Danett's Hall, the date of which is probably the middle of the last century; and also a parchment document, date 1654, signed by Ferdinando 6th Earl of Huntingdon, Lucy, Countess of Huntingdon, his wife (daughter of Sir John Davys), and Colonel Henry Hastings, the distinguished royalist leader.

By MR. HUNT: a tortoiseshell double snuff box, apparently intended to contain two kinds of snuff, or probably one for the owner and another for his friends; it was of about the beginning of this century. Also a pin with four heads, and a ring set round with camoes cut in lava. Also a silver seal found in a ploughed field near Norton Church; the coat of arms engraved thereon was a bar engrailed between three female busts.

March 30th, 1874.

THE REV. THOMAS FAREBROTHER in the chair.

After the reading of correspondence, &c.,

Mr. Alfred H. Paget, Architect, Leicester, was elected a Member of the Society.

The following antiquities, &c., were exhibited:—

By MR. HUNT: an ancient clock standing on an oaken bracket; four silver shoe-buckles with crystal ornaments.

By MR. W. G. D. FLETCHER: two pieces of Samian ware, one the base of a small vase with the potter's mark TAVRICIM, the other a fragment of a tazza with raised ornamentation. Mr. Fletcher further produced two Civil War Tracts dated 1642, and a parchment deed, dated 11th June, 9 James I., bearing the signature of Sir Edward Dymock of Scrivelsby, Knight, Champion at the Coronation of King James the First.

MAJOR BELLAIRS read the following Paper on

THE DISCOVERY OF LEADEN COFFINS.

THE interesting discovery in September and October last of three leaden coffins in Newarke Street, Leicester, has naturally given rise to some speculation as to what period of our history they belong, and how they came to be deposited in that place.

The first coffin was found on the 1st of September last, during excavations for cellarage, on the premises of Mr. Charles Billson. It was found lying east and west, with the feet towards the east, at a depth of about five feet from the present surface of the ground. The length of the lid was five feet ten inches, but that of the coffin itself was only five feet four inches; breadth of lid at the head twenty-five inches, at the foot sixteen inches; breadth of the ends,

at the head twenty inches, at the foot fourteen inches; depth at the head twenty-five inches, at the foot eighteen inches. The large size of this coffin (which has a slight striated pattern upon it) leads to the inference that it was made either for a double interment or for a person of unusual size. It had apparently been partially filled with lime, and the whole had been enclosed in a wooden chest, which, however, rapidly perished when exposed to the air. Unfortunately this coffin was pulled to pieces and the contents disturbed by the workmen as soon as it was found. One skeleton only is supposed to have been found in it; that of a female of mature age. After the removal of the coffin to the Town Museum, the Curator there reports the discovery of a seed of the carob bean imbedded in the lime at the bottom, and of a piece of coarse Roman ware. Several pieces of Samian ware were found about the coffin—that is, in the grave.

These discoveries—setting aside the topographical testimony which will be referred to presently—led to the belief that the interment was made by the Romans during their occupancy of *Rutæ*, or ancient Leicester.

Mr. Charles Roach Smith (whose opinion in all matters connected with the archæology of the Romans in Britain is always deservedly received by antiquaries with great deference and consideration) visited Leicester shortly after this discovery, and thus refers to it in a letter to the *Builder*:—"I cannot ascribe to it [the coffin] a Roman paternity, for although it may not be many centuries posterior to the Roman period, it does not conform in character to any one of the many leaden coffins of undoubted Roman manufacture with which I am familiar. I will not say these coffins" [Mr. Smith had been informed of, but had not seen, the subsequent discoveries described presently] "may not be as late or later than the eleventh or twelfth century."

This opinion from so learned an antiquary as Mr. C. Roach Smith appeared to be conclusive against the Roman origin of this coffin. But on the 10th of October, a few days after his visit to Leicester, and his inspection of the *first coffin*, two more leaden coffins were found about 50 yards from the site of the old one—upon the premises of Messrs. Brierley. They lay at a depth of about 4 feet from the present surface, side by side, with a space of about 2 feet between them. They, like the first one, were laid east and west, and, like it, at a distance of about six yards from the street. Mr. Harrison, the Curator of the Leicester Museum, who made a minute examination of these coffins, says:—"The lead of which they were composed was quite half an inch in thickness, and bore no trace of ornamentation. Each was formed of two pieces only, the corners of a large sheet of lead having been cut out, and the sides and ends bent up and hammered together, apparently without the use of solder; the lid was bent down over

this about a couple of inches all round . . . . Each coffin was crossed inside by three iron bars which sustained the lid. The skulls were very imperfect . . . A few feet from the spot I took out some fragments of a large Roman urn, and a glass lachrymatory was also found. These coffins had evidently been partly filled with lime . . . . Nothing was found in them (in addition to the skeletons) with the exception of several pieces of charcoal."

