

## II

### PALISADED ENCLOSURES, A ROMAN TEMPORARY CAMP AND ROMAN GRAVEL QUARRIES ON BISHOP RIGG, CORBRIDGE

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DURING THE summer of 1974 the new A69 trunk road was in process of construction to the north and west of Corbridge. The following report is concerned only with those archaeological sites which were investigated in sector 2, or the area known as Bishop Rigg (NT 976653). Excavations were carried out on behalf of the Department of the Environment and with the co-operation of local volunteers, to all of whom one is greatly indebted for their valuable assistance. Mr. T. Newman and Mr. I. M. Jobey supervised the excavations at intervals during the absence of the writer and were responsible for the ground-survey.

#### THE SITE (figs. 1 and 2)

Bishop Rigg is a low ridge on the west side of the Cor Burn, situated between the main Roman site at Corbridge (4) and the formerly isolated Roman bath-house at Red House (2).<sup>1</sup> Immediately to the west of the latter is the site of the newly discovered Agricolan fort (1), also excavated in 1974 and undoubtedly the major archaeological contribution to arise from the recent investigations.<sup>2</sup> To the south Bishop Rigg overlooks the line of the Stanegate and the site of the Roman mausoleum on Shorden Brae (3).<sup>3</sup> In Roman times it is probable that the main Roman complex at Corbridge would have been in full view to the south-east, as well as the river-crossing and the line of Dere Street running away to the north.<sup>4</sup>

An early reference to Bishop Rigg occurs in the Black Book of 1379, where it is recorded that thirty acres of land in Corbridge known as "the Bishoppreck" was in the possession of Hexham Priory.<sup>5</sup> After the Suppression this land passed through the hands of various owners until 1837 when it became and thenceforth remained part of the Beaufront estate. For long it had also formed part of the West Field of Corbridge,<sup>6</sup> and, all told, must have been cultivated at least intermittently from medieval times to the present day.

The low ridge is mainly composed of gravel, ranging from pea up to fist-size, and to this extent the subsoil differs from the more sandy alluvial found on the site of the newly discovered fort at Red House and parts of the main complex at Corbridge. A series of air-photographs taken by Dr. N. McCord<sup>7</sup> in 1970-71 had already revealed the crop-marks of two enclosures on the line which was eventually selected

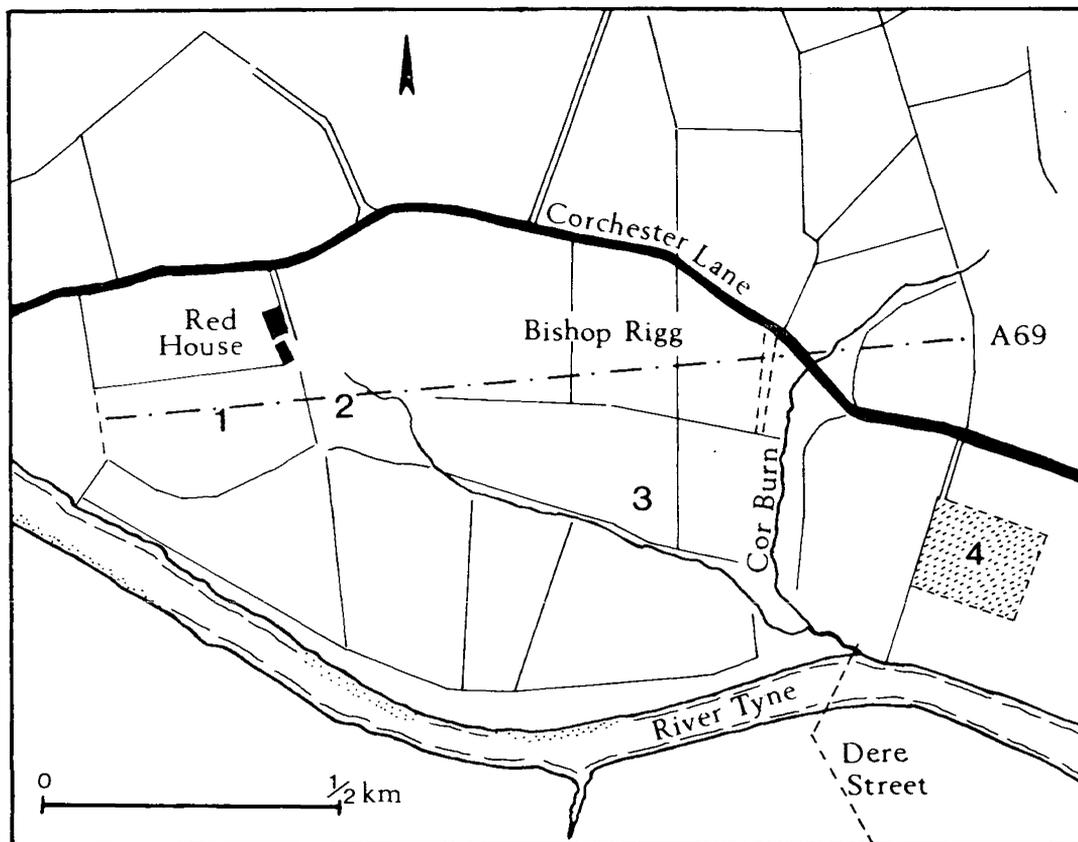


Fig. 1. Sites of Red House fort, 1; Red House bath-house, 2; Shorden Brae mausoleum, 3; Corbridge main site, 4; Bishop Rigg and A69.

for the new road (fig. 2). The first of these was a single ditched, rectangular shaped enclosure, incorporating the highest part of the ridge and extending onto the very gentle gradient down towards Corchester Lane. Whilst a Roman military context was suspected for this feature, it was by no means assured; there were no clearly defined entrances showing on the photographs then available and rectangular shaped native settlements are also persistent throughout the area. The second enclosure, somewhat more curvilinear in form, lay on the south and south-eastern slopes. Within this enclosure, and seemingly obliterating parts of its perimeter, there were large areas of discoloration on most of the photographs. These apparent areas of disturbance also extended in linear fashion further to the west along the southern slope. A possible third enclosure, much smaller and rectangular in shape, showed only as a faint soil-mark on a high level photograph taken in the autumn of 1970.<sup>8</sup> This was situated on the west bank of the Cor Burn and, if genuine, impinged upon the north-eastern perimeter of the second, curvilinear enclosure.

