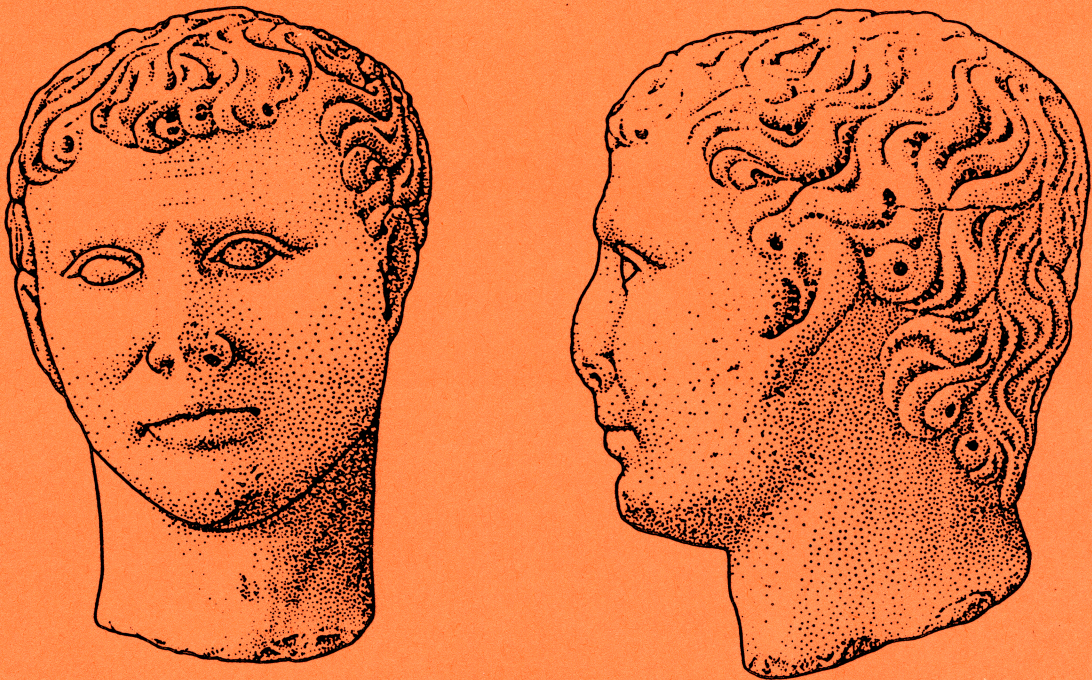




NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



Roman Marble Head
Radwell, Hertfordshire

**Roman Marble Head,
Radwell, Hertfordshire**

by
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North Hertfordshire District Museums

1: Description of Marble Head from Radwell, Hertfordshire

Height	236mm
Width	156mm
Breadth	187mm

The worst damage occurs on the left side of the chin and nose. There is also a large piece missing from the base of the neck.

The wear is most noticeable on the left side of the face especially over the cheek and ear. It appears to have been caused by abrasion during the time the object was left in the ground as the surface has been left rough and uneven. By contrast the wear on the crown was apparently caused by a different, smoother action as it has left a more polished surface, though the hair may not have been as deeply carved in this area originally.

The area around the eyes and the right side of the nose is perhaps the least worn. It retains its polished surface, and features such as the furrowed brow and wrinkles across the forehead as well as the actual chisel marks around the eyes are still visible.

There are visible imperfections in the marble; pitting in the form of small pin holes in the top of the head near the crown. Also a fault occurs in a horizontal line just above and behind the left ear.

Extensive use of the drill is apparent in the working of the object especially in forming the curls of the hair; groups of drill holes are used to separate the locks of hair and single holes form the centre of the curls. Their size, depth and spacing are not uniform which argues against a possible separate function as a means of attaching a wreath or diadem. The largest drill hole in the hair measures 6mm in diameter and around 4mm in depth.

Drill holes are not confined to the hair area. They also form the corners of the mouth, the nostrils, the orifices for the ears and the hole in the neck base, which would presumably have contained a shaft for attaching the head to its base.

While the subtle contours of the face are executed with great care, there are slight anomalies in the features; the ears are different sizes; the left ear is 66mm while the right is 55mm in length. Also the left nostril wing is larger than the right. The right eyelid is markedly thicker than the left and the eye itself is slightly higher, even taking into account the tilt of the head. However, the left eye is slightly wider than the right and all these anomalies taken together give the object a slightly lop-sided appearance.

Staining is visible where the layers of paint, now removed, have penetrated the surface. The turquoise staining is most obvious along the channels cut into the base of the neck, to a lesser extent around the left eye and occasionally in the hair. The conservator concluded that the staining on the base of the neck may have been caused by proximity to a copper- alloy pin which may have held the head in position on a base. The composition of this staining seemed to be different to that elsewhere on the head. The light brown discolouration covers much of the neck area and the right side of the face and occurs more patchily in the hair. There are two small patches of iron staining at the base of the neck opposite each other to the right and left.

