

Excavation of a Drain Cut Through the Sills Burn South Temporary Camp

Clive Waddington

The Sills Burn Roman temporary camp is located in the Redesdale Army Range, north of the modern A68 trunk road. The camp is one of seven temporary camps of varying size and proportions on the rising ground to the west of the Sills Burn (fig. 1). Access is restricted as the camp occupies land belonging to the Ministry of Defence.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The camp is situated in a space less than 170m wide, between Dere Street to the west and the Sills Burn to the east (fig. 2). The west side of the camp lies parallel to Dere Street. Such positioning implies that the camp was deliberately elongated to fit between the Roman road and the burn, and orientated so as to respect the linearity of the road. Therefore it may be postulated that the camp is later in constructional terms than Dere Street, and therefore was not associated with the earliest Scottish campaigns.

The camp lies on ground which slopes gently to the south and east. However, there is a change to a steeper gradient at the lip of the burn to the east of the camp. The camp has been placed astride a small tributary stream, which is both unusual and at odds with the precision planning usually associated with military installations. The outlook from the camp is poor. The ground slopes upwards to the summit of Silloans and beyond to Foulplay Head in the north, while to the west the ground rises to Bellshiel Law and the knoll to the south of it. To the east, beyond the Sills Burn, there are steep slopes up to Ridley Crag. It is only to the south (where a view of Redesdale can be gained, albeit restricted) that the camp in any way commands a vantage. To the east, the narrow flood plain of the Sills Burn is an area of 'dead ground'.

The camp measures approximately 105m east to west and 250m north to south (RCHME forthcoming). It encloses an area of 1.8 ha. (4.5 acres). The extant features of the camp include the rampart, external ditch, entrance causeways and internal clavicule. The ditch and rampart are best preserved towards the centre of the west side where the ditch is as much as 0.6m deep and the rampart up to 1.0m high (RCHME forthcoming). The defences are least well preserved at the south end of the east side.

A single gateway can be identified in each of the short sides, both being defended by an internal clavicula. The north clavicula reaches a maximum height of 0.4m, while that in the south has been reduced to 0.2m. Possible gateways are hinted at by opposing gaps in the ramparts

on the east and west sides, in the south half of the camp. There was a complete lack of evidence to support the notion of there being a central rampart dividing the camp into two halves as suggested by St Joseph (1935., 241).

The remains of broad ridge and furrow possibly of 16th to 17th century origin can be clearly seen overlying the camp interior and parts of the ramparts on the west side, running in an east to west direction up to Dere Street in the west.

THE EXCAVATION

The tributary stream, which has been re-used as a drainage channel and which passes through the ramparts at the western end of the north rampart, was re-cut by the tenant farmer during the summer of 1993. This caused disturbance to the archaeology of the scheduled monument and English Heritage decided that the side of the drainage ditch should be cut back in order to record a vertical section through the defences (fig. 3). The trench, which followed the line of the drain (fig. 2), cut through the defences obliquely from north-west to south-east.

The east facing section

There was no real justification for cutting the section back sufficiently to record a complete cross-section through the rampart, but the the outer ditch shows clearly at the north end of the section. The ditch had a shallow U profile, as was the case at Pen y Gwyrd, Wales (Webster 1969, 184) and Greenlee Lough, Northumberland (Welfare 1985, 31). The ditch was cut into the natural boulder clay, giving a depth (exclusive of the rampart) of 1.1m. Although the full width of the ditch could not be seen in the section, by extrapolating the direction of the scarp a width of around 4 to 4.5m would be expected. There was no evidence of collapsed rampart material in the ditch fill. Indeed, the sharp contrast between the light brown sandy basal fill with the grey boulder clay suggests a shortlived occupation of the site possibly followed by a certain amount of backfilling. This backfilled outer ditch had been re-cut for a field drain in more modern times. This drain, which can also be seen in the section is filled with a medium grey silt with a coarse gravel layer above.

