

Some nineteenth-century watercolours of Hadrian's Wall

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with a contribution by W. D. Shannon

SUMMARY

A mid-nineteenth-century notebook in the Society's possession contains hitherto unpublished watercolour paintings of Hadrian's Wall, all with the landscape exaggerated in the style of the time. Unfortunately, the artist is anonymous and has not been identified.

INTRODUCTION

IN PREPARING FOR THE EXHIBITION at the Great North Museum to mark the bicentenary of the Society, a notebook came to light (Northumberland Archives, Woodhorn SANT/BEQ/10/1/1). It was brought to my attention by the then President, Lindsay Allason-Jones, who invited me to publish its contents.

The notebook measures 190 by 125 mm and has a green cover. Its contents consist of three distinct elements: cuttings from various publications about the Wall; hand-written copies of material about the Wall published elsewhere; 35 sketches and watercolour paintings of Hadrian's Wall, most copied from published sources. Two letters, lodged with the notebook, date to 1934; they explain that the Society bought the 'little book' for £5 from George Wickham of Croydon who stated that it had been in his possession for 38 years, 'and it previously came from Plymouth where it had been for at least 10 years' and may have been part of a collection of 'an old Sea Captain — a friend of an artist named Gibbons at Plymouth'. Wickham also noted that J. P. Gibson had sought to buy the book in 1905 but failed.

THE CONTENTS OF THE NOTEBOOK

A label attached to the cover reads in the first and second lines: THE / ROMAN WALL. The third line is almost illegible, but appears to be: GEORGE WICKHAM. The presumption is that the label has been added later by Mr Wickham. Across the back is written in cursive hand, *M George Wickham*. There is no indication of the name of the author of the notebook, which is itself undated, apart from one drawing of 'Wall of Severus Wall Town Crags, Thirlwall' dated 'Illust^d. 6 Sept 51.' The contents fall into four categories: cuttings, transcriptions, drawings and paintings, and other jottings.

1. Cuttings

These are placed at the beginning and end of the notebook. At the front are parts of two maps, discussed below. There is also John Warburton's 1753 map of the Wall. At the back are four cuttings: a Newcastle newspaper report of a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries (including the statement that 'the meeting of the Archaeological Institute would in 1852 be meeting in

Newcastle'); the report by Roach Smith on his tour of Hadrian's Wall undertaken in June 1851; the references to Hadrian and to Hadrian's Wall in an encyclopaedia.

2. Transcriptions

A copy of the title page of J. Collingwood Bruce's 1851 edition of *The Roman Wall* is followed by: an advertisement for the book, and a précis of Parts I–V; transcriptions of the advertisement for the 1849 Pilgrimage of the Roman Wall, and of the programme as printed by Richard Abbatt (1849, 13–5; Birley 1961, 25); a list of some of the illustrations in Bruce's *The Roman Wall*.

3. Drawings and paintings

Hand-drawn copies of maps of the Wall. One is labelled as being by John Speede [sic], prepared by Thomas Bassett and Richard Chiswell, and dated, erroneously, to 1585; the date should be 1676 (see below). The other is copied out of Bruce's *The Roman Wall* (1851, facing p. 1).

Two pen-and-ink tracings (figs. 5 and 6) of the drawings of Walltown Craggs initialled WHB, that is, William Henry Brooke, who prepared material for Roach Smith's *Collectanea Antiqua*, published in 1852 (Smith 1852, pl. 47, opposite p. 183); and a copy of each drawing, one a preparation for a watercolour painting.

Nine watercolour paintings of the Wall (see below).

Twenty copies of woodcuts and sketches, most of which were published in Bruce's *The Roman Wall*, though with one or two copied from earlier publications; one at least could have been copied from *Collectanea Antiqua*. On one page, the last in the series (fig. 9), are two paintings; one is labelled, 'Wall of Severus Wall Town Craggs, Thirlwall' and the other 'Magna Station Caervoran'. I have been unable to trace any earlier drawing from which these might have been copied. Uniquely, the page has at the top, 'Illustd. 6 Sep 51.'

4. Jottings

On the page opposite the final section on the Pilgrimage there is a pencil-written list of sites from Tower Tye to Cawfields, and a second random list of forts and other places. A short itinerary: 'Sep 6 Wall of Severus Walltown Craggs / Station at Caervoran / Sep 20 Lake district Buttermere / 27 Dilston Hall Northumberland / Newnham S Wales & Gloster / Cardiff. Castle Bridge [?] / Tintern Abbey / Chepstow Castle / The Wyndcliff.' A bracket links the sites from Cardiff to The Wyndcliff, against which is written 'Oct'. The Wyndcliff is a beauty spot on the Wye, near Chepstow. The first date coincides with that attached to a drawing of Walltown Craggs so the itinerary is presumably the author's journey south.

There is little in the notebook that is not connected with Hadrian's Wall. There is, however, a brief description of the stones at Birdoswald ending 'there are no bonding tiles in the Roman Wall as at Pevensey', indicating his wider knowledge.

