Roman Britain to Germanic England: A Settlement Study of Military Sites in Northern England from AD 300 – 600

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Summary

This paper analyses archeological finds on settlements of military sites in Northern England from AD 300-600

Introduction

The history of Britain is one of invasion, migration, and conquest. Beginning with the Roman occupation in 54 BC and ending with the Norman Conquest in AD 1066, there has been a constant influx of people that has shaped that country’s culture. Within this history is a period of considerable change with the withdrawal of the Roman forces in AD 410 and the arrival of the Germanic tribes where the social structure of the country was dramatically altered. The transition from the occupation of the most powerful empire in the western world to the establishment of the Germanic kingdoms of early England, allows for an understanding of how the population developed out of post-Roman rule.

However, the ability to study this period is difficult as much of the archaeological evidence has been buried, destroyed, or built over. Most of the materials and structures from this period are natural and biodegradable making them difficult to identify in archaeological contexts. Former research into the Roman occupation stops at the late 4th – early 5th century. In a similar manner, research into the post-Roman occupation of Britain focuses around the early Anglian period of AD 600+ as this was when stone was re-incorporated into structures (Kerr, 1983). This has created a gap in the history of the country that is commonly referred to as the Dark Ages.

Arnold explains that in the past, scholars believed that there was a break in occupation after the Romans left and before the Germanic tribes arrived. Even more, this prior research has led to the impression that the Germanic peoples came into an empty landscape (Arnold, 1982). However, what was forgotten was the remaining Romano-British population left from the result of the Roman occupants establishing permanent settlements. “What is different about new excavations is that they provide clear stratigraphic evidence for continuing occupation of military sites beyond the end of the fourth century” (Ferris & Jones, 2000, p. 1). Research into individual Roman settlements by archaeologists such as Wilmott (1997), Wilson (1996, 2002), and Wacher (1992), have shown that there was no distinct break in the occupation of the two powers and that the remaining population was shifted from one way of life into another.

Now that light is being cast on this period, further questions are being asked. Each researcher has posed a hypothesis of how their individual site plays into the greater transition of the island, but the problem arises that each site transitions slightly different from each other. This raises questions as to the character of the
transition (N. Hodgson, personal communication, July 16, 2007). There does not seem to be an agreement on whether it was a peaceful, steady transition from one power to the next, if it was a transition of complete conquest by the Germanic settlers, or if it was perhaps a combination of both (Arnold, 1982).

It was not uncommon for the Roman government to incorporate barbarians from conquered lands into the army in the form of auxiliary troops (Frere, 1999). By the 5th century the units posted in the empire’s frontiers where mostly made of these laeti troops, including Britain. With the auxiliary troops mostly in control of the island, the distinction between Roman and barbarian military became less obvious and so it is thought that a controlled surrender of power took place from the Roman government to the barbarian troops (Tweddle et al, 1999). The other possibility is that the barbarians that the Roman government handed power over to were not from a foreign land but rather inhabitants of Britain who had been signed into service as laeti by a treaty that also required the service of their sons and their sons’ sons (Wilmott, 1997). The last interpretation is that Roman rule was replaced by rule of the surviving Romano-British, who in turn reverted back to the preexisting chieftain society (Tweddle et al, 1999).

**Settlement Patterns in the Military Zone**

Though many studies have analyzed material from this interlude period, these studies have revolved around grave goods and metal artifacts. While these do aid in the understanding of where settlements were during certain periods, they do not provide sufficient information when analyzing settlement patterns and the use of land. An in depth analysis of the layouts of settlements and the relationship between the occupation sites of the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods has not been done. The physical structure of these settlements is an important component to understanding the period of change and interpreting the arrival of the Germanic peoples because they give a stratigraphic history of what happened.

Locations of settlements are impacted by the geography of an area just as the location of a settlement can impact the geography over time (Aston, 2001). Well placed settlements are used over and over again, changing physically with the people who occupy them. While there is reuse seen in the settlements within the late-Roman period, the occupation is not continuous into the Early Anglo-Saxon Period. There is a visible break in occupation in many northernsites where the stone fortresses of the Roman period fell into decay around the mid to late 5th century but then began to be reused in the 7th century. This break in occupation has lead researchers to wonder why the stone buildings of these settlements were not used continuously and if this indicates a break in occupation for the entire area.

Through analyzing settlement patterns and structural layouts from selected, pre-excavated sites within the northern military zone (Fig. 1; Appendix A), patterns of change can be observed with what happened on those sites from AD 300 – 600.
The settlement patterns of the selected sites have already been recorded and analyzed from the Late Roman period to the Early Anglo-Saxon period and provide an interpretation as to the transition of the overall area. However, an overall analysis combining the data from the various sites has not been done and so the transition of the northern military zone as a whole is purely speculation. By finding the patterns of change between these sites, a more certain interpretation of the area’s transition may be produced. Understanding changes on the frontier is critical to wider interpretations of the end of the Roman administration and the process by which culture and power relations were transformed over Britain as a whole (Ferris & Jones, 2000).

