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William Camden and early collections of Roman antiquities in Britain

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The antiquary William Camden's rediscovery of Roman Britain, reported in successive editions of his Britannia *from 1596 onwards, is well known. His researches founded the study of Roman inscriptions in Britain. Less well known are the several early collections of Roman altars, dedication-stones and tombstones that were stimulated by Camden's work. These collections begin as early as Elizabeth I's reign, and substantial parts of them survive to this day. This paper examines the linkage of these collections to Camden's inquiries, briefly describes the main collections (referencing them to detailed accounts), and then locates these early collections of antiquities within the broader growth of collecting in seventeenth-century Britain.*

On a windswept cliff top on the northern edge of the Cumbrian coastal town of Maryport, a former Victorian naval battery looks out across the Solway Firth. Today the battery is home to the Senhouse Roman Museum, and houses a collection of Roman antiquities that dates from Elizabeth I's reign. Indeed, the distinguished archaeologist Francis Haverfield argued in 1915 that:

> The Netherhall Collection is probably the oldest collection of Roman antiquities and perhaps the oldest collection of any sort of 'curiosities' in England. It seems to be older even than that 'Ark' of Tradescant which has now become the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford.[1]

The Senhouse or Netherhall collection is, however, only one of a number of collections of Roman antiquities associated with the historian William Camden and his *Britannia* (Fig. 1). As well as Senhouse's collection, there were significant collections by Lord William Howard at Naworth, Reginald Bainbrigg at Appleby, Robert Cotton at Conington, Francis Godwin at Mathern in South Wales, and smaller 'collections' of one or two antiquities in a number of locations.

The early collections that are the subject of this paper have received little attention in the growing literature on the history of collections in England. Instead, attention has focused on cabinets of curiosities such as those of Cope, the Tradescants and Bargrave, and where classical antiquities have been discussed, it has been imported antiquities (such as Arundel's collection) that have been the subject. Vickers's paper on classical antiquities in the seventeenth century, for example, makes no mention of these 'indigenous' collections.[2] The exception has been Sir Robert Cotton's collection of Roman inscriptions from English sites, and MacGregor begins his discussion of British curiosity collecting by noting:

> The beginnings of curiosity collecting in Britain took shape lower down the social scale, and even there they came late. A nascent antiquarian interest can be detected in the foundation of the Elizabethan College of Antiquaries, for example, and in the publication of William Camden's *Britannia*. Camden himself is known to have been involved in collecting only to the extent that he accompanied his intimate friend, Robert [later Sir Robert] Cotton (1571–1631) on a tour to Carlisle and the northern counties of England in 1599, an expedition which resulted in a number of Roman and Pictish antiquities being carried off for Cotton's collection.[3]

Cotton's collection of Roman inscriptions has recently been studied as part of a wider appreciation of his collecting activities including coins, manuscripts and books.[4] However, Cotton's collection was by no means an isolated or unique example, and the aim of this paper is to elaborate on the context of such early Elizabethan and Jacobean collections, and show how they are woven into Camden's activities and influence.

Fig. 1. William Camden, a seventeenth-century engraving.

Camden's *Britannia* and the role of collecting

Camden's *Britannia*, which first appeared in 1586, made a major impact on English historical scholarship and marked a very significant point in the development of antiquarian and archaeological studies in Britain.[5] In particular Camden began the discovery of Britain as a Roman province and the reconstruction of a detailed geography of the Roman occupation, inspired by the great Continental scholar Ortelius to 'restore Britain to Antiquity and Antiquity to Britain.'[6] In Joseph Levine's words:

> The *Britannia* was, therefore, first and principally a commemoration of Roman Britain; Elizabethans were to be reminded of their direct and immediate descent not from the apocryphal Trojan-Celtic history beloved of the Middle Ages but from classical antiquity, as a province of the Roman Empire, the equal of any other.[7]

Camden's attempt to construct a countrywide picture of the history of Britain, and particularly of the Roman period, could not simply be based on records and chronicles available to him in London. It required extensive travel to see and record antiquities, and Camden's travels are well known; but equally it required a network of correspondents, to send reports to him and guide him to interesting locations. Camden had the historical documents, such as the Antonine Itinerary, as a background, but he would never have had his success if he had had to rely solely on his own explorations and discoveries. In terms of Roman inscriptions, that success was immense: in the first edition of *Britannia* in 1586, Camden had a mere twelve Roman stone inscriptions to report; by his last edition in 1610 there were over 110. We know a great deal about Camden's network of correspondents and informants, partly because he often acknowledges help in *Britannia* itself. Thus he notes of a Cumberland inscription 'This also with others Oswald Dikes a learned minister of God's word copied out for me',[8] and elsewhere in Cumberland 'were found these inscriptions exemplified for me by the hand of the right honorable Lord William Howard of Naworth.'[9] But we also have many of Camden's own notes and letters sent to him by his correspondents, preserved largely through the actions of Cotton. Selections of these letters (especially those from international scholars) were published as long ago as 1691, but key reports on British inscriptions are to be found in the Cottonian manuscripts in the British Library.[10] Some of these sources were Camden's London-based friends, antiquaries and lawyers, men such as John Dee and William Lambarde. Others were clergymen and gentry of a scholarly turn of mind such as Oswald Dykes, Reginald Bainbrigg, Bishop Francis Godwin, and the noble Lord William Howard.

