



Aerial view of Melandra Castle from the north.

(Cambridge University Collection, by kind permission of the Committee for Aerial Photography).

MELANDRA CASTLE

By JAMES A. PETCH

FOR fifty years the Roman fort known as Melandra Castle has presented a sorry spectacle. The masonry remains have lain open to the weather and vulnerable to vandals. Large and small spoil heaps, left just as they had been thrown up by enthusiasts, suggested random devastation rather than orderly examination. Of late years the Excavation Sub-committee of the Manchester Branch of the Classical Association has attempted with local support to undo what its predecessors half a century ago had been involved in the doing of. But progress with picks and spades and wheelbarrows was heart-breakingly slow, and back-breaking too so compacted had the spoil heaps become. In 1961 the Ministry of Works and the Corporation of Glossop agreed to share equally the expense of hiring machinery to level the interior of the fort. By arrangement with Messrs. M.R.Q. Construction Company Ltd. who were engaged on civil engineering work nearby, a day and a half's bulldozing in August 1962 was sufficient to tidy away the unsightly heaps and to put back over what is still left of the *principia* and the east gateway enough soil to prevent further deterioration. The closure of a chapter of its story has suggested this attempt to summarize what at present can be said of the fort.

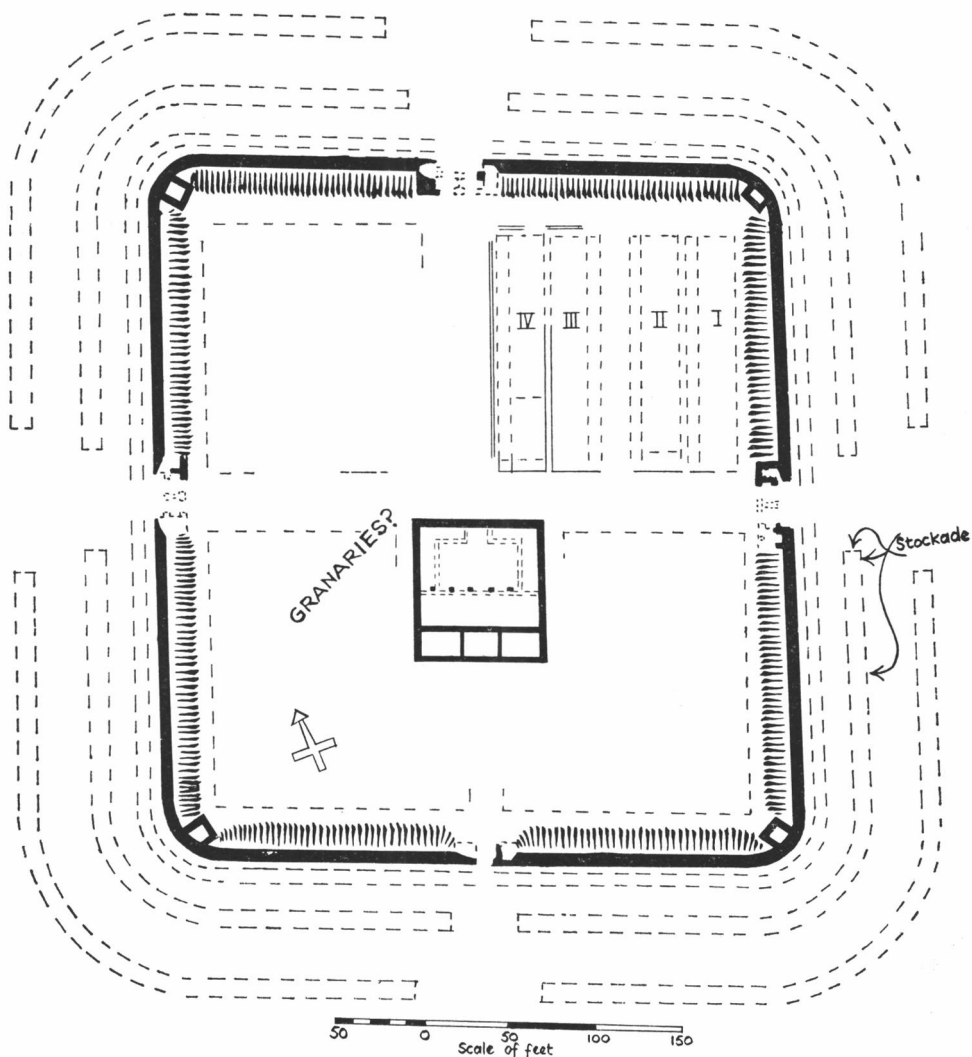
POSITION AND NAME OF THE FORT

Melandra Castle lies at the tip of a tongue of higher ground running northwards from Gamesley, which lies a mile and a half west of Glossop on the road A626 (Plate I). The National Grid reference for the fort is SK(102)008951. To the west and at the northern end this higher ground drops abruptly to the valley of the Etherow. To the east of the fort a natural depression runs from south to north along the hillside. Access to the fort is therefore easy only from the south along the ridge of the high ground. The immediate surroundings of the fort have changed considerably in recent times. The north and the west slopes of the hill have been quarried for gravel and sand; the Etherow has been channelled. Tactically, however, they are still typical of Agricola's choice for the location of a fort in hilly country. Strategically the fort stands where the road from Brough (*Navio*) over the Snake debouches into Longdendale.

I. A. Richmond and O. G. S. Crawford identify the site with the *(Ze)rdotalia* of the 7th century Ravenna cosmography.¹ They consider the form of the

¹ "The British Section of the Ravenna Cosmography", *Archaeologia*, XCIII (1948), 34.

name as there given to be corrupt and they emend it to either *Erdotalia* or *Ardotalia*. The first form they derive from *Edera-*, a river name which has become Etherow; the second, which they prefer, they derive from *ardd* (Welsh, "height"). In either case the second element of the name they derive from *-tal-ia* (Welsh, "brow", "edge", "end", "strip", "head-rigg"). As they



