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The Fosse Way in Somerset.
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On the evening of Wednesday February 16th, at 'Nortons' Dairies', Argyll Street, our member Mr. N. Watts of Downside Abbey School, gave a talk on the 'Fosse Way' with particular reference to its course in Somerset.

Mr. Watts, introducing his talk, explained that the original incentive to explore this famous old highway, was due to his noticing a 'Solitary figure' standing, entrenched, in a field alongside one particular stretch of the "Way". Upon talking to this personage, hearing of his archaeological activities, and being shown a newly excavated Roman coin, the spell was cast and the yearning to discover more of what lay beneath his feet had commenced. (The lecturer added that this 'Solitary figure' was none other than Mr. Wedlake - our respected Director of Excavations).

Mr. Watts said that besides traversing every mile of the 'Fosse Way' between Cirencester and Bath his explorations had led him along many other stretches, including those near Seaton, Shepton Mallet and Radstock, the former district being the popularly accepted site of the Southern termination of the road.

The evidence, however is fragmentary, and various authorities hold differing views.

The lecturer also gave his own reasons for the rareness of villages on the road:-

- (a) The Saxons, on their arrival after the Roman withdrawal, wished to remain undisturbed and consequently built their villages away from the thoroughfare.
- (b) The 'Fosse Way', being constructed mostly on high ground, was therefore some distance from the more fertile soil of the rivers and lowlands which the new settlers needed for the upkeep of their village communities.
- (c) Various stretches of the road were perhaps utilized as parish boundaries by the Saxons.

Present day evidence for the above theories, is afforded by the fact that most villages of Saxon origin are, on an average, half a mile off the course of the road.

As reasons for the unusual direction taken by the 'Fosse Way', Mr. Watts suggested that the highway was older than the Roman occupation, being used in pre invasion times as a road connecting two important ports (long since vanished) on the Southern and Eastern coasts of England, its course roughly following the junction of the upland and lowland zones. The prehistoric origin of the 'Fosse' is also denoted by the abundance of hill forts which flank it throughout its length. The lecturer added there is only one fort of known Roman date on the Road.

Mr. Watts put forward a theory for the fact that many lanes and byways, although closely following the original route of the road, do not in many places, actually coincide with it. He suggested that, following the withdrawal of the legions, and during the 'Dark Age' that followed, stretches of the abandoned Roman roads in time became choked and overgrown with vegetation, thus rendering progress very difficult along its course.

In answer to the question - why buildings are frequently found which are erected on the actual course of a Roman road, the Speaker suggested that, in the past, some builders have found it convenient to incorporate the material of the road into the foundations of their buildings, adding that another reason may be that wealthy landowners, wishing to make their estates more exclusive, caused lodgeseouses, and the like to be built on certain Roman roads which had, perhaps, long survived in the form of public footpaths.

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At the conclusion of Mr. Pett's talk the members of the Club were joined by Mr. R.P.L. Pett, and coffee, kindly supplied by "Hortons", proved an excellent 'round-off' to a most enjoyable and instructive evening.

M.H. GOULD (L.R.)

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"The Natural".

By R.P.L. Pett.

In excavation, when the natural sub-soil is reached, the archaeologist ceases to have any further interest in what his spade brings up. Beneath the surface layers, which reveal a tale of human life long ago, there is, however, another story written in the rocks, incredibly longer and more varied.

The area which interests us most is, of course, our site at Camerton, and here as at a great number of other places in North Somerset, the natural sub-soil consists of a rock called "oolitic limestone". The name itself is descriptive, for it comes from the two Greek words, "oon" meaning egg, and "lithos" meaning stone, and even a cursory examination of a piece of this rock shows it to be made up of hundreds of minute spherical particles which give to it an appearance very similar to a fishes roe. Roestone is, in fact, another name for this rock.

The era of Geological time when this rock was formed is known as the Jurassic period, and it lasted approximately 25 million years, and terminated approximately 120 million years ago. In these remote times, the majority of the British Isles as we know them, were under water, except for small areas of the South West, East Anglia, and Wales. The fauna of this period consisted mainly of the much popularised Dinosaurs; the whole of the Mesozoic period (of which the Jurassic forms part) was in fact an age of reptiles. The Mammals, from which man ultimately evolved, and which now dominate the animal kingdom, had only a few primitive representatives in Jurassic times.

Of the two general classes of rock viz. sedimentary and igneous, oolitic limestone belongs to the former, which means it was deposited under marine conditions. There is still some doubt amongst experts as to the exact mechanism of the formation of oolitic limestone, but the following is the generally accepted theory. Calcium carbonate in solution in sea water will, under suitable shallow water conditions, be deposited around shell particles or small sand grains, and, due to the constant movement of the water, form the small spheres characteristic of an oolite. On the Bahama Bank in the West Indies, oolites are at the present day being formed.

A study of archaeology may tend to make us think that man is an animal of great antiquity, but a very brief dip into geology will soon dispel this conceit, for even the humble ammonite flourished many millions of years before becoming extinct, thus making the species homo sapiens a mere babe-in-arms by comparison.

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Writing from Chessington, Mr. C.W. Phillips F.S.A., Archaeological Officer to the Ordnance Survey, has promised to supply us with 25 inch maps of the Camerton area, the only condition being that we pass to him any topographical information which comes our way. He has also undertaken to supply air photographs of the area, which we shall await with deep interest. We tender our grateful thanks for such a practical measure of encouragement.