

IV

BRIDGE HOUSE RE-EXAMINED

D. B. Charlton and J. C. Day

FOLLOWING THE DISCOVERY of early timber huts beneath the stone dwellings at Tower Knowe¹ in the North Tyne Valley (OS NY/700871) it was felt that similar rectilinear settlements of the Romano-British period in the area should be investigated. The report on Bridge House (OS NY/824790) contained in G. Jobey's article on 'Rectilinear Settlements of the Roman Period'² indicated the possibility of an earlier phase in connection with Hut 3 on that site.

After discussion with Mr. G. Jobey it was decided to undertake a small excavation to explore the possibility of an earlier timber built settlement on the site. The excavation at Bridge House was carried out between November 1972 and May 1973 by a group of Mr. Jobey's adult students. The authors wish to express their appreciation of Mr. Jobey's help and advice, to thank Mr. W. Smith, the farmer, for his co-operation, and last but not least, their fellow diggers for their unflagging efforts.

THE EXCAVATIONS: (measurement has been given throughout in feet and inches to allow direct comparison with the earlier plan and report).

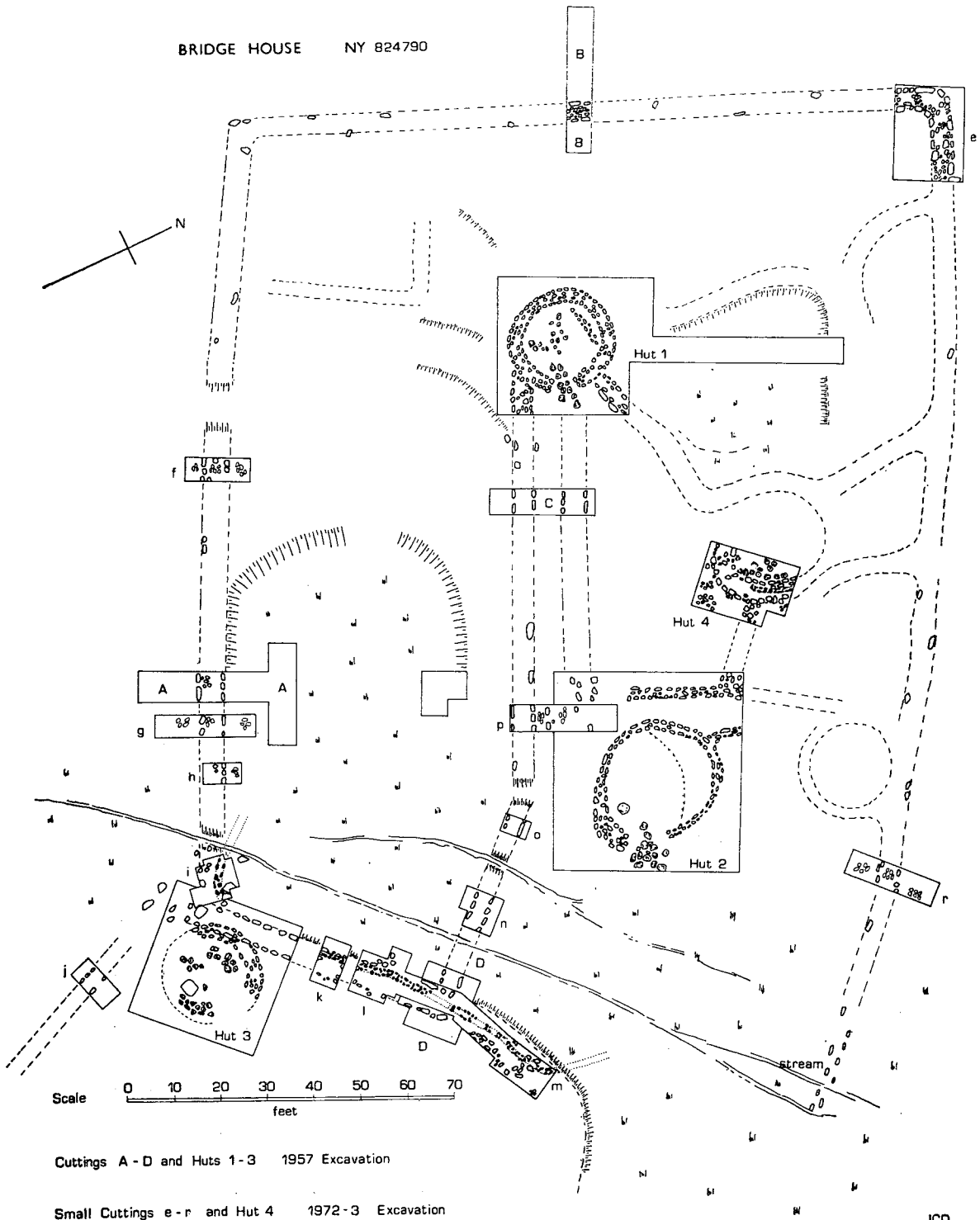
STONE ENCLOSURE WALLS

Cuttings *i* : *k* : *l* : and *m* (see plan, fig. 1) were opened on the south-east enclosure wall. The larger outer and inner facing stones were removed together with the loose wall fill. In cutting *l* in the wall fill a broken upper stone of a bun-shaped rotary quern was found. Beneath the enclosure wall in the brashy sub-soil was a clearly defined trench. It varied in depth from 15 to 18 inches, and in width from 12 to 15 inches. An irregular series of post holes, some with large packing stones was evident along the whole length of the trench (60 feet). In cutting *m* where the trench was only vestigial the post holes were still intact (fig. 2). In cuttings *k* and *l* (fig. 2)—the cuttings showing least disturbance—the trench was filled with loose brown soil containing flecks of carbon. The construction of this feature suggests a substantial timber palisade. Attempts to trace the trench between cutting *m* and

¹ *AA^s* vol. 1, 1973, pp. 55-79.

² *AA⁴*, vol. 38, 1960, pp. 1-38.

