

## IV

# Journeymen's Jottings: Two Roman Inscriptions from Hadrian's Wall

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### I. A LOST ROMAN INSCRIPTION FROM BENWELL (*RIB* 1352) REDISCOVERED

#### Summary

**R**IB 1352, long reported lost, turns out to be still legible on a fragment of column shaft on display (at least since 1988) in the Temple of Antenociticus at Benwell, although the stone was not actually found there in 1862. It is suggested that the inscription, *S E V*, makes little sense as it stands, and that it may have been a trial piece (inscribed on a finished column which had been broken and discarded before the letters were cut) by an apprentice stonemason in a workshop. A further artificial disturbance of the surface of the stone alongside the inscription is tentatively interpreted as a crude attempt by a novice sculptor at depicting a bearded head, possibly that of a horned deity.

The temple of Antenociticus in Benwell is a very familiar monument on the Hadrianic frontier (fig. 1). It was first uncovered in 1862, when its altars dedicated to the god by Aelius Vibius (*RIB* 1327) and Tineius Longus (*RIB* 1329), together with a fragment of a third (*RIB* 1328), were found; two further pieces of the last inscription were discovered built into a house in 1904. Also found in 1862 was the striking head of what was clearly the cult statue (Toynbee 1964, 106–7; Phillips 1977, 82–3, no. 232, with earlier bibliography). The temple was then re-excavated and consolidated during emergency excavations by F. G. Simpson and I. A. (later Sir Ian) Richmond in 1937, prior to the building of the housing estate which subsequently obliterated much of the southern half of the fort and its attendant *vicus* (Simpson and Richmond 1941, 37–9). It was Richmond who first published a plan of the building, together

with photographs of the temple, in *Archaeologia Aeliana* (Simpson and Richmond 1941, 37 and pl. I, facing p. 42).

In November 2000, during a visit to the temple in strong winter sunshine, I noticed that one of the stones displayed within the building, close to its north-east corner (in the foreground of fig. 1), bore the letters *S E V* lightly inscribed on it, upside down as currently displayed (fig. 2). Subsequent consultation of R. G. Collingwood and R. P. Wright, *Roman Inscriptions in Britain* I (Oxford 1965) [*RIB*] revealed that the inscription, also found in 1862, featured as the last entry under Benwell in their corpus, *RIB* 1352. The entry reads (p. 446):

Shaft of column, tapering from 11 in. to 8.5 in. in diameter, length unknown; found in 1862 in the grounds of Condercum House, Benwell. Now lost.

The original Condercum House lay immediately north of the Temple of Antenociticus, and was demolished to make way for housing in 1937. Rather misleadingly the name was then transferred to a new building on the Newcastle–Carlisle road, constructed in part over the fort's *praetorium*. The findspot of the inscription, in the grounds of the earlier Condercum House, was therefore from the *vicus* area to the east of the fort. Before its appearance in *RIB*, the stone had been published twice before, originally by Rendel soon after discovery (Rendel 1865, 170) and again in the *NCH*, volume 13, by which time it was already reported lost (Spain and Bosanquet 1935, 559, no. 30). *RIB*, following Rendel, published it as *S . E . V*, with points between the letters, but examination of the re-found stone shows no evidence for these (figs 3–4). The maximum



Fig. 1 Benwell, Temple of Antenociticus, from the north-east.

surviving length of the column shaft can now be ascertained as 20.5 inches (52 cm).

The significance of the inscription is harder to guess. There is no evidence that it ever consisted of more than the three letters, S E V, and these might be taken to indicate an abbreviation which would have been understood by the passer-by; but no such abbreviation appears in the lists included in the standard epigraphic *corpora*. Sandys (1927, 308), for example, lists SEI V E as an abbreviation, but not the form S E V. One possibility is that the column is funerary, and the inscription stands for *s(epulcrum) e(xtruunt) v(icarii)*, 'tomb built by proxy' (Dessau 1916, nos. 1659 and 1662). This expression, attested in full in the Roman world but not as an abbreviation, was used for grave-markers on slaves' tombs. Such an interpretation for this stone is however highly speculative, and in the context of Benwell very unlikely; it is in any case improbable that the inhabitants of