Based on the original plan
(1905) by F.A. Band J.S.

MELANDRA CASTLE

(?Ardotalia) 1962

FIG. 1.

themselves comment: "the 'edge of the brow' would be a remarkably accurate description of Melandra Castle, perched on the top of a high promontory."

Whether or no this identification is accepted, the modern name has been a stumbling-block to many. In the account of the fort which he communicated to the Society of Antiquaries in 1772, the Reverend John Watson, Rector of Stockport, calls it Melandra Castle.² No maps of an earlier date which show the fort are known to exist, and this seems to be the first recorded occurrence of the name. It and the variant Malandra (1857) have given rise to a lush proliferation of conjecture about possible derivations. With one exception all the guesses seem wild, some very wild.³ Save for the exception all have assumed that a name ascribed in the 18th century to a spot which may have lain uninhabited for thirteen or fourteen hundred years must derive from the original Roman name, even if there has to be resort to Greek to explain it. It seems at least as likely an assumption that Watson misheard or misunderstood his informant, presumably a native of the district; in the next century some curious names were to get on to the first O.S. maps. The most, perhaps the only, sensible suggestion hitherto is due to Mr. S. O. Addy. He noted some sixty years ago that "the surname Mallinder, accented on the first syllable, is not infrequent in Sheffield."⁴

RECENT HISTORY OF THE FORT

On his visit Watson saw clear traces of ditches on the south-east and the south-west, and he reported that there were remains of buildings outside the fort wall to the north-east and north-west. Inside the fort he records prominent remains, presumably of the *principia*. Over a century later W. Thompson Watkin gives the name of the fort as "The Castle Yard" and states that eleven fields in its neighbourhood were known as "The Castle Carrs". But he also uses the name "Melandra Castle". He commented that traces of Watson's ditches were growing fainter but that there were still obvious remains of the four gateways as well as of the headquarters building (*principia*).⁵ The ruins of the fort, however, had suffered since Watson's visit. Stone had been taken from the fort to strengthen the banks of the Etherow; in the early 1860s an elaborate system of field drains was laid throughout the interior; in 1865 the then tenant was "digging for stone".⁶

The proposal to examine the site in the interests of archaeology was due to local enthusiasts led by Mr. Robert Hamnett. The paper he delivered to this Society in 1898 brought matters to a head.⁷ A public subscription was opened to which both the Society and the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society contributed, the site was leased for ten years from the owner, Lord Howard, and Mr. John Garstang was appointed to take charge of the work.

