

First Impression of a "Dig".

My first impression of an archaeological excavation, commonly referred to in Club circles as a 'dig' was realised, not at Camerton, but on a site of a very different nature, i.e. at Inwood, just beyond Conkwell, where, last summer, a prehistoric trackway had been traced and was in process of exposure to the present-day world.

I saw it first on a sunny Saturday afternoon when with more or less bated breath I visited the site with some friends to offer my untrained services to the excavation. There was much conjecture as to what would be expected of us, and how much inadvertent damage we were likely to do in our enthusiasm over something we knew little or nothing about. Neither were we entirely unperturbed in our anticipation of the reception likely to be given us by the Chief.

We found the site in a private estate, in an area covered with a thick growth of hazel. We gazed in awe at the small extent of stone trackway already exposed, deeply rutted by the stone wheels of prehistoric vehicles (strangely enough the gauge thereof being identical to that of railway tracks of present times) thought to be proceeding on some sort of religious pilgrimages. The stalwarts of the party felled the saplings and the weaker sex removed with miscellaneous instruments, the surface soil. Unbidden to my eyes came pictures of ancient Britons in dim ages past, such as I had conjured up in imagination as a child. In fact, perhaps it was something childish which caused my enthusiasm to flag when I realised that this was not a site where one found things.

It soon returned however when I heard of the activities going on at Camerton and consequently transferred my allegiance to fresh fields and excavations new. Once more on a sunny Saturday afternoon therefore I sallied forth with trepidation on a new dig - this time of a very different type and one which has sustained my interest.

Disembarking from the Radstock bus, to the astonishment of the bus conductor whose facial expression implied that we had all gone mad, we opened a gate into a large field of stubble, its foreground intersected with efficient looking trenches and an awe inspiring tumulus in the near distance. This we were given to understand had already been excavated by an archaeologist named Skinner. However, it was with the trenches that we were immediately concerned. These had been cut across what was thought to be a Roman settlement by the side of the horse way. Our Director of Excavations was standing on part of a wall of one of the buildings and looked round with a horror-stricken countenance at our approach. No doubt he was alarmed at the thought of what a horde of uninitiated diggers would achieve.

However, each of us was put to work with one of the "old hands" all of whom were very helpful. One seemed to tread on hallowed ground and scrutinised with deep intent every piece of stone or soil that appeared unusual and treasured all sorts of old bones with tender care, terrified of inadvertently discarding a treasure. Most of us took home a few of these and a highly prized Roman nail or two. Everyone worked hard and eagerly and was reluctant to stop for tea, especially if one had found one's first piece of Samian. We were shown boxes, full of odd kinds of pottery and coins which had already been found and our interest grew stronger and as each week has gone by it has increased and I find history has taken on a new and more intimate meaning. The finding of a treasure such as a bronze bracelet or filula with spring intact is shattering when one thinks of the time that has passed since these things were made and one digs with a mental picture of the past before one's eyes. One remembers books like the "Last Days of Pompeii" and feels on a par with members of Archaeological expeditions to Egypt. One oddly enough thinks of the future too, and what forthcoming archaeologists will think of the remnants of our own day, but they'll be one up on us, with written records to help them.