VIII. *Description of two antient British Shields, preserved in the Armoury at Goodrich Court, Herefordshire ; in a Letter addressed to HENRY ELLIS, Esq. F.R.S., Secretary, from SAMUEL RUSH MEYRICK, LL.D. and F. S. A.*

Read 5th March, 1829.

20, Cadogan Place, February 23, 1829.

MY DEAR SIR,

THE two shields from the collection at Goodrich Court, which I have the honor to exhibit to the Society of Antiquaries, are antient British, and termed in that language the *Tarian* and the *Ysgwyd* (pronounced *Usgooyd*). Before entering upon the separate description of each, I beg leave to observe that much information respecting the aborigines of this island is to be obtained from the names they gave to things and places. The latter are either descriptive or commemorative, but as not wanted for my present purpose I shall not trouble you with citing any instances; the former are either indigenous or derived from a foreign source, and attention to this distinction will render great assistance in the investigation of any British antiquities. Thus, for example, Cæsar states, (Bell. Gal. lib. v. c. xii.) that the houses of the Britons were similar to those of the Gauls, and these we learn from Strabo (lib. v.) and Diodorus Siculus (lib. v. c. viii.) were of wood, of a circular form, with lofty tapering roofs of straw. This simplicity of design we shall find corroborated by the language; for the house itself was called *Ty* (pronounced *Tee*), a word unlike *Domus*, *Ædes*, or any Roman term;

and its roof *Pen*, and other appellatives, not one of which has the least resemblance to Tectum, Fastigium, or Culmen. It may appear absurd to notice so obvious a fact as that there must have been an entrance to the house, but I do so because this was termed *Drws* (pronounced *Droos*), evidently not derived from Ostium, Portus, &c. Such was the rude building even of the chiefs on Cæsar's arrival, the doors serving also the purpose of a window. When that luxury was adopted from the Romans, its appellation accompanied it, hence every Welsh peasant still calls it *Fenestyr*. The Anglo-Saxon was further advanced in the knowledge of comfort. His dwelling had not only a door, but a "wind-door" or aperture for air.

As the Britons had their places of worship long before the arrival of the Romans, there was no necessity for introducing the word Templum, *Llan* having the same meaning; but when, in later times, an edifice of a very different kind was wanted for the service of the Christian religion, they naturalized the term Ecclesia, pronouncing it in their idiom *Eglwys* (*Eglooy*s).

To come nearer to the subject before us. The inhabitants of this island, when it was first invaded, although possessed of arms, offensive and defensive, were totally unprovided with armour; but after they imitated their conquerors, (whose policy it was, as Tacitus observes, to instruct them in their arts,) and wore such protection, they called it *Llurig*, adapting, to their own mode of speaking, the word Lorica. Although the Gauls are described by Diodorus as wearing brazen helmets, Herodian and Xiphilin declare that the Britons had none. The representations on coins, which, though called British, have been by some good judges ascribed to the Gauls, are not, therefore, decisive proofs to the contrary, nor has this been controverted by any exhumation to be relied on. Adverting to that instructive guide, the language, the only British term we find is *Penwisg evydd*, a head-dress of brass, or *Penwisg dur*, a head-dress of steel; for the *Penfestin* of the Welsh laws, was the coiffe of mail, as the following passage from Gruffydd ab Arthur plainly demonstrates: *Taraw Arthur yn ei dal a*

wnaeth Frollo, a fei na rybylai y cleddyv ar vodrwiau y penfestin.
 “Strike Arthur on his forehead was what Frollo did, so that the sword was blunted on the rings of his coiffe.”

In the drawing that accompanies this, Fig. 1. is the exterior coating of a shield, such as used by the Britons before the Roman invasion, and such as they had been taught to manufacture by the Phœnicians; for when that people commenced trading with the Britannic isles the targets were of wicker work, in which the natives are said to have excelled, of a circular form, flat, and covered with a hide. The Tyrian merchants, anxious to show the islanders what advantages they might gain from commerce, did not only like Captain Cook, who ordered the armourer of his ship to fabricate in metal the tomahawks of the Taheiteans, but, as Governor Philips did in New South Wales with tin, put over their shields a thin coating of bronze. Weapons of this compound metal, exactly resembling those of bone and flint engraved in the XVth Volume of the *Archæologia*, are in my son’s collection, as may be seen in Skelton’s “Illustrations.”

