

XI.—EXCAVATIONS AT HOUSESTEADS IN 1931.

BY ERIC BIRLEY AND JOHN CHARLTON, WITH A NOTE ON
THE COINS BY W. PERCY HEDLEY.

[Read on 24th February, 1932.]

ABBREVIATIONS.

AA 2, 3, 4	<i>Archæologia Aeliana</i> , second, third and fourth series.
AJ	<i>Archæological Journal</i> .
EE	<i>Ephemeris Epigraphica</i> .

INTRODUCTION.

For the previous history of the Roman station at Housesteads, it will be sufficient to refer to Mr. R. C. Bosanquet's invaluable paper in volume XXV of the second series of *Archæologia Aeliana*;¹ the work done by the Durham University Excavation Committee in 1931 must be regarded as the logical (if belated) sequel to the excavation of 1898, to the results of which we shall have occasion to make frequent reference.

Just as the fort itself has provided, since its plan was recovered by careful excavation, the best type of a Roman frontier post, so too the settlement that covers the hill-side around it has long promised as rich and instructive a field for study as may be found anywhere in Britain; indeed, there are few sites in any province of the Roman empire where there is so good a prospect of learning about the social and economic side of life on the frontier. To throw light on that aspect of the Wall's history is the

¹ *The Roman camp at Housesteads*.

committee's ultimate aim; but it will take many years of excavation, with the means and on the scale of the present, before that aim can be realized: in the meantime, it is desirable to indicate the main initial problems, some of which have received attention during the past season, while others await further work in 1932.

There are three general problems: (1) *When did these settlements spring up?* To what extent was their growth merely a consequence of the existence of the forts? It may be that the edict of Severus, permitting soldiers to marry, gave a fillip to their growth. (2) *What was their end?* When the garrisons were removed, was there any continued occupation of the settlements, and if so, how long did it last? The tombstone of Brigomaglos from Chesterholm, and the tradition of a British king at Old Carlisle, suggest some sort of survival into the post-Roman period. (3) *What was their character?* Were they merely occupied by dependents of the garrison, or did they develop economic independence? That they could acquire an independent organization is well known; besides the British self-governing *vici* at Chesterholm and Old Carlisle an inscription found in 1931 (no. 1 below, p. 232) shows that at Housesteads there was such a community.

The first of these problems we cannot answer yet, at least as far as Housesteads is concerned; until houses are found outside it, that can be shown to be coeval with the building of the fort: or, alternatively, until the whole settlement has been examined and found to contain no such houses, the question must be left open.

The second problem, in its application to Housesteads, has been formulated so clearly by Mr. Bosanquet that we may be allowed to quote his words in full:

It is possible that in the fourth century accommodation had to be found within the walls for the population of the civil settlement which had grown up outside. It will be interesting to see, when the suburban buildings are examined, how far the latest pottery found in them agrees with the pottery found in the intrusive

structures within the camp; in other words, how far the desertion of the civil settlement outside the wall synchronized with the extension of the buildings within.²

Recent excavations at Chesterholm suggest that the extra accommodation in that fort dates from the reconstruction of the northern frontier by count Theodosius in 369; and (though the details of it do not fall within the scope of the present report) it may be noted that the pottery found inside the granaries at Housesteads during the clearing of them by the National Trust in 1930 and 1931, together with that from the intrusive structures to which Mr. Bosanquet refers, belongs almost entirely to the same period; that is to say, in 369 far more space was being occupied inside the fort than ever before. It is difficult to suppose that the garrison was increased at that late date; and we may be justified in accepting Mr. Bosanquet's hypothesis, that the civil settlement was abandoned, as being too exposed to attack. The three buildings examined in 1931 appear not to have continued in occupation after 368; but their very proximity to the fort would be sufficient to ensure their dismantlement in time of danger, as the history of Vetera in A.D. 70 shows.³ We must defer a final answer to this question until buildings in the outlying parts of the settlement have been dug.

For the third general problem, there is, as yet, little that can be said. The gateway through the Wall in the valley of the Knag Burn can hardly have been intended as a substitute for the north gate of the fort, since it is clear that that was used very considerably;⁴ analogy with other frontiers might suggest that the gateway was for non-military traffic through the frontier—that is to say, for merchants to pass into the territory outside (as we know that merchants often did) to trade with the barbarians: and for the barbarians to enter Roman territory, under suitable safeguards, and on a limited number of occasions,

² AA 2, XXV, p. 241.

³ Tacitus, *Histories*, IV, 22.

