

# I

## EXCAVATION OF AN UNENCLOSED SETTLEMENT ON STANDROP RIGG, NORTHUMBERLAND, AND SOME PROBLEMS RELATED TO SIMILAR SETTLEMENTS BETWEEN TYNE AND FORTH

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### *Introduction*

EXCAVATION OF an unenclosed platform settlement on Green Knowe, Peeblesshire, in 1977 and 78, had demonstrated the probability that at least some of the many unenclosed settlements, now recorded in numbers throughout northern Britain, might serve to fill the lacuna which had existed in the settlement pattern of the second and earlier first millennia B.C. (Jobey, 1980). During 1979–80 limited investigation of the unenclosed settlement on Standrop Rigg, which lies in the Cheviot Hills some 80 km to the east-south-east of Green Knowe, was directed towards the same problem.

This particular settlement was first recorded by Mr. T. Gates, Field Officer for Northumberland, and Mr. S. Ainsley of the Ordnance Survey. Permission to excavate was readily granted by Mr. R. Telford of Fawdon and financial assistance was provided by the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. The willing and sustained co-operation of undergraduates from the same university, together with that of some volunteer workers from the Society, is acknowledged with gratitude, as is the supervisory assistance rendered by Miss L. Macinnes and Mr. I. Jobey.

### *The Settlement and its Location (NT 951174)*

The settlement and associated field-system lie at an altitude of *c.* 380 m (1250') on the lower south to south-east facing slopes of Great Standrop in the southern fringe of the central Cheviot massif (fig. 1,1); it thus remains one of the most elevated unenclosed settlements known in Northumberland, though it is not necessarily the most exposed. At the foot of the slope, the Linhope Burn pursues its bickering course towards the River Breamish, broken by a number of cascades and 'linns' or pools, the best known being that at Linhope Spout 1 km to the east. Cheviot andesites prevail beneath the thin upland soils, which now support only rough moorland grasses, brindled with stretches of obscuring bracken and less frequent patches of heather. A similar but smaller unenclosed settlement, lying at much the same altitude as that on Standrop Rigg, also nestles in a sea of bracken a short distance to the east between the Het and Dunmoor Burns (fig. 1, 2).

Hereabouts, and without prejudice as to precise contexts, these two unenclosed settlements of round houses would seem to mark the limit of penetration into the

# Standrop Rigg, Linhope

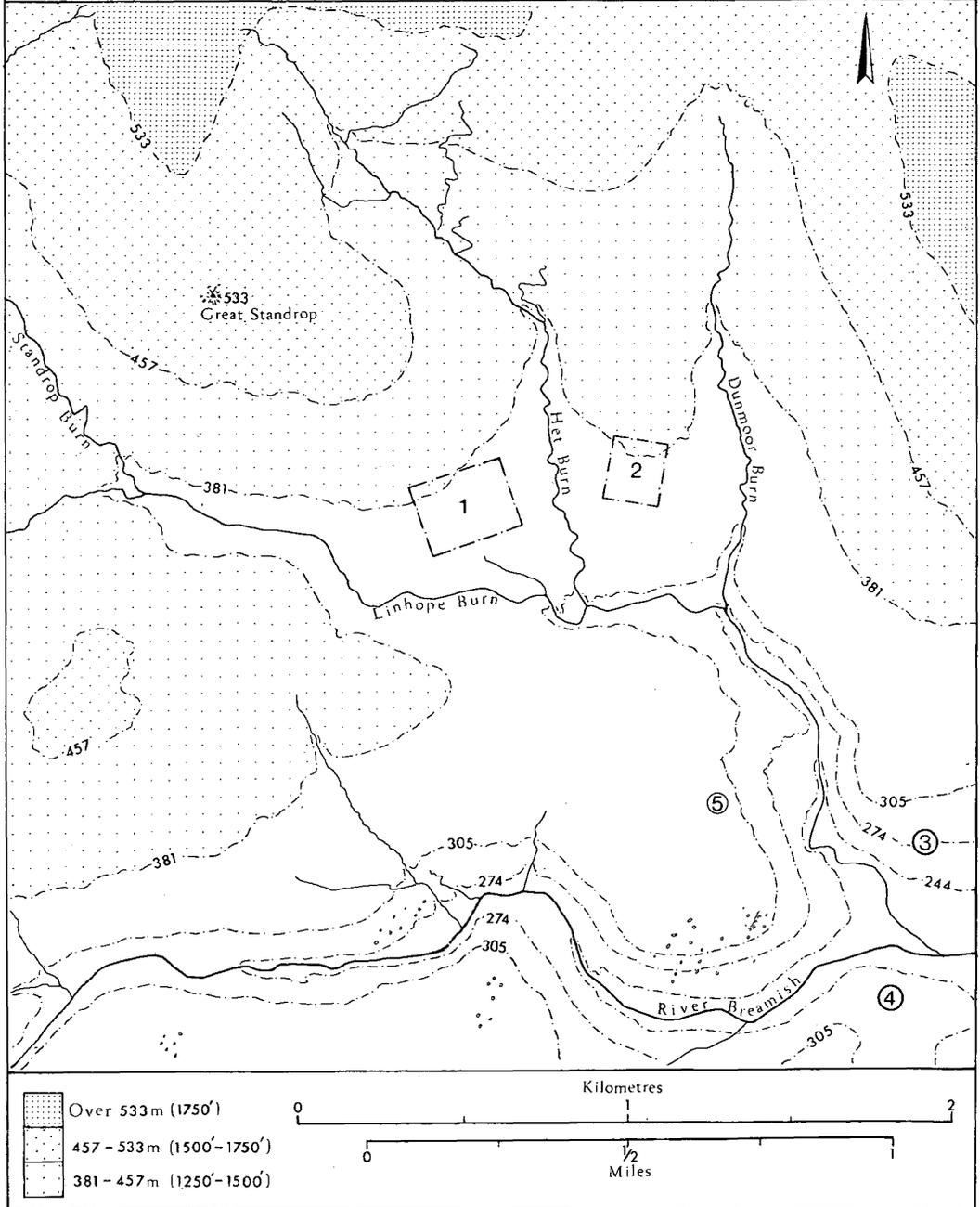


Fig. 1.

