

III.—EXCAVATIONS AT HOUSESTEADS IN 1932.

BY ERIC BIRLEY, JOHN CHARLTON, AND PERCY HEDLEY.

[Read on 22nd February, 1933.]

In 1932 the Durham University Excavation Committee continued its examination of the settlement outside the fort at Housesteads, concentrating (as in 1931) on the area outside the south gate, where the surface indications of buildings are most pronounced; some attention, however, was paid to outlying parts of the settlement, and the search for the fort's ditches was continued, with somewhat unexpected and important results. Work began on the 13th June, and ended on the 23rd July; at first three men only, but during the last four weeks twelve, were employed.

Mr. Peter Hunter Blair assisted in the direction of the work for the greater part of the time, and for lesser periods Mr. G. H. Askew, the rev. Thomas Romans, and professor C. E. Whiting, whilst we were fortunate in having the assistance of Mr. Basil Alderson for the last week; it was at this point that the human remains were discovered in building VIII, and Mr. Alderson and Dr. H. D. N. Miller of Haydon Bridge, whose assistance we invoked, examined the bones *in situ*, and supervised their removal—a matter of some delicacy, owing to their fragile condition. Subsequently, through Dr. Miller, we were able to send the remains to Cambridge for examination by Dr. W. L. H. Duckworth, whose detailed report upon them will appear elsewhere, it is to be hoped in the near future.

It is again our duty to thank professor G. M. Trevelyan, O.M., for permission and encouragement to excavate, and Mr. Thompson of Moss Kennels, the tenant of Housesteads, for assistance and forbearance, the full extent of which the excavator is only able adequately to realize

in retrospect; extensive excavations such as those at Housesteads in 1932 cannot but interfere considerably with the normal activities of a farm.

Twelve students from the university of Durham, and three from Cambridge, took part in the season's work, and by their enthusiasm and energy contributed largely to the success of it.

I. THE DITCHES OF THE FORT. BY ERIC BIRLEY.

In 1931 some trenches on the south side of the fort, to the east of the gate, failed to produce any signs of a ditch; in 1932, further trenches were dug on the south, east, and west sides, in order to discover to what extent the fort had been defended by ditches. In the event, it was found that the whole of the south side, and the east and west sides as far north as the gateways, were unprotected by ditches; but to the north of the gateways there was a ditch on either side. On the east there is a berm of 15 feet, and the ditch is some 20 feet wide, as against 12 and 25 feet respectively on the west side; both ditches are cut into the rock, to a maximum depth of some 5 feet. A typical section of the west ditch is given in the accompanying figure.

The eastern ditch runs out on the slope down to the

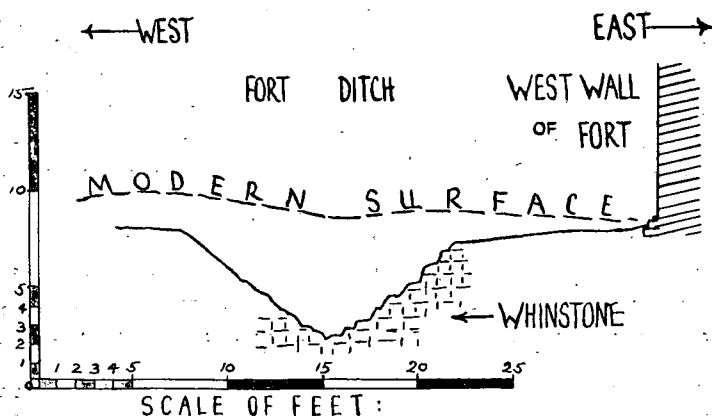


FIG. 1.

Knag Burn, some yards short of the Wall; but that on the west side extends far enough north to establish a structural sequence: the extreme end of it has been filled in to take the foundation of the Wall. At first sight, this might be taken to show that the fort belongs to an earlier phase in the history of the frontier than the Wall—that is to say, to the Vallum frontier; but that can hardly be the case. Had the fort been designed to stand independently of the Wall, it would be reasonable to expect that the ditch would have been carried 10 or 12 feet farther north, to run out over the edge of the escarpment; there could be no point in leaving a space between its end and the edge, unless it was for the Wall when it came.

