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The Roman Fortress at Carpow, Perthshire: An Alternative Interpretation of the Gates and their Dedicatory Inscriptions

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ABSTRACT

The Roman fortress at Carpow, Perthshire, was excavated in 1961–62 and 1964–79. The gates of the fortress are the key to our understanding of its occupational history. The suggestion made here is that they were initially constructed in timber, at the same time as the associated turf rampart, but were soon replaced in stone specifically to support heavy dedication slabs set above them. A new arrangement of the surviving inscribed fragments at the East Gate is proposed, and new readings adopted, which confirm their traditional Severan dating. The Supplementary Material which includes detailed descriptions of the fragments and possible restorations is available at https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068113X19000138.

Keywords: Scotland; Carpow; Latin epigraphy; Roman legions; Roman forts; Septimius Severus

INTRODUCTION

The Roman fortress of Carpow, Perthshire, on the southern shore of the Firth of Tay, was the king-pin of the attempt by the Roman army to reoccupy and hold parts of Scotland in the late second or early third century A.D.[1] It is the largest known permanent military site north of Hadrian's Wall, except for the Flavian legionary fortress at Inchtuthil.

Carpow has long been associated with the campaigns conducted in Scotland by the Roman emperor Septimius Severus in A.D. 208–11.[2] However, support has accrued for dating the

[1] Frere and St Joseph 1983, 4; A.R. Birley 1988, 182; Frere 1999, 165; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 569.
[2] R.E. Birley 1963a; 1963b, 196; A.R. Birley 1988, 175; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 569.

construction of the fortress, and with it the dedicatory inscriptions above its East and South Gates, to the reign of the emperor Commodus who ruled from A.D. 180 to 192. The late John Casey argued for this from the early 1990s onwards, though his views did not appear in print until 2010.[3] Peter Warry suggested that the fortress was built early in Commodus' reign and held for an indeterminate period.[4] R.S.O. Tomlin likewise advocated a Commodan date on the basis of the style of the sculpture and lettering on the two inscribed slabs.[5] Numismatic evidence has favoured Severan occupation with some possibility of earlier activity, either in the years immediately preceding the imperial expedition or under the emperor Commodus.[6] More recently support has again been expressed for the traditional Severan date.[7]

The site was first recorded in the eighteenth century.[8] Aerial photography from the 1940s onwards revealed not only its outlines and some internal buildings, but also a temporary camp and a polygonal enclosure both seeming to predate it.[9] Excavations undertaken by R.E. Birley in 1961–62,[10] then by J.D. Leach and J.J. Wilkes in 1964–79,[11] established the area of the fortress at 11 ha (27.5 acres) within the inner ditch (FIG. 1). The rampart was of turf set, in places, on a clay bottoming, and there were two ditches. Stone-built gates on the north, east and south sides were investigated in 1964–70; a fourth gate, in the west side, can be presumed. The fortress faced east. A solidly-built headquarters (*principia*), a bath-house[12] and a granary were identified. Traces of timber buildings of both post-hole and foundation-trench construction were located, with wattle-and-daub walling.[13] In size Carpow falls into the category of 'vexillation fortresses'.[14] Both the Second and Sixth Legions were involved in its construction and may well have contributed to its garrison, together perhaps with other troops (see also below).[15] Use of the site by the Roman army was relatively brief and terminated in an orderly withdrawal.[16]

[3] Holmes 2003, 156; Casey 2010.
[4] Warry 2006, 68; 2010, 141.
[5] On *RIB* III, 3512 at p. 461; see also Tomlin 2017, 168.
[6] Holmes 1999, 531; 2003, 99; 2014.
[7] A.R. Birley 2009, 1013; 2011, 688; Hodgson 2014, 42.
[8] Crawford 1949, 58; R.E. Birley 1963b, 184.
[9] St Joseph 1969, 110; 1973, 220; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 486; Jones 2011, 162.
[10] R.E. Birley 1963a; 1963b.
[11] Wilkes 1971; Leach and Wilkes 1977 (interim statements); Dore and Wilkes 1999 (final report).
[12] Black 1993. This building was previously interpreted as the 'commander's residence' (R.E. Birley 1963b, 189; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 510).
[13] R.E. Birley 1963b, 193; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 515.
[14] For which see Frere and St Joseph 1974; 1983, 50.
[15] The north-east quarter contained six legionary-size timber-built barrack blocks (St Joseph 1973, 222, fig. 13). The large *principia* looked to be modelled on those found in legionary fortresses (R.E. Birley 1963b, 198; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 484). For discoveries of *lorica segmentata* at Carpow, body armour normally associated with legionaries, see Dore and Wilkes 1999, 553, no. 13. A segment of scale armour (*lorica squamata*) found in 1979 cannot be attributed to any particular branch of the Roman army (Coulston 1999, 566). For roof-tiles of the Sixth Legion stamped *B(ritannica) P(ia) F(idelis)*, see below, n. 34.
[16] R.E. Birley 1963b, 197; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 571. Similarly at Cramond, at the close of Severan use of that site (Holmes 2003, 96, 156).

