

ART. III.—*The Camp at Muncaster and certain Roman Discoveries there.* By WM. JACKSON, ESQ.
Read at Wigton, August 31st, 1876.

I PROPOSE now to lay before you some particulars of the ancient camp from which Muncaster takes its name, first pointed out to me by my friend Mr. Lees, and which may plainly be discerned in a field in front of the farm house called Walls, not many yards distant from the ancient ruin of Walls Castle.

The camp, which presents on three sides distinct and continuous traces of the wall and fosse, and which is about 140 yards long, has not been less than 120 broad, but I am unable to state the exact width, even if ever it had a wall on the western side, where a steep descent of fifty feet dips sharply down to the river Esk, flowing into the Ravenglass estuary at this point. There are traces of round towers at the two eastern angles, but no other indications remain on the site.

Camden speaks of Ravenglass, “where as I have heard, were to be seen Roman inscriptions.”

Denton, who wrote c. 1680, says, of Muncaster, “This place is now corruptly called Moncaster, howbeit, the right name is Mulcastre or Meolcastre, of an old castle towards the water side, near Esk Meal. It was called Meolcastre, or Mulecastre, from the Meal on which it anciently stood, and is accordingly written Mulecastre and Mealcastre in all their old evidences and records. Esk Meal, whereon the ancient castle stood, is a plain, low, dry ground at the foot of Esk, between the mountains and the sea, which sort of grounds, lying under mountains and promontories into or at the sea, are commonly called Mules or Meils, as it were the entrance or mouth from the

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sea into a river, or such like place as the Meil of Esk, Kirksanton Meil, Cartmeil, Mealholme, the Meald of Galloway, and Millum itself."

Hutchinson says, "This has been a place of great consequence in distant antiquity. Broken battle axes of flint, arrow heads, and coins of different people have been found, many of them Roman and some Saxon."

Lysons describes two tripod bronze vessels, in the possession of S. L. Irton, Esq., both found at Eskmeals; and although he doubts their Roman origin, I cannot but think that they must have been Roman camp kettles of a by no means uncommon type. Into whose possession they fell at the dispersion of the Irton collection, I am unable to state. Mr. Linton, in his "Handbook to the Whitehaven and Furness Railway," a work whose value has scarcely been sufficiently appreciated, alludes to some remarkable discoveries made when the cutting for that line was excavated along the western side of the camp.

I have been favoured by Mr. John Tomlinson of Whitehaven, a zealous antiquary, with an account of his observations made on the spot at the period of the discovery, which I transcribe:—"During the summer of 1850, when the Whitehaven and Furness Railway was in progress of construction through Ravenglass, and the workmen were smoothing down the cutting, about 150 yards south-west from Walls Castle they discovered three remarkable constructions, about twenty yards apart from each other. The openings had been two feet below the present surface; the shape excavated was a cone or sugar loaf, say fifteen feet deep, and ten to twelve feet diameter at the bottom. The bottom had been flagged, the sides wooded round, in a square of seven or eight feet, with the trunks of trees of fourteen inches girth, laid horizontally one on the other, and filled up between them and the soil with stones, and so continued up, gradually lessening the size
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to about sixteen inches, over which a slab of stone was placed. The inside was filled with a dark, peaty matter, which on being excavated, contained many various bones, and many human bones and skulls of various sizes, but so decayed as to be beyond preservation. There were two oak clubs found in one of the structures, and a skin covering for the leg, with thongs attached. The workmen opened one of them down to the flagged bottom, under the expectation of finding it an underground passage to Walls Castle; but no coins or implements were found. I found myself a kind of shoe, a protection for the foot of a boy, made of raw skins of several thicknesses; a piece of burnt wood, part of a hazel-nut shell, part of a cow's horn which I still have." Mr. Tomlinson thinks they have been Pict's holes.

Since receiving the foregoing account, I have inspected the remains in Mr. Tomlinson's collection, and have learnt from him that he only saw the pits on the Sunday after the discovery, and that the contents were then in a state of great confusion, owing to the excavators, in their hurry to reach the bottom, where they hoped to find treasure, having thrown the bones, skulls, horns, oak leaves, &c., they passed through, indiscriminately together. Amongst the remains in Mr. Tomlinson's possession is a human bone which my friend Dr. I'Anson, identified as the first phalanx of the fore-finger of the left-hand of an adult; it had not been subjected to the action of fire. I saw a fragment of charred pine wood, still retaining its characteristic smell, and the spur of a cock.