Sir George Macdonald has recently shown, in a paper to which we are deeply indebted for the present interpretation of the Housesteads evidence,¹ that on the Antonine Wall some of the forts, in particular Balmuirdy and Old Kilpatrick, had been laid out before the detachments working on the Wall arrived; and in each case the fort-builders misunderstood the line that the Wall was to take, so that their preparations for joining fort and Wall required modification when the Wall-builders came upon the scene. It may be supposed that the situation at Housesteads was not dissimilar: the builders of the fort expected that the Wall would be brought up to the north-west angle in line with the north wall of the fort, and left what they considered to be sufficient room between the edge of the escarpment and the end of the ditch; but the Wall-builders, for some reason (perhaps because they did not like to go so near the edge), chose a line a little farther south, that made it necessary to fill in the extreme end of the ditch so as to give the Wall a firm foundation.

If this point be granted, it will be seen that it suggests a simple explanation of the situation at the north-east angle of the fort. Some years ago now, Mr. F. G. Simpson inferred that the present tower there, that is attached to the

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, LXVI (1931-1932), pp. 219-276: "Notes on the Roman forts at Old Kilpatrick and Croy Hill, and on a relief of Jupiter Dolichenus."

north wall of the fort at the point where the Wall joins it, some way from the normal position in the angle, must have been preceded by a tower in the correct position; and his excavation showed that such had indeed been the case. At the time there was no touchstone for this piece of evidence such as is now provided by sir George Macdonald's recent work on the Scottish Wall, so that the balance of probability seemed to be that the change took place on the supersession of the Vallum frontier by the Wall; in other words, that the fort had originally been designed as an independent structure, and not as a part of the Wall scheme. Now, however, the evidence from the west ditch, taken in conjunction with that from Balmuilty and Old Kilpatrick, puts such a view out of serious consideration; the men who dug the west ditch clearly knew that the Wall would soon be there, and we must explain the filling-in of its end, and the change in the position of the tower at the north-east angle, by assuming that here, as at Balmuilty, the builders of the fort expected the Wall to run parallel with its north wall, but the Wall-builders had a different line in view.

This is not the place to enlarge on the significance of the new discovery; but it may be suggested that the existing evidence from other forts, which have been thought to belong originally to the Vallum frontier, though later incorporated in the Wall, will need to be re-examined with some care; it may be that some, if not all of them, were Wall forts in design, like Housesteads, though laid out before the arrival of the Wall-builders.

II. EXCAVATIONS IN THE SETTLEMENT. BY JOHN CHARLTON.

Building III (plate 1).

It will be remembered that in 1931 three buildings near the south gate of the fort, nos. I, II and IV, were excavated, whilst another, no. III, was left for subsequent examination.² In 1932 this building was the first to receive

² Cf. plate III, and *A.A.*, 4th ser., IX, pp. 222-237.

attention. It measures 52 feet from north to south, and 27 from east to west, and lies parallel to no. IV, from which it is separated by an alley-way 3 feet wide, whilst a lane 8 feet wide runs between it and the first two buildings.

It has been robbed throughout down to floor level, and at the south end below that level; enough of the structure remains, however, to show that the north end was open, with a masonry pillar in the centre to support the roof, such

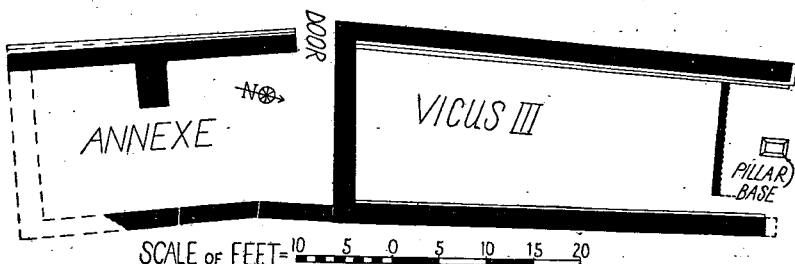


FIG. 2.

