

YCCCCART

Yatton Congresbury Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team

Newsletter February 2019

Chairman's chat

It is with much sadness that we report the recent deaths of two of YCCCCART's founding members, Shirley Everden and our president, Brian Bradbury. We will miss them, not only for their expertise and knowledge, but for their encouragement and friendship. Our thoughts are with their family and friends.

The rest of this newsletter is concerned with the standing stone circles at Stanton Drew, providing background information before our visit there on the 21 February. Please read Vince's article before the visit.

Peter English

Obituary

Brian Bradbury a founder member of YCCCCART died on January 24th 2019; he was 86.

Brian Bradbury had been a stalwart of Yatton Local History Society for many years and contributed to Yatton Yesterdays from 1987. He was chairman then president of the society for over 20 years retiring in 2009.

Yatton, Claverham, Cleeve and Congresbury Archaeological Research Group (YCCCCART) were formed following a number of local history studies. In 1985 Commander Williams was commissioned to survey older buildings in Yatton. This included Claverham Court Farm and outbuildings. Brian was involved with these latter surveys and in 2004 discussed with the late John Atwell how his "tithe barn" at Claverham Court Farm could be surveyed with a view to making an application for a grant to contribute to its restoration.

At this point Vince Russett North Somerset Archaeologist was involved and some members of Yatton Local History Society, including Mary Campbell, formed a working party meeting on Thursday mornings. Brian with Vince and Chris Short spear-headed subsequent developments, which led to the formation of YCCCCART in 2008.

Brian was YCCCCART's chairman during the early years, then president and was active in the field until ill health brought this to an end in 2017.

His considerable skills in encouraging members and others to concentrate their skills to a common purpose were key to the success of the many projects in which he was involved.

Marianne Pitman

A longer version can be found on the website.



Brian at Bickley



Taking a well-earned break. Shirley and Brian on Cadbury Hill

Shirley Everden, died 20th January 2019 aged 85.

I first met Shirley, who had recently joined us from CHERT, on the Claverham Court Farm project in 2004. It was clear from the start that she was very knowledgeable and as I later found out, a highly qualified archaeologist who had gained a first class honours degree from Bristol University in her early sixties.

She had a great deal of skill and practical experience, an example of which was her work with Mick Ashton at Shapwick. Shirley was very concerned with correct archaeological procedures and the accuracy of measurements on site. This I remember from the many other projects that I worked with her where her contribution was invaluable and YCCCART are indebted to her. Thank you Shirley.

Christine Luffham



Shirley with one of her beloved Jack Russells.

Shirley was an excellent archaeologist. A founder member of YCCCART she ensured that professional standards were met. She was a delightful lady who knew what she wanted and how it was to be done. She could be quite forceful as we found to our expense when she didn't think we had done something properly.

It was Shirley who taught us the art of manual surveying and ensured we didn't just stick to geophysics. Shirley supervised several of our excavations.

Although no longer active within the group Shirley used to call in for coffee after our surveys on a Thursday. We will miss her.

Chris Short

A longer version can be found on the website.

Stanton Drew

This article benefits greatly from the pioneering geophysical surveys of English Heritage (1997) and BACAS/Richard Sermon in 2009-10 and 2012.

Also, see video at <https://heritageaction.wordpress.com/2011/09/17/stonehenge-woodhenge-avebury-and-stanton-drew/>

Firstly, let's start with what Stanton Drew megalithic complex isn't.

