

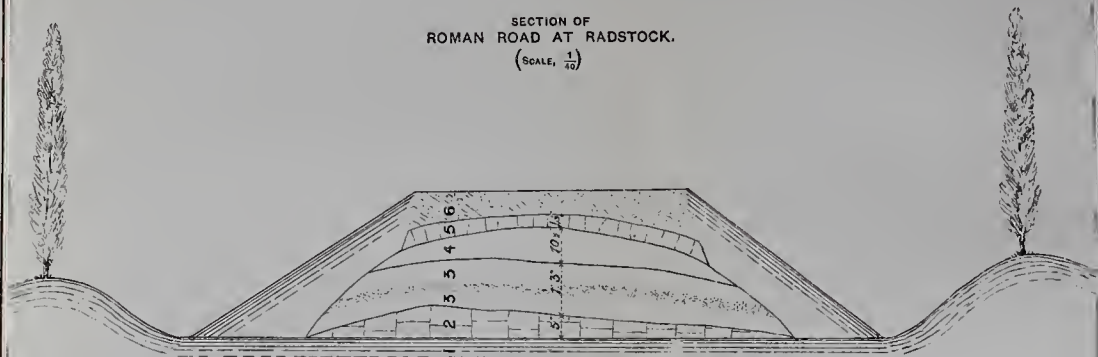
The Fosse Road at Radstock.

BY J. McMURTRIE, F.G.S.

THE general course of the Fosse road to the south of Bath is clearly shewn on the Ordnance and Saunders's maps. Collinson speaks of "the great Fosse road, running through the city from north to south," entering it by the "Porta Decumana or north gate," and leaving it by the "Porta Flumentana or south gate," leading to the river. By what means the river was passed does not appear, but the road extended onwards by Holloway and Devonshire Place to Odd Down, which it crossed very much in the line of the present turnpike. It here intersected the ancient course of the Wansdyke, which extended westward towards Englishcombe. On reaching the edge of the hill overlooking the village of Dunkerton, where the old turnpike gate formerly stood, the present highway diverges to the right, but the Fosse road keeps a perfectly straight course to the Swan Inn, at Dunkerton, where it again rejoins the main road. It was this locality, no doubt, which Collinson had in view when he wrote that "the Roman Fosse is here seen in its original perfect form; being raised very high, with a deep fosse or ditch on either side, imparting the name to this venerable relick of antiquity," and it may be noted that this is probably the nearest point to Bath where the road can be examined with advantage.

After passing the brook at Dunkerton, there is another slight divergence where the turnpike has been turned aside to find an easier gradient, but with this exception, the present highway has been constructed on the site of the old Roman road, all the way from Dunkerton by way of Camerton and Woodborough, until it enters the parish of Radstock, at Round Hill. Near this point, about 220 yards to the south of the

SECTION OF
 ROMAN ROAD AT RADSTOCK.
 (SCALE, $\frac{1}{40}$)



REFERENCES

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| } | 6. METALLING OF LATER DATE. |
| | 5. SUMMUM DORSUM, OR SUMMA CRUSTA. |
| | 4. NUCLEUS. |
| | 3. RUDUS. |
| | 2. STAMMEN, OR STATUMEN. |
| | 1. PAVIMENTUM. |

road, there is a very fine barrow, believed to have been opened by Mr. Skinner, and close by he is said to have discovered an extensive group of villas, on which he founded the important theory, that these were the veritable remains of the Roman city of Camulodunum, previously associated with Colchester. Collinson, speaking of this spot, says "large foundations of buildings have been seen," and "near the Fosse were heretofore found some large bones and part of a tessellated pavement." The Ordnance map also shows Roman remains of considerable extent on both sides of the road at this point, but the plough has been busy since those days, and not a vestige of all this is now to be seen, save only the magnificent barrow already spoken of, which it is to be hoped will be handed down to future generations.

After passing this spot, and on reaching the brow of the hill near Smallcombe, the turnpike road and the Fosse again part company; the former winding circuitously through the village of Radstock, while the Fosse keeps a perfectly straight course from Smallcombe to the Great Elm at Westfield, about a mile to the westward, where it again rejoins the turnpike road leading to Shepton and Wells. In descending through the hamlet of Smallcombe the ancient structure of the road has been lost, but after passing the Smallcombe brook it ascends the opposite side of the valley by a gradient so steep as to be impassable to modern traffic, and being entirely distinct from the existing highways, it has come down to us with little alteration from the days of the Roman occupation. This is especially true of the elevated ridge of table land which had to be crossed between the Smallcombe and Midsomer Norton brooks, where, according to Collinson, "this road for about a quarter of a mile is visible almost in its original state, being raised high above the side-dikes, about six feet broad, having a convex surface, and may possibly remain a monument of antiquity for many ages to come." It was this part of the Fosse which was visited by the Society.

It is to be remarked that here, and indeed throughout a considerable part of its course, the Fosse forms the boundary between many of the adjacent parishes and manors, which may be regarded as an evidence of its great antiquity.

In continuing southward from Radstock, the Roman road passes through the village of Stratton-on-the-Fosse, to which it gives its name, and thence by way of Oakhill and Shepton Mallet towards Ilchester; but for the most part the more ancient road has been incorporated with the modern highway and its structure lost.



DESCRIPTION OF THE FOSSE ROAD AS SEEN AT RADSTOCK,
AND GENERAL STRUCTURE OF ROMAN ROADS.

The general appearance of the Fosse road at Radstock is very striking. The land on each side being perfectly level for some distance, the road rises boldly above it in a prominent ridge, flanked by a deep ditch on either side, the whole being bounded by hedgerows of by no means recent date, although modern, probably, compared with the ancient structure which they enclose.