as there had been in the front of no. II.³ It would seem, therefore, that the front of the building was a shop, facing on the raised causeway of the road that runs eastward along the south wall of the fort; the remainder presumably furnished dwelling and storage accommodation. The floor of the business premises occupied a small platform 13 feet by 8, which was revetted at its southern edge, save near the east wall, where a passage 3 feet wide was left to give access to the inner room. Whilst the floor of the outer compartment was probably entirely flagged, the floor of the interior was largely of clay, with a few large flags, from beneath one of which came a stamp of the late second-century Rheinzabern potter Lutaeus. The floor was so close to the modern surface that virtually no stratified occupation-earth remained.

An annexe built against the southern end is clumsy in design and execution, with a floor of quite exceptional unevenness.⁴ This building was entered from the lane by

³ Cf. plate I, fig. 1, and *loc. cit.*, p. 228.

⁴ Cf. plate I, fig. 2.

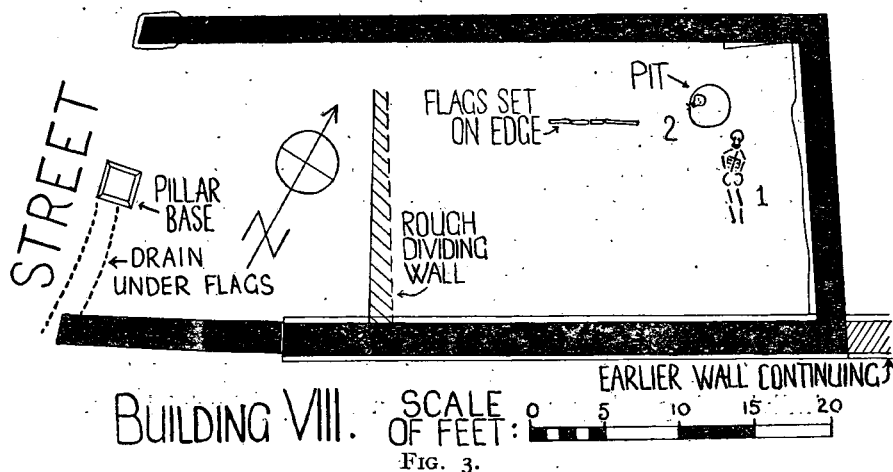
a door in the north-west corner; the purpose of a partition jutting out from the west wall is not apparent. The whole structure has been badly robbed, particularly its south wall; its use is uncertain, but it looks to have been a store-house or a stable rather than a dwelling.

Buildings V-VII.

A cursory examination of these buildings was made, so that their positions could be plotted on the general plan. Nos. V and VI were found to have been robbed to below floor level, but no. VII, lying on the west side of the south road, promises to repay thorough excavation in the future; its masonry is remarkably massive, though by no means as good as that of no. V.

Building VIII (plate II).

This building, 52 feet long by 23 wide, lies a hundred feet farther down the hill than no. II; in between are three or four buildings, whose plan it is hoped to recover in 1933, whilst the series is continued still farther down the hill-side. Though the western end of no. VIII is carefully aligned with the road, the plan of the building is extremely dis-



torted. The reason for this seems to be that the south wall, except near its western end, was founded on an earlier wall that did not run at right-angles to the road. At first, it would appear, the builders intended the north wall to run parallel with the south—there are the remains of the incompleted footing of such a wall in the north-east corner—but, in order to obtain maximum frontage and floor space, the line of the wall was carried farther north, so that the north-east angle of the building is greater than a right-angle. The building, as is usual with the type, was divided into two compartments, an outer one opening on to the street, the flagging of which extended without a break into the building, and an inner room with an earthen floor; the floor of each room sealed a quantity of debris, including pottery and coins, and, towards the centre of the inner room, a rubbish-pit from which some pottery and a number of animal bones were obtained.

The masonry was above the general standard, particularly in the street frontage, where the builders seem to have endeavoured to produce their best work.⁵ It may be noted that the south wall, which still stands ten courses high, is built with a pronounced batter on both sides, perhaps from motives of economy; for the earlier wall on which it is founded was of the generous width of 3 feet 6 inches.

