

XIV.—EXCAVATIONS AT THE NATIVE SETTLEMENT, GUBEON COTTAGE, NORTHUMBERLAND.

BY GEORGE JOBEY.

This site which lies three miles south west of Morpeth was first recorded correctly by Mr. J. R. Bibby in the Society's *Proceedings*, 5th series, vol. I, p. 376.¹ Although the site would not have merited immediate inclusion in a series of planned excavations, the fact that the field in which it is situated had been requisitioned for open cast mining made some form of "rescue" work imperative in the short time available. A study group of the Department of Extra Mural Studies, King's College, consequently decided to undertake an excavation at week-ends during the early months of 1956, and the Ancient Monuments Branch of the Ministry of Works also gave most welcome additional assistance by providing four workmen during the first two weeks in April 1956.

A general account of the position of the site and the topography of the area, together with a preliminary discussion of early records, has already been given by Mr. Bibby. Gubeon lies on the easterly fringe of the recorded sites in the Wansbeck area, the nearest multivallate circular sites of apparently similar nature being the comparatively large and more clearly defined site at Camp House,

¹ The site should be added to A. H. A. Hogg's "List of Earthworks in Northumberland" in *Proceedings*, 4th ser., vol. XI, p. 173, as follows: O.S. 6" (1924) 69SW; no. 1n; Parish, Tranwell; 55 8' 47" N, 1 43' 12" W; Ring M; Gubeon Cottage.

Whalton,² two miles to the west, and that at Whittle Hill,³ four miles to the west north west. Whereas the majority of native sites in Northumberland appear to be situated where the subsoil is gravel or rock, Gubeon lies on boulder clay. There are no strong natural features which would commend the choice of situation for defensive purposes, and at a height of 340 feet it is the most low lying multivallate site in the area.

The Site (Fig. 1).

Two low concentric banks and a medial ditch, enclosing an area of approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ acre, were visible on the ground. There was a possible entrance to the north, and a small mound to the west of this entrance. Of the two "sykes" mentioned by Mr. Bibby, that on the west could be seen to continue in parallel to the enclosure banks in the field on the south of the Common March Dyke.

A trial trench outside the main perimeter disclosed undisturbed boulder clay one foot below the surface. In view of this, the two slightly raised areas within the enclosure, one in the south western sector and the other almost immediately within the entrance, assumed additional importance as possibly better drained areas for permanent habitation.

The Excavations.

As the entrance area was not to be encroached upon by open cast operations it was decided to concentrate the main effort on the interior of the site. A cutting six feet wide was made across the perimeter at 45N, and expanded into a grid of twelve feet square in the interior, covering the two raised areas and in line with the entrance.

(a) Enclosure Banks and Ditches (Fig. 2).

The section showed two shallow round bottomed ditches

² O.S. 1", Sheet 78, 140823. J. K. St. Joseph, Cambridge University aerial photograph no. N28.

³ O.S. 1", 78/120858. Hodgson, *Northumberland*, II, ii, p. 83. J. K. St. Joseph T57.

