

Rude Stone Monuments of Exmoor

(SOMERSET PORTION)

PART III¹

BY H. ST. GEORGE GRAY, F.S.A.

THE rude stone monuments of Exmoor—Devon portion—were figured and described by the Rev. J. F. Chanter and Mr. R. Hansford Worth in two papers written for the Devon Association and published in their *Transactions*, vol. xxxvii, 375–397, and vol. xxxviii, 538–552, but these records do not include any undoubted circle or ring of stones.

The further discovery, survey and record of ‘monuments’ in the Somerset portion now demand attention, and much remains to be done before the task can be regarded as complete. The inscribed stone on Winsford Hill has been described on more than one occasion,² and I have already surveyed and described the stone circles discovered during recent years in the parishes of Withypool³ and Porlock.⁴

Early in 1931 Mr. E. T. MacDermot of Lillycombe, who kindly gave me information about the Porlock Stone Circle, wrote to say that he had heard that another circle had been observed owing to the burning of heather and other ‘wiry’

¹ Part I had reference to the Withypool Circle, and Part II to the Porlock Stone Circle. (*Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, vols. lii, lxxiv).

² *Ephemeris Epigraphica*, ix, no. 182, p. 510; *V.C.H. Som.* i, 369 (where further references are given); *Journ. Roman Studies*, ix (1919), Plate XV, pp. 208–210; *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.* xxxvi, ii, 82–87; lxiv, pp. xxxviii–xxxix; lxix, pp. xl–xli.

³ *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.* lii, ii, 42–50.

⁴ *Op. cit.* lxxiv, 71–77.

growths on Almsworthy Common.⁵ He visited the spot indicated and found an oval arrangement of stones possibly concentric. I made my first visit in May.

The Almsworthy stones are situated in the northern part of Exford parish, but only 400 feet from the Stoke Pero parish boundary (see 6-inch Ordnance Survey, Somerset XLV, N.E.).

On the 6-inch map its position is just to the west and touching the 'h' of the word 'Almsworthy'. The centre of the stone remains is about 600 feet w.n.w. of a parish boundary-stone near the 'point' of an enclosure⁶ on the east, and about 530 feet from the nearest part of the Greenland Farm enclosures on the s.w. Greenland Farm house is about 535 yards to the south of the monument. The nearest part of the Exford-Porlock road is some 700 yards in an easterly direction. Exford village is about 2 miles distant in a direction a little east of

⁵ 'Almsworthy' appears in a number of ancient records, and was of considerably more importance in early times than it is to-day.

The area is referred to in the *Domesday Survey* thus: 'Roger himself holds Edmundesworde (Almsworthy in Exford). Edric held (it) T.R.E. and paid geld for 1 virgate of land. "There is land for 6 ploughs." In demesne is "half a virgate" and 1 plough and 2 serfs and (there are) 6 villeins and 9 bordars with 3 ploughs "and half a virgate". "There are 1 riding-horse and 6 beasts and 47 sheep and 27 she-goats." There (are) 8 acres of meadow and 30 acres of underwood (*silvae minutae*). Pasture 2 leagues long and 2 wide. It is worth 25 shillings. "When he received it, it was altogether wasted (*penitus vastata*)."'—*V.C.H. Som.* i, 489.

Almsworthy was owned by John of Doneheved in 1257 (MacDermot, *Hist. of Forest of Exmoor*, 126); and there is a record that in 1270 'Herbert of la Hylle in Almundeswerthe (12d.)' made a turbary (MacDermot, 90).

'In 28 Hen. III Sibyl de Pryhou was called to warrant certain lands in Almsworthy in Exford' (Chadwyck-Healey, *Hist. of Part of W. Somerset*, 229).

In *Index, Brit. Mus. Charters*, vol. i, p. 12 (published 1900), the following record is given: 'Almsworthy, in Exford, Court-roll, 1461 (Almundesworth Blwet). Add. 7671.'

Robert Henley of Leigh (Winsham) was owner early in the seventeenth century (Brown's *Wills*, v, 26).

