

## XIV.—THE DESERTED VILLAGE OF WEST WHELPINGTON, NORTHUMBERLAND

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Abbreviations used in this paper:

*Finchale*—M. G. Jarrett and B. J. N. Edwards, *Medieval and other pottery from Finchale Priory, County Durham*, AA4 xxxix (1961) pp. 229-278.

*Med. Arch.*—Medieval Archæology.

*Oswald*—A. Oswald, *The evolution and chronology of English clay tobacco pipes*, *Archæological News Letter* v, 12 (May 1955), pp. 243-250.

*RAE*—R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, *Recent Archæological Excavations in Britain* (1956).

*SAN*—Unpublished.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

West Whelpington (NY 974837) stands on a whinstone outcrop on the north bank of the river Wansbeck about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles west of Kirkwhelpington. It is about 700 feet above sea-level, and to the west and north the ground rises further to the moors on the east side of Redesdale; to the south and east is lower and more fertile country. West Whelpington lies between the two, on land which can be cultivated, but which is far less fertile than south-east Northumberland. Quarrying of the whinstone crag has been carried out for a number of years, and no doubt some features of the village have disappeared with the quarry and its associated road. In 1957 it became clear that the rate of quarrying would be increased with the use of new machinery. In consequence the Ministry of Works decided to excavate the area immediately threatened, with the consent and cooperation of the

owner, Mr. R. Thornton, and the lessees, Messrs. Mark Appleby and Co. Ltd. During the next 20 years or more the Ministry hope to excavate the whole village in advance of quarrying. The first series of excavations, to cover the area threatened before 1964, was arranged in conjunction with the Department of Extra-Mural Studies of the Durham Colleges in the University of Durham. It involved a general survey of the visible earthworks (fig. 1, cf. the aerial photographs, plates XXIV/XXV), and excavation of as much as possible of sites 18-24.

The survey was carried out in advance of excavation by students of the Civil Engineering Department of King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne, supervised by Professor John Hugh Jones of the University of California and Mr. P. C. G. Isaac of King's College. Excavation by parties of students from extra-mural classes took place in three periods of ten days and on two or three week-ends. It was directed in 1958 and 1959 by Mr. W. W. Taylor and the author, and in 1960 by the author and Dr. Brian Dobson. Some examination of all the threatened sites except number 22 proved possible, and the results of that examination are embodied in this report.

The author's thanks are due to the persons named above for their help at various stages; to Professor M. W. Beresford for searching for records of West Whelpington; to Mr. J. G. Hurst of the Ministry of Works for his assistance and advice both on and off the site; and to all those students who actually removed the soil. Particular mention should be made of Miss E. A. Strachan, Mr. Ian Hart and Mr. Ivor Gale, who between them drew the originals of most of the plans.

## 2. DOCUMENTARY RECORDS AND THE DATE OF DESERTION

Search by Professor M. W. Beresford in the Public Record Office and elsewhere has revealed no reference to West Whelpington in medieval records. There are several references to Whelpington, the parish of which West Whelpington was one township. For example the 1331 *inquisitio post*



WEST WHELPINGTON: AERIAL VIEW FROM NORTH-WEST.

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FIG. 1. WEST WHELPINGTON: AERIAL VIEW FROM WEST-NORTH-WEST.

*Photo by J. K. St. Joseph. Crown copyright reserved.*



SITE 20: GENERAL VIEW OF THE HOUSE FROM THE WEST.

*mortem* on Robert de Umfreville, earl of Angus (d. 1325) revealed that he held "at Whelpington 270 acres of demesne; 10 bond tenants each with a croft and 24 acres of land; a new mill".<sup>1</sup> While this could well refer to the ten houses and crofts (sites 1-10) on the north side of the green at West Whelpington (which probably formed the original settlement), there is no means of knowing to which part of the large parish of Whelpington this and similar items refer.

Mr. John Philipson has kindly drawn my attention to what may be the only reference to West Whelpington as an existing village outside the pages of the parish register. In the *Order of the Watches upon the Middle Marches*, laid down by Lord Wharton in 1552,<sup>2</sup> the following statement occurs:

"FROM *West-Whelpington* to *Raye*, to be watched with four Men nightly of the Inhabitours of *West-Whelpington* and *Ray*; Setters and Searchers *William Elsdon* and *John Rotchester*."<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Philipson comments that since four is not an extraordinary number for a village to have to find this is not any indication of population; though it does certainly indicate that the village was not in decay at this date. Ray is another township in Whelpington parish; it was once almost or completely deserted, but is now re-occupied by Forestry Commission workers.

The only other published reference to West Whelpington is in the *History of Northumberland* by John Hodgson, Vicar of Kirkwhelpington, published in 1827. This is of vital importance, and must be quoted in full:

"The village of West Whelpington stood proudly on the northern margin of the Wansbeck, on an elevated plain, which slopes gently towards the east, and is defended on

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O. C 135/29/8.

<sup>2</sup> Published by William Bishop of Carlisle in 1747 as an appendix to his *Border Laws*.

<sup>3</sup> *ib.* p. 185. See also Hodgson, *Northumberland*, Pt. III, Vol. II, p. 240.

all sides, and especially on the south, by a whinstone precipice. It was of oblong form, about 440 yards long, and consisted of two rows of houses inclosing a large town green, near the centre of which a small circle probably points out the site of its cock-pit, near which stood a peel house, about  $23\frac{1}{2}$  by  $21\frac{1}{2}$  feet in the inside, having very thick walls, and a sort of yard or barmekin in front, apparently the only little fortified habitation which the place could ever boast of. Its name occurs in the parish register up to 1715 in connection, among other names, with those of Harle, Wealons, Newton, Milburne, Lambert and Stote, one of which last family, when he took the whole of it to rent, 'put out 15 farmers' here, according to the phrases and account of a person who was his servant, and is still living at the age of 86. No person, however, remembers anyone residing here; and the place is now only remarkable for the distinctness of its ruins, the beautiful verdure of its site, and especially for having been one of the numerous places in the north, where a long line of ancient tenantry had toiled and gamboled; but were forced, by a new order of things, to quit the only spot on earth that was dear to them, and find employment in some of the populous places, where, in the language of the Deserted Village,

'. . . . . Trade's unfeeling train  
Usurp the land, and dispossess the swain'."<sup>4</sup>

It is clear from Hodgson's account that desertion happened at some date later than 1715. A man born *c.* 1740 had apparently no memory of anyone living at West Whelpington, but had been employed by the man responsible for the final evictions. The outside limits for desertion are therefore 1715-*c.* 1750, and the evidence of the pottery and clay pipes so far found on the site suggests that we should probably choose a date early in this period. 1725  $\pm$  10 years is the most likely date for abandonment. We should how-

<sup>4</sup> J. Hodgson, *History of Northumberland II*, i (1827) pp. 197-198.

ever take note of a boundary stone found about  $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles west of the village, near the Ferneyrigg Burn where it crosses the road to Sweethope (956834). It records the initials of two landowners, W.B. and T.J.S., and the date 1736; on the reverse are the letters M.M. It is attractive to think that the initials T.J.S. may be those of the Stote responsible for evicting the last fifteen farmers from West Whelpington, and that this stone records the enclosure subsequent to those evictions. On the whole it seems likely that this stone is too far away from the village to mark the westward limit of its territory, though our ignorance of the extent of either arable or common land associated with upland villages in the Middle Ages means that we cannot exclude the possibility that we have here a virtual commemoration of the depopulation.

The actual reasons for Stote's dispossession of the villagers are not clear. The date is too early by half a century or more for "improved agriculture" to be a likely motive. The incentive to depopulation was probably the higher profit to be obtained from pastoral rather than arable farming. It should be remembered that most of the land around the village is marginal for arable farming, and is now (and has been for many years) under sheep. Elsewhere in England depopulations for sheep-rearing are a phenomenon primarily of the fifteenth century, though they continued into the sixteenth. The troubled conditions of the Border at this period would render such depopulation inadvisable in Northumberland. It is significant that the earliest recorded deserted villages in the county appear to be in the Tyne valley and belong to the reign of Elizabeth I. Further north and west conditions were not conducive to such depopulations until the late seventeenth century. It would appear that they continued into the eighteenth century and mingled with other changes in rural conditions consequent upon the introduction of "improved agriculture". "Improved agriculture" led normally to a large farm with dependent cottages in the place of an open-field village, rather than to a complete desertion.

## 3. THE VILLAGE PLAN (fig. 1)

West Whelpington was, like many north-eastern villages, built round all sides of a village green. The whinstone outcrop on which it is situated slopes gently northward. It is an attractive site for excavation because the lines of buildings and yard and croft walls are well marked by banks, and seem to present an unusually clear picture of the village plan. On the north side of an oval green there is a row of ten houses, each with a yard and croft behind it (sites 1-10). East of site 1 is a road entering the village green from the north, and beyond that are the remains of larger buildings closing the east end of the green (sites 21-25). The regularity of the layout on the north side of the village contrasts with the apparently haphazard plan of the south and west sides. It is likely that the houses on the north side represent the original settlement, and that those opposite indicate piecemeal development at a time of expanding population. This hypothesis cannot of course be tested until the time comes for excavation of some of the houses on the north side. At the west end of the crag, set slightly back from the houses round the green, a larger house (site 12) may represent the dwelling of a steward, though it is possible that the complex banks indicate buildings of more than one period.

