

A Young Person's Guide to the Mount



A History of the Cheswick Green Mount

By Peter Tonks

Welcome to

A Young Person' Guide to The Mount

This booklet has been produced to help young people find out information about an ancient earth works of which about a half is still standing and can be visited. The Mount is in Chatsworth Close, Cheswick Green, Solihull, West Midlands, B90 4SW. This earthwork is in the ownership of and maintained by Cheswick Green Parish Council.

The booklet was sponsored by Cheswick Green Parish Council in partnership with Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

The booklet can be accessed in Solihull Borough Council's Central Library or on Cheswick Green Parish Council's web page on www.cheswickgreen-pc.gov.uk. A copy has also been sent to all the Primary Schools in the Blythe Ward.

Cheswick Green Parish Council wishes to thank Peter Tonks for all his diligent research and time to put this booklet together and hope many people, young and old, find it interesting and enjoyable.



The Mount - Cheswick Green

Introduction:

The Mount is possibly the second oldest built structure in the Solihull Borough. On the front cover you can see an aerial view of the Mount taken in 1972. This was before its part destruction in 1973 to make way for new houses. It shows the outline by trees in the form of a “D” shaped earthwork, now at the side of Cheswick Green School. Although most of the Mount was destroyed, part of the earthwork remains near Chatsworth Close.

Imagine we could clear away all the trees and look at the actual Mount. The picture we’d see would be like the below model, which can be seen in Earlswood Village Museum.



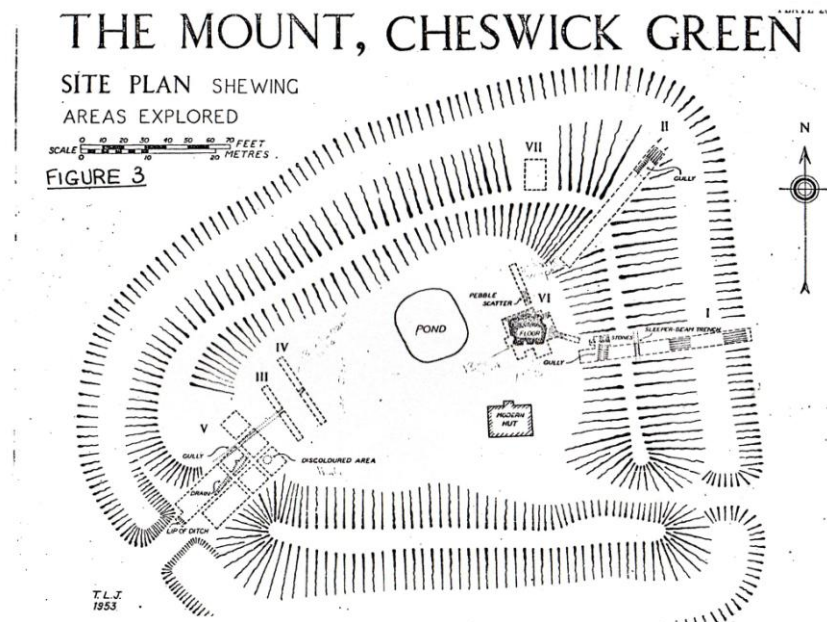
Model by the late John Sloan – now on view in Earlswood Village Museum.

To understand more about this strange earthwork, we need to look at the evidence to provide answers.

- What was it?
- How old is it?
- Who built it?
- Why was it built?
- How was it built?

The Archaeological Dig - Why was it carried out?

In 1953 it was realised that a valuable ancient earthwork, a scheduled ancient monument, could at some point be lost to the nation's heritage. The Birmingham Archaeological Society, under the leadership of Chief Archaeologist Mr. T.L. Jones, began a dig to try to uncover the secrets of the Mount. They drew a plan of the site showing its size, the moat, and entrances to the interior. We shall look at drawings of their finds later.



What did the dig tell us?

