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1921.

633RD ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,
WESTMINSTER, S.W., ON MONDAY, JUNE 6TH, 1921,

AT 4.30 P.M.

WILLIAM DALE, ESQ., F.S.A., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous meeting were read, confirmed and signed, and the Hon. Secretary announced the Election of Dr. Frank B. Rostro as an Associate.

The CHAIRMAN then, after some opening remarks, called on the Rev. Prebendary H. E. Fox, M.A., to read his paper on "The Roman Wall in North Britain," which was illustrated by lantern slides.

THE ROMAN WALL IN NORTH BRITAIN. By the
REV. PREBENDARY H. E. FOX, M.A.

IMPERIAL Rome has left many traces of her occupation of England, besides the great roads and local names which still record her presence and power. But few are so interesting, both in character and fullness, as that which is still popularly known as "The Roman Wall," stretching across the two northern counties from sea to sea. It has been examined and described by a long succession of antiquarians, and probably nowhere else in the British Isles have been found so many and so varied remains illustrating the military, religious and social conditions of the foreign garrison which held this country for at least two hundred years.

A brief mention of a few historic names and their dates may help to fix our mental perspective. Julius Cæsar landed with troops on the south coast of Britain in 55 B.C., and again in the following year; but on both occasions his stay was short. About one hundred years passed before the next invasion, when the Emperor Claudius came with larger forces. It was one of these which was cut to pieces by the warriors of the British Queen, whom we call Boadicea. But it was not long before she was defeated and died in despair. Romans pressed northwards, and in later years

invaded Caledonia, which, however, they never subdued. For some time we have little evidence of Roman occupation of England. In A.D. 199 the Emperor Hadrian, in consequence of a revolt by the British, came with a strong military force, and it is probable that at this time the building of the Wall across Northumbria was commenced. So far as we can gather from the inscriptions, coins and other relics which have been found in the proximity of the Wall, its Roman occupation continued practically for two centuries.

Before we come to details, it may be well to take a general view of this great fortification, first as to its extent and then as to its construction. It began, not strictly on the eastern shore, but at a point near to and north of the Tyne, a few miles to the west. Few, probably, who order from their coal merchants the best "Wallsend" realize why it has that name. There is no doubt, however, that the whole estuary of the Tyne was strongly fortified. There was certainly an important camp near South Shields, among the remains of which two interesting tombstones have been found. One is to a lady, and the inscription is bilingual. The first part, in Latin, may be translated, "To the Divine Shades, To Regina, freedwoman and wife. Barates a Palmyrean (places this). She was by nation a Catuallaunian (and lived) thirty years." Then follows a line in Palmyrean, "Regina, freedwoman of Barate, alas!" The other tomb is of a man by name Victor. He is described as a Moor, twenty years of age, a freedman of Numerianus, who was a soldier of the first wing of the Asturian cavalry, and affectionately followed him to the grave.

The westward course of the Wall passes through Byker, where are old quarries, from which stones were taken for the building, and then it continues through what we now call Newcastle, and where fragments of the old castellum have been found below the Norman fortifications of William Rufus. Near this place there was dredged some years ago from the river an interesting relic. It is a stone altar dedicated to Neptune, the sea god, and was probably erected by some legion in grateful memory of a prosperous voyage. At Benwell, a few miles further west, the first traces of the Wall that remain above ground may be seen. About fifteen miles further it crosses the old Watling Way, and soon after it reaches the North Tyne, a few miles above Hexham. An interesting carved stone was found some years ago at this place, and is now preserved in the Abbey. It records the death of a

Roman soldier by the spear of a Briton whom he had ridden down. Across the North Tyne was the important camp of Cilurnum, which retains the old term in the modern name of Chesters. Here may be seen the remains of officers' quarters, and the present bridge over the river rests on Roman foundations of remarkable strength.

