

XLII.—*Observations on Mr. BRAND's Opinion respecting the Origin of the Prior's Haven at Tynemouth. Communicated by THOMAS BROWN, Esq. in a letter to the President and Council of the Newcastle Antiquarian Society.*

GENTLEMEN,

I FEEL induced respectfully to submit to your consideration the few following observations, with a view of drawing the attention of your learned body to a subject of considerable importance as connected with the local history of this neighbourhood.

To doubt the accuracy of even a conjecture of so able and learned a historian as BRAND—especially on any subject connected with antiquarian research, wherein he has so eminently excelled—may appear bordering upon presumption. There are, however, conclusions, at which that learned author has arrived, which do not seem to be quite warranted, by the premises from whence they are deduced. One of these, contained in the author's account of Tynemouth, which is given in the second volume of his *History of Newcastle*, appears to furnish considerable room for doubt.

He thus commences his account—"Notwithstanding what has been advanced to the contrary by the learned HORSLEY, some recent discoveries seem clearly to prove to us, that the Romans had a station in this place, during their residence in Britain"—and in a note subjoined, wherein he narrates the finding in Tinmouth Castle, the front of a Roman altar, and also a stone with a Roman inscription thereon, he gives it as his opinion, that the Haven on the south of the Castle, was one of the artificial harbours of the Romans.

Now that the Haven is *not* of Roman origin, will, it is presumed, appear almost undeniable, even upon a cursory examination of the premises upon which the author founds his conjecture, but it is appre-

hended that the document hereafter referred to, places the matter beyond even a doubt.

Whether or not the Romans had a station at Tynemouth, is not perhaps essentially material in deciding the question now under consideration; but inasmuch as the existence of such a station gives a colourable basis for the author's conjecture as to the origin of the Haven, it may not be inappropriate, to examine the grounds upon which he constructs the assumption, that this has been a Roman station.

The author in the outset, very candidly admits the authority of HORSLEY, as being on this point opposed to him, and he raises his hypothesis, upon the single and isolated fact, of these two Roman stones having been discovered near the castle; he says that the front of the Roman altar was found by a Major DURNFORD, at the depth of six feet in the earth—"where it had been laid as a foundation stone *probably* of the ancient Christian church,* which is said to have been erected there soon after the introduction of the faith into Britain." Now the only *fact*, we here discover, is the finding of the stone by Major DURNFORD, at the depth of six feet in the earth, all the rest is purely an assumption; the fact of its having constituted part of the foundation of the ancient Christian church, could only have been established, from some trace of such foundation having been discovered; but of this we have no account, therefore under what circumstances, or at what period, this stone had been placed there, must be altogether matter of conjecture.

The other stone with a Roman inscription, and which will by and by be more particularly adverted to, was found in the same place June 12th, 1783, "where (as the author observes) it had been laid in the foundation of *some of the ancient buildings*"—but he does not venture to assert, that this stone had along with the other been employed in the foundation of the ancient church, so as to raise the inference,

* The first Christian church upon this place is said to have been built of wood, by Edwin, king of the Northumbrians, sometime between the years 617 and 633, and in this his daughter Rosella, is said to have taken the veil; Oswald, his successor, whose reign commenced in 634, caused this wooden edifice to be taken down, and erected upon the site thereof a structure of stone.—*Leland's Collectanea*, vol. iv. tom. iii. p. 42.

that both stones had been in the hands of the builder at the same period, therefore with regard to this stone, we are equally left in the dark, as to the circumstances under which, and the probable period when, it came there.

The same author describes three stones which he states to have been found at Jarrow,* one of which he suspects to be of Roman workmanship, and the other two, from the inscriptions thereon, being obviously so; these stones, he says, "may have been brought to Jarrow at the first building of the monastery, from the adjoining Roman station near South Shields." Now these stones furnish equally strong grounds for asserting, that at Jarrow also there had been a Roman station;—this however the author does not attempt to set up; but accounts for these stones having come there, in that reasonable and probable manner, which, it is submitted, is equally applicable to the stones discovered at Tynemouth, especially when the immediate vicinity of that place to the station on the opposite bank of the river, is considered.

