R. Saunders Jones, Esq.

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REGINALD THRELFALL BAILEY,
*Hon. Librarian.*

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## REPORT OF LOCAL SECRETARY FOR LANCASTER.

### EXCAVATION OF ROMAN SITES, LANCASTER.

The excavations of the Roman Fortifications in the Vicarage Field at Lancaster, begun by the Lancaster Museum Committee in November 1927, were continued during the first two weeks of October 1928, with results that add materially to our knowledge of the site. The interpretation, however, of some of the remains discovered is difficult, and must, in a measure, be taken as conjectural until the site has been more extensively explored.

Those who are familiar with the site may remember that the visible remains of the principal ramparts are clearly indicated on two sides—the North and West respectively: and that in places, more especially on the North side, the line of the ditch and the outer rampart can also be traced. 80 ft. or so East of the N.W. corner is a well-marked gap or break in the defences through which a track or road leads up from the north and is flanked on both sides by a high bank. Within the comparatively small area enclosed by the ramparts, the land slopes upwards rather steeply on both sides, but presents a very uneven or irregularly undulating surface. A small and relatively flat area is reached, however, at the S.E. corner of the field, near the Church. The wide angle formed by the ramparts at the N.W. corner has hitherto suggested a hexagonal enclosure, as at Bewcastle, thus departing from the usual rectangular form of castramentation. But the area available for investigation can only represent one corner of the original fort, the rest being cut off on the east by Vicarage Lane, and on the south by the boundary wall of the Churchyard.

The investigations in 1928 were at first devoted to an exploration of the roadway passing through the defences and also of

FIG. 20.

OUTER DEFENCES OF THE FORT, LANCASTER.

both ends of the large inner rampart by which the road is flanked. This was done in the hope of finding traces of turrets or guard chambers on either side. The road metalling, about 16 ft. wide, consisted of boulder stones and clay, but the central portion had been removed, leaving a concave surface on which a modern drain-pipe had been laid. On the eastern side was a stone revetment extending from the edge of the road metalling to a distance of about 16 ft. This structure, built in puddled clay, was supported at the end with a somewhat massive buttress, and the whole placed on a foundation of cobbles. No traces of a similar structure were found on the opposite side of the road, but a shallow stone wall was found at the top of the rampart and a stone revetment at the foot of it near the edge of the ditch.

The excavations at the eastern end of the main rampart, by Vicarage Lane, disclosed a room or turret, giving outside measurement of 21 ft. 6 in. by 16 ft. 6 in., but three sides of the building only were found—no trace of the fourth retaining wall could be discovered. The walls, built of rough quarry faced stones, attained a maximum height of nearly 6 ft., and were 4 ft. thick at the base and 3 ft. at the top. The whole structure was set in puddled clay, and the upper courses were lying just below the existing surface of the pasture. A typical piece of late first-century Samian pottery was found at the lowest level of the structure and there were also many fragments of pottery which could be attributed to a later period of the occupation. Just within the confines of the building, on the western side, was a burnt layer of rough stones—possibly a hearth ; this was covered with a thick layer of fine charcoal containing stone roofing slabs and early English pottery belonging, it may be, to the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries.

Having explored the northern defences, attention was directed to an examination of several sites within the fort in the hope of finding traces of the buildings, but no such structures were discoverable. On the higher ground forming the plateau in the S.E. corner, lying just below the turf, was a thick layer of gravel which eastwards merged into a rougher deposit of course stones, broken rock, and marl. Finds of Samian ware in the gravel show that it was laid down during the closing years of the first or early years of the second century (A.D. 80–110).

Two long trenches were cut somewhat radially from the gravelled area—one running S.W., the other N.W. In the former, at a distance of about 50 ft. from the crest of the main rampart, were found a ditch and stone rampart ; the latter consisted

entirely of large boulders, the lower courses of which had been placed in a channel cut into the solid marl or clay. The second cut also revealed the presence of a ditch, but this was wider and deeper than the first. The finds which came from the bottom of it consisted of a stout oak plank, a few bits of early Roman pottery, part of a stag's antler and some large pieces of leather. All of these were lying in a black sloppy deposit between large heavy boulders. The presence of these inner ditches and the rampart suggest that the hillside may have been terraced by these defences—if so, the buildings of the fort must lie within the area now occupied by the church, the vicarage and the castle.

The small material remains consist almost entirely of broken pottery dating from the late first to the third or fourth centuries. These include some interesting pieces of both plain and figured Samian ware; coarse ware cooking pots, mixing bowls or mortaria, etc. One notable find in the layer of gravel was a pair of large bronze forceps, perhaps used by the medical officer in charge of the legionaries. But no coins or personal ornaments were found, which is remarkable considering the extent of the dig, and the fact that many coins have been recovered from time to time in the Vicarage garden near by.

Among the finds belonging to the later periods was a horse-bit of extraordinary design and of a very severe type. It was found in association with some early English pottery and does not appear to be later than the sixteenth century, but may be as early as the fourteenth.

Professor R. Newstead, F.R.S., was again in charge of the "dig," and he was assisted during the last three days of the work by Professor J. P. Droop. Mr. G. M. Bland, F.R.G.S., Borough Librarian and Curator, Lancaster, was responsible for all the arrangements in connection with the excavations, and for the preparation of a complete record of the work.

An average of nine men was employed on the site during the fortnight's excavations, and six men for a further period of four days to clear the site.

All the objects found, along with a large plan of the site, are on permanent exhibition in the Lancaster Museum.

## ROBIN HOOD'S STONE.

In March 1926 Mr. Hand called the attention of the Society to the operations of the Mersey Building Co., at Allerton, near Liverpool, whose extensive preparations for the erection of

houses in the field where it stood were threatening damage or destruction to Robin Hood's Stone. This stone is an ancient monolith and was scheduled in 1924 as an Ancient Monument under the Act of 1913.

At Mr. Hand's instigation, Mr. Cheetham, as chief correspondent of the ancient Monuments Committee for Lancashire, in April 1926, communicated with the Office of Works urging the need for the preservation of the stone. As a result of this action, in September 1926 the Office of Works informed the Mersey Building Co. that there would be no objection to the removal of the stone to a site agreed upon. A sub-committee of the Society was thereupon set up to advise as to the removal and preservation of the stone.

In conjunction with Mr. Jenkins, the architect of the Mersey Building Co., a site at the corner of Bookers Lane and Archerfield Road, Allerton, was agreed upon, and a plan for the placing of the stone was approved. This site was conveyed by the Mersey Building Co. to the Liverpool Corporation on 19th June 1928; the stone was erected there in August, and on the 28th August 1928 the Office of Works sent a scheduling notice to the Liverpool Corporation as the new owners of the monolith.

Finally the sub-committee approved the form and wording of a bronze tablet which the Mersey Building Co. has placed in the enclosure with the stone. The Inscription runs as follows :—

> This Monolith known as Robin Hood's Stone, stood in a field named the Stone Hey at a spot 280 feet bearing North from its present position, to which it was moved in August 1928. The arrow below indicates the direction of the original site. This side of the stone formerly faced South.

It is regrettable that delay in moving the stone resulted in the chipping of a small fragment from its tip, now repaired, but the Society has cause for congratulation that the interest of its members, combined with the helpful attitude of the Office of Works and the Mersey Building Co., has effected the preservation of a valuable historical relic.