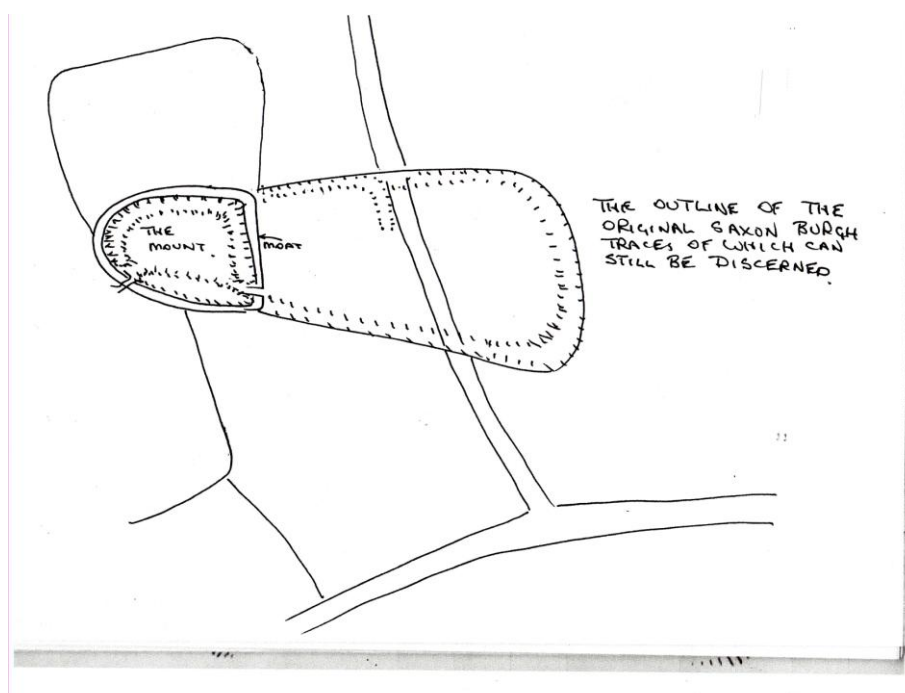
It revealed that the Mount had been strengthened and enlarged during three different periods of history.

- 1) During the Roman Occupation of Britain (AD 43-410), this was a platform of stone with post holes and was possibly a military camp, built to defend the Roman stretch of the nearby Stratford Road.
- 2) During the Saxon/Viking era (AD 400-900), known as the "Dark Ages", it was a vertical embankment, mainly of yellow clay. It was probably constructed by the indigenous people living at Cheswick Green, as a defensive fort against marauding robbers or the threat of Viking raiders.
- 3) In the Medieval period during the Wars of the Roses (AD 1455-1487), between Lancaster and York, the bank was increased in height, the moat deepened and the two entrances constructed.

Why was it a “D” shape?

This is difficult to answer. Jones thought that it was constructed to meet the risk of an attack. It took 1000 men a year to build at the time. One opinion is that the Mount was part of a Saxon Burgh (Borough today), which extended across the fields near Creynolds Lane, but was reduced in size later, as shown below.

The shape was thought to be good for defence and the construction of a wooden watch-tower at one end supports this.



Why was it built?

The need for a Roman Camp was vital at the time. In the Saxon/Viking period there were frequent raids by Vikings who travelled up the larger rivers of the Severn, Tame and Avon, before marching across the land, robbing and killing people as they went. Some eventually settled here, and it was Alfred the Great who finally divided Britain into two halves, the Dane law to the north and Mercia (Alfred's Kingdom) to the south. At Cheswick Green, an Anglo/Scandinavian by the name of Hanchetel settled here and farmed 8 acres of land, which were later given as a marriage gift to Sieriche, daughter of William de Huleal (Ullenhall), a Norman knight.

The Saxons living at Cheswick Green may have felt threatened and built up the Mount to be a place of safety for families and their livestock in the event of an attack.

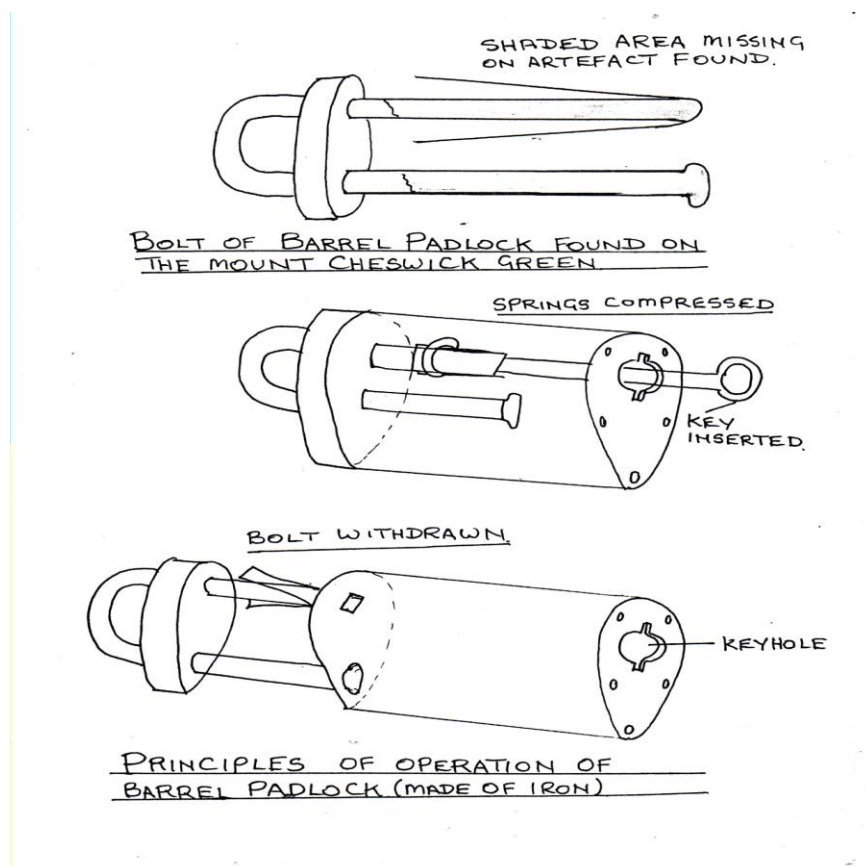
In Tudor times, a civil war known as the Wars of the Roses, lasted from 1455 to 1487. The Mount was strengthened in this period to withstand attack and may have been held by different armies at various times. The Tudors emerged as victors.

