CHAPTER 1

# ROMAN BROUGHAM AND ITS CEMETERY

## INTRODUCTION

On a hilltop that lies to the east of the thirteenth-century castle at Brougham, there is a Roman cemetery that has long been known from the tombstones found there over the years. In 1966 and 1967 part of it was excavated, often under very difficult conditions, as it was being destroyed by roadworks. It is the largest area of a cemetery ever to have been dug in the Roman north, and produced a range of finds that is still unrivalled and which have long been recognised as a resource of national importance (e.g. Willis 1997, 16, 24). This book publishes those excavations, but more importantly it tells a story of third-century Brougham, of the people who lived there and how they laid their dead to rest.

In this introductory chapter there is a consideration of what is known about Roman Brougham and some remarks that should help the reader use the report. For a variety of reasons which are outlined in Chapter 2, the cemetery site has had a difficult excavation and post-excavation history. The range of funerary features found were not understood during the excavations and that has hindered progress. Fortunately advances in our understanding of cremation rituals over the past decades has allowed the material to be re-assessed. How this was done is discussed in Chapter 2 which also considers the circumstances of the excavation in detail.

Chapter 3 describes the site and Chapter 4 presents the inventory of all the deposits. Each entry in the latter combines a description of the feature, if it survives, and the catalogue of all of the material found in it. Then follow a series of chapters discussing all the different categories of material found starting with the evidence for the pyre (Chapter 5), moving on to the dead who were buried (Chapter 6) and finishing with the animals and objects which were used as pyre and grave goods (Chapters 7–9). Chapter 10 reviews the inscribed and sculptured stones that have been found at Brougham including those found before and after the excavations. An overview of the funerals at Brougham forms Chapter 11, and finally the problem of who the people were who buried their dead in the cemetery, and where they came from is addressed in Chapter 12.

It became apparent as we worked on the material that there were very strong associations in it based on the age and sex of the deceased. It was possible to explore these formally by using statistical significance tests to see if they could have arisen by chance. Appendix 1 reports on the tests used and provides a guide to how to read the results. Some readers may find it useful to read this before they read the rest of the book.

As the post-excavation work progressed it became apparent that it was generating a wealth of data that would become an invaluable research tool. The decision was therefore taken to include this on a CD ROM with the volume. It should be possible, for the next few years at least, for researchers to import the data on it into database or spreadsheet packages of their choice for further analysis. As the catalogues in the inventory are presented by feature rather than category of object, the CD ROM also provides the quickest way to extract lists of particular object types, should people wish to consider such lists. Readers may also find Index 1 helpful in this respect.

As electronic media rapidly become outdated, the same files are also available from the Archaeological Data Service (URL http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/projArch/brougham_2003/). This has the advantage that the data will be actively curated and the formats updated as it becomes appropriate. We hope that people will take the opportunity to explore the data themselves. This book represents our view of the evidence in 2002, but just as we have benefited from developments in archaeological theory and practice in the decades since the excavations took place, it is to be expected that future developments will enable others to offer alternative interpretations.

It will become apparent that a variety of funerary related features will be described in this book. Nomenclature is difficult but wherever possible the terms *burial* and *grave* will be reserved for deposits which appear to represent the main deposition of the deceased. These frequently take the form of urned cremation burials, often with accessory vessels. The term *deposit* is a more general one that can cover burials and deposits of pyre debris and vessels.

Numbers in bold thus **154** refer to the deposit number as given in the inventory. Decimal numbers in bold thus **154.1** refer to a particular artefact catalogued in Chapter 4. References in bold which include both a letter and number (**S1**) are the numbers of selected items of unstratified material that have been catalogued at the end of Chapter 4. The prefix **S** has been used for samian, **P** for coarse pottery, **G** for glass, and **M** for metal.

## ROMAN BROUGHAM IN ITS REGIONAL SETTING

By Tony Wilmott

The Roman fort and settlement of Brougham is situated on the west side of the broad Eden valley, some 2km to the south-east of the modern town of Penrith, and a similar distance to the east of the modern cross-roads of the north–south A6 trunk road and the east–west A66 (FIG. 1.1). The site of the fort occupies a platform on the southern side of the river Eamont at its confluence with the river Lowther, and is readily visible from many directions by virtue of the medieval castle of Brougham, the ruins of which stand in the north-west corner of the fort enclosure. Its visibility has tended to make the castle the focus of antiquarian attention, with relatively little notice being paid to the Roman aspects of the site.

