

Notes on the Discovery of the Site of Cary Castle.

BY R. R. C. GREGORY.

THE only known serious attempts at digging for Cary Castle in the past, were those of the Rev. Canon Meade in 1856.

No record seems to have been kept of these works, but according to the memory of eye-witnesses, they were confined to the upper part of the lower mound, and resulted in nothing.¹

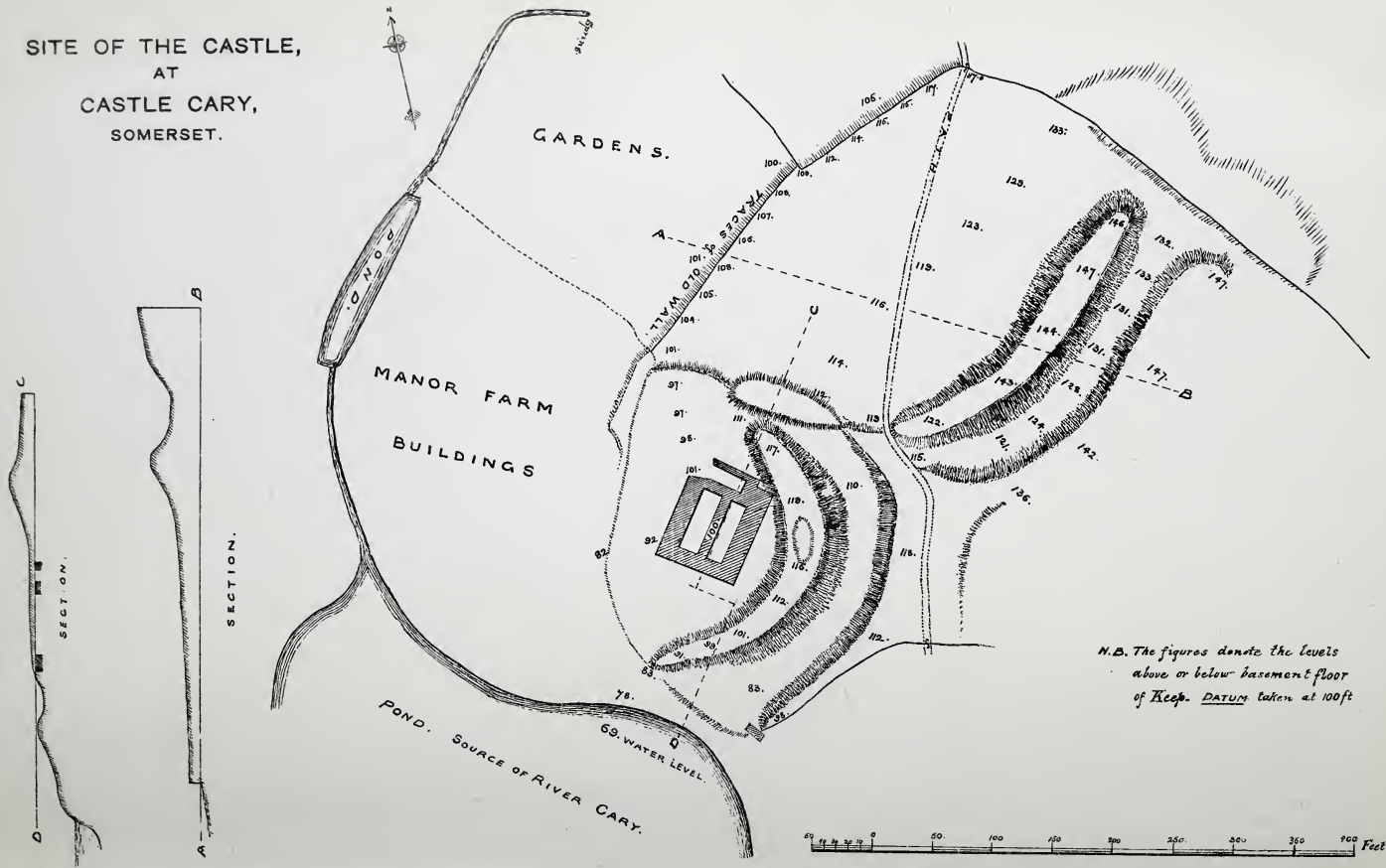
The diggings of 1890 were carried out in anticipation of the visit of the Somersetshire Archæological Society to the town. They were conducted by Mr. J. H. Francis of Castle Cary, under the general superintendence of the late Rev. J. A. Bennett, and occasionally visited by Mr. Edmund Buckle. The cost of the excavations amounted to about £39, which sum was raised chiefly in the neighbourhood, through the energy of the treasurer, Mr. F. S. Moore.

