

VII

The Housesteads Bastle

Alan M. Whitworth

The bastle at Housesteads is located adjacent to the East guardroom of the south gate of the fort (NY789686). Prior to the consolidation of the bastle walls in 1986, a detailed drawing programme was carried out by the author on behalf of English Heritage to record the surviving stonework, not only of the bastle but also of the east and west guardrooms of the south gate. The south gate had initially been cleaned out in 1822 and 1830 by J. Hodgson with later work being carried out by Clayton and Bosanquet. An outline plan and brief description was published by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) as part of their study of shielings and bastles (Ramm et al, 1970, 82–83).

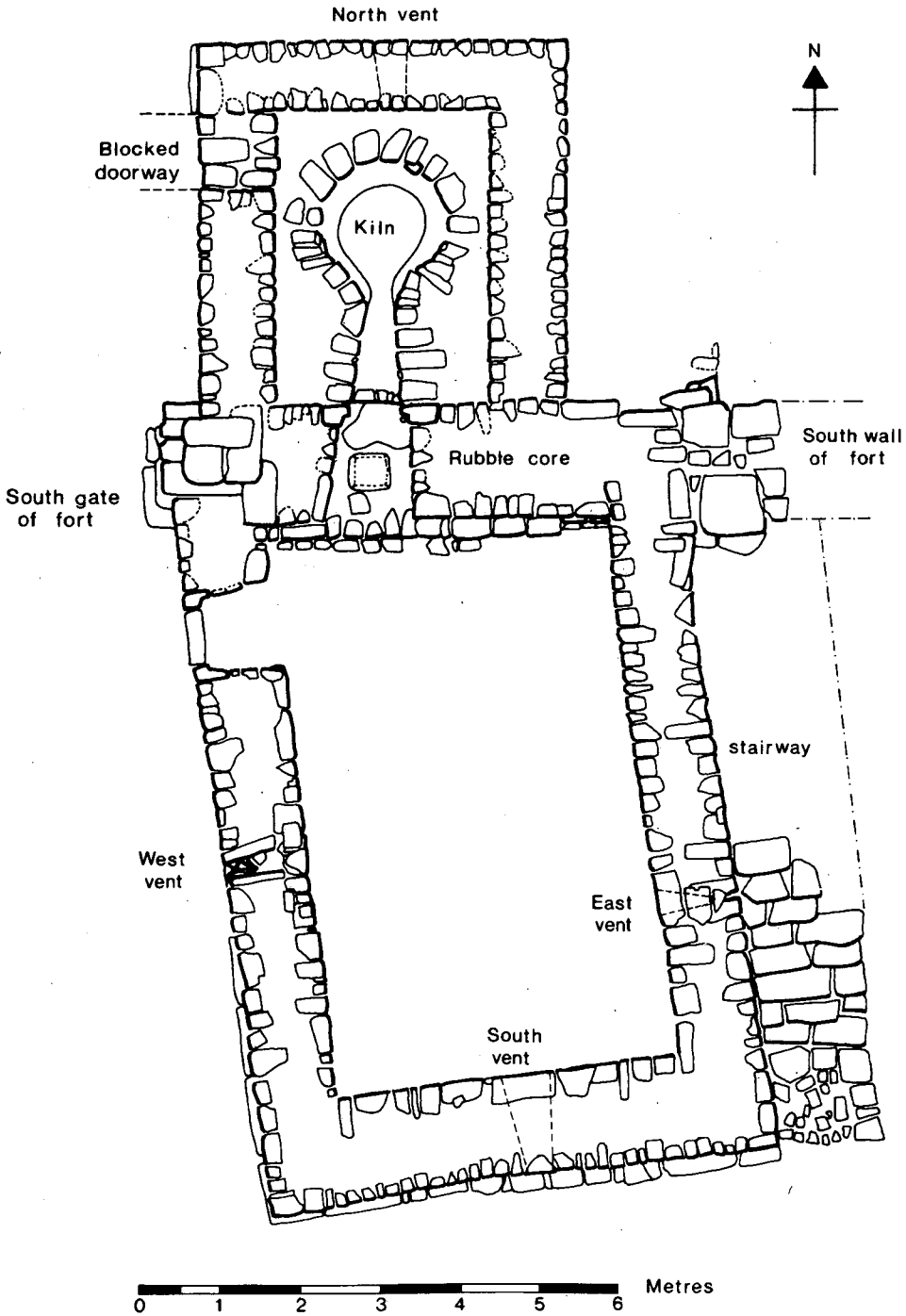
During the consolidation of the bastle walls in 1986 a retaining wall on the east side was removed to expose the stairway as well as the original face of the east wall of the bastle. The stairs, shown on the 1898 plan of Housesteads (Bosanquet 1904), had been buried by a 1.30/2.20 m wide turf-covered retaining-wall which extended the length of the east wall of the bastle to its junction with the south wall of the fort.