Towards the south end of the section an anomalous feature was identified. This apparently consisted of a

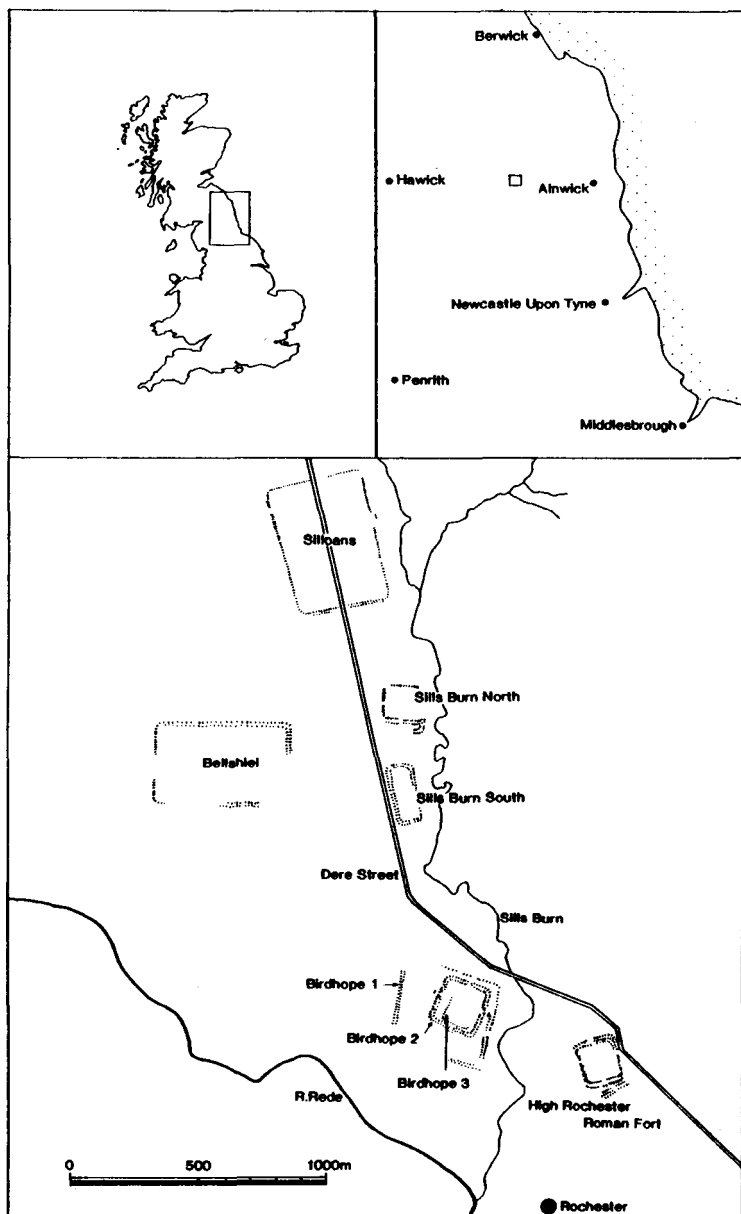


Fig. 1. Site location.