These men reported local 'finds' to Camden, some of which he was subsequently able to see for himself on his riding tours. Camden undertook a journey through Yorkshire and Lancashire in 1582 and saw the stone coffin of Marcus Verecundius Diogenes, discovered in 1579 at York (*RIB* 678[11]) 'which we saw in house of an Alderman' ['quam in aedibus cuisdarii Senatoris vidimus'].[12] In Lancashire, he visited Salesbury Hall to see the inscribed pedestal (*RIB* 583) discovered in 1578 at Ribchester and also the inscribed base (*RIB* 585) found close to Salesbury. The letters to Camden sometimes reveal

the actual process of discovery, usually by ordinary people, and then transmitted by 'credible witnesses'.[13] A statue of a man on horseback was 'found by a man plowinge' near Ribchester (Lancashire) in 1604 and reported by Thomas Braithwaite, a cousin of Camden, and Henry Savile acquired two inscribed stones found by a ploughman in Yorkshire, whilst Bishop Francis Godwin used local information, a 'report of the people', to decide to 'bestowe some mony in diggyng' at Caerleon in 1602.[14]

Very few of the discoveries of Roman antiquities were the results of systematic excavation, though John Senhouse may have been so engaged in Cumbria, discussed below. More commonly, they resulted from site disturbance for stone-extraction, or from casual finds of stones previously extracted. Camden's *Britannia* reflected a growing interest in classical civilization by those educated at the Universities or Inns of Court, and it also fed and cultivated that interest, so that local gentry looked for inscriptions in a way their predecessors had not bothered about.

This process of discovery, recording and 'warranting' that can be seen in Camden's letters and in the text of *Britannia* has been extensively studied. What has received less attention is the process of assembling collections of the inscribed stones, and that is the focus of this paper. The important question was what happened after an inscribed or carved stone was discovered, recorded and reported? A stone being left *in situ* meant continuing neglect, and a real risk of disappearance into a house or farm wall, slicing up for gateposts or other uses. Preserving the evidence meant preserving the inscription, and this was best achieved by taking the stones into 'protective custody'. This had its own risks, such as damaging the stones in transit (and in the early eighteenth century Warburton became notorious for splitting altars so they could be put in saddle-bags) and exposing them to the weather if stored or displayed in the open. Protection also meant the evidence could be reported as verifiable: documents could be checked in libraries, epigraphic evidence could be checked by visiting the custodial sites, with the local gentleman or clergyman as both custodian and 'credible witness'. Suitable visitors – those with the appropriate gentry or scholarly status –could see the inscriptions for themselves by visiting the sites.

The collections

There are five significant early collections of Roman antiquities associated with Camden's work: the Senhouse collection at Elenborough (Netherhall, Maryport), Cotton's collection at Conington, Lord William Howard's collection at Naworth, Bainbrigg's collection at Appleby and Godwin's collection at Mathern (later at Moyne's Court). Each of these will be examined in turn. But there is a question of what constitutes a 'collection' of such antiquities, for there were also examples of individuals 'collecting' one or two inscriptions in their houses and gardens. At Carlisle, Camden 'found also this inscription at Carlile [*sic*] in a stone brought from the picts wall [Hadrian's Wall] by John Myddleton and is set in his garden',[15] and at Bath two inscriptions found in 1592 were moved into the garden of a Robert Chambers.

Interestingly, Camden never himself seems to have collected Roman antiquities. He was content with copying and studying the inscriptions, and assembling his own substantial library.[16] Leaving actual collecting to others may reflect his own tastes, but may also reflect his own resources, for the major discoveries of inscriptions were not made close to his base in London but in the far north (or the far west, as with the Caerleon stones), and Camden did not have the wealth of his friend Cotton to fund the acquisition and especially the transport of stones over long distances.

As the quotations from *Britannia* suggest, it was usual for the Roman altars, tombstones and other inscribed stones to be displayed out of doors in a garden or a walled yard. In the German classification noted by Büsch, they were *Freiraumsammlungen* or 'open-air collections' rather than *Studiosammlungen*.[17] This aspect of the collections, and its relationship to other types of 'museum-garden' and the display of imported classical statuary, has recently been examined elsewhere and will not be discussed in detail here.[18]

The first collection to be noted is the one that introduced this paper, the Senhouse collection at Elenborough (Maryport), often called the Netherhall collection after the name acquired by their residence there. John Senhouse (d. 1604) was a member of the north Cumberland gentry, and two Roman altars from his estate, which contained a Roman camp overlooking the Cumbrian coast, had been reported

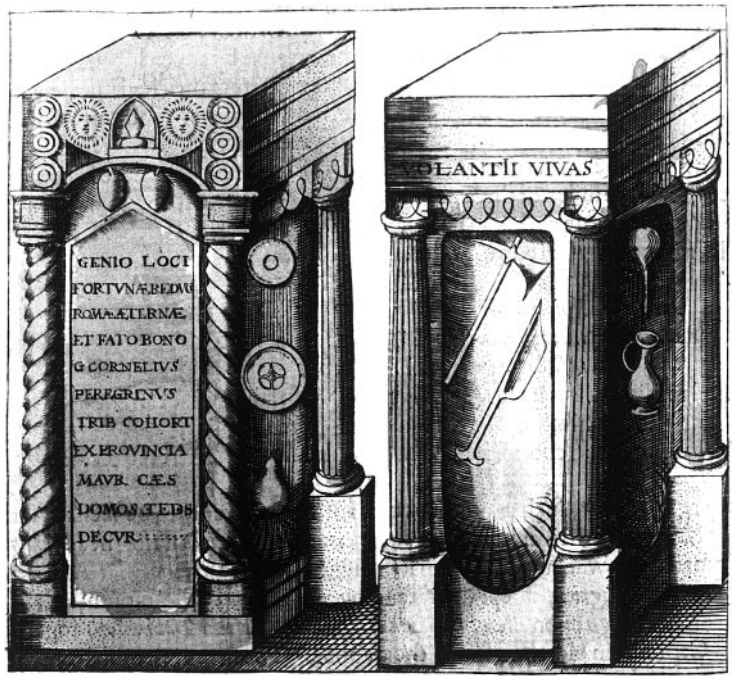

Fig. 2. The Senhouse red sandstone altar 'to the Genius of the Place' (*RIB* 812), first recorded in the 1587 *Britannia* and seen by Camden and Cotton in 1599. This is the engraving from Cotton's drawing, reproduced from the 1610 *Britannia*. The much-weathered altar is now in the British Museum.