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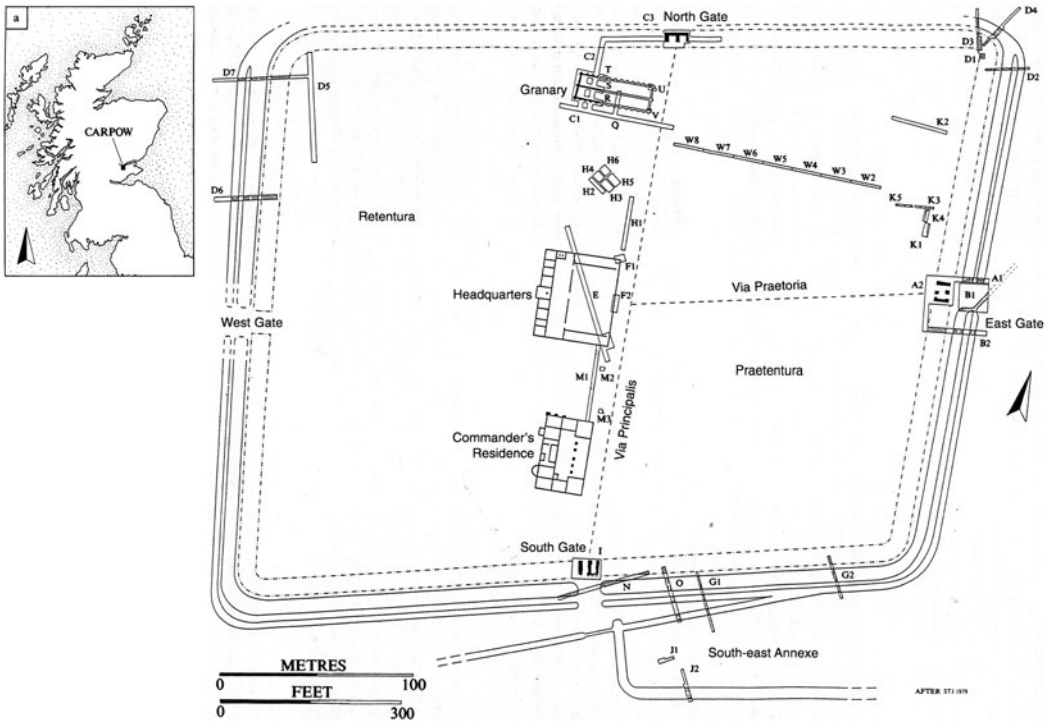

FIG. 1. Site plan of Carpow, showing results of excavations in 1961–62 and 1964–79. (*Reproduced from* Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot. *129 (1999), 482, illus. 1 and 491, illus. 5. Courtesy of Professor J.J. Wilkes*)

THE GATES AT CARPOW

The stone gates at Carpow were double-portal, so that we can envisage twin archways. There were many puzzling features. Indeed, so diverse were their ground-plans that it would be easy to think that they had been found by excavation at different sites (FIGS 2–4). The dimensions of the gates were all different, though approximating to Roman measurements.[17]

The South Gate served as the principal access point for the fortress's water supply carried in wooden pipes secured by iron collars, set in channels below the level of the road.[18] At the East Gate two drains, stone-lined and unlined, passed through the south and north passageways respectively (below).[19] Both can be seen on aerial photographs of the fortress's interior approaching the East Gate from the west.[20] No outgoing drains or incoming water-pipe channels passed through or under the North Gate, which lay on the sea-facing side of the fortress.

[17] 40 by 15 Roman feet (North Gate), 40 by 30 Roman feet (South Gate), 35 by 25 Roman feet (East Gate). On stone-built fort gateways, see Johnson 1983, 87; Bidwell *et al.* 1988.

[18] Dore and Wilkes 1999, 508, illus. 18, 557, illus. 49 nos 22–5. For the road surface *in situ* at the South Gate see Dore and Wilkes 1999, 509, illus. 18–19. For an aqueduct-channel arriving from the south, see R.E. Birley 1963b, 196; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 510, illus. 20.

[19] Dore and Wilkes 1999, 523 interpreted the unlined drain as a pipe-channel carrying water to the presumed harbour facilities on the adjacent river Tay; but their illus. 6 shows it terminating, like the stone-lined drain, in the nearby annexe ditch.

[20] Dore and Wilkes 1999, 518, illus. 28.

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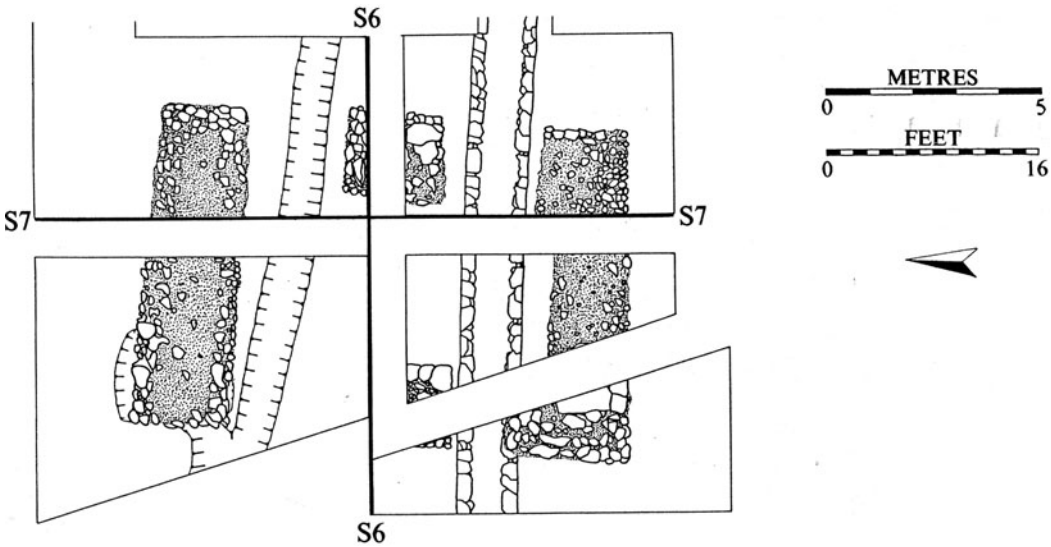

FIG. 2. Ground-plan of the East Gate. (*Reproduced from* Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot. *129 (1999), 504, illus. 14. Courtesy of Professor J.J. Wilkes*)

The stone gates examined in 1964–70 exhibited three very different ground-plans (FIGS 2–4). At the East Gate the piers differed in shape from one another.[21] There was no continuous central *spina* but two square foundations, the larger of which was surely designed to support the extra weight of the heavy slab placed above it (FIG. 2). The other was placed off-centre, which must have affected passage through the gate and influenced the design of the superstructure. A stone-lined drain, 0.45 m wide and up to 1.2 m deep, passed through the south passageway of the gate and cut the foundation trench for its southern pier, thus establishing the constructional sequence.[22] The stone-lined drain was found on excavation to have been infilled with road metalling and a large fragment of an inscribed slab (see below and Supplementary Material, Appendix 1), with a road surface laid on top. As this drain was not infilled when it was located elsewhere within the fortress, perhaps the intention at the East Gate was to improve the stability of the stone gate-structure.