Hodgson<sup>5</sup> refers to a cockpit, and near it a small peel tower with a yard or barmkin outside it. Clearly less remains of the village than Hodgson saw, for these features cannot now be identified with any certainty. The cockpit is presumably the shallow oval depression south of site 4. If it is, the structure best suited to Hodgson's description of his peel tower is site 3, with the yard, extending from site 2 into the green, as its barmkin. Surface indications today, as well as the dimensions of the peel tower ( $23\frac{1}{2}' \times 21\frac{1}{2}'$  internally) suggest that Hodgson was wrong in his interpretation; but

<sup>5</sup> *op. cit.*; see above p. 192.

# WEST WHELPINGTON

SURVEY, MAY 1958

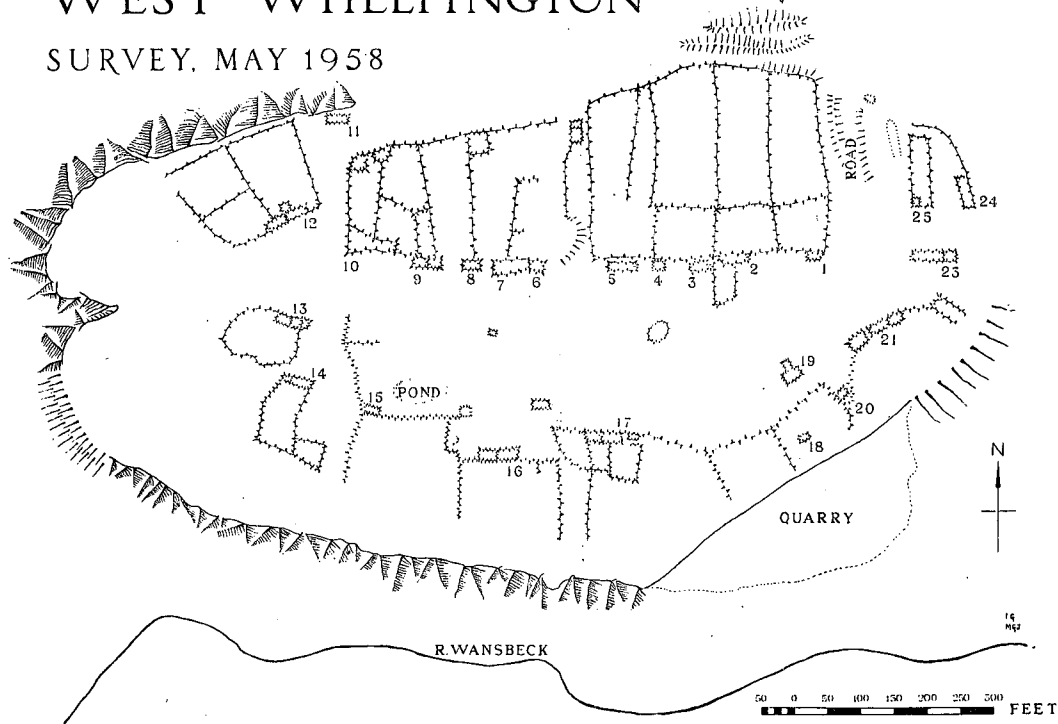


FIG. 1.

the matter remains in doubt until it is possible to excavate on the north side of the green.

In 1959 it was possible to conduct a trial excavation of the large depression in the south-west corner of the green. It had been suggested that this was a pond, but excavation revealed that the soil was only about six inches deep at this point, and that there was no indication of flooding at any time.

South-east of this depression, and close to it, a small rectangular structure had been located during the survey. This was examined, and proved to be a platform, one course high, of dressed freestone, 12' x 10'. The dressed freestone contrasts with the undressed whinstone used for the other buildings so far examined. The stone need not have travelled far; although the site is built on whin there is a disused free-stone quarry on the farm of Cornhills. The function of this platform is completely uncertain; it may conceivably have held a cross or similar ornament.

Today little of the land around West Whelpington is under cultivation; the most profitable use is for sheep-grazing. It is therefore surprising to see on the ground and on aerial photographs (e.g. plates XXIV/XXV) indications, in the form of ridge and furrow, that most of the area was under the plough in the Middle Ages. A survey of ridge and furrow round West Whelpington was prepared by Mr. Ivor Gale in 1959, and a simplified version is reproduced as fig. 2. It includes a small field directly opposite the village on the other side of the Wansbeck; this is still in the civil parish of West Whelpington and on the land of Cornhills farm. It was probably acquired by the villagers in order to secure riparian rights on the Wansbeck, perhaps in connection with a water mill; there are slight traces of a possible mill-lead below the west end of the village.

It is impossible to guess the extent of the arable and common lands of West Whelpington. On the evidence of the IPM quoted above,<sup>6</sup> it appears that 24 acres per bond-man

<sup>6</sup> pp. 190-191.

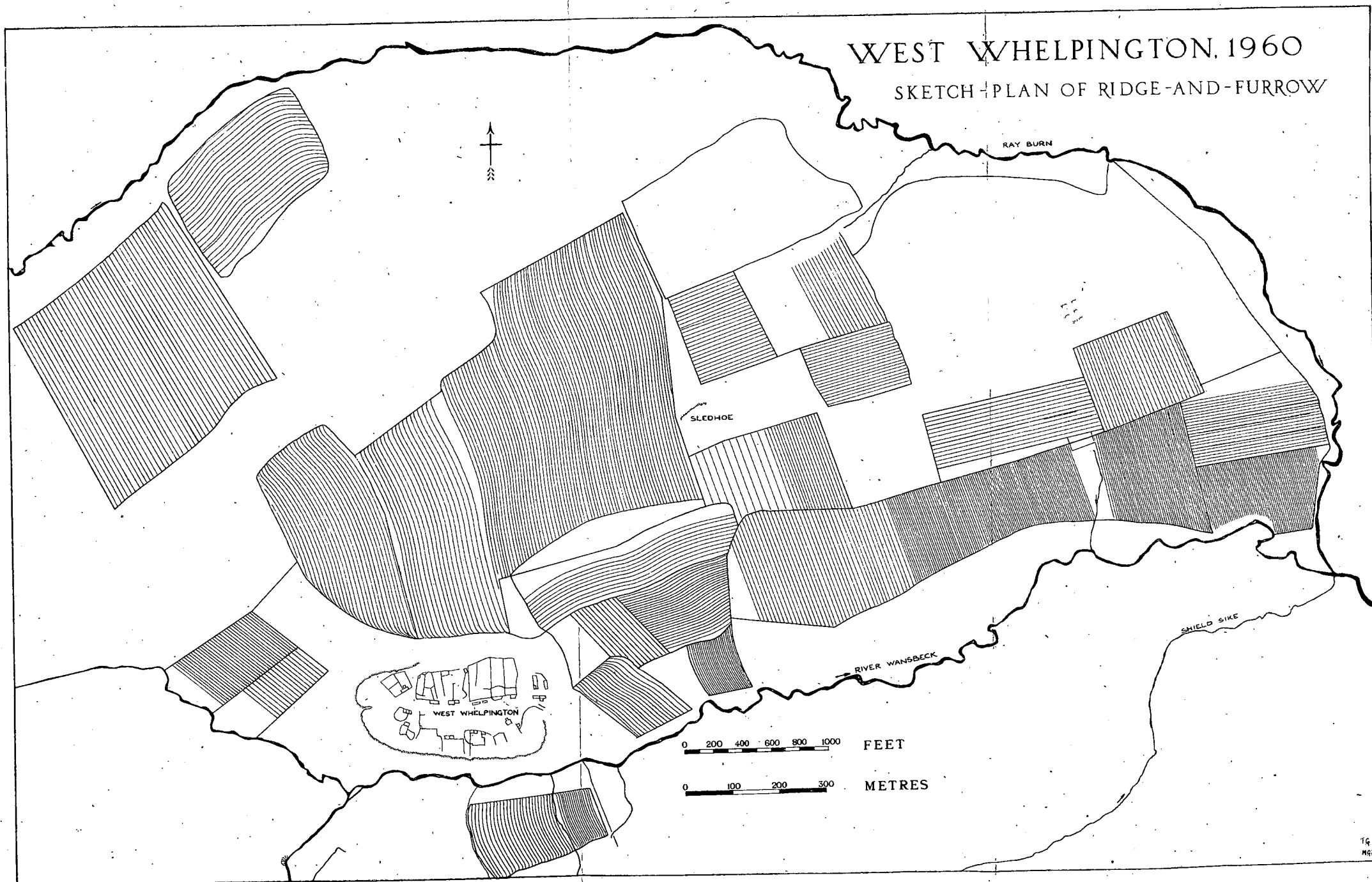


FIG. 2.



were regarded as compatible with survival—it can scarcely have been much more. Unfortunately we have no indication of the part of Whelpington parish to which this refers. Nor do we know how many houses at West Whelpington were occupied at any one time, so that we have no basis for even the roughest of calculations of the extent of arable. Fig. 2 shows some of the ridge and furrow close to the village. There is more at a distance, which may or may not belong to West Whelpington. Even if it proved possible to work out the total acreage of ridge and furrow which was connected with West Whelpington it would be of little value, since it is highly probable that only a proportion of it was under cultivation at any one time, agriculture being practised on the “infield” and “outfield” system.

Whatever the system used it is clear that during the Middle Ages this area, and similar upland areas of Northumberland, supported a population substantially in excess of any they have since known. In such country the medieval settlement pattern appears to be closely paralleled by that of the Romano-British native population;<sup>7</sup> four native sites occur in West Whelpington parish alone.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4. EXCAVATION METHOD

Over the past decade the Deserted Medieval Village Research Group has been experimenting with a new method of excavation, based on that used by Dr. Axel Steensberg in Denmark.<sup>9</sup> This was used at West Whelpington for a short time, until it became clear that too high a proportion of the restricted labour force would be involved in the recording of finds. It also became clear that, whatever the merits of the method on other sites (and we have yet to see

<sup>7</sup> G. Jobey, *Some rectilinear settlements of the Roman period in Northumberland*, in AA4 xxxviii (1960) pp. 1-38; fig. 9.

<sup>8</sup> *ib.* pp. 36-37, numbers 80-83.

<sup>9</sup> For a description of the method, see J. G. Hurst, RAE, pp. 265-273.

a full report based on this method), it was not applicable on a dry-walled site like West Whelpington.

There the topsoil normally lay directly on the weathered surface of the bedrock. This surface was marked by many small hollows and gullies, with much of the skin cracked by frost. Frost action had produced many loose chippings below the topsoil. The total depth from turf to bedrock was rarely more than 6 to 9 inches, and in only a few places could clay floors be detected. It was difficult to see how the modified-Steensberg method could be used without an inch-by-inch survey of the bedrock. This was quite beyond the resources available, and would probably not be justifiable on any excavation. In any case the method could scarcely be of value where no occupation deposit could be distinguished.

Man-made strata at West Whelpington consisted almost entirely of small patches of yellow clay used to level up the worst irregularities in the bedrock in order to make reasonably flat floors. Only on site 20 did this clay represent anything like a continuous layer, and this was the only house where the clay produced stratified pottery. Stratification of a different kind occurred in house 18, in connection with a lime dump. The shallow depth of soil at West Whelpington, with the hard whinstone underneath, precluded the digging of foundation trenches or post-holes; in consequence only a very small proportion of the finds were stratified.

They are however of more value than we might expect. On any civilian site it is likely that different buildings will have different histories, and the finds indicate that this is true of West Whelpington. Sites 18 and 21 have produced almost exclusively medieval pottery, other sites mainly sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sherds. It is difficult to believe that these differences do not indicate residential occupation at different periods, though it is possible that sites 18 and 21 continued in use as farm or store buildings after occupation for domestic purposes ceased.

## 5. EXCAVATED SITES

*Sites 18 and 18A*

Site 18, lying slightly to the north-west of the supposed house recorded in the original survey, left little indication of its size or structure. Little stone survived, and the building was probably of timber with stone packing round the uprights in lieu of post-holes, which could not easily be cut in the whinstone.

In view of the fragmentary condition of the walls, and due also to shortage of time, it was not possible to recover a complete plan of this house. It appears to have been roughly rectangular, and to have measured about 22' x 16'. At a late phase in its history the building was apparently used as a lime store. Lime was found inside it, in a layer whose thickness varied from 6" in the centre to 1" or less at the edges. The extent of this lime dump was one of the best indications of the size of the building, since much of the walling was completely robbed. Below the lime, and stratified by it, were found several fragments of medieval pottery, none of them necessarily later than the thirteenth century.

The overwhelming majority of the finds from site 18 were of medieval date, in contrast to those from the other sites excavated. They indicate that the main occupation of the building probably occurred in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, though it may well have continued in use for non-residential purposes until a later date. There was no evidence for the date of final abandonment, nor for the rebuildings which must have been necessary if the building was of timber.

Site 18A was not located in the ground survey of 1958, and its surface indications were very slight. It lies immediately west of site 20, and consists of a simple rectilinear building aligned east and west, measuring c. 20' x 15' internally. Such walling as survived closely resembled the rubble used on site 18, and suggests a timber superstructure. There were slight traces of an open fire, but no signs of a

stone hearth. The finds were mainly of seventeenth-century date, though fragments of four medieval vessels also occurred. If, as seems likely, the house was still in use not long before the desertion of the village it represents a marked contrast with the relative sophistication of house 20, occupied at the same period.

*Site 19 (fig. 3)*

From the field survey it was deduced that this site was occupied by a T-shaped building. It will be noted from the survey (fig. 1) that building 19 lies on the village green, well forward of the main lines of houses. Excavation revealed that the site was more complex than had been thought, with traces of at least six construction periods; the first three of these are fragmentary, and cannot be placed in any chronological sequence.

The best preserved of these three early structures is represented by a curved feature, built of undressed whinstone and freestone, outside and underneath the west wall of period IV. It consists of an outer wall, built without mortar, with the interior of the curve packed with rubble and earth. The feature was probably a loading platform. It is on two levels, with the upper one set well back from the lower. It is structurally earlier than the period IV west wall, which overlies it and is separated from it by a layer of earth from four to ten inches thick. Probably related to it, but possibly representing another period, is the south face of an east-west wall which survives inside the building of period IV.

The other early periods are represented by the east faces of two north-south walls which also survive inside the period IV building. Neither seems to be related to any other feature on the site.

These early structures must all have been demolished to their present level when the cross-piece of the T-shaped building survey was erected in period IV. It measures approximately 24' 6"  $\times$  13' internally. As we have seen the

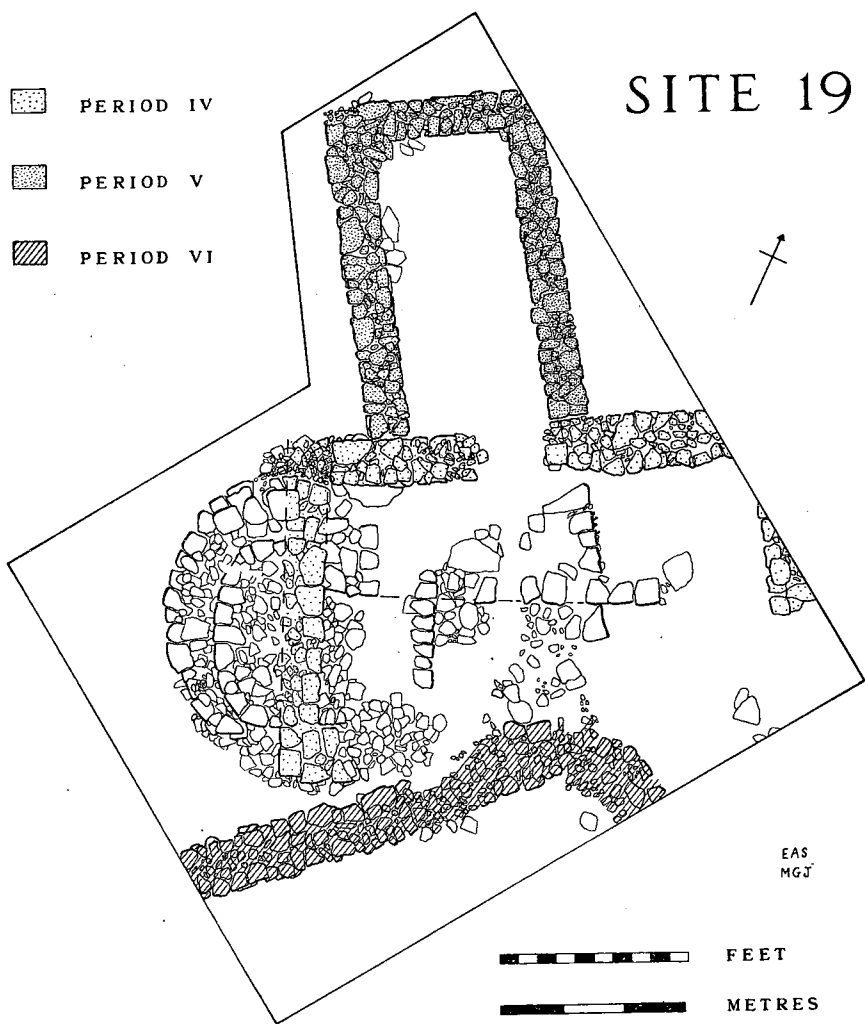


FIG. 3.

curved loading platform served as a foundation for the west wall of this new building. The indications are that it was a simple rectangular building, though the robbing of most of the south and east walls make certainty impossible. One of these presumably contained the door. No indication of a hearth was found in this building, although there were traces of burnt clay in the south-west corner.

The period IV walls are crudely built and laid directly on to the natural rock without any attempt to level it. At the north-west angle the north wall butted against the west (now robbed) without any bonding. This appears to have been a common feature at West Whelpington—it can be seen also on site 20. In this particular case the butt joint may be due to the fact that the west wall, overlying the loading platform, is at a higher level than the north wall which is on natural rock.

The rectangular building of period IV continued in use in period V, when it was extended by the addition of another room, 16' 6" × 7' 6" internally, on the north side. This was not bonded into the period IV north wall, and a doorway into the extension was made by the simple expedient of knocking a hole in that wall. No attempt was made to face the western jamb of the new doorway. The new room had no other entrance. The period V walling is neater than any other so far found at West Whelpington, and contains a higher proportion of dressed stone. Before building began the site was carefully levelled with whinstone chippings which served as a flooring material as well as a foundation for the walls.

