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Yatton Congresbury Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team

Newsletter July 2022

Chairman's chat

Arthur

MANSBURY. Another important historical site lost

Mansbury mound is located 960m east northeast of the parish church of St Andrew's, Congresbury, adjacent to the Bristol to Wrington Road.

The mound is an outcrop of the Lower Carboniferous Limestone of the nearby Broadfield Down, emerging from the surrounding clay soils of the Mercia Mudstones.

Congresbury Hundred

A hundred in England was the division of a shire for military and judicial purposes under the common law, which could have varying extent of common feudal ownership, from complete suzerainty to minor royal or ecclesiastical prerogatives and rights of ownership.

Until the introduction of districts by the Local Government Act 1894, hundreds were the only widely used assessment unit between the parish and the county.

A Hundred of Congresbury existed by 1084 and consisted of the manors of Congresbury, Wick St Lawrence, Iwood, and perhaps more surprisingly, part of Badgworth and East Cranmore, near Shepton Mallet.

Meeting place of Congresbury Hundred.

Every hundred had a traditional meeting place, where the courts and general meetings could be held in the open air.

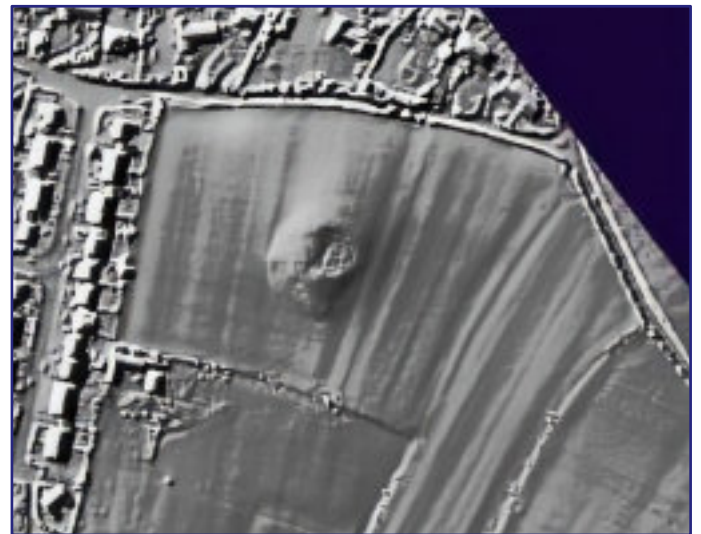
Features of hundred meeting places are -

- It must be a recognisable 'stand out' site in the landscape.
- It must have good to excellent communication routes nearby, for obvious reasons.
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- It may be remembered in field or place names.

Mansbury has these attributes. The mound is very clear from all directions, round in plan, approximately 60m across, and

almost 3m above the surrounding field on its southern side. It is still a recognised element of the landscape today, known to

generations of Congresbury children as 'The island' or 'Pirate's island'. It would have had good communication routes nearby.



Lidar image of Mansbury Mound

The name

In view of the mound's appearance, the second element of its name is almost certainly OE (Old English) 'beorg' = 'hill, artificial mound'. The first could be a breakdown of the OE 'gemaenscip' (of the community, belonging to the community). The placename means something like 'mound of the community'.

Mansbury is a good candidate for the hundred meeting place and an important historic feature which should be preserved in situ.

Destruction

Sadly, though developers have other ideas and currently (May 2022) there are plans to shortly grind the mound away in advance of house building.

Chris Short

SS Great Britain – What I have learnt so far about this great ship

I started to volunteer at the Great Britain site last autumn. As the training developed it became apparent how little I really knew about the story of this ship.

- One of the engineering marvels of the 19th century
- The forerunner of all modern shipping
- The first ocean going luxury liner with
- Iron hull
- Propeller driven
- Box girder keel
- A bridge for the officers
- Six masts named after days of the week. Few sailors were numerate - so "Go to mast four – Eh, Go to mast Thursday ok fine".
- Five operational lives
- Two salvage operations
- Travelled over 1 million miles
- 250,000 Australians can trace their ancestry to passengers on this ship
- Launched 19th July 1843, came home 19th July 1970
- Adults who were Bristol children in 1970 will swear that they had a school trip to see the ship return to dock on 19th July 1970 which is odd as it was Sunday.
- It lives now in the dry dock in which it was born.
- Probably as famous as the Titanic but the difference is that it is not miles below the surface of the Atlantic.



