LII. *An Account of some Remains of Roman and other Antiquities in and near the Town of Brecknock, in South Wales: By John Strange, Esq. In a Letter to the President, Council, and Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries.*

Read April 13 and 20, 1769.

It seems at present generally received among the learned, that the principality of Wales supplies very few remains of Roman antiquities. Some of the inscriptions collected by Camden have scarcely been admitted as genuine by succeeding antiquaries. Upon considering, however, that the second Augustan legion had indisputably their head-quarters at *Caerleon* in Monmouthshire; that there were other Roman stations (as *Maridunum*, *Lucentium*, and *Segontium*) in the more remote parts of the country; and that the eleventh and twelfth Iter in the Itinerary of Antoninus skirted the North and East sides of it; I was hence persuaded, that the intermediate provinces might afford more traces of the Romans than have hitherto been observed; and a late tour through Wales gave me an opportunity of making some enquiries relative to this subject. Little new may, perhaps, be expected after such distinguished writers as Leland, Camden, and the ingenious author of the *Archaeologia*. But as the former only proposed an Itinerary through the country; as it does not appear that Camden visited every part himself; and as Lhwyd sometimes depended on the relations of others; sufficient scope yet remains for the researches of the inquisitive. As, therefore, these researches formed one principal object of my tour, I esteem myself
myself obliged to communicate the fruits of them to the judgment
of this learned Society; and have endeavoured to merit their in-
dulgence, by confining myself to a mere narration of facts.

From the evidence of Roman coins frequently found in and
about the town of Brecknock, Camden was of opinion, that this
country was inhabited in the time of the Romans. Lhwyd's
further enquiries confirmed that opinion, for he particularly in-
forms us of a Roman brick, stampt LEG. II. AVG. dug up near
Brecknock, and of a square camp at a place called The Gaer, about
three miles from the town. But as he only slightly mentions
this camp, and is mistaken in some particulars relating to it, I
shall endeavour to supply his omissions, by giving a more exact
account of a place which I think not undeserving the attention of
a curious traveller. It is superfluous to remark, that the very
name of The Gaer is a sufficient proof of its antiquity; the word
itself importing a round wall or fortification; and most of the places
in that country, where such works have been made, retain this
name even at present. But The Gaer near Brecknock seems to
have been so called by way of distinction, as being the most con-
fiderable fortification in that part of the country. As bricks with
the aforesaid inscription upon them are frequently found upon the
very spot, and considerable ruins of a Roman wall are still re-
mainling, it is probable that a detachment of the second Britan-
nick legion, from Caerleon in Monmouthshire, was stationed at
this place. These bricks even now are so common, that a servant
in the family at The Gaer found one for me upon a day's notice,
which measured 8 inches square, and 2 1/2 thick, and is stampt
nearly in the middle in the same form with those dug up at Ca-
erleon. Since my return to London, I have been apprised by
Thomas Jones, Esq. of the Exchequer, that other Roman

bricks have been dug up in the area of this camp, of an oblong square form, and with the same inscription LEG. II. AVG. stamped across one of the corners. Mr. Jones saw one dug up at The Gaer about five years since; and likewise assures me, that several of the same kind were found at this place some years before.

But to bring those remains of antiquity more immediately under your notice, let me observe, that the place, now called The Gaer, is a small farm belonging to the widow of David Williams, Esq. about three miles North-west from Brecknock; within half a mile of the farm house, the present road from Brecknock joins an old Roman caufeway; which, though much broken and over-run with bushes, is still very discernible. It was originally a raised way near forty feet wide, and seems to have been chiefly made with large round pebbles of various sizes, collected probably from the bed of a neighbouring river. This caufeway runs in a direction nearly at right angles with the Efkir, a small brook which joins the river Usk just below the Gaer. I could find no traces of it on the other side of the Efkir, nor signs of a Roman road any where in that neighbourhood, except near Rhyd y Briw bridge, about seven miles from Brecknock in the road to Trecaftle, where there are very visible remains of one, which will be mentioned in a subsequent part of this letter. The caufeway at The Gaer seems then to have conducted only to this station; and was, in all probability, a branch of the great Roman caufeway leading from Caerleon in Monmouthshire through the vale of Usk, and the Eastern part of Brecknockshire to Ariconium, which is the 12th Iter in Antoninus’s Itinerary. In the middle of this caufeway, about a quarter of a mile short of the farm house, is the monumental stone described and engraved by Mr. Lhwyd. It is called Maen y Morinnion, or the maiden stone; from a tradition