² *Archaeologia*, III (1772), 236.

³ W. F. Gosling gives a very cautious survey of the range in "Roman Place-Names of Derbyshire", *D.A.J.*, LVI (1935), 16-17.

⁴ *D.A.J.*, XXIX (1907), 44, footnote. Perhaps there was once a tenant called Melvin (or even Bill) Andrew!

⁵ "The Roman Stations of Derbyshire", *D.A.J.*, VII (1885), 87-90.

⁶ So R. Hamnett in *D.A.J.*, XXI (1890), 12, 18 and 14.

⁷ "Melandra Castle, Derbyshire", *D.A.J.*, XXI (1890), 10-19.

Excavating began in August 1899. When Garstang left in October for the work in Egypt and the Near East which was to bring him over the years an international reputation, uncovering of the remains went on under the direction of Hamnett and his friends.

Romano-British field-work as it is understood today was then at its first beginnings. Garstang's departure meant that enthusiasm had to substitute for disciplined knowledge. When the newly formed Excavations Committee of the local branch of the Classical Association came to be associated with the work, better things might have been hoped for. Local interest was immense. Sixpenny excursions by railway were run on Saturdays from Manchester to view the progress of the work — "Refreshments available on the site". But strong personalities and clashing temperaments were involved. And when every possible allowance is made that is the proper due of all pioneers who blaze trails, under a superficial appearance of solidity the report published in 1906 is jejune.⁸ There is somewhat more archaeological substance in the ten pages of the supplementary report issued with the branch's second annual report.⁹

When the main efforts of the Classical Association were diverted to examining part of the site of Roman Manchester, further work at Melandra was reported on by the Reverend Henry Lawrance.¹⁰ Organized work on the site seems then to have petered out; but it is said that unauthorized and unreported digging continued sporadically through the 1920s and later.

In 1935 the Excavations Sub-committee of the Manchester Classical Association decided to attempt further examination of the fort within the limits of its own slender resources. Four brief campaigns were conducted annually, the outbreak of the second world war ending the series.¹¹ During the war the interior of the fort suffered badly from the activities of the local Home Guard. They built a redoubt in the north rampart with a communications trench stretching to it from the centre of the fort. Further disturbance of the interior was caused by measures taken to stamp out a violent outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the vicinity.

When the Sub-committee was once again able to do some field-work, the Manchester site, part of which had been cleared as a result of bomb-damage, called for its immediate attention. Work at Melandra, now on a very small scale with local volunteers as labourers, did not begin again until 1958. This phase can be regarded as having been ended by the levelling operation in 1962.¹² Should a subsequent generation of field-workers decide to remedy the errors of all their predecessors in the way of omission, commission and

⁸ *Melandra Castle*, edited R. S. Conway, Manchester Univ. Press, 1906.

⁹ *Excavations at Tothill and Melandra*, edited F. A. Bruton, Manchester Univ. Press, 1909; supplementary volume to the Second Annual Report of the Manchester and District Branch of the Classical Association, 24-33. See also R. Hamnett, "Excavations at the Roman Camp of Melandra 1906-7", *D.A.J.*, XXX (1908), 319-323. Haverfield's account in the *V.C.H.* (I, 210-215) was written before the results of these excavations were published.

¹⁰ "Melandra Castle: I, Excavations 1908-11", *D.A.J.*, XXXIV (1912), 153-157.

