

Inveresk Roman fort: trial trenching

W S Hanson*

with contributions by Grace Simpson and A Young

SUMMARY

Trial trenching at the W end of the Roman fort demonstrated the variable survival of Roman levels and confirmed that the fort was occupied twice within the Antonine period.

INTRODUCTION

The approximate size and character of the fort at Inveresk was established by trial trenching in 1946–7 by the late Sir I A Richmond (Richmond 1980). The bulk of the fort lies beneath the cemetery of St Michael's church, but extends slightly beyond it to the W into land which is still part of a market garden (illus 1). Examination of this field in 1947 was restricted by the intensive nature of cultivation therein. Nevertheless, Richmond was able to put a series of trenches along its E margin immediately outside the cemetery wall. Apart from determining the line of the rampart and intervallum road at the N and S edges of the field, he concluded that all traces of buildings and streets had been removed by the systematic deep digging to which the area had been consistently subjected (Richmond 1980, 292, fig 3).

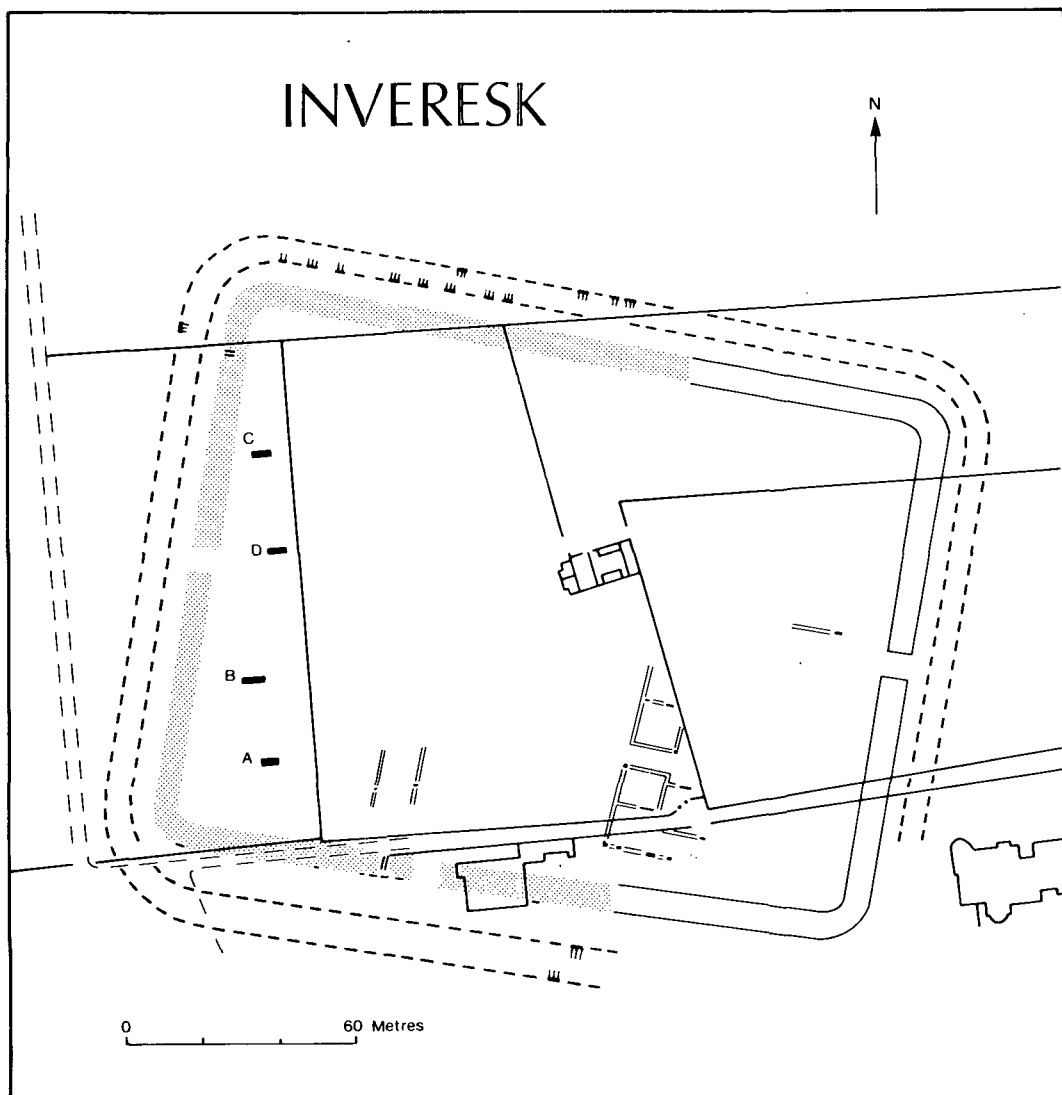
The possibility of a further extension of the cemetery prompted a reassessment of the archaeological potential of this area and the author was invited by the SDD (Ancient Monuments) to undertake an excavation. Given the noticeably higher ground level in the market garden compared with that within the cemetery, it seemed strange that archaeological survival in the former should have been so poor by comparison. Yet Richmond was quite categorical in writing off the area as archaeologically barren. Under the circumstances it was decided to place several trial trenches across that part of the field where buildings would have stood, but away from the cemetery wall where Richmond had excavated, in order to test the survival of Roman remains before any commitment was made to work on a larger scale.

