

V.—THE DEFENCES OF THE ROMAN FORT AT HALTON CHESTERS.

BY MICHAEL G. JARRETT.

The fort at Halton Chesters on Hadrian's Wall has been known for many years; antiquaries from the time of Horsley have commented on the unusual shape of the fort, with its westward extension south of the Wall, giving it the appearance, in plan, of a reversed 'L'. None of them claim to have seen the fort walls standing, though some were able to trace the lines of buildings and streets.

The earliest excavation of the defences of the fort was conducted by Mr. F. G. Simpson and Mr. (now Professor) I. A. Richmond in 1935-6.¹ The angle tower at the junction between the west wall of the extension and Hadrian's Wall was excavated in 1935, and in the following year there was an examination of the *praetentura*, north of Hadrian's Wall. This involved excavation of the three gates north of the Wall, a section through the north wall of the fort, and a study of the internal buildings in the eastern portion of the *praetentura*. The building inscription from the west gate was found in 1936; it had been set up under A. Platorius Nepos, imperial legate in Britain from A.D. 122 to c. 125. It was thus clearly established that the earliest forts were added to Hadrian's Wall within a few years of its initial planning.

The section through the north wall revealed that it had been robbed to its footings at the front.² The turf rampart backing had been removed in order to build a platform for a heavy catapult. No details are given in the report of the size or method of construction of the fort wall north of the line of Hadrian's Wall.

¹ AA4 xiv 151-171; cf. PSAN4 vii 132-137.

² AA4 xiv 167-168.

THE HADRIANIC WEST WALL AND THE DATE OF THE EXTENSION.

When excavation started in 1956, the most important problem of the site was the date and function of the extension. Simpson and Richmond, on the basis of the excavation of the north-west angle tower, had provisionally dated it to the beginning of Wall Period III, c. 297-300, but further excavation was required to test this conclusion.

To solve this problem the excavation of 1956 was concentrated on a section across the west wall of the Hadrianic fort. By this we should also discover whether this wall had been demolished when the extension was built; whether we were dealing with an extension of or an annexe to the original fort.

The excavation revealed that the Hadrianic fort wall had been demolished when the extension was built, and that in places at least the whole superstructure had been removed. The surviving portions of the fort wall showed the method of construction. Below original ground level was a single course of small squared stones resting on a flag footing. Above these, and set back a little, was a course of masonry fourteen inches high; the next and highest surviving course formed a chamfered plinth. Of the inner face of the wall, only a course of whin boulders covered by the turfwork of the rampart backing survived. The core of the wall, which was seven feet nine inches wide over the foundations, was of rubble and mortar.

The demolition of this wall involved a levelling of the area at about two feet six inches above the natural subsoil. The pottery from this level indicates that demolition took place in or shortly after the closing years of the second century (Group A). Seven feet outside the outer face of this wall a stone building was erected; the floor sealed pottery of the second century (Group B), and third century pottery was found within the building in the occupation deposit above the floor (Group C). This building is therefore almost certainly of early third century date. It was built so close to

