

ART. V. — *A Romano-British Farmstead at Fingland*. By G. G. S. RICHARDSON, B.Sc.

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THE site (at NY 26895745) was reported by Mr T. Hunter, then owner of Midtown Farm, Fingland, who informed Mr R. L. Bellhouse that he had repeatedly observed a circular crop mark in one of his fields. Mr Bellhouse invited me in 1970 to carry out an exploratory excavation; the crop mark was not visible, but preliminary examination and probing indicated that there was a ditch about 12 ft. wide enclosing a roughly circular area about 100 ft. in diameter, with a possible entrance on the east side. The ditch and an entrance causeway were proved by excavation in that year, and a single trial square within the enclosure revealed one small post hole and showed that the occupation level was a very thin one, immediately below the plough soil. The crop mark reappeared in the following year as a ring of "laid" barley in an otherwise standing crop, enabling the full course of the ditch to be plotted. Further work was delayed by a change in ownership of the field, but it was learned in 1973 that the new owner, Mr J. Wills of Finglandrigg, was considering deeper ploughing which would clearly destroy the shallow remains. He readily agreed to allow as full an excavation as possible of the central area. This revealed a single circular hut foundation about 30 ft. in diameter, and provided dating evidence, which had been lacking in the 1970 excavation, for occupation in the late third or early fourth century.

(Note: The initial excavation in 1970 was based on a 10-foot grid. By the time that work was resumed in 1973 metric measure had become the accepted standard, but it was decided that the complications and possibilities of error arising out of a change of measure were unacceptable, and Statute Measure was accordingly retained throughout the work. Measurements in this paper are given accordingly.)

### **Location**

The enclosure lies in Field No. 65 (Black Dyke field) 200 yds. north of the Kirkbampton — Fingland road B5307, and touching the hedge forming the western boundary of the field. It is situated on the southern slope of a glacial esker. The subsoil over most of the area is red boulder clay with extensive inclusions of light brown sand, but changes to a grey clay at the southern extremity. The sandy inclusions were in places heavily ironstained, and gave misleading suggestions of sleeper trenches. The site is about a mile south of the Roman fort at Drumburgh, and slightly to the west of the direct line from Drumburgh to Old Carlisle (Fig. 1). Traces of a possible Roman road on this line have been found near Old Carlisle (CW2 lvi 42 & lxxii 330) but it has not so far been traced nearer Drumburgh.

### **The Enclosure (Fig. 2)**

The enclosure was 110 ft. in diameter, approximately circular, and protected by a ditch 12 ft. wide cut into the clay to a depth of 4 ft. below the present soil level. Traces of