Accordingly, excavation took place over one week in April 1981 with the aid of students from Department of Archaeology, Glasgow University, to whom I wish to express my thanks. I am grateful also to Mr A K Livingstone, the owner of the market garden, for permission to excavate, to Dr D J Breeze for assistance in setting up the excavation and for his comments on a draft of this report, and to Alison McGhie for the line drawings.

EXCAVATION

Four trenches, each between 7.5 and 10 square metres in area, were dug by hand at regular intervals across the interior of the fort (illus 1). Beneath the modern topsoil in all cases was a

* Department of Archaeology, University of Glasgow



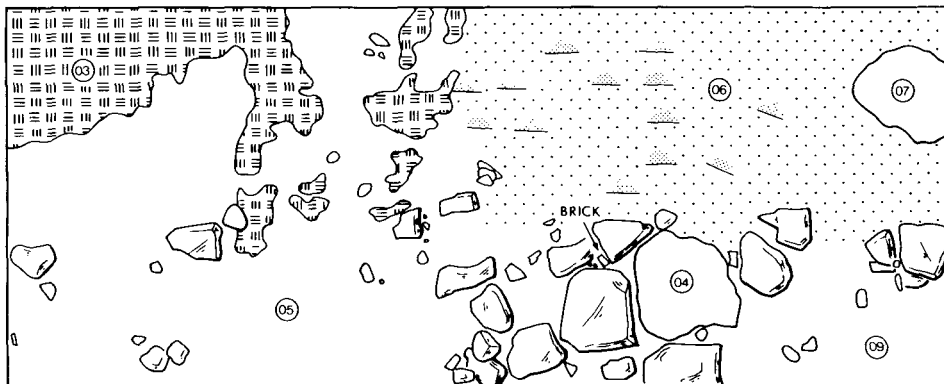
ILLUS 1 · Inveresk Roman fort: trench location




layer of chocolate brown sandy loam which varied in depth from as little as 0.15 m at the W end of trench A to over 0.5 m at the E end of trench C. This layer contained a collection of bone, clay-pipe fragments and pottery of Roman and more recent date, and clearly represented the accumulation of soil from cultivation in the post-medieval period. Roman pottery from this layer has been catalogued below as unstratified. The survival of Roman levels in each trench varied considerably.

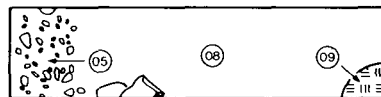
TRENCH A (illus 1 & 2)

Two features at first suggested themselves as of possible importance: an area of dirty clay in the NW corner (A03) and a rough flagged surface running at a slight angle across the SE quarter of the

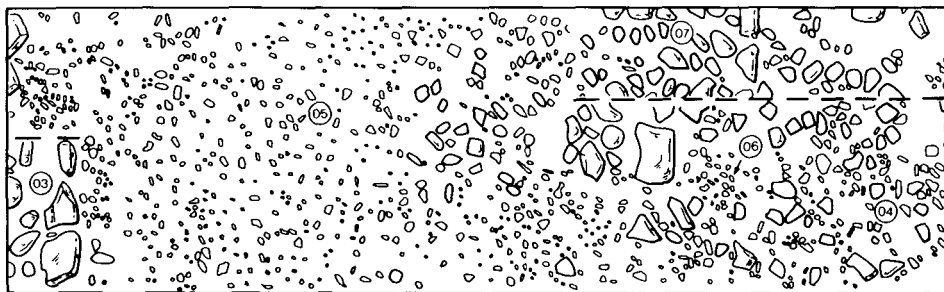
Trench A



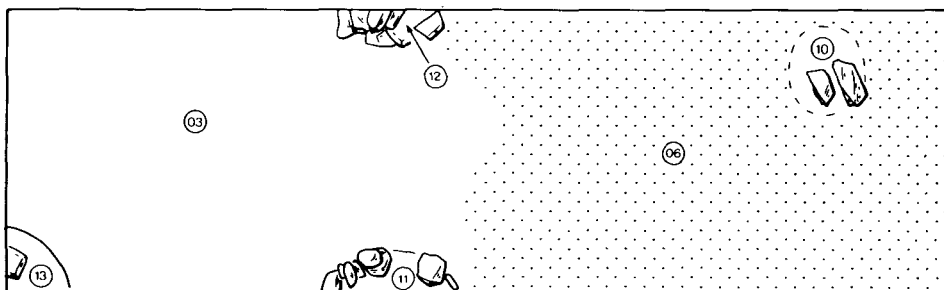
-  orange/yellow sand (subsoil)
-  dirty yellow/orange clay
-  brown loam



Trench C



Trench D



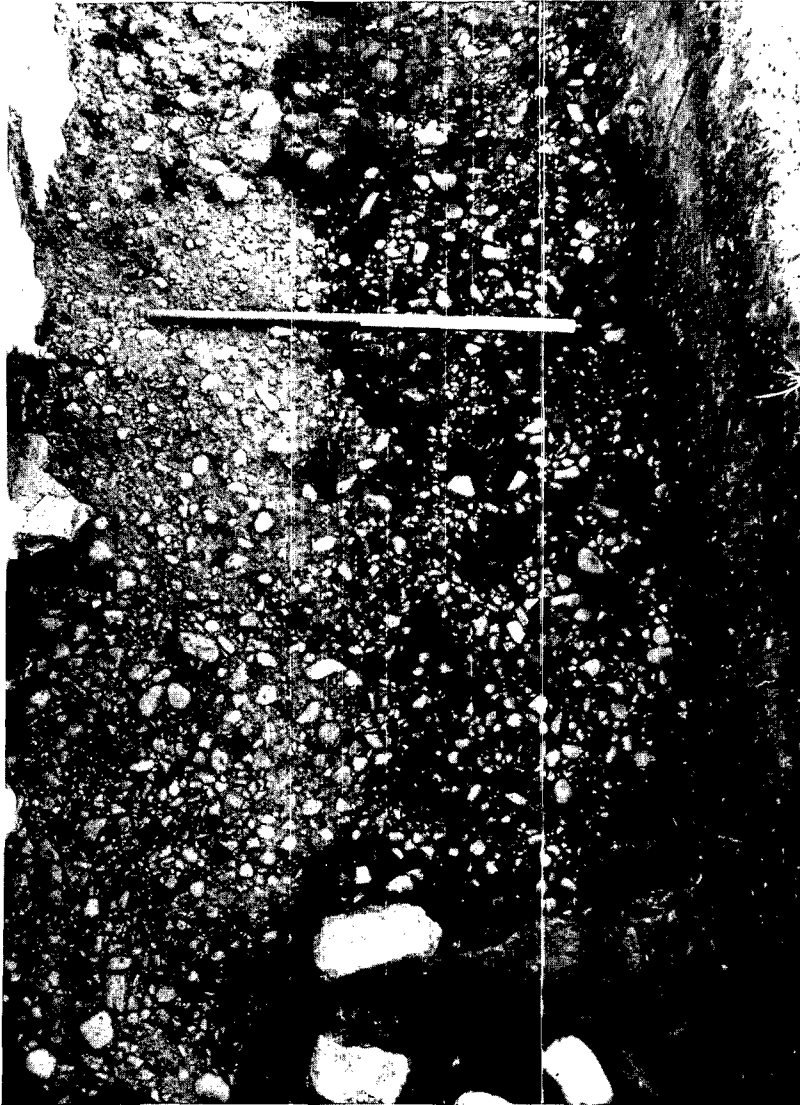
0 2 Metres

ILLUS 2 Inveresk Roman fort: plans of trenches A, C and D

trench (A04). On closer examination, however, the former proved to be no more than the disturbed upper surface of a patch of natural clay, while the latter incorporated a piece of brick of probable post-medieval date¹. The whole area was clearly much disturbed by cultivation, with spade marks visible in the sandy subsoil in the NE quadrant. This might also serve to explain the patches of brown sandy loam noted at the E end of the trench (A07 and 09), although the latter produced a BB1 rim (illus 6 no 3) and two fragments of burnt bone.

TRENCH B (illus 1)

No features were visible in the sand subsoil which lay immediately below the post-medieval cultivation layer, although a few scattered pieces of building stone were noted in the topsoil.



ILLUS 3 Inveresk Roman fort: W end of trench C. Rough wall in foreground overlying period 1 intervallum road. The irregular vertical line visible in the road surface is the result of differential drying

TRENCH C (illus 1-4)

Roman levels were here well preserved and confirmed that there were two periods of occupation within the fort. Most of the trench was taken up by the intervallum road of period 1 which consisted of hard-packed small cobbling (C04: illus 3). Adjacent to this at the E end of the trench was a chocolate brown loam (C08) from which were recovered nails, hobnails, teeth and bone fragments of ox, and one rim of a coarse ware jar (illus 6 no 5). This probably represented the topsoil at the time of the Roman arrival on the site, for it ran beneath the E edge of the road surface, but the only feature noted within the limited area exposed was a small patch of clay (C09). Overlying the E end of the intervallum road and the adjacent pre-Roman topsoil was a rough surface made up of rather larger cobbles (C07), sandstone rubble (C04) and one or two



ILLUS 4 Inveresk Roman fort: E end of trench C. Period 2 intervallum road make-up in foreground partly overlying period 1 intervallum road

small building stones (illus 4). This would seem to represent the make-up for a second period of intervallum road positioned somewhat further E than its predecessor. From within the sandstone rubble came a fragment of BB1 rim (illus 6 no 2). Of the smaller cobbling (C06), which would have formed the actual road surface, only slight traces were recorded, but they incorporated one very battered body sherd of orange coarse ware. Finally, overlying the intervallum road of period 1 a few large stones admixed with sandy loam formed a line at the extreme W end of the trench (illus 3). The construction seemed rather too insubstantial to be part of a building but may perhaps have served as some form of revetment at the tail of the rampart of period 2.

TRENCH D (illus 1, 2, 5)

No floor levels remained here and it was at first thought that, like trench B, all traces of Roman activity had been removed. Indeed, because of the slope of the ground even sub-floor



ILLUS 5 Inveresk Roman fort: W end of trench D. Postholes D11 and 12. Posthole D13 is just visible in the bottom right-hand corner. The slight colour change discernible as a vertical line towards the centre of the trench is the result of differential drying

remains were poorly preserved at the E end of the trench where the very bottom of one stone packed posthole (D10) was almost removed before its significance was recognized.² Towards the W end of the trench, however, a little brown sandy loam (D03) was preserved above the sand subsoil. This probably represented the remains of the pre-Roman topsoil as recorded in trench C, and from it were recovered a fragment of amphora, a sherd of a BB2 bowl and one of decorated samian form Dr 37 (illus 6 nos 6 & 7). Cut through this layer were two circular stone-packed postholes (D11 and 12) surviving to a depth of 0.4 m (illus 5), from the first of which came one small scrap of samian of uncertain form and a fragment of tile. Finally, part of a fourth posthole was noted in the extreme SW corner of the trench. No post-impressions were recognized in any of the postholes.

Identification of a building on the basis of four postholes would be foolhardy, but their position in the N half of the *praetentura*, assuming that Richmond was correct in his location of the gateway (1980, 293–5), would fit either barrack, stable or store building. The use of stone-packed postholes for such buildings is typical of Antonine construction methods (Hanson 1982, 184–5).

FINDS

COARSE POTTERY (illus 6)

Unstratified

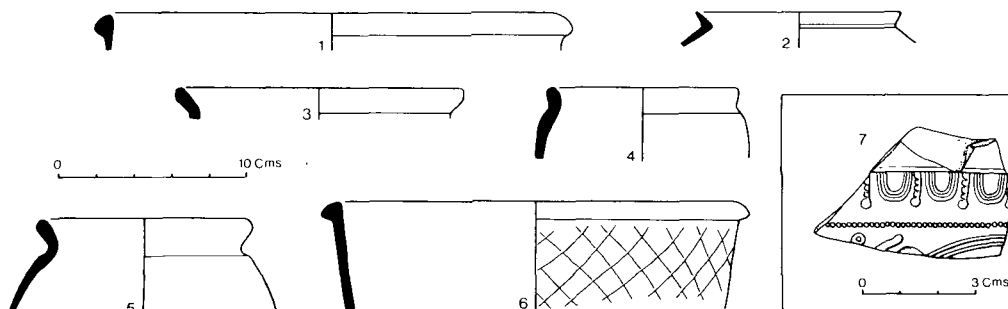
- 1 Rimsherd of bowl in brick red fabric with cream slip. Inner surface much eroded. From trench A.
- 2 Rimsherd of small jar with short everted rim in orange-buff fabric with traces of orange-brown slip: cf Gillam type 166. From trench B.

Several body sherds (not illustrated) of various vessels were recovered including rough cast beaker, mortarium, amphora and possibly Derbyshire ware.

Stratified

- 3 Rimsherd of cooking-pot in BB1 with everted rim: cf Gillam type 121. From disturbance at E end of flagged surface in trench A (A09).
- 4 Rim fragment of cooking-pot/beaker in BB1 of uncertain diameter: cf Gillam 1976, no 21. From make-up of period 2 intervallum road (C04).
- 5 Large sherd of cooking-pot or jar in smooth orange-buff fabric with slight blackening on the rim. From pre-Roman topsoil (C08) below the make-up of period 2 intervallum road.
- 6 Rimsherd of BB2 bowl: cf Gillam type 222. From putative pre-Roman topsoil (D03).

None of the coarse pottery would be out of place in an Antonine context.



ILLUS 6 Inveresk Roman fort: coarse pottery (scale 1:4) and samian (scale 1:2)

SAMIAN

Grace Simpson

Unstratified

All are from Lezoux with typical micaceous fabric, and contemporary with no 8 below, except for nos 6 and 7 which differ in fabrics.

- 1 Small size Dr 33 basal fragment with a good glossy Lezoux slip. From surface collection in SW quadrant of cemetery.
- 2 Large size Dr 33 rim fragment, typical Lezoux product. From trench A.
- 3 Dr 37, the rim and plain band just above the ovolo, which is missing. From trench D.
- 4 Dr 18/31, two sherds join. Glossy slip, typical Lezoux ware. From trench D.
- 5 Dr 18/31 rim in typical good early Antonine Lezoux ware. From surface collection in SW quadrant of cemetery.
- 6 Tiny basal fragment with rouletted ring from platter form. The fabric is a very fine, dense, pinky-red colour, without mica, and probably from Les Martres de Veyre. The decorated bowls of Cettus or the Small S Potter were also made there and are common on the Antonine Wall. His period of manufacture was c AD 135–60 (*contra* Stanfield & Simpson 1958, 247). From trench C.
- 7 Bead rim only, with pale brown fabric and poor thin brownish slip. This kind of product is uncommon, but belongs to second-century Central Gaul. From trench C.

Stratified

- 8 Dr 37 in the style of Cinnamus with his ovolo 2 (Rogers B231) (illus 6 no 7). From the left, the small circle topped a vertical bead row, next comes his astragalus, and then his large double plain medallion. These details form a common arrangement in his panel styles (Stanfield & Simpson 1958, nos 17, 25, 41 & 46). c AD 140–60. From the putative pre-Roman topsoil (D03).
- 9 Small sherd, slightly burnt, of uncertain form. Typical micaceous Lezoux fabric, therefore contemporary with no 1. From posthole (D11).

IRON

All the ironwork was much corroded and none is illustrated. Only stratified finds are described.

- 1 Small nail 40 mm long from make-up of period 2 intervallum road (C04).
- 2 Twenty-six hobnails each c 15 mm long, found together within the pre-Roman topsoil (C08) beneath the edge of the period 1 intervallum road.
- 3 Sixteen hobnails each c 15 mm long, found together within the pre-Roman topsoil (C08).
- 4 Large nail 175 mm long without head, from the pre-Roman topsoil (C08).
- 5 Large nail 125 mm long, from pre-Roman topsoil (C08).
- 6 Small bent nail 50 mm long, from pre-Roman topsoil (C08).

BONE

A Young

- 1 Two pieces of bone which appear to have been subjected to fire but are not completely calcined. They could be from human forearm bones, but there is nothing positively to identify them as such. From disturbance at the E end of flagged surface in trench A (A09).
- 2 Four teeth (none intact). Three molars and one premolar, all maxillary, bovine and fairly well worn. From pre-Roman topsoil (C08).
- 3 A small fragment of alveolar bone that seems to fit the largest of the four teeth above. Probably bovine maxilla. From pre-Roman topsoil (C08).
- 4 Seven fragments of long bones, possibly bovine in origin. From pre-Roman topsoil (C08).

CONCLUSION

Richmond's dismissal of the market garden area can now be seen to be something of an overstatement. Although Roman levels in the S half of the field do seem to have been removed,

survival in the N part was rather better than might have been expected. Consequently, larger scale work in this area ought to produce useful evidence of the internal organization of this important fort, about which at present we know very little (illus 1).

The trial excavation itself added something to our knowledge of the site. It confirmed that there were two periods of occupation, both of Antonine date, with perhaps a slight reduction in the internal area of the fort in the latter. It also served to demonstrate that not all the buildings in the interior were stone built as had previously appeared to be the case.

NOTES

- 1 My thanks to E J Talbot for his comments.
- 2 The dimensions of this feature as recorded on illus 2 are, therefore, only approximate.

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