Towards the west end of the inner room, the floor had been made up with an unusually thick layer of clean clay, the purpose of which was not at first apparent; but it proved to cover an unexpected contribution to our knowledge of the social life of the settlement. The remains of two human beings were found beneath it and resting on the original floor; the skeleton of the first was comparatively complete, and from among its ribs came what appears to be the point of a sword: of the other skeleton only a few fragments were recovered. The remains were submitted to Dr. W. L. H. Duckworth, who reported that they represented a tall, robust man of middle age, and a slighter individual, possibly a woman. An ordinary burial is out

⁵ Cf. plate II, fig. 2.

of the question, and it is impossible to avoid the inference that we have here a case of murder to deal with; there was sufficient stratification preserved above the secondary floor to show that the bodies were not inserted at a later time, after the building had ceased to be occupied.

The period of the building, and consequently of the murders, is discussed in the next section.

CONCLUSIONS.

The excavations of 1932 have added something to the evidence to hand for answering the three main problems outlined in our first report.⁶ In each of the buildings completely excavated, sufficient material deposited before its erection was recovered for a *terminus post quem* to be indicated; in no. III, from the footing of the revetment at the northern end came a hammer-head mortarium with bands of red paint on the rim, of a type that can hardly be earlier than A.D. 300, whilst from below the south wall came the greater part of a wide-mouthed jar, of a well-known late third-century type;⁷ in the case of no. VIII, coins dropped before its erection extend to Claudius Gothicus and Tetricus, and a painted mortarium-rim, from below the original floor at the eastern end, again suggests A.D. 300 as the earliest possible date for the building. Nos. III and VIII, then, though they fit into the same scheme as the buildings excavated in 1931, apparently date a century later than two of them; it will be remembered that only in the case of no. I was there a suggestion of building later than the first half of the third century.

With regard to the terminal date, the small amount of stratified material makes definite conclusions difficult; but the scarcity of late pottery suggests that nos. III and VIII, like the buildings previously examined, were not occupied again after the Picts' War.

On the character of the occupation, new and somewhat

⁶ *Loc. cit.*, p. 223.

⁷ Cf. *A.A.*, 4th ser., VII, plate LI, no. 20.

lurid light is shed by the recent excavations. To the gamblers' rendezvous in no. I we may now add the coiners' den,⁸ to which the mould and unfinished casting discussed by Mr. Hedley below testify, and the murders in no. VIII. In that building, the discovery of a skeleton with the tip of the murderer's sword in its ribs, lying in a posture that could not represent a ceremonial interment, together with its more fragmentary companion a few feet away, points to less legitimate activities than the occupants of nos. I and IV indulged in. It would seem that the murderers, embarrassed by the problem of removing the two bodies from their house unobserved, had devised the plan of laying them out in the inner room, where the murder had occurred, and then covering them with a thick layer of clay, on the pretext of remaking the floor of the room. The ruse was successful, and their victims remained undisturbed, and securely stratified, for the instruction of posterity. It is to be regretted that, although the murder can be dated to the period c. A.D. 300-368, and the approximate age of one of the victims surmised, no clue remains to lead us to the perpetrators of the crime, or to reveal their motive.

Sufficient excavation has now been carried out to justify an endeavour to trace something of the street-plan of the settlement. This appears to have been governed by three roads, all of which seem in origin to be earlier than the third- and fourth-century buildings near the south gate of the fort.

The first road leads south from the fort gate,⁹ and the presence of buildings on either side of it warrants its description as a street. On it open nos. I, II, VII and VIII, whilst other buildings, also aligned on it, await excavation; how far it extended to the south, and whether it continued without a bend, is not yet clear, though it may

⁸ The coin-mould came from the alleyway between nos. III and IV; it might be conjectured that it belongs to no. IV, where evidence for industrial activity of some sort was found in 1931; cf. *A.A.*, 4th ser., IX, p. 230.

