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SUMMARY

Within Trenches 1 and 2, topsoil overburden of up to 1.20m in depth provided a protective cover over any putative archaeological remains such as a shallow ditch observed in Trench 1 of unknown date.

In Trench 3, two possible phases of Roman occupation probably existed.

The earlier phase consisted of two shallow cuts of uncertain form and function that were abandoned allowing wind-blown sand to accumulate.

The later phase comprised a cobbled surface and possible adjacent beam slot.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project origins

English Heritage was consulted by Copeland Council regarding a pre-planning application for the redevelopment of Roman Way, Silloth.

The scheme has the potential to affect the extant remains of the north-west corner of the Roman fort at Beckfoot, an unscheduled monument that was an integral part of the Roman coastal defences and as a result an assessment programme of archaeological evaluation was required to inform upon a management plan.

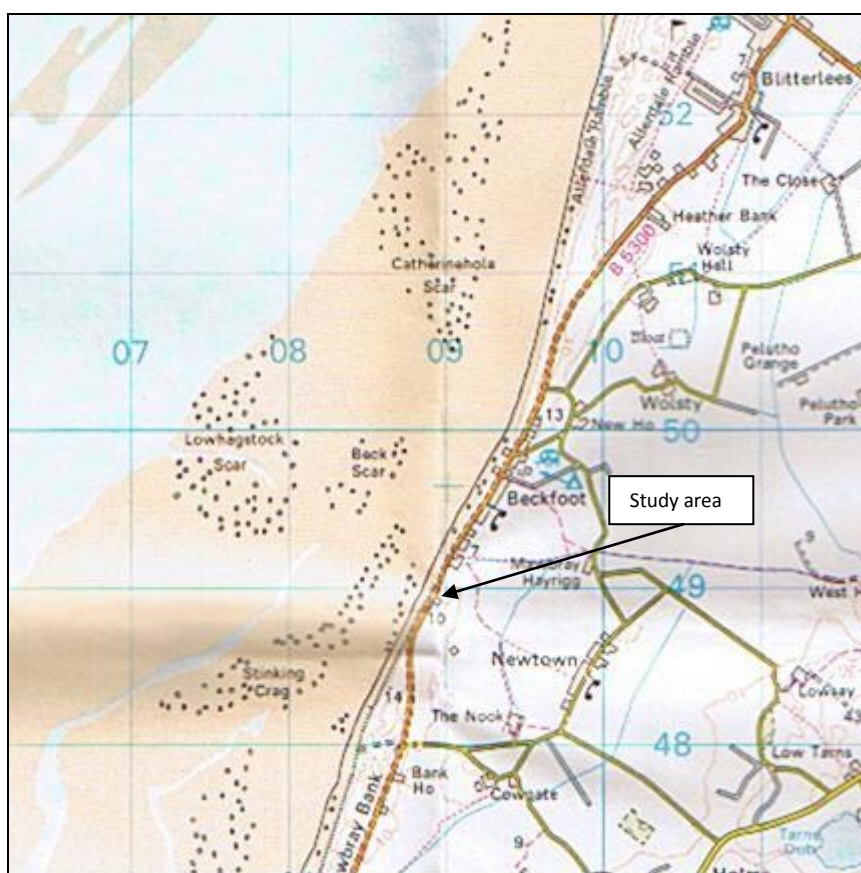


Figure 1. Location of Roman Way, Beckfoot

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2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Project Design

In response to a request by English Heritage, Gerry Martin Associates Ltd submitted a project design for an archaeological evaluation. This document outlined the contractors' professional suitability, past cultural context, broad objectives required of the project, the methodology and the resources needed for the successful expedition of this work.

The project design on being accepted by the curatorial body, Gerry Martin Associates Ltd was commissioned to undertake the archaeological evaluation.

All projects are carried out in accordance with PPS 5 (2010), the guidelines and recommendations issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists and English Heritage and in accordance with the brief prepared by the curatorial authority. The Project Manager, Gerry Martin has achieved the accreditation level of MIfA (Member) with the Institute of Archaeologists (IfA).

Fieldwork took place on July 11th-12th 2011.

2.2 Archive

The archive has been compiled in accordance with the project design and the guidelines set out by English Heritage (1991, 2006) and the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994, 2008).

