

= Stanton Drew stone circles =

The Stanton Drew stone circles are just outside the village of Stanton Drew in the English county of Somerset . The largest stone circle is the Great Circle , 113 metres (371 ft) in diameter and the second largest stone circle in Britain (after Avebury) ; it is considered to be one of the largest Neolithic monuments to have been built . The date of construction is not known but is thought to be between 3000 and 2000 BCE which places it in the Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age . It was made a scheduled monument in 1982 .

The Great Circle was surrounded by a ditch and is accompanied by smaller stone circles to the north east and south west . There is also a group of three stones , known as The Cove , in the garden of the local pub . Slightly further from the Great Circle is a single stone , known as Hautville 's Quoit . Some of the stones are still vertical , but the majority are now recumbent and some are no longer present .

The stone circles have been studied since John Aubrey 's visit in 1664 with some excavations of the site in the 18th century . In the late 20th and early 21st centuries geophysical surveys have confirmed the size of the stone circles and identified additional pits and postholes . The Cove has been shown to be around one thousand years older than the stone circles . A variety of myths and legends about the stone circles have been recorded , including one about dancers at a celebration who have been turned to stone .

= = Monument = =

The most famous feature is the Great Circle , the second largest stone circle in Britain (after Avebury) . The stone circle is 113 metres (371 ft) in diameter and probably consisted of 30 stones , of which 27 survive today . It was recorded by both John Aubrey in 1664 and William Stukeley in 1776 . The Great Circle probably was surrounded by the ditch (approximately 135 metres (443 ft) outer diameter ? now filled in) of a henge . The North East Circle is 30 metres (98 ft) in diameter and probably consisted of 10 or more stones , of which 8 survive today . The South West Circle is 43 metres (141 ft) in diameter , and has 12 stones surviving today . An avenue extends to the northeast of the Great Circle towards the River Chew and a second avenue meets it from the north eastern stone circle .

A (now recumbent) standing stone called Hautville 's Quoit lies across the river to the north on an alignment with the centres of the Great Circle and the southern circle . It is a large stone close to Hautville Quoit Farm , recumbent since at least the mid 17th century but assumed to have originally been upright . Described by Stukeley in 1723 as being 13 feet (4 @. @ 0 m) long , it is now about half that length , Leslie Grinsell suggesting that fragments have occasionally been broken off for mending the roads . Stukeley also referred to the presence of a second stone .

Further to the west is a cove of two standing stones with a recumbent slab between them , which can be found in the garden of the Druid 's Arms public house . All are of different heights , the stone to the north east being 4 @. @ 4 metres (14 ft) the south western 3 @. @ 1 metres (10 ft) , and the north eastern 1 @. @ 4 metres (4 ft 7 in) . The stones of The Cove are mineralogically different from those in the nearby stone circles . A long barrow burial chamber has been found under the stones of The Cove . It is thought that this predates the erection of the stones by approximately a thousand years .

= = Excavations = =

In 1740 the site was surveyed and mapped by John Wood , the Elder , who noted the different stones used . He suggested the layout was based on the Pythagorean planetary system , and thought it was used as the Druid 's " University " .

When one of the stones fell in the mid 17th century , some human bones were discovered accompanied by an object described as a " round bell , like a large horse @-@ bell " . The burial date and the purpose of the bell @-@ like object are unknown .

== Geophysical survey ==

Geophysical work by English Heritage in 1997 revealed a surrounding ditch and nine concentric rings of postholes within the stone circle . More than four hundred pits , 1 metre (3 ft 3 in) across and at 2 @. @ 5 metres (8 ft 2 in) intervals , stood in rings at the site . The ditch is 135 metres (443 ft) in diameter and about 7 metres (23 ft) wide . A 40 metres (130 ft) wide entrance was visible on the north east side . No surrounding bank has been identified although the site awaits excavation .

The geophysical work transformed the traditional view of Stanton Drew as being a surface monument and the Great Circle is now seen as being one of the largest and most impressive Neolithic monuments to have been built . Analogous with the circles of postholes at sites at Woodhenge , Durrington Walls and The Sanctuary , it is thought that the pits would have held posts which would have either been freestanding or lintelled as they could not have supported a roof at that size . The postholes in nine concentric rings held posts up to 1 metre (3 @. @ 3 ft) in diameter .

Nearby and to the north east is a smaller ring of eight stones in the centre of which the geophysical work identified four further pits . A third ring of twelve stones , measuring 43 metres (141 ft) wide , stands to the south west .

A fluxgate gradiometer survey in July 2009 investigated standing stones in the garden of the Druids Arms public house known as The Cove , which showed that the stones date from nearly a thousand years before the stone circles . The conclusion from the study was that these upright stones are likely to have been the portals or façade of a chambered tomb .

In 2010 a further survey was carried out by Bath and Camerton Archaeological Society and the Bath and North East Somerset Archaeological Officer . This involved high data density magnetometer , resistance pseudosection profiles and photographic surveys showed a new henge entrance and further detail of post holes .

== Myths about Stanton Drew ==

Being a henge and stone circle site , astronomical alignments are a common theory to explain the positioning of the stones at Stanton Drew . Similarly , there are less well evidenced theories relating to ley lines .

Theories suggest the site was dedicated to funerary ritual . There are several local traditional stories about the megalithic complex . The best known tells how a wedding party was turned to stone : the party was held throughout Saturday , but a man clothed in black (the Devil in disguise) came and started to play his violin for the merrymakers after midnight , continuing into holy Sunday morning . When dawn broke , everybody had been turned to stone by the Demon : so the stone circles are the dancers , the avenues are the fiddlers and The Cove is the bride and the groom with the drunken churchman at their feet . They are still awaiting the Devil who promised to come back someday and play again for them .

Wade and Wade in their 1929 book " Somerset " suggest :

One of the curiosities of the place is Hautville 's Quoit , which , to save time , should also be looked for on approaching the village . (Enter iron gate on L. a few hundred yards before reaching tollhouse , and search backwards along the hedge bordering road .) It is a large stone , which legend says was hurled by Sir J. Hautville (whose effigy is in Chew Magna Church) from the top of Maes Knoll . The famous " druidical remains " will be found near the church . About 50 yards from the entrance to the churchyard take a lane to the L. leading to an orchard : the stones will be observed in the field beyond (admission free , but field closed on Sundays) . The " remains " consist of three contiguous circles . The first is of considerable area , and is marked out by twelve large stones , only three of which remain upright ; a smaller circle of eight stones lies just beyond ; and a third circle of eight will be found farther away in an orchard on the R. The two larger circles have each a few scattered stones thrown off as a kind of avenue . Standing apart from the circles is a curious group of three stones huddled together in a garden abutting on the churchyard , from

which they can be easily seen by looking over the W. boundary wall . These mystic rings probably had the same origin (whatever that may have been) as that of the more famous circle at Avebury in Wiltshire , with which they should be compared . The proximity of Maes Knoll is comparable with that of Silbury Hill . A ridiculous theory suggests that the monoliths were erected as a trophy after one of Arthur 's victories . Arthur is connected to the site because a site in the nearby village of Camerley is reputed to be the location of Camelot in an oral tradition . The stones are of a reddish hue similar to that described in the Arthurian legend as connected to Camelot and to a sword that was seen in a stone near to Camelot . The country story is that a local wedding once took place on a Sunday , when the frivolous guests would insist on winding up with a dance . The penalty for a " Sabbath " thus " profaned " was the prompt transformation of the bridal party into stone . Hence the local appellation of " The fiddlers and the maids " .