CONDERCVM would have understood such a contraction. SEV might of course stand for a personal name, the *cognomen* Severus – not the emperor Septimius or any other member of the Severan family (in which case we would expect to have the full imperial titulature starting IMP CAES), but a private individual. Yet this is not a wholly satisfactory explanation either: if a grave-marker, one might expect it to be preceded by D(is) M(anibus), if religious by the name of a god, and so on. In short, three letters of a single (abbreviated) name do not comprise a coherent, finished Roman text, because it fails the test of any inscription's primary purpose, namely to inform. On the other hand, as Dr Roger Tomlin has pointed out to me, the letters might represent the name of the mason, builder or owner (Severus) responsible for the column, similar to examples at Caerleon (Wright 1956, 147, no. 6, recording a *centuria's* name) and Fishbourne (Wright 1971, 369, no. 8), although



Fig. 2 Benwell, Temple of Antenociticus, broken column shaft.

the latter is a lightly-scratched graffito and lacks the monumentality of lettering present on the Benwell inscription.

The tapering of the stone was clearly deliberate, and the shaft presumably formed part of a variety of small column, wider in the middle than at top and bottom, which is known in military contexts both in Britain (e.g. at Housesteads: Crow 1995, pl. 28; and at Corbridge: Bishop 1994, fig. 34) and in Germany (e.g. at Aalen: Filtzinger 1983, Taf. 13). Tapering columns are also occasionally depicted on inscriptions (e.g. Phillips 1977, no. 186, with pl. 46, from Risingham; Keppie and Arnold 1984, no. 3, with pl. 1, from Birrens). One possible explanation for the

presence of an inscription on the column is that the piece came from a stonemason's workshop, and that the column shaft, after an accidental break during manufacture, was discarded, only to be used later by an apprentice trying to get some experience in letter carving. The letters, 2.9 in. (75 mm) high, are not deeply incised (figs 3–4) and were clearly not completely finished, but they have been formed with care: there are serifs, for example, at the top of the V on either side. The V is, however, not quite correctly formed. The right-hand stroke is set at a gentler angle to the vertical than the left-hand one, making the letter slightly asymmetrical, and it is not fully finished at the base of the V: the stonemason appears to have been put off by a prior deep incision on the surface (shown as an open oval shape on fig. 4). These features strengthen the hypothesis that the inscription is a trial piece by an inexperienced mason. There is absolutely no reason to doubt, however, that the three letters are genuinely Roman; this is not a nineteenth-century forgery.

Immediately to the right of the V of S E V, there is some irregular pitting of the column shaft which does not represent weathering or a geological fault in the stone but is man-made. With the eye of faith a very crude depiction, incised and not in relief, of an oval, elongated male head can be made out, 75 mm (3 in.) from top to bottom and 40 mm (1.5 in.) wide, with prominent almond-shaped eyes, a circular bulbous nose, and a deep chin, possibly to indicate a beard (figs 5–6). The last feature may indicate that a local god is being featured, and almost equally crude and perfunctory depictions of the anthropomorphic face are not unknown elsewhere on the northern frontiers (cf. Coulston and Phillips 1988, no. 354, from Vindolanda; Bishop 1994, figs 34–5, from Corbridge, also on a column; Keppie and Arnold 1984, no. 143, from Bearsden). The shape of the head, tapering towards a squared-off chin, is typical of Celtic art (Ross 1967, 33–8). There is also a hint, above the head on the left-hand side, that a horn was in the process of being roughed out, but here the surface of the stone is much less deeply cut, and the abrasions are not continuous: the work, if such it was, was

