

III.—EXCAVATION OF A NATIVE SETTLEMENT AT MARDEN, TYNEMOUTH

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This report describes emergency excavations on a native settlement, probably of the Roman period, situated in Tynemouth on the coastal plain of Northumberland, near to the east end of Hadrian's Wall (NZ:353708 and fig. 1). The settlement appears to be a variant of those Romano-British rectangular enclosed settlements prolific further to the west in the same county, as described in *Archæologia Aeliana*, 4th series, Vol. XXXVIII (1960).

Introduction

The site was first observed during aerial reconnaissance by Dr. J. K. St. Joseph and subsequently reported as a small Roman temporary camp, about one hundred feet square.¹ An air photograph showed short lengths of the north-west and south-east sides and the whole run of the north-east side of a ditched enclosure projecting beyond the edge of some new housing development, now part of the Marden Estate (fig. 2). A rather wide entrance was visible in the north-east side.²

No surface indications of the earthwork remained, the area for long having been devoted to arable farming; nor were there any finds recorded from the immediate vicinity. However, a search amongst the collection of air photographs belonging to the local Town Planning Department revealed a high level photograph, taken before houses were built over the greater part of the site. This showed the enclosure as an

¹ *J.R.S.*, XLVIII (1958), 87. The site is incorrectly indexed as *Preston, Lancs.*

² *Ibid.* and photograph kindly supplied by Cambridge University.

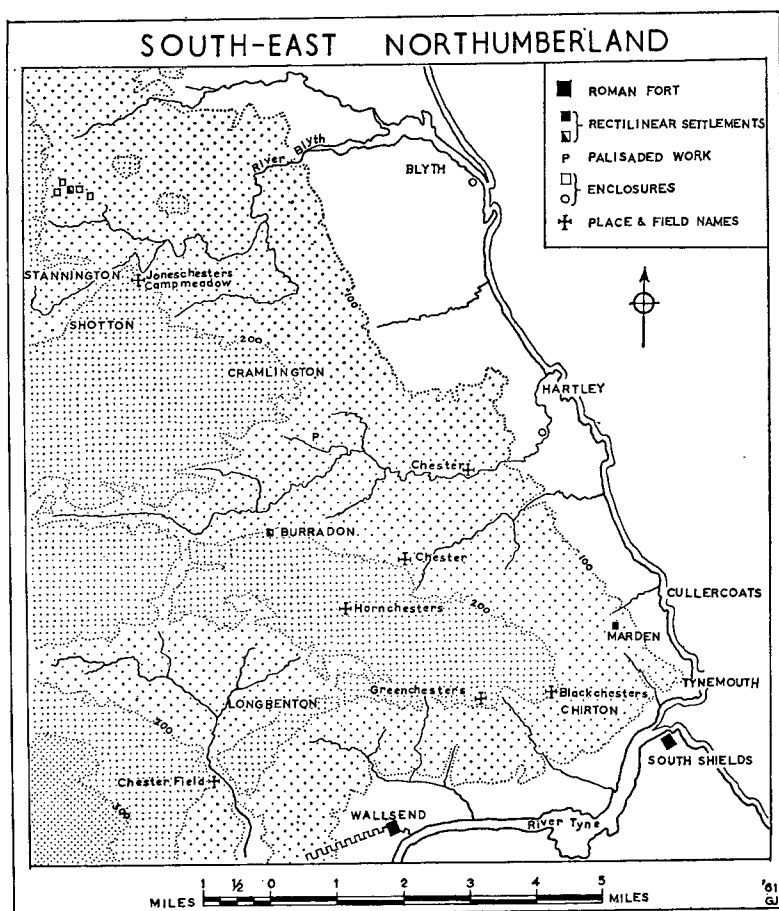


FIG. 1.

oblong with slightly longer sides on the north-west and south-east but no more than the single entrance in the north-east.³

An interval of four years elapsed between the cutting of the first exploratory trench and the final excavations, due to

³ I am indebted to our member Mr. M. Preston for the discovery of the photograph and to him and the Borough Surveyor's Department for the surveyed plan upon which fig. 2 is based. Mr. Preston kindly assumed responsibility for all arrangements with the contractors.

