

Archaeological Reports

MELANDRA CASTLE EXCAVATIONS, 1960.

By JAMES A. PETCH.

FOR the period chosen for work at Melandra in 1960 the weather turned out almost as unpropitious as it had been favourable in the two previous years. Digging began on Saturday, 20 August, and continued for a fortnight. After a few days heavy rains flooded many of the workings and in consequence more levelling of old spoil-heaps than opening up of new areas was completed. Mr. J. Gould, the owner of the site, again readily consented to the work being done; Mr. L. J. Webb again saw to the voluntary labour force; the expenses of hiring a hut from Messrs. C. V. Armstrong of Broadbottom for only a nominal rent and of buying equipment were borne by subscribers to a special fund opened on behalf of the Excavations Sub-Committee of the Manchester Classical Association by members of the Branch; once more Mr. A. H. Ball undertook the photographic record.

Further 10-foot squares in the western half of the *praetentura* were examined. One produced a length of post-trench and several produced remains of clay floors with thick black layers interleaved. The area of one square was covered with cobbles and gravel 8 to 9 in. thick, apparently in two layers, the lower of gravel only. There was a somewhat doubtful post-hole at one edge of this cobbled area. These fragmentary traces may in time begin to fall into some kind of plan when other similar traces can be added to those already known.

Most of the work done in 1960 centred on the *principia*, presumably the interior building which the Reverend John Watson reported as being "exceedingly visible" when he visited the site in July 1771. In 1899 the late Professor John Garstang opened up what was then left

of the building. What he exposed to view has lain open ever since to the weather and other destroying agents. *Melandra Castle* has little to say about it since no work was done on it in 1905 and the plan there given shows that about half of the interior of the *principia* had not been fully examined.¹ Unfortunately in the following three years the "clearing" of the whole of the interior was completed, the work being described in *Toothill and Melandra*.² Part of the work done in 1960 consisted of getting some of the masonry remnants under cover again. But before this was done, and before the weather intervened, some features of the construction were examined and, so far as casual water permitted, photographed.

The plan of the *principia* given in *Toothill and Melandra* shows a line of five oak posts, each 16 by 16 in., running across the interior from east to west and dividing the building approximately in half. The placing of the five posts which were found suggests that there was originally a sixth to the east of the five.³ This plan also shows a conjectural cross wall of masonry (designated *APQB* from east to west) against the northern face of which the oak posts were thought to have backed. The evidence for this masonry wall was exceedingly scanty; it consisted entirely of "what seemed to be a fragment", and that of footings only, at the extreme west end, *B*, of the line of the supposed wall.⁴ By analogy from the plan of Hardknott this fragment was interpreted as suggesting a wall which with two return walls, more substantial traces of which remained, would give a forecourt having an L-shaped portico on either side of it.

That the plan of the *principia* at Melandra followed the general pattern of *principia* plans in contemporary forts is probable. But in the present state of our knowledge of

¹ *Melandra Castle*, ed. R. S. Conway (Manchester 1906), 54 and plan between pages 42 and 43.

² Ed. F. A. Bruton (Manchester 1909), Second Annual Report, supplementary volume, of the Manchester and District Branch of the Classical Association.

³ On the plan the posts are lettered *U* to *Z* (from east to west). The suggested sixth would therefore be *T*. But to judge from the spacing there may have been one more at each end of the line, that is *S* and *Z*, respectively. It will be worth looking for these in more favourable conditions than 1960 afforded.

⁴ *Toothill and Melandra*, 28.

the building it seems more likely that at least in one version of the plan the line of oak posts formed a screen dividing the forecourt from the inner court rather than that they stood against a masonry wall where they have no clear structural purpose. Two points noted in 1960 suggest that the *principia* as we see it now represents the second of two phases of development: (a) the east wall was found to lie over a foundation trench narrower than the masonry of the wall itself; (b) the front wall of the three rooms forming the southern end of the *principia* may not be of the same build as the main west wall.

The east wall of the *principia* is in a far more ruinous state than the west wall; indeed the plan in *Melandra Castle* shows that fifty years ago there was no masonry *in situ* for the northern half of its length. Advantage was taken of this in 1960 to cut a section across the line of the wall.⁵ It was then found that, although the masonry of the east wall seems to have been at least 30 in. wide, as was the masonry of the west wall, the east wall had been erected over a trench only 23 in. wide. The trench had been cut into the natural clay and, as seen in Plate XIIa, filled to a depth of 15 in. with river cobbles packed tightly in clay. Beneath this packing were two very large cobbles, each 9 in. thick, lying above the original clay; they may have been there naturally but it seemed more likely that they too had been placed there.

That the foundations are narrower than the wall itself suggests that the trench used for them was originally dug for another purpose. It probably belongs to an earlier version of the *principia*, apparently representing the sleeper-trench of the original exterior east wall. When the *principia* was reconstructed, in stone or partly in stone, the sleeper-trenches of the timber version were packed with cobbles in clay to give foundations for the masonry version without it being thought necessary to widen them to the full width of the walls which were to run above them. In 1958 the cobble footings of the west gateway in its stone phase were found projecting beyond the face of the masonry wall; presumably the stone phase of the

⁵ A little north of R on the *Toothill and Melandra* plan, Plate 8, opposite page 28.

gateway did not correspond with the lay-out of the earlier timber version.

A further trace of this timber version of the *principia* may have been found in 1960. The ranging-rod in Plate XII**b**, stands in what seemed to be a post-hole, 9 by 9 in., cut into the clay to a depth of 7 in. A slab of stone covered the mouth of the hole and another smaller slab formed the base. This may indicate that before the masonry front wall was built the rooms at the rear of the *principia* had a front wall of timber.