to Camden for the second (1587) edition of *Britannia*. The 1600 edition reported (in Latin) what Camden and Cotton had seen on their visit, and the 1610 edition translates it:

> The ancient vaults stand open, and many altars, stones with inscriptions, and Statues are here gotten out of the ground. Which I. Sinhous a very honest man, in whose grounds they are digged up, keepeth charily, and hath placed orderly about his house. In the mids of his yard their standeth erected a most beautifull foure square Altar of a reddish stone right artificially in antique worke engraven five foote or there abouts high, with an inscription therein of an excellent good letter.[19]

There were ten altars and other inscribed stones in Senhouse's grounds, including the very fine local red sandstone altar 'to the Genius of the Place, to Fortune the Home-Bringer, to Eternal Rome, and to Good Fate' (*RIB* 812), one of the two altars reported in 1587 and now seen in its glory (and reproduced as an engraving by Cotton in *Britannia*) (Fig. 2). It is worth continuing the quotation from Camden, for it shows his strong reaction to seeing the Senhouse altars:

> But loe the thing it selfe all whole, and every side thereof, as the draught was most lively taken out by the hand of Sir Robert Cotton of Connington, Knight, a singular lover of antiquity, what time as he and I together, of an affectionate love to illustrate our native country, made a survey of these coasts in the yeare of our redemption 1599, not without the sweet food and contentment of our mindes. And I cannot chuse but with thankfull heart remember, that very good and worthy gentleman not onely in this regard that most kindly he gave us right courteous and friendly entertainment, but also for that being himselfe well learned, he is a lover of ancient literature, and most diligently perserveth these inscriptions, which by others that are unskilfull and unlettered be streight waies defaced, broken, and converted to other uses to exceeding great prejudice and detriment of antiquity.[20]

There is nothing anywhere else in Camden's *Britannia* that quite compares with this lengthy tribute and enthusiasm: to find eight new inscriptions on one site (and such a dramatic site), to see them cared for and set out by Senhouse, and to see the quality of the red sandstone altar standing 5 feet high. In many ways, it is Elenborough (Maryport), not the Roman Wall, that is the highlight of the 1600 edition of *Britannia*, and it may well have been the sight of Senhouse's collection that set the avid antiquarian collector Cotton off on a quest for his own collection of inscribed stones. Senhouse may, in fact, have been the first to excavate a Roman site with scholarly intent, for the 1590 *Britannia* refers to 'one of them recently dug out of Kingshall hill there',[21] and the 1610 translation (quoted above) notes 'are here

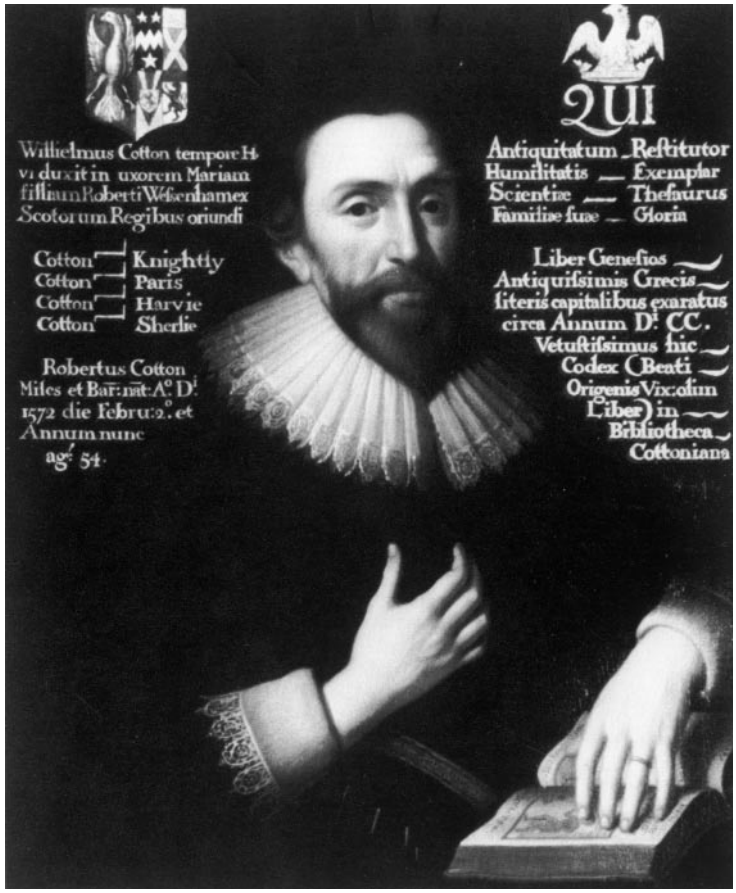

Fig. 3. Sir Robert Cotton. A portrait commissioned by Sir Simonds D'Ewes in 1626 and attributed to Cornelius Janssen. Reproduced by kind permission of the Rt. Hon. Lord Clinton, DL, Devon.

gotten out of the ground' 'and in whose grounds they are digged up.'