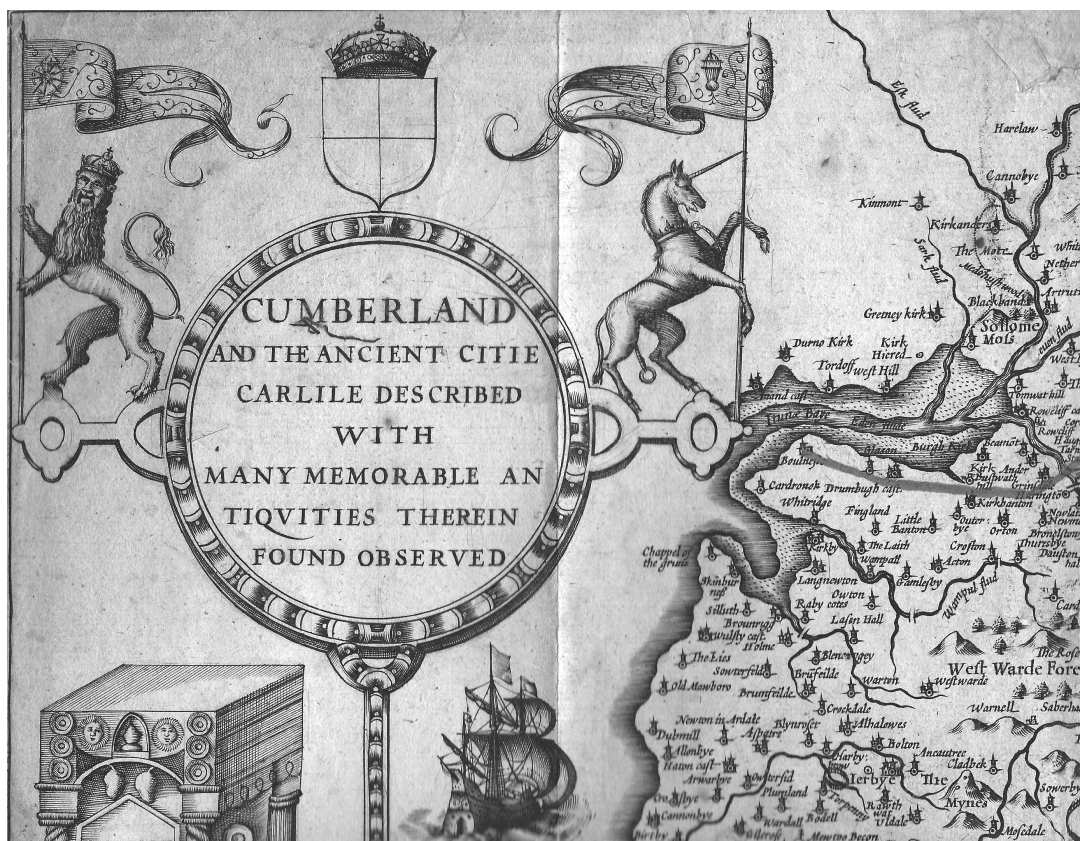


Fig. 1 Part of the proof of Speed's map of Cumberland, 1611, included in the notebook.

THE MAPS

William D. Shannon

At the front of the notebook are parts of two maps, of Cumberland and Northumberland, on which the line of the Wall has been coloured in, in red. Both maps are by John Speed, but that of Cumberland is of particular interest as it is a very rare advanced proof dating from about 1608. These proofs were prepared by the engraver Jodocus Hondius in Flanders and sent to Speed for correction before the appearance of the first printed edition of his *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain* in 1611 (Skelton 1970, 33–5). The proofs lack the sea-shading which characterises the printed maps. The shield which should bear the royal arms on the map of Cumberland (fig. 1) is empty, and a reference to 'Part of Scotland' is missing. The line of the Wall is not indicated on the proof (although it has subsequently been inserted by hand, in red); on the printed version it appears as a castellated convention. Only three bound sets of these advanced proofs survive, and 'loose proof maps, likewise without text on the back, are extant but rare' (Shirley 1980, 120). Unfortunately, only the western half of this map has survived with the cuttings. It is highly unlikely that the owner had only half of this map, but we can only speculate as to when the eastern half became separated from the western half.



Fig. 2 Part of the proof of Speed's map of Northumberland, 1676, included in the notebook.

The second map, of Northumberland (fig. 2), has also been torn in two at some stage, though both halves survive. Like the Cumberland map, it is a Speed and, similarly, the line of the wall has subsequently been coloured in along its length. This copy, however, is from the 1676 edition of Speed's *Theatre of the Empire*, known as the Bassett & Chiswell edition from the revised printers' names shown in the imprint (Skelton 1970, 91). Unlike the Cumberland proof, the reverse of this map bears text giving the history of Northumberland, and a list of the principal towns. Of particular antiquarian interest, however, are the printed insertions onto the map of the British tribal name *The Ottadini*, the words *Vallum Severi* below the Wall, and the listing of ten Roman place-names, both along, and to north and south of, the Wall. These additions to the original plate were made in the 1620s, before Speed's death in 1629, and show signs of being rather uncomfortably squeezed in. Six of the ten names come from the *Notitia Dignitatum*, the other four from the *Antonine Itinerary*. However, these names, and their locations, as well as the tribal name and attribution of the Wall to Severus, are all clearly taken by Speed from either the 1607 (Latin) or 1610 (English) edition of Camden's *Britannia*. Only one of the ten, *Corstopitum*, is located where present-day scholars would place it (Corbridge), while some of the other identifications now look very strange indeed, as where Speed, following Camden, located *Gallana* at Walwick (now identified as *Gallava*, Ambleside), or *Axelodunum* at Hexham (now *Uxelodunum*, Stanwix). That the owner of the notebook was unaware of the origin of the map would appear from the fact that he, or someone else, has

written the date '1585' in the imprint box. It may be that the owner thought the map was from Camden, although the first edition of the *Britannia* did not in fact appear until 1586, while the county maps for which the work was later famous first appeared in 1610.

