

ART. X.—*Robert Smith and the "Observations upon the Picts Wall" (1708-9)*. By the late R. C. BOSANQUET, edited by ERIC BIRLEY.

Read at Carlisle, September 13th, 1955.

INTRODUCTION. By ERIC BIRLEY.

ON 21 March 1933 R. G. Collingwood, then President of our Society, gave at its Spring Meeting the first report on a volume of Bishop Nicolson's diaries, covering the period from 25 March 1709 to the end of 1710, which had come to light long after most of its fellows and had been submitted to him for examination by Mr Nicholas Mansergh. Two years later, he published in our *Transactions* (CW2 xxxv 80-145) a transcription of the volume, furnishing it with an introduction in which he made acknowledgements to R. C. Bosanquet, then one of our Vice-Presidents, to whom he had referred it in March 1934 and who had called his attention to various matters of interest in its text, contributing several footnotes on individuals whom Bishop Nicolson has had occasion to mention in it. One such note (*ibid.*, 89) refers to entries of 13 April 1709 and 2 June 1710 and identifies the Mr Smith who occurs in them as Robert Smith of St. John's College, Cambridge, and Morton-house, Durham, adding that he was a kinsman of Dr John Smith (1659-1715) of the same college, treasurer of Durham and editor of Bede, who seems to have introduced him to Nicolson. The note continues:

"It was probably through J.S. that R.S. became a student of northern languages, and at his request that he visited the Picts' Wall in 1708 and 1709. His *observations*, from internal evidence, were primarily meant to throw light (1) on Bede's allusions to the Wall (2) on the site of Goodmanham in Yorkshire. The new volume of Nicolson's diary shows that he came

to Rose Castle in 1710 and visited the part of the Wall, west of Carlisle, which he omitted in 1708. His MS. was handed to Gibson, who inserted it in his *Camden* of 1722 so carelessly that the Goodmanham section appears at the end of the Observations on the Wall, and remained so in the second edition, though rightly placed in the third."

Before quoting this distillation of much research, thus generously communicated, Collingwood reported that its author had promised a note on Smith's career for these *Transactions*. But before Collingwood's article was in print, Bosanquet had died—on Easter Sunday, 1935; and the same volume includes a brief and moving memoir of him (unsigned, but certainly from Collingwood's pen).¹ Twenty years after, one still feels the sense of personal loss which the news of his death brought; yet to the younger men whom he led so patiently and helped so unselfishly, his example and his writings and the memory of his gay personality remain as a constant source of inspiration and encouragement.

I had for long assumed that the promised paper on Robert Smith was never written (so little leisure for writing did his friends leave him); but his son Dr C. I. C. Bosanquet, Rector of King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne, recently came across an envelope among his father's papers, endorsed in his writing "Smith of Durham", which proved to contain drafts of it. At my friend Professor Richmond's suggestion, Dr Bosanquet forwarded the MSS. to me, and I have to thank him for permission to edit them for publication, and for the opportunity which that has afforded me of paying my own tribute to the memory of a great scholar, "whom to know was at once to admire and to love."²

On internal evidence, Bosanquet had been working on the problems of the *Observations upon the Picts Wall*, and their authorship, for a considerable time before the

¹ CW2 xxxv 289-290; cf. also the memoir by R. H. Hodgkin, his brother-in-law, in AA4 xiii 1-8 (with frontispiece portrait), and *Robert Carr Bosanquet: letters and light verse*, ed. Ellen S. Bosanquet (1938).

² John Fenwick, writing of Anthony Hedley (quoted, AA4 xiii 168).

discovery of the Nicolson diary gave, directly, the answer at which he himself had already arrived by a process of eliminating all other contemporary Smiths of Durham (and there were a good many possible candidates to consider). Parts of earlier drafts remain in the envelope, probably because they contained points which he hoped to work into the final version of his paper. But the paper itself was clearly approaching completion when he laid it down, and the first long section, below, is given virtually in the form in which he left it. My own task has been to retain as much as possible of his own words, even though that has made it necessary to print as separate sections, paragraphs or pages which he would have welded into an artistic whole; the text, then, is his—but I must bear the responsibility for any lack of continuity between its sections.

