

### III

## A Trial Excavation on Hadrian's Wall at Buddle Street, Wallsend

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#### INTRODUCTION

Following the extensive excavations directed by Mr. C. M. Daniels, the site of the Roman fort at Wallsend has recently been landscaped, the position of its defences and some internal buildings marked out and the remains of its headquarters building consolidated for permanent display. This work was financed by North Tyneside M.B.C. As a continuation of the active interest shown by the Council in the remains of the Roman frontier in Wallsend, the Tyne and Wear Joint Museums Service was asked to undertake an excavation in June and July 1988 on open ground between Buddle Street and Rawdon Court, west of the fort, in order to determine whether it would be feasible to expose the remains of Hadrian's Wall for consolidation and eventual public display. It is uncertain whether funds will be available to proceed with the larger scheme to display the Wall and it has been thought advisable to report immediately on the work carried out so far.

The area of land available for excavation, and perhaps for the eventual display of Hadrian's Wall, is bounded by Buddle Street on the south, Benton Way on the west and to the north by a service road on the same line as the former Denham Terrace, which has now been mostly built over by modern housing (fig. 1). In 1812 the Carville or Colliery Chapel was built on this plot of land; in 1888 a Sunday school was added and in 1906 a new chapel was built, the old chapel being converted into another Sunday school in 1926 (Anon 1938, 2-4). These three buildings were demolished in 1978 and the site was eventually landscaped.

In 1929 the North of England Excavation

Committee dug two trenches in the grounds of the Carville Chapel (*NCH*, xiii, 493-4, fig. 8). The trench east of the chapel uncovered the footings of the Wall which were 8 feet (2.44 m) in width; no facing stones were found in position. The southern lip of the Wall ditch was found to be some 20 feet (6.1 m) north of the Wall. West of the chapel two courses of facing stones survived; at this point the Wall was 7 feet 6 inches (2.29 m) wide above its offsets and its footings were 8 feet (2.44 m) in width. The north side had subsided which had apparently brought about the collapse of the north face of the Wall.

Following these excavations a series of rock gardens was laid out east of the chapel built in 1926. The gardens incorporated "Roman Wall Stones" from excavations in the chapel grounds and in adjoining streets and also "stones displaced in the course of the extension of Stott's Road, Walker, where a cutting was made through the Wall and one of its turrets" and from the demolition of Stott's House Farm (Anon 1938, 5, 8). The "turret" referred to is possibly Milecastle 1 (Daniels 1978, 59). At the same time the line of Wall was marked out in concrete. All these features were destroyed when the chapel and associated buildings were demolished in 1978.

#### THE 1988 EXCAVATIONS

The purpose of these excavations was not so much to examine the Wall itself as to determine the depth of overburden and whether there were deposits associated with the Wall which would also require investigation if a length were to be excavated for public display.

