

REPORT FOR 1894 OF THE NORTHUMBERLAND
EXCAVATION COMMITTEE.

1. *Aesica* or Great Chesters stands on the western side of the depression which divides the 'Nine Nicks of Thirlwall' from the range of Whinshields and allows the Caw burn to find a passage southwards to the Tyne valley at Haltwhistle. Half a mile to the west of the burn is the farmhouse of Greatchesters, six hundred feet above the sea, amid an expanse of moor and grass fields, and immediately west of the house the outlines of the Roman fortress are still distinctly visible. The situation is not unfavourable; the ground slopes gently to the south, and additional shelter is provided by the rounded mass of



Chesters pike, which rises to the height of eight hundred feet about half a mile to the north. The fortress is an oblong area of three acres, measuring about three hundred and sixty by four hundred and twenty feet,

and resting its northern face upon the wall. To south and south-east lay the usual 'suburban' buildings of the so-called 'civil settlement,'



a hypocaust belonging to which is said by Dr. Bruce to have been visible in 1867. Farther south, about a quarter of a mile from the fortress, runs the line of the *vallum* and beyond it, at

Walltown mill, Brand and Hodgson suppose the cemetery to have

been. The fortress was garrisoned by the Second Cohort of the Asturians;* but our further knowledge is limited to that supplied by



three of the not very numerous inscriptions discovered here. One of these mentions Hadrian. A second records work done about A.D.

165, while a third states that a ruined store-house was rebuilt by the garrison A.D. 225. The fortress lies at present almost untouched beneath a grass field. Its eastern face has been encroached on by the



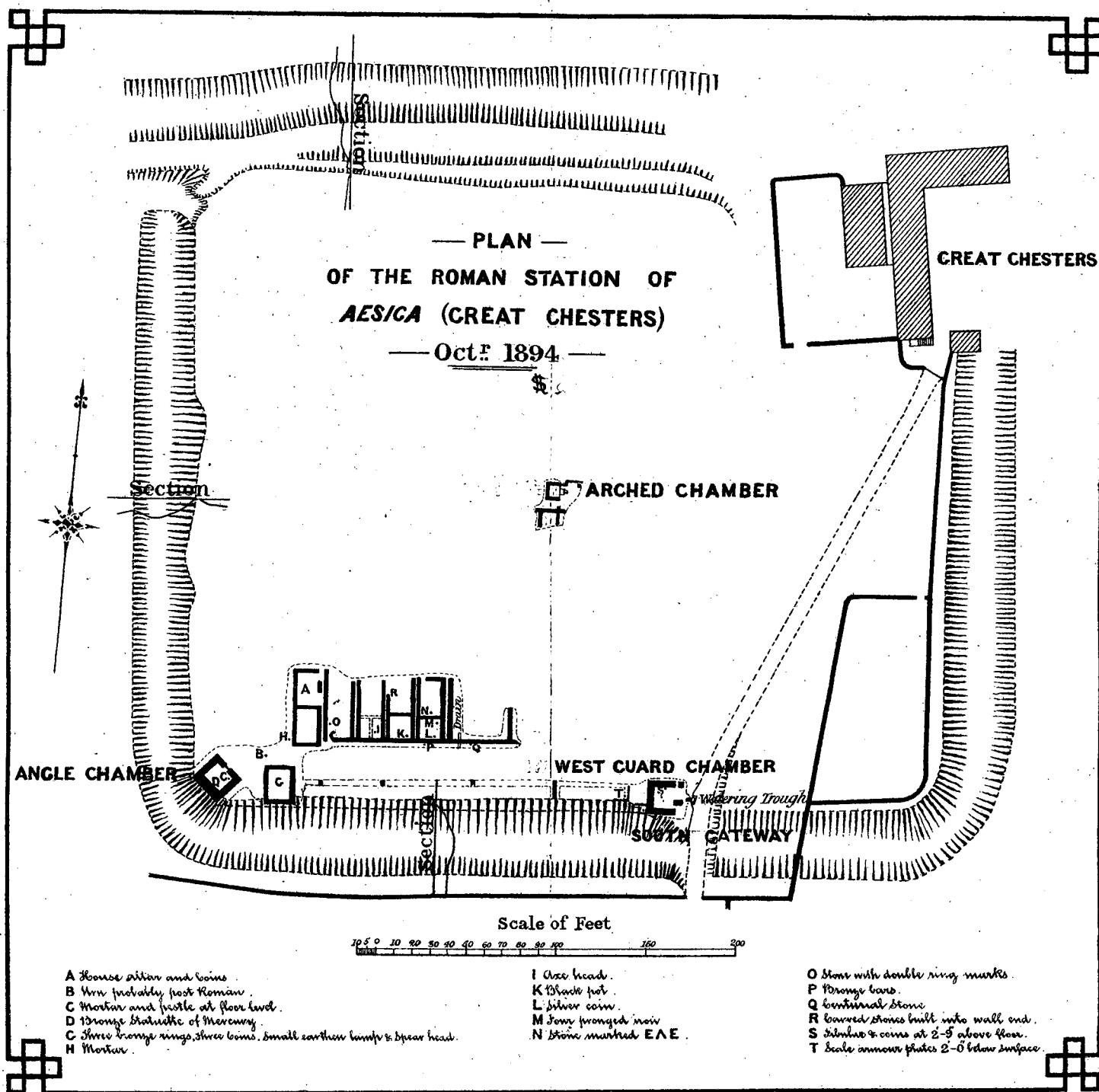
* See illustration of tile found at *Aesica*, naming this cohort, on preceding page.