The second point noted in 1960 concerns the relationship between the main outer west wall of the *principia* and the cross wall forming the front of the three rooms. Mr. Ball's photograph, reproduced as Plate XII**b**, shows the junction of the south face of this cross wall with the interior face of the outer west wall. The cobble footings of the cross wall are under water in the photograph but even so it is clear that the masonry of the cross wall goes deeper than the cobble footings of the outer wall, and that the upper three remaining courses of masonry of the cross wall abut against, without bond into, the outer wall. Nor is the masonry of the two walls identical in appearance; the cross wall has blocks of masonry, some headers and some stretchers, in contrast with the prevalence of slabs, some quite thin, in the outer wall. The same phenomena were noted in the supplementary angle formed by the two walls.

Any consideration of the relationship of these two walls must take account of the fact that, although the natural slope of the hill-top downward from the south-west to the north-east is pronounced, the Roman engineers seem to have done little in the way of levelling the site before beginning to build the fort on it.⁶ In 1958 the footings of the north member of the west gateway were found to be at a lower level than the footings of the south member;⁷ in 1960 the top of the footings at the north-west corner of the *principia* were found to be approximately 4 ft. below the top of the footings at the south-west corner. It might appear that on such a pronounced slope a wall

⁶ *D.A.J.*, LXXVIII (1958), 6, mentions the substantial base of the northern rampart.

⁷ *D.A.J.*, LXXVIII (1958), 4.

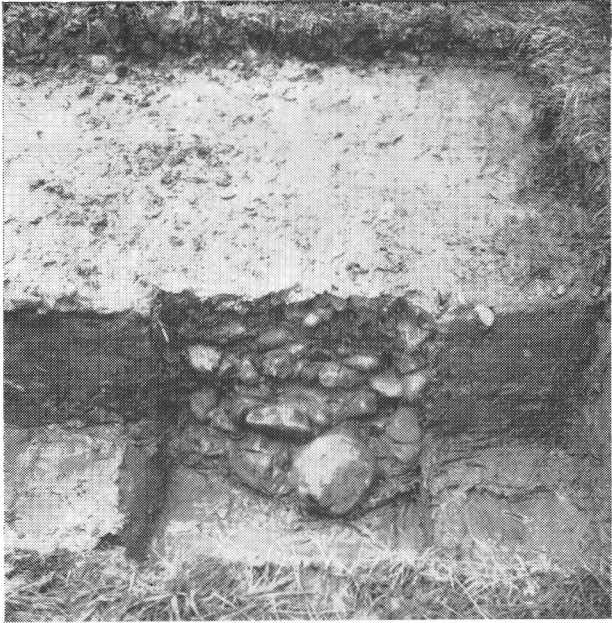


PLATE XIIa. Melandra Castle — trench beneath east wall of *principia*.

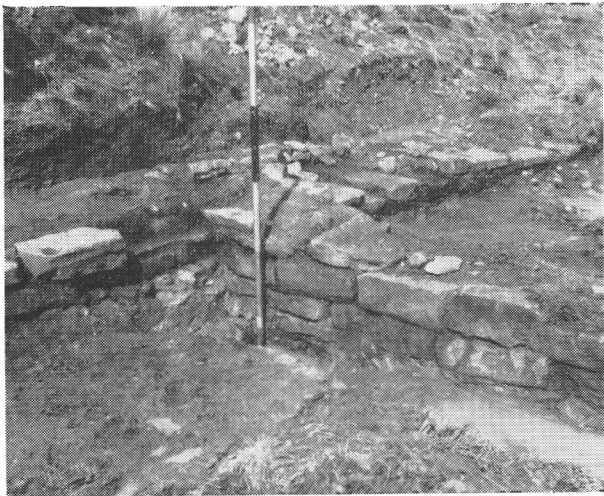


PLATE XIIb. Melandra Castle — junction of south face of cross wall with west wall.

across the line of surface slope should go deep to carry the thrust of that part of the structure which was higher up the slope; but it is not likely that the *principia* at Melandra at any stage in its development would be so massive as to call for a precaution of this nature. The differences noted between the two walls seem to be better interpreted as suggesting two periods of construction.

Further work is required to elucidate fully the history of the *principia* at Melandra. At present the development seems to have been somewhat as follows:

- a. The first building was of timber, represented by (i) the filled-in sleeper-trench of the east wall, (ii) the oak posts recorded in *Toothill and Melandra*, (iii) the post-hole found in 1960.
- b. The outer walls were later rebuilt in stone — or at least the lower portion since even in its second phase the *principia* may have been half-timbered. Before the masonry was built up the sleeper-trenches of the original version were packed with cobbles in clay.
- c. The oak posts marking off the forecourt from the inner court may not have been replaced by masonry in this second version; the evidence for such a wall is at present scanty. But the smaller posts of the timber front wall of the southerly rooms were replaced by a masonry wall which may have been put in later than the time when the exterior wall of the *principia* was first built in stone.

A ROMANO-BRITISH SITE AT OWSLOW FARM, CARSINGTON.

By JOHN LOMAS.

THE finding during ploughing operations in 1946 of an inscribed pig of lead at Owslow Farm, Carsington (Nat. Grid Ref. 238533) was reported by Mr. R. W. P. Cockerton.¹ In 1959 search in the find area

¹ *D.A.J.*, LXXIII (1953), 110.