



Sandstone head from West Denton

X.—NOTES

1. A SANDSTONE HEAD FROM WEST DENTON

In Spring 1969 a sandstone head (Pl. XXXIV) was found during building development at West Denton.¹ Its shape is roughly cubic (height 0·215, width 0·222, depth 0·26m.). Only the face and the forward part of the left side are carved; the top and bottom surfaces, the right side and back are each formed by a natural regular break, and the rearward part of the left side is formed by three such natural breaks. The head is unweathered and appears to be undamaged. That the carving is subsequent to the breaks is shown by (1) the distinctive marks of a claw-chisel which are carried over the forehead onto the top surface, (2) a protuberance on the right side of the jaw, which would have been cut back if the right side had ever been carved like the left, and (3) the fact that the top and bottom surfaces are horizontal, the right side vertical, the front and back in parallel planes dipping slightly forward from the vertical.

Forehead and nose are in one plane, eyes, cheeks and the lower face in another. The eyebrows are defined above by two incised shallow curves, the nose is pear-shaped with nostrils firmly indicated, the eyes are each represented by two curving incisions which meet in neither corner. Above the mouth, which is scarcely shown, is a full drooping moustache, and tooling on the narrowing chin suggests a beard. The left eye has two crowsfeet running back on the side of the block towards a tuft of hair, which is swept back above the crudely indicated left ear.

The nose has been worked to a smooth finish, and the

¹I am grateful to the owner, who wishes to remain anonymous, for showing me this head and allowing me to publish it. The find-spot is said to have been at approximately NZ:191658, less than 100m. south of Hadrian's Wall; this is near the site of Milecastle 8. Some further details have been lodged with the Museum of Antiquities.

rest of the face has the distinctive rough marks of a six-point claw-chisel (width .023m.). There is no indication of a drill, unless this tool was used to delineate the eyes, nor are there traces of either paint or plaster. The left side is more fully indicated and more carefully finished than the right: only the left ear is shown, with the tuft of hair above it, and the left eye and eyebrow and the left half of the moustache are more accurately sculpted than their counterparts on the right.

This is a particularly fine example of the so-called Romano-Celtic cult head, of which there are many specimens from the area of the Wall, from elsewhere in Britain, and from the continent.² The scowling expression is typical, and the tooling, the single ear, and the treatment of eyebrows, moustache, beard and mouth have good parallels. Dr. Anne Ross has suggested a date for this head "in the 1st or 2nd century at the latest."³

R. M. HARRISON

2. TUNNELS AT QUARRY HOUSE, WIDEOPEN

Quarry House, Wideopen (N.G. 45/242727), now stands in grounds of 1¼ acres, adjacent to the Great North Road (A1) and opposite the junction of a minor road from Dinnington Colliery. Immediately south of the grounds is the site of an extensive quarry, now filled in to make a playing field. Sandstone was quarried for building materials and grindstones and later (within the writer's memory) for garden ornaments. Access to the quarry was once possible from the North Road, by means of a ramp and two tunnels which meet at a vertical shaft, about 28ft. below ground level. The tunnel leading from the ramp to the shaft is much shorter

² A. Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London, 1967), especially Chapter II. "The Cult of the Head", pp. 61-126.

³ In personal correspondence. I am grateful to Dr. Ross for her authoritative view, which is based on the photographs and my written description. For the photographs I am grateful to my wife.

than that leading from the shaft to the quarry. The longer tunnel has a narrow side tunnel, terminating in two small subterranean chambers, near the house. The ramp, the shorter tunnel, the shaft, and 169ft. of the longer tunnel lie within—or are accessible from—the grounds of Quarry House.

HISTORY

The age of the house and tunnels has not been exactly determined. A tythe map of 1842 shows a quarry in the north-east corner of the present grounds—a depression still exists—and a row of quarrymen's cottages, but no house. A map produced for the Brandlings' auction sale of 1852, shows the house—or part of it—the cottages, and a quarry immediately to the south of the house *within* the boundary of the present grounds. The Ordnance Survey of 1858 shows the house in its present grounds with the ramp, shaft, and tunnels, and with a quarry *outside* the present grounds to the south and east. A revision of the Ordnance Survey in 1894/5 shows the house and grounds as they appear on the earlier edition but the quarry has been enlarged and extended westwards almost to the North Road.