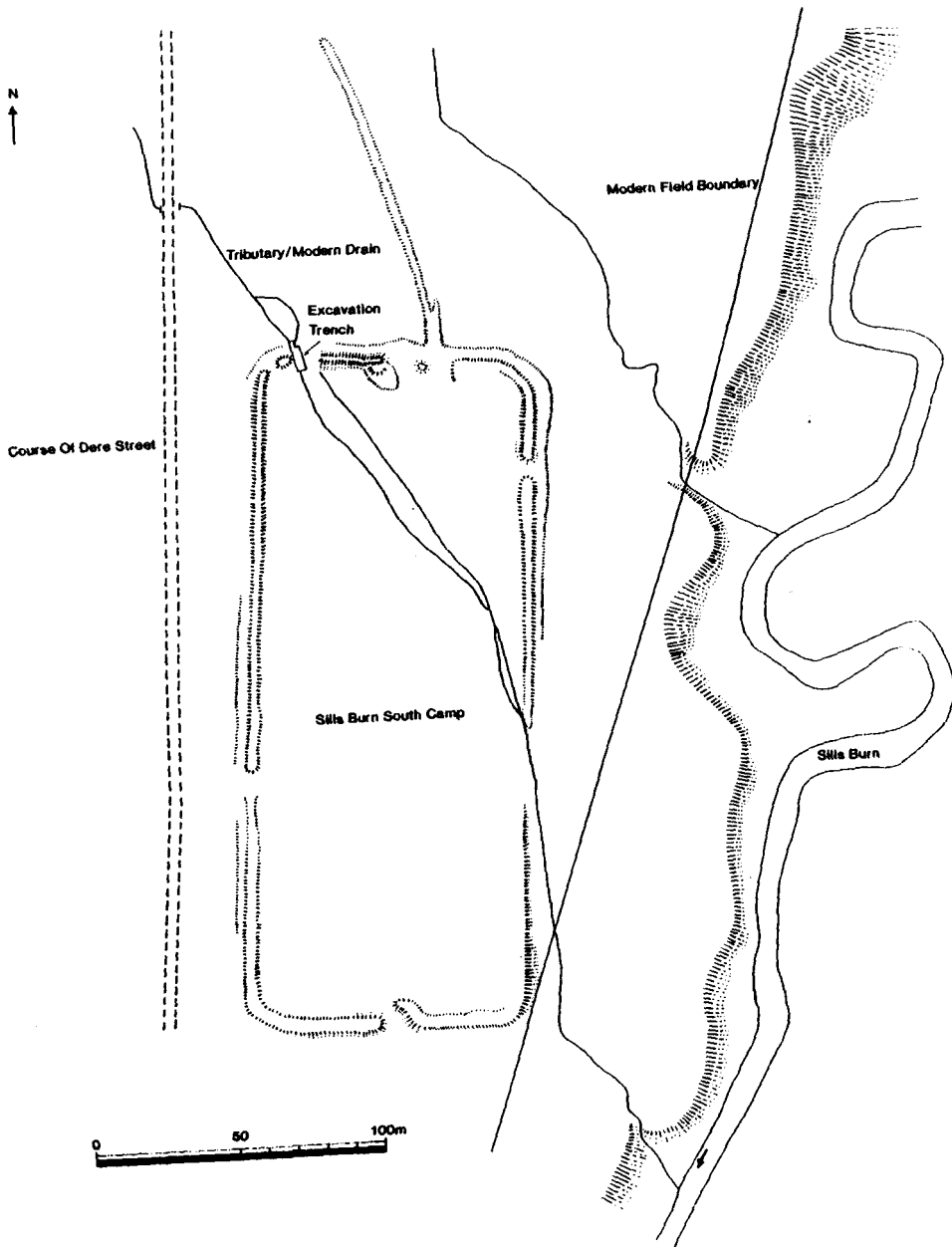


Fig. 2. The Sills Burn South Temporary Camp.

ditch profile (B), a larger flat bottomed hollow (A) with a number of large smoothed and rounded sandstones, (possibly brought up from the Sills Burn) deposited in it, and another apparent ditch profile (C) (Fig.3). As all these features had been covered by the same grey-brown sandy loam deposit it can be surmised that they were broadly contemporary and were probably a part of the same overall feature. It is postulated that this feature could possibly be the truncated remains of a prehistoric stone burial cairn with an enclosing ring ditch. Further excavation would be required to confirm the identification of this feature.

The west facing section

The west facing section cut through a low point in the rampart just before it was broken to allow the tributary to flow through the camp, following its natural course. However, the remains of the base of the rampart and its marking-out trench were visible. The rampart measured 3.75m across at its base in the section. However, elsewhere on the north side the rampart base was up to 4.9m in width. This is comparable to the rampart of the temporary camp at Oakwood, Scotland, which measured just under 5m at its base (Steer and Feachem 1954, 85). Clear evidence of turf cladding or a cheek, laid over the rampart dump on both the internal and external sides was seen in the section. This would have added stability to the rampart dump which was composed of the clay and loam upcast from the ditch. In the 1930s St. Joseph noted a large amount of stone incorporated into the rampart dump on the east side (St Joseph 1935 238-43). This may have been due to the proximity of the east rampart to the lip of the Sills Burn which would have been rendered unstable here if a ditch had been dug to any depth. In addition, loose stone would have been readily available from the burn immediately below.

The cut of a marking-out trench for the rampart was visible, extending 1.2m north of the north face of the rampart. This marking-out trench took the form of a cutting 4.95m wide and on average 0.3m deep. This is the same width as the rampart for most of its course which generally measured 4.9m. Therefore, the excavation trench picked up the rampart profile as it began to narrow or tail off, in order to allow the tributary to flow through the rampart. The contemporaneity of the marking-out trench with the rest of the rampart was evidenced as it cut the two buried pre-Roman turf horizons and had the same base as the base of the rampart dump. That is, the rampart dump had been piled directly into the marking out trench.

The trench was not extended to pick up the outer ditch at the north end of the section as it would have caused further unnecessary damage to the monument. However, the lip of the ditch, 1.5m from the outer face of the rampart at this point, demonstrates the existence of a narrow berm in this section of the defences.

