

7. A ROMAN BUILDING AT EASTER LANGLEE, ROXBURGHSHIRE

In June 1965 Roman masonry was encountered during the removal of top soil at a gravel quarry which was being worked on the farm of Easter Langlee, a little over one mile E. of Galashiels. The discovery was made near the crest of a ridge in the southernmost of the four fields collectively known as 'The Knowes', 200 ft. NW. of spot-level 487.¹ According to reports the masonry was left *in situ* for a day or two, but by the time that news of its existence reached the ears of one of our Fellows, Mr Colin Martin, it had been bulldozed over the edge of the quarry, and the stones, now detached from one another, lay in a heap on the quarry floor mixed up with a large number of boulders and a quantity of the gravel subsoil. I visited the scene with Mr Martin on 5th July, and a few days later a working party about 40 strong, mainly composed of boys and girls recruited by Mr Martin and by Mr Stephen Willy of the Archaeology Division of the Ordnance Survey from schools in Edinburgh and the Borders, extricated the Roman stones and cleaned them for detailed examination.

The total number of stones recovered was forty-seven, and several more are said to have been previously removed by workmen and built up in a retaining wall, where they are no longer visible. The two largest stones were both of buff-coloured sandstone and were identical in length (4 ft. 6 in.) and breadth (2 ft.); one was 9 in. thick and the other 7½ in. Each had a mortise 2¾ in. square and 2 in. deep on the upper surface, possibly for the tenons of a wooden door-frame, but neither stone showed any sign of wear. The remainder of the stones were all of red sandstone. Twenty-four of them were facing stones, and all except one of these were decorated with tooling of diamond pattern (Pl. XLIV, 1); the exception was roughly scabbled with a drafted margin. Most of the facing stones also had from one to three dovetail cramp-holes on their upper surfaces, and several had a small dowel-hole in addition. The other twenty-one stones were not facings and only one of them exhibited a cramp-hole.

When the masonry was first uncovered, the workmen observed that several of the stones were inscribed, and careful scrutiny revealed that four of them bore numerals (III, CX (twice), and MIII), while a fifth was inscribed COH I (Pl. XLIV, 2), the signature of the first (double) cohort of a legion, which contained the masons and other craftsmen.

¹ O.S. 6-inch sheet NT 53 NW; N.G.R. NT 520361.

The inscriptions had been roughly executed, in two cases with a punch and in the other cases with a chisel, and it is evident that the numbers were simply tally-marks and were not intended to indicate the positions of the stones in the structure. Similarly, the cohort signature must be related to quarrying since it was cut on the edge of one of the unfaced stones where, unlike a building-inscription, it would be invisible once the stone had been placed in position.

It can be inferred from the foregoing details, and from the reports of workmen who witnessed the discovery, that the masonry originally formed part of a solid or semi-solid platform which was laid on a foundation of natural boulders and was designed to support a substantial stone structure. The platform was evidently incomplete when found, since it is not possible to reconstruct the outline by matching the cramp-holes of the surviving facing stones, and all that can be said is that its area was not less than 144 sq. ft. The superstructure, too, must have been removed long ago as no trace of it could be seen before quarrying began, and the remains of the platform were only a few inches below the surface.

In the absence of more specific information the purpose of the building is conjectural, but it seems probable that it was a temple rather than a military installation such as a signal-station. Although a tower in this position would have been in view of the signal-station on Eildon Hill North,¹ the site is not adjacent to a Roman road and is on the wrong side of the River Tweed for a signalling system linking Newstead with the forts at Oakwood or Lyne. On the other hand the detached situation would be explained if the building was a temple dedicated to Silvanus, patron of hunting, or to some local god or godling, while the shrine known as Arthur's O'on, near Falkirk, which was also erected by legionary craftsmen, stood on a podium not unlike the platform under discussion.²

Specimens of the stones from Easter Langlee are now preserved in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh, and in the grounds of Old Gala House, Galashiels.

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Photo R.C.A.M.

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1. Roman building stones from Easter Langlee, Roxburghshire, exhibiting cramp-holes and tooling of diamond pattern



Photo R.C.A.M.

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2. Detail of Roman building stone from Easter Langlee, Roxburghshire, showing punched inscription