The Pulborough Head

A MID-3RD-CENTURY ROMAN STONE PORTRAIT FROM WEST SUSSEX

By Miles Russell

An extremely weathered marble portrait unearthed near Pulborough in 2008 is considered here in print for the first time. The find was made within an area of intensive Romano-British activity and, although the possibility of recent importation cannot be completely discounted, the likelihood is that it represents a genuine Roman portrait of the mid-3rd century AD, defaced and disposed of in antiquity.

INTRODUCTION

In 2010 a battered stone head was shown to staff at the Novium Museum in Chichester for reporting, recording and identification. Recovered during small-scale building works in a private garden to the north of Pulborough in West Sussex, the artefact appeared to be Roman in date and, as such, was brought to the attention of the author, then engaged in a reassessment of 1st- and 2nd-century Roman sculpture from southern Britain (Russell 2013; Russell and Manley 2013a; 2013b), by Novium Collections Officer, Anooshka Rawden. The report that follows is the first description of the head to be published, discussing its nature and survival, and attempting to establish its meaning, significance, possible context and associations.

DESCRIPTION

The head (Fig. 1), depicting a young adult male, is slightly larger than life size, measuring 282mm in height, 118mm in width and 235mm in breadth, and is made from a coarse, white marble, possibly of Italian origin. It presumably once formed part of a more complete image, possibly a full-figure portrait or, more probably, a portrait bust, having become detached from the body in antiquity, the break across the lower neck now being largely worn smooth.

The piece is extremely weathered, erosion being most noticeable on the face and left profile, especially across the forehead, brow and left eye socket. This has exaggerated the rather elongated shape of the head, distorting it significantly especially when viewed from the front. Weathering has further obliterated almost all traces of hairstyling along the left side of the head, the only areas of coiffure remaining in the fringe and along the neck. The crown is badly worn whilst the position of the left ear canal and shape of the jaw are only just visible. Survival of the coiffure, ear and facial features is considerably better on the right side where discrete locks of hair are discernible in the fringe, over the ear, on the nape of the neck and within the beard. The differential pattern of surface abrasion as recorded appears to be wholly natural in origin and presumably relates to a period of weathering and frost damage when the head was left partially exposed on, or close to, the ground surface.

Despite the extensive areas of erosion noted, enough survives to show the defining characteristics of the individual represented, namely the long face, broad cranium, high forehead and tapering chin. Unfortunately, damage to the front of the face has removed much of the nose, leaving only its rough outline together with part of the right nostril. The face itself is represented in a relatively naturalistic way, especially with regard to the treatment of hair and beard, no evidence of wrinkles, furrows or other signs of aging being apparent in the forehead or around the eyes, nose or mouth. The shallow eyes are, however, unusually large and set beneath sharply arching brows, the thin, equally sized eyelids and eyeballs appearing rather flat and unrealistic. There is a slight indication, in the better preserved right eye, that the pupils were originally lightly drilled. The sculptor seems not to have made much attempt to disguise evidence of drilling at the corners of the eyes and the mouth, but the deeply incised mouth has been further disfigured by weathering, with the outline of the lips lost.

The coiffure is short, with lightly incised, waving locks of hair combed from the crown down the back and sides of the head, closely following the contours of the skull. The fringe, which is worn high, is given a degree of greater volume, individual strands of hair being 'puffed-up' above the forehead. Unfortunately the exact nature and form of a
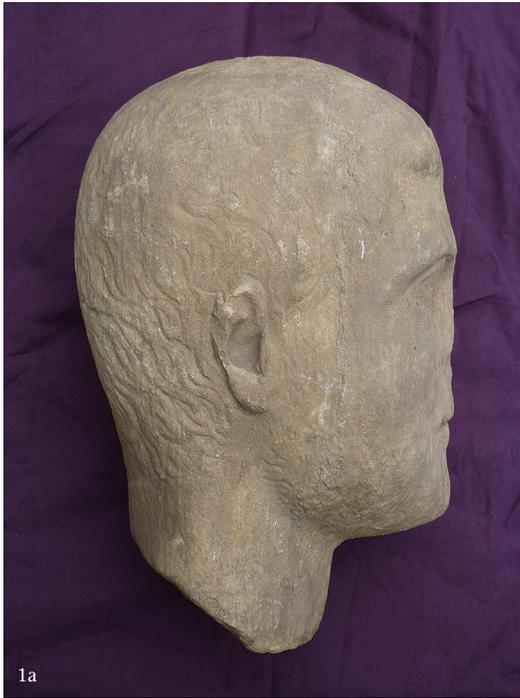
Fig. 1. The Pulborough head: a. right profile showing detail of the coiffure and beard; b. front showing levels of weathering to the face; c. left profile; d. back.

