

Geophysical Survey, Hollies Lane, Batheaston.

Re-evaluation April 2022



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Introduction

On taking up the position of Director of Archaeology, the author carried out an assessment of the published BACAS reports along with other investigations attempting to find field work projects for the society. A report that stood out was the Hollies Lane geophysics report (Jackson & Oswin, 2019) which suggested the feature at ST 779 690 (Figure 1), was man-made and carried a further suggestion of being a potential long barrow.

If this feature were a long barrow, this would be extremely important to the Neolithic landscape of the area, long barrows (usually Neolithic) are absent in the area for a radius of several miles, add to this only one cursus and no causewayed enclosures in the area would make this a unique find.

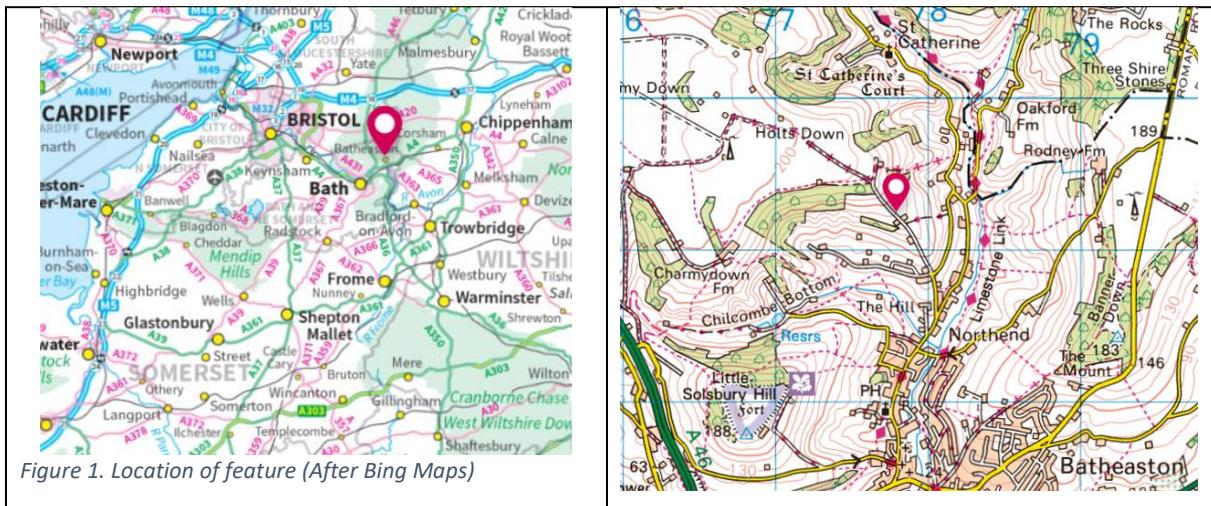


Figure 1. Location of feature (After Bing Maps)

History

In July 2019, the B.A.C.A.S. (BACAS) Geophysics team conducted a survey of the hill that was perceived to be of long barrow shape and reported the findings, (Jackson & Oswin 2019).

The findings included the following points:

1. On the west side, the mound appears as a distinct feature, although this is less obvious on the east side where the slope is continuous. The mound blends into the rising ridge at its north end, and the mound is approximately 60m long and 25m wide.
2. It was reported that someone perceived the feature to be a possible long barrow in one of the Wessex Water documents.
3. The feature “seems to have had the centre scooped out and filled with low resistance (wet) material.”
4. “The results suggest the mound may be manmade, but further work is needed to identify the provenance of the feature.”
5. The long barrow suggestion is credible but has not been proven.

Discussion

In 1991 in advance of a new reservoir to be constructed by Wessex Water, Bath Archaeological Trust (BAT) undertook excavations and surveys immediately to the north and northeast of the feature, a

report was written and lodged with the HER, (Russett, 1991). As can be seen in Figures 2 and 3, area 3 is in the field immediately north (a matter of metres) of the feature.