DISCUSSION





















The slender shape of the temporary camp is unusual, being nearly three times as long as it is broad. However, it is not alone in this, as the Bagraw camp near Horsley, 3.5 miles further south on Dere Street, has similar proportions (St Joseph 1935, 241). The reason for this particular form being chosen at each of these sites would appear the same. Each is fitted into a constricted space between Dere Street and the Sills Burn and the Bagraw Burn, respectively. The area enclosed by the camp would be sufficient to accommodate at least two cohorts under canvas; this estimate is based on a minimalist view of the ratio of troop strength to size of temporary camps, (for a full discussion, see Hanson 1978, 142-3; Maxwell 1980, 45-52).

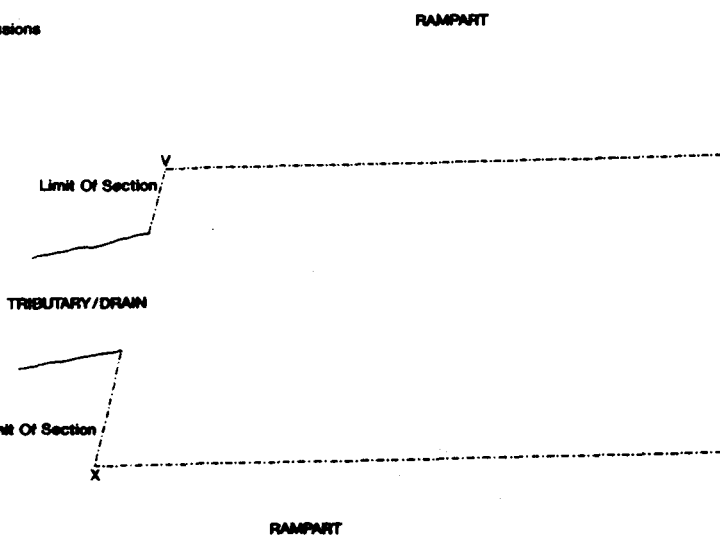
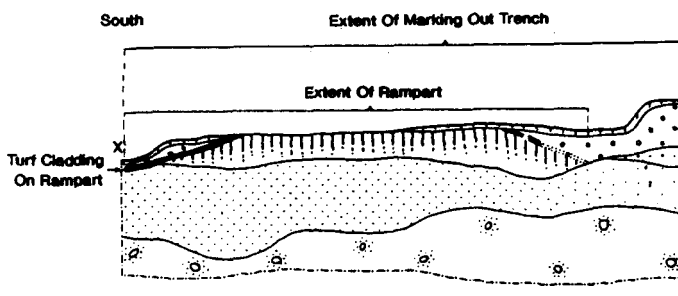
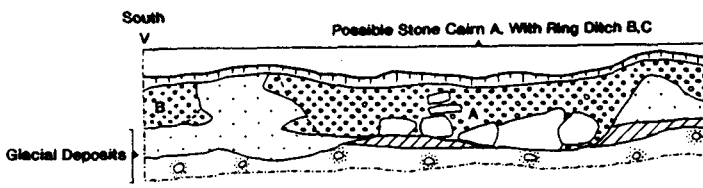
The different types of rampart construction evidenced in the Sills Burn South rampart, that is ditch upcast with turf cladding on the north rampart and a stone and earth compaction on the east rampart, implies a flexible approach towards the task of constructing the rampart. In this case account was taken of the topography around which the camp was located so as to best use its resources. However, the decision to locate it in that position cannot have been determined primarily by martial expediency and strategic considerations as there are many more suitable locations which could have been used if such considerations were dominant.

As the rampart in the west facing section did not fill the full width of the marking out trench, and was therefore correspondingly narrower and lower than elsewhere on the north side, this observation supports the view that a deliberate gap was left in the rampart to allow the tributary to flow through the camp, rather than trying to divert it. This arrangement could also account for the internal bank on the west side of the tributary inside the camp which may have served as a defensive contingency, clavicula-style, to this otherwise weak link in the defences. Alternatively the bank on the west side of the tributary could be the remains of the accumulated upcast from the recuts of the drain.

As ground more suited to strategic needs lies close by we must look beyond a campaigning/scoutpost function for the *raison d'être* of the camp. Its deliberate siting in a non-strategic location, with restricted views and straddling a tributary stream, would suggest that the character of the site would seem not to lie primarily in its martial/tactical significance. The site may be considered to face southwards, on the basis that this is the only direction in which a reasonable view can be had; two low points in the east and west ramparts towards the south end could be the remains of entrances which would indicate a praetentura at the south end of the camp. The camp's attention would thus seem focussed on an area to the south along the adjacent Dere Street.

