

ART. VII.—*An unpublished Roman Altar at Netherhall.*
By J. B. BAILEY.

Read at Carlisle, April 27th, 1905.

SOME months ago I was looking over the altars at Netherhall, when my attention was drawn to two stones which I had not previously noticed. One of them, apparently part of an altar, was uninscribed, but the other had an inscription of three lines. A portion of this was very indistinct, but the concluding part presented no difficulty. It was as follows :—

.
. . . CO PRAEF
COH T LING

Careful inquiry on the spot failed to supply the faintest trace of their origin. My first idea was that they must have come from Moresby ; but, if so, there was no record. On turning, however, to page 294, vol. ix., of these *Transactions*, light was thrown upon the subject. There Dr. Hooppell described two exactly similar stones, which, he says, were found in 1885 during the restoration of Harrington Church, and which, at the time he wrote, were in the vicarage garden there. In a note to the above statement, the late Chancellor Ferguson remarked that they had been removed to Newcastle. The question then was how they had got to Maryport, assuming them to be the same stones. To decide this I wrote to Mr. R. Blair, F.S.A., of South Shields, and he kindly informed me that they had been in his possession,* but that in or about the year 1887 he gave them to Chancellor

* By the gift of Mr. Curwen, vicar of Harrington.—R.B.

Ferguson, who, in turn, gave them to the late H. Pocklington Senhouse, Esq., of Netherhall. I was unable to gather when this transfer took place, but I assume that it must have been at a very recent date. It thus seems clear that these two stones at Netherhall are really those found at Harrington.

The inscribed stone is clearly part of a larger one, which had probably been cut down to make it fit for the use to which the church builders designed it. Its breadth on the face is 16 inches, its height in front 11 inches, and at the back 15 inches. Its thickness at the bottom is 9 inches, and at the top 11 inches.

The inscription, which is evidently only a portion of the original, is in a sunk panel, the raised edge of which is complete at the bottom and on the right hand, whilst on the left it has been broken off. There has been a similar panel on both sides of the altar, but there are no sculptures of any kind visible.

With a further wish to recover, if possible, the full inscription, on April 13th Mr. T. Carey went with me to Netherhall. As the lettering on the left of the stone was very indistinct, we expected that our task would be a difficult one; but the experience I had gained whilst reading the altars at Rokeby (these *Transactions*, N.S., v., p. 121) proved very useful, although we had not the use of the lichen on this occasion.

We first thoroughly sponged the whole inscription with water, and then lightly dried the elevated portions with a duster. By this means the letters themselves were rendered much more recognizable. At length, after viewing them from various positions, besides using other expedients tending to produce a shadow, we came to the conclusion that the inscription is:—

C V R A N V M R M
C V R B A C O P R A E F
C O H T L I N G

Whether this is likely to prove a satisfactory rendering is quite another matter. We have, however, very little doubt about the correctness of the reading of the first line. As to the second we are not quite so confident. The initial C may or may not be there, but appearances strongly favour its presence. Then, again, between the letter B and Co are two strokes which we could scarcely identify as forming a letter. They are in the form given in the text, but the first stroke starts at the lower end of the down stroke of the B, and cuts the curve of the B; the second filling the space between the letters B and Co. Its height is some two-thirds of the height of the other letters. It is to be noted that the letter o after C is much smaller than the other letters. There can be no dispute as to the rendering of the third line.

Without attempting to give an explanation of this inscription, it might seem probable that the altar had been erected as a memorial of some work that had been executed under the care of the Prefect of the 2nd Cohort of the Lingones.

With regard to the uninscribed stone, it is apparently the right hand portion of the top of an altar. At first we thought it might have been the upper part of the inscribed portion, but we afterwards found reason to alter our opinion. It is 16 inches high, 8 inches broad at the top and 5 inches at the bottom, with a thickness of 9 inches. An ornamental band runs across the top, and then some eight inches down the right side. Assuming that the same band was on the left side, the space included between these lines was taken up with three sunk panels, each some two inches wide; two of them are slightly concave, the third, or lowest, being flat.
