

ART. VI.—*Pottery from the Vallum filling at Birdoswald.*  
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THE purpose of this paper is to place on record three small groups of pottery found in the ditch of the Vallum at Birdoswald fort, during the excavations of 1929 and 1932, and not hitherto published.<sup>1</sup>

In the 10th edition of the *Handbook to the Roman Wall* (1947), Professor Richmond writes that the Vallum was obliterated at this fort very soon after its creation. The main evidence for this statement is to be found in the report on the excavations in 1928. It was discovered that near the south-east and south-west angles of the fort, the Vallum ditch had been filled up with cut blocks of peat thrown in anyhow, one on top of the other, and sealed with a layer of boulder clay. A section of the ditch filling was sent to Dr Kathleen Blackburn for analysis, with a view to finding out how long the ditch had been open before it was filled with peat. She found that, though the seeds of such plants as establish themselves quickly were present in the layer between the ditch bottom and the peat filling, there was none of the decayed vegetable matter that would have been expected if the plants had had time to establish themselves completely. She concluded that the ditch could only have been open for a year or two before the re-filling with the peat. The speedy disuse of the Vallum ditch in this area is thus indisputably established. The excavations

<sup>1</sup> The reports on the successive seasons' work at Birdoswald, by the Cumberland Excavation Committee, under the direction of F. G. Simpson and I. A. Richmond, from 1928 to 1933, are published in CW2 xxix-xxxiv.

of 1932 established that the peat filling had not been put into the ditch until the stone-revetted causeway which carried the road to the south gate of the fort over the Vallum ditch had been partly demolished. The disuse of the causeway and of the gate by which traffic across it was once controlled, is then contemporaneous with the obliteration of the Vallum ditch.

The excavation reports contain no explicit reference to the pottery found in the Vallum ditch, but the excavators carefully packed the different groups of pottery in separate bags, each with a label giving the exact find-spot. Three of the bags contain pottery from the filling of the Vallum ditch; this pottery is described and discussed below.

Nos. 1 to 7 were found in 1932 in the layers immediately above the peat filling, by the causeway.

1. Rim and shoulder fragment of a cooking jar in hard, undecorated, plain grey fabric.

cf.

Chesterholm	22	pre-Wall-fort,
Corbridge, 1911	23	pre-Wall-fort,
Haltwhistle Burn	16	Hadrianic,
Poltross Burn, M/C 48	III, 26	period I A,
Throp	11	Hadrianic.

Wheel-made vessels in this fabric, referred to here as cooking jars to distinguish them from cooking pots in black fumed ware, are common at sites abandoned when the fort garrison was moved on to the line of the Wall: they are also common in the earliest levels of sites on the Wall, but they are very rare on the Antonine Wall.<sup>2</sup>

2. Rim and wall fragment of a mortarium in pinkish buff fabric with a grey core; sparsely sprinkled with large grey grit.

cf.

Balmuildy	XLI, 16	Antonine,
Chesterholm	61	pre-Wall-fort,
Corbridge, 1911	100	Antonine,
Corbridge, 1938	11 lower, 4	stamped SVLLON, unstratified,
High House, M/C 50	101	period I A/B,
Throp	3	Hadrianic.

<sup>2</sup> S. N. Miller, *The Roman Fort at Balmuildy*, p. 88.

The unstratified example from Corbridge is stamped by the firm which used the trade-mark SVLLONIAN, and was active early in the second century; it is not impossible that the present piece was made by that firm. The peak period of use for this type is clearly Hadrianic-Antonine.

3. Four fragments of a mortarium in a soft dirty buff fabric; no grit survives.

cf.

Birdoswald, 1929                      4                      period I.

The parallel with the published example from Birdoswald, which was found in the barracks, is remarkably close both in shape and fabric. The low bead and hooked rim are features found more frequently in mortaria of the earlier part of period I than of the later.

4. Three fragments of a flat-rimmed bowl in the normal black fumed fabric, with distinct cross hatching right up to the rim.

cf.

Birdoswald, 1929                      65                      period I,  
Polcross Burn, M/C 48 III, 4                      period I A.

