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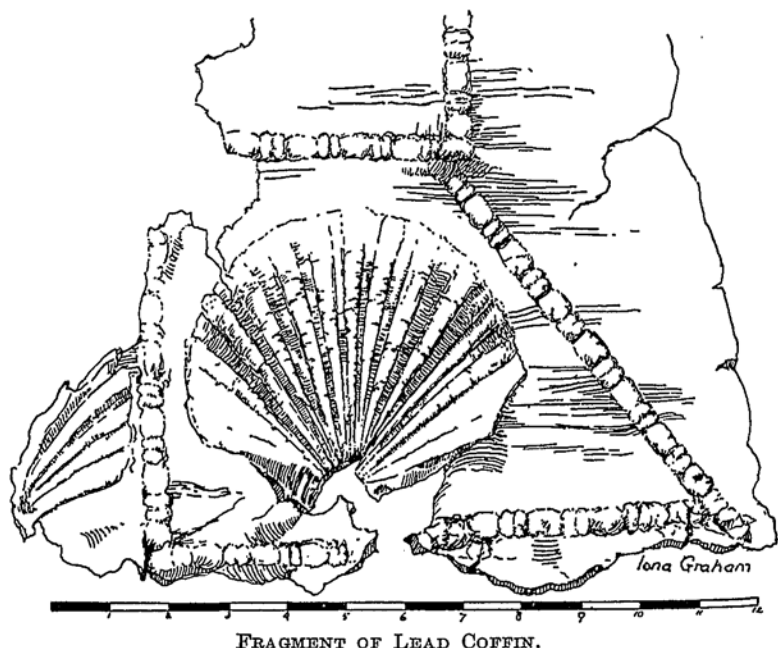
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BOLEY HILL, ROCHESTER.

BY REV. S. W. WHEATLEY, M.A., F.S.A.

ROCHESTER has for about a year been the happy home of industry for miners, labourers and sanitary engineers carrying out the scheme of main drainage for the Medway towns, which, though agreed upon years ago, had been put aside owing to the interruption of the great war. This industry has caused a smothering of our persons and possessions with chalk dust, and has occasionally made night hideous by strange noises issuing from the bowels of this chalk, where excavating was being carried on. For the antiquary, however, all this discomfiture was brightened by the hope that the trenches might yield some relics of the past, whereby further knowledge might be obtained of bygone Rochester and its inhabitants. Discoveries have been disappointing on the whole ; for nothing of any real significance has come to light, but it is worthy of note that on all hands confirmation has been obtained of the work of such antiquaries as the late Sir William St. John Hope, the late Mr. George Payne and Canon G. B. Livett. For portions of the foundations, before undiscovered, of the Roman city wall have been exposed, just where they should be ; further Saxon walls have been found close to those of the Saxon Cathedral ; and ancient masonry came to light by the Deanery, where Sir William St. John Hope had shown on his Priory plan that the site of the old Deanery should be. One find, however, has suggested the writing of this article, viz., that of a Roman lead coffin, found when a trench was being dug in front of No. 2, Love Lane. For this find seems to suggest a new argument for the post-Roman date of part, at least, of the Boley Hill earthworks. As a preliminary, then, to the consideration of this matter, Boley Hill is comprised within the following boundaries. On the North, the Castle ditch, now filled up and made into pleasant

walks ; on the South, the ditch just below Love Lane ; on the East, St. Margaret's Street ; and on the West, the river front. The thoroughfare leading from the High Street past the site of the Roman Southgate is rather unfortunately named Boley Hill, since it is not Boley Hill itself, but the way to it, which in former years bore the names of Doddinghearne Lane, or King's Head Lane, both interesting old-world

