



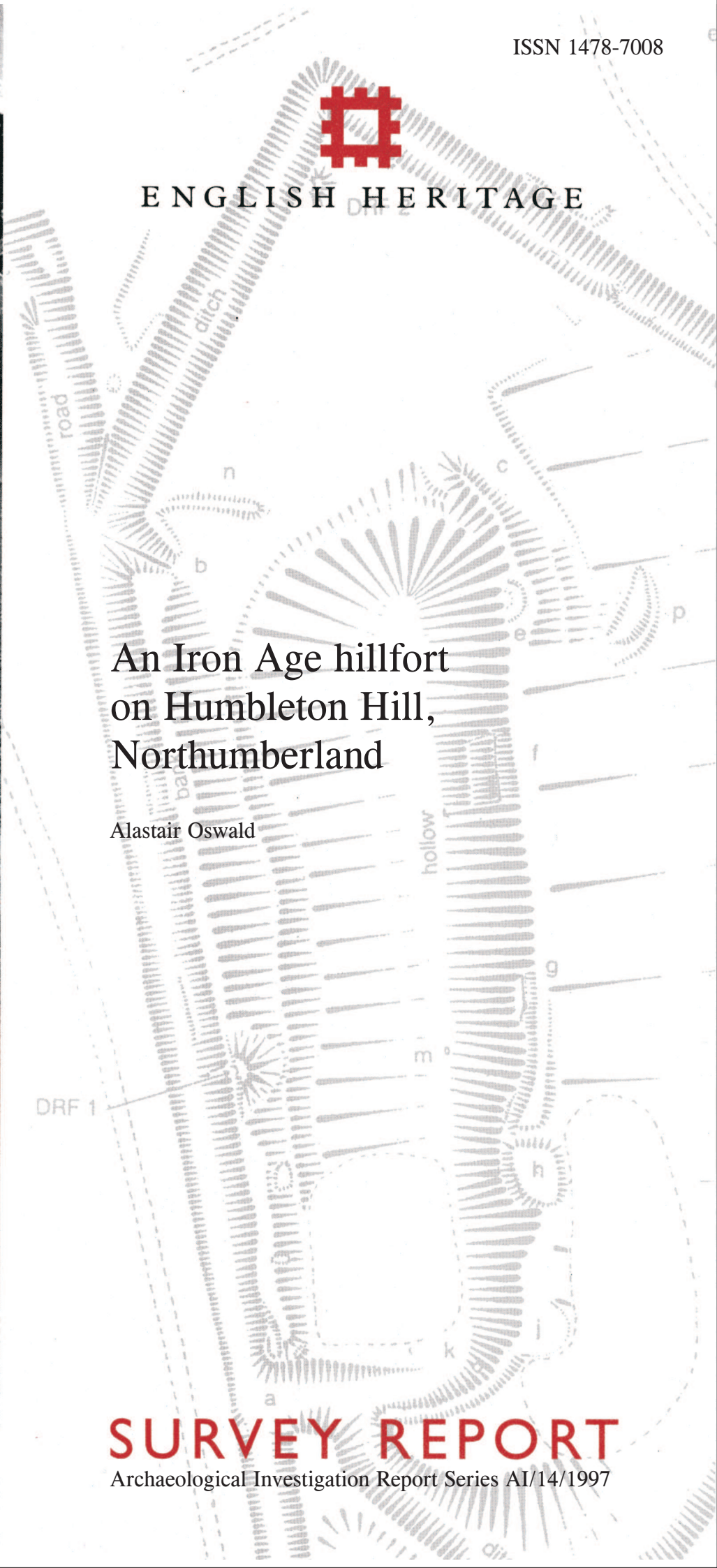
ENGLISH HERITAGE

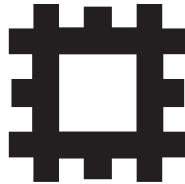
An Iron Age hillfort  
on Humbleton Hill,  
Northumberland

Alastair Oswald

**SURVEY REPORT**

Archaeological Investigation Report Series AI/14/1997





**AN IRON AGE HILLFORT  
ON HUMBLETON HILL,  
NORTHUMBERLAND**

**Archaeological Investigation Report Series AI/14/1997**

**NMR No: NT 92 NE 56  
NGR: NT 9670 2827  
SAM No: Northumberland 217**

Surveyed April 1997  
Surveyed by A. Oswald, A. Lax  
and C. Lofthouse  
Report by A. Oswald  
Drawings by A. Oswald

**English Heritage 1999  
ISSN 1478-7008**

**Applications for reproduction should be made to English Heritage.  
Please note that this report was originally produced by the  
Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England,  
which merged with English Heritage on 1 April 1999**

**York Office:** 37 Tanner Row, York YO1 6WP  
*Tel:* 01904 601901 *Fax:* 01904 601998  
National Monuments Record Centre, Great Western Village, Kemble Drive, Swindon. SN2 2GZ  
*Tel:* 01793 414700 *Fax:* 01793 414707 *World Wide Web:* <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk>



## **CONTENTS**

---

1. Introduction	1
2. Archaeological history	3
3. Description of the site	4
4. Interpretation and discussion	11
5. Survey methodology and acknowledgements	14
6. Bibliography	15

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

---

<i>1. Location map</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>2. RCHME earthwork plan, surveyed at 1:1000 scale</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>3. RCHME interpretative plan</i>	<i>11</i>

