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**Hadrian's Wall Milecastle 14 (March Burn), Northumberland:
Interim Report on Archaeological Evaluation, September 2000**

Helen Moore and Tony Wilmott

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Summary

Milecastle 14 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 14 was sampled by Stevens in 1946. The trench excavated in 2000 confirmed that the milecastle was of short axis type, and established the state of preservation of the milecastle. The outer wall and the walls of an internal building were all heavily robbed, with only the mortar and rubble core surviving. Interior rubble surfaces were heavily scored by the plough, but part of the wall of a post-Roman stone building, possibly a field barn, was found surviving above the Roman deposits.

Keywords

Excavation
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Author's address

English Heritage Centre for Archaeology, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth, PO4 9LD. Telephone: 02392 856700. Email: tony.wilmott@english-heritage.org.uk

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HADRIAN'S WALL MILECASTLE 14 (MARCH BURN), NORTHUMBERLAND

Interim Report on Archaeological Evaluation, September 2000

1. Project background

Thirteen out 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 another seven evaluations 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. These will be circulated to archaeological curators, and also to the owners and managers of individual sites.

The work on Milecastle 14 was undertaken by permission of the site owner, Mr John Spence, Whitchester Farm, Heddon on the Wall.

2. The Site

This is located (Fig 1) at NZ 1068 6768. Hadrian's Wall itself here runs beneath the B6318 Military Road, and most of the site of the milecastle lies in OS field 7255 south of the road. It is 1452m west of Milecastle 13 and is sited on the crest of a small rise on the west side of the March Burn. The site of the milecastle is visible as a low platform 0.4m high, which has been spread by continuous and continuing ploughing.

The platform which marks the milecastle site was noted by both MacLauchlan (1885, 16) and Collingwood Bruce (1867, 129). The site was examined by C E Stevens in 1946 as part of an exercise to see whether milecastles 14, 36, 41, and turrets 36a, 40a and 40b conformed to the typology which was established by Simpson and Birley. The only published reference to the work (J Roman Studies 1947, 168) is a terse comment to the effect that the milecastle was 18.3m wide internally, had 'broad' side walls and was "presumably of short axis type". The field in which it is situated is under regular

cultivation under Class Consent, having been carried out between 1976 and 1981 and annually since. Although the owner claims that he has never been aware of encountering masonry when ploughing, masonry and “burnt levels” have been observed being revealed after ploughing as well as pottery and other artefacts. This observation as well as the visible platform suggested that some of the fabric of the milecastle survives *in situ*.

It is protected as a scheduled ancient monument, formerly part of Northumberland 28(4), now part of the monument numbered SM26040.

3. Original aims

M14.1 to locate the remains of the milecastle walls and sample the interior survival and condition without disturbance to *in situ* surviving remains.

M14.2 to ascertain the depth below the present surface at which remains of the milecastle survive

M14.3 to assess the impact on the site of past cultivation, and the implications of its continuance

4. Site Methodology

Two trenches were excavated (Fig 2). Trench 1, measuring 8m x 2m was dug to determine whether the southern wall of the milecastle survived, and to sample the interior archaeology to assess survival and condition. Trench 2, measuring 10m x 2m transected the western wall of the milecastle and continued eastwards into the interior.

5. Archaeological results

5.1 Description

Trench 1 (Fig 3)

The ploughsoil (708) covering Trench 1, varied in thickness between 0.21m to 0.25m, depending on the gradient of the slope. It contained relatively little rubble to suggest the presence of a building below the surface. Immediately below the ploughsoil however, a large spread of rubble was uncovered (719), most of it randomly distributed. Constructed on top of the rubble was a fragment of wall (720), 1.92m long x 0.28m wide, aligned on a north south axis. The sandstone slabs, of which there were two courses, were bonded together with a pale yellow sandy mortar. It was very badly robbed and plough-damaged and little of it had survived attrition by robbing and ploughing. No other walls or structural features survived at this level within the trench to suggest a plan of the building, but it is probable that it may continue further to the east beyond the trench. The rubble was spread more densely in the northern sector of the trench, which may suggest disturbed structural features in this area.

The rubble sat within a homogeneous deposit of mid red brown sandy silt (709) which seems to be an earlier ploughsoil. It was very fine and uniform in colour, which suggested that it had been reworked over a long period. It varied in depth from 0.34m to 0.50m, being much thicker at the southern end of the trench.

