

Observations on the Altar and Inscription found at Tynemouth in the year 1781, by MR. THOMAS HODGSON.

As the illustration of the ancient state and history of these Northern Counties forms one of the leading objects of this Society, the following observations suggested by a consideration of some Roman remains found in this neighbourhood, may perhaps not be considered irrelevant, though their discovery is not of recent date. The remains to which I allude are the Altar and Tablet, which forty years ago were found about six feet underground, on the north side of Tynemouth Castle, where they had been buried as foundation stones of some of the ancient buildings or churches. They were communicated soon after their discovery to the Society of Antiquaries of London, by their Secretary, the Rev. John Brand, and figures of them, with explanations by Mr. Brand, were published in the eighth volume of the *Archæologia**. They were also published by Mr. Gough, in his edition of Camden's *Britannia*.† The inscription on the altar is,

Jovi optimo maximo, Ælius Rufus, præfectus Cohortis Quartæ Lingonum.

The inscription on the tablet is not so easily defined, the two first lines having been so injured that it is difficult to ascertain what they have been. The figures given by Mr. Brand and Mr. Gough, though taken nearly about the same time, differ exceedingly; but as the stones themselves are now in the possession of the Society of Antiqua-

* Pl. xxi. p. 326. fig. 1, 2, 3, 4.

† Vol. iii. pl. xxii. fig. 14, 15. ed. 1789.

ries, it is not in our power, by a personal inspection, to ascertain which is most correct. Mr. Brand's was probably taken on the spot, soon after their first discovery, when they might possibly be in a more perfect state than when seen by Mr. Gough, and may therefore perhaps be more to be depended on. As he has given it, the inscription seems tolerably legible, though it is not easy to ascertain the exact meaning. With the explanation he has given, I cannot wholly agree; but it is not necessary for my present purpose to ascertain it with minute accuracy; it is sufficient for that purpose to know, that it evidently records the erection of a temple and some other public works, by a person named Maximinus.

The fact of the erection of such works being thus clearly proved, the question naturally arises—at what place did this erection take place? The answer is apparently obvious, that no doubt it must have been very near the spot where the stones were found. But as there is no record of a station having ever been at this place, and especially as no name has been handed down to us, which can be applied to it, it has been denied by many that the Romans had any station or establishment at Tynemouth. Amongst those writers who support such an opinion, appears to be Mr. Gough, who suggests,* that the stones in question might, perhaps, have been brought from South Shields, where undoubtedly there has been a station, and used as foundation stones in the building of the first Christian church at this place. But the futility of this opinion must be apparent to every one at all acquainted with the topography of the situation; for it can scarcely be believed that the builders of that church would take the trouble of bringing foundation stones a distance of at least a mile, and across a wide river, when stones of all sizes could be had in such abundance close at hand. It is much more probable that they found them on the spot, and with the other remains of the temple, &c. used them in the building of their church. It is indeed a matter of great surprise to me, that any doubt

* *Camd.* vol. iii. p. 235.

should ever have arisen on the subject; for independent of the fact that these inscriptions have been found at Tynemouth, it requires, I think, but a very slight knowledge of military affairs to convince us that the Romans must have maintained a fort, or post of some sort, on the north side of the mouth of the Tyne. The district of country from the Tyne to the Solway Frith was, we know, considered of the utmost importance by the Romans. It was here they erected the bulwarks of their empire in Britain, against the invasions of their northern neighbours; and in this district maintained more numerous forts and garrisons than in any other part. To supply, to succour in case of need, and to preserve the communication with, these forts, must have been objects of primary importance in their eyes. Can we therefore suppose that they would fail to occupy a river like the Tyne, which afforded them such extreme facilities for the purposes in question? or that they would not take every precaution, by the erection of forts, &c. to prevent the possession of the river being wrested from them? * That they had a post at South Shields is quite certain, but, I think, it can scarcely be maintained that that fort alone would afford them the adequate security. Is it at all probable, I would ask, that they would erect a fort upon a comparatively low point of land, easily accessible on every side, and situated so far behind another, that the approach of an enemy by sea from the north, could not be observed until they were close upon them, and leave unoccupied a promontory fortified almost by nature, and commanding a view of the coast as far as the eye can reach? It is impossible to believe it; indeed, it is, I think, self-evident, that if they considered the fortifying of the point on the south side of the mouth of the Tyne, necessary for their security, they must

* As for obvious reasons they could not retain similar possession of the Solway Frith, being in fact obliged from its great extent and its separation from their other positions, to abandon the whole of the north shore of that estuary to their enemy, the secure possession of the Tyne became consequently of greater consequence to them. Besides it was from the east coast that their supplies would naturally come.

have felt the fortifying of the point on the north side of infinitely more importance.