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Summary

*The Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) has carried out an archaeological survey of Humbleton Hill in Northumberland (National Monuments Record number NT 92 NE 56). Two enclosures, neither of which is accurately dated, and numerous smaller pen enclosures and house platforms were recorded. The more massively constructed enclosure is very probably of later prehistoric origin and is interpreted as a 'hillfort'. The second enclosure is very probably prehistoric, and has been suggested to be Neolithic, but its stratigraphic relationship to the first remains uncertain. Both have been subject to stone robbing and other modifications.*

In late April 1997, RCHME undertook an analytical earthwork survey of two stone-built enclosures on Humbleton Hill, as part of a national project to record Industry and Enclosure in the Neolithic Period. The inner enclosure, which is termed the 'hillfort' throughout this report, comprises two massive stone ramparts, while the outer is less substantial, formed by a low earth and stone bank. Several circular house platforms were also recorded, mostly lying within the hillfort. In addition, various apparently more recent features, including numerous small enclosures, interpreted as possible Medieval sheilings and associated pens, and a cairn on the summit, were surveyed. The site lies 2kms west of Wooler in the parish of Akeld, in the Berwick upon Tweed district of Northumberland, centred at National Grid Reference NT 9670 2827. In view of the uncertain relationship between the hillfort and the outer enclosure, both are recorded in the National Monuments Record under

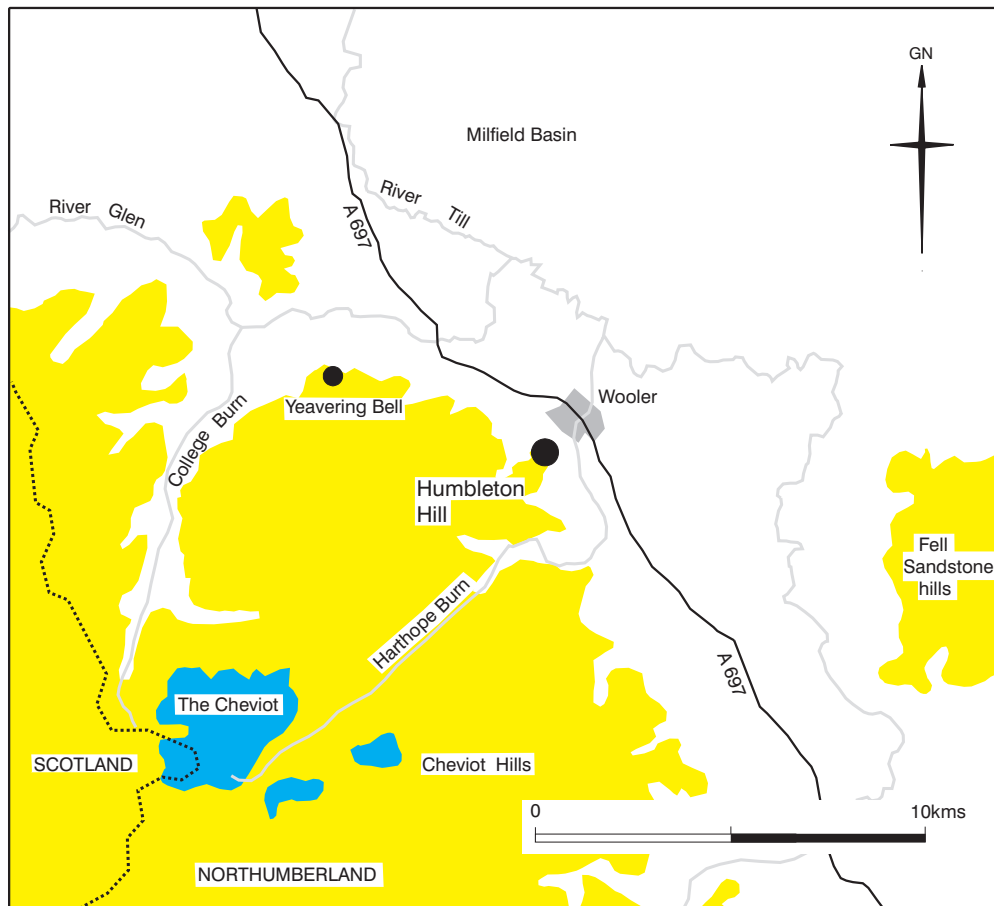


Figure 1.  
Location map

a single number: NT 92 NE 56. Humbleton Hill is privately owned but lies within The Cheviot National Park and the archaeological remains are protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (NORTHUMBERLAND 217).

Humbleton Hill is a prominent outcrop of andesitic granite at the north-eastern limit of The Northumberland Cheviots. On the south-west, the hill is divided from the main massif by an almost sheer-sided ravine once known as Homilheugh. The summit reaches an altitude of m above OD, and commands panoramic views over distances of up to kms; to the north, the hill overlooks the low-lying Milfield Plain and the confluence of the rivers Glen and Till. In the far distance and Traprain Law are prominent landmarks, respectively kms and kms away. To the south, the view is similarly extensive.

The recent survey was undertaken in the light of a recent unpublished proposal by Paul Frodsham, the National Park Archaeologist, that some of the remains might be of Neolithic date. This suggestion is based in particular on the unusual morphology of the outer enclosure and its relationship to the natural topography, and more generally on the recent identification of superficially similar Neolithic stone-built enclosures elsewhere in England.