⁴ Bruce, *The Roman Wall* (2nd edition), p. 187.

for a like purpose. The great extent of the settlement may indicate, and excavation may be expected to show, that besides the dependents of the garrison, and the traders who supplied its wants, Housesteads formed a centre for traders on a route that continued in use (though moved, as Mr. Bosanquet has pointed out to us, from the Knag Burn to Busy Gap) until comparatively recently. If such was the case, it is not impossible that Housesteads will produce evidence of some industrial activity, as well as warehouses and the like; and it is to be hoped that our work there will throw further light, at its source, on Roman trade with Scotland, on which Mr. James Curle has recently written a most instructive paper.

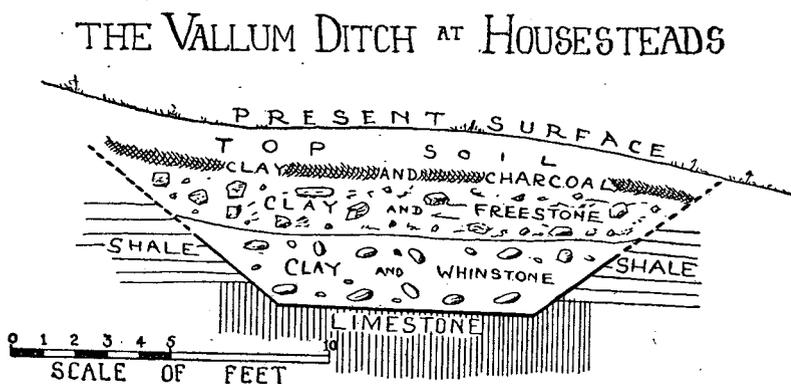
THE EXCAVATIONS OF 1931.

The work done in 1931 fell into two main divisions: the tracing of the line of the Vallum from the Knag Burn westwards, and the excavation of three buildings of a group outside the south gate of the fort; besides this, some attention was paid to the building attached to the east side of the gateway, and to the long structure that blocks the roadway immediately inside it.

THE VALLUM.

Five trenches were dug to determine the course of the Vallum, of which there is no indication on the surface between the Knag Burn and Bradley farm. It was found that the Vallum continues on a straight line from the point on the east bank of the Knag Burn where it is last visible; its ditch has been dug down into the limestone, and was found to have been filled in very thoroughly in each of the trenches dug. Fig. A gives a schematic representation of the ditch and its filling in relation to the present surface. The last trench, *E*, south of the fort, underlay one of the terraces, thus showing the terrace to be subsequent at least

to the filling-in of the Vallum; as yet there is no conclusive proof of the date at which this terrace was built, but it is hoped to give further attention to the point in 1932; at present, it may be said that nothing has been found inconsistent with the view that this terrace, at least, dates from the second century.



THE FIRST BUILDING (VICUS I).

The first building is roughly parallel to the south wall of the fort, from which it is separated by no more than 32 feet; immediately to the north of it is a flagged roadway, 8 feet wide, that overlies the lower courses of its north wall; the road is therefore structurally later than this building.

Vicus I is approximately rectangular, 53 feet east to west by 21 north to south; it is built of carefully dressed blocks of freestone, many of them obviously re-used. The original ground level sloped sharply from west to east (cf. fig. B), so that, in order to obtain a comparatively level floor, it had been found necessary to fill in the east end to a depth of some 3 feet above foundation level. The inner walls had no dressed face for these first 3 feet; two courses of massive, roughly hewn blocks, many of them 18 inches high and a foot long, formed a strong but inelegant support to

the carefully dressed wall above, and cannot have been intended to be seen, originally at least. At first the building formed one long room, with a floor of puddled clay, and a hearth towards the west end. Subsequently, at the east end a basement room, 13 feet long, was made by digging the floor down to foundation level, thus exposing the rough blocks to which we have referred; a dry-stone wall, carried up to the level of the original floor, revetted the west end of this room. Access to the basement was provided by three steps at the south end of the revetment; the second step formed a landing, while the top step was set at right angles to it; a low guard wall, jutting out from

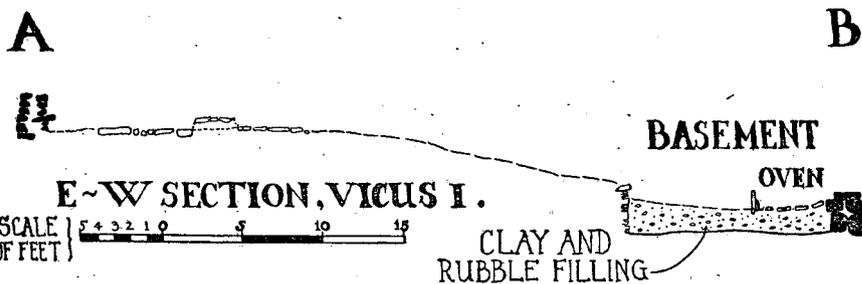


FIG. B.

