

VARIOUS

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FIRE TOWER



Throughout Scotland and Ireland there are scattered great numbers of *round towers*, which have puzzled all antiquarians. They have of late obtained the general name of *Fire Towers*, and our engraving represents the view of one of them, at Brechin, in Scotland. It consists of sixty regular courses of hewn stone, of a brighter colour than the adjoining church. It is 85 feet high to the cornice, whence rises a low, spiral-pointed roof of stone, with three or four windows, and on the top a vane, making 15 feet more, in all 100 feet from the ground, and measuring 48 feet in external circumference.

Many of these towers in Ireland vary from 35 to 100 feet. One at Ardmore has fasciæ at the several stories, which all the rest both in Ireland and Scotland, seem to want, as well as stairs, having only abutments, whereon to rest timbers and ladders. Some have windows regularly disposed, others only at the top. Their situation with respect to the churches also varies. Some in Ireland stand 25 to 125 feet from the west end of the church. The tower at Brechin is included in the S.W. angle of the ancient cathedral, to which it communicates by a door.

There have been numerous discussions respecting the purposes for which these towers were built; they are generally adjoining to churches, whence they seem to be of a religious nature. Mr. Vallencey considers it as a settled point, that they were an appendage to the Druidical religion, and were, in fact,

towers for the preservation of the sacred fire¹ of the Druids or Magi. To this Mr. Gough, in his description of Brechin Tower,² raises an insuperable objection. But they are certainly not belfries; and as no more probable conjecture has been made on their original purpose, they are still known as *Fire Towers*.

For this curious relic we are indebted to Mr. Godfrey Higgins's erudite quarto, entitled "The Celtic Druids," already alluded to at page 121 of our present volume.

¹ Like the ancient Jews and Persians, the Druids had a sacred and inextinguishable fire, which was preserved with the greatest care. At Kildare it was guarded, from the most remote antiquity, by an order of Druidesses, who were succeeded in later times by an order of Christian Nuns. The fire was fed with peeled wood, and never blown with the mouth, that it might not be polluted.

² "On the west front of the tower are two arches, one within the other in relief. On the point of the outermost is a crucifix, and between both, towards the middle, are figures of the Virgin Mary and St. John, the latter holding a cup with a lamb. The outer arch is adorned with knobs, and within both is a small slit or loop. At the bottom of the outer arch are two beasts couchant. If one of them *by his proboscis was not evidently an elephant*, I should suppose them the supporters of the Scotch arms. Parallel with the Crucifix are two plain stones, which do not appear to have had anything upon them. Here is not the least trace of a door in these arches, nor anywhere else, except in the church."

SOME ACCOUNT OF STIRBITCH FAIR

BY A SEPTUAGENARIAN

(For the Mirror.)

(Stirbitch Fair, as our correspondent observes, was once the Leipsic or Frankfurt of England. He has appended to his "Account" a ground plan of the fair, which we regret we have not room to insert; the gaps or spaces in which, serve to show how much this commercial carnival (for such it might be termed) has deteriorated; for the remaining booths were built on the same site as during the former splendour of the fair. Our correspondent accounts for this "decay, by the facilities of roads and navigable canals for the conveyance of goods;" the shopkeepers, &c, "being able to get from London and the manufacturing districts, every article direct, at a small expense, the fair-keepers find no market for their goods, as heretofore." His paper is, however, a curious matter-of-fact description of Stirbitch, "sixty years since." We have been compelled to reject all but one verse of the "Chaunt," on account of some local allusions, the justice of which we do

not deny, but which are scarcely delicate enough for our pages.

Stirbitch is still a festival of considerable extent, although it has lost so much of its commercial importance. There are but few fortnight fairs left: Portsmouth, we *recollect*, lasts 14 days, and there is a fair held on some fine downs in Dorsetshire, which extends to that period.)

Stirbitch Fair is held in a large field near Barnwell, about two miles from Cambridge, covering a space of ground upwards of two miles in circumference. It commences on the 16th day of September, and continues till the beginning of October, for the sale of all kinds of manufactured and other goods, and likewise for horses.

