Roman Coffins discovered at Keynsham, 1922.

BY H. ST. GEORGE GRAY.

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INTERESTING archæological remains of the Roman period, including two coffins, were discovered in digging for the foundations of Messrs. J. S. Fry & Sons' new factory and garden city at Keynsham Hams, Somerset, on 1st May, 1922. Having heard of the discovery from Mr. J. E. Pritchard, F.S.A., I made arrangements to visit the site on May 4th. Dr. A. Bulleid, F.S.A., joined me during the afternoon and took some photographs. The position is three-quarters of a mile east of the Cemetery and Mortuary Chapel on the Bristol Road, where the remains of a Roman villa have recently been found.

Both the coffins (Plate XXII), which appeared to be of oolite (Bath stone), had stone covers, the tops of which were about 2ft. below the surface of the ground. They were close together and the lids—shown in dotted lines in the accompanying drawing (Plate XXII)—touched each other at one point. The position in which they were found was about 63 ft. above mean sea-level, and only 400 ft. W. of the River Avon, which divides Somerset from Gloucestershire. The Roman Road from Bath to Avonmouth passes three-quarters of a mile to the N. of the coffins.

Coffin I, the most northerly, was rounded at the head,[1]

* *See* Preface to this volume.

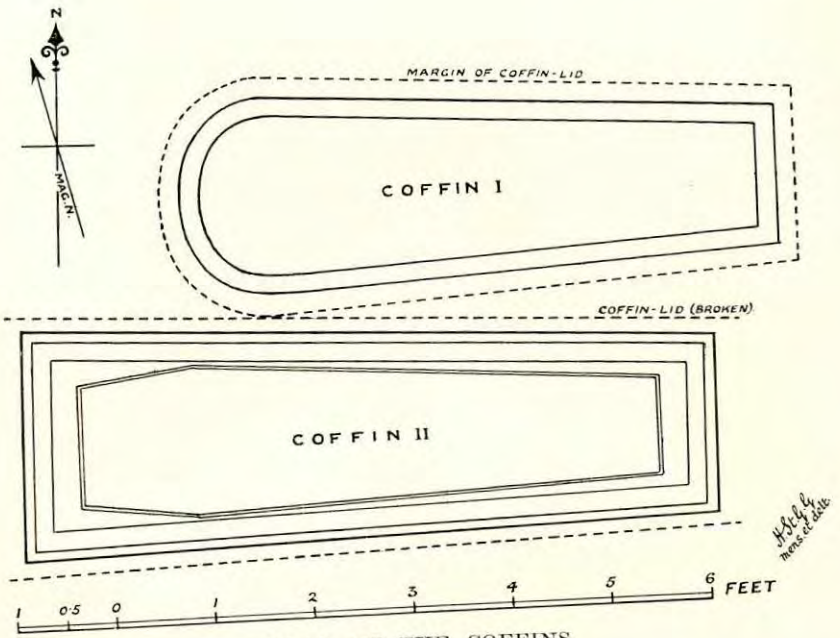
1. Three other stone coffins having the head-end rounded and containing female skeletons have been found recently in Somerset, at Priston, Midford and Burnett. *The Antiquaries Journal* (Oct. 1922), II, 380–1.

the foot being squared. Coffin II differed in being squared at both ends. The lid of Coffin I was of the same shape as the coffin, length 6·4ft., max. width 2·5ft., min. width 1·8ft. Its top was ridged lengthwise, with a max. thickness of about 0·6ft.; at the margin it measured 0·4ft. in thickness. The underside was flanged along the margin so that it might the better fit the top of the coffin proper. The external length of the coffin was 6ft.,[2] max. width 2ft., diminishing to 1·25ft. at the foot. The internal depth was 0·85ft., and the internal width varied from 1·45ft. at the head to 0·75ft. at the foot. The coffin is stated to have been found almost filled with earth. This, however, had been mostly removed before my arrival, and some of the bones of the skeleton had been disturbed. The facial bones and the lower jaw had been broken. There was some overlap of the tibia and femur in both legs (when seen by me), and it is possible, therefore, that the knees were flexed at the time of burial. The face of the skeletons was upwards in both cases; and both were adults. The heads were to the west, as shown in the drawing.