The first attempt was made in the higher part of the lower mound. Traces of a wall were found running along the middle of the mound, with foundations about two feet below the surface, and two feet in thickness. This wall was considered to be of comparatively recent construction.

Attention was next attracted to the position and appearance of the small trees—hawthorne and elder—growing between the lower mound and Manor House. They were growing in a line, and their roots spread themselves out in an unusual manner. It was suggested that the trees were possibly

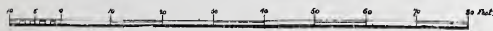
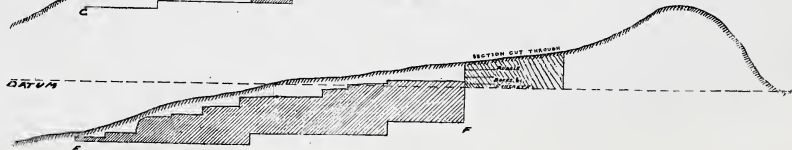
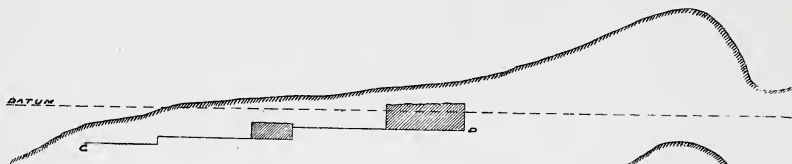
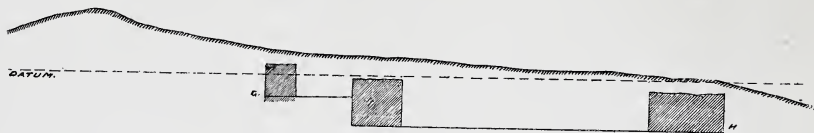
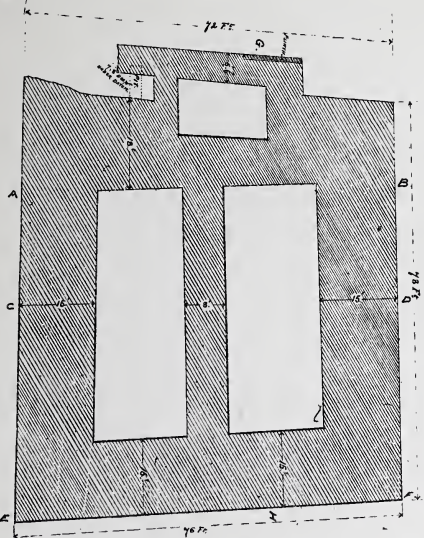
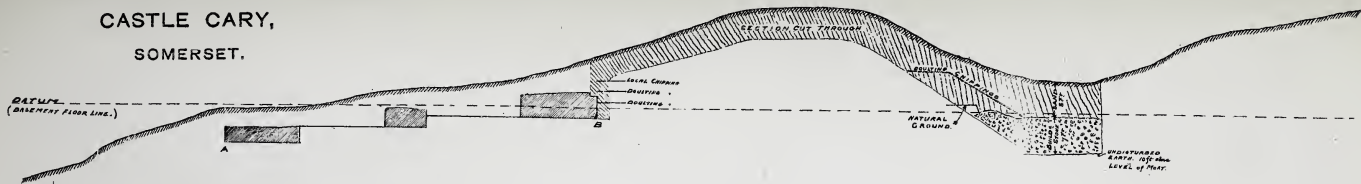
¹ A paper on this subject will be found in vol. vii of the Society's *Proceedings*.

SITE OF THE CASTLE,
AT
CASTLE CARY,
SOMERSET.



N.B. The figures denote the levels
above or below basement floor
of Keep. DATUM taken at 100ft

PLAN AND SECTIONS OF THE KEEP,
 CASTLE CARY,
 SOMERSET.



growing upon the foundations of a wall, and that this accounted for the expansion of the roots.

