

ART. VII.—*A morphological study of Romano-British settlements in Westmorland.* By ROBERT A. WEBSTER, Ph.D.

Read at Hexham, July 16th, 1971.

THIS paper presents a hypothesis derived from the study of "native" settlements in Westmorland. It is based on a morphological classification of settlement sites. Morphology has been used because it is the only archaeological criterion for which equivalent information is available for most of the sites in the county. Classification by chronological or artifactual data would be more reliable but for most sites this is unavailable.

A variety of morphological properties has been used by several authors in the classification of Romano-British sites in Britain. Jobey (1966),¹ writing of north-east England and southern Scotland, differentiated between rectilinear and curvilinear enclosures. In Wales, A. H. Hogg (1966) distinguished polygonal and oval sites.² These workers and others have also used the association of field systems with settlements, hut size, ditches, building material and many associated features to group settlements.

One basis of classification, implicit in some of the above groupings, is the distinction between "enclosed" and "unenclosed" (hereafter described as "agglomerate") settlements. Examples, illustrated in Fig. 1, will help to elucidate these terms. Crosby Ravensworth 29 (the numbers refer to *RCHM Westmorland*) is an enclosed settlement in a poorly preserved state whereas

¹ Jobey, G., "Homesteads and settlements in the frontier area", CBA Res. Report No. 7.

² Hogg, A. H. A. (1966), "Native settlements in Wales", CBA Res. Report No. 7.

Crosby Garrett 8 (2) is agglomerate. The distinction was first applied to Westmorland by C. W. Dymond and T. H. Hodgson³ in 1902. Their observations contain a definition of the two types:

the settlements in and near the Lake District are not all of the same class. Some of them . . . are more or less completely contained within a rudely circular stone rampart, as though their builders saw need for providing some defence against risks of occasional attack. Others . . . were irregularly laid out with walls, sometimes nearly straight, unprovided with a closely enveloping rampart, and quite open and defenceless.

The common denominator of enclosed sites is a single continuous boundary wall. This wall appears to have been designed and constructed as a unit and did not evolve in piecemeal fashion. Internal earthworks have either been built to this wall, or are separate from it. Agglomerate sites on the other hand, have no single wall containing the settlement. The settlement may be bounded by walls on all sides but these are just the outsides of internal earthworks. The internal earthworks, huts, paddocks or fields, appear to have accreted in haphazard fashion over a protracted period of time. This then is the basis of the classification below, but as yet it is too simplistic to accommodate all the variations found in Westmorland's native settlements.

Let us examine first the enclosed settlements. One problem which has long concerned writers in these *Transactions* has been the "defensive" nature of the outer wall. It is easy to see why the walls give this impression. They are often 10 feet or more wide. They are almost all built with a double row of massive upright blocks with a filling of rubble and soil in between. One peculiar feature, however, is that most settlements are situated in non-defensive positions. Many are located below slopes that would give strong advantage to an adversary (Hugill 13 is a good

³ Dymond, C. W. and Hodgson, T. H., "An ancient village near Threlkeld", CW2 ii 38-52.

example). It is possible that the wall was surmounted by a palisade but there is no evidence for this from excavation. This strongly suggests that the defensive function is a misinterpretation. Perhaps then the style of the wall is a cultural trait. There is no geological evidence to suggest that the orthostats were transported very far: they may have been collected simply as a convenient method of land-clearance at a pioneer stage of settlement. We have no knowledge of how high they were, but no excavator has suggested that they were very high. It has been suggested that they were surrounded by a hedge: the writer considers this a strong probability for many sites.

A few enclosed sites are clearly defensive: these are the well-known local hill-forts. They occupy commanding positions; some are ditched. Very few, if any, of the non-defensive sites have external ditches. Sites that have clearly defensive earthworks (massive walls and/or ditches) or that are in defensive positions have therefore been separated in the classification from non-defensive enclosed sites. We shall return to the function of the boundary wall below.

There is one group of settlements that appears to have had an originally enclosed form to which external earthworks have been added. Of course this cannot be proved without excavation, but the morphological evidence is strong. An example of this type (Fig. 1) is Askham 44 (1), Skirsgill Hill No. 1. These settlements form a separate group.