# Standrop Rigg, Linhope

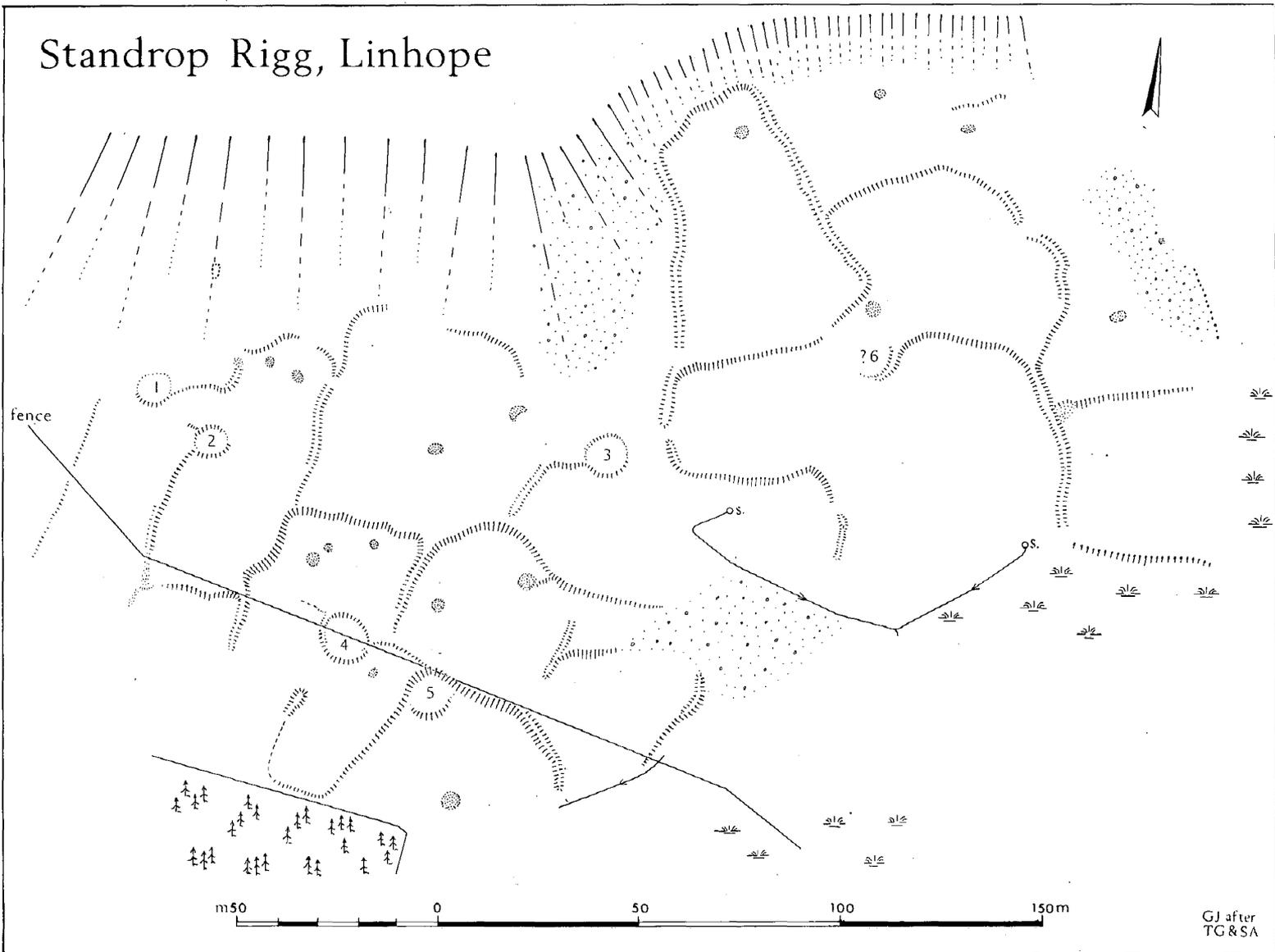


Fig. 2.

interior of the uplands by *permanent* settlements of any date: in this instance, the outliers of the many small hillforts and stone-built Romano-British settlements of the area extend no further into the interior than the spurs and hillslopes bordering the main valley of the River Breamish (fig. 1; 3, 4 and 5), the most notable being the bivallate fort and overlying, stone-built settlement at Greaves Ash (3). Such a phenomenon is not unknown elsewhere in the uplands between Tyne and Forth and may call for comment at a later stage.

At least five and possibly six stances for round buildings are discernible on Standrop Rigg, either in the form of slight, circular platforms or ring-banks of stone (fig. 2). The plot-system is demarcated either by low, turf and bracken shrouded banks of stone or slight terraces; at least a dozen of these small plots can be envisaged, varying somewhat in individual size but having an average area of 0.2 ha. Whether or not a number of breaks in the linear banks are genuine access routes remains a matter for conjecture, but there is no obvious driveway between the plots. Whilst the total area covered by the visible remains is in the region of 2.75 ha (c. 7 acres), it is possible that the clearance system could have extended initially into the area presently occupied by the plantation on the south and, more doubtfully, into what is now boggy ground to the east. At least twelve, small, turf-covered piles of stone, presumably also arising from land-clearance, are scattered amongst the plots; in common with the similar occurrence of clearance cairns and linear banks associated with unenclosed settlements elsewhere, this could be indicative of a separate and differently organized system of clearance (Jobey, 1981).

The smaller settlement to the east of the Het Burn consists of only one visible house-site accompanied by perhaps four cleared plots, marked by linear banks, and a few scattered clearance-cairns. Just such a close occurrence of two or more unenclosed settlements, sometimes, as here, separated by intervening burns, is not unusual in the uplands, but the possible significance of this juxtaposition of sites must remain uncertain in the absence of precise contexts.

#### THE EXCAVATIONS

The available resources allowed no more than the excavation of two house-sites, both of which were approached from different directions by linear banks (fig. 2; nos. 2 & 4). Ubiquitous bracken roots and small animal burrows, together with a number of natural stone stripes in the subsoil, all hindered the recovery of complete structural patterns on the two stances; the two former intrusions also created difficulties in the collection of suitable material for radiocarbon assay.

##### *Area/House 2 (fig. 3)*

From surface observation this appeared to be one of the smaller stances in the settlement. On excavation, however, the few stones which broke the surface on its circumference proved to be merely the uppermost stones of what, with due caution, must be described as a ring-bank rather than a stone wall, consisting of a jumbled mass of land-stones and some larger boulders. As such, it was at least 2.5 m broad and

# Standrop Rigg : 2

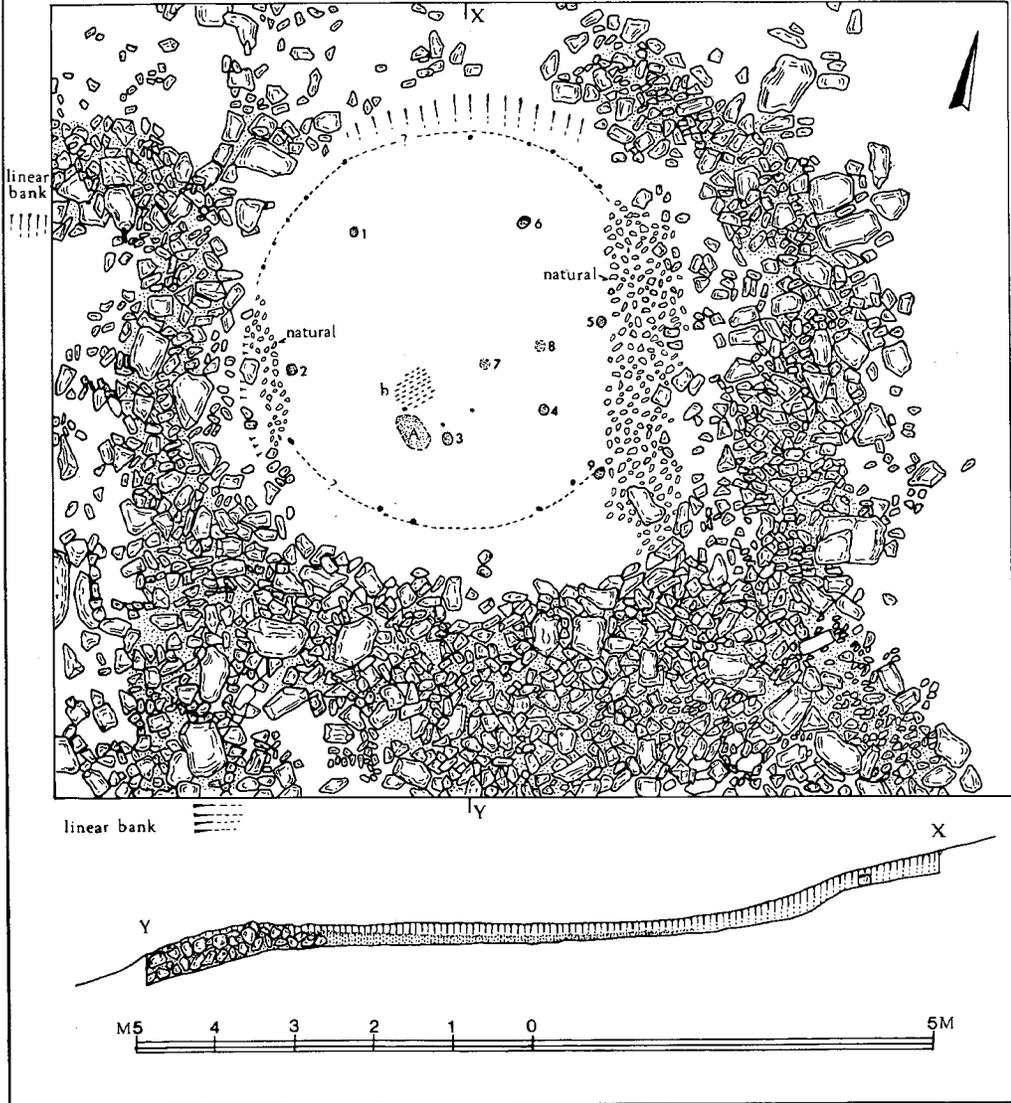


Fig. 3.

