



THE ROMAN FORTLET ON BARROCK FELL.

Oblique view looking South; Low Hesket beyond.

TO FACE P. 111.

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ART. XII.—*A Roman fortlet on Barrock Fell, near Low Heskett.* By R. G. COLLINGWOOD.

Read at Penrith, September 17th, 1930.

IN July, 1930, Wing-Commander G. S. M. Insall, V.C., M.C., whose services to the aerial photography of archaeological sites have done much towards perfecting this new and powerful instrument of research, discovered and photographed a small square double-ditched site close to the main (Roman) road from Penrith to Carlisle. Mr. O. G. S. Crawford, to whom he communicated the discovery, sent the photograph to Mr. R. E. Porter, who, with the help of our member Dr. W. Goodchild identified the site at a point about 220 yards east of the seventh milestone south of Carlisle and a quarter of a mile north of Low Heskett village. Potsherds picked up on this occasion made it clear that the remains were Roman, and arrangements were made with the owner, Lt.-Col. C. A. James, of Barrock Park, and the tenant, Mr. J. Watson, for a day's digging. This was carried out on Sept. 10th by a party consisting of Dr. Goodchild, Mr. R. E. Porter and the writer, with two workmen.

The remains are situated at about 300 feet above sea level on a narrow shelf of fairly level ground, about 40 yards wide, which lies on the hillside leading up from the road to Barrock Fell. To the east, the ground slopes up towards the summit of the fell, and in this direction the site commands no view and is tactically very weak. To the west, the ground falls rather sharply to the road, and beyond the road to the valley of the river Petteril, and there is an extensive view over the rolling Inglewood country. To north and south there is a good view along

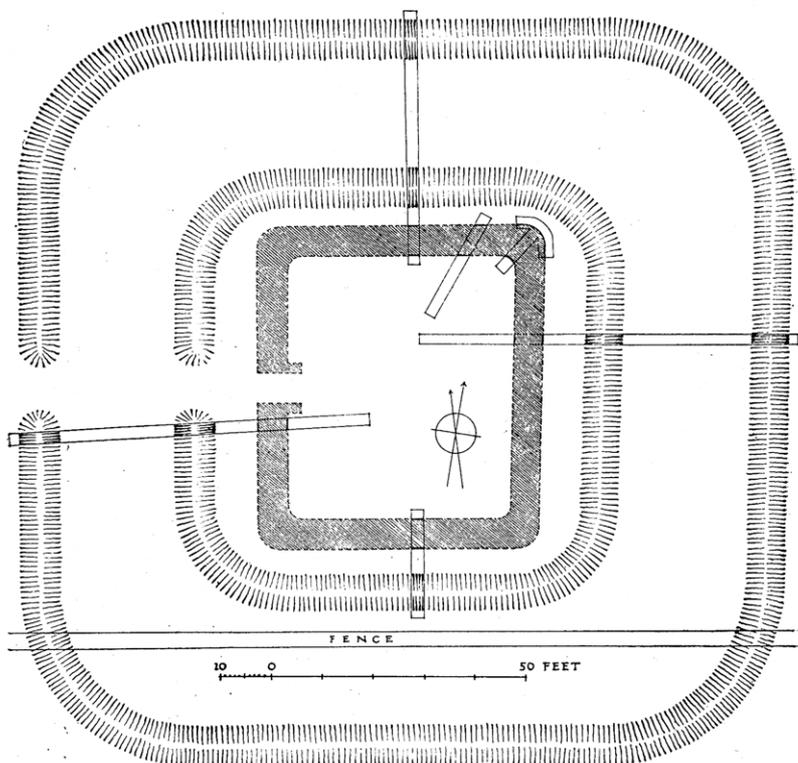
the Petteril valley. Northwards Carlisle is visible in clear weather, with Burnswark hill beyond; and even in thick weather Carleton Hill, nearly half-way to Carlisle, is well seen. Southwards the near view is bounded by the conical mass of Thieveside Hill, from whose summit the Roman fort at Old Penrith is in sight. Thus the new fortlet, from its position, appears as a halfway-house between Old Penrith and Carlisle, and suggests a chain of three signal-stations (Thieveside Hill, Barrock Fell, Carleton Hill) connecting these places. Quarrying has destroyed the top of Thieveside Hill, but Carleton Hill might repay examination. Our excavation, it will be seen, failed to bring the Barrock Fell site into any known class of Roman signal-stations, but its position forces us to believe that signalling was its primary purpose, for its tactical weakness would be intolerable in a post whose main function was defence.

