

CHAPTER XVII

Conclusions

THE description of the Roman operations in Caledonia, as we find it in written history, is too vague and obscure to enable us to identify the part played by the Newstead garrison in the drama which passes before our eyes in the pages of Tacitus and later writers. And yet it is tempting to speculate upon the place the fort occupied, in those years of struggle, and to try to identify its successive alterations with the advances and retreats of which historians have preserved for us an all too brief outline. Certain points seem clear enough.

To begin with, the limits of time into which we must compress the various changes which it reveals, are tolerably clear. It is evident that they are comparatively, narrow. This is borne out by the coin finds, which strikingly confirm the conclusions arrived at earlier from similar discoveries on other Scottish sites. Professor Haverfield in his Appendix to the *Antonine Wall Report*, published by the Glasgow Archaeological Society in 1899, dealt with the Roman occupation of Scotland, and more particularly with the evidence as to its duration which was furnished by coins. Bringing together statistics of the various recorded discoveries in or near the Vallum or its forts, together with the hoards and isolated finds which had come to light throughout the country, he noted that the silver coins of Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian and Pius, and the bronze coins of Trajan, Hadrian and Pius were common on the Vallum and chief Roman sites, and that Marcus Aurelius, still more Commodus (177–192), were scantily represented, and later Emperors practically absent. From this he concluded that, while it was always possible that silver denarii of Domitian might go back to an occupation by Agricola, the rest of the finds very clearly pointed to an occupation which began in the reign of Pius and terminated after a comparatively brief period—in short, that the whole land north of the Cheviots must have been lost before or about A.D. 180.

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Professor Haverfield's note was published in 1899. Since then, excavations have taken place at Camelon, Lyne, Inchtuthil, Castlecary, Rough Castle, and Bar Hill. Castlecary and Rough Castle produced no coins, Inchtuthil only a single piece, probably of Domitian, while, except for a denarius of Mark Antony—a variety which is well known to have remained long in circulation—the series from Bar Hill and from Camelon begin with Vespasian and end with Marcus Aurelius. In both, the issues prior to the reign of Pius largely predominate. The agreement with statistics previously available is thus complete.

The same is the case at Newstead. The coins discovered in the course of the excavations numbered 249. These have been most carefully examined by Mr. George Macdonald, who has dealt with them in an appendix to this volume. Mr. Macdonald has been able to identify no fewer than 234—a series much larger than any that has as yet been obtained on an excavated site in Scotland; to these he has added 26 whose discovery is recorded by earlier observers, so that the total is 260. All save 4, which were found in the Baths adhering through corrosion, were picked up singly, scattered over the fort and its annexes. The earliest are 9 Republican denarii and 8 denarii of Mark Antony. Augustus is represented by one denarius and one second brass, and Tiberius by a denarius; Nero by 2 bronze coins and one denarius; Galba by 2 denarii; and Otho and Vitellius each by a denarius. Then come large numbers of Vespasian, 28 bronze and 22 silver coins. Of Titus there are 10 bronze and 2 silver, of Domitian 25 bronze and 12 silver, and of Nerva one bronze and 3 silver. Trajan is represented by 27 bronze and 15 silver. Hadrian with the Empress Sabina is responsible for 29 bronze and 22 silver. With Pius the numbers decrease. To this reign, including the coins of the elder Faustina, belong 13 bronze and 10 silver. Of Marcus Aurelius, and his wife Faustina the younger, there are 5 bronze and 2 silver. The list closes with a single denarius of Crispina, who married Commodus in 178. The series thus exhibits precisely the same features as were noted by Professor Haverfield in earlier lists from Roman sites in Scotland. There is the same preponderance of early issues, the same scarcity of coins of the period following the death of Pius. The coin of Crispina carries us down to Commodus, and so confirms Professor Haverfield's conclusion that in or about the beginning of the reign of that Emperor, the Romans lost their hold of Southern Scotland.

