



Communications.

THE RIBCHESTER "TEMPLE."

NINETY-TWO years ago, in July, 1811, a Roman inscription was discovered at Ribchester, which, though fragmentary and in part obscure, provides evidence that early in the third century of our era a high Roman military official, acting at the orders of the governor of the province, restored and dedicated a temple—*templum a solo, ex re[s]ponsu [numinis or the like, re]stituit et dedicavit*. The circumstances of the find are thus recorded by a contemporary writer, T. D. Whitaker, in his *History of Whalley* (third edition, 1818, p. 17):—

In the month of July, 1811, some workmen, employed to stop the encroachments of the Ribble almost opposite to the parish church of Ribchester, at the depth of about a yard beneath the present surface met with the foundation of two parallel walls, lying nearly north and south, at the distance of about twenty-four yards from each other, and very strongly cemented. The south side appears to have been carried away by the river, that on the north remained for the present unexplored. Among the rubbish were five human skulls, and a corresponding quantity of other bones, all of which had been disturbed before. At the same time and place was discovered a very curious stylus or bodkin, of hard yellow stone. Within the walls was an ordinary flagged floor; and near the south end lay the remains of a large flat stone, which the workmen inadvertently broke into many pieces before they discovered that the lower surface contained an inscription. The fragments being carefully collected and put together, exhibited the following appearance. . . .

In his *History of Richmondshire* (ii, 459, ed. 1823), he describes the discovery more briefly :—

In July, 1811, some workmen, in securing the bank from the depredations of the Ribble, at a distance of 40 or 50 yards beneath [the place where the helmet was discovered in 1796], observed several fragments of flagstone, each containing Roman characters ; and when all the pieces were put together like a dissected map, they produced this fine but very difficult and still mutilated inscription . . .

The position of these remains cannot now be determined with minute precision, but it appears to have been near, and probably inside, the southeast face of the Roman fort, and about halfway along it. The inscription was obviously not found *in situ*. Turned face downwards, it apparently formed part of a flagged floor between two walls. Whether these walls and floor were Roman or later work, is, of course, impossible now to decide. It is not unreasonable to conjecture that they were Roman. The fort at Ribchester appears to have been occupied, in some form or other, till late in the fourth century, and it is credible that there, as elsewhere, an inscribed slab was used up in building or rebuilding. So at Chesters, six or seven years ago, a memorial slab was found, face downwards, serving as a step in a room of the fort, and at Great Chesters, about the same time, seven inscriptions—two dedications, two gravestones, and three fragments—were discovered to have been used as building material for the walls and flooring of a building in the fort. Parallels, indeed, abound, and it is needless to cite more instances. But it should be noted, as a fact bearing on the age of the Ribchester walls, that they are described as “lying nearly north and “south.” The ramparts and buildings of the fort, on the contrary, lie northeast and southwest. It is most unusual, in a normal Roman fort, to meet with structures (other than drains) which run obliquely

to the general lines of the place, and if the points of the compass were read correctly in 1811, it would seem as if the walls were not Roman.

Various attempts have been made to locate the temple mentioned in the inscription, and to connect it with architectural remains found at Ribchester. Whitaker, combining the remains found in 1811 with others found soon after, situated nearer the centre of the fort, devised the plan of an edifice measuring 45 feet deep, 112 feet long, and adorned with 16 columns in front.¹ Recently Mr. J. Garstang has suggested in these *Transactions* a different idea. He connects his temple with remains situate wholly in the inner part of the fort and distinct from the walls found in 1811, and sketches the plan of a "Prostyle" temple, 50 feet deep and 25 feet along its facade. I do not think either Dr. Whitaker's or Mr. Garstang's attempt can be regarded as at all successful.

