brigantes, as discussed below. Secondly, there is no evidence that warfare was continuous. It might be better described as sporadic. In the second century, there was warfare under Trajan, perhaps twice under Hadrian, certainly under Antoninus Pius but probably as a Roman initiative rather than in response to a threat from her enemies, in the 160s, the 180s, the late 190s and 200s. This was roughly every 20 years, or each generation, the timespan between the first and second

world wars. In the fourth century, the gaps between the recorded episodes of warfare were even longer. To these literary references, however, we should add the testimony of inscriptions: the successful operations across the Wall as attested by an altar erected at Kirksteads, the killing of a group of barbarians recorded at Carlisle, the slaughtering of a band of Corionototae acknowledged at Corbridge, and the killing of a soldier in the fort at Ambleside by the enemy.¹⁹ The first three references perhaps date to the second half of the second century or the early third, while the last probably falls into the fourth century.

The forts were placed to control the local population

The study of the army of Britain in the second century has been bedevilled by a theory advanced by Francis Haverfield in 1904.²⁰ Haverfield brought together several pieces of evidence which led him to propose that there had been a rebellion by the Brigantes in the 150s. These items were the discovery in the River Tyne of an inscription recording soldiers from Germany being sent to join the three legions during the governorship of Julius Verus (158); the rebuilding of the fort at Brough-on-Noe in the same governorship; the possibility of the same governor appearing on an inscription at Netherby; the reference by Pausanias to a raid by the Brigantes on the Genunian region sometime during the reign of Antoninus Pius; the statement that there was unrest in Britain in 161; and the building activities of the governor Calpurnius Agricola (161/2-3) in northern England, and the re-occupation of other forts at about the same time. Subsequently, evidence for the theory was amplified, for example by a coin issue showing *Britannia* supposedly subdued, an altar dedicated to Mars Ultor at Corbridge, the destruction and rebuilding of the fort at Birrens, and a siege at Burnswark.

In the first edition of *Hadrian's Wall* published in 1976, Breeze and Dobson argued that the case for the proposed Brigantian Revolt will not stand up to scrutiny and the evidence has been more recently reviewed by Paul Bidwell and Nick Hodgson who are cautious about the existence of a revolt in northern England.²¹ Haverfield's proposed revolt is based upon linking together separate and possibly unconnected items. Some of these items have been disproved or rejected and we are left with three separate items to consider.²²

1. During the governorship of Julius Verus the forts of Birrens north of Hadrian's Wall and Brough-on-Noe in the southern Pennines were rebuilt. It has been suggested that both were rebuilt as the result of a conflagration which stretched across northern England. These forts lie over 250km (160 miles) apart and it is going too far to suggest that their rebuilding points to the whole area in between partaking in a revolt. Further, the circumstances are different. Birrens was rebuilt after destruction – though the cause of this is not known – while Brough was rebuilt after a gap in occupation.
2. A coin issue of 154/5 shows *Britannia* 'subdued'. It has been argued that this coin was issued in Britain and that therefore too much should not be read into the depiction of *Britannia*.²³ In any case, if the coin relates to an event, that event must have occurred before its date of issue and may not be associated with the fort rebuilding which occurred after 155.
3. Troops were moved into or out of Britain. Unfortunately, the inscription is not explicit about the direction of travel, though it is now usually interpreted as indicating the transfer of troops from Britain to Germany.²⁴

In short, these ‘events’ are not evidence for any disturbance in the territory of the Brigantes, however that might be defined.²⁵ Nevertheless, the ‘Brigantian Revolt’ continues to cast a long shadow. It is still used to explain the abandonment of Antonine Scotland, through the argument that the abandonment of so many forts in northern England in the 140s provided an opportunity for disturbances or even outright rebellion among the Brigantes which in turn led to the Antonine Wall and its attendant forts being abandoned. In the circumstances, it must be emphasised that the ‘Brigantian Revolt’ is a modern theory based on no ancient source and with no directly supporting evidence. There remains no documentary evidence for any disturbance in the hinterland of Hadrian’s Wall during the Roman period.

The supervision of mining

Mining for metals was an activity frequently supervised by the army.²⁶ A small fort lay at Pumpsaint beside the gold mines at Dolaucothi in south Wales, for example, and a fortlet at Charterhouse close to the lead mines.²⁷ Hanson has argued that the retention of forts in central Wales related to the supervision of the local lead/silver mines. A similar situation pertains elsewhere in the empire, with the best argument for the continuing military presence in north-west Spain, for instance, being supervision of the extensive gold mines.²⁸ Three mining areas are known in northern Britain. The Derbyshire field has produced 22 lead pigs (*RIB* II 2402.9-60) and southern Yorkshire at least four pigs (*RIB* II 2402.61-64),²⁹ while some of the lead sealings found at Brough-under-Stainmore bear the word *metal(la)* (*RIB* II 2411.123-7) or *met(alla)* (*RIB* II 2411.289). The first five of these sealings also bear the abbreviation for the *cohors II Nerviorum*, which was based at Whitley Castle. This, Richmond argued, was evidence for Roman lead mining of the Alston field; he also noted that lead ore had been found in the fort.³⁰ Unfortunately, nothing is known for the Roman period of the extraction of lead/silver from these areas and therefore the exact location of the Roman activities cannot be determined. However, we can note that Brough-on-Noe is conveniently placed to supervise the Derbyshire ore field, which lies to the south-east.³¹ The Yorkshire field lies within the Pennines, in Roman military terms mainly between the forts at Ilkley and Bainbridge.

It has been suggested that the continuing military presence in the Lake District and at Malton may be related to mining in both areas, though evidence for such activities has not yet been discovered.³² On present evidence, Roman mining of lead/silver was localised in northern Britain and would have had relatively little effect on the main distribution of forts.

The difficulty of supporting the army of Britain

The army of Britain was certainly large during the first and second centuries, leading, for example, to the governor of Britain being one of the most prestigious such appointments. The main reason for the size of the army assembled for the invasion of 43 was presumably to ensure success. Thereafter, it was required as campaigning, conquest and invasion continued into the early third century. In the fourth century the army of Britain had to be reinforced on several occasions, in 360, 367, 372 and about

400 when Britain came under attack.³³ There is, however, no earlier evidence that the number of troops in the province was kept artificially high because of problems of reinforcement.

Britain as a military reserve

It is certainly true that regiments might be withdrawn from Britain in times of emergency elsewhere. Agricola lost part of his army in the early 80s to campaigning in Germany and the Second Legion *Adiutrix* was transferred to the continent in 85/6 in the face of a dire emergency on the Lower Danube. In the second century, a detachment of the British army appears to have been transferred to Germany to help with a crisis.³⁴ But there is no evidence that the army of Britain was maintained at an artificially high level to act as an imperial reserve, but rather, like other provincial armies, it was drawn upon in times of stress elsewhere in the empire. In the 170s, 5,500 Sarmatian *Iazyges* cavalry were sent to Britain but this would appear to have been part of an action to spread these new recruits round the empire rather than because of specific wars in Britain; they have left very little evidence of their presence in Britain.³⁵

Inertia

It is fair to state that all bureaucracies suffer from inertia. Part of the problem which we characterise as inertia is hindsight. Could the emperors of the early third century have perceived that the Caledonians and Maeatae had ceased to be a significant threat, at least in the meantime? It was normally only after an appreciation that the situation was changed, a period of reflection which might take some years, that action was taken.³⁶ On a different level, there was inertia in relation to the movement of individual units. The legionary dispositions in Britain demonstrate this. The legions were established at Caerleon, Chester and York in the late first century and stayed there for over 200 years even though the frontier had moved forward leaving them far to the rear. On a wider scale, most units of the Roman army became classified as frontier troops, usually fossilised in patterns of military deployment which dated to the first or early second centuries, leading to the establishment of new, mobile field armies in the late third and fourth centuries.

