

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Britain's northern frontier	1
2.2 What is a <i>vici</i>	2
2.3 Form and Function.....	2
2.4 Successful <i>vici</i>	3
2.5 Economics of the <i>Vicani</i>	4
2.6 Researching <i>vici</i>	5
3. Conclusion	6
4. Figures	7
4.1 Map of Roman Britain.....	7
4.2 Map of Roman Forts on the 'outer <i>limes</i> ' of Upper Germany	8
4.3 Strip-Houses	9
4.4 Vindolanda Bath-House	10
4.5 Corbridge (interpreted from a magnetic survey)	11
4.6 Birdoswald (interpreted from a magnetic survey)	12
4.7 Maryport (interpreted from a magnetic survey).....	13
5. Bibliography.....	14

1. Introduction

The majority of forts on Rome's northern frontier that were occupied over a long period of time developed a civilian settlement, or *vicus*, outside their walls.

The *vici* on Britain's northern frontier are thought to have flourished and typically decayed during the 3rd-century (Hodgson 2009a:33). They have often been interpreted in terms of the provision of services to the garrison and to some extent as residential areas for soldiers' families (Gardner 2007:48). In the past their study was secondary to forts (Bidwell 2007:82) and only Vindolanda and Housesteads have had their *vici* extensively excavated.

Geophysical surveys of the northern frontier have revealed the 'footprints' of many unexcavated forts and settlements. The evidence from surveys and excavations is valuable in comparing and interpreting sites in the Roman Western Provinces - especially the *limes* including the Fossatum Africae and the outer *limes* of Upper Germany (Whittaker 1994:47).

2. Britain's northern frontier

2.1 Roman Western Provinces

The Western Roman Empire was initially set apart in AD 286 by Diocletianus and formalized after the death of Theodosius I in AD 395. It existed intermittently between the 3rd and 5th-centuries and it was comprised of Italy, Spain, Gaul, Britain, Illyricum, and northern Africa. The other part of the empire was the Eastern Roman Empire (often called the Byzantine Empire).

Rome's northern frontier is a region or zone. It was initially controlled by a chain of forts along The Stanegate. Later Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall were built to control physical access into and out of the region (see Figure 4.1).

2.2 What is a vici

There are a number of ancient definitions of what a *vicus* is and historical sources, including Isidorus and Arrian, are "frustratingly ambiguous" (Birley 2010:9).

Sommer (2006:97) has confirmed that nearly all auxiliary forts were accompanied by a *vicus* and that their lay-out was similar to those in the other Roman western provinces. *Vici* which are associated with a fort are often referred to as military *vici* (Sommer 2006:95, Hodgson 2009a:35) or Extramural Settlements (Birley 2010:1).

The exact definition of the term may not be essential as the modern interpretation of this type of settlement generally agrees that they were more than a villa/farming/manufacturing community and much less than a *civitas*. Rorison adds that of Gaul's 192 known *vici* there is considerable variation in their size, layout, building types and purpose. Each of the *vici* on Rome's northern frontier are associated with a fortress and their purpose was linked to, or dependant, on their adjacent fort's military community. I suggest that the *vici* on the Roman *limes* are a closer parallel than British non-military *vici*.

2.3 Form and Function

Excavations and geophysics have hugely expanded our knowledge of *vici* in both Britain and Europe (principally within Germany) including Vindolanda, Housesteads, Birdoswald (Biggins and Taylor 2004a:154-177) Papcastle and Cockerthorpe (Graham 2011), Maryport (Biggins and Taylor 2004b:103-106), Newton Kyme (Boutwood 1996:340-344), Binchester (Burnham 2008:283-285), Caer Eborac (Hopewell et al 2005:227-233) and Sommer (2006:96) who listed rescue excavations in Germany (Figure 4.2, highlighted in red).

The majority of *vici* are distinctly modest in both scale and sophistication and focused on small scale and localized trade and manufacturing. They comprised of a cluster of strip-buildings flanking the main-road and adjacent to their fort's *porta principalis dextra* and included a cemetery, bathhouse and temples (Fields 2006:50-51). Sommer (2006:97, 101-103, 108-110) is right to say that the heightened interest in *vici* has helped to expand the corpus of knowledge - especially as most of the research has been published. Sommer has used this to characterize the typology of military *vici*, while stressing that they are "rarely ... clear-cut and straightforward", including:

Layout:

- a) Street-type is the most common in Britain and Wales and buildings stretch along either side of the main road and approach one (usually the *porta principalis dextra*) or both of the fort's *portae principales*.
- b) Tangent-type, which is less common, where the major road bi-passes the fort - usually for topographical reasons such as at Old Carlisle.
- c) Ring-type, found on the continent for mounted garrisons, where the buildings are on the far side of the fort's outer road/ditches surrounding the fort.