The coins found during the excavation are not, as indicated, the only ones that have been discovered on the site. The *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*

of Scotland contains a list compiled in 180 by Dr. J. A. Smith.¹ Thirty-one coins are there enumerated more or less specifically. Twenty-three of these belong to very nearly the same period as those unearthed in the excavations the earliest are consular denarii, while all the more important reigns from Nero to Pius are represented. This is just what we should expect. Dr. Smith, however, goes on to mention a coin of Victorinus, followed by coins of Diocletian, Carausius, Galerius Maximianus and Constantine. Nothing that was turned up during our five years' digging gave any support to the view that there had been an occupation in the third century or later. No coin of that period was found. The characteristic fibulae and the pottery were both wanting. Dr. Smith does not say exactly where any of these late coins were discovered. It is evident that he saw them, but the proof that they were actually found in or near the fort is lacking. It is possible that they had been picked up on the site or in its immediate neighbourhood, and that they came there long after the abandonment of the fort. On the rising ground south of the village of Newstead earth-houses have been discovered, and into the doorway of one of these there was built a characteristic piece of Roman moulding.² Roman Stone work was also noted in one of these constructions at Crichton Mains in Midlothian,³ showing that they belong to a post-Roman period, but that period cannot be a very late one, as elsewhere in Scotland their contents have included pieces of vessels of Terra Sigillata.⁴ The discovery of an earth-house at Newstead, then, points to native occupation in the neighbourhood of the fort at no long period after the final abandonment; and, in view of the whole results of the excavation, it would appear safest to assume that Dr. Smith's late coins should be connected, not with a subsequent Roman occupation, but with a traffic which, after the period of withdrawal, had gradually been resumed between the Romanised portion of Britain and the people who dwelt to the north of the English wall.

The latest date to which the occupation of the fort by Roman troops could be assigned is the campaign of Severus, A.D. 208 to 210. Severus, however, has, so far as we know, left no clear trace of his presence behind him in Scotland, and we have no definite evidence of his having been at Newstead. The permanent occupation must certainly have ended earlier,

1 Vol. i. pp. 33–38; also vol. v. pp. 105, 108, 362.

2 *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol. i. pp. 213, 217.

3 *Ibid.* vol. viii. p. 105.

4 *Ibid.* vol. viii. p. 25.

It is probable that the whole period of its history lies within the century that elapsed between the year A.D. 80 and the earlier part of the reign of Commodus. Within this period fell the two great invasions chronicled in history—that of Agricola and that of Lollius Urbicus, and, were we to argue from a superficial view of the list of coins, we might hold that during the whole of it the occupation of Newstead was well nigh unbroken. History, however, tells us of the recall of Agricola, and indicates in no uncertain way the undoing of his work, while the expedition of Lollius Urbicus was itself a reconquest, not simply a new phase in the policy of a continued occupation. Of the intervening period of withdrawal, the debris gathered from the pits and wells at Newstead provides abundant evidence. One hundred and seven of these receptacles were cleared out. They could be divided into two distinct classes, an earlier and a later.

Save in a very few cases, their position gave no clue to their age; pits of different periods often lay side by side. But as has elsewhere been noted, the pottery fell quite naturally into two groups, and those two groups were never mingled. The early Terra Sigillata, with its arrow-point patterns and its winding scrolls of the transition period, was never mixed with the later ware, decorated with large medallions, coarser wreaths and free figures, while differences in the coarse pottery were no less strongly marked. Between the deposits of such fragments in the two groups of pits there must have elapsed a period in the course of which the sources of supply of the pottery, no less than the fashions in its decoration, had undergone a decided change. The Terra Sigillata of Pit LXXVI, bearing the stamps of Firmo, Masculus, Sabinus, is typical of the end of the first century. That of Pit LXXII, closely adjoining, turned out from the potteries of Cracuna, Ruffus, Suobnillus, is no less typical of the second century; some of it, from its similarity to pieces in the ditch of the earthen fort at the Saalburg, might date from the end of the Hadrianic period. Similarly, the dishes of Pit LIV with the stamps DAGO, OF-COTTO and OF-IVCVN are entirely distinct from those of Pit XLIX with REGINI·M, AVITVS, RVFFI·MA, and the imperfect stamp of CINNAMVS.

It would be rash to put forward the theory that all the fragments found in association in one of these pits were necessarily contemporaneous. But there can be little doubt that most of the pits were open for a comparatively short period, and certainly no example was observed in which the forms characteristic of the two groups of pottery were found at the same level.

