

**An Account
Of
Some Antiquities
Found In Cornwall**



**Rev. William Borlase,
M.A.F.R.S
1758**

An Account of some Antiquities found in Cornwall: In a Letter from the Rev. William Borlase, M.A.F.R.S. to the Rev. Charles Lyttelton, L.L.D. Dean of Exeter.

Ludgvan, Dec. 4. 1758.

Rev. Sir,

AS I know the pleasure, which every branch of ancient literature gives you I should not excuse myself, if I did not communicate to you a late discovery of Roman antiquities in these westernmost parts of Britain.

In the year 1756 a farmer at Bossens, in the parish of. St. Erth, driving his oxen from the field, perceived the foot of one of them to sink a little deeper than ordinary into the earth at A, fig. 8. (See Tab. 1.) Curiosity, and the hopes of treasure, led him soon, after to search the place; where was soon discovered a perpendicular pit, circular, of two feet and half diameter. Digging to the depth of 18 feet, there was found a Roman patera (fig. 1. & 2.) : about 6 feet deeper, the jug, fig. 3: nearby, among the rubbish, the stone, fig. 4; a small millstone, about 18 inches diameter: then another patera, with two handles, in other particulars of the shape and size as fig. 2, but unfortunately mislaid, and not now to be found. Intermixed with these were found fragments of horns, bones of several sizes, half-burnt sticks, and many pieces of leather, seemingly shreds of worn-out shoes. Having sunk to the depth of 16 feet, they found the bottom of the pit concave, like that of a dish or bowl. There was a sensible moisture, and mostly wet clay, in all parts of the pit. On each side there were holes at due distances, capable of admitting a human foot, by which persons might descend and ascend. There is no doubt but this work must have been intended for a well: but a pit so deep, and of such narrow dimensions, must have been sunk thro' a stony ground with much difficulty, and with tools very different from those now in use.

Coming to the spot on the 22nd of May last with Henry Davies, Esq; proprietor of the land, who first favoured me with the notice of this discovery, I found, on the higher part of the tenement, in a field called the Rounds, the remains of a fort: the length of it, bearing nearly north and south, was 152 feet; the breadth, from east to west, about 136 feet. The foss on the outside is still discoverable; the walls dismantled, but

sufficient remains to shew, that the work was rectilinear, with the angles rounded off; a manner of fortifying, which the Romans were generally fond of, as may be seen by their stations *per lineam valli* (Horsley *Britannia Romana*; p. 113, and many other places). At the north corner, B, there was an additional building, projecting outwards beyond the rampart, about 30 feet long, not quite so wide: at the south angle at D there are the signs of a building of like kind: these were the procestria of the fort. The shape and size of the work, as it stands at present, may be seen in the drawings annexed, *fig. 8.*

Upon examining the rubbish near the pit, I found the cut stone, *fig. F.* part of a large stone vase, and part of an earthen sepulchral urn: I found also fume fragments of leather: all which, with what was found before, and brought me, I shall beg leave to describe, with a few observations.

Fig. 1. and 2. are two views of the patera: it was made of tin, the 20th of an inch thick, four inches and a half wide at the brim, but growing narrower downwards, was at the bottom, which was flat, two inches and a half in diameter. The bottom of the inside is represented *fig. 1.* in its real size. *Fig. 2* is the side of the same patera, by the scale annexed.

The Roman patera was not always of the same dimensions. When it was of the larger size, its use is well known to have been for receiving the blood of the victim, or to be carried before the priests with other offerings; but when of smaller dimensions (as this is), either to offer libations of water, oil, or wine, on the altar (whence on medals the hand so often stretched out, holding the patera towards the altar), or to participate the rites of sacrifices by drinking. This patera had no ansa, or handle; tho' that which is lost, and has been mentioned above, had one on each side: and indeed those found in England generally have. Mr. Addison observes [*Travels*, of his works, p. 115.], that it is not so common to find patera with handle to them abroad; but that a patera without a handle would be as singular here [in England] as one with it at Rome and Mr. Horsley, (p. 191), that all pateræ, which he had seen upon any altars in Britain, had handles, tho' of different sizes and shapes: but it may be observed, that the five pateræ, which I have seen found in Cornwall, never had any, and are therefore the more remarkable. It is more rare still to find there seemingly trifling cups and dishes inscribed to a particular deity; but most

uncommon to see them distinguished by the names of the donor and his father, as well as the name of the deity to which they were dedicated. This Patera, found at Bossens, about three miles north-east of St. Michael's Mount, is a singular instance of the latter usage, and has the following inscription engraved on its bottom, in shape, and size, and circular line, as in fig. 1.