The geology of the site consists of the Permian Penrith Sandstone, which is masked by glacial drift deposits – locally sands and gravels. The river Eamont, which finds its source in Ullswater, and flows eastwards from the northern tip of the lake, is one of many tributaries of the river Eden, which flows north–south some 5km to the east of Brougham. The valleys of the Eden and Eamont form a broad area of low-lying land hedged around by uplands – the Lakeland fells to the west and the Pennines to the east. Within this area, the soils which develop over the local sands and gravels are light, sandy, and easily worked, with considerable agricultural potential. In addition, the site is a natural meeting point for overland routes. From the east, the Stainmore Pass follows the river Greta to the watershed which it shares with the Eden, forming the main trans-Pennine route, while westwards the Eamont valley traces the route to Ullswater and modern Keswick. The route northwards follows the valley of the Petteril to Carlisle, and southwards the Lune Gap affords access towards Tebay and Lancaster. The area is extremely rich in archaeological sites of many periods, and it seems that its many natural and strategic advantages have been recognised and exploited for millennia; as Birley (1932, 139) presciently observed, Brougham 'is more likely than any other Roman site in our district to have been important before ever the Romans came'. A great deal of prehistoric material exists within a 7km radius of Penrith. At Eamont Bridge, the henges of Mayburgh, King Arthur's Round Table and the Little Round Table (Bersu 1940) form one of the most important regional groups of ritual monuments, and there is a group of cairns and stone circles at Moor Divock, Askham. In addition, beaker burials have been found at Moorhouse Farm and Clifton Hall (Clough 1968). Neolithic flints and pottery were found during the excavations reported in this volume (Fell 1972), and a number of polished stone

