

## III.

NOTICE OF LETTERS ADDRESSED TO CAPTAIN SHAND, R.A., BY PROFESSOR THORKELIN AND GENERAL ROBERT MELVILL, ON ROMAN ANTIQUITIES IN THE NORTH OF SCOTLAND, 1788-1790. BY JOHN STUART, Esq., SEC. S.A. SCOT.

The gentleman to whom the letters now to be noticed were addressed, was a native of the parish of Forgue, in Aberdeenshire, and the events of his life are summed up in the following epitaph to his memory, which is inscribed on a monument erected on his property of Templeland :—

“ To the Memory of ALEXANDER SHAND, Second Son of GEORGE SHAND and AGNES LITTLEJOHN, in *Parkdargue* ; Colonel of the Royal Regiment of Artillery : who died on the 7th of April, 1803, aged 72 Years.

“ COLONEL ALEXANDER SHAND, to whom this Pyramid is erected, was a striking Instance of the Efficacy of strong natural Powers and vigorous Perseverance. His Parents had soon learnt to appreciate his Genius, and bestowed upon him so liberal an Education, that, during several of the early Years of his Life, he was himself enabled to act as an Instructor of Youth. The natural Bias of his Mind, however, speedily became too powerful to permit him to rest in the Obscurity to which Circumstances seemed to have consigned him ; and some time previous to the Year 1760, he entered as a Private in the Royal Regiment of Artillery ;—soon thereafter became a non-commissioned Officer, and was promoted by his Majesty to the rank of Lieutenant Fireworker, in which Capacity he gallantly distinguished himself in several Actions in Germany, and received a severe Gun-shot Wound in the Foot at the Battle of Corbach, on the 10th of July 1760. He was also wounded at Brandywine River in America, on the 11th of September 1777.—His Services at Gibraltar were held in high Estimation during the memorable Siege of that Fortress in the Years 1780, 1781, 1782, under the Command of the Right. Hon. Lord Heathfield, whose Confidence and Regard he enjoyed in an eminent Degree : and having thus, during a long Course of Years, signalized himself in the Service of his Country, and attained to the Rank

of Colonel, this gallant Soldier died on his Estate of Templeland, and was buried in the Churchyard of this Parish.

“The Merits and Character of Colonel Shand may be sufficiently traced in the History of his Life. Entering into the World destitute of Friends, of Fortune, and of Influence, he quitted it rich in the Possession of all these Gifts. His Perceptions were clear, his Judgment sound, his Information extensive, his Courage calm, and his Integrity spotless.—The Toils of his early Years, and the Perils that marked the Meridian of his Life, were rewarded at its Close by an honourable Competence, and the Recollection of a Life devoted to his King and his Country.—In his Death he has bequeathed this useful Lesson to Posterity, that the most formidable Obstacles disappear before Vigour and Perseverance; and that, in this Land of genuine Freedom, the highest Stations are equally accessible to Talents and to Virtue, as to Riches or high Descent.”

On his retirement from active life he devoted himself to the improvement of the lands of Templeland, which he had purchased, and to a study of the Roman remains in the country to the north of the Tay.

He was the first to discover the great Roman camp at Glen-mailen, near the source of the Ythan, and in the year 1788 he prepared a description of it for the Society of Antiquaries of Perth. In General Roy’s work on Roman Antiquities, the 51st plate gives a plan of this camp and other works in the neighbourhood, which was copied from one prepared by Captain Shand, and, as it would appear from the following note, somewhat inaccurately:—

“GIBRALTAR, 1st June 1798.

“General Roy not having traced the greatest existing Roman camps farther north than Battledykes, in the parish of Oath-law, shire of Angus, it is probable that many of the readers of his excellent work would wish to have plates 50 and 51 more fully explained, the places represented by them being situated, the one at the northern extremity of the Mearns, and the other on the confines of Banffshire, about an hundred miles beyond the South Esk river.

“The very remarkable spot exhibited in the fiftieth plate, called Garnic-hill, and Ridykes of Ury, is by several good judges believed to be the camp of Agricola, at the time when he gave battle to Galgacus,

the Caledonian chief, and is well-described, together with all its out-posts, by an author having a borrowed signature (supposed to be Lord Buchan), in a publication which came out many years ago, the name of which is not at present remembered, but resembling 'Romana Britannia Topographica.'

