



MUCKLEBANK WALL TURRET AND WALLTOWN CRAGS.

*J. P. Gibson, Photo.*

## 2. MUCKLEBANK WALL TURRET.

BY J. P. GIBSON.

In the summer of 1891, while examining carefully the grass-covered line of débris that indicates the track of the Roman Wall along the 'Nine Nicks of Thirlwall,' my attention was attracted by a square joint between two stones in a hole scratched by a rabbit. Upon examination, it proved to be part of the ruins of a wall turret hitherto undescribed.

Horsley says that in his time wall turrets were more generally and entirely ruined than mile castles. His theory that there were four turrets between each mile castle received no confirmation whatever during the careful examination of the Wall made by the late Mr. Clayton in 1873, when the Black Carts turret was found. A little later another turret, very dilapidated, was discovered at Brunton, and partly rebuilt to about the height of five feet by Mr. Clayton's orders. Hodgson records the finding, in 1833, of a turret about three hundred yards west of AMBOGLANNA, which he says was destroyed in 1837. In the summer of 1883, the whinstone quarrymen at Greenhead, engaged in baring the surface of the rock at the west end of Walltown crags, came upon a turret described in a paper read before this society by Dr. Bruce.\* This turret has entirely disappeared, the steep rock on which it stood having been used up to supply Carlisle with paving material. About half-way between this turret and Walltown farmhouse, a few months later another turret was found, and partially excavated by Mr. Tailford, Mr. Clayton's excavator, who also noticed the existence of the turret which is the subject of this paper.

The Mucklebank turret is unique alike in its situation and in its mode of construction. In going westward, about half-way down the western face of Mucklebank, the highest of the Nine Nicks of Thirlwall, the Wall deflects to the south as it usually does when it descends into a defile. The deflection generally occurs on the slope of the defile, and at an acute angle to the general course of the Wall. At Mucklebank the Wall deflects southward at a right angle, enclosing the small plateau on which the turret is built, and at its south-west corner makes another rectangular turn to enable it to run down the steep slope and cross the defile to the west by the shortest route. The turret is placed in the more northerly of these two right angles.

\* *Archæologia Aeliana*, vol. x. page 57.

The accompanying illustration (plate I.) from a photograph taken looking down upon it from the east shows its situation, which is exceedingly strong for defensive purposes, as it completely enfilades and commands the Walltown defile. It has also a most extensive outlook to the north. Looking westward from it on a clear day, the gleaming silver line that can be seen on the far distant horizon is the Solway firth beyond Carlisle. Many of the wall turrets shown on the bas reliefs on the Trajan column at Rome have a lighted torch projecting from the window of their upper storey. These lights might be used for signalling at night. A light in the Mucklebank turret would be seen along the whole range of the Walltown crags, which the illustration shows in the distance beyond the turret.

Permission having been obtained of the owner, Mr. W. H. Coulson, the assistance of Mr. Tailford and other workers was secured, and in June, 1892, the excavation of the turret was commenced.

The excavation made there is fairly typical of the general character of the work done in the camps and mile castles on the line of the Wall. It may therefore be well to describe it in detail, as the small size and isolated position of this turret cause it to furnish more sharply defined evidence of the epochs of destruction and rebuilding than can be expected in the camps and mile castles, where, during the long period of the Roman occupation, many changes and alterations must have taken place quite apart from the great renovations required after Caledonian invasions.

On cutting away the turf, the soil about twelve inches below the surface was found to be mixed with large stones, around which were clustered innumerable snail shells, countless generations of snails having crept among the interstices of the fallen masonry and found there a lodgment and a sepulchre. Embedded in the debris at every angle, just as they had fallen at the destruction of the turret, were found heavy slabs of the slate-like freestone of the district, from three to four inches in thickness and about twenty-four inches square; these might be the floor of an upper chamber in the turret, or, possibly, the continuation of the path along the top of the great Wall over or through the turret. These slabs were much thicker than the roofing slates usually found in the camps, and were not pierced for nails as the roofing slates are. They must have been supported on

wooden joists, no traces of arches being found. The number of very large iron nails, many much oxydized, found at this stage of the excavations seems to indicate that a great portion of the upper part of the turret must have been constructed of wood. On the column of Marcus Aurelius at Rome are shown wall turrets having an upper storey of timber, with a wooden palisade in front of them, indicating that they were enclosed on three sides by a stockade within the main outer wall. If any such stockade had existed here it may have enclosed the little square plateau, in the north-west corner of which the turret stands. There were not found any of the rounded stones used as projectiles in the ballista, like those since discovered at the north-west angle turret at *AESICA*; so that if any engine of war was mounted on the turret it was probably only a small catapult for throwing javelins, such as was used as the field artillery of the Romans. Here was found a small copper coin of Valens (364 A.D. to 378 A.D.), in fairly good preservation.

On the outside of the south-east angle of the turret was found a centurial stone, which had evidently been intended for the place it occupied as a coign or corner stone, as one end, as well as the face, was dressed smoothly. Very few centurial stones had previously been found in any wall or building in their original position, most of them being discovered in the fallen debris or re-used in modern buildings. If they were employed, as Mr. Clayton suggested, to mark the completion of the work of a company under a centurion, this is what might naturally be expected, as their usual original position would most likely be at or near to the top of the wall.