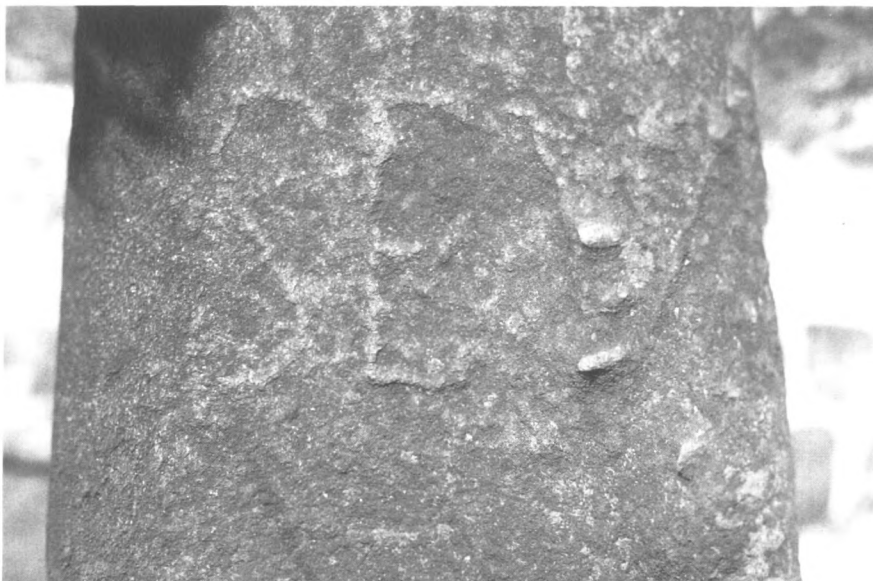


Fig. 3 Benwell, Temple of Antenociticus, detail of Latin inscription.



Fig. 4 Benwell, drawing of Latin inscription (made from a squeeze); scale 1:2.

not pursued, and there is no corresponding 'horn' on the other side. If this interpretation is correct, presumably the image was intended as a representation of a horned god, paralleled elsewhere on the northern frontier (Phillips 1977, nos. 324–5; Coulston and Phillips 1988, no. 81; Coulston in Wilson 1997, 119, fig. 8.13).

Clearly the head, if such indeed it was, is a very poor rendering indeed; but if, as already suggested, the broken column shaft is to be seen as a 'trial piece' in a stonemason's workshop, perhaps this crude 'doodle' is also the work of

an apprentice sculptor, making early tentative steps at anthropomorphic representation. There is also a wiggly-line groove cut in the column below the 'S' of the inscription (visible in fig. 2, near the top of the stone in its upside-down state), which might also be interpreted as the work of a moment's experimentation by a novice stonemason, getting used to his tools and his material for the first time; it is certainly not a recent incision.

It would be intriguing to ascertain both how and when the stone bearing this inscription,

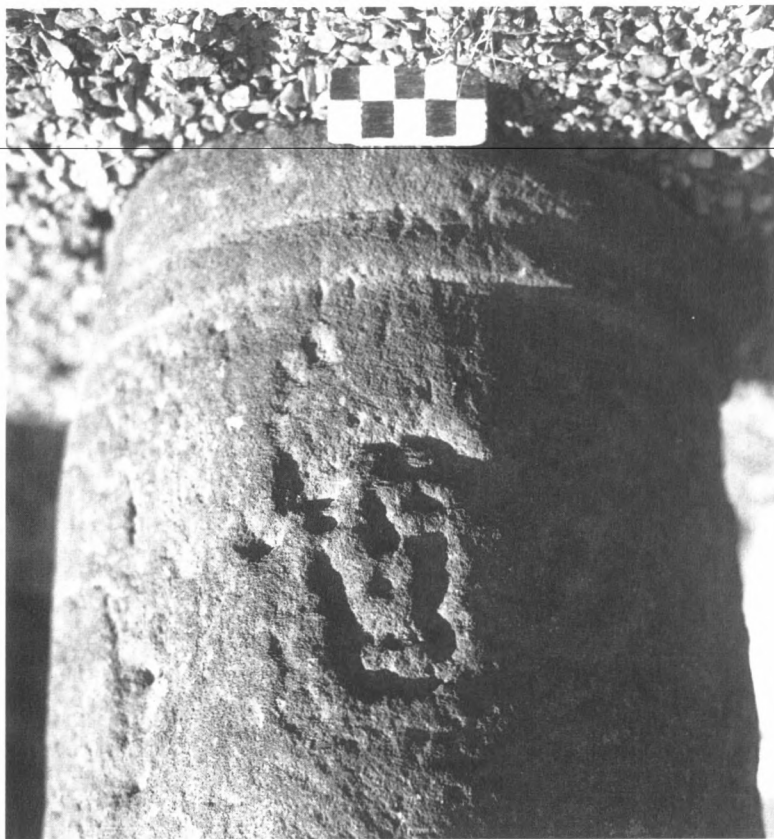


Fig. 5 Benwell, Temple of Antenociticus, detail of incised 'doodle' on column shaft (scale: 5 cm).