Almsworthy sent a representative to appear for a tithing at the forest court, according to the survey made by the Commissioners of the Commonwealth in 1653 (MacDermot, 190).

A few other references are obtainable in MacDermot and Chadwyck-Healey. See also *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.* xxxv, ii, 45.

⁶ The Inclosure Award for Almsworthy Common is dated 26 January 1848 (*Hist. MSS. Com.*, 7th Report, 700b; MacDermot, *Hist. Forest Exmoor*, 10).

south, Lucott Cross is a mile north, and Dunkery Beacon 3 miles due east.

The remains are situated at an altitude of about 1,430 feet, and the ground occupied by the stones slopes slightly from N.W. to S.E. (The slope is 10.5 feet in the area covered by my plan). From here the moor gradually slopes down to the Chetsford Water and Bridge to the N.E.

The newly discovered remains are about 2 miles south of the Porlock Stone Circle, and 670 yards S.E. of Alderman's Barrow, which represents the junction of the parishes of Exmoor, Exford, Porlock and Stoke Pero. Two tumuli, known as 'Bendels Barrows', situated on Exford Common, are $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile S.E. of the stone rings.⁷

The marginal lines of my plan (Plate XV) have been delineated approximately true north and south and east and west,⁸ and enclose an area of 0.33 acre.⁹ On turning to the plan, the first thing which will be noted is that the arrangement of the stones is by no means circular.

When making the survey on 15 October 1931 I found fourteen stones, the highest, No. 4, standing 1.85 ft. above the surface of the moor, and having a basal width of 1.75 ft. Twelve of the stones stand more or less upright or lean very slightly; Stone 8, although standing, leans considerably, and No. 12 is prostrate.

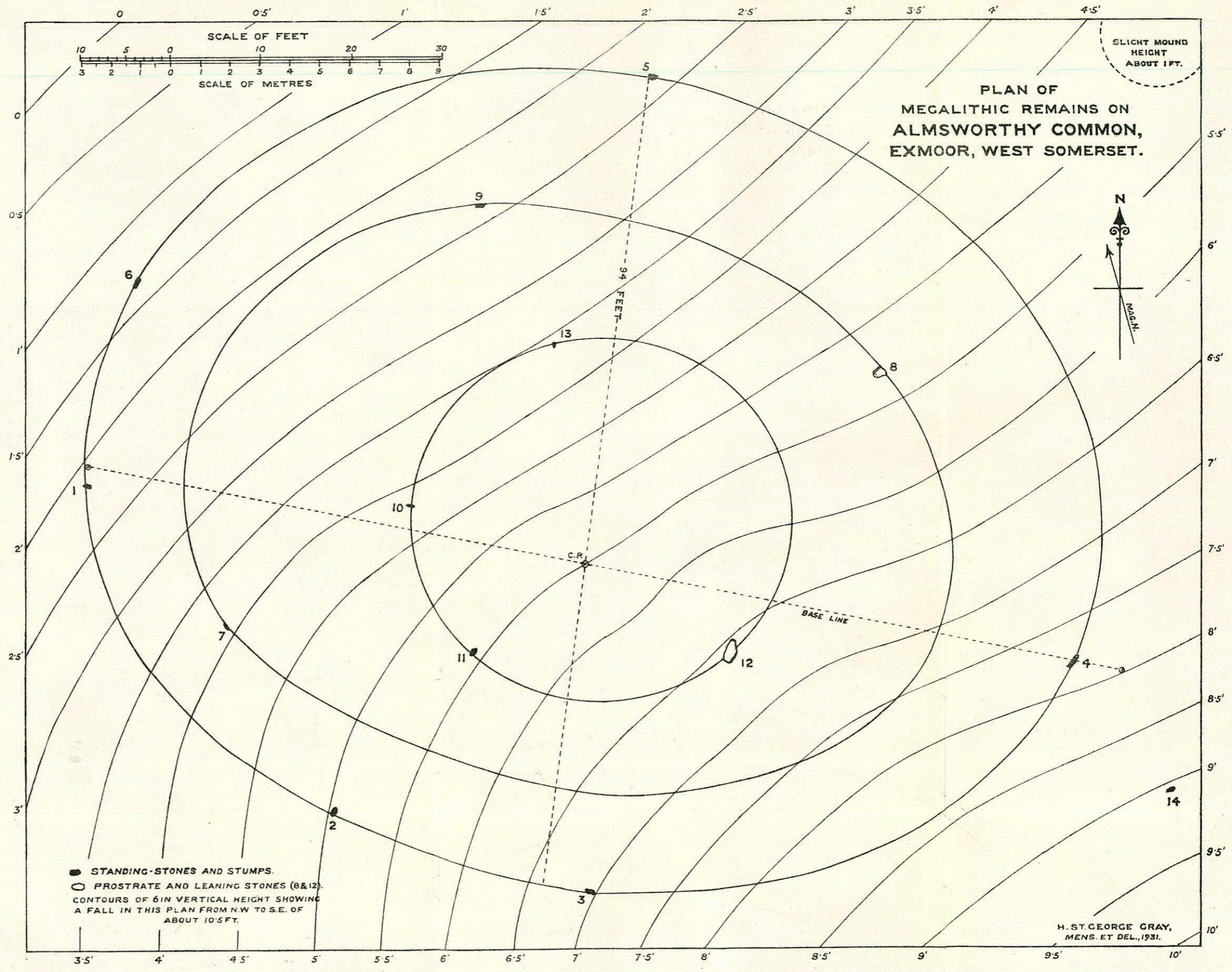
Until the stones were shown in their relative position on paper it was difficult to say precisely what their arrangement indicated. On considering the position of the stones in detail, it appears that originally there was an outer ring of stones arranged in oval form, the long axis being W.N.W. and E.S.E. What number of stones formed the ring originally it is impossible to say. The dimensions of the oval are 112½ feet by 94 feet.