The length of the right femur (in Coffin I) was taken in the ground as 17⅜ins. (441mm.), and of the left femur 17¼ins. (438mm.). According to Rollet's method of calculation this gives a stature of 5ft. 4·3ins. if female, and 5ft. 3·4ins. if male. The bones were in sequence and appeared to occupy a length of only 5ft. in the coffin, but the skull, etc., had been moved from the original position before my arrival.

Coffin II also had a heavy cover, the west end of which was badly broken by the tools of the workmen, but there were also two ancient fractures across the block of stone. The length of the cover could not, therefore, be clearly ascertained, but its width towards the larger end was 2·7ft., and at the smaller end 2·15ft. It was 0·6ft. thick, except at the margin where there was a worked edge to fit the rebate (1in.) round the coffin, which increased the thickness to 0·68ft. The coffin proper had an external length of 7ft.; the external width was 2·4ft. at the head and 1·85ft. at the foot. The outer depth of the coffin was 1·5ft., inner depth at the sides 1·2ft. Within the

2. The Priston and Midford stone coffins were also 6ft. in length.



PLAN OF THE COFFINS.



From a Photograph by Dr. A. Bulleid, F.S.A.

ROMAN COFFINS FOUND AT KEYNSHAM.

stone coffin was a lead shell or lining in a good state of preservation, but shorter than the coffin proper, as shown in the drawing. This is a very rare feature. The leaden receptacle measured 5·9ft. in length, and in width 1·6ft. at the shoulders, 1·3ft. at the head, and 1·05ft. at the foot. The internal depth was 0·85ft. The leaden cover (length 6ft.) was detached from the rest but had originally been soldered. The thickness of the stone sides of the outer coffin was 0·3ft. of which 0·1ft. was rebated at the top, so that the cover might the more easily fit. The extended skeleton occupied a length of 5ft. 4ins. Length of the right femur 17½ins. (445mm.); left femur, ditto; left tibia 14ins. (359mm.); left humerus 12½ins. (318mm.). The leg bones give a stature, if male, of 5ft. 4ins. Calculated from the humerus only, the stature works out at 5ft. 3·6ins.

No relics were found associated with the skeletons, but the interments are undoubtedly of the Roman period, and in trenching to the south several fragments of Romano-British pottery were found, down to a depth of 4·5ft. below the surface, including part of a tazza (shallow), lathe-turned, with ring-base, brown and black outer surface, and ' basin-shaped ' rim-pieces; also some oyster-shells and remains of horse, ox, pig, sheep and small dog.

At a distance of 2ft. from the coffins on the south side a silver *denarius* of Gordianus Pius, A.D. 238–244, was found. The following is its description :—

Obv.—IMP. GORDIANVS PIVS FEL. AVG.=Laureated head to left.

Rev.—P.M. TR. P. III. COS. II. P.P.=Female figure seated, holding an olive branch. (*In good preservation*).

Since the coffins were found a " third brass " coin of Constantius II, A.D. 337–361 (well preserved) was uncovered near by. Also a bronze needle, 5¼ins. long, finely patinated.

Obv.—CONSTANTIVS P.F. AVG.=Head to right.

Rev.—GLORIA EXERCITVS=Two soldiers, each with a spear, regarding a central standard with M. on the banneret. In exergue, TRP (?).

I understand that a " second brass " coin of Maximianus (A.D. 286–305) and a " third brass " of Constantinus I (A.D. 306–337) have also been found. In extending the digging

north-westwards stone roofing-tiles, some having the iron nails still in position, have been uncovered in some numbers ; they were more or less piled up indicating the remains of a Roman building which had suddenly collapsed. Large pieces of worked stone were also found close to and traces of stone foundations ; also more pottery including fragments of *terra sigillata*. The work was temporarily stopped in this position.[3]

Leaden coffins found within Roman sarcophagi are unusual ; but they have previously occurred in Somerset and elsewhere.

A stone coffin containing another of lead was found at a place called Hobb's (or Hobbs's) Wall (or Well) near Barrow Vale Farm, Farmborough. This place is six miles south of Keynsham Hams ; and the coffin is of the same dimensions as the larger coffin from Keynsham. The leaden remains from Farmborough were sent to Bristol Museum in 1886, but it has been stated on good authority that a few months subsequently they found their way to the melting-pot.[4]

A freestone coffin found (depth about a foot) in a field called Great Wemberham, in the parish of Yatton, in 1828, is described as containing bones of a skeleton and some parts of a leaden coffin.[5] Probably much of the leaden shell had perished. The head of the coffin pointed to the north-west.