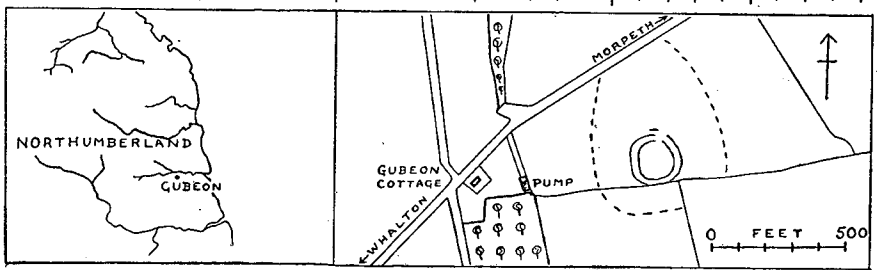
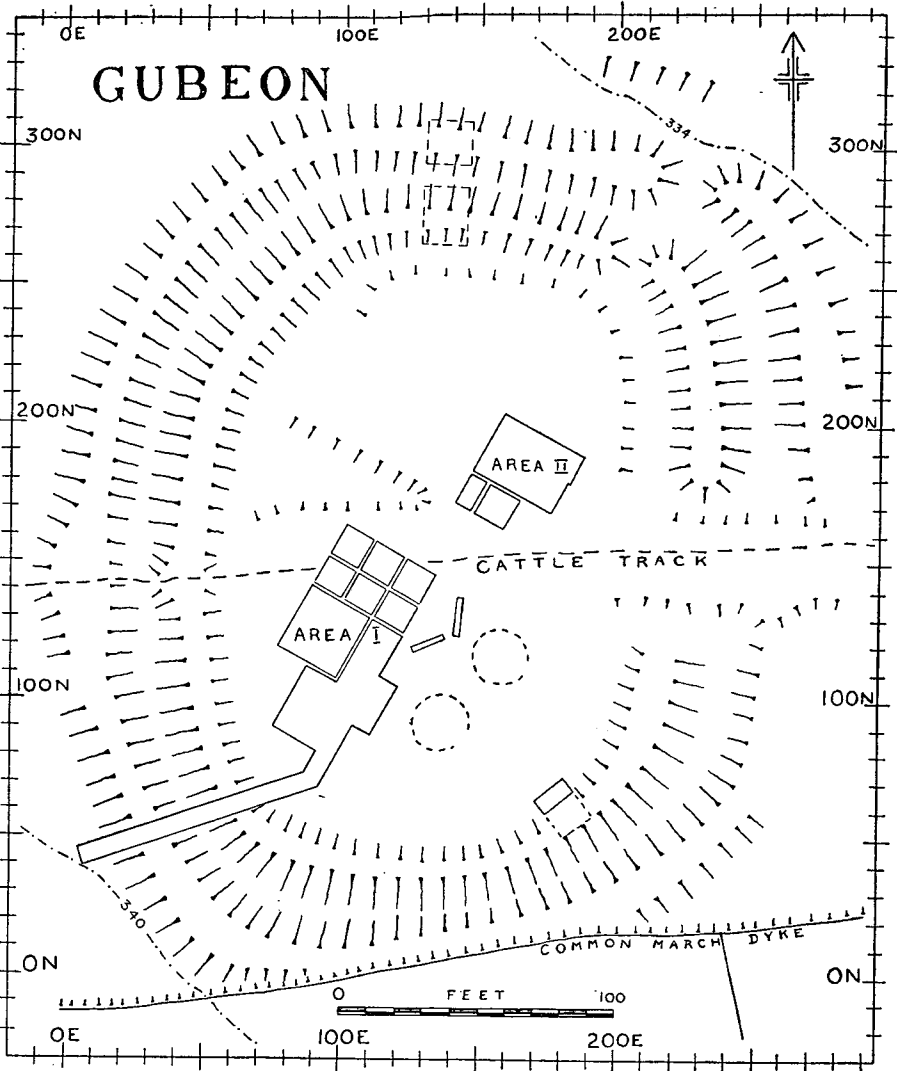


FIG. 1.

and the remains of a medial and interior rampart both of fairly compact clay, formed from the ditch upcast. The maximum depth of the ditches below the old turf line, clearly visible beneath the medial ramparts, was no more than three feet, which suggested that their main purpose had been to obtain upcast for the ramparts. Trenches for later field drains had interfered with both ditch sections, but there seemed to have been little silting in the ditch bottoms before they had been filled by clay. The top level of the clay filling was fairly uniform and suggested deliberate levelling rather than tumble from the ramparts. Some fragments of charcoal were found on the old turf line but there was no structural

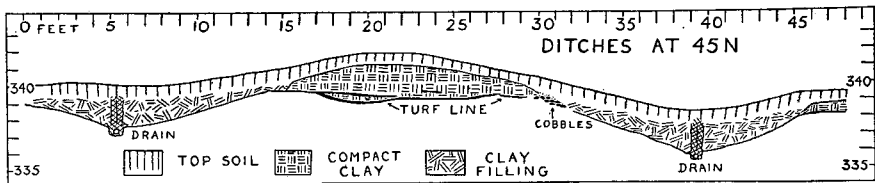


FIG. 2.

evidence for an earlier palisade in the cutting, and the remains of the ramparts were such as to give little indication of their original form.

(b) Interior: Area I (Fig. 3).

Despite the shallowness of the top soil, deep ploughing, and disturbance from field drains, there were some areas where an occupation level still remained beneath the top soil and overlying the boulder clay. This level, not more than two inches thick, was composed of dark greasy earth containing smears of carbon, small pieces of coal and charcoal, and occasional quartz pebbles. It was from these areas that the majority of the sherds were recovered.

(i) The Pits (Fig. 3, nos. 1, 2, 3).

