

# South Shields 1875: an early excavation in context

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## SUMMARY

*Robert Blair (1845–1923) served as Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle, and editor of this journal, for forty years until his death. But his association with the Society had in fact begun a decade earlier, when he became involved in plans to explore the remains of the Roman fort at South Shields in 1874. This paper is inspired by a scrapbook he later compiled relating to the venture, which offers detailed insight into the practical and financial organisation of the excavation, the role of SANT, which has previously been underplayed, and the long-running debate over the preservation of the site. In terms of the development of British archaeology, it illuminates what is clearly a significant episode in the twilight between the domination of the interests of landowners and amateur antiquarians, and the institutional sponsorship of excavations from the 1890s onwards.*

## INTRODUCTION

*Roman remains on Tyneside*

**B**Y THE MIDDLE YEARS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, evidence of Britain's distant past, in the tangible form of archaeological remains, was being turned up in ever-greater quantities, as land long left undisturbed was claimed for roads, railways and housing estates (Levine 1986; Hoselitz 2007). Land in industrial South Shields, across the Tyne from the eastern extremity of the Roman Wall, was no exception. Having taken possession of the Dean and Chapter's estates there in 1870, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners bought up the leaseholds of adjoining estates and laid out as building plots and thoroughfares a large area on the Lawe, 'untouched for centuries, except by the making of the Ballast railway' (Hooppell 1878, 40). By changing the terms of the old twenty-one year leases, which provided an effective deterrent to builders and speculators, they sold the land either as freehold, or on long-term building leases (Bruce 1885, 230; Hodgson 1903, 205).

In October 1874, during the construction of one of the access roads to the area under development, large amounts of Roman pottery, coins, animal bones and a stone carved to resemble a fir-cone were discovered. This excited the interest of 'several local gentlemen' who were anyway in the habit of meeting as an informal weekly group (Hooppell 1878, 4; Hodgson 1903, 14; cf. Allason-Jones and Miket 1984, 9–13). One of them, Robert Blair, a young solicitor in the town, contacted the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle for advice and before the end of the year became a member, in order to exhibit the chance finds at a meeting of the Society. This was the start of almost a half-century of service to the Society, ending only with his death in 1923 (fig. 1).

They were not, of course, the only people in the town to find the prospect of Roman treasure enticing. In mid-February 1875, a group of 'Tyne Pilots', conducting a dig of their own after hours, uncovered two intact stone pillars. This seems to have galvanised the gentlemen, and a plan was made to form an Exploration Committee. They orchestrated a



Fig. 1 Portrait of Robert Blair in old age. This illustrated his obituary which appeared in *AA*<sup>3</sup>, 20, 187 (Oxberry 1923).

*R Blair*

campaign in the local press to raise public interest, and subscriptions to fund the excavation of the site before it could be covered with new streets and houses (Hooppell 1878, 5). The town Mayor, who was also the agent for the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, was approached for permission, which he gave with the proviso 'that all discoveries made by those excavations shall be lodged in the Free Library and belong to the town'. He was invited to chair a Public Meeting on 8 March, at which the Committee and their plans were made the subject of a formal resolution, as proposed by Dr Robert Hooppell, headmaster of the Marine School and architect-in-chief of the enterprise. According to the newspaper reporting, John Collingwood Bruce, celebrated populariser of the Roman Wall, next stepped forward to propose that a fund be raised by subscription. He spoke in support of the venture, explaining what this new 'mode' of investigating the past 'by taking the spade and shovel and wheelbarrow and digging into the ground' could reveal.

Reports in the local newspapers show that excavations formally began a few days later, and continued at great speed until the end of May, after which the press coverage dwindled, and progress appears to have slowed (Bidwell 1999a, 4). It may also be that the response to the renewed fundraising campaign was more muted than the enthusiasm which had greeted the initial call for subscriptions in March. While efforts were made to keep the project 'in the news', there was no article in the press about new discoveries at the site between 13 May and 19 August 1875, and the piece which then appeared is highly technical and difficult to follow.

Writing up an account of the excavation for *Archaeologia Aeliana* nearly a decade later, Bruce observed that the results had been 'disappointing' in terms of structures: 'The buildings are more battered and broken than we had hoped they would have been. Owing to the quantity of soil which covered them, the work of excavation was slow and costly' (Bruce 1885, 236).

#### *Later twentieth-century assessments*

Bruce's judgement notwithstanding, posterity, in the shape of modern archaeologists of Hadrian's Wall, has been kind to the 'exploration' as an interesting, if limited, episode in the history of the archaeology of Roman Britain. Eric Birley, in a detailed survey of Wall historiography, judged the excavation to have been intelligently conducted and successful:

The upshot more than justified the initiative and generosity of those concerned; the outline of the fort was established ... and such substantial and impressive buildings were found in its central third that eventually steps were taken to have that part of the site excluded from the housing project and preserved as a 'Roman Remains Park' (Birley 1961, 154).

Bidwell (1999a, 5; cf. Bidwell and Speak 1994) has also presented the excavation in a positive light:

The excavations were at first organised in an orderly fashion, even though they seem to have degenerated subsequently ... and the excavators were interested in most of the aspects of the discoveries which are still modern preoccupations: for example, structural history and economic aspects such as animal bones, and the sources of building stones, as well as numismatics and pottery finds.

In fairness to the explorers, as Bidwell (1999a, 3) also observes, '... in 1875 virtually nothing was known of the plans or layout of buildings in permanent Roman forts'. Indeed, Bruce's account of the excavation relies almost exclusively on the interpretation of structures uncovered at High Rochester in the 1850s, and John Clayton's discoveries at Chesters, embellished by comparisons with the organisation of public areas at Pompeii (Bruce 1885, 232–3; cf. Smith 1854, 163–4; Bruce 1857).

Both Bidwell and Birley also admire the report published by Hooppell in 1878, together with the excellent finds drawings, professionally-made plans, and accompanying illustrations of excavated architectural structures traced from photographs. The use of photography by J. H. Haggitt of South Shields to record the excavations in April and May 1875 should also be noted as an innovatory use of an improving technology associated with the exploration, possibly '... the earliest use of photography in the Hadrian's Wall zone for "scientific" recording, show[ing] that those involved in the work were open to new approaches (cf. Richmond 1934, 83; Bidwell and Speak 1994, 37, 40). Although Birley (1961, 154–5) was less complimentary about Bruce's later papers published in *Archaeologia Aeliana*:

[A] very full and useful report by ... Dr. Hooppell ... gives a better basis [than that of Bruce] for assessing what was evidently one of the best-conducted excavations of the 19th century. The plans ... and careful drawings ... taken in conjunction with Hooppell's clear and methodical exposition, make his report exceptionally stimulating — as R. C. Bosanquet found when writing his account of the *principia* at Housesteads.

If we read Hooppell's account (1878, 5–12) with any modern plan to hand, it is possible to grasp both what the explorers first hoped to achieve, which was to plot the extent of the fort,

and a fair sense of what they found. For a flavour, this is the succinct summary of the exploration with which he began:

The first thing done by the regularly appointed Committee was to begin from the same spot [i.e. where an almost intact column had recently been revealed] and carry a trench east and west till the ramparts of the Station should be reached. Then the central portion was entirely uncovered. Then a trench north and south was carried to the bounds of the Station, and after that other portions of the Station in various parts were laid bare (Hooppell 1878, 5).

Bidwell emphasises the significance, for our judgement of the 1875 exploration, of the contemporary attention drawn to the educational importance of site, and the aspiration of the Committee to instruct and 'improve' the public. This idea was central to the scheme from the start, and greatly emphasised in the report of the open meeting held on 8 March, to plan the excavation (1999a, 5). It will be the subject of more thorough discussion below.

In his assessment, Birley chose to concentrate on some of the more important finds yielded by the site in the ensuing three or four years, notably the famous tombstones of Regina and Victor from the Roman cemetery outside the perimeter of the fort, the large number of coins, and the lead seals first published by Blair (1880, 57–9; cf. Hodgson 2014, 37–8). In his judgement, '[t]he whole amount of Roman material from the site is exceptionally large and varied, mainly because Robert Blair was so assiduous in watching casual excavations and in keeping in touch with builders' 'activities', citing two interesting and unusual finds, a bronze skillet and a bone weaving-frame, as examples of what would otherwise have been lost (Birley 1961, 156–7). Birley's judgement also reflects Dr Hooppell's assertion that he had been forced to reconsider his intention to provide a 'Catalogue Raisonné of the Miscellaneous Objects discovered' because 'the "Finds" have of late so increased, in number and interest' (Hooppell 1878, 39). While the formal excavations were originally confined to the interior of the fort, it is interesting to note that the many later finds recorded by Blair came mostly from the extramural areas.

#### *Blair's scrapbook as evidence*

The diaries kept by Robert Blair as Secretary to the Exploration Committee, in which he recorded the details of the excavation day-by-day, seem to have disappeared (Reay 1995, 7; Bidwell 1999a, 5; cf. Oxberry 1923, 192–4). Alongside these notes, however, he kept a file of press cuttings, finds drawings, and examples of correspondence from subscribers and interested antiquarians. Some years later, he arranged them in an album running to more than a hundred pages, sometimes chronologically, sometimes thematically. A selection of material from Blair's papers was added after his death, and the whole bound in one very large volume, still kept in the Public Library at South Shields (Blair 1957).

There is no guesswork involved in the integrity of the scrapbook as a source. The pages put together by Blair himself have frequent annotations and attributions in his own hand, and it is not difficult to distinguish the portion he himself compiled from the additional material. The advantage of this is to lend an 'authorial voice' to the book: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Only by evaluating it as a whole, does the story, or two related stories in fact, that Blair had to tell, emerge.

The first story, as it were, is a personal record of the initial excitement and planning, and also the mechanics of running a dig by subscription. Through Blair and Hooppell's obvious

need for practical advice and support, as well as financial backing, we gain insight into Victorian antiquarian networking at its best and, occasionally, most waspish. The book also provides information on the role of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle, in the period immediately before it began formally to sponsor and commission archaeological work on the Wall. It describes an encounter between the Roman past and the high Victorian present on the cusp of the modern era of archaeology, as much in terms of ethics — issues of ownership, responsibility, and ‘legacy’ — as of methods; allowing us to assess both the extent to which some of the original aspirations were met, or even shared, and how history sometimes papers over the cracks.

The second story, bound up with the first, is the one Blair seems to want to tell most in his scrapbook, and also the one that may be missed by cherry-picking letters and documents rather than considering the book as a whole. This is his account of how the excavation acted as a springboard to his life-long career as an amateur antiquarian. Dr Hooppell similarly built a reputation for himself, soon enjoying renown as the excavator of the Roman fort at Binchester where he was the incumbent from July 1875. Blair, meanwhile, stayed in South Shields, doing what he could to mitigate the effects of the looting and vandalism to which the exposed site was continually subject throughout the rest of the 1870s, and buying coins and other items when they were offered to him (Hooppell 1878, 20–23; cf. Bruce 1885, 275). His collection was eventually sold, and donated anonymously to the Newcastle Antiquaries (*PSAN*<sup>2</sup> 1899, 5). However, notes in the scrapbook relating to the safekeeping of various coins imply that the purchaser was the Duke of Northumberland. The book obliquely charts his development as an antiquary, accruing skills and connections with considerable dedication and determination, as the result of an archaeological opportunity which had presented itself on his doorstep.

In both these respects, the material in Blair’s book thus invites us to set the excavation in contemporary social and archaeological context, in a way that seems fresh and possibly unique. In order to make it easier to use, the letters and documents contained in the scrapbook have been catalogued in simple chronological order (available as an appendix to this paper via *Durham Research Online*).

#### *The aims of this paper and research influences*

Based on the evidence of the scrapbook, this paper considers the funding and organisation of the excavation, the involvement of SANT and its more prominent members, and the role of wider antiquarian networking in the project, both in 1875–6 and subsequently. Blair’s scrapbook offers valuable insights into the role of individuals in archaeology, and the mechanics of building an antiquarian career at this time. It will also assess the extent to which the original ambitions of the Committee were realised, particularly in relation to the preservation of the site, public education, and the creation of a museum. With the help of the evidence of Blair’s book, it is thus possible to locate the excavation at South Shields more firmly in the context of the social and cultural development of archaeological activity as the nineteenth century progressed.