¹¹ "Recent Work on Melandra Castle", J. A. Petch, *D.A.J.*, LXIV (1943), 49-63. At the time this "preliminary report" was written it was hoped that the work would be resumed when the war was over.

¹² *D.A.J.*, LXXVIII (1958), 1-8; LXXIX (1959), 122-124; LXXX (1960), 105-109; LXXXI (1961), 146.

interpretation, they at least will have the advantage of *terra rasa* from which to start. Meanwhile the general appearance of the interior of the fort is more attractive, and also more meaningful to the casual visitor, than it has been throughout the present century up till now.

SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF EXCAVATION, 1899-1961

The only evidence from the site itself for dating the period of the Roman occupation is provided by the pottery which has been found there.¹³ Nothing is known about the stratification of any of the pottery found before 1935, and little of that found in the later years was stratified. Much of the pottery from the early work is now in Buxton Museum to which it was loaned when Glossop found it impossible to provide suitable accommodation for display. It is rumoured that there are in the locality other collections from the early digging, but they prove elusive. Fragments are still being picked up on the slopes to the north and west outside the fort; Mr. Michael Brown and his friends are keeping a careful record of such chance finds as come to their knowledge or which they themselves make.

Taken as a whole the pottery from the site indicates that the occupation began under Gnaeus Iulius Agricola, governor of the province from A.D. 77/8 to 85/6, and so far as organized occupation was involved came to an end about the middle of the 2nd century. One or two 3rd century fragments and one or two late coins do not provide sure grounds for believing that the fort was re-occupied after the first evacuation; 4th century pottery is absent. Like the fort at Slack and unlike the fort at Brough (*Navio*) Melandra seems to have been abandoned when units were needed further north. The First Cohort of Frisiavones which is named on a centurial stone found "just outside the east angle" of the fort in 1771 was at one time stationed at Manchester (*Mamucium*).

From what is known of other sites in Roman Britain it would be normal to expect that, at some time between the foundation and the abandonment of the site some sixty years or so later, the original fort would have been modified more or less drastically. Evidence from the excavations shows that this did take place although the evidence is not conclusive enough to allow us to say whether the rebuilding was carried through as part of the Trajanic or as part of the Hadrianic reorganization of the frontier regions of the province. Nor is it certain that it was a complete rebuilding in stone. There is, however, sufficient evidence that the fort went through two phases. In the first it was constructed of earth and wood, in the second parts of it at least were of stone. The fragment (IMP . . .) recorded by Watkin could be all that is left of the building inscription recording the reconstruction.

Phase I.

The Agricolan fort was defended by a rampart of earth and at least one

¹³ "The Date of Melandra Castle; Evidence of the Pottery", J. A. Petch, *D.A.J.*, LXIX (1949), 1-40.

ditch. In 1958 the northern rampart was found to rest on a massive bottoming of rough boulders. This may have been put down to counteract the pronounced slope on which the fort stands (downward from south-west to north-east). Again in 1958, traces of what may have been a brushwood or timber float for the south rampart were noticed at the south gateway. No such bottoming was noticed in the section cut across the east rampart in 1935, nor was there any orderly arrangement of the upcast material forming the rampart. But as a clay curb was found running along at the inner foot of the rampart, the section indicated that the original width at the base had been 17 ft. plus a number of feet which could not be determined. The original outer face of the earth rampart had later been cut back to receive a facing of masonry as part of the phase II remodelling. The relationship of the Agricolan rampart to the presumably Agricolan ditch suggests that the original width of the rampart at its base was about 20 ft. or so over-all. The interior roadway which ran round the fort at the foot of the rampart seemed to be only 7 ft. 9 in. wide (Fig. 1).

Of the three ditches located in 1935 the innermost can be ascribed to the Agricolan layout, firstly because it was only 8 ft. wide as compared with the 10 ft. of each of the other two, secondly because of the relationship of the three ditches and berms to the line of the stone rampart. The Agricolan ditch may have been filled in as part of the phase II remodelling of the fort; but while it was open it was made a more formidable obstacle by some kind of stockade running along it. Soundings in 1958 suggested that there was a ditch somewhat similarly situated outside the west gateway.