The sites used for this research are the military fortresses of York, Catterick, and Birdoswald focusing on building architecture and materials used in the structures. As all forts in Northern Britain, including these three sites, followed the same building layout, common road and buildings terms will be used (Fig. 2). The study will look at patterns of intense periods of building which implies prosperity in the settlements and periods of destruction, both intentional and unintentional, which indicate abandonment. The internal construction of buildings along with stratigraphic layering will provide insight into their functions at various times. These functions will provide an idea of how the settlement was used during this period culturally—whether for occupation or for industry, and how this reflects the changing nature of the settlement itself.

Catterick was chosen because it has evidence demonstrating continual occupation. A subset of the forts established to protect the frontier, it is close enough to York to have a large military and civilian population which influenced its development but is also far enough away that it could have developed on its own. York is being used because it was the centre of military power during the Roman period and was later the royal and ecclesiastical seat of the kingdom of Northumbria (Tweddle et al, 1999). The Roman civilian settlement of York was also the capital of Britannia Inferior from the 3rd century onward. The site of Birdoswald is perhaps the most well known site along Hadrian’s Wall due to its continual occupation into the Early Anglo-Saxon Period. It was also solely a military
establishment with no civilian settlement associated with it. The analysis of a high government site, a supporting fort, and a frontier fort may give indications as to the transition depending on settlements and their populations during the Late-Roman/Anglo-Saxon interlude.

![Fig. 2 Roman Fort Layout with Key Latin Terms (Wilmott, 1997)](image)

**Fig. 2 Roman Fort Layout with Key Latin Terms (Wilmott, 1997)**

### Roman Occupation

At the middle of the first century BC, Rome’s empire had developed and expanded from its local centre in the Mediterranean west to Gaul and east to Constantinople and northern Africa. The governor of the provinces in Gaul was Caesar who took leadership in 58 BC (Frere, 1999). Caesar was very involved in defending and expanding Rome’s interest in Gaul, especially against a renewed German presence along the Rhine. In 56 BC he planned an expedition to Britain after seeing the influence the island had on Gallic affairs. In the summer of 55 BC a small force of Roman soldiers crossed the channel and landed on the shores of Britain, but the expedition failed as Caesar was not prepared for what awaited him. A much larger expedition was planned for the following year and an army of five legions and two thousand cavalry were assembled to make the journey. This expedition as well met with difficulty and after only a few months was forced to withdraw back across the channel (Frere, 1999).

It was not until the reign of Emperor Claudius that Rome established its presence in Britain. In 43 BC, four legions, along with auxiliary troops, were sent from the continent to Britain. These legions, the II Augusta, IX Hispana, XIV Gemina, and XX Valeria Victix, remained in Britain during Rome’s entire occupation (Frere, 1999). Like Caesar’s expedition, the legions met with opposition but this time they were prepared to face it. Relations were built between the Celtic tribes of the island that did not oppose the Roman presence, while those who did were assimilated into the Roman society (Frere, 1999). Claudius’ campaign in Britain lasted many years and saw the construction of thousands of temporary camps and large forts all across the southern part of the island (Fig. 3). Unlike the remains of fortresses that can be seen today, many of these structures were originally built of timber and thatch (Breeze, 1983). Since Rome’s campaign of Britain was offensive and was meant to conquer the island, the need to establish permanent towns was not needed. Most of the fortresses were used in the winter anyways as the army usually was out campaigning in the summer (Breeze, 1983).
During their occupation of Britain, the Roman Empire changed its focus from an offensive system to a more defensive system due to increased opposition from barbarian tribes in the north. Forts were transitioned from mobile, temporary camps to more permanent structures of stone (Breeze, 1983). A definite distinction between a northern military zone and a southern civilian zone was established with most of the defensive structures being found in the north and west areas of the island (Sargent, 2002). These were the frontiers, where invasion by rebellious tribes was far more likely. The most legendary of these defensive structures is the 76 mile stone wall dividing Britain from the barbarian lands. Built under the Emperor Hadrian in AD 122, Hadrian’s Wall (Fig. 4) has become the iconic symbol of...
Rome’s power in Britain. Like most of the structures of Roman Britain, Hadrian’s Wall was originally built of timber and then later transitioned to stone. As instabilities in Rome increased, the empire eventually abandoned Britain, pulling out its legions in AD 410 leaving the Romano-British population to fend for itself.

