

= Glastonbury Tor =

Glastonbury Tor is a hill at Glastonbury in the English county of Somerset , topped by the roofless St Michael 's Tower , a Grade I listed building . The whole site is managed by the National Trust , and has been designated a scheduled monument .

The conical hill of clay and Blue Lias rises from the Somerset Levels . It was formed when surrounding softer deposits were eroded , leaving the hard cap of sandstone exposed . The slopes of the hill are terraced , but the method by which they were formed remains unexplained . Artefacts from human visitation have been found , dating from the Iron Age to Roman eras .

Several buildings were constructed on the summit during the Saxon and early medieval periods ; they have been interpreted as an early church and monks ' hermitage . The head of a wheel cross dating from the 10th or 11th century has been recovered . The original wooden church was destroyed by an earthquake in 1275 , and the stone Church of St Michael built on the site in the 14th century . Its tower remains , although it has been restored and partially rebuilt several times . Archaeological excavations during the 20th century sought to clarify the background of the monument and church , but some aspects of their history remain unexplained . The Tor is mentioned in Celtic mythology , particularly in myths linked to King Arthur , and has a number of other enduring mythological and spiritual associations .

= Etymology =

The origin of the name " Glastonbury " is unclear , but when the settlement was first recorded in the late 7th and early 8th centuries it was called Glestingaburg . Of the latter name , Glestinga is obscure , and may derive from an Old English word or Celtic personal name . It may derive from a person or kindred group named Glast . The second half of the name , -burg , is Anglo -@- Saxon in origin and could refer to either a fortified place such as a burh or , more likely , a monastic enclosure .

Tor is an English word referring to a high rock or a hill , deriving from the Old English torr . The Celtic name of the Tor was Ynys Wydryn , or sometimes Ynys Gutrin , meaning " Isle of Glass " . At this time the plain was flooded , the isle becoming a peninsula at low tide .

= Location and landscape =

The Tor is in the middle of the Summerland Meadows , part of the Somerset Levels , rising to an elevation of 518 feet (158 m) . The plain is reclaimed fen above which the Tor is clearly visible for miles around . It has been described as an island but actually sits at the western end of a peninsula washed on three sides by the River Brue .

The Tor is formed from rocks dating from the early Jurassic Period , namely varied layers of Lias Group strata . The uppermost of these , forming the Tor itself , are a succession of rocks assigned to the Bridport Sand Formation . These rocks sit upon strata forming the broader hill on which the Tor stands ; the various layers of the Beacon Limestone Formation and the Dyrham Formation . The Bridport Sands have acted as a caprock protecting the lower layers from erosion . The iron @-@ rich waters of Chalice Well , a spring at the base of the Tor , flow out as an artesian well impregnating the sandstone around it with iron oxides that have reinforced it to produce the caprock . Iron @-@ rich but oxygen @-@ poor water in the aquifer carries dissolved iron (II) " ferrous " iron , but as the water surfaces and its oxygen content rises , the oxidised iron (III) " ferric " iron drops out as insoluble " rusty " oxides that bind to the surrounding stone , hardening it .

The low @-@ lying damp ground can produce a visual effect known as a Fata Morgana when the Tor appears to rise out of the mist . This optical phenomenon occurs because rays of light are strongly bent when they pass through air layers of different temperatures in a steep thermal inversion where an atmospheric duct has formed . The Italian term Fata Morgana is derived from the name of Morgan le Fay , a powerful sorceress in Arthurian legend .

=== Terraces ===

The sides of the Tor have seven deep , roughly symmetrical terraces . Their formation remains a mystery with many possible explanations . They may have been formed as a result of natural differentiation of the layers of Lias stone and clay used by farmers during the Middle Ages as terraced hills to make ploughing for crops easier . Author Nicholas Mann questions this theory . If agriculture had been the reason for the creation of the terraces , it would be expected that the effort would be concentrated on the south side , where the sunny conditions would provide a good yield , but the terraces are equally deep on the northern side , which would provide little benefit . Additionally , none of the other slopes of the island have been terraced , even though the more sheltered locations would provide a greater return on the labour involved . Alternatively , the flattened paths may have been created by the hooves of grazing cattle .