0.5 m in height on the southern, downhill arc, but faded out altogether above a slight interior scarp on the northern, uphill perimeter. At no stage during the excavation, including the final removal of the feature, was there evidence of an inner or outer facing, or any suggestion that it could have served as a foundation for a superstructure of other material such as turf. No post-sockets were discernible amongst the stones themselves or, ultimately, in the underlying land surface and subsoil. All told, there was no apparent difference in the nature of this ring-bank of stone and the low clearance banks which merged indistinguishably with its perimeter in the south-west and the north-west, but no more than doubtfully in the south-east; the two former banks were already visible before excavation as surface features bordering the cleared plots, the latter was not and, being absent from a cutting made at 2 m distant beyond the south-east corner of the main area, can probably be discounted as such. Although the entrances to round houses hereabouts normally fall in the arc east to south no break in the ring-bank could be detected in this sector.

Within the ring-bank of stone and immediately beneath the rooty topsoil, the first level encountered consisted of a grey, silty earth, possibly containing some downwash (fig. 3, section X-Y). This layer was more thinly disposed over the northern, uphill quadrants, but occurred in depths of at least 250 mm in the southern half of the interior, where it had accumulated against the basal stones of the ring-bank but did not extend beneath them. A spread of comminuted charcoal from the surface of this layer yielded a radiocarbon date of  $410 \pm 70$  b.c. (HAR-3399;  $2360 \pm 70$  b.p.), thus providing a general *terminus ante quem* for the ring-bank of stone and the main occupation of the site (below).

No interior structural evidence was discernible, nor were any potsherds recovered, until after the removal of the above layer and the exposure of the light brown, stony subsoil on which there were thin patches of dark grey occupation earth and charcoal. At this level the structural features consisted first of a number of small, somewhat ill-defined stake-holes, of which only the unequivocal examples have been shown on the plan (fig. 3); none of these exceeded 70 mm in diameter or 100 mm in depth below the surface of the subsoil. Fifteen examples lay on the circumference of a circle c. 5 m in diameter and in places occurred at intervals of c. 0.4 m apart; the series as such, though clearly incomplete, makes sense as the wattle screen or wall of a round house. Within the area thus circumscribed a number of the more substantial post-holes which were beyond question, in particular nos. 1 to 6, may be seen as the sockets for internal roof-supports. A further substantial post-hole no. 9, lying on the hypothetical circle formed by the smaller stake-holes and conceivably part of the provision for a south-east facing entrance, could not be matched by a second unequivocal example in the broken surface of the natural stone-stripe. And although the down-slope course of the latter was suggestive of a pathway running beneath the ring-bank, there was no artificially made-up surface or, in this instance, any discernible break in the ring of jumbled stone at any stage in the excavation. The remaining interior features consisted of a patch of burnt red subsoil (b), possibly the site of a hearth, and a shallow 'pit' (A) which was filled to a depth of no more than 140 mm with dark grey earth, charcoal-flecked but otherwise sterile on analysis.

Sherds of hand-built pottery were recovered from the patches of thin occupation earth or embedded in the subsoil surface within the area encompassed by the stake-holes, and also from beneath the outer spread of stone in the ring-bank on the southern and eastern perimeters. Two fragments from saddle querns, together with a number of possible hand-rubbers, were also incorporated into the uppermost stones of the ring-bank (*v.* small finds, below). By analogy, the decorated potsherds would seem to indicate a general context for occupation in the second millennium B.C. To some extent this is confirmed by a radiocarbon date of  $1050 \pm 80$  b.c. (HAR-3538;  $3000 \pm 80$  b.p.) obtained from charcoal, composed of hazel and some willow, in the greasy occupation earth directly overlying the subsoil in the area of post-hole no. 3.

#### *Area/House 4 (fig. 4)*

This house, being situated near to the foot of the main slope, was marked by a more prominent ring-bank rather than an actual platform. It is crossed from east to west by a modern fence which, as it controls the passage of sheep to and from the higher grazing lands of Great Standrop and Hedgehope to the north, had to be left in position during the excavation.

In this instance the ring-bank of stone was continuous, though somewhat less substantial immediately beyond the baulk in the north-east. The confused mass measured up to 3 m in overall width and 0.75 m in height, and enclosed only a roughly circular area some 8.5 m to 9 m in diameter. A linear clearance bank merged into its north-western perimeter, without any apparent break, and another if less certainly by the baulk on the east (*v.* fig. 2). As in the case of house 2 no kerbs or facings were apparent, either at the outset or during the final removal of large sections of the ring-bank, whilst at one point in the northern sector the stone had merely been piled against an enormous, earth-fast boulder. The plan, fig. 4, shows the extent of the ring-bank of stone as originally uncovered, except for the full extent of the interior spread in the south-east quadrant, where it covered a number of post-holes, and likewise in the north-east quadrant where it partly obscured pit A.

In the interior the same grey silty layer was encountered beneath the thin humus; as on the site of house 2 this layer did not extend beneath the stone bank but had accumulated against and above the basal layer of stone. Once again interior structural features were not evident until the underlying subsoil was reached, here somewhat stonier than hitherto and crazed with bracken roots. Nevertheless, the arc of a ring-groove was clearly discernible in the north-west quadrant as a dark stain in the subsoil up to 150 mm wide, though except for a minimal stain in the south-west quadrant it was not visible elsewhere, and when emptied was no deeper than 70 mm. At least twelve unequivocal vertical stake-holes occurred within or on the edge of the groove in the north-west, all of similar dimensions to those found with house 2, whilst a further twenty-five were recovered roughly on the projected circumference of a circle with a diameter of 7.75 m. Despite the undoubtedly incomplete nature of the record both the spacing and pattern of the stake-holes, especially in the north-western quadrant, would indicate the likelihood of some replacement of the wattle screen

