

## IX.—NOTES ON AIR RECONNAISSANCE IN NORTHUMBERLAND AND DURHAM—II

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The object of this paper is to present a second report on aerial photography in Northumberland and Durham, mainly as it relates to early settlement. The first report appeared in *Archaeologia Aeliana* XLVI (1968). Work described in the present account was undertaken in 1969 and 1970 by the first named writer with the aid of grants from the research funds of the University and the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, and the Durham County Local History Society. The year 1970 in particular has proved most fruitful for the discovery of crop-marks on the coastal plain and the cultivated valleys of both counties.

It may not be amiss to mention here that the collection of aerial photographs held in Newcastle University does in fact cover a wide variety of sites of historical interest, including medieval and later structures. Whilst our concern at this stage is with sites of an early context, it is hoped to present a later report on the scope of other sections in the collection.

In the case of individual sites quoted below, the suggested name, the map reference, and a short description of the traces visible on the photographs is given. The final reference is to an item or items in the collection of photographs. Only the most obviously illuminating photographs are mentioned, but in most cases others are available and black and white prints are also complemented by colour transparencies.

The plan adopted is to offer first a small group of sites of peculiar individual interest and then to give a description of newly discovered sites which appear to relate in some way or other to early settlement. A short discussion of the

material will be found at the end of the paper.

1. *Washing Well, Co. Durham*; NZ 219603, pls. XI, 1 and 2.

Roman military sites situated on the western outskirts of Gateshead, between the Team Valley trading estate and Whickham, at an altitude of c. 325'. The ground slopes away on all sides except the north, where the approach is more level. The photographs show ditches of several phases or periods and, at two points arrowed in pl. XI, 2, small symmetrically placed crop-marks would seem to indicate large post-holes which must have held the timber uprights of gateway structures.

Fainter crop-marks exist in the immediate vicinity of this site (v. no. 11 below), perhaps indicating barrows and non-Roman occupation of the area. A Bronze Age burial is known from the same area in recent years, part of the material from which is in Sunderland Museum.

A/069599/71; A/069486/67

2. *Housesteads Roman Fort, Northumberland*. Pl. XII, 1.

A recent photograph illustrating the latest work within the fort and, in particular, the newly excavated commandant's house.

3. *Yeavinger, Northumberland*; NT 946298; pl. XII, 2.

Two rectangular structures on the lower slopes of Akeld Hill, and only a few hundred yards from the Anglian palace site. These can be most reasonably interpreted as outlying elements of the same complex.

A/069571/1

In the following list of sites the rough typological distinctions made in the 1968 report are adhered to, with other sections for sites of interest which do not readily fit into this classification.

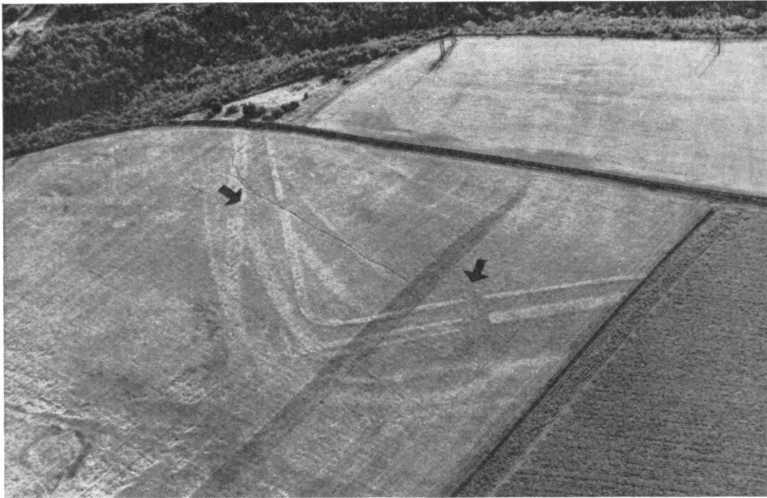
*A. Rectangular enclosures consisting of a single ditch*

The first six sites in this group bear a typological resemblance to the homestead site at Burradon, excavated in 1968-9.<sup>1</sup> The key feature is a rectangular, ditched enclosure, containing the site of a large round house. On excavation