The evidence of the pottery thus goes to prove that somewhere at the end of the first or early in the second century there was an abandonment of the site followed by a second-century reoccupation.

There need be little hesitation in attributing this break in the occupation to the first half of the second century. History gives no support to the theory that Agricola's 'conquest' resulted in a permanent acquisition. Agricola himself is represented as having been recalled by Domitian, and the fruits of his victories sacrificed—*perdomita Britannia et statim missa*. The account by Tacitus of his father-in-law's expedition conveys no impression that its results were abiding, and so far archaeology has failed to produce, north of the Tweed, any records of a permanent nature which can be associated with him.

We cannot tell how soon the recall of Agricola was followed by a general withdrawal of the troops which he may have left behind to hold what he had won. But it is certain that about the year A.D. 120 Hadrian established his frontier line between the Tyne and the Solway, and we know that that event was preceded by serious troubles in Britain, involving probably the whole land north of the Humber, and that in some great disaster of that troubled time the Ninth Legion was apparently overwhelmed. With the first mutterings of rebellion in the rear, the position of the garrisons guarding the long line of communications would become insecure, and the forces would retreat to the south. Somewhere, then, in these early years of the second century, if not in the end of the first, we must place the earliest abandonment of Newstead. There can be little doubt that the fort remained deserted till the advance of Lollius Urbicus soon after the year 140.

The history of the fort would thus appear to be divisible into two main periods, corresponding respectively to the expedition of Agricola, and to the building of the Vallum under Urbicus. To the earlier period may be assigned, not only the early fort, but also the first occupation of the enlarged fort which succeeded it. The ditch of the early fort was certainly open as late as the year A.D. 86. Two bronze coins struck in the Twelfth Consulate of Domitian had dropped into it before it was covered by the clay rampart that subsequently concealed it. These were recovered, one from the west, the other from the south front. The year is the year of Agricola's departure. Now we know of no Roman mints in Britain, and it is highly improbable that these coins reached Newstead and were lost in the very year of their minting. Another coin, a denarius of Domitian of the year A.D. 92, almost unused,

lay below the level of the road constructed for the second occupation, where it passed between the later ditches on the south. We cannot, of course, rely altogether upon such a find as evidence of the prolongation of the first occupation. All that we can say with certainty is that the latest coins found in the ditch of the early fort date from A.D. 86, and that it is well nigh certain that a garrison was still there at that date. But indications already alluded to suggest that the earlier of our two main periods did not end with the evacuation of the Agricolan earthwork, but included also the earliest occupation of the enlarged fort.

Here again the strongest of these indications is obtained from the pottery, particularly that taken from the overlapping ditch in front of the West Gate, a ditch which, as we have seen, must have been filled up at a comparatively early period. It is a mere handful of fragments—some twelve pieces of Terra Sigillata. Four belong to decorated bowls. One is the rim of Dragendorff, Type 29. Two show the well-known arrow points. A fourth has a border of long, pointed leaves, resembling those illustrated on page 211, Fig. 4. The undecorated vessels comprise pieces of Dragendorff, Types 18, 27 and 35, as well as of the bowl-like vessel with flat rim, ornamented with lotus buds, figured in Plate XXXIX., Type 11. Of the coarse dishes there is a fragment of a dark-grey colour, exhibiting the technique of 'rustic ware,' and also a portion of the neck of a large urn-like vessel of a close-textured reddish-brown ware, such as was noted in Pit LIV. There is not among these pieces a single one which is characteristic of the late period. Unfortunately the corresponding ditches in front of the North and South Gates yielded little, though 'rustic ware' came from the former. It must further be noted that most of the types of Terra Sigillata mentioned above were present in that portion of the inner ditch of the enlarged fort cleared out on the west front. As a rule, the evidence of ditches is less to be relied upon than that of pits. The latter do not seem to have been open for any length of time. After they had once been filled up with rubbish, they were probably closed for sanitary reasons. The clay stopping near the surface was no infrequent feature. Ditches, on the other hand, must have lain open for a long period. Yet in this case the pottery of the ditches entirely supports the theory put forward. The ditch of the enlarged fort, open no doubt for a comparatively long time, produced not only the early fragments, but also many of later date, including one or more which seem to belong to the export from Rheinzabern, while the branch of the same ditch in front of the gate, filled up early, showed only early pottery.

