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**Hadrian's Wall Milecastle 63 (Walby West), Cumbria: Interim
Report on Archaeological Evaluation, September 2000**

Tony Wilmott

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Summary

Milecastle 63 is one of thirteen of these installations on Hadrian's Wall under regular or intermittent ploughing. Field evaluation was carried out on these milecastles in 1999-2000.

Geophysical survey was thought to have located milecastle 63 on its assumed, measured position. A trench excavated on the site showed that the assumed position was too far north. The surviving bottom course of Hadrian's Wall was recorded in a field boundary.

Keywords

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Author's address

English Heritage Centre for Archaeology, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth, PO4 9LD. Telephone: 02392 856700. Email: tony.wilmott@english-heritage.org.uk

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HADRIAN'S WALL MILECASTLE 63 (WALBY WEST), CUMBRIA

Interim Report on Archaeological Evaluation, September 2000

1. Project background

Thirteen out of the milecastles on the World Heritage Site of Hadrian's Wall have been identified as being under potentially damaging land regimes, principally cultivation either in rotation, or annually for cereal crops. A programme of field evaluation to investigate the condition of the remains and their vulnerability to further cultivation was put forward in a Project Design (Austen and Wilmott 1999) in June 1999, and the first phase of the work, during which five of the milecastles were evaluated, took place during August 1999. A further phase of work which covered seven evaluations took place in Autumn 2000.

The primary objective of the fieldwork was to provide data on the survival and vulnerability of these milecastles in order to inform discussions with land owners and managers over their future management. Archaeological information on the shape, size, internal layout and dating of the milecastles was also recovered.

Pending the production of a formal MAP2 assessment on the completion of the whole project, it has been decided to produce a series of short interim reports summarising the results of the work on each site. These will be circulated to archaeological curators, and also to the owners and managers of individual sites.

The work on the projected site of Milecastle 63 was undertaken by permission of the site owner, Mr J Pattinson, Walby Hall, Crosby on Eden.

2. The Site

The traditional site of Milecastle 63 (Walby West) lies at or near NY4315 5974 (Fig 1). The field boundaries shown on OS mapping have altered in recent years, however the northern part of the milecastle site has been presumed to lie in the former OS parcel 0377 which is now part of a larger field. The milecastle has been thought to be bisected by a track which runs along the south boundary of this field, with its southern half in OS Parcel 2764 to the south of the track.

Though no visible remains of either the milecastle or the Wall can be seen on the ground, the Wall ditch was clearly observed as a linear indentation centred some 15m north of the southern edge of the field to the north of the track. The ditch was very clearly visible as a result of rutting caused by the passage of farm machinery harvesting a maize crop in the waterlogged conditions which obtained in the abnormally wet autumn of 2000.

The area between here and Brunstock Park to the west, broadly conforming to Wall mile 63, has been the subject of a number of archaeological interventions over the last two decades. In 1981, geophysical survey (Gater 1981) on the presumed sites of several milecastles, including that of Milecastle 63, was undertaken in order to provide background for the excavation of a transect through the frontier on the line of a north-south gas pipeline near Crosby-on-Eden in Wall Mile 61 (Bennett forthcoming). This survey tentatively identified the milecastle site at NY 4315 5974, somewhat to the east of its measured position, and suggested that part of it lay in the northern field. In 1990 the area between this site and Brunstock Park was examined by geophysical survey and small scale excavation as part of an evaluation to find the least archaeologically destructive route across the Roman frontier works for the line of the North-West Ethylene Pipeline. This was followed by an excavation on the route of the pipeline itself in 1991 (Lambert 1996, 79-86).

The northern field, of which OS 0377 now forms part, is under a rotational regime, currently maize. The direct impact of this on any surviving archaeological deposits has not been assessed, but is potentially detrimental. The central and southern parts of the milecastle under the lane and within OS 2764 are in stable condition. The southern field is also in rotation, and has been ploughed this year.

Both fields which contain the site of the milecastle are owned by Mr J Pattinson, Walby Hall, Crosby on Eden Carlisle, CA6 4QL. The site is protected as a scheduled ancient monument as part of Cumbria 28(16). The MPP revision of the scheduling has renumbered this part of the monument as SM26088.

3. Original aims

The original aims for the work were:

M63.1 to test the results of the geophysical survey with regard to the location of the milecastle without disturbance to *in situ* surviving remains.

M63.2 to ascertain the depth below the present surface at which remains of the milecastle survive.

M63.3 to assess the impact on the site of past cultivation, and the implications of its continuance, and the condition and survival of the remains identified in geophysical survey

4. Site Methodology

The results of the 1981 geophysical survey were regarded with some circumspection when the line of the Wall ditch was revealed by the sunken tracks of harvesting machinery so close to the southern boundary of the large field which subsumed OS Parcel 0377, as it seemed possible that the milecastle did not extend into this field at all. It was

therefore decided to cut a single trench measuring 2m x 8m, oriented north-south, with its southern edge as close as possible to the field boundary (Fig 2). The intention was to locate the line of the Wall itself, as this would inform the positioning of any trenches to the south of the Wall which might have picked up the east and west walls of the milecastle. The result from this trench clearly demonstrated the futility of further evaluation trenches.

