

## XIV

# Excavations in North-East England: A Note on the Excavation Index for England

### INTRODUCTION

SINCE 1978 the National Archaeological Record (NAR) of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) has been compiling an index of archaeological excavations carried out in England. This project has four main aims:

1. To compile a list of all excavations in England.
2. To locate the original records from those excavations.
3. To locate the finds from those excavations.
4. To indicate those excavations for which a report has been published.

The project began in the North of England, and has progressed on a county by county basis. With the completion of the Index for Greater London in 1989, national coverage has been achieved. Those counties which were compiled first are being brought up to date prior to initiating a programme of annual maintenance.

A separate Excavation Index record is made for each excavation. The following types of information are noted: locational details, period and type of remains recovered, name of the director of the excavation, sponsoring and funding bodies, the location of finds, the location and contents of the archive, the nature of any publication. They are recorded in separate retrievable fields on the computerized database.

At the time of writing, the Index contains over 25,000 records nationally, including over 1,200 for the counties of Cleveland (123 records), Durham (207 records), Northumber-

land (688 records), and Tyne and Wear (202 records). Excavation archives have been located for 53%, and finds for 57%, of excavations nationally.

### PERIODS REPRESENTED

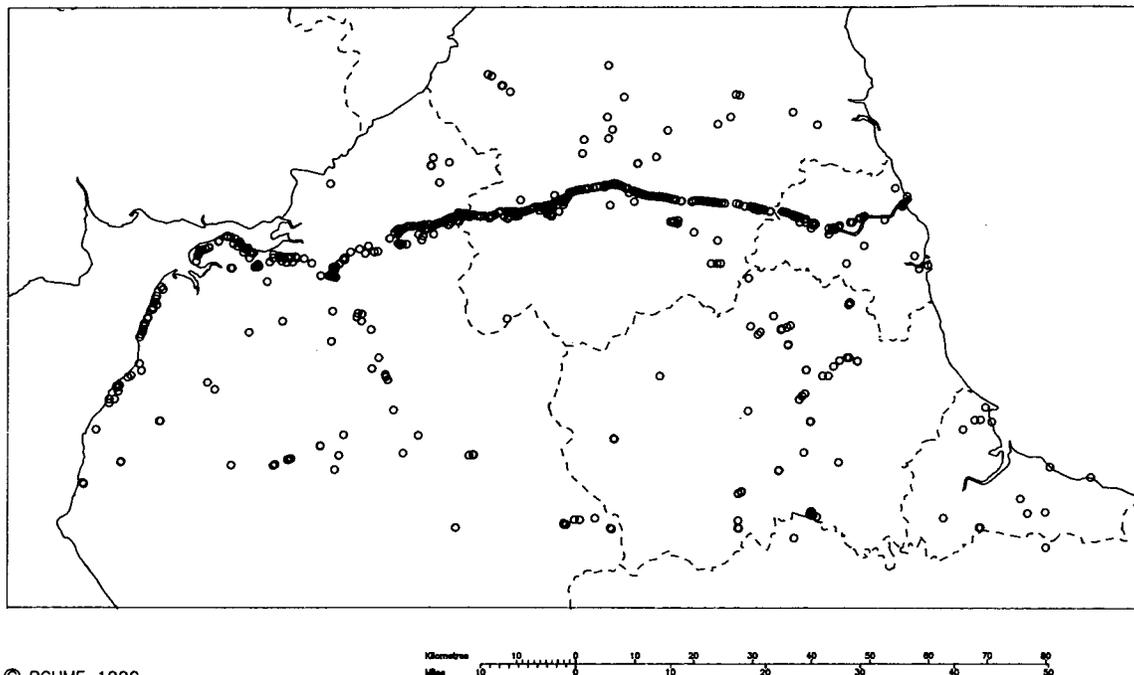
Table 1 compares the frequency with which each period is represented in excavation in North-East England with its frequency nationally. This reveals the focus of archaeological interest within the region, but it should be remembered that many excavations are multi-period.

The degree to which Hadrian's Wall, with its associated forts, milecastles, turrets, signal towers, roads, and other features, has dominated the attentions of archaeologists and antiquaries may be seen in Fig. 1. This is reflected

Table 1: Percentage of excavations by period.\*

	North-East England	National average
Palaeolithic	0.1	1.0
Mesolithic	1.0	2.0
Neolithic	1.4	5.1
Bronze Age	20.5	19.8
Iron Age	6.0	10.4
Roman	47.1	36.7
Early Medieval	5.6	9.8
Medieval	22.0	26.7
Post Medieval	9.1	13.2
"Unclassified"	3.1	8.3

\* (These figures record the percentage of excavations which have produced material of a given period. Owing to the presence of multi-period sites, these figures add up to more than 100%.)



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Fig. 1. Computer-generated distribution of excavations producing Roman material in the North of England.

in Table 1 which shows that excavations on sites of the Roman period are heavily over-represented. The frequency of excavations producing Bronze Age material is close to the national average, many of which are "barrow openings" by Canon W. Greenwell, J. C. Atkinson and others. All other periods are under-represented in excavation in the north-eastern counties.

