

## Melandra Castle, Derbyshire.

By ROBT. HAMNETT.



MELANDRA CASTLE is situated at Lower Gamesley, Charlesworth, in the ancient Parish of Glossop, Derbyshire. Melandra is a Roman name derived from the Greek *Melandryon*, which means "a herb among corn, with a white flower."\* We know that the ancient Britons cultivated corn, and it is quite probable when the Romans selected this site for the station, the herb might have been so prevalent there as to induce the Romans to give it this name; but, according to William Thompson Watkin's *Roman Cheshire*, the proper name is *Lerdotalia* or *Ledrotalia*. It is, however, better known by the name of Melandra Castle. Glossop is surrounded by hills belonging to the British Alpine Range, and, prior to 1792, there were no turnpike roads through it, only pack-horse roads and footpaths, consequently, it was difficult of access, and, apparently, escaped the notice of antiquaries.

I am not aware that anything was known of its antiquities before July, 1771, when the Rev. John Watson, Rector of Stockport, visited Melandra Castle, and identified it as a Roman station. He wrote a letter to the Rev. Mr. Norris, Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries, London, describing his discoveries, which that gentleman read to the Society on the 10th December, 1772, and which appears in full—with a sketch of the plan of the station, and translation of an inscribed stone—in Vol. III. of *Archæologia*, 1775.

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\* *Μελανδρῶν* = *the heart in oak timber*. Perhaps so named from the abundance of stout oaks in the vicinity.—ED.

Mr. Watson, it is well known, was a trustworthy authority, being careful not to make any statement unless he had convincing evidence of its truthfulness, therefore, his letter is most important to us, as it gives a better idea of the station than we can form from its present condition. "The plough had not then defaced it, and its form could not be mistaken."

The form of the station was a parallelogram, with the corners rounded off; its extent, 122 yards by 112 yards; and the walls were twelve feet thick, their height, of course, not now being ascertainable, but sufficient, we may depend, to resist any sudden onslaught.

There were four entrances, and, most probably, an inscribed stone over each, as one was found by the farmer who farmed the land, a few years previous to Mr. Watson's visit. The farmer had this stone built over the doorway of his house, where it remained until 1842, when the farmhouse was pulled down and re-erected, the stone being again built in the wall, over a doorway, exposed to the weather, and there it remains to this day. By the way, the site of the station seems to have been a veritable quarry to the farmers in the vicinity for dressed stone, for most of the farm-houses, barns, out-buildings, and fence-walls in the neighbourhood contain considerable quantities of stone obtained from this Roman station, the nature of the stone and the peculiar manner in which it was dressed—by a kind of pick—making them easily distinguishable.

I have brought with me a plaster cast of the inscribed stone, also a photo of same. If you compare them with Watson's engravings in Vol. III. of *Archæologia*, you will perceive a slight difference—for instance, there is no dot in the centre of the O; Watson has a dot between L·V: it should be on the other side of the V; and the conjunction of the  $\pi$  are separated. I am not in a position to say it alters the translation, but it may be a point worth noting; however, Watson's translation has never been questioned, and it is thus: "Cohortis, Primæ, Frisianorum, Centurio, Valerius Vitalis"—that is, "Valerius Vitalis,

commanding a century, or company of the first Cohort of the Frisians, was stationed here.”\*

Of all the numerous officers of the twentieth Legion—in the long period the Romans were stationed here—who commanded detachments, Valerius Vitalis is the only one whose name we have any record of—such is fame!

The Right Honourable Lord Howard of Glossop is presenting a Technical School to Glossop, and when it is completed, I hope this Society will make such representations to his Lordship as will persuade him to have the stone removed from its present position—being on his estate—and placed in a suitable case in the Technical School, where it could be better and more conveniently seen, until such times as we have a regular, properly cared-for museum.

In 1832 a portion of a larger inscribed stone was found, and so little was thought of it by the finder that Captain de Holyngworthe, of Holinworth Hall, purchased it for 2s. 6d. I have, fortunately, a sketch of it, made from the original fragment by Mr. Ralph Bernard Robinson, author of *Longdendale*.