The inscription on this stone (see illustration p. 12) is :

C O I · I · O

FL · C

enclosed in a *tabula ansata*. The tying of COH is peculiar and unusual, but a similar ligature exists on a centurial stone of the first cohort of Batavians found at Poltross burn. As another centurial stone of this cohort was found at *MAGNA* (Carvoran), the nearest station to the west of the turret, there seems every probability that this cohort, which accompanied Agricola in his conquest of Northern Britain, took part in the building of the wall between Mucklebank and Gilsland. Afterwards it was for a long period quartered at

PROCOLITIA. This is proved by the numerous inscriptions found in that camp and in the votive well discovered just outside its western rampart in 1878 (*Arch. Ael.* viii. 1-49).

Under a quantity of rubbish bearing marks of fire, and at a depth of about four feet from the highest portion of the turret, a pavement of rather irregularly laid flagstones was found, but a careful examination of the doorstep and jambs showed that the original floor level had not yet been reached. On raising these flags, under another mass of debris showing traces of fire at a depth of about six inches, a second floor of similar flags was found; and at a depth of about eighteen inches below this second floor of flags was the original floor of the turret formed of beaten clay, which had, apparently, been hardened by fire or mixed with ground bricks. Upon it were found many bones of domestic animals, covered by fallen portions of the building, mixed with considerable masses of charcoal from burnt timber.

The south inner wall of the turret showed traces of the long continued action of fire, and a piece of coal was found, showing the Romans must have known and worked some of the outcropping seams of coal not uncommon in the district. In the north-east corner of the turret were found the broken remains of a large amphora, of which the neck and both handles were perfect.\* The mark on one of the handles was Q MCC A S. It had not been employed for holding any liquid, as two small irregular holes purposely made near its base rendered it unfit for that purpose. Possibly it may have been employed as a receptacle for the rations of the guard who occupied the turret. Many fragments of coarse pottery were found, and portions of a small bowl of red ware, commonly called Samian; it had on it raised ornamentation, but the glaze and the work were both poor in quality. Some buckles, studs, and small objects of bronze were found just above the original floor level, which is usually the place most prolific in objects of interest in excavations on the line of the Wall.

No traces were found of either an outer or inner stair in connexion with the turret, or of anything giving a clue as to the means of access from the floor level to the upper storey of the turret or the top of the great Wall. The small size of the interior of the turret would prevent

\* See illustration, p. 18.

any internal means of communication larger than a ladder. The doorway was on the west side of the south wall, and showed remains of bolt holes.

The internal dimensions of the turret were about eleven feet square, the thickness of the south and east walls about three feet. The north and west walls of the turret were portions of the great Wall itself (here about six feet thick), into which the turret was recessed to a depth of fourteen inches. There is a plinth on the east interior wall only, about eight inches high, and projecting four inches from the wall. The highest portion of turret wall measured about six feet in height, and was composed of courses of squared stone, the walls being built in the same fashion as the great Wall, with outer and inner faces of squared stones, the core being filled in with grouted rubble.

The chief conclusion to be arrived at from the exploration of this turret seems to be that the two great epochs of disaster indicated in many of the explored camps occurred after the completion of the Wall and its turrets, as this turret seems to have been occupied for a considerable period before its first overthrow. If it were possible to determine at what time this overthrow took place, an important step would be made towards deciding the vexed question of the identity of the builder of the Wall. It was not thought desirable to clear the outer faces of the turret formed by the great Wall, as it would have subjected the little building to the risk of wanton destruction.

As few wall turrets are known to exist, it is well to put on record here, for the first time, that a few hundred yards to the east on the steep eastern face of Mucklebank, I have found the remains of another turret. Owing to its exposed position, very little of its masonry is left, and as yet no attempt has been made to explore it. Between BORCOVICUS and the mile castle, about half a mile to the west of it, a recess on the inside of the wall, about thirteen feet long, and going about a foot into the wall, probably indicates the site of a wall turret.

The wall turret to the west of the mile castle on Walltown crags, excavated by Mr. Tailford in 1883, is now in an exceedingly dilapidated condition, and will probably soon share the fate of that at the western end of the crags, of which the best remaining record is Mr.

C. J. Spence's beautiful etching in the *Arch. Ael.* x. facing p. 57, and in the third edition of Dr. Bruce's *Handbook of the Roman Wall*, p. 186.<sup>10</sup>

The destruction of much of the line of the Wall in this district seems inevitable, as the quarry is rapidly extending eastwards, and archæology must stand aside when an important and valuable property like the enormous masses of whinstone on which the Wall has its base can find a market at a price equal to or greater than that of coal, the staple product of our two northern counties.

Wherever the Wall and the rock or ground on which it stands is about to be absolutely destroyed all particulars available about it should be at once put on record, and careful search made among the debris at its base for centurial stones or other objects of interest. It would therefore be well if some arrangement could be come to between the Northumberland Whinstone Company and our Society by which we should have notice when the Company purposes bareing a fresh stretch of ground on which the Wall stands preparatory to its final removal.

It would be well to make special search at the points where any change in the thickness of the Wall occurs as, if the theory so often put forward that these changes took place where the work of one centurial detachment left off and that of another commenced is correct, it might be reasonable to expect to find among the debris at these points inscribed centurial stones, which might possibly afford some clue as to the absolute date of the erection of the Wall.

<sup>10</sup> I gladly acknowledge the kind assistance received from Mr. Spence, who spent a day at the turret, and showed his proficiency with pick and spade by excavating the portion of the south face of the great Wall shown in the illustration.



FRAGMENTS OF AMPHORA FROM MUCKLEBANK WALL TURRET (see p. 16).