A borer was applied, and at a depth of four feet came upon stone. On clearing away the soil it was found that the borer had struck solid masonry. It proved to be the foundations of a wall, fifteen feet thick, and fortunately the point at which the instrument struck was close to an angle formed by the junction of two walls. The credit of making this interesting find rests with Mr. Francis.

It was soon made clear that the largest and most useful stones had been quarried out and taken away. The foundations had in many places been well worked in this manner, and had been filled in again with small rubble stones and rubbish. It was generally easy to tell when the spade was in virgin soil or otherwise, and the workmen found an infallible guide as to the direction of the walls in the line of "black soil" which marked what was the upper surface when the building was first constructed. This "black line" was in places five and six feet below the present surface, the depth varying according to the slope of the ground.

Following the direction of the fifteen feet wall towards the mound, the south-east angle was reached in about forty feet. A discovery was here made which gave rise to a good deal of speculation. Exterior to the building, at a depth of about ten feet from the present slope of the mound there was found a kind of concrete floor. It was about two inches in thickness, and was fairly hard. Four inches below this was another layer of the same material, of similar thickness and consistency. Between the two layers at this particular point there was also found a large quantity of bones. The lower layer was very hard; it required a good deal of force to pierce it with a heavy crowbar, but the soil beneath it was soft.

The real nature of these layers was not discovered till the deep section at the north-east corner had been effected.

Bones were occasionally met with throughout the whole of

the excavations, but the greatest quantity was turned out at the south-east angle. These, according to Mr. Bidgood, consisted largely of swine, ox, and deer. Near the north-west corner, the head, and a good deal of the skeleton of a horse was found. No human remains were recognised.

The worked stones found were principally from Doulting and Ham Hill. The finds in the way of faced Doulting stones were not numerous. They had no doubt been carted away. "Castle stones" of this class are to be seen in many of the old houses and walls of the town. There are several good specimens in the end wall of the "George Inn," and in the walls round the rick yard of the Manor House. These were examined by Mr. Bennett, and rubbings were taken of them. Mr. Arthur Harrold possesses a very fine arch stone, having the characteristic Norman zig-zag moulding.

A great number of Cary Hill stones were found, but there could be no doubt that the face of the building was constructed of Doulting and Ham Hill stone, and that the local quarries were used for the purpose of filling in only. Burnt stones were found everywhere. These were all small rubbles of local stones. They gave rise to the theory that the Castle was destroyed by fire, but none of the faced stones bore any evidence of having been in contact with fire. The general opinion was that the large number of small burnt stones were the refuse from a lime-kiln of a date posterior to that of the Castle. The actual discovery of the kiln seemed to bear out this theory.²

The foundations of the fore-building of the keep were to a great extent clearly defined, and in connection with them, the workmen came upon a splendid piece of chamfered plinth, which had never been disturbed. This piece of stonework, which was the only masonry found above the level of the original surface, was in a perfect state of preservation.

² There is, however, burnt stone in the ditch on the other side.

Its edges were not in any way chipped, nor had it the appearance of having been exposed to the weather for any length of time. Its "newness" of appearance was one of its striking features. This piece of plinth was considered as some evidence that the Castle did not exist for any great number of years. It was covered in by the soil before it had time to get weather-worn or otherwise marked, and has remained undisturbed to this day. The workmen were careful not to remove any part of this plinth, and when the trenches were filled in, it was again buried.

The outline of the fore-building was complete, except at the end towards the farm, which had been very much disturbed by the construction of the lime-kiln. A pit was found in the fore-building. It was of a somewhat irregular form, and was about six feet below the "black earth line." It was filled with loose materials, mostly small burnt stones and sandy soil, corresponding with the natural soil which forms the surface of the pasture farther up the hill. In this pit were found the bones of a large animal, probably a horse.

At the north-west corner the workmen thought they had found the well. It however turned out to be a lime kiln of a perfect and regular construction. This kiln had doubtless been built for the purpose of burning up the local stones that were found in such abundance. There was no evidence as to the date of its construction, but it must have been long posterior to the destruction of the Castle.