The various military works, which have from time to time been constructed, in and near the ruins of the ancient monastery, the excavation of vaults within its site, and the digging of graves in the cemetery immediately adjoining, together with the removal of the mounds of earth, on the outside of the present fortifications, must have afforded many and ample opportunities of discovering other remains of Roman antiquities, had any such existed there; and the total absence of such indications would seem most fully to justify the presumption, that the Romans never had a station at this place.

The author having thus assumed the existence of a Roman station, and having taken it for granted, that the stone secondly mentioned had been placed by the Romans, as a tablet on a temple erected there to the God of the Winds, he proceeds therefrom, and from the inscription which he makes out upon this stone, to deduce the inference, that the haven, called Prior's Haven, is of Roman origin.

The following is the inscription given as found upon this stone:—

* See BRAND, vol. ii. p. 62,—and appendix, p. 590.

"*Gyrum Cumbas et Templum fecit Caius Julius Verus Maximinus Legionis sextæ victricis ex voto.*"*

The note which immediately follows runs thus:—

"I suppose Gyrum to mean here,—a circular harbour for the shipping—and, in favour of this hypothesis, have to observe that there is still a recess of that form, called Prior's Haven, adjoining on the south to Tynemouth castle, which has every appearance of having been one of the artificial harbours of that great people, and is, I presume the place alluded to in this inscription." Now from the author's own account, it does not seem *quite* clear, that he is accurate as to this word "Gyrum," upon which his whole argument hinges, actually being part of the inscription, for he says, "The first letter of what I call the first line of the inscription, is confessedly faint and doubtful: the second letter appears plainly to be a Y, as does the third to be an R, though at first sight, it resembles a P, there can be no doubt concerning any of the others;" granting, however, that he is correct as to the word, and without questioning the accuracy of his translation, as from authorities† he quotes, the word would certainly seem to have been used to denote "a harbour," it does not for the following reason, as far as relates to the term "circular," seem applicable to Prior's Haven.

It is true that the banks inclosing the western side of the haven, have from the accumulation of sand at high-water mark, and other adventitious causes, assumed a sort of semi-circular or amphitheatrical

* It should have been *Cypum cum basi, et Templum, &c.*—i. e. Caius Julius Verus Maximinus of the Sixth Victorious Legion according to a vow erected this Cippus, with its base and a temple. The Cippi were columns erected on pedestals or bases as boundary marks, memorials of affection or events, and for many other purposes. Sometimes when placed in temples they were surmounted with the statue of the Deity to whom the building was dedicated. When Christianity became the established religion of Europe, crosses were erected for purposes similar to those for which the Romans had used Cippi.—J. H. Sec.

† SKEFFER in his book *de Militiâ Navali Veterum*, p. 212, cites COLUMELLA, lib. ix. as describing the ancient mode of making harbours in the following words, "præjaciuntur in Gyrum moles." This word seems to have been corrupted afterwards into "*Gyrrus*," see DUFRESNE *in verbo*, where he gives a quotation from an authority of the date of 1064, in which the following passage occurs—"eant et redeant piscatores Gyrrum."

shape, yet it cannot but be quite apparent to the most common observer, that the land must at one period have reached out to the present extent of, and have covered the rocks lying on the north and south sides of the haven, consequently, that when it has been cut, the haven itself instead of being *circular*, must have been decidedly *oblong*.

Independent, however, of all that has before been observed, the conjecture of the learned historian appears to fall to the ground on the score of improbability; for what motive or inducement had the Romans it may reasonably be asked, when by means of a strong and formidable station on the south bank of the Tyne, they had the full command and use of a good *natural* harbour, to form an *artificial* harbour, so immediately in its vicinity?