Although the vessel is incomplete, the depth of the existing fragments shows that they are from a bowl and not from a platter; the black fabric is typically Hadrianic-Antonine; the vessel has therefore been restored as a deeply chamfered bowl of this period.

5. Rim and wall of a bowl in hard, gritty, red fabric; undecorated.

Close parallels are lacking; the fabric is very similar to that of several vessels in the Tolson Memorial Museum, Huddersfield, found at Slack which was occupied from *circa* A.D. 80 to *circa* A.D. 140.

6. The greater part of a flat-rimmed platter in dense, slightly gritty, black fumed fabric; the vessel is decorated with cross hatching, lightly scored on an already burnished surface.

cf.

Cardurnock	27	Hadrianic,
Corbridge, 1911	44	pre-Wall-fort,
Corbridge, 1911	85	Antonine,
Haltwhistle Burn	8	Hadrianic,
Slack	66	pre-Antonine.

This type of platter without a chamfer, but with a flat rim, is exclusively Hadrianic-Antonine; it differs from the later

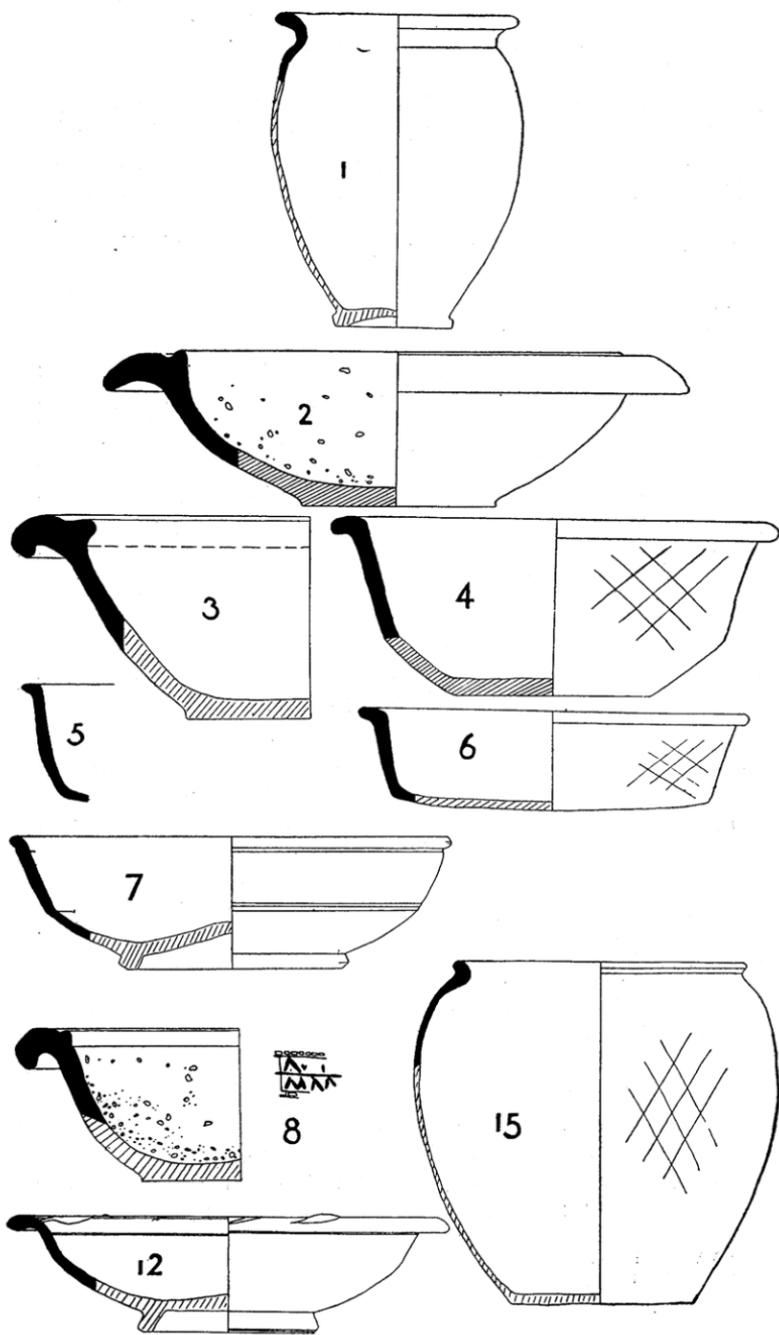


FIG. 1.—Birdoswald: pottery from the Vallum filling. (4).

