

# Notes on New Dating Evidence for the Roman Settlement at Slack, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire

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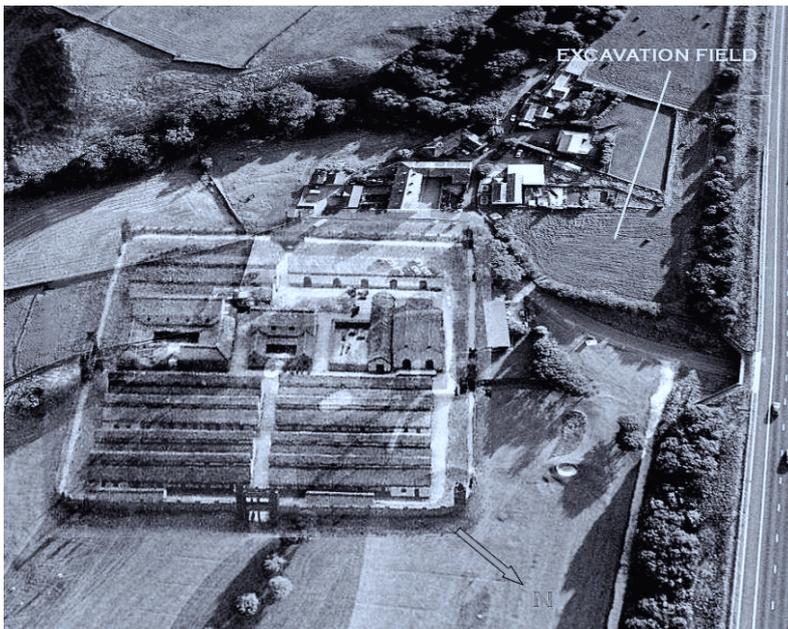
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*These notes report on recent dating evidence for the vicus area of the Roman fort at Slack near Huddersfield. This site has been excavated by the Huddersfield and District Archaeological Society (HDAS) in 2007, 2008 and 2010 under the directorship of Barry Hobson. Radiocarbon dating of wood from a water conduit and the analysis of pottery, including that from B.R. Hartley's 1960s excavations, have extended evidence for activity outside the fort until the late 3rd or early 4th century AD.*

## Introduction

Until recently it has been accepted by most authorities (e.g. Bidwell and Hodgson 2009; Richmond 1925) that the involvement of the Roman army with the fort at Slack near Huddersfield (NGR SE 084 175) ended at about AD 120 and not later than AD 140. These assumptions were based largely on the pottery previously recovered from within the fort which spanned the late 1st and early 2nd centuries (Hunter *et al.* 1967) and the historical records of the Roman army's move northwards to Hadrian's Wall and beyond (Bidwell and Hodgson 2009). However, recent exploratory excavations by HDAS uncovered a complex of conduits designed for carrying fresh water supplies to the *vicus* area north of the fort and heading directly towards the fort<sup>2</sup> This work was prompted by earlier geophysical studies undertaken jointly with Bradford University and the knowledge that the field chosen had not previously been investigated nor had it been disturbed by the construction of the M62 motorway (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1** A representation of Slack Roman fort on the modern landscape by Granville Clay of HDAS. The M62 motorway is on the right and the *vicus* excavation site is indicated. North is towards the bottom right corner.

HDAS reconstruction based on © Google Earth; Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky.

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately these remains are now covered by the local golf club house and car park.

**Figure 2** Junction point in one of the water supply conduits which is believed to have served the *vicus* and probably the fort if it was in use in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.

## Results

The competent construction of the conduits in stone (Fig. 2) with overlapping capping stones sealed with clay and their direction from a spring line towards the fort suggest a military design and use reminiscent of structures seen in Austria between Mauer and Atzgersdorf and also at Laab and in the Lainzerstrasse (Barkoczy 1978). Importantly, parts of the conduit were floored with wooden planking that has been radiocarbon dated to Cal AD 133 to Cal AD 345 (SUERC-16080 GU-15880 1775±35 BP)<sup>3</sup>. This therefore implies a later date than the previous estimates.

This late date is supported by pottery recovered from the same excavations. An unpublished study by Griffiths (2011a) has identified a large proportion of material especially the black-burnished wares which date to the later 2nd and early 3rd centuries AD. The presence of Cream ware pottery, mainly Crambeck and Aldborough White wares dating from the 3rd to the end of the 4th centuries AD, suggests even later occupation at Slack. This has prompted a re-examination of the pottery finds excavated by B.R. Hartley in 1968–69, again from the *vicus* area, but not yet published. These artefacts are now in the custody of HDAS and have been found to include a large proportion of chronologically diagnostic pottery manufactured during the second half of the 2nd century AD which seems to support the late date. The Hartley collection also contains a small amount of the North Yorkshire Cream wares dating into the 3rd and possibly 4th centuries (Griffiths 2011b).



## Discussion

This new evidence suggests continuing Roman or Romano-British presence in the *vicus* after the Roman frontier moved north to Hadrian's Wall and beyond, and that there was a continued importance of the Chester to York Roman road. This could also put into context the late dating of the Roman altar found at Greetland, some 4km north of Slack fort. The inscription [RIB 627<sup>4</sup>] is dated to AD 208 which may be contemporaneous with the now lost altar to *Fortunae* found by the Slack fort bath-house. The inscription [RIB 624] for this survives and its dedication by a centurion of the *Legio VI Victrix* (the Sixth Legion) cannot be earlier than AD 122 when this legion moved to York from the continent. The Sixth Legion returned from supporting Albinus on the Continent in his attempt to challenge Severus as Emperor in AD 197 and re-established itself at York (Salway 1993). Thus, as the Sixth Legion's main early task was the construction of Hadrian's Wall, and as other military units were moved north for this work, it seems unlikely that the legion would have been at Slack at this time. What is

<sup>3</sup> SUERC (2007). The calibration was undertaken using OxCal v3.10 (Bronk Ramsey 2005) using atmospheric data from Reimer, *et al.* (2004).

<sup>4</sup> RIB references in this article relate to Collingwood and Wright (1965).

more probable is that detachments of the legion were active during the late 2nd and early 3rd century while re-establishing military control of York and the Pennine area.

The presence of these two altars may also be associated with a third undated Roman altar found in 1882 at Lower Gate, Longwood about 4km south-east of the Slack fort (Richmond 1925). This altar [RIB 623] is dedicated to the same deity of *Brigantia* as the Greetland altar. On the basis of these the late Professor Richmond suggested that there may have been a settlement of Roman army veterans in the Calder basin in the 2nd and later centuries (Richmond 1955). Their significance is that these apparently isolated altars may have marked boundaries for such special districts.

## Conclusion

The authors believe that the new dates and pottery from the excavation and other contextual information indicate continued activity in the *vicus* to a much later date than previously thought and seems to imply extended use of the military way between Chester and York. HDAS intend to fully publish the findings of the excavations together with a review of the Hartley excavations in due course.

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