The preservation by Blair of so extensive a collection of documents associated with this project may provide an unusually full picture. Nevertheless, evidence of antiquarian activity elsewhere provides some helpful comparisons. The 1850s–70s saw a concentration of

developments in excavation methodology and interpretation of sites, foreshadowing the better known, institutionally sponsored, excavations of the 1890s onwards (Chapman 1989; Browning 1991, 354; Evans 2007). General Pitt Rivers, famous for his pioneering of excavation methods as well as an extensive anthropological collection, published many reports of his archaeological investigations in the twenty years before he inherited Cranborne Chase in 1880 and began excavating there. He operated broadly outwith the context of archaeological societies, and published his findings in a range of journals on geology, ethnology, and anthropology, as well as *Archaeologia* (Bowden 1991; Evans 2007). Meanwhile, in the seven volumes of the *Collectanea Antiqua* (1848–80), Charles Roach Smith recorded a wide geographical spread of archaeological activity, and a preoccupation with issues of preservation and public education which are highly relevant (Rhodes 2004; Hoselitz 2007). Well-known contemporary excavations of Roman material include those of Rev. Mr Joyce at Silchester commissioned by the Duke of Wellington, the discovery and removal of mosaic pavements at Cirencester, and Thomas Wright's excavation at Wroxeter, which was widely celebrated as a result of the handsome volume he published in 1860 (Wright 1860; cf. Smith 1883; Hoselitz 2007, 148–9; Hingley 2012b, 33). As has been suggested, excavations closer to home, along the line of the Roman Wall by John Clayton at Chesters (1840 onwards) and Housesteads (1852 onwards), and under the auspices of the Duke of Northumberland at High Rochester (1852–5), provided an obvious point of reference and resource for the Committee at South Shields (Longstaffe 1857, ii; Bruce 1857; Bruce 1885; cf. Stobbs 2000a, 9). The identification of a 'forum' (now known to have been the *principia* or headquarters building) at Chesters clearly had a direct influence on Hooppell's interpretation of the grand central structure excavated at South Shields, and indeed the comparison was discussed in some detail by Hooppell, Bruce, and Clayton at the meeting of the Newcastle Antiquaries in April 1875. As Richard Hingley has suggested, the context of urban reconstruction and improvement of South Shields in the 1870s may in itself have had an influence on Hooppell's civic interpretation of structures at the site (Hingley 2012a, 196).

John Collingwood Bruce's close advisory role in the planning of the South Shields excavation is likely to have increased the impact on the excavation at South Shields of a sensational recent discovery near the Roman Wall (see below). At the least, it seems to have framed the expectations of other interested antiquarians. The location of this discovery lay 110 miles away on the Solway Firth, at the thriving industrial port town of Maryport, which in late Victorian times was a place not dissimilar to South Shields. Like South Shields, moreover, it was the site of a Roman fort and settlement, in this case the most southerly of a line of forts protecting the coastline leading up to the west end of the Roman Wall (Wilson 1997, 24). The Roman remains were part of the estate of the Senhouses of Netherhall, and indeed generations of the family had collected stones from the site, starting with Sir John Senhouse in the 1580s (Hingley 2012a, 339; cf. Bruce 1875, 429). Camden and Cotton had also visited Maryport in 1599, resulting in several entries in the next edition of *Britannia* (Freeman 2007, 53; Hingley 2012a, 66–7).

At Maryport in April and May 1870, however, a new group of seventeen well-preserved inscribed altars had been discovered about 350 yards from the southeast corner of the fort, 'buried in pits', as Bruce wrote in *Lapidarium Septentrionale*, published by SANT in 1875. He included a full-page plan of 'The Diggings, Maryport' showing the relative positions and contents of the pits, and a lengthy account of the site, before his illustrated catalogue of these stones and others (Bruce 1875, 428–52). The similarities between Maryport and South Shields,

and the recent discovery at the westerly site, may make better sense of remarks made to Blair in the first weeks of the excavations by both Ralph Carr Ellison and Charles Roach Smith, who shared great expectations of the 'exploration' at South Shields. Carr Ellison offered the services of his foreman from another excavation project, and assured Blair that the man in question 'will be singularly careful as to extracting and raising any altars that may be found', before advising him to provide a lock-up on site 'in which all altars we find may be deposited at once'. In a letter Blair preserved from Roach Smith, he signed off: 'Hoping to have the pleasure of hearing you have discovered perfect inscriptions'.

The Maryport altars took their place as trophies on the portico of Netherhall, the stately home belonging to the Senhouses, who owned the land where the fort lay. Central to this study, in fact, is the uneasy debate concerning the ownership of the past, and its concomitant, the question of where responsibility should lie for investigating, preserving, and curating it. While this is a preoccupation familiar to all those working in archaeology, museums, and the heritage industry in the twenty-first century, witness the mildly controversial crowd funding of an excavation on Lindisfarne in the summer of 2016, in the middle of the *nineteenth*, this new 'mode' of uncovering the country's historical past, as Bruce described it, was newly making the issue a topic of lively interest, as public as it was political (*Durham University News* 2016).

Material from Blair's scrapbook has been used judiciously in *Arbeia* Magazine, to enliven the history of the site, and create biographies of Hooppell and Blair for a non-specialist audience (Reay 1994; 1995; Bidwell 1999a; Stobbs 2000a; 2000b). However, this paper will suggest that recognition of the potential of the scrapbook to illustrate and explore such themes of ownership and responsibility, has also led elsewhere to the misuse of selected letters and newspaper cuttings, to support arguments that are anachronistic or simply wrong. The decision to raise funds to conduct an excavation by subscription, justified by a rhetoric of civic pride and the public good, does not necessarily equate with an inclusive, 'accessible' community project or an avowedly 'democratising' ethic (Ewin 2000). It is still more inaccurate to present the events of 1875 as a clash between Robert Blair's supposed 'vision for a better tomorrow' for South Shields, focused on the creation of the People's Roman Remains Park, and the need to find land for new housing (Lawson 2011).

As Louise Revell has recently observed: 'We are increasingly aware that our reconstruction of the past is fundamentally located within the context of the present, and that the politics and the social assumptions of the present impact upon our reconstruction of past societies' (Revell 2016, 5; cf. Shanks and Tilley 1992). While her starting point is the need to create more distance from 'the assumption that people in the past', specifically the inhabitants of the Roman Empire, 'were just like us', similar caution should arguably also be extended to judgements about the motives and identity of people in South Shields in the 1870s (Rogers 2015, 1–6; Revell 2016, 1). What the scrapbook offers is evidence of an encounter with a version of the Roman past which was inevitably invented, or imagined; and an opportunity to locate and contextualise this encounter in its own time and on its own terms. Recent work on Classical receptions has emphasised, for instance, the potential for social and moral good which the opportunity to disinter the Roman history of South Shields may have been thought to present (Hardwick and Stray 2011; Richardson 2013). It is in this way that the Victorian excavation of a Roman fort in the far north of England may provide an illustration of the dynamic relationship between past and present, so elegantly described by Barkan in terms of a stimulating engagement with Foucault (Barkan 1999, xxi–xxxiii; 61–3).

## THE ORGANISATION OF THE EXCAVATION

The site of South Shields on the south bank of the Tyne has a rich settlement history, with evidence of occupation from the Mesolithic onwards (Bidwell and Speak 1994, 11–4; Hodgson *et al.* 2001). While the Romans were evidently not unique in recognising the strategic and economic potential of this headland promontory, it was the material relics of Roman occupation which particularly caught the imagination of the late Victorian champions of the town (cf. Rogers 2015, 195).

*Knowledge of the Roman fort in the 1870s*

According to Eric Birley, who collected and summarised the antiquarian evidence for Roman period occupation in *Research on Hadrian's Wall*, the identification of South Shields as a Roman site was first made by John Horsley in his *Britannia Romana* of 1732: 'That there has been a Roman station at South Shields is out of all question. The altars that have been found there, and the military way which has gone from it, are convincing proofs of it' (Horsley 1732, 449; cf. Birley 1961, 152–3). Further on Horsley adds: 'That it was in being in the time of Marcus Aurelius, appears from the altar and inscription found here, if Dr Lister's reading be just, but I am apt to think it was abandoned not very long after ...' A century later, reviewing what was known, Rev. John Hodgson commented: 'The remains of the station when Horsley visited it, about the year 1728, were certainly visible, though he has taken little pains to describe them' (Hodgson 1840, 228). Extracting from an account by Robert Surtees in 1820, Hodgson explained the source of more recent information:

In 1798, the site of this station, and much adjacent ground, belonged to the late Nicholas Fairles, esq., who, in that year had employed workmen to remove the foundations of many old walls that had obstructed the plough, and in this undoing, found the remains of a hypocaust, of which he showed a slight sketch to Mr. Brayley two or three years after. The site of the station was then ascertained to have comprehended several acres; and the lowest course of some of the walls to have been formed 'of rough whinstone, evidently brought from the shore, as the barnacles (*patella vulgata*) were still adhering to them'. Several coins were also then found, and among them a beautiful gold one of Marcus Aurelius, and several of small brass, from Claudius Gothicus, in 268, to Valentinian, in 380, which show that the station was not deserted, as Horsley would have inferred, soon after the building of The Wall and the station of Segedunum, but in use only a short time before the desertion of Britain by the Romans.

Here Hodgson added his own observation:

Of the remains of Roman works here, I can myself well remember, some thirty years since [*i.e.* c.1810] having seen indubitable evidence, in hewn stone and bath cement, not only built up in large quantities in the fences of the Lawe estate, but scattered, with abundance of Samian ware, over the newly-ploughed land. But its walls, to their foundations, and all its suburbs, have been so entirely ransacked from time to time, for building the quays and houses of South Shields; and constant cultivation in a very productive soil has done so much to smooth its site, that the lines of its ramparts and ditches can now scarcely be traced.

Though intended, according to the preface, to be an introduction to the works of Horsley and Hodgson for a more popular audience, the first edition of Bruce's *The Roman Wall* included little more than a summary of the passage on South Shields in Hodgson, with no



more recent intelligence (Bruce 1851, 322). The second edition expanded on this, to include a topographical description of the site, and the observation that '[f]ew traces of Roman magnificence are now visible, but the bold south-west rampart of the station may easily be detected by proceeding up "Fairless's old waggon-way", which cuts through it' (Bruce 1853a, 293–4). For the third edition for some reason the passage was pared back down to include even less detail than the first (Bruce 1867, 308). A letter pasted into Bruce's much-corrected proof copy of the 1853 edition (1853b) (preserved in Durham University Special Collections), which he also evidently used in preparing the third edition, nevertheless indicates more interest in the site on Bruce's part than this would suggest. His correspondent was William Brockie of South Shields, the first editor of the *Shields Gazette* and a well-known local historian. Preceding a lengthy discussion of the Roman roads, and the relationship between Segedunum, the fort on the Lawe, and Jarrow — some of which made its way into the handwritten draft pasted into the same section — the letter opens:

Dear Sir, Since I had the pleasure of meeting with you, I have had some conversations with various parties who have resided all their lives in Shields, with the view of getting out of them some information relative to the Roman antiquities said to have been dug up here from time to time. But nothing of a reliable nature has been obtained. The foundations of buildings [...] dug up when Mr Salmon's ballast-way was made, many years ago, were ground up or carried away and no trace of them is left. Whatever [...] of a curious nature was found at the same time was appropriated by parties who did not know its value, [...] or made away with or as is [...] now unrecoverable. I suspect, however, from what I can learn, that the remains are of no very ancient date. Some bones of animals [...] but no coins or domestic utensils (Brockie 1853).

Twenty years later in *Lapidarium Septentrionale*, his masterly work of synthesis sponsored by SANT, Bruce repeated that there had certainly been a large Roman camp on the Lawe: 'The exigencies of a rapidly growing population have obliterated most of its features; but at various times old walls, hypocausts, Samian ware, and Roman coins have been found within its area' (Bruce 1875, 273). As we know from a letter dated 20 February 1875, Robert Blair and Bruce, then Secretary of SANT, were already in contact about more recent finds at South Shields when the *Lapidarium* was in its final stages of preparation. The more dramatic discoveries of March and April were yet to come, of course; and Blair had, at this stage, no fresh inscribed stones to excite Bruce's attention.

Such was the state of knowledge of the Roman remains until spring 1875, when building contractors moved in to stake out the land for streets of terraced houses. The existence of the site was well known, but beyond the anecdotal, very little 'of a reliable nature' could be asserted. Relying on John Hodgson's authority, Bruce and others had concluded that there was probably nothing of value remaining on the site.

#### *George Hodgson's 'History'*

In 1903 George Hodgson, then, and for many years afterwards, the editor of the *Gazette*, published a large and meticulously researched historical survey of South Shields. His main theme was the rapid growth and improvement of the port since it obtained municipal status in 1850, and particularly in the previous thirty years, following a terrible smallpox epidemic of 1870–71, when the number of deaths effectively forced the Corporation to take measures to improve public health and sanitation (Hodgson 1903, 206–7).

Hodgson's *History* was a landmark work of local, social history, and is still the first bibliographical point of reference for the nineteenth-century history of the town. He wrote, by his own account, 'in the hope of satisfying the demand ... for information regarding the history of the Borough of South Shields', for an audience familiar with the small-town politics and personalities associated with more recent events (Hodgson 1903, v).