The Senhouse collection is particularly interesting, both because of the exceptionally early start of this collection and because the family continued to value it and add to it, with local excavations through three centuries. John Senhouse's great-grandson, also John, was owner during excavation of the *principium* *c.*1686; his brother, Henry Senhouse I was host to Stukeley in 1725; Henry's son, Henry Senhouse II supervised excavations in 1742 and 1766; and his son, Henry Senhouse IV excavated the north gate and bath-house in 1787–8; a century later his great-grandson, Henry Pocklington-Senhouse, oversaw the extensive 1870 excavations. It is a remarkable family continuity and involvement in archaeology, and each period added to the collection.[22] This continued to be kept at the family home of Netherhall, initially in the garden and later in the portico. In 1965, as the house became neglected, the stones were removed to a coach house for storage and remained there until the Senhouse Museum Trust established the museum in its new home in 1990.

The second collection which will concern us is that of Sir Robert Cotton (Fig. 3). Because Cotton's collecting activities have received more attention recently, the account here can be brief.[23] Cotton, a wealthy Huntingdonshire landowner and former pupil of Camden at Westminster School, established himself as a leading antiquary, scholar and collector in the 1590s, collecting manuscripts, coins, medals and books. A close friend and colleague of Camden, Cotton accompanied him on his northern tour of 1599, and began to have inscribed stones transported and shipped back to his country house at Conington.[24] His collection eventually comprised some twenty inscribed stones (of which fifteen survive today). As he built up his collection from all over the north of England, he housed the stones in a

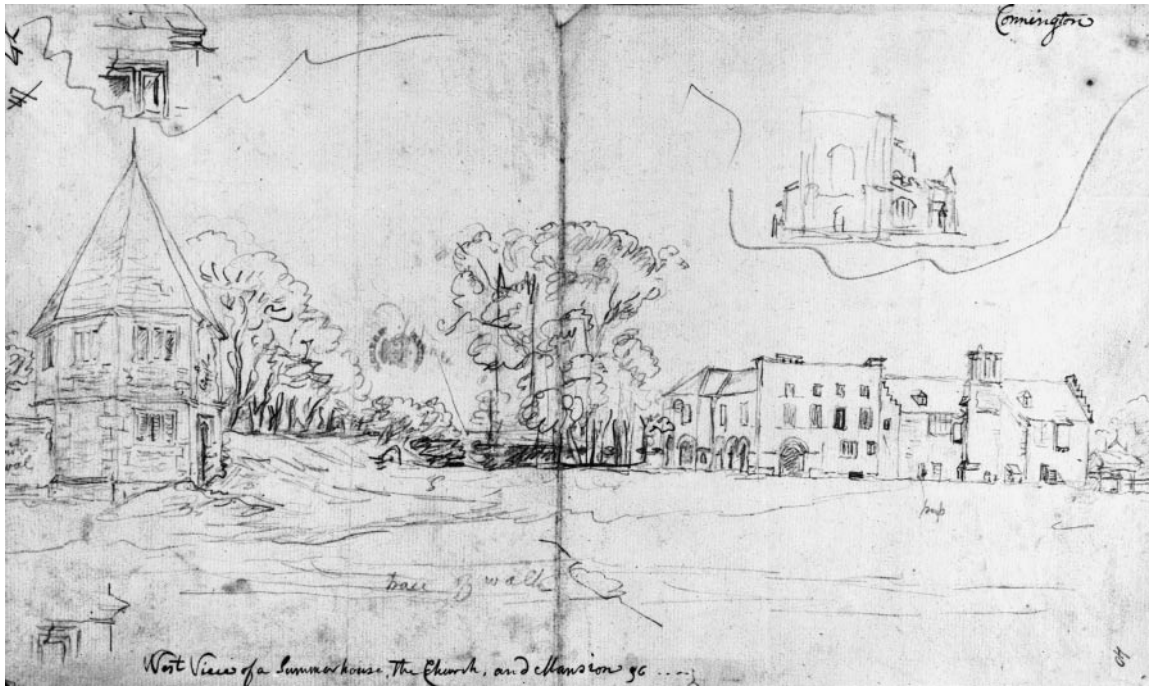

Fig. 4. Cotton's octagonal summer house at Conington, used to display his collection of inscriptions. View of the summer house, church and mansion by John Carter, 1798. Courtesy British Library, BL Additional MS 29936, fol. 40.

specially-built octagonal summerhouse in his garden (Fig. 4). Camden refers to Cotton and his summer house display in the 1607 edition of *Britannia* (here quoted from the 1610 Philemon Holland translation), as 'having gathered with great charges [cost] from all places the monuments of venerable antiquitie, hath heere begunne a famous Cabinet, whence of his singular courtesie, he hath often times given me great light in these darksome obscurities'.[25]

Most of Cotton's collection came from Northumberland and Cumberland, and Cotton may have made a special second visit to help acquire some of the Redesdale stones that he and Camden had learned about from Bainbrigg's tour north of the Wall. He probably obtained most of the stones very cheaply from local farmers and tenants, for as late as 1739 Sir John Clerk claimed Roman inscribed stones could be bought near the Wall for a few pence; at Bowness on Solway he found a dedication slab, and 'being of no great weight I gave my landlord a shilling for it, who had it in his dyke, and carreid it away with me.'[26] However, there could be difficulties, as was the case with one of his very first stones, the Bowes altar to Fortune (*RIB* 730), which Dykes was commissioned to buy whilst Camden and Cotton were still on their 1599 tour. In January 1599/1600, Dykes wrote that 'if I cold either for mony or gould have had the stone, that shold have bene brought yow at Newcastle or yow removed from thence', but he was delayed until the settlement of a dispute about rightful possession of the 'howse and tenement' where the stone was situated. This stone and the Old Carlisle altar to Jupiter (*RIB* 897) may well have been Cotton's initial acquisitions, stimulated perhaps by his sight of the remarkable Senhouse collection whilst on the tour. Two stones probably came to Cotton by gift: the altar to Victoria Brigantia (*RIB* 627), found in 1597 at Greetland near Halifax, and recorded by Camden in 1600 as at the house of Sir John Savile at Bradley, later entered Cotton's collection. Similarly a tombstone from Silchester (*RIB* 87), found before 1577 and mentioned in the first 1586 edition of *Britannia*, was first installed in Lord Burghley's house in London but later acquired by Cotton.

