

YCCART

Yatton Congresbury Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team

Newsletter December 2016

Chairman's chat

In the last issue we described the excavation YCCART carried out at Congresbury Cross. This revealed the full extent of the foundations and will enable the County and Parish Councils to develop measures to protect it from traffic damage. What may not be obvious to members is that our excavation and the production of the excavation report will have saved both councils a considerable amount of money.

Over the last seven years YCCART has gained a reputation for top quality geophysics survey work. The Committee is of the opinion that as a group we now need to extend both the scope and type of projects we undertake. As a start Vince has produced a list of possible projects for which we need leaders. Are you interested?

Peter English

Locking Castle Report 2016

This is just a brief summary of the report which is available in full on [YCCART's website](#).

The site of the motte and bailey at Locking Head Farm, North Somerset lies on top of a low wooded hill close to the M5, and the centre of Worle. Although close to a heavily urbanised area, the monument is shielded by dense mature woodland growing to its north and east. Please note there is no public access to the site.

Motte and bailey castles are medieval fortifications introduced into Britain and subsequently, other parts of Europe, by the Normans. They comprised a large conical mound of earth or rubble, the motte, surmounted by a palisade and a stone or timber tower. In a majority of examples an embanked enclosure containing additional buildings, the bailey, adjoined the motte.

Built in towns, villages and open countryside, motte and bailey castles generally occupied strategic positions dominating their immediate locality and, as a result, are the most visually impressive monuments of the early post-Conquest period surviving in the modern landscape. The motte and bailey castle south of Locking Head Farm survives particularly well as an outstanding example of its class.

[The gradiometric results](#) are largely unrevealing. Both sides of the modern enclosure are compromised by barbed wire fences, whilst the most obvious feature is the line traversing the site. This is almost certainly the water pipe supplying a cattle trough at the centre of the survey area. Two very large responses (*one on the top of the motte, and one very close or on the junction of the motte with the bailey on its western side*) are not immediately explicable. They appear to mark sites of intense burning, which could have many causes, not the least of which could be the former use of the motte for beacon or



Aerial view of the motte with large trees in place - 1982

recreational fires. There do not appear to be any of the gradiometry patterns typical of domestic / industrial activity either, especially in the bailey, which may imply the occupation of this castle was not of long duration.

[Resitivity](#) - The overall shape and nature of the motte and bailey is clear, and several basic questions (*such as the size and continuity of the motte ditch*) are answered. There is evidence of a bailey ditch over which a bridge probably provided access to the bailey. Evidence of robbed out walls or stockade foundations are also a strong feature. There are clear signs of a motte ditch, approximately 30m in diameter, running around the majority of the mound, although it appears interrupted in the northern edge. This may be an original access arrangement from the bailey or possibly alterations made when a windmill was sited on the mound in the post-medieval period. Other high resistance signals could be evidence of post-pads supporting large timbers on the motte, although another possibility is that these are features connected with the trees on the motte in the 19th century. A circular very high resistance feature on the top of the motte surrounded by a low earthwork bank coincides with the area of heavy burning

seen on the gradiometry results.

These surveys show the surface structures of the motte in unparalleled detail. In particular, the structures on the top of the mound, coinciding with resistance and gradiometry results, define the area precisely. The very topmost structure, a broken ring 6m across, might well fall within the size range of a post-medieval tower mill. This would also probably coincide with the 1902-3 diggings, although in the absence of any precise record of those, this cannot be proved without excavation. The larger mound, 10m across could form the base of an earlier tower contemporary with the erection of the motte and bailey.



Locking Head Farm and earthworks in 1903

Drawing together these surveys and the documentary and botanical evidence, it is clear that the castle is one of the Norman Conquest and Subjugation periods, in Somerset 1066-c1070, and is almost certainly that of William de Falaise and constructed as part of the Norman assault on the Worle estate belonging to Esger the Staller. (see *Vince's corner* for more on Esger.)

The motte may have possessed a central tower at some point, and the resistivity results suggest that it was stockaded near the base. The bailey bank was potentially rebuilt in stone and heavily robbed later or possibly contained dwarf walls supporting a stockade. The bailey seems to show no detectable signs of occupation, but further terrain survey is needed. The castle is so close to the pre-Conquest manorial settlement at the foot of the hill that it may never have represented more than an initial aggressive act, which was not developed later as a high-status dwelling, since that may have already existed at the foot of the hill.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Wednesday 14th December 7.30pm Methodist Hall, Congresbury. A History Group talk on the origins of Christmas traditions by Professor Hutton.

Thursday 8th December YCCCART pre Christmas walk around Wrington, with Mark Bullen, followed by lunch at The Plough. Meet at the Ship & Castle at 10.45 a.m. to car share, Wrington at 11.00 a.m. or go direct to the pub for 12.30 p.m..

Can you help?

We're looking to form a small working party to carry out scrub clearance on Cadbury Hill in early 2017. As we do not wish to compromise our current work programme we wondered if YCCCART's members would be prepared to volunteer a couple of Monday mornings, weather permitting, to help clear brambles and nettles etc. If you can help please let me know on j.dickson7@sky.com

Team Leaders

As mentioned in the Chairman's Chat, Vince has produced a list of projects which will allow us to widen the scope of our work. The list has been circulated and we are looking for volunteers to take them on.

[Ian, Maureen and Chris](#), have expressed an interest in taking on the Congresbury Bridge Project with any other volunteers.

[Peter English and Chris Short](#) will continue the Pottery Project. This will include a visit to Taunton Museum to photograph Congresbury Ware in their collection. Is anyone else interested in this?

[Peter English](#) is also interested in the Industrial Archaeology aspects of Strawberry Line.

[Bev](#) is also looking for volunteers interested in surveying, mapping and researching non-military Roman roads in the area.

If you are interested please let a committee member know.

Book donation

Somerset Villages: Traditional Houses and Farms in The Parish of Trent by Sue Shaw. The author of the above has donated a copy of her book to Congresbury History group. If you would like to borrow it, please see Geoff.

Vince's Corner - Local hero? Esger the Staller

The manor of Worle, once centre of a great estate like Banwell or Congresbury, was held in 1066 by Esger the Staller. Stallers were close to the king and the most powerful people in the country below the rank of earl.

Esger owned an estate of 300 hides in 9 shires, one of the richest thegns in England. By the 1060s he was one of the leading men in the king Harold's circle and a personal friend. He also led the resistance of the citizens of London to William ('the Conqueror'). William later gave Esger's 'inheritance' to Geoffrey de Mandeville, but it was Walter of Douai who obtained Worle.

Somerset produced stern resistance to the Norman invasion, and Walter entered Somerset from the north-east, building castles as he went. Probably the erection of castles near two manors in the Worle estate (including Lockinghead) was in response. Robert of Mortain's castle at Montacute was attacked by 'the men of Somerset' as late as 1069. This was the very manor where Tovi, Esger's grandfather, found the Holy Cross of Waltham. So what happened to Esger? Did he remember King Alfred and fight on? History does not say.