

Excavations at Cadbury Camp Congresbury, Somerset



Keith S Gardner
(with notes by Vince Russett)
Clevedon and District Archaeological Society
1959

Note: This report formerly existed only in a hand-written form in KSG's archive. It was typed up by VR in January 2009. Notes with blue numbers are VR comments. There is further comment at the end. Sadly, the illustrations are not available, but much will have been published in Rahtz, Fowler and Gardner 1970 and Rahtz et al 1992.

Cadbury Camp

- 1 Introduction
- 2 The excavations
- 2a Casual finds
- 3 The Motte
- 4 The Quarries
- 5 Mound 1
- 6 Mound 4
- 7 NE Gateway Trenches 1, 2, 3
- 8 Conclusions
- 9 Acknowledgements

Excavation of Mound 1 (early stage) (Fig 1: cover)

Plan of hillfort (Fig 2)

Plan and section of mound 1 (Fig 3)

Plan and sections NE Gateway (Figs 4 and 5)

Page of line drawings pottery (not available)

Plate of DA sherds (not available: substitute) (Fig 6)

Excavations at Cadbury Camp Congresbury, Somerset

Nat Grid Ref. ST440650

Introduction

Cadbury Hill, with the least known of Somerset's three Cadbury Camps, is situated some half a mile north of the village of Congresbury, a village traditionally associated with an unidentified Dark Age monastic establishment destroyed by the Saxons¹.

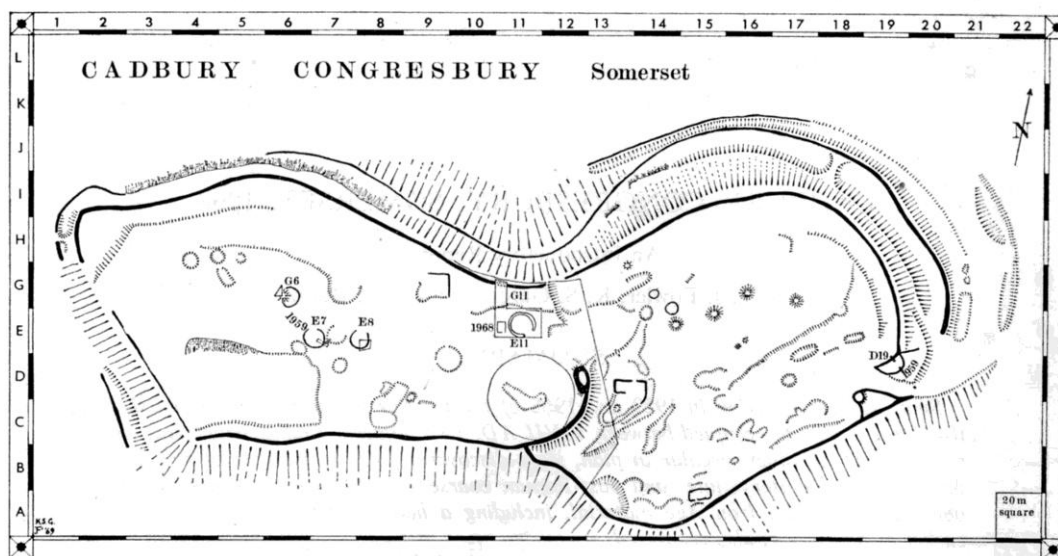


Fig 2 Plan of Cadbury Congresbury hill-fort

The hill rises from the flat alluvial moors around Yatton and Congresbury as a flat-topped plateau of Carboniferous Limestone – the south-west extremity of the massif which runs from Barrow Gurney to the Wrington Vale¹. This flat top is defended by a single low rampart thrown up from shallow quarries inside the camp, except on the north-east where the entrance, together with a low col connecting Cadbury with Henley Hill, is given the benefit of a ditch or heavy outer rampart. This latter construction, although turf covered in the open, appears in the woods as a bank of tumbled stone not unlike the Worlebury defences.

The defended area is shaped rather like an hour-glass, and is dominated by a central tree-covered mound of stones surrounded by the remains of a dry-stone wall. This mound will, for the sake of convenience, be referred to as 'the motte'².

