

## V

# Investigations on the eastern margin of the extra-mural area at Benwell Roman fort

*Jennifer Proctor*

### SUMMARY

*An archaeological excavation undertaken ahead of the redevelopment of Trinity School, Benwell, on the eastern side of the extra-mural area of Benwell Roman fort, revealed several phases of activity dating from the Roman period onwards. The earliest feature, a metalled hollow-way, may represent part of a Roman track leading down the valley side to the River Tyne. The northern extent of this hollow-way was truncated by a boundary ditch — representing the south-eastern corner of an enclosure — which was subsequently backfilled and reinstated further to the west. The interior of this lay largely beyond the excavated area, and so interpretation of function is problematic. However, the limited artefactual assemblage recovered from the investigations suggested that the boundary ditches enclosed an area utilised for agricultural purposes. The small pottery assemblage suggested that the activity dated principally from the second century AD with limited activity into the late third century. Later phases of archaeological activity at the site relate to medieval and post-medieval agricultural use of the land.*

### INTRODUCTION

**A** PHASED PROGRAMME OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited (PCA) in 2008–2009 ahead of the re-development of Trinity School (Oakfield College Site), Benwell. The scheme was an element of Phase 2 of the Newcastle ‘Building Schools for the Future’ (BSF) Project, this being delivered and partly funded by Aura, Newcastle City Council’s private sector partner. The archaeological work was commissioned by Sir Robert McAlpine Limited (SRM), the principal contractor for the scheme, and had been required as a condition of planning permission on the recommendation of the Tyne and Wear County Archaeologist.

The site lies on the northern side of the Tyne valley, a short distance to the south of the line of Hadrian’s Wall and to the east of the Roman fort at Benwell. English Heritage’s Hadrian’s Wall Archaeologist also advised on the work as the site lies in the vicinity of two scheduled sections of the Roman frontier, which is a World Heritage Site. A desk-based assessment of the archaeological potential of the site (PCA 2008) was followed by a field evaluation in January 2009 which identified features of Roman and medieval date (PCA 2009a).

The subsequent excavation was undertaken in April and May 2009. A Project Design was prepared by PCA and approved by the County Archaeologist (PCA 2009b). Following the completion of the fieldwork, a post-excavation assessment report was prepared; this contains details of all methodologies employed during all stages of the work, descriptions of the archaeological remains with detailed illustrations, specialist assessments of all the artefactual and ecofactual material, and it quantifies all elements of the archive (PCA 2009c). The Tyne

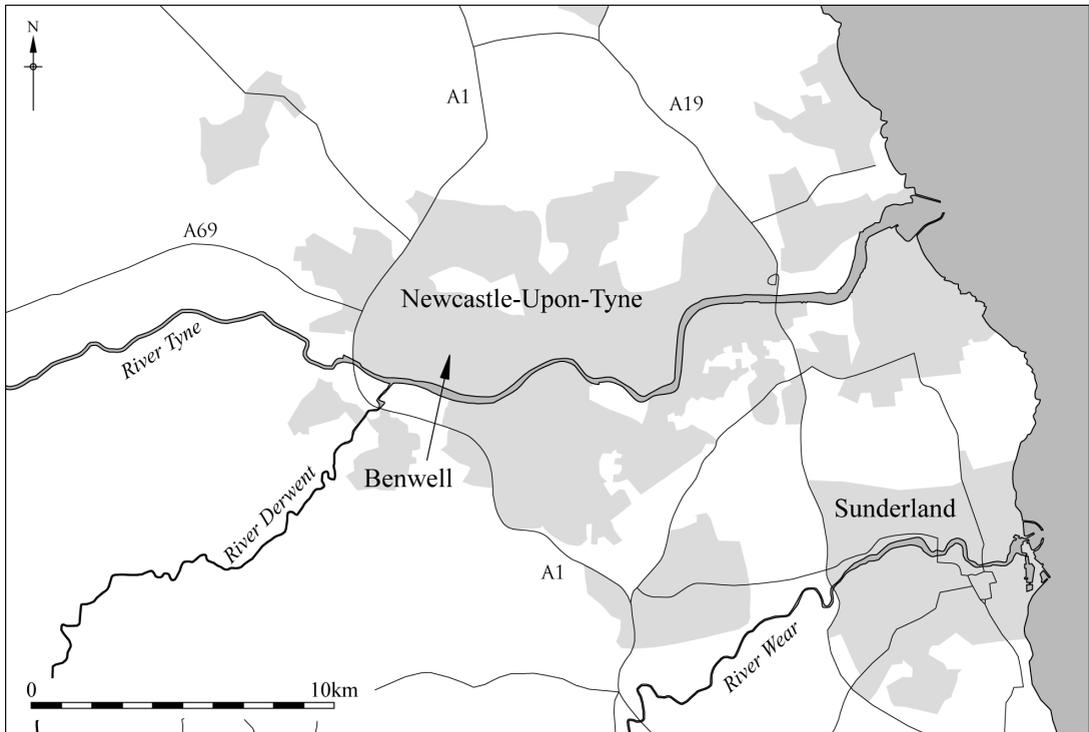


Fig. 1 Site location. Based on the Ordnance Survey map. © Crown copyright.

and Wear Historic Environment Record (HER) holds a copy of the assessment report. The archive will be deposited with Tyne and Wear Museums and Archives, Arbeia, under the site code TOB 09.

### SITE DESCRIPTION

Trinity School is in Benwell, a western suburb of Newcastle, lying c. 4 km west of the historic core of the city (fig. 1). The site is c. 100 m south of the A186 (West Road), which follows the line of Hadrian's Wall as it leaves the city (fig. 2). It is bounded by Condercum Road to the east, Conhope Lane to the south, and to the north and west by gardens of housing along various streets (fig. 3). Prior to the re-development scheme, school buildings, access routes and car parks occupied the north-eastern portion of the site. The existing school was modern and had replaced the former Lower Condercum House (Special School), which utilised a former dwelling of nineteenth-century origin. A community farm in the north-western part of the school site was to be retained as part of the scheme. Two modern buildings in the south-eastern corner of the site were also to be retained. The majority of the southern portion of the site was undeveloped; to the south-west was rough pasture for animal grazing and to the south-east was a sports pitch. The archaeological excavation (fig. 3) was conducted across an irregular-shaped area of land, measuring a maximum of 35 m from east to west by 32 m from north to south, located at the northern end of the rough pasture (NZ 2180 6449).

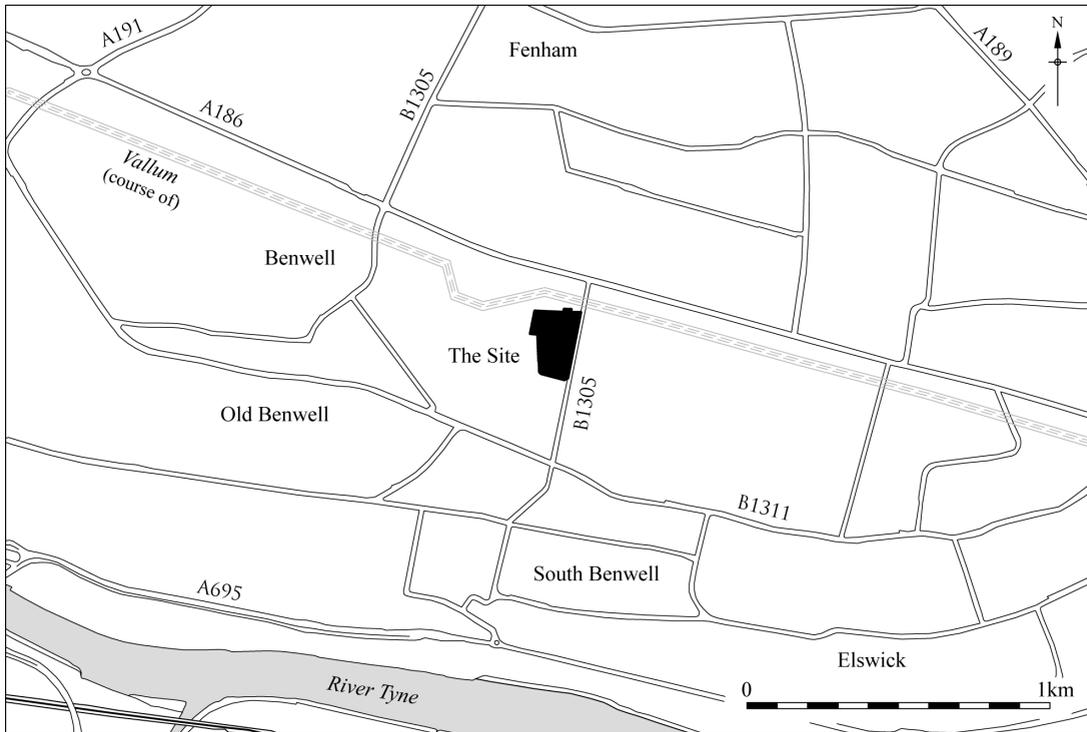


Fig. 2 Detailed site location. Based on the Ordnance Survey map. © Crown copyright.