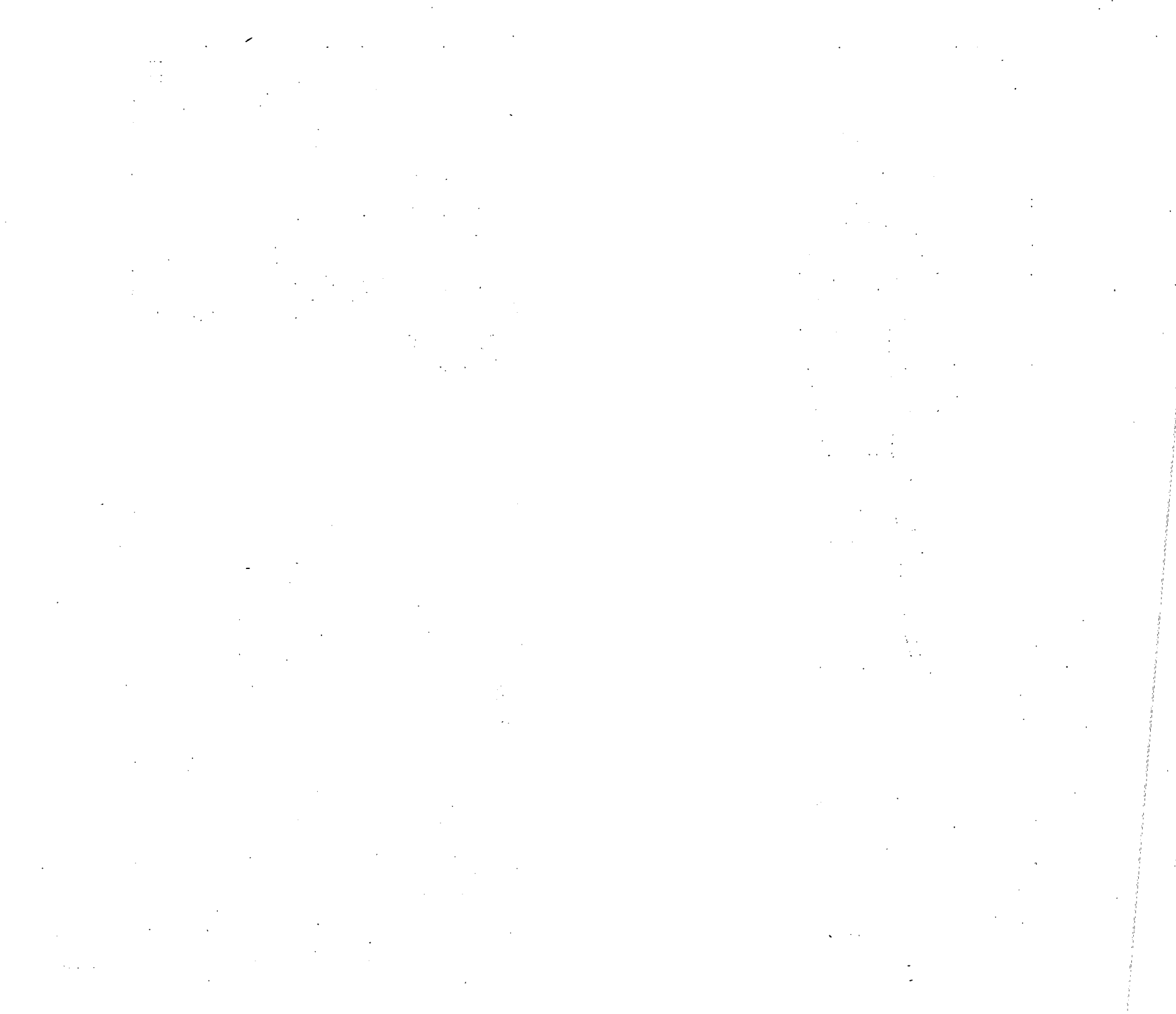
† See illustrations of these three inscriptions on this and preceding pages.

farm buildings, and some foundations in the upper part of it were cleared out in 1767, but the site is obviously a promising one, and had been marked as such. The excavation committee was fortunate enough to obtain the leave of the owner, Mr. H. J. W. Coulson, and of the tenant, Mr. Woodman, both of whom, by their ready concurrence, have laid archaeologists under a considerable obligation.

