

On Roman Remains

DISCOVERED AT CAMERTON,
SIX MILES FROM BATH,
ON THE LINE OF THE FOSS-WAY TO
ILCHESTER.

BY THE REV. PREBENDARY SCARTH, M.A.

IN February, 1816, the Rev. J. Skinner communicated to Samuel Lysons, Esq., F.R.S., the particulars of certain Roman Remains which had been found in the year 1814 in a field called "Eighteen Acres," in the parish of Camerton, of which he was Rector. These appear to have been read to the Society of Antiquaries but, as far as I can ascertain, never published. The MS. was kindly lent to me by the Rev. Samuel Lysons, of Hempstead Court, near Gloster, who inherited his uncle's property, and into whose hands it has come; and, as it contains information which is valuable for the Somersetshire Archæological Society to possess, with the permission of the owner of the MS., I now make known the particulars. The object of

our Society being to collect together and record all well authenticated discoveries, and to prevent any fact of historical value passing out of memory, I need offer no apology for placing the notice before them.

Camerton is situated a little more than six miles from Bath on the road from Bath through Shepton Mallet to Ilchester, *i.e.* on the line of the old foss-road, which has been traced from Lincoln almost in a direct line to Ilchester, but the whole course is not given in any of the Itinera, it will be seen by referring to the Map of Roman Briton, published in the *Monumenta Historica Britannica*.

The Foss, says Horsley, proceeds directly from Bath to Lincoln. I believe it has been continued beyond Bath as far as Ilchester at least, if not to the sea—Dr. Stukely thinks to Seaton. Great part of this, too, *viz.*, that which is in the very heart of the kingdom has had no part of an “iter” on it, but the latter part of the 6th iter, and the middle of the 8th from Venonæ to Lindum have no doubt been on the other parts of it. It still bears the name of the Foss-way from Lincoln to Bath and beyond it. Some affirm it to have been continued in a pretty direct line beyond Lincoln to the sea coast. Mr. Leman says in his MS. notes to Horsley (see copy in Lit. and Sci. Inst. Bath), “I myself found it very perfect from Lincoln to Ludford.” He says the Foss-way came from the sea coast of Lincolnshire and ran through Ludford, Lincoln, Brough, Newark, Thorpe, East Bridgford, Willoughby, Leicester, Highcross, Harewoods House near Darnford, Morton, Stow, Cirencester, Eastongrey, Bath, Ilchester, and, as Stukely thought, straight over Wind Whistle Hill to Seaton, or, as others have supposed from Ilchester to Honiton and Exeter, and he gives the portions of the 6th and 8th Itinera as follows:

Iter 6th, portion of the Foss-way (from London to
Lincoln).

RATIS	Leicester	MP. XII.
VEROMETO	n. Willoughby	MP. XIII.
MARGIDVNO	n. East Bridgeford	MP. XIII.
AD PONTEM	n. Thorp	MP. VII.
CROCOCALANO	Brugh	MP. VII.
LINDO	Lincoln	MP. XII.

Iter 8, portion of Foss-way (from York to London).

LINDO	Lincoln	MP. XIV.
CROCOCALANO	Brugh	MP. XIV.
MARGIDVNO	n. East Bridgeford	MP. XIV.
VERNOMETO	n. Willoughby	MP. XII.
RATIS	Leicester	MP. XII.
VENONIS	High Cross	MP. XII.

Some further observations on the origin and construction of the Foss-road may be useful on the present occasion, I therefore quote the following passage from a paper, by Dr. Guest, on the four Roman roads.

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P. 100.—“According to Jeffrey of Monmouth, King Belinus, son of Molmutius, constructed the ‘four roads,’ some four centuries before CHRIST. One of them “he ordered to be made of stone and mortar, the length of the island, from the sea of Cornwall to the shore of Caithness.” . . . This, in all probability, was intended to represent the Foss.

P. 101.—Higden repeats the story of King Belinus and says “The first and greatest of the four roads is called the Foss and stretches from south to north from its commencement in Cornwall

at Totenese to the extreme point of Scotland at Catenese. To speak more accurately, however, according to others, it begins in Cornwall, and, stretching through Devon and Somerset, runs by Tetbury on Cotswold, by Coventry to Leicester, and thence over the open wolds, ending at Lincoln."

