

EARLY SETTLEMENT AND TOPOGRAPHY IN THE BORDER COUNTIES

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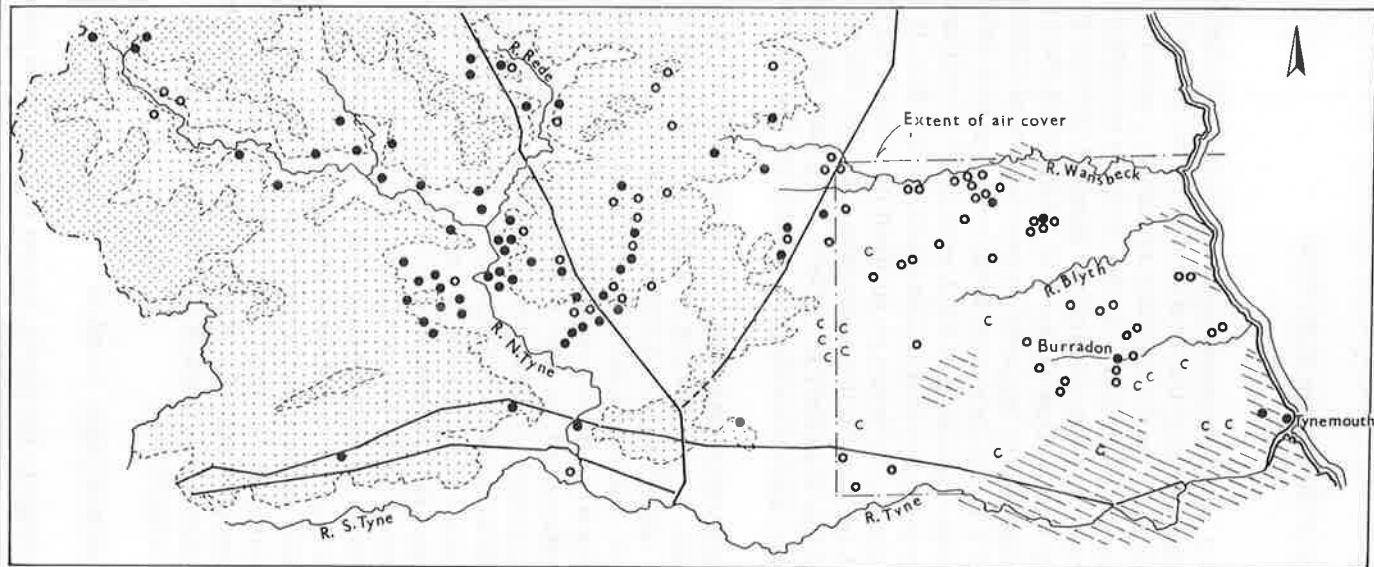
The structural model for a relative chronology of Late Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements over large tracts of the Border country is well enough established in general terms. It is the Hownam sequence¹, commencing with palisaded settlements, some now as early as the sixth or seventh centuries B.C., yielding in turn to perimeters of earth or stone of various orders and culminating sometimes in multivallate defence in depth. With the arrival of the Pax Romana such strength was replaced by non-defensive settlements epitomized, at least over a fairly extensive area in the eastern inter-mural zone, by walled enclosures containing at first perhaps the traditional round timber-built hut but later the more distinctive stone-walled hut. In the Tyne-Forth province in particular, all phases as outlined may occur on the one site, though continuity of occupation is not thereby assured. There is little else in this area which at the moment can be seen to intrude into such a sequence except, on a very limited number of occasions, the aberrant broch.

By and large later land utilization has been kind to the survival of these early settlements. Nevertheless, in both the pre-Roman and Roman distribution patterns there are some voids². Some of these, as in the case of the Cheviot massif or parts of Ettrick, are explainable in terms of inhospitable altitude alone. Others, such as the area to the west of the North Tyne in Northumberland, a land of flows, flosses and, at one time, liver-fluke, have never been noted for good living. Moreover, in what are essentially riverine settlement patterns, decreases in density can at least be anticipated on the moorland watersheds between the main river systems, as is exemplified in eastern Dumfriesshire. There are also suggestions of differential patterns, as on the Northumbrian Fell Sandstones, where scarps offered good commanding positions for Iron Age defensive works but acid soils proved less popular to Romano-British farmers than the more verdant foothills of Cheviot. However, there remained some voids where topography could not be so readily invoked by way of explanation. It is with two such areas, one covering some seven hundred square kilometres in south east Northumberland and the other some nine hundred square kilometres in eastern Dumfriesshire, that the following summary of progress is concerned.

