ART. VI.—*Excavation of a Romano-British settlement at Waitby, Westmorland.* By ROBERT A. WEBSTER, Ph.D.

Read at Cockermouth, July 14th, 1972.

IN July and August 1967, an exploratory excavation was made of the north-western settlement of the native site Waitby 13 (R.C.H.M., W.). This site consists of two settlements at 35/755074, half a mile south-east of Waitby village. Permission to excavate was gained from the Ministry of Public Building and Works, to whom the writer is grateful. Thanks are also due to volunteers from the Lakes Secondary School and Kirkby Stephen School, and to University of Reading Research Board for financial assistance. No previous work had been carried out at the site apart from planning by the R.C.H.M. The trenches were refilled after excavation and the turf replaced.

Introduction.

Excavation was carried out as part of a palaeo-environmental study of the Romano-British settlements of the area.[1] This settlement was chosen because of its distinct external rectilinear form and because of its juxtaposition to a curvilinear settlement (Fig. 1). Rectilinear native settlements are rare in Westmorland, and it was hoped that excavation at this site would provide evidence upon the chronological and cultural relationships between the two. The specific purposes of excavation were: (1) to establish a date for the rectilinear site, (2) to examine its double orthostat wall, (3) to determine the nature of the cultural

[1] Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Reading. 1969.

occupation, and (4) to provide evidence on the economic basis of the occupants.

The settlements are situated in open limestone pasture a little above the 850-ft. contour on the gradual slope

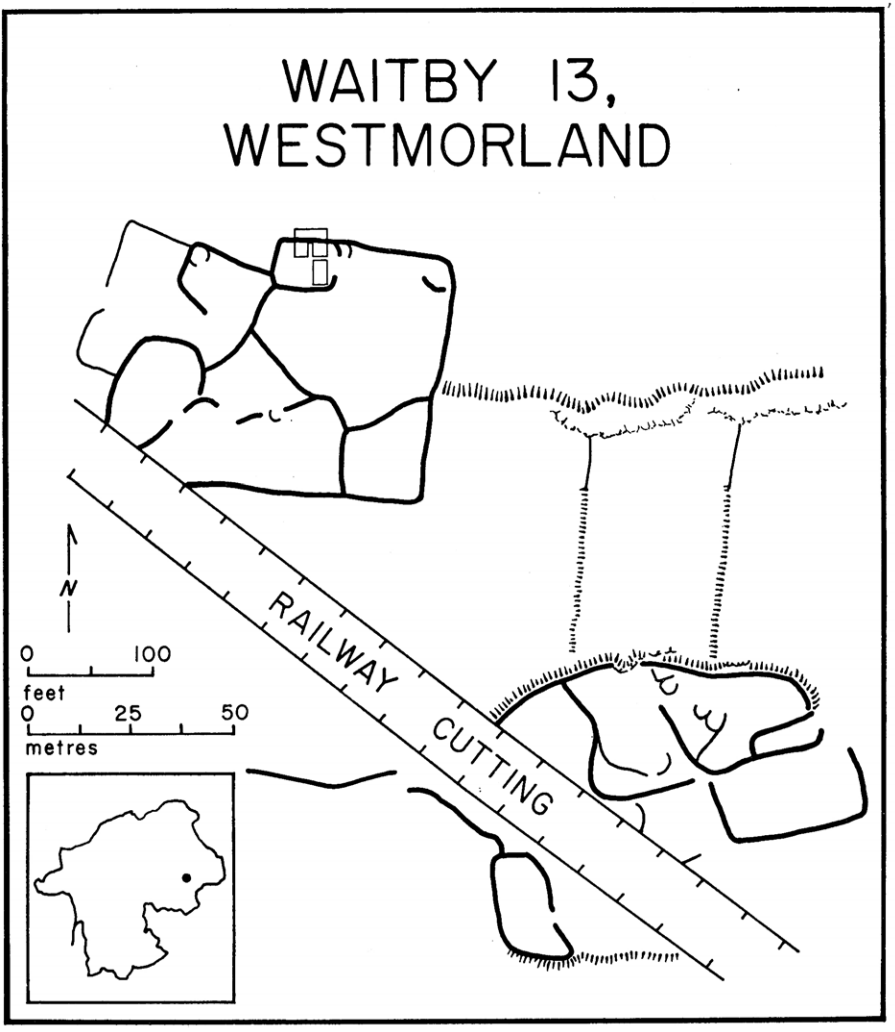

FIG. 1.

down from Ash Fell (1,266 ft. O.D.) to the Eden valley. The drift cover is varied; in the immediate vicinity of the site the calcareous soil is only 10 in. thick above the bedrock. There is very little surface water at this altitude except after heavy rain.

As this was an exploratory excavation only a small area of the total was uncovered, namely, a section of the boundary wall and part of the interior of one enclosure (Fig. 1). In all, 60 square meters were uncovered. After stripping the turf, the soil was trowelled to bedrock.

The outer wall.

The wall was constructed of two almost parallel rows of stones with an infilling of rubble (Fig. 2). The overall width varied from 1.20 metres (4 ft.) to 1.60 metres (5 ft. 4 in.). There was no difference in the construction of the two rows: both consisted of standing limestone blocks (one of gritstone) and of coursing up to three stones high. Coursing and orthostats were randomly inter-spaced. The maximum height of orthostats was 66 cm. (2 ft. 2 in.) and they varied in length from 50 cm. (1 ft. 8 in.) to 1.20 m. (4 ft.). The topsoil had been trenched so that the orthostats stood more or less on bedrock. Small quantities of soil found under the orthostats were examined for pollen content but no grains were found; presumably pollen grains would have oxidised in the basic soil.

The coursing was of large blocks laid horizontally. Little care had been taken to overlap vertical joints, but the stones had been chosen to present flat vertical faces outwards. No stone was dressed. The upper part of the wall had fallen both outside and inside the enclosure: the limits of the tumble are shown by the dotted line on Fig. 2. The filling was of unsorted limestone rubble with a considerable amount of soil. In the

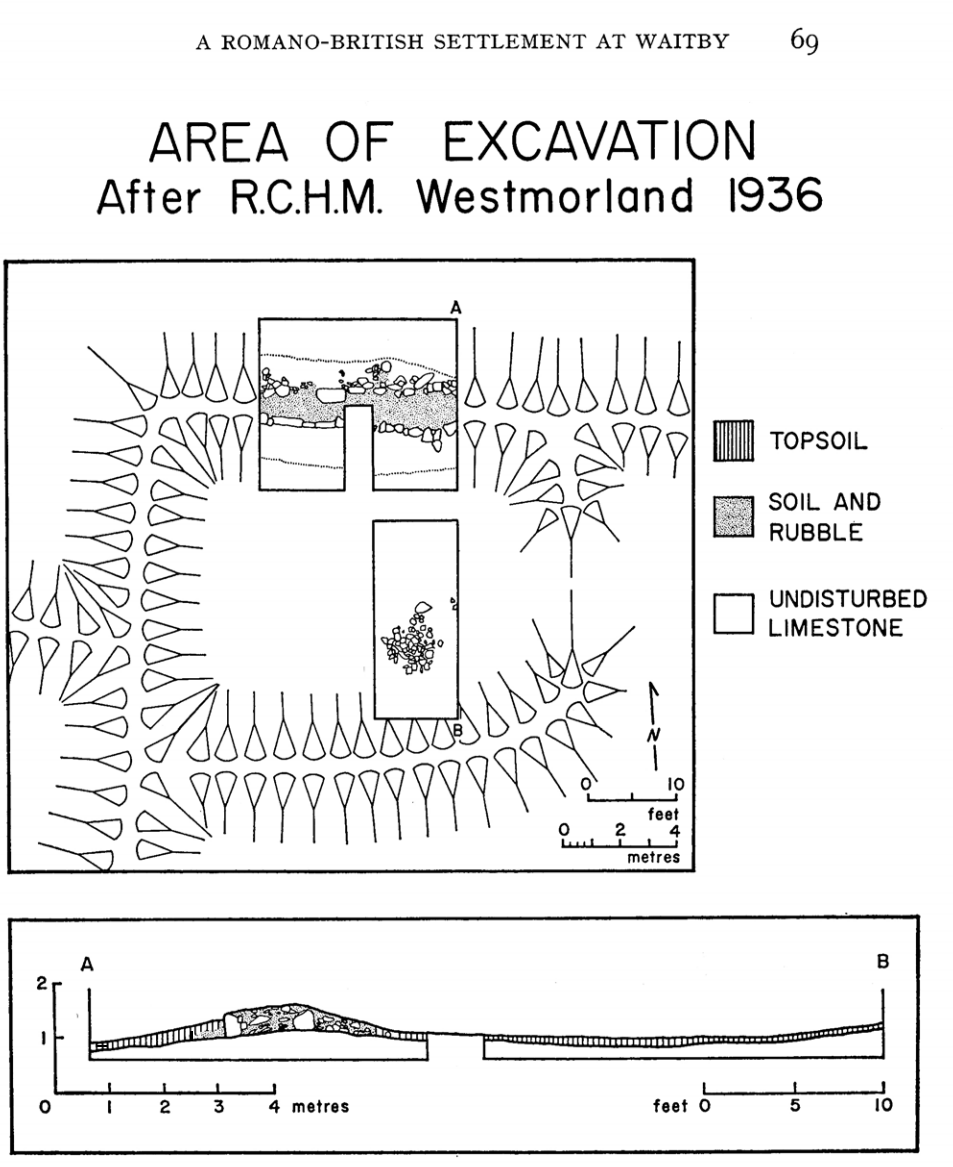
AREA OF EXCAVATION
After R.C.H.M. Westmorland 1936
A
B
TOPSOIL
SOIL AND RUBBLE
UNDISTURBED LIMESTONE
N
0 10
feet
0 2 4
metres
A
B
2
1
0 1 2 3 4 metres
feet 0 5 10

FIG. 2.

centre of the wall, it was an average 45 cm. (1 ft. 6 in.) deep. Throughout, it rested on bedrock. As the cross-section in Fig. 2 shows, the bedrock rose in a slight ridge beneath the wall.

The interior of the enclosure.

The one trench in the interior of the enclosure yielded an irregularly shaped feature of limestone and sandstone blocks and limestone and flagstone paving. The blocks formed the outside of the feature, the flagstone paving the inside. Nothing was found within or under the stones. The flagstones apparently formed part of a single slab which has since been broken. There was no indication of fire staining nor of charcoal.

Finds.

The only structural remains found have been described above. On the outside of the wall, within the tumble, a small quantity of coarse calcite gritted ware was found. This was identified by Mr Robert Hogg, of Tullie House Museum, Carlisle, as Huntcliff Ware, dating to A.D. 360-400 (Gillam, 1957). This identification was confirmed by Mr George Jobey (personal communication). Also in the exterior tumble of the wall, a small quantity of bones and teeth of sheep, pig, horse, deer and dog were found. These were identified by Dr L. B. Halstead, of the University of Reading.

Discussion.

The small area uncovered gave evidence of only one period of construction. Sectioning of the wall gave no indication of prior building. The limestone bedrock beneath it was undisturbed. From the amount of tumble, it may safely be said that the wall stood higher than it stands today. Unless the stone has been

substantially robbed, however, it is unlikely that the wall stood more than one metre (about 3 ft.) high. This suggests that the wall had a superstructure, presumably of perishable materials, possibly a hedge. There was no indication of post-holes within the fill of the wall, but such are unlikely to have remained intact.

One feature of this site in common with that excavated by Lowndes at Eller Beck (1964) and other sites in the area is the way in which the bedrock rises beneath the wall. It is not thought that the builders chose a natural ridge because the same feature is thought to occur beneath every wall of the settlement. The fact that the interior feature was laid directly upon solid rock suggests that soil had been cleared from the interior of the enclosure. The rubble fill of the wall was very akin to the weathered and broken limestone surface at the soil-bedrock interface. Thus, the bedrock of the interior of the enclosure may have been lowered a few centimetres to provide fill for the wall.

This would not account for the difference in level that is seen in section today, nor does it account for the lowering of the bedrock outside the enclosure. The fact that the limestone begins to rise beneath the tumble suggests to the writer that the lowering may be due to the weathering of the subsoil limestone since the wall was built. No explanation can be given of the function of the enclosure, nor of the interior stone feature; further excavation would be required to throw more light on them.

From the date of the Huntcliff Ware pottery, it would seem that at least part of the settlement was occupied in the latter part of the 4th century A.D. This is a very late date for a Romano-British site in this part of England. Furthermore, from the evidence of the earthworks and the plan of the site, the writer suggests that the entrance enclosure on the west side of the site

is later than the main part of the settlement; occupation may have continued into the Dark Ages.

Huntcliff Ware has been found in the uppermost levels (III/IV) of Hadrian's Wall at Birdoswald (Richmond and Birley, 1930). It is a prolific ware in other parts of northern England but is rare in Cumbria; the coincidence of these finds and the rectilinearity of the outer walls of the settlement lead the writer to suggest some degree of Romanisation at this site.

The animal bones and teeth, together with the system of small fields (see below) are indicative of a truly mixed hunting-herding-cultivating economy. The absence of remains of ox is not regarded as particularly significant due to the small excavated area.

The field system.

It is from the two or three fields situated between the rectilinear and curvilinear sites that some evidence for their chronological relationship can be gleaned. The field boundaries are lynchets running north from the curvilinear settlement that become banks at their northern ends, where they abut a small limestone scarp.

At first sight it would appear that the fields belong to the curvilinear settlement, but the writer believes that this is not the case for the following reasons. First, in other curvilinear enclosed sites in the county, the fields are *radial* from the settlement (e.g., Shap 73, Crosby Ravensworth 26 — evidence from aerial photographs, and Crosby Garrett 8 — R.C.H.M., W.). These field boundaries are parallel, not radial. It would therefore be unprecedented to find a rectangular field system around an enclosed site. Second, the field boundaries are almost parallel with the eastern wall of the rectilinear settlement, and connected to it by a natural scarp. The writer suggests, therefore, that the field system was laid out from the rectilinear settlement

into space formerly belonging to the curvilinear settlement. The curvilinear settlement is in a far poorer state of preservation that the rectilinear, and may even have been robbed to build the latter.

I am grateful to Mrs Carol Bellinger for drawing the plans.

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