#### DATES OF EXCAVATIONS

Figure 2 shows the number of excavations conducted in North-East England by decade. Disregarding King John's treasure hunt at Corbridge,<sup>1</sup> the earliest archaeological excavations recorded are those of Sir John Clerk and Alexander Gordon in 1724 at the Roman fort of *Vercovicium* (Housesteads).<sup>2</sup> A number of

other Roman sites and Bronze Age burial mounds were explored by antiquaries during the eighteenth century, but it was not until the middle decades of the nineteenth century that excavation with an archaeological intent became frequent.

Canon William Greenwell was active as a "barrow opener" throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, and particularly in the 1860s–1870s, while John Clayton excavated on Roman sites along the Wall from the 1840s–1880s. During the 1910s–1940s F. G. Simpson conducted over 150 excavations along the line of the Wall and explored its turrets and mile-castles. Another prominent excavator of those decades was Prof. I. A. Richmond, who often worked with F. G. Simpson. Just before the Second World War their fieldwork reached a peak which has scarcely been equalled. Much important work in the inter-War years was

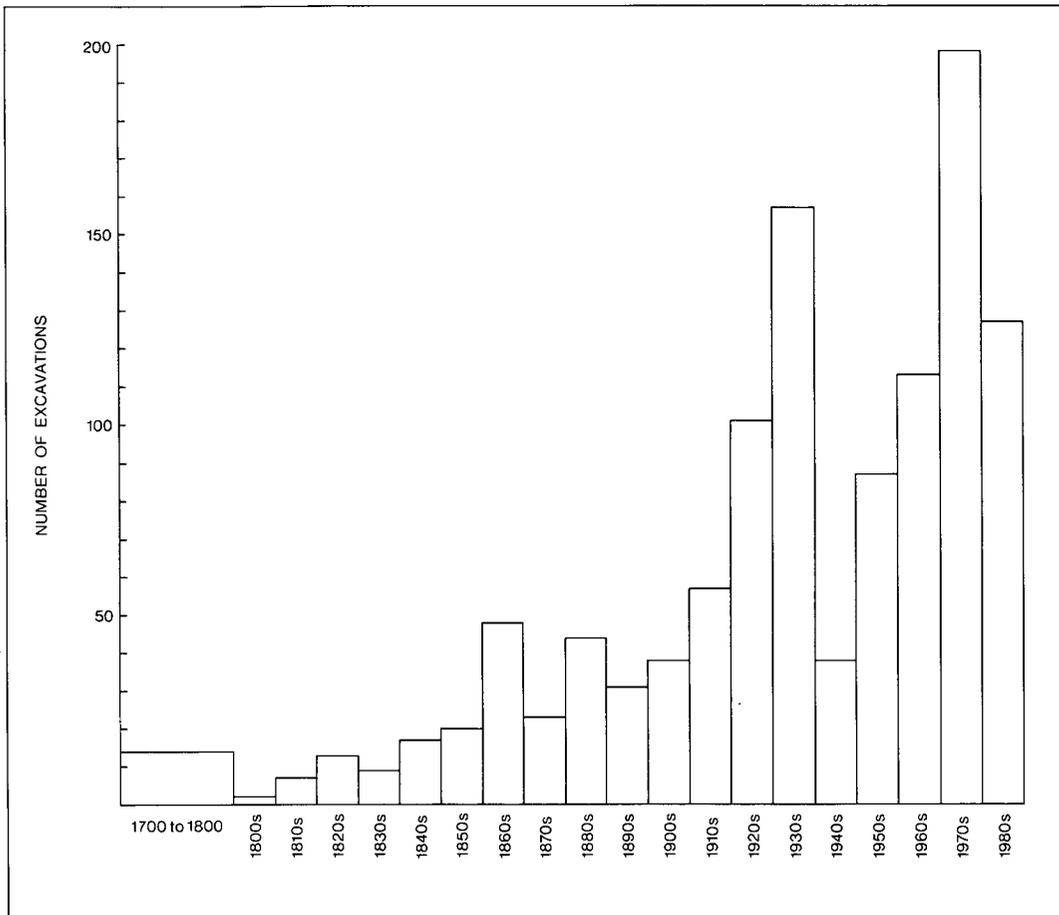


Fig. 2. Number of excavations by decade since 1800 (drawn by A. Donald).

funded by the North of England Excavation Committee and the Durham University Excavation Committee. Many of the prominent excavators of the post-War years are still alive, and need no further mention here.

#### USING THE INDEX

The database created by the Excavation Index is a national archaeological resource, and is available in the standard format for the whole of England. It is computerized, allowing in-

formation to be retrieved from any combination of fields in the record. The NAR also houses an expanding collection of archaeological records on microfilm which is available for public consultation.

Enquiries can be made by personal visit, or by telephone or letter as detailed below. On-line searching of the Index is possible via a computer terminal in the NAR library in Fortress House. Catalogues can be generated in answer to specific enquiries from members of the public. These should be framed using particular criteria of interest, e.g. location, excavator, period, or site type. This service is

free, although a small charge is made to cover the cost of printout.

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## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup>MPBW (1954) *Corbridge Roman station: official guide*, p. 3.  
<sup>2</sup>Gordon, A. (1726) *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, p. 77.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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