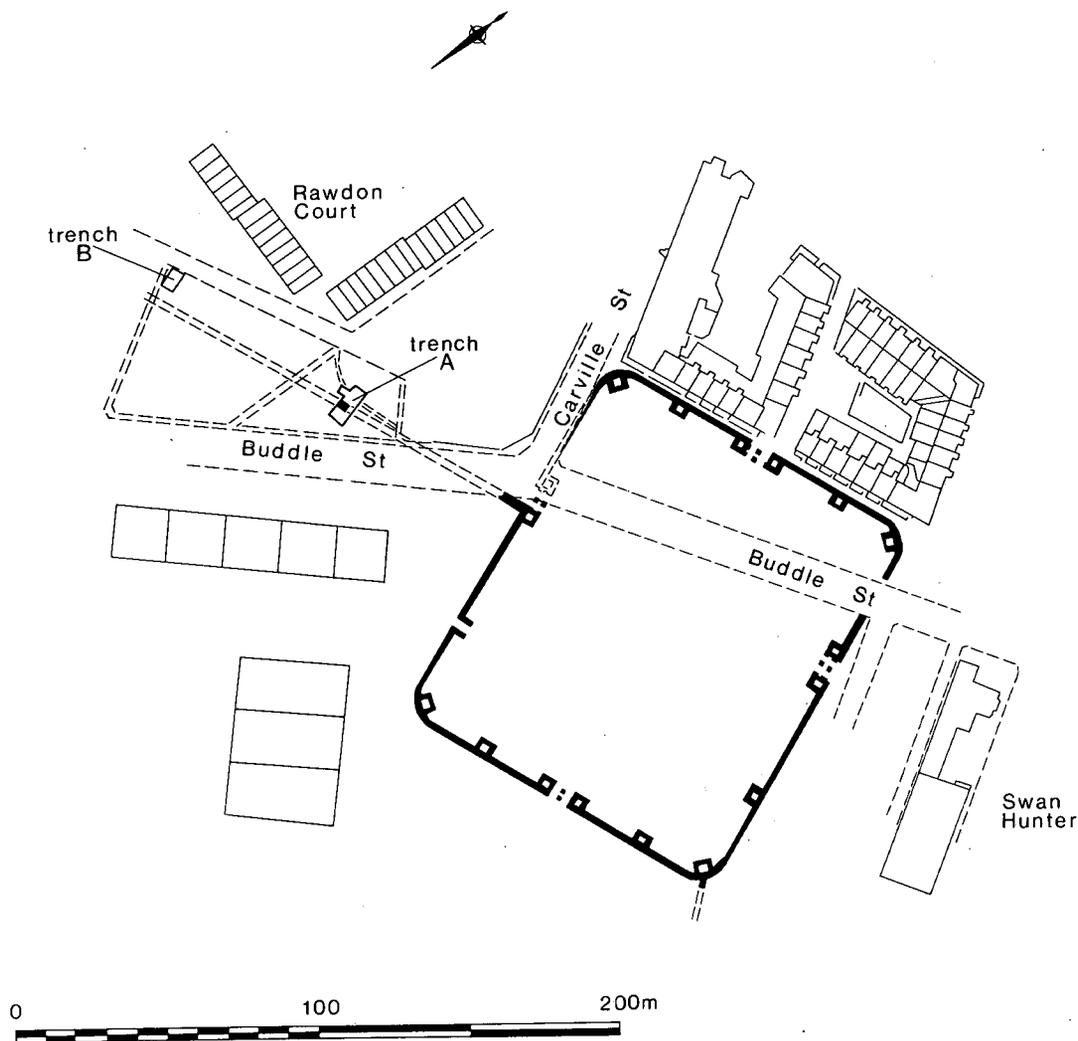


Fig. 1. The position of the excavations in relation to the Roman Fort of Wallsend. Scale 1:2500.

Most of the effort was concentrated on Trench A on the eastern part of the area, where the excavations in 1929 had indicated that only the footings survived.

#### *Trench A*

Modern demolition debris was cleared by machine to the level of the Victorian yard surface of brick (fig. 3, Section 1, 10); the underlying deposits were excavated by hand.

The natural subsoil was boulder clay, predominantly yellow in colour but streaked with grey and containing occasional rounded pebbles. A poorly defined horizon of clayey soil with much iron oxide staining was located on both sides of the Wall, although extending only c. 1.0 m beyond the north side, and was cut by its footings (fig. 3, Section 1, 40). Careful examination of this deposit and the surface of the underlying natural subsoil re-