At the North Gate (FIG. 3) the layout of the neatly-kerbed foundation cobbling and a surviving course of masonry *in situ* above it appeared to preclude any passage through it.[23] Indeed the excavators did not initially consider it to be a gate.[24] Post-pits midway across both passageways could have been part of a preceding timber structure; smaller post-holes, presumably supporting timber uprights, suggest a number of lean-to structures against the gate.

[21] For timber gateways at Roman forts, see Manning and Scott 1979; Johnson 1983, 78; Hobley 1988.

[22] The squared-off cobbling to one side of both the North and South Gates perhaps concealed earlier features.

[23] Dore and Wilkes 1999, 505. The pit into which the north pier of the East Gate collapsed seems too large to have been a post-pit from the timber phase.

[24] Dore and Wilkes 1999, 504, illus. 14. The East Gate at Carpow bears some resemblance to the simple ground-plan of the north-west gate of the fort at Bewcastle, Cumbria (Richmond 1938, 202, fig. 4; Austen 1991, 44; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 503).

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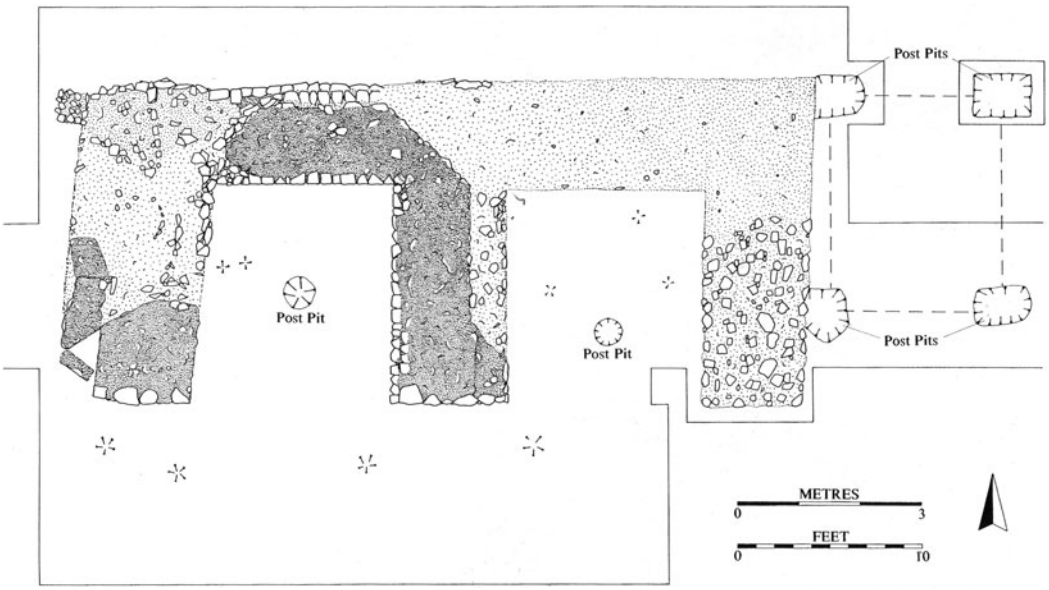

FIG. 3. Ground-plan of the North Gate. (*Reproduced from* Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot. *129 (1999), 506, illus. 16. Courtesy of Professor J.J. Wilkes*)

The foundation cobbling at the South Gate appeared casually laid and incomplete (FIG. 4); it similarly extended across the two gate-passageways. By contrast with the carefully designed North Gate, it gives the impression of ramshackle construction.[25] Yet these foundations seemingly supported a finely sculptured slab (see below). The squared-off masonry set midway over the west pier of the gate and over the *spina* could testify to the actual placing of the slab and suggest that not all the cobbling was eventually built on.

At the South Gate (FIG. 4) the ground level, to judge from the published plan and accompanying photograph,[26] had been lowered, perhaps to facilitate the laying down of the cobble foundations, thereby shaving away two incoming water-pipe channels in the east passageway, which presumably went out of use, to be replaced by the broader channel in the west passageway, which cut through the foundation cobbling.[27]

A number of timber features were found during excavation of the gates.[28] At the North Gate (FIG. 3) four post-pits were located east of the stone gate; they appeared to belong to a free-standing timber-framed tower, which measured 10 by 12 Roman feet. No matching post-pits were found west of the gate in the areas examined. At the South Gate (FIG. 4) post-pits were found next to the gate, suggesting a timber tower to either side.[29] Two post-pits 'alongside the south side of the East Gate' (FIG. 2), mentioned in the final report but not shown on the published plans, were perhaps part of a similar structure.[30] There was no indication at

[25] Dore and Wilkes 1999, 521, illus. 14, 31.
[26] Dore and Wilkes 1999, 506, illus. 16.
[27] Dore and Wilkes 1999, 490, 500.
[28] Dore and Wilkes 1999, 502 with illus. 18–19.
[29] Dore and Wilkes 1999, illus. 18–19.
[30] Dore and Wilkes 1999, 523 with illus. 18.

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FIG. 4. Ground-plan of the South Gate. (*Reproduced from* Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot. *129 (1999), 508, illus. 18. Courtesy of Professor J.J. Wilkes*)

Carpow that the timber posts had been forcibly removed at the end of their useful life. If the stone gates were inserted into existing timber structures solely to support the heavy slabs placed above them, as is suggested here, the building of flanking stone towers, whose absence has been remarked upon, may have been judged unnecessary.[31] At the North and South Gates the stone piers were wedged tight against the post-pits of the likely timber towers (see below), partly overlying them. The placing of the north pier of the East Gate above a pre-existing pit could suggest that its builders had no choice over where to place its foundations. The possibility that stone gates were flanked by timber towers seems unlikely.

[31] Wilkes 1971, 54; Leach and Wilkes 1977, 51; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 503. The fort gates at Hardknott and Bewcastle lacked flanking towers.

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At Carpow the insertion of deep foundation cobbling for the successor stone gateways could have removed traces of any timber predecessors, and account for irregularity and oddities in construction. As Carpow was much larger than a 'standard' fort built to house a regiment of auxiliaries, timber gate-structures of some complexity might be looked for; however it is hard to determine what their overall layout was. Flanking towers at timber gateways were generally integral with the gate-structures, not free-standing entities.