(a) South East Northumberland (figs. 1 and 2)

As compared with the uplands to the north, known or suspected pre-Roman

RECTILINEAR SITES :: SOUTH NORTHUMBERLAND



● - ROMANO-BRITISH TYPE ○ - UNCLASSIFIED & A.P.s. C - CHESTER PLACE NAMES ▨ - URBAN AREAS



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Figure 1.

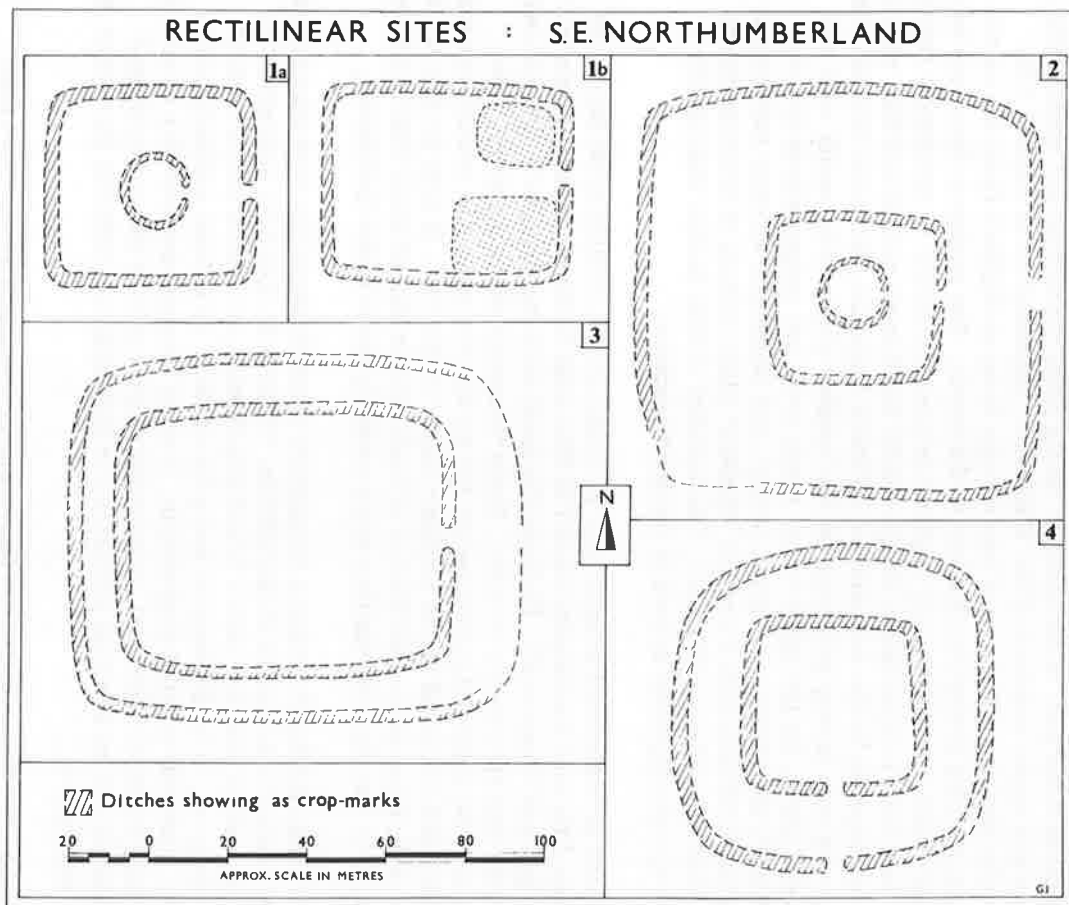


Figure 2.

