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MANCHESTER: ITS EARLY POLITICAL HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a brief summary of the historical and political developments that affected Manchester and its region from AD 43 to AD 919, and so provides a broad framework for the assessment of the developments and changes revealed by excavation.

THE ROMAN CONQUEST OF THE AREA

From the Roman conquest in the 1st century AD until the end of the Western Empire, cAD 410, most of the territory of the Celtic tribe of the Brigantes, meaning free, high or upland people (Rivet and Smith 1979, 278-80), which stretched from the Derbyshire Peaks virtually to Hadrian's Wall, was under direct military control. The Brigantes were a loosely confederated tribal group and it is possible that the Manchester area was the homeland of a tribal sub-group, the Setantii (Rivet and Smith 1979, 456-7).

Apart from the initial pre-conquest period information about the nature of the social, political and economic relationships between the Roman army and the native Brigantes is almost non-existent. The major problem is that despite being named by Tacitus (Agricola 17) as the most populous tribe in Britain, the Brigantes have remained an elusive people both from an archaeological and historical viewpoint, as most of the documentary evidence tends to be biased in favour of the Roman point of view, and towards a political and military standpoint.

Initial contact between Rome and the Brigantes was probably made soon after the first landing of the invading army in AD 43. By AD 47 Roman troops led by the Governor Plautius had come to a halt on the line of the Fosse Way. As we know from the Roman author Tacitus that Cartimandua, the queen of the Brigantes at that time, was friendly to Rome (Annals xii 36 and 40), it is likely that Plautius was using the Brigantian state as a buffer between the Roman army and more hostile tribes further north. The maintenance of such a buffer state in the north was important to Roman strategy at a time when their hold on the south of England was being consolidated, and the vulnerable western flank threatened by hostile Welsh tribes was being pacified. The client arrangement between Rome and the Brigantes was clearly in force by the mid AD 50s for we know from the same source that the Roman governor from AD 52 to AD 57, Gallus, intervened with his Roman auxiliary troops to prevent Venutius, the anti-Roman consort of Cartimandua, from taking control of the Brigantes.

Archaeological evidence for Roman activity within Brigantia in the early years of the invasion is patchy but it does seem to suggest that some direct military intervention took place. It has been known for some time that the foundation of the early fort at Templeborough near Rotherham (fig 2.1) was probably Neronian (May 1922, 11) and, in recent years, Claudian and Neronian military occupation has also been discovered at Chesterfield, (Courtney 1978) and probably at Littlechester (Brassington 1970). The garrisons at these sites were probably positioned there so that they could quickly intervene in the event of any trouble at Cartimandua's base. The exact position of her stronghold is not known, but there is little doubt that it was east of the Pennines, and several possible sites have been put forward including Aldborough, the Roman tribal capital of the Brigantes, the legionary base at York, and the Iron Age hillforts at Almondbury and near Berwick in Elmet. For a recent discussion of the likely alternatives see Webster (1981, 90-2) and Hartley (1980, 2).

West of the Pennines there is evidence of early pre AD 79 sites at Chester (McPeake 1978) and at Walton-le-Dale near Preston (Olivier pers comm). The latter site probably represents a temporary military incursion into Brigantia, but it is likely that Chester was one of a string of semi-permanent forts which included Whitchurch (Jones and Webster 1969) and Wroxeter (St Joseph 1953). These were probably constructed by the