There are other indications that the first occupation of Newstead was prolonged beyond the period of Agricola's campaigns; in other words, the years lying between A.D. 80 and A.D. 86. These are to be found in the coin series and in the large proportion of relics from the early rubbish pits. In examining the former, one cannot but be struck by the comparative paucity of the issues of Nero. As representing the coinage of his reign of fourteen years we have two bronze and one silver pieces, while the bronze coins of Vespasian and Domitian number twenty-eight and twenty-five respectively. This would suggest that by the reign of Domitian the bronze issues of Nero did not form any large proportion of the currency. If between the death of Nero in A.D. 68 and the year A.D. 86 the Neronian issues of bronze coins had so far exhausted themselves, it is difficult to believe that the later coins of Domitian, and the coins of Nerva and Trajan, were all of them brought into Caledonia in the reign of Antoninus Pius. Further, Mr. Macdonald's study of the coin-finds has established the interesting fact that they include a number of coins struck in the reign of Domitian subsequent to the date of Agricola's departure, as also pieces dating from the reigns of Nerva and Trajan, which are in such good condition that they cannot have been in circulation for any length of time, a state in which we could not expect to find them had they been dropped in the reign of Pius. It is, to say the least, probable that some of the coins of these Emperors belong to the first period of the enlarged fort, the occupation of which began after the recall of Agricola. The rubbish-pits tell the same tale of continuous activity in the early period. Of the one hundred and seven pits and wells discovered since 1905, at least thirty-six could be attributed to the early period as against twenty-nine which were late, but the great majority of the objects found were taken from the early pits. Indeed, the preponderance of early finds is even greater in the general collection than in the collection of coins.

There is nothing in history to tell us what happened in Scotland immediately after Agricola's return to Rome. The impression generally conveyed is that the early advance was very much shorter in its duration, and less effective in its character, than that which followed in the reign of Pius. This is doubtless a true presentment of the facts taken as a whole. But the abundance of relics of the early period at Newstead suggests that that fort at least was a centre of considerable activity, and held a considerable population for some time after A.D. 86. It is quite possible that with the abandonment

of Agricola's forts between the Forth and Clyde some strategic line further to the south, including Newstead, was held until increasing pressure from the north, or an uprising in the rear, rendered a further retreat necessary.

It must at the same time be admitted that any impression of the length of an occupation based largely on the quantity of the relics left behind may easily be erroneous. The relative strength of the garrison in the two periods is an important factor which has to be reckoned with. A large force concentrated on a site for a comparatively short period would leave a comparatively large deposit of refuse behind. A sudden abandonment would also tend to increase the quantity of relics remaining on the ground, and that some disaster terminated the early period at Newstead seems probable. It is difficult to account for the presence of many of the objects found in the early rubbish pits, except on the hypothesis that they were concealed on the eve of a hurried evacuation.

Passing from the early period, we would fain distinguish the exact phase in the evolution of the fort which marks the reoccupation of Newstead after its abandonment. There need be little doubt that the later period coincides generally with the Antonine occupation. Its pottery belongs to a distinct period of Roman activity in Scotland. The same potters supplied the ware used alike at Newstead and in the forts of the Vallum; decorated bowls in the style of Cinnamus and Divixtus were common in both. And in both we have the occurrence of the stamps of the same potters, who can be definitely assigned to the second century.

The phase in the evolution of the fort, which it seems safe to assign to the later period, is the reduction in its size at the beginning of the fourth occupation. It also seems safe to assume that the cutting down of the West Annexe belongs to the same time. A coin of Hadrian came from the bottom of the inner ditch covering the Bath buildings; the pottery found in it was entirely of the later period. But the reduction in size can hardly have marked the beginning of the Antonine period. Pottery of the later period was lying in the upper levels of the pit in the Baths, but beneath the cobble foundation of the rampart that passed above it; and the rampart obviously belongs to the same period as the ditch beside it. It would therefore follow that the beginning of the Antonine occupation preceded the reduction in the size of the fort, and that it coincided with the phase which has been termed the third occupation, in which the overlapping ditches in front of the gates were filled up, but in which the entrance from the south was still on the

line of the later Via Quintana. Such a conclusion might well have been anticipated. The forces of Urbicus about A.D. 140 would find the enlarged fort with its earthworks much as its earlier Flavian or Trajanic garrison had left it. Its reoccupation and the repair of its defences would naturally follow. Probably the opportunity would be taken to strengthen it by building the surrounding wall. It has been noted elsewhere that the overlapping ditches in front of the earlier gates on the north and south, and of the gate on the west, were filled up when the wall was built. The more substantial defence seemingly enabled the device to be done away with.