It may be doubted that there was any regular review of military deployment throughout the empire; it is more likely that changes only took place when events forced a reaction.³⁷

An analysis of military deployment

We therefore have two main possibilities for the continuing strong military presence in northern England, the threat from Rome's enemies and internal unrest. How can we decide between these? Firstly, we must consider the nature of military deployment in northern Britain. Along Hadrian's Wall, forts were placed about 11km (7 miles) apart, each, with but one exception, capable of holding a complete auxiliary unit. In

the Hadrianic period, there were three advance forts to the north-west. Later in the second century, Birrens to the west was abandoned, but two forts north of the eastern end of the Wall were occupied, providing a balance of two advance forts on each side of the country to the north of the Wall.

In the hinterland, regiments were based in forts on the roads leading south. In the east, the main road, now known as Dere Street, led south from Corbridge. To the west, the main road, following for its northern sector the modern M6, ran south to Manchester. One road led south-west from Carlisle to Papcastle and the coast, while a further main road passed over Stainmore to link the north-west to York. Forts were generally about a day's march apart, 21km (14 miles), though they could be closer, for example in County Durham, in the upper Eden Valley and over Stainmore to Greta Bridge.

This was the pattern in the earlier decades of the second century. The re-occupation of southern Scotland in the 140s changed that for there was widespread abandonment of forts in north Britain leaving only Maryport, Ribchester, Bowes and Lanchester known to have been occupied south of Hadrian's Wall in addition to the legionary bases at Chester and York. The withdrawal from the Antonine Wall and its attendant forts in the late 150s and 160s led to re-occupation of many forts in northern England but not quite in the same pattern as before. Although the pattern of military deployment remained largely the same in north-western England, there was a noticeable change in the north-east. There were now four forts occupied where there had been previously, that is under Hadrian, two. In considering this situation, Dobson suggested that 'these sites were highly convenient for stationing units which could not be squeezed onto the Wall line but were part of the expeditionary force for activities north of the Wall'.³⁸ The concentration of forces close to the Wall, both west and now east of the Pennines, is emphasised by the failure to re-occupy forts in the Vale of York abandoned under Hadrian.

It is only in the early third century that we have sufficient evidence to be able to determine the units based at many of the forts in northern England and then interesting patterns emerge. Eric Birley pointed out that in the early third century most of the cavalry units in northern Britain were focussed on the two main roads through Hadrian's Wall, Portgate on Dere Street and Stanwix north of Carlisle, being located at Old Carlisle, Papcastle and Brougham to the west with Binchester and Chester-le-Street to the east.³⁹ On the Wall, cavalry units were based at Halton Chesters and Chesters close to Dere Street and, in the west, at Stanwix. These forts were supported by several mixed infantry and cavalry regiments occupying the dense concentration of forts in County Durham and on the road across Stainmore. These extend south into a zone 50km (32 miles), that is two-day's march, deep. Only a handful of forts lay further south in a much looser framework. The pattern strongly suggests that the threat which these units were intended to face was not internal but came from outside the province.⁴⁰

The pattern in the southern part of the hinterland is worthy of note, the location of units of different strength being important. The larger units generally lay on the main

roads north. These included the cavalry regiments at Lancaster and Ribchester to the west of the Pennines, balanced by another at Malton to the east. Most forts through the second and into the third centuries were occupied by 500-strong infantry units or mixed units of infantry and cavalry, the work-horse of the frontier.⁴¹ Those on the cross routes through the Pennines – and elsewhere in the more mountainous areas – were small, each generally only sufficient for a 500-strong cohort. In the fourth century, most of the new units sent to Britain – those listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum* – were located on the main roads leading to the frontier. John Mann argued that these were mobile units⁴² In addition, we may note that the army maintained its protective stance up to the very end of Roman Britain, erecting new stations along the Yorkshire coast, presumably to protect the province from the depredations of seaborne invaders.

In their new overview of the Roman army in northern England Bidwell and Hodgson have reviewed the pattern of military deployment in northern England and offered an analysis.⁴³ They reject Dobson's reason for the placing of forts in the immediate hinterland of Hadrian's Wall in the 160s, stating that this 'fails to take account of the emphasis on control in the north-west that had persisted during the period 120-160. Internal insecurity is perhaps the only explanation for a pattern of military dispositions which still placed a noticeable emphasis on north-western Britain ... the widespread provision of *vici* defences in northern England, which are scarcely known in other frontier provinces, speaks of a concern with insecurity. ... On the other hand, there are indications that control of a troublesome upland population was not the sole reason for the intensive military occupation of the hinterland of Hadrian's Wall'. They draw attention to the fact that the military presence was largely removed from Wales and ask 'why could this not be achieved in northern England? The answer must lie in the unsolved problem of the northern frontier and the need to have units in reserve to support Hadrian's Wall and deal with attackers who succeeded in penetrating or bypassing the Wall'. They suggest that there were 'two distinct roles for hinterland forts: on the one hand internal security (including the control and supervision of mineral extraction), on the other support for the northern frontier.'⁴⁴ They also reject the argument, first advanced by John Mann, that some forts were abandoned in the later third century, citing statements by Frere and Hartley.⁴⁵

It must be acknowledged that there is little difference between the views of Breeze and Dobson on the one hand and Bidwell and Hodgson on the other. They both state that the primary concern of the Roman army in Britain was defence. Dobson placed emphasis on the geography of Britain preventing the location of all troops on the line of Hadrian's Wall and suggested that most other units were stationed as close as possible, in the forts of northern England. Although Dobson was writing about military deployment in County Durham, the same point is true for the north-west of England; surely here the troops are retained for defence of the frontier? Dobson also predicates an offensive role for these troops; Bidwell and Hodgson suggest only a defensive role. Here is the nub of the argument. For Breeze and Dobson, the Roman army is a mobile offensive body, in the words of Hodgson, moving with confidence in north Britain.⁴⁶ Bidwell and Hodgson do not see it in that light, hence their reference to defence-in-depth and their suggestion that internal security was a problem. This

leads to their rejection of the Mann hypothesis and the interpretation of defences around civil settlements as relating to such internal insecurity. I will consider each aspect in turn.

