

Samuel Pegge
Observations on Kit's Cotty House, in Kent
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VIII. Observations on Kit's Cotty House, in Kent. In
a Letter to the Honourable Daines Barrington, from
the Reverend Mr. Pegge.

Read at the Society of Antiquaries, Jan. 13. 1774.

Sir,

Considering that freedom of thinking on points of
antiquity, and that liberty of debate, which your Society
not only allows, but encourages in its members; no apology
need be made for resuming the consideration of any subject of
enquiry, or for dissenting from those who may have delivered
their sentiments concerning it before. I flatter myself, there=
fore, that I shall neither give offence to the candour of the So=
ciety in general, nor to the liberal mind of your worthy trea=
surer, Mr. Colebrooke, in particular, if, with all deference and
respect towards him, I should cause that rude and ancient Kentish
monument, vulgarly called Kit's Cotty House, to pass again in
review before you, and should happen to disagree with him, and
others, in certain particulars concerning it.

British monuments in the county of Kent are but few in
number [a]; the reason of which I take to be, first, that the

[a] Kit's Cotty House at Ailsford: the oval and circular rows of stones at
Addington, first mentioned by Dr. Harris, but more fully described by Mr. Cole=
brooke, *Archaeolog.* II. p. 407. Perhaps Julaberr's grave at Chilham and a
long gigantic barrow on the side of Wye down.

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Britons in that tract of the island were found, on the arrival
of Julius Caesar, to be more civilized than the rest [b]; and
secondly, that the natives were afterwards so soon driven from
those parts into the other quarters of the country; Kent, as
their landing place, being one of the first districts possessed by
the Romans.

However this may be, the most remarkable of the British
remains there is that rude structure in the parish of Ailsford
written by Mr. Lambarde 'Citscote house' [c], and now commonly

'Kit's Cotty House'. Of this monument we have several representations engraved [d], as likewise many verbal descriptions [e]; some of these last, particularly that from the pen of Mr. Colebrooke, are so minute and exact, that nothing further in that way need be required. It appears to me to have been first notified to the public by Mr. Lambarde, the famous Kentish antiquary, in the second edition of his *Perambulation of Kent*, A. D. 1596, p. 409; though Mr. Colebrooke, in his observa-

[b] 'Ex his omnibus, longe sunt humanissimi, qui Cantium incolunt; quae regio est maritima omnis; neque multum a Gallica differunt consuetudine.' Caesar de B. G. v. §10.

[c] *Peramb. of Kent*, p. 409. edit. 1596. Camden writes, 'Keith-Coty-house'; Stow, 'Cits Cotthouse'; Philipot, 'Kits-Cotehouse'; and Harris, 'Kits Cotty-House'.

[d] The first, I presume, is that very bad one by Philipot, *Villare Cant.* p. 49; a second, and somewhat better, by Dr. Harris, *Hist. of Kent*, p. 371; then an East and West front, by an anonymous author in *Gent. Mag.* 1763, p. 248; copied in the second edition of Dr. William Borlase's *Antiquities of Cornwall*, p. 224; and lastly (not to mention the two unpublished views by Dr. Stukeley, for which see Mr. Gough's *Anecd. of Brit. Topogr.* p. 229, and which will appear in the new volume of his *Itinerary*, publishing by subscription), an accurate plate by Mr. Colebrooke, and a view by Mr. Grose.

[e] Lambarde. *Camden, Brit. col.* 230. Stow, *Chron.* p. 52. edit. 1631. Philipot, p. 48. Harris, p. 31. *Gent. Mag.* l. c. Dr. Borlase, and Mr. Colebrooke, p. 114. 116. The accounts given by the three last are by far the most minute and particular.

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tions, making use only of the first edition of that work, printed in 1576, reasons sometimes from Mr. Lambarde's silence about it [f], and seems to think Mr. Camden, or Mr. Stow, was the first author that mentions it [g].

The question is, of what nature this ancient British monument may be, and for what purpose it was originally designed? Now, Sir, our older authors in general will tell you, it is the sepulchral monument of prince Catigern, brother of king Vortimer, who was slain in battle here [h]; and so the matter stood, in the opinion of our Antiquaries, till Mr. Colebrooke arose and observed, and I think very justly, that little or nothing can be inferred from the similitude of the names, Catigern and Kits-Cotty-House, which the preceding gentlemen had chiefly grounded their notions upon: 'I apprehend,' says he, and one cannot but agree with him, 'the name of Kits or Keiths Cotty-house to have been given to this place from some old shepherd, who kept sheep on this plain, and used to shelter himself from the weather on one side or other of this monument; for, from whatever quarter a storm came, he might here find shelter [i].' And, thus discarding the received opinion, that Kit's Cotty House was the funeral monument of prince Catigern, he inclines to think it rather the tomb of Horsa, Hengist's brother, killed at the same time with prince Catigern, and that this last was interred in a circle of stones at Addington about eight miles off [k]. The Britons, he con-

[f] *Archaeol.* II. p. 110. 114. [g] *lb.* p. 115.

[h] Lambarde, Camden, Stow, Philipot, Harris. Philipot pretends, p. 48, that another such a monument was erected for Horsa at Horsted, in the parish of Chatham; but this is *gratis dictum*. See Mr. Colebrooke, p. 110.

