

## 7. PREHISTORIC OCCUPATION

A small scatter of prehistoric artefacts indicated occupation of the hillside from the Neolithic period onwards, confirming the indication from the pollen analysis that there had been a human population in the vicinity for a considerable period prior to the construction of the Antonine Wall (18.5, below). Most finds came from the area to the south-west of the fort, which was dominated by ditches draining away from the main focus of the Roman civil settlement (*vicus*) on the plateau immediately to the west of the fort (see 6.2–6.3, above). Various worked flints and a flake from a Great Langdale polished stone axe point to Neolithic activity, while a sherd of cordoned urn, a convex scraper and a barbed and tanged arrowhead from Area L indicate a Bronze Age presence (see 16 and 17.7, below). The latter may relate to a burial, for some 16m south of the palisaded enclosure (7.1, below), situated between the bypass road and its associated northern

ditch (see 4.2, above), was a shallow (0.3m deep) sub-rectangular scoop (RAQ) (Illus 4.12 and 6.1), measuring 3m by 0.7m–1.2m. Within its loamy fill were two sherds of beaker pottery,<sup>11</sup> with two further small sherds recovered nearby, one from topsoil, the second from a shallow pit or stone hole (RBO), 0.75m wide and 0.28m deep, located 7m south-east of the palisaded enclosure (Illus 6.1 and 6.8). Finally, two more sherds of beaker pottery came from topsoil in Areas B and E to the east (see 16, below). The possibility that a small piece of unidentifiable bone, also recovered from the shallow scoop (RAQ), might provide further corroborative evidence was investigated, but the relevant radiocarbon sample indicated an early medieval date of 888–1016 cal AD (95.4% probability; SUERC-100000).

### 7.1 Palisaded enclosure

At the northern limit of the excavation area to the south-west of the fort, on the east side of Area R,



**Illus 7.1** Palisaded enclosure from east, with rectangular structure visible top centre

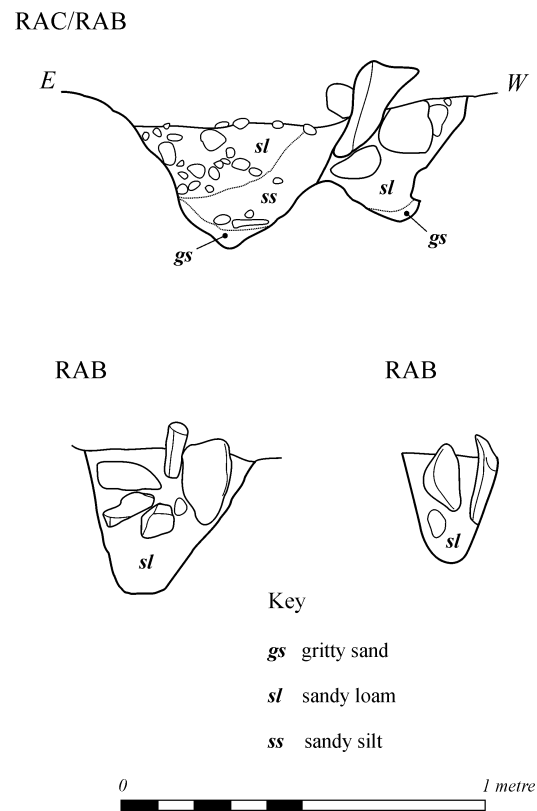
approximately one third of a palisaded enclosure was revealed (Illus 6.2 and 7.1). It consisted of an arc of an irregular circle at least 21m in diameter defined by a construction trench (RAB/LAX) averaging 0.25m–0.4m in width and up to 0.45m deep, though it was much shallower in places, especially where it was cut through bedrock (Illus 7.2). The trench was a truncated V-shape with a flat bottom (Illus 7.3) and was generally packed with stones, often with their longer axes aligned along its length. In some cases probable post settings could be identified (Illus 6.3, 7.4 and 7.5), suggesting that the posts were only *c* 0.2m apart centre to centre and of varying dimensions up to 0.12m across. A terminal marking one side of an entrance gap fell just within the trench on the east side of the enclosure, defined by a post hole 0.35m in diameter and 0.31m deep (Illus 7.5).

Near the mid-point of its arc, the palisade trench was partly overlain by a shallow sub-circular depression (RAY) (Illus 6.2 and 7.2), *c* 1m by 0.45m, packed with stones on a different alignment to those in the palisade trench. This may indicate a later repair or, given the recovery of Roman nails from the interstices, an unrelated later feature. No internal features likely to have been contemporary with the palisade were identified, though a small number of post holes were recorded, some of which could relate to the palisade rather than to the rectangular Roman building (above, 6.1).

The only finds from the palisade trench were three small fragments of Roman pottery. A Roman date for the structure, however, is highly improbable (see 7.3, below), and this is confirmed by its relationship with an intersecting Roman gully on the east side. As the gully (LET/RAC) curves slightly to the east,