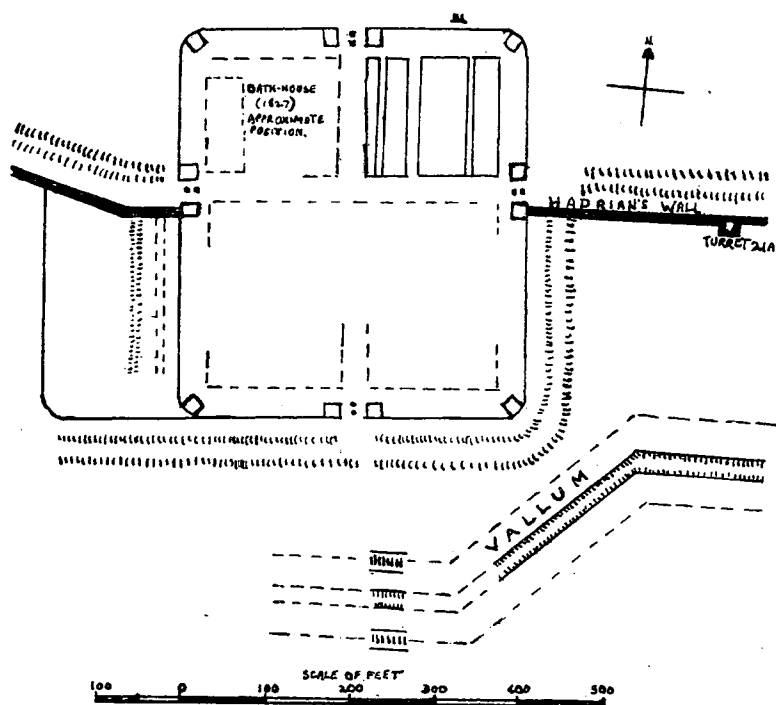


FIG. 1. HALTON CHESTERS; GENERAL PLAN.