Vici could develop more than one street-type; for example at Vindolanda all three types are used. I suggest that a *vicus'* age and size are likely to be factor in this as *insulae*, which are characteristic of larger urban sites, evolved.

Features:

- d) Strip-houses, or *tabernae*, which rectangular and their short side fronted the road. They served as both homes and businesses (the commercial element faced the road) and they could have more than one story (Bidwell 2007:82). Rorison (2001:51) notes that 58% of *vici* in Gaul had pottery, metal working, market/food processing, textile or other workshops (see Figure 4.3). Pompeii, a significant Mediterranean town, has similar buildings which demonstrates the ubiquitous nature of these structures throughout the Roman world (Beard 2010:82) although Mac Mahon (2009:48-51) acknowledges the relationship between strip-houses in Italy and Britain while observing that those in Italy are considerably more “evolved and complex” than those found in the northern-western provinces which reflects a more developed urban/economic environment.
- e) Drainage, cisterns, aqueduct and wells.
- f) Bath-house, such as at Vindolanda (see Figure 4.4), located on the lowest-lying ground so that water can flow downward into it. It is often adjacent to the *porta principalis dextra*.
- g) Temples and shrines, using a variety of designs, were usually situated on the outer fringes of *vici*.
- h) All settlements had a least one cemetery.
- i) Some *vici* on the northern frontier, such as Cramond, were enclosed by defences (Bidwell 2007:87). Some Vindolanda strips-houses have been built on the foundations/lower-walls of Severan military buildings and I believe that future research will reveal that *vici* founded/expanded into existing protected areas.
- j) Mature *vici* had additional structures including a *mansio*, warehouses, granaries, port, amphitheatre, villas (such as in Vindolanda) or public areas/buildings.

2.4 Successful vici

The longevity of a *vicus*, Bidwell (2007:87) explains, was dependent on factors such as its geographical location and, significantly, its military neighbour. A small number of *vici* benefited from a wider economic environment and some of these were the nuclei of towns which survived after the military withdrew or diminished (Millett 2005:74).

Most *vici* existed as long as the fort that they serviced was garrisoned. For example the *vicus* at Navio [Brough-on-Noe] was co-founded with its fort c. AD 80 and closed down when the garrison was withdrawn c. 120 only to reappear when the garrison returned. Dearne (1993:159) says that this demonstrates the dependence of the *vici* on its fort. It is likely that a garrison and its ‘camp followers’ were effectively a single unit and that when the garrison was transferred so was the civilian community (Crow and Mason 2009:65). In Navio’s case we should not deduce that the *vicus* was unsuccessful because of its short existence and I suggest that it was successful and simply existed for as long as it was needed. Zosimus, a Byzantine historian, wrote that Constantinus I (r. AD 306-337) reversed the Diocletianus (r. AD 284-305) military policy and withdrew troops from the frontiers and placed them in cities (Salway 2001:211-215, 231-232). This, combined with unrest, such as Carausius’ revolt and Constantinus’ re-conquest and re-organization of Britain under a civil administration (Fields 2006:9), may have contributed to the withdrawal, and potentially the loss, of frontier troops or a decline in the northern frontier’s *vici*.

Carlisle and Corbridge are located at either end of The Stanegate (Breeze 2006:415) and they flourished during the 4th-century (Hodgson 2009b:3). Carlisle guarded a strategic bridge over the Eden; its *vicus* evolved into a market town and then into *civitas Carvetioruma* (Walker 1968:168). Corbridge was an Agricolan fort and supply base located at the cross-roads of The Stanegate and

Deer Street and it protected the northern bridge-head over the Tyne (Hodgson 2009c:25). Thanks to geophysical surveys we can 'see' the site's growth into a town (see Figure 4.5). As with many other sites on the northern frontier they were initially located for strategic reasons. But their growth, and post-Roman survival, was because of their success as regional trading or redistribution centres - assisted by their location on active trade-routes which were facilitated by roads, rivers and coastal routes.

2.5 Economics of the *Vicani*

Vici flourished in the middle of the Roman period and they are often interpreted in terms of the provision of services to the soldiers, and to some extent, as residential areas for soldiers' families (Gardner 2007:48). The relationship between a fort and *vicus* was a partnership; the fort's garrison provided a demand and the *vicus* supplied the goods and services which the individual soldier or military organization required (Bidwell 2007:85). They were centres for industry and trade - but on a modest scale. Each *vicus* was potentially an embryonic town with much of the core economic characteristics of primary urban sites and *civitas* in the non-militarized regions such Lugdunum [Lyon] or Camulodunum [Colchester].