"The camp near Glen-mailen, on Ythan, was first discovered to be a Roman work, during the years 1785 and 1786, by Captain Shand, an Officer of Artillery, who gave in a paper, about the beginning of 1788, to the Antiquarian Society of Perth, describing that post, and the Castellum on Barra-hill, nigh to Old Meldrum, a station no way inferior in grandeur, or good preservation, to any work of the kind, that at Ardoch excepted.

"Captain S. did not finish his plan of the ancient military vestiges, on the sources of the Ythan, till some time afterwards, and permitted a good many copies to be taken, and as some of these have been copied from other copies, a few errors have crept in, particularly in the orthography, several of the names of places, and grounds in plate 51, being spelled in such a manner as would make them unintelligible to the country inhabitants.

"Both the above mentioned parts, as they furnish positive evidence that the Romans had passed the Grampians, with an army at least of 26,000 men (see the author on castrametation), and had possessed the country, in their usual manner, by a strong permanent præsidium, are esteemed discoveries of the greatest importance, not only as mere evidence of an historical point, but as tending to shew the true tract of the itinerary, and pointing out methods for further investigation. When the Perth Society think proper to publish their collection of antiquities, the curious will find a short account of the camp near Glen-mailen, in Sir John Sinclair's Statistical History of Scotland, vol. 12, at pages\* 287, 288,

\* *N.B.*—In that account of the Roman camp near Glen-mailen, it is asserted by some of the well-informed neighbours, that the author has made a mistake in putting down a ruin near Pitcaple as a Roman outpost, it being only the remains of a castle belonging to the Leslies, a powerful family sometime ago; and though the entrenchments near miln of Easter-town have more the appearance of a field work, that it had been only a gentleman's dwelling surrounded with a ditch. Nevertheless, the last mentioned place has all the appearance of a Roman work, excepting

& 313 to 316. Likewise in *Newte's Tour*, quarto edition, printed in the year 1791, at page 301, beginning at line 5, and continuing to the end of the paragraph, only omitting line 6 altogether, and three words to the same purpose in line 14, the editor having been misled in that assertion concerning an Officer, eminent for his critical knowledge of the Roman classics and Roman British topography.

ALEX<sup>r</sup>. SHAND."

The letter from General Melvill to Captain Shand was written in 1788. In it he expresses a favourable opinion of Captain Shand's paper on the Roman antiquities north of the Forth, sent to the Society of Antiquaries at Perth, and states that he himself was the first to discover the large Roman camps in Forfarshire, in the course of a visit to Lord Panmure in the summer of 1754. It is as follows:—

"LONDON, 12th May 1788.

"DEAR SIR,—I was lately favored with your obliging letter of the 30th March, and by what cause its delivery to me had been so long delayed I know not.

"I pursued with much satisfaction your vigorous paper on the subject of the Roman highways, camps, and posts northward from the Forth, in as far as can be discovered, and can be reasoned upon in a military view. Agreeably to your desire with the wishes of your V. Pres<sup>t</sup>. & Members of the Antiquarian Society of Perth, I have forwarded the paper in a letter to the Rev<sup>d</sup>. Mr. Whitaker, and have acquainted him with the time of my intended departure from London, so that he may have sufficient time to write to you on the subject, thro' me, if he is desirous of it. It is true, as you have mentioned in your letter, that I was the first who discovered the large Roman camps, as being such to the North of the Forth & Tay, which happened in Summer 1754, when on an attentive perusal of Julius Agricola's *Life* by his son-in-law Tacitus, particularly of what relates to his 6th or 7th Campaign, I was led to conclude, from the nature

that no gate or prominent station can be observed; and its name (the Rivers or Robbers) seems to declare that it had been something military either in ancient or modern times. A tradition likewise has prevailed among a few inhabitants that vestiges of Roman camps have been observed not far from the maiden causey, an ancient work which terminates at the Barmkin on the E. summit of Bennachie.

of the country and the *reason* of war, that the general assembling of his troops must, for many reasons, have been held in the higher parts of the country, between the rivers Forth & Tay, and that his march thro' a passable and cultivated country approaching towards the N.E. coast and along the Grampians could only be in those days, from a rendezvous probably in the neighbourhood of the large Castellum at Ardoch, with a succession of camps at the end of proper marches into Strathmore, having crossed the Tay at some safe ford above the situation of Perth.

