

BURROW MUMP: A REVISION

ROBERT DUNNING

In April 1939 Harold St George Gray carried out a small excavation on Burrow Mump (Fig. 1; Plate 1). His published results included references to the hill itself and buildings on it in an attempt to supplement the unhelpful archaeological remains that he had uncovered.¹ Those remains comprised the foundations of a church beneath the present building and a substantial wall foundation he identified as Norman and probably a castle.

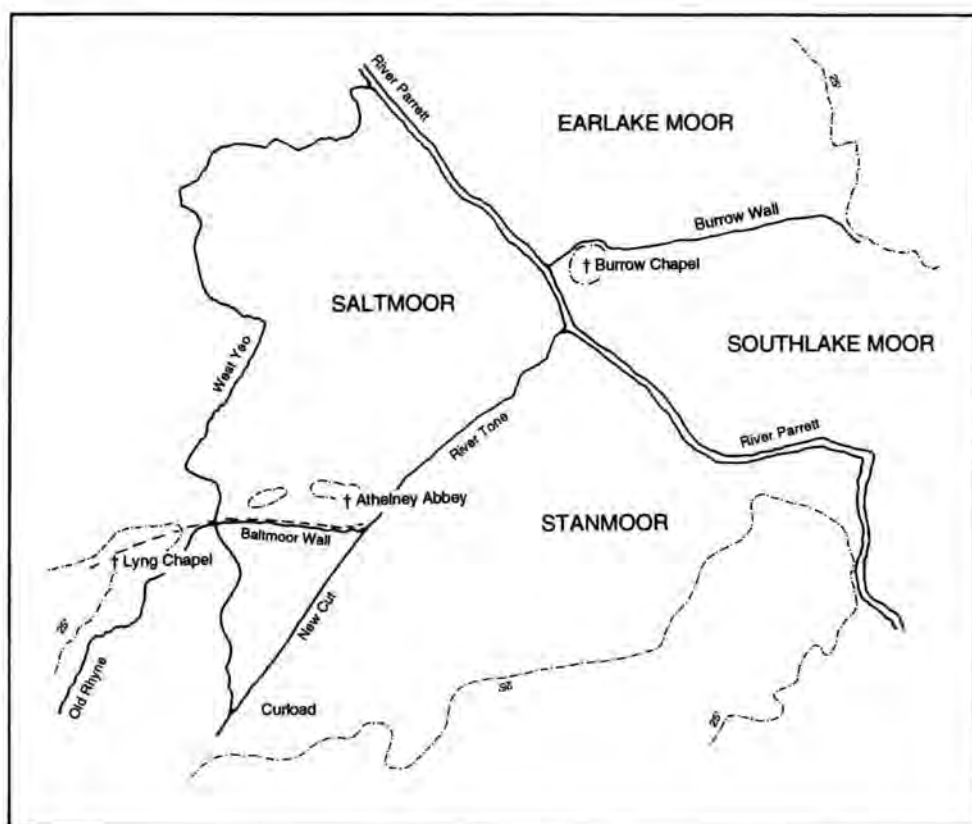


Fig. 1 Location map.

Gray himself admitted that his conclusions could be no more than tentative. Since his paper was published, work on the history of drainage in the area,² the recognition of *Lengen* of the Burghal Hidage as East Lyng³ and a number of crucial written sources unknown to Gray have called in question his interpretation and suggest that the time has come for a review of the history of the Mump. Such a review may have unfortunate consequences since much of the questionable information has recently been used in the revised scheduling of the site.⁴

Michael Williams suggested that the Mump was earlier referred to under the name Tutteyate, and cited both the *Glastonbury Chartulary* and complaints made to a royal commission in 1385 which described the nearby Southlake Wall as lying between Pathe and Tutteyate Trees in the parish of Weston. An osier bed at Tutteyate was recorded at the same time.⁵ The English Heritage documentation equates the name with a feature on the perambulation attached to a charter dated 937 by which King Athelstan granted to the monks of Athelney a *mansio* at *Relengen*.⁶ The only other points on that perambulation which may be identified with reasonable certainty are 'Privetesmoreshed' and 'Privetesbrigg', names whose main elements became 'Privetesmore' in the 13th and 14th century⁷ and in modern times Primmere in North Petherton.⁸ Three other points on the perambulation have later associations with North Curry: 'Hengestwere', which in the 12th century seems to have been on the Tone,⁹ and 'Asklake' and 'Slo', both also part of North Curry.¹⁰ The text of the charter makes the same point: the gift to the monks, who already owned Athelney island, was of a *mansio* 'in the place called Relengen in the town to the west (*in oppidi eius occidente*)'. The exact bounds may continue to be unclear, but it is obvious that the property lay to the west of East Lyng village. Neither the charter nor the perambulation can include Burrow Mump to the east. 'Totteyate' in the 937 perambulation, meaning an entrance to a hill, must refer to some other high ground, and more specifically between 'Asklake' and 'Hengestwere'. The Tutteyate near Southlake Wall obviously refers to another hill, in this case certainly the Mump.

Gray wrote before David Hill's identification of the earthworks at Lyng as one of the strong points on the Burghal Hidage. The tortuous arguments of earlier historians to make Asser's description of two fortresses fit the topography of the area¹¹ were quite confounded by the now obvious explanation: the fortresses, joined by a bridge, lay one each end of what is now the Baltmoor Wall, its eastern end on Athelney 'island', its western East Lyng itself. The wall is a causeway, built about 1154 to divert the Tone from its original course between the two.¹² Having identified Asser's two fortresses, there is no need to look for one on the Mump.