During the 3rd-century, while the northern frontier's *vici* were flourishing (Hodgson 2009a:33), the national economy became increasingly regional centric and, as Millett (2005:157) explains, this was at the expense, or possibly because of, a decrease in inter-provincial trade. Local manufacturing and production replaced long distance trade. For example Biggins and Taylor (2004b:125), while discussing the geophysical survey of Birdoswald (see Figure 4.6), confirm that metal working in *vici* was ubiquitous in Britain – Vindolanda's *vicus* certainly has evidence of iron smelting (Birley and Blake 2005:67). The trade-routes which passed through Germany and northern Gaul were interrupted – possibly because of the unrest of the outer *limes* (Bidwell 2007:151, Hodgson 2009b:3-4). This disturbance, presumably including routine communications with the Imperial administration, must have been traumatic to romanized Britain and the decay of the northern frontier's *vici* may have been one of the results.

The 3rd-century also saw changes in the size and the type of fort garrisons (Millett 2005:162-163). *Limitanei* [frontier troops] become almost entirely hereditary and from AD 313 service was compulsory. Goldsworthy (2007:170-172) confirms that this division of the Roman army into *comitatenses* [field troops] and the *limitanei*. The *limitanei* were still part of the regular army, what I would consider a paramilitary police force, rather than a local militia and this is another characteristic of decentralization or break-down of the Roman 'machine'.

Septimius Severus, who came to power through the support of the army during two civil wars, granted soldiers the right to marry (Campbell 1978:153, 165) and it is likely that married soldiers would have lived-out with their families and dependants in the *vicus*. The existence of family members is confirmed from tombstone (Allason-Jones 2008:44-45); officers, and possibly soldiers, owned slaves who probably also resided in *vici*. Bidwell (2007:83-4) also uses inscriptions to demonstrate the cosmopolitan makeup of populations. Residents also included auxiliary veterans who tended to settle where they served; evidence such as diplomas (which proved citizenship and the legality of marriages (Allason-Jones 2008:46)) and inscriptions from all parts of the Western Provinces such as the Black Sea coast and Mauretania Caesariensis [Algeria] (Mann 2002:183). Veterans who settled locally weren't retirees and they set themselves up in business (Hingley and Allason-Jones 2009:147). Dearne (1993:159-160) believes that the *vicani* must have included service providers such as shopkeepers, craftsmen, prostitutes, farmers and transient officials.

2.6 Researching vici

Understanding, and ultimately protecting, a site within the regional and inter-regional environment requires careful spatial mapping (Breeze and Jilek 2008:10-11). In some locations geophysical surveys and excavations are not possible, for example where the landowner isn't amenable or in heavily populated urban areas such as along the Rhine and Danube. Using historical documents, such as the Antonine Itinerary (2nd-century), the Notitia Dignitatum (5th-century) or the Ravenna Cosmography (7th-century), can help suggest sites where other investigations are not possible (Roman Britain Organization 2011). As the corpus of research, from sites such as Vindolanda and Maryport (see Figure 4.7), grows it may be possible to infer the purpose of sites which cannot be physically researched. I strongly agree with Hodgson (2009b:4) that the break-down of the German and northern Gaul frontiers probably had a significant impact on Britain's northern frontier and that archaeological research of both frontiers is essential to have a fuller understanding of what is a 'dark' period of history.

Forts have been well researched throughout the Roman Western Provinces but, until recently, *vici* have only received cursory study and the current study is still in its infancy. Birley (2010:4) says that only Vindolanda, which has been extensively excavated and studied, has sufficient information for in-depth study alongside comparator sites such as Housesteads, Birdoswald and Maryport and those in other Provinces. The outlines of *vici* in northern England, recently recovered by geophysical survey, show them as they were at their most developed stage (Hodgson 2009a:35). I agree with Hodgson that the detailed graphical display of the underground features is "nothing short of revolutionary" but we must accept Birley's (2010:51-52) caution that geophysics has limitations and that interpretation of features is subjective unless their actual date/period and function is corroborated by excavation. Even at Vindolanda, which has been extensively excavated, it hasn't been possible to determine how many buildings were within the *vicus* or the full extent of their life-cycle from creation to decay and eventual abandonment.

Knowledge of *vici* is in its infancy and, understandably, is only able to present information on the physical footprint of individual sites based on geophysical surveys and the small number of excavations (accepting the rescue-excavation have less opportunity to retrieve the depth of information which Vindolanda has). As more excavations are undertaken it may be possible to understand the wider social, economic and political place of these settlements. Todd (1970:124) raised useful and valid observation when he wrote that we have very little understanding of the relationship between a *vicus* and its surrounding countryside or the chronological development of *vici*. We must accept and be challenged by how little we understand of the government of *vici*, property ownership and its taxation, its social structure/hierarchy or gender issues, relationships with the local indigenous population and – importantly – the relationships with the fort's military command or the wider military organization.