“ I found no encouragement for this idea either from the writings of Gordon and other unmilitary Antiquaries, nor what was still more discouraging from our Engineers employed on the Survey of Scotland; for, on the contrary, the gentleman who had just finished the survey of Angus assured me that he had been very careful to discover & mark down all traces of entrenchments, and had found none but the common circular or oval ones on hills or eminences which were not ascribed to the Romans. I remained, however, persuaded that there must be discovered vestiges of Roman camps formed or used by that Roman army either marching together or in divisions advancing N. Eastwards, or returning into that country, of the Horestii, that I went from Edin<sup>r</sup> to visit my good friend Lord Panmure at his seat of that name, and thence to make enquiries and searches, especially in heaths and uncultivated places beyond it. The result was, that I soon found in excursions the remains of the camp at Kirkbodie, Keithock beyond Brechin, Battledykes near Finhaven, and Lintrose near Cupar; but being obliged to return suddenly to Fifeshire & Edin<sup>r</sup>. I neither could examine for more of these encampments towards Ardoch to the S.W. or towards the Mearns to the N.E. The forms of these camps were Roman like, with gates, and large enough to contain a considerable force, according to their mode of castrametation, but I had only time enough to take very rough sketches of them.

“ Upon my return to Edin<sup>r</sup>. my first proselyte was the present Gen<sup>l</sup>. Roy, then one of the surveying Engineers, but not the one who had surveyed Angus. He afterwards visited these camps, took their measurements, and entered them in the Government Map of Scotland, together with the addition of one at Grassy walls, as I think they call it, not far from Scone, on the E. side of the Tay; and another, or rather two, enclosing parts of each other near the Castellum of Ardoch;—an intermediate one

was supposed to be near Gask, by part of a ditch, visible within these few years, but is upon the whole too much effaced to be ascertained in its dimensions. Gen<sup>l</sup>. Roy took occasion afterwards to give his views in a MS. description with drawings, a very good performance, not only of these several camps already mentioned, but with regard to the march of Agricola into Scotland, and of the posts made or occupied by him.

“I hope to get to Scotland this summer, and when at Edin<sup>r</sup>. shall hope to have the pleasure of seeing repeatedly our worthy friend Major Foulis.

“I have only to add for the present that I am with great regard,

“My Dear Sir,

Your most obedient

And most obedient servant,

“Captain SHAND.

ROBERT MELVILL.”

The other two letters are from the well-known Danish antiquary and scholar, Professor Grimm Thorkelin, who in one of the letters encloses an essay, which he declares to be his first attempt to write in English. It appears to have been on the subject of Roman antiquities, and he makes sundry inquiries regarding the Roman remains inspected by Captain Shand in Aberdeenshire.

In the other, after conveying his thanks for the satisfactory answer furnished by Captain Shand, he goes on to answer some questions put to him by the latter relating to the ancient roads of Denmark and the finer breed of sheep.

The letters are in the following terms :—

“BROWNLOAFTS, LONGACRE, *Sept. 18th, 1790.*

“DEAR SIR,—According to your kind permission, I take the liberty to trouble you with the enclosed—the first attempt of mine in the English language. I only wish that the time you may bestow on reading the Essay through may not seem to you to be entirely thrown away for an idle purpose. Your approbation will be my reward—a reward I am very anxious to gain, but still more your information both with respect to the matter in question, & the Roman Remains, which have come in your way in Aberdeenshire. Give me leave to ask you these three questions. When & where did you discover Roman Camps and outposts in the said

country? & where have you discovered Roman roads there? Have you examined these roads, and what reasons have you to believe that these roads are Roman works? Pardon me for troubling you with these queries, & believe that nothing would have made me so bold, but the conviction I have of your obliging readiness in spreading useful knowledge among your fellow-citizens.—I have the honour to remain, with the most sincere respect,

“ Dear Sir,

Your most obedient &

very humble servant,

“ To Captain SHAND.