settlements of any order decreased rapidly in number to the south of a line drawn from the Rede to the Wansbeck³. In particular, the boulder clays of south east Northumberland itself had little to offer in this respect until one reached marine headlands, such as Tynemouth, which provided better defence and improved drainage⁴. On the other hand, during the Roman period, part of this southern area and, most notably, those lands bordering the North Tyne, Rede and the upper reaches of the Wansbeck, appeared to be replete with stone-built settlements, here of rectilinear form as distinct from the curvilinear enclosures prevailing further to the north. The tendency therefore was to regard these more southerly regions as possible areas of secondary settlement, their fuller exploitation delayed until the Roman period and then perhaps partly in response to the demands of military logistics. But even this secondary development was barely reflected on the boulder clays of the south east and the coastal plain. On the other hand, there were low ridges where the drift was thinner, the drainage perhaps better, and situations at least sufficiently favourable to attract both a crop of 'chester' place-names of some antiquity and a quota of medieval villages⁵. The validity of this lacuna was clearly a task for air-photography to test in the first instance.

As a result of a minimal programme of flying over a limited area there are now some fifty new enclosures known in this area between the lower reaches of the Tyne and Wansbeck⁶. Perhaps the most striking feature is that almost all of them are rectilinear in form. More tenuously at the moment, this pattern may be extended coastwise as far as the AIn and a few rectilinear sites have also been revealed in the broader valley of the Till. It may be that on the coastal plain this crude distribution of rectangular shaped sites will be shown eventually to link up with similar sites recently noted in the Lothians⁷.

In south east Northumberland a temporary classification has been adopted as a working basis for selective investigation. Clearly it cannot be assumed that all of these sites will fall into a broad pre-Roman or Roman native context. But, equally so, it is difficult to see a lot of them as Roman military works or, say, medieval moated farmsteads. It must be apparent that this is part of the country where Crawfords' 'easy-going wobbly line of the undisciplined barbarian' is not an absolute criterion for judgement as between the works of Roman and native.

Type 1 (fig. 2). The majority of the crop-mark sites fall into this broad category of a single ditched enclosure, square or rectangular in form, enclosing an area of two to two-and-a-half thousand square metres, and having a single, generally east facing, entrance. Many are at present featureless in the interior but two sub-types may be distinguished amongst the remainder. There

are a few homestead sites with a round, presumably timber-built house in the interior, marked by a drainage ditch (1a). As such these may be pre-Roman or, by analogy with a recently excavated site on the boulder clay at Burradon, near Newcastle, Roman native in context⁸. Others have indications of what may be interior yards on either side of the entrance (1b), a familiar feature in the stone-built, rectilinear, Romano-British settlements further to the west in Northumberland. Three type 1 sites so far investigated in the south east, two of them originally featureless in the interior, have all turned out to be Roman native in context. This in itself must increase the prospect of a similar date for others in this group, and, at the same time, support the thesis already proposed elsewhere for an extension of the rectilinear Romano-British settlements in some numbers onto the coastal plain. Differences in environment and topography could account for the possibly prolonged use of timber for house building on the boulder clays of the south east, instead of the more usual stone.

Type 2. Only a few sites are known so far in this category but they are notable in that they are enclosed by two fairly widely separated ditches. At least two of them have clear indications of a large, round, timber-built house within the inner enclosure. Twin, widely separated perimeters of this form are known on curvilinear palisaded sites and hillforts of pre-Roman date in the uplands of the Border counties, but they have yet to appear in a Roman native context. In the case of some of these lowland examples of rectilinear form it is always possible that both perimeters are contemporary in construction. However, at the recently excavated site at Burradon, whatever may be the case in other instances, the inner enclosure appeared to be a homestead of Roman date, superimposed upon an earlier rectilinear enclosure containing timber-built huts which must be associated with saddle querns and finger impressed pottery of the 'Early Iron Age'. The implications of such a pre-Roman settlement of rectilinear form in this part of Northumberland could be manifold. It opens up the prospects concerning the nature of settlement in what we have seen to be a pre-Roman void. By the same token, it must make for a reconsideration of the possible context of some of those rectangular enclosures of North Tynedale and Redesdale which originally could not be classified as Romano-British settlements⁹. Furthermore, it may in some measure dispense with the necessity to invoke Roman precept or example to account for the rectilinear form of Romano-British settlements in that area fronting onto the Hadrianic limes.