James (2001:78, 83, 88), in my opinion, made thought provoking comments within his critical review of the current understanding on perceived divisions between a fort and its *vicus*. He doesn't agree that there was a neat spatial division between the military, contained behind their walls, and "non-soldierly 'tail'". Birley (2010:290-294), in his doctoral thesis, expands on James' work by researching the nature of Vindolanda's fort and *vicus* to understand the similarities and differences of their material culture and to address whether the 'great divide' existed. He used Vindolanda's wealth of information to prove, for example, that beads (suggesting female owners) were more commonly recovered in the *vicus*' 3rd-century contexts and, after the *vicus* was abandoned, there is an increase in the number of beads in the fort's 4th-century contexts. From this single example we can deduce that women moved into the fort after the *vicus* was abandoned. The inferences that

can be drawn from this excellent research is significant and is potentially applicable to *vici* within the entire Roman Western Provinces. Birley has confirmed that the 'great divide' was "porous".

3. Conclusion

The internal layout and features of *vici* vary, such as the size of strip-buildings or their building materials, but *vici* at opposite ends of the Roman Western Provinces, populated by peoples from different ethnicities, share remarkably similar characteristics and functions. They demonstrate a level of commonality within this part of Rome's society.

Recent research into both *vici* and forts has explored the relationships between these neighbouring clusters of Roman occupation in a new light. Birley's work at Vindolanda, for example, has challenged some of the traditional thinking about the 'great divide' between the military and non-military societies by analysing disposition material to reveal details about people lives.

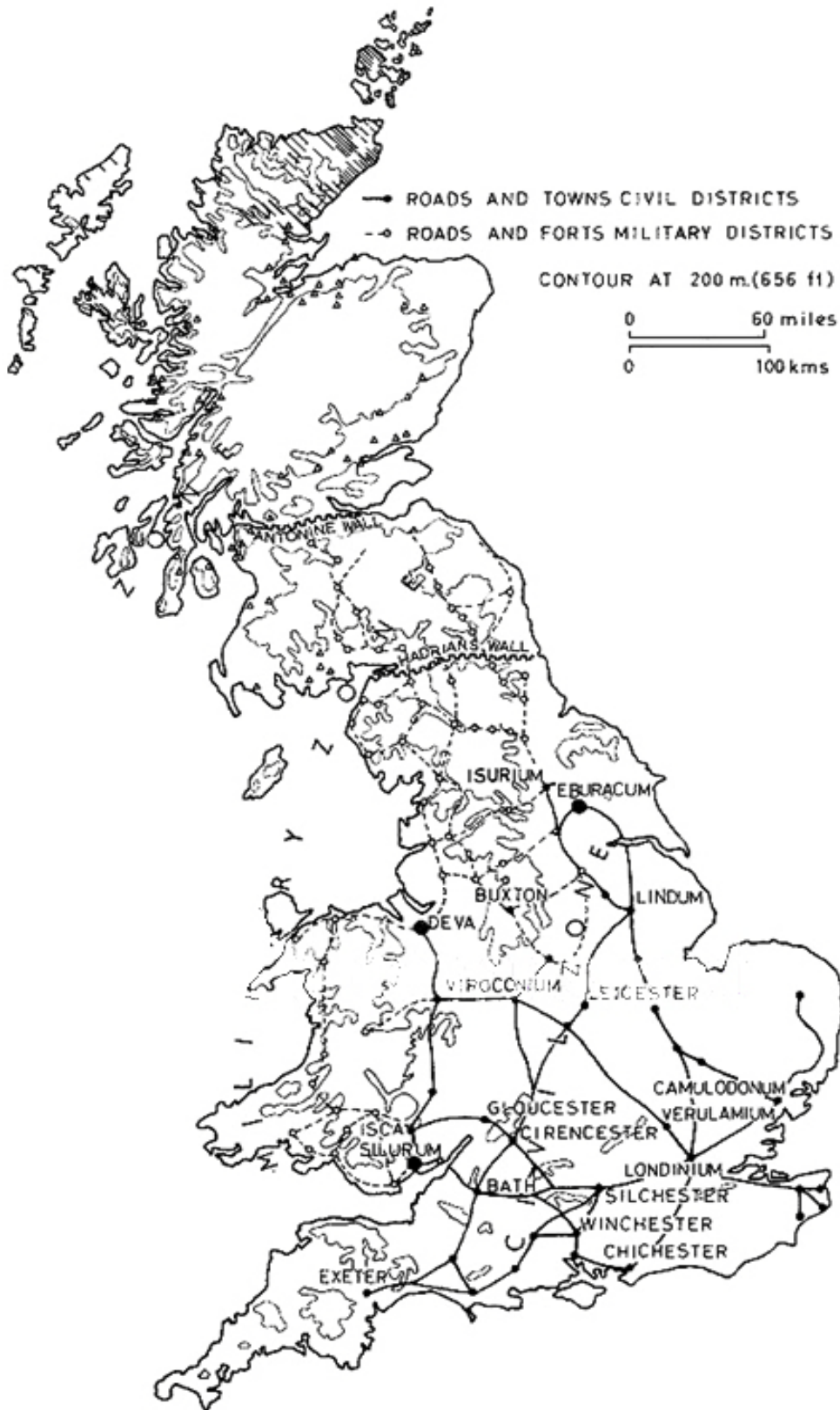
Our corpus of knowledge on *vici* on Britain's northern frontier is in its infancy and its future research is has great potential for understanding not only *vici* throughout the Roman Western Provinces but also the society of the people who live within them.

