

ART. XII.—*Account of a Roman Station near Crickhowel, in Brecknockshire.*

BY THE REV. HENRY THOMAS PAYNE OF LLANBEDER.

In a Letter to JAMES HOTCHKIS, Esq. F.S.S.A.

Read 10th February 1823.

I THINK that when I had the pleasure of seeing you last in S. Wales, I mentioned to you a discovery, which I conceive myself to have made some years since, of the site of an ancient Roman Station in the vicinity of Crickhowel. I presume to call it *my discovery*, as it does not appear in either of the ancient Itineraries of Antoninus or Richard; neither has it been noticed by Camden, Horsley, Strange, Harris, nor indeed by any

other writer to my knowledge; till, in the year 1804, I pointed it out to Sir Richard C. Hoare, whom I accompanied to the spot, and who, after a minute investigation, was so fully satisfied of its reality, that, in the introduction to his translation of the itinerary of Giraldus Cambrensis, he has admitted it, as "a decided Roman station;" and it has since, but very briefly, been noticed by Mr Jones, the Brecknockshire historian, who has given an engraving of it from a plan which I lent him, and which was made for me by Mr Davies, a land-surveyor of this neighbourhood, whom I had taken with me to the spot. The place alluded to is called Pentre Gaer, signifying, in the Welsh language, the Head of the town of the Fortress. It is situated in the parish of Llanvihangel Cwmde, or Michael's church, in the South Vale, being about four miles distant from Crickhowel, on the right hand of the road leading from that place to Brecknock. A tradition has been prevalent among the Welsh inhabitants that a town once occupied the site. Documents also of the 9th and 10th centuries inform us, that the ancient name of the parish was Llanvihangel Trefcerrian, or more properly Tref y caeran the township of fortifications (a). These considerations first attracted my notice to the spot, and induced me, in the year 1802, to make those researches which have ended, as I think, in the discovery of a Roman station.

In the first place, however, allow me to request your attention to a few preliminary remarks.

It will be recollected that the final conquest of the Silures, under which denomination I shall include all the inhabitants of S. Wales—as all fought under the banners of the Silurian general Caractacus—was effected, after many struggles, by Julius Frontinus, in the reign of the Emperor Vespasian; and to him, we have reason to believe, the military ways called Viæ Juliæ have

(a) See Spelman de Concil. p. 386, and Dugdale's Monasticon, vol. iii. p. 211.

been indebted for their appellation. To keep this fierce people, the "*validamque et pugnacem Silurum gentem*" of Tacitus, in subjection, the second legion of Augustus was planted at Caerlleon upon the river Usk; whence roads, with military stations placed upon them at such intermediate distances as best suited the nature of the country, were carried in different directions throughout the southern part of the principality, to the extreme western point of Menapia, now St Davids, upon the Irish Channel. These roads formed, as it would appear, two grand and distinct lines—one running coastwise through Glamorganshire, as described in the 12th Iter of Antoninus (b) and Richard's 11th Iter (c); and the other through the interior of the country. Sir Richard Hoare distinguishes them as the *Via Julia Maritima*, and the *Via Julia Montana*; and expresses his opinion that they united at Maridunum, or Caermarthen, and were from thence continued in one line to Menapia. It is with the last of these lines only which we are now concerned. From Caerlleon it was carried in a northern direction up the vale of Usk (d). Antoninus and Richard, however, pursued it no further upon that river than to Gobannium or Abergavenny, from whence they continued it to Magnis, now Kenchester in Herefordshire. It cannot, however, be doubted that a chain of posts had also been continued upwards from thence upon the northern bank of the river Usk, by the way of Pentregaer in Cwmde to the upper Gaer at Aberisgaer, three miles beyond the present town of Brecknock, where considerable remains are still visible (e). From thence it passed on, as I conceive, to Llanvair ar y Bryn, near Llandvery, in Caermarthenshire, where Sir Rich-

(b) See Gale's Comment. 4to, p. 124-125.

(c) See Stukely, p. 54-55.

(d) See R. Hoare's map at the end of the second vol. of Giraldus.

(e) They will be found accurately described in the communications of Messrs Strange and Harris to the London Society of Antiquaries, in the 1st, 2d, and, I believe, the 4th volumes of their *Archæologia*.

ard Hoare discovered some remains, and from thence, possibly, by the way of Llandilovawr to Maridunum, before mentioned (*f*).

The Welsh word *caer*, literally translated, may be considered as equivalent to the Latin word *septum*, an enclosure (*g*). But when applied, as in the present case, to military works, it is constantly held to be synonymous with the Roman *castrum*, and the Saxon *ceaster*. In support of the position which I have now laid down, let me remark that the Roman road from Gobannium to the Upper Gaer (both of which I shall assume to be admitted stations) could not possibly have taken any other line, without twice crossing the river Usk, which there cannot be any reason to suppose it did; and it is further worthy of observation, that the situation of Pentre Gaer divides, as nearly as local convenience would admit, the distance between the two stations, being about ten miles distant from the former and twelve from the latter place. If this is conceded to me, the following may be taken as an iter from Caerlleon to the Upper Gaer:—

Ab Isea	M. P.	Caerlleon upon Usk.
Burrio	VIII.	Usk Town or its vicinity.
Gobannio	XII.	Abergavenny.
Pentre Gaer	X.	Llanvihangel.
Gaer Superior	XII.	Aber is Gaer, 3 miles beyond Brecknock.
<i>Millia Passuum</i>	XLII.	