THE SLABS AT THE EAST AND SOUTH GATES

A particular highlight of the excavations was the discovery at the East Gate in 1964–65 of two sizeable fragments of a commemorative stone tablet, lying atop the road 'in front of the south passage' (FIGS 5–6).[32] The slab was presumably set into the outer facade of the gate-structure. A detailed description of all the surviving fragments can be found in the Supplementary Material, Appendix 1.

FIG. 5. Sculptured side-panel found at the East Gate in 1964 (*RIB* III, 3512(a)) (© *Dundee City Council*)

[32] Wright 1965, 223, no. 10; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 524, nos 1–2. *RIB* III, 3512 supersedes all previous assessments.

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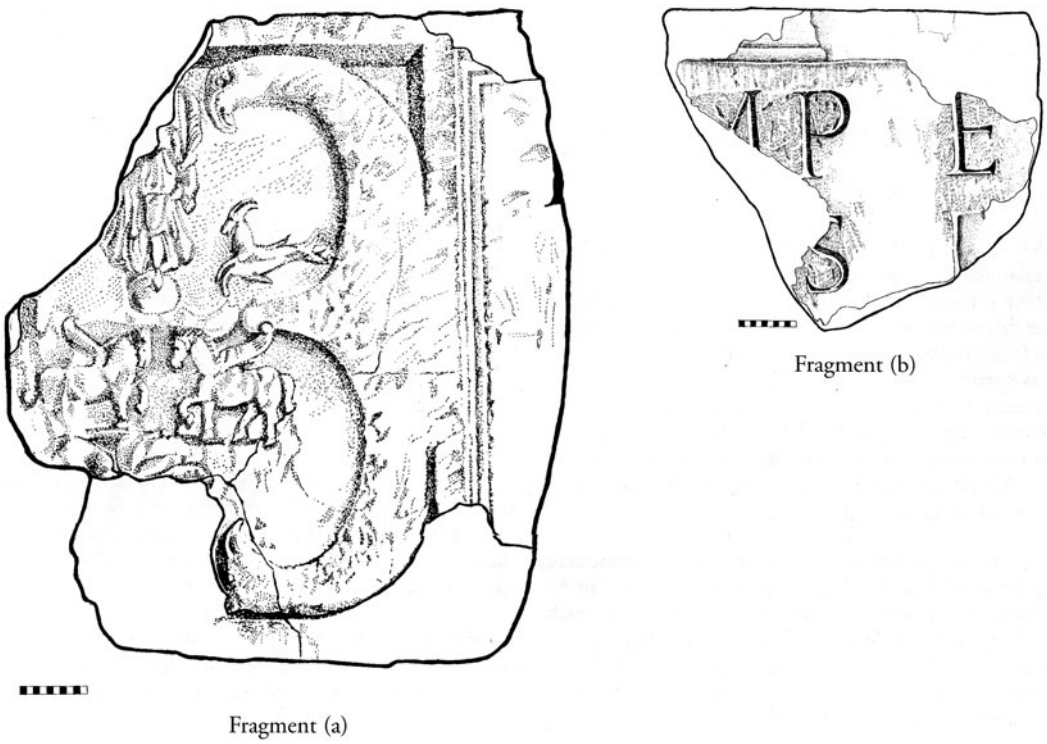

FIG. 6. The major fragments from the East Gate (*RIB* III 3512(a)–(b)), as drawn by R.D. Grasby. (*Reproduced by permission of the Administrators of the Haverfield Bequest*)

Publication was undertaken by R.P. Wright who interpreted the fragments as belonging to a commemorative slab specifically naming Caracalla who reigned as sole emperor from late A.D. 211 to 217.[33] Wright restored the first two lines of the inscription to read: *[I]mp(erator) e[t d(ominus) n(oster) M(arcus) Aur(elius) Antoninus / Piu]s F[elix ...]*; 'Emperor and Our Lord Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, Dutiful, Fortunate ...' (see FIG. 7). 'Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Pius' is not, as we might easily suppose, the emperor Antoninus Pius or his adopted son and successor Marcus Aurelius, but rather the elder son of the emperor Septimius Severus, whom we know as Caracalla.

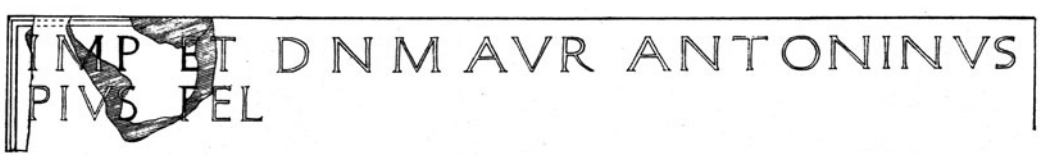

FIG. 7. Text of the East Gate slab as restored by R.P. Wright. (*Reproduced by permission of the Administrators of the Haverfield Bequest*)

[33] Wright 1964; 1965; 1966; cf. Dore and Wilkes 1999, 526.

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The left side-panel shows a winged Victory, a Capricorn and two Pegasi, sculptural imagery which presumably alludes to successful military campaigns. The presence of the Capricorn and Pegasi, emblems of the Second Augustan Legion, is a clear indicator of building work at the gate by its soldiers.

Presumably a matching right-hand side-panel bore more motifs, such as a kneeling captive or a military standard. Wright argued that the right-hand side-panel could have shown one or more emblems of the Sixth Legion which we know, from the survival of quantities of stamped roof-tiles at Carpow, was also active in building the fortress.[34] However, the appearance of the emblems of two legions on the same stone would be a rarity.

