

REVIEWS

Paul Bidwell and Stephen Speak, *Excavations at South Shields Roman Fort, Volume I*, (Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne Monograph no 4), 1994. £35.00.

THE Roman fort at South Shields is one of the success stories of British archaeology. Taken into local authority ownership the year *before* the passing of the first Ancient Monuments Act in 1882, it was re-vitalised in the 1970s when the present campaign of excavation started. Now, nearly all the fort lies within the Roman Park and excavations continue to discover, expose and interpret more of the fort. South Shields has been well served, too, by its excavators—R. E. Hooppell, Ian Richmond, John Gillam, Roger Miket and now Paul Bidwell and Stephen Speak, co-authors of the latest report. Publication of the results of the various campaigns of excavation has often been through the volumes of this Society and it is welcome to see this continuing through the joint publication of the latest report by the Society and the Tyne and Wear Museums Service, which maintains the enlightened approach of its local authority forebears.

This volume, running to 285 double-column pages, is in fact the report on two buildings, the headquarters and the south-west gate. Yet, these two buildings are placed within the context of the whole fort, and in particular its history, in the manner which readers of Paul Bidwell's reports have come to expect. In some ways, therefore, this volume also serves as an interim report on the buildings (in particular the third and fourth century headquarters building, barracks and courtyard house) which will be the subject of volume 2. Also of more general importance is the discussion of supply, Marijke van der Veen's report on the grain, the description of the buildings of turf, and the discussion of the possible stone church. The report includes a discussion of the research design, which, in its practical and philosophical discussion, has implications far beyond South

Shields, while the wider implications of the South Shields discoveries themselves are always considered.

So far as the structure of the report is concerned, this is, in many ways, a model of an excavation report. The evidence is generally clearly presented and discussed, with support cited, though a little more consistency in referring to the dating material and cross-referencing would have been helpful. My only cavil so far as the structure of the report is that I would have placed the general discussion at the end, after the presentation of the detailed evidence. But the authors judged correctly (in my view) that this was a signal contribution to knowledge and have given it due prominence. I respond by concentrating my comments on that chapter.

My concern in this review is not to examine the minutiae of the report, important though that is, but to concentrate on those aspects which are of wider interest. Of considerable significance is the re-defining of the chronology of the site. Bidwell and Speak reject the Hadrianic date for the first stone fort which has been generally accepted since it was first advanced by Ian Richmond in 1934, preferring a mid-Antonine date linked to the re-occupation of Hadrian's Wall following the abandonment of the Antonine conquests. As with so many "firm" dates or "facts", there was an element of uncertainty with the Hadrianic date and this reviewer well remembers standing on the site of the SW gate in 1966 listening to John Gillam rehearse the arguments for its date, an exercise he would not have undertaken if he had felt certain in his own mind. Bidwell and Speak's allocation to the mid-Antonine period is based on careful analysis of the pottery from the layers associated with the first visible fort and earlier deposits. In attempting to check the dating, however, I found the report left something to be desired. The diagnostic pottery is cited in the discussion of the dating of each period in both the chapter on the history of the fort and in the descrip-

tions of the buildings themselves (though the citations are not always cross-referenced to the pottery report), but no justification of the dating, in the form of parallels, for example, is given in the pottery report.

The dating evidence is slight, as the authors always acknowledge. The pre-fort phases are dated "Trajanic or early Antonine, or possibly still earlier" (p. 17), leaving open the possibility that the first stone fort was late Hadrianic not Antonine. There are only 4 Antonine samian sherds from sealed contexts and a similar amount of coarse pottery. Bidwell and Speak are suitably cautious in recording that "a mid-Antonine date for the construction of the fort now seems probable on the evidence of the stratified samian" (p. 20). The dating of the supply base to the Severan period is even less secure, as the authors acknowledge (pp. 23 and 28).

