

ART. IV. – *Hadrian's Wall: the forts at Drumburgh*

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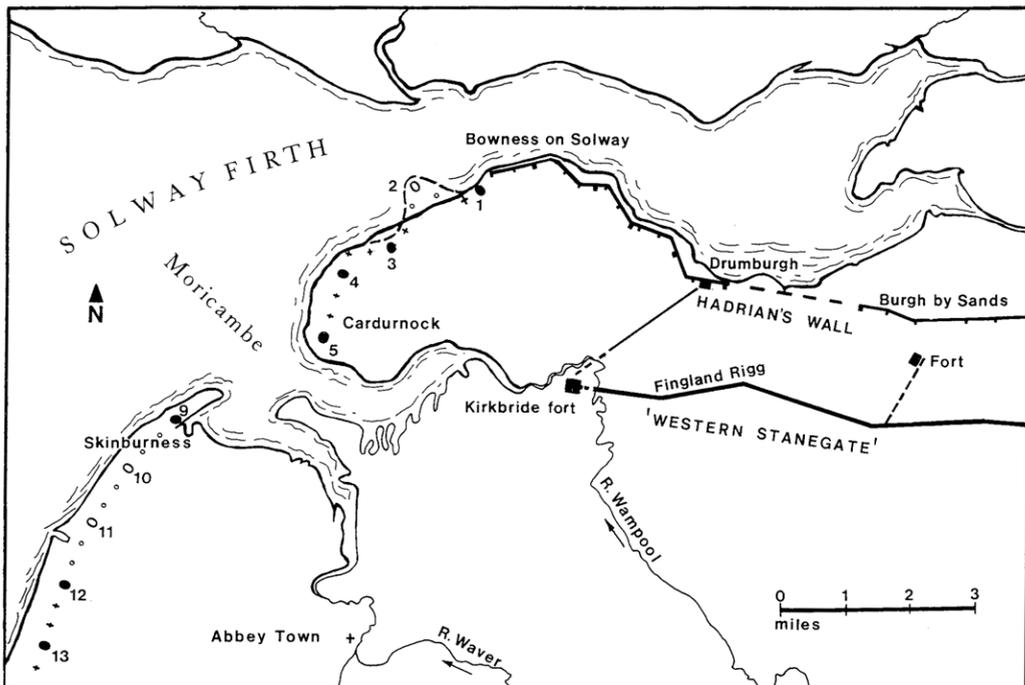
THE line of the Great Wall lies across the summit of the green hill of Drumburgh. All that we know of the structures adjoining this line on the south side derives from the excavations of Haverfield in 1899<sup>1</sup> and Richmond and Simpson in 1947,<sup>2</sup> to which may be added Robert Hogg's report of his findings in a trench parallel to Haverfield's no. 9 in 1953.<sup>3</sup>

Haverfield wrote:

The masonry which we found is much ruined. The Great Wall and the west wall of the fort have been 'spoiled' down to their foundation courses or even removed wholly. In each wall the surviving foundation course is faced with large thin red-sandstone slabs . . . At the corner of the fort, where the Great Wall and the fort wall meet, the foundations seem to be bonded together.

Nearly fifty years later Richmond and Simpson came to Drumburgh in an attempt to trace the course of the Vallum: they found a fort with a rampart of grey clay:

. . . the Stone-Wall fort at Drumburgh . . . would appear to have been substantially smaller



Outline map of the Solway showing part of the coastal system and Hadrian's Wall before the addition of the forts and the so called Western Stanegate with the Kirkbride to Drumburgh road link.

than the earth-work fort which preceded it. The west defences of the early fort were not obliterated . . . The south ditch of the early fort . . . was deliberately filled with the whitish clay from its own rampart, and it is therefore not impossible that the stone fort impinged upon it, though actual remains, if they existed, may have been destroyed in the lowering of the surface already described.

The Stone Wall which replaced the Turf Wall was examined:

The further fact emerges that, while the Turf Wall was here built in normal turf-work the associated fort had a grey clay rampart. The fort was therefore not of one build with the Turf Wall but additional to it. Its small size (316 by 270 ft.) and its intermediate position between the large forts of Burgh-by-Sands and Bowness will further suggest that it does not belong, as they do, to the first series of additions but . . . added still later in the light of experience.

The report ended with a reference to the article on the Drumburgh-Kirkbride road in the same volume. It had no special significance at that time and was assumed to be heading for the fort at Beckfoot on the coast via Abbeytown. There was nothing illogical in this as a cross-country road would be linking two Hadrianic sites. The possible presence of a fort at Kirkbride had long ago been discounted and references to it removed from the maps. The case for a Kirkbride-Beckfoot link (reported in *Britannia*, I, 1970, 277) collapses for lack of evidence. The fort at Kirkbride was at last defined in 1976; pottery types indicated a Trajanic foundation and the presence of only small amounts of Black-burnished Ware (BB1) and the evidence of dismantling suggest the garrison was moved to Bowness, to a new fort on the Wall, say between 122 and 124 – the 'fort decision' which also added Beckfoot to the line on the coast. Therefore it would be illogical to expect a road link in the first instance to a fort not yet built, and in the second instance from a fort about to be demolished and abandoned.

On the other hand the Drumburgh-Kirkbride road may be seen as an important clue: it suggests there was an outpost fort on the hilltop at Drumburgh before the building of Hadrian's Wall, that is, the Turf Wall. Another clue is the turf itself; as Richmond and Simpson point out, Wall turf was different from fort turf. If the early fort was there before the Turf Wall, why was it so nicely lined up with it, and why was there a butt end to the fort ditch on the west side, with a gap of 32 ft. between ditch end and Turf Wall?