Fig. 6 Benwell, Temple of Antenociticus, drawing of incised 'doodle' (made from a squeeze); the parts in black indicate incisions made in the surface of the stone. Scale: 1:2.

lost for so many decades, 'reappeared', and also how long it has been lying unnoticed in the temple of Antenociticus. It has certainly been there since 1988 (information, David Sherlock), and it appears in this position in a photograph of the temple published in 1992 (Green 1992, 34). While found in the vicinity, it is clear that it was not actually discovered inside the temple, and has therefore *sensu stricto* no proper place there now. Photographs of the building taken by the author of this note in 1972 and 1979 (Breeze 1996, 27 is similar) show various small stone items placed inside the shrine, in much the same positions as they had been left after the consolidation of the structure in 1937 by the then Office of Works

(Simpson and Richmond 1941, pl. I): no column shaft with a sloping (broken) upper edge is visible, nor (if it had been set the other way up) is any moulding corresponding to that at the top of the inscribed column shaft visible in the pieces formerly on display within the temple.

At some time, between 1979 and 1988, therefore, the presentation of the site was changed: the base, assumed to be that for the cult statue, was moved from the north wall of the temple and placed in the apse at the south end where it presumably once stood; gravel was laid in the interior to replace the grass; and some of the other small miscellaneous items which used to be displayed at the site were removed. The tapering column shaft with *RIB* 1352 does not appear to be in either the 1930s or the 1970s photographs; but it had been placed there at least by 1988. The lower part of the shaft, closest to the break, still retains its natural brownish-yellow colour, whereas the upper part, including the inscription, has become black through weathering. This suggests that the column had been displayed for some years with the lower part of its shaft buried in earth, prior to its removal to its current position; but where that was at present remains unclear. The column shaft is firmly doweled into position; there are no plans to move it from its present site.

## II. A NEW ROMAN QUARRYMAN'S INSCRIPTION ON BARCOMBE HILL

### Summary

*The Roman quarry face on the south-west side of Barcombe Hill, already known for its wedge-marks, incised phallus, and sculpture of a running boar, also contains an inscription of Roman date, the numeral XIII. This was probably a batch number, part of a control mechanism used by the quarry workers, and can be paralleled elsewhere in Roman Britain, and more especially in Roman quarries in other parts of the Empire. It was probably carved by men from the Twentieth Legion, either during the initial building of Hadrian's Wall and its attendant forts, or at some*

*later period of repair and reconstruction when detachments of this legion returned to the Wall region to help with such duties.*

On the south-west summit of Barcombe Hill, facing west with spectacular views over the Roman fort of Vindolanda, lie two quarry faces. The more southerly of the pair, almost certainly Roman in origin (see below), was substantially reworked in the nineteenth century; but the more northerly quarry (NY 776662) has not been touched since the Roman period (fig. 7). The exposed, worked, stone face is about 4 m high, and stretches approximately 14.50 m from north to south. Three items of archaeological interest in this quarry have already been noted by previous scholars. At the extreme northern (left-hand) end of the quarry face, a crudely-incised phallus, 50 cm across, has been published by Robin Birley (Birley 1973, 117, no. 13, with fig. 2 on 118; Coulston and Phillips 1988, no. 442). Four metres to the south, but still to the left of centre of the quarry face, is a vertical natural fissure in the rock, and 80 cm to the left of it three rectangular Roman wedge-marks, set in a row vertically (each is 9.5 cm long and cut 5 cm into the rock), are visible, made by hammering metal wedges into the rock to split it; their existence was noted by the late Tom Blagg in an article published in 1976 (Blagg 1976, 154), and illustrated in another of his publications with a photograph (Blagg 1990, 45, fig. 15). Also once visible in this quarry face, towards its southern end, was a crude and indistinct carving of a running boar, symbol of the Twentieth Legion and presumably therefore the source of the men who worked this quarry (Coulston and Phillips 1988, 137, no. 390), but the relief has now apparently been completely obliterated by weathering; at any rate a very careful and systematic scrutiny of the exposed surface by three pairs of eyes in 2001 failed to locate it.

