

BROUGHAM CASTLE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY REPORT
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RCHME Newcastle

THE ROMAN FORT AND LATER EARTHWORKS AT BROUGHAM CASTLE

The remains of the Roman fort at Brougham Castle, identified as BROCAVUM (Rivet and Smith, 1979, 283-4), are situated immediately below the confluence of the Eamont and the Lowther, at a point where the enlarged river is crossed by the Roman road which runs North to Carlisle and south-eastwards via the Stainmore Pass to York. The strategic importance of this position was later recognised by the Normans who built a keep immediately to the North of the fort; this forms the nucleus of Brougham Castle, now in the care of English Heritage. The castle is built on the edge of a short, steep slope, about 5.5m above the river and overlooking the crossing, whereas the fort is set back from the river-cliff some 45m, and occupies a level site at the extreme eastern side of a large field under permanent pasture. There has been an extensive external settlement associated with the fort, but nothing of it survives above ground. The RCHME survey at 1\500 scale was therefore restricted to the earthworks of the Roman fort, and those of Brougham Castle. The walls of the castle have been transferred onto the plan from a reduction of the detailed survey at 1\100 scale of 1985 (Ploughman Craven and Associates), which has been checked on the ground and simplified.

The Fort

No archaeological excavations are known to have taken place at the fort itself. Such disturbance that can be seen on the ground seems to be a result of robbing or random digging with one possible exception (at A, discussed later). Birley (1932, 124-39) has documented the antiquarian interest in the fort since the time of Leland in the early sixteenth century. Leland noted the finds, in the plough soil somewhere near the castle, of many square stones 'tokens of old buildings', but even then there were no indications that this was the site of a Roman fort. Stukeley visited in 1725 and described the fort as a 'square plot' on the South side of Brougham Castle; he described a broad ditch round it, with the track of the Roman wall visible on the edge of the 'vallum'.

Despite much later disturbance, the fort is in comparatively good condition, although on the northern side the position of the rampart and ditch are obscured. On the West, South and East sides however, the defences are better-preserved, surviving for the most part as a turf-covered bank separated by a berm from a broad, outer ditch, 10m-14m wide. Preservation is best on the West and along the western part of the south side; here the outer slopes of the bank are quite sharp, up to 0.9m high, whereas the inner scarp, where it is possible to identify it, is shallow, achieving a maximum height of 0.7m. The bank is traceable around the West, South and part of the East sides as far as a disturbed area directly opposite the presumed site of the West gate. To the North of this point, the remains of the rampart are reduced to a barely discernible outward-facing scarp, ending on an old fence-line, formerly the boundary of an orchard still containing some trees.

The internal scarp of the ditch in the West and South-West is up to

1.4m deep and the external scarp is 1.1m deep; the ditch is somewhat marshy at the south-western corner, probably indicating better organic preservation there. On the West its outer lip appears to have suffered some damage by the incursion of broad ridge-and-furrow; this cultivation is very abraded and difficult to interpret on the ground, but is more clearly visible on air photographs (CUCAP BE\93, 94 and 95). For most of the southern side the ditch is reduced in depth to less than 1.0m, and remains shallow along the eastern side before fading just to the South of the probable site of the East gate.

The berm between the bank and the ditch is a fairly regular feature around the western part of the periphery, becoming rather scalloped and less pronounced around the remainder of the South and East sides. This represents the track of the Roman wall noted by Stukeley; it appears to have been completely robbed out and nothing survives of any wall fabric above ground.

The western defences now end abruptly at the north end, close to the south-western corner of a rectangular enclosure which lies between the visible remains of the fort and the castle moat (see below); the eastern rampart fades just to the South of the walled garden of Castle Farm. The presence of the enclosure has given rise to conjecture concerning the position of the northern defences, and therefore the size and shape of the fort. Birley (1932, 139) has suggested that the northern ditch of the Roman fort is now occupied in part by the moat of Brougham Castle. He cited as evidence the large quantity of Roman pottery found in the castle moat when it was cleaned out by the Office of Works in about 1930. This would indicate dimensions between the inner edges of the ditches of 175m from North to South by 115m transversely. Clark, on the other hand, stated (1883, 16) that the length was probably 198 yards (181m); this would place the northern defences on the very edge of the river cliff overlooking the River Eamont. Clark appears to have confused the approach to the castle, terraced into the river cliff, with the northern defences of the fort. Evidence on the ground suggests that both Birley and Clark are incorrect in their assumptions. The southern boundary of the rectangular enclosure at the northern end of the fort is now almost completely robbed-out, but it seems to overlie faint traces of a bank, between about 8m and 10m wide and up to 0.3m high, which has a barely discernible depression, up to 0.2m deep, to the North. On balance, it seems most likely that this broad bank represents the modified remains of the northern rampart of the fort. If so, the fort must have measured about 125m from North to South by 110m transversely, enclosing an area of 1.37 hectares (3.4 acres).