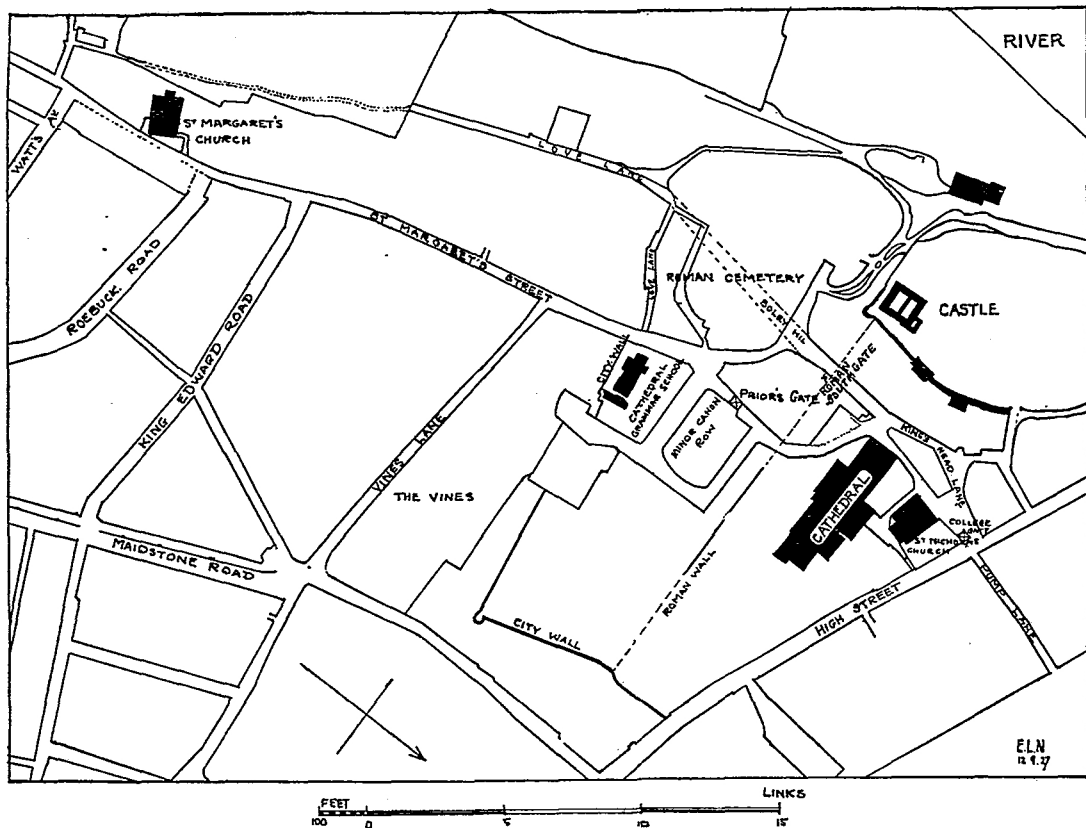


FRAGMENT OF LEAD COFFIN.

names and worthy of preservation. The earthworks which form Boley Hill have been ascribed to various periods of our history. The late Mr. George Payne¹ and others held that they were of Celtic origin, defending a British Settlement by the ancient ford of the Medway. In Fisher's History of Rochester,² largely the work of the Rev. Samuel Denne, no mean antiquary, there is a special chapter upon Boley Hill—which is there quaintly spoken of as "this elegant and engaging rural recess"—and in this is set forth arguments in

¹ Collect. Cant., p. 126.

² 1817 Edition, pp. 305-11.



favour of the Danish case for the earthworks. Mr. Beal Poste¹ supported the Danish claims and so did Sir G. L. Gomme² when he made it the basis of his interesting, if not quite convincing, article on Boley Hill. Mr. G. T. Clarke, to whose industry and learning the subject of military architecture owes much, expressed the opinion that "the grounds were insufficient" upon which the Danish theory was supported. One turns naturally to the Victoria County History of Kent for an authoritative and recent opinion, but here we only find the statement, perhaps wisely indecisive³, "Suffice it to say that the writer holds the long-accepted theory of Danish origin to be untenable, and thinks that the Southern fosse may have guarded a Celtic settlement on the promontory, though, on the whole, inclined to attribute the entire work to Norman hands." It would really seem impossible to establish the fact of either a Celtic or a Danish origin to these earthworks—unless some relics of these periods come to light on the site, and so far no such relics have come to hand. It is, however, to the exclusion of the Celtic origin of the earthworks that the finding of the Roman lead coffin seems to afford definite evidence. It has been well established by the finding of Roman interments in the past, and in recent years, about Boley Hill that one of the cemeteries of the Roman city of Durobrivis lay just outside the Roman South Gate. Now if the natural slope of the hill is followed to Love Lane it will be seen that this Lane will be on the Southern boundary of this cemetery. The coffin in question was found about seven feet below the surface of the road, where a trench was being dug for the insertion of drainage pipes, and all along the road westward where the trenches were dug quantities of bones and skulls were found. It seems difficult to escape, then, from the conclusion that the mound and ditch which now intervene between the lower level of the hill and Love Lane, were made after Roman times. Canon Livett has