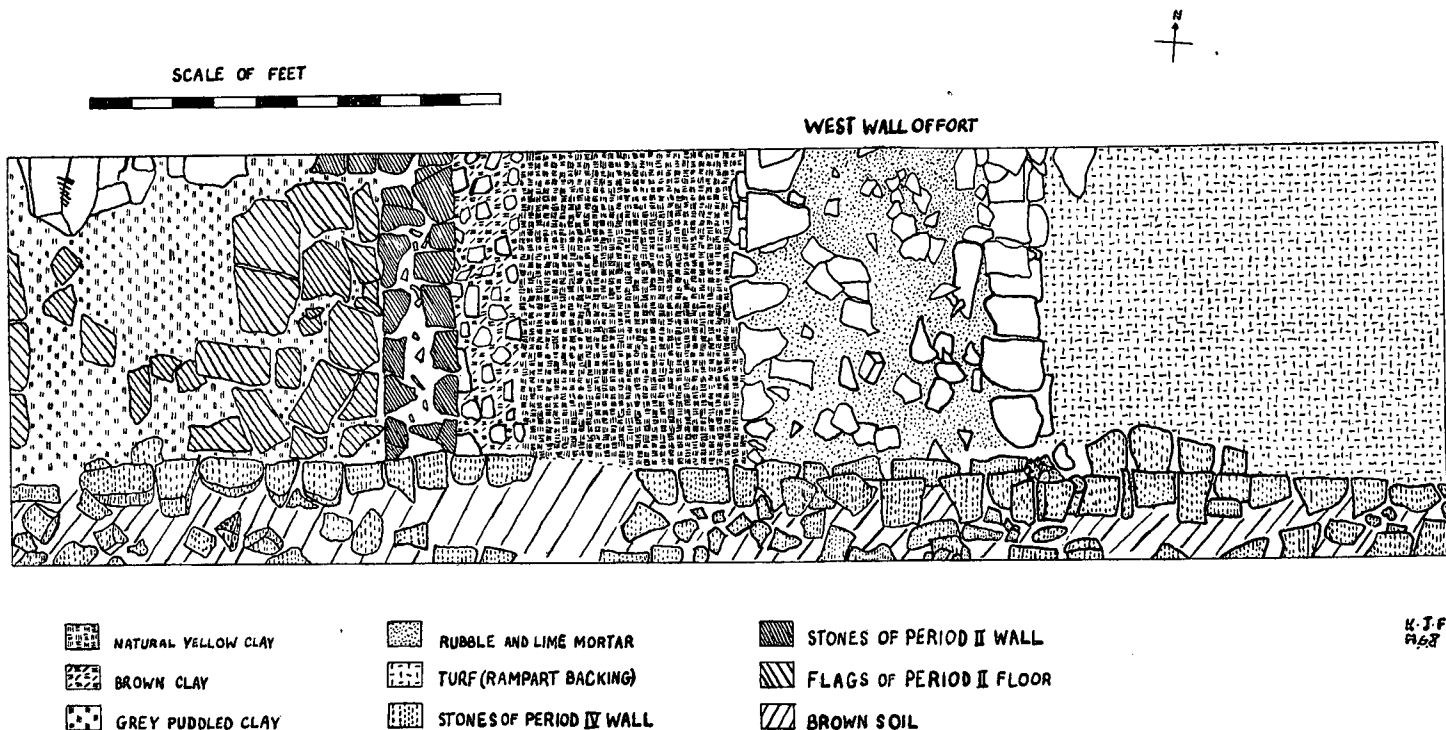


FIG. 2. HALTON CHESTERS 1956; WEST WALL OF HADRIANIC FORT.

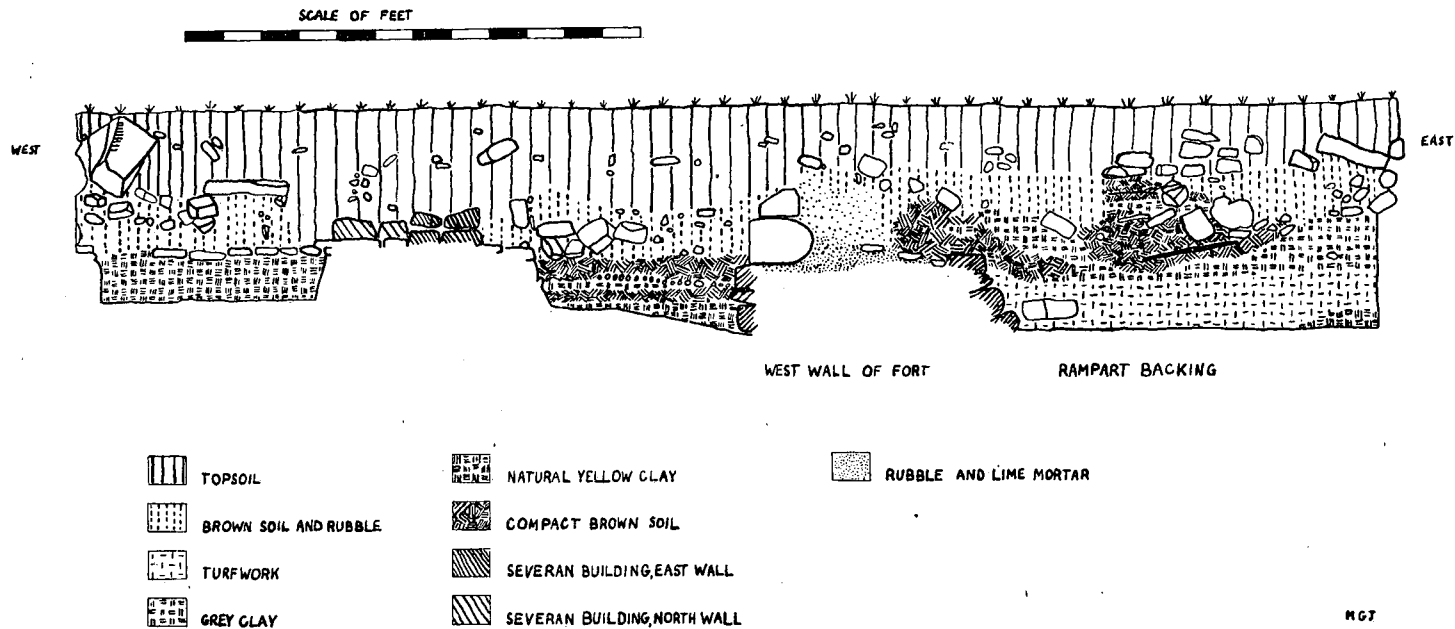


FIG. 3. HALTON CHESTERS 1956; SECTION THROUGH WEST WALL OF HADRIANIC FORT.