the south wall of the building, would prevent anyone from falling downstairs. It does not appear whether there was any such precaution taken along the revetting wall; it is possible that there was originally a wooden partition from floor level upward, but we found no conclusive evidence for one. During this phase of the occupation (phase *a*) a fairly large amount of pottery was used, and left lying, in the basement, and some coins lost. At a later date, the basement was filled in again with rubble and clay to within a few inches of the original floor level, and an oven with walls and bottom of thin flags built in its north-east corner. Elsewhere in the building, the only piece of secondary work that had survived the considerable activities of stone robbers was a small patch of flagging in the north-west corner.

THE SECOND BUILDING (VICUS II).

The second building is separated from the first by an alleyway only 16 inches wide—the footings even touch in places; it is 51 feet by 22 feet, poorly planned and roughly built. Like the first building, it has suffered severely from stone robbers, particularly at the west end, where we found a Scottish coin of the seventeenth century and the bowl of a clay pipe that appears to belong to the early years of the eighteenth. While the footings of the building were throughs, the masonry was composed for the most part of roughly dressed squarish blocks, save at the east end, where long thin flags were used. The east wall was carried 3 feet further down on the outside than on the inside, apparently because a cutting had been made for a lane separating the first two buildings from the third. The west end of Vicus II was formed by two massive slabs, slotted for wooden partitions of some sort, separated by a gap that had probably contained a block of masonry. There was secondary cutting on these slabs, which must have come from an earlier building; the northern one showed signs of considerable wear, and clearly marked the position of the door. It looks as if the west front was left open but for some sort of wooden erection, perhaps a shop-front, that could be closed by shutters. The floor was of puddled clay, with patches of irregular flagging; several layers of clay, and occasional flags, at higher levels, showed that there had been a number of phases in the occupation of the building, but there was no trace surviving of more than one structural period. The only internal details were a partition (the sleeper track of which survived) running some 10 feet eastward from the centre of the west end, and a raised hearth in the centre of the building.

THE THIRD BUILDING (VICUS III).

A lane 10 feet wide separated the first two buildings from a third, running north and south; the outer face of

the east wall of this building was uncovered, but no more; its thorough excavation is to be undertaken in 1932.

THE FOURTH BUILDING (VICUS IV).

An alley-way 3 feet wide separated the third building from a fourth, which was excavated fully. It will be convenient to describe this part of the site in the order of its occupation rather than to give an account of its excavation from the top downwards. Originally there was a fairly uniform downward slope towards the east, as well as to the south. The first building erected here was apparently of wood (though only one post-hole attributable to it was found); and to secure a level floor for it, a platform some 10 feet square, with its eastern end revetted by a dry-stone wall, was formed, the whole being covered by a layer of clean grey clay. During the course of its occupation, the floor of this building was made up with fresh layers of clay on as many as four occasions; it proved possible to keep distinct the pottery and coins from the five floor levels. Subsequently a stone building, 54 feet long and 24 feet wide, was erected, the south-east corner of which enclosed the platform of the wooden building. The platform made it unnecessary to fill in this corner, but the south-west corner was filled in with a quantity of rubble, among which a fair amount of pottery and a number of coins were found; in the northern half of the building, too, a good deal of rubbish underlay the earliest floor of the stone building. The inner face of its walls was not carried below floor level, but the outer face rested on the limestone which at this point comes close to the surface. The northern half of the building had been extensively robbed (only a few flags of the early floor remaining), while at the south end the wall had been robbed to below floor level; but sufficient remained in the centre for the phases of its occupation to be recovered.

Fragmentary cross-walls suggested that Vicus IV was at first divided into three or more rooms; its chief internal

feature was a furnace in the most southerly room. This furnace (for the plan and section of which, on plate xxxiii, we are indebted to Mr. Philip Corder, F.S.A.) is of an uncommon type: a long flue, built of freestone with a floor and cover of thin flags, and its joints sealed with clean yellow clay, leads to a square compartment, with a flag for floor; here there were signs of intense burning, of which there was no trace whatever in the flue. Presumably the latter was intended to provide a strong draught; to complete the furnace, a chimney would be needed to carry off the smoke, and create the draught. A furnace of rather similar construction was found by Dr. Wheeler at St. Albans in 1931.