The occupation earth in this area contained sherds of

native Iron Age pottery including rims nos. 1, 2, 9, 10, fig. 6, one scrap of Samian ware, and a rim of Romano-British coarse pottery datable to the late first or early second century. When the occupation layer was removed, three oval pits were disclosed, the average length being about four feet, width three feet and depth two feet. In the filling of the pits there was slightly more charcoal than in the surrounding

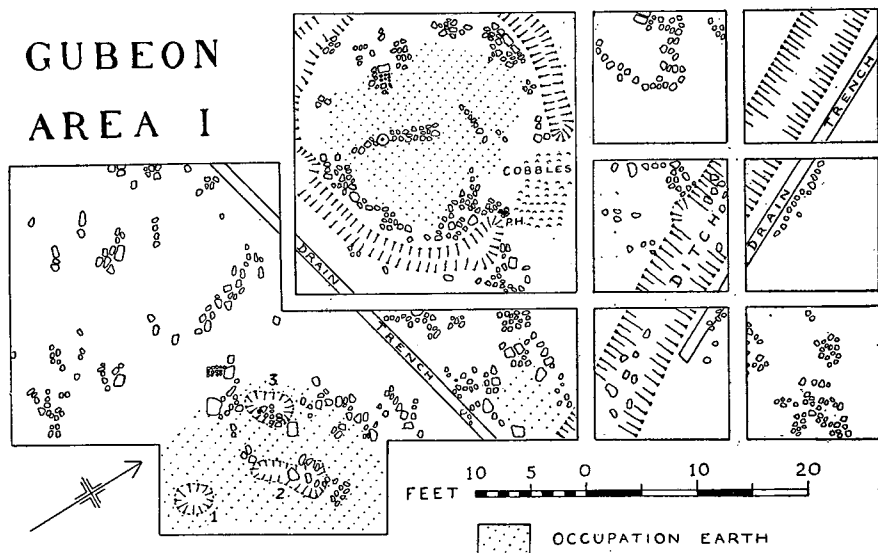


FIG. 3.

occupation earth. Pits nos. 1 and 2 had been sealed near to the top by a thin band of clay as though they had ceased to have further use. Although the sides of the pits were hard and well formed, there were no signs of burning on the clay, which ruled out the possibility of them having been used as cooking pits. As storage pits they had little to commend them.

Close to the east side of pit no. 3 was a rectangular sandstone slab set into the clay, lying on the top of which was a pounding stone of greywacke and a large quartz

pebble. There were a few loose stones in the area, but these formed no pattern and some bore the marks of the ploughshare. No post holes were found in the boulder clay.

(ii) The Hut Circle (Fig. 3).

To the north of the pits was the site of a hut circle of about twenty feet diameter, ringed by a shallow gully filled with grey clayey silt. Within the area outlined by the gully there was sufficient evidence to suggest that there had been at least a low stone wall to the hut. Although the majority of the stones near the centre of the circle were lying loosely on top of the occupation spread which covered almost the whole of the interior, there were a few stones closely set into the boulder clay which could have provided a base for a central roof support. The doorway was on the east, where the line of the encircling trench was interrupted and a thin spread of small sandstone cobbles apparently served as an approach. A careful search of the area, including the gully, revealed only one post hole, shallow but carefully packed by four upright stones, on the south side of the entrance.

The absence of post holes or packing stones in the gully and the vestigial remains of a stone wall suggested that the trench had been used for drainage, as at the Tofts, Stanwick,⁴ rather than for structural purposes as is found with the "ring groove" and "ring ditch" houses in southern Scotland⁵ and as may have been the case at Ingram⁶ and Witchy Neuk⁷ in Northumberland. The area was damp, and when later cleared by mechanical excavators, albeit too swiftly for careful study, a shallow drainage duct was seen to be leading away from the hut circle gully at its lowest point on the north side.

Numerous sherds of native pottery were found in the occupation earth within the hut, including rims nos. 6 and 7,

⁴ R. E. M. Wheeler, *The Stanwick Fortifications*, p. 8, fig. 3.

⁵ R.C.A.M., *Roxburgh*, vol. I, p. 19. *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scotland*, vol. LXXIII, pp. 1ff. and pp. 45ff.

⁶ *Arch. Aeliana*, ser. 4, vol. XXXIV, p. 152, fig. 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. XVI, p. 133.

fig. 6, also one upper rotary quernstone, a pounding stone of greywacke, and a small fragment of glass from an imported vessel of the first century A.D.

(iii) The Ditch (Fig. 3).