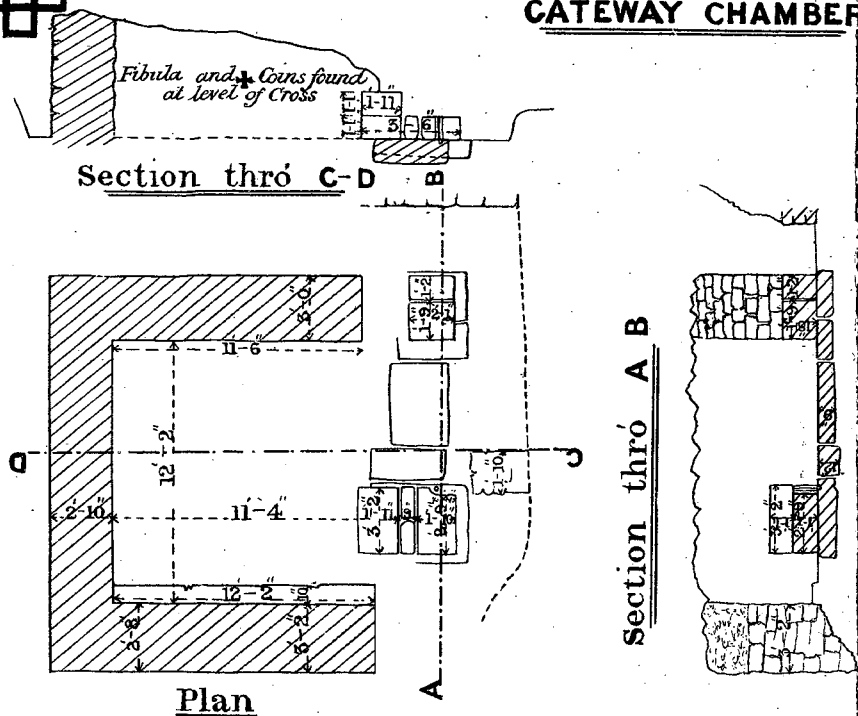
2. Excavations were commenced on Monday, July 23rd, at the south-west corner of the camp, a point previously selected by the committee, and were continued eastwards in a manner which will be seen from the plan. It was subsequently judged advisable so far to exceed the area continuously excavated as to include the south gate, and the vault in the centre of the camp. The work at first proceeded slowly, as the workmen were unused to their task and insufficiently provided with tools. The earth to be moved was full of very large stones, and the trenches required were nearly five feet deep.

3. The corner turret, which was first excavated, appears to resemble the corner turrets of the other mural fortresses, the best preserved being at *Cilurnum*. It is well and solidly built of hewn stone, measures internally very nearly ten by twelve feet, and has an entrance three feet wide with a sill at the bottom. The whole may be certainly classed among the better built and better preserved turrets of the *muris*, the masonry being over six feet in height. Like many other buildings in the mural fortresses, it had two flagged floors, one about a foot above the other; on and between the floors were bones and burnt refuse, and in two of the corners were marks of fire. There were traces of a third floor below the second. This, however, was not flagged. The discoveries in the turret were not of very great importance. The most interesting was a large pestle with a correspondingly large mortar, found on the level of the upper floor. Fragments of pottery and iron objects and a stone trough were also turned up, and immediately outside the doorway, at a depth of five and a half feet, a quern fifteen inches in diameter. Just outside the southern wall of the turret, at a distance of three feet below the surface, an interesting coin was found, a *denarius* of M. Antony. This is one of those republican silver coins which remained in circulation during the empire owing to the goodness of their metal. The easily distinguishable republican silver is not unfrequently discovered