Jane Read
Illustrator/Finds Officer
11.10.95

North Hertfordshire District Museums

2: Notes on Marble Head from Radwell, Hertfordshire

The obvious classical style of the head together with its likely association with the Radwell villa site, if accepted, make this sculpture one of only four discovered in such circumstances in Britain, the others being the busts from Lullingstone Villa in Kent, and the head of a boy from Fishbourne Roman Palace, Sussex, all of which are discussed below.

The Radwell head is most likely to have been carved by a classical sculptor and imported to Britain as a finished work in antiquity. It is also possible that it was produced by a Mediterranean sculptor working in Britain at a time when Roman occupation was established and many craftsmen, merchants and people from all walks of life were settled here. The third and perhaps least likely option, though it cannot be discounted altogether, is the possibility of its having been imported in comparatively modern times by a collector of antiquities. If this were the case, then why, having gone to the trouble of transporting it some 2,000 miles, did the owner or subsequent owner allow it to be covered in paint and cement and to find its way into an outhouse among garden tools and other household paraphernalia. Fortuitous indeed that the outhouse is situated adjacent to a grand and complex Roman villa site.

The dating of the piece has been suggested as second century AD based on several features; the style and technique of carving the hair, the representation of the eyes and the subtle contours of the face. It has been difficult to establish the date with certainty as the head displays characteristics usually associated with different periods. The hair has obvious drill holes of varying depths in the centre of and between each curl and the style is similar to that on depictions of Titus and Domitian e.g. from Ephesus (Ramage & Ramage 1991, pl.5.22), dating to the late first century AD. However, there is an anomaly in that the facial features bear no resemblance to the powerful, squat portraits of this period. The eyes are left blank with no carving of pupils and irises though they would originally have been painted as would the rest of the sculpture. The representation of eye detail by carving was introduced half way through the reign of Hadrian i.e. around AD 120. The physiognomy; the high cheek bones, the heavy brows, the suggestion of a Roman nose (now damaged), the severe, straight mouth and realism of the piece, all suggest a similar date. The head bears a strong resemblance to the idealised portrait of Augustus dating to c.AD 125 though the features of this piece are perhaps more angular.

Reference is made in a discussion on a disputed Roman head from Broadbridge, Sussex, (Connor 1974, 379) to a portrait of Tiberius from Corinth which describes extensive use of the drill; at the corners of the mouth and within the nostrils and ears. The mid second century marble head of Minerva from the London Mithraeum (Toynbee 1962, pl.28) has drill holes forming the curls of the hair but the features are more severe than those of the Radwell head. The two examples demonstrate undisguised use of the drill throughout the first century and well into the second century AD at least.

It has been suggested by Dr. Henry Hurst (Museum of Classical Archaeology, Cambridge) that the head has its closest parallels among the portraits of the Julio-Claudian period e.g. the Claudius in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen. However, he goes on to point out several differences such as the treatment of the hair which he says could be put down to regional variation, the presence of drill holes in the Radwell head which he suggests may be modern (extensive research shows that this is unlikely) and the more crude carving of the eyelids of the Radwell head. He also confirms that it is less likely that the crude marble would have been imported to Britain for sculpting in a British workshop or by a Mediterranean sculptor working in Britain. He therefore concludes that it was probably imported ready carved.

Dr. Martin Henig (Institute of Archaeology, Oxford) has also suggested a parallel from the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, a portrait said to be of Tiberius. (Poulsen 1962, 81-2, pls.LXXIV, LXXV.) He concedes that the Radwell Head may possibly be associated with the nearby villa but places much importance on the inconclusive nature of the evidence.

Marble classical sculpture found in secure contexts is fairly rare in Britain. Some examples are outlined below.

The Lullingstone bust is of a slightly later date than the Radwell head and copies the Hadrianic style. It is the better preserved of two similar marble busts found in the 'Deep Room' of the villa, deliberately hidden towards the end of the second century AD and dating from early-mid second century (Toynbee 1964, pls.X, XI). They depict ancestors of the previous villa owners and were venerated as house spirits by the new owners following a period when the villa was unoccupied. The sculpture is of very high quality and typical of the period in more affluent parts of the Empire. It is carved from Greek Pentelic marble and probably of Greek workmanship. It is likely to have been imported in a completely finished condition though it is possible that it arrived semi-complete for finishing in a local workshop, a possibility which may be similarly applied to the Radwell head.

