

**DIARY OF A DEAN: BEING AN  
ACCOUNT OF THE EXAMINATION OF  
SILBURY HILL, AND OF VARIOUS  
BARROWS AND OTHER EARTHWORKS  
ON THE DOWNS OF NORTH WILTS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649561889

Diary of a Dean: Being an Account of the Examination of Silbury Hill, and of Various Barrows and Other Earthworks on the Downs of North Wilts by John Merewether

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**JOHN MEREWETHER**

**DIARY OF A DEAN: BEING AN  
ACCOUNT OF THE EXAMINATION OF  
SILBURY HILL, AND OF VARIOUS  
BARROWS AND OTHER EARTHWORKS  
ON THE DOWNS OF NORTH WILTS**



605

R. P. L. Booker.

DIARY OF A DEAN. Eton.

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE

EXAMINATION OF SILBURY HILL,

AND OF

VARIOUS BARROWS AND OTHER EARTHWORKS ON THE  
DOWNS OF NORTH WILTS,

OPENED AND INVESTIGATED IN THE MONTHS OF JULY AND AUGUST 1849.

With Illustrations.

—♦—  
BY THE LATE

JOHN MEREWETHER, D.D. F.S.A.

DEAN OF HEREFORD.

"Ducere sollicitæ jucunda oblivis vitæ."  
HON.

LONDON:  
GEORGE BELL, 186 FLEET STREET.

1851.

## ADVERTISEMENT.

---

THE following Diary is reprinted from the volume detailing the proceedings of the Archæological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, at Salisbury in 1849. In issuing it separately, the Publisher is fulfilling the wishes of the lamented Author, expressed to him a very short time before his death. Dr. Merewether hoped that it might in that form attain a wider circulation, and by increasing general interest in the antiquities treated of, tend to promote their more careful local preservation.

The Illustrations are from his own drawings, executed during his last illness. He himself regarded them as most unpretending; but the little volume may be looked upon as a legacy to his native County, whose antiquities he began in early life to study, and never ceased to estimate as of the highest National importance.

G. B.

*July 1851.*



## CONTENTS.

---

	PAGE
EXAMINATION OF SILBURY HILL . . . . .	8
EXAMINATION OF BARROWS AND OTHER EARTHWORKS AT SILBURY	
HILL AND AVEBURY . . . . .	18
ANTIQUITIES FOUND NEAR AVEBURY . . . . .	44





THE

## EXAMINATION OF SILBURY HILL,

IN JULY AND AUGUST 1849.

AVEBURY, Silbury Hill, Wansdyke, and their adjacent downs, studded with tumuli and cairns and earthworks of endless variety and surpassing interest, were known to me from my earliest youth; and so intimately associated in my memory have they been with those happy days, and the pleasure of then contemplating and investigating them, that it required no greater inducement than the intimation that I might be useful in examining the progress of the excavations at Silbury, on my way to Salisbury, to attend the meeting of the Archæological Institute, to determine me at once to set off for that purpose. Accordingly, on the evening of July the 18th, I found myself safely deposited at the Waggon and Horses Inn at Beckhampton; whence, having deposited my luggage and secured a resting-place within sight of Silbury, I proceeded without delay to inspect the progress already made in its examination, which had commenced on the 10th of July. Although, during my sojourn here, my attention was devoted at intervals to the antiquities of the neighbourhood, and not without success, during such times as the workmen were engaged in the tunnel, in which there was barely room for two persons to pass, I purpose to confine my remarks in this communication to Silbury alone, and to reserve my other discoveries for a subsequent paper. Before I enter into the hill itself, I will venture to detail some few particulars which, although perhaps already known to many, may yet serve to make this record of what I observed (and in some respects I alone) more intelligible.

The tumulus was originally formed upon the gradual slope of a hill, rising from north to south at an angle of about four degrees from its point of section with the horizontal base-line of the natural hill. The circumference

of the tumulus, after the removal for its formation of the before-mentioned natural hill on the east, north, and west sides to a very considerable extent, is 1550 feet; and it is remarkable, although I have not seen it noticed by former writers, that the verge of the base is set round with *sarsen*\* stones, 3 or 4 feet in diameter, and at intervals of about 18 feet; of these, however, only eight are now visible, although others may be covered with the detritus of the sloping sides of the tumulus, and overgrown with turf. The tumulus rises at an angle of 32 degrees, is in its vertical measurement 125 feet high, and has on its summit a level area of about 100 feet in diameter, in which are still observable the remains of the shaft worked in 1777 by the Duke of Northumberland and Colonel Drax, and the mounds of earth which the excavators had not taken the trouble to throw in. It is much to be regretted that no detailed account of these operations is upon record, and it is hardly credible that they could have been completed without some account of their progress and the discoveries effected, and perhaps even yet such documents may come to light.† On the south the original constructors of this stupendous mound left two narrow isthmuses of earth, con-

\* 'Sarsen' is the name given by the inhabitants of this district to the fine compact white sandstones of which Avebury Temple, Stonehenge, the Cromlech at Clatford, and the Grey Wethers, are composed; and of which there are tens of thousands still scattered over these hills and their valleys; some having evidently formed *cistvaens*, with the gallery of approach to the chamber, some cromlechs, some avenues of approach to consecrated spots, some circles round the sepulchral deposits, some lines of demarcation, few of which are known as they deserve to be, and all, alas, are annually reduced in their number by the appropriation of them to the purposes of building. The stone for the new railway-bridge at Windsor is taken from Clatford Bottom. The cromlech there I recollect when it stood in the midst of the Valley of Stones; now it is surrounded by a field of turnips.

† The following are statements made by two old men as to the former examination of Silbury Hill:

Richard Maskelyn, of Beckhampton, aged eighty, has often heard his father tell of the miners out of Cornwall that cut into Silbury Hill; they went, as he heard,

down to the bottom, and they found "a man."

John Blake, of Avebury, aged ninety-five years, states that he recollects when the miners from Cornwall dug into Silbury Hill; it was when he was keeping company with his first wife, and was about twenty years of age. He went with her to see the place, and they cut her gown. They went down to the bottom, and found a man — i. e. a skeleton, in the phrasology of the Wiltshire Downs, where the flint-diggers are constantly in the habit of finding skeletons, both in the barrows and frequently on the verge or slope of them, as well as in the plain down, unmarked by any irregularity of surface. These two old men, therefore, may have been led to infer what was expected, and to declare that "a man" was found; though such assertion indicates rather what they would deem likely than the positive fact.

I subjoin the only record of this operation known, extracted from Douglas's *Nenia Britannica*, 1793, p. 161:

"The great hill of Silbury, generally considered as a barrow, was opened by the direction of the late Duke of Northumberland and Colonel Drax, under the