P. 104.—Henry of Huntingdon says, "The fourth road, the greatest of all, begins at (Totenes) Totness, and ends in Catnes, in other words, runs from the commencement of Cornwall to the limits of Scotland, and this road passes across the island from the south-west to the north-west. It is called 'Fossa,' and passes through Lincoln.

P. 105.—The Foss is mentioned in several Anglo-Saxon charters, some of which date as early as the 8th century. All the estates described in them can still be pointed out. With one exception they lay along the Foss, north of Bath, and within some fifty or sixty miles of that city. The exceptional charter refers to an estate at Wellow, three miles south of Bath. It is no doubt a forgery, but could not have been fabricated later than the 12th century, and, therefore, is good authority for our present purpose. To the same century belongs the charter which is quoted by Gale, and by which Henry I. granted permission to Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, to divert the 'Chimum Fossa,' so as to make it pass through his town of Newark. We may then reasonably conclude that the whole of the Roman road between Ilchester and Lincoln was known as the Foss during the 12th century, and probably, at a much earlier period.

South of Ilchester the Roman road has been im-

perfectly traced. It seems to point to Seaton, which is generally taken to be the Roman *Mari-dunum*. We must not lay too much stress on the phrase 'from Totness to Caithness,'—it was merely a proverbial expression to denote the entire length of the island, and may be found even in *Nennius*."

- P. 114.—The name Foss has given rise to some strange hypotheses. It has been supposed that the road was so called because it was one of the hollow ways which marked out the lines of ancient British traffic; but, in truth, the Roman character of the Foss is, perhaps, more decided than that of any other highway in the kingdom. Roman writers give the name *Fossa* not merely to open, but also to the covered drain, e.g. '*fossa patens*' '*fossa cæca*.' In making a causey the Romans first removed the surface soil, in other words, made a '*fossa*' to receive the gravel or hard materials. As the *fossa* which served for a covered drain retained the name when filled with stones, brushwood, and covered in with soil, so, I believe, the road-makers' '*fossa*' kept its name, even when it appeared as a finished causey. '*Fossatum*', which, by later Latinists was used as a synonym of *fossa*, denotes a causey in charters from 11th to 15th century. The great Roman road which we call the Foss appears to have been termed the *foss κατ' ἐξοχὴν*—the Causey.
- P. 115.—The term '*fossa*' is used for a causey in Dorset. Speed places Dorchester on the Foss. The Dorsetshire Foss was no part of the highway about which we have been speaking. There is

a large raised causeway running directly from Dorchester for ten miles together, to a place called Egerton Hill, where the remains of a Roman camp are to be seen called by that name.

P. 116.—The Watling Street and the Foss were no doubt throughout their whole course Roman causeys, and there can be little doubt that in the 12th century these magnificent works existed in nearly their original state.”

The distance of Camerton from Bath, a little above six miles, will probably warrant our supposing it to have been the first Roman posting station out of Aquæ Solis, on the Foss Road in a south-westerly direction.

Mr. Skinner very carefully recorded every thing he found, and his MS. is accompanied by a map, in which is noted the place where each relique was discovered, and every foundation traced. In the map which accompanies his MS. ten places are marked, where foundations, coins, pottery, &c., were discovered. The houses, he says, were of small dimensions, and built on each side of the Foss Road in the same manner as our ordinary villages. He could not ascertain how far those buildings extended, but he had reason to think that they continued for a considerable distance.

These remains are marked on the ordinance map, and are one mile from the Red Post Inn. Collinson in his *History of Somerset*, slightly mentions them, but neither he, nor any other writer, as far as I can ascertain, has given any description of them. Before the time of Mr. Skinner becoming rector of Camerton no notice seems to have been taken of them, although coins, incidently found in that locality, appear to have been collected by the owners of the properties on which they were found. Unhappily, when

the ground was enclosed, no record was kept of what was discovered, while in clearing the ground quantities of foundation stones have been removed, and thus the sites and extent of many buildings are lost. Mr. Skinner was led to excavate one building by observing the inequality of the ground; and, after opening it, he came to the foundations of a building, which he describes as having a front wall towards the road 76 feet long, and another circular wall enclosing a space, and containing within the enclosure five rooms of different dimensions. This building will be best understood by reference to the accompanying plan.

