

XIII Notes

1 A “NEW” TILE-STAMP FROM CORBRIDGE AND LEGIONARY DISPOSITIONS ON THE TYNE–SOLWAY ISTHMUS

THE recent discovery of a picture of a previously unpublished tile stamp of *legio IX Hispana* amongst photographs of the 1906–1914 *Corstopitum* excavations (Bishop 1994, fig. 29) at Corbridge (fig. 1) offers some interesting insights into questions of legionary dispositions and supply mechanisms on the northern frontier of Britain during the first two centuries A.D. Apart from its association with other Corbridge photographs of the period, the tile has quite clearly had the numerals “40” painted onto it, probably denoting its discovery on Site 40 (in the West Compound) during the 1912 campaign of excavations (Forster and Knowles 1913). Confusion can arise over the use of both Latin and Arabic numerals to denote sites—Knowles’ published plan of the 1912 excavations uses Arabic numerals, for instance, whereas the text uses Latin.

The tile-stamp is from the same die as examples from Carlisle, Scalesceugh, and Stanwix (RIB 2462.4; Wright 1978, Type 5), and is assumed to date to the late 1st century A.D. If it was indeed found at Corbridge, then that would seem to indicate the supply of tile from the Scalesceugh tiliary and, by extension, the involvement of *legio IX Hispana* in the construction of at least one phase of the fort on the main site at Corbridge (Bishop and Dore 1989, 126–41). The likely date of the tile-stamp would seem to render the first (c.A.D. 85–103) and third (c.A.D. 122–38) phases unlikely (too early and too late, respectively) and point

towards the second (c.A.D. 105–22). It was this phase that was identified as the one to which the Corbridge Hoard probably belonged (Allason-Jones and Bishop 1988, 6), and that included objects with clear legionary associations, such as *ballista* bolts and a *pilum*, as well as the famous segmental armour (Allason-Jones and Bishop 1988, 110). Despite doubts on the part of some scholars about the validity



Fig. 1 The photograph of the previously unknown tile-stamp of *legio VIII*, possibly from Corbridge (Corbridge Excavation Fund).

of using artefacts to identify unit types (Maxfield 1986, challenged by Bishop and Coulston 1993, 206–9), the question nevertheless arises as to whether the Ninth's involvement in Corbridge extended beyond the construction of phase II and if they actually comprised part of its garrisoning force at any time. Legionaries from an un-named unit appear to be attested (on a writing tablet) at Vindolanda c.A.D. 104–20 (Bowman and Thomas 1994, 123 and 126—*Tab. Vindol.* II, 180, 22) and auxiliaries from Vindolanda were earlier being outposted to Corbridge (if the identification of the site with the *Coria* of the writing tablets is correct), so a link between the two sites might not be unprecedented (ibid. 93 and 96–7—*Tab. Vindol.* II, 154, 7; cf. Bowman 1994, 23).

All three British legions were evidently stamping their own products at Scalesceugh (*II Augusta*: RIB 2459.1–2; *IX Hispana*: RIB 2462.2–4; *XX Valeria Victrix*: RIB 2463.1–3), suggesting (but not, of course, proving) that this material was for the exclusive use of each legion. It is apparent that this did not hold true in the second century, for although detachments of all three legions (then *II Augusta*, *VI Victrix*, *XX Valeria Victrix*) were present at Corbridge, the only tile-stamps represented are those of *VI Victrix* (RIB 2460.48, ix–xvi; 49, vii–ix; 50, xvii–xxii), apparently from a tilery local to Hadrian's Wall (Frere and Tomlin 1992, 148). A logistical change may be indicated here, between the use of a unit's own products and the use of rationalised, “regionally” produced, supplies provided by kilns run by *legio VI Victrix*. These may originally have been established with the specific aim of supplying the needs of the forces constructing Hadrian's Wall (or, more properly, its associated structures requiring tile and brick). *Legio VI* continued to produce tile to supply its own needs in the York area (Frere and Tomlin 1992, 148), since the dies for the two regions are mutually exclusive.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to David Breeze, Charles Daniels, and Georgina Plowright, who all read and commented upon preliminary drafts of this

note. The photograph reproduced here was made available through the good offices of Georgina Plowright, curator of the Hadrian's Wall Museums for English Heritage. The copy was kindly made by Neil Askew.