![Hadrian's Wall](image)

**Fig. 4 Hadrian’s Wall (Wilmott, 2000)**

**Early Anglo-Saxon Period**

The terms for this period vary depending on the scholar discussing it. It is often referred to as the Early-Medieval Period, The Anglo-Saxon Period, The Early Anglo-Saxon Period, and The Dark Ages. For purposes of this study it will be referred to as the Early Anglo-Saxon Period as there are many phases of development of the Germanic cultures prior to the medieval era. The author would also like to establish that though the term Anglo-Saxon is used to describe the period, the people actually occupying the area under investigation were the Angles.

The Germanic tribes began moving through England at the beginning of the 5th century. These seafaring peoples arrived in boatloads from their homelands of present day Northern Germany, Holland, and Denmark. The newcomers from the northern regions of Germany, the Saxons, settled in the south and west regions of the island, those from the areas around Holland, the Angles, settled in the midlands and the northern regions of the island, and the migrants from Denmark, the Jutes, settled the south-eastern coast (Leeds, 1913). The people the era is named after, come from the midland center of the island where a kingdom of both Angles and Saxons coexisted (Fig. 5).

According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons is given a date of 494 AD when “Cerdic and Cynric his son landed at Cerdic’s Shore with 5 ships” (Swanton, 1996, p. 2). However, this date has been called into question because of references to fighting the Saxons in Britain prior to Cerdic and Cynric’s arrival elsewhere in the Chronicle (Swanton, 1996). To complicate things further, it is known that a Germanic presence was already in Britain during the time of the Romans as they were among some of the auxiliary troops that were sent with the legions. This makes it difficult to determine when the Germanic peoples first came to Britain.
The Germanic tribes were sea faring people, highly mobile around Northern Europe. It is in response to their skill as seamen that Carausius is said to have constructed the Saxon Shore forts (Frere, 1999). The construction of these forts lend to the belief that prior to the Roman abandonment of the island there was a threat from the continent. These people were also highly skilled in metal and wood working so much of what has been studied about them is from artifacts rather than large, elaborate settlements. The use of stone in Anglo-Saxon architecture is not seen in this early period. The buildings of the early Celtic church were made of wood but shifted to stone after the arrival of Roman missionaries (Kerr, 1983). Much of the style and material from this early period has been lost because of constant rebuilding by later invasion by the Vikings and the Normans making it even more difficult to study.

**Catterick**

The Roman site of Catterick, *Cataractonium*, is located in the county of Yorkshire
a few miles north of the Roman military capital of York and aligned along Dere Street, a major supply road to Hadrian’s Wall (Fig. 6). Catterick is thought to be of strategic importance in the Roman period because it was located along the main road that leads north from York to the forts along Hadrian’s Wall and along the shores of the River Swale. Its location would have made it a main stop for troops and officials traveling north to the frontier (Wilson, 2002). The site was first excavated in the 1950s when it was discovered by Hayward. Excavations over the last 50 years have revealed major changes in the occupation of Catterick starting in the 4th century (Wilson, 2002) and continuing through to the Early Anglo-Saxon Period.

There was substantial building and rebuilding at Catterick during the 4th and 5th centuries. Buildings that were occupied during the previous phases were rebuilt and re-planned incorporating new walls or expansions. In areas that were abandoned there was reconstruction of buildings that were present in previous areas but had been demolished. In all of these constructions, material from other buildings on the site was incorporated into the structures. The reuse of individual stones and even floors from previous phases is curious when paired with the idea that this expansion indicates a period of wealth and prosperity for the settlement.

Fig. 6 Roman Catterick (Wilson, 2000)
During the early 4th century, the main fortress was expanded and rebuilt utilizing elements from pre-existing buildings. However, the alignment of the new layout in some portions was quite different (Wilson, 2002). Most of this expansion is seen around the *mansio* bath wing in *Insula III* where the original four roomed building was expanded to six reusing the original *praefurnium*. The rebuilding shows a degree of planning by a certain group or individual, reflecting ownership or tenancy either by a new civilian elite or the military (Wilson, 2002). Some of this rebuilding does indicate a possible increase in status as buildings were being built larger with luxuries such as *hypocausts*. The fortress may have been a centre for this new elite who influenced all expansion and building (Wilson, 2002). However, because of the reorganization of the army at this time under Constantius and earlier under Septimius Severus, there may have been a redistribution of functions within the area and the stationing of a detachment of the army for protection of the site.

In other areas of the fortress, there was building and expanding of workshop strip buildings indicating an increase in craft production within the site at this time. Evidence of iron-working and pottery making have been found within these buildings in the forms of iron slag and pottery shards. Layers of burned debris and possible hearths or ovens have also been found (Wilson, 2002). However, it is not known whether this production was military or civilian run. In the area of the *mansio* in *Insula III* the relatively poor construction of the buildings may indicate military occupation. The areas of *Insula VI* and *Insula VII* appear to be focused more towards the civilian population that appears to have been growing within the fortress. Buildings in *Insula VI* seem to have been used for public use such as temples and workshops. Strip buildings show signs of division indicating a room for work and a room for occupation. Even though these changes could be linked to an increase in civilian prosperity, the changes could also be related to military involvement where goods were being produced for the army (Wilson, 2002).