That the place now called Prior's Haven, was, as its name imports, made by the Priors of Tynemouth, for the use of that monastery, seems to be placed beyond a doubt by the document presently referred to. It would appear that during the thirteenth century, great feuds and contentions had existed between the priors and the burgesses of Newcastle, who claimed the port under the crown, respecting certain alleged infractions on the part of the monastery, with reference to the duties and customs upon goods landed for its use; the supplies for the monastery coming by sea, and these would not be inconsiderable in amount, would, when brought within the limits of the port, be liable to these imposts—to avoid this, and perhaps other exactions of the king's officers and burgesses, it is fair to presume that the prior had been induced to cut the harbour in question, without the limits of the port, and the jurisdiction of the town of Newcastle; for by the record of a suit, appearing to have been instituted before the king in parliament in the term of St. Hilary, in the 20th of Edward I. (1292) between the king and the burgesses of Newcastle, and the prior of Tynemouth, the prior is required to answer for certain grievances and injuries alleged to have been committed by him, as well against the king as against the said burgesses, and he is charged (*inter alia*) with *having made for his own use and benefit, in his domain and lands lying between the town of Newcastle and the sea, a port where no port before existed.*

The following are extracts from this record, a copy of which is given by BRAND, in the appendix to his second volume of the *History of Newcastle*.

“Pretextu cujus mandati venerunt predictus prior et predict' burgenses personaliter modo hic et pred' burgenses pro Domino Rege dicunt quod cum ipse Dominus Rex habeat et habere debeat totum portum in aqua de Tyne a mari usque ad locum qui dicitur Hydewine-Streames, ita liberi quod non liceat alicui carcicare seu discarcicare mercandizas aliquas seu denaratas nec forstallum facere de hujus modi mercandizis seu denar' emend' vel vendend' eadem nisi infra villam Novi Castri predict'. Ita quod Dominus Rex tolmeta sua prisas et costumias et alia ad dominium suum ibidem spectant' percipere possit.—Predictus prior qui habet dominicas terras suas predict' aque adjacent' inter mare & villam pred' carcicare & discarcicare facit ibidem mercandizas & denar' quascunque ibidem applicant' emend' et vendend' in terris suis pred' pro voluntate sua *faciendo ibi portum ubi nullus portus prius fuit* et etiam forstalla mercandizarum in prejudicium Domini Regis et ville sue.”

“Dicunt etiam quod homines et tenentes predict' prioris de Tynemuth et de Sheeles per ipsum priorem apud Sheeles receptati carcant et discarcant mercandizas et denarratas ac si essent mercatores secundum quantitatem bonorum suorum, *et ita portum et forstallum ibidem faciunt ubi nullus portus de jure fieri deberet.*

“Et quia compertum est per veredictum jur' sicut in recordo patet superius quod portus in aqua de Tyne a mari usque ad locum qui dicitur Hidewyne Streames est liber portus Regis, et quod nullus in portu illo carcicare aut discarcicare potest sine licent' Regis aut ballivorum suorum. Ita quod *apud Tynemuth* neque apud Sheeles *naves carcantur sive discarcantur* bona vel mercimonia ibidem de cetero vendantur infra coopertum nec extra, &c. Et recuperet Dominus Rex dampna sua que taxantur per jur ad quatuor libras *ratione carcacionis et discarcacionis navium ibidem per predict. priorem.*”

The foregoing extracts from this record, seem clearly to show that the prior of Tynemouth was *charged* at least, with, not only having

made ("faciendo" is the term used) a port where no port before existed, but also with having loaded and unloaded ships *there* (i. e.) "apud Tynemuth."

That the parts of this voluminous record, appearing to bear upon this question, may have been overlooked by Brand, is by no means improbable; inasmuch as he has contented himself with quoting from Bourne, that which *professes* to be a translation of the record, but wherein the foregoing passages are altogether omitted.*

I am, Gentlemen,

With much respect,

Your obedient and very humble Servant,

THO. BROWN,

Newcastle, Oct. 6, 1829.

* Since the preceding remarks were drawn up, I have met with the following note in the marginal MS. additions made by Grey to his *Chorographia*, and published by the Newcastle Antiquarian Society. The note is marked p. 18, line 24. "The prior of Tinemouth contended with the T * * for the privilege of Key * * but was foiled, which made the prior to make the haven called Prior Haven.