5. Archaeological results

5.1 Description

Trench 1 (Fig 3)

The topsoil in the trench (1600) ranged from 250-500mm in depth, and consisted of a friable dark red-brown sandy loam. To the north of the trench this sealed a small area of sparse grey sandstone rubble 120mm deep (1601), comprising flat squared or irregular pieces. This is interpreted as collapse or robbing debris from the curtain wall of Hadrian's Wall, the foundations of which (1600) lay 3m to the south of the rubble. These foundations were 2.60m broad within the field, but only the north face was present; the south face seems to lie beneath the field boundary, though the tails of the facing slabs were found in the south edge of the trench. The face comprised a single line of 140mm thick flagstones, tapered back into the wall core from faces ranging from 400-600mm broad. All of the facing stones revealed (a total of five) displayed an east-west linear crack some 240mm from the face. This represents the pressure point where the face of the curtain wall stood on the flag foundation, which was offset to the north. The weight of the Wall above, now completely robbed, had caused the flagstone course to crack along the line of the offset.

All that remained of the core was a thick scatter of irregular grey sandstone pieces, up to 170mm wide. This was completely robbed in the south-east corner of the trench in a very square area, a fact which at first suggested that two walls at right-angles were actually present.

The wall sat upon a widespread subsoil deposit of very compact reddish-brown sandy silt (1603). A single Roman potsherd lay in the surface of this material immediately north of the Wall.

5.2 Interpretation

It is clear that the broad east-west wall found in the trench was Hadrian's Wall. This is apparent from the structure and dimensions, and also from the crack along the foundation course which is a virtual signature feature of the stone Wall in the former turf Wall sector

(Richmond and Gillam 1952, 19; Caruana and Fane-Gladwyn 1980, 21). It was surprising that no sign of the turf Wall survived at all, as in Wall mile 61 considerable traces of turf work were present (Bennett forthcoming), and elements of turf work were also found on the site of Milecastle 62 (Walby East) (Wilmott 1999). The Wall defines the south edge of the field with remarkable precision. It seems likely that the track to the south is of considerable antiquity, and probably originated when the Wall was standing to some height.

The excavation firmly denied the results of the geophysical survey, and this requires explanation. The principal evidence for the side walls of the milecastle was the appearance of a pair of anomalies some 18-20m apart running southwards from the presumed wall line under the bank to the south of the northern field. Comparison with the excavated trench suggests that these anomalies simply represented parts of Hadrian's Wall which were unrobbed between areas of total robbing like that defined in the excavation trench. The anomaly interpreted as the Wall itself might thus be only its south face. Milecastle 63 clearly does not lie in the field which was evaluated, but under the track and field immediately to the south.

6. Conclusions

6.1 *Original aims*

As the milecastle did not lie in the area evaluated, the aims were only met in relation to the line of Hadrian's Wall, not to the milecastle. The geophysical survey clearly did not locate the milecastle itself (M63.1), though the Wall was reached without disturbance to its fabric. Measurement from the now known sites of milecastles 62 and 64 suggests that milecastle 63 lies in this vicinity, though its site must be entirely contained under the track, and in the southern field, OS Parcel 2764, which was not available for examination. If so, then the milecastle site is still subject to regular ploughing. Despite this, no concentrations of stone were observed in the newly ploughed field, suggesting that the milecastle is not under active threat (M63.2, M63.3). Comparison with the Wall might imply that the milecastle too is robbed to the very bottom of its foundations. Milecastle 62 was found to be in a similar condition, and it is probable that both installations have been robbed for building work in Walby.

The single course of the Wall is in severely robbed condition, and it appears that it may survive only sporadically along the northern edge of the track (M63.2). It is possible that the positioning of the trench was fortunate in finding a part of the Wall in good condition.

The southern face of the Wall lies under the hedge bank at the edge of the field, and is not ploughed. The north face of the Wall, though ploughed, lies beneath a sufficient depth of soil (250-500mm) to preserve it from future plough damage (M63.3).

6.2 *Recommendations*

In the north field the current ploughing regime need not be altered, as the remains of the Wall are not suffering additional damage. The site of the milecastle remains unknown, but is likely still to be under the plough. Consideration might be given to attempting to locate the site in the south field through geophysical methods, though such attempts have not been successful over most of the area from Wall mile 50 to 70. Monitoring the surface after ploughing would show whether new damage was taking place, as concentrations of stone might be expected to be visible after damage episodes.

Evaluation by: Jean Riddell (Supervisor)

Date: September 2000

Nicholas Best
Marc Duurland
Fraser Stewart
George Marchant

Report by:

Tony Wilmott

Date: May 25th 2001

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Enclosed figures and plans

- Figure 1 Location of milecastle 63 on Hadrian's Wall
- Figure 2 Projected position of milecastle 63 and the 2000 excavation trench shown in relation to modern mapping
- Figure 3 Plan of Trench 1