Type 3. The question must now also be put as to whether the few rectilinear sites with multiple, closely set ditches, recently discovered in the south east, could be lowland equivalents of the small upland, curvilinear hillforts. Form could be changing with topography as in the case of the 'ridge-forts' of

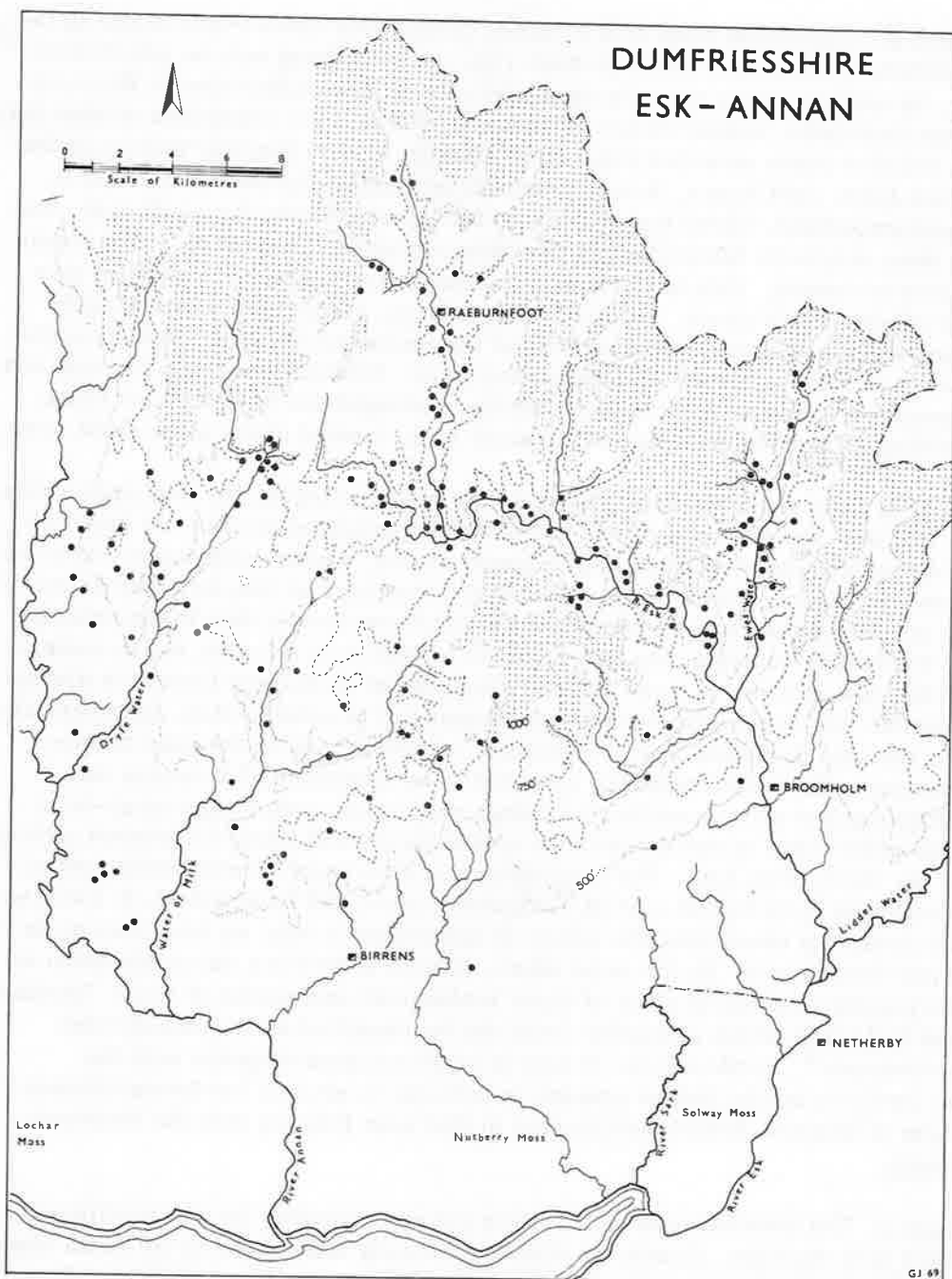


Figure 3.