This is the third find of a similar nature which railway excavations have produced. The first was discovered at Stone, in Buckinghamshire, and though fragments of urns were found in the pit, Wright, in his "*Celt, Roman, and Saxon*," expresses a strong opinion that it was a rubbish-pit, and not of a sepulchral nature. His affirmative opinion on the point, at any rate, seems to be rendered doubtful

doubtful by the discovery I have narrated, and the one I am about to mention.

I am indebted to Mr. Orfeur, of Norwich, for my first information respecting the important discoveries made in that neighbourhood, and, subsequently, to Mr. Barton, who described them in a communication to the Norfolk Archæological Society, printed in the *Norwich Mercury* of October 24, 1874, from which and from a private letter with which he favoured me I epitomize the following account:—

“In the course of excavating a cutting on the Watton and Swaffam Railway, near the village of Ashill, the workmen passed through a tract of ground called Robin Hood’s Garden, which turned out to be the site of a Roman camp, in the centre of which, about six feet below the present surface, they found three wells, all of a similar nature, but the description given applies more particularly to the third. It was about forty feet deep, having a floor of flints; it was a square, lined with a framework of oak, the massive pieces composing it being of a thickness of five inches, made out of trees, two feet at least in diameter, axe hewn, and laid together something like an Oxford picture frame; the frame-work was coated internally with oak of a similar thickness. The internal dimensions of the pit were three and a half feet square; the external about four and a half feet. It contained not less than a hundred urns. Upwards of fifty of them were recovered whole; these had, most of them at any rate, been deposited carefully in the pit. There was no vestige of human dust or remains, though there were found horns, antlers, and heads of oxen and deer, old sandals, and bits of broken pottery, whole vessels and fragments of Samian ware. About half way from the bottom, the urns and other contents seem to have been deposited in an orderly manner; in the upper part the articles might have been thrown in indiscriminately.”

It is remarkable that at the north-east corner of this
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Norfolk camp, there may yet be traced the foundations of a Roman villa, which is about the position our Walls Castle occupies with reference to the Muncaster camp. The discoveries in Norfolk seem in many respects curiously in accord with those at Muncaster, which it must be recollected, were not subjected to the same minute examination.

Mr. Tomlinson also informs me of another discovery of considerable importance. He had long in his possession a gold coin of the Emperor Vespasian, found during the progress of the railway excavations in the same cutting. Dr. Bruce states, in his "Lapidarium Septentrionale," that "the coins of Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian may be supposed to represent the supplies transmitted to Britain during the campaigns of Agricola." We have good reason, therefore, to suppose this was one of the original *castella* erected by Agricola.

Though, with the exception of the ruin described, there are now no other visible remnants of the old dwellers, the names of many of the fields sufficiently indicate the extent of land once occupied by them: Castle Meadow, Castle Field, Stone Warron, Stone Acre, Broad Walls, Walls Field, Walls Close, Black Stones, &c.

About a mile to the north-east is a farm, called Bracken Wall in the Ordnance Survey, always, alas! so far as names are concerned, so very unreliable. The local name is Branken Wall, but in Donald's map of Cumberland, published in 1798, it is marked as Burnham Walls. This may probably have been the site of another Roman villa.

From the indications of excavations on Newtown Knot, where the present tower stands, erected as a land-mark to steer by on entering Ravenglass harbour, Canon Knowles and I were led to suppose that it might have been the site of a *turris exploratoria*, but as it is not visible from any part of the neighbourhood of Hard Knot Castle, with which any such erection would certainly have

have communicated, we felt compelled to abandon the idea, although its prominence is from other directions sufficiently remarkable. If the carse or twenty-five feet sea level extended down to the Roman era, the estuary of Ravenglass would be a noble haven for ships, and even were the extent of water only the same as at the present, a large town, such as would grow up around the camp, would necessitate a considerable commerce.

The popular story that at times the remains of sunken Roman galleys may be seen by the spectator in Selker Bay,

“In the waves beneath him lying,”

may well be a tradition of some great nautical catastrophe which befel a fleet bound here, for it is certain that vessels, caught under some circumstances with a north-westerly wind, would find it no easy matter to weather the south-western promontory of that bay.

Since writing the foregoing I have been informed by Mr. Barton that he has abandoned his idea that the enclosure in which these pits were discovered was a Roman camp. Its magnitude (250 yards square), and the fact that there is a ditch inside the bank militating strongly against that supposition. The villa was at the north-eastern corner of the area, between the inner and the outer ditches, so that this enclosure was probably intended for cattle belonging to the occupant of the residence.