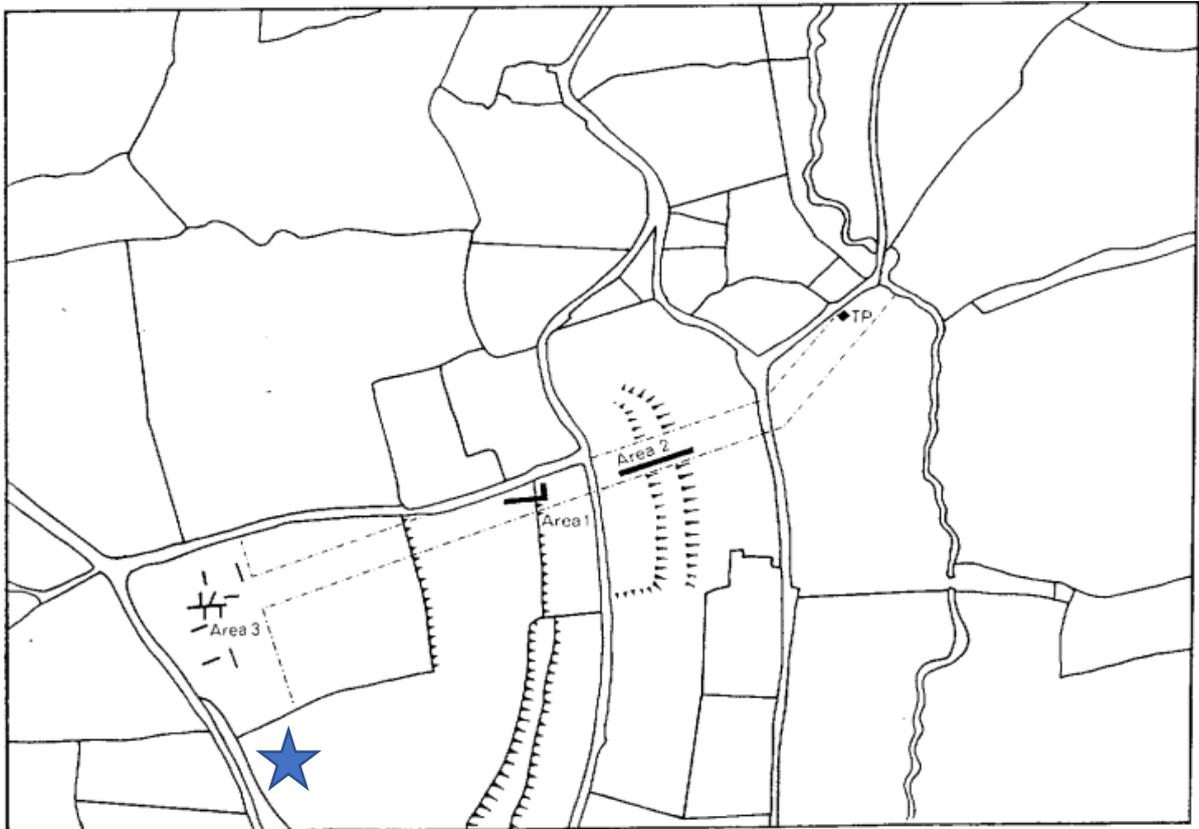


Figure 2 Map of the BAT excavations 1, 2 and 3 showing the location (star) of the feature later surveyed (After Russett)

Discussion of points noted:

Point 1.

As seen in the photograph (Figure 4), the mound rather than blending into the ridge at the north end of the field is part of a longer hilltop, and the “slight plateau” noted in the BAT report in which area 3 was excavated can also be seen and is part of the same hill.

*Note, apologies on the reproduction of the photograph, normal copying facilities were not available at time of visit, November 2021.

Point 2.

The features around area 3 were discussed in the BAT report and the Holloway forming the northern boundary of the reservoir was reported as ancient, probably prehistoric. If the southern half of the hill were seriously considered a potential long barrow it would be strange that this was not noted in the published report.



Figure 3. Report map overlaid on current map, with star showing area of survey (after Bing Maps & Russett.)

Point 3

The BACAS geophysics reported that the centre was scooped out and refilled with different material, the BAT report states that Area 3, the plateau, *“has a solid geology basically consisting of Oolitic limestone, but with a series of clay-filled natural features and in some areas, a thick (up to 2m depth) cover of clay above the bedrock”*. The BAT report also stated that Area 3 underwent an earlier geophysical survey which *“concluded that there was a major natural clay-filled feature running north-south through the site”*.

Area 3 did show several slight features on an earlier proton magnetometer survey, however the trenches placed over these features found no archaeological features.