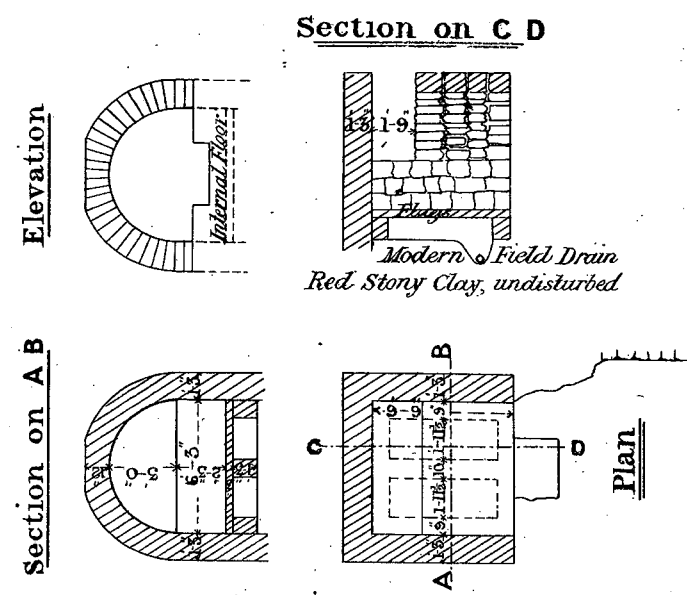
GATEWAY CHAMBER



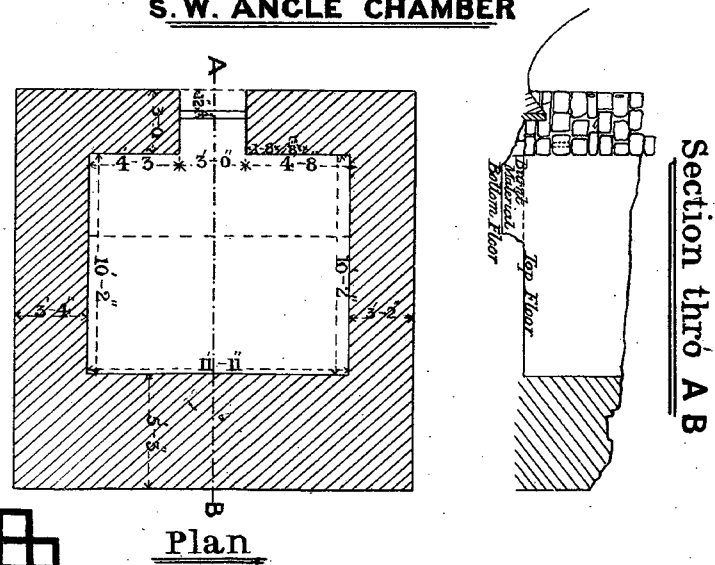
DETAILS AESICA

1894

CENTRAL ARCHED CHAMBER



S. W. ANGLE CHAMBER



NOTES

The dotted portion indicates where the ground has been opened up during 1894. With the exception of the Angle, Gate & central chambers, the walling is of a poor character & some of this material has been re-used. The south west angle does not appear to have been rounded in the usual manner, but follows the line of the Angle Chamber. This chamber has been twice floored, the material between the floors having traces of fire. There is a small recess to the left of the entrance with splayed angles. The Gateway has remained, the walls of the Guard Chamber. The bases of two of the pillars on the west side with the reveal and pivot holes for the door. But these have evidently been later date alterations to the gateway. The central chamber remains partially arched, the top of it being level with the present surface and has a flagged floor resting on dwarf walls. It seems to have been approached by a stair way from the east and the general appearance points to its having been a bath or the service Water Tank for the station, for which purpose, it being wholly built in the strong red clay it would be quite serviceable. A modern field drain has been cut through this chamber which has in part disturbed the floor.

along with imperial issues, and in places where republican Rome was unknown. Thus, a hoard of coins recently found at Silchester, apparently deposited in the early years of Septimius Severus (*circa* A.D. 195), contained a few of these republican silver coins among a great number of later ones.

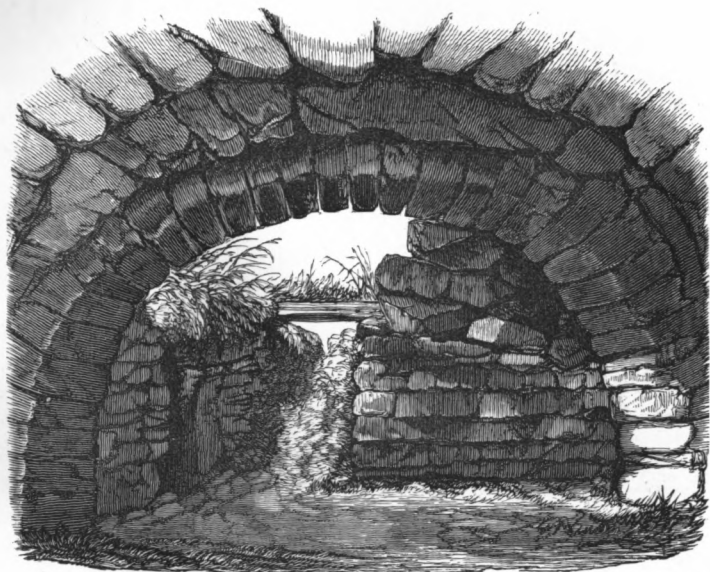
4. From the turret a trench was driven north-east towards the centre of the camp, until a wall was struck about forty feet from the turret. The trench itself revealed very little. Near the turret, two lines of black earth, the upper one four feet six inches below the surface, were noticed, and thought to correspond to the two flagged floors of the turret. About twenty feet from the turret a pot was found in thirteen pieces, three feet below the surface. From this trench another was carried back to the wall, east of the corner turret, with the result that another turret was found built against the wall. The masonry of this turret was extremely rude, as it showed no outer faces that could be seen; it was perhaps piled up from the outside with earth. It was flagged in rough fashion, and is only remarkable for yielding a small find of three coins (one of Trajan, one of Faustina), four bronze rings, and some small iron objects. Close by were discovered a spear head, a bit of window glass, and some other small fragments.