The late Mr. John Clayton, owner of the land, was an enthusiastic archæologist, and has preserved a large number of most interesting remains, which have been found both at Cilurnum, and other stations on the Wall. These have been admirably arranged in a museum adjoining his house. Before referring to some of these, it may be well to explain the structure of the military work and take a brief survey of its course westwards. Strictly described, it is more than a wall. It has three or four ramparts and a fosse, which are all earthworks, besides a trench, which is sometimes found north of the Wall. The southern fosse is usually about 24 feet from the Wall, but further west, where the country becomes more hilly, the road keeps to the level ground, carrying with it the earthworks, while the stone Wall goes straight over the moors, regardless of hill or valley, till it reaches the Solway, near Bowness. Along the Wall, at regular intervals, were built military stations, mile castles and turrets. The former provided quarters for troops, but were constructed chiefly for security, and show no traces of the luxury or display which may be seen in Roman remains elsewhere. Very little of these buildings can now be seen above ground, for generations of British and Anglo-Saxon have found the well-cut materials too valuable for building their own dwellings to be left for the curiosity of their descendants. But as we tramp across the moorland in the line of the Wall, still visible, our feet may sometimes strike a stone that plainly was once cut by human hands, sometimes lying by itself, sometimes as part of a building or pavement. In one case at least which was pointed out to the writer, there was plain evidence that the stones formed part of a castle gateway; and between the bases of the upright posts the flat stones were lined with ruts, which had evidently been made by the frequent passing of heavy wheels. It is an interesting fact that the gauge of these vehicles corresponds with that of the chariots which have left similar marks in the streets of Pompeii.

But it is among the antiquarian treasures collected in the Chesters Museum that we shall learn most about the builders of

the Wall, and the occupants of its fortified posts, their religious life, their racial, social and military conditions. It is impossible, however, in this short paper, to give any adequate description of the numerous objects which fill several hundred pages in the official account of the museum. A brief notice of the most prominent must suffice.

Among the legions drawn from different races in the Roman Empire there were naturally "lords many and gods many." For example, there is a fine altar dedicated by Germans to Mars Thingsus and two female deities, Beda and Fimmilena.

A well-carved but now headless figure of Cybele, the great world-mother, standing on a bullock, the emblem of tillage, is suggestive of Greek origin.

The statue of Mithras was probably put up by soldiers from lands still further east.

Huntsmen have built an altar to some local god of the woods.

An officer in command of the fourth cohort of Gauls has made one to the Genius of the Prætorium.

Venus, a German, has dedicated another to Fortuna Conservatrix.

Besides foreign deities, one, believed to be the presiding genius of a neighbouring spring, and by name Coventina, is honoured on a sculptured stone, where she is represented as floating on the leaf of a water-lily.

The name of each reigning Emperor had its place. Two examples may suffice. "In honour of the Emperor Cæsar Trajanus Hadrianus Augustus the second legion (styled) the August (has placed this by the command of) Aulus Platonius Nepos legate, and proprætor.

A mural slab, placed by a regiment of the 20th legion, is dedicated to another Emperor known to us as Antoninus Pius; beneath the inscription is the figure of a wild boar, the emblem of the legion.

A stele, showing a soldier on sentry duty and another with a stag and fawns, represent two sides of a soldier's life, and the milestone may suggest days of weary march.

With all the serious aspects of the busy camp, the Roman boy appears to have been very much like the British boy of to-day. Two stones on which he has cut his caricatures have survived far beyond all the dreams of the young artist.

Two other treasures of Cilurnum must be mentioned as of special interest. One is a case of coins—gold, silver, and brass—

bearing the names of nearly a hundred rulers. Most of them were found in the well of Coventina, with rings, brooches and jewels, all probably representing the votive offerings of successive generations for at least two hundred years. The other, a diploma of citizenship, is not now at Chesters, as it was transferred by Mr. Clayton to the British Museum. It is too long and too technical to be given fully in this paper. It begins with a laboured recital of the names, ancestors, titles and honours of the Emperor Antoninus Pius; and then gives the names of over twenty regiments (as perhaps we might call them), and confers on all the men who had obtained honourable discharge after twenty-five campaigns "the Roman citizenship and the right of lawful marriage with the wives they had when the citizenship was given, or with those they may afterwards take, provided one at a time."

