

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORTS

## EXCAVATIONS AT MELANDRA CASTLE, DERBYSHIRE 1969

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**I**N the summer of 1969, earth-moving operations by the contractors for Manchester Corporation on their Gamesley overspill scheme made possible renewed excavation on the area of the civil settlement adjacent to the Roman fort at Melandra Castle, Derbyshire. These excavations in July 1969 were directed by the author for the Ministry of Public Building and Works.<sup>1</sup>

Work was concentrated on an area to the east of the fort, adjacent to that part of the supposed mansio excavated in 1966.<sup>2</sup> It proved possible to reveal an almost complete plan of the remainder of that building (see fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> The supposed mansio measured approximately 160 x 60 ft. overall (50 x 18 m.), being constructed of timber, fronted by a road to the west, and backed by a rampart and ditch system. The width of some of the timber slots suggests a building of more than one storey in places. The overall plan suggests that the southern end (observed in 1966) contained the main "reception" rooms, while the northern contained small cubicles for sleeping accommodation and a sizeable kitchen quarter (including a large room with a probable stone hearth). The 1969 excavations indicate demolition rather than destruction as the ultimate fate of the building. Examination of the majority of the pottery gives a date *c.* A.D. 140 for this demolition.<sup>4</sup>

The supposed mansio fronted a road originally only about 10 ft. (3.05 m.) wide to judge from the heavy cobble bottoming which is all that remained. This road separated the mansio from smaller and less substantial timber buildings to the west. However, at some time after *c.* A.D. 120/25 these buildings were demolished and the whole area covered with a spread of gravel.

<sup>1</sup> We are most grateful to Manchester Corporation for permission to excavate and to the Engineer's Dept. and the contractors on the site for considerable help and co-operation during excavation.

<sup>2</sup> See *D.A.J.* (1967), 161-2. Also *J.R.S.*, LVII (1967), 180, fig. 6, for a plan of the supposed mansio as revealed by the 1966 excavations.

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately the cutting of a sizeable trench for a sewer in 1968 removed part of the unexamined west front of the building.

<sup>4</sup> I am most grateful to Mrs. Felicity Wild for examining and reporting upon the samian from both the 1966 and 1969 excavations.