ΛΙΒΙΟΥ ΜΟΔΗΣΤΟΥ ΔΡΙΥΛΙ Γ ΔΙΟ ΜΑΡΤΙ

Which I read thus, till better information: “*Livius Modestus Driuli* (or *Douiuli*) *f.* (for *filius*) *Deo Marti.*”

The two first words are very plain (tho’ like the whole, a mixture of Greek and Roman characters), and not rare in Roman history. Livius is too well known to need any comment; and as it is well known, that the virtues oftentimes gave names to persons, it is as certain, that modesty among the rest had that privilege. Sometimes the person, who had this name, was called Verecundus [*Diis Manibus Verecundi*, in a Roman monument at Skirway in Scotland; Horsley, 199: and the same name is to be traced in another monument, Ibid. Plate 64. No. X.] Here it is Modestus, of which we have also instances, as Publius Æeilus Praefectus, who dedicated an altar to Hercules, Ibid. Pl. 16. No. XLI.; and *Caius Murrius Modestus miles* in Somersetshire, Ibid. Pl. 71. No. II.

The letters in general of this inscription are badly shaped; but in the third word particularly the characters are more perplexed than in the rest. The first letter is the Grecian small *delta*; the second I take to be the little *ro* of the Greeks revered (viz, with the long stroke on the right, instead of its being as usual on the left hand): the other letters are more truly delineated, tho’ somewhat crowded: so that I take this word to be *Driuli*, a name, which I do not recollect to have met with before: but if the second letter shall appear to the learned to be more likely intended for the Greek character *a*, or *ou*, this word will then be *Douiuli*, or *Duili*, a name very honourable among the Romans. F stands for *filius*, as usual; and the two

last words are beyond doubt *Deo Marti*. The language is Roman; but the λ, δ, Δ, η, (which in the words *Modestus* and *Deo* is used for the Latin *e*), and the *ro*, or *q*, are proper to the Grecian alphabet. The R in *Marti* is singular, intended for *P*. the Greek capital *Ro*; but instead of the femi-circular part joined to the upright, thro' the incorrectness of the engraver, it has a demi-hexagon, like a canopy, over the upright line. The *o* is oval, not round as with the Latins; and the A has no transverse stroke. The other letters are common to the Greeks and Romans.

That this Latin inscription should have so much of the Greek character is remarkable. It is well known, that the Druids used the Greek letters.. Whether the person, who consecrated this patera to Mars, might intrust the engraving to one of the Druid sect, or whether the engraver was one of the auxiliary cohorts and natives of Greece, as the Thracian and Dalmatian horse (for such we certainly had in Britain), it is in vain to inquire; but neither of these conjectures is improbable. There are, I think, but two inscriptions in the Greek language as yet found in Britain ; but in the Latin language this seems to me the only one as yet discovered in the island written in Greek characters.

Fig. 3. is a jug or jar (of tin also) containing four quarts one pint and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a quartern, wine measure its weight 7 lb. $9\frac{1}{2}$ oz. It is the *præfericulum* of antiquarians, a vessel used to bring the holy water, or other sacred liquor, to the altar. It seems to have had that name from its being carried in procession before the priests in a kind of shallow bason (which Feftus chooses rather to call the *præfericulum* as see Montfaucon *de pateris*, tom. ii.), in much the same manner as the bason and ewer were formerly used among us.