The Fishbourne head, though incomplete, shares more common characteristics with the Radwell head than do the two from Lullingstone (Cunliffe 1971, 166). It was recovered from the fill of a robber trench in the North Wing of the palace. The carving of the eyelid on the two sculptures is very similar, both portray a youthful fleshed out face with individual characteristics, both are skilfully carved from white crystalline marble from Italy (Carrara marble in the case of the Radwell head) and the two are of a similar size. The style of the Fishbourne head suggests a late first century date while the Radwell head may be a little later. Both carvings appear to portray individuals rather than generalised deities; perhaps they depict members of the respective villas' households.

Several parallels may be drawn between the Lullingstone, Fishbourne and Radwell sculptures; their villa associations, their classical style which infers their importation to Britain, the competence of the workmanship and the similarities of the sculptural techniques.

Perhaps the closest parallel, overall, to the Radwell head, is the marble head of ?Germanicus found at Bosham, W. Sussex (Toynbee 1962, pl.1 and MacDermott 1910). It was discovered in near pristine condition in the mid nineteenth century during excavations for the foundations of a house on the Bosham villa site. If this were the case, the early first century AD date means the head would have been imported after AD 43 as an heirloom, or, as Toynbee (1962) suggests, it may have existed in an earlier building on the nearby Fishbourne site, having cast doubt on the Bosham find spot. The original note in the Sussex Archaeological Collections, however, seems quite clear on this point.

The head depicts a member of the Claudian family, possibly Germanicus (d. AD ?17). It portrays a youth of similar age to that portrayed by the Radwell head and similarly has individual characteristics. The two portraits may not be quite contemporary but they have many common features: the carving of the nose and mouth, the rounded chin, the countenance and again, the appearance of being a portrait of an individual. The main differences are the treatment of the hair, the more severely carved eyelids of the Bosham head (cf. portrait of Augustus c. AD 125 but perhaps based on earlier models - Ramage & Ramage 1991, pl.3.9), and the neck extending further into the shoulders.

Another marble head, the history of which is obscure, comes from Crondall, Hampshire (Millet 1977, 351). It depicts a youth in the classical style and though very worn the high quality of the carving and use of the drill are still apparent. The style has been compared to Antinous type statues and therefore dated to the Hadrianic period i.e. early-mid second century AD. The head was left to Crondall church in 1962 and though nothing is known

about the circumstances of the find, tradition associates it with the nearby villa site at Barley Pond.

A marble head has also been recorded from Acton, Suffolk which is also very battered and worn (Wilson 1972, 330). It was a chance find from a ditch and has been interpreted as being a votive object.

More generally, classical sculpture or Romano-British sculpture in classical style has been found elsewhere in Britain, often in religious or funerary contexts. The sculptures from the Mithraeum in London are among the finest examples; the marble relief of Mithras slaying the bull (Toynbee 1962, pl.73), the statuette of the Bacchus group (pl.34), the marble head of Mithras wearing a Phrygian cap (pl.42), the statuette of a genius (pl.25), the river god (pl.35) and the highly classical head of Serapis bearing a corn measure on the top of his head which dates to the mid-late second century AD (pl.43). Again, they are most likely to have been imported ready carved.

There is also a small marble statue of Diana Luna associated with a sacrificial bull recorded from the villa at Woodchester, Glos. (BM Guide 1922, pl.II). The statue would have originally been around 50cm tall. At Chesters on Hadrian's Wall, a full size statue of a goddess, possibly Cybele, standing on a bull was found (Toynbee 1962, pl.41), and from Bradwell Roman villa in Buckinghamshire, a cockerel of Carrara marble was found, dating to the late second century AD (Green 1974, 381). The carving was probably part of a Mercury group of Gaulish or British manufacture and may have had religious significance or been purely decorative.

Examples from funerary contexts include the marble statuette of Bacchus from a grave close to Spoonley Wood, Glos. (Henig 1984, pl.84) and more locally, a marble sarcophagus from Welwyn, Herts. (Rook, Walker & Denston 1984, 143-62). Only fragments remain, but from these it is apparent that the sarcophagus was decorated with figures carved in high relief at the front and in low relief on the left side. The back appears to have been left blank which suggests the piece would have been sited against a wall. It is highly polished in places and the absence of visible drilling together with the high quality of the work places it probably in the first half of the third century AD.

Portraits meant for public display in triumphal or commemorative contexts include the early second century AD marble head of a man from Hawkshaw, Peebleshire, possibly part of a monument commemorating the conquest of the area (Toynbee 1962, pl.11). The head is very finely carved and wears a very severe expression. By contrast, the massive fourth century stone head of Constantine from York wears a gentle yet commanding expression and the style of carving suggests non British craftsmanship; perhaps a Gaulish or Mediterranean artist (Toynbee 1962, pl.12).