It is striking that many of the people acknowledged in the Preface, and referenced liberally throughout the text, are names familiar from the press coverage of events surrounding the excavations on the Lawe thirty years before. By Hodgson's influential account, the town's Roman past had now become the most 'important' episode in its early history (meriting twenty pages of the first chapter, against three for the ancient Britons, and five for the Saxons and Vikings combined). He depicted the excavation of the Roman fort as an intrinsic part of the up-turn in the fortunes of South Shields, reinforcing the link between present and future worth of the town and its Roman past, a 'story ... honourable to the enterprise and public spirit of the borough' (Hodgson 1903, 14; 205; cf. Vance 1997, 244–5; Hingley 2016, 161–2). In so doing, he was replicating the tone of the contemporary newspaper reporting of the excavation barely a generation before, and subscribing to a persuasive rhetoric of civic pride which the Exploration Committee channelled most persistently to raise the subscriptions required to fund the project. The figure of Robert Blair features in Hodgson's historical narrative on almost every page, an apt illustration of the author's technique of appealing to the personal and the particular to establish his authority with his readership. Not yet thirty years old when the opportunity to excavate on the Lawe arose, by 1903 Blair was almost the only survivor of the original Committee, and still running his law practice in the town (Reay 1995, 6).

Hodgson (1903, 30) concludes his account of 'Roman South Shields' with a nod to any resident of the 'modern' town still smarting from the mid-nineteenth century appellation of 'the jakes of Newcastle':

We have thus in South Shields those evidences of importance in Roman days which a recent writer has said are almost entirely lacking in Newcastle, namely, the remains of a large station and the convergence upon that station of Roman roads, besides the existence of considerable over-sea commerce attracting merchants [such as the Palmyrene Barates, husband of Regina] even from the ends of the earth.

Hodgson (1903, 181; 206–9) had set himself the task of reflecting on the transformation of South Shields from a place of great industrial strength — of factories and iron works, timber yards, shipyards and collieries — but lacking in municipal structures, a clean water supply, or basic sanitation, to a well-run Victorian borough. The transfer of the Dean and Chapter estates to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and the change in the leasehold arrangements, by his account 'marked an epoch in the development of South Shields', which was to be forever linked with the consequent discovery of significant Roman remains on the Lawe (Hodgson 1903, 205). Moreover, George Hodgson's *History of the Borough* could itself be considered largely responsible for cementing this new mythology in the popular imagination.

#### *Mr Blair and Dr Hooppell*

Robert Blair, prominent in Hodgson's *History*, and his older contemporary Robert Hooppell, had already been long-time residents of South Shields when the contractors' picks and shovels began to unearth fresh evidence of Roman occupation. The son of a Tyne pilot, Blair

was born on the Lawe, but articulated to a local firm of solicitors when he left school at thirteen. Hooppell also appears to have come from a modest, and maritime, background, as the son of a carpenter from Rotherhithe. After reading Mathematics at Cambridge, however, he became a schoolmaster and was ordained, before being appointed Headmaster of the Winterbottom Nautical Academy, South Shields, sixteen years prior to the events of 1875. During this time he had published two textbooks on navigation and several volumes of sermons, been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, and become an active campaigner for social reform (Courtney 2004). Hooppell also delivered evening lectures at the Mechanics Institute 'on scientific and classical subjects', which Blair attended (cf. Oxberry 1923, 191–2; Reay 1995, 5).

This apart, there is little evidence for an unusual level of interest in antiquities on the part of either, although Hooppell's membership, from 1869, of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society would have brought him access to its well-stocked library, and lectures on a broad range of subjects, including recent discoveries about the Roman Wall. As it happened, John Collingwood Bruce had delivered a pair of lectures on this subject on 3 and 5 November 1873 (Bruce 1874). Blair applied to be a member of SANT only at the very end of 1874, as the letter from Bruce to Blair implies, while Hooppell appears on the membership list for the first time in 1876. It could be said that they were qualified to run an archaeological excavation only by energy and optimism, and a certain *auctoritas* based on their standing as men of position and commitment to local interests; and yet they apparently succeeded in doing so, in ways which have been judged kindly in modern times, as we have seen.

Blair begins his scrapbook as a record and documentary repository of how the project was financed, the sources of help and advice available to the Committee, and the aspirations expressed by those involved. Particularly at the start, there was a blatant element of appeal to popular interest, born of the need to finance the excavation by public subscription. Some of the early press reports are as hyperbolic as they are wordy. Possibly for this reason, Blair's first intention seems to have been to preserve newspaper cuttings separately from letters and other items, but this rapidly caused too much dislocation in the chronology of the account, and false distinctions between categories of material. For example, there are significant letters and exchanges which Blair is able to record and preserve only because they were published in the local papers. Likewise, the many newspaper reports on the excavation are in such laborious, and often technical, detail that copy must have been supplied by those who were actively involved. Sometimes a handwritten card or letter is juxtaposed with a printed piece, to provide better explanation of one or the other.

As the collection continues, Blair selected letters and cuttings to highlight the debate surrounding the preservation of the site, and the enthusiastic reception of the new museum. He provided details of the brisk trade in coins and other finds, which kept local entrepreneurs busy for as long as building work continued on the Lawe, and the circumstances of his own burgeoning career as an amateur antiquary. By this account, the 'legacy' of the episode took a number of different forms.

#### *Excavation by subscription*

According to the scrapbook, the public campaign to attract interest in the scheme was launched in a letter to the Editor of the *South Shields Gazette*, dated 20 February 1875 (cf. Allason-Jones and Miket 1984, 10–11). Against the pen name, 'Scrutator' (i.e. 'Investigator'), Blair has pencilled 'R. E. Hooppell':

Sir, — It is doubtless known to many, but there are probably also a great number of the inhabitants of South Shields who are not aware, that South Shields was as important a place in very ancient times as it promises to be in the future. Among the fortified towns of the Romans from 1500 to 1700 years ago, the Lawe held a prominent position, and there is every reason to believe that the fields, now being laid out for building purposes between Ocean Road and the river, contain beneath their soil most interesting evidences of the fact. In years gone by such things as altars, gold coins, and sculptured stones have been discovered, and, only a few days ago, a dish of Samian ware, of large size and nearly perfect, was found in excavating for the cellar of a house just commenced erecting. This is in the possession of Mr. Brown, grocer, Green's Place, and may be seen by the curious in the window of his shop ... My object in drawing attention to these facts is that now, before the whole ground is covered with streets and houses, an effort should be made to unveil the buried city, and to reveal, before the opportunity has passed for ever, the exact position, the extent, the character, and the surroundings of the great fort, which in those long past times guarded the entrance to our important river. If a committee could be formed, and leave obtained from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who, I believe, own the site of the old Roman town, the explorers would doubtless be rewarded by the discovery of many articles, illustrative of the military and domestic habits of our warlike predecessors, and these, if presented to the town, and lodged in the Free Library, would form a valuable and distinctive feature of that important municipal institution.

Intended to fire the imaginations and open the pocket-books of the butchers, bakers and candlestick-makers of South Shields who took turns to grace the ranks of the Town Council, Hooppell's letter is well-judged, and reminds us that his experience as a teacher, writer and public lecturer made him the ideal publicist for the venture. The language is simple and direct, with no hint of pomposity or intellectual high-handedness. His message is as strong as his sense of audience, and he strikes a good balance between the exotic and the familiar, indicating that a prized recent find had been placed in a grocer's shop window for all the town to see, rather than hidden away in a private study or library (cf. Hooppell 1878, 5). He makes his main point clearly, explains the urgency, and hints at the future value of the 'exploration' to the people of South Shields, all calculated to inspire quiet confidence in the scheme and the intentions of those responsible.

This letter elicited three positive responses, published in the Gazette in the following days. The first, from the well-known Newcastle antiquarian Ralph Carr Ellison, endorsed the plan to explore the remains, and, crucially, introduced the idea that it would require financial support. The second is a long letter from Blair, showing none of Hooppell's facility for succinct communication. He emphasised the need to act quickly, listed previous finds from the site, and the items which had recently come to light, and concluded by explaining that the excavation would have to be funded by subscription:

... I think that a Committee should at once be formed and a commencement made ... by excavating that portion where building operations are now in progress, and I dare say when the matter assumes a tangible shape (which I hope it soon will) subscriptions will flow in. I am sure there need be no fear of failure from lack of funds, as there are many in this town and neighbourhood who would gladly contribute their mites for such a desirable object as the one in question.

The third letter, from a keen local historian, calls for the assistance of 'the venerable Dr Bruce'.

Thanks to the scrapbook, we also know that this exchange of views in the press was in fact carefully choreographed, from the contents of a private letter of 27 February from Hooppell to Blair, evidently retrieved from Blair's papers and added, by the 1950s compiler, as a form

of preface to the book. It conveys valuable information about the atmosphere surrounding the plan to excavate the site, and in particular, an intense awareness of the importance of good publicity to 'the cause' (Blair 1957). If they wanted to raise the money to excavate, and in the short time available, they needed to win public sympathy:

Dear Sir, I don't think we'll go to the Mayor today. I think it will be better to let R.C. Ellison's letter in the Gazette today appear first. It will lead to fresh interest in the subject, and to conversation between this and Monday, which will doubtless materially advance our cause in all quarters.

I think a letter from you in Monday's Gazette, briefly summarizing the relics that have been found in past years, and lately, would be very effective. There is the hypocaust, the gold coin, the altar, the various other coins, the sculptured stone you have got, (which I look upon as particularly interesting & significant, for if that was there how many more altars, inscriptions, carved stones, & fragments of walls, are doubtless still awaiting exhumation,) the stones in situ with mortar, the pottery embossed and plain, & last but no means least the paved road crossed by the new line of Baring Street. All these evidences brought together in a letter, written and signed by you, would be very effective and would whet curiosity and anticipation. If you could get such a letter into Mr Simpson's hands today, or early Monday morning, it would be safe for Monday's Gazette, & would help on the cause wonderfully — Faithfully yours, R. E. Hooppell.

A short article/press release in the *Daily News* reported on a 'deputation' a few days later of two other members of the putative Committee to the Mayor, as the agent of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, to request formal and exclusive permission to excavate. This was granted on condition 'that all discoveries made by those excavations shall be lodged in the Free Library and belong to the town'. Moreover, the readership was informed, the official explorers had been given 'permission ... to prosecute any parties, other than those authorised by them, who might disturb the ground or attempt to make any excavations'. Work then began later that day, and immediately brought to light 'several coins' and 'a column 12 feet high, supposed to have belonged to some of the public buildings of the Romans'.

The *Newcastle Chronicle* duly reported another deputation, the visit of John Clayton and Ralph Carr Ellison from the Society of Antiquaries to South Shields, on Thursday 4 March. They were shown round the site by Blair, Hooppell, and the Mayor, and, according to the report, offered their practical and interpretative advice. The visit is also recorded in the *Proceedings* of the Society. Meanwhile, Blair and Hooppell advertised a public meeting to be held the following Monday, to organise the excavation, or in fact to encourage people to contribute financially to plans which had already been laid.

Blair has preserved two newspaper reports of the occasion. The second, an extremely detailed account, bears witness to the planning behind it, and the carefully crafted messages the Meeting was designed to convey. It was also effectively the first of a string of articles in the *Gazette* as the official mouthpiece of the Committee, intended to be instructive and informative reports on the progress of the project from an insider perspective. As a historical source, this first report introduces the interested parties, the 'stakeholders' in the plan to uncover the Roman past of South Shields, and suggests where they stood in relationship to each other.

Those who spoke at the well-attended meeting in the Free Library were as follows: John Broughton (the Mayor of South Shields), Dr Hooppell, John Williamson (prominent local businessman and member of the town council), Dr Bruce at length, then briefly, J. M. Moore, G. Lyall, and Rev. H. Morton, all members of the Exploration Committee. It was important

that the venture should not be presented as the pet project of an exclusive cabal, or as duplicating earlier discoveries. The Mayor opened the Meeting, and emphasised the *educational* value of excavating the remains, adding that, 'he hoped the gentlemen who took an interest in the Free Library and in education generally would subscribe the means for carrying out such a work'. Hooppell 'then rose to propose the first resolution', that the excavation should be undertaken, that any discoveries should be presented to the Town and displayed in the Library, and that an organising Committee of twenty-three named individuals (including Bruce, John Clayton, and Ralph Carr Ellison) should be formed, 'with power to add to their number'. He read out letters of support from two well known locals unable to attend in person, one of whom sent a guinea subscription, and also spoke of the educational potential of the exploration, which 'would advance learning generally' and 'might also be valuable to the students of holy scripture', taking care to stress the uniqueness of the location and what it might reveal:

The Roman stations hitherto explored had been inland stations, and he did not recollect any station so thoroughly maritime as the one at the Lawe. If they explored the site thoroughly, and if the remains existed, they should find [the Romans'] mode of fortifying a maritime station, which would throw much light upon what they did not find in inland stations.

Anticipating the charge that the project was of strictly local significance, and possibly more of interest to antiquarians than to anyone else, Councillor Williamson had been deputed to second Hooppell's resolution. He not only 'remarked that he thought they were greatly indebted to those gentlemen who initiated the movement, which appealed entirely to the sympathies of the community', but added '[t]here was a probability that the town might come to be known all over the world as a spot where ancient remains would be found', and referred to his own visit to the site of Pompeii. Mr Williamson was also prepared to lead by example, and headed the subscription list with a substantial donation of £25, as it was also noted at the end of the report of the Meeting. By the end of the excavation he had given £50 in all, the equivalent of more than £4000 today (Hooppell 1878, 20).