The solid geology of the area is the Middle Coal Measures, which predominantly comprises interbedded bands of sandstone, mudstone, siltstone and coal seams. Quaternary glacial drift deposits of variable depth, mainly till, overlie the solid geology in the area. The site of the school lies on the sloping northern valley side of the River Tyne and the land falls from a level of around 120 m OD on the West Road to little more than sea-level at the river, just over 1 km to the south.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### BENWELL FORT AND VICUS

Evidence for the fort and *vicus* at Benwell comes from chance discoveries and from observations dating back to the mid eighteenth century, along with excavations carried out since the mid nineteenth century. In the area of the fort, both the Vallum and the Wall ditch were once visible as earthworks on either side of a turnpike road: West Road is the modern, widened, version. Various antiquarian records, including those of Horsley in 1732, Bruce in 1851 and MacLauchlan in 1858, give descriptions of Roman earthworks visible at the time. Robert Shafto planned the fort bath-house to the south-west of the fort in 1751/2. The most substantial excavations were undertaken in the first half of the twentieth century. Excavations by Petch in the 1920s examined the position and size of the fort and investigated the defences,



Fig. 3 Area of excavation. Based on the Ordnance Survey map. © Crown copyright.

buildings within the eastern side of the fort and part of the *vicus* settlement to the south (Petch 1927; 1928). Excavations in 1932 and 1933 by Birley, Brewis and Charlton concentrated on the Vallum crossing and civilian buildings overlying the infilled Vallum (Birley *et al.* 1934). The results of this work were summarised in a report by Simpson and Richmond (1941), which also details their own excavations undertaken in 1937 during the construction of the housing estate that now covers much of the southern portion of the fort. This summary was updated by Birley (1961, 163–5) and more recently by Breeze in the fourteenth edition of the *Handbook to the Roman Wall* (Bruce 2006, 151–7, 480).

The *vicus* probably developed initially alongside the road that ran south-westwards from the south gate of the fort, within the area defined by the Vallum and fort walls, but later expanded further southwards. The Vallum ditch was infilled comparatively early and buildings were recorded on both the east and west sides of the causeway (Birley *et al.* 1934, 180). A large stone building, located immediately to the south of the Vallum crossing (fig. 4), was excavated by Petch (Petch 1928). The orientation of the building suggests that it lay on the eastern side of the road leading north-eastwards through the *vicus* to the fort, and MacLauchlan's 1858 survey seems to show a causeway continuing down the hill around the site of the building (Bruce 1867, 107). The function of this building is not known for certain; Petch concluded that it was a civilian residence rather than being associated with the military. It has been suggested that it could have been a *mansio*, aisled barn or villa (Tyne and Wear Museums 1991; Bidwell 2009, 73). The remains of another Roman building were also observed by Petch (1928, 74) on the line of a drainage trench to the south of the possible *mansio*.

Although the precise extent of the *vicus* at Benwell is not known, the discoveries made from the eighteenth century onwards demonstrate that it was a substantial and widespread settlement which extended some considerable distance to the south of the fort. Shafto's plan of the bath-house also notes that several other extra-mural buildings were present in this area, and pottery and coins have been recovered up to 450 m from the southern defences of the fort. Two parallel ditches were observed during excavations in the 1920s, running south-westwards from the south-eastern corner of the fort (Petch 1926, 161; 1928, 73, Plate XIV). Although no detailed descriptions were provided, Petch's plan shows that the eastern ditch was of substantial size, c. 6 m in width, whilst the western ditch, which was traced for a distance of over 70 m, was narrower, c. 2.5 m wide. The ditches are described as running north to south, but their alignment is actually NNE–SSW (fig. 4). The location of these ditches demonstrates that they must have post-dated the infilled Vallum ditch (Tyne and Wear Museums 1991). It has been suggested that these ditches may have delimited the eastern extent of the *vicus* (*ibid.*) and the fact that Petch recovered virtually no evidence for Roman occupation when in 1928 he trenched further to the east, in the paddock of Condercum House, could offer support for this theory (Tyne and Wear Museums 1991).

The discovery at Benwell of a dedication slab to the *Matres Campestres* (RIB 1334) has been interpreted as being indicative of the presence of a military parade-ground outside the fort, as the *Campestres* are generally known as the 'Goddesses of the Parade Ground' (Tyne and Wear Museums 1991). A possible location for this may be to the west of the fort where an area of flat ground is shown on MacLauchlan's plan of 1858 (Bruce 1867, 107). No evidence for the *vicus* settlement was recorded to the west of the fort during trial trenching at Pendower Hall in 1977 and 2001 (HER 5262).

Land to the east of the fort seems to have contained a zone of burials and temples. The Temple of Antenociticus, excavated initially in 1862, lies c. 60 m to the east of the south-eastern

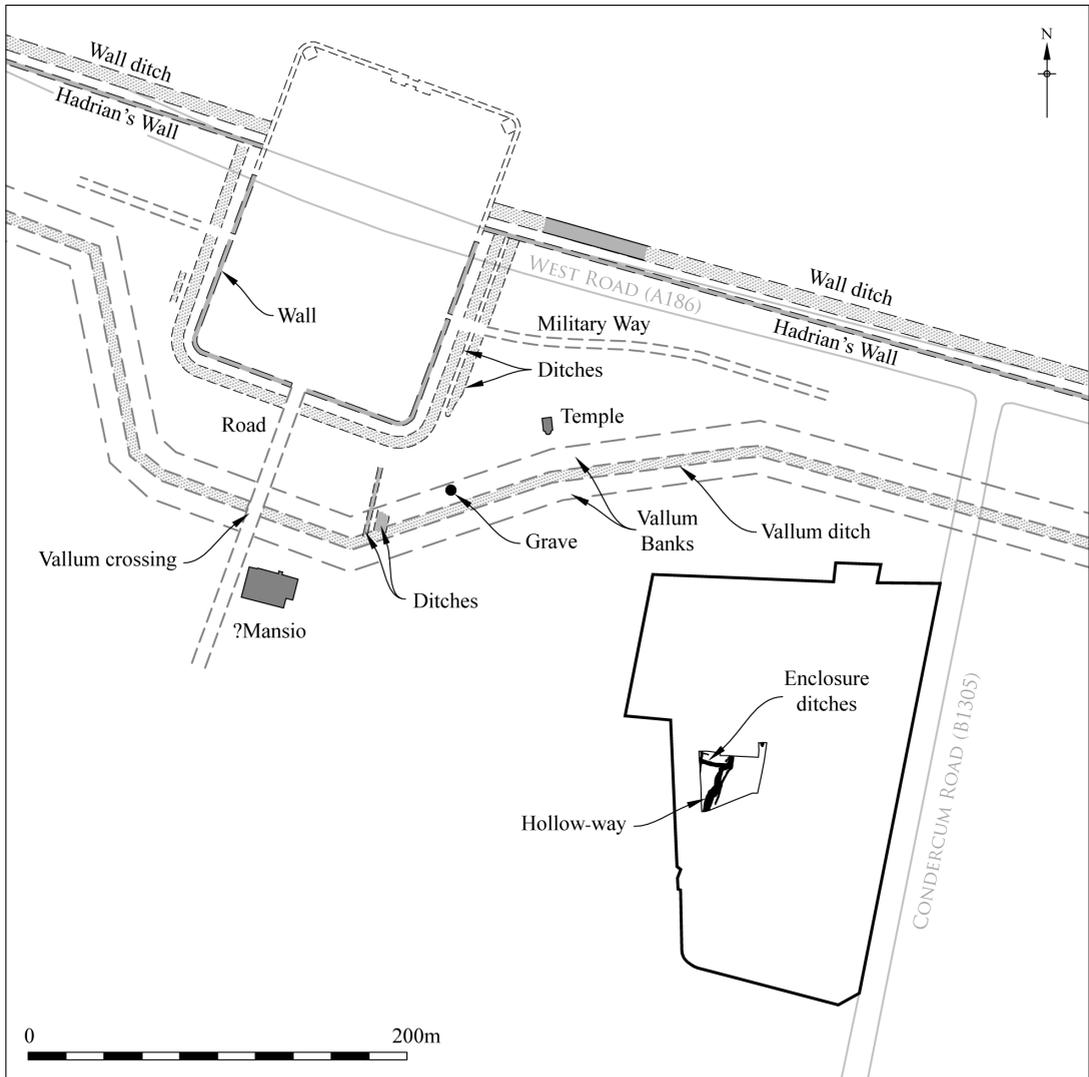


Fig. 4 Benwell fort and Hadrian's Wall, after Simpson and Richmond 1941.

corner of the fort and a short distance to the north of the Vallum mound (Simpson and Richmond 1941, 38–9). The consolidated remains of the temple are now displayed in Broomridge Avenue. Dating evidence from coins, altars and timber all demonstrate that the temple was built in the second century AD, probably soon after the construction of the fort. Collapsed walls associated with burnt timbers and roof tiles show that the temple was destroyed by fire in about AD 197 (Simpson and Richmond 1941, 39).

## POST-ROMAN BENWELL AND THE SCHOOL SITE

Unstratified artefacts of sixth-century Anglian date have been found at several Wall and hinterland forts, including at Benwell where an Anglian cruciform brooch was discovered (Brewis 1936). No evidence for immediate post-Roman and Anglian occupation outside the forts within the *vici* settlements has yet been discovered. However at Benwell, three skeletons in cist graves were found in the apse of the Temple of Antenociticus, post-dating its destruction, suggesting the possibility of post-Roman burial activity (Richmond and Simpson 1941, 38). Two brooches and a glass vessel were also discovered to the east of the fort and these are indicative of Anglian burial equipment (Jobey and Maxwell 1957).