## **2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL HISTORY**

---

The recent survey identified three probable archaeological excavation trenches, all sectioning the bank of the outer enclosure, but no published account of any such investigation has been published. The placement and form of the trenches would suggest a mid-twentieth century date. In the absence of excavated evidence, the interpretation of the date and function of the enclosures continues to rely entirely on the morphology of the visible remains.

A map of the County at a scale of one inch to one mile, surveyed in 1827-8 (Greenwood and Greenwood 1828), has a schematic depiction of the hillfort, but the first useful depiction of the site is a plan made by HH MacLauchlan in 1858 at a scale of eight chains to one inch (NMR a). This shows the main elements of the hillfort, together with five hut circles and the largest cairn. Curiously, the Ordnance Survey one inch map published seven years later does not portray the fort, possibly because it would have obscured the symbol for the trigonometrical pillar which had been erected on the summit. The First and Second Edition 25-inch maps (respectively published 18 and 18) depict

George Jobey's survey borrowed heavily from the existing Ordnance Survey depictions (Jobey 1965, 35-6 and Figure 9).

Most recently, an analytical earthwork survey was carried out under the direction of Clive Waddington of Newcastle University Department of Archaeology (Waddington 1997a in press). This survey was able to record significant new details about the site, including evidence for the developmental sequence of the hillfort. A topographic survey illustrated the relationship of the enclosures to the natural topography. Waddington concludes that notwithstanding the uncertain relationship between the two enclosures, there is nothing to support the suggestion that any of the surviving remains may be of Neolithic origin, and that a broadly Iron Age date is on balance more likely.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

---

For terms and letters which appear in bold in the text, see RCHME earthwork plan surveyed at 1:1000 scale (Figure 2) and interpretative plan (Figure 3).

#### Topography

The topography of the hilltop is quite variable, restricting lines of sight within the outer enclosure in particular. The granite boss which forms the central summit outcrops on the north and north-west, intermittently forming cliffs between 2m and 5m high. At the foot of the granite boss, the terrain within the outer enclosure undulates erratically, before dropping away more abruptly on a line which for the most part corresponds approximately to the course of the enclosure wall. The convex profile of the northern side of the hill means that the lower slopes are seldom visible beyond a distance of *c.* 100m from the crest. On the east, the ground slopes in a more gentle and regular incline and there are fewer rock outcrops. The Homilheugh ravine, which is some 120m wide and 35m deep (Waddington 1997a in press), cuts straight through the southern side of the hilltop, dividing it from the main massif. MacLauchlan's survey annotates the ravine as 'Fire Burn', but there is no evidence that a stream has flowed through it since the last Ice Age, when it was probably formed as a sub-glacial melt-water channel. The northern side of the ravine (ie adjacent to the site) is extremely steep, reaching an angle of 70° in places. This side of the ravine, and parts of its base, are covered with scree.

#### The hillfort

The perimeter of the hillfort describes roughly a horse-shoe shape, with its open end to the south almost abutting the edge of the Homilheugh ravine. The overall area enclosed is *c.* 1.5ha (acres), measuring some 110m both east - west and north - south. A second line of rampart, which seems to be a later addition (Waddington 1997a in press, *contra* Jobey 1965, Figure 9), diverges from the inner side of the northern end of the outer rampart and passes close to the summit on the east side. The area enclosed within this inner rampart is reduced to 0.5ha (acres). Many of the stones used in the construction of the hillfort seem to have been deliberately split into blocks (Waddington 1997a in press), although it is likely that unweathered scree was also used. With the exception of some of the larger facing stones, all the blocks are of portable size. As a result, there has been considerable robbing of the stone for other structures. In addition to the smaller enclosures around the hilltop and the large cairn on the summit, which are described below, nine sub-circular grouse-butts have been constructed on top of the ramparts, with two more in the interior. These are between 3m and 6m in diameter and stand to between 0.5m and 1.5m high. The unweathered condition of the stones confirms that they are all of recent date. Together with the stone-robbing which has taken place in order to construct the cairn on the summit, these have inflicted considerable damage to the earlier remains.

The 'outer rampart' at first sight appears to be a single broad bank of stone 10m wide on average, but on close inspection there is good evidence that it originally comprised a double stone wall. It is possible that it was a single wall with a double outer face, as at Brough Law in the Ingram Valley (NGR; Jobey 1965, Figure 11), but this seems unlikely given the greater breadth of the rampart as a whole. The outer faces of both walls can be traced intermittently and, where the faces themselves are absent, their courses are marked by steeper scarps in the rubble spread. Aerial photographs taken



# HUMBLETON HILL, NORTHUMBERLAND



Figure 2. RCHME earthwork plan, surveyed at 1:1000 scale

in low-light conditions also reveal the extent of the double wall (ref). In two of the gaps on the eastern side where footpaths have been cleared through the rampart, the outer edges of both walls are exposed. The inner edges can only rarely be traced, but it seems probable that the inner wall was generally between 3m and 4m wide at the base, and that the outer was slightly narrower (and presumably much lower). At least some of the stone for the eastern stretch of the rampart appears to have been obtained from a discontinuous series of small quarry scoops immediately behind the inner wall. Around the northern to north-western sector of the hillfort, there seems to have been only a single wall (the inner); this is not remarkable given that here the natural scarp and granite outcrops are much higher and almost sheer in places, apparently in part due to quarrying, as Waddington suggests.

One certain original entrance through the outer rampart (a) is located close to the south-eastern terminal, some 30m from the edge of the Homilheugh ravine. The squared terminals of the bank on both sides of the entrance are defined by a series of much larger granite blocks and boulders, including a few earth-fast orthostats, leaving a gap 1.5m wide.