With regard to agglomerate settlements, a final distinction may be made between those with curvilinear walls and those with rectilinear. In Westmorland, even the rectilinear walls have rounded corners. An example is Waitby 13 (1). The above criteria give the following classification:

- Group 1. Enclosed defensive settlements.
- Group 2. Enclosed non-defensive settlements.

CLASSIFICATION OF "NATIVE" SITES IN WESTMORLAND

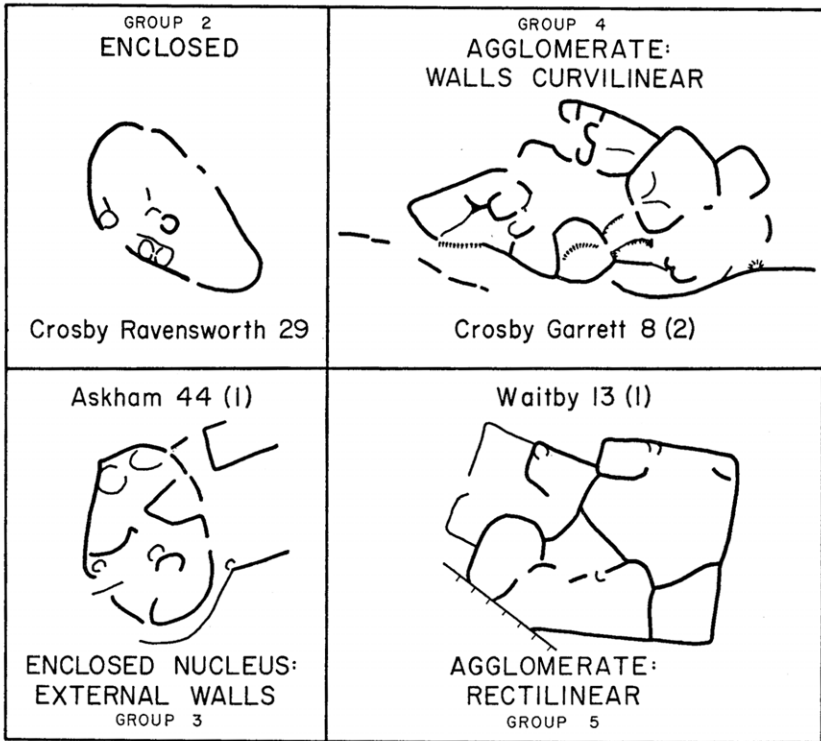
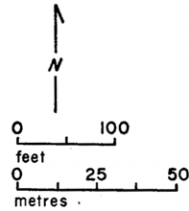
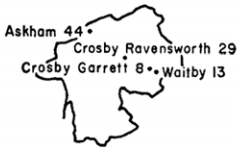


FIG. 1.

- Group 3. Settlements with an enclosed nucleus and external earthworks.
- Group 4. Agglomerate settlements with curvilinear walls.
- Group 5. Agglomerate settlements with rectilinear walls.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all settlement sites in Westmorland examined in the field by the writer according to the above classification. These sites are listed in Appendix I. A number of sites are unclassified or have question marks beside them. If too many settlements do not fit a classification, then it is at fault. These sites therefore require special mention. A number of settlements are simply too poorly preserved to determine whether they were enclosed or not. Among them are Bampton 71, Shap 75, Crosby Ravensworth 26 and 32, and Barbon 9.⁴ There is good reason to suspect that Barbon 9 is not Romano-British at all.

Two of the most important sites in the county, Crosby Ravensworth 25 (Ewe Close) and Crosby Garrett 8 (Severals) are problematical, the writer believes, largely because of their economic success and their size. Successive rebuilding phases have destroyed their original plans. It is probable, however, that Ewe Close belongs to Group 3 and Severals to Group 3 or Group 4.⁵ Bampton 75 is a ditched enclosure that may never have been a settlement: there are no indications of internal earthworks, otherwise it would have been a clear Group 2 site. It is suspected that Lowther 31, like Barbon 9, may not belong to this period because of its unusual shape and unique internal earthwork construction (see plan in *RCHMW*).

The question may now be asked: what is the

⁴ Lowndes, R. A. C. (1963), "Celtic fields, farmsteads and burial mounds in the Lune valley", *CW2* lxiii 77-95.

