

THE EXPEDITION TO HADRIAN'S WALL,
2-5 SEPTEMBER 1963

THE Honorary Treasurer, W. G. H. Jones, proposed and organised this expedition. Thirty-one other stalwarts made the journey with him. They were members either of our Society, of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, or of one of our affiliated societies. Professor Eric Birley at the last moment had to tell us that he could not lead the party as he had arranged to do. Fortunately he persuaded Dr. S. Bartle to take his place. The party could not have asked for a more enthusiastic and genial leader.

Mr. A. W. Andrews, Mrs. Hilda Edwards, and Mrs. J. D. Jones, Honorary Secretary of the Bromborough Society, submitted reports of the expedition. The Honorary Editors have used their reports to compile this composite account. Initials at the end of sections indicate authorship.

We joined the coach at the south end of St. George's Hall, and consternation arose when some members uncertain of their companions-to-be, asked several bystanders, "Are you going to the Wall?" The coach collected more members at Preston. Then after lunch at Knaresborough and a brief glimpse of a ruined castle standing guard over the River Nidd, we drove to Durham where Mr. Jones arranged for the party to be conducted round the Cathedral. I had visited Durham Cathedral only a fortnight earlier, but on this second occasion I saw many things which I had not seen the first time.

We were accommodated in the Ethel Williams Hall, one of the halls of residence belonging to Newcastle University. After room allocation and supper, we visited the museum of King's College, to see the collection of Roman antiquities. Here were, of course, many plaster casts of sculptured stones, but the big attraction was the plaster scale model of the Wall as it must have appeared when it was in full use and fully manned. Topographical features forced the Wall to zig-zag, and the model, accommodated in an articulated show-case, itself zig-zagged the length of a long room to carry its wonderful exhibit. Another fascinating exhibit was the Mithraum. This was a tableau staged in a darkened room, where the press of a button lit up the reconstructed interior of the Temple of Mithras discovered at Carrawburgh, and concealed mechanism

reproduced a male voice giving an explanation of the cult of Mithras. I shall never visit Newcastle again without seeing King's College museum.

Daily journeys were made along the Wall—for the first few miles along a road made under General Wade's orders by tipping the remains of the Wall into its own ditch. Vestiges of The Vallum—that ridge-ditch-ridge which follows along the south side of the Wall to create a "No-admittance-except-on-business" area—became visible on the outskirts of Newcastle, and occasionally small remainders of the core of the Wall appeared. The vallum carried on for some miles as a mere depression in fields, but I was happy to notice that the owner of one modern "semi" was inspired to call his home "Vallum View".

Midway across England, between Newcastle and Carlisle, the Wall diverges from the road and continues through farmland and moorland, so that we were unable to track its full length from the coach. Again at the western end it has disappeared in marshland. There are, however, compensations. At Burgh-by-Sands we visited the church where the body of Edward I lay after his death on the marshes, and at Drumburgh we saw the church bells which were stolen from a Scottish church across the Solway Firth by English parishioners in retaliation for the theft of their own bells, and their subsequent loss in the Solway. We learned that to this day, after the induction of a new incumbent to either church, the Scots send a request for their bells. They receive the unchanging reply that they may have them back when the English bells are restored.

[J.D.J.]

On our return from the first day's excursion we visited the Temple of Mithras at Carrawburgh. Standing on this site, the present becomes remote, the Roman world immediate and tangible. The grey stones of the shrine, still evocative of a continual sequence of birth and death, claim attention in a subtle, unobtrusive appeal. The Wall area offers several more impressive reminders of imperial days. The ordered lines of the fort at Housesteads are still redolent of the discipline and valour of the Roman infantry; the bridge abutment at Chesters, even in ruins, has the air of massive solidity, and the middle section of the Wall itself still broods over the region and suggests a hardly-relaxed vigilance. Nevertheless, this ruined temple, 40' by 18' and hardly capable of accommodating more than a score of worshippers, has a compelling fascination.

[A.S.A.]

On the Wednesday morning, 4 September, we made straight for Corbridge to see the museum and excavations. Besides the usual collection of stone altars, statuary, broken arches and dedication stones, the museum has cases of brooches, gold and bronze bracelets and clasps, tools and weapons made of bone, iron and bronze, examples of glass and earthenware, and a rich collection of coins. Some of the exhibits had been made by British craftsmen. Some jewellery showed Celtic characteristics, and the Corbridge lion itself was probably of British workmanship. A first glance convinced us that the lion was mauling a sheep; the sculptor surely could never have seen a stag!

What a tidy job the Ministry of Works makes of a site. The Corbridge granaries are beautiful examples of under-floor airing, and the aqueduct bringing water from an outside source to a fountain in the middle of the camp is an intriguing remnant of Roman engineering.

After visiting Corbridge church and Hexham abbey, we lunched in Hexham and then set out for Chesters. This fort, which first served the Romans as a cavalry and then as an infantry station, is renowned for its magnificent site, its almost complete bath house, and its museum. Like Corbridge it boasted its underground strongroom, and a hidden aqueduct brought water from a stream on higher ground first to the bath house and then to the latrines. We were led through the sequence of rooms in the bath house, and later inspected the abutment of the bridge which once carried the line of defence across the North Tyne.

Thursday morning was perfect for a coach trip, and we enjoyed a fine journey across the magnificent country south of the Wall. At Alston and Penrith some members began to shop. I saw loaves disappearing into holdalls, and myself bought Cumberland sausage and rum-butter. Rather regretfully we were preparing to return to 1963.

[H.E.]