In view of this locational information, the ability of the encampment to accommodate a troop strength of around two cohorts, and the shortlived nature of the site as evidenced by the ditch section, it is postulated that the camp may have served as: 1) a labour-resource extraction

-  Boulder Clay
-  Silty Clay
-  Mineralised Sandy Clay
-  Part Mineralised Sandy Clay
-  Mineralised Sand With Clay Traces
-  Buried Turf Horizon
-  Clay Loam Rampart Dump
-  Modern Turf Landeurface
-  Sandy Loam Subsoil
-  Silty Clay
-  Fine Sandy Subsoil
-  Coarse Gravel Drain Deposits
-  Coarse Gravel With Stone Inclusions
-  Fine Sand
-  Drain Sediments
-  Degraded Sandstone In Sand
-  Loam Subsoil
-  Sandy Clay
-  Sandy Subsoil
-  Sandy Loam



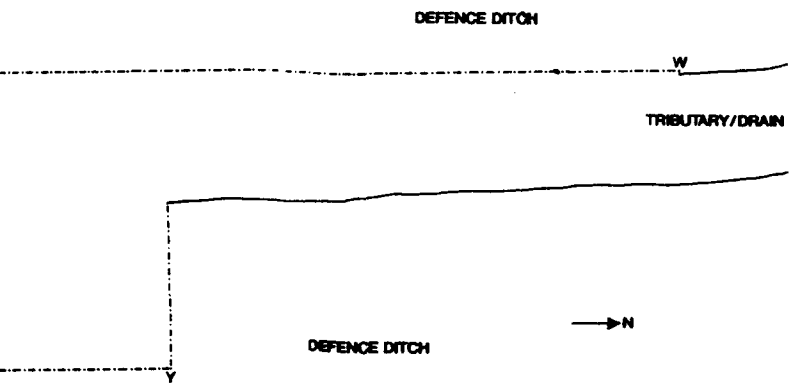
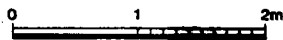
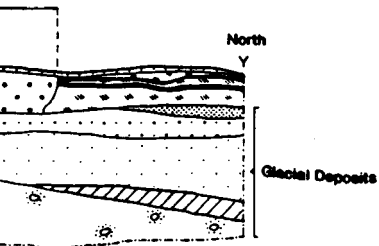
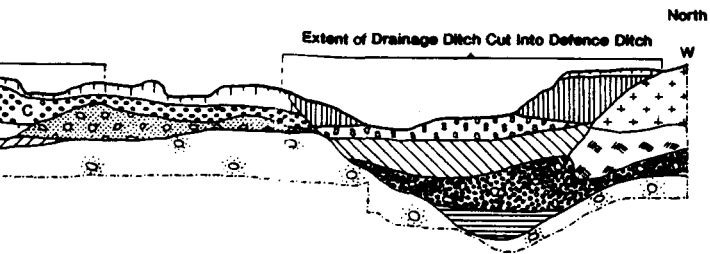


Fig. 3. The excavated sections.

camp (ie. to accomodate soldiers and a working area engaged in the aquisition and processing of raw materials for building etc.), possibly during the construction of the early fort at High Rochester, 1200m SSE, or 2) as a practice camp for the troops occupying the fort at High Rochester. As the camp was deliberately positioned to allow running water to pass through it (see above), a specific use for it may have been intended. A constant supply of water is useful for resource processing of many kinds. This observation gives more strength to ascribing a labour-resource extraction function to this camp.