Other explanations have been suggested for the terraces , including the construction of defensive ramparts . Iron Age hill forts including the nearby Cadbury Castle in Somerset show evidence of extensive fortification of their slopes . The normal form of ramparts is a bank and ditch , but there is no evidence of this arrangement on the Tor . South Cadbury , one of the most extensively fortified places in early Britain , had three concentric rings of banks and ditches supporting an 18 @-@ hectare (44 @-@ acre) enclosure . By contrast , the Tor has seven rings and very little space on top for the safekeeping of a community . It has been suggested that a defensive function may have been linked with Ponter 's Ball Dyke , a linear earthwork about 1 kilometre (0 @. 62 mi) east of the Tor . It consists of an embankment with a ditch on the east side . The purpose and provenance of the dyke are unclear . It is possible that it was part of a longer defensive barrier associated with New Ditch , three miles to the south @-@ west , which is built in a similar manner . It has been suggested by Raleigh Radford that it is part of a great Celtic sanctuary , probably 3rd century BC , while others , including Philip Rahtz , date it to the post @-@ Roman period and link it to the Dark Age occupation on Glastonbury Tor . The 1970 excavation suggests the 12th century or later . The historian Ronald Hutton suggests that the terraces are the remains of a medieval " spiral walkway " created for pilgrims to reach the church on the summit , similar to that at Whitby Abbey .

Another suggestion is that the terraces are the remains of a three @-@ dimensional labyrinth , first proposed by Geoffrey Russell in 1968 . He states that the classical labyrinth (Caerdroia) , a design found all over the Neolithic world , can be easily transposed onto the Tor , so that by walking around the terraces a person eventually reaches the top in the same pattern . Evaluating this hypothesis is not easy . A labyrinth would very likely place the terraces in the Neolithic era , but given the amount of occupation since then , there may have been substantial modifications by farmers and / or monks and conclusive excavations have not been carried out . In a more recent book , Hutton writes that " the labyrinth does not seem to be an ancient sacred structure " .

== History ==

=== Pre @-@ Christian ===

Some Neolithic flint tools recovered from the top of the Tor show that the site has been visited , perhaps with lasting occupation , since prehistory . The nearby remains of Glastonbury Lake Village were identified at the site in 1892 , which confirmed that there was an Iron Age settlement in about 300 ? 200 BC on what was an easily defended island in the fens . There is no evidence of permanent occupation of the Tor , but finds , including Roman pottery , do suggest that it was visited on a regular basis .

Excavations on Glastonbury Tor , undertaken by a team led by Philip Rahtz between 1964 and 1966 , revealed evidence of Dark Age occupation during the 5th to 7th centuries around the later medieval church of St. Michael . Finds included postholes , two hearths including a metalworker 's forge , two burials oriented north @-@ south (thus unlikely to be Christian) , fragments of 6th century Mediterranean amphorae (vases for wine or cooking oil) , and a worn hollow bronze head

which may have topped a Saxon staff .

= = = Christian settlement = = =

During the late Saxon and early medieval period there were at least four buildings on the summit . The base of a stone cross demonstrates Christian use of the site during this period and it may have been a hermitage . The broken head of a wheel cross dated to the 10th or 11th centuries was found part way down the hill and may have been the head of the cross that stood on the summit . The head of the cross is now in the Museum of Somerset in Taunton .

The earliest timber church , which was dedicated to St Michael , is believed to have been constructed in the 11th or 12th century from which post holes have since been identified . Associated monk cells have also been identified .

St Michael 's Church was destroyed by an earthquake on 11 September 1275 . According to the British Geological Survey , the earthquake was felt in London , Canterbury and Wales , and was reported to have destroyed many houses and churches in England . The force was greater than 7 MSK , with its epicentre in the area around Portsmouth or Chichester , South England .

