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Archaeology on the Mound

Last year Richard Brunning of South West Heritage Trust led a team in the first archaeological dig on the mound since Philip Rahtz's dig in the 1960s. Initially GeoFlo surveyed the area, which clearly showed up the third building that Beth Francis of Avalon Archaeology Group had found when she did the resistivity survey for the Friends in the 1990s. GeoFlo also found traces of an Iron Age ditch around the buildings, and a possible site for the Well. The analysis of the skeletons which Richard lifted showed them to be dated between 450AD – 750AD. This means that there was a Christian type of burial site on Brides Mound (aka Brides Hill) during the era when St. Bridget was alive and reputedly visited Glastonbury. It is also the same era when King Arthur reputedly had his vision at the chapel on Brides Hill. So the legends have been reinforced by the archaeology making this place possibly the earliest evidence of monastic Christianity in Britain.

GeoFlo have now completed a survey of the ridge field, which had never been fully surveyed though Beth did survey part of it and found some medieval pottery. They also surveyed the riverbank looking for the site where the Blue Bowl was hidden by John Goodchild in 1898 and then found by Kitty Tudor Pole in 1906 (See Patrick Benham "The Avalonians" for the full story). The Blue Bowl is kept at Chalice Well. Here is a photograph of Wellesley Tudor Pole's father standing by the culvert where the bowl had been hidden and then found, so we know what it looked like.



Tudor Pole and Alice Buckton, who looked after the Well in the early part of the 1900s, used to do a pilgrimage around Glastonbury and down to Brides Mound and they called the culvert Brides Well. Max King, whose father farmed the land during the 1950s and 1960s, went around the fields with us pointing out where the outlets to the river were in his time, and also where the original site of the stone marking Brides Well had been erected in the middle of the field. It was moved to its present position in the 1960s because it got in the way of haymaking, slurry spreading, etc.

We were interested both in finding the original site where the Blue Bowl had been hidden and whether or not there was a well near the chapel and associated buildings. Geo Flo did three surveys: of the area near the chapel where they thought there had been a possible well; of the whole of the ridge fields; and all the river bank between the south side of the ridge and the present site of the Brides Well stone. They found no well, which suggests that whoever was living on Brides Hill, as it was known from medieval times until recently, used to get their water directly from the river. Richard Brunning thought that possibly the Iron Age people who lived by the edge of the River Brue near Godney, which was the original course of the river, could well have used the ford at the river end of Brides Mound for tying up their boats, because Philip Rahtz had found lead weights, which were used by Iron Age people to weight down their nets for catching wildfowl, on the north side of the mound where the river used to flow. However, no sign of any type of pier was found on the north side of the ridge.

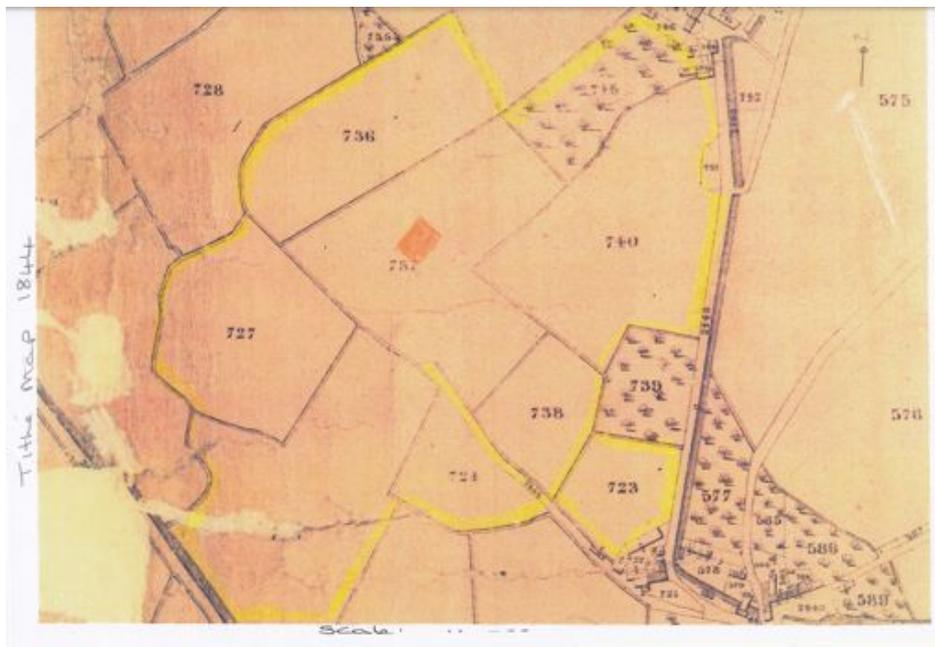


But we have found what could well be another culvert leading into the river, which has been covered up by the new embankment that was built in the 1960s.

