

*Stone Head from Millom. By C. RICHARDSON, Transactions, 002, 1978, Vol 78*

*Manufactured from red sandstone, this head (Plate) was presented to Whitehaven Museum by Mr E. James in June 1976. It was recovered from St. George's Churchyard, Millom (SD 171 800), and had been used for some two years as a "doorstop", the flat smooth-surfaced back making it ideally suited for such a purpose. It is worth noting that a number of stone heads, ranging from Celtic to relatively modern, possess flat backs.' In the case of the early heads, this is frequently the result of re-use in later structures, notably field, house and church walls. In view of the number of "modern reproductions" in circulation, one is inclined to question the validity of stone heads lacking a context. Dating such heads is invariably hazardous, resting upon stylistic grounds. Despite the wide range of types, stone heads from Iron Age contexts exhibit certain common characteristics, cf. Ross (1967, 61-126), Jackson (1973, 2-4), the present example displaying these features and suggesting authenticity.*

*Overall length 30 cm, average width 19.5 cm, max. thickness 10 cm, rectangular-shaped eye sockets (left 3.5x 2.5 cm; right 3.0 x 2.2 cm). Eyebrows clearly defined, slit mouth 6.5 cm in length, showing teeth. Nose is parallel-sided extending downwards from the inner bottom corner of each eye socket for a distance of 4.5 cm, the vertical marks linking up. Nostrils have been inserted with a hint of a moustache. An attempt has been made to provide the head with hair, on the top, side of face and chin. Tooling marks are visible, comprising small circular punch-like depressions and elongated score marks.*

*Several crude heads of Roman period date fashioned from local sandstone and associated with native cults have been recovered from the Cumbrian area. Excavations at Castlesteads yielded stone objects including a roughly worked head with features similar to the Millom head: rectangular eye sockets, parallel-sided nose, hair shown by pecking. No attempt had been made to fashion the Castlesteads head into naturalistic form, unlike the present example which has a roughly shaped outline. The parallel-sided nose form is found on examples from Maryport (incised head) and Netherby, while the slit mouth is a feature of many Celtic heads, teeth occasionally being displayed. A head from the N. Riding, Yorks., is close to the Millom specimen, differing in squared outline and almond-shaped eyes. Tricephalos from Woodlands, Co. Donegal, possesses eyes and nose of form similar to the Millom head.' One of two heads built into the church at Kirkby Malham, N. Yorks., is likewise close.*

*The Millom head exhibits features which can be paralleled in examples from Iron Age contexts, and a date within that period is tentatively suggested. Drawing of firm conclusions must await detailed recording and study of existing heads in the Cumbrian area, plus additional material. It is worth bearing in mind that Celtic characteristics were copied by 19th century stone-carvers, an aspect yet to be investigated locally. For a study of medieval and later effigies, busts and portrait medallions in the Diocese of Carlisle, cf. CW1, xv, 417-458; CW2, iv, 118-145.*

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