

= Cadbury Castle , Somerset =

Cadbury Castle , formerly known as Camalet , is a Bronze and Iron Age hillfort in the civil parish of South Cadbury in the English county of Somerset . It is a scheduled monument and has been associated with King Arthur 's legendary court at " Camelot " .

The hillfort is formed by a 7 @. @ 28 hectares (18 @. @ 0 acres) plateau surrounded by ramparts on the surrounding slopes of the limestone Cadbury Hill . The site has been excavated in the late 19th and early 20th century by James Bennett and Harold St George Gray . More recent examination of the site was conducted in the 1960s by Leslie Alcock and since 1992 by the South Cadbury Environs Project . These have revealed artifacts from human occupation and use from the Neolithic through the Bronze and Iron Ages . The site was reused by the Roman forces and again from c . 470 until some time after 580 . In the 11th century , it temporarily housed a Saxon mint . Evidence of various buildings at the site has been unearthed , including a " Great Hall " , round and rectangular house foundations , metalworking , and a possible sequence of small rectangular temples or shrines .

= = Background = =

Hillforts developed in the Late Bronze and Early Iron ages , around the start of the first millennium BC . The reason for their emergence in prehistoric Britain and their purpose has been a subject of debate . It has been argued that they could have been military sites constructed in response to invasion from continental Europe , sites built by invaders , or a military reaction to social tensions caused by an increasing population and consequent pressure on agriculture . The dominant view since the 1960s has been that the increasing use of iron led to social changes in Britain . Deposits of iron ore were located in different places from the tin and copper ore necessary to make bronze and , as a result , trading patterns shifted . The old elites lost their economic and social status and power passed into the hands of a new group of people .

Archaeologist Barry Cunliffe believes that population increase still played a role and has stated that " the forts provided defensive possibilities for the community at those times when the stress of an increasing population burst out into open warfare . But I would not see them as having been built because there was a state of war . They would be functional as defensive strongholds when there were tensions and undoubtedly some of them were attacked and destroyed , but this was not the only , or even the most significant , factor in their construction " .

= = Early occupation of the site = =

The earliest settlement on the site is represented by pits and post holes dated with Neolithic pottery and flints . These are the remains of a small agricultural settlement which was unenclosed . Bones recovered from the site have been radiocarbon dated to 3500 and 3300 BC . A bank under the later Iron Age defences is likely to be a lynchet or terrace derived from early ploughing of the hilltop . The site was also occupied in the Late Bronze Age , from which ovens have been identified . Radical revisions of the Bronze Age archaeology on the lower slopes resulted from discoveries during excavations and survey work by the South Cadbury Environs Project . Finds include the first Bronze Age shield from an excavation in northwest Europe , an example of the distinctive Yetholm @-@ type . Carbon dating implies that the shield was deposited in the 10th century BC , although metallurgical evidence suggests that it was manufactured two centuries earlier . A metal @-@ working building and associated enclosure were discovered 2 km (1 @. @ 2 mi) south east of the hillfort , roughly contemporary with the period of manufacture .

Human occupation continued throughout the Iron Age . A stone enclosure was constructed around 300 BC with timber revetting , and ploughing ceased within the hilltop site . Excavations have shown the signs of four and six post rectangular buildings which were gradually replaced with roundhouses . Large ramparts and elaborate timber defences were constructed and refortified over the following centuries . Excavation revealed round and rectangular house foundations , metalworking , and a

possible sequence of small rectangular temples or shrines , indicating permanent oppidum @-@ like occupation . Excavations were undertaken by local clergyman James Bennett in 1890 and Harold St George Gray in 1913 , followed by major work led by archaeologist Leslie Alcock from 1966 ? 1970 . He identified a long sequence of occupation on the site and many of the finds are displayed in the Museum of Somerset in Taunton . The finds from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age , exploring the ramparts and southwestern gate structure , represent one of the deepest and most complex Iron Age stratigraphic sequences excavated in southern Britain .