A section was made across the centre of the keep, on the level of the original ground line, in the hope of finding something interesting on the floor of the lower chamber. Only a few loose stones were turned out, but the workmen came upon a perfect piece of masonry, representing the interior of the outer wall on the east.

The mound near the keep was and is the source of a good deal of speculation. Why was it thrown up? When was it thrown up? Was it anterior or posterior to the Castle?

Mr. Clark was of opinion that "the mounds" were "Anglo-Roman," but from the evidence supplied by the sections there can be no doubt that the lower mound was thrown up after the Castle was built.

The concrete floor already alluded to runs about twenty feet under the mound. The mound could not therefore have been in existence when the floor was made. But this floor is no doubt associated with the layer of Doultling chippings found in the section at the north-east angle, and in fact in every section that was made, in every case at about the level of the floor-line of the Castle.

The section at the north-eastern angle of the building was thirteen feet in depth. It revealed three layers of chippings. The lowest was composed of chippings of Doultling stone, the second of the same, and the top layer was mostly of local stones. They were not perfectly level, but slanted downward somewhat from the Castle walls. They were about three and a half feet apart.

The supposition is that the workmen in building the Castle prepared their stones on the spot, the chippings thus forming a kind of floor. When the wall was breast high, soil was heaped against it, forming a platform, on which the workmen stood and again worked, thus the second layer was formed. Repeating this process once more the platform was raised again, and the next layer was formed.

Time and funds would not allow the cutting to be made right through the mound, but there seemed little doubt that the lower layer ran into the hill in a similar way to the layer at the south-east angle, probably some twenty feet.

An interesting discovery was made on the opposite side of the mound, in a line with the north face of the building. Eight feet from the surface was found a layer of chippings of local stones, upon the same level as the layer at the north-east angle. This would indicate that the top layer of chippings ran right through the mound, forming the surface of a

level platform. From the outward extremity of this platform the layer ran downwards at an angle of some thirty or forty degrees into the ditch. The work of levelling these chippings seemed to have been done with care and regularity. The oblique line was very straight. The platform was afterwards covered with many tons of soil, which now form the summit of the mound. This top soil is of a sandy nature, and is mixed very largely with dust of Doultling stone, with here and there amongst it small bits of charcoal.

A section was made in the ditch in a line with the north face of the keep, and led to very interesting discoveries. The workmen first dug through seven feet of sand, mixed with particles of lime rubble. They then came upon a large quantity of stones—Cary Hill and Doultling—extending to a depth of eight feet further. These stones were in some cases slightly “fired,” and some of them had mortar still attached to them, thus plainly indicating that they had formed part of some wall. Immediately under the stones was virgin soil, so that they must have got into that position before the ditch had time to get silted up. This may be an important fact in arriving at the date of the destruction of the Castle.

A section twelve feet deep was made about forty feet north of the fore-building. It again revealed the layer of Doultling chippings, but at a slightly lower level than the layer found in the moat. This would suggest that the outer bailey in which this section was made was also covered, at least to some extent, with the stone chippings.

A few small sections were made with the view of discovering some wall in the upper mound, but they led to no result. Borings were also made, but nothing of any importance was found.

The open space below the upper mound, and extending to the orchard and gardens, was popularly described as the “Outer Bailey.” A few borings were made here and there about it, but with no result. Distinct traces of a wall that

was probably high and wide were found on the west side, extending from the gardens belonging to "The George" to the Manor Farm. Near the latter, in the high bank at the top of the orchard, are large quantities of Doultling stone.

Some of the objects found:—Bones of horse, pig, deer, and ox; portions of broken querns; ³a stone used for sharpening edged tools; a carved figure that had never been walled in—possibly carved by some workman for amusement; an abbey token; a spear head; some sling stones.

Results of the work.—The diggings of 1890 show that the Castle of Cary possessed at least a rectangular "keep" of unusually large dimensions. They also remove all doubt as to the actual situation of the Castle. They prove that the lower mound was made after the Castle was built. But they throw no light upon the "upper mound." They increase the mystery of the ditches, and when their actual results are made known it is hoped that they will stimulate the town at some future day to take steps for completing the plan by settling the exact boundaries of the "Outer Bailey," and clearing up the mystery as to the municipium of Tracy.

³ A flint which had been used for cutting or scraping, and which appeared to have been rubbed upon, and exactly fitted the above was also found.