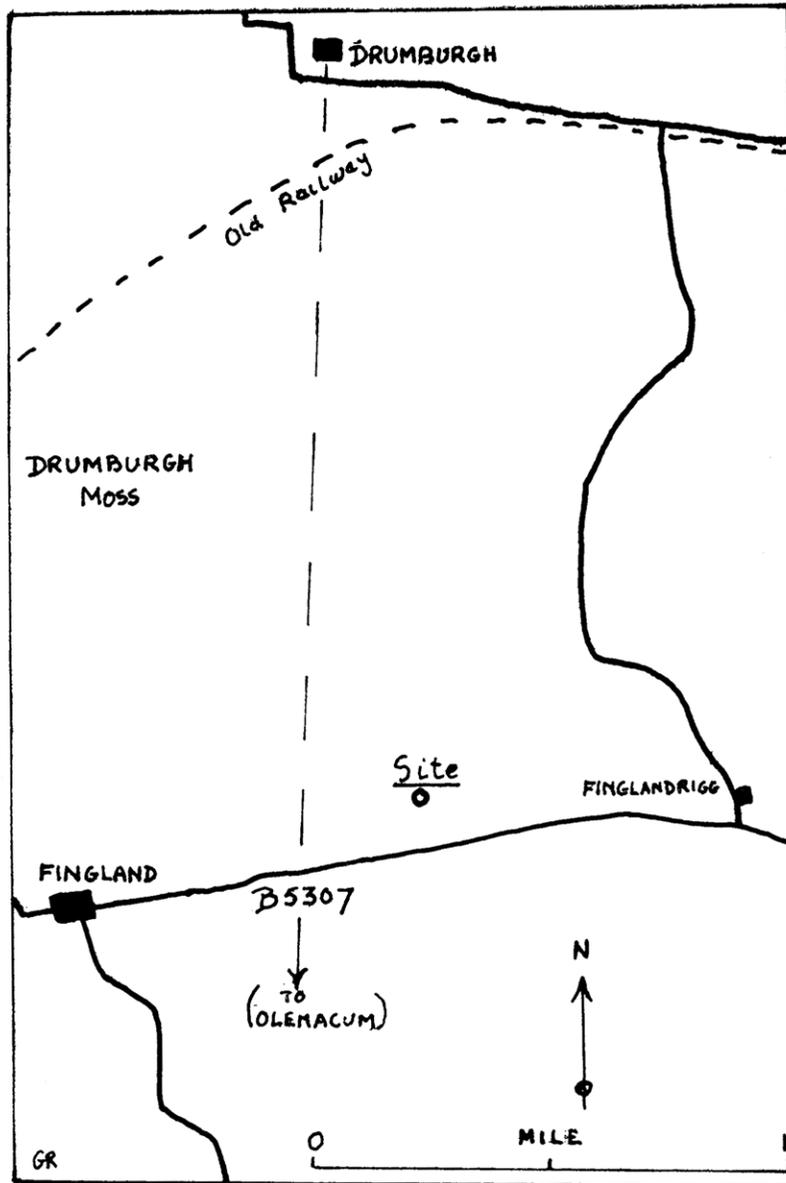


FIG. 1. — The position of the site.

a buried soil line in the section showed its original depth to have been about 3 ft. 3 ins. The bottom of the ditch was roughly flat, 6 ft. across. (Fig. 4) There was an upcast mound of mixed clay on the inner side of the ditch, and the section exposed one post hole. Pieces of oak and willow were found in the lower levels of the silting in the ditch. It is probable that the upcast mound was surmounted by a palisade. After some silting had taken place in the ditch a single layer of large cobbles had been laid on the inner lip of the ditch, presumably as a revetment to prevent erosion of the mound. (Fig. 4).