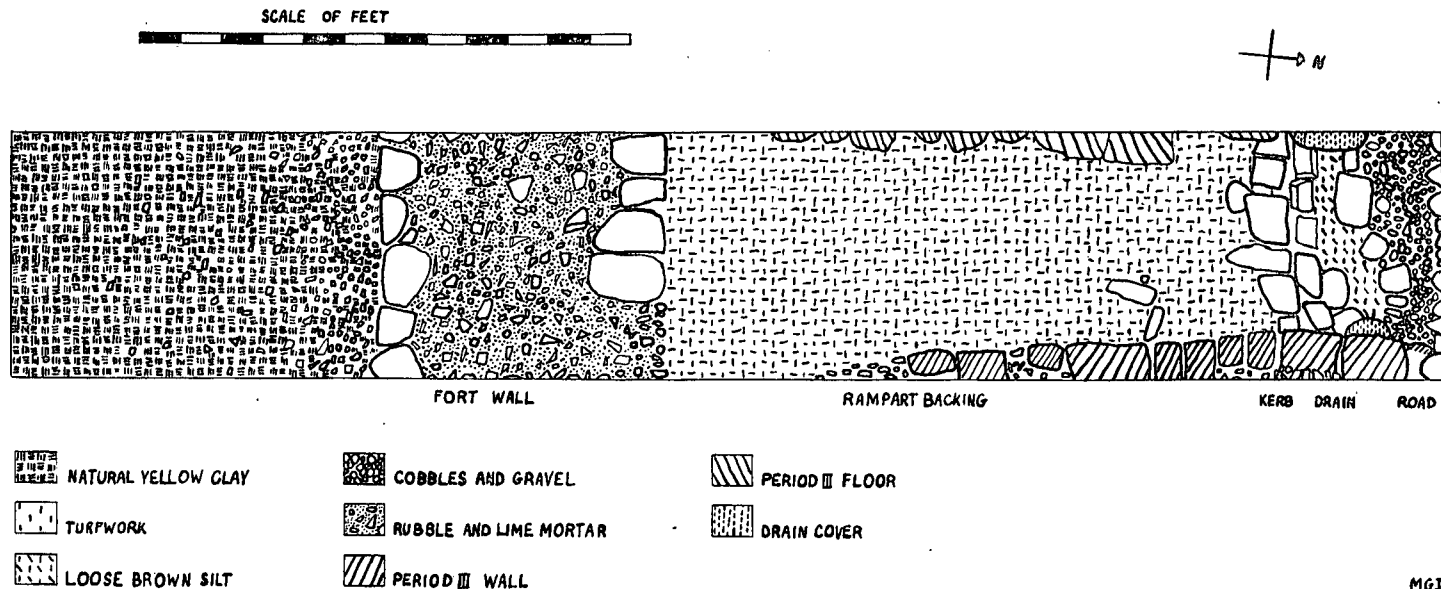


FIG. 4. HALTON CHESTERS 1957; SOUTH WALL OF HADRIANIC FORT.

the site of the fort wall that the latter would have lost all its defensive value if it had still been standing. It seems from this evidence that the demolition of the west wall of the Hadrianic fort and the building of the extension are to be dated to the reconstruction of Hadrian's Wall by Septimius Severus at the beginning of the third century, not to that of Constantius Chlorus at the end of the century.

No structural remains of Wall Period III (A.D. 300-367) were found in 1956. A crudely built wall ran along the south edge of the area excavated. Subsidence over the lighter soil of the rampart backing had caused it to break its back across the demolished remains of the fort wall. It will not be possible to say anything about the function of the building to which it belonged until there has been more excavation in this area. Sealed by it was a single sherd of a red-painted Crambeck *mortarium* (Group D), assignable to a date after the Pict's War of A.D. 367, so that the building was erected either in the course of Wall Period IV (A.D. 369-400), or in a post-Roman period.

HADRIANIC DITCHES.

