

ART. III.—*The Roman forts near Caermote.* By R. L. BELLHOUSE, B.Sc.

*Read at Carlisle, April 11th, 1959.*

THIS is a report of the excavations carried out by volunteer labour in the spring of 1959. For earlier accounts of the site the reader is referred to CW2 lvii 27-29, xlvi 202 f. and particularly Haverfield's excellent report on the Cumberland Excavation Committee's provisional exploration in 1902, iii 328-339. Our findings amplify rather than correct his work, except for a few minor points.

The site has a particular place in my archaeological education; through it I came to know the late Walter Aitchison who set my feet firmly, actually and metaphorically, on to Roman roads.

The excavations were laid out as substantive trenches across the ramparts and ditches in order to provide comparative sections: the first across the composite west rampart, the second on the same line across the east rampart of the smaller fort, and the third across the unmodified rampart of the larger fort some distance to south of the first section.

Taking section III first, the larger fort was defended by two small ditches, with centres 18 ft. apart, made more prominent by mounds of upcast between them and on the outer lip of the outer ditch. A berm 6 to 8 ft. wide separated the inner ditch from the rampart which was entirely of very black turfwork lying directly on the old land surface. No kerbing or rampart base was found. An *intervallum* road 8 ft. wide was proved close to the toe of the rampart within the fort.

Section I revealed the modifications made when the

smaller fort was built, using part of the earlier rampart and ditch system. The existing rampart was refaced with new turf, less peaty and with more clay in it and thus easily distinguished from the earlier turf. The new facing rested on a cobble kerb. The south-west corner of the smaller fort was made by breaching the earlier rampart and throwing the spoil to either side before joining to it a new section at right angles. Although the spoil obstructed the partly silted ditches, the outer one was cleaned out opposite the remade rampart and turned by a new cut round the new south-west angle. It was made to drain into a new inner ditch dug between the old inner ditch and the newly faced rampart thus reducing the berm to about 18 in. This ditch too was taken round the south-west angle. The *intervallum* road was proved as before.

The east and south ramparts of the smaller fort lie within the larger. Section II shows the details of its construction; in this case a rampart base had been made of poles about 8 ft. long set 3 to 4 in. apart in grey clay kerbed at the front with boulders. It bears the grey turf like that on the remade face of the west rampart. The berm is very small. Against the inner slope of the rampart we found a great thickness of broken stone, soil and clay, and on its surface pieces of amphora, coarse pottery, nails and a piece of the black polished ware that became common in Hadrian-Antonine times. A single ditch completed the defences.

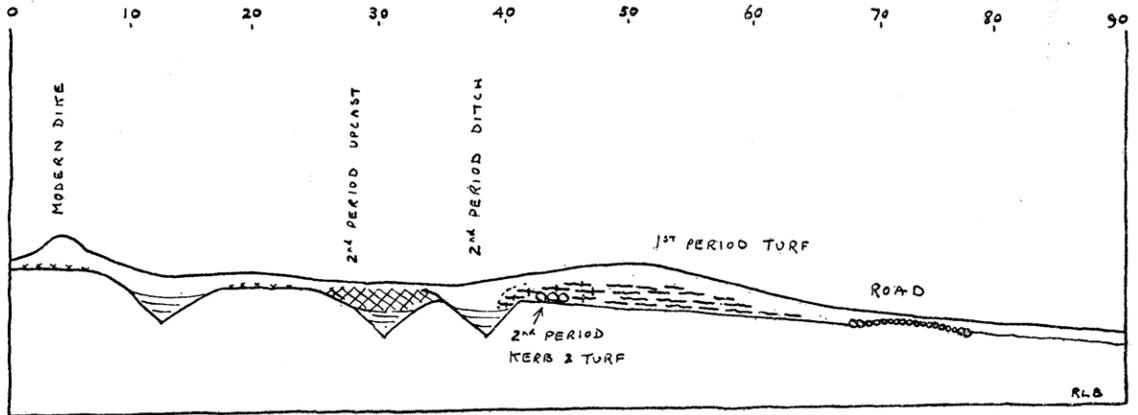
Digging within the smaller fort on the line of sections I and II showed very few signs of occupation but demonstrated the extreme wetness of the site. The Romans must themselves have found this for it seems certain that the very prominent stony ridges that can be traced inside both forts, and the stony rampart backing in section II, were put down in an effort to make the place habitable. Confirmation of this theory came when we examined the south-west corner of the larger fort; masses of charcoal with some sherds and glass fragments lay on the old

surface, tidily covered with a layer of rammed broken stone on which more sherds and glass were found.