The stone was evidently of far greater importance than the one existing, the letters “I M P” indicating a more exalted personage, probably the name of the reigning Emperor when the station was built; unfortunately, since Captain de Holyngworthe’s death, all trace of the fragment has been lost.

Previous to the reservoir belonging to the Manchester Corporation being made at the Hague on the Cheshire side, the river Etherow was undermining the bank, and it was found necessary to build a wall to prevent its encroachments. For this purpose the workmen took away all the stone then lying at Melandra, and amongst them was another inscribed stone. One of the men employed had no knowledge of its antiquarian value, and built it in the interior of the wall, though a bystander remonstrated with him for so doing, using these words in the local dialect: “Thart puttin’ summut in neaw ut ull be wanted sum day.” A

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\* An engraving of this stone and inscription is given in Gough’s *Camden’s Britain*, Vol. II., 431, Ed. 1806.

few days afterwards, Mr. Bennett Woodcroft, a gentleman visiting in the neighbourhood, hearing of the matter, went to the place and offered £5 if the workmen would recover the stone, but the clerk of the works would not permit the wall to be taken down, as the exact spot where it was could not be accurately located. I mention this, so that if at any future time it is found necessary to take down the wall, the stone may be looked for and taken care of. The other, and the remaining portion of what is called the Holyngworthe stone, remain yet undiscovered.

The station is situated, as many Roman stations are, at the confluence of two streams, the Glossop brook and the river Etherow, and on elevated ground. According to W. T. Watkin, the famous Roman Consul and General, Agricola, wintered at Chester in the year of 78 and the early part of 79, and took the opportunity of tracing the tributaries of the Mersey to their source. If this is true, which I have no reason to doubt, then he would come up the Etherow, and it was to him that Melandra Castle owed its existence.

The Etherow, before the Manchester Corporation took most of the water, was a river of much larger volume and dimensions than now, and must at the period of the appearance of the Romans have abounded with salmon and other fish, which would, of course, be acceptable to the Roman soldiers, furnishing them with sport and also a welcome source of food supply. The brook, the river, and the declivities protected the station on two of its sides, the other two sides being protected by deep ditches, part of which yet remain. The proximity of the British fortress at Mouselow rendered it absolutely necessary for a station here, and no better site, from a Roman point of view, could have been selected. It was not so elevated as to expose the garrison to the cold winds, so prevalent on the adjacent hills, and sufficiently far enough away from them to prevent—by judicious posting of sentries and picquets—being taken by surprise. The Druidical remains found in the neighbourhood, and the revelations of the bone caves and barrows in the Peak, are sufficient evidence to convince us that there must have been a large force of Britons

inhabiting this part of the country, and as the country was well wooded, hilly, and almost inaccessible, many severe conflicts must have ensued before the Romans became firmly established.

There is a tradition in the neighbourhood that Mouselow Castle, the British fortress mentioned, was attacked by an enemy, whose nationality is not known, and that a dreadful battle took place. Certain it is that on the side which is most accessible there is a field, named in old deeds, "Almen's Death," and many remains of weapons of war have been turned up there by the plough. I have here a spear-head found during excavating operations, in the clay near to the castle. I am unable to say whether it is Roman or British, but of its antiquity there can be no doubt.

Another place near to is called Redgate, and tradition asserts that it is so called because of the blood which flowed down the bank. Watson visited Mouselow shortly after visiting Melandra—they are within a mile of each other—before the hill was planted with trees, and he describes it as a place of great strength, defended by ditches, which are even now plainly discernible. Whether the battle, which tradition says took place, was between the Romans and Coritani, or during Anglo-Saxon times, will probably never be known, but it is scarcely credible that the British fortress would be abandoned without an attempt at defence. That an attempt was made by the natives to drive the Romans from their camp is inferred from the battle-axes and other British weapons that have been found there.

In 1865 the tenant of the land was digging for stone, and he discovered one of the entrances to the station. The stones then unearthed are lying in the area of the station, and are of large size. There is a key stone of an arch, several cap stones, and pilasters. The workmanship is rude, what one might expect from unskilled labour, working under the direction of a mason. In several cases, where an attempt at ornamentation has been made, the workman, in measuring off his distances, has sunk the tool used too deep in the stone. The large size of the stones used,

the width, and the extent of the walls, shows plainly that the station was a most important one, and their solidity proves that the Romans had fully made up their minds for a lengthened occupation.