⁹ The eastern portal of the south gate was blocked up in Roman times (cf. *A.A.*, 2nd ser., XXV, p. 284); this will explain why nos. I, II, and VIII stretch so far west.

be presumed to have led to Chapel Hill. In its last phase its surface was of large, well-laid flags—comparable to those of the highest level of the *via praetoria* at Chesterholm.¹⁰

The second road, also carefully flagged, runs eastward along the south wall of the fort, about on the line where a ditch might have been expected; owing to the slope of the ground, its southern side is embanked, and rises some feet higher than the floors of nos. III and IV; opposite the end of the latter, the road was provided with masonry that partook of the nature both of a revetment and a guard-wall, while immediately east of no. IV a roughly constructed ramp led down to the lower level. The road appears thereafter to have proceeded eastwards to the south-east angle of the fort, where it takes a northerly turn, possibly to join the military way near the crossing of the Knag Burn. Within the angle formed by these two thoroughfares lies a crowded block of buildings, intersected in one place at least by a narrow lane; whether or not there are further buildings to the east of no. IV is a point that still awaits investigation.

The third road runs in a south-westerly direction from the fort gate, past the cut-off corner of no. V, as though heading for Chesterholm; but its course has yet to be traced.

OTHER WORK IN THE SETTLEMENT.

The Vallum.—A careful section of the Vallum ditch and the superimposed terrace was made at a point due south of the lane that separates the first two buildings from no. III; the conclusions suggested by the section taken in 1931 were borne out, but a full discussion of this branch of the work must be deferred until our next report, when it is hoped that it will be possible to include evidence for the relationship between the terrace overlying the Vallum and the street running south from the south gate of the fort.

Chapel Hill.—Two trenches were dug, one along the

¹⁰ Cf. *A.A.*, 4th ser., VIII, p. 198.

crest, the other at the foot of Chapel Hill on its northern side; some Roman pottery was found in each trench, but the ground had been disturbed, subsoil was soon reached, and there were no traces of buildings.

The Knag Burn.—Eastward from Chapel Hill, near the fallen column drum,¹¹ where the Knag Burn emerges from the defile through which it runs past the bath-house, some trenches were dug to see whether buildings had extended so far eastwards; some pottery was found, and occupation matter, together with a patch of cobbling that appeared to be part of a roadway, but no structural remains.

The Bath-house.—A trial trench showed that the bath-house extended some 15 feet farther north than the surface indications suggest; one of its walls was found still standing ten courses high, and it appears that the building has suffered less from the flood of 1817 than Hodgson believed.¹²

The south-east angle.—The passage through the fort wall of the drain from the latrines in the south-east angle was examined, and a preliminary survey was made of the course of the drain down the hill-side. It was found to emerge on one of the terraces. Further work will be done here in 1933 to determine its bearing on the date of the terraces it crosses.

THE FINDS.

The total yield of pottery and metal objects was considerable, and, taken in conjunction with the material from the excavations of 1931, sufficient to give a good index of the occupation of this part of the site. The metal objects,

¹¹ Cf. *A.A.*, 2nd ser., XXV, p. 196.

¹² *History of Northumberland*, II, iii, p. 188: "A great part of its ruins were carted away 60 years since to build stone walls with; and a flood, in 1817, broke up the foundations of the remaining part of the building, though considerable portions of its interior are still disinterred. Great quantities of tufaceous limestone were taken out of it, and built up in the fences on the Moss-kennel grounds."

in particular, appear to deserve careful attention; thanks to a grant from the committee of the Armstrong College Research Fund, a detailed report on them is in course of compilation. It is hoped that our next report will include full accounts of the small objects, pottery and coins from the first two seasons' work.

No inscriptions were found in 1932—in this respect alone the season's results fell below those of the first year—but compensation was provided by a relief of Mercury, found in the trench across the Vallum, at a depth of two feet from the present surface. The sculpture¹³ is good provincial work, of local freestone, and has been subjected to very little weathering. The figure, in somewhat high relief, stands in a panel 10 inches by 6; its proportions are not perfect (the head, for instance, is rather large), but the workmanship is better than that of most sculptures from the line of the Wall, and suggests a craftsman who knew his medium and had done similar work before. The pose is one that is commonly met with, and is presumably copied from a well-known statue of the god.

