

= Danebury =

Danebury is an Iron Age hill fort in Hampshire in England , about 19 kilometres (12 mi) north @-@ west of Winchester (grid reference SU323376) . The site , covering 5 hectares (12 acres) , was excavated by Barry Cunliffe in the 1970s . Danebury is considered a type @-@ site for hill forts , and was important in developing the understanding of hill forts , as very few others have been so intensively excavated .

Built in the 6th century BC , the fort was in use for almost 500 years , during a period when the number of hill forts in Wessex greatly increased . Danebury was remodelled several times , making it more complex and resulting in it becoming a " developed " hill fort . It is now protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument , a Site of Special Scientific Interest. and a Local Nature Reserve .

= = Investigation = =

Until the 19th century very little was known about hill forts , as none had been excavated and their original purpose had been long forgotten . In the medieval period , their construction was attributed variously to iconic figures such as King Arthur , King Alfred , the Danes , Julius Caesar , and even giants . By the 18th century , it was widely thought that hill forts were Roman in origin .

Interest in hill forts was roused by the investigation of a hill fort at Worlebury Hill in the early @-@ 19th century . The first excavation at Danebury was carried out in November 1859 , under antiquarian Augustus Wollaston Franks . His workers cleared out an Iron Age pit that was 2 metres (7 ft) deep and 1 @.@ 5 m (5 ft) in diameter , although they were not able to ascertain its purpose .

The first widespread investigation of hill forts was carried out in the second half of the 19th century under Augustus Pitt @-@ Rivers . Pitt @-@ Rivers ' work on the hill forts of Sussex led him to the conclusion that most hill forts were built in the Iron Age , and it paved the way for future work on hill forts . In the 1920s and 1930s , there was " hill fort mania " in British archaeology ; by 1940 , about 80 had been archaeologically excavated .

In the late 1960s , Barry Cunliffe decided to examine a single hill fort and its surrounding territory in an attempt to shed light on Iron Age society , its politics , and population . With the permission of the site 's owner , Hampshire County Council , archaeological excavations began in 1969 and continued until 1988 . Over the twenty seasons archaeologists spent examining the site , they looked at the defences and the gateway , and excavated 57 % of the interior , where the remains of wattle and timber houses were discovered . It was the lengthiest investigation of any hill fort in western Europe .

A further non @-@ invasive survey was carried out in 1997 , as part of the Wessex Hillforts Project , using a magnetometer .

= = History = =

There is no historical record of events in Iron Age Britain , so archaeological investigation is the only way to reconstruct the history of Danebury , and other such hill forts . It is impossible to state with certainty every significant event in the hill fort ? s history , but where an event leaves an archaeologically identifiable trace , a general chronology can be established , although dates are much less easy to establish . The hill fort was occupied from the mid @-@ 6th century BC until around 100 BC , and the defences were remodelled numerous times .

Early in its life the site consisted of a single ditch encompassing an area of about 5 ha (12 acres) , with two gateways , one in the south @-@ west and another in the east ; two more rings of ditches were added later . The north part of the fort was occupied by four @-@ post structures , probably granaries , which were later replaced by storage pits , and in the south part , there were roundhouses in between granaries and storage pits . When Danebury was built in the 6th century BC , it coincided with the construction of several other hillforts in the Wessex region , all of a similar size and layout .

The first phase of defences dates from around 550 BC , and consists of a rampart behind a ditch . When the ditch was cut , the chalk rubble fill was used to build the rampart , along with some of the local clay soil . The material was contained by timber , making it a box rampart with a vertical face . The east gateway was a simple 4 m (13 ft) wide gap in the defences with a timber gatehouse (the south @-@ west gateway has not been excavated) .

At least 50 years after the rampart was first built , it was raised with the addition of more chalk material ; this has been interpreted as maintenance work due to the ramparts beginning to collapse as the timber box started to rot . Around the same time the ramparts were altered , the east gateway was widened to 9 m (30 ft) . The gates were burnt down not long after the east gateway was altered . For a short time the hill fort was gateless , when the east gateway was repaired the passage from the entrance was lengthened .