Excavations in 1958 within the area of the extension showed that the Hadrianic fort had two ditches on its west side, for at a distance of fifty feet from the outer face of the original west wall the inner lip of a ditch thirteen feet three inches wide running north and south was found. This implies the presence of another ditch between it and the fort wall, as the normal width of berm between wall and ditch would be less than twenty feet. No sign of any other ditch was found in the next twenty feet further west, so that we may reasonably infer that, as at Chesters and Stanwix, there were two and only two ditches. A detailed report on the ditch found in 1958 will be made when it has been possible to check on the existence of the inner ditch.

THE HADRIANIC SOUTH WALL.

In 1957 sections were dug through the south ramparts

of the Hadrianic fort and of the extension. The south wall of the Hadrianic fort had been robbed to its footings, but it had been similar to the west wall excavated in 1956. The total width of the footing was seven feet. Once again the inner face, below the rampart backing, was of whin boulders, the outer face small freestone blocks; the core between was of rubble and chippings grouted with lime mortar.

The rampart backing was of turf, fourteen feet six inches wide, with a stone kerb along the inner edge to prevent spread. Immediately to the north of this was a stone drain with a flagged cover, separating the rampart backing from the cobbled intervallum road.

THE SOUTH DITCH.

A berm eighteen feet ten inches wide separated the fort wall from the inner lip of the ditch, which was twenty-one feet six inches wide. From surface indications it is clear that this ditch is later than the building of the extension; it presumably replaced a smaller Hadrianic ditch, comparable with that now known on the west side. Whether the ditch, like the extension, is Severan cannot yet be said, but it is certainly not earlier.

THE SOUTH WALL OF THE EXTENSION.

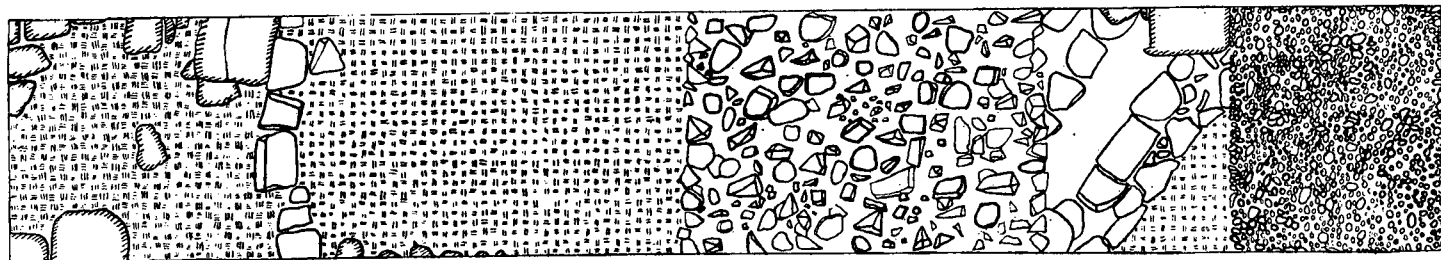
The south wall of the extension, like that of the Hadrianic fort, was robbed to foundation level. It was eight feet nine inches wide, and the foundation was of broken freestone, whin and river cobbles set in yellow clay, the natural subsoil of the site. Unlike the Hadrianic south wall, there was no definite edging to the wall at this level.

The rampart backing was of light grey clay, ten feet wide, with a stone kerb behind; immediately north of this (without the intervening drain found in the Hadrianic fort) was the intervallum road of flags set in yellow clay.

THE BATH-HOUSE DRAIN.

