

VI.

THE EXCAVATIONS AT BONCHESTER HILL, 1950.

By C. M. PIGGOTT, F.S.A., F.S.A.Scot.

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Excavations financed by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland were carried out during June and July 1950 at Bonchester Hill,¹ Hobkirk, Roxburghshire. The excavation was directed by the writer in collaboration with Mr R. J. C. Atkinson, and Messrs K. A. Steer and R. W. Feachem of the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments, and the work was carried out by students under the auspices of the Scottish Field School of Archæology. Access to the site was considerably facilitated by the loan of a shooting-brake and a jeep provided by the Commission, who were at the time working on the *Inventory for Roxburghshire*. Permission to excavate was kindly given by Mr G. C. Douglas of Bonchester Bridge.

THE CHOICE OF THE SITE FOR EXCAVATION.

Following a programme designed to cover some years, to study the Iron Age hill-forts of Scotland, two Cheviot sites have been excavated in the last two years, and the 1950 excavations at Bonchester add a third fort in this region.

Hownam Rings,² excavated in 1948, proved to have four phases of construction. The earliest phase (first century B.C.), represented by a

¹ For the meaning of the name Bonchester see Appendix II, p. 136.

² *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxxii. (1947-48), pp. 193-225.

palisade enclosure, was further studied at Hayhope Knowe¹ in 1949. Bonchester was selected to throw more light on the succeeding phase at Hownam Rings, when the hilltop was enclosed with a single stone wall.

It was felt that a site known to have been complex, and to have produced finds of pottery and metal, should be selected in the hope that it would produce evidence of structural sequence and date. Bonchester had long been recognised as a site of some local importance, and the large number of huts scattered over the site² gave promise of some occupation in the Roman and post-Roman periods. In addition, and more important, the trial excavations carried out by Dr Curle in 1906³ revealed pottery and saddle-querns, as well as a ring-headed pin of the type known from the Scottish vitrified and "Gallic" forts of Childe's Abernethy culture.³ At the time this pin was not known to be associated with any structural phase of the fort, but the discovery suggested that Bonchester might indeed prove to be another "Gallic" fort.⁴

It was hoped that the 1950 excavations would result in three discoveries: (a) the date and cultural setting of the ring-headed pin; (b) the type of wall which appeared from field observation to be the earliest defence of the hill, and which would almost certainly prove to be similar to Hownam Rings Phase II or to be timber-laced; and (c) the sequence and date of the subsequent structures.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS.

The results were not altogether satisfactory, since in the four weeks' excavating only three or four finds were made, and in consequence the historical interpretation of the fort remains confusing.

The date of the ring-headed pin was obtained with some certainty, as it seems to have belonged to the earliest defensive period of Bonchester, and this was represented by an enclosing wall somewhat similar to that of Phase II at Hownam Rings, excavated in 1948. This analogy implies a date for its construction in the early first century A.D. or only a little before. This fact is of significance for the dating of the Abernethy culture and, with other supporting evidence, will be discussed in greater detail in the final section of this report.

Numerous cuttings were made in positions which would have been instructive if finds had been made, but in almost every case this hope was

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxxiii. (1948-49), pp. 45 ff.

² *Ibid.*, vol. xliiv. (1909-10), pp. 225-36.

³ See *Prehistory of Scotland* (1935), p. 236.

⁴ Since the writing of this report, Professor Wheeler has called attention to the current misuse of the term "*murus gallicus*," which should only apply to walls built strictly in the way described by Cæsar, who referred to a sophisticated construction with a timber framework held together with iron nails. The many other timber-laced walls probably reflect a long-established and parallel Iron Age tradition, and into this category most of the Scottish "Gallic" forts are likely to fall.

unfulfilled, and the general conclusion must be that the occupation of the hill in Roman times can only have been slight, if it was inhabited at all during that time. More probably the occupation was pre- and post-Roman, and much of it may be well into the Dark Ages.

Such evidence as was obtained for the sequence of structures on the hill will be described below; it must be emphasised, however, that the interpretation is extremely tentative.

The earliest defence seems to have been a wall enclosing the top contour of the hill; this was evidently strengthened on the north side by two and possibly more outworks. Below these again and well down the slope of the hill were yet more ramparts and ditches, some of which may themselves have been reconstructed, and one of the ramparts was provided with a double crest palisade, probably in the Dark Ages, when the area enclosed suggests a cattle pound rather than a defended settlement.

THE POSITION OF BONCHESTER HILL. (Nat. Grid. Ref. 595117.)

The hill is an outlier of the main range of the Cheviots from which it is some six miles distant (fig. 1). It is in the parish of Hobkirk, 500 feet above the Rule Water at Bonchester Bridge, and 5 miles south-east of Hawick. It is not a particularly conspicuous hill, for although it reaches a height of over 1000 feet it is dominated by the neighbouring peak of Ruberslaw. Bonchester is uncultivated and is used for pasturing sheep. The photograph (Pl. X, 1) shows the topographical relation between Bonchester, Ruberslaw and the Eildons (the Roman *Trimontium*, with the fort of Newstead at the foot near the modern Melrose).

Under natural conditions obtaining in the Iron Age the valleys must have been thickly wooded and undrained. It is interesting to note that Pliny refers to the country to the north of Brigantia as the *Caledonian forest* (*Nat. Hist.*, vol. iv., p. 102). Such thick woods may partly explain the lack of Iron Age field systems in Scotland, where hoe cultivation seems to have been the common agricultural practice until late in the pre-Roman period.

A note on the geology of the site will be found in Appendix I, kindly supplied by Mr Eckford. For the present it is sufficient to say that the natural rock was close to the surface on the south and west of the hill, but on the north a thick layer of boulder clay of variable depth rested upon it. No doubt this clay when exposed quickly became muddy, and consequently it was found that large areas had been covered by cobbling or paving-stones.

THE EXCAVATIONS OF 1906.

As the positions of the cuttings made in 1950 were to a certain extent influenced by the earlier excavation of the site, the work done at Bonchester

in 1906 will be briefly summarised. Dr Curle regarded his excavation as a preliminary examination of a site to which, if the finds warranted further work, he intended to return and do more. Circumstances, however, did not permit a second season until 1950, when the present writer continued the excavations. During the fortnight at Dr Curle's disposal the following

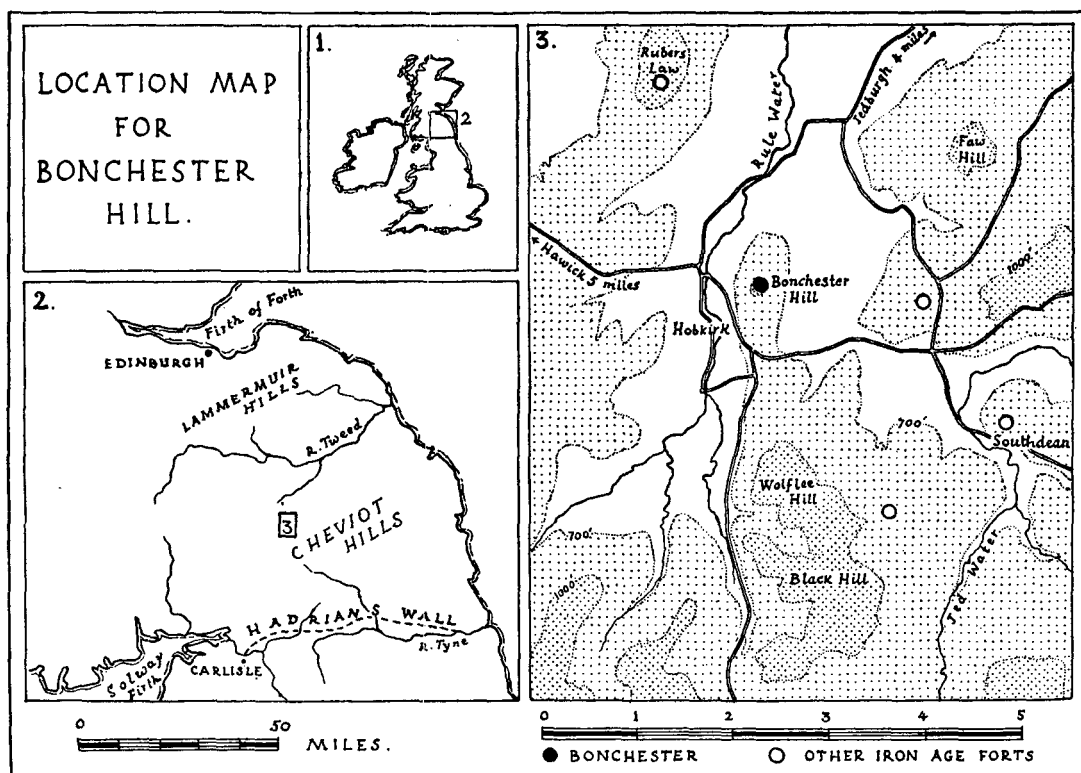


Fig. 1.

features were partially excavated, and these have been indicated on the plan (fig. 2) by stippling.

The entrances through the innermost enclosure were on the north-east, north-west and south. Only that on the north-east was found to have been cobbled. Cobbling was also found inside the fort by the north-west entrance but at no great depth, and it may have been a secondary feature connected with a later occupation. The widths of these entrances were found to be: north-west and south 10 feet, and north-east 5 feet. It was not possible to say which entrances were original and which secondary.

Several huts were partly cleared. In Huts I and IV were discovered two small saddle-querns, and another came from the make-up of the wall

itself near to the south entrance. Hut V was almost certainly contemporary with the second rampart on the west of the hill, *i.e.* the rampart constructed, in places at least, with upright facing-stones in the lower courses, examined in 1950 and shown in fig. 8 and Pl. X, 2.

The only other objects recovered from the inner enclosure were some fragments of pottery (fig. 6) and an iron ring-headed pin, which was discovered at a depth of 3 feet from some distance inside the inner wall on the north side. This is the only object whose fairly accurate provenance can now be established.