5. It will be convenient to deal here with the buildings which were first discovered in the trench from the corner turret, and which were subsequently traced for a considerable distance, though not completely. The buildings seem to consist of a range of oblong chambers, each divided into two more or less square rooms, and separated from one another by very narrow spaces, of which the object is not clear. Apparently every chamber must have had its own outer walls, but the complete excavation of the block is necessary before they can be compared with some possibly similar features at *Citurnum*. The remains found in these chambers were few and disappointing. The westernmost chamber yielded a small altar-shaped stone, in size seven by ten by seven inches, with an ornament of incised lines, which may point to mere architectural use. This chamber had two flagged floors, one a foot below the other. The other rooms yielded some building stones strongly resembling that which was at first taken to be an altar, an axehead, some coins, some brass pans, a

curious iron object, and besides some smaller remains, pottery, etc., two lettered fragments, one bearing the letters IAE, the other the numerals XLVIII. The general disposition of these objects will be seen from the plan, on which also a drain is shown which issued from one of the eastern chambers. The masonry of these chambers was of a very poor character and it is not impossible that the excavators made mistakes as to one or two pieces of walling in the stony and highly disturbed soil. For the present we can only say that the presence of these chambers proves the existence at *Aesica* of a feature which seems to distinguish our northern fortresses from those on the German *Limes*. This feature is the greater abundance of traceable buildings within the camp area.

6. A separate examination was made of the vault in the centre of the camp. This had been cleared out before, and indeed yielded, in the shape of relics, nothing more valuable than modern crockery and milk tins; but its good preservation, and its similarity to the vaults at *Cilurnum* and elsewhere, rendered its exploration desirable. It proved to be a vaulted chamber almost exactly six and a half feet square. It was paved with large flags resting on small dwarf walls, which Mr. Holmes thinks are coeval with the flagging, while doubting if this was the original floor of the chamber. These dwarf walls rest on undisturbed clay, and a modern horse-shoe drain has been carried between them at some more or less recent period. On the western side of the vault some large stones lie regularly, as if intentionally, on the flooring, and make a ledge about eight inches high and twenty-eight inches wide; on the north side a native rock juts out to about the same height. The roofing is made by five courses of stone, the top of the arch being about five feet above the lower flooring. The exit from the vault appears to have been on the eastern side, but no steps were discovered there, though the excavation was taken, as it appeared, into undisturbed clay. It may be worth while to add, by way of comparison, some details of the vault at *Cilurnum*. This vault stands inside a square room on the south side of the 'forum,' its area is nine feet by ten, its height six and a quarter feet, so that it is larger than the *Aesica* example. A passage three feet wide leads for five feet to steps by which the surface is reached. The roof is arched with five courses of stones; the floor is flagged. When the vault was first

opened, the remains of the original door, bound with iron, were found. Both vaults plainly have the same use. They do not seem adapted for water. Of the other two theories usually suggested, a prison or a treasury, the latter seems the more probable. The recent examination of the forts on the German *Limes* has revealed somewhat

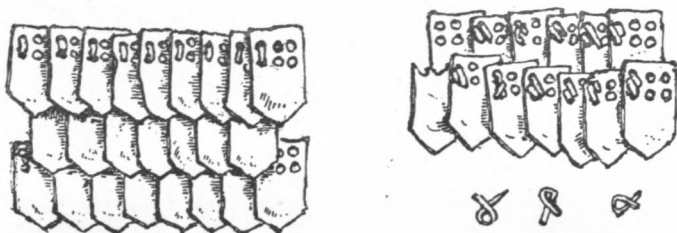


VAULT AT CILURNUM.

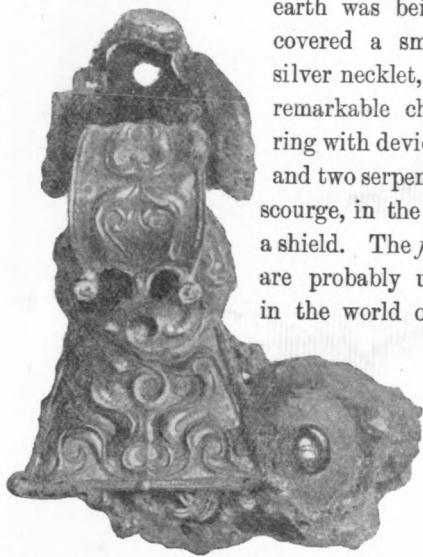
similar vaults in connection with some of the *praetoria*. These appear to be under the 'shrines' of the camps, and various features lead to the supposition that they were used to store money or documents. A somewhat similar vault has been noticed at *Bremenium*.

7. Finally, the site of the south gate was ascertained and a part of it, the western guard chamber, was cleared out. The gate appears to have been where the modern road to the farmhouse passes the wall of the fortress, and it is possible enough, as Dr. Bruce supposed, that this road is on the course of a Roman road down to the Stanegate. This gateway is farther to the east than we should have expected, as it appears to be the only gateway of the side. There were signs that it had, at some time, been walled up like other gateways along the Wall. Outside the guard-chamber and just inside the wall of the

camp a find of scale armour was made which resembled fragments of armour found elsewhere on the Wall,* but was much more abundant.