It seems right that I should end this introduction with a list of those of his articles in *Archæologia Aeliana* which treat of the history of the Wall, and of the period in which Robert Smith lived; it is a splendid series to which this last paper provides, after many years, an epilogue.

"The Roman camp at Housesteads" (AA2 xxv 193-300, especially the first twelve pages, with their brilliant survey of the history of the site before his own excavations of 1898).

"Dr John Lingard's notes on the Roman Wall" (AA4 vi 130-162).

"Cavaliers and Covenanters: the Crookham affray of 1678" (AA4 ix 1-49).

"John Horsley and his times" (AA4 x 58-81; Bosanquet also made important contributions to Sir George Macdonald's "John Horsley, scholar and gentleman", *ibid.*, 1-57).

THE AUTHOR OF THE OBSERVATIONS.

By R. C. BOSANQUET (1872-1935).

Passages in the new volume of Bishop Nicolson's Diary confirm a conclusion that I reached some time ago about an old puzzle, the authorship of the first detailed description of the Roman Wall. In the second edition of his

recension of Camden's *Britannia* (1722) Bishop Gibson included two chapters entitled "Observations upon the Picts Wall, in a Journey made between Newcastle and Carlisle, in the year 1708, on purpose to survey it"; and "Observations upon that part of the Picts Wall which lies betwixt Newcastle and the Wall's-end; in a second Journey, begun May the 25th, 1709."³ Mr R. G. Collingwood long ago emphasized the value of this survey, with its "new accuracy" and good field-work—"a great advance on anything that preceded it."⁴ It is a matter of some historical interest to ascertain who made it and why.

We may rule out the suggestion made by John Hodgson and others, that Gibson himself was the writer,⁵ for in his preface (among acknowledgements to those who had revised or contributed chapters) Gibson mentions "the Bishoprick of *Durham*, by Dr. *Smith*, Prebendary of that Church; the Account of the *Picts-wall*, by another very worthy person of the same name and Country, whose accurate Survey of it is here printed at large." The author, then, was named Smith and belonged to the county of Durham. Gough, the next editor of Camden, knew this and no more: "The survey of the work in Gibson's Camden was made by one Mr. Smith of Durham, who is very incorrect in his account of the antiquities found there."⁶ That he should so underrate what Gibson had justly called an "accurate survey" is not surprising, for Gordon and Horsley had superseded it. In his own recension of Camden (1789) Gough therefore omitted the *Observations* and incorporated much of Horsley's description.

No help can be got from Gordon's *Itinerarium Septentrionale* (1726/27), since he refers only to the 1695

³ 2nd ed. (1722), ii 1051-1060; 3rd ed. (1753), same pages; 4th ed. (1772), ii 191-194.

⁴ JRS xi (1921) 49 f.

⁵ *Hist. of Northumberland* II iii (1840) 283, 293; JRS *cit.*

⁶ *British Topography* (1780), ii 62; Gough was at work on Camden from about 1773.

edition of Gibson's Camden. But Horsley used the 1722 edition and had studied the *Observations*. Once he names the writer: "Dr. *Hunter*, Mr. *Smith*, and others, take notice of some remains at Portgate"; once he chides "the Gentleman in the last edition of Cambden", and elsewhere refers to him merely as Cambden or Cambden's *Britannia*.⁷ As a contemporary and a local man, Horsley must have known who Mr Smith was, and we may infer from the sparing mention of him by name that Horsley regarded him as an amateur who had vanished from the archæological scene. He was in fact alive, but his interests lay in a different field, as we shall see.

The late Robert Blair, J. W. Fawcett of Satley (who had an intimate knowledge of Durham family history) and John Meade Falkner, late honorary librarian of the Durham Cathedral Library, did their best to identify him, but without success.