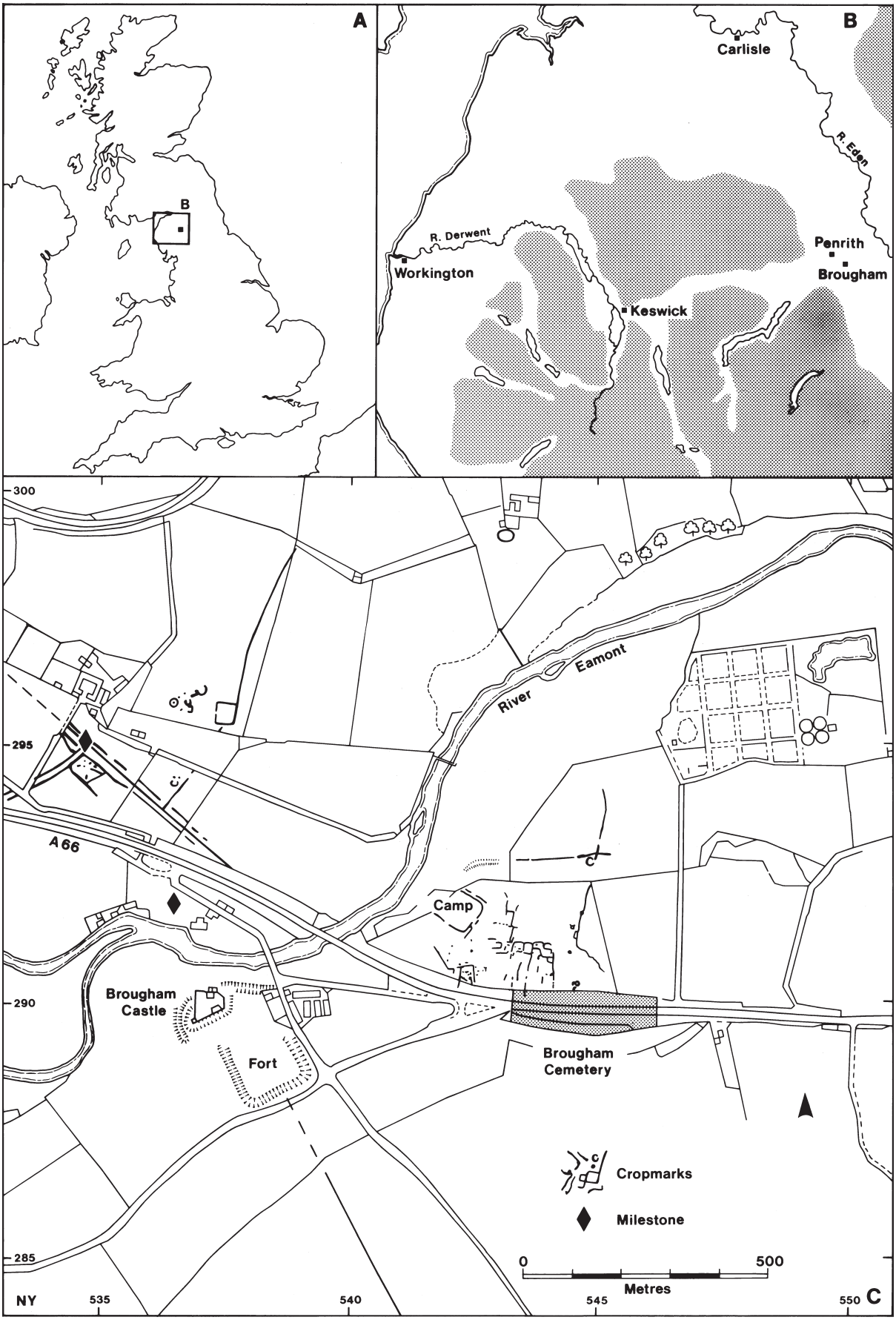


FIG. 1.1 Location of Brougham and its cemetery. On plan B the stippled area represents land over 305m (1000 feet). The stippled area on plan C locates the area of the excavations.

axes come from the Penrith area (*ibid*). In the immediate pre-Roman Iron Age, Higham and Jones (1975, 24; 1985, 11; also Jones 1999, 92) have postulated that a major focus of occupation may have been the 3ha enclosure of Clifton Dykes, which lies in an elevated position 2km to the south of Brougham, and which has a significantly similar topographic relationship as a potential military site to the Eamont/Lowther confluence as do the later Roman fort and medieval castle at Brougham itself. It is clearly possible that this site served a similar function in dominating the important river crossing and intersection of routes in the pre-Roman period. Brougham has yielded a larger number of inscriptions of the native deity Belatucadrus than any other single location (*RIB* I, nos 772–7), and it has been suggested that the region may have been the pre-Roman centre of this cult. Higham and Jones (1985, 11) have further pointed out a connection with earlier ritual sites in this regard, noting that the Eamont Bridge henges continued as meeting places into the medieval period.

Birley (1932) set the basis for the study of Roman Brougham in a paper which set down all that was known of the site and its antiquarian history at that date. Leland noted the castle and not the Roman settlement, and Camden, through his informant Reginald Bainbrigg of Appleby, had as evidence one milestone (*RIB* I, no. 2285) and the name Brougham, which was even then assumed to derive from the *Brocavum* of the Antonine Itinerary:

> 'Tho age has consum'd both its buildings and splendour, yet its name is preserv'd almost entire in *Brougham* as we call it at present ... At the confluence of *Loder* and *Eamont* was dug up (in the year 1602) this stone set up in memory of *Constantine* the Great'.

It appears that between the early sixteenth-century visits of Bainbrigg and the first quarter of the seventeenth century, elements of the village of Brougham were pulled down and the stone reused in field walls (Simpson 1866, 63). This resulted in the re-appearance of many Roman stones which had hitherto been concealed. Stukeley (1776) wrote:

> 'The Roman city lies on the east side of the Lowther, just by Brougham Castle, whose walls and those of the park are for part built of stones from the old city, being manifestly of Roman cut ... I saw many fragments of altars and inscriptions at the hall nearer to the bridge, all exposed in the courtyard to weather and injuries of every sort ... In the wall by the Roman road ... near the Countess of Pembroke's pillar is a pretty busto, part of a funeral monument the *bulla* of the mantle most conspicuous though much injured. Further on in the same dry wall near the corner is another *basso relievo*, but so defaced that I could not make anything of it ... The square plot of the city is very perfect, on the south side of Brougham Castle. It had a broad ditch around it ... The high ground by the Countess' pillar where most of the inscriptions were found seems to have been the site of the city, and this the castle or fort, the Roman road lying between'.