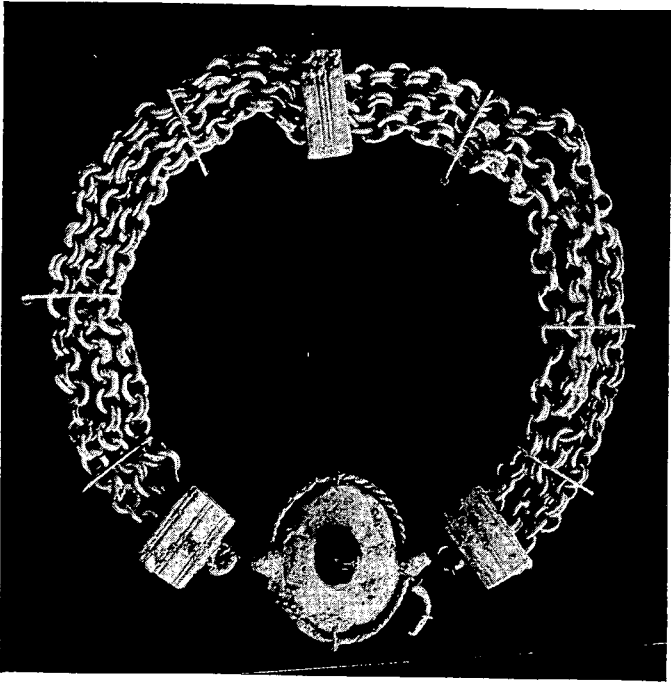
Inside the guard-chamber a very remarkable find was made. As the earth was being cut down, there was discovered a small parcel of *fibulae*†, rings, silver necklet, scale armour,† etc., of a very remarkable character, including an *Abraxas* ring with device of a figure with head of a cock and two serpents for legs, holding in one hand a scourge, in the other a shield. The *fibulae* are probably unique in the world of Ro-



mano-British archaeology, and are ascribed by Mr. A. J. Evans to the end of the second century, and the age of Severus. They are of Celtic character, and undoubtedly represent a contemporary Caledonian art. They are

* See *Arch. Ael.* xvi. p. 441.

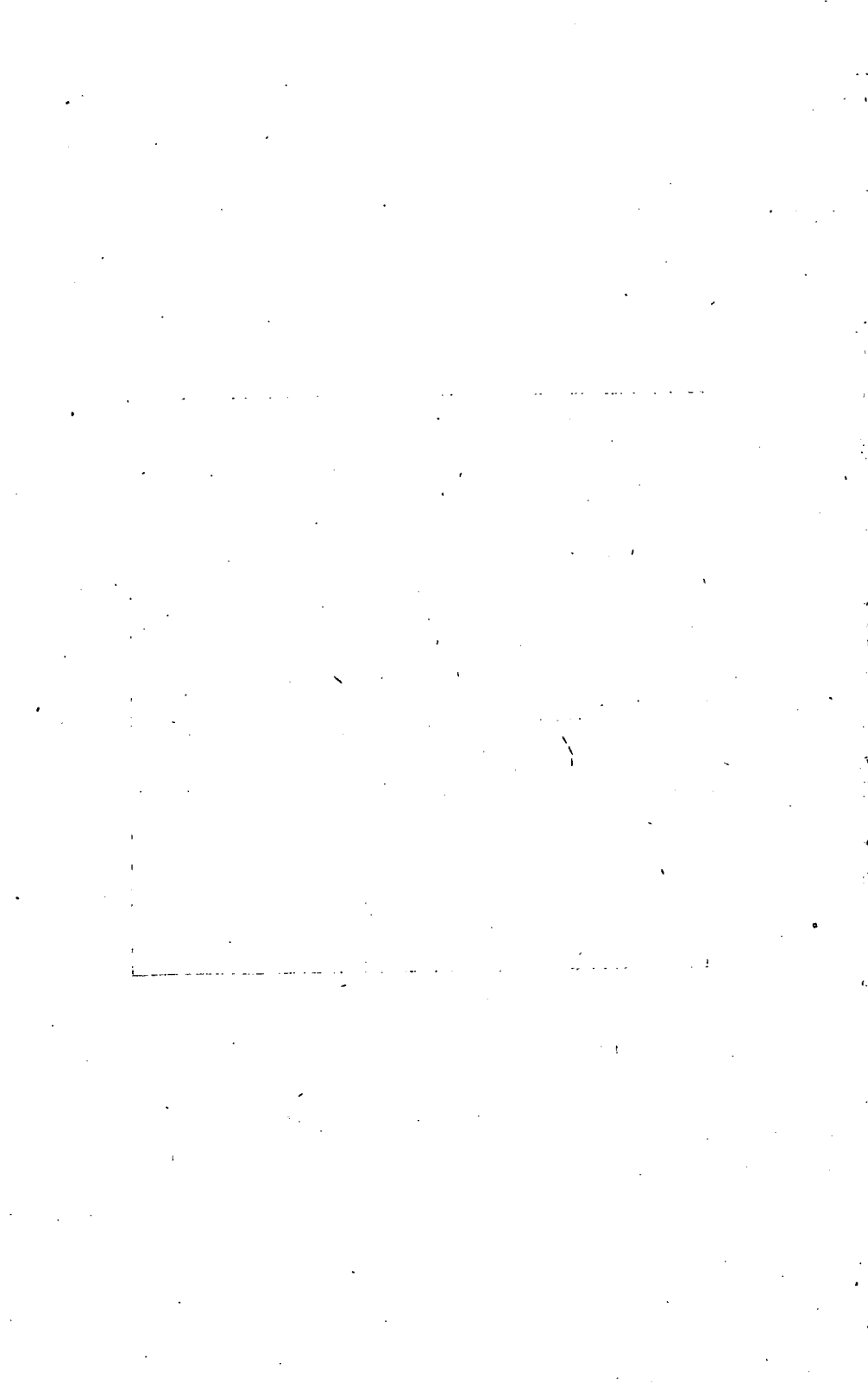
† In the illustrations the scale armour is represented full size, and the *fibulae* one half linear.