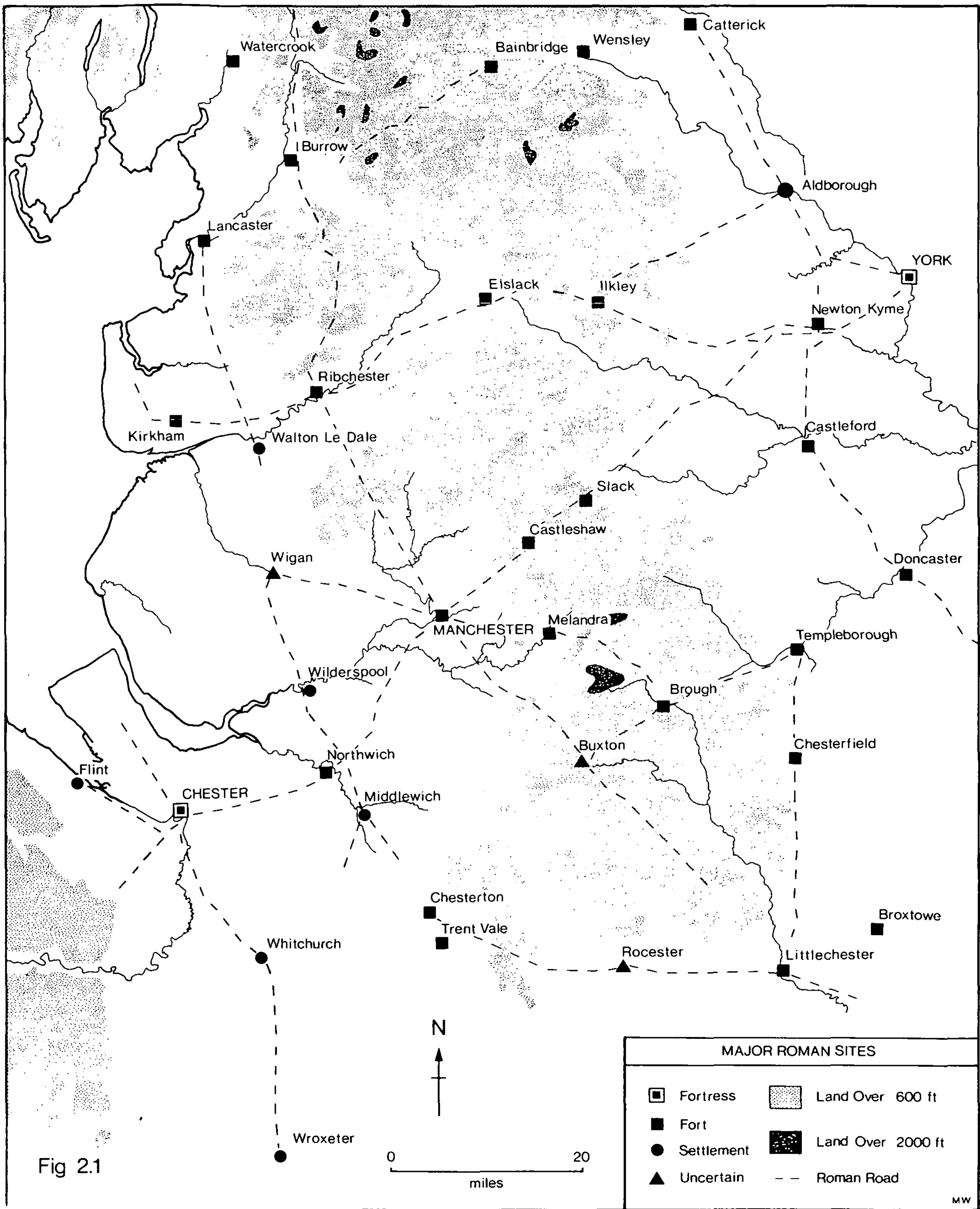


Fig 2.1

governors Scapula (AD 47-52) or Gallus, to prevent the hostile tribe of the Ordovices in North Wales from crossing into Brigantia and threatening the alliance between Cartimandua and Rome. The reality of the threat from North Wales was clearly demonstrated by the events recorded during Scapula's governorship, when Caratacus, the British leader who had just been defeated by the Roman army in North Wales, fled to Cartimandua both in the hope of finding refuge and to carry on the fight against the Romans. However she promptly handed him over to the Romans.

