

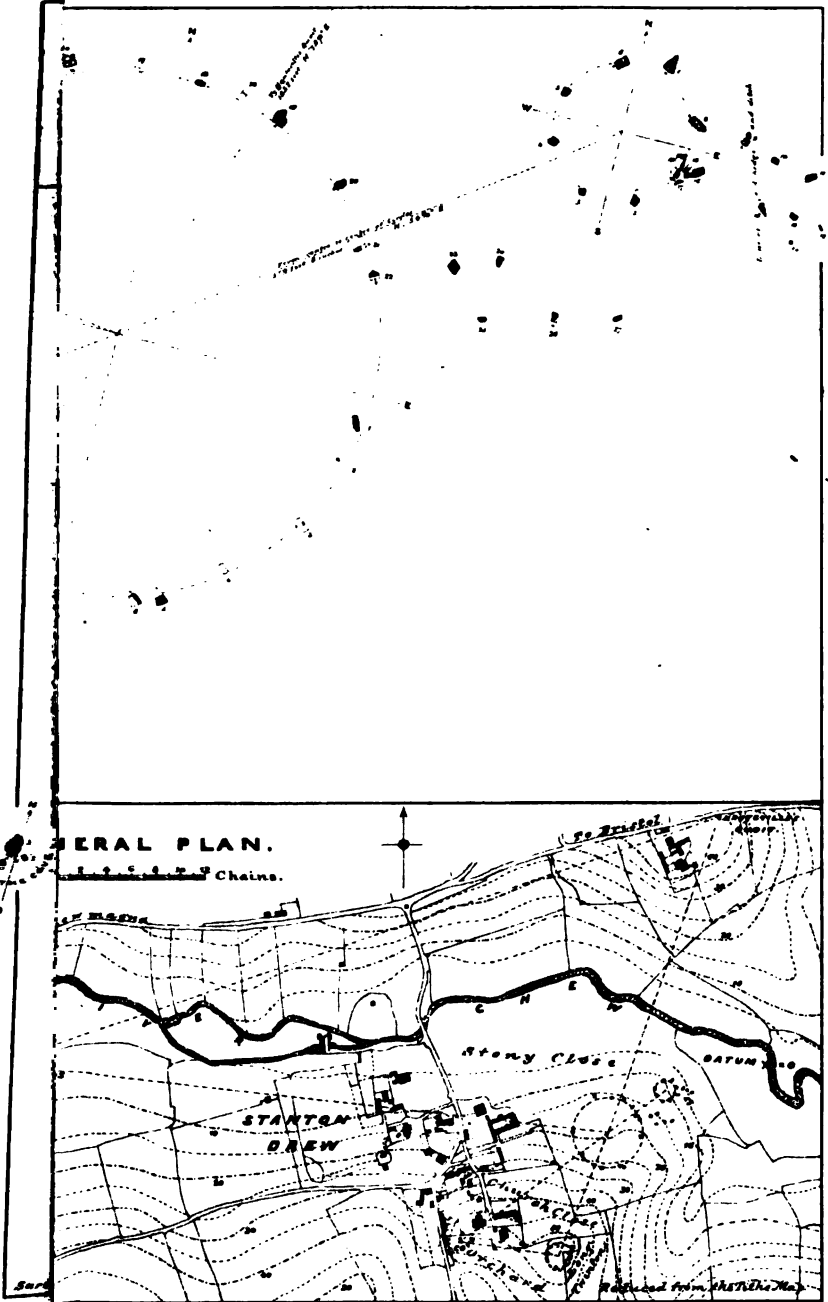
Notes on the Megalithic Antiquities at Stanton Drew.¹

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THESE remains are situated in a broad, rich valley, about six miles south of Bristol, overlooked on the north and south by high hills; and consist of three peristaliths,—two of them with attached avenues; a group of three large stones, called “The Cove;” two prostrate stones in a field, at the distance of about two-thirds of a mile to the west of the circles; and one prostrate stone, called “Hauteville’s” or “Hackell’s Quoit,” about one-third of a mile to the north-north-east of the large circle.