It isn't simple: the rings of rocks and the outliers are part of a much larger picture. It's nothing to do with the Druids (despite the pub name!). It isn't a phenomenon all constructed at the same time: like any well-studied prehistoric site, it has developed over time. Our (natural) tendency to collapse time when we consider the past (that milestone, that church, that

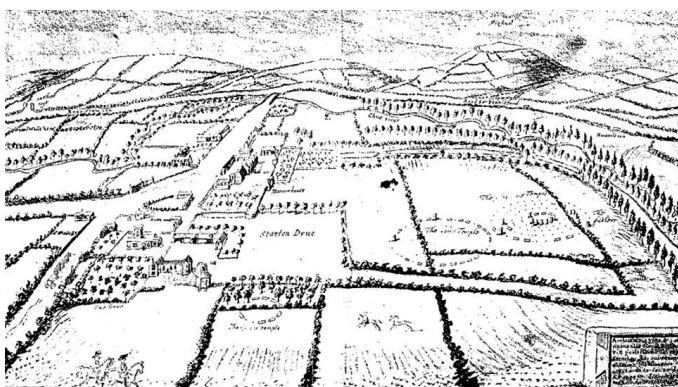
hill fort are all just 'old' until we come to practise archaeology). It's nothing to do with 'Chariots of the Gods', nor is it evidence of a lost prehistoric civilisation with special scientific or magical powers. Glad we've got that out of the way.

Consider an iceberg. As we all know, most of it is underwater and invisible. So most of the Stanton Drew complex is invisible, until examined.

Now let's consider that name. The first part is easy: Old English 'tun' (settlement, farm) + 'stan' (stone). 'The settlement by notable stones', in other words. The suffix, which has caused much excitement among antiquaries, is named after a former land owner: from John Collinson's History of Somerset (1791):

'...after him came Gefferey de Stanton, who had lands in Timsborough, Stowey, and other places in this neighbourhood, 8 Henry III. One of this family bore the appellation of Drogo, or Drew, de Stanton, and gave it his name by way of distinction from another parish in this neighbourhood called Stanton-Prior, and from Stanton-Wick, a hamlet in this parish.'

All the usual suspects examined Stanton Drew. John Aubrey visited in 1664, at which time the Great Circle was divided into fields growing corn. William Stukely (who rather fancied himself an arch-druid) visited and drew one of his aerial views: our own John Skinner rocked up there at least five times. In the 19th century Dymond, Lloyd Morgan and many other antiquaries visited. In the 20th, Leslie Grinsell wrote about the folklore of the stones (which is extensive).



A view of the Great Temple, with the Woodhouse at Stanton Drew, July 1723.



However, the stone complex remained little understood (or even visited) until late in the 20th century, when the spectacular results of an English Heritage survey changed everything.

Within the complex are three stone circles, two avenues, and a 'cove'. There are also outliers: Hautville's Quoit and the Tynning Stones.

The principal site is the Main Circle, which has an avenue leading eastwards from it. Nearby is the North-East Circle, which has an avenue leading south-east from it. The two avenues coalesce. The two circles and their avenues are all in one field, which is called 'Stone Close'. In a separate field is the South Circle.

West of this, in the pub garden of the Druids Arms, are the three stones known as the Cove.

Well to the west of the monument, 700 m away, there are two stones, the Tynning Stones. They are known to have been moved in recent times.

To the north-east of the monument, 500 m away across the River Chew, near the Pensford to Chew Magna road is Hautville's Quoit.

The air photograph shows in the centre, the Great Circle, the second largest stone circle in England (after Avebury). Compare it with the houses in the village to get some idea of its epic scale. The north-east circle can be seen top right: the southern circle is in the triangular enclosure at bottom centre: the Cove is in the pub garden at bottom left, SW of the parish church.

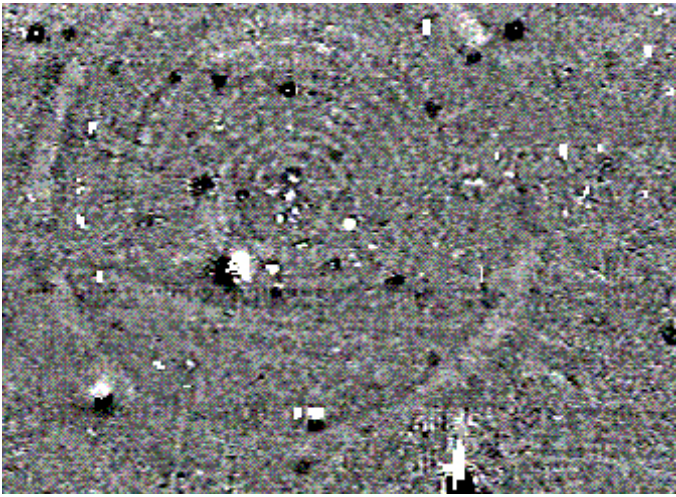
So, what did English Heritage (now Historic England) find? Previous to their survey, only the stones themselves (and some rather half-hearted probing attempts) were there to say anything of the site.