Selkirkshire or, for that matter, the curvilinear contour forts of the rounded hill tops of the Cheviots, or the D-shaped forts of the Northumbrian Fell Sandstone cuesta¹⁰. A metamorphosis might be seen to be taking place in Northumberland at extant pre-Roman multivallate sites such as Manside Cross, situated on the fringes of the hill country. Much of this must remain hypothetical, but if pre-Roman development of the boulder clay area is confirmed, then it might be allied generally with the slight evidence for the speeding up of deforestation at this time in other parts of northern England¹¹.

Type 4. This category comprises sites of the so-called Roman fortlet type. Although Harburn above the Devil's Causeway has been recorded as a Roman fortlet¹², similar sites at Mitford and probably Ogle are well removed from known Roman roads in Northumberland. Their true nature will need to be determined by excavation¹³. *CUPAR ANGUS?*

(b) East Dumfriesshire

The problem here is somewhat different and, to a greater or lesser extent, one which is common to many parts of south west Scotland. It was evident from the early Royal Commission Inventory that the area possessed its quota of hill-forts and related sites. More recent observations had also revealed a small number of palisaded works, sufficient to suggest that in general the Hownam structural sequence would apply to the pre-Roman landscape. On the other hand, it was difficult if not impossible to evaluate the general nature and extent of Romano-British settlement from the information available¹⁴.

As we have seen, in the eastern sector of the Roman inter-mural zone, the distribution pattern of Roman native settlement has been based mainly upon the presence in field survey of the enclosed but non-defensive settlements of round, stone-built huts. At one time their distribution had been thought to be distinctive of the Votadini. Later, it was demonstrated that this type of settlement was not confined to what might be regarded as Votadinian territory since groups of similar settlements occurred, for example, on Slitrig Water and in the area of the Roman fort at Lyne. If the Votadini were in expansive mood, then an extension into the Biggar Gap might not be surprising, since the importance of this route shows itself in such diverse aspects as the movement of Mesolithic man on the one hand or the eastward extension of the Bishopric of Glasgow on another. Whatever the explanation, the frequency of the so-called, stone-built settlement diminished towards the west, as can be seen from the recent Peeblesshire Inventory, and as a type it did not appear to be present in Dumfriesshire. It seemed unreasonable to assume that depopulation had been carried out as part of Roman policy - a measure proposed from the troublesome Grahams of a

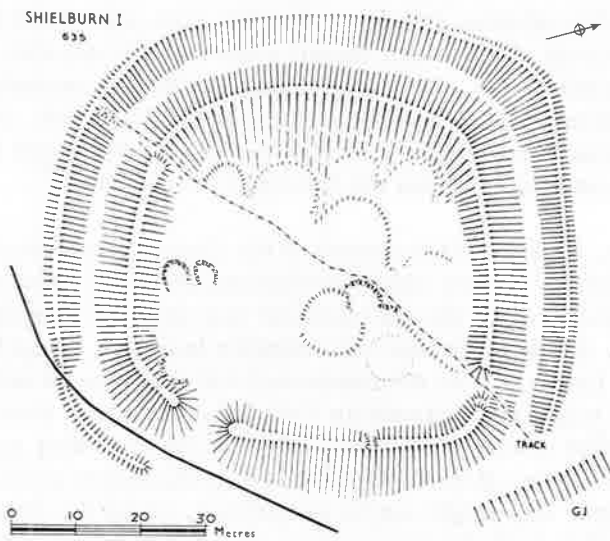
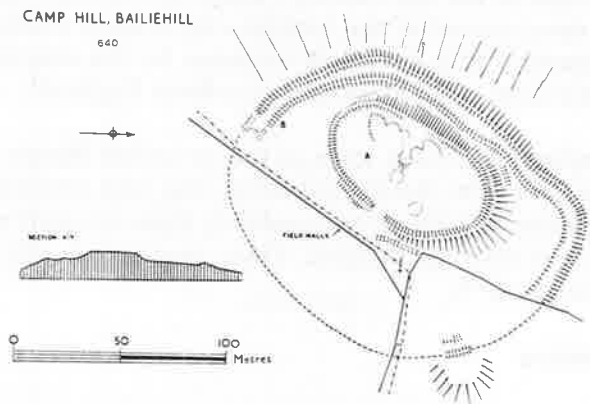