In view of the detailed attention, therefore, which earlier scholars have given to this small Roman quarry, it is all the more surprising that a short Roman inscription has hitherto escaped detection and publication. At a distance of 1.50 m to the right of the natural vertical fissure in



*Fig. 7 Barcombe Hill, the Roman quarry from the north (the arrow indicates the position of the inscription).*

the rock, at eye level (1.40 m) above the floor of the quarry, the Roman numeral XIII has been inscribed (figs 8–9). The inscribed area is 16 cm across, and the highest character, the initial X, varies between 9.5 cm (on its left-hand side) and 6.5 cm high. The three 'I's are not set vertically but at an oblique angle; they are 6.5 cm, 4 cm and 5.3 cm long respectively, and the middle one of the three is not parallel to the other two. This central one is also shallower than the adjacent strokes; the last of the three by contrast is the deepest, made by striking three small circular holes with a point, and then removing the two bridging pieces of stone between them (see Blagg 1976, 159–61, for use of the point). The first oblique stroke was clearly made in the identical manner. The initial X consists of a circular hole punched at top left, another at bottom right, and the deepest point

in the centre; two longer horizontal grooves were then gouged out at bottom left and top right, and some much shallower incision was made near the centre of the X. The formation of this numeral, however, did not proceed further: although legible, the X is clearly unfinished.

Approximately 24 cm to the left of 'XIII' is another inscription, made in the modern era, possibly during the nineteenth century: the letters 'J W' have been neatly and crisply carved, 14.5 cm across in total, with the J 4 cm high and the W 3 cm high (fig. 10). They are presumably the initials of a passer-by, perhaps one of the quarrymen who worked on the adjacent second face to the south, wishing to emulate the practice of his Roman forerunners. Since the companion quarry was re-exploited during the building of the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway,

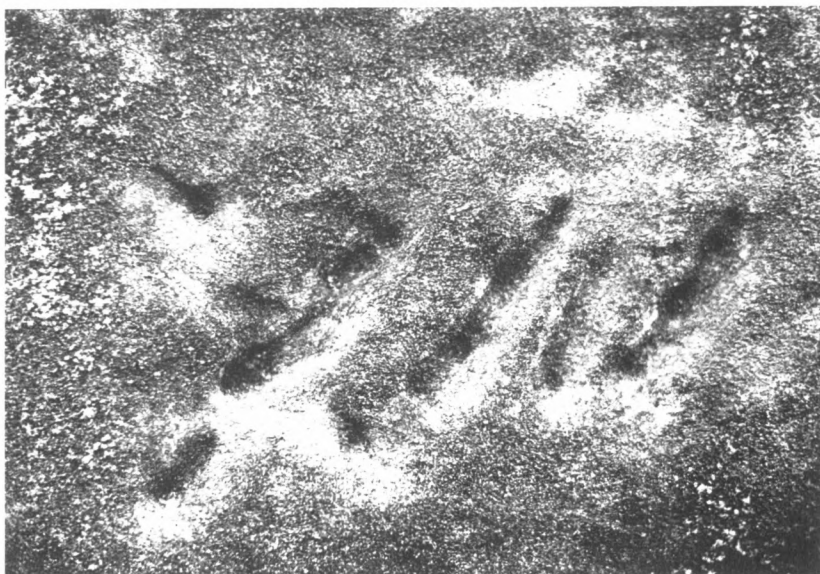


Fig. 8 Barcombe Hill, Roman inscription in the quarry face.



Fig. 9 Barcombe Hill, drawing of Roman inscription (from a squeeze); scale 1:2.

which was opened in sections between 1834 and 1839 (the longest railway in the world at that time), it is possible that the initials were added to the Roman quarry face in the 1830s. Certainly the letters are expertly carved by a skilled stonemason: this is no amateur graffito.