How have the recent archaeological projects on Britain's northern frontier contributed to our understanding of the role of vici in the Roman Western Provinces?

4. Figures

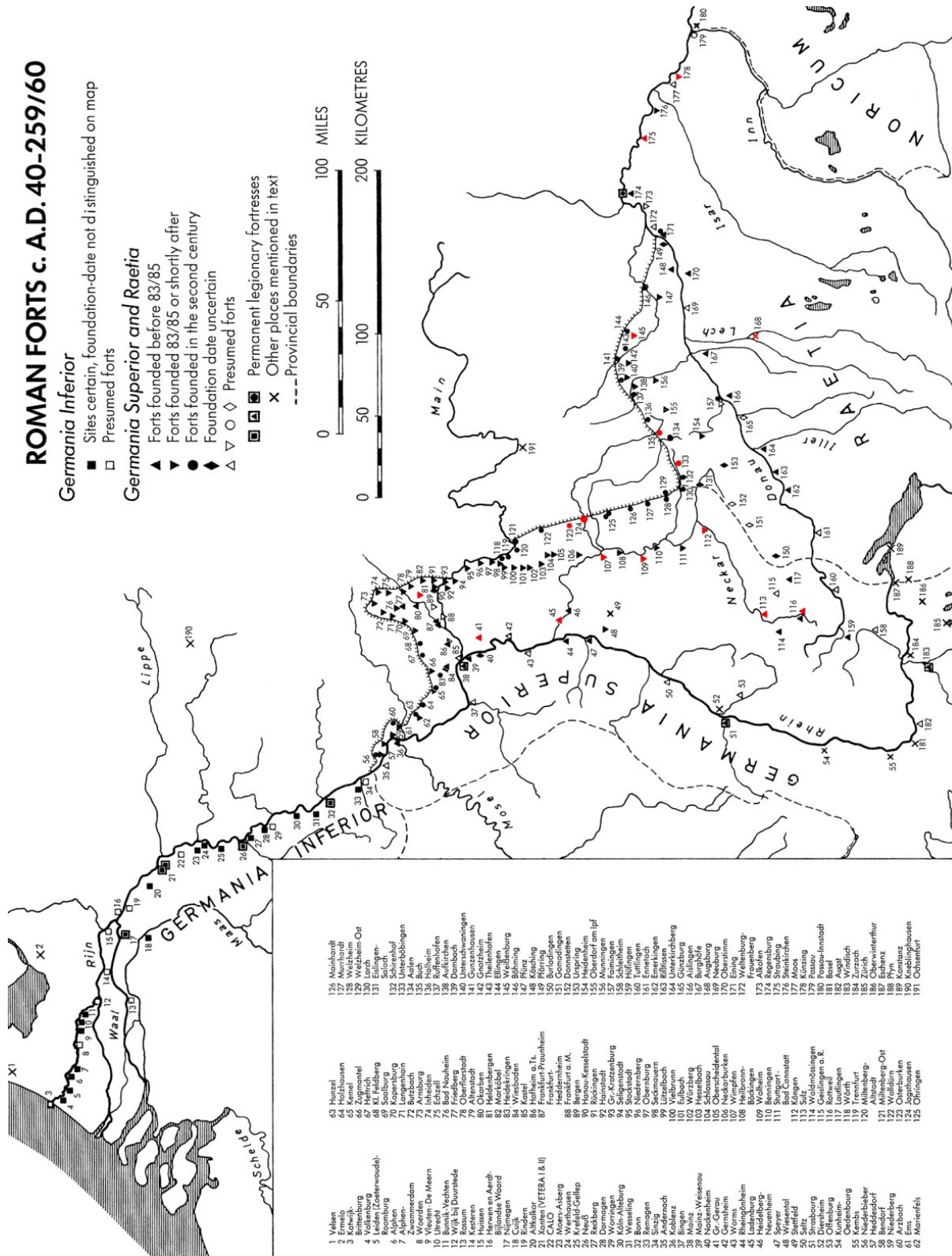
4.1 Map of Roman Britain

(British Towns and Villages Network 2011)