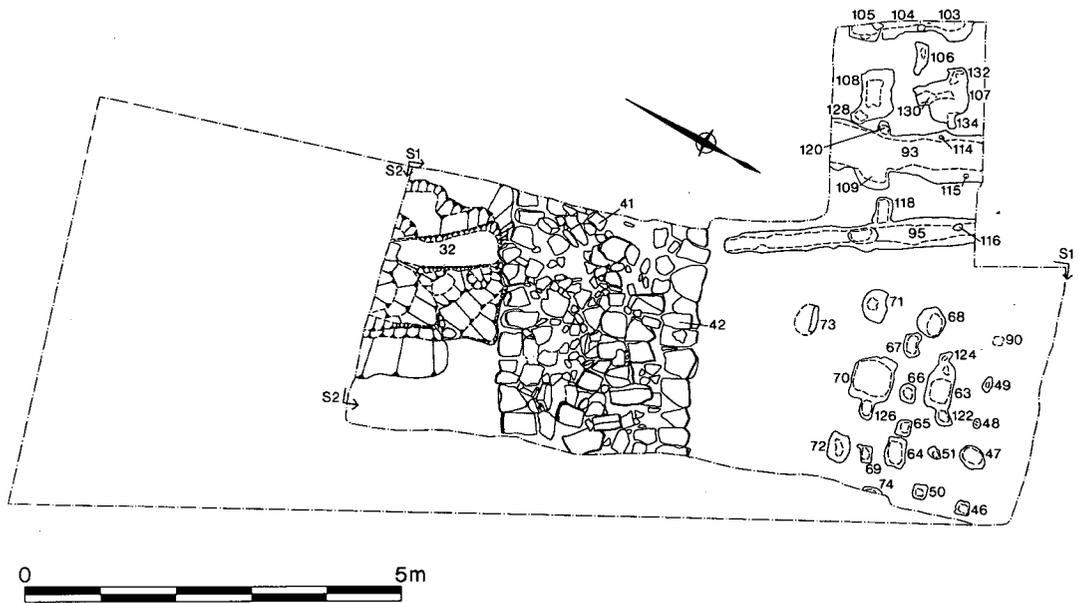


Fig. 2. Trench A: showing footings of Hadrian's Wall and complex of postholes north of the Wall. Scale 1:100.

vealed no traces of cultivation, such as ard- or plough-marks. This absence of evidence for agriculture was unexpected; excavations inside the fort suggested that its site had been under cultivation before the construction of the fort (Goodburn 1976, 308). A possible explanation for this absence was supplied by an extensive scatter of postholes *c.* 1.5 m north of the line of the Wall. They were cut through the natural subsoil, had a uniform fill of blue-grey silt and were sealed by a layer of silt which seems to have begun to accumulate after the Wall was built (fig. 3, Section 1, 39). The postholes clearly represent more than one period of activity but only more extensive excavation will reveal meaningful plans of the structures which they represent. Their prehistoric date cannot be conclusively demonstrated because the silt which sealed them contained pottery of late third- or fourth-century date. However, it seems improbable that the structures which they represent were in existence when the Wall had been built. An earlier Roman date is

possible but some association with the settlement responsible for the agricultural activities which preceded the Roman fort seems more likely.

The remains of Hadrian's Wall were revealed over a length of 3.22 m (fig. 2). Its footings were between 2.5 and 2.6 m in width and were set in a trench with a maximum depth of 0.1 m. Roughly-worked blocks of sandstone, some showing pronounced tapers or "tails" behind their front faces, and whin cobbles, also showing some rough working, were used to edge the footings. The core consisted of whin boulders and ironstone set in a matrix of redeposited boulder clay. One facing stone 0.19 m in height survived in position on the north side of the Wall, set back 0.08 m from the edge of the footings. No mortar was found adhering to its surface. Behind the facing stone was part of the Wall core, which was of sandstone rubble set in dark brown clay-silt.