Other features inside the camp are

- a) the stone quarries

- b) a number of shallow grooves and depressions, probably mineral workings, but possibly in some cases, storage pits and
- c) a series of low circular mounds.

Local tradition knows the central motte as the 'Roman Camp', and a flat slab of rock on the SW approach track as the 'Devil's stone'. There is also a traditional rumour of the practising of witchcraft on the hill.

The site is mentioned in all the standard works on Somerset antiquities*, the most instructive being the Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society. In Vol XXIII Pt. 2 p 27, for example, we learn of the discovery of a human interment on the north side of the summit³. This burial, which was uncovered by soil-diggers, was apparently in a stone cist and was associated with Samian and other types of Roman pottery, as well as coins, including one of Constantinus II as Caesar (317 – 337 AD). The presence of a substantial building nearby was suggested by the occurrence of fragments of Roman roofing tiles 'one nearly perfect with the nail remaining in it'.

The site of these discoveries in 1877, if we take the motte as the summit, might have been the depression between the motte and the rampart to the north, which seems to have a greater depth of soil than anywhere else in the camp. One sherd of RB grey ware was found near here in 1959, and also a fragment of sandstone similar to local RB roofing tiles. It is also possible that the finds were made outside the camp, as the description 'north side of the summit of the hill' is not very specific, and in 1957, Mr T Parsons of Henley Farm found a coin of Valens (364 – 378 AD) at the foot of the north slope of the hill, thrown out by motor cycles, who's owners use the camp as an organised race course! In 1849, a number of RB burials and coins were found near Cadbury House only a few hundred yards west of Mr Parson's discovery (PSANHS).

In order to make an attempt at locating the possible Romano-British remains within the camp as well as to obtain dating evidence for the hill fort itself, a limited number of trenches were dug by the Clevedon and District Archaeological Society in the summer of 1959.

The Excavations

Trenches were dug at what was considered to be the most significant points, i. e.

- i) The N E Gateway
- ii) A possible hut site
- iii) The area between the motte and the north rampart
- iv) Several depressions, quarries or storage pits

Apart from these trenches, a close watch was kept on animal or vehicle disturbances which produced a small quantity of pottery, or the use of a

probe or borer was employed over a wide area in order to assess the depth of the soil or the extent of the rubbish spread.

Casual discoveries

As mentioned, a number of small holes were bored which revealed that a rubbish layer extended over most of the western half of the camp. From one of these holes, between M and M came sherd CH5.

CH5. Sherd of hard bricky buff ware with horizontal parallel rilling.
Amphora type Bii 5th-8th centuries AD

A number of small sherds (nos. CH19 – CH26) were found at the top of the motor cycle track where it mounts the terrace north of the outer rampart. These were mostly small and of various red coloured fabrics not unlike the Dark Age examples.

The Motte

This tree covered mound of stones appears to rest on a natural knoll of limestone. It is roughly circular, 40 yards in diameter with a depression in the centre (mineshaft or treasure-seekers trench?). Speculation on its origin is beyond the scope of this report although it is hoped to devote some attention to the matter at a future date. A low dry stone wall surrounds the site, and local children who are in the habit of building 'dens' among the stones are reported to have found, inter alia, a wooden bowl, a spearhead and a number of coins. Fortunately one of these coins came to light, and proved to be a silver ½ penny of Henry VIII (struck at the London Mint about 1520. Initial mark – Portcullis).

A number of trenches were dug between the motte and the north rampart revealing a layer of finely broken bones resting just above the rock surface at 6". In this rubbish layer (which seems to be spread over the western half of the camp) was found a Bronze Age barbed and tanged arrow head, a sherd of RB grey ware, and a quantity of Dark Age pottery.

Pottery – the motte

The following sherds are from a series of holes dug between the motte and the north rampart associated with a spread of small bones and rubbish at 6"

Ref No	Description	Illustration
CH1	Grey fabric Romano-British	
CH2 / CH3	Heavy coarse ware, 12mm; grey fabric becoming light reddish brown on outer surface, which is rough or gritty. Wheel turned.	