In the first place, the two writers named and (so far as I know) all who have treated the subject, plant the temple inside the walls of the fort. But temples have no business in Roman forts. A Roman fort is a definite thing, planned on a fixed scheme. The nature of that scheme is well enough known from numerous excavations of forts erected and occupied in the first two and a-half centuries of our era, and I need not here explain it. But it is important to realize that the scheme is fixed—so fixed, indeed, that a visitor standing over the ruins of one fort, with the plan of another in his hands or head, can prophecy with some accuracy the buildings likely to be found in the various parts of the fort before him. And this scheme does not include a temple. No trace of one has ever been

¹ Baines, *Hist. Lancashire*, iii, 380; Baines and Fairbairne, *Lancashire, Past and Present*, i, 274.

found in any excavation of the interior of a fort.² Indeed, the associations and accompaniments of an ancient temple suit ill with the general character of a Roman fort. This was purely military: all alien elements, such as women and traders, were rigidly excluded, and allowed only to settle without the gates. We should not be surprised to find a temple outside the gates, and indeed temples have been discovered in such situations. Inside the gates we should neither expect to find a temple, nor have any ever been discovered there. It is therefore contrary to all our knowledge of Roman military arrangements either to look for the Ribchester temple within the walls of the fort, or to explain architectural remains found within the fort as the remains of a temple.

Moreover, these architectural remains do not, of themselves, demand any such explanation. They are few and fragmentary and imperfectly recorded, and perhaps admit of no definite interpretation. Certainly, if it had not been for the inscription, it would never have occurred to anyone to consider them parts of a temple. If any conjecture might be hazarded about them, it is that they belong, at least in part, to the so-called "Prætorium"—the central building which seems to form the headquarters of each fort. Their chief elements—columns and steps—are elements which meet us in the architectural features of the "Prætoria" excavated in various forts. They seem to have been found near the centre of the fort; it is at any rate not impossible that they may belong to the "Prætorium" of Ribchester.

Where, then, was the "Templum" mentioned in the inscription as having been repaired and

² The temples sometimes alleged to have stood within the walls of Chester (Tite, *Archæologia*, xl, 285), Reculver, Richborough, etc., are all devoid of authority, and rest only on misconceptions,

consecrated early in the third century? We could answer this question better if we had before us the whole inscription, instead of only its latter part, and if we knew the name of the deity or deities to whom the temple was dedicated. But one obvious possibility is before us. The temple may have stood without the walls of the fort, and the dedicatory inscription may have been torn from it to serve as a flagstone when the building was erected in which the inscription was actually found. Numerous instances might be cited of inscribed stones being thus treated by the Romans themselves, and two have been already cited in this article. If this be so, if the temple at Ribchester stood without the walls of the fort, we shall, of course, resign all attempt to re-construct it.

There is another possibility. The "prætorium" normally contained a room where the "colours" were kept in a sort of shrine, and where the official worship of the army was conducted. It was not the kind of place which would naturally be styled *templum*. But it seems once or twice to be denoted by this appellation (C. iii, 5565; Brambach, 467), and it is at least conceivable that it might be so called in the case before us. Then we should reach the conclusion that there was no temple, properly so called, at Ribchester, and we should continue to reject the re-constructions suggested by previous writers for it. But this is a very rare and also an irregular appellation: it belongs to a later date than that of the Ribchester inscription, and its few instances are none of them wholly certain. We should be rash to do more than include it among the possibilities of the case.

Probably we shall never know for certain the site of the Ribchester temple. But something will be gained if it be recognised in future research that

both our knowledge of Roman forts and our knowledge of the Ribchester remains, point in a direction wholly different from the re-constructions hitherto brought forward.

I may add a further caution. In 1796 a finely-decorated helmet with face-mask was found at Ribchester. with other bronze objects, all plainly buried together on purpose, and more probably buried for concealment than (as Benndorf conjectures) as a sepulchral deposit. This helmet has often been connected with the temple, and explained as part of a statue, and identified variously as representing Minerva, or Isis, or Mars, or Victory. It is difficult to accept any such view. The helmet appears to be an independent object, not the head of a statue, and it cannot be easily interpreted as belonging to any of the deities named. Other similar helmets with face-masks are known to have been studied by various scholars—Donner von Richter, Benndorf, Albert Müller and others—and though their exact use or uses are still a little doubtful, they seem definitely unconnected with statues and temples. Some of them are sepulchral death-masks : some perhaps are ornamental : none belong to statues or deities.

F. HAVERFIELD.

OXFORD.