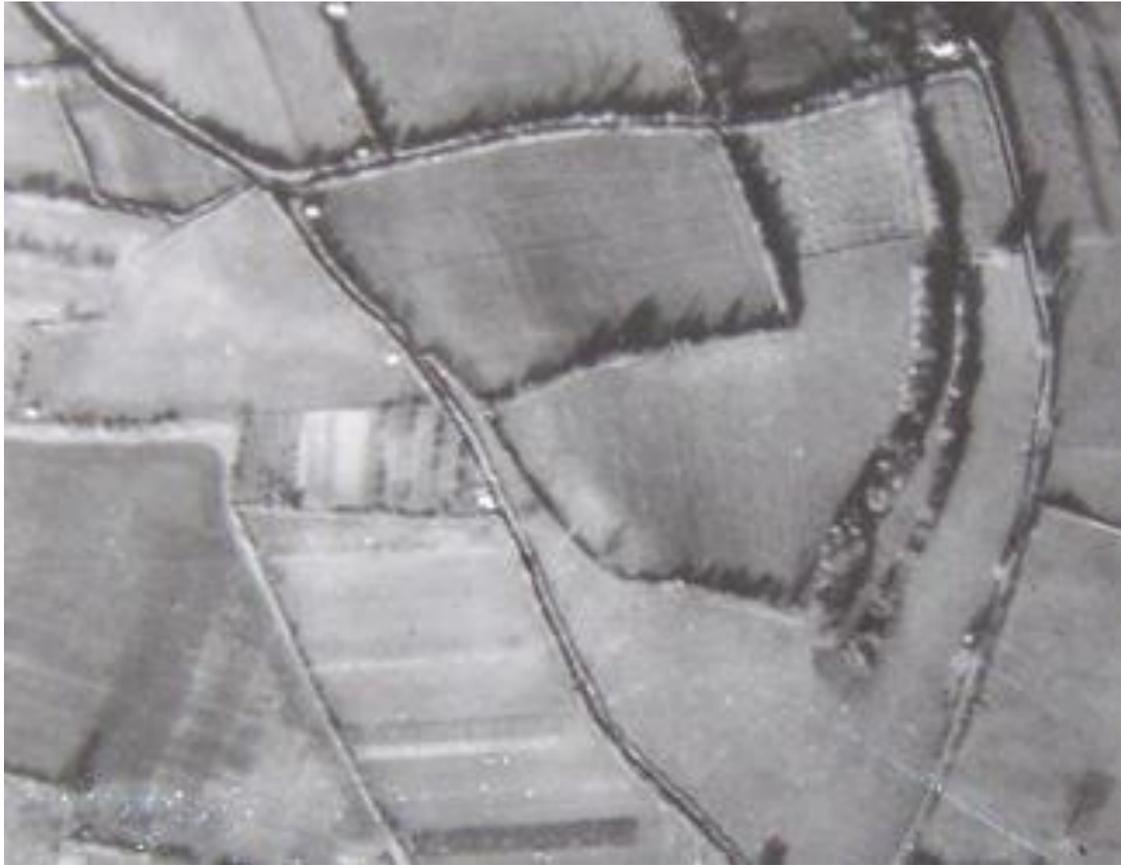


Figure 4. Aerial Photograph (After National Monuments Register)

Point 4.

The suggestion that the mound is man-made due to an area of low resistance material is at odds with the BAT report which concludes (with excavation) that the low resistance material is naturally occurring pockets of clay.

Conclusion

Part of the shape of the mound was a contributory reason for the geophysical survey conducted by BACAS, however, as can be seen in the photograph in Figure 4, what appears on the ground is not a barrow but is part of a longer hilltop of which in the northern half is a plateau.

The BACAS suggestion that this may be manmade due to an area of low resistance on the geophysical survey is mirrored on the north half of the hill by naturally occurring pockets of clay of which a longer feature extends to the south. Some of these features were excavated by BAT with no archaeological remains found in either finds or features.

To build a mound of this substantial size would require a great deal of material, there is no evidence of ditches as would be expected with a long barrow.

The BACAS report states the long barrow suggestion is credible, however, currently there is no evidence to support this statement.

It is recommended that no further archaeological work is necessary at this site and is no longer under consideration for further field work.

Bibliography

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