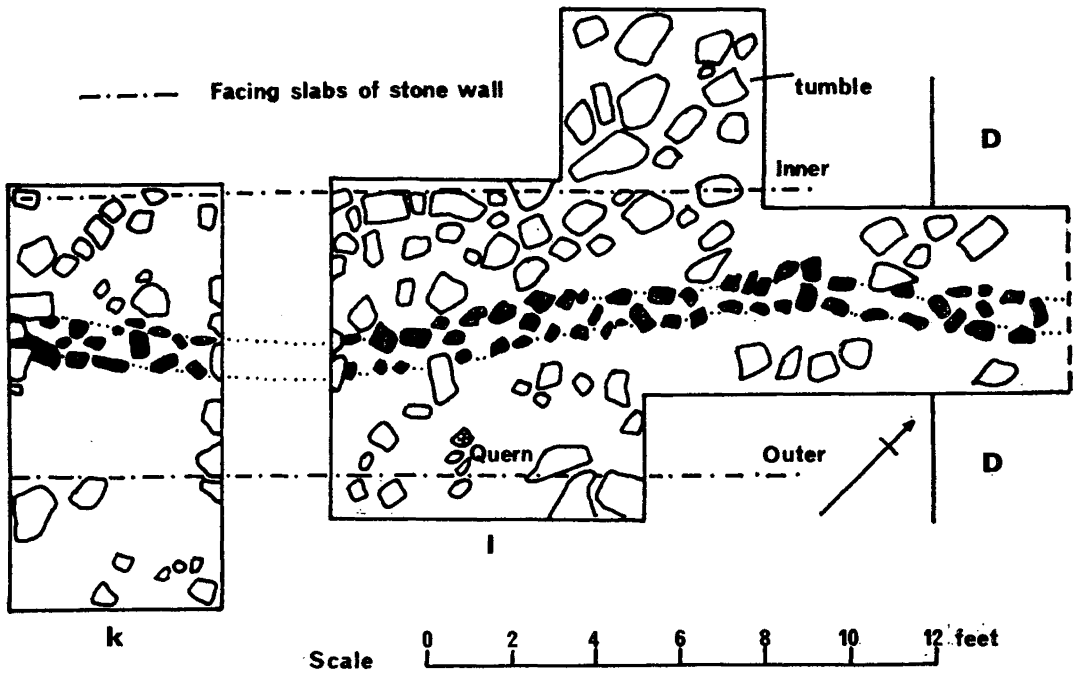
BRIDGE HOUSE NY 824790



Cuttings A - D and Huts 1-3 1957 Excavation

Small Cuttings e - r and Hut 4 1972-3 Excavation

Fig. 1



PALISADE TRENCH

Cuttings k: l and m

Fig. 2

the north-east wall were not made at this point, where it appeared to be turning, as there was a sharp drop in the ground level into an extensive marshy area. Further efforts were made in cuttings *r* and *e* to pick up the palisade trench but these too were unsuccessful even though both cuttings were extended well beyond the perimeter wall of the later settlement.

At the junction of the south-east enclosure wall with the south-west wall (cutting *i*) the palisade trench appeared to curve inside the later stone wall, and continue into the depression. Again, unfortunately, because of the boggy nature of the site it was impossible to extend the cutting any further. Cuttings *h* : *g* : and *f* across the south-west wall also failed to locate the palisade trench below the wall. Investigation beneath the centre wall (cuttings *n* : *o* : and *p*) and of the field wall (cutting *j*) showed no evidence of earlier structures.

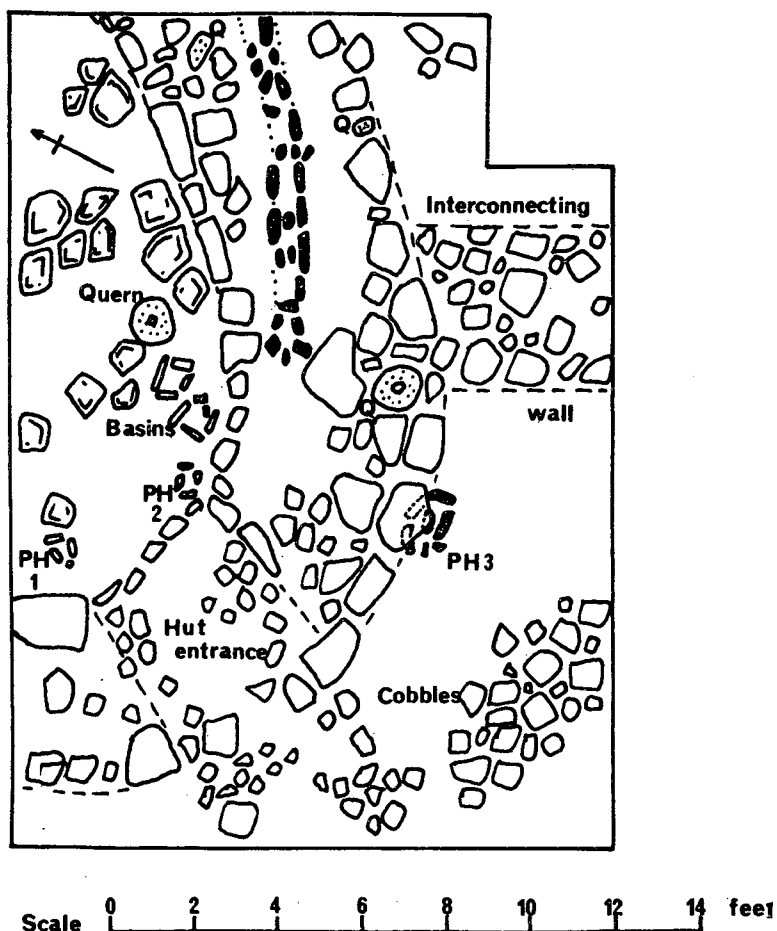
The construction of the enclosure wall on the south-west and north-east sides was similar to that of the south-east wall, i.e. large facing slabs with rubble fill, but unlike the south-east wall they were both resting on closely packed cobbles which extended beyond the inner and outer facing stones. From the base of the enclosure wall in cutting *e* two sherds of coarse black native pottery were recovered, and from the wall fill two fragments of a circular iron ring. From both cuttings *o* and *p* fragments of bun-shaped rotary querns were found, both being in the centre wall fill.