M. C. Bishop

Braemar, Kirkgate, Chirnside, Duns, Berwickshire, TD11 3XL

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALLASON-JONES, L. and BISHOP, M. C. 1988. *Excavations at Roman Corbridge: the Hoard*, HBMCE Archaeological Report 7, London.
- BISHOP, M. C. 1994. *Corstopitum: an Edwardian Excavation*, London.
- BISHOP, M. C. and DORE, J. N. 1989. *Corbridge Excavations of the Roman Fort and Town*, HBMCE Archaeological Report 8, London.
- BOWMAN, A. K. 1994. *Life and Letters on the Roman Frontier*, London.
- BOWMAN, A. K. and THOMAS, J. D. 1994. *The Vindolanda Writing-Tablets (Tabulae Vindolandenses II)*, London.
- FORSTER, R. H. and KNOWLES, W. H. 1913. “Corstopitum: report on the excavations in 1912”, *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 3 ser 10, 230–80.
- FRERE, S. S. and TOMLIN, R. S. O. (eds.) 1992. *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain. Vol. II, Instrumentum Domesticum, Fasc. 4*, Stroud.
- MAXFIELD, V. A. 1986. “Pre-Flavian forts and their garrisons”, *Britannia* XVII, 59–72.
- WRIGHT, R. P. 1978. “Tile-stamps of the Ninth Legion found in Britain”, *Britannia* IX, 378–82.

2 WATCHING BRIEF AT MORTON WALK, SOUTH SHIELDS

A watching brief carried out in March 1994 by Tyne and Wear Museums during work by South Tyneside MBC, revealed further information on the Roman cemetery excavated in 1993 (AA⁵ 22 (1994), 43–66).

Machine-cut pipe trenches were observed parallel to the north-western and south-eastern sides of the Morton Walk playground. In the former, all archaeological deposits had been truncated, sandy subsoil being overlain by