In 1908 Hamnett reported finding remains of a wooden structure under the stone north gateway.¹⁴ It is likely that they, together with an oak post found in 1862, represent the original wooden north gateway of the Agricolan fort. Nothing like this was found when the west gateway was re-examined in 1958. It is, however, reasonable to assume that the Agricolan fort had four gateways, all of wood, where later stood the four gateways of stone of which remnants still remain *in situ*. At present it can only be conjectured that the four stone corner-towers took the place of corner-towers of wood.

The remains of the *principia* have lain exposed to the weather since their uncovering was completed in 1906. In 1960 the east wall was found to lie over a trench packed with cobbles which was narrower than the footings of the masonry wall. The trench presumably belongs to the first building on the site, other remains of which are a post-hole, also found in 1960 and, more substantial, the five stout oak posts which in 1907 Hamnett found in line across the centre of the *principia* from east to west.¹⁵ It was then thought that there was evidence that these posts, and the screen they may have supported, were replaced by a wall of masonry. This is likely, but no confirmatory evidence has so far come to light. It can only be assumed that in phase I the plan of the *principia* was close to, perhaps identical with, the plan of the phase II building.

¹⁴ D.A.J., XXX (1908), 320-321.

¹⁵ Toothill and Melandra, 27-28.

In the light of Professor Richmond's work at Fendoch and the late C. E. P. Rosser's discovery on the neighbouring site at Castleshaw,¹⁶ the occurrence of three wooden sleepers in the western half of the *retentura*, noted in 1937 but not fully explored, can be taken as giving the situation of the granary, more probably pair of granaries, in the Agricolan layout. The commanding officer's house may have lain beyond the granaries. As yet very little is known about what lay in the eastern half of the *retentura*: the work in 1937 revealed only fragmentary structural remains and an extensive area of cobbling.

Work in the eastern half of the *praetentura* in 1937 and 1938 brought to light unmistakable remains of wooden buildings (Plate IIa). The method of erection had been to take out trenches 9 to 11 in. wide and 18 to 24 in. deep into the natural clay, erect in them rows of posts 2 to 4½ by 1½ to 3 in. in cross-section and then ram back hard the excavated material to hold the posts firm. The spaces between these uprights may have been filled in with horizontal planking or with wattle and daub or some other such material. There seem to have been four buildings of this kind in this quarter of the fort, each 135 ft. long (north to south) by 29 ft. 6 in. wide. They were apparently oblong, not L-shaped, and can be interpreted as barrack-blocks.¹⁷

The plan accompanying the report on the work of 1935 to 1939 suggests how four similar buildings would, conjecturally, fill the western half of the *praetentura*. Work in later years has not produced evidence for the existence of four such buildings here, but a short length of post-trench with three stumps remaining indicates that the south wall of a wooden building ran where the conjectural plan shows the end of the sixth barrack-block (numbering from the east). Other structural traces in the western *praetentura* which have been found so far consist only of gravelled and cobbled areas with an occasional posthole.¹⁸

Phase II.

Scanty as may seem our present knowledge of the Agricolan layout of Melandra, less is known for certain of the stone version. *Melandra Castle* gives ground-plans of the east, north and south gateways. When the west gateway was re-examined in 1958 it was found to resemble the twin-portalled north and east gateways. The south gateway had only one portal. The plans of all the gateways suggest gatehouses over the entrances rather than twin towers, one at either side.¹⁹

¹⁶ For Castleshaw see *Trans. Lancs. and Chesh. Antiq. Soc.*, LXXI (1961), 164.

¹⁷ Further details are discussed in *D.A.J.*, LXIV (1943), 55-58. In Plate IIa, facing p. 8, there is the stump of a post (west wall of Block II) at the foot of the front (left) ranging rod. Halfway up this rod are seen what appeared to be the footings of a masonry wall of phase II. The two front ranging rods on the right each have a stump at their foot (south wall on Block II) with a hearth immediately to the left. There is another stump (south wall of Block II) at the foot of the third rod on the right and the post-trench for this wall runs to the ranging rod at the end of the trench. In this trench only occasional stumps were looked for as a check upon the discolouration which revealed the existence of the Roman post-trench.

