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Source: *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 9 (1919), pp. 208-210

Published by: [Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/296006>

Accessed: 09/05/2014 08:19

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## THE CARATACUS STONE ON EXMOOR.

By F. A. BRUTON, M.A. Litt.D.

(Plate xv).

On the very top of Winsford Hill, the southern limit of Exmoor, more than twelve hundred feet above the sea, two roads meet at right angles, at a point called Spire Cross. One connects the ancient (some say prehistoric) bridge known as Tarr Steps, on one side of the hill, with the picturesque village of Winsford, lying deep down in the valley of the Exe, on the other. The second road runs north-west from Dulverton to Exford, and so to Porlock and Lynmouth, passing on the left Hawkcombe Head, the favourite meeting-place of the Somerset and Devon Staghounds, and the Lorna Doone country.

At a short distance from Spire Cross, over the open moor, stands a lonely stone. Little known, even to antiquaries, this stone is the only one that bears the name of Caratacus. It still stands more than three feet out of the ground, leaning over now from its once perpendicular position, with only the wild moor around it. The late Sir Thomas Acland raised over it a massive concrete canopy, quite in keeping with its character, which still leaves the monolith open to the four winds. On its eastern side, rudely carved in bold (probably fourth-century) letters, two words can be deciphered, in two lines, reading from above downwards :

CARATACI  
MEPVN

The two central letters of the name are ligatured, and, as may be seen, the N of the second word is reversed.<sup>1</sup>

For the moment the stone has a special interest because one of the last archaeological expeditions made by the late Professor Haverfield was a pilgrimage to Exmoor to examine it. 'It is all right,' he wrote to me in two letters dated respectively November 2 and

<sup>1</sup> The inscription is numbered 982 in Haverfield's Supplement to *C.I.L.* vii (*Eph. Ep.* vol. ix, fasc. iv). His note upon it there, written before he had seen the stone, runs: 'The inscription is

Celtic rather than Roman, perhaps of the fourth or fifth century; Rhys has pointed out that the word *nepus* (i.e. *nepos*) here signifies kinship or family relationship.'



NO. I. THE CARATACUS STONE (p. 209)



NO. 2. WALL AND STEPS IN ROCK, CROCCIA COGNATO (p. 213).

November 10, 1918 (a few weeks after he had visited the stone); 'that is, it is really Caratacus. All I can say is already in *Ephemeris* ix, no. 982, p. 510. All I did was to satisfy myself that the rather sensational reading hitherto accepted was in essentials correct. The stone is so remote from railways and the ways of Latinists, that it has hardly ever been seen by any epigraphist.' Later, he added a note upon it to his Presidential address in the Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological Society, vol. lxiv. This is identical with the quotation given below in the footnote.

I may add (from my own experience), for the benefit of those who wish to visit it, that the stone may be reached by a pleasant walk of six or eight miles from Dulverton, and that it is within two miles of Winsford. Owing to the orientation of the stone, the inscription is seen most clearly at midday. Reaching it in the late afternoon, I found some little difficulty at first in deciphering the letters. Indeed Mr. J. L. W. Page, who was the first to write about the stone (more than thirty years ago), says: "The inscription in a dim light is scarcely legible." The accompanying photograph (plate xv, no. 1), the first to be published of this inscription, was taken at the special request of Dr. Haverfield, on his return, and he was delighted with it. It is a copy, by Mr. H. St. George Gray, of the excellent cast of the stone which hangs in Taunton Castle museum, which again was taken from a squeeze obtained by Mr. Page and others in September, 1890. When the squeeze was taken, the letter N was missing. The fragment bearing it was afterwards found and cemented in position,<sup>1</sup> and I saw it thus in September, 1919. I should guess that the fragment may have been restored to its position when the canopy was erected, but of this I have no proof.

The monument affords an extraordinary example of the ease with which a slip may be made in copying an inscription. When I copied the letters on the spot in 1919 and came to read them over, I found that I had omitted the third A, and it is inserted above in the sketch I brought away with me. Rhys, who spoke of this stone as 'one of the most important monuments in south-western England,' sent an account of it to the *Academy* for August, 1890 (p. 179). Exactly the same mistake occurs there, and Rhys wrote a letter to the *Academy* for September, 1890, to correct it. It is remarkable that Haverfield, who gives the references to Rhys's article

<sup>1</sup> On this point Haverfield merely says (*V.C.H. Somerset*, vol. i, p. 369): 'The N was found later.' Again in *Proc. Somerset Arch. Soc.* vol. lxiv, p. xxxviii, he adds: 'The first letter of the second line is a broken N.' Page, who took Rhys to see the stone in August, 1890, wrote (*Proc. Somerset Arch. Soc.* vol. xxxvi, 1890): 'At the time of our visit there was no actual evidence that the N existed . . . The Rev. J. J. Coleman, the local secretary for the Society for Dulverton . . . hearing about three

years since [i.e. about 1887] that a portion had been broken off, visited the spot and secured and buried the pieces. "One of these pieces," Mr. Coleman wrote, "is inscribed distinctly with N and it exactly fits on to the part of the stone which is inscribed EPVS, the N evidently forming part of the same word as that to which EPVS belongs." Apparently, therefore, Mr. Coleman was the first to see the fragment.

and his correcting letter, should himself have allowed the same error to appear in his account of the inscription in *Eph. Ep.* vol. ix, no. 982, for there also the name reads as CARATCI. In *V.C.H. Somerset*, vol. i, and in *Proc. Somerset. Arch. Soc.* vol. lxiv, he gives it correctly as CARATACI.

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Since the above was in type I have visited the stone again on three separate occasions ; twice on September 8, and once on September 9, 1921. The point that struck me most then was the excellent definition of the reversed N, in spite of the fact that the upper part of the third stroke is somewhat obscured by the cement used to keep the fragment in position.

Just as I was leaving the stone for the last time, the sun shone out brilliantly, throwing such strong shadows that every letter showed as though painted in black. This was at 11.45 a.m. (summer time). The sight more than repaid the trouble of another visit, and no doubt that is the time to see the inscription at its best, as it seems to face north-east by east.

I found on this occasion that the distance from the town of Dulverton is exactly five miles ; but it must be remembered that the town is two miles from the railway station.