

EXCAVATION OF A MOUND AT CHRISTCHURCH, HANTS

BY H. ST. GEORGE GRAY.

When excavating in the autumn of 1921 at Crouch Hill,¹ Stanpit Marsh, Christchurch, on the north side of the Harbour, my attention was drawn by Mr. Herbert Druitt to a mound, south of Purewell, in a low field adjoining the marshes on Major F. A. Loudon's property, Hengistbury House, Christchurch.

On inspection I found the mound to be of slight elevation; its average height above the surface of the almost flat field being 2ft. (maximum 2.3ft., minimum 1.7ft.). The mound appeared to be circular and was surrounded by a ditch, about 8ft. in width. The diameter of the mound was 56ft., or, including the ditch, 72ft. The surface of the "silting" of the ditch was nowhere deeper than 0.4ft. below the surface of the field. The mound was overgrown in places with thorn, bramble and other bushes, and the place was rendered all the more picturesque by the presence of three Scotch firs, two growing on the top of the mound and one on the inner edge of the ditch.²

This mound is not marked on the 25in. Ordnance sheet as a tumulus, but only as a plantation. However, seeing that Crouch Hill, near by, had revealed prehistoric remains, I saw no reason why the mound under consideration should not be of ancient origin.

It might be recorded here that, at a short distance from the mound and to the east, a bronze palstave was found in November, 1921, by Sydney Burbidge, when a meadow³ was being converted into an extension of Mr. Maurice Prichard's Nurseries, at Stanpit. It was discovered at a depth of from 4ft. to 4½ft. in sandy soil.

The palstave has no loop, and is 6¾in. in length. The blade is of rather slender form with a comparatively narrow cutting-edge. The end for the cleft wooden haft is clumsy and wide in proportion to the somewhat attenuated neck and blade of the implement. Bubble-holes are seen penetrating the surface of one of the "pockets." The fin, little trimmed or worn down, is conspicuous along both sides. Weight in present condition, 13½ozs. avoirdupois. This specimen may be seen in Mr. Druitt's museum at Christchurch.

After a preliminary inspection, it was decided to excavate the mound at the first favourable opportunity, Mr. Druitt paying the expenses.

Major Loudon's permission having been obtained, I found it convenient to examine the site from Friday morning, October 13th, to Monday afternoon, October 16th, 1922. Three men were employed, two of whom had had experience a year or two

¹ On behalf of Mr. H. Gordon Selfridge, the owner.

² I am informed by Major Loudon that in the forties of last century a Kite was shot on this mound, said to be the last record of this bird in Hampshire. A white stoat (ermine) was living in the mound during the winter of 1920-21, which the Major refused to have killed.

³ The field is immediately behind a house called "Mayfield."

previously in similar work at Hengistbury.¹ Having plotted a section, a north-and-south² cutting, 43ft. in length by 6ft. in width, was begun at the south end in the position of the slight ditch. We dug down to the undisturbed sand and gravel, but no outline of a cut ditch could be traced. Here we found the stumps of two wooden posts, about 3ft. apart—perhaps the remains of a modern fence which may have encircled the mound. In this position water was reached at a minimum depth of 1.7ft.

The objects found here and in the cutting through the mound were disappointing, and consisted of the following, uncovered at all levels from the surface down to the undisturbed gravel:— Shards of modern glazed pottery (early 19th Century), including fragments of "Spode," small pieces of modern window-glass, and fragments of bricks and earthenware tiles, intermingled with a few flint flakes and cores, small flint implements with secondary chipping, and a fair number of burnt flints. The latter may have been calcined even in quite recent times. The flint implements are of Neolithic *type*, and were no doubt mixed with the soil from which the mound was formed.

As we worked northwards towards the middle, it was observed that all the material forming the mound was loose, mixed and "seamed"—not consolidated in the least. It soon became evident that not only the ditch but the mound also were of modern construction. At the centre the natural gravel was reached at a depth of 2.6ft.

An extension of the main cutting was made on the west, 8ft. by 5ft., as shown in the Plan, but here the soils were even more mixed, and modern shards of pottery were picked up frequently at levels deeper than some of the flint flakes and implements. None of the numbered flints were found deeper than 2ft., whereas some of the modern shards were removed from a depth of 2.3ft. Seventy-six flint flakes were counted from the cutting; of these a few showed signs of secondary chipping. In addition there are the nine implements, marked from 1 to 9, here described:—

1. Flake partly covered by the cortex or crust of the pebble from which it was struck; secondary chipping along one edge.

2. Long, oval, nicely-formed flint flake. Length, 35mm. (1½in.). In the form of a leaf-shaped arrowhead, which it may have been in the making.

3. Steep-edged, ovoid, flint scraper, of almost plano-convex cross-section. Cortex covers a great part of the back. The working extends about three-quarters of the way round the edge. Maximum diameter 45mm. (1½in.).

4. Flint scraper. Length, 50.5mm. (2in.), of horse-shoe type. The steep edge is fairly well worked; made from a rather faulty piece of flint.