A relative dating can be attempted for the camp complex west of the Sills Burn. Clearly the Sills Burn South camp was laid out in respect to the Sills Burn on the one side and to Dere Street on the other. Therefore, the camp either post-dates or is contemporary with the construction of Dere Street, which is generally considered to be of Agricola date or soon thereafter. The larger and more strategically placed encampment at Silloans (18.4 ha, 45.4 acres) (RCHME forthcoming) certainly pre-dates Dere Street, which runs straight up the spine of the camp. The similarly sized camp at Bellshiel (15.9 ha), SW of Silloans is also probably pre-Dere Street as it is not laid out in relation to it in any way. There is no evidence for the suggestion that these two camps may have been for two sections of the same army, though it is worth noting. The Birdhope sequence of camps undoubtedly occupies the best strategic location in the immediate vicinity. Therefore it is suggested that Birdhope 1 (RCHME forthcoming) is the earliest in the area. The Sills Burn North camp occupies a stronger and better placed strategic location than Sills Burn South and as such probably pre-dates it. In summary, it is suggested that Sills Burn South camp is probably the latest in the series, and that it postdates Dere Street, while Birdhope 1 is possibly the earliest as it occupies the best location. Silloans, and possibly Bellshiel, are pre-Dere Street and therefore early. However, Birdhope 2, Birdhope 3 and Sills Burn North can probably be fitted in the sequence somewhere between Birdhope 1 and Silloans at the earliest end of the chronology and Sills Burn South at the latest. Wilson (1974, 343) has argued that Flavian camps tend to be square in plan and later ones oblong, but if Sills Burn South is determined by the burn and the road, its proportions may be less significant in dating.

Acknowledgements

This project was arranged by Henry Owen-John of English Heritage who kindly commented on a draught version of the text. Access to the site and payment for the work was kindly given by Mr and Mrs Carruthers. The assistance from Adam Welfare and Jim Crow in discussing the intricacies of the site in depth, and from Humphrey Welfare for comments on the draught and in granting access to RCHME material, is gratefully acknowledged.

References

- BELLHOUSE, R., 1956 The Roman Temporary Camps Near Troutbeck, Cumberland, *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society* 56 (1956) 28-36.
- BENNET, J., 'Temporary' Camps Along Hadrian's Wall, *Roman Frontier Studies 1979* ed. Hanson, W.S. and Keppie, L., BAR International Series 71(i) 1980 151-72.
- COLLINGWOOD, R.G. & RICHMOND, I.A., 1968 *The Archaeology of Roman Britain*, London.
- DANIELS, C.M. & JONES, G.D.B., 1969 The Roman Camps on Llandrindod Common, *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 118 (1969) 124-34.
- DAVIES, R.W., 1968 Roman Wales and Roman Military Practice Camps, *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 117 (1968) 103-20.
- FEACHEM, R.W., 1956 Six Roman Camps Near the Antonine Wall *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 89 (1956) 329-39.
- FRERE S.S., 1974 *Britannia* (2nd edition) London.
- GIBSON, J.P. & SIMPSON, F.G., 1909 The Roman Fort on the Stanegate at Haltwhistle Burn, *Archaeologia Aeliana* ser.3 vol. 5 (1909), 213-85.
- HANSON, W.S., 1978 Roman Campaigns North of the Forth-Clyde Isthmus: the Evidence of the Temporary Camps, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 109 1978 140-50.
- JONES, B. & MATTINGLEY, D., 1990 *An Atlas of Roman Britain*. Oxford.
- MAXWELL G.R., 1980 Agricola's Campaigns: the Evidence of the Temporary Camps, *Scottish Archaeological Forum* 12 1980 25-54.
- RCHME forthcoming *Roman Camps in England*
- RICHMOND, I.A., 1940 The Romans in Redesdale, *Victoria County History of Northumberland* 15 63-159.
- RICHMOND, I.A. & KEENEY, G.S., 1937 The Roman Works at Chew Green, Coquetdalehead, *Archaeologia Aeliana* ser.4 vol.14 (1937), 129-50.
- STEER, K.A., & FEACHEM, R.W., 1952 The Roman Fort and Temporary Camp at Oakwood, Selkirkshire, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 86 (1952) 81-105.
- ST. JOSEPH, J.K., 1935 Roman Camps Near High Rochester From The Air, *Archaeologia Aeliana* ser.4 vol. 6 (1933-5) 238-43.
- WEBSTER, P., 1969 A Section Through The Roman Marching Camp at Pen y Gwyrd, Caernarvonshire, *The Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* vol.23, part 2 (May 1969).
- WELFARE, A.T., 1985 Excavations at Greenlee Lough Bardon Mill, Northumberland *University of Durham and Newcastle Archaeological Reports For 1984* 30-31.
- WELFARE, A.T., 1986 The Greenlee Lough (Northumberland) Palimpsest: An Interim Report on the 1985 Season *Northern Archaeology* vol.7 pt 2 (1986) 35-37.
- WILD, J.P., 1969 A Note on Titulum *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 118 (1969), 133-4.
- WILSON, D.R., 1974 The Roman Camps in Britain, *Actes du X Congres International d'Etudes sur les frontieres romaines* 1972 Bucharest / Cologne (1974), 343-50.