

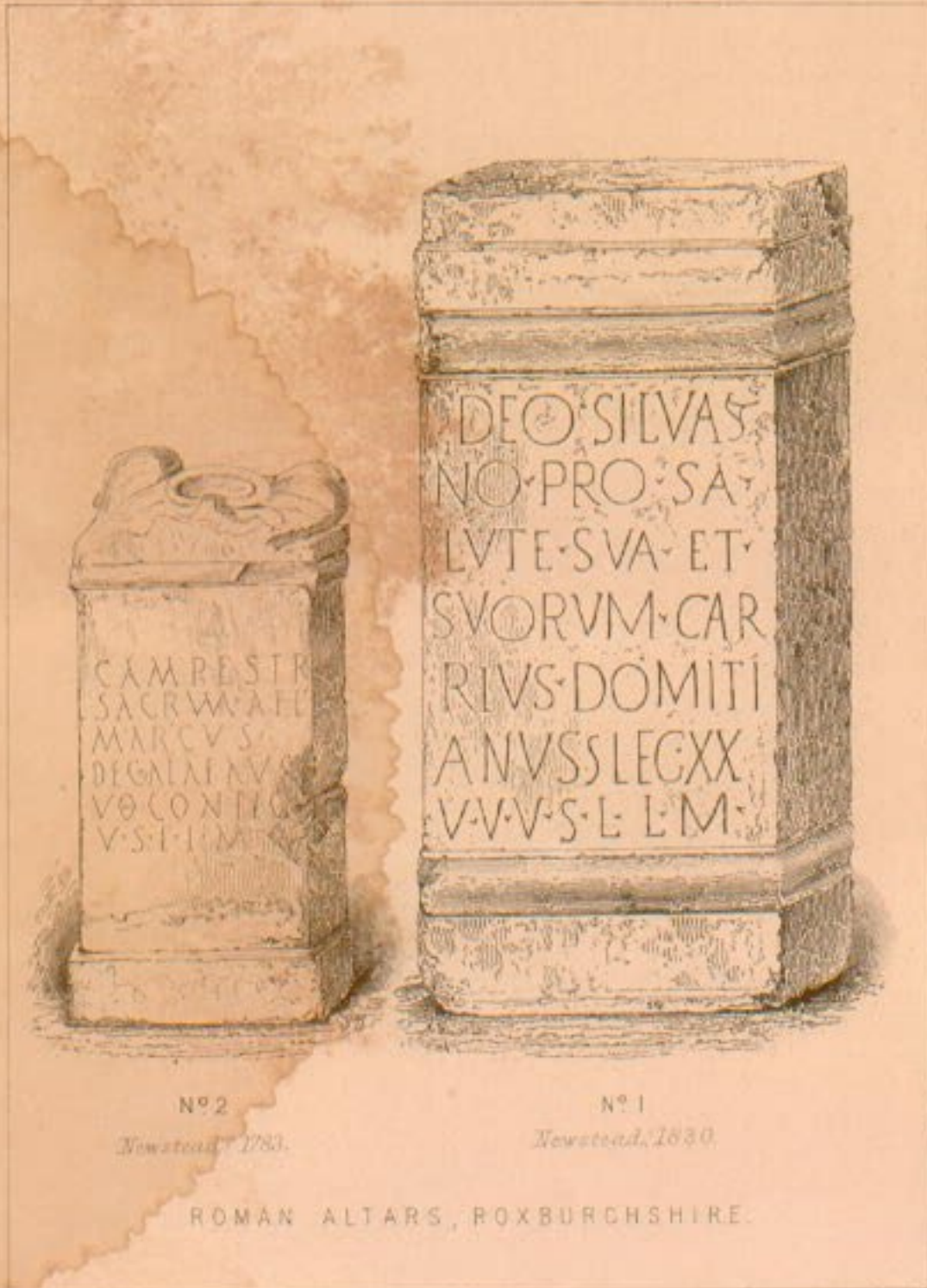
ROMAN ANTIQUITIES FOUND AT NEWSTEAD, ROXBURGHSHIRE.

