



Monumental Latin Inscriptions from Roman Britain in the Ashmolean Museum Collection

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ABSTRACT

This article presents some of the results of the Ashmolean Latin Inscriptions Project (funded by the AHRC 2013–2017), with new editions and commentaries on inscriptions from Roman Britain in the Ashmolean Museum. It offers an evaluation of these inscriptions based upon autopsy and digital imaging (Reflectance Transformation Imaging), and includes new photographs of them. It offers insights into the culture and society of Roman Britain as well as into the changing attitudes towards Romano-British antiquities in modern Britain from the 1600s onwards.

Keywords: Latin inscriptions; Ashmolean Museum; Chester; South Shields; Woodeaton; Manchester; York; Martin Lister

The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford contains a small collection of monumental inscriptions in Latin on stone or metal from various sites in Britain, which have all recently been re-examined as part of the Ashmolean Latin Inscriptions Project (AshLI), funded by the AHRC.¹ The project team has scrutinised and evaluated the transmission of the texts of the inscriptions, checking readings via autopsy and digital imaging, employing Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) — a photographic technique which captures an object's surface texture multiple times and then combines with software to allow the viewer to examine the object via interactive lighting from all directions;² it has described their monumental appearance in detail and made a comprehensive photographic record; it has assessed their

¹ I would like to thank the other members of the AshLI team for their contribution to the project: Dr Susan Walker, Dr Paul Roberts, Dr Charles Crowther, Dr Jane Masségliia, Dr Hannah Cornwell, Dr Abigail Baker; members of the Ashmolean Museum Antiquities Department: Dr Helen Hovey, Ilaria Perzia. For feedback on this article, I am indebted to the journal's anonymous readers. AshLI 145 = Ashmolean AN1955.323 = *RIB* I, 135 is omitted here, since we have been unable to examine this stone ourselves. The full online catalogue of the project can be found at <http://latininscriptions.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/>.

² RTI was carried out by Benjamin Altshuler.

contribution to the social and cultural history of Roman Britain; and it has illuminated their potential for increasing our understanding of ways in which Latin inscriptions in Britain have been collected, viewed and displayed from the seventeenth century onwards.

This article presents updated editions of the following inscriptions, intended to complement their publication in *Roman Inscriptions of Britain (RIB)*:

- RIB* I², 649: AshLI 02, York
- RIB* I², 1054: AshLI 03, South Shields
- RIB* I², 17: AshLI 09, London
- RIB* I², 452: AshLI 01, Chester
- RIB* I², 575: AshLI 137, Manchester
- RIB* II.8, 2504.16: AshLI 141, Woodeaton
- RIB* I, 237: AshLI 172, Woodeaton
- RIB* I, 238a–d, 239a–e; *AE* 2001, 1280: AshLI 170, Woodeaton
- RIB* I, 240: AshLI 139, Woodeaton
- AE* 2001, 1297: AshLI 157, Benwell

THE FIRST INSCRIPTIONS FROM BRITAIN IN THE ASHMOLEAN

The Ashmolean Museum opened to the public on the initiative of Elias Ashmole on 21 May 1683 in a purpose-built building (now the Museum of the History of Science) in the centre of Oxford, on Broad Street next to the Sheldonian Theatre. The new building contained the museum itself on the first floor, a lecture hall on the ground floor and a laboratory in the basement. The core of its original collection consisted of materials typical of ‘Cabinets of Curiosities’ during the Renaissance, namely natural specimens of all kinds including fossils, rocks and minerals, samples of flora and fauna, as well as historical curios such as Powhatan’s Mantle from Virginia, a native American hanging of deer skin and shells, thought to have belonged to the father of Pocohontas. Many of these objects came from the ‘Ark’ at Lambeth in London, a collection assembled by the two John Tradescants (father and son), who had anticipated the move towards accessibility made by the Ashmolean by admitting the public to view their collection on payment of sixpence. Elias Ashmole had taken control of the Tradescants’ collection in contentious circumstances, but his foundation of the new museum in Oxford ensured that the collection remained intact and accessible to the public.³

Antiquities from Roman Britain had pride of place from the time of the very opening of the museum: an ‘advertisement’ at the end of volume 13, no. 145 of the *Philosophical Transactions* of The Royal Society of London records that two altars had now arrived in Oxford and were to be displayed in the ‘Court before the Musaeum’.⁴ That this was so might not seem surprising, given that we might expect the Roman history of Britain to be of interest in Oxford, home to the Camden Chair in Ancient History endowed by the author of the authoritative history, *Britannia*,⁵ but in reality their presence in the new museum owed more to

³ MacGregor 1988.

⁴ Lister 1683, 112. It is not entirely clear where exactly the altars ended up being displayed, but this advertisement indicates that their arrival in Oxford was much heralded, and that they were talked of as an exciting addition to the new museum’s collection.

⁵ The first Latin edition of *Britannia* was published in 1586, while an English translation of the work was first published in 1610 and subsequently continued to be revised and republished over the next two centuries.

the personal ambition of one individual than to a desire to gain enlightenment about Britain's Roman past. The two altars in question were given to the Ashmolean Museum by Martin Lister (1639–1712).⁶ Lister was typical of his age for combining pursuits as a physician, antiquarian and natural historian, being the author of works on spiders and shells: the common thread between these three pursuits was that each of them required minute detailed observation.⁷ Furthermore, Lister used his studies as a means of securing professional preferment. Lister practised medicine at York, but apparently desired to achieve the highest status within the medical profession. This was not an unreasonable ambition. After all, his great-uncle Sir Matthew Lister had himself been royal physician to King James I.⁸ In order to achieve this ambition, however, Lister needed to be awarded a degree, and appears to have calculated that he might secure an honorary Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Oxford by becoming an enthusiastic supporter of the new Ashmolean Museum. This pathway had already been trodden by Elias Ashmole himself, who had been awarded an honorary degree in recognition of his work on the Bodleian Library's collection of Roman coins.⁹ From 1682, therefore, Lister became a prominent donor of collections to be housed in the new Ashmolean Museum, presenting to the University large numbers of specimens of shells and minerals from his own collection, Roman coins, and over a thousand books. Dr Robert Plot, the first curator of the museum, encouraged Lister to continue sending specimens and collectables to Oxford and by 1684 Lister's contribution was even housed in its own 'Lister Cabinet', a small upper room in the museum.¹⁰ His name was also painted in gold letters alongside that of the museum's founder, Elias Ashmole, above the door to the museum's library.¹¹

The actual altars themselves were arguably something of an anti-climax, both being severely weathered. The first altar, of limestone, decorated with reliefs sculpted within panels on its sides (h. 0.68 m; w. 0.42 m; d. 0.33 m) bears a badly worn inscription, enough of which was deciphered when it was first discovered to reveal it as dedicated to the Roman god Jupiter and the deities of hospitality and home (FIGS 1–3):¹²

I(ovi) ° O(ptimo) ° M(aximo) / dis ° deabusque / hospitalibus ° pe/natibusq(ue) ob con^servatam
salutem / suam ° suorum ° q(ue) / P(ublius) ° Ael(ius) ° Marcian/us ° praef(ectus) ° coh(ortis) /
aram ° sac(ravit) ° C ivy-leaf ∩ ° r a ° c ° de(dit)

To Jupiter Best and Greatest, to the gods and goddesses of hospitality, and to the household gods, for having preserved the welfare of himself and his family. Publius Aelius Marcianus, cohort-prefect, consecrated and donated the altar.

⁶ Roos 2011.

⁷ *ibid.*, 262–3.

⁸ Nance 2004.

⁹ Roos 2011, 260–1.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 267.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 10.

