

ART XVI.—*The Roman Camp near Beckfoot (Mowbray)*  
*Cumberland.\**

*Communicated at Maryport, June 16th,† 1880. By JOSEPH ROBINSON.*

**F**EW districts are more full of interest to the antiquary than the Abbey Holme, the Island of Holme and Raby, as it is called in the old charters. Its very name, Holme Cultram, recalls its brightest historical days, and revives the interest which clings around the departed glories of its once famous Abbey. The fact of its having been long retained as a Royal Manor after the dissolution of the Monasteries, has preserved to us many valuable records of its customs, embalmed in the surveys made from time to time. The particulars given in these surveys are the floating traditions of the present day amongst its population.

The Holme has been rich in remains of the prehistoric period. I have the pleasure of showing here a small collection of weapons of the stone period, axes, hammers, celts, &c., eleven of which have been found in this district. I find also that many have been broken up for metalling the roads, owing to their value being unknown. It has been equally rich in specimens of the bronze period, but I regret to state that a large and systematic destruction of these valuable implements has gone on for years among the brass founders at the Abbey Town. These implements were purchased as old brass from hawkers and others for a few pence, and so complete has been the destruction that I only know of one specimen left, a spear head, found along with some deer bones when a large drain was being

\* On this camp confer Transactions this Society, vol. iv. pp. 318—320, where is an article by the Editor.

† Since the date of its communication to the Society, the paper has been revised, and brought up to the end of 1880.

cut

cut upwards of twenty years ago. The proprietor of the foundry expressed great regret when told of the valuable relics thus lost to science. Shortly after leaving him, on the completion of my enquiries, I met a hawker, and wishing to test the information, asked him if he knew what a battle-axe was. He immediately described the different varieties of bronze weapons, and said he had sold about twenty himself at the foundry, bought at farm-houses, but had seen none for years, and thought they were all cleared out now. As far as I could find not even one specimen had been preserved by the workmen out of curiosity.

In October, 1879, I was preparing a paper on the Abbey Holme for the Maryport Literary and Scientific Society, and in collecting my information, decided on enquiring into the Roman Camp at Mowbray, mentioned in most of our histories of Cumberland, but in a vague and indefinite manner. I will not trouble you with any quotations, as they are mostly repetitions, and give no real facts as to the site.\* I first saw it named in Hutchinson ten years ago, but a few casual enquiries at the time elicited no information. On the 18th of October, 1879, I had occasion to go to Beckfoot to receive three of the celts I have referred to, and began my enquiries for the camp at Mowbray in passing. I was surprised to find that no one I could meet with knew anything of any camp, mound, or ditch. Going on to Beckfoot I repeated my enquiries with the same result at first, but on asking if any fields had anything about a *camp* in their names, was told of Castlefields, and taken to them. Passing through three I selected one which I thought looked like the site of the lost camp, although on the surface there was no sign of pottery or foundations. It required some searching to find any free-stone, but the only specimen found had a mark in it which I recognized as a pick mark. The field had a slight elevation towards the south-west corner, and this elevation

---

\* See the passages cited in the Transactions of this Society, vol. iv. pp. 318-320.

eventually proved to be very rich in remains. It was then in oat-stubble, and having arranged for permission to dig, I began ten days after with the result I will presently describe.

I was not aware till upwards of a week after operations had been begun that our Editor, Mr. Ferguson, F.S.A., had made three visits to this locality in search of this camp, and had fixed on this field as the most likely place. He was prevented proving his conjectures by the crop being on at the time of his visits. We were both, up to this time, unaware of the fact that the "Castlefields" are marked on the six-inch scale Ordnance Map as "supposed site of camp."

