

ART. V.—*The discovery of Roman altars at Busbridge Hall, near Godalming, Surrey.* By R. P. WRIGHT, M.A., F.S.A.

Read at Alnwick, September 6th, 1975.

TWO discoveries of Roman inscriptions were made in 1923 and 1926 in the Godalming area, and the credit for these belongs to the late Rev. H. M. Larner, then Rector of Busbridge. The photograph and details which he provided enabled R. G. Collingwood to identify the first stone, found¹ at Great Munstead Farm, a mile south-east of Busbridge Hall, as a dedication to Cocidius, a local god of Northumberland and Cumberland, by the First Cohort of Dacians, the unit stationed at Birdoswald, on the western portion of Hadrian's Wall. In 1926 Mr Larner discovered two more inscribed altars (*RIB* 1980, 2025) and a small one with its text then weathered away built into a rough wall beside the Ghost Walk in the grounds of Busbridge Hall. These four items were later placed in Godalming Museum and in 1959 were transferred to Carlisle Museum, in the region from which they had been derived. A dedication-slab (*RIB* 2075) was also discovered in 1926 serving as the keystone of the entrance to a grotto on the north side of the Upper Lake at Busbridge Hall.

In CW2 xxviii 129-141, in "The Scaleby Castle Roman Antiquities", Collingwood showed that these inscriptions and a few others had formed the collection of antiquities which had been assembled at Scaleby Castle, five miles north-east of Carlisle and one mile

¹ R. G. Collingwood and R. P. Wright, *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain* I, no. 1872. The substance of this present paper was sent to the Godalming Angling Society, probably to form an appendix to their Jubilee History.

north of milecastle 61 on Hadrian's Wall, between 1694 and 1741 by William Gilpin, Recorder of Carlisle, and his son, Richard Gilpin. In 1741 Richard Gilpin sold the estate to Edward Stephenson, sometime Governor of Bengal, but the latter did not take up his residence in the Castle. No details have been traced of the date when the stones were transferred to Busbridge, or of the person who secured the transfer. But it is highly probable that this was Philip Carteret Webb, a well-known local antiquary and member of Parliament, and a dilettante who built several romantic structures in the extensive grounds of Busbridge Hall, which he acquired in 1748. In his list Collingwood cites three inscribed altars and one with no inscription which "remain undiscovered", and two other uninscribed stones which lack sufficient detail to be identified now.

The lacuna in the record of the Scaleby Castle stones has now been filled in by the Godalming Angling Society, and its members deserve our warmest congratulations. In the spring of 1973 their clearance of the silt in the Lower Lake at the west end of the grounds of Busbridge Hall laid bare five altars² grouped in an arc some three metres across the chord at the north-east margin of the lake. From left to right they were:

(a) *RIB* 1992. Red sandstone altar, 52 cm. wide by 102 cm. high by 33 cm. deep, with no *focus* but with a band of carving on the right side of the capital. Five centimetres of the surface have flaked off the capital and upper left corner of the die, but the text on the altar is preserved nearly as well as it was when Horsley drew it about 1729 at Scaleby Castle. It reads:

[DEO] SOLI|[I]NVICTO|

SEX·SEVE|RIVS SA|LVATOR|[P]RAEF|[V S]L M

"To the Invincible Sun-god, Sextus Severius Salvator, prefect, willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow."

² See *Britannia* V (1974), 462-463, nos. 9-12.



Photo: D. G. Bird

PLATE I.—Birdoswald altar from Busbridge Park
(Scale: 1/12).

This altar came from the fort of Castlesteads. The unit was five hundred men strong, as it was commanded by a prefect.

(b) Buff sandstone altar, 61 cm. wide by 107 cm. high by 39 cm. deep, with elaborate decoration. The die carries no trace of any incised lettering, although a text may once have been painted upon it. Part of the capital has been scooped away. On the face there are four roundels and two objects like cups. On the left side of the die is a tall one-handled jug, and on the right a two-handled cup on a tripod. It was drawn in, or before, 1726 by Alexander Gordon at Scaleby Castle, and is published in his *Itinerarium Septentrionale* (1726), p. 95, plate XLII, figs. 1-3.

(c) *RIB* 1977. A red sandstone altar, 20 cm. wide by 28 cm. high by 13 cm. deep, with plain sides and a round *focus* and two bolsters, had probably become detached from the central recess. Part of the base, drawn by Gibson long before 1740, later broke away. The surviving dowel hole was probably cut for placing it on a pedestal at Busbridge Hall. It³ reads:

DEO·S(ΛNCTO)·BE|LΛTVCΛ[D]|RO
 Λ(R)V(LΛM)·DO[N(ΛVIT)]|·VLLINVS|
 V(OTO) S(OLVTO).

“To the holy god Belatucadrus Ullinus gave this small altar with his vow fulfilled.”

(d) Not in *RIB*. Plate (opposite). Buff sandstone altar, 55 cm. wide by 110 cm. high by 23 cm. deep, with rectangular *focus*. On the front of the capital there is a band of decoration, on its right side is a jug and on the left perhaps the base of a pan. On the right side of the die is an axe and on the left a cleaver. The text, especially the top three lines, is weathered. It reads:

³ For *arulam donare* see *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, xiii, 569. Although this interpretation is unusual it seems preferable to the assumption that a dedicator of a small altar in the third century had three names. Professor S. S. Frere and Dr J. C. Mann gave help in the solution of this text.

[D]EO|NEP[T]VNO|REGINIUS|IVSTINVS|
 TRIBVNVS|[V]OTVM|LIBENS|SOLVIT|ME[RITO].

“To the god Neptune Reginius Justinus, the tribune, willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow.”

It is unusual for the formula of dedication in II.6-9 to be set out unabbreviated. A good example of a dedication to Neptune, as god of the inland waters, comes from the fort of Castlecary on the Antonine Wall (*RIB* 2149). Although the unit is not mentioned the rank of *tribunus* shows that it was one thousand strong. In the context of the Scaleby Castle collection this means Birdoswald, and not Castlesteads. As the earlier accounts give no record of this altar it seems highly probable that it was added to the collection between Horsley's last visit to Scaleby Castle (about 1729) and Richard Gilpin's sale of the Castle in 1741.

(e) *RIB* 1994. Red sandstone altar, 56 cm. wide by 89 cm. high by (now) 15 cm. deep, with a round *focus* and two bolsters and plain sides. When a fallen tree was being cleared in the spring of 1973 it was found to have sheared off the surface of the die. One fragment was recovered, reading: DEO · S[OLI Horsley recorded:

DEO SOLI MITR(AE) | . . .]VIS| . . .]COR|

“To the Sun-god Mithras . . .” As the face of the die and the front of both capital and base had been lost it did not seem worth including this damaged altar in the transfer to Carlisle.

The Reverend Mother General of the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood, Ladywell Convent, Godalming, has graciously allowed the transfer of items (a), (b), (c) and (d) for placing on permanent loan in Carlisle Museum, which serves the area from which they came into the hands of the antiquary, Philip Carteret Webb. All who are keen

on Roman inscriptions must express their deep gratitude to the Mother General and her Congregation for their generous loan and to Miss Clare Smith and to Mr and Mrs D. G. Bird for their indispensable help in the examination of the altars and in negotiating this transfer.