In 1976, Ordnance Survey field investigation first recorded a second possible entrance (b) at the south-western corner of the hillfort (NMR b). The entrance is quite unusual, formed by a simple gap between the rampart terminal and the edge of the ravine, but apparently with a quite complex outwork. Waddington has interpreted this as the main entrance into the hillfort, pointing out that the location at the edge of the ravine constricts the approach, adding to the strength of the defences. The outwork comprises a well-defined earth and stone bank surrounding a level platform at the foot of the main rampart to the north of the entrance, and a length of bank to the south, along the edge of the ravine. Both banks are 1.0m high externally, with steep outer faces, and both are overgrown with grass. They are very different from the main ramparts in their crisp appearance, and may be a later modification. Indeed, the embanked platform on the northern side of the entrance is not certainly a rampart, and may have supported some form of structure.

The inner rampart of the hillfort runs parallel to the outer, at a distance of 25m, turning slightly to join it at the northern tip of the perimeter (not as shown on Jobey's 1965 plan). Like the outer rampart, it survives generally as a bank of loose portable stones, 9.5m wide on average and up to 1.0m high. As MacLauchlan first observed, at the northernmost end of the bank, both the inner and outer faces of an original single wall survive well for a distance of 8.5m, the outer face standing six courses high (1.0m). At this point, the width of the rampart was originally *c.*3.5m. As Waddington has pointed out, the angle change between the two ramparts at this point would suggest that the inner rampart is a later addition. However, the 'dog-leg' would also seem partly to result from the deliberate slighting of almost the whole northern section of the rampart (as MacLauchlan first suggested), the only exception being the short section of remarkably well-preserved walling. The original inner face of the wall, which continues the alignment of the well-preserved stretch with only a slight angle change, survives as a discontinuous line of earth-fast orthostats, some 3m behind the present rear edge of the stony bank. The original outer face also survives intermittently as short alignments of larger stones, or more usually as a steeper fall, towards the rear of the present bank of tumbled stones.

The probable entrance through the inner rampart (c) has been distorted considerably by the course of the present footpath: the gap is now m wide, and the precise positions of the original terminals of the rampart on either side are unclear. The entrance is

off-set by some 50m to the north of the entrance (a) through the outer rampart, effectively creating a large 'hornwork'-like defence. The northern terminal shows some evidence of having been more complex, with a possible 'guard chamber' set into the thickness of the wall. This is obscured by tumbled stones, and is partly overlain by a grouse-butt, whose western side incorporates a short well-preserved section of the outer wall face. The chamber can be identified as a continuous line of earth-fast stones, representing the lowest course of a wall. The line describes a right-angled corner, presumably defining two sides of a room at least 2m square. Though the original rampart terminals are unclear, the presence of this feature would seem to confirm that the gap is an original entrance, and not simply later damage.

The majority of the certain and possible house platforms lie within the hillfort, and may well be contemporary with it. Most have been recorded by previous fieldwork. Twenty circular platforms, ranging between 4m and 8m in diameter, were recorded within the inner rampart. They are usually defined by a semi-circular scoop into the natural slope uphill, with a corresponding semi-circular terrace or apron of spoil downhill. To the north of the cairn, a circular 'ring-groove', (a double line of earth-fast stones, which would have supported timber uprights), is almost entirely overlain by a grouse-butt. Only a short arc of the ring-groove itself can be seen, but within the grouse-butt two flat, worn stones may be part of the flooring of the original building.

Up to eight more circular platforms lie in the space between the inner and outer ramparts, mostly abutting the edges of the ramparts. Some appear to have re-used shallow rock-cut quarries, which had presumably provided material for the construction of the ramparts. These are generally slightly smaller in diameter than those inside the inner rampart.

## **The outer enclosure**

The course of the outer enclosure follows the natural break of slope for most of its length. The only significant exception is the eastern side, which turns and ascends the slope obliquely to join the outer rampart of the hillfort. However, the undulating nature of the topography in certain places around the circuit forces short lengths of the wall to climb and descend quite steep gradients. The convex slope on the northern side of the hill means that the perimeter actually follows a 'false crest', and visibility across the area immediately downslope is therefore limited to between 50m and 100m. Due to its relation to the natural topography, the plan of the enclosure describes an irregular polygon, with maximum dimensions of 290m east - west and 210m north - south, and an area of ha (acres). On the south, the perimeter is defined mostly by the edge of the Homilheugh ravine. The bank can be traced for c.60m on the north-west, but the evidence that it continued along the whole length of the edge, as Waddington's survey suggests, is slight.

The RCHME survey recorded evidence for three possible excavation trenches in close proximity, sectioning the bank on the northern side of the hill. In each case, the earth obscuring the orthostats which form the outer face of the wall has been removed, and the core of smaller granite fragments has been exposed.

The construction technique of much of the perimeter of the outer enclosure differs markedly from that of the hillfort. Along the north-western side, it seems to be formed predominantly by an earth and stone bank rather than a stone wall, on average 5.0m wide but only 0.7m high externally. A series of shallow quarry hollows along

the interior of the bank may have provided some of the material. In contrast to the hillfort, the facing stones, of which relatively few are visible, and most of the other stones in the bank itself, are weathered and rounded, and do not appear to have been obtained by splitting or quarrying. There are numerous small, shallow depressions (not surveyed) within the outer enclosure, which probably represent stone extraction pits; these may be the source of some of the rounded stones. The size of the enclosure bank suggests that it may not even have formed a wall as such, but perhaps consolidated the footings of some form of timber superstructure.