There are also two hand-drawn copies of maps of the Wall. One is a composite copy of the two Speed maps (fig. 3), which had a considerable degree of overlap between Carlisle and Thirlwall. The copyist has primarily used the Northumberland sheet east of Carlisle, which appears twice on his map. No detail is shown west of Carlisle (as the early editions of Speed did not insert Roman place-names), but to the east, eight Roman names are given, plus *The Pictes Wall* and *Vallvm Severi*. Interestingly, the compiler has twice mistranscribed these names (*Segenodvm* for *Segedvnm* and *Vindromora* for *Vindomora*) and has missed one name (*Gallana*). The compiler also inserted over forty 'modern' names, using Speed's spellings. The fact that the map may have been unfinished is suggested by some seven symbols for places which have not had the names inserted. The label on the map is copied from that on the printed Northumberland sheet, with the addition of the erroneous date of 1585. The second hand-drawn map is a copy of that appearing in Bruce's *The Roman Wall* (1851 and 1853), as already noted.

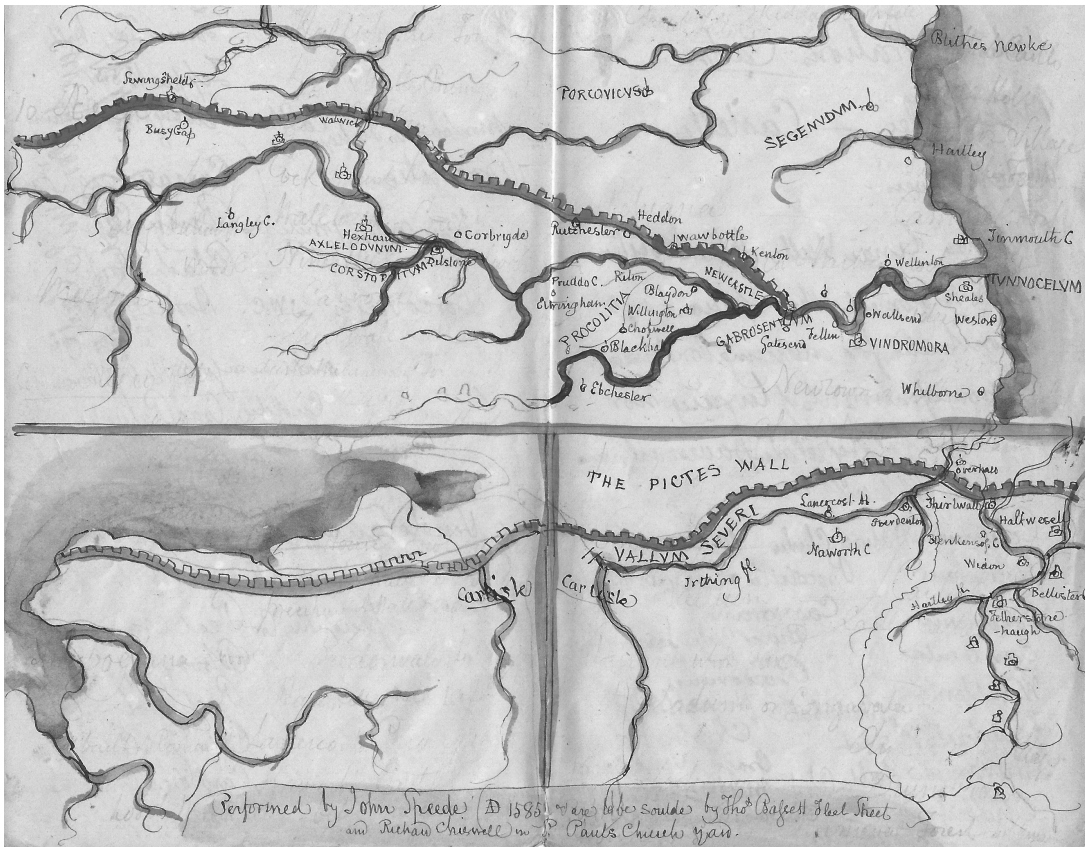


Fig. 3 The hand-drawn composite copies of Speed's maps.

THE WATERCOLOUR PAINTINGS

As noted, most of the drawings, and indeed some of the paintings, are copies, many from Bruce's *The Roman Wall*. The primary interest lies in nine watercolour paintings and one drawing, all of which appear to be original. The watercolours are presented three to the page, and each painting measures about 110 by 55–60 mm. The views are all recognisable today, though exaggerated.

In the list of images that follows, the long-hand annotations are given in italic type.

On the first of these pages (fig. 4) are three watercolour sketches:

Craggs of Carvorran Fells over which the wall is traceable in places 8 feet high (supposed 9 Nicks of Thirlwall)

Hadrian's Dyke is indicated bottom left, and Wall in the centre. North is marked. This is a copy of W. H. Brooke's illustration, noted above. The notebook also contains a tracing of Brooke's drawing with his initials, and a separate draft sketch, presumably by the anonymous artist (fig. 5). The view is of Mucklebank Crag looking east, with a building, presumably intended to be Walltown farm, to the right.

Fragment built horizontally but running almost perpendicular with the valley beneath 300 feet — near Carvorran

South side of wall indicates with an arrow the visible face of the Wall. Bottom left is Wall town Moss. North is indicated. This also is a copy of a second Brooke drawing; the notebook includes a tracing of this and also the anonymous artist's preliminary sketch for his painting (fig. 6). The painting is coarser in detail than Brooke's original and changed in detail. The Wall in the background is much more sinuous than in Brooke's drawing, the tree to the left in leaf rather than bare, and the figure much more sketchy. A broadly similar stretch of Wall survives today on Walltown Crag.