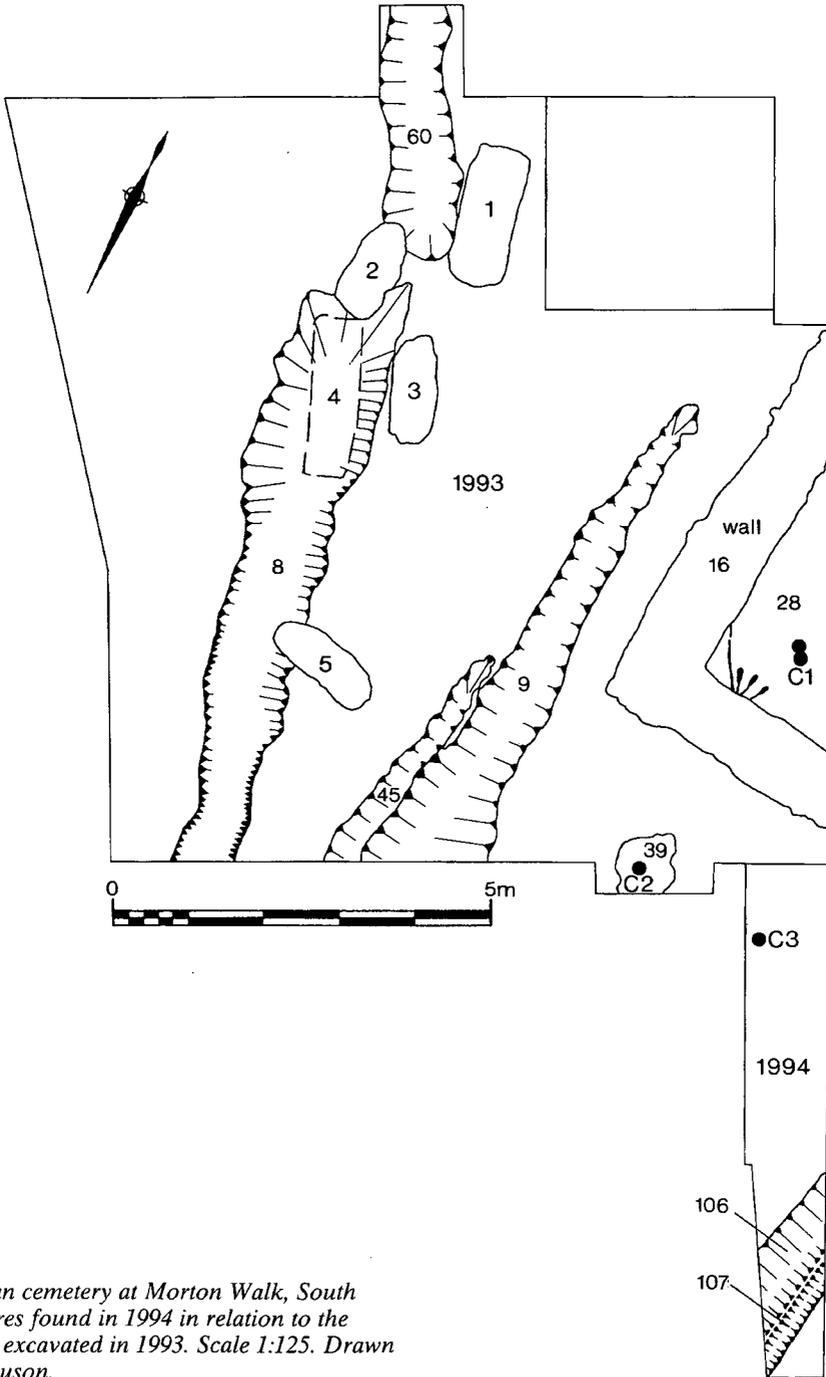


Fig. 2 Roman cemetery at Morton Walk, South Shields; features found in 1994 in relation to the main features excavated in 1993. Scale 1:125. Drawn by Keith Ferguson.

0.15 m–0.30 m of modern soil. In the latter, overburden was 0.30 m–1 m in depth, but sandy silts survived to a maximum depth of 0.50 m at the north-eastern end of the trench.

In a hand-dug trench adjacent to the 1993 excavation area (fig. 2), modern overburden a maximum of 0.2 m in depth overlay three silt layers. The upper (102) was 0.15 m in depth, the layer below (103) a maximum of 0.28 m in depth. Overlying natural was a layer (105) 0.26 m deep, presumably the Roman soil surface.

A cremation (C3) lay close to the cremations (C1 and C2) found in 1993. Fragments of burnt bone were contained in the truncated lower half of a cooking pot in Black Burnished Ware Category 2, dated to the second half of the second century (*Info.* P. T. Bidwell). It was overlain by the upper silt layer (102).

At the south-eastern end of the trench were two narrow V-shaped gullies, running north/south, parallel to the drainage gullies (9, 45) found in 1993. The depth of the larger (106) was c.0.35 m, that of the smaller (107) was 0.28 m; the relationship between them had been destroyed by terracing. The fills were of sandy silt.

Finds (by Alexandra Croom)

Layers 102 and 103 contained samian, fine wares and coarse wares, many sherds being small and abraded. Sherds of a poppy head beaker were concentrated in the vicinity of the cremation. Including the truncated cooking pot, the pottery weighed 0.56 kg in total.

A small enamelled plate from layer 102 was too distorted by fire for proper identification. The design, using white, blue and ?red enamel, involved concentric rings and at least one adjacent triangle.

Human remains (by Joy Langston)

Bone fragments were small (the largest being 2.5 cm) and no fragments of teeth were found. The well developed and compact cortical bone is suggestive of an adult, as is the form of the bone end fragments.

Acknowledgements

Tyne and Wear Museums are grateful for the co-operation of John Young of the Develop-

ment Services Department, South Tyneside MBC, and Messrs Dorin Ltd., contractors. The watching brief was supervised by Graeme Stobbs and the excavators were Tony Drake, Kevin Inkster, Paul Mayne, Brian Tansy and Ray Tebble.