SILVER NECKLACE, FROM GREAT CHESTERS (*Aesica*).

(Thirteen inches in circumference.)

(From a Photograph by Mr. C. J. Spence.)



of extraordinary size, and one of them, which had been gilt, is covered with an exquisite flamboyant relief of Celtic design, and was probably the most beautiful object of the kind ever found. The larger of the *fibulae* was of purely Celtic pedigree, starting from a form which seemed to have originated in south-east Europe, and



which had found its way into Britain already before the Roman conquest. The nearest approach to the *Aesica* form was a type found in Northumberland, which from the find could be fixed to the age of Antoninus Pius. The other *fibula* is a highly original adaptation

of a Gallo-Roman type with a median disc, which from a Rhenish monument was shown to have been prevalent at the end of the first century. The Celtic ornamentation answered to that of a series of late Celtic armlets found in Scotland, for the most part north of the Firth of Forth. The whole seems to him to resemble a female sepulchral deposit, but the evidence as to the exact character of the find is not



minute enough to enable us to judge certainly on this point. It is noteworthy, however, that the *fibulae* are of a north-British type, and that they are comparatively unused, and must have been buried soon after they were made, and that they were found some distance above the floor of the guard-chamber.*

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The following is a list of the coins discovered during the excavations:—

- 1.—MARK ANTONY. *Denarius*. *Obv.*—ANT AVG III VIR B P O. Galley. *Rev.*—LEG X. Eagle between two standards. Cohen, i. 4 $\frac{1}{2}$.
- 2.—DOMITIAN. Second brass. Illegible.
- 3.—TRAIAN. First brass. *Rev.*—In exergue, VIA TRAIANA (almost obliterated). Cohen, ii. 6 $\frac{6}{47}$.
- 4.—TRAIAN. First brass. Illegible.
- 5.— " " "
- 6.—HADRIAN. Second brass. Illegible.
- 7.—ANTONINUS PIUS. Second brass. *Obv.*—ANTONINVS AVG PIVS P P TR P XVIII. Bust radiate to right. *Rev.*—LIBERALITAS COS IIII S C. Liberty standing. Cohen, ii. 323.
- 8.—ANTONINUS PIUS. Second brass. Illegible.
- 9.—MARCUS AURELIUS. Second brass. Illegible. *Rev.*—Mars marching to right.
- 10.—FAUSTINA THE YOUNGER. First brass. *Ob.*—FAUSTINA AV *Rev.*—Illegible.
- 11.—SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS. *Denarius*. *Obv.*—SEVERVS PIVS AVG. Bust laureate to right. *Rev.*—P M TR P XIII COS III P P. Mars holding Victory and spear reversed. Cohen, iv. 4 $\frac{9}{47}$.

* For full account of the objects found and Mr. Hodgkin's descriptions of some of them, see *Proceedings*, vol. vi. pp. 241-245.



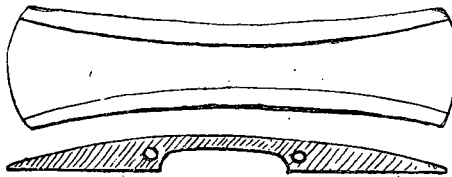
ROMAN BRONZE FIGURE OF MERCURY, FROM *AESICA*.

(FULL SIZE.)

From a photograph by Mr. C. J. Spence.