CORBRIDGE SECTOR 2 1974

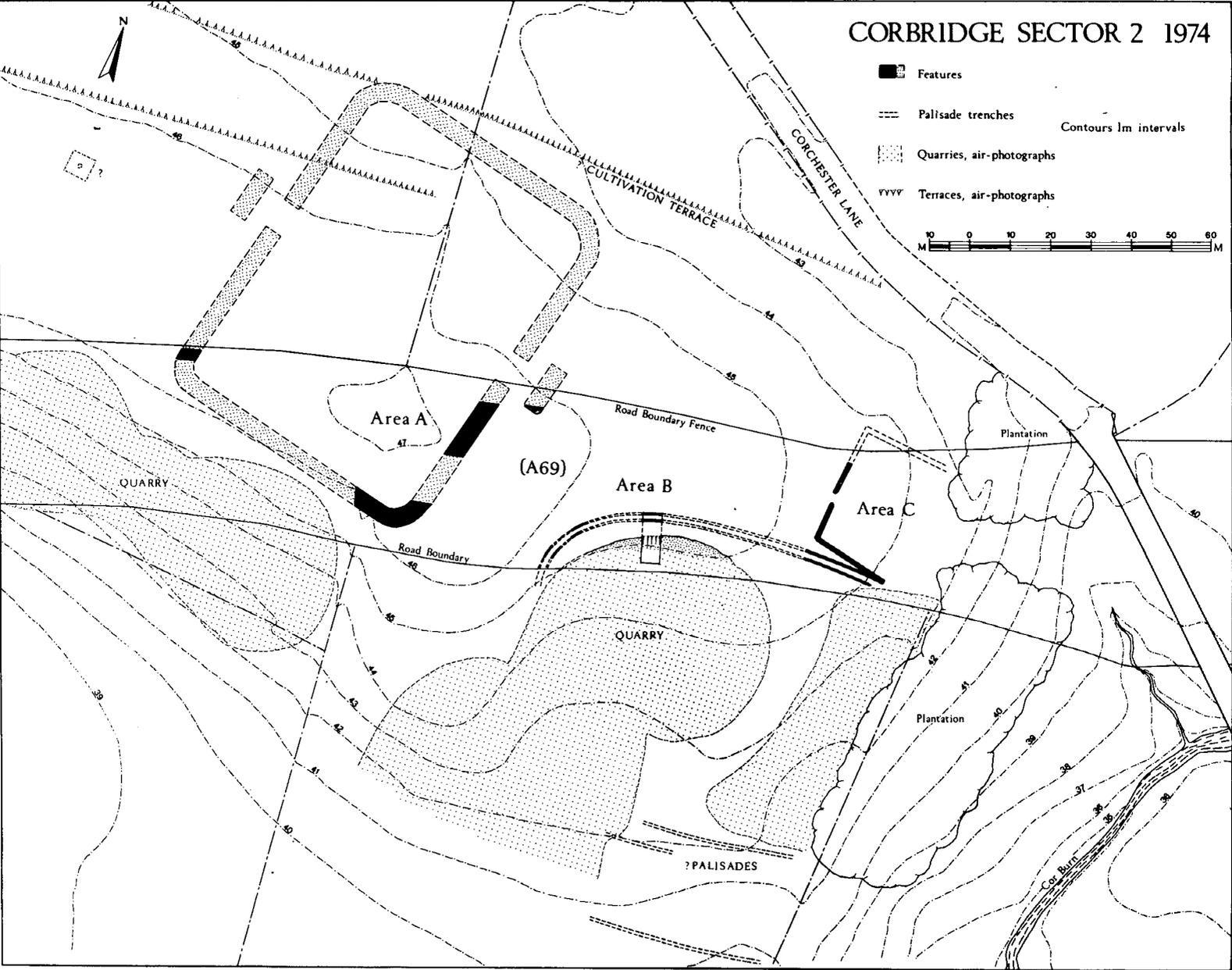


Fig. 2

Additional features were also visible on a number of air-photographs and are perhaps worthy of note at this stage, although all lay beyond the limits of the new road and were not available for investigation. Faint traces of a very small ditched enclosure with a central pit, possibly though by no means certainly a burial, can be seen some forty metres to the west of the suspected Roman work. On the gentle slopes towards Corchester Lane there are also a series of linear crop-marks resembling the remains of ploughed down cultivation terraces, such as are still visible on the slopes below Sandhoe to the north.