The alliance between Rome and the Brigantes managed to survive the crisis of the Boudiccan revolt in AD 61 and did not finally collapse until the Empire-wide civil war of AD 69, when the Roman army in Britain became temporarily immoblised. The anti-Roman faction in Brigantia, led by Cartimandua's consort Venutius, were quick to take advantage of this immobility and depose Cartimandua, without Bolanus, the governor at the time, being able to take any effective action, though the poet Statius, cAD 95, credited Bolanus with the capture of a British king's breast plate (Silvae vii 149). A dangerous situation must therefore have existed on the northern frontier until stability was restored with the arrival of Cerialis, the first of the Flavian governors. Cerialis moved quickly onto the offensive in Brigantia, and Tacitus tells us that after a series of battles he overran most of the territory (Agricola 17). It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that his orders were to invade Brigantia and crush all anti-Roman resistance.

As would be expected from such a rapid and successful campaign, archaeological evidence of the Cerialian conquest is not plentiful; nevertheless, the number of military sites which are attributable to Cerialis has been increasing in recent years, and it is becoming apparent that Brigantia was garrisoned, albeit thinly, during the early and mid AD 70s. One of the first objectives of Cerialis's campaign east of the Pennines had been to neutralise the potentially dangerous opposition from the political and population centres of the Brigantes. For this reason he garrisoned one of the major elements of the army, the newly arrived VIth legion,at York which was probably founded by AD 71-2 (Wenham 1971). Further east auxiliary forts were also established at Malton (Wenham 1974), Brough-on-Humber (Wacher 1969), Hayton (Johnson 1978) and Doncaster (Frere et al 1977, 384).

In the North-West, pre-Agricolan military occupation is less evident, but some of the auxiliary forts attributed to Agricola may have been founded during the Cerialian campaigns of the mid AD 70s or by Frontinus, AD 73-77. A pre-Agricolan fort has recently been identified at Ribchester, on the same site as the Agricolan fort (Olivier 1981, 33), and Jones (Jones and Grealey 1974, 3) also considers that the construction of the fort at Brough-on-Humber may be datable to the campaigns of Cerialis. In addition, Webster (1981,102) has suggested that there is insufficient evidence to date the foundation of the fort at Northwich closer than AD 65-80, which could easily place it in the early or mid AD 70s.

Julius Frontinus succeeded Cerialis as governor not later than early AD 74 and it is likely that the military situation in Brigantia remained fairly static during his three year period as governor. The back of Brigantian resistance had been broken by Cerialis, and the presence of military garrisons prevented an immediate outbreak of further trouble. The completion of the process of conquest and pacification of Brigantia begun by Cerialis was probably delayed, however, by the outbreak of renewed hostilities with the Silures in South Wales. A single sentence by Tacitus in the Agricola (Agricola 17) tells us that Frontinus "subdued by force of arms the strong and warlike nation of the Silures", and it is likely that they would have posed a considerable threat to the western flank of the army. Indeed Frere (1974) suggests that with his proven record in mountain warfare Frontinus may have been brought to Britain with the specific task of campaigning against the Silures in Wales. However, although they were defeated, the problem of the western flank was still present when the new governor, Agricola, arrived in Britain. This was probably in the summer of AD 77, for we know from his son-in-law and biographer Tacitus that Agricola conducted a brief and successful campaign against the Ordovices in North Wales, before turning his attention to the Brigantes (Ogilvie and Richmond 1967,53).

Once his flank was secure, Agricola probably spent the following year consolidating the conquests made previously by Cerialis, before moving into Scotland in the summer of AD 80. Tacitus mentions that Agricola personally chose the sites for the construction of new forts (Ogilvie and Richmond 1967), and although he is only mentioned on two insciptions, both from the fortress at Chester, it is likely that he was responsible for the foundation of most of the forts of known Flavian date in Brigantia. These include Manchester, Lancaster, Castleshaw, Slack and Melandra, west of the Pennines, as well as others to the east. New forts were also built on the earlier sites at Chesterfield, Ribchester, and Malton, and a comprehensive network of roads was constructed, linking the fort garrisons. Most of the Agricolan forts, including Manchester, were square in plan, covering an area of between 2.5 and 3.5 acres (1.0ha and 1.4ha), and probably contained units made up of 500 infantrymen (Jones, M J 1975, 64).