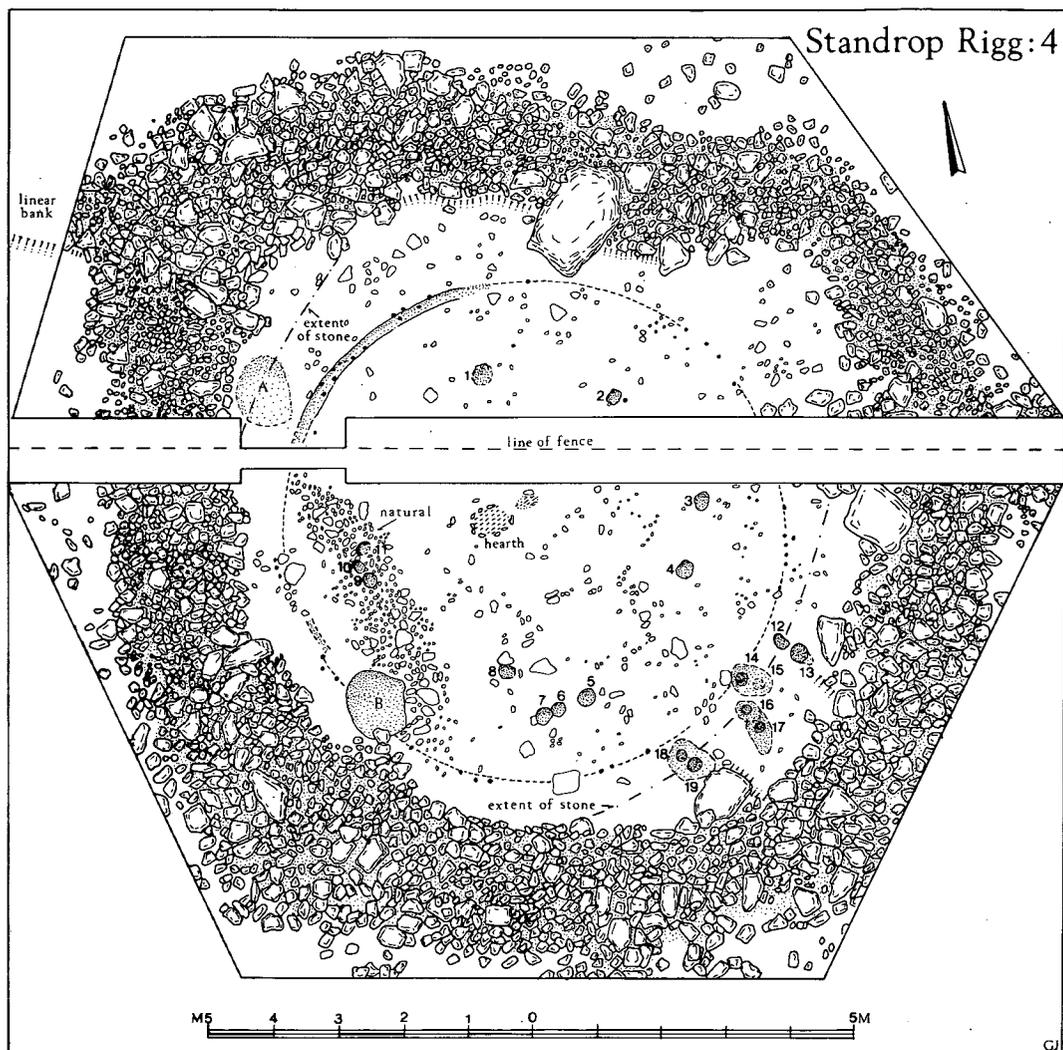


Fig. 4.

or wall if not the presence of more than one structural phase. Within this lay the stub-ends of eleven larger post-holes, 200 to 250 mm in diameter and up to 300 mm in depth, but in some instances, where odd packing stones were *in situ*, the diameter of the uprights could have been no greater than 180 mm. Though again not all post-holes were necessarily recovered, at least some of those numbered 1 to 11 may be taken to have supported vertical posts for a ring-beam and roofing spars. The remainder of the larger post-holes, nos. 12 to 19, were all in the south-east quadrant,

where they were partly or entirely overlaid by the stones of the ring-bank. Hereabouts, the underlying surface and subsoil was not only less stony and firm than elsewhere, but also much discoloured as if from concentrated traffic in antiquity. Post-pipes packed around with earth and some stone were discernible in the larger post-holes, though in two instances the latter had been disfigured and possibly enlarged by animal burrows. Although conclusive evidence was lacking, the arrangement of four sets of twin post-sockets suggest successive doorways, perhaps two in number, post-sockets 12 and 13 conceivably allied with 16 and 17, and 14 and 15 with 18 and 19. Such a structural solution would at least be in keeping with the evidence for more than one structural phase being represented in the disposition of the smaller stake-holes. A broad, gently shelving and discoloured hollow in the subsoil was the only indication of a pathway running from the proposed doorway beneath the unbroken mass of stone in the ring-bank, but, as in the case of house 2, careful dismantling of the latter revealed no kerbed passageway. Only one large basal slab, flat enough to have served as a paving stone or threshold, was inconveniently situated to have served as such on the edge of post-hole 19.

At least one slightly off-centre hearth had existed within the house or houses, marked by a number of small stones set into the subsoil around an area flecked with charcoal and burnt red to a depth of 40 mm. A second less extensive patch of burning on the subsoil, lying a short distance to the north-east, could well have marked the site of another though in this instance no kerbing survived.

The two remaining features within the area as a whole were both shallow pits. Pit A shelved into the subsoil to a depth of 120 mm and was filled with grey earth containing concentrations of charcoal from branches and twigs of hazel. Being largely covered by stones of the ring-bank this pit was presumptively earlier than the bank as it presently existed, whilst its proximity to the structural features in the same area seemed to preclude contemporaneity. Pit B was a more substantial bowl-shaped hollow, penetrating the subsoil and a natural stone-stripe to a depth of 300 mm. Its fill consisted of a grey silt, barely if at all distinguishable from the grey silty material which had accumulated against the ring-bank, though there was a substantial admixture of charcoal from hazel and willow in its lower reaches. By virtue of its location the pit was not contemporary with the stake circle and on balance was probably intrusive.

Hand-built pottery, some sherds bearing scored decoration similar to those from house 2, were found at various points beneath the grey silty accumulation over the house floor or lodged in the filling of larger post-holes, particularly in the area of the proposed doorways (*v.* small finds). Again no sherds were recovered from the main body of the ring-bank itself, though a few came from beneath the outer peripheral stones in the southern, downhill sector. Unfortunately, charcoal samples suitable for radiocarbon assay were severely limited, either because of their limited quantity or the danger of contamination due to disturbance caused by bracken roots and animal burrows. Only two samples met the requirements, neither directly related to the main structural elements, and these at best give no more than a probable *terminus post* and *ante quem* respectively for the main occupation. A sample from pit A yielded

a date of  $2070 \pm 80$  b.c. (HAR-3983;  $4020 \pm 80$  b.p.) and another from pit B a date of  $350 \pm 70$  b.c. (HAR-3981;  $2300 \pm 70$  b.p.).

### *Problems of Reconstruction*

In both cases there remain difficulties with respect to the reconstruction of the round houses. Sufficient evidence was recovered to indicate the presence of substantial internal uprights, capable of acting as roof-supports and presumably carrying a ring of horizontal members for roofing spars. In addition, the small stake-holes undoubtedly marked the circumferences of wattle screens or walls, but being of comparatively small diameter might be thought to be too frail for weight bearing, even if ringed with horizontal spars at the height of the eaves. Although the short arc of a ring-groove was also present on the site of house 4, it must be stressed that this was in no way comparable with the substantial ring-grooves or construction trenches for the solid timber walls of houses such as have been recorded on palisaded settlements and hillforts of the area. Be this as it may, it would be difficult to interpret the low ring-banks of stone as the tumbled outer walls of houses, perhaps furnished on the inside with wattle screens, or as walls of later structures. The preferred if no more than temporary solution would be to see the ring-banks as clearance material deposited around the existing timber-built structures, as almost certainly appeared to be the case on the unenclosed platform settlement at Green Knowe, Peeblesshire. In this event, however, it might also be necessary to assume that some amount of clearance had continued after these particular house-sites in the settlement were abandoned, thus obscuring the initial approach to their doorways (cf. platform 2, Green Knowe).

## SMALL FINDS

### POTTERY (fig. 5)

Although 143 sherds were recovered, 23 from various provenances in Area 2 and 120 from Area 4, no more than 17 different hand-built vessels are represented, the majority from Area 4 where on structural evidence the occupation could have been longer. There are some differences in fabric but all sherds contain grits of varying sizes which often break the surfaces. Most of the sherds are small and some slightly abraded, so that no complete vessels can be reconstructed. Many of the rim sherds, however, are undoubtedly from wide-mouthed vessels, perhaps of barrel or bucket-shaped form. With one exception the decoration, when it exists, is scored or gently incised, and is ostensibly confined to the upper parts of the outside surface, maybe in two instances above a slightly raised cordon. Only the rim sherds and decorated sherds have been illustrated.