The most interesting feature presented, is the formation of the road itself as exposed in the section, showing an extraordinary amount of care and skill. It may be useful in the first instance, however, to notice the general structure of Roman roads, as laid down by Vitruvius:—

“The Romans began the construction of roads by making two parallel furrows the intended width of the road, and then removed all the loose earth between them till they came to the hard, solid ground, and they filled in this excavation with fine earth, hard beaten in. This first layer was called the *pavimentum*. Upon it was laid the first bed of the road, consisting of small square stones, nicely ranged on the ground, which was sometimes left dry, but often a large quantity of fresh mortar was poured into it. This layer was called *statumen*. The next was called *rudus* or *ruderatio*, and consisted of a

mass of small stones broken to pieces, and mixed with lime in the proportion of one part of broken stones to two of lime. The third layer or bed, which was termed *nucleus*, was formed of a mixture of lime, chalk, and pounded or broken tiles or earth, beaten together; or of gravel, or sand and lime mixed with clay. Upon this was laid the surface or pavement of the road, which was called technically *summum dorsum* or *summa crusta*. It was composed sometimes of stones, set like the paving-stones in our streets, and sometimes of flag-stones, cut square or polygonally, and probably more often of a firm bed of gravel or lime. The roads were thus raised higher than the surrounding grounds, and on this account the mass was termed *agger*."

Similar information, with slight variations, appears in the works of other writers, and in cutting through the Fosse road at Radstock I was curious to ascertain how far it would be found to agree. I was much gratified to find that this local section exactly confirmed the description given by Vitruvius, layer corresponding with layer throughout the entire structure.

In order to show its formation with greater exactness, I have had a section prepared, which gives a general view of the road, and of its elevation above the adjacent land. It will be observed from this section that after cutting through the Roman work the original soil was met with at a level corresponding as nearly as possible with the surface of the adjacent fields, the whole formation of the road having been raised above that level. The ditches on each side are little, if at all, below the level of the soil, the hedge-rows having been thrown up, so that they also rise above the adjoining land. These hedge-rows are necessarily shown in the section, but they may be dismissed entirely from our minds in considering this beautiful example of Roman work. The road was doubtless constructed originally through a country only partially cleared, and many centuries may probably have elapsed before the lands were enclosed, and fences became necessary for the purposes of

cultivation. With the hedge-rows omitted, the section may be taken to show the road as it left the hands of the Roman engineers.

Taking the section in ascending order, I would observe that although we have in the bed of soil reached the true representative of the Pavimentum described by Vitruvius, there is nothing in its appearance to show that it was fine earth pounded and beaten in, in the manner described.

Upon its surface we find a layer of rubble stones exactly corresponding with the Statumen of Vitruvius, and in this instance no lime appears to have been used. This course, which is five inches thick in the centre, thins off on each side, and each bed in ascending order becomes more convex in form.

Next in order is a bed of concrete of a very distinctive character, about one foot three inches in thickness, agreeing with the layer termed Rudus. It is for the most part exactly what he describes it, "a mass of broken stones mixed with lime," the greater part of the material being of a yellow colour, and evidently derived from the Lias or Oolite formations of the locality. Near the middle of the bed, however, there is a thin layer of red marl and pebbles, entirely different from the other material, although amalgamated with it. Nothing exactly like it occurs near the spot, and I imagine it must have been derived from the Dolomitic Conglomerate in the neighbourhood of Stratton-on-the-Fosse, which it most resembles.

Resting on the bed I have described is another layer of finer material, consisting apparently of Inferior Oolite or Lias pounded very fine, mixed with lime, and well rammed, which we can have little difficulty in identifying with the Nucleus bed of Vitruvius. It is $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep in the centre, but thinner at the sides, its upper surface being rounded off very symmetrically.

On this was laid a course of paving stones, which evidently formed the ancient surface of the Roman road. It is from four to five inches in thickness, and consists of the thinner

beds of the Lias, common in the neighbourhood. According to Vitruvius this course, termed *Summum dorsum*, was composed sometimes of stones set like the paving stones in our streets, and sometimes of flag stones cut square; but in the Fosse road, at Radstock, it consists of stones of all sizes and shapes put together as random work, the lime having probably been poured in afterwards. In this way the whole surface of the road was so firmly cemented together, that in removing it during the recent excavations, the stones more frequently split through the solid than separated at a joint.

On my first inspection, only 18 inches or so in length of this pavement had been laid bare, and beyond the smoothness of its upper surface, there was no apparent evidence of the purposes to which the roads had been applied. Feeling assured, however, that a close examination of a larger surface area could not fail to throw light on this part of the subject, I afterwards had the ancient surface laid bare for three or four yards in length, and I was more than gratified to find two clearly defined ruts, worn in the stone by the wheels of chariots or other carriages, which it is fair to assume must have passed over it during the Roman occupation. These wheel tracks are two feet nine inches apart, or about three feet from centre to centre; so that, although the surface of the road was only about six feet in width, it was sufficient for the passage of the narrow vehicles then apparently in use. The rut on the northern side of the road is deeper and more sharply defined than the other, being about two inches wide, and two or three inches deep; while that on the opposite side is wider, shallower, and less distinct. Their appearance thus laid bare, after the lapse of 1500 years, was most impressive, calling up forcibly to the imagination the Roman legions which must have passed along this road in ages long since passed away.

The ancient surface of the road has in later times been covered by a coating of broken stones and earth, as shewn in the section. This may probably have been done to widen the

surface of the road, and admit of the more convenient passage of stock from one field to another, which is the only purpose it at present serves; but of the time and circumstances under which this surface layer was added nothing is known.

I would only add, in conclusion, that although careful watch was kept in the course of these excavations, no coin, implement, or pottery was found, nor anything to fix definitely the age of this interesting example of Roman work.