There was further expansion within the military settlement in the mid to late 4th century. In the south of *Insula III*, more buildings were constructed possibly being utilized for barracks by *gentiles*, *laeti*, or a field army (Wilson, 2002). Increased activity within the fortress correlates to the abandonment of the civilian settlements and surrounding areas during this period. Site 343 and the Bainesse settlement both show evidence of abandonment in the mid-late 4th century determined by the accumulation of dark silty layers over the buildings (Wilson, 2002). Scholars believe that during this period, a movement was made into the fortress for either safety or prestige. The decline of these northern suburbs indicates a civilian migration behind the defences increasing the fortress population (Wilson, 2002). Additional unified complexes in the *Insulae*, especially VII, continue to support the idea that there was a change in ownership and/or military control (Wilson, 2002). The presence of weaponry evidence in the surrounding context tends to support the latter. It is suggested these groupings could be versions of the *principia* and *praetorium*.

Evidence does show that occupation continued into the 5th century and changes to buildings did continue over a reasonable length of time (Wilson, 2002). Evidence of a 3rd fort at Catterick would support the reorganization of the settlement to suggest that Catterick remained strategically important to the northern occupation. The urban elite that began to develop at this
time (Wilson, 2002; Ferris and Jones, 2000) expanded agriculture in the area adding to the prosperity of the settlement. Dark soils in and around the abandoned outer settlements has lead researchers to conclude that the inhabitants of Catterick were running farms located outside the main fortress from behind the defensive wall (Wilson 2002).

If Catterick prospered at this time and was able to rebuild much of the major fortress, then it would seem appropriate that new stones and flooring would be produced. However, the evidence does not support this and so archaeologists are unsure as to the nature of these phases. It raises questions as to who was in control of Catterick during the 5th century. If the military was in control, then it would seem fitting that new building materials would be used as the military was trained and responsible for the building of towns and fortresses all over Britain (Wilson, 2002). If the government of Catterick was civilian run, then the reuse of material would not be surprising. It is unlikely that civilians were trained in the production of building materials because the army was responsible for construction. Researchers believe that while Catterick may have been prospering at this time, the lack of financial stability with in Britain and the empire did not allow for the processing of new materials (Wilson, 2002).

Substantial rebuilding using stone continued on sit into the mid-late 4th century. Researchers, again, point to an increase in prosperity where the settlement was able to grow and expand because of the rise in occupational activity. A potential threat from outside the defended area may provide an explanation as to the use of stone for construction. At this point, the military was being removed from the country because of problems in Rome; the decrease in military presence may have made the need for stronger defenses important for the civilian population. Though, at Catterick, archaeological material has revealed that a military presence was at the site during the 4th – and early 5th centuries but to what extent it had power over the civilian group is unknown.

During the early stages of Catterick’s existence there was a separation of military and civilian groups. The primary fortress was occupied by the military and the civilian settlement was set up to the north of the River Swale outside the fortress walls. Over time, the civilian site expanded and a new settlement, the military vicus was established outside the fortress (Wilson, 2002). Even though there was an increase in civilian occupation, they were still kept outside the primary fortress. In addition, the buildings within the fortress began to show signs of civilian involvement. A new bath house was constructed during the early 4th century, and though it would have only been used by the military and high ranking officials, workers would have been pulled from the civilian population (Wilson, 2002). Despite the definite distinction during the early periods between the military and the civilian presences, by the late 4th century the lines of distinction appear to have blurred (Wilson, 2002). This may be a result of the decrease in military presence as Britain moved into the 5th century.

In the Early Anglo-Saxon Period, a major feature of the landscape would have been Dere Street and the possibly visible ruins of the Catterick fortress defenses. Most of the early Anglian evidence was concentrated towards the north edge of the area and though it consisted of a limited amount of settlement evidence, it is concentrated in a large enclosure with a ditch and boundary feature (Wilson et al, 1996). The area also showed evidence of an isolated Grubenhaus in the north east corner.
of the enclosure (Wilson et al, 1996). This timber building was most likely a domestic structure with evidence of a hearth in the south east corner. Two pits north of a ditch containing burnt and fire-cracked cobbles may have been cooking pits. Researchers think that their isolation from the building was a result of wanting to keep the activity away from the occupation areas (Wilson et al, 1996). Craft production is also believed to have taken place in the building due to evidence of irregular post-holes that are believed to have supported a weaving loom. The area of the complex was abandoned during second half of the 4th century but a post-Roman date for features appear probably because of the presence of Anglian pottery (Wilson et al, 1996).