Period VI saw the abandonment and partial demolition of the T-shaped building of period V. The south and east walls were extensively robbed, and part of the line of the south wall was covered by a new croft wall. This was not recorded during the original ground survey, and its precise direction remains uncertain. It has in its turn been extensively robbed, presumably for field walls. In view of the absence of any reliable dating evidence, it is possible that this

wall is a field boundary later in date than the desertion of the village.

The finds from site 19 were very few in number. As on other sites (notably 20) the majority of sherds were of sixteenth- or seventeenth-century date, though at least five medieval vessels were represented. On the basis of the finds it may be suggested that the site was certainly occupied in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that periods IV and V probably belong to those centuries. Whether period VI represents activity late in the seventeenth century, hinting at a gradual decline of the village, or whether it is later, we cannot say.

The siting of building 19 on the village green, the paucity of finds and the apparent absence of a hearth all suggest that it may not have had a residential function and may have been a barn; this view is reinforced by the apparent absence of any croft walls associated with it. The loading platform suggests a similar function for an earlier building on the site, and it should be noted that it overlies a gully in the top of the natural rock over which it would have been difficult to drive a cart. This loading platform does not appear to have been used in periods IV and V as there is no door in the west wall of those periods.

#### *Site 20 (fig. 4)*

The field survey revealed only the substantial house at the east end of this complex site. This is well built in whin and freestone with a rubble core. No mortar was used in the walls, which vary in thickness though they are rarely less than two feet in width. The building is irregular. The internal measurements are: north wall 23' 6"; east c. 19'; south c. 19' 6"; west 17'. The south-east angle has been completely robbed, and as the walls were laid direct on to the natural rock without any foundation there is no certainty about the exact position of this angle. As elsewhere in this village there seems to have been little attempt to bond walls together at the corners; the north-east and north-west corners

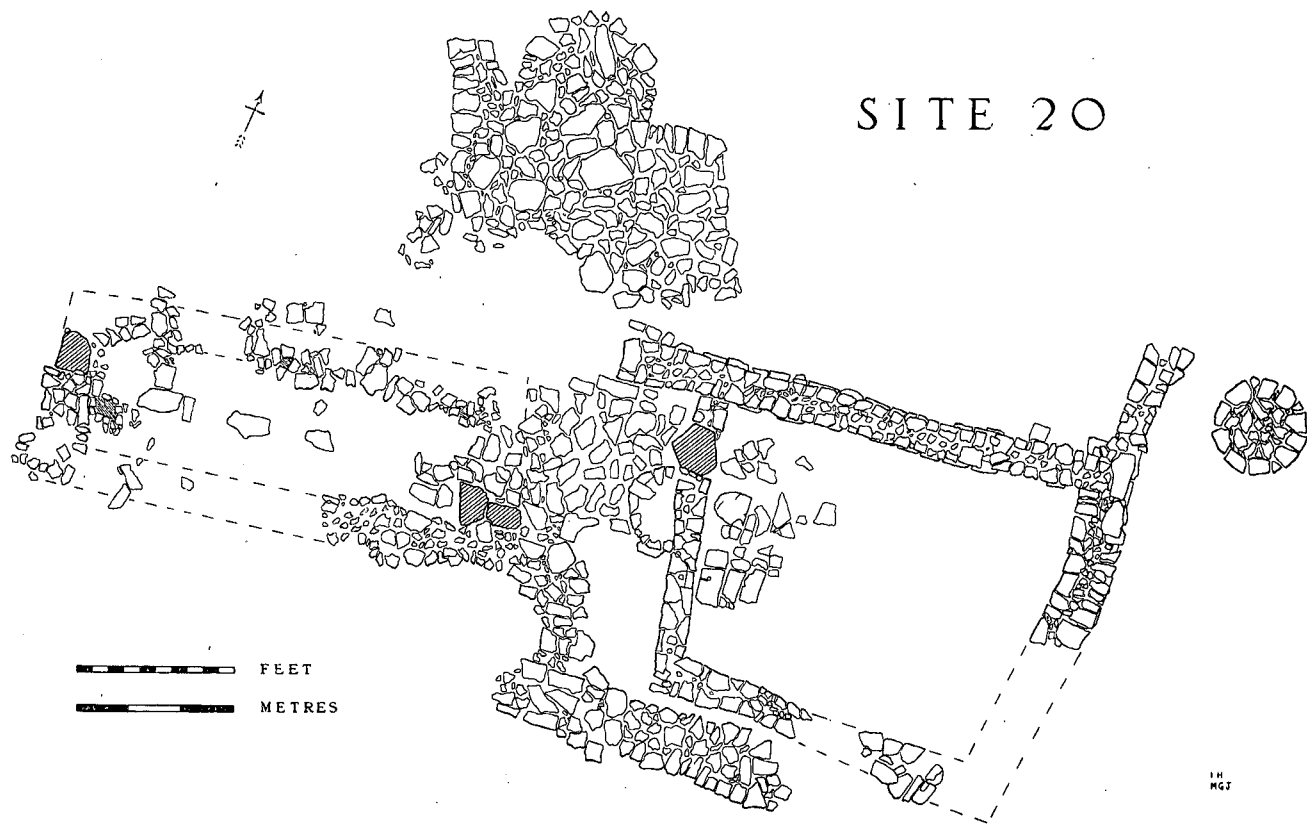


FIG. 4.

of this building show butt-joints. There is a door, with a large flag as threshold, near the north end of the west wall, and immediately south of it was the hearth. Behind this, outside the west wall, was a semi-circular structure three feet in diameter. This is interpreted as the base of a buttress chimney, and can be paralleled at Crane Godrevy, Gwithian, Cornwall.<sup>10</sup> A near-rectangular buttress chimney can be seen in Northumberland in farm buildings at Broomley (NZ 038601) which are probably of seventeenth-century date. A semi-circular example occurs on the south wall of Aydon Castle (NZ 001663) at a much earlier date—apparently with the original building of c. 1305. From the thickness of the walls and from the absence of any indication of timber uprights even at three feet above ground level it would appear that the house was stone built to the eaves; the only timber work would be that needed to support a thatched roof.

The original floor of the house consisted of the natural whinstone, levelled up where necessary with yellow clay. This clay contained a certain amount of pottery, of which the latest sherd was a piece of slipware not earlier than the late sixteenth century. This could conceivably have been trodden into the floor while it was in use. The earlier sherds (some perhaps as early as the fourteenth century) presumably represent earlier material which was on the site when building commenced; at best they indicate that the clay floor was laid at some date in or after the fifteenth century.

With the original floor was associated a hearth on the natural whinstone. Above this ash was allowed to accumulate to a depth of almost a foot. The few sherds in this ash were all of sixteenth- or seventeenth-century date. Above it a new rectangular hearth of sandstone set in yellow clay was built, and at the same time the floor was partially flagged. To the south of the new hearth a stone hob, approached by a step from the east, was built. In the upper surface of this hob was a small socket with a groove leading into it. Since no comparable socket existed on the other side of the hearth

<sup>10</sup> *Med. Arch.* iii (1959) pp. 315-316.

it cannot have been intended for a spit; most probably the socket held a metal upright with a swinging arm, from which a pot or kettle could be suspended over the fire. It was presumably clamped to the wall at the upper end. In the wall behind the hearth there were slight traces of a blocked flue; presumably the flue was raised at the same time as the hearth. The flue into the chimney from the second hearth did not survive.

The pottery from this site was almost exclusively of sixteenth-century or later date. Only five sherds are likely to be earlier than 1500, and these contrast with large numbers of later pieces—Delft, German and English stoneware (mostly Bellarmine) and English slipware. The latest pottery from the village, two sherds of Staffordshire ware assignable to the eighteenth century (number 42), and also the largest number of clay pipe fragments, came from this site. On the evidence available it is difficult to believe that the site was built before *c.* 1550, and it seems clear that it continued in use until the desertion of the village *c.* 1725.

Other finds give us some indications that peasant life in this period may have been rather less hard than we should expect. Enough coal was found inside the house (there was a small dump immediately south of the hob) to suggest that it was the regular fuel for domestic heating, and a quantity of window glass comes from the site.

Other structures survive close to this house. To the north-east a croft wall runs off from the north-east angle, probably joining that from the south-west angle of site 21. Close to it lay a circular stone platform, six feet in diameter, which was probably the base for a hay-rick. Against the croft wall, north-west of this platform, a band of rich black soil 12" thick indicates the site of a dung-hill or midden. Whether these features are associated with site 20, or whether this croft area belonged to another house (21 or 22) it is impossible to say. No pottery was found in the midden deposit.

The continuation of the north wall of the house west of

the north-west corner suggested that it might originally have had two rooms. No other evidence was found to support this view. To the west of the house another building was located. This was of relatively slight construction and measured *c.* 25' × 7' internally. Such walling as survived was of rubble and small stones; two small holes in the north wall (shaded in fig. 4), about 7" across, may have held the uprights for a timber superstructure. A similar stone-built socket, 15" across, adjoining the west wall, may have held an additional support for the roof. At each end of the building was a doorway with flagged threshold (shaded in fig. 4). The east door appears to have had some sort of screen wall immediately to the north. It was originally thought that the building was a cow-byre for house 20, but it seems excessively narrow even for the small animals of the seventeenth century. There is no trace of the drain which we should expect in any cow-shed. Far more probably the building was residential. It may have been abandoned when house 20 was built, or it may have continued in use as a barn or other store.