The archive will be deposited with an appropriate repository, Senhouse Museum, Maryport and a copy of the report donated to the County Sites and Monuments Record, as requested by the curatorial authority.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Location, topography and geology

The study area (NY 08950 48925) lies within the parish of Holm St Cuthbert and resides above a cliff-top, surrounded to the east by open countryside, both arable and pasture, at a height approximately 10m OD. The study area lies on the eastern side of the B5300 road between Mawbray and Silloth.

Solid geology consists of Permian sandstone but the locality is noted for sand dunes that form the underlying drift geology

4 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

4.1 Historical background

The study area involves three spatial elements that can be summarised as follows.

Roman Fort

Beckfoot Roman fort (*Bibra*) covered an area measuring 1.1 hectares dating from the Hadrianic period and was occupied until the 4th Century AD. Mentioned in the Roman Cosmology placing the fort between Maryport and Silloth, the fort was garrisoned by Cohors II Pannoniorum Equitata during the 2nd Century AD (Frere and St Joseph 1983, 71-73).

The fort enjoyed considerable antiquarian interest between the late 19th and early 20th century as summarised below.

Roman occupation was largely conjectural until 1879, when Mr. Joseph Robinson of Maryport made a partial exploration of a Roman fort. He discovered remains lying chiefly in the third field west from Beckfoot Mill. He described his findings (*C. and W. Ant. Soc., Transactions, o.s. v, 139*) as:—

"A hole six feet in depth was dug. The first obstacle was a pavement of cobbles. I preserved the first dug up and it is much worn on the surface. Underneath was a bed of black earth mixed with slate, pottery and stones bearing signs of work and fire; at 3 feet sand was reached, and 18 inches beneath

this a block of well-dressed freestone was brought up. We afterwards found this part of the field to consist largely of such layers as are here described. The four corners of the camp [sic fort] have all been found and uncovered, and thus we have its dimensions, viz— interior, east and west, 405 ft.; north and south on west side 283 ft., on east side 267 ft. The area of the camp is about 2¾ acres ... It has no gate on the west or seaward side and the gates on the north and south sides are nearer the west gate of the camp than the east. There is a gate in the east or landward side. Two guard chambers occur at the south gate and two at the east, but only one at the north. The walls are each 2 ft. 6 ins. in thickness and the interior space nine feet square; buildings have existed outside the camp to the north-east, and probably elsewhere."

Finds uncovered by the excavation included:

- at the south-western corner of the fort an altar measuring 17 inches by 7 inches was uncovered bearing a figure of Diana (now no. 146 in the Carlisle Museum, given by Mr. Thomas Carey in 1914)
- a mutilated Victory
- three querns
- a coin of Trajan, much worn, and one of Constantine
- two copper beads; fragments of copper and iron; a round stone, 11 inches. in diameter, with a hole near the edge
- Samian, Castor, Upchurch and Salopian ware
- carved stone broken in two, 5ft. long, with an inscription in letters 3 inches high,—]LIA . PRAEF . COH . II . PANNON . FECIT, identifying a certain piece of building at Beckfoot fort had been done under the care of an officer of the second cohort of Pannonians mentioned in Hutchinson's *History of Cumberland*, ii, 346 and rediscovered in 1880 when utilised as a gatepost into a wall; it is given in *Lapidarium Septentrionale* as no. 903; in Huebner's *Corpus* vii, no. 417

In 1908 near this fort a large, narrow-necked store-vessel (*olla*), 10½ ins. High was found, now in Carlisle Museum. Messrs. T. May and L. E. Hope (*C. & W. Trans.*, N.S. xvii, 173) stated that such vessels, of "Belgic" origin (now known as Black Burnished Ware), ornamented with cordons, raised bands, comb-markings, etc., and with a black polish, date to the close of the first century A. D.

In 1921 Harold Duff presented to the same museum pottery found by himself in the sand-dunes near Beckfoot, including many fragments of Castor ware. One of these was part of a beaker with ornament of stems and leaves *en barbotine*. Another was a nearly complete cooking-pot, 8 inches in height, of brown ware, with lattice ornament; this has been stated to date from the first century BC, but R. G. Collingwood remarked that in form it was identical with the ordinary cooking-pot of the second century A.D.

In 1922 further specimens were given by Harold Duff to the museum, including roof-tiles, rims of *mortaria* and cooking-pots, Castor ware and part of a white clay flagon coated with black slip. He also found at Beckfoot iron nails, half a silver ring which had been subjected to fire, pieces of carved bone (perhaps from a knife-handle) and much charcoal mixed with the debris, suggesting cremations and burials on the sandhills (dunes).

