

Rude Stone Monuments of Exmoor

(SOMERSET PORTION)

PART V.¹

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(a) THE CARATACUS STONE

IN October 1936 it was discovered that this well known inscribed stone, which had been scheduled as an ancient monument some years ago and had been covered with a stone shelter by the late Sir Thomas Dyke Acland,² had been thrown down or 'uprooted'. This news came to the writer from Mr. Alfred Vowles, of Alcombe, who has special knowledge of the Somerset portion of Exmoor. We got into communication with him, and to save the risk of further destruction or interference he agreed to superintend the removal of the stone, temporarily, to a closed shed near by, at Folly Cottage, Winsford Hill, where Keeper James Weetch lives. This protective measure was carried out on 23 October, when it was found that since the 21st the prostrate stone had been moved to the extent of about 1 ft. further east. In the first instance it had been thrown to the ground in a direction at right angles to its leaning position, which would mean that considerable manual power would be necessary for replacement. It appeared that some digging had taken place, but probably not much.³

There is a tradition in the neighbourhood to the effect that money is buried beneath the stone. The villagers formerly spoke of a legend that a wagon drawn by two horses used to

¹ Part I had reference to the Withypool Circle, Part II to the Porlock Stone Circle, Part III to megalithic remains on Almsworthy Common, and Part IV to the ancient remains on Dunkery Hill. (*Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, vols. lii, lxxiv, lxxvii, lxxviii).

² *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, lxix (1923), p. xli, where the inscribed stone is illustrated. The shelter measures, externally, 6 ft. 7 in. square.

³ A full statement of this destruction was made to the Somerset Constabulary.

go to haul away treasure, or gold, from the Caratacus stone at midnight every twenty-four hours !

At the request of H.M. Office of Works (the stone being a scheduled ancient monument) and the National Trust, on whose property the stone is situated, the writer supervised the re-erection of the stone on 14 June 1937, the others present being Mr. Vowles (who rendered assistance in various ways), Mrs. St. George Gray, Mr. H. D. and Miss Badcock and Mr. James Steer, the Winsford contractor, and the men who did the manual work.

Before bringing back the stone from Folly a small excavation was made within the area of the shelter, of sufficient size¹ to receive the bed of concrete (fine chippings and cement), provided for the better security of the stone,² which was finally replaced, at the instance of H.M. Office of Works and the National Trust, in the leaning position in which it was known prior to October 1936. In carrying out this digging no human artefacts nor anything of scientific interest were found, so that no clue to the date of the original erection of the stone was revealed.³

Photographic records of the stone before and after its uprooting and of the progress of its re-erection were made by Mr. Vowles. The stone out of the ground measured 5 ft. 3 in. in length ; it is 14 in. wide and 8½ in. in average thickness.

Other references to the Caratacus Stone are : *Ephemeris Epigraphica*, ix, no. 982, p. 510 ; *V.C.H. Somerset*, i, 369 (where further references are given) ; *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.* xxxvi, ii, 82-87 ; lxiv, pp. xxxviii-xxxix ; lxix, pp. xl-xli ; *Journ. Roman Studies*, ix (1919), Pl. xv, pp. 208-210.

It is important to add Dr. R. A. S. Macalister's reference to the stone in 'The Ancient Inscriptions of the South of England', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, lxxxiv (1929), p. 193 :

'The fractured corner (of this stone) has been found and replaced, and the missing \aleph (written μ) is now restored to the

¹ The excavation was 3 ft. square, and was carried to a depth of 2 ft. 2 in., when the undisturbed ground was reached.

² The writer, who re-visited the site on 6 March 1938, found the stone securely rooted in its bed of concrete.

³ In two perambulations of Exmoor Forest dated 1219 and 1279 it is described as 'Langeston.' (E. T. Macdermot, *History of the Forest of Exmoor*, 117, 130).

second word. I am not convinced that the name is meant to be **CARATACI**: the horizontal stroke above the second **A** is not in contact with, but is raised slightly above it: and a stroke above the line is more usually to be taken as an abbreviation for **N**. The name would in that case be **CARANACI**. Obviously the inscription is incomplete: for the name of the commemorated person, grandson of Carāacus, is not recorded. In point of fact there are clear traces of a line of writing preceding Carāaci, which has been chipped away: nothing is left of it but an **S**, just above the third **A**.’

