

# IN GREATER MANCHESTER

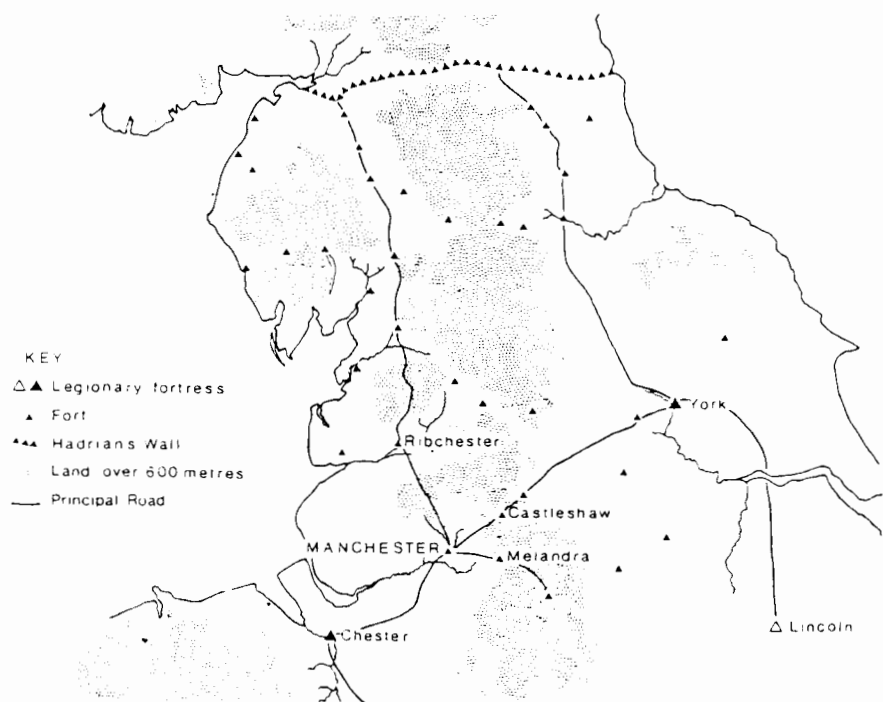
## Castleshaw Roads and Romans

A straight line drawn between Chester and York follows within half a mile the route of the Roman road that connected the legionary fortresses of Deva and Eboracum. Midway between these two lies the site of the Roman forts at Castleshaw (O.S. Grid Ref. SD999096). They are situated on a spur of high ground at the head of Castleshaw Valley in Saddleworth. There are two superimposed military works: the larger and earlier (Castleshaw I), is a standard auxiliary fort of two and a half acres; the smaller and later fortlet (Castleshaw II), with its south-east ramparts overlying part of the larger fort, is half an acre in area.

Twenty eight years elapsed between the landing of the Romans at Richborough in AD 43 and their advance into this area. By AD 71 the time was ripe for an attack upon the loose confederacy of northern tribes who were collectively known as the Brigantes. The newly-arrived governor Petillius Cerealis commenced operations against the Brigantes in that year. Within a short period of time he built a new legionary fortress at York. In AD 77, Agricola became governor. He subdued North Wales using Chester as his base. This was achieved within twelve months and in AD 78 he turned his attentions to the Brigantes. It is probable that the legions carried out a simultaneous advance from Chester and York along the two well defined natural routes East and West of the Pennines with the intention of isolating the Brigantes in the upland areas.