The pattern of the Agricolan military occupation of Brigantia is generally speaking, consistent with a policing role; however, west of the Pennines auxiliary forts are interspersed with several military sites whose function is less easy to define, but which were probably supply bases and works depots. At present four such sites are known; at Walton-le-Dale, Wigan, Wilderspool and Holt near Chester.

The site at Holt has been known for some time to be a depot for the manufacturing of tiles for the legionary base at Chester, and probably also for most of the auxiliary forts west of the Pennines. Wilderspool was excavated during the 1970's by various people, but still awaits full publication. Interim results (Jones and Grealey 1972) suggest that the settlement covered a large undefined area on the south bank of the Mersey, dating from the latter part of the 1st century, which contained large rectangular timber buildings, and there is evidence for a wide range of industrial processes including metalworking of various kinds, and the making of glass and pottery.

More recently at Walton-le-Dale, Olivier (1981, 53) has identified a 20 to 40 acre (8.1ha to 16.2ha) site, which also contains a number of large rectangular timber buildings between 15 and 20m long, as well as furnaces, hearths and wells,

all dating from the Flavian period to the mid 2nd century. At Wigan, smaller scale excavations have also recently produced evidence for substantial Flavian timber buildings, similar to those from other suspected supply bases, over 15m long and set out on a regular grid along a road (Tindall 1983).

By virtue of their layout, the building techniques used, and the range of activities carried out in them, these sites do not fall within the conventional typology of fortresses or auxiliary forts even though it is clear that they were almost certainly run by the military. It is likely that they performed a range of functions associated with maintaining and supplying of various goods and services to the large garrisons which were stationed in western Brigantia during the Flavian and Trajanic periods. In at least one of the phases at Walton-le-Dale, the large timber buildings were probably used for the storage of supplies for the army (Olivier pers comm). Like the other probable supply bases at Red House, Corbridge (Hanson et al 1979, 79-80) and Fishbourne Phase I (Cunliffe 1969), Walton-le-Dale is well sited for such a role, being on a navigable river close to a likely bridging point and on a major communication route. Supplies brought by river could therefore be stored temporarily before being moved by road to their destination.

THE ROMAN CONSOLIDATION OF THE AREA

The military system constructed by Agricola remained, on the whole, unaltered through to the early 2nd century. The only changes seem to have been the construction of a fort at Watercrook, Cumbria (Potter 1979), the replacement of the large fort at Castleshaw with a smaller fortlet (Bruton 1911) and the construction of a large turf and timber fort at Lancaster.

A number of the Flavian turf and timber forts also had stone revetments added to their turf ramparts in the 2nd century, and some further work also took place in the Trajanic period. Chester has a Trajanic building inscription (RIB 646) as does Lancaster (RIB 604). However, the recent discovery of the Trajanic turf and timber fort at Lancaster suggests that the Lancaster inscription probably only refers to a stone building constructed inside the turf and timber fort. Stone rebuilding is also attested at Melandra (RIB 279), Ribchester, Doncaster (Britannia 1973, 282), Kirkham and Templeborough (May 1922, 14), but these could all have just as easily been constructed under Hadrian and it is interesting to note that all the rebuilt forts continued to be occupied throughout the principate of Hadrian. A programme of reconstruction of selected forts in Brigantia as and when it became necessary, like the programme which is believed to have been carried out throughout the northern frontier in the early 3rd century (Jarrett and Mann 1970), seems to have been taking place in the Trajanic period.

FROM HADRIAN TO SEVERUS

The tight military grip which had been kept on Brigantia during the Flavian and Trajanic periods, was loosened at the beginning of the principate of Hadrian in the AD 120s. The motive for this change in policy was probably a renewed Imperial interest in the northern frontier which followed a personal visit by Hadrian, and the subsequent decision to construct a permanent frontier between the Tyne and the Solway.