= = Castle = =

During the first century BC additional lines of bank and ditch were constructed turning it into a multivallate hillfort which is now known as the castle . There is evidence that the fort was violently taken in around AD 43 and that the defences were further slighted later in the 1st century after the construction of a Roman army barracks on the hilltop . Excavations of the southwest gate in 1968 and 1969 revealed evidence for one or more severe violent episodes , associated with weaponry and destruction by fire . Whereas the excavator , Leslie Alcock , believed this to have been dated to around AD 70 , Richard Tabor argues for a date associated with the initial invasion , either AD 43 or 44 . Michael Havinden states that it was the site of vigorous resistance by the Durotriges and Dobunni to the second Augusta Legion under the command of Vespasian .

There was significant activity at the site during the late third and fourth centuries , which may have included the construction of a Romano @-@ British temple .

= = Post @-@ Roman occupation = =

Following the withdrawal of the Roman administration , the site is thought to have been in use from c . 470 until some time after 580 . Alcock revealed a substantial " Great Hall " 20 by 10 metres (66 ft × 33 ft) and showed that the innermost Iron Age defences had been refortified , providing a defended site double the size of any other known fort of the period . Shards of pottery from the eastern Mediterranean were also found from this period , indicating wide trade links . It therefore seems probable that it was the chief caer (" fort ") of a major Brythonic ruler , his family , his teulu (literally meaning " family " , but actually meaning " warband ") , servants , and horses .

Between 1010 and 1020 , the hill was reoccupied for use as a temporary Saxon mint , standing in for that at Ilchester . Some small @-@ scale fortification of the site may also have occurred in the 13th century .

= = Description = =

Cadbury Castle is located 5 miles (8 @. @ 0 km) north east of Yeovil . It stands on the summit of Cadbury Hill , a limestone hill situated on the southern edge of the Somerset Levels , with flat lowland to the north . The summit is 153 m (500 ft) above sea @-@ level on lias stone .

The hill is surrounded by terraced earthwork banks and ditches and a stand of trees . On the north west and south sides there are 4 ramparts , with two remaining on the east . The summit plateau covers 7 @. @ 28 hectares (18 @. @ 0 acres) , and is surrounded by the inner bank which is 1 @. @ 2 kilometres (0 @. @ 75 mi) long . The hill fort is overlooked by Sigwells , a rural plateau rich in archaeological remains . Due to scrub and tree growth the site has been added to the Heritage at Risk register .

= = Interpretation = =

The suffix -bury or sometimes byrig " ; byrig is the Anglo @-@ Saxon word meaning " fort " or " town " , which is frequently , but not exclusively , used to refer to hill @-@ forts . The first part of the name may come from the River Cam as with nearby villages the villages of West Camel and Queen Camel . Other scholars suggest a derivation from some figure named " Cador " or " Cada " . It is one

of three sites in Somerset to include the Cadbury name , the others being Cadbury Camp , near Tickenham and Cadbury Hill which is also known as Cadbury @-@ Congresbury to distinguish it from the other sites .

Local tradition , first written down by John Leland in 1542 , holds that Cadbury Castle was King Arthur 's Camelot . The site and the Great Hall are extensive , and the writer Geoffrey Ashe argued in an article in the journal *Speculum* that it was the base for the Arthur of history . His opinion has not been widely accepted by all students of the period .

Militarily , the location makes sense as a place where refugees and the southwestern Brythons of Dumnonia could have defended themselves against attacks from the east . If Arthur was indeed conceived at Tintagel , as tradition asserts , he may have been a prince of Dumnonia and used Cadbury as a stronghold on his eastern frontier .

= = South Cadbury Environs Project = =

The recent work on the archaeology of the site and the surrounding area has been carried out by the South Cadbury Environs Project . Since 1992 the project team , which included local volunteers South East Somerset Archaeological and Historical Society and the Yeovil Archaeology and Local History Society , have carried out geophysical surveys including gradiometry and electrical resistivity tomography , ploughzone sampling , test pits , deeper excavations and geographic information system (GIS) approaches . The project had input from academics and archaeologists from the universities of Bristol , Glasgow , Birmingham and Oxford , funded by the Leverhulme Trust and Arts and Humanities Research Council . The project studies the castle and surrounding area up to 8 kilometres (5 @.@ 0 mi) away , using landscape sampling ,