South of the Wall and sealing the early soil

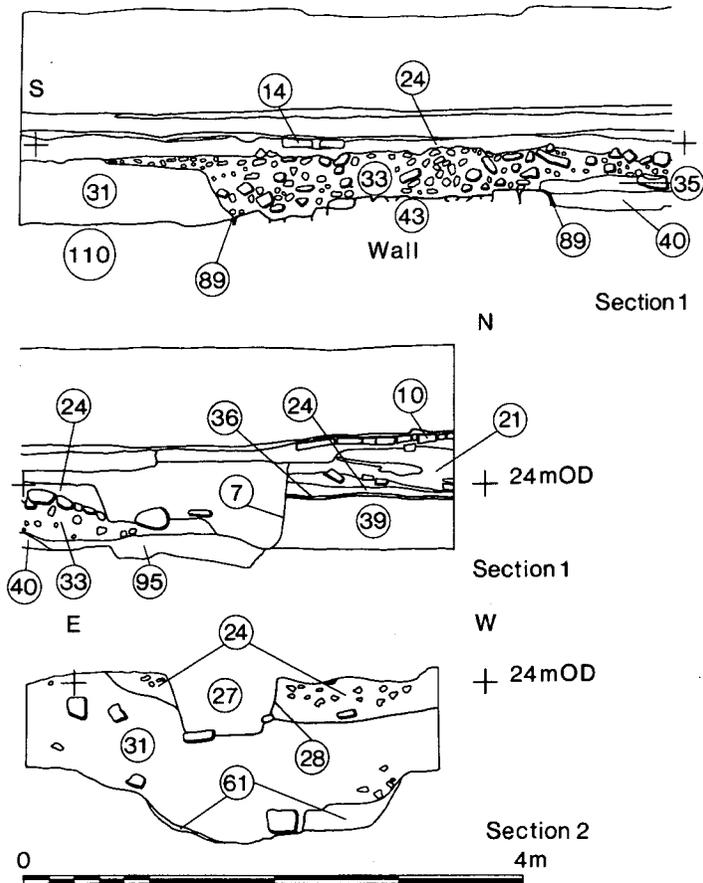


Fig. 3. Trench A: Section 1, east facing: Section 2, north facing. Recent deposits unnumbered except for 10, a nineteenth-century brick yard-surface. Scale 1:50.

horizon was a layer of masons' chippings, debris from the construction work (57, not illustrated). This was sealed by a layer of silt 0.2 m in depth which had accumulated after the construction of the Wall (59, not illustrated). A large feature which was cut through the silt ran up to the rear of the Wall, slightly displacing the southern edging stones of the footing, and extended southwards beyond the limits of excavation (fig. 2, 32). Its width was at least 2.63 m and its depth 0.95 m. Its profile was irregular, possibly as a result of weathering which would suggest that it had remained open for some considerable time. The feature

perhaps represents a drainage or boundary ditch extending southwards from the Wall. Its main fill consisted of clay-silt and contained three facing stones, probably from the Wall (fig. 3, Section 2, 31). The latest pottery from this deposit was of late third- or fourth-century date (fig. 4, nos. 3-9). A lower fill, perhaps representing primary silting, consisted of clay-silt with some lumps of clay, and produced a sherd of decorated samian (fig. 3, Section 2, 6). Silt had also accumulated on the north side of the Wall (fig. 3, Section 1, 35 and 39). It sealed two parallel gullies running from north to south. The eastern gully was 0.49 m in width

and 0.18 m in depth (fig. 2, 95); at its north end was a rectangular stakehole (fig. 2, 116). The western gully was 0.62 m in width and 0.28 m in depth (fig. 2, 93); two stakeholes were cut into its side (fig. 2, 114–15). The filling of these gullies was of clay-silt and contained pottery of third-century date.

The Wall had been robbed from above the level of the silt which had accumulated against its south and north faces. The filling of its robber trench consisted of sandstone rubble and grey-brown clay-silt (fig. 3, Section 1, 33); no fragments of mortar were noted. A *terminus post quem* of the late third century was established for the robbing of the Wall by a sherd from a plain-rim dish in East Yorkshire ware. The actual date of the robbing was perhaps much later. Above the robbing of the Wall were a series of deposits of nineteenth-century date. Over much of the northern part of the trench there extended a brick yard-surface (fig. 3, Section 1, 10) which contained a brick stamped "LUCAS", a product of a factory either at Eighton Banks (1858) or Dunston (1841–1948) (see Davison 1986). All traces of the rock gardens of the Carville Chapel had been removed when the site was landscaped subsequent to 1978.

#### *Trench B*

This trench was intended to locate the length of the Wall exposed in 1929 and to explore deposits to the north of it. During preliminary clearance by machine it became apparent that the modern overburden was much deeper than in Trench A and the natural sub-soil was more than 2 m below the present ground-level. The modern material was uncompacted and shoring would have been required, involving expenditure beyond the available resources; accordingly the trench was immediately back-filled.

### CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The excavations in 1988 established that the footings of the Wall survive and that their consolidation for public display would be

feasible. However, they also revealed a number of other features of Roman and probable pre-Roman date, the existence of which means that any further work on the Wall in this area could only be justified if it was part of a wider scheme of investigation. It has been suggested that the complex of postholes north of the Wall might well represent structures belonging to a settlement from which the fields underlying the fort at Wallsend were farmed. Excavations in the fort suggested that cultivation had continued until shortly before the site was appropriated by the Roman army; in places sandstone chippings from the construction-work were found lying in the bottom of the furrows of the "lazy beds" or narrow cordrig (Goodburn 1976, 308; the "bedding trenches" for timber granaries noted in this reference were later identified as agricultural features, information from C. M. Daniels).