Running below the south wall of the extension from

SCALE OF FEET



ROAD

KERB

RAMPART BACKING

EXTENSION WALL

DRAIN



NATURAL YELLOW CLAY

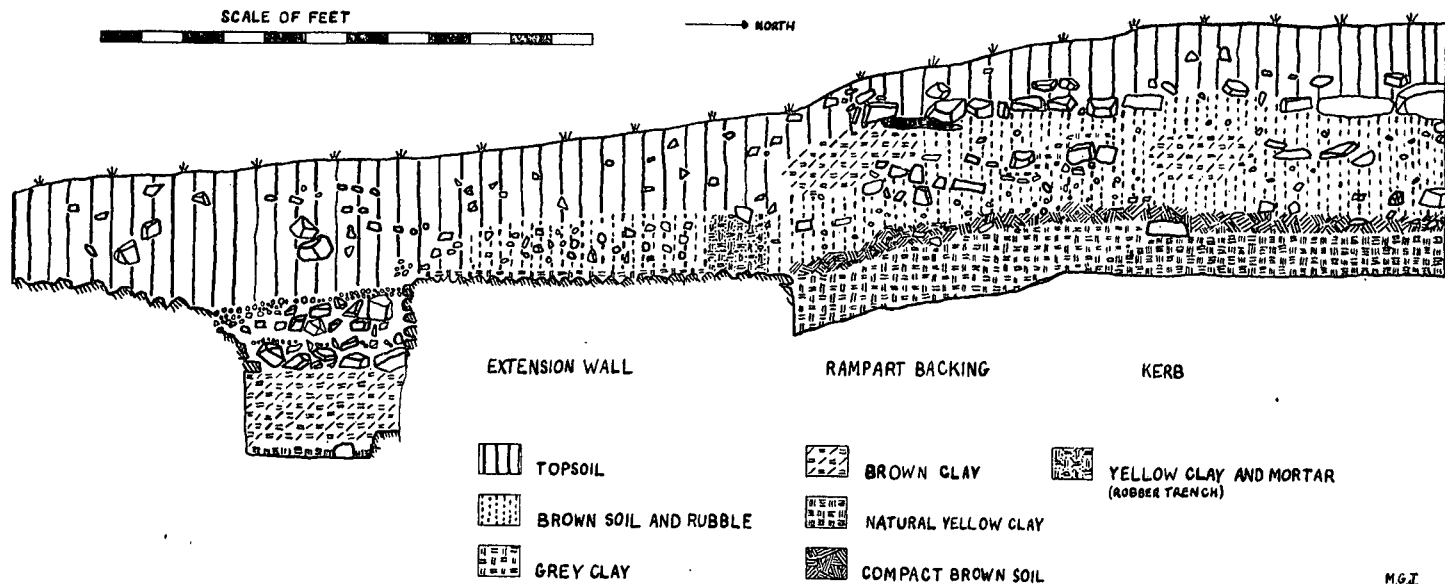


GREY CLAY



HARD GRAVEL

FIG. 6. HALTON CHESTERS 1957; SOUTH WALL OF EXTENSION.



M.G.J.

FIG. 7. HALTON CHESTERS 1957; SECTION THROUGH SOUTH WALL OF EXTENSION.

north-west to south-east was a large stone built drain set in clay. When discovered it was still in working order, and was acting as a field drain. To carry the wall of the extension and to prevent subsidence a heavy stone packing had been laid above the drain.

At the time it was supposed that this drain was of a period earlier than the extension, and that it probably belonged to the Hadrianic bath-house which was presumed to underlie the extension which, on this theory, would have been built to compensate for the internal space lost by moving the bath-house into the northern part of the fort. The bath-house found there in 1827 by John Hodgson³ would thus be Severan, like the extension.

This theory was not disproved, but was rendered considerably less probable by excavation within the extension in 1958. This excavation found traces of a Severan bath-house overlying one of the ditches of the Hadrianic fort. A definite link between this bath-house and the drain found in 1957 has yet to be established, but a connection seems likely.

On the evidence at present available, the bath-house found in 1827 will belong to the reconstruction under Constantius Chlorus at the end of the third century, when the Severan bath-house in the extension was demolished. In the *Praetentura*, the second and third centuries were each represented by buildings discovered in 1936 in the north-eastern portion of the fort, and similar contemporary buildings in the north-western portion may be inferred, for the whole *praetentura* is likely to have been symmetrically planned about the north-south axis of the fort. The site of the Hadrianic bath-house has yet to be found; it is by no means impossible that it also lay in the area of the extension.