Additional garrisons were required to serve on Hadrian's Wall and in its immediate hinterland, and it was probably considered that Brigantia was sufficiently pacified after forty years or so of Roman rule for a number of its garrisons to be removed. Most of the troops as Hartley (1966, 15-16) has pointed out, were removed from eastern Brigantia. From the Pennines there is good evidence that Elslack, Ilkley, Bainbridge, Castleshaw and Brough-on-Noe were abandoned under Hadrian; and east of the Pennines similar evidence occurs at Castleford, Chesterfield, and also probably at Catterick, Newton Kyme and Aldborough. Hartley suggested that the decision to leave most of the garrisons west of the Pennines in place may have been due to continued local unrest (Hartley 1966, 16; 1980, 5). However, the number of auxiliary forts west of the Pennines and not directly associated with Hadrian's Wall that have well attested Hadrianic occupation is relatively low. The remaining forts were only Lancaster, Ribchester, Watercrook, Ambleside, Northwich, Barrow and Kirkham, and the evidence from the latter two seems inconclusive. In Lower Brigantia there were at least five forts which continued to be occupied during the Hadrianic period; Manchester, Slack and Melandra in the Pennines and Templeborough and Doncaster east of the Pennines. The apparent disparity between the sizes of the Hadrianic garrisons in east and west Brigantia is not as great as was once thought, and is certainly not significant enough to make any deductions about separate military policies for the two regions in the Hadrianic period.

The military garrison of Brigantia was further depleted in the early AD140s with the departure of the garrisons from Slack and Melandra in the Pennines, and from Northwich in the Cheshire plain and possibly from Manchester. This was almost certainly as a result of a need for more troops on the northern frontier following the decision of the Emperor at the time, Antoninus Pius, to abandon the frontier along Hadrian's Wall and occupy southern Scotland.

The suggestion that a native revolt may have broken out in Brigantia in the AD 150s, whilst the military garrison was insufficiently strong to effectively police the territory, has recently been restated by Hartley (1980, 5) and Frere (1974b, 153). The archaeological evidence for the revolt is based upon the apparent destruction of two Brigantian forts at Lancaster and Birrens, and the moves made to re-organize Brigantia, such as the reoccupation of a number of abandoned Pennine forts together with the first abandonment of the Antonine Wall. The reoccupied forts are at Ilkley, Elslack, Brough-on-Noe, Bainbridge and possibly Manchester.

There is also a combination of literary, numismatic and epigraphic evidence which indicates

that a native uprising may have occurred. A coin issue of AD 154-5 (RIC 930) reputedly shows Britannia, the symbol of the Britons, subdued as a result, it is argued, of the British being defeated in battle. There is also an inscription from Newcastle (RIB 1322) mentioning replacements for all three of the British legions in the AD 150s, again, it is argued, to help suppress a rebellion. In addition there is also a much disputed passage by the ancient Greek author Pausanias, which mentions the Brigantes "having been deprived of a greater part of their territory because they invaded the Genunian district which was subject to Rome" (Graeciae descriptio viii 43).

The argument for a Brigantian revolt in the AD 150s therefore, relies on the cumulative evidence from these sources, all of which have been disputed at one time or another. In particular, the destruction of Lancaster has now been discounted by excavation (GDB Jones pers comm) and the purpose of the legionary reinforcements remains unclear. There is also uncertainty over the precise date of the passage from Pausanias and the location of the Genunian district which he refers to (Rivet and Smith 1979,47).

With the Pennine forts, the major problem appears to be in deciding whether their reoccupation was the result of a Brigantian revolt or whether it was merely the consequence of a redistribution of the military garrison of the north, following an unrelated imperial decision to abandon Scotland. On balance the latter alternative seems more likely, considering the inconclusiveness of the other evidence for a revolt.

Of the reoccupied forts, Ilkley, and Elslack were reconstructed in stone and Manchester, Brough-on-Noe and Bainbridge in turf and timber; the latter possibly reflecting a continuation of the policy of turf and timber construction used previously on the Antonine wall.

