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Certain Roman Remains at Watercombe, Near Bisley

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CERTAIN ROMAN REMAINS AT WATERCOMBE, NEAR BISLEY.

By ST. CLAIR BADDELEY.

EITHER in 1799 or a year or two later (it is reported by Lysons), in a place between Painswick and Bisley, and called "Custom Scrubs," were found two small votive stone tablets (anaglyphs) shaped like the front elevation of a temple, and each containing an upright male figure, carved in relief, facing the spectator.¹

The exact spot was in a stone quarry that had eaten into the side of a steep tongue of land which there ends (overlooking and commanding one of the most beautiful scenes in Gloucestershire, the head and body of the SLAD valley) in a grassy platform, still called "ROMAN TUMP." The nature of these discoveries renders it probable that this fine platform may have been crowned with a local sanctuary or Romano-British temple. In the side of the coombe at its foot rises a lonely chapel of the Methodists, the present representative of local religion, and a ruined seventeenth-century lodge (? keeper's), called 'The Mill.'

The two tablets are of similar dimensions, measuring 19 in. high by 14 in. wide. They are not made of the local lias, but of fine-grained Bath stone.

Another, but inferior, example from the same place is in Cirencester Museum.² This later specimen was found in 1851. It measures eighteen inches in height. In it a warrior holds his shield high, covering his left shoulder and side. His spear is in his right hand, slanting. No other Roman remains (with the exception of some coins), such as tesserae or pottery, are recorded to have since been found

¹ Cf. *Reliquiæ Brit. Rom.*, par. 2, table 28, figs. 5, 7.

² A warrior bearing his shield.

thereabouts nearer than at Bisley itself, or a full mile away.¹

In 1845, having been acquired by Mr. T. Baker, he took these tablets, together with certain other remains found at Oakridge (Church-Piece), and building at Watercombe, near his residence, a fancy summer-house, he set them into the south wall thereof, at about seven feet above the ground. At that time, or perhaps before it, they suffered grave indignities. The carved edges had been shaved down as if to fit them to the surface of a wall, and they had been painted all over with black. The paint has since worn off.

Upon No. 1 Lysons doubtfully read:—

DEO ROMVLO VETTINVS DONAVIT . JVVENTINVS
FECIT.

Upon No. 2 some other person read:—

MARTI OLLVDIO.²

I will deal with No. 1 first. The inscription upon No. 2, indeed, has by this time left traces only of what may have been the terminal DIO.

As the photograph reveals, the first word of the dedication, DEO, and the first two and a half letters of ROM[VLO] are sufficiently clear. Then occurs an awkward break along the shaven-off ascending cornice; but the lettering takes up faintly again before reaching the crown, or apex, made by the inclined cornices of the tablet, and here can be made out 'A V,' followed, after the median line has been passed, by a fairly clear G.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to point out firstly that, unless it was smartly abbreviated by the sculptor, there was, and is, only just room for the entire name ROMVLO. Secondly, it is needful to ask what can AVG signify here, unless we supply (in short) ET . N[VMINIBVS] AVG[VSTI] ?

¹ Similar, but inferior, votive representations occur on the little altars found at King's Stanley, now in the British Museum.

² Lysons gives no trace of inscription upon this example in the *Reliquiæ Brit. Rom.* He also omits the representation of the caligæ, which are still well seen, while, on the other hand, he represents diagonally across the altar-stem three (? spiral) bands which are now obliterated.

We might therefore take that to have been the intention of the mutilated dedication, and that it originally read:—

DEO . ROM[VLO] ET . N[VMINIBVS] AVG[VSTI].

On the other hand, there is reason for not attributing this sculpture to a later date than the third century; and although it is probably much later than that of the Antonines, it is well to recall that under various Emperors occur occasional brasses stamped with the flattering legend—

ROMVLO AVGVSTO,

evidently intended to identify the virtues of the reigning sovereign with those of the Founder of Rome. It is probable, therefore, that in our anaglyph, when perfect, we should have seen that very formula, with the aforesaid prefix DEO. Hence, we are in all likelihood correct in reading here:—

DEO . ROMVLO . AVG[VSTO],

for which, it will be found, there is just sufficient room.

Next occurs the name of the donor of the votive tablet, whom the *Corpus Inscriptionum*¹ (following Lysons) gives as VETTIVS.