In 1925 Harold Duff found the fragments of a Samian vessel, shape 33, with potter's stamp *dagomorvs*, probably made about A.D. 110–120, and a small brass (sic) coin of Carausius, A.D. 287–293.

The second field northward of the fort yielded large quantities of pottery and tiles and may therefore be the site of the *vicus* outside the fort.

About 80 ft. from the northern end of the seaward wall, a T-shaped structure of large red-sandstone blocks was found, measuring 4 ft. 9 inches. by 5 ft. 5 inches. According to R. G. Collingwood, its position forbade the supposition that it was the *spina* of a gateway but it may have been a base for a statue or altar.

Despite some excavation, further investigation is required in order to establish the date at Beckfoot for the forts origins. The fort was current during the second century AD but was razed at least once then rebuilt surviving until the time of Constantine (early 4th Century AD).

Roman vicus

The site of a southern vicus associated with Beckfoot Roman fort, was seen as cropmarks and mapped from air photographs taken in 1949. Probable remains of the vicus are visible to either side of the road outlined as a series of strip buildings that run out from the north gate of the fort, for a distance of 236 metres. Rectilinear enclosures, many incomplete, and with dimensions of 15-17 metres by 7-8 metres are visible.

To the north-east of the fort, and 77 metres east of the road at NY0906 4890, is the curved corner of a feature which continues for 16 metres to the north, and 9 metres to the east; this may be the approximate position of the "building" found by excavation described above. Its line may continue further to the north. Evidence discovered during excavations in 1879-80 indicated a building north-east of Beckfoot Roman Fort, allegedly a bath house of which there is now no trace.

Roman cemetery

Cemeteries are known on the western side of the Roman coastal road both north and south of the fort. These burials include 2nd Century cremations with associated pyres and later stone-lined graves.

In 2006, part of the cemetery was excavated by Lancaster University although the results appear to have been largely insignificant.

The southern cemetery is subject to serious erosion and is the centre of ongoing investigation (Mason 2009, 100).

5 RESULTS

5.1 Methodology

At present Roman Way is still extant, therefore the evaluation had to be conducted outside the footprint of the proposed redevelopment.

A total of three trenches (figure 2) were requested by the curatorial authority in order to provide an archaeological deposit model for the development.

Trench 1 (figure 3) measured 1.50m x 3.00m and investigated the western side of the redevelopment.

Trench 2 measured 1.50m x 2.00m and investigated the southern side of the redevelopment.

Trench 3 (figure 6) measured 1.50m x 3.00m and investigated the southern side of the redevelopment.