¹ Archæol. Cant., II., p. 70.

² Archæol. Cant. XVII., pp. 181-188.

³ Vict. Hist. Kent, Vol. I., p. 419.

surmised¹ that the road which passed through the Roman South Gate proceeded more or less straightly towards that portion of Love Lane that runs North and South and continued Southward passing the West door of St. Margaret's Church. If this was so, then again, neither the mound nor its Southern ditch existed at that time, and the Roman cemetery would lie on either side of this road. The present St. Margaret Street seems to have its origin from the time—1225—when King Henry III included Boley Hill by his new fortifications in the defences of the city and established a new South gate slightly South East of the old Roman South Gate. All this seems clearly shown by Canon Livett in his article on "Mediæval Rochester."²

The value of the finding of the Roman coffin has been much reduced by the circumstances associated with it. Although all contractors for the main drainage works were, under their contracts, bound to watch for, and to protect when found, all objects of interest, the workmen who discovered this coffin in their digging, concealed the fact and sold the lead to a dealer in old metal, thus rendering accurate observation of the place and the circumstance of the finding impossible. The trench from which the coffin came was dug longitudinally East and West, and thus the coffin, which lay North and South, was cut in two, and with no thought in their heads but that of gain, the lead was torn up ruthlessly and so broken as to make any exact statement of its size impossible. Several of the workmen assured the writer that, except for a few small bones—manifestly those of a child—and some lime, there was nothing in the coffin, nor lying near to it. The scallop shell decoration is finely and boldly impressed; the "baluster" mouldings surrounding them are of the usual type; no other device was discernible. In comparing the shell decoration on this coffin, with those of similar coffins found at Chatham and East Ham in Essex there are in each case differences of general design in the arrangement of the scallop shells. This is the first time

¹ St. Margaret's Parish Magazine, July, 1919.

² Archæol. Cant. XXI, 53-57.

that a Roman lead coffin has been found in Rochester—or at least recorded as having been found—but in the neighbourhood one was found at Frindsbury, and two at Chatham, the first of them above St. Mary's Church about 1838, and the second on May 16th, 1878, in the new Chatham cemetery, and part of this latter may be seen in the Chatham museum.

This charming suburb of our city, sometimes referred to as Boley Hill-next-Rochester, is so full of historical association—with its siege memories of Bishop Odo, King John and De Clare—its legal curiosities, the Justice Tree, the Pie Powder Court and the Baron of the Bully—its social memories of the benevolent Richard Watts and his royal visitor, of the learned Recorder Longley and his distinguished son, whose episcopal appointments varied his signature at different stages, Charles, Ripon, Dunelm, Ebor and Cantuar; of Mr. Brooke, who filled up the Castle ditch, and of Mr. Baker who made our pleasant “walks”—as to justify further notes on the place on some future occasion.

Measurements of Roman vessels found in 1906 in Boley Hill:

URN. Blackish pottery, 7 in. in height, $7\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter; this was filled with bones.

WATER CUP. Blackish pottery, $3\frac{3}{4}$ in. in height, $3\frac{3}{4}$ in. diameter.

FOOD BOWL. Reddy-brown pottery, 4 in. in height, 3 in. diameter.

INCENSE CUP. Reddy-brown pottery, 2 in. in height, $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter.

The above were bequeathed to the Rochester Museum by the late Mr. Spencer Sills, Assistant Surveyor of the City, who found them.