Important advances in our knowledge of the supply base have come through the excavation and elucidation of the headquarters building and an examination of the plans of its 21 granaries. Dore and Gillam recognised the existence of granaries of two different plans (the distinction lies in the number and location of the buttresses) but considered that this had no special significance. The authors suggest that there is a significance to the two types of granaries. They have also ascertained that the headquarters building had a more complex history than hitherto believed. Firstly, it was turned round and a granary built in its former courtyard; subsequently the cross-hall was turned into a second granary (a new headquarters was then built elsewhere, but that is not reported on in this volume). In addition, though not reported upon here apart from the provision of a plan and brief discussion, two phases have been identified in the barracks in the southern part of the fort.

As a result of the new work and re-thinking of the old, Bidwell and Speak argue that there are two phases to the supply base. The first encompassed the extension of the fort south, the use of the north part as a supply base through the construction of 13 new granaries (in addition to the earlier double granary), the

division of the supply base from the rest of the fort by the building of the long-known dividing wall and the construction of barracks and two granaries in the southern part of the fort for the regiment in residence, who used the remodelled headquarters building. In the next phase the headquarters was demolished and a successor constructed on a new site, the barrack-blocks in the south part of the fort were rebuilt and six additional granaries, each following a new plan, were constructed in the southern part of the fort.

The authors assign the establishment of the first supply base to about 205–7 on historical grounds. They suggest that its construction could be connected with the frontier policy adopted during the first part of Severus' reign, i.e. the maintenance and repair of Hadrian's Wall. But equally, they propose, it might have been the forward policy of the latter years of his reign which led to its construction. In offering a date of about 205–7 they seem to fall between two stools. If the supply base was associated with the earlier policy, why was it built so late; if the later policy, why was it built so early? There still seems to me to be much sense in seeing the supply base as connected, not with the Severan campaigns, for which there would be no need of such a major building project, but the projected Severan conquest of the rest of the island (cf. Cassius Dio 76, 13, 1), as Brian Dobson pointed out to me several years ago. This would place its construction in 208/9.

The dating evidence for the extension of the supply base is as meagre as for every other period, as the authors, with their unfailing honesty, admit (p. 28: "very meagre"). It consists of an unspecified number of black-burnished ware cooking pot fragments, an unstratified tile stamped Calvisius Ruso (governor sometime between 225 and 235), and the aqueduct inscription of 222. It is suggested that the tile indicates building activity in this period when it is also argued tiles were manufactured and stamped by *cohors V Gallorum*. The evidence taken together leads the authors to suggest that the supply base was extended during the years 222–235.

The reconstruction of the accommodation and the addition of six granaries between 222 and 235 is linked to the final withdrawal from, or changes to, the garrison of Cramond (they correctly point to material dating to later than 211 from both Cramond and Carpow) and the introduction of irregular units to the Wall forts. After discussion of various possibilities (a collecting point for the export of grain, for the supply of the fleet, or the use of grain as a diplomatic tool), the authors argue that the "large capacity of the supply base means that its main purpose was almost certainly the supply of the frontier garrisons" (p. 31); they also float the possibility (pages 14 and 32) that this supply base may have had a predecessor on another site in South Shields. In making this suggestion they also cast doubt on the proposition that the "forts on the northern frontier could ever have relied entirely on supplies of grain from their immediate hinterlands." In this connection, it is interesting to note van der Veen's report on the grain from the forecourt granary. This includes bread wheat not native to the area and possibly imported from the continent (p. 258).

The supply base continued in use until the end of the third century or the beginning of the fourth. At a date probably after 286 but before about 318 a major fire occurred in the fort. The authors are cautious about the cause of the fire, pointing out that "certain discoveries suggest that the fire deposits . . . were not connected with deliberate demolition by the army" and hinting at a preference for enemy action (p. 33). The fort was then re-planned. The earlier headquarters building was restored to its primary function, eight granaries were remodelled as barracks with two new barrack-blocks constructed, while a large courtyard house was added; eight granaries were retained and the double granary was demolished. The planning of this fort is discussed and compared to other late forts in which the *via principalis* loses its importance to be replaced by a focus on a new cross road about half-way between the headquarters building and the *porta praetoria* with greater emphasis on the *via praetoria* which is now colonnaded. It is proposed that

the new unit in residence was the *numerus barbariorum Tigrisensium*.