Benwell was originally a small village in its own right, prior to absorption into the urban west end of Newcastle. The earliest reference to the village of 'Bynewalle' (referring to its position on Hadrian's Wall) is from c. AD 1050 (Simeon, of Durham 1868, 148). The settlement formed part of the Barony of Bolbec and in the mid-fifteenth century the manor was given to Tynemouth Priory (Gibson 1846; Oliver 1924). In the medieval period the village was of 'two-row' form, with the rows separated by a wide street or green running west from the manor house (HER 140). While the overall street pattern survives in general form today, no medieval buildings remain. Away from the village, the Trinity School site was probably utilised for agricultural land throughout the medieval period. Following the Dissolution, Benwell passed to the Crown and it was divided into four; two parts were bought by Robert Shafto and one by Sir Peter Riddel (Dodds 1930, 211–34). The course of the ancient roadway from Carlisle to Newcastle effectively follows the course of Hadrian's Wall. The earliest reference to 'West-gate' is 1163–80 and by the late thirteenth century, following construction of the Newcastle town wall, the West Gate provided access to this main route (HER 3495). In 1751 a toll road — the Military Road — was constructed on the same alignment as the ancient roadway.

A plan of the manor of Benwell dated 1637 shows the Trinity School site lying in an area of defined fields, meadows and closes to the south of the Wall (Tyne and Wear Museums 1991). Charlotte Pit, Benwell Colliery, which was opened in 1766 and worked until 1939, was situated c. 50 m to the south of the school. A composite plan, depicting the estates of Robert Shafto in 1780 and Andrew Bowes in 1808, shows the site probably occupying a land parcel named 'Middle Close' alongside what would become Condercum Road, with what was presumably Charlotte Pit within a land parcel 'Low Close' to the south (*ibid.*). Cartographic evidence of the early-mid nineteenth century is of note in that it conveys what was still — despite increasing industrialisation along the Tyne — generally an agricultural landscape to the south of the line of Hadrian's Wall in the Benwell area. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1858 shows the school site in detail. At the time, it occupied the entirety of a single field within what was still an essentially rural landscape on the south side of the West Road. Immediately to the north of the site, fronting onto the south side of West Road, stood Condercum Villa. South of the site was the isolated Charlotte Pit ('Charley Pit') of Benwell Colliery. The 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1898 shows the north-eastern portion of the school site occupied by the grounds of the aforementioned house, Lower Condercum. The land within the site is depicted as being sub-divided. The road to the east of the site is named 'Charlotte Pit Lane', with the colliery complex of that name to the south showing substantial development from the 1st edition. The line of the Vallum is indicated on the 2nd edition, running parallel to West Road and skirting the northern edge of the site. Land along both sides of West Road had been increasingly developed by this time. By the time of the 3rd edition Ordnance

Survey map in 1919 the area to the east of the site had been infilled with a street grid of terraced housing. By the time of the 1939 map, Lower Condercum House was annotated 'Special School' and the southern portion of the site had been converted to playing fields, thus reflecting the change of use from a dwelling to an educational establishment. This map depicts the shaft of Charlotte Pit as 'disused'. The exact date of demolition of Lower Condercum House is not known. At the time of the excavation, the buildings of Trinity School were mostly of late twentieth-century date.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS

### PHASE 1: NATURAL SUB-STRATUM

The glacial till sub-stratum was exposed as the basal deposit across the area of excavation and was of variable composition as is typical of the region. In general, in the western part of the excavation area it comprised light brownish yellow clayey silt, while to the east it was light yellowish brown silty clay. Large boulders were observed very occasionally throughout the till, along with small and medium-sized stones. The level at which the sub-stratum was encountered sloped down from 101.55 m OD in the northern part of the excavation area to 99.15 m OD in the south, reflecting the natural topography of the northern valley side.

### PHASE 2: ROMAN HOLLOW-WAY

A substantial, rather sinuous, linear feature [81] was recorded extending from the south-western corner of the excavation area on a NE-SW alignment (fig. 5). It was traced for a distance of 26 m, having been truncated to the north by a later ditch and continuing to the south beyond the limit of excavation. The feature was up to 4.50 m wide and 0.45 m deep and generally had a shallow U-shaped profile with moderately shallow sloping sides and a very shallow concave to irregular base (Section 1, fig. 8). It is interpreted as a hollow-way, which is likely to have formed through a combination of erosion from human and/or animal traffic and water flow downslope, with possibly some definition by human intervention. A perceptible change in direction was evident within the northernmost surviving portion of the hollow-way, and since no trace of the feature was recorded to the east of the subsequent Phase 3 boundary ditch (see below), it is assumed that the later ditch closely followed the course of the hollow-way towards the northern limit of excavation and had truncated all remains in this area. A metallised surface [119], up to 50 mm thick, was recorded along the base of the hollow-way. This was traced for a distance of 19.5 m, continuing beyond the southern limit of excavation, and was 2.5 m wide, generally occupying the central part of the feature. The surface was constructed with small and medium-sized rounded cobbles within a silty clay matrix. The surface may have been a later addition to the hollow-way, presumably being added to consolidate the ground within it. No dating evidence was recovered to determine the date at which the hollow-way was established. A single sherd of pottery, from a Nene Valley ware beaker of third-century AD date, was recovered from the metallised surface. As a ditch that was in use during the second century truncated the hollow-way, the Nene Valley pottery must have been associated with the use of the metallised surface rather than dating from its construction. It may be that the southern part of the metallised hollow-way continued in use after the enclosure was established to the north.

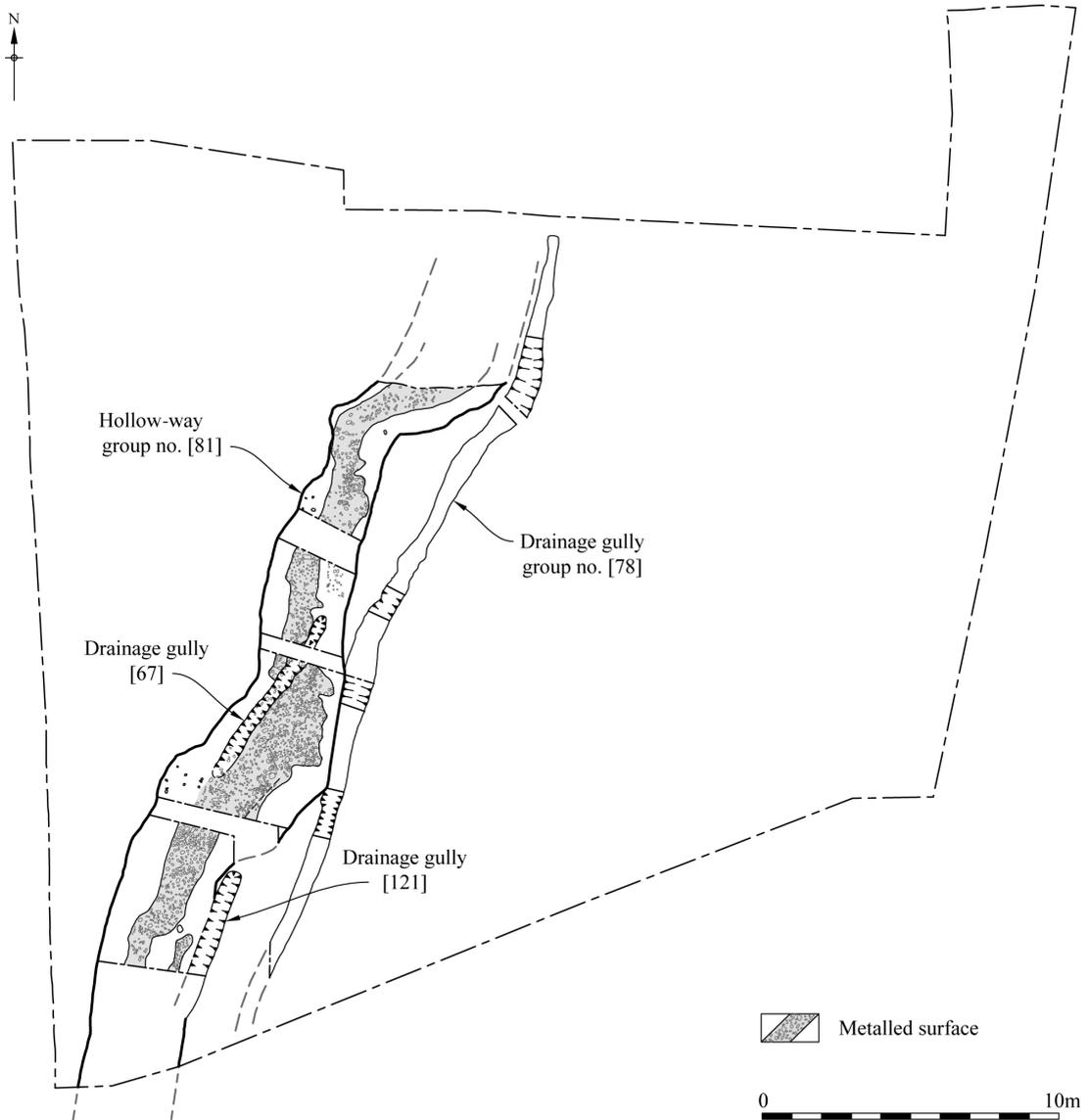


Fig. 5 Phase 2: Roman hollow-way.