After Cotton's death the collection suffered neglect typical of most of these early collections. The main house became ruinous in the eighteenth

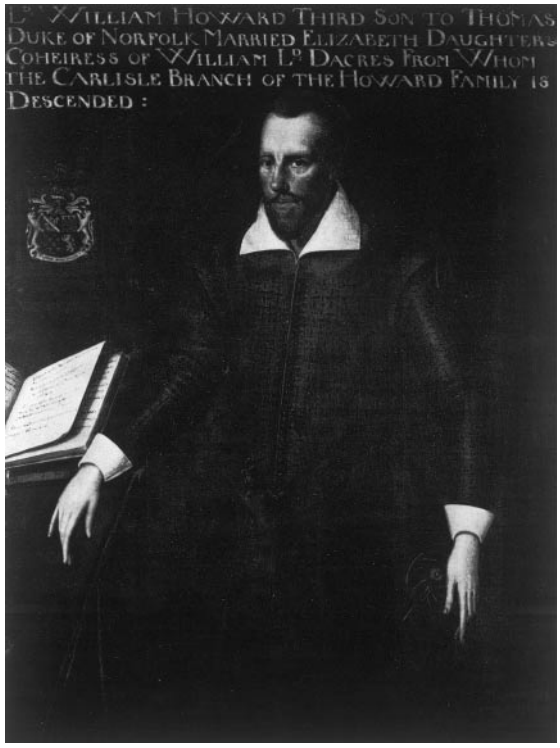

Fig. 5. Lord William Howard. One of the few portraits, reproduced from the frontispiece of G. Ornsby, *Selections from the Household Books of Lord William Howard of Naworth Castle*, Surtees Society vol. 68 (Durham, 1868).

century, and in 1731 James West found the Roman stones broken and trodden under foot, while John Horsley wrote:

> When I look round me in that summer-house, and observed particularly the inscriptions which had been removed from our own county and neighbourhood, it gave me for some time a great deal of pleasure; tho' it was afterward much abated, by reflecting on the ruinous state of both the house and inscriptions.[27]

In 1750 the fifteen surviving stones were given to Trinity College, Cambridge, where they were housed in the Wren Library until 1969, when they were transferred to the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, where they remain today.

The third collection associated with the *Britannia* is that of Lord William Howard, assembled at Naworth Castle in east Cumberland and a short distance south of the Wall.[28] Lord William (Fig. 5) was the third son of Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk, who was executed in 1572. Through his wife Lord William inherited part of the Dacre estates in Cumberland, but gained possession of them only in 1603–4. Howard was a keen antiquary and scholar who knew Camden and Cotton in scholarly circles in London in the 1590s. It was several years after Camden and Cotton's tour of 1599 that Howard himself moved north, and became a correspondent, reporting Roman and Anglo-Saxon finds to his London-based friends. His favourite daughter married Cotton's son and Howard regularly visited London. At Naworth, he restored the castle, acquired a significant library of books and manuscripts, and began his own collection of Roman antiquities. These altars and inscribed building-stones came from the important fort of Birdoswald on the Wall to the north of Naworth. Some of the inscriptions had already been seen by Camden in 1599 or reported in 1600/1601 by Bainbrigg, but others were reported for the first time by Howard himself and included in the 1607 edition of *Britannia*. Howard's collection was set out in the garden at Naworth (Fig. 6). His friend Nicholas Roscarrock, who lived at Naworth, wrote to Camden in 1607 of a milestone from Thursby, that Lord William 'hath yt now, with a great many more, in his garden-wall at Nawarde.'[29] The Naworth collection eventually totalled over a dozen stones, several of them fine altars. Howard also assisted his friend Cotton in the acquisition of several of the Redesdale altars, providing transport and expediting the shipping from Newcastle.

The Naworth collection became neglected after Howard's death in 1640. Lord William's descendants became important figures in regional and national politics, acquiring the earldom of Carlisle and holding estates in Cumbria, Northumberland and Yorkshire. The 3rd Earl, Charles Howard (1674–1738), built the grand house of Castle Howard on his Yorkshire estate. Whilst this new expression of classical grandeur was being built, visitors to Naworth were confronted with the unkempt state of Lord William's classical antiquities. In 1725 William Stukeley reported that: 'in the garden are many altars and inscriptions. I copyed all those tolerably fair, with much regret I saw those noble monuments quite neglected and exposed. Some cut in half to make gate-posts.'[30] John Horsley also visited in the 1720s and noted of one altar (*RIB* 1889): 'This inscription is upon a very beautiful altar, that was standing in the

Fig. 6. Naworth Tower, Cumbria. Howard's collection of inscriptions was displayed within the walled garden on the right. Photograph by the author, August 2002.

walk with a sun-dial upon it. The letters having been so long exposed to the weather are now become very obscure, though yet discernible'.[31] He also wrote:

> Several of the curious inscriptions that are in this garden, have been very fortunately preserved in a great measure from the injuries of the weather by a laurel hedge, which grows against a wall, where they are placed. But many of them have been long exposed to the weather, and suffered greatly by that means. This has rendered them obscure and difficult to read, which has been the true reason, I believe, why several of them have not been published before.[32]

The collection was saved from further neglect through Thomas Robinson, the 3rd Earl's son-in-law. During the 1730s, while Robinson was developing his own estate at Rokeby in North Yorkshire, he was given the Naworth collection by the Howards. All the monuments, with the exception of one or two illegible stones built into walls, were moved to Rokeby, probably between 1746 and 1760. The first recorded sighting of the collection in its new home was by Richard Gough in 1763, who noted:

> . . . monuments [from Greta Bridge Roman camp] and some dug in Sir Thomas Robinson's Park at Rookby on the other side of the road. All these and many others presented to Sir Thomas by the Earl of Carlisle and brother-in-law from his seat at Naworth are preserved in a Museum built by Sir Thomas on purpose adjoining to his House . . .'[33]

This appreciation of the collection lasted only a decade or two, for Robinson was a very extravagant man and had to sell Rokeby (and its collection of antiquities) in 1769. Bacon Morritt, son of the new owner (and owner himself after 1791) was a keen classical scholar and antiquary, who might have been expected to look after the Howard collection. However, his interests were focused more narrowly on finer, classical Mediterranean statuary. Thomas Whitaker wrote in 1823 of 'several stones in the back-yard of the house at Rokeby, the tradition concerning which is, that they were given by Lord Carlisle to Sir Thomas Robinson, and brought from Naworth castle.'[34] He continued:

> These rude remains of Roman Britain, however, wherever discovered, and now remaining at Rokeby, are so completely thrown into the back-ground by the collection of Greek and Roman inscriptions, urns etc, in marble, brought by the taste of the present owner from Greece or Italy, that they are scarce likely to meet with the degree of attention to which from local circumstances they are entitled.

Later generations of the Morritt family disposed of the Mediterranean antiquities, but the Howard collection remained and by the 1860s was displayed on a stone platform in the garden, with the altars arranged around the platform edges.[35] Although there had been losses since the eighteenth century, five altars and an inscribed building-stone still remained, and the collection is still there, kept by the present owner Sir Andrew Morritt (Fig. 7). In the centre of the

Fig. 7. The Naworth altars on the platform at Rokeby in June 2001. The 'sundial' altar noted by Horsley (*RIB* 1889) is in the centre of the display. This was one of the altars seen by Camden at Willowford and recorded in the 1600 edition of *Britannia*. Photograph by the author.

display stands the altar to Jupiter (*RIB* 1889), an inscription first seen by Camden on his tour in 1599 and recorded in the 1600 *Britannia*; later it was used as a sundial in the garden at Naworth, as reported by Horsley (above), before being transported to Rokeby.

The fourth collection in our series was that of Reginald Bainbrigg, the master of Appleby Grammar School in Westmorland.[36] Bainbrigg was a keen antiquary and an enthusiast for Camden's work though the two men seem never to have met. His correspondence with Camden shows that Bainbrigg was acquainted with both the 1590 and 1594 editions of *Britannia*; in a letter of March 1600 he showers praise on its author:

> I can not find wordes, to expresse my love towards you who take suche paines, that our countrie maie lyve for ever, det deus ut quam diutissime vivas, et hoc tuum opus, quod iam sub praelo est. 'Laudetur, vigeat, placeat, relegatur, ametur'.[37]

Bainbrigg searched out Roman inscriptions in the north, sending details to Camden. In particular he made two visits to Hadrian's Wall and beyond, one in 1599 and one in 1601, visits which added a great deal to Camden's 1607 edition of *Britannia*. The details reported by Bainbrigg led Cotton to track down some of the Northumberland inscriptions – notably those from Redesdale, north of the Wall – and to have them transported to his collection at Conington.[38] But Bainbrigg was himself not content simply to draw and report the inscriptions he located. He also was a collector, and it was a collection that began early. In one letter he wrote to Camden of an inscription 'now sett in my new howse at Applebeie'.[39] His collection was a medley of original, Roman inscribed stones, together with copies of his own readings of other Roman inscriptions he had seen, which he then had chiselled into stone, and also with what Haverfield called Bainbrigg's *jeux d'esprit* – his own contemporary inscriptions.

Like the other collections, Bainbrigg's Appleby collection at the grammar school has undergone neglect and loss. By Horsley's time in the 1720s, there were 'two or three stones with inscriptions upon them, which the masons had lately destroyed at Appleby', and 'others now . . . lying loose upon the ground'.[40] Further losses were noticed by Gough and by Hugh Todd,[41] but today quite a number do survive. Most are built into a wall in Chapel Street,

Fig. 8. Part of the Bainbrigg collection in the Chapel Street wall, Appleby, June 2001. The now-indecipherable Kirkby Thore altar is second left, lower row. Lower row, far right, is a careful copy of a Brougham milestone. Most of the other visible stones are Bainbrigg's *jeux d'esprit* and variations in the quality of lettering suggest some may have been by Bainbrigg himself rather than a skilled stonemason. Photograph by the author.

opposite the site of the old Grammar School, though two (Bainbrigg's own) are at the post-1887 school site to the north of the town (Fig. 8). Of the sixteen stones in the wall, only one can be definitely identified as a genuine Roman inscription (*RIB* 759 from Kirkby Thore). Others are indecipherable, are known copies (e.g. *RIB* 1202 from Whitley Castle and *RIB* 998 from Crowdundle quarry), or are Bainbrigg's own creations (e.g. one commemorating the founders of the school and one recording Bainbrigg himself as aged fifty-seven in 1602). They are a remarkable survival in such a public place, being passed unnoticed as visitors move to the riverside or the swimming baths, yet they enjoy no legal protection whatever.[42]

The fifth of our early collections was that of Camden's lifetime friend Francis Godwin (1562–1633). Godwin, then sub-Dean of Exeter, had toured South Wales with Camden in 1590, and in 1601 became Bishop of Llandaff. A man of wide intellectual and scholarly interests (including writing one of the very earliest science-fiction novels),[43] Godwin corresponded with Camden about antiquarian discoveries in South Wales. In particular, he reported a series of Roman inscriptions found at Caerleon; some of this correspondence survives and the inscriptions were included in the 1607 edition of *Britannia*. But Godwin also collected the stones and had them moved to his official residence or palace at Mathern.[44] Of two inscriptions Camden records 'Extant hae inscriptiones ad Mathern in aedibus Episcopi Landavensis' [These inscriptions are

placed in the house of the Bishop of Llandaff at Mathern].[45] In all Godwin assembled five inscriptions at his house. These were *RIB* 316, 326, 331, 335 and 352. In 1608 Godwin and his wife bought the house of Moyne's Court near Mathern, and at some subsequent date the stones were moved there. When Godwin later transferred to the see of Hereford (in 1617), the collection of inscriptions did not go with him, but was left for the new owners of Moyne's Court.