parting in the forehead is unclear due to the pattern of extreme weathering. Traces of sideburns can be seen curling over the better preserved right ear, whilst slight indications of a well-trimmed beard, lightly incised as individual swirls, are detectable across the right side of the face, closely conforming to the line of jaw and chin. It is likely that there was also originally a moustache, however damage has removed almost all indication of facial hair on the mouth and lips.

The overall elongation of the head together with the short cap of hair with individually raised strands, when combined with the somewhat unrealistic nature of the eyes, strongly suggests a creation date in the mid-3rd century. Professor Jane Fejfer of the University of Copenhagen has noted that the artistic execution of the head 'suggests a date between 240 and 270, between the late Severan / Gordianic period and the Gallienic period' (Fejfer pers. comm.). The hairstyling and facial features, in particular the smooth unfurrowed skin and the form of the eyes, appear to fit best with portraits being produced in the early years of the reign of emperor Gallienus (AD 253–68), notable examples surviving in museums in Berlin, Copenhagen and Rome (Kleiner 1992, 373–5; Prusac 2011, 52–4). Roman sculpture from this period is extremely rare in Britain, although early 3rd-century portraits of the young emperors-in-waiting, Geta and Caracalla, the two sons of Septimius Severus, have been recorded from London (Frel and Morgan 1981, 96; Coombe *et al* 2015, 14–6) whilst an image of Severus himself (AD 193–211), admittedly of disputed context and associations (Coombe *et al* 2015, 18), is on display in Ospringe, Kent (Blagg 1985), whilst a monumental portrait in marble of a clean-shaven emperor from York (probably representing Constantine the Great: AD 307–37) shows that stone sculptors were still operating in Britain, albeit infrequently, until at least the 4th century AD (Tufi 1983, 23; Henig 1995, 149; Hartley *et al* 2006, 120).

CONTEXT

The Pulborough head was recovered in the summer of 2008 from the bucket of a mechanical digger levelling a depression covered with leaf mould behind a disused dog kennels, then in the process of demolition, in the garden of a house on Cray Lane, Codmore Hill. Fortunately the head does not appear to have sustained further damage at the time of exposure, the patterns of abrasion relating to natural weathering rather than to machine action. The precise location of the discovery, although recorded by both the author and the staff of the Novium, has been withheld here at the request of the finders. The artefact appears to have been an isolated piece, no further archaeological discoveries being made at the time of the initial recovery or in the years since.

There can be no doubt that, given the nature of artistic representation and execution, the head represents a genuine antique Roman portrait. But, without secure archaeological provenance, a degree of caution must be expressed with regard to its archaeological context. It could, for example, represent a souvenir from a Grand Tour, brought to Britain in recent times and subsequently lost or otherwise discarded in the Pulborough area. Certainly large quantities of antique Roman sculpture were brought back to Britain from Italy in the 18th and early 19th centuries (Michaelis 1882; Scott 2003; Bignamini and Hornsby 2010), the West Sussex country houses of Bignor Park and Petworth displaying, to this day, the products of such collecting fervour (Raeder 2000; Dimas 2013). There is, however, no evidence of Grand Tour material being summarily or randomly discarded within the Sussex countryside, and the heavily-abraded nature of the Pulborough head, when combined with its relative distance from the nearest modern sculptural collection of any significance (Bignor Park), convincingly argues against the theory of recent importation. The head, as a poorly preserved stone portrait found out of context and apparently unassociated with contemporary Roman material, would not appear altogether unique, other such examples having been recovered in broadly similar 'isolated' circumstances across southern Britain in the last two centuries (for example two portraits in stone of the emperor Nero from London and Radwell in Hertfordshire and a bronze head of the same emperor from the river Alde in Suffolk: Russell and Manley 2013a; 2013b). Nevertheless, the placement or deposition of the stone head upon Codmore Hill, to the immediate north of modern day Pulborough, some distance from the nearest Romanised urban centre of Chichester (*Noviomagus*), may require some degree of explanation.