\* Before proceeding to describe the work done, I may say that the Castlefields are eight in number, and cover about thirty acres. Previous to the 14th February, 1767, the land was unenclosed "rig and reann"\* in forty-three lots, held among five owners. On the date named an agreement was signed between the then owners to divide the land by the 2nd February following, and by that time the present boundaries would be fixed. Through the kindness of Mr. Joseph Bell, of Newtown, I am able to produce the original agreement and plan. The former is endorsed "Articles of Division for Newtown Castle," and is signed by Joseph Barn, Joseph Ostell, Isaac Todd and Sarah his wife, Thomas Atkinson, and John Saul. The witnesses are Jeremiah Barwise, John Ostell, and Daniel Waite. These old Holme names are still represented by some of our most substantial Cumberland statesmen, and I trust they will long be so. The present owners are Messrs. Dan Glaister Ostle, Robert Little, and Joseph Bell, of Newtown, and Robert Rylands, of Beckfoot; and I am much indebted to the kindness with which these gentlemen at all times received me, and for their courtesy in so readily

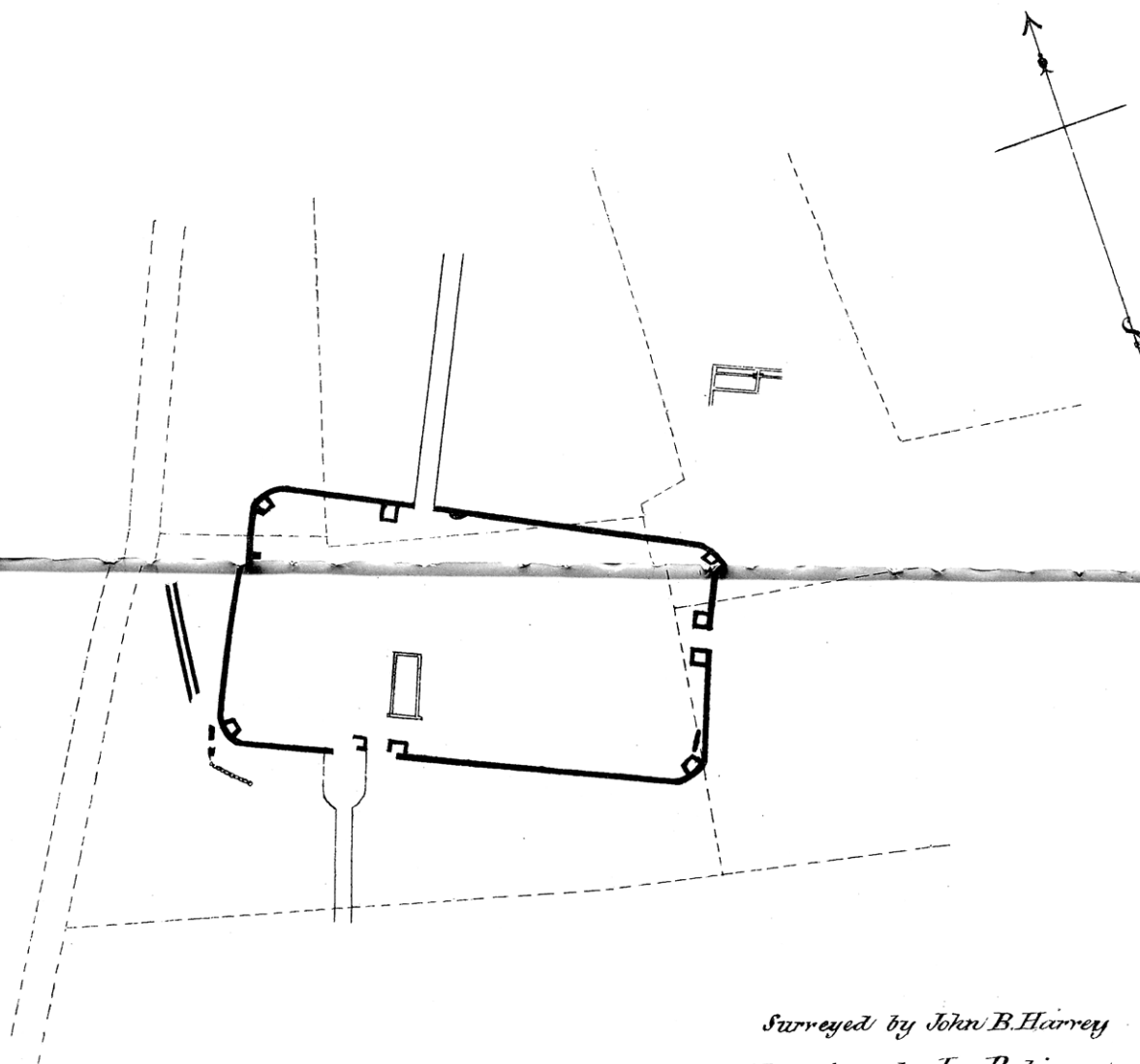
\* An arable field held in shares, which are divided by narrow green lines (ranes), and the intervals usually cultivated. Confer Dickinson's Glossary of the Dialect of Cumberland.