There is a record in 1855 of one Robert Robson (Whelans Directory of Northumberland), builder and quarry owner of Wideopen. The name "Mary Robson" is inscribed, evidently with a diamond cutter on a small pane of glass in a first floor window of the house, and the name "J. L. Bell, 1863", is also inscribed on another nearby pane. Subsequent directories record John W. Robson, Quarry-master of Wideopen, 1887, and Alfred Chisholm Robson of Quarry House, Wideopen, 1910. The Robsons were tenants on estates which originally belonged to the Brand-

¹ The 1851 population census records, under Wideopen Colliery, four unmarried sisters and a niece of surname Robson, described as house proprietors of Blagdon. One of the sisters, aged 55, was named Mary Robson. The record of a niece named Robson indicates a brother (not in residence at the time of the census) and this was probably Robert Robson.

lings of Gosforth House. These estates subsequently passed to Thomas Smith Esq. in 1852 and eventually to his son Thomas Eustace Smith. The trustees for Thomas Eustace Smith sold the estates by auction in 1920. Lot 4, Quarry House, was purchased by the present owner-occupier Miss Ada Weddell.

PRESENT SURVEY

Because of the danger of falling masonry in the shaft, and the frequent intrusion of young explorers, Miss Weddell decided to block up the entrance to the first (i.e. shorter) tunnel during August 1969. At short notice, a hasty survey was undertaken by the writer, assisted by his wife and a local retired miner Mr. J. Gray. Measurements had to be completed within one weekend and the only instruments readily available were: an army pattern prismatic compass, a hundred foot tape measure, and—for estimating inaccessible heights—a small rangefinder. The resultant plan is shown in Fig. 1. On the occasion of the survey, humid conditions prevailed and the air, especially in the side tunnel, was foul. The remote chamber of the side tunnel could not be measured because of foul air and is sketched in from memory.

Each part of the tunnel system will now be described in more detail.

THE RAMP. The entrance from the main road can no longer be traced having been obliterated by a modern side road and bungalow site. From a wall at its present north end, 69ft. from the tunnel mouth, the ramp exists as a cutting with stone retaining walls up to 6ft. high and embankments overgrown with grass and ivy. The carriageway is 10ft. wide, overgrown with ivy. The gradient is about 1 in 12.

THE SHORTER TUNNEL. The entrance to the tunnel comprises a walled face of masonry reaching to a height of 17ft. from the present threshold of the tunnel mouth. The