North aspect of Wall near Carvorran Craggs and Walltown Crag.

North is indicated. Top left is 9 Nicks. This again is looking towards Mucklebank Crag from Walltown Crag, but the foreground could represent one of several stretches, including an area quarried away since 1851.

On the second page (fig. 7) are:

Caerborran Craggs near Glenwhelt

To the right top is: *curious mount (supposed British encampment)*. Roman wall indicates the line of the stone wall. This is the west slope of Mucklebank Crag looking east. The crag and the small hills to the right are considerably exaggerated, but the view point is recognisable today.

Summit of Wall Town Crag descending nearly 350 feet perpendicular into the morass beneath

North aspect is added, top left. This view is similar to that of the crag on which T 45b sat until its destruction, as depicted by C. J. Spence (engraving opposite Bruce 1885, 57).

Wall House and Thirlwall Castle, Hadrian's Dyke & Wall of Severus

The word *water* indicates the location of the Tipalt Burn. This view is recognisable today, but the profiles are greatly exaggerated. The trees in the centre foreground stand where a house now sits, while the two buildings bottom left have been pulled closer together and reduced in scale.

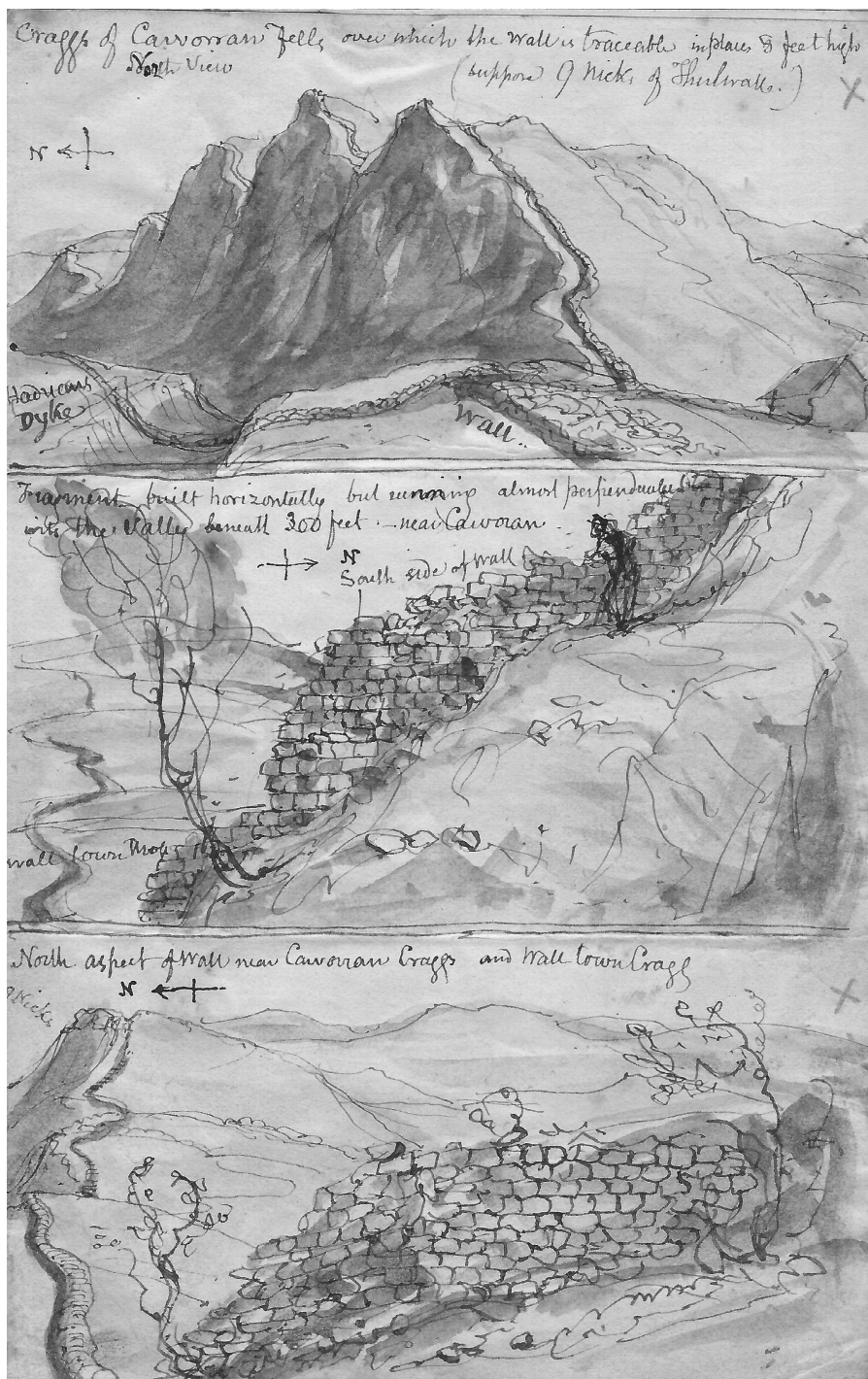


Fig. 4 'Crags of Carvoran Fells', now more generally termed Walltown Crags