The southern wall of the milecastle was not visible at this level, so a decision was made to cut a small slot along the eastern side of the trench 0.50m wide and 5m long to ascertain if it still survived below the lower ploughsoil (709). The remnants of the southern wall of the milecastle were discovered about 0.55m below the topsoil. Only the rubble core of the wall survived, the facing stones having been robbed away completely. What was left of the wall was composed of irregular pieces of sandstone bonded together with a yellow sandy mortar (722). This was very similar to the natural subsoil (710), except that it was darker in colour and contained frequent white patches and flecks of lime. The rubble was very loose and had probably been disturbed by stone robbing rather than ploughing. It was 2.40m wide, and was not excavated to the bottom of its foundations.

The natural subsoil (710) was visible below a large depth of the lower ploughsoil (709) at the southern end of the trench, approximately 0.70m from the top of the topsoil. The northern end of the trench was not excavated down to natural.

Trench 2 (Fig 4)

The topsoil (700) covering Trench 2 varied in thickness between 0.28m to 0.32m, due to the gradient of the hill, which sloped downwards to the west. Directly below the topsoil on the western side of the trench lay elements of the lower ploughsoil (709) noted in Trench 1. This sealed a broad deposit of loose mid greyish-brown sandy silt with yellow mortar flecks containing large quantities of rounded and angular stones (707). This was identified as the fill of a north-south robber trench 6.3m broad, with a good edge against a surface of crushed sandstone rubble in a sandy matrix (705). A deeper slot 0.50m wide and 6m long was excavated through the fill (707) of the large robber trench in order to determine whether it was, in fact, a robber trench and to see if any walls survived in situ below its fill. At the western side of the trench below the robber trench fill, the western wall of the milecastle (716) was identified. All of the facing stones had been removed, but the wall core survived in the form of sandstone pieces bonded roughly together with pale yellow sandy mortar. The excavated section of the wall was 2.45m wide and was 0.70m below the topsoil. It seems to continue westwards beyond the trench. Within the same robber trench, at the eastern end, the fragmentary remains of another wall were noted (718), approximately 1.20m to the east of the western wall of the milecastle. All of the facing stones of this wall had also been robbed, and only the loose rubble and yellow mortar core survived. It was approximately 1.20m wide, and was 0.70m below the top of the topsoil. This fragment would appear to be the remnant of the western wall of an internal building within the milecastle, robbed simultaneously with the western outer wall. .

At the eastern edge of the trench lay a second robber trench (703). This was not seen completely in plan, as it extended to the east beyond the trench edge. It had vertical sides and was filled with a dark grey brown clayey silty sand (704) which contained large

amounts of stone rubble, probably discarded from the robbing of the wall. In the small slot that was excavated, it was evident that any wall had been completely robbed down to the bottom of its foundations as none of it survived *in situ*. It seems possible that this trench robbed the eastern wall of the internal building.

Both robber trenches (706) and (703) truncated a sand and rubble surface (705), which is likely to be the floor surface associated with the internal building mentioned above. This surface was composed of a mid orange grey-brown silty sand with frequent angular sandstone fragments rammed tightly together.

Observed in the base of robber trench (703) was a circular feature (713) which was approximately 0.09m deep with concave gradually sloping sides and a rounded base. No finds were recovered from the fill (714), a homogeneous red-brown silty clay. It was not completely seen in plan as it was excavated at the base of a small slot through the robber trench, so it is difficult to determine what its form or function was.

The natural subsoil (702) was only observed at the base of the two robber trenches (706) and (703), and was approximately 0.75m from the top of the topsoil.

5.2 Interpretation

The position of the south wall of the milecastle confirms Stevens' observation that the milecastle was of short-axis type. Unfortunately the extensive robbing of the milecastle makes judgements as to original wall widths difficult, as the robbing was not done in a tidy fashion, simply following the walls. However, the fact that the core alone measured up to 3m wide confirms Stevens' observation that the walls were broad, and it is therefore likely that this represents the short-axis counterpart of broad Wall milecastles such as milecastles 9 (Wilmott 2001) and 10 (Wilmott 1999). Internally there was at least one building on the western side of the milecastle. This was up to 5m wide (external measurements) with walls up to 1.2m thick. The building lay approximately 1.2m east of the western wall of the milecastle, and its internal surface seems to have comprised crushed rubble and sand. The milecastle has been completely robbed with all facing stones of the outer walls and internal buildings removed, probably to build the group of buildings to the west around the former "Iron Sign" public house. The visible platform of the milecastle would doubtless have been a lure to stone-robbers. This robbing seems to have pre-dated the reuse of the milecastle platform for a later building, possibly a post-medieval field barn.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Original aims

M14.1 to locate the remains of the milecastle walls and sample the interior survival and condition without disturbance to *in situ* surviving remains.