The next communication, by Dr John Alex. Smith, formed the third of a series of papers on Roman Antiquities found at various times in the Red Abbeystead and adjoining fields, to the east of the village of Newstead, Roxburghshire.¹ After shewing that no evidence can be traced of any ecclesiastical foundation having occupied the site of the so-called Red Abbeystead, Dr Smith proceeded to consider the question of the true site of the Trimontium of Ptolemy being in the neighbourhood of the Eildon Hills, as follows :—

“The reasoning of those who follow General Roy, in his view of Trimontium being somewhere near the Eildon hills, is, in my opinion, tolerably convincing. The isolated and prominent position which they occupy in the view from the south, and their distinctly triple character, are as accurately described by the name Trimontium as could well be (if we consider it as meaning *the town of the triple mountain, Colonia Trimontium.*) Chalmers (*Caledonia*, vol. i., p. 60) takes the opposite view, of Trimontium being at Birrenswark Hill in Annandale; and declares that the prefix of the name is plainly derived from the British word *Tre*, a town; but he offers no explanation of the *montium*! If we examine Ptolemy’s well-known map of Britain, which, notwithstanding the great general error of twisting Scotland to the east, instead of its lying north and south, is on the whole wonderfully correct in its details, we find Trimontium situated near, or on a river, which empties itself into the *German Ocean*; this river he calls the *Vedra*. If we suppose this the *Tweed*, as in all probability it is, being the only large river at that part of the map, and the second river of any size from the Bodotria estuarium or Firth of Forth (the first being the Tyne), then his only mistake is that of making the site of the town further from the sea than it ought to have been. We must remember also that questions of minute inland distances were very apt to be involved in considerable obscurity, when the only authorities must have been the historians of the *British Campaigns*.”

But whether or not *Trimontium* may have been the name of this station, the fact of one, if not two great Roman roads running directly to the base of the Eildons, increases the probability of some station having been erected close by. General Roy, who visited the district in 1769–71, admits that all the remains he had been able to find, consisted merely of some “imperfect traces of an entrenchment perceived at the village of Eildon, situated under the eastern skirt of the hills.” Since then, however, many Roman remains,

¹ “Notices of various discoveries of Roman remains at the Red Abbeystead, near the village of Newstead, Roxburghshire, with an endeavour to localise the site of Trimontium in the neighbourhood of the Eildon Hills.” Read May 21, 1850.



Nº 2

Newstead, 1783.

Nº 1

Newstead, 1830.

ROMAN ALTARS, ROXBURCHSHIRE.

foundations of buildings, pieces of Samian ware, amphoræ, and other pottery, tiles of red clay, querns, and stones retaining the characteristic checkered markings of the Roman axe, occurring on the Red Abbeystead, and other fields in the vicinity of the village of Newstead, serve to shew that the latter is the true site of the old Roman station near the Eildon Hills. Some thirty years since, the tenant of the Well-meadow, or field immediately to the west of the Red Abbeystead, excavated a portion of a regular causewayed roadway running nearly N. and S. ; and among its materials was a stone having a wild boar—the well-known symbol of the Twentieth Legion—sculptured on it in bold relief.

“ *The Roman Votive Altar*, dedicated to the forest deity Silvanus, by a centurion of the Twentieth Legion, which is generally described as having been discovered at Eildon,—where, so far as I am aware, no Roman remains of any description have been met with except those alluded to by General Roy,—was in reality found on the 15th of January 1830, in digging a drain, about three feet below the surface, in a field immediately to the south of the Red Abbeystead. The height of the Altar, Plate I., fig. 1, is 43 inches, breadth 18 inches, and thickness 12 inches. It is formed of a block of yellowish sandstone, with an ogee moulding round the top, and a similar one *reversed* round its base. This moulding is continued round three of its sides, leaving the altar as usual plain on the back, as if to stand against a wall. The only published figure of this altar is an inaccurate one in Stuart’s ‘*Caledonia Romana*.’ The inscription, which is distinctly legible on the altar, as shewn on the accompanying engraving, Plate I., has been thus extended:—*DEO SILVANO, PRO SALUTE SUA ET SUORUM, CARRIUS DOMITIANUS, CENTURIO LEGIONIS VICESIMÆ VALENTIS VICTRICIS, VOTUM SOLVIT LIBENTISSIME MERITO*. The altar is in the possession of Thomas Tod, Esq., of Drygrange, the proprietor of these fields.”