Stukeley here made the distinction between the fort and the settlement or *vicus*, and his comment that a 'funeral monument' lay in the wall by the Countess' pillar is the earliest reference to the location of the cemetery. Horsley (1732, 297) was somewhat laconic about the site, noting simply:

> ' ... Brougham Castle, where as appears by all the usual evidences there has been a Roman station'.

The next substantial reference was that of James Simpson, rector of Kirby Stephen. He, like Stukeley, recognised the site of the cemetery:

> 'Several incised stones were found in a field not far from the Countess' pillar, but on the opposite side of the turnpike road, where the Roman burial place seems to have been' (Simpson 1866, 63).

Simpson also recorded other inscriptions, one of which was found capping a well. The area of the Countess' pillar was noted as being the Roman cemetery again by Harkness (1876) when he reported the discovery of another tombstone from the opposite side of the road, together with building debris. Collingwood (1922) postulated a later Christian population on the basis of an apparently Christian formula inscribed on a tombstone (*RIB* I, no. 787; the editors of *RIB* remark that the Christian attribution is by no means secure and see also p. 427). By the early twentieth century, the cemetery of Brougham was perhaps the most noted aspect

of the site. This trend has continued up to and beyond the excavations reported in this volume, with the foundations of a mausoleum and an urned cremation burial found in 1958 (deposit **349** and the Monument p. 28 here), two further tombstones being ploughed up in 1960 (Wright 1961, 193), and another in 1974 (Tomlin 1976).

The first description of the fort was given by Clark (1883, 16–17), who noted that the broad ditch of the fort, which was 25 yards wide, enclosed an area 113 yards by at least 134 yards, and that the actual length of the fort may have been 196 yards. The south wall and gate were clearly visible, but the north wall was under the castle. Collingwood (1922) remarked that the site was large enough for a milliary cohort. The only finds from the site of the fort itself have been pottery, which Birley (1932, 134) records from the south moat of the castle, which he logically identifies with the north ditch of the fort. Though this material was dated to the second century onwards, the majority of it was Crambeck and Huntcliff ware of the later fourth century. Birley (1932, 139) gave a judgement of the state of knowledge on the fort which still holds true when he wrote that 'of the fort itself little can be said. The date of its foundation, the period of its occupation and its final end are alike obscure'. The strategic position of Brougham has long been recognised. Simpson (1866, 63) noted the strategic position of the Roman fort on the river crossing of the Eamont, while Harkness (1876) made the first remarks on the position of Brougham within the Roman road system of the region with particular reference to the road from Low Borrowbridge. Later Ross (1920) demonstrated what Harkness had suggested, namely that the Roman road traversing the Lune Gorge from Low Borrowbridge did indeed head for Brougham, and not for Kirkby Thore.

There have been few reported casual finds from the site other than the cemetery material already noted. In 1910 the first of two coin hoards from the area was found near Brougham Castle Farm (Heelis 1911) near the foundations of an 'ancient wall'. Heelis recorded 23 coins dating to *c.* A.D. 253–273. The surviving elements of this hoard, which was split up among private owners, were published by Shotter (1978), who showed that of a total of 74 surviving examples, only eight were regular issues, the rest radiate copies. Shotter suggested a date of deposition before *c.* A.D. 280. A second hoard, of 23 coins found during grave digging at Ninekirks, was first thought to be sixth century (Bouch 1955), but has since been shown by Casey (1978) to be later third century. Like the Castle Farm hoard, it consisted predominantly of radiate copies with no Carausian issues, and was dated by Casey to *c.* A.D. 276–286. A complete folded beaker was found at Brougham Castle Farm in 1962 (Priestman 1963).