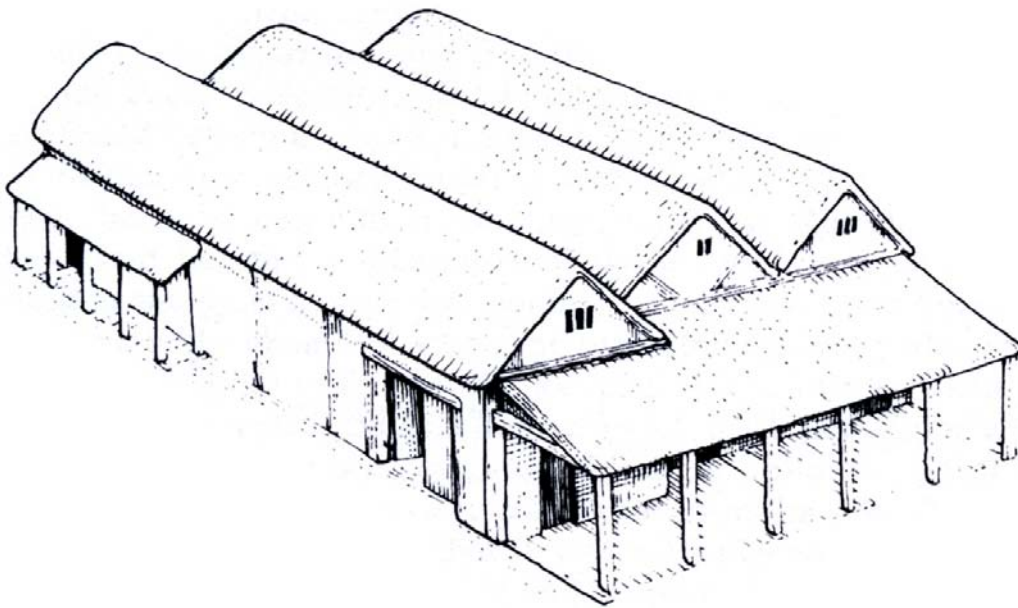
How have the recent archaeological projects on Britain's northern frontier contributed to our understanding of the role of vici in the Roman Western Provinces?

4.2 Map of Roman Forts on the 'outer limes' of Upper Germany (after Schönberger 1969:Fig. 20)

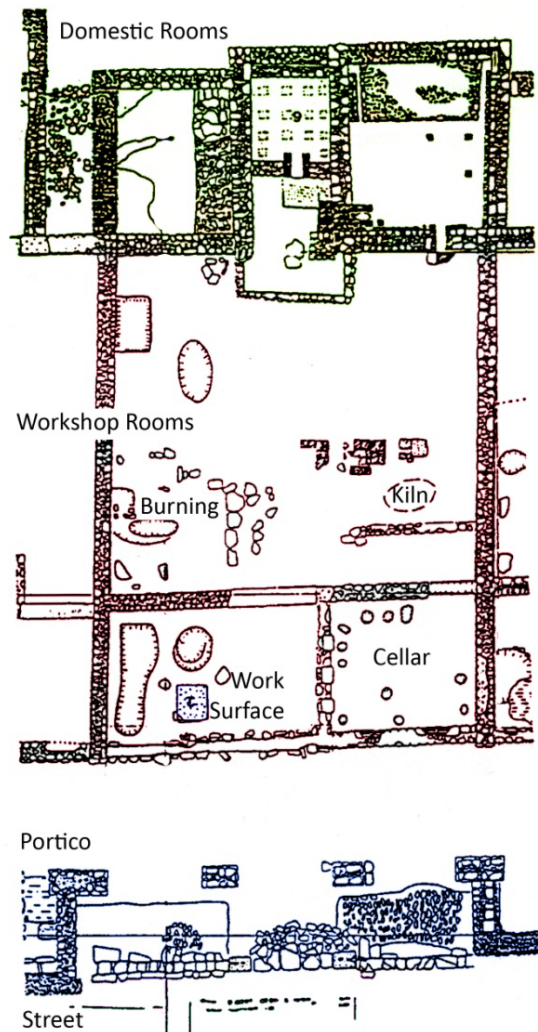


4.3 Strip-Houses

Artist's impression of timber-framed houses on Londinium's main-road (Hall 2009:128)