It is now accepted that the advance into Yorkshire was made from Chester and it is assumed that the connecting road was built at this time. The road which Agricola constructed passed from Chester through Northwich and Manchester, by-passing the fort at Castlefield. It left Manchester by way of Newton Heath and continued through Failsworth, Oldham and entered Saddleworth at Austerlands. After traversing around High Moor and Knott Hill, it went up Castleshaw Valley and eventually reached the summit of Standedge. Just below the summit, on a spur of high ground, Agricola constructed a fort (Castleshaw I) to guard the road

Ken Booth  
reviews a century  
of research and  
excavation

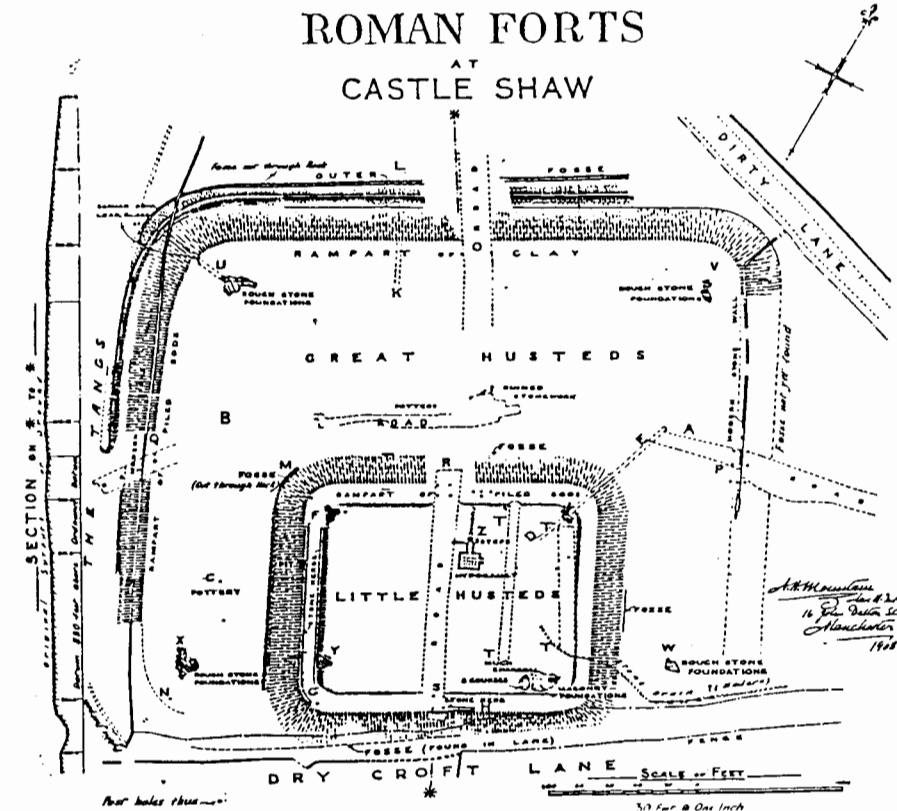


NORTHERN FORTS, Roman Manchester in its regional setting.

# A HISTORY OF THE EXCAVATIONS

In a paper presented to the Royal Philosophical Society in 1751 Thomas Percival of Royton after describing the route of the Roman road from Manchester says: "At Castleshaw I was well pleased to find a double Roman Camp". The paper contained the earliest known plan. In 1897 Ammon Wrigley dug "Trial holes" and found fragments of tile and pottery. A year later in 1898, Mr G F Buckley, a local worthy, leased the site, hired five labourers and a number of trenches were dug. He found pottery, tiles and two coins dating to Vespasian, (AD 79). After his lease had expired Ammon Wrigley returned to the site and carried out further excavations recovering more pottery and tiles. On July 19th, 1907 the site was bought by Samuel Andrews and Major William Lees. Assisted by Bruton, they concentrated their efforts on the defences of the fort and fortlet and the interior layout of the fortlet. In 1908 they published their First Interim Report followed by a second in 1911. Both reports contained a plan of the site and many splendid photographs. For the first time an accurate layout of some of the buildings and roads in the site was available as well as the usual assortment of smaller finds.