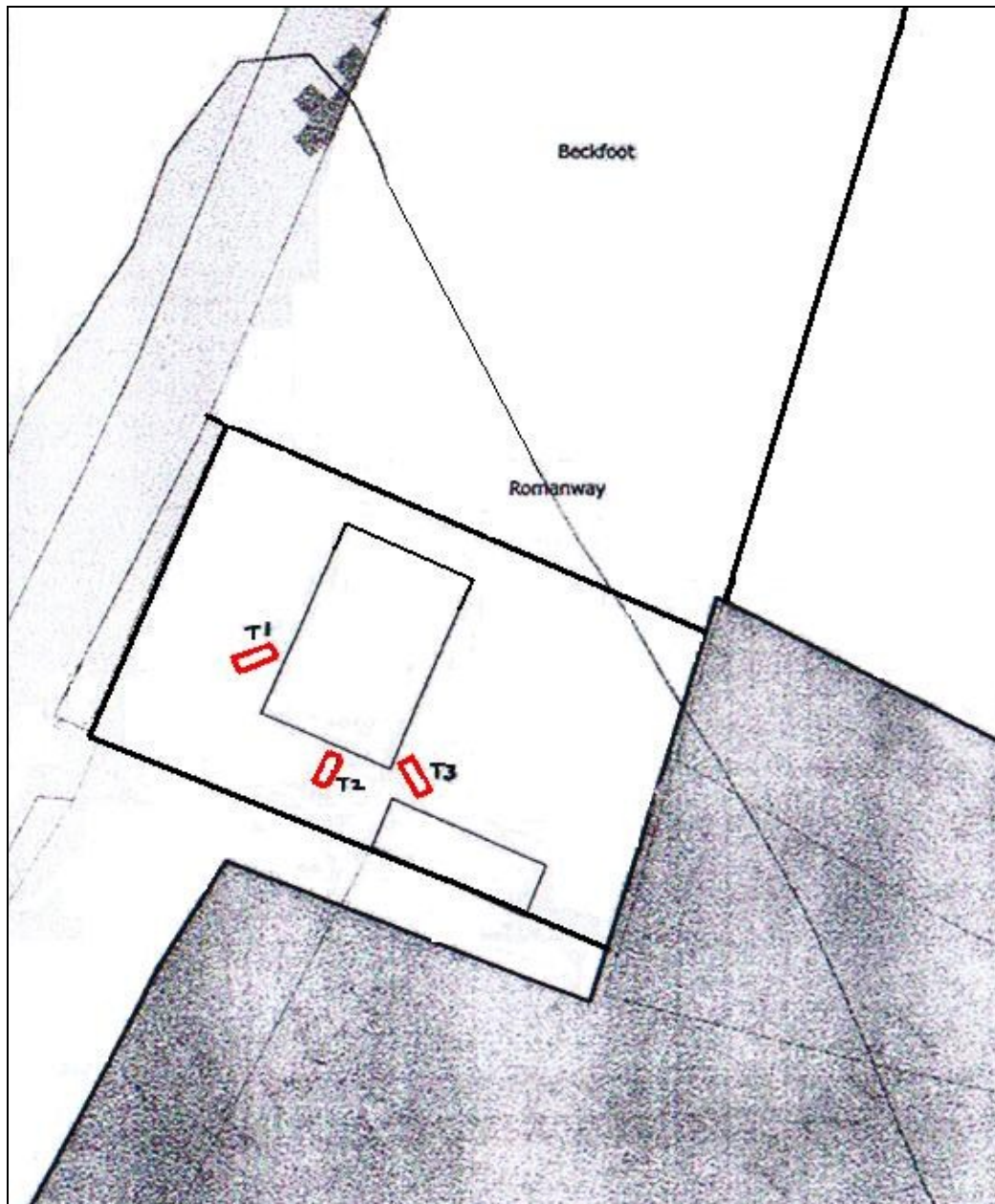


Figure 2. Location of trenches

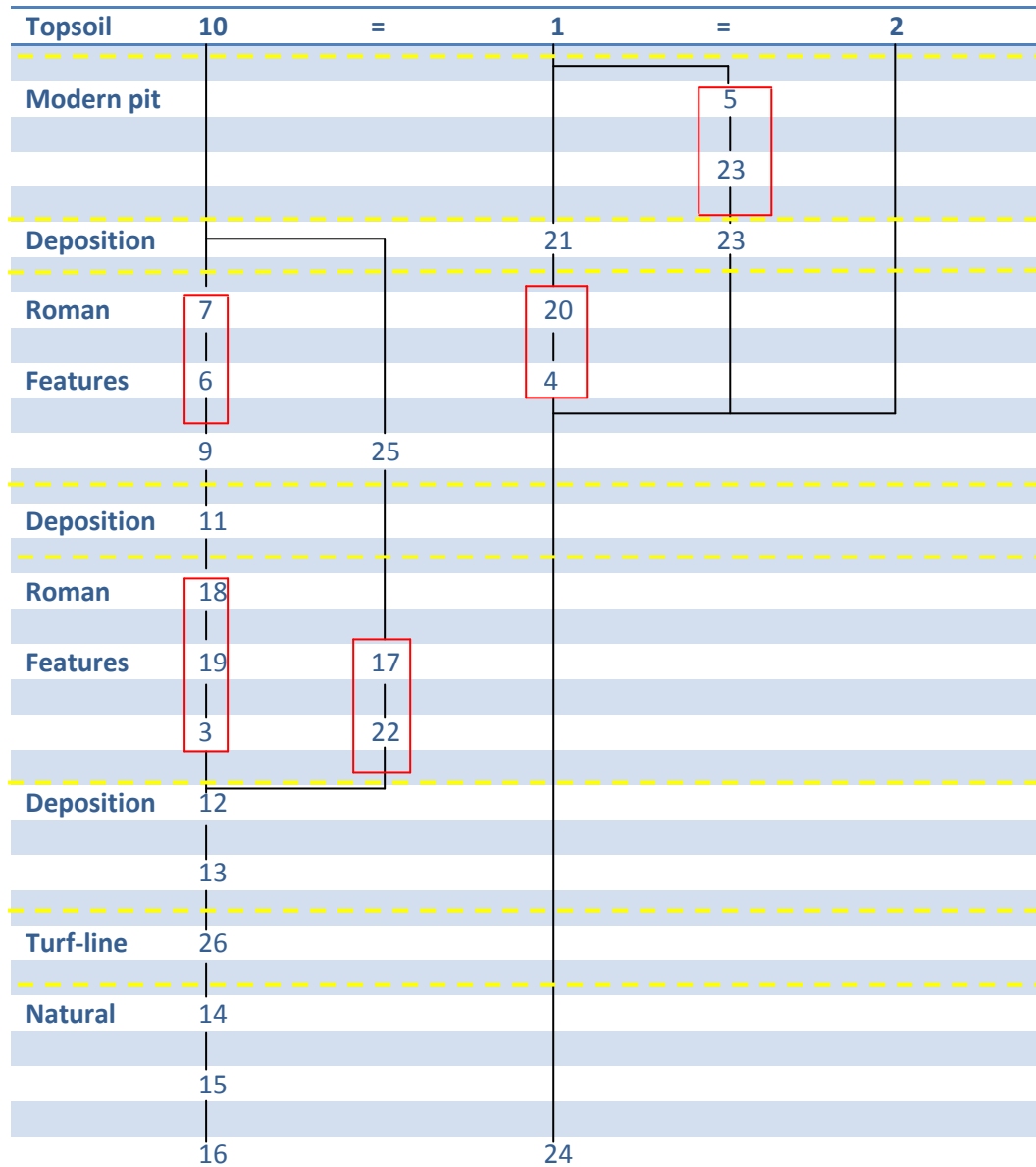
5.2 Results

Trench 1

The earliest element uncovered was a possible butt end for a shallow, flat-bottomed, north-south aligned linear ditch 4 (figures 3 and 4), 0.30m in depth filled by clean brown silty sand 20 sealed by light brown slightly silty sand 21 that formed a wind-blown sub-soil resting above natural golden sand 24 that formed drift geology.

Cutting a similar wind-blown light brown sandy sub-soil 23 was a sub-circular plan pit 5 (figure 3) filled by dark brown sandy silt 8. Within the pit was a probable horse burial left unexcavated for health and safety reasons. The extant house (Roman Way) was constructed during the inter-war period, the horse burial probably interred during the late 19th or early 20th century.

All features were sealed by a thick deposit of loam topsoil 1 (0.75m in depth).



Matrix detailing the stratigraphic elements encountered within Trenches 1-3

Trench 2

Trench 2 was excavated to a depth of 1.20m (figure 5). Only homogenous brown topsoil 2 comprising of silt and a high sand content was encountered. No residual cultural material was recovered except one sherd of Roman greyware.

Due to the depth of the trench, no further excavation could safely take place.