### THE EXCAVATIONS

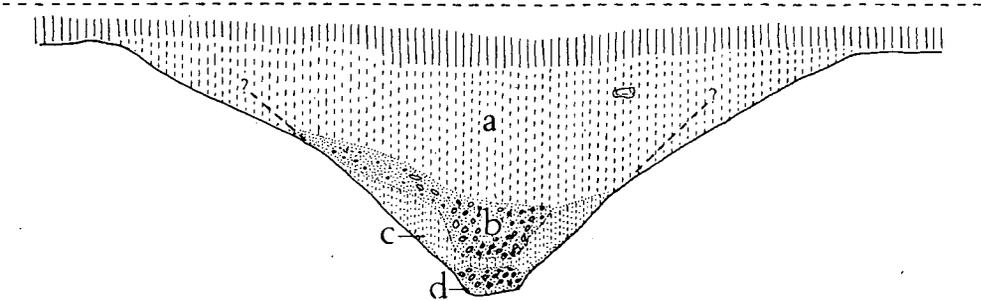
Investigations had to be restricted to the width of the road-works, from which most of the topsoil had been previously removed by heavy machinery, and were further confined by the requirement to leave access tracks for through traffic to the west. All told, a strip of little more than thirty-five metres wide was available for clearance and the disposal of spoil. No features additional to those visible on the air-photographs were found in this sector and eventually the investigations were limited to three areas shown on fig. 2.

#### I. *Palisaded Enclosures* (figs. 2 and 3, pl. Xb)

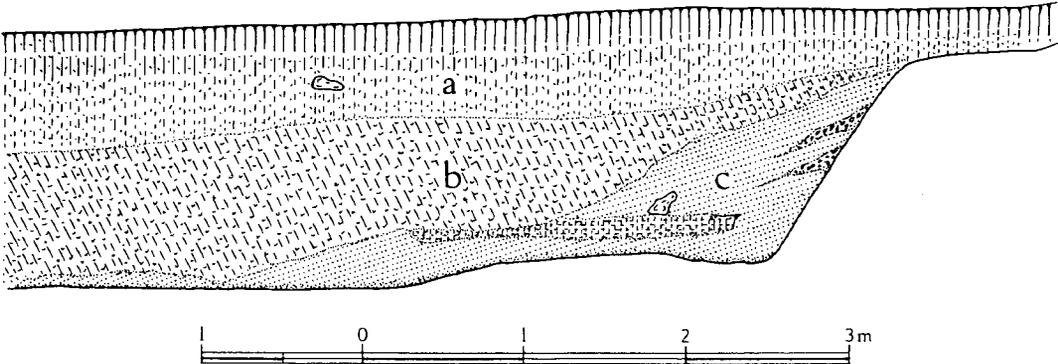
Most of the northern perimeter of this feature was uncovered. At subsoil level it showed as a single band of disturbance, 1.5 to 2 m wide, but in excavation proved to have been caused by the impinging construction trenches for two lines of continuous timber uprights (fig. 3). In both cases the vertical timbers had been packed on either side with rammed gravel. The slots marking the position of the palisades were not consistently visible at surface level and the outer slot in particular could have been deliberately back-filled after the withdrawal of the timbers. So far as could be determined the two lines had run more or less in parallel, at a distance of up to 0.8 m apart, but it was difficult to envisage them as having been used in conjunction as part of a single enclosure. Consequently, although the nature of the gravel packing did not allow the problem of sequence to be resolved, two structural phases have been assumed, both consisting of a single-line, palisaded enclosure. Such a conclusion would find additional support in the presence of what appear to be three widely separated palisade trenches on the lower southern slopes, showing as thin lines on a number of air-photographs (fig. 2).

No datable artefacts were found in direct association with these palisade-trenches and no material suitable for radiocarbon dating was recovered, so that their true context must remain uncertain. Some fragments of glass bangles of first/second century date and part of a bun-shaped rotary quern were recovered from different and widely separated points on the gravel surface, well outside the northern perimeters of the trenches, but whilst these may be native in concept their provenances elsewhere are by no means confined to native settlements. On the other hand, in support

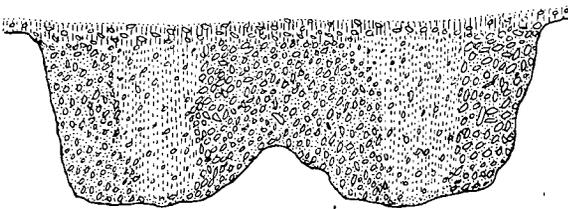
Roman Ditch, A-B Area A



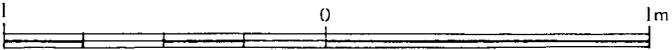
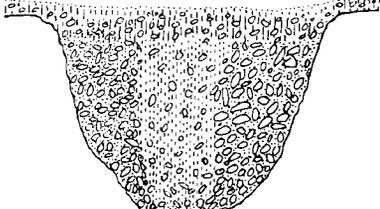
Roman Quarry, Area B



Palisades, Area B



Palisade, Area C



CJ

Fig. 3.

of a pre-Roman or, at latest, an early Roman date for these enclosures it must be significant that not one of the hundreds of Roman sherds recovered from the excavations as a whole was found in the long lengths of construction trenches which were completely emptied. Furthermore, at the extreme south-east corner of Area C, the outer palisade-trench had been cut by the later support-trench for the small rectangular-shaped enclosure, itself almost certainly of the Roman period (Section IV, below). Although it can be no more than inference from the evidence of air-photographs, it also seems possible that elsewhere the various lines of palisade-trenches had been removed by gravel quarrying, which, as we shall see, may have started in the early Roman period in the north (Section II, below).