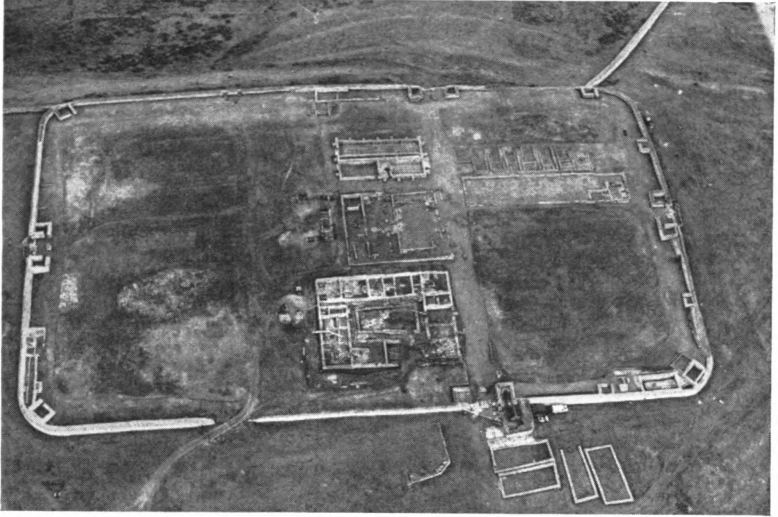
<sup>1</sup> *Arch. Ael.*, XLVIII (1970), 51ff.