¹² AshLI 02 = Ashmolean AN C3-2; *ILS* 3598; *RIB* I², 649; <http://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/649> [accessed 07/08/16]. Most recently discussed by Tomlin 2012, 419–20 (c) = *AE* 2012, 833. A number of ligatures are recorded in lines 5, 8 and 9: in line 5, E is reversed to form a ligature with R, and E is reversed in a ligature with T; in line 8 the letters AE are joined together, and in line 9 AM and the final DE. Even by the time of Chandler 1763: Syllabus II.1, only the first line remained in his view. The card index in the *RIB* archive held at the Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents, Oxford, records that when the stone was examined in 1944, only the first two lines were legible, and no trace remained of line 3 onwards.



FIG. 1. York, *RIB I*², 649 (AshLI 02, AN C3-2): front face (RTI). (AshLI, courtesy of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford)



FIG. 2. York, *RIB I*², 649 (AshLI 02, AN C3-2): right side (RTI). (AshLI, courtesy of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford)



FIG. 3. York, *RIB I*², 649 (AshLI 02, AN C3-2): left side (RTI). (AshLI, courtesy of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford)

Only the first line of this inscription is now visible, so we are reliant upon earlier accounts for this reading of the text (letters underlined, above). The inscription informs us that the altar was dedicated by the commander of a Roman auxiliary cohort. Unusually, he does not actually name his cohort, but, given the inscription's findspot in York, we may surmise that it was stationed in the north of Britain. Both sides of the altar displayed images in sculpted relief, but these are now hardly visible at all¹³ (FIGS 2–3). On the right side is a relief which reportedly (according to *RIB*) depicted a figure holding a staff in its left hand, but what seems to be visible now at top left is a shape resembling a trophy in form. The left side is usually interpreted as a sacrificial scene (*RIB*), with a male figure, in a knee-length tunic and possibly a hair-band, holding an animal. In the background above this animal is a wreath, and possibly an altar appears below it. Fresh autopsy, however, suggests a military figure in profile facing right wearing a crested helmet and possibly armour, with a band sculpted around his neck. He has his left arm raised to hold up a wreath-shape, over a very worn object (possibly the animal seen by earlier viewers).¹⁴ Notes in the card index of the *RIB* archive in the Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents (Oxford) tentatively describe the right-side relief as possibly Jupiter ('figure with shaft in left hand, weathered away below waist') and the left-side relief as Hercules ('figure with ?head faces sin. And seems to wrestle with an animal (?lion), *corona* above. ?Hercules').

The altar was found in 1638 in digging the foundation of a house on the site at Castlegate, York, where Fairfax House was later built in 1762. It was owned variously by Sir Ferdinando Fairfax, Sir Thomas Widdrington, and Lord Thomas Fairfax, and his son-in-law George Villiers Second Duke of Buckingham (who died in 1687).¹⁵ Muratori was apparently mistaken in locating the altar at Durham, since Wellbeloved records the stone's early movements, all within York, until the Duke of Buckingham abandoned Fairfax House.¹⁶ It was first published by Lister in 1682 who was chiefly interested in its material, claiming that the stone came from quarries near Malton (just north of York).¹⁷

The altar was dedicated by the commander of an auxiliary cohort. A similar combination of deities is found on an altar from Newcastle-upon-Tyne.¹⁸ AEL is first used in abbreviated form for the *nomen* AELIVS from A.D. 135,¹⁹ but this inscription is likely to be somewhat later, from the mid-/late second or third century, when York was flourishing. The career of a homonymous P. Aelius Marcianus in an inscription from Caesarea Mauretaniae includes his post as *praef. coh. I Augustae Bracarum*, which Birley suggested may have been stationed in Britain.²⁰

Most of the text has been handed down without a problem, but the reading of the final line has been much disputed. Several different versions have been suggested, including *aram sac(ra) f(aciendo) n(un)c(upavit) d(edicavit)*,²¹ *aram sac(ram) f(actam) n(omine) c(omuni) d(edicavit)*,²² *numini conservatori dedicatam vel dari iussit*,²³ *f(ecit) n(un)c de(dicavit) or no(nis) de(cembribus)*,²⁴ and *k(alendis) Aug(ustis) d(edit)*.²⁵ Leaving aside these reconstructions

¹³ Rinaldi Tufi 1983, 3, no. 6 + pl. 2.

¹⁴ Visual analysis by Jane Masségliia.

¹⁵ Hargrove 1818, 141.

¹⁶ Muratori 1739, 11, no. 6; Wellbeloved 1842, 87.

¹⁷ Lister 1682, 91–2.

¹⁸ *RIB* I², 1317: *[[ovi]] O(ptimo) M(aximo)... [d]is hospita(l)ibus*.

¹⁹ Gordon 1983, 145.

²⁰ *PIR*² I, p. 37, no. 217; *ILS* 2738, with Birley 1942, 139.

²¹ Horsley 1732, 309 (following Lister).

²² Ward, in Horsley 1732, 309.

²³ Ursatus, cited by Hargrove 1818, 143.

²⁴ Orelli 1828, vol. I, no. 1675.

²⁵ Henzen 1856, 153, no. 1675.

elaborated upon by later authors who had not actually seen the monument, we should give more weight to the earliest account of the inscription which comes from Bryan Fairfax (1633–1711), via Francis Drake's 1736 book *Eboracum*, who copied the final letters as SAC f NC DE, suggesting that a leaf-stop (represented by a lower case 'f' or letter 's' with a stroke through it) followed the abbreviated word SAC, and representing the final DE as ligatured letters.²⁶ The simplest reading of the text, as suggested above, results in the phrase *aram sac(ravit) ° Civy-leaf* ∩ ° *ra¹c ° de(dit)*, emending NC to AC. Supplying the verb *dedit* removes the repetition inherent in *sacravit ac dedicavit*, which does not appear to be found epigraphically elsewhere. An altar dedicated to Feronia from Aquileia, by contrast, does include the phrases *sac(ravit) ... d(onum) d(edit)*.²⁷ Tomlin suggests, however, that Lister's edition rendering the text as ARAM SAC F NC DE may perhaps stand for an original ARAM SAC ET AVG DE = *aram sac(ram) et aug(ustam) de(dicavit)*, but he duly acknowledges that this has no valid epigraphic parallel either.

The second altar was found in c. 1672 on the south bank of the river Tyne at South Shields and was sent to Martin Lister at York,²⁸ who first published it in 1683. Nevertheless, he presented it in 1683 together with the altar from York to the new Ashmolean Museum.²⁹ According to Horsley and Hutchinson,³⁰ on Lister's death the altar was taken to Norwich, to a Mr Giles, and they supposed that it was subsequently lost. This version of events, however, is in error, since the altar was certainly published by Lister,³¹ and his donation of it to the new Ashmolean Museum duly advertised, whereas he died only in 1712. Bidwell suggests that the inscription went to Norwich on its way to Oxford, but this does not fit chronologically.³² It was displayed in the entrance hall of the Ashmolean by the 1920s and is recorded as being in The Arundel Vestibule on the ground floor in 1931, presumably having been moved there in the late nineteenth century.³³ It was then relocated on permanent loan in the early 1980s to Arbeia Museum (South Shields), where it is now on display (FIG. 4).³⁴

When he first published it, Lister commented with regret that its text was largely illegible, but he made the best of the problem, interpreting the text as a thanks-offering for safe return after battle against the Caledonians of Scotland.³⁵ The inscription represents the fulfilment of a vow made by the military unit stationed at South Shields (at that time known as *Lugudunum* rather than *Arbeia*) in A.D. 211 on behalf of the safe return from campaigning in the North to their base at South Shields of the two joint emperors, Caracalla and Geta:

dis || conservato/rib(us) ° pro salu(te) / imp(eratoris) ° C(aesaris) M(arci) Aurel(i) /⁵ Antonini / Aug(usti) Brit(annici) Max(im)i) / [[et imp(eratoris) C(aesaris) P(ubli) Sep(timi) Getae Aug(usti) Brit(annici)]] / [n(umerus) [?] L[u]g[udun]ens(iu)m /¹⁰ ob reditu(m) || v(otum) s(olvit)

To the preserving gods for the welfare of Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus Greatest Britannicus [[and of Emperor Caesar Publius Septimius Geta Augustus Britannicus]]. The unit of the Lugudunenses fulfilled its vow for their return.³⁶

²⁶ Drake 1736, 56, with pl. 8, fig. 3 (following Bryan Fairfax); see Tomlin 2012, 419 with n. 70 on Fairfax as likely being the earliest contemporary observer of the altar.