The Vision

The Directors of the Great Western Railway (GWR) and their engineer I. K Brunel (IKB) had a vision of seamless travel from London to New York. Fast train from London to Bristol, stay at their hotel (it's still there behind Bristol City Hall as Brunel House but now student accommodation) then steam driven ship to New York - the SS Great Western, a wooden hull paddle steamer. (This ship was owned by a separate Company, The Great Western Steam Ship Company (GWSSC)).

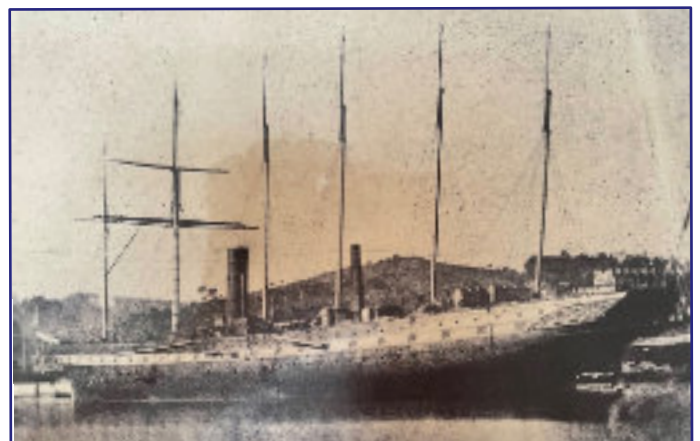
In practice a success: so GWR, GWSSC and IKB decided in a second ship but during the design phase IKB convinced the Boards that something bigger and better was needed. (There were in fact six major versions in the design phase, ranging from a copy of the Great Western, to the wood and paddle



propulsion that was finally built) A ship 1½ times bigger than ship built before which would mean building in iron and very experimental propulsion by propeller. To build it would require a new dry dock to construct the ship and the widening of Bristol Dock locks.

Cost of dry dock - £53,000, cost of engines £30,000, estimate for ship £76,000, actual £117,000, about £15 M in current prices. The engines were built in dockside buildings to a design, developed by IKB's father, to pump water from the first tunnel under the River Thames. The iron sheets used to build were from Colebrookdale.

The launch was attended by Prince Albert



After the launch the ship stayed in the floating harbour for final finishing alongside the area of the old gas works/Mardike. It was photographed by Fox Talbot and is believed to be the first photo of a ship.

Operating Life number one - 1846

Luxury liner to New York from Liverpool.

The ship was always too big to operate from Bristol Docks so Liverpool was destined to be the home port (also it was cheaper than Bristol).

Only five trips were made - each one lasting 15 – 20 days. Although capacity was 250 passengers, only 45 were on the first trip. Perhaps people were afraid an iron ship may sink. Her fame had gone before her and huge numbers of New York residents turned out to see her arrive.

On the fifth trip, 180 were on board but the Captain made a terrible navigation error. He thought a light house he could see was on the southern tip of the Isle of Man but instead it was a light house on the Irish coast. The ship ran aground at full speed onto the sands of Dundrum Bay and was well and truly stuck. Nobody was hurt and all passengers and crew were safely evacuated. But it would be a year until there was a tide high enough to re-float her.



She survived a year of winter storms because she was an iron ship and IKB had ordered some extra protection. But the main disaster was that the owning company had only insured her for one tenth of her value so they went bankrupt. The salvaged ship was towed back to Liverpool and there she sat awaiting new owners.

Operating Life number two - 1852 to 1876

A Gold Rush and immigration ship to Australia.

Salvation came from the discovery of gold in Australia sparking a gold rush and the call for immigrants to populate Australia. (Note; these were not early £10 Poms, no assisted passage here) New owners, Gibbs Bright of Bristol and Liverpool bought the ship and converted her to take immigrants and first and second class passengers. An extra deck was fitted,



together with new engines, fewer masts and a major conversion to the accommodation so that capacity was increased to about 700. Because it was possible to mostly sail to Australia and back using the known trade winds, the operation of the ship changed. From being a steam ship with

sail assistance she became a sailing ship with steam assistance. To the extent that whilst sailing, the propeller could be lifted into a cavity within the ship to reduce drag.