Internal security

We have seen that there is no evidence for a ‘Brigantian Revolt’ in the 150s or at any other time. Any interpretation of the forts of northern England as being located to deal with internal security therefore depends upon an analysis of their distribution. Significantly, there are no forts in the core territory of the Brigantes, which appears to lie in Yorkshire. This is not surprising for if opposition to Rome was to come from anywhere in northern England it might be supposed that it is less likely to have come from the farmers of areas such as the Vale of York and more likely to have emanated from hill folk living in the Pennines.⁴⁷ Yet, as we have seen, all the forts here are small. Some forts in the southern Pennines appear to continue in occupation, but again Brough-on-Noe, for example, is small in size and may have been retained in order to supervise the local mines.⁴⁸ One distinctive absence in northern England is the fortlet. This is a small military enclosure at which no more than 80 men were usually based. In Britain they are found from the earliest years of the occupation through to the end and are particularly numerous in southern Scotland during the Antonine occupation. Yet they are most rare in northern England off the line of Hadrian’s Wall and the Cumbrian coast, less than five being recorded from all periods. This absence is not easy to interpret. As Matt Symonds has noted, does this mean that the area was too unsafe to outpost such small groups of soldiers, or was it so safe that they were not necessary? (*pers. comm.*) The placing of a fortlet at Maiden Castle on the Stainmore Pass suggests that security was not a problem. The fortlet was apparently occupied for at least 200 years and beyond its walls lay an unprotected civil settlement.⁴⁹

What, or who, however, could make the area unsafe? It may be suspected that the population of the hill country of northern England was relatively sparse. Was it large enough to lead to the retention of so many forts in northern England? Or did the problem lie elsewhere? Higham noted that most forts were built beside good farmland.⁵⁰ He linked this to supply, such an area being able to provide food and other commodities for the soldiers, but this was where most people lived, so an alternative scenario could be argued, that the inhabitants of these valleys remained resolutely anti-Roman over centuries. This would indeed be remarkable, if not unique in the Roman world and, as a suggestion, better discarded. Even so, it has had its supporters. Leo Rivet offered the concept of ‘failed forts’.⁵¹ He suggested that ‘the assimilation of a new province to the Roman Empire had three stages: first, the actual war of conquest; second, the planting of military garrisons in the conquered territory to control, subdue and civilise; and third, the withdrawal of the troops, except for frontier guards, and the replacement of forts by towns, in which the newly enlightened provincials settled down to sensible, productive Roman life.’ For Rivet, the third stage failed in the military zone, and ‘it was this failure to civilise, represented ... by the “unsuccessful forts” in the Pennines and southern Scotland, that was the economic reason for the most un-Roman slithering about where the northern frontier of the province ought to run’. Yet was it that the Romans failed to civilise the inhabitants of northern Britain – or perhaps that they

refused to be civilised – that was the reason for the retention of the forts, or was it that the forts were retained because of the disruptive activities of the enemy lying unconquered beyond the frontier?

The first proposition received some support from Willy Groenman-van Waateringe. She argued that ‘for a successful Roman occupation the pre-existence of a native infrastructure was an essential condition on two counts, firstly, for the food supply of the Roman army and secondly for the imposition of the Roman administrative structure. The necessary infrastructure in this case is an urbanised level of society’.⁵² On this basis, the province of Britain ought to have been restricted to the southern part of the island where a level of urbanisation had taken place. Groenman-van Waateringe considered that ‘the Romans were able to extend beyond the “frontiers of urbanisation” in certain geographically favoured areas of Europe. The occupation of Britain for example extended further north and more to the west’ than the area of pre-Roman urbanisation.⁵³ In other words, there was a degree of lack of civilisation of the people of northern Britain in relation to those of the southern parts of the island.

While it may be accepted that the peoples of northern Britain were not as ‘civilised’ as their neighbours to the south, as indicated by their lack of coinage, it may be noted that there were political structures and even, in the case of the Caledonians, an ability to combine against a common foe.⁵⁴ The situation, however, may have been even more subtle. I have previously argued that the lack of settlement hierarchy in much of northern England may suggest that the army acted as the equivalent of the top layer of society, in effect creaming off surplus production.⁵⁵ In short, the continuing presence of the army may have prevented the development of society and the appearance of the social elements which we interpret as ‘civilisation’.

‘Security’, nevertheless, is likely to have been the reason for the continuing occupation of these small forts on the cross routes. Their purpose is likely to have been to help maintain communications on the military roads connecting the main forts in the frontier zone.⁵⁶ This interpretation may gain some support from consideration of the location of the fort at Low Borrow Bridge in the narrow defile between the Lune and Eden basins. In many ways, this is not a sensible place for a fort but it was clearly regarded as a necessary link in the chain of forts along the western route north.

The Mann model for the late third and fourth centuries

The crux of John Mann’s argument was that new units arrived in Britain in the fourth century to occupy forts abandoned sometime since the middle of the third century. Bidwell and Hodgson have challenged this, stating, ‘the notion of abandonment of forts in northern England was rejected by several scholars, including those with first-hand knowledge of some of the sites and their finds and stratigraphy’, the scholars cited in the attached footnote being Sheppard Frere and Brian Hartley.⁵⁷ It is instructive to examine what these two scholars said.

Frere, while acknowledging that there was a ‘smaller number of forts still occupied in the north of England at this time’, that is the third century, also stated that ‘there

is, however, no evidence that forts such as Bowes, Greta Bridge, Whitley Castle, Bainbridge or Old Carlisle were unoccupied in the late third century... That a number of units had somehow been quietly disbanded, as suggested by Professor J. C. Mann ... is, in view of the wars of the period, frankly unbelievable'.⁵⁸ We may note, however, that in his discussion of this period, Frere does not mention any wars. Hartley was more cautious. He stated, 'in our area, where there has been relatively recent excavation, the evidence seems on the whole to be more in favour of continued occupation into the fourth century. This is true of Bainbridge, Bowes, Brough-on-Noe, Ilkley and Malton at least ... it is significant that none of the recent excavations have produced evidence of terminal destructions of third century forts. The old idea of destruction connected with the usurpation of Allectus seems finally to have disappeared'.⁵⁹ It is worth noting that Hartley's comments appear to be focussed on the events considered to relate to 297 (the downfall of Allectus) rather than the suggestion of Mann. I will consider the evidence for third century occupation at each site listed by Frere together with Malton, all sites proposed for abandonment during the late third century by Breeze and Dobson, there being agreement on the continuing occupation of Brough-on-Noe and Ilkley.⁶⁰

Bowes In his recent report on the 1966, '67 and '70 excavations at the fort by Brian Hartley, Frere recorded 'occupation of the fort appears to have been continuous except for a possible diminution of occupation between c.A.D. 140 and 160; we found no evidence for periods of disuse'.⁶¹

Greta Bridge There has only been one small excavation on the fort.⁶² Suggestions of continuing occupation of the fort are dependent on the evidence for continuing occupation of the civil settlement which appears to have remained in use into the fourth century. Greta Bridge is in a strategic position and one could envisage a civil settlement continuing there after the fort was abandoned. If Greta Bridge lay in southern Britain there would be no problem about continuing occupation of the civil settlement after the fort had been abandoned.

Whitley Castle This site has only seen one excavation.⁶³ In the report there are only 18 pieces of pottery discussed. Seven sherds are dated to the third century (the bracket is very wide, in one case 190-297), one to the third or first half of the fourth, and three to the fourth. This is not strong evidence for occupation throughout the third and fourth centuries.