A—a large apartment, 28 feet by 25, the floor apparently of terras.

B—a small room, 9 feet square, in which was found the fragment of an inscribed stone, a fragment of the lower part of a statue of a female figure, and fragments of painted stucco.

C—a room, 9 feet by 12.

DDD—courts, in which did not appear any remains of foundations except the fragment of one at G, being circular; but many fragments of pottery and some Roman coins were found.

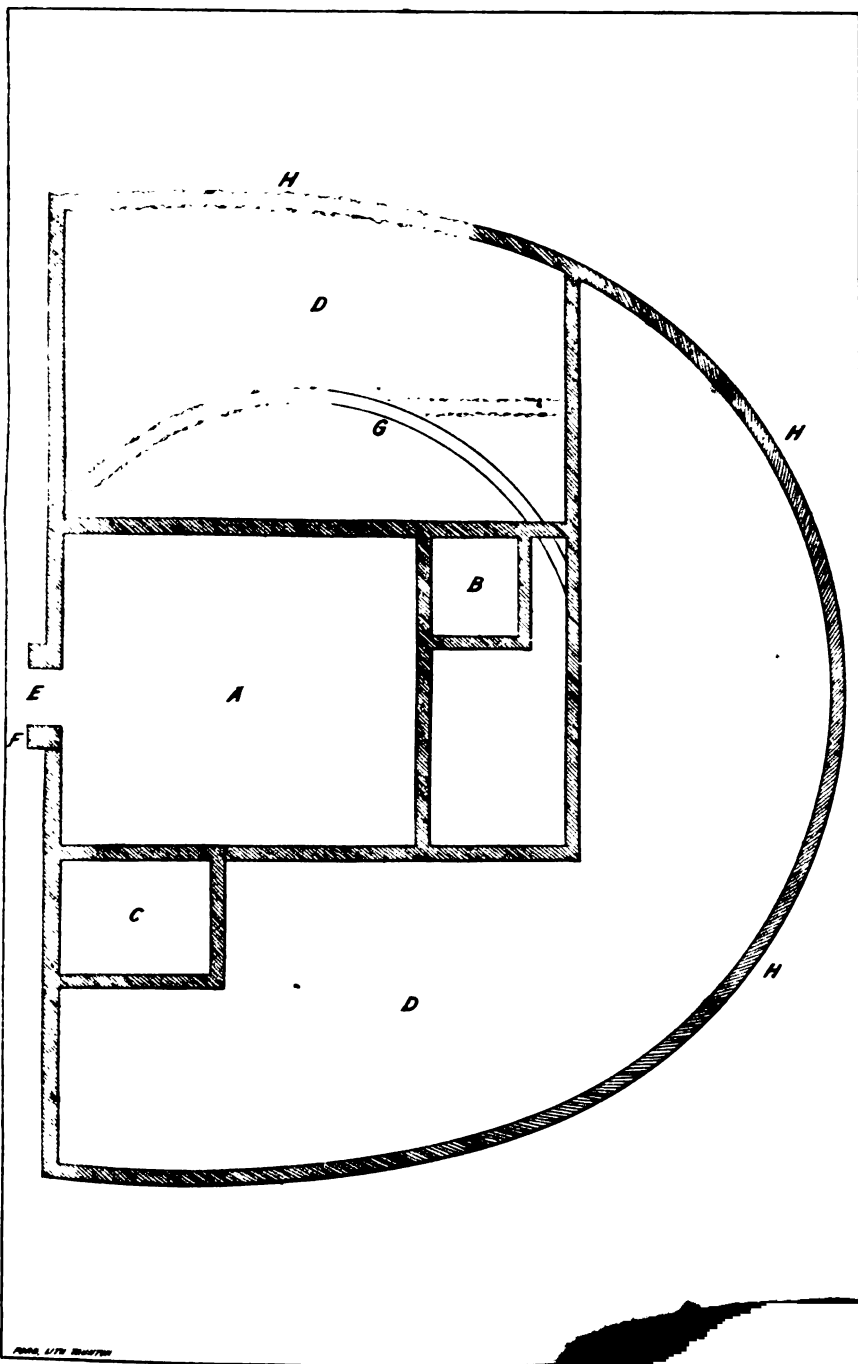
E—entrance, 5 feet wide.