	Imported amphorae Bi AD 5 th – 8 th Cent	
CH4 a,b,c	Soft red sandy fabric, 5mm; Trace of raised decoration. Imported Amphorae Bii AD 5 th – 8 th Cent	

See Medieval Archaeology Vol III 'Imported Pottery in DA Western Britain'
Chas. Thomas.

The Quarries

Apart from the shallow quarrying immediately behind the rampart, there is a large quarry in the south-west corner. Modern quarrying operations are carried out at the foot of the hill, and it is difficult to see why one should quarry the hill top, unless the stone was to be used there, possibly in the motte?

The varying colours of the grass revealed numerous points where stone appears to have been removed and investigation at one such spot produced a Romano-British pot rim from the quarry exposed rock surface.

Pottery

Ref No.	Description	Illustration
CH27	Rim in grey hard fabric RB	
CH28	Fabric as last	
CH29	Pipe stem	

Immediately east of the motte is a ditch similar to Mendip lead 'gruffies'. Small fragments of iron ore were abundant here, or on the edge of other circular depressions nearby and these may be therefore be (sic) mineral workings. The ditch could alternatively have been a source of stone for the construction of the motte or even a form of defence.

Other circular depressions in the eastern half were smaller in diameter, and the area investigated was filled with small stones, bones, flint fragments or a few minute Iron Age potsherds, suggesting that it was an Iron Age storage pit.

The Mounds

Of the low circular mounds, MI was selected for investigation. This was some 20 ft in diameter and about 12" high in the centre. The north west quadrant

was removed being composed of a tumbled mass of limestone blocks. The initial trench was L-shaped (the angle being removed to complete the quadrant) and at one end of each arm of the 'L', it was noticed that a number of stones appeared to have been laid flat in the form of a foundation. On removing the rest of the quadrant, these stones were observed to follow a line, and were presumably all that remains of a hut wall.

Within the arc formed by these stones were quantities of bone, iron ore, flint scraps and pot sherds of the 1st century AD, all sealed in by the mass of the tumbled stone mound. Such remains were almost entirely absent outside the 'hut wall'.



Fig 3: Mound 1 excavation complete KSG 1959

Pottery

Ref No.	Description	Illustration
CH6	Simple 1 st C RB rim form. Hard dark brown fabric 8mm thick	
CH7 / CH8	Simple native rim form. Dark grey 'corky' fabric of light weight with many pitted holes where calcareous material has been dissolved. 7mm. 1 st century AD Iron Age 'B' type	
CH9 - 14	Well fired harder fabric than 7 & 8 but also dark in colours with fewer pitted holes. One rim fragment (CH9) repeats the simple form of previous	

	sherds. The surface of these sherds is of a lighter, brownish colour than the core. 7mm	
--	---	--

These sherds, with the exception of CH6, are all very badly eroded, but are not dissimilar in fabric to certain of the 1st century sherds from Abbots Leigh (ST53757370), where in 1957, early RB forms were found mixed with native wares. Other sherds from this latter context compare favourably with sherds of the early part of the second half of the 1st century AD from other sites in N Somerset, e.g. Hole Ground, Wookey, Chew Valley etc.

Mound 4

Apart from mound I, a second mound, No 4 was investigated. This was actually a ring of stones rather than a mound, as if the centre had been removed by treasure hunters. This theory was strengthened when a 3' by 12' trench exposed a solidly packed 'foundation' with no sign of any collapsed or tumbled material within its arc. The old land surface beneath a layer of humus or small stones produced three scraps of EIA pottery and one sherd of 17th century ware.

Pottery

Ref No	Description	Illustration
CH15 - 17	Black fabric, brown outside, gritty 8-10mm	
CH18	Finely glazed 18 th C? 3mm	

The North-East Gateway Site

At the NE end where the outer rampart begins, is the original approach track entering the camp from the north between two 'gatehouses'. A line of trenches was dug across the northern gatehouse exposing well-defined and datable deposits.