We meet Mr Smith of Durham, author of the *Observations*, in a letter written by Bishop Nicolson on 12 March 1708/9 to Ralph Thoresby of Leeds. In that winter Gibson (not yet a bishop, but employed as chaplain and librarian at Lambeth) was revising the northern counties for the second edition of his Camden. Although its publication was ultimately delayed till 1722, he was able to say on 4 March 1709/10 that "the preparations for the *Britannia* are as good as finished."⁸ Thoresby was responsible for Yorkshire, Nicolson for Northumberland. The three met in London in February 1708/9, and when Thoresby had gone home Nicolson wrote to him:

"Mr Smith (a gentleman of the county of Durham, who now sojourns here in Westminster) has put into my hand some very curious observations which he made this last summer on a view of the Picts' wall, from Newcastle to Carlisle. I am sorry that my business here will not allow me to converse with him so fully as I could wish; for in truth he seems to me to be an extraordinary person."⁹

⁷ *Britannia Romana* 142, 106, 216, 221.

⁸ *Thoresby Correspondence*, ii 229.

⁹ *Ibid.*, ii 144. One need hardly remark that *curious*, meaning "careful

High praise, but the bishop was impulsive: as Hearne said, "his Characters are generally very partial". The first mention of Smith in the diary, 14 February 1708/9, records a morning visit from "Dr. Smith and (the Anti-quary) his namesake." Nicolson returned Smith's visit on 18 February. On 15 March he notes a visit from "Mr. Smith (with K. J.'s Charter)". On 16 March, "Mr. Smith carried me to Mr. Leneve; who shew'd us *Dooms-day Book*, y^e Rolls of 20 Ed. I, *Testa de Nevil*, &c." Peter Le Neve, an old acquaintance of the bishop, was Richmond Herald and Norroy King-at-Arms, and had charge of the records at the Exchequer and in the chapter-house at Westminster.¹⁰

Since 1704, when he served on a "Committee for ordering the records in the Tower", Nicolson had been trying to bring about reforms. On 12 April 1709 he went with the Committee of Records to the Queen's Bench and Court of Wards, "the latter most scandalously neglected and abused by Mr. Grimes". Next day he showed the Court of Wards to his new disciple, and on 15 April "calling on Mr. Smith (in M. Court) we Row'd to Dr. Gibson's", at Lambeth, where perhaps the *Observations* were handed over for inclusion in the next edition of Camden. Then they visited the Tower, "where both y^e Repositories of Records shewn to Mr. S." They had another interest in common, "Septentrional learning", as the study of northern languages was then called. On 21 April they went together to see the great Saxonist, George Hickes, now old and infirm. They enjoyed other

and thorough", and *extraordinary* were used without any shade of irony. When Nicolson received his copy of the new Camden in 1695, he wrote that Wales was "admirably well done . . . Mr. Lhwyd is indeed an extraordinary person." And he wrote thus to Thoresby about William Gilpin of Scaleby castle: "The wall runs through his demesne, and he is a very curious gentleman. This lucky union of skill and opportunity makes me hope for a deal of light from him." (*Thoresby Corresp.*, i 203 and ii 26.)

¹⁰ The original diaries were lent in 1888 by Nicolson's descendant Colonel Lindesay, of Loughry, Co. Tyrone, to Bishop Harvey Goodwin and his daughter, Mrs H. Ware, who had them copied. The transcript then made is preserved in the Carlisle Public Library, and I am indebted to Mr Thomas Gray, F.L.A., for the extracts quoted above; they were omitted by the late Dr Henry Ware, bishop of Barrow-in-Furness, when he published extracts from the diaries in CW2 i-v (see especially, for this period, iv 45-49).

such evenings in later years; "hearty and free" is the bishop's comment after one of them (2 March 1710/11). In that circle of scholars ecclesiastical differences could be forgotten, though he once reminds himself that his host ranked as bishop of Thetford among the non-jurors and jots down, with a touch of Whig malice, "Dr. (or Bp.) Hickes".