In contrast, the eastern end of the wall has much in common with the hillfort, as both the Ordnance Survey field investigators and Waddington have pointed out. Many of the facing stones survive *in situ*, indicating a wall between 2.5m and 3.5m wide at the base. They are mostly large quarried blocks (in some cases more than 1.0m square), and the core of the wall is formed almost entirely with smaller fragments of stone. Over a distance of c.35m where the wall ascends the steep slope towards the outer rampart of the hillfort, its structure appears more complex. Within the core of the wall, which has been heavily robbed, at least five cross-divisions are evident, each formed by a line of larger stones, similar in size to the facing stones. The divisions are regularly spaced at intervals of 3.0m, suggesting that the wall may have ascended the steeper gradient in a series of steps.

As Waddington has pointed out, the lowest pair of cross-divisions (**d**), spaced only 1.2m apart, seem to define external faces, suggesting the location of a possible narrow entrance. Two more gaps, a short distance to the north, and a number of other partial breaches elsewhere around the perimeter, seem to result from clearance for tracks of more recent date, some of which may be associated with the smaller enclosures described below. The most convincing original entrance (**e**) lies at the south-western corner of the enclosure, immediately adjacent to the edge of the Homilheugh ravine. The entrance, which is 4.0m wide, is defined by series of larger stones set on edge; a fallen 'gatepost' stone lies adjacent to the outside of the southern terminal. A 25m length of the bank to the north of the entrance and a slightly shorter stretch to the east have apparently been enlarged at some stage: the bank increases abruptly to 1.5m in height externally and 8.0m in width, and the internal quarry hollow broadens to 5.0m. Additional material seems to have been obtained by cutting into the back of the bank, creating extra height, at the expense of width.

It has been suggested that there may have been towers or bastions at two points along the northern perimeter of the enclosure (Waddington 1997a in press). The RCHME survey suggests that both these structures are more likely to be later enclosures built against and partially overlying the bank of the outer enclosure.

The outer enclosure has been referred to as an 'annexe' (eg Jobey 1965), implying it to be a later addition to the hillfort. The stratigraphic relationship between the outer enclosure and the hillfort remains somewhat uncertain, because the final 15m of the outer enclosure have been almost entirely robbed out. As Waddington has pointed out, the plan relationship between the alignments of the two features must indicate that the eastern side of the outer enclosure post-dates the hillfort. However, there is slight evidence that the eastern side of the enclosure, which is the only section of the perimeter which deviates significantly from the natural break of slope, may not be its original course. A possible continuation (**f**) along the contours is apparent on aerial photographs taken in low-light conditions. On the ground, a steep stony scarp some 50m long was recorded; two quarry hollows to its rear and a small number of possible

facing stones also suggest it to be artificial. If the enclosure originally continued along this line, its area would have been *c.* ha ( acres).

In addition, the robbing of the end of the outer enclosure immediately adjacent to the hillfort suggests that there may have been further phases in the sequence of development. The rampart of the hillfort does not seem to have been robbed nearly as heavily as the terminal of the outer enclosure, hinting that the latter may have been used as a source of construction material for a re-modelling of the hillfort defences, at some point after the addition of this section of the outer enclosure. While it is possible that the outer enclosure was robbed to gain material for the nearby small enclosures (see below), the apparently selective and intensive robbing of the short section of wall adjacent to the hillfort rampart suggests a more deliberate purpose. Robbing for field walls and buildings in the valley bottom seems improbable, given that there is plenty of loose stone available around the lower slopes of the hill, particularly in the bottom of the Homilheugh ravine.

On the northern side of the hill, the recent survey identified faint traces of what may be later prehistoric 'cord rig' cultivation, extending on an approximately west to east axis within the outer enclosure. The evidence was considered too slight to record on the ground, and from the air.... The ground in this area has almost certainly been cleared of stones (though perhaps to build the enclosure), and has a smoothed appearance suggestive of agriculture.

There are several possible house platforms in the outer enclosure, although few are as well defined as those within the hillfort. A double circular, or perhaps sub-rectangular, house platform is apparently associated with the largest of the small enclosures described below. Seven more circular platforms were identified, one with a ring-groove. Three deeper, more sub-rectangular scoops, with a pronounced embankment downhill, which have previously been interpreted as hut scoops, are of uncertain function. A similar scoop, noted outside the survey area on the south-eastern flank of the hill, stratigraphically post-dates a cultivation terrace. There are at least six such terraces in proximity to each other, which by their form and alignment seem to be contemporary with Medieval strip cultivation on the lower slopes. A relatively recent date would be consistent with the fairly sharp profiles of two of the three scoops on the hilltop.

## **Small enclosures**

MacLauchlan, Jobey and Waddington have all recorded a number of small enclosures abutting the inner and outer sides of the hillfort ramparts, together with a larger one built against the north-eastern angle of the outer enclosure. The RCHME survey has identified at least eight more such enclosures, including three along the course of the outer enclosure and two which lie in isolation a short distance to the east of the outer enclosure. The features recorded by Jobey on the north-western flank of the hill were not surveyed in detail, but a brief investigation indicated that they are more numerous and extensive than his published plan suggests. As has been noted by previous investigators, in every instance where a stratigraphic relationship can be detected, the construction of the small enclosures clearly post-dates the disuse of both the hillfort and outer enclosure (Jobey 1965; Waddington 1997a in press). They are interpreted as functioning as pastoral enclosures, perhaps shielings or associated pens for livestock. However, most are quite dis-similar from typical rectangular shielings and their associated pen enclosures (RCHME 1970), and the steep gradient on which

many lie is also unusual. All are probably of Medieval or later date, but differential robbing indicates that some originated later, or continued in use longer, than others.