The Mercury holds a *caduceus* of simple style in the left hand, and some drapery hangs over the left arm; the purse is more elaborate than usual, and has been executed with some care: the only close parallel to its shape that has been noted from Britain is the purse held by the bronze figure of the god from Caerleon amphitheatre, here reproduced by permission of the Society of Antiquaries.¹⁴ On the continent, parallels may be noted from watch-post 12 in the section of the Raetian *limes* from Gunzenhausen to Kipfenberg,¹⁵ Mainz,¹⁶ and Marköbel.¹⁷ In the last example, and in a Mercury found at Exeter in 1778,¹⁸ the method of holding the purse is the same as in the Housesteads sculpture.

¹³ Cf. plate iv, fig. 1.

¹⁴ Plate iv, fig. 2; cf. *Archæologia*, 78, p. 161.

¹⁵ *O.R.L.* Lieferung 45, p. 137 and plate 16, 33 and 34.

¹⁶ *Germania Romana*, IV, p. 36 and plate xi 1.

¹⁷ *O.R.L.* Lieferung 3, p. 18; this is clearly in the same tradition as far as the purse is concerned.

¹⁸ *Archæologia*, 6, plate 1, no 2.

III. THE COINS. BY PERCY HEDLEY.

One of the most interesting of the minor objects found during the excavations of 1932 is a coin-mould, found in the passage between buildings III and IV. Another object of similar interest is a circular piece of bronze with a coin reverse on one side of it; this came from the drain at the south-east angle of the fort. It will be as well to consider these objects together, and it may not be thought out of place to discuss two other objects, a coin which has belonged to this society since 1841, and part of a crucible found recently by our member, Mr. James McIntyre, near the fort at Binchester on Dere Street.

1. The coin-mould is one inch in diameter and a quarter inch thick. One side bears the impression of an obverse of Julia Domna: IVLIA AVGVSTA, bust r. The other side has a reverse impression VICT.AVGG.COS.II.P.P., Victory walking l., holding wreath and palm (as Cohen, Severus 694). The obverse IVLIA AVGVSTA was in use from A.D. 194-211; the reverse is more closely dated to A.D. 194-201.

2. The circular piece of bronze, which we can consider as a half-made coin, is one-eighth inch thick and three-quarters of an inch in diameter. It bears a coin reverse P.M. TR.P.III.COS.P.P., Jupiter standing l., holding *fulmen* and long sceptre.

3. This coin was found at Risingham, and was presented to this society by Mr. Richard Shanks in 1841;¹⁹ it had been cast, and not struck as were the official coins from regular mints.

Obv. P.SEPT.GETA.CAES.PONT., bare head r. bust draped.

Rev. P.M.TR.P.III.COS.III.P.P., Providentia standing l., holding rod and cornucopia; at feet l., globe; in field r., star. Not in Cohen.

Geta was trib. pot. III in A.D. 211.

¹⁹ Cf. *A.A.*, 1st ser., III, List of donations, p. 12.

4. The crucible, about one half of which remains, seems to have been made of fireclay, and shows signs of considerable use. Some metallic slag remains in the inside. It is just such a crucible as would have been used for counterfeiting, or for the manufacture of objects of precious metal.

Part of a coin-mould with an obverse of Caracalla has also turned up recently at Binchester; the only part of the inscription that remains seems to be M.AVR, which may be extended to M.AVR.[ANTONINVS CAES. or ANTON.CAES.PONTIF., obverses used by Caracalla in A.D. 196-197.

Coin-moulds have been found in many places in England and on the Continent in considerable numbers, but the Housesteads specimen is the first recorded from Northumberland. It is not necessary to list here all the British sites where moulds have been found, as this has been done recently by Mr. A. E. Robinson;²⁰ but mention may be made of a large hoard from Lingwell Gate, near Wakefield, now divided between the British Museum, Tullie House, the Yorkshire museum, the Hull museum, and the collection of the Society of Antiquaries of London; while the Ashmolean museum possesses a considerable number from Edington in Somerset, presented to the museum by Aubrey in 1670; the British Museum also has a number of other coin-moulds, mostly from British sites, including some "found in Mr. Grueber's cupboard." In the whole series, two main periods are represented: the first comprises moulds of Severus, Caracalla, Geta, Julia Domna, Plautilla and Severus Alexander; the second, of Galerius, Maximinus Daia, Licinius and Constantinus I.