None of the gates survives in good condition, and indeed, only the western example can be identified on the ground with any certainty. Its approximate position can be seen as a break in the bank, which is now spread to 13m wide due to surface quarrying. There is no trace of a corresponding causeway over the ditch. On the southern side of the fort, both bank and ditch gradually reduce in height and depth towards the centre, but there is no distinct break in either feature to suggest the location of the South gate. However the RCHME air photo transcription (July, 1990) shows a road running from a central point on the southern side of the fort, and also from the West gate. A cut into the scarp just to the east of the position of the South gate is a later mutilation. The East gate was presumably directly opposite the western

one, but here the defences are very reduced; a recent metalled track, now grassed over, cuts through the bank and ditch at this point and much building debris has been dumped in the ditch on either side of the track. Of the North gate there is now no trace. The entrance causeways must have been removed (and perhaps the ditch recut) in the late Roman or post-Roman periods, but without excavation further certainty is impossible. The position of the West gate indicates that the fort faced North.

Extending from East to West across the interior of the fort are the reduced remains of ridge-and-furrow, best-preserved towards the northern side. Two of the furrows are deeper than the rest, suggesting that they have been re-cut as drains. The interior shows evidence, particularly around the western and southern sides, of later ground disturbance, probably stone-robbing. Only at A is there a pattern of robbing which may indicate the remains of a particular structure: in this case, a two-cell, rectangular building. Immediately to the North of the putative position of the East gate, a broad curving bank, 0.9m high, extends westwards then turns to the North-North-West to join the suggested line of the northern rampart of the fort. It has been greatly spread by the plough, and its purpose and its relationship to the fort and to the later enclosure is uncertain; one of the drains appears to cut through it.

The Earthworks of the Castle

The castle has been constructed on a spur of the low river-cliff jutting into the floodplain, and this provides a natural defence on the North and on the northern part of the West side; the cliff has undoubtedly been artificially steepened, notably on the West. The North wall of the inner and outer gatehouses, added to the keep in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth-centuries, springs from a point part of the way down the natural scarp. The outer gate is approached from the East by a terrace, cut into the river-cliff, about 4m wide and some 2m below the crest. A causeway, 11m wide, crosses the moat between the river-cliff to the north and a stone revetment to the moat on the south side. Clark's plan (1883, 18), and the OS 1st edition 25-inch map of 1856-60, show the moat as an irregular, discontinuous feature, partly filled with water. Neither plan depicts the stone revetment; either the revetment dates from the cleaning out of the moat in the 1930s, a process which seems to have been very comprehensive, or it formed part of the northern boundary of the garden apparently constructed by Lady Anne Clifford (see below).

The moat now extends alongside the curtain wall, ending abruptly at a point where the river cliff approaches the defences. On the East side the moat is between 15m and 18m wide and 3.4m deep; the southern arm is of similar proportions for most of its length but at its south-western angle it deepens on its outer side to 4.0m. On the western side the scarps of the moat decrease to a height of 2.0m on the inside and 2.8m on the outside. A slight counterscarp around parts of the eastern and southern sides of the moat, 0.1m-0.2m high, may be an original feature or may possibly be a result of the 1930s cleaning process. The Tower of League, built at the south-western corner of the curtain wall, projects into the moat, so that at this point the base of the tower is only 1.1m above the bottom of the moat. This may indicate either that

the tower post-dates the moat and, by association, the curtain, or that the tower and curtain are contemporary and the moat is earlier. There must have been an enceinte wall contemporary with the Norman keep (Clark, 1883, 25), but the precise line of the early defences cannot be confirmed on the ground from topographical survey alone. The defences provided by the moat are supplemented on the West by an outer ditch with a counterscarp bank, formed by cutting into the natural scarp. This ditch descends from the summit of the river-cliff, where it is 3.3m deep, northwards onto the floodplain (marked B on plan), where the base of the ditch is 5.5m below the level of the base of the curtain wall. At this point the external scarp of the ditch is 1.2m high, and the counterscarp bank is up to 0.5m high.

An earthen causeway crosses the ditch towards its south end; it is revetted on the northern side by a discontinuous line of stones, up to 0.3m high, and at its base a sluggish spring issues and drains down the ditch. On the flood-plain the ditch merges with former natural water-courses approaching from the west; here the counterscarp bank disappears, and it is difficult to determine to what extent the depression to the North of this point is natural or man-made. To the North-West of the north-western angle of the curtain, this feature appears to turn East for a short distance as if to run along the northern side of the castle at the base of the river-cliff.