These successive timber-built enclosures would have enclosed areas measuring at least eighty by seventy metres. Presumptively native in nature, they might also be assumed to have contained round, timber-built houses. In view of the extensive areas of disturbance on the southern slope, however, it is doubtful if traces of these will ever be recoverable. Even so, the potential of the area for native settlement of this order is undeniable. One need look no further than Site XI on the main Roman station at Corbridge to find a ready, though smaller, parallel in the form of a palisaded homestead,<sup>9</sup> together with structural indications of more extensive pre-Flavian settlement as yet unpublished.<sup>10</sup> In addition, recent excavations carried out a short distance to the north have revealed the ditch system of what is presumed to be a native settlement of rectangular or square plan, situated on the west side of Dere Street and sealed by Roman cremations lining the west side of the road.<sup>11</sup>

Until a few years ago one might have been inclined to envisage a context for the Bishop Rigg palisaded enclosures in the first half of the first millennium B.C., on the basis of structurally analogous sites found beneath hillforts in the area and the available radiocarbon dates. However, the essentially non-defensive nature of these palisades on the forward slope of Bishop Rigg, combined with more recent disclosures of single-line palisaded enclosures as immediate precursors to some of the stone-built Romano-British settlements in the nearby North Tyne Valley,<sup>12</sup> must illustrate the difficulty of attributing a more precise context in this instance.

## II. *The Roman Gravel Quarries, Areas A and B (figs. 2 and 3)*

The edges of these gravel pits were exposed in Areas A and B, but what is probably their full extent has been plotted from air-photographs, the area of discoloration alongside the Cor Burn being the least certain as to its nature. Resources were such that only one cutting could be completely emptied, this in Area B, where the original quarry face attained a depth of 1.75 m from the present topsoil (fig. 3). The primary fill over the quarry floor consisted of a light brown, sandy silt containing two or three lenses of darker earth and pea gravel (c), the whole possibly representing a fairly rapid re-entry of material after the extraction of the gravel. This was covered by a thick band of brown soil and small gravel (b), as if accumulated during the course of ploughing, and in turn by an equally thick layer of mixed topsoil and some gravel (a).

Only a single sherd was found on the quarry floor to provide a general indication of when this quarry might have been open. This was a rim-sherd from a plain jar of Gillam type 101, dated *c.* A.D. 70–110,<sup>13</sup> and perhaps significantly was one of the few sherds of early Roman pottery from the excavation as a whole. A small number of Hadrianic/Antonine sherds were also recovered from the top of the secondary fill (b) and in the bottom of the mixed topsoil (a). In these circumstances, it is tempting to take the single sherd at face value and to see the exploitation of the gravel starting in the Flavian period. Although there would have been a supply of cobbles and gravel available in the river itself, the convenience of this additional source of material for the builders of the early forts at Corbridge, or even at Red House, as well as of the nearby Stanegate and Dere Street, will be self-evident.

### III. *The Roman Temporary Camp, Area A* (figs. 2, 3 and 4, pl. Xa)

Clearance of Area A disclosed parts of the ditches of the south and east sides of this enclosure, together with the well rounded south-east corner typical of a Roman military work. The line of the ditch on the west side was established only in a single cutting, but eventually its continuation to the north could be observed at ground level by a slight difference in colour in the ripening barley in the adjoining field. There was no entrance through the ditch on the south side but the presence of the stub-end of a detached ditch, probably that of a simple gateway-traverse, denoted an entrance at or near to the centre of the east side which lay beyond the area available for excavation. This was confirmed by an air-photograph which came to hand at a late stage in the excavations, as was the presence of a similar entrance midway along the west side. Generations of ploughing had completely removed all traces of the rampart, but the camp would have measured internally some eighty metres north to south by some sixty metres east to west, yielding an interior area of *c.* 0.5 ha.

Only a 4 m length of ditch could be completely emptied, this on the east side where it now appeared to be slightly wider than elsewhere. At this point the width between the surviving lips was as much as 4.5 m, although originally it may well have been a metre or more less than this, as the material through which it had been cut, though reasonably compact, would have eroded fairly quickly (fig. 3). A narrow, fairly flat bottom, conceivably the remains of a working trench, was reached at a depth of 1.4 m. There was a primary fill composed of silt and large gravel intermixed (d), overlaid by a deposit of smaller gravel and sandy silt (c). The latter also contained an intrusive entry of larger gravel (b), as if at some stage there had been a recutting or refurbishing of the ditch. However, no confirmation of this could be seen in the undifferentiated earth and gravel fill above this level (a).

As might be anticipated in the case of a well-ploughed, temporary camp most of the interior that could be examined was featureless, except for more recent field-drains which in this subsoil served only as a testimony to overenthusiastic land-improvement. In the south-east corner, however, there were a number of post-holes and shallow pits, the former up to 0.3 m deep and containing some packing stones, the latter up to 0.4 m deep in the gravelly subsoil (fig. 4). Taken collectively or in