All but the largest of the enclosures around the perimeters of the hillfort and outer enclosure are sub-rectangular, between 25m<sup>2</sup> and 160m<sup>2</sup> in area. Formal walling is only apparent in two cases, the remainder comprising loosely structured bands of stone. This may indicate that the 'walls' were merely footings for timber or furze barriers. The largest such enclosure occupies the north-eastern angle of the outer enclosure, re-using a 40m long stretch of the earlier bank. The northern end appears to have been re-modelled at least once, at its largest extent enclosing an area of *c.* ha (acres). It seems to be associated with the double or sub-rectangular house platform mentioned above, which lies immediately to the north-west. Another relatively large enclosure occupies the plateau to the west of the central granite boss. This seems to be associated with the more carefully constructed track which obliquely ascends the steep northern stretch of the hillfort rampart. The path is terraced and reveted, and its surface is deliberately packed with fist-sized and smaller chips of granite.

## **Cairn**

A circular cairn 9.0m in diameter and 2.0m high stands on the summit of the hill. Superficially, this appears to have been constructed entirely using stone robbed from the hillfort, although modern additions may mask an earlier feature. MacLauchlan portrayed it on his survey of 1858, and suggested it to be a beacon, but there is little evidence to support this proposal, other than the prominent and strategic position of the hilltop.

## 4. INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

The dating of the remains on Humbleton Hill is fundamental to further discussion of their function. Information from the excavations which appear to have taken place on the outer enclosure is lacking, and there are no known stray finds from the immediate vicinity. The surrounding area is rich in archaeological remains of all periods, and therefore provides circumstantial evidence which could effectively be used to support virtually any date. The prominent location in the landscape, overlooking a fertile river plain, is certainly typical of upland Neolithic enclosures in general. That the monument is centred around an eye-catching natural outcrop is particularly reminiscent of the so-called ‘tor enclosures’ of Devon and Cornwall. However, the location could equally be said to be typical of Iron Age hillforts and many Medieval fortifications. The hillfort and outer enclosure clearly pre-date the small enclosures, but this relationship is not particularly helpful, given that the latter could be of late Medieval or even later date. The dating of all the features must therefore rely at present upon their plan and constructional morphology, both of which are complicated by the apparent re-use and remodelling which have taken place.

Although it is not impossible that the hillfort is of Early Medieval date - a hypothesis which successive field investigators have considered - an Iron Age, or at least later prehistoric origin, seems more likely. In plan, the site has much in common with the group of ‘defended enclosures’ or ‘citadels’ in the border region, as defined by Feachem (1966, 82-5). Although a post-Roman date has been postulated for these on the basis of their unusual form (RCAHMS 1956), only at Dundurn in Perthshire and Dunadd in Argyll has an Early Medieval presence been proven by excavation. Recent investigations at Dunadd have supported Feachem’s assertion that the Medieval occupation represents re-use of hillforts of Early Iron Age origin (Feachem 1966, 85). Comparable re-occupation is well-attested in Wales and the South West of England (Fowler 1971, Figure 39). Jobey too rejected the possibility of a Medieval origin, concluding that ‘There would seem to be no compelling reason to regard it