Following this contribution, Dr Bruce, the celebrated expositor of the Roman Wall, proposed that £100 'in the first instance' should be raised by subscription, and delivered a long and rather florid speech on the value of investigating 'that wonderful people who first of all brought civilisation to this part of the world' by the digging up of archaeological remains.

To judge by this report, which is corroborated in essentials by the briefer account in the *Daily Dispatch*, this 'public meeting' was a carefully planned piece of pure theatre, with important parts distributed to three main players. First there was a wealthy and doubtless well-respected representative of the Town Council, clearly as 'eager to embrace evidence of the importance of the ... locality in the national past' as the local champions of Roman period exploration in Virginia Hoselitz's case studies (2007, 56). Secondly came Hooppell, highly-educated, a visible public figure, active in the complementary spheres of education, and moral and social betterment of his fellow men; and thirdly Collingwood Bruce, a name at this time nationally synonymous with the remains of that monument to imperial domination, the Roman Wall, and potentially the originator of the plan to raise money for this excavation by subscription. Writing in 1878, Dr Hooppell recorded: 'The sum of £279 16s 8d, in all, was raised, and expended, the account being finally closed August 16th 1877' (Hooppell 1878, 20).

Blair's scrapbook nevertheless suggests that attempts to attract fresh, or repeat, subscribers in May and July 1875, and again in January of the following year, failed to elicit great

enthusiasm, and that imminent shortage of funds was an anxiety from May onwards. At the beginning of the month, the antiquarian H. Ecroyd Smith visited South Shields to deliver a lecture on the excavations. According to a newspaper report of the event, Dr Hooppell took the floor after the lecture, to introduce a motion to raise a further £300. He spoke at length about future plans to continue the exploration, and establish 'a fine antiquarian museum' in the Free Library to house the finds. However, a report of Hooppell's speech to a meeting of the Tyneside Naturalists' Field Club, three weeks later, alludes to the need to attract subscriptions to continue the work, and a printed leaflet dated to the beginning of July (including an edited version of addresses by Hooppell and Bruce on the latter occasion) clearly implies that without further subscriptions, the work would have to stop. Blair also preserved a collection of letters from wealthy and influential potential subscribers unwilling to contribute to the fund. Among these, Lord Ravensworth's secretary replied 'that though the discovery of Roman remains at South Shields is no doubt of an interesting nature, there is nothing very [...] in that discovery'. In fact, the Earl seems eventually to have reconsidered, as he appears on Hooppell's list of notable backers alongside the Duke of Northumberland. In a further flourish of the publicity machine, that gentleman's generous financial contribution, as reported in the Newcastle press, was pointedly linked with the close involvement and supervision of Bruce (Hooppell 1878, 20). Not everyone was as persuadable, however. When asked to subscribe in May 1875, the colliery-owner, shipbuilder, and new MP for North Durham Charles Palmer, replied: '... although I have no doubt the matter to which you refer is one of great interest, I have so many claims of a [...] character that I am unable to comply with your wishes but I hope the antiquarians with Mr Clayton at their head will come forward to assist you'.

Despite another contribution from the Duke of Northumberland at the end of January 1876, it seems the project could no longer be sustained. On 3 February Blair wrote a letter to one of the Newcastle papers, commenting on a report of the AGM of SANT, which recorded the Society's regret at the suspension of the excavations at South Shields. He wanted to make it known that they would certainly be continuing, were it not for the lack of funds. The following week, a meeting of the Exploration Committee resolved to make a fresh appeal for subscribers, but it appears that organised excavation was effectively at an end from this point.

### *Contemporary comparisons*

Virginia Hoselitz (2007) argues that mid-nineteenth-century responses to evidence of the Roman occupation were essentially localised, reflecting contemporary power structures in the places she studied. Naturally this also affected the way in which excavation, when it happened, was organised and funded (Hoselitz 2007, 179–83). Thus, where a site was on the land or in the domain of a wealthy aristocrat such as the Duke of Wellington at Silchester or Lord Bathurst at Cirencester, excavation might be on the 'traditional' pattern of the exercise of patronage by the landowner, who would then lay claim to any interesting discoveries (Hoselitz 2007, 180).

Somewhat closer to home, the excavation of the fort at High Rochester (*Bremenium*) also appears to fall into this category, but it transpires that the situation was rather less clear-cut. The landowner, the Duke of Northumberland, financed an excavation in 1852, and commissioned and paid for Henry MacLauchlan's *Survey of the Wall* in 1852–4 (Bruce 1857, 69; MacLauchlan 1858). However, as the Secretary's report of the Newcastle Society for 1855

recorded: 'The excavations at Bremenium, which have been carried out at so much expense by the munificent Patron of the Society, the Duke of Northumberland, have been this year as far as possible completed by some of the members, aided by a further donation of £25 from his Grace' (Longstaffe 1857, ii). In his account of the excavations, which appeared in this same volume of *AA*, Bruce is at pains to distinguish between the excavation of 1852, '... conducted ... by direction of the Duke of Northumberland', and that of 1855, which was carried out by a 'Committee of Exploration' from the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle. Indeed, his confident account is confined to the latter, with reference to the former (Bruce 1857, 78 etc.). As a further twist in the tale, in *Collectanea Antiqua* Volume 3, Charles Roach Smith claimed that the Duke had initially approached the Society of Antiquaries of London for help with planning the investigation of Roman sites on his land, but that '[t]he overture did not produce the anticipated result' (Smith 1854, 155–6). Allowing for the fact that this entire volume of the *Collectanea* constitutes an attack on the workings of the Society, by one who had for many years failed to be elected a Fellow, it still suggests a recognition on the part of the Duke of Northumberland, if no one else, of the potential importance of institutional support for large archaeological excavations (cf. Rhodes 2004; Evans 2007).

Attention has here been drawn to the undoubted complexities of the earlier situation at High Rochester, partly to suggest that the funding of such projects, different, for instance, from Clayton's on-going work on his own land, was not a straightforward matter. It calls into question the simple characterisation of nineteenth-century archaeology as a transition from aristocratic to institutional patronage (cf. Browning 1991, 354). The earlier excavation is also likely to have had a bearing on Bruce's advice to Blair and Hooppell at the planning stages of that at South Shields, where of course there was no aristocratic landowner poised to interest himself in the exploration.

Another possible model was Thomas Wright's 1859 excavation of Wroxeter (*Uriconium*) prominent in the 1860s because of the lavishly illustrated book Wright produced, which ran to six editions before his death in 1877 (Wright 1860). Pasted inside the front cover of Bruce's own copy of *The Roman Wall*, in fact, is a newspaper report of an address by Canon Greenwell to the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society, dated March 1863, favourably comparing the remains of 'the Roman Wall of Hadrian' with Roman remains in other parts of the country (and praising Bruce's work), '... though we have no large and wealthy city to excavate like Wroxeter' (Bruce 1853b).

We know something of the difficulties Wright encountered in attempting to fund his excavation by subscription from Charles Roach Smith, an outspoken critic of the lack of Government funding for the investigation and preservation of sites of historical interest, as well as a correspondent of Robert Blair's (Rhodes 2004). Having failed to attract Government support for his excavation at Lymne in 1850, he succeeded in financing the project by appealing to the generosity of 'friends': 'Such was their liberality that towards the close of our work, I was obliged to check the generosity of the subscribers, having already in hand more money than we could use' (cf. Smith 1852, ii; Smith 1883, 206). Wright, however, whose own lack of preference and support by the Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries also fed into Roach Smith's narrative of the exclusion of the social outsider, was not so fortunate (Smith 1883, 76–81):

With the aid of his friend Mr Beriah Botfield, MP, he instituted excavations at Wroxeter on the site of the Roman *Uriconium*. [Various notables] and others in the locality took an active part in the



adventure; the Duke of Cleveland, as landlord, did all that could be expected; a considerable sum of money was raised; and for some time the work went on successfully. But my friend did not estimate the cost and the difficulties so highly as I did; and the excavations, for want of funds, came to a standstill for years (Smith 1883, 82).

According to Roach Smith, Wright's appeal to the Chancellor of the Exchequer was turned down, and after a generous contribution of 50 guineas from Liverpool antiquarian Joseph Mayer, a close associate of Roach Smith's, was used up, excavations had to stop. His final verdict on the value of the work is disappointing: 'Although Mr Wright published a handsome volume, it must be allowed that the excavations did little more than to establish the fact that the wide area of the buried city is rich in remains, which past efforts leave unrevealed' (Smith 1883, 82–3). As Wright's correspondence with Mayer demonstrates, he was forced to spend so much of his time networking and lecturing, to promote the project and attract sponsorship, that his role as director of the excavation was increasingly neglected (Hoselitz 2007, 180–81).

### *The role of the Newcastle Antiquaries*

Although it was not in a position to fund the scheme, or direct it from day to day, the particular local context in which the South Shields excavation was planned and conducted was the support of SANT and the dominating figure of John Collingwood Bruce. Founded in 1813, SANT pre-dated the efflorescence of local historical and archaeological societies which became a feature of middle class social life in the 1840s and 50s. Nevertheless, it shared many of the characteristics of the newer groups (Levine 1996, 4; Hoselitz 2007, 1–2; Breeze 2013). The active members of SANT had a wide range of antiquarian interests, and the dominance of Roman archaeology at meetings of the Society was variously criticised, defended, or denied in the pages of the *Proceedings*. Nevertheless, 'Roman' papers predominate in *AA*, from 1876 (when Volume 7 appeared following a gap of eleven years) until the death of Bruce in 1892. After this, Roman archaeology was relatively more marginalised in the activity of the membership.

Bruce himself was a man of many parts and wide interests, within SANT and beyond, but it is in his role as expositor and populariser of the Roman Wall that he was chiefly known in the 1870s, and this would doubtless have been at the front of Blair's mind when he first made contact with Bruce, as senior Secretary of the Society (Bidwell 1999b, 2; Breeze 2003). Bruce's reply to the young solicitor's advances was courteous and encouraging. He apologised for being slow to respond, being, he said, consumed by the task of finishing the *Lapidarium*. He invited Blair to make a report on the findings from the Lawe and exhibit the objects mentioned at the March meeting. It is likely that Blair did so, as the day after the meeting a deputation from the Society visited the site at South Shields, and so began a supportive association between several influential Newcastle antiquaries and the Excavation Committee, amounting to an informal sponsorship of the project, which nevertheless stopped short of the wholesale patronage envisaged by Mr Charles Palmer (see above). The report in the *Shields Gazette* of the next (April) meeting of the Society, largely devoted to a presentation by Dr Hooppell on the excavation so far, clearly demonstrates the dependence of the Exploration Committee on their Newcastle friends for every element of planning, execution, and interpretation of the discoveries. Hooppell even opens his address with a reference to 'the

great and efficient help which individual members of the society had kindly rendered to them'.

Bruce had a keen instinct for the value of publicity. He had deliberately, and most successfully, cultivated a strong popular appeal in his 'rediscovery' of the Roman Wall, from the Pilgrimage of 1849 onwards (*PSAN*<sup>2</sup> 1887, 135; Birley 1961, 25–6). As we have seen, his celebrity status made him a great asset to the initial campaign for subscriptions, and his public association with it attracted much attention. Newspaper coverage following the reporting on the Public Meeting on 8 March assumes that the plan to explore the remains actually originated with Bruce, and that the role of the Exploration Committee and associated wealthy backers was that of enthusiastic helpmeet to the great man. A mildly satirical piece in the *Daily News*, a South Shields paper, characterised the situation in the following terms:

What a fine Roman nose the Doctor has; it bridges the centuries with a keen scent. Give him a bit of Roman cement the size of a button, and he will stick the Lord of all the Earth on it, and construct around him a tunnocelum [a sly reference to the question of the Roman name of South Shields, a topic of intense speculation in the newspapers], and light it up with Roman candles, till our imagination is quite dazzled, and the bands of our purses are unloosed, and we gladly contribute to the fighting fund.

It was also Bruce who invited Dr Hooppell to present the first fruits of the exploration to the Society in April, knowing, and perhaps ensuring, the occasion would be minutely covered in the local press.

The truth is a matter of surmise. However, it is certainly the case that Blair was more interested in recording Bruce's subsequent role, in advertising the results of the excavation at the Society of Antiquaries in London, and encouraging Blair's own antiquarian interests, than in his contribution to the organising of the dig. No personal communication from Bruce is preserved between February 1875 and June 1876, when he invited Blair to a meeting of the London Society. Blair did, however, carefully keep evidence of the contribution of two other important Newcastle antiquaries, Ralph Carr Ellison and, to a lesser extent, John Clayton.