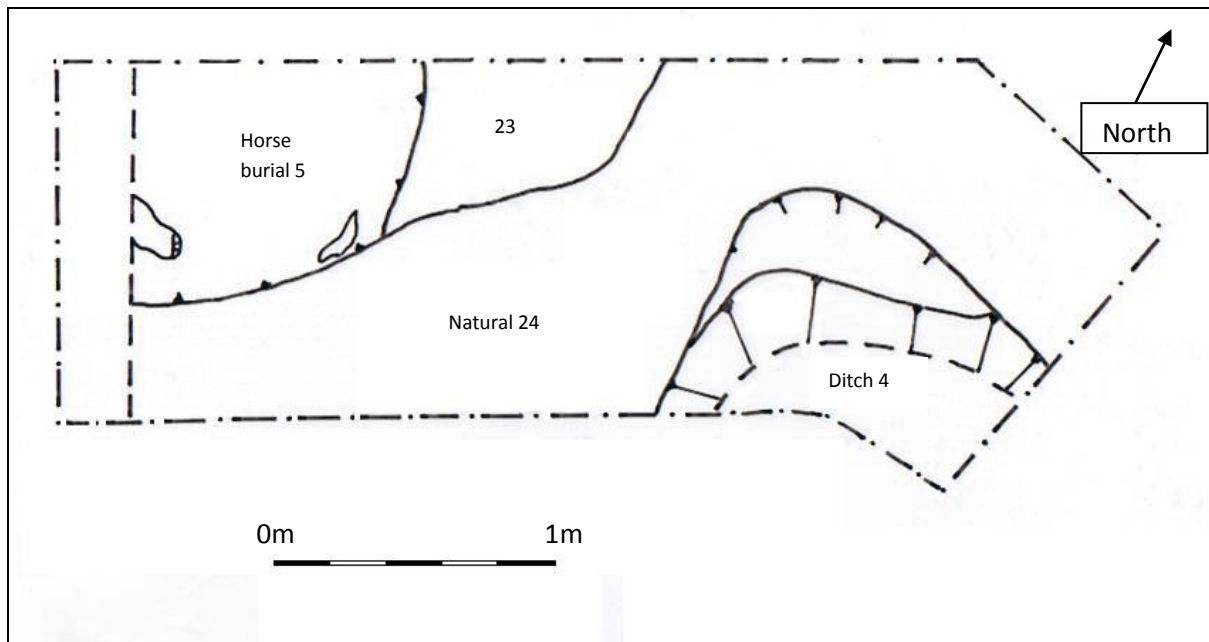


Figure 3. Plan of Trench 1



Figure 4. Ditch 4, Trench 1



Figure 5. Trench 2

Trench 3

Natural drift geology comprised of clean golden sand 16 that had been lain as sand dunes during antiquity.

Resting above layer 16 was brown and orange sand 15 affected by bioturbation below a thin surface of pale grey washed sand 14. This material was sealed by thin dark brown silty sand 26 that formed a probable turf-line denoting a former ground surface prior to cultural intervention.

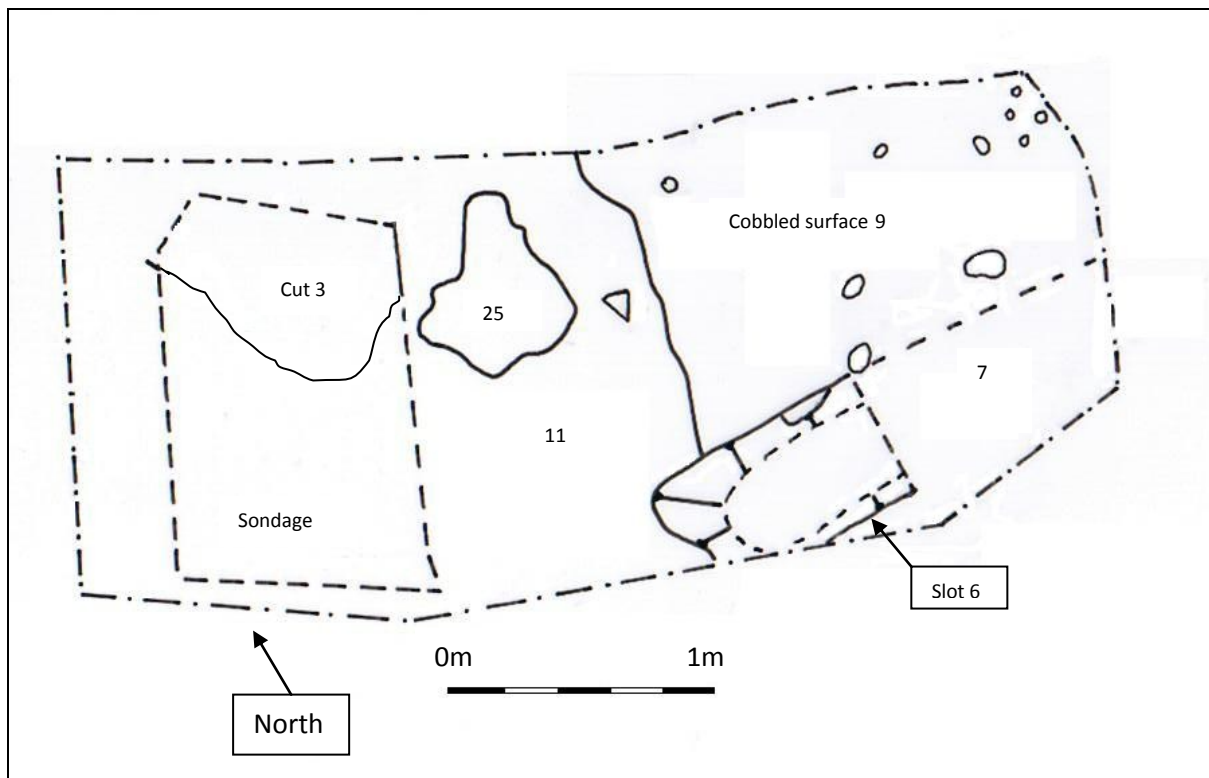


Figure 6. Plan of Trench 3

A hiatus above turf-line 26 (figure 7) allowed the deposition of clean grey sand 13 and mixed brown silty sand 12 possibly during a period of abandonment.