Fig 4: Gatehouse excavation Trenches 1 & 2 KSG 1959

Trench 1

This section was taken across the inner rampart exposing a core of laid stones with a spread of collapse on either side. This collapse sealed in pot



Fig 5: Gatehouse trench 1

KSG 1959

sherds of at least the 1st century AD resting on the old land surface of hard soil or small stones.

Trench 2

This continued the line of trench 1 eastwards across the outer wall of the northern gatehouse. The wall was well-constructed of large flat slabs of limestone, and against the outer face was a pile of refuse, black soil with bones, flints and coarse, friable potsherds of 4th century BC. This rubbish heap was sealed in by the collapse of the upper part of the wall, which also covered similar pottery on the inside of the gatehouse.

Trench 3

This continued the line of the other two trenches across the original trackway in order to determine whether or not there was ever a cobbled surface to it. At the point of investigation, there were no signs of any such work, the living rock being a matter of inches beneath the turf.

Pottery

Ref No	Description	Illustration
	Trench 1 Sealed by collapse from rampart	
CH36 / CH37	Dark grey, hard gritty, well fired fabric – 5mm – probably Romano-British, at least 1 st century AD	
CH38 - 40	Soft brick coloured fabric. Small sherds 5-7mm thick. Not inconsistent with Dark Age Bii fabric, but too small to be dogmatic about.	
	Trench 2 Beneath collapse inside 'gatehouse'	
CH30 – 35	Poorly fired coarse pottery, dark brown fabric fired lighter brown on surface. 10mm. Too fragile to water-wash, paste decomposes on contact with water ⁴ .	
	Trench 2 Outside wall in rubbish pile sealed in by collapse	
CH41 - 49	As 30- 35. ?Early Iron Age 'A' 5 th – 4 th centuries BC. (Mr Raleigh Radford compares with Bindon Hill – Antiquaries Journal XXXIII nos 1 and 2	



Fig 6: Typical east Mediterranean amphora ('Bii') sherds KSG 1974

Conclusions

From these minor incisions it would seem that although probably visited by Bronze Age hunters, Cadbury Hill was first occupied or fortified by one of the earlier Iron Age groups of settlers in the 4th / 5th century BC. The type of simple contour defence is consistent with this theory, which is supported by the evidence from the north-east gateway. The occupation continued through into the Christian era with numbers of stone huts by people who left traces of local Iron Age 'B' type pottery, together with sherds showing a more Romanized influence. It is quite possible that the NE outer rampart was added at this period.

Scraps of Romano-British pottery suggest at least a visitation during the period although there may well have been some more substantial form of settlement.

The occurrence of a quantity of Dark Age pottery associated with a rubbish spread over quite a wide area of the camp would appear to indicate some considerable reoccupation, although whether of a defensive nature is not evident. Congresbury's Dark Age ecclesiastical traditions may have root here, and it is perhaps worth including the fact that Arthur Mee's 'Somerset' refers to the hill as a 'Saxon battlefield'.

A tumbled mass of stones with medieval remains in close association sets yet another problem for the future to answer.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Mr Parsons of Henley Farm for permission to work on the site; to Mr W Solley for conducting the survey and preparing the drawings; to all the members of the Clevedon and District Archaeological Society and of the Bristol Exploration Club whose assistance in the field was invaluable and to Mr C A Raleigh Radford , Mr C A Thomas and Mr A ApSimon for examining and commenting on the various groups of pottery.

Vince Russett notes

- 1 This is, of course, Broadfield Down, as Keith knew – I wonder why he didn't name it?
- 2 This is our old friend the Victorian tree clump and it's wall.
- 3 Almost certainly an inhumation from the adjacent temple cemetery on Henley Hill.
- 4 There are notes in KSGs archive, which probably date to c2000, where he suggests this pottery is not 4th/5th century BC, but the IHP (Indigenous hand-made pottery) found elsewhere on the site, and almost certainly of late 5th - early 6th century AD. This would fit with Ken Dark's contention that such D-shaped pairs of gatehouses are typical of iron age hill forts re-occupied in late antiquity.