Judging from the three stones, Nos. 7, 8 and 9 (No. 7 only a

⁷ For other barrows, etc., in the neighbourhood, see paper on Porlock Stone Circle, *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.* lxxiv, 72-73.

⁸ The magnetic variation at Porlock Circle on 1 October 1928 was 14° 17' W. I have used the same for Almsworthy, but there *may* be a discrepancy of 2° as my prismatic compass was not working quite correctly.

⁹ The C.P. (central picket) in the Plan represents the surveying centre from which in the beginning of the survey the base-line was set out and all chief measurements made.



PLAN OF
MEGALITHIC REMAINS ON
ALMSWORTHY COMMON,
EXMOOR, WEST SOMERSET.

● STANDING-STONES AND STUMPS.
○ PROSTRATE AND LEANING STONES (8 & 12).
CONTOURS OF 6 IN VERTICAL HEIGHT SHOWING
A FALL IN THIS PLAN FROM N.W. TO S.E. OF
ABOUT 10.5 FT.

H. ST. GEORGE GRAY,
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stump), there would appear to have been a concentric oval ring of stones measuring $85\frac{1}{2}$ feet by 65 feet.

Within the smaller oval, four stones remain, of which No. 12 is now prostrate, and No. 13 a small stump. These conform to the line of a true circle having a diameter of 42 feet.

On the E.S.E. a standing-stone (No. 14) is seen (Plan, Plate XV), at a distance of 16 feet from the nearest part of the outer oval.

On the N.E. a slight mound (height about 1 ft.) was observed having a diameter of about 12 feet. A slight mound, in a similar position, is to be seen at the Porlock Circle, but in the latter case there is a small standing-stone on its N.W. margin.¹⁰

Dr. H. H. Thomas, F.R.S., petrographer to H.M. Geological Survey, describes the stones as sheared micaceous felspathic sandstone, probably of local origin, with characteristic local red staining of a rock that would otherwise have a greyish colour.¹¹

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STONES

OUTER RING.