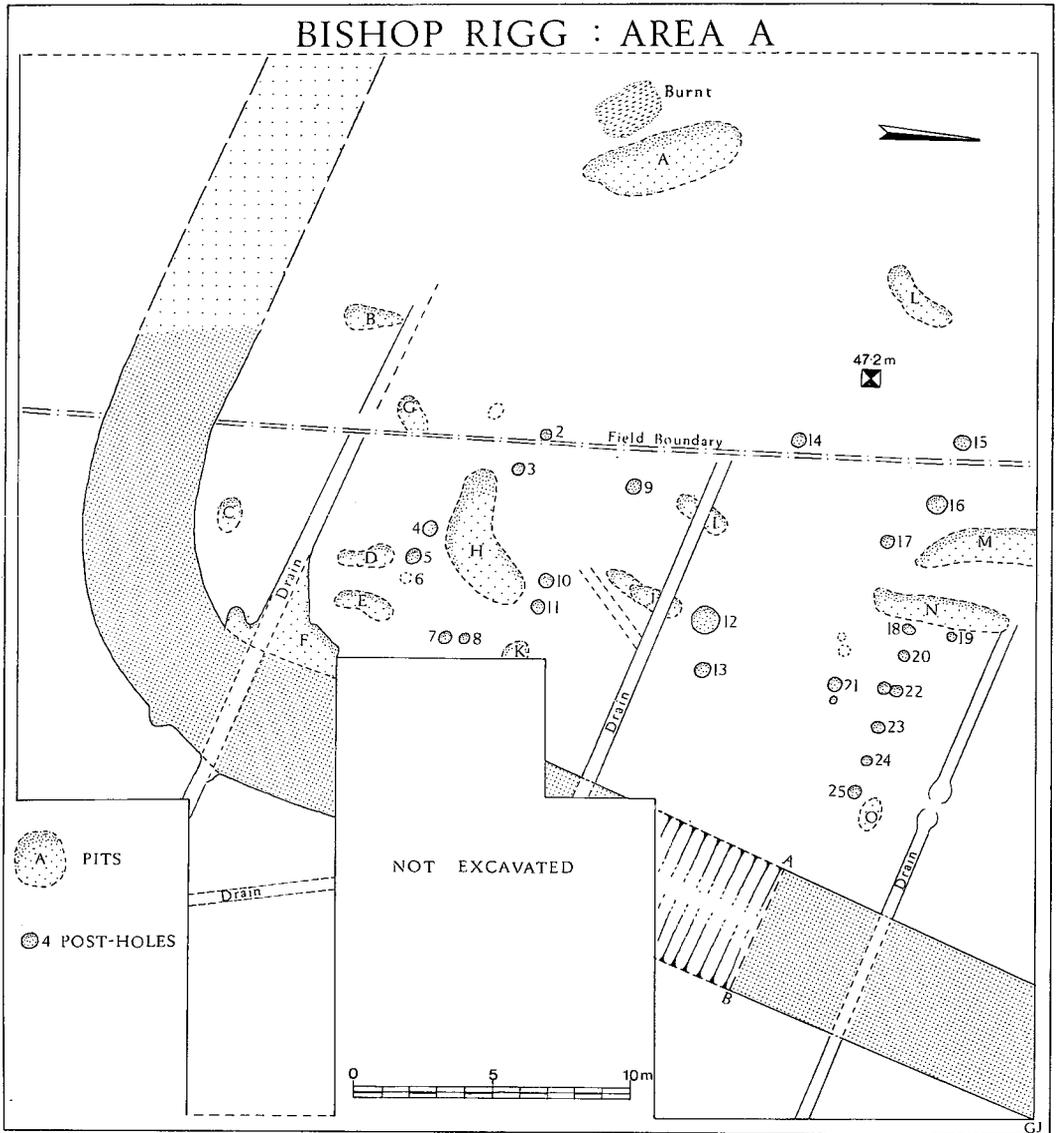
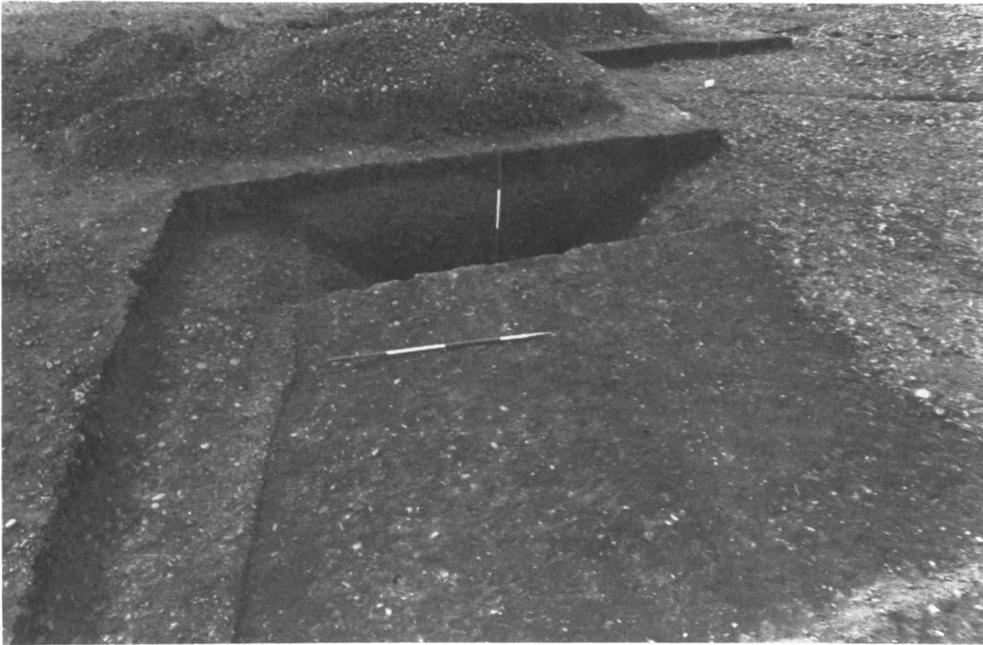


Fig. 4.



a. Ditch of Roman Camp, Area A, in process of excavation



b. Area C. Palisade trenches, rectangular enclosure, etc. in process of excavation.

smaller groups the post-holes made little structural sense. The pits shelved quickly to irregular bottoms and were invariably filled with a fairly clean mixture of sandy earth which yielded no clues as to their function. They possessed neither the appearance of natural features nor of tree-holes, and, somewhat doubtfully, may have been no more than the result of minor attempts at gravel-winning. The contexts of both pits and post-holes were similarly unresolved; all that can be said is that many of them could not have been associated with the occupation of the camp, since they were undoubtedly located where the rampart would have been.