Hadrian's Wall was originally planned to run no further east than Newcastle. The decision to extend it to Wallsend is generally believed to have been taken at the same time as forts were added to the Wall and the width of the Wall was reduced from Broad to Narrow gauge. The full width of the Wall footings has been exposed at seven points east of Newcastle excluding the Carville Chapel site; its width near the junction of Grenville Terrace and Blaydon Street, the westernmost point where the full width has been seen, was 2.57 m (*NCH* xiii, 497); east and west of the church at St. Dominic's Priory it was 2.44 m wide (*ibid.*, 496–7; see Rankov 1982, 342 for further excavation), at the junction of Fosseway and Whinneyfield Road it was c. 2.44 m wide (*NCH* xiii, 495) and at Stott's Road it was 2.49 m wide (*ibid.*, 494). The stretch of Wall footings reported on here was 2.5–2.6 m in width. One exception to the general width for the footings of about eight feet (2.44 m) is the "Branch Wall" running from the south-east corner of the fort at Wallsend to the River Tyne, which was only 2.13 m in width (Corder 1903–4, 44); this might represent a rebuild. The other exception occurs between Stott's Road and Finchley Crescent, some 700 m west of the stretch of Wall examined in 1988, where

the footings of puddled clay and cobbles were 3.1 m wide; the Wall appears to have collapsed because of subsidence and part of it was rebuilt on footings 3.0 m wide (Goodburn 1979, 279). The width of the footings at this point is of Broad Wall gauge, although the footings did not consist of the flat slabs set in clay which are typical of Broad Wall construction. This discovery raises the possibility that work began on building an extension of Hadrian's Wall from Newcastle to Wallsend before the Narrow Wall was introduced, although it seems that most of the work was actually carried out after its introduction. It underlines the importance of seizing any opportunity to examine the Wall on Tyneside. The eastern end of the Wall is more at risk than other parts because of its urban setting but it is also the section where there is the greatest uncertainty about the positions of milecastles and turrets, much of the evidence usually adduced for their spacing being "old and unsatisfactory" (Har-

bottle *et al.* 1988, 157).

There is one further important point arising from the excavations reported on here. The remaining core of the Wall was not bonded with mortar but was set in a dark brown clay-silt. Unfortunately there are no descriptions of the core at the other points where the Narrow Wall has been examined between Wallsend and Newcastle, although the stretch of Wall between Stott's Road and Finchley Crescent, apparently built to Broad Wall gauge, did have a mortared core (information from P. S. Austen). The Narrow Wall is usually described as having a core always set in lime mortar (e.g. Daniels 1978, 16) but recent dissections of the Narrow Wall at Chesters and Willowford (Bidwell and Holbrook 1989) and at Steel Rigg (information from J. Crow) have shown that the core was unmortared. The excavations at Buddle Street, Wallsend, demonstrate the existence of unmortared Narrow Wall core east of Newcastle.