No time was available to clean out a length of the ditch, but a section showed that it was only two feet deep, with gently sloping sides and a rounded bottom. Apart from a few inches of grey silt in the bottom, the remainder of the filling was comparatively loose black earth and occasional isolated stones. A field drain commenced close to the ditch, although not impinging upon it, and together with the ditch followed the natural fall of the ground from south to north. Traversing trenches near to Area I showed that the ditch turned at right angles on the south side of the excavated area, and ran towards the east. Its proportions seemed to be too large for it to have been a comparatively recent open field drain. At some future date when open cast mining has ceased it should be possible to determine its relationship with the ramparts near to the entrance.

(c) Interior: Area II (Figs. 4 and 5).

The most substantial stone work of the whole excavation was revealed in this area in the form of a crescent shaped stretch of paving, containing some fairly large slabs of sandstone worn smooth on the surface, and resting on grey clayey silt. No finds were made on the flagging itself, but there were a number of sherds of hand made native ware in the very thin band of occupation earth overlying the cobbling on the west side. There was a scatter of comparatively large sandstones lying loosely on the cobbling in the south west of the excavated area.

The paving, which incorporated a small portion of a base stone of a rotary quern, was undoubtedly the latest feature in the area, and had not been laid down until about six inches of silt had accumulated over the cobbling. When the paving stones and underlying silt were removed the cobbles

were seen to extend across the area to the edge of a depression, in the bottom of which was a narrow gully cut into the boulder clay and filled with compact grey silt (fig. 5).

GUBEON AREA IIA

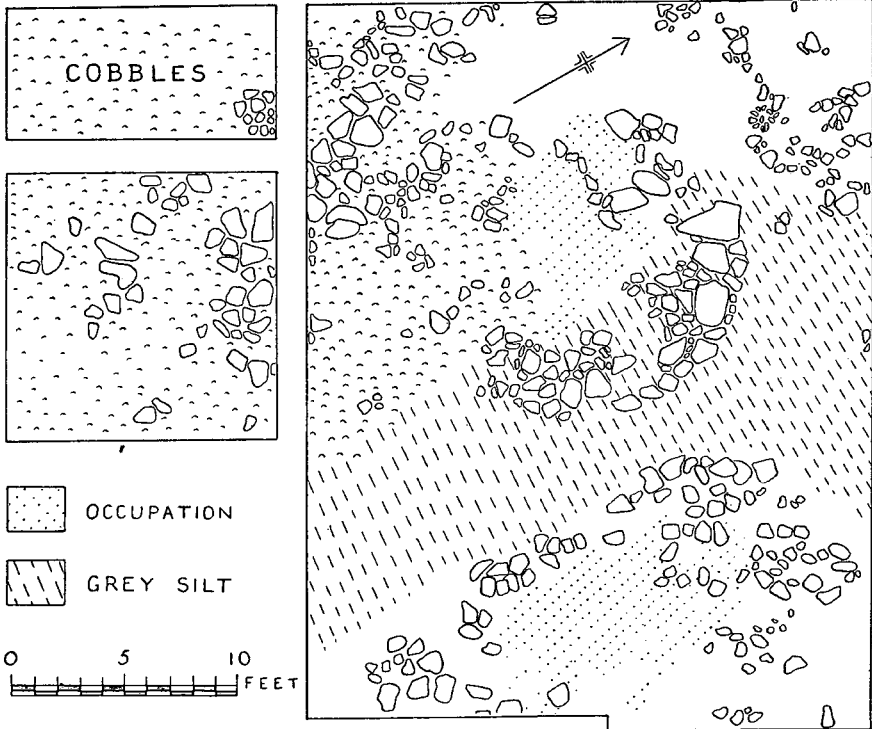


FIG. 4.

The gully ran in a wide arc around the raised platform of natural boulder clay to the east, on which there was a scatter of stones and spread of occupation earth. This combination suggested the possibility of a further hut circle with its peripheral drainage trench, but there was no time available to test this supposition.

(d) Remaining features (Fig. 1).

Whilst the top soil was being removed by mechanical scrapers, a necessarily hurried examination, in addition to revealing the points already mentioned, led to the discovery of the sites of two huts at 160E:120N and 140E:100N.