A reduction in size of the fort area followed. This might perhaps be interpreted as the result of more settled conditions on the Vallum and a consequent decrease in the garrison, but it does not seem probable that the change was prompted by peaceful conditions. Rather it appears to indicate an attenuated garrison alive to the possibility of attack. The building of the reducing wall, the alteration of the main buildings, the raising of the rampart encircling the outlying Bath building were works which can only be interpreted as defensive and rendered necessary by the imminent presence of danger, a danger which ultimately caused a second, but not yet final, abandonment.

We have evidence that some eighteen or twenty years after the building of the wall, shortly before the close of the reign of Antoninus Pius, there were troublous times in Northern Britain, at the close of which forts were once more rebuilt and Rome resumed for a time the mastery.

Thus at Birrens we have distinct evidence of a reconstruction of the fort, and we have further a dedication to the Emperor by the Second Cohort of Tungrians, on a slab which no doubt formed part of a building, which gives us the date A.D. 158, and in part the name of the Governor of Britain, Julius Verus. At Birrens there is no trace of any pottery which suggests an occupation earlier than Pius. That it may yet be found is possible. But in the large collection from the site in the National Museum in Edinburgh, its absence is striking. As far therefore as our material justifies a conclusion, we must place the building of Birrens in the reign of Pius (or possibly Hadrian) and its rebuilding, shown by the alterations on its plan, in the Antonine period, and it is highly probable that this tablet of the Tungrians gives us the date. We have evidence of the same process along the Vallum, for Mr. George Macdonald's researches have proved that there also some forts underwent reconstruction in the Antonine period.¹

1 *The Roman Wall in Scotland*, chaps. vii. and xii.

Professor Haverfield has gathered together other signs of rebuilding further south in inscriptions at Brough in Derbyshire, at Newcastle, and at Netherby.^[1] In all of these he has pointed out that there occurs, as at Birrens, the name of the Governor Julius Verus, and that all of these sites, including Birrens, lay within the limits of the territory of the Brigantes, a tribe to which more than one allusion, significant of their fighting strength and love of freedom, has survived in the pages of Roman writers. It seems probable then that the necessity of quelling a Brigantian uprising about A.D. 158 involved a loosening of the hold on the Vallum, and that such forts as Birrens and Newstead were then lost at least for a time.

The reoccupation of the fort opens the final chapter of its history. Once more there was considerable alteration and rebuilding. The reducing wall was thrown down, buildings were restored and a larger garrison installed. But if we may judge from such worn foundations as have survived, the reconstructed buildings had less of the element of permanency than those that preceded them. Here and there, built into the later walls, or in the masonry of the main outlet of the drains on the west, or again employed as drain covers, there were found blocks which had obviously formed part of earlier buildings. They were distinguishable from those beside them by their greater size, and by the fineness of their dressing. Clearly, in the final occupation, the hold on the north was slackening. And then, probably somewhere early in the reign of Commodus, when we know that the British war was pressing heavily, must have come the end. The Roman grasp of the Vallum must have given way, and with it their hold of the supporting forts, such as Birrens and Newstead. How these fell it is improbable that we shall ever know, and yet traces of the catastrophe which overwhelmed them have been revealed to us, after the lapse of many passing centuries. It is the secret drawn from the wells and rubbish pits—a tale of buildings thrown down; of altars concealed, thrown into ditches or into pits, above the bodies of unburied men; of confusion, defeat, abandonment; of a day in which the long column of the garrison wound slowly southward across the spurs of the Eildons, leaving their hearths deserted and their fires extinct.

¹ *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, Vol. xxxviii. p. 454.