The local tradition of a Roman town having occupied the vicinity of the encampment derives a considerable portion of cre-

(*f*) The Baronet's station-map at the end of the 2d volume of his translation of Giraldus gives a very accurate description of all these local positions.

(*g*) From the verb *can*, pronounced *cai*, to inclose or force in; from whence also *cae* an hedge, now metaphorically used in S. Wales to signify a field.

dibility, if not an actual assurance, from the numerous fragments of bricks, worked stone, foundations of walls, pottery, and coins, which from time to time have been discovered as well upon the surface as underneath the ground (*h*).

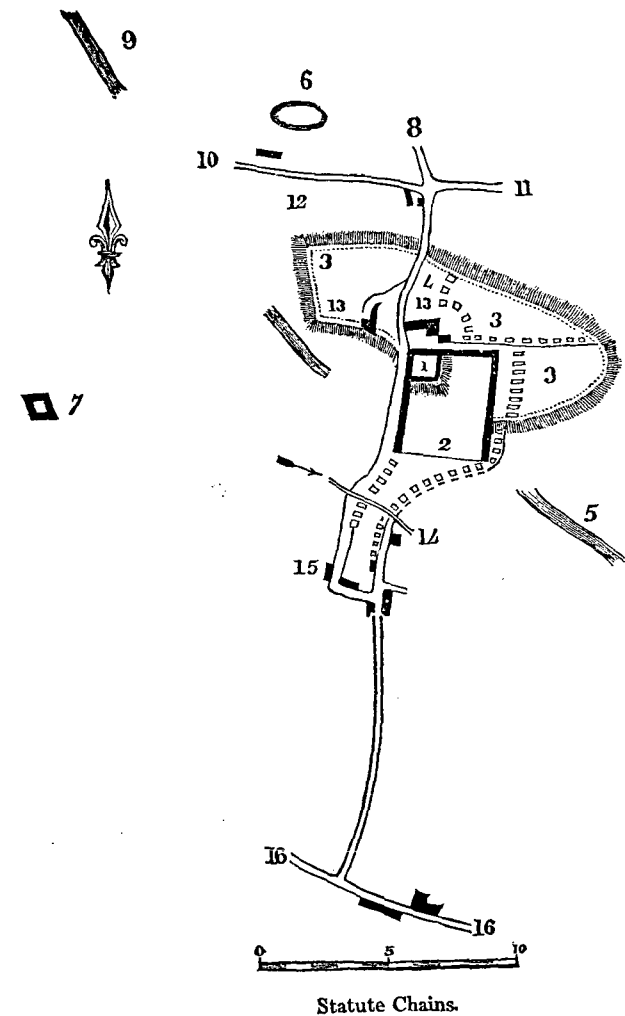
I shall now proceed to the description of the camp, which is situated in a beautiful and fertile valley, upon a gently descending level, sloping to the south, with a trifling deviation to the west. A streamlet, called the Ewyn, runs at the bottom of it. The north and east sides are still traceable. They present two long lines of rubbish, consisting, for the most part, of broken bricks, stone, and lumps of hard cement composed of lime and pounded brick, beneath which I conceive would still be found the foundations of the ancient walls. The west side adjoins a public road, which has probably infringed upon it. The lower end is not distinctly marked (*i*).

An orchard occupies the area of the encampment. At the upper end, in the north-west corner, is an elevated spot protruding into the area, which may possibly have been the post of the commander of the garrison. For a general survey of the whole, a reference may be made to the annexed plan (*k*).

(*h*) A few small copper coins of the lower empire, picked up by the country people, and one of the large brass series, bearing on its obverse the bust of an emperor, filleted with bays as usual, I think an Hadrian, are now in my possession. Upon the reverse is a female figure standing, having in the right hand a cornucopiæ, and in the left a pair of scales, with the letters S. C. in the field. I think when my eyes served me that I made out the legend of the reverse to be *Moneta Augusti*; but I have lost my memorandum.

(*i*) Upon the plan I have marked my own idea of it (see the Plan on the following page) by a pricked line.

(*k*) In the M.S. transmitted to the Antiquarian Society, from which this essay has been printed, some few references, by means of alphabetical letters, were made to particular sites in the camp, while in the plan which accompanied the dissertation these letters did not appear. It became necessary, therefore, for the sake of avoiding perplexity, that the letters, which stood thus unconnected, should be left out altogether.



EXPLANATION OF THE PLAN.