A stone sarcophagus found in 1853 at Haydon Square, near the Minories and the Tower of London, contained a lead coffin with an ornamented lid.[6]

In 1801, a stone sarcophagus was found at Southfleet, Kent, which contained two leaden coffins which were originally enveloped in wood (as indicated by the iron nails found loose

3. Several other specimens, I am informed, have been found during the autumn, including a silver *denarius* of Antoninus Pius, two bronze pins and a bone whistle.

4. *Proc. Clifton Antiq. Club*, I, 109–113.

5. Rutter's *Delineations of N.W. Somerset*, 70 ; *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Lond.*, XI, 30.

6. *Archæol. Journ.*, X, 255 ; *Collect. Antiqua*, III, p. 45 *et seq.*, and Plate xiii ; *Guide to Roman Britain* (Brit. Mus.), 1922, pp. 16 and 101, and Plate x ; *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, V, ii, 67.

in the sarcophagus). Each of the leaden cases contained a skeleton and grave-goods.[7]

Another large Roman sarcophagus lined with lead was found near Caerwent in 1854.[8]

A stone coffin found at Whatmere Hall, Sturry, Kent, contained a lead shell in six pieces, put together without solder.[9] Another lined with lead was found at Crowle, Worcestershire ;[10] and one similar was found at York.[11]

In 1916 a lead coffin of a child, of the Roman period, was found at Cann, near Shaftesbury. The coffin rested on a tray of what on close examination proved to be an artificial cement. This remarkable ' find ' I have figured and described.[12]

There is evidence of other leaden coffins having been found in Somerset, but without outer cases of stone. One was found near Wiveliscombe,[13] of which there are fragments in the Somerset County Museum. Fragments of a leaden coffin found at Northover House, Ilchester, in 1836, ornamented with a plaited herring-bone design, are also exhibited in the Museum.[14] The same collection includes a piece of another from Chillington (1848)[15] ; and a larger fragment of one found near Bearley Farm, parish of Tintinhull, a mile north of the Fosseway.[16]

7. *Archæologia*, XIV, 37–39, and 221–223 ; *Collect. Antiqua*, III, 54 ; *Guide to Roman Britain* (Brit. Mus.), 1922, p. 14 ; *Gents Mag.*, 1802, ii, 921.

8. *Archæol. Journ.*, XII, 76–78.

9. Hasted's *History of Kent*, III, 615 ; *Collect. Antiqua*, VII, 190.

10. Nash's *Worcestershire.*

11. *Proc. Clifton Antiq. Club*, I, 112.

12. *Proc. Dorset Field Club*, XXXVIII, 68–73. (The first archæological article I ever wrote was on a leaden coffin of the Roman period enveloped in a wooden case, found at Marnhull, Dorset. *Western Gazette*, 29th July, 1892 ; *Som. & Dor. Notes and Queries*, IX, 5–8).

13. *Som. & Dor. Notes and Queries*, IX, 8, 58.

14. One piece was given by Dr. H. Norris (*Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, LI, ii, 50) ; another fragment is in the A. Hull Collection (*Proc.*, LXIII, 117).

15. *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, LI, ii, 150 ; LXIII, 117 ; *Som. & Dor. Notes and Queries*, IX, 230 ; XIV, 335.

16. *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, XLVIII, ii, 52 ; the account is here corrected. I have a further note that the coffin was lying in a N. and S. direction, and that tesserae had been found near it.

A large number of stone coffins of the Roman period have been found in and around Bath,[17] but no specimen, I believe, with an inner shell of lead. There is a record of a leaden coffin having been found at Sydney Buildings, parish of Bathwick.[18]

In the Lansdown excavations conducted by the Bath Branch of the Somersetshire Archæological Society a number of stone coffins of the Roman period have been found, but none with lead linings. Some of them were rounded at the head-end; others were squared at both ends. But the form of the coffin did not indicate the sex of the individual buried. (*See* plates in Reports of the Bath Branch for 1906, 1907 and 1908).

17. *Aquae Solis*, by the Rev. Preb. H. M. Scarth, 97–106; *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, v, ii, 49–72; *The Antiquaries Journal* (Oct. 1922), II, 380 and *Proc. Bath Branch, Som. Arch. Soc.*, 1922, pp. 169-170 (Walcot Parade).

18. *Aquae Solis*, 99.