Figure 4.

later period - though this explanation might have appealed to some. The alternatives were to look for an altogether changed form of Romano-British settlement or, more probably, a settlement of similar form but with a continuing tradition of timber-built dwellings in place of stone.

A ground survey of those earthworks that could conceivably fall within a Bronze Age to Romano-British context has progressed as far west as the Annan and where remains warrant, plans now exist for those sites plotted in fig. 3¹⁵. Air-photography will almost certainly extend the distribution into the lower reaches of some of the river valleys but, for the moment, the sample is sufficiently large to give a basis for selective excavation. Unfortunately, limitations on space prevent a detailed refinement of this crude distribution at this stage. However, one or two observations may be made so far as the quest for Romano-British settlement is concerned.

(a) The Stone-Built Hut. In survey at least, the stone-built hut is virtually absent from enclosed settlements in Dumfriesshire, even in those areas where subsequent stone-robbing or cultivation would not appear to be a major hazard. The precise reason for this is as difficult to explain at the moment as, indeed, is the occasion for the switch from timber to stone in the eastern uplands. The answer could lie in a combination of the lack of suitable land-stone for building and, less likely, the availability of timber. A similar distinction in the availability of suitable stone, as between the east and west, may be reflected in the different materials used in rampart construction on Roman forts of the Antonine period north of the Hadrianic system¹⁶. In a Roman military context, however, this can be no more than a suggestion, since quarrying and transportation would present much less difficulty. The greywackes and friable sandstones of Dumfriesshire do not appear to have provided good land-stones for later field walls, and it is worth noting that, reputedly for this same reason, boundary pits were dug¹⁷ after the fashion of better known Iron Age examples elsewhere.

(b) Hillforts and Overlying Settlements. The number of occasions on which native settlements of the Roman period overlie hillforts and related sites is a feature of the eastern marches, the task of detection being made the easier by the presence of the distinctive stone-built hut. In Northumberland alone there are some thirty possible instances where this occurs. Between Esk and Annan, however, only four possible examples have been noted. Two of these, Castle O'er and Bailiehill (fig. 4) have already been mentioned elsewhere in this context¹⁸; but in all instances excavation would be required to confirm the secondary nature of the smaller enclosures with their timber-built huts.