This first phase of the stone building appeared to follow without historical break on the occupation of the wooden building; otherwise the absence of débris of that building could hardly be explained; but the second phase clearly followed on a destruction. Masonry débris and rubbish separated the first floor from a second, again mostly of flags, a foot above its predecessor; in this phase, Vicus IV formed a single long room. At least during this same phase, the wall was of half-timber on a stone base; considerable fragments of wattle and daub, burnt hard in the fire that destroyed the building, provided evidence for this method of construction, which was followed in the last period at Birdoswald, and may indeed have been the rule in barrack-buildings in the forts.

CONCLUSION.

Until this part of the site has been fully examined, and the stratified finds published, it would not be profitable to discuss in detail the evidence for the date of the buildings that have been excavated so far. Reference to the table of stratified coins (extracted from the full report by Mr. Hedley, which will accompany the detailed publication of the pottery) will show, however, that there is a good deal

of coin-evidence for the dating of the periods of occupation of the buildings.

Vicus II is the simplest; here coins of Hadrian and Commodus, and a worn legionary denarius of Mark Antony, came from below the earliest floor, and a coin of Severus, dated A.D. 197, was found in the mortar of the east wall, thus giving a *terminus post quem* for the building; the pottery from the earliest occupation was in keeping with an early third century date, including part of a samian vase with *appliqué* decoration, a samian mortarium (Dr. 45) of Rheinzabern fabric, and other wares of this period. Coins dropped during the first phase of the occupation extend to Elagabalus; those from higher levels (*b* and *c*) extend to Tetricus only, but a fair amount of fourth century pottery was found in the building, though none that need be dated later than A.D. 368.

Vicus IV also presents a fairly simple case; the third floor-level of the wooden building included coins of Severus, so that (in the absence of traces of destruction) the building can hardly be dated before the Severan reconstruction of the Wall. The first period of the stone building produced no coins later than Caracalla, and the second two coins only, of Hadrian and the younger Faustina; but here, too, there was sufficient pottery to show occupation throughout the third century and the first half of the fourth.

Vicus I presents problems of some difficulty. Apart from the east end (where the excavation of the basement had in any case removed material belonging to the first phase of the occupation) the original floor level had largely perished; there was only a small patch of secondary flagging in the north-west corner, which sealed a small deposit, containing a coin of Gallienus, a brooch of well-known third-century type (Mr. Collingwood's type 79), and one or two indeterminate pieces of pottery; enough to suggest; but not to prove, a third-century occupation. The material from the floor of the basement (phase *a*) included coins ranging from Severus Alexander to Tetricus, but the

pottery was uniformly datable to A.D. 300 or thereabouts; the coins from the filling (phase *b*) cover much the same period; the last phase (*c*) alone has fourth-century coins to show. Whether the building existed before 300 or not, it is difficult to say with certainty: the pottery from the passage-way between Vicus I and II, and the nature of the deposit formed there, may serve, on publication, to decide the point; at present it looks as if the building is not earlier than that date, and that, in consequence, there was a considerable and surprising survival of early third-century coins at the time of its earliest occupation.

We are greatly indebted to Mr. Percy Hedley for the care with which he has examined and reported upon the coins; his full report (which is already prepared) will form a valuable section of the detailed description of the evidence, which it is hoped to publish in the course of the next year.

THE INSCRIPTIONS.

1. Vallum, trench E; top soil. Fragment from the lower left-hand corner of an inscribed slab, 11×11×3½ inches; the letters, 2½ inches high, have been roughly picked out. (Plate xxxiv, fig. 2.)

I V L · S I ] *Iul(ius) S[. . . .] d(ecreto) vica[norum]*
D · V I C A I

Clearly, this records the execution of some work by Julius S. . . . , in accordance with the decree of the inhabitants of the *vicus*, who therefore had some sort of corporate life. It is to be hoped that the remainder of this inscription will ultimately be found, since by analogy with the altar from Chesterholm⁵ it should contain the name of the place, as to which the *Notitia* and *Ravennas* disagree entirely.⁶

2. On the flagged roadway between Vicus I and the medieval house. "Portable" altar, 9×5×5 inches overall; broken horizontally into two nearly equal pieces. The letters range in height from ½ inch to 1 inch, and though sharp are poorly cut.