HUT 4

This was the largest remaining hut not examined by Mr. Jobey in 1957. Approximately one third of the hut area was excavated (fig. 3). The entrance, walls and paved floor of the hut were exposed.³ In the wall fill was found a complete upper stone of a rotary quern, and fragments from two others. As in the earlier excavated huts the entrance had a raised threshold with interior opposed post holes (PH 1 and 2) for door frame timbers. The paving in the hut was very substantial. Set into it—in one instance protruding above floor level—were two stone lined basins, similar to those found in Huts 1 : 2 : and 3. Adjacent to the basins, and slightly below floor level, was the base stone of a flat, coarse sandstone, rotary quern. The quern was in four fragments with a broken iron spindle in situ.

The stone hut walls and paving were then removed, in the process a broken glass counter was found beneath the wall. Immediately below the outer facing stones of the later hut a rectangular stone lined hole (PH 3) (15 × 12 inches, 16 inches deep), of substantial construction, with large packing stones was uncovered. At the same level under the centre of the stone wall was a trench (12 inches wide, 8 to 11 inches deep). In the area excavated this feature ran in an unbroken arc for eight feet, terminating in a post hole (12 inches

³ For full description of hut construction see AA⁴ vol. 38, 1960, pp. 10-13.



HUT 4 - PALISADE TRENCH

Fig. 3

deep, 12 inches in diameter). Packing stones blocked the trench at approximately twelve-inch intervals, and the dark brown fill contained traces of carbon. The disturbance caused by the construction of the later stone hut made it difficult to establish the exact relationship between the trench and the rectangular hole. In the area of the cutting excavated no similar features were found.

FINDS

NATIVE POTTERY

Two small sherds of coarse handmade, undecorated ware. From wall fill in Cutting *e*. Similar in form, fabric and context to those found on other rectilinear settlements in the North Tyne.

METAL

A flat, open ended iron ring, $2\frac{3}{8}$ " across (Fig. 4, No. 1). The ring, recovered in two pieces, was very heavily corroded. From wall fill Cutting *e*. Its use is indeterminate.

GLASS

Half a circular, translucent, bottle green counter, $13/16$ " in diameter, $5/16$ " thick (Fig. 4, No. 2). From beneath the wall of Hut 4. A similar counter, although of opaque white glass, came from Tower Knowe. Other examples, in various materials, have been recorded, e.g. in the occupation deposits at Traprain Law,⁴ Newstead,⁵ Birrens,⁶ and in a burial at Tarland, Aberdeenshire.⁷

STONE

Rotary querns. All stones are of the bun-shaped or flatter type common to the area in the first and second centuries A.D. or later. As was the case at Huckhoe (*AA*⁴, vol. 37, 1959, pp. 269-273) there is an excess of upper stones over base stones, but none show decoration.

- a. Half of an upper stone, very fine sandstone. Part of hopper, spindle hole and two socket holes present. Diameter 11" : height $4\frac{1}{2}$ ".
Found in wall fill Cutting *l*. (Fig. 4, No. 3.)
- b. Half of an upper stone, fine sandstone. Hopper and one socket hole present. Diameter 12" : height 5".
Found in wall fill Cutting *o*.
- c. One third of a base stone, fine sandstone. Diameter 15" : depth 6".
Found in wall fill Cutting *p*.
- d. Fragment of an upper stone, coarse sandstone. One socket hole present. Diameter 11" : height 4".
Found in wall rubble Hut 4.
- e. Small fragment of an upper stone, coarse sandstone. Diameter about 10" : height 3".
Found in wall rubble Hut 4.
- f. Complete upper stone, coarse sandstone. Hopper and three socket holes present, vestiges of one hole being in the grinding surface. Diameter 13" : height $3\frac{1}{2}$ ".
Found in wall rubble Hut 4. (Fig. 4, No. 4.)

⁴ *PSAS* vol. XLIX, 1914-15, p. 191; *PSAS* vol. LV, 1920-21, p. 190.

⁵ Curle, J., *A Roman frontier post and its people*, 1911, p. 338.

⁶ *PSAS* vol. XXX, 1895-96, p. 192.