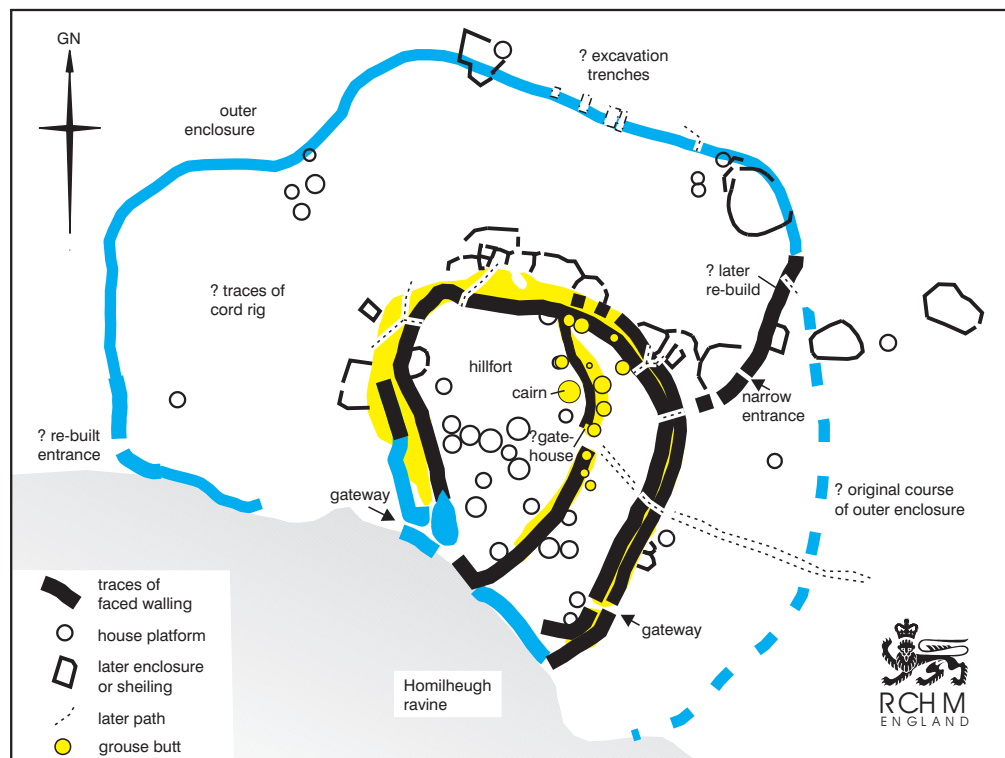


Figure 3.  
RCHME  
interpretative plan

[the hillfort] as a post-Roman structure' (Jobey 1965, 36), and, most recently, Waddington has reached the same conclusion. Some aspects of the plan are similar to other hillforts in The Cheviots, which have not been classed as being 'citadel'-like and are unquestionably of Iron Age date. Harehaugh in Upper Coquetdale (NY 969 998) is comparable in the way in which an apparent entrance is formed by the termination rampart terminates at a slight distance from the edge of the natural scarp (Waddington 1997b in press). Nearby Yeavinger Bell (NT 928 293), Brough Law in the Ingram Valley (NGR) and Great Hetha, near Hethpool (NGR) all have second lines of rampart with staggered entrances, forming defences similar to the 'hornwork'-like plan of the fort on Humbleton Hill. The technique of wall construction is also similar to most of these stone-built hillforts, and to sites in southern Scotland, such as The Dunion, in Roxburghshire, where excavation has suggested a Middle Iron Age date (Rideout 1992). The concentration of circular house platforms and ring-groove structures in the interior of the hillfort is also consistent with a Bronze Age or Iron Age origin. They are similar to examples found throughout the Cheviots, a small sample of which have been dated by excavation (for summaries, see Jobey 1965; Gates 1983; Burgess 1984). Although Romano-British circular houses are also well-attested (Jobey 1964), they are generally distinguished by faced stone walls rather than the low banks evident on Humbleton Hill.

The date of the outer enclosure remains uncertain. Waddington has pointed out that the plan of the site, as recorded by Hogg and his own fieldwork, would indicate that the construction of the outer enclosure post-dates the hillfort. However, if the anomalous eastern section of the outer enclosure indeed results from a later modification, and the perimeter originally continued along the line of the earthwork (f) identified by the RCHME survey, the stratigraphic relationship between the two enclosures remains unproven. The very different techniques evident in the construction of the hillfort ramparts and the the outer enclosure bank, and their use of different sources of stone, may well indicate that they date to different periods, though clearly their intended function may also account for the constructional differences. Feachem (1966) observes that the term 'citadel' may be inappropriate to describe the central circuit of similar sites. He argues that all the Scottish examples which could be described as such seem to have been constructed at a later date than the larger enclosures with which they are apparently associated. Taken in isolation, the outer enclosure is superficially similar in plan to Neolithic enclosures such as Carn Brea in Cornwall (SW 684 408) and Gardom's Edge in the Peak District (SK 275 734), though the latter may in fact prove to be of Early Bronze Age date. It may well be an example of a Bronze Age 'irregular enclosure' as defined by Burgess (1984, Figure 8.5), though the dating of these sites also relies on the morphology of the surface remains.

In terms of the construction technique of the low earth and stone bank, the use of unworked stones, apparently cleared from the surface, is a feature of many of the proven and putative Neolithic enclosures in south-western England, including Carn Brea, and may indicate a relatively early date. The relationship of the outer enclosure to the possible 'cord rig' cultivation may be of significance, since on the very tenuous evidence at present available, the agriculture would seem to be delimited by the bank, suggesting the enclosure to be Iron Age or earlier.

The recent survey supports Waddington's suggestion that the present appearance of the site as a whole owes much to Medieval and later activity. It is even possible that the putative re-alignment of the eastern end of the outer enclosure to join the hillfort is Medieval, with its stepped construction, represents Medieval remodelling.



However, similar cross-divisions within stone walls are a characteristic of certain hillforts assumed to be of Iron Age origin, such as Ingleborough in the Peak District (). Most of the small enclosures interpreted as shielings or similar stock pens could have originated in the Medieval period, through the summer transhumance of flocks from the lower-lying ground. Some may well have originated in, or continued in use into, the Post-Medieval period.

The recent survey has recorded further evidence in support of Waddington's suggestion that the site was military in function. The possible guard chamber adjacent to the staggered entrance through the inner rampart is paralleled at numerous other Iron Age stone-built hillforts (examples in Hogg 1975; Cunliffe 1994). The addition of the inner rampart would clearly have fortified the entrance, although the outer enclosure could then also have served as a corral for livestock (Jobey 1965, 43). In passing, it is worth noting that the strategic location of the hilltop, and its visually striking form, may have had attractions beyond the purely military. The dramatic topographic setting is typical of the sort of 'landmark' locations which Tilley (1994) has argued were deliberately chosen for the construction of various types of prehistoric monument.

In contrast to the evident strength of the hillfort, the false-crest siting of much of the outer enclosure makes it poorly suited for defence. While the regular incline on the south-eastern side of the hill offers good visibility, the convex profile of the northern and western slopes leaves much of the lower slopes invisible from the course of the enclosure and creates several blind-spots within 50m. Furthermore, as Waddington observes, the great extent of the outer enclosure would make it extremely difficult to defend the entire perimeter effectively.