[i] *Archaeol.* p. 114. See also Dr. Borlase, p. 224, where the vulgar name, Kits Cotty-house, is derived from Koitten, or Goitten, a quoit.

[k] *Archaeol.* p. 109. 113. 117.

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jectures, might retreat, after the battle, to those stones erected

in an oval form at Addington, as to a place of strength [l]. But surely, whatever may become of the retreat, the oval could be no place of safety fit for the vanquished Britons to retire to.

As to the main point, the interment of prince Horsa at Kits-Cotty-house, this hypothesis appears to me extremely doubtful; since, in the first place, there are not the least footsteps, from etymology, or otherwise, to lead us to prince Horsa, except that vague and uncertain passage in Bede, 'e quibus Horsa postea occisus in bello a Britonibus, hactenus in orientalibus Cantiae partibus monumentum habet suo nomine insigne [m]:' which is equally as applicable to Addington as to Kits-Cotty-house, though the former happens to be on the Western side of the Medway, Mr. Colebrooke himself having remarked, that the limits of E. and W. Kent were at that time different from what they are now taken to be [n]. I observe next, that, supposing Kit's Cotty-house to belong to Horsa, it instantly becomes a Saxon, instead of a British monument; which I think very material in the case, as the Saxons are not known to have used the cromlech, for their sepulchral monuments, as the Britons and the Celtae did [o]. The safest way would therefore be, to call it a cromlech, or British tomb, as apparently it is [p], and to leave the name of the person there interred undecided, and not to assign it either to Catigern or Horsa; and

[l] Compare p. 113, with p. 117.

[m] Bede, p. 53. edit. Smith.

[n] Archaeologia, p. 117.

[o] Borlase, p. 225.

[p] Compare it with those in Rowland's *Mona Antiq.* p. 92, seq. and in Borlase, p. 223. et seq.

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indeed it is a point very problematical with me, whether this British piece of antiquity be not older than their time [q].

I have hitherto called the cromlechs British tombs, in compliance with the present received opinion; and in consequence thereof I have admitted Kits-Cotty-house to be of a sepulchral nature. But I hold it, nevertheless, very uncertain, whether those piles are in fact funeral monuments. Dr. Borlase, indeed, has endeavoured to shew, by some plausible arguments, that they are really such [r]; but yet that hypothesis is attended with some difficulties, as that the cromlechs are sometimes found mounted upon barrows [s], which often have a Kist-vaen, or stone coffin, a structure of a funeral nature, within them; which seems to make it very superfluous to erect a cromlech, or another of the same kind, upon the top. It is true, the doctor infers from this very incident, that the cromlech must be sepulchral [t]; but others, I imagine, will incline to conclude the contrary from it, and will think that for that reason they cannot be sepulchral. 2dly, The cromlechs are also seen raised upon rocks [u], where a dead body could not be interred; whence the probability seems to be, that these piles were rather places of devotion than of interment, as the word cromlech evidently imports [w]; and so were placed only casually, and not always or universally, over graves. This I find to be the opinion of Mr. Toland and others [x], and appears to be, at last, the very notion which Dr. Borlase himself had of them, when he says 'That these places of burial be=

[q] See Borlase, p. 224, 225. [r] Idem, p. 226. et seq.

[s] Idem, p. 223, 227, 228, 229, 232. [t] Idem, p. 229.

[u] Idem, p. 223, 230.

[w] Idem, p. 225. Toland's works, p. 97.

[x] Idem, p. 225. Toland, p. 97.

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came afterwards the scenes of the Parentalia, or where divine honours were payed, and sacrifices performed to the manes of the dead, is very reasonable to believe; but these rites must have been transacted at some distance from the cromlech, which (as I think has been shewn) could never serve for sacrifice [y].’ And again, ‘The cromlech might be, as it were, the sacred Kibla, to mark the place of assembling, and to which they were to direct their devotions [z].’ Wherefore, if that were the case, and cromlechs are not funeral monuments, one has still more reason for doubting, as was stated above, whether the cromlech called Kits-Cotty-house is the tomb either of Catigern or Horsa. The late Lord Barrington has shewn, that ‘altars were as often memorials of God’s having appeared to the patriarchs at the place they were erected at, as for sacrifices, and that therefore in Jacob’s case they were called pillars; the design of which, as is well known, is to perpetuate the memory of the thing they are set up for [a].’ Again, his lordship expressly says [b], ‘The altars or pillars that were built by the Post-diluvian patriarchs were not used for sacrifice (unless in the extraordinary case of Abraham’s offering the ram), but to strengthen their faith and hope, and the faith and hope of after-times, when they called on the name of the Lord.’ Whence it should seem, that all Dr. Borlase’s reasoning from the unfitness of the cromlechs to be altars, and that therefore they must of necessity be sepulchral, is not so conclusive as he imagined. We are, however, highly obliged to Mr. Colebrooke for the careful personal view he has taken of this vene-

[y] Borlase, p. 229. [z] Idem, p. 230.

[a] Lord Barrington’s Works, III. 177. second edition. [b] P. 179.

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rable remain, as also for his discoveries at Addington, and the satisfactory account he has given us of the unmeaning assemblage of stones at Horsted, reputed in that neighbourhood to be Horsa’s monument.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient,

SAMUEL PEGGE.

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<C.F. May 2011.>