

XI. *Observations on Mr. Peter Collinson's Paper on the Round Towers in Ireland, printed in the first Volume, p. 305. By Owen Salusbury Brereton, Esq. F. R. S.*

Read at the SOCIETY of ANTIQUARIES, Dec. 15, 1763.

WHEN I lately made the tour of the south west parts of Ireland, I saw several of those buildings called usually Penitential Towers; not one of them had either belting or girting, nor the least sign of there having been any room in them till within ten feet of the top; that room had windows exactly facing the cardinal points; from thence, downward to the entrance, which is about fifteen feet above the surface of the ground, only a few flits were cut, just to give light to persons going up or down the stairs. These towers are all built of stone, and exceeding strong, the stones and mortar remarkably good; and in general they are intire to this day, though many churches near which they stood are either in ruins or totally destroyed.

I THINK them rather ancient Irish, than either Pictish or Danish structures, having never heard of one like them in Denmark, or any other part of Europe, except in Scotland: I saw one there at Abernethy, near Perth, which exactly resembles those in Ireland. Upon looking into Gordon's *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, I find his opinion is, that it was the work of the Picts: what reason there is for such a conjecture I do not see; I rather think we may conclude, when the Irish made their incursions into Scotland, they built the two towers there after the model of so many they had left behind them in Ireland. However, I deem their antiquity greatly
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to precede the use of bells, cast ones at least, in that country; and from their situation near churches, and having a floor and windows only at the top, I verily believe their principal use to have been to receive a person to call the people to worship with some wind instrument, which would be heard from a much greater distance than small uncast bells possibly could: One of these towers at Dramiskin is, at this day, made use of as a belfry. In Mahometan countries the voices of their Muezens, or callers to prayers, who stand for that purpose on turrets, much higher than their mosques, are heard to a very great distance.

THE Aegyptians at this day proclaim the time of worship with some wind instrument from a high place; which I the rather take notice of here, because the late Bishop Pocock often mentions the amazing conformity he had observed between the Irish and the Aegyptians in many instances.

WHEN in Holland, I was much surprized to what a distance I heard the man, whose station is at the top of their highest steeples: he blows a trumpet frequently during the night, and if he observes a fire, he keeps the instrument directed that way, and blows with a continuance, which never fails to be heard to the most distant part of their largest towns.

I MUST add here an anecdote I met with in a Welsh MS. of the Gwider family in North Wales, since published by my worthy friend Mr. Barrington; in which it appears, that so late as the year 1600, the common Welsh were so wild, that Sir John Wynn, when he went to church, was forced always to leave a watchman on an eminence, whence he could see both his house and the church; his duty was, to give notice if he saw any attack made on the former, though it was always left bolted, barred, and guarded during church-time. This anecdote naturally hints another manifest use of these towers, as the castles in Ireland (for such every gentleman's house was) almost always stood near a church; and conse-

quently in a country in that age (1015) much more wild than Wales, a watchman at the top of one of these towers, remaining all church-time, must be of the greatest advantage, to give alarms to the family in their churches.

I AM not singular in my opinion on these matters, for both Earl Morton and Bishop Pocock concurred with me; the latter had seen a long trumpet of iron, which was dug from the bottom of one of these towers: several such have been found in Ireland, near these buildings; some of them are exhibited in one of the plates published by this Society, and others are now extant in the Royal Museum.

THE conjecture of their being for the reception of Penitents has been mentioned as Sir James Ware's opinion, but is, indeed, only that of Mr. Harris, the re-publisher of Sir James's *Antiquities of Ireland*: it is ingenious; and after bells came into use, these towers might be appropriated for some such purpose; but I cannot conceive it probable that the antient Irish should build towers of such a height as 130 feet, for the single purpose of having one room only, and that not five feet diameter, for Penitents: and the rather too, as the expence of building them must have been immense; for the stones in general must have been brought from a very great distance, and indeed, I should think, the builders too, the workmanship is so good: whereas much smaller places for prisons, on the ground, and of coarser materials, would have answered every penitentiary use, infinitely better in every respect, and the expence, in comparison of these, would have been extremely trifling.