²⁷ *CIL* V, 776; Brusin 1991, no. 200.

²⁸ AshLI 03 = Ashmolean AN C3-3 = *RIB* I², 1054; Bidwell 2014; <http://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/1054> [accessed 07/08/16].

²⁹ Roos 2011, 263.

³⁰ Horsley 1732, 287; Hutchinson 1823, 610.

³¹ Lister 1683.

³² Bidwell 2014, 51.

³³ Leeds 1931, 21.

³⁴ Bidwell 2014, 53.

³⁵ Lister 1683.

³⁶ The words within the brackets [[]] have been deliberately erased. This edition follows Bidwell 2014.

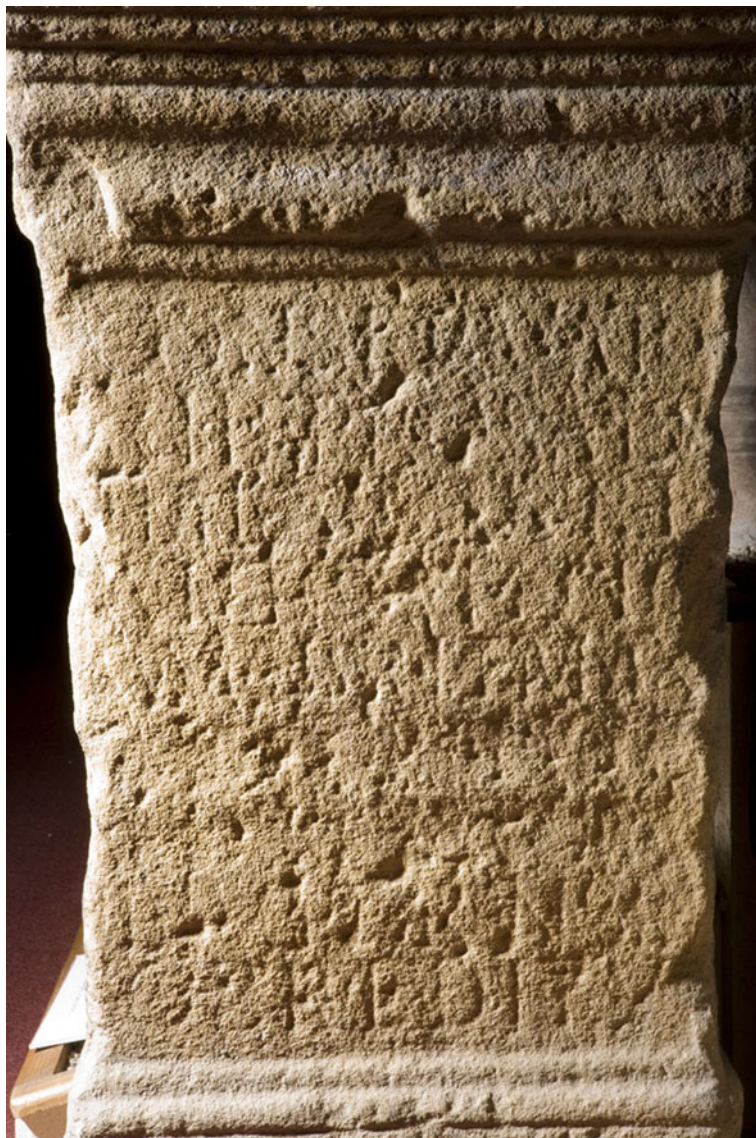


FIG. 4. South Shields, *RIB* I², 1054 (AshLI 03, AN C3-3): front face. (Courtesy of Arbeia Museum)

It dates roughly between their accession after the death of their father, Septimius Severus, on 4 February A.D. 211 and the murder of Geta by his brother Caracalla in late December of the same year.³⁷ Some of the problems of reading the inscription were caused deliberately, since the part of the text mentioning Geta had been deliberately erased, like many other texts naming Geta, who was murdered by his brother who did not wish to share imperial power. The full text has only recently been deciphered, thanks to modern imaging technology.³⁸

³⁷ Barnes 1968, 523–5.

³⁸ Bidwell 2014.

An ‘advertisement’ in volume 13, no. 145 of the *Philosophical Transactions* supplements the article by Lister earlier in the *Transactions*, discussing the South Shields altar, and records that this monument had now arrived in Oxford, together with another ancient Roman one, as a gift from Martin Lister, and would speedily be displayed ‘in the Court before the Musaeum’ established by Elias Ashmole.³⁹ This was followed in April of 1683 by a formal letter of thanks to Lister for the altars from the University’s Vice-Chancellor, John Lloyd. In the meantime, Lister’s professional career took on an upward trajectory: having been awarded a degree as Doctor of Physic on 5 March 1683, he was admitted to the Royal College of Physicians of London on 25 June 1684. The museum’s Book of Benefactors from 1683 explicitly denies any link between the award of an honorary degree and the generous donations made by Lister:

Martin Lister Esquire, the son of a Knight, was awarded a Doctorate in Medicine for which he had not himself supplicated but which was spontaneously conferred on him by the University of Oxford; he had no foreknowledge of this, but amply deserved it.⁴⁰ He was famous for his deeds and his writings; and in order to further the study of Natural History, he enriched this museum collection with shells of all kinds, from the sea, from the rivers and from the land; also freshwater mussels; formed stones and fluors, and various types of gypsum, mica, talc and metals of all kinds, most of which come from England. Furthermore, to preserve the past for posterity, he generously gave the Museum a large number of antiquities, Roman as well as British, which included altars, medals, rings and seals. This most excellent of men, to make complete his generous gift, also gave the Museum a variety of books, listed in his own catalogue, illustrating different aspects of Natural History.

Of course, this statement only means that the possibility that such a link existed is made all the more visible. In a rather curious fashion, therefore, these first two Latin inscriptions in the Ashmolean Museum illustrate the value of antiquity as a prestigious commodity, which could even help open the doors to becoming a royal doctor, since eventually Martin Lister became physician to Queen Anne in 1709.

THE CHANGING FEATURES OF A ROMAN SOLDIER FROM LONDON

The early Ashmolean Museum was not, however, the main setting for displaying classical antiquities in central Oxford: in the late seventeenth century, this role fell to the ‘Garden of Antiquities’ around the exterior of the Sheldonian Theatre, which existed between 1660 and 1715.⁴¹ Alongside the Arundel marbles, other inscriptions presented by John Selden as well as other donations to the University were also displayed there. One such large monument was a stele of limestone, with an inscription at the top, and a full-length male figure in a niche below, which had emerged from the ruins of the Great Fire of London in 1666 (FIG. 5).⁴² It had been found by Sir Christopher Wren in 1669, when St Martin’s Church, Ludgate Hill, London was being rebuilt following the Great Fire. It was brought to Oxford at the expense of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Gilbert Sheldon, who was also the benefactor of the eponymous Sheldonian Theatre, designed by Sir Christopher Wren and completed in 1669.

³⁹ Lister 1863, 112.

