XIV. *Some Account of Roman Antiquities discovered at Caerhun, in Carnarvonshire, and in other Parts of that County.*
By Samuel Lysons, Esq. F.R.S. Director.

Read Feb. 26, 1807.

ALL writers on the subject of the Roman Stations in this island, agree in opinion that *Caerhun*, a small village on the river Conway, about five miles distant from the present town of that name, is the site of the ancient *Conovium*; a station which occurs in the eleventh iter of Antonine's Itinerary, and in the first of that of Richard of Cirencester. Camden supposes the name of *Caerhun* to be a corruption of *Caer hên*, the old city, but says that the common tradition of the neighbourhood was, that it received its name from Rhun ap Maelgwn Gwynedh, who died about the year 586. It is certain that in very ancient writings it is called *Caerhun*, whatever may be the etymology of its name. *Caer* is the well-known addition to the British names, of such places as were Roman Stations; and synonymous with 'Chester or Caster, still preserved in so many of them. Bishop Gibson in his additions to Camden's *Britannia* says, "that not many years since there was a Roman Hypocaust discovered at *Caerhun*; and that he had seen in the possession of Sir Thomas Mostyn, Bart. some curiosities which he had received from thence, particularly a hollow brick taken from the hypocaust above-mentioned, thirteen inches long and five and a half square, having a round hole in the midst, of about two inches diameter, the thickness of the brick not exceeding three quarters of an inch, (figured in Vol. ii. p. 834. 2d Edit. fig. 8.) and a round piece of copper, flat on one side, and convex on the other, about eleven inches over, and forty pounds weight, and having on the flat side an oblong square sunk in the

midst, with this inscription, *Socio Romæ*; this is figured in the plate above-mentioned, fig. 19. It was supposed by Sir Thomas Mostyn to have been a piece of rude copper or bullion, and that the inscription was only the merchants stamp, or direction to his correspondent at Rome, adding that there were some signs of a Roman copper-work near *Trevria*, about three miles hence, and elsewhere in this neighbourhood; whence it was probable they had dug it^a."

The site of *Conovium* is nearly a square of 260 feet, surrounded with a slight vallum of earth, at the distance of somewhat more than 500 feet from the river Conwy, on the side next to which the ground is very steep from the edge of the station. Within this ancient site stands the church of *Caerhun*, but no dwelling house, the village being at some distance. At a small distance north-west of the church two ancient sepulchres were discovered several years ago, walled and of a square form, containing human bones, but the exact particulars I could not learn. Their situation is pointed out in the plan Pl. III. Fig. 2; and in the hilly ground between the station and the river called *Erwr Gaer*, or the Castle-acre, the remains of a considerable building were discovered several years ago, then supposed to have been an Hypocaust. On the 9th of May, 1799, the Hon. Colonel Greville exhibited to this Society an ancient shield, found at *Caerhun*, a short time before, on the east side of the Roman Station, on opening an old drain about two feet below the surface of the earth; and at the same time he exhibited several specimens of ancient pottery found at the same place, nearly resembling the red Samian ware so frequently discovered in Roman Stations, but of a softer substance, and the figures not so well executed, see Pl. IV. in which some of them are represented, in figs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. These were supposed to have been manufactured near the spot where they were found, as there remained evident traces of fire, and a considerable quantity of fine clay. At the same time the fragment of a small Patera of the Samian Ware was found, with PATRICI stamp on the bottom of it. See Pl. IV. Fig. 8, 9.

^a Gibson's Camden, Vol. II. p. 802, second edit.

PL. IV.

Fig. 1.

In the year 1800, Colonel Greville favoured me with an introduction to the Rev. Hugh Davies Griffith, the amiable and hospitable proprietor of Caerhun, from whom I received a pressing invitation to assist at the investigation of the Roman remains above-mentioned, which he very obligingly promised to defer till it should suit me to go down for that purpose. In consequence of this invitation, I went into Caernarvonshire, in the latter end of July, 1801, and the morning after my arrival, Mr. Griffith, having got together as many labourers as could be spared from the hay-making, we proceeded to investigate these remains; a work which the Welshmen undertook with more than usual energy, being fully impressed with the belief that great treasures were buried in *Erwr Gaer*; and having a tradition among them, of some extraordinary discoveries which had been formerly made in an adjoining grove.