placing

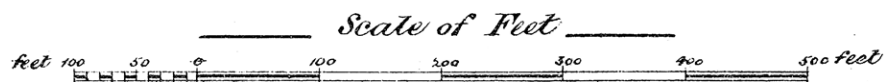
\_\_\_\_ **PLAN OF ROMAN CAMP** \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ **NEAR BECKFOOT** \_\_\_\_

(Near Marbray)



*Surveyed by John B. Harvey*  
*Examined by Jos. Robinson*  
*- 1879-80 - Maryport.*



placing their fields at my disposal. Three of the fields adjoin the road from Maryport, being on the right hand side before the mill at Beckfoot is reached. To show the character of the land, I may state that, owing to an objectionable right of way, one of the fields was kept under crop for twenty-seven consecutive years before it showed signs of being exhausted.

It was on the 28th October, 1879, that I made the first cutting in one of Mr. Ostle's fields, the third from the mill in the direction of Maryport, and, on the slight elevation already referred to, a hole six feet in depth was dug. The first obstacle was a pavement of cobbles. I preserved the first one dug up, and it is much worn on the surface. Underneath was a bed of black earth, mixed with slate pottery and stones, bearing signs of work and fire. At three feet, sand was reached, and eighteen inches beneath this a block of well-dressed freestone was brought up. We afterwards found this part of the field to consist largely of such layers as are here described. The whole of the fields have a substratum of sand, on which the foundations of the camp rest, and no drains are used or required. The next cutting was made about four yards nearer the sea, and brought to light the outer wall of the camp. This was six feet in width, and consisted of cobbles set in clay. It presented a very fresh clean appearance. This wall was eventually followed a distance of two hundred and eighty-three feet on the seaward side by a series of over thirty trenches of varying width, and in several places the freestone forming the second course above the foundations was found undisturbed. Near to the north hedge in this field was found a fine specimen of Roman work, a solid block of masonry, measuring eleven feet by seven, built close to the inside of the outer wall, and consisting of five courses of dressed stones, set on the usual cobble foundation, which was here put in four courses deep in the sand. When first uncovered it was beautifully fresh, but the first  
course

course and part of the second suffered considerably by being pulled off by visitors. Eventually the owner took off four courses of the ashlar work, but left one remaining. It has been at first suggested that this was the foundation of a Pharos or lighthouse, erected for the use of the Roman Galleys going up the Solway to the end of the wall at Bowness. From this point the wall ran into Mr. Robert Bigland's field, the second south of the mill, and here made a round turn into Mr. Bell's seed field, where we could not then follow it, and considering this as the angle of the camp, we had to give it up at this point. We had here, however, the hardest part of our digging, through losing the line of a wall which appeared to run north after the angle had been turned, and a number of pits, six feet and upwards in depth, were sunk in the attempt to recover it. The soil here is wonderfully good, the whole depth named being rich black earth. I always consider that, notwithstanding the work put into this portion, we abandoned it too soon, and I looked forward to its re-opening with some interest. It must be borne in mind, however, that our time was very limited, the workers few, and that we were in the shortest days of November and December. The distance from Maryport also, nine miles, made our available time much less. All our work was done with the design of proving in the first place the extent and bounds of the camp, and as there was absolutely nothing to show us where to dig, it may be imagined that a good deal of experimental work had to be done.

Returning to the point at which I first began, the south-west corner, we found the angle of the camp there to be rounded also. The foundations of a small square building, about eight feet seven across inside, were uncovered here,\* and a remarkable row of eighteen large cobble stones running diagonally across this corner, as shown on the

---

\* Similar foundations were afterwards found at all the angles: probably they supported angle-turrets.

plan,

plan, but I can form no opinion as to their original use.