It is unclear why this outer ditch on the west side was constructed; this sector is not particularly vulnerable and there is adequate defence here in the form of the inner moat and the river-cliff. There is no evidence on the ground for it having continued around the South or East sides of the castle where the approach is the easiest. The inner moat is crossed in two places by stone-revetted causeways; one (C on plan) immediately West-North-West of the Tower of League, permits access by a dog-leg to the causeway over the outer ditch, and the other crosses the southern arm towards its eastern end (D on plan). These correspond with posterns inserted into the curtain at the time of Lady Anne Clifford in the third quarter of the seventeenth-century, when the defensive function of the castle was no longer of major significance. Lady Anne began the restoration of the castle, which was in poor condition, immediately after her return to the North in 1649, and converted it to a grand residence commensurate with her status (Williamson, 1922, 431-2).

The postern and causeway (D) provide direct access from the castle to the remains of the enclosure previously mentioned, situated between the castle and the Roman fort. This enclosure may be confidently identified as the garden known to have been created or re-established during the restorations undertaken by Lady Anne. It is bounded on the West side by a stone wall, 0.9m thick, part of which was exposed and consolidated during the cleaning out of the moat in the 1930s. At the North-West corner, it abuts the curtain of the castle. To the South of the moat as far as the south-west corner of the garden, the wall is partly buried beneath a low, turf-covered bank; this stands 0.1m high on the East side and 0.5m above a slight ditch to the West, itself 0.3m in maximum depth. The footings of the wall protrude intermittently through the bank for a further 4m East of this angle. Within the south-west angle is an arrangement of three stones, flush with the ground, which forms a short stretch of walling, 0.9m wide. This, together with a light scatter of stone and brick debris, almost

certainly represents the site of a structure, possibly a summer-house, built into the corner. The garden would have been bounded on the south side by a continuation of the wall visible at the south-west corner, as far as the present garden of Castle Farm, but it seems to have been removed almost completely. The construction of this wall and subsequent tree-planting must have been responsible for the slighting of the North defences of the fort; today the remains of the Roman rampart, which were probably re-used as a raised walk within the garden, are the more prominent feature. The OS 1st edition 25-inch map of 1856-60 depicts a rectangular building, about 7.5m by 4.0m, on the line of the southern wall some 3m West of the south-western angle of the farm garden; this has now disappeared. There is no trace of the East side of the seventeenth-century garden which may have extended as far as the modern road; its southern boundary has evidently determined the alignment of that of the present farm garden. Immediately to the West of the curator's cottage, as far as the South-East corner of the moat, the northern side of the garden is bounded by a bank, up to 0.5m high on the North side; no evidence of walling can be seen. The bank disappears close to the edge of the moat, and its course thereafter is unknown. It was probably destroyed when the moat was cleaned out.

Lady Anne's diary of January 31st 1676 notes work undertaken on a garden at Brougham Castle (Williamson, 1922, 271-2). Summerson (1990, 69-70) mentions a garden, apparently on the south-eastern side of the castle beyond the moat, the walls of which were repaired in 1671, and which employed a full-time gardener in the 1660s. Clarke (1789, 5) also mentions the repairs of 1671, and notes that afterwards (pre-1789) it was planted with trees; his small scale, schematic plan shows an L-shaped wooded area to the south of the castle and eastwards as far as the public road. Charlton (1985, 7, 11, and 15) has postulated an alternative function for causeway D. He suggests that the causeway represents the original entrance to the Norman castle, and that the Roman fort formed an outer ward of this earliest phase of the castle (cf Bowes). Evidence for this is very limited; certainly the absence of causeways across the Roman ditch at the South and West gates indicates recutting, but it is impossible to determine when or why this took place. Also, it appears that the castle and the fort are separate from each other, and not joined as Birley has suggested (1932, 139). The castle was partly demolished in 1691 after Lady Anne's death, when the stone, lead and timber were sold to Mr John Monkhouse and Mr Adderton, of Penrith (Clarke, 1789, 5). The OS 1st edition 25-inch map of 1859-60 shows that the garden was still a plantation, but no enclosing wall is marked, so presumably this had been removed by then. Today the area still contains several mature trees, and some recent planting has taken place, but numerous tree holes and considerable ground disturbance indicates that planting has been very much more intensive in the past.