Of two of the three barriers, or *prætenturæ*, erected by the Romans across this isthmus, we have positive evidence that two of them did not extend as far as Tynemouth; but what reason have we to suppose that the chain of forts drawn by Agricola across the island, might not extend so far? and that those at the eastern extremity might not be maintained even after the building of the walls of Hadrian and Severus? * Though those walls terminated, the one at Newcastle and the other at Wallsend, we must not thence conclude that the country between such terminations and the sea, was left unoccupied by the Romans. The cause of their being terminated before reaching the sea, I conceive to have been, that the depth and breadth of the river were then deemed a sufficient protection against the sudden inroads of the enemy. The motive for extending the wall of Severus beyond that of Hadrian, was no doubt to secure the last place on the river where it could by possibility be forded. Beyond this point a wall was no longer necessary; but to leave the country east of it unoccupied, would have been to expose unnecessarily their sea flank, to render it liable to be turned, and thus their immense fortifications, erected with such great labour and expense, rendered useless. Besides, what is there to make us believe that the Romans should confine themselves on this point more closely to the wall than they did on others,—on this point where the want of a wall rendered precaution and vigilance more necessary? We find, moreover, from the numbers of stations occupied by them on the sea coast at the west end of the wall, that the security of that sea flank was an object of the greatest importance to them, even though

* Mr. Horsley seems to think, that after the building of the wall of Severus, the station at South Shields was abandoned—an opinion for which I cannot see much reason. If it ever was abandoned, it was in all probability owing to finding that the security afforded by the station at Tynemouth, rendered the other no longer necessary. The abandonment of that station would, however, increase the importance of the one at Tynemouth.

the wall did there reach to the very edge of the sea,—why therefore are we to conclude, that the security of the east coast was not also an object of the first importance to them, or that they would neglect it*? But that they did extend their communications beyond the station at Wallsend, is a fact of which, fortunately, more convincing proofs than mere conjecture evince the truth. At Chirton, may yet be traced the form of a Roman station, known by the name of Blake Chesters—a name sufficiently expressive of its origin. In the neighbouring fields too coins have been found at various times; and I am told by good authority, that several squares and oblongs, extending from West Chirton to Tynemouth, may yet be traced. Supported by these facts, the conjecture of a fort having existed at Tynemouth, amounts almost to certainty.

If we are satisfied of the existence of a Roman fort or station at Tynemouth, there can be no uncertainty respecting the troops by which it was garrisoned, since the inscription on the altar satisfactorily proves that the *Cohors quarta Lingonum* was stationed here. This is the only inscription hitherto discovered in this island, in which the name of this cohort is found, nor is there any other record of its presence in Britain. The name of the *Cohors secunda Lingonum* occurs in inscriptions at Moresby in Cumberland, at Lanchester, and, as Mr. Horsley thinks, at Ilkley in Yorkshire. Now it is very remarkable, that neither the *Cohors secunda*, nor the *Cohors quarta*, LINGONUM, are mentioned in the *Notitia*, but in that curious record there occur the names of the *Cohors secunda*, and the *Cohors quarta*, LERGORUM. This circumstance has given rise to a doubt in my mind, which, if well founded, will be found of some importance to a correct knowledge of the geography of this part of Roman Britain. For it is further worthy of remark, that these two cohorts *Lergorum* have never yet been found

* The secure possession, which the occupation of the points of land at the mouth of the Tyne, gave them of the country to the south, was no doubt one reason why they found it unnecessary to occupy so many stations on the east, as on the west coast.

mentioned in any inscription discovered in Britain. So that the cohorts *Lingonum* occur in inscriptions, and not in the *Notitia*, and the cohorts *Lergorum* in the *Notitia*, and not in inscriptions. I am hence strongly inclined to suspect, that some of the early transcribers or printers of the *Notitia* have made a mistake, and put *Lergorum* for *Lingonum*. And that the orthography of the *Notitia* is not considered infallibly correct, we have evidence in some literal corrections made by Mr. Horsley. Should the doubt which I have here thrown out be considered to be well founded, it will, as I have said, be found to have an important inference with regard to the Roman geography of this part of the country, as it will decidedly prove that Mr. Horsley was correct in beginning the stations *per lineam valli* at the east end of the wall, and not at the west, as preceding writers had done. For by the *Notitia*, the first of these stations, *Segedunum*, is said to have been garrisoned by the *Cohors quarta Lergorum*, supposed *Lingonum*, and this altar erected by the prefect of the *Cohors quarta Lingonum* is found at Tynemouth, evidently shewing that that station was at this end of the wall, if my supposition be correct. *Segedunum*, it is well known, is placed by Mr. Horsley at Wallsend; a decision which the preceding remarks may perhaps at first sight be thought to invalidate, as should they be correct, this station ought rather to be placed at Tynemouth. But as the assigning of such name to the station at Tynemouth would be entirely subversive of the principle of order in which these stations seem entered in the *Notitia*, and by the observance of which Mr. Horsley was enabled to fix them with such apparent certainty, I see no reason for deviating from his arrangement. I am therefore inclined to be of opinion, that the station at Tynemouth was only a secondary station or fort, subordinate to that at Wallsend, and under the command of the prefect of the Cohort stationed there. Motives of pleasure or the nature of the service on which he was employed, would no doubt often induce him to fix his quarters here, and on some of such occasions this altar was probably erected. That no name has been handed down to

us that can with probability be applied to this station ought not to surprise us, or raise any doubt of this point of land having been occupied by the Romans; for if a dependency on the station at Wallsend, it of course would not be comprehended in the plan of the *Notitia*, and its situation would naturally preclude it from being included in any of the Itinera of either Antonine or Richard. But with regard to name, I cannot help suspecting that it may, together with the station at South Shields, be included by Ptolemy in the appellation of *Ostia Vedræ*. For as this name is in the plural, it must be inferred either that the Tyne had at that time more mouths than one, or that this phrase alludes to the forts, which, like gates, secured its entrance. In after times it may have had a more specific name, which has since been lost amidst the lapse of ages,—a fate which has no doubt attended that of many other stations.

Newcastle, December 1, 1821.