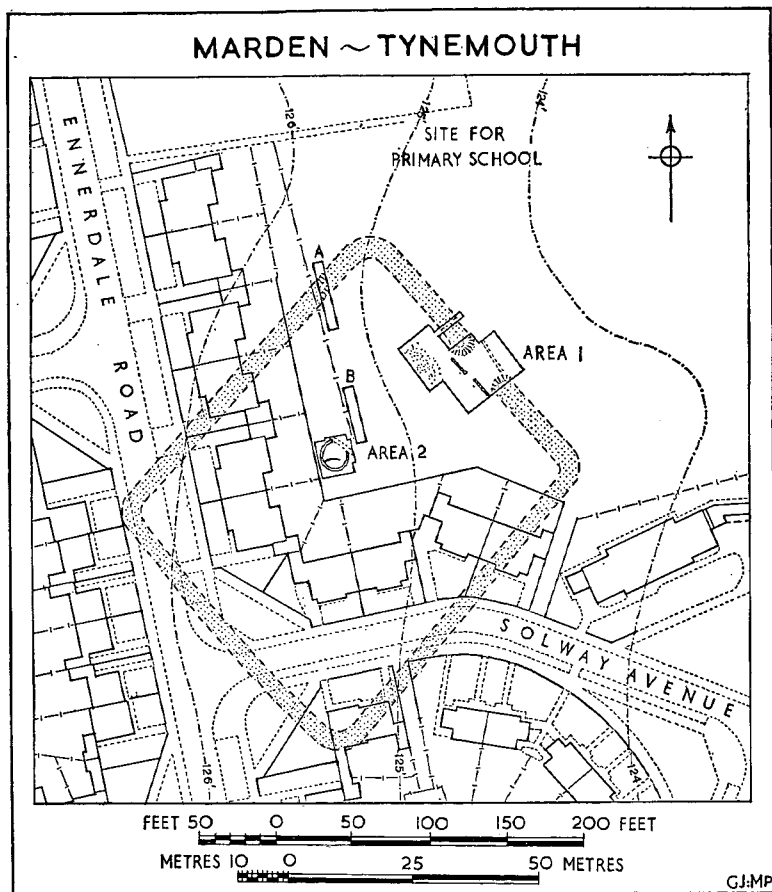


FIG. 2.

the postponement of development plans and the return of the land to tillage. During the winter of 1961/62 the construction of a new school on the remainder of the site was imminent. Tynemouth Corporation readily granted permission to excavate and work was carried out at week-ends by students from the Department of Extra-Mural Studies, King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne, who showed their

usual fortitude in face of adverse conditions. The generosity of Mr. Owen Pugh and Messrs. J. T. Bell and Sons in giving free use of mechanical equipment is acknowledged with gratitude.

Situation (figs. 1 and 2)

The settlement had been established on almost level ground at an altitude of one hundred and twenty-five feet and originally lay between the headwaters of two streams, the Marden Burn to the north and the Pow Burn to the south. Both streams have long since disappeared, but the course of the Marden Burn, leading to the sea, is marked by the line of the present Burnside Road and Eskdale Terrace, Cullercoats, and that of the Pow Burn, directed to the River Tyne, by the deep cleugh known as Spital Dene.⁴ The aspect to the east would have been over gently sloping ground down to the sea, a mile distant.

EXCAVATIONS

Cutting A (figs. 2 and 4)

This cutting, the only work done in 1958, was made in order to establish the precise orientation of the site. Once this was ascertained it was evident that the internal measurements of the original enclosure had been in the region of one hundred and ninety by two hundred and twenty feet. It was equally clear from the cutting that any internal occupation levels had probably been removed by consistent and deep ploughing. Beneath the ploughed soil, the undisturbed sub-soil consisted of twelve or more inches of boulder clay and brash, overlying soft sandstone rock. The ditch at this point was no more than twelve feet wide between the existing lips and three and a half feet deep from the bottom of the ploughed soil (fig. 4). Grey clayey silt filled the bottom twelve inches of the ditch (c), overlaid in turn by a mixed band of clayey soil and brash (b) and an amount of sandy

⁴ *History of Northumberland*, VIII, 247, 259 and 280.

soil containing some rock fragments (*a*). No remains of upcast could be detected on either side of the ditch. There were no small finds other than comparatively recent material from the top soil. The hearth lying on level *b* was no more than a temporary feature.