The accompanying plan is a reduced *fac-simile* of one which has been plotted to a large scale, with the utmost care, from an accurate instrumental survey. The magnetic bearings were taken with a prismatic compass, the readings of which were adjusted by angular measurements with a sextant. To insure that these should be as correct as possible, special observations were made to ascertain the local deviation of the magnetic needle, which was found to be 20° west of north. The distances from the large circle to the quoit, and to the stones in Lower Tynning, are scaled from the tithe-map; but the magnetic bearings of these outlying objects from the circle and from one another, together with that of the line between the cove and the large circle,—none of which could be directly taken, in consequence of the intervention of obstacles,—have been deduced from others which were instrumentally observed. Contour-lines, shewing differences of five feet in vertical height, referred to a *datum* on the bank of the stream, are traced on the parish-

(1). Condensed from a paper by the author, published in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* for 30th September, 1877.



map by means of a series of levels taken over the whole area occupied by the remains.

It being known that several of the stones were long ago entirely buried in the ground by a former tenant of the land, repeated and exhaustive search for them has been made. This has brought to light several that, hitherto, have been only suspected to exist; and it is believed that none of the hidden stones can now have escaped detection. The edges of those which are either partially or entirely below the surface have been carefully traced with a probe, where they have not been revealed by digging. The results of this inquisition are embodied in the plan which gives to the large circle twenty-four stones, being ten more² than are shewn in Crocker's plan, and six more than are mentioned by Rutter, who, in his *Delineations of Somerset*, 1829, describes five stones as standing erect, eight others as "evidently buried just below the surface, whilst the position of five more is indicated in dry summers by the withering of the turf over them." The plan in Seyer's *History of Bristol*, 1821, shews fourteen stones standing or lying distinctly above ground, eight others as nearly buried, and five more as merely conjectural, or "only suspicious." All of these have been found, except three,—two of which (those assumed to be between Nos. 6 and 7, and Nos. 14 and 15) are in the last category, and, evidently, do not exist: the third is that which Seyer has placed at the root of the southern line of the large-circle-avenue, and has indicated as partly visible. This last cannot now be found, and I conclude that Seyer must have been misled by the small fragments which abound at that spot in a layer a few inches below the surface, and which may be the remains of a stone long ago broken up. In the south-west circle, Seyer has shewn a partly visible stone, about half-way between Nos. 6 and 7. It is not there now; but, possibly, its remains may exist in the fragments at the corner of the wall, near the centre of the circle. Traces of a buried stump, as dotted in the plan,—

(2). Nos. 2, 3, 4, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 28, and 29.

probably the broken base of the prostrate stone,—were found by probing at the rear of the cove, the site of which, within and without, appears to be formed of small rammed rubble, which was often used for keeping erect stones in position. No such foundation-bed has, however, been detected in connexion with the circles and avenues.

The sixty-six stones now remaining at Stanton Drew may be tabulated thus:—

	Erect Stones.	Prostrate Stones.	
		More or less visible.	Quite buried.
Large Circle	3	15	6
Ditto ditto Avenue	3	2	—
North-east Circle	5	4	—
Ditto ditto Avenue, etc.	5	5	—
South-west Circle	—	12	—
The Cove	2	1	—
Lower Tynings	—	2	—
Hauteville's Quoit	—	1	—
Totals.....	18	42	6

Hauteville's Quoit was formerly larger than it now is. In 1664, Aubrey, on the authority of a friend who measured it for him, reports its dimensions as 10 ft. 6 in. × 6 ft. 6 in. × 1 ft. 10 in. In 1773, Stukeley (doubtless exaggerating) gives the figures, 13 ft. × 8 ft. × 4 ft.

Stone No. 16 in the avenue of the north east-east circle, now prostrate, was part of a *mênhir* of which another part, No. 18, remains rooted, though much declined from the perpendicular. The apex and south-eastern side of the latter match exactly with the recessed face of No. 16. It therefore originally stood nearly behind No. 1 which was a separate stone, and appears never to have been disturbed or injured. The thin slab leaning against the western end of No. 16 must originally have formed its base, and have flaked off when this portion of the *mênhir* fell.

