

V.—EXCAVATIONS IN THE ROMAN FORT AT HOUSESTEADS, 1961

*John Leach and John Wilkes with a contribution by
J. P. C. Kent*

In August and September 1961 excavations were continued within the fort of Housesteads on behalf of the Durham University Excavation Committee. Previous work in this series has been described in earlier volumes of this journal (AA4 xxxviii 61-70 and xxxix 279-300; for the 1898 excavations by R. C. Bosanquet which produced the plan of the whole fort cf. AA2 xxv 193-300 with folding plan facing p. 300). The writers wish to record their thanks to various people for assistance both during the course of the excavations and in the preparation of the report. In particular we would like to thank Mr. Richard York for undertaking the drawing of the plan; Miss Olive Kitson for undertaking the photography; Dr. J. P. C. Kent of the British Museum for his report on the coins; Mr. Wilfred Dodds of the Department of Archæology in Durham and Mr. and Mrs. J. Alarcao of the Institute of Archæology in London for drawing the finds. As in previous years we would like to record our gratitude to Professor Eric Birley and Dr. J. C. Mann for help and advice, and likewise to Mr. Charles Anderson of the Ministry of Works whose help and co-operation was of the greatest value. Finally we would like to thank the numerous volunteer helpers who kept the work progressing in spite of appalling weather conditions.

To the south of barrack XIV (on Bosanquet's numbering which is followed here throughout) and on the north side of the *via praetoria* a rectangular building, with dimensions

similar to those of a barrack block, was long conspicuous for the remarkable quality and size of its masonry, which drew comments from antiquaries and excavators alike. In particular, the east end of the building stood out as a conspicuous ruin and attracted the attention of John Hodgson, the historian of Northumberland, who cleared it to reveal a small bath block with moulded cold bath and hypocaust. Bosanquet in 1898 concentrated on trenching the remainder of the building in a search for partition walls, of which he was unable to locate a single example. We were able to observe traces of at least two of his trenches towards the middle of the building on a north-south alignment and one of them had apparently cut through the stone floor of the third period. Bosanquet stated that he could discover no evidence for the use of the building (AA2 xxv 241).

The 1961 excavations exposed the whole building except for the 38' at the east end occupied by the bath block. Its overall dimensions were 162' 6" by 35'. The walls were constructed from large blocks of sandstone, each stone carefully dressed to fit alongside those next to it. The foundation course, where this survived, was laid directly upon the natural whinstone and measured at least 3' in width. Above the foundation course the wall was constructed either with throughs or with flatter stones set on end at the inside and outside edge of the wall, with the cavity in between filled up with rubble. This variation in quality of construction was one of the many remarkable features of this structure. No mortar was deemed necessary, the weight of the stones themselves being sufficient to keep them in place. Where two or more courses survived there appeared signs of the courses' being tapered gradually to counteract the slope of the ground (approximately 12' 6" from west to east); one course in particular began about the middle of the north wall at a thickness of four inches and finished at the east end well over a foot thick. On the north side of the building there were originally eight buttresses set at intervals of approximately 17'; all these are visible today except for the one near the

west end whose foundations were located during the excavation of barrack XIV. Although these buttresses were constructed from the same large masonry as the walls they could not have added any real strength to the structure, since none of them appears to have been bonded into the wall courses. Much less of the walls was preserved on the south side. Only towards the east end did any of the wall survive above the foundation course, while for a length of 45' towards the west end even the foundations had gone. There is no doubt that this was due to robbing, since the trench cut in the whinstone to accommodate the wall stones was clearly to be seen. The absence of any quantity of the large masonry amongst the debris within the building, and the considerable amount of smaller building stones of the normal size, suggest that the monumental construction was never completed to a level much higher than that at which it stands today, and that the upper parts of the structure were completed with the smaller blocks with perhaps a timber roof. Another interesting feature was the almost complete absence of either tiles or stone roofing slates, the latter being particularly widespread in the debris of barrack XIV.

A doorway 5' wide was situated in the west wall, some 11' from the north-west corner, while an entrance 10' wide near the middle of the south wall of the building may have provided access for carts. Both the doorway and the entrance exhibited signs of wear; the latter possessed two sockets on the right-hand side and grooving probably caused by the passage of cartwheels.

Within the building a floor of stone flags was laid over the whole area. These flags averaged 18" square and were about 2" thick. The laying of the floor had been carried out with the greatest care; first the whole site was levelled by tipping in clay and rubble to give a fairly horizontal foundation, upon which was spread a thin layer of clean sand. Into this the flags were set, great care being taken to attain a perfectly level floor surface. The durability of this floor was amply demonstrated by its condition when uncovered (cf.

plate XII fig. 2), for in many places it was broken into many fragments and smoothed with wear, suggesting many decades of continuous use. The largest area of this floor survived at the west end while another patch was uncovered at the eastern end of the area excavated, still at the same level as the floor to the west, in spite of the slope of the outside ground level. There is no evidence to show that this floor did not extend over the whole of the interior of the building, which was divided in half by one north-south cross wall; although the construction of this wall was markedly inferior to that of the outside walls, it may possibly have formed part of the original plan of the building. However, it would be misleading to indicate this feature, on the plan, with the same designation as is employed for the large masonry, and it has thus been shown as secondary (cf. fig. 1). Against the inner face of the north wall were found two post sockets, one of them stone lined, which indicate that at some period the building was divided by wooden partitions. The only other trace of an occupation later than the large masonry phase occurred at the west end, where three large stone blocks were found laid on the flagged floor in a straight line roughly opposite the doorway; it is possible that they represent the foundation of a late division within the building (cf. plan and plate XII fig. 2). In addition, a number of large stone slabs set on the stone floor around this feature may be the remains of a later floor surface. At some period the western doorway was also blocked up, and this is perhaps the most conclusive evidence for a later occupation at this end of the building (cf. plate XII fig. 2).

Compared with barrack XIV the evidence for earlier constructional periods was disappointing. The first 50' from the west yielded no trace whatsoever of any occupation beneath the large masonry floor level, so efficiently had the work of levelling been carried out in preparation for the laying of that floor. Similarly, any traces of earlier levels at the east end were probably obliterated by the bath block, whose lower floors were set well below the level of the stone



1. BUILDING XV FROM NORTH-WEST BEFORE EXCAVATION.



2. NORTH-EAST CORNER FROM NORTH-WEST SHOWING FLOOR AND LATER FEATURES.



1. PERIOD I, SOUTH WALL FROM WEST WITH PERIOD II WALL ON RIGHT.

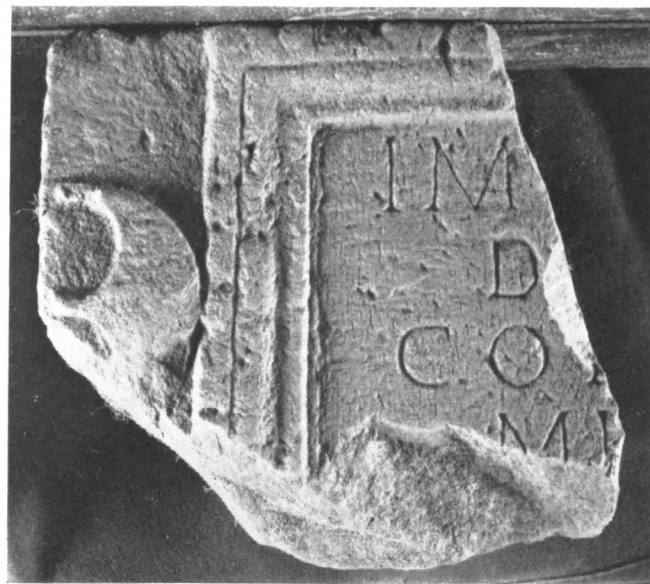
2. PERIOD I WALL WITH PERIOD III DRAIN AND
PERIOD IV CROSS-WALL IN FOREGROUND



1. PERIOD I PIT CONTAINING BONES WITH
PERIOD III DRAIN REMOVED.



2. WALLS OF PERIODS I AND II FROM EAST WITH
PERIOD III FLAGGED FLOOR.



1. BUILDING INSCRIPTION.

2. TOMBSTONE FRAGMENT.

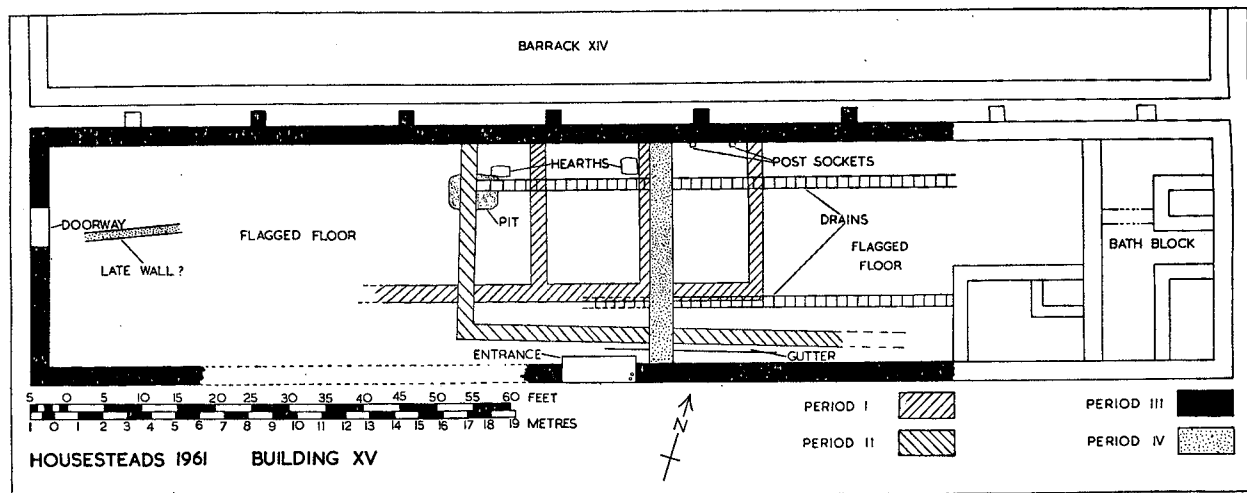


FIG. 1.

floor. In the central third of the building some traces were preserved of earlier structures. Here, beneath the stone floor, were discovered wall footings consisting of small sandstone blocks set carefully in puddled clay, with a bedding of whinstone chips and clay. In style the structures were very reminiscent of those of the first and second periods of barrack XIV, which were dated to the second and early third centuries (cf. AA4 xxxix 279ff.).

Two periods of these buildings were identified, both of whose north walls were clearly on much the same alignment as the north wall of the large masonry structure (cited now as period III). The first structure consisted of a rectangular building with an overall width of about 24'; three partition walls were discovered, spaced at intervals of 15', giving separate rooms, smaller but comparable in size with the Hadrianic *contubernia* of barrack XIV (dimensions 12' 6" by 19' internally as compared with the *contubernia* 11' by 25'). Two clay hearths were found in the north-east corners of the two rooms, while to the west of the last cross-wall a pit, measuring 6' by 3' and about 18" deep, was found filled with crushed animal bones (cf. plate XIV fig. 1). This feature is undoubtedly to be associated with period I, since the cross-wall of the second period was constructed through the pit-filling. This building was clearly destroyed or damaged by fire, since a burnt layer was found running over its foundations which, however, was cut through by the foundations of the walls of the second period, traces of which were less extensive than those of the first (plate XIV fig. 2). The south wall of period II ran on a line some 3' north of the south wall of period III but on a slightly different alignment, in contrast to the period I wall which ran parallel to the latter, some 8' to the north of it. A gutter covered with stone slabs for part of its length ran along the south face of this period II wall. As a glance at the plan will show, there is no evidence that the period I building extended further eastwards than 100' from the west wall of period III, while the period II building seems only to have extended westwards to within 56'

of the same wall. No trace was found of partition walls assignable to the second period.

When the third period was constructed the outside face of the foundation course of the period I south wall was incorporated in one of two stone-lined drains, running east-west and covered with heavy slabs (cf. plate XIII fig. 2). Their precise function is not clear, since in the region where they appear to have commenced all trace of the period III floor had disappeared. Both drains were traced as far as the bath block, but here no outlet was discovered. They may well have gone out of use when the bath block was inserted, perhaps at the end of the third century. Both drains contained quantities of clean silt, while from the southernmost of the two came a coin of Tetricus (A.D. 270-274), suggesting that they were still in use during the later third century.

No chronology put forward for this building can be regarded as in any way certain, but the small though significant group of second-century pottery sealed beneath the period III floor points to a date not much later than the early third century for the opening of that period, while numerous coins of the late third and early fourth century trodden into cracks in the floor indicate continuous use well into the first half of the fourth century. The building inscription (plate XV fig. 1) found in the debris near the east end is not necessarily to be connected with any phase of the building.

For barrack XIV comparison with the plan of Flavian Fendoch was most instructive in elucidating the character and plan of the earlier phases. On either side of the *via praetoria* Fendoch appears to have had two long barn-like structures with no apparent trace of subdivision (PSA Scot. lxxiii 114 fig. 2 and 136f.). This is clearly not the case at Housesteads, where the earliest building was divided into rooms somewhat comparable to *contubernia*, with hearths in what appear to be corresponding positions in two of the rooms. The hearth of the western room took the form of a small clay-lined pit in which were found the almost complete remains of two vessels, a flagon in orange fabric, and a

cooking pot in dense black fabric, both assignable to the second quarter of the second century. If any dates are to be suggested for the first two periods, the first is almost unquestionably the original Hadrianic construction, while the second cannot be later than the early third century when we believe period III to have been constructed. The occasion for the first rebuilding was a fire which destroyed the earlier structure, perhaps towards the end of the second century, as is suggested by the fragment of Antonine samian from the burnt layer (fig. 2, no. 5).

It was hoped that excavation would lead to a solution of the main problems connected with building XV at Housesteads, i.e. the purpose of the large masonry structure, our period III. We must admit that the work of 1961 has contributed little towards that solution, although it has provided some interesting information about the construction, interior and probable date. The buttresses and style of construction suggested an Antonine date to Bosanquet; possibly he had in mind the plan of Birrens with its Antonine inscription. He suggested on the basis of an unspecified German parallel that the building may have served as an officers' messhouse (AA2 xxv 241). Perhaps it is safest to regard the building as a storehouse or depot of a special kind; this view is certainly supported by the existence of an entrance, on the south side, obviously designed for waggon. Bosanquet assumed that a set of buttresses similar to those on the north side would be found along the south wall, but no traces of any such features were discovered. In view of the fact that the northern buttresses were uphill of the wall and not even bonded to it, it is by no means clear what purpose they could have served.

Whatever the function of the building, the condition of the flagged floor clearly indicates prolonged use. If we are correct in assigning to it an early third-century date, then no major reconstruction took place during the Constantian rebuilding, a phase so well represented in barrack XIV. As mentioned above, the bath block may be a later insertion,

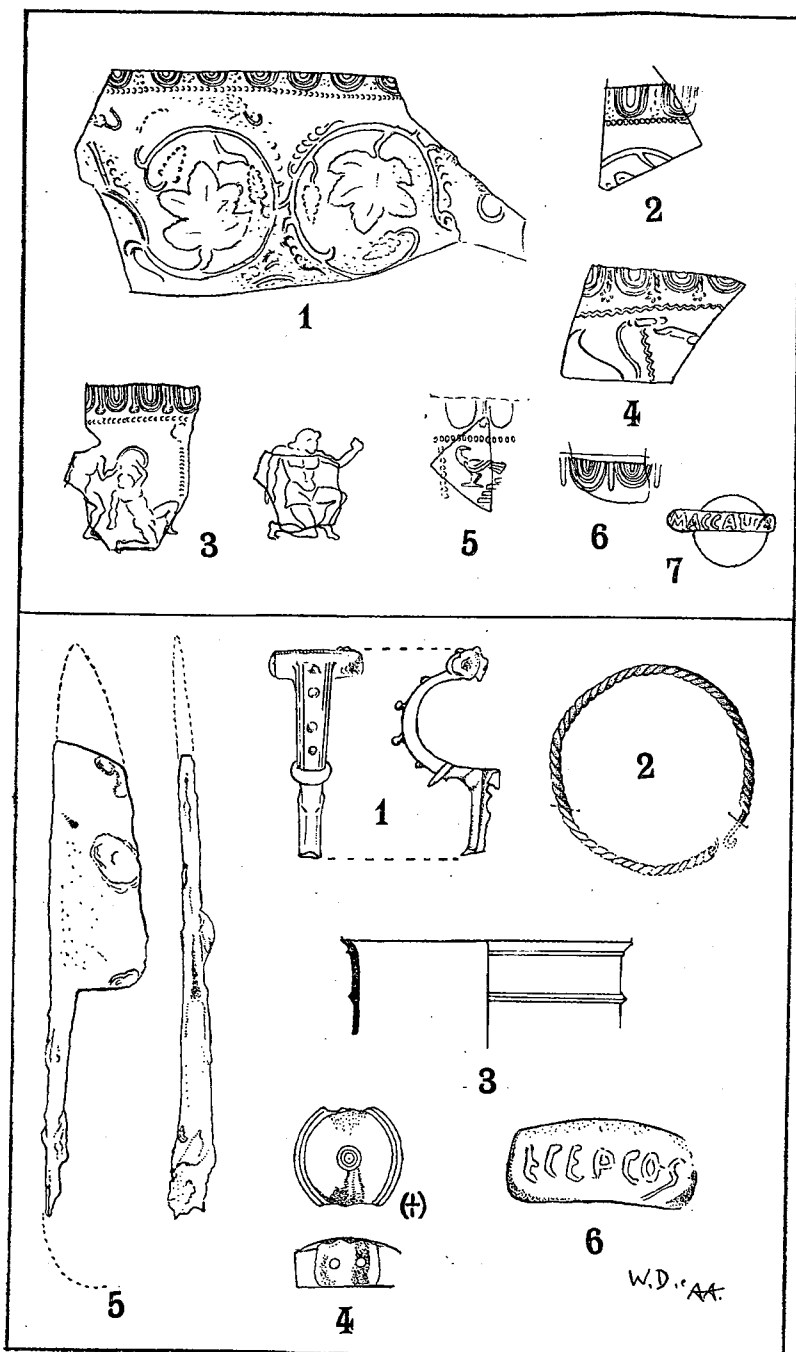
but this can only be demonstrated by further work on that part of the site.

In conclusion we may note that, compared with barrack XIV, the building produced only a small quantity of third- and fourth-century pottery types from the debris and other levels, while more second-century pottery came to light from a smaller area than in the other building. Whatever the later modifications signify, it is clear that the building was not drastically replanned to serve as living quarters, as were several other buildings within the fort during the later fourth century.

THE FINDS

(a) *The Samian pottery* (fig. 2)

1. Form 37. Found beneath flagged floor in east end. Light buff/pink clay with good medium red glaze. Medium sized double-bordered ovolo with straight rosette-tipped tongue associated with a bead-row. Scroll-type decoration of vine branches with leaves, tendrils, grapes and pecking bird, quite common on bowls of the early second century. This piece is clearly by the same potter as the piece figured in *Central Gaulish Potters* pl. 90, Condollus no. 3, from Birdoswald, though Stanfield's files contain rubbings of two more fragments in the same style from the Guildhall Museum filed under Donnaucus, and another similar fragment from Corbridge appears in CGP pl. 73 no. 47, there ascribed to the workshop of Quintilianus. Lezoux. Hadrianic.
2. Form 37. Fragment showing same ovolo and part of a similar motif to no. 1.
3. (a & b) Form 37. Found beneath flagged floor in east end. Hard pink clay with good medium red glaze. Small squarish double-bordered ovolo with small plain rosette-tipped tongue associated with a bead-row. Naked defeated gladiator kneeling to right of conqueror, who holds out a shield in his left hand, with similar figure to right. The types are similar to, but not the same as, Déch. 592 and 593=Osw. 1011 and 1012, which are clad. They appear on a fragment from London with the same ovolo (CGP pl. 49 no. 587) attributed to the style of Donnaucus. Lezoux. Hadrianic/Early Antonine.
4. Form 37. Found beneath flagged floor in east end. Orange clay with fairly good glaze. Medium sized double-bordered ovolo with corded tongue ending in a rosette bent to the



FIGS. 2 AND 3. THE SAMIAN AND SMALL FINDS ($\frac{1}{2}$).

left associated with a wavy line, one of those used by the so-called potter X-6 (CGP p. 150 no. 2) who also used the astragalus and trailing ivy motif (CGP pl. 76 no. 30). Lezoux. Hadrianic/E. Antonine.

5. Form 37. Found in burnt layer covering period I foundations. Orange clay with good medium red glaze. Small bird (Osw. 2298) in corner of panel formed by bead-rows; edge of wreathed medallion; rosette tip to tongue of ovolo. Figure type used by Attianus, Cinnamus, Criciro, Doeccus I and Paternus. Possibly style of Cinnamus or Criciro. Lezoux. Antonine.
6. Pink clay with poor glaze. Medium sized triple-bordered ovolo with straight plain tongue.
7. Base of plain form 33 bearing stamp MACCALI M. Lezoux. Hadrianic/Antonine.

(b) *Miscellaneous small finds* (fig. 3)

1. P-shaped bronze brooch (Collingwood group T, type 73) with a row of four knobs along the bow, similar to two found at Corbridge (AA3 vii 185) dated to c. A.D. 220.
2. Bronze bracelet of two strands of twisted wire (Kenyon type D, cf. *Jewry Wall* p. 254 fig. 83 no. 7). Date uncertain.
3. Rim of a glass beaker, possibly a facet cut beaker (cf. Charlesworth, AA4 xxxvii 39, fig. 3 no. 7). From clay and cobbles near period II wall footings. ? second century.
4. Flat, round, jet bead with moulded decoration on top, and pierced with two holes; possibly for a bracelet. Similar to Kenyon type A (*Jewry Wall* p. 270, fig. 94 no. 1 and *Lydney Park* fig. 18 nos. 77 and 79) A third- and fourth-century type.
5. Iron knife blade.
6. Amphora stamp reading ? ECERCOS.

(c) *The coarse pottery* (fig. 4)

- (i) Periods I and II. The items of the following group were all found securely stratified beneath the flagged floor of the large masonry building.
1. Roughcast beaker in pinkish fabric, Gillam type 72. 80-130. Fragments of a folded roughcast beaker in similar fabric (Gillam type 73) were also found.
2. Narrow-mouthed jar in hard light bluish grey fabric, similar to Gillam type 30. 160-200.
3. Roll-rim segmental bowl reminiscent of mortarium shape, in slightly gritty pink fabric, similar to Gillam type 294 but with a slightly different rim. 120-160.
4. Cooking pot in fairly dense black fabric with a wavy line decoration on the outside of the rim and a zone of cross-hatching on the belly. Gillam type 120. 125-160.

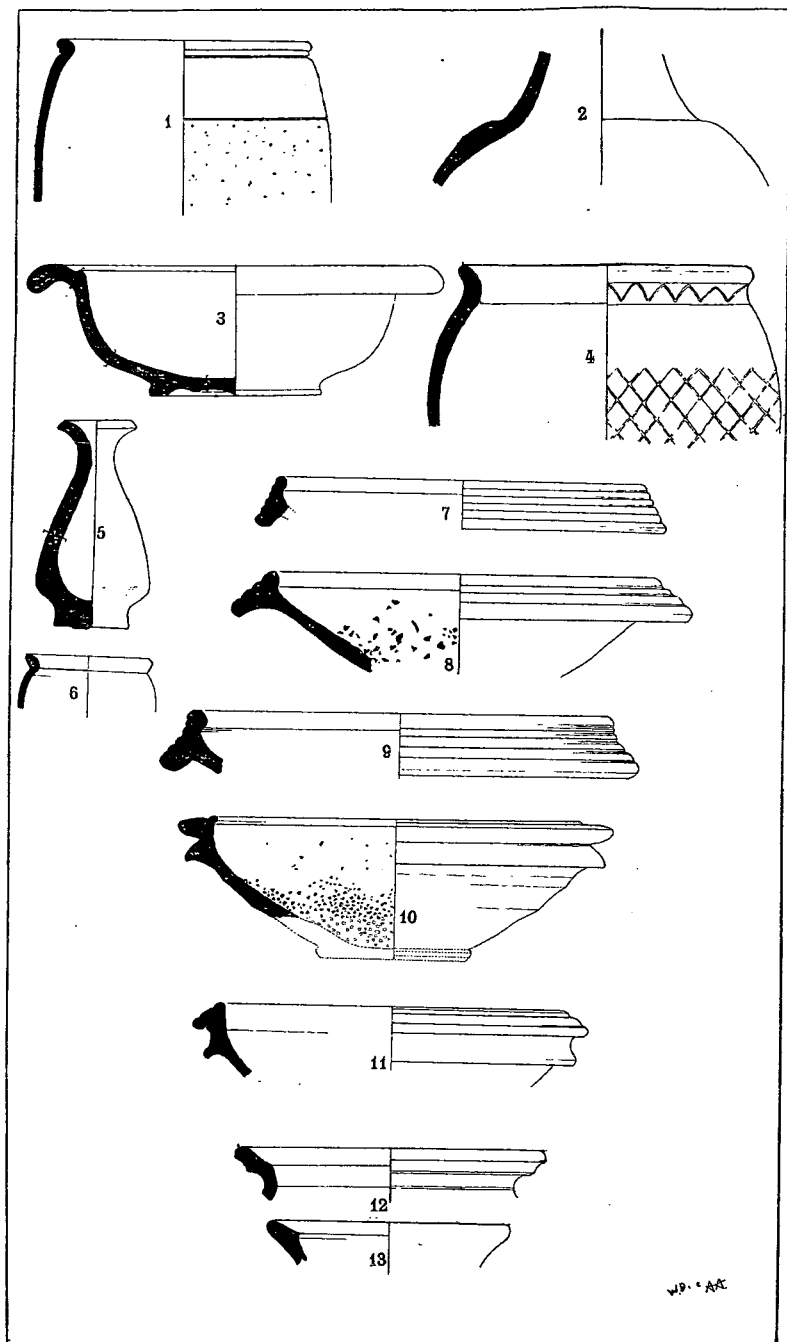


FIG. 4. THE COARSE POTTERY ($\frac{1}{4}$).

5. Small flask in orange/buff fabric similar to Gillam type 37. 120-170.

6. Jar-shaped beaker in coarse grey gritty fabric similar to Gillam type 168, but of thinner fabric and larger. ? c. 120-160.

Other items belonging to periods I and II (not illustrated) include a fragment of a vessel of softish buff fabric in rustic ware (E. Hadrianic), the rim of a cooking pot in light grey fabric, Gillam type 132 (140-220), and the rim of a segmental bowl in red fabric, Gillam type 296 (150-200), as well as the Hadrianic cooking pot and flagon in orange fabric from the clay hearth mentioned above. It can be seen that the group contains no vessel which cannot be securely dated to the second century.

(ii) Period III and later.

7. Mortarium in smooth, hard, buff fabric similar to Gillam type 282. 290-370.
8. Mortarium in hard buff/grey fabric with ironstone grit, similar to no. 7 in type.
9. Mortarium in fairly smooth buff/grey fabric similar to Gillam type 283. 290-370.
- 10 and 11. Mortaria in fairly smooth yellowy white fabric, similar to Gillam type 290. 370-400.
12. Cooking pot in hard black gritted ware.
13. Rim of cooking pot in softish brown ware with shell grit, "Dales ware", cf. Gillam, *Ant. J.* xxxi, 1951, p. 157, type 18. c. 290-320.

(d) *Inscriptions*

1. (plate XV fig. 1) Single fragment of a building inscription in light sandstone measuring approximately 13" by 13". Found in upper debris towards the east end of the building. The letters are set in an ansate tablet surrounded by a moulded border and flanked by pelta ornaments.

IM [P
 D [IVI . . . F
 C O H [I TVNGR
 MI [L FEC?

If the pelta ornament was centred at the side of the panel we can conclude that the inscription consisted only of four lines. Cohors I Tungrorum milliaria is well attested as the garrison of Housesteads during the third century and is listed for there by the *Notitia Dignitatum* (Occ. xl 40). It would be hazardous to assign a date to the stone on stylistic grounds, but if it is of the third century then coh. I Tungrorum milliaria can be restored with confidence (the evidence for the garrison of Housesteads is summarized by E. Birley in CW2 xxxix 215).

2. (plate XV fig. 2). Fragment in coarse sandstone found amongst debris on the period III floor at east end of the building, dimensions approximately 7" by 5".

...] M.S [. . . .
] VIX I [. . . .
] OSTI [. . . .

Probably part of a tombstone. In 1. 2 the last letter is clearly not A and thus one cannot restore VIX A[NNOS . . . ; on the other hand it may have been VIXI[T ANNOS, but the space between the x and the next letter and the suspicion of a stop in the interval suggest that the last letter may have been the first letter of a quite different word.

3. (not illustrated). Fragment of fine grained sandstone with smoothed surface measuring approximately 7" by 5". It bears the top part of a well-cut letter which may be either a P, B or an R. The stone and carving are exactly similar to the fragments of the Severan building inscription, found in the granary in 1931 and preserved in the Housesteads Museum (cf. E. Birley, AA4 ix 233 n.5 and pl. XXIV fig. 1). Bearing in mind the proximity of its findspot to the granary, where the other fragments were found, it may well be part of that inscription. Some traces of carved relief suggest that our fragment belongs to the edge of the inscription.

(e) *Coins.* By J. P. C. Kent

1. Probably Antoninus Pius (138-161), *As*.
2. Saloninus (256-259), double denarius, PIETAS AVG, Lyons mint, RIC 9.
- 3-4. Uncertain emperors, radiate, c. A.D. 270.
- 5-35. Barbarous radiates.
36. Crispus (317-326), AE, VOT X CAESARVM NOSTRORVM,

PLON ^u

, London mint, A.D. 323-4.
37. Constantine II (317-337), AE, GLORIA EXERCITVS (two standards) Trier mint,

. . T] RS [. .

 A.D. 330-5.
38. Probably Constantine II and as above no. 37, but mint mark illegible.
39. Urbs Roma,

.PLG

, Lyons mint, A.D. 330-2, CHK I 190.
40. Constantinopolis,

TR-S

, Trier mint, A.D. 330-3, CHK I 66.
- 41-53. Uncertain, third/fourth century.