From the south-western corner of the Tower of League, a wall, similar to that defining the west side of the garden, crosses the moat; it too was exposed during the cleaning out process. It is more or less aligned with the causeway over the outer ditch and, beyond that, with a turf-covered bank and ditch, which follows the upper edge of the river-cliff curving away to the South-West. Broad ridge-and-furrow approaches the bank at the edge of the cliff at an acute angle, and the impression gained is that the bank is later than the cultivation. All this may represent the wall of the park repaired by Lady Anne which, as

noted by Williamson (1922, 432), abutted the castle wall at one end, and at the other was joined to the garden (presumably opposite Castle Farm).

The site was surveyed at 1/500 scale using a Wild-Leitz T1000 electronic theodolite and DI1000 EDM for the control survey, and the archaeological detail was supplied by a combination of graphic methods and plane-tableing using a Wild RK1 self-reducing alidade.

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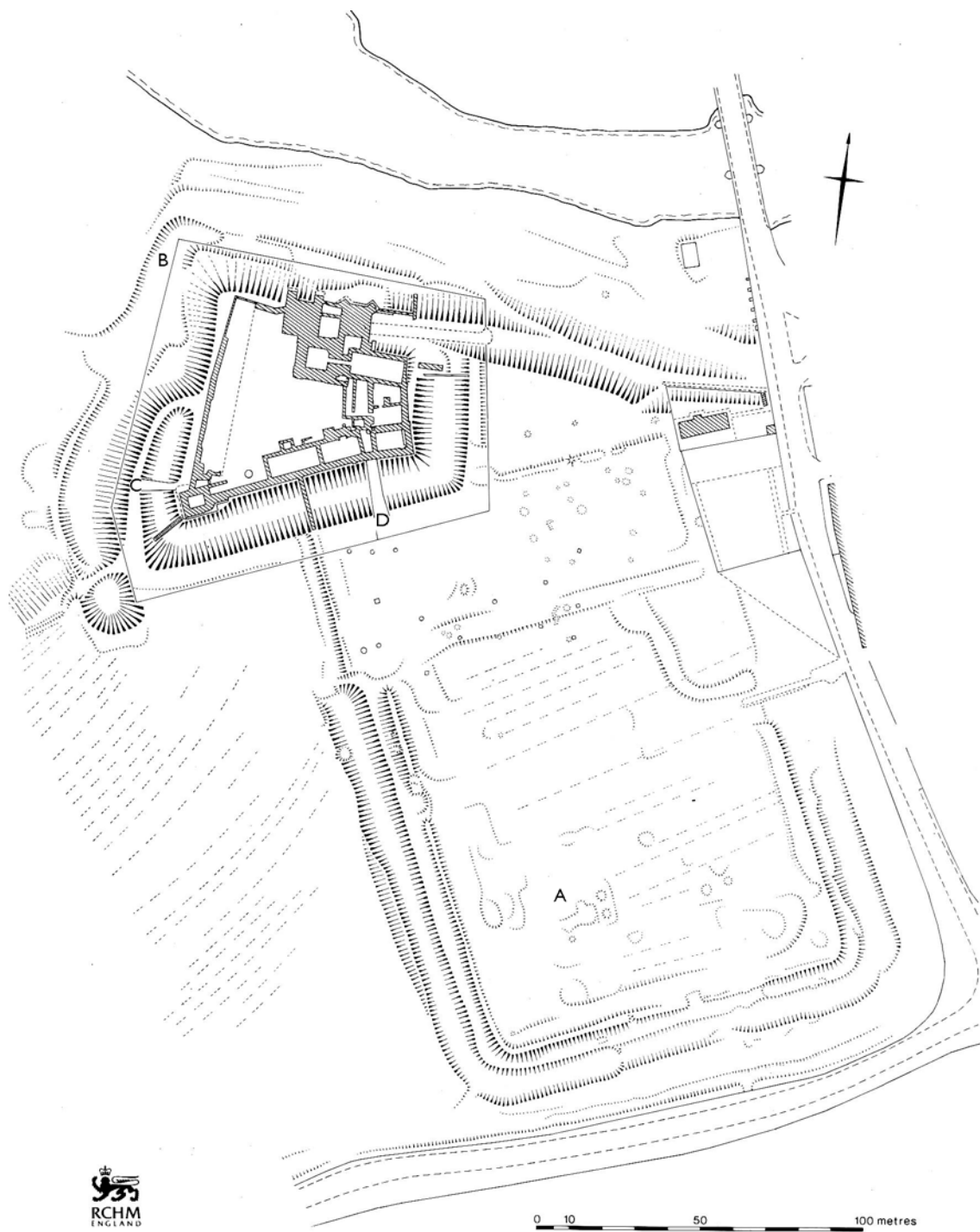
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Survey of Brougham Castle reduced from original at 1:500

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