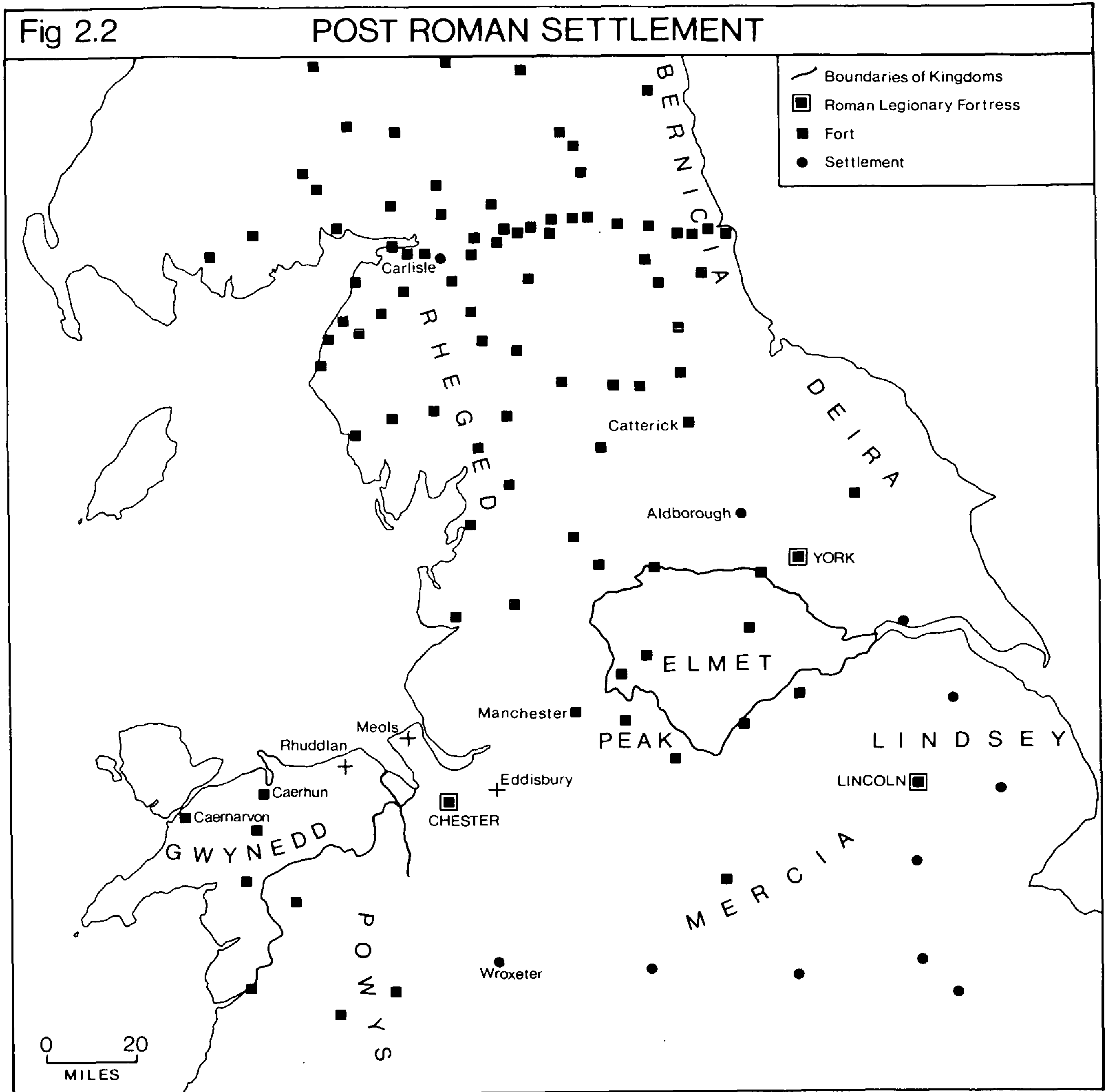
The return of a substantial portion of the military garrison of the North West and the Pennines, including probably the XXth legion at Chester (Strickland 1982) is likely to have provided an economic stimulus to the production centres that catered principally for the military market. The Antonine period AD 138-92, corresponds with the most intensive phase of industrial activity in the north vicus, or civilian settlement, at Manchester, where secondary iron production or 'smithing' was taking place over an area of between five and ten acres (2.1ha and 4.1ha). The scale of production was more than sufficient to cater for the needs of the auxiliary garrison at Manchester, and some of the production may therefore have been in direct response to the increased demand created by the reoccupation of the Pennine forts. The settlement at Wilderspool was also producing large amounts of iron products in the Antonine period, possibly as a response to increased demand from the nearby fortress at Chester.