1. Site of Washing Well fort, river Tyne in background



2. Roman fort at Washing Well

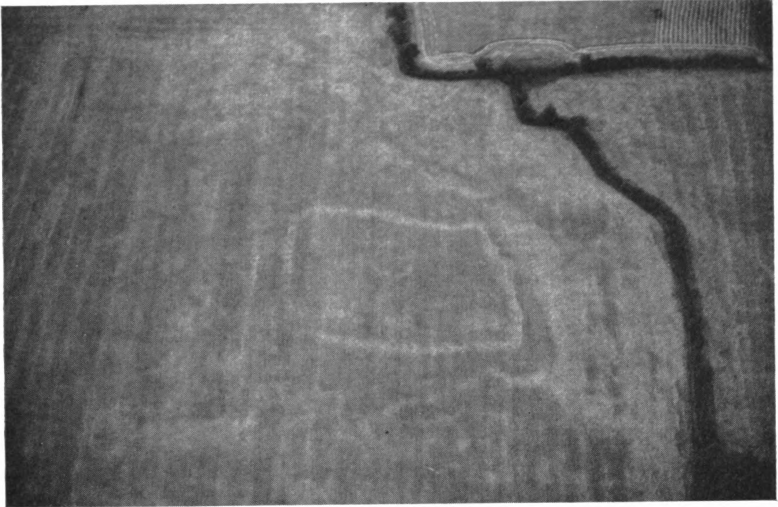


1. Housesteads showing recently excavated Commandant's House

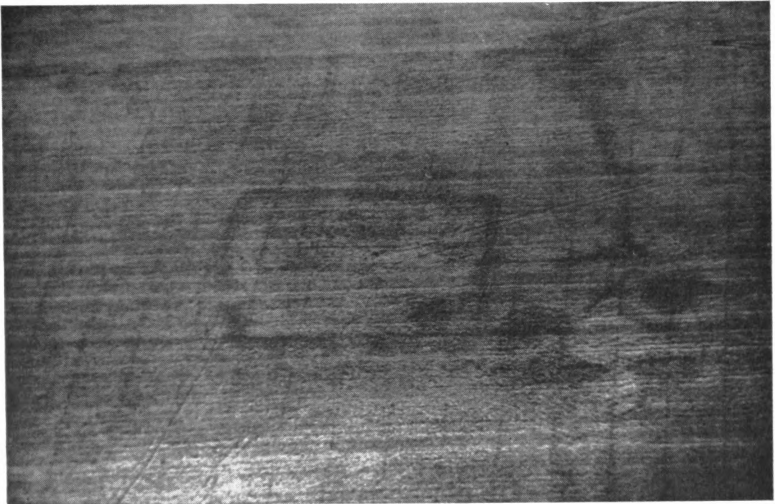


2. Yeaving

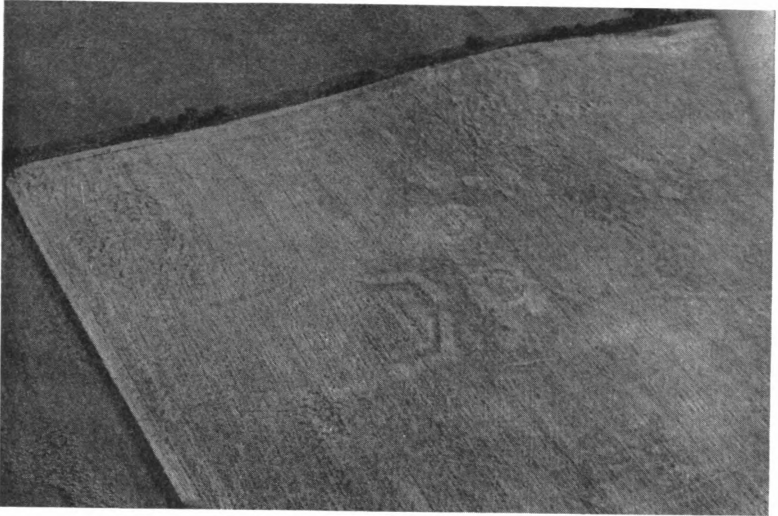




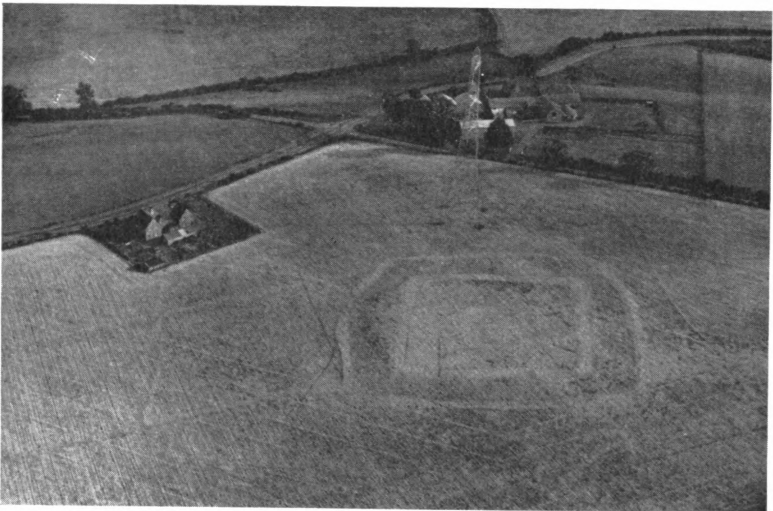
1. Larberry Pastures



2. Reavely Burn East



1. West Bewick Bridge



2. Flodden Edge



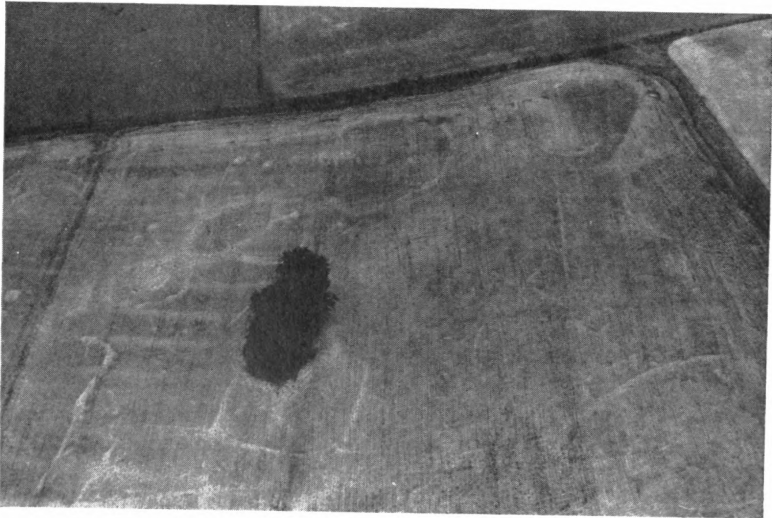
1. West Akeld Steads



2. Sandy House, Milfield



1. Wooperton East



2. Milfield Council Houses East

the Burradon homestead proved to have had a more complex history than the aerial photographs had indicated, and although in this instance the large round house may have been occupied in the Roman period, no such context is necessarily implied for the following examples.