Proceeding east the south gateway was reached, and the east side of the foundations laid bare. The other side has apparently been removed. They consist of very large cobbles, some upwards of three feet square. Small chambers, probably guard chambers, occur at the sides. A road had been previously found running to this point, and its course was easily traced through the whole field, and to the north as far as the mill, a distance of over four hundred and thirty yards. It was afterwards proved in several fields to the south, and I hope eventually to bring it to Maryport, or the point where it leaves the Wigton road, assuming it does so. It is of a most substantial character where it has been uncovered, being composed of large cobbles with smaller stones at the top, and about fifteen feet in width.

As the ground was wanted for cultivation, I had to abandon work in December, 1879, and was unable to resume it until after the crops were got in in 1880, and I closed the excavations in November of that year.

It would occupy too much space, were I to give a daily record of our doings, and I will briefly summarise. I may, however, mention that the work of 1880 corrected and explained much that puzzled in 1879.

The four corners of the camp have been all found and uncovered, and thus we have its dimensions, viz:—Interior east and west, 405 feet; north and south *on west side*, 283 feet; *on east side*, 267 feet. The area of the camp is about two and three-quarter acres, or about the size of those at Castlesteads and Stanwix. It has no gate in its west or seaward side, and the gates in its north and south sides are nearer the west side of the camp than the east. There is a gate in the east or landward side. Two guard chambers occur at the south gate, two at the east, but only one at the north. The walls are in each case two feet six in thickness, and the interior space nine feet square.

Buildings

Buildings have existed outside the camp to the north-east and probably elsewhere, but these and the foundations inside the camp have not been yet sufficiently explored by the spade for their plans to be intelligible. They are, however, faintly indicated on the plan now given.

I may state that sixty-three cart loads of stones were led out of Mr. Ostle's field after we finished work in 1879, although all the foundations remain untouched, and we left all in we possibly could. I understand it has been a common practice, as long as any one can remember, to go round with crowbars taking out stones which were in the way of the plough, whenever the fields were in cultivation.

I exhibit the objects found, viz.:—An altar, seventeen by seven inches, uninscribed, a figure of Diana as Luna Lucifera, thought at first to be Mithras, but since determined by Mr. Roach Smith, F.S.A., the eminent antiquary; a mutilated figure of Victory, three querns, a large slab, two large blocks of mortar, a large wedge showing the diamond tooling (the only one found), two coins, one of Trajan, much worn, and one of Constantius, two copper beads, several fragments of copper, iron, &c., a round stone, eleven inches in diameter, with a hole near the edge, apparently intended for a weight: a deal of pottery was found, including Samian, Castor, Upchurch, and Salopian ware.

We are indebted to Mr. Thompson-Watkin, of Liverpool, for the recovery of the figures of Diana and Victory, as he kindly gave us a hint, through Mr. Ferguson, to look for figures immediately outside the walls, and these were found at the south-west corner. No doubt they have been mutilated by the barbarians, who would take possession after the departure of the Romans, and would throw these figures over the walls as a mark of contempt. Photographs of the stones referred to will be found in the series I have had taken.

The only inscribed stone known to come from this camp  
is



is the one mentioned in Hutchinson's History of Cumberland, vol. ii. p. 346. The writer did not see it, and came to the conclusion that if fully recovered it would "show that the Spaniards built the wall, and was therefore of no further importance." We now know that the Spaniards and the Pannonians were not the same people, and it would hardly repay us to pause and enquire what is meant by "The Wall" here. The inscription is given by Hutchinson as L·TA· PRAEF· COH· II· PANNON· FECIT: The stone is recorded in the Lapidarium Septentrionale as No. 903, and is said to be lost, but I found it built into a wall at Newtown, and arranged to purchase it from Mr. R. Little, the owner; Mr. Senhouse having expressed a desire to have it. I was glad to have an opportunity of adding to the valuable collection already at Netherhall, and after being photographed it was taken there on 1st May, 1880. It weighs about half a ton, and is in two pieces, the first four letters being on the smaller portion. It is five feet long (including both pieces), and the inscription, in letters three inches long, is on a chamfer of eight inches in depth. The break in the stone is a straight joint, which must have existed before the letters did, and it occurs after the fourth letter—not after the third. The first three letters should be L I A, not L·T A. The reading in the Lapidarium Septentrionale (copied from Hutchinson, as the stone had not then been refound) should be corrected accordingly. From the position and size of the letters the inscription must have been intended to be read from below. I conjecture it went over the eastern gateway of the camp, and that it was brought from near the east side of the camp about the beginning of this century, when it was built into its present position. The mason who built it up says many querns and carved stones were then broken up for building.