⁴⁰ Ashmolean Museum, Book of Benefactors: <http://www.ashmolean.org/ash/objects/makedetail.php?pmu=571&mu=573>y=qsea&sec=&dtm=15&sfm=Title,PageNumber&cpa=1&rpos=0&key=Martin> [accessed 07/08/16].

⁴¹ Sturdy and Moorcraft 1999.

⁴² AshLI 09 = Ashmolean AN C3-10; *RIB* I², 17; <http://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/17> [accessed 14/08/16]; currently on display in the Museum of London.



FIG. 5. London, *RIB* I², 17 (AshLI 09, AN C3-10). (Courtesy of Museum of London)

The figure carved in the niche is roughly three-quarters life-size, around four feet tall. He stands facing the viewer, and is represented with short tunic, belt and cloak, resting lightly upon a staff in his right hand and carrying what appears to be a scroll in his left. The wooden staff may be a

symbol of his status as a centurion in the Roman army, in a similar way to the representation of the centurion M. Favonius Facilis at Colchester.⁴³ There are two secondary dowel-holes in line 3 of the inscription, another in the figure's chest, and another half way up on the right-hand edge of the monument (with remains of metal still visible). The former apparently caused some confusion in early accounts of the text. There is also a small rectangular dowel-hole on both left and right edges, corresponding to each other, at about the neck height of the figure. The bottom right edge of the tombstone is slightly cut away, up to the height of the figure's knee. The surface of the inscription is eroded and scratched.

Illustrations of the tombstone, however, have restored the figure in various ways. The earliest illustration, from 1676, in Prideaux's *Marmora Oxoniensia ex Arundellianis, Seldenianis aliisque conflata* represented him with long hair and carrying a sword,⁴⁴ whereas in Gale's *Antonini Iter Britanniarum* of 1709, he was illustrated with short hair, wielding sword and staff as he stands ready for action⁴⁵ (FIGS 6 and 7).

A first attempt to offer a critique of such illustrations is found already by 1732 in Horsley who, however, reached the wrong conclusion albeit on what sound like reasonable grounds. Commenting that he was puzzled by the huge differences between the illustrations of Prideaux and Gale, he argued that Prideaux's was likely to be the more accurate, because it was produced earlier: 'as Dr Prideaux's copy was taken first, and when the original was doubtless much more perfect than it is now, so it comes nearer to the present remains'.⁴⁶ For this reason, Horsley also reproduced the rather fanciful image of a Roman soldier bedecked with a full head of shoulder-length hair and equipped with a long sword. By the nineteenth century, however, some realised that the style of such illustrations owed much to the underlying historical outlook of their authors: Pennant, for example, was criticised for his desire to identify Marcianus as a 'British-born' soldier precisely because of such inaccurate drawings: 'This stone, which is much mutilated, has been several times engraved, yet never with sufficient accuracy. The sculptured figure, according to Pennant, represents the deceased Vivius Marcianus, "as a British soldier, probably of the *Cohors Britonum*, dressed and armed after the manner of the country, with long hair, a short lower garment fastened round the waist by a girdle and fibula, a long *Sagum*, or plaid, flung over his breast and one arm, ready to be cast off in time of action, naked legs, and in his right hand a sword of vast length, like the *claymore* of the later Highlanders".'⁴⁷ As observed by Charles Knight in 1841, the possibility of reinterpreting the figure carved on the tombstone was the result of the fact that the actual relief was badly worn away, leaving viewers free to reconstruct it according to their own tastes: 'in truth nearly all the points of his attire and accoutrements are so uncertainly delineated on the mutilated stone that anything like a complete or consistent picture of the whole can only be made out by an exercise of fancy' — although he still chose to reproduce the more attractive, highly reconstructed version of the image.⁴⁸ The other underlying problem was the tendency to look only at illustrations of the tombstone rather than at the monument itself. Finally, by the mid-nineteenth century we find a much more reliable image, executed in watercolour over graphite, which was produced by J.W. Archer in 1852.⁴⁹ In this way, the tombstone regularly featured in historical works on the development of London and, rather bizarrely, the physical

⁴³ *RIB* I², 200; <https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/200> [accessed 24/10/17]. Compare also the centurion M. Caelius killed in the Varus disaster: *CIL* XIII, 8648, with image at EDCS 11100742 [accessed 24/10/17].

⁴⁴ Prideaux 1676, 280; Maittaire 1732, 46.

⁴⁵ Gale 1709, 68.

⁴⁶ Horsley 1732, 331 + Middlesex pl. I.

⁴⁷ Allen 1827, 21, citing Pennant 1791, 12–13.

⁴⁸ Knight 1841, 286.

⁴⁹ British Museum: BM inv. 1874.0314.234, accessible online as image AN651893001.

Marmora Oxoniensia.

CXLVII.



FIG. 6. London, *RIB* I², 17 (AshLI 09, AN C3-10), in Prideaux 1676.



FIG. 7. London, *RIB* I², 17 (AshLI 09, AN C3-10), in Gale 1709.

appearance of Vivius Marcianus himself went through various transformations, acting as a kind of litmus paper both for contemporary fashions and changing perceptions of Roman Britain.

Its inscription commemorates a deceased Roman soldier:

d(is) m(anibus) / Vivio ° Marci/ ano Centurioni Century-leaf leg(ionis) ° II / Aug(ustae) ° Ianuaria / ⁵ Martina ° coniunx ° / pientissima ° posu(it) ° memoriam

To the spirits of the dead. Ianuaria Martina, most dutiful wife, set up the monument for Vivius Marcianus, centurion of the Second Augustan Legion.

In addition to fairly large triangular interpuncts (throughout, except at line ends), there is an ivy-leaf interpunct in line 3, between ANO and LEG, while a centurial sign > may be squeezed in before the ivy-leaf interpunct.⁵⁰ It looks as if either only the top part of this sign is inscribed or its lower part has been worn away. This mark might otherwise be interpreted as an interpunct, but given that the interpuncts elsewhere in the text are simple triangular marks, interpreting this mark as the top half of > seems more attractive, especially since the figure's wooden staff might be taken as a mark of status as a centurion. The Second Augustan Legion came to Britain during the Claudian invasion and remained until the Romans withdrew from the province, being based at its legionary headquarters in Wales at Caerleon by the mid-second century. This soldier was, therefore, commemorated far from his unit's headquarters, but it was quite usual for individual soldiers to be posted to serve in the provincial capital at London, probably on secondment to the staff of the provincial governor there.⁵¹

RE-READING AN ALTAR FROM CHESTER

The final Romano-British inscription to find its way to Oxford in the seventeenth century is a red sandstone altar discovered at Chester (FIGS 8 and 9),⁵² It was found intact in Foregate Street, Chester in 1653.⁵³ Its discovery was witnessed by chance by John Grenehalgh, Chief Master of the Free School, who recorded that the exact findspot was Forrest Street, in the house of Richard Tyrer, beyond the city's east gate. Grenehalgh immediately realised its Roman origins and returned the next day to transcribe its text, but was not over-confident of the accuracy of his transcription.⁵⁴ Although the MS recounting his first encounter with the altar is now missing from Chester Chapter Library, MSS. in the Bodleian,⁵⁵ together with Lansdowne MS. 843 in the British Library, preserve copies of Grenehalgh's notes: in a postscript to MS. Rawl., Grenehalgh explained that his original manuscript transcription of the inscription which he had made shortly after its discovery had become illegible by being handled so much, and so at the request of friends he had produced a new copy.⁵⁶ The altar attracted much attention, with an exchange of letters between William Dugdale, Gerard Langbaine (Provost of Queen's College Oxford) and John Selden already in December 1653.⁵⁷ The text of the inscription had been sent to Langbaine by Dugdale, and he in turn sent it to Selden, who replied that he had already received five or six different copies of it. This perhaps explains Watkin's misleading claim that the earliest description of the altar was in a manuscript of Sir William Dugdale.⁵⁸ A transcription was also sent by Dr William Holder, sub-dean of the Chapel Royal (1674–89), to John Aubrey.⁵⁹ Grenehalgh's reading of the inscription formed the basis of Prideaux's text,⁶⁰ since already by 1675 the inscription had become very faint. Local antiquarian Randal Holme

⁵⁰ Wright 1970, 315, 'corrigendum', following Birley 1966, 228.