The area where the sculpture head was found lies just over 800m due west of the large Roman villa complex of Borough Farm, significant parts of

which were investigated in the early 19th century (Rudling 1998; 2003, 112–4; Russell 2006, 138–40). Here the outline of a 'quadrangle' or courtyard, measuring 46m north by 60m west and surrounded by a series of rooms, was partially excavated by the Rev.d Edmund Cartwright in 1817 (Page 1905, 25). Following the discovery of further walls, C. Praetorius and H. Price in 1907 began the small-scale investigation of an impressively large corridor which appeared to have terminated in an apse. Unfortunately, neither of the excavation reports recorded the full extent of areas investigated, although the occasional reference to 'oblique trenches cut between walls' (Praetorius 1911, 2 and fig. 1) seems to indicate that both phases of work adopted the simple procedure of wall-chasing. Given that so little of the villa building has been adequately recorded and that no serious consideration has been given to context and phasing, it would perhaps be unwise to speculate on villa chronology, layout and function. It is worth noting, however, that the basic arrangement of features of the Borough Farm villa, when combined with the few dateable finds retained, seems to indicate that the site is broadly comparable with the late 1st-century palace of Fishbourne, near Chichester (Rudling 2003, 113; Russell 2006, 140). Whether, as at Fishbourne, the Borough Hill site was occupied into the mid-3rd century, the period to which the Pulborough head appears to belong, is currently unknown.

Further afield, archaeological work conducted sporadically around Pulborough has indicated significant amounts of later Iron Age and early Roman activity. The precise nature and extent of this activity unfortunately remains unclear, although considerable quantities of later prehistoric and early Roman material, including late Iron Age coins and 1st-century BC / early 1st-century AD Roman amphorae and fine wares, recovered to the immediate north east of the town would appear to hint at the presence of an important pre-Roman trading post established at the northern tidal limits of the river Arun (Cunliffe *et al* 1996, 17, 135–6; Pope 2012), one of the few rivers in Roman Britain for which a Latin name has been recorded (the *Trisantona*: Rivet and Smith 1979, 45). Results of archaeological fieldwork conducted at Redfolds Farm and Beedings Castle, to the north of Nutbourne, in 2008 led the investigation team to conclude that the hilltop overlooking Pulborough

and the river Arun 'should be considered as one single, evolving precinct of high-status activity from a century before the Roman occupation through to at least the 2nd century AD' (Pope 2012, 91).

Further Roman activity in the area appears to be concentrated within and immediately around the so-called 'Pulborough Triangle' (Caroline Wells pers. comm.), formed by the intersection of three Roman roads, the north-east to south-west side being Stane Street, the major thoroughfare that linked Chichester to London, the southern-most edge of the triangle being the Greensand Way, from Hardham to Lewes, and the eastern side being a minor 'link-road' connecting the two major transport arteries and roughly followed today by the line of Broomers Hill Lane. Within and around this 'triangle' of activity lies the Roman mausoleum (or temple) of Huddlestone (Martin 1859, 141–2), the Roman bathhouse complex at Wiggonholt (Winbolt and Goodchild 1937; 1940; Evans 1974), the possible temple at Holme Street (Martin 1859, 139; Garraway Rice 1901) and the structural evidence from the Stockyard Walls site (Caroline Wells pers. comm.). A Roman *mansio* or posting station, possibly overlying the remains of an early fort or harbour, lies to the south-west of Pulborough on the former line of Stane Street at Hardham. Partially excavated in the 1920s and '30s (Winbolt 1927; 1935, 36–8), Hardham has been the target of a detailed geophysical survey conducted by English Heritage, the results of which demonstrated that the earthwork originally comprised a large rectangle, measuring 95 by 120m internally, with rounded corners and at least two external ditches (Payne 2001, 6–7).