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| 1. The Prætorium. | 9. Hool Ddu. |
| 2. The area of the camp. | 10. Road from Bwlch. |
| 3, 3, 3. An entrenchment. | 11. To Gwindu Church. |
| 4. Ruins resembling fire-places, the walls of well hewn stone. | 12. Pen heol y Crwys. |
| 5. Supposed part of the Julia Via. | 13, 13. Pen y Gaer or Pentre Gaer. |
| 6. Foundations of walls dug up here. | 14. Ewyn Brook. |
| 7. An urn filled with bones found hereabouts. | 15. Gaer. |
| 8. Tregraig road. | 16, 16. Main road from Brecon to Crickhowel. |

In a field upon the opposite side of the lane from the encampment, and a little higher up, is a spot where Mr Watkins, a late proprietor of it, informed me he recollected having seen, in his younger days, the foundations of some ancient walls which had been broken up by his father. The materials were carted away for the clearance of the ground. Among the rubbish he saw several bricks marked with letters and numerals, and particularly remarked a square stone tablet, bearing an inscription; but, as no one present understood its meaning, it was thrown into the common heap, and has been either lost or demolished. The soil in this field is of a darker colour than that of the surrounding ground, and fragments of brick are as it were blended with it. Not far from this site, an arched drain was broken into by labourers who were clearing the ground; and beneath the ground, in different parts of it, were found foundations of walls, brick, and long slabs of free-stone. A spot worthy of notice is now a garden belonging to Mr Even Gwilym. In clearing a part of it, he found it necessary to take up a large stone which impeded his work. Upon its removal, it appeared to be a large piece of free-stone, which had evidently been worked, and beneath it was another of the same kind, but of rather larger dimensions, which was also removed. About five feet beneath the present surface of the ground, immediately under these stones, he broke into a small vaulted cavity, which was lined with a cement of such hardness that the bottom resisted for a time the strokes of an iron crow-bar. It contained a considerable quantity of human bones, for the most part broken to pieces. This cavity was about three feet high, three feet wide, and about six feet long. Upon a sloping field at some distance from the encampment were discovered, by the persons employed in clearing it, the foundations of an ancient building, and of walls which were carried to a considerable length across the ground. The rubbish consisted of broken brick, stones, and cement. Several long slabs of free-stone, like hearth-stones and chimney-pieces, were also discovered, as well as broken pottery. Two pateræ of mixed metal were here picked up. The owner tells me that, for several years, they were kept as curiosities in the house; but that afterwards a servant carried them away: and he thinks they are now in the possession of a person near Usk, in Monmouthshire. Upon another spot was dug up a large urn of coarse pottery filled with fragments of bones and ashes. The workman broke it with his pick-axe. I only saw the fragments. The roads which are marked do not now appear; but the lines were particularly pointed out to me, and to the surveyor who drew the plan, by a respectable farmer, who, about forty years ago, when his father occupied the land, had himself assisted in breaking up a part of it. He also remembers a neighbour having been employed in a similar work in the adjoining lands. The road is described as having been nearly thirty feet wide, and composed of pebbles so firmly embedded in gravel that it was with difficulty penetrated. Thus much for the description of Pentregaer.

I think it very probable that from this station a vicinal road was carried over the Gogyd Hill towards Talgarth, thereby forming a communication between the vales of Usk and Wye. But I must confess that as yet I have not discovered any remains of it.

The name of Tal y Tarm, *i. e.* the Front of the Causeway, given to a farm in that direction, seems, however, to give some colour to the supposition; and further on, upon a hill called Pentir, or the Headland, nearly opposite to Cwmde Church, are the evident traces of a military position. It is upon a considerable elevation, though far below the summit of the hill, and includes a space of about 145 yards long, by 105 yards wide, fortified with strong mounds of earth and rubble, with a deep fosse or ditch at the lower end. A wood immediately below it is called Coed y Gaer, *i. e.* the Wood of the Fortress. This is by some supposed to have been British; but, from its square form, I conceive it to be Roman, and perhaps the *Castrum æstivum* of the Pentregaer station. Upon the summit of an insulated hill called Myarth, rising to the south above Pentregaer, and occupying a space between that station and the river Usk, the area of a considerable British post is very plainly to be traced, being surrounded by a mound of stone, but without any ditch. At the upper end of it is an artificial mount like a barrow, which the natives call y Castell, or the Castle. Tradition reports a bloody battle to have been fought in the vale beneath. Upon a field about half a mile from Pentregaer, upon the margin of the Rhyangoll brook, is the stone described by the Honourable Daines Barrington to the London Society of Antiquaries in 1773, from the communication made to him by Mr Maskeleyne. He has not, however, given the inscription accurately. It is under a hedge near the line of the Roman road; and should be read differently.

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I fear, my dear sir, that you will think my description tedious; but as the communication relates to some interesting remains of antiquity, which, excepting in the short notices which I supplied to Sir Richard Hoare and Mr Jones, have hitherto been passed in silence, I have thought that it would be more satisfactory to give it in detail. Believe me, &c.

HENRY THOMAS PAYNE.