### *Area/House 2*

1. Four conjoining sherds from a vessel with a wide mouth, probably up to 260 mm in diameter though the rim angle is uncertain; surfaces buff coloured with a carbon deposit on the outer, core dark brown and containing large grits; decoration now limited to a single,

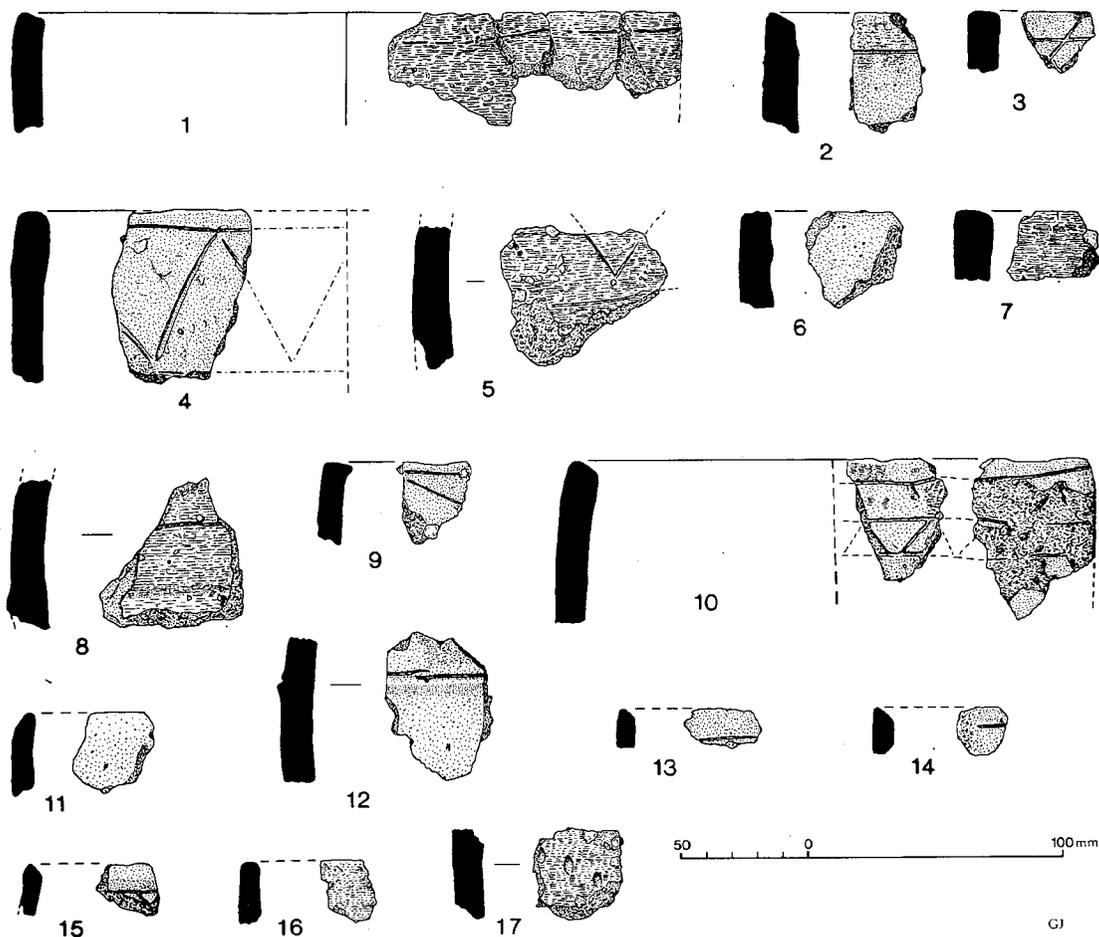


Fig. 5. Pottery (1:3)

horizontal, scored line but may have been more extensive (*cf.* examples below). From the old land-surface beneath the outer stones of the ring-bank, SE quadrant.

2. Rim sherd with internal bevel and remains of horizontal score mark on outer surface; fabric more sandy and containing smaller grits than no. 1. From the old land-surface beneath the outer stones of the ring-bank, SW quadrant.

3. Small probably flat rimmed sherd; sandy fabric with small grits, pink to brown in colour throughout and having a slight carbon discolouration on the outer surface; the scored decoration is clearly incomplete. Provenance as no. 1 above.

4. A single slightly rounded rim sherd of uncertain angle but from a wide-mouthed vessel; surfaces are buff to brown in colour and the dark grey core contains some large grits; scored decoration almost certainly consists of a continuous zig-zag between two horizontal lines. Embedded in the surface of the charcoal flecked subsoil within the area of the house floor, NW quadrant.

5. Wall sherd in fabric similar to but not the same as no. 1, containing large grits which break the surfaces; scored decoration when complete may have consisted of a zig-zag between two horizontal lines similar to no. 4, but this is not the same vessel. Embedded in a thin patch of occupation earth within the stake-circle, SE quadrant.

6. Rim sherd of uncertain angle; sandy fabric with small grits, the outer surface brown, the inner buff, and the core dark grey. From the old land surface beneath the outer stones of the ring-bank, SE quadrant.

7. Rim sherd, slightly rounded but again of uncertain angle; fabric similar to no. 1, but not from the same vessel. Embedded in the surface of the charcoal flecked subsoil, house floor, SW quadrant.

8. Wall sherd in a fabric similar to nos. 1 and 5; a single horizontal score mark lies well above what may be a slightly raised cordon. From beneath the outermost stones of the ring-bank, NE quadrant.

\* Not illustrated. A number of small, undecorated wall and base sherds in fabrics similar to the above vessels were recovered from patches of occupation earth or in the surface of the charcoal flecked subsoil within the area of the house and from beneath the outer peripheral stones of the ring-bank.

#### *Area/House 4*

9. Rim sherd flattened and pinched internally; buff surfaces and dark grey core with mixed grits; scored decoration consists of one horizontal and one tangential line. From earth fill of post-hole 16, covered by the inner spread of the ring-bank, SE quadrant.

10. Two rim sherds from the same wide-mouthed vessel, the outer surface of the larger sherd being abraded; surfaces brown with carbon deposit on the outer, and dark grey core containing small grits; scored decoration consists of three, spaced, horizontal lines with a continuous zig-zag between the middle and the lowest. Provenance as no. 9 but not from the same vessel.

11. Small rim sherd of very uncertain angle; fabric sandy coloured throughout containing only small grits. Provenance as nos. 9 and 10.

12. Wall sherd with carbon deposits on both buff coloured surfaces, core dark grey with grits; the more deeply scored or incised decoration consists of a broken horizontal line and residual traces of a tangential line on the right-hand break, possibly part of a zig-zag pattern similar to nos. 4 and 5; the narrow raised cordon appears to be intentional rather than the result of the application of the decoration. From in the top of the earth fill around post-holes 17 and 18.

13. Small rim sherd with internal bevel, from a thinner walled and probably smaller vessel than any of the foregoing; sandy fabric with small grits; surfaces buff in colour with a slight carbon discolouration on the outer, core grey; only one horizontal score mark remains. Provenance as no. 12.

14. Small rim sherd with internal bevel and wall thicker than no. 13; fabric dark grey throughout and partly vitrified possibly by subsequent burning; traces of a horizontal score mark below the rim. Provenance as nos. 12 and 13.

15. Rim sherd with sharp internal bevel, pinched out, similar to but not from the same vessel as no. 14; shallow horizontal score mark and part of an oblique score mark below this. From the surface of the subsoil within the floor area of the house, SE quadrant.

16. Gently rounded to flat rim sherd; buff to grey surfaces and a dark grey core containing large grits; two possible finger-nail marks below the rim. Provenance as no. 15.

17. Wall sherd, the larger of two from the same vessel; red to brown outer surface, grey

core with grits up to 5 mm across, carbon encrustation on the inner surface; decoration consists of fairly deep stab-marks. Lying in top of the carbonaceous fill of pit A.