To the north of the gap between this building and house 20 is a paved area which appears to be a minute yard; it is too small to be a farmyard and its functions remain uncertain.

So also do the functions of the broad wall whose lowest course survives parallel with and immediately south of the south wall of house 20. It may be part of a croft wall or it may represent the only surviving trace of an early building. What may be the lowest course of another wall runs north from the west end of this wall to the south-east corner of the building west of house 20. However this need be no more than a small area of paving.

#### *Site 21 (fig. 5)*

Excavation revealed that there were two periods of building on this site. The earlier was represented only by a fragment of walling in the centre of the building, parallel with the long axis of the house. This appeared to have been

# SITE 21

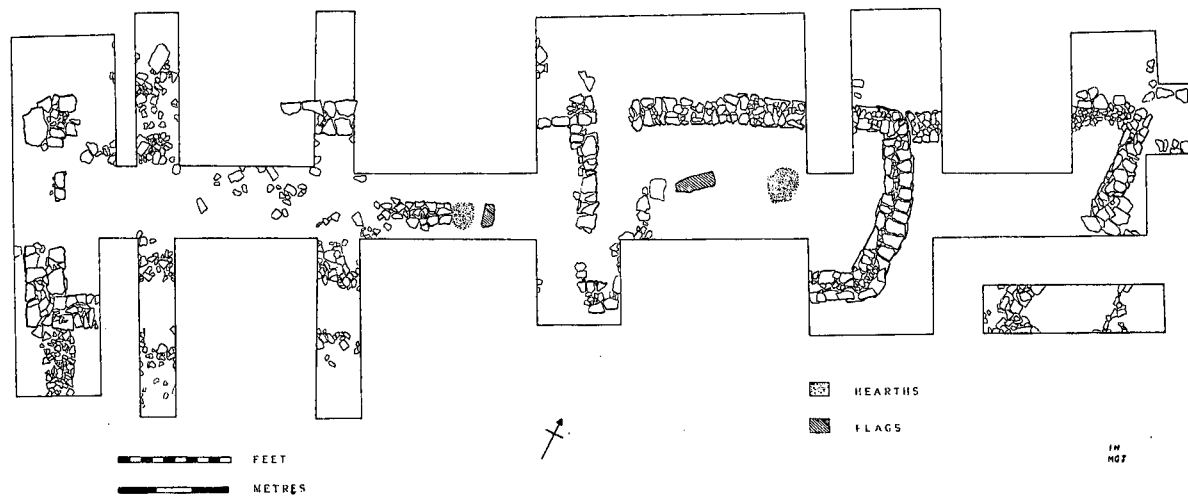


FIG. 5.

deliberately left in position when the rest of the building was demolished. Its substantial character suggests that it was not a partition wall for the house which now survives on site 21.

This secondary building measured *c.* 76' × 20' overall, and was divided into two unequal rooms. The larger, south-west, room was approximately 45' × 14' internally, the smaller 25' × 13'. This smaller room had a slightly curved wall at its north-east and an external door in the north-west wall at its south-west end. The south-east wall appears to have been of one build with the south-east wall of the larger room. A patch of ash and burnt clay indicates the position of an open hearth, and about five feet to the south-west of it was a large flagstone.

The association of hearth and flagstone occurs also in the larger room, where the two are much closer together. We may compare this with the use of flags round the second hearth in house 20; it is possible that the flags were intended to provide a level platform for standing pots and pans. No other flags were found on site 21. In the larger room the hearth is immediately next to the stump of earlier walling; this walling was levelled at a height of about fifteen inches above the ground, perhaps for use as a low bench.

The walls of the larger room have been much robbed. The south-east wall has almost entirely disappeared, and its course is marked by a line of stone-free topsoil; the tumble to either side escaped the attention of stone-robbers. Two gaps which suggest that they may be doors may also be due to robbing. One is in the south-west wall of the room; it appears more likely that an external door would be found in the north-west wall, facing on to the village green. There may also be a door at the south-east end of the north-east wall, connecting with the smaller room.

It is however more likely that this smaller room represents a separate, smaller cottage, with its own external door and open hearth. Outside its north-east end is a crudely built wall surrounding a small yard or compound, probably

# SITE 23

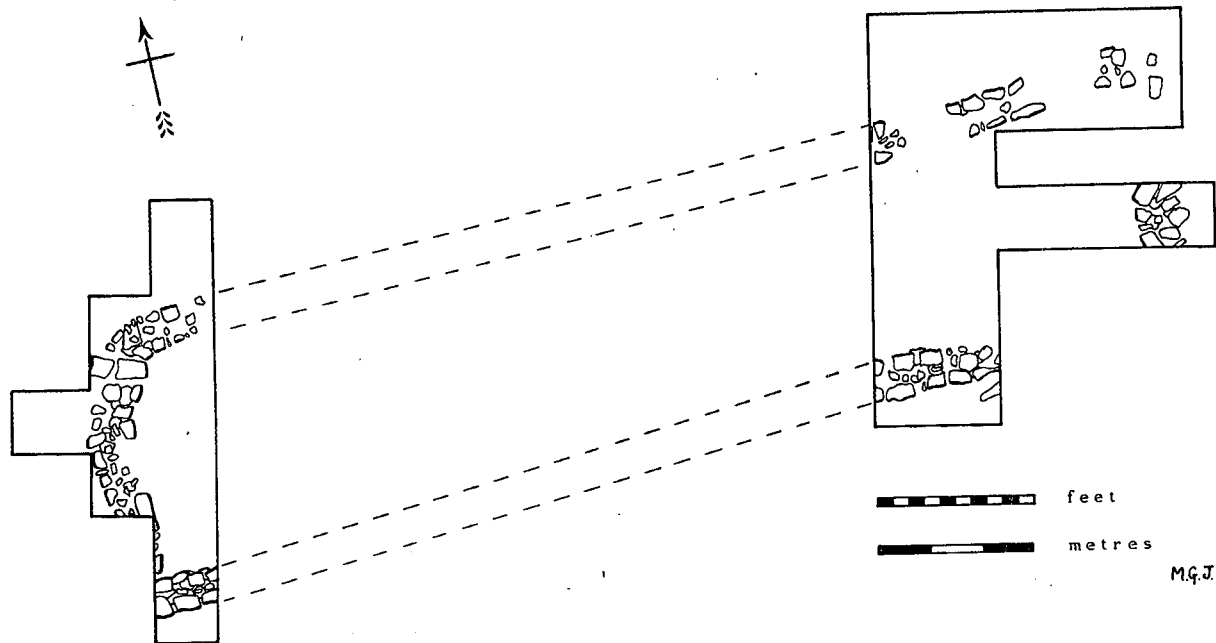


FIG. 6.

used for domestic animals. This wall was not bonded in to the wall of the main building. The clay used in its construction contained small sherds of thirteenth-century pottery.

The pottery from site 21 is exclusively medieval in date, and suggests that residential occupation of the buildings had ceased by 1500. The open hearths in the centre of the floor accord with such a dating. By contrast, house 20, probably built in the sixteenth century, had its hearth against the wall, with an external chimney.

There is however no indication that house 21 was of slight construction, even if it lacked comfort. The walls were for the most part unmortared, but substantial enough to suggest that they had been continued in stone to the level of the eaves. They are more solidly built than the yard and croft walls at the north and south angles and were much more substantial than the walls of site 18.

#### *Site 23 (fig. 6)*

It was only possible to spend two hours on the excavation of this building, and in the nature of things it was impossible to do more than establish its outside limits. It may however be noted that in 1960 no trace of a cross-wall, recorded in the original ground survey, could be detected without excavation, and it remains uncertain whether we are dealing here with a single long house or with a row of two or three cottages. The internal measurements of the building were approximately 66' × 14', and the building was in the usual dry stone construction, though much robbed. The ten sherds from the site are all in medieval gritty fabrics; none calls for more detailed comment.

#### *Site 24 (fig. 7)*

Only half of this house was in the threatened area and available for excavation. It proved to be of the normal stone construction, but much robbed. No significant features could be observed in what remained of the building. The pottery is all earlier than 1500, and the building is presumably of medieval date.

## SITE 24

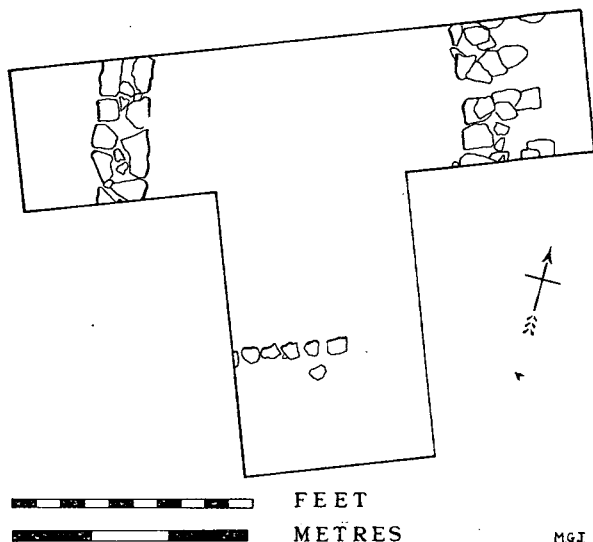


FIG. 7.