⁵¹ Hassall 1973, 233–4.

⁵² AshLI 01 = Ashmolean ANC3-1; *RIB* I², 452; <http://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/452> [accessed 16/06/16].

⁵³ In 1648, according to Hearne 1733, vol. I, Preface §4, xvi–xviii; Bannister 1887; Williams 1886, 13–14, no. 1, in error, following Aubrey 1676, 468–71, who stated that it was found in 1648 at The Greyhound inn, Fore Street, in digging a cellar.

⁵⁴ Grenehalgh, Bodl. MS. Rawl. (1722); Lansdowne MS. 843 (1658).

⁵⁵ Grenehalgh, Bodl. MS. Rawl. D. 1173, ff. 17–30 (1722) and Bod. MS. Eng. b. 2042, ff. 95–7 (Gibson 1695a) (= Gibson, Bishop Edmund, *MS Collections for Camden's Britannica*, vol. 1 (c. 1695)).

⁵⁶ For an assessment of Grenehalgh's account, see Collingwood 1925.

⁵⁷ Hamper 1827, 274–6.

⁵⁸ Watkin 1886, 165.

⁵⁹ Aubrey 1676, 468.

⁶⁰ Prideaux 1676, 282, no. 148.



FIG. 8. Chester, *RIB* I², 452 (AshLI 01, AN C3-1): front side. (© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford)



FIG. 9. Chester, *RIB* I², 452 (AshLI 01, AN C3-1): right side. (© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford)

also made a transcription and gave the earliest account of the altar in print; his edition is distinctive in providing a drawing of just the altar itself, indicating reliefs and decorative features, followed by a separate drawing of the inscription.⁶¹ The altar was given to Oxford University in 1675 by Sir Francis Cholmondeley, who had been awarded an MA from Brasenose in 1669, and belonged to a local landowning family from Vale Royal near Chester.⁶² In 1931, it was on display in The Arundel Vestibule on the Ground Floor of the museum.⁶³ It is currently on display in the gallery 'From Ark to Ashmolean'.

The altar is of red sandstone, carved in relief, with a *focus* on top (h. 0.97 m; w. 0.45 m; d. 0.43 m). It is divided into three main sections. On all sides, the topmost section is itself divided into three, with cylindrical bolsters followed by a border of egg-and-dart and then by another border depicting

⁶¹ Holme 1688, 464.

⁶² Henning 1983; Prideaux 1676, 282.

⁶³ Leeds 1931, 21.

pairs of leaves. The central section is framed by an ornamental moulded frame, while on its four sides are the following: inscription (front); a small five-petalled flower inside a circular garland, or perhaps a libation-dish (rear); jug (left side); six-petalled flower (right side). The base section consists of another border depicting pairs of leaves and a roughly finished base.

It is inscribed on its front face, within a rectangular moulded frame (h. 0.27 m; w. 0.285 m). The inscription has been in a very poor condition ever since the altar was discovered, because of the crumbling nature of the sandstone from which it is made. This was then not improved by the fact that after its initial discovery it remained exposed in a garden for some years.⁶⁴ Horsley noted that there were remains of a piece of iron on its top surface and supposed that something had been added to it in post-Roman times,⁶⁵ while Henig suggested that this may date from the period when the altar was displayed in Tyrer's garden.⁶⁶ Already in 1763, it seemed illegible to Chandler.⁶⁷ Watkin made engravings of the stone based upon photographs taken in 1884, which show some traces of lettering,⁶⁸ but when examined by Hübner for *CIL* only a few faint traces of lettering were visible,⁶⁹ and it now seems largely illegible to the naked eye. Nevertheless, RTI has enabled us to read some letters, permitting us to reassess previous editions of the inscription and its layout (FIG. 10). This confirms the accuracy of much of Grenhalgh's initial report,⁷⁰ but supports the reading CLVNIA (as suggested by Kubitschek) rather than GVNTA or GVNTIA at the end of line 3.⁷¹ RTI has also allowed us to reassess the inscription's layout and letter heights more accurately. The letters in lines 1–4 are 0.03 m high, but with some variation in height in line 1, with the letters at the end appearing shorter: whereas the initial I is 0.035 m high, at the end of the line A is 0.025 m high, while R and O are 0.03 m high. In line 1, the first I and final O are clear, while traces of ANAR are visible. In line 2, the final R is clear, while traces of upright strokes of the first letter and the final LE are visible (h. 0.03 m). In line 3, the letters PR and VNIA are clear, and traces of AE are visible; P and N are 0.03 m high, and the letters NI are ligatured; the letter A at the end of the line is shorter (0.02 m). In line 4, PRI, XX VV and the interpuncts are clear, as well as traces of LEG. Only faint traces of some letters in lines 5–6 can be made out; they appear smaller in height on RTI, but are not visible enough to be measured from the stone. In line 6: the letter N is visible in RTI; while in line 7 there is an M, h. 0.01 m. This confirms the overall layout of the inscription over seven lines, and shows that line 7 is centred, to judge from the placement of the M.

I(ovi) ° O(ptimo) M(aximo) T(anaro) / T(itus) Elupius Galer(ia tribu) / Praesens [Cl]unia / pri(nceps) ° leg(ionis) ° XX V(aleriae) V(ictricis) / ° Commodo et / Laterano co(n)s(ulibus) / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)

To Jupiter Best and Greatest Tanarus. Titus Elupius Praesens, of the Galerian voting-tribe, from Clunia, *princeps* of the Twentieth Legion Valeria Victrix, in the consulship of Commodus and Lateranus, willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow.

⁶⁴ Grenhalgh 1722.

⁶⁵ Horsley 1732, 315.

⁶⁶ Henig 2004, 8.

⁶⁷ Chandler 1763, 'Syllabus. Pars tertia'.

⁶⁸ Watkin 1886.

⁶⁹ *CIL* VII, 168.

⁷⁰ Grenhalgh (British Library MS. Lansdowne 843 f. 22–5; first autopsy, 1658): I ° O ° M ° TANARO / T ° ELVPIVS ° GALER / PRAESENS ° GVNTA / PRI ° LEG ° XX V V / COMMODO ° ET / LATERANO COS ° / V ° S ° L ° M °

⁷¹ Kubitschek 1889, 192.



FIG. 10. Chester, *RIB* I², 452 (AshLI 01, AN C3-1): RTI Specular Enhancement snapshot. (AshLI, courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford)

The altar was dedicated in A.D. 154 to a Romano-Celtic god by an officer of Spanish origin (from Clunia, in Hispania Tarraconensis) serving in the Roman legion XX Valeria Victrix, which from the Flavian period was stationed at Chester, near the border with Wales in the north-west of England. The name of the dedicator is unlikely to have been ELVPIVS, an otherwise unknown *nomen*,⁷² and it seems that the name was only faintly visible even when the stone was discovered. Although Hübner in *CIL* conjectured a corruption of FLAVIVS, Collingwood argued that Grenehalgh would have been ready to recognise this familiar name had it been inscribed here. This is persuasive, but Collingwood's conjecture, L. BRVTTIVS, seems rather far from what the earliest readers of the stone thought they could see. An emendation to TI. LVPIVS suggested by Michael Crawford is attractively simple.⁷³ Another name attested epigraphically at Clunia, L. VALERIVS, is perhaps just as possible.⁷⁴ It may be best simply to regard the name as irrecoverable. The god receiving the dedication is a god of thunder, combining Roman and Celtic forms.⁷⁵ He is otherwise unknown in Britain. Other inscribed dedications to a Celtic/Germanic thunder god in the form *deo Taranucno* have been

⁷² Solin and Salomies 1994, 73.