Two rooms, marked B and C, in the ground plan, Pl. V. had been discovered several years ago, and the rubbish cleared out of them; the floor is of a coarse sort of terras; of the walls between these two rooms nothing more remained than the foundation; it was, however, sufficiently evident where the door-way had been. The walls of the rooms remained in some places to the height of more than six feet, built of the kind of stone which is found lying dispersed about the fields, and in great abundance just below the surface of the earth, in that neighbourhood, and which was too hard to be hewn, but was laid in large irregular pieces, in the same manner as they build with it at present; all the plaster had fallen off. We began our investigation at the south end of these rooms, and by following the course of the walls soon ascertained the form of another, twenty feet nine inches, by fourteen feet ten inches, marked A in the plan, and proceeded to clear it out. To the depth of five feet below the surface it was filled with large stones, earth, and rubbish, below which was a stratum of black mould, mixt with burnt wood, in which lay many fragments of coarse earthen vessels of various kinds; but only two, of which enough remained to shew their original form; one of them was an Amphora; they are figured in Pl. VI. Fig^s. 1, 2: in the same place we also found a coarse lamp of lead, figured in Pl. VII. Fig. 1. Bricks of various

thicknesses were also found among the rubbish; and several masses of wall, formed chiefly of thin brick tiles laid in mortar, also many lumps of clay, and of a stalactitical incrustation.

At the east end of the room, at *b*, was a sort of hearth, formed of large thin stones, placed edge-ways in the earth, and large bricks laid flat over them, bearing strong marks of fire. On the north side of the room were two piers rudely constructed, they were built partly of the hard stone of the country and partly of sand stone (see the ground plan *a, a.*) In the spaces between them great quantities of fragments of pottery, several lumps of clay, and several pieces of iron were found. See Pl. VII. Figs. 2, 3, 4, and 5.

There did not appear to be any remains of pavement in this room: under it was a small drain of stone, covered with slates. Having thoroughly investigated this end of the building, and having every reason to believe that it had not extended any further southward, we proceeded to explore the opposite end, and soon discovered it to be of a very irregular form. In the room marked *D*, there were no remains of pavement; fragments of plaster remained on some parts of the wall. The area of this room was filled with loose rubbish, mortar, and fragments of brick and tiles, among which we found a rude kind of square pillar, two feet seven inches and a half in height, of sand stone, exactly similar to those which support the floor of the Hypocaust discovered many years ago in Bridge Street, at Chester, (see Pl. VIII. Fig. 4, where its several dimensions are expressed); and part of a brick funnel, the aperture of which was six inches by four inches three-quarters, and the sides about half an inch thick. The room marked *E*, in the ground plan, was paved with large slates. In this room was a pier two feet ten inches square, of brick and stone, in alternate layers, (see the plan *c*,) and one foot four inches high; some of the bricks were seventeen inches square and two inches thick, others seventeen inches by twenty-one; great part of the walls of this room were of brick, and in some places the plaster was remaining, coloured red. At the north-west corner were two steps of stone leading into the room marked *K*, which appeared to have been very much worn by use.

Fig. 1.

J. Basire sculp.

Under the floor of this room we discovered a drain, varying in width from one foot three inches to one foot nine inches, and from three feet seven inches in depth to four feet six inches, the bottom of it was formed of large slates. In clearing out this apartment we found the fragment of a piece of cornice of sand-stone represented in Pl. VIII. Fig. 5, and a kind of square stone-post, two feet nine inches in length, with a round hole near the top, one inch and a half in diameter, and the tenon at the other end by which it has been fixed up, (see Pl. VIII. Fig. 6.) The room marked K, in the ground plan, was paved with large slates. This appeared to have been a kind of Vestibule; it is twenty-three feet one inch in length. In that marked H were found many stone pillars of the same kind as that already described, standing upright, and supporting parts of the floor, which was of large slates; others had fallen down. There did not appear any funnels in the walls, or other marks of a Hypocaust.

On the outside of the building, close to the wall of the room marked E, (at *d* in the plan,) we found a stone two feet long and one foot wide, with a channel cut in the middle, as if for the conveyance of water from a spout, and from this were laid a row of seven brick funnels, closely fitted together; they were all of them about ten inches and a half in length, but varied in width; some were six inches and a half wide, and others only five inches and a half; they had all of them round holes on the narrow sides; some of them were scored on the broadest sides; see Pl. VIII. where at Fig. 1, the manner in which they lay is expressed; and two of them, of different sizes, are represented in Figs. 2, and 3. It will appear by a comparison with the figures in Gibson's Camden, above noticed, that the funnel there represented, and supposed to have belonged to a Hypocaust, exactly resembled these.