Hitherto there has been no mention in the diaries of Smith's interest in Roman antiquities, but on 26 April he came "bidding farewell for his journey to-morrow". We may guess that he had promised to continue his survey of the Wall by following it from Newcastle to Wallsend, as we know he did at the end of May (p. 157, above). Nicolson was not in London the following winter, but in June 1710 "Mr. Smith of Morton-place", for the first time so identified, was his guest at Rose Castle. Smith arrived with Archdeacon (afterwards Bishop) Fleming, who seems to have been asked to meet him, and they left together five days later. The chaplain showed him the Roman fort at Old Carlisle, the bishop took the whole party to Bowness for a day on the Picts' Wall, and the archdeacon went with him another day to Carlisle. Thus Smith traversed most or all of the ground omitted in his first journey. If he wrote any account of what he saw, he was discreet in not offering it for publication, since his host, to whom the Wall had been entrusted in the previous edition, had a lifelong knowledge of this part of it.

The bishop went to London in December 1710, and soon had a visit from "Mr. R. Smith of Durham, studying Islandic". Plainly the northern languages were his main interest, as they had long been Nicolson's. There is a revealing entry on 25 January 1710/11: "Even. Visitted by Dr. Woodward, much in starch; Mr. Smith, my brother Antiquary, full of Willeramus, Tatian, &c. Dr. Dent, of Emptiness". Nicolson's own bent was towards Scandinavian literature and antiquities, but he had studied

at Leipzig and could share the young man's pleasure in Old High German books. The talk that he preferred to Woodward's and Dent's was about Willeram, abbot of Ebersburg, who wrote a paraphrase of the Song of Songs (c. 1060),¹¹ and the East Franconian version of Tatian's Gospel Harmony (c. 835),¹² recently printed from a manuscript in the Bodleian. Passing over other references to Smith in the unprinted part of the diary for February 1710/11, we come to 19 February, when they went to the "Rendezvous of ye Antiquaries at ye Fountain" (CW2 iv 49). The revived Society of Antiquaries, which had been meeting for three years with Le Neve as chairman, had moved in 1709 from the Young Devil tavern in the Strand to the Fountain, outside Temple Bar. Another evening at the Fountain followed a morning spent in making extracts at the Cotton Library. With his energetic friend the bishop interviews Bentley at the Royal Library, obtains a sight of the Parliament Office, and spends an evening "merrily" over records with Maddox, historian of the Exchequer. Smith is "for goeing to visit Mr. Harley" a few days after the great man had been wounded by Guiscard. He grows ambitious and would like to become secretary to some ambassador, whereupon Nicolson invokes the good offices of Robinson, bishop of Bristol, who had held diplomatic posts in Sweden and was a man of influence, soon to become Lord Privy Seal. Robinson was "very ready to assist" and saw Smith, but nothing came of it. The two were much together that spring (1711), examining Swedish books in Smith's rooms, walking round the Park, visiting Gibson at Lambeth and Maddox at the Remembrancer's Office. It was at the house of John Chamberlayne, another student of northern languages, that on 4 April Mr. R. Smith was "struck dead with ye news of my goeing away."

¹¹ Willeramus, *In Canticum Canticorum paraphrasis gemina*, ed. Merula, Leyden (1598).

¹² *Tatiani Harmonia Evangeliae antiquissima versio Theotisca*, ed. Jo. P. Palthenius, Greifswald (1706).

During the session of 1712 they met less often, and the London journal for 1713 is missing. For the spring of 1714 we have an almanac with notes of "Visits rec^d and given at Westminster" which shows that the friendship continued. The bishop asks Smith to dinner to meet Dr Gibson, or to supper at his favourite tavern, the Dog, with the dean of Limerick, a Cumberland man. So too in the session of 1715, which kept the bishop in town from March to September. They dine together half a dozen times, and escape on hot afternoons to pleasant places, Barn Elms or Battersea. "May 31, p.m. Mr. R. Smith, set on a Ramble" suggests that Smith was the driving force. There is no diary for 1716. The last mention of him that I have found is in a memorandum of "Letters written in y^e Road" to London, dated 7 February 1716/17: "Mr. R. Smith. I cannot ramble". Twenty years before this the bishop had been compelled by rheumatism to curtail his botanical walks: "I have not once gotten to the top of any of our mountains this year, tho' I used to have rambled over a good many of them before the season was thus far advanced".¹³ Now he was suffering from gravel, deep in politics moreover, and much at Court in his new office of Lord High Almoner.