In around 400 BC the third phase heightened the rampart and at the same time the ditch was re @-@ dug . The V @-@ shaped ditch was 6 m (20 ft) deep and between 11 m (36 ft) and 12 m (39 ft) wide ; the size of the previous ditch is unknown as re @-@ cutting the ditch has made it hard to ascertain . The wooden box was abandoned in favour of allowing the rampart to slope down to the ditch , but to provide protection the rampart would probably have been surmounted by a dry stone wall made from flint . From the top of the ramparts to the bottom of the ditch is about 16 m (52 ft) .

Although the rampart and ditch were in use for a long time , during this period the east gateway was remodelled twice , making it longer , and creating earthworks on each side of the approach . The southwest gateway was given extra defences in the form of earthworks before being abandoned and filled in . Also in this period , the southern part of the fort became populated with four- and six @-@ post structures , probably granaries , replacing the earlier roundhouses . The fort 's centre was probably used for shrines while houses were mainly built close to the ramparts . A new series of earthworks was created beyond the already existing ring , turning Danebury into a complex multivallate (more than one series of earthworks) fort . They added 5 @.@ 3 ha (13 acres) to the fort and probably were used to protect livestock .

Danebury was abandoned around 100 BC , in common with the trend across Britain for hill forts to fall out of use around that time . Once again , the east gate was burnt down , although this time it was not replaced . Most of the inhabitants deserted Danebury , and groups of bodies were disposed of in charnel pits . The site continued in use , but on a much smaller scale than before . Buildings were left to decay and the interior of the fort became used for grazing . By the start of the 1st century AD , the settlement of Danebury was probably nothing more than a single farm .

= = Interpretation = =

Danebury Hill , on top of which the hill fort sits , rises to 143 m (469 ft) . The hill fort dominates the local landscape , which rarely rises above 100 m (330 ft) , and has commanding views of the area . The surrounding country has light soil that would have been easily cultivated . Territory commanded by Danebury included areas of forest , pasture in the uplands , and access to water sources in the form of the River Test . To the west runs Wallop Brook which flows south east into the River Test .

The nearby hill forts of Figsbury Ring , Quarley Hill , and Bury Hill were probably established around the same time as Danebury . All of a similar size , the hillforts were generally equally spaced , commanding similar sized territories and resources . There is some debate whether hill forts were purely defensive structures , and to what extent they were occupied . Cunliffe interprets the ramparts as essentially defensive , although he concedes that they may have been a means of displaying wealth and power , as Danebury would have been visible for miles around .

The ramparts were the strongest part of the fort , with the entrances the weakest . The complex gateways support the view that the site was militaristic ; the long , curving east entrance maximised the time it would have taken for attackers to enter the fort and would have allowed defenders on the ramparts more time to hurl missiles , while the southwest entrance narrowed forcing attackers together and causing disarray . Iron Age society was , in Cunliffe 's view , " effervescent ... essentially unstable , and prone to conflict " , and he uses the possible military nature of hill forts to

support this view . The burning of the gates was probably the result of an attack , and the charnel pits dating from the end of the intense period of Danebury 's occupation contain about 100 bodies , many with injuries that appear to have been inflicted by weapons such as spears and swords .

Surrounding Danebury hill fort are many smaller farmsteads , between 1 ha (2 @. @ 5 acres) and 2 ha (4 @. @ 9 acres) in size . The fort was supplied with grain from the surrounding farmsteads , and could hold 20 times more food than the average farmstead , indicating Danebury had a higher status than local farmsteads . This is further supported by the fact that the hill fort was used as a " central place " where people could gather to trade and store commodities . Periods of intensified activity in hill forts such as Danebury coinciding with depopulation of the surrounding landscape could indicate the increasing importance of hill forts in society , or that there were times of unrest when people would retreat to the relative safety of a hill fort 's ramparts .

While other hill forts were abandoned in the 4th century BC , in about 400 BC Danebury grew into what is known as a " developed hill fort " . Danebury 's importance in the landscape increased over time , as demonstrated by its continued use until around 100 AD . It was possibly inhabited by a king or chieftain and his family , retinue , and craftsmen , and may have housed a population of 200 ? 350 . There are traces of craft and industry on a large scale , and use of the site by a social elite is indicated by the presence of shrines in the centre of the fort .