\* Not illustrated. Small undecorated wall and base sherds include the following:- 35 small fragments, only 2 conjoining, from the earth and stone fill around post-sockets 16 and 17; 4 sherds from the surface of the earth fill around post-socket 12; 5 fragments from the patches of occupation earth or top of the subsoil within the area of the house; 5 fragments from the top fill of post-holes 3, 6 and 7; 4 small sherds from beneath the innermost stones of the ring-bank in the area of the proposed doorways, SE quadrant; a number of very small fragments from beneath the outer, peripheral stones of the ring-bank, SW quadrant.

The decorated pottery from Standrop Rigg would best fit into a context in the second millennium B.C., and certainly has no parallels amongst the material from the much later palisaded or fortified sites of the area. Although the main decorative motif of scored zig-zags between horizontal lines is fairly basic in nature it is, in brief, far from rare as an incised or scored design on the upper part of bipartite, bucket, and cordoned cinerary urns found in Bronze Age funerary contexts. And in two instances there are at least the semblances of what may have been slightly raised cordons below the decoration, again reminiscent of cordoned urns.

The material from other unenclosed settlements in the area, which have been or are currently being excavated, is not yet published. Even so, it is worthy of note that the site at Bracken Rigg, lying above Teesdale to the south, has produced some sherds from vessels of similar nature with scored decoration below the rims and a radiocarbon date of  $1230 \pm 60$  b.c. (D. Coggins, forthcoming). Amongst the material from the unenclosed settlement presently under investigation at Houseledge, in the northern Cheviots, there are a number of sherds decorated with twisted and whipped cord, which would suggest a context no later than *c.* the mid-second millennium B.C. in absolute terms, though there is one large vessel with oblique score-marks below the rim (Burgess, 1980, and information). By way of contrast, the pottery already published from the unenclosed settlement at Green Knowe, Peeblesshire, was all undecorated, though some of the radiocarbon dates and particularly those from platform 2 at Green Knowe are not significantly different from the single date of  $1050 \pm 80$  b.c. from house 2 at Standrop Rigg. But even at Green Knowe it was possible to draw particular attention to one distinctive vessel with a single cordon, not very dissimilar from a cordoned urn, as well as a number of vessels with single or multiple shallow, horizontal finger-grooves below the rims. The latter seemed to be a genuine decorative trait and occurs, even if at present only sporadically, on vessels from certain or presumptively later Bronze Age contexts between at least Holderness in Yorkshire to the south and Culbin Sands, Morayshire, to the north (e.g. Jobey, 1980, with additions).

For the present, and in view of the shortage of published material and investigation of domestic sites of this order, it would be hazardous to go beyond drawing attention to some similarities with funerary pottery of the Bronze Age and the possibility of filling the domestic ceramic vacuum with types other than the chronologically insensitive, so-called Flat-Rim pottery. The day may not be too far distant when a general typological sequence or even regional variations may be perceived.

## STONE AND FLINT (not illustrated)

1. Flint. Only three small flakes were recovered, all being waste; two came from the floor area of house 4 and one from beneath the outer spread of stone of the ring-bank in the SW quadrant. A few small flakes of quartz with sharp edges, possibly of use in cutting or scraping, were found on the subsoil surface in house 2.
2. Saddle Querns. Two fragments, broken in antiquity, were found amongst the stones of the ring-bank in Area 2 and one larger fragment came from a similar context in Area 4.
3. Pounders and Rubbers. Two slightly larger than fist-sized pounders with percussion marks at one end were incorporated in the ring-bank, Area 2, and a third came from the house floor. One bun-shaped hand rubber with an oval shaped grinding surface, measuring 150 by 220 mm, was recovered in two parts from amongst the stones of the ring-bank, Area 4.

## ORGANIC MATERIAL

Two small samples were examined by Mrs. A. Donaldson, University of Durham, but yielded no identifiable organic material, other than the wood charcoal from *Corylus avellana* (hazel) and *Salix sp.* (willow). The first sample was from a patch of occupation earth in house 2, which also gave the radiocarbon date of 1050 b.c., and the second from the groove of house 4, where the material was so penetrated by modern rootlets as to make it unsuitable for radiocarbon dating. From an early date hazel was probably coppiced to produce long straight lengths for use as wattle and timber, though there is no evidence to suggest that this was the case at Standrop.

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The possibility that there could have been some activity on the site as early as the mid-third millennium B.C. is indicated by a radiocarbon date from charcoal in a shallow pit adjacent to house 4. In the absence of associated structural evidence and artefacts appropriate to the period the nature of this activity must remain indeterminate. Albeit on the datable evidence provided by only a single radiocarbon date, obtained from material on the floor of house 2, the context of the settlement and its associated field-system of small plots would fall in the thirteenth to fourteenth century B.C. (1050  $\pm$  80 b.c., calibrated Clarke, 1975). Although closely dated domestic pottery of the period in northern Britain is scarce, the more distinctive decorated examples from the two excavated houses need not be entirely out of place in such a context (v p. 13). Whilst there could have been some further activity in the area of the settlement during the second half of the first millennium B.C., the nature of this is again doubtful, the evidence consisting of no more than a radiocarbon date from material in a pit which appeared to interrupt the course of house 4, and from a scatter of charcoal on the surface of a layer which had ostensibly accumulated after the occupation of house 2.

On the basis of somewhat incomplete structural evidence timber-built houses with wattle walls have been envisaged, lying within ring-banks of stones most probably obtained from clearance. The latter merged indistinguishably with the linear banks of stone surrounding the cleared plots, a situation perhaps similar to that encountered on the unenclosed settlement at Green Knowe, Peebleshire (Jobey, 1980). But it would

be less than judicious not to recognize the difficulties in interpretation, which are equally evident, for example, in the interim report on a similar unenclosed settlement at Houseledge in the northern Cheviots (Burgess, 1980). It would appear from short interim reports that other solutions may be offered in the case of houses of broadly similar contexts in the west of Scotland, where the perimeter stake-holes are seemingly interpreted as the inner lining to a wall or bank of stone and earth (e.g. C.A., 1982; D.E.S., 1980). There was no evidence for the reconstruction of house 2 at Standrop Rigg, but house 4 had probably been rebuilt on at least one occasion. And if the ring-banks of stone were the result of clearance around structures, then this activity could well have continued after the demise of both houses, since the amount of stone obstructing the approaches to the doorways was more substantial than could readily be taken as tumble. In this event, it would follow that not all of the six possible house-sites need have been occupied at the same time.

Some fragments of discarded saddle querns were recovered, but more explicit evidence as to the exact nature of the farming practice carried out in the small fields, either individually or collectively, was not forthcoming in the limited excavations. On the other hand some arable may be suspected, rather than clearance merely for improved grazing or hay. Pollen diagrams for the area generally, though they indicate clearances of tree cover at times during the second to early first millennium B.C., are often from locations somewhat removed from known settlements of this order, and perhaps not surprisingly sometimes lack evidence of cereal pollen. There are three exceptions in Northumberland, that most worthy of note in the present context being from Broad Moss, lying at altitude in the northern Cheviots. This core yielded barley in addition to agricultural weeds in the estimated Bronze Age levels and, as it happens, was taken from a location hard by a number of unenclosed settlements accompanied by clearance cairns and banks, though these are not recorded in the botanical report (Davies and Turner, 1979; Jobey, 1981). Although the settlement on Standrop Rigg and its neighbour above the Linhope Burn are at an altitude of *c.* 1250' (380 m), they both have southerly aspects, and at a time before any radical climatic deterioration there would seem little reason why cereal cultivation should not have been viable. A similar unenclosed settlement on Halls Hill above Redesdale, which is also accompanied by clearance, has produced seeds of both wheat and barley (T. Gates, forthcoming). It is some 400 feet lower in altitude than Standrop Rigg, but at the same time is in some respects more exposed, and by radio-carbon assays can be dated generally to the first half of the first millennium B.C., when the climate could have been less propitious than that which prevailed at the time when Standrop Rigg was occupied.