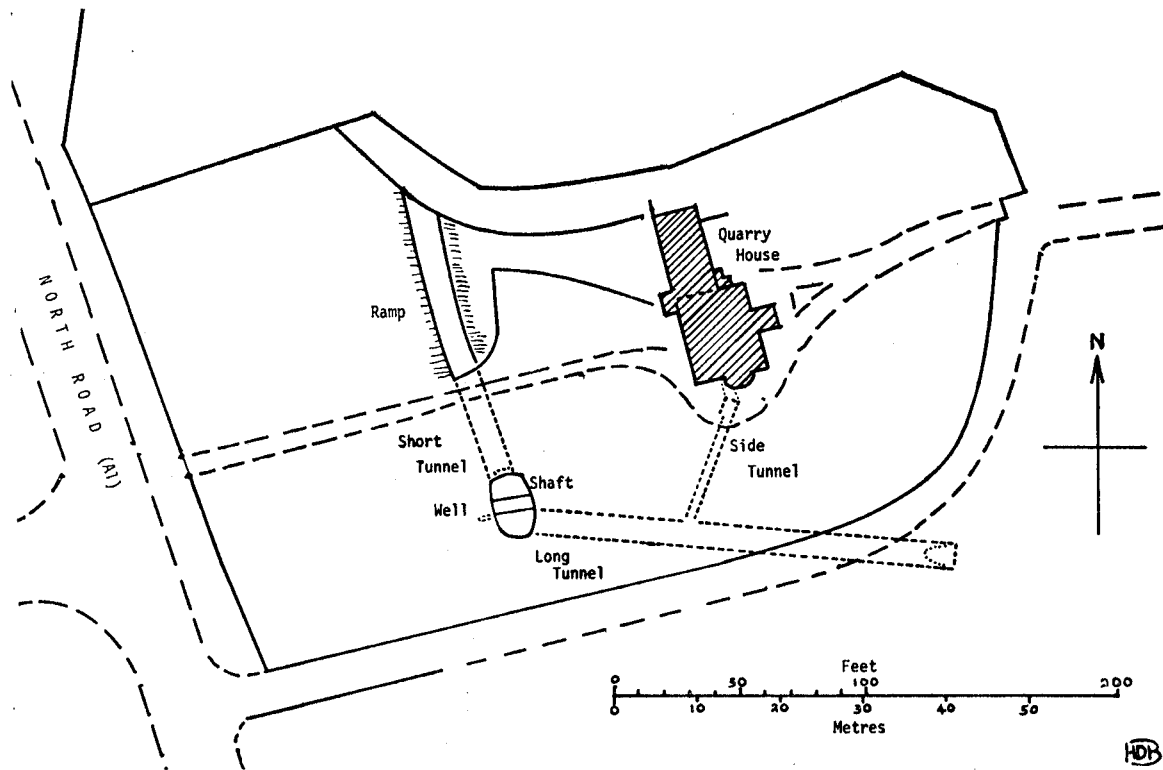


Fig. 1. Tunnels at Quarry House, August 1969

highest point of the arch is 8ft. 6in. above the present threshold and the present threshold is about a foot above the floor inside the tunnel. The tunnel is 9ft. wide at the entrance and 41ft. long. It is 10ft. wide at the inner end where it is blocked by a stone wall about 2ft. 6in. thick, except for a small doorway at the right hand (west) side.

THE SHAFT. The upper lip of the shaft is inaccessible at ground level because of dense undergrowth and bushes, but it is roughly oval. At the bottom it is bridged east and west by a stone arch 6ft. thick and 9ft. 6in. from the present threshold to the highest point of the arch. The arch supports a level stone platform about 14ft. above the threshold and a narrow wedge of masonry rests centrally on the platform at each end, abutting the walls of the shaft. The arch springs from the shaft wall at a height of about 5ft. at the west end, but sweeps down almost to floor level at the east end. There is a recess adjacent the west end of the arch and immediately to the south of it, 5ft. 3in. deep by 1ft. 9in. wide and 5ft. 2in. high. This recess contains a well shaft lined with masonry 1ft. 9in. diameter and at present 6ft. deep—dry with debris at the bottom.

THE LONGER TUNNEL. The longer tunnel leaves the bottom of the shaft at an angle of $123\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ to the shorter tunnel. It is straight, 10ft. wide and 10ft. high to the top of the arch. The floor is very slightly rutted as if by waggon wheels. Like the shorter tunnel the roof is arch bound with roughly dressed stones, larger stones of irregular size being used in the walls.

Originally this tunnel proceeded straight into the quarry with a slight downward gradient but now at a distance of 157ft. from the shaft a bank of clay slopes up to the roof—over a further 12ft. After proceeding 61ft. into this tunnel from the shaft, there is a small side tunnel on the left hand side. The entrance is 4ft. 6in. high and the average width about 2ft. Once inside, the roof arch is 3ft. wide but the

