

CADBURY CASTLE

BY MARY HARFIELD

The hill of South Cadbury is an outlier of the oolite of the Corton Denham escarpment. There is an outcrop of Yeovil sandstone at the south-west corner. The hill is surrounded by four banks with ditches, said to be of the Iron Age. The height from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the vallum is in some places as much as 50 ft. The vallum is faced with stone on the inner side — an unusual feature. The area enclosed by the banks is about twenty acres. Camden quotes Leland as saying 'there might be seen foundations of walls'. Perhaps that is where the stone facing has come from. The stones are very large and many of them are dressed. There are no foundations of walls observable now, except in one place, which will be described later. Leland also mentions the 'dusky blew stone, which the people of these parts carried away'. This may account for the considerable quantity of blue lias found at Whitcomb Farm, not far away. When the writer first visited Cadbury, there was plenty of blue lias scattered about — pieces of paving and what might have been roofing — but that has disappeared in the deep cultivation of recent years.

The only systematic examination of the hill was carried out by Mr. H. St. George Gray in 1913. He describes the trial excavations, which he made at the south-west entry and at several points in the banks, in *Proceedings* Vol. 59. Previous to this, articles had appeared by C. W. Dymond in Vol. 29 and Rev. J. A. Bennett in Vol. 36, both discussing the connection of Arthur with Cadbury. Mr. Gray summarised their arguments and findings in his paper. Messrs. C. A. Raleigh Radford and J. Stevens Cox wrote a note for *Proceedings* Vols. 99/100 describing and illustrating finds made at Cadbury up to 1955.

Through the kindness of Lady Langman, the owner of the site, the writer was enabled to go to Cadbury twice a week from 1954 to 1959 to make an intensive search of the enclosure and ramparts. The material collected has been presented by Lady Langman to the Somerset County Museum.¹ There is also a small collection of Neolithic material in the Bristol City Museum.

¹ See "Additions to the Museum", *Proc. S.A.S.* Vols. 98, 99/100 and 101/102.

The presence of a Neolithic Culture is attested by the finds of worked flints in great quantity. There are two working floors on the northward facing slope. The first is just under the summit. Leaf-shaped arrow-heads have been found there. These are nearly all in private collections and are to a large extent unrecorded. The other working floor is on the same slope, but farther east. Among the finds, from these places are flint tools, cores, arrow-heads, scrapers, burins, fabricators, saws, knives and uncountable unfinished points. Flint flakes covered the ground. The writer has found a quantity of Neolithic potsherds of a fine, hard black paste, sometimes with shell or grit, and the hand-flattened rim so characteristic of this pottery. Some of the sherds were baked brown on the outside, and have finger-worked patterns. One splendid little artifact is a water-worn beach pebble, about the size of the palm of the hand, with well-worn grooves on both sides and a hole for suspension. It shows signs of long use and is possibly a needle grinder.

As for the Bronze Age, very little has been found: the point of a spear, a little bronze boss from a scabbard,² and a blue glass bead. These are all at Taunton Castle.

The Iron Age is well represented by potsherds of all three periods. Especially noticeable are sherds of storage jars smeared with grey slip. Most of these are rims. Perhaps cultivation has resulted in the tops of the jars being torn off and brought to the surface, in much the same way as, when an urnfield near Steyning in Sussex was ploughed, only bases came to the surface. Two interesting sherds were of black paste with an interior groove and a cord pattern under the rim beautifully executed. Similar pottery has been found at Jarlshof. Some pieces of fine black pot with patterns like those at Glastonbury have been found. A great many sling stones are lying about, and some of baked clay.

The Romans certainly occupied Cadbury. Samian ware has been found in some quantity, also flue tiles. There is talk of a Roman villa in the village. Mr. Stevens Cox has informed the writer that some Roman pottery was found in an orchard there.

But perhaps the most interesting discovery of recent years is the Dark Age pottery found in 1955. This consists of pieces of amphorae of eastern Mediterranean manufacture, and also the rim of a bowl

² Analogous to the Bugthorpe Scabbard (*British Museum Guide to Early Iron Age Antiquities* (1925) p. 115).

of fine and rather soft red pottery of Tintagel A.i.³ Could there have been an Early Christian Settlement at Cadbury? Even if the vessels were brought by trade, and not by missionaries, this still seems to suggest a Christian community.

On the south face of the earthwork are the rubbish heaps, which have not been excavated, but which have yielded much material of all periods — Neolithic, Iron Age and Medieval pottery, worked bone and animal horns.

On the eastern side of the Castle is what some have considered to be an Eastern Entrance. There is certainly a wide gap in the vallum at that point. Here there is a sort of berm, which drops suddenly to a hollow way leading to the cultivation terraces, which surround the lower slopes of the hill. About three-quarters of the way up the hill the hollow way ceases. On the north side of this hollow way, coming from under the vallum, are the foundations of a wall, which is standing in places 2 ft. high, of dry stone walling, the outer face being of large stones and the interior filled with rubble. There is no sign of mortar. At the point where the hollow way stops is an entry in the wall 5 ft. wide. This leads in to the bottom of the first ditch, which is now filled with heaps of fallen stones. The wall stretches down to the last ditch, and, judging by the amount of fallen stone all the way down, it must have been fairly high. The wall is about 2 ft. thick. The whole suggests a cattle enclosure. It should be stated that the foundations, which emerge from under the vallum, appear to be of much more solid work than the wall further down.

We know from coins that there was a mint on Cadbury in Saxon times. Cadbury lies at the end of an ancient road from Milborne Port, where there was also a mint. Coins of Ethelred the Second were minted at Cadbury.