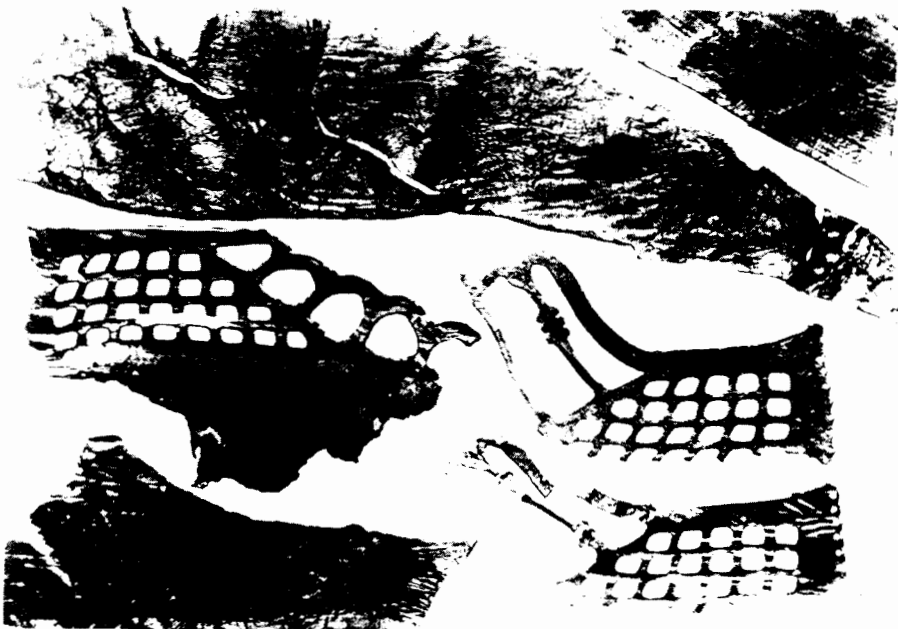
In 1923 Sir Ian Richmond published a paper in Volume XL of the Transactions of Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society entitled "The Sequence and Purpose of the Roman Forts at Castleshaw". This paper put forward evidence to date the forts and reasoning for their sequence. Richmond again recorded his theories in the Tolson Museum Handbook No.



the Romans advance into Scotland was dismantled and deserted. By AD 104 the Romans had returned to Castleshaw and built the fortlet almost certainly to protect the road. The garrison for this second occupation was probably no more than 160 strong. A section of the south east rampart of the earlier fort was utilised as the fortlet's own south east defence. Turf ramparts were set on a rubble foundation, bounded by stone kerbs and drained with small culverts. Timber palisades surmounted the ramparts but the fortlet had only two gates, one in the north side and the other in the south. The position of the post-holes suggests that the gates were single portal structures, without guard chambers, but probably having a



The hypocaust, as excavated in 1908.

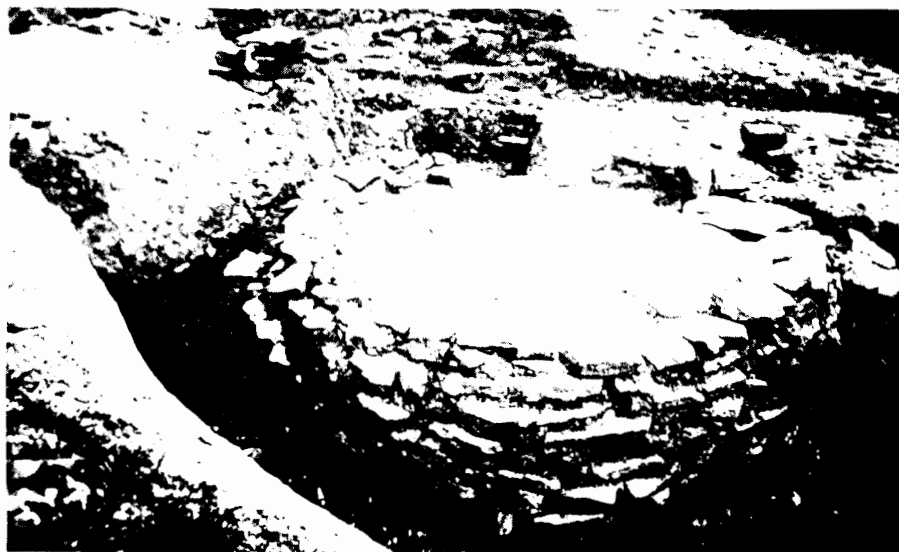


Fragments of Roman leather shoes, found in the well.