At Moyne's Court the inscriptions became part of a garden display. Gibson reported in 1695 of all five monuments: 'These inscriptions are in the wall of the Garden of Moinscourt'. In 1774 Wyndham noted, 'In the garden walls of Moinscourt are to be seen many of the inscribed stones mentioned by Camden, which were brought from Caerleon by Godwin . . . but the most curious inscriptions have lately been removed and are now preserved in the house of Moinscourt.' By 1798 Archdeacon Coxe recorded:

> I observed on walls which enclose the courtyard two of the Roman inscriptions which Gibson in the Supplement to Camden mentions as having been found at Caerleon and transferred by Bishop Godwin to their present situation. They are considerably defaced, and without Gibson's assistance I could not have fully deciphered them.[46]

Of the five inscriptions collected by Godwin, three survive (*RIB* 316, 326 and 331), having been transferred to Caerleon museum in the mid-nineteenth century.

The wider context of collecting

Having set out the specific details of these early collections of Roman antiquities, it is now possible to consider their relationship to wider issues of the growth of collecting in seventeenth-century England, both in terms of the nature of the collections and the character of the collectors.

The first and immediately obvious point is that these were specialist collections of antiquities, assembled in the main very close to the places of discovery. The Elenborough or Netherhall collection of the Senhouses required transport over only a few hundred yards, those of Howard and Godwin only a few miles, as was true of the genuine Roman inscribed stones in Bainbrigg's collection. Only the wealthy and determined Sir Robert Cotton transported stones over long distances to form his collection at Conington. Moreover, although some of the altars have aesthetic appeal, much of the attraction is scholarly: without an interest in their origin, in the decipherment of the inscriptions and their linkage to the Roman occupation of Britain, the stones would have very limited appeal.

The collections of Roman antiquities thus differ markedly from the better-known collections of 'curiosities' and 'rarities' such as those of Cope, Bargrave or Tradescant. They are not the diverse assemblies of easily portable objects from exotic travel (whether by the collector or by travellers). They cannot, therefore, be readily mapped into the growing literature on collecting as means of fashioning identity, most forcefully argued by Bann in his study of the Bargrave collection,[47] but also deployed by Swann in her recent overview of seventeenth-century English collecting.[48] Nevertheless, there are aspects of the early antiquarian collections that do bear wider significance.

Although the collections of Roman inscribed stones were of a specialist nature, their collectors were both scholars and collectors on a wider front. Cotton's reputation as a collector is without equal in the early seventeenth century and his collections of manuscripts, books and coins are better known than his stone inscriptions, and all have been the focus of recent study.[49] But the same scholarly role is true of the four other collectors. We know least about the Cumberland gentleman, John Senhouse, and all we have is Camden's comment in *Britannia* that Senhouse was 'himselfe well learned, he is a lover of ancient literature', but Camden was not one to bestow accolades lightly. Lord William Howard's wider interests as part of the antiquarian community are well known and at Naworth he established a notable library.[50] On a smaller scale the same is true of Reginald Bainbrigg, who, for a provincial schoolmaster, assembled a significant library of books on history, religion and also medicine, a library that largely survived and is now at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne.[51] Finally Bishop Godwin was a wide-ranging scholar, described by Wood as 'a good man, a grave divine, skilful mathematician, excellent philosopher, pure Latinist, and incomparable historian, being no less critical in histories than the learned Selden.'[52] This apparent paragon undoubtedly assembled a substantial library,

evidenced by his own publications, but there is no record of it.

There are, however, few instances of these collections extending beyond serious antiquities, books and manuscripts and into the wider realms of the cabinet of curiosities or rarities. The rather isolated examples make the point: Richard Verstegan's gift to Cotton of a 'petrified fish tongue' and Cotton's own investigation of a fossilized skeleton of an enormous fish found when making a pool near Conington were not the basis of any further collecting.[53] Lord William Howard's Household Books show his interest in astrolabes, dials and scientific instruments, and his purchase of some 'Cornish diamonds' (quartz-type crystals) has been seen as evidence of wider collecting. But the Cornish diamonds were in fact not for Lord William at all, but were purchased 'on her lady's account' by Lady Elizabeth, his wife.[54] Contrasting with other early seventeenth-century cabinets or with later, diverse collections such as that of Ralph Thoresby,[55] these were the specialized collections of serious antiquaries and scholars, focused on literary and physical evidence. Whilst the contents of many 'cabinets of curiosities' were in fact miscellaneous assemblages of little coherence or value, the collections of inscribed stones were far more 'modern' in being connected to historical research and scholarship. This linkage was, in part, possible because the collections were epigraphic and textual, essentially 'documents on stone'. Coins provide a parallel case, and Cotton also assembled an important collection of these.[56] However, Cotton's coins were not directly related to his collection of Roman altars, nor were they displayed together; the other collections have no coins associated with them, nor are any mentioned in Camden's correspondence or in *Britannia*.