This is just to the south of the ridge where there is a hedge and ditch line leading towards the river, near where we have built the pond. That field tends to flood badly in the winter and this would be the ideal place for an outflow. Mary Claridge of SSARG (Somerset Archaeology Research Group) is preparing to investigate and see what structure is there. Possibly it will also look like the one in the corner of that field which is similar to the one Tudor Pole's father is pictured standing next to. However, it is uncertain whether or not this was the place where the bowl was hidden because we have a map made by Kitty Tudor Pole.



She shows the spot as being further north up the riverbank. John Goodchild's map shows it even further north up the river bank, but his map is very inaccurate showing the ditches and drove on the other side of the river in a different place from where they are actually located. Therefore, it is probably best to use Kitty's map to give the original location. GeoFlo did find a ditch on the north side of the ridge that is closer to where Kitty located the place where she found the bowl. However, they did not find any evidence of stone, which we know the culvert was made of. So unless we investigate the riverbank more extensively at that ditch point, the mystery remains!



One mystery is the strange kink in the hedge on the ridge field. The Tithe map 1844 (one of the maps Sue Hooper unearthed) shows that this is the remaining part of a hedge that used to go right across the field north of the ridge that is labelled simply "Bride"! The curving line of this old hedge suggests it may well have marked the former course of the river Brue before the monks dug out what is called "back river" and the route through Meare to Highbridge in medieval times. It would make sense for the river to turn northwest just north of the ridge after it had gone over the harder rock that forms the ridge that makes the ford at that point.

Last year Richard Brunning also dug a trench across the building Beth had found and discovered that it had lots of pottery and animal bones, suggesting that it was a place where people stayed and therefore might have been a pilgrims hostel. The legends state that pilgrims used to come across the ford of the river at the end of the ridge field and stay for 24 hours at the chapel before going on up to the Abbey, so this legend has also been reinforced by archaeology.

What's in a name? In the Tithe map you will see that, whilst plenty of the fields around the chapel field called Bride in some form or other, the chapel field is called Chamberlains Hill. This is the only time I've come across this name. Dr. Adam Stout who is fantastic at searching historical records has found maps, leases, etc., from 1539 onwards all of which call it Brides Hill, as shown in the maps by John Goodchild and Kitty Tudor Pole. So why the change of name in the 1844 tithe map? Another mystery!

SID 14103626

SHHA 102 Assignment 1

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND EXCAVATION

Details from the Tithe Apportionment Book which relate to the fields in the search area are as follows¹:

Field Number	Owner	Occupier	Name of Field	Description of Land	Acreage	Rent
723	Hannah Bath	Thomas Bath	Home Field	Pasture	A.2 P.2	7d
724	Robert Phippen Bath	Thomas Bath	Left Hand Little Ground	Meadow	A.2 R.11	7d
725	Miss Anna Emery	Edward Pratt	Goodings (Bride)	Meadow	A.9 R.2 P.37	2s 5d
727	Robert Phippen Bath	Thomas Bath	Bride	Meadow	A.5 R.3	1s 6d
736	Robert Phippen Bath	John Barnett	Pound Ground Bride	Meadow	A.5 R.1 P.30	1s 4d
737	Robert Phippen Bath	Thomas Bath	Chamberlain's Hill	Meadow	A.7 R.2 P.25	1s 11d
738	Robert Phippen Bath	Thomas Bath	Right Hand Little Ground	Pasture	A.2 R.1 P.25	7d
739	Hannah Bath	Thomas Bath	Bride Orchard	Orchard	A.1 R.2 P.30	5d
740	Hannah Bath	Thomas Bath	Bride 10 Acres	Meadow	A.10 P.27	1s 9d
745	Miss Anna Emery	Edward Pratt	Orchard (Bride)	Orchard	A.2 R.3 P.19	9d
2443	Curate of St John's	Same as Owner	Roadway	Roadway		Church Land

¹ Tithe Apportionment Book 1844 DO/RLM/18

Beneath is an aerial photo of the land in 1944. There is no sign of the Brides Well stone in the centre of a field so it must have been put up after this. I think it was sometime in the 1950s when Wellesley Tudor Pole bought Chalice Well and set up Chalice Well Trust. And then in the 1960s he employed Philip Rahtz to do the excavation on the mound – by which time the farmer had moved the stone to its present position.



