

ART. VII.—*A forged Rock-Inscription near Lanercost.* By
R. G. COLLINGWOOD.

Read at Kendal, April 25th, 1928.

CUT on a rock-face on the left bank of the Banksburn, about half a mile north-east of Lanercost, and a quarter of a mile south of Hare Hill and the line of Hadrian's Wall, are the letters I BRVTVS DEC AL PET. They purport to be a Roman inscription, like the numerous others in this part of England,* left by men winning stone for the Wall or some other construction.

This inscription was first recorded in the year 1859, unlike the great majority of these rock-inscriptions, most of which had been well known for centuries. This may be plausibly explained by its comparative inaccessibility. All the others are easy to get at; this alone is in a place which can only be reached by some rather awkward scrambling. For the same reason, no doubt, it has been very seldom inspected by antiquaries since its first discovery; Bruce gives a good illustration of it in the *Lapidarium*, no. 402, but there is no independent reference to it by any other competent student of inscriptions. The voluminous MSS. and note books of Haverfield contain no record of his seeing it. My own first visit to it was in 1927, when I was making a special study of these Roman rock-inscriptions. I had no sooner set eyes on it than I was convinced of its being a forgery. My reasons, in the order in which they struck me, were these:—

* Coome Crag, two miles to the east, has a whole series of Roman inscriptions, in connexion with the traces of ancient quarrying. The cliffs above the Eden at Wetheral, two different rocks on the Gelt, and (farther away) the now perished written rocks of the Shawk and of Crawdendale Beck, show the same combination of Roman inscriptions and quarrying; and the same combination reappears once more at Fallowfield Fell near Hexham.

1. The rock-face on which it is cut is not a quarried face, but an entirely natural crag. This explains its inaccessibility—an inaccessible quarry being a contradiction in terms—but it caused me to ask myself, why should such an inscription have been cut here at all? All others of the class are definite records of quarrying; and people who have referred to the Banksburn inscription have explained it in the same way, but erroneously. This raised my suspicions of something wrong.

2. The rock is a reddish sandstone, to which weathering has given a greyer patina. This patina extends all round the letters, but inside the cutting (or rather punching) of the letters themselves there is no trace of patina; the surface of the stone is here quite fresh and red, indistinguishable in appearance from the surface exposed by a flake that has recently peeled away in the neighbourhood. Accustomed as I was to the well-patinated surface inside the letters of other written rocks, I could not but see that these letters were modern.

3. The EC of the word *dec(urio)* are tied together back to back. Except in the stamps of Samian potters, where all sorts of queer things happen, I have never seen this ligature in any other inscription from any part of the Roman world. Nor does it occur, so far as I know, in any compendium of abbreviations (*e.g.* in the table of nearly 300 given in Cagnat's *Cours d'Épigraphie latine*); and to an expert it has a most unnatural appearance. But an amateur forger would arrive at it by an easy, though fallacious, analogy with, for instance, the common ET ligature, which occurs no farther away than Coome Crag.

4. Another suspicious fact is that the A has a *very faint* V-shaped cross-bar, as if the cutter was in doubt whether to put it in or not. Now this V-shaped cross-bar is utterly un-Roman. It is Anglo-Saxon; and, significantly enough, a faint cross-bar of this same type has been wrongly thought to be present in an A in the Coome Crag

inscription. The mark in question, though certainly not part of the original A, may have been added by some modern person tampering with the original inscription (so Haverfield: *Ephem. Epigraphica*, ix, p. 603).

5. It had not occurred to me before that the name I BRVTVS is utterly impossible. There is no *praenomen* beginning I; and a *nomen* such as Iulius or Iunius would not be abbreviated to a mere initial unless the initial of a *praenomen* went before it. Q. I. BRVTVS is possible in an inscription, but not I. BRVTVS; though that formula does occur in special kinds of inscriptions, e.g. oculists' stamps, where the limitations of space are unusually severe. I think that a Roman cutting his name on a rock like this would certainly cut IVL. BRVTVS or the like.

But more disconcerting than the I is the Brutus. This *cognomen*, so far as I know, simply does not appear in Imperial times, and for an excellent reason. If the reader found a stone with the inscription J. ISCARIOT, LT.-COL., would he hesitate to identify the gallant officer's corps as the Horse Marines? But the name Brutus in the Roman Empire is the analogue of the name Iscariot in a Christian country.*

An amateur forger who had not the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* at his elbow would not know this. His education no doubt made him familiar with the name Brutus as a distinguished name in earlier history, and that was enough for him. As for the phrase *dec(urio) al(ae) Petr(ianae)*, he modelled it on the phrase *em(eritus) al(ae) Petr(ianae)* in an inscription (C.I.L. vii, 323) published by Camden and thence copied by many later antiquaries.

Motive and precedent for the forgery are easily found.

* Quell' anima lassù . . . è Giuda Scariotto . . .

Quei che pende dal nero ceffo, è Bruto . . .

Dante, *Inferno* xxxiv, 61.