Anglian structural evidence has also been found along the North Bank of the River Swale and in the Bainesse settlement. In the area of the 4th century Roman theatre, the flagged stone floor was cut by the insertion of a Grubenhaus divided into two unequal halves (Wilson et al, 1996). Unlike the previously mentioned Grubenhaus, the bottom of this structure was lined with a layer of small stones in some areas that may have been deliberately laid or remnants of a Roman period layer found during its construction. There also appears to be no internal hearth but excavations did encounter a pit containing ash, burnt clay, and charcoal (Wilson et al, 1996). At the Bainesse site, seven Anglian burials were cut into the remains of the latest Roman buildings on the site (Wilson et al, 1996). While these burials do not support occupation, it does support an Anglian recognition of the area.

When the Angles arrived during the mid 5th century, it is possible that the surviving population remained largely un-Romanized in social habits so it is possible that the indigenous population and the new arrivals adopted each other’s practices. It is probable that by the later 5th and 6th centuries Anglian settlement patterns were integrated with that of the indigenous population. As Anglian material culture is made of natural materials such as timber, it is not surprising that little evidence has survived (Wilson et al, 1996).

York

York was the centre of military power for the Roman Empire in Britain. Built in the 1st century by the Ninth Legion, the area became the base for the Sixth during the 2nd century. During the reconstruction of much of the fortifications in the military zone under the reign of Septimius Severus, York served as the base where the emperor stayed and sent out his orders. York’s strategic location at the convergence of the Rivers Ouse and Foss made it a highly valuable site both in the Roman era and in the Early Anglo-Saxon Period (Fig. 7). After the Roman occupation, York became the royal and ecclesiastical seat of power for the kingdom Northumbria. Today, it is still considered the military capital of the country (A. Morrison, personal communication, August 4, 2007).
During the 4th century, York went through a period of building and rebuilding of the defenses and internal buildings. The context for this rebuilding could come from the reorganization of the army under Constantine in the 4th century and its redistribution around the island. Resurfacing of the perimeter street along the wall, the via sagularis, took place during this period as evidenced by layers of fill and cobbles. In the area around the porta principalis sinistra, the maintenance was even more prominent, because it was in a more important part of the site near the military headquarters building (Ottaway, 1996). The administrative buildings remained in use during this period of considerable occupation (Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, 1962). The principia basilica was reorganized and the first cohort barracks were altered (Tweddle et al, 1999).

The walls of the fortress were rebuilt approximately in 296 or later and used the Severan walls as foundations and incorporated projecting towers (Commission on Historical Monuments, 1962). The ditch around the fortress was also recut, indicating development of the defenses. The rampart was also built up in this period which made it wider and higher in some areas. However, researchers see no correlation between areas where the rampart was built up and any threat to the fortress. In its modification, the rampart sealed demolished remains of earlier intervallum buildings abandoned as areas of the fort went out of use. It is also known that there was not a reduction in the size of the defended area of the fortress during this reconstruction (Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, 1962).

During the mid 4th century there were changes in the reorganization of the for-
tress. Excavations revealed a drain cut into the *via sagularis* dating to this period. Around it, as well as in other areas of the site, there were many refuse disposals also dating to this period indicating a lax in discipline of the area. This less disciplined approach infers a character change in the occupation, resulting from the decrease in military presence seen all over Britain (Ottaway, 1996).

In the late 4th century and into the 5th century there was a phase of decay in the fortress. In certain areas, the wall was decaying, creating breaches that were later plugged by the controversial Multanular and Anglian towers, which indicate the Roman defenses were already ceasing to function in a recognizable way (Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, 1962). Streets such as the *via decumana* and the *via principalis* also went out of use at this time as evidenced by the layers of dark silty deposits they are sealed by. Evidence from excavations suggests that the bath house at this time went out of use and was partially demolished (Tweddle et al, 1999). The only sign of upkeep during this later period was the covering of the drain cut into the *via sagularis* and the resurfacing of the street. This feature also goes out of use after a short while (Ottaway, 1996).

The Anglian period in York does demonstrate the reuse and development of route ways and certain structures from the Roman period. As the walls survived more or less intact it is unlikely that they would have been removed in the sub-Roman or Early Anglo-Saxon period (Tweddle et al, 1999). The survival of Roman structures would have influenced any building that would have been constructed during the sub-Roman period since they would have been visible. Similarly, the main Roman roads survived through the fortress since the gates were still in use because of the standing walls.

Structures that survived into this period included the *principia* cross-hall that was presumably still standing and in use until AD 800 (Tweddle et al, 1999). The bath house and walls of the *colonia* were most likely also still standing and therefore would have had an influence on any building or use of the settlement during the Early Anglo-Saxon Period. The survival of these buildings also helps support the reuse of Roman stone in later buildings. Roman stone has been found in structures built in the 11th century indicating its availability at the time, thereby implying a greater abundance prior to this. Its reuse is further support by the appearance of robbing trenches from the Anglo-Scandinavian and Norman periods (Tweddle et al, 1999). Therefore, researchers assume robbing also occurred in the Early Anglo-Saxon Period.