Swann, amongst others, has argued for a close association between chorography, antiquarianism, mapping and the rise of landed property in early seventeenth-century England, an association in which Camden's *Britannia* was central.[57] Through the Latin editions of Camden, and then the 1610 English version of Holland and through to the revisions of Gibson in 1695 and those of the eighteenth century, the *Britannia* was the major historical and antiquarian source for both gentry and scholars, as the work of Woolf has recently demonstrated.[58] He notes:

> *Britannia* deserves a special place in the history of history in England, less for what its author did for historical method than for what the book itself did, in the century after its first publication in 1586, for the dissemination of a rudimentary knowledge of British antiquity, and the turning of many gentry minds toward the history and archaeology of their localities.[59]

Just as Camden's work painted the Kingdom as inheritor of the Roman province of Britannia, so the preservation of local Roman antiquities linked a locality to its classically-civilized past and the landowner as local inheritor of that role. Camden's correspondents (and our five collectors) gained their own recognition through named citation in the *Britannia*, where all five are mentioned by the 1607 edition. Such recognition may appear a very limited canvas, but the impact and wide diffusion of the *Britannia* must also be acknowledged. The recognition must have been welcomed and helped reinforce their self-identities as significant scholars and antiquaries.

In one or two instances we can glimpse the collectors identifying themselves with the lapidary inscriptions they collected. Howarth has studied Cotton's use of Roman altar design and inscription in Cotton's drawings of 'the Cecil altar' and his donation inscription to the Bodleian Library, together with the funerary monuments for Conington church.[60] In Appleby, Reginald Bainbrigg also played with memorializing in Roman style, when he had stones carved to commemorate the history of Appleby, the foundation of the school, and one in 1602 recording that he had taught at Appleby for twenty-two years and was then aged fifty-seven.

Survival or loss

The private collection has a high attrition rate: interest declines after the death of the original collector, and transfer to some 'public' collection is often the necessary condition for survival, as with Bargrave's cabinet to Canterbury Cathedral, and the Tradescants' collection to the Ashmolean in Oxford. Although altars, milestones and tombstones are harder to lose than smaller collectors' pieces, similar processes are at work. Neglected in garden undergrowth or backyard, stones are prey to recycling into buildings, walls and field-drains. In this light the fate

of the five early collections discussed here has been remarkably good.

It is interesting to examine the 'survival rate' of the Roman inscribed stones seen or reported by Camden in his various editions of *Britannia* and to calculate the role of these collections. The loss rate of the inscribed stones, as they became incorporated into buildings, buried, moved and misplaced, has been high. Of the twelve inscriptions on stone reported in the first (1586) edition, only three survive today. Of the sixteen in the 1590 edition, only five survive. In the 1600 edition, fifty-three are reported, and only eighteen survive. By 1607 there are 102, of which thirty-nine survive. The five collections make up major proportions of the survivals: of the thirty-nine from 1607 or before, twenty-seven are in the five collections.[61] The Cotton collection is undoubtedly the most important, with fourteen, the Senhouse collection at Maryport provides five, the Naworth-Rokeby collection four, Godwin's Caerleon collection three and Bainbrigg's Appleby collection one. Thus, although each of the collections has lost items through the four centuries, they have played a significant part in the preservation of the Roman inheritance discovered by Camden and his associates, whereas stones not incorporated into collections have fared much less well.

One factor that may have influenced survival was the limited monetary value of the antiquities. They were not easily exchanged, unlike coins, medals or books, nor did they have the wide (and hence valuable) aesthetic appeal of classical Mediterranean statuary, for even as inscriptions the lettering was often rather crude compared with the best Rome could provide. Where items in the collections were exchanged, after their initial, low-cost acquisition, it was as part of the elite 'gift economy' rather than for money, and such exchanges were not common. Cotton's acquisitions, presumably as gifts, from Savile and Burghley have been mentioned already. The finest Maryport altar 'To the Genius of the Place' (*RIB* 812), illustrated in the 1600 *Britannia*, was given by a later John Senhouse *c.*1668 to the local Cumberland magnate Sir John Lowther, and another altar (*RIB* 814) was presented to the Bishop of Sodor and Man between 1726 and 1731 (now in Carlisle Museum). The gift of the entire Naworth collection to Thomas Robinson provides the most substantial example.

Finally, the wider impact and legacy of these early collections should not be neglected. In particular, it can be argued that Cotton, Camden and Howard had a direct and strong influence on the taste and collecting of the Earl of Arundel.[62] Arundel's interests developed towards the finer classical statuary and inscriptions from the Mediterranean homeland of classical civilization, but his collecting began a decade after the collections discussed here, a decade when these three men played significant roles in his life. The early collections associated with Camden thus had an enduring and wider influence through their influence on Arundel, 'the father of vertu in England' as Horace Walpole described him. The collections also set a pattern for later antiquarian research on Roman Britain. Much of the seventeenth century after Camden was a barren period for the investigation of Roman Britain, but the end of the century saw a revival of interest,[63] accompanied by the creation of new collections by scholars and landowners such as Sir John Clerk, Sir Robert Sibbald and Alexander Gordon in Scotland and Christopher Hunter, John Horsley, John Warburton and Robert Graham in the north of England.

These later strands should not, however, obscure the prime significance of these Elizabethan and Jacobean collections of Roman antiquities. That significance lies in the fact that their creators wanted to explore and to celebrate the Roman contribution to Britain and to value the material remains of that Roman occupation. Today the substantial surviving elements of the collections – whether seen in the cliff-top museum (e.g. *RIB* 810) at Maryport, a neglected street-wall in Appleby (*RIB* 759), or displayed on the lawn of a country house (e.g. *RIB* 1889 at Rokeby) – allow a direct, material link to those days of Camden's discovery of Roman Britain, and should be recognized as important early contributions to the culture of collecting in Britain.

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