Robert Smith thus disappears from the diary. What little is known of his later life is soon told. Surtees mentions a letter to him, dated Gray's Inn, 14 May 1717, from his cousin James Mickleton, another Durham antiquary, about a detail of family history.¹⁴ Smith may have left London before this. He does not appear among the members of the Society of Antiquaries when it was reconstituted in January 1717/18, though it included James Mickleton, their common friend Humphrey Wanley, and others of his circle. In 1727 he and his father, Thomas Smith of Morton House, Co. Durham, were parties to a deed concerning houses inherited from his maternal grandfather, Christopher Mickleton of Crook

¹³ Letter of 17 June 1697 (*Thoresby Corresp.*, i 292).

¹⁴ Surtees, *History of Durham* I ii 187.

Hall.¹⁵ His father was buried at Houghton-le-Spring on 11 May 1731, and "Robert Smith, Esq., of Morton-house" at the same place on 17 May 1760. The date of his death is given in a local diary: "1760, May 8. Died at Morton house, at an advanced age, Mr. Robert Smith, distinguished by the name of Count Smith".¹⁶

Had Count Smith earned his nickname by a sojourn abroad, satisfying that desire to see the world which had made him wish for a post at some embassy? If so, we can understand why he had no opportunity of revising the proofs of his *Observations* before they were given to the world in 1722. By an absurd blunder, the description of the Wall from Newcastle to Wallsend is interrupted by a paragraph of 53 lines relating to *Godmundingaham* (Goodmanham) in Yorkshire,¹⁷ after which the journey to Wallsend is resumed. Plainly the *Observations* on the Wall were followed by a report of a visit to Goodmanham, the scene of a famous episode in Bede's History, and editor or printer misplaced the pages. One thinks that if Smith had ever seen his work in print, he would have protested. It is strange enough that no one else noticed the mistake. Yet in the edition of 1753, though minor *errata* noted at the end of the previous one are put right, the intrusive Goodmanham passage stands uncorrected. In the edition of 1772, which underwent more searching revision, it is transferred to the proper place in the description of Yorkshire.¹⁸

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Prebendary Smith (1659-1715) was born at Lowther in Westmorland, where his father, William Smith, was rector; he was one of eleven brothers "all of whom rose to prominent positions".¹⁹ He had been preparing his

¹⁵ PSAN₃ ix 134.

¹⁶ *Diary of Thomas Gyll* (Surtees Society 110), 207.

¹⁷ 1722 ed., ii 1057-1059.

¹⁸ 1772 ed., ii 104.

¹⁹ D.N.B. (Surtees, however, in his pedigree gives only seven sons: *Hist. of Durham* IV ii 76 f., 96, 98). The Lowther parish registers give the baptisms of one daughter and nine sons between 1658 and 1676, the last with the name *Posthumus*; as William Smith became rector in 1657, he may well have had other children, born elsewhere before he came to Lowther.

edition of Bede since 1703, and divided his time between Durham (where he held the office of Treasurer as well as a prebend) and Cambridge, a better centre for his research. He was in touch with the Oxford school of Saxonists, and had sent his son George to study at Queen's College, under Thwaites.²⁰

Robert Smith (1682-1760) was a cousin of his wife's; he was the eldest son of Thomas Smith of Morton House, who belonged to the family of Smith of West Herrington, while his mother was a daughter of Christopher Mickleton of Crook Hall: thus he came on both sides of minor Durham gentry. He was educated at the Kepier grammar school at Houghton-le-Spring, and was admitted in 1697, at the age of 14, to St. John's College, Cambridge; he matriculated in 1699, but seems not to have taken a degree.²¹

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As to Robert Smith's methods and purpose, we must start from the internal evidence of the *Observations* themselves. In the edition of 1722, in which they were first printed, the additions written as supplementary notes for that of 1695, by Todd for Cumberland and by Nicolson for Northumberland, were incorporated in Camden's text, only distinguished from it by inconspicuous brackets. That text was itself a new translation made by different hands from Camden's Latin. The result is a patchwork, which has lost the unity of style and Elizabethan vigour of the original. In contrast to it, Smith's modest chapters stand out because they are homogeneous and full of zest, the work (one thinks) of a young man writing his impressions to a friend, without thought of publication. He knew the Camden of 1695, but had little knowledge of texts such as the *Notitia*. He accepts the identifications

²⁰ George Smith completed the work after the prebendary's death, and issued it in 1722 from the Cambridge press.