Clayton was 83 in 1875, and wrote to Blair declining active involvement as a member of the Committee. In a letter of 11 March he suggested dimensions for the 'Exploratory Trench', then wrote a few days later enclosing his subscription, commenting: 'You must have much Engineering Talent amongst you at South Shields, which by means of mechanical appliances may diminish the extent of manual labour in the Excavations'. With Carr Ellison, he had formed the deputation of Newcastle Antiquaries to the Lawe at the beginning of the month, and his advice and observations on the likely presence of 'some important remains which might eventually lead to the discovery of a large and important Roman station or camp', were reported in some detail. The report of the 'highly satisfactory' visit concludes:

The deputation counselled the South Shields gentlemen to trench round the ground, and to carefully excavate all round with a view to tracing the boundaries of the station and the direction of the road which it was expected had led from the camp. The committee undertook that this should be done ...

And indeed it was (Hooppell 1878, 5). Clayton's partner in the visit, Ralph Carr Ellison, had already lent his authority to the plan to excavate the site in a letter to the *Gazette*. Additionally Blair recorded his involvement by preserving three letters from Carr Ellison in March 1875, offering help and advice. He contributed to the subscription fund by supplying

a foreman to the excavation at his own expense (cf. Hooppell 1878, 20). Additionally he provided a list of the basic equipment required for a successful dig, and advised on the importance of site security, recommending a lock-up for important finds. In a separate communication he sent his firm assurances of personal support and involvement. Carr Ellison also had a prominent congratulatory role in the formal opening of the new Museum at South Shields in February of the following year.

It could be said that the generosity and interest of these men was more than repaid subsequently by Robert Blair. Having begun his career as an amateur antiquary with the support and encouragement of the Newcastle Society, in 1883 he became one of its Secretaries, and editor of its journal. For the next forty years he shepherded the Antiquaries with such devotion and industry, it is said, that after his death in 1923, the roles he had fulfilled had to be taken on by three separate people (Dyson 2006, 127; Breeze 2013, 45–6).

### ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE PUBLIC GOOD: EDUCATION AND PRESERVATIONISM IN SOUTH SHIELDS AND BEYOND

May they who, in subsequent centuries, write the history which we of the present generation are moulding, be enabled to testify that we have emulated all that was good in our ancestors; that we have held firm, and transmitted to posterity, all the benefits which our forefathers bequeathed to us; and that we ourselves have done something to render the world better and happier! (Bruce 1874, 68).

So John Collingwood Bruce chose to conclude the published version of a pair of lectures he delivered at the Literary and Philosophical Society, Newcastle upon Tyne in 1873. Entitled *The Wall of Hadrian: with especial reference to recent discoveries*, it is a masterful, if forgivably Northumberland-centric, account of the civilising benefits of the Roman occupation of Britain as he saw them, with a particular emphasis on the role of the Roman empire in the spread of Christianity (Bruce 1874, 63–8). The Pilgrimages Bruce led along the Wall in 1849 and 1886 were, similarly, underpinned by an avowedly didactic purpose (Birley 1961, 25–7; cf. Bidwell 1999b, 2–3; Ewin 2000, 14–16): ‘Our pilgrimages will instruct us and make us the means of instructing others’, as he wrote when the planning for the second pilgrimage was under way (*PSAN*<sup>2</sup> 1887, 136). Reports of his speech at the public meeting to plan the excavation at South Shields in 1875 likewise show Bruce using his well-practised skills as teacher and preacher to communicate and inform, in support of Dr Hooppell’s assertion of the great educational value of the project to the people of South Shields.

Despite the excitable tone of much of the press coverage surrounding the beginning of the excavation, calculated to appeal to a sense of civic pride, there can be little doubt that the aspirations of Hooppell and Bruce were a matter of sincerely held belief. That public morality could be promoted by proper education of the public was an ethic which also sat easily with prevailing ideas linking good moral foundations with a knowledge of the classical world (Richardson 2013, 13–14). However, Hooppell’s strong educational aspirations in this instance should be regarded more as a product of the same sense of public duty which led him to organise the South Shields branch of the Church of England Total Abstinence Society in November 1862, or spend his evenings sharing the fruits of his own education, lecturing to youth groups or at the Mechanics Institute (Hodgson 1903, 452; Reay 1995, 5).

In March 1875, during the first weeks of the excavation, these aspirations found expression in an informative series of letters sent by Hooppell to the *Gazette*. But in concrete terms they

were realised in the opening of a public museum in the town, and by preserving a portion of the site as a public amenity. As has already been emphasised, the lodging at the Free Library on Ocean Road of any finds from the excavation was a founding principle of the venture (cf. Allason-Jones and Miket 1984, 10–11). We know from the newspaper reports collected in Blair's book that this element of the scheme was quickly enacted, and a new museum, mostly exhibiting Roman objects from the Lawe, was formally opened in February 1876. We also know, not least from George Hodgson's *History of the Borough of South Shields*, that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners granted the Town Council of South Shields a 999-year lease on the central section of the site, and that the remains were enclosed, to preserve them and provide a public park, 'The People's Roman Remains Park' (Hodgson 1903, 27–8). However, the evidence of letters and articles carefully preserved by Blair tell a darker tale, of the procrastination and obstructiveness which prevented, for five years, the site from being protected, while the remains were vandalised, and systematically looted by treasure-seekers wishing to sell on their booty and by builders removing stones for reuse (cf. Hooppell 1878).

It was evidently judged to be in the best interests of South Shields, or more likely the reputations of all involved, that the less creditable events of 1875–80 should be glossed over. Hodgson had his reasons for silence on the matter, as previously discussed. Even Dr Hooppell, perhaps wishing to protect his recently acquired status as the excavator of Binchester, was uncritical, in print at least, by November 1881. Blair's book was compiled for his own satisfaction, of course, and the record of the 'afterlife' of the excavation is arguably preserved as much to document Blair's fledgling antiquarian career, as *qua* chronicle of events. It is also the case that the date of a SANT meeting agenda inadvertently included by Blair, (he used the back of it for some notes), suggests the scrapbook may have been assembled, or completed, in the 1900s, some 30 years later. Nevertheless, it will be argued, strong echoes in this material of the nineteenth-century public debate concerning the value of preserving the monuments and relics of the nation's past, fiercely and consistently reflected in the writing of Charles Roach Smith, provide a context beyond the local and the particular for the discussions surrounding the fate of the Roman remains (Hudson 1981, 50–58; cf. Levine 1986, 119–23). This section of the paper will conclude by discussing how it is that the 1875 excavation at South Shields and its outcomes have been interpreted as an early manifestation of the 'democratisation' of Roman archaeology in Britain (Ewin 2000, 25–37).

#### *Preservation of the site: the debate in 1875*

Almost from the first, there was critical comment in the South Shields press on the discrepancy between the public rhetoric associated with the launch of the subscription fund ('by the People for the People'), and the way the excavation was in practice being conducted. From here it was but a small step to questioning the aims of the entire enterprise, focussed, naturally enough, on the future of the site. As is never explicitly mentioned, but everywhere implied, the Lawe had suddenly become valuable building land. It was evidently suspected that there were vested interests at stake among some prominent supporters of the excavation project.

A letter to the *Gazette* dated 20 March advocated the use of a volunteer labour force to 'excavate the rubbish away from the Roman remains', which would save the money raised from subscriptions for 'the purchase of the ground with a view of [*sic*] keeping it open for the benefit of the town'. To this a firm rebuttal was issued by Thomas Lincoln, a member of the Committee, on 22 March. The public must be patient, he explained: 'Rome was not built in a

day ... [T]he fitful, uncertain and irregular work of promiscuous volunteers cannot be relied upon compared to that of men who do a fair day's work for a fair day's wage ... The committee did, I believe, on Saturday afternoon, accept the volunteer labour of our zealous and energetic friends the pilots, who set to work and did "yeoman service", but this was a special arrangement ...'

It is worth noting that a fault line seems to have immediately appeared between what were projected to be the interests of 'the people of South Shields' and the aspirations of the Committee, despite Dr. Hooppell's continuing efforts to the contrary. The very next day, an essay by Hooppell on the successive names of the town from the time of the Roman occupation appeared in the letters column of the same paper, referring to the excavation as 'exploration by the people of South Shields'.

In terms of the arrangement of his book, after many pages containing reports of the latest discoveries, and a record of antiquarian disputes connected with the project, Blair in fact devoted an entire section to the interconnected themes of tensions between 'Committee' and 'public', vandalism of the site, the need for preservation, and his own role in events. Beyond the brief feint and parry described above, which was preserved among the letters and reports on the initial organisation and progress of the excavation, the items on these themes, however, are truly buried. They first appear on page 72 of 132 large and closely packed pages, and for this reason alone it is perhaps not surprising that less successful, or more controversial, aspects of the excavation, have remained under-discussed. The cuttings are also interspersed with finds drawings and sealing wax impressions of intaglios dated 1877 to 1881, demonstrating that recording the finds was a protracted process for the small group of enthusiasts who undertook the work in their spare time.

The first subject of this section is tension over the role of the Committee. In mid-April, a busy month after excavation had begun, an exchange of letters, and a comment in a newspaper article also criticising Blair's stance appeared in the *Daily News*, a Newcastle paper. This was a week after Blair and Hooppell had made their report at a meeting of the Newcastle Antiquaries. Blair has not included his first published letter, but enough of it is quoted to see that he seems to have given a known critic of the Exploration Committee some welcome ammunition. For on 14 April, someone describing himself as 'A Visitor' (i.e. to the site of the Roman remains) replied with a carefully-crafted attack on the Secretary and the conduct of the excavation, as follows:

Is it possible that R. Blair, whose signature is attached to a letter on the Roman Remains at the Lawe, South Shields, in your impression yesterday, can be the Secretary to the Committee charged with the excavation of the same?

If he is, the statement that he is 'afraid that scores of visitors will be attracted to the spot', and the assurance that if they are 'they will be greatly disappointed', are the strangest utterances I have ever known to come from a person holding a like position.

'Visitor' then went on to compare this attitude with a helpful and informative tour of the site by the Junior Secretary of SANT, strongly implying that the Committee at South Shields were prioritising the Roman remains over those of later periods on the site, or even perhaps failing to identify the latter through lack of knowledge:

I heard him say, pointing to the raised pavements and other remarkable remains at the Western rampart 'What makes the station of South Shields so very interesting is the evident marks there are of later occupation.'

He also said — pointing to the deep chambers and arched work in the same locality — ‘There is no telling but that the whole of this may be Saxon, like the crypt at Hexham Abbey.’

It is suggested not only that the Committee are trying to deter the public from visiting the site, but also may not be as knowledgeable as they would like to appear.

Blair replied in terms of some exasperation:

If ‘Visitor’ had attached his name to the disingenuous letter in your paper yesterday, instead of sheltering himself under that anything but appropriate *nom-de-plume*, it would have been more satisfactory to all concerned.

As regards my remarks, however, I can only say that they were intended simply for those people who purposed visiting the ground out of sheer curiosity and nothing else, as they who have done so in consequence of the *couleur de rose* descriptions that have from time to time appeared in your and other papers, have gone away disappointed and annoyed.

No one can or does deny that there are traces of various occupations of the site; there being evident marks of destruction by fire and subsequent rebuildings, but that is vastly different from asserting dogmatically that this or that piece of wall or building is British, Roman, Romano British, Saxon, Danish, or what not.

In conclusion permit me to inform ‘Visitor’ that I do not in future intend to answer anonymous or indeed, I may say, any correspondent, and at the same time to assure him that my interest in this and kindred subjects is of long standing and not of yesterday, as my friends are doubtless aware.

That this was not merely a passing motif is indicated by a later exchange on access to the site, in the *Gazette*, in September of the same year. A correspondent calling himself ‘Veritas’ made a thinly veiled attack on the way public access to the excavations was being controlled. Thomas Lincoln, on behalf of the Committee, wrote a lengthy denial, asserting that excavation is a delicate operation, and the workmen should be allowed to get on with it unhindered by ‘the public’. Nevertheless, ‘the committee are anxious that visitors should have every facility to see every part of the excavations, and to enable them to understand the plan of the fortress as a whole’.

Another ‘Committee’ insight into the difference between legitimate and malign interest in the excavations, and the struggle to protect the site, even as the work and the publicity surrounding it was at its most intense, occurs in a report on progress in the *Gazette* of 18 April. This was the first bulletin since the long report of Hooppell’s address to SANT 10 days earlier, and Blair’s spat in the *Daily News*. Most interesting is a lengthy section on serious vandalism at the site, implying that it had been a problem almost from the start. Without this information, we might assume that the destruction and depredation of the remains dated entirely from the years when the central portion of the site lay exposed and untended (cf. Hooppell 1878, 10; 19).

The author described a deliberate act of destruction of a structure which had been particularly remarked on in the press by Bruce, explaining: ‘As little notice as possible has been taken hitherto of these disgraceful acts of vandalism, although it is well-known that the Exploration Committee have been obliged to board over, or to hide again with earth, the most interesting remains uncovered, and to abstain from opening out others, lest they should be irretrievably destroyed before they could even be measured, photographed or drawn’. He then goes on to describe an incident where an unnamed (but evidently identifiable) individual broke off pieces of excavated stone slabs, in the face of protests from the night watchman, apparently to satisfy his own curiosity. The episode was even more reprehensible, the report suggests,

because the offender 'should, from his calling and position have been one of the first to aid the committee in their work of endeavouring to preserve, as well as to exhume, these interesting relics of antiquity ...'