A second church , also dedicated to St Michael , was built of local sandstone in the 14th century by the Abbot Adam of Sodbury , incorporating the foundations of the previous building . It included stained glass and decorated floor tiles . There was also a portable altar of Purbeck Marble ; it is likely that the Monastery of St Michael on the Tor was a daughter house of Glastonbury Abbey . In 1243 Henry III granted a charter for a six @-@ day fair at the site .

St Michael 's Church survived until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539 when , except for the tower , it was demolished . The Tor was the place of execution where Richard Whiting , the last Abbot of Glastonbury Abbey , was hanged , drawn and quartered along with two of his monks , John Thorne and Roger James . The three @-@ storey tower of St Michael 's Church survives . It has corner buttresses and perpendicular bell openings . There is a sculptured tablet with an image of an eagle below the parapet .

= = = Post @-@ dissolution = = =

In 1786 , Richard Colt Hoare of Stourhead bought the Tor and funded repair of the tower in 1804 , including the rebuilding of the north @-@ east corner . It was then passed on through several generations to the Reverend George Neville and included in the Butleigh Manor until the 20th century . It was then bought as a memorial to a former Dean of Wells , Thomas Jex @-@ Blake , who died in 1915 .

The National Trust took control of the Tor in 1933 , but repairs were delayed until after the Second World War . During the 1960s , excavations identified cracks in the rock , suggesting the ground had moved in the past . This , combined with wind erosion , started to expose the footings of the tower , which were repaired with concrete . Erosion caused by the feet of the increasing number of visitors was also a problem and paths were laid to enable them to reach the summit without damaging the terraces . After 2000 , enhancements to the access and repairs to the tower , including rebuilding of the parapet , were carried out . These included the replacement of some of the masonry damaged by earlier repairs with new stone from the Hadsen Quarry .

A model of Glastonbury Tor was incorporated into the opening ceremony of the 2012 Summer Olympics in London . As the athletes entered the stadium , their flags were displayed on the terraces of the model .

= = Mythology and spirituality = =

The Tor seems to have been called Ynys yr Afalon (meaning " The Isle of Avalon ") by the Britons and is believed by some , including the 12th and 13th century writer Gerald of Wales , to be the Avalon of Arthurian legend . The Tor has been associated with the name Avalon , and identified with King Arthur , since the alleged discovery of his and Queen Guinevere 's neatly labelled coffins in

1191 , recounted by Gerald of Wales . Author Christopher L. Hodapp asserts in his book *The Templar Code for Dummies* that Glastonbury Tor is one of the possible locations of the Holy Grail , because it is close to the monastery that housed the Nanteos Cup .

With the 19th century resurgence of interest in Celtic mythology , the Tor became associated with Gwyn ap Nudd , the first Lord of the Otherworld (Annwn) and later King of the Fairies . The Tor came to be represented as an entrance to Annwn or to Avalon , the land of the fairies . The tor is supposedly a gateway into " The Land Of The Dead (Avalon) .

A persistent myth of more recent origin is that of the Glastonbury Zodiac , a purported astrological zodiac of gargantuan proportions said to have been carved into the land along ancient hedgerows and trackways , in which the Tor forms part of the figure representing Aquarius . The theory was first put forward in 1927 by Katherine Maltwood , an artist with an interest in the occult , who thought the zodiac was constructed approximately 5 @, @ 000 years ago . But the vast majority of the land said by Maltwood to be covered by the zodiac was under several feet of water at the proposed time of its construction , and many of the features such as field boundaries and roads are recent .

The tor and other sites in Glastonbury have also been significant in Goddess worship , with the flow from the Chalice Well representing menstrual flow and the tor being seen as either a breast or the whole figure of the Goddess . This has been celebrated with an effigy of the Goddess leading an annual procession up the Tor .