Towards the close of 1846, excavations carried on a little to the south-east of Newstead, during the construction of the Hawick branch of the North British Railway, brought to light various circular pits or well-like holes of different dimensions, filled for the most part with black fetid matter, but also containing numerous remains of Samian ware, mortaria, amphoræ, &c., some of them with potters’ stamps; also skulls and bones of short-horned cattle (*Bos longifrons*),—the first time Dr S. believed that they have been noticed as occurring in Scotland,—red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), horse, and common hog. In one of them a male human skeleton was found erect, with the iron spear, figured above,

beside it, part of the wooden handle of which remained in the socket. Immediately to the east of these pits a further portion of the paved Roman Road, above alluded to, was exposed in the course of the same excavations. It has been traced northwards towards the site of an ancient stone-bridge over the Tweed, remains of which are referred to by Milne in his description of Melrose parish, in 1743. Still further to the east a bed of mixed clay and wood charcoal was cut through, also containing Roman pottery, animal remains, a few leathern sandals, &c.¹ Dr S. was inclined to consider this bed as the site of *ustrinæ*, and the pits as the sepulchres of the station.

In continuation of the same researches, Dr Smith read a second paper² to shew that another altar, now in the Society's Museum, to which it has been transferred from the Advocates' Library, appears to correspond with an inscribed stone found near Newstead in 1783. Dr Smith remarked:—

“ While pursuing the former researches, I had sent to me by a friend, a few notes, giving an account of an inscribed stone which had been found many years ago in the neighbourhood of Newstead, but of which no notice seemed ever to have been taken.

“ The stone was described as having been ‘ found by Thomas Vair, weaver in Newstead, while ploughing in the field next the Red Abbeystead park, and about 200 yards east from it, in the year 1783.’ It is noted as having been 2 ft. long and 1 ft. broad, and the inscription was said to have been as follows:—

SACRVM
MAFIE
MARCVS
DECOLVG
VACONIE

This seemed a complete enigma. It was partly Latin, undoubtedly, but it appeared to be an incomprehensible combination of words or letters. I applied accordingly for permission to inspect the original notes. They had been found, I learned, among the papers of the late Mr John Bower, of Melrose, for many years the enthusiastic cicerone to the beautiful ruins of Melrose Abbey. On getting the paper, it was evident from its water-mark of 1825, that the inscription had not been taken from the stone itself, but was a copy at second-hand. Mr Bower adds a note, to the effect that ‘ the man who found it is still alive,’ and notices ‘ that it was discovered about 400 yards north-east of the

¹ Various examples of the pottery, the human skull, and skulls of the *Bos longifrons*, with other animal remains, have been presented by Dr Smith to the Society's Collection.

² “ Notice of an Inscribed Stone found near Newstead, Roxburghshire, in 1783, with an attempt to trace its existence in one of the altars now in the Society's Museum.” Read 28th May 1851.

place where the last one was found in 1830.' This last is of course the Roman Altar dedicated to the god Silvanus. It is also noted that the first inscribed stone "was found 47 years before;" so that the finding of the Altar in 1830, had apparently made him think of procuring and preserving some notes of the former stone, found in 1783. And it is expressly stated that 'it was given to the Museum, Edinburgh.' I could, however, find no traces of it in any of the Edinburgh Museums. On making inquiries at Newstead, I ascertained that Thomas Vair, the finder of the stone, was long since dead, but was said to have been fond of antiquities, in his small way; and his wife, who might probably have remembered something about it, had been cut off during the cholera epidemic of 1832, while her son, who is still alive, having none of his father's antiquarian sympathies, unfortunately knew nothing about the matter. Here then the matter rested. Some time after, however, when looking with a friend over Stuart's '*Caledonia Romana*,' we were struck by the correspondence of the inscription on an altar figured by him, to the one I had been trying to decipher. It is found in the chapter (p. 219, first edition), where he gathers together various Roman inscriptions, 'regarding which,' he says, 'no records are preserved, nor anything known beyond the simple fact of their existence.' 'The altar,' he remarks, 'is in good preservation, but rudely executed, and seems to belong to the *third or fourth centuries*. It measures,' he adds, '26 inches in height.' It was then in the Advocates' Library, but has since been transferred to the Society's Museum.

"One can hardly avoid being struck with the considerable correspondence of the two inscriptions, which, with the exception of the first, have line after line almost alike. And, as Mr Stuart, it may be observed, only imperfectly copied the inscription, much more may we suppose a man of such education as this Newstead weaver might possess, would be puzzled to make it out, even in the mutilated form given in the note; and the chances of mistakes are further increased in a second copy, as this seems undoubtedly to have been. The first line has been omitted, possibly from being rubbed out of the old copy, in the tear and wear of forty-seven years. A comparison of the two will readily account for the origin of other variations.