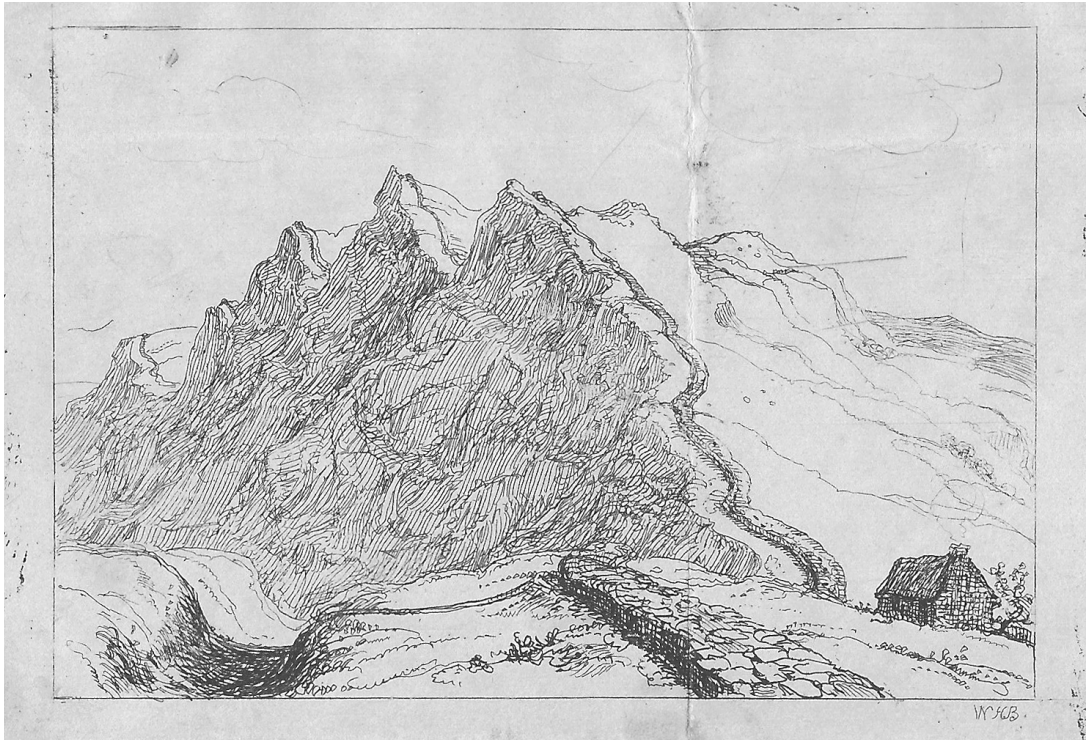


Fig. 5 The tracing of W. H. Brooke's drawing of Mucklebank Crag

On the third page (fig. 8) are:

remains of Hadrians Foss Dyke & adjoining Stone Wall of Severus 4 miles N of Hexham at Accum Fell looking towards Newcastle [sic]

The word *Wall* is marked to the right. This view is probably near Milecastle 25. The *Wall* ditch is rather exaggerated, and quarries in its northern edge seem to be shown.

Stagshaugh bank towards Corbridge

Wheat Sheaf Inn is labelled top right. At its corner, in black but with a red dot, is *Fragment*. *Roman Military Road* is marked across the bottom running east-west, and *Roman Portgate* along the north-south road. The *Wheat Sheaf*, built of stone, and with a red roof, has an inn-sign (annotated) on its gable. Graeme Stobbs has kindly informed me that the *Wheatsheaf Inn* is marked at *Portgate* on Charles Smith's *New Map of Great Britain and Ireland* published in 1804; it is approximately in the same location as the *Errington Arms*.

opposite side of the Military Road, looking N

Wheatsheaf Inn is marked, with *Fragment* at its north-east corner, similarly marked as on the other painting. *Roman Military Road* appears again, but the north-south road is labelled *Roman Watling Street*. On the ridge below the sky line a dotted line running east-west is labelled *Picts Wall*.