In general, these limited excavations have reinforced the potential, first demonstrated at Green Knowe in Peeblesshire, which the unenclosed settlement has to offer towards filling the gap in the settlement record hereabouts in the second to earlier first millennium B.C., and before the emergence of palisaded or stockaded enclosures and hillforts. Hitherto, the exceptions were few, consisting of some domestic but generally structureless coastal sites, the well established Late Bronze Age occupation of the western plateau of Traprain Law, East Lothian, or in the west, for example,

the doubtful Beaker house at Woodhead, Cumberland, to which, incidentally, more credence may now be given (e.g. Simpson, 1971). This potential has been further enhanced by recent investigations on those upland sites to which reference has already been made; namely, Houseledge, where an early Bronze Age context before 1500 B.C. is envisaged; Halls Hill, where radiocarbon dates point to occupation in the first half of the first millennium B.C. (570 B.C., 610 B.C., and 830 B.C.); and Bracken Rigg in Co. Durham which was conceivably occupied about the mid-second millennium B.C. or somewhat before this ( $1230 \pm 60$  B.C.). Likewise, in the lowlands, a seemingly unenclosed timber-built house at Look Out Plantation in the Till valley, Northumberland, has yielded radiocarbon dates which would suggest a general context in the first half of the second millennium B.C. (J. Monaghan, information). In a more complex setting there are also the unenclosed houses underlying the enclosed or defensive phases of the fort at Broxmouth in the lowlands of East Lothian, which could well predate the sixth century B.C. (P. Hill, interim report and information). The latter in particular brings to mind the unenclosed house once found to be earlier than the upland palisaded settlement at West Brandon, Durham, and sites such as Burradon or even Hartburn in the lowlands of south-east Northumberland, where it is equally conceivable that unenclosed houses could have preceded the enclosed settlements (Jobey, 1962; 1970; 1973). As a broad category, therefore, unenclosed settlements in the Border counties could range in date from the early second millennium well into the first half of the first millennium B.C., and at least overlap with some palisaded settlements in the lowlands if the unenclosed ring-ditch houses at Dryburn Bridge, East Lothian, be taken into consideration (J. Triscott, interim report).

Mainly as a result of the field-work of colleagues, the number of unenclosed settlements recorded in the Border counties has greatly increased in recent years. Extant house-sites are indicated by so-called ring-grooves, ring-ditches and ring-banks, or by platforms cut into the hill-slopes. The unenclosed platform itself is probably no more than a matter of topographical determinism, having no chronological or morphological significance. In Northumberland alone there are now well over fifty certain or probable settlements of this order, the number of visible houses in individual settlements varying between one and twelve but generally below six in number (T. Gates, forthcoming). Most of the recorded sites are accompanied by some form of field-clearance, and to this extent and for whatever reason they differ from the majority though not all of the unenclosed platform settlements previously recorded in the Inventories for Peeblesshire and Lanarkshire (R.C.A.M. 1967; 1978). Not surprisingly most of the Northumberland examples lie in the zone of survival in the uplands, though as we have seen they are not necessarily confined to such altitude. To publish a distribution map for the Border counties at present would probably serve little real purpose, except to redress the imbalance created by the earlier Inventories or to indicate those areas where further work may be necessary. Even so, with obvious caveats as to their precise individual contexts or supporting economy, certain observations on their distribution in selected areas of Northumberland may be apposite.

In the first place, the acceptance of a second millennium context would in a number

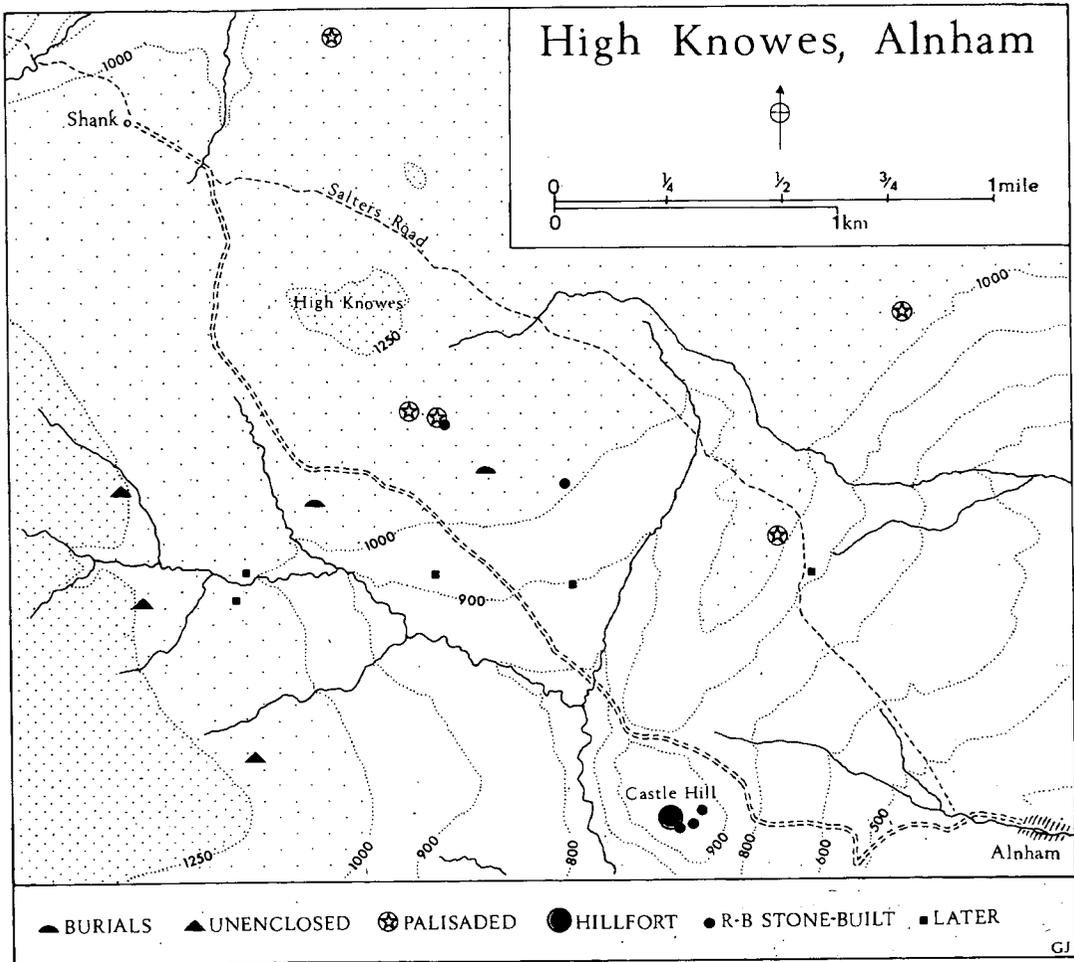


Fig. 6.

of instances go some way towards resolving anomalies encountered in field-work, some of which have been recorded in earlier volumes of these Transactions. A comparatively small area in the Cheviot foothills to the north of the reduced medieval village of Alnham, where the early archaeological landscape is reasonably well preserved, will serve as an example (fig. 6). It contains a reasonable quota of Romano-British type, stone-built settlements, the multiphase Iron Age hillfort on Alnham Castle Hill, a number of timber-built, palisaded settlements, and at least two groups of well robbed burial cairns. Investigation of four burial cairns some years ago yielded not only a cremation with a late type of Iron Age ring-headed pin, for which there would be no shortage of domestic sites in the area, but also burials with Bronze Age

Beaker and Urn (Jobey and Tait, 1966). At the time there appeared to be no corresponding domestic sites to account for the Bronze Age funerary remains, but the more recent discovery of three unenclosed settlements by Mr. Gates, all lying at 1200–1250 feet on the slopes of Hazleton Rigg to the west, would at least provide some contenders to fill the settlement vacuum. Such an exercise could also be applied to parts of the Border counties outwith Northumberland, perhaps nowhere more appropriately than in upper Tweeddale, where a clutch of Bronze Age funerary and ritual monuments exist in some isolation unless the unenclosed platform settlements are transferred from their Iron Age context in the Inventory to the Bronze Age distribution map (v. maps in R.C.A.M., 1967).