Cuttings through the outer ramparts were made where indicated on the plan. A small sketch of their profiles was published in the report.

As none of the huts excavated could be related to any structural phase of the fort, it can only tentatively be suggested that Huts I and IV, which produced saddle-querns, may be contemporary with the earliest fort. The other huts may be later. No evidence for date or sequence was obtained, and the stratification was extremely difficult on the north side of the hill where the rock is overlaid by boulder clay.

The only object of note which was recovered is the iron ring-headed pin, and this will be discussed in the last section of this report.

THE EXCAVATIONS OF 1950.

(a) *The Earliest Fort.*

This appears to have been delimited by the innermost remaining wall round the hill-top, and it is referred to in this report as Wall I (fig. 2). It was examined in three cuttings, I, II and IV, and in addition a hut overlying it in Cutting III was excavated in the hope of obtaining a *terminus ad quem* for the wall.

This early wall was found to have been built on a slight scatter of occupation soil, from which burnt bones and fragments of carbonised wood were obtained in Cuttings I and II. There was no appreciable depth to this soil, and it immediately underlay the large stones of the wall foundations without an intervening turf-line. This fact is of importance for dating purposes, and it must be stressed here that the rich soil on the north of the hill would quickly grow a turf-line, but as one was not present the occupation represented by the burnt bones and ash almost certainly immediately pre-dated the construction of the fort. It is unlikely that there was any appreciable interval of time between the two.

In all cuttings the composition of Wall I was found to have been almost entirely of large stones, uncoursed, and not laced with timber. In Cutting II it was clear that the lower part of this wall had a sloping ramp against the outside; this projected several feet forward from the actual wall face, the large stones of which were carefully selected long, roughly rectangular,

blocks, sometimes of basalt from the immediate vicinity, and sometimes of sandstone which must have been quarried from farther down the hill.¹

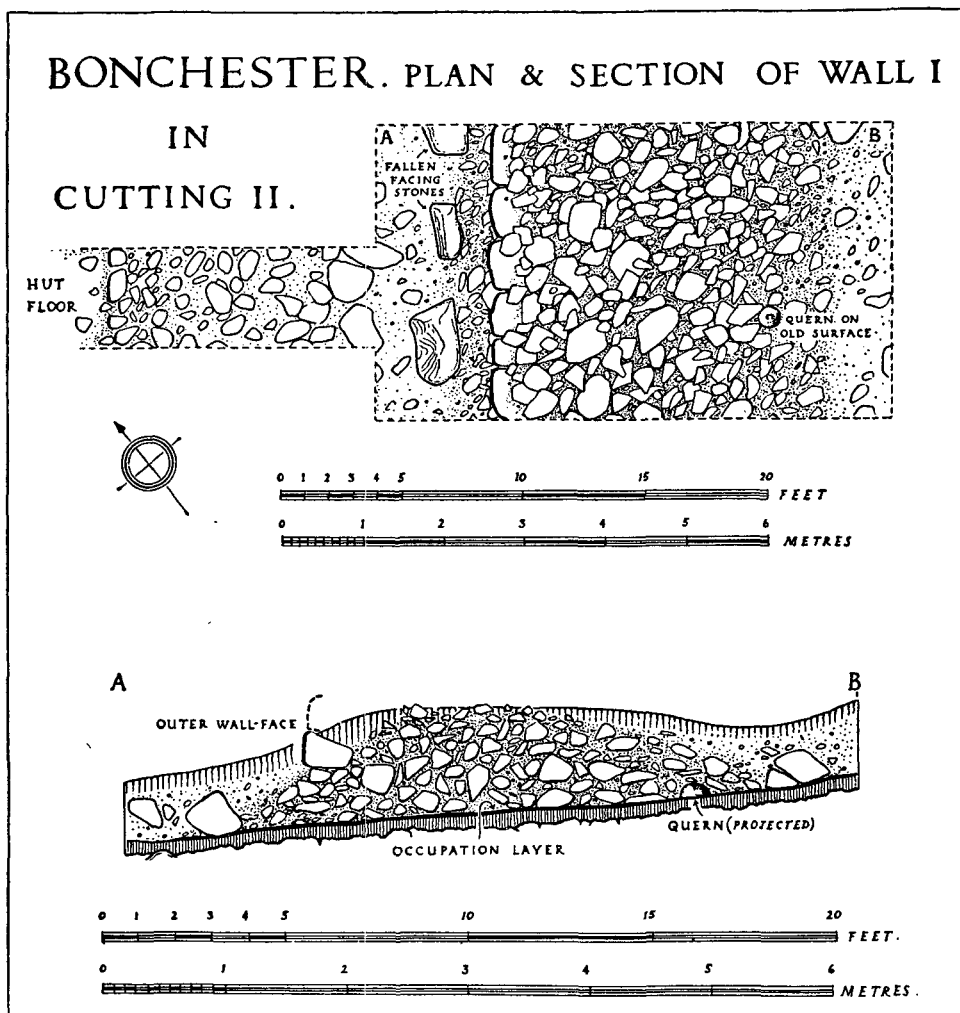


Fig. 3.

As Pl. XI, 2, shows, some of these large facing-blocks had tumbled or been thrown down and had rolled to the bottom of the slight forward ramp. The back of the wall had been much robbed for later hut building, and in no cutting was it possible to find the inner wall face. Consequently the width of the wall is unknown. It is also unknown whether the wall was backed

¹ See Appendix I, p. 135.

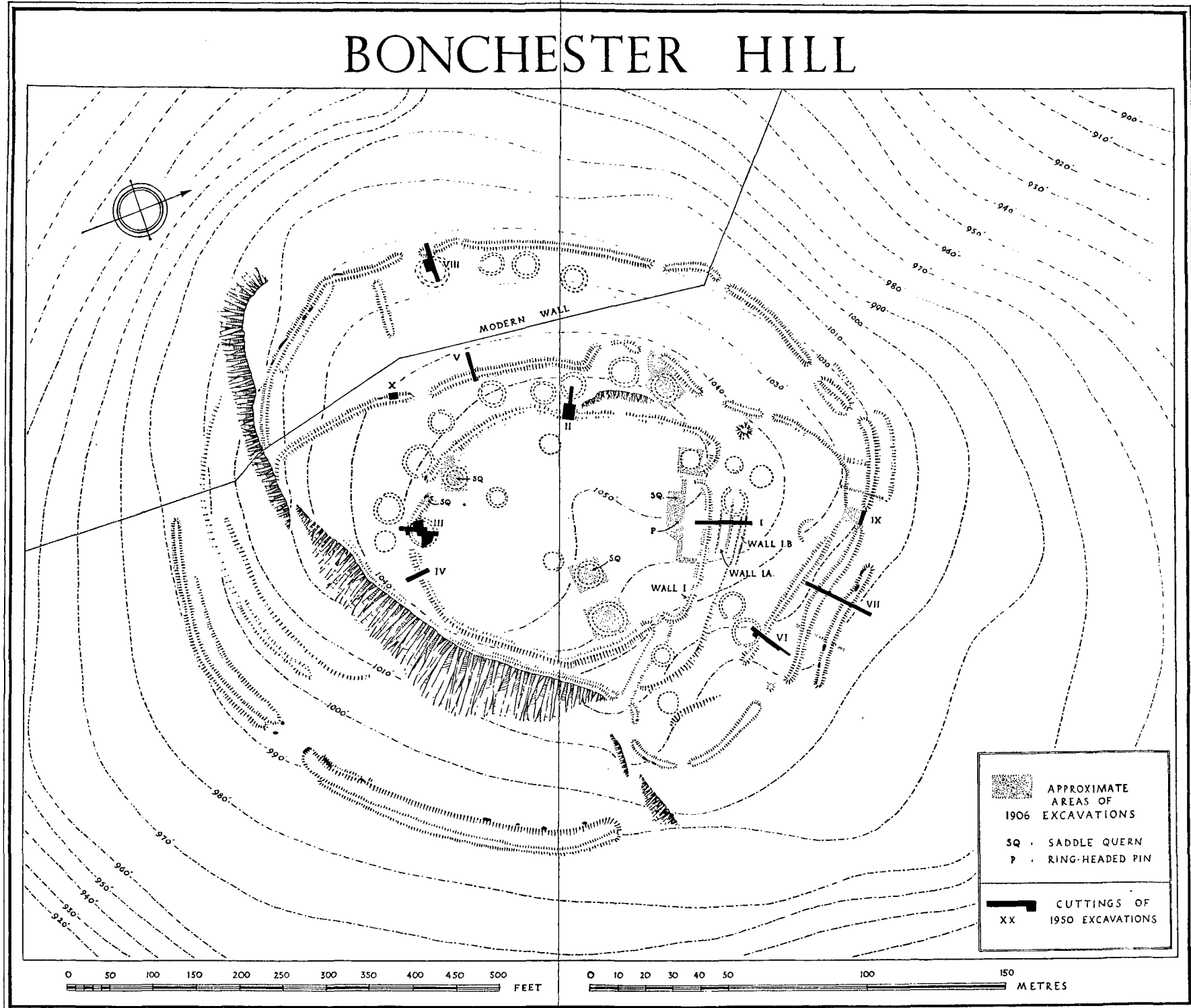


Fig. 2. Contoured Plan.

[To face p. 116.

with a ramp of stones and earth, or whether it had a vertical face. Several large blocks of quarried sandstone on the inside of the wall suggest that these were tumbled stones from an original face; but this point must remain unsettled.