- 12.—ELAGABALUS. *Denarius*. *Obv.*—IMP CAES M AVE ANTONINVS AVG. Head laureate to right. *Rev.*—MARS VICTOR. Mars marching to right. Cohen, iv. 335.
- 13.—VICTORINUS. Third brass. *Rev.*—PROV[IDENTIA AVG].
- 14.—TETRICUS. Third brass. *Rev.*—PAX AVG. Almost obliterated.
- 15.—ALLECTUS. Third brass. *Obv.*—IMP C ALLECTVS P F AVG. Bust radiate to right. *Rev.*—PAX AVG. S P in field; C L ? in exergue. Pax standing. Cohen vii. 48.
- 16.—CRISPUS. Third brass. *Obv.*—CRISPVS [NOBIL] C. Bust armed, to right. *Rev.*—[BEAT]A TRANQVILIT[AS]. Altar inscribed VOTIS XX. Cohen, vii. 340.
- 17.—CONSTANS. Third brass. *Obv.*—CONSTANS P F AVG. Bust to right. *Rev.*—VICTOR[IAE PP AVGG Q N]N. Two victories. M in field; SARI in exergue. Cohen, vii. 431.
- 18.—CONSTANS. Third brass. Similar type.
- 19.—MAGNENTIUS. Second brass. *Obv.*—D N MAGNENTIUS P F AVG. Bust draped to right. A in field. *Rev.*—GLORIA ROMANORVM. S P in exergue. Emperor on horse spearing an enemy.

Nine coins obliterated (four second brass, five third brass). Cohen, viii. $\frac{12}{7}$.



Bone object, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, from Greatchesters (*Aesica*).

THE NORTHUMBERLAND EXCAVATION FUND IN ACCOUNT WITH
HODGKIN, BARNETT, PEASE, SPENCE, & CO.

1894. Dr.			1894. Cr.		
£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Feb. 14.	To Young for carriage hire ...	1	7	6	
Mar. 31.	„ Jemison for Down Hill Excavations (balance) ...	6	0	0	
Aug. 18.	„ AESICA Excavations : Wages				
TO	of Workmen				
Sept. 24.	„ &c. ...	126	17	0	
Oct. 1.	„ Woodman, damage to grass ...	5	0	0	
„ 12.	„ S. Holmes, Expenses of Survey	5	0	0	
Nov. 9.	„ G. Nicholson, for Printing, &c. ...	1	17	6	
	„ Petty Disbursements ...	0	15	0	
	„ Balance in Secretary's hands £1 15 0				
	„ Balance in Bank 1 2 6				
		2	17	6	
Jan. 1.	By Balance of Subscriptions and Donations ...	5	1	0	
Feb. 9.	„ J. C. Bowles ...	1	1	0	
	„ R. Y. Green ...	1	1	0	
„ 28.	„ E. C. Craster, per Lloyd ...	1	1	0	
Mar. 10.	„ Mrs. Ware (Carlisle) ...	1	0	0	
„ 17.	„ E. Fisher ...	1	1	0	
„ 28.	„ J. C. Brooks ...	1	1	0	
April 13.	„ J. D. Leader (Sheffield) ...	1	1	0	
„ 23.	„ Prof. E. C. Clark (Cambridge) ...	1	0	0	
May 25.	„ The Earl of Ravensworth ...	5	0	0	
„ 31.	„ Hugh Taylor ...	5	0	0	
June 2.	„ Dr. Hodgkin (subscription) ...	2	2	0	
„ 2.	„ D. Embleton, M.D. ...	1	1	0	
„ 5.	„ Earl Percy ...	10	0	0	
„ 5.	„ F. W. Rich ...	2	2	0	
„	„ Wm. Smith, Gunterton ...	1	0	0	
„ 6.	„ S. Holmes ...	1	1	0	
„ 12.	„ F. W. Dendy ...	1	1	0	
„ 12.	„ Rev. T. Calvert ...	1	0	0	
„ 15.	„ J. M. Moore ...	1	1	0	
„ 15.	„ W. J. Armstrong ...	1	1	0	
„ 29.	„ Sir John Evans ...	2	2	0	
„ 29.	„ Sir A. W. Franks ...	5	0	0	
July 5.	„ W. G. Branford ...	0	10	0	
Aug. 1.	„ T. J. F. Deacon ...	1	1	0	
„ 8.	„ Chas. Mitchell ...	10	0	0	
„ 8.	„ J. P. Gibson ...	1	1	0	
„ 17.	„ T. G. Gibson ...	5	0	0	
„ 18.	„ Duke of Northumberland ...	20	0	0	
Sept. 10.	„ Sir Wm. Crossman ...	2	2	0	
„ 21.	„ C. J. Spence ...	5	5	0	
„ 27.	„ H. A. Adamson ...	1	1	0	
„ 27.	„ C. B. P. Bosanquet ...	1	1	0	
„ 27.	„ W. H. Knowles ...	1	1	0	
„ 29.	„ Rev. H. E. Savage ...	1	1	0	
Oct. 27.	„ Thos. Hodgkin (donation) ...	20	0	0	
Nov. 9.	„ Oxford Friends Society of Antiquaries. London ...	15	0	0	
„ 13.	„ F. J. Haverfield, Oxford ...	3	13	6	
		£149	14	6	
		£149	14	6	
	By Balance down ...	£2	16	6	