

3.2.1 FORTRESSES, FORT AND FORTLET.

(Extract, pp 26-27)

An enclosure at Scaftworth, Bawtry has long been interpreted as a Roman fortlet [NT.99.8.1]. St. Joseph and Frere (1983:135) define fortlets as accommodation for small detachments of troops with no administrative facilities, the distinction between fort and fortlet apparently being validated by the identification of the specific Roman term *burgus* in contemporary literature.

The enclosure lies on sandy loam just north of the confluence of the Rivers Idle and Ryton where the Idle flows in a more easterly direction. This feature consists of a triple-ditched enclosure, three sides are known and have been partially excavated, the fourth, north-west side is obscured by a river levee. The site was recorded as an earthwork in 1774 on mapping by the antiquarian John Chapman (Van de Noort et al 1997:411). This interpretation has endured intrusive investigations (e.g. Bartlett and Riley 1958). The positive identification of a section of the Roman road between Littleborough and Bawtry, which runs parallel to the north side of the enclosure appeared to validate this attribution (Margary 28a). Close to the fortlet this feature has caused parching in the crop [NT.99.9.1] whilst slightly further north excavations revealed a causeway across the wetter land (Frere 1992).

Recent considerations of the site have led to an alternative - non-military interpretation. The late date indicated by secure artefacts from the site is considered incongruous with the contemporary military situation in the north east (Van de Noort 1997: 427). Head et al (1997:291) suggest the associated artefacts - from the surface and excavation - are compatible with a site of domestic rather than military status, and that the ditch profiles - being U-shaped are atypical of military constructions. The morphology of the site is thought to be comparable with other domestic settlements becoming increasingly apparent within the Humberhead Level survey area (Chapman 1997:401).

Several examples of multi-ditched near square enclosures are known in Nottinghamshire - a good example is recorded within 1.3 km of the east of the Scaftworth enclosure [NT.101.1.1]. However, these are morphologically distinct from the Scaftworth example. Few have enclosing ditches that are truly concentric and the corners are generally sharper than the Scaftworth example, details that may be lost at 1:10 000 scale mapping. There are few published aerial photographs of levelled fortlets with which to compare the morphology of this site - a fortlet at Gatehouse of Fleet, Kirkcudbright provides the closest parallel (Wilson 1982:100)

Swan and Welfare, suggest that the V-shape cut was not an inviolable rule for all Roman military ditches (1995:18). U-shaped ditches are known in military contexts, apparently as responses to specific circumstances such as high water table (Jones 1975:109). Before the constriction of the River Idle this would undoubtedly have been a factor of the Scaftworth environment. Jones also suggests archaeologists should be wary of taking the observed RCHME 26 NOTTINGHAMSHIRE NMP ditch to be the original, stating ditch maintenance and re-cutting may obliterate earlier profiles (Jones 1975:109).

Whilst the debate continues this project maintains a military interpretation for this feature.