²¹ AA3 iii 314.

proposed in the 1695 edition, generally without question. These are:

Bowness	. Blatum Bulgium (1695 ed., 829 and 839).
Willowford	. Amboglanna (<i>ibid.</i> , 836, note).
Chesters	. Gallana (<i>ibid.</i> , 848).
Whitchester	. Vindolana (<i>ibid.</i> , 856).
Wallsend	. Vindobala (<i>ibid.</i> , 857).

Though he noticed the "foundation of a very large castle about one hundred and forty yards square" at "Burdissel" (Birdoswald),²² he was content to accept the less suitable site at Willowford for the station of *coh. I Aelia Dacorum*. At Walwick Chesters he goes further than Camden, who only says "which some have fancy'd to be the Gallana of Antoninus", and makes the positive statement "at this place hath been fixed the fort Gallana"; here he is probably trusting to Morden's map. It is only at Housesteads, which Camden had not visited, that he thinks for himself. Noticing Camden's remark (erroneous by the way) that *coh. I Tungrorum* lay at "Bremetura cum along the Wall" (*ibid.*, 835), and finding inscriptions of that unit at Housesteads, he identifies that fort as Bremetura cum. Like Camden, he calls Whitchester *Old Winchester* and places *Vindolana* there because of the resemblance of the name: yet they both saw the fort at Rudchester, so near as to make the coexistence of a fort at Whitchester improbable. He attempts no other identification until, in his second journey, he reaches Wallsend, which like Camden he takes to be Vindobala, relying on a false etymology. In short, Smith had made no study of the original sources, such as the Notitia, but was content to rely on Camden's account with Nicolson's additions of 1695.

Though scholar enough to read Roman inscriptions, he makes no effort to copy them, even at Housesteads—as he should have done, if his object had been to supplement Camden's record, since previous editions had given

²² Sir Christopher Ridley had mentioned it in his list of forts c. 1572 (Hodgson, *Hist. of Northumberland* III ii 273).

no inscription from that site. But in contrast to his silence about classical texts and indifference to inscriptions we may note his keen interest in Bede.

The breadth of the Wall between Carrawburgh and Chollerford is "eight foot, as Bede describes it" (1722 ed., ii 1054). At "Waltown" (the modern Welton in Ovingham parish), identified by Camden as Bede's *Ad Murum*, he enquires in vain for some local "tradition of its having been a Royal Vill in the time of the kings of Northumberland, or, of either King *Penda's* or *Sigbert's* King of the *East Angles*, being baptized there by *Finan* Bishop of *Lindisfarne*". This argues acquaintance with Bede,²³ for Camden's text does not mention that *Ad Murum* was a *villa regia*. He then recalls that at another Waltown, east of Carvoran, "they have a tradition of a certain King's being baptized in a Well hard by, which they shewed me; but then it by no means agrees with the distance of twelve miles from the Sea, which *Bede* makes *Ad Murum* to be" (*ibid.*, 1054-5). Summing up his impressions, he returns to Bede's statement about the thickness of the Wall as though he had been asked to verify it. Nicolson, in one of his additions to the 1695 edition, had said:

"Bede's account of the Roman Wall . . . is very likely, fair and true. For in some places on the Wasts, where there has not been any extraordinary Fortifications, several fragments come near that height, and none exceed it. His breadth also (at eight foot) is accurate enough: For, wherever you measure it you will always find it above seven."²⁴

In place of this comfortable generalisation, our Observer gives particulars which show that the question had been in his mind throughout the journey.

We get a clue to his motive when we find his answer incorporated in an appendix to Prebendary John Smith's edition of Bede, "*De praetenturis murisque quos Romani in Britannia fecerunt*":

²³ *Hist. Eccles.* iii 22, cf. 21.