The Reverend John Maughan of Bewcastle, who found this inscription in 1859, wanted to have a Roman station at Lanercost. He stated his views to this Society in 1867 in a paper published in the first volume of our *Transactions* (o.s. i, 46); but he had already laid it before the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries in 1858, when he read that Society a paper on the inscriptions at Lanercost and expressed his opinion that Lanercost was a Roman station (*Proc. Soc. Ant. Newcastle*, series 1, vol. i, p. 330; *Arch. Aeliana*, series 2, vol. iii, p. 39). This paper was not printed or abstracted, and one may infer that it was not well received. Certainly Dr. Bruce, the leader of opinion in such matters at Newcastle, was not likely to be impressed, as may be gathered from the fact that in the first and second editions of *The Roman Wall* (1851, 1853) he says nothing of a Roman site at Lanercost, though he was perfectly familiar with the Roman stones there.

Maughan's theory was not, in fact, supported by a single scrap of what we should now-a-days call evidence. He arrived at it partly *a priori* from reading the *Notitia Dignitatum*—where Petrianae comes next after Amboglanna, and must therefore, he supposed, be sought somewhere not very far west of Birdoswald—and partly by false inference from the fact that Lanercost Priory is largely built of Roman stones. He asserts that traces of Roman streets and buildings are visible on the priory green, and that a depression which had once been visible there might have been a relic of the Roman fosse. But, one need hardly add, the Roman stones prove nothing; they were brought from the Wall, whose nearest point is only half a mile away, as an obvious quarry; cases are numerous where ready-cut stone has been led from Roman sites by medieval builders a much longer distance than that. As for the alleged traces of Roman buildings on the green, they were trenched in 1895 (these *Trans.*

O.S., xiv, 195) and conclusively proved not Roman by complete failure to find anything Roman in them except (an exception that really *does* prove the rule) a Romano-British burial in a cist. This is proof positive that the ground in which it lay was not part of a Roman fort.

The very year after Maughan's abortive attempt to convince the Newcastle Society, this inscription was found. The situation was now changed; and evidently people felt that there was more in the Lanercost-Petrianæ theory than they had imagined. Bruce, in his third edition (1867) and his later *Handbook to the Roman Wall*, allowed himself to admit the possibility of a station here, in view of "indications of ramparts and a north gateway on the priory green," though at the same time he insisted that excepting the possible relics of a Roman bridge "there are no remains of Roman work at Lanercost" (*Wall*, ed. 3, 270) and that, when the ground is broken up, Roman pottery and other relics are never found (*Lapid. Sept.* p. 181).

Undoubtedly, this partial success of Maughan's theory was due simply and solely to the Banksburn rock-inscription. All else might be challenged by a sceptic: the stones might have been brought from the wall, the mounds on the green might be susceptible of another explanation: but here we were on firm ground. The inscription actually named the Ala Petriana, and the sceptics were confuted. (Illegitimately, in point of fact; because a unit mentioned in a rock-inscription never actually had its quarters close by; but let that pass). This gives its motive. The forger was certainly not Maughan himself, but someone who wished to take him in, and did it in exactly the right way, by giving him a bait he was sure to swallow. I may quote an acute remark made in connection with the greatest archaeological hoax on record:—"on prend les sardines avec de la rogne, on

prend les grives avec du genièvre, on prend les savants à thèses avec le mirage de leurs théories.”*

Who the forger was, I do not know and do not wish to know; but I suspect that he was the same person who imposed on Maughan by forging the Runic rock-inscriptions at Barnspike and Hazelgill.† These came to light in 1864 and 1872; they were eagerly accepted by Maughan and by Professor George Stephens of Copenhagen, to whom he communicated them; and it was not until 1899 that their true character was announced by Mr. W. G. Collingwood, who exposed both frauds in *Early Sculptured Crosses in the Diocese of Carlisle*. His results were accepted by Chancellor Ferguson and communicated to the Society of Antiquaries (*Proc. Soc. Ant.*, ser. 2, xviii, 88-91) with a confession that both he himself and Bishop G. F. Browne had long suspected the truth. Indeed, suspicion had been rife from the first. Dr. Edward Charlton of Newcastle had gone to see the Barnspike inscription and written: “what was my horror to see that it was freshly cut as on a tombstone of yesterday” (Stephens, *op. cit.* vol. I, p. 654). Of course the shepherds assured him that it had not been like that at first, but had been re-cut to get a good photograph!

Now the Barnspike forger, obsessed by the theory of Lanercost as Petrianae, had the effrontery to drag that identification by the heels into what purported to be a twelfth-century inscription, grotesquely calling Lanercost FETRIANA NU LLANERKASTA, “Petriana, now Lanercost.” How hard the way of transgressors can be, appears from the pathetic fact that no one recognised

* A. Vayson de Pradenne, *L’Affaire de Glozel*, in *Les Tablettes d’Avignon et de Provence*, October 1, 1927.

† Barnspike: *The Builder*, Oct. 8, 1864; Stephens, *Old Norse Runic Monuments*, vol. I, pp. 648-654, a long discussion contributed by Maughan.

Hazelgill: these *Trans.* o.s. I, 318 (article by Maughan); Stephens *op. cit.* vol. II, pp. 310-311.

this to be what he meant (his runes being too bad) until the inscription was re-examined, and incidentally nailed to the counter, by our present President.

Forged inscriptions are rare in this country; but not so rare as, in themselves, to deserve elaborate discussion. My only reason for giving the Society a paper on this one is that as archaeology becomes more popular, the inducement to fraud becomes stronger. It therefore behoves the antiquary to study the forger's habits. Here, in this corner of Cumberland in the middle of last century, we have what may almost be called a little local Glozel of our own; and it exhibits the characteristic features of Glozelism so perfectly, that it deserves attention.