⁷³ Michael Crawford, pers. comm.

⁷⁴ *AE* 1971, 205.

⁷⁵ Much 1891; Green 1982, 39; 1986a, 130.

found in the Rhineland and Dalmatia,⁷⁶ while Lucan alludes to *Taranis ara* ('altar of Taranis').⁷⁷ Lysons suggested that *Tanarus* was a stonecutter's error for *Taranus*,⁷⁸ but this may be an unnecessary emendation, given that a parallel dedication from Dalmatia *Iovi Tan(aro)* has now been published.⁷⁹ Green tentatively suggested that what have been described above as flowers on the altar's rear and right sides should instead be interpreted as stylised wheels. This iconography would fit the context of an altar to Jupiter Tanarus, and would increase the Celtic flavour of the cult, by making a link to Jupiter in the guise of a Romano-Celtic wheel-god.⁸⁰ The image on the rear of the altar, however, lacks the spokes that would normally be expected in a wheel design, while the design on the right side is not circular (FIG. 9), and Green later describes the images as 'six-petalled flower' and 'wreath enclosing rosette'.⁸¹

THE CHANGING FORTUNES OF A DEDICATION TO FORTUNA FROM MANCHESTER

An inscribed base was found beneath the roots of an oak-tree in 1612 at Castlefield, within the Roman fort at the junction of the Medlock and Irwell rivers, to the south-west of Manchester.⁸² An abbreviated version of this inscription was published by Selden in 1629,⁸³ which he stated that he owed to Camden, who was intending to add it to a new edition of his *Britannia*, although, as Gibson stated,⁸⁴ it was his edition of Camden that added this inscription to Camden's original text. This red sandstone base (h. 0.685 m; w. 0.385 m; d. 0.27 m) has a relief of a libation-dish (*patera*) on its right side and a jug (*urceus*) on its left (FIG. 11). The top and bottom of the monument have been cut away and a socket cut into its rear side. As a result, it is not possible to be sure whether the base originally functioned as an altar (the more likely possibility) or whether it may have supported a statue. On the top surface towards the rear is a small round hole with remains of metal inside, while the rear side is roughly finished. In line 1, the letters TVN are ligatured, and in line 2, the letters VA.

Fortunae / Conserva/trici ° vac. / L(ucius) ° Senecia/^snius Mar/tius C3 = centurio ⊃ leg(ionis) / VI ° Vict(ricis) Civy-leaf ⊃

To Fortune the Preserver. Lucius Senecianus Martius, centurion of the Sixth Legion Victrix.

Set up by a centurion from the Sixth Legion Victrix, which was based in York, the dedication was found at the site of a Roman fort near Manchester. Senecianus Martius may have been in command of an auxiliary cohort there at the time. Currently on display on the first floor in Manchester University Museum, the base has experienced a variety of settings in the past. After its discovery in the seventeenth century, it was kept until c. 1770 in the gardens of Hulme Hall nearby, where it was seen by various visitors, including Martin Lister in 1683,

⁷⁶ *CIL* XIII, 6478; *CIL* III, 2804.

⁷⁷ Lucan, *Pharsalia* 1.446; Green 1984, 251–3, 359 D7; 1986b, esp. 65–7.

⁷⁸ Lysons 1810, 428.

⁷⁹ *AE* 2010, 1225.

⁸⁰ Green 1979, 346–7, 349, 363, no. 5, with figs 2–5.

⁸¹ Green 1984, 359.

⁸² AshLI 137 = Ashmolean AN1875.15 = *RIB* I², 575 (1995) = <http://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/575> [accessed 03/09/16]. Leigh 1700, vol. 3, 14 is mistaken in asserting that it was found in 1692, while Collinson 1791, 'Bath', 12 is equally mistaken in attributing it to Walcot, a suburb of Bath, although this is repeated in Gough's 1806 edition of Camden, vol. 1, 117.

⁸³ Selden 1629, 56, no. 4, printing the first two words only of the inscription, as if on a single line.

⁸⁴ Gibson 1695, 800.

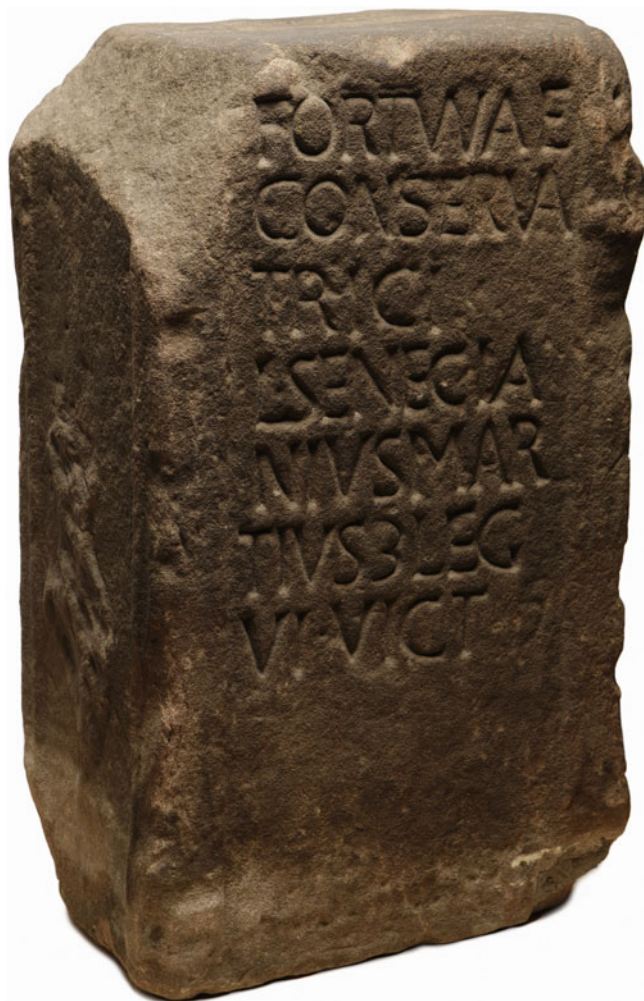


FIG. 11. Castlefield (Manchester), *RIB* I², 575 (AshLI 137, AN1875.15). (Courtesy of Manchester Museum © The University of Manchester)

who published an edition from autopsy shortly afterwards.⁸⁵ It was also seen there by Stukeley in *c.* 1730.⁸⁶ Sir Edward Moseley had bought Hulme in the reign of King William III (*r.* 1688) and bequeathed it to his daughter Anne in 1695, who had married Sir John Bland (1663–1715). They then lived at Hulme (sometimes ‘Holme’) beside the river Irwell. Hulme Hall’s gardens were noted in the eighteenth century for their display of antiquities, including local finds like this one. Hulme Hall was inherited by their son Sir John Bland, who sold it to George Lloyd in 1751.⁸⁷ Part of it was then sold in 1764 to the Duke of Bridgewater and displaced by his canal.

⁸⁵ Lister 1684, 457, fig. 8; it is also mentioned by Leigh 1700, vol. 3, 14; Horsley 1732, ch. 3, 30, ‘Lancashire’ no. 1.

⁸⁶ Watkin 1883, 106; Harland 1866, 54.

⁸⁷ Carlisle 1826, 49–50.