[b] See Plate IX. Fig. i.
[c] Gibson’s Camden’s Britannia, vol. II. pag. 834. Fig. VI.
in and near the Town of Brecknock.

prevailing among the common people in the neighbourhood, that it was erected to the memory of two virgins who were murdered there. It formerly lay by the road side, but was set up in the place where it now stands a few years ago, and is about six feet high from the ground, and three and a half wide. Mr. Lhwyd gives it only two feet in width, and doubts whether it be British or Roman. The bas relief upon it, representing probably a soldier and his wife, rude as it is, seems clearly of Roman sculpture. Had we, indeed, no other proof, there is such a precision in all their works, even of the most barbarous ages, as sufficiently distinguishes them from the unmeaning strokes of Gothicism. But there is likewise an actual inscription in good Roman characters upon the stone itself under the figures, not mentioned by Mr. Lhwyd; which, though in great measure effaced by time, yet manifestly appears to have consisted of four lines in a regular compartment; and the word **CONIUVNX**, which begins the last line, with several other letters, is still plainly legible. Mrs. Williams, the present owner of The Gaer, who has lived there about forty years, assured me, that the whole inscription has been legible within her memory. As the aforesaid engraving of this stone by Mr. Lhwyd is not by any means a just representation of it, I have furnished[4] another from a drawing made upon the spot, and obligingly communicated to me by Mr. Serjeant Whitaker. The figures in bas relief upon this stone are three feet and a half high, and the area on which they are wrought is, in some places, two or three inches below the surface of the upper and lower part of the stone, which Mr. Lhwyd has taken notice of, and which, indeed, is not uncommon in bas reliefs of the latter Roman empire.

The situation of the camp at The Gaer agrees entirely with the practice commonly observed by the Romans in fixing their stations; for it is on a rising ground, near the confluence of two

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[4] See Plate IX. Fig. II.
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rivers. We know likewise, from many of the stations per lineam callii, and elsewhere, that the Romans were particularly fond of choosing the lingula, or angle between two rivers, as by that means they saved the trouble of other fortifications. If any accidental circumstance of situation rendered that spot disadvantageous, another was chosen; and as, in the present case, the angle between the Usk and the Ffhir lay in a bottom, the Romans fixed upon a small eminence, gradually rising from the North-East bank of the latter, from whence they commanded an extensive view of the vale of Usk between Brecknock and Trecaflle. As to the camp itself, it is a parallelogram of 624 feet by 456, the longest parallels pointing nearly South and North. The foundation of the wall which bounds this area remains entire; and even the ruins of it above ground are, in some places (particularly on the North and East sides), from three to six feet high, and part of the facing is still perfect. This consists of squared stones of about twelve inches dimension, the middle being filled up with rubble, and the whole thickness of the wall is nearly seven feet and a half. It is in every respect similar to the remains of the walls of Caerleon and Caerwent in Monmouthshire. The farm-house and offices at The Gaer are built in the North-West angle of this camp, and chiefly from the ruins of the said wall. After repeated searches, I could find no signs of any inscription either on the stones used in the farm-house and buildings, or upon those which lay loose in the yard and fields. I observed no mark of the chisel, except on part of the base of a small pedestal, which I found by the hedge side within the walls, and a large piece of stone that seemed to have been the squared member of a building, lying on the causeway not far from the farm-house. I was, however, upon enquiry, assured, that many fragments of figured stones, urns with ashes in them, brass and silver coins, had been found at different times within the walls of the camp; and likewise, when this piece of ground was last ploughed, that some traces
in and near the Town of Brecknock.

Traces of a kind of brick drain were discovered, made of semicircular tiles of about an inch thick. Whether this might have served as a water-duct, or a kind of subterranean funnel for the communication of heat, agreeably to what is supposed of the like remains at Stunfield in Oxfordshire, I cannot determine. This spot was fallow last season, and is one of the home fields of the farm; the foundation of the old wall, with the bushes which overrun them, serving to fence it from the adjacent lands. I must not omit to observe, that about a mile from this place, and two miles nearly North-West from Brecknock, on the summit of a high hill, are the remains of a very large British camp, called Pen y Crug, which signifies the chief heap or barrow, forming an oval figure, surrounded by three very deep and broad intrenchments. Neither Leland, Camden, nor Lhwyd, take any notice of it; which is the more surprising, as it appears to be one of the most curious and best-preserved remains of that kind throughout the whole principality.