It is clear, therefore, that the Pulborough head was recovered from within an area of extensive Roman and pre-Roman settlement, burial, religious and trade activity. It is possible that, assuming the portrait was not originally brought some significant distance from an area of Roman settlement for disposal, it may originally have adorned either a public space in the speculative trading / harbour area to the immediate south and west of modern Pulborough or within a more private space such as would have been available in the villa of Borough Farm or the Roman mausoleum / temple site of Huddlestone.

As a piece of decorative Roman stonework, the Pulborough head is also not without parallel in the area around Codmore Hill, at least two pieces

of antique carved stone having previously been recorded. At Bignor, 9km to the south-west, the early 19th-century excavation of a bathing complex attached to the Roman villa yielded the female head of a statuette depicting the goddess Fortuna or Ceres (Cunliffe and Fulford 1982, 26; Rudling and Russell 2015, 137). Although the artefact was unfortunately later stolen from the site museum, it had thankfully been recorded by the director of operations, and chief draftsman, Samuel Lysons (Lysons 1817, pl xxxii). At Fittleworth, 7km to the west of Pulborough, an ornate fragment of capital, carved from French limestone and depicting an episode from the story of Iphigenia in Tauris, was brought to light in 2010 (Black *et al* 2012). Although the piece could have derived from the 19th-century excavations conducted at Bignor villa (Black *et al* 2012, 248), it could also plausibly have originated from Borough Farm or any one of the other high status Roman sites noted within the immediate vicinity of modern Pulborough.

IDENTIFICATION

The unstratified nature of the Pulborough head, when combined with its excessively weathered state, means that it is difficult to establish a definitive identity for the piece. That the man depicted was young, rich, important and a Roman citizen is clear enough, the artefact having probably been manufactured on the continent and transported to Britain in antiquity rather than having been made locally. The execution and artistic style of the portrait, as discussed, strongly suggests that it was created in the mid-3rd century AD.

The head could plausibly represent a portrait of an important 3rd-century landowner, politician, official, tribal leader, local dignitary or city benefactor; or it could be part of an honorific statue with which to glorify the achievements of a significant individual. Discoveries of non-imperial (private) portraits are rare in Britain, when compared with other provinces of the Roman Empire, although examples may be cited from Bath, Blackheath, Caerwent, Chichester, East Meon, Fishbourne, Hinckley, Lullingstone, Radwell, Sutton Mandeville, Winterslow and York. The identification of these sculptured heads as private individuals is not always certain. However, the twice-life size form of the battered female head from Bath (Cunliffe and Fulford 1982, 5) clearly

indicates imperial associations, whilst two late 2nd- or early 3rd-century portrait busts found in the cellar of a villa at Lullingstone, once thought to represent Romano-British landowners (Meates 1979, 137), have been reinterpreted as images of the British governor, and later emperor, Pertinax and his father Publius Helvius Successus (De Kind 2005). Of the remaining examples cited, those from Blackheath, Chichester, Fishbourne, Hinckley, Radwell and York have variously been identified as the emperors Vespasian, Julian, Nero, Nero (again), the emperor Claudius's brother Germanicus and empress Salonina (the wife of emperor Gallienus) respectively (Huskinson 1994, 14–15; Russell 2013; Russell and Manley 2013a; Read and Burleigh 1995, 3; Tufi 1983, 45–6). But significant doubt exists as to the identity and nature of the badly damaged portraits recovered from East Meon (Cunliffe and Fulford 1982, 24–5), Sutton Mandeville and Winterslow (Cunliffe and Fulford 1982, 25).