Outside the fortress, the civilian settlement underwent a period of addition and reorganization during the Roman period. In a few areas there was the construction of large houses, but overall there was more building destruction. It appears that by the 5th century most of the area was abandoned (Tweddle et al, 1999), presumably with a migration into the fortress. During the Early Anglo-Saxon Period, these settlements showed signs of Anglian activity but the majority of it was concentrated at the site of 46-54 Fishergate during the 7th and 9th centuries (Kemp, 1996). This may be because the Anglian people were not accustomed to working with stone and so avoided the Roman fortress during the mid and late 5th century (A. Morrison, personal communication, August 4, 2007). This theory is supported by the fact that the only Anglian evidence found within the fortress dating to this time has been personal items (Tweddle et al, 1999) giving researchers no indication of permanent occupation.
It is reasonable to conclude that York went through a period of decline after the middle of the 4th century and was eventually abandoned during the 5th and 6th centuries. Occupation appears to have moved out of the city into the surrounding settlements, though route ways through the city appear to have still been used. It could be said that the Anglian presence around York avoided the fortress setting up their own permanent settlement to interact with the Romano-British population that was still in the area and then decided to move back into the city during the 9th century (Tweddle et al, 1999). However, historical texts do point to a possibility that the Roman fortress was used by the elites of the Anglian population, presumably around the centre of the fortress and the principia since it appears to have remained roofed and sporadically occupied until the 9th century (Tweddle et al, 1999).

**Birdoswald**

The site of the Roman fort of Birdoswald was built on a high spur near the River Irthing (Fig. 8). The fort’s location on the North bank of the river gives it a strategic importance because it monitors the river’s crossing point at Willowford Bridge (Wilmott, 1997). Of all of the forts along Hadrian’s Wall, Birdoswald is the only one with substantial evidence of continual occupation from the Late-Roman to the Early Anglo-Saxon Period.

After a period of abandonment, the fort was reoccupied in the late 3rd – early 4th century. An inscription found at Birdoswald seems to support this reoccupation and comments on a restoration of the fort (Wilmott, 1997). A series of alterations were done on the roads, buildings, and drainage system at this time. The fort ditch was recut indicating the reuse of defenses and refortification of the fort. There were several phases within this period where the ditch silted and was recut, due to problems with flooding. In this case, the continual maintenance of the ditch supports occupation at this time. Alterations took place with the remodeling of Building 4400 into two structures, Building 4401 and Building 4402. After the remodeling, the construction trench cut into the via principalis was filled in and the road resurfaced several times (Wilmott, 1997) further supporting the reorganization of the site.

Building 4401 was remodeled and used for industrial purposes indicating an increase in craft production particularly in the use of metal. Excavations revealed stone boxes containing backfill and industrial waste in the form of iron slag support-
ing the buildings’ function as an iron workshop. These boxes are thought to have been used for tasks such as quenching or making steel. As very little waste was found, researchers believe that most of it was disposed of outside the building down the cliff into the river (Wilmott, 1997). Building 4402 is also thought to have been a workshop with its rooms having specialized layouts. Researchers think that it may have been a storehouse with one room being a work room. Evidence to support the presence of a wood bench was found on a cobbled platform with a drain adjacent to it cut into the wall. Waste from the work done in this room would have been poured down this drain (Wilmott, 1997).

Occupation patterns of rebuilding and road resurfacing continued into the 4th century. The western defenses underwent considerable refurbishments with the recut of the defensive ditch and resurfacing of the road north of the Porta Principalis. There was a reinforcement of the wall by a buttress built on a platform inserted into a back filled ditch (Wilmott, 1997). Once the ditch had silted, a rough, unbonded wall was put in place to reinforce the buttress. This helps to support the need for maintenance because of flooding since erosion had compromised the integrity of the wall structure. There were also three major resurfacings of the via principalis during this period indicating potential activity related to the further transformation of Building 4401 into an industrial building. The restoration of the ditches and the drainage system appear to be synchronous with that of the buildings indicating major renovation. The restoration of the main administrative buildings in the fort, along with those associated with industrial work, would imply a reoccupation by the military at the time and a reestablishment of the fort on the wall.