Two structural discoveries require separate consideration. Under the headquarters building of the first stone fort was found a building constructed of turf and timber and a second (rendered with clay) was found beside the SW gate. These allowed re-interpretation of two structures found in 1978 as similar buildings. All structures appear to be late-Hadrianic to mid-Antonine in date. As the authors point out, now that these have been recognised it will only be a matter of time before more examples are found.

The second structure lies at the other end of the history of the site. The 1875 excavation led to the discovery of a stone table in the forecourt of the headquarters building, surrounded on three sides by drystone walls forming a small recess. As this was still standing when the fort was abandoned, Bidwell and Speak assign it to the fourth century. Citing parallels, they point out that it is "very similar to the earliest form of Christian altar" (p. 103).

Occupation continued in the fort throughout the fourth century and, the authors argue, into the fifth century. Evidence to support their case comes from both the SW gate and the headquarters building. At the former, following the last formal evidence, a coin of 388–402, the causeway was cut through by a ditch, which itself partially silted up before receiving rubble which the authors propose came from the remodelling of the gate, entailing the removal of the upper storeys and the replacement of one arch by timber portals: there is a possibility that the causeway may then have been replaced across the ditch. In the forecourt granary of the headquarters building there is another late sequence of activity running through four phases. In the face of a lack of dating evidence the authors are reduced to the traditional argument that three or four stratified levels suggest activities spread over several decades, continuing the occupation into the second half of the fifth century (p. 46). As they point out, our problem is that we still need to be able to recognise the diagnostic finds which will help confirm such hypotheses.

For an excavation report this is reasonably priced at £35. It contains, however, embedded within it, an important discussion of the fort, its history and residents and their supplies. This deserves to be more widely known and it is hoped that in due course a more popular account of Roman South Shields better suited to the pockets of the layman can be published.

David J. Breeze

Margaret E. Snape, *Roman Brooches from North Britain: A Classification and a Catalogue of Brooches from Sites on the Stanegate*. Tempus Reparatum: British Archaeological Reports, British Series 235 (1993). ISBN 0 86054 762 0. Pp. v + 123, figs 19, pl. 1. £25.

Brooches are one of the commonest classes of artefact from Roman sites in Britain and are well understood as a result of frequent detailed publication in excavation reports. However, there are few books giving an overview of the study of brooches. The basic classification of Roman brooches was made by R. G. Collingwood in the 1930s. Syntheses prepared by M. R. Hull, who reported on many important groups of brooches in post-war excavation reports on sites in southern England, have only recently begun to appear in print, some years after his death. Works in English devoted solely to brooches are limited to a popular summary by Don Mackreth and a series of catalogues of the private collection of Richard Hattatt, the contents of which are mainly metal-detector finds from southern Britain. Some types such as penannular, headstud and crossbow brooches have been the subjects of special study but otherwise we are still forced back to the specialist excavation reports for basic information.

Mrs. Snape gives a detailed classification of brooches, based, like most modern discussions, on Collingwood's classification, but with some original elements. In itself this is a useful statement of modern usage. Her classification is accompanied by simple line-drawings of the groups and sub-groups together with brief

comments on their origins, distribution and dating. The discussion of the types and sub-types contains important comments on dating and origins.

Other sections include a glossary of the parts of brooches and a review of the evidence for their manufacture. Of interest in taking the subject beyond the technical and typological, though the data is not new, are considerations of who wore brooches and how they were worn. Figure sculpture suggests that the orientation of the brooch could be a matter of taste although they were commonly worn with the foot uppermost. Paired brooches, joined by a chain, may have been a female fashion.

The heart of the book is a catalogue of the brooches from Stanegate sites, namely Corbridge Red House (7 brooches), Corbridge (218), Chesterholm (61), Nether Denton (16) and Carlisle (73). No brooches are known from Brampton Old Church, Throp, Haltwhistle Burn or Kirkbride, other Stanegate sites where excavation has taken place. Since the research for the work was first undertaken in 1988 (as part of an M. Litt. course) a number of important collections from Corbridge (45), Chesterholm (12) and Carlisle have been published and these have been incorporated briefly into the catalogue.