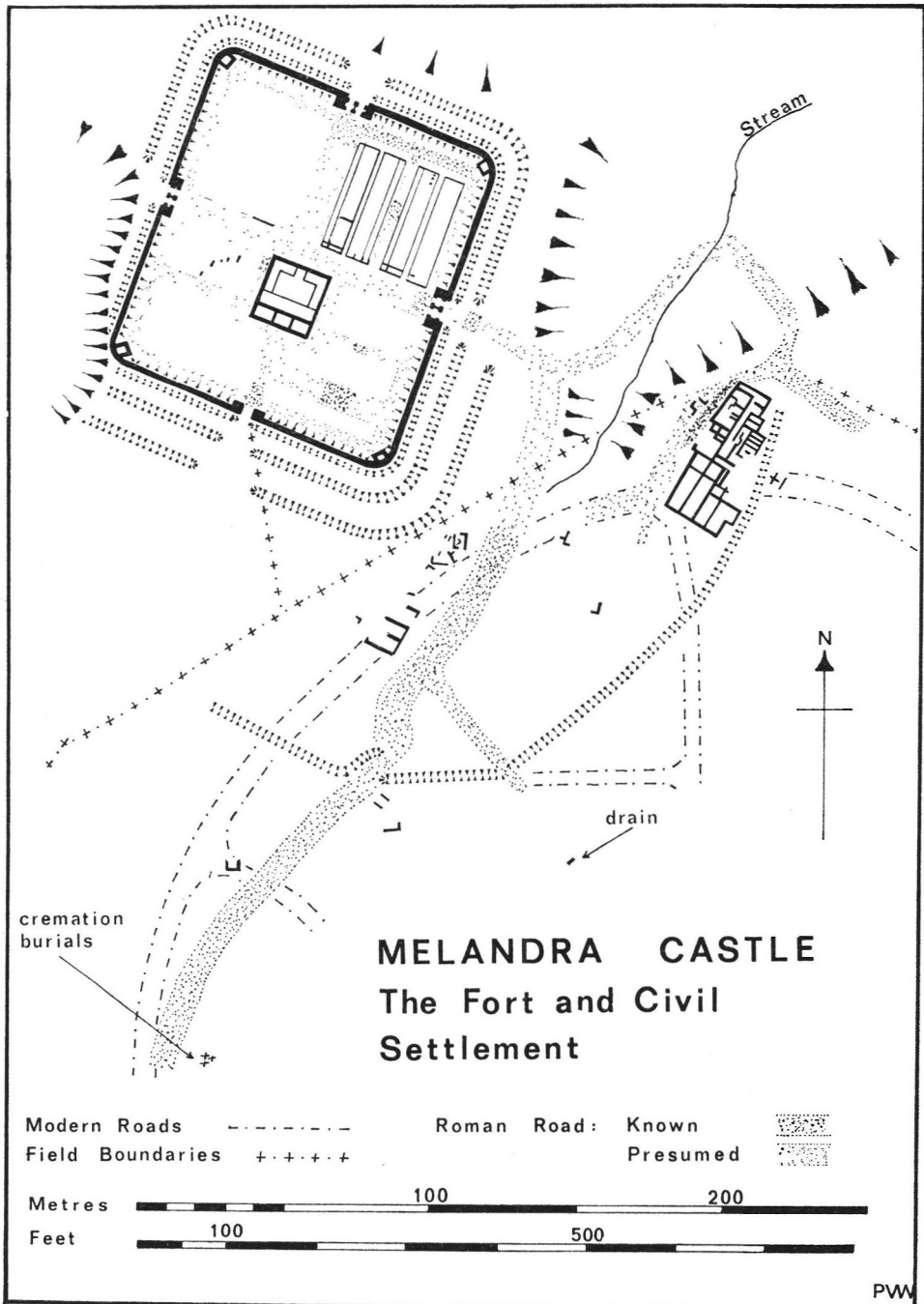


FIG. 1. Plan of the fort and civil settlement.

Behind the supposed *mansio*, the ditch traced around the perimeter of the civil settlement<sup>5</sup> in 1966-8 was found to continue as expected. Four sections were cut across this feature, all revealing a fairly uniform story. Four phases in the history of the defences emerge. As originally cut into the natural clay, the ditch in this area was a sharp V-shape 10 ft. wide (3 m.) and 6 ft. deep (1.8 m.). This was later relined with clay to provide a slightly shallower profile. During both these phases a clay bank on the inner (western) side of the ditch can be assumed. The third phase of defence history would appear to be an attempt to counter subsidence of this bank into the ditch. Stakes were hammered into the sides of the ditch to retain heavy beams whose purpose was evidently torevet the bank. This operation considerably reduced the size, and, therefore, presumably the effectiveness of the ditch as a means of defence. It was presumably to counteract this that upright stakes were hammered into the outer face of the ditch at regular 1½ ft. (0.45 m.) intervals. The final phase was one of decay perhaps assisted by deliberate demolition. The revetting structure slumped forward over the already silted ditch and the clay rampart followed it, so forming a clay seal over the timber revetting beneath. This had preserved much of the lower timberwork and we were able to recover several substantial fragments from two of the 1969 sections.<sup>6</sup>

The collapse, or more probably the demolition, of the defence system was followed by a period in which rubbish accumulated in any depressions on the uneven surface over the ditch. This process clearly antedates the demolition of the *mansio* as burning resulting from that demolition process overlay the ditch at one point. The pottery evidence for the destruction of the *mansio* therefore gives a suggested *terminus ante quem* of c. A.D. 140 for the final abandonment of the defences.

To the east of the ditch two trial strips were cleared to test for structures. No buildings were discovered but the test strips did reveal the line of a road running NW.-SE. presumably towards the fort of Brough-on-Noe. beside this a small cobble foundation about 1 yard square was suggestive of an extramural funerary monument.

The 1969 season concluded the excavation of the area threatened by the Gamesley overspill scheme. Excavation and subsequent observation of building operations have clearly not revealed all the buildings in the area, but an overall impression of the sizeable defended civil settlement at Melandra can now be gained. It seems remarkable that a fort which can never have occupied a key position in the overall strategy of the northern military zone had a considerable civilian population near its gates and had attached to it so large a *mansio*, if such it be. The excavations serve, therefore, to underline our ignorance about the civil settlements of northern Britain and to emphasize how much more we might expect to learn from excavation around its more important military centres.

<sup>5</sup> I am most grateful to Mr. Michael Brown of Glossop for watching building operations between 1966 and 1969. It is largely due to his work that it is possible to locate the complete course of the ditch. He has also been responsible for observation of several timber buildings revealed during construction work.

<sup>6</sup> Now in the Derby Museum.