During my stay in Brecknockshire, I made an excursion to Yniskedwin in the vale of Tawy, and on the confines of Glamorganshire, in order to examine the tract of the mountainous country which forms the boundary of those two counties. Returning from thence by Ufraedvelty and Merthyr Tudvell to Brecknock, about a mile beyond Capel Coelbryn, I fell in with some very considerable remains of a Roman cauëway, which, so far as I recollect, is not observed by any writer, though it continues uninterrupted for a mile, at least, in a very open country, and is seen from all quarters to the distance of two or three miles. If Sarn Elen, or Helen’s cauëway, which is said to have led from Carnarvon to Salisbury in Wiltshire, crossed Brecknockshire into Glamorganshire, these remains must certainly have been a part of it; but as it is supposed by most antiquaries to have taken its course through Herefordshire and Gloucestershire, it seems very improb-
bale, that any part of it should lie in so remote a corner; unless it made a circuit, striking off in a South-East direction from Merionethshire (where there are traces of it) towards the Severn sea, and so returned by the vale of Usk into Herefordshire by the 12th Iter of Antoninus. In this case, the remnant of the causeway before mentioned near Rhyd y Bwv bridge, between Brecknock and Trecaisile, may have been a part of it; and Talsarn, which signifies the end of the causeway, and is in that adjacent part of Carmarthenshire, may have derived its name from it, as Mr. Kennet [?] full oles Taly Sarn, on the river Conway in Carnarvonshire, had done. Whether it was a part of Helen's causeway, or of some other Roman road leading from Neath over the mountains into Brecknockshire, I will not pretend to assert, but am certain it has all the marks of a Roman work. It is a raised road about forty feet wide, with a ditch on each side. I could trace no signs of it to the North of the little stream that runs by Capel Coelbryn, and joins the Tawy; but to the South you command it in a direct line, for near a mile, up the side of a hill called Mynidd Hir, or the long mountain, a high ridge extending itself from East to West between, and almost at right angles with, the vales of Tawy and Neath. This causeway is still frequented by the country people coming from Neath towards Capel Coelbryn, and other hamlets and farms in that neighbourhood; the ground on each side of it being boggy, and in many places not passable. I followed the whole extent of it, up the side of the long mountain, and then made an angle to the East, in order to join the vale of Neath. Going through a gate into the cross road, I observed a large stone in the wall with the remains of an inscription upon it, which, unfortunately, is in a great measure effaced by time; but I could plainly discern MARC in very good Roman characters. This stone for many years served as the gate-post; but is now part of a loose or

[?] Parochial Antiquities in Hist. of Alchester and Burcester.
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uncemented wall, and lies upon the estate of Herbert Macworth, Esq. who, as I am informed, intends to remove it to his seat at the Knoll near Neath. A few yards beyond the spot where I entered the cross road, the Roman causeway is entirely destroyed; which may be attributed to its being on the steep side of a mountain, and so gradually worn down by the violence of the rains. No mention is made of this Roman causeway by any writer on this subject, owing probably to its being in such a remote and unfrequented part of the country. Nor is this surprising, since others much nearer home; and of greater consequence, have shared the same fate. Plot observes, that neither Camden, Sir H. Spelman, nor any other author, mention any thing of that part of the Kinmel way which passes through Oxfordshire, though it is easily traced, and in many places retains its old name to this day.

As the remains of the castles in and near this county are in themselves very inconsiderable, and are already well known from Mr. Buck's engravings, it is unnecessary to enter into a particular description of them. It may not, however, be impertinent to give a short account of the remains of Morlaes castle, since, by its situation in a very remote and unfrequented part of the country, some curious particulars relating to it have hitherto passed unnoticed. It is on the confines of Glamorganshire, about three miles North-East from Merthyr Tudwell, and a few furlongs to the Westward of the road leading from Cardiff to Brecknock. Leland, whose Itinerary, as far as it respects this county, is in general very exact, has by mistake placed this castle in the valley; whereas it is built on the summit of a very high hill which commands the whole country, in as bold a situation as any inland castle I have seen throughout Wales. Nature has sufficiently defended it on the North and West sides by the height and steep-
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nests of the hill itself, and by the deep bottom of the lesser Tave which runs at the foot of it. The South and East sides, though naturally weak, are strengthened by a deep and wide trench cut in the solid rock. The area, on which the main body of the castle was built within this trench, forms a kind of irregular pentagon; on the outside of the trench are the foundations of several walls, of about three feet and a half thick, intersecting each other in various directions, and forming a kind of outwork. The whole remains within and without the trench include, at least, an acre of ground. From the appearance which the ruins of this castle make at present, one might, upon a cursory view, scarcely imagine that any part of it continues entire. But on going through a narrow subterraneous passage, which I discovered among the ruins, it conducted me into a circular Gothic room, still in perfect preservation, and measuring about thirty feet in diameter. The sides are adorned with twelve flat arches, in which the doors and windows were placed; and a central pillar supports the roof, in the same manner as in the circular Gothic room at Margam in this same county, which it likewise perfectly resembles in its ornaments and style of architecture. This room, which is one of the greatest curiosities on this side of the country, is so buried by the ruins of other parts of the castle which have fallen about it, that there is scarce any appearance of it above ground, chance alone leading me to the discovery. But to return to our Roman antiquities.