A good deal of interest centres in the Pannonians. Their country corresponds nearly to the modern Kingdom

OT

of Hungary, and readers of Roman History will hardly need to be told that the Pannonian troops, under Severus, decided the fate of the Empire in his contests with Niger, the governor of Egypt, and Albinus, the governor of Britain, after the murder of Pertinax, in A.D. 193. Their rapid march upon Rome on that occasion is cited as a marvel of military endurance, and their fame struck terror into the Pretorian Guard, and compelled its surrender. They are everywhere spoken of as a warlike, hardy race, with a strong love of independence, and who only yielded to the Roman power after severe struggles. They are named on only four other inscriptions in Britain, viz., the Malpas and Sydenham diplomas and the tombstones of two soldiers, Nos. 198 and 254 in the Lapidarium Septentrionale. They were known to be in England in A.D. 106, the date of the Sydenham diploma, but we know nothing of the time of their leaving. This is the only inscription found in Britain which records this particular cohort.\*

In conclusion I desire to call attention to the following points:—

1. The position of the camp is about half way between Maryport and Bowness, and commands a distinct view of the former camp. I am of opinion, from more recent observations, to which I shall refer in another paper, that signals could also be exchanged with Bowness. The camp stands low, close to the edge of the Solway, just below the fine anchorage of St. Catherine's Hole, which lies just below the modern port of Silloth. As a military position also it is stronger in itself than it appears at first sight. A small stream covers the north front, and it is very peculiar to observe that there is a perceptible difference in its banks; that on the side of the camp being a few feet higher than the other. In Roman times the land on the north of the

---

\* An inscription found at Aesernia, in the kingdom of Naples, mentions Publius Septimius Paterculus as being Praefect of the first cohort of the Pannonians "*in Britannia*." (See Mommsen *Inscrip. Neapol.* No. 5024.) W. T. Watkin.

stream

stream may have been a swamp, as it is very flat, or they may have had the idea of converting it into one at any time by damming up the water by a sluice about where the mill dam is now, and where their ford could cross. I have no direct evidence of this however.

2. The camp appears to me to be of two periods, and to have been ruined and rebuilt. I do not pay much attention to the constantly recurring traces of fire in the interior, as they may have been left at a later period, but on the crown of the small hill where I first began to dig I found a substantial pavement. Under this, as I have before stated, is a considerable mass of rubbish, charcoal, broken stones, &c. The large slab was found under this refuse at a depth of four feet. The altar was found under the pavement, so were two of the querns, the round stone, and nearly all the iron.

3. From the south gate to the south-east angle, running parallel to the wall, and at a distance of fifteen feet, is a gravel road. This led to a very curious structure, close to the angle turret. It consisted of a wall about twenty feet in length and four courses in depth. On this rested twenty large flags, some upwards of four feet long, slanting outwards on each side at an angle of about forty-five degrees, like the roof of a house. A space of one foot along the centre of the wall was untouched by the edges of the flags, and leading out of this space was a hewn channel, apparently intended for water. Two large freestone troughs were resting on the flags, one broken into four pieces, but the other quite perfect, measuring four feet by two, and with one corner very much worn away as if by use. Many of the flags were also much worn, those between the troughs being quite hollowed out. The whole of the stone here was taken out. I made a search here for a well but without success. This road is also found inside the wall on the east side, and a rough freestone foundation or pavement exists also outside the wall on the

S

west,

west, south, and east sides, at varying distances. Further excavation is needed before certainty as to this head can be arrived at.