Bainbridge Hartley noted in his report on his excavations on the site in the 1950s that, 'There is no evidence for or against continuous third century occupation of the Severan buildings' and 'the north ditch of the east enclosure was out of commission for a time during the third century, since peat would not have been allowed to grow in a ditch that was in use, while even a *numerus* would scarcely have been permitted to leave a dead cow lying there ... It will be necessary in the future to bear in mind the possibility of abandonment of the whole fort for a time'.⁶⁴ However, work leading to the publication of the later excavations by Brian Hartley has led Paul Bidwell and Richard Brickstock to state that neither pottery nor coins suggest a break in the occupation during the third or fourth centuries.⁶⁵

Old Carlisle The fort has not been excavated. Bidwell and Hodgson note that ‘sherds of later fourth century pottery have been picked up on the site’, which fits the evidence of the *Notitia*.⁶⁶ Shotter notes the lack of coins, which mainly derive from the civil settlement, later than the mid-third century, two in fact.⁶⁷

Malton There has been no work in the fort for over 80 years. The excavations by Philip Corder of the 1920s were limited in scope consisting of trenches across the defences, the investigation of one gate and the examination of one internal area. The evidence was slotted into the then preferred framework of Wall periods, with reconstructions about 182, 300 and 369. In the third century, the excavator noted that the occupation was ‘perhaps only partially military’, and in the fourth, though acknowledging that occupation ‘seems to have been almost continuous’, doubt was cast upon the nature of the military occupation.⁶⁸ Buckland, in his review of the evidence, suggested that it was ‘possible that the fort at Malton was either completely abandoned or held by only a caretaker garrison from the mid-third century until early in the fourth’.⁶⁹

From the Frere/Hartley list, I would accept that Bainbridge and Bowes appear to have been occupied through the third and fourth centuries and Greta Bridge possibly also. Corder is open-minded on the nature of the military occupation at Malton. There is insufficient evidence for any conclusions to be made about Whitley Castle and Old Carlisle. This is hardly a significant change to a map containing 28 forts in the hinterland of Hadrian’s Wall.⁷⁰

To conclude this review: the available evidence supports continuing occupation through the third and fourth centuries at Brough-on-Noe, Ebchester, Ilkley, Manchester and Ribchester, and probably/possibly Bainbridge, Binchester, Bowes, Brougham, Burrow-in-Lonsdale, Catterick, Chester-le-Street, Doncaster, Greta Bridge, Low Borrow Bridge, Old Penrith and Watercrock. This represents an addition of eight forts possibly occupied in the late third century according to excavation reports published since 1985.⁷¹ It should be noted, however, that these 12 forts are not certainly occupied through the late third into the fourth century, while in the case of 11 out of the 28 forts under review, there is insufficient evidence to reach any decision on the occupation of the site in the second half of the third century, and it remains possible that many, most or all were abandoned for a time.

The problem of dating in the third century

Behind this discussion are some serious problems relating to the interpretation of the available evidence. The crucial problems are the difficulty of providing accurate dates for third century pottery; of obtaining new interpretations from old excavation reports whose conclusions were often determined with a particular historical framework in mind, that is the ‘Wall periods’; and of characterising the nature of military occupation.

The third century is a most difficult period for dating as there are no known events. The second century was punctuated by the building of Hadrian’s Wall, the building of the Antonine Wall, the abandonment of the Antonine Wall, warfare in the 180s with the Severan campaigns following in 208-11, and, with the exception of the

abandonment of the Antonine Wall, each event was marked by literary and epigraphic evidence. These episodes provide a framework which helps the dating of pottery, one of the main dating tools, as each period has produced diagnostic material. In the third century, a series of early third century inscriptions indicate that some of these forts continued in occupation into the early 240s, only Lancaster producing a stone of a later date. The latest attested dates for units at individual forts are 205-7 at Bainbridge, Bowes and Greta Bridge, 216 at Chester-le-Street, 213-7 at Whitley Castle, 213-222 at Ebchester, 222 at South Shields, 225-35 at Old Penrith, 238-244 at Lanchester, 241 at Papcastle, 242 at Old Carlisle and 262/6 at Lancaster.⁷² These inscriptions, of course, do not indicate the date of abandonment, which may have been at any subsequent date, assuming that abandonment occurred. Indeed, technically, they do no more than demonstrate building or occupation of a particular fort on a particular date, though they are usually taken to indicate more than that, the continuation of the overall pattern of military deployment into the middle of the third century. There are two building inscriptions of 296-305 from Hadrian's Wall, but none from any of the hinterland forts and the only later inscription is from Ravenscar, a fortlet/tower on the Yorkshire coast, which is not itself dated but is presumed to date to the 370s or thereabouts.⁷³

Nor are coins of much help in helping to demonstrate the occupation – or otherwise – of forts in the third century. As Shotter has remarked with reference to the north-west of England, 'coin-loss in the first half of the third century is always low ... it is not until Constantinian coinage of the second decade of the fourth century that we see contemporary coinage making a regular appearance as site-finds'.⁷⁴ He further noted that 'it is harder to use coin-loss of the third and fourth centuries for detailed discussion of occupation-trends in the period, because of doubts which continue to surround the circulation patterns of much of the coinage'.⁷⁵ He continues, 'coin loss in the fourth century is equally difficult to interpret ... We may observe, then, a decline in activity in the first half of the fourth century at sites such as Bewcastle, Kirkby Thore, Old Carlisle, Old Penrith, and Watercrock. Chester and Ribchester do not appear to extend much beyond the middle of the century, whilst at Maryport, Ravenglass, and perhaps, Brough-under-Stainmore, a slackening in the middle of the century may have been followed by a later revival'.

Pottery is equally unhelpful in dating sites in the third century. As John Gillam stated over 50 years ago, 'the subdivision of the third century as a basis for pottery dating is difficult. No major events are attested by literary sources'.⁷⁶ The fact that we know of no events during the third century had resulted in pottery of that period being given a wide date bracket. To assign pottery a 'second century' date would result in the response, is it Flavian-Trajanic, Hadrianic, early Antonine or late Antonine? That is not possible in the third century. In view of the lack of 'events' Gillam offered the following way to categorise third century pottery: 'those vessels which closely resemble second century pottery, and are therefore presumably of *early* third century date, and those vessels which resemble fourth century pottery, and are therefore presumably of *late* third century date, are excluded from the total yield of vessels from unsubdivided third century deposits, leaving a *mid* third century residue'.⁷⁷ This is hardly an exact science. Our conclusion must be that coarse pottery in the third century is too

rough an indicator to use to identify limited periods when sites were or were not occupied. More specifically, we should be cautious in assuming that the existence of a few sherds of third century pottery proves that a fort was occupied throughout that century. As Hildyard and Gillam noted in relation to the pottery at Low Borrow Bridge: 'as to the question of the length of the occupation, the pottery ... proves that it continued throughout the Roman period in the north of Britain, though is not possible to determine whether there were intervals in the tenure of the site'.⁷⁸ How can we judge whether there was continuing occupation or a break? Again, Hildyard and Gillam offer a comment, 'perhaps the most striking fact about the pottery is the abundance of late fourth century material in comparison to the whole, allowing for the proportion of the total length of occupation that it should represent'. In other words, a lack of pottery of a particular period, judging against the whole, may indicate a gap in occupation, though we also need to acknowledge that variations in supply may play a part.⁷⁹ A revised map of forts possibly occupied or abandoned in the third century would, however, require a re-assessment of the pottery from all these forts. John Gillam could have done this as he reported on the pottery from many of these forts; today, it would be a major undertaking. In the meantime, we should be cautious about any statement which avers continuing occupation of a fort throughout the third century and into the fourth on the basis of the pottery evidence.

There is a further difficulty, that of recognising the structural evidence for a break in occupation. Certainly, forts were re-occupied. But what did the break consist of? Did each fort continue to have a small care-and-maintenance detachment (in our terms) during the period of its 'abandonment'? Were forts completely abandoned? Were their buildings left standing? Would we recognise evidence for re-building if walls were reduced to the lowest course by post-Roman activities?