32 trips were made carrying about 25,000 passengers – people out, gold back. The journey time was 60 to 80 days

There were also voyages taking troops to the Crimea.

Operating Life number three - a three masted sailing ship

Welsh coal to San Francisco and grain to the UK.

By 1876 the ship was too old to be insured as a passenger ship so she was tied up at Liverpool again. In 1882 new owners Antony Gibbs and Sons of Tynesfield fame could see an opportunity to convert the ship to purely cargo and sail driven only as she had always sailed very well. Railways were being constructed in the USA from both sides of the Continent. But only the eastern side had coal. So the opportunity was there to take good Welsh steaming coal to the West coast. The ship had three masts and was covered in pitch pine coated planks and zinc sheets above the water line. Capacity was about 3,500 tons.

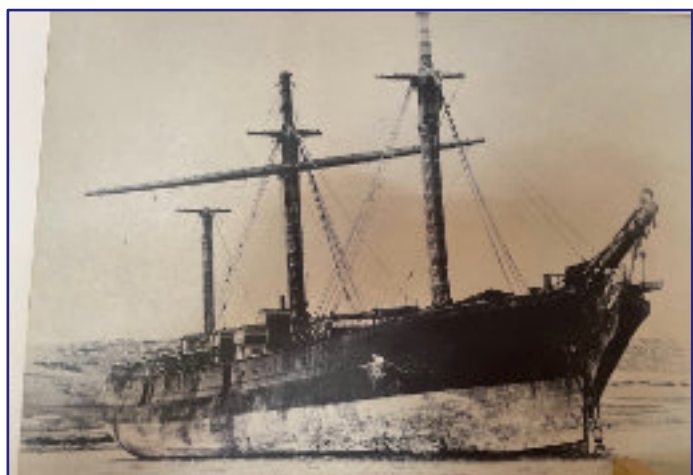


Three trips were made of about 180 days sailing each way. The voyages were very rough as the ship was going the 'wrong' way around Cape Horn. On the third trip the cargo shifted and so the ship was run back to the Falkland Islands to effect repairs. Sadly the ship was assessed as being beyond repair.

Operating Life number four - Floating warehouse

An asset to Port Stanley

The ship however was afloat and the Falkland Island authorities could see an opportunity as an excellent floating warehouse



and that was how she entered her next life. She was particularly useful to deliver coal for the Royal Navy in the First World War South Atlantic sea battles. By 1938 she had even come to the end as a warehouse and fearing that she would sink and block the harbour she was towed to Sparrow Cove and scuttled in shallow water

Operating Life number five - Resurrection

World record recovery tow and first-class museum.

The recovery is a long one driven by the determination of one man, Ewan Corlett, with the assistance of folks in USA starting with a letter to the Times. In summary the recovery was -

- An Anglo-German company would take an ocean going tug and giant pontoon to the Falklands
- Re-float the ship and mount it on the pontoon
- Tow it 8,000 miles back to Bristol harbour. Believed to be the longest tow in history
- Unload the ship at Bristol Docks and tow it up the River Avon back to the dry dock in which it was built.
- All paid for by Sir Jack Haywood
- Bristol City were not too keen to have a rusty hulk in the middle of their plans to regenerate the waterfront. Wiser counsel prevailed.

- And to complete the circle Prince Phillip was on the deck when it returned home.
- The ship is now under the care of a Trust.

Numbers

- Recovery £150,000 £2.5m in current prices

Fares

- New York 20 to 35 guineas - about £3,500 in current prices
- Australia 15 to 70 guineas - 31,700 to £8,000 in current prices
- Restoration £11.3M
- The dry dock with its roof should preserve the portion of the hull which was below water when the ship was scuttled for 100 years.
- Build the original dry dock - 3 years to build the ship - 3 years
- To look around the ship once built - 6d

Ian Morton

Book reviews - Janet Dickson

Ancestors. The Prehistory of Britain in Seven Burials by Professor Alice Roberts

Alice Robert's most recent book explores the stories of ancient people through the investigation of burials and funerary rites. Now this may sound rather dry and a trifle morbid but is in fact a fascinating account of early human activity across thousands of years. She explores how archaeology and genetics are combining to shine a light on our very early ancestors; where they came from and how they shaped our country.