coins, leather sandals, a leaden lamp holder and two wooden lances (pila muralia). Near the hypocaust a number of stamped tiles were found. Originally the stamps was believed to be that of the Fourth Cohort of the Breuci, a unit known from the Roman fort at Slack, near Huddersfield. More recent research suggests that the tile stamps are those of the Third Cohort of the Bracaraugustani, a unit known from three English military discharge diplomas and tile stamps found at the adjacent forts at Manchester and Melandra, near Glossop. This cohort was recruited in Portugal in Bracara Augusta (modern Braga). Evidence suggests that by AD 125 the fortlet had been dismantled and abandoned

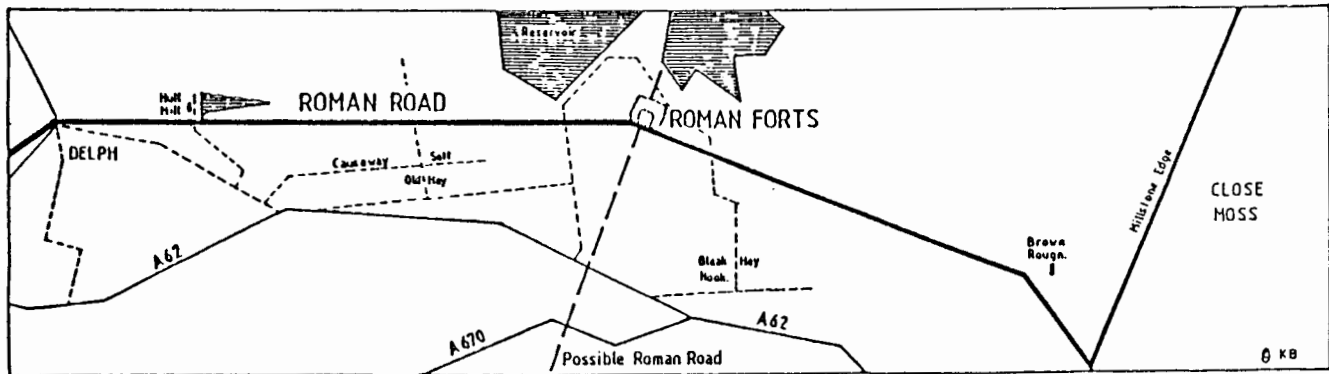
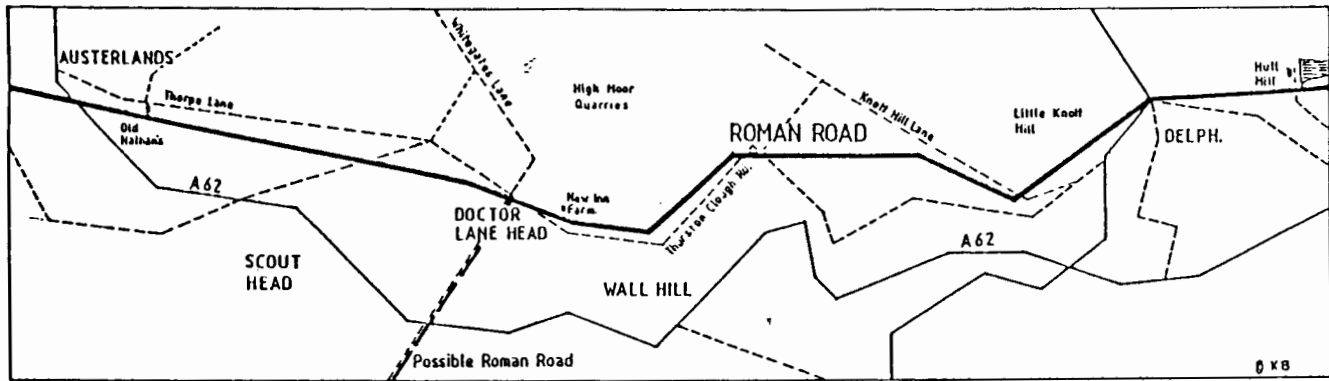
rampart walk above them. Rough stone foundations were found at each corner of the fortlet and were possibly the footings for the timber corner turrets. Running through the fortlet between the gates, was a well-made, carefully paved road. The bottom eight courses of a beehive oven were found in the south east corner of the fortlet. Adjacent to the road through the fortlet, on the eastern side, the foundations of a small stone building with a hypocaust was discovered. An abundance of post holes suggests that the remaining buildings were of timber construction.

