

XX.—*Accounts of some ancient Wooden Coffins discovered not far from Haltwhistle, in the County of Northumberland (one of which was presented to the Society by the RIGHT HON. THOS. WALLACE), contained in Letters from LT.-COL. COULSON and MR. WALLACE'S STEWARD, to JOHN ADAMSON, Esq., Secretary.*

*Blenkinsopp, April 20th, 1825.*

DEAR SIR,

IN compliance with your request I shall make you acquainted with what I know respecting the Coffin which has been presented to the Antiquarian Society, by my neighbour, Mr. Wallace. It was discovered last year, along with several others of the same description, by some men who were cutting a drain about two hundred yards to the north-east of the farm house at Wyden Eals, which property belongs to Mr. Wallace, and is situate on the north bank of the river Tyne, two miles above the village of Haltwhistle: it is formed from the boll of an oak tree which has been split by the wedge and hollowed out in a very rough manner to admit the body, the lid secured at the head and feet by wooden pins: it was lying at the depth of six feet from the surface in wet clay, those in dryer ground were of course more decayed; few bones were found, and those, after being exposed to the air, shortly became dust. As neither history nor tradition make mention of any place of worship having ever been near this spot, it is, in all probability, a burial ground of remote antiquity. King Arthur is said to have been interred in a trunk of oak hollowed, which the Monk of Glastonbury calls Sarcophagus Ligneus, the most ancient record of wooden coffins among us.

I was fortunately on the spot when these relics were found, which probably has been the means of preserving them from destruction, as I

had four of the most perfect immediately removed to Featherstone Castle, the seat of Mr. Wallace.

I am, my DEAR SIR, Your's faithfully,

J. BLENKINSOPP COULSON.

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*Featherstone Castle, March 27, 1825.*

SIR,

MR. WALLACE has desired me to write to you all particulars relating to the finding of the Coffins, which is as followeth :—The Right Hon. Thos. Wallace had employed some labourers to drain some swampy ground in an estate of his called Wyden Eals, within two miles of Haltwhistle, in the county of Northumberland, near the side of the river Tyne. In cutting the main drain they met with what appeared an oak tree, and, as it impeded their progress, they got an axe to cut it out, and, to their surprise, it proved to be a coffin, after that they took out the remains of four more, in one of which there was part of a skull. The coffin I have sent was the most perfect. The workmen passed several coffins lying north and south, very near each other, and about five feet below the surface of the ground. I think it does not admit of a doubt that it has been a place of interment, but at what period is uncertain. There is no building or remains of buildings near the place, except the remains of what appears to have been a cottage, and a modern-built farm house.—The only buildings that appear to have been of any particular account are Featherstone Castle, the property of the Right Hon. Thos. Wallace, the remains of Blenkinsopp Castle, the property of Col. Coulson, and of Bellister Castle, the property of Mr. Kirsop. The castles are nearly at an equal distance from the place where the coffins were found. Can this have been a burying place for the families of these three castles?

The above is the best account I am able to give ; if any further information is wanted, I shall be very ready to give it to the best of my knowledge,

I am, very respectfully, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

W. HUTTON.