Careful scrutiny shows that reading to be impossible, for there is a letter more in the name under consideration than in VETTIVS. The name, in fact, has nine letters, of which the first two are VE, and the last four are certainly EPIVS. Between these the two more doubtful letters are IO. The last letter has lost its top, and consequently resembles the lower half of an English U, but the curved sides show it to be not a V (or part of an N), but the lower half of the letter O.

Hence the name should really read VELOEPIVS.

By itself, below this, and to the right of the warrior's head, follows:—

DONAVIT

JVVENTI . IS (JVVENTIVS)

FECIT (rather bedimmed by rubbing).

It is therefore clear that to the god Romulus a

¹ First edition, vol. vii., p. 31.

provincial (perhaps a legionary) named VELOEPIVS gave this votive offering (probably, judging from the style, in the third century A.D.), and that one JVVENTINVS made it for him.

The figure standing thus under the dedication, within its stone frame, may be considered above the average of its class in point of technical execution. It measures 1.4 in. in height, and is habited in the typical accoutrements of the Roman warrior. It may here either represent the donor or the deity.

He is girt with a ribbed cuirass (*lorica*), tunic, and subucula, not descending below the knees. Around the waist is worn, with a large central buckle, the *cingulum*, into which is fastened, upon the left side, the short sword; the belt seeming to pass through an invisible loop behind the sheath. Above the thick rounded head of the sword-handle is seen the *sagum* (or plaid) crossed over the breast, and passing from the right shoulder on to the left arm over the elbow-joint, that arm being extended freely so as to hold in place by its rim the long ovate (damaged) shield, the central boss of which is just apparent. The opposite or right arm holds at rest an upright lance (*pilum*), having a peculiarly thick socket to the broad head. At the neck is worn a graceful collar of radiating metal (?) plates leading up to a continuous hood, apparently all in one with the helmet, and framing round the entire visage. The whole effect recalls the Fool's cap of the fourteenth century. The helmet (*galea*) is of an unusual form, and most of the central (plumed) crest (*crista*) is worn away; but at a short distance from it, on either side, appears another ridge or knob of well-rounded form. These side ridges are placed too high upon the head, and project too far, to belong to the hinges of the visor.¹ Below each of them projects a large curved ornament, like a wing, somewhat giving the effect of a volute. If these lower projections were intended

¹ The appearance of this helmet of three ridges recalls the *Truphaleia*, however distantly.



WATERCOMBE. FIGURE I.

to represent the metal neck-rim, they also are placed unwarrantably high, as high as would be the wings on the helmet of Roma, as shown upon coins. These might not be inappropriate to the god Romulus. The helmets of gladiators occasionally bore them.¹ The cheek-pieces are wanting. Caligæ are worn, extending to above the ankles, and ending in a thick band, as if turned over and tucked in.

Beyond the lance stands an altarlet, upon which is erected a twofold cornucopia containing "plenty," represented by three (?) apples.

We have a dedication, therefore, to Romulus, the protector of the crops, and we should consequently either conjecture the donor to have been a native of Central Italy, in spite of his barbaric name, or that he had served in the days of Maxentius (A.D. 306), to whom the revived cult of Romulus signified so much, and whose son was purposely named Romulus Augustus. But, chiefly owing to the style, we think that he belonged to a rather earlier date, and simply used a formula uniting the titles, imperial and divine. This, it is believed, is the sole dedication to Romulus known in Britain.

The SECOND relief, similar in dimensions to the first, and evidently by the same hand, presents us with another male figure, represented holding a pendent patera by its rim in his right hand above another altar. With his left he clasps close to his body an erect cornucopia,² the loaded head of which reaches above his left shoulder, and holds fruit. Though in some portions (particularly the right half of the figure) more damaged than its fellow-tablet, sufficient remains of the details to be described.³

The tunica here descends to rather below the knees.

¹ Cf. A bronze helmet in the British Museum, found at Guisborough, co. York, and another from Cambridgeshire. The former is here represented. See, however, the illustration from Greek gems under GALEA (*Dict. Gr. and Rom. Antiq.*).

² This also may have been a double one.

³ It has been mentioned already that the altar, as Lysons saw it, was decorated with bands or fillets (probably spiral in intention).



WATERCOMBE, FIGURE II.

The caligæ (strangely omitted by Lysons) are similar. The right half of the body has now so lost surface that the details of the armour have vanished, nor is there left a trace of the "cingulum" or a sword.