The Roman name for, presumably, the stone fort is CONGAVATA, or more correctly CONCAVATA, which means 'scooped out'. Rivet and Smith (*The Place Names of Roman Britain*) state:

. . . an adjective whose unexpressed noun we cannot guess; applied to the shape of a coastline or to some other natural feature. The name is Latin – wholly exceptional among the forts which make up the defensive system in this region – may show that the fort was built in exceptional circumstances.

I believe the name describes the appearance of the site at the time of the building of the stone fort rather than the shape of the coastline. The evidence for scooping out is in Richmond and Simpson's report, p. 10, in the stackyard of the Grange:

Here the ditch was in due course found, but two new features presented themselves. The ditch had been reduced to 10 ft. in width by a systematic lowering or removal of the adjacent original surface at an uncertain period, not necessarily Roman. Before this happened, however, the ditch

had been deliberately obliterated by a filling of tightly-packed whitish-grey clay at a time when not much silt had gathered in its bottom, and therefore certainly during Roman times and presumably not very long after it had been dug.

To reduce ditch width from 15 to 10 feet requires the removal of soil to a depth of 3 feet. If this was indeed part of a 'scooped out' area significant enough to give the stone fort its name one may wonder what the soil was used for: if it was for the Turf Wall the clay fort was there first. It seems possible now to suggest a chronology based on the facts we have, it can only be tentative in the almost complete absence of datable finds from both forts. The fort at Kirkbride must have had an important role in the early second century spanning the period of the last years of Trajan's reign and the first years of Hadrian's. For some reason the army needed a small outpost fort on the summit of Drumburgh hill, possibly because of its outlook to north and east over the Inner Solway; easily available grey clayey marine alluvium from the marsh was used to build the defences, and a lightly constructed gravel road on an agger of peat connected the two forts. If plans for the new frontier had been in existence at that time the fort builders would have known exactly where the curtain was to pass over the hill and could have lined up the new fort with its north rampart on the line, and completed the circuit of the defences in grey clay which would later be incorporated in the turf of the Turf Wall. The fort ditch on the north side could have been dug on the line of the Great Ditch. This would explain the butt end of the west ditch and the gap between ditch end and Turf Wall. When the curtain was completed the fort had served its purpose and part at least was obliterated – there were no forts in the original scheme.

It seems much more likely that the clay fort was part of the pre-Wall period organization rather than an addition to the Wall itself. Many forts north of the Tyne-Solway line were abandoned in the early years of the second century and a sort of frontier emerged on the line of the east-west road between Corbridge and Carlisle – the Stanegate – with five forts on it dating probably from the end of the first century. More forts were added under Trajan and work on this frontier may have continued into Hadrian's reign. Kirkbride, connected by a road with Carlisle, must be seen as the west terminus and a logical addition to the developing scheme under Trajan. A new fort a little south of Burgh-by-Sands appears to be Hadrianic and, in my judgement, can be seen as an addition to the 'western Stanegate' at the end of a spur road pointing north-east, just as the clay fort at Drumburgh lies at the end of a spur from Kirkbride.

On the other hand the Turf Wall could have been finished, and the clay fort was therefore a true addition, but the small amount of silt in the fort ditch argues against this. The obliteration of the fort may have been a consequence of the 'fort decision' in 122 or a little later. The sizes of the three forts based on their measurements over the ramparts are: Drumburgh 1.76 acres, Kirkbride (position of west side estimated) 6.57 acres, Bowness (east wall found in 1988 shortening fort by about 90 feet) 5.46 acres. On these figures and on the assumption that forts were designed to house and provision so many men per acre, the garrison of Kirkbride could not all have been accommodated at Bowness; the surplus, with Drumburgh (2.87 acres) was not enough to fill Burgh-by-Sands (4.4 acres) but might have been squeezed into Beckfoot (2.5 acres). Professor Jones estimated the size of Burgh-by-Sands South as 4.6 acres so the garrison could have been accommodated in the Wall fort there.

Some years ago the reporting of a fort on Fingland Rigg seemed to support the neat

and logical idea that Kirkbride went to Bowness, Fingland Rigg to Drumburgh, and Burgh-by-Sands South to the Wall, half a mile to the north. Dr Brian Dobson in his Horsley Lecture<sup>4</sup> commented thus:

West of Carlisle account must be taken of the recent work by Professor Barri Jones. This does not, however, as yet, give a single unequivocal answer. Kirkbride . . . clearly pre-dated any 'system'.<sup>27</sup> Burgh-by-Sands South, on the other hand, could belong not to a 'Western Stanegate system' but to the period of the first scheme on Hadrian's Wall. Finglandrigg is no longer held to be a fort. It is not clear at present if the other features postulated by Professor Jones, when fully published, will command acceptance by other scholars.

Note 27 states 'The elimination of the proposed fort at Finglandrigg is based on a personal comment by Professor Jones to Dr Breeze'. Readers may wonder why I have chosen to write Fingland Rigg: the hamlet of Fingland lies on low ground at the west end of a long whale-backed ridge of boulder clay which rises to 89 feet OD, this feature is Fingland Rigg (Ridge). The ground falls away steeply at the east end and here on the level ground a farm was created in the last century and named Finglandrigg, thus on the maps. The features thought to be Roman are not *at* the farm but lie *on* the Rigg about half way between Fingland and farm.

### Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> CW1, xvi, 81-91.

<sup>2</sup> CW2, lii, 9-12.

<sup>3</sup> CW2, liii, 215-17.

<sup>4</sup> AA5, xiv, 4.