Wright's interpretation, that the inscription honoured Caracalla, seemed to conflict with the accepted chronology of the site at Carpow which most then believed was constructed in the aftermath of the invasion of Scotland by the emperor Septimius Severus and his forces in A.D. 208, and abandoned in early 211. Severus died at York in February 211 and, according to contemporary historians, his sons Caracalla and Geta who had been with him in Britain left immediately for Rome.[35]

Wright's view was soon queried by J.C. Mann and M.G. Jarrett who argued that a dedication involving more than one emperor (i.e. Severus and Caracalla, with Geta as *nobilissimus Caesar* (A.D. 208–9), or Severus, Caracalla and Geta (A.D. 209–11), or Caracalla and Geta (A.D. 211)) was possible on his readings;[36] but Wright later reiterated his view in favour of a dedication recording building work by Caracalla alone.[37] More recently both Peter Warry and the late John Casey have offered restorations naming the emperor Commodus who ruled from A.D. 180 to 192.[38] See Supplementary Material, Appendix 2.

In 1969–70 three fragments of a similarly substantial slab were found during excavation of the South Gate 'in the filling of a pipe-channel', one of those carrying the fortress's main water supply into the fortress (FIG. 8).[39] Presumably this means the curving channel which cut the South Gate's cobble foundations (see below). A full description of the fragments can be found in the Supplementary Material, Appendix 3.

SCULPTURAL DECORATION AND STYLE OF LETTERING

The left side-panel of the East Gate slab depicts a range of sculptural motifs familiar at Roman military installations in North Britain (FIGS 5–6); they call to mind the distance slabs from the Antonine Wall, presumed to have been carved in A.D. 142–43. The *pelta*-motif was in regular use by the Roman army in North Britain; bird-headed terminals were especially popular with the Second Legion.[40] The *pelta*-motif continued in use after the death of Antoninus, though increasingly 'devolved' and poorly executed, until the Severan period.[41] There are numerous continental examples of its use over a long period.[42]

[34] Wright 1971, 294. See *RIB* II.4.2460.71–4. The emblem or emblems of the Sixth Legion are unknown.

[35] Dio 78(77).1.1; Herodian 3.15.6. For the suggestion of a much longer occupation of the site, down to the early fourth century, see Bidwell and Speak 1994, 29; Frere 1999, 171, 339. This scenario was not supported by the results of the 1964–79 excavations.

[36] Mann and Jarrett 1967, 64; cf. Jarrett and Mann 1970, 201. For the date of Geta's murder, which can be placed late in A.D. 211, see Barnes 1968, 524; Birley 2005, 207.

[37] Wright 1971; 1974.

[38] Warry 2006, 68; cf. Warry 2010, 141; Casey 2010, 233.

[39] Wright and Hassall 1971, 292, no. 15; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 528, nos 9–11; *RIB* III, 3514 (a)–(c). Cf. Keppie and Arnold 1984, no. 172.

[40] Thompson 1968; Phillips 1974; Keppie 1998, 62.

[41] See *RIB* 658, 746, 980 with *RIB* I *Addenda*, p. 777.

[42] Hock 1922; Thompson 1968, 52.

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FIG. 8. Sculptured side-panel found at the South Gate in 1969 (*RIB* III, 3514(a)) (© *Dundee City Council*)

The slab at the South Gate was provisionally assigned by Wright and Hassall to the Second Legion also,[43] but the difference in the style of carving should indicate that it was not the work of the same craftsman as at the East Gate, and could therefore commemorate building work by a separate detachment or another legion. The *pelta*-motif on the South Gate slab (FIG. 8) is carved with plumage which recalls a distance slab of the Sixth Legion.[44] Perhaps the vine-leaf with grape-cluster was a 'signature' of the stonemason.[45]

The carving on the two slabs from Carpow, especially that on the slab from the South Gate, is superior in quality to much of the known relief sculpture from the military zone of Roman Britain. The carving on the distance slabs from the Antonine Wall is much admired, but in fact the quality varies.[46] On the other hand, identifying Severan-period relief sculpture in Britain is a difficult task, in the absence of datable contexts. The relief sculpture of Brigantia found at Birrens, Dumfriesshire, has been adjudged Severan,[47] but the fort there appears not to have been occupied at that time.[48] Professor Martin Henig advises me that, in his view, a number of

[43] Wright and Hassall 1971, 292, no. 15.
[44] *RIB* 2173; Keppie and Arnold 1984, no. 145.
[45] Grape-clusters held by winged Cupids on the Antonine Wall distance slabs were perhaps intended as symbols of fertility or fruitfulness (Keppie 1979, nos 10, 16; 1998, nos 8, 15 with discussion at p. 64). Note the double-axes in a similar position on a dedication slab of the Second Legion at Corbridge (*RIB* 1148); their significance is discussed by Phillips 1977, 33, no. 85.
[46] Keppie 1979; 1998, 52.
[47] *RIB* 2091. See Toynbee 1962, 157, no. 80; Henig 1984, 210 with fig. 103. For Severan-period sculpture in provincial contexts see Kleiner 1992, 340; Newby 2007, 211.
[48] Robertson 1975, 286. But see Birley 2001, 18 for a suggested Severan reoccupation at Birrens.

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stylistic features could favour, or at least not preclude, a Severan date for the sculptured panels at Carpow.

Given that so few letters survive on the slabs at Carpow, we can make only limited comments about their style and date. The lettering on the East Gate slab is deeply cut, equal in quality to many monuments from Rome or from the cities of Roman North Africa. Part of a single letter A is preserved on one of the fragments at the South Gate (see Supplementary Material, Appendix 3); the cutting is broader and shallower than the lettering at the East Gate. By contrast with the many surviving Antonine-period slabs, the limited number of datable Severan inscriptions erected by legionaries in North Britain can on occasion exhibit a good standard, but they still fall short of the quality which can be found in the Antonine period.[49]

REPOSITIONING THE MAJOR FRAGMENTS FROM THE EAST GATE

In publishing the inscription R.P. Wright made a basic assumption, which I believe has gone unchallenged by subsequent commentators, that fragments *RIB* III, 3512(a) and 3512(b) were set close together, so that the first line of the text began [I]MP E[. . ., i.e. the first word was a grammatical form of the title *imperator* (see FIG. 7).[50] The surviving letters in line 2 were seen by him as preserving parts of two imperial titles, [PIV]S and F[ELIX]. The nominative case of the restored word *Pius* in line 2 seemed to demonstrate that the nominative *imp*(*erator*) was to be read in line 1 (see above), in preference to the dative *imperatori*, making the emperor the subject of the sentence rather than its dedicatee. Wright expanded E in line 1 to ET ('and'). Indeed, as he noted, no other restoration seems likely. He went on to suggest, on Sir Ian Richmond's authority, that the connective ET could have been followed by the abbreviation D N (*dominus noster*), 'Our Lord'.[51]

In the early Empire, building inscriptions naming an emperor regularly began with the abbreviations IMP CAES (for the titles *imperator Caesar* (nominative case) or *imperatori Caesari* (dative case)) followed by the family names and titles of the incumbent. From the middle of the second century other ways of referring to an emperor were being introduced, regularly involving the abbreviation D N (*dominus noster*). The earliest epigraphic use of the word-sequence *dominus noster imperator* can be dated to A.D. 155,[52] and of *imperator dominus noster* to the Severan period.[53] There is no need of a connective '*et*'.