²⁴ 1695 ed., 869 (referring to Bede, *op. cit.*, i 12).

Observations &c., 1057 f.:
 "As to *Bede's* observation of the *thickness* of the Wall (*viz.* eight foot) it seems generally to hold . . . except upon those steep and ragged hills in the Wastes, where it was little above five foot, or however not full six, thick."

1056: The ditch is found before the Wall "even upon the highest hills, excepting only the space afore-mentioned between *Caervorran* and *Seaven-Shale*; where the vast and horrid steepness of the Rocks to the North, is more than a sufficient security to it."

The last words of the Latin expand "inaccessible" in an earlier passage, describing the tract in question:

"From the top of the *Thirlewall*-bank, to *Seaven-Shale*, for eight or nine miles together, the Wall runs over the summits of steep, ragged, bare, and inaccessible rocks on the north-side, being built only at eight, six, five, four, and very often at scarce two yards from the very precipice" (1052).

It becomes clear that in writing the *Observations* Robert Smith did not set out to correct or add to Camden, but to furnish Dr John Smith with information that he required for his forthcoming edition of *Bede*. He was asked, I suggest, to survey the Wall (his own word) and to answer certain questions; and it was perhaps only due to Nicolson's suggestion that the resulting documents were passed to Gibson and ultimately used in the edition of 1722.

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Robert Smith's survey has historical value as the first continuous description of the Roman frontier-works. Leland and Camden had dealt with them piecemeal in their sections on Cumberland and Northumberland, but had not traced the line from fort to fort or described the

Dr. John Smith's *Bede*,
 App. V, 665:

Hic autem accurate notatur muri apud Northumbros latitudo, nisi quod quinque vel sex pedes tantum latus sit in acclivibus et praeruptis montibus, qui ab ipsa natura septi fere et muniti contra ferocissimam inimicorum rabiem videbantur.

state of the remains in successive sectors. The survey was made in the two years following the Union, which took effect on 1 May 1707 and made possible, if it did not immediately bring about, the maintenance of order in the moorlands between Irthing and North Tyne.

Camden had been kept from visiting Great Chesters, Housesteads and Chesterholm (to use the modern names) in 1599 by fear of border thieves, for that in the speech of his time is the equivalent of his *praedones limitanei*, which Philemon Holland rendered in his loose way as "rank robbers", and Gibson as "moss-troopers" — an anachronism, for this name is no older than the Civil War. The Union of 1603 did not mend matters. Though the riding clans were dislodged from Liddesdale and the northern fells of Cumberland, broken Nixons and Nobles and Armstrongs shifted to the uplands south and east of Bewcastle. In the last years of the 17th century Housesteads and Grandees' Knowe, an adjoining farm, were the headquarters of a gang of horse-stealers who operated as far north as Perth and as far south as the Midlands; and it was only in 1701 that a more than usually savage crime roused the country against them. Nicholas Armstrong of Housesteads had sold the freehold to Thomas Gibson, a Jacobite and Roman Catholic gentleman of Hexham, in 1698, but he and his three brothers were tolerated as tenants until the law finished their business, about 1704, by hanging Nicholas and driving the others to renew their enterprises in America.²⁵

As early as 1702, Dr Christopher Hunter had reported to the Royal Society on inscriptions at Chesterholm and Housesteads. Bred at Medomsley, just across the Durham border, he was wooing Margaret Elrington of Espersields on the Northumberland side of Derwent. His family had Jacobite sympathies and he was a physician, two qualifications which might serve as pass-

²⁵ One of the horse-stealing firm, Thomas Armstrong, known as "Luck-in-a-bag", probably a cousin of the Housesteads brothers, survived to join the rising of 1715, as did George Gibson, eldest son of the owner of Housesteads.

ports in that dangerous neighbourhood.²⁶ It might have been anticipated that Dr John Smith would have turned to Hunter, a member of his college who had already visited the Wall, for answers to his series of questions. But there is reason to think that during these very years Hunter was in bad health. Nichols, in his *Literary Anecdotes*,²⁷ mentions "a fall from his horse, in consequence of free drinking while at College, about 1708 or 1709, by which he received so violent a shock as greatly endangered his life, and for a long time affected his intellect"; and it was not until 1717 that he resumed his contributions to the *Philosophical Transactions*.