¹⁸ E.g. *D.A.J.*, LXXIX (1959), Plate VIIa.

¹⁹ The north gateway of Manchester (*Mamucium*) seems also to have been of the gatehouse type (*Trans. Lancs. and Chesh. Antiq. Soc.*, LXVI (1956), 33). In *Toothill and Melandra*, 33, F. A. Bruton gives the reasons for suggesting that at Melandra there were no guard-chambers at ground level. The evidence from the west gateway in 1958 was not conclusive either way.

Garstang reported that, in 1899, the stone corner-towers had no ground floors and that stone robbers had made it impossible to determine how the towers were related structurally to the rampart of masonry.²⁰ Hamnett concluded that before this masonry rampart had been built against the Agricolan rampart of earth the outer face of the earth bank had been cut vertically straight to receive it. This conclusion was confirmed in 1935, but the section then cut did not give clear evidence for his conclusion that the masonry was 6 ft. thick.²¹ The defences of the stone fort were strengthened by the cutting of two ditches beyond the Agricolan ditch which may then have been filled in; the inner of the two ditches was reinforced with stockading.²²

Within the fort the plan of the stone *principia* is known probably more or less completely. The entrance in the north wall gave access to a courtyard surrounded probably by a portico open to the courtyard. The courtyard led to a cross-hall (*basilica*) on the south side of which stood the "shrine of the standards" (*aedes principiorum*) with a chamber on either side.²³ The work in 1961 showed that what in the previous year had seemed might be evidence of two stages of development in the stone *principia* had been illusory. Nothing is known of floor levels or of stratification within the building. The recent re-examination of parts of the area suggests that any evidence of the history of the building which may have been left unscathed by the early excavations has by now perished by exposure.

In the whole of the remainder of the interior nothing has so far come to light which has suggested the plan of a single building of stone. The stone drain running behind the western rampart seems to belong to phase II; but if there ever were stone buildings over a substantial area of the interior, they have suffered total robbing, and so far the robber trenches have not been noticed. The pottery from the site suggests that the fort was occupied for some time after the building of Hadrian's Wall and one would have expected to find that the remodelling in stone would have been completed at a date earlier than that suggested by the pottery for the evacuation.

THE CIVIL SETTLEMENT

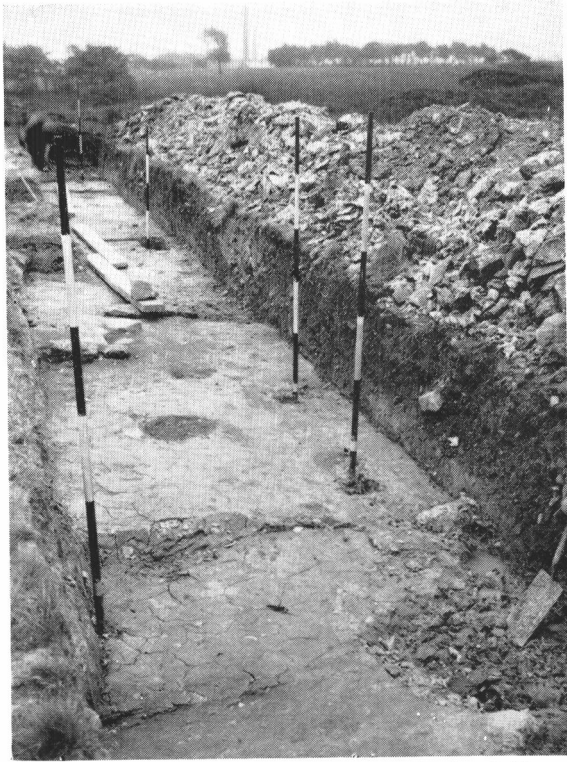
There is yet another blank in our understanding of Melandra Castle. Part of a *solea* which was found in the second ditch in 1936 (Plate IIb, right) suggests that there were civilians, and that female, on the hillside at some time during the Roman occupation. No trace of a civil settlement has yet come to light nor is there any knowledge of a bath-house outside the fort. The latter may have been down by the Etherow. The *canabae* may have lain on the northern and western slopes of the hill which have since then

²⁰ *D.A.J.*, XXIII (1901), 92.