4. *Gardener's Houses, Northumberland*; NZ 209744.

Situated  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile north of Dinnington at a height of c. 200'. The photographs show two successive phases, one enclosure underlying part of a later and clearer one, both enclosures containing one large round house. Fainter crop-marks elsewhere in the vicinity suggest that this site too may have had a more complex pattern of occupation.

G/063567/34

5. *Lanton North, Northumberland*; NT 924314.

Situated  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile north of Lanton on an eastward facing hill slope at an altitude of c. 450'. The enclosure is trapezoidal in shape, the east side being markedly shorter than the west. Again a large round house-site is visible inside.

A/063350/3 (v. also Cambridge University, no. GT/0081)

6. *Milfield Council Houses East, Northumberland*; NT 938339.

See entry no. 32.

7. *Larberry Pastures, Co. Durham*; NZ 384178; pl. XIII, 1.

Situated 4 miles west of Stockton, on a low ridge at a height of c. 150'. The enclosure is roughly rectangular in shape but irregular in line, and the single house-site showing inside appears somewhat smaller than those visible in other sites of this type.

A/069890/21

The attribution to this type of the following two sites is less certain and the traces appreciably fainter.

8. *Low Grange, Co. Durham*; NZ 298448.

Situated 2 miles north-east of Durham city on a flat area just to the east of the steep valley of the Wear. The single ditch of the rectangular enclosure is clear, but the internal circular crop-mark is very faint and appears unusually large in relation to the outer rectangle, raising the possibility in this case that the two may relate to different occupations.

A/069656/18

9. *Fatfield House, Co. Durham; NZ 315440.*

Situated 1 mile south-east of *no.* 8, at a height of *c.* 300', just to the north-west of the valley of a small tributary which enters the Wear at Old Durham. The rectangular enclosure is clear, but the inner circular crop-mark, though discernible in several photographs, is very faint.

A/069656/26

The remaining rectangular sites in this group include one settlement containing a number of circular houses, whilst the others show no clear internal features.

10. *Reaveley Burn East; Northumberland; NU 027148; pl. XIII, 2.*

Situated 1 mile north of Ingram and a little distance to the east of the Reaveley Burn at an altitude of *c.* 400'. There are faint traces of several house-sites within the rectangular, ditched enclosure. The entrance lies off-centre in the southern side. Beyond the north side of the site are several circular features which may have been springs flowing into an old stream bed before ploughing.

A/063350/1

11. *Marshall Lands, Co. Durham; NZ 216603.*

Situated a few hundred yards west of *no.* 1, the Roman fort at Washing Well, at a height of *c.* 350'. The crop-marks are faint, but seem to indicate a rectangular enclosure.

A/069432/12

12. *North Finchale, Co. Durham; NZ 297475.*

Situated just to the north of the steep Wear valley and on the bank opposite Finchale Priory, at an altitude of *c.* 150'. The crop-mark is faint and there are no signs of internal structures.

A/069153/5

13. *High Coniscliffe, Co. Durham; NZ 235154.*

Situated  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles east of Piercebridge and  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile north of the river Tees at a height of under 200'. Only the north side and parts of the east and west sides of a rectangular enclosure are visible. There are no signs of internal structures and the enclosing ditch appears slight.

A/069589/7

*B. Rectangular enclosures with two ditches*

Two new sites in this category were found in 1970, both

in the Till valley in north Northumberland. The first is of particular significance because of its proximity to a Roman road (v. Discussion below).

14. *West Bewick Bridge, Northumberland*; NU 047222; pl. XIV, 1.

Situated  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile east of the A697 and  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile west of Bewick Bridge, on a low ridge at a height of c. 200'. The site is very close to the presumed line of the Roman road, the Devil's Causeway, as it proceeds up the Till valley. No internal features are showing. In front of the site lies a row of three small circular sites and faint traces of others appear in the same field. These are not necessarily related and could be the sites of barrows.

A/069656/162

15. *Flodden Edge, Northumberland*; NT 914349; pl. XIV, 2.