## 6. THE FINDS

## A. POTTERY

*Michael G. Jarrett and B. J. N. Edwards*

Unless otherwise stated all pottery is unstratified. An asterisk indicates that a sherd or vessel is illustrated.

*Site 18*

Numbers 5, 6, 7 and 9 were found below the lime dump which appears to have occupied the building after its abandonment as a house site. None of them need be later than 1300.

- \*1. Rim of cooking pot in hard dark grey gritty fabric with pinkish buff surfaces. The rim was folded outwards. The type clearly has affinities with twelfth- and thirteenth-century cooking pots. Aper. diam. 7".
- \*2. Rim of lid-seated cooking pot in buff gritty fabric with grey core. Cf. *Finchale* 97 (early thirteenth century) and SAN 93 (Shilmoor). Aper. diam.  $5\frac{1}{2}$ ".
- \*3. Rim of cooking pot in hard pink fabric with some fine grit, red surfaces; rim folded outwards. The fabric is unusual, but the general shape of the rim may be compared with number 2. Aper. diam.  $5\frac{1}{2}$ ".
- \*4. Rim and neck of lid-seated cooking pot in very hard dark grey gritty fabric with buff pimply surface.
- 5. Rim and neck of cooking pot in creamy buff fabric with grey core. Rim folded over on to the neck. Similar to numbers 2 and 3.
- \*6. Neck of jug in hard grey-brown sandy fabric, with clumsily finished outer surface. Aper. diam.  $3\frac{1}{4}$ ".
- \*7. Rim of cooking pot in grey gritty fabric with off-white surfaces, clear or yellowish-green internal and external glaze. Aper. diam. 5".
- 8. Body sherd in grey gritty fabric with external green glaze, horizontal row of applied pellets with purple glaze which has bubbled and run down the body.
- 9. Body sherd in hard red-pink fabric, external greenish-brown glaze over incised horizontal lines. A single pellet has been applied and glazed as in number 8.
- 10-12. Three handles of globular cooking pots, similar to *Finchale* 90-94. Fabrics: 10, hard grey gritty, with buff surfaces; 11, pink sandy with thin red outer surface; 12, soft grey very sandy with buff-pink surfaces. Fourteenth century.
- 13. Two sherds of a plate in red "flower-pot" fabric with white slip decoration, yellow glaze on upper surface. Cf. *Finchale* 120 and 121. Seventeenth century. Diam. 7".
- \*14. Rim of bowl in hard pink fabric with chestnut brown internal glaze. Rim folded outwards. Seventeenth century? Aper. diam.  $7\frac{1}{2}$ ".
- 15-16. Rims of two bowls similar to number 14, in similar fabrics and glazes. Seventeenth century?
- \*17. Rim of vessel of uncertain shape and function, fabric and glaze as number 14. Seventeenth century? Aper. diam.  $4\frac{3}{4}$ ".
- 18. Portion of body and handle of jug in soft grey sandy fabric with light grey to buff surfaces. Thin external olive-green to clear glaze. The lower junction of handle and body is ornamented with thumb mouldings. A horizontal band of combed

wavy lines decorates the body above this junction. A thick coating of soot on the outer surface indicates that the jug was used for cooking.

*Site 18A*

- \*19. Reeded rim of large dish or bowl, possibly oval, in hard grey gritty fabric with pinkish surfaces. If the vessel was circular the diameter was c. 21".
- 20. Small rod handle in red-pink fabric, with no finger-moulding at lower junction with body. Unglazed.
- 21. Thirteen body sherds of jug in reddish-brown fabric with grey outer surface, thick and hard dark green internal glaze. The handle was luted to the body without any moulding. Sixteenth or seventeenth century.
- 22. Two sherds of slipware plate. Cf. number 13. Seventeenth century.
- 23. Six sherds of slipware plate in red fabric with greenish-brown glaze over white slip decoration. Seventeenth century.
- \*24. Rim of jar or jug in red-pink "flower-pot" fabric with internal chestnut glaze. The rim is decorated with a series of combed lines. Seventeenth century. Aper. diam. 6".
- 25. Fragment of rim of bowl similar to number 14 in red-pink fabric with chestnut internal glaze which continues over the rim. Aper. diam. 9".
- 26. Three sherds of very soft fawn fabric with white tin glaze and blue decoration. "Delft", sixteenth or seventeenth century.

*Site 19*

- 27. Frilled basal angle of jug or flagon in grey stoneware with mottled external grey and brown glaze, internal fawn wash. Siegburg ware, mid-sixteenth century.
- 28. Rod handle in buff sandy fabric. From a globular cooking pot, cf. *Finchale* 90-94. Fourteenth century?
- \*29. Rim of jug in grey sandy fabric with buff surfaces, pale external green glaze. Aper. diam. 3½".
- \*30. Body sherd in red fabric with green external glaze, applied white pellets and clear glaze overall. The pellets are applied on the line of a horizontal groove. Patches of thin internal glaze. Sixteenth or seventeenth century.
- \*31. Rim and neck of jar or jug in soft red-pink fabric with clear or chestnut internal glaze. Cf. number 32. Seventeenth century. Aper. diam. 5".
- \*32. Rim and neck of jar or jug in hard orange-red fabric with thin clear internal glaze. Cf. number 31. Seventeenth century. Aper. diam. 6".

- \*33. Rim, neck and part of shoulder of drug-jar in soft buff fabric with blue decoration and white tin glaze. "Delft", sixteenth or seventeenth century. Aper. diam.  $4\frac{1}{2}$ ".

*Site 20*

Number 45 was found in the yellow clay floor.

- \*34. Rim and neck of jug or jar in buff-pink fabric with grey core and external pale green glaze. Decorated with a series of rectangular rouletted depressions round the rim. Cf. number 29. Aper. diam. 5".
- \*35. Body sherd in hard red fabric with applied white pellets over green external glaze. Patches of thin glaze internally. Cf. number 30. Sixteenth century.
- \*36. Rim and upper part of body of mug or small jug in hard grey fabric with white slip under greenish clear glaze; internal glaze. Sixteenth or seventeenth century. Aper. diam. 3".
37. Three sherds of plate in red "flower-pot" fabric with white slip decoration under clear glaze on upper surface. Cf. *Finchale* 120 and 121. Seventeenth century. Diam. 10".
38. Three sherds of slipware plate, similar to number 37. Seventeenth century. Diam 10".
- \*39. Rim of lid or bowl in reddish-grey fabric with internal and external orange-brown glaze. Seventeenth century?
40. Rim of bowl in reddish-pink slightly gritty fabric with thick and hard internal and external orange-brown glaze. Seventeenth century? Diam 7".
- \*41. Rim of bowl with thickened rim in "flower-pot" fabric with internal clear to chestnut glaze. Seventeenth century? Diam. 7".
42. Two body sherds in very hard cream fabric with feathered brown external slip giving a marbled effect, internal and external clear glaze. Staffordshire ware, first half of eighteenth century. These two sherds are the latest pottery from West Whelpington.
43. Frilled basal angle of jug in very hard grey stoneware with clear external glaze, cream internal wash. Siegburg ware, c. 1500.
44. Body sherd in very hard grey stoneware with mottled grey and brown external glaze, fawn internal wash. Fragments of an applied medallion survive, clearly from the belly of a Bellarmine. Late sixteenth or seventeenth century.
45. Fragment of rod handle in very hard grey stoneware, mottled grey and brown glaze. Frechen ware or an imitation, late sixteenth or seventeenth century.
46. Small body sherd in very soft cream fabric with white tin

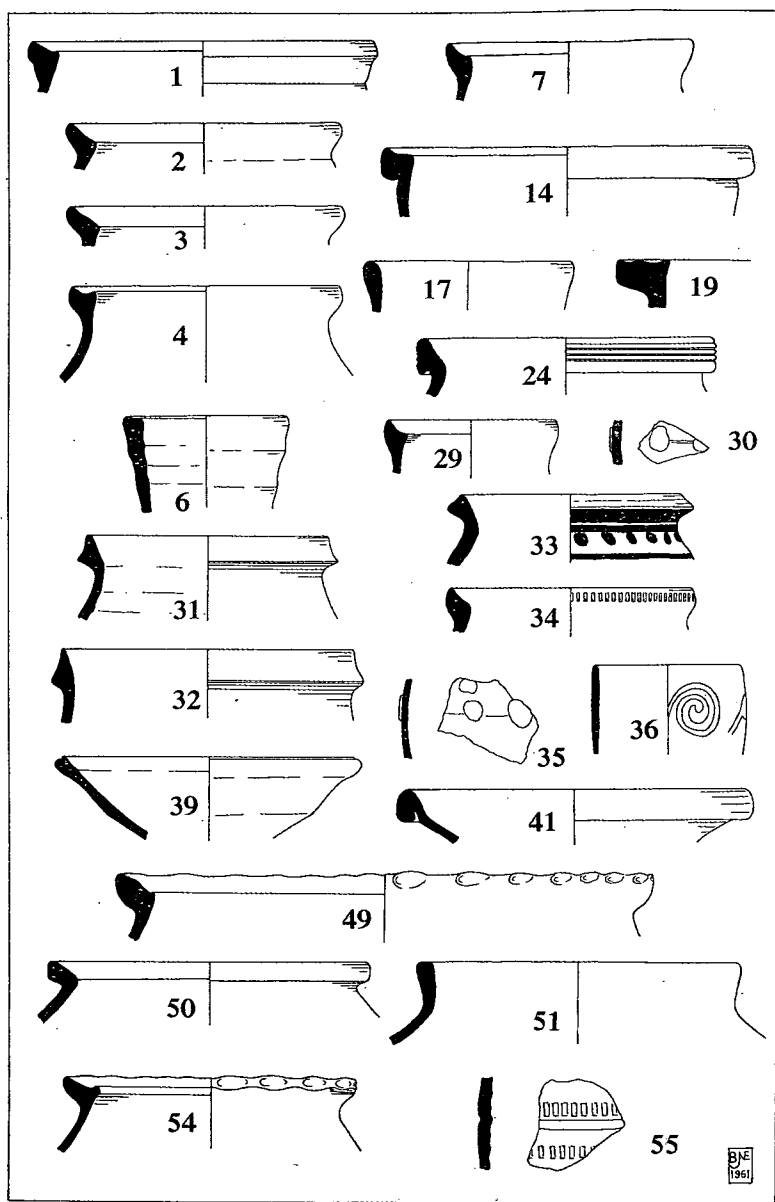


FIG. 8. POTTERY ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ).

glaze, blue and yellow decoration on one side; the yellow was applied after the blue. Polychrome Delft, sixteenth century.