Being obliged to leave Caernarvonshire before the whole of these remains had been completely investigated, I shall here insert part of a letter I received from Mr. Griffith, dated Dec. 10, of the same year; and though the whole of that extract does not apply to the discoveries at Caerhun; yet, I am unwilling to omit any part of it, as it relates to Roman remains in another part of Caernarvonshire. The extract is

as follows: "My discoveries have by no means been commensurate to the expectations I had formed of them. Excepting one solitary coin, (a Domitian, I believe,) and an iron chain of twenty-eight links, somewhat larger than a modern jack-chain, I have nothing worth notice to communicate; though I have never quitted the men for half an hour, and have cleared to the very bottom, nine apartments of the suit about which we were employed, and which building I have completely insulated; when I shall have cleared the whole, which I hope to do by the latter end of next week, I shall draw a plan, and send it up with full particulars for your inspection. I hope to reach town myself in the spring, when I shall bring the coin, chain, and any thing else worth notice with me. The only legible letters on the coin, which is of copper, are these, and are just above the crown of the head VESP. F. DOMIT. I have found pillars without end, some of them entire and in their proper places, with some of the floor remaining on them. During my last excursion, I took a very interesting walk from *Dinorwig* (the Roman work near *Pentir*) to *Segontium*, and traced the Roman road nearly the whole way. There is another road of which one very fine fragment remains, pointing from the former place to the southward of *Segontium*, towards *Dinas Dinlle*, another Roman work; but which inclines so little from the line to which *Segontium* bears, between the two, that I feel a difficulty in supposing there could be any other communication between those two posts, than through *Segontium*, and therefore fancy that road must have had some other object. The road from *Segontium* to *Dinas Dinlle*, is uncommonly interesting, as it is carried chiefly over a flat morass, and broken only in one part by a river; the ford over which is at this day called by the peasantry *Rhyd y pedestre*. The *Rhyd equestre*, which was extant in the time of Rowlands, author of *Mona Antiqua*, is now lost among the country people; though I think I can point out the spot. My friend, Colonel Greville, thinks this road over the morass is an old embankment against the sea, but that idea is certainly erroneous. It might, indeed, have served both purposes, but in a very partial way as an embankment, as it does not include one half of the marsh, and its interruption by the *Rhyd y*

Pedestre, and its being the direct communication with Segontium is to me decisive.”

The following is an extract from a subsequent letter which I received from Mr. Griffith, dated Feb. 7, 1802. “Since my last letter to you, an idea has occurred to my mind, founded on reasons which I will explain when we meet, that this suit of apartments was actually a place set apart for the manufacture of earthen ware: since I entertained the thought every circumstance has tended to confirm it.

“One of the workmen lately picked up at a considerable depth below the surface, a small precious stone, perforated, and a part probably of a necklace; the remaining part of which eluded our most vigilant search. From its crystallization, and its colour, I conceive it to be a *beryll*, but of this I am by no means certain.”

The reasons which induced Mr. Griffith to suppose this building had been a manufactory of Roman pottery, were unquestionably very strong; besides the great quantities of broken pottery and lumps of clay, already mentioned to have been found in the room which we first investigated; many more were found in those parts of the building, which were traced after I left Caerhun; and some of them unfinished, and imperfectly baked, others pressed and burnt together in masses. An elegant little lamp of earthen ware which was probably manufactured here, was found in one of the rooms. It is represented of the same size as the original, in Pl. VI. Fig. 3.

Any further discoveries at Caerhun were unfortunately prevented by the death of Mr. Griffith, which happened in the July following. Had he lived he would have pursued the investigation of the remains of *Concivium* in every direction, where there was the slightest chance of success, and this Society would unquestionably have derived much valuable information from his inquiries.

It may be observed that, in all probability, this part of the county was much frequented by the Romans, on account of its slate quarries, and valuable lead and copper mines. There are considerable remains of a large Roman building on an estate belonging to the Duke of Ancaster, between *Capel Kerrig* and *Llanrwest*, near a place called *Bryn Gevailio*, or the Hill of the Smithy. The spot is one of the

most beautiful in the neighbourhood, commanding a fine view of the mountain called *Moel-Shabod*, which is seen here in the best point of view. Abundance of building materials have been taken from these remains, for several years past. I distinctly traced the walls of one room, the dimensions of which were sixty feet by twenty, and of another eighteen feet six inches square, in which were several short square pillars of stone, like those of the Hypocaust under the Feathers' Inn, at Chester.