The designation IMP ET D N (*imperator et dominus noster*) appeared to be unique, as Wright admitted. He could only argue that unfamiliarity with changing fashions in describing emperors' titulature, during a transitional phase between styles, resulted in a superfluous '*et*'.[54] More significantly, the opening sequence IMP CAES remained the standard formulation on building records during and after the reign of Severus.

However, whichever dating is preferred, I can find no compelling reason to place the two major surviving fragments of the East Gate slab in close juxtaposition.[55] Fragment *RIB* III, 3512(a)

[49] Perhaps *RIB* 1151 (a Severan dedication at Corbridge marking construction of a granary) can be cited, on which see Hodgson 2008, 70. From a quite different part of the Empire, a series of finely carved slabs at Bu Njem, Libya, erected in A.D. 201 over the fort's gateways by the Third Augustan Legion, belies their Severan date (*IRT* 914–916 with pl. xi; *AE* 1976, 697. *IRT* 2009 has photographs of all four slabs). The style of lettering on another slab at Bu Njem, erected by the same legion at much the same date (*IRT* 913 with pl. xi), is much more typical of the Severan period.

[50] Wright 1964; 1971; 1974.

[51] Wright 1964, 203.

[52] *CIL* VI 2120 = *ILS* 8380. Most examples date from the fourth century.

[53] e.g. *ILS* 8914.

[54] Wright 1964, 204; 1971, 295; 1974, 291.

[55] The present writer's doubts are of long standing; see Keppie 2000, 33.

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preserves the upright stroke of an initial letter (see above). This may indeed be I (of the abbreviation IMP). However, to me it seems just as likely that Fragment 3512(b) preserves some letters from a quite different part of the text, in my view (see below) close to the ends of its first two lines.

The upper line on Fragment *RIB* III, 3512(b) could well read IMP ET but I consider ET as foreshadowing either more imperial titles or a reference to a separate personage named in line 2.[56] Seen in this light it is tempting to restore the second surviving letter of line 2 as E (rather than F),[57] again forming part of the word ET, with the preceding letter forming the end of an abbreviation such as [PROCO]S for *proconsul* (see below). The ET here, if close to the end of line 2, could be a connective preceding the titles of another person who is named in line 3. A survey of inscriptions which include the word ET indicates that it often serves as a link between named individuals. The connective ET regularly occurs at the ends of lines or at the beginnings of lines, incidentally demonstrating forethought in the laying out of texts.

On the well-known Arch of Severus in the Forum at Rome, erected by the Senate and People jointly to Severus, Caracalla and Geta in A.D. 203 (FIG. 9), the first three lines of the text, as originally inscribed, all ended in ET.[58] In line 1 of that text, the word ET linked elements of Severus' own titulature, in line 2 it served to presage the names and titles of his elder son Caracalla, and in line 3 (as originally inscribed) the names and titles of the younger son, Geta.

FIG. 9. The Arch of Septimius Severus in the Forum at Rome, south façade. The inscription was altered in A.D. 211 to remove the names and titles of Severus' younger son, Geta. (*Photo: Margaret J. Robb*)

However, if Wright's restoration of the Carpow text is dismissed as implausible, little is gained if an equally unlikely restoration is offered here. The particular challenge is finding a suitable expansion for [I]MP in line 1, if these letters appear, as is proposed, towards the end of the line. Assuming for the moment that [I]MP is an abbreviation for *imperator* or *imperatori*, a quite narrow range of possibilities, among epithets and titles with which emperors were honoured, includes *invictus imperator*, 'unconquered emperor',[59] and *optimus imperator*, 'best of emperors'.[60]

[56] For the sequence *imp. et* where the *et* introduces another emperor's name, see *ILS* 419 with Tomlin in *RIB* III, p. 461.

[57] A possibility allowed for by Wright (1964, 203; 1974, 290).

[58] *ILS* 425, on which see Brilliant 1967; 1993; Kleiner 1992, 329. For an improved reading of the text see *CIL* VI, fasc. 8.2, p. 4318.

[59] *ILS* 419, 421.

[60] *ILS* 2666a, 5891, 6295; *RIB* 1329. An alternative would be to suppose an inverse order, e.g. XI IMP (instead of the normal IMP XI) to indicate the number of imperial salutations (see *RIB* 1147, 1148 for partial parallels); but this is rare.

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On the other hand, we might wonder whether IMP is abbreviated not from *imperator* but from *imperium* (i.e. 'power', 'empire'), and forms part of the phrase *propagator imperii*, 'enlarger of empire'. Emperors such as Augustus, Claudius and Trajan had enlarged the Empire beyond its previous limits, and would with good reason have merited the title *propagator imperii*, but it is not attested for them. The first recorded epigraphic occurrence of the title comes surprisingly late, in A.D. 166 with reference to the eastern campaigns of Lucius Verus, then joint emperor with Marcus Aurelius.[61] It also occurs on a medallion issued jointly by Marcus Aurelius and Commodus in A.D. 178–80.[62] There appears to be no record of its use by Commodus during his own reign. The title can be written out in full, or is sometimes abbreviated to PROPAG IMP.