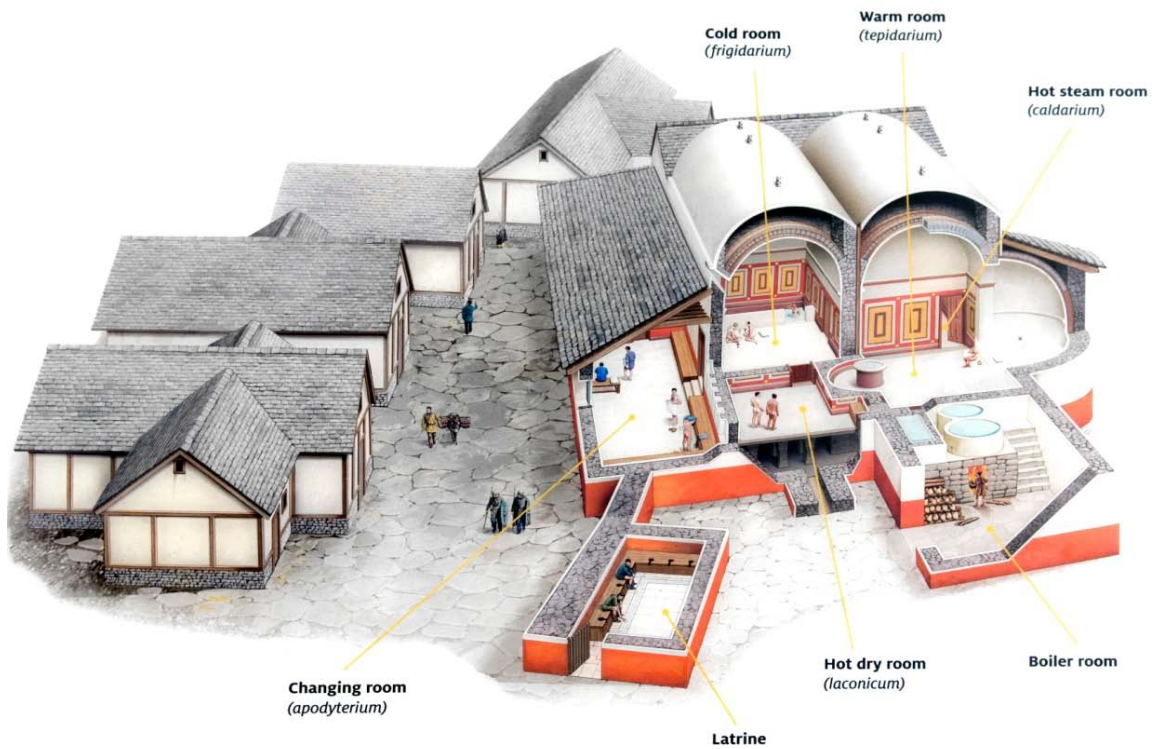
Foundations of a Workshop excavated at Bliesbrusk [Gaul] (Rorison 2001:39)



How have the recent archaeological projects on Britain's northern frontier contributed to our understanding of the role of vici in the Roman Western Provinces?

4.4 Vindolanda Bath-House

Artist's impression of the Bath-House (author's photo of signage at Vindolanda)



Excavated remains of the bath-house's latrine



How have the recent archaeological projects on Britain's northern frontier contributed to our understanding of the role of vici in the Roman Western Provinces?

4.5 Corbridge (interpreted from a magnetic survey)
(Hodgson 2009c:23)



How have the recent archaeological projects on Britain's northern frontier contributed to our understanding of the role of vici in the Roman Western Provinces?

4.6 Birdoswald (interpreted from a magnetic survey)
(Biggins and Taylor 2004a:163)

How have the recent archaeological projects on Britain's northern frontier contributed to our understanding of the role of vici in the Roman Western Provinces?