M14.2 to ascertain the depth below the present surface at which remains of the milecastle survive

M14.3 to assess the impact on the site of past cultivation, and the implications of its continuance

The aims of the work were met, the only archaeological features to be excavated being the fills of robber trenches (M14.1). The foundations of the western and southern walls of the milecastle survive in a very fragmentary and robbed state in robber trenches 500mm deep. The internal surfaces of the milecastle have been truncated by ploughing, and this attrition is continuing, as the surface of the platform lies just beneath the ploughsoil (M14.2). The partial survival of the post-Roman building would suggest that most of this truncation has taken place in the past (M14.3).

6.2 Recommendations

It is suggested that some mitigation of the continuing plough damage should be negotiated, either by taking the milecastle remains out of cultivation, agreeing to plough more shallowly over the remains, or by seeding through direct drilling.

Evaluation by: Helen Moore (supervisor)
Nicholas Best
Rodney Cottrill
Adam Elkington
Elizabeth Humble
Elanor Johnson
George Marchant.

Date: September 2000

Report by: Helen Moore & Tony Wilmott

Date: 25th May 2001

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Enclosed figures and plans

- Figure 1 Location of milecastle 14 on Hadrian's Wall
- Figure 2 Milecastle 14 and 2000 trenches shown against modern mapping.
- Figure 3 Plan of Trench 1
- Figure 4 Plan of Trench 2