The aeroplane-photographs at our disposal showed that the site was surrounded by two ditches having a considerable interval between them. We began by locating these ditches on the east and west of the fortlet, and discovering their size and shape. They are eight feet wide and three feet deep, and somewhat roughly dug; the customary square drainage-channel is absent. The aeroplane-photographs show that the inner ditch, at least, is interrupted by a causeway on the west or downhill side, towards the road; we accepted this as sufficient evidence that the entrance was (as one would naturally expect) on that side, and that there was only one. The distance between the ditches proved to be about 22-24 feet, or about 30-32 feet from centre to centre, these measurements being verified also on the north side; on the south, a modern fence has interfered with the ditch-system.

Inside the inner ditch, and separated from it by a berm varying from 3 to 7 feet wide, is the fort itself. The irregular width of the berm is due to the fact that, whereas

the ditches are laid out on a square, the fort is oblong, almost as if the ditches had been designed for a building other than that which was actually erected—a square tower, rather than a fort. This is built of stone and has walls six feet thick, with faces of large square stones and

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core of rubble in white mortar, laid on a foundation of clay and cobbles. There is no earthen bank behind the wall. The masonry is very rough and irregular. The material is local sandstone, which splits easily into good building-stones, four to six inches thick; but these stones have not been dressed with the chisel or even with the

mason's pick, but have been laid just as they came from the quarry. We cut six trenches across the wall, finding in general one course standing above the foundations; but we also saw a very large number of building-stones from the wall, some fallen into the inner ditch, and others, ploughed out of the ground, now lying in the adjacent fence-dike; and in no instance did we see a single tool-mark upon them. We examined the north-east corner, and found it rounded off externally to a radius of about four feet. We did not look for the entrance, but assumed it to be in the west opposite the entrance through the ditch shown by the aeroplane-photograph.

The interior of this fortlet was examined by digging down to virgin soil (about $2\frac{1}{2}$ to three feet down) in three short trenches. No well-defined floor-levels or structural remains of any kind were discovered. Had there been, inside the curtain-wall, a stone signal-tower of any magnitude, we should have come across its foundations, or at least the centre of the fort would have contained a mass of fallen stone; but nothing of the sort was found; the nearer we came to the centre, the fewer stones we met with. We inferred that there was no tower, and that the interior of the fort contained nothing but slight hutments whose remains our brief exploration could not be expected to reveal. Roofing-slates and nails, even, were absent.

Except for a tiny flake of flint and a scrap of window-glass, the finds consisted entirely of potsherds. There were 42 sherds of Huntcliff ware and six of other wares, three being softish gritty grey fabric, one gritty brown with grey core, one hard red fabric, and one a fragment of a buff mortarium with black grit. No rims other than Huntcliff were found. Huntcliff ware belongs to the fourth century, and preferably to its later part; it is especially associated with the last thirty years of that century. The other sherds, though some of them are rather indeterminate in character, are all consistent with the

same date. It is noteworthy that one Huntcliff sherd was found quite near the bottom of the inner ditch, and that even in digging down to undisturbed subsoil inside the fort we found not a single fragment of earlier ware, except one very much worn and battered Samian sherd.

The evidence of the pottery thus demands an exclusively fourth-century date for the site. The Samian sherd does not overthrow this conclusion, for its condition renders it valueless as evidence, and similar stray sherds of Samian have been found in the Yorkshire coast signal-stations. The evidence of the structure itself is consistent with this. The typical squarish and neatly-cut walling-stones of the earlier periods are absent, and in their place we find rough materials roughly used. The two ditches with a wide interval between them are unlike the ditches of forts belonging to the first three centuries, and remind one of the tactical methods of the late Empire, when a wide berm was used to keep wheeled engines away from the walls and to trap assailants in a prepared field of fire at close range.

This brief exploration, therefore, suffices to show that the fortlet on Barrock Fell belongs to the latest period of the Roman occupation. The almost complete absence of wares other than Huntcliff tends to suggest that it was probably not built so early as the reorganisation of the defences of Britain by Constantius Chlorus at the end of the third century, and the possibility of assigning it to a later date must be considered. A small stone fort apparently belonging to the same late period has been recently identified at Newbrough near Hexham, and we know that at Birdoswald and elsewhere there was a reorganisation of the northern frontier by Count Theodosius about A.D. 370. It is highly probable that Theodosius also created the system of signal-stations on the Yorkshire coast; and in any case it is certain that he reorganised the defences of Britain after a serious disaster,

due not only to invasion from the north but also to invasion overseas from east and west. The most probable explanation must at present be merely provisional, is that it was built by Theodosius as part of a scheme for improving the communications between the Wall and the army headquarters to the south. Its character shows that it was intended to serve as a police post for patrolling the road, like the (earlier) fortlet of Maiden Castle in Stainmore (these *Trans.* N.S. xxvii, 170); its position suggests that it was also designed for receiving and sending visual signals along the road.

