

PLATE VIII



INSCRIPTION TO FLAVIUS VALERIUS SEVERUS,  
FOUND AT STOKE-UNDER-HAM, 1930

## Inscription to Flavius Valerius Severus found at Stoke-under-Ham, 1930

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Soon after the finding of the column bearing an inscription to Flavius Valerius Severus, the writer read a paper on the subject to the Somerset Archæological Society on July 23 at the Yeovil Meeting.

Since that time he has published accounts of the discovery in *The Times* (July 29), the *Western Gazette* (August 1), *The Antiquaries Journal*<sup>1</sup> and *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries*.<sup>2</sup>

In the last-named article details of the way in which the inscribed column came to light have been published, and a record made that a special vote of thanks to Colonel E. Stead, the county surveyor, and his colleagues was passed by the Council of the Society for the care they had exercised in the excavation and removal of this interesting stone to the County Museum at Taunton Castle.

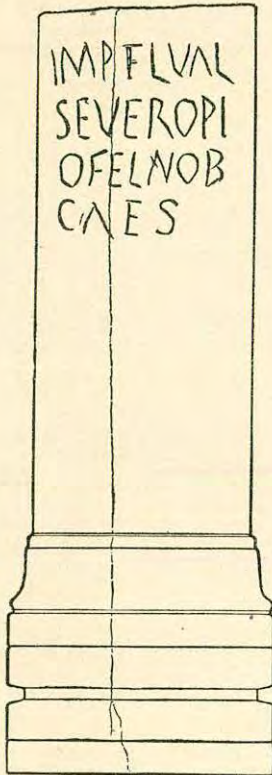
TOWARDS the end of May last workmen employed by the Somerset County Council discovered a moulded column of Ham Hill stone during the process of widening Venn Bridge on the Fosse Way between Ilchester and South Petherton. It was embedded in the south bank of the stream about 6 ft. below the surface and from 3 to 4 ft. from the actual waterway. The spot is just within the parish of Stoke-under-Ham, but close to the Martock and Tintinhull boundaries, on the north side of the district known as Stanchester, where remains of a Roman building were found in 1919,<sup>3</sup> and a little west of two barrow-like mounds, about 70 yds. long, 20 ft. broad and 5 ft. high,

<sup>1</sup> October 1930, vol. x, no. 4, pp. 390-2 (*illus.*).

<sup>2</sup> December 1930, vol. xx, no. 167, pp. 73-75 (*illus.*).

<sup>3</sup> *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.* lxxv, lxxii.

running due east and west, known as 'The Trutts'—the significance of which has not yet been ascertained.<sup>1</sup> The column was found barely a mile, as the crow flies, north of the nearest part of the summit of Ham Hill.



Columnar Base for a Statue,  
Stoke-under-Ham,  
Somerset.

As the drawing shows, the shaft is apparently a columnar base for a statue, such as are fairly common in the late Roman period.<sup>2</sup> Although broken off at the top it was probably little higher originally. The present dimensions are: Height,  $48\frac{1}{2}$  in., including the moulded base 13 in.; maximum diameter at the top  $11\frac{1}{2}$  in., increasing to  $13\frac{1}{2}$  in. at the base.<sup>3</sup> The circumference of the smaller part of the column is 37 in., and of the base 43 in. The stone is not of a truly circular cross-section. The front face bearing the inscription is weathered to some extent, whereas the opposite face is better worked and less weathered. The sides (right and left) are, however, rough and irregular with oblique tool-marks and shallow vertical grooves, as if prepared for fastening to some structure with mortar. Unfortunately the stone has a vertical crack throughout its length.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. R. H. Walter, F.S.A., did a little digging here in 1905, 'but very slight evidence of their nature was gathered. Between the eastern extremities of the mounds, about 4 ft. below the present surface, was found a flooring of roughly-hewn Ham stone slabs extending over an area of 8 ft. by 10 ft. surrounded by a low wall about 1 ft. high. These stones showed evidence of having been burnt, but no remains of bones were seen, though traces of charcoal and decayed organic matter were noted' (*Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.* lviii, ii, 48).

<sup>2</sup> There is one, for instance, with an inscription to Carinus, A.D. 283–285, which was found in a Roman villa at Clanville, Weyhill, near Andover, the circumstances making it somewhat closely analogous to the Stoke find (*V.C.H. Hants*, i, 297).

<sup>3</sup> These dimensions vary *very* slightly from those published previously.

The inscription is as follows :

IMPFLVAL  
SEVEROPI  
OFELNOB  
CAES

*Imperatori Flavio Valerio Severo Pio Felici Nobilissimo Caesari.* These formulae do not as a rule make very good English, but the translation is perhaps best rendered, 'To the Emperor Flavius Valerius Severus, pious and fortunate, most noble Caesar'. The reign of Flavius Severus was short, A.D. 305–306. He was 'Nobilissimus Caesar' from 1 May 305 to 25 July 306, and the inscription is dated within this period. He then became Augustus and died in April 307.<sup>1</sup>

Flavius Severus was born of a humble family in Illyria, and was distinguished chiefly if not solely for his vices. But the very perverseness of the man was the cause of his advancement. Galerius (A.D. 292–305) raised Severus to the dignity of Caesar on the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian; and soon after, on the death of Constantius Chlorus, refused to recognize Constantine (afterwards Constantine the Great). At Galerius' instigation Maximianus Hercules invested Severus with the title of Augustus.

Quarrels ensued, and ultimately Severus, after being besieged in Ravenna in a civil war in Italy, was perfidiously sent captive to Rome, after having borne the supreme title of emperor only for a few months. He was compelled to choose the manner of his death and caused his veins to be opened.

Mr. R. G. Collingwood, F.S.A., who is interested in this inscription, does not know of another to this emperor alone, found in Britain. But there is a very rude roadstone (i.e. road-mark rather than formal milestone) in Maidstone Museum,<sup>2</sup> found on the line of the Roman road from London and Springhead (? Vagniacae) to Rochester, which mentions Flavius Severus and a better known man, Maximinus, nicknamed Daza. The date of this stone (which is sarsen) also is A.D. 305 or 306.

<sup>1</sup> April, according to Stevenson, *Dictionary of Roman Coins*.

<sup>2</sup> It came from the collection of the late Mr. G. M. Arnold, F.S.A., and was given by Mr. Bernard Arnold.