We are then left with a temporary marching camp, or, in view of the apparent stature of the ditch, perhaps a short-term labour camp. Too little is known about the purpose and context of smaller temporary camps in the frontier zone to advance even the most tentative suggestions as to a date based upon form. Its possible context can only be inferred from a single rim and some fragmentary wall-sherds of a vessel, almost certainly Trajanic/Hadrianic in date,<sup>14</sup> which was recovered from the very bottom of the ditch in the cleared section. In this event some connection with activity in the initial stages of what was to become the Hadrianic frontier is conceivable. A large number of sherds of Hadrianic/Antonine date were recovered from the topsoil, on the gravel surface, or caught up in the top fill of the ditch (a). This phenomenon, however, was common to all areas of the excavations and the material from Area A as a whole was in that sort of quantity and of such a nature that it could not have been debris solely from the occupation of a temporary work. Although the bulk of this material was unstratified, other and more convincing reasons must be sought for its presence (Section V, below).

#### IV. *Stockaded Enclosure, Area C* (figs. 2, 3 and 5, pl. Xb)

This right angled enclosure was marked by a construction trench up to 0.8 m wide and 0.5 m deep from the gravel surface. A more or less centrally placed slot, marking a line of contiguous timber uprights, could be discerned in places and a number of post-impressions survived in the bottom of the construction trench, most notably on either side of the off-centre entrance in the west side and at the south-west corner. Various factors connected with the road-works prevented a complete clearance of the enclosure, but so far as could be ascertained its north to south measurement was in the region of thirty metres and the east to west measurement certainly no less than this.

Apart from the score-marks left by deep ploughing, and trenches for field-drains, the only surviving feature in the interior was an isolated pit, 0.5 m deep and containing a sandy fill similar to that in the pits in Area A (fig. 5). Although the pit was somewhat elongated, as if for a burial, chemical tests failed to confirm this function. In any event, it will be evident that there can be no guarantee of an association of the pit with the enclosure itself when vertical stratification was entirely lacking. Whilst the structural method employed in the timber-built enclosure may be seen as native rather than Roman in concept, the absence of any evidence for internal structures denies any meaningful suggestion as to its precise function—a situation

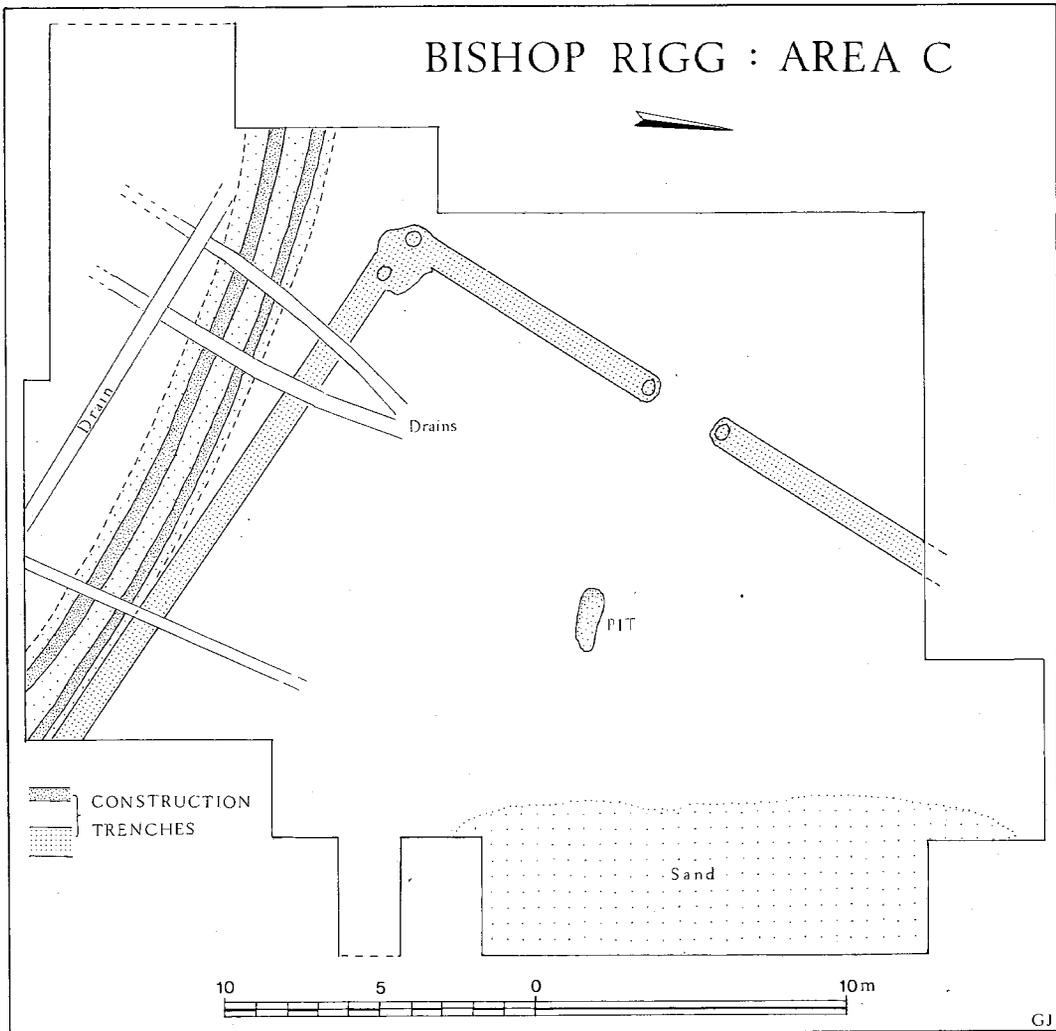


Fig. 5.

which is not resolved by the loose finds from the area as a whole.