V E T E R *Veteribus posuuit Aure(lius) Vict(or) v(otum).*
I B V S
POSVVITA "To the Veteres, Aurelius Victor has placed a
VREVICTV votive offering."

⁵ Cf. AA 4, VIII, p. 194.

⁶ One gives *Borcovicium*, the other *Velurtion*.

EXCAVATIONS AT HOUSESTEADS IN 1931



The Veteres are discussed fully by Haverfield in a paper on *Early Northumbrian Christianity and the altars to the Veteres* in AA 3, XV; a good summing up of the evidence is given by Mr. Collingwood in the recently published second edition of his *Roman Britain*. It appears that originally outland auxiliaries set up altars to their native god Hvitris, and that subsequently other troops on the Wall, misled by the similarity of the name to the Latin adjective, adopted the dedication as "to the old gods." Hodgson notes the occurrence of the name *Vithris* as one of the names of Odin in the Death Song of Lodbroc,⁷ but there appear to be etymological difficulties in the way of identifying Vithris with Hvitris.⁸

The reduplication of the **V** in **POSVVIT** is uncommon, but not otherwise unknown; another British example, on an altar to Silvanus, perhaps from Old Penrith, is EE ix, 1223.

3. Unstratified, from the west end of Vicus II. Rude "portable" altar, 9×5×5 inches. Originally there were five lines of lettering, but little of it has survived the redressing of the stone for building purposes.

D I . . .

 . . . V
 S L M

Di[bus veteribus] is a possible reading that suggests itself, but we have been unable to make out anything definite after the first two letters. **V S L M** at the end, though very faint, appears certain.

4. Unstratified. Part of a moulded slab, now 15×20 inches; on the upper side of it is a roughly picked out inscription, with letters averaging 2½ inches high.

JNVS FECIT " . . . nus made this."

Presumably the mason occupied a spare moment by signing his name on the stone he had just dressed.

5. From the south granary of the fort, where it was found during the National Trust's excavations in December, 1931. Fragment of a large and finely cut inscription, with a cable border above; the letters are 3¼ inches high. (Plate xxxiv, fig. 1.)

P C A
 E R T

Further fragments of this inscription are now in the Clayton Memorial Museum at Chesters;⁹ taken together, they give the following text:

⁷ II, iii, p. 140.

⁸ Cf. Haverfield in AJ XLVII, p. 262.

⁹ For those found at Housesteads in 1898, cf. AA 2, XXV, p. 279.

**IMPP CAess I sePTimio severo
pio PERTinaci et m aurelio anto
nino augg &c.**

This is, therefore, another Severan building-inscription, the second that has been found on the Wall.

(Plate xxxiv, fig. 3.) Sculptured figure, apparently of a god, though what god we are unable to determine. Mercury has been suggested. Found in Vicus II, unstratified.

LATE BUILDINGS AT THE SOUTH GATE.¹⁰

Trial holes were dug inside the oblong building that projects from the east guard-chamber of the south gate of the fort. It was found that all occupation levels had been destroyed, no doubt by the excavators of the middle of last century; and no evidence for the date of the building remains inside it. But the massive footings of its south wall are separated by a layer of rubbish a foot thick from the flagged roadway that runs along the north side of Vicus I; that roadway itself, as we have observed, was structurally at least later than Vicus I; and it appears that the roadway was covered with rubbish, and all memory of it lost, when the projecting building was put up; for otherwise it would surely have been used as a foundation. On the whole, it seems best to suppose that this building is medieval or even later.

A little work was done on the long building immediately inside the south gate; but the results were inconclusive, and further work will be needed before its date can be determined.

It remains for us to express our thanks to professor G. M. Trevelyan, O.M., for his invitation to dig on the site, and for his ready support of the work; to Mr. Thompson of Moss Kennels, the tenant, for assistance in many ways; to our members, Messrs. G. H. Askew, Philip Corder, F.S.A., Peter Hunter Blair, John Gibson, F.S.A. (to whom we are indebted for permission to reproduce his photograph of the first two buildings, plate xxxii), W. Percy

¹⁰ Cf. AA 2, XXV, p. 282.

Hedley, F.R.N.S., the rev. T. Romans, F.S.A., and C. E. Stevens, for assistance on and off the site; and above all to Mr. R. C. Bosanquet, V.P.S.A., for considerable help in the planning and execution of the work.

THE COINS.

BY W. PERCY HEDLEY.