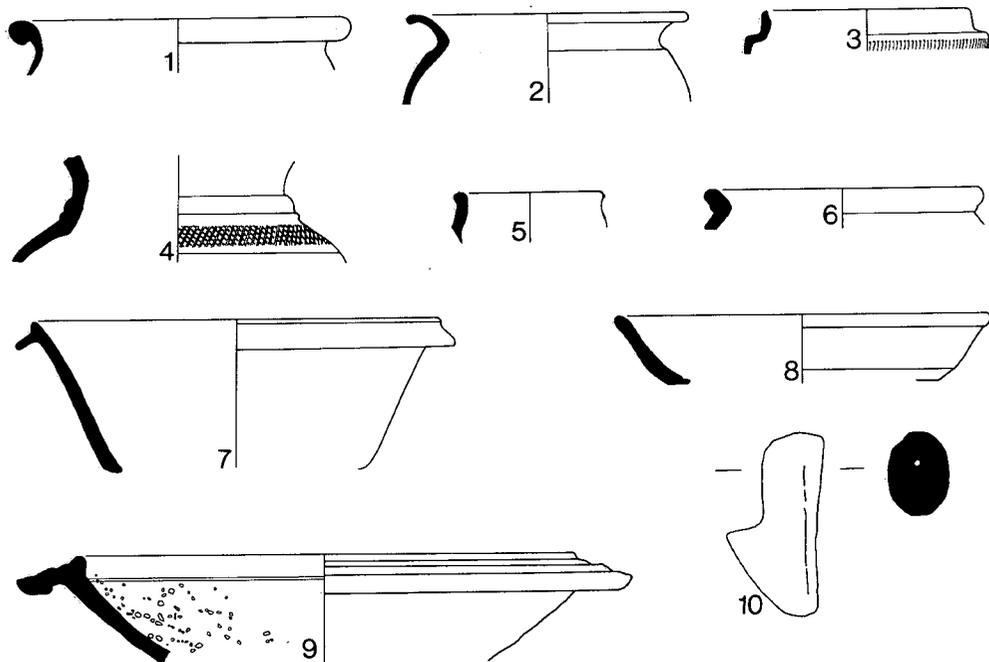


Fig. 4. Roman pottery. Scale 1:4.

## COARSE POTTERY

Roman pottery occurred in some quantity but only sherds of significance for dating purposes or of intrinsic interest are described below. The general character of the pottery was unremarkable, apart from the absence of later fourth-century pottery such as Huntcliff-type calcite-gritted ware and Crambeck painted white wares.

*Silting north of Wall* (fig. 3, Section 1, 39)

1. Rim of cooking pot in light grey fabric with darker surfaces, slightly micaceous, scattered small white and dark grey inclusions. Probably late second or third century.

Other pottery from this deposit included the rim of a Mancetter-Hartshill mortarium of late second- or third-century date, the rim of a Nene Valley funnel-neck beaker, second quarter of the third century or later, and a plain-rim dish with a single groove under the rim, probably in East Yorkshire grey ware and thus late third- or fourth-century in date (for the date at which East Yorkshire ware first appeared on the northern frontier, see Bidwell 1985, 179).

*Lower fill of feature south of Wall* (fig. 3, Section 2, 61)

2. Cooking pot in BB1 (Black-Burnished Ware, Category One); a third-century date is probable.

This deposit also contained a sherd of East Yorkshire grey ware, late third or fourth century.

*Upper fill of feature south of Wall* (fig. 3, Section 2, 31)

3. "Castor box" in Nene Valley ware.

4. Sherd from the neck and shoulder of a narrow-mouth jar in buff sandy fabric with soft brown slate-like inclusions, grey surfaces. There is a zone of impressed decoration on the shoulder, probably roller-stamped. Second or third century.

5. Hand-made rim, dark grey, slightly gritty fabric with wiped surfaces, probably a cruci-

ble, although no metal residues adhere to its surfaces.

6. Rim from a jar in grey sandy fabric with large ferrous and quartz inclusions. Date uncertain.

7. Flanged bowl in East Yorkshire grey ware. Late third or fourth century.

8. Dish in BB2 (Black-Burnished Ware, Category Two), probably no later than the mid-third century.

9. Mortarium from the Lower Nene Valley, probably third century (cf. Bidwell 1985, fig. 72, no. 164).

Amongst other pottery from this deposit were two sherds of amphorae in the same fabric as Fig. 4, no. 10, sherds from two Mancetter-Hartshill and one Lower Nene Valley mortarium and sherds of Nene Valley, BB1 and BB2 wares. Given the presence of East Yorkshire grey wares and the absence of calcite-gritted wares, a late third- or early fourth-century date for this deposit is probable.

*Unstratified*

10. Handle of amphora in red sandy fabric with frequent small black glassy inclusions, probably volcanic sand. Sherds of amphorae in this fabric occur commonly in deposits of third- and fourth-century date at South Shields; their source is uncertain at present. The amphorae have cylindrical bodies and necks with handles of circular or oval section. At Vindolanda this fabric was extremely rare; only two sherds were recognised amongst 103 kg of amphora sherds from the 1980 excavations (Bidwell 1985, 182). The sherds came from contexts dated to c. 250-60 and c. 275-300.

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