A drainage gully [67], aligned NE-SW, cut through the metallated surface across the central portion of the hollow-way for a distance of 6.5 m (fig. 5). Up to 0.65 m wide and 0.28 m deep, it had rounded terminals at each end. It was infilled with sterile silty clay, derived from natural silting, which produced no datable artefactual material. Another drainage gully [121], 0.6 m wide and up to 0.3 m deep, ran along the eastern edge of the hollow-way in the south-western corner of the excavation area (fig. 5; Section 1, fig. 8). This was traced for a distance of 5.3 m, continuing beyond the southern limit of excavation, and had a rounded terminal to

the north. Running roughly parallel to the eastern side of the hollow-way, and in some places adjacent to its edge, was a sinuous drainage gully [78]. This was traced for a distance of 27 m and was truncated by modern activity at its southern extent and had a shallow rounded terminal to the north. It measured up to 0.48 m wide and 0.40 m deep and generally had a broad shallow U-shaped profile, except in the central section where it survived to a greater depth and had steeper sides.

### PHASE 3: ROMAN ENCLOSURE DITCH

The northern end of the hollow-way was truncated by the corner of an L-shaped ditch [32], recorded within the north-westernmost portion of the excavation area (fig. 6). This is interpreted as representing the south-eastern corner of a substantial enclosure. Its WNW–ESE aligned element was recorded for a distance of *c.* 16.5 m, continuing beyond the limit of excavation to the west, and was up to 2.0 m wide and up to 1.2 m deep. This turned sharply at its eastern extent to form a right-angled corner with the NNE–SSW aligned element of the ditch, recorded for a distance of *c.* 6 m, continuing beyond the northern limit of excavation. This element of the ditch had a distinct V-shaped profile with a generally narrow and concave base (Section 2, fig. 8). Towards its eastern extent, the WNW–ESE aligned element of the ditch had a steep-sided profile, stepping down to a narrow base. To the west it was U-shaped in profile with a generally wide, concave base (Section 3, fig. 8).

The primary fill of ditch [32], up to *c.* 0.43 m thick, was generally relatively sterile silty clay, indicating accumulation by natural silting. Nine sherds of pottery were recovered from the deposit, including one sherd of locally produced mortarium dated to AD 120–160 and eight sherds of second-century AD South-east Dorset black burnished ware (BB1). A few scraps of tile were also recovered, including one possible fragment of *tegulum*. A bulk sample from the primary fill [94] adjacent to the northern limit of excavation (Section 2, fig. 8) produced small quantities of charcoal, clinker and coal. Low numbers of charred and uncharred plant weed seeds were also present, including charred sedges and uncharred sedges and a seed of elder. The charred remains are likely to derive from areas of wasteland, while the uncharred remains possibly derive from semi-waterlogged conditions within the ditch.

In most excavated sections of ditch [32] the primary fill was overlain by clayey silt deposits up to *c.* 0.33 m thick, again of relatively sterile composition with very little artefactual material, suggesting that they also derived from natural silting. Two sherds of second-century pottery were recovered from these secondary silting fills: another sherd of South-east Dorset BB1 and an oxidised ware. These deposits were thickest towards the corner of the ditch, indicating that water puddled at this location; within the corner of the ditch the infill was solely deposits deriving from natural silting, with a maximum combined thickness of 0.88 m. Adjacent to the western limit of excavation, there was only primary silting. A bulk sample taken from the secondary silting fill [93] adjacent to the northern limit of excavation produced small quantities of charcoal, clinker and coal. Only one charred seed of the wildflower pink, likely to have derived from an area of wasteland, and one uncharred seed of common nettle were recovered.

The silts in the ditch were generally overlain by more mixed deposits, comprising various compositions of clay and silt, suggesting deliberate backfilling of some upper parts of the ditch. No such backfill deposits were present within the corner of the ditch where, as previously mentioned, natural silting deposits completely infilled the feature. West of the corner,

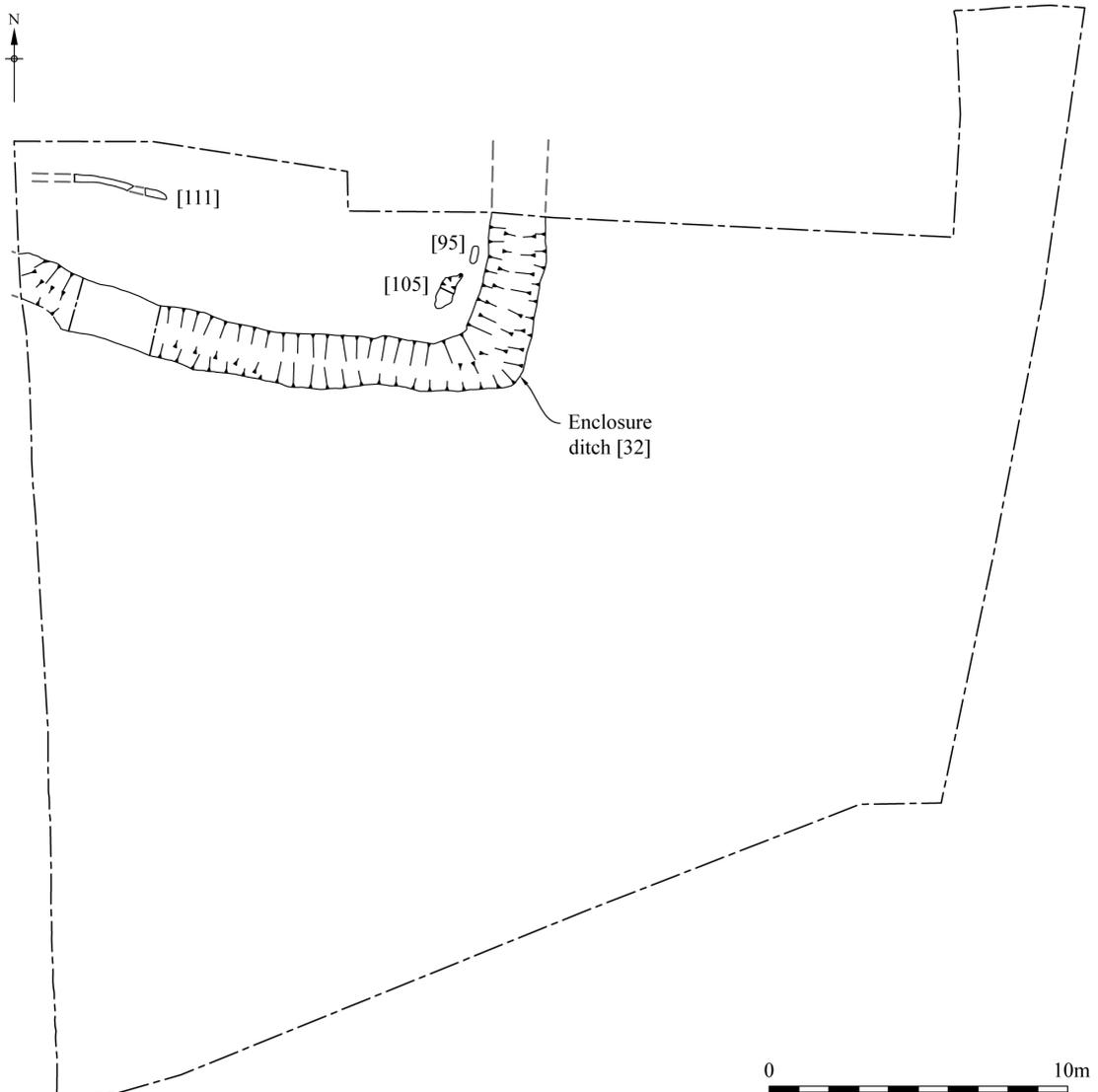


Fig. 6 Phase 3: Roman enclosure ditch.

along the WNW-ESE aligned element of the ditch, the thickness of the backfill deposits increased — from a thickness of *c.* 0.4 m in the east to *c.* 0.6 m towards the west — as the natural silting deposits decreased in thickness. Adjacent to the western limit of excavation, three backfills were recorded, [101], [99] and [98], with a combined thickness of *c.* 1.0 m (Section 3, fig. 8). North of the corner, the backfill [92] was *c.* 0.20 m thick adjacent to the northern limit of excavation (Section 2, fig. 8). Five sherds of pottery were recovered from the backfill; four sherds of coarseware, a mixture of locally-produced material and BB1, and one sherd

of Central Gaulish samian ware, all of second-century date. A few scraps of ceramic building material were also recovered.