I have here a portion of cement, or concrete, from Melandra, used for filling up the interior of the walls. It is composed of gravel and sand from the river bed, and united by magnesium lime from Ardwick, Manchester, which is another link in the chain confirming that Melandra was contemporary with the Roman forts at Stockport and Manchester. Whittaker, in his *History of Manchester*, 1773, says on this point, "In making the Roman mortar, the sand was mingled with the lime, unrefined by the screen, and charged with all its gravel and pebbles. On breaking it, some of the mortar appears to have been tempered with powdered brick; small fragments of the latter very prettily chequering the surface, and being thoroughly incorporated with the said substance. The lime was not derived from the hills of Buxton or Clitheroe, which have long supplied the town with that necessary fossil. The Roman is strikingly different from that of both in its colour, being of a much shadier and browner hue." Whittaker, when writing this description of the cement, had no knowledge that such a place as Melandra Castle existed, yet his description corresponds with this portion I found there. About two years ago during sewage operations at Stockport, a Roman brick kiln was discovered, also a large number of tiles and bricks of all descriptions. These correspond in shape, colour, etc., with the bricks and tiles found at Melandra, the latter having evidently been made there. They are made of Permian Marl and sand in various proportions. This kind of marl does not exist in the neighbourhood of Melandra, and is not to be found nearer than Stockport, at the spot where the brick kiln is.

In 1841, Messrs. Shepley, of Brookfield, had occasion to make a "race," "goyt," or "cut," as it is variously locally called, in connection with their mill dam, and discovered a stone coffin within a hundred yards to the east of the station. Among the *débris* was also a coin of Domitian, who was Emperor of

Rome 81 to 96. If we take, then, into consideration, the nature of the Roman cement, the tiles, the date of the coin, and the probable visit of Agricola, we can fix the date of the erection of the station not later than from A.D. 77 to 84. Many coins of Domitian have been found in the area of the station, but have got into the possession of private collectors.

In January of the present year, Mr. John Hurdman, of Glossop, and myself, were walking round the area, when we noticed that a portion of the old fence wall had recently fallen down. On examination, we found in the foundation of the wall a brick, and on removing this from the soil we perceived some lettering which at first sight we took to be the word DRAIN, but on closer observation we found it was a Roman inscription "DRAIW." That it is Roman can scarcely be doubted; it is longer, wider, thinner, pressed from the narrow side, and composed of the glacial clay found on the site; the material is better tempered and burnt than any local modern brick—in fact, there was scarcely any brick used in Glossop fifty years ago, before the advent of the railway, stone being so plentiful at hand—the conjunction of the last two letters W, the known antiquity of the site, and the age of the fence wall, all being evidence in its favour.

Watson mentions seeing a gravel road leading from Melandra, and pointing towards Stockport, another road passing through the Hague and Mottram-in-Longdendale to Doctor's Lane Head, where it joined the great military road from Manchester to York. Another road, called the Doctor's Gate, passed through Glossop to the Roman station at Brough. This road was of great value from several points of view. It enabled reinforcements to be sent quickly right into the heart of the mountain fastness of the Peak; was a means of keeping the turbulent tribes in check; and was available for conveying mineral and other resources of the country to the various headquarters of the Roman legions. The road was paved with large stones, proper drains being made where necessary. A considerable portion of this road was used up to 1821, when the opening of the Sheffield turnpike road led to its

disuse. In some places it is in excellent preservation, and worthy of a visit by members of this Society. Another road went to Buxton, where the Romans had baths, and where they probably sent their sick, using the place as a sanatorium. Watson states that the foundations of a large building, in the area 25 yards square, with walls  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet thick, was distinctly traceable, and he is of opinion that it was the praetorium, the residence of the commander of the detachment and governor of the districts, the place where markets were held and justice dispensed. Watson also mentions a subterraneous stream of water. This issues some distance down the hill side, and from its direction evidently passes immediately under the centre of the station. There is another and similar one about one hundred yards to the west. I am of opinion that if this was examined, it would prove to be one, if not the main sewer. At one point the archway must have given way, as at this particular place the earth continually sinks in, and, being near to a footpath, the farmer is periodically filling the hole up with fresh soil; you can see the sand washed out by the water at the exit.