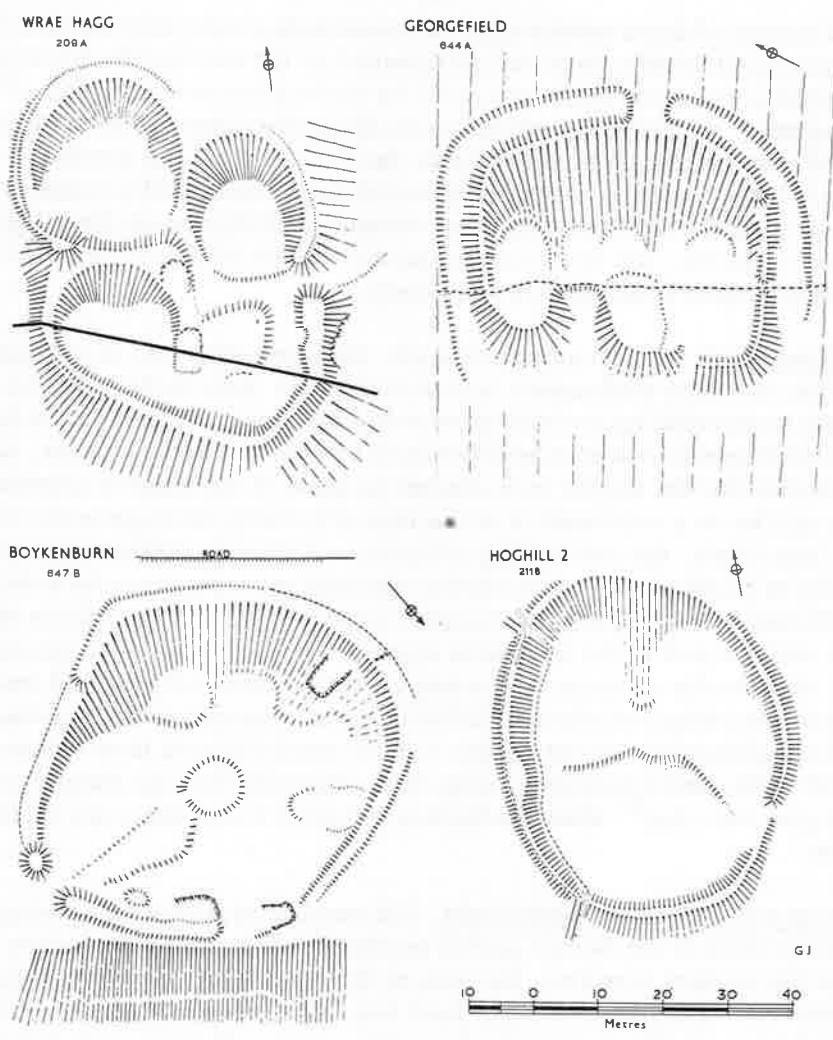


Figure 5.

(c) Homesteads and Settlements. By analogy with the eastern pattern, the main weight of Romano-British settlements should be found on the riverine hill slopes and river terraces. Briefly, the initial choice in Dumfriesshire will lie amongst the following sites, whose function was sometimes seen in the old Inventory as being that of cattle shelters in days of medieval Border strife. Most are scooped enclosures, as topography dictates, and many contain positions appropriate to round timber-built huts.

Defended Settlements. These, by virtue of the proportions of their ditch and mound and points of vantage on higher slopes, would seem to be hill-slope versions of the more normal small hillfort with contoured defence and, as such, may be tentatively dismissed from present consideration (Shielburn, fig. 4).

Non-defensive and River Terrace Settlements. Although some of these have a single ditch, it is often no more than an attempt to shoot the water away from the back of the site and at the same time to obtain a slight enclosure bank (Georgefield I, fig. 5). A hardy perennial on hill slopes they could, by analogy with southern examples, occur in time from the Bronze Age onwards. Given the task of siting round houses on a slope, a certain uniformity in enclosure plan is almost certain to arise, whatever the context. Others have indications of a slightly depressed forecourt after the manner of the eastern stone-built settlements (Boykenburn and Hogshill 2, fig. 5), and may provide the best starting point for selective excavation aimed at finding Romano-British settlement. A notable feature of the area is the frequency of the river-terrace site, often situated on a snob of land formed by the entry of a tributary stream into the main water course. Apart from their scooped interiors a number are featureless, and it would be foolhardy to imagine them all as being of one period or to force them into too rigid a classification at this stage. However, the one air-photograph available for a ploughed-out site of this nature, at Eskdalemuirkirk, gives a clear indication of round hut positions at the base of the interior scarp and, no doubt, other partly obliterated sites will be found to be similar. In general, therefore, it seems highly probable that the previous void in Romano-British settlement will be found once again to be more apparent than real.

Notes

1. Piggott, S. 'A scheme for the Scottish Iron Age', in Rivet, A.L.F. (ed.), The Iron Age in Northern Britain (1966), 1-13.
2. Steer, K.A. 'John Horsley and the Antonine Wall'. Arch. Ael.,⁴ XCII (1964).