So far no trace has occurred in connection with the Wall of any other than pagan religions, during the centuries of its occupation by Roman forces. To what extent Christianity had spread in England during those years is very uncertain. Contemporary writers, such as Clement of Rome, Tertullian and Origen, speak in somewhat rhetorical language of Britain possessing the Gospel; but the extent could have been very local and limited. Only one bit of evidence, and that not more than probable, comes from the Northumbrian Wall. This is in the form of a rude inscription on a stone beside the military road. It contains but three words, which translated are, "Brigowaglos lies here." The name is certainly British, and the other two words, common on Christian tombs, are hardly ever used by heathen. It is not unreasonable to think that they mark a Christian grave.

As to other evidence of Northumbrian Christianity, I can only come to such a conclusion as that which old Thomas Fuller gives at the close of his chapter on the third century in his great book of Church History. "This is all I have to say of this century, and must now confess myself as unable to go on, as ashamed to break off, since having had, of a full hundred years, so many words of solid History. But as I find little, so I will feign nothing; time being better spent in silence than in lying. . . . If any hereafter shall light on more History of these times, let them not condemn my Negligence, whilst I shall admire their Happiness."

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN said the subject before us was one of great interest. The Roman occupation of Britain was, at the first, military. The Roman roads, we can still trace, were made for the transport of soldiers in the first instance, and it was not until the third and fourth centuries, when the native tribes were largely brought under subjection, that peaceful occupation began. The early days of the Roman period in Britain were cœval with the birth of the Christian Church. The first invasion was made by the Emperor, who commanded all Jews to depart from Rome, and thus brought Aquila and Paul together. An ingot of lead from the mines of Mendip was found near Winchester, which bore the stamp of Nero, before whom the apostle himself was brought, and so the interesting question arose as to whether the gospel of Christ reached our shores thus early. The evidence in the affirmative is of the slenderest character. It is true there were saints in Nero's household, but it seemed fairly certain that most of the legions which came to our country were drawn from the more outlying portions of the Empire and did not come from Rome. If facts are thus wanting, there is still room for the imagination. Above all we are thankful that the great apostle of the Gentiles was brought into contact with the military power of the Empire, and that chained to a soldier he was able to give us, from looking at soldiers, such as we should hear of to-day, the immortal description of a Christian clothed in the whole armour of God—his loins girt about with truth, having on the breastplate of righteousness, his feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Over all taking the shield of faith to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one, and taking the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. It was this armour that appealed to John Bunyan, who clothes Christian therewith and gives him the victory in his fight with the foul fiend in the Valley of Humiliation.

One more association may be mentioned. There is a well-known passage in Pliny referring to the early Christians in Rome. It is, he says, "Their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and sing by turns a hymn to Christ as God and to bind themselves with an oath, not for any wickedness, but not to commit theft robbery or adultery, nor to break their word, nor to deny a deposit when claimed." The word "sacramentum" here used cannot

bear its familiar modern sense. It means the military oath by which soldiers vowed obedience to their general. The Christian was Christ's soldier and in all his worship he solemnly acknowledged Christ as the Captain of his salvation.

The Rev. JAMES THOMAS stated that when talking with the late Chancellor Edmonds (of Exeter) on the introduction of Christianity into Britain, the Chancellor said that the tomb of the wife of a Roman soldier had been found at the great Roman Wall on which it was recorded that the deceased was a Christian. Mr. Thomas understood that Chancellor Edmonds obtained his information from Dr. Bruce, and he inquired if Prebendary Fox was able to corroborate this. If such an inscription were found it would be clear evidence of the existence of Christianity in the Roman Army of Occupation.