Beginning with the Red Lady of Paviland Cave on the Gower coast whose remains have been radiocarbon dated to 34,000 years ago ie pre ice-age, and ending with Iron Age chariot burials discovered in Pocklington, Yorkshire, Roberts explores the remains unearthed in a wide variety of burials including bones found in Cheddar and the Amesbury Archer with his fine array of grave goods.

Thousand Ancient Genome Project.

At the start of the book Roberts recounts visiting the Crick Institute to find out more of the above project. In 2019 plans were a foot to begin the most ambitious archaeological genetic project ever carried out in Britain, to fully sequence a thousand ancient genomes. The aims of the project are two fold, to not only make connections between peoples from across Britain and beyond but also chart migrations from mainland Europe to

our shores. Also by analysing ancient DNA it's hoped to be able to better understand the evolution of ancient diseases and to see if any changes occurred when humans moved from living in small groups as hunter gatherers to the development of agriculture in the Neolithic.

Sadly in 2020 the Crick Institute was forced to concentrate all its energies on a little thing called Covid and at time of publication, 2021, the project was still waiting to begin.

Whilst some of the book is a little academic Robert's writing style makes this a compelling read for anyone interested in pre-history and the story of early man.

Janet Dickson

Articles please!

If you have read this far, perhaps you would consider submitting a brief article or some photographs. Something relating to local/regional events or finds is always welcome as it often helps to put in context YCCART survey analysis. However, we also welcome articles relating to places you have visited, either home or abroad that have some historical or archaeological interest. Commenting and reporting on books, reports, exhibitions can also be a source for an article. Sharing our knowledge and understanding is important.

Remember YCCART has an educational remit and education is not limited to those in formal education. The phrase '*every day is a school day*' springs to mind and is applicable to us all. Janet collates all the articles and photographs before sending them on to me for desktop publishing.

Dates for your diary

Monthly coffee meetings will continue to be held at the Methodist Hall, 1st Thursday in the month at 12.00pm. October's meeting will however be an extended one, 10.00-12.00 to review all the work carried out over the summer months and plan future surveys.

Detector Finds, Buttons

Buttons of various types are fairly common detector finds from brass four-hole trouser buttons to Livery buttons. There is a wide variety to be found, military, civilian uniform and various dress buttons.



No1 above are two early buttons for the Royal Navy, the one on the left is the earliest with a Tudor rose design. It is not known why this was but could date back to Henry VIII. Before 1768 naval officers could wear more or less what they liked. Between 1748 and 1787 buttons became fairly standardised and both lieutenants and commanders wore Tudor rose buttons. It wasn't until the latter part of the 18th cent. that the anchor design with the crown being added in 1812 as in the second button. This is an early Victorian example found at Brinsea Batch Farm.



No.2. A Bristol Volunteers button with the Bristol coat of arms and the letters BV and dates from 1797-1802. This is a brass with silver plate and would have been worn by other ranks were officers would have had silver buttons. The volunteers were formed in 1797-1802 then reformed in 1803 until 1814 when the name changed to the Royal Bristol Volunteers. Their motto was "In Danger Ready".

No.3. This button was found near Wedmore and was just a crusty lump of verdigris but after a few days in the tumbler you could make out a rider on horse back. It is a one piece dating to c. 17th cent. Similar have been found in different parts of the country.

No.4. This button was found at Low Ham on the site of a long gone windmill. Again a one piece button brass button with a design engraved onto it and would date to around the 17th cent.



No.5. below This is a large dandy button, brass with silver plate finish. Dandy buttons were worn in the 18th century and were always large and flat.



No.6. A silver Victorian Somerset Constabulary button. This was found in the large field behind Pineapple Farm at Congresbury in the same were the seal matrix was found.



No. 7. This a selection of Tombac buttons, Tombac is an alloy of brass and zinc, they turn up quite often in many different sizes as you can see. These were worn the military and civilians alike.



Dave Long