The construction trench for this enclosure impinged upon that of the outer of the two palisade-trenches, and at this point it was demonstrably the later. A *terminus post quem* for its construction is provided by a reeded rim from a bowl of Gillam type 214 (A.D. 80–125) and a fragment of samian ware of form 27, south-Gaulish and pre-Hadrianic in date, both of which were sealed in the undisturbed gravel packing which had supported the vertical timbers in the construction trench. Once again it seemed most unlikely that the unstratified and plentiful scatter of later pottery

in the area could be associated in any way with its occupation. On the other hand, the deposition of this pottery could well suggest that the enclosure had fallen into disuse by the later second century A.D. (Section V, below).

#### V. *The Pottery Scatter*

About nine hundred sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from the excavations as a whole. With the exception of the few recognizably early sherds, to which reference has already been made, these were essentially unstratified, having come from the remaining topsoil or from the top of the underlying gravel surface. They were by no means confined to the areas of the structural features but scattered over the whole length of the excavations, perhaps increasing slightly in density towards the Cor Burn. The vast majority of the sherds are from vessels of Hadrianic/Antonine date and as a group could well have been found on Antonine levels on the nearby site at Corbridge. Few sherds are conjoining, a number are abraded, and the quantity of vessels represented must be considerable. Spatial analysis discloses no readily discernible differences in types or functional classes from one end of the excavation to the other. By way of illustration only, there are decorated samian fragments most probably in the styles of SACER, BUTRIO, PATERNUS, DOCILIS, PUGNUS and CINNAMUS,<sup>15</sup> mortaria stamps of SULLONIACUS and MESSORIUS MARTIUS and an amphora stamp of G I ALBINUS. Coarse wares include Gillam types 72, 75, 118, 129, 168, 221, 234, 308, 344 and 350. For what it may be worth in terms of furthering the context, the proportion of black-burnished sherds of BB1 is high as compared with that of BB2, and only one sherd shows any indication of burning. There are only a few sherds which are undoubtedly later than Antonine in date; these belong to the third or fourth century, but occur in no greater number than might be expected as loose finds on fields in close proximity to the site at Corbridge.

In the report on the Corbridge excavations of 1950–51 Mr. J. P. Gillam<sup>16</sup> drew attention to the fact that the quantity of pottery from excavations between 1946 and 1951 varied from level to level, being plentiful in each of the three pre-Antonine levels and also abundant in the destruction level which was then dated to A.D. 196–7. By comparison there was a notable scarcity of pottery in the Antonine occupation levels. He attributed this phenomenon to a deliberate cleaning-up process, in which rubbish was removed and disposed of in the pits found in the 1907 excavations<sup>17</sup> on the west side of the Antonine forts and on the brow of the slope leading down to the Cor Burn.

We have already seen the difficulties in relating the majority of the pottery from Bishop Rigg to the various features uncovered in excavation. Could it not then be that most of this unstratified material is from the same cleaning-up process, in which rubbish from the Antonine forts was also dumped on vacant land if not on fields already under cultivation? Although cartage over some three to four hundred metres would have been necessary, this would probably have been no more labour-intensive than digging rubbish-pits. Indeed, if midden material had also formed part of the refuse it could well have been more beneficial to the cultivation of crops.

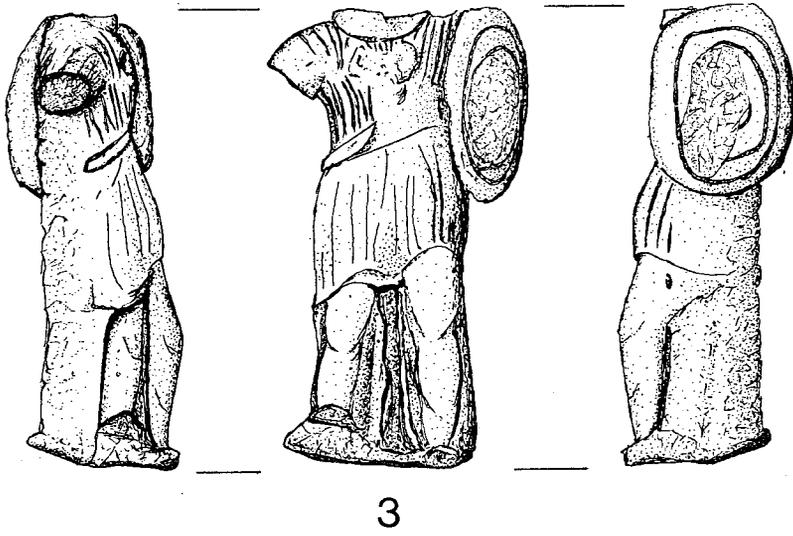
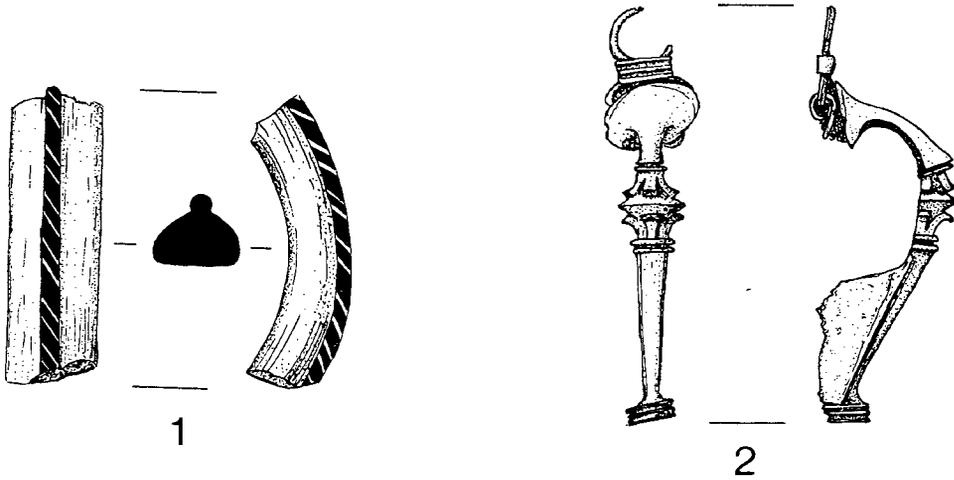


Fig. 6. 1. Glass bangle, clear blue-green with cable of pale grey on purple-black; 2. Bronze trumpet brooch; 3. Clay figurine (1:1).