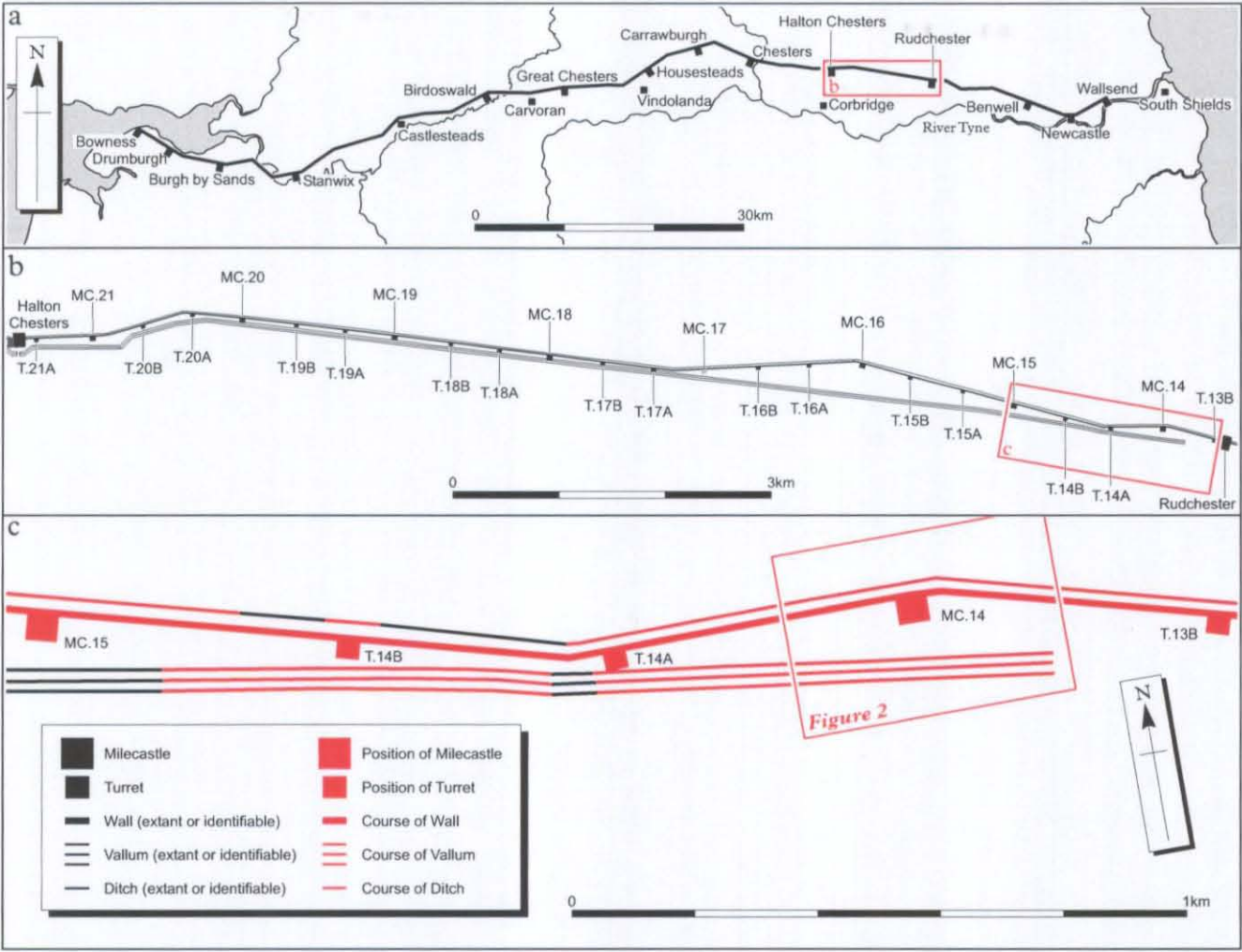


Figure 1 Location of Milecastle 14 on Hadrian's Wall

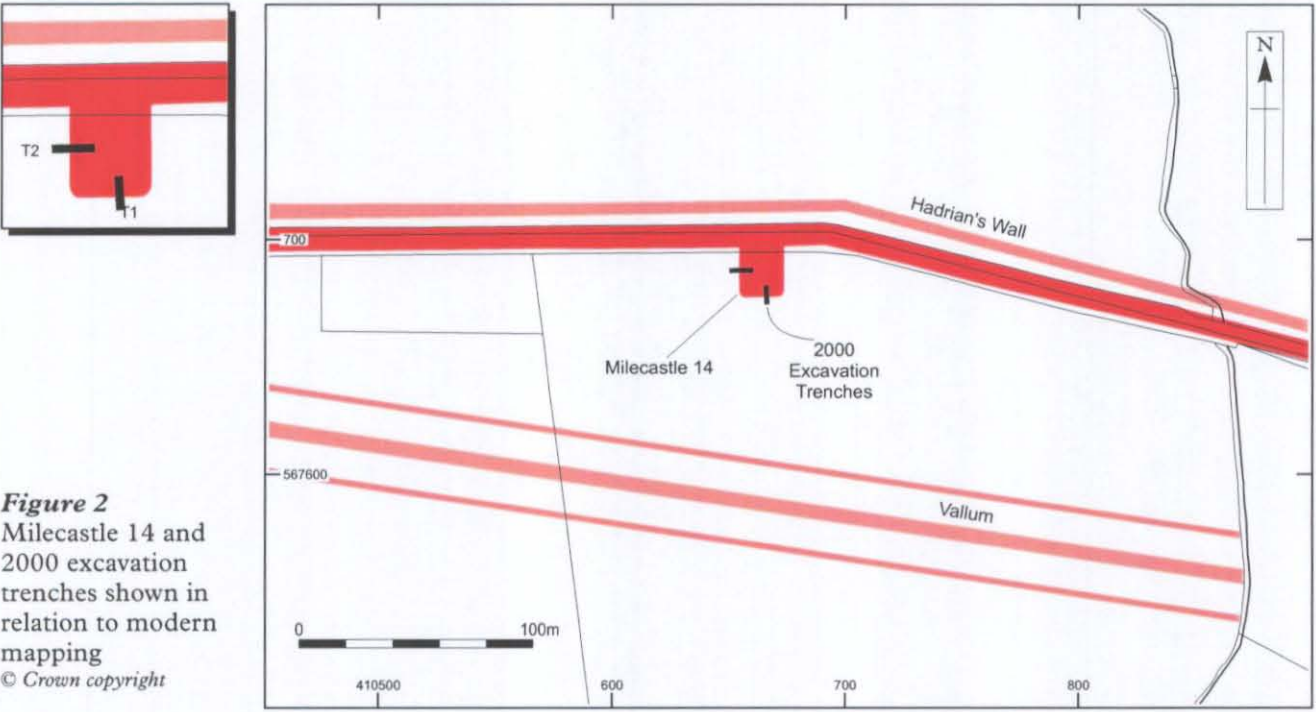
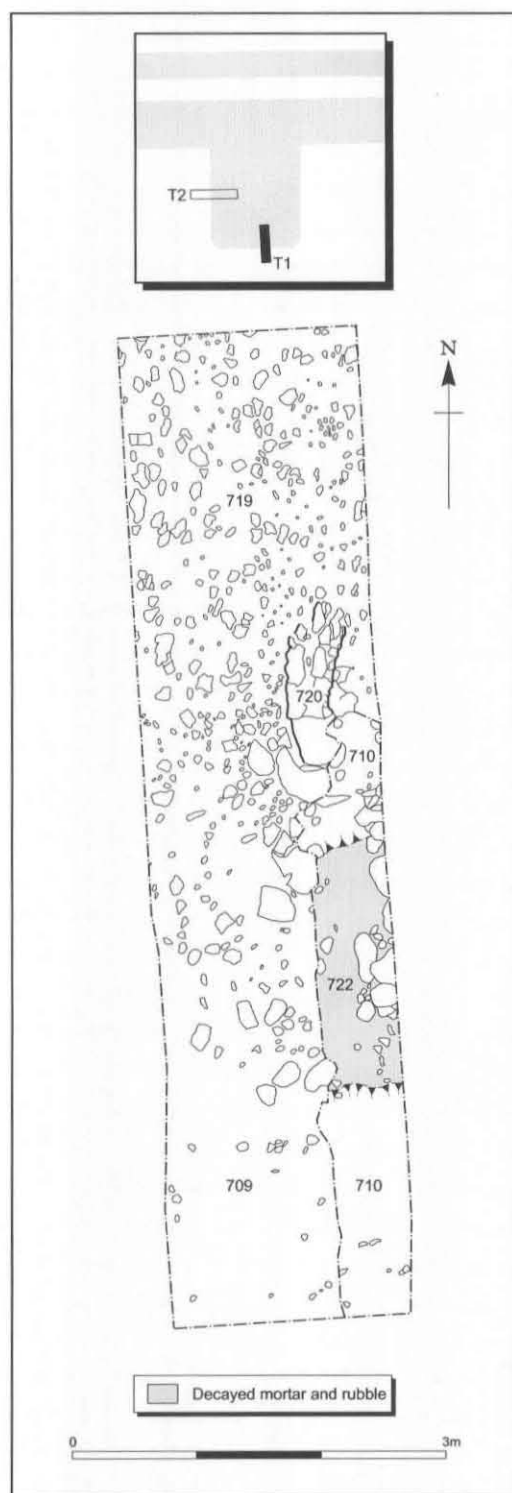