The turf and timber forts at Manchester, Brough-on-Noe, Bainbridge and the stone fort at Ilkley were refurbished in stone at the beginning of the 3rd century, probably as part of the national programme of replacement, which also probably included the rebuilding of the wall at Chester (Strickland & Davey 1978). Many of the auxiliary forts in the North-West have early 3rd century Severan (AD 193-235) building inscriptions (RIB 637) which probably refer to rebuilding. At Manchester there is also another inscription (RIB 576) which refers to a legionary detachment which is dated to AD 197. Two of the rebuilt forts, Ilkley and Bainbridge, were dismantled and destroyed prior to being rebuilt, and there is evidence for a short period of abandonment between destruction and rebuilding at Bainbridge (Hartley 1980, 6). Hartley considers the rebellious Brigantes may once again have been responsible, but as with the earlier rebellion of the AD 150s, the evidence is not conclusive. A more likely explanation is that they were destroyed deliberately by their garrisons, before they left to join the British governor and usurper Albinus's abortive expedition to Gaul in AD 196. With the defeat of Albinus the Emperor Severus controlled Britain and, together with his sons, commenced to re-organise, refortify and perhaps expand the province after his arrival in AD 208.

The beginning of the 3rd century saw a decline in the scale of production at Wilderspool and in the northern vicus at Manchester, where industrial activity gave way to domestic buildings. By the end of the 3rd century the north vicus, or civilian town, was all but deserted. The published evidence from Wilderspool also suggests a similar pattern, with the wide range of industrial processes which were evident in the 2nd century, giving way during the 3rd century to smaller-scale domestic and agricultural activity which continued into the 4th century. A steady contraction in the military market for the products of these centres is the most likely reason for their decline.

In particular, the disappearance of most of the XXth legion from Chester sometime in the first half of the 3rd century, a unit which contained over half of the soldiers of the North-West (Strickland and Davey 1978, 28) probably had a significant effect upon the economic viability of the nearby settlement at Wilderspool. There is little evidence for the appearance of production, marketing and distribution centres, catering for the demands of the native population, which might have been able to fill the economic vacuum left by the disappearance of some of the military market and its production centres. There is some evidence that the extra-mural settlement at Whitchurch to the south of Brigantia may have developed into a small walled town in the 3rd century (Jones and Reynolds 1978) and Strickland (1980, 10) has suggested that after the departure of the XXth legion, Chester may have developed in the same way. Apart from these few examples, however, the general picture is one of decline in the size and the range of functions carried out in the settlements controlled by the army.

Fig 2.2 POST ROMAN SETTLEMENT



THE END OF ROMAN RULE AND THE EMERGENCE OF KINGDOMS

The onset of the 4th century saw an increasingly defensive attitude adopted by the army in the North-West. Substantial defensive ditches were dug at Manchester, Ribchester and Lancaster. The fort at Lancaster was also rebuilt with a free standing stone wall and external bastions, in a style similar to that of the Saxon shore forts of south and east England. It is likely that the threat was external and sea borne; probably from Irish raiding inland via the estuaries of the Dee, Ribble, Lune and Mersey.

A small coastal defence fort at Caer Gybi has been known for some time; in addition to the fort at Lancaster there may have been a naval presence at Chester, and it is possible that the forts at Manchester and Ribchester, both sited on navigable rivers, may have formed part of a coastal and river defence system similar to the Saxon shore. Dornier (1982) has recently suggested that the area was incorporated into a late Roman province called Valentia centred on Chester.