5. Flake of a dark slaty-looking flint, with some secondary chipping at the edges.

¹ Tom Ford, Wm. Henry Ford and George Freeman. Mr. Druitt's assistant, B. Dear, also rendered me some help.

² The north point was fixed on the plan with a compass which was slightly defective, but it cannot be far wrong.

6. Scraper, rather roughly worked. The cortex covers nearly three-quarters of the back of the implement.

7. Long, narrow flint flake, having a saw-like edge. The cortex covers about two-thirds of the back. Length, 37.5mm. (1½ in.).

8. Scraper of a light khaki-coloured translucent flint. Length, 45.5mm. (1¾ in.); of duck-bill type, but somewhat broken at the butt-end.

9. Leaf-shaped flint flake, translucent and of a warm khaki colour. Finely worked along one of the convex edges on both faces. Length, 34mm. (1⅓ in.). Perhaps an incomplete arrowhead, but more probably a small knife, complete, without its haft.

Sufficient work was done to assure me that this mound, situated in a field which is sometimes flooded, was of modern construction. Had the excavations revealed any indication of the mound being of prehistoric origin, the work would have been continued. Its original purpose is unknown. Major Loudon said that he had heard it stated that it had been the site of a maze.

NOTE.—The mould composing the mound may have come from the garden of Hengistbury House; but the quantity of flint flakes found in the cutting (almost suggesting a flint factory) seems a little remarkable, if the whole mound be of modern origin. Yet, short of uncovering the whole site, which is impossible without removing the three trees, we must accept Mr. St. George Gray's conclusion, which is strictly in accordance with the available evidence. If the mound is modern, it only shows how soon and easily its origin has been forgotten; for nothing appears to be known beyond Major Loudon's information that it may have been a maze. If so, it must have been very small; nor is there any trace of yew or other shrubs which composed it.

The meadow in which the mound stands is floodable, but this mound can scarcely have been made either for a hayrick or for cattle, for which, of course, a clump of trees would afford shelter. An idea which occurs to me is, that it is just possible that the mound may be the site of a small round barrow, long ago dug up and rendered unrecognizable, but just surviving, mixed up with modern matter, in the form which Mr. Gray describes above. Perhaps evidence, documentary or otherwise, may some day be forthcoming to establish its origin. I feel very grateful to Mr. Gray for the careful attention which he has given to this mound, and to Major Loudon for allowing it to be examined. At any rate, it adds a paragraph from Mr. Gray's pen to the history of Christchurch; so that the labour, though disappointing in result, has not been in vain.—H. DRUITT.

[The Society is indebted to Mr. Drutt for the cost of one of the illustrations.—ED.]

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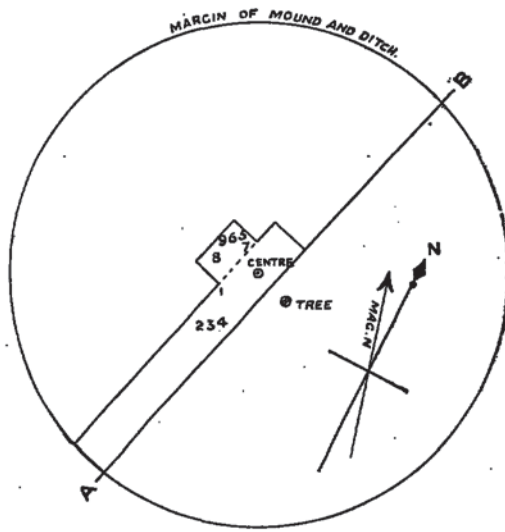
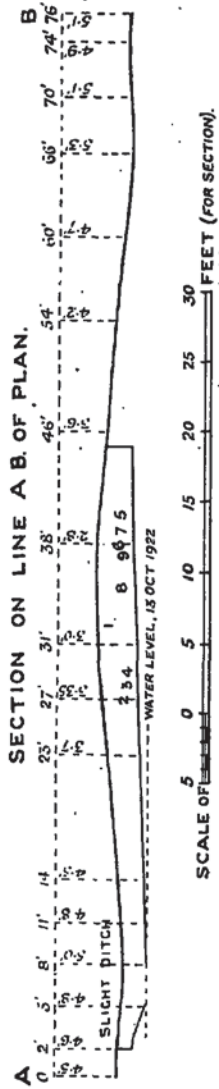
MOUND NEAR HENGISTBURY HOUSE, CHRISTCHURCH, 13TH OCTOBER, 1922.
View from the S.E., with Christchurch Priory in the distance. Beginning of Excavations.



MOUND NEAR HENGISTBURY HOUSE, CHRISTCHURCH, 16TH OCTOBER, 1922.

View taken from W.S.W., when finishing the cutting through the Mound.

[From a Photograph by Mr. H. St. George Gray.



**PLAN OF MOUND IN FIELD ADJOINING
THE MARSHES ON MAJOR F.A. LOUDON'S
PROPERTY, HENGISTBURY HOUSE,
CHRISTCHURCH, HANTS.**

H. St. George Gray
Mens et Delt., 1922