At some time *c.* 1770, the base was in the Leverian Museum. This was founded by Sir Ashton Lever, at first as a collection at his home Alkrington Hall near Manchester, and then bought by lottery in 1785 by a Mr Parkinson who transferred the collection to London. In 1806, the collection was dispersed, sold at auction.⁸⁸ According to Clayton,⁸⁹ the inscription was bought by Thomas Burgon, an assistant curator in the British Museum's coin room, who gave it to a relation named Johnson who lived at Cheshunt in Hertfordshire. He in turn bequeathed it to the original purchaser's son, John W. Burgon, who gave it to the Ashmolean in 1875, as the Rev. J.W. Burgon, Fellow of Oriel from 1846 and later Dean of Chichester from 1876.⁹⁰ The inscription was studied in the Ashmolean by Watkin in 1884 and by Haverfield.⁹¹ In 1931 it was on display in The Arundel Vestibule on the Ground Floor of the museum,⁹² but has now returned home to Manchester.

ROMANO-CELTIC TEMPLE AT WOODEATON

During the nineteenth century, reports were made of various ancient objects found clustered around the area of Woodeaton in Oxfordshire. In 1841, Hussey recorded 'a broken piece of a thin plate of metal stamped with the letters –EDO' as having been found along with many other objects, including coins, pieces of pottery and spear- and arrow-heads, on a hill overlooking the river Cherwell at Woodeaton near Islip.⁹³ This was later identified as a Romano-Celtic temple-site.⁹⁴ According to Kirk,⁹⁵ the plaque's whereabouts were unknown for some years during the nineteenth/early twentieth centuries, but it was bought from the sale of the contents of Woodeaton House in 1937 by Dr A.R. Bowen who gave it to the Ashmolean (FIG. 12). It consists of a fragment of the right side of a small thin plaque of copper alloy (h. 0.048 m; w. 0.07 m; d. less than 0.001 m), with the outline of a 'handle' in imitation of a *tabula ansata* (tablet with handles), broken to the left but intact to top, right and bottom. The margin of the plaque is decorated with vertical dashes all around, forming a decorative border. Small round nail-holes for affixing the plaque are visible to right, top right and top centre. Guiding lines are visible. The letters (h. 0.015–0.013 m) are imprinted into the metal surface. The complete text cannot be reconstructed, but it is probably a votive plaque, preserving the end of a personal name.⁹⁶

A second fragmentary metal plaque, broken on all sides (h. 0.02 m; w. 0.03 m)⁹⁷ preserves letters punched into its surface over three lines, with possible further traces above.

[---]XENOVI[---/---]NDVX *vac*[---?/---] + T[---]

It was found at Woodeaton during ploughing some years before 1953.⁹⁸ *RIB* states that it is 'now in the Ashmolean Museum', but we have been unable to identify its inventory number.

⁸⁸ Watkin 1883, 106; Williams 1909, 20–1.

⁸⁹ Clayton 1885, 119.

⁹⁰ Ashmolean MS. Ashmolean Museum Collection List of Additions 1875, no. 15.

⁹¹ Clayton 1885, 118; *EphEp* 9, 558.

⁹² Leeds 1931, 21.

⁹³ Hussey 1841, 38; AshLI 141 = Ashmolean AN1937.809 = *RIB* II.8, 2504.16 = <http://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/236> [accessed 21/06/16].

⁹⁴ Goodchild and Kirk 1954.

⁹⁵ Kirk 1949, 41; similarly, Taylor 1917, 102, n. 4 'the original seems to have vanished'.

⁹⁶ For a similar fragmentary votive plaque, see *AE* 1998, 824d.

⁹⁷ AshLI 172 (Ashmolean inventory number unknown) = *RIB* I, 237 = <http://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/237> [accessed 23/06/16].

⁹⁸ Wright 1954, 103 no. 2.



FIG. 12. Woodeaton, Oxon., *RIB* II.8, 2504.16 (AshLI 141, Ashmolean AN1937.809). (AshLI photograph, courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford)

These are now on display in the Rome Gallery, along with several other individual inscribed letters from the same site, which have been found over the years both during controlled excavation and casually by fieldwalkers.⁹⁹ The latter consist of individual letters of copper alloy (some complete and some fragmentary), elegantly cast and ridged, with nail-holes for fixing them to a surface. The following individual letters are all similar in style (FIG. 13):

- A (Ashmolean AN1935.426): nail-hole at bottom of letter stem; point and end of one stem broken; central ridge down each stem
- T (Ashmolean AN1935.428): h. 0.029 m; top part of the letter, with a nail-hole at top centre
- M (Ashmolean AN1952.565): h. 0.062 m; four nail-holes visible at top and bottom of outer stems of the letter; broken across second apex
- N (Ashmolean AN1952.566a): h. 0.062 m; four nail-holes visible at top and bottom of letter stems
- TI or IT (Ashmolean AN1952.567a), in ligature: h. 0.075 m; nail-holes at top and bottom of letter
- I (Ashmolean AN1952.568a): h. 0.031 m; a vertical stroke that could be upper or lower half of I, or upper half of L
- A horizontal stroke that could be base of E or L (Ashmolean AN1952.568b): h. 0.033 m; w. 0.012 m; a small nail-hole at one end
- Part of V (Ashmolean AN1954.704.a): h. 0.032 m
- Corner of an unidentifiable letter (Ashmolean AN1954.691): h. 0.016 m
- Part of a letter M, N, V or A (Ashmolean AN1963.1652): h. 0.021 m; w. 0.017 m; small nail-hole at the point
- A (Ashmolean AN1963.1553): h. 0.05 m; right side of the letter A

The height of the individual letters suggests that they may originally have belonged to a monumental inscription, perhaps the dedicatory inscription of the temple itself; however,

⁹⁹ AshLI 170 = Ashmolean AN1935.426, 428; 1952.565, 566a, 567a, 568a/b; 1963.1652, 1653; *RIB* I, 238a–d, 239a–e; *AE* 2001, 1280 (1963, 1553) = Tomlin and Hassall 2001, 389, no. 11. <http://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/238> [accessed 23/06/16]; <http://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/239> [accessed 23/06/16].



FIG. 13. Woodeaton, Oxon., *RIB* I, 238a–d, 239a–e (*AE* 2001, 1280, AshLI 170, Ashmolean AN1952.565 + 1952.566a). (© *Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford*)



FIG. 14. Woodeaton, Oxon. (unpublished, AshLI 171, Ashmolean AN1954.691). (© *Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford*)

Goodchild and Kirk suggest that they could have been ‘sold on the spot to enable visitors to set up their own votive inscriptions’,¹⁰⁰ although the other votives from the site consist of inscribed metal plaques. In addition, there is one further letter, which appears to be unpublished, a D which is different in style from the others, with a flat profile (FIG. 14).¹⁰¹ It is not known to which deity the temple was dedicated.¹⁰² The inscriptions probably date from the second half of the first or second century to judge from the dating of the temple structures, which are thought to have been constructed in the first century and later expanded.¹⁰³ Parallels for similar individual metal letters have been found elsewhere, including a sporadic find at Alchester in Oxfordshire, discovered in c. 1978 by metal-detector and presented to the Ashmolean by E. Houlihan.¹⁰⁴ It consists of a single letter V made of copper alloy (h. 0.058 m), with three nail-holes for affixing it to a surface.

These fragmentary inscriptions give an impression of individuals creating relationships with a deity via the written word in a rural location to the north of Oxfordshire. The potential sophistication of the literacy used to negotiate these relationships can be further illustrated by the fragmentary gold-leaf amulet, also found at Woodeaton temple (on loan to the Ashmolean), but probably dating from a rather later period (fourth or fifth centuries).¹⁰⁵ It bears a text in Latin, with additional magical characters repeated in order to enhance their efficacy, and an invocation *Adonae*, ‘Lord’.