Another local find is the alabaster frieze fragment from Hitchin, Herts. discovered in the foundations of a public house when it was demolished last century. The fragment, the exact context of which is uncertain, has been variously identified as Etruscan and third century AD, and depicts an apotheosis scene.

Examples of Romano-British monumental sculpture, carved to varying degrees in the classical style, are represented also. A bust was found set into a wall niche of a cottage at Sutton Mandeville, Wilts. (Toynbee 1976, 109, pls.XVI, XVII). It was carved of locally quarried limestone and had dowel holes for joining on the rest of the statue. The piece has similarities with depictions of Augustus and has been dated to the beginning of the second century AD. Many tombstones survive also, especially military examples such as that of Marcus Favonius Facilis, centurion with Leg XX in Colchester (Toynbee 1962, pl.93). A fine second or third century piece from Cirencester carved from Cotswold Stone depicts Mercury in a style which combines classical naturalism and Celtic strength and individuality; a clear example of native sculpture copying the classical style. Another head of Mercury which is very similar in style, is the remarkably high quality example from the

Uley Shrines, Gloucestershire (Toynbee 1962, pl.29 and Woodward & Leach 1993, fig.72). Carved from local stone, it was originally part of a complete statue. It is clearly based on a classical style and comparisons with depictions of Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius, especially with regard to the treatment of the hair, places it in the second century AD.

If the villa association is accepted, the Radwell head is one of a small group of marble sculptures found in rural contexts in Britain, the others being the Lullingstone and Fishbourne heads, the Spoonley Wood Bacchus and the Woodchester Diana, all of which are securely provenanced. Though much, of course, depends on the chance of survival, the rarity of marble classical sculpture in Britain and the consequent difficulty in finding parallels for the Radwell head attest to the uniqueness of this find and the importance of the villa site with which it is associated.

Jane Read,
Illustrator/Finds Officer

(ed) Gil Burleigh
Keeper of Field Archaeology

12.10.95

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3: Roman Marble Head from Radwell, Hertfordshire.

- 1 Found in the outhouse of an agricultural worker's cottage in 1994 during house-clearance.
- 2 Sold at auction to a private collector in 1995.
- 3 Owner loaned it to N. Herts. Museums for recording.
- 4 Owner has now offered it to NHDC for £5,200 (confidential).
- 5 Research by N.H. archaeologists suggest that it may well have been found by a now-deceased farm worker who formerly occupied the cottage.
- 6 The stone head was buried in the outhouse under years of accumulated debris and clutter. Its importance seems not to have been appreciated because it had been mistreated to the extent of having large amounts of various modern paints deposited on it and some modern cement. None of the recent occupants of the cottage or neighbours knew anything about it.
- 7 The modern paint, etc. has been cleaned off by the Verulamium Museum Conservator.
- 8 The cottage is within 500m of an extremely impressive Roman villa (a Scheduled Ancient Monument) on land which used to be ploughed by the former occupant of the cottage. Roman remains are known to extend to within about 200m of the cottage.
- 9 Although it is very unusual to find a sculpture of this quality and date in Britain, and its lack of archaeological context leaves its true provenance open to doubt, nevertheless it is possible it was found on or near the villa site.
- 10 However, it is possible also that the sculpture is a Grand Tour import. How it ended up in the cottage outhouse if a Grand Tour item is difficult to explain. There is no country mansion near.
- 11 It is sculpted from Italian Carrara marble - identification by Henry Buckley, Collection Manager, Dept. of Mineralogy, The Natural History Museum, London.
- 12 All the experts who have seen the head agree that it is Roman, however, there are some differences of opinion as to its actual date. All agree that it is probably first century A.D. or early second century at latest.
- 13 The Ashmolean Museum put it at first century A.D.
- 14 Dr. Henry Hurst of the Museum of Classical Archaeology, University of Cambridge, inclines to a mid-first century A.D. date, and compares it with some portraits of Claudius in style (although there are differences such as the drill holes and the treatment of the hair), such as those in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen. However, the eyelids of the Radwell head resemble the eyelid of the marble head found at the Roman palace at Fishbourne. The latter head is published as late first century A.D.
- 15 Dr. Janet Huskinson of the Open University inclined to a second century A.D. date, although probably earlier in that century.

- 16 16 Dr. Martin Henig of the Institute of Archaeology, Oxford also inclined to a mid-first century date.
- 17 Although I have made initial contact, I have not managed yet to discuss the head in detail with the other obvious expert, Dr. Susan Walker at the British Museum.
- 18 The head is Roman and would make a marvellous addition to our collection, even if it does not come from a Romano-British context. It could be a wonderful draw in a display in the proposed new Letchworth Museum. The price seems to be a bargain.

Gil Burleigh
Keeper of Field Archaeology

04.10.95.