Fig. 4. & 5. are of stone. The first and largest weighs 14.lbs 1 oz. (avoirdupois) and 11 *dwt*s. amounting, if I mistake not, to 8 lbs Roman and 337 grains. The second and smaller stone weighs 4 lbs. 1 oz. (avoirdupois) and 7 *dwt*s. or 5lbs $\frac{1}{4}$ Roman and 95 grains. By the holes these stones have near the top, they were probably designed as weights, whereby provisions were bought for, and afterwards shared among, the soldiers of the fort.

The ancients sometimes made their weights of stone, and of different shapes, round, rectangular, and conical: sometimes they were of marble, as these exhibited by Gruter, p. 221, 222. (as Kemp quotes him), and that in the *Monumenta Kempiano*, p. i 524 and in other repositories. There here are both of the dove-coloured Cornish granite, discoloured as it seems by fire. But the ancients seem not to have made their weights of stone by choice, but for want of metal; for they, could not be ignorant, that lead, brass, or iron, was more compact, ponderous, and durable; and that stone was liable to become heavier, by assuming into its substance the moisture and weight of adjacent bodies, and on the other hand to be corroded, and become more porous and lighter, by means of any penetrating acid, or heat or drought; and so either exceed or fall short of the intended standard. These inconveniences of stone weights the ancients, I say, could not but foresee; they are alterations which the materials could hardly escape: and therefore I conjecture, that the weights before us have varied: they both exceed the number of Roman pounds, which they were probably at first adjusted to. The great weight indeed has been increased but a small matter, viz. 337 grains more than 18 pounds; the small one more in proportion, viz. 1406 grains more than 5 pounds, i. e. above a quarter of a pound: nor is it to be wondered at, that, tho' both of the same sort of stone, they should have acquired different quantities of weight; for the addition must have been according to the nature of the rubbish in which they have lain. If there were any metallic ores (iron, for instance, copper, or tin) or impregnated waters, in the rubbish, where these stones were deposited, then the addition would be great, otherwise the addition would be no more than that of common moisture or earth.

Fig. 6. is part of a vase or bowl, sometimes made of brass, or richer metal, but here of stone. This, I apprehend, is what Feftus calls the *præfericulum* [*Præfericulum, inquit Festus, vas æneum, fine ansâ, appellatum patens fimum, ut pelvis, quo ad sacrificia utebantur in Sacratio*. Montfaucon, torn. ii. p. 142.]; and by its gradually increasing thickness towards the bottom, appears to have been of like design with that exhibited in the *Antiquities of Cornwall*, plate xxi. fig. 5. p. 27. This vase was of curious grey granite, formed by turning, well-polished within, somewhat discoloured without, as if it had suffered by fire.

The small millstone, by the smoothness of one side, shews that it had been much used and was such, without any material difference, as is now used in the islands of Scilly (and elsewhere) for hand-mills to grind corn in times of siege and confinement, and must be absolutely necessary in all forts.

The bones and horns may be supposed to have belonged to animals, either sacrificed, or killed for the sustenance of the garrison: the ashes, and half-burnt sticks, are the remains of sacred or culinary fires. The fragments of leather are for the most part patched, and coarsely sewn together; but one piece, which I found more intire, may contribute perhaps to shew us the shape of the Roman calceus of those times; and may be seen fig. 7, by the same scale with the rest. Some bits of leather were also pierced with circular holes; but whether parts of the calceus, cothurnus, or any border for the habit, armour, or vehicle of the officers, enough does not remain to decide.

I than make no other reflection at present on these antiquities, than that the inscription is the first discovered in this county of such high antiquity; and will satisfy the learned, that the Romans had penetrated into the westernmost parts of Cornwall before the empire became Christian: that the sacrificial vessels, the paterx, and præfericulum, are of tin, the natural product of Cornwall: the vase, the weights, the millstone, are also of Cornish granite: and by the walls, the religious utensils, the weights, the quantity of shoes, bones, horns, vases, urn, and ashes, this fort appears to have been that of a fixed garrison, not a temporary occasional fortification: that by the shape of this fort, and the antiquities discovered in it, it was a Roman fort.

I remain,

SIR,

Your most obedient Servant,

William Borlase.

