

The Mound, Glastonbury¹

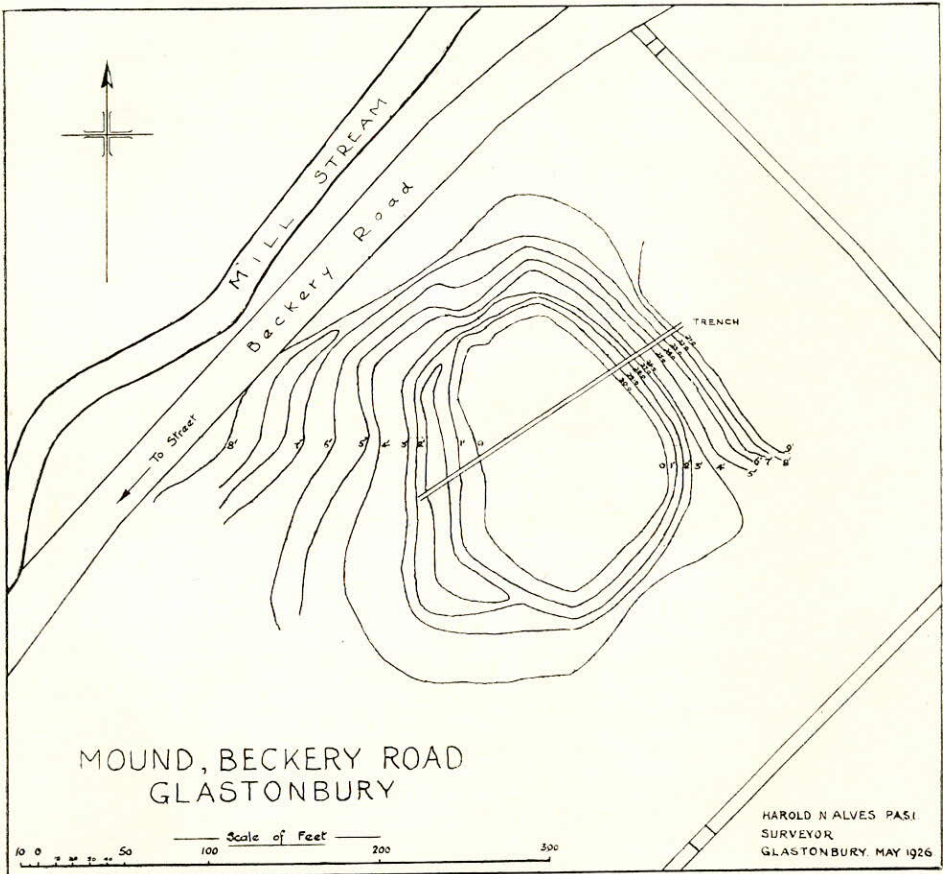
Report of the Excavation Committee²

BY ARTHUR BULLEID, L.R.C.P., F.S.A., AND JOHN MORLAND

THE low land lying to the N. of Wyrall Hill (commonly called Wearyall) was at one time occupied by a small mere or area of swamp. This was bordered on the N. side by two promontories of land, one running S.W. from the locality of the church of St. Benignus and terminating at Park Farm, the other passing N.E. from the raised ground at Beckery towards Park Farm, and ending in a rounded mound which has for many years excited the curiosity of antiquaries. A gap of low land of some 50 yds. or so in width separated this mound from the promontory on which Park Farm stands. It was through this gap that the water of the mere found an exit. In flood time the area of the mere is frequently seen in winter. The mound is somewhat circular in outline and measures about 100 yds. in diam. N. and S. and E. and W. The top is flat and, roughly speaking, oval in shape, the long diam. being N. and S., and is about 160 ft. in length. The mound is more clearly defined on the N. and E. sides, where it rises abruptly from the low land to the height of 12 ft. The area is surrounded by a distinct shallow ditch from 3 ft. to 5 ft. below the level of the top. Very little can be said regarding the name of the mound; 'Castle mound' is of quite recent origin, and was probably not known fifty years ago.

¹ See also pp. lv-lvi.

² The Excavation Committee consisted of: Mr. H. Alves, Dr. A. Bulleid, Mr. C. E. Clayton, Mr. H. St. George Gray, the Rev. Father E. Horne, and Mr. John Morland.



Last July it was decided to dig a trench across the mound in N.E. and S.W. direction. The excavation proved that the mound was an inhabited site during the Romano-British period and in more recent times, but no actual foundations of a dwelling were discovered.

Below the surface soil there was a layer of clay 12 in. to 23 in. in depth, which appeared to have been brought to the site and spread over the top of the mound at a recent date. As to the origin of this layer of clay, Mr. Morland has been informed by Mr. Herbert Brooks that when the Glastonbury Canal basin was made in or about the year 1825, the clay was carted to the site and spread over the top of the mound.

Below this clay was a layer of black earth of varying depth up to 15 in. This layer was formed during the time the mound was inhabited, and contained fragments of pottery and other objects of human workmanship, from which an approximate date of occupation may be surmised. Below the black earth were undisturbed yellowish and grey clays, showing that the mound is a natural formation of lias clay.

The ditch surrounding the mound is of doubtful date. If it had been made at the time the site was inhabited, we should expect the silting to contain some of the black earth and also objects lost during the occupation, but it contained neither. The black earth tailed out at both edges, from which we gather that the ditch was made at a later date, and consequently makes the question of its origin and purpose a matter of greater difficulty to solve. Mr. Morland suggests that 'the so-called ditch may be partly due to the natural slipping of the clay. That there had been in recent times a slip of the clay at the E. side of the mound was shown by the fact that at the base the clay overlapped a surface of peaty earth containing rushes. Moreover, whilst the excavations remained open there was heavy rain, causing a layer of clay to slip forward perhaps 3 ft., leaving a smooth surface exposed. It had slipped in the natural bedding of the strata.' Mr. Morland has noticed elsewhere regular ditch-like depressions formed by the sliding of clay, but although this may to some extent account for the ditch on the E. aspect, it is not easy to attribute the depression in the other quarters of the mound to the same cause.

The excavation trenches were divided into lengths or sites, in order that the 'finds' might be tabulated. Among the objects discovered were the following :

Fragments of a human skull belonging to a young adult. A human toe bone. Two awl handles of red deer antler. Several pieces of unworked red deer antler. Two pieces of cut ditto. Two pieces of worked bone. Animal bones.

Two pieces of bronze, one being possibly the bowl of a spoon. A small piece of rolled lead. Part of an iron ferrule and an iron nail. Two iron knife blades.

Some flint cores. A piece of worked flint, probably part of an arrowhead; this was the only fragment of flint showing secondary flaking. Several flakes and pieces of flint.

Fragments of a large two-handled amphora of buff-coloured ribbed ware. Fragments of Romano-British pottery, and pieces of coarse pottery. Pieces of medieval pottery.

Pieces of baked clay with wattle marks.

The conclusions to be drawn from the excavations are :

1. That mound is not artificial.
2. That it was an inhabited site in Romano-British times, and probably at a later date.
3. That a dwelling was made of wattle and daub and was destroyed by fire.

The warmest thanks of the Glastonbury Antiquarian Society are due to the mayor, Mr. R. Clark, for kindly allowing the digging to take place on his land, and to Mr. Alves for making the contoured plan of the mound (Plate XII).