Of considerable interest in the context of defence is the probable re-fortification of the entrance (e) through the western side of the outer enclosure, and the possibility that the outworks associated with the entrance (b) on the same side of the hillfort may also be later additions. The apparent deliberate slighting of a large section of the inner rampart would also seem to represent a military act. It is tempting to link all these modifications with the documented battle which took place on the north-western slopes of Humbleton Hill in 1402 (Graham 1988, 22-4). According to the *Annales Henrici*, the Scottish force commanded by Douglas, which numbered more than 10,000, initially took up a strong position on Humbleton Hill. However, when they were forced to descend to repulse a relatively small force of archers, the main English and Welsh force, led by Harry 'Hotspur' Percy, attacked from Harehope Hill, inflicting heavy casualties and quickly winning a decisive victory. The use of an earlier fortification by the Scots is not mentioned specifically in the account, but it would seem quite conceivable for them to have done so. The number of Scottish soldiers involved may well have been exaggerated in the English account of the battle, but would certainly seem to have been large enough for them to have carried out substantial re-modelling of the pre-existing earthworks. The slighting of the inner rampart of the hillfort might have been carried out by the English in the aftermath of the battle. However, many similar conflicts have almost certainly gone unrecorded in the turbulent history (and prehistory) of the border region, and it is perhaps misleading to single out the single documented case.

## **5. SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The archaeological survey was carried out by Alastair Oswald of RCHME's Cambridge Office, with Amy Lax and Colin Lofthouse of the Newcastle office. Most of the major archaeological features, together with control points and Ordnance Survey hard detail, were surveyed using a Wild TC1610 Electronic Theodolite with integral EDM, from a traverse of five stations around the summit. Data was captured on a Wild GRM 10 Rec Module and plotted via computer at 1:1000 scale on a Hewlett Packard Designjet 750 plotter. Details of the earthwork plan were subsequently supplied with tapes using normal graphical methods. Contours were generated from the EDM data using Key Terra-Firma software, but are accurate only in relation to the value of the Ordnance Survey spot height on the summit.

The earthwork plan and CAD-based drawings were prepared by Alastair Oswald, with assistance from Trevor Pearson. The report was researched and written by Alastair Oswald and edited by Peter Topping.

RCHME would like to thank the landowner, Mr Jim Short, for giving permission to carry out the fieldwork, and Mr Paul Frodsham, Archaeologist for Northumberland National Park. In particular, RCHME is grateful to Clive Waddington of Newcastle University for making available the results of his own survey, and commenting on the draft text of this report.

The site archive has been deposited in the National Monuments Record, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ (SU 90 NW 2).

Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England.

## 6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Burgess C 1984 'The prehistoric settlement of Northumberland: a speculative survey' in R Miket and C Burgess (eds) *Between and Beyond the Walls* Edinburgh, John Donald

Cunliffe BW 1994 *Iron Age Communities in Britain* [third edition] London, Routledge & Kegan Paul

Feachem RW 1966 'The Hill-forts of Northern Britain' in ALF Rivet (ed) *The Iron Age in Northern Britain*, 59-88 Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press

Fowler PJ 1971 'Hillforts, AD 400-700' in M Jesson and D Hill (eds) *The Iron Age and its Hill-forts* Southampton, Southampton University Archaeological Society

Gates T 1983 'Unenclosed settlements in Northumberland' in JC Chapman and HC Mytum (eds) *Settlement in North Britain 1000BC -AD1000* British Archaeological Reports [British Series] 118, 103-48

Graham F 1988 *Famous Northern Battles* Rothbury, Butler & Butler

Greenwood C & Greenwood J 1828 *Map of the County of Northumberland from an actual survey made in the years 1827 & 1828* London, Greenwood & Co.

Hogg AHA 1975 *Hill-Forts of Britain* London, Hart-Davis, MacGibbon

Jobey G 1964 'Enclosed stone built settlements in North Northumberland' *Archaeologia Aeliana* [4th series] 42,

1965 'Hillforts and settlements in Northumberland' *Archaeologia Aeliana* [4th series] 43, 21-64

Lynn F 1907 'Yeavinger Bell, Harehope Fort and Humbleton Hill' *History of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club* 19 (1903-5), 158-9

NMR a Photographic copy of plan of Humbleton Heugh dated August 1858. Figure 20 (page 20) in HH MacLauchlan's 1867 'Additional notes to the memoir on Roman roads and other remains in Northumberland'. Negative number 105/Y/25a; original held in private collection of the Duke of Northumberland (copyright reserved).

b Ordnance Survey field observation on NT 92 NE 56 03-SEP-1976

Ordnance Survey

Ordnance Survey 1865 1-inch scale survey sheet 110

18 First Edition 25-inch sheet

18 Second Edition 25-inch sheet

RCAHMS 1956 *An Inventory of the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Roxburghshire* Volume II Edinburgh, HMSO

RCHME 1970 *Shielings and Bastles* London, HMSO

Rideout JS 1992 'The Dunion, Roxburgh, Borders' in JS Rideout, OA Owen and E Halpin (eds) *Hillforts of southern Scotland* Historic Scotland Monograph 1 Edinburgh, AOC publications

Tilley C 1994 *A Phenomenology of Landscape* Oxford, Berg

Waddington C 1997a (in press) 'Humbleton Hill hillfort survey' *Northern Archaeology* 15

1997b (in press) 'Survey and excavation at Harehaugh hillfort and possible Neolithic enclosure' *Northern Archaeology* 15