Three features were recorded within the area defined by ditch [32]. Close to the north-western corner of the excavation area was a WNW–ESE aligned linear feature [111], 3 m in length, truncated by a Phase 4 feature to the west and with a rounded terminal to the east (fig. 6). It was 0.3 m wide and only 70 mm deep, with steep sides and a flat base and may have been a beam slot for a horizontal timber, though this is far from certain. Although no datable artefactual material was recovered from its single clayey silt fill, the similarity of alignment to boundary ditch [32] perhaps indicates contemporaneity, a suggestion further supported by the fact that it was truncated by a feature assigned to Phase 4. An irregularly shaped, but roughly oval feature [105], which measured 1.40 m by 0.54 m and was 90 mm deep, was found within the south-eastern corner of the enclosure delimited by ditch [32] (fig. 6). Its function is unclear and its sandy clay fill provided no indication of its use. A short distance to the north-east was an elongated oval feature [95], which measured 0.88 m by 0.22 m and which was 0.18 m deep. This had regular vertical sides and a flat base, and again its single clayey sandy silt fill provided no clue as to its function. No datable artefactual material was recovered from either of these features, but as they were situated within the south-eastern corner of the enclosure and were overlain by a Phase 5 colluvial deposit, they are most likely to have been contemporary with the enclosure.

#### PHASE 4: ROMAN ENCLOSURE DITCHES

Ditch [50], which truncated the western end of Phase 3 feature [111], was recorded for a distance of *c.* 3 m north-south, continuing beyond the northern limit of excavation (fig. 7). The ditch turned gradually at its southern extent to run on a WSW–ENE alignment (as far as could be ascertained, given the limited degree to which it was possible to expose this portion of the feature up to the western limit of excavation). In this area, ditch [50] truncated the northern side of enclosure ditch [32] (Section 3, fig. 8). Ditch [50] measured up to 1 m wide and 0.70 m deep. Its north-south element had steeply sloping sides and a concave base becoming stepped to the south (Section 3, fig. 8). Definite interpretation of the ditch is problematic as only a small portion was exposed within the excavated area. However, it may represent a boundary ditch that reinstated the south-eastern corner of the enclosure *c.* 16 m further to the west than the Phase 3 enclosure.

Adjacent to the northern limit of excavation, ditch [50] contained a primary silty clay fill, up to 0.30 m thick, derived from natural silting. Exposed at the base of ditch [50], at the southern extent of this primary silting fill, were nine large rounded boulders. These were probably deliberately placed to stop water running down a conjoining ditch to the south, and it was observed that the primary silting deposit did not extend westwards beyond the boulders. The primary fill of ditch [50] was overlain by a silty clay fill [51] up to *c.* 0.6 m thick, which formed the only fill in the western extent of the ditch, beyond the boulders (Section 3, fig. 8). A single sherd of second-century BB2 pottery was recovered from this deposit along with a roughly-dressed flagstone measuring *c.* 0.49 m by 0.46 m and 90 mm thick. This was presumably derived from a substantial stone structure, either a building or an external surface, and it was dumped into the ditch after some degree of demolition of the original structure.

A ditch [102], aligned NNE–SSW, truncated the southern edge of Phase 3 boundary ditch [32] adjacent to the western limit of excavation and joined with ditch [50] to the north (fig. 7).

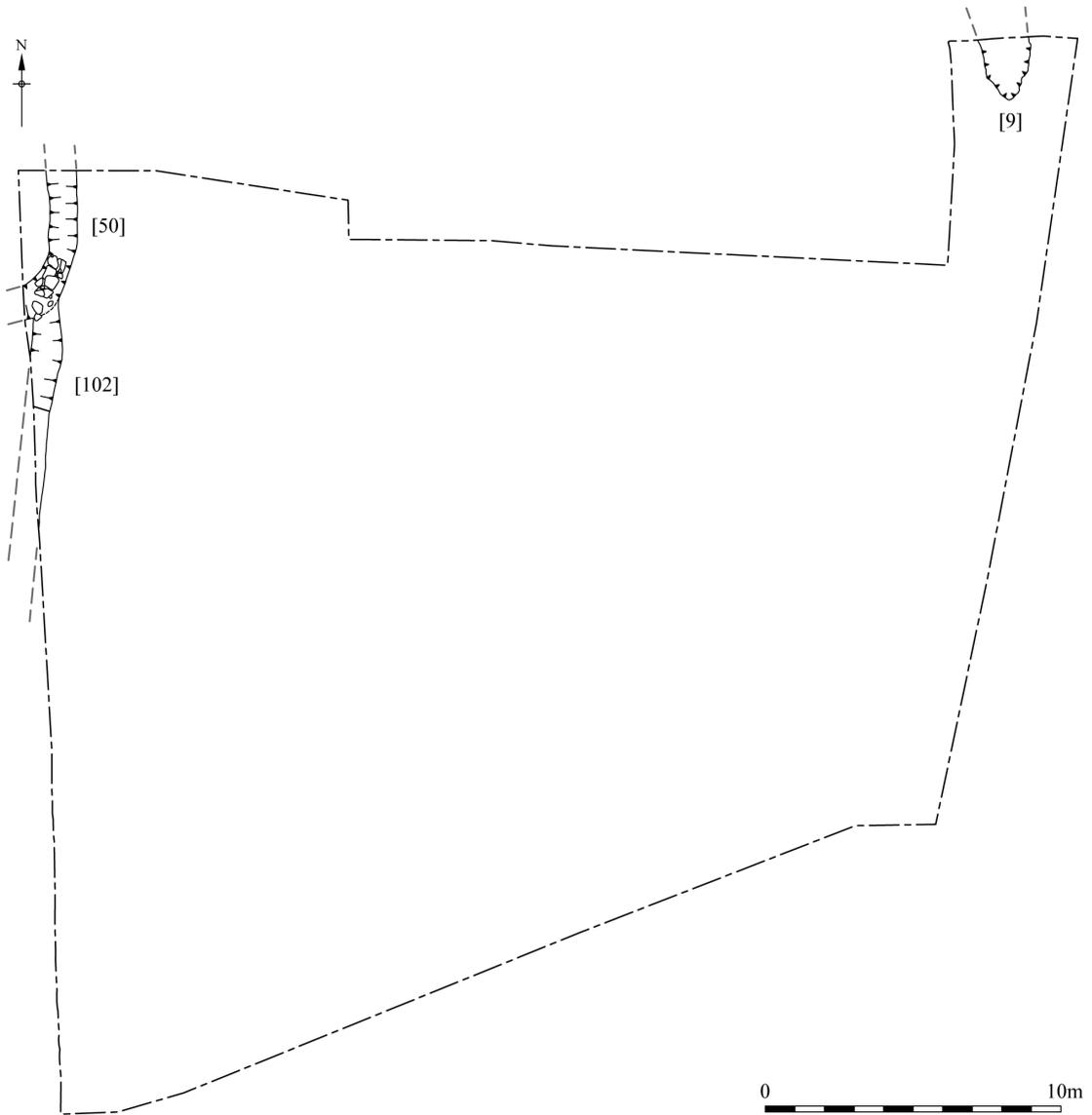
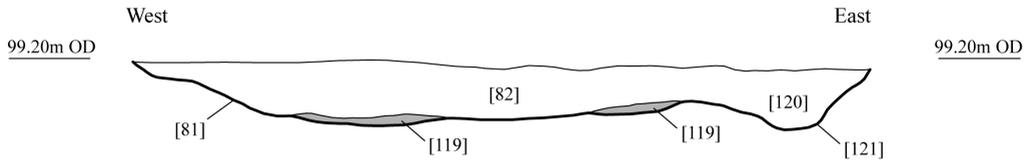


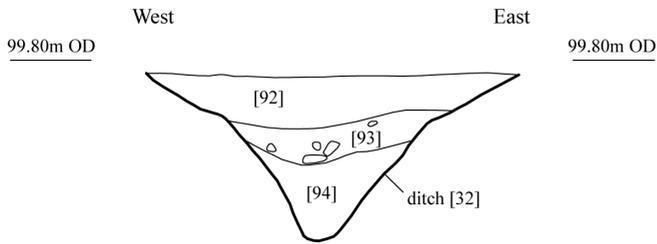
Fig. 7 Phase 4: Roman enclosure ditches.

It may have been that the boulders within that feature, as described above, were deliberately placed to prevent water from running into ditch [102]. Ditch [102] measured at least c. 5.8 m in length, continuing beyond the western limit of excavation, by up to 1.50 m wide and 0.50 m deep. It had steeply sloping sides and a concave base, very similar in profile and dimensions to ditch [50]. The primary fill [107] comprised sterile silty clay indicative of natural silting and this was overlain by another clayey fill [103], up to 0.40 m thick. No datable artefactual material was recovered from either fill, but the feature is considered to be

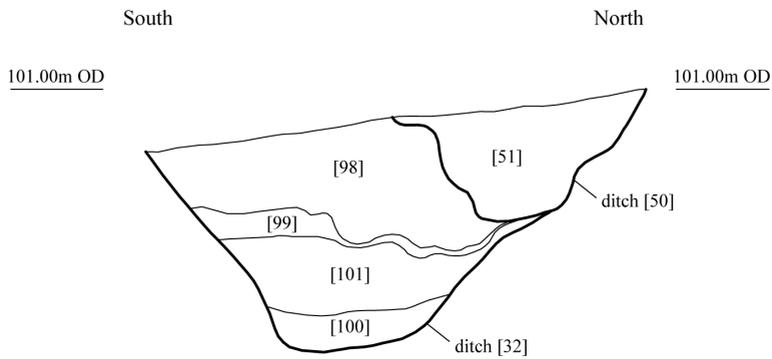
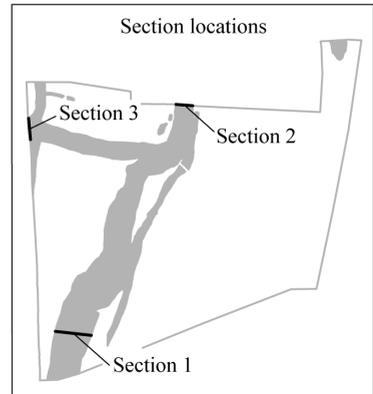


Section 1, south facing across Phase 2 Roman Hollow-way

 Metallised surface



Section 2, south facing across Phase 3 Enclosure ditch



Section 3, east facing across Phase 3 and 4 Roman Enclosure ditches



Fig. 8 Phases 2 to 4: Sections 1 to 3.

contemporary with boundary ditch [50]. It is therefore interpreted as a drainage ditch, possibly also functioning as a boundary ditch delimiting the eastern side of a parcel of land to the south of the re-established enclosure. A bulk sample from fill [107] produced small quantities of charcoal, clinker and coal and only one charred seed of grass, likely to have derived from an area of wasteland in the vicinity.