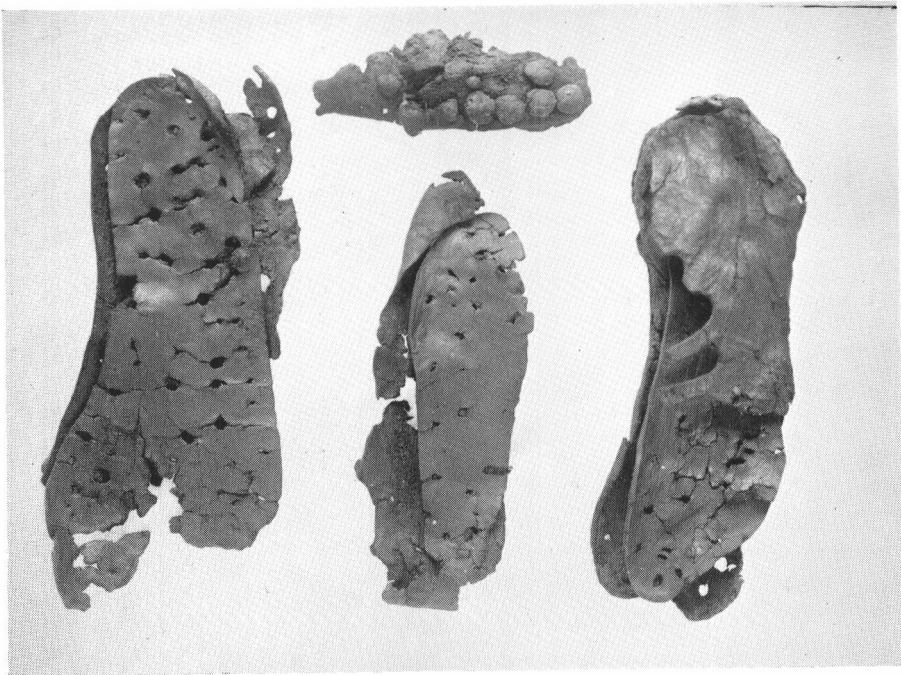
²¹ *D.A.J.*, XXX (1908), 323.

²² The plan (Fig. 1) shows ditches all round the fort. It has been suggested that ditches would not be necessary on the north and west. This does not take into account alterations in the appearance of the hill in recent times. Traces of the ditch system are visible in the face of the quarry to the west of the fort. In October 1963 Mr. Michael Brown and his friends were recovering from the face of the quarry leather fragments outside the west gate, presumably from one of the ditches which is now being eroded as a consequence of quarrying operations in recent years.

²³ See Richmond in *Antiq. J.*, XLI (1961), 226.



a. Post-trenches for south wall of blocks I and II
(from the west: see footnote 17, p. 7).



b. Leather footwear (*caligae* and *solea*) from ditch 2.

Melandra Castle

been quarried into; Watson reported remains of buildings there as visible in his day. No trace of them was found in 1906.²⁴ Air photographs have so far failed to suggest that any foundations still remain. A small building immediately outside the north gateway seems to have been erected after the period during which the fort was occupied and may not be Roman at all. Roman masonry was used, but not in the usual Roman manner.²⁵ Just where under the ramparts of *Ardotalia* lived the wearer of the pair of sandals one of which is now in the Manchester Museum, and whether she was buried somewhere on the hillside, is not known.

²⁴ *Toothill and Melandra*, 24-25.

²⁵ *D.A.J.*, LXXVIII (1958), 7.