RAMPART BUILDINGS.

In both the sections excavated in 1957, it was clear that a modification to the original plan of intervallum road, turf

³ *History of Northumberland*, pt. II, vol. iii, pp. 316-320.

or clay rampart backing and stone fort wall had been made at a later date. The rampart backing had been levelled, and a new building immediately behind the fort wall added as at Housesteads.⁴ The material used to level the rampart backing consisted of builders' debris (dressed stones, disused hypocaust pillars, tiles etc.) with much soil and rubbish from earlier rubbish tips; the pottery from the level above the Severan rampart backing contained a considerable number of second century sherds, though some pieces are as late as the end of the third century (Group E). Similarly the pottery from the level immediately below the rampart building behind the Hadrianic south wall goes down to the end of the third century (Group F). It may be concluded provisionally that these two rampart buildings were of Constantian date (c. A.D. 300), though further excavation will be required before their plan or purpose can be demonstrated clearly.

THE POTTERY.

Throughout this section, reference is made to the type numbers used in "Types of Roman coarse pottery vessels in Northern Britain", by Mr. J. P. Gillam (AA4 xxxv, pp. 180ff.), and his dating has been accepted. Only stratified pottery is recorded, and Samian ware is ignored because in every instance it is to be dated earlier than some of the coarse pottery in the same group. In each group, the latest date of first emergence is given, since this provides the *terminus post quem* for the feature dated by the pottery.

GROUP A. Demolition layer, above the Hadrianic west wall.

Gillam types 85, 127, 128, 137, 246, 266, 309, 310, 313.

Associated with coin number one, of Domitian. Latest date of first emergence, A.D. 190 (type 313).

GROUP B. Below the floor of the building outside the west wall of the Hadrianic fort.

Gillam types 130, 308. Latest date of first emergence, A.D. 140 (type 130).

GROUP C. Inside the same building, immediately above the floor, in occupation debris.

Gillam type 144. Date of first emergence, A.D. 200.

⁴ AA2 xxv 245.



1. HALTON CHESTERS 1956: WEST WALL OF HADRIANIC FORT.

Photo. C. M. Daniels.



2. HALTON CHESTERS 1956: WEST WALL OF HADRIANIC FORT, FROM WEST.

Photo. C. M. Daniels.



1. HALTON CHESTERS, THIRD-CENTURY BUILDING OF THE EXTENDED FORT (FOREGROUND) WITH DEMOLISHED HADRIANIC WEST WALL BEYOND.

Photo. B. J. N. Edwards.



2. HALTON CHESTERS, 1957: FOUNDATIONS OF SOUTH WALL OF HADRIANIC FORT.

Photo. R. Wallis.



1. HALTON CHESTERS, 1957: FOUNDATIONS OF SOUTH WALL OF THIRD-CENTURY EXTENSION.



2. HALTON CHESTERS, 1957: DRAIN BELOW SOUTH WALL OF THIRD-CENTURY EXTENSION.

Photos. R. Wallis.