Was the Mount ever attacked?

There is some evidence of a battle at Cheswick Green in Saxon times., In a letter dated 1677, Sir Simon Archer of Umberslade Hall, referred to a mass grave, which also contained shields and spears being found on his land. It was estimated that the remains of up to 2000 bodies are buried here. This suggests that a significant battle was fought, but sadly the site of the mass grave is unknown. During a dig an item of horse armour was found, but this was from Tudor times, (much later) and is not in itself proof of a skirmish or battle.

What objects were found on the Mount?

Drawings of pottery and finds are shown below. Perhaps the most important find was a barrel padlock of a type known only to have been introduced by the Vikings. Examples of similar padlocks are in the Yorvik Museum in York, the Viking capital. Below is a sketch of how it worked. There is a similar example of part of a barrel padlock in Earlswood Village Museum, but this is not a local find.



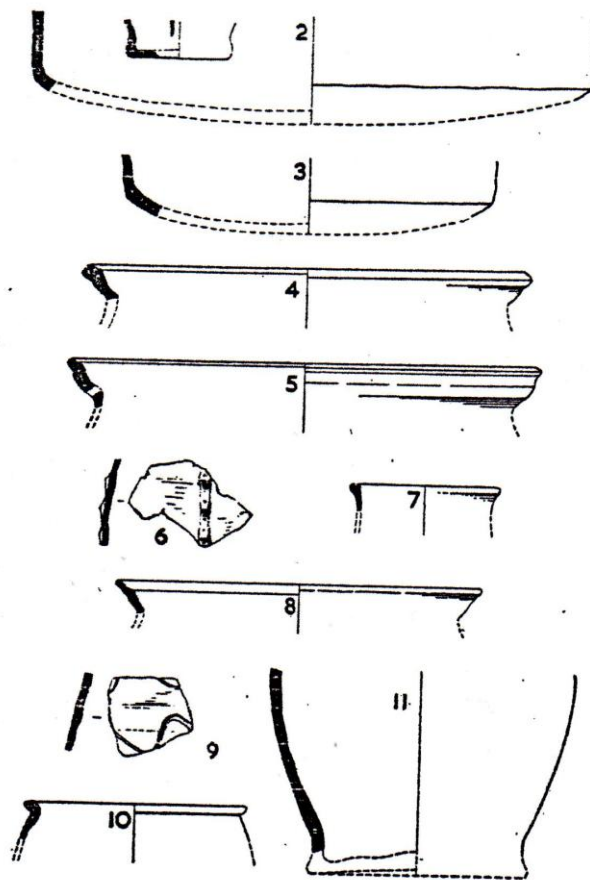
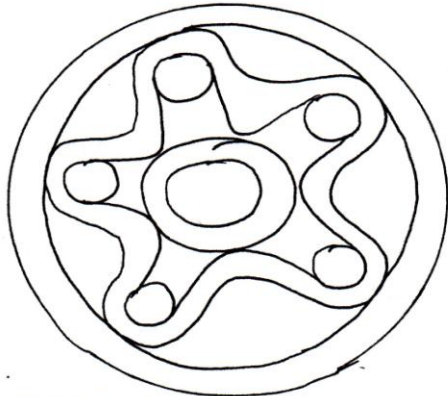


FIG. 3. THE MOUNT, CHESWICK GREEN. Pottery.

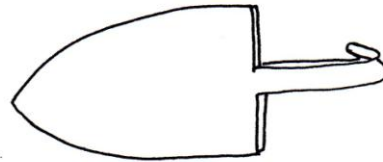
Pottery from the 1953 Dig.