No. 1.—Standing-stone, rather sharply pointed on top, leaning towards the south; in a depression (except on N. side), caused, as in other cases, by the treading of sheep when using the stones as rubbing-stones; tussock round the stone. Width at base 1 ft.; max. thickness 0.47 ft. Height above the ground level* 1.1 ft.

No. 2.—Standing-stone, upright, in slight depression; tussock on N. and W.; sharp along top of stone. Width at base 1.2 ft.; max. thickness 0.5 ft.; height 1.1 ft.

No. 3.—Standing-stone, leaning slightly inwards; depression on N., W. and E., not very deep; tussock, except on the S.; stone rather sharp at top. Width at base 1.3 ft.; max. thickness 0.5 ft.; height 1.45 ft.

No. 4.—Standing-stone—the largest—leaning slightly inwards and standing

* Height above average level of the ground is always given, unless otherwise stated.

¹⁰ *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.* lxxiv, 75.

¹¹ The following extracts are taken from Bailiff's Rolls published in Chadwyck-Healey, *Hist. of Part of West Somerset*.

On p. 423—'For 5000 stone tiles to be dug and had from the land of Ralph Durburgh at Almsworthy, 10d.' (Mich. 1419 to Mich. 1420).

On p. 442—'For 2000 stone tiles bought at Almsworthy, 2s. 4d.' (Mich. 1425 to Mich. 1426).

in a deep depression; tussock all round except on s.; several fairly large stones scattered round, which may have been 'packing-stones'; rather sharp at the top; fairly flat inner face. Width at base 1.75 ft.; at top 1.2 ft.; max. thickness 0.6 ft.; height 1.85 ft.

No. 5.—Standing-stone, leaning slightly inwards; very slight depression and tussock. Width at base 1 ft.; max. thickness 0.55 ft.; height 1 ft.

No. 6.—Standing-stone, leaning slightly outwards; depression especially marked on w., n.w. and s.w.; tussock round stone. Width at base 0.85 ft.; max. thickness 0.55 ft.; height 1.5 ft.

MIDDLE RING.

No. 7.—Shattered stump, sharp at top, showing only 0.35 ft. above the ground; dimensions 0.85 ft. by 0.23 ft.

No. 8.—Standing-stone, but leans considerably inwards; fairly deep depression round, especially on the n., s. and w.; tussock on s. and w. Width at base 1.35 ft.; max. thickness 0.65 ft.; dimensions at top, 0.5 ft. by 0.3 ft.; height in its leaning position 1.1 ft.

No. 9.—Standing-stone, upright; depression all round, with slight tussock. Width at base 0.9 ft.; max. thickness 0.4 ft.; height 1.2 ft.

INNER RING.

No. 10.—Standing-stone, upright; slight depression on s. only. Width at base 0.92 ft.; max. thickness 0.25 ft.; height 1 ft.

No. 11.—Stump, or small stone, 0.92 ft. by 0.5 ft.; height above ground 0.6 ft.; no depression.

No. 12.—Stone, prostrate, sloping slightly n., and lying in a depression some 4 ft. in diameter. Dimensions 3.1 ft. by 1.25 ft.; max. thickness about 0.7 ft.

No. 13.—Stump (loose) of small stone, 0.7 ft. by 0.15 ft.; slight depression on w.; stone only 0.05 ft. above ground.

OUTLYING STONES.

No. 14 (on plan).—Standing-stone, upright in a depression (less marked on n.); tussock on n. and w. Width at base 0.95 ft.; max. thickness 0.47 ft.; height 1.05 ft.

[No. 15 (not on plan).—Standing-stone, apparently only a parish boundary (and rubbing) stone, and having no connection with the megalithic remains here described. It is marked 'B.S.' (boundary-stone) on the 6-inch Ordn. Sheet, and is situated about 600 ft. e.s.e. of the centre of the megalithic remains and about 30 ft. s. of the nearest enclosure in this part of the moor. Its dimensions are 1.2 ft. by 0.47 ft., and it stands 1.85 ft. above the surrounding tussock.]