4.7 Maryport (interpreted from a magnetic survey)
(Crow and Mason 2009:101)



5. **Bibliography**

- Allason-Jones, L. 2008. *Daily Life in Roman Britain*. Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing.
- Beard, M. 2010. *The Fires of Vesuvius: Pompeii Lost and Found*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bidwell, P. 2007. *Roman Forts in Britain*. Stroud: Tempus Publishing.
- Biggins, J and Taylor, D. 2004a. Geophysical Survey of the *Vicus* at Birdoswald Roman Fort, Cumbria. *Britannia*, Vol. **35**, 159-178.
- Biggins, J and Taylor, D. 2004b. The Roman Fort and *vicus* at Maryport: geophysical survey, 2000-2004. In Wilson, R and Caruana, I (eds), *Romans on the Solway: Essays in Honour of Richard Bellhouse*. Kendal: Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society, 102-133.
- Birley, A and Blake, J. 2005. *Vindolanda Excavations 2003-2004*. Hexham: Vindolanda Trust.
- Birley, A. 2010. *The nature and significance of extramural settlement at Vindolanda and other selected sites on the Northern Frontier of Roman Britain*. <https://ira.le.ac.uk/handle/2381/8306> (accessed 21-Aug-2011).
- Boutwood, Y. 1996. Roman Fort and 'Vicus', Newton Kyme, North Yorkshire. *Britannia*, Vol. **27**, 340-344.
- Breeze, D and Jilek, S. 2008. *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: the European dimension of a World Heritage Site*. Edinburgh: Historic Scotland.
- Breeze, D. 2006. *Handbook to the Roman Wall, Fourteenth Edition*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne.
- British Towns and Villages Network. 2011. *Major Roman Settlements and Roman Roads in the UK*. www.british-towns.net/national_maps/uk_roman_occupation.asp (accessed 02-Sep-2011).
- Burnham, B. 2008. Hadrian's Wall. In Burnham, B, Hunter, F, Booth, R, Worrell, S and Tomlin, R. (eds), *Roman Britain in 2007*, *Britannia XXXIX*, 278-283.
- Campbell, B. 1978. The Marriage of Soldiers under the Empire. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. **68**, 153-166.
- Crow, J and Mason D. 2009. Forts and their Extramural Settlements. In Symonds, M and Mason, D (eds), *Frontiers of Knowledge: A Research Framework for Hadrian's Wall, part of the Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site, Volume 1 Resource Assessment*. Location not stated: Durham County Council, Durham University and English Heritage, 63-107.
- Dearne, M. 1993. *Navio: The Fort and vicus at Brough-on-Noe, Derbyshire*. Oxford: BAR.
- Fields, N. 2006. *Rome's Saxon Shore: Coastal Defences of Roman Britain AD 250 – 500*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing.
- Gardner, A. 2007. Fluid Frontiers: Cultural Interaction on the Edge of Empire. *Stanford Journal of Archaeology*, Vol **5**, 43-60.
- Goldsworthy, A. 2007. *Roman Warfare*. London: Orion Books.
- Graham, M. 2011. *Unlocking Hidden Heritage Project: Community Geophysical Survey at Papcastle and Cockermouth, Cumbria*. <http://www.bassenthwaite-reflections.co.uk> (accessed 01-Sep-2011).
- Hall, J. 2009. The shopkeepers and craft-workers of Roman London. In Mac Mahon, A and Price, J (eds), *Roman Working Lives and Urban Places*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.
- Hingley, R and Allason-Jones, L. 2009. Life and Society. In Symonds, M and Mason, D (eds), *Frontiers of Knowledge: A Research Framework for Hadrian's Wall, part of the Frontiers of the Roman Empire*

- World Heritage Site, Volume 1 Resource Assessment*. Location not stated: Durham County Council, Durham University and English Heritage, 147-166.
- Hodgson, N. 2009a. *Hadrian's Wall 1999-2009*. Kendal: Titus Wilson.
- Hodgson, N. 2009b. The Historical Framework of Hadrian's Wall: An Assessment. In Symonds, M and Mason, D (eds), *Frontiers of Knowledge: A Research Framework for Hadrian's Wall, part of the Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site, Volume 1 Resource Assessment*. Location not stated: Durham County Council, Durham University and English Heritage, 1-9.
- Hodgson, N. 2009c. The Pre-Hadrianic Frontier on the Tyne-Solway Isthmus, and The Stanegate. In Symonds, M and Mason, D (eds), *Frontiers of Knowledge: A Research Framework for Hadrian's Wall, part of the Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site, Volume 1 Resource Assessment*. Location not stated: Durham County Council, Durham University and English Heritage, 10-33.
- Hopewell, D, Burman, J, Evans, J, Ward, M and Williams, D. 2005. Roman Fort Environs in North-West Wales. *Britannia*, Vol. **36**, 225-269.
- James, S. 2001. Soldiers and civilians: identity and interaction in Roman Britain. In Millett, S and Millett, M (eds), *Britons and Romans: advancing an archaeological agenda*. York: Council for British Archaeology, 77-89.
- Mac Mahon, A. 2009. The shops and workshops in Roman Britain. In Mac Mahon, A and Price, J (eds), *Roman Working Lives and Urban Places*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.
- Mann, J. 2002. The Settlement of Veterans Discharged from Auxiliary Units Stationed in Britain. *Britannia*, Vol. **33**, 183-188.
- Millett, M. 2005. *The Romanization of Britain: An Essay in Archaeological Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rorison, M. 2001. *Vici in Roman Gaul*. Oxford: BAR.
- Salway, P. 2001. *A History of Roman Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schönberger, H. 1969. The Roman Frontier in Germany: An Archaeological Survey. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. **59**, No. 1/2, 144-197.
- Sommer, S. 2006. Military *vici* in Roman Britain Revisited. In Wilson, R (Ed.), *Romanitas: Essays in Honour of Sheppard Frere on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 95-145.
- Todd, M. 1970. The Small Towns of Roman Britain. *Britannia*, Vol. **1**, 114-130.
- Walker, J. 1986. The Role of a Frontier settlement at Manchester. In Walker, J (Ed.), *Roman Manchester: a frontier settlement - the archaeology of Greater Manchester, Volume 3*. Manchester: Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit, 167-181.
- Whittaker, C. 1994. *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A social and Economic Study*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.