Reference must also be made to the inscribed stone at Egremont Church, Carmarthenshire, which is built into the west wall of the nave, outside, with the longest dimension in a vertical position. The stone, which is 4 ft. 6 in. in height and 1 ft. 5 in. in maximum width, has at the top a rudely incised cross with two horizontal bars which appears to have been cut over the initial **C** of the inscription (**C**)**ARANTACVΓ**. (See two drawings and description by J. Romilly Allen in *Archaeol. Cambr.*, 5th ser., vol. vi, 1889, p. 306). The lettering is of similar character to that on the Caratacus Stone. The final letter, according to Prof. J. Rhys, seems almost a counterpart of the ‘s’ in the Drosten inscription at St. Vigean, near Arbroath, Scotland. ‘It is not very different either, from the long ‘s’ on the Caldý Stone.’ (*Ibid.*, p. 311).

(b) ‘**HERNES BARROW**’, PARISH OF EXFORD

The writer first visited this site with Prebendary W. T. Reeder on 22 October 1931: he made another visit, to check some former observations, on 6 March 1938.

The remains are situated on Court Hill¹ in the parish of Exford, just over $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile sw. of the earthwork known as Road Castle, a mile ssw. of Exford Church, a mile nne. of Withypool Church, $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile se. of Chibbet Post, and 500 feet ne. of the nearest part of the Exford-Dulverton road. The elevation is 1286 feet O.D.; but the site is not marked on the 6-inch Ordnance Sheet, Somerset XLV, S.E.

The remains seen to-day consist of stones which protrude

¹ Not marked on the 6-in. O.S., but ‘Court Plantation’ is marked on the n. of Court Hill and ‘Court Copse’ to the n.e.

from a slight encircling bank which is somewhat defaced. The stones are five in number so far as they are now exposed on the N., W. and S., but other stones were probably covered. The approximate diameter of the area covered by the inner face of the stones is 38 feet. The highest stone is 15 in. above the turf; in width they vary from 21 in. to 26 in.¹; the two nearest remaining stones are 9 feet apart (measured from centre to centre),—the two most distant 16½ feet apart.

The bank may represent the margin of a barrow or tumulus, the centre of which is 156 feet S. of the hedge where it is joined by a hedge running NNE. and SSW. At this point there is a trigonometrical station which is 315 feet to the W. of the nearest gateway; and this gateway is 349 feet ENE. from the centre of the ring.

The central area appears to have been dug over (not recently) and there are some fairly deep depressions in places, especially on the NW.; also some 'hummocks' especially on the S.,—probably material thrown back in excavating. Some of the excavated material was apparently placed round the mound proper, the diameter being approximately 53 feet. On the S. at a very short distance a slight mound is observed—perhaps a spoil-heap.

It is very probable that the remaining stones represent part of the retaining-wall and perhaps the boundary of a round barrow; and that the irregular bank beyond the limit of the stones merely indicates excavated material thrown round the barrow, when it was mutilated, and never replaced.

On turning to E. T. Macdermot's *History of the Forest of Exmoor* (pp. 119 and 130) and in reading the perambulation of Exmoor Forest made by the commissioners and returned in January 1279, one naturally comes to the conclusion that this mound is none other than *Hernesbureghe* or 'Hernes Barrow'. To quote from E. T. Macdermot:

'The "Great Eisse" is of course the river Exe, and the perambulation follows the stream through Exford to "la Rode", which Mr. Rawle was no doubt right in identifying with Road Castle (above mentioned), an ancient entrenchment above the south bank

¹ One of them shows so little above the turf that it is not included in these measurements.

of the Exe about a mile below Exford. Ernesburg (Hernesbureghe 1279) was probably a barrow on Room Hill, not far from the junction of the three parishes of Exford, Winsford and Withypool.'

We are of opinion that Mr. Macdermot would have been more correct had he written Court Hill instead of Room Hill. There is still a track (*see* Ordn. Sheet) running sw. from Road Castle across and to the west of Road Hill. From there the ancient track probably continued to 'Hernes Barrow', and not along the present parish boundary dividing Exford from Winsford, which extends along the N. boundary of Room Hill.¹ Mr. J. K. Ridler, of Minehead, informs me that his grandfather bought Court Hill which had been open ground and enclosed it.

To the south of 'Hernes Barrow' is a standing-stone practically upright (height 2 ft. 6 in. above ground), but loose in its socket, at a distance of 372 feet from the approximate centre of the mound. This stone is 188 feet N. of a gateway and 312 feet N.E. of the corner of the field. We do not regard this stone as being anything more than a modern rubbing-stone: there is one in the next field east and another in the next field east again.

On 6 March 1938 we observed that some recent digging (presumably archaeological) had taken place in the Court Hill field in at least two places.

¹ We do not know of a barrow on Room Hill, but there are three small standing-stones on its west side and close to Room Hill Road.