The *vicus* of the fort has been examined by aerial photography (Higham and Jones 1975, 26). The road from the north towards Frenchfield was the most obvious feature, with flanking ditches related to adjacent field systems and pit alignments. Several site nuclei are thought to lie around the road, and there may have been a northern cemetery, though it is possible that traces indicative of this are actually prehistoric. The area was photographed under different conditions for three years, and was seen to be thinly settled and widely dispersed, with nothing like the intensive and close-packed *vicus* buildings of a site like Old Carlisle. Recent work by Carlisle Archaeology Ltd at Frenchfield again showed the Roman road with buildings on either side of it forming a ribbon development (Burnham 2000, 337). The pattern of apparently dispersed settlement continued to the east towards Ninekirks, with traces of buildings towards the cemetery. The layout of the *vicus* is anomalous, and a great deal more work is needed to understand it.

A final element in the archaeology of the Brougham area is a site near Fremington to the south-east of the Roman fort, which was excavated as part of the North West Ethylene Pipeline project (Oliver *et al.* 1996). This was a post-Roman rural settlement centred on the seventh and eighth century. The main building type consisted of sunken-featured buildings or grubenhauser, which are extremely uncommon in the North. These were associated with hand-made pottery, and evidence for textile and pottery production. This settlement is the first indication that the Brougham area saw continuity of occupation after the accepted end of the Roman period, and might be associated with a tradition that Ninekirks, where a large enclosure has been revealed in aerial photography (Higham and Jones 1975), was associated with the

fifth-century mission of St Ninian (Simpson 1958). In context with the Fremington site, it is interesting that Birley (1932), like Camden, invoked the continuation of the name of the fort, *Brocavum*, into the form Brougham to conclude that 'if there is any site in our district where Romano-British survival can be postulated, it is here'.

With so little actual evidence, it is highly premature to put forward, even tentatively, a history of Brougham (FIG. 1.2). We know the site name of *Brocavum* which has been mentioned above, and which appears only in the Antonine itinerary. Rivet and Smith (1979, 284) state that there are good reasons to believe that the derivation of the modern name from the ancient is valid. As for the date and foundation of the fort, interpretation of the Roman conquest of north Britain long hinged on Tacitus' account in the *Agricola*. Over the last couple of decades, however, our understanding of the detail of the conquest, and indeed of the biases inherent in Tacitus' text, have been considerably altered, to the benefit of the military reputation of Agricola's predecessor, Petillius Cerealis. Shotter (2000) has recently published a cogent summary of the history of the north-west region and of the conquest during the Flavian period. It lies outside the scope of this volume to reprise this history, but the conquest was undoubtedly the time at which the Brougham area first fell into the sphere of interest of the Roman army. The date of this interest has recently been shown to be Cerealian, as the south gate of the timber fort at Carlisle produced dendrochronological evidence showing that the timber of which it was built was felled in winter A.D. 72/73, demonstrating that Carlisle was built during the northern campaigns of Cerealis (Caruana 1992, 104). As the timber was felled in the winter, it can be assumed that Cerealis intended to hold the territory which he had taken by imposing permanent garrisons, or at least by establishing bases which could be used as springboards for further advance; a practice followed by all of the Flavian governors (Breeze 1982, 55). There is a fundamental problem throughout the north-west of England, which is that insufficient excavation has been carried out on the forts, and a great deal of interpretation has been placed upon extremely small amounts of material (*pace* Bidwell *et al.* 1999) in order to arrive at conclusions relating to the earliest period of Roman penetration. Much of what follows is therefore argued from factors such as fort spacing and siting, and the presence of lines of communication.

If Carlisle was Cerealian it follows that many of the forts south of Carlisle were also Cerealian foundations, and evidence for this has recently emerged from Ribchester (Buxton and Howard Davies 2000), Kirkham (Howard Davies and Buxton 2000) and probably Lancaster (Shotter 2000, 40). Shotter suggests that a two-pronged advance took place, with one force from Lincoln including *Legio IX* moving into the north-west across the Stainmore pass to link up with a force based on *Legio XX* from Wroxeter campaigning northwards on the western side of the Pennines. If this model is an accurate reflection of Cerealis' advance, then the link between the two routes would have been at the point where the Roman road over Stainmore meets the north–south road, namely at Brougham. North of Lancaster the road to Carlisle is punctuated by three forts, Burrow-in-Lonsdale and Low Borrowbridge, where small amounts of Flavian material have been recovered (Hildyard 1954; Hildyard and Gillam 1951), and Brougham itself. These have been postulated by Breeze (1988, 12) as relating to the primary penetration of the North-West on the basis of their regular spacing (betwen 15 and 19 miles apart). These forts are also implicitly claimed for the Cerealian advance by Shotter (2000, fig. 3), and there is thus a clear possibility on strategic and spacing grounds alone that Brougham was also a Cerealian foundation. The siting of the fort makes considerable sense topographically and in terms of communications, and in addition it is possible that it was sited to be near a major population centre at Clifton Dykes and a cult centre, that of Belatucadrus, within the general area.