With few exceptions the earliest unworn coins are of Septimius Severus and his family. The exceptions are the coins from the Vallum trenches and some from the wooden building on the site of Vicus IV. Excellent information on the survival of coins in circulation is made available by the lists. The best example is that of a "hoard" of five coins found corroded together in the passage between Vicus III and IV. The coins are of Vespasianus, Severus, Caracalla, and Elagabalus (2). That this need not be taken to suggest that the coins had been hoarded and not in regular circulation is shown by other groups of coins, e.g.

Flavian Dupondius (no. 5) found with coins of Caracalla (no. 114) and Julia Domna (no. 101).

Denarius of Divus Antoninus (no. 32) found with coin of Caracalla (no. 79).

Coin of Diva Faustina senior (no. 29) found with coin of Elagabalus (no. 91).

The hoard covers the period from A.D. 72 to A.D. 222 (150 years). The survival of early bronze coins is almost entirely economic. After the time of Marcus Aurelius, few bronze coins were struck except by Severus Alexander and Gordianus, and sesterces and asses of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius remained in regular circulation until a very late date.

The gap in the coinage from Maximus to Valerianus is due mainly to the settled state of Britain and the permanency of the monetary system.

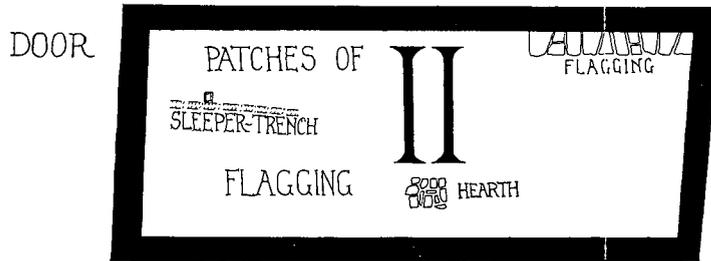
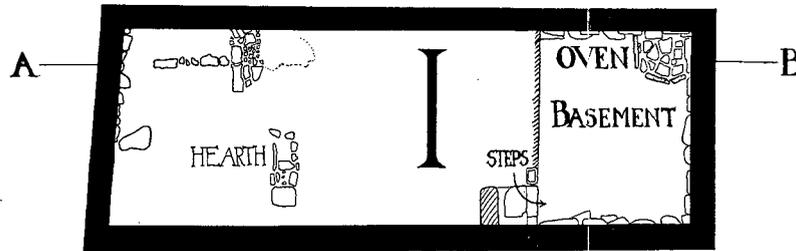
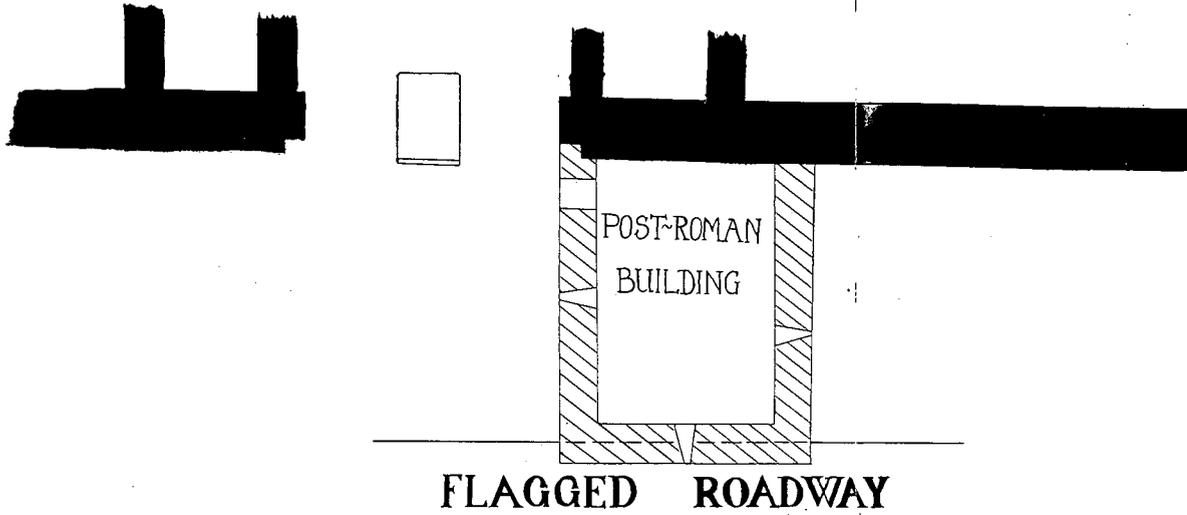
The survival of the antoniniani of Gallienus, Postumus and Claudius Gothicus is probably due to the monetary reform effected by Aurelianus, when it appears that the antoninianus was reduced in value from 24 to 20 asses. Numerous hoards of coins of this period have been found all over England and France. The coins were put away by their owners in the hope that at a later date they would again have their face value.