Some antiquaries have been of opinion, that Buahlt, a small market town on the West bank of the river Wye, was the Bullaeum Silurum of Ptolemy; but I could not find, upon the strictest enquiry, that any Roman coins, bricks, or other remains of antiquity, had ever been found in that neighbourhood; and since the town of Buahlt is situated in a small tract of valley or bottom, surrounded on all sides by a very high range of mountains, had the Bullaeum Silurum of Ptolemy been situated in any part of this vale, some relics of antiquity could hardly, I imagine, have escaped
escaped us. This seems to strengthen the doubts which Mr. Lhwyd[6] likewise had upon the same subject. I cannot, however, agree with him in placing Bullaeum Silurum at Kaereu, or Cairé in this county; since I could never learn, that there ever were any Roman antiquities discovered at or near that place. Cairé is in the parish of Llangarnmarch in the vale of Ithon, about eighteen miles North-West by North from Brecknock, and twelve miles South-West by South from Llandrindod wells in Radnorshire. I had not an opportunity of visiting this spot myself; but Charles Powell of Castlemadock, Esq. a gentleman of great curiosity and learning, who lives on that side of the country, and has examined it with the greatest attention, was so obliging as to inform me by a letter, that he cannot trace the least appearance of a Roman work there. As to the remains of an intrenchment on a rising ground not far from that place, he says, they are evidently British; and I observed other vestiges of British antiquity a few miles distant, in this same vale of Ithon, in my road from Brecknock by Llanvibangle Abergwaffin into Cardiganshire. They are two very large stones, eight or nine feet high, and about four feet wide, of an irregular form, standing nearly a furlong distant from each other in some low grounds, a mile South-East of Llanworbid wells. Hence there seems to be very little foundation for placing the Bullaeum Silurum of Ptolemy, either at Buahlt or Kaereu, as Mr. Horley [i] justly observes. Near the river Ithon is a spot, about a mile and a half distant South-West from Llandrindod wells in Radnorshire, and not much out of the road from thence to Buahlt, which seemed to me to have really the appearance of a Roman station, and may very probably have been the Bullaeum Silurum of Ptolemy. There is the aera of a camp very plain, as well as the foundations of a wall which appears to

[b] Bishop Gibson's edit. of Camden's Britannia, vol. II.
[i] Britannia Romana, B. III. chap. i. pag. 363.
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have been built of flones, in the same form and thickness with that of The Gzer, near Brecknock. Having been prevented by the badness of the weather from examining this place myself with due exactness, I entreated the favour of Mr. Powell (in whose neighbourhood it lies) to make further researches, and to oblige me with them. The following is an extract of a letter, dated 25th October last, which I received from him upon this occasion.

"In September last, agreeable to your desire, I visited the remains of the old camp or station near Landrindod wells in Radnorshire. It is in a farm called Cwm, in the parish of Llanir, about a mile and a half North-West of Llandrindod, and on the West side of the river Ithon. By its situation on the banks of the river, by the form of it (which is a perfect square), and by the remains of a very thick stone wall which bounds this square, it seems to be indisputably Roman. The area within is a flat or plain of about four acres, each side within the walls measuring about 432 feet. The walls, which are now a heap of rubbish, overrun with bushes and briars, appear to have been built with stone, and the foundation measures about eight feet in thickness; a fosse also without the wall measures about ten or twelve feet. Parallel to the North and West sides, but not quite the length of either, and about twenty yards from the fosse, there are the remains of another wall and ditch, seemingly a kind of outwork to this side, which is the most accessible; the river Ithon, and a kind of gully or hollow naturally defending the others."