Area 1 (figs. 3 and 4)

At the entrance the ditch had terminated so as to leave a rather wide passageway measuring twenty-two feet across. A large stone-filled drain and more recent horse-shoe tile

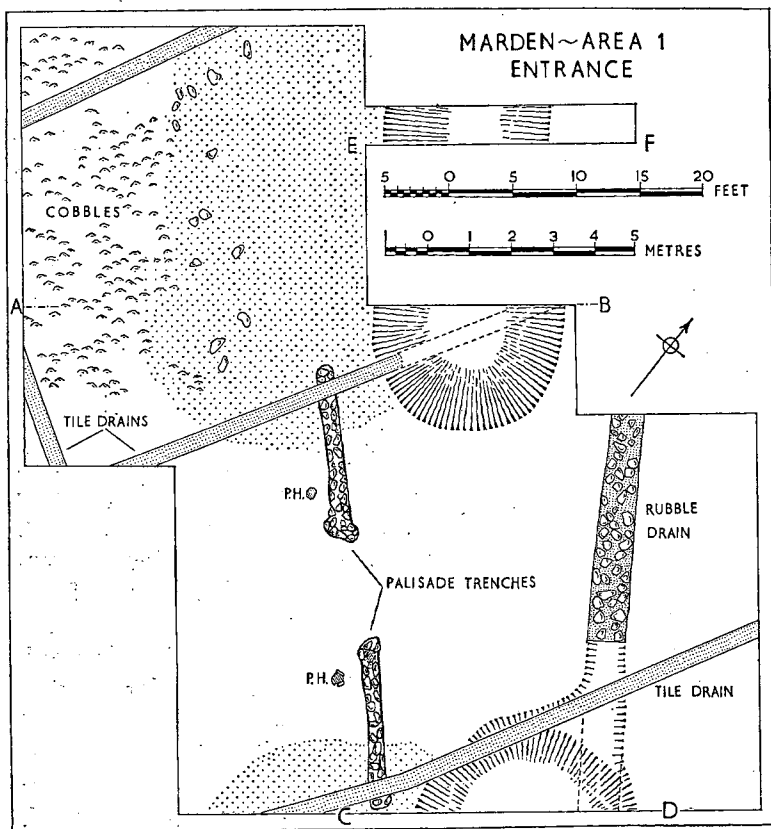


FIG. 3.

drains interfered extensively with the profile and plan of the ditch on the south side. Immediately on either side of the entrance the ditch was more substantial than found elsewhere, being up to eighteen feet wide between the existing lips and four feet deep from the bottom of the plough soil. However, the width diminished quickly to thirteen and a half feet in section E-F (fig. 3), where the depth was just over three feet, and it seems probable that for most of its run the ditch was of the dimensions observed in cutting A, but with slightly spatulate terminals at the entrance.

A short distance within the inside lip of the ditch were two lengths of palisade trench, one lying on either side of the entrance and projecting in such a manner as to reduce the width of the passageway at this point to a more reasonable distance of eight feet. Both trenches were fourteen feet long and eighteen inches wide and deep, terminating in two slightly deeper holes at the gateway. Arrangement of the packing stones suggested that the trenches had held fences of close-set uprights. Two isolated post-holes, approximately nine inches in diameter and twelve inches deep, lying one on either side of and within the gateway, could have supported uprights to contain transverse bars used to close off the entrance when necessary.

On the inside lips of the ditch on both sides of the entrance a change was observed in the surface of the sub-soil, to the extent that there were more traces of disintegrating brash in the surface of the boulder clay (stippled area fig. 3). In the absence of more prominent surface remains this was thought to be significant as a probable indication of the former line of an internal mound, already demanded by the short lengths of palisade trench. The ditch filling immediately on either side of the entrance was similar to that observed in cutting A, but with two additions. Most noticeable was the substantial quantity of large stones incorporated into level *b* as compared with the complete absence of stones in the other two cuttings (AB and CD cf. with EF and cutting A). In view of the friable nature of the