The lack of any excavation within the fort at Brougham limits its interpretation in terms of periods of occupation and change. Analogy with other sites in the Hadrian's Wall hinterland offers some potential for tentative conclusions, though the above caveats should still be borne in mind. Brougham's pivotal position in the communication system may have been enhanced during the consolidation of the military occupation in the Agricolan, later Flavian and Trajanic period, although the siting of other routes which could not conveniently originate at Brougham

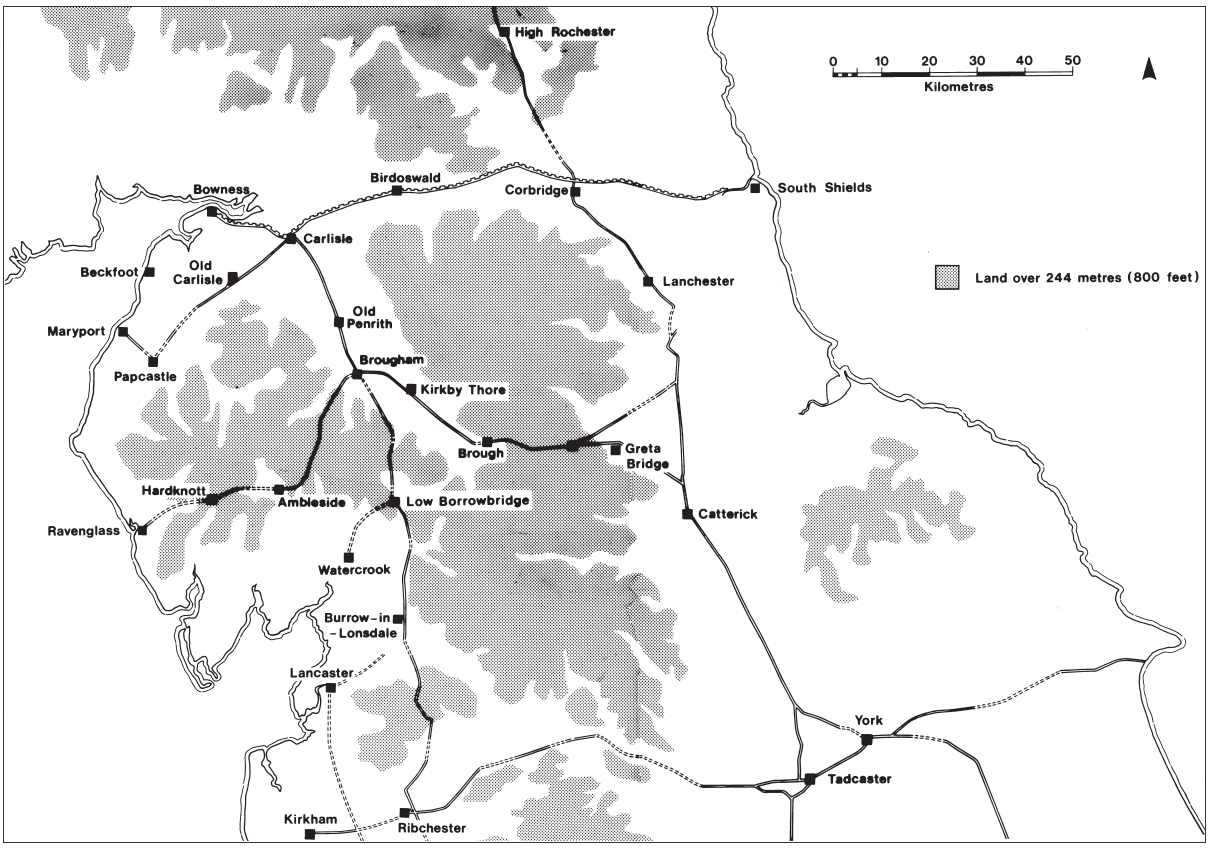


FIG. 1.2 Roman North Britain.