Situated at an altitude of c. 300',  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles north-west of Milfield and  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile west of the multivallate fort at South Flodden. A very clear crop-mark of two ditches enclosing a rectangular area in which several round house-sites can be detected. The houses are particularly clear on some of the colour photographs. A much slighter enclosure seems to be attached to the east side of the main site, resembling the annexe of the multivallate fort on Flodden Hill which lies  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile to the north.

A/069656/143

C. No further examples of category C in the previous report—palisaded enclosures—appeared in 1969 or 1970, although there are traces of what could be a palisaded perimeter on recent photographs of the multivallate fort already recorded at South Flodden (NT 924351).

#### D. *Curvilinear Enclosures*

The first group of sites under this broad head may be tentatively considered as henge monuments. Again, these are in the Till valley.

16. *West Akeld Steads, Northumberland*; NT 957307; pl. XV, 1.

Situated 2 miles north-west of Wooler and a little distance north of the river Glen. A broad and somewhat oval shaped ditch with opposed entrances, roughly north and south, no doubt forms a class II henge. Inside there are what appear to be a group of con-

centric post-holes or pits. Nearby lie three smaller circular sites, possibly barrows. The area also includes traces of a field or drainage system which over-runs this site.

A/069656/154

17. *Ewart Park, Northumberland*; NT 956376.

Situated 3 miles north-west of Wooler and  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile west of Ewart Park. A circular enclosure, smaller than *no.* 16 above, but again with two opposed entrances.

A/069656/149

18. *East Marleyknowe, Northumberland*; NT 943324.

Situated 1 mile south of Milfield, just to the west of the A697. A segmented circular enclosure, the enclosing ditch being interrupted at least a dozen times by gaps in a manner similar, for example, to some of the Dorchester, Oxon., henges.<sup>2</sup> A short distance to the south-west is a small circular enclosure, possibly the remains of a barrow. One or other is probably the "small camp or tumulus" recorded by Henry MacLauchlan at Marleyknowe (*Additional Notes* (1868), pp. 25-6). A pair of roughly parallel lines set fairly close together, as if marking a route or way, runs north to south on the west side of the henge and bends slightly as if to avoid the site of the enclosure. This feature is not a *cursus* and is a southern continuation of the same way which passes through the opposed entrances of the Coupland henge (*v. no.* 20 below). Other faint crop-marks forming irregularly shaped enclosures may be geological faulting rather than a field-system. The new North Sea Gas pipeline skirts the east side of the henge.

A/069571/7

19. *Milfield North, Northumberland*; NT 934346.

Situated  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile north of Milfield, just to the east of A697. A segmented enclosure similar to but smaller than *no.* 18. Fainter traces of an internal circular line can be seen running concentrically within the enclosure. There is a second small enclosure almost due west, on the west side of A697 and about the same distance from it. Both may be the remains of barrows or small enclosed cemeteries rather than henges proper.

A/069484/27

20. *Coupland Henge, Northumberland*; NT 940330.

This henge has already been recorded (*P.S.A.S. LXXXIV* (1949-50), 64) and may also be the Meldon Camp recorded by MacLauchlan (*Additional Notes*, 25). The "way" running through the

<sup>2</sup> Atkinson, R. J. C., *Excavations at Dorchester, Oxon.* (1951).



henge can now be seen clearly running further to the north and south (*no.* 18 above). Other, smaller enclosures are also visible in the same field.

A/069484/15

Of the remainder of the curvilinear sites some are clearly settlements, but the nature of many must remain in doubt because of the absence of visible internal features.

21. *Roundabouts Camp, Northumberland*; NT 132311.

Situated  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles south-east of Belford, just to the east of the A1, on a low rounded hill at a height of *c.* 260'. There are two concentric ditches clearly visible but no signs of internal structures. This is most probably a hillfort and will be the now ploughed-out site of Roundabouts Camp, noted by MacLauchlan (*Additional Notes*, 10).

A/069656/137

22. *Marleyknowe, Northumberland*; NT 933321.

Situated 1 mile south of Milfield and  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile south of Sandy House, on an eastward slope at a height of about 250'. This is a multivallate curvilinear site with clear signs of several round house-sites within the enclosure.