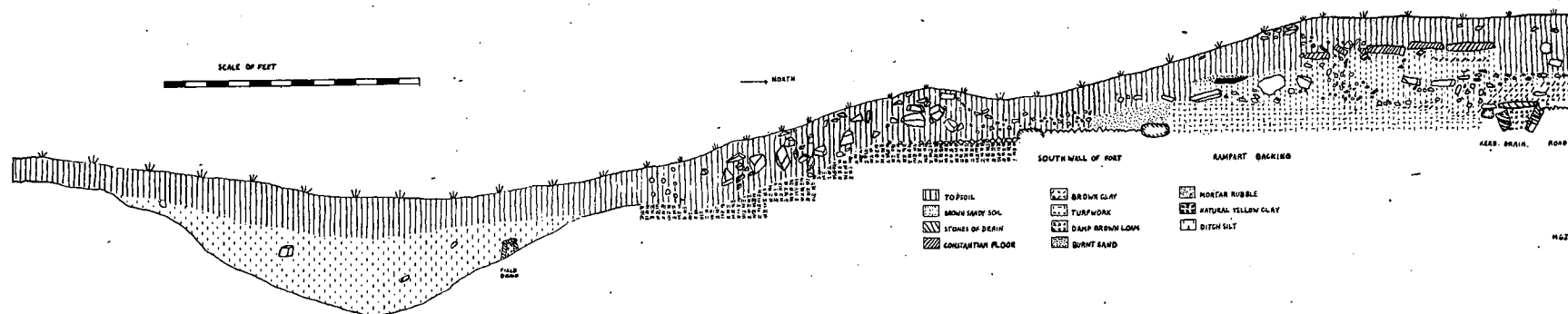


FIG. 5. HALTON CHESTERS 1957; SECTION THROUGH SOUTH DEFENCES OF HADRIANIC FORT.

GROUP D. Against the foundations of the wall running across the demolished Hadrianic west wall.

Gillam type 290. Date of first emergence, A.D. 370.

GROUP E. Below the flagged floor of the rampart building behind the south wall of the extension.

Gillam types 36, 51, 80, 116, 134, 136, 138, 139, 142, 151, 157, 170, 172, 218, 219, 253, 272, 310, 311, 313, 314, 319, 329. Associated with coins of Faustina I and Faustina II, numbers eight and nine. Latest date of first emergence, A.D. 280 (type 157).

GROUP F. Below the flagged floor of the rampart building behind the south wall of the Hadrianic fort.

Gillam types 157, 319. Latest date of first emergence, A.D. 280 (type 157).

THE COINS.

BY J. H. CORBITT, F.R.N.S.

1. DOMITIAN. Sestertius. A.D. 81-96.

Obv.: []VG GERM[]

Rev.: *Illegible*.

Based on good outline of bust.

2. TRAJAN. Sestertius. A.D. 103-114.

Obv.: []RVAE TRAIANO AVG.

Rev.: *Illegible*.

Dated by obverse legend, used only in this period.

3. LATE ANTONINE. Sestertius. *Illegible*.

Possibly Commodus, A.D. 180-192.

4. CONSTANTINIAN. Ae. *Illegible*.

5. CONSTANTINIAN. Ae. *Illegible*.

6. CONSTANTINIAN. Ae. *Illegible*.

7. *Illegible*.

8. FAUSTINA I. Denarius. After A.D. 141.

Obv.: DIVA FAVSTINA.

Rev.: AETERNITAS—Juno stdg. 1.

RIC 344.

9. FAUSTINA II. Sestertius. After A.D. 175.
Obv.: [DIVA] FAVSTINA PIA.
Rev.: SIDERIBVS RECEPTA SC.
RIC 1715 (Marcus). Scarce type.
10. SEVERUS ALEXANDER. Denarius. A.D. 222.
Obv.: IMP SEV. ALEXAND AVG.
Rev.: PM TR P COS PP Mars stdg. 1.
RIC 266 Variety. Mint of Antioch. (This obverse
legend not recorded for this reverse.)
11. *Illegible.* Antoninianus. 2nd-3rd century A.D.
12. CONSTANTINIAN. *Illegible.*
13. CONSTANTIUS II. A.D. 337-361.
Very worn coin of the FEL TEMP REPARATIO type, fallen
horseman reverse.
- 14 & 15. *Illegible.*

The coins are all in a very worn or corroded condition. Number 9 has a rather scarce reverse type, and number 10 has an unrecorded obverse legend, although the coin may be a hybrid.

The author's thanks are due to the Durham University Excavation Committee, who initiated and financed the excavations (which are expected to continue for another four years), and to Major Douglas Blackett, of Halton Castle, who has allowed and encouraged excavation.