Our last monumental inscription from the area suggests that writing may have spread further than the religious sphere and may have lasted beyond the lifetime of the temple itself (FIG. 15). Found in 1934, during ploughing at Woodeaton, it consists of an irregular-shaped block of local oolitic limestone (h. 0.54 m; w. 0.515 m; d. 0.16 m); roughly cut and roughly finished on all sides, broken at top and bottom.¹⁰⁶ The lettering is very uneven and poorly cut, and varies in height. In style, the letters resemble those of a graffito rather than a text that has been professionally cut:¹⁰⁷ d(is) [m(anibus)] / Dec(i)mus Malus[ius? ---]. ‘To the departed spirits: Dec(i)mus Malus[ius? ---]’. It is unclear, even with the aid of RTI, whether there are traces of letters between these two lines, which are quite far apart, and also beneath them, since the stone has scratches upon its surface. It is most likely to have been an epitaph, but the text is

¹⁰⁰ Goodchild and Kirk 1954, 28.

¹⁰¹ AshLI 171 = Ashmolean AN1954.691.

¹⁰² For further similar letters discovered at the site, see *AE* 1998, 824a–c; *AE* 2001, 1280; Ashmolean inv. 1954.691.

¹⁰³ Goodchild and Kirk 1954, 22–4.

¹⁰⁴ AshLI 174 = Ashmolean AN1998.39 = *AE* 2001, 1281; Tomlin and Hassall 2001, 388–9.

¹⁰⁵ *RIB* II.3, 2430.2; Kotansky 1994, 13–15, no. 3; Hassall and Tomlin 1996, 457, d.

¹⁰⁶ AshLI 139 = Ashmolean AN1896–1908, G.1203 = *RIB* I, 240 = <http://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/240> [accessed 21/12/15].

¹⁰⁷ cf. Harden 1939, 301.

too worn to assert much with confidence. If Malus[---] is a gentilician or family name, the most likely restoration is Malus[ius]. Another possibility, though, is that the text could be restored as ending in a filiation formula, as Malus[i f(i)lius].¹⁰⁸ A date from the third or fourth century has been posited, but it is unclear on what grounds.¹⁰⁹ The fact that the inscription is cut informally, in the style of a graffito, rather than being cut professionally by a stonemason indicates that literate modes of communication were not necessarily dependent upon being mediated by a specialist craftsman.



FIG. 15. Woodeaton, Oxon., *RIB* I, 240 (AshLI 139, Ashmolean AN1896-1908, G.1203). (*AshLI RTI image, courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford*)

THE MOST RECENT ROMANO-BRITISH ACCESSION

The museum has continued to add to its collection of Romano-British inscriptions in recent years, via the purchase of a dedication to Hercules, reported as found at Benwell (Tyne and Wear).¹¹⁰ The inscription consists of letters punched as dots onto the front face of a thin copper-alloy plaque

¹⁰⁸ EDH-HD069547 [last updated 17/03/15, Vanderbilt; accessed 21/12/15].

¹⁰⁹ Harden 1939, 301.

¹¹⁰ AshLI 157; Ashmolean AN2001.1; Tomlin and Hassall 2001, 392, no. 18, with photograph at pl. XVII; *AE* 2001, 1297. Currently on display in the Rome Gallery.

(*tabula ansata*), with nail-holes on each handle (h. 0.049 m; w. 0.071 m; d. 0.001 m) for hanging it up or fixing it to a wall. There is damage to the bottom edge. The letters (approx. h. 0.008–0.01 m) are centred on each line, while the lettering in line 3 encroaches onto the space of the handles:

deo / Hercul^ri / Marus trib(unus) / leg(ionis) XX fec(it).¹¹¹

To the god Hercules. Marus, tribune of the Twentieth Legion, set this up.

This dedication is made by an individual who was a tribune in the Twentieth Legion and so of equestrian status, who identifies himself by *cognomen* only. Tomlin and Hassall argue that the omission of the legion's honorific title, *Valeria Victrix*, suggests that this dedication may pre-date the granting of that title in A.D. 61 or 83. They also suggest that it would be usual for a legionary tribune to make such a dedication in his permanent headquarters, which in this case would be Colchester (*Camulodunum*). They accept, however, that it is also possible that the dedication might have been made while the legion was on active service in the north-east of England. Malone points out that the omission of the legion's title is not a secure means of dating the plaque, which might instead date from the second half of the first or second century.¹¹²

ROMANO-BRITISH MONUMENTAL INSCRIPTIONS IN THE ASHMOLEAN

This summary of the monumental Latin inscriptions from Britain on stone and metal in the Ashmolean shows how, despite the greater fame of the Arundel marbles, the Romano-British epigraphic collection, though often visually unimpressive in its fragmentary and worn state, has the potential to offer insights into the culture and society of Roman Britain as well as into the changing attitudes towards Romano-British antiquities from the 1600s onwards. We can see early on an appreciation of the monuments as decorative objects, to be displayed in gardens, whether at a house in central Chester, on an estate near Manchester, or in the 'garden of antiquities' outside the Sheldonian at Oxford. At the same time, there was much discussion about the texts and interpretations of some inscriptions taking place by exchange of letters among antiquarians. By the eighteenth century, however, many of the University's collection of Latin inscriptions had been transferred to the basement of the original Ashmolean Museum on Broad Street (now the Museum of the History of Science), as shown by the manuscript list of ancient marbles transferred in January 1888 from the (Old) Ashmolean Museum basement room to the marble rooms of the Randolph Building on Beaumont Street, which had been built alongside the University Galleries.¹¹³ During the first half of the twentieth century, therefore, it was the material property of the inscriptions that came to determine where they would be displayed, with the summary catalogue by E.T. Leeds from 1931 describing them as displayed in the Arundel Vestibule on the Ground Floor of the museum. Most recently, however, the incorporation of several of the inscriptions within displays in the Rome Gallery shows how thematic display — in this case illustrating aspects of Roman religions — offers the greatest chance of encouraging visitors to view the inscriptions both as objects and as texts. Others of the inscriptions have returned on loan to their places of origin, in Manchester, South Shields and London, where being able to place them within the context of regional history lends them more meaning.

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¹¹¹ HERCVLL appears in error.

¹¹² Malone 2006, 92, no. 10.

¹¹³ Ashmolean Museum Department of Antiquities MS. 'Marbles sent from Ashmolean Museum'.

ABBREVIATIONS

AE = *L'Année Épigraphique*, Paris (1888–)

AshLI = Ashmolean Latin Inscriptions Project

CIIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, I–XVII, Berlin (1863–)

EDCS = Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss / Slaby http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/epi.php?s_sprache=de

EphEp = *Ephemeris Epigraphica. Corporis Inscriptionum Latinarum Supplementum*, Rome/Berlin (1872–1913)

ILS = *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (ed. H. Dessau), Berlin (1892–1916)

*PIR*² = *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* (2nd edn), Leipzig/Berlin (1933–2015)

RIB I = R.G. Collingwood and R.P. Wright (eds), *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain. Volume I. Inscriptions on Stone*, Oxford (1965)

*RIB I*² = R.G. Collingwood and R.P. Wright (eds), *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain I, Inscriptions on Stone*, Oxford (1965); reprinted with *Addenda and corrigenda* by R.S.O. Tomlin, Stroud (1995)

RIB II.3 = S.S. Frere and R.S.O. Tomlin (eds), *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain. Volume II. Instrumentum Domesticum, Fascicule 3*, Stroud (1991)

RIB II.8 = S.S. Frere and R.S.O. Tomlin (eds), *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain. Volume II. Instrumentum Domesticum, Fascicule 8*, Stroud (1995)

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