A/069571/60

23. *Lilburn Tower East, Northumberland*; NU 028247.

Situated between Lilburn Tower and Lilburn Grange, 3 miles south-east of Wooler, at a height of *c.* 250'. A single curvilinear ditch rather irregular in outline; no signs of internal structures.

A/074015/1

24. *Milfield Council Houses East, Northumberland*; NT 437337 (*v.* also *nos.* 6 & 32).

Situated just to the north of the group of council houses at the southern end of Milfield village. A single curvilinear ditch but no signs of internal structures. Fainter traces of another enclosure lie just to the south-east.

A/069484/18 (*cf.* Cambridge University, *no.* DO O11)

25. *Percy's Cross North, Northumberland*; NU 056203.

Situated  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile east of Wooperton. A circular enclosure with no clear signs of internal structures. On a low ridge some little distance south of the site a field-system of roughly rectangular enclosures is clear.

A/069571/38 and A/069486/9

26. *Stephen's Hall, Co. Durham*; NZ 155633.

Situated 1 mile south of Ryton. An odd site showing two concentric crop-marks, perhaps lying within a less clearly marked rectangular enclosure. It is not at all certain that this site is of any great antiquity.

27. *Hedley Hall West, Co. Durham*; NZ 217563.

Situated 2 miles north-east of Stanley at a height of c. 500'. A single ditched curvilinear enclosure, rather irregular in outline. No signs of internal structures.

A/069589/27

### *E. Possible Round Barrows*

Some possible sites of ploughed-out round barrows have already been mentioned in passing. From a number of additional instances the following are given as examples only. They do not appear to be the sites of unenclosed, ditched houses.

28. *Sandy House, Northumberland*; NT 936326; pl. XV, 2.

Situated about 1 mile south of Milfield. A "way" similar to that already mentioned, and from which this may be some branch route, crosses the fields. There are also two clearly marked but small circular ditches, one lying within the line of the way itself. What may be the corner of a rectangular ditched enclosure also peeps out from the corner of a wood.

A/069484/29

29. *Wooperton East, Northumberland*; NU 047203; pl. XIV, 1.

Along the top of a fairly pronounced ridge, just to the east of the A697 there is a line of at least three small ring-ditches. Other marks are difficult to explain, but may have been field boundaries.

A/069486/56; A/069656/59

### *F. Possible Field-Systems and other less well-defined features*

The difficulties in interpretation under this head are manifest. Many of the crop-marks which have come to light are somewhat irregular in pattern and may indeed be the

result of natural faulting.<sup>3</sup> Further flights and detailed mapping will be required to clarify the complexities showing on some photographs. However, with such reservations in mind, the following are quoted merely as examples from a more extensive cover in the valleys of the Tyne and Till.

30. *Bywell Hall Moor, Northumberland*; NZ 035623.

On sloping ground a few hundred yards north of the river Tyne and about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile west of Bywell Hall, crop-marks show a very complex pattern, some of which may result from field-systems and some from settlements. Faint traces resembling those at Bywell also appear in the Tyne Valley near Ovington, Dilston, Whittle Dene and Brocks Bushes 1 mile to the east of Corbridge.  
A/069486/56; A/069656/59

31. *West New Bewick, Northumberland*; NU 060205.

On the slope of a ridge  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile east of Wooperton. Here again a large area is covered with a pattern of crop-marks. One group of elongated rectangular areas would certainly seem to be the remains of a field system of sorts, but of uncertain context.  
A/069486/11; A/069486/19

32. *Milfield Council Houses East, Northumberland*; NT 938337; pl. XVI, 2.

The small group of council houses at the south-east end of Milfield stands in the corner of a large field. One site, known previously, has already been described and listed at *no.* 24. Across the south-east corner of the field there is an unusual crop-mark of an elongated site having two parallel sides, one straight end, and one apsidal end. It may prove to be of some interest in view of the Anglian connections with Milfield. Elsewhere in the same field and that immediately to the north (*no.* 6 above) are traces of both rectangular and curvilinear enclosures of uncertain nature. The "way", already noted as running from well south of the Coupland henge, crosses the "council-house" field and continues north to beyond Milfield. Although the context of this route may well be comparatively late, it is not without interest, and there are other similar "ways" in this general area, such as the one already noted at Sandy House (*no.* 28). Pl. XVI, 2 here illustrates the high concentration of cropmark sites found in the Till valley in 1970.  
A/069484/17

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. discussion of frost-wedge polygonal patterns in Dimpleby, G. W., *Journal Soil Science* 3 (1952), pp. 1-19.