Those stones which are still erect are filled in with black on the plan.³ Two of these in the north-east circle and its avenue decline from the upright; and one in the cove projects edgewise considerably beyond its base: the overhang in each case is shown in unshaded outline. The visible portions of prostrate stones are stippled and line-shaded: the edges of those parts which are underground are indicated by dotted outlines.

Two of the stones are new red sandstone—the rock of the site; one is similar to that obtained from Dundry—4 miles north-west; a few are limestone from neighbouring quarries; and the rest—by far the majority—are a pebbly breccia of the magnesian limestone, probably brought from Broadfield Down—6 miles west, or from East Harptree—6 miles south.

The large and north-east circles stand in a pasture sloping very gently toward the stream on the north-east. A rather quicker fall eastward occurs on the line of an old hedge, at about the middle of the avenue of the north-east circle. From the large circle the ground rises rather more rapidly toward the south-west circle which is on a level platform, of its own diameter. From this the ground falls in every direction,—very gently toward the west and north-west, and most steeply toward the east. The cove stands on a slight slope, at the brow of a small, flat-topped knoll, of nearly equal height, level to the north-east, as far as the church,—which stands near its edge,—declining very gently toward the east and south-east, but most steeply toward the west.

If the country were bare the undermentioned points would be visible from one another:—

Stones in Lower Tynning, from base of cove; from $1\frac{1}{2}$ foot over centre of large circle; and from 8 feet above-ground at quoit.

Centre of south-west circle, from base of cove; centre of north-east circle, from 5 feet high at cove; centre of large circle, from 6 feet high at the same.

(3). From the greatly reduced scale of the photolithograph, this distinction is not clearly preserved, as it is in the original plan. The reference-table, however, will clear up any ambiguity.

Centre of south-west circle, from base of quoit; centre of large circle, from height of $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet at quoit; centre of north-east circle, from height of $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet at the same.

Centre of large circle, from height of 6 feet at centre of south-west circle; centre of north-east circle, from height of 4 feet at centre of south-west circle.

The magnetic bearings, &c., of the avenues are as follow :—

NORTH-EAST CIRCLE.

North line of stones bears E., $13\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ S.; and points 31 ft. N. of centre of circle.

South line of stones bears E.; $8\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ S.; and points $9\frac{1}{2}$ ft. S. of centre of circle, and 4 ft. N. of stone No. 1, running through the base of Nos. 16 and 18, when *in situ*.

Centre line of avenue bears E., 11° S.; and points 11 ft. N. of centre of circle.

LARGE CIRCLE.

North line of stones bears N., 65° E.; and points to centre of circle⁴ (?).

South line of stones bears N., 75° E.; and points 6 ft. N. of centre of circle.

Centre line of avenue bears N., 70° E.; and points 3 ft. N. of centre of circle; or

Centre line of avenue bears N., $73\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ E.; and points 19 ft. N. of centre of circle, if the northern line of stones took the direction suggested in the note below.

The points from which the circles were ranged have been found by trial on the plotted plan; and indicate, as closely as it is now possible to discover, the centres of the work as it stood when perfect. To this end, the position of every stone has been studied on the ground, and, where practicable, the part which was, either certainly or apparently, the base of each has been marked by a small cross. As a rule which admits of but few exceptions, —and these are accounted for by the form of the ground,—that

(4). Great uncertainty attaches to this, as only one stone in this line remains standing. The direction given runs through the cross at the foot of stone No. 22, which, being small, and lying across the circular line, has very likely been shifted from its place. This line of stones may have run to, and included, the small stone, No. 14 of the north-east avenue; in which case its direction would have been N., $72\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ E.; and it would have pointed 32 ft. north of the centre of the circle.

STANTON DREW, SOMERSET.



View of N. E. Circle, looking W.