"Some doubt, indeed, remains as to the reading of the true inscription, from the vagueness of some of the letters, while the distinguishing peculiarities of others require to be sought for with care, thereby furnishing another example of the difficulty of getting an exactly correct copy of any inscription of the kind. The Advocates' Library, the place where this altar was so long preserved, corresponds with the statement that it 'was given to the Museum, Edinburgh;' as at the time it was found, 1783, the Advocates' Library was *the Museum* in

Edinburgh for the Antiquities of Scotland, while that of the Society of Antiquaries existed only in the germ.¹

“*The Size* of this Altar also corresponds very nearly with the dimensions of the stone given in the notes referred to, viz., two feet long and one foot broad. The altar being exactly two feet three inches long, and one foot broad, or two feet, if measured to the groove on the side, excluding the shattered top; a difference too slight to affect the identity of the two inscribed stones. In addition to these others proofs, on comparing the *character of the sandstone* of which the Altar is composed, with that of the ruins dug up in the adjoining fields, I find them to be of the same reddish-coloured sandstone found in the district.

“These various details seem amply sufficient to shew the very great probability, if not to establish the certainty, of this Altar being the very stone found near Newstead in the year 1783.

“The altar is accurately figured in the engraving, Plate I, fig. 2, and the following reading has at least the merit of including the whole inscription :

“CAMPESTRIBVS · SACRVM · AELIVS · MARCVS · DECVRIO ·
ALAE · AVGVSTAE · VOCONTIO ; VOTVM SOLVIT LIBENTISSIME
MERITO.

“*i.e.*, Sacred to the Field Deities ; Aelius Marcus, Decurio of the Ala or Wing, styled the August (under the command of) Vocontius. A vow most willingly performed. The altar is chipped at the side, and might read originally *vocontior* ; in which case the word rendered a proper name should rather be *vocontiorum* ; of the nation of the Vocontii.

“Under the Empire, when the cavalry were separated from the legion, they were formed into bodies called *Alæ*, which varied in number according to circumstances. These *Alæ* or bodies of cavalry were divided into *Turmæ*. And the whole *Ala* was commanded by an officer called the *Praefectus Alæ* ; while each *Turma* was commanded by the officers next in rank, the *Decuriones* ; under whom again were the *Duplicarii* and the *Sesquiplarii*, one of each of these officers being attached to each *Turma* or troop, the *Decurio* being its chief officer under the *Praefect* ; and hence I am inclined to consider the word *Vocontio*, if this is the correct reading, as in all probability referring to the name of the chief, under whom Aelius Marcus served. Should we consider the true interpretation to mean simply the wing of the second legion, or the cavalry attached to the second legion, then we have here one of the many stations once occupied by this celebrated legion, dignified as it was by the appellation of the

¹ Possibly, however, the Museum referred to may have been that of the Royal Society, or as it was then called, the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, from which objects of Antiquity have been transferred, both to the Advocates' Library and to the Society's Museum.

'August,' which is believed to have served longer in Britain than any other. In Hodgson's 'Northumberland' is an account of several altars found at different times, near Old Carlisle, Cumberland, which bear apparently a considerable resemblance to the one I have described; they were dedicated by an *Ala*, which, for its valour, had acquired the honourable title of *Augusta*, as we find stated on most of the altars themselves,—*ALA . AVGVSTA . OB . VIRTVTEM . APELLATA, &c.* And from the names of the consuls sculptured on some of these relics of a former age, the dates of the residence of the *Ala* there are found to range from A.D. 185, 188, 191, during the reigns of Commodus and Septimius Severus, to A.D. 213, shortly after the beginning of the reign of his son Caracalla. If the latter be the true explanation, we have then a proof, and, as far as I am aware, *the only proof, of this Ala, with its most ancient title of Augusta, having been also stationed in the south of Scotland at a very early period.*

"In conclusion, I may remark that if I have succeeded in proving that this *stray altar*, sacred to our northern Field Deities, is the stone referred to in the rude copy of the inscription sent me, as having been found at Newstead, in the year 1783, I shall regard it with considerable interest as a valuable addition to the Roman remains of that district; and as adding another proof to the early occupation, important character, and great antiquity of the Roman station (whether it be considered as *Trimontium* or not), which I have pointed out as having existed near the base of the Triple Eildon."¹

The third of the series of papers on the Roman Antiquities of Roxburghshire, by Dr John Alexander Smith, now read, was entitled:—