This map also shows the two culverts that we know about along with the ditch that GeoFlo found on the north side of the ridge field, but no ditch or culvert near where the stone is or where Kitty and John mark it as having been. Another mystery! However, there does seem to be a small tree just north of the Brides Well stone place, which might have been the tree that Alice Buckton called the Tree of Sorrows on her pilgrimage route. (Thanks to Sue Hooper for the maps that were part of her Archaeology course project at Strode College).

Stewarding at Glastonbury Festival

Thank you to our fantastic team of stewards who this year were working as a special team on back stage gates in the SE Corner fields: Glasto-Latino, Unfairground, Shangri-La and The Common. They were praised by the venue managers and the steward coordinator for their high level of competence and unfailing good humour under occasionally very trying circumstances. It was overall a much better year than last year because we only had dust to deal with rather than knee level mud! Also doing gates on 6-hour shifts was better than the extremely noisy and overcrowded venues and 8-hour shifts. So this method of fundraising is definitely improving!! Also nearly everyone from the previous year worked again this year – we obviously enjoy it.

Glastonbury Neighbourhood Plan

Glastonbury Town council are in process of doing a Neighbourhood Plan and Brides Mound has been declared a protected area as part of Green Infrastructure for Local Plan 2 submission. This is a much needed extra level of protection for Brides Mound and we are very grateful to the deputy Town Clerk, Gerard Tucker, and Town Councillor Steve Henderson for helping us with this.

(Serena Roney-Dougal)

Chair's report.

We have had a difficult summer. We had to deal with a number of campers on our triangle field and one camper in the dip between the Mound summit and the Ridgefield whom we believe was the cause of the graffiti on the gates, vandalism to the Somerset County Council information boards and to our beloved Brides Well Stone! However, without any evidence there was little we could do except ask him to move on. The police took photographs and the wonderful Kellands came and professionally cleaned the Stone. We are very grateful to them for their wonderful support with the upkeep of the Stone.

Our lovely new look leaflet also went into circulation this summer. You might see it around town or down at the Mound next time you visit the land. This was achieved mainly by Miranda Bruce, our Land Manager and with a little help from myself and the rest of the committee I think we have a good promotional leaflet now. However with the access to the Mound now compromised by the building of the industrial units in front of the Chapel Field, where the orchard is, I am concerned that people will not be able to find their way to our gate opposite the Darch Oils Yard. This access route certainly is not the prettiest (until you pass through our gate). We also have had to block the parking space in front of our gate with a vehicle because otherwise unknown camper vans or vehicles block it. This is our best solution for now, so that the farmer can get access into our fields for cutting the grass and maintenance. Our farmer, who pays an annual fee for the grass to be cut for hay, has been very patient with the camping situation, however was very concerned about the hay getting tent pegs in it and causing damage to his cows.

So now the fields are empty of campers, although we have to constantly check no one new has moved on. There is only one leaflet box on our access gate; the others have all disappeared and the South West Heritage Trust, who now manage the Chapel Field for Somerset County Council are not certain when they will be able to replace the information boards, possibly in 2018. The grass has been cut and the blackberries are out. Even with all these ups and down, it has become peaceful on the land again without the campers and the sloe berries are also ripening. Soon the starlings will return and Brides Mound is one of the best sites to visit just before dusk to experience their murmurations heading out to the levels to roost for the night before sunset.

May Bridgets/Bridies/Brighe's light shine brightly for us all throughout these months ahead, until Imbolc, her celebration day on the 1st of February, when we will again be celebrating on the summit of the Mound with her fire and our prayers, poems, wine and songs in 2018, as always. I hope you will be able to join us.

(Jaine Rain)

Blessings and Peace