F—square piece of freestone, $2\frac{1}{2}$ by 3 feet.

G—circular wall, supposed part of a former building.

HHH—boundary wall.

Mr. Skinner thinks that this building had succeeded to a former, as old materials were found worked up, and stones having stucco on them used in the foundations; also the circular wall, marked G, appeared to be part of an older building. A quantity of gypsum was found near the entrance, and the remains of a mortar or hand mill near it. In the apartment marked C a flue was found, but no



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appearance of pavement for the floor. An iron spear and an arrow head were found three feet below the surface in the room marked A, and amongst the rubbish and foundations a number of brass coins, some of which were notched, as though they had been proved by a file to try the metal. A stylus and two bronze fibulæ were also found. The floor of this chamber was laid with mortar, composed of lime and small shells and sand, and about two inches in thickness. At the entrance to it was found a squared piece of freestone, which seems to have formed the base of a pillar, so that the entrance was probably adorned with a pair of columns. Within the circuit of the enclosing circular wall was found a quantity of pottery and some coins. Mr. Skinner gives a catalogue of the things found within and near the foundations of this edifice.

- 1.—Part of a female figure, and a stone spear-head lying near it.
- 2.—A stone, bearing an inscription on it, found in the small chamber marked B,

APIVS
CONEDIT
BASSO ET QVINTIANO COS.

which seems to fix the date of the building, A.D. 289, when Bassus and Quintianus were consuls, *i.e.* in the first and second year of Carausius.

- 3.—A small sculptured stone, contained only the feet of four figures. These Mr. Skinner has restored conjecturally.
- 4.—The capital of a freestone column, measuring 20 inches in diameter.
- 5.—Fragments of Samian pottery and pieces of painted stucco.

- 6.—Coins of Vespasian, Constantius, Constantinus, Tetricus, Maximianus, and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, also a British coin of rude workmanship.
- 7.—Pieces of glass and two fibulæ.
- 8.—The half of a mill-stone (said by Mr Skinner to be the same quality of stone as that found in the pen pits, Stour-head, Wilts), and part of a stone mortar, and two large pebble stones, which seem to have been used for grinding; these were found in the gypsum and mortarium near the entrance.

Besides the edifice now described, the ground-plan of which is given, the foundations of six others, running parallel to the Foss-road were uncovered, and two on the opposite side; and in all of these fragments of Roman pottery and coins were found. Mr. Skinner says: "I have no doubt many interesting remains still continue hid beneath the surface." In the one which was opened August, 1815, walls of a building were traced, 30 feet by 18, and a flue laid open. An iron spear-head was found three feet below the surface, fourteen coins and a stylus among the rubbish, which consisted of building and flat-roofing stones; also a leaden circle or armet, representing a coiled snake, was dug out.

Mr. Skinner has made careful drawings of the various articles found. The specimens of Samian ware are very good. The potter's stamps are GLVPPLM* and OF. SECVN. This second piece he describes as of inferior quality, the clay being only coloured on the surface with vermilion, and the interior being brown clay, whereas the finer specimens are coloured throughout. One fragment of a vessel of stone-ware was found, and he states that he

* Both are given by Mr. Wright in his list. See *Celt, Roman and Saxon*, p. 470-473. He writes the first GLVPEIM.

ROMAN REMAINS DISCOVERED AT CAMERTON. 183

discovered eight different kinds of pottery, from the thick kind employed in the amphora, to the smallest articles of earthenware.

Mr. Skinner has also given a list of coins found at Camerton, chiefly in the eighteen acre field, where these buildings have stood.

	Copper	Silver
Claudius ..	2	
Nero ..	1	
Vespasianus ..	5	1
Antoninus. P. ..	2	
M. Antoninus ..	1	
Severus Alexander	1	
Gordianus ..	1	
Constantius ..	33	
Constans ..	1	
Crispus ..	1	
Magnentius ..	1	
Gallienus ..	5	
Constantinus ..	9	
Con. Nob. Cæs.	2	
Victorinus ..	1	
Maximianus ..	1	
Carausius ..	3	
Alectus ..	1	
Roma ..	3	
Constantinopolis	1	
Tetricus ..	13	
Faustina ..	1	
Julianus ..	1	
Quintilianus ..	1	
Valentinianus ..	1	
Apparently British	1	

The total number found by Mr. Skinner amounts to 110, some of which are illegible, and therefore not classified by him. They nearly extend throughout the period of the the Empire. I have also in my possession a coin of Postumus, found at Camerton A.D. 1862.