At Caerwent, the base (for a sadly no longer extant) early 3rd-century AD statue, commemorating one Tiberius Claudius Paulinus, has been found (Collingwood and Wright 1965, 107), something which not only provides a clear example of the existence of non-imperial portraiture in Britain but which could potentially represent a useful parallel for the Pulborough head, if that is also to be considered as an official dedication to a private individual. Paulinus was, according to the inscription, commander of the II Augusta Legion who became (amongst other things) the governor of *Britannia Inferior* (the province of 'Lower Britain'). He was, therefore an aristocrat with extraordinary influence within both Rome and the provinces, to whom the urban community of Roman Caerwent dedicated the statue, evidently with one eye on its own future economic and political prosperity. The Pulborough head, if intended to represent the likeness of an important dignitary, could conceivably represent a similar attempt by a local community to glorify a prominent regional (or more widely significant) political figure. The rather flattened form of the Sussex portrait, however, suggests that it may not originally have been intended as part of a full figure statue, rather a bust which may have been privately revered, possibly as a family or ancestral likeness as with the images of Pertinax and his father recovered from Lullingstone (De Kind 2005).

The Pulborough head could, of course, plausibly represent the portrait of a 3rd-century

Roman emperor, other imperial candidate or usurper. An imperial portrait is certainly a possibility. If so, it being life-size suggests that it had been created during the life of a particular individual, rather than to celebrate a deceased or deified emperor whose image would have been created on a more monumental scale. Identifying 3rd-century emperors from their surviving portraiture is notoriously difficult, given not only the multiplicity of both 'legitimate' imperial candidates (such as Septimius Severus (AD 193–211), Caracalla (211–17), Geta (211), Macrinus (217–18), Elagabalus (218–22), Alexander Severus (222–35), Maximinus (235–8), Gordian I (238), Gordian II (238), Pupienus (238), Balbinus (238), Gordian III (238–44), Philip (244–49), Decius (249–51), Trebonianus Gallus (251–53), Aemilius Aemilianus (253), Valerian (253–60), Gallienus (253–68), Claudius II (268–70), Quintillus (270), Aurelian (270–75), Tacitus (275–76), Florianus (276), Probus (276–82), Carus (282–3), Numerian (283–4), Carinus (283–5), Diocletian (284–305) and Maximian (286–305)), but also the numbers of successful usurpers active in the north-western provinces (such as Postumus (260–9), Laelianus (269), Marius (269), Victorinus (269–71), Domitian II (271), Tetricus I (271–4), Tetricus II (273–4), Carausius (286–93) and Allectus (293–6)). The relative brevity of individual reigns, along with the paucity of confirmed portraiture and the deliberate destruction or modification of images following assassination or the toppling of an unpopular regime, add further complications to identification.

The style of the head, alongside the nature of artistic execution, suggest, as has already been noted, that the piece was originally created within (or influenced by) the late Severan / Gordianic and Gallienic period of portraiture, between AD 240 and 270. Of the key characters in this 30-year period, whose images are recorded and well-understood, the surviving elements of the Pulborough head compare most favourably with the portraits of the emperor Gallienus. Publius Licinius Egnatius Gallienus reigned as co-emperor with his father Valerian from AD 253, and alone from AD 260 following the capture and imprisonment of Valerian by the Persian king Shapur I. Gallienus's control over the north-western provinces of the Roman Empire was never complete, because migrating Germanic tribes disrupted the infrastructure of

Roman territories bordering the Rhine in the mid-250s and a revolt in AD 260, led by the governor of Lower Germany, Marcus Cassianius Latinius Postumus, wrested the provinces of Germany, Gaul, Raetia, Spain and Britain from his control. Although it did not immediately threaten Roman security, the territory governed by Postumus, dubbed the 'Gallic Empire', represented a significant loss to Gallienus of prestige, revenue and resources. Attempts by Rome to bring the 'Gallic Empire' to heel were initially unsuccessful, as Gallienus was militarily distracted by wars and rebellions elsewhere, and the breakaway state retained its independence for a further 14 years before finally succumbing to Roman troops in AD 274. By then, however Gallienus was dead, having fallen victim to a conspiracy among his own bodyguard in September 268.