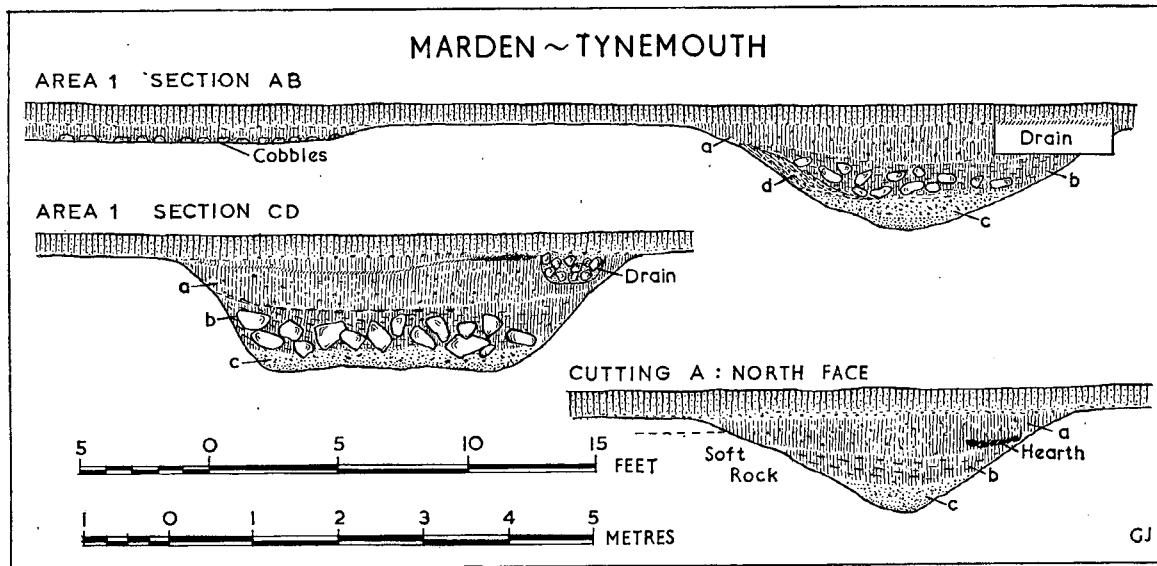


FIG. 4.

rock it is unlikely that the upcast from the ditch would have provided a completely stable mound. Clearly whatever the method of revetment adopted elsewhere, a stone face or curb most probably existed at the entrance. A tip line of brash (*d*) observed in section A-B could have been material slipped back from an internal mound.

Whether or not the two fences at the entrance had extended back into the body of the mound is problematical. Since the trenches were of consistent depth throughout there is no reason to suppose that the fences necessarily ran onto the top of the upcast mound to form a palisade.⁵

In the extension of the excavation to the north-west a slightly hollowed area had been formed in the natural sub-soil, commencing on the inner edge of the assumed line of the upcast mound. Within this area and thereby probably surviving the ravages of deep ploughing, were patches of cobbles set in bluish, stained clay. Circumstances did not allow an exploration of the corresponding area to the south of the entrance but a subsequent examination of an enlarged copy of the earlier air photograph showed areas of lighter texture both to the north and south of the entrance, conceivably due to the presence of two areas of laid stone.

Apart from comparatively modern material from the top soil only two small finds were recovered from the area, both presumably removed from their original context. These were the rim sherd of a Romano-British jar of Antonine type from the filling in a trench for a field drain and the top stone of a bun-shaped rotary quern from the top filling (*a*) of the ditch on the south side of the entrance. Even so, when taken in conjunction with the rectangular shape of the enclosure and the likely presence of two cobbled yards, these small finds provided a case for regarding the site as a settlement possibly similar to that type of rectilinear enclosed settlement of Romano-British date found elsewhere in the county.⁶ In

⁵ See e.g. Early Iron Age settlement at Draughton, Northants, in *Problems of the Iron Age in Southern Britain* (ed. S. S. Frere), 23.

⁶ *A.A.*⁴, XXXVIII (1960), 1 ff.



FIG. 1. HUT, AREA 2. MARDEN.

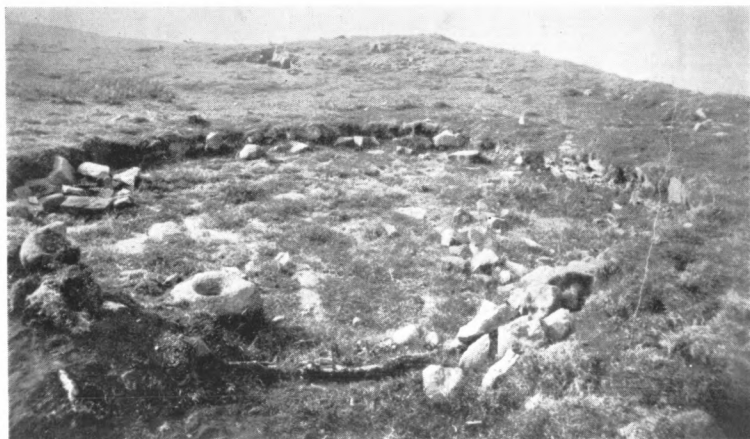


FIG. 2. HUT CIRCLE, GUNNERTON CRAGS, NORTHUMBERLAND (1887).

such settlements the front portion of the enclosure is normally devoted to two stockyards and round stone huts are situated towards the rear of the enclosure. This being so, attention was directed to the extreme south-west corner of the area still available for excavation, where, by analogy, the foremost of the round huts might be found.

