

## EXCAVATIONS AT CORBRIDGE-ON-TYNE.

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In the course of last summer the Northumberland History Committee undertook an excavation upon a small scale on the Roman site of Corstopitum, near Corbridge, a few miles from Hexham. The town lay upon the high north bank of the River Tyne, at the head of the bridge over which the military road from York ran up to join the Wall; how far it was a military station and how far a place of civil residence was one of the points upon which the History Committee were anxious to throw light. Not enough has yet been done to answer this question with certainty, but the actual results were of sufficient interest to warrant the excavation of the whole site by a wider body more directly interested in such a work. Accordingly, with the ready co-operation of the landowner, Captain Cuthbert, a Corbridge Excavation Committee has been formed, under the presidency of the Duke of Northumberland, and the work is to be carried on regularly in future. A detailed preliminary report<sup>1</sup> of this year's work is to be published, but the main points of it may be given here.

Operations were confined to the south-east corner of the site, and were of a somewhat scattered nature, it not being known at the time that this was the preliminary to a systematic excavation. The ditch was cut in several places, and with rather curious results. Towards the east the ditch lay well above the brow of the hill that here slopes down to the river, and was accordingly cut in the gravel soil with a sharply defined section, 8 feet deep by 14 feet across. Running westwards, the ditch descended the face of the hill, and in proportion as it drew nearer to the level ground at the foot its depth

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by the Hon. Secretary, W. H. Knowles, Esq., F.S.A., Gosforth, Northumberland.]



ROMANO-BRITISH VASE FOUND AT CORSTOPITUM,  
NORTHUMBERLAND.

*Scale  $\frac{1}{8}$ .*

diminished, and its southern or outward side tended to disappear, until at last it gave place to a steep bank of gravel between which and the river (then much closer to the hill than it is to-day) lay a stretch of marshy ground wherein an artificial cutting would have been both difficult and useless. Nothing in the nature of a rampart-wall was found; if such ever existed it has been, at this point, completely dismantled by those who for fifteen hundred years have used the site as a quarry for building-stones; possibly the military defences of the place were confined to a certain area, and the surrounding civil buildings here were content with the somewhat inadequate protection of the ditch and swamp; but no theories are needed on a subject which future digging will undoubtedly make clear.

Work was begun upon two building sites, though unfortunately the time at the disposal of the excavators did not allow of a complete plan being obtained in either case. One site must, if symmetrical, have been of very considerable dimensions, not less than 200 feet from north to south, and shewed a number of rather poorly built structures, mostly long and narrow with cross-divisions but no passages, surrounded by a fine plinthed wall five feet in thickness. The narrow ends of these buildings faced upon a cobbled way or court running east by west, whose north side formed practically the boundary of the area excavated; the eastern limit also of this building was not reached.

The other site, apparently of a residential nature, produced excellent floors of *opus signinum*, walls faced with coloured plaster, and, in one room, a system of heating-flues in which the whole wall is jacketted with box tiles secured by T clamps, a system found in a bath-house at Binchester Banks, Durham, etc., but of somewhat unusual occurrence. A building of this sort seems at once to distinguish Corstopitum from the military stations of the Wall, where work is of a far more simple and utilitarian kind, and to give to it an added importance as being the one real town-site of the North on which excavation can be freely carried on; for whereas Shields and Carlisle have been continuously inhabited throughout history, Corstopitum lies open and unencum-

bered by any buildings of later than Roman date. The most interesting point about this house, however, was that in its south wall were found embedded two moulded *voussoirs* of considerable size and good workmanship; the arch from which they came had a span of 12 feet 6 inches, and was in measurement and in quality unequalled by any known Roman work in the north of England. As in their present position they supported the lowest of four distinct floor-levels, representing some considerable period, the structure of which they originally formed a part, and which, judging from its mass and importance, would have stood some time before being destroyed and thus re-utilized, must go back to a very early date in the history of the Roman occupation.

Amongst the minor finds, mostly of small consequence, one may well be signalised here. This is a vase (see Plate) 12 inches high by 9 in diameter; it is of creamy-white clay, finely levigated, covered with a slip of reddish-brown colour, rather ill-fixed, having a very slight orange glaze, and decorated with creamy-white paint put on over the glaze. Round the neck is a row of white dots; below this a line of flattened S-shaped curves, slightly overlapping each other; on the upper part of the body a free scroll-work design based on a floral motive into which large and small dots and trefoil leaves are introduced, the large dots serving as flower-terminals, the smaller following the stalk-lines. Below this come three double rows of machine-turned hatched lines, the upper perpendicular, the two lower oblique. This vase, which was very fragmentary but could be safely restored, is of an interesting type, and its decoration shews a purely native and Keltic influence. It is very probably of Durobrivian fabric, of which a fair number of fragments of the more usual types were found in the course of the excavations, but is of an uncommonly large size and rather peculiar ornamentation. As a specimen of Romano-British ware, it certainly deserves attention.