The surviving portraiture of Gallienus has been broadly classified into three main types (Wood 1986, 88–93; Kleiner 1992, 373–5; Prusac 2011, 52–4). The earliest, created when he was co-emperor with his father Valerian, depict him with a smooth, youthful face, noticeably broad in the cranium, with a high forehead (Fig. 2), the two later types seeing him become more 'fleshy' and ornately hirsute. As with all emperors of the 3rd century, Gallienus is always shown with a moustache and beard, whilst his hair, although short and clearly following the contours of the head, is never as severe as the military buzz cut preferred by his predecessors, individual locks often curling freely at the sides and down the neck. Facial hair is also often shown in a more full and plastic way than the stubble of previous emperors which was sometimes simply picked out onto the surface of the portrait with a chisel.

In his official portraiture, Gallienus appears to have been keen to distance himself from the stern, more overtly muscular depictions of the 'soldier emperors' (such as Caracalla, Philip, Decius and Trebonianus Gallus) who preceded him, wishing instead to emphasise his 'calm and aristocratic' qualities (Wood 1986, 90–1, 106, 116–7). Under Gallienus, portraiture in general tended towards the more abstract, reducing the head 'to simple geometric forms' (Wood 1986, 90), flattening the face and creating a rather more unrealistic triangular appearance with a broad forehead and tapering chin. As the cheekbones disappeared, the eyes became larger and eyebrows high and 'stiffly patterned' (Wood 1986, 93). Hair in Gallienus's early portraits echoed the coiffure of Augustus, the

Fig. 2. The emperor Gallienus (AD 253–68), an early portrait found in Anzio, Italy, made when he was co-emperor with his father Valerian, between AD 253 and 258, preserved in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen (inv. 831): a. front view; b. left profile. Courtesy of Roger Ulrich.

first emperor, his later mature portraits recalling the more broad of face and exotically coiffured fashions of Hadrian and his successors (Wood 1986, 101), corkscrew curls of his beard becoming ever more elaborate (Kleiner 1992, 373).

If, as seems likely, the Pulborough head was intended to represent the emperor Gallienus, then it must have arrived in Britain, and been on display, no later than the autumn of AD 260, when the provinces of Britain, together with those of neighbouring Gaul and Germany, rejected the authority of Rome and threw their lot in with the Gallic Empire of Postumus. Identification with Gallienus would certainly fit the apparent 'youthful' nature of the Pulborough head, the emperor being in his early 40s when Britain broke from Rome, but a positive attribution must, due to the extremely weathered nature of the portrait, ultimately remain elusive. Perhaps all that can really be said with confidence, is that the head was influenced by the

form, style and execution of portraits made in the early years of Gallienus's reign (c. AD 253–60).

Whether the Pulborough head was originally intended to represent a mid-3rd-century emperor, someone from the imperial family, a contemporary general, governor or usurper; or whether it was actually a representation of an otherwise anonymous private businessman or landowner based in a nearby villa, it remains an important find. For Roman portraiture Britain was one of the least well-supplied provinces (Stewart 2003, 174), although West Sussex has had a large proportion of the stone portraits recovered to date (Henig 1996; 2002, 51; Russell 2013; Russell and Manley 2013a; Soffe and Henig 1999). The majority of examples found in Britain, however, are of 1st- or 2nd-century date. So the Pulborough head, coming from the mid-3rd century, has few parallels (Henig 1995, 149–50), the only other positively attested example of the period being a life-size representation, quite

possibly of the empress Salonina (AD 260–8), wife of Gallienus, recovered from York in 1882 (Tufi 1983, 45–6).

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