The southern terminal of a presumed linear north-south aligned feature [9] was recorded at the north-eastern extent of the excavation area (fig. 7). It measured at least 2.10 m by 1.72 m wide and was up to 0.50 m deep. No datable artefactual material was recovered from its single sandy clay fill, [10]. Only a small portion was exposed, but it may possibly represent the terminal of a drainage ditch.

#### PHASE 5: LATE ROMAN OR POST-ROMAN

The upper fill of boundary ditch [32] (fig. 6) was overlain by an extensive silty clay deposit [3], up to 0.30 m thick, which was observed extending across the central and northern parts of the excavation area during machine clearance of overburden. It certainly sealed Phase 3 features [32], [35], [95] and [105], and possibly extended across the whole of the excavation area prior to modern landscaping. A small assemblage of thirteen sherds of early to mid second-century pottery was recovered from this deposit. The deposit is interpreted as colluvium, or hillwash material, that probably began to accumulate when Roman occupation in the area ceased.

An extensive, relatively sterile, silty clay deposit [82] overlay the fill of gully [67] and the metallised surface [119] of the hollow-way, in fact completely infilling this feature (fig. 5). This represents material accumulating within the hollow-way once it became disused. Seven pottery sherds were recovered from this deposit, consisting of two Dressel 20 amphora sherds, four sherds of second-century coarseware and one sherd of probable late third-century pottery. Small fragments of Roman tile were also recovered from this deposit, some of which were identified as pieces of *imbrices* and *tegulae*, along with a sherd of Roman glass, probably a fragment of window glass, and an iron nail. A bulk sample taken from this deposit produced only small quantities of charcoal, clinker and coal, with no plant macrofossils present. Drainage gully [78] was infilled with material of the same composition as the deposit infilling the hollow-way, suggesting that these features went out of use at the same time. This produced a single sherd of second-century coarseware.

#### PHASE 6: MEDIEVAL TO POST-MEDIEVAL AGRICULTURAL FEATURES

Documentary and cartographic sources demonstrate that the land around the school site was utilised as agricultural land throughout the medieval and much of the post-medieval periods. A linear feature [23], aligned NNE–SSW, extended across the eastern portion of the excavation area for a distance of at least 23.5 m, continuing beyond the limits of excavation to the north and south (fig. 9). It was up to 1.65 m wide and 0.42 m deep and had a broad U-shaped profile. Although no datable artefactual material was recovered during the excavation from either of its generally clayey silt fills, the ditch had been examined during the evaluation phase of the work, at which time a single sherd of thirteenth to early fourteenth-century pottery was recovered. This feature is interpreted as a boundary ditch, probably also serving the dual purpose of drainage, delimiting a parcel of land which presumably would have

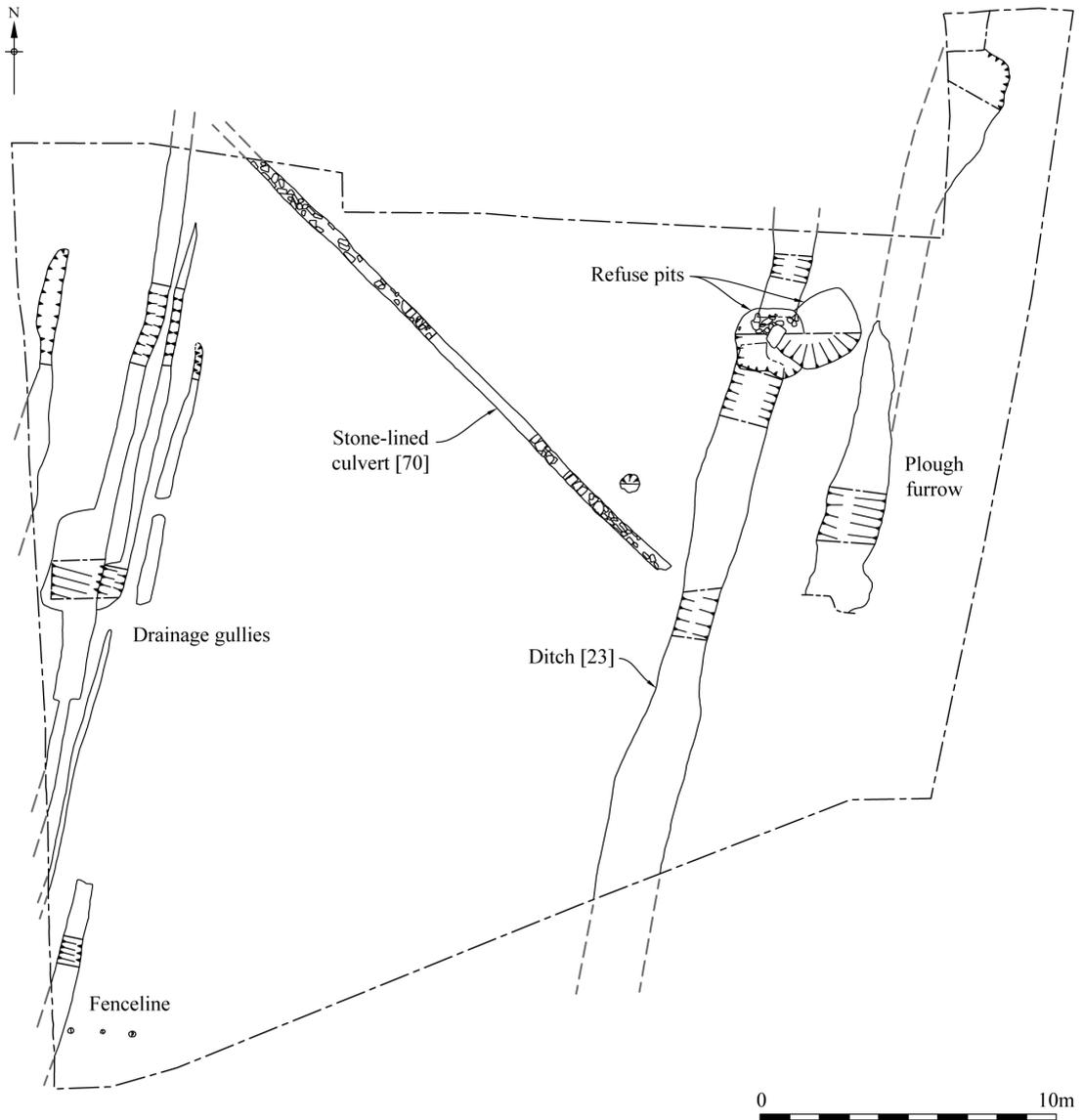


Fig. 9 Phase 6 and 7: medieval and post-medieval features.

extended southwards down the valley side from the line of the Newcastle to Carlisle road. Dating of the feature is problematic as it only produced one sherd of medieval pottery. If the feature was of medieval date, then it may have been a long-lived boundary as a short distance to the east were two fragments of a parallel shallow post-medieval plough furrow. This was up to 2.2 m wide and was traced for a distance of around 20 m, having been truncated by modern landscaping. It produced two sherds of post-medieval pottery and an iron nail.

## PHASE 7: POST-MEDIEVAL TO EARLY MODERN FEATURES

A group of parallel shallow linear features aligned NNE–SSW was recorded adjacent to the western limit of excavation (fig. 9). All may have been associated with drainage activity on the valley side during the post-medieval period and early modern era. Their fills were notable for varying quantities of crushed and fragmented coal, presumably derived from colliery workings in the near vicinity. Three postholes located towards the south-western corner of the excavation area may have formed part of a fenceline aligned roughly at right-angles to the drainage gullies. Their fills also contained frequent inclusions of colliery waste.

Two inter-cutting substantial sub-circular pits truncated the Phase 6 boundary ditch towards the northern limit of excavation. The earliest of these measured c. 3.2 m by 2.6 m and 1.2 m deep, and its primary fill, which was up to 0.40 m thick, was a relatively sterile deposit, indicative of re-deposited natural clay. This was overlain by a sequence of fills containing varying quantities of colliery waste including one consisting entirely of crushed and fragmented coal. The uppermost fill also contained frequent fragments of shale. This was probably a refuse pit of post-medieval or early modern date. Truncating the western edge of the pit was another sub-circular pit, measuring 2.4 m by 2.3 m and 0.52 m deep, containing stone rubble.