47. Seven fragments of one or more Delft plates with white tin glaze, blue decoration. Sixteenth or seventeenth century.

#### Site 21

48. Bifid rim of bowl or cooking pot in hard pinkish-grey fabric with pink outer surface where not protected by the thin pale olive green glaze. Cf. *Finchale* 111, late twelfth or early thirteenth century.
- \*49. Rim of bowl or cooking pot in grey gritty fabric with orange-pink surfaces. Finger impressions on rim. Thirteenth century. Aper. diam. 11".
- \*50. Rim of small cooking pot in coarse grey gritty fabric with buff surfaces. Cf. SAN 96 (Shilmoor, Northumberland). Thirteenth century? Aper. diam. 6½".
- \*51. Rim and neck of jug or jar in buff gritty fabric with patchy external green glaze resulting from dusting with galena particles. Thirteenth century?
52. Much abraded rim and neck of jar or jug in soft orange-pink gritty fabric with grey core. Thirteenth century??
53. Portion of neck and handle of globular cooking pot in grey gritty fabric with grey and orange surfaces. Minute spots of clear glaze.

#### Site 24

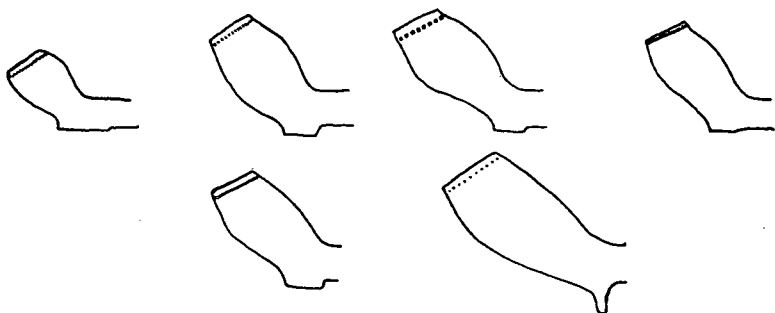
- \*54. Rim and neck of cooking pot in pink sandy fabric with patches of thin pale green or clear external glaze. Finger impressions round rim. Thirteenth century?? Aper. diam. 6".
- \*55. Body sherd in pink gritty fabric with external green glaze. Decorated with cordon mouldings and horizontal bands of rectangular rouletting.

### B. CLAY PIPES

A considerable number of clay pipe fragments were found during the excavation, most of them on site 20. All were assignable to the seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries. Only six bowls are sufficiently complete to justify illustration and comment.

1. *Site 19*. Small bulbous bowl, with rudimentary heel. Rouletting just below the lip. A very early type, akin to *Oswald* type 2, which he dates c. 1580-1620.

2. *Site 18A*. Slightly bulbous bowl, stepped heel, rouletting below lip. Cf. *Oswald* type 4c, c. 1630-1670.
3. *Site 19*. Bulbous body, stepped heel, rouletting below lip. The nearest type is *Oswald* 4a, c. 1620-1650.
4. *Site 18A*. Elongated bowl with slight belly, flat heel, groove below lip. Cf. *Oswald* type 4c, 1630-1670.
5. *Site 20*. Similar bowl to number 4, but with stepped heel.
6. *Site 18*. Larger bowl, with spur and rouletting below lip. There is nothing close to this in *Oswald*, but the bowl has various features which suggest a date of c. 1700-1720.

FIG. 9. CLAY PIPES ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ).

In general the resemblances to Oswald's types are not very close; clearly the pipes in use in the north-east have local characteristics, and require far more study than they have yet had.

Stamps of different pipe-makers have been found at West Whelpington.<sup>11</sup> One, reading ESH, occurs on the flattened heel of a seventeenth-century bowl fragment. The others are on stems, enclosed in an oval stamp; it is probable that this form of stamping occurs in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. A

re-examination of the stamp published as [ ]<sup>12</sup> suggests that it

should be read  $\begin{matrix} \text{T H O.} \\ \text{PARR} \end{matrix}$

<sup>11</sup> Published in AA4 xxxviii (1960) pp 238-239.

<sup>12</sup> AA4 xxxviii (1960), p. 239, number 9.

## C. GLASS

Every excavated house site produced fragments of translucent green window glass, usually 2-3 mm. thick. Only site 20 produced enough to suggest that it had glazed windows.

The only other piece of glass was from site 19. It was a small fragment of a blue glass vessel with a ridge on the outer surface. Mr. R. J. Charleston of the Victoria and Albert Museum has been kind enough to examine the piece, and comments:

"These alternatives seem possible, in descending order of probability:

(a) A Roman survival, from a 'pillar-moulded' bowl. This is by no means unlikely, bearing in mind the Roman pieces which have turned up in Anglo-Saxon finds, the fragment of cameo glass found in a (?) Viking context in Norway etc. A piece of blue glass, even fragmentary, might have been an attractive object in the Middle Ages.

(b) Seventeenth century. This was a period of experimentation in glass, but I do not know of anything with which this fragment might be at all plausibly associated.

(c) Islamic medieval importation. This glass does not strike me as Islamic in its general quality."

If the piece is a survival of the Roman period it may possibly have been re-used in a brooch or similar ornament.

## D. METAL

*Michael G. Jarrett and Derek G. Stevens*

Iron and bronze objects from West Whelpington were almost all in badly corroded condition. None were stratified. An asterisk indicates that an object is illustrated.

*Site 18*

- \*1. Upper part of a small bell in sheet bronze. Probably a ram bell.
2. Square-sectioned tang from an uncertain implement.  $3\frac{1}{4}$ " long. Traces of wooden handle adhering.
- \*3. Square-sectioned iron hook (?) *Broken*.
4. Iron nails, all of square or rectangular section.

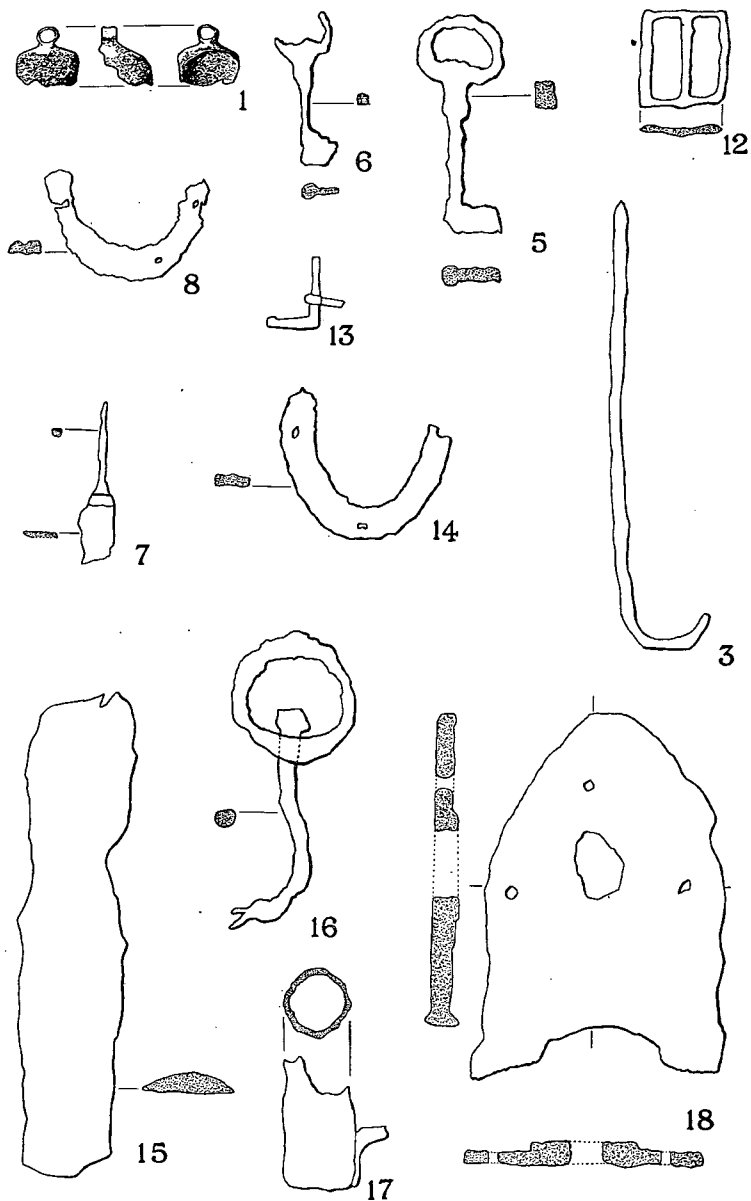


FIG. 10. METAL OBJECTS (1/3).