Two features probably possessing a cultural function cut layer 12. These features were as follows:

- An amorphous plan cut 3 (figures 7 and 8) filled by a basal fill of dark brown sand with small clumps of grey clay 19 overlain by pale brown sand containing angular red sandstone fragments 18.
- An unseen in plan, small cutting feature (possibly a post-hole) 22 filled by dark brown mixed sand 17.

A further period of possible abandonment, albeit temporary, allowed the deposition of loose pale yellow sand 11 heavily affected by bioturbation.

Finally, the site was re-occupied probably during the Roman period. These elements were as follows:

- An east-west aligned cut 6 (figure 9) possibly formed a beam slot filled by light brown slightly silty sand 7 that cut a coarse and loose cobbled surface 9 within a light yellow sand matrix (figure 9).
- A spread of light grey clay 25 may have represented a residual bonding agent.
- Layers 9 and 25 and fill 7 were sealed by a thin brown silty sand forming topsoil 10.

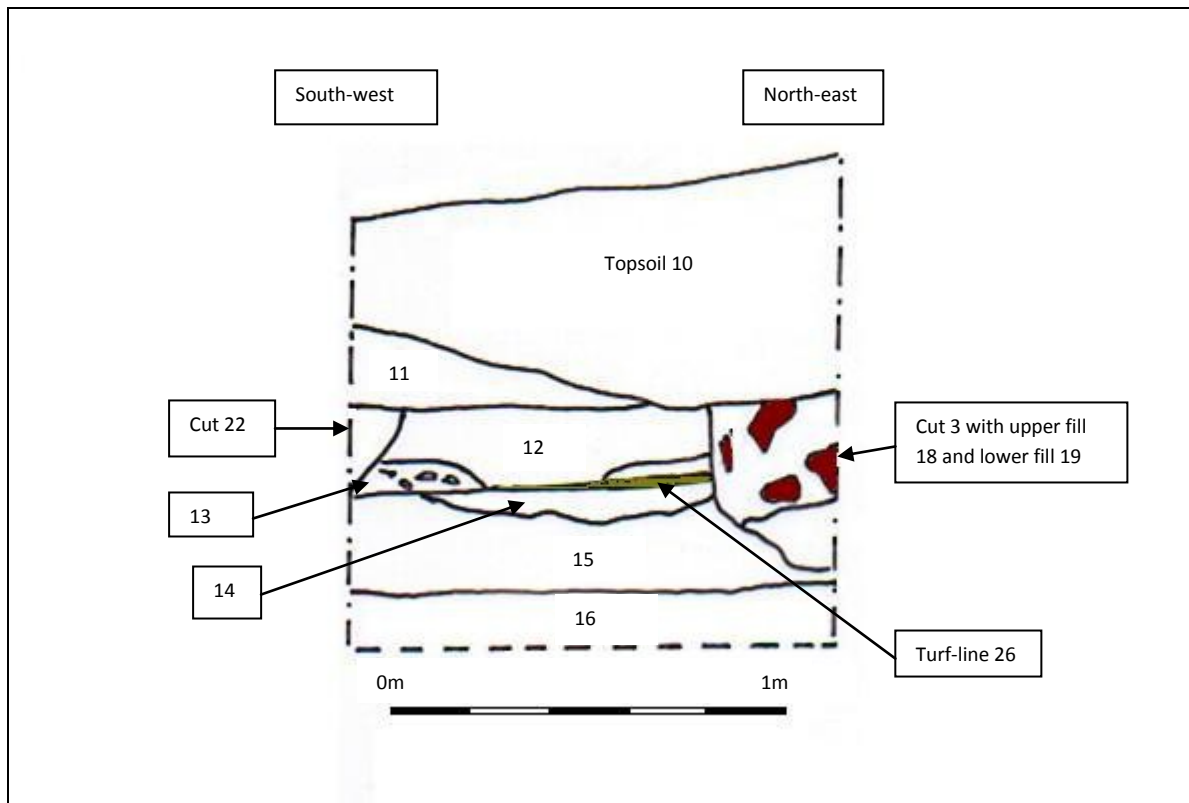


Figure 7. Section facing south-east illustrating cuts 3 and 22 and deposits 11-19 and 26, Trench 3



Figure 8. Section view of cut 3, Trench 3



Figure 9. Cut 6 with cobbled surface 9, Trench 3

5.3 Pottery

In total, five pottery sherds were recovered during the evaluation of which only context 7 (beam slot fill) was stratigraphically secure. This data is summarised below.