The scarcity of the fourth century coinage is perhaps due to more or less peaceful evacuation of the *vicus* at the outbreak of the Picts' War in A.D. 368, but more likely to the lack of soil and cover on the site of the *vicus*, in many parts of which the latest period of occupation has been denuded.

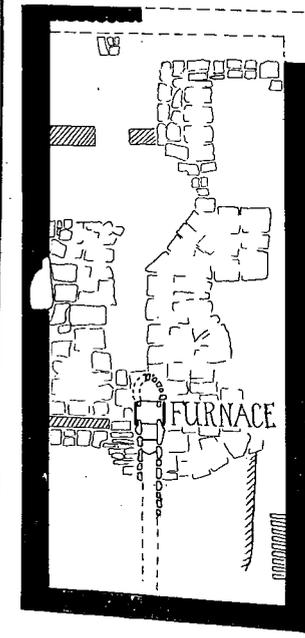
Very considerable assistance in the identification of the coins has been rendered by our Keeper of Coins, Mr. G. H. Askew, who personally cleaned by chemical processes a large number of the coins which were too much oxidized to be identified before cleaning.

DISTRIBUTION OF STRATIFIED COINS.

- Vicus I. Period 1. Gallienus (116).
 Period 2. Diva Faustina junior (42), Commodus (52), Severus (60), Soaemias (92), Alexander (100), Victorinus (123), Claudius Gothicus (140), Constantinus I (146).
- Basement Period a. Alexander (94, 96, 98), Gallienus (112), Victorinus (125), Tetricus (130), Tetricus junior (136).
 Period b. Second century (56), Alexander (93, 95, 97, 99), Mamaea (102), Maximinus (104), Valerianus junior (110), Gallienus (111, 113, 114), Victorinus (119, 120, 121, 122, 124), Tetricus (126, 129), Tetricus junior (132, 133, 137), Claudius Gothicus (138, 141), Barbarous antoniniani (149, 155, 156).



I V



HOUSESTEADS, 1931.

SCALE OF FEET

5 10 15 20 25 30

1/8" = 1'

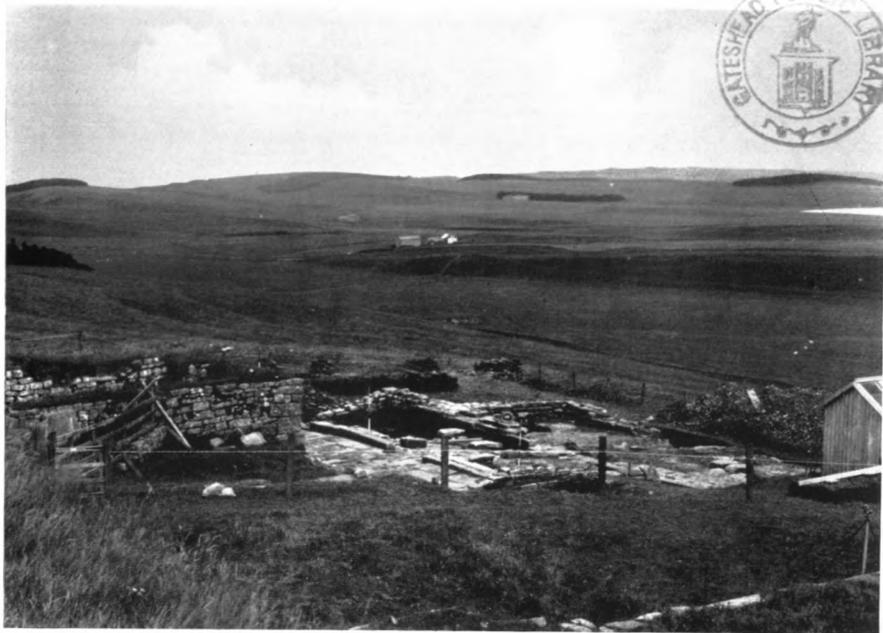


FIG. 1—BUILDINGS I AND II FROM THE NORTH-WEST.



FIG. 2—BUILDING IV FROM THE NORTH.



FIG. 1—BUILDING IV FROM THE SOUTH.