The significance of the numeral XIII on this quarry face is now impossible to establish with any certainty, but it is likely to denote a batch number or some other system of quarry-control

marking. The only direct Romano-British parallels come from two Cumbrian quarries, one on the west bank of the river Eden, near Corby Castle, the other the 'written Rock of Gelt' near Brampton: the former inscription reads simply 'II' (*RIB* 1006), while the latter, now lost, is recorded as 'IX X' (*RIB* 1007). In both cases, however, the numbers do not stand alone like the Barcombe one, but are accompanied by other inscriptions denoting



Fig. 10 Barcombe Hill, nineteenth-century (?) inscription in the quarry face (height of letter J: 4 cm).

quarrymen's names and the legions to which they belonged. In addition to these, there are numerous instances of stones from Roman Britain inscribed with simple numerals, but most are probably masons' marks added as an aid in construction after the stone had left the quarry (*RIB* 40, 58–65, 394, 1196–7, 1326, 1379, 1381–2, 1393, 1411, 1417, 1517–8 and 1720). Eric Birley, however, thought that seven stones from Milecastle 9 (Chapel House) on Hadrian's Wall, five reading 'VIII', one 'VIII' and one 'X' (*RIB* 1370–2), all bore inscriptions which in his view were more likely to have been made in the quarry rather than at the building site (Birley 1930, 160); and another, reading 'XVI', found built into a field wall at Vindolanda in 1973, was likewise thought to be a quarry mark (Wright and Hassall 1974, 462, no. 8). Roman quarries outside Britain have produced more plentiful examples of the use of numbers on quarry faces, whether alone or in conjunction with a range of enigmatic formulae. They are commonplace, for example, in the Roman marble quarries of Phrygia (Fant 1989, *passim*), and are ubiquitous in the granite quarries of

Mons Claudianus in Egypt (Peacock and Maxfield 1997, 216–24).

The date of the inscription at Barcombe quarry cannot be established with certainty. The quarry is only a small one, which might suggest that it was the product of a single extraction campaign, rather than one which was worked on a number of different occasions. The sculpted relief of the running boar, symbol of the Twentieth, points to a period when this legion was involved in construction or repair work in the region of Hadrian's Wall, and it is logical therefore to assume that the numeral XIII was also made during the same quarrying operation. The quarry may, therefore, have been worked, and the inscription cut, in the Hadrianic period, during the time of the initial building of the Wall and its works in which all three of the British-based legions were involved. Supporting evidence for such a date comes from the 'Thorngraston' hoard of 63 coins, found in an arm-purse in 1837, the last of which was struck no later than AD 122 (Hodgson 1840, 289; Clayton 1859); the discovery was made in the sister quarry to the

south during nineteenth-century stone extraction for the Newcastle–Carlisle railway, and points to the likelihood that this quarry was originally worked in the Hadrianic period (Bidwell 1985, 10, pointing out that the quarry indicated as the findspot for the arm-purse, both on the *Ordnance Survey Map of Hadrian's Wall*'s 1972 edition and in Bruce 1978, 155, is incorrect). Indeed the presence of the Twentieth at the fort of Vindolanda itself, situated immediately below the quarry, is attested by three building-stones from there carved with its emblem of the running boar, two of them also naming the Twentieth (Coulston and Phillips 1988, 101, nos. 250–1, and 103, no. 259). It is possible, therefore, that detachments from the Twentieth Legion had a hand in the building of the first (Hadrianic) stone fort at Vindolanda, and that the Barcombe quarries were opened up precisely for this purpose. On the other hand, a fragmentary Hadrianic building inscription from Vindolanda (*RIB* 1702) indicates it as the work of the Second Legion Augusta; and in any case none of the Vindolanda stones with the running boar emblem was found *in situ*, and their dates cannot therefore be precisely determined (Bidwell 1985, 9–10 and 33).

Detachments of the Twentieth did return to the Wall region at other times, for example in the late 150s and the 160s (Breeze and Dobson 2000, 155; *RIB* 1149, 1322), and the three building stones carved with the running boar may, therefore, date to repair work at Vindolanda in the Antonine period or later. The Twentieth probably also helped in the major refurbishments which took place on Hadrian's Wall in the later second and early third centuries. Then large portions of the Wall were rebuilt from near ground level, and clearly, despite re-use of Hadrianic building material wherever possible, major fresh supplies of stone would have been required. So although a date in Hadrian's reign seems the most likely, not least because of the Hadrianic date of the Thorngraston hoard from the second quarry immediately to the south, a later chronology for the Roman quarry at Barcombe and its inscription cannot be entirely ruled out.

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