This may also be the first public statement of the Committee's interest in ensuring the site was preserved, which became a prominent strand running through the coverage of the excavation from then on. As part of the renewed fundraising campaign, at the start of May the well-known antiquary and author H. Ecroyd Smith was invited to South Shields to lecture on the Roman Remains (cf. Hoselitz 2007, 71). Hooppell gave a vote of thanks, alluding to plans for 'a fine antiquarian museum for the Free Library' for the preservation of the 'rapidly accumulating' finds, and the public discussion which had begun on the preservation of the site. He was also careful, however, to point out that while the Committee were enthusiastic supporters of the scheme to preserve the site for public enjoyment, '[m]oney would ... be required, and it was for the public to say whether it wished the ground to become its property'.

By the end of May, the issue of *responsibility* for preserving the site was a topic for the letters column of the *Gazette*. Thomas Lincoln wrote, calling for the Town Council to take action on the grounds not only of the historical and educational value of the ruins, but also the desirability of improving the amenities of South Shields:

If discoveries like these at the Lawe had been made at Tynemouth, we all know that they would have been hailed as one of the greatest boons that could befall the place. Don't let us then at South Shields, be branded by the next generation for either supineness or vandalism, in allowing these historic ruins to be either pulled down or covered up.

In response, a correspondent calling himself 'Typo' maintained that while something should be done to preserve the remains, it was unfair to make it the financial responsibility of the Council.

Although 'Typo' remained firmly in the grip of the local and the particular in his purview, an unattributed newspaper article from June makes an attempt to locate the issue of site preservation at South Shields in the wider national debate about public responsibility for the nation's past. Following a reprint of the text of Ecroyd Smith's recent lecture, the author remarks as follows:

... scarcely a day passes without accumulating proof of the extreme desirability of conserving the remarkable remains, but for this purpose funds must be obtained, and in this country such must be privately contributed. In France, Prussia, or Italy, the Government would take its proper part in materially assisting, if not bearing the whole expense of securing to future generations as well as to present, these valuable proofs of Early Occupation and Enlightened Civilisation.

This is a striking echo of views expressed by Charles Roach Smith throughout the 1850s and 1860s in the first five volumes of the *Collectanea Antiqua*. Part archaeological periodical, and part personal political manifesto, the work amounts to a campaign for public accountability, to engineer Government support for the preservation of ancient monuments and the development of instructive museum collections (cf. e.g. Smith 1857, vii). Roach Smith was not, of course, the only person to write on such topics, but he was certainly a prominent and influential figure in the movement to promote preservationism from the 1840s onwards (Rhodes 2004). He was instrumental in establishing the British Archaeological Association in 1843, and encouraging a network of local societies, to be the eyes and ears of the Association

on the ground. The famous schism of 1845, which resulted in the Association splitting into two separate bodies, is thought by some to have had its roots in an argument about the responsibility of landowners to conserve ancient structures in their care, and the obligations of the State to curate the national past (cf. Wetherall 1994; 1998; Hoselitz 2007, 19–22; 26). Clayton and Bruce both subscribed to the entire seven volumes of the *Collectanea* (1848–1880). Roach Smith was also an honorary member of SANT, and corresponded with Robert Blair in April and November 1875, though on topics other than the preservation of the site.

In the case of the fort at South Shields, evidently no consensus on the fate of the site was achieved during the months the excavation was actively being pursued. Among other items dated September 1875, Blair kept another letter to the *Gazette* from Thomas Lincoln making the case for preservation, together with a report of a meeting between Committee, Councillors and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to discuss plans for the site. Meanwhile, a handwritten letter to Blair of October 1875, arguing that the venture should be formally discontinued and the ground levelled for building, gives a flavour of the range of opinion on the subject even within the Committee.

### *The Museum*

Roach Smith opened the sixth volume of the *Collectanea* with an article on Roman remains recently discovered at Hod Hill, Dorset, including his thoughts on the value of collecting and displaying antiquities methodically, in context, and with due regard to provenance: '[C]ollections made in the pure spirit of scientific inquiry, and freely recorded so as to be accessible to all, cannot be too highly estimated'. A list of examples follow, including 'that now being made at Wroxeter by Mr Wright; the museums of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, of York, of Caerleon; and of our great National Museum, the officers of which are animated by an anxiety to give, as far as possible, the full history of the precious works of ancient art which are there accumulating' (1868, 1–3). Roach Smith's own 'London Museum of Antiquities', finally sold to the British Museum in March 1856, was arguably something of a staging post between the gentlemanly concept of 'the cabinet of curiosities', the private collection to be privately enjoyed, and the museum as a tool for the proper education of the masses. Similarly, Augustus Pitt Rivers had offered his vast anthropological collection to the South Kensington Museum, where it remained 'a private collection on public exhibition' from 1874 until 1884, when he gifted it to the University of Oxford (Thompson 1977, 37). His fully realised vision of 'a private museum as a method of education' was eventually developed at Cranborne Chase in Dorset in the early 1890s (Thompson 1977, 80–85; cf. Bowden 1991, 141–53). It is interesting, perhaps, that John Clayton's Antiquities House at Chesters remained, by contrast, a private affair until after his death (Ewin 2000, 25–6).

At South Shields, meanwhile, the new Museum seems to have been the one element of the excavation scheme to be achieved without undue controversy and wrangling. At the beginning of February 1876, a formal resolution was recorded at a meeting of the Exploration Committee, to 'hand ... over the articles discovered during the excavations last summer to the Free Library committee, in order that the museum may be publically opened on the 24th Inst.' The day before the formal opening, an enthusiastic paean appeared in the *Gazette*, explaining that the finds from the Lawe constituted the 'backbone' to a museum collection 'now ... but the embryo of an extensive and complete one in future', and providing a touchingly idealised portrait of the place of the Library and Museum in the lives of the residents of the town:



The museum is the natural accessory to the library; in the one the realms of nature, science, and art are investigated, described, portrayed; in the other they are illustrated, presented, seen face to face. From the news-room to the museum is a swift transition from today to the remote long ago. We have finished the debate on the Suez canal purchase in this morning's 'Times', and we step back into the museum and pore over the dim record of a Roman brick.

An affectionate dialect poem on the new museum was also published in the *Gazette* in November 1880, and preserved by Blair among items connected with the site preservation debate.

The opening ceremony itself, heralding a day of festivities, was later reported in the same paper. From among the Newcastle Antiquaries, Ralph Carr Ellison and John Collingwood Bruce made warm speeches of congratulation and support. Bruce compared the collective will to realise the museum favourably to the situation in Newcastle and other northern towns, where less had been achieved, he said, and spoke of the benefits of museums to the visiting public.

#### *Preserving the Roman remains 1876–81*

It is clear that the preservation of the site on the Lawe was in no sense as politically straightforward as setting up the public museum, and Blair made an effort to keep a record of events as they unfolded.

Dr Hooppell had left South Shields for Byers Green in the summer of 1875, but kept in touch with the progress, or lack of it, towards the preservation of the remains. In January 1877 he is reported to have delivered a public lecture in the town, during which he commented on the 'lamentable' state of the site, and '... commended it to be preserved for the honour of the town, and the education of the people of South Shields'. Nearly a year and a half later, he delivered a paper at the AGM of the Tyneside Naturalists' Field Club, suggesting that the situation was deteriorating. We have the published version of the text, which appeared later in 1878 and makes for sober reading:

Builders' labourers are robbing the edifices of stones; children, and judging from the size of the stones, even men, are hurling masses of stone into the excavated chambers, overturning pedestals, and smashing the great boundary stones of the forum. Everywhere destruction is rampant. ... If none of the Station should be preserved, the disgrace to South Shields will be eternal. Men, in years to come, will not accept the excuses that one hears now on every side, such as that 'The Ecclesiastical Commissioners ought to preserve it,' 'The public spirited leaders of the Borough ought to come forward,' 'The Committee ought to be more energetic,' 'The Town Council should take it up.' The only thing remembered will be that the thriving, populous, and ought-to-be-cultured town of South Shields had, within its borders, a citadel of Roman power, a relic and a witness of its own importance in far-off days, a powerful attraction to visitors, a priceless educational boon for its own children, and, through apathy, or devotion to all absorbing monetary pursuits, suffered it to be wiped out, to be swept away, to be stamped out of its midst (Hooppell 1878, 19).

Blair has then included a group of three newspaper articles from May and June 1878 on the topic, which had become a matter of national concern in antiquarian circles. Five days after Hooppell's paper was delivered, whether coincidentally or not, it was reported that a resolution had been passed by the Council of the British Archaeological Association 'calling the attention of the governing bodies of South Shields to the neglected state of the newly

discovered Roman station there, and pointing out the importance of a portion, at least, of this being preserved' (*JBAA* 1878, 233). The resolution was communicated to the Town Council and the MP, and under this pressure, the Town Council resolved to approach the Ecclesiastical Commissioners about acquiring the land for the town.

But this was not the end of the matter, it seems, as Blair reflected in continuing to amass newspaper cuttings recording disagreement, political antagonism, and inaction. In July 1879, more than a year later, a letter appeared in the *Gazette* from 'A Disgusted Burgess', apparently a sarcastic protest against the expense of entertaining the new Bishop of Durham at South Shields. After a lavish lunch, the correspondent suggests, they will '... escort the scholarly Bishop to the Roman station at the Lawe, and show him how a stupid, ignorant, and contemptible Council can allow an ancient monument of Roman power to be wrecked and destroyed'. A report of a Town Council meeting from June 1880, yet another year later, demonstrates that while a certain amount of progress had been made, there remained deep divisions on the wisdom of spending money to create a public park, and whether the Council had a duty to preserve the site at all. As a result of this debate, nevertheless, some practical steps were agreed, which is presumably why Blair chose to include the article.

Despite this almost interminable catalogue of reluctance, it is perhaps understandable that, once the People's Roman Remains Park was a reality, commentators were keen to forget that it had been so long and difficult in the making. Hooppell had a regular column in the *Newcastle Courant* entitled 'Rambles of an Antiquary', one particular instalment of which, because it included some detailed suggestions about the further consolidation of the site, was reprinted in the *Shields Gazette*. By November 1881, the author of the impassioned diatribe quoted above merely praised what had been done so far, and made no further reference to depredations or the avoidance of 'indelible disgrace' (Hooppell 1878, 10). Similarly, George Hodgson finished his account of the excavation of the Roman remains, which he had presented as a high-water mark in the nineteenth-century history of South Shields, with a neutral summary of the ultimate fate of the site, prefaced by what could be interpreted as a mild aspersion:

So interesting were the remains of the station as revealed by the excavations that in May 1878 the Council of the British Archaeological Association urged the Town Council to secure at least part of the site, in order to preserve for the public benefit these unique evidences of Roman occupation. The hint was acted upon ... (Hodgson 1903, 27).

Meanwhile, it should be remembered, Bruce and a small group of others, notably Rev. T. Stephens and Thomas Vint, were kept busy, ever vigilant for digging activity on the Lawe, and ready to purchase looted items when they were offered for sale (Birley 1961, 156–7). But even this determination could not prevent more damage than good being done in these years, if we are to accept Dr Hooppell's testimony. Quite apart from the destruction of the site, 'many more [finds] have doubtless been dispersed in all directions', as he admitted in 1881 (cf. Allason-Jones and Miket 1984, 11).

#### *South Shields and the 'democratisation' of archaeology*

It has been suggested that a tradition quickly accrued to the excavation in South Shields which made much of the unusually 'democratic' impetus for the project, and that George Hodgson largely bears responsibility for this. Written at the turn of the twentieth century, his

celebration of South Shields linked the re-discovery, 30 years before, of Roman remains on the Lawe, with a radical improvement in the town's amenities and fortunes.

Additionally, he emphasised the credit to 'the enterprise and public spirit of the borough' of all involved in '[t]he story of how Roman South Shields was rediscovered and in a manner reconstructed', encompassing the civic leaders at the time, actively involved individuals such as Blair and Hooppell, and 'the man on the street'. According to Hodgson, '[t]he expenditure was much decreased by the enthusiasm of the townsfolk, the excavations being continued gratuitously by relays of pilots in the evenings after the ordinary workmen had left' (Hodgson 1903, 14). This implies a radically more indulgent attitude to the activities of the free workforce than appears in the contemporary press coverage, but the point remains that Hodgson's account has become almost canonical (see above).

Using some of the rich material Robert Blair collected in his scrapbook, but choosing not to look beyond the public rhetoric of the letters and reports of March 1875, Alison Ewin has picked up Hodgson's baton, casting the excavation as an early marker in the cause of the democratisation of archaeology. Doubtless influenced by knowledge of Blair's many future years of service to the Newcastle Antiquaries, she has extrapolated an 'obligation recognised by Bruce and Blair via the antiquarian societies to communicate with a wider public ...' (Ewin 2000, 36). She also sees the Victorian excavation project as setting the tone for the way archaeology of the fort has been approached in more recent times:

South Shields' Roman remains are the story of civic pride which has regarded the excavations as a local responsibility which was on the whole cherished, if occasionally neglected. In effect the town has ensured the survival of the remains for over a century providing an amenity of educational value and a community focus. Attempts have been consistently made to be genuinely popular and relevant to the local population as a whole, maintaining the vision of Blair and Hooppell (Ewin 2000, 32).