From this account of the actual remains of Roman antiquities in and near Brecknockshire, we shall be the less surprised at finding some vestiges of that people even in the customs of the country. Dr. Kennet [k], speaking of the Roman customs in particular, says, he never saw the sport called Quintain practised in any part

[k] Parochial Antiquities in Hist. of Alcester and Burcester, chap. iv.
of the country but where Roman ways did run, or where Roman
garrisons had been placed. This sport is still practised at wed-
dings among the better sort of freeholders in Brecknockshire; and
as it differs a little from that of other countries, it may not be
amiss to describe the manner of it here. On the morning of the
nuptials, the bridegroom, attended by a large company of his re-
lations and friends on horseback, goes to fetch his bride at her
father’s house, and thence escorts her to church, accompanied by
another party of her relations and friends. After the ceremony is
over, on their way home to the bridegroom’s, a spot is chosen
near the road side, where a few flat planks about six feet high are
erected side by side. Long thick sticks are then distributed to
each of the young men who are inclined to enlist in the sport.
They grasp these sticks near the middle, resting one end of it
under the arm; and thus they ride full speed towards the planks,
striking the stick against them with the utmost force in order to
break it, where the diversion ends. We know not precisely how
the Romans practised the Quintain, but it is supposed to have ob-
tained that name from Quintus, because it was repeated every fifth
year among the Olympic games. It is still practised in many
places both in France and other countries [1], and, in all proba-
bility, nearly in the same manner, if one may judge from Reg-
nier’s metaphorical use of the word Quintaine in the famous 13th
Satire, intitled, “La Macette,” where, speaking of the heroine of
his piece, he says:

“Laffe enfin de servir au peuple de quintaine.”

Plot [m], who likewise considers it of Roman origin, describes
the manner of it in Oxfordshire, which exactly corresponds with
the account which Sir Henry Spelman [n] gives, who was an

Glofs. in verbo.

[m] Hist. of Oxfordshire, chap. x. fect. 22. 53.

[n] Glofsary voc. QUINTAN.
eye-witness. It is still practised, though differently, about Caermarthen (the ancient Mariduorum of the Romans), so that Dr. Kennet’s observation may be esteemed in general true. Since, therefore, we trace the footsteps of the Romans in this sport, the prevalence of it in Brecknockshire, where we have other evident marks of them, seems a circumstance not unworthy notice.

Having nothing further to observe relative to the Romans in Brecknockshire, give me leave, by way of supplement, to add some account of another remain I met with in Landevailag churchyard, two miles North of Brecknock in the road to Buahlt. It is a flat monumental stone, four inches thick, seven feet ten inches long, and about fifteen inches wide in the middle, being contracted nearly an inch towards the top and the bottom, where likewise it appears to have been broken. This stone was, I presume, originally sepulchral, but at present it serves to cover a low wall contiguous to the outside of the South wall of the church. Upon the upper part is carved, in very low relief, a rude unpoltished figure, representing, perhaps, some king, or military chief, arrayed with a sort of tunic, and holding a sceptre, sword, or other instrument in each hand. Over his head is a cross; and under his feet an inscription; the characters of which are remarkably plain, exclusive of their being a little disfigured by a fracture in the stone. What is really the meaning or even the language of this inscription is not easy to determine, as the last letter appears reversed, and some of the others are different from any I can find in the British characters. They continue very legible, as may be observed from the exact copy of them in the engraving here given of this stone [e], which I am induced to esteem a remain of Danish antiquity, from its perfect resemblance to many others allowed to be so. The whole (except a small fragment broken on one side) is in exceeding good preservation, although it was probably the workmanship of the fifth or sixth century. Mr. Jones of the Exchequer was pleased to apprise me of the following in-

[e] Plate IX. fig. 3.
On the Round Towers in Ireland.

scription on a monumental stone in the porch of the same church, CATVC, which may perhaps refer to Cadoc, who was a king and martyr in Brecknockshire, and died in the year 492.

Such are the observations I have the honour of laying before the learned Members of this Society; and if thought worthy of their approbation, the trouble which attended the collecting them will be amply compensated.

LIII. Observations on the Round Towers in Ireland: By Mr. Peter Collinson.

Read December 7, 1763.

IN the parish of Ardmore, and county of Waterford, in Ireland, there is a round tower[a] built of hewn stone, upwards of one hundred feet high, and forty-five feet in circumference at the base; the door is fifteen feet from the ground; the roof is pyramidal, being of stone, very well cut, and closely joined together, and well plastered within side, from top to bottom, as clean and white as if newly done. The whole fabric is divided into four unequal beltings or stories, with a window to each; having four windows in the upper story. On the top is a kind of cross.

Sir James Ware mentions a round tower which stood near the cathedral of Cork, and another near the church at Brigonne; but these no longer remain.

There is one, however, now standing at Cloyne; and another, much more remarkable, near the old ruined church at Kinnith. As this last is different from all others, it may deserve a description. It is seventy feet in height; consisting of six stories, each eleven feet nine inches high. The first story is a regular hexagon, each side

[a] Plate X.