Slightly more than a third of the brooches catalogued are drawn. However, none of the brooches from recent publications have been illustrated. Eleven brooches from Nether Denton (69% of the site total) are drawn and four (57%) from Red House Corbridge (those from the bath-house are redrawn but not those from the base). However, for Carlisle there are only six illustrations (8%). It is arguable that the existence of modern reports with good quality illustrations allows this volume to be produced more cheaply by not redrawing brooches from recent reports. However, the omission of these drawings unbalances the volume and does not make it easy to use. It is important to note that Snape does not always follow the cataloguing in the original publications but has reclassified some brooches and described features such as repairs not always previously noticed.

The final chapter is a discussion of the sig-

nificance of first century brooches in the frontier zone. This focuses particularly on the presence of brooches thought to have gone out of use before the end of the first century, some of them on Hadrian's Wall, and on the high proportion of first century brooches at South Shields. Snape proposes that the lifespan of some brooches needs reconsideration and argues that South Shields might be a Trajanic rather than a Hadrianic foundation.

A useful appendix lists the brooches found on Hadrian's Wall sites and other appendices identify headstud, knee, developed crossbow and exclusively first century brooches.

Despite its overall merits, there are aspects of the book which are not altogether satisfactory. The quality of the data collection is patchy. This is most obvious in the treatment of the Carlisle material. The 28 brooches from Blackfriars Street, published in 1990, are omitted while the Castle Street brooches, which only appeared in print in 1991, are fully cross-referenced to the published volume. Other unpublished finds, e.g. from The Lanes, excavated in the late 1970s and early 1980s but available for study, have been ignored. There are also question marks over the listing of early brooch finds from Carlisle, now in Tullie House, many of which were published by Haverfield in 1919 (CW2 xix). The 1919 catalogue gives no reason to think that some of Snape's catalogue (Nos 251, 260 and 280) came from Carlisle. (Her No. 277 seems to be RF308.1 which does belong to Carlisle rather than RF308.2 which does not). On the other hand Haverfield's Nos 2F and 5A, both recorded for Carlisle, are omitted.

Similarly there are indications that the coverage of Chesterholm is incomplete. Snape lists five brooches seen only on display in the site museum which she has not been able to catalogue fully. Inclusion of the Chesterholm brooches seems to be restricted to the 1970s excavations and those published from Bidwell's 1980 excavation. However, a clearer statement of exactly what has and has not been examined would have been helpful.

Another point of concern is the book's subtitle "sites on the Stanegate". The unwary

might expect that the Stanegate frontier system was in some way a significant link between the brooches studied. However, Corbridge, Carlisle, and Chesterholm have occupation both earlier and later than the early second century when the system was operative. The vast majority of the brooches considered in the book were not, in fact, contemporary with the Stanegate system and their connection with the Stanegate (the road) does not give their study as a group any intellectual coherence. In fairness, Snape does not attempt any analysis of the group as a whole or relate the brooches to the Stanegate. The subtitle is symptomatic rather of a certain lack of focus to the book. At times the author is straining to write about the whole Tyne-Solway frontier zone; at other times she is constrained by her subtitle.

Despite these reservations, this book is very welcome. At the most basic level it will greatly simplify the work of other small finds reporters by its listing of finds from the frontier zone (Stanegate and Hadrian's Wall). The analysis of the problem of first century brooches demonstrates how artefacts other than coins and pottery can also yield broader historical information when subject to close examination. Snape only uses her data to a limited extent but we may hope that the existence of the corpus will stimulate further use of this material.

Ian Caruana

The Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne Bicentenary Lectures 1993 [Newcastle; the Society, 1994; pp. xii + 216; £15.00].

This volume, as John Philipson records in his introduction, is by way of a celebration. It reprints a series of eleven lectures which the Society commissioned to celebrate their first two hundred years, together with the speech proposing the Literary and Philosophical Society's health at the bicentenary dinner. The lectures are published as they were given, in an attempt "to recapture the wit and humour" of those evenings between January and Novem-

ber 1993. It would be tempting, therefore, to assume that the volume is of little interest to the outsider, and to imagine that it provides the members with a souvenir which has little interest to others; as John Cannon suggests at one point, in his lecture on "The Historians", the celebrations were "semi-private and of a local character." That temptation should, however, be firmly resisted. This is not just because the volume comprises lectures by men of great distinction, but because throughout it provides far more than a mere recollection of enjoyable talks; it highlights aspects of the life and history of the city of Newcastle, and of the north-east region and beyond, and has illuminating insights into such diverse subjects as historiography, architecture, and medicine which makes it a volume of continual surprise and fascination.