Antonine chamfered platters, and from third-century platters which have no chamfer but have a different kind of rim.

7. Rim fragment from a platter in plain Samian ware, of Dragendorff's form 18/31.

The vessel is fairly similar in shape to no. 6, pl. XLVI of Oswald and Pryce, which is dated "Hadrian-Antonine".

Nos. 8 to 14 were found in 1929 in the Vallum ditch near the south-west angle of the fort.

8. Rim and wall of a mortarium in hard orange-buff fabric; the protective grit is profuse and is white and brown in colour.

There is a clear impression on the rim of a potter's stamp in two lines—AV[STN] MAN[VS]. It is stamp type "A" used by the potter AVSTINVS, who probably worked in the north-west of England. In the report on mortaria from Corbridge<sup>3</sup> his period of activity is given as A.D. 140-160, but, as examples of his products have been noted at Cardurnock<sup>4</sup> (on the subsoil) and at Chesters, it seems probable that they had begun to circulate during Hadrian's reign.

9. (Not drawn). Fragment of mortarium spout in gritty, medium-soft dull brick-red fabric. It has a hooked rim, typical of the first half of the second century.

10. (Not drawn). Small rim fragment of a flat-rimmed bowl in very coarse, gritty reddish fabric: not enough of the vessel survives to show whether it was chamfered.

11. (Not drawn). Badly preserved fragment of the rim of a bowl in soft orange fabric.

12. Two fragments of the rim of a bowl in plain Samian ware, of Dragendorff's form 35 or 36.

The vessel is closely similar in shape to no. 12, pl. LIII of Oswald and Pryce, which is dated "Trajan-Hadrian".

cf.

Birdoswald, 1929      II, 7      period 1.

The parallel with the published example from Birdoswald, which was found in the alley, is remarkably close.

13. (Not drawn). Rim fragment from a platter or cup in plain Samian ware, of Pan Rock type 7 or 8.

14. (Not drawn). Small fragment of a cup in plain Samian ware, of Dragendorff's form 33.

<sup>3</sup> AA4 xxvi 175.

<sup>4</sup> CW2 xlvii 118.

No. 15 was found in 1929 in the filling of the Vallum ditch when trenching was undertaken to find the new fort ditch south of the fort.

15. Rim and wall fragment of cooking pot with short rim, in hard gritty black fumed fabric, now turned red, probably as a result of being exposed to fire in the open air. The cross hatching is not very pronounced.

cf.

Birdoswald, 1929	39	period I — alley,
Corbridge, 1938	8, 15	Antonine I,
Corbridge, 1938	9, 8 and 10	Antonine I,
Denton Hall, T 7b	6	period I,
Newstead, 1947	14	Antonine I.

This type of cooking pot is especially common in the Hadrianic-Antonine period.

When the ditch of the Vallum was deliberately filled, it was completely filled in one operation, and there was no interval of time between the filling with peat blocks and the completion of the filling with boulder clay. One of the groups (nos. 1 to 7) came from immediately above the peat; this means that it was in the filling. While the exact stratification of the other two groups within the filling is not recorded, it is explicitly stated that they both came from it. It is thus clear that all three groups found their way into the Vallum ditch at the time it was being filled, and they may therefore be treated as one group.