The first cutting B (fig. 2) revealed nothing except the usual pattern of field drains, but a second, placed as close as possible to the foundations of the present garden walls, disclosed the arc of a trench cut into the natural sub-soil. Consequently the time remaining for excavation was spent in uncovering Area 2.

Area 2 (fig. 5 and plate II)

The former presence of a round hut some eighteen to nineteen feet in internal diameter was apparent in the dark line of a trench, running full circle except for a small segment obliterated by a later, stone-filled drain. This trench was twelve inches wide but for most of the circumference survived to a depth of no more than six inches and, unlike the palisade trenches at the entrance to the settlement, did not penetrate into the solid rock. No individual post-holes were present in the flat, rather square-cut bottom, though a few stones of a size suitable for packing were found in the western sector of the trench where it was slightly deeper. Slight traces of a shallow trench for a partition lay within the circle, providing an internal space some six feet across at its widest point. Three feet outside the circumference of the circle and beyond the stone-filled field drain lay an isolated post-hole, possibly to be associated with the hut as part of a porch structure, though confirmation was lacking. And in any event, the south-east is the more usual position for the doorways of the huts in these settlements, with partitions, screens or benches, where they exist, generally lying to one or other side of the entrance rather than directly opposite.⁷

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12 and 13. Where partitions exist the normal breadth of the enclosed space at the widest point is from 4-6 feet, but occasionally it is as little as 2½ feet—perhaps bed or storage space but hardly a room (e.g. Gunnar Peak, A.A.², X (1885), 30).

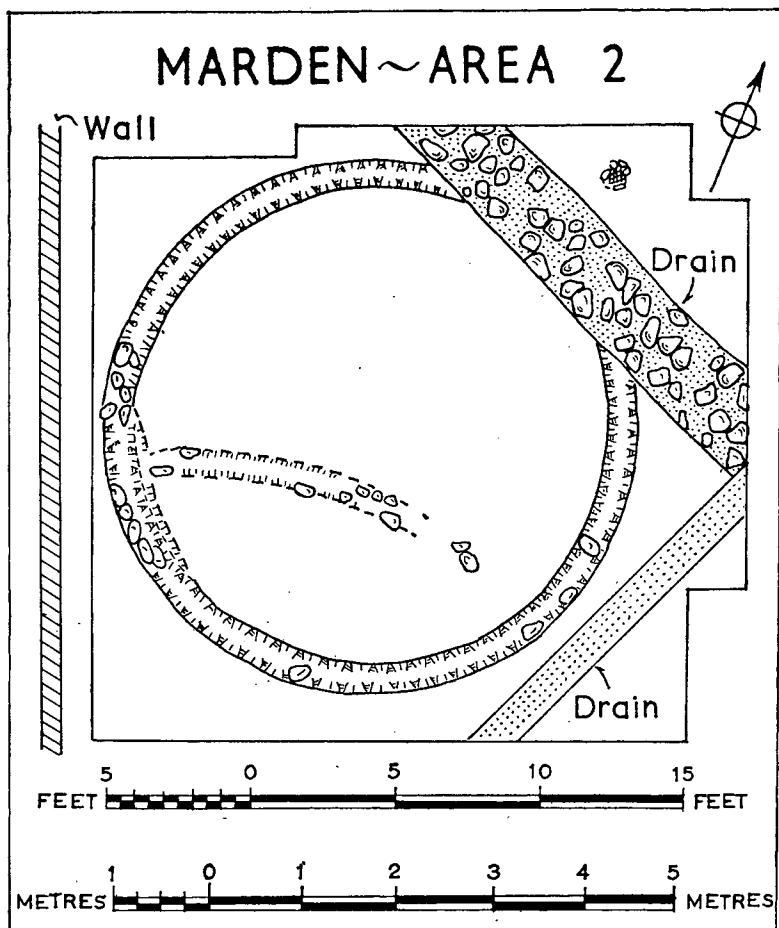


FIG. 5.

All traces of occupation earth had been removed by ploughing and the only small find from the area was the top stone of a bun-shaped rotary quern found amongst the stone filling in the open field drain.