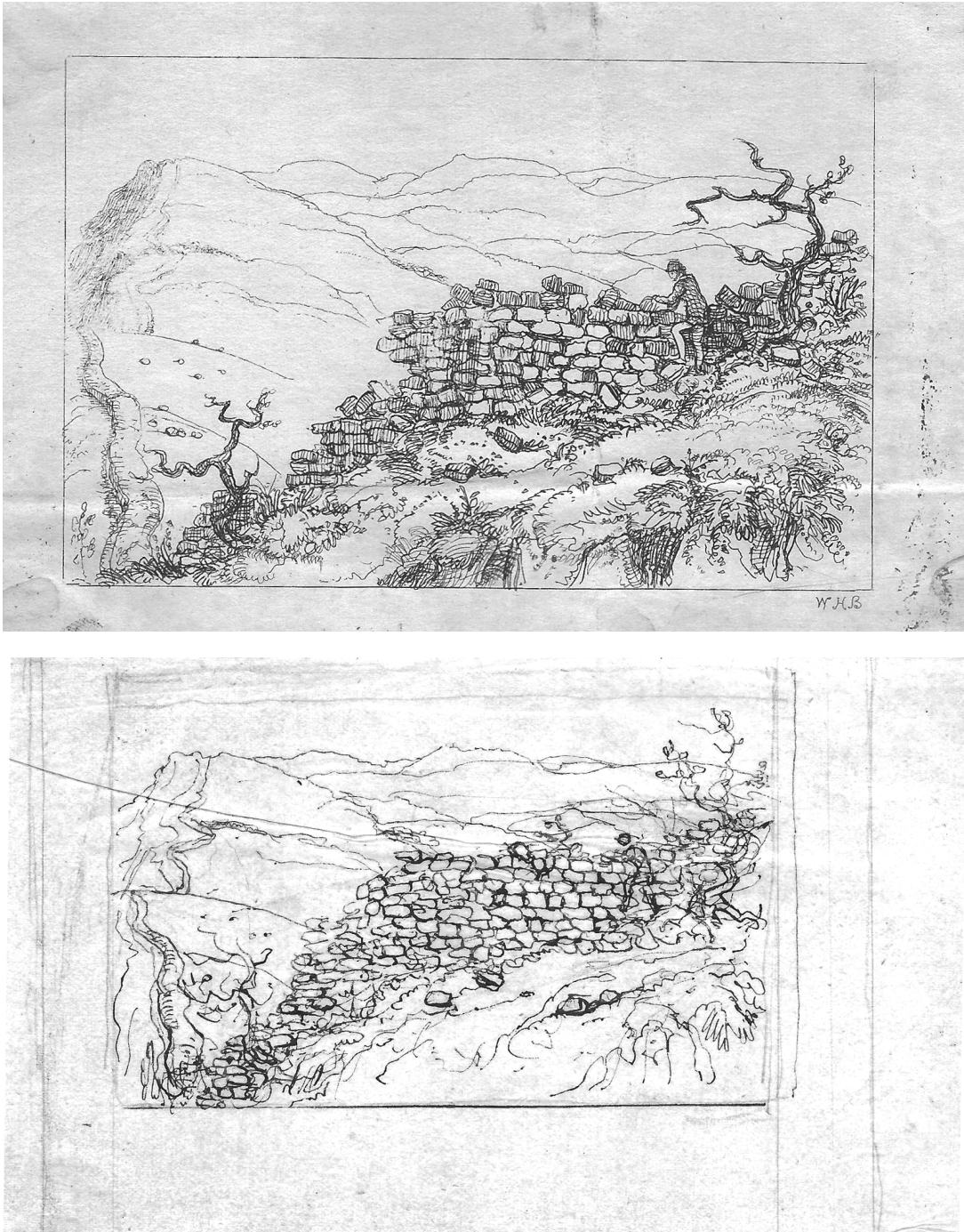


Fig. 6 The tracing of W. H. Brooke's drawing of Walltown Crag, with the anonymous artist's draft for his painting