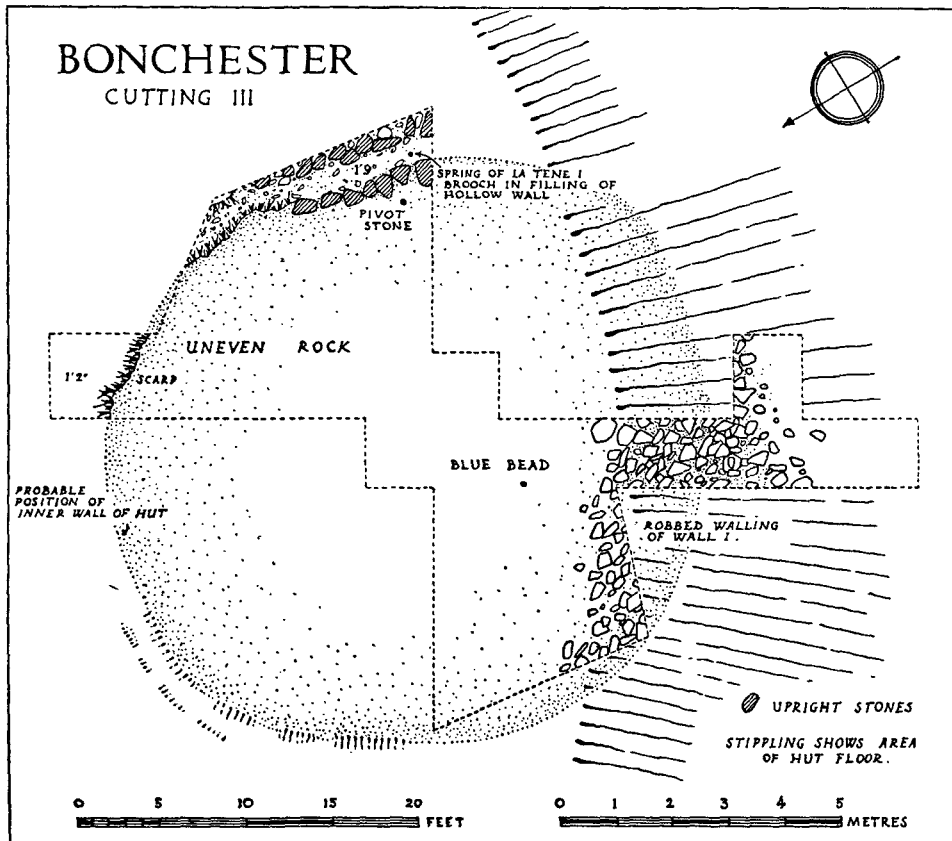


Fig. 4. Plan of Hut in Cutting III.

In Cutting II, between 10 and 11 feet from the outer face of the wall, and resting on the occupation soil below it, was the upper stone of a rotary quern (fig. 7). This was in such a position that it was impossible to be sure whether it had been incorporated into the wall as one of the stones, or whether the wall falling inwards had collapsed upon it. (In this cutting, as in all the others, the rear face of this wall could not be identified.) In either case, however, the date of the wall is unlikely to have been very different from that of the quern, though it is unfortunate that we cannot say whether this date marked the beginning or the end of the life of the early fort. The

reasons for assigning this quern to the first century A.D. will be discussed below (p. 130).

In Cutting III a hut was partially excavated which had been built over, and no doubt partly of material from Wall I (fig. 4). The date of this hut is rather insecurely fixed by a bead apparently of Dark Age type found in a crevice on the rocky floor. Within the wall of this hut was found a fragment of an iron brooch of La Tene I (c) type, probably of late first century B.C. or first century A.D. This was evidently lying about, already broken, at the time of the hut's construction, although it might, from its position on the natural rock surface, have been sealed under the foundations of the fort wall. On the whole this is considered to be less likely. More probably, both it and the iron pin found by Dr Curle must have been the possessions of the builders of the first fort at Bonchester.

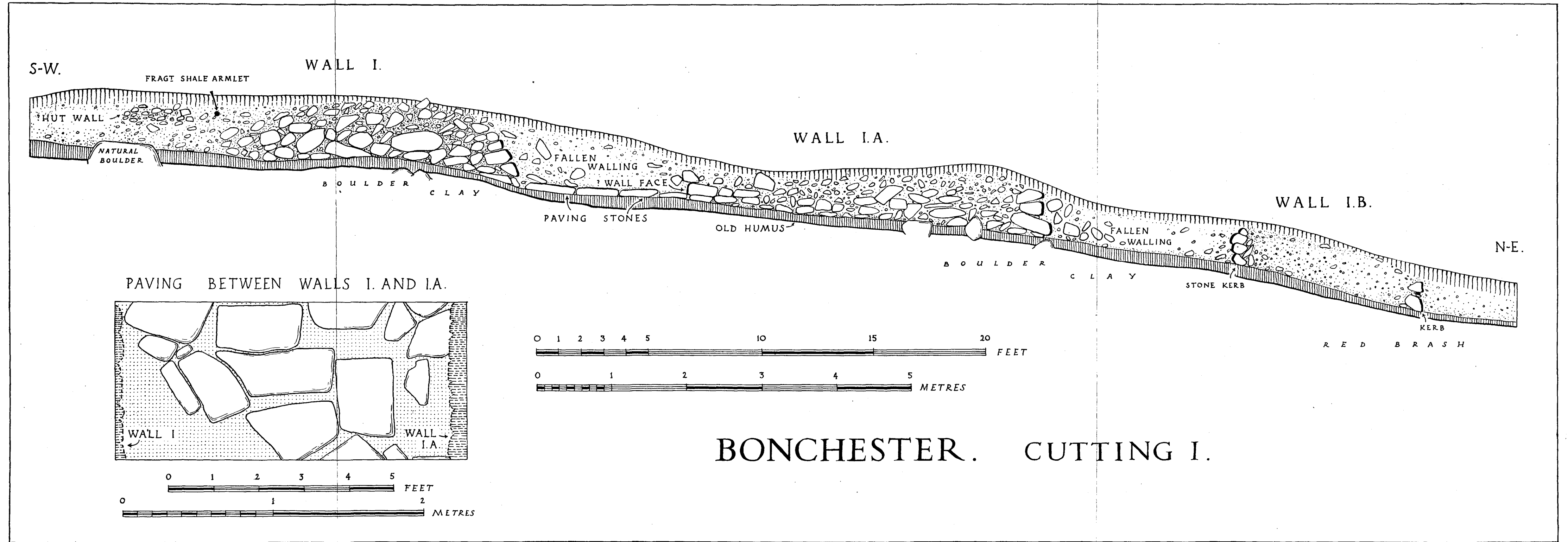
Cutting IV yielded no very satisfactory results, for it was again found impossible to identify for certain either the inner or the outer wall face, the larger blocks of stone from which had evidently been robbed.

(b) *Additional Outworks, probably of pre-Roman date.*

On the north side of the hill, Cutting I was extended outwards beyond the earliest fort wall and two additional outworks were discovered. These were both in all probability broadly contemporary with Wall I, and have here been called I A and I B, and they can be found so marked on the plan (fig. 2).

Outside Wall I the old surface was found to have been carefully paved with large stones lying on the natural boulder clay. This paving is shown in fig. 5. Above was a mass of stones which, from the angle at which they were inclined, appeared to have fallen from Wall I directly on to the paving. Just under 8 feet north from the outer face of Wall I a second wall, I A, was found. The lower stones of this were long flat slabs exactly similar to the paving-stones on which they lay, and unlike Wall I the foundations were coursed. Remains of the outer face of I A were discovered to consist of three superimposed large blocks, 17 feet away from the rear face. No sign of this wall showed above the ground, and its discovery was completely unsuspected and somewhat puzzling.

Eight feet beyond the outer face of I A another wall, 8½ feet in width, was discovered. This wall, I B, was again different in construction from I and I A. Faced on both sides with large stones, which on the outer face were inclining inwards with quite a pronounced batter, the core was composed of orange sandy soil. Though called a wall in this report, it should perhaps be more properly referred to as a revetted rampart. As the plan shows, I B was built roughly parallel with I and I A and further along its course it had been completely obliterated by later huts. These facts,



BONCHESTER. CUTTING I.

however, constitute the only dating evidence and must be treated with caution. On the other hand, the paving laid between I and I A must surely have been placed outside Wall I when that wall was still complete, and consequently it can be argued that I and I A must be broadly contemporary. On the existing evidence it seems probable that all three are contemporary.¹

The relation of these outworks with any original entrance into this early fort is unknown, though there is more than a suggestion that I B curves in towards the entrance on the north-east which Curle found to be only 5 feet wide. Narrow gateways of this kind are characteristic of many Iron Age contour forts, and this one may therefore be original. The discovery of outworks on the north side need cause no surprise, since it is the side where gently sloping ground would afford the easiest approach to the fort.

(c) *The Finds from the Early Fort.*

Three finds are of particular significance from this fort. One is the ring-headed pin of iron, found by Dr Curle in 1906 and already mentioned (fig. 6). Another is the fragment of La Tene I (c) brooch found in the wall of a hut in Cutting III; and the third is the fragment of beehive quern found in Cutting II. All of these finds almost certainly belong to the first phase of the fort's history, and the first two are of particular interest for they serve to link Bonchester chronologically with the forts of the Abernethy culture. The reasons for ascribing a date not earlier than the late first century B.C. or first century A.D. will be given below (p. 129 ff.).

The Pottery (fig. 6).—The pottery found by Dr Curle cannot definitely be equated with the earliest occupation of the fort. For though found close to the iron pin its depth was not recorded, and it is possible that it belongs to a subsequent phase. It is typical of the pottery found in some other south Scottish hill-forts, and it has been called Votadinian ware after the tribe in whose territory it has mostly been found.² In the opinion of the writer this name is misleading, for it seems unlikely that this ware is confined to the Votadini, and very similar ware has been found as far afield as Wales and Cheshire. It would be better to regard it as "kümmerkeramik" or degenerate ware, liable to be representative in all backward areas. New settlement produces new pottery forms and methods of potting; conservatism and stagnation result where occupation by newcomers is infrequent. It is a mistake, however, to expect to equate such stagnant areas with the Highland Zone, for this is demonstrably not always the case.

Included amongst the pottery recovered by Dr Curle were fragments of two large pots each about a foot in diameter at the slightly inturned rim. One of these was perforated (fig. 6, Nos. 9 and 10). Another interesting

¹ Compare with Greaves Ash, *Hist. Berwickshire Nat. Club*, vol. iv. (1856-62), p. 296.

² *Arch. Æliana*, 4th S. vol. xx (1942), p. 121.

vessel is a small straight-sided cup, or possibly crucible (fig. 6, No. 8), which is closely comparable to an example from Earns Heugh, Berwickshire,¹ as well as to another from Maiden Castle, Dorset.²

Other finds from the earlier excavation (which may, however, not belong

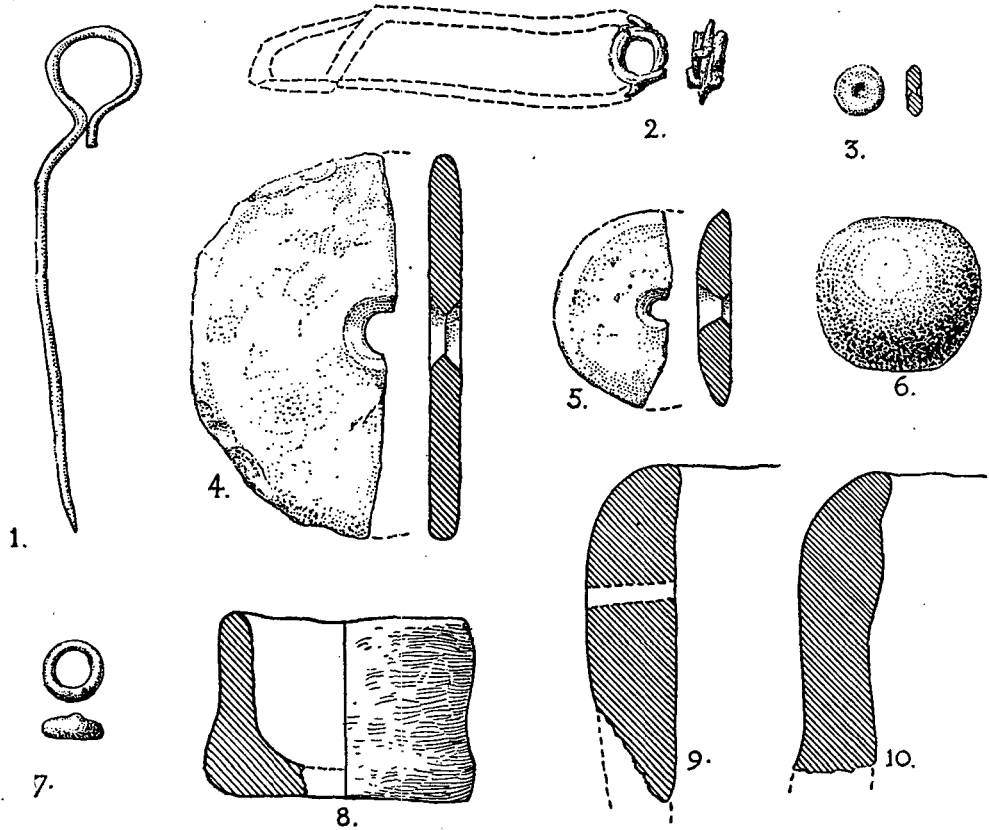


Fig. 6. (No. 7 full size, the others half size).

to the pre-Roman phase of Bonchester) included two perforated stone discs (fig. 6, Nos. 4 and 5), and two stone balls, the larger of which is shown in fig. 6, No. 6 (Museum Nos. G.P. 331-334). These stone balls are carefully made and therefore are unlikely to be sling stones. They occur fairly frequently in south Scottish hill-forts, but their significance is not yet clear.

The Ring-headed Pin (fig. 6, No. 1) (Museum No. G.P. 339).—See pp. 129 ff. for the discussion of this find.

The Iron Brooch Spring (fig. 6, No. 2).—Found in 1950 in the turf or

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxvi. (1931-32), pp. 152-83.

² R. E. M. Wheeler, *Maiden Castle, Dorset*. Research Report No. XII of the Society of Antiquaries of London (1943), fig. 119, no. 3.

rubble filling of the hollow wall of a hut in Cutting III. This spring was much corroded, but skilful cleaning at the National Museum of Antiquities has made it possible to identify it as belonging to the class of brooch known as La Tene I (c). This will be discussed more fully below (p. 129).

The Quern (fig. 7).—The upper stone of a rotary quern of beehive type was found as described in Cutting II. Comparable examples belong to the second half of the first century A.D. The diameter of the quern is 14 inches and the height 8 inches.

Mr Eckford kindly identified the lava of which this quern was made as augite andesite of Old Red Sandstone Age, and common among the volcanic

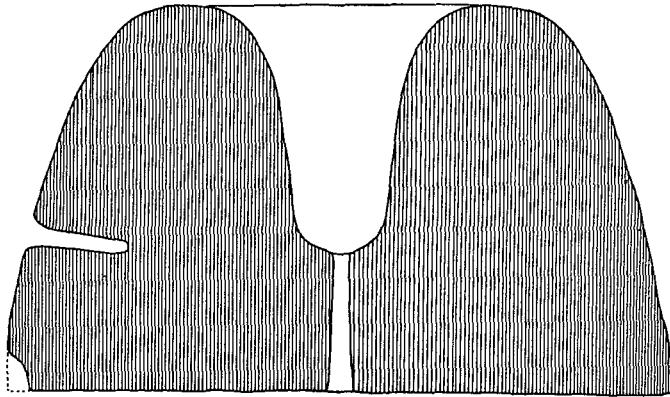


Fig. 7. Quern from Cutting II (1).

rocks of the Cheviot Hills. He adds, "the nearest outcrop of Old Red Sandstone lavas to Bonchester Hill is on the hill known as Steel Knowe, four miles to the south-east, but the writer cannot say whether or not they contain this particular type."

(d) *The Later Defences and Huts Examined.*

The plan shows a number of additional ramparts and walls very roughly concentric with the original fort. No evidence of sequence for these was obtained, and the fact that what appeared to be continuous defences might reveal totally different characters in two nearby cuttings, showed that a good deal of alteration and addition had been made from time to time. The large number of huts evidently at one time contained within the second wall on the west suggests that this represented the first enlargement, and it was evidently built at some time after the Agricola period, which seems to have ended the life of the early fort.

This second wall was cut in two sections (Cuttings V and VI, in fig. 9), and in addition a well-preserved portion of it was cleared to expose the wall

face (see Pl. X, 2 and fig. 8). On the north side of the hill this "wall" was found to be entirely composed of earth and light soil which had not apparently been quarried. Examination of part of a hut which utilised this earthwork for one of its walls unfortunately failed to produce any dating evidence, though hearth-soil contained a large amount of burnt bone and wood.

Cutting V is not illustrated, as it was impossible to determine how the wall, here entirely built with big stones, had been constructed. No sign of a wall face on either side could be recognised, and if this had ever been present it had either collapsed or it had been extensively robbed. It was clear, however, that the builders had made full use of a natural steep scarp in the rock along which to build this wall. Cutting X, though only a very short distance from that just mentioned, showed an interesting construction and it was unfortunate that time did not allow this cutting to be made through the wall so that it could be studied in section. As shown in fig. 8, the lower courses of the outer wall face had been most skilfully built of large upright stones, carefully trigged into position, and wedged with small, suitably selected stones between. Above this the walling was continued with horizontally laid stones. Such a building technique is not known to the writer from pre-Roman Iron Age sites in the north, though it is not uncommon from those of the Roman period or the Dark Ages. Among such sites may be mentioned Crock Cleugh, Roxburghshire,¹ Bwrdd Arthur and Pant-y-Saer in Anglesey,² Greaves Ash, Northumberland,³ and the evidently Dark Age nuclear fort of Peniel Heugh in Roxburghshire.⁴ It will be interesting, as more excavations in the highland zone are carried out, to discover whether such a building technique, used either in the walls of forts or enclosures, or in the huts themselves, may in fact have a regional chronological significance.⁵

Two additional earth banks had been built far down the slope on relatively flat ground, and though on the north side these were roughly parallel with the wall just described, they can be seen in the plan to swing away in a wide loop on the east and south sides, well below a steep natural scarp in the rock. On the west only one work, evidently a wall, continues their line. Examination by ground observation and excavation showed that these outworks

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxxi. (1946-47), pp. 138-57.

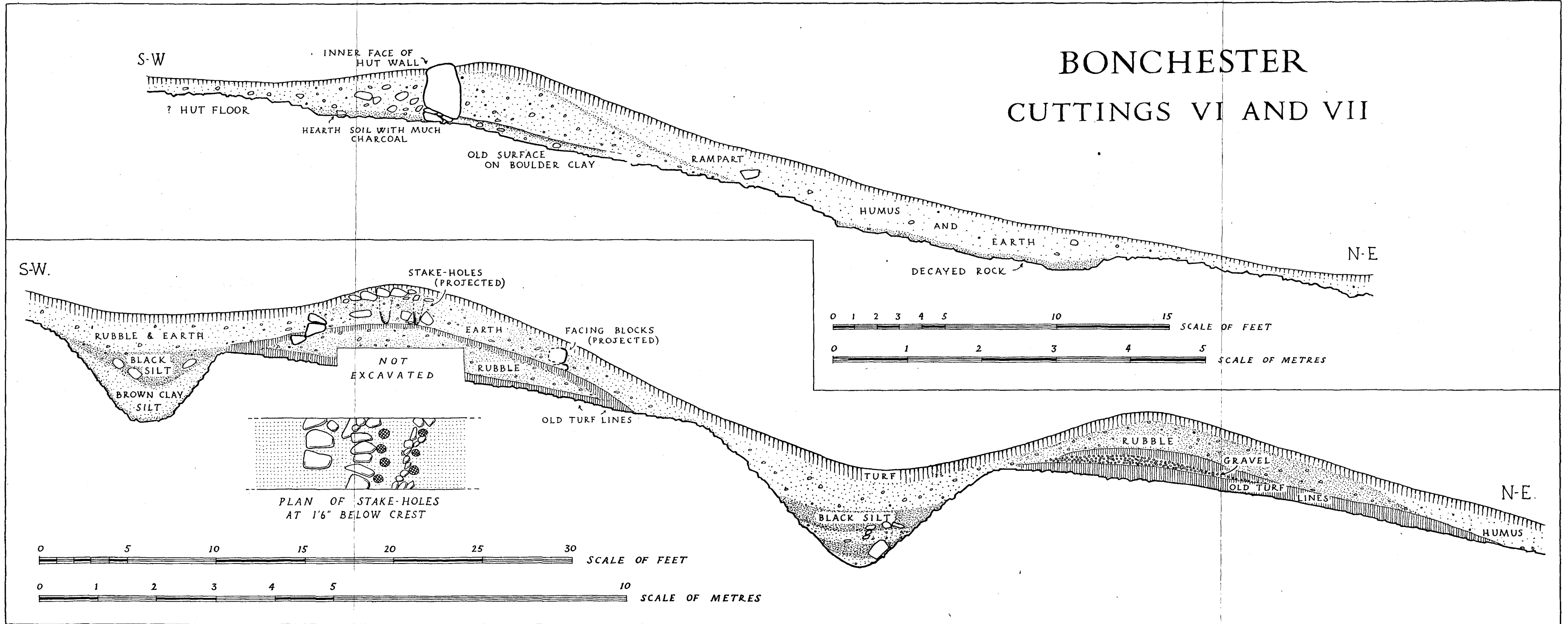
² *Arch. Camb.*, vol. lxxxix. (1934), pp. 1-36.

³ *Hist. Berwickshire Nat. Club.*, vol. iv. (1856-62).

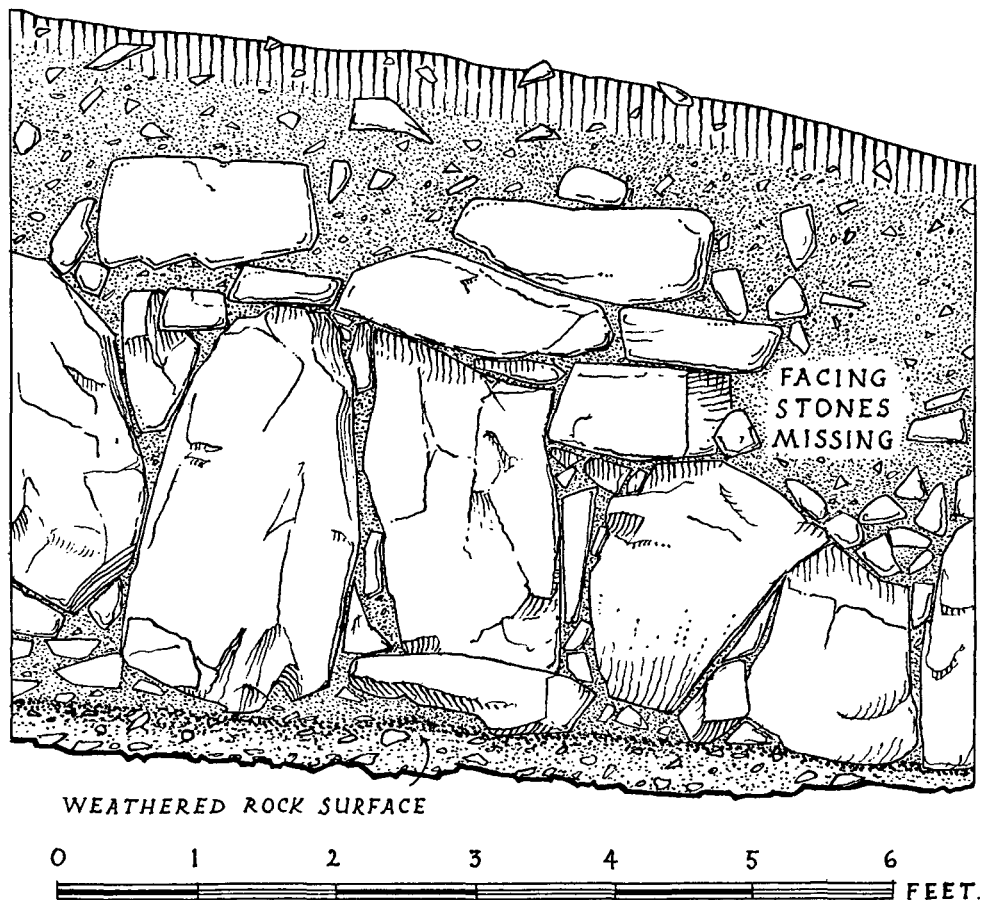
⁴ Unpublished. See Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments (Scotland), *Roxburghshire Inventory*, forthcoming.

⁵ Mr Raleigh Radford informs me that hut walls with upright stones seem to occur as early as the Late Bronze Age in Cornwall, and are common in the North Welsh forts of probably Iron Age date. In Dark Age sites in the south-west horizontally laid stones seem to be normal, though there are exceptions; in Anglesey, however, a number of sites of this period have upright stones set in the walls, and it appears to be the normal building practice in Gwynedd, and it may equally well prove to be so in the Scottish lowlands. In this connection see also W. J. Hemp and C. A. Gresham on "Hut Circles in North-West Wales," in *Antiquity*, vol. xviii. (1944), pp. 183-96.

BONCHESTER CUTTINGS VI AND VII



may have belonged to more than one phase, having possibly been re-dug on the north of the hill. They had been provided with steep V-shaped quarry



DETAIL OF WALL FACE IN CUTTING X

Fig. 8.

ditches placed *within* the enclosed area, not outside in the more usual manner.

Of these two earthworks, the innermost had at some stage stood only to a height of three feet above the old surface (fig. 9). It was composed of rubble presumably obtained from an outer quarry ditch. This bank was sealed by a greasy grey turf-line, over which the additional rampart material had been placed. This had probably been obtained from a new *inner* ditch,

and from the recutting of the outer one. The bank was carefully built with stone blocks facing it on either side. Before this earthwork had been completed, two parallel rows of stakes averaging 6 inches in diameter were driven in at intervals of about a foot. Round these were then placed stones to give additional support before the remaining part of the rampart was heaped up, leaving, one imagines, the stakes projecting some four or five feet above the surface. These stake-holes were invisible both in plan and section but were discovered by careful probing. The hardened edges of the holes were then distinguished from the looser soil of their filling. The inner ditch had a rounded V-shaped profile 6 feet in depth. The brown clay silt suggested a gradual and slow formation, and certainly was not deliberate in-filling, and when about half silted up, stones, possibly from the rampart revetment, had fallen into it. No object was discovered from either ditch or rampart. A small cutting, IX (fig. 10), was made to examine a gap in this rampart, in an area previously partly examined by Dr Curle. This was found to be an original gap, and a cobbling of very small stones had been laid over the surface of the road through. This showed no evidence of wear and was probably only in use for a short time. A gate post-hole 8 inches deep and 14 inches across was found on one side.

On the west of the hill Cutting VIII was made through the outermost rampart which, as can best be seen from the plan (fig. 2), seems to be a continuation of the defence just described. It was found, however, to be completely different in character. For it was here found to be a narrow wall, less than 8 feet in width, revetted with larger stones than those comprising its filling. Evidently contemporary with it, and for this reason selected for excavation, was a hut, 25 feet in diameter, which failed to yield any finds other than slag. It was, however, closely similar in construction to the hut in Cutting III (shown in fig. 4), for it also had been built with hollow walls, and the two may be regarded as broadly contemporary and to belong to the Dark Ages.¹

The outer rampart also showed evidence suggesting two building periods, though no long time interval need have separated them. The first stage was represented by a thin layer of clean gravelly soil which can hardly have been long in place before the additional soil of the second phase was heaped upon it; for it contained no carbonised roots and discoloration of the kind usually found when soil has been near the surface for some time. It had, however, been sufficiently long established for a turf-line several inches in depth to form upon it. Though not found in the excavated section, the inner edge of this rampart was punctuated irregularly with large stones. The ditch which, as has already been mentioned was probably a recut one, again was V-shaped, carefully dug, and filled by alternate layers of dark and lighter silt. One very large stone had fallen to the very bottom,

¹ For comparable walling see *Arch. Camb.* (1949), pp. 173-206.

BONCHESTER. CUTTINGS IV, VIII, AND IX.

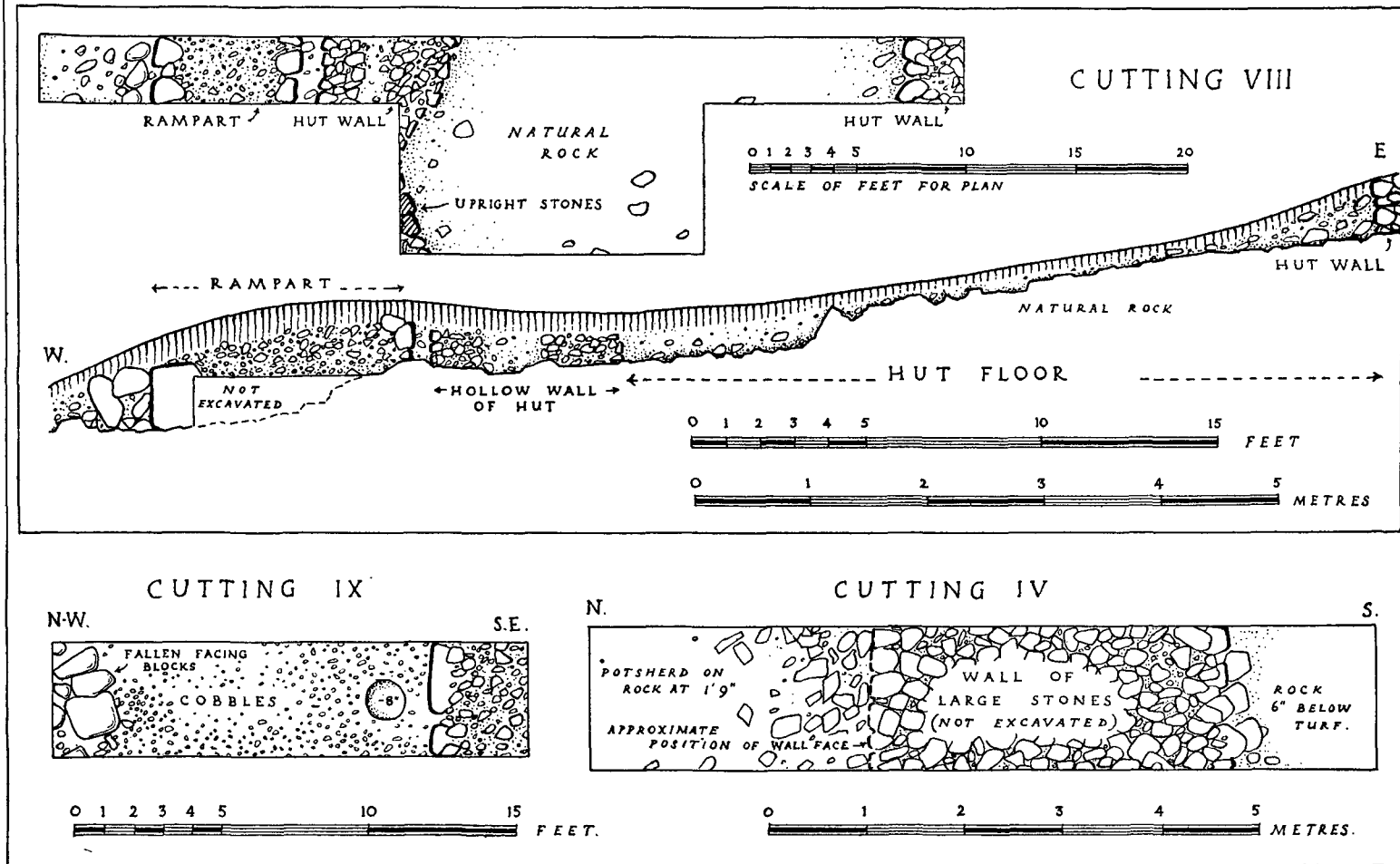


Fig. 10.

and this may either have been one of the spaced stones just mentioned, or it might have been one of the outer facing blocks of the inner of these two ramparts. It suggests that the use of these defences was only shortlived.

Unsatisfactory though this cutting may have been from an informatory point of view, it is felt that the unusual character of one of these earthworks with its double stockade along the crest must denote a cultural or chronological position, the significance of which we have as yet too little knowledge to access.

These outer earthworks, it must be admitted, are extremely difficult to understand. This is not surprising when the paucity of comparable excavated sites is realised. It is in fact impossible to guess at their purpose with any conviction, for they not only seem deliberately to forgo any advantages afforded by higher and stronger ground, but also their very position so low down the hillside would make them almost impossible to defend. The wide entrance on the south-east, and the *interior* ditches, lead one to consider whether they were intended not to keep people out so much as cattle in, perhaps at seasonal round-ups or markets. The presence of a few scattered huts within this area could be explained as belonging to herdsmen. Such tentative suggestions can, however, at this stage be of little value. As far as their date is concerned, the earliest stage probably falls within the Roman period or the Dark Ages, for they appear to represent the last expansion of defences required by the inhabitants of Bonchester. In support for such a date it should be noted that in places they are stopped up against natural scarps or outcrops of rock, a practice which has recently been shown as characteristic of Dark Age "nuclear" forts.¹ (See Pl. XII).

The later phase, when the banks were heightened and the inner one provided with a palisade, may belong to any time between the Roman and medieval periods. It may be significant that the only really close parallel known to the writer for such a rampart construction comes from a medieval work at Bishopston in Gower.²

(e) *Finds from the Later Phases.*

These were extremely few, and although they no doubt included some of the finds discovered by Dr Curle in 1906, it has not been possible to equate these with any particular structural stage in the history of the site.

Only two finds of the 1950 season can be regarded as subsequent to Phase I, and these are both small objects, not themselves closely datable.

The Blue Glass Bead (fig. 6, No. 7) came from the filling of the hollow hut wall in Cutting III. It is very dark blue and, as shown in the illustration, retains the evidence that it was made originally by coiling the glass

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxxiii. (1948-49), pp. 186-98.

² *Arch. Camb.*, vol. liii. (1899), pp. 249-58.

round a rod. This bead was submitted to Dr Harden of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, who reported that in his opinion it more closely resembled Dark Age beads than Roman and Iron Age examples. He mentioned the fact that Iron Age beads tend to have smaller holes and to be more spherical than the Roman and Saxon varieties. He quoted analogies from the Abingdon Saxon cemetery and from a late Irish context. It is probable, then, that this bead is of the post-Roman period (particularly as there was nothing similar from Newstead), and that it and the hut in which it was found represent a Dark Age occupation at Bonchester.

Stone Bead or Counter (fig. 6, No. 3).—This was found immediately beneath the turf outside Wall I in Cutting IV. It is not possible to say exactly what this object was, and if it was intended for a bead its perforation was never completed. Not closely datable.

There were no other finds from the later phases, except a pivot stone from the hut in Cutting III and a small piece of shale armlet from the topsoil in Cutting I.

CONCLUSIONS.

Perhaps the most important result of this excavation has been to fix with reasonable certainty the chronological setting for the earliest fort, which, as has already been mentioned, is linked by the presence there of the ring-headed pin and La Tene I (c) brooch with the "Gallic" wall forts of the Abernethy culture, as defined by Childe in 1935, and including such sites as Dunagoil, Bute,¹ and Castle Law, Abernethy.² Both of these forts produced a pin and brooch of the same kind, and were then assigned to the third century B.C. Such a high dating can, however, now be considerably reduced. In addition, this excavation has shown that it was not the invariable practice of the people responsible for the building of these forts to construct their walls with timber-lacing, for both at Bonchester and at Hownam Rings Phase II this timber-work was not present. Nor does it appear to have been used in the comparable wall of Woden Law Phase I.³

The date of the Abernethy forts was reviewed by Childe in 1946⁴ in the light of the evidence obtained at Maiden Castle in Dorset. At that site Wheeler was able to demonstrate that brooches and pins of the types under discussion were still in use in the first century B.C. Accordingly Childe concluded his summary with the words: "Hence all we are so far entitled to assert is that some Gallic forts . . . may have been founded between 350 and 50 B.C. Really 100 is a more likely date than 300 for the earliest documented remains of our last stage." With this statement the evidence from Bonchester is in agreement, though perhaps one might in some

¹ *Trans. Buteshire Nat. Hist. Soc.*, vol. ix. (1925), pp. 56-60.

² *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxxiii. (1898-99), pp. 13-33.

³ Information kindly given in advance of publication by Professor I. A. Richmond.

⁴ *Scotland before the Scots* (1946), p. 129.

cases, including Bonchester itself, postulate an even lower dating. In this connection mention should be made of another almost certain example of an iron La Tene I (c) brooch which was found in a midden at the foot of Dun Fheurain, Gallanach, near Oban,¹ with Samian pottery, a spiral ring of a type discussed below, and objects of Broch type, and likely to be at least as late as the second century A.D. For the sake of completing the Scottish finds mention should be made of a pin from the Isle of Clairinch, Loch Lomond, here referred to by permission of Mr Mann through the kind offices of Mr R. Mackay. Fig. 11 is a re-drawing by Mrs Margaret Scott of the bronze pin from Dunagoil, showing its decoration, which had not previously been recorded.²

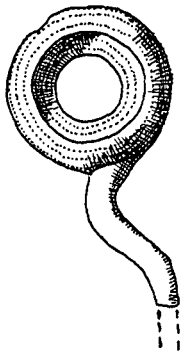


Fig. 11. Ring-headed pin from Dunagoil, Bute. (†.)

The evidence for close dating at Bonchester depends not only on these iron objects, but also on the beehive quern (fig. 7) which, as shown above (p. 123), must reflect fairly closely the date of the building of the fort. Querns have unfortunately been much neglected in the past, particularly in the Highland Zone, where large quantities of them have been found and where they are all too frequently mentioned and dismissed with tantalising brevity. The tall beehive querns of the Bonchester type are known to have lasted long in use only in areas unaffected by the Roman conquest, and in the north they do not appear to have been made before the last century B.C. at the earliest. Curwen³ recognised this type as "a product of the northward spread of the Iron Age 'B' culture," and regarded it as ancestral to what he called the Roman legionary type of quern. He cites a late first- or mid-second-century A.D. example comparable to that from Bonchester which was found at Newstead, and others of the same date from Castlecary Fort, Stirlingshire.

The Bonchester quern is, then, of vital importance for the dating of the fort which, in the absence of any Roman objects, must be considered to have come to an end at the time of the Agricolan campaign.

It may be felt that there is a case at Bonchester for the two metal objects to have come from an earlier occupation of the hill, before the defences were built. At both Hownam Rings and Hayhope Knowe,⁴ and it is probable in many other forts as well, the earliest occupation was marked by a palisade enclosure surrounded by a timber fence, either single or double, and leaving

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxix. (1894-95), p. 282.

² Note also an interesting bronze pin from Coll (*Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xv. (1881), p. 81) of Irish type derived from Yorkshire. This was not included by Dunning in *Arch. Journ.*, vol. xci. (1934), p. 286.

³ *Antiquity*, vol. xi. (1937), pp. 133-151. See also J. Phillips in *Trans. Leicestershire Arch. Soc.*, vol. xxvi. (1950), pp. 75-82.

⁴ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxxiii. (1948-49), pp. 45-67.

slight traces only, which when overlaid or partly obliterated by later walls or earthworks can very easily escape detection by the excavator. Such a palisade enclosure might then have existed at Bonchester, but in the opinion of the writer this was extremely improbable, for the outcropping rock, which over most of Bonchester was only just under the turf, would have made the construction of a palisade enclosure extremely difficult, unless it was farther down the hill on the north side where deep boulder clay would allow stakes to be bedded in. It must be remembered that unlike so many Cheviot forts where the subsoil is weathered Old Red Sandstone, at Bonchester the rock is basalt, a notoriously hard rock to dig. The excavators therefore consider it improbable that any occupation at Bonchester had significantly preceded the building of the fort.

In the case of the palisade enclosures we are too little acquainted with the material equipment of the people to know whether or not they were newcomers to the district. The excavations at Hayhope Knowe unfortunately only produced one metal object, an iron spear-head of simple type which is likely, on analogy with others from elsewhere in Britain, to belong to the first century B.C. or A.D. It cannot be said whether this spear was acquired in the course of trade between the indigenous and backward people of Middle Bronze Age tradition then living on the Cheviots, or whether it was brought by settlers who had moved up from the south. That question cannot be answered until more excavations have taken place in palisade enclosures. Consequently we do not know if the fort builders were the first newcomers to the district, but we do know that their forts cannot have been long preceded by the palisaded enclosures. We can also say with some confidence that the forts of Hownam Rings Phase II and Bonchester types, as well as at least some of the forts of the so-called Abernethy culture, were built and designed by refugees from the south. Evidence for this lies not only in certain constructional features common to the south of England and the Border counties, but more particularly in the metal objects, notably the brooches, pins, and spiral finger- and toe-rings.

The date of the introduction of these metal types to North Britain is fortunately relatively securely tied by consistent evidence to the first century A.D. or slightly earlier. Mention has already been made of the fact that these brooches and pins, both present at Bonchester, were still in use in Wessex in the first century B.C. The spiral rings are even more informative, for at Maiden Castle they were closely dated to the period 25 B.C.—A.D. 50, and their distribution, confined as it is to two areas of Britain—south of the Wash—Severn line, and again in south and mid-Scotland (see fig. 12)—clearly points to direct connection between the two areas. For such rings have no ancestry in the Middle or Late Bronze Age tradition in the north.

At the turn of the first century B.C. and A.D., then, we have evidence not only for the sudden building of defensive enclosures in the north, but at the

same time new types of personal ornaments begin to arrive; for the origin of these innovations as a group we must turn to an area remote from Scotland but restricted in extent. Only in the south of England do we find forts occupied by people wearing identical brooches, pins and rings. Here, then, we have reason to assume the presence of political refugees installing them-

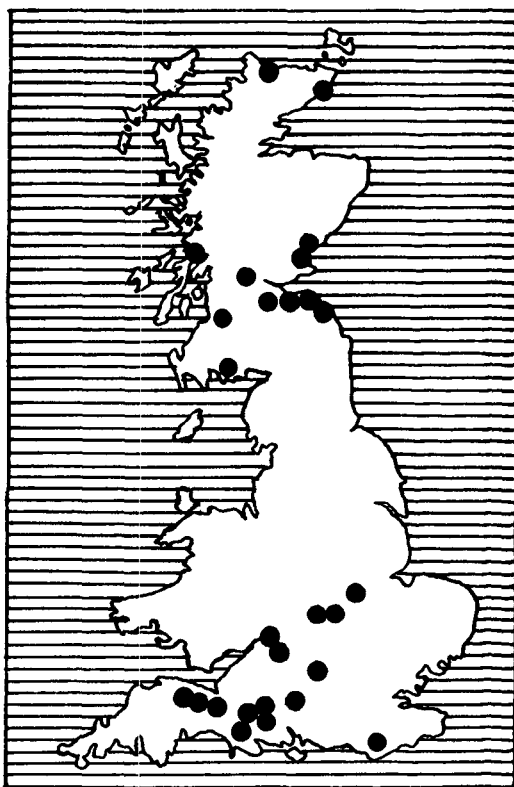


Fig. 12. Distribution of spiral finger-and-toe rings.
(For revision of Scottish sites, see fig. 13).

selves on the Borders in times of stress, and apparently bringing with them little other than their personal belongings. Meanwhile the local people on whom they imposed their power continued to make pottery in the way familiar to them, and neither in the forms of the pots nor in the methods of potting is there apparent any appreciable southern influence such as one would expect had many womenfolk accompanied the men in their flight. There are, however, rare hints of such influences. One of the pots from Hownam Rings¹ with a groove round the top of the rim to hold a lid has

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxxii. (1947-48), p. 213, fig. 10, No. II, 2.

parallels from Maiden Castle,¹ while several sherds from the same site are better matched in Wessex than in the north where similar hard black ware is very rarely found. Again, the small straight-sided pots from Bonchester (fig. 6, No. 8) and from Earns Heugh, Berwickshire,² closely compare with some from Maiden Castle,³ though it must be emphasised that these may be explicable as specialised crucible forms associated with the novel metal shapes and their local production.

We have mentioned that the men responsible for bringing this sudden activity into the regions to the north of Brigantia evidently arrived alone, and this may to some extent account for the relatively small size of the Cheviot forts compared with those in Wessex. In the area under discussion

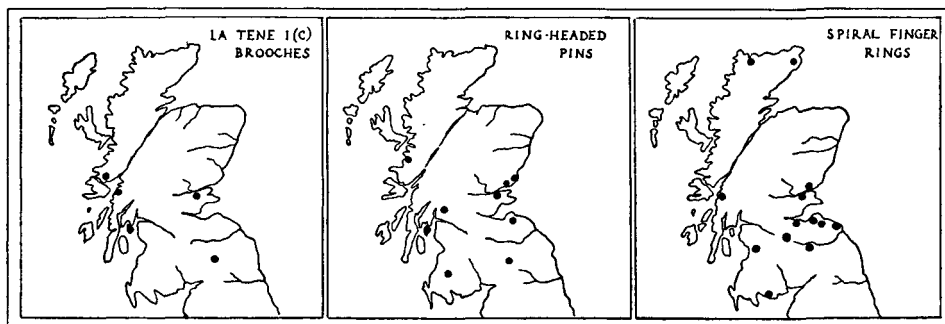


Fig. 13. Distribution Maps (Scotland).

there are not more than five or six large tribal forts, and the rest are all small enclosures, frequently not much more than one or two acres in extent, and these must have been based on a family rather than a tribal unit.

At about the same time large families of refugee people were arriving at various points on the coast and islands of the West Highland seaboard. In the case of these people, as one might expect when whole families migrate, the material equipment they took with them, and thereafter continued to make, was more considerable, and reflects much Iron Age "B" influence from the south-west of England. Conspicuously absent from their settlements, whether wheel-houses, crannogs or brochs, are the three metal ornaments already described, and this emphasises the likelihood that these families came from a more westerly origin in the south. They undoubtedly made their journey by sea, and this also seems to have been the case with the new overlords in south and mid-Scotland. A distribution map of forts⁴ shows that it was from the east end of the Cheviots that these immigrants

¹ *Maiden Castle*, fig. 67, Nos. 117-19.

² *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxvi. (1931-32), p. 180, fig. 22.

³ *Maiden Castle*, fig. 70, No. 161, and fig. 119, No. 3. Dated there late first century B.C. and first century A.D. respectively.

⁴ See *British Association Handbook*, Edinburgh (1951), fig. 9.

crossed into the lowlands, and if they came overland it is difficult to account for the almost total lack either of forts or of comparable personal ornaments from the extensive territories under Brigantian rule, and the question must be asked whether refugees may not even have been refused permission to pass through Brigantian lands if strict political control was in force. A temporary relaxation of this suggested control would, however, have obtained for about the period of a year around A.D. 70-71 when Brigantia was in a state of civil war prior to being subdued by Petilius Cerialis. Settlement from the west end of the Cheviots is improbable in view of the great rarity of multiple-walled forts in Dumfriesshire, for although a large number of forts were listed in 1920,¹ the majority of these are not comparable either in size or defensive position with the Cheviot forts, and many indeed appear to be nothing more than defended houses of unknown date.

In conclusion we can summarise the present state of our knowledge as follows. Individuals or families representing both the Iron Age "A" and "B" cultures of the south, and perhaps Belgic as well, were displaced by foreign settlers in the south and west of England in the late first century B.C. and early A.D. Some may have found their way north by land up the Welsh Marches and thence by sea into the Solway area and the Argyllshire coast, while others may have sailed up the east coast to land north of Brigantian territory, approached by the Tyne, Tweed and Tay. These men came alone, and introduced changes of fashion in clothing and warfare to those areas in which they settled, and where they impinged upon a population still living virtually in a Middle Bronze Age tradition: for even if the builders of the palisade enclosures were newcomers from the north of England, they were not long arrived and were themselves in a backward cultural stage which, in Cheshire,² Professor Varley has termed the Ultimate Bronze Age.

Being themselves of mixed cultural ancestry, it is hardly surprising that these people did not always build timber-laced walls to their forts. There were alternative methods of wall construction, particularly if speed was required, and hence, perhaps, the simple revetted walls or ramparts such as were found at Hownam, Bonchester and Woden Law. The exact bounds of the territories belonging to the Votadini and Selgovæ have yet to be identified. It appears likely, however, that Hownam Rings and Woden Law would have been in the Votadinian lands, whereas Bonchester (being near to the Selgovan town of *Trimontium*) more probably belonged to that tribal area.³

The defensive methods first introduced into the Borders seem to have called for a single-walled enclosure. This was quickly outmoded, it seems,

¹ Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments (Scotland), *Dumfriesshire Inventory* (1920).

² Varley and Jackson, *Prehistoric Cheshire* (Chester) (1940).

³ See "The Votadini," by A. H. A. Hogg, in *Aspects of Archaeology in Britain and Beyond* (1951), pp. 209-19.

after a fashion lasting only one or two generations. Multiple defences were then introduced, alterations took place in the early forts and others were built with multiple walls or ramparts—apparently it was immaterial which, provided that defence in depth was achieved.¹ These forts too were short-lived, and were abandoned or dismantled under Roman authority, in the late first century A.D., though some may have been redefended and occupied early in the second century and subsequently during the Roman period when the frontier was temporarily withdrawn further south. In this connection Haverfield's words on Romanization are relevant. "It did not," he wrote, "everywhere and at once destroy all traces of tribal or national sentiments or fashions. These remained at least for a while and in a few districts, not so much in active opposition as in latent persistence, capable of resurrection under the proper conditions."²

The position of the natives, both under Roman rule and subsequently in the Dark Ages, is at present almost totally obscure, and must wait for excavations designed to study the problem. Only the combined efforts of prehistorians and Roman archæologists and historians can throw light on the problem. Until such a time, the work on the later defences at Bonchester must await interpretation.

APPENDIX I.

The Geology of Bonchester Hill.

By R. J. A. ECKFORD, Geological Survey of Great Britain.

The upper portion of Bonchester Hill is formed of igneous rock (basalt) that covers an area of approximately a quarter of a square mile. The basalt is believed to be plugging an ancient volcanic vent that has been drilled through the strata of Upper Old Red Sandstone Age, that forms the surface rock of the surrounding district. Basaltic plugged vents are common in the Border region, and represent the final phase of volcanic activity when the molten matter ceased to be ejected at the surface but cooled and crystallised in the funnels.

The stones used by the builders of the innermost wall at Bonchester (Wall I) comprised only sandstone and basalt derived from local sources. As there are numerous outcrops of basalt around the summit of the hill, the source of these stones has obviously been in and around the fort itself, so their transport would involve little labour.

The particular source of the sandstone, however, is not so definite, but it is the surface rock round the lower slopes of the hill up to a height of 900 feet on the southern side and 800 feet elsewhere. No signs of ancient quarries, however, were noticed on the lower slopes, but in any case such excavation would probably have been shallow and subsequent weathering would most likely have obliterated any traces on such steep slopes. The sandstone must have been transported up

¹ "The Romans in Redesdale," by I. A. Richmond, in *A History of Northumberland*, vol. xv. (1940), pp. 63-128.

² *The Romanization of Roman Britain*, 2nd ed. (1912), p. 18.

the hill after having been brought from some source in the vicinity. Exposures in the nearby Rule Water and its tributaries show similar red and pink, medium grained sandstones to those used in the wall. The nearest to the site of the former sandstone quarries of which there are records (late eighteenth century) was that of Fodderlee, 2 miles to the north.

A number of the sandstone blocks seen in the excavations at the fort bore the impression of having been dressed by the masons of the period.

In Cutting I the foundation of the wall was seen to rest on tough clay that looked like boulder clay. As the ice-movement in this district was from the south-west, it looks as if some at least of the depressions on the sheltered side of the hill had been filled with this ice-borne deposit.

APPENDIX II.

The Place-Name Bonchester.

Miss J. O. Ramsay has provided the material for the following note. The earliest record of the name is *Bunchester*, in the *Register of the Great Seal*, 1566. The etymology of this name is quite uncertain, though J. B. Johnston in his *Place-Names of Scotland* interprets *Bon* as a Gaelic element describing a site in the angle at the confluence of two streams. *Bonchester*, however, does not lie in such a position.

The element *chester* in Scottish (as distinct from English) place-names usually designates a non-Roman earthwork or fort (see *E.P.N.S. Intro. Vol.*, pp. 146-147: cf. also Christison, *Early Fortific. in Scot.* (1898), pp. 104-8). Of the twenty or so place-names in Roxburghshire which contain this element, only two are near authentic Roman sites, and these two are equally near native British sites. In Northumberland, by contrast, six out of eleven names in *-chester* or *-cester* apply to Roman stations. Of these, however, many belong to the region of Roman concentration in the neighbourhood of Hadrian's Wall.

APPENDIX III.

Carbonised Wood at Bonchester Hill, Roxburghshire.

By M. Y. ORR, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.

Specimen.	Determination.
6. Charcoal, behind inner wall in C. IV old surface.	<i>Alder.</i>
9. Charcoal, east end of C. II inward from inner end of wall.	<i>Oak, Alder and Willow.</i>
12. Charcoal from hearth on hut floor behind rampart, C. VI.	<i>Oak, Alder and Willow.</i>
13. Charcoal from occupation soil under wall in C. II.	Charred and friable, <i>Alder and Willow?</i>
18. Charcoal from occupation layer under wall in C. II.	<i>Alder and Willow.</i>
22. C. VII, primary silt inner ditch.	<i>Alder, Willow and Birch.</i>



*Photo: J. K. St Joseph.
Air Ministry, Crown Copyright Reserved.*

Bonchester from the south-east.



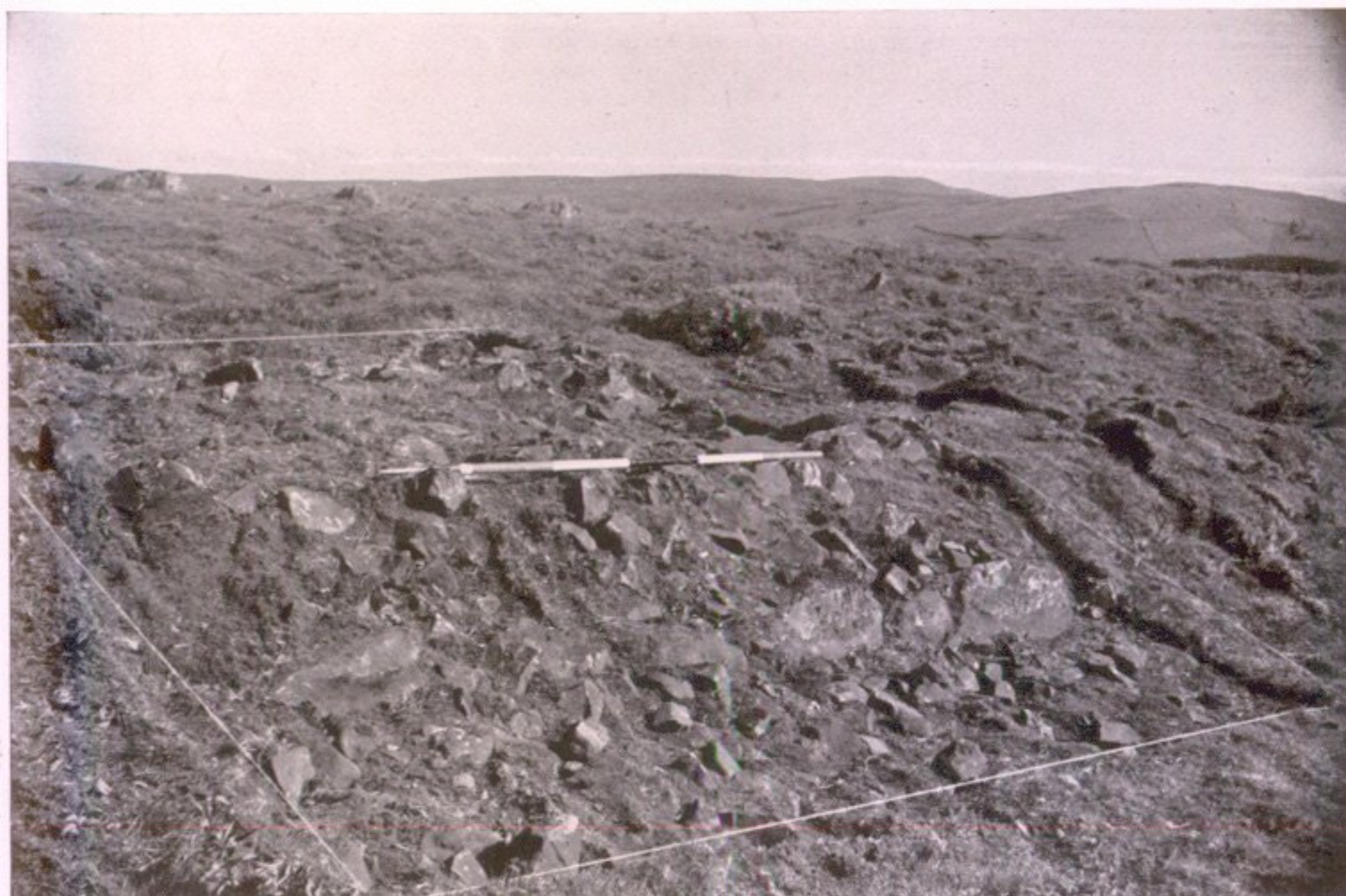
1. View of Bonchester Hill from the south. Ruberslaw on left and the Eildons in middle distance.



2. The wall face in Cutting X.

C. M. PIGGOTT.

[All photos by R. J. C. Atkinson.]



1. Beginning of the excavation of Wall I in Cutting II.



2. The same wall at finish of excavation. Fallen facing stones in foreground.
Foreward ramp removed.

C. M. PIGGOTT.



1. The two outermost ramparts, near to Cutting VII. Ruberslaw in distance.



2. Entrance through lower defences on south.

C. M. PIGGOTT.



1. Cutting VII. The outer rampart.



2. Cutting VII. Post-holes of double palisade along crest of rampart.

C. M. PIGGOTT.

Specimen.	Determination.
23. From post-hole in Middle Bank, C. VII.	Very minute, might be fragment of <i>Alder</i> .
25. Charcoal from old surface under rampart in C. VI.	<i>Alder</i> and <i>Willow</i> .
31. Charcoal, bottom of inner wall, C. I, C. II, C. IV.	<i>Oak</i> , <i>Alder</i> and <i>Willow</i> .
32. Charcoal from under wall, C. I.	<i>Oak</i> , <i>Alder</i> and <i>Willow</i> .

APPENDIX IV.

The Animal Bones from Bonchester.

By Miss M. I. PLATT, Royal Scottish Museum.

Cutting I (from old ground surface inside Wall I). Part of the mandible of a Dog, *Canis familiaris* of adult size. Teeth of Ox, all broken and well worn, therefore adult.

Cutting II (from occupation layer on the old surface immediately inside Wall I). Calcined bones, probably of Sheep.