Reconstruction of the hut from the data available is somewhat problematical. A simple solution would be to

assume that the circular trench had been used to support a log or split timber wall, after the manner of some of the larger pre-Roman Iron Age houses.⁸ In the particular circumstances existing on this site the shallowness of the trench and the scarcity of packing stones need not argue against this. By way of comparison, the fences at the entrance to the enclosure, lacking the rigidity provided by the framework of a circular hut, had required deeper trenches and consequently an amount of stone packing had survived later ploughing and disturbance. On the other hand, if strict analogy is to be sought with other rectilinear Romano-British settlements in the county and no geological factors invoked to explain differences in construction and materials employed, then the former presence of stone huts could be anticipated. Once again ploughing and the amount of stone used in the open field drains could account for the removal of the stone foundations. And as it happens, annular trenches lying by or within the inside face of the stone walls of circular huts in the Tyne-Forth province and serving variously as drains or constructional trenches are known on Romano-British settlements at Milking Gap,⁹ Northumberland, and Edgerston,¹⁰ Roxburghshire, whilst shallow grooves were also noted at Bridge House and West Longlee,¹¹ Northumberland. The size of the dwelling at Tynemouth would be in accord with the smaller, stone-founded huts of the area and the partition trench, though not exclusive in a chronological or geographical context, is present in a number of Romano-British stone-built huts further to the west in the county, as at Carry House¹² and West Gunnar Peak¹³ (e.g. plate II).

⁸ E.g. Brandon, *A.A.⁴*, XL (1962), 16.

⁹ *A.A.⁴*, XV (1938), 318.

¹⁰ R.C.A.M. *Roxburgh I*, no. 457. The trenches here were incorporated in the wall structure.

¹¹ *A.A.⁴*, XXXVIII (1960), 10-12.

¹² *Archæologia*, XLV (1873), 358.

¹³ *A.A.²*, X (1885), 12-37; also with variations at Swint Law (*B.N.C.* 1856-62, 442) and Huckhoe (*A.A.⁴*, XXXVII (1959), 242). But the ubiquity of such basic features as benches and partitions renders them of little use in diagnosing a chronological or cultural context, cf. Oelmann *Haus und Hof in Altertum*, 33.

All told, the question of a stone or timber-built structure is best left unresolved until more is known of the settlements in the different environment of the coastal plain.

SMALL FINDS

Pottery

Fig. 6. Rim fragment from a jar in sandy, pinkish grey fabric with rim internally ledged as for a lid. This is a close parallel to Gillam's type no. 150. Suggested dates A.D. 140-210. (*A.A.*⁴, XXXV (1957), 17.) Found in the back filling of the modern field drain on the north side of the entrance, Area 1.

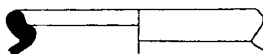


FIG. 6.

Quernstones

1. Fig. 7 No. 1. Half the top stone of a bun-shaped rotary quern of sandstone with an almost flat grinding surface; diam. 12 ins., height 5 ins.; socket hole in side for the handle.

2. Fig. 7 No. 2. Part of similar top stone of sandstone. A niche has been worn in the lower wall of the hopper by the spindle, as often happens. The socket-hole for the handle lies at an angle. Though they could well be of earlier date, almost identical stones have come from stone-walled settlements in the area of at least the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. (*A.A.*⁴, XXXVII (1959) 269 ff. and XXXVIII, 31-2).

CONCLUSION

In shape the settlement was an almost strictly rectangular enclosure with rounded corners. The perimeter, formed by a ditch and probable internal mound, included an area of slightly over half an acre. Within the single, north-east facing entrance lay at least one cobbled yard and further to the rear a small round hut, no doubt only one of a number of such dwellings. Although the evidence falls short of proof, the settlement can probably be placed generally within the Romano-British period and regarded as an equivalent of the stone-walled rectilinear settlements of Romano-British

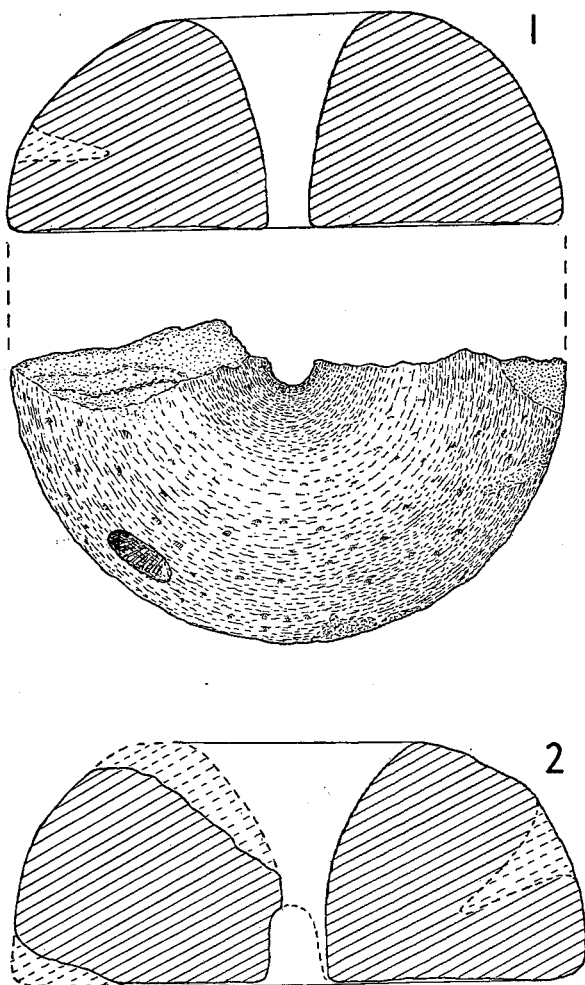


FIG. 7.