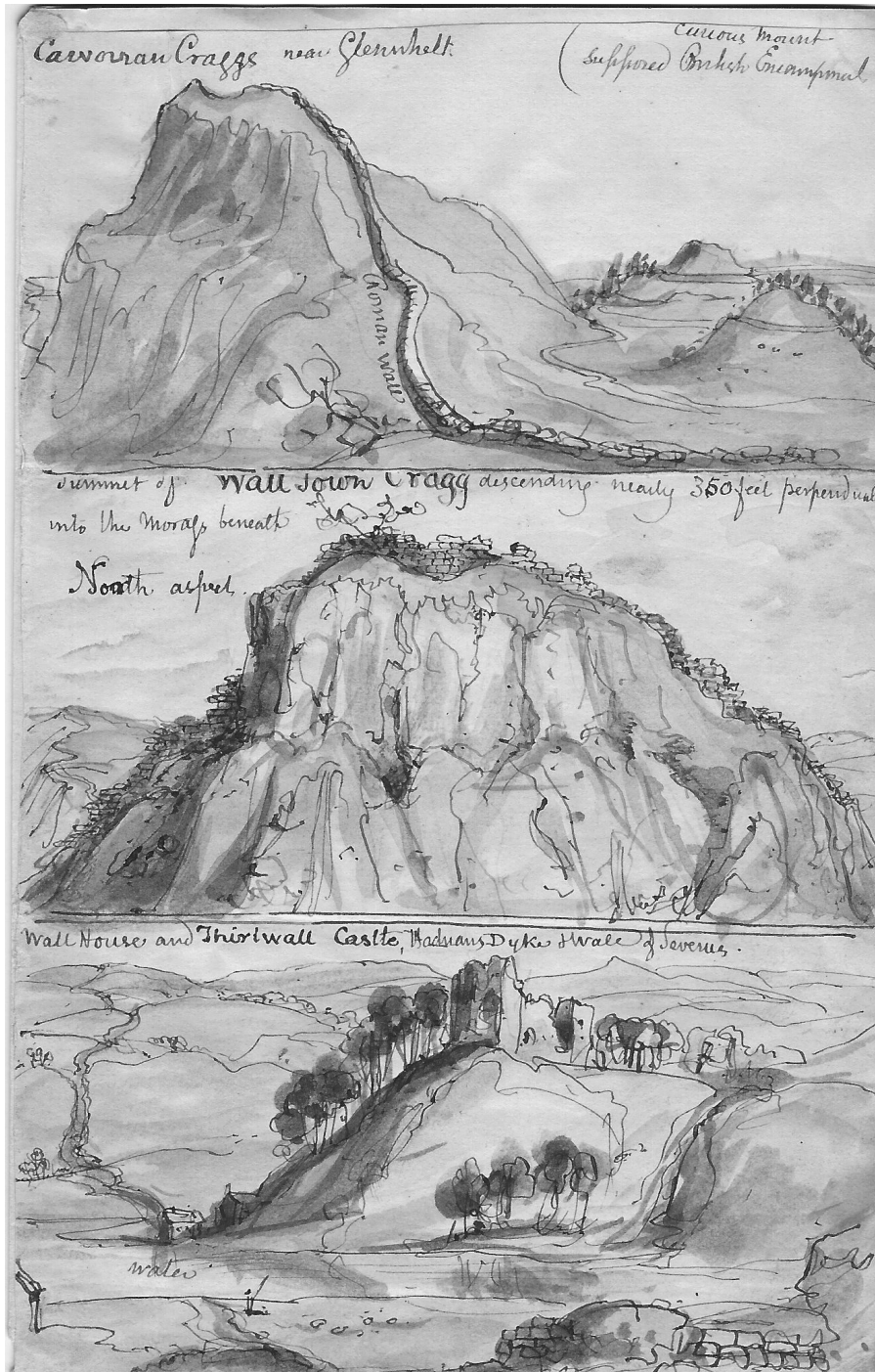


Fig. 7 Walltown Craggs, and Thirlwall Castle



Fig. 8 Acomb Fell, and Stagshaw Bank at Portgate

These two paintings are difficult to interpret. The east-west road is described as the 'Roman Military Road' but the eighteenth-century Military Road is presumably meant; this was built on top of Hadrian's Wall. A building, now gone, stands in the north-west angle of the crossroads. The Wheatsheaf Inn has a red roof in one painting and a grey roof in the other. *The Picts Wall* is marked some distance to the north of Portgate. This is clearly another error. Dorothy Charlesworth (1967) examined the Portgate in 1966. She located its north face 'in the north-west angle of the Stagshaw cross roads, only just clear of the north kerb of the Military Road'. This outer face lay 3–3.6m north of the north face of Hadrian's Wall, which lies under the south carriageway of the modern road. Horsley (1732, 121) stated that the gate was square, lay astride the Wall and was similar in size to a milecastle. This would suggest that the Portgate extended about 8m south of *Roman Military Road*, i.e. Hadrian's Wall. Charlesworth, however, stated that the 'total length of the north face is 9ft. 5 ins.' (2.87m). This is unlikely to be correct because she also stated that the 'four blocks of massive masonry which form the north face of the west side of the gateway were partly uncovered' together with the 'cornerstone, to carry the arch'. It would appear that Charlesworth only uncovered the west side of the north gate. The full length of the north wall is likely to have been 2.87 m + 2.87 m + a gate 3 m wide = 7.74 m. This is considerably smaller than Horsley's milecastle, but these dimensions would fit the position of the *Fragment* better. Assuming that the Portgate was square, its south-west corner would have lain about 2 m south of the *Roman Military Road*, i.e. Hadrian's Wall, which is exactly where *Fragment* is marked on the two paintings.

It is unfortunate that the paintings are not more accurate depictions of the Wall and scenery, in particular of Walltown Crags and the Nine Nicks of Thirlwall as quarrying has taken two large bites out of the Wall there. Nevertheless, the general locations are still recognisable today and the two paintings of Stagshaw Bank offer potentially significant information.

PEN-AND-WASH DRAWINGS

On a single page (fig. 9) are two pen drawings with washes in brown and blue:

Wall of Severus Wall Town Crags, Thirlwall

At the top right-hand corner is the wording: 'Illustr^d 6 Sep 51.' This is a view of Walltown Crags looking east and is still recognisable from the hills in the background.

Magna Station Caerboran

Andrew Birley confirms that neither he nor his father, Robin, recognises this view as being the fort at Carvoran. The view, as the former points out to me, is likely to be from a high point further east and it is clear that the aspect is to the west. One possibility is that the wall depicted on the drawing is at, or in the vicinity of, T 45b, found and destroyed by quarrying in 1883 (Bruce 1883, 235). This becomes a strong possibility when this view is compared to the middle painting on fig. 7. On both, the wall stands to about the same height with a tree depicted in the same location, a little to the north of centre, and it is also the same shape on each, albeit shown without leaves in one. The illustrations appear to depict opposite sides of the same wall; this is useful new information on the state of the Wall here thirty years before the discovery of the turret.