A stone-lined culvert, aligned NW–SE, was recorded extending from the northern limit of excavation across the central portion of the excavation area (fig. 9). It lay within a vertical-sided cut up to 0.44 m wide and 0.40 m deep. The walls of the culvert comprised roughly hewn sandstone slabs measuring up to 400 mm by 280 mm and 80 mm thick. The base was not stone-lined but similar slabs as those used for the walls formed a capping. The culvert was recorded for a distance of at least 19.4 m, continuing beyond the northern limit of excavation and truncated at its south-eastern extent by recent levelling activity. It is possible that the culvert formed part of a wider drainage system associated with the grounds of the Lower Condercum in the nineteenth century.

## SPECIALIST REPORTS

## ROMAN POTTERY

*by Alex Croom and Paul Bidwell*

The excavation produced 28 sherds of Roman pottery weighing 0.355kg, which was catalogued by weight, EVES (Estimated Vessel Equivalents) and sherd count. The sherds are generally small, and there were a number of unidentifiable scraps. At least fourteen vessels are represented, most by a single sherd.

*Sherds illustrated*

fig. 10.1. Crambeck reduced ware jar. Late third century or later. Recovered as residual material from the infill [74] of a post-medieval gully.

fig. 10.2. Locally produced mortarium with distal groove on rim. Orange fabric with wide grey core and the remains of a cream wash, with mixed white, grey, and brown trituration grits. The fabric and the presence of the groove are particularly associated with the potter Anaus (AD 120–60). Fill [34] of Phase 3 enclosure ditch [32].

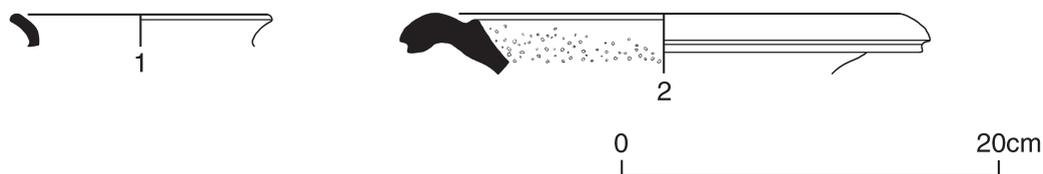


Fig. 10 Roman pottery.

### Discussion

The assemblage consists of material typical for the region, with the majority of sherds dating to the second or third century. It is made up largely of BB1 cooking pots and vessels in locally produced wares, with a sherd from a locally produced mortarium (fig. 10, no. 2) and a single sherd of Central Gaulish samian. There are only three sherds that definitely date to the third century or later. One is a sherd of a Lower Nene Valley ware colour-coated indented scale beaker dating to the third century from context [119]. Later material was represented by two sherds: there was a small body sherd of calcite-gritted ware with an oxidised exterior from the silting deposit [82] over the metallated surface and a rim of a cooking-pot or countersunk lug-handled jar in Crambeck reduced ware (fig. 10, no. 1) from a post-medieval context [74]. Crambeck reduced ware dates to the late third century or later, and calcite-gritted ware typically has a similar date range within this region (Bidwell and Croom 2010, table 4.1).

These two wares are usually found only in very small quantities within military *vici*, which generally contracted or were abandoned during the second half of the third century (Hodgson 2009a, 35). The sherd of calcite-gritted ware was found in a silt layer [82] that covered the hollow-way after it had fallen into disuse, so it is likely that this part of the settlement had also been abandoned by the late third century.

### OTHER ROMAN FINDS

#### *Glass and ceramic building material, by Alex Croom*

A single fragment of Roman glass was recovered from the silting deposit [82] overlying the Roman hollow-way. The glass fabric is the ubiquitous blue-green glass commonly found between the first and third centuries, but which is also present in smaller quantities in the fourth century. This sherd has very meagre sanding on one surface. The sherd of glass is flat which suggests it is window glass.

The majority of the tile assemblage, consisting of 22 fragments, was derived from the natural silting deposit [82] overlying the metallated surface within the hollow-way, but given the size and poor condition of this assemblage they are likely to be residual in context. Fragments from at least three *imbrices* and a probable *tegula* were identified and they were accompanied by a large number of fragments, and were all in poor condition. An assemblage of seven sherds was recovered from the combined fills of the enclosure ditch [32] and this was also small in size and in poor condition. The bulk of the assemblage, aside from broadly dating individual features, largely provides background evidence for the presence and character of Roman structures within the wider vicinity. The presence of Roman tile indicates the existence of masonry structures nearby but the small size and re-deposited nature of the

assemblage prevents any further characterisation. It is likely that the tile material is derived from Roman masonry structures associated with the *vicus*.

*Metal finds, by Marit Gaimster*

Two incomplete iron nails were retrieved from Roman features, one from a drainage gully [66] and one from the silting deposit [82] overlying the metallated surface within the hollow-way.

*Building stone*

A roughly-dressed sandstone flagstone was recovered from Phase 4 ditch [50]. This measured 490 mm by 460 mm by 90 mm thick. This presumably originated from a structure in the near vicinity.

## DISCUSSION

Previous excavations undertaken in areas to the east and south of the fort, along with antiquarian discoveries of inscriptions, altars and tombstones, suggest that the *vicus* extended for a considerable distance to the south and south-west, whilst the area to the east seems to have been utilised as a ritual zone for temple related-activity and burials. The *vicus* was regularly laid out along a road aligned NE–SW that led across the Vallum causeway and into the south gate of the fort. In the vicinity of the fort the Vallum ditch was infilled relatively early, probably by the middle of the second century AD, and occupation debris on the east side of the causeway indicates the presence of pre-Severan buildings in this area (Birley *et al.* 1934). At least three phases of *vicus* buildings have been identified built over the infilled Vallum ditch to the east of the causeway, with buildings of uncertain date also constructed over the infilled ditch to the west (*ibid.*). A substantial building erected around AD 150, which may have functioned as a *mansio* or travellers' inn, was located south of the Vallum crossing along the eastern side of the north-south road (Petch 1928; Bidwell 2009, 73). Projection of the line of the two ditches, aligned NE–SW, to the south of the south-eastern corner of the fort (Petch 1926, 161; 1928, 73, Plate XIV) places them 60 m to the east of the Vallum crossing and 28 m to the east of the *mansio*. The cumulative evidence from investigations and chance finds suggests that these ditches delimited the eastern side of the *vicus*. The remains excavated at Trinity School lie 200 m east of the projected line of these postulated *vicus* boundary ditches, and the archaeological evidence recorded at the site is consistent with the suggestion that this area lay beyond the limits of the settlement.

A recent programme of geophysical survey at numerous *vici* along the Wall has demonstrated that many developed into extensive and prosperous settlements (Hodgson 2009a, 35). This makes the subsequent contraction or abandonment of the *vici* settlements in the second half of the third century all the more striking (*ibid.*). It is generally accepted that occupation at most of these settlements ceased after the end of the third century AD; this abandonment occurs not just along the Wall, but in the majority of *vici* at the hinterland forts as well (Hodgson 2009a, 35). A dramatic reduction in troop numbers in the frontier zone, which eventually decreased to 50 per cent of the strength seen in the second century, presumably had an impact on the economies of the *vici*, resulting in their eventual abandonment (Bidwell and Hodgson 2009, 33).

The earliest Roman feature excavated at the Trinity School site was a metalled hollow-way aligned NE–SW and running approximately parallel to the boundary ditches recorded to the east of the putative *mansio* (fig. 4). Whether this has any significance and could suggest contemporaneity of use, or whether this is just a result of the topography, which perhaps largely determined that such boundaries and trackways ran on this alignment, cannot be determined. Nor can it be ascertained where this track led to, although it is feasible that it led down to the Tyne, c. 1 km to the south. That it had developed as a hollow-way suggests that it was subject to heavy traffic and it is possible that it may have been used to herd animals to riverside pastureland. The importance of this route is underlined by the laying down of a metalled surface within the hollow-way and by the construction of drainage gullies. No dating evidence was recovered for the date at which the hollow-way began to be formed, but by its very nature it must have been a long-lived feature and it is feasible that it may even predate the construction of the Wall, although as no pre-Hadrianic activity has yet been discovered in the area this is speculative. A date after the construction of the fort therefore seems most likely.

The palaeoenvironmental evidence recovered from excavations in the fort interior during the 1930s indicated that at the time of the construction of the fort the valley sides are likely to have been wooded, dominated by hazel and alder but with some pine and lime also growing, with open glades (Simpson and Richmond 1941). Clearance of the valley sides no doubt occurred during and after the establishment of the fort, both to acquire timber as well as to clear the land for arable and pastoral use. The army would produce some of its own supplies as each unit was provided with an area of land around its fort to grow crops and to use as pasture for animals (Breeze 1982). Elsewhere in the Empire, there are inscriptions recording such *territoria* (Manning 1975, 114). Britain is generally lacking in evidence for *territoria* from inscriptions, but there is some evidence to suggest the existence of these lands attached to the fortresses at Inchtuthil, Usk and Chester (*ibid.*), and recent geophysical work at Maryport identified a ditch nearly 700 m from the north-east gate of the fort which may have defined the *territorium* (Hodgson 2009a, 163). An inscription from the auxiliary fort at Chester-le-Street (RIB 1049) demonstrates the existence of a *territorium* there, and no doubt this was the usual practice (Breeze 1984, 282).