Margaret Snape

Arbeia Roman Fort and Museum

Baring Street, South Shields, NE33 2BB

3 RADIOCARBON DATES FROM THE SETTLEMENT AT CHESTER HOUSE, NORTHUMBERLAND

INTRODUCTION

In 1985 the settlement at Chester House was excavated by the first named author on behalf of the Archaeological Unit for North-East England: a report was subsequently published in this journal (Holbrook 1985). During the excavations bulk samples were collected from a variety of features for environmental analysis, and these were examined by the second named author as part of a larger study of later prehistoric agriculture in north-east England. Owing to the complete absence of artefacts from the excavation, the dating of the various phases of the site was extremely tenuous. Consequently, a programme of radiocarbon dating was instigated as part of the environmental research. The results of the radiocarbon dating and of the archaeobotanical analysis have been published in Van der Veen (1992) where full details can be found. The purpose of this note is to bring the radiocarbon dates to the attention of the readers of this journal (see Table 1). Unfortunately, the dates do not provide conclusive evidence for the dating of the site. At least two interpretations are possible, both of which are presented below. The first interpretation relies heavily on existing knowledge of similar sites in the region and is the interpretation preferred by the first author. The second interpretation concentrates more on a critical assessment of the reliability of the

Table 1 Radiocarbon dates from Chester House. The dates have been calibrated using the calibration program by Van der Plicht and Mook 1987; see Van der Veen 1992: 51–71 for further details.

Material	Lab. Code	Date BP	Calibrated dates at 1 sigma confidence
<i>117 (fill of the evesdrip gully of House 2)</i>			
emmer chaff	OxA—1743	2030 ± 70	156 cal B.C.—54 cal A.D.
charcoal	GrN—15708	2360 ± 60	752 cal B.C.—388 cal B.C.
<i>140 (fill of ?ring-groove of House 3)</i>			
charcoal	GrN—15709	2530 ± 80	804 cal B.C.—530 cal B.C.
<i>127 (fill of post-hole 128)</i>			
charcoal	GrN—15707	2280 ± 50	402 cal B.C.—248 cal B.C.

radiocarbon dates, and is preferred by the second author. It will not be possible to test either interpretation through further excavations, as the site was destroyed by open-cast mining.

INTERPRETATION 1

In the report it was proposed that Houses 1 and 2 related to a phase of unenclosed settlement which pre-dated the construction of the banked and ditched enclosure. House 1 was earlier than House 2; it was tentatively suggested that post-hole 128 may have been associated with House 1. Little could be said with regard to the relationship of House 3, although its location suggested that it too predated the enclosure.

The dates obtained from the two samples from House 2 are clearly at variance and discrimination between them is difficult. The charcoal could easily be old material which was washed into the evesdrip gully; equally the emmer chaff could have fallen down cracks in the soil or have been brought down by animal activity. As reconstruction of the plan allows the potential co-existence of Houses 2 and 3 it may be better to favour the earlier date, in which case the two dates from Houses 2 and 3 point towards unenclosed settlement on the site in the earlier part of the first millennium

B.C. In the report it was suggested that post-hole 128 may have been associated with House 1, the earliest structure discovered on the site. If correct, the date obtained from that feature would appear to contradict the dating just proposed. Restudy of the site plan, however, shows post-hole 128 to be on a common linear alignment with the three other post-holes discovered: it is more likely therefore that it formed part of a fence unrelated to either of the houses. Indeed taking the single date from the post-hole on face value suggests that the fence line is later than the demolition of House 2.

Overall the dates point to occupation of the site from around 800 B.C. through to the beginning of the first century A.D. The earlier date would be consistent with Gates' (1983, 106) consideration that the pottery from the seemingly comparable unenclosed sites at Burradon and Hartburn should be dated to the earlier first millennium B.C. Unenclosed settlement at Chester House commencing around this time would therefore seem to be indicated. It is uncertain whether the date from the emmer chaff, if indeed it is intrusive into the context in which it was found, gives any indication of the date of construction and occupation of the banked and ditched enclosure. The dating evidence we have for this type of settlement is heavily biased towards the Romano-British

period. Nevertheless a first century B.C.—first century A.D. date for the enclosure is possible.