But the Mump was there, called variously 'Labergh', 'la Bereg', 'Burgh' and 'Burgus' from the 13th century onwards, standing sentinel where the rivers Parrett, Cary and Tone came together, a detached part of Athelney's home estate but equally visible from the lands of Glastonbury. Thus, in the survey of Othery manor in the time of Abbot Michael of Amesbury (1235–52) land was described as *subter Bereg, subter Berga* or *apud Bereg*;¹³ in 1242 John and Agnes of Aller agreed with Athelney over land on Saltmoor and referred to land 'next the water of Perret towards Labergh';¹⁴ in 1245–6 the tithes of the fishery of Burgh were confirmed to Athelney;¹⁵ at some time shortly before 1336 Walter and Alice atte Burgh held a close of land called Burghmede;¹⁶ not a castle, simply a hill.

The concluding remarks of Gray's article suggest that he was uneasy about his discovery of 'Norman' remains and was unusually tentative. On the basis of 18 ft of wall with no datable associated finds he postulated an adulterine castle erected 'presumably' in Stephen's reign which may have been dismantled under Henry II but 'probably' survived until a later period. This late survival was suggested because he believed that there was a castle on the Mump in 1315–16. This was the *castello* recorded in the



Plate 1 Detail from a watercolour drawing of Burrow Mump by John Buckler, 1840.
From the Society's collection.

Nomina Villarum.¹⁷ So Gray constructed an elaborate explanation, based on a charter by which Robert de Beauchamp was made a tenant of some Athelney land in Seavington Abbot,¹⁸ that Robert and his family were in some way protectors of the abbey, and that it was 'not improbable' that the stronghold on the Mump was built before 1153 and was garrisoned by Beauchamp for the abbey.¹⁹

Unfortunately for Gray's argument, it has long been clear that the *castello* of the *Nomina Villarum* was Rook's Castle, on the Quantocks in Broomfield parish.²⁰ Further, the Beauchamp charter is common form by which most religious houses let land to wealthy neighbours in return for political rather than physical protection. But still there is a 'Norman' wall to account for, and the point that Gray might have made remains an important one: the Mump was part of Athelney's estate, not part of Othery or Stoke manors which almost entirely surrounded it. Its physical attributes were clearly of significance.

Gray was not at all tentative when he described the remains of a chapel under the present unfinished church though the date of the building caused him something of a problem. There was 'no doubt' an oratory or chapel associated with the castle which 'may have been constructed at this [Norman] period' and which 'there can be little doubt' was owned by Athelney in the later Middle Ages. The argument had to be tentative because he had found no reference to a chapel before c. 1480. At this date William Worcester called the hill Myghellborough;²¹ in 1511 the commissioners of sewers named it Michellis Bourgh;²² the receivers of the issues of the dissolved abbey of Athelney Mychaells Borough.²³ The name referred to the chapel of St Michael which the chantry commissioners named in 1548.²⁴ Gray did not know of the charters in the 'lost' section of the Athelney cartulary which named the hill *Burgus Sancti Michaelis* in 1444, and which listed the *capellam de Burgo* among the properties confirmed to Athelney abbey by Pope Innocent IV in 1245–6.²⁵ This earlier date may be a solution to the puzzle: not a 'Norman' castle but a chapel.

The chapel found by Gray produced little datable material. Some masonry fragments were in the Perpendicular style²⁶ and an engraving of 1763²⁷ indicates Decorated tracery in the south 'chapel' and Perpendicular work in the upper stage of the tower and the tower stair. The plainer walls whose details are not visible in the engraving may, of course, be of the chapel referred to in 1245–6, although the proportions of the building do not suggest an earlier date. That earlier chapel might equally be represented by the 'Norman' walls of the building no longer tenable as a castle.

The subsequent history of the chapel as outlined by Gray tells the story of its gradual decline. In 1548 it was described as a free chapel; its chalice, roof lead, ornaments and bell metal were weighed and valued as if for sale like a chantry.²⁸ It remained unsold in 1602²⁹ but was still in use in 1613 when Andrew Perry read services there.³⁰ Two visitors noted the chapel in the 1630s³¹ and in 1648 local Presbyterians regarded it as a distinct church.³² The presence of a Royalist garrison there in 1642 and 1645³³ may have proved a discouragement to worship and in 1663 a brief was issued for the chapel's repair.³⁴ The Mump was again occupied by troops in 1685 by Captain John Coy and a detachment of the King's Royal Regiment of Dragoons.³⁵

Several drawings of the chapel were made in the 18th century, each indicating a more or less ruined building which contemporaries seem to have assumed was unfinished, and a restoration about 1730 was thought to have been incomplete.³⁶ The building was roofless by 1762–3 and its bells had been removed to East Lyng by 1791.³⁷ About 1793 the medieval ruin was demolished and a single-cell chapel was begun with a porch in the centre of its south wall and a west tower.³⁸ It was probably never finished. A new church was built at the foot of the Mump in Burrowbridge village in 1836–8,³⁹ leaving the unfinished church as the focal point of what was to become the county's war memorial.

The significance of the Mump remains somewhat problematic. At the time when Alfred retreated to the fen fastnesses of Athelney in the winter of 877–840 the possible military importance of the hill must surely have been recognised. When the *parochia* of Athelney was established in rather different circumstances a decade later the hill was included, although it stood on the far bank of the Parrett and beyond the meanderings of the Tone. Archaeology might or might not support the popular notion of an Alfredian fort. Its retention as part of the abbey's demesne holding may have had another motive, for until the diversion of the Tone c. 1154, the strip of land between the hill and the Parrett was the nearest place to land river-borne goods for the abbey. By the 16th century, when the first written sources for such a suggestion appear, the Tone ran very near the abbey buildings, but still there were eleven tenements including four shops on the abbey land beside the hill.⁴¹ In such circumstances the chapel could have served as a lookout and a lighthouse.

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AUTHOR

Robert Dunning, Victoria County History of Somerset, County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY.