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**Hadrian's Wall Milecastle 9 (Chapel House), Tyne and Wear:
Interim Report on Archaeological Evaluation, September 2000**

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Summary

Milecastle 9 is one of thirteen of these installations on Hadrian's Wall under regular or intermittent ploughing. Field evaluation was carried out on these milecastles in 1999-2000.

Milecastle 9 was excavated by Birley in 1929. The trench excavated in 2000 confirmed the state of preservation of the milecastle, sampling the outer wall and the walls of an internal building, together with external surfaces. It now seems that the milecastle was constructed on earlier archaeological deposits. A ditch to the east of the milecastle was sampled. This may have been an additional element in the defences of the installation.

Keywords

Excavation
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HADRIAN'S WALL MILECASTLE 9 (CHAPEL HOUSE), TYNE AND WEAR

Interim Report on Archaeological Evaluation, September 2000

1. Project background

Thirteen of the milecastles on the World Heritage Site of Hadrian's Wall have been identified as being under potentially damaging land regimes, principally cultivation either in rotation, or annually for cereal crops. A programme of field evaluation to investigate the condition of the remains and their vulnerability to further cultivation was put forward in a Project Design (Austen and Wilmott 1999) in June 1999, and the first phase of the work, during which five of the milecastles were evaluated, took place during August 1999. A further phase of work which covered seven more milecastles took place in Autumn 2000.

The primary objective of the fieldwork was to provide data on the survival and vulnerability of these milecastles in order to inform discussions with land owners and managers over their future management. Archaeological information on the shape, size, internal layout and dating of the milecastles was also recovered.

Pending the production of a formal MAP2 assessment on the completion of the whole project, it has been decided to produce a series of short interim reports summarising the results of the work on each site. The second tranche of these reports which report on the work undertaken in 2000 are incorporated in the new *Centre for Archaeology Reports Series*. These will be circulated to archaeological curators, and also to the owners and managers of individual sites.

The work on milecastle 9 was undertaken by permission of the farmer, Mr J R Lawson of Crescent Farm, Throckley, Northumberland.

2. The Site (Figs 1, 2)

This is the most easterly milecastle (other than the Westgate Road milecastle: Harbottle *et al*, 1988) to be positively located and which is known still to survive. Its site lies to the east of Blucher village at NGR NZ 1785 6627. The line of Hadrian's Wall and the north wall of the milecastle lie below the south carriageway of the B6318, which has been slightly re-aligned here to link up with the roundabout to join Union Hall Road and the A69 dual carriageway. There is a wide verge of grass which covers the remains of the central part of the milecastle, but the archaeological effect of the realignment of the road is unknown. The southern end of the milecastle extends for approximately 8m into OS field 8915 which has been cultivated each year at least since 1945 for cereal crops. A slight rise in the fence line between the verge and the cultivated field is indicative of the buried remains. The milecastle is a scheduled ancient monument as part of Tyne and

Wear 28(20).

The milecastle may have been first noted by John Horsley (1733, 138) though robbing and ploughing had obliterated all surface trace of it until it was re-located in 1928 and partly excavated in 1929 by Eric Birley. It is one of the more completely excavated of the milecastles (Fig 3), and Birley's excavations were the subject of a detailed report (Birley 1930) which included comment on finds and pottery. The internal measurements of the milecastle were 14.9m east-west by about 18m north-south. The side walls were 3.1m wide, the same as the Broad Wall in this sector. This was the first Broad Wall milecastle to be thoroughly examined, though some work also took place at around the same time on milecastle 10 (Walbottle Dene) (Spain *et al* 1930; Wilmott 1999). The west wall and the western part of the south wall were virtually completely destroyed, though several stones of the north face of the south wall remained, at least two with inscribed Roman numerals on the faces. A single course of each face of the east wall which comprised large blocks, however survived in good condition. The wall-core was of clay and rubble, as was the foundation, though the east wall was mortared. Enough mortar survived to demonstrate that the wall above the footing course was offset by 154mm, on each face, and was therefore 2.80m wide. The south-east angle was robbed, but the shape of the corner was rounded inside and out. Little was left of the south gate, though the eastern pivot-hole in the footing course of the gate jamb and the gate-sill were intact. The sill, though the photographs show it much worn, retained the upstand against which the inward-opening door shut. The gate passage was contained within the thickness of the wall.

The primary road through the milecastle was constructed of earth and gravel with a drain on the western side. The road was later made up so that it had an even slope from north to south. In the second period the road was re-made. Although most of this road was subsequently ploughed away, a drain associated with it survived within the south gate.

In the eastern half of the milecastle, and towards the southern side was a primary internal building, approximately 7.3m long by 4.5m wide, constructed with clay-bonded masonry and clay floors. This contained two rooms, and was in an excellent state of survival, standing up to six courses high in places. When the road was re-surfaced, a flagstone floor was laid in one of the rooms. In the "second period" this building was extended by at least one additional room to the north. At the same time a clay and flag floor was laid in the original building, and the door-sill raised to provide a higher threshold.

To the west of the road there was clearly considerable disturbance, and the sequence is less clear. The published photograph suggests that the archaeology was fragmentary, but rather more complex than the report indicates. Certainly early post-holes were found, and though these were 76mm in diameter and as much as 254mm deep, they did not extend into the undisturbed subsoil. The published plan shows two rows about 1.8m apart of at least three post-holes. This is clearly not wide enough to represent two walls of a building, and no firm conclusion was reached as to their function. In the second period, a stone building was erected of which a threshold and parts of the east and west walls only survived. This lay 1.05m from the road edge, from which it was separated by a kerbed path.

Milecastle 9 is one of the few examples where external areas have been excavated. The

burial of a male youth was discovered close to the south wall of the milecastle. It was aligned with feet to the east, and was laid out parallel with the milecastle wall. The fact that the head was missing appears to result from later disturbance rather than from deliberate decapitation. Though interpreted as Roman, it seems more likely that this inhumation was of early post-Roman date simply because of the context of the burials with relation to the milecastle, and the same may be true of the parts of two skulls found near the south-east corner. To the south of the milecastle, 9.6m from the south wall the north kerb of the military way was located in a trench which extended 15.6m southwards from a point midway between the gate and the south-east corner. This road was at least 5.4m wide, with a branch road 4.8m wide forking “from the east to the gate of the milecastle”. Despite the length of this trench, no sign was found of an encircling ditch.

Several small finds were recovered, including four coins ranging in date from one of Julia (79-81) to one of Valentinian I (364-375), a second century brooch, a sword-scabbard chape, part of a sculpture of a female figure within a conventionalised temple, possibly one of the *Deae Matres*, a portion of a gaming board, and several mill-stones. Pottery dated from the second to the fourth century, material from the later period including both Crambeck and Huntcliff wares. The dating of the two “periods” identified in the work was interpreted in terms of the Wall Periods, which were formally promulgated in the paper which includes the report (Birley 1930). These structural periods are therefore attributed to the Hadrianic and Severan periods. The pottery report would seem to confirm that this is broadly correct, or at least that the second period is indeed late second- early third century. The later finds attest to occupation through to the later fourth century, though the structural and stratigraphic evidence for these periods had been removed by ploughing prior to 1929.

3. Original aims

The main aims of the evaluation were:

- M9.1 to determine whether the features recorded by Birley still survive without disturbance to *in situ* surviving remains.
- M9.2 to record the depth below the present surface of any surviving remains.
- M9.3 to assess the impact on the site of past cultivation, and the implications of its continuance.

4. Site Methodology

So little of the milecastle remains within the ploughed field that it was felt that a single T-shaped trench would sample both the east and south walls. The east-west bar of the “T” was 9.5m long, and the north-south bar measured 6m in length. Both were 2m wide. Excavation was entirely by hand, and the intention was to excavate to the top of intact Roman archaeology insofar as this survived the 1929 excavations. In order to clarify the stratigraphy, and to distinguish between excavation fill and intact stratigraphy, the northern metre of the east-west bar, and an area in the south-west corner of the north-south bar were excavated to a greater depth than the rest of the trench. All recording was

carried out according to the methods currently in use in the CfA.

5. Archaeological results

5.1 *Description* (Figs 4, 5)

The trench lay virtually wholly within the area excavated in 1929, with the exception of the eastern 4.7m of the east-west bar, which lay outside the east wall of the structure, and beyond the clearly defined edge of the 1929 excavation area. The portion of the trench within the 1929 area included the east wall of the building on the eastern side of the milecastle, the east wall of the milecastle itself, and the robbed south-east corner of the milecastle. It should be noted that the method of the original excavator appears to have been to clear the interior of the milecastle, leaving the walls of interior buildings upstanding. The photograph taken at the time (Birley 1930, pl xliii, fig 1) demonstrates that the stratigraphy over the milecastle walls themselves was left in situ, and only the faces of the surviving facing stones were exposed.

Post-Roman deposits

The active ploughsoil above the archaeological deposits (1207) was uniformly 220mm deep, and clearly represented the depth of ploughing which had occurred during the period since the 1929 excavation. Beneath this, the surface of archaeological deposits was scored by parallel plough marks (1206) up to 10mm deep. The edge of the 1929 trench (1210) lay 950mm east of the east face of the east wall of the milecastle, and the disturbed and mixed stony soil of the backfilling of the excavation (1204, 1203) was found in between the standing Roman walls. The excavation trench cut through an in-situ layer of dark-grey-brown silty loam (1200=1202) containing fragments of sandstone rubble including a considerable concentration of such material close to the eastern milecastle wall (1205) and ranging from 290-500mm in depth. Beneath this, and also cut through by the 1929 trench lay a deposit of loose, mid-brown sandy material containing up to 50% sandstone rubble. This had originally been banked up against the milecastle walls (E wall, 1211: S wall 1209), and appears to have comprised destruction debris from the collapse or robbing of the structure. It can be inferred from a reading of Birley's report (*ibid*, 154) that this material sealed the burial outside the south wall which was excavated in 1929. Within the intact stratigraphy over the east wall, most of which comprised the clay and rubble wall core, the eastern edge (1216) and stony fill (1208) of a pre-1929 robber trench, which had been cut to remove stones from the west face of the wall was defined.

Roman structures and deposits

The footings of the milecastle walls were 3.16m thick. The wall core (1201) consisted of 40% angular sandstone rubble up to 200mm in a matrix of yellow-brown mottled clay. This was faced with grey sandstone blocks (1213, 1215) which were dressed to a good square face some 390mm square, but were otherwise roughly dressed, and which tapered back from 700mm-1.05m into the core. The facing stones were bonded with clay similar to that in the core, but the stones of the inner face of the east wall retained mortar on the

top surface, which had bonded the next course to the footing course. As Birley (*ibid*, 153) observed, this mortar showed that the actual wall face had been set back from the face of the bottom course, and this offset was 140mm wide. Birley's photographs show a similar offset on the north face of the south wall, where part of the second course remained intact (*ibid*, pl xlv, fig 1) . The south-east corner was, as Birley observed, totally robbed, though the foundations of clay and rubble filled a foundation trench which described a rounded corner on the interior and exterior faces.

The wall of an interior building was found 1.02m west of the east face of the east wall of the milecastle. This building was clearly the primary stone structure found by Birley in 1929. The wall (1218) survived to a height of three courses (880mm). It was built of clay-bonded coursed rubble, with clay core and bonding, and was 540mm wide.

Outside the walls of the milecastle around the south-east corner was a paved surface of small yellow sandstone slabs 40mm thick set in yellow-brown clay (1214). This surfacing was not noted in 1929. To the east of the milecastle at a distance of 4.65m from the face of the east wall, the western edge of a ditch (1221) filled by dark soil and rubble (1220) was found. This ditch was cut from the same level as that from which the milecastle was constructed, and appears to have been a contemporary feature.

?Pre-Roman strata

The natural subsoil was not encountered in any part of the excavated area, even within the edges of the eastern ditch. The milecastle was built on a layer of yellow clay (1212=1219=1222). In the ditch edge it was observed that this was the uppermost element of a series of strata at least 450mm deep comprising alternating layers of yellow clay (1212=1219=1222, 1224,1226) and brown silty soil (1223, 1225).

5.2 Interpretation

The banded strata which pre-date the construction of the milecastle are probably the most significant new discovery on the site. There are a number of possible interpretation, of which the most likely may be that they were laid as a building platform in preparation for the construction of the milecastle. They could also relate to early Roman or prehistoric occupation. No new data on the form or the construction of the milecastle itself has been recovered from the present work, though the paved area outside the south-east corner and the ditch to the east are new elements in the archaeology of the site. The ditch is particularly enigmatic in view of the results from the 1929 work, where in a trench 15.6m in length, no south ditch was found. The eastern ditch was cut from the same level as that from which the milecastle was built, and was parallel to the east wall; there seemed to be an association. Any future work should attempt to assess this relationship. It is conceivable, for instance, that the 1929 trench ran through a gap in a surrounding ditch provided for access to the south gate.

6. Conclusions

6.1 *Original aims*

These were met. The previously excavated remains of the milecastle survive remarkably well, and do not appear to have suffered enormously from post-excavation ploughing since 1930 (M9.1). However, there seems to be some potential for soil cover to gradually reduce due to erosion down slope to the south and west. The depth below surface varies. A uniform cover of 220mm consisting of active ploughsoil, with the layer below ranging from a depth of 290mm to the north, and on top of the slope, to 500mm (M9.2). The upper courses of the wall of the interior building are certainly being clipped by the plough, causing some cracking, and if ploughing continues while soil cover lessens in thickness these courses could easily be displaced and the wall damaged (M9.3).

6.2 *Recommendations*

The ongoing plough-damage to the milecastle would suggest that the best approach is at least to take it out of cultivation. However, the condition of the milecastle, the quality of what remains in terms of structure, and the fact that most of the interior stratigraphy has been excavated away presents an opportunity which deserves serious consideration; the option to re-excavate the milecastle, consolidate knowledge on its structure and phasing, and lay it out for public display. This recommendation is unique among those which have emerged from the milecastle project. It is particularly desirable and practical in this case for a number of reasons:

1. The site lies within the urban area of Newcastle-upon Tyne where there are very few parts of the Wall which can be seen. Apart from the fort and wall section at Wallsend, there are the piece of Vallum and the temple of Antenociticus at Benwell, the sad scrap of curtain Wall in the forecourt of Charlie Brown's garage at Denton Burn, the length which includes turret 7b at Denton and some scraps of foundation alongside the A69 Carlisle road.
2. Surviving, visible interval structures cannot be seen in the Newcastle area. After Denton turret, the first visible piece of curtain westwards is at Heddon-on-the-Wall, and the first turret is No 26b (Brunton) near Chesters. The first milecastle which is laid out is No 35 (Sewingshields). This means that to see such structures school groups (for instance) have to travel considerable distances at some expense. To have a visible milecastle within easy bus travel of the city centre would provide a new and valuable educational resource within easy reach of most city schools.
3. During the evaluation it transpired that many local people had no idea that the milecastle was there. Many actually asked whether it was intended to display the monument. It seems likely that a culture of

local “ownership” and pride in the milecastle might grow if it was displayed.

4. Consolidation and display is entirely consistent with plans for the management of the World Heritage Site. The Hadrian’s Wall Management Plan (English Heritage 1996, 25) recommends in its vision for the urban areas “the exposure of [the] remains wherever practicable” and also (ibid, 26) the “consolidation and exposure of remains in a number of strategic locations, possibly including the re-excavation and display of previously excavated areas, when appropriate and merited by the quality and robustness of the remains.
5. Most of the milecastle is already on public land, lying as it does beneath the road verge.

If the recommendation to excavate and display was adopted, it would be important to ensure that the opportunity was taken to add research value to the work, as this would at very least inform any information panels or guide leaflets that might be produced. In particular, it will be important to examine:

1. the damaged west side of the milecastle interior, in order to find out if more information can be retrieved using modern techniques.
2. the area outside the walls of the milecastle, in order to establish the nature of the ditch to the east, the paved surface at the south-east corner, and to seek a context for the human burials found in 1929.
3. the pre-milecastle archaeology defined on the eastern side during the current evaluation.

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Report by: Tony Wilmott

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Enclosed figures and plans

- Figure 1 Location of milecastle 9 on Hadrian's Wall
- Figure 2 Milecastle 9 and 2000 excavation trench against modern mapping.
- Figure 3 Excavation plan of milecastle 9 based on Birley (1930) with location of 2000 trench superimposed
- Figure 4 Plan of 2000 trench
- Figure 5 East-west section B-A