⁷ *PSAS* vol. XLIX, 1914-15, p. 205.

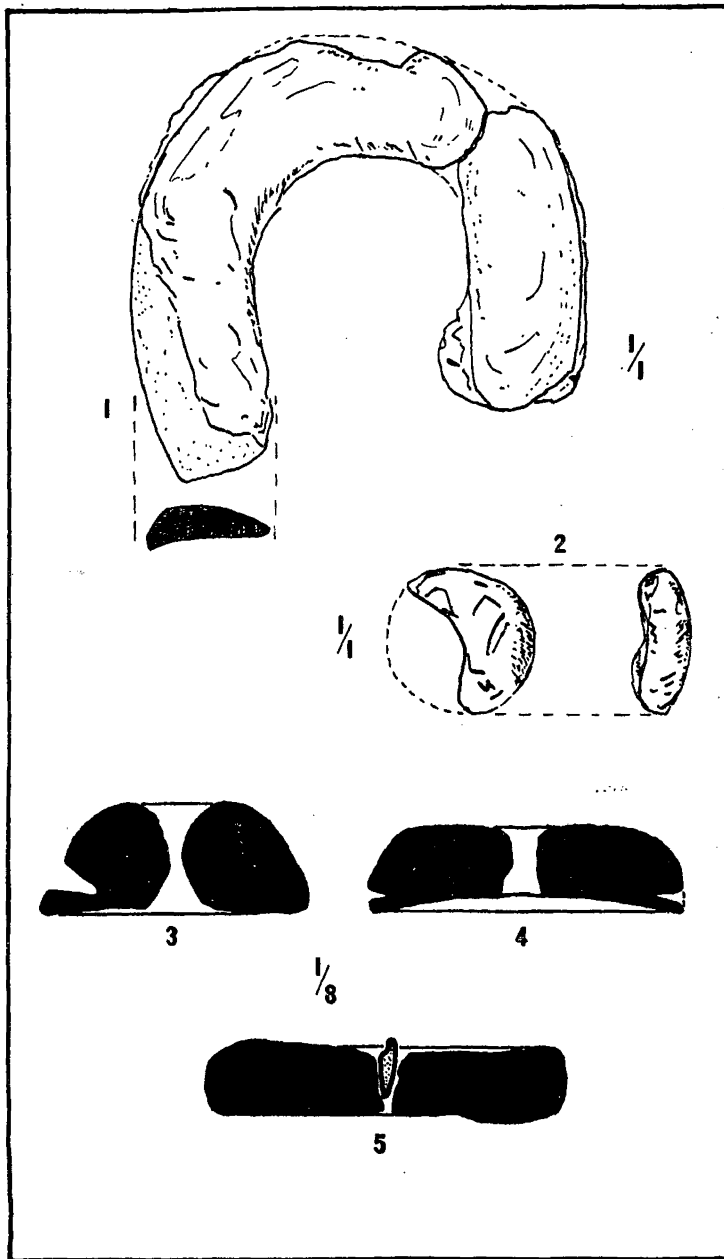


Fig. 4

- g. Complete base stone, very coarse sandstone. Fractured iron spindle in situ ($\frac{1}{2}$ " in diameter, 2" high). Diameter: 15" : depth 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ ".
Found inset in paving of Hut 4. (Fig. 4, No. 5.)

CONCLUSION

From the evidence presented it would seem reasonable to assume that there was occupation of the site prior to the stone walled settlement. The palisade lying under the south-east wall of the later settlement was presumably the perimeter of the timber phase on the site. As excavation showed that it did not underlie the remaining stone walls it appears that unlike Tower Knowe, the builders of the later stone walled enclosure did not follow the line of the earlier perimeter. It is unfortunate that later flooding of the area made the ground too waterlogged to trace the palisade any further. The existence of timber features beneath Hut 4 also clearly indicate an earlier occupation phase on the site; whether the timber hut is contemporary with the timber enclosure palisade is open to conjecture.

Timber features beneath the stone remains on two North Tyne Romano-British sites have now been established, further excavation on similar sites would confirm or refute whether this is a normal development in the occupation pattern of the rectilinear settlements.