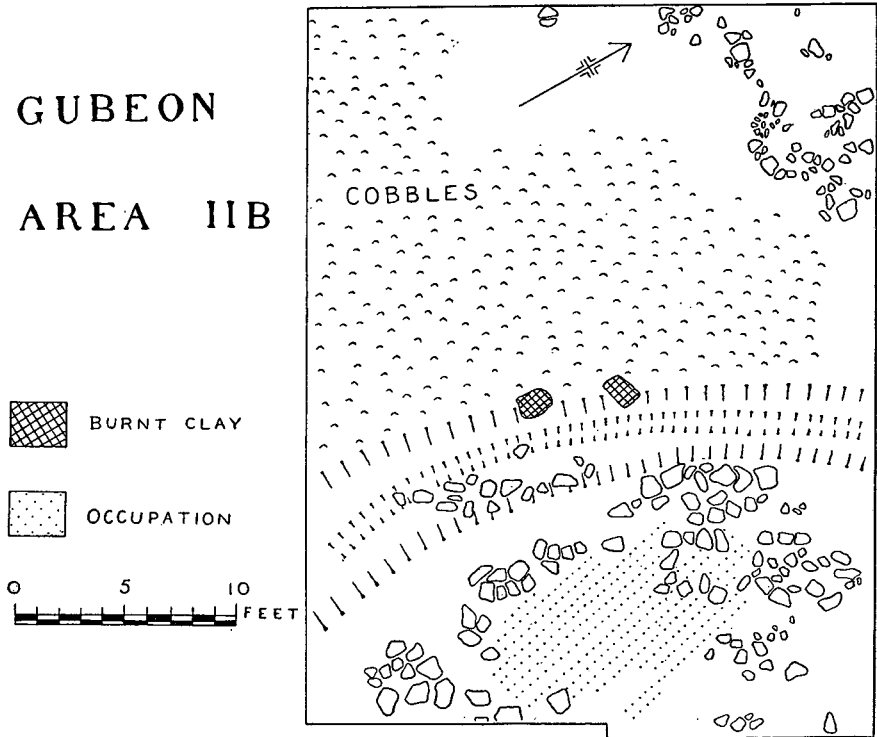


FIG. 5.

The scrapers had cut into the clay subsoil and all that remained were the traces of two narrow trenches forming circles of approximately 22 feet diameter and filled with grey silt. There was a break in the first circle in the south east, presumably the entrance. The time available between the journeys of the mechanical scrapers was only sufficient

to take photographs and probe the trenches. There were no packing stones amongst the silt, and it is reasonable to assume that these were drainage gullies similar to the drainage gully in Area I. A sherd of native pottery with a crude incurving rim was found near to the surface of the silt in one gully, and between the two circles a small red stain led to the unearthing of a complete mortarium bowl of Hadrianic date, resting in a small depression in the clay.

Summary.

On the evidence of the fragment of glass and the few Romano-British sherds found in the occupation earth, it appears that the site was occupied in the second century A.D. or later. No date can be given to the secondary flagging in Area II.

The native pottery found generally in the occupation earth within the hut circle and in the area of the pits is in the main degenerate Iron Age pottery, which at the moment is not closely datable. Similar pottery has occurred on other sites in apparently pre-Roman to post-Roman contexts.⁸ However, amongst the sherds recovered at Gubeon, there are in general two fabrics which can be distinguished, as at Traprain Law;⁹ one where the clay is coarsely levigated, and the other where the texture is more sandy and the clay contains less grits. The comparatively more sophisticated forms are made from the finer clays (e.g. fig. 6, nos. 9 and 10 and base no. 11). It may be that these may come to have some chronological significance when more sites have been excavated. One type of sherd found in small quantity at the native settlement and hill fort at Huckhoe, a few miles to the west, is missing from the record of native pottery at Gubeon. This pottery closely resembles the undecorated parts of Bronze Age cinerary urns of the area, and at Huckhoe it appears to be associated with the palisade

⁸ K. A. Steer, *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scotland*, vol. LXXXIV, p. 152. C. M. Piggott, *ibid.*, vol. LXXXIV, p. 121.

⁹ A. H. A. Hogg, "The Votadini" in *Aspects of Archaeology*, p. 214.

trenches of the earliest enclosures there, which are pre-Roman. (Report not yet published.)

In Northumberland, palisade trenches of the earliest enclosures on the site have also been found at Ingram Hill,¹⁰ and it seems possible that there may be a palisade trench earlier than the rampart at Witchy Neuk, Hepple.¹¹ This is a feature found as the earliest phase on some of the settlement and hill fort sites of southern Scotland, and at the hill fort of Hownam Rings in the county of Roxburgh it was succeeded by a sheer faced stone wall and later multiple defences of "rampart-and-ditch" type, defensive techniques of the early Iron Age A and B cultures of Britain.¹² No structural evidence for an earlier palisade was found at Gubeon, but the scraps of charcoal beneath the medial rampart may have some significance, and from the small amount of excavation done on the perimeter it would be premature to suggest that the ditches and clay ramparts formed the first enclosure on the site. When the opportunity presents itself, further work will be necessary on the ditches and mounds in the area of the gateway to determine the sequence. The two so-called "sykes" although containing a much larger area are also worthy of investigation.