A well or pit in the south-west corner of the fortlet yielded, when excavated, a number of interesting items including



The stone built base of the beehive oven in the south east corner of the fortlet.

# THE ROAD TO CASTLESHAW



In AD 79 under Gnaeus Julius Agricola, the Roman army built a network of roads and forts over the troublesome West Pennines. The Roman road from Chester through Manchester and Oldham, on through Saddleworth and the first Roman fort at Castleshaw, and thence over the watershed to the fort at Slack, is one strand in that net. They advanced North as part of a defence policy to protect the Romanised south east of England. From the east gate of the Chester fortress the road (numbered 7a by I.D. Margary in his book "Roman Roads in Britain") passed through Kelsall, Northwich, Bowden, Sale, and Stretford into Manchester. At Manchester the main road turned northwards but another road (numbered 712 by Margary) continued in a north eastward direction. It is this road, which after passing through Failsworth and Oldham, still on an alignment starting in Stretford, enters Saddleworth at Austerlands where Thorpe Lane joins Huddersfield Road. The road crosses the meadows to the south of Thorpe Lane, and at Old Nathans Farm an agger (the mound on which the road was built) 7 to 11 metres wide and 0.6 metres high can be seen. Between Old Nathans and Doctor Lane Head are

scattered traces of gritstone metalling together with a low agger south of Daisy Hollow Farm. Just before Doctor Lane the first of number of alignment changes take place. The road now crosses the field opposite Masons Row as a terrace way and then crosses Thurston Clough Road.

Just beyond New Inn Farm the road emerges as an agger 6 metres wide and 0.6 metres high. An excavation carried out in 1973 revealed a fine agger of rammed sandstone and gravel. From New Inn Farm the road drops down the hill into Thurston Clough where it can be seen as a terrace way to the north of the modern road. The road climbs out of Thurston Clough, through the fields to the east of Knarr Barn Farm where a slight agger can be seen in melting snow. The road continues on a terrace way towards Slack Field. It follows Knott Hill Lane for a short distance before contouring around Knott Hill and descending into Delph village on a 7 metre terrace. From Delph the road goes up Cobblers Hill for a short distance and passes under the modern houses before reaching Hull Mill.

A section of agger is apparent as the road crosses the fields

to the Castleshaw forts. In places it is 12 to 15 metres wide and up to 1 metre high. A section excavated in 1975 showed a well constructed agger of rammed stone and gravel set on natural clay. At the southern corner of the fort the alignment changes and the road follows Dry Croft Lane passing beneath Castleshaw House and climbing to Standedge. As the road gains height the agger is 7 to 11 metres wide and varies 0.5 & 2 metres high. In the field in front of the ruins of Brown Rough Farm, the line of the road turns eastwards and follows the wall to the summit of Millstone Edge. Here it turns north again and follows the boundary to Oldgate Clough where it descends and crosses the moors to the fort at Slack, it continues to York via Leeds and Tadcaster.

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