As before remarked, Mr. Smith saw only the first discovered of these three coffins; and his remark upon its non-conformity to undoubted examples of the Roman period certainly does not apply to the two subsequently found; neither do I think that Mr. Smith gave sufficient attention to the locality where they were exhumed. That locality would be just outside the Roman south wall of the ancient city, the southgate of which would be in Millstone Lane, opposite Marble Street. I may mention that many skeletons, a glass cinerary urn, and other leaden coffins (one I understand, ornamented with a star pattern) have also been discovered on this site. This position for the Cemetery would be in strict conformity with the laws and customs of the Romans. Mr. Bloxam, in his *Fragmenta Sepulchralia* says, "Although prohibited by the laws of the twelve tables from burying or burning their dead within their cities or towns, they (the Romans) were allowed to deposit their remains *close by;* and at many of the ancient towns in Italy, the burial places still appear on the sides of the roads leading from them, commencing near the gates, which custom prevailed amongst them also in Britain, since their sepulchral vestiges are most commonly found adjoining or very near to stations, and *in or by the sides of their public highways.*" That such was the custom in this country is shown by the known sites of the Roman Cemeteries outside the walls of London, York, Lincoln, and many other places. I think in addition to locality, the type of coffins found, and the existence in, or near, of indications of Roman occupancy, all point to a Roman origin for the coffins. Perhaps much stress should not be laid upon their position, but the fact of the bodies lying east and west, with feet towards the *east,* implies that they were interred rather with Pagan than Christian rites. If to all this it be added that Leicester was a city of considerable size during the Roman occupancy of Britain, and so must have had a Cemetery near to it, and that Marble Street and Brown Street represent the south road leading from Leicester, there requires little ingenuity in pointing to the site where these coffins were found as the Cemetery of Roman Leicester, and the road just indicated as the "Street of the Tombs of Ratæ." I therefore am of opinion that the coffins in question are Roman, and that opinion is shared in by several antiquaries well qualified to form a correct conclusion from the evidence afforded.

This enquiry has led to the following suggestion—That all Roman discoveries should be marked on a plan of the town, in the exact site where recently found, and on the supposed site where described by old historians. This would probably throw a very great light on the plan of Roman Leicester—for instance, the Roman Columns, found at the corner of St. Nicholas Street, and those near St. Martin's Church, and others in Blue Boar Lane, seem to point out the sides of some large square—which would probably be the Roman Forum. It is remarkable that within this area no Roman foundations or pavements have been discovered. The position of the Old Roman Bow Bridge (of which the foundations are said still to remain) would mark the west entrance to the city; and it need scarcely be said very many other discoveries of apparently no importance. One of the Plans recently published by the Borough Surveyor, which is very correct, would answer the purpose very well.*

May 25th, 1874.

CAPTAIN WHITBY in the chair.

After the transaction of business in Committee MR. JAMES THOMPSON reported the result of enquiries he had made relative to the preservation of Wyggeston's Hospital, Leicester.

T. E. Blunt, Esq., M.D., was elected a member of the Society.

* Such a Map exists. It was presented to the Society several years ago by the Borough Surveyor (Mr. Stephens). It has since that time been in the care of Mr. James Thompson, who has, I believe, marked upon it most of the discoveries of Roman Remains within the limits of the Borough. The following Remarks by Mr. Charles Roach Smith, recently made by him in "*Footprints of the Romans in Kent*," are appended as of value with reference to the above Paper:—"These coffins are of the highest interest, and it is a reproach to the intelligence of the day that so often they have been sacrificed for the paltry consideration of the value of the metal. They are valuable illustrations of the manufactures in native lead, one of the mineral productions of Britain which tempted the Romans to subjugate this remote and ungenial country and maintain it so long by such costly sacrifices of men and money. The exports from Britain, in lead, tin, and iron, must have been very great. Evidences are abundant of the extent of the mines, and also of the iron foundries. From the earliest period of occupation to the time of Severus, at least, pigs or blocks of manufactured lead, stamped with imperial name, have been found here and there, lost most probably in transit; and we find that throughout the province this metal was applied to public and domestic purposes much as at the present day. Roman leaden coffins must have been very common among the higher class, for, within the last few years, a considerable number have been discovered and preserved. Previously, they were never understood, and, consequently, destroyed for the sake of the metal. They are nearly always, not invariably, ornamented, and sometimes tastefully, with good designs. These designs have given rise to speculations on their meaning in reference to their application to the furniture of the grave. But I very much doubt if symbolism ever entered into the minds of the manufacturers. Even in the scallop shell, which, in the middle ages, was an emblem with the pilgrims, I see ornamentation only, applied capriciously, according to the humour or whim of the maker."—*T. N., March* 1877.