Roman sites of what may be called the fortlet class have been somewhat neglected in the past, and it may be well to enumerate a few in the north of Britain. There is one, inserted in an earlier and larger fort, at Castleshaw near Manchester (Bruton, *Roman Forts at Castleshaw*; Richmond, *Huddersfield in Roman Times*); it dates from Hadrian and measures about 160 by 190 feet over the ramparts. Maiden Castle in Stainmore has been mentioned; it measures about 150 by 120 feet to the centre of the ramparts and probably dates from the second century. A fortlet connected with the Cumberland coastal signal-stations, and therefore of Hadrianic date, is surmised at Burrow Walls, Workington (N.S. xxix, 157), and others may have existed between St. Bees Head and the Solway. The sites at Throp, near Gilsland, and at Haltwhistle Burn, both on the Stanegate and both of the early second century are well known (*ibid.* N.S. xiii, 365-6; external dimensions 208 by 167 feet and 202 by 194; internal area in each case 0.6 acre). The so-called "redoubt" in the south camp at Burnswark (*Proc. S. A. Scot.*, 1898-9) is really a small and strongly-entrenched post earlier in date than the camp and measuring internally about 120 by 90 feet; it contained at least one permanent building. At Makendon ("Chew Green") the elaborate cluster of Roman works includes a square fortlet built of

stone and surrounded by three ditches; the whole system, ditches and all, is about 90 yards square, and the fortlet measures about 180 by 180 feet over the ramparts (R. C. Bosanquet in *Trans. of the Berwickshire Arch. and Nat. Hist. Soc.*, xxv, 59-69).

But all the above—except Burrow Walls, whose dimensions are unknown—differ from Barrock Fell in size, being many times larger than it. The closest parallel, so far as size goes, is to be found in the milecastles of the Wall; and fortlets of this very small size are also found in Germany on the Limes (e.g. Zwing, Seitzenbuche, Robern, in *O.R.L. Lieferung* xlv, and Raitenbuch, Petersbuch, Hirnstetten, *ibid.* xlv), where they run about 18-20 metres square, and, like the milecastles, evidently served as quarters for groups of men doing duty in the adjacent signal-stations. Both these parallels, therefore, suggest that Barrock Fell may have been an element in a chain of signal-stations though not itself exactly a signal-station. It was rather, perhaps, a half-way house between Carlisle and Old Penrith, designed to accommodate a handful of men (perhaps not more than fifty) working signal-stations along the road.

So far as plan goes, we have one almost exact parallel, namely the fortlet of Old Burrow Camp on Exmoor, dug by Mr. H. St. George Gray, F.S.A., in 1912 (*Trans. Devonshire Assoc.*, xlv). Here, exactly as at Barrock Fell, there was a small fort—in this case an earth fort—surrounded by two ditches having a wide interval between them, the whole forming a square with round corners. The inner ditch at Old Burrow Camp was double, and the whole thing was on a larger scale; the fort about 80 by 80 feet, and the entire site about 300 by 300. But its Roman date is certain, and the tactical purpose of the widely-spaced ditches is betrayed by the fact that the outer ditch is “punic”—its counterscarp vertical, so that a man who has crossed it in attacking cannot get back and is trapped

in a field of fire. One can hardly refrain from conjecturing that Barrock Fell and Old Burrow Camp have the same purpose—that of housing men employed in adjacent signal-stations, in one case along the main north-western road, in the other, along the south side of the Bristol Channel—and that they belong to a single scheme, a scheme to defend the west coast of Britain against the Scots of Ireland. The Barrock Fell evidence tends to connect that scheme with Count Theodosius, the creator, it appears, of the Yorkshire coast signal-stations. Thus the discovery of this new site may lead to important advances in our knowledge of the last phase in the history of Roman Britain.

This is the first occasion on which aerial photography has been applied to the archaeology of our district. The fact that it has resulted in the finding of an altogether unsuspected Roman site, of unusual character and considerable interest, shows how rich are the possibilities of future discovery which it offers to archaeologists here as elsewhere.