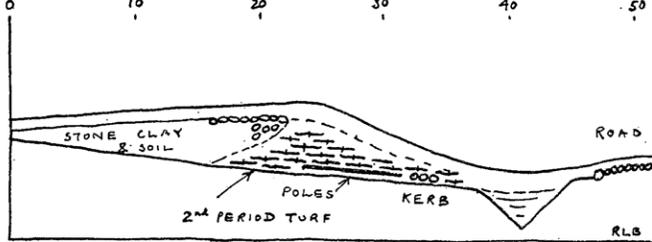
On the whole dateable material was scarce as might be expected, glass and Samian fragments were common, but Samian had so been acted upon by soil acids that in most cases it was indeterminable. However, two periods may be deduced from the pottery; the larger fort must be the earlier and must be associated with the earlier sherds, of which pieces of red mortaria with white opaque grit (Gillam's type 237, A.D. 60-90) would be a good example. The smaller fort is securely dated by sherds on the rampart backing; the black polished piece already noted (Gillam's types 118-148) is very early Hadrianic—Antonine, and is exactly matched by finds from the coastal towers. (CW2 liv 48 f.)

Haverfield examined the south gate of the large fort and reported that the ends of the ramparts seemed to be turned inwards but was unable to prove it to his satisfaction by excavation; his plan, page 331, shows these returns as "dubious rampart." There can be no doubt that his conclusion was right because of our findings when, after deciding that the stony ridges within the fort were roadways and footpaths, we traced one of them from near the south gate along a line parallel with the south rampart to turn at the south-west corner to become the *intervallum* road already proved in section III. We found an exceptionally wide space between the road and the rampart, a space much used for camp fire activity, and as at the south-west corner, tidily gravelled over. Such a wide space would be needed to allow the rampart to be turned. On page 334 (*loc. cit.*) the site is said to have a gravel subsoil; this is not so, the tough peaty moorland soil lies on a sticky yellowish boulder-clay, therefore any gravel spread near the surface will be man-made. I hope that during the next few years pupils from the Nelson-Thomlinson school will tackle the roads inside the forts and plan all these stony strips so that we can see what sort of pattern they make.

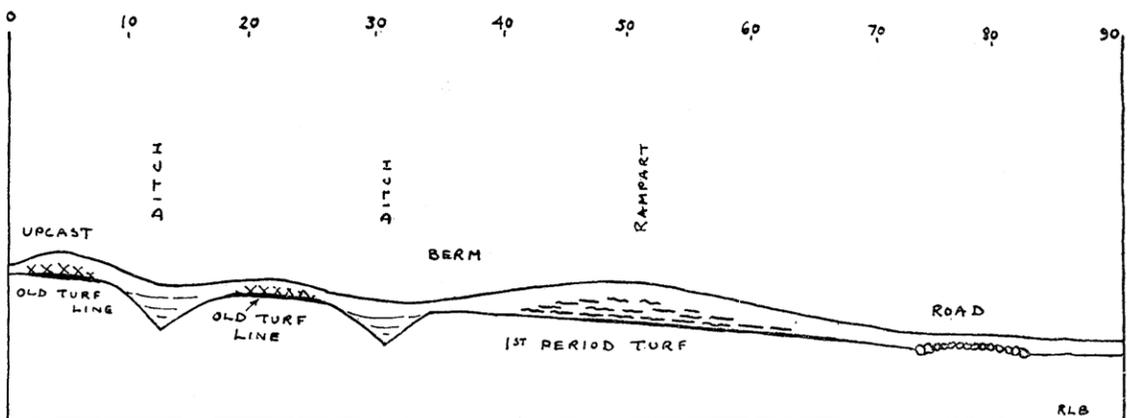
SECTION I



SECTION II



SECTION III



I give my grateful thanks to Mr Thomas Thirlwall of Bothel Crag, who owns, and his son who farms, the land on which the forts stand, for permission to dig; to the Nelson-Thomlinson pupils under Mr James for their help and interest, and to Mr Anthony Whitehead and his party who nobly did most of the hard work.