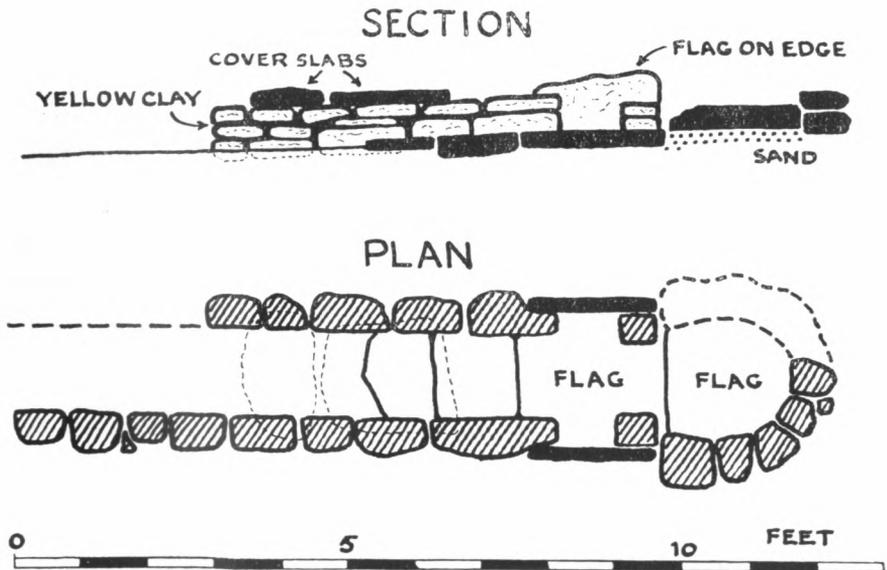


FIG. 2—FURNACE IN BUILDING IV.

P.C. 1937



FIG. 1.

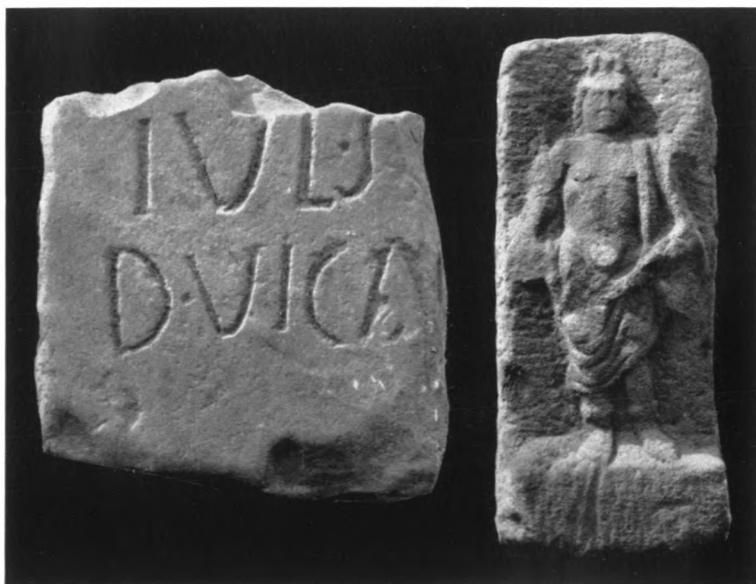


FIG. 2.

FIG. 3.

- Period c. Severus (63), Julia Domna (72), Tetricus junior (134), Constantinus I (144), Constantine family (148).
- Vicus II. Zero. M. Antonius (1), Hadrianus (12, 14), Commodus (51), Severus (64).
- Period a. Diva Faustina senior (29), Faustina junior (41), Geta (84), Elagabalus (91).
- Period b. Hadrianus (15), Antoninus Pius (20, 24), Faustina junior (43), Commodus (53), Severus (61, 66), Elagabalus (90), Valerianus (109), Tetricus (127).
- Period c. Antoninus Pius (25), Lucius Verus (45).
- Vicus IV. Zero. Antoninus Pius (18, 21), Diva Faustina senior (30), second century (57).
- Wood. Antoninus Pius (23, 28), M. Aurelius (35), Faustina junior (40), Commodus (49), Severus (65, 69, 70).
- Stone 1. Traianus (8, 10), Hadrianus (17), Antoninus Pius (26, 27), Divus Antoninus (32), Diva Faustina senior (31), M. Aurelius (33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39), Commodus (47, 48, 50), second century (55), Severus (59, 62, 67, 68), Julia Domna (75), Caracalla (79, 80, 82).
- Stone 2. Hadrianus (13), Diva Faustina junior (44).
- VALLUM. ?Flavian (6), Hadrianus (11, 16).

Coins which appear to be little worn are in italics.