Trench	Context	Sherd count	Type	Date
1	1	1	Samian	Roman
1	1	2	Colour coat	250-400AD
2	2	1	Greyware	Roman
3	7	1	Greyware	Roman

5.4 Environmental analysis

Due to the very high incidence of sand in the underlying soil matrix, the survival of diagnostic organic or environmental material was exceedingly poor. Moreover, the lack of stratigraphic security in Trench 1 further compromised any potential sampling strategy.

5.5 Discussion

The study area lies outside of the Roman fort of *Bibra* within a marginal position in close proximity to the north-bound Roman road leading out from the fort. Any past cultural deposits encountered probably relate to a putative informal settlement or *vicus*.

Hadrian's Wall Research Strategy (Symonds and Mason 2009, Volume II 12-15) has sought to address the relationship between the formal fort and extra-mural activity, highlighting the importance of zoning that may be indicative of particular functions or social classes and illustrative of economic activity.

The connection between the fort and extra-mural settlement is poorly understood. Orthodox opinion suggests a division between the two areas; the military (inhabitants of the fort) being served by a group of ostensibly servile camp followers who create an ad hoc settlement (*vicus*).

Despite the understandable limitations of using generalities, certain themes do emerge from recent Wall research. Frequently within the *vicus*, there existed considerable formal orthogonal spatial organisation as at Stanwix and Birdoswald (Wilmott, pers comm.) whilst the material culture recovered is ostensibly the same as within the fort, but often in greater abundance as at Stanwix (Carauna 2000, 55-70).

The simple conclusion that can be drawn is that occupation within the fort and outside in the *vicus* could easily belong to the same group of people, there being after an elapse of time and as the settlement has matured a preference for living outside the fort. This may be explained by retirement and encouragement to settle through gifts of small parcels of land, thereby reinforcing Roman influence and control.

Based on the evidence from this evaluation such a hypothesis cannot be tested as the sample size is miniscule whilst the structure and form of the fort and vicus is understood only in a very elementary manner.

Trench 3 appeared to indicate clear cultural activity probably attributable to the Roman period.

Two broad cultural phases appeared to exist.

The earliest phase comprised of two cuts 22 and 3 the latter containing stone fragments possibly discarded from nearby construction or conversely packing for a post.

A period of abandonment 11 may have ensued before the site was re-occupied with the introduction of a putative beam slot 6 respecting a crude cobbled surface 9. A very limited assemblage of residual Roman pottery indirectly suggests that occupation was occurring into the 3rd or 4th Century AD.

In Trench 1 a possible butt end for an undated north-south aligned ditch 4 probably belonged to the Roman period.

This feature fell into disuse, buried by wind-blown sand 20 before a thick horizon of topsoil 1 (corroborated in Trench 2) was deposited.

Horse burial 5 was left unexcavated as it probably represents a clandestine, relatively recent interment that may possess a public health risk.

Although the sample size is extremely small, the broad phasing of the study area appears to comply with a deposit model constructed in the 19th century of a fort that was occupied, abandoned and then re-occupied until the 4th century AD.

In terms of the development implications derived from the archaeological evaluation, the depth of topsoil in close proximity to Trenches 1 and 2 suggest that construction and ancillary services will have little impact upon extant archaeological deposits to a depth of approximately 1.00m.

Close to Trench 3, the topsoil cover is approximately 0.40m in depth. It would appear highly likely that any development would impact upon Roman archaeological remains, albeit of uncertain form and function.

6 ARCHIVE

The archive for this project will be deposited with the appropriate archaeological curator. This archive has been assembled in accordance within the protocols of Management of Archaeological Projects (MAP2).

7 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Mr Lewis Allen and for his assistance with the fieldwork and answering my varied questions regarding the history of Roman Way.

I would also like to thank Mike Collins for his guidance on the brief, the staff of Carlisle Library with my research into the local history of the area and the staff of Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle for documentary material.

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