



Roman Excavation at Teffont

## *NOTES ON PREHISTORIC AND ROMAN TEFFONT*

The rapidly flowing stream which issues at Spring Head towards the northern end of the parish and gives the village its name, provides an obvious and adequate reason for the occupation of the valley by man which has been continuous for several thousand years. A fossilized bone, probably one of the vertebrae of an ichthyosaurus, found on Teffont Down (and now in Salisbury Museum) suggests that there were large-scale signs of life in the district a few million years ago, though at that time a large part of Teffont was very probably beneath the sea, and was the haunt of sea-shells which are now found in the parish in fossilized form.

Teffont has nothing to show of the Old Stone Age when England was joined to, and was a peninsula of, Europe. As there are no caves in the parish, we cannot hope to find any of the cave paintings 30,000 years or so old, or traces of the artists thereof. But we have numerous flint and stone instruments of later age, and before the metal users came. These include a flint arrowhead, a stone axe, flint scrapers for cleaning skins, and borers for punching holes in them for sewing purpose.

Metal came with the Bronze Age, and the discovery of smelting processes is evidence in Teffont by palstave shaped like a narrow axe and which has found its way into Devizes Museum, where it keeps company with a fine rapier shaped dagger of bronze. This latter was found in the River Nadder on the southern boundary of the parish. Other finds, including a bracelet and some remains of the "Beaker" type of pottery which has given a name to a race of people who came into England, and apparently Teffont, from the Continent.

They were an artistic, comparatively peaceful people, corn growing, and with domesticated animals, so that one is pleased to look back on them as ancestors however remote. Whereas the Stone Age people before them had narrow, long skulls, the Beaker folk had round broad skulls. But it would be unwise to argue that their peaceable nature arose from roundness of skull.

Teffont had until recent years two round barrows of Bronze Age date, built as burial mounds. One of these is still partly in being in Upper Holt, the other was at the northern end of the parish. The first was excavated some years ago but little was found except pottery fragments. The other has been ploughed out, but unfortunately no record was kept of its contents.

From about 800 B.C. a more bellicose race of iron-users came across the Channel from Europe. It is the descendants of these people who raised the emphatic objections to the arrival of Julius Caesar in England. Their headquarters in the Teffont district were centered on Wick Ball Camp, with Old Lane leading down to the village stream as their nearest water supply. The banks surrounding the Camp had wooden stockades, more for the protection of their stock from wolves than for defence against the human form of animal. These people were skilled potters, and were not averse to shaping derelict human bones for various practical uses. Some years ago a blue bead was found at Spring Head at the throat of a skeleton which had obviously been unceremoniously buried.

At this time the Druids first arrived from Gaul. They had nothing to do with the building of Stonehenge, which was in being 1000 years before they came to England. Their teaching that after death the soul passes from one body to another tempts us to think of the possibility of our remote kinship with these early inhabitants of Teffont.

The coming of the Romans did not see any drastic change in the life of the district, though there are many objects of various kinds which show the influence of their civilisation. Most of these were found about the quarry above Teffont Ewyas Church, and in Upper Holt. In both places there have been many finds of pottery, miscellaneous metal objects – pins, brooches, bracelets, a chopper and knife, and Roman coins. Also found was a stone palette used for mixing salves, pastes and so forth – not to mention cosmetics. More substantial were the remains of two hypocausts, a very adequate and inexpensive form of central heating, concerning which there is much that we could learn from Romans.

**Extract from Teffont Village History Scrap Book by Womens Institute published 1956.**