We shall search in vain for any Roman appellative from which the British ones of *Tarian* and *Aes* could be derived, the former implying “the clasher,” from its coming in collision with an enemy in close conflict, the latter given from its being “flat.” The Roman *Parma*, *Clypeus*, or *Cetra*, although resembling its shape, were not the prototypes of this defence, and the following adage is probably of higher antiquity: *Car dy gymydawg, ond na ro iddo na’th gledd na’th darian.* “Love thy neighbour, but give him not thy sword nor thy target.” On examining the drawing it will be perceived that it was held at arm’s length, and a handle with a concavity for that purpose is observable on the inside, while the latter forms the conical boss without. The Anglo-Saxon shield was used in the same manner, but the umbo was of iron, the rest being convex and of wood. Whoever takes the trouble diligently to read Douglas’s *Nenia Britannica*, and compare the result with the illustrations in the Anglo-Saxon MSS., will be convinced of this fact. So likewise will he find that all the weapons of

that people were of this same metal, its abundance on the coasts of the Baltic having made them acquainted with its properties before their settlement in England.

The ornament on this British Tarian consists of nineteen concentric circles, which, though the number of the lunar cycle, may or may not have an astronomic reference; and between are raised as many little knobs as the spaces admit. Now, on comparing it with a Highland target, we shall find that, although the Roman mode of putting it on the arm has been adopted by those mountaineers, the boss, thus rendered useless, is still retained, and the little knobs are imitated with brass nails. The drawing exhibits both the outside and interior, and in the latter may be perceived the rivet that held a thong, having a loop at its other end to put on a hook, when it was necessary to suspend it from the person.

This curiosity was found in a turbary called *Rhyd-y-gorse*, not far from Aberystwyth, in Cardiganshire, about five and twenty years ago, and was generously added to the collection of ancient arms at Goodrich Court, by Miss Probert, of Copthorne in Shropshire.^a

Fig. 2. is the exterior coating of another antient British shield, such as the Britons fabricated after they had been induced to imitate the Roman fashions. For, although Diodorus Siculus expressly assures us that the Gauls had long shields, of a size almost sufficient to cover those who used them, and varied only by some private insignia thereon, the Britons did not adopt this form from them. It was the Roman Scutum that served as their model, and hence they termed it *Y* (pronounced *E*) *Sgwyd* (*Sgooyd*) “the Sgooyd,” afterwards corrupted into one word, *Ysgwyd* (pronounced *Usgooyd*). This very curious specimen is

^a Mrs. Newcombe, sister of the justly renowned Dr. Vincent, Dean of Westminster, has kindly deposited in the armoury at Goodrich another similar specimen. It was found in the year 1784 in a peat moss at Moel Sinbod, near Capel Curig, Caernarvonshire. The only other one I have heard of was exhumated near Newcastle on Tyne, when the owner, wishing to gratify all his friends, cut it up like a cake and sent to each a slice.

formed of two sheets of brass joined in the centre, by that portion which forms its ornament and extends its whole length. It was held at arm's length, such is the force of habit, by a handle fitted into the groove made by the ornament, the gripe being guarded, as in the Tarian, with a convex boss. Now it may be objected that, had the Scutum formed the prototype, there would have been straps for the hand and arm. But the Britons could not easily alter a mode to which they had been long habituated, and as a recent instance of the force of custom I need only mention that the Greeks have pared down the butts of the English muskets they have received, in order to render them more like those of the Albanians, which are consequently without due counterpoise to the weight of the barrel. This shield appears to have been originally gilt; for, although Pliny informs us (lib. xxxiv. c. 8.) that the Romans had a method of staining such plates of copper as were used for crowns and chaplets worn on the stage by actors, and thence called *Æs coronarium*, with ox gall to resemble gold, this seems to me to be genuine, particularly as it was for some person of eminence. The practice continued, indeed, for a long time among the descendants of the Britons, for Taliesin about the year 540 says :

Aur vy ysgwydrwy.

“Gold is my shield border.”

and Bleddyn Vardd in 1246, describes his hero as,

Aer ysgwn aur ysgwyd oedd.

“The stay of slaughter with a golden shield.”

Fig. 3. shows the ornament of its full size,^b as it appears at each end.

Fig. 4. the umbo of its real dimensions.^b This has on it some pieces of red cornelian, common enough in this country, and fastened by brass pins. It is impossible to contemplate these artistic portions without

^b These have been since reduced in the engraving, but as a scale for the express purpose has been put on the plate, there will be no difficulty in ascertaining the magnitude.

Fig. 3.

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 4.

Scale to Fig. 1 & 2.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 inches.

Scale to Fig. 3 & 4.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 inches.

feeling convinced that there is a mixture of British ornament with such resemblances to the elegant designs on Roman work, as would be produced by a people in a less state of civilization.

This valuable, curious, and unique specimen was added to my son's collection through the energetic kindness of Earl Brownlow, and the liberality of its late possessor, the Rev. Humphrey W. Sibthorpe, of Washingborough, Lincolnshire, having been found, about two years ago, in the bed of the Witham, near his property.

I remain,

My dear Sir,

Very truly yours,

SAMUEL RUSH MEYRICK.

TO HENRY ELLIS, Esq.
F. R. S. &c.