The etymology of the name of this fair has been much disputed. A silly tradition has been handed down, of a pedlar who travelled from the north to this fair, where, being very weary, he fell asleep at the only inn in the place. A person coming into the room where he lay, the pedlar's dog growled and woke his master, who called out, "Stir, bitch"; when the dog seized the man by the throat, which proved to be the master of the inn, who, to get released from the gripe of the dog, confessed his intention was, with the aid of the ferryman who rowed him over from Chesterton, to rob the pedlar; from which circumstance the fair ever after obtained the name of *Stirbitch*. But a more reasonable derivation might be found in the known custom of holding a festival on the anniversary of the dedication of any religious foundation. There is a small and very ancient chapel, or

oratory, of Saxon architecture, still standing in the field where the fair is kept; but to what saint dedicated, is not recorded. I know not if a St. Ower is to be found in the calendar; if there is, it will, by adding "wijk," or "wych," a district or boundary, be no great stretch of invention to account for a transition from "St. Ower wijch" to *Stirbitch*; or perhaps from a rivulet which empties itself into the Cam at Quy-water, small streams, in some counties, being called "stours."

Leaving this argument, however, at the road-side chapel, we must proceed to the fair, where the "busy hum of men" announced the approach of the mayor and corporate body to make proclamation. First are,

**Mr. Samuel Saul, the beadle, and his
assistant, in full costume, with their
staves tipped with silver, bearing
the arms of the Corporation**

**Next followed two trumpeters, in gowns,
on horseback**

Sackbut and clarionets

The mace

upper end of the fair, next in the Mead where the pottery and coal fair were held, and last at a little inn near the horse fair, in which place a "Pied-poudre" court was held during the fair, for deciding disputes between buyers and sellers, and for punishing abuses and breaches of the peace in a summary way—stocks and a whipping-post being placed before the door for that purpose. Here the mayor and the cavalcade partook of some refreshment.

Should the harvest be backward, and the corn not off the ground, the booths, nevertheless, are erected, the farmers being, as they admit, more than indemnified for their losses in that case, by the immense quantity of litter, offal, and soil left on the ground after the standings and booths are cleared away; besides which, they seize on every thing left upon the land after a fixed day. This has sometimes occurred, and the forfeiture of the goods and chattels so seized has been recognised judicially as a fine for the trespass. This local custom, sanctioned by usage from time immemorial, is without appeal.

The booths were from 15 to 20 feet wide by 25 to 30 feet deep; they were set out in two apartments, the one behind, about 10 feet wide, serving for bed-room, dining-room, parlour, and dressing-room, The bedstead was of *four posts and a lath bottom*, on which was laid a truss of clean, dry straw, serving as a palliasse, with bed and bedding. The front was fitted up with counters and shelves. The stubble was well trodden into the ground; over which were laid sawdust and boards behind and before the counters, to secure the feet from damp. The shutters, of the space allowed for

the windows, were fixed with hinges, and when let down, rested upon brackets, serving as showboards for goods. The booths were constructed of new boards, with gutters for carrying the rain off, and covered with stout hair cloth, with which also a covering was made to an arcade in front, about 10 feet wide. Under this the company walked, protected from rain or the heat of the sun.

The proclamation being made, the clamour and din from the trumpets, drums, gongs, and other noisy instruments, began. The road from Cambridge was actually covered with post-chaises, hackney-coaches from London, gigs, and carts, which brought visiters to the fair from Jesus-lane, in Cambridge, at sixpence each. As soon as you passed the village of Barnwell, your attention was attracted by flags streaming from the show-booths, suttling-booths, &c.; whilst your ears were stunned with the "harsh discord" of a thousand Stentorian bawlers, and the clang of jarring instruments of music. The show-booths were the first on entering the fair, being situated on the north side of the high road. Here were three companies of players, viz. the Norwich company, a very large booth; Mrs. Baker's, whose clown, Lewy Owen, was "a fellow of infinite jest and merriment;" and Bailey's. The latter had formerly been a merchant, and was the compiler of a Directory which bore his name, and was a work of some celebrity and great utility. Fronting these were the fruit and gingerbread stands. On the opposite side of the road stood the cheese fair, attended by dealers from all parts, and where many tons' weight changed hands in a few days, some for the