GJ

date, prevalent further to the west, particularly bordering on North Tynedale and Redesdale.¹⁴ Granted such a context, the discovery of the site at Marden would point to an extension of similar settlements on to the coastal plain.

Extensive land utilization of the coastal areas in Northumberland clearly affects the distribution pattern of extant field remains. For this reason, and merely to serve as an indication of possible sites, A. H. A. Hogg included place-names containing the element "chester" in his list of native sites in the county (fig. 1).¹⁵ More concrete evidence is now forthcoming. In addition to the Marden settlement it is worth placing on record at this juncture that one of the five rectilinear earthworks, already recorded on the coastal plain at Stannington Station, has produced some "native" pottery, a bun-shaped quern, and at least one sherd of Romano-British coarse pottery (figs. 1 and 8).¹⁶

It is of course evident that the description rectilinear

¹⁴ Distribution map *A.A.*⁴, XXXVIII (1960), fig. 9, p. 18.

¹⁵ *P.S.A.N.*⁴, XI (1948), 140, where most of the original references are given. The location of many of the "chester" names is no more than approximate. For additional possible enclosures at Stob Hill, Blyth, see *N.C.H.*, IX, 348, and at Harley West Farm (NZ:335754) air photograph by Dr. N. McCord, King's College GO22478/19. Horsley's observation in *Britannia Romana*, 135-6, of "the crooked risings and settlings . . . not unlike a round fort or tower projecting from the north side of the station" at Wallsend "with a triple rampart and ditch" could point to the presence of an earlier earthwork at this place. In another connection, but perhaps not without some interest in this context, my attention was directed by Professor E. Birley to the early beehive-shaped rotary quern from the foundations of the guardchamber at the east gateway of the fort at Wallsend (*P.S.A.N.*³, V (1912), 204-14).

¹⁶ The site is listed as no. 107 (NZ:220815) in *A.A.*⁴, XXXVIII, 37. It was trenched by Mr. J. Clarke with the aid of boys from Netherton School during the summer of 1961. I am indebted to him for allowing me to examine and make reference to the material.

All five sites have been ploughed over, but this one in particular approaches most closely in appearance to the familiar settlement type. It lies on fairly level ground at an altitude of 180 feet and has had an east facing entrance. No stone is visible. The overall measurements are one hundred and eighty by two hundred feet. It was surveyed together with other sites in the area in April 1958, G.J.

Mr. A. L. Rivet, Assistant Archæology Officer O.S., informs me that "Roman finds" recorded from Stannington refer to an entry at NZ:19988151, near to Dovecote House, over a mile to the west of the above sites.

More recently the top stone of a bun-shaped quern has been ploughed up in the field immediately to the west of South Brenkley Farm (NZ:217751). *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 6 May, 1963.