Such a solution would also go some way towards explaining the presence of odd fragments of tile and glass amongst the scatter of debris on Bishop Rigg, and need not exclude the fragments of glass bangles (types 2 and 3),<sup>18</sup> a broken bronze trumpet brooch (type Rii), or a more exotic clay figurine<sup>19</sup> (fig. 6). The figurine lacks a head and one arm, but it is perhaps unnecessary, and would certainly be tempting providence unduly, to invoke the discovery of "the arm of a small statuette in paste" from the 1907 excavations in order to clinch the argument that much of this was rubbish from the Corbridge site. This being so, it could have been derived from the Antonine forts, now numbered IVA and IVB,<sup>20</sup> and only possibly, because of the presence of BB2 sherds,<sup>21</sup> the occupation following on the end of IVB by *c.* A.D. 163.

One further comment may be allowed in respect to this unstratified material from Bishop Rigg, since there is yet another location which has been envisaged for rubbish from the Antonine forts. In his discussion of samian ware, as related to the Roman occupation of Scotland, Mr. Hartley has advanced cogent reasons for placing the end of period II on the Antonine Wall in *c.* A.D. 163. Inevitably this has led him to a re-assessment of the date of much of the material in the Corbridge destruction deposit,<sup>22</sup> to which he would attribute an earlier date than has been given hitherto. This has been generally accepted, although the extension of the argument elsewhere<sup>23</sup> may not receive unqualified support. Be this as it may, Mr. Hartley has suggested that the Corbridge deposit could contain much of the rubbish from the Antonine forts, brought back to the site in material used for levelling preparatory to Severan building in the early third century. This could well be so, but it should not be allowed to cloud the fact that there was a conflagration and a genuine destruction level on much of the site at Corbridge.<sup>24</sup> It may have been re-cycled in places and there may have been a levelling down as well as a levelling up process. In other areas, however, it was undoubtedly *in situ* and it will be necessary to maintain these distinctions in future discussions on context.

*Note:* Small finds from Bishop Rigg are lodged in Museum of Antiquities, Newcastle upon Tyne.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Daniels, C. M., "The Roman Bath House at Red House, Corbridge", *AA*<sup>5</sup>, XXXVII (1959), 85-175.

<sup>2</sup> Excavated by J. P. Gillam, C. M. Daniels and W. Hanson; report forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> Gillam, J. P., "The Roman Mausoleum on Shorden Brae", *AA*<sup>4</sup>, XXXIX (1961), 37-61.

<sup>4</sup> The line of the road was also established in 1974 by Mr. J. Casey.

<sup>5</sup> *History of Northumberland*, X, 107n.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-7, plate II.

<sup>7</sup> University of Newcastle, A1068-A1619.

<sup>8</sup> B.K.S. Surveys Ltd., B4161 no. 644817.

<sup>9</sup> Richmond, I. A. and Gillam, J. P., "Some Excavations at Corbridge 1952-1954", *AA*<sup>4</sup>, XXXIII (1955), 218-20.

<sup>10</sup> Information Mr. J. P. Gillam.

<sup>11</sup> Information Mr. J. Casey.

<sup>12</sup> Jobey, G., "Iron Age and Romano-British Settlement on Kennel Hall Knowe", *AA*<sup>5</sup>, VI (1978), forthcoming, and earlier references.

<sup>13</sup> Gillam, J. P., *Types of Roman Coarse Pottery Vessels in Northern Britain* (1970).

<sup>14</sup> I am indebted to J.P.G. for additional comments on these sherds.

<sup>15</sup> Stansfield, J. A. and Simpson, Grace, *Central*

*Gaulish Potters* (1958); Hartley, B. R., "The Roman Occupation of Scotland: the evidence of the samian ware", *Britannia*, III (1972), 1-55.

<sup>16</sup> Richmond, I. A. and Gillam, J. P., "Further Exploration of the Antonine Fort at Corbridge", *AA*<sup>4</sup>, XXX (1952), 251-66.

<sup>17</sup> Forster, R. H. *et al.*, "Corstopitum: Report of Excavations in 1907", *AA*<sup>3</sup>, IV (1908), 205-303.

<sup>18</sup> Stevenson, R. B. K., "Romano-British Glass Bangles", *Glasgow Arch. J.*, 4 (1976), 45-53.

<sup>19</sup> The fabric is light grey and the surfaces abraded. Execution is somewhat crude and vestments represented merely by scratched lines. The back is plain, roughly moulded, and it is difficult

to see if a cloak was intended for this martial figure.

<sup>20</sup> Gillam, J. P., "The Roman Forts at Corbridge", *AA*<sup>5</sup>, V (1977), 64-74.

<sup>21</sup> Gillam, J. P., "Sources of Pottery found on Northern Military Sites", in *Current Research in Romano-British Pottery* (C.B.A. 1973), 56. Questioned by Hartley, *op. cit.*, 48.

<sup>22</sup> Hartley, B. R., *op. cit.*, Appendix II, 45-8.

<sup>23</sup> Simpson, G., "Haltwhistle Burn, Corstopitum and the Antonine Wall: a Reconsideration", *Britannia*, V (1974), 327-39.

<sup>24</sup> Richmond, I. A. and Gillam, J. P.; *op. cit.*, note 9 above.