⁵ These sites are given a full discussion in: Webster, R. A., "The Romano-British Settlements of Westmorland". Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Reading, 1969.

significant difference between a settlement that is enclosed by a single boundary wall and one that is not? First, an enclosed settlement was planned as an entity, or at least, the enclosure was. In all probability the boundary wall and some internal constructions were built within a season. The function of these sites was primarily pastoral, as judged by excavations and lack of extensive field systems; in a predominantly pastoral economy close control over animals is of prime importance. Once the enclosure was complete, this control was established: the settlement became functional. It is the writer's hypothesis that this type of settlement is a pioneer type in a landscape that had not been settled before by that cultural group.

It is suggested that the boundary wall was built to keep animals — sheep and cattle — under surveillance, possibly bringing them into the enclosure each night. The wall would also be important for keeping predatory animals out. Its size, as was indicated above, could be the result of contemporaneous land clearance. The double-orthostat construction is apparently a cultural trait because it is encountered in Romano-British settlements in other parts of Highland Britain. Also, even in Westmorland, it is used on different types of bedrock — limestone, slate and granite — which suggests its use was not just the result of availability of raw material. As is indicated below, it was used in both dense woodland and open grassland situations. It is tentatively suggested here that the origin of double orthostat construction may be found in wooden palisade construction, upright stones replacing the upright timbers of the palisade.

Let us now examine the aggregate sites, and their possible relationship to the natural environment. Sites in Groups 4 and 5 have no enclosed nucleus, and grew by accretion. Whereas much of the expansion of enclosed sites was inside the enclosure, aggregate sites

grew outward. A number of aggregate sites have no apparent field systems: presumably their economy was substantially the same as the Group 2 sites — based largely on pastoralism. Some enclosures in the aggregate sites may have been cultivated fields (the same may be said for Group 2 sites) but their area is small. It is difficult to explain settlement morphology, therefore, in terms of economic activity. A suggestion lies in the very openness of the sites, and in their piecemeal development: the second part of this hypothesis is that these features exist only in secondary settlement, that is, that these were settlements built when the landscape was already “known”. It is proposed, therefore, that Group 4 and Group 5 sites are the daughter settlements from the pioneer Group 2.

The distribution map, Fig. 2, shows that Group 2 sites predominate in the Lake District valleys; very few are found in the Eden valley. Group 3 sites are located in both areas. Groups 4 and 5 sites predominate on the limestone hills of the upper Eden valley. This distribution needs to be considered in the light of the above hypothesis. A simple correlation between enclosed sites in the Lake District valleys and unenclosed sites in the upper Eden does not appear to be valid because of the small number of enclosed sites that occurs in the latter area and because Group 3 sites, also in that area, are thought to have been enclosed settlements originally. It is thought that the distribution supports the pioneer and secondary settlement hypothesis for the following reasons.

The natural environments of these areas today are quite different. The Lake District valleys have heavy rainfall and acid soils whereas the Eden valley is in the rain shadow of the mountains and has basic soils. Evidence from pollen diagrams suggests that in the Romano-British era these differences were enhanced by different floras. The Lake District valleys

were under dense mixed oakwood with alder carr in many of the valley bottoms. This would not be an easy environment for the development of a pastoral economy. We may assume that the Group 2 settlements that are widely dispersed throughout the area were located on natural or man-made clearings in much the same manner as the Viking settlements that followed them.