The title *propagator imperii* is attested epigraphically above all for Septimius Severus.[63] Caracalla too can be so described, when co-emperor with his father, but also as sole emperor from A.D. 211.[64] Thereafter the title is found only occasionally, before coming back into regular use under Constantine, his sons and successors in the early fourth century. The designation *propagator imperii*, when used to describe Septimius Severus, is found almost exclusively in his home province of Africa.[65] There is one example from *Parentium* (Poreč) in modern Croatia.[66] The title is unattested in Britain;[67] this lack may be due principally to the smallness of the surviving epigraphic corpus. A reference to Severus as *propagator imperii* in north Britain, where his campaigns had substantially extended the geographical extent of the province, and particularly at Carpow where Severus or Caracalla, or more probably both, had spent time, would be particularly apt.[68] Their northwards advance beyond the Cheviots and their military victories had resulted in a sizeable extension to the Empire, in recognition of which both, together with the younger son Geta, adopted the titles *Britannicus Maximus* early in A.D. 210, presumably reflecting victories won during the previous summer's campaign season.[69]

In line 2 of the Carpow inscription Wright and subsequent commentators read [Piu]s F[elix], a combination of titles used by Commodus, Caracalla and many of their successors.[70] However, as already stated, I suggest that the first word was [PROCO]S, the standard epigraphic abbreviation for *proconsul*. The emperor had always been notionally *proconsul* of the provinces he had taken under his control, matching the title used by the governors despatched by the Senate to provinces which remained nominally within its ambit. Epigraphically the title *proconsul* is attested for emperors from Augustus onwards. It is not found in use by Commodus,[71] but Severus and Caracalla both employed it.

RESTORING THE EAST GATE INSCRIPTION

The suggestion offered above is that both lines 1 and 2 of the inscription on the East Gate slab ended in *et*, and that this word introduced either further imperial titles or the name or names of

[61] *CIL* XIV 106.
[62] A.R. Birley 1974, 297.
[63] Instinsky 1942, 212; A.R. Birley 1974.
[64] *AE* 2010, 324b.
[65] A.R. Birley 1974; see also Le Bohec 1989, 398.
[66] *Inscr.Ital*. x.2.6.
[67] On *RIB* 1235 (Risingham) line 4 was originally restored as [PROPAG IMPE]RII, but was afterwards reread as [PATRI PAT]RIE (i.e. *patri patriae*).
[68] Geta was, we are told, left to gain administrative experience overseeing southern Britain (Herodian 3.14.9 with A.R. Birley 2005, 200).
[69] Heil 2003.
[70] For titles borne by Caracalla and Geta see Mastino 1981.
[71] Professor A.R. Birley advises me that the title *proconsul* was used by an emperor at this time only when he was travelling outside Italy or on campaign. Commodus, after his accession and return to Rome in A.D. 180, never left Italy again.

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other emperors. We need to consider therefore whether it named Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (joint emperors A.D. 161–69); or Marcus Aurelius and Commodus (joint emperors A.D. 176–80); or Severus and Caracalla (A.D. 198–209), with Geta as *nobilissimus Caesar*; or Severus, Caracalla and Geta (A.D. 209–11); or Caracalla and Geta (A.D. 211). If three individuals are named, then we are restricted to Severus, Caracalla and Geta, and a date-range of A.D. 208–11. Further, if the title *propagator imperii* is correctly restored in line 1 (see above), we have a firm pointer to the reigns of Septimius Severus or Caracalla rather than earlier emperors. So few letters survive that certainty is unattainable. Three possible restorations are considered in the Supplementary Material, Appendix 4. The likeliest (Appendix 4, no. 2) commemorated the emperor Severus, with his titles spread over two lines. All three restorations require an exceptionally elongated slab, but the heights of the few surviving letters serve to indicate its overall monumentality.

When complete, the slabs above the East and South Gates at Carpow must have been among the most substantial erected at a military site in Roman Britain, second only to, if indeed not surpassing in length, the fragmentary slab from Risingham, Northumberland, which was set into the wall of that fort's *principia* during the reign of Caracalla.[72]

A.R. Birley, who has remained consistently in favour of a Severan date for the occupation of Carpow, raised the possibility of three separate inscriptions over three of the gates, one honouring each of Severus, Caracalla and Geta, so allowing space for their full imperial titles.[73] However I prefer to suppose that the two (or more) inscriptions had the same or similar texts, potentially differing only in the name(s) of the legion(s) responsible.

DISCUSSION

Despite many seasons of excavation at Carpow, in the years between 1961 and 1979, a total of some six months' work in all, evidence which would allow close dating of its construction and occupational history has always been in short supply. The quantity of pottery and small finds recovered was small, testifying perhaps to a short occupation, or a careful tidying up at its end, or both.

A number of different possibilities can be considered when attempting to reconcile the archaeological, numismatic, historical and epigraphic evidence. Before the site at Carpow was subject to any archaeological excavation, a Flavian (i.e. first-century) date had been advocated.[74] A few coins of this period were recovered during excavation,[75] but no pottery.

Given the 'Antonine' date (i.e. between A.D. 138 and 192) advocated by R.S.O. Tomlin for the sculptural fragments and letter-forms from the East and South Gates (see above), it could be tempting to assign to Carpow a date contemporary with the Antonine Wall. If put on a map of Antonine Scotland, the site seems appropriate as an advanced base which effectively anchored and protected the line of otherwise exposed forts extending northwards into Perthshire.[76] However, no archaeological evidence from the site exists in favour of such a dating. Another option was Commodan occupation (A.D. 180–92), favoured by Tomlin and others (see above), followed by abandonment, then re-use at the time of the Severan campaigns (A.D. 208–11). Commodus won victories in Britain through his legate Ulpius Marcellus, and in A.D. 184 took

[72] Richmond 1940, 135, no 19; *RIB* 1235.
[73] A.R. Birley 2005, 202; 2009, 1013; cf. Casey 2010, 226.
[74] R.E. Birley 1963b, 186; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 483.
[75] Holmes 1999, 532, nos 3–5.
[76] See R.E. Birley 1963a; 1963b, 186.

the title *Britannicus Maximus*.[77] The location of these campaigns remains unknown, but could easily have involved northern Britain beyond Hadrian's Wall.