*General Remarks*

In the prehistoric field an interesting element is the growing emphasis on the evidence of early activity in the terraces and gravels of the Till valley. To the Coupland henge, already known, a further group of this kind of monument has been added (*nos.* 16-20), while a number of the small circular sites discovered in the same season are probably the sites of barrows. It is relevant in this connection to remember that this same area has also produced the greater part of the admittedly small collection of neolithic wares, Beakers apart, from Northumberland as a whole. The continuing importance of the area in later times has for long been evident, by virtue of the large centre on Yeavinger Bell, and from the very large number of smaller hillforts and stone-built Romano-British settlements which occupy the foothills surrounding the natural amphitheatre in which the henges lie.<sup>4</sup> It now seems likely that, apart from the henges and barrows, some early settlements also extend into the lower lying, but reasonably well drained, sites nearer to the main river system (*nos.* 5, 6, 15, 21-5). It is then increasingly clear that the Anglian centres at Yeavinger and Milfield were established in areas already of long-standing importance, possessing natural links with Greater Tweeddale beyond.

The results of 1969-70 have pointed to the existence of somewhat different site patterns in the south-east and the north-east of Northumberland. Although there has been a good deal of aerial coverage of the south-east of the county, no henge monuments like the group found in the Till valley have appeared in the south-east, where the predominance of the rectangular settlement types has already been mentioned in the first report on this work. It is very unwise to be dogmatic about a position which may change with further discoveries, but the evidence at present available does rather

<sup>4</sup> *Arch. Ael.*<sup>4</sup>, XLIII (1965), 57 & XLII (1964), 62.

suggest earlier development in the river valleys like that of the Till, and somewhat later development of the south-eastern boulder clays.

On the other hand, another apparent discrepancy may be on the way to disappearance; that is the apparent difference between the numbers of sites known in south-east Northumberland, and the comparative dearth in the coastal plain of County Durham. There has not been as much flying over Durham as over Northumberland, but the comparatively small amount of work done in Durham in 1970 produced results (*nos.* 8, 9, 11-13, 26, 27) which suggest that the discrepancy is one of exploration rather than the actual existence of sites, and that when more flying has been done the apparent variation in intensity of sites may well disappear as the Durham discoveries mount. Certainly there seemed to be no good topographical reasons to account for the apparent discrepancy, and it is helpful to see this particular puzzle mitigated in this way.

In the history of Roman Britain, the most important discovery of these years is the fort complex at Washing Well, south of the Tyne, and just to west of the Team valley (*no.* 1). The Roman military dispositions east of Corbridge in the pre-Hadrianic period have been for many years one of the notable missing pieces in the historical jigsaw of the Roman frontiers in Britain. This new site, with its suggestions of timber gates in at least two periods, is a potentially very useful clue. It is still possible that additional flying in the area between Corbridge and this new site may bring to light further information bearing on this problem, despite the obvious difficulties which urbanisation and intensive land utilisation in that area present.

One further problem of a kindred nature which deserves comment is that of the Roman military dispositions along the line of the Roman road known as the Devil's Causeway. The new site at West Bewick Bridge (*no.* 14) very close to the presumed line of that road is relevant here, together with a recent discovery by Dr. St. Joseph at Longshaws on

the river Font.<sup>5</sup> A major difficulty hereabouts, however, is the possibility of confusion between Roman military fortlets and the rectangular form of native settlement.<sup>6</sup> Only excavation of more of these sites is likely to resolve this difficulty, and it is hoped that the forthcoming excavation, by the second named author, of the presumed fortlet at Hartburn, Northumberland, may cast some fresh light on this problem, which will be discussed at greater length when the Hartburn excavation has been completed.

<sup>5</sup> *J.R.S.*, LIX (1969), 105.

<sup>6</sup> Discussion and refs. *v. Arch. Ael.*<sup>4</sup>, XLVII (1968), 53ff. and note 4 above.