Acknowledgments.

The group is grateful to Messrs. Holloway Bros., the contractors on the site, for allowing the excavation to continue until the last possible moment, and to Mr. J. P. Gillam, Reader in Roman British Archæology, King's College, for his examination of the Romano-British coarse pottery.

NATIVE POTTERY.

Fig. 6 nos. 1, 2, 3.

The angles of these rims are not certain. All are from substantial, hand-built vessels with simple round to pointed incurving rims.

¹⁰ A. H. A. Hogg, *Arch. Aeliana*, ser. 4, vol. XXXIV, p. 154.

¹¹ T. Wake, *ibid.*, vol. XVI, p. 138, fig. 2.

¹² C. M. Piggott, *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scotland*, vol. LXXXII, p. 193.

The rim section may vary on the same vessel. The clay is poorly levigated and contains large grits. Surface colour varies from brown to brick red and the cores are grey to black. There is a clearly defined band of black encrusted deposit stretching from the lips for two inches or so down the walls of the vessels. Finger impressions are visible on all surfaces. Rims nos. 1 and 2 were found in the occupation spread near to the pits in Area I, together with a scrap of Samian ware and a Romano-British rim of late first, early second century. Rim no. 3 was in the silt overlying the cobbles in Area II, but not sealed by the paving. Close parallels to this type of vessel have been found on other native sites in Northumberland and southern Scotland, e.g. Greaves Ash, Northumberland, *Arch. Aeliana*, ser. 4, vol. XX, p. 124, fig. 5, no. 3; Crock Cleuch, Roxburghshire, P.S.A.S., vol. LXXXI, p. 153, fig. 7, no. 3. A fairly large rim fragment of a similar vessel has also been found at Yeavinger, Northumberland, of which Mr. Hope Taylor has kindly given the following information. "It was found in the uppermost layer of the inner fort ditch, and its size and condition tend to suggest that it was in fact contemporary with the final decay of the fort. The same layer contained large quantities of burned daub, apparently derived from the destruction of the nearest palace building, and would thus represent the surface open towards the middle of the seventh century."

Fig. 6 no. 4.

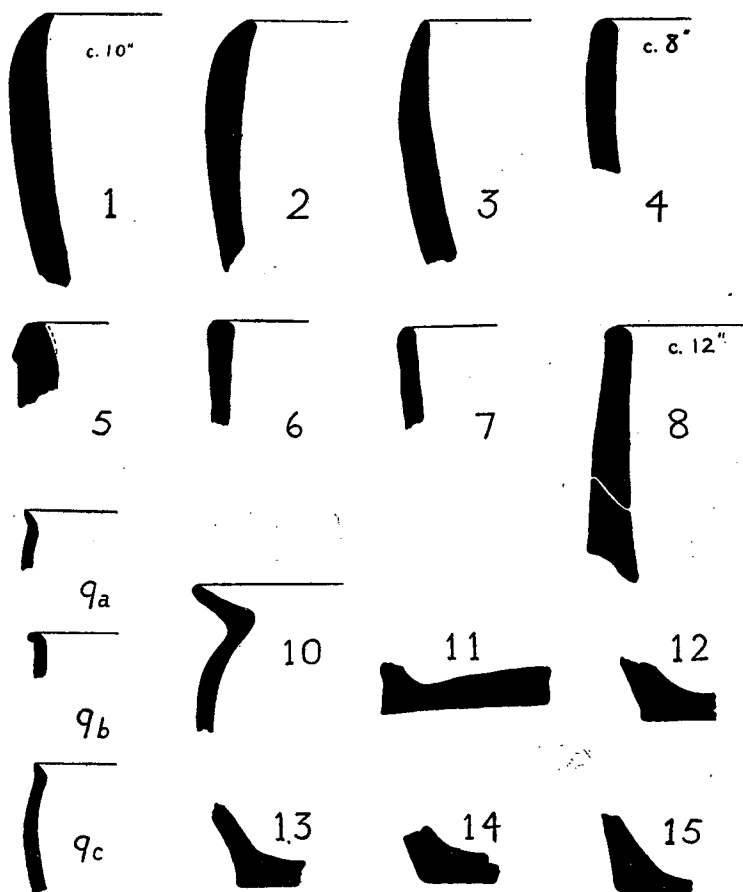
Roll rim from a vessel approximately eight inches in diameter at the rim. The angle is not certain. It has been built up by the coil technique, the coils showing clearly in the break. The surfaces are light brown in colour, the core dark grey. It is slightly sandy to touch and is micaceous. Found on the cobbles to the south of the paving in Area II. Similar to a sherd from Traprain Law, Scottish National Museum of Antiquities, Traprain Area B, Level I, Museum no. II, 15, 442. See also sherd from primary occupation deposit, "Ramparts at Traprain Law", P.S.A.S., vol. LXXIV, p. 58, fig. 7a.