London market, by the factors from thence; and such cheeses as were brought from Gloucester, Cheshire, and Wiltshire, and not made elsewhere, were purchased by the dealers and farmers of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. Opposite the cheese fair, on the north side of the road, stood the small chapel, which was then used as a warehouse for wool, hops, seed, and leather³. Here were the wool-staplers, hop-factors, leather-sellers, and seedsmen. The range of booths in the front were for glovers, leather-breeches makers, saddlers, and other dealers in leather. Opposite to this, at the end of the line of show-booths, Garlick-row commenced; the first range being occupied by hardwaremen, silversmiths, jewellers, and fine ironmongery. The next range was the row of mercers and linen-drapers, where a draper from Holborn had a stock of not less than 5,000*l.* value. The next range of booths was occupied by stuff-merchants, hosiers, lacemen, milliners, and furriers; here one vender has been known to receive from 1,000*l.* to 1,200*l.* for Norwich and Yorkshire goods. A lace-dealer from Tavistock-street likewise attended here with a stock of 2,000*l.* value, together with many other respectable tradesmen, with goods according to the London fashion. Then followed the ladies and gentlemen's shoe-makers, hatters, and perfumers; and next to the inn was an extensive store of oils, colours, and pickles, kept by an oilman from Limehouse, whose

³ A church or chapel is generally to be found throughout the whole Christian world near a ferry, to which the passenger went to propitiate the Deity before embarking, and to express his gratitude when safely arrived.

returns were seldom less than 2,000*l.* during the fair; and the father of the writer of this article, who attended the fair during forty years, usually brought away from 1,200*l.* to 1,500*l.* for goods sold and paid for on the spot, exclusive of those sold on credit to respectable dealers, farmers, and gentry. On the outside of the inn were temporary stables for baiting the horses belonging to the visiters. The carriages were drawn up in the fields in a line with the stables or standings for the horses.

Next was the oyster fair; the oysters from Lynn, called the Lynn channel, were the size of a horse's hoof, and were opened with a pair of pincers. At the bottom, in the Mead, next the river, was the coal fair; opposite which were the pottery and fine Staffordshire wares. Returning to and opposite the oyster fair was the horse fair, held on the Friday in the week after the proclamation. The show of beautiful animals here was, perhaps, unrivalled by any fair in the empire; the choicest hunters and racers from Yorkshire, muscular and bony draught-horses from Suffolk and every other breeding county, drew together dealers and gentlemen from all quarters, so that many hundreds of valuable animals changed masters in the space of twelve hours. Higher up was Dockrell's coffee-house and tavern, spacious and well stored with excellent accommodations. About 200 yards onward was Ironmonger-row, where the dealers from Sheffield, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, and other parts, kept large stocks of all sorts of iron and tin wares, agricultural implements, and tools of every description. About 20 yards from them, westward,

and bordering on the road, were slop-sellers, dealers in haubergs, wagoners' frocks, and other habiliments for ploughmen; and next, the Hatters'-row. Behind Garlick-row, next the show booths, stood the basket fair, where were sold rakes for haymakers, scythe-hafts, and other implements of husbandry, of which one dealer has been known to sell a wagon-load or two.

Having now made the promenade of the fair, let us step into one of the suttling booths. The principal booth was the Robin Hood, behind Garlick-row, which was fitted up with a good sized kitchen, detached from a long room and parlour. Here were tables covered with baize, and settles of common boards covered with matting. The roof covering was of hair cloth, the same as the shops, but not boarded.