*The Cove, looking W.
from a measured sketch.*

end of a stone which is now the lowest, and is sunk more or less into the soil, was, undoubtedly, the original base. Where it has been found difficult to choose between two sides, a cross is put to each; but it is altogether omitted in cases where it has been impossible to decide on its proper place. From the ascertained centres, dotted circles have been struck, representing, as closely as possible, the lines on which the stones appear to have been originally set up. It is thus made evident that these rings were not (as has hitherto been supposed) ellipses of various degrees of eccentricity, but that, when perfect, they were very nearly true circles.

There has been much difference of opinion as to what were the original numbers of stones with which the three circles were constructed; and facts have sometimes been greatly strained (even to the extent of diminishing the number of stones now existing,) in the endeavour to give support to preconceived theories. With respect to the north-east circle, there can be no room for doubt that there were always, as now, only eight members, spaced at nearly equal distances around the curve, at opposite extremities of the respective diameters. The plan of the south-west circle shews a similar oppositeness in the remaining stones, even though all of these have been overthrown, and some of them, doubtless, displaced. Nos. 1 and 2 may originally have been one stone, as also Nos. 10 and 11. Then, looking at the present spacing, there seems to be room for one in the interval between Nos. 10 and 12, and for two more between Nos. 6 and 7. This would give thirteen for the complete number; but it is quite possible that there were only twelve, or even so few as eleven. When we come to the large circle, the case is much less clear. The stones which remain are spaced at irregular intervals, and yet almost every one has a *vis à vis*. To make the couples complete, (if Nos. 11 and 12 are reckoned one stone, as they perhaps were), three more stones are required respectively in the intervals between Nos. 6 and 7, Nos. 14 and 15, and Nos. 1 and 22,—in which last case there was, no doubt,

one at the root of the southern line of the avenue. This will give the complete conjectural number 26 for this circle,—or 27 if Nos. 11 and 12 were two distinct stones.

The cove has been another bone of contention. With some it has been a throne or chair of state for the arch-druid, who has been vividly pictured as sitting within its ample arms several times a-day to dispense justice! With others it has been a dolmên. If we suppose the latter, its reconstruction is attended by the following difficulties :—The prostrate stone (which could not possibly have fallen, as it has, if it had been the “table-stone”) must have been a side-stone standing erect where its southern end now is, and at right-angles with the other two, on the broken stump which still seems to be traceable in the ground. We shall thus have three uprights of greatly varying height—one 14 ft. 6 in. high, another 10 ft. 3 in., and a third 4 ft. 6 in. It would be impossible to rest a cap-stone on these; and, to carry such a one, we must provide a supporter on the southern side, nearly, if not quite, as high as the prostrate one. Then, over the head-stone there would be a gap about 4 ft. high, in addition to the large square hole on one side of its base; and, over the foot-stone, a gap 10 ft. high, increased by the pyramidal shape of the stone. Now, not only would such a dolmên be of most unusual height, in proportion to its length and width, but its chamber would always be open to easy access, which it would indeed tax the ingenuity of the sternest unbeliever in “free-standing” dolmêns to close by microlithic masonry, as a necessary preparation for covering it with a mound. But, if there were formerly a fourth side-stone and a table-stone, what has become of them? They are not buried in the soil which is very shallow. There is no reason for supposing that they have disappeared during the present century; so that it is not likely that they were broken up to make or mend the country lane which passes near by; and no fragments of such stones can be seen in any of the neighbouring fences or buildings. The inference, therefore, seems plain, that these three

stones are all that this monument ever possessed; and it is fortified by the fact that two instances of a similar kind formerly existed at Avebury. It may be well to note here that the magnetic bearing of a line passing through the centres of the two standing stones in the cove is N. 59° E., and that of a transverse line between the same stones is S. 33° E.

In the preceding notes I have, for the most part, been careful to avoid repeating what has been published before. The best general account of Stanton Drew that has hitherto appeared is that by William Long, Esq., F.S.A., which will be found in the *Archæological Journal* for 1858. From want, however, of trustworthy data, all writers on this subject have entertained many misconceptions, and fallen into serious errors. It is now hoped that the completeness and accuracy of the particulars furnished by the accompanying plan and notes will set at rest several of the vexed questions that have arisen in the study of these remains.