The excavations undertaken at Benwell in the 1920s produced a variety of faunal remains with the three main domesticated animals — cattle, pig and sheep — represented, along with deer and duck, which were presumably hunted in the vicinity of the fort (Petch 1928, 74). As well as oyster shells, which were identified as being of a southern species, the remains of more local shellfish were also recovered including a type of freshwater mussel that is found in the Tyne (*ibid.*). It is possible then that the metalled hollow-way at the Trinity School site may have been used as a route for the movement of stock to and from the Tyne and also as a pedestrian route used to exploit the resources of the river.

The northern end of the hollow-way was truncated by the south-eastern corner of an enclosure ditch, which, following a period of natural silting, had been backfilled and a new boundary was established farther to the west. The sherd of third-century pottery found in the metalled surface suggests that the southern part of the metalled hollow-way continued in use after the enclosure had been established, allowing access to continue down the valley side. As only a very small part of the enclosure area lay within the excavated area, it was not possible to determine for certain the activity undertaken within the enclosure. However, despite the large proportion of these ditches that was fully excavated, only a very small artefactual assemblage was recovered. This is in contrast to the pottery assemblage that was recovered

from the ditch interpreted as bounding the eastern side of the *vicus*: the portions of the narrower western ditch excavated in the area between the fort and Vallum (see fig. 4) were described as being ‘comparatively rich in pottery’ (Petch 1927, 161). The western ditch was also investigated farther to the south, in the area to the east of the putative *mansio*. The absence of building debris and the scarcity of pottery recovered from the ditch in this area — only six sherds in total — led Petch (1928, 73) to conclude that the settlement did not continue to the east of the putative *mansio*. This was further supported by the evidence from trenches that were excavated in the grounds of Condercum House in the 1920s, between the *mansio* and the Trinity School site. Only a few fragments of worked stone were found in these trenches, with no evidence for any masonry *in situ*, and the absence of any material indicative of nearby buildings led the excavator to conclude that this area did not form part of the *vicus* (*ibid.*). The size and form of the enclosure ditches found at Trinity School demonstrated that they were not defensive in nature and were presumably simply boundaries. The general dearth of material associated with occupation, such as domestic refuse and structural debris, in the ditches indicates that they did not bound an area of settlement, but instead may have demarcated a plot of agricultural land associated with the fort. Excavations to the north of the Wall at Wallsend uncovered a series of gullies, which although broadly aligned with the fort, did not appear to form part of a regular layout (Griffiths 1993, 32). These are interpreted as having served the dual functions of drainage channels and plot boundaries. The substantial number of gullies recorded suggests a series of small plots — possibly some form of allotment, rather than a field system, as such (*ibid.*, 33) — which extended for 100 m beyond the fort (Hodgson 2009b, 71). An extensive field system, including agricultural terraces, is known outside Housesteads fort (Crow 2009, 81). The scale of the Benwell enclosures suggests that a fairly substantial agricultural field system was established outside the fort and although it was not possible ascertain the full dimensions of the enclosures, it is possible — given that the enclosures were over 200 m from the south-western corner of the defences — that a wide hinterland around the fort may have been exploited. What limited artefactual evidence there was indicated that this part of the extramural area of the fort at Benwell was utilised during the second century with some activity into the third century, the decline in activity occurring at the same time as the general contraction and abandonment of *vici* in the region. The increasing exploration of the extramural areas of the Hadrian’s Wall forts is beginning to provide significant information concerning the use of these areas not just for the *vici* themselves, but also for a broader range of uses including agriculture. It is hoped that further investigations and research outside the fort at Benwell may reveal whether the organisation of such an agricultural system formed part of a formal *territorium* for the fort to supply produce for the garrison, or whether this was land cultivated by the civilian population within the *vicus*.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited would like to thank Sir Robert McAlpine Limited for commissioning the work. The roles of Eddie Dolphin and Sean Took are particularly acknowledged. The curatorial role of the Tyne and Wear Specialist Conservation Team, particularly Dave Heslop, the County Archaeologist, is acknowledged. The input of Mike Collins, the English Heritage Hadrian’s Wall Archaeologist, is also acknowledged. The Project Manager was Robin Taylor-Wilson and the Post-Excavation Manager was Jennifer Proctor. The field-work was supervised by Aaron Goode. PCA would like to thank all of the field team: Andrew

Bartlett, Adrian Bailey, Mick Coates, Bryan Murray and Scott Vance. The figures were prepared by Mark Roughley. PCA would also like to thank Alex Croom of Tyne and Wear Museums Service for her work on the Roman pottery and other finds. The assessment report on the biological remains was prepared by Archaeological Services Durham University.

This paper is dedicated to Bryan Murray, who died in 2011.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BIDWELL, P. T. 2009 'Benwell (Condercum)', in Symonds, M. F. A. and Mason, D. J. P. (eds.) *Frontiers of Knowledge*, 1, Durham, 73.
- BIDWELL, P. and CROOM, A. 2010 'The supply and use of pottery on Hadrian's Wall in the 4th century AD', in Collins, R. and Allason-Jones, L. (eds)  *Finds from the Frontier: Material Culture in the 4th–5th Centuries* (Council for British Archaeology Research Report, 162), York, 20–36.
- BIDWELL, P. and HODGSON, N. 2009 *The Roman Army in Northern England*, Kendal.
- BIRLEY, A., BREWIS, P. and CHARLTON, J. 1934 'Report for 1933 of the North of England Excavation Committee', *AA<sup>4</sup>*, 11, 176–84.
- BIRLEY, E. 1961 *Research on Hadrian's Wall*, Kendal.
- BREEZE, D. J. 1982 *The Northern Frontiers of Roman Britain*, London.
- BREEZE, D. J. 1984 'Demand and supply on the Northern Frontier,' in Miket, R. and Burgess, C. (eds.) *Between and Beyond the Walls: Essays on the Prehistory and History of North Britain in Honour of George Jobey*, Edinburgh, 264–86.
- BREWIS, P. 1936 'A cruciform brooch from Benwell', *AA<sup>4</sup>*, 13, 117–21.
- BRITISH GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, available at <http://www.bgs.ac.uk> (accessed 27.7.2011).
- BRUCE, J. C. 1867 *The Roman Wall* (3rd edition), London and Newcastle upon Tyne.
- BRUCE, J. C. 2006 *Handbook to the Roman Wall*. 14th ed., by D. J. Breeze. Newcastle.
- CROW, J. 2009 'Housesteads', in Symonds, M. F. A. and Mason, D. J. P. (eds.) *Frontiers of Knowledge*, 1, Durham, 79–82.
- DODDS, M. H. 1930 *Northumberland County History*, 13, 211–34.
- GIBSON, S. 1846 *The History of the Monastery at Tynemouth*.
- GRIFFITHS, W. B. 1993 'Excavation to the north-east of the Wallsend Roman fort — 1993', *Arbeia Journal*, 2, 25–36.
- HODGSON, N. 2009a *Hadrian's Wall 1999–2009*, Kendal.
- HODGSON, N. 2009b 'Wallsend', in Symonds, M. F. A. and Mason, D. J. P. (eds.) *Frontiers of Knowledge*, 1, Durham, 69–71.
- JOBEY, G. and MAXWELL, D. 1957 'A square-headed brooch from Benwell', *AA<sup>4</sup>*, 35, 282–3.
- MANNING, W. H. 1975 'Economic influence on land use in the military areas of the Highland Zone during the Roman period', in Evans, J. G., Limbrey S. and Cleere H. (eds.) *The Effect of Man on the Landscape: the Highland Zone*, Council for British Archaeology Research Report No. 11, 112–16.
- OLIVER, A. M. 1924 'The Baronies of Bolbec', *AA<sup>3</sup>*, 21, 142–54.
- PETCH, J. A. 1927 'Excavations at Benwell (Condercum). First Interim Report (1926)', *AA<sup>4</sup>*, 4, 135–92.
- PETCH, J. A. 1928 'Excavations at Benwell (Condercum). Second Interim Report (1927 and 1928)', *AA<sup>4</sup>*, 5, 46–74.
- PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY 2008 *An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment: Trinity School (Oakfield College Site), Condercum Road, Benwell, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear*, unpublished report.
- PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY 2009a *An Archaeological Evaluation at Trinity School (Oakfield College Site), Condercum Road, Benwell, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear*, unpublished excavation report.
- PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY 2009b *Project Design for an Archaeological Excavation at Trinity School (Oakfield College Site), Condercum Road, Benwell, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear*, unpublished document.

- PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY 2009c *An Archaeological Excavation at Trinity School (Oakfield College Site), Condercum Road, Benwell, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear*, unpublished post-excavation report.
- SIMEON, OF DURHAM 1868 *Symeonis Dunelmensis Opera et Collectanea*, ed. J. Hodgson Hinde, SS 51, 138–52.
- SIMPSON, F. G. and RICHMOND, I. A. 1941 'The Roman Fort on Hadrian's Wall at Benwell', *AA*<sup>4</sup>, 19, 1–43.
- TYNE AND WEAR MUSEUMS SERVICE 1991 *The Roman Fort at Benwell and its Environs*, unpublished report.