When a new-comer or fresh man arrived to keep the fair, he was required to submit to the ceremony of christening, as it was called, which was performed as follows:—On the night following the horse-fair day, which was the principal day of the whole fair, a select party occupied the parlour of the Robin Hood, or some other suttling booth, to which the novice was introduced, as desirous of being admitted a member, and of being initiated. He was then required to choose two of the company as sponsors, and being placed in an arm-chair, his shoes were taken off, and his head uncovered. The officiator, vested in a cantab's gown and cap, with a book in one hand and a bell in the other, with a verger on each side, robed, and holding staves (alias broomsticks) and candles, preceded by the suttler, bearing

a bowl of punch, entered the parlour, and demanded "If there was an infidel present?" Being answered, "Yes," he asked, "What did he require?" Answer. "To be initiated." *Q.* "Where are the oddfathers?" *R.* "Here we are." He then proceeded as follows:—

(Plain chant.)

"Over thy head I ring this bell,
 [*Rings the bell,*
Because thou art an infidel,
And such I know thee by thy smell.

CHORUS

With a hoccius proxius mandamus,
Let no vengeance light on him,
And so call upon him."

Supper was then served up, at the moderate charge of one shilling a head, exclusive of beer and liquors. The cloth being cleared, the smokers ranged themselves round the fire, and kept up the meeting with mirth and harmony, till all retired and were lulled to anticipating dreams of the profits of the coming day, to which they woke with the sun, cheerful and unenvious of each

other's success. Such was Stirbitch fair some sixty years ago, as
witnessed by

Your constant reader,

Σηννα

NOTES ON NORTHERN LITERATURE

(For the Mirror.)

Tordenskiold is a name frequently met with in the annals of Denmark. A singular anecdote is connected with one of the bravest individuals who ever bore the name—the renowned Admiral Tordenskiold, of the days of Frederick IV. While he was yet a young and undistinguished naval officer, he chanced to be in the hall of the royal palace at the time that the king, wearied with the flatteries of some courtiers, who were congratulating him on the success of his war with Sweden, exclaimed, "Ay, I know what you will say, but I should like to know the opinion of the Swedes themselves." Tordenskiold slipped unobserved from the royal palace, hurried to his ship, set sail, and was in an hour on the coast of Sweden. The first sight that caught his eye on landing was a bridal procession. Hastily seizing bride, bridegroom, minister, peasants, and all, he hurried them aboard, and returned to Denmark. Two hours had scarcely elapsed from the moment of the king's expressing his wish, when Tordenskiold, stepping from the crowd of courtiers who surrounded his majesty, informed him that he had now an excellent opportunity of gratifying his

wishes, as Swedes of every class of society were in waiting. The astonished monarch, who had not yet missed the young captain from the hall, demanded his meaning; and on being informed of the adventure, summoned the captives to his presence. After gratifying his curiosity, he dismissed them with a handsome present, and ordered them to be conveyed back to Sweden. The promptness of young Tordenskiold was not forgotten, and he speedily rose to the high admiralship of Denmark, a post which he filled with more glory than any other of his countrymen, either before or since.

The memoirs of Lewis Holberg, which have lately appeared in English, are remarkably curious and interesting. It is not generally known, that this celebrated writer, the Moliere of Denmark, was educated at Oxford, whither he repaired penniless, to secure a good education.

Holberg, Samsøe, and Oehlenschläger are the three dramatic luminaries of Denmark. The best production of Samsøe is the play of *Dyveke*, produced a few days after his death. Such was the enthusiasm it excited, that the following epitaph was proposed to be inscribed on his tomb, in the public cemetery of Copenhagen:

"Here lies Samsøe;
He wrote *Dyveke* and died."

The best poet that Sweden has ever produced is Esaias Tegner,

the bishop of Wexio, now living. His first production was *Axel*, a short poem on the adventures of one of those pages of Charles XII. who were sworn to a single life, to be entirely devoted to the fortunes of war. He has struck out great interest by plunging this hero in love, and painting the conflicts between his passion and his reverence for his oath. The words have been translated into Danish, German, and English. The latter translation appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Although the Danish language is so akin to the Swedish, that translation is the worst of the three. It is said that this poem procured Tegner the bishoprick of Wexio. A singular circumstance is connected with it. A German literary gentleman was so delighted with the version of it in his own language, that he actually studied Swedish for the sole purpose of reading it in the original.

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