The stairway remains (fig. 1), consisting of eight steps laid on a rubble and earth base, rise to 1.35 m above the present ground level and vary between 1.20/1.50 m in width. The northern half of the stairway has been removed and this probably occurred during the period that the guardrooms and bastle were being cleaned out and exposed in the nineteenth century. The rubble packing under the stairs extended up to and over the south wall of the fort, on top of which several large flagstones had been placed to form a level platform. The external face of the east wall of the bastle stands 13 courses (2.60 m) high where it abuts the south wall of the fort. The bastle walls had been constructed

by the dry-stone technique with a rubble core fill. The stairway packing had covered a number of courses of fallen Roman masonry several of which have now been consolidated in the position in which they were found. A section of original core and mortar was exposed in the outer face of the south wall of the fort and has been retained behind the recent consolidation.

The stairway had not been bonded into the east wall of the bastle and blocked the east vent, indicating that the stairs were a later addition. The original entrance to the upper storey may have been either from the north east corner of the bastle, where Hodgson recorded a flight of steps (Birley 1937), or from an internal ladder on the ground floor possibly placed in the area where the kiln is now located. The kiln is almost certainly a secondary re-use of the guardchamber; this is indicated by the medieval door jambs in the passageway leading into it, as well as the vent in the north wall of the chamber now hidden behind the kiln walls. These jambs are virtually identical to those still in place in the ground floor entrance in the west wall.

This vent, which appears in photographs taken by C. Anderson during previous consolidation work in the guardchamber, may be seen at ground level on the outer face of the north wall of the guardchamber, partly blocked by an unconsolidated stone. The vents in the walls would all appear to be contemporary and part of the primary phase of the bastle. Since the kiln blocks the north vent, it can be shown to be an insertion into an earlier room. A second ground floor room is unusual in the design of bastles (Ramm et al 1970). The external staircase is also secondary but it is unlikely to be contemporary with the corn drying kiln, constructed once the bastle house was out of use (Crow 1989:6).



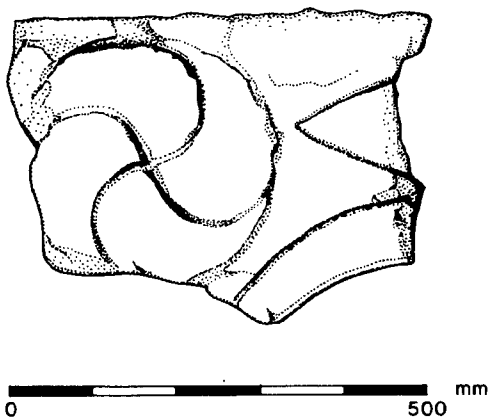


Fig. 2. Fragment of decorated Roman window head re-used in the sill of the west vent of the bastle.

The vents in the east, west and south walls have been exposed and consolidated. A fragment of sculptured stonework was found beneath the splays of the west vent and appears to have been part of an arched lintel for a window. This piece (fig. 2) has been consolidated in the position in which it was located.

No independent dating evidence was recovered during the consolidation work, but it may be noted that the bastle is evidence for the 16th or early 17th century occupation at Housesteads not as stated in the *Handbook to Hadrian's Wall* (Daniels 1978:148). For a survey of the structural history see Crow 1989:6.

The drawings of the south gate of Housesteads fort are now located in the plans room of HBMC at Fortress House, London with the site reference NS307 AS5 1/21.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge the invaluable

help and assistance given by Mr. J. Crow, archaeologist for the National Trust at Housesteads, Dr. S. Johnson of English Heritage and also J. Clarke and A. P. Whitworth. The drawings were produced by Kate Wilson.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BIRLEY, E., CHARLTON, J., HEDLEY, W. (1932). "Excavations at Housesteads in 1931", *Arch Ael*, 4 ser, Vol. 9 222/237.
- BIRLEY, E. (1937). "Fifth Report on Excavations at Housesteads", *Arch Ael*, 4 ser, Vol. 14 172/184.
- BIRLEY, E. (1961). "Research on Hadrian's Wall", 178/184.
- BOSANQUET, R. C. (1904). "Excavations on the line of the Roman Wall in Northumberland: 1. The Roman Camp at Housesteads", *Arch Ael*, 2 ser, Vol. 25 193.
- BRUCE, J. C. (1853). "The Roman Wall", 2nd ed. 185.
- CROW, J. C. (1989). *Housesteads Roman Fort. English Heritage Handbook*.
- DANIELS, C. M. (ed.) (1978). "Handbook to the Roman Wall" 13th ed. 334.
- HODGSON, J. (1822). *Arch Ael*, 1 ser, Vol. 1 263/320.
- HODGSON, J. (1840). "History of Northumberland", Pt. 2, Vol. 3, 186.
- RAMM, H. G., MCDOWALL, R., MERCER, E. (1970). "Shielings and Bastles". Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England).

Also consulted were the series of photographs (HOUSESTEADS VOL 1) taken by Mr. C. Anderson, foreman stonemason, during the initial consolidation of the guardrooms of the south gate at Housesteads. These photographs are located at English Heritage, Bessie Surtees House, Newcastle.

This paper has been published with the assistance of a grant from English Heritage.

Fig. 1. Ground Plan of the bastle house with external stairway and kiln at the south gate of Housesteads Fort.