G. THORKELIN.”

“ BROWNLOAFTS, LONGACRE, *Octobr. 9th, 1790.*

“ DEAR SIR,—I render you my warmest thanks for your very obliging letters, through the medium of which I have received the most satisfactory information relative to the Romans & their invasion, in the northern parts of Scotland. May I but be able to make a condign use of your friendship & the trouble which you give yourselves on my account. Howsoever I may succeed in shewing the high sense I feel of the obligations I am under to you & your beloved native country, (where I have met with the most unbounded Kindness & Hospitality,) I hope that my attachment to the Caledonians will not be exceeded by any; & in this sacred purpose I trust you will assist me, & remember me now & then of my duty. Relying on your good offices & friendship, I shall now beg leave to answer more immediately your kind letters, in particular what relates to the antient roads & the finer breed of sheep. With respect to the roads, all I can say is this, that as far as can be seen from the monuments of history handed down to us from the 12th and 13th Centuries, we are authorized to believe that, before the Conquest of Norway by Harold the Hairfair, no roads existed in those quarters. The laws which his son Hacon The Good, who had been educated in the court of Adelstan in England, are the first records we have, regulating the statute labour, by which the highroad or *Hergata via militaris*, should be kept in repair. However, these laws leave us at a loss with respect to the modes of making roads, their width & nature. In Sweden no roads, or at least very bad ones, seem to have existed before the eleventh century—for St Ansgare,

the Apostle of the North, used a whole month to travel from Lund, in Scane, to Stockholm, a distance which is at present run in two days, & yet this holy man travelled post, a circumstance which must induce us to think of a country overgrown with bogs & woods. In Denmark roads have been from the days of yore; we still see the *High way* of Waldemar the 1st. Moreover the Laws passed in 1163 divide the roads into *public & private*, & ascertains the fines for either neglecting or destroying the *Kings high way*, viz. three marks of silver, or 4£ 16s, an immense sum in those days. The roads, or rather the fragments of them, which still exist, are about 12 feet wide, in some places paved with stones—in others again made of gravel & clay beaten together. Now to the sheep. I perfectly agree with you that the sheep are of various kinds in various quarters. The analogy of nature makes good our assertion—though the genus be not different, yet the species may be so. We know that the people of one place are handsomer, more strong, & possess more vivacity of Mind & body, than those of another place; but here must be some latent causes, which ought to be anxiously enquired into. It is not enough that we introduce a new breed of men & other animals, unless we know before hand how to preserve these new inhabitants. The climat of our countries, pure and serene, seems to invite us to mend our breed of sheep, & it is beyond all doubt that sheep must yield the more excellent wooll the nearer they live towards the pole. Nature, the invariable nature, has clothed those inhabitants of her woods, who are remotest in the north, with the softest & the most precious furs—& why should the sheep not then be dressed by the benevolent nature in the warmest silky fleeces? I know not what is the case with Scotland, except from your letters, equally instructive & patriotic; but I can speak with certainty as to my native country, Iceland. The sheep are there one of the most important articles, & it is generally believed that the sheep are finer in every respect on the northern coast of that extensive Island. Much, however, depends on the mode with which the sheep are treated. We let them go out in winter even in the most frosty day, & at night drive them to a shelter, where they are saved from being buried in the snow. Nay, there are sheep on the south-east coast, which are totally wild; they breed & grow without the least care, & must be shot & hunted before they can be taken.

I regret infinitely your going abroad: it will prevent me from gaining



from you the most useful instructions. However, let me intreat you to continue your friendship ; & let me add as a motive—that I being a dependant of your countrymen, who settled in Iceland in the tenth century, has some claim to your kindness ; and this I will never forget, either I shall live on the lofty mountains of Iceland, or on the watry plains of Denmark.—Your health & prosperity will constantly engage the most ardent wishes of him who has the honour to be,

“ Dear Sir,

“ Your most obedient very humble

“ & most obliged serv<sup>t</sup>.

“ G. THORKE LIN.

“ To ALEXANDER SHAND, Esq<sup>r</sup>.”

---