Finally, there is a difficulty in identifying the slight evidence that we have as military in scope rather than civilian. Buckland noted that at Doncaster, although it remained a military site, 'inactivity brought a decline in standards and the nature of later third century occupation remains enigmatic'.⁸⁰ Sometime towards the end of the third century or early in the fourth, the walls of the fort were rebuilt, yet he acknowledges that 'the nature of this strongly fortified enclosure is not entirely clear. In size, it could equally be a fort or small, defended civil settlement, like those in Lincolnshire at Caistor and Horncastle. None of the internal structures are diagnostic and the present of late Roman military equipment would not be unusual in a town'. However, a gap in the coin sequence between about 320 and 340 led Buckland to argue in favour of military use as he suggested that a gap in civilian occupation of this nature would be less likely,⁸¹ though since it is believed that most coins came into circulation through the army, the opposite position may be thought more likely. Can we be sure that Doncaster and Malton continued in use as forts rather than that the military installations were passed over to civilian control at some time in the late Empire?⁸²

In summary, our evidence for the occupation of most forts in northern Britain in the third century is very sketchy, and in many cases non-existent. Any map of military deployment in the third century is, more than for any other period, built on a framework of guesses.

The question of civil settlements

Bidwell and Hodgson argue that ditches outside fort defences were to protect civil settlements: 'there are at least 20 certain or probably examples of annexes or, more commonly, enclosures around *vici*'.⁸³ Bidwell and Hodgson differentiate between an annexe attached to a fort, such as those outside several of the forts on the mid-second century Antonine Wall, and 'an irregular defensive circuit attached to at least two sides of a fort and often enclosing an area at least as large as that contained within the fort defences'.⁸⁴ The authors cite Sommer as support for their view that the annexes on the Antonine Wall were defended *vici*, though an alternative explanation is that they were military in purpose. This was most cogently stated by Peter Salway who argued that 'the annexes of the Antonine Wall and its area correspond in function to the space between the Vallum and Hadrian's Wall (which was in fact an elongated annexe)'.⁸⁵ The only building regularly found in the Antonine Wall annexes is the military bath-house, and Salway noted the differences between the traces of activities recorded in these annexes and those found in civil settlements, even in such settlements built of timber.⁸⁶

Bidwell and Hodgson record the existence of enclosures protected by banks and ditches attached to the forts of Catterick, Malton, Melandra and Wallsend. At Housesteads and Birdoswald, and we may add Maryport, only ditches are known, in each case through geophysical survey. Other enclosures of uncertain type have been recorded at Ambleside, Elslack, Manchester, Ribchester and possibly at Binchester, Doncaster, Chesterfield, Kirkby Thore, Kirkham and Papcastle. Bidwell and Hodgson note the lack of defended *vici* in Germany and suggest that 'their common occurrence in northern Britain is probably explained by greater insecurity than in Germany'.⁸⁷ Recent geophysical survey has suggested that the position in Germany may need to be revised as ditches have been recorded round the civil settlement at Arnsburg.⁸⁸

Bidwell and Hodgson are cautious about the evidence, and rightly so. In several cases the support for the existence of defended *vici* depends on slight evidence. In some cases it is a single wall (Kirkby Thore) or ditch (Chesterfield), at others there was more than one ditch (Ambleside) or a rampart and a ditch(es) (Manchester, Slack and Melandra). In some cases, the 'defences' ran from the fort to the river (Catterick, Malton and Papcastle which was only observed in the 1850s).⁸⁹ At Kirkham and Elslack it is difficult to make much sense of two or more overlapping enclosures. Some forts were abandoned in the second century (Chesterfield under Hadrian, Manchester early in the second century, Ambleside, Melandra and Slack in the mid-second century). There remain a core of sites where there is stronger evidence for the occupation of a defended area from the late second century into the third. At Ribchester a rampart and ditch was constructed 140m beyond the fort in the late second century, at Doncaster 'three defensive ditches apparently enclosed the settlement on the SW site', at Binchester the extensive civil settlement appears to have been bounded by two ditches revealed through geophysical survey while at Catterick the civil settlement was so extensive that it has been termed a town.

The location of these last sites and the size of the units based at the forts is noteworthy. None lie in areas which might be thought to be dangerous. Furthermore, the units

attested at Banchester, Doncaster and Ribchester were all cavalry, who it might be thought were capable of looking after their civilian dependents as well as themselves. The presence of the cavalry may be significant in another way. Could it be that these well-paid troops gave rise to substantial civil settlements whose occupants sought the prestige of building walls round them? 'Status' is indeed the reason offered by Wilson for the construction of defences round the civil settlement at Catterick in the second century.⁹⁰ It is interesting that no fort in the hill country of northern Britain where disturbances to the Roman peace might be thought to have occurred has produced unmistakable evidence for a defended civil settlement.

There are several reasons why civil settlements might have been defended. These include protection against wild animals or thieves and brigands, always a problem in the Roman empire.⁹¹ There is evidence for raiding across every Roman frontier at various times.⁹² The ditches, visible on geophysical surveys in particular, might have been land boundaries; it is noteworthy that the several different and overlapping lines of ditches surrounded the civil settlement at Maryport. These – and others – are accepted as boundary ditches by Sommer, who also considers it possible that the ditches at Birdoswald may have had a "defensive" function' though this interpretation is complicated by the existence of possible buildings beyond the ditches.⁹³ At some sites the evidence is simply baffling. There are defensive ditches at Wallsend, but also evidence for settlement to the north of Hadrian's Wall; both appear to date to the third century though they do not necessarily overlap in occupation. It is difficult to argue that the ditches south of the fort protected a civil settlement while, at the same site, undefended buildings lay north of the Wall.

A single statement by Arrian, governor of Cappadocia, has often been taken as support for measures to protect civilians. In the 130s, Arrian inspected one of the most exposed frontiers of the Roman empire, that along the eastern coast of the Black Sea. At one site, Phasis, he ordered the construction of a line of defence to protect the civilians living outside the fort.⁹⁴ One reference to such action, and on an exposed frontier, is insufficient evidence to base a general theory. As Salway notes, 'this was clearly a special case: the primary purpose was protection for the shipping and it need have no relevance to the problem of the relatively common annexes of the northern part of our region'.⁹⁵

In summary, evidence has been provided for the construction of ramparts and ditches which may relate to the protection of some civil settlements. The precise reasons for their provision are, however, debatable. Defence against raiders, thieves, wild animals are all possible as are reasons of definition or prestige. Nor is it clear how the defences of civil settlements might be manned; should the site be attacked, the primary purpose of the soldiers would be to defend their fort not the civil settlement.⁹⁶

Conclusions

This has not been an attempt to write a history of northern Britain during the Roman period, rather to seek to understand the implications of military deployment and the reasons for its changing pattern. On the basis of the evidence from the rest of the

Roman empire, the forts south of Hadrian's Wall should have been abandoned. The fact that they were not indicates that there was a problem. Exploring the nature of that problem – or problems – has been the purpose of this paper.