INTERPRETATION 2

The radiocarbon dates from Chester House consist of three dates based on charcoal and one date based on cereal chaff (Table 1). Before interpreting radiocarbon results it is essential that one carefully assesses two things: the relationship between the sample and the event it is meant to date, *and* the actual age of the sample at the time of burial or discard (for a full discussion of these issues see Van der Veen 1992, 51–71 and Waterbolk 1971). The date on the emmer chaff was intended to date the occurrence of emmer wheat at Chester House. The association between the sample and the event to be dated is good, and the difference between the age of the sample and the event to be dated is negligible. Thus, we can argue with a high degree of certainty that emmer wheat was being used at Chester House around 2030 ± 70 BP.

However, the situation is different for the charcoal dates. No charcoal was found/collected for dating purposes during the excavation, so that it was necessary to use the small fragments of charcoal present in the flotation samples. While there is an association between the date of a particular context (e.g. post-hole, ring-groove, evesdrip gully) and its fill, this association is not necessarily very close (there may be a long time gap between the construction of a feature and it being filled up). Furthermore, wood from long-lived tree species (e.g. oak) may be up to several hundred years old, and there may, consequently, be a time difference between the age of the sample and the time of discard/burial of several hundred years. In addition to that, such wood is also subject to re-use. One also needs to take into account the fact that charcoal can still be recognised as such once it has been reworked into later/earlier features. It may disintegrate into smaller and smaller fragments, but remains identifiable as charcoal. Thus, we cannot assess with any degree of certainty how

good the association is between the age of the contexts and the charcoal dates. With hindsight it is clear that these small charcoal fragments from flotation samples do not represent good samples for radiocarbon dating. It is the opinion of the second author that these three dates on charcoal from Chester House cannot be regarded as reliable indicators of the date of the houses. At most they allow the conclusion that some form of occupation was present at the site during part of the first millennium B.C.

There is a difference of *c.*300 years between the charcoal and emmer chaff samples from context 117. While cereal chaff can be subject to reworking just like charcoal, it does not survive reworking in the same way as charcoal. Once it starts breaking up it will become impossible to be identified to species level. The sample of emmer chaff selected for dating from context 117 was well preserved. The date on the emmer chaff is, therefore, a more reliable indicator of the date of the fill of context 117 than that based on the charcoal fragments.

There is no date for the enclosure ditch, nor is there any stratigraphical relationship between the houses and the enclosure ditch. Thus, the evidence allows two interpretations: the houses can either pre-date or post-date the enclosure ditch. While during the first millennium B.C. we can observe a general tendency for a move from unenclosed to enclosed settlements, there are exceptions to this “rule”: at both Thorpe Thewles and Stanwick a settlement sequence from enclosed to unenclosed has been identified (Van der Veen 1992). Neither the radiocarbon dates nor the stratigraphical evidence rule out the possibility that the enclosure ditch preceded the unenclosed settlement.

Neil Holbrook¹ and Marijke van der Veen²

NOTES

¹ Cotswold Archaeological Trust, Corinium Museum, Cirencester GL7 2BX.

² School of Archaeological Studies, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- GATES, T. (1983). "Unenclosed Settlements in Northumberland" in Chapman, J. C. and Mytum, H. C. (eds) *Settlement in North Britain 1000 B.C.—A.D. 1000*. Oxford, British Archaeological Reports 118, 103–48.
- HOLBROOK, N. (1988). "The Settlement at Chester House, Northumberland", *AA ser. 5*, 16, 47–59.
- PLICHT, J. VAN DER and MOOK, W. G. (1987). Automatic Radiocarbon Calibration: Illustrative Examples, *Palaeohistoria* 29, 173–82.
- VEEN, M. VAN DER (1992). *Crop Husbandry Regimes. An Archaeobotanical Study of Farming in Northern England 1000 B.C.—A.D. 500*. Sheffield, Sheffield Archaeological Monographs 3.
- WATERBOLK, H. T. (1971). "Working with Radiocarbon Dates" in *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 37, 15–33.