When the natives became reconciled to their lot, wolves, boars, deer, and bears being plentiful, the garrison would not lack for want of sport—hunting, fishing, bear-baiting, and hawking finding them in amusements to fill up their time when not occupied with military duties.

After some years of occupation, time-expired soldiers and colonists settled under the protection of the station, midway on the slopes of the surrounding hills, inter-marrying with the natives, and forming British-Romano settlements. Roman coins have been found in nearly all of the surrounding hamlets and villages. In 1838, in a field near Hooley Wood Quarry, two men, John Hyde Roberts and George Rolley, whilst removing the soil, discovered a considerable quantity of Roman coins of Billon. The coins were mostly those of Alexander Severus—one of which I have had lent me for this occasion—and Julia Maesa, all of them being of a later date than some of those found at the station. Nearly a century ago, whilst digging the foundations for a mill at



Woolley Bridge, a beautiful Roman sepulchral urn of red earthenware was found. It remained in the possession of Messrs. Lees, the owners of the mill, until some years ago, when a careless servant knocked it from the mantel, and it was broken beyond repairing. Another one found on the site is in Warrington Museum, along with other curios from this ancient military position.

It has been stated by several historians that the plain at the foot and to the north of Melandra was at the time of the Roman occupation a vast lake, and that these people cut the hill at Best Hill, Broadbottom, thus letting off the waters and effectually draining the land. This is an illusion. In 1841, at Pym's Parlour, a deep recess in the rocks—called by the country people the Fairies' Cave—a few yards from the river edge, were found some old coins, one of them of a date, I believe, anterior to the Roman invasion. Had such a lake as I have mentioned existed, it would have been impossible for the coins, and the stone coffin found in Shepley's goyt, to have been where they were discovered. That a lake has existed there cannot be denied, but it was thousands of years ago.

Many Roman remains were found on the plain when the reservoir, previously mentioned, was constructed. Between the reservoir and Melandra Castle the Glossop Corporation are going to construct settling tanks in connection with their sewage works, and we may therefore anticipate important finds, and it is to be hoped the local municipal authorities will arrange for anything of historical value to be collected and preserved.

No systematic effort has ever been made to excavate and thoroughly examine the site of Melandra Castle. In 1863 or 1864, during the Cotton Famine, some men were employed in laying drains, about eight yards apart, across the area, being ordinary drainage operations and not for any antiquarian object, when they came across several querns and other remains, which were taken to Glossop Hall; but the coins found were pocketed, as were other small articles.

I am sorry to say that the inhabitants of the district, with one

or two exceptions, have taken very little interest in Melandra Castle. There was scarcely one inhabitant in a hundred, until a few weeks ago, knew that such a place existed; however, the Vicars of Glossop, Whitfield, and Dinting, and a few other local gentlemen, are bestirring themselves, and if we could prevail upon some gentleman from this Society to come to Glossop and address a public or select meeting, on the advantages and importance of such societies as the Derbyshire Archæological and Natural History Society, there is no doubt you would have more support from the Glossop end of the county, and be the means of a local branch being formed, the members of which would always be alert to any find, and on the look-out for any fresh information relating to the history of the district and county. Reparation would then be made for our past neglect, and eventually lead to a thorough and exhaustive search being made, not only of the site, but also of the suburban buildings which evidently existed round Melandra Castle. The present is a most opportune time for excavating, as the tenant of the land is giving up his tenancy this month, and I am sure that the lord of the manor, who is a member of this Society, would willingly give his consent, providing the work was done under the direction of a competent person. Why should not an effort be made for this to be done? If this Society and the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society were to join hands, assisted by a local committee, I am sure funds could be raised for the carrying out of this project. Much remains to be known of this ancient place, which only a careful and systematic search of the site will reveal.

I am sorry that an abler person than myself is not addressing you; my only excuse for my presence is that I am interested in these matters, and contribute my mite in the hope that someone with more time, ability, and resources will be aroused to take that interest in the antiquities of Glossop that they deserve. Should such be the case I shall feel amply repaid for my slight and humble effort in trying to explain to you what Melandra Castle is and has been,