While any sealed deposit of pottery may always include a few strays and survivals, these will normally be rare, and the deposit will reflect styles current at the time it was formed. The present group may be treated as an association of a number of vessels, in styles already familiar, and may be dated typologically, using the parallels that have been quoted without reference to the significance of the particular find-spot. There can be no doubt that the group, taken as a whole, is Hadrianic; almost every vessel in the group is of a type which has

already been recorded from a Hadrianic deposit, while none would be out of place in such a deposit. None of the vessels are of types whose peak period of use falls long before or after the reign of Hadrian. A closer dating within the period is possible. Nos. 1, 2 and 6 are of types which had emerged before the first series of forts was built on Hadrian's Wall; but, except that the cooking jar no. 1 was becoming rare, the types had not wasted out completely by the time that the Antonine Wall was built. On the other hand nos. 8 and 15 have not yet been noted in a pre-Wall-fort deposit—Cardunock is probably to be connected with the later building phase, in and after A.D. 128<sup>5</sup> — and the types are as common in early-Antonine as in Hadrianic deposits. The group then appears to belong to late rather than early in Hadrian's reign. This provides an approximate date for the filling of the Vallum ditch at Birdoswald—some time in the 130's.

The structural evidence for the date that the ditch of the Vallum was filled, considered without reference to the pottery, gives similar results. The Turf-Wall milecastle at High House (M/C 50 TW) was built while A. Platorius Nepos was governor of Britain<sup>6</sup>; his term of office began in A.D. 122. This milecastle was abandoned when the corresponding Stone-Wall milecastle was built, some time before the end of Wall period I A. The Vallum diverges from its course to avoid the Turf-Wall milecastle, and it was therefore constructed after A.D. 122 but some time before the end of Wall period I A. Evidence from the Wall in Northumberland confirms this and allows greater precision to be attained. The forts at Halton Chesters<sup>7</sup> and at Benwell<sup>8</sup> were built while A. Platorius Nepos was still in office, though

<sup>5</sup> CW2 xlvi 123.

<sup>6</sup> CW2 xxxv 229.

<sup>7</sup> AA4 xiv 161.

<sup>8</sup> AA4 xix 19.

Halton Chesters fort was not built until after the ditch of the Wall had been dug. The Vallum diverges from its course to avoid both forts, and at Benwell a causeway of undisturbed subsoil was left in the Vallum ditch opposite the south gate.<sup>9</sup> The Vallum was therefore probably constructed several years after A.D. 122. The fort at Carrawburgh was built over the filled-in Vallum ditch.<sup>10</sup> The most plausible interpretation of a building inscription<sup>11</sup> found at the fort is that it records the initial building while Sextus Julius Severus was governor of Britain, that is in the early 130's. The upper and lower limits for the construction of the Vallum are thus known; and further, an approximate date, late in the 120's, for the actual operation is obtained by considering the probable length of time that elapsed between the various stages of the Wall building programme.

The botanical analysis of 1928, already referred to, shows that a very few years had elapsed between the digging and the re-filling of the Vallum ditch. When this fact is taken in connection with the evidence for the date of construction of the Vallum, it brings the act of re-filling to some time in the latter half of Hadrian's reign.

Two separate lines of approach thus lead to the same conclusion; the structural and botanical evidence, without reference to the pottery, and the style of the pottery in the filling, without reference to the known date of the vallum or to the botanical evidence, each independently establishes the fact that the Vallum, its ditch and its crossing were obliterated at Birdoswald in the latter half of Hadrian's reign.

The complete references to the reports from which parallels have been quoted are as follows. The usual abbreviations have been used for periodicals.

<sup>9</sup> AA4 xi 176.

<sup>10</sup> Durham University Journal xxix 95.

<sup>11</sup> JRS xxxiv 87.

<i>Balmuilty</i>	S. N. Miller, <i>The Roman Fort at Balmuilty</i> , 1922.
<i>Birdoswald</i> , 1929	CW2 xxx 175f.
<i>Cardurnock</i>	CW2 xlvii 108f.
<i>Chesterholm</i>	AA4 xv 222f.
<i>Corbridge</i> , 1911 and 1938	AA3 viii 168f, and AA4 xv 266f.
<i>Denton Hall</i> , T 7b	AA4 vii 151f.
<i>Haltwhistle Burn</i>	AA3 v 264f.
<i>High House</i> , M/C 50	CW2 xiii 339f.
<i>Newstead</i> , 1947	PSAScot., forthcoming.
<i>Poltross Burn</i> , M/C 48	CW2 xi 446f.
<i>Slack</i>	YAJ xxvi 61f.
<i>Throp</i>	CW2 xiii 374f.