*Site 18A*

- \*5. Iron key,  $3\frac{1}{2}$ " long.
- \*6. Small iron key. *Broken.*
- \*7. Square-sectioned tang and lower part of blade of small knife.
- \*8. Heel iron from a man's clog; this is remarkably close in form to its modern equivalent.
- 9. Iron nails.
- 10. Circular piece of thin bronze,  $1\frac{1}{8}$ " diam., with a hole of  $\frac{1}{8}$ " diam. near the edge. Identified by Dr. J. P. C. Kent of the British Museum as a seventeenth-century token of uncertain variety, but resembling types produced at Nuremberg in the second half of that century.

*Site 19*

- 11. One half of the head of a hammer, used perhaps by a mason or quarryman.

*Site 20*

- \*12. Simple bronze buckle, with no moving parts.  $1\frac{1}{2}$ "  $\times$   $1\frac{1}{4}$ ".
- \*13. Single-pin bronze buckle. *Broken.*
- \*14. Iron object; either a small pony shoe or the heel-iron from a man's boot.
- \*15. Blade, plano-convex in section, of uncertain function,  $1\frac{3}{8}$ " wide. *Broken at both ends. Coulter??*
- \*16. Iron swivel ring of rectangular section; the broken shaft was probably straight originally. Probably from a cart, though it might have been used in a stable.
- \*17. Iron candle-holder (?), with spike at one side. This was presumably intended as a support when driven into a wall or post. *Broken.*
- \*18. Iron object of unknown function. *Broken.* Three small holes are arranged round a larger one which appear to have been pushed through without any attempt to trim the resulting rough edges. At the top there may have been another, larger, hole; in this case the metal on the edge of the hole has spread to both sides of the implement.
- 19. Portion of a blade, probably from a pair of shears.
- \*20. Iron object of unknown function, broken at both ends.
- \*21. Chisel blade, width  $\frac{1}{4}$ ". *Broken.*
- 22. Fragment of horseshoe.

*Site 21*

- \*23. Iron blade from a pair of shears made in one piece, with spring handle.
- \*24. Iron knife blade (*broken*) and tang of rectangular section.

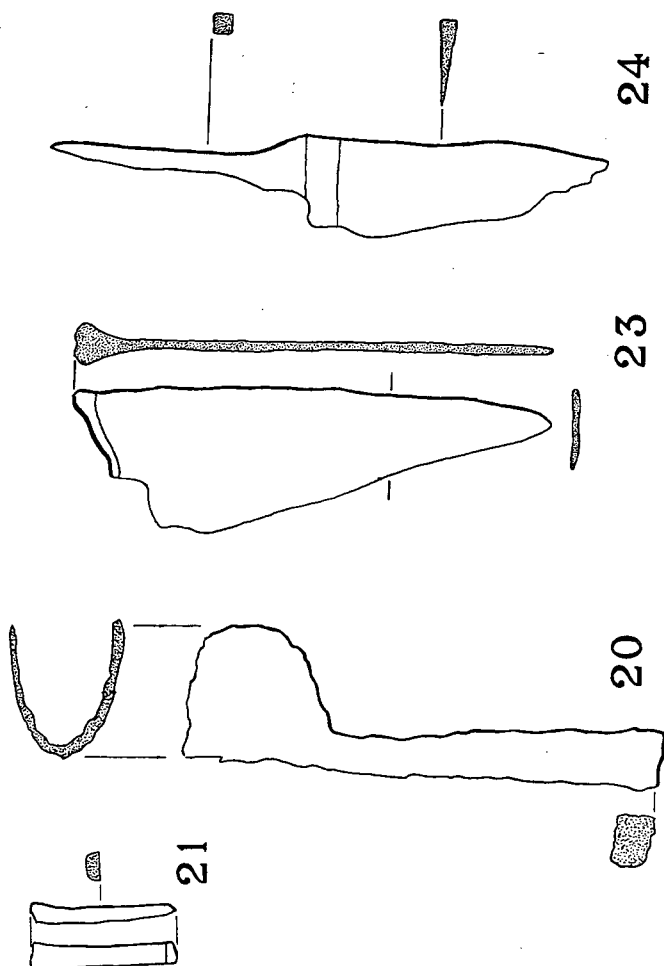
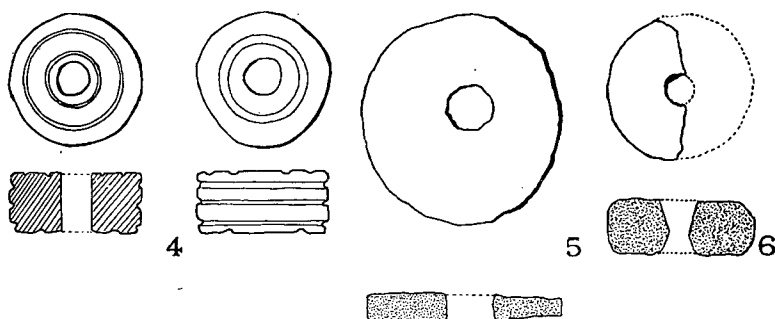


FIG. 11. METAL OBJECTS (4).

## E. STONE OBJECTS

- 1-3. *Site 18A*. Three pieces of flint, possibly from strike-a-lights.
- \*4. *Site 18*. Pulley for a bow-drill, in fine-grained limestone,  $1\frac{1}{4}$ " diam. with central hole  $\frac{3}{8}$ " diam. Three grooves round the circumference, and two grooves round one flat surface, one round the other. The type is known in the pre-Roman Iron Age (e.g. Castell Odo, Cearns., and Maiden Castle, Dors.<sup>13</sup>).
- \*5. *Site 18A*. Half a spindle whorl in fine-grained sandstone, well-polished on outer surfaces. Diam.  $1\frac{1}{2}$ ", diam. of central hole  $\frac{3}{8}$ ".
- \*6. *Site 20*. Roughly made spindle whorl in fine-grained limestone with eccentric hole. Diam. c. 2", diam. of hole  $\frac{1}{2}$ ".

FIG. 12. STONE OBJECTS ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ).

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

It is now clear that the village of West Whelpington had before its desertion a more complex history than was at first thought. Unlike Wharram Percy<sup>14</sup> it did not have a number of houses built directly above one another. The fragmentary indications of early periods suggest that the villagers were not averse to quite bold changes of layout and planning. In consequence a method of excavation based on the individual house sites as recorded in the survey has been proved

<sup>13</sup> *Archæologia Cambrensis* cxix (1960) pp. 131-132; R. E. M. Wheeler, *Maiden Castle, Dorset* (1943) pp. 294-295.

<sup>14</sup> *Med. Arch.* i (1957) pp. 166-168.

inadequate. In any future excavations it would be desirable to strip the whole area involved, including those parts which apparently formed parts of crofts. Although this would need far greater resources than were available in 1958 to 1960, it would also provide far more information about the economy of the village. Had the whole area available in 1958 been stripped, we might now have some idea of the extent of the crofts, the number of haystacks per peasant household, as well as having more information about the medieval settlement in the south-eastern part of the village.

As a site for total excavation, West Whelpington has much to commend it. The ground plan suggests that the original settlement was on the north side, with later, piecemeal, development to the south and west of the green. On the south side site 18 has produced pottery of c. 1200, and it is fair to guess that the houses on the north side may yield evidence of occupation as early as the Norman conquest.

The picture which emerges from the excavations of 1958-60 is of a small village farming much land which is not now under cultivation. Arable farming certainly played a big part in the economy of the village, but it was not the whole story. A sheep bell and a pair of shears suggest that, as we might expect, the rough ground west of the village towards the Wanney Crag was used for sheep grazing. At home the women indulged in their traditional occupation of spinning, though there is no evidence that weaving was practised.

Little can be said with certainty about the village during the Middle Ages, but it clearly had some prosperous residents in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They enjoyed a higher standard of living than might have been expected. At least one house had glazed windows and coal fires, and was probably lit by candles. Another house, apparently timber built, has produced keys for two different locks. Fragments of at least twenty-five tobacco pipes, and quantities of German and Dutch pottery, indicate that by the seventeenth century the West Whelpington peasants were

not living at or near subsistence level; this is borne out by the find of a token, probably from Nuremberg.

On the other hand it appears that they were not so prosperous as their Midland equivalents. So far West Whelpington has produced no house comparable with those of Leicestershire peasants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,<sup>15</sup> and the survey suggests that, with the possible exception of site 12, no such houses are likely to be found.

How far West Whelpington is typical of the many deserted villages of Northumberland is by no means clear. Much more work is needed on the documents, in field surveys and in excavation of selected sites before this important aspect of the social and economic history of the county can be seen in perspective. A chronological connection between the desertion of many villages and the rise of Tyneside industry can already be seen; whether there was any causal connection is by no means clear.

<sup>15</sup> See plans in W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant* (1957) and in M. W. Barley, *The English Farmhouse and Cottage* (1961).