The results in the Great Circle showed a large external ditch, with a 50m wide entrance facing east, and 9 concentric rings of post-holes, each up to 1m wide with 1m gaps between them. There was presumably an outer bank (derived from digging the ditch, and presumably used to refill it later). By definition, this makes the Great Circle a henge.

As Oswin and Sermon point out, the likelihood is that the timbers were erected first, then the ditch dug, otherwise the importing and erection of the timbers would be far more difficult.



*Part of the North-east Circle, Stanton Drew village in background
© Historic England*

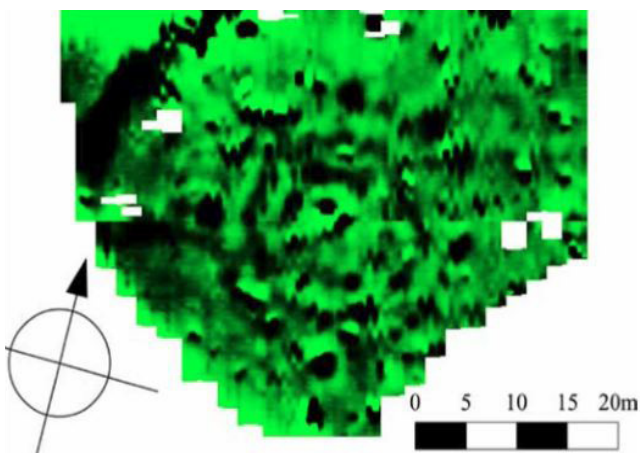


The astounding results of the magnetometry survey in 1997:
© Historic England

Neither is there any reason to suppose that the stone circle is of the same date as the timbers: it has been argued that the erection of circles of stones at sites that were formerly in timber is an act of closure.

The north-east circle is much smaller, but also has an avenue, reaching from the circle towards the Chew. Again, it has been speculated (on a much longer scale, of course) that avenues such as that at Stonehenge lead from water to a circle (or perhaps vice versa) and that this connection to flowing water was important to those who constructed the monuments. It also has a post-setting in it, revealed by the two sets of surveys: a square stone setting or cist is revealed in the circle by cropmarks in hot summers. Again, this does not have to be contemporary with the other stones. Such cists are known at other stone circles, most famously at Calanais (Callanish) on Lewis.

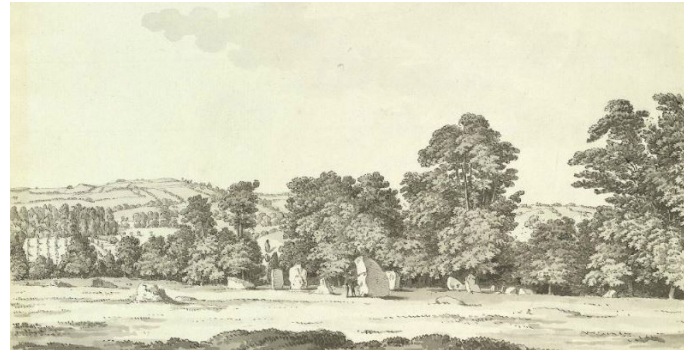
The smaller stone circle to the south across the farm track was thought to be possibly bogus before the geophysical surveys, but they showed categorically that it is not. Within the circle are three concentric circles of post holes. What are we to make of these multi-ringed post structures? The video (mentioned previously) suggests they form a stylised forest,



Clear signs in the gradiometry result that the south circle also has rings of postholes within it: © Oswin & Sermon

perhaps for hunting or blood sports. No-one seems to think they were roofed buildings (although given the sheer number of posts, this cannot be entirely ruled out).

