

ART. II.—*Excavations at Bowness on Solway, 1955.*
By C. M. DANIELS.

Read at Kendal, April 21st, 1960.

I N 1955 it was decided to build four houses in the field which lies immediately to the west of the ditch of the Roman fort of Bowness and between the modern road and the Solway Estuary.¹ As there was some likelihood of civil settlement having occurred on this site the writer was asked by the Ministry of Works to undertake its excavation in November and December 1955.

The modern road is so related to the west gateway of the Roman fort that it must lie approximately on the same line as any Roman road running west from that gate.² Accordingly, the first trenches (nos. 1-3) were dug across the field in a north-westerly direction from the hedge bordering the road, in order to discover the remains of any structure that had lined the ancient road. In all three it was found that the original surface of the ground had sloped away southwards approximately to the level of the present road, and had remained the same throughout the Roman period. No structure at all was found, although trench 1 did cut across a small ditch or gully of Roman date.

In medieval times the level of the land had been raised so as to give to the slope of the field something approaching its present appearance. The material used for this was probably derived from the wide medieval ditch lying immediately to the east of the area examined. Whether this ditch is a Roman work enlarged, or whether it is wholly of medieval date, the amount of upcast produced would be considerable, and would consist of the same type

¹ No. 1311, O.S. 25-inch map.

² For discovery of Northern guard-chamber of gateway see CW2 xxxi 140-144.

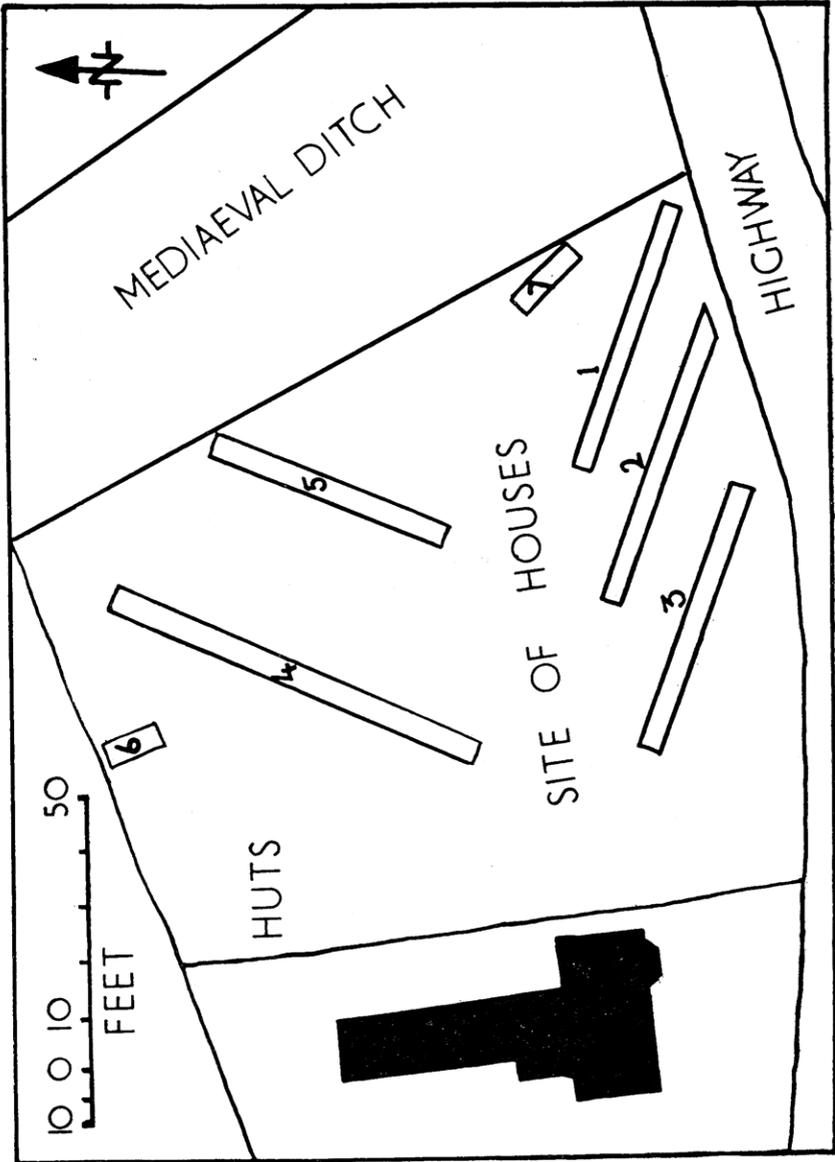
of material as was used in the levelling: topsoil, rich in weathered Roman sherds which had been further mixed in moving, disturbed under-clay, and a mixture of red and grey clays produced by the deeper cutting. (The subsoil excavated from trench 1 formed an identical mixture when blended in the spoil-heaps with the ubiquitous red-clay upcast.) Furthermore, the levelling material also differed in order of deposit from point to point, as one would expect from dumped material obtained in this manner.