4. As to the name and date of the camp we have as yet no direct evidence, but, as Maryport is now fixed to be the Axelodunum of the Notitia, it is probable some light may be thrown on this point eventually. From the position in which the coin of Constantius was found, we may infer that the camp was still held between A.D. 352 and 361, if not later, as I dug it out at a depth of three feet, and it was surrounded by debris. These dates approach so near to that about which the Notitia Imperii would be compiled, that its being one of the Notitia stations may be reasonably expected.

5. There are no quarries in the neighbourhood, and the stone for building must have come from a distance, probably from Sheepfield quarry, or Aigle Gill. These places are situated at a distance of six and a quarter and four and a half miles respectively from Beckfoot, in a straight line, and each commands a view of the Maryport and Beckfoot camps; Sheepfield is in the centre of a triangle formed by Allerby Cross, Canonby and Swartha Hill. It is known to be an old quarry, and there are signs of extensive workings, not to be accounted for by the building of any modern village. Until very lately it has not been wrought within living memory, and I find there is a very old tradition that the stone had been shipped to Scotland. At Beckfoot there was found a tradition that the stone had been brought by sea; but I do not attach any importance to these unsupported statements. Aigle Gill I have already described in these Transactions, ante p. 121.

6. The camp has always been stated to be near Mowbray, but as it is over a mile distant, and really joins Beckfoot, I have adopted the latter name as being more distinctive. The village of Newtown has led to great confusion in the name. It has not always occupied its present  
site

site. It formerly stood near to the camp, but in the middle of the 16th century the nuisance of blown sand from the sea became so great that the inhabitants removed some of the houses. The Holme was then a Royal Manor, and the removal attracted the attention of Lord William Dacres, Lord Warden of the West Marches, who wrote the following letter to the Steward of the Manor:—

“After my hearty Commendations unto you, Whereas I perceive that there be Certain Tennants of the Town of New Mowbray Removed out of the same place to a place called Studfoldrigg, and have left other their Dwelling there, which is a weakening to the Frontiers there. These therefore shall be to Require you in the King and Queen’s Majesties Name and Behalf to place all the said Tennants together in one Town, Whereas the said Town may be Dyked and Quicksett about and have two out gates for their Strength and Defence Against the Invasion of the Enemys: and cast their lands in Inclosors: and take Order that the same may be done as Conveniently as may be. Thus I bid you heartily Farewell.

At Carlisle the first of February Anno 1555.

Your Loving Friend, WILLIAM DACRES.

To my Friend John Leigh of Isell, Steward of Holme Cultram.”

The King and Queen here named would be Philip of Spain and Mary.

In consequence of this the houses would be removed to Newtown, which retaining also its name of New Mowbray is called Newtown of Mowbray in some documents.

The site of the old village is a few fields nearer Maryport than the Castlefields, and the sand blown on the land still remains, and is cultivated. It originally covered about forty acres: I dug through it three feet in several places, and found the Roman Road and the old surface very distinct. The blowing still continues, but is confined to the shore where large heaps have been drifted up. I am told by residents that the formation of the largest heap first began to attract their attention about forty years ago. There is a sunken forest off the camp, of considerable extent. It is about three hundred yards below high water  
mark

mark, and the roots and trunks of large trees, embedded in fine blue clay are very numerous. Adjoining these is a fine deposit of leaves and small branches, two feet six inches in depth, which, when cut into, presents a fine dry appearance.

In conclusion, I have endeavoured in this brief, and I fear imperfect sketch, to place before you, as far as possible, the results of my excavations. I had many willing helpers in the work, chief of whom was my friend and constant companion there, Mr. Thomas Carey.

I am indebted to Dr. Bruce, F.S.A., Mr. Roach-Smith, F.S.A., Mr. Thompson-Watkin, and to the Editor of these Transactions for many hints and for kind replies to my many queries. Dr. Bruce came over from Newcastle on purpose to inspect the excavations. The Society is also indebted to Mr. J. B. Harvey for the great care with which he took the measurements, and for the accurate plan which accompanies this paper.

---