On the opposite side of the Foss-road, and nearly facing the line of the foundations just described, is a large barrow, measuring 20 ft. in perpendicular height, 100 ft. in diameter and 350 ft. in circumference. This barrow, which may be seen from the present turnpike road, and has a tree growing on the top, was opened by the Rev. J. Skinner, who says that in the autumn of 1815 he had an opening made in it by four colliers and penetrated to the centre. It was composed of loose stones and rubble. The ground for upwards of twenty feet before coming to the centre exhibited marks of burning, as the soil for an inch and a half or two inches in depth was black with charcoal and ashes. Some pieces of burnt wood were two inches in length and as thick as a man's finger. In their progress the workmen discovered a small whetstone and the jaw-bone of a sheep, with some other bones of animals, but the ashes of the person for whom the tumulus had been raised were removed (as was perceived by the mixture of the earth), and that a shaft had been sunk from the top of the barrow to four feet in depth below the natural surface of the soil. "We therefore," says he, "proceeded no further, but closed the opening we had made. The tree at the top of the barrow is apparently fifty or sixty years old and must have been planted subsequently to the opening, but the old people in the neighbourhood knew nothing when it was made." This barrow is conjectured to have been made prior to the Roman Settlement, and is probably a remnant of the ancient inhabitants of this part of Somerset. A flint

knife or spear-head was found near Woodboro' House, it is now in the possession of Savage Waite, Esq., Sept. 13, 1862. The field in which it was found is called 'The Hayes.' Not far from this barrow some primitive interments were come upon on opening a quarry close adjoining the Foss-way at the point where the Radstock road leaves the Foss. These contained fragments of rude brown pottery, bones of animals and human bones, some burnt and some not. The graves were sunk about five feet into the rock, and were about the same in diameter. The bottom was laid with a thick coat of red clay. One of these is so close to the ditch of the Foss-way that it seems to have been dug into when the Romans were making the road. Mr. Skinner conjectures from this and the rude character of the pottery that these graves were dug prior to the Roman occupation of the island. He has given accurate drawings of the pieces of rude pottery found in the graves, as well as the bones, among which are the tusks of a wild boar. Three flint arrow-heads also were found in a barrow at Shorsecombe, a hamlet partly belonging to Camerton parish. The land where these remains, both British and Roman, have been found, was formerly a common about 200 acres in extent, the enclosures have taken place within the last hundred years, and probably since the present century commenced. In the progress of cultivation many barrows have been removed. Mr. Skinner has recorded the destruction of some. He says, "There was one at Marks-bury on an elevated ground, commanding an extensive view, on the spot where the parsonage is now built. On digging the foundations of the house this barrow was laid open and a skeleton discovered in a cist, having a large glass bead lying near it; it is now in the possession of Mrs. Barter, wife of the rector of Timsbury. I made a

drawing of it for Mr. Douglas," and he gives a rough sketch of it. This probably was the interment of some ancient British female of distinction.

Mr. Skinner in his earnest pursuit after antiquarian knowledge sometimes appears to have allowed his zeal to carry him beyond the just limit of speculation. Thus he attempted to prove Camerton to be the ancient Camalodunum of Tacitus.

Some of his papers are printed in Mr. Phelps' *History of Somerset*, and he has left much in MS. attempting to establish his point. His arguments were met and refuted by the late Sir R. C. Hoare, who printed a pamphlet for private circulation in answer to Mr. Skinner's arguments, in which he cites authorities for shewing that Colchester, or rather Lexden, near Colchester, was the true site of that important Roman stronghold. We are, however, greatly indebted to Mr. Skinner for preserving a record of the Roman and British remains found in his parish, and for faithfully recounting whatever appeared to him worthy of notice. If, therefore, his zeal may have misled him in any particular point, we may well pardon its excess in the recollection of the valuable example he has left to all clergy and gentlemen resident in the country, faithfully to record whatever discovery may be brought to their notice, and his success should stimulate them to investigation whenever there appears reason to believe ancient remains exist, for by such investigations we are continually gaining new and accurate ideas of the Roman occupation of this island.