It was, I suggest, during this eclipse of Hunter's powers that Dr John Smith, feeling the need of further information about the Wall, bethought him of a younger member of the college, a kinsman of his own, who shared his interest in Bede, and in Old English. It may be noted that on 16 March 1708/9 Bishop Nicolson visited the 'Saxon Nymph', Elizabeth Elstob, and her brother William, to pay in four subscriptions to her *English-Saxon Homily*, which appeared in the following autumn. In the list of subscribers to that work the two names which we have been dealing with stand side by side: "Dr. Smith, Preb. of Durham, Mr. Robert Smith, of Morton-House, in the Bishoprick of Durham". Robert Smith's interests made him particularly well qualified for the mission which, as we have seen, the prebendary asked him to fulfil.

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Robert Smith made one enduring contribution to the nomenclature of the Wall, for he gave currency to the convenient word *milecastle*. Camden, as translated by Gibson, had spoken of "Turrets or little Castles a mile from one another, call'd now Castle-steeds" (1722 ed.,

²⁶ For Hunter, cf. now the paper by our member the Rev. John Rogan, "Christopher Hunter, antiquary" (AA4 xxxii, 1954, 116-125), which discusses the importance of his contributions to the study of the Wall. E.B.

²⁷ viii 282 ff., quoted in AA2 xv 171; cf. also Surtees, *Hist. of Durham* ii 288.

ii 1049). Smith in his very first paragraph has "little Towers or mile-Castles", and in his *resumé* (1055) "little Forts or Castles, which the Inhabitants thereabouts call *Mile-Castles*, as built at every mile's end; and so I believe they really were, for, at that distance, I have observed several". By "inhabitants" he certainly meant the country-people. Elsewhere he says, "the Wall is generally called by all the Inhabitants that live nigh it, the *Pight* or *Piaght*-Wall, gutturally, and with an aspiration, scarce pronouncing the *t*" (1057); and of the Chapel-hill at Housesteads, "the Inhabitants do still call it the *Chapel-steed*". But was milecastle really the popular name? Horsley questions it, for he must have had Smith's statement in mind when he wrote, some twenty years later, "they are constantly called *castles* or *castle-steeds* by the country-people . . . These *castella* are by some modern authors called *mile castles* or *milliary castella*".²⁸ Yet we cannot doubt Smith's statement. Perhaps the name was coined by some of the *litterati* (such as Nicolson and Gilpin in Cumberland or Cay, Hunter²⁹ and the Gibsons in Northumberland) who preferred it to *castle-steeds* with its rustic flavour, and was adopted from them by farmers and shepherds with whom successive travellers talked. Seed sown by a passing antiquary is often harvested as a local tradition.

The new name did not make its way at once. Gordon used *watch-tower*. Horsley adopted *castellum*, and his lead was followed by Wallis, Hutchinson and Brand. Hutton (1801) is, I think, the first writer to use *mile-castle* consistently, and he probably got it from the *Observations*, which down to his day were the best account of a journey along the Wall. Lingard in 1807 reverted to *castle stead*. John Hodgson generally wrote *castellum*, and confirmed Horsley as to the popular name being

²⁸ *Britannia Romana* 118.

²⁹ Hunter, we can now add, noted that the Wall "as I was told has been defended by a square tower at every mile" (AA4 xxxii 122): this comes very close to establishing *milecastle* as early as 1702. E.B.

castle-stead; he uses that name once and *mile-castle* at least once in his description. The regular modern use dates from Clayton's report on his excavation of the Cawfields milecastle in 1847-48,³⁰ and was popularised by Bruce, who adopted it in his programme for the Pilgrimage of 1849, and in the successive editions of his book on the Wall.

³⁰ AA1 iv 54: "Excavations at Cawfields mile castle" (1848); *ibid.*, 269: "Disinterment of the Housesteads mile castle" (1853).