Significantly, much of the enjoyment of those evenings in the Society's buildings survives the transition to print. It comes across not least from Andrew Greg's account of the building itself, with its original estimate of £5,000, and its eventual cost of over £13,000, and the strictures passed on the nude sculptures which adorned it, at once an invitation to prudish censorship or a titillating invitation to explore still greater delights inside! It is epitomised by John Cannon's off-the-cuff remark that the versatile first professor of history at Newcastle, the Rev. William More Ede, author of a pamphlet on cheap food and cheap cooking, together with "hints for penny dinners for children", should have been put in charge of the catering! Or Lord Taylor's story of his return from Cambridge, proudly wearing his new Hawks Club tie, to be confronted by the attractive junior librarian, who brought him firmly down to earth by asking, as she glanced at the object of his pride, "Did ye gan to Ryhope Grammar School?"

Lord Taylor's lecture illustrates another facet of these talks—their contemporary relevance. Here is the Lord Chief Justice of England announcing firmly, in his lecture on "The Lawyers", how much he regrets that "prolixity, repetition and flanneling figure too frequently in . . . the courts." Aspiring bar-

risters from all over the country would be well advised to read this talk before they appear before his Lordship. It is tempting to allude to Norman McCord's passing reference in his lecture on "The Engineers" to Charles Parsons' conduct of industrial relations—going round the Newcastle shops buying invalid foods for the wife of a worker he had erroneously dismissed—as being an example of contemporary relevance; though perhaps Professor McCord would argue that his now familiar dismissal of such concepts as the middle class and the working class as "quite literally, figments of the imagination, theoretical constructions rather than realistic social categories" was of more practical application.

The volume contains an appropriate balance between the sciences and the arts. Colin Russell describes distinguished scientists who have graced the Society, John Fauvel discusses mathematicians in a lecture that was originally to have been given by the late Peter Wallis, while Roy Porter, one of the self-confessed outsiders who helped the Society celebrate its bicentenary, talks about the doctors, if that is not too grand a title for John Graham, the "king of quacks," who claimed to be able to restore virility and potency with the aid of an electro-magnetic Celestial Bed! William Feather, art critic of the *Observer*, discusses the Society's artists, while Percy Lovell, an insider, talks about a quintet of the Society's musicians, drawn, as he confesses, from a veritable orchestra available to him. Tension between the sciences and the arts is not, however, a recent phenomenon; as Professor Russell notes, "open warfare" broke out between the two in 1808, with the scientists being forced to remove their lectures from the honoured precincts of the library.

The first and last lectures of the bicentennial series, and the first and last chapters of the book, form as it were an introduction and conclusion, though in fact they are far more substantial than that description would imply. Anthony Quinton concludes the volume with a glance at the 3,000-odd lectures that preceded his own over the Society's two-hundred-year history, and attempts to draw some cultural

conclusions, with the sad reflection that we have become intellectually more passive over that time, turning our backs on intellectual self-improvement. If that conclusion is valid, then Asa Briggs, who is also retrospective, but perhaps more optimistic in his survey of the foundation and subsequent role of the Society, with which the volume opens, sets a challenge to it; rightly eschewing the temptation, as a good historian should, himself to predict the future, he nevertheless reminded his audience that for the Literary and Philosophical Society itself looking into the future was not so much a pastime, as a responsibility. If the Society

heeds the exhortation of one peer, the fear of the other need not come to pass.

The whole volume is neatly presented, and well illuminated with a series of black and white illustrations. The large number of subscribers listed in the volume doubtless already value it; and at the amazingly reasonable price (for these days) it is to be hoped that the volume will find, as it deserves to do, an equally valued place on the shelves of many others as well.

Alan Heesom

University of Durham