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- Jobey, G. 'Homesteads and Settlements of the Frontier Area', in Thomas, C. (ed.), Rural Settlements in Roman Britain (1966), 1-13.
3. Jobey, G. 'Hill Forts and Settlements in Northumberland'. Arch. Ael.,⁴ XLII (1965), 21-64.
 4. Jobey, G. 'Excavation at Tynemouth Priory and Castle'. Arch. Ael.,⁴ XLV (1967), 33-104.
 5. Smailes, A.E. North England (1960), 101.
 6. McCord, N. & Jobey, G. 'Air Reconnaissance in Northumberland and Durham'. Arch. Ael.,⁴ XLVII (1969), 1ff.
 7. I am grateful to Mr Gordon Maxwell, Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments, for information in advance of publication. Maxwell, G. (1970). 'Early Rectilinear Enclosures in the Lothians'. Scot. Arch. For. (1970).
 8. Report forthcoming, Arch. Ael.,⁴ XLVIII (1970).
 9. Jobey, G. 'Rectilinear Settlements of the Roman period in Northumberland'. Arch. Ael.,⁴ XXXVIII (1960), 1-38.
 10. R.C.A.M. Selkirkshire, 18, and note 3 above.
 11. Turner, J. 'A Contribution to the history of forest clearance'. Proc. Royal Soc., B, 161 (1965), 343-54.
 12. E.g. O.S. Map of Roman Britain.
 13. v. now St Joseph, J.K. 'Air Reconnaissance in Britain 1965-8'. J.R.S., LIX (1969), 106.
 14. R.C.A.M. Dumfriesshire (1920). Many of the earthworks are described but not illustrated.
 15. I am indebted to the Margary Trust for a grant-in-aid.
 16. This does not, of course, apply to internal buildings and there is e.g. an exception such as the turf rampart of Cappuck in the east.
 17. Prevost, W. Annals of Three Dumfriesshire Dales (1954).
 18. Feachem, R. The North Britons (1965), 180.

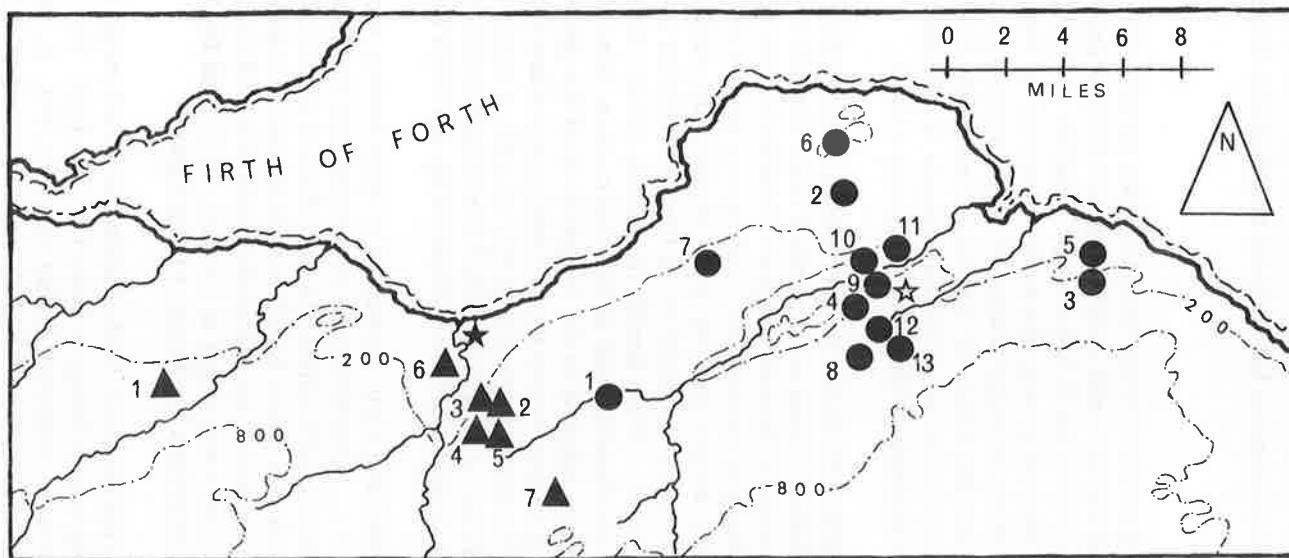


Figure 1. Distribution map of rectilinear enclosures in the Lothians. Sites in East Lothian are indicated by circles, those in Midlothian by triangles; the numbering follows the system adopted in the accompanying lists. The positions of Traprain Law and Inveresk are shown by a white and a black star respectively.