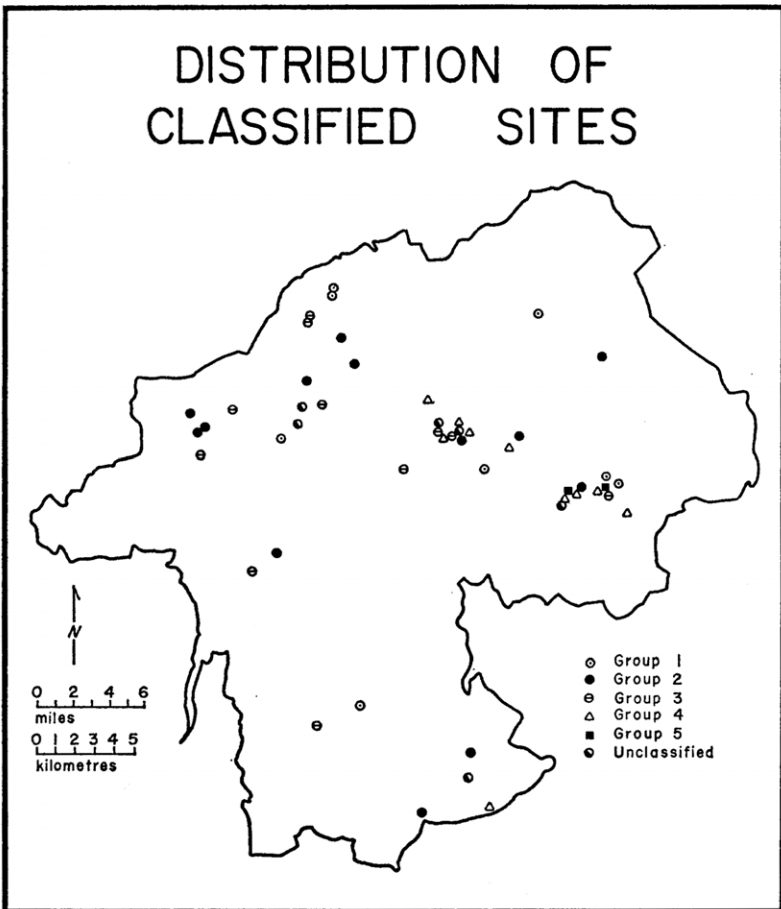


FIG. 2.

Palynological evidence⁶ shows that the hills of the Eden valley supported a more open woodland and grassland vegetation at the beginning of the Romano-British era. This then was a much more favourable environment for pastoralists and cultivators. A comparable situation is found in south Westmorland in the Group 4 Eller Beck settlements. Some settlements of Groups 3, 4 and 5 have field systems. Most of these are located in the Eden valley. The writer suggests that the Group 3 sites bear witness to a changing economy: from pastoralism to cultivation. It is quite possible that small fields were located inside the Group 2 settlements and that when the opportunity presented itself for expanded cultivation, it was taken. This possibility was available in the open grassland-woodland environment of the Eden valley.

The discussion above is not intended to suggest that the settlements of the Lake District valleys showed no secondary development. The Group 3 sites of this area are a witness to expansion. In all probability, settlements with a larger than usual number of hut circles, such as Kentmere 18, are evidence of internal expansion.

It is evident that Groups 2, 3, 4 and 5 do form a temporal sequence. This is not to say, however, that any Group 4 site is later than every Group 2. Even in a small area, pioneer settlement may have been late in some valleys and therefore overlap, in time, secondary settlement elsewhere. The differences in agglomerate sites between curvilinear and rectilinear are not easily accounted for. It is possible that the rectilinear settlements show a degree of Roman influence but only further excavation could demonstrate this.

My thanks are due to Miss Carol Hamm for drawing the maps.

⁶ *Ibid.*

APPENDIX I.

<i>Name.</i>	<i>Group.</i>
Asby 20	2
Asby 21	4
Asby 22	1
Askham 44 (1) and (2)	3
Bampton 68	1
Bampton 71	Unclassified
Bampton 73	2
Bampton 75	2
Barbon 9	Unclassified
Crosby Garrett 8 (1)	? 3 or 4
Crosby Garrett 8 (2)	4
Crosby Garrett 8 (3)	5
Crosby Ravensworth 25	? 3
Crosby Ravensworth 26	3
Crosby Ravensworth 27	4
Crosby Ravensworth 28	3
Crosby Ravensworth 29	2
Crosby Ravensworth 31	4
Crosby Ravensworth 32	Unclassified
Crosby Ravensworth 33	4
Crosby Ravensworth 35	4
Dufton 8	1
Eller Beck Group	4
Kentmere 18	2
Hugill 13	3
Kirkby Lonsdale 37	2
Kirkby Stephen 9	1
Levens 17	3
Lowther 31	2
Martindale 34	3
Middleton 13	2
Nateby 6	Unclassified
Natland 8	1
Patterdale 61	3
Patterdale 62	2
Patterdale 63	2
Shap 73	3
Shap 74	2 or 3
Shap 75	Unclassified
Waitby 8	1
Waitby 9 (1) and (2)	4
Waitby 9 (3)	2

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Waitby 10	4
Waitby 13 (1)	5
Waitby 13 (2)	3
Warcop 13	2
Yanwath and Eamont Bridge 15	1
Yanwath and Eamont Bridge 16	1