There is general agreement that the continuing occupation of the forts in northern Britain was necessary for the defence of the province, coupled with the possibility of troops being retained close to the frontier for offensive operations to the north. This interpretation rests on the concentration of troops in the immediate hinterland of the Wall and, in the early third century, the focussing of cavalry on the two main routes north through Hadrian's Wall. The pattern of military deployment is different in Britain from Germany because of the need to maintain a large army in the north of Britain, presumably in the face of disturbed conditions on the frontier, the impossibility of stationing all the army along Hadrian's Wall, and the geography of Britain. In Germany, also with a large army but a much longer frontier, it was possible to deploy all the troops on the frontier line itself.⁹⁷ One interpretation of the military deployment in Britain is that it reflected 'defence-in-depth', but without the diagnostic features such as fortified granaries and towns within the province and re-occupied hill-forts, the pattern is more likely to have resulted from the geographical constraints.

In the hinterland of Hadrian's Wall some forts, especially in the Pennine Hills, may have been retained to allow the army to supervise mining; these include Brough-on-Noe and Whitley Castle, and perhaps Ilkley and Bainbridge, a situation paralleled in Wales and north-west Spain. There is, however, disagreement on the proposal that forts were retained for internal security which was such a serious problem that civil settlements required to be defended. The forts on the roads across the Pennines were small and, it might be argued, their regiments concerned with control of the routes through the hill country; this certainly indicates a concern with security. Further, it could be suggested that the larger units were placed on the north-south routes, and in areas where they could be more easily supplied, not just to support the northern frontier but to act as springboards for intervention in the more hilly regions. Yet, the continued occupation of the fortlet at Maiden Castle on the Stainmore Pass and the presence of civilians living beside it suggest that security was not a problem.⁹⁸ The presence of the fortlet here points to the reason for the continued occupation of these small forts in the hills: to support the primary purpose of the military presence, which, it is argued here, was the defence of the province, through the maintenance of communications and supplies in the frontier zone.

The fact that most of the forts in northern England could be abandoned when the Antonine Wall was constructed also indicates that the army did not consider that security in the area was an issue. It is no argument to suggest that this view was mistaken because the Brigantes broke into revolt for we have seen that there is no evidence for such an event. Nor is there any other evidence to suggest that unrest in the Pennines led to the abandonment of the Antonine Wall.

Our lack of understanding of the reasons for the construction of defences round civil settlements outside forts renders it difficult to use this evidence to support the case for unsettled conditions in northern England. The construction of one earthwork is,

surprisingly, not cited by Bidwell and Hodgson as support for their case, the Vallum to the south of Hadrian's Wall. This, it has been suggested, was erected to protect the rear of the Wall zone, possibly following local opposition to the building of the Wall.⁹⁹

The view that there continued to be a concern with internal security is intimately related to the Mann hypothesis. He offered an implied assumption that the north was peaceful in the later third century. Hence his argument has to be demolished. I have sought to demonstrate that the archaeological evidence is such as to allow the maintenance of the Mann model. If this is accepted, another plank of the argument in favour of the north of England continuing to be unsettled is removed. It must be noted, however, that new excavations are producing more evidence for third century occupation at forts in northern England, though the difficulties of determining continued occupation throughout the period have been noted. Nevertheless, no alternative proposition has been offered for the nature of the change from early empire units to late units in the forts of northern England.

The Groenman-van Waateringe and Rivet propositions that the people of northern England were not advanced enough to be assimilated to the empire and were not civilised during the Roman occupation, and therefore by extension required continuing military supervision, may be challenged. We now know of two civil administrations in the north, the *civitas Brigantum* and the *civitas Carvetiorum*, with the possibility of others, indicating that the normal arrangements for self-government were established in the area (Breeze 2008).¹⁰⁰ Further, if the reason for the continuing military presence in the north was primarily because the whole of the island had not been conquered, then the forts had not failed in the sense that the Romans had failed to civilise the local population, but rather were constrained by the limits of conquest.

In conclusion, forts continued to be maintained in the immediate hinterland of Hadrian's Wall because of the threat from the north and spread across the countryside owing to the narrowness of the frontier. Beyond the 50km (32 mile) zone to the south of the Wall, it is possible that the main role of some soldiers was supervision of mining activities as well as supporting the military infrastructure. As the threat from the Caledonians receded in the third century it is still likely that units in some northern forts were transferred elsewhere or disbanded. This would account for the introduction of new units in the late third and/or fourth centuries and the re-occupation of many forts in the face of a new threat from the north, the Picts.

There remain several problems. What evidence could we find which would help determine the argument? This is not easy to answer. As Ben Edwards has pointed out (*pers. comm.*), the fact that we cannot identify the location of most of the 5,500 Sarmatian cavalry – perhaps 10 or 11 units – sent to Britain in 175 emphasises how shaky are the foundations on which we seek to build our arguments. When we can identify military sites, how do we recognise continuing occupation of a fort or the other side of the coin, a break in occupation? Why did forts like Doncaster continue in occupation, assuming that it did? Why was Malton re-built and continue in occupation into the fourth century? What was the threat in that area: could it have been sea-borne? Were Doncaster and Malton forts or small towns? How do we distinguish between

military and civilian occupation? How do we determine the purpose of defences round civil settlements? One problem is fundamental: we need more archaeological evidence in order to understand the third century better.

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- ² I use the term 'advance forts' rather than 'outpost forts' as recommended by Mark Corby, 'Hadrian's Wall and the defence of North Britain', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, **39**, (2010), 8-13
- ³ D. J. Breeze and B. Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall*, 4th edition (London, 2000), 23
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- ⁷ M. G. Jarrett, 'Non-legionary Troops in Roman Britain: Part One, The Units', *Britannia*, **25**, (1994), 74
- ⁸ J. C. Mann, 'The Northern Frontiers after A.D. 367', *Glasgow Archaeological Journal*, **3**, (1974), 38
- ⁹ quoted by Jarrett, 'Non-legionary Troops', 69
- ¹⁰ M. W. C. Hassall, 'The historical background and military units of the Saxon Shore', in D. E. Johnston (ed.), *The Saxon Shore*, CBA Research Report 18 (London, 1977) 7-10; P. Holder, *The Roman Army in Britain* (London, 1982), 109-110
- ¹¹ For Ribchester, see B. J. N. Edwards, 'Roman Garrisons in North-West England', *CW3*, **10**, (2010), 119-35. The Sixth Cohort of Nervians was attested at Bainbridge in the early third century and at *Virosidium* in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, the general presumption being that *Virosidium* was the Roman name of Bainbridge though there is no independent proof (A. L. F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London, 1979), 506-7). While it remains possible that the unit moved between these two dates, the evidence for continuing occupation of the fort in the form of pottery and coins is strong. I am grateful to Paul Bidwell and Richard Brickstock for advice on the pottery and coins.
- ¹² Mann, 'The Northern Frontiers', 38
- ¹³ The evidence for this regiment being at Brough depends upon the discovery of many lead sealings at the site. This is circumstantial as generally lead sealings from other units are found at any one site. The argument here depends upon the large number, but if normal criteria were adopted the Seventh Cohort of Thracians would be based elsewhere.
- ¹⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus 20, 1; 27, 8; 28, 3; 29, 4, 7
- ¹⁵ D. J. Breeze, 'Demand and Supply on the Northern Frontier', in R. Miket and C. Burgess (eds.) *Between and Beyond the Walls: Essays on the Prehistory and History of North Britain* (Edinburgh, 1984), 268
- ¹⁶ D. J. Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession, Britain in the Roman Empire* (London, 2006), 239
- ¹⁷ Breeze, 'Demand and Supply', 265
- ¹⁸ Brigantes: Tacitus, *Annals* 12, 40; *Histories* 2, 45; Caledonians: Tacitus, *Agricola* 25-38; Trajan: E. Birley, *Roman Britain and the Roman Army*, 1953, 20-4; Hadrian: *Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian* 5, 2; Fronto, *Letter to Marcus on the Parthian War*, 2; *RIB* 3364; Antoninus Pius: *Historia Augusta, Life of Antoninus Pius* 5, 4; Marcus (160s): *Historia Augusta, Life of Marcus* 8, 7; 22, 1; Commodus (180): Dio, *History of Rome* 72, 8, 1; *Historia Augusta, Life of Commodus* 6, 1; Septimius Severus: Dio 75, 5, 4; 76, 10, 6; 76, 11, 1; 13; 15 and Herodian 3, 14; 15; 305: Eumenius, *Panegyric of Constantine* 7, 1-2; Anonymous Valesianus 2, 4; 342/3: Ammianus 20, 1, 1; 367-8: Ammianus 27, 8 and 28, 3; 382: *Chron. Gall.* 452; 400: Claudian, *on the consulship of Stilicho* 2, 247-55; 401/2: Claudian, *on the Gothic War* 416-8. I have not included the supposed attack of the Brigantes on the Genounian district under Antoninus Pius (Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 8, 43) as indicating trouble on the northern frontier owing to the doubt