Dr. A. WITHERS GREEN said : Some of us, who have not traced the Northern Roman Wall, are familiar with the London Wall and wonder whether the two are comparable in any details. The London Stone, in Cannon Street, from which distances used to be measured, is squarish and not round and pillar shaped like the sample the Prebendary has shown to us.

I suppose the "Old Watling Way," seen on the screen, is the northern end of our London Watling Street, which practically starts from the London Stone, "Watling" meaning a descendant of a man called "Wætla."

One of the turrets the lecturer has spoken about can be seen at the back of the General Post Office, carefully preserved underground, at the north-west corner of the London Wall.

The other prominent instance of Roman remains, besides the London Wall and London Stone, is the Roman Well in the Strand. The Roman soldiers coming from the Tower in full attire used to pass along Knightrider Street, jingling their shining spurs in Giltspur Street, till they reached Smoothfield (now Smithfield) to find open ground for the tilting encounters. At the end of the conflicts they would retire to the Roman well or bath to wash away their dust and dirt. I wonder whether the well of Coventina had any such use besides being strangely a depository for coins and jewels.

Dr. SCHOFIELD said : That he desired heartily to thank Prebendary Fox for his most interesting paper, which was far too short.

On p. 257 his allusion to a stone altar to Neptune, erected by some legion in grateful memory of a prosperous voyage, reminded him of one of the latest instances of the same showing unchangeable custom. The last time I crossed the Atlantic on the newest Allan liner we were all assembled in the saloon to give thanks (not to Neptune) for a prosperous voyage.

On p. 258 I see the Prebendary mentions British as contrasted with Anglo-Saxons. The two, Celts and Saxons, are strongly contrasted, and this indeed forms one of the difficulties of three-fourths of Ireland to-day, compared to the peace of the remainder when Celts are few. The lecturer might have added in this district the Danes—distinct from either, with black hair and quick temperaments, whose descendants abound to-day in Carlisle and the neighbourhood.

At the foot of the page the rut of the chariot wheels worn in the pavement irresistibly reminds me of the similar ruts in the old Roman tessellated pavement, 12 feet below the road under the arch of "Ecce Homo" at Jerusalem.

On p. 260 Coventina, the local deity of a spring, seems to have been worshipped for two hundred years.

There is now a distinct recrudescence of the same class of worship.

The citizenship of Rome is mentioned on the same page, recalling St. Paul, and like him the man may lawfully take wives, "*provided one at a time.*"

It is not surprising that only one touch of Christianity is observed. For a Roman military structure is the last place one would look for it. Northumbria's early Christianity must be looked for elsewhere, and it should even be remembered that England is the only country it conquered without bloodshed.

Mr. G. WILSON said: Being a north countryman, and having lived for some years almost within sight of the Roman Wall, I should like to supplement what our lecturer has already told us.

Among the greatest authorities on the history of the "Wall" was the late Dr. Bruce of Newcastle-on-Tyne, a most interesting man, and well known, I imagine, to Prebendary Fox, although he has not mentioned his name.

There are still some remains of the old Wall to be seen in the City of Newcastle, not far from some of the leading thoroughfares, but requiring to be looked for.

I think it is generally admitted that the site of the important Roman station of "Pons Ælii" lies between the Cathedral and Central Station, and may now be covered by the buildings of the General Post Office.

If this is so then the present "Old Castle" and "Black Gate" were very close thereto.

Dr. Bruce, Mr. Longstaff and other antiquarians, were instrumental in saving the Black Gate from demolition, and it now contains an interesting museum of Roman antiquities.

From Newcastle the Wall runs west up the hill, in much the same direction as the present "Westgate Road"; and about three miles from the town we reach what was known as "Condercum." This was a cavalry station, and is believed to have been occupied by Spanish troops. The modern name of the locality is Benwell.

The Wall then passes on to "Throckley and Heddon-on-the-wall." Then we come to Harlow Hill and Whittle Dene, where the city's water supply originates.

Further on we reach Stagshawbank, familiar to all in the district for its annual horse fair.

To the south of Stagshaw lies the small town of Corbridge, where the Tyne is crossed by a stone bridge.

A few years ago extensive explorations were undertaken in this place, and a most interesting site of an "Old Roman Market-town" was discovered, and a large number of relics, coins, etc., were found.

As you are already informed, the Wall crosses the Tyne, a little west of Hexham, at Chollerford. Here the river is crossed by a fine stone bridge, and in the clear water of the stream the outlines of the foundations of the old Roman bridge can be clearly traced. The Chesters Museum is well worth a visit. We cannot stay to refer to the many interesting stations on the Wall which may be seen in this neighbourhood, but as we pass further west we begin to see what the Wall must really have been.

As it goes west it rises to higher ground, and a more thinly populated country, and consequently it has not been so much used for building material. There are miles of the Wall standing visible above the ground, in many places three to six feet high and four feet wide.

Any active and venturesome person can walk for long distances on the top of the Wall without having to descend on the ground.

About six miles west of Hexham we come to Haydon Bridge, which I believe gets its name from the bridge, which here crosses the South Tyne and originally was supposed to have been built by Hadrian.

Starting either from here or Bardon-Mill, the next railway station, we have the most convenient points for visiting what is undoubtedly the most perfect and interesting parts of the Wall.

The Wall is on high ground, sometimes running along the edge of precipitous cliffs, and affording magnificent views of the surrounding country. Just beyond the Wall to the North lie the Northumberland lakes of Broomlee, Grindon and Craig Lough and Greenlee.

Lying on the slope to the south of the Wall is the extensive camp known as "Borcovicus," which has already been referred to by the lecturer, and is I think, without doubt, the most perfect example of the stations which still remain in connection with the Wall.

From this neighbourhood on a clear day the views are simply magnificent, and probably unequalled in any other part of this country.

Looking away beyond the Wall we see the Cheviot Hills; to the right we see Simonside and the hills around Rothbury.

Looking to the South we see "Langley Castle," celebrated in our history in connection with the ill-fated Earls of Derwentwater.

It was purchased from "Greenwich Hospital" (?) by the late Mr. Cadwalader Bates, a well-known north country antiquarian, who undertook its restoration, but did not live to see it completed. His body now lies buried in the castle grounds. Beyond the castle, in the far distance, we may see Crossfell and Skiddaw.

The Wall proceeds west across very undulating country, passing several interesting "Stations," which I have not time to allude to, until it reaches Winshields, and attains its greatest elevation, passing over ground which is 1230 feet above sea level.

Several of the stations in this district bear suggestive names, such as Milking Gap, Cats Stairs, Bloody Gap, etc.

Further west it passes over the "Nine-nicks of Thirlwell," being then not far from Gilsland, where it passes over the border into Cumberland.

After this it quickly loses its bold outline and can often only be traced by mounds covered with grass, and broken piles of stones.

Those who are interested in the subject will be well repaid by reading Dr. Bruce's book on the Roman Wall, or a small book, written about 1913 by Miss Jean Terry, entitled "Northumberland : Yesterday and To-day."

MR. PETER F. WOOD writes : This paper on the Roman Wall is a very interesting one and on a most fascinating subject, but it is all *too short* ; it is an introduction, and after the manner of the old divines, should be followed by firstly, secondly, thirdly and then ended up with a summary or application ! The lecturer might then follow it up with an addendum in the shape of a paper on the " Wall of Antoninus in Scotland," also of surpassing interest to antiquarians.

The lecturer (p. 257) puts down the wall as being commenced in A.D. 199 ; but was it all built at the same time ? Is it not possible that some parts were built much earlier, especially the camps. Taking the Wall Vallum Fosse, etc., as a whole, I think some have thought it may have embraced a period of some 80 years. The Roman rule lasted altogether some 350 years, it is said their final retreat was in A.D. 436.

Its probable cost is an interesting thing ; probably now the cost would be millions. Major Ruch, R.E., estimated it at over 1½ millions sterling, but that, I think, was many years ago.

How many men would it take to man it ? I believe this has been estimated at 10,000 or more. The Wall was about 73 miles long with some 23 stations on it, about four miles apart, without counting mile castles, etc.

The lecturer puts the southern fosse as usually about 24 feet from the Wall. Many think that the Murus and Vallum were some 130 yards to half a mile apart. If this be so, would not 24 feet be too little ?

We are told that this wall, etc., constitutes one of the greatest works of its kind made by the Romans in their whole Empire. This Wall was taken for the most part straight along, uphill and downhill, and some of the excavations for the ditch were through solid rock.

The Romans never failed at a difficulty : some of their roads have lasted for two millenniums. They built for eternity. This

Wall was splendidly constructed. Their cement was probably equal to, if not much better than, any our engineers could make.

The lecturer on p. 256 calls the Queen of the Iceni Boadicea, but is not the form Boudicca (from a root meaning victory) to be preferred ?

At the bottom of p. 257, Old Watling Way is mentioned as crossing the Wall, and there was also another principal road crossing it, much more to the west, viz., the Maiden Way (= Mai-dun the great ridge); this with its continuations connected with London in the south and Scotland in the north, probably crossing the Wall about the Station Magna. This is a road about which I have long sought for information; it came up apparently through Lancashire to the Roman Camp of Alauna in Westmoreland. This camp commanded the defiles near Low Borrow Bridge, a few miles south of Tebay, and went on north past Black Dub on Shap Fells, through the Wall and on to or near Bewcastle in Cumberland, and on (perhaps called here The Wheal Causeway) to Roxburghshire, north of Deadwater, and on (roughly) as far as Wolflee, thence lost. This road over Shap Fells was evidently at one time one of the great routes from Scotland to London, and was used by King Charles' army before the Battle of Naseby. This is recorded on the obelisk at Black Dub.

The lecturer speaks of the splendid remains at Cilurnum. I have had the privilege of seeing them and also those at Amboglanna (Birdoswald) and at Borcovicus (Housesteads) and the many extensive remains uncovered in recent years at Corbridge, South of Hexham. The paper mentions (p. 258) the Museum at Chesters; this is beautifully arranged and well worth a visit; the one at Newcastle also should not be missed on any account.

We are told in the first three centuries there were some thirty legions in Britain, and that during the third century the north front was the principal field of military activity in the Roman empire; perpetual military operations were going on between the Tyne and Solway, and the post of commander was of very great importance, as the names of the commanders show.

There are sermons in stones. Originally every Station and Mile Castle had a wide gateway opening northwards, but we are told, and it is very significant, that when the garrisons became weak and demoralized, they diminished the size of the gateways and some were

walled up altogether ! If the stones could speak what a wonderful tale they could tell. What victories, what endurance, what defeats, what despair !

There is much to be learned from this hoary relic of antiquity, and we are much obliged to the lecturer for calling our attention to this subject.

In a paper written in 1887 by a Bishop of Carlisle, he estimates the complete armament of the Wall at probably 12,000 men, not Romans chiefly, but Batavians, Gauls, Tungrians, Spaniards, Thracians, Dalmatians, and others, and notes that the following plants found at the Wall—*Corydalis lutea*, *Erinus Hispanicus*, *Geranium lucidum*, were probably brought originally by the Asturians.

Col. MOLONY, O.B.E., writes : The devoutness of the Romans should shame us, for I counted over eighty altars in the Chesters Museum he mentions. The foundations of the Roman station in the park there are almost complete. Can anyone say whether the making of ladders was beyond the skill of the Picts and Scots ? Or was the Wall's top more than thirty feet above the bottom of the ditch, making escalade difficult ; or was it garrisoned by thirty thousand men, the necessary number, if the barbarians had ladders ?