From the left shoulder, and entirely covering the left breast, falls an ample military cloak or paludamentum, spread outward by the left arm and elbow in clasping the cornucopia, and descending thence in rigid herring-bone folds as far as the base-line of the skirt or tunic. There is visible a broad hem or border. The face, well-delineated, shows from a tight-fitting (? cloth) head-dress, resembling that of a mediæval knight. But there is no visible helmet. The effect is rather that of a Georgian wig.

In the hollowed space, rather more than midway between the head and the cornice (to left), are faint traces of a dedicatory inscription 10. The *Corpus Inscript.* gives this as MARTI . OLLVDIO. or Mars Olludius,¹ but says that 'it seems to be corrupt.' Scraping and a now worn-through coat of dark paint have done their worst, and the former operation, alas! would seem to have been perpetrated merely in order to make the face of the relief flush with the wall surface, when the little building was erected by its original possessor in 1845.

The said building or summer-house (now much needing repairs) has been constructed and roofed largely with material brought by Mr. Baker from remains of a Roman villa located in Church-Piece field near Oakridge.² It is tiled with hexagonal Bisley slats, and in the walls, besides courses of tripled red tiles, there are hypocaust tiles inserted here and there, face-outwards, so as to display their stamps. These tiles are of two sizes.

The smaller (measuring $7\frac{1}{4}$ in. by $7\frac{1}{4}$ in.) are impressed in the hollow letters by a metal stamp ($12\frac{3}{4}$ in. by $1\frac{1}{8}$ in.) T·PFP.

¹ Cf. *Olus oiera* = garden herbs, vegetables.

² Cf. *Journ. Arch. Assoc.*, vol. i. p. 44, vol. ii. p. 324; *Arch. Journ.* vol. ii. p. 42.



WATERCOMBE. TILE I.



WATERCOMBE. TILE II.

The next, measuring $14\frac{1}{8}$ in. by $10\frac{1}{2}$ in., are stamped with a wooden stamp, likewise with hollow letters, as shown in the photograph.

While No. 3 (same size) repeat the letters of No. 1 in the larger scale of No. 2.

In all of these examples the most noticeable and interesting feature is the early form of the unjoined loop of the letter P.¹

Next, in No. 2, a stop occurs after the letter T, and the space should indicate another stop after the P. Probably there should be stops between each letter.

As it is unlikely, though not impossible, that we should find 'TEGVLAE . Publicae,' or 'Privatae,' in Britain, it might seem wiser to look for owners' names in the above letterings. The period and (probably) the factory have been identical and of early date. We might therefore, but with due reserve, have hazarded T[itus] P[LAVTIVS] FA[BIANVS].

But it is important to note that similar brick-stamps came to light in 1800 with some Roman remains within a few miles of Bisley, at Rodmarton, and among these latter was found a third related variety marked TPFC.² These are now to be seen in the excellent museum at Cirencester. The bricks are from the same factory. It is curious that neither Lysons nor Mr. Baker have represented the stops which occur between some of these letters. But further, since those days, at Cirencester (Corinium) itself, have been brought to light similar tiles bearing the following additional varieties:—

TPFC (here the top of P is joined).

TPFP do. do.

TPLF (raised letters).

TPFA (loop joined).

TC.M (hollow letters).

TC.

¹ This usually belongs to the first century, and its provincial survival in this instance is noteworthy.

² Cf. *Archæologia*, 1808, S. Lysons.

Hence, one may rather conclude that the factory of all these bricks was located at the large neighbouring town of CORINIVM; and that the Community there may have issued public tiles; the earlier ones bearing in the stamp (with stops), the unjoined P, and the later ones the later form of the letter and no stops. In such case, the last two letters of the various examples may have had reference to different 'issues,' or series.

It has been noticed that in the *Ifold Villa*, at Painswick,¹ the tiles bear a stamp relating to the community of GLEVVM. We should therefore reasonably expect those found at the above localities to bear one relating to CORINIVM.

In conclusion, the writer owes his thanks to Mrs. Davis, the present owner of these interesting relics, for much courtesy, and to Mr. E. W. Reed, of Painswick, for photographing them in the manner desired under considerable difficulties. In view of the superior quality of the workmanship and the peculiar interest of the subject, he ventures to express the hope that these objects will some day find an honourable home in the Gloucester Museum.

¹ *Trans. B. & G. Arch. Soc.*, vol. xxvii. p. 159.