Figure 3
Plan of Trench 1



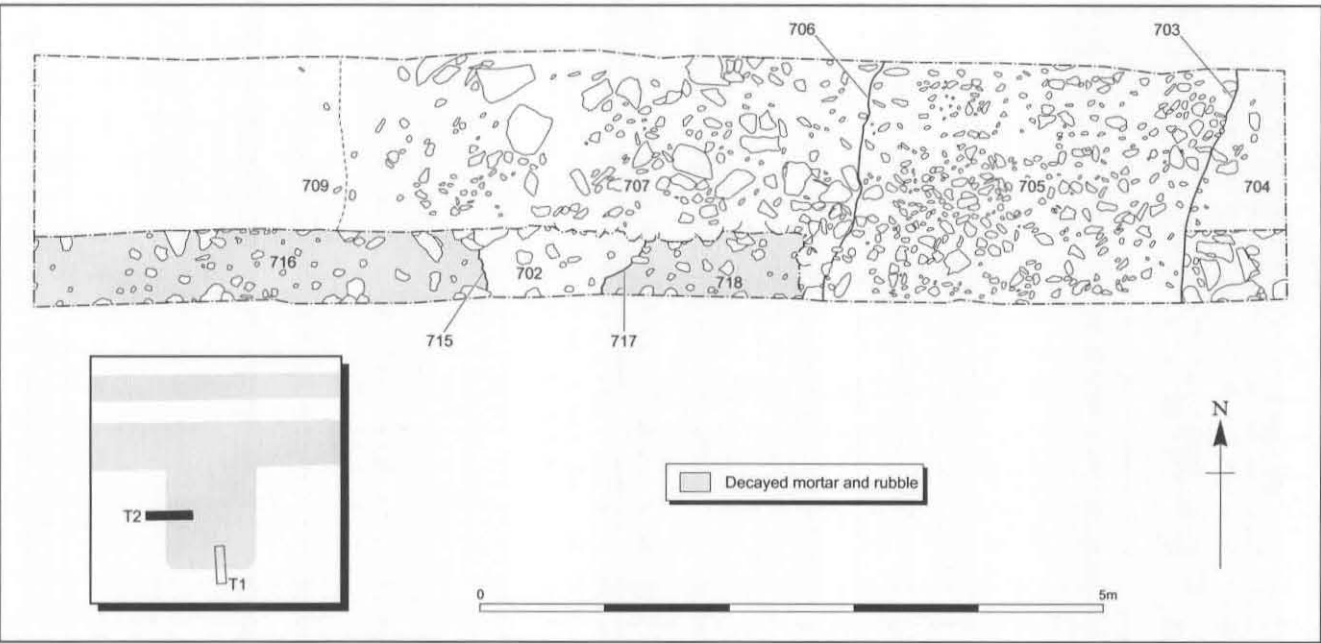


Figure 4 Plan of trench 2