The stones in the circles are largely of silicified conglomerate and conglomerate, with a few oolite and Pennant Sandstone. Hauteville's Quoit appears to be of sarsen from Wiltshire.

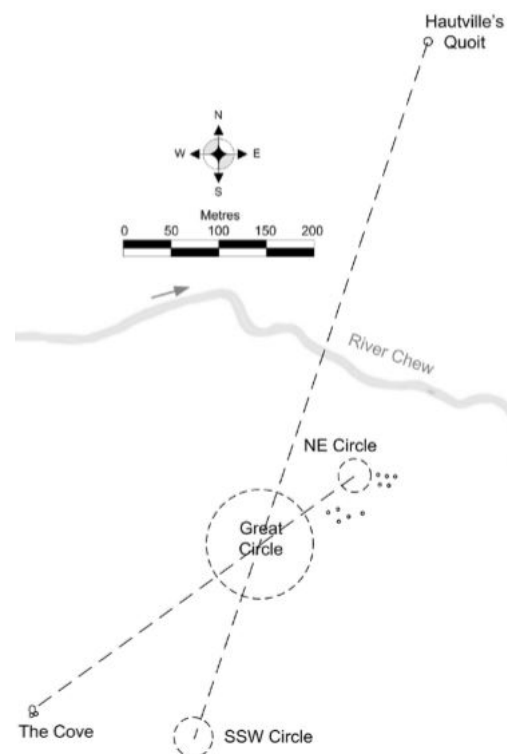


Drawing by Grimm 1789

The Cove, close to the Druids Arms pub, is more mysterious. Oswin and Sermon, who have carried out extensive geophysical survey around it, believe it may be the 'false portal' of a Neolithic long barrow (with some justification).

The outlying stones: Hauteville's Quoit, lying beside the Chew - Pensford Road, the Tollhouse Quoit (no longer in place) and the Tynings stones (still extant, but known to have been moved in relatively recent times) have an ill-defined relationship with the three circles.

Hauteville's Quoit, it has been shown, lies on a line projected from the centres of the south and Great Circles: the Cove lies on the projected line between the centres of the northeast and Great circles: such geometry seems unlikely to have arisen by chance, and has interesting implications about the ability of the monuments builders to plan over a large area.



The relationship of the stone monuments to each other is clear, although this does not necessarily mean they were contemporary

The question everyone wants to ask, however is 'Where did the stones come from?' and especially 'How did they move them without machinery?'



Drawings by Grimm 1789

The answer to the first is that we know roughly where the nearest sources of such stones were, but can't be sure that was the source without further analysis similar to that for Stonehenge and Preseli. Apart from Hauteville's Quoit, most of the sources are within a few kilometres.

The answer to the second simply shows our modern propensity for impatience and 'effectiveness'. If you have



sufficient traction (perhaps tens of people) and sufficient time and reason to want to move such a stone, it has been shown to be perfectly possible (and I'm sure we're all fed up with the seemingly annual new theories on 'how the stones got to Stonehenge'). One thing we can be certain about, though, is that the stones at Stanton Drew were not moved there by glaciation!

Vince Russett



The 'favourite' view at Stanton Drew: not only atmospheric, but from the pub!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday February 21st

Visit to Stanton Drew stone circles with a light lunch at the Druid's Arms to follow.

Please meet at the Ship & Castle 10.00am. Although I've arranged for us to park at the pub it's important that we car share as there's only limited parking. For insurance purposes a fee £1.00 will be charged for non- YCCCART members.

Thursday April 11th

YCCCART AGM, Congresbury Methodist Hall at 10.00 am followed by a fish and chip lunch.