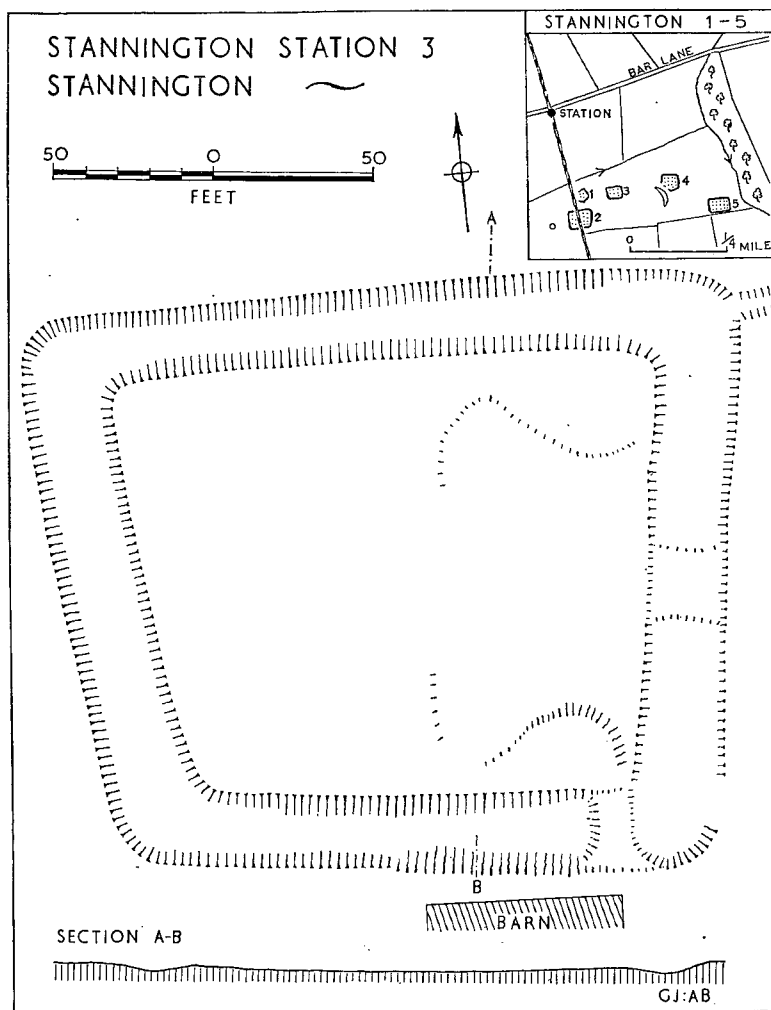


FIG. 8.

enclosure may cover a variety of sites in time and nature¹⁷ and in this same area of the coastal plain there is the rectilinear palisaded enclosure at Seghill¹⁸ as well as the homestead of uncertain context, comprising a single circular house within a rectangular enclosure, at Burradon.¹⁹ Even so, it seems more than possible that settlement sites similar to that at Marden could account for some of the previously recorded "Roman stations" such as Blackchesters²⁰ (fig. 1) and the "several squares and oblongs" at one time said to extend from West Chirton to Tynemouth.²¹ Nor need a strictly military function be envisaged to explain the series of small *camps* "eighty or one hundred yards square", recorded by John Hodgson²² as then running northwards "through the parish of Long Benton" and "out of Cramlington"²³ grounds, through Plessey and Shotton into part of the township of Stannington". Given this change in interpretation, however, his further observations²⁴ could be pertinent—"that the Romans occupied the country along the seaside and a great way north of the Wall for agricultural purposes is plain from the presence of many small square deep trenched camps that still remain on the banks of Blyth and Wansbeck."

¹⁷ For convenient summary and references see Mrs. Aylwin Cotton in *Berks. Arch. Journ.*, 59 (1961), 14-35, and *A.N.L.*, vol. 7, no. 7 (March 1962), 150. Cf. also pre-Roman Iron Age sub-rectangular enclosure at Brandon, Co. Durham, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ *A.A.*⁴, XL (1962), 32. The map reference on the original photograph is not correct and should read NZ:281751.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Visited Nov. 1962. From air photograph and ground inspection it would appear to have been c. 150 feet square with an east facing entrance. A few stone fragments were visible in the surface of the ploughed field, roughly on the line of the south and west sides. The homestead is situated on a slight ridge in a reasonably well-drained situation at an altitude of c. 210 feet. G.J.

²⁰ *A.A.*¹, I (1882), 231 ff. The two pieces of sculpture entered in the old *Blackgate Museum Catalogue* (*A.A.*², I, nos. 41 and 64) as having been found at Blackchesters are extremely doubtful in a Roman context and the exact provenance is uncertain. The donor also had a local reputation as an indiscriminate collector.

²¹ *Ibid.* and *History of Northumberland*, VIII, 316.

²² *Northumberland* II, II, 306; II, III, 280 and 440.

²³ The inscribed stone and tile from Cramlington (*A.A.*², I, nos. 142 and 245) were almost certainly removed from their original context and do not support claim for outlying military work as suggested in *History of Northumberland*, XIII, 540.

²⁴ *Northumberland*, II, III, 280q.

The settlement at Marden not only serves as a reminder of the potentials of the coastal plain but, at the same time, illustrates the confusion that on occasions might arise when diagnosis is made from air photographs alone. In a local context investigations of such a Roman fortlet as that at Mitford Steads perhaps becomes the more urgent.²⁵

²⁵ *J.R.S.*, XLI (1951), 56. Particularly if linking roads are to be postulated as by Hafemann, *Beiträge zur Siedlungsgeographie des römischen Britannien*, I (1956), 149.