called for additional road-junction forts to be constructed. Kirkby Thore is probably not a primary penetration fort, but later Flavian (Breeze 1988, 12). This establishment lies *c.* 12km east of Brougham on the Stainmore road, where it occupies the junction with the Maiden Way which leads over the Alston fells by way of Whitley Castle to Carvoran. Between Brougham and Carlisle lies Old Penrith, a late-Flavian or Trajanic foundation (Austen 1991, 225), at the head of a road which appears to run to the undated fort at Troutbeck. Brougham seems to have been linked similarly to Ambleside, a late-Flavian fort dating to *c.* A.D. 90–96 (Potter 1979, 358), and Low Borrowbridge was probably linked to Flavian or Trajanic Watercrook (Potter 1979, 139). Troutbeck, Ambleside and Watercrook thus all occupy advanced positions west of the main fort and road network on major passes into the Lakeland interior. The road system between these installations has been the subject of study by Richardson and Allan (1990), who have suggested that Ambleside was reached from Troutbeck over Kirkstone pass, and have further postulated a fort on this line at Bracken Rigg, with a road leading thence to Brougham, though the existence of such a road and fort is hypothetical. To complete the pattern to the west, on the northern fringes of the upland a road led to Papcastle whose assumed Flavian date is based on slim evidence (Birley 1963, 121). If Maryport is Flavian as recently restated by Caruana (1997, 41) then this too is part of the early system, though a Hadrianic date may be more likely (Jarrett and Stephens 1987, 61).

The construction of the Hadrianic frontier did little to alter this basic pattern, though the penetration of the Lake District, and its coastal encirclement, was continued with the construction of the forts which formed part of the Cumberland coast defences at Beckfoot, Maryport and Moresby, and the continuation of the road from Ambleside through Hardknott (Bidwell *et al*. 1999, 65–6) to Ravenglass (Potter 1979, 29). Once established the network of roads and forts appears to have changed little over the remainder of the Roman period. If one examines the maps which Breeze (1988, fig. 1) produced of occupied forts in *c.* A.D. 85, 110, 130, 170, 280 and 367 one sees but small differences except for the period of the Antonine

advance into Scotland, when many forts show evidence for desertion in favour of the occupation of southern Scotland. Breeze's maps assume the continuity of occupation at Brougham for all periods, even the Antonine, and while the site appears as a hollow square (for 'possibly occupied') because of the lack of positive evidence for most periods, the map for *c.* A.D. 170 shows 'some evidence' and that for *c.* A.D. 367 'good evidence', the latter being presumably based upon the pottery finds for the late fourth-century reported by Birley (1932). It is possible that the exceptionally broad ditch of the fort is also a late feature. The basis for the assumption of continuity is clearly the important strategic location of Brougham, and the idea that a site which was so pivotal would tend to be maintained in all periods.

The garrisons of the fort are all but unknown. The size of the fort would certainly be adequate for a milliary cohort, and it is possible that such a unit occupied it at some time, however Bennett (1986) shows that this would be suited to several other unit types, and fort sizes are no real guide to the type of garrison at any time. The only unit named from an inscription found on the site is a *Numerus equitum Stratonicianorum* (*RIB* I, no. 780), and the Brougham reference, which is undated, is the only reference to this unit. It was probably originally raised at one of the eastern cities called *Stratonicaea* (Jarrett 1994, 69), and is likely to be third-century or later in date. The only other possible reference to a unit is on *RIB* 1, no. 772, which is a dedication to Belatucadrus from a *cuneus*. As has been noted, the deity Belatucadrus appears on seven inscriptions from the site, and that without excavation. The argument that there may have been a cult centre in the area is strengthened by the fact that the second highest number of such dedications is from adjacent Old Penrith where there are two antiquarian finds (*RIB* I, nos 914, 918) and two from excavations in 1978 (Austen 1991, 110). This evidence is further considered by Fitzpatrick on p. 407.