- cast on its relevance to Britain by Hind (1977). Note the observation that the emphasis on disturbed conditions at the beginning of successive reigns may have been in order to enhance the reputation of the emperors (Breeze and Dobson 2000, 120)
- ¹⁹ *RIB* 2034, 946, 1142, 3218
- ²⁰ F. Haverfield, 'Discovery of Roman inscriptions etc, at Newcastle', *Archaeologia Aeliana*², **25**, (1904), 142-4
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- ²² Cf. Breeze and Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall*, 106-8; J. G. F. Hind, 'The "Genounian" Part of Britain', *Britannia* **8**, (1977), 229-34
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- ²⁵ N. Higham, 'Brigantia Revisited', *Northern History*, **23**, (1987), 7; D. J. Breeze, 'Civil Government in the North: the Carvetii, Brigantes and Rome', *CW3*, **8**, (2008), 66; L. Allason-Jones, 'Some Problems of the Roman Iron Age in N England', in W. S. Hanson (ed.), *The Army and Frontiers of Rome*, (Journal of Roman Archaeology SS 74 (Portsmouth, RI, 2009), 220
- ²⁶ P. Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1981), 633-6
- ²⁷ See references in W. S. Hanson, 'Rome, the Cornovii and the Ordovices', in *Studien zu den Militärgrenzen Roms III* (Stuttgart, 1986), 47-52
- ²⁸ R. F. J. Jones, 'The Roman military occupation of North-West Spain' *Journal of Roman Studies*, **66**, (1976), 45-66
- ²⁹ Dr Pete Wilson has kindly drawn my attention to a possible lead pig found at Hurst in Swaledale allegedly stamped Hadrian, according to A. Raistrick and B. Jennings, *A History of Lead Mining in the Pennines*, (1965) 3, deposited in the British Museum, but not subsequently traced
- ³⁰ I. A. Richmond, 'Roman lead sealings from Brough-under-Stainmore', *CW2*, **36**, (1936), 109
- ³¹ G. Simpson, *Britons and the Roman Army* (Farnborough, 1964), 139
- ³² D. J. Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession, Britain in the Roman Empire* (London, 2006), 136
- ³³ Ammianus Marcellinus 20, 1, 1; 27, 8, 7; 29, 4, 7; Claudian, *On the consulship of Stilicho*, 2, 247
- ³⁴ D. J. Breeze and B. Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall*, 4th edn., (London, 2000), 118
- ³⁵ Edwards, 'Roman Garrisons', 127
- ³⁶ By way of comparison, it may be noted that defences against a German invasion were still being constructed in north Britain in 1943, three years after the threat had passed
- ³⁷ For the possibility of a review of imperial commitments following the retirement of the long-serving praetorian prefect Gavius Maximus see A. R. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius* (London, 1987), 112-4
- ³⁸ B. Dobson, 'Roman Durham', *Trans. Architect. and Archaeol. Soc. of Durham and Northumberland*, **2**, (1970), 34
- ³⁹ E. Birley, 'Roman Papcastle', *CW2*, **63**, (1963), 122; for map see D. J. Breeze, 'The Roman Army in Cumbria', *CW2*, **88**, (1988), 17, fig. 2. To this deployment we can possibly add Catterick which has produced a tile, now lost, which may indicate the presence of an *ala Sarmatae*: *RIB* 2479
- ⁴⁰ Breeze, 'Roman Army', 16; P. Bidwell and N. Hodgson, *The Roman Army in Northern England* (Kendal, 2009), 44-45
- ⁴¹ For the north-west see now Edwards, 'Roman Garrisons'
- ⁴² Mann, 'The Northern Frontiers', 38
- ⁴³ Bidwell and Hodgson, *Roman Army*, (2009, 42-5)
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 43-45
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26
- ⁴⁶ N. Hodgson, 'The abandonment of the Antonine Wall: its date and causes', in W. S. Hanson, *The Army and Frontiers of Rome* (Portsmouth RI, 2009), 192
- ⁴⁷ Higham 1982 links the location of forts to good farmland while Higham 1987, 7 places 'the core of tribe on the better-drained lowland soils of western Yorkshire'
- ⁴⁸ For a similar problem in identifying the potential troublemakers, in this case in Wales, see Hanson 1986.
- ⁴⁹ H. Welfare, 'Maiden Castle Fortlet, Stainmore', in R. Vyner, R. Annis and H. Welfare, *Stainmore, The Archaeology of a North Pennine Pass*, Tees Archaeology monograph series 1, (London 2001), 96-8
- ⁵⁰ N. Higham, 'The Roman impact upon rural settlement in Cumbria', in P. Clack and S. Haselgrove (eds.), *Rural Settlement in the Roman North* (Durham, 1982), 108
- ⁵¹ A. L. F. Rivet, 'Social and Economic Aspects' in A. L. F. Rivet (ed.), *The Roman Villa in Britain* (London, 1969), 190-2