This may well be a reasonable description of the ethos and activities of the local archaeological society at *Arbeia* in the mid-twentieth century (cf. Birley 1961, 155). In particular, it mirrors the theme of continuity expressed in Dore and Gillam's courteous dedication of their account of Excavations 1875–1975: 'To the Townsmen of South Shields, whose representatives early showed an appreciation that the remains of their Roman Fort were something to investigate and preserve ...' (Dore and Gillam 1979). However, David Breeze's (2014), recent account it should be noted, is somewhat less romanticised, emphasising the significance of a decision in the 1970s by the local authority to create tourist attractions of the Roman forts at South Shields and Wallsend. According to Breeze, the opportunity and the resources to re-excavate the sites were more a happy by-product of this impetus: 'New houses were not built over the fort at South Shields, nor at Wallsend. On the contrary, money was pumped into these sites and new archaeological parks created' (Breeze 2014, 8–9). Equally, although a well-presented visitor attraction can, and should, also be a source of local pride and an amenity, such consequences need not have been the primary motivation in its inception.

Ewin's assertion that a 'democratising' ethic was at work either in the motivations of the Exploration Committee in 1875, or of the events in the years immediately after the excavation, is difficult to support. The Foreword to her book suggests that 'even in the early days there were a few, such as Robert Blair of South Shields and his colleagues on the local Council, who looked to widen accessibility for *ordinary* people' (Shotter 2000). It is true that the Foreword is setting Ewin's work in the context of the changing 'class-range' and 'age-range' of visitors

to Hadrian's Wall, rather than making a historical judgement. Nevertheless, such an assertion would also need to address the furious exchange in the *Daily News* letters column of April 1875, where 'Visitor' attacked Blair personally, for attempting to discourage the 'scores of visitors' interested in the excavation (see above). It is certainly the case that the interests of the architects of this project were not affected by their ownership of the site, in contrast to Clayton at Chesters and Housesteads, for example, the subject of one of Ewin's case studies of the evolution of access to archaeological sites on the Wall (cf. Ewin 2000, 25–6). From what we have seen, however, it need not follow that their fundamental motivation was to widen popular access to the relics of the past. Besides sharing his younger colleague's gentlemanly interest in antiquarian matters, Dr Hooppell was ever an energetic champion of social reform and moral improvement in South Shields. It seems from the material in Blair's book that he saw the exploration of the remains as a moral and educational opportunity for the town. In the campaign to raise funds for the excavation, he certainly appealed to the sense of civic pride he felt responsible 'ownership' of the past would further promote. We should be cautious, however, about confusing Hooppell's aspirations, and the idealistic enthusiasm which he brought to the project, with the actual course of events, or with an anachronistic archaeological agenda.

While George Hodgson's *History* was conceived and produced as a work of local interest, the results of the 1875 excavation of the Lawe were widely discussed at the time, in serious archaeological circles in both London and Germany (Bidwell 1999a, 5). And yet it is Hodgson's appropriation of the story of the excavation, as a facet of the civic coming-of-age of South Shields, that has had lasting impact. Reflecting this, the episode has been considered chiefly in the context of the social history of archaeology rather than that of the development of archaeology itself. Even the role of SANT as part of an informal but crucial network of support and advice to Hooppell and Blair, one of the aspects of the excavation which Blair's scrapbook elucidates, has received little attention, partly, no doubt, as a result of the personal nature of the network, and certainly, the historiographical dominance of Bruce.

As already discussed, Eric Birley and more recently Paul Bidwell were willing, in the second half of the twentieth century, to engage with the more positive elements of the 1875 excavation. In the judgement of archaeologists writing in the earlier twentieth century, however, the excavation was firmly part of an older world from which they were keen to distance themselves. In 1921, R.G. Collingwood published an influential article in the *Journal of Roman Studies*, in which he wrote about the work of Bruce and Clayton, and how it materially advanced the theory that Hadrian's Wall was indeed a frontier system planned and built in the reign of the Emperor Hadrian. But for Collingwood, 'scientific' excavation began only in the 1890s, and Clayton's methods, from the 1840s to the 1880s, he described as follows:

It was, of course, not what we call scientific digging. That had not yet been invented. It was pioneer work, and inevitably destroyed much evidence which today would be valuable: for Clayton's main object was only to clear the chief walls and to collect inscribed stones (Collingwood 1921, 55).

Ian Richmond, writing on the Roman fort at South Shields for *AA* in 1934, drew attention to the quality of the accounts of the 1875 excavation by Bruce and especially Hooppell, the photographs from which lithographs were made to illustrate them, and the 'excellent actual-state plan of the remains' accompanying Bruce's 1885 article (see fig. 2): 'These works, whether photographic or architectural, are the essential basis of an archaeological study of the site. Very rarely do early excavations boast such careful records ...' But the archaeological

Archaeologia Aeliana, Vol. X, p. 230.



PLAN OF THE ROMAN CAMP AT THE LAWE, SOUTH SHIELDS.

Fig. 2 Plan showing the 1870s excavations of the fort at South Shields. This illustrated Collingwood Bruce's 1885 account of the excavations, published in *AA*<sup>2</sup>, 10, 230.

work itself is discussed in less than a sentence, and described strictly in terms of its limitations (Richmond 1934, 83).

### LEGACY: ROBERT BLAIR AND VICTORIAN ANTIQUARIAN NETWORKING

In the last year of his life, the antiquarian Charles Roach Smith went to stay with John Clayton, revisiting sites associated with the Roman occupation of northern England.

My latest visit to Chesters was during the present autumn, after spending two days at Lincoln during the congress of the British Archaeological Association [i.e. 1889], and passing a night with Dr Bruce at Newcastle. During a week's stay I had the advantage of the company of Mr Robert Blair, who rowed me across the North Tyne to see a fragment of an inscription discovered by Mr Ridley while fishing. It had been cut upon the rock by one of the Roman quarrymen: we could only pronounce, from its imperfect state, that it had been votive. Mr Blair also took me to Chollerton Church to see a row of Roman columns which, without doubt, had been taken from the ruins of Cilurnum. Procolita was again visited; and the grand remains of Cilurnum once more examined with increased interest (Smith 1891, 174).

In this brief description, he offers an attractive vignette of Blair in vigorous early middle age, squiring the elderly author around places of interest to both. For Blair, the 15 years since he had joined SANT, and thrown himself into the organisation of the excavation at South Shields, represented a remarkable period of antiquarian industry. He learned his trade recording Roman finds for the Museum at South Shields, keeping watch over the continued depredations on the Lawe, and presenting his observations at the monthly meetings of the Society. His first really significant contribution, a paper on the collection of leaden seals discovered at South Shields, was delivered in May 1877, and appeared in the next volume of *AA* (Blair 1880; Bruce 1885, 253). In 1883 he became Secretary of SANT, and editor of the journal (*Breeze* 2013, 45). He had also been elected Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1884. The patronage and sponsorship of Bruce is everywhere implied, and Blair repaid him by applying himself to the institutional roles Bruce, now also in his mid-80s, was relinquishing, i.e. Secretary of SANT from 1883, *de facto* organiser of the second Pilgrimage in 1886, and after Bruce's death, editor of five successive editions of the *Handbook to the Roman Wall* (Birley 1961, 28; 298). Blair had in some sense become the standard-bearer for 'the patriotic, local antiquarian, northern tradition' which Bruce and Clayton exemplified (Beard 2013, 60). To quote from Blair's obituary in *AA*: 'It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that no task was too onerous for him to undertake, no sacrifice of worldly advantage too great for him to make if the studies of antiquities were thereby assisted, or the prosperity of the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries enhanced' (Oxberry 1923, 203; cf. Dyson 2006, 126–7).

The final section of this paper will firstly discuss the antiquarian progress of Blair, which he documented with evident pride in his scrapbook of the 1875 excavation at South Shields, with reference to the influence of personal relationships between antiquaries. Secondly, it will consider the 'northern tradition' shouldered by Blair, and the impact of this milieu on the way interpretations of the Roman occupation of northern England developed in the nineteenth century.

*Networking in practice*

In the archives at Durham University there are two volumes, handsomely bound at South Shields, entitled *Archaeologia* 4 and *Archaeologia* 17 (Blair n.d.). Each contains papers, newspaper cuttings and correspondence collected and arranged by Robert Blair, and are interesting not least because they represent a record of the antiquarian knowledge-building and knowledge-sharing in which Blair was engaged from 1875 onwards.

The core of the earlier volume is a collection of papers and letters sent to Blair by senior antiquarians between May and July 1877, to assist him in preparing an account of the 'leaden seals' excavated on the Lawe. Charles Roach Smith sent two articles on seals from *Collectanea Antiqua*, together with a letter, also preserved, further discussing the mysterious *signacula*, the inscriptions they bore, and modern parallels. John Edward Price, Secretary of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society and, like Roach Smith, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, provided a copy of a paper by Henry Coote which references Roach Smith's work (Coote 1873). Henry Ecroyd Smith contributed a paper on the Roman remains at Brough, where he had collected some seals, drawings of which appear as a plate illustrating Coote's discussion (Smith 1866). Ecroyd Smith also referred to significant correspondence between Roach Smith and John Clayton on the topic.

There followed a printed version of Blair's paper on the seals, a newspaper account in the *Newcastle Journal* of the meeting of SANT when he had first presented it, and a letter Blair had written to the newspaper himself, quoting Emil Hübner, whom he had been consulting about the inscriptions. Hübner assured him that 'the drawing and impression of the two leaden seals, which you had the good luck to obtain from the soil of South Shields, are highly interesting', and discussed the ideas of Coote and Roach Smith. Another card from Hübner in July 1877 refers to a continuing correspondence about the seals (Blair n.d.).

In this way Blair recorded the industry with which he made contacts and consulted known authorities, sharing and transmitting the results of his research, and the credentials of his informants at SANT meetings and in the local press. The attitude of his fellow enthusiasts towards Blair's efforts to build and share antiquarian knowledge seems to have been generous, at least to one benefiting from the patronage of Bruce and Clayton, and his work was ultimately rewarded by the inclusion of a paper on the lead seals in AA 1880. Perhaps more significantly, it also attracted a favourable appraisal in Roach Smith's *Collectanea Antiqua* 7, circulated in the same year (1880, 66–70):

In addition to the plates of Roman leaden seals given in volumes iii and vi, Mr Robert Blair kindly contributes six examples recently discovered at South Shields on the site of a Roman castrum which was laid open by excavations for building purposes. These seals, first made known in these volumes, have contributed novel materials for archaeological opinion and research, and have excited much interest from the variety of the abridged inscriptions they bear ...

Such recognition of his work presumably strengthened his case for election to the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1884.

*A career begins*

As we have already seen, Blair seems to have sustained an interest in almost everything to do with the site of the Roman fort at South Shields, although sets of finds which lent themselves to typological or serial arrangement, such as coins and the lead seals, had a particular appeal.

The scrapbook documenting the excavation demonstrates, more broadly than Blair's more polished compilations, the vigour with which he pursued antiquarian knowledge and tapped into the interconnectedness governing British archaeology in the last decades of the nineteenth century (cf. Freeman 2007, 91–6). It also confirms that his development as an antiquarian depended to a significant extent on the ready-made network at the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries, which in the 1870s was dominated by Bruce and Clayton and their Roman interests.

On 20 February 1875 Bruce wrote to Blair, who had recently joined the Society, and had evidently signalled his intention to be an active member, even before the potential of the remains at South Shields were known:

My dear Sir, Excuse my delay in answering your last letter. I am intently set upon finishing the 'Lapidarium' quickly and am apt to push other things to one side for this purpose.

I am glad you intend to be at the meeting of the Antiquarian Society on Wednesday, 3rd March. I wish very much you would read a little account of what you have observed during the recent turning up of the ground on the Lawe. By all means bring the coins, the fibula and the other things. The fir-cone ornament is curious. In the museum at Naples there are some like it — that is having pedestals. I shall bring to the meeting two drawings of them.

If you will read a paper and let me know in time I will have it announced as part of the business of the meeting. I expect our treasurer sent you a receipt for your subscription.

I am my dear Sir  
Yours faithfully  
J. Collingwood Bruce.

Together with the letter by 'Scrutator' from the *Gazette*, this is the earliest document preserved by Blair about the exploration of the site in 1875 (see above). This is where the story of the excavation, and Bruce's involvement in it, officially begins. However, rather than including it among the letters and papers recording the early stages of the scheme, Blair grouped it, a third of the way through the book, with five other letters showing how in 1876 he gained an introduction to archaeological and antiquarian circles in London, via Bruce and Charles Roach Smith. Next in date is part of an on-going correspondence with Roach Smith, returning a set of coloured sketches, also preserved, of finds from the Lawe. Roach Smith made a few tentative suggestions about the finds, concluding:

I should suggest your appealing at once ... to the Society of Antiquaries of London [his underlining]; to the Royal Archaeological Institute; and to the British Archaeological Association, and I should appeal in earnest; *at the first public meeting of each*. Probably you have prepared for this step. Hopefully ... these 3 societies could do all you require.