By the beginning of the 5th century Roman rule had collapsed. In the first half of the century southern and eastern England came under the control of invading Angles, Saxons and allied tribal groups. In the area around Manchester Roman administration and the forts gradually ceased to exist. The newly emergent Celtic west that arose after the collapse of Roman rule, appears to have developed as a series of petty kingdoms. G R J Jones (1975) has shown how in Gwynedd and Elmet

(fig 2.2), two British kingdoms to the west and east respectively of Manchester, there evolved an organisation and social system that was a mixture of Roman and indigenous traits. Unlike Anglo-Saxon society, much of Celtic society was then a continuation, albeit in debased form, of Roman and pre-Roman social and economic systems (Alcock 1973, 355-7). Some of the peasant settlements and small farms in Elmet seem to have remained reasonably unchanged during this period whilst many towns, villas and mass producers of pottery quickly disappeared (Faull 1974). However, Dodgson (1970) puts forward a convincing and now generally accepted case for English settlement in Cheshire from the late 6th century, based on place name evidence.

Only four historic events are documented for the area over the next five centuries. The first, the Battle of Chester in the early 6th century, if indeed it ever took place, appears to have been one of a series fought between the Anglo-Saxons and the surviving population (Alcock 1973, 85-8). Dodgson (1970) and Sylvester and Nulty (1958) conclude that the battle of Chester was indecisive, and that there is no evidence of Northumbrian control of Cheshire. Dodgson (1970) argues that the battle was an attempt by Northumbria to protect their settlement in Lancashire, and sees the alliance between Mercia and Gwynedd as being a response by Mercia to protect English settlers in Cheshire. More importantly it may be possible to trace 7th century events through place name evidence of 6th century settlements. In AD 616 a further battle took place between Aethelfrith, King of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria, and the Welsh king of Gwynedd. Within a few years the Northumbrians under King Edwin exercised some sort of control over the region that included Manchester. The Welsh or British struck back under Cadwallon who was slain shortly afterwards by Edwin's successor Oswald. It was with the final defeat of the British kingdom of Elmet in AD 620 however, that the Manchester embayment was laid open to widespread Anglo-Saxon settlement (Faull 1974) and although British princes were still to continue their involvement in Mercian and Northumbrian affairs the initiative was lost following the death of Cadwallon in AD 633. In the 7th century English settlers were in the Peak District and moving into the Dark Peak from the west (Hart 1981, 111-16). By the end of the century Wat's Dyke was firmly established to the west of Chester to keep back the Welsh, and between it and Manchester lay the English tribal grouping of the Westerne with 7000 hides of land (Stenton 1971, 292).

From sites around Chester evidence has come to light of a culture containing a mixture of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic traits. From Meols comes a range of Celtic ornaments and "porcupine type" 7th century Anglo-Saxon coins (Bu'Lock 1960, 4). Indeed Chester in AD 604 was the setting for a meeting to discuss the date of Easter between bishops from various sub-cultures and it appears that even Edwin, the Northumbrian king, had been brought up amongst the Welsh (Bu'Lock 1962). On this and other evidence the Saxon assimilation of the area did not bring with it the complete destruction of the Celts or their social structure (Higham 1979).

From Manchester a number of Anglo-Saxon finds have been discovered (Morris 1983) and historical evidence suggests that for a large amount of the time the Manchester embayment may have acted as a buffer between three polities; North Wales, English Northumbria and English Mercia. Indeed in AD 919 a burh or fort was repaired and manned at Manchester as part of King Edwards' attempt to rationalise his borders (Morris 1983). An attempt has been made to suggest that the area may have been part of an independent kingdom (Bu'Lock 1956) called Teyrnllwg, but this seems to have been disproved (Richards 1959).

Although during the 7th century the Manchester embayment came under Anglo-Saxon control and Scandinavian influence, in areas like the Salford Hundred, which includes Manchester, Celtic land-holding patterns survived (Higham 1979). As these patterns are probably a continuation of Roman systems which may in turn have been heavily influenced by earlier Celtic patterns, the impact of the Roman fort and late burh upon the basic structure and economy of native society may have been relatively slight.