During the middle of the 4th century, the fort went through a major change with the selective reuse of some of the stone buildings using stones from demolished buildings in the construction. Evidence of this reuse happened at horrea Building 197 and Building 198. Building 197 was occupied during this period. Excavations revealed that the sub floor was backfilled to lay a solid floor using original flagstones from the previous suspended floor. A hearth was built indicating the use of the building for a new purpose but the lack of industrial waste has lead researchers to conclude its purpose was domestic. The floor was also resurfaced once during the buildings use, but the reason is unknown (Wilmott, 1997). Often in Roman culture, new floors were laid when occupational debris built up over the old floor rather than removing the debris (G. Stobbs, personal communication, July 10, 2007). Eventually, Building 197 fell into disuse as indicated by a thick layer of soil and building rubble from its eventual collapse (Wilmott, 1997).

Building 198 fell into disuse during the mid 4th century. The sub-floor was used as a dumping ground for refuse, its roof collapsed, and it was eventually quarried for stone for other buildings in the fortress (Wilmott, 1997). Based off of materials recovered from the stratigraphic layers, it is believed that the collapse Building 198’s roof was after AD 350-353 providing a time context for the later periods of the fort. The disuse of both granaries within the fort is puzzling to researchers, because it implies a reduction in the amount of occupants in the fort (Wilmott, 1997).

The successor to Building 198 was Building 199. This building contained flooring made of stone; however, the structure itself was made of timber except for its western wall which was in fact the
western wall of the former *horreum*. This building and its contemporary, Building 4426 located in the western area of the fort, indicate the first of two timber phases of building at the site during the 5th century. Both buildings utilized standing masonry elements from the previous buildings in their construction. In the case of Building 4426 this was potentially a lean-to structure against the west fort wall using the south wall of the south tower of the *porta principalis sinistra* as its north wall (Wilmott, 1997). Construction of these buildings is placed after AD 367-78 with fair certainty. This date correlates to a coin in the dumps of Building 198, thereby giving a date of AD 388-95 for the construction of these buildings (Wilmott, 1997).

The second phase of timber construction during the 5th century is represented by three surface-built timber buildings around the *porta principalis sinistra* and the *via sagularis*. Building 200 is the largest of these timber buildings and aligned to the *porta principalis sinistra*. Its alignment suggests that it was probably a building of importance. Buildings 4298 and 4299 occupied the area of the *via sagularis* and are situated in alignment to Building 200 indicating their less importance. Both Buildings 200 and 4299 were free standing structures built without the use of stone walls. Building 4298 on the other hand, may have been a lean-to structure utilizing the south portal blocking and the south tower of the *porta principalis sinistra*. Given the date of construction for Building 199 and an average life of 50 years estimated to each building, researchers have put the construction of Building 200 around AD 470.

During this phase, there were also major modifications to the gate where postholes were cut outside the gate thereby allowing the doors to open outwards rather than inwards as they had done in Roman times. This change put the fort into a more defensible position implying either a heightened period of hostilities or a lack of military presence at the fort.

A tradition of timber building in the 6th and 8th centuries has been identified on a number of type-sites. These structures are difficult to identify in excavations because they are made of natural and biodegradable materials and do not leave a recognizable footprint like stone structures. These types of structures become more common during the Early Anglo-Saxon Period. However, as the Angles did not reach Cumbria till the mid-7th century (Wilmott, 1997), researchers think that the structure at Birdoswald is solely Romano-British and the residence of a chieftain or royal official. This would indicate that after the Roman occupation of the frontier, the population resorted back to the chieftain society it previously had (Wilmott, 1997). As this social structure is also a part of Anglian society, it would not be surprising if once the new comers encountered this Romano-British population there was an integration of the two cultures.

**Shedding Light On A ‘Dark’ Age**

In the past, there has been a mentality that after the Romans left, there was a discontinuation in occupation before the Germanic tribes arrived. However, recent studies have raised awareness as to the consideration that a Romano-British population was left behind as a result of the establishment of permanent Roman settlements. Research is beginning to show there was continuity between the two powers of the Romans and the Angles and that the remaining Romano-British inhabitants were shifted from one way of life to another. From the three sites previously discussed, a dynamic change can be seen in the occupation of northern military sites.
starting at the turn of the 4th century and continuing through to the 6th century. This change shows there was a reestablishment of the military within the fortress settlements, the rise of a civilian urban elite, a decline of the military garrisons, and a revival of pre-Roman British social structure.

At the dawn of the 4th century there appears to have been a reoccupation of the fortresses and settlements in the military zone, including a re-defence of Hadrian’s Wall (Dark, 2000). Reconstruction of the main military buildings and official complexes, such as the principia at York (Ottaway, 1996) and Birdoswald (Wilmott, 1997) and the mansio bath wings (Wilson, 1996), implies a reorganization of the settlements either under the military or an individual group. Roads were resurfaced and defensive ditches were recut, indicating a refortification of the settlements. The changes to these sites support a reestablishment of Roman authority in Northern Britain.