- ⁵² W. Groenman-van Waateringe, 'Urbanization and the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire', in W. S. Hanson and L. J. F. Keppie (eds.), *Roman Frontier Studies 1979* (BAR IS 71, Oxford, 1980), 1037
- ⁵³ Groenman-van Waateringe 1980, 1042
- ⁵⁴ D. J. Breeze, 'Why did the Roman army fail to conquer Scotland?', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, **118**, (1988), 13
- ⁵⁵ D. J. Breeze, 'The impact of the Roman army on the native peoples of north Britain', in H. Vetters and M. Kandler (eds.), *Der römische Limes in Österreich, Heft 36. Akten des 14 Internationalen Limeskongresses 1986 in Carnuntum* (Wien, 1990), 93
- ⁵⁶ For the role of the army in maintaining communications and protecting goods in transit see R. W. Davies, *Service in the Roman Army* (Edinburgh, 1989), 59-61
- ⁵⁷ P. Bidwell and N. Hodgson, *The Roman Army in Northern England* (Kendal, 2009), 26
- ⁵⁸ S. S. Frere, *Britannia* (London, 1987), 173 and n. 64
- ⁵⁹ B. Hartley, 'Plus ça change . . . or reflections on the Roman forts of Yorkshire', in J. Price and P. R. Wilson (eds.) *Recent Research in Roman Yorkshire* (BAR BS 193, Oxford, 1988), 157
- ⁶⁰ D. J. Breeze and B. Dobson, 'Roman Military Deployment', 15, fig. 9
- ⁶¹ S. S. Frere and L. Fitts, *Excavations at Bowes and Lease Rigg Roman Forts*, Yorkshire Archaeological Reports, **6**, (Leeds, 2009), 52
- ⁶² P. Bidwell and N. Hodgson, *The Roman Army in Northern England* (Kendal, 2009), 51
- ⁶³ N. Shaw, 'Excavations at Whitley Castle, Northumberland, 1957-8', *Archaeologia Aeliana*⁴, **37**, (1959), 191-202
- ⁶⁴ B. Hartley, 'The Roman Fort at Bainbridge, Excavations of 1957-9', *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society* 9, pt. 3, (1960), 119
- ⁶⁵ See note 11
- ⁶⁶ P. Bidwell and N. Hodgson, *The Roman Army in Northern England* (Kendal, 2009), 124
- ⁶⁷ D. C. A. Shotter, 'Recent Finds of Roman Coins in Cumbria', *CW2*, **96**, (1996), 31-2
- ⁶⁸ P. Corder, *The Defences of the Roman Fort at Malton* (Malton, 1930), 64-8; see also P. R. Wilson, 'A Yorkshire Fort and 'Small Town': Roman Malton and Norton Reviewed', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, **78**, (2006), 35-60
- ⁶⁹ P. Buckland, 'The Malton burnt grain: a cautionary tale', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* **54**, (1982), 58
- ⁷⁰ D. J. Breeze and B. Dobson, 'Roman Military Deployment in North Britain', *Britannia*, **16**, (1985), 15, fig. 9
- ⁷¹ I have amended my position on Bainbridge, Binchester, Bowes, Brougham, Catterick, Chester-le-Street, Ebchester and Old Penrith since 1985 owing to the publication of new excavation reports
- ⁷² The references are: *RIB* 722 and 3215 (Bainbridge); 740 (Bowes); 746 (Greta Bridge); 1049 (Chester-le-Street); 1202 and 1203 (Whitley Castle); 1101 (Ebchester); 1060 (South Shields); 929 (Old Penrith); 1074, 1091 and 1092 (Lanchester), *RIB* 882 and 883 (Papcastle); 897 (Old Carlisle) and 605 (Lancaster)
- ⁷³ *RIB* 721
- ⁷⁴ D. Shotter, *Roman Coins from North-West England* (Lancaster, 1990), 120-1
- ⁷⁵ D. Shotter, *Roman Coins from North-West England, Second Supplement* (Lancaster, 2000), 126
- ⁷⁶ J. P. Gillam, 'Roman pottery in the north of Britain', in E. Swoboda (ed.), *Carnuntina* (Graz-Köln, 1956), 72
- ⁷⁷ Gillam, 'Roman Pottery', 72
- ⁷⁸ E. J. W. Hildyard and J. P. Gillam. 'Renewed excavation at Low Borrow Bridge', *CW2*, **51**, (1951), 55
- ⁷⁹ It is worth considering the case of Brough-on-Noe. This is accepted as being occupied during the third and into the fourth century by Breeze and Dobson. The evidence cited by Bidwell and Hodgson is: 'Occupation is thought to have continued down to the mid-4th century or later, but later-Roman pottery and coins seem to be scarce on the fort site. Limited excavations in the vicus suggest (*sic*) that it was abandoned by the end of the 3rd century'. P. Bidwell and N. Hodgson, *The Roman Army in Northern England* (Kendal, 2009), 94. These two statements are hardly ringing endorsement for occupation in the third century.
- ⁸⁰ P. C. Buckland, *Roman South Yorkshire: A Source Book* (Sheffield, 1986), 13
- ⁸¹ Buckland, *Roman South Yorkshire*, 17
- ⁸² A similar problem exists at Newton Kyme near York; this has been claimed as both military and civilian (Bidwell and Hodgson, *The Roman Army*, 138)
- ⁸³ Bidwell and Hodgson, *The Roman Army*, 31
- ⁸⁴ Bidwell and Hodgson, *The Roman Army*, 31-2
- ⁸⁵ P. Salway, *The Frontier People of Roman Britain* (Cambridge, 1965), 158

- ⁸⁶ Salway, *Frontier People*, 157
- ⁸⁷ Bidwell and Hodgson, *The Roman Army*, 33
- ⁸⁸ H.-M. von Kaenel and C. Wenzel, 'Arnsburg "Alteburg": Kastell und vicus mit monumentalem Zentrum und Umwehrung', in P. Henrich (ed.), *Perspektiven der Limesforschung. 5 Kolloquium der Deutschen Limeskommission* (Stuttgart, 2010), 112
- ⁸⁹ This arrangement has been noted elsewhere, for example at the legionary fortress at Carnuntum on the River Danube.
- ⁹⁰ Wilson 2002 Part II, 459. Cf. A. Olivier, 'Postscript, The Nature of the Ribchester Civil Settlement', in B. J. N. Edwards and P. V. Webster (eds.), *Ribchester Excavations, Part 2, Excavations in the Civil Settlement, A. The Structures* (Cardiff, 1987), 177-26 for a discussion of civil settlements and their defences
- ⁹¹ R. W. Davies, *Service in the Roman Army* (Edinburgh, 1989), 56
- ⁹² D. J. Breeze, *The Frontiers of Imperial Rome* (London, 2011), 188-90
- ⁹³ C. S. Sommer, 'Military vici in Roman Britain Revisited' in R. J. A. Wilson (ed.), *Romanitas, Essays on Roman archaeology in honour of Sheppard Frere on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday* (Oxford, 2006), 130
- ⁹⁴ Arrian, *Circumnavigation of the Black Sea*, 9, 5
- ⁹⁵ Salway, *Frontier People*, 157
- ⁹⁶ See Caesar, *The Gallic War*, for a reference to civilians being allowed to come into the shelter of the camp when under attack
- ⁹⁷ Breeze, *The Frontiers of Imperial Rome*, 59-60
- ⁹⁸ It may be unwise, too, to ignore the weather, which was the main subject of Tacitus' account of Agricola's third season: Tacitus, *Agricola* 21
- ⁹⁹ D. J. Breeze, 'Warfare in Britain and the Building of Hadrian's Wall', *Archaeologia Aeliana*⁵, 31, (2003), 13-16
- ¹⁰⁰ See Breeze, 'Civil Government in the North: the Carvetii, Brigantes and Rome', *CW3*, 8, (2008), 63-72. There is a political dimension to the incorporation of the north of England into the Roman empire other than the favourable geographical circumstance mentioned by Groenman-van Waateringe. The Brigantes had been part of the province from soon after the invasion and Hadrian's Wall came to be built along what we believe was their northern boundary. It was therefore a rational boundary for the northern limit of the province. D. J. Breeze, 'Why was Hadrian's Wall built across the Tyne-Solway isthmus?', in F. Beutler and W. Hamater (eds.) *"Eine Ganz Normale Inschrift"... und Ähnliches zum Geburtstag von Ekkehard Weber* (Vienna, 2005), 13-16