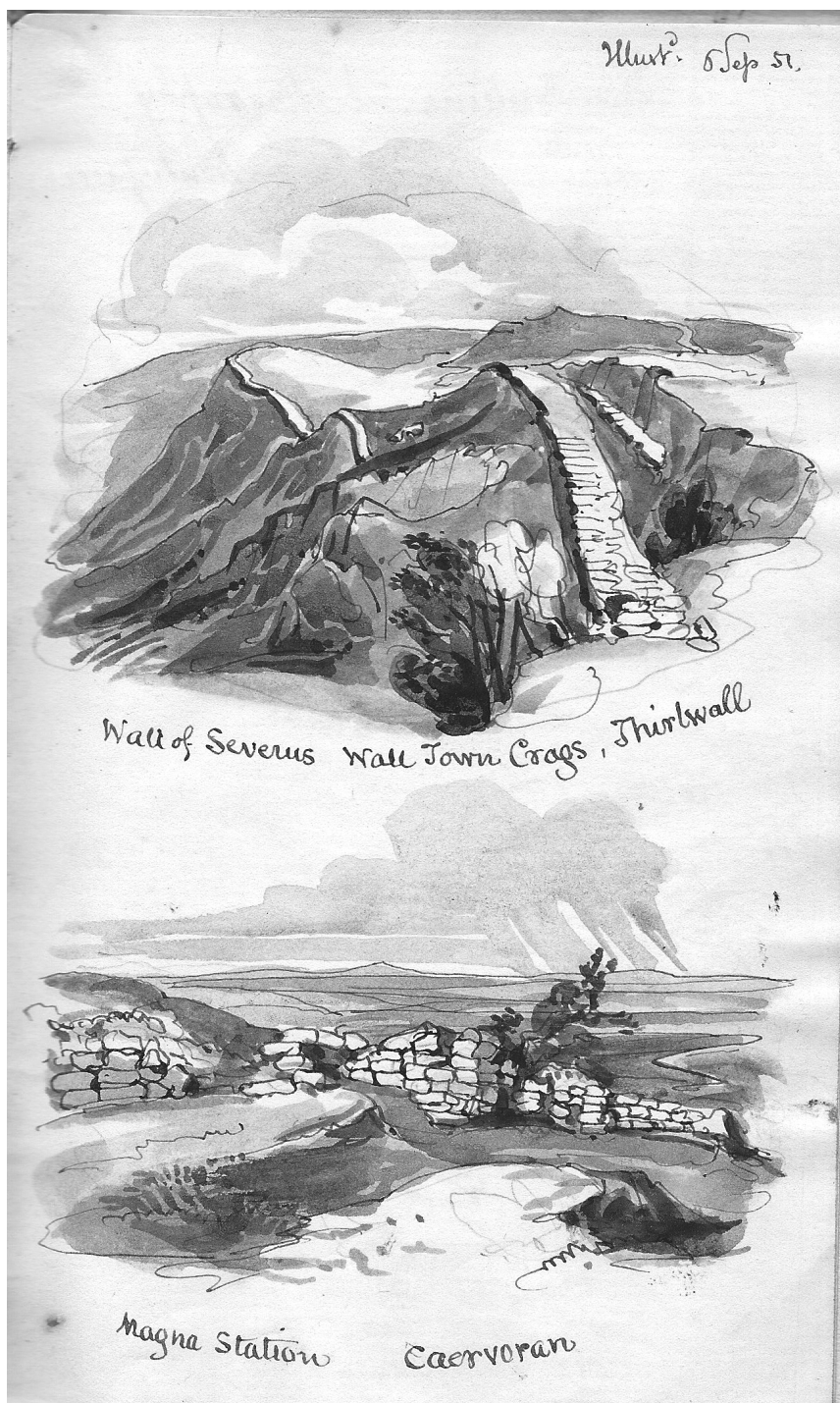


Fig. 9 Walltown Crag, and Carvoran.

THE ARTIST

Most of the items in the notebook are of a general nature but some are specific. These are the list of sites along the Wall, the itinerary of a journey south from the Wall to south Wales, and the dated watercolour painting of Hadrian's Wall. In addition, there is the copy of the advert and programme for the Pilgrimage. The search for the painter has been fruitless.

George Wickham mentioned an 'artist named Gibbons'. He has been identified, through the kindness of Paul Willis of Plymouth Museum, as William Gibbons (1840–86). He was born, the son of a shoemaker, in Exeter, and moved to Plymouth in about 1861 to work as an artist; there he married Elizabeth Lewis in 1863. He painted portraits and landscapes, both coastal and urban, and took a special delight in recording the bustling life of the town and the changing moods of the sea. One of his four children predeceased him and he ended his days in a mental asylum. There is no evidence that he travelled to the north of England, and it is not likely that he would have visited the Wall as a child in 1851.

It seems likely that we can also rule out W. H. Brooke. The style of the watercolours is not the same as his published drawings, and there would have been no reason for him to copy one of his own drawings and then amend it prior to painting a new version.

Roach Smith visited Hadrian's Wall in June 1851 (Roach Smith 1852, 173) and there is no record of a visit in September 1851. Further, there is no record of his drawing archaeological sites; on the contrary, he employed Brooke to do this on the Wall and at Pevensey (Roach Smith 1858, ii).

It might be expected that if the compiler of the notebook had attended the Pilgrimage he or she would have no need to copy out the advert and programme; the copying of this information may have simply been preparation for the visit to the Wall which he undertook in 1851. The connection with Plymouth, mentioned by George Wickham, prompted consideration that the anonymous compiler might be one of the southerly based participants on the Pilgrimage. The only two Pilgrims from south of the northern counties were William John Beamont of Trinity College, Cambridge, and Richard Abbatt (mentioned above). It seems unlikely that Abbatt would copy out his own text into the notebook. William John Beamont (1828–68) was an undergraduate when he attended the Pilgrimage. In 1858, together with John Ruskin, he helped to found the Cambridge School of Art, and amongst his publications is a pamphlet entitled *Fine Art as a Branch of Academic Study*, listed in his entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

Tony Kirby has kindly provided information on Beamont. He reports that there is little known about his life and his movements. He has sought paintings by Beamont but has been unable to locate any. Through his good offices, however, the archivist at Trinity College, Cambridge, was able to provide letters written by Beamont. Iain Gordon Brown, formerly of the National Library of Scotland, has examined these letters and the handwriting in the notebook and confirmed that the two are not by the same person. So it seems that Beamont can be ruled out.

There are other possibilities closer to home. In June 1848, Charles and Henry Richardson accompanied John Collingwood Bruce on his tour of Hadrian's Wall and the latter prepared many sketches which were later worked up into paintings (Bruce 1905, 110–12). The products of our anonymous painter, however, bear no resemblance to those of Henry Richardson, and indeed are jejune in comparison. Marshall Hall kindly suggested another possibility was the

local artist William Sydney Gibson, but again there is no similarity between his work and that of the anonymous painter.

The compiler of the notebook was a person of some archaeological knowledge, presumably having visited Pevensey, which he mentioned, as well as Hadrian's Wall. The list of subscribers, and those acknowledged, in Roach Smith's report (1858) on the excavations at Pevensey offer no hint to the identity of our painter. He also had access to material — the maps — of some antiquity, though how he obtained the proofs of the Speed maps is unknowable. He visited Hadrian's Wall in 1851, and travelled south from there to Chepstow and Cardiff. His identity, however, remains obscure.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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