In 1955 the hill was sown with oats. One day during a dry spell in June the writer noticed that the whole area was covered with crop marks. It was essential to get an air photograph taken before the crop was cut. A letter was sent to the Commanding Officer, R.N. Air Station, Yeovilton, telling him how important it was, as the hill was to be put down to permanent pasture and the opportunity might not occur again in our time. The Commanding Officer was most

³ For this and some of the other finds mentioned see *Proc. S.A.S.* 99/100 pp. 106-13; *Dark Age Britain* (Studies presented to E. T. Leeds, 1956) p. 70.

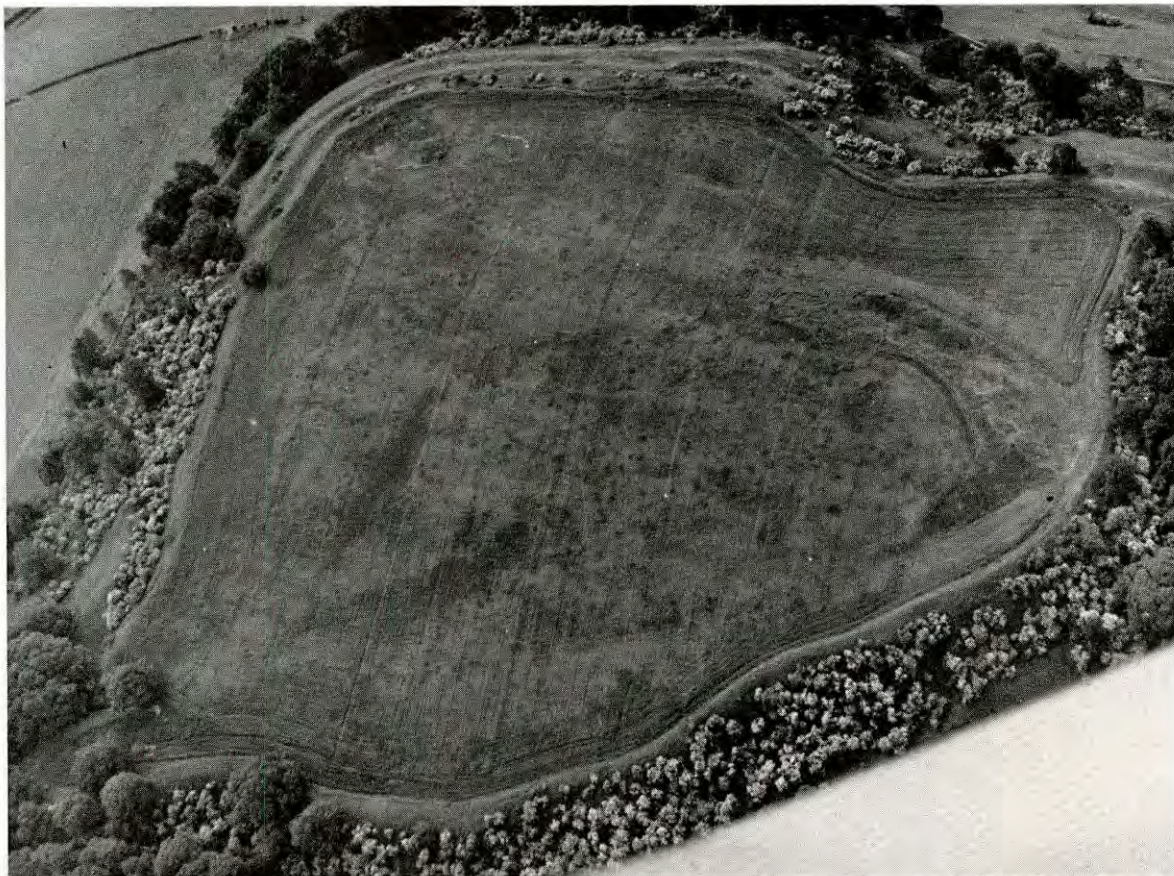
PLATE I



CADBURY CASTLE: VIEW FROM NORTH-WEST

Official Admiralty Photograph

PLATE 2



CADBURY CASTLE: VIEW FROM NORTH

Official Admiralty Photograph

co-operative and two of the resulting photographs are reproduced by kind permission of the Admiralty as Plates 1 and 2. In Plate 1 the bank and ditch of an earlier Iron Age fortification can be seen in the right-hand lower corner and its ploughed out remains continue across the interior. The thick pattern of black dots indicates storage pits, some apparently dug through the remains of the defaced rampart. In Plate 2 the remains of the earlier Iron Age defences can be seen. The ploughed out contours suggest an overlapping entrance of a type found in other Iron Age forts. The main entrance of the later pre-Roman Iron Age fort can be seen in the lower left corner. It has projecting ramparts covering the long sloping gate passage, which is further protected by an incurving of the innermost bank. The inner subsidiary gate in the south-west angle shows, but its complex outworks lie beyond the margin of the photograph. The multiple defences of this fort are particularly clear in the south-east corner and along the south side, where they are free from trees.⁴

This brief survey was occasioned principally by the opportunity of securing and of publishing important aerial photographs. The writer also makes a plea for the depositing in the County Museum for detailed study and future publication of the artifacts now in private collections. It is her hope that these notes will draw attention once more to the claims of South Cadbury Castle to be the Camelot of Arthur. Many years of residence in and study of the area have convinced her that this was indeed Camelot and that the strong and lengthy tradition, which still survives as strong as ever in the district, has firm foundations.

⁴ The writer is grateful to Mr. C. A. Raleigh Radford for these descriptions of the two photographs.