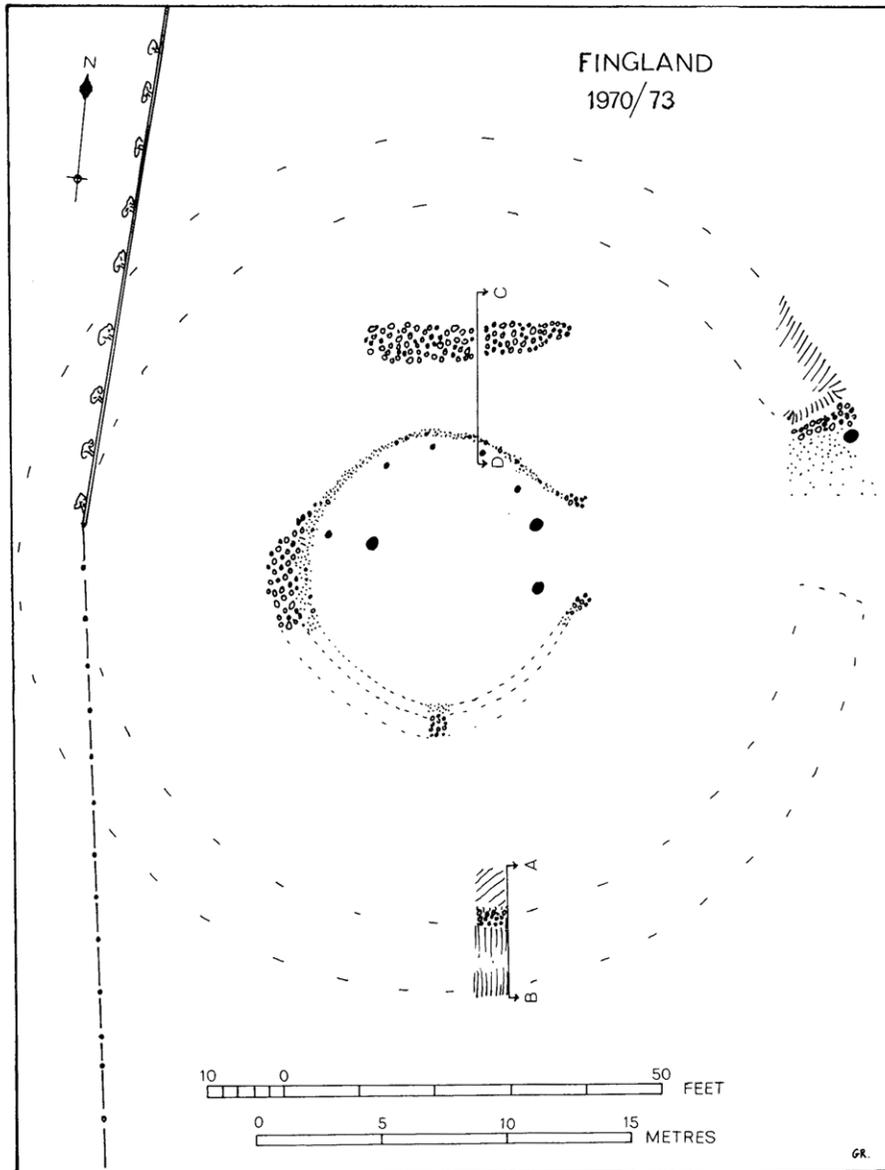


FIG. 2. - Site plan.

On the eastern side of the enclosure the ditch had been left uncut for a distance of about 12 ft. to provide an entrance causeway. Here again the lip of the ditch had been revetted with large cobbles. The central track of the causeway was of hard-beaten natural clay, with a strip of small pebbles 2-3 ft. wide along the edges. Cutting through the cobble revetment near the outer end of the causeway there was a rectangular post hole, 18 ins. x 8 ins. x 12 ins. deep, probably to support a barrier across the entrance.

The interior of the enclosure was examined in 1973, but time and resources only enabled the northern half of it to be fully exposed. This revealed the foundations of a

circular hut, described below, lying almost centrally in the enclosure, and an irregular spread of large cobbles and broken stone, 24 ft. long and 5-6 ft. wide, 7 ft. north of the hut. The stone spread did not seem to have any structural significance; it filled what appeared to have been a natural hollow in the original ground surface, and was probably no more than a levelling off of a muddy part of the enclosure to provide satisfactory footing for cattle. The clay surface surrounding the spread was very solidly compacted.

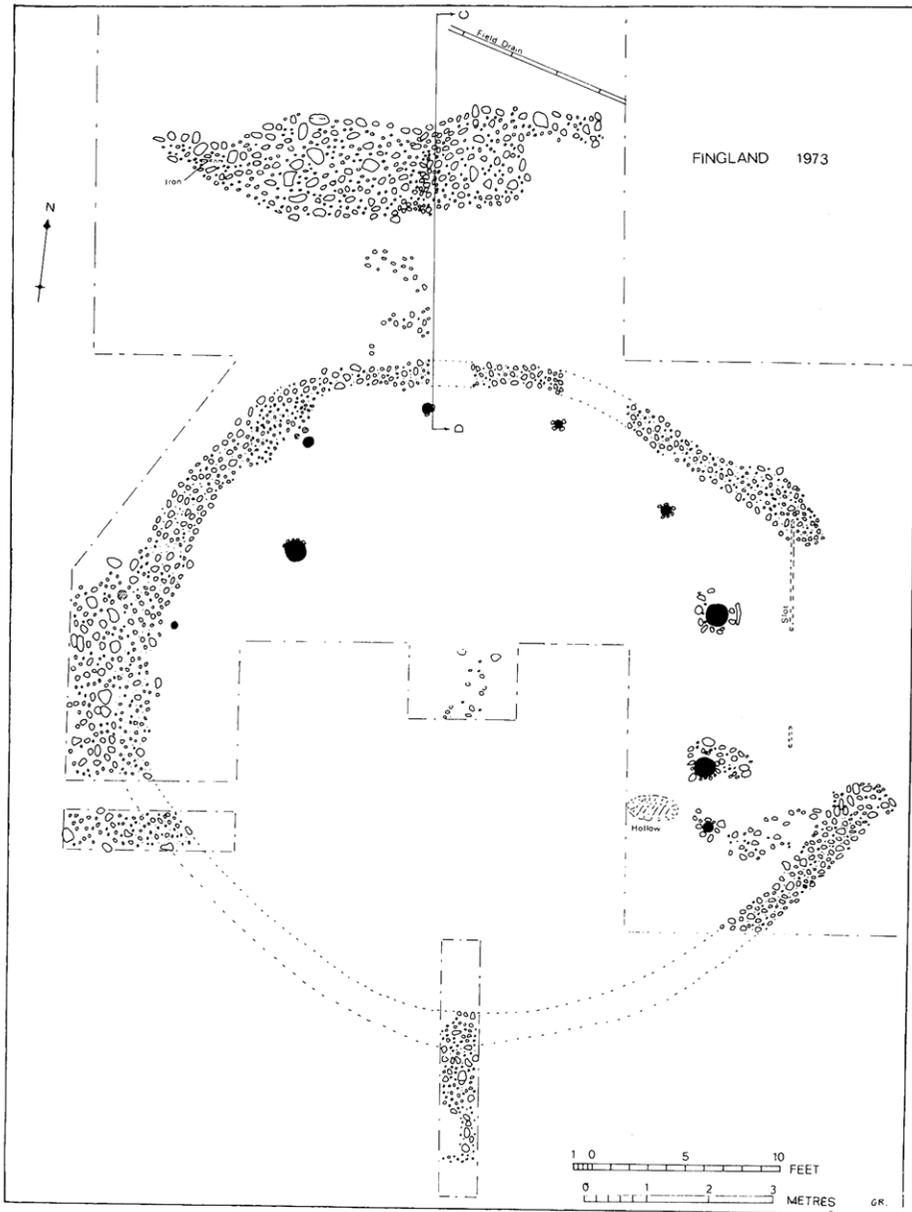


FIG. 3. — House plan.

**The Hut Circle (Fig. 3)**

The Roman levels in the central area lay not more than 18 ins. below the present surface and had been considerably disturbed by ploughing; they remained only as a thin layer without any stratification. A strip of small cobbles and broken stone, about 2 ft. wide, defined a circular hut 30 ft. in diameter; in a few places there were traces of decayed turf which, taken together with the absence of any significant scatter of stone, suggests that the outer wall of the hut was of turf resting on a stone foundation. Some 18 ins. to 2 ft. inside this wall there was a series of 6 in. diameter post sockets, 5-6 ins. deep, at an average spacing of 6 ft. 6 ins.

The entrance was on the eastern side, facing the causeway crossing the ditch. Here the wall foundations terminated in a somewhat wider spread of larger stones, leaving an opening 13 ft. wide. This must have been in the nature of a "porch", the true doorway being defined by two 15 in. diameter post holes, 5 ft. within the gap in the outer wall. These post holes, 15 ins. deep, and set 6 ft. apart, were heavily packed with stones. Another, similar post hole was located towards the rear of the hut.

Extending from the inner edges of the termination of the wall on both sides of the entrance there was a shallow slot, well marked on the north side but fragmentary on the south side. There was nothing to prove how it had been formed, but it is suggested that it may have been the trace of a light wooden screen narrowing down the outer entrance to the width of the inner doorway, and defining the "porch".

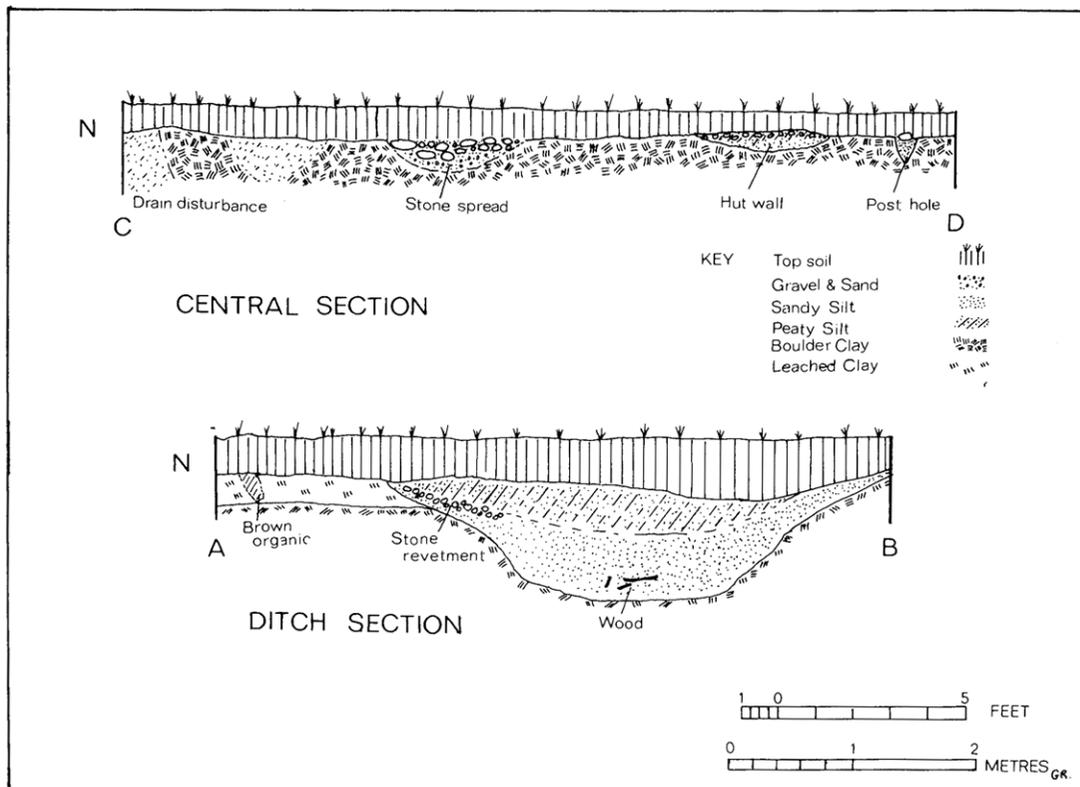


FIG. 4. - Principal sections.

The only feature found within the hut was a hollow 2 ft. 6 ins. × 12 ins. × 12 ins. deep, a short distance in from the south door post. It was filled with black organic material, with lenses of charcoal, but its purpose remains obscure.

### Finds

As is usual on sites of this character the finds were sparse and undistinguished. In addition to the pottery described below there were a number of small pieces of tile mixed with the stones of the wall of the hut, and traces of a totally corroded strip of iron about 12 ins. long and 1 in. wide below the upper layer of stones in the spread north of the hut.

Only eighteen fragments of pottery were found, most of them considerably worn. Of these there were three which could be firmly identified:

1. Mortarium; fragment of "hammer-head" rim, with triple reeding and lower edge of rim rolled, in smooth off-white pipe-clay fabric. Traces of black grit. Probable diameter 11 ins.  
(cf. Gillam Type 284)
2. Mortarium; fragment of similar rim but with squared upper edge; lower edge missing; pipe-clay fabric with trace of black grit. Probable diameter 11 ins.  
(cf. Gillam Type 279)

Also two wall sherds of similar fabric.

3. Bowl or dish, about 10 ins. diameter with flanged rim; dark grey smooth fabric with traces of black slip on upper surface of flange; rim lightly reeded.  
(cf. Gillam Type 231)

Also two small sherds from bowl in similar fabric, one showing rilling.

Pieces not identifiable were –

flat base of bowl or jar, thick walled with thinner bottom 5 ins. diameter, in coarse red fabric with pale grey (underfired) core.

2 fragments of undecorated Samian ware, very worn.

3 wall fragments from separate vessels, one in coarse brown fabric with black burnished surface; one in fine lead-coloured fabric; and one in a white sandy fabric with traces of colour coating.

5 fragments of amphora.

The amphora pieces came from the ditch near the causeway, and all the rest from the central area of the hut, predominantly towards the entrance.

The assemblage suggests a date of occupation in the late third century or early fourth century.

### Conclusions

The only evidence of stratification was the thin layer of silting underlying the stony "revetment" on the inner lip of the ditch, and this need not imply an interval of more than two or three years between the initial cutting of the ditch and the deposit of the stones. The generally shallow nature of the deposits, taken together with the evidence of the pottery, suggests a fairly short period of occupation, probably early in the 4th century. The site as a whole shows some similarity to the one partly excavated by the late Miss K. S. Hodgson and B. Blake at Jacob's Gill (CW2 lix 6). Their limited examination of that site did not confirm any internal building, but their excavations of Wolsty Hall, described in the same report, exposed a "round house" somewhat larger than, but broadly comparable with, the hut at Fingland. The Jacob's Gill site could only be broadly dated to "the latter half of the Roman period", but the present excavation may

provide some further evidence for Mr Blake's conclusion that the establishment of some of the numerous farm settlements observed in the Solway plain coincided with a period of agricultural prosperity about the beginning of the 4th century.

### **Acknowledgements**

Permission to carry out the excavations was given in 1970 by Mr T. Hunter, then of Midtown, Fingland, and in 1973 by Mr J. Wills of Finglandrigg. I am also indebted to Mr Wills for undertaking the back-filling of the 1973 excavation. The cost of the operations was defrayed by a grant from the Council of our Society. The actual work was carried out by volunteers from the Carlisle Regional Group, to all of whom I would record my thanks.

Finally I must thank Mr R. L. Bellhouse for encouraging investigation of the site, and for helpful discussions of the results, although his hopes that it might prove to be a Roman signal station were disappointed.