It is remarkable that the moulds should be so largely of these two periods, and further that there is a scarcity of cast coins in existence which can have been made in them.

Up to the time of Severus, the whole of the imperial coinage came from the mint of Rome; Severus opened imperial mints probably at Alexandria, Laodicea, Emesa,

²⁰ *Journal of the Antiquarian Association of the British Isles*, vols. II and III.

and Antioch, though only the last of these continued open beyond the first three years of his principate.²¹ The next emperor to make any large increase in the number of mints was Gallienus; barbarous imitations of coins of his time are very plentiful, but moulds of the period are rare. Finally, a further increase in the number of mints marks the early years of the fourth century, when the second series of moulds appears.

It seems that an increase in the number of official mints tended to encourage the manufacture of counterfeit coins; this was especially the case under Severus and again under Gallienus, when the official coinage was deliberately debased.

DISTRIBUTION OF STRATIFIED COINS.

Of the coins found in 1932, ten only were found in circumstances that warrant their mention here; but the identification of the whole series has been completed, and a numismatic report on the coins so far obtained is to be appended to our next report.

Vicus VIII. The following coins were deposited before the erection of the building, so that they provide evidence for the *terminus post quem* :

Hadrianus, *den.* and *sest.*; M. Aurelius, *sest.*; Julia Domna, *den.*; Gallienus, *ant.*; Claudius Gothicus, *ant.*; Tetricus I, *ant.*

S.E. angle. Three coins were found in the main drain of the fort :

M. Aurelius, *sest.*; Philippus I, *ant.*; Constantinus I, small *follis*.

²¹ Cf. H. Mattingly in *Numismatic Chronicle*, ser. V, no. 47, pp. 177 ff.

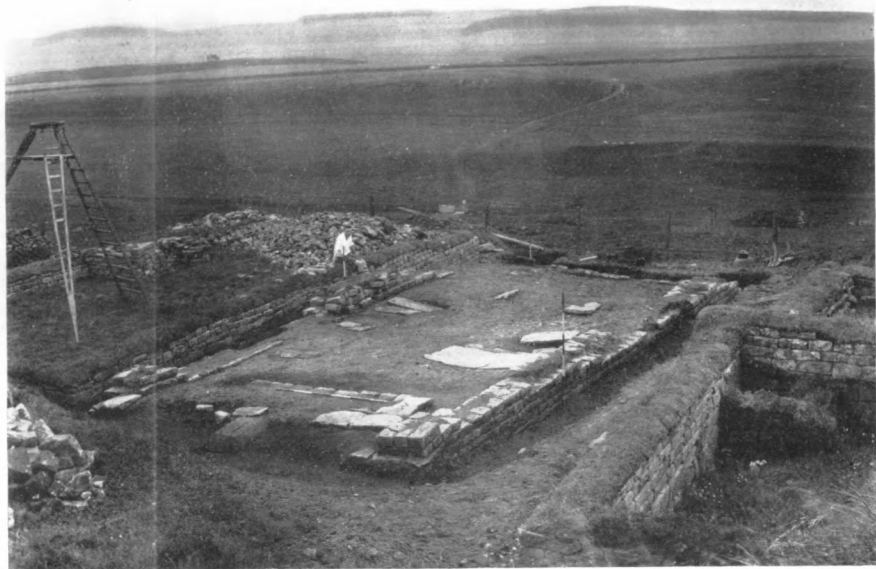


FIG. 1—NO. III: FROM THE NORTH-WEST.



FIG. 2—NO. III: ANNEXE.



FIG. 1—NO. VIII FROM THE NORTH-EAST.



FIG. 2—NO. VIII: STREET FRONT. KING'S HILL IN BACKGROUND.

