

THE NINE LADIES STONE CIRCLE

By J. P. HEATHCOTE

The bibliography of this stone circle, many with plans, drawings and photographs, from 1782 to 1978, runs into hundreds of books and articles. During the whole of this period a tenth stone has lain unnoticed some two inches below the surface. The drought of 1976, together with the increased erosion caused by visitors walking over the area, uncovered one edge of this stone and led some unknown person, probably with pocket

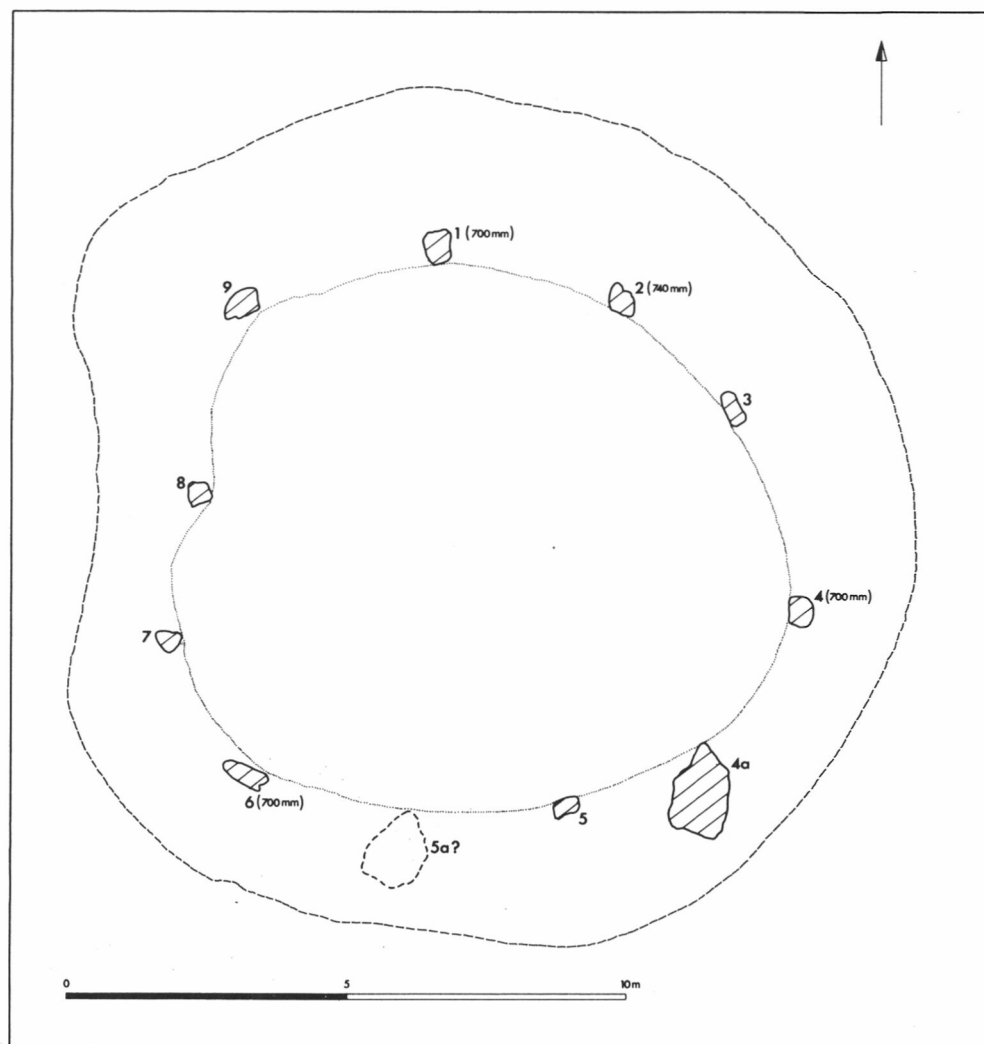


Fig. 1 The Nine Ladies stone circle, Stanton Moor, Derbyshire: plan. Stone 4a is the fallen stone now uncovered. Heights are given for Stones 1, 2, 4, and 6. The dotted line marks the inner face of the bank and the dashed line marks the outer face, which is poorly defined.

knife only, to uncover the whole of the stone in August 1977. The site has for the last ten years repeatedly suffered excessive damage from witchcraft fires and associated drinking ceremonies, but there is no evidence to suggest that this led to the final uncovering.

Without further excavation it would not be possible to prove conclusively that this belonged to the original circle but an accurate survey by Colin Morse strongly supports the view that this stone (4a on Fig. 1) was one of the uprights. It seems to be the invariable rule on all disc mounds that the uprights are always on the inner edge of the surrounding bank. The recently uncovered stone fits this position accurately. It has obviously fallen on top of the bank and is well above the original ground surface. No other large stones have ever been noticed in the bank. If a stone of this size had been lying on the original surface it is highly likely that it would have been used as one of the uprights. Very many stones in other circles are not now horizontal. They are to varying degrees sloping as if their buried ends had slowly broken out of the original hole. The present stone is inclined slightly from the horizontal.

Its present position fits exactly where a few writers (such as Jewitt, and more recently Barnatt in his *Stone Circles of Derbyshire*) have suggested a missing stone. It is in the widest of the gaps, between Stones 4 and 5. It has also been suggested that an eleventh stone would conveniently fit into the next gap between Stones 5 and 6.

It seems rather remarkable that so many fallen stones had been originally fixed up with their pointed ends in the ground. This was obviously a poor technique. It could be explained by the difficulty bronze age man would have in digging a large hole in stony ground. Alternatively it could be the result of purposely endeavouring to show a particular stone higher than the others. This was suggested in the case of Doll Tor Circle, Stones 5 and 6 (Heathcote, 1939).

The shape of Stone 4a in the Nine Ladies circle appears to approximate to the lozenge or 'female' shape as does Stone 5 in the Doll Tor circle. It lies exactly southeast of the centre. It may be significant that stones which are rectangular in section usually are placed with their longer sides following the line of the circumference. The King Stone to the southwest of Nine Ladies has its longer side in line with the Nine Ladies, which would certainly be the case if it had been part of an avenue. Generally they are so rough in outline as to make accurate alignments very difficult to imagine.

Stone 4a in the Nine Ladies circle has its surface heavily encrusted with large pebbles of spar. There is no evidence that bronze age man attached much significance to this—many stones in this area have large crystals of spar on their surfaces. Stone 4a has been greatly weathered since bronze age times by lying on the surface.

REFERENCES

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Jewitt, L. (1870) *Grave Mounds and their Contents*. London, Groombridge.