

ART. II.—*The Roman cemetery on London Road, Carlisle.* By T. PATTEN, M.B.E.

Read at Kendal, April 27th, 1974.

THE strip of land on each side of London Road, Carlisle, the main road leaving the city to the south, has long been considered to have been the site of a Roman cemetery, associated with the Roman city of Luguvalium, and one where burials, both by cremation and inhumation, were reported to have taken place as late as the fifth century. The local press has reported finds of Roman urns, coins and other material at various dates since 1786, whenever repairs were made to the turnpike road. In the 1790s a number of urns were unearthed during such an operation, but were apparently broken by workmen in search of coins; nothing seems to have survived from this period.

The most important period of discovery was in 1829, when the road was being improved by cutting through Gallow Hill. The first reported find was in July of that year, when a large fall of earth took place from the top of the hill, on the east side of the road, bringing down with it a lead coffin; it was unfortunately broken into pieces in the fall and its contents were lost, except for a small part of a skull to which some reddish hair, from its length presumed to be female, still adhered. The coffin was about 3 ft. 7 in. long by about 10 in. high and about 22 in. wide. Two days later a stone coffin was unearthed, but no description of it was published. In the same month a sepulchral stone vault was uncovered, about six feet from the surface; it was 7 ft. 9 in. long by 2 ft. 4 in. wide, 2 ft. 6 in. deep and covered with some strong rough pieces of oak. Inside the vault was a much decayed oaken coffin, containing

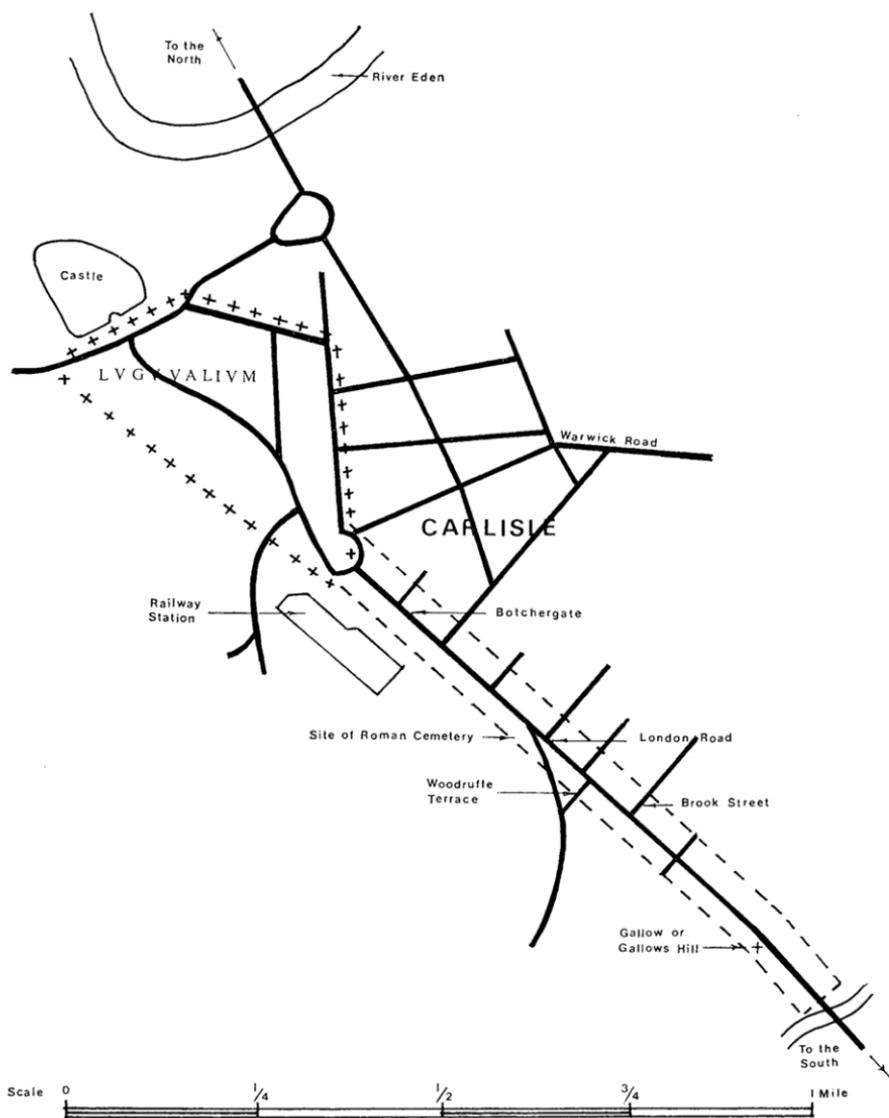


FIG. 1.—Sketch map of Carlisle showing sites of Roman burial discoveries.

another one of lead. The lead shell held some human bones and six Roman brass coins, five of Antoninus Pius and one of Faustina. There was also a piece of lead, shaped like a small lamp, and near by was found a small urn.

Graves of a similar type to this, with lead coffins or lead coffins in stone coffins or vaults, in some cases associated with wooden parts, have been discovered at many other sites in Britain and abroad, in almost all cases containing coins.