Fig. 6 no. 5.

Small fragments of rim, well worn, light grey core and brick red surfaces. The clay is coarse and contains large grits. Found embedded in the undisturbed boulder clay to the west of pits in Area I.

Fig. 6 no. 6.

A badly formed flat rim with finger impressions on both surfaces.

FIG. 6 ($\frac{1}{3}$ actual size).

It is black throughout and contains some grits. Found in the occupation level in hut circle in Area I.

Fig. 6 no. 7.

A worn fragment of a vessel possessing a simple roll rim. It is dark grey throughout and contains large grits. Found in the occupation earth in hut circle, Area I.

Fig. 6 no. 8.

A large fragment from a substantial straight sided vessel approxi-

mately 12" in diameter at the lips. The rim varies from simple roll to almost flat. There is a slight concavity on the exterior immediately below the lip, and finger impressions at regular intervals on the top of the rim. The core is black, and the outside surface buff where it has not been covered by a black encrustation presumably from overspill of the contents. It has been built up by coil technique from clay containing grits. It was found amongst the cobbles set in the boulder clay in Area II. In shape and general appearance it is very similar to a sherd from Greaves Ash, Northumberland, in Alnwick Castle Museum. See also *Arch. Aeliana*, ser. 4, vol. XX, p. 125.

Fig. 6 no. 9a, b, c.

Three rim fragments from the same or similar vessels. The rims have been formed by pinching the clay between finger and thumb, the finger nail marks being evident in places beneath the rim in 9a where it has been sharply everted. The clay is much cleaner than in the case of the majority of sherds from the site. The inside and outside surfaces have fired to a brown colour, except in places on the exterior surfaces where there are some dark irregular bands. Wall thickness seldom exceeds $\frac{3}{8}$ ". All three rims were found in the occupation earth in the area of the pits, but other fragments of the same ware came from various parts of the site.

Fig. 6 no. 10.

An everted rim with prominent finger impressions on the underside. The surfaces, which are sandy to touch, are light brown in colour. Only one small quartz grit is to be seen in the grey core. It was found on the edge of the occupation earth near to pit no. 3 Area I. A rim of similar shape and material but thicker in section comes from Traprain Law, 1924, Area Q, Level 3, Scottish National Museum of Antiquities no. 328.

Fig. 6 no. 11.

A well formed base with smooth undersurface. The core is grey but both surfaces have been oxidized to brick red, and are sandy to touch. It is similar to a base from Hownam Rings, Roxburghshire (Museum no. H.H. 537) except that the undersurface of the Gubeon base is smoother. The material is different from that of the remainder of the bases nos. 12-15 which are made from the usual coarsely levigated clay containing large grits. Found embedded in boulder clay immediately below the top soil to the west of the pits in Area I.

Not illustrated.

A portion of a wall of a squat vessel, black in colour throughout. The surface is lumpy and shows finger impressions. It was found amongst the cobbles in the southern part of Area II. This sherd closely resembles in form and texture a vessel from Traprain Law, Area T, Level 2, Museum no. 1924/336, which is illustrated in *Aspects of Archaeology*, p. 216, fig. 56, no. 23.

In addition to the above, about one hundred and fifty sherds were found. Most of them are small fragments and defying even the initial stages of reconstruction. Break lines are oblique or semi-circular, presumably occurring at the junctions between the coils of clay used in the construction of the vessels.

Stone

(a) Querns (Fig. 7).