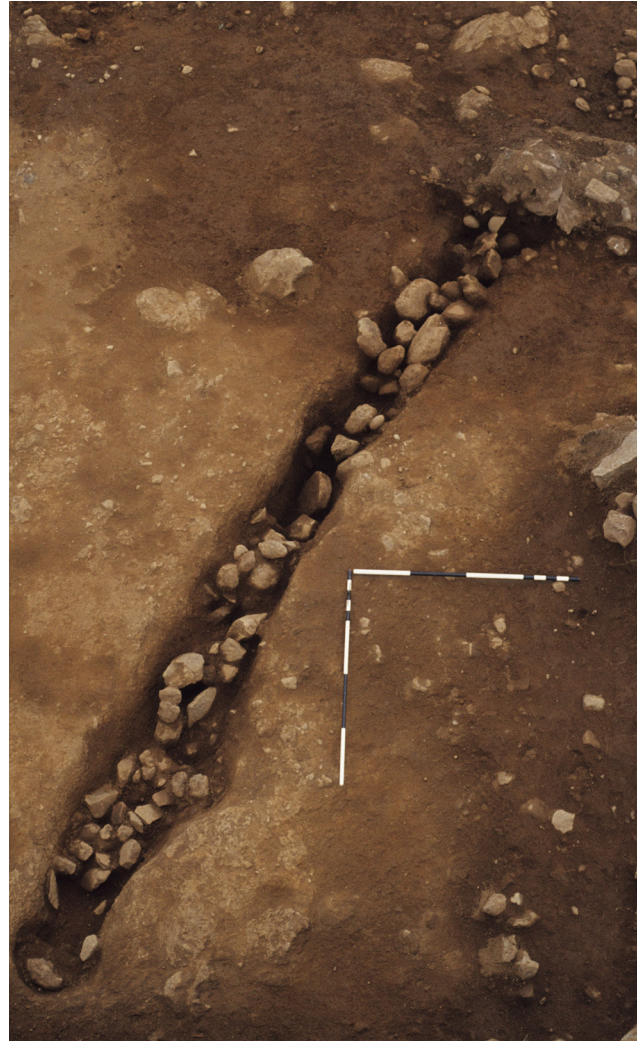
**Illus 7.2** Central sector of palisade RAB cut through bedrock viewed from the west. Shallow depression RAY, filled with stones, is visible at the top



**Illus 7.3** Sections through palisade trench (RAB) and its intersection with gully (LET/RAC)



**Illus 7.4** Detail of palisade trench (RAB/LAX), showing stone chocking near western end



**Illus 7.5** North-eastern terminal of palisade trench showing stone packing and post hole at the end, from the north

it cuts into the palisade trench (LAX/RAB) (Illus 7.3), taking advantage of the pre-existing line for some 1.5m, from which all the packing stones were removed, before continuing south down the slope. The three sherds of Roman pottery in the palisade trench (RAB/LAX) may then reasonably be explained as the result of disturbance of the upper levels in the Antonine period. This same area of disturbance (LET/RAC) also produced two sherds of late prehistoric domestic pottery (16.3 and 16.4, below) (Illus 16.3).

The second point of intersection, this time with a Roman construction trench (RAF), is stratigraphically less clear-cut. Indeed, superficially the deeper palisade trench (RAB) appears to cut the shallow linear slot (RAF), which continues beyond it to the west for *c* 1m. However, the intersection

coincided with the cobble base of a relict post-medieval field boundary (Illus 6.2 and 6.3) making the relationship between the two features more difficult to discern on the surface. It would be unjustified, therefore, to argue for a post-Roman date on the basis of this apparent relationship.

## 7.2 Associated finds

RAB/LAX, palisade trench: 3 sherds of Roman coarse ware

RAQ, shallow scoop adjacent to northern road drainage ditch: 2 sherds of beaker pottery (now missing); fragment of early medieval bone

RAY, shallow, stone-packed pit: nail; hobnail

RBO, shallow pit or stone hole adjacent to palisade: sherd of beaker pottery (Illus 16.1, no. 1)

See also LET/RAC, gully/fence line cutting palisade trench (6.3, above).

### 7.3 Interpretation and analogies

The combination of four beaker sherds and a barbed and tanged arrowhead, all from the same area of the excavation, are suggestive of a disturbed beaker burial (see 17.7, below). Inhumation was the norm in the Early Bronze Age in Scotland and beaker burials occur in pits or, more commonly, in cists, though considerable regional diversity is apparent (Downes 2012: 131–7). The pit (RAQ) adjacent to the bypass road at Croy Hill would not be out of place in the limited cannon of non-cist inhumations in Scotland, its relatively poor preservation being the result of a combination of disturbance by Roman road-building and intensive agricultural denudation in the medieval and post-medieval periods, as confirmed by the complete disappearance of the immediately adjacent Roman road.

Palisaded enclosures are particularly well attested on the eastern side of northern Britain and are generally identified as settlement enclosures of Iron Age date (Ritchie 1970; Harding 2004: 66–9). They are usually curvilinear in outline, though rectilinear examples are known, and vary considerably in size, the larger examples often provided with a double palisade (eg Atkinson 2000). Where they have been investigated, they usually contain one or more round timber houses, but produce very limited finds. Harding is at pains to emphasise that a palisade is

simply a constructional technique without cultural or chronological implications (2004: 55). Indeed, some can be shown to have continued in use for a long period of time, the palisades augmented or superseded by ditches, even into the Roman Iron Age (eg Proudfoot 1978; Ellis 2007). However, those palisades which define a free-standing, single stockaded enclosure are quite distinctive and are generally ascribed an early Iron Age date (Ritchie 1970: 53; Harding 2004: 66–8). It is unlikely, therefore, that this site was still in use at the time of the Antonine conquest and occupation of the area.

The palisade at Croy Hill is well paralleled, both structurally and morphologically, by these Iron Age examples. The two sherds of later prehistoric domestic pottery from Roman disturbance of one section of the palisade (RAC) are consistent with this identification and suggested date. Assuming that the arc of the palisade represents approximately one quarter to one third of the full enclosure, this would have had a diameter of 24–26m. This compares, for example, with Glenachan Rigg, Peeblesshire (Feachem 1959), which is *c* 33m by 25m, and Knapps, Renfrewshire, which is *c* 25m by 21m (Newall 1965). There has been debate about the function of such palisades, some preferring to see them as temporary stock enclosures rather than settlements (eg Topping 1989). There was no evidence from the Croy Hill example which might directly contribute to this debate, but its sheltered location on a flat plateau with a good water supply would be highly appropriate for a small domestic settlement.