In October of the same year, a Roman headstone was found on the eastern side of the road at Gallow Hill, about four and a half feet below the modern surface. It was 5 ft. 4 in. high by 2 ft. 9½ in. wide and about 6 in. thick. On it was carved a female figure, three feet high, holding in her left hand a rudely sculptured flower, and in her right a scarf thrown over her shoulder. Underneath the figure was the inscription:

D M AVR AVRELIA VIXSIT
ANNOS XXXXI VLPIVS
APOLINARIS CONIVGI CARISSIME
POSVIT

The inscription, now to be cited as RIB 959, is to be translated as: "To the spirits of the departed—Aurelia Aureliana lived 41 years. Ulpius Apolinaris set this up to his very beloved wife." The stone was found with the figure and inscription facing downwards, and beneath it was a grave about five and a half feet deep, containing an oaken coffin in which were eight badly corroded copper coins. It was acquired by the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle, and is now in the Museum of Antiquities at the University of Newcastle.

Near to this burial were also discovered six Roman urns of various dimensions, one of them full of ashes, together with a lachratory, three jet rings (the largest of them three inches in diameter), a roughly executed

Corinthian capital of yellowish freestone, 20 x 16 in., partially scooped out as if for the reception of an urn or a lachrimary, and the head of a statue, of almost natural size, also of yellowish freestone.

Another find, made in the same month, was a beautiful glass bottle, unfortunately broken, ornamented with letters and other devices. With it were found a great number of Roman coins, said to be several hundred; unfortunately, no details were given except that they were of various sizes and different reigns, the earliest being one of Galba.

In December 1829, another coffin was discovered. It was of roughly hewn red stone, about six feet long and covered by a large flagstone. In it were a skull and some human bones, but they were so much decayed that they fell to pieces on being touched. The coffin bore no inscription, nor were any coins found, but beneath it was a small urn.

The next discovery reported was in 1851, when workmen were excavating drains for some cottages on Gallow Hill. They uncovered a large flat stone which, on being raised, proved to be part of the roof of a stone vault; it was constructed of Lazonby flagstones, set edgewise, the roof and floor being formed of two flags each. Great care appeared to have been taken in its construction, and all crevices had been sealed with fine clay. Its roof was about four feet beneath the modern surface, and the internal measurements were 7 ft. 6 in. long by 2 ft. 6 in. wide by 3 ft. deep. When the roofing flags, one of which was found to be broken, were removed, the remains of a lead coffin were discovered, resting on what appeared to be the bottom of a strong oak one, both coffins being supported by stone pillars placed on the floor. There were no traces of either lid or inscription; the lead shell was evenly coated over the inner surface with a thin layer of white lead, and the coffin was perforated, at distances

of about five inches, by nail holes of considerable size. It contained nothing but some dust and a quantity of human hair, of a deep auburn colour, about a foot to 18 in. long. The lead shell was gashed at one end, as though it had been struck by a spade or some other blunt tool, and it was presumed that the grave had been robbed on some earlier occasion. Its direction was north and south, the head southwards as indicated by the proportions of the lead and oak coffins. The stones of the structure were presented to the Carlisle Mechanics' Institute.

In 1863, when workmen were digging the foundations for a house in Woodruffe Terrace, London Road, they unearthed a stone trough cut out of red sandstone, about 2 ft. by 1 ft. 10 in. and 1 ft. 10 in. deep externally, and about 4 in. thick. The lid was a large flat stone bearing an inscription, barely legible but one line apparently ending in RIVS and the second in IS; see RIB 956 (there stated to have been found in Grey Street in 1864), which shows that it had started [D] M, and that the letters in the third line read]LIS; it is now in the Carlisle Museum at Tullie House. Inside the trough was a small Roman jar of red clay, together with a large glass bottle, in the mouth of which was a small jar and also an earthenware lamp "in the shape of an old-fashioned cream jug with a handle, a spout for the jet and a hole for the oil". When the bottle was emptied, it was found to contain a large quantity of human bones, tightly packed; they were broken into small pieces and had evidently been cremated. A large rusted nail was attached to one of the pieces of calcined bone. The letter M was moulded on the base of the glass bottle.

Finally, in October 1892, another tombstone was found at Gallow Hill, by Mr C. Dudston. The inscription, now RIB 955, is in characteristic 4th-century style, and is now one of the most interesting exhibits

at Tullie House; its text, taking into account letters omitted by the stonemason, gives the reading: "To the spirits of the departed — Flavius Antigonus Papias, a citizen of Greece, lived sixty years, more or less, and gave back to the Fates his soul lent for that extent of time. Septimia Do[———]."

Mr R. P. Wright, F.S.A., who provided this translation in R.I.B., has pointed out that the curious wording is best explicable as a quotation from a poem; the reference to "sixty years, more or less" is best compatible with the family having been Christian, regarding minute details of time spent in this life as unimportant in comparison with the life to come.

The last recorded discovery is that of tiles, one with the stamp LEG II AVG and the other LEG XX VV, covering a grave. They were found in July 1894, when workmen were digging foundations for some cottages in Brook Street, off London Road.

[References: The *Carlisle Patriot* and the *Carlisle Journal* for 1829, 1851, 1863, 1892 and 1894; and the *Cumberland News* for 1932.]