This shows how pots were made and used on the Mount by the people who once lived on Cheswick Green. Using the pieces of pottery called sherds, the archaeologists were able to reconstruct the shape of the pots to give us the pictures shown above. The pottery contained grit, because to obtain clay, the people simply dug it out of the ground. Today the clay used in potteries to make our cups, plates and vases, is refined to remove all the grit first, so it is very smooth to use.

Appendix I
OTHER FINDS FROM VICINITY OF THE MOUNT.



SHIELD BOSS



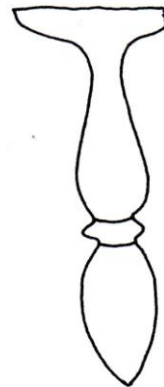
ARMOURIAL SHIELD



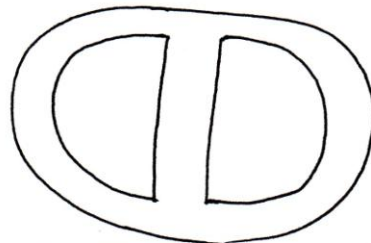
CHAIN MAIL HOOK.



SERPENT RINGS



SAXON
HAND MIRROR HANDLE.



CLOTHES BUCKLE.

Some of these objects were found on the Mount and are on display at Earlswood Village Museum. The chain mail hook and the serpent rings are Roman. The clothes buckle and armourial shield are probably medieval.

Does the position of the Mount form part of a line of similar “border forts”?

It could be that the Mount was part of a line of forts used to form a border separating the Dane law from the Alfred’s kingdom. There is evidence of similar earthworks, at Alderminster (Northampton) and Pembridge (Staffordshire). However, more investigation needs to be done before any claims can be made. In this area of the Forest of Arden, there remain a large number of defensive moats of varying shapes and sizes, although the Mount is the largest of them all. There are also smaller examples near to Cheswick Green that are moated. An early map of Cheswick Green shows a moat at the bottom of Creynolds Lane and just inside the entrance to Cheswick Way, which is thought to be the ancient manor of the Crewenhale family. At the training college half way up Creynolds Lane, previously known as Elliots Hall, are the remains of two moats.

How can I find out more about the Mount?

A section of the earthwork remains at the side of Chatsworth Close, Cheswick Green, Solihull, B90 4SW and can be visited at any time. This is only a very small section of what was once a large structure, most of which was destroyed in 1973.

Activities you can do.

- Visit Earlswood Village Museum at Earlswood Village Hall.
- Find out more about the Romans, Saxons, Vikings and the Tudors – Wars of the Roses
- Visit the New Place Museum in Stratford upon Avon which has wonderful examples of Saxon grave finds.
- Draw pictures of Romans, Saxons and Vikings. Ask your school to mount a display of these people and the way they lived.
- Search your own back garden, because families living in different parts of Cheswick Green have found very early spears, decayed, but recognisable. You may be lucky, but do ask permission before you dig up the flower beds.

Look at the photograph below. Try to locate Mr. T.L. Jones who is standing on a raised platform at one end of the Mount. It is believed to be the site of the original lookout tower. How high do you think the tower was?



Bibliography:

Dugdale W. *Antiquities of Warwickshire*

Hook D. *The Landscape of Anglo Saxon England* (1998)

Jones T.L. ‘Excavations at the Mount, Cheswick Green, Shirley’.
Birmingham Archaeological Society Transactions for 1953.
Vol.71 (1955).

Salter M. *The Castles and Moated Mansions of Warwickshire* (1992)

Tonks P.K. *An Archaeological Report on the Earthwork at Cheswick Green*
(2001)

(This report was produced by Peter Tonks as part of a course in Archaeology run by the University of Warwick. Peter is a retired Physics and Maths teacher with an interest in Archaeology. He was a member of the ‘Save the Mount Campaign in 1973.)

Wilson D. *Moated Sites* (1985)

Sources:

Warwickshire Information Sheet –*Mancetter A.D.60*

Sites and Monuments Records 3065 (West Midlands Joint Data Team)-
The Mount Cheswick Green (1985)

Victoria County History of Warwickshire p.168/171.

Earlswood Village Museum, Earlswood Village Hall, Shutt Lane Earlswood.

www.earlswoodvillagemuseum.org.uk

e mail: info@earlswoodvillagemuseum.org.uk

Open on the first Saturday of the month from March to October at 2.30pm.

Special visit by arrangement with the curator Val Tonks.

Primary Sources:

Collection of Deeds W.C.R.O. Ref.CR 1095/1-20

© Copyright. P.K. Tonks 2015.