A Severan date for the fortress at Carpow was embraced in the final reports on the excavations undertaken in 1961–62 and 1964–79, but it was accepted that the pottery could allow a wider date-range.[78] Stratified coins from the site suggest that the fortress was given up at the close of a Severan occupation, not Antonine or Commodan.[79] A recent survey of the pottery at Carpow, comparing it to ceramic material from South Shields and Corbridge, supply bases for the imperial expedition of A.D. 208–11, also favoured the Severan dating.[80]

The results of excavations at the gates in 1964–70 could be understood as furnishing evidence of two periods, in timber and then in stone (see above). This was a scenario advanced by the excavators in their interim statements,[81] but discarded by the time the final report came to be written.[82] Timber-built gates were the norm at first-century forts, and are regularly found on the line of the Antonine Wall and elsewhere in Scotland. The use of timber is rare in later contexts.[83]

If the stone phase at the gates and the dedicatory inscriptions are Severan, should we be thinking of an earlier foundation date for the fortress as a whole? However nothing suggests a meaningful time-lapse between the suggested timber and stone phases. Initial construction of the fortress could therefore belong in the years A.D. 208–9, and the stone gates in A.D. 210–11.

For a military site of this size, appearing to belong in the late second or early third century, a perimeter wall of stone rather than a turf rampart might have been expected, perhaps with an earthen or clay bank behind. Yet in the later second century, many towns in southern Britain were being fortified with earthen banks.[84]

One option might be that the site was initially conceived of as a 'campaign base' where troops over-wintered, without the expectation of permanency.[85] The arrival on-site of the emperor Severus himself could have prompted a rethink, leading to the erection of stone gates, thus allowing suitable commemoration of this outpost of Roman power at the edge of the known world. In this case the inscribed slabs would testify to this second phase and not to the fortress's initial construction. The solidity of the stone *principia* and of the baths could indicate that they are contemporary with the stone phase at the gates; however, no evidence was found of preceding structures.

The diversity of their ground-plans suggests that the three stone gates at Carpow were the work of three separate detachments, each tasked with creating a solid structure to support the heavy dedication slabs, but achieving that end in different ways. As we know that at least three gates were (re)constructed in stone, there should have been at least three inscribed slabs, more probably four.

There were indications of secondary phases at two of the stone gates. At the East Gate (FIG. 2), the stone-lined drain was a later feature (see above), into which an inscribed stone block was then tipped and a road surface laid over it (see Supplementary Material, Appendix 1). At the South Gate one fragment of an inscribed slab ended up in a debris-filled pipe-channel;[86] the final gate structure, to judge from its foundations, was poorly finished off (FIG. 4). If more than a single

[77] A.R. Birley 2005, 167.
[78] R.E. Birley 1963b; Bidwell and Speak 1994, 31; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 484, 540.
[79] Holmes 1999, nos 12, 14, 15, 23, 28, 29, 30.
[80] Hodgson 2014, 43. The Second Legion long maintained a presence at Corbridge, including in the Severan period (Hodgson 2008, 75).
[81] Wilkes 1971, 54; Leach and Wilkes 1977, 51; cf. Wright 1974, 289.
[82] Dore and Wilkes 1999, 571.
[83] See Hanson 1982.
[84] Wacher 1974, 75; Frere 1984; 1999, 242.
[85] See Dobson 2009, 28 for sites of this sort.
[86] Wilson 1971, 248. For coins found among debris at or near the South Gate, see Holmes 1999, 12, 14, 23, 29.

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phase is thus indicated at the gates, we might want to consider whether occupation at Carpow extended over a longer time-period, but the archaeological assemblage does not support this.[87]

By its very geographical position, the fortress at Carpow in the Severan period looks to be an isolated outpost, supported potentially only by the fort and supply base at Cramond on the river Forth.[88] No evidence of a natural or man-made harbour at Carpow has ever been found in the vicinity of the fortress, to support the prevalent view that it was supplied by sea.[89] Perhaps the intention, never realised, was to build, or rebuild, many other forts as part of a full-scale reoccupation of central and southern Scotland.

Maintaining a site so far north in Britain was unrealistic once the Severan expeditionary force withdrew. The garrison of Roman Britain was surely overstretched, as it had been in the Antonine period.[90] What is clear is that there was lavish commemoration on a monumental scale over at least two gates by highly competent legionary stonemasons perhaps travelling in the emperors' entourage, or identified in the accompanying military force, craftsmen well versed in the traditional styles.[91]

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

For Supplementary Material for this article please visit https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068113X19000138.

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[87] For a proposal, based on numismatic evidence, that occupation at Carpow began in or soon after A.D. 200, see Holmes 1999, 532; 2003, 99; 2014, 151.
[88] Holmes 2003, 99, 156; Hunter 2004, 270, fig. 7.
[89] Richmond 1958, 143; R.E. Birley 1963a, 132; Dore and Wilkes 1999, 483, 570.
[90] Keppie 2009.
[91] The monumentality of the stone gateway which gave access to the east annexe of the fort at Cramond (Hunter 2004, 270, fig. 7) could provide a parallel. The attractive suggestion has recently been made that it was constructed to commemorate the arrival there of the emperor Severus in A.D. 208 or later (Cook *et al*. 2017, 65).

EPIGRAPHIC CORPORA

AE	*L'Année Epigraphique*, Paris, 1888 onwards
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin, 1873 onwards
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, Berlin, 1892–1906
Inscr.Ital.	*Inscriptiones Italiae*, Rome, 1931 onwards
IRT	*The Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania*, Rome/London, 1952 (electronic reprint (2009) with many added photographs)
RIB	*The Roman Inscriptions of Britain, Volume 1. Inscriptions on Stone*, Oxford, 1965
RIB I *Addenda*	*The Roman Inscriptions of Britain, Volume 1. Inscriptions on Stone. Addenda and Corrigenda by R.S.O. Tomlin*, Stroud, 1995
RIB II	*The Roman Inscriptions of Britain, Volume 2. Instrumentum Domesticum*, Stroud, 1990–95
RIB III	*The Roman Inscriptions of Britain, Volume 3. Inscriptions on Stone found or notified between 1 January 1955 and 31 December 2006*, Oxford, 2009

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