During the mid 4th century, further development is seen in the rise of an urban elite within the fortresses and an increase in civilian activity. Late Roman residences were larger than their predecessors (Cleary, 2000) and tended to accommodate luxuries such as hypocausts (Wilson, 1996). These buildings represented something different from the commander’s houses of earlier periods during a time when the traditional command arrangements of the Roman army had radically changed (Ferris and Jones, 2000). Coincidentally, this construction parallels with the decrease and abandonment of sites outside the main military settlements causing researchers to conclude that there was a movement of the civilians into the fortified settlements.

It is also in this period that a decline or reduction of the sites’ garrisons has been indicated. Barrack blocks are reorganized into divided buildings call chalet houses that accommodated smaller groups of soldiers, usually between six and eight (Wilmott, 1997; 2000). There is also the conversion of horrae at many sites, including Birdoswald and South Shields (Wilmott, 1997), which provides further support for a reduction in garrison size as it implies a decrease in necessity for large food stores.

By the late 4th century, most of the fortresses had been converted to public use. An increase in craft production within the forts can be seen with the increased number of strip buildings and workshops containing layers of ironwork debris and burned materials. It is also believed that at this time the urban elite are running farms from behind the settlement defenses. As a result, there was also a decrease in the distinction between military and civilian populations (Cleary, 2000).

At the dawn of the 5th century, the only military left in Britain were the auxiliary soldiers. Also by this time, each settlement had begun to develop independently. When the Roman political framework collapsed, status and symbols of that order lost their validity and meaning (Cleary, 2000). It is probable that military power was handed over to the commanders of the auxiliary units. These troops, being of barbarian descent and never fully integrated into the Roman culture, slowly resorted back to the British chieftain social structure. Despite a return to their previous social structure, there was an attempt to keep the Roman traditions they had become acculturated to after 400 years of occupation. The refurbishment and re-use of Roman buildings in the 5th century did occur, and followed recognizable patterns of using structures with architecture that rendered them habitable in post-Roman contexts (Dark, 1993; 2000). Substantial rebuilding first took place reusing materials from
abandoned buildings. The forts and their defenses were furnished with earthen banks and ditches during these later periods. These modifications indicate a movement away from the Roman tradition of building with stone and a revival of using natural resources (Dark, 2000).

The final step in the revival of the British chieftain tradition is the construction of timber buildings such as the Grubenhaus at Catterick (Wilson et al, 1996) and Building 200 at Birdoswald (Wilmott, 1997). This return to the pre-Roman way of life is similar to the early Anglian evidence found at Fishergate 46-54, one of the largest Anglian settlements in northern England (Kemp, 1996). Though it does not imply a removal of Romano-British culture, both groups are structurally and culturally similar leading to the conclusion that an integration of the cultures took place upon the Angles’ arrival in the 5th century.

This Romano-British population did integrate with Germanic migrants to form the early Kingdoms of England and the foundations of the country. However, the integration of these two cultures would not leave a noticeably distinct transition. In the north, the integration of the surviving Romano-British population with the Anglian newcomers and the use of biodegradable materials have caused this period to appear archaeologically invisible. The material culture is not chronologically diagnostic and is often difficult to observe in archaeological contexts. Despite this difficulty, there was a population left by the Romans who developed their own distinct culture, and it is this Romano-British population, still yet to be explored, that must be the focus of future studies into this period.

Bibliography


Appendix A

Key to Fig. 1

1. Birrens
2. Broomholm
3. Netherby
4. Bewcastle
5. Bowness
6. Dumburgh
7. Burgh by Sands
8. Stanwix
9. Castlesteads
10. Birdoswald
11. Carvoran
12. Great Chesters
13. Housteads
14. Chesterham
15. Carrawburgh
16. Chesters
17. Halton Chesters
18. Corbridge
19. Rudchester
20. Benwell
21. Newcastle
22. Wallsend
23. Shouth Shields
24. Beckfoot
25. Maryport
26. Moresby
27. Papcastle
28. Caiermore
29. Old Carlisle
30. Carlisle
31. Wreary, Park House
32. Whitley Castle
33. Ebchester
34. Old Penrith
35. Troutbeck
36. Brougham
37. Kirkby Thore
38. Binchester
39. Ravenglass
40. hardknott
41. Ambleside
42. Brough under Stainmore
43. Bowes
44. Greta Bridge
45. Low Borrow Bridge
46. Watercrook
47. Overburrow
48. Bainbridge
49. Catterick
50. Lease Rigg
51. Cawthorn
52. Malton
53. Lancaster
54. Long Preston
55. Elslack
56. Ilkley
57. Newton Kyme
58. York
59. Kirkham
60. Ribchester
61. Slack
62. Brough on Humber
63. Castleshaw
64. Manchester
65. Melandra Castle
66. Templebrough
67. Doncaster
68. Chester
69. Buxton
70. Brough on Noe
71. Rocester
72. Little Chester