With the assistance of Bruce, a Fellow of the Society, Blair seems to have acted upon this advice, since apart from Bruce's early letter to Blair, the other items in the group all pertain to dealings with the London Antiquaries. At the end of April 1876, according to a transcript Blair must have requested from the *Proceedings*, he contacted SAL to describe the recent discovery of Roman period burials by labourers on the Lawe, enclosing a sketch of a fragment of tombstone. Two months later, Bruce wrote to Blair explaining that he was soon to give a paper about the South Shields excavation at the London Society, and asking to borrow 'the enamelled brooches which have been discovered' to exhibit at the meeting. After considering the options for transporting the brooches to London, Bruce was suddenly struck by a happy thought:



Or better still; next week is Race week and most people take a holiday; what say you to taking a run up to London yourself and bringing the *fibulae* with you. Your attendance at the meeting at Burlington house on Thursday evening would be a great advantage.

Blair has preserved a letter from the Secretary of the London Society, duplicating the request, and acknowledging that Blair had indeed contacted the Society for assistance the previous year, with his coloured sketch. There is also a *pro forma* certificate from the Society recording gratitude for the items exhibited, and a further excerpt from the *Proceedings*, confirming that Blair attended the meeting with Bruce and exhibited the Roman enamels in person. Thus it was that within 18 months of joining SANT, Blair found himself a welcome guest at a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries of London, having accompanied, at his suggestion, the renowned John Collingwood Bruce on the early morning steamer from South Shields.

Later in the scrapbook, Blair recorded other examples of the way he enlisted antiquarian contacts to help interpret the finds which he was processing for the new museum. H. Ecroyd Smith evidently remained in touch with Blair after his visit to South Shields in May 1875, as a note written in easy and familiar terms and requesting drawings of 'your Roman *Teetotem* and the Tile inscriptions' suggests. There are also two cards and three full length letters from Professor Hübner in Berlin, saved as a group, and dated mostly earlier than the correspondence on the lead seals. Hübner had visited Northumberland and Scotland on '*eine epigraphische Reise*' while gathering material for *CIL* 7, and begun a lasting antiquarian friendship with Bruce (Hübner 1867; 1873; cf. Keppie 2012, 118). As Bruce wrote, in connection with deciphering Regina's tombstone at South Shields, 'I cannot omit this occasion of saying how greatly I value the friendship of Dr Hübner, and how highly I estimate his scholarship and great skill and experience as an epigraphist' (1885, 316–17).

In the first of Hübner's letters saved by Blair, from August 1876, the implication is that Bruce had already consulted his friend over inscription evidence for the unit garrisoning the fort, and provided Blair with an introduction. Hübner was polite and thorough in his reply, but seemed not to be envisaging an extensive correspondence. Less than a fortnight later, therefore, he may have been surprised to find himself writing again to Blair, who was keen to avail himself of the epigrapher's compendious knowledge. Blair was rewarded not only with further suggestions and interpretations, but also with instructions and material for making paper casts of inscriptions. As a result of his new expertise, moreover, Hübner was able to quote him as the source for a number of entries to the *Addimenta ad Corporis CIL* 7 he was then compiling.

A combination of persistence, energy, and willingness to engage quickly made Blair a useful addition to the networks Bruce helped him access. He also widened his institutional affiliations, becoming a member of the British Archaeological Association in 1878, and the Cumberland and Westmoreland Society in 1879. However, as Blair was, during these years, a practising solicitor with a growing family, it is perhaps unsurprising that so much of the time available to him for antiquarian pursuits was apparently limited to furthering the interests of SANT.

*'The patriotic, local antiquarian, northern tradition'*

In an essay which argues contrary to the idea that the nineteenth-century archaeology of Roman Britain was filtered through a prism of 'the British imperial experience', Mary Beard (2013) has explored the paradox of Britain's being at the centre of her own Empire, but at the

periphery of Rome's imperial reach. This, she suggests, resulted in conflicting images of Roman Britain: On the one hand a metropolitan province where 'the British Pompeii' was enthusiastically discerned at Verulamium and Silchester among other locations, and on the other, a heavily militarised frontier province (Beard 2013, 57–60).

It is also the case, however, that competing notions of *Britannia* sometimes co-existed and overlapped. The interpretation of an urban, metropolitan element to the 'stations' along the line of Hadrian's Wall persisted even in the later writing of John Collingwood Bruce, and among those who may have been influenced by his ideas (cf. e.g. Bruce 1885, 232). It was evident in Hooppell's 1878 interpretation of the forum and public buildings at South Shields, and in the report of the discussion following his talk at SANT in April 1875, when Clayton drew comparisons with the forum at *Cilurnum*.

Despite arriving at a different view of the importance of ancient and modern imperial comparisons, in her reference to 'the patriotic, local antiquarian, northern tradition', Beard also picked up strongly on Hingley (2012a) on the distinctive cultural milieu in which the sites and structures of the northern frontier zone were now being explored. The pride Bruce, Clayton, and others took in the burgeoning commercial and civic life of Newcastle, he has argued, was reflected in a positive and metropolitan re-imagining of the Roman occupation in the North, to which Bruce's attention was drawn from the late 1840s onwards (cf. Ito 2006; Hingley 2012a, 147–55). Similar impulses have been detected at South Shields, in the rhetoric associated with the 'exploration' of the fort, and in George Hodgson's influential account of the significance of the excavation, a generation later.

A more generalised idea of the genuine importance of the Roman archaeology of the Wall zone, and Bruce's role in promoting it, was certainly recognised at the time. Preserved inside the front cover of Bruce's own copy of *The Roman Wall*, which he was using to prepare the new edition, is a cutting from one of the Newcastle papers dated March 19th 1863 (Bruce 1853b). It reports on an address by Canon Greenwell at the AGM of the Literary and Philosophical Society, during which he said:

Of Roman civilisation and power we have relics unsurpassed by any other part of England; for though we have no large and wealthy city to excavate like Wroxeter (Uriconium), we have, besides, numerous military stations and ways, that gigantic work of Roman skill and energy — the Roman Wall of Hadrian, with its several adjunctive forts, so learnedly and at the same time so popularly, illustrated by our fellow-member, Dr. Bruce.

The published work of Charles Roach Smith, being the closest thing to a disciplinary journalism of archaeology in the mid-nineteenth century, also supports this view. The three volumes of his archaeological memoir, the *Retrospections*, written towards the end of his life, are scattered with affectionate references to the efforts of Bruce and Clayton, and the role of Chesters as a hub of northern antiquarian networking (Roach Smith 1883, 169–70; 1888, 170; 1891, 165). In more concrete terms, he used *Collectanea Antiqua* to record and support the work of Bruce and Clayton from early days. To publicise the publication of *The Roman Wall* in 1851, a lengthy survey article appeared in Volume 2 (Roach Smith 1852, 171–202). It began as follows:

Whoever has ventured far into the more remote ... parts of England, with a view to examine and study their remains of antiquity, cannot but feel how imperfect a notion he has hitherto formed of those remains, and how little in reality has been done to make them properly understood and valued (1852, 171).

Roach Smith (1852, 177; 183) endorsed Bruce's book, and particularly its usefulness as a guide for making the remains accessible, and praised Clayton's investigation and preservation of those sections of the Wall in his ownership, in contrast, of course, to the Government's carelessness and active work of destruction. In Volume 4 he included notes on a week-long 'Northern Tour' undertaken in the autumn of 1854, when he visited 'some of the *castra* on the south of the barrier, which are somewhat difficult of access, seldom visited, and little known, except to a few of our more zealous colleagues in the north' (Roach Smith 1857, 129–54). The last volume of the *Collectanea*, which also contains the article about Blair's work on the lead seals from South Shields, demonstrated huge enthusiasm for the advances made in the study of the Wall, centred around a discussion of Clayton's excavations at Carrawburgh (*Brocolitia*), on which he had collaborated in a recent publication (cf. Clayton and Smith 1878; Roach Smith 1880, 115–135):

The Roman Wall, having for a long time been talked about and referred to by historians, is now being seriously studied ... It is in our own day that this stupendous monument of Roman Britain has been closely examined and criticised in proper spirit; the men are yet living and working who have brought together scattered facts; who have collected new materials; and who have tested them with the knowledge and judgement of advanced and sound archaeology (Roach Smith 1880, 115).

Within Blair's lifetime, as we have seen, the achievements of Clayton as an archaeologist were being minimised (Collingwood 1921, 55; see above). However, more recent assessments have emphasised the value of Clayton's work (and the publications of Bruce, and Henry MacLauchlan, which drew on it) in a more conceptual sense, particularly by comparison with archaeological work elsewhere in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century (cf. Hingley 2012a, 177–200). As Bruce, Greenwell, and Roach Smith all appreciated at the time, the coherence of the Wall as a historical monument, which Clayton's work promoted, gave it a unique and valuable context: 'In other words, the components of the monument could be related to one another and to the landscape in which they lay' (Freeman 2007, 60–61).

Blair numbered among the subscribers to the seventh and last volume of the *Collectanea Antiqua*, and would presumably have found it gratifying to see his own work, and the collective progress of northern antiquarian work on the Roman Wall, celebrated and approved in its pages. Moreover, the reign of Clayton and Bruce was to last another decade, until their deaths in 1890 and 1892 respectively. Given the speed with which new archaeological ideas were taking hold elsewhere during these years, it is not unreasonable for scholars to have suggested that this final period inhibited the development of new approaches to exploring the remains of the Roman Wall zone (Birley 1961, 64; Ewin 2000, 18; Breeze 2014, 22–3). However, there is no hint of a critical eye in Blair's scrapbook, despite the many years that separated the compilation of most of it from the events of 1875, and even from the death of Bruce. Judging by the papers in the Blair archive at the University of Durham, his subsequent antiquarian interests ranged widely over the history of the north east, particularly its churches and church yards, but his early career and antiquarian reputation were certainly rooted in the aftermath of the excavation at South Shields, and the opportunities presented by Bruce's patronage (cf. Blair 1874–1923). In this sense, the scrapbook may be read as a memorial to the strong antiquarian tradition of which Blair, in his roles at SANT, quickly became the custodian, and which circumscribed the work on and around Hadrian's Wall and its interpretation until after Bruce's death.

## CONCLUSION

The excavation at South Shields in 1875 is a remarkable set of events in the history of Romano-British archaeology. Apart from *Bremenium* in the 1850s, South Shields represented the first attempt to excavate the limits of a Roman fort anywhere in Europe. It was also apparently organised by individuals with no archaeological experience, and paid for by subscription. Despite being widely reported at the time, and competently written up afterwards, it has nevertheless been largely disregarded in archaeological terms. The most straightforward explanation for this is that it happened barely two decades prior to the well-known and institutionally sponsored excavations of the 1890s, signalling a new era of 'scientific' archaeological research (Hingley 2012a, 231–8). In historiographical terms, perhaps it has occupied an uncomfortable position between an old world and a new.

Instead, other elements of the legacy of the excavation have received far greater attention. Writing at the turn of the twentieth century, local historian George Hodgson enshrined the events of 1875 as a defining moment in the civic development of South Shields. Reflections on the once and future greatness of the town were stimulated by the discovery of a large and important Roman 'city' on the Lawe, just as civil and urban interpretations of the Roman fort may themselves have been prompted by the urban reconstruction and growing commercial prosperity of the Victorian town (cf. Hooppell 1878; Hodgson 1903). More recently, the excavation has also been the subject of examination as an episode in the social history of archaeology, with the suggestion that it constituted an early example of the widening of participation in archaeology, and of public access to historical remains (Ewin 2000).

This study has used Robert Blair's scrapbook, which is kept in the Public Reference Library at South Shields, to examine more closely the currency of these ideas in the 1870s, together with themes which Blair himself chose to explore in his compilation. In doing so, it has uncovered important aspects of the episode emphatically not highlighted in Hodgson's account, particularly the role of SANT in the organisation and promotion of the excavation, and the discreditable tale of small town in-fighting associated with the row over the preservation of the Roman site. Perhaps above all, it has tried to reflect Blair's desire to build an old-style antiquarian career through the opportunity the excavation presented, which he did with notable success. It has made a large and unwieldy collection of material more usable, and has sought to illustrate how a reception-based approach to the history of archaeology, tackling the extra layers of meaning and commentary attached to a particular episode, can attempt to elucidate the original circumstances.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- AA *Archaeologia Aeliana*  
 AJ *The Antiquaries' Journal*  
 CIL *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*  
 JBAA *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*  
 JRA *Journal of Roman Archaeology*  
 JRS *Journal of Roman Studies*  
 NHT *Natural History Transactions of Northumberland, Durham, and Newcastle upon Tyne*  
 PSAN *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne*  
 SAL Society of Antiquaries of London  
 SANT Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne

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