A few fragments of Roman pottery had fallen among the red and grey clay, but not so many as were found in the reused topsoil which also yielded much early medieval pottery, especially in trench 1, where the remains of a single, robbed stone wall of medieval date were found near the south-east end.

Trenches 4 and 5 were cut in the same area of the field, avoiding both the excavator's huts and the site of the proposed houses. Here the land had been recently cultivated by the local school. Trench 5 yielded virgin clay at a depth of from 2 to 3 ft. along its entire length. Trench 6 showed the same condition, but at its north-east end the undisturbed red-clay subsoil dropped away under boulder-clay filling to a depth of at least 4 ft. 8 in. Rain prevented deeper digging, but a rich deposit of medieval sherds in the boulder-clay filling indicated that the north side of the area had also been levelled at this date.

Trench 6, cut south of the north hedge, produced no facts of significance. It is known that the Wall has here been removed by erosion of the cliff, and lay further north.³ Trench 7 was cut in order to test for a continuation of the small ditch in trench 1, but although it reached a greater depth than the latter, the sloping subsoil revealed no ditch. This trench also produced boulder-clay filling yielding abundant pottery, almost exclusively of early medieval date. Its story thus resembles that of the previous trenches.

³ CW. *loc. cit.*



It may be recorded, therefore, that no trace of any structure of Roman date was found. This field had evidently not been the site of the *vicus*, nor, considering the sharp slope and gully which pocked its surface, the parade-ground. But the Roman pottery, found in fair amount, may well represent litter from the *vicus* which had lain in the topsoil exposed to long wear and weathering. It ranged in date from Hadrian to the early 4th century, but there was a complete absence of sherds later than the Picts' War of A.D. 367-9, suggesting that the extra mural occupation stopped at that time, probably with the removal of civilians inside the fort as attested elsewhere in the late 4th century.⁴

Medieval remains were thickest along the eastern limit of the field, and included a wall of undetermined nature. The medieval pottery was earlier than the Scottish War of Independence, a point which must be taken in conjunction with Professor Birley's dating of the large ditch.⁵ If the ditch, as presumed, belongs to the troubled times of the War of Independence, the pottery shows precisely what might be expected, namely, a complete cessation of occupation outside the defended area, and the external areas levelled so as to eliminate cover for attackers. The series of pottery is then broken, and is resumed only with a late-Tudor, or even Jacobean tyg, after which it steadily increases until modern times. This would indicate renewal of extra-mural activity upon the Union of the Crowns, and its continuation to the present, although that continuation has not been associated with buildings, but represents the strewing of the area with rubbish and garden soil.

With the exception of a rather worn modern halfpenny, the only small finds from the excavation were the pottery.

⁴ I. A. Richmond, *Roman Britain* (Penguin Books, 1955) p. 63.

⁵ CW. *loc. cit.*

NOTES ON THE POTTERY.