1. The upper stone of a bun shaped rotary quern of sandstone was found resting on the occupation spread in the hut circle, Area I. It is 14" in diameter and 5½" in height, but has originally been

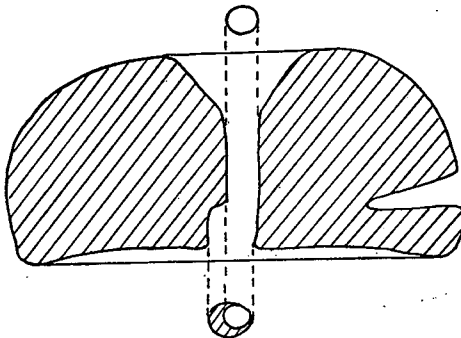


FIG. 7 ($\frac{1}{8}$ actual size).

higher, in that one handle socket lying at 30° to the one remaining in use, has been worn away by grinding or possible breakage and redressing. The setting of the two sockets is such as would not have allowed them to be used in conjunction, as appears to be the case in some of the Yorkshire querns.¹³ Moreover, the grinding process has been continued after the first socket has become useless. Some small scraps of iron were removed from the interior of the handle socket which suggests an iron handle, or possibly a wooden

¹³ N. Smedley, *Yorks. Arch. Journal*, vol. XXXVI, p. 238; J. Phillips, *Trans. Leicester. Arch. Soc.*, vol. XXVI, pp. 75ff.

handle with an iron sheath. Scraps of iron have been found in the handle sockets of two rotary querns from the native site at Huckhoe a few miles to the west of Gubeon. The niche at the bottom of the feed pipe, a feature found frequently on other quernstones in the area, if not intentional, may be the result of wear from the spindle where uneven force has been used to propel the stone. It does not appear to be a mistake in the original manufacture. Such a quernstone as this would not be out of place in the first or second century A.D. in this area.¹⁴

2. A very small fragment of a base from a rotary quernstone was found re-used in the later paving in Area II. The grinding surface is slightly convex.

(b) Pounding Stones or Pestles.

Two stone pounders or pestles of greywacke, oval in section, smooth on the surface and fitting comfortably into the hand, were found close to the pits in Area I. One was lying on the flat stone slab close to pit no. 3 and the other in the occupation earth nearby. The flat slab could have been used as a base for pounding. They resemble closely the pestle stones found at Blue Crag, Northumberland,¹⁵ the ends of each bearing either the percussion marks of pounding or the smoother wear resulting from grinding. They are 4½" long and 2" broad. A third stone of the same grit, more round in section, was found in the occupation earth in the hut circle in Area I.¹⁶

(c) Whetstone.

Part of a whetstone of Water of Ayr stone was recovered from the bottom of the top soil in Area I. It is triangular in section.

Metal.

Parts of a prick spur and a rowel spur, and one George III penny, all found in the top soil.

Glass.

Two fragments of glass were found, no. 1 in clay removed by the mechanical excavator and no. 2 in the occupation spread in the hut circle in Area I. Mr. W. Bulmer, Hon. Curator of the Black Gate Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne, has contributed the following note.

¹⁴ See also C. Curwen, *Antiquity*, 1937; Proc. Soc. Ant. Scotland, vol. XXXVI, p. 104, and vol. LXXXIV, p. 123.

¹⁵ Proc. Soc. Ant. Newcastle, ser. 4, vol. II, p. 81.

¹⁶ The group is grateful to Dr. S. Tomkeieff, Dept. of Geology, King's College, for the identification of these stones.

"These two fragments are from bases of glass vessels of the Roman period. No. 2 varies only in minor detail from Morin-Jean's Base Type no. 19.¹⁷ No. 1 is of the same type and, except for its diameter, is exactly comparable with the glass cup from Besançon illustrated in Morin-Jean's figure no. 281. These bases belong to rather tall cylindrical cups with domed footstands made, probably in Alexandria, during the first century A.D. Although the fragments correspond so exactly to the quoted prototypes it must be pointed out that the metal differs from that usually associated with Alexandrian products and that the exceptionally large diameter of no. 1 is difficult to explain. Nevertheless the metal is entirely consistent with a first century date and there seems to be no doubt whatever that the vessels from which these fragments came were made during the first century and imported into this country from Roman Egypt."

Coal.

Small pieces of coal were found in the occupation earth in both areas, although there was no evidence that it had been burnt on the spot, since no cinder or coal ash was recovered. Nevertheless, the fact that coal has also been found in a Roman and possibly pre-Roman context at the native settlement at Huckhoe a few miles to the west suggests that the native communities may have been working the outcrops in the area. From evidence on Roman military sites it is possible that the use of coal was well organized on the Antonine Wall by the middle of the second century, and there is evidence for its use in the second century at Benwell Roman fort, and in the Antonine period at Corbridge.¹⁸

¹⁷ Morin-Jean, *La Verrerie en Gaul sous l'Empire Romain*, Paris 1913.

¹⁸ For a summary of the evidence see G. Webster, *Antiquaries Journal*, vol. XXXV, pp. 200 and 207.