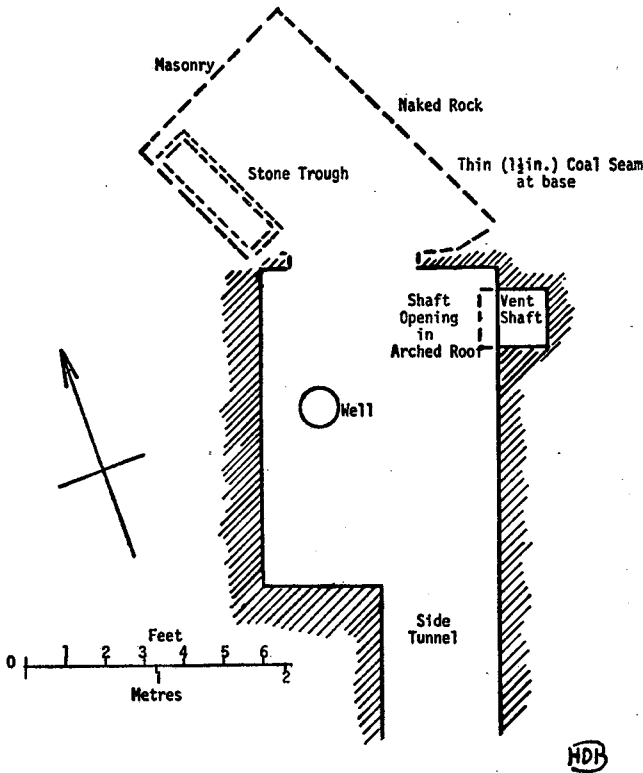


Fig. 2. Plan of the subterranean chambers

walls have closed in to 1ft. 6in. in places, at lower levels. The roof is arched while the walls are lined with large roughly hewn stones. The side tunnel is 45ft. long descending irregularly about 4ft. It gives access to the corner of a chamber 8ft. long, 6ft. wide and approximately 6ft. high with arched roof. A circular hole about 12in. diameter in a floor paving stone gives access to a shallow well of clear water, the water level being only a few inches below the rim. In the corner opposite the entrance at a point where the roof arch springs from the wall is an aperture 17in. \times 15in. from which a stone lined, rectangular section, shaft

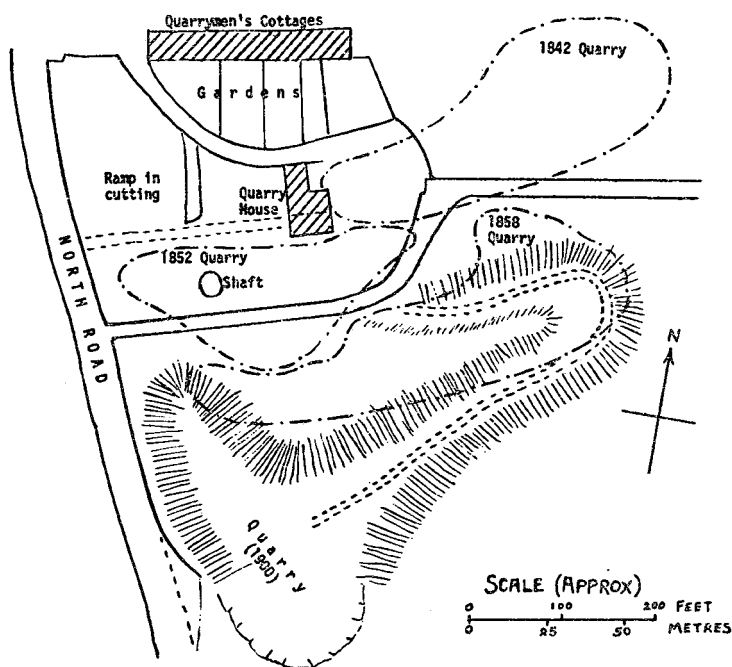
rises vertically. The shaft is blocked at its upper end but the beam of a torch showed about 15ft. of shaft. At the corner of the chamber diametrically opposite the entrance from the side tunnel is an opening leading to a second chamber set askew to the first chamber. The walls are partly naked rock and a shallow stone trough runs along the left hand side. Foul air prevented further measurements and investigations. Fig. 2 shows the subterranean chambers.

DISCUSSION

The shaft is too near one end of the main tunnel system to be intended for ventilation, and in any case natural ventilation would be adequate. Its function was probably that of a light shaft to illuminate the inner mouths of two tunnels at a point where the route changes direction sharply. The arch at the bottom of the shaft appears to be a buttress for the walls of the shaft, which are tending to collapse inwards. Locally the shaft has been named the "round-about".

From the sequence of early maps it seems possible that the tunnels were not necessarily excavated, but built along the floor of the quarry shown immediately to the south of the house on the 1852 map, then covered over with spoil from the newly opened quarry outside the boundary of the present grounds, shown on the ordnance survey of 1858. (Refer to Fig. 3.)

The purpose of the side tunnel and the two underground chambers is not known. The presence of spring water, a trough and a vent shaft suggested an illicit still, so Mr. John Philipson's advice was sought. After inspection he thought the absence of signs of intense heat or combustible material made this idea improbable. The side tunnel proceeds in the direction of the house but Miss Weddell has no knowledge of any cellars or underground passages below the house. It is significant however that the end of the second chamber, whose walls are largely naked rock, has



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Fig. 3. Quarry House, Wideopen, and immediate environs about 1900, with perimeters of earlier quarries superimposed

a wall of masonry which might have blocked off a further passage.

The maps referred to in this report can be inspected at the Northumberland Record Office and the writer gratefully acknowledges the assistance and interest of Mr. R. M. Gard, County Archivist and his staff.

H. DENIS BRIGGS