A further observation with respect to the general distribution of upland, unenclosed settlements in Northumberland is most apparent in the foothills surrounding the main Cheviot massif (fig. 7). Here they would appear to represent the maximum extent of penetration of early settlements into the interior when compared with the distribution of extant palisaded settlements and forts. This is a phenomenon which has already been noted in describing the location of Standrop Rigg itself. It has been suggested elsewhere (e.g. Burgess, 1980), that during the first half of the first millennium B.C. there was an expansion of agricultural activity into the uplands in response to the economic demands created by a rising population, possibly reaching a zenith after the mid-second millennium B.C. Whatever the reasons may be the argument would find some support in the area under consideration, though the concomitant suggestion that some of the earlier, low lying farming areas, such as the Milfield plain were now abandoned and exhausted is perhaps more debatable.

Our more immediate concern at this juncture, however, must be with the additional Malthusian proposal that at a still later date a combination of factors, including rising population, the exhaustion of thin upland soils, and deteriorating climate forced farmers out of their upland settlements such as Houseledge to places unknown, conceivably leading to “a major population disaster.” Subsequently, but only “three to four hundred years later”, people appeared again in the Cheviots with their palisaded enclosures and hillforts (*ibid*). The thesis at least requires some qualifications so far as this area is concerned. A withdrawal from the interior is not improbable, amounting to one or two kilometres in the Cheviots, and perhaps four to five kilometres in the upper Tweed valley if the distribution map of unenclosed settlements is set against that of palisaded settlements and hillforts (v. maps, R.C.A.M., 1967). But the proposed gap of up to four centuries in the settlement pattern may be quite illusory, especially in view of the few sites that have been excavated. As we have seen this hiatus need not have occurred in the lowlands, and in the uplands the radiocarbon dates from Halls Hill come down to and overlap with those for some palisaded sites, a probability which was already forecast in the report on the excavations at Greene Knowe (Jobey, 1980, p. 95).

The relative importance of the exhaustion of upland soils, as against that of deteriorating climate, is more difficult to determine in this particular area during the second and early first millennia B.C. As presently known the distribution of unenclosed settlements, spread out over time, would not necessarily demonstrate overpopulation

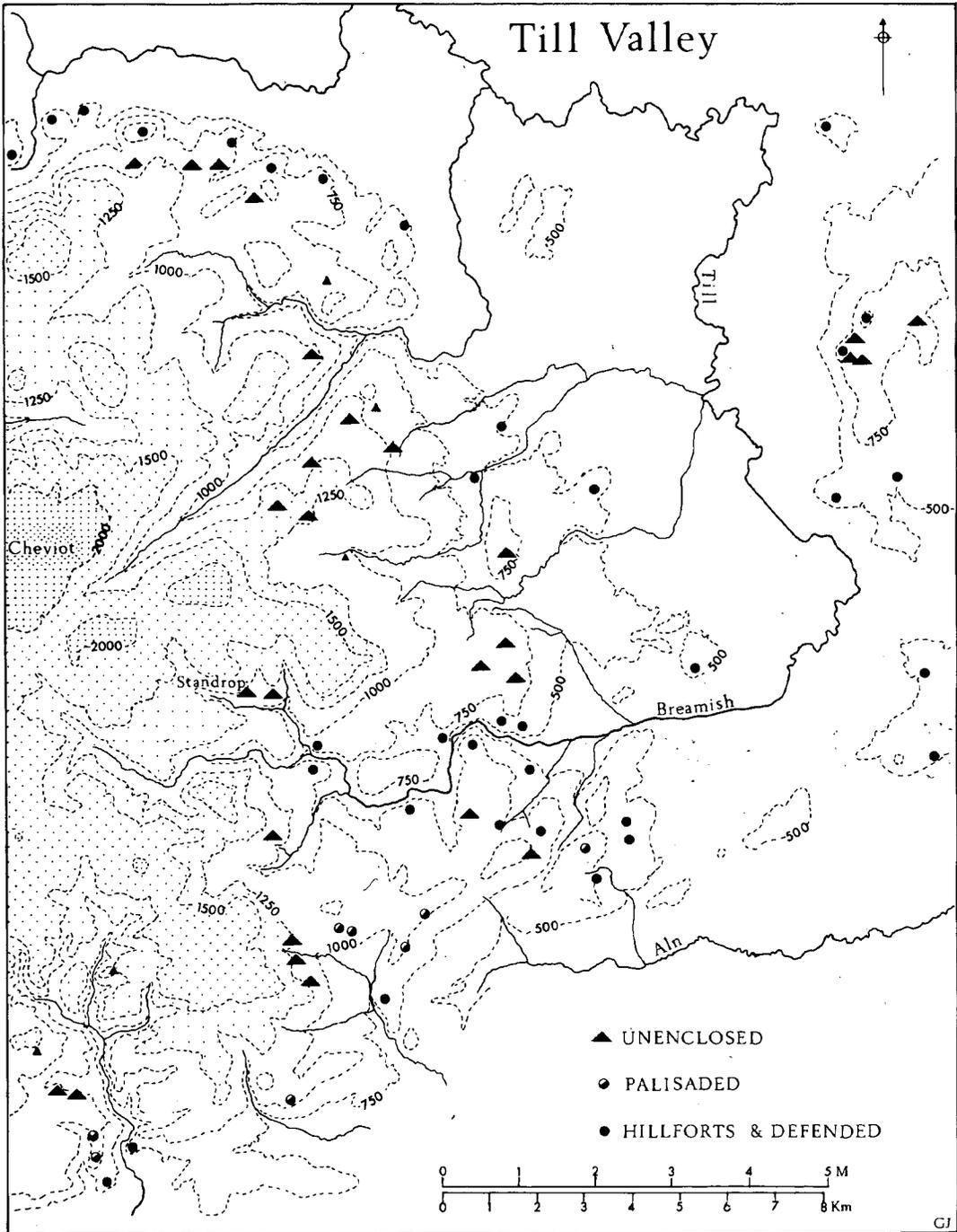


Fig. 7.

of the marginal lands to the extent that they were exhausted by human agency. On the other hand, the contribution of this factor could be more readily acceptable if large groups of clearance cairns in the uplands were to be added to the present distribution map, even though in these instances they are not accompanied by visible house-sites. Such an early context is conceivable for at least some of these cleared tracts, but the supporting evidence in this event would have to come from groups of clearance cairns on the Fell Sandstones to the east side of the River Till (Jobey, 1981).

Whenever these unenclosed settlements of the upland interior were abandoned, the palisaded settlements and more particularly the hillforts tend to seek out the more naturally defensible locations on the hills, spurs, and scarps overlooking the main valleys. This development towards protection and defence, maybe already under way by the eighth century B.C. in the form of palisaded enclosures, is not always a matter of seeking out lower absolute altitudes or less exposed situations in the face of climatic deterioration. Without entering into the realms of percentages, it may be worth noting that there are at least twenty five palisaded enclosures and hillforts in the uplands of the eastern Border counties which lie at altitudes which do not differ from or are well in excess of the most elevated of the unenclosed settlements with field-systems. Later defensive attitudes apart, one of the most notable differences between an unenclosed settlement such as Standrop Rigg and any palisaded or defended settlement in the area is the apparent absence of clearance plots or fields in unequivocal association with the later sites. However, various indications of somewhat different forms of agricultural activity do exist in the uplands (e.g. Halliday *et al.*, 1981), and until the contexts and associations of these are determined it would be unwise to assume that there was a radical change in the nature of the economy, synchronous with the appearance of the upland palisaded settlements and hillforts.

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