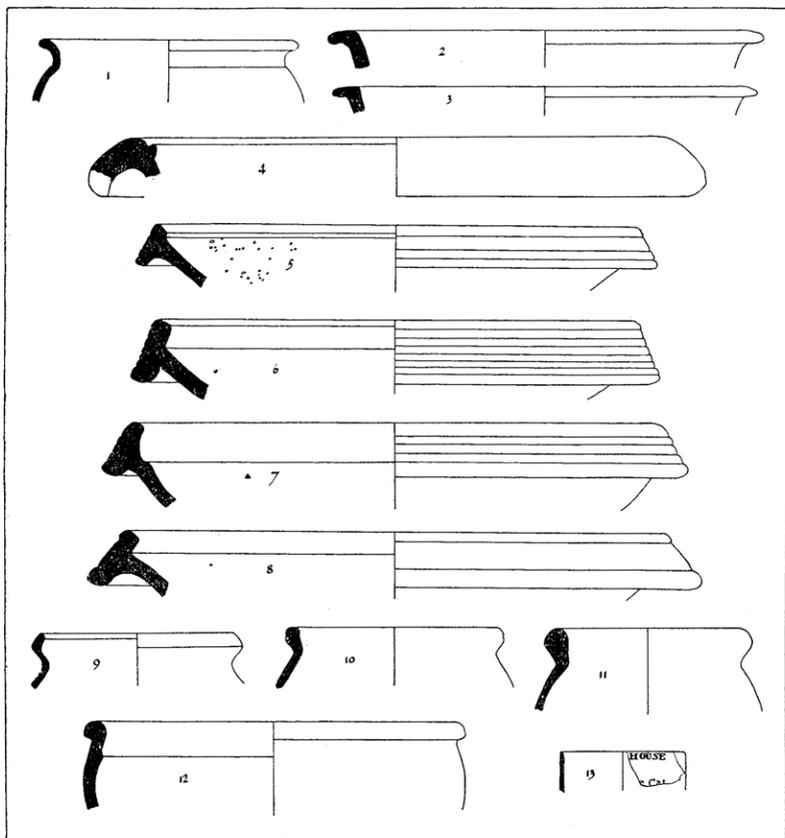
By J. P. GILLAM, F.S.A.

From among the fragments of pottery of various dates found in the course of the excavation, all those which can be drawn appear on Fig. 2. They comprise four assignable to the 2nd, four to the 4th, four to the 12th or 13th and one to the 19th centuries. Descriptions follow:

1. Single worn fragment from a jar or cooking-pot in light grey fabric, possibly once burnished; second or third quarter of the 2nd century. Trench I; unstratified.
2. Single much worn fragment from a bowl or dish in black burnished fabric; second quarter of the 2nd century. Trench I; unstratified.
3. Single much worn fragment in dark grey fabric; second quarter of the 2nd century. From material used to level up a depression in trench II.
4. Single worn fragment from a mortarium in brick-red fabric with a blue-grey core; it is possible that there was once a white slip; no grit survives; the vessel is probably of north-western origin; second quarter of the 2nd century. From material used to level up a depression in trench I.
5. Substantial fragment from a mortarium in a-typical cream fabric with blue-grey surface; sparse small dark grit; close of the 3rd century or first half of the 4th. Trench IV; unstratified.
6. Two conjoined fragments in typical white self-coloured fabric; few surviving specks of light brown grit; the vessel is probably of west-midland origin; contemporary with no. 5. From material used to level up a depression in trench II.
7. Substantial fragment in typical white self-coloured fabric; speck of black grit; first three-quarters of the 4th century. From material used to level up a depression in trench I.
8. Six conjoined fragments in creamy white self-coloured fabric; fleck of dark grit; second or third quarter of the 4th century. From material used to level up a depression in trench I.
9. Two fragments, not conjoined, from the same narrow-mouthed jar in fine hard fabric with splashes of translucent yellow glaze; the larger fragment is in light orange-buff fabric, while the smaller is grey; first three-quarters of the 13th century. From trenches I and VII; unstratified.

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10. Single rim fragment with several non-conjoined wall fragments, from a jar or cooking-pot in very hard, gritty dark blue fabric with a goose-flesh surface on which are traces of an orange slip; the fabric resembles both Romano-British Derbyshire ware, and certain Romano-Rhenish cooking-pots found on the east coast of England; late 12th-century. From material used to level up a depression in trench IV.



11. Three conjoined fragments, with several non-conjoined wall fragments, in hard blue-grey fabric heavily charged with quartz-like grit; there is an orange slip; character, date and findspot as no. 10.

12. Two conjoined fragments from a wide-mouthed jar or bowl, in pinkish orange self-coloured slightly gritty fabric; probably medieval rather than Roman, and therefore possibly contemporary with nos. 9-11. From material used to level up a depression in trench I.
13. Small rim fragment from a mug in white vitreous-glazed fabric; in purple pigment below the glaze is the inscription: — HOUSE / — e Cat — ; first three-quarters of the 19th century. Trench III; unstratified.

The material used to level up the depressions included medieval pottery, which thus provides a *terminus post quem* for the operation; Roman pottery of both the 4th century and the 2nd was present in the material. The 2nd-century sherds are noticeably more worn than the 4th-century sherds — far more than their greater age would warrant, unless the earlier fragments had become abraded in Roman times; both earlier and later fragments would be moved simultaneously at some time in or after the 12th century.

No Roman pottery was found which is datable to before A.D. 120, to between A.D. 180 (at latest) and A.D. 290 (at earliest), or to later than A.D. 370.