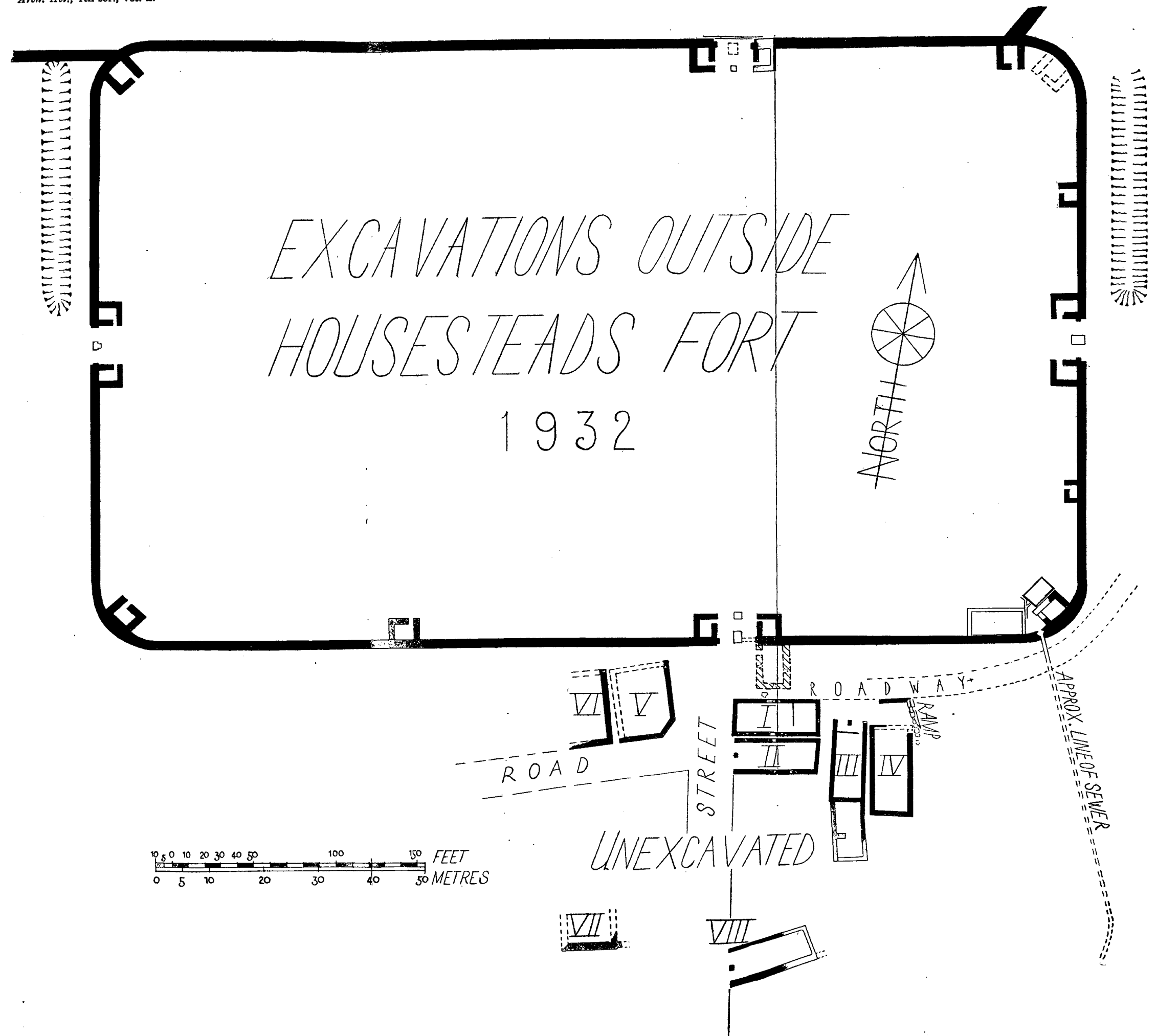




FIG. 1—MERCURY FROM HOUSESTEADS.



FIG. 2—MERCURY FROM CAERLEON.

